Gourlay, Andrew (2017) *Things left behind: matter, narrative and the cult of St Edmund of East Anglia.* PhD thesis.

http://theses.gla.ac.uk/8265/

Things Left Behind:

Matter, Narrative and the Cult of St Edmund of East Anglia.

Andrew Gourlay, MA (Hons), MLitt

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of

Philosophy

School of Humanities

College of Arts

University of Glasgow

March 2017

Abstract

This thesis provides a detailed and interdisciplinary analysis of one of medieval England's most enduring saints' cults: that of St Edmund of East Anglia. Focussing largely on the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the surviving material, literary and visual evidence is examined through the twin lenses of matter and narrative, thus offering a novel means of perceiving medieval saintly devotion. Borrowing elements from Alfred Gell's distributed agency theory, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) and notions of 'object biography', chapter one develops a bespoke means of modelling the spatial, temporal and material dimensions of cult. Saints' cults are imagined as expansive and entangled phenomena, focussed around a central 'relic nexus'. Following this, chapter two employs these ideas to analyse the historical and material growth of Bury St Edmunds as a cult centre. This chapter demonstrates that Edmund's materiality both played a significant role in determining the form his cult took and positioned him within an elite cadre of incorrupt saints. Switching to the narrative lens, chapter three contrasts early chronicle texts with later hagiography and charter evidence. This chapter shows that, across succeeding generations, Edmund's legend shifted in line with contemporary historical circumstances to become entwined with the institutional identity of Bury St Edmunds Abbey. Chapter four expands the narrative analysis to consider the consequences of literary and oral dissemination. Tracing the literary transmission of a story implicating Edmund in the death of Swein Forkbeard, this chapter reveals how a series of twelfth-century, historical and political writers adapted this legend for their own purposes. Yet, far from being limited to literature, the chapter further argues that Edmund's narrative was couched within a fluid oral context. Chapter four concludes by employing the theoretical structures developed in chapter one to model the narrative environment of Edmund's cult. Chapter five focusses on how Edmund was visualised at his cult centre. A particular example of pictorial storytelling produced at Bury, the miniature sequence in Pierpont Morgan MS M.736, is analysed to reveal that visual representations provided a means of expounding both the material and narrative sensibilities of cult. Chapter six expands the visual and material discussion. A range of media, from large-scale wall art to small-scale archaeological finds, are used to show that Edmund and his narrative could be presenced in personal and idiosyncratic ways through a variety of objects. Chapter seven draws together the interrelated strands from the preceding sections and discusses what we can say about the relationship between matter and narrative in cult. It concludes that combinations of Edmund's materiality and narrative could be combined, to create the unique truths that fashioned personal and corporate identities. Edmund's cult, it is suggested, was a multi-faceted and expansive phenomenon which, although based around his shrine at Bury St Edmunds, held meaning well beyond. Following this, some concluding thoughts are offered on how the theoretical framework developed in this thesis might be adapted and applied to similar cult structures.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Diagrams

List of Figures and Illustrations

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis over the course of the past six years has been a labour, some might say a labour of love, but a labour nonetheless. This work would never have been possible without the help, guidance and support of those around me. This necessarily brief acknowledgement mentions only a few; were I to thank everyone, I would need a second volume.

Crafting a PhD can be a lonely business but the warm and sympathetic environment provided by the University of Glasgow's academic community made it seem less so. I would like to express my gratitude, in particular to: Dr Marie-Louise Leonard, Dr Sara Öberg Strådal, Dr William Hepburn, Dr Hanna Kilpi, Dr Miles Peterson, Dr Fergus Eskola-Oakes, Dr Jennifer Boyle, Dr Rosalind Chapman, Charles Mitchell, Paul Goatman, Rebecca Mason and Jamie Kelly, all of whom shared either an office or a drink with me at some stage and all of whom listened unwearyingly to my ideas, offering vital criticism where it was needed. Throughout the course of my PhD the staff at the University of Glasgow were approachable, encouraging and ever-willing to give up their time and expertise. Special thanks go to Dr Stephen Marritt, Dr Katie Lowe, Dr Debra Strickland, Prof Matthew Strickland and Dr David McOmish for providing help and advice when I found myself on unfamiliar or difficult ground. Most of all, I would like to thank my supervisory team. Prof Julia Smith, my primary supervisor, who was a constant inspiration and who persevered with my idiosyncratic working patterns. Her astute insights and criticisms, as well as her encyclopaedic knowledge of the medieval cult of saints, were an ever-present spur, driving me to the finishing line. Prof Elizabeth Robertson, whose unique perspectives and intelligent critiques helped to bring to my early ideas to fruition. I am especially grateful to Dr Nyree Finlay for stepping into my project in my final year. Without her thorough grasp of theory and unfailing support I would likely have come apart at the seams. I also offer sincere thanks to my examination panel: Dr Simon Yarrow (external), Dr Ewan Campbell (internal) and Dr Stuart Airlie (chair) for making my viva an experience that was challenging, engaging and, somewhat surprisingly, enjoyable.

Beyond my academic bubble I was fortunate to have the generous support of a host of family and friends. I thank my parents, Sandra and Terry, not only for providing financial aid, but for persistently reassuring me that I was not out of my depth. I am eternally grateful to them for indulging my ambitions and teaching me to never give up. I thank my brothers Iain and Stephen, as well as my good friends Jamie Carlin and William McPhee for reminding me that there is more to life than 'dusty old books'. I thank Dr Gavin Brown and Kevin Kerrigan who motivated me to go down this path in the first place. Most importantly, I thank my partner, Isobel Barclay, for putting up with me and my interminable mood swings over the course of my degree. Nobody has sacrificed more towards my education than she has; this thesis is as much a product of her iron resolve as it is of my wandering mind. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to two men who taught me in my early life, George Roberts and Alistair McGregor. The first thought I could, the second thought I couldn't, their words, in equal measure, have guided me to this point.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

Printed name _____

Abbreviations

Abbo	Abbo of Fleury, '*Passio Sancti Eadmundi*', in *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, ed. and trans. Francis Hervey (London, 1907), pp.6-60.
Aelf.	Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints, 2 vols, Early English Text Society 76, 82, 94, 114, ed. and trans. W.W. Skeat* (London, 1881-1900).
ASC	*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London, Phoenix, 2003)
Bart.	Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Woodstock, 2013)
B.Chron.	*Chronica Buriensis: The Chronicle of Bury St. Edmunds, 1212-1301,* ed. Antonia Gransden (London: Nelson, 1964)
BNJ	*British Numanistic Journal*
BSE	Antonia Gransden (ed.), *Bury St Edmunds Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy* (Leeds, 1998)
Cal.L.P.	*Calendar of Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry* VIII, 21 vols, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R. H. Brodie (London, 1862– 1932)
Cath.Enc.	New Advent, *Catholic Encyclopaedia,* [http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/]
COG	Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, 2002)
Corolla	Francis Hervey (ed.), *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr* (London, 1907)
Ecc.His.	Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D.H. Farmer (London, 1990)
St.Ed.	Anthony Bale (ed.), *St Edmund King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint* (York, 2009)
EHR	*English Historical Review*
Father	New Advent, *The Fathers of the Church,* [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/index.html]
Gesta	*Gesta Sacristarum*, trans. W.L North (Minnesota)
Gosc.	Goscelin of St Bertin, *Miracles of St Edmund*, in *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. Tom License (Oxford, 2014), pp.127-305
Herm.	Hermann the Archdeacon, *Liber De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*, in *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. Tom License (Oxford, 2014), pp.1-127

Joc.	Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway and Jane Sayers (Oxford, 1989)
JMC	*Journal of Material Culture*
JML	*Journal of Medieval Latin*
Lib.El.	*Liber Eliensis*, ed. and trans. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005)
Memorials	*Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Arnold (London, 1890-96)
Miracles	Tom License (ed.) *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund,* (Oxford, 2014)
Norman	Tom License (ed.), *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 2014)
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [http://www.oxforddnb.com/]
PSIAH	*Proceedings of the Suffolk Institue of Archaeology and History*
R.D.	Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, ed. James Raine (London, 1835)
Samson	*Opus De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*, in *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, I., ed. Thomas Arnold (London, 1890), pp.105-208
S#	Electronic Sawyer number [http://www.esawyer.org.uk/]

General Introduction

The Latin *reliquiae*, from whence we get our word relic, translates literally as 'things left behind'.[1] When any person dies, they leave behind them two things - matter and narrative - material things and stories. This thesis, which focuses on the Christian middle ages, is interested in the 'things left behind' after a saint, a particularly holy person, dies. It was common, from the earliest times, for Christians to collect not only stories concerning a saint's life but the material through which they had lived it. Bones, hair, clothing and other paraphernalia, came to be considered as holy relics. These objects, it was believed, were imbued with the sanctity of the figure with whom they were associated. Employing a large-scale case study – that of St Edmund of East Anglia – this thesis offers a novel approach to understanding how a medieval saint's cult functioned. Through using the twin lenses of matter and narrative, this study shows how Edmund's continued presence in the world, through 'things left behind', provided not only the impetus for his cult's ongoing development but a range of ways for the living to interact with their saintly patron.

This introduction begins by setting out the primary aims of this thesis. It then proceeds to position the work in its correct scholarly context by offering an interdisciplinary overview of recent scholarship on the cult of saints. After establishing disciplinary boundaries, it goes on to consider the merits of using St Edmund as a case study. Finally, the structure of the work, as well as individual chapter objectives, is outlined.

---

[1] It ultimately derives from a compound of the noun *res* (meaning 'a thing') and the verb *linquo* (meaning 'to leave or abandon').

Thesis aims

> 'A saint was not a person of a particular type but a person who was treated in a particular way. That "way" can be summed up by the word "cult", and its three key elements were public recognition of the name and day of the saint; special treatment of the saint's bodily remains; and celebration of the saint in writing.'[2]

When we think of matter and narrative in the cult of saints, our minds are, as in the above quotation from Robert Bartlett, immediately drawn towards relics and hagiography. For generations, these twin pillars have been treated as the defining features of a saint's cult. This thesis, while acknowledging the centrality of these elements, contests that, if we wish to see cults for the socially engaged institutions that they often were, it is necessary to cast our net wider. Utilising surviving evidence from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the principal aim of this thesis is to offer a more expansive definition of what constituted cultic materiality and cultic narrative. Although both were influential, neither St Edmund's relics nor his hagiography were monolithic. Edmund's cult was woven from a fabric that incorporated a myriad of objects and a diverse range of narratives: meta and micro, written and oral. At all times, Edmund's cult was constructed and maintained through the intimate interplay of the ideal and the material. This interlinkage was, this thesis suggests, based upon a symbiotic relationship between matter and narrative and how people engaged with and used the two. Such engagement was no mere mental exercise, cognitively segregated in some religious closet, but instead permeated aspects of people's daily lives and was integral to identity formation.

This thesis also aims to show that, although grounded in the soil of East Anglia, Edmund's cult was expansive. Over time, the saint's relics and hagiography developed material and narrative accretions, thus altering the shape of the cult's physical and ideological footprint. This expansive nature is equally detectable through the material and narrative traces of Edmund's legacy that were spread out over a broad geography.

---

[2] *Bart.,* p.95.

In this cultic hinterland, free from the direct influence of Bury St Edmunds, recognition of the saint could take on surprising forms.

This thesis advocates a holistic approach that encompasses a broad source base. Therefore, to achieve the above aims, it will not only draw upon traditional, literary and historical data but will also utilise a range of evidence more familiar in other disciplinary settings. Visual representations, as well as archaeological material will help to pinpoint trends in Edmund's cultic development. These trends, in turn, will be highlighted and rationalised through the creation of a bespoke theoretical model, designed and adapted from ideas current in the disciplines of material culture studies.

Scholarly context

Although nominally a work of history, this thesis is an interdisciplinary project and draws on a range of approaches from a variety of academic fields. It is fitting, therefore, that the medieval cult of saints has, in recent decades, seen interest from a broad range of directions. There is neither time nor space here to provide an exhaustive bibliographic account of these various contributions. Instead, what is offered is a brief overview that aims to ground this thesis in its proper scholarly context. This thesis engages closely with ideas such as 'materiality' and 'object agency', ideas brought to the fore by the 'material turn', therefore, this section will include a treatment of this intellectual movement and its impact on the disciplines involved in medieval studies.

History and the cult of saints

Saints cults were ubiquitous throughout the European middle-ages, each cult representing at once the unifying power of the Christian faith and, at the same time, a unique regionalised expression of that faith. Consequently, it should be no surprise that modern historical approaches to medieval saints are traditionally split between large-scale surveys of multiple cults, and focussed studies concentrating on a singular veneration. Regarding the former, Robert Bartlett's monumental, *Why Can the Dead do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, not

only serves as a detailed, diachronic overview of the cult of saints in its pan-Christian context but, with ninety-one pages of bibliography, also offers a thorough appraisal of recent scholarship on saints and their cults.[3] The latter, on the other hand, is typified by Michael Lapidge's epic study: *The Cult of St Swithun*.[4] Lapidge's work is near encyclopaedic in its historical detail and not only provides translations of key texts but also includes contributions from area specialists such as John Crook and Susan Rankin. Although less statistical in their approach, both works are redolent of the degree of historical rigour seen in Ronald Finucane's *Miracles and Pilgrims*, Pierre-André Sigal's *Le Homme et le Miracle* and Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*.[5]

Despite the undoubted erudition of both scholars, their approaches leave certain areas relatively underexplored. Bartlett, for example, offers reflections on hagiography and the nature of cult but mentions the role of oral culture only in passing. Similarly, Lapidge, who dedicates the majority of his book to the discussion of literary sources, provides a limited sense of the material experience of Swithun's cult. These are less oversights than disciplinary conventions, and can readily be put down to an absence of available evidence; oral narrative is, by nature, ephemeral and the material remnants of St Swithun's cult have been all but lost to time. Yet, as scholars such as Rachael Koopmans and Simon Yarrow have shown, it is possible, through the careful use of theory, to extrapolate from texts a sense of the roles played by both oral and material culture in the cult of saints.[6] In their respective ways, both Koopmans and Yarrow are interested in going beyond our clerically written sources to uncover the 'personal' and 'experiential' aspects of the cult of saints. To build her theoretical approach, Koopmans

---

[3] *Bart*.

[4] Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford, 2003).

[5] Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (Basingstoke, 1995); Pierre-André Sigal, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale, XIe-XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1985); Andre ́Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997).

[6] See; Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Oxford, 2011) and Simon Yarrow, 'Miracles, Belief and Christian Materiality: Relic'ing in Twelfth-Century Miracle Narratives', in *Contextualizing Miracles in the Christian West 1100 – 1500: New Historical Approaches*, ed. Matthew M. Mesley and Louise E. Wilson (Oxford, 2014), pp.41-63.

draws on the work of, among others, the linguists Sandra Dolby Stahl and Candace Slater, sociologists Jacqueline Hagan, Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein, as well as the anthropologist Elinor Ochs and the psychologist Lisa Capps. [7] Yarrow, meanwhile, engages with the ideas of anthropologist Karin Barber as a means of showing how objects can become 'entextualised'.[8] The work of Koopmans and Yarrow represents a shift that has taken place over the course of the past two decades that places greater emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration. This move has seen ideas and methodologies, current in other disciplines, enter the arena of medieval studies. Through its engagement with ideas from the fields of archaeology and material culture studies, this thesis also belongs to this tradition.

The 'material turn'

When it comes to dealing with matters of material culture and materiality, historians are, to a degree, latecomers. Writing in 2009 the historian, Frank Trentmann stated that, while those within the discipline of history often talk of engaging with the material things, their notions of how to deal with them remain entrenched and antiquated: focussing solely on notions of 'symbolic communication and identity formation'.[9] Such approaches to materiality represent what Julia Smith has referred to as 'comfortable interdisciplinarity.'[10] Trentmann and Smith are both writing in the context of an intellectual movement that has, in recent years, had a broad effect on the humanities: 'The material turn'.

---

[7] Sandra Dolby Stahl, *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (Bloomington, 2008); Candace Slater, *Trail of Miracles* (Berkeley, 2006); Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, *Living Narratives: Creative Lives in Everyday Storytelling* (Massachusetts, 2001); Jacqueline Hagan, *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope, and Meaning on the Undocumented Journey* (London, 2012); Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *Analysing Narrative Reality* (London, 2009). Koopmans credits these writers in Wonderful, p.231, n.17, and throughout her work.

[8] Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics Oral and Written in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2007).

[9] Frank Trentmann, 'Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 48:2 (2009), pp.283-307.

[10] Julia Smith, 'Portable Christianity: relics in the Medieval West (c.700-c.1200)', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 181, (2012), p.144.

Often characterised as a 'return to things', over the past two decades the 'material turn', has had a broad influence within many academic disciplines, none more so than those concerned with studying the past. It is grounded in the idea that humans exist within a tangible physical environment, filled with tangible, physical things which, through their very existence, have tangible effects. The rise, within the humanities, of the notion that we live with and through material objects and that the relationships we share with them are integral to our existence may, to some, appear recent. However, the material turn has been underway within the fields of archaeology and anthropology for several decades now.

As Dan Hicks reveals in his extensive, historiographical study, *The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect*, beyond the core manifesto to engage with things on 'their own terms', there has been little homogeneity surrounding the turn's intellectual output.[11] Commencing in the late nineteen eighties, almost simultaneously within the fields of archaeology and anthropology, the material turn had its origins as a response to symbolic, constructivist and empirical approaches to material culture. Such approaches, it was argued, ignored the tangible, tactile and experiential nature of 'the material', elements which are integral to the human experience. Since its beginnings, as Hicks portrays it, the material turn has moved and shifted in multifarious directions and has seen unprecedented engagement with ideas from philosophy and the social sciences. These engagements are discussed in more detail in chapter one of this thesis.

Medieval Christianity and the material turn

Within its native disciplines, the material turn has, in some quarters, provoked a conscientious drive to reconsider the role of 'the material' in religious life. This concern is clearly demonstrated by the *Journal of Material Religion*, which adopts a truly global and pantheistic perspective, engaging with the materiality of faith from a plethora of

---

[11] Dan Hicks, 'The Material Cultural Turn: Event and Effect', in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford, 2010), pp.25-98.

angles ranging from pre-colonial Peru to contemporary Vietnam.[12] Conspicuous by their relative absence from this publication, however, are articles examining the materiality of religion from a medieval Christian perspective. This seeming lack of engagement with the material aspects of medieval religious life may be symptomatic of the fact that the study of the medieval period, particularly in its later centuries, has traditionally been dominated by the agendas of historians and art historians rather than archaeologists.[13] Indeed, talking about medieval Christian culture more generally, the art historian Beth Williamson recently commented on the fact that:

> 'until relatively recently, the study of medieval Christianity did not routinely or necessarily involve a consideration of buildings, painted images, furnishings, textiles, or other material accoutrements connected with Christian devotion and practice… It is vital that these conjunctions of medieval Christianity and material culture are considered, given how important visual, material, and even spatial ways of approaching the sacred were in medieval Christianity.'[14]

Material things have not, however, been completely ignored by medievalists. Caroline Walker Bynum has long flown the material flag for medieval studies and must, at least in part, be considered responsible for a recent upsurge in interest.[15] Bynum's work is unique in that, while it has overlapped with the advent of the material turn, it has developed largely independent of its influence, being based instead on a thorough understanding of medieval theology. More theoretical approaches are found in abundance in the range of edited volumes published in recent years. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner's 2010, *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred,* contains a series of essays dedicated to

---

[12] Caroline Dean, 'Fame of Thrones: Seats, Sights, and Sanctity among the Inka', *Journal of Material Religion*, 11:3, (2015), pp.355-385. Gertrud Hüwelmeier, 'Cell Phones for the Spirits: Ancestor Worship and Ritual Economies in Vietnam and its Diasporas', *Journal of Material Religion*, 12:3, (2016), pp.294-321.

[13] Dries Tys, 'Medieval Archaeology' in *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*, 2nd edition, v.I, ed. Neil Asher Silberman (Oxford, 2012), pp.291-2.

[14] Beth Williamson, 'Material Culture and Medieval Christianity', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford, 2014), p.2.

[15] Bynum numerous publications have tended to focus on medieval Christian attitudes towards the body. Her most recent work, however, *Christian Materiality*: *An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011), focusses on a broad range of devotional objects.

religious objects and their representations in literature and art.[16] Also published in 2010 was Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson's *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings*, which offered a variety of interdisciplinary contributions focussing on functional objects.[17] Volume two of Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand's 2011 edited collection, *Push Me Pull You,* dedicated to *Physical and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art,* shows a broad degree of engagement with ideas emanating from the material turn.[18] *English Language Notes* recently dedicated its Fall/Winter 2015 edition to *Medieval Materiality,* while 2016 saw the publication of the multidisciplinary collection *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe*, a selection of papers focussing on the materiality of medieval religion.[19] In addition, a large-scale, AHRC funded, research project led by William Purkis of the University of Birmingham and entitled, *Bearers of the Cross: Material Religion in the Crusading World, 1095-1300,* is currently underway.[20]

Saint's cults, however, remain curiously underserved when it comes to considerations of materiality, especially with regards how materiality relates to the broader social and discursive environment of cult. Individual studies focussing on relics and collections of relics are common, but as this thesis will show, relics were but one, albeit important, aspect of the material life of cult. The reason for this tendency to view relics as the sole locus of the materiality of cult stems from the paradigm set by Peter Brown in his seminal *The Cult of the Saints: Its rise and function in Latin Christianity.*[21] Brown's notion of *praesentia* identifies the relic as the saint's physical

---

[16] Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner (eds.), *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred* (New York, 2010).

[17] Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham, 2010).

[18] Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand (eds.), *Push Me Pull You: Imaginative, Emotional, Physical, and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, v.2 (Leiden, 2011).

[19] Katie Little and Anne Lester (eds.), *Medieval Materiality: English Language Notes*, 53:2 (2015). Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan and Laura Katrine Skinnebach (eds.), *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe* (Dublin, 2016).

[20] [http://www.bearersofthecross.org.uk/project/], project due for completion in 2017.

[21] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1982), esp. C.5, 'Praesentia', pp.86-105.

manifestation within the living world. The presence or lack of relics within a specific location provides, according to Brown, a marker of spatial distance or proximity between the venerator and the venerated. This notion, which naturally isolates the relic as the sole emphasis of cult, has dominated subsequent studies since its publication. The aim here is not to challenge the basic idea of *praesentia*, but to build upon it and to show that saint's cults were expansive both in terms of matter and narrative. Following Brown's lead, this thesis argues that we should take a wide geographic view, where relative distance from the centre plays a key role in the reception and materialisation of cult. Through the case study of St Edmund of East Anglia, this thesis also demonstrates that cult was couched within the broader social, material and narrative fabric of the medieval world. In this way, cults can both reflect the unique character of their local environment and that of wider Christian society.

Why St Edmund?

The saint employed as the case study for this thesis is St Edmund. Commonly referred to as St Edmund King and Martyr, in life, he was the last independent king of East Anglia. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, on November 20th 869, he was put to death by pagan, Danish invaders.[22] Veneration of him began almost immediately after his death and would continue for more than six hundred years until its final suppression during the dissolution of the monasteries. Throughout this life-span, the cult, centred at Bury St Edmunds monastery in Suffolk, remained a popular devotion. At its peak, during the high middle ages, the cult's influence extended well beyond Edmund's old kingdom and was regularly patronised by royalty. This extensive history is one of the primary factors that make Edmund's cult an ideal case study.

Another reason that St Edmund serves as a worthy focus for this study is that, of all the saintly venerations of the English middle-ages, his ranks among the best documented. The monks of Bury left us a substantial archive of evidence. These records

---

[22] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London, 2003), p.70.

fall into many different categories; hagiographies, miracle collections, chronicles, charters, liturgies, legal records and poetry, many of which have been the subject of scholarly editions. Thomas Arnold's three volume *Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, published between 1890 and 1896 contains Latin editions of a great number of historical and hagiographic materials from the abbey.[23] Francis Hervey's 1907, *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, provides a broad range of material, including many of the abbey's most important charters, in Old English and Latin, as well as in translation.[24] D.C Douglas' 1932 *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, also contains Latin editions of many legal documents from the abbey.[25] Individual historical and hagiographic works have also been published. Antonia Gransden's translated edition of the thirteenth-century *Bury Chronicle* was published in 1964, followed in 1970 by her edition of another thirteenth-century text *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds*. [26] Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* was edited in Michael Winterbottom's 1972, *Three Lives of English Saints*.[27] Jocelin of Brakelond's *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, meanwhile, has been edited on numerous occasions, most recently in 1989 by Diana Greenway and Jane Sayers, whose translation now forms part of the *Oxford World Classics* series.[28] In 2009, Anthony Bale and A.S.G. Edwards provided an edition of John Lydgate's Middle English *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*, while in 2014 Tom License edited and translated two twelfth-century collections of St Edmund's miracles in his *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles*

---

[23] *Memorials*.

[24] *Corolla*.

[25] *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, ed. D.C Douglas (Oxford, 1932).

[26] *B.Chron*.; *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk*, ed. Antonia Gransden (London, 1973).

[27] *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Toronto, 1972).

[28] *Joc*.

of St Edmund.[29] Also, in the same year, D.W. Russell edited Denis Piramus twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *La vie seint Edmund Le Rei.*[30]

The abundance of available evidence has led to a significant degree of scholarly interest. Edmund and his cult have a historiography that stretches back over 200 years. Early examples in the antiquarian tradition such as William Yates' *History and Antiquities of the Abbey of St Edmund's Bury* are too broad based to be of any significant use to the modern scholar.[31] J.B. MacKinlay's *St Edmund King and Martyr*, on the other hand, adopts a tone which is too credulous and panegyric to be taken seriously. [32] In their respective works, both Thomas Arnold and Francis Hervey approached the cult of St Edmund with a welcome degree of scholarly rigour. [33] However, as the primary purpose of both men was to provide a compilation of edited sources, it is understandable that their treatments of the topic are short.

The early-twentieth century saw the beginning of a trend towards focussed research on Bury's archive. Documentary studies by H.W.C. Davis and V.H. Galbraith, while not directly addressing cultic practice at Bury St Edmunds, nevertheless did a great deal to reveal the historical context within which the saint's veneration was conducted. [34] In addition, The *Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History* published numerous articles in their proceedings relating to Bury St Edmunds and its saint.[35] By the mid-twentieth century, the sheer variety of sources available from Bury St Edmunds seems to have become fully apparent, and some scholars have forged

---

[29] John Lydgate, *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund and Extra Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. Anthony Bale and A.S.G. Edwards (Heidelberg, 2009). Tom License, *Hermann the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. and trans. Tom License (Oxford, 2014).

[30] Denis Piramus, *La vie seint Edmund Le Rei*, ed. D.W. Russell (Oxford, 2014).

[31] William Yates, *History and Antiquities of the Abbey of St Edmund's Bury* (London, 1843).

[32] J.B. MacKinlay, *St Edmund King and Martyr* (London, 1893).

[33] *Memorials*; *Corolla*.

[34] See; H.W.C. Davis, 'The Commune of St Edmund', and 'The Liberties of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 24 (1909), pp.313-317,417-431; V.H. Galbraith, 'The East Anglian see and the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 40 (1925), pp.222-228; V.H, Galbraith, 'The St Edmundsbury Chronicle, 1296–1301', *EHR*, 58 (1943), pp.53–78.

[35] Perhaps the most influential among these has been; Dorothy Whitelock, 'Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St Edmund', *PSIAH*, 31:3 (1970), pp.217-233.

careers making significant use of them. Such scholars are typified by Rodney Thomson and Antonia Gransden, who between them have published a substantial number of books, articles and scholarly editions of manuscript sources.[36] Other scholars too have made significant contributions to the study of Bury St Edmunds and the cult of St Edmund. St Edmund figures prominently in Susan Ridyard's 1988, *The Royal Saints of Anglo Saxon England*, where she sees him as belonging to a long tradition of royal saints within East Anglia.[37] Gábor Klaniczay, on the other hand, in his 2000 work, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, recognises in Edmund's narrative; 'a new model of sanctity' that 'reconcile(s) royal authority with the qualities of a saint.'[38]

A rising familiarity with the richness of the cult of St Edmund as a subject of study is reflected by the publication, in recent years, of several edited volumes dedicated to Bury St Edmunds and its saint. Chief among these are; Antonia Gransden's 1998, *Bury St. Edmunds: Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology, and Economy*; Anthony Bale's 2008, *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint* and; Tom Licence's *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*.[39] These collections have seen scholars, from a variety of fields, come together to present papers on aspects of religious life at and within the abbey of Bury St Edmunds. Many of these essays explore aspects directly related to the veneration of St Edmund and cover topics ranging from the architectural setting of the cult to liturgy, music and hagiography, to St Edmund's appeal and influence outside of England.

Thus far, however, little has been done to describe the inner workings of St Edmund's cult in a holistic way that pays attention, at the same time, to 'the material'

---

[36] Thomson's most influential contribution was his *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (Woodbridge, 1980); Gransden, meanwhile, has in recent years published the first two volumes of her *A History of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (Woodbridge, 2007-15), which summarises a lifetime of work.

[37] Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988).

[38] Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge, 2000).

[39] *BSE*.; *St.Ed*.; *Norm*.

as well as the literary. Some, however, have come tantalisingly close. From an art historical perspective, both Barbara Abou-El- Haj and Cynthia Hahn, have commented on the political and social implications of Edmund's cult and how these were manifested visually.[40] Simon Yarrow, on the other hand, in his *Saints and their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England,* dedicates a chapter to the cult of St Edmund and recognises within Edmund's miracle stories an attachment to a broader social world.[41] In so doing he echo's Emma Cownie's 1998, 'The Cult of St Edmund in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', where she identifies that the strategies Bury's monks employed to reach multiple audiences were composed of 'mixed media' and could vary dependent upon proximity to the cult centre.[42] These contributions are significant, but they leave open the question of precisely how materiality and narrative inter-relate within cult. The literary scholar Robyn Malo goes some way towards this in her 2013 book, *Relics and Writing,* where she uses Edmund's cult to develop the notion of *Relic Discourse*.[43] Her vision, however, remains one of a centrally administered institution, underpinned almost entirely by relics, shrines and hagiography.

Rebecca Pinner's 2010 PhD thesis, subsequently published in 2015 as *The Cult of St Edmund in East Anglia,* also makes a significant contribution.[44] Pinner, who is primarily a literary scholar, adopts a diachronic approach that examines the cult of St Edmund within a regional context from a variety of angles. Rather than relying purely on hagiography, Pinner introduces a range of visual and material sources. The tone of

---

[40] Barbara Abou-El-Haj, 'Bury St Edmunds Abbey between 1070 and 1124: A History of Property, Privilege and Monastic Art Production', *Art History*, 6 (1983), pp.1-29; Cynthia Hahn, 'Peregrinatio et Natio: The Illustrated Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr', *Gesta*, 30:2 (1991), pp.119-39.

[41] Simon Yarrow, *Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England* (Oxford, 2006).

[42] Emma Cownie, 'The Cult of St Edmund in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: The Language and Communication of a Medieval Saint's Cult', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 99:2 (1998), pp.177-199.

[43] Robyn Malo, *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England* (Toronto, 2013).

[44] Rebecca Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr: Constructing his Cult in Medieval East Anglia* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of East Anglia, 2010) and Rebecca Pinner, *The Cult of St Edmund in Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge: 2015).

her work, however, remains heavily influenced by her disciplinary background. Despite her efforts to engage with a broader source-base, there remains little sense of how these elements relate to one another. Furthermore, the exhaustive chronological remit of her work means that we gain only a partial insight into how the cult of St Edmund was linked to the broader social and religious environment. The temporal scope of this thesis is more restricted than Pinner's. Although it, on occasion, steps either back or forward in time, it is largely limited to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, arguably the highpoint of St Edmund's cult. This approach will allow for a more nuanced analysis of the unique historical circumstances that effected the cult's development.

Structure

This work is structured thematically and is, consequently, divided into three main sections, each comprising two chapters. Chapters one and two examine the material aspects of Edmund's cult, chapters three and four explore ideological and narrative based elements, whilst chapters five and six focus on visual representations as a combination of the two. A seventh and final 'discussion' chapter links the key themes together before a final conclusion is offered.

Chapter one

Chapter one deals with the theoretical and methodological aspects of the thesis. It introduces and utilises theories borrowed from material culture studies, particularly theory involving 'material agency'. It then adapts these elements to develop a bespoke model, based on concentric circles, that allows for a better appreciation of the role of 'the material' within St Edmund's cult. Furthermore, using examples from the twelfth-century *Chronicle of Jocelyn of Brakelond*, this chapter reveals how it is possible, through close analysis of literary sources, to excavate traces of a lost materiality from the matrix of text left to us. The notion of 'object biography' is also considered.

Chapter two

Employing the ideas cultivated in the preceding chapter, chapter two focusses in on the centre point of St Edmund's cult: his shrine. The chapter draws on a range of direct and comparative sources to show that, from the outset, material concerns played an important role in the development of St Edmund's cult. Indeed, it is demonstrated that Edmund's materiality, in many ways, defined him as an idiosyncratic, saintly personality. Edmund's cult existed in a world subject to ever changing social, political and religious circumstances. This chapter surveys how Bury's community met these challenges and how their responses could result either in the co-option or alienation of material things.

Chapter three

Chapter three begins with an exploration of the early development of St Edmund's hagiography. It reveals that Edmund's story was intimately intertwined with other historical, political and religious narratives. Subjected to these associations, Edmund's character would be remoulded on numerous occasions. Ultimately, during the late-eleventh century, a period of political turmoil at Bury St Edmunds would lead to an increasing symbiosis between Edmund's hagiography and the abbey's historical narrative. Edmund was once again recreated, through the use of tenurial documents and fresh hagiographic material, as a figure-head that could actively represent the abbey's interests. This chapter also examines the processes through which Edmund's cult accreted further hagiographic narrative over time.

Chapter four

Chapter four expands on the analysis performed in the previous chapter and charts the dissemination of Edmund's cultic narrative beyond the bounds of East Anglia. Through examining the writings of some of England's foremost medieval thinkers, it is demonstrated that Edmund was reimagined in innovative ways. This chapter also takes account of the oral dimension of St Edmund's cult. Although these unrecorded stories

are, for the most part, lost to us, careful source analysis makes it is possible to uncover traces of this vanished oral tradition. Finally, the chapter returns to the concentric circles structure, developed in chapter one, and uses it to model the narrative environment of Edmund's cult.

Chapter five

'The visual' provides a means of expounding both the material and narrative sensibilities of cult. Chapter five opens by examining how 'accurate' visual representations of a saint can be. Beyond this point the chapter focusses on a particular example of pictorial storytelling produced at Bury: the 32 image miniature sequence that appears in Pierpont Morgan MS M.736. For a full understanding of the sequence and its significance, this chapter first considers the manuscript as an object. This approach reveals much about the material context of St Edmund's cult centre, the manuscript's function and the narrative implications of the sequence. The chapter then offers a detailed analysis of the miniatures themselves. This analysis demonstrates that the artist used material markers as means of elucidating power structures within his narrative. Finally, a comparison between the sequence's narrative structure and that of its literary equivalent reveals that the compiler made some unique adaptations to further enhance the visual, emotional and narrative impact of the work.

Chapter six

Chapter six expands the visual and material discussion. This chapter considers how, through the creation of figurative depictions, other individuals and institutions could lay claim to an Edmund of their own. This chapter demonstrates that, during the lifetime of Edmund's cult, two competing archetypal images of the saint existed contemporaneously and stood for alternating understandings of Edmund's character. By charting their geographic frequency, this chapter shows that these competing figural representations enjoyed relative popularity dependant on their proximity to the cult centre. Beyond this point, this chapter explores the various media used to depict the

saint, indicating in the process how the material form of these representations impacted both on their use and interpretation. In doing so, this chapter makes use of several types of material evidence normally unused by the historian. Ultimately it is revealed that Edmund could be realised, not just through relics, but through a variety of objects.

Chapter seven

The concluding 'Discussion' chapter draws together the interrelated strands from the preceding sections and considers what we can say about the relationship between matter and narrative and how these two aspects of cult fit into wider paradigms of materiality and immateriality and proximity and distance. It is also considered how combinations of Edmund's materiality and narrative were used in different places, at different times and by different people to create the unique truths that fashion personal and corporate identities. Following this, some concluding thoughts are offered on how the theoretical framework developed in this thesis might be adapted and applied to similar cult structures.

Chapter 1: Matter Matters - Modelling the Materiality of Cult

1.1: Introduction

One of the principle arguments put forward by this thesis is that, when it comes to medieval, Christian saints, matter matters. Our medieval forebears, like ourselves, occupied a material world: the lives they lived and the relationships they built, even those relationships with supposed non-corporeal beings, were deeply influenced by the world's material nature. Where persons sought to retreat from the world, to adopt an 'anti-materialist' perspective or to commune with a non-material, spiritual realm, it was impossible for them to do so without setting themselves against and thus negotiating with the perpetual immediacy of the 'material'. This being the case, the examination of matter can tell us a great deal about the past, not just about how our ancestors constructed and worked with matter, but about how they understood it and engaged with it in more profound ways. This chapter demonstrates that such is undeniably true of the cult of saints.

As my general introduction makes clear, my approach will be to examine the 'things left behind' by a medieval, English, saint's cult. Adopting England as the focus for such a study presents a particular hurdle. The extreme iconoclasm of England's Reformation has left little in the way of tangible 'stuff' to examine and what does remain is often devoid of context. Yet, the near extinction of medieval, Christian materiality in England does not make the task impossible. Although the matter itself may have vanished, we are often left with documentary and literary sources that record how people reacted and interacted with it. Drawing on such evidence in respect to a saint's cult can help us reconstruct a sense that cult's lost materiality.

Excavating a fragmented materiality from a textual matrix necessitates a fairly robust range of theoretical tools. Consequently, this chapter will be focussed on building a theoretical apparatus. Many of the ideas introduced here are current within the field of material culture studies and may appear novel to some historians. This being the case it will first be necessary to provide some terminological definitions. Having done this, I go on to employ the concepts of 'materiality' and 'material agency' to develop a framework that allows for a revealing exploration of 'the material' within the cult of St Edmund. This exploration, in turn, illustrates that saints' cults were defined, constructed and maintained in relation to their material environment. The theoretical methodologies examined in this chapter are diverse and, at times, may even appear contradictory, but, through adopting and adapting elements from each, I am able to produce my own cohesive and sustained theoretical model. Examples of this model in practice will show that viewing the cult of saints from a matter-focussed perspective is not only a valid, but also rewarding approach.

1.2: Materiality

The term materiality has, in recent years, held broad currency within a range of theoretical works emanating from the field of material culture studies. Papers, monographs and edited collections have been written on such diverse subjects as the 'materiality of magic', the 'materiality of domestic waste' and the 'materiality of individuality'.[1] Broadly speaking, these studies either aim at highlighting the material dimensions of subjects generally not considered from a materialist perspective, such as: literature, emotions and ideologies, or aim to provide a non-objectivist perspective on artefacts, recasting 'the material' as a genuine contributor to the world of social

---

[1] Ceri Houlbrook and Natalie Armitage (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic: An artifactual investigation into ritual practices and popular beliefs* (Oxford, 2015); Laurence Douny, 'The Materiality of Domestic Waste: The Recycled Cosmology of the Dogon of Mali', *JMC*, 12:3 (2007), pp.309-331; Caroline L. White (ed.), *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives* (London, 2009).

relations. Given the broad remit of these studies, it is less than surprising that there is no strict consensus as to what precisely is meant by 'materiality'.

One scholar who has offered a definition is the archaeologist Carl Knappett. Fully aware of the ambiguity surrounding the term, Knappett takes the logical step of defining materiality by contrasting it with some of its approximate cognates: 'artefacts', 'materials', 'material culture' and 'material worlds.'[2] The abovementioned cognates are, according to Knappett, too 'static and categorical', to represent the depth of what materiality encompasses. Material culture, for example, risks portraying 'a polarized world of materials on the one hand and culture on the other, with the former acted upon by the latter.'[3] Materiality, for Knappett, is a more 'relational' term which, 'though not perfect', goes some way towards conveying the 'on-going dynamic of human artifactual relations'.[4] The fundamental aim of materiality research, he tells us, is to downplay the 'duality between mind and matter.'[5] In other words, Knappett's materiality deals not only with concrete physical things, but also with how our inner, cognitive worlds are linked to 'the material'.

Daniel Miller, who in recent years has been one of the principal exponents of theories surrounding materiality, takes a more pragmatic stance, suggesting that there are two valid ways of understanding the term, one 'vulgar' the other 'philosophical'.[6] For Miller, the 'vulgar' understanding of materiality imagines it as something wholly composed of physical objects: in other words, materiality as 'artefact'. An alternate, more philosophical viewpoint, he argues, would be to consider materiality as including 'the ephemeral, the imaginary, the biological, and the theoretical'.[7] This more inclusive

---

[2] Carl Knappett, 'Materiality in Archaeological Theory', in *Encyclopaedia of Global Archaeology*, *v.7*, ed. Claire Springer (New York, 2007), pp.4700-4708.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.4701.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.4702.

[5] *Ibid.*, p.4702.

[6] Daniel Miller, 'Materiality: An Introduction', in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, 2005), p.10.

[7] *Ibid.*, p.10.

approach suggests that even the most conceptual of constructs are defined in relation to the material world. Some, such as Miller's colleague at UCL, Victor Buchli, have gone further still, arguing that we should recognise the immaterial as nothing more than an extension of the material. His recent work has shown how our interactions with the immaterial are framed by our experience of the material world.[8]

The broad definition of materiality advocated by Miller and Buchli has been enthusiastically received in some quarters, for others, however, it is less than convincing. Indeed, in 2007 the anthropologist Tim Ingold lamented that the ideas surrounding materiality had become so convoluted that they presented 'a real obstacle to sensible enquiry into materials, their transformations and affordances.'[9] Whilst Ingold's grievances may not be entirely without merit, in the context of this thesis, where I will often be discussing objects no longer extant and their association with an immaterial being, it is necessary to adopt a position on materiality which extends beyond the mere physical. This thesis is as much concerned with the way in which our material environments are cognitively framed, as it is with matter itself. It is important, of course, when approaching such a subject historically, to account for contemporary perceptions. How then do we, as twenty-first-century scholars, adopt a medieval view on materiality? One interesting approach, which has long been in vogue within the field of material culture studies, has been to examine materiality through the lens of 'agency'.

1.3: Agency and material agency

The concept of agency - the capacity to act - lies at the crux of this study. To medieval Christians, saints were universally believed to be agential beings: heavenly residents with the ability to effect the living environment. Yet, for the modern thinker, the idea of a saint acting agentially represents something of a conundrum. Traditional

---

[8] Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of the Immaterial* (London, 2016).

[9] Tim Ingold, 'Materials Against Materiality', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14:1 (2007), pp.1-16.

approaches to agency are almost entirely anthropocentric, characterizing agency as the product of *intentional* action conducted solely by living *human* actors. A good example of this orthodox perspective is provided by the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Archaeology*, published in 2003, which defines agency in the following way:

> '**agency** [Th.] The proposition that human beings think about the intentional actions they perform and the resources they need to achieve their ends.'[10]

From an objective standpoint, saints – deceased individuals existing as invisible entities – do not fulfil the criteria of being human. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that our medieval Christian ancestors *were* affected by them. Innumerable accounts survive detailing miraculous cures or unlikely chains of events, each attributed to saintly intervention. Whether one sees these effects as the result of the real presence of a supernatural force or whether one instead interprets them as the cumulative result of misdirected belief and psychosomatic response, this evidence is, at the very least, testament to the power of the *idea* of saints. As noted above, such affective power is a natural indicator of agency, traditionally a human only facet. When we consider the phenomenon of relics, traditional notions of agency are further problematized. Medieval accounts are clear that relics were the most effective locus of a saint's power. The saint's supernatural agency was seen to project from these artefacts. Surviving accounts are unequivocal that people's behaviours and actions were shaped through their proximity to these material objects. Again, such a scenario, whereby an inanimate object displays the ability to effect the environment and the people surrounding it, challenges traditional notions of agency as an exclusively human attribute.

Thinkers from various disciplinary backgrounds have developed a range of theoretical apparatus aimed at tackling the problem of non-human agency: collectively these are often referred to as theories of 'material agency'. Theories of 'material

---

[10] Timothy Darvill, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* (Oxford, 2003), p.5.

agency' all suggest, in one way or another, that, through effecting their environment, objects can behave much like social actors. The idea that a non-human can have agency is of course contentious.[11] As indicated above, traditional definitions of agency rely upon the concept of *intentionality*: the idea that actions are perpetrated consciously and deliberately. Inanimate objects, at least within modern western ontology, lack the ability to act intentionally. It stands to reason, therefore, that attempts to account for the affective ability of 'things' have required a substantial reconsideration of what agency is and how it works. The anthropologist Alfred Gell, sticking with the notion of intentionality, argued that agency is not inherent within matter, but is instead distributed and imbued by an initial human actor or actors.[12] The sociologists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, on the other hand, have urged a radical redefinition of our concept of agency, suggesting that agency does not inhere within any one actor, but is instead created in the interactions between actors.[13] All of this, as Andrew Jones and Nicola Boivin highlight in their chapter of the *Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, has made material agency, like materiality, a notoriously difficult concept to define and one constantly subject to misunderstanding. [14]

Difficult to define though it may be, developing an understanding of notions of material and non-human agency is an important aspect of this thesis. Part of the reason for this is that medieval Christians were far more at home with the idea of extra-human agency than we are today. Indeed, within medieval Christian cosmology all action was ultimately believed to stem from a non-human source. God gave life to the universe and was responsible for the laws of time and nature, therefore, all action, natural or

---

[11] For a critique of material agency see; Ingold, 'Materials against materiality'.

[12] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency an Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 2013).

[13] Callon introduced the concept of so called 'actor networks' in 1986. See; Michel Callon, 'The Sociology of an Actor-Network: the case of the Electric Vehicle', in *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology*, ed. M. Callon, J. Law and A. Rip (London, 1986), pp.19-34.

[14] Andrew Jones and Nicole Boivin, 'The Malice of Inanimate Objects: Material Agency', in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford, 2010), p.334.

supernatural, was ultimately seen to stem from God.[15] In addition, it was widely accepted that objects, in the form of relics, had miraculous properties that could affect the physical and mental state of those who came into contact with them. When studying a social phenomenon, such as a medieval saints' cult, couched in such a belief system, it is pertinent to find a means of reconciling the temporal and ontological divide between then and now. The use of material agency theory will assist in doing so. Alfred Gell's work, which suggests that humans impart their own agency into objects, is especially useful in conceptualizing how people understood the miraculous functions of religious relics.

1.4: Alfred Gell and the 'relic nexus'

In his 1998 book *Art and Agency* the anthropologist Alfred Gell attempted to develop a new approach that accounted for the emotional responses art could seemingly elicit.[16] Gell's aim, was to develop a theory of 'distributed agency', focussing on how effects are induced, or are perceived to be induced, by one subject (the artist) upon another (the recipient) through the medium or 'index' of art.[17] In this theory the artwork itself, as a created thing, is granted or is believed to be granted, agency by its creator. Gell points out that when one encounters a work of art and is moved in a particular way, the tendency is to believe that this effect was the artist's original intention.

Gell's model is particularly relevant to the study of relics and the cult of saints because he draws active parallels between art and religion. For Gell, art is a 'cult', a 'faith', a system of belief reliant upon both subjective choice and social pressures.[18]

---

[15] *COG*, 10:9.

[16] For a posthumous collection of Gell's essays see; Alfred Gell, *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams*, ed. Eric Hirsch (London, 1999). For numerous discussion of Gell's work and its importance see; Liana Chua and Mark Elliot (eds.), *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell* (New York, 2013).

[17] Miller, *Materiality,* pp.12-13.

[18] Alfred Gell, 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology', in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, 2009), p.209f.

Likewise, to Gell, the aesthetic appreciation of art, in all its many forms, is tantamount

to theological speculation within religion. In this context, the artworks themselves

might be viewed as the material manifestations of the cult of art, in the same way that

relics can be seen as a material manifestation of the cult of saints: both inspiring awe

and wonderment from the initiated. Yet, Gell's project in *Art and Agency* was not to

provide a manifesto for aesthetic appreciation. His aim was to design an anthropological

methodology that might counteract the subjectivity of aestheticism. Gell was concerned

that previous anthropological or sociological approaches to art had been either too

subjective, being driven by localized aesthetics, or too focussed on notions of symbolic

value.[19] According to Gell an object of art is:

> 'a physical entity which mediates between two beings, and therefore creates a
> social relation between them, which in turn provides a channel for further social
> relations.'[20]

The two beings in question are the artist and their audience. Through the artwork,

through the process of creating, the artist is able to communicate ideas and thus affect

his or her audience indirectly, see Tab.1.1 below.
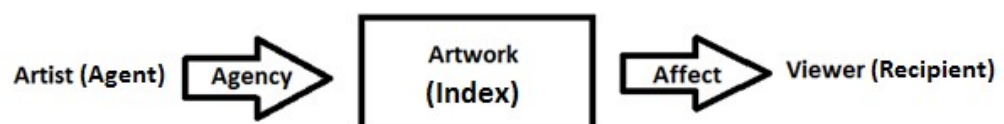
Tab.1.1: Basic model of distributed agency.

In all likelihood the artist will not be present to decode the precise meaning of these

ideas or to mediate the precise nature of the effect; the art object is left to do this by

itself. Instead, the artist, through his or her artistry, has imbued the work with a form

of agency. Gell accepted that agency requires intentionality, therefore, he understood

---

[19] *Ibid.*, p.210.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.218.

that the agency seemingly displayed by artworks was 'secondary' or 'distributed' in nature. The artist, through his or her skill, arranges their base materials to form their artwork. Through this creative process he or she transfers agency into the work, thus granting it the ability to act freely as an agent on their behalf.

The simple chain of agency distribution – from artist to artwork to recipient - underlines the essence of Gell's argument. However, it would be overly reductive to think that this represents the limit of his analysis. For Gell, there were in fact four principal components[21] within any artistic encounter - we have already referred to the artist, the index (artwork), and the recipient - the fourth was the 'prototype': the thing (real or imagined) that the artwork represents. Again, in their simplest arrangement, we can imagine these contributors existing in a chain:
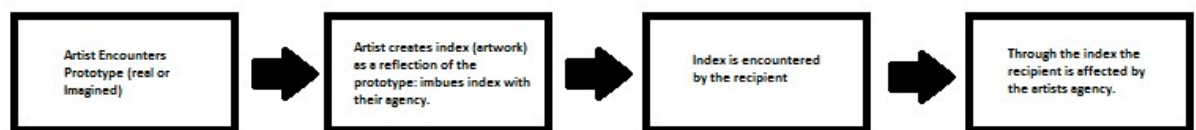
Tab.1.2: Four part distributed agency.

Yet, Gell's notion of agency was never intended to be a one-way street. As an anthropologist, Gell was keenly aware that the effects brought about through this species of agency were culturally and technologically relative. Moreover, he was also aware that the roles played by each contributor in the agential chain could be configured differently when viewed from different cultural perspectives. In order to account for these variations, Gell produced a table that placed each of the contributors in an agential dialogue with every other. Within this model any contributor could take on the active role of 'agent' (actor), or the passive role of 'patient' (entity being acted upon). He named this table the 'art nexus', see Tab.1.3 below.[22]

---

[21] Henceforward referred to collectively as 'contributors'.

[22] The table is taken from Gell, *Art and Agency*, p.29.

AGENT

PATIENT	Artist	Index	Prototype	Recipient
Artist	Artist as source of creative act / Artist as witness to act of creation	Material inherently dictates to artist the form it assumes	Prototype controls artist's action, appearance of prototype imitated by artist. Realistic art.	Recipient cause of artist's action (as patron)
Index	Material stuff shaped by artist's agency and intention	Index as cause of itself: 'self-made' / Index as a 'made thing'	Prototype dictates the form taken by index	Recipient the cause of the origination and form taken by the index
Prototype	Appearance of prototype dictated by artist. Imaginative art	Image or actions of prototype controlled by means of index, a locus of power over prototype	Prototype as cause of index / Prototype affected by index	Recipient has power over the prototype. Volt sorcery.
Recipient	Recipient's response dictated by artist's skill, wit, magical powers, etc. Recipient captivated.	Index source of power over recipient. Recipient as 'spectator' submits to index.	Prototype has power over the recipient. Image of prototype used to control actions of recipient. Idolatry.	Recipient as patron / Recipient as spectator

Tab.1.3: The 'Art Nexus' table.

In the following sections I will show that, with the proper adaptations, Gell's 'art nexus' offers a useful tool for analysing the social interactions required to bring a saint's cult to life. By placing a physical medium at the heart of these interactions, it also provides a powerful method of rationalising the central role played by 'the material' within the cult of saints. However, in order to apply this model historically, it is necessary to alter some of Gell's terminology. The medieval cult of saints existed within a very specific ontological system with its own set of theological rules: rules which are not, in all cases, directly comparable to those Gell imagined as applying to the world of art.

Index/Relic

At the centre of Gell's model lies the 'index'. The index, to Gell, represented the artwork itself, the created, material thing which indexes: the form of the prototype, the intentions of the artist and the expectations of the recipient. In chapters five and six we will discuss the indexical nature of visual culture within the cult of saints. However, for the moment, it suffices to say that both in a material and in a theological sense, at least in western Christendom, the role of visual representation was less central to the cult of saints than that played by relics. Although they take on an index-like role, relics differ from the artwork in Gell's model, in that they are not 'created' in the same way as a work of art is created.[23] Theologically speaking, what differentiated a relic from a common object were two things, firstly its association with the saint to whom it belonged and secondly, its purported ability to act as a medium through which that saint could enact miracles. Like works of art, relics are 'physical entities which mediate between two beings'. If the mediation involving art is between artist and audience, then, in the simplest sense, the mediation produced by a relic is between saint and venerator, see Tab.1.4.
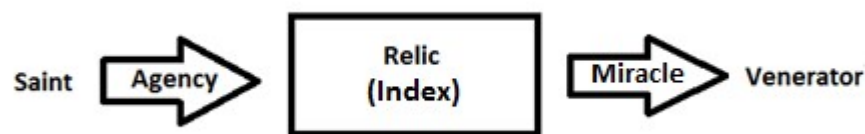
Tab.1.4: Distributed agency and the cult of saints.

Note should be taken at this point that, although contemporary sources frequently attributed miracles to saints, this is not entirely correct. Orthodox Christian teaching held that saints were *intermediaries* with no miraculous power in and of

---

[23] The relics referred to here are the primary relics left behind by a saint. 'Contact relics', sometimes called 'secondary relics' could be created. The process leading to this creation is discussed later in this section under the heading 'Relic as agent' and in further detail in chapter two.

themselves: they could only *intercede* with God to bring about miraculous occurrences; see Tab.1.5 below.[24]

Tab.1.5: Distributed agency and the cult of saints (extended).

In reality, saints were understood to act as a medial link in an agential chain that directed the miraculous power of God, by way of relics, to the earthly realm. Throughout this thesis I shall continue to refer to the 'miracles of saints' or the 'miracles of relics', this is done, however, with the caveat that saintly miracles were a figment of contemporary popular perception rather than *theological* dogma. Irrespective of whether we recognise relics as an index of the saint or ultimately as an index of God, they were, in either case, the material fulcrum around which cult revolved.

Artist/Interlocutor

As outlined earlier, relics often had no artist in a truly direct sense. It is, of course, possible to think of the artist as consonant with the saint him or herself. Within Christian theology the piety of a saint was considered to be so powerful that it could adhere to and inhere within the tangible products of that saint's life: his or her relics.[25] However, a difficulty is presented when we consider that we are talking about material objects in the material world. Saints, by definition, are immaterial and, with the exception of occasional, miraculous interventions, were not capable of acting unilaterally within the material world. Before a saint's relic or relics could form the

---

[24] *COG*, 10:9.

[25] *Bart.*, p.244.

basis of a cult, these objects first needed to be recognised as especial and then had to be arranged spatially within the physical environment. It is, therefore, better, in most circumstances, to consider the 'artist' as the human doing the recognising and arranging. This person's role is not that of an artist per-se, but instead is that of an interlocutor between the unseen saint: the prototype being indexed, and the venerator: the recipient. In most cases, the interlocutor should not be thought of as a discreet individual. Instead, given that the greater proportion of relics existed within a monastic milieu, we should think of them in institutional terms. The role would have been extra-generational and over time would have involved a great many individuals. Furthermore, within the cult of saints, the role of interlocutor does not enjoy the same degree of separation from the recipient as the term 'artist' would imply. Interlocutors were themselves venerators in that they viewed the saint with the same, if not higher, esteem as did ordinary cult members. It might, therefore, be better to think of the role of the interlocutor as closer to that of an 'executive recipient' rather than an artist.

Prototype/Saint

As has already been suggested, it is possible to think of the saint as, at least partially, fulfilling the role of the artist. However, given the saint's exulted state of being and their general need for an interlocutor, it might be more accurate to think of them as the prototype: the thing being indexed by the relic. This having been said, if a saint is to be thought of as a prototype, then, as we are considering them within a medieval Christian context, they should be thought of as a prototype with far more direct agency than Gell's model would conservatively permit. Unlike the prototype indexed by a landscape painting or a portrait, the indexical relationship between a saint and his or her relics is not merely representational. Relics do not merely capture an image or an idea in time and space; they enjoy a direct and continuous relationship with their prototype. Indeed, the metaphysical link between a saint and his/her relics was so

strong that it was possible to think of the saint *as* the relic. As we shall see in chapter two, this was certainly the case in cults which revolved around a 'whole body'.

Recipient/Venerator

In the cult of saints, the contributor who takes on a similar role to Gell's recipient is the venerator. In many ways this is the least complicated analogy in that, for the most part, a venerator's response to a relic is highly redolent of a recipient's response to an art index. It should be noted, however, that not every interaction with a saint and his/her relics was an act of veneration. Indeed, hagiographic texts are replete with instances where saint's punished those who failed in their venerative obligations. I have adopted 'venerator' as a blanket term for those who generally took on the position of 'patient' within cultic relations. 'Venerator', therefore, can be understood, primarily, to denote the cult's audience. Nevertheless, venerators were not 'patient only' contributors. As patrons they had significant agency in their own right.

The relic nexus

Having identified how Gell's terminology can be adapted to fit the specific circumstances existing within the cult of saints, it would be useful to adapt his 'art nexus' table to suit. Tab.1.6 below displays what I have termed the 'relic nexus'.

Tab.1.6: The 'relic nexus'.

As with Gell's art nexus, each of the contributors in the relic nexus is capable of affecting any other. When we place each contributor in the respective positions of agent/patient the effects reveal some very specific forms of interaction. In the following sections I will look at how each contributor, in the position of agent, is capable of affecting the others.

Interlocutor as agent

For Gell, when an artist is in the active role of agent, then they are the source of the creative act. If we are to consider the interlocutor as the source of the 'creative act', then we need only think of the phenomena of *invention* (from the Latin word *invenio*, meaning 'to find'). It is often the case in saints' narratives that a relic has first to be

found before a cult can properly be established. It does not matter whether one considers such discoveries to be the results of divine providence or the cynical and exploitative actions of the interlocutor. In either case, through the process of invention, the interlocutor is, performing a creative and agential act.

The interlocutor's agency was not strictly limited to 'invention'. Interlocutors could also influence the form of a **relic** in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, interlocutors could be responsible for the 'fragmentation' of a relic. This fragmentation was a process whereby the relic, as a locus of saintly power, could be broken up into pieces and those pieces gifted to other institutions and individuals. In theory, fragmentation did not dilute the inherent power of the relic, but instead permitted the saint to be present at several locations at one time.[26] By intentionally breaking up a relic into multiple parts the interlocutor could enact a very direct form of agency over the artefact and its indexical power.[27] Indirectly, interlocutors were responsible for 'shaping' a relic through the production of reliquaries and shrines. The majority of relics remained, for the most part, hidden from view, encased within richly ornamented repositories. The commissioning and manufacture of shrines and reliquaries afforded interlocutors control over the external 'form' of the relic that would be seen by the broader community. In both these scenarios, direct and indirect, the interlocutor acts as agent, while the relic is patient. It should be noted that since, theologically speaking, a saint's relics *were* the saint, by acting as 'agent' towards the relics, the interlocutor also placed the **saint** in the position of patient. Furthermore, as will be discussed

---

[26] *Ibid*., p.239.

[27] The practice of deliberate symbolic fragmentation of objects and bodily remains is not unique to the Christian middle ages. For a prehistoric context for this practice see; John Chapman, *Fragmentation in archaeology. People, places, and broken objects in the prehistory of south-eastern Europe* (London, 2000), particularly c.5 and c.6. For a classical context see; Iain Ferris, 'A severed head. Prolegomena to a study of the fragmented body in Roman archaeology and art', in *Roman finds: context and theory*, ed. R. Hingley and S. Willis (Oxford: 2007), pp. 116-127. Of particular interest in Ferris' work is the notion that pre-Roman Britons already have engaged in practices analogous to medieval relic veneration, p.122.

throughout this thesis, human interlocutors were responsible for 'shaping' both the saint's literary and figurative images. In so doing they again adopted an agential stance, thus making the saint the patient. Finally, interlocutors shared an agent/patient relationship with the saint's **venerators**. As interlocutors were responsible for maintaining and arranging the material and intellectual environment within which cult was performed, they were directly responsible for shaping venerator experience.

Relic as agent

For Gell, when an art index takes on an agential role it can be understood to be self-creative. The cult of saints presents numerous examples where relics are seen as a creative force in their own right, for example, the phenomenon of *acheiropoita* (literally 'not made by hands') in the Greek Orthodox tradition, where religious icons were thought able to spontaneously manifest.[28] Likewise, the prevalent idea of 'contact relics': previously mundane objects made holy through proximity to pre-existing relics. In both cases the indexical object itself performs a creative role. Of course, the miraculous agency imbued within the relic is, at all times, of a distributed or secondary kind, having originated from the saint or from God. Nevertheless, it is evident that ordinary medieval men and women took a more ambiguous stance towards object agency. Indeed, it has been noted that it was not uncommon for medieval Christians to view their world and the objects in it, relics included, in an almost animistic way.[29] This suggests that a gap existed between an elevated theological understanding of the world and the more earthy and folk logic of everyday life. Such folk logic is likely to have seen relics as a far more direct repository of supernatural power and thus agency.

---

[28] According to Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the iconoclast era c.680-850: a history* (Cambridge, 2001), p.35, *acheiropoita* are the form of image which 'most closely approximated relics'.

[29] For a discussions concerning the survival of animistic practices and beliefs within the medieval Christian world see; Kit W. Wesler, *An Archaeology of Religion* (Lanham, 2012), p.45 and 231-2; Nicholas Terpstra, 'Civic Religion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Religion*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford, 2014), p.160.

Relics could occupy the position of agent within the relic nexus in a number of ways. It was discussed above that through creating a reliquary the **interlocutor** was capable of acting upon the relic. It should also be considered that, in such circumstances, there is a reverse interaction taking place. The material form of the relic dictated to the interlocutor what shape the reliquary should take. The ultimate exempla of this were so called 'speaking reliquaries': reliquaries shaped to represent the body part from which their relic derived.[30] Gell's 'art nexus' further suggests that it is possible for the prototype to be acted upon by the index: Gell himself offers the fictional 'Picture of Dorian Grey' as an example of how such a process might be thought to work.[31] Similarly, it is a common trope within hagiographic narrative that a saint's mood, demeanour and or actions are directly affected by the treatment of his or her relics. In such cases the **saint** is acted upon by the relative status of his/her relic and is thus the patient. The close agent/patient relationship shared between the relic and its saint is perhaps most keenly demonstrated by the 'humiliation of relics.[32] The humiliation of relics was a phenomenon whereby a religious community would seek to spur their saint into action by removing his or her relics from their repositories and placing on the ground before the high altar. The supposition was that, with their relics placed in such an uncomfortable position, the saint would be compelled to take action on behalf of the community. In such circumstance the saint is the patient, acted upon through the human agency distributed into the relic. Finally, the **venerator** commonly adopted the patient role towards the relic: often quite literally. One need only to consider the Christian tradition of pilgrimage where a saint's venerators would travel over great distances to be acted on by the saint through his or her relics. During such encounters pilgrims would often seek to be cured of some physical, mental or

---

[30] For the significance of 'speaking reliquaries' see Cynthia Hahn, 'The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries', *Gesta*, 36:1 (1997), pp.20-31.

[31] *Art and Agency*, p.32.

[32] For more on this phenomenon see 'Humiliation of Saints' in Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (London, 1994), pp.95-116. See also *Bart.*, p.110-11.

existential impediment by making contact with relic material: truly a patient in every sense of the word.

Saint as agent

When Gell thought of the prototype in an agential role he imagined it as the causal factor underlying the index. Again, as the saint can be seen as analogous with the prototype and the relic with the index, it is easy to draw a causal trajectory between the two. It was through a relic's association with the saint's piety that it came to be considered a supernaturally potent artefact. However, the saint's agency should not be thought of as limited to defining the relic/index. Saints were understood to be continuous agents and any miracles brought about through contact with their relics were, by way of distribution, seen as the actions of the saint.

In the context of the relic nexus the saint can take on the role of agent to the other contributors in a number of ways. Firstly, the agency of the saint can hold significant influence over the **interlocutor**. As suggested above, the role of the interlocutor in many ways more closely resembles that of Gell's 'recipient' than that of his 'artist'. The interlocutor may be the human middle-man between the saint and his/her ordinary venerators, but they are still a believer in their own right: a believer who is in regular and close contact with the saint and his/her relics. As will be seen when we come to look at the cult of St Edmund, within hagiographic tradition, it was common for a saint to make instrumental use of a human interlocutor. A saint's heavenly existence limited their ability to interact with the wider world in a human-like fashion, making the presence of an interlocutor – a person able to interpret and execute the saint's will – a necessity. This relationship is often presented as one where the interlocutor is nothing more than a passive patient acting out the wishes of their patron.

One such example appears in the origin story of Walsingham Abbey.[33] According to tradition, in 1061 the Virgin Mary appeared several times to an English noblewoman named Richeldis de Faverches.[34] During these visitations Mary instructed Richeldis to build a house for her at Walsingham, even going so far as to provide precise dimensions for the structure. The resultant 'Holy house of Walsingham' would later become one of England's most popular destinations for pilgrimage. Richeldis, in the story, is very much presented as a patient to the saint's will, acting out the Virgin's divine wishes. In the Walsingham case it is also possible to think of the **relic** as patient to the saint's agency. In providing Richeldis with the dimensions for her holy house, Mary showed that it was thought possible for a saint to have direct control over the form their relic/index took. Hagiographic sources provide countless other examples where saints, through controlling the material attributes of their relics, display a direct and miraculous form of agency. This is particularly the case in instances where institutional ownership of the saint's remains is contested. Within such narratives it is common for a saint to make their relics miraculously heavy to the point where the illegitimate party is unable to lift them.[35] As one might imagine, the relics then revert to their standard, transportable weight once the righteous custodian takes hold of them. Through rendering their relics temporarily and miraculously immovable, saints were considered able to elicit direct, agential control over them. Lastly, the saint, through their ability to act as an agent, has power over the **venerator**. This power could be miraculous, in the sense that saints could affect their venerators through supernatural means, or symbolic in that a saint could play a significant role in defining both the individual and social identities of their venerators.

---

[33] For a detailed treatment of Walsingham's origin story see; Gary Waller, *Walsingham and the English Imagination* (London, 2016).

[34] The tradition that Walsingham had pre-conquest origins, still endorsed at the modern pilgrim shrine, is now considered highly dubious. Walsingham priory is known to have been founded in 1153 by one Geoffrey de Fervaques. See; John Twyning, 'Walsingham and the Architecture of English History', in *Walsingham in Literature and Culture from the Middle Ages to Modernity*, ed. Dominic Janes and Gary Waller (Farnham, 2010) p.168.

[35] Ridyard, *Royal* Saints, p.146.

Venerator as agent

We tend, as in Tabs.1.4 and 5, to think of the recipient/venerator as fulfilling the passive role of the patient. However, within the context of Gell's art nexus, recipients, through their role as patron, are equally capable of acting as an agent. This was certainly the case for venerators within the cult of saints.

Although novel modes of piety might begin life as 'popular' movements, those ultimately responsible for 'formally' sanctioning innovations were the saint's **interlocutors**. The body (monastic or otherwise) that cared for a saint's shrine could choose to endorse or reject any practice pertaining to the veneration of a saint and while that choice was not, strictly speaking, binding, it nevertheless carried a great deal of weight. One would think that such a scenario places agency firmly in the hands of the interlocutor, but this was not necessarily the case. As institutions that spanned multiple generations, saint's cults were subject to shifting trends in audience expectation. If, as the saint's earthly executors, interlocutors failed to keep up with the demands of this audience, then they risked their cult becoming irrelevant. As Richard Landes puts it: 'In matters of ritual innovation, *vox populi, vox Dei*.'[36] In this way, interlocutors were very much patients to the agency of the venerator.

In his art nexus, Gell accounts for the recipient's agency over the index by suggesting that they, as patron, can be responsible for the commissioning of an artwork. In the cult of saints, where a **relic** acts as the index, there is no direct analogy to the commissioning process. However, much like interlocutors, venerators could use their agency to affect the form of the relic both directly and indirectly. Medieval and late antique sources detail numerous instances where over-zealous venerators sought to take portions of a relic away for themselves. On early example of such behaviour is famously revealed in a letter written by a nun named Egeria. Egeria, who went on pilgrimage to

---

[36] Richard Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes, 989-1034* (London, 1995) p.211.

Jerusalem in the 380s relates how the relic of the 'true cross' required to be guarded because: 'someone is said to have bitten off and stolen a portion of the sacred wood.'[37] Although such action was evidently highly transgressive, Egeria's anecdote, nevertheless, reveals that a venerator could directly impact the physical form of a relic. Venerators could also, much like interlocutors, influence the form of a relic in a less direct manner through the production of reliquaries, shrines and other adornments. The venerator's agency as a patron also extended to placing the **saint** in a patient role. A saint required venerators (those remembering him/her as a saint) in order to maintain their existence. Despite its extended theological significance, 'veneration' is fundamentally a process of memorialisation. If potential venerators chose not to remember or honour a saint, then that saint's religious significance would swiftly fade.

Summary

The adaptation of Alfred Gell's art nexus presented above provides a means of articulating how the fundamental elements, both material and immaterial, of a saint's cult relate to and interact with one another. Within this 'relic nexus' we can see that a material index, in the form of a relic, often lies at the heart of cult. This relic acts as an agential filter through which social relations and exchanges, involving not only humans, but also 'culturally postulated beings' such as God or his saints, could be mediated and enacted. Tab.1.7, presented below, provides a simplified representation of these interactions.

---

[37] Egeria, *The Pilgrimage of Etheria*, ed. and trans. M.L. McClure and C.L. Feltoe (London, 1919) p.75.
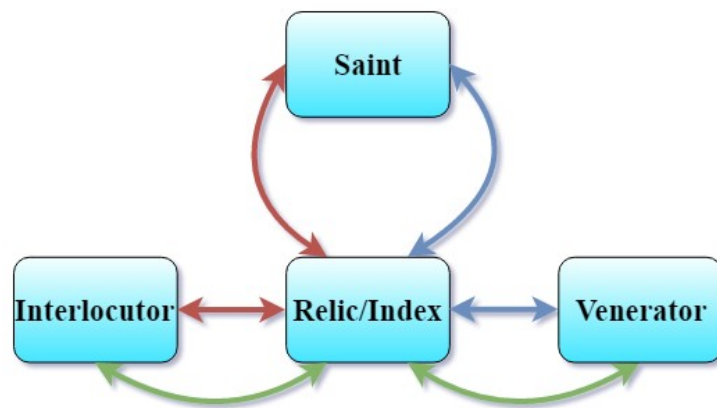
Tab.1.7: Fundamental interactions within the relic nexus.

Adopting such a perspective reveals the centrality of 'the material' within the cult of saints. Yet, to limit the materiality of cult to relics alone is to oversimplify. One criticism that has been levelled at Gell's model is that it pays too little attention to the broader experience of the recipient.[38] To properly conceptualise the materiality of cult and to understand how that impacted upon audience experience, it is necessary to broaden our theoretical horizons. Medieval saints' cults, like any social institution, did not exist in a vacuum, either material or intellectual. In order to better express this I will turn to another theory which deals with material agency ANT, or Actor Network Theory.

1.5 ANT: theory and application

ANT: the basics

Actor network theory or ANT, is a theory which has its origins in 'science studies'. It was originally pioneered by the French sociologists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour at the *Ecole des Mines de Paris* and has been further popularized through the work of John Law

---

[38] Caroline Van Eck, 'Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response and the Sublime', *Art History*, 33:4 (2010), pp.642-659.

and others.[39] Methodologically speaking ANT seeks to present the world as a series of inter-reliant networks. The constituent parts of any network are referred to as 'actants'.[40] Actants are not the same as traditional human 'actors' in the sense that they have no inherent agency. Instead, for the proponent of ANT, agency is something which, although it may be perceived to adhere to a single actant, is in fact achieved as an effect of a network, where human and non-human actants come together.[41] A simple example of this is provided by Daniel Miller: 'People do not fly, nor does a B52 bomber, but the U.S. Airforce does.'[42]
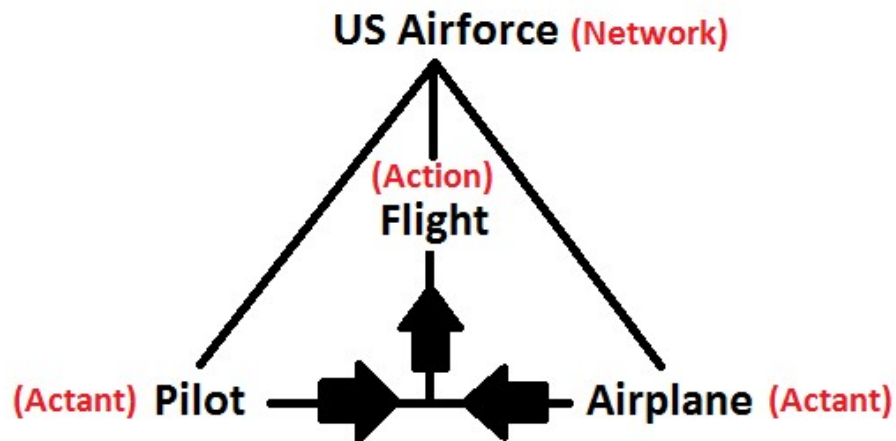
Tab.1.8: ANT example – US Airforce.

As Miller's analogy rightly points out, neither airplanes nor people can perform the action of flight in and of themselves, but when they interact as a network (The US Airforce), they are able to do so. Agency in this model lies within the interaction itself rather than within any one actant. This, of course, represents an entirely new definition of what constitutes agency. According to Latour, traditional approaches ignore the

---

[39] Cassandra S. Crawford, 'Actor Network theory' in, *Encyclopaedia of Social Theory, v.1,* ed. George Ritzer (London, 2005), pp.1-4.

[40] Bruno Latour, 'On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications', *Soziale Welt*, 47, (1996), pp.369-381. Web version from [http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-67%20ACTOR-NETWORK.pdf], p.5.

[41] Jonathan Hearn, *Theorizing Power* (Basingstoke, 2012).

[42] Miller, *Materiality*, p.12.

'missing mass' of contributors to all forms of social engagement: things.[43] Things, the mass of manufactured and non-manufactured objects that surround us are, to Latour and his colleagues, our co-contributors in the formation of societies and social relations. Things can stand for or against us, they can be convenient or inconvenient, but they always demand a reaction. Things, or as Latour calls them 'non-human actors' are the ubiquitous, though often unnoticed other, constantly at work in the background, facilitating and influencing modes of action and interaction. Miller's example is of course a heavily abridged one. In reality the US Airforce consists of far more than just pilots and airplanes. In reality actor-networks are extremely heterogeneous consisting of humans, objects, and ideas, all feeding into and off of one another.

The aim of ANT is to pick apart the interactions that form actor networks and to understand how they operate. Of course, not all networks immediately appear as networks. Generally, we see a house as a house, not as a collection of building materials, we see a car as car, not as a collection of manufactured parts, likewise we talk of social institutions as social institutions without giving thought to the myriad of individual persons and things that they consist of. This process whereby we perceive a single actant rather than the network it is composed of is referred to as 'simplification'.[44] John Law explains the reasons for simplification:

> 'All phenomena are the effect or the product of heterogeneous networks. But in practice we do not cope with endless network ramification. Indeed, much of the time we are not even in a position to detect network complexities.'[45]

Networks, Law tells us, remain in a simplified state while all the constituent actants of that network continue to interact. When applied to a simplified system, ANT reveals the truth: that all networks are expansive. ANT pays no attention to geographic or temporal

---

[43] Bruno Latour, 'Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artefacts' in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, 2009), pp.229-254.

[44] For a discussion of 'simplification' see; Michel Callon, 'The Sociology of an Actor-Network', p.28f.

[45] John Law, 'Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity', *Systems Practice*, 5 (1992), p.385.

distance between its actants. In such a way it abjures the sociological tendency to isolate and localize analytical targets: interaction is everything.[46] Consequently, the actions it examines are always open to outside influence, there is no strictly demarcated inside/outside divide.[47] Unlike Gell's analytical framework, which is limited to four primary contributors, ANT reveals the reality that no system, however simple, exists within a complete vacuum, but is instead contingent upon a network of supporting actions. In order to illustrate this, we will apply a modified version of the ANT methodology to one small passage taken from one of this thesis' key texts: The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond.

Jocelin of Brakelond: ANT in practice

The passage in question describes a scene which took place in the chancel of the abbey-church on 23 November 1198, the evening before St Edmund would be translated to a new shrine. Jocelin's text is very descriptive, paying particular attention to environmental detail. Although it is brief, the extract provides a good snapshot of the wealth of interrelated material elements that went into producing St Edmund's central cultic environment. Furthermore, through analysing Jocelin's description, we can gain some insight into the sheer complexity of the network that supported St Edmund's cult. The passage runs as follows; material elements have been highlighted:

> 'That night when we came to Matins, the great shrine stood empty on the high altar, prepared with a lining of white tawed deer skins, above, below and round-about, which were fixed to the wood by silver nails. One panel stood on the ground, against a column, and the Saint's body still lay where it had always been.'[48]

The material conditions described within this passage are constructed through a range of interactions between human and non-human actants. Not all of these actants are

---

[46] Latour, 'On actor-network theory', p.4.

[47] *Ibid.*, p.4.

[48] *Joc.*, p.99.

directly described, but can be inferred through our knowledge of modes of production. The table below reveals how these inferences can be made.

Non-Human Actants in Text	Raw Materials	Human Actants inferred
Edmund's Body	Flesh and Bone	Danish invaders/King Edmund
Edmund's Shrine	Wood	Carpenter/Forester
Architectural Elements	Dressed Stone	Stone Mason/Quarry Worker
'White Tawed Deer Skins'	Deer skins	Leather Worker/Hunter
Silver Nails	Silver Ore	Silversmith/Miner

Tab.1.9: List of actants.

Tab.1.9 serves to highlight the biography of individual objects. However, to see how they worked together to produce the 'cultic environment' as described by Jocelin, it is necessary to present them as part of a 'network diagram'. To avoid unnecessary complication Tab.1.10, shown below, has been simplified and does not infer beyond two generations of production in any direction. Yet, even from this restricted analysis we can gain some sense of the array of human/non-human interactions required to make the scene possible. It is important to note that the interactions required to make up this network took place across a disparate time frame. Equally, not all of the human actants would have been aware that their work would find use within Edmund's cult. Nonetheless, each contributed in the cult's material orchestration. Such analysis reveals that the material conditions of cult are not isolated from the outside world and that the cult itself was part of a broader societal structure.
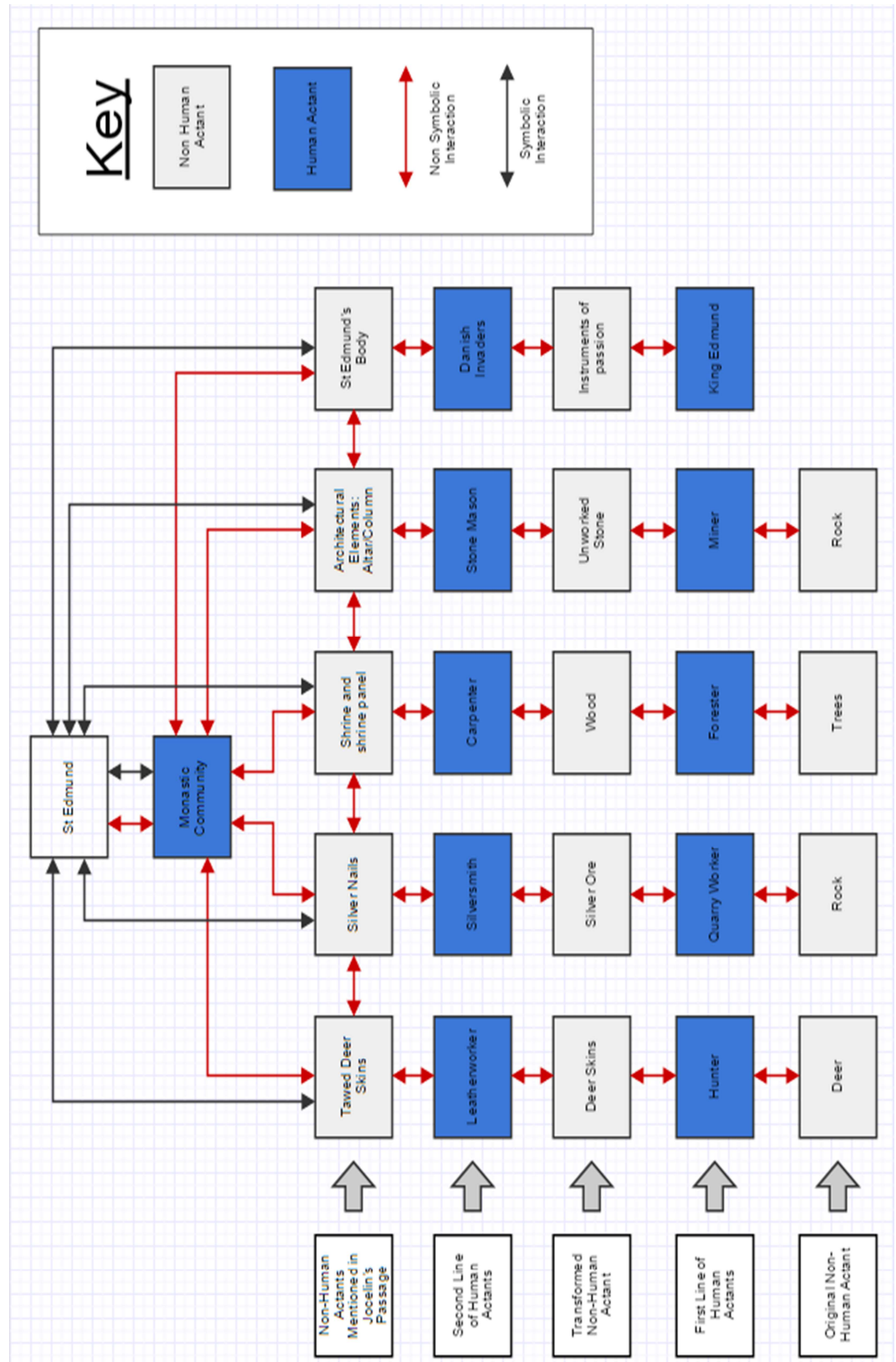
Tab.1.10: ANT diagram from Jocelin passage.

Beyond the non-human actants directly mentioned by Jocelin, we also need to account for the monastic community themselves (the 'we' referenced by the author). The monastic community is central, not only as the primary subject in Jocelin's description, but as the final line of human actants in the arrangement of the cultic environment; the monks were, after all, St Edmund's interlocutors, responsible for acquiring, arranging and maintaining the materials described by Jocelin. Furthermore, as mentioned above, ANT gives symbolic modes of interaction parity with material actions and actants. Given this, we can infer the active role of St Edmund as an idea. Similar to the way in which relic and saint were separated in our discussion of Gell, Tab.1.10 separates St Edmund's body from the metaphysical concept of the saint, as, although linked to his earthly remains, the saint was not entirely constrained by them. Indeed, the concept of St Edmund, as a personality residing in heaven, provides the glue that bonds all of the material and non-material elements together; it is the cult's *raison d'etre*.

Acknowledging the symbolic element of the cult can also provide insight into how and why specific materials were selected and arranged in a particular way. For example, 'white tawed deer skins' were used to upholster the inside of the shrine. Tawing was a process whereby an animal skin was transformed into a white leather through the use of alum.[49] Unlike tanned leather, tawed leather was particularly flexible and resistant to long-term decay, though, also unlike tanned leather, it would revert to rawhide through prolonged exposure to water.[50] People in the middle ages were well aware of the positive and negative properties of both materials and used them for differing purposes.[51] Asides from the practicality of tawed leather, it is

---

[49] Cheryl Porter, 'The use of Alum in the preparation of tawed skin for book covers in the 11th-15th centuries: advantages and disadvantages for the book structure', in *L'alun de Méditerranée*, ed. Philippe Borgard, Jean-Pierre Brun and Maurice Picon (Naples, 2005), pp.293-298.

[50] *Ibid*. p.294.

[51] Tawed leather was commonly used by book binders and glove makers, whereas tanned leather was more commonly used by shoemakers and tailors.

worthwhile noting the semiotic relevance of this substance. When we consider that it was being used to decorate the inside of the shrine of a supposedly incorrupt saint, it was surely seen as fitting that the inner cover of that shrine should be as imperishable as the saint himself. Equally, it is worth noting that despite the prevalence of dyes used during this era, the skins were bleached white, the colour of purity. Likewise, the use of soft 'silver nails' rather than more practical iron nails can equally be seen as symbolic; again, compared with iron, which is subject to rust and decay, silver is a relatively inert substance, reflecting the incorrupt nature of the saint himself. It should be considered that these materials were used to cover the *inside* of the saint's shrine, thus like the saint's body, they too would remain inaccessible to the public eye. The fact that such care was taken to select symbolically potent materials, materials that reflected the nature of Edmund's sanctity, and the fact that these materials would remain hidden, confirms the level of investment that Bury's monastic community had in the translation process and the importance of materiality.

The limits of ANT

The above analysis of Jocelin's text shows that cult materiality expanded well beyond relics, encompassing a wide variety of objects, persons and ideas. Yet, while this reveals much regards the complex interactions required to allow a cult to manifest materially, it tells us little about how or why the saint's cult functioned as it did. This is in part due to ANT's own methodological shortcomings. ANT's egalitarian tendency to treat all actants, human or otherwise, equally means that it can present a rather clinical and schematic picture of reality and this picture does little to reflect contemporary *perceptions* of the world. Likewise, ANT's insistence that 'interaction is everything' means that it has a tendency to homogenise space and to a lesser extent time. Indeed, Latour once referred to the study of geography and proximity as the

"tyranny of distance".[52] A practitioner of ANT might argue that no one site or actant within Jocelin's scene was objectively more important than another. Yet, subjectively, saint's cults were *perceived* to exist as spatial and material hierarchies. Within the medieval cult of saints, the spatial grammar of 'the material' was, as I shall demonstrate, of acute importance. Indeed, spatial hierarchies were of particular importance to one group of venerators: pilgrims.

Pilgrimage: space and interrelatedness

In her 2011 paper *Making 'sense' of the Pilgrimage Experience of a Medieval Church* the archaeologist and art historian Emma J Wells attempts to gain insight as to the importance of materiality within a pilgrim church. In the opening sentence, she states:

> 'It cannot be doubted that medieval devotion towards the cult of saints was a physical affair, involving touching, kissing, and even crawling as a way of coming into direct contact with the intercessory power of the divine.'[53]

Wells goes on to show how pilgrimage within medieval England was a thoroughly sensory phenomenon; sights, sounds, smells, sensations, each played their part in ensuring that the pilgrim's experience was managed for optimum effect. Of course, pilgrimage and the ritual performance of pilgrimage are just one form of human action associated with the cult of saints, from silent prayer, to the mass at a saint's annual feast, many other forms of devotional expression existed. Yet, what Wells draws our attention to is equally applicable in any one of these contexts. Veneration of a saint, was not a purely emotional and internal experience, it was also an intensely somatic one. In accepting Wells' premise that medieval devotion was as much a bodily as a cognitive experience, we are forced to confront another truth: devotional activity, although aimed at permitting engagement with the immaterial, was a very material affair. When our

---

[52] Latour, 'On actor-network theory', pp.4-5.

[53] Emma J. Wells, 'Making 'Sense' of the Pilgrimage Experience of the Medieval Church', *Peregrinations*, 3:2 (2011) p.122.

medieval forbears sought to engage with the divine there was always an imminent materiality at play. Where a devotee closed their eyes in prayer, those eyes were closed to shut out material distraction; whenever they were open it was normally to permit the devotee to focus upon some object or icon. Likewise, the postures adopted during prayer, bending the knee, or lying prostrate, may have been intended as symbolic displays of humility and obeisance, but how and where one prayed was influenced by one's physical surroundings. It is this ubiquitous and immediate materiality within the cult of saints that is often underappreciated. Although the phenomenon of relics has become a popular research topic, studies of these holy objects tend not to dwell upon the broader material context within which they are couched. The material relationship between relics and their environment is what Wells seeks to bring to the fore.

Using examples from Canterbury, Wells shows us how the physical arrangement of the cultic environment was designed to influence the experience of a visiting pilgrim:

> 'The architectural and material aspects of these sacred locations including their plan, altars, screens, glass, paintings, relics and shrines created and expected multiple experiences designed to stimulate their audience's mental visualizations through use of their senses.'[54]

In short, both space and objects are arranged in such a way as to evoke an emotional reaction. According to Wells, this was achieved at Canterbury through the development of a prescriptive pilgrimage route through the church. This route was progressive and narrative focussed, taking in many of the sites most closely linked with Thomas Becket's *vita*. Having first been conditioned through stories told by Canterbury's monks, the path began at the high altar where Becket had been martyred; it then passed through the crypt where he was originally buried; the path then ended at St Thomas' shrine in the Trinity Chapel. The journey undertaken by the pilgrims was one that mirrored Thomas's own acquisition of sainthood. Having undergone the ordeal of martyrdom, Thomas had descended into the darkness of death, only to arise once more into the triumphant light

---

[54] *Ibid.*, p.125.

of God's presence. Such prescriptive courses through pilgrim churches were common in the middle ages and provided a powerful medium through which sacred history could be encountered by the participant.[55] Indeed, the geographers Maoz Azaryahu and Kenneth E Foote have cited the historicizing tendencies of medieval pilgrimage routes as a direct antecedent for modern approaches to 'spatial narrative' at historical sites.[56] Yet, although clearly intended as a symbolic journey through the saint's narrative, the pilgrim's passage through the church and their experience while doing so were equally the products of the material environment. The gloom of the crypt in which Becket was once buried was in direct contrast with the light-filled Trinity Chapel with its stained glass windows, each depicting scenes from the martyr's life and posthumous miracles. Central within this space was the ultimate object of any pilgrimage, the saint's shrine and close by, similarly illuminated, was Becket's head reliquary. A careful arrangement of architectural and material elements ensured that the pilgrim's journey packed the optimum emotional punch, with the final ascent from darkness into light providing a fitting end to a journey which may have taken its traveller hundreds of miles.

Unfortunately, no precise description survives detailing a pilgrim's experience or route through Bury St Edmunds church, though in keeping with standard medieval practice, it seems likely that such a route was devised. In the second chapter of her PhD thesis, Rebecca Pinner attempts to reconstruct a pilgrim's encounter with St Edmund and his shrine.[57] Again, like Wells, Pinner is keen to emphasise the role played by architecture in conditioning the devotee's journey through the church. Yet, while her account draws attention to the plethora of objects that filled St Edmund's church and

---

[55] Paula Davies and Deborah Howard provide a good overview of the role of architecture in pilgrim experience in the introduction to Paula Davies, Deborah Howard and Vendy Pullan (eds.), *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond* (Farnham, 2013), pp.1-21.

[56] Maoz Azaryahu and Kenneth E Foote, 'Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites', *GeoJournal*, 73:3 (2008), pp.184-185.

[57] Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr,* pp.176-254.

while her consideration of the abbey's spatial arrangement is useful, she nonetheless fails to adequately articulate how these elements combined together to produce a dynamic and affective cultic environment.

Summary

Considering the affective ability of sacred spaces and the objects that filled them leads us back to a consideration of agency. Through what agency were pilgrims' emotional reactions brought about? Was it through the agency of the saint's interlocutors, the church's clerical community, responsible for arranging the church fittings and planned the pilgrimage route? Was it through the supernatural and symbolic agency of the saint? Was it an effect of the imagination and expectations of the venerator/pilgrim? Or, was it through the affective power of the matter itself; the walls, the stained glass, the relics? If we follow Alfred Gell's lead, then the affective power of the material environment stems ultimately from the human choices made by interlocutors and venerators. Conversely, practitioners of ANT, such as Bruno Latour would argue that all of these elements; the interlocutor, the venerator, the saint and material environment, were equal co-conspirators in the creation of the cult's affective power. The two would at first seem to be mutually exclusive and a compelling case can be made for either in isolation. I, however, would argue that the two can be reconciled.

Although they take different approaches and use differing vocabulary, both Gell and the ANT scholars ultimately make the same point: that social interaction is manifested through and in conjunction with 'the material'. Whether agency ultimately stems from a human source, or whether it is created in the space between actants is a philosophical question which has little bearing on this thesis. What is important to recognise is that, one way or the other, materiality plays a significant role in the mediation and expression of agency. Coming to this realisation makes it possible to draw positive elements from both approaches and to blend these elements together into

a new theory. The utility of the 'relic nexus' (see Tab.1.6-7), adapted from Gell's work, is that it provides an elegant and simple model of agency mediated through a material index. Such a structure reveals how cults were localised around specific objects at fixed locations. It also provides a useful heuristic device for modelling contemporary, medieval understandings of saintly interaction. ANT on the other-hand, while less useful at analysing the specific, is far better at revealing the expansive nature of materiality within the cult of saints. It shows that even a seemingly closed and localised system such as a cult was in fact a fragment of a more complex material/agential web. Taken alone, neither approach can provide a complete sense of the role of the material within the cult of saints, yet combined they can yield the tools necessary to construct a more nuanced picture, see Tab.1.11 below.
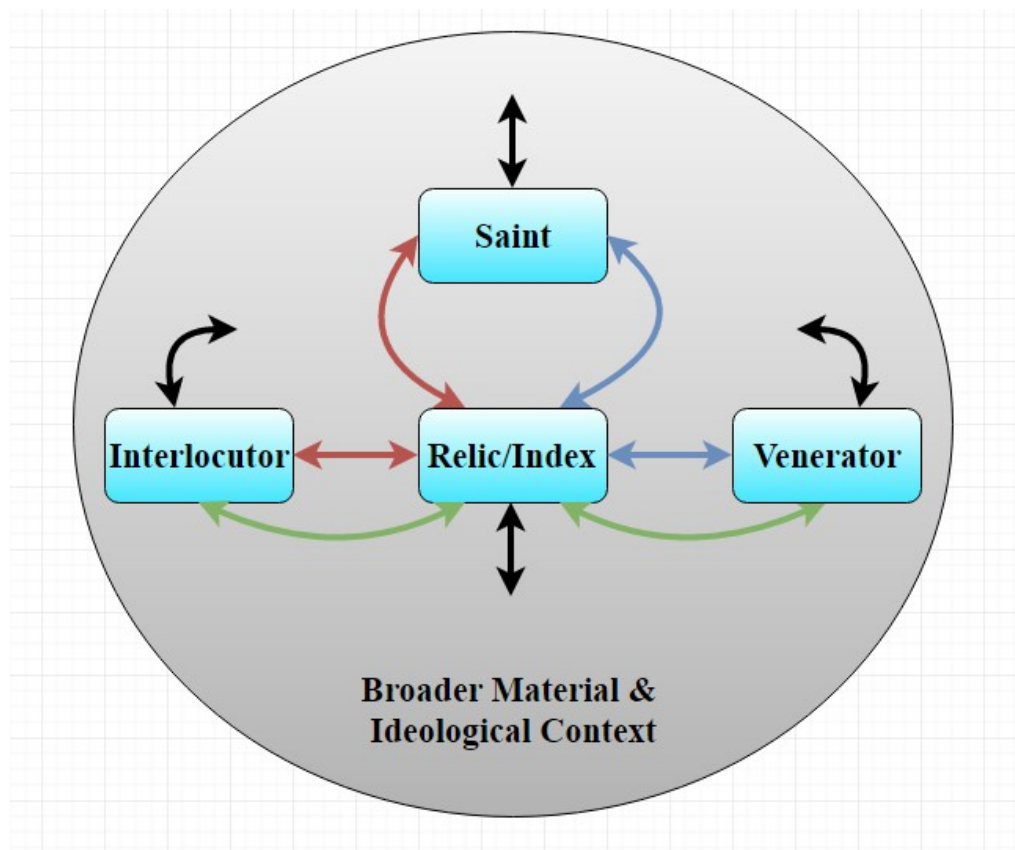
Tab.1.11: Relic nexus in context.

Placing our Gellian diagram at the heart of our model we can view it as representative of the 'cult centre', the fulcrum of cultic activity, centred upon the saint's shrine or relic. This position is taken only with the caveat that the relic nexus represents a *perceived* 'simplification' of reality. In truth this *perceived* system feeds from and into the broader material and ideological context revealed by ANT. That said, Tab.1.11 does not yet represent our model in its complete form. As discussed above, ANT has the tendency to flatten geographic and temporal distance. Saint's cults were spread out over space and time, holding different meanings for different people, in different places and times. If we wish to examine cult, as this thesis will do, on a geographic and temporal basis, then we need to modify our approach appropriately.

1.6 Geography: concentric circles

When we think about material environment within the cult of saints, or when we discuss cultic *materiality*, we should not merely consider the church as an architectural structure, or the saint's relics as the ultimate embodiment of the saint. To do so is to unnecessarily objectify and to isolate individual material elements. Instead, we should think of the materiality of cult as an infinitely complex arrangement of interrelated and interacting *things*. Moreover, we should not seek to delimit cult to the immediate spatial surroundings of the church, but instead should consider that it existed on a more geographically capacious scale. After-all, by its very definition the word pilgrim means: 'A person on a journey, a person who travels from place to place; a traveller, a wanderer, an itinerant'.[58] If a shrine was the eventual end point of such a journey, then we also need to acknowledge that the journey began elsewhere and therefore the cult existed beyond the bounds of the pilgrim church. Although Emma Wells focuses largely upon architectural setting as the context for devotional activity, her discussion of votive offerings and pilgrim souvenirs also hints at a broader definition of cult. Drawing on the work of Sarah Blick, Wells reveals that these offerings and keepsakes were, through

---

[58] Oxford English Dictionary: [http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/143866?rskey=IM05zw&result=1#eid].

their association with the saint's shrine, transformed from 'mere mementoes into relics'.[59] Whether such a claim would stand up to theological scrutiny is open to question, however, it is evident that in taking items away with them, pilgrims were attempting to preserve, in a tangible form, something of their experience at the saint's shrine.[60]

According to mapping data provided by the University of Nijmegen's Kunera project, pilgrim badges relating to the cult of St Thomas Becket have been found from as far afield as Lödöse in Sweden and Silves in Spain, while badges depicting St Edmund have been found at Nieuwlande in the Netherlands.[61] Finds such as these are noteworthy and attest to the extra-national appeal of English saints' cults, revealing that the great pilgrimage centres of England attracted visitors from the continent. Those persons, who travelled across the channel to visit a saint's shrine, brought mementos home with them, thus materially dispersing the cult. These continental men and women were undoubtedly 'venerators', but what was their experience like and how did it differ from a pilgrim who travelled a lesser distance?

The importance of spatial distance was underlined by Peter Brown in his *The Cult of the Saints*.[62] Relics were, for Brown, the saint's material presence in this world; they were the invisible made visible. The existence or absence of relics within a specific location marked out the relative distance between a saint and his/her followers. In order to 'see' a saint, one often had to travel and only in close proximity to his or her relics could one truly say they were in the saint's presence. The problem of distance, he argues, was frequently remedied through the fragmentation and distribution of relics.

---

[59] Wells, 'Making Sense'p.131. For Blick's work see; Sarah Blick, 'Votives, Images, Interaction and Pilgrimage to the Tomb and Shrine of St Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral', in *Push Me, Pull You: Art and Devotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand (Leiden, 2011), pp.21-58.

[60] For a broad ranging discussion of the significance of pilgrim badges see the introduction to; Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London, 1998), pp.1-31.

[61] [http://www.kunera.nl/kunerapage.aspx?From=Default].

[62] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, esp. C.5, 'Praesentia', pp.86-105.

This thesis takes a similar approach, arguing that we should view saints' cults simultaneously as a centralised institutions based around relics and as geographically expansive phenomena involving other material expressions.

Saint's cults, this thesis suggests, operated within a spatial and material hierarchy where 'significant matter' became more dispersed and less dense the further one moved from the centre. As John Blair has pointed out, the notion of a 'sacralised landscape' as consisting of 'concentric zones around a holy core', was not unheard of during the middle ages itself. [63] A passage in the seventh/eighth-century *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, prescribes a series of 'precincts' around a holy place: the *sanctissimus* (most holy), the *sanctior* (more holy) and the *sanctus* (holy). [64] Indeed, David, H. Jenkins has suggested that this idea had a genuine impact on the settlement patterns of the early Irish church. [65] The concentric circles model adopted here, however, is not intended to be viewed in quite so formal a manner. Rather it is intended as a way of conceptualising different spatial extensions of cultic materiality. This can be characterized diagrammatically in a radial fashion; see Tab.1.12 below.

---

[63] John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005) pp.221f.

[64] *Die Irishche Kanonensammlung*, ed. Hermann Wasserschleben (Giessen, 1874), p.202-3.

[65] David H. Jenkins, *'Holy, Holier, Holiest': The Sacred Topography of the Early Medieval Irish Church* (Turnhout, 2010).
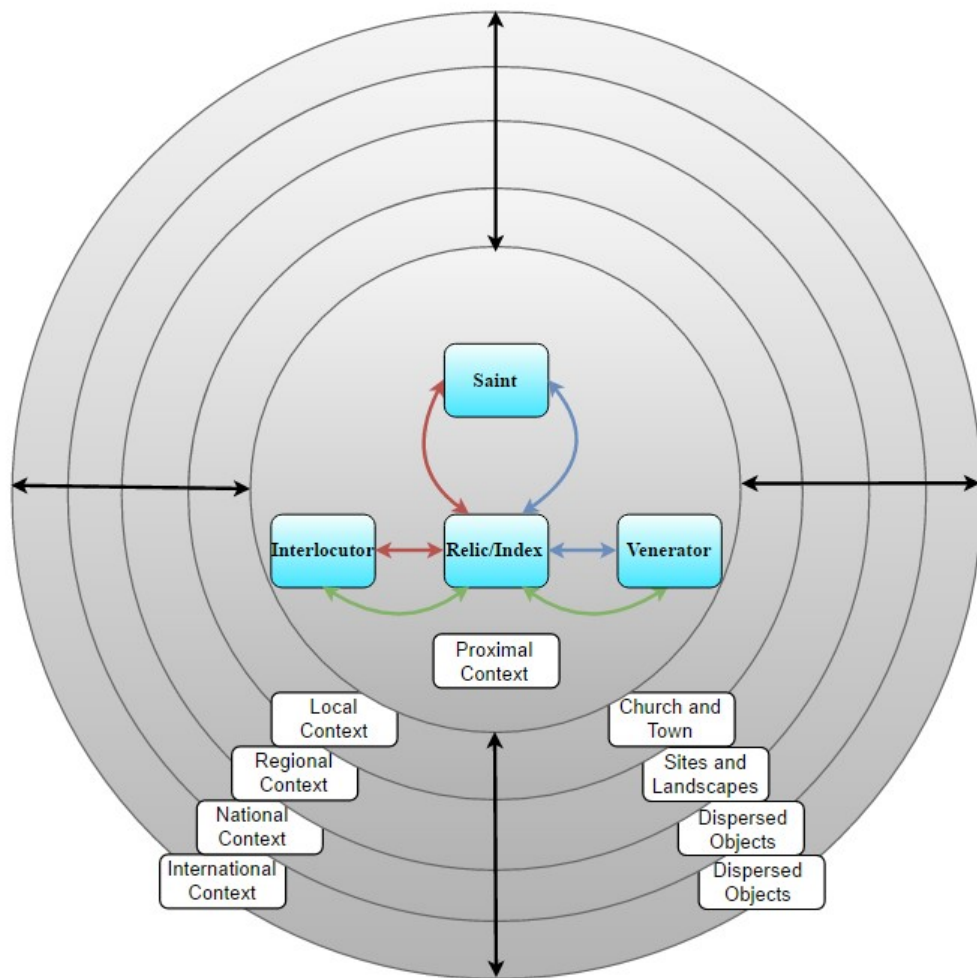
Tab1.12: Materiality and distance.

At the centre of our diagram we have our relic nexus, facilitating the fundamental connections that underlie the cult. As before, the constituent contributors to the nexus can be seen to feed into and from a broader material and ideological context, only this time, rather than 'flatten distance', we have divided spatial context into degrees of proximity: proximal, local, regional, national and international. Within the **proximal** context materiality manifests through the saint's relics, the 'things left behind' that located them geographically. A saint's shrine was the place where his or her narrative took physical form, where venerators could exist in the very real, physical presence of their saintly patron. This embodied presence meant that the shrine was the point where the material aspect of cult reached its maximum density. The further one

travelled from the epicentre, the more dispersed significant matter became. The **local** context can be thought of largely in architectural terms. The church within which the saint's shrine was located, as well as other built elements, could, in their own way, be considered as material extensions of cult. Whether those buildings were ecclesiastical, civic or domestic in nature, they each functioned to support a community that would have identified closely with the saint. Beyond this architectural context, particularly in cases where the saint was a native of the region, the landscape itself could figure prominently in the materiality of cult. It was common for **regional** structures and topographical features to be named after the saint, often because they featured prominently within their established narrative. In some cases, these sites could even fulfil the role of secondary centres of cultic activity. In extra-regional contexts, cultic matter becomes further disseminated. Nevertheless, church dedications, relic fragments and personal items enabled veneration in environments which otherwise might have no direct affiliation with the saint. Such a structure bears some similarity to the ideas of Mircea Eiliade, particularly those pertaining to the *axis mundi*.[66] However, unlike Eiliade, this model does not seek to postulate a direct partition between the divine and the profane. Indeed, as Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer have argued, such a dichotomy should be viewed in fluid terms; many aspects of religious life take place outside of established ritual centres.[67]

A good way to envisage the significance of this pattern might be to return to the pilgrimage routes discussed by Wells and Pinner. This time, however, rather than dwelling on the affective power of church architecture, we should instead consider the pilgrim's journey as a whole. From the point of embarkation, the pilgrim's journey represents a gradual increase in proximity to the saint's shrine. Likewise, this can also

---

[66] Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York, 1959), esp. pp.12-17.

[67] Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, 'Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space' in *Defining the holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer (Aldershot, 2005) p.4.

be viewed as a gradual process of materialization. In the case of a pilgrim visiting Bury St Edmunds, he or she potentially moved from 'foreign' climes into 'St Edmund's country', 'St Edmund's liberty', 'St Edmunds town', 'St Edmund's Abbey' and finally towards 'St Edmund's shrine'. As this journey neared its end, points of the saint's narrative, with which a pilgrim would likely be familiar, would begin to manifest physically in the landscape. Medieval pilgrimages, although ending at a final destination, typically took in multiple religiously significant locations. Indeed, it was not unheard of for the inmates of pilgrim shrines to accompany their visitors on excursions to other, local religious sites.[68] In the case of the cult at Bury St Edmunds we have no direct evidence for such activity. However, as will be explored further in chapters two and three, Edmund's cult was deeply rooted in the geography of East Anglia. Approaching Edmund's Abbey, the physicality of the pilgrim's experience would have become palpable, until, at last, reaching the shrine, Edmund would become physically imminent. Then, having fulfilled their vow, pilgrims would often take some physical token of their journey back home with them. Those pilgrim badges and mementos, although mass produced, could then serve as a focal point of private devotion.[69] The translation of pilgrim badges and mementos from Bury St Edmunds to remote locations ensured the dispersal of 'significant' matter over a broad geographic span.

The 'concentric circles' model highlighted above allows for a nuanced consideration of the spatial politics of cult and their ramifications for cultic materiality. This framework will be used and expanded upon throughout the remainder of this thesis. However, the one dimension not dealt with by this model is temporality. In order to address this discrepancy, I will turn to one final analytical tool: object biography.

---

[68] 'Pilgrimage, Christian' in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg (London, 2011), p.481.

[69] Megan H. Foster 'Pilgrimage Through the Pages: Pilgrims' Badges in Late Medieval Devotional Manuscripts', in *Push Me, Pull You: Art and Devotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand (Leiden, 2011), pp.227-276.

1.7: Temporality: biography

In the general introduction to this thesis I referred to matter as one of the 'things left behind' after a person dies. These material 'things' are the legacy of objects, properties, spaces and bodily remains that survive a person's death to act, for the living, as physical reminders of the departed. Of course, a material legacy cannot last forever. Over time, the matter associated with a person in life, or at least that matter's connection to that person, dissipates. Objects and property are eventually degraded, destroyed, sold-on or lost, while they might find new owners or users, as generations pass, all connection to their original possessor is slowly forgotten.[70] Studies have shown that the oral memory of ancestors typically endures within families for no more than two or three generations.[71] Indeed, unless they are provided with a memorial of some description, human remains themselves swiftly dissolve into anonymity. This gradual severing of the tie between a deceased person and their material footprint is an organic process which reminds us that the world and the things in it belong, for the most part, to the living and not the dead. Within the medieval cult of saints, however, matters differed somewhat. Rather than dissipate, the material footprint of a saint could, in fact, proliferate over time: expanding to encompass more and more material. 'New' relics might be *invented*, as was often the case, and new churches, shrines, altars and reliquaries might be built to house them. Furthermore, as chapter two will demonstrate, kernels of saintly matter might then be gifted to other religious houses, allowing fresh fields of materiality to flourish.

The model of materiality over distance, outlined in the previous section, is constructed on the basis of proximity from a central point and thus can be adjusted to varying cultic scales and locations. Unfortunately, when we think of materiality on the

---

[70] Roberta Gilchrist discusses the phenomenon of 'curated' objects with specific reference to the middle ages in the final chapter her book *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp.237-42.

[71] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985), p.175.

temporal axis it is more difficult to apply a diagrammatic, 'one size fits all' approach.

Different cults sprung up in different periods, under different circumstances and lasted

for wildly varying durations. Given the appropriate training and expertise, it might be

possible to create some form of general, periodised typology reflecting changing trends

in medieval cultic materiality, but such an endeavour lies outside of the scope of this

thesis. Instead, a more pragmatic approach is to think in terms of material biography.

By focussing on known, individual artefacts or assemblages of artefacts and by paying

attention to their broader material, social and historical contexts, we can reconstruct

some sense of their shifting significance over time. Born from the ideas of Igor Kopytoff,

object biography has, for a number of years, been employed by archaeologists as a

means of analysing the temporally relative significance of artefacts.[72] Gavin Lucas

describes the approach as follows:

> 'This concept (biography) is not simply the idea that objects have life cycles…
> More specifically, it is the notion that objects have a cultural history, that their
> meanings change through time and that the very historicity itself also imparts a
> meaning.'[73]

According to Lucas, the biographical approach emphasises multi-temporality in the

sense that it does not argue for the primacy of any one interpretation. Object

biographies are about more than just the changing physical shape of matter over time.

They evoke more than just a sense of use/wear or 'lifecycle', they are also about the

changing identity of objects. In his analysis of the approach, Steve Ashby advocates that

biographies should adopt a broad periodization and that they should contain:

> '…information - either by direct observation, or through analogy - for all the
> significant phases of an object's life; its production, distribution, consumption,
> and disposal.'[74]

---

[72] Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process' in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), pp.64-91.

[73] Gavin Lucas, *The Archaeology of Time* (London, 2005), p.56.

[74] Steve Ashby, *Artefact Biographies: Implications for the curation of archaeological ivories* (2009), p.2 [http://www.ebur.eu/index.php?q=27&s=3&t=3].

This temporally relative, periodic framework can accommodate additional periods of redistribution and re-consumption making it highly flexible. Such flexibility means that object biographies have the capacity to account for any number of identities an object might develop over time. Fundamentally, object biography is about studying contextual change. In one way it is about looking at an object and seeing how shifting social contexts influenced its interpretation and identity. In another, like Gell's Art Nexus or Latour's ANT, it is about considering the material's role as an agent of change in its own right. In this way, the biographical approach is as much about examining an object's impact on society as it is about understanding how society impresses meaning upon objects.[75]

As highlighted previously, the material objects at the heart of this study are, for the most part, no longer extant. As an approach, object biography has largely been employed as a means of furthering the understanding of artefacts that remain available for study: usually archaeological finds, or objects placed in curatorial contexts. In attempting to apply a biographical approach to lost objects, this thesis is, to an extent, departing from established tradition. Fortunately, in the case of relics at least, the materiality of cult often leaves a considerable textual imprint. This, as Ashby has commented, is relatively uncommon.

> '… it is rare that we have detailed unambiguous information regarding the manufacture, trade, use and disposal of a single object. Such approaches are thus best applied to either entire classes of object, or to artefacts with particularly well documented lives.'[76]

A biographical approach can remain viable, even where the objects themselves are absent, provided they have left a sufficiently detailed textual imprint. Naturally, chronological gaps can present themselves, but these can be filled through analogy. The

---

[75] Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, 'The Cultural Biography of Objects', *World Archaeology*, 31:2, (1999), p.170.

[76] Ashby, *Artefact Biographies*, p.2.

biographical approach may be inclined towards a focus on individual objects, but it is designed to feed from and into broader social histories that favour broad classes of artefact. [77]

By way of showing how an object biography works in practice, I will here present a biographical sketch of one artefact which figured prominently within the cult of St Edmund: the saint's shirt. This garment, which Edmund purportedly wore during his martyrdom ordeal, was one of several objects retained by his cult as a holy relic. Like so many other medieval English relics, Edmund's shirt did not survive the Reformation. Fortunately, it appears frequently within the historical record, and, at times, is discussed at considerable length. In the absence of the object itself we need to draw on this textual information.

In order to produce an object biography for an artefact that no longer exists we first have to consider two propositions. Firstly, that the object existed at all and secondly, that the object was as it is described to be. In the case of St Edmund's shirt, the evidence is such that we can readily accept the first proposition. Numerous sources from across the centuries attest that a garment, considered to be a relic, was kept and displayed at Bury St Edmunds abbey. The second proposition is more difficult to prove. Fundamentally, whether the shirt kept at the abbey ever did grace Edmund's back is something of a moot point. What matters most is that the people who engaged with it believed that it had. Nevertheless, as a demonstration of the biographical method in practice, it is worthwhile considering whether the object's pre-mortem association with the saint was genuine.

Edmund, according to tradition, died in 869. The last mention of his shirt at the abbey comes in the form of a letter written in February 1536 by John ap Rice, one of Henry VIII's commissioners. In this letter he describes the shirt as among many 'vain and

---

[77] Harold Mytum, 'Artefact Biography as an Approach to Material Culture: Irish Gravestones as a Material Form of Genealogy', *Journal of Irish Archaeology*, 12/13 (2003/2004), p.111.

fictitious relics' kept at the abbey.[78] For an item of clothing to have survived nearly 700 years seems, at first, to stretch the bounds of credulity. However, given the right conditions, the long term preservation of textiles is certainly not without precedent. When the tomb of St Cuthbert of Durham was opened in the nineteenth century, it was found to contain the remains of several vestments dating from as early as the eighth century.[79] Indeed, church shrines, such those at Durham or Bury, seem to have been good for preservation. According to Elizabeth Coatsworth: 'The most substantial textile remains from Anglo-Saxon England have all been preserved within ecclesiastical contexts, either tombs or church treasuries.'[80] While this proves nothing, it at least confirms the possibility that Edmund's shirt could have survived for an extended period of time.

The earliest mention of Edmund's clothing appears in Abbo of Fleury's mid-tenth-century *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*. Abbo states that Theodred, bishop of London (909-c.53), opened Edmund's tomb and re-clothed the saint in '*novis et optimis vestibus*' (new clothing of the best kind).[81] The description is non-specific and nothing is mentioned as to what became of the garments stripped from Edmund's body. The first indication that Edmund's clothes were treated as relics comes from Hermann the Archdeacon, writing towards the end of the eleventh century, who states that Abbot Leofstan (1044-65), like Theodred before him, opened the saint's casket and removed his clothing. Again, the description is non-specific, Hermann merely defines the garments as '*vestibus*'. It is clear, however, that these were not the '*novis et optimis*' trappings granted by Theodred. According to Hermann, the items of clothing removed were; '*partim rubeis rubore sanguinis, partim perforatis ictibus telorum crebris*' (in

---

[78] *Cal.L.P.,* vol. X, no.364.

[79] Elizabeth Coatsworth, 'The Material Culture of the Anglo-Saxon Church', in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. Helena Hamerow, David A. Hinton and Sally Crawford (Oxford, 2011), p.783.

[80] *Ibid.*, p.782.

[81] *Abbo,* p.52.

some places stained red with blood and in others riddled with arrow-holes).[82] Whatever items were removed, they were unmistakably linked to Edmund's martyrdom. Furthermore, Hermann, unlike Abbo, is clear on what was done with the saint's clothes after their removal: '...*sed tamen reponendis saluti credentium profuturis.*' (...but they are to be kept, so that future believers may enjoy their healing power).[83]

How then are we to reconcile the fact that two men, separated by more than a century, are both supposed to have re-clothed the saint? The answer may be presented in an early-twelfth-century reworking of Hermann's text which was likely written by the hagiographer Goscelin of St Bertin. Goscelin, unlike his predecessors, refers specifically to Edmund's shirt (*camisia*) and even more specifically as an undershirt (*interulam*).[84] If the relic in question were indeed an undershirt, then it is just possible that Theodred, during his inspection, merely removed the saint's outer garments, leaving his undergarments intact. An undershirt would certainly have been in keeping with ninth-century Anglo-Saxon fashion. According to Gale Owen-Crocker, an expert in medieval English dress, an undershirt, normally made from linen, was a staple item of clothing for ninth-century Anglo-Saxon men.[85] In terms of the specific appearance of Edmund's shirt, we are assisted by the presence of a series of miniatures accompanying Goscelin's text (see Fig.5.13-16).[86] The scenes in question show Edmund's martyrdom. In them he wears a green tunic over a russet-brown undershirt. These images were produced during a period where Edmund's shirt, unlike his corpse, was available for view. It is, therefore, possible that the garment displayed in the illustration is a likeness of Edmund's relic-

---

[82] *Herm.*, pp.54-5.

[83] *Ibid.*, pp.54-5.

[84] *Gosc.*, p.294 and 288 respectively.

[85] Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, Revised and enlarged edition (Woodbridge, 2004) p.187. See also; Penelope Walton-Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England*: AD 450-700 (York, 2007) pp.199-208.

[86] Pierpont Morgan M.S. M.736. Known as the Morgan Edmund, this manuscript and its remarkable series of miniatures will be examined in more detail in chapter five.

shirt. The russet brown may have been an attempt, on the part of the artist, to render a faded crimson or purple as it appeared in his day.[87]

So far we have established that, from at least the mid-eleventh century, a shirt, associated with the martyrdom of St Edmund, was in the possession of Bury St Edmund's Abbey. Circumstantial evidence also suggests that this item may once have been worn by Edmund. In accordance with the periodization suggested by Ashby we might postulate as to the production methods that may have been used in the initial creation of the item. An undershirt of linen, or possibly even imported silk, would have been consistent with kingly attire. However, we can also think of Edmund's martyrdom as a second phase of production. After the saint's death, his shirt was no longer a shirt in the functional sense. The original purpose of its manufacture had been superseded. Although its outward appearance remained that of an item of clothing, through having been pierced with arrows and stained with blood, it had been transformed into an object of supernatural power and significance.

Had the shirt's intended lifecycle continued, it would have been purchased, worn and later discarded, but it was now, in its transformed state, destined to serve an altogether different purpose and to undergo different forms of distribution and consumption. Unlike the saint's body, the shirt could be divided up, allowing fragments to be distributed beyond Bury St Edmunds. The significance of this fragmentation will be considered in more detail in chapter two. For the moment it suffices to say that portions of Edmund's shirt were granted to numerous monastic houses both within and

---

[87] Such colours were known to Anglo-Saxons as *weoloc- basu* (whelk-brown) or *wyrm-basu* (worm-brown), on account of the fact that they derived from the glands of shellfish and were extremely expensive. See; *A Late Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University*, ed. Jan Hendrik Hessels (Cambridge, 2011), p.223. For more information on the use of pigments see C.P. Biggam, 'Knowledge of whelk dyes and pigments in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 35 (2006) pp.23-55. It should be noted that linen does not respond well to natural dyes and tended to be worn as a plain, bleached white. This makes it unlikely that the undergarment represented in the Morgan manuscript was linen. It is possible, however, that it was composed of imported silk.

without England.[88] Such action was a clear attempt to expand commensality in the cult. Edmund's shirt, therefore, had become not only a holy relic, but an item of currency within the economy of inter-religious politics.

Aside from the small scraps of material sent to other religious houses, it would seem that the greater portion of Edmund's garment remained at Bury. There, one might think, it would provide a means of allowing visiting pilgrims a tactile experience with a holy object: something that was not permitted with the saint's body. However, Goscelin reveals that this, at least by the time of his writing, was a practice very much frowned upon. Goscelin recounts the story of a monk named Herman, who, with the 'temerity of rash initiative', removed the shirt from its chest and not only displayed it, but allowed a crowd of pilgrims to touch and kiss it. [89] In the rush that ensued, the relic was damaged: 'the holy blood that stained it fell to the ground and perished'. Soon afterwards, Herman, the instigator of the unfortunate episode, became ill and died: a divine punishment for his 'temerity.' This story reveals much about the consumption of relics at twelfth-century Bury St Edmunds. It tells us that although there was great demand for access and although it was permissible for relics to be seen by a massed crowd, it was not common practice to permit such objects to be touched with impunity. Although subsequent hagiographies repeat stories of its healing prowess, Edmund's shirt ceases to play a central role in any new miracle accounts from this point on. The final mention of the shirt is in John ap Rice's letter, presumably, like so many other relics, it was soon afterwards destroyed in the purges of the Reformation era.

The above biographical sketch allows us to recapture a sense of the shifting significance of a singular object. During its life course Edmund's shirt was transformed

---

[88] Hermann emphasises that pieces of the garment were sent overseas. He confirms that relics were sent to Lucca, St Riquier and Normandy respectively. *Herm.*, p.80-93.

[89] *Gosc.*, pp.286-95 License believes that the Herman in Goscelin's story is in fact Hermann the Archdeacon, his hagiographic predecessor. See; Tom License, 'History and Hagiography in the Late Eleventh Century: The Life and Work of Herman the Archdeacon, Monk of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 74:508 (2009), pp.526-9.

from a practical garment into a highly symbolic object, replete with divine power. Having been removed from Edmund's tomb it acted as an externalised representation of the saint who remained within. In this guise it became an index not only for the desires of the faithful, but also for the religio-political aspirations of the monastic community that cared for it. It was a jealously guarded object, subject to intense desire and yet, through fragmented distribution, afforded Edmund's cult the ability to expand its horizons. It is ironic that an artefact which once held so many positive meanings for so many ultimately ended its life viewed as a subject of superstition.

1.8: Conclusion

Materiality, as has been defined in this thesis, involves far more than the physical environment alone, it also encompasses the ways in which tangible objects occupy the human mind and how, reflectively, these objects affect our concepts of reality. Subsequent chapters will continue to show, through focussing on the central case-study of the cult of St Edmund of East Anglia, that medieval saints' cults were intensely material in nature. This first chapter, however, has been used to develop a bespoke suite of theoretical tools. Borrowed, bent and re-fashioned from existing ideas prevalent in archaeology and material culture studies, these tools are designed to encourage a more material-centric perspective. Furthermore, in keeping with a historical study, this theoretical apparatus is intended to promote a view of cultic materiality as revolving around both a spatial and a temporal axis.

In a spatial sense, the Gellian concepts of distributed agency and the art nexus – reimagined as the 'relic nexus' - have provided a means of modelling a cult centre as a social space where interactions were consistently mediated through the presence of relics. In such environments relics fulfilled an indexical role, a role where they not only played proxy to a divine entity, but also coordinated human aspirations and expectations. Yet, while Gell's ideas reveal the fundamental mechanisms of cult, in

placing a relic as a singular material focus, they fail to acknowledge the broader influence of the material environment. This complication is overcome by incorporating aspects of Actor Network Theory. ANT exposed the materiality of saints' cults as an expansive phenomenon, consisting not only of innumerable, interlinked objects, but also of people and ideas. In standard historical accounts this multiplicity of interactions often fades into the background, yet it was always an integral component in the construction and maintenance of cult. The addition of ANT permits a more inclusive evaluation of cultic materiality, yet it also presents a fresh problem. In its tendency to flatten distance, ANT diverts attention from a key consideration for Christian saints' cults: proximity.

In order to account for the importance of proximity and distance it has been necessary to take the most useful elements from Gell and ANT and place them within a framework that reflects spatial difference. This model, composed of concentric circles, allows for cult to be examined from a variety of longitudinal angles. The closer one gets to the centre, the more concentrated the saint becomes. Hazy concepts and formless narrative begin to manifest physically, initially as wide landscapes of memory, later as specific places and structures and ultimately as the relics, bones and bodies that form the material fulcrum of cult; one can view this as a gradual process of 'thickening'. What elsewhere could exist merely within the confines of the mind begins to materialize as proximity to the fulcrum declines. At the cult centre, where optimum 'thickness' is reached, the line between concept and matter is almost completely blurred; here the saint *is* both in an abstract, spiritual sense and in a direct physical form.

The 'concentric circles' model is valuable as a means of thinking about cult structure, but it does little to account for change. Cults and the people, ideas and objects they consisted of were not static, they altered over time. To reflect temporal change, both material and ideological, this chapter introduced the concept of object

biography, an analytical technique that focuses on the lifecycle of an artefact and uses it as a prism for exploring shifts in cultural context. In conjunction with the concentric circles model, developed above, this thesis adopts the language of biography, at times focussing on individual objects, at others on assemblages. Combined together these two approaches permit an examination of a saint's cult on a joint temporal/spatial axis.

Chapter 2: The Heart of the Matter –

Edmund's cult centre

2.1: Introduction

The previous chapter developed a methodological and theoretical apparatus for examining the materiality of the cult of saints. This chapter will take that apparatus and apply it to the cult of St Edmund of East Anglia. For more than five centuries veneration of St Edmund flourished at the abbey of Bury St Edmunds. During that time, the materiality of his cult continually evolved, but one thing remained constant, always, at the heart of the matter, was the saint's miraculously preserved body. Edmund's body, it will be seen, was very much the index-like relic at the heart of a 'relic nexus': it represented a conduit for supernatural agency, it embodied theological concepts and it indexed earthly aspirations. Furthermore, as the saint's physical locus, Edmund's body not only acted as an arbiter of proximity and distance, it also provided the kernel around which materiality accrued and spread outwards.

Using St Edmund's body as a focal point, this chapter takes the biographical approach examined in chapter one and applies it not to a singular object but to the materiality of his cult as a whole. It will be seen that, throughout the centuries, Edmund's cult consistently produced significant material, material which was both distributed and consumed in a variety of ways, in a variety of places, by a variety of people. Chapter two will begin by looking at the development of the saint's shrine and its architectural setting. This, in turn, will lead to a discussion of the body contained within and the theological and practical significance of its purported miraculous preservation. After this we shall consider the diversification and dissemination of Edmund's cultic matter.

2.2: Bury and St Edmund's shrine

What is a shrine?

This thesis argues that we need to understand the shrine as both a spatial and a symbolic concept. As it is here defined, a shrine is a permanent or semi-permanent and demarked space where hagiographic narrative collides with physical reality to create a unique environment for remembrance. Through the indexical medium of a holy object, such as a relic, a shrine presents a nexus through which agency, both natural and supernatural, can be enacted. Equally, a shrine serves as the physical and symbolic axis around which the extended material and ideological connections necessary for a cult's development are made.

One might think that, as the physical centre-point of cult, the shrine would also be the undisputed focus of devotional activity within any church: it was not. Within most medieval churches the high altar embodied the pinnacle of the sacral pyramid. Designed to represent the banquet table at which Christ and his disciples shared their last supper, the high altar was the point from which mass was conducted and the place where the miracle of transubstantiation took place.[1] Yet, while the spiritual significance of the high-altar is undisputed, it is, nevertheless, arguable that a saint's shrine could form a secondary *sancta-sanctorum*. The shrine is here referred to as 'secondary', this is intended only in the sense that, theologically speaking, the veneration of a saint was indeed a secondary form of devotion. In practical terms it is clear that within pilgrim churches the shrine was viewed as a sacral centre on a par with the high altar. The high altar was the centre-point of Christianity envisioned as a universal phenomenon, but a saint's shrine could reflect more nuanced interpretations of faith. A shrine, dedicated to a saint or saints, acted as a differentiating sacral feature which characterized the

---

[1] 'High Altar', *Cath.Enc*.

Christian identity not only of the church and its inmates, but often of the region within which it was located. In spatial terms there was no fixed rule as to where a saint's shrine ought to be located. However, a position just behind the high altar, as at Bury St Edmunds, was the norm.[2] Such an arrangement marked out the eastern end or chancel of the church as the epicentre of holiness and focus of devotional activity.[3] Often though, even where the shrine and high altar were closely aligned, they were separated as distinct through the use of screens.[4] Use of such screens preserved the spiritual centrality of the space, yet set the altar and shrine apart as arenas for distinct forms of devotional activity.

Throughout the middle ages, thousands, if not millions of pilgrims came to the abbey of Bury St Edmunds to 'visit' their saint. Yet, like Edmund, who was reimagined across the centuries, the shape and form of his shrine would consistently change. Before examining the symbolic and functional relevance of some of the objects that made up the 'shrine-space' this section will provide a chronological, biographical overview of the historical and architectural development of Edmund's shrine. This account focuses not on one structure, or even one space, but on the changing material context that accommodated Edmund's shrine as a concept. During the life-course of Edmund's cult this material context was in a constant state of flux. Usually change took place gradually, as objects and ornaments were added or removed, or as the surrounding built environment developed. However, on occasion, contextual shifts were more dramatic and intentional. These dramatic alterations generally occurred as part of a rare *translatio* ceremony. During these occasions Edmund's reliquary casket would be opened so that his remains might be inspected, re-clothed and moved to another more fitting venue or receptacle. At least six such ceremonies were conducted for St Edmund

---

[2] Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England* (Oxford, 2002), p.248.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.89.

[4] Tim Tatton Brown, 'Canterbury and the architecture of pilgrimage shrines in England', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 2002), p.96.

during the middle-ages. These events will be used as chronological landmarks as this biographic summary proceeds; their details and approximate dates are listed in the Tab.2.1, below.[5]

> ### List of St Edmund's Translations
>
> 1. Edmund is moved from his original resting place to Bury (c.903).
>
> 2. Edmund is temporarily transported from Bury to London (c.1010).
>
> 3. Edmund's body is moved back from London to Bury (c.1013).
>
> 4. Edmund's body is moved into Cnut's church (Oct 18th 1032).
>
> 5. Edmund's body is inspected by Abbot Leofstan (c.1060) ***
>
> 6. Edmund's body is moved into Baldwin's new church (Apr 29th 1095)
>
> 7. Edmund's body is moved into a new feretory by Abbot Samson (Nov 23rd 1198)
>
> *** Leofstan's inspection was not a translation as such, but is noteworthy.

Tab.2.1: List of Edmund's translations.

The location of Edmund's first shrine

When the nineteenth-century historian Thomas Arnold edited his *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey* he described the hagiographic prehistory of St Edmund's cult as 'an unsubstantial edifice of myth, with a streak of historical fact appearing here and there.'[6] The difficulty, as always, comes in ascertaining where the fact begins and where the fiction ends.[7] Indeed, John Crook may have been right when he commented in more recent times that: 'Perhaps all one can safely say is that by about 1000 a shrine,

---

[5] Details of these translations can be found in *Abbo*, *Herm*., and *Joc*. The dates for the first three translations are purely speculative as none of the sources provide a specific and verifiable date. McKinlay, *King and Martyr*, cites four more translations, all of which take place in France. These have been disregarded as one would need to accept the rather suspect assertion that Louis VIII of France stole Edmund's body in 1217 before gifting it to the basilica of Saint Sernin in Toulouse in 1219. This tradition does not manifest until the fifteenth century and is likely spurious.

[6] *Memorials*, I, p.xviii.

[7] For attempts to untangle fact from fiction in St Edmund's myth see; Dorothy Whitelock, 'Fact and Fiction' and Antonia Gransden, 'The Legends and Traditions concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 100:394 (1985), pp.1-24.

allegedly containing the body of King Edmund, was at the centre of a cult at Bury.'[8] One thing, however, does seem to be more likely than not; all the sources, hagiographic and otherwise, testify that before his translation to Bury, Edmund had rested elsewhere. Unfortunately, there is considerable debate as to where that resting place may have been. Numerous early sources disagree as to the specific location, though most concur that it was close to the site of Edmund's martyrdom.[9] The earliest surviving written description of a cult of St Edmund is Abbo of Fleury's tenth-century *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*. When Abbo wrote, Edmund's body had already been moved to Beodericsworth (Bury St Edmunds).[10] However, Abbo was clearly aware that Edmund had not always been there, and placed the saint's first shrine in the forest of *Haglesdun*.[11] *Haglesdun*, although it may have been easily identified in the hagiographer's day, does not correspond directly to any modern place name. Numerous sites have been suggested for it including Hollesley and Hellesden Lay in Suffolk, Hellesden in Norfolk and Halesdun in Essex.[12] This confusion is compounded by the fact that Hermann the Archdeacon, who composed a collection of the saint's miracles in the late-eleventh century, places Edmund's original shrine at a village named Sutton (*villula Suthtune dicta*).[13] Sutton is such a common Suffolk place-name that it might offer any number of attributions.[14] Conversely, the location most regularly associated with St Edmund's death during the middle ages was the village of Hoxne in the diocese of Norwich. Hoxne, at one time an episcopal seat for the bishops of East Anglia, is first mentioned in

---

[8] John Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge, 2011), p.90.

[9] For a summary of scholarship on this issue see; S.E. West, 'A New site for the Martyrdom of St Edmund', *PSIAH*, 35:3 (1983), pp.223-5; Margaret Carey Evans, 'The Contribution of Hoxne to the cult of St Edmund King and Martyr in the Middle Ages and Later', *PSIAH*, 36:3 (1987), pp.182-195 and Keith Briggs, 'Was Haegelisdun in Essex?: A new Site for the martyrdom of Edmund', *PSIAH*, 42:3 (2011), pp.277-291.

[10] Abbo himself mentions it in his *Passio* as does Bishop Theodred of London in his will dated c.950. For Theodred's will see; *ESawyer* no.1526, and *Anglo Saxon Wills*, ed. and trans. by Dorothy Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930), p.2-5.

[11] *Abbo*, pp.42-3.

[12] Briggs, 'Was Haegelisdun in Essex?', p.277f.

[13] *Herm.*, p.4.

[14] Evans, 'The Contribution of Hoxne', p.182.

association with St Edmund in the foundation charter for Norwich cathedral.[15] Further charter evidence from Norwich suggests that there was a chapel dedicated to St Edmund at Hoxne from at least the early-twelfth century.[16] There is, however, no indication of an active cult at the site prior to the thirteenth century and any etymological link with *Haglesdun* has been all but ruled out.[17] This variety of attributions, both medieval and modern, is a testament to the enduring association of St Edmund with broader East Anglian geography. That Edmund's life was written into the landscape at any number of sites indicates his importance as an icon of East Anglian regional identity.

The architectural context of Edmund's first shrine

If the geographical setting for Edmund's original interment is obscure, then so too is its architectural context. Abbo recounts that, after Edmund was buried, a church (*basilica*) of 'humble work' (*vili opere)* was constructed over his grave. The term *basilica* is particularly relevant here as it has a rather specific meaning. According to the archaeologist Christopher Pickles '*basilicas* were funerary churches outside city walls, normally associated with a cemetery... they often contained the shrine of a local saint or martyr and hence became centres of pilgrimage.'[18] Both Aelfric, who adapted Abbo's work into Old English a short time after it was written, and Hermann the Archdeacon,

---

[15] This charter which survives in numerous copies, all dating from after the beginning of the thirteenth century, was apparently drawn up by Bishop Herbert de Losinga in 1101. See; *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, ed. Barbara Dodwell (London, 1975), no.12. The Norwich charter is the first written document to associate Edmund with Hoxne, but it is likely there were pre-existing oral traditions linking the saint to the site. Bishop Theodred, who made a grant to Hoxne in his will, associated the site not with St Edmund, but with St Ethelbert, another Anglo-Saxon, royal, martyr saint. Ethelbert's martyrdom narrative shares some parallels with Edmund's, it is possible, therefore, that Edmund and Ethelbert at some stage became conflated there.

[16] At some point between 1110 and 1119 Herbert de Losinga granted the 'church of St Edmund' at Hoxne to Ralph the Dapifer and his wife. See; Evans, 'The Contribution of Hoxne', p.184 and *Norwich Charters*, no. 114.

[17] For an etymological discussion on *Haglesdun* See; *Corolla*, p.xxxiii.

[18] Christopher Pickles, *Texts and Monuments: A Study of ten Anglo-Saxon churches of the pre-Viking period, BAR British Series 277* (Oxford, 1999), p.103. Pickles is here discussing architecture in the continental, Gallic tradition. However, given that Abbo was himself a Frenchman, it is not surprising that he would use 'basilica' as a descriptor.

who wrote some one hundred and fifty years later, refer to this original structure as a 'prayer house'.[19] The form of the prayer house is never described in any detail, though, given that all three authorities emphasise its small and rustic status, it seems likely to have been a single celled chapel, perhaps similar in form to the earliest phase of excavation at Raunds Furnells in Northamptonshire (Fig.2.1).[20] One further account, from a later source, may furnish a little more information. Goscelin of St Bertin, who adapted and expanded Hermann's *De Miraculis* in the early-twelfth century, recounts a story which was popular with the 'common folk' *(vulgatum multo iam ora resoluit)* concerning a blind man who was cured at Edmund's first shrine.[21] Caught out by the oncoming night, the blind man and his companion sought refuge at the saint's chapel. After encountering a miraculous pillar of burning flame the blind man gained the power of sight. The story itself is highly conventional in terms of narrative. However, it reveals an interesting point of note. On their way into the chapel we are told that the old man tripped over the saint's tomb *(tumulum)*, which he later used as a pillow. All the sources are agreed that at this stage Edmund was buried beneath the earth in a wooden coffin *(ligneo locello)*. The *tumulum* in question is therefore likely to have been a recumbent slab placed above the saint's grave, possibly of a similar style to those found at St Gregory's minster in Kirkdale, North Yorkshire (Fig.2.2-3).[22] Speculation aside, the

---

[19] *Aelf.*, I, p.326 uses OE '*gebaed-huse*', while *Herm.*, pp.4-5 uses the Latin '*domuncula orationis*'.

[20] For a detailed report on excavations at this site see, Andy Boddington (ed.), *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo Saxon Church and Churchyard* (London, 1996). Although there is no evidence of a saint having rested at this site, a *sacrarium* or piscina was found buried near the church altar. It has been suggested that this pot was once used to house 'sacred material' in the form of ashes used during the church's consecration ceremony. See, David Parsons 'Liturgical and Social Aspects' in *ibid.*, pp.58-66.

[21] For this story see *Gosc.*, pp.133-7. Although the story appears late, the reference to its popularity among the 'common folk' suggests that it preserves fragments of oral tradition.

[22] The grave slabs belong to a collection of mid-Anglo-Saxon architectural features reused during the eleventh-century construction of the church. For a discussion of the significance of these grave-slabs see; Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts, 'Three Ages of Conversion at Kirkdale, North Yorkshire', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge, 2005), pp.299-300. See also; James Lang, *Corpus of Anglo Saxon Stone Sculpture, vol.III, York and East Yorkshire* (Oxford, 1995), p.161-2, no.7-8.

precise form of Edmund's first shrine is now lost to us. Fortunately, the sources are more forthcoming with regards the saint's next place of residence.

Three churches at Beodericsworth/Bury St Edmunds

All the texts that make up Edmund's hagiographic tradition share a consistent concern that the saint's body should reside in a place appropriate to his esteem. The writers in question clearly recognised that Edmund's profile had steadily increased as time went on. This being the case, within the texts, Edmund conceptually outgrows his physical surroundings on several occasions. When Abbo describes Edmund's initial interment within the small mortuary chapel, he considers the structure to be an 'appropriate tomb' (*competenti mausoleo*).[23] Later, however, once knowledge of Edmund's miracles had begun to spread, he describes the same tomb to be 'unsuitable' (*incongruo mausoleo*).[24] Where these descriptions occur they usually preface a translation; either from one church to another or from one reliquary to another. The first such translation took place around the beginning of the tenth century. According to Abbo, Edmund's body was moved from its small wooden shrine to a far more prominent location at the 'royal vill' of Beodericsworth (Bury St Edmunds).[25] At Bury, Edmund occupied a succession of three churches, the first, built of timber, would have housed his shrine during Abbo's day, the second was built during the reign of Cnut and the third, the ruins of which stand today, was constructed and consecrated shortly after the Norman Conquest.

No maps or plans survive to describe precisely what Edmund's first church at Bury looked like. It is not even known exactly when Edmund's body was moved there.[26]

---

[23] *Abbo*, pp.42-3.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp.50-1.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp.44-5.

[26] There is some ambiguity as to when this took place. Abbo says only that the saint was translated 'many years later', Goscelin is similarly vague, while Hermann dates the translation to the reign of Athelstan (925-941). Two later sources; the *Vita et Passio* found in M.S. Bodley 240 and the 'Curteys Register' (BL, Add. MSS 7096 and 14848) are more specific, respectively dating this first translation to 36 (905) and 33 (902) years after Edmund's martyrdom. See; *Memorials,* I, p.xxi for further discussion.

Abbo says of the structure only that it was: 'a church of immense size, with storeys admirably constructed of wood.'[27] Although we tend to associate medieval church-building with stone, it would have been relatively common to find impressive churches built from timber.[28] Unfortunately, the perishable nature of wood has meant that almost nothing survives of what must once have been an extensive and greatly refined architectural tradition. Greensted church (Fig.2.4), near Chipping-Ongar in Essex, is now the only extant Anglo-Saxon church built in wood. Although numerous later additions have been made to the structure, largely in brick, the central nave is composed of timber radiocarbon-dated from the mid- to late-eleventh century.[29] Greensted is a rather modest construction and can hardly be cited as a direct equivalent to Abbo's 'church of immense size'. We can, however, gain some appreciation of what could be achieved when wood was employed as a medium for medieval church building by using an example from further afield. Although it is from a later period, the twelfth/thirteenth-century stave church at Borgund, Norway (Fig.2.5) is a multi-storied structure that reveals the intricate craftsmanship employed by the medieval carpenters of Northern Europe.[30] It seems likely that Edmund's wooden church would have been built to a similar if not higher standard. Abby L. Antrobus, drawing on previous scholarship, has made a compelling case that this wooden structure may not have been built for Edmund's translation at all. Instead, she suggests that there may have been an extant middle-Saxon church at the site.[31] The *Liber Eliensis* indicates that another East Anglian martyr king, Sigeberht (r. c.629-634), founded a monastery at Beodericsworth.[32]

---

[27] Abbo, pp.44-5 *permaximam miro ligneo tabulatu ecclesiam*.

[28] Mary and Nigel Kerr, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (Aylesbury, 1989), p.57f.

[29] W. Rodwell, 'Anglo-Saxon Church Building: Aspects of Design and Construction', in *The Anglo Saxon Church: Papers on History, Architecture and Archaeology in Honour of Dr H.M. Taylor*, ed. L.A.S Butler and R.K. Morris (London, 1986), p.171.

[30] For more on Norwegian stave churches see; Roar Hauglid, *Norwegian Stave Churches*, trans. R.I. Christopherson (Oslo, 1970).

[31] See; Abby L. Antrobus, *Urbanisation and the Urban Landscape: Building Medieval Bury St Edmunds*, 2 vols (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: Durham University, 2009), pp.106-120.

[32] *Lib.El.*, pp.xxiii - xxiv, 11 and n. e.

Bede supports Sigeberht's role as a monastic founder but neglects to name the site.[33] Although it is by no means certain, it is possible to speculate that Edmund ultimately replaced Sigeberht, a pre-existing, but by then largely out-dated, Anglo-Saxon, royal martyr at Beodericsworth.[34]

As will be explored in chapters three and four, the early decades of the eleventh century saw several significant changes take place with respect to the form and function of Edmund's cult. These changes extended to a complete reimagining of cult's physical setting. In 1020 King Cnut re-founded the community at Bury St Edmunds, replacing the group of secular clerks who guarded Edmund's body with twelve Benedictine monks from the Abbey of St Benets Hulme.[35] Around the same time, Cnut commissioned the building of a new church at Bury, this time in stone. Cnut's church was completed and consecrated in 1032 by bishop Aethelnoth of Canterbury. According to Hermann the Archdeacon, this stone structure was: 'simple in design, not as cleverly constructed as some are today.'[36] By the time Hermann was writing, Cnut's chapel had already been replaced by Abbot Baldwin's enormous Romanesque church. Given this context, we can interpret Hermann's comment that Cnut's chapel was 'simple in design' as suggestive of a sense of inadequacy. Hermann's view on Cnut's chapel mirrors Abbo's remark that Edmund's original shrine became *incongruo mausoleo* as the saint's fame expanded. Again we are left with the idea that the magnificence of Edmund's legend had outgrown his body's meagre surroundings. In this way we can see how Edmund's fame had a direct impact on the material environs of his cult.

The final ecclesiastical structure to be erected at Bury was Abbot Baldwin's colossal Romanesque abbey. Baldwin's role in the development of St Edmund's cult will

---

[33] *Ecc.His.*, p.171.

[34] There are certainly similarities between Sigeberht's story as presented by Bede and Edmund's as presented by Abbo. Both were East Anglian kings, both displayed pacifism in the face of aggression and both were ultimately martyred by a pagan invader.

[35] *Lib. El.*, p.155.

[36] *Herm.,* pp.110-11.

be explored in greater detail in chapter three. For now, it is sufficient to say that he was the prime driving force behind most of the late-eleventh-century innovations that took place at Bury. As an architect he was responsible not only for designing the new abbey church, but also for a complete re-planning of the surrounding town.[37] Although it was never completed during his lifetime and numerous additions were made in successive centuries, the basic shape of Baldwin's abbey remained in place through to the Reformation.[38] The scale of the building (Fig.2.6) suggests that Baldwin had designs to ensure that his church would provide a fitting architectural context for the cult of St Edmund irrespective of any increase in his saint's popularity. By the time of its completion in the twelfth century, the finished structure ranked amongst the largest ecclesiastical buildings in the Christian world and at 505 feet, was the second longest in England, after Winchester.[39] In terms of materiality, a saint's church, the place that housed his or her remains, could be considered the outermost and certainly the most immediately visible expression of their prestige and sanctity. Such a massive building as that constructed by Baldwin at Bury was a testament not only to the abbot's own ambitions, but to Edmund's burgeoning popularity. Yet, if the abbey church was Edmund's *sanctum*, then inside the church was his *sancta sanctorum*.

Edmund's shrine at Bury

In his *Passio* Abbo states, on several occasions, that Edmund's body remained in its original wooden coffin. He makes no mention of any more elaborate reliquary. It would therefore seem likely that this coffin, at least during the saint's early days at Bury,

---

[37] For the development of the town of Bury St Edmunds see; Antrobus, *Urbanisation and the Urban Landscape.*

[38] For the development of the abbey church see Eric Fernie, 'The Romanesque Church of Bury St Edmunds Abbey', in *BSE,* pp.1-15. and 'Bury St Edmunds after 1081', in Fernie, *Architecture of Norman England*, pp.128-9. For a more general discussion of Bury's place in the architectural tradition of East Anglia see; Stephen Heywood 'Stone Building in East Anglia' and Richard Plant, 'Romanesque East Anglia and the Empire', in *East Anglia and the North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Robert Liddiard (Woodbridge, 2013), pp.256-269 and 270-286. For later architectural developments see; Gransden, *A History of the Abbey*, pp.229-235.

[39] Fernie, 'The Romanesque Church', pp.4-5.

acted as the direct focal point of cult activity. According to Hermann the Archdeacon, in 1010, the coffin (*locello*) and its contents were temporarily moved to St Paul's, London by Aelwine, St Edmund's shrine-keeper. [40] Hermann confirms that, during this sojourn, the coffin was openly displayed, covered only by an altar cloth (*pallum)*. Two early-twelfth-century images of Edmund's casket are preserved in the passion cycle at the beginning of the Morgan Edmund. [41]

These images may represent stylistic conventions rather than accurate depictions, but they display several features which conform well with written descriptions of the coffin. The images show scenes from Abbo's *Passio* and Hermann the Archdeacon's *De Miraculis* respectively. The first image (Fig.5.23), which illustrates Edmund's initial translation, shows the casket as a relatively simple, coffin shaped, wooden box, etched with scrollwork. The second (Fig.5.28), which portrays Edmund's body being moved temporarily to London, shows the saint's coffin, on the back of a cart. The scrollwork is no longer evident, but is instead replaced by a wave pattern, presumably designed to represent a fabric covering of some sort. Unlike the first image, which shows Edmund's wrapped body being lowered into an open casket, the second image reveals that the coffin had a domed lid, topped with a small cross. With its lid in place, the coffin is reminiscent of a Scandinavian hogback tombstone stone. [42] In both miniatures, the lower half of the casket rises upwards at either end to form an elevated lip, likely for the insertion of poles to assist in carrying it. Jocelin of Brakelond, writing in the thirteenth century, attests that Edmund's coffin did indeed have '…iron rings at the two ends of the coffin, like those usually found on a Norse chest.' [43] The same source

---

[40] *Herm.*, pp.32-41.

[41] Morgan, MS M.736*.*, f.18r. and 20v.

[42] It is not immediately apparent where the artist might have found a prototype. Despite the long Danish occupation, no hogback stone has ever been found in East Anglia. See; Howard Williams, *Valorising Viking Valhalla? Rethinking the Hogback Tombs* (Annual Sue Margeson Memorial Lecture, 1st March 2014) available at: http://www.nnas.info/sites/default/files/downloads/NNASLecture1March2014_Williams.pdf

[43] *Joc.*, p.99.

also confirms that the coffin contained 'an opening in the coffin-lid, through which, in the past, wardens of the shrine used to put their hands to touch the holy body.'[44] Jocelin clearly felt that the coffin was of considerable antiquity and there is no reason to doubt that assertion.

By the eleventh century, translations like that conducted by Abbot Samson were the only time that Edmund's remains were likely to be publicly exposed. However, the idea that the saint's coffin was initially displayed openly and that, at one time, Edmund's body could be touched is in keeping with Hermann's assertion that, before Cnut re-founded the abbey in 1020, Edmund had been cared for by a community of secular clerks.[45] It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a community of this type would exercise a less rigorous access policy with regards the saint's remains than the Benedictines later would. Certainly, both Abbo and Aelfric suggest that at one time the saint's body may have been frequently aired. Both include the story of Oswyn, a pious woman who 'dwelt near the saint's burial place in prayer and fasting.'[46] Oswyn, we are told, annually opened Edmund's coffin so that she might trim his hair and pair his nails. These offcuts were, according to the sources, placed within a pyx and treated as revered relics.[47] Although he does not mention Oswyn, Hermann the Archdeacon reveals that this tradition continued afterwards. According to Hermann, the monk Aelwine, who figures heavily in the Edmund's narrative:

> '…attended to the saint's body in the manner of a devoted servant. Indeed, he often poured pure water over the incorrupt body and combed its hair, and he lovingly kept any hairs, drawn out by the comb, in a box, like relics.'[48]

---

[44] *Ibid.*, p.98.

[45] *Herm.*, pp.42-3.

[46] *Abbo.,* pp.44-47 and *Aelf.*, I, pp.328-9.

[47] Henry VIII's commissioners list the saint's fingernails as amongst the relics still found at Bury St Edmunds at the Reformation. See; *Cal.L.P.*, vol. IX, no.772.

[48] *Herm.,* pp.18-19.

The writings of Reginald of Durham provide a story which shares close parallels with those of Oswyn and Aelwine. In his *Libellus,* Reginald describes the activities of Elfred Westou, a mid-eleventh-century sacristan at Durham, who was known to frequently open St Cuthbert's tomb so that he could dress the saint's hair.[49] Hair and nail pairings were easy to separate from a body and were amongst the most common of bodily relics.[50] However, the stories from Bury St Edmunds and Durham stand out in their inclusion of a character whose specific task it was to care for the saint in this way. Furthermore, another element links these tales. Like both Abbo and Aelfric, who situate Oswyn's tale before their own time, and Hermann who recounts Aelwine's actions in the past tense, Reginald also places his story in *temporibus antiquis*. For all three writers the regular exposure of their saint's body was clearly a thing of the past. A similar theme appears in an account of the life of Harald Hardradi which appears in Snorri Sturluson's late-eleventh-century *Heimskringla*. According to the story:

> 'When Harald was ready to leave Trondheim, he went to St Olaf's shrine and opened it, and trimmed the saint's hair and nails. Then he locked the shrine again and threw the key into the river Nid, and since then St Olaf's shrine has never been opened.'[51]

Again, Snorri's account not only emphasises the removal of bodily matter, but places such activity in the past. This may suggest the existence of a tenth/eleventh-century hagiographic *topos* whereby, in a bygone age, a saint's remains could be safely interacted with, provided they were treated with the requisite care.[52] Furthermore, the existence of such similar narratives lends credence to the idea that the practices of individual saints' cults were thoroughly intertwined and that ideas were borrowed and

---

[49] *R.D.,* c.16, pp.28-32.

[50] *Bart.*, p.245.

[51] Snorri Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, trans. and ed. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson (Harmondsworth, 1966), p.139.

[52] There are indications that Reginald may have drawn upon Hermann's work, or at least used a shared exemplar. Hermann refers to Aelwine's care for St Edmund as his 'singular prerogative' (*prerogatiue singularis)*, Reginald uses a very similar phrase (*speciali praerogativa*) when describing Elfred's charge. Given the close parallels that the two stories share, this is likely more than pure coincidence.

exchanged from site to site. Whatever the case may have been, Edmund's shrine became both more elaborate and less accessible after the introduction of Benedictine monasticism.

According to the *Gesta Sacristarum,* which provides a biographical account of Bury's architectural development, during the reign of Abbot Baldwin the sacristans Thurstan and Tolinus: 'crafted the bier of the blessed martyr and saints Botulph and Jurminus using sheets of silver.'[53] This bier was likely the first independent shrine to be constructed and would have been designed as an external housing for Edmund's coffin. Unfortunately, no images survive to depict what this original feretory looked like. The only other surviving visual depictions of Edmund's shrine come from John Lydgate's fifteenth-century *Lives of St Edmund and St Fremund* (Fig.2.7-10). Again, these images may draw upon stylistic conventions, but they were produced at Bury and are likely to have been influenced by the appearance of the actual shrine. The images in Lydgate's work reveal a fully developed and elaborate reliquary shrine, clad in gold plate and adorned with embossed images. Elevated on a decorated, stepped dais of stone and surrounded by a curtained railing, this was probably how Edmund's shrine appeared in its full maturity and is likely the same edifice which Henry VIII's commissioners commented was so 'cumberous to deface'.[54]

Although no images remain from the period between the Morgan Edmund and Lydgate to show how the saint's feretory developed across the intervening three hundred years, we do have one detailed literary description of the area surrounding Edmund's shrine. This description is provided by Jocelin of Brakelond, whose late twelfth-century Chronicle offers an account of life at the abbey during the reign of Abbot Samson (1182-1211). Samson was the first abbot since Baldwin to translate Edmund's remains to a new shrine, and as chapter one revealed, Jocelin left a record of

---

[53] *Ges.Sac.*

[54] *Cal.L.P.*, vol.XIII(ii), no.192.

the process. Samson, Jocelin tells us, had intended on improving Edmund's shrine, but his hand was forced early, in 1198, by an unexpected conflagration within the shrine precinct. [55] Between the shrine and high altar, Jocelin explains, there had been a wooden platform within which the shrine-keepers stored various combustible items. Upon this platform, the sides of which were clad in iron railings, stood a candle composed of recycled taper-wax. On the night in question, the candle had not been properly snuffed out and it collapsed, causing a fire that burned its way into the vicinity of the shrine. Jocelin describes how the monks battled the fire until it was finally put out. In the aftermath it was found that the silver plates that adorned the saint's feretory – presumably the same plates commissioned by Baldwin - had fallen off and the wood underneath had been burned to the 'thickness of a finger'. Many of the precious stones that adorned the reliquary had also fallen from their sockets and were 'nearly crushed' in the confusion. [56] In the end, the damage caused was largely superficial. Matters could easily have been far worse. In Jocelin's day there was a great carved beam, placed someway beyond the high altar, upon which were displayed many of the abbey's most holy objects. This mode of displaying multiple artefacts within the shrine space reveals the perceived linkage of holy objects at the abbey. According to Jocelin, the beam housed:

> '... the cross and the 'Mariola' and the 'John', and the casket with the shirt of St Edmund, and the monstrances with the relics... and other reliquaries.'[57]

The height of the flames, coupled with the positioning of this beam meant that many of the abbey's most prized possessions had been at risk. Fortunately, so Jocelin tells us, the beam had been taken down for renovation; otherwise it would likely have suffered the same fate as the painted wall hanging which had temporarily taken its place. Concerned that a similar disaster might occur in the future, Samson decreed that

---

[55] For Jocelin's description of this scene see *Joc.*, pp.94-96.

[56] *Ibid.*, pp.94-6.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp.94-6.

Edmund's feretory should be elevated. During the preparations for the translation the feretory, which had previously housed Edmund's coffin, was disarticulated: it being composed of detachable panels. Edmund's coffin, meanwhile, was temporarily placed upon the high altar. Samson hired masons to build a stone platform upon which the reliquary would rest. He also invested a substantial amount of the Abbey's capital in the creation of a gilded crest and frontal for the feretory. The *Gesta Sacristarum* confirms that Robert de Graville, the sacristan during Samson's reign: 'rebuilt the beamwork of the nave of the church, made a covering above St Edmund and adorned it with a variety of images.'[58] The images in Lydgate's work correspond closely to this description and it is likely that the feretory produced by Samson was the same one that lasted through to the Reformation.

It is clear from this brief biographic sketch that the material environs of St Edmund's shrine changed over time. These changes were not merely changes of form; they were also changes of location and, to an extent, meaning. As Edmund's fame grew, so too did the material footprint of his cult and always, at the centre of things, lay his shrine. Yet, the one purportedly unchanging element in all of this, the one constant that anchored the cult irrespective of space and time was the saint's body. All the other physical paraphernalia of cult: paintings, vestments, wall hangings, reliquaries, architecture, even the saint's very location, transformed significantly across the centuries, but Edmund's body, enshrined within the feretory, supposedly remained frozen in a state of perfection. In the next section I will go on to discuss the symbolic and practical functions of Edmund's whole and inviolable body.

---

[58] *Ges.Sac.*
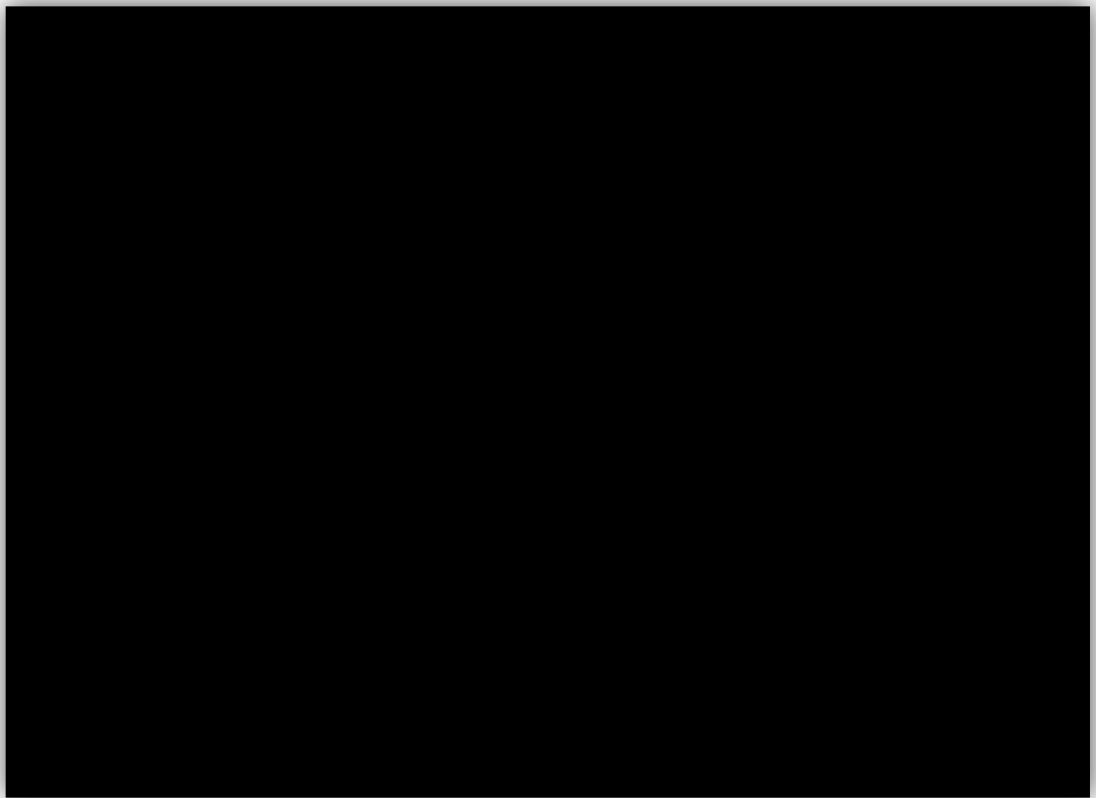
Fig.2.1: Plan of the single cell chapel, Raunds Furnells, Northamptonshire.
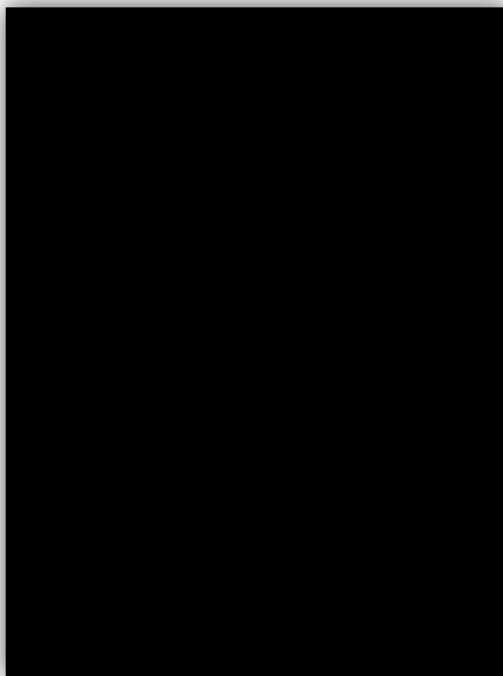
Fig.2.2: Tomb-slab, St Gregory's minster, Kirkdale, North Yorkshire.
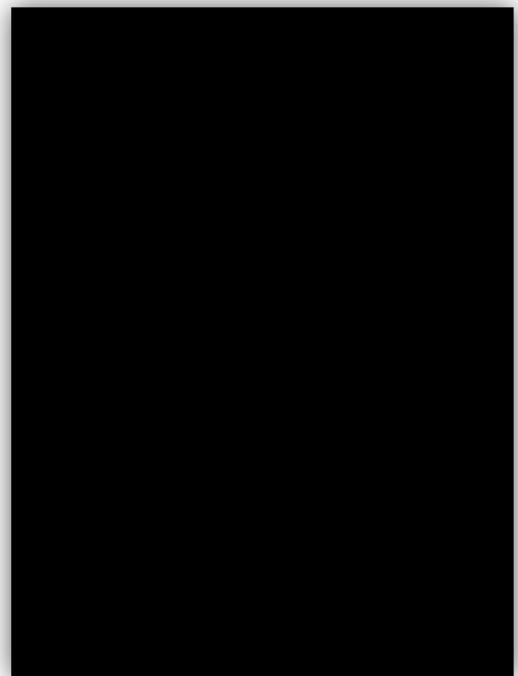
Fig.2.3: Tomb-slab, St Gregory's minster, Kirkdale, North Yorkshire.

Fig.2.4: Greensted church, near Chipping-Ongar in Essex.
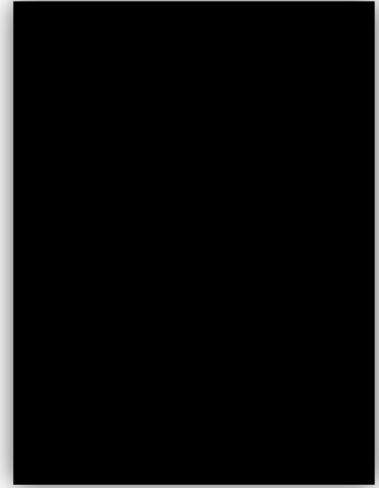
Fig.2.5: 12th/13th-century stave church, Borgund, Norway.
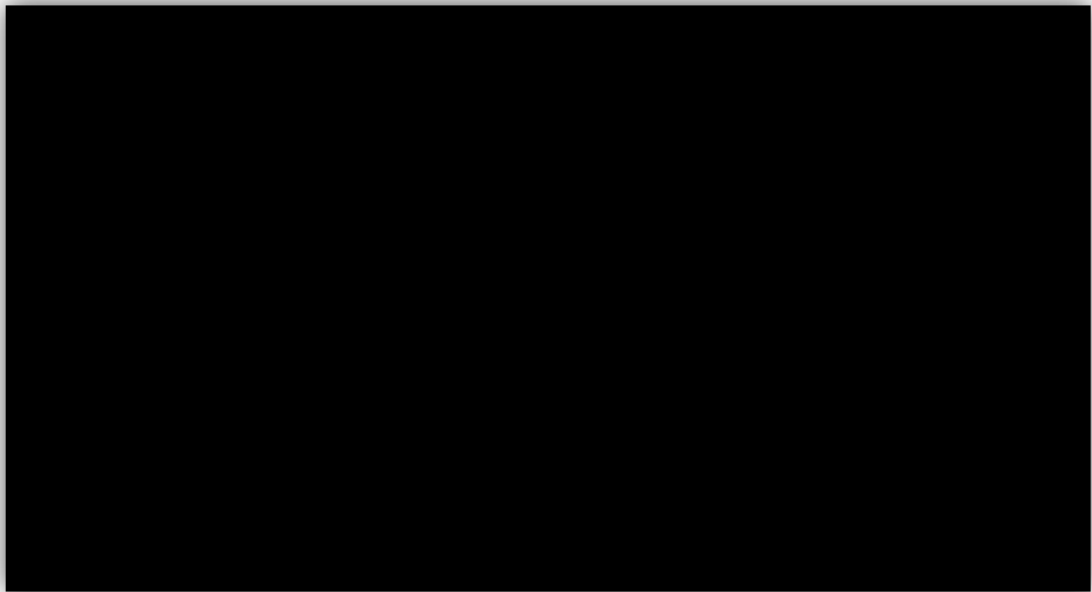
Fig.2.6: Bury St Edmund's Abbey after 1081, plan.[59]

---

[59] Fernie, *Architecture of Norman England*, p.129.

Fig.2.7: Henry VI at St Edmund's shrine
Harley MS 2278, f.4v.
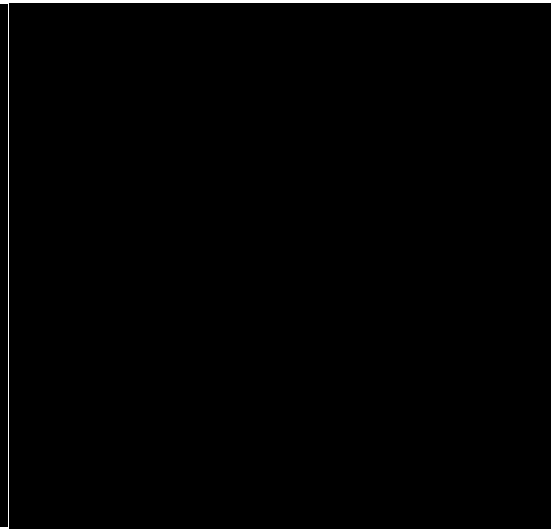
Fig.2.8: A petitioner is removed from the shrine
Harley MS 2278, f.106r.
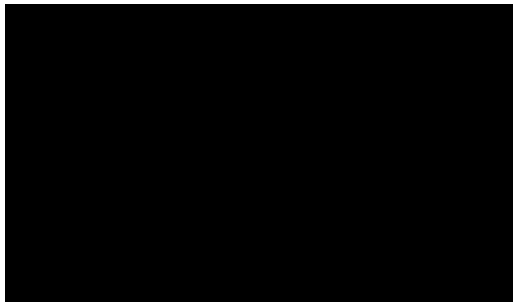
Fig.2.9: John Lydgate at St Edmund's shrine
Harley MS 2278, f.9.r.
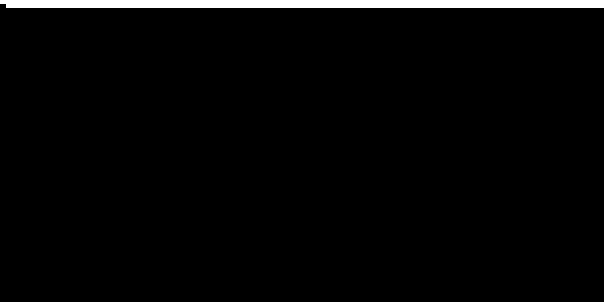
Fig.2.10: Knights repenting at St Edmund's shrine
Harley MS 2278, f.108v.

Fig.2.11: Distribution of St Edmund's relics from I.G. Thomas' data.[60]

---

[60] Unless otherwise stated, all maps in this thesis were created using Scribblemaps [www.scribblemaps.com]

Fig.2.12: Distribution of St Cuthbert's relics from I.G. Thomas' data.

Fig.2.13: Distribution of St Aethelthryth's relics from I.G. Thomas' data.

Fig.2.14: Distribution of St Thomas Becket's relics from I.G. Thomas' data.

2.3: Wholeness and incorruptibility

One of the principle features that marked out St Edmund's cult from many of its contemporaries was its focus upon a whole and incorrupt body. At the heart of the cult, within its reliquary casket, Edmund's corpse remained undivided and unsullied, the heart of his 'relic nexus'. Irrespective of the outward form of Edmund's shrine, the preserved corpse within served as the material apex for his community of faith: the arbiter of cultic proximity and distance. So long as his wholeness was preserved the locus of his cult remained unchallenged. This section examines what concepts of bodily wholeness and incorruption contributed to Edmund's cult. It is revealed that Edmund's miraculous preservation placed him amidst a network of 'incorruptible' English saints. This group epitomised, through their bodies, some of the most important ideas in medieval Christian thought. It will also be shown that the wholeness of St Edmund's body, its indivisibility, afforded his interlocutors - the monks of Bury St Edmunds - a form of monopoly on sacred matter that made their control of his cult all the more effective.

An incorruptible trinity

Saints' cults focussing on whole bodies were less frequent within Christendom than those centred on fragmentary relics, but they were still relatively common.[61] Provided a saint's bones were not disarticulated and split up then it would be fair to say that such a cult remained a 'whole body cult'. In England, a late Anglo-Saxon document known as the *Secgan* lists the resting places of around eighty such 'whole body' saints. According to the historian D.W. Rollason, the form of resting-place lists such as the *Secgan*:

---

[61] *Bart.*, p.239f.

> '… implies that they are dealing predominantly with whole saints, not with small corporeal relics of saints, or, in other words, that the entire earthly remains of the saint rest where they locate them.' [62]

Wholeness and incorruptibility, however, are *not* the same thing. Incorruptibility refers specifically to the flesh, the medium through which corruption is normally enacted, both in the physical sense of bodily decay and in the metaphorical sense of moral corruption through sexual incontinence. Those saints whose flesh remained upon their bones and did not decay represent a special group who, through miraculous influence, were not subject to normal taphomonic processes. Within England, Edmund, along with St Cuthbert of Durham and St Aethelthryth of Ely, seems to have formed a recognised and especial trinity of whole body, incorrupt saints. Aelfric of Eynsham was the first to identify this distinct group. In his Old-English version of Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* Aelfric states:

> 'The English nation is not without the Lord's saints, since in England 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.' [63]

The association of these saints as a recognizable trio endured for a number of centuries as we find the same three mentioned in a story told by Reginald of Durham in the late-twelfth century. [64] In Reginald's tale a man suffering from leprosy looks to find a cure through saintly intervention. Recognising that Cuthbert, Edmund and Aethelthryth ranked amongst the most distinguished (*excellentiores*) saints in England, he decided to appeal to one of them for assistance. [65] However, he was unable to decide which. To

---

[62] For a description of the *Secgan* and other, non-extant Anglo-Saxon lists see; D.W. Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting places in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 7 (1978), pp.61-93.

[63] *Aelf.*, I, pp.332-3. All quotations from Aelfric's 'The Passion of Saint Edmund, King and Martyr' are taken from a modern rendering of Skeat's translation available at [http://faculty.virginia.edu/OldEnglish/aelfric/edmund.html].St Aethelthryth is attributed several female siblings, it is unclear as to which Aelfric is referring, though Wihtburh, another purportedly incorrupt saint, seems the most likely candidate.

[64] See; Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, p.145.

[65] *R.D.,* c.19, pp.37-41.

help him make a decision the nobleman lit three wax tapers, naming them for each of the three saints, the taper which burned out first would indicate the saint to whom he should dedicate his venerations. Given that this story appears in a work dedicated to Cuthbert, the outcome is less than surprising, but which saint, in the event, was more powerful is hardly important. What is important is that they were recognised as sharing a unique attribute that could have made any one of the three a suitable intercessor: not only were they at the centre of 'whole body' cults, those whole bodies were incorrupt.

Incorruption and the resurrection

Incorrupt bodies were always of considerable theological significance within Christian thought. During its earliest phases Christianity had developed an enduring doctrine which argued that, before the fall, man had been clothed in a perfect spiritual flesh; only after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden had this flesh been corrupted. Augustine (354-430) wrote:

> 'Human flesh was indeed constituted in one way before there was sin – that is, it was made so that it could not suffer death; and in another way after sin, being then made such as we know it to be in this wretched mortal condition, unable to hold onto enduring life.'[66]

Augustine goes on to argue that after the general resurrection man would once again wear a flesh which was perfect and incorruptible. In so doing Augustine was following the teachings of Paul concerning the resurrection.

> 'Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'[67]

---

[66] *COG.*, bk.21, c.8, p.1060.

[67] This passage is from 1 Corinthians 15:51-2. For more on Paul's teachings concerning the resurrection see the rest of 1 Corinthians 15 and Philippians 3:20.

The belief, that Christ's second coming would result in a bodily resurrection and the restitution of man's 'spiritual flesh', led inevitably to the questions as to the status of the flesh of the saints; those already residing in heaven. Was it possible that the bodies of saint's reflected a preview of the resurrection?[68] This idea, that the flesh and bones of saints were somehow closer to man's post-resurrection splendour, lies at the heart of the miraculous powers attributed to bodily relics. Indeed, as Caroline Walker Bynum shows in her *The Resurrection of the Body*, it became commonplace for medieval thinkers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Goscelin of St Bertin to describe relics as being the saint's *actual* resurrected body.[69] The idea of corporeal purity as a portent of the resurrection is especially marked in the respective hagiographies of Edmund and Aethelthryth. In both instances their mode of death had left prominent bodily wounds; Aethelthryth had died from a large tumour on her neck, while Edmund had been shot through with arrows and beheaded.[70] In both cases, after a period of entombment, their wounds were found to have healed, which ties in with Pauline descriptions of the resurrection where the 'corruptible must put on incorruption' and thus be 'transformed'. Edmund and Aethelthyrth were not merely frozen in a physical stasis that preserved their bodies as they were at death, they had actually undergone the transformative and miraculous process of a posthumous healing.

Returning briefly to Reginald of Durham's story of the leper with his three wax tapers, it is now clear why he selected the three saints that he did. As a leper, Reginald's protagonist was undergoing a process of bodily decay whilst still living.

---

[68] For more on the early ideas surrounding the incorruptible flesh of saints see; Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 2011), pp.15-23.

[69] Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995), pp.174-5 and 211-12.

[70] See Abbo, p.44-5 and *Lib. El.*, p.60. For more discussion on Edmund's posthumous recapitation see; Mark Faulkner, '"Like a Virgin": The Reheading of St. Edmund and Monastic Reform in Late-Tenth-Century England', in *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (Leiden, 2012), pp.39-52 and Ciaran Arthur, 'Giving the Head's Up in Aelfric's Passio Sancti Eadmundi: Postural Representations of the Old English Saint', *Philological Quarterly*, 92:3 (2013), pp.315-333.

Leprosy was not only a corrupting disease; it was also a condition which ultimately left the body fragmented. In appealing to Cuthbert, Edmund and Aethelthryth he invoked three saints who had somehow attained an early state of post-resurrection bodily perfection. The wholeness and incorruptibility of these three saintly bodies symbolically represented the reversal of the man's own condition.

Incorruption and virginity

For medieval theologians and hagiographers, posthumous bodily incorruption was not only an indicator of general sanctity, it also implied a specific form of sanctity: virginity. Christianity viewed sexual activity as a necessary, though deeply corrupting practice. This viewpoint stems from the 'Original Sin' perpetrated by Adam and Eve in eating from the tree of knowledge, often interpreted as an allegory for sexual discovery. Adam and Eve had been conceived by God as eternal and undying. Only after they had sinned were they condemned to 'return unto the ground'.[71] As such, sexlessness was widely associated with deathlessness in Christian thought. Any mortal who lived as a sexless virgin was seen to preserve an element of the deathless purity of Eden, a purity which would return at the end of time with the general resurrection. Several early Church fathers exalted the position of virginity, suggesting that sexual abstinence could result in the physical incorruption of the body, both in life and after death.[72] Augustine wrote of the practice of virginity:

> '...virginal chastity and freedom through pious continence from all sexual intercourse is the portion of Angels, and a practice, in corruptible flesh, of perpetual incorruption.'[73]

Augustine's contemporary Gregory of Nyssa (335-c.395) stated of the virgin body:

---

[71] Genesis, 3:19.

[72] Freeman, *Holy Bones*, p.19.

[73] Augustine, *De Virginitate*, in *Father*, trans. C.L Cornish, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009), c.12,. See also c.26 which refers to 1 Corinthians 15.

99

> '…death cannot pass beyond virginity, but finds his power checked and shattered there, it is demonstrated that virginity is a stronger thing than death; and that body is rightly named undying which does not lend its service to a dying world… In such a body the long unbroken career of decay and death, which has intervened between the first man and the lives of virginity which have been led, is interrupted.'[74]

Bede (c.672-735), often described as the last of the fathers of the Western Church, provides, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, several examples, including Cuthbert and Aethelthryth, of saints whose bodies had remained incorrupt after death. In Cuthbert's case, there is no overt mention of virginity as the underlying factor behind his miraculous preservation. However, virginity is implied through the extreme asceticism he practiced in life. Bede tells us that when, eleven years after Cuthbert's death, his fellow monks exhumed his remains:

> '…they expected to find his flesh reduced to dust and his remains withered, as is usual in dead bodies… when they opened the grave, they found the body whole and incorrupt as though still living and the limbs still flexible, so that he looked as if he were asleep rather than dead.'[75]

According to Bede, such preservation marked out 'the height of glory' that Cuthbert had attained after death. Aethelthryth, Bede tells us, was similarly exhumed, this time sixteen years after her death, and was likewise found to be 'free from decay as if she had died and been buried that very day.'[76] In Aethelthryth's case, however, virginity is characterised as the overt cause of the saint's posthumous incorruption. Aethelthryth, an East Anglian princess, had twice been married and on both occasions had refused to consummate her union, instead preferring the celibacy of the convent. Bede tells us that this sexual abstinence directly resulted in her miraculous preservation:

---

[74] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity,* in *Father*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009),c.13.

[75] *Ecc.His.*, IV.30.

[76] *Ibid.,* IV.19.

> 'For the miraculous preservation of her body from corruption in the tomb is evidence that she had remained untainted by bodily intercourse.'[77]

The literary historian Virginia Blanton has identified a link between Bede's description of Aethelthryth and the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, suggesting that the *topos* of the miraculously preserved virgin saint may have been drawn directly from Gregory's *Life of Macrina*.[78] This *topos* is repeated in the *Ecclesiastical History* when Bede describes the almost identical circumstances pertaining to the preservation of Aethelburh, identified in some sources as Aethelthryth's sister. Bede again tells us that her bodily perfection, after a six year entombment, showed that she had been 'immune from the corruption of sinful desires.'[79] It is clear, therefore, that for Bede, posthumous bodily incorruption was the direct and miraculous outcome of a virgin life.

Edmund's incorruption in Abbo and Aelfric

Bede's work had a massive influence on the development of the English literary landscape and successive generations of historians and hagiographers made considerable use of his writings. Abbo of Fleury, Edmund's first hagiographer, was one such writer. In Abbo's *Passio* the summary he provides of early English history is taken almost verbatim from Bede's text. It is equally clear that Bede's views on bodily incorruption had an influence on Abbo. In justifying a belief in Edmund's own bodily incorruption, Abbo initially evoked the example of:

> '...Cuthbert, the Saint of the Lord, and incomparable Confessor and Bishop, who not only to this day awaits with body incorrupt the day of the first resurrection, but continues to be suffused with a gentle warmth.'[80]

---

[77] *Ibid.*, IV.19.

[78] Virginia Blanton, Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Aethelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615 (University Park, 2007), p.44f.

[79] Ecc.His., III.9.

[80] Abbo, p.11.

Further on, like Bede, he draws an explicit link between Edmund's virginal life and his bodily preservation and interposes a lengthy exegesis on the subject, stating:

> 'And how great was the holiness in this life of the holy martyr may be conjectured from the fact that his body even in death displays something of the glory of the resurrection without trace of decay; for it must be borne in mind that they who are endued with this kind of distinction are extolled by the Catholic Fathers in the rolls of their religion as having attained the peculiar privilege of virginity, for they teach that such as have preserved their chastity till death and have endured the stress of persecution even to the goal of martyrdom, by a just recompense are endued even here on earth, when death is past, with incorruption of the flesh.'[81]

Mark Faulkner points out that Abbo never states directly that Edmund *was* a virgin and only suggests that he was "like a virgin".[82] However, Abbo's insinuation - that Edmund practiced virginity – is made all the clearer when he goes on to paraphrase Augustine:

> 'What, indeed, can be thought a higher privilege in the dispensation of love and Christian faith than this, that mortal man should acquire by grace the attribute which angels have by nature?'[83]

Abbo's digression into the virginal implications of Edmund's incorruption should be viewed against the context within which he was writing. Abbo produced his *Passio* not at Bury St Edmunds, but at Ramsey Abbey, one of the leading monasteries in the tenth-century English, Benedictine, reform movement. Abbo was himself a deeply reforming influence, introducing many continental ideas into England.[84] His intention in producing the *Passio* was to provide, through Edmund, an exemplary life which might be followed by the abbey's inmates:

> 'And let those who render to him the ministry of human reverence strive to the utmost to please him by that purity of life, which his uncorrupted body proves to have been his continual happiness; and, if they cannot do so with the flower of

---

[81] *Ibid.* p.57.

[82] Mark Faulkner, "Like a Virgin", p.47.

[83] *Ibid.*, p.47. See also Augustine, *De Virginitate*, c.12.

[84] Marco Mostert, *The Political Theology of Abbo of Fleury: A Study of the ideas about society and law of the tenth-century monastic reform movement* (Hilversum, 1987), esp. pp.40-5.

virgin modesty, let them at least steadfastly mortify their desire for pleasure, of which they have had past experience.'[85]

Abbo used Edmund's virginal body as an index for notions of monastic propriety. As celibacy was an important focus of monastic reform, a virginal Edmund was a pre-requisite if he were to act as an exemplar.[86] Interestingly, Edmund's later hagiographers dwell less upon virginity as a cause of Edmund's incorruption. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Aelfric of Eynsham, who abbreviated Abbo's life into old English, remarks upon Edmund's bodily preservation, but he makes no explicit mention of the saint's purported virginity.[87] Instead he states:

> 'His body shows us, which lies undecayed, that he lived without fornication here in this world, and by a pure life passed to Christ.'[88]

The absence of fornication (*forligrian)*, or sex outside of marriage, represents a distinct form of sexual purity from virginity (fǽmn-hád) and does not rule out the possibility of sex within marriage. No source ever refers to Edmund having been married, but Aelfric's choice of words does not preclude the possibility. Indeed, Carl Phelpstead has argued that the absence of a preoccupation with virginity in Aelfric's text may represent an attempt to make Edmund appear more kingly.[89] This may very well have been the case. Later hagiographers, with the notable exception of Lydgate, scarcely mention Edmund's virginity at all. It seems to have become undesirable to portray St Edmund, a kingly saint, as incapable of procreation. The ways in which Edmund's purported virginity was expressed visually will be explored in chapter six.

---

[85] *Abbo*, pp.56-7.

[86] Mark Faulkner, "Like a Virgin", suggests that both Abbo and his later reviser Aelfric, were creating, in Edmund, a saint who physically embodied tenth-century concerns with monastic reform.

[87] For a discussion of the transmission of St Edmund from Abbo to Aelfric and the shift in focus from virginity see; Carl Phelpstead, 'King, martyr and virgin: Imitatio Christi in Ælfric's Life of St Edmund', in *St.Ed.*, pp.27-44.

[88] *Aelf.*, I, pp.328-9. Mark Faulkner, "Like a Virgin", p.47, conflates lack of fornication with virginity.

[89] Phelpstead, 'King Martyr and Virgin', p.43.

Invisible incorruption

The idea that Edmund's corpse remained *integer et viventi simillimus,* 'whole and in a state very much as if it were still living', is a trope repeated consistently in the hagiographic sources. However, in spite of these constant assurances, Edmund's body largely remained unseen. Although miracle accounts frequently speak of pilgrims flocking to 'see' St Edmund, none of these visitors ever actually 'saw' him. To 'see' the saint, in the sense intended by the hagiographers, was to be in his presence and to experience him through the medium of his secondary relics or shrine. By keeping their saint's remains out of sight, the monks of Bury were following traditional protocol. According to the art historian Kirk Ambrose, it was standard practice, from late antiquity onwards, to keep relics hidden from sight. [90] This exercise was no doubt primarily intended as a measure to protect relics from overzealous pilgrims, but it was also aimed at protecting the living. Relics were considered a powerful medium through which a saint could miraculously interact with the world. The sacred energy they emanated could heal and cure, but it was also capable of causing harm if not treated with due care. This idea is best articulated in a letter written by Gregory the Great to the Empress Constantia in 594.[91] In it Gregory outlines how the superintendent of the Apostle Paul's shrine died shortly after removing some relics from the vicinity of the sepulchre. He also describes how a group of workmen, who happened upon the tomb of St Laurence, reached a similar fate. Although they did not dare to touch the saint's remains, the very fact that they saw the saint's body was a sufficient act of profanation that they died within ten days. In both instances, however involuntarily, the presence of the unfortunate victims had threatened to pollute the sacred matter of the relics.

---

[90] Kirk Ambrose, '"Cunningly hidden": Invisible and Forgotten Relics in a Romanesque Work of Art', in *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jenner (New York, 2010), pp.79-96. Ambrose notes that this would change in the thirteenth century when windowed reliquaries became fashionable.

[91] Gregory the Great, *Epist. IV: 30*, in *Father*.

Likewise, Edmund's own incorruption was at risk if he were mishandled in any way and it is clear from the sources that the monks of Bury had similar ideas to those expressed in Gregory's letter.

In his *De Miraculis* Hermann the Archdeacon recounts the story of a Dane who, 'impudently lifted the cloth cover' on St Edmund's litter. The man did so, so that he might 'inspect with his impudent eye what kind of saint was kept there.' This presumptuous action was punished and the Dane was immediately struck blind.[92] This story repeats earlier features present in Abbo's *Passio*, where the tale of Leofstan, a local nobleman, is recounted. Leofstan, through the 'impetuosity of youth', had insisted on a private viewing of Edmund's remains. Yet, as soon as the saint's coffin was opened he was struck down with madness. Abbo makes it clear how this story should be interpreted by comparing Edmund's miraculous actions with those of St Laurence, as cited in Gregory's letter.[93] Evidently direct contact, either physical or through the eyes, with St Edmund's remains was considered to be a dangerous proposition and not just for laymen; monks too could suffer a similar fate. Abbot Leofstan (1044-1065), who opened Edmund's shrine and removed his shirt could not resist testing whether Edmund's head had indeed been miraculously re-joined with his body. In a bizarre experiment, Leofstan pulled at Edmund's head while one of his monks gripped the saint's feet. The saint's miraculous preservation was confirmed, but not without some unfortunate after-effects for the inquisitive abbot. According to Hermann:

> 'Perhaps because his act had been pleasing neither to God nor the saint, his hands were captured by perpetual numbness for the rest of his days.'[94]

Leofstan's crime was dual in nature, not only had he disrespectfully manhandled the saint, he had also shown doubt as to the saint's incorruption. In his redaction of *De*

---

[92] *Herm.*, pp.36-7.

[93] *Abbo*, pp.53-4.

[94] *Herm.*, pp.54-5.

Miraculis, Goscelin of St Bertin includes the stories of Tolinus and Herman, two monks who were separately punished after laying hands upon Edmund's relics.[95] In both cases this was done with the best intentions, but without taking proper precaution. Such stories, which were clearly aimed at a monastic audience, give object lessons, not merely in humility, but also on what *not* to do when dealing with a supernaturally potent artefact. Being in close proximity to a relic of immense power, such as Edmund's incorrupt body, the temptation to transgress must have been ever present. For this reason, the saint's reliquary was an essential intermediary, not only did it protect the inviolable body inside, but it protected those outside from the adverse effects of coming into contact with it.

As Cynthia Hahn has noted, although reliquaries obscured their relics from view, they also acted as a material extension of the sacred matter they contained: they were, in effect, an index of an index.[96] This was true not just in a visual sense, but also through the effects that could be gleaned by coming into contact with them. In order to understand how this worked, it is useful to turn once again to Gregory the Great's letter. After describing the accidents at the shrines of St Paul and St Laurence, Gregory goes on to describe how the energy emitted by saints' bodies was transferable. This energy, in theory, acted much like atomic radiation in that it could be absorbed and passed on to other objects and even people exposed to the relic. As discussed in chapter 1 (Fig. 1.6), this transference of energy made relics, to an extent, self-propagating. In his letter Gregory describes how *brandea*, a form of 'contact relic', are made:

> 'Let my most tranquil lady know that it is not the custom of the Romans, when they give relics of saints, to presume to touch any part of the body; but only a cloth (*brandeum*) is put into a box, and placed near the most sacred bodies of the saints: and when it is taken up it is deposited with due reverence in the Church that is to be dedicated, and such powerful effects are thereby produced

---

[95] *Gosc.*, pp.274-99.

[96] Cynthia Hahn, 'What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?', *Numen*, 57 (2010), pp.284–316.

there as might have been if their bodies had been brought to that special place.'[97]

Gregory of Tours similarly describes the creation of *brandea* by pilgrims at the tomb of St Peter.[98] Indeed, he goes further still, stating that regular visitors to Peter's tomb would: 'fashion gold keys for unlocking the railings of this blessed tomb; after they present them for a blessing, the keys cure the afflictions of ill people.'[99] In the descriptions by both Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours it is clear that the sanctity and miraculous power of the saint's body has been transferred to another object. Following this logic, the reliquary itself acts in the same way as *brandea* in that it is in constant contact with the saint's body and can therefore consistently soak up the relic's power. In Edmund's case, his bejewelled reliquary casket acted as a sort of gilt-silver epidermis, simultaneously hiding, protecting and reflecting the value of the sacral treasure within.

The utility of wholeness and incorruption

Edmund's wholeness and incorruption served a number of purposes. The wholeness of his body gave the monastery the benefit of a monopoly on sacred matter. A fragmentary relic, at least in theory, is as powerful as a bodily whole. [100] However, if a body remains intact, then corporeal relics cannot be dispersed. Contact relics, such as scraps of the saint's shirt, could still be gifted away, but in spite of their theological parity, there is little doubt that the symbolic power of a whole body was greater. If a saint's body *were* the saint, then a fragmented saint/body could be said to be in more than one place at one time. Conversely, if a cult centre, such as Bury, could claim to have a saint's whole body, then they could claim to possess the saint entirely. The saint, as such, would

---

[97] Gregory the Great, *Epist. IV: 30*. For the significance and variety of contact relics in the middle ages see, Bynum, *Christian* Materiality, pp.136-39.

[98] Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, trans. Raymond Van Dam (Liverpool, 1988) pp.45-6.

[99] *Ibid*. pp.45-6.

[100] Gregory the Great, *Epist. IV*: 30.

become indisputably associated with that single location, a location from which proximity and distance could be measured. Being in a single location, the saint's narrative development would become inextricably linked with that place. Equally, the saint's remains could sacralise and legitimise any location they occupied as a cult centre. By maintaining the undivided wholeness of St Edmund's body, the monastic interlocutors who guarded his remains were able to retain the full extent of that legitimising power for themselves. One has to imagine that self-protectionism on the part of Bury's monastic community represents one of the primary reasons why Edmund's body was moved and exhibited so infrequently.

The symbolism of Edmund's inviolability also indexed the abbey's broader ambitions. Bury St Edmunds abbey was a major landholder within medieval East Anglia and was a significant power in the region. This being the case the monastery frequently had to fend off challenges, from both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, to its rights and privileges. By positioning the abbey as an institutional extension of the saint's miraculously incorrupt body, the monks were able to argue that an attack on their possessions was effectively an attack upon the saint himself, an act of corruption. Indeed, the symbolism of incorruption could be used as a defence mechanism in a far more direct way.

Abbot Samson's principle reason for beautifying his patron's shrine must have been, as already suggested, to ensure that the materiality of cult adequately reflected Edmund's revered status. There was, however, another, more practical reason for adorning the shrine with gold, silver and precious gems. In his chronicle, Jocelin of Brakelond makes it clear that the inviolability of the saint's shrine made an investment in expensive decoration a means of ensuring the security of the abbey's capital. During the reign of Abbot Samson, he explains, 'There was not one treasure in England that was not given or exchanged for money, and yet the shrine of St Edmund remained

intact.'[101] The reason for the shrine's inviolability was clear to Jocelin. There had, at the time of Richard I's capture, been a debate amongst the Barons of the Exchequer as to whether the shrine should be partly stripped to pay the king's ransom. Abbot Samson, Jocelin tells us, challenged the barons to try:

> 'Take it for certainty, that this shall never be authorised by me, nor is there any man who would get me to agree to it. But I will open the doors of the church – let anyone enter who will, let anyone who come near who dare.'[102]

Edmund's reputation, it would seem, was suitably fierce as to persuade the barons to desist in their efforts to despoil Edmund's feretory. Jocelin records how they replied to Samson:

> 'I shall not go. Nor I. St Edmund vents his rage on the distant and the absent: much greater will his fury be on those close at hand who seek to rob him of his clothing.'[103]

Of course, one could easily interpret this conversation as fictitious, an example of rhetorical artistic license. Yet, it confirms that the monks of Bury had cultivated the idea that Edmund's corporeal inviolability extended to his shrine and that to deface the shrine was to risk invoking the saint's wrath. The quotation also reveals that notions of proximity and distance and the concentration of saintly power within space were contemporary, medieval discourses.

Summary

Edmund's body was the heart of his cult. It lay whole and incorrupt within its reliquary shrine. Yet, Edmund's incorruption not only provided material testament to his sanctity, it also placed him within an elite group of English saints whose sexual purity and

---

[101] *Joc.*, p.86.

[102] *Ibid.*, p.86.

[103] *Ibid.,* p.86.

unblemished bodies defined them. Furthermore, by providing an indisputable locus for his cult, Edmund's bodily inviolability had further utility. As the material embodiment of his saintly person, his sustained corporeal perfection had important connotations for both the institution that maintained it and the broader material environment that extended from it.

2.4: Other relics at Bury St Edmunds

As the biographical sketch of Edmund's shirt, provided in chapter one, revealed, the saint's body was not the sole relic possessed by the abbey church of Bury St Edmunds. Bury's relic collection, as one might expect from such a prominent foundation, was large and included sacred artefacts belonging to many saints. Indeed, so extensive was the collection that there appears to have been a chapel dedicated to their keeping, though its precise location is unclear. [104] It was common for medieval ecclesiastical centres to maintain lists of the relics in their possession. Indeed, over forty such lists survive from medieval England.[105] It is entirely likely that Bury once possessed such a list. However, no relic inventory has survived through to today. Without such a document it is impossible to assess with any certainty the variety of 'sacred matter' in the abbey's keeping. Nor is it possible to ascertain when and from where such objects were acquired. Fortunately, we can extrapolate, from other written sources, some indication of the type of relics in the abbey's keeping.

Other saints' shrines at Bury

Alongside Edmund's body, the abbey also kept the remains of two other prominent East-Anglian saints; St Jurmin and St Botulph. Jurmin, according to tradition, had been the

---

[104] MacKinlay, *King and Martyr*, p.370, recognised the central apsidal chapel in the chancel as the site for this 'relic house'. M.R. James, *On the Abbey of S. Edmund at Bury* (Cambridge, 1895), identified the apsidal chapel in the church's north transept as the 'relic chapel'. Modern analyses tend not to identify a specific location.

[105] I.G. Thomas, *The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of London, 1974).

son of King Anna (636-654), whose issue included St Aethelthryth, St Seaxburh and St Aethelburh.[106] It seems likely that Bury's acquisition of Jurmin's remains was intended to bolster the abbey's connection, beyond Edmund himself, to the ancient royal line of East Anglia. St Botulph, on the other hand, had been a prominent sixth-century abbot who had founded a monastery at Icanho (modern day Iken).[107] Bury was not the only medieval foundation that claimed to hold Botulph's relics; Ely, Glastonbury, Reading, Thorney and Westminster all kept portions of the saint's body.[108] Indeed, Botulph's widespread popularity may have been the primary reason behind Bury's acquisition of his remains. At least 64 medieval churches were dedicated to him.[109] According to Rosalind Love 'Scattered early evidence presents a picture of the saint (Botulph) as a leading light in the seventh-century monastic movement.'[110] His prominent position in the early monastic history of England may account for why so many religious houses, including Bury, were keen to assert ownership of his remains. On 29 April 1095, according to Hermann, both Jurmin's and Botulph's remains were translated along with St Edmund's into Baldwin's new abbey church, where they each had their own separate reliquary casket.[111] According to the *Gesta Sacristarum* Botulph and Jurmin were again translated to new shrines during the reign of Abbot Hugh II (1157-82).[112] That these saints were important at Bury is attested by a reference in the *Chronicle of Jocelin of*

---

[106] The twelfth-century *Lib.El.*, C.2, (p.14), considers Jurmin to be a brother of St Aethelthryth. *Ecc.His.* makes no mention of him.

[107] David Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 2004), p.73.

[108] Thomas, *Cult of saints'*, comments on the likelihood that there may have been more than one East Anglian saint named Botulph. John Blair echoes this sentiment suggesting that there may have been as many as four bodies, though he cautions that "The idea of four saintly East Anglian Botwulfs strains credulity", see; John Blair, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford, 2002), pp.495-567.

[109] Thomas, *Cult of saints'*, pp.373-4. F.S. Stevenson, 'St Botulph (Botwulf) and Iken', *PSIAH*, 18 (1922), pp.29-52, counts more than seventy, along with five towns and villages that bear his name.

[110] Rosalind Love, 'Folcard of Saint-Bertin and the Anglo-Saxon Saints at Thorney', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. Martin Brett and David A. Woodman (London, 2015), p.27.

[111] *Herm.*, pp.116-119.

[112] *Ges.Sac.*

Brakelond, which confirms that St Botulph had a separate shrine warden at the abbey.[113] Although there are no later references to Jurmin, it is clear that Botulph's cult remained active right up until the dissolution. A letter from one of Henry VIII's commissioners, reporting on the visitation of the monasteries, suggests it was the custom at Bury that: 'whenever rain is wanted to carry about in processions the shrine containing the bones of St Botulph, in the hope that rain will come the sooner.'[114] This statement not only confirms that Botulph continued to be revered alongside St Edmund, but that he had developed, by this stage, a particular miraculous utility as a rain maker.

Alongside the relics of St Edmund, St Jurmin and St Botulph, Bury later added another cult: that of 'Robert of Bury'. Robert was said to have been a young boy murdered in 1181 at the hands of the town's Jews. Jocelin of Brakelond, who apparently composed a now lost *vita* for the saint, confirms that the boy was buried at the abbey.[115] The appearance of the cult of St Robert in the late-twelfth century is no coincidence. It reflects a contemporary trend towards the establishment of cults for murdered child saints, called 'blood-libel saints', in England and Europe. This rather macabre fashion accompanied, and in many ways was a by-product of, an increase in popular anti-Semitism. The accounts describing these 'martyrdoms' were often lurid and focussed on ritualistic anti-Christian aspects. The introduction of Robert's cult at Bury has all the hallmarks of a cynical response to the cult of 'Little St William' at neighbouring Norwich. William, who was murdered in 1144, was the very first recorded blood libel saint and inspired a spate of similar cults across Europe.[116] Although William's veneration was ultimately short lived, it was initially very popular and greatly enriched the cathedral's coffers. According to E.M Rose, Bury's introduction of Robert

---

[113] *Joc.,* p.102.

[114] *Cal.L.P.,* vol.X, no.364.

[115] *Joc.*, p.15.

[116] E.M. Rose, *William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2015) p.2.

came at a time where the abbey was suffering considerable financial hardship.[117] Considering the wealth that Little William had brought to Norwich Cathedral, the temptation to introduce a copy-cat cult must have been too tempting for the monks of Bury to ignore. Although the surviving evidence is scant, it would seem that Robert's veneration was sustained for several centuries. A mid-fifteenth-century 'Praier to St Robert', composed by John Lydgate, is preserved in Bodleian, MS. Laud 683.[118]

St Robert provides an example of Bury's attempt to take advantage of a trend in popular piety. St Edmund was undoubtedly the centre of religious life at the abbey, but auxiliary cults such as those of Jurmin, Botulph and Robert filled their own specific purposes, both symbolic and practical. Possession of material objects relating to these saints reflected the cosmopolitan nature of venerative practices at Bury. That the community recognised the importance of offering a variety of devotional choices is confirmed by the fact that, by the time of the Reformation, the abbey also possessed minor relics of SS. Thomas Becket, Laurence, Stephen and Petronilla, as well as fragments of the True Cross.[119] The presence of multiple saints meant that visitors to the abbey could direct their venerations to the most appropriate patron. Bury's attempt to gather together a supporting cast of saints' relics to complement Edmund's shrine parallels a similar approach taken at Durham during the mid-eleventh century. Symeon of Durham, writing a century later, recounts how Elfred Westou, Durham's sacristan, embarked on a program of relic acquisition that saw the remains of St Bede and St Oswald, among others, transported to and enshrined at the cathedral.[120] The aim at Durham, as at Bury, was to create a regional centre for pilgrimage activity. Major religious houses were often reliant upon 'spiritualities' for their continued success. The

---

[117] *Ibid.*, p.188.

[118] Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.112-127.

[119] *Cal.L.P.,* vol.X, no.364.

[120] See; William M. Aird, *St Cuthbert and the Normans: The Church of Durham, 1071-1153* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp.118-20.

votive gifts left by pilgrims brought in much needed funding for the maintenance and expansion of ecclesiastical buildings. Reliance upon the pilgrim's coin made it essential that centres like Bury and Durham keep abreast of developments in devotional practice. Bury's major attraction, however, always remained St Edmund and the abbey housed more than just his incorrupt body.

Edmund's non-corporeal relics

There were other, inalienable, indivisible relics at Bury St Edmunds, relics which, despite not holding the same cultic centrality as St Edmund's body, nevertheless required wholeness in order to fulfil specific practical and symbolic functions. These objects were generally non-corporeal in nature, instead being items which Edmund was believed to have possessed in life. Unlike Edmund's body, these relics had no fixed shrine and were thus portable; among them, 'St Edmund's cup' appears to have held a particular significance. Jocelin of Brakelond mentions the monks' dismay at the thought that this item had been destroyed during the fire of 1198:

> 'Then, to our horror, some of our brethren shouted out with a loud wailing that St Edmund's cup was burnt. But when some of them were looking here and there among the cinders and ashes for stones and sheets of precious metal, they drew out the cup in perfect condition...'[121]

The monks' preoccupation with a cup belonging to St Edmund does not seem to have had any direct relation to Edmund's early hagiography: neither Abbo nor Hermann make reference to it. Indeed, absence from Edmund's early hagiographic tradition is a repeated theme with many of the saint's secondary relics. It would seem that these items were added as Edmund's cult developed. As such, they provide evidence of the material proliferation of cult alluded to in chapter one. Later narrative reveals that the cup of St Edmund was considered to be particularly effective in producing miraculous cures. Drinking a draught from this chalice could, apparently, cure all manner of

---

[121] *Joc.*, p.95.

ailments. A late-twelfth-century version of *De Miraculis*, attributed to Abbot Samson, contains three accounts of the cup's healing power. Two individuals, including a Cistercian monk named Gervasius, were cured of fever, while another man was relieved from dropsy, after having imbibed from the cup. [122] Another tradition, found within the fourteenth-century Bury Chronicle, further indicates the significance of this object.[123] It relates the story of two unnamed aristocrats, who, having been tempted by the devil, had agreed a suicide pact. They were, we are told, only dissuaded from this course of action after they had drunk the *Plenum,* or 'brimming cup', of St Edmund:

> 'For their custom from the earliest times was that every day after lunch, when thanks had been returned to God, a drink called the 'plenum' or 'brimming cup' of St Edmund, should be quaffed in honour of the glorious king and martyr Edmund.'[124]

The way in which this incident is described – the *Plenum* needed to be 'fetched' - implies that this may have related to an actual physical object. Considering the close control the abbey placed over Edmund's shrine, it is likely that St Edmund's cup, made from imperishable metal, was used as a form accessible relic for visiting pilgrims.

Accompanying Edmund's cup was another object which was said to have belonged to the saint in life: his sword. The significance of Edmund's sword appears to have been almost entirely symbolic. None of the hagiographic sources list any miraculous cures associated with the relic, it is therefore unlikely to have been available for veneration by pilgrims. As an object, the sword has always been associated with the regalia of kingship. It is therefore likely that possession of the sword was intended, at least partially, as a symbol of Edmund's continued dominion over East Anglia as a patron saint. Like Edmund's cup, the existence of this relic appears to have been a later innovation as none of Edmund's early hagiographies makes mention of it.

---

[122] *Samson,* pp.202-204.

[123] The story appears in *B.Chron*., pp.158-60, in the entry for 1300.

[124] *Ibid.*, p.159.

Later sources do, however, recount stories of Edmund carrying the sword in dream visions. In the Samson version of *De Miraculis,* Edmund appears to a sickly monk from Shrewsbury while carrying the weapon. On the sword is written the inscription *Haec est victoria qua mundum vicit AEdmundus* (This is the victory through which Edmund has conquered the world).[125] The inscription's allusion to Edmund's status as a martyr suggests that the sword may either have been seen as the direct instrument of Edmund's death, or as a surrogate for it. Another account, this time from the fourteenth century, relates how a sleeping monk watched Edmund leave his shrine and enter the 'chapel of the relics' where the ghost of the monk Aelwine handed him his sword.[126] By locating the object in the relic chapel, this account, unlike the previous story, confirms the existence of the sword as a physical rather than metaphorical object. Edmund's sword seems to have remained an important relic at Bury until the dissolution as its presence is mentioned by Henry VIII's commissioners.[127]

Several nineteenth-century historians note that the abbey also kept a psalter which had once belonged to St Edmund and from which, as a child, he had learned all the psalms by heart within a year.[128] I can find no medieval source which supports the existence of such a relic. This tradition likely stems directly from Geoffrey of Wells *De Infantia Sancti Edmundi*, a mid-twelfth-century work which adds a mythical and almost certainly spurious childhood to Edmund's *vita*.[129] Geoffrey of Wells' text establishes Edmund's juvenile mastery of the psalms, a trope he may have borrowed directly from Asser's *Life of King Alfred*.[130] It is possible that the monks of Bury began to associate a

---

[125] *Samson*, p.201, the inscription is a direct adaptation of John 5:4; '*et haec est victoria quae vincit mundum, fides nostra*'.

[126] *Memorials.* III, p.325

[127] *Cal.L.P.,* vol.X, no.364.

[128] See; MacKinlay, *King and Martyr*, p.262 and Richard Yates, *History and Antiquities of the Abbey of St Edmund's Bury* (London, 1843), p.30 for examples.

[129] For the most recent edition of this text see; *'Geoffrey of Wells De Infantia Sancti Eadmundi', ed. R.M. Thomson, Analecta Bollandiana,* 95 (1977), pp.25-42

[130] Alfred the Great is similarly said to have memorised the psalms in his youth.

particularly old psalter in their library with the saint's early life. It may be no coincidence that the only English psalter to survive from the eleventh century is the *Bury Psalter*.[131] The abbey also possessed an artefact known as 'St Edmund's standard', though it is unclear whether this was thought to be a banner carried by the saint during his life. Whether or not it was an actual religious relic, it is clear that this banner, which bore St Edmund's arms, was of huge symbolic importance. It was an object of regional pride and even competition. Relating the details of a dispute between Abbot Samson and Richard, Earl of Clare, Jocelin of Brakelond tells us that the latter laid claim to a fee for holding the position of 'St Edmund's standard bearer'. [132] Each of the items listed above were powerful objects in their own right, yet as a collection, their presence further reinforced the monopoly that Bury held with respect to St Edmund's holy matter. But this was a monopoly which was, on occasion, broken.

Alienable relics

Although powerful in their own right, portable relics, such as those outlined above, concentrated less symbolic value than Edmund's immaculate and complete corpse. This meant that, unlike the saint's body, they could, potentially be broken up and shared with other ecclesiastical centres without fear of compromising the saint's, and thus the abbey's, inviolability. Indeed, it is clear that the monks of Bury made a policy of disseminating Edmund's sacred matter. This was particularly the case during the reign of Abbot Baldwin. Accounts of Baldwin's activities in Hermann the Archdeacon's *De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi* make clear that he saw the dispersal of Edmund's relics as a powerful tool, both in expanding the reach of the saint's cult, and in forging alliances both at home and abroad:

> 'Relics of the holy martyrdom of our devoted protector, Edmund the martyr, have been borne to various parts of the world. (For no piece of the holy and

---

[131] Now, Rome, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, MS Reg. lat.12.

[132] *Joc.*, pp.51-2.

inviolate body itself may be removed, because it rests undecayed, waiting for the day of universal judgement.)'[133]

The 'relics of the holy martyrdom' alluded to in the above passage are likely to have been fragments of St Edmund's shirt, discussed in chapter one. This garment, infused with the saint's bodily fluid and closely associated with his passion narrative, was both a powerful and a desirable relic. The *Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis*, dated to 1116, confirms the presence, at Abingdon, of several St Edmund relics:

> 'Of the blood-stained shirt of St Edmund, king and martyr which he was wearing at the hour of his passion, and of his wooden coffin, and of the reliquary of his pillow and of the shavings of box-wood of which it was full.'[134]

The relics listed are consistent with the items found during Abbot Leofstan's eleventh-century examination of Edmund's remains as described by Herman the Archdeacon:

> 'Next the saint is divested of his holy martyr's garments, in some places stained red with blood and in others riddled with arrow-holes, but they are to be kept, so that future believers may enjoy their healing power. A small pillow called an 'ear rest' is discovered under the holy head neither stuffed with feathers nor woven with any kind of silk but filled only with sawdust.'[135]

There are indications that these items may have been sent out to Abingdon as part of a promotional 'kit' that also included literature relating to the cult of St Edmund. A greatly abbreviated pamphlet version of Herman's *De Miraculis*, bound into Oxford, Bodleian, MS Digby 39 (fols 24r-39v), has an ex-libris inscription placing it at Abingdon from at least the thirteenth century.[136]

Another potential source of alienable relics was the box containing Edmund's hair and nail pairings mentioned above. Their large number and small size made them

---

[133] *Herm.*, pp.80-1.

[134] *Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon*, 2 vols., ed. John Hudson (Oxford, 2002-2007), ch.226, vol.2, pp.222-3.

[135] *Herm.*, p.55.

[136] Antonia Gransden, 'The Composition and Authorship of De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi, Attributed to Herman the Archdeacon', *The JML,* 5, (1995), pp.7-8.

ideal for dissemination. We know that Baldwin gifted relics to other religious houses, including Lucca in Italy, and St Denis in France.[137] This was likely done in an attempt to expand the scope of Edmund's cult to the continent.[138] The occasional extraction of small relic fragments, and their subsequent donation to far flung ecclesiastical centres, was a small price to pay for the prestige and diplomatic benefits that such action would bring. Yet, the alienation of relics to other religious houses was not limited to continental destinations. Bury shared its relics domestically as well.

In his 1974 PhD thesis, I.G Thomas surveyed the 46 medieval English relic lists that survived.[139] Excluding copies, these came from 35 separate centres of varying character. According to Thomas's data, 11 of the 35 foundations, for which lists survive, held relics of St Edmund in one form or other.[140] These relics fell into four broad categories; bodily matter (blood, fingernails, hair clippings etc.), clothing, coffin fragments and other unspecified relics.[141] Although his data is drawn from a limited source-pool that can hardly be taken to reflect the full extent of the diaspora of relics within England, an interesting pattern nevertheless emerges. Of the eleven institutions that held relics of St Edmund, six were Benedictine (Abingdon, Glastonbury, Reading, St Albans, Shrewsbury and Westminster), two were Cathedral priories (Canterbury and Worcester), one was Augustinian (Waltham), one was Cluniac (Thetford) and the other was the royal chapel at Windsor. This pattern suggests that the monks of Bury were highly selective in the type of institutions they were likely to make gifts to.

---

[137] *Herm*.pp.80-4, includes the story of a young boy cured by a relic of St Edmund at a shrine in Lucca. Guibert of Nogent, writing in the early-twelfth century, mentions an altar to St Edmund at St Denis. See; Guibert of Nogent, *Monodies and on the Relics of Saints*, ed. and trans. Jay Rubenstein and Joseph McAlhany (London, 2011), p.184.

[138] Antonia Gransden, 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi', Revue Benedictine*, 105 (1995), pp.75-8.

[139] Thomas, *The Cult of Saints*.

[140] For statistics on St Edmund see; *Ibid.* p.390.

[141] For Thomas' typology of relics see; *Ibid.* p.353.

Saint's Relics Found in Lists by Institutional Denomination				
	St Aethelthryth	St Cuthbert	St Edmund	St Thomas Becket
Augustinian	1	2	1	2
Benedictine	2	5	6	5
Cathedral Priory	1	2	2	5
Cistercian	0	1	0	1
Cluniac	1	0	1	0
Secular Cathedral	2	2	0	4
Other	0	0	1	3
Total	7	12	11	20

Tab.2.2: Comparative relic distributions for saints.

When the dispersal of Edmund's relics is contrasted with that of St Cuthbert and St Aethelthryth, as it is in Tab.2.2, it can be seen that Edmund's monastic interlocutors were comparatively less free with whom they shared their saint's remains. Excluding Durham itself, Cuthbert's relics are found in lists from twelve institutions; five are Benedictine (Abingdon, Glastonbury, Hyde, Reading and St Albans), two are Cathedral priories (Bath and Canterbury), one is Cistercian (Meaux), two are Augustinian (Twynham and Waltham) and two are Secular Cathedrals (Lichfield and York). Aethelthryth's remains are found in lists from seven institutions; two are Benedictine (Glastonbury and St Albans), one is a cathedral priory (Durham), one is Cluniac (Thetford), one is Augustinian (Waltham) and two are secular cathedrals (Salisbury and York).

Saint's Relics/Institutional Denomination: Correlation by Percentage[142]				
	St Aethelthryth	St Cuthbert	St Edmund	St Thomas Becket
Augustinian	14%	17%	9%	10%
Benedictine	29%	42%	55%	25%
Cathedral Priory	14%	17%	18%	25%
Cistercian	0	8%	0	5%
Cluniac	14%	0	9%	0
Secular Cathedral	29%	17%	0	20%
Other	0	0	9%	15%

Tab.2.3: Relic distributions by percentage.

---

[142] Rounded to the nearest integer.

When viewed proportionally, as in Tab.2.3, 55% of St Edmund's relics appear in lists from Benedictine houses, clearly the highest percentage: Benedictine lists account for 29% of St Aethelthryth's relics and 42% of Cuthbert's respectively. Furthermore, although Cuthbert and Aethelthryth were, like Edmund, incorrupt Anglo-Saxon saints, their relics, unlike Edmund's, are both found in lists from secular cathedrals. This may foreseeably be due to the fact that both Aethelthryth's and Cuthbert's cults were themselves located in Cathedrals (Ely and Durham), albeit Cathedral priories. Unlike a dedicated abbey, such as that at Bury St Edmunds, Cathedral priories were immersed not only in a monastic, but also an episcopal milieu. It is therefore likely that Ely and Durham had an elevated interest in promoting their cults within other Cathedrals. Bury, by comparison, as will be explored in chapter three, had a long and combative history with episcopal authority and had a purely monastic outlook.

Bury's trend towards exclusivity becomes even clearer when Edmund's data is compared to the relics of St Thomas Becket, which are mentioned in 20 of Thomas's 34 foundations.[143] Canterbury it seems had an even less restrained approach to sharing their saint's treasured relics. Of the institutions that held relics of St Thomas five were cathedral priories (Bath, Canterbury, Coventry, Durham and Worcester), four were secular cathedrals (Exeter, Lincoln, Salisbury and St Pauls), five were Benedictine monasteries (Glastonbury, Leominster, Reading, St Albans and Shrewsbury), one Cistercian (Meaux), two Augustinian (Twynham and Waltham) and one was a parish church (St Stephen Walbrook). Relics were also listed at the royal chapel at Windsor and the secular college of St Mary at Warwick. With the exception of the royal chapel at Windsor, the monks at Bury chose to restrict St Edmund's relics almost exclusively to monastic centres and largely to their fellow Benedictines. Canterbury on the other hand, like Ely and Durham, was more than willing to gift St Thomas's relics to secular

---

[143] For statistics on St Thomas Becket see; *Ibid.* p.465-7.

institutions. Fig.2.11-14 present Thomas' data for St Edmund, and the other saints discussed here, as a series of distribution maps.

2.5: Conclusion

During the life-span of his cult Edmund's shrine space constantly developed. As the saint's fame grew, so too did the grandeur of his surroundings. This evolution was not merely one of expanding space; at times it was one of shifting place. Yet, the material context of the cult was always anchored by the presence of the saint's body. To those who venerated him, Edmund's shrine and the body it contained were ever a holy of holies. Beyond Bury St Edmunds, beyond East Anglia, beyond even England itself, Edmund could be the focus of devotion, but only at the cult centre did he fully become one with the material world.

Edmund's materiality also extended beyond the tangible and into the conceptual. Amongst a restricted company of English saints, Edmund's corpse came to symbolise notions of incorruption, sexual purity and immortality. These associations were not purely theological, they embodied the anxieties of those most closely associated with his cult. Edmund's monastic interlocutors closely guarded his bodily unity as, in Edmund's inviolability, lay the key to their own longevity as an institution.

Beyond Edmund's shrine, Bury played host to a wide variety of significant objects. These artefacts took on many forms and fulfilled a variety of functions. The remains of other saints complemented Edmund's, filling sacral niches that he himself could not and solidifying Bury's position as a powerful, regional, devotional centre. Furthermore, through Edmund's non corporeal relics Bury's monastic community could strategically alienate relic material. This distribution not only promoted the cult over a wide geographic distance, it also opened the possibility that satellite cults, based around Edmund's fragments might evolve.

Chapter 3: 'Tangled up in stories' - The Narrative Evolution of St Edmund

3.1: Introduction

If materiality can be seen as the beating heart of cult, then narrative should be considered its life's-blood. Chapters one and two revealed that materially speaking, although Edmund's cult was based around a 'relic nexus', it nevertheless extended, over space and time, to incorporate a complex and interrelated body of people and things. A similar view can be taken with regards cult narrative. As the philosopher Paul Ricoeur puts it, every person's life is 'tangled up in stories'.[1] Individual stories, he tells us, exist amidst a background composed of 'the living imbrication of all lived stories.' The act of telling a story, he suggests, is to force that narrative to 'emerge out of this background'. This chapter shows that, while stories may have 'emerged' around St Edmund, they were always crafted in dialogue with a shifting narrative background.

By examining the chronological evolution of St Edmund's legend, from the ninth century onward, this chapter reveals that the saint was consistently 'tangled up' with a range of narrative discourses. Hagiography, while of crucial import, existed alongside and interacted with other narrative traditions and structures in the forming and shaping of Edmund's cult. Edmund's hagiography, it is shown, came to be inflected, at various points, by: historical narratives, narratives of resistance and reform and narratives of regional and institutional identity. The saint's posthumous personality or, more accurately, personalities, were, in turn, formed and informed by these inflections. Some of these narratives were more formally conceived than others, but each was influential in its own right.

Acting as a platform for a deeper discussion of narrative dissemination in chapter four, this chapter serves as a form of 'posthumous biography'. Beginning with an

---

[1] Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London, 1991), p.30.

examination of the late Anglo-Saxon milieu surrounding Edmund's death, it is shown that identity politics were, from the beginning, central in the shaping of his cult narrative. The story of a valiant, Christian king, dying at the hand of a pagan invader, would form the kernel around which all subsequent versions of his legend were built. Yet, it is argued, the St Edmund of the late-ninth century may have been a very different figure from the one that survives to us from hagiography. An analysis of the contributions to Edmund's cult made by the writers Abbo of Fleury and Aelfric of Eynsham shows how tenth-century church reformers appropriated and recast Edmund to reflect their own reforming narrative. Later still, during the highpoint of Edmund's cult at Benedictine Bury St Edmunds, Edmund's persona was, over time, subtly interwoven with the institutional identity of the abbey and its monks. Ultimately, it is argued, Edmund's hagiographic narrative would become inseparable from the historical narrative of the abbey that housed his remains. This chapter ends by discussing how future generations would further enhance Edmund's story in line with their own needs.

3.2: Early cult narrative

Almost nothing is known of King Edmund of East Anglia's life. Written evidence for his reign is non-existent and, despite a glut of later hagiography, the true circumstances of his death remain vague. Indeed, were it not for a few, brief notices in reliable, near contemporary sources and the existence of coins minted during his reign, one might wonder whether Edmund was the retrospective invention of a later age. Fortunately, such evidence does survive, but what, if anything, can these references to Edmund the king reveal about Edmund the saint?

All early allusions to Edmund as a living person involve his death. The generally accepted date for this event, based on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, is 20th November 869.

The 'Winchester Chronicle', the earliest extant manuscript belonging to the *ASC* tradition, states in its entry for 870:[2]

> 'Here the raiding (Viking) army rode across Mercia into East-Anglia, and took winter-quarters at Thetford; and that winter King Edmund fought against them, and the Danish took the victory, and killed the king and conquered all that land.'[3]

The prototype for all future branches of the *ASC* tradition is thought to have been compiled at some point in the late-ninth century: the Winchester Chronicle is itself dated to the opening years of the 890s.[4] As such, its account of Edmund's death, produced within three decades of the event, can be considered broadly contemporary and thus likely to be relatively accurate. What stands out from the chronicle is the lack of any indication that Edmund was considered a martyr.

Numismatic evidence makes the absence of any reference to cult all the more striking. 'Memorial coins', referring to Edmund as a saint, were current in East Anglia from 895 at the latest.[5] The earliest of these coins are inscribed on the obverse with the legend *SCE EADMVNDE REX* ('O Saint Edmund the King!).[6] Given the context within which they were minted - from Edmund's death until 917/18 East Anglia was under Danish rule - these coins suggest Edmund's cult must have already been well established before 895. Circulation of the coins was fairly broad and variants continued to be issued until the region was recovered from the Danes.[7] Mark Blackburn and Hugh Pagan, in

---

[2] Edmund's death is said to have occurred on 20th November. Although the *ASC* dates Edmund's death to 870, the annalistic year begins on 24th September, hence the events actually belong to 869.

[3] *ASC,* p.70.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.xxi. The 'Winchester Manuscript' otherwise known as the 'Parker Manuscript' is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 173, ff. 1v – 32r.

[5] S.E. Rigold, 'Finds of St Edmund Memorial and other Anglo-Saxon coins from excavations at Thetford', *BNJ*, 29 (1958), 189-90.

[6] M. Blackburn and H. Pagan, 'The St Edmund coinage in the light of a parcel from a hoard of St Edmund pennies', *BNJ*, 72 (2002), p.1.

[7] For a detailed discussion of St Edmund memorial coinage, its variants and the location of finds see; C.E. Blunt, 'The St Edmund Memorial Coinage', *PSIAH,* 31 (1969), pp.234-55. For additional interpretation and more recent finds see; Blackburn and Pagan 'The St Edmund

agreement with Susan Ridyard, argue that the geographical frequency of finds and longevity of the coinage indicate that the ruling Danes must themselves have, at least latterly, sponsored the cult.[8] They note that the legend inscribed on the Edmund coins takes the place normally occupied by the reigning monarch and have taken this as evidence that Edmund's cult had, by 895, become sufficiently well established that it was plausible for his name to be used in place of East Anglia's Danish overlord.[9]

Edmund's death had ended the East Anglian royal line. As the pagan Danish conquerors laid down roots, native traditions would have been placed under strain. Whereas Edmund may at first have been seen, as Alison Finlay has suggested, as a 'warrior king who falls in battle', it would seem that a Christian significance was rapidly appended to his death.[10] Christianity, at least initially, was the principle feature separating East Anglians from their Danish conquerors. It should be no surprise, therefore, that amidst a sea of change, the people of East Anglia clung to Edmund as an island of familiarity and a symbol of resistance. The concept of Edmund, a king who died for his people and his faith, would have evoked ideas of a shared past, a past through which East Anglians could preserve their regional identities. Yet, while conflict likely laid the foundation of Edmund's cult, the Danes themselves swiftly adopted Christian practices.[11] Their seeming acceptance of Edmund as a saintly patron hints that he may have served as something of a cultural bridge during this period.

---

coinage', also; Gareth Williams, 'Coins and Currency in Viking England: AD 856-954', in *Early Medieval Monetary History: studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*, ed. Rory Naismith, Martin Allen and Elina Screen (Farnham, 2014), pp.13-39.

[8] See; Ridyard, *Royal Saints,* pp.214-16 and Blackburn and Pagan, 'The St Edmund coinage', p.2.

[9] *Ibid.* During the early years of the Danelaw the Viking invaders seem to have made use of client-kings. Coins survive from the period immediately after Edmund's death for kings named Aethelred and Oswald. A combined total of only eight examples survive, contrasted with two hundred or so from Edmund's own reign. Their influence, it would seem, was very limited. See; Rory Naismith, 'Coinage in Pre-Viking East Anglia', in *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Robert Liddiard (Woodbridge: 2015), p.149.

[10] Alison Finlay, 'Chronology, Genealogy and Conversion: The Afterlife of St Edmund in the North' in *St.Ed.,* p.50.

[11] The timeframe for the conversion of the Eastern Danelaw is uncertain. A lack of characteristically pagan grave-goods suggests the swift adoption of Christian burial practices. However, as

Why then, if his cult was already well established by the 890s, does the Winchester Chronicle fail to acknowledge Edmund as a saint? The reason, it seems, is likely one of geography. Both the Winchester Chronicle and its prototype were the work of scholars from Wessex, operating during the reign of King Alfred.[12] At the time of its initial composition, East Anglia was firmly under Danish rule and was, to an extent, culturally disconnected from other parts of England. As such, it is possible that the chronicle's compiler was not aware that a cult had sprung up around the deceased king. Knowledge of Edmund's veneration, though widespread within East Anglia, may not yet have extended beyond the region's borders. Another near contemporary source from Wessex, Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, lends credence to this idea. It has the following to say of Edmund's death:

> 'In the same year, Edmund, king of the East Angles, fought fiercely against that army. But alas, he was killed there with a large number of his men, and the Vikings rejoiced triumphantly; the enemy were masters of the battlefield, and they subjected that entire province to their authority.'[13]

Asser, who finished his *Vita* c.893, draws heavily on a version of the *ASC*. However, unlike the *ASC*, Asser was in no way restricted by annalistic protocol and was free to include additional descriptive detail. His failure to acknowledge Edmund's sanctity, some twenty-four years after his death, either bespeaks a lack of awareness, or an effort to avoid diverting attention from his own project: the exaltation of King Alfred.

Although neither the Winchester Chronicle nor Asser refer directly to Edmund as a figure of veneration, their respective entries may reveal something regarding the early narrative tone of his cult. As chapters one and two showed, in later centuries,

---

Lesley Abrams has cautioned, conversion and Christianisation are different processes. See; Lesley Abrams, 'Conversion and Assimilation', in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and J.D. Richards (Turnhout, 2000), pp.135–53.

[12] *ASC,* p.xviii.

[13] Asser, 'Life of King Alfred', in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London, 1983), p.78.

Edmund's cult placed especial emphasis on the circumstances of the saint's martyrdom: his saggitation, beheading and re-heading. By contrast, the implication drawn from the sources examined above is that Edmund died *in battle* against the invader. Aethelweard's chronicle, a later, expanded, Latin version of the *ASC*, seems to both acknowledge Edmund's sanctity and foreground his military exploits:

> 'After a year they moved again, and struck across the kingdom of the Mercians to East Anglia and there laid out a camp in the winter season at Thetford. And King Eadmund decided on war against them, and after a brief interval he was killed by them there. And his body lies entombed in the place called Bury St Edmund's (*Beadoricesuuyrthe*).'[14]

Written at some point between 975 and 983, Aethelweard's chronicle is the earliest narrative source to refer to Edmund in anything like a cultic context. He does not openly name Edmund as a saint, but his reference to Edmund lying entombed at *Beadoricesuuyrthe* shows that he was at least aware that Edmund and Bury shared a significant connection. Unlike the Winchester Chronicle's compiler or Asser, Aethelweard was writing in a period where East Anglia was no longer under Danish control and had been incorporated into the English state, he was therefore more likely to be familiar with Edmund's cult.

It is impossible to say precisely what kinds of stories ninth-century East Anglians told about their fallen king to make him into a saint, but analysis of the available evidence suggests that, in its earliest guise, Edmund's narrative took on a military aspect. The depiction of St Edmund as an embattled king, bravely and vainly defending his kingdom against godless invaders, certainly fits well with contemporary circumstances and is in keeping with the historical and annalistic sources. Indeed, there is evidence that such a portrayal continued to have currency centuries later. Rebecca Pinner has convincingly shown that, throughout the middle ages, the notion of Edmund as a military figure, based on the chronicle entries examined above, continued in

---

[14] *The Chronicle of Aethelweard*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (London, 1962), p.36.

parallel with developments in Edmund's mainstream, cult narrative. [15] Geoffrey Gaimar, for example, who used a version of the *ASC* to produce his twelfth-century *Estoire des Engleis*, continues to see Edmund as a militaristic character. [16] Edmund's satellite cult at Hoxne also continued to trade on the saint's martial prowess. [17] However, such stories would become a sub-stream of Edmund's cult narrative as the hagiographers of the tenth century would develop a very different vision of the saint.

3.3: Abbo and Aelfric

St Edmund's first hagiographic narrative derives not from Bury St Edmunds, but from another monastery, one intimately involved in the tenth-century monastic reform movement: Ramsey Abbey. Ramsey was founded in 969 during a period where, throughout England, the rule of St Benedict and the monastic culture that went with it were being broadly re-imposed. The Danish conquests of the ninth century had resulted in an almost uniform break in English monastic history. [18] Many religious communities, which had previously been Benedictine, had reverted to governance by secular priests or 'canons'. These heterogeneous religious groups were not bound by monastic vows and thus were subject to criticism from ecclesiastical authorities. [19] Consequently, inspired by continental Cluniac reforms, a concerted effort was made, in the mid- to late-tenth century, to replace these lay institutions with groups of Benedictine monks. [20]

---

[15] Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr*, p.134f. Pinner recognises the 'chronicle' and 'hagiographic' traditions as largely separate until the production of Oxford, MS Bodl.240 in the late-fourteenth century.

[16] *Ibid.*, p.294-7 and Geffrei Gaimar*, Estoire des Engleis*, ed. and trans. by Ian Short (Oxford, 2009), pp.156-9.

[17] Evans, 'The Contribution of Hoxne', describes a medieval tradition that a bridge at Hoxne was Edmund's hiding place after his defeat by the Danes.

[18] Gransden, *Legends and Traditions,* p.1.

[19] Timothy R. W. Jordan, 'Holiness and Hopefulness: The Monastic and Lay Audiences of Abbo of Fleury's Passio Sancti Eadmundi and Ælfric of Eynsham's Life of St. Edmund, King and Martyr', *Enarratio*, 19 (2015), p.3.

[20] For a review of pre-millennial scholarship on the English, tenth-century Benedictine reform see; Catherine Cubitt, 'Review article: The tenth-century Benedictine Reform in England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 6:1 (1997), pp.77-94. For more recent scholarship see; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.341-367 and Julia Barrow, 'The Chronology of the Benedictine

As a new foundation, it was important that Ramsey exemplify the reforming ideal. The man principally responsible for Ramsey's creation was himself a committed reformer: St Oswald, bishop of Worcester (961-972) and later archbishop of York (972-992). [21] According to the mid-twelfth-century *Liber Benefactorum*, it was Oswald who invited the French intellectual Abbo of Fleury to visit Ramsey and found a school. [22] There, Abbo compiled the *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*. [23]

With respect to the chain of narrative development, Abbo's *Passio*, written around 986, appears fully formed. According to Abbo, he had heard the story directly from St Dunstan, who, in turn, had heard it as a youth, from a man who had been St Edmund's arms-bearer. The story Abbo relays runs roughly as follows:

Edmund, king of East Anglia, was a good and pious monarch. At the peak of his powers his kingdom was invaded by a Danish army led by two warlords named Hinguar and Hubba. The suddenness of this assault caught Edmund by surprise and left him no time to respond. The warlord Hinguar sent a messenger to the king demanding he surrender and become his client. Cautioned by his advisors to escape, Edmund refused to fight, flee, or accept his enemy's terms, instead opting to sacrifice himself. Putting his trust in God, Edmund was taken without resistance, and subjected to a series of tortures, culminating in his being shot with arrows and beheaded. The king's head was then thrown into a thicket in an attempt to prevent a proper burial. In the aftermath of the martyrdom Edmund's people searched for his remains. Hearing their king's voice cry out to them, they

'Reform", in *Edgar, King of the English, 959–975*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), pp.211–23. For reform in a European context see; Julia Barrow, 'Ideas and applications of reform', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, v.3: Early Medieval Christianities, c.600-c.1100*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge, 2008), pp.345-362.

[21] For a collection of essays detailing Oswald's career see; Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt (eds.), *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence* (London, 1996).

[22] *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis,* ed. W. Dunn Macray (London, 1886), p.42. Abbo also figures heavily in Byrhtferth of Ramsey's *Life of St Oswald,* where he is referred to as 'the philosopher'. See; Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Oxford, 2009), esp. pp.90-5 and 164-9.

[23] *Chronicon Rameseiensis*, p.42-3.

found the disembodied head, protected by a giant wolf. Head and body were miraculously fused together and Edmund was moved to a temporary resting place. Some years later, after the Danes had gone, he was translated to Beodericsworth. There, his sanctity was evidenced by both his continued corporeal incorruption and a series of posthumous miracles.

It is clear that Abbo's *Passio* departs from the sources discussed above; while the historical texts are virtually silent on Edmund's sainthood, Abbo is effusive in his praise of the martyr king's pious virtues; whereas the earlier sources suggest Edmund died in battle, Abbo emphasises that, in an act of self-sacrifice, the saint passively handed himself over. The resulting figure is a model king-saint who represents, through piety, passivity and painful suffering, an idealised form of Christian life.

There has been some debate as to the level of historicity evidenced by Abbo's *Passio*. Defenders of the tale's historical veracity have built their arguments around the brutal nature of Edmund's death and how this reflects the reality of Scandinavian torture practices.[24] Even Ridyard, who cautions that Abbo's text is a 'minefield of hagiographical *topoi*', is inclined to accept the structure of his narrative as broadly accurate.[25] Other scholars, however, have been more sceptical. Julia Barrow, who assesses Abbo's work as 'essentially unhistorical', suggests that the story has much in common with accounts of Danish violence in Adrevaldus' *Miracles of St Benedict*.[26] Antonia Gransden, meanwhile, assesses that Abbo's narrative represents '...little more than a hotchpotch of hagiographical commonplaces.'[27] St Denis, a beheaded martyr at

---

[24] For supporters of this theory see; Whitelock, 'Fact and Fiction'; Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian kings in the British Isles 850-880* (Oxford, 1977), p.210 and Ian MacDougall, 'Serious Entertainments: An Examination of a Peculiar Type of Scandinavian Atrocity', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 22 (1993), pp.211-12. For a summary of the arguments see; Paul Cavill, 'Analogy and Genre in the Legend of St Edmund', *Nottingham Medieval Studies,* 47 (2003), pp.21-45.

[25] Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, pp.212-3.

[26] Julia Barrow, 'Danish Ferocity and Abandoned Monasteries: The Twelfth-century View', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. Martin Brett and David A. Goodman (Abingdon: 2015), pp.83-5.

[27] Gransden, 'Legends and Traditions', p.6.

the centre of a royal cult, Gransden argues, would have struck Abbo as a fitting model upon which to base his Edmund. Gransden points to numerous *topoi* in various renditions of St Denis' life that bear resemblance to the Edmund legend: both men were subjected to lengthy torture before a final beheading, both men afterwards remained miraculously animate, and both men had a wild animal lie peacefully before them: in Denis case a Lion, in Edmund's case a wolf.[28] Paul Cavill, a scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, agrees with Gransden and argues that Abbo's portrayal of Edmund is similar to that of a traditional Roman martyr-saint. Cavill builds his thesis with reference to the descriptive vocabulary employed by both Abbo and his redactor Aelfric, and states that although the saggitation of St Sebastian serves as an obvious model, one acknowledged by Abbo himself, there are also parallels between Edmund's martyrdom and that of St Lawrence.[29] In doing so, he counters Thomas Head's contention that the circumstances of Edmund's death made him a uniquely Anglo-Saxon martyr-saint.[30] According to Cavill: 'It is unclear in what way Edmund was a particularly Anglo-Saxon form of martyr… he has more in common with Roman martyrs than, say, with St Oswald or St Edward.'[31] A lack of specifically Anglo-Saxon character is in keeping with the fact that Edmund's *Passio* was composed by a continental scholar whose personal proclivities were towards a universalised form of monastic culture. Abbo, as a Frenchman, however learned, is unlikely to have been familiar with the regional peculiarities of English hagiography. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the narrative he created for Edmund more closely resembles the *vitae* of early martyrs such as Sebastian and Lawrence, than it does a saint from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Looking for any trace of historicity in Abbo's account would seem to lead us up something of a blind alley.

---

[28] *Ibid.*, p.6.

[29] Cavill, 'Analogy and Genre', p.31.

[30] T. Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (Cambridge, 1990), p.243.

[31] Cavill, 'Analogy and Genre', p.37.

In the absence of any corroborating evidence, it seems likely that Abbo largely pieced the plot for his narrative together from a range of hagiographic tropes and topoi, but for what purpose? In order to answer this question, it is worthwhile considering how Edmund is characterized within the *Passio*. Contrary to the earlier chronicle entries, the *Passio* emphasises that Edmund adopted a pacifistic stance towards the Danes. Rather than fight, King Edmund willingly surrenders himself to his captors, knowing full well that this will result in his death. There are clear parallels between this behaviour and the actions of Christ before his crucifixion. Christ, as 'king of kings', serves as the ultimate exemplar of how a monarch should behave. According to Marco Mostert, Abbo positions Edmund in a similar way.[32] Edmund is portrayed as a generous, noble and peaceful king who cares for his subjects and is submissive to the will of God. To Mostert, the *Passio* resembles a 'ninth century prince's mirror', yet this was no advice book for rulers. Abbo's intended audience was a monastic one.

Edmund not only represents the ideal ruler, he also embodies the three 'evangelical counsels', so important to monastic reform: chastity, poverty and obedience. Edmund's purported chastity was discussed in considerable detail in chapter two and therefore requires no further analysis here. Edmund's poverty is attested by his final act as a living man. By sacrificing all worldly pomp for a martyr's death, he commits himself to the ultimate form of poverty. Edmund's obedience is obedience to God. He remains true to his faith even when his life and kingdom are threatened. Edmund's conformity to the three evangelical counsels makes him an ideal exemplar for Ramsey's reformed monks. He was a virginal man who was obedient to the will of God and was willing to abandon all worldly things. The fact that he was rewarded with sainthood underlines the value of living such a life.

Produced within ten years of Abbo's *Passio*, Aelfric's Old English treatment of the Edmund legend is a testament to the swift popularity the earlier work must have

---

[32] Mostert, *The Political Theology*, pp.40-45.

enjoyed.[33] Aelfric is explicit that his text is a reworking of Abbo's, and although heavily abbreviated, he closely follows the *Passio*'s narrative, with few innovations. Aelfric does, however, excise much of the material through which the narrative is addressed towards a monastic audience. The reason for this omission is revealed through the work's broader literary context. Aelfric's account of Edmund's passion appears in his collection of homilies on the 'Lives of Saints'. In the Latin preface to this collection, Aelfric makes clear his purpose in producing vernacular renditions of saints' lives:

> 'This book also have I translated from the Latin into the usual English speech, desiring to profit others by edifying them in the faith whenever they read this relation, as many, namely, as are pleased to study this work either by reading or by hearing it read.'[34]

Unlike Abbo, it is clear that Aelfric's intended audience was not a monastic one. It was Aelfric's hope that by presenting his stories in the 'vulgar' tongue they would: 'refresh by their exhortations such as are slothful in the faith, since Passions of the Martyrs greatly revive a failing faith.'[35] The stories he presents are redactions of existing works of Latin hagiography. In abbreviating these texts he was conscious that he could not 'render everything word for word', but instead sought to deliver the stories 'sense for sense… by means of simple and obvious language.'[36] For Aelfric, who intended his text to be read by a lay audience, hagiographies were vehicles for delivering moral messages. In the case of St Edmund this was a message on the ideal form of Christian life. In the same way that Abbo had used Edmund to instruct the reformed monks of Ramsey on

---

[33] Winterbottom, who discusses the MS heritage of Abbo's *Passio* in considerable detail was aware of at least twenty-one extant copies. See; Winterbottom, *Three Lives*, pp.8-10. The text was redacted in c.1180 by Nicholas of Wallingford and in the 1220s by Henry of Avranches. It also served as the basis for two works of vernacular poetry; Denis Piramus' *La vie seint Edmund le Rei* and the anonymous *Le Passiun de seint Edmund*. Hayward, 'Geoffrey of Wells', p.63, notes that all that remains of Nicholas' work are a few extracts found in later texts. Henry's metrical rendition of Abbo's *Passio* appears in David Townsend, 'The Vita Sancti Eadmundi of Henry of Avranches', *JML*, 5 (1995), pp.95-118. Denis Piramus work is edited in, *La vie seint Edmund Le Rei*, ed. D.W. Russell (Oxford, 2014), the anonymous appears in *Le Passiun de seint Edmund*, ed. Judith Grant (London, 1978).

[34] *Aelf.*, I, pp.2-3.

[35] *Ibid.*, I, pp.2-3.

[36] *Ibid.,* I, pp.4-5.

their Christian duties, Aelfric sought to use Edmund as an educational tool beyond the cloister.

For the Edmund legend, the tenth century was the point at which history transformed into hagiography. Despite Abbo's claim to have heard the story from St Dunstan, the disparity between his *Passio* and earlier, annalistic accounts, suggests that he had a creative, rather than purely interpretive influence on Edmund's narrative development. The tale that he and Aelfric present would later come to be viewed as the orthodox reading of Edmund's passion, but it wilfully departs from established traditions surrounding the saint's death. Neither man, as far as we can tell, consulted the community at Bury St Edmunds while constructing their story; Abbo mentions Bury in passing, while Aelfric does not mention it at all. To both men the physical location of Edmund's remains was accidental to their existence. Furthermore, the story may be situated in East Anglia, but it is not of a particularly East Anglian or even English character. The *Passio's* Edmund is a universal archetype, intended to embody and expound universal Christian values. Any sense of Edmund's importance as a regional, historical icon had become secondary to the story's didactic purpose.

3.4: Institutional narrative

If the narrative crafted for Edmund in Abbo and Aelfric's texts is an extension of the ideals of the tenth-century monastic reform movement, then by the end of the eleventh century the saint had become more specifically linked with the abbey of Bury St Edmunds and its concerns. This focus on identity between saint and institution would be sustained at Bury thereafter. Through the production of both hagiographic narrative and diplomatic documents Edmund would be cast as a figure whose motivations and actions were on a par with those of the abbey that housed him. In this way the saint's interlocutors developed him in an instrumental fashion, whereby the saint's agency was presented as identical with their own. In order to reveal how this worked in practice, it

is first necessary to explore some of the early history of Bury St Edmunds as religious institution.

The obscurity of St Edmund's early narrative is equalled by the obscurity of Bury St Edmund's early history. The paucity of information surrounding early Beodericsworth means that there can be no certainty even as to when Edmund was first translated there. Early sources are virtually silent on the matter, while later ones give a loose date range within the first few years of the tenth century.[37] The earliest internal evidence for St Edmund's presence at Bury comes not from any hagiographic writing, but from legal documents. The will of Bishop Theodred of London which leaves four estates to 'St Edmund's Church', confirms that there was a church dedicated to Edmund at Bury by 951 at the latest.[38]According to tradition, at this point Bury was, like many other houses, under the control of secular clerks and would remain so until it was re-founded as a Benedictine house.[39] Although no official diploma survives, Bury's re-founding is commonly dated to 1020 and attributed to Cnut.[40] The abbey's archive records a succession of bequests made prior to this date, suggesting that, irrespective of Bury's status before 1020, the saint's cult was attracting wealthy patrons.[41]

Much of Bury's landed endowment dates to the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) and was contained within an area known as the 'Liberty of St Edmund' (see Figs 3.1-3).[42] The Liberty was remarkable both for its size and for the level of autonomy

---

[37] Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p.213. Ridyard confirms this uncertainty by citing a late-fourteenth-century entry in MS Bodl.240 which gives 900 or 906 as the year of Edmund's translation, while the fifteenth-century *Curteys Register* (B.L. Add. MSS 14848, 7096) asserts 903.

[38] Whitelock, *Anglo Saxon Wills*, pp.2-5.

[39] The story of Cnut's re-founding of the Abbey is first found in *Herm.*, pp.40-3.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp.40-3.

[41] Eleven tenurial documents survive which purportedly predate 1020, these are; S.483, 507, 703, 1213, 1219, 1483, 1486, 1494, 1501, 1526 and 1528. An edition of Bury's charters by S. Foot and K Lowe is forthcoming. Interpretation of the documentary base within this thesis relies upon their published articles as well as older scholarship.

[42] St Edmund's Liberty has been studied in detail elsewhere, notably in Davis, 'The Liberties', and Kathryn Lowe, 'Bury St Edmunds and its Liberty: a charter text and its afterlife', in *English*

it afforded the abbey. Within its geographical scope, which incorporated much of western Suffolk, the Abbot had powers far in excess of an ordinary landlord. With full right to act as sheriff, mint coinage and levy taxes, he exercised many privileges normally reserved for the crown. Within the Liberty was a smaller area, the *Banleuca*, which extended from St Edmund's shrine for one mile in every direction. Inside this vicinity the abbot exercised absolute power on St Edmund's behalf; this included the ability to exclude royal and episcopal visitations.[43] Although the *Liberty* developed out of Edward the Confessor's patronage, the *Banleuca* was purportedly established some time earlier. A charter of Edmund the Elder (S.507), dated to 945, supposedly marks its formation.[44] However, its form is suggestive of the early medieval tradition of 'circuits of miles' surrounding ecclesiastical centres, implying it may have had even earlier origins.[45]

Manuscript Studies 1100-1700 (17), ed. A.S.G. Edwards and O. da Rold (London, 2012), pp.155-172.

[43] For a detailed discussion of the *Banleuca* and its boundaries see; Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp.60-66.

[44] *Corolla*, pp.588-93.

[45] For more on 'circuits of miles' see; D.M. Pallister 'Review Article: 'The minster hypothesis': a case study', *Early Medieval Europe*, 5:2 (1996), pp.210-11.
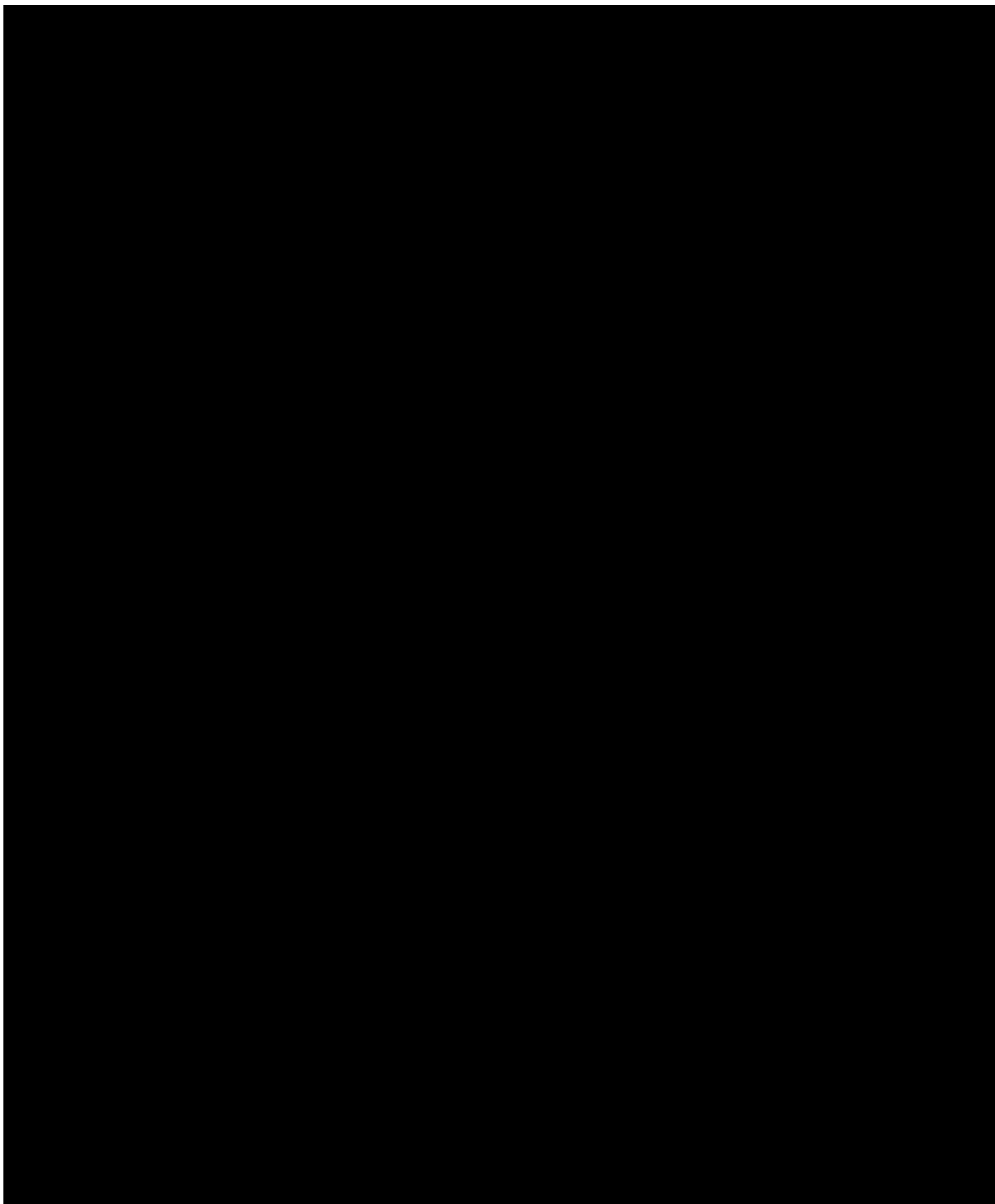
Fig. 3.1: The Liberty of St Edmund[46]

---

[46] Image taken from; Robert Gottfried, *Bury St Edmunds and the Urban Crisis 1290-1539* (Princeton, 1982).
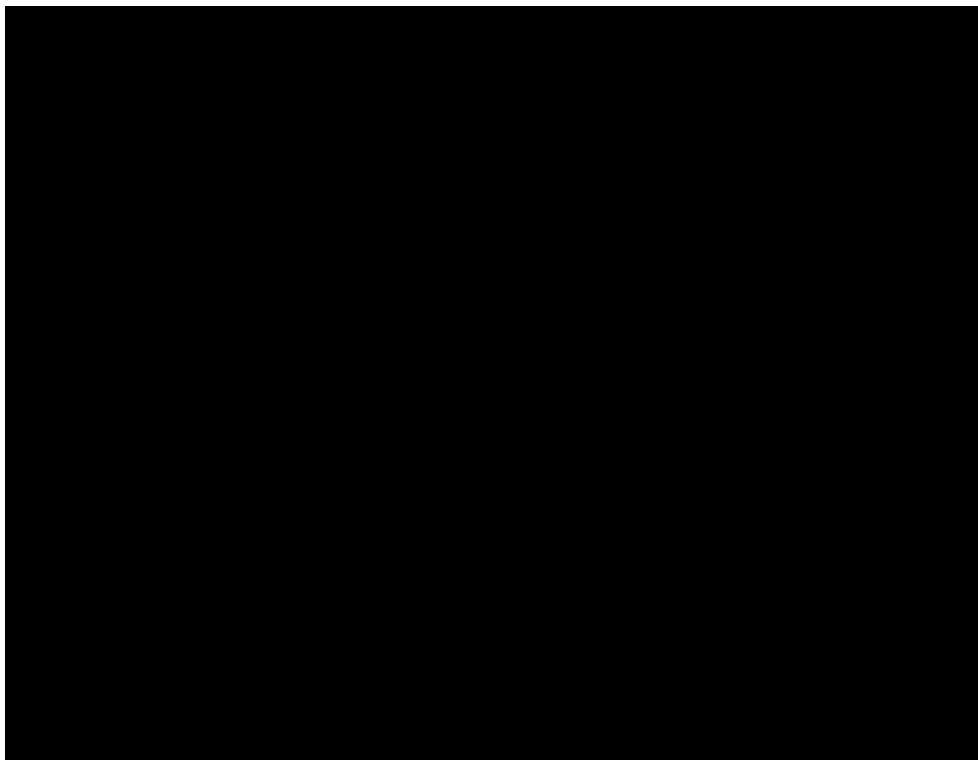
Fig.3.2: Edmund's Liberty in medieval Suffolk[47]
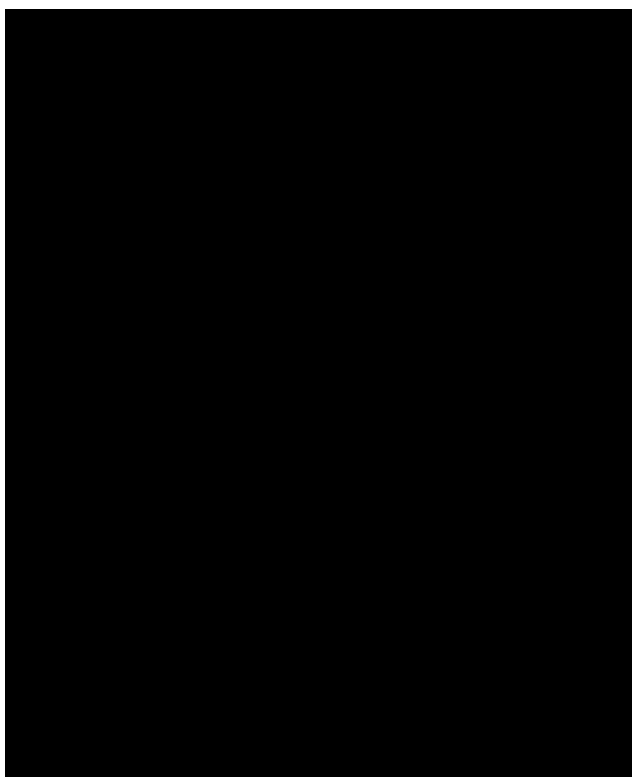
Fig.3.3: East Anglia in an English Context

---

[47] Image taken from; Mark Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk: An Economic and Social History 1200-1500* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), p.4.

Although the abbey's beginnings remain opaque, scholarly consensus is clear that the period leading up to the close of the eleventh century represents a crucial stage both in the history of Bury St Edmunds as an institution and of St Edmund as a cult figure. In 1955 Davis commented that: 'The period 1021-1148 was the formative period in the history of monasticism at St Edmund's Abbey.'[48] Likewise, Gransden marked out the mid to late-eleventh century as a critical juncture, not only for St Edmund's cult narrative, but also for the creation of legends and traditions concerning the abbey's origins.[49] Furthermore, Tom License has recently considered the closing decades of the eleventh century as a 'golden age' for Edmund's cult.[50]

Others doubtless contributed to the flowering of Bury St Edmunds, but one man's influence stands out above all others: Abbot Baldwin (1065-1098). Responsible for the introduction of many innovations, Baldwin was perhaps the most significant personality in the history of Bury St Edmunds and its patron's cult.[51] Previously, all of Bury's abbots had served time as monks of St Benedict's Holme before beginning their abbatiate. Baldwin was the first non-native to take on the role.[52] Originally a monk of St Denis in France, a royal foundation with a cult based around a martyr saint, Baldwin's background would have prepared him well for taking up Bury St Edmunds abbacy.[53] Hand selected for the position by Edward the Confessor, for whom he also served as personal physician, Baldwin was the sole, non Anglo-Saxon abbot in England at the time

---

[48] R.H.C. Davis, 'The Monks of St. Edmund' 1021-1148', *History*, 40:140 (1955), p.227.

[49] Gransden, 'Legends and Traditions', p.8.

[50] Tom License, 'The Cult of St Edmund', in *Norman*, p.118.

[51] For a survey of Baldwin's career see; Antonia Gransden, 'Baldwin Abbot of Bury St Edmunds', in *Anglo Norman Studies 4*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge, 1982), pp.65-76. For a more recent assessment see; David Bates, 'The Abbey and the Norman Conquest an unusual case?', in *Norman*, pp.5-21.

[52] Both Abbots Uvius (1020-44) and Leofstan (1044-65) had been inmates at St Benedict's Holme.

[53] Bates, 'The Abbey and the Norman Conquest an unusual case?'. Bates discusses Baldwin's connection with St Denis, its impact on his abbacy and how this led to Bury's strong continental ties.

of the Conquest.[54] Antonia Gransden has studied Baldwin's career and describes his apparently indefatigable appetite for work. Baldwin, she states, was a great builder, responsible not merely for the construction of a new abbey church, but also for the expansion of the surrounding town, where he built over three hundred new houses, as well as a parish church.[55] He was also a great patron of the arts and donated a large number of books to the abbey's library. All this would single Baldwin out as remarkable enough. Yet, it would also seem that, more than any abbot before him, he understood the significance of his abbey's *raison d'être*: St Edmund. Hitherto, Bury had itself produced no hagiography for St Edmund. Indeed, as Emma Cownie has commented, prior to the mid-eleventh century, there were no clear signs that Edmund's cult was even being orchestrated from Bury.[56] This would change during Baldwin's abbacy. As circumstances conspired to undermine the abbey's position, Baldwin would refashion Edmund's narrative into a weapon, one he would use against his opponents.

The abbey Baldwin inherited was, as has been seen, both wealthy and prestigious, but Bury's increasing profile had affected the balance of regional ecclesiastical power. The virtual autonomy enjoyed by Bury St Edmunds challenged local episcopal authority, while the abbey's burgeoning wealth drew the covetous eyes of the clerical elite. Ultimately this would lead to a long-term political crisis which threatened to tear Bury St Edmunds from monastic control and place it in the hands of the bishops of East Anglia. The first bishop to make such a move was Harfast, bishop of Elmham (1070-75) and later Thetford (1075-1085). Harfast's attempt to control Bury St Edmunds was motivated by reforms instituted by Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury (1070-1089), which sought to transfer episcopal sees from traditional, but unimportant, towns into more prominent urban centres.[57] Accordingly, from 1070 onwards, Harfast

---

[54] *Ibid.,* p.5. Baldwin would retain the role of royal physician under William I.

[55] Gransden, 'Baldwin', p.74.

[56] Cownie, 'The Cult of St Edmund', p.177.

[57] Gransden, 'Baldwin', p.69.

sought to shift his seat from Elmham to Bury St Edmunds, a move which was vehemently opposed by Baldwin and his monks. Herbert de Losinga, bishop of Thetford (1090-95) and later Norwich (1095-1119) was the next prelate to make advances on Bury. Basing his claims along similar lines to Harfast, Herbert initially sought to install himself at Bury, but eventually limited his claims to the abbey's spiritual incomes.[58]

Facing the prospect that his abbey might be amalgamated with the East Anglian see, Baldwin needed to rally support around a symbolic banner. St Edmund himself was the obvious choice, but which Edmund? Which Edmund would reflect and reinforce the abbey's independent identity? Which narrative could the abbot rely upon to bolster his community's resolve? Baldwin, who must have been familiar with his saint's history, would have recognised the way in which, during the Danish occupation, previous generations of East-Anglians had used Edmund as a catalyst for cultural preservation. Yet, this narrative, whatever form it may once have taken, had been superseded by Abbo's *Passio*. Although the *Passio* had originally been produced for the monks of Ramsey, by Baldwin's reign it had come to be accepted as an origin story for Edmund's cult at Bury.[59] This presented Baldwin with a problem. Abbo's Edmund, an ideal, Christ-like king, was a passive, submissive and sacrificial character, hardly virtues that encouraged resistance. The answer it would seem was not to radically redraft the saint's origin story, but to build upon it, to add a posthumous spin to Edmund's saintly persona, a spin which cast him as an effective supernatural protector whose motivations and concerns mirrored Bury's own. The text which best articulates this vision of St Edmund is Hermann the Archdeacon's *Liber de Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*.

---

[58] Tom License, 'Herbert Losinga's Trip to Rome and the Bishopric of St Edmunds', in *Anglo Norman Studies 34*, ed. David Bates (Woodbridge, 2012), p.156.

[59] The three earliest surviving copies of Abbo's *Passio* were all produced within Baldwin's abbatiate. Two, (now BL MS. Cotton Tiberius Bii and Lambeth Palace MS. 362) belonged to Bury. The third, (Royal Library, Copenhagen, MS. Gl. Kgl. S. 1588, ff.2-28) was kept at St Denis.

De Miraculis

Commissioned by Baldwin and produced at Bury St Edmunds towards the end of the eleventh century, *De Miraculis* combines a collection of miracle stories with a potted summary of the abbey's past. It therefore represents both a hagiography and an institutional history. The sole surviving full-length copy, (British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius B.ii, ff.20r-85v) has been dated between the fourth quarter of the eleventh century and the first quarter of the twelfth.[60] By the time Hermann wrote his text, Bury had already overcome the challenge presented by Harfast in the 1070s-80s, but was facing a fresh raft of claims from de Losinga. Given this context and the fact that Hermann himself had served in Bishop Harfast's retinue, it is perhaps no surprise that episcopal authority and monastic autonomy figure as a key themes in *De Miraculis*.[61] At the heart of the text is the longest surviving narrative account of the abbey's struggle with Harfast.[62] According to *De Miraculis*, Harfast laid claim to Bury on the basis that it had previously fallen under the jurisdiction of the East Anglian Bishopric. As Hermann describes it, the struggle was one of oral and material evidence pitted against documentary evidence. Having no charters to prove his case, the bishop called upon the testimony of persons that Hermann rather disparaging refers to as *bacalarii* (smallholders).[63] Harfast also spent a considerable amount of money, presumably in the form of a bribe, to acquire an old crosier in the abbey's possession.[64] This object, which had once belonged to one of Harfast's predecessors, was to be used as proof that Bury

---

[60] Thomas Hardy, *Descriptive catalogue of materials relating to the history of Great Britain and Ireland*, v.2 (London, 1865), p.28, offers the date 1077. Arnold, *Memorials*, I, p.xxviii suggests that it may be Hermann's autograph copy. License makes a compelling case that there must once have been at least two further copies of Hermann's text at Bury. See; *Miracles*, p.xci-xcv. For detailed analysis of the text as a whole see; Gransden 'Composition and Authorship', pp.1-52 and License, 'History and Hagiography', pp.516-544.

[61] Hermann acted as Harfast's secretary, see; *Herm.*, pp.70-1.

[62] *Ibid.*, pp.66-81.

[63] According to License (*Herm.*, pp.68-69, n.276), this is a specific reference to the legal status of such persons and their inability to give testimony in cases that involved property exceeding the value of their own.

[64] *Ibid.*, pp.68-69.

had once fallen within the East Anglian diocese.[65] Baldwin, meanwhile, was content to rely upon documentary evidence in the form of charters outlining the saint's Liberty. Furthermore, when Harfast escalated his case to the king, Baldwin undertook a journey to Rome where he acquired a papal privilege from Alexander II, confirming the abbey's freedom. Upset that Baldwin had not sought his consent, Harfast persisted by offering the king financial incentives to have his case heard. Without a final resolution, the matter reached a crisis point. It is at this juncture that Hermann begins to introduce St Edmund into the narrative. 'Edmund's patience', Hermann tells us, 'was being stretched, and he avenged his flock at the perfect moment.'[66] This vengeance took the form of a riding accident which left Harfast partially blinded. Harfast, knowing that his adversary Baldwin was a skilled physician, begged assistance and was granted it on the basis he retract any claim he had to the abbey. Harfast did so and was healed. This cure, though it came from human hands, was interpreted, by Hermann, as a miracle insofar as Baldwin was the instrument of Edmund's will.[67] After this incident Harfast initially withdrew his petition, but later recanted; in this context Hermann referred to him as a *preuaricator* (oath-breaker).[68] From this point on, every misfortune and defeat that befell Harfast was attributed, in part, to St Edmund's will. Hermann, through this narrative, presents not only a legal case for Bury's defence, but a faith based case too.

Tom License refers to the Harfast episode as 'Bury's casebook', suggesting that it presents the community's rationale for defending their abbey against episcopal claims.[69] If this section is taken in isolation then his argument appears strong. However, to refer to this excerpt, detailed though it may be, as something separate from the rest

---

[65] Although Hermann assures that there was no truth to this claim, he remains notably hazy on Bury's status prior to 1020.

[66] *Herm.*, p.72-3.

[67] As noted by Carole Rawcliffe, 'Curing Bodies and Healing Souls: Pilgrimage and the Sick in Medieval East Anglia', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan,* ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 2002), p.116.

[68] *Herm.*, p.76-77.

[69] License, 'Herbert Losinga's Trip', pp.151-168.

of *De Miraculis* is to miss the point of Hermann's text. *De Miraculis* is 'Bury's casebook': the entire work. It was written to showcase Bury's (and St Edmund's) resistance against external control, be that control clerical or temporal. Hermann presents a range of miracle stories, a substantial proportion of which share thematic similarities with the Harfast episode. In each case an authority figure is miraculously punished, either for disregarding the abbey's privileged position, or for showing some other form of disrespect towards St Edmund. As, Barbara Abou-El-Haj has noted, the period of *De Miraculis'* production was one where many miracle collections, from many institutions came to be imbued with political subtexts reflective of contemporary reality. She recognizes, for example, a general, eleventh-century, hagiographic trend towards punishment miracles as reproducing the multitude of challenges facing the monastic communities of the day:

> 'Scenes of destruction at Elnone, Bury, and elsewhere seem to record an increasing number of infringements on monastic property and privileges, to which the clergy responded with increasingly authoritarian images of its saints, as well as punishment stories and relic ceremonies both defensive and coercive.'[70]

She goes further to suggest that such stories: 'were designed to preserve the clergy's social and economic position against challenges from superiors, from vassals, and from new towns in their seigneurial patrimonies.'[71] In other words, by presenting Edmund in this way, Hermann and Baldwin promote a sense of continuity between the saint and his monastic community. Such an idea leads naturally to the concept that to disrespect St Edmund's abbey was tantamount to disrespecting the saint himself.

If Edmund's persona was envisaged by Hermann as that of an aggressive avenger, he was furthermore imagined as a passionate supporter of monastic independence. Preceding the account of Baldwin's dispute with Harfast is another miraculous incident

---

[70] Barbara Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge, 1994), p.58.

[71] *Ibid.*, p.58.

which underlines the saint's distaste for episcopal interference. According to Hermann, during the reign of King Aethelred, Edmund's remains were temporarily moved to London. While in exile, Edmund proved popular on account of the miracles worked at his shrine.[72] For this reason, when the time came for Edmund to be taken home, the local bishop, Aelfhun, was apparently loath to see the saint leave and attempted to move his coffin to St Paul's cathedral. Edmund was clearly unhappy with the bishop's plan and revealed his displeasure by preventing his casket from being physically moved. However, when Edmund's shrine keeper tried, the bier was shifted with ease and carried back to Bury. In keeping with the idea that the governing theme of *De Miraculis* is freedom from episcopal control, this particular incident can be interpreted as an allegorical precursor to the real world dispute with Harfast. Edmund only responds to monastic control; he does not react positively to the intentions of greedy bishops. Close reading of Hermann's text reveals that his Edmund was created to emphasise a particular ideological position. Yet, the connotations implicit in *De Miraculis*, reveal more than simply the abbey's views on ecclesiastical politics, they also tell us a great deal about how the monastery viewed its own role as a source of regional power and influence.

Edmund as a regional king

Edmund's narrative persona, as constructed through *De Miraculis*, holds meaning outside the immediate confines of Bury St Edmunds and its abbey. It is clear that both Hermann, who wrote the text and Baldwin, who commissioned it, were aware of their saint's pre-existing significance within wider East Anglia. What made Edmund exceptional among East Anglian saints was that he was not only a martyr, but also the very last independent king of the region. This very 'lastness' marked him out as totemic of a lost past, a lost past where East Anglia had been independent. *De Miraculis*

---

[72] The story of Edmund's exile in London appears in *Herm.*, pp.33-41.

develops this unique aspect of the saint's persona, emphasising Edmund's kingly status as much, if not more, than his saintly status. Edmund's protective or defensive nature, as portrayed within Hermann's text, is very much framed within an East Anglian context. His miraculous interventions are often seen to be conducted on behalf of those who, during Edmund's lifetime, would have been considered his subjects. In this way Edmund, even in his saintly guise, continues to act as a good king should. That Edmund was being developed, through *De Miraculis,* as a kingly figure is made all the more apparent through a sentence which appears early in the text:

> 'Remaining, by God's grace, the defender of East Anglia (to which he had been a sort of heptarch {*quasi eptarcha*}), Edmund provided unceasing support all over that region. For we believe he merited this privilege from the Almighty: that none other than God should succeed him in those parts.'[73]

One of the active words in this sentence is heptarch (*eptarcha*). Although this word is now used to describe the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as they appear in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Hermann's use of *eptarcha* is a neologism, as confirmed by both Howlett and License.[74] Edmund, Hermann tells us, continues to act as a 'defender of East Anglia', just as he did when he was *quasi eptarcha*. That this relates to Edmund's kingly status in life is confirmed by the latter half of the sentence which states: 'we believe he merited this privilege from the Almighty: that none other than God should succeed him in those parts.' In short, upon Edmund's death, East Anglia became God's country. By protecting his lands and people Edmund, as God's proxy, continued to act as a heptarch should. This strong flavour of regionalism appears elsewhere in the text. Edmund is variously referred to by Hermann as 'protector of the East Angles', 'Glory of

---

[73] *Herm.*, p.6-7.

[74] *Ecc.His.,* pp.63 and 111-113. Bede never uses the term himself. See; D.R. Howlett (ed.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources, fascicule IV, F-G-H* (Oxford, 2013), p.1145 and *Herm*. p.6, n.25. Later in *De Miraculis* Hermann describes Cnut's dividing of England into four Earldoms as the creation of a 'tetrarchy' (*tetrarchizante*). Hermann would have been familiar with this term from biblical sources as it appears in Matthew 14:1 and Luke 3:1, 3:19 and 9:7. It seems that he merely substituted hepta/epta for tetra, thus creating the word heptarch.

the East Angles' and 'Shield of the East Angles'.[75] Hermann portrays Edmund as the *genius loci* of East Anglia, an essential part of the regional character. Given the historical and political context within which it was written, it is likely that, by foregrounding Edmund's importance within East Anglia, Hermann's writing reflects contemporary efforts by the abbey to garner support within the region. In doing so he promotes the notion that Bury St Edmunds abbey, as the saint's resting place, was also essential to East Anglian identity. Furthermore, by positioning the abbey as a benign intermediary between the saint and his people, Bury's monastic community could hope to more easily manage the considerable estates they governed in St Edmund's name.

De Miraculis' is an ideologically potent text. Its political preoccupations are revealed both reactively, in the sense that it provides a response to episcopal aggression, and pro-actively, in that it discloses much about the abbey's approach to governance. St Edmund's persona, as presented in Hermann's narrative, differs markedly from the earlier works of Abbo and Aelfric and is staged as a figure concerned with the political fate of his former kingdom. Hermann's intention in recasting Edmund in this way can be seen as an attempt to develop the saint, through narrative, as a figurehead synonymous with Bury St Edmunds Abbey and its interests. That this emphasis was not isolated and formed part of a long-term strategy is evidenced through another species of document: charters.

Charters: An ideology in tenurial documents

Taken individually, monastic charters rarely fit any traditional definition of the term narrative. They are records detailing the transferral of property (usually land) from one party to another. Charters, however, were often kept together in cartularies: record books which, should the need arise, could be called upon to bear out any entitlements under legal challenge. Aside from this practical function, cartularies also formed a

---

[75] Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p.230.

narrative of sorts, a compound record of institutional growth over time.[76] That they were viewed in such a way is attested to by the existence of so called 'chronicle-cartularies', charter collections given additional historical context by an accompanying narrative chronicle.[77] Today, Bury St Edmunds boasts the largest surviving collection of cartularies to have come from any religious house in England.[78] Yet, for all the documents the abbey produced over the centuries, the charters which retained the most long-term importance were among the earliest. Many of Bury's early charters can be found, copied again and again into cartularies and registers, all the way through to the Dissolution. Davis provides a potential reason for this when he suggests that Bury's continued success was owed not to the acquisition of new lands and privileges, but 'to the scrupulous maintenance and the careful administration of ancient rights and possessions.'[79]

The charters which establish the most important and enduring of the abbey's privileges and entitlements largely date between the mid-eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Chief among these documents are four royal charters purportedly produced by Cnut, Harthacnut and Edward the Confessor (x2).[80] Cnut's charter (S.980), which was apparently drafted at some point between 1021 and 1023, survives in no fewer than thirty-three copies, Harthacnut's (S.995) in eleven and Edward the Confessor's (S.1045 and 1046) in twenty-three and nine respectively.[81] Cnut's charter grants a range of liberties, freeing the abbey from episcopal power and urging that Bury St Edmunds

---

[76] Sarah Foot discusses the narrative potential of charters in her article; 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record or Story?', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout, 2006), pp.39-67.

[77] G.R.C. Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland*, rev. Claire Breay, Julian Harrison and David M. Smith (London, 2010), p.xvi.

[78] Thomson, *Archives*, pp.3-4. Thomson knew of thirty-nine, Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, cites the same and gives them numbers 95-134.

[79] Davis, 'The Liberties', pp.421-2.

[80] These documents represent the only surviving, pre-conquest royal diplomas issued to Bury St Edmunds. Latin transcriptions and English translations can be found in *Corolla*, pp.596-613.

[81] For lists of MSS. see Esawyer.

should remain perpetually under monastic control. It also goes on to grant that the army and ship taxes, taxes normally reserved for the crown, should be paid directly to the monastery for its upkeep. Furthermore, Cnut grants the monastery '*tun-socn* of all their lands which they now have, and, by favour of God, may yet acquire.'[82] Harthacnut's charter reaffirms the abbey's freedom from episcopal jurisdiction, detailing that no bishop has the right to:

> '...hold any Court, or to celebrate mass therein, unless he shall have been allowed so to do by the Abbot of that place, or the Abbot shall have been pleased, in case of homicide or adultery, to commit any of his folk to such a prelate.'[83]

Edward the Confessor's two charters pick up the same theme stating, in the strongest terms, that no bishop should have authority over the town or monastery of St Edmund and that the monastery should never be occupied by anyone other than monks, further adding that the monks alone should choose their abbot. The Confessor's charters also detail his donation of Mildenhall and the eight and a half hundreds of Thingoe, the single grant of land that formed the basis of St Edmund's Liberty.

The unifying concern which arises in all of these charters is a pre-occupation with the abbey's independence from episcopal control; a factor which has been seen by some as no coincidence. Gransden, for example, points to the Harfast narrative in *De Miraculis* and notes Abbot Baldwin's reliance upon documentary evidence.[84] She asserts that the documents he used were a genuine papal bull of Alexander II, acquired 1071, as well as S980, 995 and 1045-6, charters which were, in her opinion, purposefully

---

[82] *Corolla,* p.597. According to Henry Adams, 'The Anglo-Saxon Courts of Law', in *Essays in Anglo Saxon Law*, ed. Henry Adams (Clark. N.J., 2004), pp.40-45, the Anglo-Saxon word *socn* can have multifarious legal meanings dependant on context, though generally it can be taken to mean; '… the sum of the fiscal privileges enjoyed by lands which the king and witan had freed from fiscal burdens, and to which they had granted the proceeds of fines.'

[83] *Corolla,* p.599.

[84] Gransden, 'Baldwin', pp.70-1.

forged.[85] This conclusion is less than surprising. Baldwin, who was surely responsible for the fabrication, had previously been an inmate of St Denis, an institution which, during his time, had similarly used forged charters to plead its case in a jurisdictional dispute.[86] Equally, it should not be imagined that Bury was the only English house to resort to forgery in this period. Indeed, Michael Clanchy has suggested that, when approaching monastic documents from around the time of the Norman Conquest, it may be true to think of forgery as the 'rule rather than the exception.'[87] He estimates that only 39% of 164 extant charters attributed to Edward the Confessor are demonstrably authentic.[88] In a post-Conquest environment, where the newly enthroned Norman line was still establishing its legitimacy, the wishes of Edward the Confessor carried especial weight: William I's claim to the throne of England was, after all, built on the basis of such a wish. Consequently, by establishing that Edward and his predecessors had endorsed Bury's cause, the monastery could greatly enhance their suit against East Anglia's bishops, and if posterity did not provide, then the scribe's pen would.

Although Bury's recourse to forgery was a tactic typical of the age, much can be gleaned by analysing how these documents were constructed. For example, both M.K. Lawson and S. Keynes note similarities between Cnut's charter (S.980) and a charter produced at St Benedict's Holme (S.984), the religious house which had served Bury

---

[85] *Ibid*. Although Gransden was the first to discuss this suggestion at length, she was not the first to make it. See; F.E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester, 1954), pp.141, n.2, 142-5 and 433-5. Sarah Foot, suggests that Baldwin may also have used another dubious diploma, attributed to Edmund the Elder, (S.507). See; Sarah Foot, 'The Abbey's Armoury of Charters', in *Norman*, pp.46-48.

[86] For discussion on St Denis influence on Bury Charters see; Thomas Waldman, 'Charters and Influences from St Denis c.1000-1070', in *Norman*, pp.22-30. Brian Briggs has suggested that Obsbert of Clare may have developed a similar approach to charter forgery after a stay at Bury St Edmunds. See; Brian Briggs, *The Life and Works of Osbert of Clare* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: University of St Andrews, 2004), p.48.

[87] M.T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307, 2nd Edition (London, 1993), p.318.

[88] *Ibid*., p.319.

with its first two abbots.[89] Keynes goes so far as to suggest that S.984 was the direct model for S.980. Such a notion implies that, as an activity, the forging of charters could involve collusion between monastic houses. Although there may be an element of truth to this, other studies have suggested looking closer to home for an exemplar. Kathryn Lowe has argued that S.980, as well as S.1046, may, at least in part, be based upon a collection of authentic writs, issued to the abbey by Edward the Confessor between 1042 and 1066 (S.1068-85).[90] S.980 and S1045-6 share clear grammatical and syntactical features with these writs; what remains notably absent from the authentic documents is any sense of Bury's freedom from episcopal jurisdiction. This suggests that the purpose of the forgery was to conceal the circumstantially convenient notion of episcopal freedom amidst genuine diplomatic material.

Aside from the above observations, I would argue that analysis of these forged documents betrays a deeper vein of thought in their construction, a vein of thought which, like *De Miraculis*, places St Edmund at the forefront of regional politics. The primary feature indicating this is the use of Edmund's name as the direct recipient of the benefactions. Such a practice, like forgery, is unremarkable in and of itself. It was common, both in England and on the continent, for charters to be directed to a saint rather than his or her community.[91] What makes these charters noteworthy is the personal affection for St Edmund displayed within them. This is most notable in the case of Edward the Confessor. Edward's affection for the saint is clear from the sheer number of authentic writs he issued in the abbey's favour. These documents cover a

---

[89] See; M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), p.239 and S. Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', *in The reign of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A.R. Rumble (London, 1994), p.49.

[90] The writs in question are printed in both old and modern English in Harmer, *Writs*, pp.154-165, no.8-21. Lowe is not averse to the suggestion that some elements of S.980 may in fact belong to an original, now lost, document. See; Lowe, 'Bury St Edmunds and its liberty', pp.159-60. Foot, 'The Abbey's Armoury', p.46, supports this assertion.

[91] Ben Nilson discusses this in his *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2001), p.126f. See also; Helen Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (London, 2013), pp.223-4.

significant amount of ground, issuing St Edmund and his monastery with a raft of privileges and exemptions, including, but not limited to; the right to pursue and execute justice, the right to levy taxes and the right to mint coinage.[92] According to Ridyard, this makes Edward by far and away Bury's most significant royal benefactor.[93] Further evidence that Edward held St Edmund in high regard is revealed by the fact that he refers to the saint as his 'kinsman' within four of his writs.[94] Caution must be taken when approaching this as, during this period, charters were generally drafted by the beneficiary rather than the donor. Therefore, any reference to 'kinship' may be an affectation of Bury's monks rather than Edward himself. Nonetheless, it is a somewhat unusual turn of phrase. If the sentiment were genuine, then Edward's claims of kinship may represent nothing more than an expression of personal devotion. Equally, it might be viewed as an attempt by Edward to associate himself and his line with sacral kingship. What is intriguing, however, is that the forged diplomas, composed from Edward's writs, continue to refer to 'kinship'. S.1045, the most commonly copied of Edward's two forged charters, states the following:

> 'I will that the monastery of S. Edmund, my kinsman, and the town in which that monastery is, enjoy perpetually that freedom that King Cnut and King Harthacnut, my brother, granted thereto.'[95]

If S.1045's purpose was, as Gransden suggests, to support the abbey's case in the dispute with Harfast, then the presence of Edward's familial identification with the saint was not a formality. Certainly, the suggestion that Edmund was close to the Confessor's heart may have increased the charter's affective power, but it is not essential to the document's primary purpose. Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind

---

[92] S.1078 grants Bury six specific Royal forfeitures; *Frydwite*, *Fihtwite*, *Aebaertheof*, *Grithbreach*, *Forsteall* and *Hamsocn*. See; F.E. Harmer, *Writs*, pp.160-1. Davis, 'The Liberties', sees this as an 'imposing list' which could not be matched by 'any Old English *land-rica*'.

[93] Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p.225.

[94] Examples are provided by S.1073, 1074, 1078 and 1084. See; Harmer, *Writs*, nos. 13, 14, 18 and 24.

[95] *Corolla*, pp.602-3.

that of the eighteen writs attributed to the Confessor only four refer to St Edmund as his kinsman. As such, 'kinsman' might easily have been omitted from the forged charter. It seems clear that its inclusion represents a conscious decision on the part of the forger. We can assume that Abbot Baldwin had a significant say in the document's production. We can also assume that Baldwin would have given his forger access to the full range of authentic writs. Consequently, we must assume that Baldwin saw some merit in maintaining the emphasis on Edward's kinship with St Edmund. This is further evidenced by the fact that *De Miraculis* makes a similar allusion, stating that Edward shared *consanguinee proximitatis* with the saint.[96] The maintenance of Edmund's purported 'kinship' with the Confessor stresses Edmund's royal credentials. It gives Edmund's cult both regal endorsement and situates him as an ancestor of the current royal line. The choices made in the construction of these documents suggest something more than a response to a jurisdictional dispute. Edmund himself was being used instrumentally for some purpose.

If cartularies represent a form of institutional history, then by writing St Edmund into their charters, the monks of Bury ensured their saint was an active part of that narrative. The abovementioned documents not only placed the monastery in charge of a sizable portion of Edmund's former kingdom, they also granted privileges which were royal prerogatives. Lands require a ruler and prerogatives need authority to be enforced and while one might take umbrage with their being placed directly in the hands of a monastic order, one could hardly argue with a saint's right to hold them, particularly when that saint had been East Anglia's last independent king, a king who was recognised as kin by contemporary monarchs. As a titular ruler, St Edmund, unlike abbots or monks, did not grow old and die, he was eternal. Therefore, a grant made to him could itself be seen as eternally valid. It has already been shown that, through its likening St Edmund to a heptarch, *De Miraculis* emphasised Edmund's on-going royal

---

[96] *Herm.*, p.60-1.

status. Similarly, the wording of the charters meant that the beloved and loving patron saint of East Anglia was still a landholder. Between them, Baldwin, Hermann and the monastic forgers had created, in Edmund, a figurehead whose right to govern was indisputable. Of course, it hardly needs emphasising that having a saint as landlord presented practical problems. To this end, by incorporating Edmund within the institutional narrative of the abbey, the monks, promoted a correlation between themselves and St Edmund. The monks were Edmund's rightful and preferred executors. The monastery was an extension of Edmund himself. Like Edmund, it too was corporeally and morally inviolable. Consequently, to interfere with the abbey was to interfere with the saint and to risk his wrath. The Edmund created by the monks of Bury in the late-eleventh century was both king and martyr, both ruler and saint.

3.5: Narrative accretion

Edmund's story began long before Bury St Edmunds was ever founded and yet, from the eleventh century onwards, Edmund's hagiography was inherently bound up with the story of his abbey. Bury's privileged position as the centre of Edmund's cult and the protector of the saint's remains afforded the abbey's monks the ability to arbitrate what did and what did not meet the narrative standard. Through their acceptance of Abbo's *Passio* as a foundation narrative and by their reinvention of Edmund as the politically active figure of *De Miraculis*, Bury's monastic community had established a lasting template, but later writers would add material of their own; new miracles needed to be documented and aspects of Edmund's story remained untold (Tab.3.1). This section looks briefly at some of the later additions to Edmund's hagiography.

St Edmund's Narrative Development	Date
Abbo of Fleury - *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*	c.986
Hermann the Archdeacon - *Liber De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*	c.1098
Goscelin of St Bertin - *Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi Regis et Martyris*	q.1, 12th C.
Osbert of St Clare - *Liber Miraculorum*	q.1 to q.2, 12th C.
Geoffrey of Wells – *De Infantia Sancti Eadmundi*	1150-6
Samson - *Opus De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*	c.1189
Anonymous - MS Bodl.240	c.1376

Tab.3.1: Chronological list of the main texts comprising St Edmund's hagiographic tradition.

The continuation of Edmund's hagiographic tradition

The twelfth century would prove particularly fertile in terms of hagiographic production. Hermann's *De Miraculis* would be fully redrafted twice within this century alone. The first of these redactions, compiled at some point in the first quarter of the twelfth century, has recently been edited by Tom License who has convincingly argued for Goscelin of St Bertin as its author.[97] The text, which exists as a single copy in Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.736, reworks the 'biblical' narrative style employed by Hermann and adds a great deal of expository and historical detail to many of his stories, as well as several miracle's not present in *De Miraculis*.[98] Although Goscelin's work retains the majority of Hermann's miracle accounts, it notably does not include the Harfast episode discussed above and evinces a less anti-episcopal tone. License, who argues for a date of composition as early as 1100, has proposed that the exclusion of overtly political and anti-episcopal material results from a period where the abbey was temporarily under the sway of Herbert de Losinga. Goscelin, he suggests, was in the employ of the bishop while carrying out his redaction.[99]

Between Goscelin's and the next reworking of *De Miraculis*, two entirely new works of hagiography would be produced. The first, written by Osbert of St Clare

---

[97] License's argument for Goscelin's authorship can be found in *Miracles,* pp.cix-cxxvii.

[98] License, 'History and Hagiography', p.542.

[99] *Miracles*, p.cxiv.

(d.1158) in the first half of the century, survives in fragmentary form in later texts.[100] Osbert, who at the time was prior of Westminster, seemingly wrote this work at the request of Abbot Anselm (1121-1146), with whom he shared a close correspondence.[101] The miracles included in this text are of a more benign character than those found elsewhere in Edmund's hagiography and, as Pinner has suggested, may reflect Osbert's position as an outsider.[102] The second, *De Infantia Sancti Eadmundi*, dedicated to Abbot Ording (1146-56), was written in the early 1150s by Geoffrey, a hagiographer and likely a canon of Wells Cathedral. *De Infantia* adds a fresh dimension to St Edmund's character by granting him a childhood.[103] This text, which survives in two copies, was intended as a prequel to Abbo's *Passio* and takes the seemingly bizarre narrative decision to place Edmund's origins not in East Anglia, but in Old Saxony.[104] According to *De Infantia*, Edmund was adopted by an East Anglian king named Offa whilst he visited the continent. *De Infantia* positions the young Edmund as a boy destined for both kingship and sainthood, a child whose behaviour and miraculous potency set him as an example for the princes of the day.[105] A second recension of *De Miraculis* was produced towards the end of the twelfth century and has been attributed to Abbot Samson, either as author or commissioner.[106] This text survives complete in British Library MS Cotton

---

[100] The text survives complete in B.L. MS Cotton Titus A.viii, and in fragmentary form in several other Bury MSS including MS Bodl.240.

[101] According to Brian Briggs Osbert, under Anselm's protection, sheltered at Bury during a period of exile from Westminster. See; Briggs, *Life and Works*, p10 and 200-3.

[102] Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr*, p.95. For descriptions of Osbert's miracles see; Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities*, pp.55-7. Briggs, *Life and Works*, p.202, interprets Osbert's contribution to St Edmund's narrative as an 'addition' to rather than a 'reworking' of previous material.

[103] The text is edited in *Memorials*, I, pp.93-103, *Corolla*, pp.134-162 and with commentary by R.M. Thomson 'Geoffrey of Wells', pp.25-42.

[104] Manuscripts are; Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 1. 27, fol. 70v-72v; Hereford Cathedral MS P. 3. 1, fol. 81v-83v. Extracts from Geoffrey's text are also found in Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodl.240.

[105] Hayward has argued that Edmund's portrayal is constructed in response to the 'disastrous' reign of King Stephen. See; Paul Anthony Hayward, 'Geoffrey of Wells's Liber de infantia sancti Edmundi and the 'Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign', in *St.Ed*, pp.63-86.

[106] R.M. Thomson, 'Two versions of a saint's life from St Edmund's abbey: changing currents in twelfth century monastic style', *Revue Benedictine*, 84, (1974), pp.390-1

Titus A.viii. It takes material from both Hermann and Goscelin's works and expands upon them by incorporating miracle stories from Osbert of St Clare's lost collection, as well as several contemporary miracle accounts.

After the twelfth century there appears to have been a period in which little in the way of fresh hagiography was produced at Bury St Edmunds. This inactivity would come to an end around 1376 when the anonymously authored MS Bodl.240 was compiled. A massive compendium of hagiographic material, it not only includes a complete copy of John of Tynemouth's *Historia Aurea*, but also gathers together, for the first time, all the disparate elements of St Edmund's hagiography in a single volume (Tab.3.2).[107]
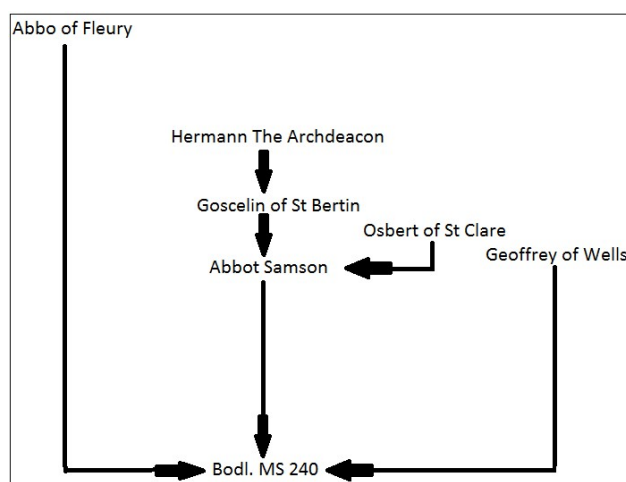
Tab.3.2: The creation of St Edmund's narrative tradition.

The fifteenth century would see John Lydgate go on to produce his *Lives of St Edmund and St Fremund*, but the sheer breadth of material in the Bodleian manuscript means that it serves as the closest we can come to a definitive statement on St Edmund's hagiography.[108]

---

[107] For a full description of the manuscript and its contents see; Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr*, pp.134-7.

[108] Lydgate, *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*.

Narrative and characterisation across the centuries

The texts outlined above represent a gradual process of narrative accretion across several centuries. When we examine the respective authorship of the works a trend becomes apparent. Although each addition is closely associated with Bury St Edmunds, the period between Hermann and Samson – some ninety-two years – saw no 'in house' hagiography produced. Instead, Bury and its monks seem to have relied upon professional hagiographers to do their work for them. Goscelin of St Bertin, Osbert of Clare and Geoffrey of Wells were each, in their own way, outsiders when it came to Bury St Edmunds abbey. Each man was commissioned to produce his work for Bury, but they would each apply their own influences and unique perspectives to the saint's legend. Goscelin would remove the most blatantly political elements from Hermann's *De Miraculis*, Osbert would add a series of benevolent miracles to the saint's repertoire, while Geoffey would grant the saint a mythical childhood. It is not until the reign of Samson that we see Bury, once again, take full charge of producing its patron's narrative and by the time MS Bodl.240 was compiled, these external influences had been well and truly absorbed into Bury's view of their saint.

The influence of these successive reimaginings of the saint are detectable through changing patterns in the types of miracle associated with St Edmund, something which Rebecca Pinner has studied in detail.[109] Pinner, who examined the contents of seven texts ranging from Abbo's *Passio* to John Lydgate's *Lives of St Edmund and Fremund*, divides the saint's miracles into six categories; 'punishment', 'healing', 'assistance', 'nature' 'bodily incorruption' and 'general'.[110] In all cases, the first three categories comprise the bulk of the narratives included in the texts. Examining

---

[109] Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr*, pp.383-5.

[110] *Ibid*. In the above analysis I have discounted statistics relating to Abbo's *Passio*, Geoffey of Well's *De Infantia Sancti Edmundi* and the Morgan miniatures because they are not 'miracle collections'. I have also discounted Lydgate because his text falls outside the temporal remit of this thesis.

Hermann's *De Miraculis,* and its subsequent redactions, she establishes that while punishment miracles start out as a substantial proportion of those recorded, accounting for 33% of Hermann's total, by the time Abbot Samson produced his greatly expanded redaction in c.1200, they only accounted for 22%. Conversely, healing miracles and assistance miracles, 36% and 19% within Hermann's text, rise considerably to 48% and 19% in Samson's. This is even further marked by the time the massive fourteenth-century MS Bodl.240 miracle collection was compiled, where punishment miracles only account for 11%, healing miracles for 43% and assistance miracles for 36%. Citing Simon Yarrow, Pinner contests that this statistical shift from punishment to healing and assistance miracles represents a conscious attempt, on the part of Bury's monastic community, to recast their saint.[111] Yarrow himself suggests that, over time, Edmund became a more: 'forgiving saint, a priestly saint concerned about the moral wellbeing of his people and a saint who inspired devotion not from fear but through his ability to protect the interests of his people in their everyday lives.'[112]

A statistical increase in healing and assistance miracles and a decrease in punishment miracles would, at first glance, seem to represent a gradual softening of Edmund's character over time. It is not, however, entirely surprising that healing and assistance miracles should account for the vast majority of new additions to the saint's hagiographic corpus. As a pilgrimage centre, Bury would have received countless petitioners seeking either to have an ailment cured, or to receive assistance in some other form. One can assume that the majority of narratives encountered and subsequently recorded by Bury's monks would be of these types. It should be noted that the vast majority of punishment narratives in Hermann's text were, even in his day, historical. Pinner's statistics show that the actual number of punishment miracles changes very little in subsequent redactions; from ten in Hermann's text, to twelve in

---

[111] *Ibid.,* p.94-6. See also; Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities*, p.53-7.

[112] *Ibid.,* pp.61-2.

Samson's, to eleven in Bodl.240. The same punishment stories are repeated again and again, with little variation, throughout the saint's hagiographic tradition. For example, despite adding a further forty-five new miracles to its predecessor's total, Bodl.240 only contributes one new punishment miracle. [113] This suggests, as with the charters discussed in chapter three, that the abbey relied upon tried and tested narratives to reinforce its institutional identity. The type of new miracles the abbey used to expand the saint's repertoire were those which indicated the efficacy of the saint for ordinary men and women. In other words, rather than softening throughout the twelfth century, Edmund had developed two characters in parallel. One, drawn from time honoured stories of protection and vengeance, was designed to face outwards, to those who would challenge the abbey. The other, built from the writings of commissioned hagiographers and the positive experiences of pilgrims, was constructed for those on the inside, those who understood what Edmund was and the good he could accomplish.

3.6: Conclusion

After King Edmund's death, around a small historical kernel, the substantial, nuanced and often contradictory story of Saint Edmund was built. This chapter has revealed that the development of Edmund's written narrative did not follow a path that might be expected of an Anglo-Saxon saint. His story continuously transformed across the centuries, influenced by the cosmopolitan mixture of cultures that shaped English history. Those who wrote about Edmund were themselves tangled up amidst a brocade of historical, political, cultural and religious narratives and these entanglements, in turn, had a profound influence on the way in which they characterised him.

One can envision Edmund's narrative evolution using the biographical notion of a life course. Born amidst the contentious milieu of a conquered East Anglia, Edmund's

---

[113]Pinner, *St Edmund King and Martyr*, p.135-6.

legend, in its original form, seems to have presented him as a figure of militant resistance. This primordial representation of the saint as an icon of regional identity would remain a persistent feature of his character to the end. However, barring a few, brief, historical allusions, the precise nature of the stories told about him during the first century of his cult's existence can only be guessed at. We are left instead to turn to his narrative's first, youthful phase of growth. During the last decades of the tenth century Edmund was recast, through the hagiography of Abbo and Aelfric, as a perfect kingly martyr: a personification worthy of the ideals of reformed monasticism. The figure crafted during this formative period furnished many of the saint's fundamental attributes. Yet, Edmund's fate was not to stand as an icon of universal monasticism. Instead, he would come to be associated with a single institution. In a troubled adolescence that spanned the immediate aftermath of the Norman Conquest, Hermann the Archdeacon would reconcile Abbo's image of Edmund as a pacifistic and self-sacrificing king with the Abbey's need for a pro-active, even aggressive, saintly figurehead. Abbot Baldwin, meanwhile, would enshrine Edmund's links to the abbey through a series of forged tenurial documents. Over the proceeding centuries, Edmund would mature in a way which left him with two characters; one outwardly protective, the other inwardly welcoming. These twin characters would survive until Edmund's second death during the Reformation. Indeed, they are apparent even now, in his most recent afterlife, where Edmund has become the subject of historical interest.

Chapter 4: Telling Stories – Disseminating Edmund's Cult Narrative

4.1: Introduction

Scrutinising the historical development of Edmund's legend revealed that ongoing hagiographic production became a key factor in establishing Benedictine Bury St Edmunds as the centre of the saint's cult. Edmund was woven into the fabric of the abbey's history and politics, as well as into the monastic identity of its inhabitants. Such a realisation is significant in characterising Bury as a cult centre. However, for the cult to survive and thrive, stories of Edmund's miraculous efficacy had to be broadcast beyond the cloister. Taking a broad view of the narrative landscape, this chapter examines how Edmund was represented through other narrative forms, both literary and oral, and asks how much control, if any, Bury's monks could elicit over narrative dissemination and reception.

Approaching the literary and the oral as separate but interacting 'spheres', this chapter begins by tracing the literary transmission of the narrative which perhaps best epitomises Bury's institutional conception of the saint: the story of Swein Forkbeard. Pregnant with political metaphor, this story, which first appeared in Hermann's *De Miraculis*, proved popular with audiences beyond Bury and was incorporated into the work of some of medieval England's best known historical writers. By considering how these men co-opted and reshaped this legend, it is seen that elements of Edmund's hagiography were used to support narrative agendas other than the abbey's own. Equally, it is revealed that Bury's community were engaged in a dialogue with these sources, whereby their hagiographic treatment of Edmund was influenced by external literary reception. Next, this chapter turns to a consideration of oral narrative. In a world where literacy, especially Latin literacy, was limited, the oral diffusion of narrative would have been of primary importance. This chapter attempts to piece together a sense of the malleable and 'lost' environment of oral tradition that once

surrounded Edmund's cult. It is revealed that the diffusion of Edmund's legend, through both literary and oral means, held consequences, not only in terms of how Edmund was characterised more broadly, but also as to how Bury itself viewed the saint. Finally, having considered these two narrative spheres, we return to the notion of 'concentric circles' and attempt to model the narrative environment of cult.

4.2: Literary dissemination

This section considers the consequences of the literary dissemination of Edmund's cult narrative. In doing so it focusses on the reception of one, particularly popular, miracle account: the story of the death of Swein Forkbeard. This narrative has been selected for analysis for two reasons. Firstly, it epitomises Bury's approach to politicizing its saint and secondly, it found traction with some of England's most notable eleventh and twelfth-century writers and thus appears in numerous contemporary works. Examining how this narrative was received will provide an indication as to the relative success, or otherwise, of Bury's attempts to broadcast their conception of St Edmund. However, before examining the story in further detail, it is worthwhile considering the transmission history of the text to which it originally belonged: Hermann's *De Miraculis*.

As noted in chapter three, although it was subject to several redactions, *De Miraculis*, in its original form, survives in only one late-eleventh-century copy: MS Cotton Tiberius B.ii, (fols 20-85v).[1] Very much a product of Bury's local political environment, this version would seem to have been intended for consumption only by those who were interested in Bury's perspective on the intricacies of East Anglian ecclesiastical politics: namely the abbey's own community.[2] The only iteration of the

---

[1] See; this work, p.134, n.58. It is questionable whether Tiberius B.ii does resemble Hermann's work in its final form as it cuts off mid-sentence while recounting its final miracle. For analysis see; *Miracles, p.xci-xcv.*

[2] *De Miraculis'* scarcity either suggests that Bury's community were selective about the text's diffusion, or that Hermann's compendium of miracles lacked broad appeal as a single body of

text to be found in manuscript contexts beyond Bury is a heavily abridged 'pamphlet' version. Dating from roughly the same period as Tiberius B.ii, two examples survive, these are; Paris BnF, MS lat. 2621 (fols 84r-92v) and Oxford, Bodleian, MS Digby 39 (fols 24r-39v).[3] Although these pamphlets were, in all likelihood, produced at St Edmund's abbey, they once resided in libraries other than Bury's own. This leads both Gransden and License to view them as examples of 'promotional tracts' sent out by Edmund's monks to publicise the saint's cult.[4] The booklets feature the majority of the pre-conquest miracles from *De Miraculis*, while discarding those of a more recent date. Furthermore, overtly political material, such as the account of the monastery's dispute with Harfast, has also been excised.[5] The decision to remove explicitly political material from the abbreviated version suggests an awareness on Bury's part that such parochial concerns would not necessarily resonate with a broad audience. Yet, miracle stories showcasing Edmund's reaction to improper use of authority continue to form the core of the pamphlet version.[6] Equally, the shortened version retains *De Miraculis'* emphasis on Bury as the *locus* of St Edmund's power. The miracle accounts included in the pamphlets may not directly describe political realities, but they nevertheless reflect, if only allegorically, Bury's political opinions.

The Swein narrative: form and origins

The retention of stories showcasing Edmund's response to unchecked authority indicates that, while the abbreviators were willing to expunge genuine political narrative in order to reach a wider audience, they were not willing to compromise on the persona *De*

---

work. Its limited circulation is in direct contrast with the popularity of Abbo's *Passio*. See; this work, p.127, n.33.

[3] Digby 39 appears to be a twelfth-century copy of MS lat. 2621, which itself dates from the late-eleventh/early-twelfth century. For a more detailed description of these two texts see Gransden, 'Composition and Authorship', pp.7-9.

[4] See *Ibid.*,p.18 and License, 'History and Hagiography', p.524.

[5] Gransden, 'Composition and Authorship', pp.10-17.

[6] The shorter version is edited in *Miracles*, pp.306-35.

Miraculis had developed for the saint: Edmund was to remain, if only surreptitiously, a political animal. One story which retains its place, as well as its political meaning, is that of King Swein: in synopsis, the narrative runs as follows:

In 1013, Swein, the ruler of Denmark, invaded England, usurped King Aethelred's throne and imposed on the country's inhabitants a crippling, universal tax which Bury St Edmunds alone refused to pay. Despite constant persecution, the townspeople denied the tax collectors' advances, citing customary exemptions. The collectors persisted, however, and started to behave in an increasingly threatening manner. Eventually, the townsfolk turned to their saint for aid and brought their grievance to the keeper of St Edmund's relics, a monk named Aelwine. Aelwine, who often conversed with St Edmund whilst dreaming, made an appeal to his patron. Taking pity, Edmund tasked Aelwine with passing on a warning to Swein, commanding him to stop his harassment, or face the consequences. Visiting the king's court at Gainsborough, Aelwine duly delivered the saint's message, but was met with violence and mockery in return. Ejected from Swein's camp, beaten and despondent, Aelwine turned back. Yet, on the first night of the return journey St Edmund again appeared to him, this time revealing that before he reached home he would hear news of Swein's death. Setting out the same evening, it wasn't long before Aelwine encountered some Danish soldiers. The soldiers reported that Swein had been found, dead, mysteriously skewered by a lance. The miraculous nature of this event was later confirmed when it was discovered that, at the very moment of Swein's undoing, many miles away, a dying man had pronounced Edmund as the lance's wielder.[7]

This tale, like others in *De Miraculis*, is an allegory designed to imprint contemporary political notions on the past. Edmund, as presented within the story, epitomises the protectionist persona formulated for him during the late-eleventh

---

[7] Adapted from *Herm.*, pp.14-26.

century. The saint is presented as standing up to a ruthless and acquisitive authority figure whose actions are undermining the autonomy of his community. Aelwine, as characterised within the story, is similarly allegorical. The connection Aelwine shares with St Edmund can be seen as a micro-cosmic reflection on how Bury's convent viewed their own place within the saint's cult. Like Oswyn, whose care of Edmund's remains was discussed in chapter two, Aelwine's relationship with the saint was defined by interactions with relics. According to Hermann, Aelwine acted as 'the martyr's chamber attendant', combing his hair and washing his body.[8] This corporeal familiarity led in turn to a special bond which allowed Aelwine to act as an intermediary: St Edmund's miraculous response to the townspeople's plight is only brought about through Aelwine's intercession. Likewise, at eleventh-century Bury St Edmunds, the monastic community, as keepers of the saint's shrine, fulfilled the role of interlocutor between saint and venerator. In this way, the narrative serves as a metaphor for the perceived order of things within the cult.

The origins of the tale are uncertain; Hermann does not divulge his source. Gransden, who believes the narrative to have formed part of a lost, tenth-century miracle collection, argues the story was in circulation long before Hermann's day.[9] License, conversely, suggests that Hermann devised the story to mirror the death of Julian the Apostate: as it appears in Aelfric's Life of St Basil, Julian was reputedly slain by St Mercurius in similar circumstances.[10] License's observations are lent credence by the fact that Hermann himself draws the same analogy:

---

[8] *Ibid*. p.18-19.

[9] Gransden, 'Composition and Authorship', pp.26-8. Gransden argues that the Swein narrative, along with several others, possess elements that suggest a deeper heritage.

[10] *Miracles*, p.lxxviii-ix. License points to numerous phraseological similarities between Hermann's story and the Mercurius legend as it appears in Aelfric's life of St Basil, a text Bury itself possessed.

'The martyr Edmund wondrous in the might of his miracles, is now equal to the martyr Mercurius, who brought down vengeance on Julian the Apostate for his insulting blasphemies against God's mother and St Basil, man of God.'[11]

Whatever the case may have been, Swein's story is first preserved in *De Miraculis* and continues to feature in all subsequent redactions and abbreviations of the text.

The Swein narrative: external reception

Although it first appears in texts from Bury, from the early-twelfth century onwards the story of Swein's death begins to find its way into other, English chronicles and histories. The first chronicle within which it makes an appearance is John of Worcester's *Chronicon Ex Chronicis*. John (d. c.1140), a scribe at Worcester Cathedral Priory, was instructed by his bishop, Wulfstan, (d.1095) to produce his chronicle as a continuation of that of Marianus Scotus.[12] The text, which survives in numerous copies, was revised several times throughout John's lifetime.[13] In his entry for 1014 John provides the following account:

'After many cruel atrocities, which he perpetrated both in England and in other lands, the tyrant Swein filled up the measure of his damnation by daring to demand enormous tribute from the town where the incorrupt body of the precious martyr Edmund lay, a thing no one had dared to do before since that town had been given to the church of the aforementioned saint. He very frequently threatened that if it were not speedily paid he would destroy utterly the martyr's church, and he would torture the clergy in various ways. In addition, he frequently disparaged the martyr himself in many ways - he dared to say that he had no sanctity - and, because there were no bounds to his malice, divine vengeance did not allow the blasphemer to live any longer. At last, when the evening was approaching of the day on which, at the general assembly which he held at Gainsborough, he repeated the same threats, at a time when he was surrounded by Danish troops crowded together, he alone saw St Edmund, armed, coming towards him. When he had seen him, he was terrified and began to shout very noisily, saying "Help, fellow-warriors, help! St Edmund is coming to kill me!" And while he was saying this he was run through fiercely by the saint with a

---

[11] *Herm*. p.20-1.

[12] P. McGurk, 'John of Worcester', *ODNB* (Oxford,2004)
[http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48309].

[13] *Ibid.,* This includes a copy from Bury St Edmunds (Bodl. Oxf., MS Bodl.297), which is heavily interpolated with material relating to the abbey's history.

spear, and fell from the stallion on which he sat, and, tormented with great pain until twilight, he ended his life with a wretched death on 3 February.'[14]

Several key elements from Hermann's rendition of the Swein story are absent in John's; gone is any mention of the involvement of the monk Aelwine; gone is the pre-emptive warning issued to Swein; gone is the confirmatory revelation of the dying man. There are also novel elements in John's account which do not appear in *De Miraculis*. For example, John enhances the story by adding that Swein threatened to destroy the town and torture its clergy. We also learn that Swein's death took place while he was seated on a horse. Furthermore, John, who seems to take an almost perverse pleasure in recounting Swein's end, even supplements the story by giving Swein a voice: a voice begging vainly for help. These disparities leave the question of the story's transmission open to debate. Lene Demidoff assesses that: 'In spite of the similarity in the way of death it is not very likely that Florence (John) knew Herman's work, partly because his narrative does not resemble that of Herman, partly because we have no other evidence of such contact.'[15] Yet, there are aspects which indicate a relationship between Hermann and John's accounts. There are elements which seem to preserve the politicizing tendencies of Hermann's narrative. It is clear, for instance, that Swein only puts himself in danger by attempting to levy taxes from the town. Consequently, the punishment Swein suffers is as a direct result of his attitude towards St Edmund's possessions and not his general behaviour. Equally, Tom License has recently detected certain linguistic similarities in the Latin vocabulary used by both John and Hermann which leads him to disagree with Demidoff and to conclude that John 'probably had seen a version of Hermann's work.'[16] A need for annalistic brevity can account for the

---

[14] John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. ii, ed. and trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1995), p.477.

[15] Lene Demidoff, 'The death of Sven Forkbeard – in reality and later tradition', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 11 (1978), p.40. Demidoff refers to John of Worcester as 'Florence', a name formerly associated with the chronicle.

[16] *Miracles*, p.cxxviii.

elements absent from John's account. Equally, it is revealing that the narrative additions John makes cover areas where Hermann is non-specific. Hermann, for example, mentions only that Swein's tax collectors 'bullied the town's inhabitants', he gives no exegesis on the nature of their threats.[17] Hermann is equally vague when it comes to Swein's death, stating only that the king had been 'transfixed by a lance', giving no indication as to where or in what circumstances this took place.[18] Whether the additional detail John provides derived from oral testimony or from his imagination is beyond knowledge. However, the inclusion of these elements seems to be a direct response to the descriptive weaknesses of Hermann's narrative. On balance, it seems likely that John based his account on Hermann's while adapting it for his own purposes. John's is a concise rendition of the story and is designed to demonize Swein as the pantomime villain of English history. Swein is painted as a tyrant who had filled up his 'measure of damnation' by committing 'many cruel atrocities' in England and elsewhere. With this in mind, it makes sense that John would seek to amplify and elaborate on Hermann's account.

William of Malmesbury (c.1095-c.1193) was also familiar with the Swein story and included it in both his best known works, the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*. According to Rodney M. Thomson, he was a correspondent of John of Worcester, so it is just possible that he first encountered the story through him, though differences in the tone, emphasis and detail of the narrative suggest it likely that he encountered it independently.[19] Although William later made revisions, both his major works were completed around the same time (c.1125). Oddly, however, his account of the Swein story varies significantly between the texts. The *Gesta Regum*,

---

[17] *Herm*. pp.16-17.

[18] *Ibid*. pp.22-3.

[19] Rodney M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2003), p.74. See also; Martin Brett, 'John of Worcester and his Contemporaries', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R.W. Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace Hadrill (Oxford, 1981), pp.101-26.

presents the narrative in the context of describing the depredations inflicted by Swein

during his invasion, it runs as follows:

> 'However, the divine Mercy did not long leave England tossing in this sea of misery, for the invader soon met his end on the Purification of St Mary, by what form of death is disputed. It is said that while he was ravaging the lands of St Edmund the martyr himself appeared to him in a vision and complained mildly about the miseries of his community; and when he returned an insolent reply, the saint struck him on the head a blow from the pain of which he shortly afterwards died.'[20]

Like John's account, the *Gesta Regum's* narrative is significantly shorter than

Hermann's and is missing many key elements; again, there is no mention of the monk

Aelwine; the pre-emptive warning remains, but on this occasion is delivered by St

Edmund in person, rather than through a messenger. Equally, there is less emphasis on

Bury St Edmunds than previously seen. Unlike Hermann who considers the episode's

impact on Bury as of primary importance, William views Edmund's action as extending

from 'divine Mercy' for all of England. It has been suggested that in observing that the

mode of Swein's death is 'disputed', William shows a degree of scepticism towards the

story. However, it is unclear whether this was a general scepticism or merely

uncertainty over specific, narrative elements.[21] It is notable that the *Gesta Regum's*

account is the only one to insist that Swein died from a blow to the head, all others

emphasise that he was run through with a lance. We cannot know from where William

derived this information. License suggests that William likely encountered the narrative

through an oral source, though Thomson highlights the use of *peruasor* (invader), an

unusual word, which Hermann himself employs in his rendition.[22] It is known that

William conducted much of his research in person and certainly spent time at Bury St

---

[20] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998-1999), v.I, p.308-9.

[21] See *Ibid.*, v.II, p.163, n.179:I.

[22] *Ibid.* v.II, p.163, n.179.

Edmunds.[23] He makes use of several items from the abbey's library in his work, including hagiographies, and no doubt engaged his fellow Benedictines in conversation about their saint; he may also have observed the liturgical offices of St Edmund.[24] It is therefore possible that William was aware of several variants of the story and compiled his own redaction based on these. As such, the 'dispute' in question may merely refer to the exact method of Swein's miraculous execution and not the veracity of the miracle itself.

Unlike *Gesta Regum*, which situates Swein's death as part of the metanarrative of English history, *Gesta Pontificum* locates the tale within a chapter dedicated to Bury St Edmund's abbey. Although he provides some historical information, William largely uses this chapter to expound upon St Edmund and his miracles. He begins by summarizing Abbo and proceeds to offer a selection of posthumous miracles from the *Passio* and *De Miraculis*.[25] The Swein narrative runs as follows:

> 'When Swein was laying waste all England in the days of King Aethelred, his threats were equally unrestrained in the territory of St Edmund. The story is that Swein was gently admonished by the martyr in a dream; but when the barbarian in his folly returned a dusty answer, the saint killed him with a blow from a pike, though there was an interval in which, emerging from his coma, he was able to tell those who stood by the manner of his death and who was responsible. Astonishingly enough, the watchers over the body had heard the exchanges between the pair as they quarrelled and the sound of the blow.'[26]

Again, as in *Gesta Regum*, this rendition of the tale is heavily redacted, yet, it nevertheless makes several significant amendments and additions. Swein is no longer killed by a blow to the head, but is instead, as in John and Hermann's versions, pierced

---

[23] Rodney M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29461].

[24] William of Malmesbury*, Gesta Pontificum Anglorum,* 2 vols., ed. and trans. by R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 2007), v.II, p.86, comments that William made use of Hermann's *De Miraculis* and Abbo's *Passio*, as well as other items from the abbey's archive.

[25] *Gesta Pontificum,*v.I, p.242-9. William describes Edmund's beheading and subsequent recapitation, as well as the stories of the hanged thieves, Oswen the shrine-keeper, Leofstan the wicked sheriff and Abbot Leofstan, who was crippled for doubting Edmund's incorruption.

[26] *Ibid.*, p.246-7.

with a spear. William also adds new elements to the story; that Swein briefly awoke to reveal the nature of his death and that 'the watchers over the body had heard the exchanges between the pair'. The former piece of information, although not found in Hermann's account, suggests William did indeed find the story in the abbey's books, or at least consulted with someone who had. Pierpont Morgan MS. M.736, an early-twelfth-century *libellus* from Bury St Edmunds, contains a series of thirty-two full page miniatures detailing the life and miracles of St Edmund. These images portray a chronologically progressive narrative and are not directly accompanied by any text. The Morgan sequence will be analysed in greater detail in chapter five, for the moment, however, it suffices to say that three of the final four miniatures illustrate the Swein story. The first of these shows the monk Aelwine remonstrating with King Swein (Fig.5.29); the second, St Edmund slaying the king while he rests in bed (Fig. 5.30); the third, the 'dying man' announcing the miracle from his deathbed (Fig.5.31). The fact that both Swein and the dying man are shown abed and that the images follow on from one another might have led William to assume that the latter depicted Swein 'emerging from his coma'. That the miniatures are textually unaccompanied means that such a false conclusion might easily be reached. The second piece of information is equally tantalizing. 'The watchers over the body' (*custodes corporis*) seemingly refers to St Edmund's shrine keepers. As this anecdote does not appear elsewhere, it would seem that it reflects an oral tradition which William may have picked up at Bury, possibly while interviewing the abbey's inmates.

When comparing the disparities evident between *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum,* a picture emerges of William's interactions with the Swein narrative. It would seem that the *Gesta Regum* version represents the story as William first knew it. His use of a rare word found in *De Miraculis* suggests that at least part of the narrative came from a literary source, potentially one imperfectly abbreviated from Hermann's work. Furthermore, the doubt he expresses as to how Swein was killed implies he was

aware of variants on the tale. The *Gesta Pontificum* account, by contrast, seems more considered. William no longer expresses any doubt and corrects Swein's mode of death so that it is in line with Hermann's original account. Also, the additional information he provides seems to derive from Bury, indicating that this version was composed after a research trip to the abbey. William's increased familiarity with Bury and its highly politicized interpretation of Edmund is further evidenced later in his text when he states

> 'Tax-gatherers, rampant elsewhere and making no distinction between right and wrong, are here suppliants, and stay their litigious demands this side of St Edmund's Ditch, being well aware of the punishment of many who have thought fit to ignore this limit.'[27]

In including this statement, William promotes the idea, first found in *De Miraculis*, that the rights and privileges of the abbey are indeed coincident with the rights and privileges of the saint.

The differences between *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum* reveal a progression in William's narrative awareness, yet one thing remains constant between both: Edmund's behaviour is significantly less vehement than in any earlier version. William's Edmund 'complains mildly' (*leniterque*), while Swein is 'gently admonished' (*leniter ammonitum*). It is only after Swein returns an 'insolent' (*insolentiusque*) or 'hard-hearted' (*durius*) reply that he is struck down. This mild mannered Edmund is more redolent of the meek, sacrificial king of Abbo's *Passio* than the aggressive avenger of Hermann's *De Miraculis*. The reason, it would seem, is that William wished to make Edmund more palatable to a broader audience, to make Edmund a saint for the general populace. Indeed, within the *Gesta Pontificum* William goes so far as to describe Edmund as a figure; 'Who as king and prince won the guerdon of praise for being the first of the saints of his country.'[28] For William, Edmund was a saint who had 'won the

---

[27] *Ibid.,* pp.246-7.

[28] *Ibid.,* pp.242-3.

hearts of all the inhabitants of Britain' through his ability 'to spare the subjected and subdue the proud', a feature he exhibited 'now as in the past.'[29] In short, William's Edmund is the Edmund of *De Miraculis*, but shorn of all the immediate wrath that Bury's episcopal disputes had engendered in Hermann's text. William preserves Edmund's miraculous efficacy, he preserves, even enhances, the saint's ability to act as a protector, yet he sweetens Edmund's character through making him more temperate. In this way Edmund becomes a saint for all of England.

The next medieval writer to make use of the Swein narrative was John of Salisbury (c.1120-1180). Although he enjoyed a brief period of overlap with John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury, John ultimately belonged to the following generation of English scholars.[30] His major work, for which he is best remembered, is *Policraticus* or 'The Statesman', completed in 1159.[31] *Policraticus* was widely read during the middle-ages and has been heralded as a classic work of medieval political theory. Perhaps rather surprisingly, for a text which was so influential, the underlying thesis of *Policraticus* is still the subject of significant debate.[32] However, one theme which does emerge clearly is the author's preoccupation with the tyrannical misuse of power. Indeed, John dedicates the whole of *Policraticus'* eighth book to exploring the ways in which tyrants ought to be punished. As in other areas of his work, John draws upon a variety of *exempla* to illustrate the inevitable downfall of tyrants. This was John's key technique in developing his arguments. *Exempla* were illustrative stories

---

[29] *Ibid.,* pp.244-5.

[30] For a comparison between William of Malmesbury and John of Salisbury as 'humanist' scholars see; Rodney M. Thompson, 'John of Salisbury and William of Malmesbury: Currents in Twelfth Century Humanism', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford, 1984), pp.117-127. For a contextualisation of all three men and their relationships see; Thomson, *William of Malmesbury,* pp.72-5.

[31] David Luscombe, 'John of Salisbury', *ODNB*, (Oxford, 2004), [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14849].

[32] See; Cary J. Nederman and Catherine Campbell, 'Priests, Kings and Tyrants: Spiritual and Temporal Power in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*', *Speculum*, 66:3 (1991), pp.572-590.

designed to reinforce a moral point.[33] In keeping with John's scholastic background, the majority of his *exempla* come from either classical or biblical sources.[34] There are, however, exceptions, one of which is the tale of King Swein's death.

The story appears towards the end of the twenty first chapter of *Policraticus'* eighth book, a chapter which appears under the rubric:

> 'All tyrants reach a miserable end; and that God exercises punishment against them if the human hand refrains, and this is evident from Julian the Apostate and many examples in sacred scriptures.'[35]

That the Swein narrative should appear alongside the story of Julian the Apostate is significant and suggests that John may have consulted *De Miraculis* directly. As indicated above, Hermann draws a direct comparison between the Mercurius/Julian legend and that of Edmund/Swein. Although they clearly drew on Hermann's work, neither John of Worcester nor William of Malmesbury highlights any link between the two narratives.[36] Other than Hermann himself, John of Salisbury appears to have been the only writer to emphasise any similarity. For John, Edmund's action against Swein is a contemporary example of a long tradition, stretching back to Julian, whereby God punishes unrepentant tyrants. His account of the Swein story runs as follows:

> 'Among the nation of the Britons the hand of the most glorious martyr and king Edmund was employed for the suppression and punishment of the savagery of tyranny, as is witnessed by certain of our histories. For when the island of Britain was for the most part occupied, pillaged and ravaged by Swein, who was assailing the members of Christ with many persecutions, he burdened the province with the imposition of tax, which in the language of the English was called the Danegeld, and he ordered the tax to apply to the possessions of the just-mentioned martyr. There was a public supplication to Swein; he spurned these requests. The brother of a religious order was dispatched by the martyr in

---

[33] For more on *exempla* see chapter two of Larry Scanlon's, *Narrative, Authority and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007).

[34] Peter Von Moos, 'The Use of *Exempla* in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford, 1984), pp.207-263.

[35] John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge, 1990), p.210.

[36] Philip Shaw, 'A Dead Killer? Saint Mercurius, Killer of Julian the Apostate, in The Works of William of Malmesbury', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 35 (2004), pp.1-22.

order that the tyrant might be restrained by means of intimidation lest he oppress the Church of Christ, the house of the martyr and his free family with undue servitude. But in his impiety, he paid no attention to these demands, he got angry at the prohibition, he was hardened by the threats and, inflicting abuse and injury upon the humble messenger, he hurried along vengeance at the hand of God, provoked a scourging and ran with blind rashness into death by his contempt for the patience of God. And there was no delay. While walking alone among his soldiers in camp, as was admitted by them, he saw beside him the blessed Edmund with a sword; the martyr censured him most harshly and then hacked him to death. The tyrant died in his footsteps. And from that day, although the island has endured grievous tyrants, the Church of the blessed Edmund has remained immune from the imposition of the foregoing tax. For none of them was bold enough to provoke the martyr or to cause peril by the oppression of his church.'[37]

In terms of narrative structure, John follows Hermann far more closely than either John of Worcester or William of Malmesbury. Unlike his predecessors, he includes the episode detailing the failed delegation to Swein's camp. There are, however, differences between John's account and that of Hermann. In his narrative, John alters the mode of death. Rather than being skewered by a spear, Swein is hacked to death with a sword. It seems likely this change was an authorial introduction designed to differentiate Edmund's slaying of Swein from Mercurius' killing of Julian. There are also differences in the moral emphasis of the story. Swein's mortal punishment is now envisaged as a response to his general tyranny. John clearly recognises that Edmund was drawn to act by the plight of his people, but he only hastened 'the avenging hand of God', which Swein had already provoked. Edmund, in John's version, is not merely responding to East Anglian concerns, he is acting as a general agent of holy tyrannicide.

Through their writings, John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury and John of Salisbury situated St Edmund and his miracles within a broader historical and intellectual landscape. For John of Worcester, the story provides an explanation for an event which affected the whole of England: the death of King Swein. William of Malmesbury, on the other hand, subtly translates Edmund's persona into a form more acceptable to a broad English audience. John of Salisbury, in turn, recognises in Edmund

---

[37] *Policraticus*, p.212-3.

an example of God's response to tyrannical rulers. One might think that the insertion of Edmund's miracle stories into non-East Anglian texts, where they could be reused and reinterpreted in ways contrary to their original conception, could be problematic for Bury and its monks. Such a process necessarily involved a certain loss of narrative control. [38] Yet, despite the numerous changes they make, all three writers tacitly preserve elements of the protectionist ideology so apparent within *De Miraculis*. Furthermore, there is evidence that St Edmund's community actively engaged with external interpretations of their hagiographic tradition. A version of John of Worcester's chronicle, containing numerous amendments and interpolations, was produced at Bury in the mid-twelfth century. Among the changes it makes, it reintroduces material that had been excised from the Swein narrative.[39] Equally, it is clear that Bury's monks made use of John of Salisbury. Alongside the Swein narrative, John used a second *exemplum* involving St Edmund. The story recounts the death of Eustace, the son of King Stephen. Eustace, John reveals, died on account of his having ravaged St Edmund's lands and having stolen property belonging to the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds:

> '…he was touched by the hand of the martyr and struck down with a fatal illness, his life and affairs ceased on about the eighth day.'[40]

This story does not appear in *De Miraculis*, though it does appear in later redactions of the text. That Bury's monks took the tale from John's work is attested to by a textual correlation found between *Policraticus* and the fourteenth-century miracle compendium represented by MS Bodl.240. In John's text, towards the end of his chapter on unrepentant tyrants, he provides a list of individuals, from his own time, who have felt the wrath of God:

---

[38] Worcester's and Malmesbury's revisions of the narrative would ultimately go on to spawn rich and complex transmission histories of their own, see; Demidoff, 'The Death of Sven'.

[39] *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol.ii, p.642. The manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl.297, adds detail concerning the dying man who announced Swein's death.

[40] *Policraticus*, p.213.

> 'Why do I concentrate upon a few examples? In order that I might speak of familiar events, where are Geoffrey, Miles, Ranulf, Alan, Simon, Gilbert – not so much counts of the kingdom as public enemies? Where is William of Salisbury? Where is Marmion who, pushed by the Blessed Virgin, fell into the pit which he had prepared for others? Where are the others whose mere names would consume a book? Their wickedness is notorious, their infamy is renowned, their ends are unhappy and of them the present generation cannot be ignorant.'[41]

This passage was reproduced, in MS Bodl.240, with the names replaced by men familiar from St Edmund's hagiography:

> 'Where are they, so that I might speak a few names, King Swein, the prelate Harfast, Eustace son of King Stephen (of whom John of Salisbury writes in his Policraticus) Henry of Essex, Rodger Bigod count of Norfolk, William of Gislingham the king's justicar, John of Belmont, where are those whose names might fill a book? Certainly the malice of these men is detestable, their infamy renowned, their ends wretched; the present age should not be ignorant of any of those hitherto mentioned.'[42]

Not only does Bodl.240's author acknowledge John of Salisbury as a source, but in adopting his rhetorical style and in drawing attention to his use of St Edmund as an *exemplum*, he is also able to situate the abbey's protectionist outlook within a broader political discourse. It was no doubt hoped that such clever manipulation of the textual tradition would redouble the ideological potency of the abbey's conception of St Edmund. Yet, while St Edmund's hagiographers might have drawn inspiration from the wider literary environment, they also used a far more ephemeral source.

4.3 Oral dissemination

Throughout human history the principal mode of transmission for any story, indeed any form of information, has been oral. Even in environments where literacy was comparatively high and where textual communication played a significant role, a

---

[41] *Ibid.*, p.213.

[42] *Memorials*, III, p.326-7: *Ubi enim, ut de paucis loquar, rex Suanus, praesul Arfastus, Eustachius filius regis Stephani, (de quo scribit Johannes Sarum in Policratico suo,) Henricus de Estsexia, Rogerus Bigot comes Northfolchiae, Willelmus de Gislingham justitiarius regis, Johannes de Bello Monte(?) ubi, quorum nomina conficerent librum? Horum utique malitia execrabilis est, infamia celebris, infelix exitus; quem adhuc de quibusdam eorum praesens aetas non ignorat.* (author's translation).

written story would be paraphrased orally many more times than it was read from the page. The historical intangibility of oral expression leaves a vast lacuna in our knowledge of the past. As Walter Ong has stated:

> 'Of the countless languages which human beings have spoken over the millennia, almost none have any connection with writing at all or ever will have – since most of them have disappeared unrecorded.'[43]

The net outcome of this lacuna is that historians, and those in related disciplines, are essentially attempting, irrespective of the period they work within, to reconstruct the past based on a fragment of the information exchanged by individuals living at the time. Naturally, this reality has repercussions for our appreciation of narrative within the cult of saints.

Rachael Koopmans sees the miracle collections of the high middle ages as a secondary feature of a more far-reaching, oral phenomenon. Rather than the textual tradition, Koopmans sees the practice of oral storytelling as the life's-blood of any saint's cult. The cult, she tells us, was maintained not through texts, but by means of; 'swarms of stories that shrank and expanded according to their own internal and often mysterious rhythms.'[44] In her view, the writing down of miracle stories was an attempt, on the part of England's monastic communities, to 'stabilize the oral stories they most liked in a secure and unchanging format'. This, she goes on to suggest, was not conducted in order to propagandise the saint's cult through dissemination, but to 'imprison' and 'pin-down' the stories like 'butterflies in a natural history display.'[45] Many elements of Koopmans' argument ring true. Certainly the dynamic of oral storytelling was of the upmost importance in maintaining a cult's currency within broader society. A saint could only remain active as a cult figure if people continued to

---

[43] Walter J. Ong, 'Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualisation', *New Literary History*, 16:1 (1984), p.5.

[44] Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p.5.

[45] *Ibid.*, p.5.

see him/her as important and continued to talk about him/her. Equally, it is clear that memorialising the saint played some part in the collection of miracle accounts. Indeed, the prologue of *De Miraculis* cites the purpose of the text as being one of preservation. Hermann tells us that he wrote his text: 'so that what has been lost through generations of neglect may at least, so long as we are alive, be reinstituted by investment of the talent entrusted to us by God.'[46] However, this vision of the hagiographic lepidopterist, catching pretty narratives in his net, somewhat oversimplifies the relationship between oral and written traditions within the cult of saints. In reality, there was a close interplay between the oral and the literary spheres which not only saw stories captured, but also released back into the wild. The next two sections will consider the relationship between oral and literary narrative within the cult of St Edmund as a process of reciprocal exchange.

Oral to literary transmission

Almost all stories committed to text through miracle collections, in theory at least, began life orally. Koopmans considers that the stories contained in miracle collection roughly fall into two categories: fabulates and memorates. [47] Fabulates, are those 'popular' stories which, through a process of constant retelling, have evolved folk-tale like qualities. Koopmans sees them as the 'elephants of the oral world --slow-moving, long-lasting, not very numerous.'[48] St Edmund's hagiographic tradition, though subject to numerous influences across the centuries, may have been based upon a core of such stories. Catherine Cubitt, has recognised elements of Abbo's *Passio* as conforming to a fabulate structure, while Gransden recognises the same in some of Hermann's pre-conquest narratives.[49] Memorates, by contrast, are 'personal stories', tales recounting

---

[46] *Herm.*, pp.4-5.

[47] Koopmans, *Wonderful*, p.14.

[48] *Ibid.*, p.17.

[49] Catherine Cubitt, 'Folklore and Historiography: Oral Stories and the Writing of Anglo-Saxon History', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West,* ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross

the individual experiences of those who engaged with the saint. Such stories, which were often collected directly from those who visited the saint's shrine, recount cases of: 'personal illness and recovery, peril and rescue, oaths forgotten and remembered, injuries and punishments, and so on and on…'[50] The topical nature of memorates mean that they account for the majority of the more recent miracles in any collection. In the case of St Edmund, periodic revision of his miracle repertoire meant that the record of his miraculous actions remained topical.

Miracle collections, however, only represent a fraction of the stories that were in circulation at any given time.[51] What then were the considerations that decided whether a narrative was worthy of inclusion in a miracle collection? First and foremost, it had to be the correct kind of story. Susan Ridyard provides a concise definition of purpose of hagiography:

> 'Hagiography aims to educate and to edify: accordingly, its subject must present an example of Christian virtue in such a way as to encourage emulation. More important, it seeks to increase the reverence felt for the individual saint; closely related to this, it may seek also to enhance the prestige of the church or religious community which claimed to possess that saint's relics.'[52]

As hagiographers, the compilers of miracle collections not only gathered stories that extolled their subject, they also sought out tales that were didactic and spoke a moral message. Furthermore, as Ridyard points out, another prime concern for the hagiographer was to ensure that the standing of their patron institution was suitably amplified. As chapter three revealed, Edmund's miracle collections were tied in with the specific circumstances and needs of Bury's monastic community. Consequently, the stories selected for inclusion reflected those circumstances. Yet, for a miracle account

---

Balzaretti (Turnhout, 2006), p.197. Cubitt recognises Edmund's talking head and protective wolf as deriving from oral sources. Gransden, 'Composition and Authorship', pp.26-8.

[50] Koopmans, *Wonderful*, p.14.

[51] Simon Yarrow, 'Narrative, audience and the negotiation of community in twelfth-century miracle collections', *Studies in Church History*, 42, (2006), p.71.

[52] Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p.9.

to tell the right kind of story was not, in itself, enough. By the time Hermann was compiling *De Miraculis* it was no longer acceptable to automatically interpret an unusual occurrence as miraculous. A current of thought was rising, fuelled by the scholastic movement, which sought to differentiate between the direct influence of God and the regular workings of nature.[53] This shift, as Yarrow has pointed out, led to a sustained demand, within miracle collections, for reliable witnesses.[54]

Throughout the history of his cult, Edmund's hagiographers show a consistent preference for stories which are reliably corroborated. For example, Samson, in his reworking of *De Miraculis*, recounts the story of Lambert, an Angevin Abbot.[55] Lambert, who provides detailed testimony, tells of how his ship was once prevented from crossing the English Channel by high winds. Encouraged by an old monk to invoke St Edmund, he vowed that were he able to cross safely, he would visit the saint's shrine upon landing. The invocation having been made, the ship successfully arrived in port. As miracle accounts go, a safe arrival in port is less than impressive; it is Lambert's position as a reputable person that is key to the story's inclusion. Indeed, as if to illustrate this point, we are told that, immediately after Lambert had finished relating his tale, three men from London told of how St Edmund had provided them with a 'fair wind' while they were on a journey to the French port of St Gilles.[56] Their story, though similar in structure, is not related in anywhere near the same detail. It would seem that it was only included in order to complement their predecessor's account. As an abbot, and thus a witness of considerable authority, Lambert's narrative was given precedence.

---

[53] Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2002), pp.10-12.

[54] Yarrow, 'Narrative, audience and negotiation', p.71.

[55] *Samson*, pp.176-8.

[56] *Ibid*. p.178. Arnold notes that St Gilles is an abbey town, on the banks of the Little Rhone, near Arles and close to the medieval harbour of Aigues Mortes.

Sometimes it was not possible to name witnesses, in such cases the hagiographer had to find other means of authenticating the narrative. In one such case Hermann tells us the story of an unnamed, lame woman who was healed while visiting the abbey:

> 'Cured and holding no stick, she was made to stand where all might see her, to testify. There were also witnesses who said that they saw her when she was lame. Those who witnessed God's miracle magnified the praise for the martyr Edmund.'[57]

The story itself fits with the type of narrative that would be passed on orally to the monks at the saint's shrine. Yet, the lack of any named witness is far from ideal. In order to combat doubt, Hermann shows that the abbey performed due diligence by making her 'stand where all might see her', adding that there were unspecified witnesses who 'who said that they saw her when she was lame'.

The best form of testimony, of course, was personal testimony and hagiographers often include narratives where they themselves are the principal witness. One such example, where Hermann claims to have seen the occurrence with his own eyes (*oculisque vidimus*), involved a local villain named Wulmer who, having returned from a pilgrimage to Rome, was struck down by a fit.[58] Senseless for four days, Wulmer had a dream where he was told to make an offering at the saint's shrine. Following this advice, he was duly cured. This is a fairly standard miracle account, which follows the same, basic narrative structure as many other healing and curing miracles. Where it differs is in its description of the response to Wulmer's story. After Wulmer revealed his tale to Bury's convent, Abbot Baldwin was so impressed that he immediately called for the tale to be preached to the assembled congregation.[59]

In many ways Wulmer's account typifies the hagiographer's considerations in selecting an oral story; it reveals the saint's miraculous efficacy; it was reliably

---

[57] *Herm.*, pp.122-3.

[58] *Ibid.*, pp.104-9.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp.108-9.

witnessed and, in providing an example of a local man, a farmer on St Edmund's land, who benefitted from showing due reverence to his saint, it also delivers a message. Wulmer, within this story, is the ideal tenant of St Edmund, he is pious, respectful and, through sharing his story with the convent, shows due reverence not only to his saint, but to the monks and abbey as well. That Baldwin was keen to share this narrative with a wider audience, an audience likely to include local men and women, suggests that he was aware of this significance. Furthermore, Wulmer's story confirms that written miracles accounts were not merely textual artefacts; they began orally and were redistributed orally.

Literary to oral transmission

Simon Yarrow has suggested that, in order to encourage Christian virtue, tales from miracle collections were actively disseminated not only through literature, but also by oral means.[60] To illustrate this, he points to a collection by Goscelin of Saint Bertin which details the miraculous deeds of the female saints of Ely. In his prologue Goscelin states:

> 'We ought to vigilantly place them in the closet of our heart by attention to frequent reading, nor however, contain them only within our own walls but also to proclaim them far and wide to the praise and glory of the Godhead.'[61]

Yarrow affirms that: 'monks, through repetitive reading, were meant to commit these stories to memory and recite them to wider audiences.'[62] This recitation, he suggests, would often take place through sermons or as readings on special feast days. Indeed, this was the case with the Swein story, discussed above, which was employed as one of

---

[60] Yarrow, Narrative Audience and Negotiation, p.71.

[61] Yarrow takes this quotation from: Goscelin of Saint Bertin, The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely, ed. and trans. R.C. Love (Oxford, 2004), p.99.

[62] Yarrow, Narrative Audience and Negotiation, p.73.

the principle lessons in the liturgy for St Edmund's feast.[63] We can imagine that this was only one of many stories re-circulated in this way. It is impossible to tell in what form the original, oral narratives reached Bury's monks, but we can be certain that, in many cases, the stories will have been altered, infused with whatever political subtext suited the abbey's agenda at the time. There was clear utility in publicly reading hagiographic material to a massed audience. If the saint's hagiography was the narrative championed from the cult centre and enshrined within text, then such performances made it possible to deliver Bury's institutional vision of the saint to non-literate audiences.

Yet to deliver hagiography publicly was to transpose it from the comparatively stable, literary sphere into the mercurial realm of oral tradition. Unlike literary dissemination, which is at least partially prescriptive, oral transmission is considerably more fallible. As Julie Cruickshank, an anthropologist specializing in oral storytelling, comments:

> 'Oral testimony is never the same twice, even when the same words are used, because the relationship – the dialogue- is always shifting. Oral traditions are not natural products. They have social histories, and they acquire meaning in the situations in which they are used, in interactions between narrators and listeners. Meanings shift depending on how fully cultural understandings are shared by teller and listener.'[64]

Such inherent changeability means that once a written story is metaphorically released into the wild, its meaning and the interpretation of that meaning can shift both drastically and quickly. Indeed, it is entirely possible that the variations between

---

[63] These lessons appear in Pierpont Morgan MS. M 736. For a studies of this manuscript see; Rodney M. Thomson, 'Early Romanesque Book Production in England: The Dates of the Pierpont Morgan "Vitae Sancti Edmundi" and the Bury Bible', *Viator*, 2 (1971), pp.211-226 and Hahn, 'Perignatio et Natio'. For a detailed description of the composition of music for the Offices of St Edmund see; Rodney M. Thomson 'The Music for the Office of St. Edmund King and Martyr', *Music and Letters*, 65:2, (1984), p.189-93.

[64] Julie Cruikshank, *Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Vancouver, 1998) p.40.

different versions of the Swein narrative, discussed in section 4.2, come from processes of oral transmission.

Lost oral narrative

Thus far we have seen how St Edmund's hagiographers relied upon oral tradition to build their repertoire of stories, we have also seen how these stories might be redistributed back into the oral sphere, freshly imbued with ideological significance, but what of the many tales that went unrecorded? Occasionally, otherwise unrecorded stories appear in texts not directly associated with the cult centre. In the case of St Edmund, stories are found both in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* and in Guibert of Nogent's *Monodies* that do not come from any of Bury's hagiographic collections.[65] It is likely that these stories reached their respective writers by oral means. Unfortunately, the ephemeral nature of oral narrative means that the majority of such stories are irretrievably lost. That, however, has not stopped some from attempting to recover our lost oral heritage. Through the use of techniques such as 'form criticism' scholars have, with varying degrees of success, identified oral substrata underlying important pre-modern texts.[66] In the case of narrative sources, such efforts often rely upon identifying tell-tale grammatical or syntactical patterns that betray an oral root.[67]

However, we should remain cautious about viewing the contents of miracle collections as 'oral' in any sort of pristine way. As Aaron Gurevich has pointed out, the traces of oral tradition found in written sources, are only ever 'indirect reflections'. Gurevich further warned that, in a medieval context, such reflection is 'always and

---

[65] The Eustace narrative from John of Salisbury is discussed above. The story from Guibert tells of how an injured Roebuck with a broken leg was healed at the saint's shrine. See; *Monodies*, p.181.

[66] For an account of various approaches used to reveal oral elements within texts see; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 2002).

[67] Ong identifies nine elements that characterise oral traditions. See; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp.36-49.

inevitably transformed and distorted... through ecclesiastical ideology.'[68] The first part of his assessment is undeniable, the second part, however, can be cautiously contested. It is beyond doubt that the majority of orally based narrative traces found in medieval texts have been ideologically compromised. However, with adequate close reading, it is sometimes possible to pick up the residue of oral traditions unprejudiced by the author's own ideological concerns. Indeed, Gurevich himself ultimately concluded that in spite of the inherent bias faced when engaging with medieval material, it was nevertheless possible to 'dig down' to 'popular culture'.[69] Relying on two peasant dream visions, recorded in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Gurevich was able to uncover relics of the oral transmission process. The approach used here differs somewhat from Gurevich's in that it argues that these oral residues are often found, not in the principle narratives presented by the writer, but in the writer's responses to contemporary counter-narratives. Such responses are rare, but where they do occur, they indicate the reality that miracle stories, as recorded by monastic writers, are but the tip of the narrative iceberg.

In his chronicle entry for 1182 Jocelin of Brakelond describes the situation at Bury during an abbatial election. Several candidates had been put forward for the position and, as the convent had been unable to reach a decision, an election committee, including the eventual winner, Samson, had been dispatched to London to procure the king's judgement. As Jocelin tells it, the result hung very much in the balance and excitement was high amongst lay and ecclesiastical communities alike. Amid this restless environment, Jocelin recounts that two monks, one named William de Hastings and the other Edmund, predicted the outcome based on dream visions.[70] As illustrations of how the saint was seen to be at work in the political machinations of the

---

[68] Aaron J. Gurevich, 'Oral and Written Culture of the Middle Ages: Two "Peasant Visions" of the Late Twelfth Early Thirteenth Centuries', *New Literary History*, 16:1 (1984), p.51.

[69] *Ibid.*, p.51.

[70] *Joc.,* pp.18-19.

abbey, the dream narratives are interesting in their own right, more intriguing, however, is the suggestion that these were not the only visions experienced at the time:

> 'Dreams of this kind were being experienced by our brothers and accounts of them immediately circulated, first through the cloister and then through the courtyard, so that before evening the talk among the common people was: "This one, and that one, and so-and-so have been chosen, and one of them is going to be abbot."'[71]

In this extract Jocelin implies that there were other dreams, which predicted alternative outcomes, for alternative candidates. In the event, Jocelin recorded only the two most relevant to the final outcome. The other, unrecorded narratives were doubtless, with hindsight, deemed insignificant. Such stories accord well with Koopmans' definition of memorates. Equally, although Jocelin's work is by no means a miracle collection, it reveals that stories would only be incorporated if they related a narrative that conformed to the abbey's institutional requirements. Although they leave only a thin residue, the unrecorded stories alluded to by Jocelin suggest that the narrative environment of Edmund's cult was a dynamic one and that Bury's monks were active in exchanging oral narratives with the 'common people'. Formal sermons on feast days were not the only means of oral transmission, stories, it seems, also passed swiftly and casually through word of mouth.

Another example illustrating an oral tradition can be found in the fourteenth-century miracle compendium MS Bodl.240. Discussing the fate of William Bateman, bishop of Norwich (1144-55), who had undermined St Edmund's liberties, it recounts a dream by one of the abbey's monks. In this dream St Edmund marches from the abbey baring his relic sword:

> 'Seeing and hearing this the aforementioned monk, the reporter of the present story, uttering a cry of grief beyond measure feared that what the common people were saying at that time had come to pass, evidently, that after blowing

---

[71] *Ibid.* p.19.

his horn three times the blessed Edmund, abandoning Beodericsworth would return to Hoxne where he was martyred.'[72]

This extract records an oral tradition alongside the main narrative, one that was evidently circulating among 'the common people'. This specific tradition is recorded nowhere else, though its emphasis on St Edmund leaving Bury and decamping to Hoxne is in keeping with political developments of the day. By the fourteenth century relations between the abbey and the townsmen of Bury St Edmunds had become strained, resulting in several outbursts of civic unrest. The town burgesses, disaffected by the restrictions placed upon them, sought the right to elect their own aldermen and to set their own market tithes, prerogatives normally reserved for the abbey.[73] The recorded oral tradition reveals how narratives evoking close affiliation between saint and monastic community could, in times of crisis, be used against the abbey: if St Edmund was no longer present, then neither was the monks' reason for being there. Again, this anecdote gives us a rare glimpse into the vast oral hinterland that lay beyond St Edmund's hagiography.

4.4: Concentric circles

In this chapter I have attempted to give a sense of the narrative landscape underlying St Edmund's cult. This task has been a difficult one in the sense that the narratives that remain to us today primarily derive from St Edmund's hagiography and are therefore compromised by the abbey's ideological concerns. Nevertheless, it has been possible to discern certain trends, trends which can, in turn, be plotted in a diagrammatically similar way to materiality in chapter one.

---

[72] *Memorials*, III, p.325, *Hoc videns et audiens monachus praedictus, relator praesentium, supra modum lamentans timuit jam illud vulgi dictum tunc esse completum, videlicet, postquam tertio beatus Edmundus cornu suum flaverit, relinquens Beodricesworthe rediret ad Hoxne ubi martyratus occubuit.* (author's translation).

[73] See; Davis, 'The Commune of Bury St. Edmunds'.

Concentric circles of involvement

Before thinking specifically about narrative in St Edmund's cult, it is useful to think in more general terms about narrative exchange within a cult structure. How aware of, and how closely aligned an individual was to the cult, as well as to what extent they were able to exert an influence on its development was, to a large degree, dictated by their vicinity to the cult centre. Again, as with our approach to materiality, we can think in terms of radiating spheres of significance: proximal, local, regional, national and international (Tab.4.1).
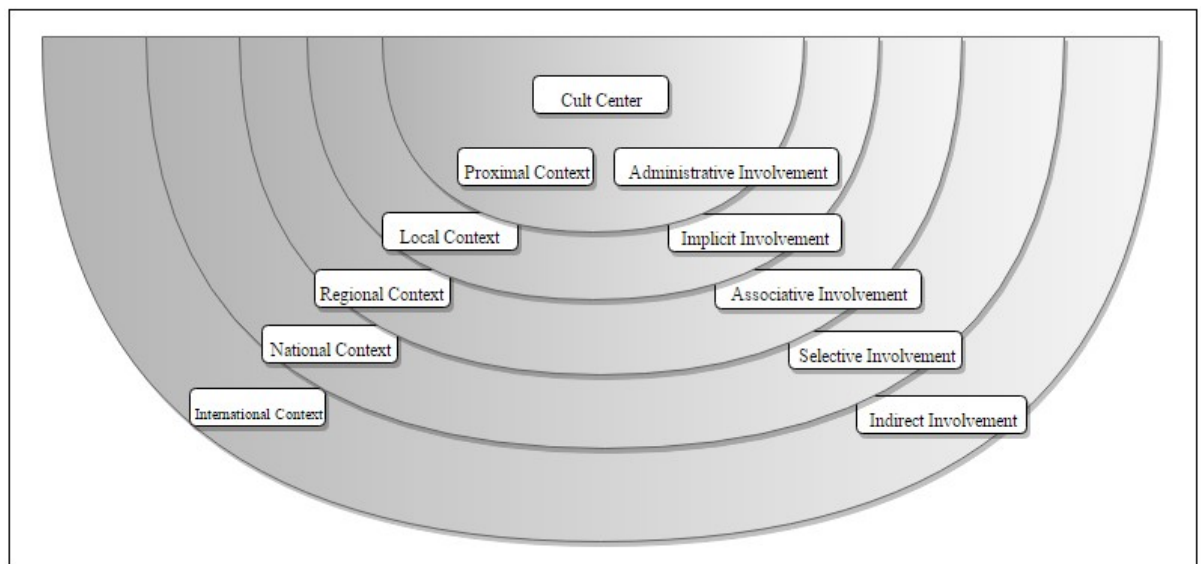
Tab.4.1: Bands of involvement.

Those within the **proximal** sphere, normally the religious community maintaining the shrine, are the most directly involved in the saint's cult. We might expect the identity of this group to depend most upon its role as custodians of the cult. Within a **local** context, it is not unusual for communities to grow up around a saint's shrine. Indeed, it is often the case that such communities develop with the express purpose of servicing the needs of the cult centre. This implicit link with the cult centre means that persons occupying the local sphere are considered to be the second most directly involved group. It is often the case that saintly figures have a **regional** significance

which extends beyond the bounds of their immediate locality, but which does not translate to a national or international level. Such significance can have implications associated with regional identity and can lead to a high degree of cultic involvement. In terms of the broader **national** and **international** spheres, the same logic applies, though involvement tends to be more selective and less direct. As we move through each successive spatial band, the degree of involvement and the degree of potential influence steadily decreases. The case study employed throughout this thesis, the cult of St Edmund of East Anglia, incorporates the full range of spatial spheres (Tab.4.2).

Involvement in the cult of St Edmund
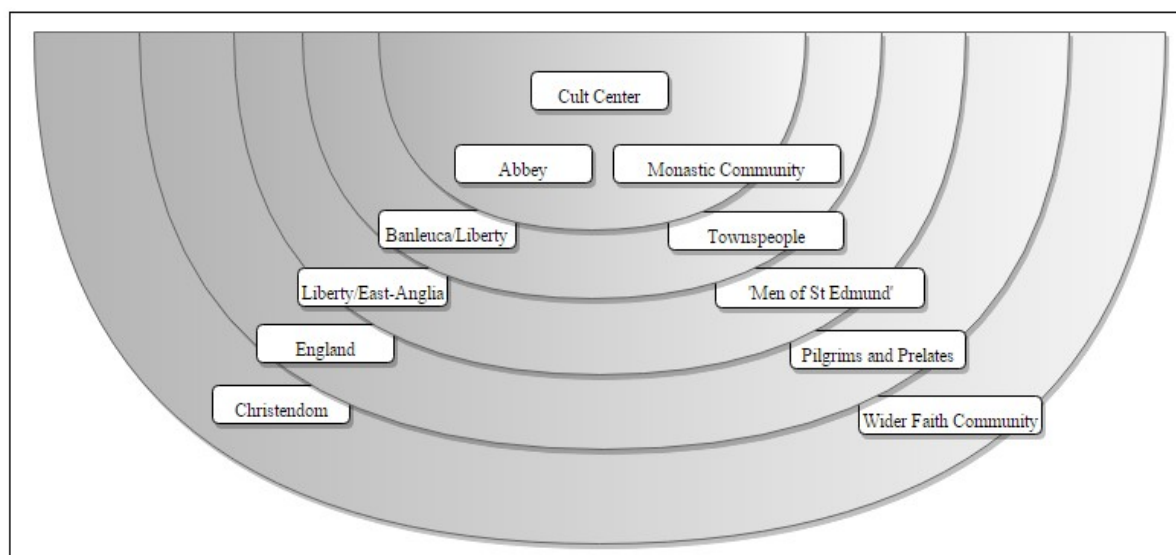
Tab.4.2: 'Involvement' in the cult of St Edmund.

As we saw in chapter one, Edmund's bodily remains rested at Bury St Edmunds **abbey** making it, in effect, the centre of his cult. The community within the abbey walls were the cult's inner core. These men, whose lives were dedicated to the protection, maintenance and veneration of St Edmund, represent the pinnacle of involvement. Through their self-identification with the saint, through the enactment of liturgy and ritual and through the execution of Edmund's seigniorial rights, they were the cult's authoritative voice, the saint's interlocutors and the arbiters of the saint's on-going

legacy. Next within the hierarchy of involvement were those persons living within Edmund's chartered sphere of influence, the men and women who resided within the town, **banleuca** and **liberty** of St Edmund; men and women who had direct tenurial ties to the saint. To these individuals the abbey, with its attendant rights and privileges, would have been seen as the immediate font of worldly authority. Yet, they would have been aware that the monastery was, in effect, a proxy for St Edmund himself. As such, their involvement with him would have been acutely felt. The wider **East Anglian** community, those who lived within the region, but not all of whom were tenants of the abbey, represent the next stratum in this hierarchy. These men and women would have been aware of the saint's significance in terms of their region's religious and general history and would have embraced him as an aspect of their identity. Beyond East Anglia, Edmund's cult can be seen to have existed through the myriad pilgrims and prelates who travelled to the saint's shrine from all across **England**, as well as from **Christendom** at large. Their veneration of Edmund may have been no less keenly intended, yet they are likely to have been less familiar with the regional peculiarities of Edmund's character.

Finding Meaning

Sphere	Type of Narrative Created
Proximal	Written 'hagiographic' narrative.
Local	Oral politically potent narratives.
Regional	Narratives of regional identity.
National	Broader, narratives couched in notions such as national history.
International	Generic narratives indicating Christian stereotypes.

Tab.4.3: Types of narrative by band.

Using the above criteria, one can look at the saint's narrative and see it become decreasingly idiosyncratic and more generic the further one moves from the centre (Tab.4.3). Bury St Edmunds abbey was, as has been seen, the primary compiler and

exponent of the saint's hagiographic narrative. Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries fresh hagiography was produced at the abbey once every generation or so. Additions and redactions within Edmund's hagiographic corpus tend to reflect the social and political concerns of the abbey at the time of their production. This being the case, the image of Edmund produced within these texts tends to be highly idiosyncratic in nature.

Within the local sphere, the primary mode of narrative exchange was likely to have been oral. Consequently, we cannot say with any certainty how the saint was imagined at any given time. However, as our discussion of embedded oral narratives revealed, the remnants of these traditions that survive suggest a heavily politicized tone. The saint was seen to be an active participant in community life and could even be co-opted and used against the abbey given the right circumstances.

Within broader East Anglia, Edmund embodied concepts of regional identity. Again, as with the local sphere, it is likely that regional variations on St Edmund's narrative were restricted to the oral transmission. However, there are examples which show that St Edmund's monks recognised this regional significance and sought to exploit it for their own ends. The manipulation of St Edmund's position as the fulcrum of a shared identity, is well illustrated by an incident related in Jocelin of Brakelond's chronicle. Jocelin recounts a dispute between the then abbot, Samson, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter (1193-1205). After a heated altercation Samson makes an extraordinarily sentimental appeal to the Bishop. Samson:

> '… spoke more moderately, asking him to treat St Edmund's church more gently on account of his local birth, since he was virtually *a man of St Edmund*, born and bred.'[74]

---

[74] *Joc.*, p.75 (Emphasis my own)

This plea was aimed to pluck the heart-strings of personal and regional pride; it was a persuasive tactic, which was meant to tap into the Bishop's latent identity as a 'man of St Edmund'. According to Jocelin at least, it had the designed affect:

> 'The legate blushed because he had unadvisedly poured out venom that had formed within him.'[75]

Jocelin's chronicle is replete with such references to 'The men of St Edmund' as a cultural and or social group. The extent of this group is attested by another incident from the chronicle in which one of Hubert's predecessors as archbishop, Baldwin of Forde (1184-1190), refuses to have his dispute with Samson settled in the county courts of Norfolk and Suffolk on the grounds that:

> 'The men of Norfolk and Suffolk were devoted to St Edmund and that a large area of both counties was under the abbot's command.'[76]

We can see from this reference that the archbishop not only feared the abbot's influence within Norfolk and Suffolk, the regions which had comprised the larger part of St Edmund's earthly kingdom of East Anglia, but the influence of the saint himself. The suggestion, as one might expect, is that a close relationship existed between the abbey and the saint. The jurymen of Norfolk and Suffolk, who were 'devoted to St Edmund' would naturally side with their saint, meaning they would side with his abbot. If we take Jocelin's chronicle at face value we are left, rightly or wrongly, with an image of East Anglia not only as a region happily under the protection of its patron saint, but also as a region happy to accept the earthly rule of the saint's monastic representatives.

Within the national sphere, as we saw with our discussion of the literary dissemination of the Swein story, narratives could contain petrified remnants of their local, political origins. Nevertheless, they tended to be watered down to conform to

---

[75] *Ibid.*, p.75.

[76] *Ibid.*, pp.46-7.

broader historical, philosophical and theological trends. The same is even truer within the international sphere, where a highly distinctive, local veneration could come to be seen as nothing more than a Christian archetype. The overall pattern to be discerned from this is one whereby the saint's character and narrative becomes less specific and more homogeneous as it spreads outwards from the centre.

Narrative Mobility
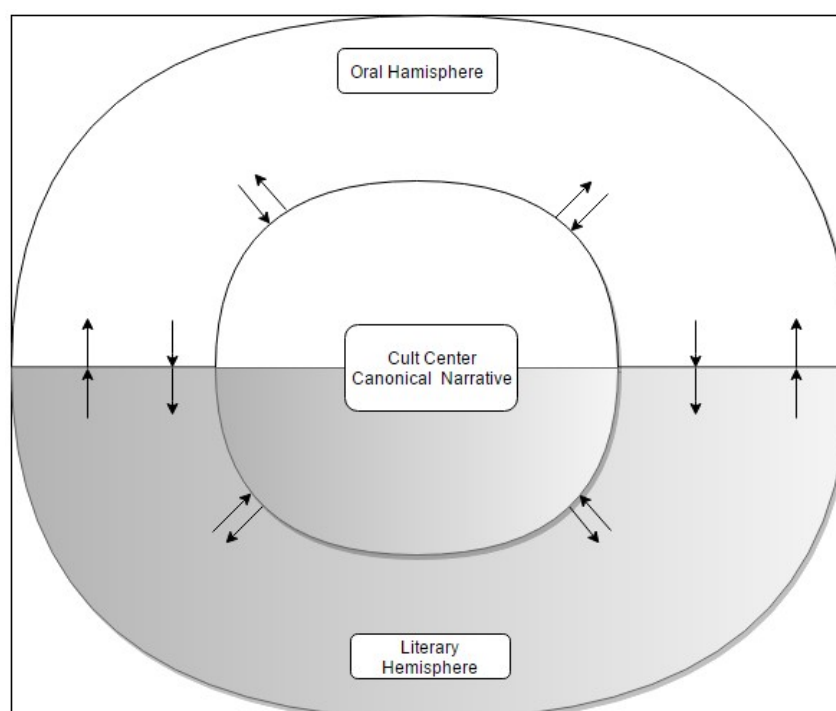
Tab.4.4: Narrative mobility.

So far we have examined how closer involvement with and proximity to the saint's cult centre led to more idiosyncratic and politically charged narrative. However, as this chapter has indicated, narrative, within any of the sphere's outlined above, was not static. Stories constantly flowed in and out of the saint's repertoire, both in literary and oral formats. Furthermore, it was equally possible for stories to exist in their own right, outwith the influence of St Edmund's abbey. How should we view this process? One way of imagining it is to place the cult centre as a juncture between two narrative hemispheres, one oral and the other literary (Tab.4.4). Although narratives shifted

independently from the oral sphere into the literary and vice-versa – a process beyond the cult centre's control - it was the role of the saint's community of interlocutors to form and attempt to enforce a prescriptive vision of the saint. This was done both by exporting narrative into and by pulling fresh narrative out of these hemispheres. Through such processes it was possible to project a vision of the saint in keeping with the community's agenda and to ensure that the saint's on-going miraculous deeds were documented.

4.5: Conclusion

This chapter has shown how, having developed a narrative for their saint, St Edmund's community went about disseminating it to wider audiences. Both the process of fashioning this narrative and the process of adding to it were acts that demanded a constant dialogue with other narrative interpretations; both oral and literary. While literary circulation of narratives invariably resulted in the saint being co-opted into external agendas, elements of the original message continued to be broadcast. Yet, while it was conceivable that a single community might control the material elements of cult, the same cannot be said for narrative. The stories told about a saint were free-flowing; tales were passed from one person to the next, endlessly shifting form and emphasis in the process. This ceaseless narrative circulation was an essential and largely oral component of cult.

Chapter 5: 'Species digna imperio'- Edmund in Morgan MS M.736

5.1: Introduction

Chapter four discussed literary and oral means of transmitting Edmund's narrative. There was however another medium through which Edmund could reach a broad audience: visual representation. The term 'visual representation' is preferred to 'art' chiefly because 'art', in modern parlance, has come to imply value judgement. What is intended by 'visual representations' are human attempts to depict a saint, either figuratively or abstractly, in an externally visible and recognisably iconic manner. While this chapter does refer to 'the artist' as the person making compositional decisions, this should merely be viewed as shorthand for the range of persons who may have had a hand in producing visual representations. This chapter and the next will explore the multiple ways in which St Edmund was portrayed visually during the middle-ages.

Throughout this thesis I have suggested that St Edmund's cult can be perceived as a series of 'concentric circles'. Consequently, relying upon one particular sequence of late-eleventh/early-twelfth-century images from Bury St Edmunds abbey, found in Pierpont Morgan MS M.736, this chapter will focus on how St Edmund was represented visually at his cult's centre. In so doing, it will be seen that visual representations could act as points of confluence between the narrative and the material dimensions of his cult. One might attempt to classify the images examined here as 'visual culture'; however, visual culture is itself merely an offshoot of material culture. [1] Visual representations demand the use of materials in their creation; they are made of things and appear on things. Equally, visual representations demand, in the context of the cult of saints at least, a degree of narrative awareness to find their meaning. The analysis

---

[1] Paul E. Bolin and Doug Blandy, 'Beyond Visual Culture: Seven Statements of Support for Material Culture Studies in Art Education', *Studies in Art Education*, 44:3 (2003), pp.249-50.

performed in this chapter will allow for a detailed consideration, in chapter six, of how figurative portrayals of St Edmund varied across the broader cultic landscape.

5.2: Edmund's Likeness?

A pertinent question with which to open this exploration of visual representations of St Edmund might be to ask how accurate images were in their physical depiction of him. This may sound like a hopeless exercise. However, the question takes on fresh significance when we consider the nature of Edmund's cult. As we saw in chapter two, unlike many other English cults of the period, Edmund's sanctity was based upon the inviolate and incorrupt nature of his remains. From his death in 869/70 to the end of the twelfth century, Edmund's body was removed from its tomb on at least six occasions (Tab.2.1). During these brief periods of exposure, the saint's body, his face and his features, would temporarily be revealed. Is it therefore possible that some of the surviving impressions of the saint may have been 'life' studies? The best way we can answer this question is to look to written source material for a physical description of the saint and to contrast any description with surviving pictorial evidence.

Our earliest source, Abbo of Fleury's *Passio*, provides ample description of Edmund's character, but offers a hazy picture of his physical appearance. Abbo merely states that the saint had '*species digna imperio'*, 'an appearance worthy of rule'.[2] The only other physical detail highlighted in the *Passio* concerns Edmund's post-mortem appearance. Around the saint's neck, Abbo suggests, was: 'an extremely thin red crease, like a scarlet thread': a remnant of Edmund's martyrdom.[3] This mark of sanctity aside, Abbo is less interested in Edmund's appearance than he is in his character. Likewise, later accounts, such as Hermann's description of Abbot Leofstan's opening of the saint's tomb, tend to dwell less upon Edmund's personal appearance and more upon the miraculous attributes of his remains. Hermann gives a detailed description of the

---

[2] *Abbo*, pp.14-15.

[3] *Ibid.,* pp.44-47.

contents of the saint's shrine, but when it comes to describing Edmund's appearance he simply states: 'He lies undecayed like a sleeping person.'[4] This lack of specifics suggests that Edmund's bodily appearance was not of foremost concern to Hermann either. Indeed, the only direct, physical description of Edmund's body to have survived comes from a later source and it too is frustratingly vague. Jocelin of Brakelond provides an account of Abbot Samson's translation of Edmund's remains in 1198. In it he describes the prelate's reaction upon opening Edmund's reliquary:

> 'So taking his (the saint's) head in his hands… he proceeded to touch the eyes and the very large and prominent nose and then he felt the breast and the arms, and raising the left hand, he took hold of the Saint's fingers and put his fingers between them. Continuing he found that his feet were firmly upright as of a man who had died that very day, and he felt the toes, counting them as he went.'[5]

The only details revealed are that Edmund had a prominent nose and that his corpse was well preserved. Again, the author is not interested in painting a detailed physical portrait.

Another area where Edmund was believed to reveal himself was through visions and dreams. However, where such instances are recorded, the saint's facial characteristics are again considered less important and less definitive than his demeanour, or his deportment. Often Edmund's garb is described. One such example comes from the Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond where, during a judicial duel, Edmund appears before Henry of Essex. Henry sees:

> '…the figure of the glorious king and martyr, Edmund dressed in armour and apparently floating in mid-air. He was looking at Henry sternly, shaking his head repeatedly, and gesturing angrily and indignantly in a threatening fashion.'[6]

A detailed physical description of the saint is less relevant here than the message expounded through his body language: that he is against Henry's winning the duel.

---

[4] *Herm.,* pp.52-3.

[5] *Joc.*, pp.100-101.

[6] *Ibid.*, p.63.

Similarly, an early-fourteenth-century account of a vision beheld by 'a certain monk named William de Hengham' describes Edmund, again dressed in armour, marching from the abbey church, his sword drawn, ready for battle.[7] Again, Edmund's demeanour is important here; it reveals that he is ready to undertake aggressive action on the abbey's behalf, but any specific details of his appearance are absent.

The fact that Edmund's hagiographers provide no physical description of him is not exceptional. For the physical appearance of a saint to remain undeveloped was a common feature of medieval saint's lives. Michael Lapidge highlights this point and suggests a reason for it: 'The saint's power of intercession was the hagiographer's uppermost concern: and hence it did not matter whether the saint was tall or short, fair or bald, fat or thin, blonde or brunette.'[8] In other words, the saint's actions, their character attributes, and what they represented were more important than what he or she looked like. One might argue further that in choosing not to elucidate a saint's physical appearance, hagiographers were able to open up the reception of their work to a wider audience. The lack of any consistent physical description would force the audience to draw upon a personal reservoir of iconic stereotypes, thus creating a bespoke interpretation of the saint's form. In such a way, a saint might traverse geographic barriers with a minimal need for cultural translation. Such an approach is reminiscent of the style employed by the writers of the New Testament, who preferred to focus on the deeds and the message of Christ rather than his physicality.[9]

The question posed at the start of this section, as to whether visual representations of St Edmund were based upon his likeness, is ultimately unanswerable. Indeed, in many ways, it is irrelevant. As Lapidge points out, a degree of variation in

---

[7] *Memorials,* III, p.324-5.

[8] Michael Lapidge, 'The Saintly Life in Anglo Saxon England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Michael Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), p.261.

[9] See; Robin M. Jensen, 'Jesus in Christian art', in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (London, 2010), pp.477-504.

the way a saint was portrayed was to be expected. Hair colour, eye colour and body shape were largely matters of artistic preference. Yet, such distinctions aside, a level of representative continuity could also be expected. In St Edmund's case this continuity can be found in the fact that, at all times, his appearance was of a king and saint 'worthy of rule'. As will be seen, what this meant and how it was achieved would vary in accordance with context. The following section will introduce some of the earliest known figural representations of Edmund and will analyse what these can tell us about the importance of images within his cult.

5.3: The Morgan manuscript

St Edmund could be many things to many people. Anyone, upon first encountering the saint's narrative, whether orally or in literary form, would immediately begin to form a cognitive image of him. Although the resulting visualisation would be heavily influenced by the skill and intention of the narrator/author, the end result is ultimately the product of the individual's imagination. In much the same way that we might picture a character whilst reading a work of fiction, a person's mental conception of a saint is informed by the individual's own vested preconceptions and stereotypes. In certain circumstances, however, such a bespoke, ephemeral and mental representation might be seen as less than sufficient. Indeed, in certain circumstances a more consciously designed and prescriptive depiction of the saint might be called for; this was no more so the case than at Bury St Edmunds. St Edmund was the very reason for the monastery's existence. It was therefore important that the Edmund take on a guise which emphasised both power and legitimacy, that he have *species digna imperio*.

In order to establish how Edmund's *species digna imperio* was realised, I will turn to the earliest surviving pictorial source for the saint's appearance: the miniatures of Pierpont Morgan MS M.736. As a complete work, MS M.736 has often been cited as

one of the finest examples of Anglo-Norman, Romanesque book production.[10] Scholars, however, have tended to approach the manuscript by tackling its various composite parts as discrete from one another. Some have looked at the miracle texts, others have examined liturgical elements; others still have looked to the artistic merit of the manuscript's illuminations.[11] While each of these approaches has yielded useful analysis of individual elements, they have done little to illuminate the purpose of MS M.736 as a complete 'thing'.

Folios	Content
f.1	Blank - Apart from modern notes
f.2	Letter from Henry I to Abbot Anselm
f.2-3	Letter from prior Talbot to Abbot Anselm
f.3-4	Record of monks' pittances given by Anselm
f.4v	Blank
f.5-6	Four Lections for the feast of St Edmund
f.6v	Blank
f. 7-22v	32 full-page miniatures
f. 23-76	Anonymous *Miracula*
f.76v	Blank apart from a note in a 17th C. hand
f.77-86	Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*
f.87-100v	Office for the Feast of St Edmund

Tab.5.1: Foliation of Morgan MS. M736

Containing both hagiographic and liturgical elements, Morgan MS M.736 is a typical example of an illustrated *libellus* or 'little book'. The term *libellus* should not be taken as a description of the book's size; instead, it was used as an idiom for a type

---

[10] For a detailed history of MS. M736's reception see; Adam Cohen's, 'The Historiography of Romanesque Manuscript Illumination', in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. C. Rudolph (Oxford, 2006), pp.357–81.

[11] License, *Miracles*, pp.cix-cxxvii examines the hagiographic materials contained within the manuscript. For liturgical elements see; Henry Parkes, 'St Edmund between Liturgy and Hagiography', in *Norman*, pp.130-159. Art historical approaches are best typified by the work of Barbara Abou El Hadj and Cynthia Hahn.

of book.[12] Such deluxe books, which were often associated with the shrine or high altar of major European monastic centres, were fairly common from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.[13] Manufactured at the scriptorium of Bury St Edmunds during the first three decades of the twelfth century, the illustrations contained within MS M.736 reveal how Bury's monks envisioned their saint at this time.[14] To better understand the significance of these miniatures, it is worth considering the manuscript's composition as a whole, as well as its readership and its practical function as a physical object. The manuscript's foliation is detailed above in Tab.5.1.

The codex begins with two letters directed to Abbot Anselm and a fiscal document related to the provision of monastic pittances (f.2-4).[15] Both letters concern Anselm's absence from the abbey. The first, written by Henry I, forbids the abbot from undertaking a journey. The second is a plea by Talbot, Bury's prior, begging Anselm to return from Normandy. [16] Although helpful in providing dating evidence, the relevance of these elements to the rest of the manuscript at first seems obscure. To modern eyes, these functional documents appear out of place in a book otherwise dedicated to the veneration of a saint. However, their inclusion implies that the manuscript's creator saw no distinct line between the sacred history he was writing and practicalities of

---

[12] In the case of MS M.736, which is 100 leaves long, the dimensions are 27.3 x 19.05 cm (10.75 x 7.5 inches).

[13] Francis Wormald, 'Some Illustrated Manuscripts of the Lives of Saints', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 35 (1952-3), pp.248-266.

[14] It should be noted that although there is little doubt as to a Bury origin for the text, there has been some debate as to the origin of the miniatures. It is clear that they share a relationship with late 11th/early 12th C. work from St Albans. See; Thomson, 'Early Romanesque Book-Illustration', and, Peter Kidd, 'Cambridge, Pembroke College Ms 120: Overlooked and New Observations', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 13:3 (2006) pp.289-299.

[15] According to the Morgan library's curatorial description, the MS is: 'Written in a minuscule book hand of the middle of the twelfth century. The preliminary documents (ff.2-4) are by three scribes, two of whom do not recur in the body of the MS. Hand I wrote f.2-3, 3v-4. Hand II wrote all of f.3 below the first five lines, and beginning again on f.5 he wrote all the text. Hand III is responsible for ten lines on f.4.' The full entry for MS M.736 can be found at [http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0736a.pdf].

[16] E.W. Williamson suggests that these letters refer to a pilgrimage to Compostella proposed by Anselm in his correspondence with Osbert of Clare. See; Osbert of Clare, *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster*, ed. E.W. Williamson (Oxford, 1929), p.195.

monastic life. Both were part of the monastic remit, both fulfilled the same purpose: to glorify God and St Edmund. R.M. Thomson suggests that the copying of important documents into such books was not uncommon.[17] Liturgical books, he tells us, were often associated with the high altar and therefore could come to be venerated as sacred objects in their own right.[18] Anything copied into such a book would be 'endowed with both sanctity and security.'[19] This may not only explain the inclusion of the Anselm documents in MS M.736, but may also shed some light upon the functional nature of the manuscript. In a situation where the monks of Bury were forced to contend with an absentee abbot, Thomson speculates that upon Anselm's return:

> '…the monks made him promise to stay home more often, possibly even asking him to swear on the Morgan Vitae. The presence of the letters in it was to remind him of the sacredness and seriousness of his pastoral responsibility.'[20]

The swearing of solemn oaths on sacred objects was a common practice in the middle ages. Oaths were often taken in the presence of relics, altars or gospel books.[21] The sacred presence of such objects was thought to make any promise or commitment binding in the eyes of God. It was equally common to invoke a saint in the process.[22] Yet, the use of a saint's *vita* as the material focus of an oath is less well attested. Nevertheless, in this case it would seem that, by incorporating written copies of the Anselm letters into the fabric of MS M.736, Bury's monks were seeking to bind their Abbot's behaviour in some way. Indeed, the process of symbolically binding an oath through the sanctification of documents has a strong precedent. One famous example

---

[17] Thomson, 'Early Romanesque', p.215.

[18] Francis Wormald, 'Some Illustrated Manuscripts' p.262, supports this suggestion, stating that illustrated *libelli*, such as MS M.736 would have been second only to relics in terms of their holiness.

[19] Thomson, 'Early Romanesque', p.215.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.215.

[21] Patrick J, Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1990), pp.37-8.

[22] Jan Ziolkowski, 'Saints in Invocations and Oaths in Medieval Literature', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 87:2 (1988), pp.179-181.

involves St Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester (1062-1095), who instructed his monks to copy the cathedral's charters into the 'Great Bible'.[23] Other well-known exempla can be found is the so called 'St Petroc Gospels'. Dating from between the fourth quarter of the ninth and the first quarter of the eleventh century, these gospel books contain a series of marginal notes detailing the manumission of some fifty Cornish slaves.[24] The text records that such manumissions were performed publicly at the high altar; the actions were further sanctified through their inscription into the gospel book. Indeed, at Bury itself, documents relating to the abbey's dispute with Bishop Harfast were inserted at the end of an early-eleventh-century gospel book.[25] The inclusion of such documents within MS M.736 and the implication that the book may have been used in such a performance only adds weight to the suggestion that the manuscript was in some way associated with the abbey's holy of holies, St Edmund's shrine.

That MS M.736 was indeed kept at St Edmund's shrine and was used in the ritual veneration of the saint is suggested by the inclusion of several pieces of liturgical literature. The documents on the first few folios are followed by four lections for the vigil of St Edmund (f.5-6), which complement similar material found later in the manuscript (f.87-100). Their incorporation suggests that MS M.736 was never intended to be purely ornamental and was instead designed to fulfil a practical role in the saint's liturgy. According to Barbara Abou-el-Haj '...the book was designed to be used publicly, in the church, for St Edmund's feast, when the relationship between the community and the saint was staged liturgically.'[26]

---

[23] For a thorough discussion of this event see; Francesca Tinti, 'Si litterali memorie commendaretur: memory and cartularies in eleventh-century Worcester' in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, David Pelteret (Farnham, 2009) pp.475-499.

[24] Karen Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult of St Petroc* (Woodbridge, 2000) pp.52-3.

[25] The book in question is Brit. Lib. Harl. MS 76 f.7-8. For the charters see; Douglas, *Feudal Documents*, pp.xxv, xxxii-xxxiv and Royal Charters 7-8.

[26] Abou-el Haj, 'Bury St Edmunds Abbey', p.6.

Beginning with f.7r, the lections are followed by 32 full page colour miniatures, positioned on 16 leaves of thickened vellum. Starting with the early history of England and ending with an apotheosis scene (F.22v), the miniatures encompass a broad cross-section of Edmund's hagiography. Although they correspond to literary episodes found in the manuscript's texts, the miniatures are not, themselves, accompanied by any inscriptions. Instead, they form a purely pictorial sequence portraying Edmund's life and miracles as a single, unified and continuous narrative. By contrast, MS M.736's compiler presents Edmund's written hagiography as two discrete works: the anonymous redaction of Hermann's *De Miraculis*, which Tom License has attributed to Goscelin of St Bertin (F.23-76v), and Abbo's *Passio* (F.77-86).

Despite the fact that the miniatures are sequenced chronologically - placing the events from the *Passio* before the saint's later miracles - the written hagiography in MS M.736 is out of sequence: Edmund's miracles appear before Abbo's *Passio*. This inconsistency between text and image led Sir George Warner to suggest that the miniatures predate the rest of the manuscript and were originally intended for an earlier work.[27] He believed the most likely contender to be British Library MS. Cotton Tiberius B.ii. Further circumstantial evidence suggests there may be some merit to his argument. The miniatures are not the only illustrative features contained within the Morgan MS. Throughout the manuscript's various works there are a series of 39 decorated capitals, many of them historiated. The motifs that adorn the capitals vary from intricate floral patterns to visual representations of textual scenes. Edmund is depicted several times; on F.23 he is seen, as in the miniature on F.21v, impaling Swein Forkbeard with his lance; on Fs.49 and 74 he is shown holding the palm of martyrdom in scenes reminiscent of his apotheosis (F.22v); while Fs.94v and 97 show scenes from his martyrdom which are elsewhere rendered as miniatures (F.14-16). While the figurative

---

[27] George Warner (ed.), *The New Palaeographical Society: Facsimiles of Manuscripts and Inscriptions*, ser.1, vol.2 (London, 1903-12), pp.51-8. — cited in the Morgan Library's catalogue description.

elements within the capitals share a degree of thematic commonality with the miniatures, they nonetheless differ stylistically. From their execution alone it is clear that the capitals are the work of another artist. Peter Kidd, in his analysis of English Romanesque book illustration, points to the fact that both Pembroke MS 120 and the St Albans Psalter (Hildesheim MS L) use different artists for different illustrative elements. Kidd cites this as evidence that 'differences of style and technique do not necessarily mean that... images did not originally belong with the rest of the manuscript.' [28] Yet, while this assertion may be true of Pembroke MS 120, it seems less likely the case for MS M.736, especially when the compositional inconsistencies, highlighted above, are considered.

If Warner's proposition that the miniatures were originally intended for another book is accepted, then we are left to ask why they ultimately found their way into the Morgan manuscript. One possible explanation may be found in the incomplete nature of what Warner considered to be the most likely candidate for an original companion manuscript: MS Cotton Tiberius B.ii. Tiberius B.ii contains a version of Abbo's *Passio,* as well as the earliest surviving copy of Hermann's *De Miraculis*.[29] Notably, unlike MS M.736, Tiberius B.ii presents the two writers' works sequentially. Yet, the Tiberius manuscript is incomplete in two ways; firstly, the text contains numerous blank spaces where Edmund's name was intended to be written in coloured ink; secondly, the text breaks off abruptly during the recounting of *De Miraculis*' final miracle story.[30] In terms of dating, Tiberius B.ii belongs to the very end of the eleventh century. It is possible that by this time Hermann's version of Edmund's miracles had, for some reason, gone

---

[28] Kidd, 'Cambridge, Pembroke', p.292.

[29] *Miracles*, p.xcii.

[30] For a catalogue description of Tiberius B.ii see; Thomas D. Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials Relating to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol.I, pt.2 (London, 1862), p.533 (no.1109). See also; Gransden, 'Composition and Authorship', p.2f.

out of fashion.[31] The faintly anti-Norman tone of the work, not to mention the heavily politicised character of its narrative, might have seemed out of keeping to a cult with its eyes set towards expansion. It is conceivable, therefore, that the abbey employed someone, possibly Goscelin of St Bertin, to rework Hermann's material into a more palatable form. If this were the case, then it is perhaps understandable that the monks of Bury St Edmunds should choose to abandon work on Tiberius B.ii. Other scholars have demonstrated that the Morgan miniatures were the work of a visiting artist from the St Albans scriptorium.[32] If these miniatures were executed separately from the abandoned Tiberius text, then the monks would have found themselves, upon the miniatures' completion, with a collection of deluxe images and nowhere to put them. Ultimately, the decision could have been made to incorporate them into their new *libellus* (MS M.736) which contained a new written version of Edmund's miracles. Clearly Tiberius B.ii had reached a sufficiently advanced state of completion to warrant its long-term preservation, though its unfinished features make it clear that it never attained its intended luxury state. It is likely that both Tiberius B.ii and MS M.736 belonged to St Edmund's shrine. An inscription in the Tiberius manuscript ties it to the shrine, while the liturgical nature of MS M.736 ensured that it was equally well suited to such an environment.[33]

It is also worthwhile considering why the Morgan manuscript's compiler opted to arrange the miniatures as a prefatory sequence rather than including them alongside the texts. Francis Wormald confirms that to place miniature sequences before textual content was a common compositional strategy, though he makes little comment upon

---

[31] License provides a detailed description of the alterations made to Hermann's text by the author of the MS M.736 *miracula.* See; License, 'History and Hagiography', p.526f.

[32] See, R.M. Thomson, 'Early Romanesque', and Katherine Bateman, 'Pembroke 120 and Morgan 736: A Reexamination of the St. Albans Bury St. Edmunds Manuscript Dilemma', *Gesta*, 17:1 (1978), pp.19-26.

[33] A note on folio 2 of Tiberius B.ii, written by Henry of Kirkstead, a late 13th C librarian at Bury, reads '*Liber feretrariorum sancti Edmundi in quo continentur uita passio et miracula sancti Edmundi. Item vite et passionesx xxiij. Sanctorum in anglia.*' The reasons for supposing that MS M.736 belonged to the shrine are discussed above.

why the images might be arranged in this way.[34] I would suggest that the reason for this arrangement lies with the book's practical function. We have seen already that MS M.736 has been recognised as belonging to the abbey's shrine. The shrine was a public space visited by pilgrims from across England and beyond. It is likely that most visitors would not have been entirely familiar with St Edmund's story or at the very least would have arrived with the expectation of hearing it told. This being the case, the shrine afforded an opportunity for the monks to present their vision of St Edmund to a wider audience. During religious festivals and ceremonies this would have been achieved through liturgical readings, presumably taken from the Morgan manuscript itself. In such circumstances, the monks would be better able to bring Edmund's story to life by having a visual epitome ready to hand.

It is unlikely that a deluxe and well preserved manuscript such as MS M.736 would have been available for open viewing, its images were clearly not designed to be seen by a large audience. There were, however, other images in the vicinity of St Edmund's shrine. Large-scale visual sequences are known to have existed from at least the late-twelfth century onwards. One such cycle is described in a thirteenth-century manuscript: now London, Royal College of Arms MS Arundel XXX.[35] Forming a series of wall hangings, which M.R. James identified as belonging to Edmund's shrine, it depicted a series of scenes taken from the saint's hagiography.[36] This cycle of images, while not identical to that in MS M.736, retains the same structure of illustrating first scenes from Edmund's passion and second scenes of his 'miracles'. Cyclical hangings and wall paintings would have served to illustrate, for the massed ranks of pilgrims, the narrative scenes conjured up during sermons. The pictorial sequence in MS M.736 may have fulfilled a similar role, on a more limited, yet no less important, basis. The valuable

---

[34] Wormald, 'Some Illustrated Manuscripts', p.261f.

[35] For a description of the manuscript see; W.H. Black, *Catalogue of the Arundel Manuscripts in the library of the College of Arms* (London, 1829), pp.44-57.

[36] James, 'On the Abbey', p.187, provides a copy of the excerpt.

nature of the manuscript suggests that the miniatures would have been reserved for a select audience, perhaps the abbey's higher status visitors. The idea that Bury's wealthier and more influential patrons were afforded privileged access to spiritually potent objects has precedent. The Morgan manuscript's redaction of *De Miraculis* confirms that 'one of England's great nobles' was permitted a private viewing, in the abbey's crypt, of Edmund's relic-shirt.[37] The man in question, who is never named, is said to have 'knelt, revered the relics, then went away very grateful.'[38] Likewise, to be invited to view the images in MS M.736 would clearly have been a far more intimate and perhaps a more affective experience than engaging with the more public images surrounding the shrine. One can imagine that such a restricted viewing would have been accompanied by an oral rendition of Edmund's life and miracles by a member of Bury's convent.

5.4: The Morgan miniatures

If the preceding section encouraged a greater appreciation of the Morgan manuscript as a complete, material object, then the following section shifts focus to the most broadly studied, individual aspect of the manuscript: its miniatures. As highlighted earlier, scholarly interest in Morgan MS M.736 has tended towards producing studies concentrating on particular elements of the manuscript. This discrimination is most evident in the field of art history, where specialist selectivity has extended to isolating and analysing individual illustrations. For example, Barbara Abou-El-Haj, in her 1983 study of the manuscript, ignores the majority of the miniatures, choosing to focus on a few which support her theory that the images profess an aggressive, political ideology.[39] Cynthia Hahn on the other hand selects different images from the series to suggest that

---

[37] *Gosc.*, pp.286-7.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp.288-9.

[39] Abou-el Haj, 'Bury St Edmunds Abbey'.

the manuscript's producers were aiming to pitch Edmund as a national saint.[40] Both writers make strong cases, but their selectivity means that they ignore the fact that the miniatures were always intended to function as a sequence. To understand how they functioned and what they were designed to say, one needs to approach the sequence as a whole. However, rather than individually analyse each of the 32 miniatures in the cycle, this thesis divides them into groups. Together, it is argued that these groups form the constituent elements of a traditional dramatic, narrative sequence. This sequence, it is suggested, illustrates how the community of Bury St Edmunds sought to portray Edmund as an ideal and eternal king for East Anglia. This examination will also reveal that the artist, or person responsible for arranging the miniatures, was familiar with Edmund's written hagiography, showed a well-honed awareness of narrative structure and was not above editing existing tradition in order to give his message greater resonance.

If, as scholars have suggested, the Morgan Miniature cycle predates the written elements of MS M.736, then it may very well represent the first attempt to produce a fully integrated hagiographic tradition for St Edmund. Containing scenes from both Abbo's *Passio* and Hermann's *De Miraculis*, the Morgan miniature cycle is the result of a careful editing process. With no accompanying text, the images needed to tell a progressive and self-evident story. Necessarily, its creator had to be selective in choosing which scenes to illustrate. The resultant sequence is effectively an epitome of St Edmund's legend: a visual abstract revealing who Edmund was and what he stood for. Tab.5.2 details the content of the 32 images, and how they correspond to the two written sources. Each image has been allotted an MM (Morgan Miniature) number: the images themselves are shown, in order, on the proceeding pages.

---

[40] Hahn 'Peregrinatio et Natio'.

	MS folio	Scene Detail	Corresponding written source
1	fol. 7R	Saxons on 6 ships coming to Britain	Abbo Chapter 1
2	fol.7V	Saxons, Jutes, Angles fight against Britons	Abbo Chapter 1
3	fol. 8R	Three tribes divide the kingdom	Abbo Chapter 1
4	fol. 8V	Edmund's coronation	Abbo Chapter 3
5	fol. 9R	Edmund gives coins to beggars	Abbo Chapter 4
6	fol. 9V	Danes arrive in England	Abbo Chapter 5
7	fol. 10R	Danes sack an English town	Abbo Chapter 5
8	fol. 10V	Inguar demands Edmund's submission	Abbo Chapter 7
9	fol. 11R	Edmund takes council with his bishop	Abbo Chapter 8
10	fol. 11V	Inguar receives news of Edmund's refusal	Abbo Chapter 10
11	fol. 12R	Edmund is seized by the Danes	Abbo Chapter 10
12	fol. 12V	Edmund is dragged away in bondage	Abbo Chapter 10
13	fol. 13R	Edmund is stripped	Abbo Chapter 10
14	fol. 13V	Edmund is tied to a tree and beaten	Abbo Chapter 10
15	fol. 14R	Edmund is shot through with arrows	Abbo Chapter 10
16	fol. 14V	Edmund is beheaded, his head thrown in a thicket	Abbo Chapter 10-12
17	fol. 15R	The Danes leave on their ships	Abbo Chapter 10-11???
18	fol. 15V	Edmund's decapitated body is found	Abbo Chapter 12
19	fol. 16R	Edmund's head is found, guarded by a wolf	Abbo Chapter 13
20	fol. 16V	Edmund's head is carried away, wolf follows	Abbo Chapter 14
21	fol. 17R	Edmund's head is re-joined with his body	Abbo Chapter 14
22	fol. 17V	Edmund's complete body is carried away	Abbo Chapter 14
23	fol. 18R	Edmund's body is laid in its shrine	Abbo Chapter 14
24	fol. 18V	Thieves attempt to break into Edmund's church	Abbo Chapter 16
25	fol. 19R	Thieves are captured and sentenced	Abbo Chapter 16
26	fol. 19V	Thieves are hung	Abbo Chapter 16
27	fol. 20R	A priest's house is burned after refusing Edmund sanctuary	Hermann Chapter 10-11
28	fol. 20V	Edmund's cart miraculously crosses a narrow bridge	Hermann Chapter 12
29	fol. 21R	Aelwine is expelled by Swein	Hermann Chapter 5
30	fol. 21V	Swein, in his bed, is slain by St Edmund	Hermann Chapter 5
31	fol. 22R	A dying man announces a vision of Swein's death	Hermann Chapter 7
32	fol. 22V	Edmund's Apotheosis	Abbo Chapter 18???

Tab.5.2: The 32 Images in the MS. M736 Cycle.

Fig.5.1: MM.1.

Fig.5.2: MM.2.

Fig.5.3: MM.3.

Fig.5.4: MM.4.

Fig.5.5: MM.5.

Fig.5.6 MM.6.

Fig.5.7: MM.7.

Fig.5.8: MM.8.

Fig.5.9: MM.9.

Fig.5.10: MM.10.

Fig.5.11: MM.11.

Fig.5.12: MM.12.

Fig.5.13: MM.13.

Fig.5.14: MM.14.

Fig.5.15: MM.15.

Fig.5.16: MM.16.

Fig.5.17: MM.17.

Fig.5.18: MM.18.
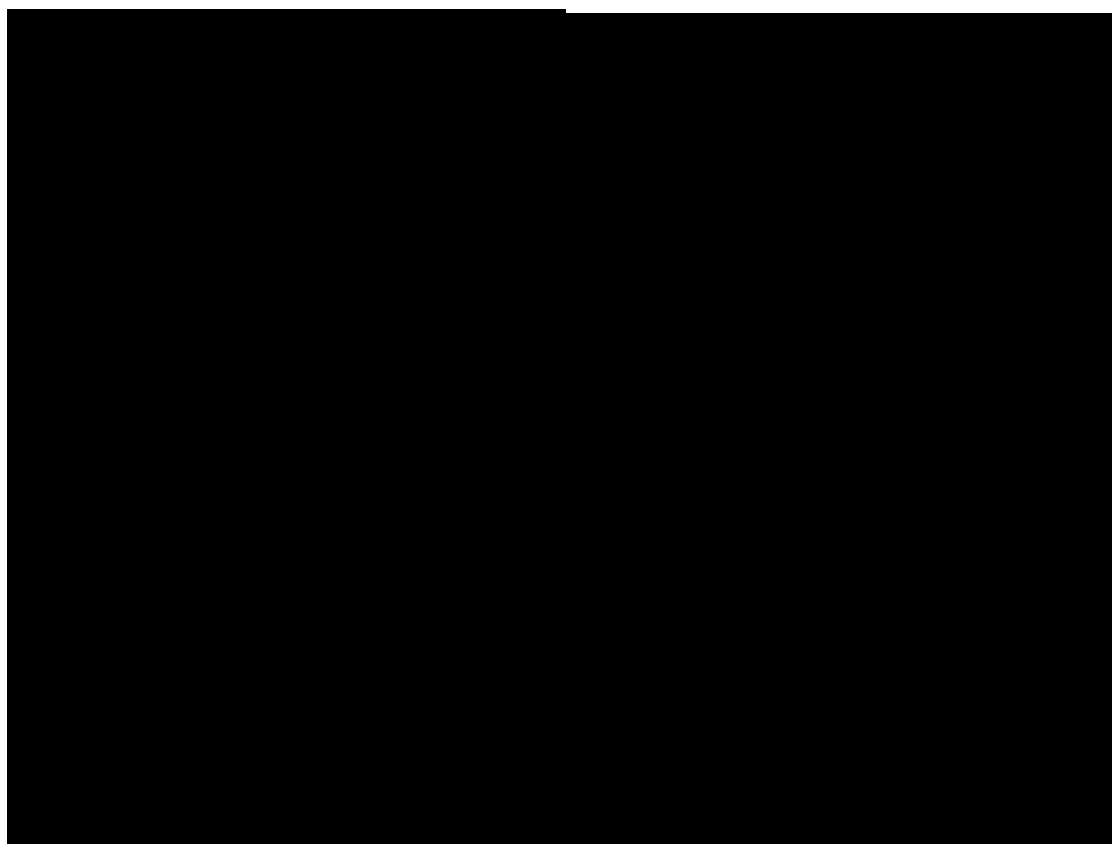
Fig.5.19: MM.19.
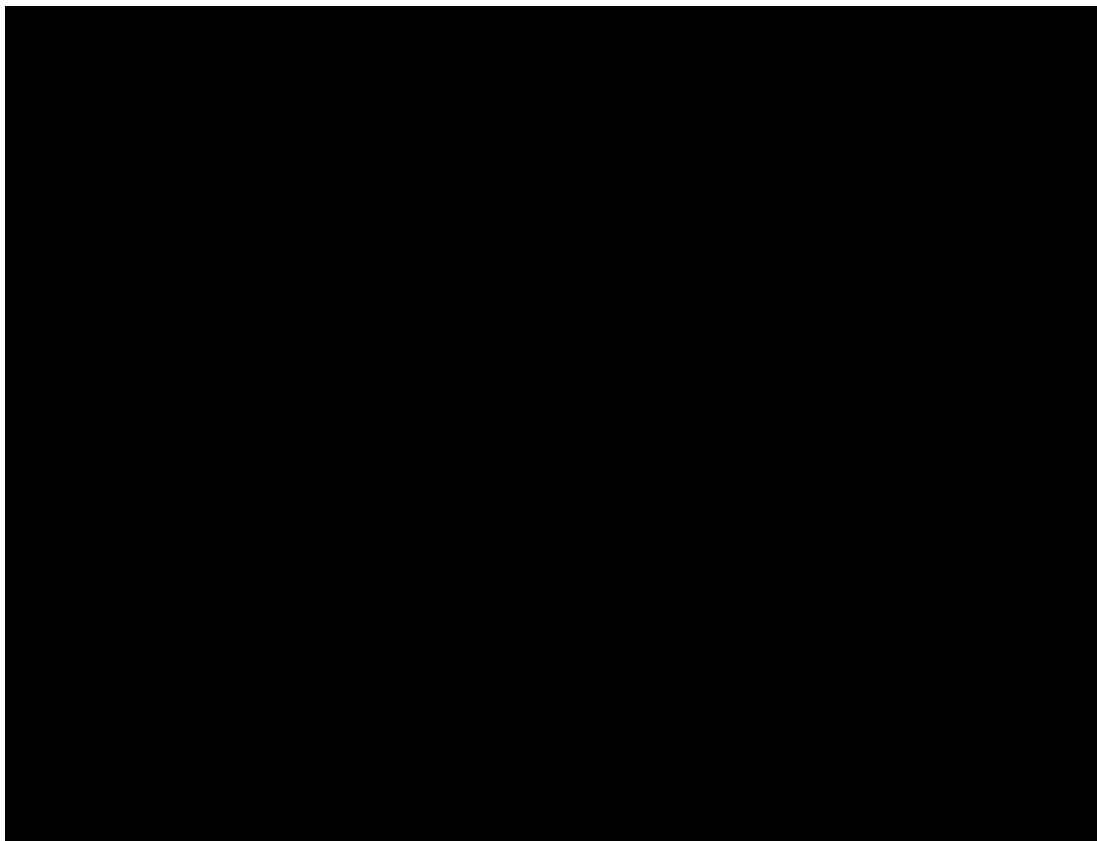
Fig.5.20: MM.20.
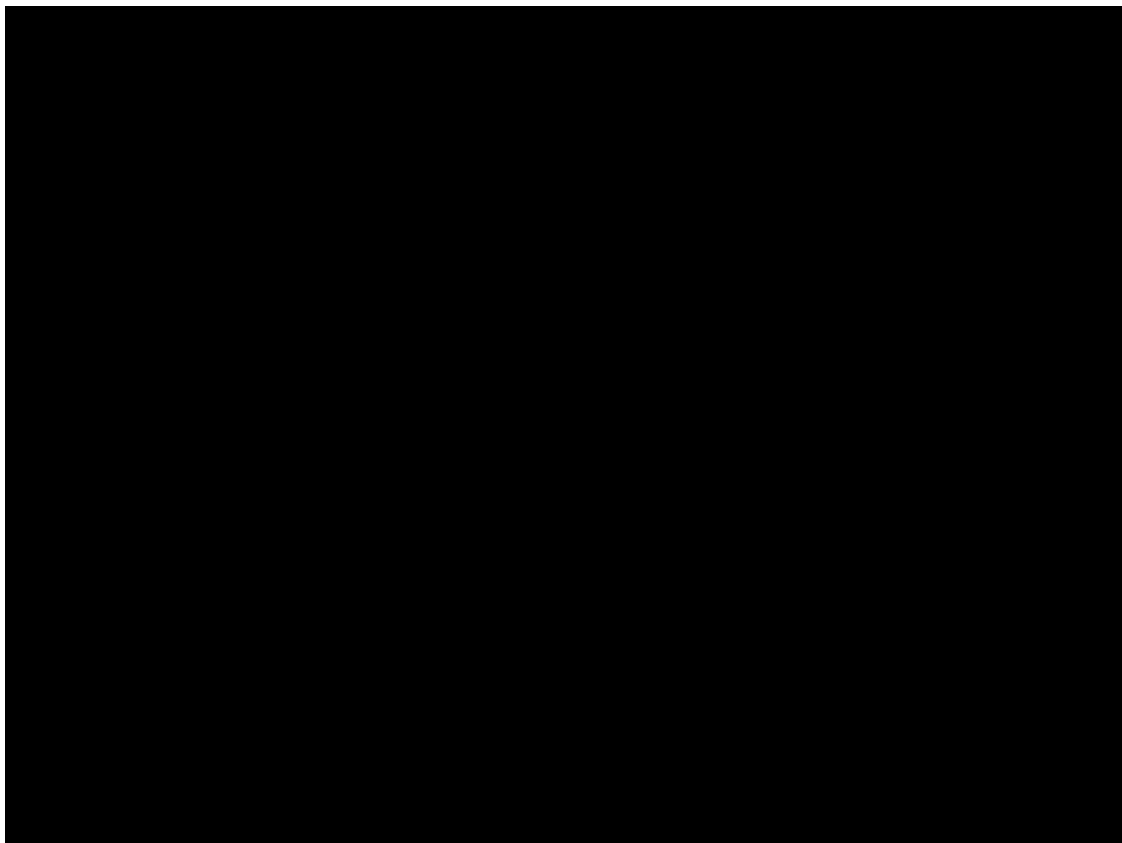
Fig.5.21: MM.21.

Fig.5.22: MM.22.
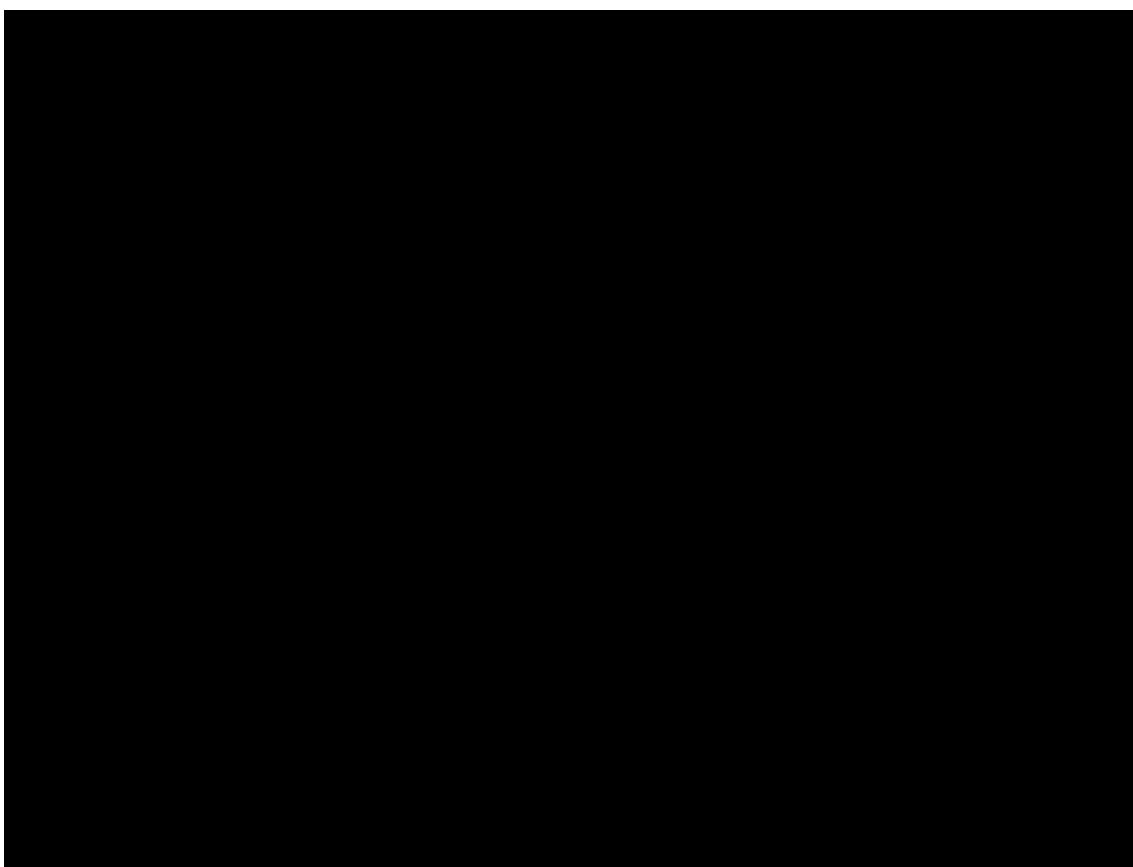
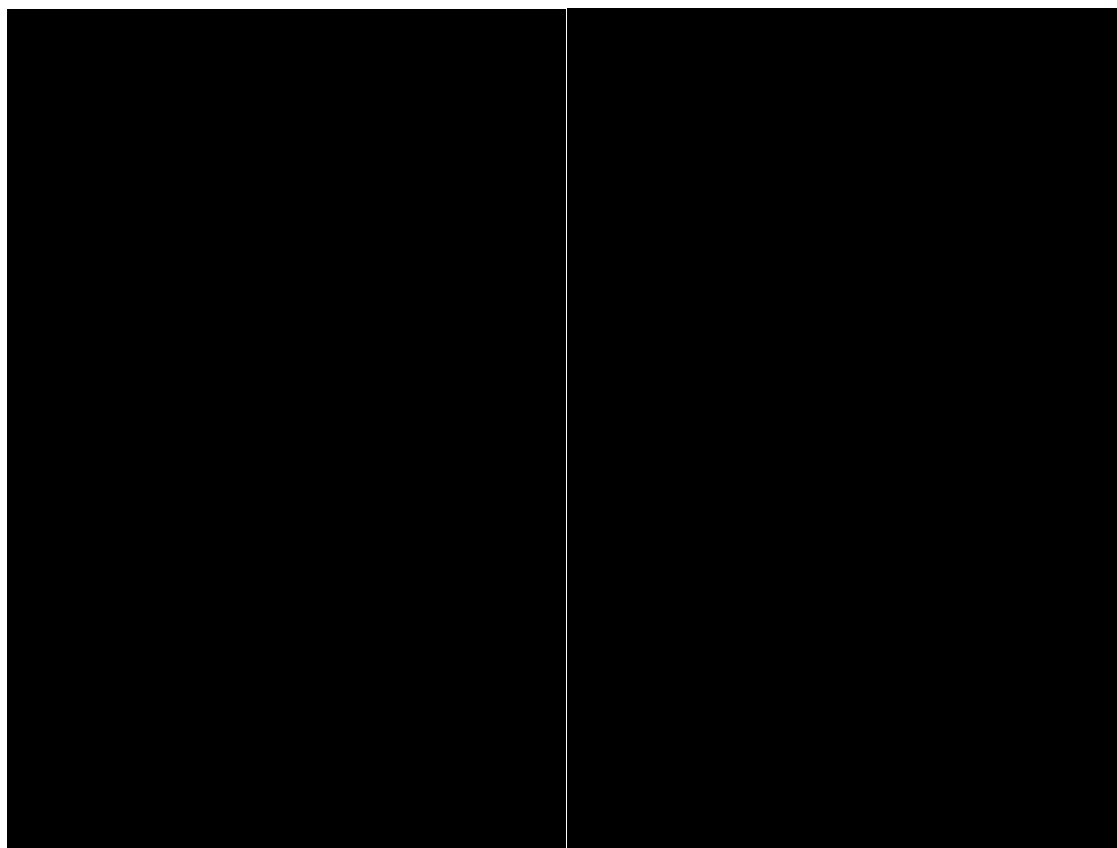
Fig.5.23: MM.23.

Fig.5.24: MM.24.
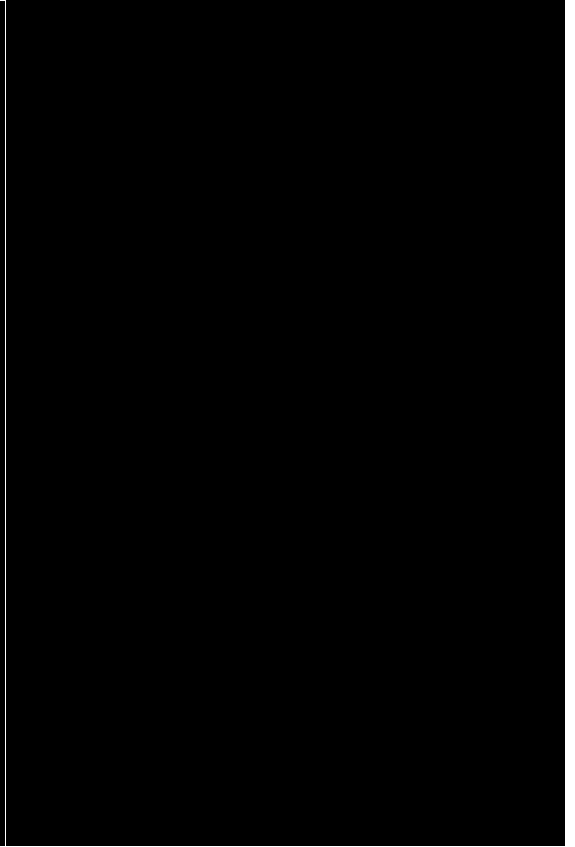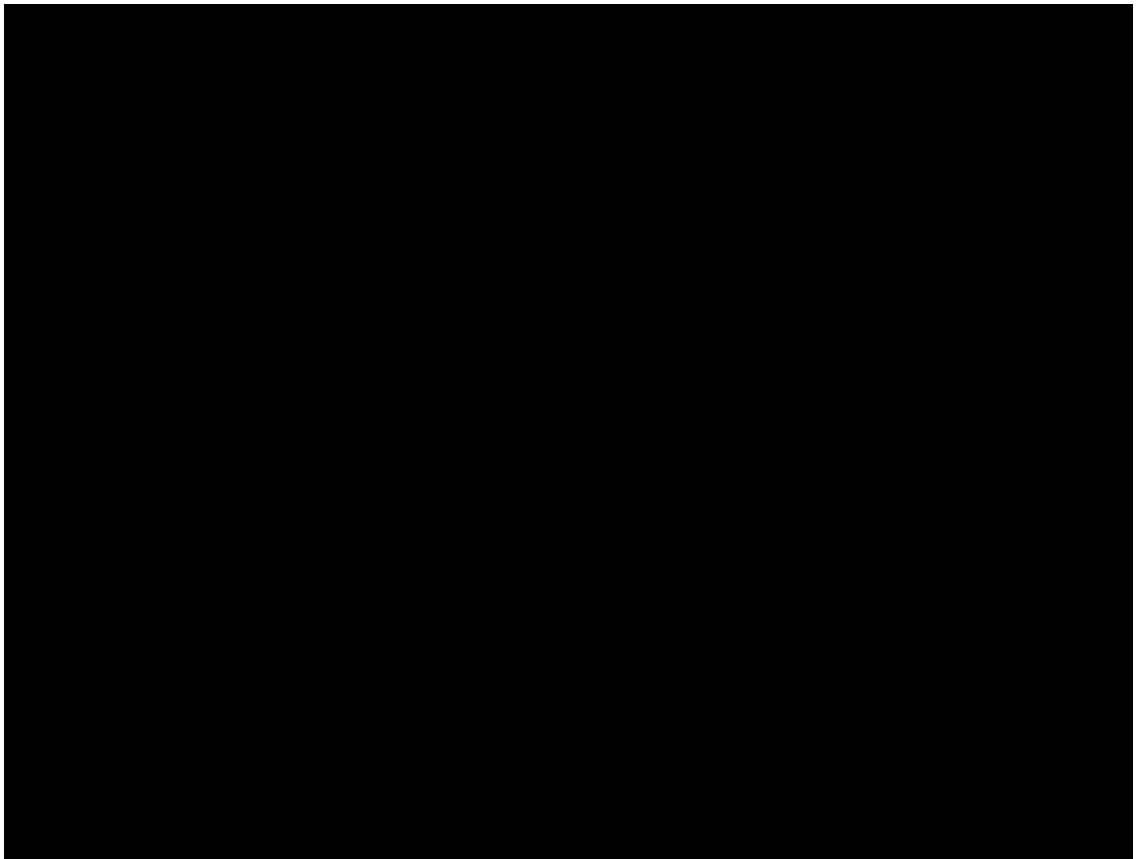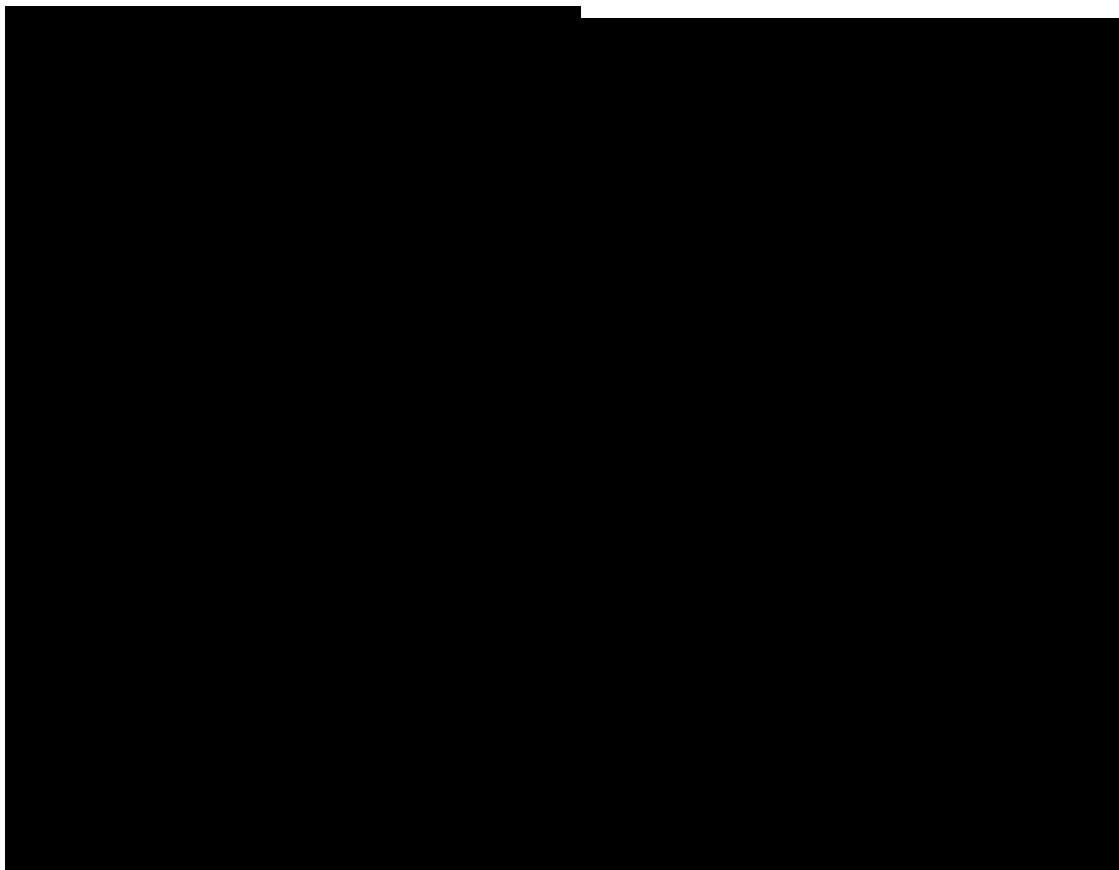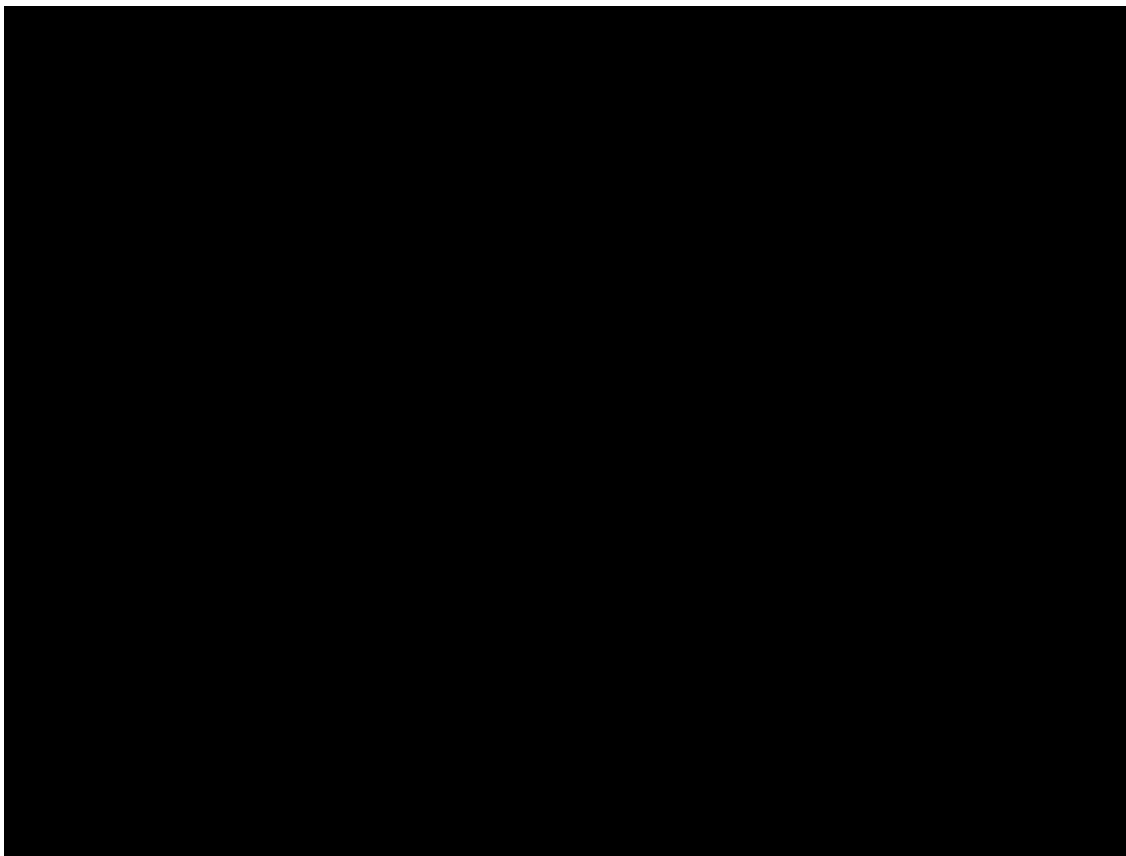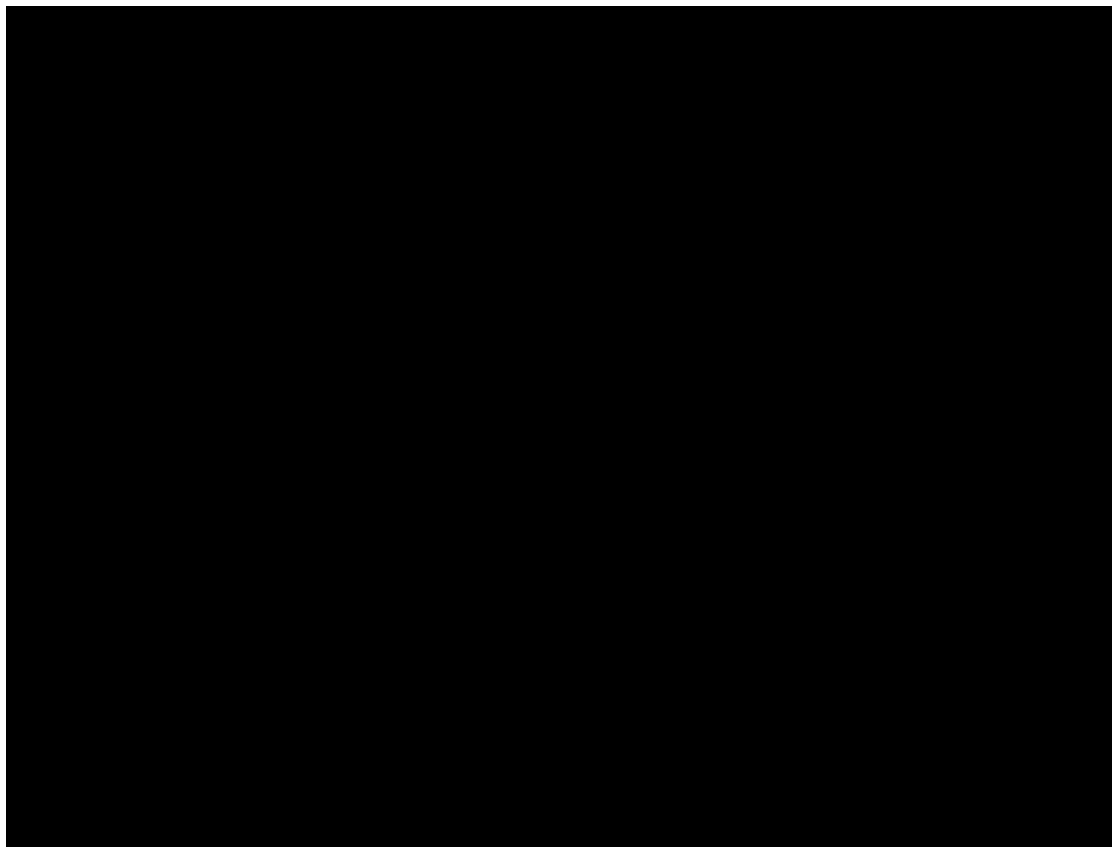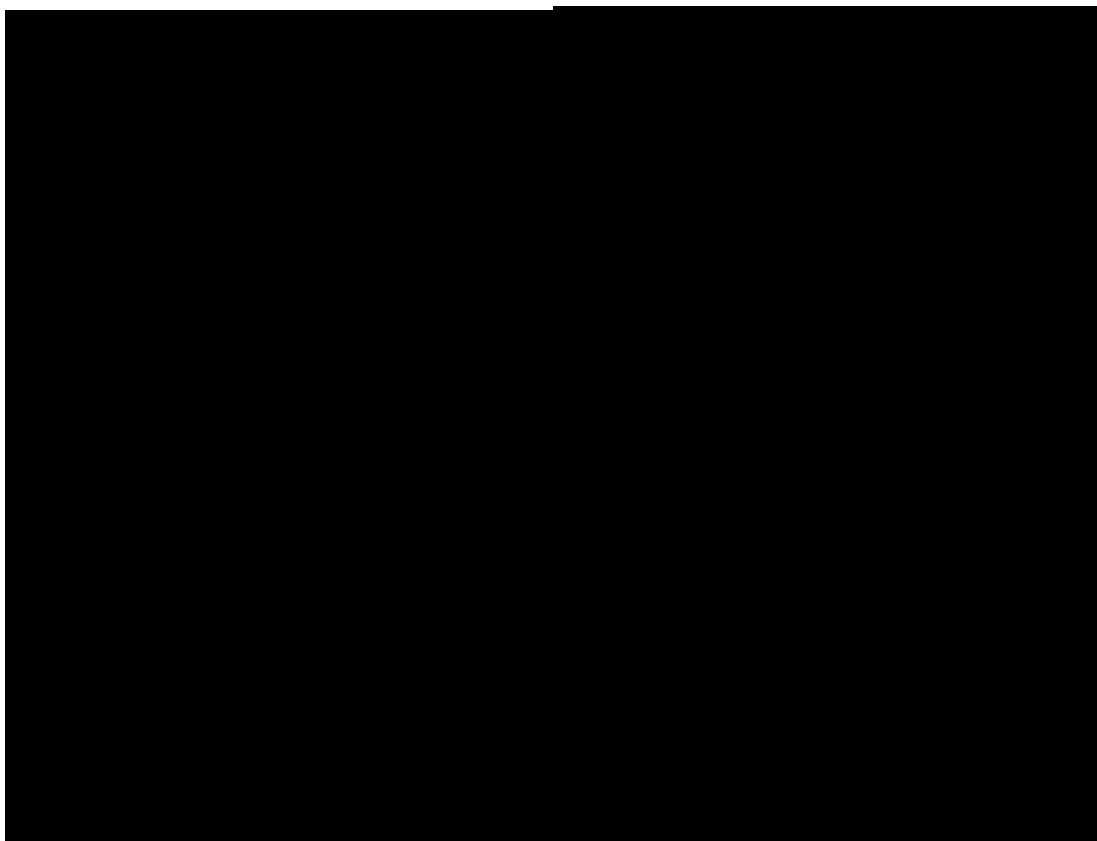
Fig.5.25: MM.25.

Fig.5.26: MM.26.
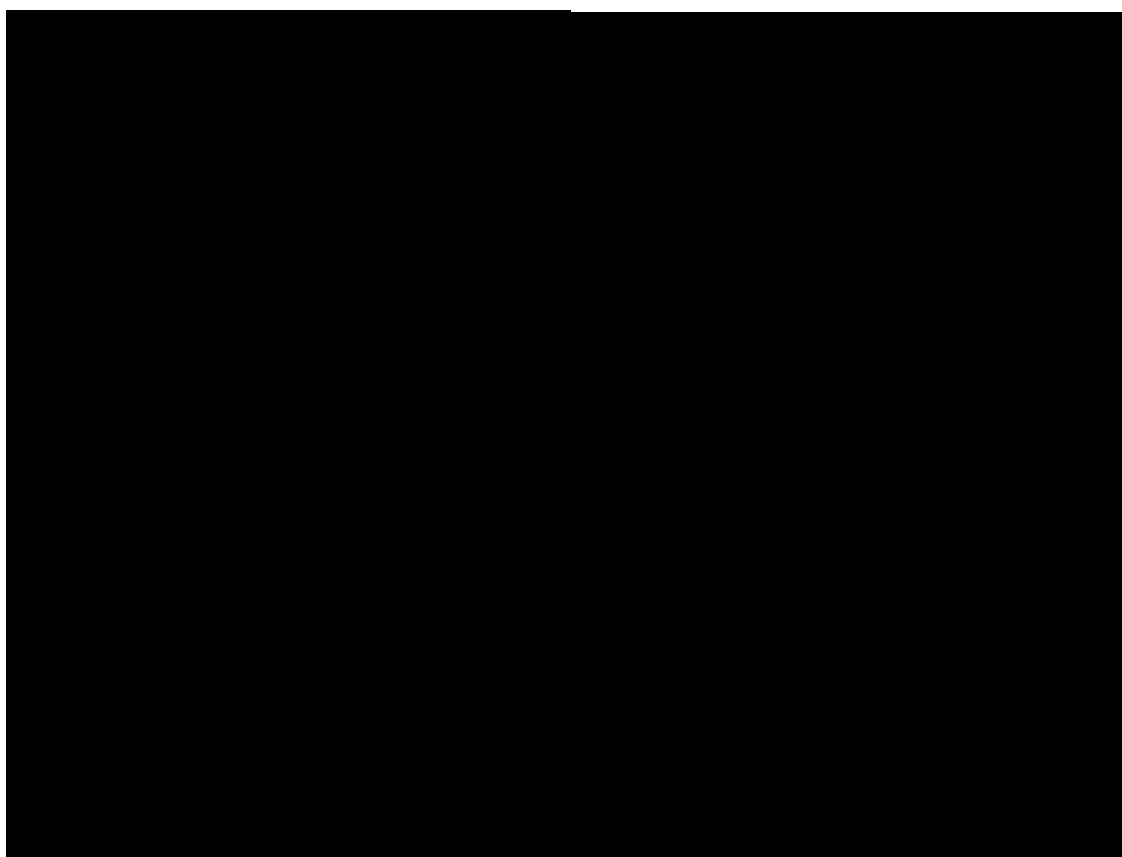
Fig.5.27: MM.27.

Fig.5.28: MM.28.
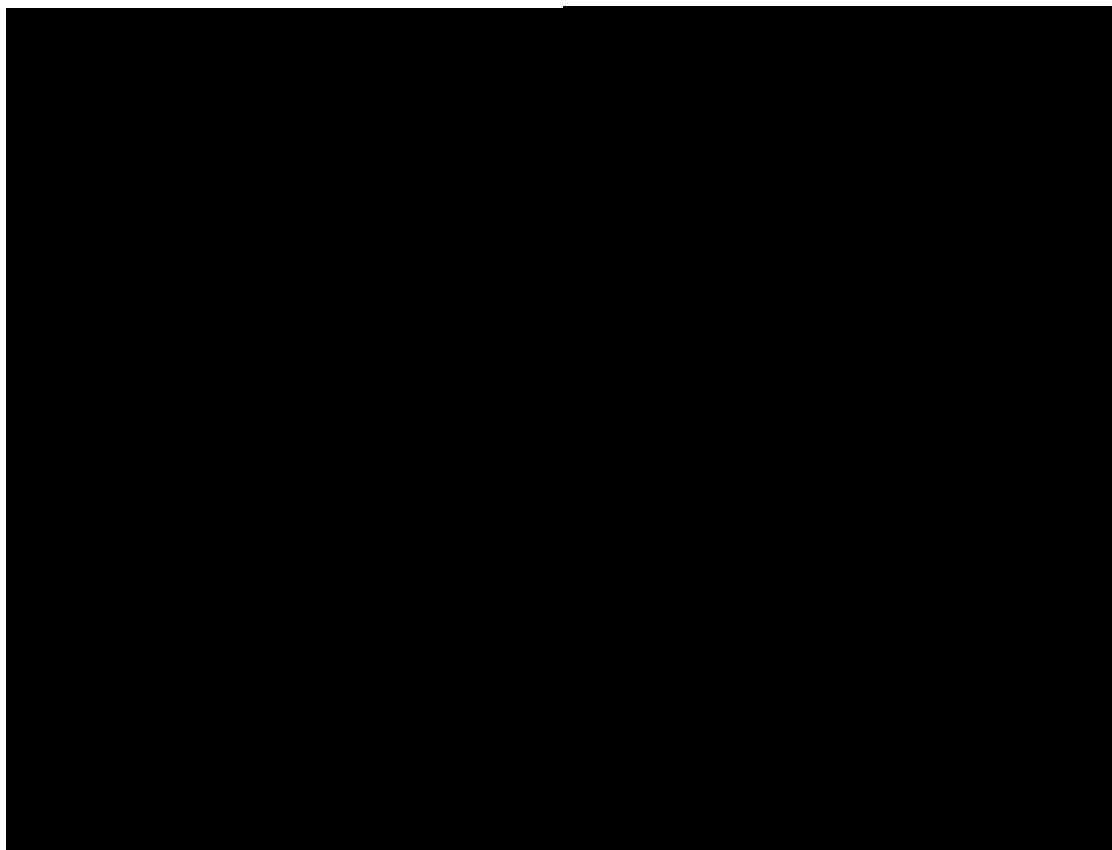
Fig.5.29: MM.29.

Fig.5.30: MM.30.
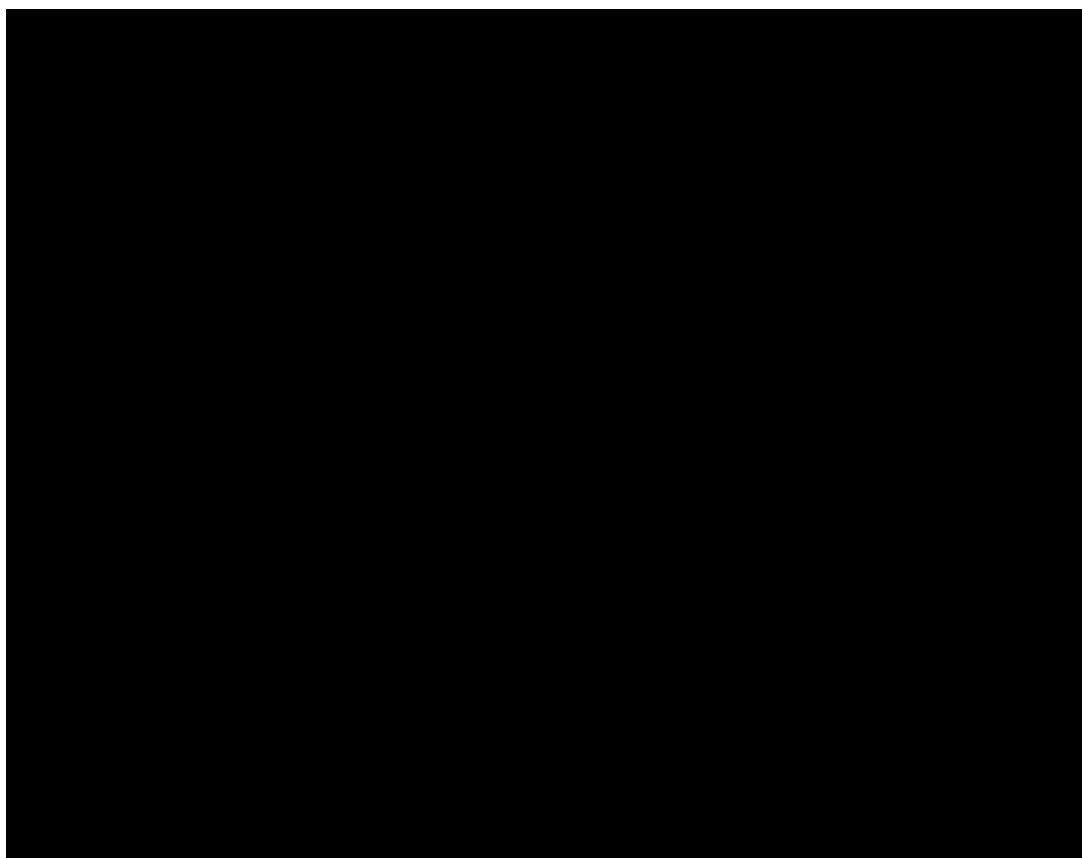
Fig.5.31: MM.31.

Fig.5.32: MM.32.

Group no	Group Title	MM. Images
1	Early English History	1-3
2	Edmund's Character	4-5
3	The Danish Invasion	6-10
4	Edmund's Passion	11-16
5	The Danes Leave	17
6	Recovery of Edmund's body	18-23
7	Posthumous Miracles	24-32

Tab.5.3: Image Groups.

The entire Morgan sequence can be seen to form a single narrative, but it is a narrative composed of recognisable thematic chunks. Where these chunks begin and end and how many there might be is entirely open to interpretation. In this thesis the miniatures have been divided into seven groups. For easy reference these groups are detailed in Tab.5.3. The proceeding sections briefly summarize each group, justifying why the selection of images has been identified as a discrete unit.

Group 1: Early English history

The scenes depicted in these three images do not feature St Edmund himself. Instead, they correspond directly to chapter one of the *Passio*, where Abbo provides a background history to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in England. This historical material was itself drawn from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.[41] The artist divides the Anglo-Saxons into three tribal groups: Saxons, Angles and Jutes. In MM.1 we see three fleets of ships; MM.2 shows three cavalry divisions; MM.3 depicts three leaders taking up power. Together they provide a broad historical framework for Edmund's story. Pinner has suggested that these scenes are designed to remove the sense of regionalism implicit in Abbo's text, and place Edmund in a national context.[42] However, they can be read in

---

[41] Abbo follows Bede closely in his exposition, contrast; *Ecc.His.*, c.16, pp.62-4 with *Abbo*, pp.10-13.

[42] Pinner, *King and Martyr*, p.99.

another way. The country within which they were produced was and had been for centuries, a unified England. Within such a context, it may have been deemed necessary to show a visiting pilgrim audience exactly how England had once been divided and why East Anglia's regional identity was still important.

Group 2: Edmund's character

Group 2 consists of two images, corresponding respectively to chapters 3 and 4 of Abbo's Passio. These are the first images in which we see Edmund himself. Interestingly, he appears unbearded in both, likely a representation of the fact that he was thought to have been very young when he came to power. However, Edmund's beardlessness in these scenes may also represent his virginity, a feature Abbo dwells upon at great length in the final chapter of the Passio.[43] As will be explored in the next chapter, later figural depictions of the saint from other sources seem to be split between depicting Edmund as a mature, bearded king and a virginal, beardless youth. The first image, MM.4, introduces Edmund through his coronation. The following scene, MM.5, characterises the saint as a generous and benevolent ruler by showing him handing out alms to what appear to be beggars.

Group 3: The Danish invasion

Group 3 represent a shift away from Edmund towards the key event which triggers the narrative: the arrival of the Danes (MM.6). In a series of scenes, we see the Danish leader, Inguar, marked out by a characteristic green tunic and red cap, lead an invasion of East Anglia. MM.7 shows the sack of a city, described by Abbo in chapter five of the Passio. The following three scenes show Inguar engaged in diplomacy with Edmund. First, (MM.8) Inguar sends a messenger to Edmund demanding his submission (naked prisoners of war are shown in the background). Second, (MM.9) we see Edmund consult with his

---

[43] *Abbo,* pp.54-7.

bishop on the best course of action. It is evident that this section is meant to take place sometime after the images in Group 2, as Edmund is no longer beardless; the king's growing a beard marks this passage of time. MM.10 shows the messenger returning to Inguar to reveal Edmund's refusal. Together this collection of scenes covers chapters 5 to 10 of Abbo's *Passio*, but can be understood to represent a single passage of action, where the normal order of life is disrupted.

Group 4: Edmund's passion

Group 4 is composed of six images, corresponding mostly to chapter ten of Abbo's *Passio*, the central chapter of his work where Edmund's passion takes place. The sequence begins with Edmund being dragged from his throne by the Danes (MM.11), Edmund is then escorted away (MM.12), stripped and flogged (MM.13), tied to a tree and beaten (MM.14), shot through with arrows (MM.15), then decapitated, with his head thrown into a thicket (MM.16). This sequence of brutal images is reminiscent of similar sequences showing the passion of Christ. The Christological aspects of this group will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Group 5: The Danes leave

Consisting of a single image (MM.17), this hardly constitutes a group, yet it fits neither within Edmund's passion sequence, nor in the following sequence where his bodily remains are recovered. Equally, it is the only image, with the possible exception of the final apotheosis, which does not have a textual precedent. In the text itself, the Danes are described as retiring "deep into the wood", rather than sailing away. Of course, historically speaking, the death of Edmund (869) signalled the beginning of a fifty year Danish occupation of East Anglia, which was only ended by Edward the Elder's conquest of the region in 920. Altering Abbo's narrative to suggest that Inguar and his soldiers left after Edmund's death provided the artist with a useful way of avoiding any need to explain (pictorially speaking) an awkward half century of Danish rule. The artist's Danes

are not conquerors, rather they are raiders and pillagers. This change provides an example of the artist taking liberties, not only with his written source material, but with history itself.

Group 6: The recovery of Edmund's body

After a brief and invented intermission, represented by MM.17, Group 6 returns to following the arc of Abbo's narrative. Here we see a series of six scenes, taken from chapters twelve through fourteen of the *Passio*, where Edmund's body, so ravaged by torments, is returned to a state of perfection. Firstly, (MM.18) we see the discovery of Edmund's headless corpse by his people. Afterwards, we see Edmund's decapitated head recovered from a thicket (MM.19), where it is guarded by a wolf. After this (MM.20), Edmund's head is taken up by its discoverers and miraculously re-joined with his body (MM.21). Edmund's newly 'recapitated' corpse is then carried in a litter (MM.22) and ultimately laid to rest in his reliquary tomb (MM.23). Within these scenes Edmund's lifeless body, as opposed to his living and suffering body, takes a place of central importance. We also see the portrayal of several, recurring, iconic tropes within his hagio-artistic tradition. Firstly, the wolf, which appears in scenes MM.19-22 and secondly the thin red line which, according to both Abbo and later hagiographers, marked out the re-joining of Edmund's head and body (MM.21-22). This sequence also provides an explanatory framework for the saint's eventual presence at Bury (MM.23). As discussed in chapter two, prior to his translation to Bury, Edmund's body was said to have rested at a 'chapel of rude construction' within the wood of Haglesdun. There can be little doubt, however, that for reasons of brevity, the Morgan illustrator chose to depict Edmund's translation to Beodericsworth directly. The church, with its twin towers, columns and arches, seems rather ornate for a 'rude chapel' and more likely represents the chapel of stone which Abbo states was built after the Danish occupation. Such a move would be in keeping with the artist's decision to ignore the Danish

occupation and again shows a willingness to play fast and loose with awkward, even contradictory, tradition.

Group 7: Edmund's posthumous miracles

Group 7, forms the largest and most eclectic selection of scenes, representing a series of miracles performed posthumously by the saint. These images are drawn not only from Abbo's *Passio* (MM.24-6 and 32), but also from Hermann's *De Miraculis* (MM.27-31). These scenes represent Edmund's return to the narrative as an active character: his agency enhanced through his martyrdom. The first three images in this group, taken from the *Passio*, relate the story of eight thieves who attempted to break into Edmund's shrine to steal pilgrim offerings. In chapter sixteen of Abbo's work, where the story is recounted, it is told that the men were frozen in place by Edmund's miraculous power (MM.24), they were later tried by Theodred of London (MM.25), before being executed by hanging (MM.26). This is one of only two posthumous miracle stories told by Abbo. The other concerns the miserable fate of a local sheriff who desecrated the saint's sanctuary. The reason why the story of the thieves has been portrayed, rather than the fate of the sheriff, must surely have to do with its emphasis on the administration of clerical justice. In the story, Edmund effectively hands the transgressors over for punishment to the church authorities, implicitly suggesting that the saint's will is one and the same as that of the church. Equally, if, as suggested earlier, the Morgan Edmund's miniatures were intended for consumption by an elite class of pilgrims, it may have had further didactic utility. It at once warns against stealing from the saint's shrine, while at the same time reassuring the pilgrim audience that their donations are safe in the hands of Edmund and his church. The concept of divine justice continues to feature throughout the remaining scenes. MM.27 shows the house of a priest burning after he has refused sanctuary to Edmund. MM.28 depicts a cart carrying Edmund's body, crossing an impossibly narrow bridge, its wheels floating above the water. In either image, God's approving hand projects power through the saint's body, thus endorsing

the righteousness of Edmund's cause. Images 29-31 recount the famous story of King Swein's demise at the hands of St Edmund, while the final image is of Edmund's apotheosis, of his becoming a saint.

5.5: Emergent themes

Before examining how the various groups of images identified in the last section fit together in a narrative structure, it is worthwhile considering the key themes which occur within the cycle. Three themes in particular emerge naturally from any analysis: temporal continuity, *Imitatio Christi* and the nature of authority.

Temporal continuity

The Morgan miniatures visually link two of the key elements from Edmund's hagiography into a single narrative: Abbo's *Passio* and Hermann's *De Miraculis*. According to Tom License, there seems little doubt that *De Miraculis*' author viewed his work as 'a continuation of Abbo's text'.[44] Certainly the two works had previously been presented together, but they were always recognised as separate literary compositions. Until the Morgan cycle, no attempt had been made to directly merge the two into a single cohesive narrative. Indeed, the Morgan cycle could be considered the first attempt to provide a continuous history charting Edmund's progress from holy king, to bloody martyr, to established saint. While this is indeed a story of a man's transition from the earthly to the celestial realm, it is also a story of continuity. Edmund's acts in life are what marked him out for sainthood, his acts post-mortem are the testament that he reached his saintly potential. Edmund's care for East Anglia in life is mirrored by his goodly acts as a saint. Equally so, Edmund's passive resistance and martyrdom in the

---

[44] *Miracles,* p.lxi.

face of the invading Danes is mirrored by his willingness to react aggressively against those who would undermine or infringe upon his abbey's rightful privileges.

The artist's concern with temporal continuity is best exemplified by MM.5. In this scene, which corresponds to chapter four of Abbo's *Passio*, the artist makes a small but significant change. In Abbo's text it tells us that Edmund was: 'liberal in his bounty to those in want, and like a benignant father to the orphan and the widow.'[45] Those shown in the image are clearly not 'orphans and widows'. Indeed, Cynthia Hahn has successfully argued that the men depicted in the scene are dressed in a manner typically associated with pilgrims.[46] Certainly pilgrims could be classified as 'those in want', yet their place in Edmund's narrative belonged properly to his saintly afterlife rather than his kingly lifetime. By exchanging orphans and widows for pilgrims, the artist establishes a visual link between Edmund's past and his present. At the time of the book's production, pilgrims would have been a familiar sight at Bury St Edmunds. Indeed, Edmund's later hagiographies are replete with stories of men, women and children journeying to Bury to elicit miraculous cures. Through positioning figures who correctly belong to Edmund's later hagiography in a scene from his passion narrative, the artist reveals that Edmund does not have two stories – one post-mortem, one pre-mortem – he has a singular and continuous narrative tradition, within which he acts unremittingly as an agent. This image is designed to force the reader into making an immediate link between Edmund's in-life benevolence towards 'orphans and widows' and his on-going miraculous interventions on behalf of pilgrims. The emphasis is on continuity of character from life, through death and into the hereafter. Edmund has been, is and always will be a protector to those in need.

---

[45] *Abbo*, pp.16-17.

[46] Hahn, *Peregrinatio et Natio*, p.121f.

Imitatio Christi

Edmund's similarity to Christ is another theme which emerges from the miniature cycle. Clearly, Edmund's martyrdom (Group 4) shares close and intentional parallels with Christ's passion. Yet, the sense of imitation which radiates from the cycle extends far beyond suffering. Indeed, it is manifested in three distinct ways; imitation through **action**, imitation through **appearance** and imitation through **pictographic genre**.

A good king was expected to be Christ-like in his actions, he should rule his dominion as Christ ruled the world; peacefully, with compassion and, in the right circumstances, through self-sacrifice. To suffer martyrdom, particularly for a king to suffer martyrdom was an act of *Imitatio Christi*. Indeed, Edmund's Christ-like suffering serves as merely one example of the long-established convention of royal martyrdom. Royal martyr saints were a staple feature of Anglo-Saxon Christian tradition. Bede mentions several martyred kings in his *Ecclesiastical History* they include, among others; Oswin of Deira (d.651) Edwin of Northumbria (d.633) Oswald of Northumbria (d.642) and Sigbert of East Anglia (d.635).[47] Edmund's narrative of a pious and benevolent ruler suffering and dying for the greater Christian good fits well within such company. In the context of the Morgan cycle, the Christ-like quality of Edmund's rule is best revealed through contrasting his coronation scene (MM.4) with the ceremonial investitures of Anglo-Saxon rulers in MM.3. In both images leadership is indicated through the granting of 'objects of power'. However, Edmund stands apart from his predecessors in the type of objects used. Unlike them, Edmund's badges of office are not weapons or armour, but the more symbolic crown and sceptre – a sign that Edmund was, unlike them, a proper Christian king who would rule through peace, not war.[48] The idea of Edmund as a Christ-like ruler is further enhanced in MM.5, where he is shown distributing coins to the

---

[47] Phelpstead, 'King, Martyr and Virgin', p.33. See also Ridyard, *Royal Saints*.

[48] For a recent study of medieval pacifist kings see; Paul Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011).

needy. This scene, however, might be said to reveal that the artist held a broader conception of *Imitatio Christi*. As mentioned above, Cynthia Hahn has successfully demonstrated that the 'needy' persons shown in this image are in fact pilgrims.[49] To support her hypothesis, Hahn reveals the close similarity that exists between the pilgrim dress worn by the men in the Morgan image and that adorning Christ in the *St Albans Psalter*; a manuscript produced at or at least influenced by the same workshop. The *St Albans* image depicts the parable of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35). In the story, the risen Christ appears to the men, disguised as a traveller or pilgrim, only revealing his true nature after they offer to break bread with him. The *St Albans* image shows Jesus wearing and carrying the standard iconographic attire associated with pilgrimage, a cap (*petaso*), a rough woollen cape (*pellegrina*), a pilgrim's knapsack (*capsella*) and a walking stave (*baculus*).[50] These same features appear in MM.5 of the Morgan cycle, identifying the figures as pilgrims. Indeed, Hahn argues that these men belong to a well-established literary *topos* which sees all Christians as pilgrims on the 'journey' of life. That the Morgan artist came from the same school as the artist of the *St Albans Psalter* and that he chose to portray these men dressed in the same way as Christ suggests that, in the artist's mind at least, all men were capable of *Imitatio Christi*.

In terms of appearance, Edmund fits within the well-worn tradition of presenting kings in a Christ-like fashion. Despite a lack of biblical precedent, the bearded Christ had become the standard depiction of Jesus by the middle ages.[51] Consequently, this

---

[49] Hahn, *Peregrinatio et Natio*.

[50] For the terms used to describe medieval pilgrim attire see; Mark Hall, 'A Roman Pilgrim' *Peregrinations*, 2:4 (2009), pp.183-4.

[51] Although almost no physical description of Jesus is provided in gospel accounts, medieval theologians drew the inference that Christ had a beard from the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah; specifically, 50:6. For further discussion see; John F. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.88-9. The art historian Thomas F. Matthews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, rev. edition (Princeton, 1999), pp.108-9, attributes Jesus' beard to the early interpolation of visual features derived from the Roman god Jupiter.

influenced figural representations of Christian kings. According to the archaeologist John Steane: 'They (medieval kings) are shown very much as Christ was depicted on sculptured typana… seated in judgement on thrones, bearded, crowned, holding swords and sceptres.'[52] Such is certainly the case in the apotheosis image of Edmund (MM.32), where he is presented as seated upon a throne, receiving a crown and sceptre from angelic servants. There are also clear parallels to be seen in the nature of Edmund's martyrdom, where, like Christ, he was bound to an upright structure and pierced with weapons. In Christ's case the instruments were cross and a spear, in Edmund's a tree and arrows. This comparison was clearly not lost upon Abbo of Fleury, the writer from whom the Morgan artist drew his inspiration:

> 'Just as Christ, free from all taint of sin, left on the column to which he was bound, not for himself, but for us, the blood which was the mark of his scourging, so Edmund incurred a like penalty bound to the blood-stained tree, for the sake of gaining a glory that fades not away.'[53]

Beyond acting and appearing like Christ, the Morgan cycle represents another material-centric means of imitation: the very pictographic form used to compile the images. In presenting Edmund's life, passion and miracles as a cycle of wordless images, the artist evokes an ancient Christian tradition whereby the story of Christ's passion was broken down into a series of figurative episodes. The oldest surviving example of such a visual passion cycle, consisting of four ivory panels now housed in the British Museum, comes from the fifth century.[54] Like Edmund's story in the Morgan sequence, the scenes present a greatly abridged version of Christ's passion. Such episodic panelling was to become a standard means of revealing Christ's suffering in an accessible, pictorial form. Another early example, this time from Anglo-Saxon England, can be found in the St Augustine Gospels (now Parker MS 286f. 125r.). Here, in a series of 12 miniature panels,

---

[52] John Steane, *The Archaeology of Medieval English Monarchy* (London, 1993), p.15.

[53] *Abbo*, pp.36-7.

[54] The BM museum numbers for these panels are: 1856,0623.4 – 7. Curatorial descriptions can be found at [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx].

Christ's final hours, from his riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, to his carrying of the cross, are displayed. The parallels between the Morgan cycle and Christological passion sequences are not coincidental. From the earliest times martyrs were compared to Christ in their suffering. The second-century Martyrdom of Polycarp, for example, shares many explicit parallels with the story of Christ.[55] Edmund's own narrative is but one regional expression of the grand Christian narrative. As a martyr saint, Edmund in effect fulfils the role of a Christ for East Anglia. As Abbo states in the aftermath of Edmund's execution:

> 'Thus in his departure from life, the king, following the footsteps of Christ his master, consummated that sacrifice of the Cross which he had endured continually in the flesh… … … Christ, whose life was without stain, suffered in his great benignity the bitter pain of unmerciful nails in his hands and feet in order to cleanse away the foulness of our sins; Edmund, for the love of the holy Name, with his whole body bristling with grievous arrows, and lacerated to the very marrow by the acutest tortures, steadfastly persisted in the avowal of his faith which in the end he crowned by undergoing the doom of death.'[56]

Edmund's story and the form it takes, whether literary or pictorial, can never be divorced from its wider Christian context. The relationship of Edmund's narrative to the central Christian metanarrative is integral both to its conception and its function. Indeed, Abbo's text makes the contrast explicit, comparing Edmund's encounter with Inguar to Christ's meeting with Pilate.[57]

---

[55] See; L. Stephanie Cobb, 'Polcarp's Cup: *Imitatio* in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*', *Journal of Religious History*, 38:2 (2014), pp.224-240.

[56] *Abbo*, pp.36-7.

[57] *Ibid.,* pp.32-3.

Attribute / Figure	Height	Facial Hair	Hat	Tonsure	Crown	Cloak or habit	Military Items	Scepter or staff	Palm Frond	Other
God	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o
Edmund (as a saint)	o	o	x	x	o	o	x	o	o	x
Kings	o	o	x	x	o	o	x	o	x	x
Cheftains	o	o	o	x	x	o	o	x	x	x
Bishops	o	o	x*	o	x	o	x	o	x	x
Aristocrats	o	o	o	x	x	o	v	x	x	x
Monks	o	o	x	o	x	o	x	o	x	x
Pilgrims	x	v	v	x	x	o	x	o	x	o
Soldiers	x	v	v	x	x	x	o	x	x	x
Principle Thief	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Tab.5.4: Figures and attributes.[58]

Figures: / Image no:	God	Edmund (As Saint)	Kings (Edmund or Swein)	Cheiftains	Bishops	Nobility	Monks/clerics	Pilgrims	Soldiers	Theives	Other
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
3	x	x	x	o	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
4	x	x	o	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	o
5	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x	o
6	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	o
8	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	o
9	x	x	o	x	o	o	x	x	o	x	o
10	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
11	x	x	o	o	o	x	x	x	o	x	x
12	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
13	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
14	o	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
15	o	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
16	o	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	o
17	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x
18	x	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
19	o	x	o	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o
20	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
21	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
22	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
23	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
24	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o	x
25	x	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o	o
26	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o	o
27	o	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x
28	o	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x
29	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o
30	x	o	o	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	o
31	x	x	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x	o
32	o	o	x	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	x

Tab.5.5: Figure location.[59]

Authority

It is clear that authority is a major theme within the miniature cycle. Each scene, in its own way, portrays the exercise of power by one person or group over another, whether

---

[58] This table lists iconic markers of authority alongside the various social groups depicted in the miniature sequence. 'O' marks the presence of these markers, 'X' denotes their absence, while 'V' indicates variation.

[59] This table depicts the presence ('O'), or absence ('X') of the various social groups within each of the Morgan images.

this be military subjugation, kingly dominion, legal sway or miraculous intervention. From the outset, persons in a position of authority are clearly marked out. This marking out is achieved either through their appearance or through their possession of symbolic objects. Analysing the distribution of these authoritarian markers reveals that the artist sought to construct a visual hierarchy of authority (Tab.5.4). At the peak of this hierarchy is God. The chain then descends through St Edmund himself to kings and chieftains, bishops and monks, aristocrats and soldiers, pilgrims and thieves. Each class, at a certain stage is shown exerting power or influence and wherever this is evident the artist uses both natural and artificial attributes to indicate this authority (Tab.5.5).

In a natural sense, the height of authority figures is a persistent feature. Throughout the cycle, those in authoritative positions always appear to be significantly taller than those surrounding them. Leaders in this pictorial cycle are 'big men' in a figurative as well as a metaphorical sense.

Facial hair is a consistent, natural indicator of power. Edmund, like all figures occupying positions of authority within the cycle, is generally shown sporting a healthy beard. The exception to this rule comes in images from group 2 where Edmund is beardless. While, as will be explored elsewhere in this thesis, a beardless Edmund would ultimately become a competing figural archetype, in the context of the Morgan sequence it serves merely as a device to display the passing of time. The ability to grow a beard acts as a natural sign that a man has reached sexual maturity. Therefore, images of the saint as a beardless youth can be taken to denote that Edmund was young when he ascended to the throne of East Anglia. Edmund was traditionally held to have been only fourteen years of age at the time of his coronation.[60] In medieval art it was

---

[60] The earliest source for this tradition is the twelfth-century *Annals of St Neots* which dates the beginning of Edmund's reign to Christmas Day 855, though apparently his coronation was suspended for a full year until he was fifteen, placing his birth in 841. See; *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle a Collaborative Edition, v.17: The Annals of St Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti*, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1985) p.45-51. This dating further appears in the Chronicle of Rodger of Howden and Rodger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum* both of which seem to have employed the *Annals of St Neots* as a source. See Hervey, *Corolla* p.162-3 and

common for kings to be depicted wearing a beard whether or not they wore one in life.[61] The beard performed the role of a symbolic trope designed to foreground certain character attributes. It was necessary for a king and indeed a king's ancestors to be seen to display many of the traits that a beard could represent. Wisdom and maturity implied good governance, while virility and strength suggested security and longevity of the regnal line. Throughout the sequence the Morgan artist uses beards to symbolise these virtues both in Edmund and in other men of power. That this is indeed the case and that the artist is not merely reflecting contemporary fashion is made clear by the contrast evident between authority figures and background figures. Background figures, who compose the bulk of the persons depicted in the cycle, frequently appear as beardless. Giles Constable has suggested that where groups of men are depicted in medieval art, the relative number of men bearded or un-bearded serves merely to indicate the intended age demographic of the crowd.[62] However, in the context of the Morgan cycle wearing a beard frequently serves as a means of marking men out from the crowd as particularly important.

Artificial indicators of authority are signified through the trappings worn by the cycle's figures and by the objects they carry. Headwear is a ubiquitous indicator of authority throughout the cycle. In every scene the preeminent figure wears a cap, a helmet, a tonsure or a crown. The only exceptions are during the passion sequence, where Edmund's crown is lost (Group 4) and in the scene where thieves attempt to breach his sanctuary (MM.24). In the latter scene the robber chief (on the far right) is marked out through his superior height and beard, yet the lack of any discernible headwear seems to show that his authority is false. In addition, cloaks, cassocks and

---

168-9 respectively. This dating scheme seems to have been accepted by later authors as John Lydgate's fifteenth-century *Life of St Edmund King and Martyr (*British Library MS. Harley 2278 f.14v) continues the tradition that Edmund was born in 841.

[61] See Steane's discussion of 'Portraits of Kings' in *Medieval English Monarchy*, pp.14-18.

[62] *Apologiae duae*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, with intro by Giles Constable (Turnholt, 1985).

croziers, sceptres and swords are each used as indicators of social position and the influence that comes with it; see MM.4-5.

Of the whole sequence, MM.3 presents the most instructive scene in terms of the importance of objects as indicators of power. Indeed, it sets the tone for how authority figures ought to be portrayed for the rest of the cycle. Divided into three separate compartments, it shows the respective leaders of the Saxons, Angles and Jutes (all tall bearded men) being handed objects to represent their assumption of authority. None of the three men can, in the strictest sense, be said to be kings, as none of them wears a crown or carries a sceptre. Instead, the leader in the top left panel is handed a sword, the top right a spear and the bottom a shield. It is evident from the composition of each scene that these objects are intended to indicate the assumption of power. In addition, the leaders in the top left and right panels are about to be swaddled in a cloak, whereas the man in the bottom panel already is.

The artist evidently understood the important role objects played in conveying and displaying earthly authority. Conversely, he seems to have viewed heavenly authority rather differently. Within the cycle, God's power is manifested either through a hand descending from heaven (MM.14-16, 23 and 27-8); through the natural sign of the wolf protecting Edmund's body (MM.19-22); or through the presence of the angelic host (MM.32). While divine power can be seen to act upon objects, as in MM.27-8, where rays from God's hand descend upon Edmund's reliquary, it is the only form of authority in the sequence which is not, at least partially, defined by manufactured objects. At one point the artist provides a direct visual contrast between earthly and heavenly authority. We see this contrast in the first appearance of the 'heavenly hand' (MM.13) during Edmund's passion (Group 4). It cannot be coincidental that the hand of God appears only after Edmund is stripped of the tangible symbols of his earthly reign - his cloak and crown. Indeed, the significance of this forfeiture seems not to have been lost upon Abbo. When describing the saint's decapitation Abbo states that Edmund was:

'Bidden to stretch forth the head which had ever been adorned by the royal diadem.'[63] Abbo seems to suggest that for a king to lose his head was also to lose his earthly crown. It is clear in the context of the Morgan cycle that Edmund's martyrdom, as an event, is intended to be seen as a social leveller. Edmund, in his suffering, loses his crown and with it his power over other men. He suffers for his faith as any good Christian might. Yet, none of Edmund's torturers is ever depicted wearing any form of head covering, indicating that they have no power over him. The absence of headgear suggests that in these scenes God alone has become the authority figure, and God's authority requires no object to define it. After Edmund loses his crown authority in his passion sequence is depicted solely through the 'heavenly hand' descending from the clouds. While he is beaten and shot (MM.14 and 15), Edmund is shown looking upwards towards this hand, as if to show his submission to a greater power, and ultimately, after his beheading (MM.16), this hand is shown clutching a dove, representing the ascent of Edmund's soul to heaven. The whole scene, composed of six images, can be read as a metaphor for Edmund's movement from the sphere of earthly power, represented by physical objects, to the realm of heavenly power where such tokens were of little relevance.

The final image in the entire cycle (MM.32) reveals Edmund in his heavenly splendour. Again in this scene he wears the trappings of kingship which had marked out his earthly reign. In a mirror of his original coronation (MM.4), Edmund is handed a crown and sceptre by an angelic host, though added this time is the palm of martyrdom. It would seem this image was intended not merely to show Edmund's saintly credentials, but also to foreground the resumption of his earthly authority. It should be noted that two images previous (MM.30), Edmund is shown striking down King Swein. This marks the first time Edmund is depicted figuratively since MM.22, where his body was laid in its coffin. In the intervening period the coffin itself is shown, but in all instances where it is associated with miracles (MM.27 and 8), the impetus for miraculous action comes

---

[63] *Abbo*, pp.34-5.

from God, depicted as the heavenly hand. It is possible to view this extended sequence (Group 7) as a gradual transformation from ignominious death, to full, independent sainthood. The period during which Edmund's presence is implied by his coffin is liminal, the coffin itself forming a sort of chrysalis within which a transformation is taking place. MM.30 and 32 mark Edmund's final becoming, where he emerges as a powerful saint, willing and able to act, as he did in life, in the best interests of his people. The presence of the crown, cloak and sceptre in MM.32 are intended as symbols of more than just Edmund's sainthood, they are indicators that Edmund remained king of East Anglia in a very real way. It was important for the monks of Bury St Edmunds to portray their saint in such a manner, to foreground his kingly attributes, as they ruled a significant portion of East Anglia in his name. The monks of Bury St Edmunds were, in effect, Edmund's earthly executors. MM.32 explicitly reveals the nature of this relationship by showing two monks kissing Edmund's feet. To monastic eyes, Edmund was king and martyr not merely in the historical sense, but in a very real and present fashion.

5.6: Narrative structure

Having divided the Morgan miniatures into seven, recognisable groups and having examined some of the key themes which emerge from the pictorial sequence, we will now look at the ways in which these groups come together. Many of the images in the Morgan cycle speak for themselves in terms of the action they portray. Indeed, the story they tell is so progressively constructed, that were one to encounter the cycle without ever having heard St Edmund's story, one might very well be able to reconstruct substantial portions of the narrative. There are, however, elements which, without an accompanying text, make little sense. For this reason, it is likely that viewings of the manuscript were accompanied by an oral narration of Edmund's life, passion and miracles. The following section will analyse the overall 'grand narrative' implicit in the sequence. This analysis will reveal not only the cycle's underlying didactic message, but

will also show how its artist purposefully subverted the chronology of Edmund's narrative to enhance this message. In order to conduct this analysis, we will employ the ideas of Gustav Freytag (1816-1895). Freytag, a nineteenth-century German novelist, playwright and critic, was interested in the structural similarities he perceived within classical and Shakespearian drama. Drawing on Aristotle's Poetics, in *Die Technik des Dramas*, Freytag argued that all dramatic narratives conformed to a universal five act structure.[64] While his approach is often criticised by modern scholars of narratology for being too normative, Freytag's five act arrangement remains a popular mode of plotting dramatic action.[65] Film, for example, a modern visual medium, tends to conform closely to Freytag's ideas.[66] Freytag's model is particularly well suited to the analysis conducted here as it was specifically designed to be applied to pre-modern narratives. Freytag's five acts begin with *exposition*, move forward through *rising action*, resulting in a *climax*, followed by a *falling action* and end in a *denouement*, or final act, in which the various plot strands are tied together. Within Freytag's structure there are four critical points which link the acts together. At the end of the first act, after exposition, there should be an *inciting incident* which leads to the rising action in the second act. The end of the second act sees the dramatic tension heightened by the interjection of a *complication*; this will ultimately lead, in the third act, to the moment of high drama, the climax. The third act ends in a *reversal* of said complication and a release of tension through the falling action of the fourth act. The fourth act then leads to the *resolution* of the narrative arc, before the denouement. This structure is best realised in its diagrammatic form, as a *Freytag Pyramid*, an example of which is shown below:

---

[64] For an English translation of his work see; Gustav Freytag, *Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, third edition, trans. by Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago, 1900).

[65] Manfred Jahn, 'Freytag's Triangle', in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (Abingdon, 2010), pp.189-90.

[66] Torben Grodal, 'Film Narrative', in *Ibid.*, p.172.
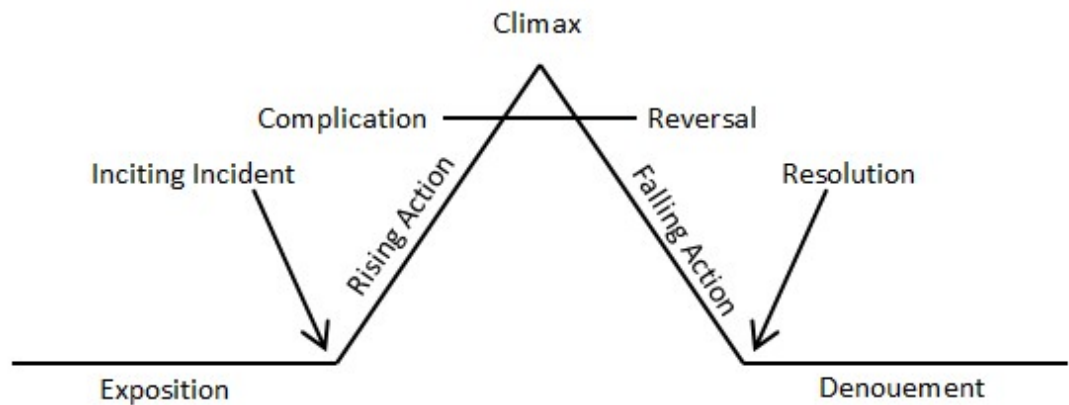
Tab.5.6: Freytag's Pyramid

Applying the pyramidal structure to the Morgan miniatures we can see how it might look:
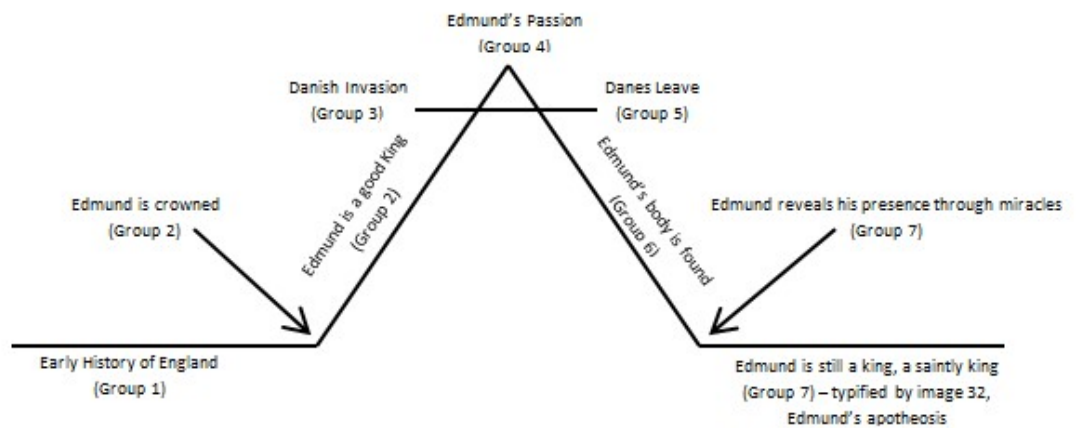
Tab.5.7: The Narrative structure of the Morgan miniatures.

Exposition:

The images in group 1, dealing with early Anglo-Saxon history, form a natural expository sequence to the main narrative. As does the corresponding section of Abbo's text, the images position the story in its proper historical context. This part of the sequence

would have served the important role of explaining to its audience the constitutional state of England in a previous era, thus making the regional context of Edmund's kingship more readily explicable.

Inciting incident:

The first image in group 2, where Edmund is crowned, marks the beginning of the narrative proper; it is the 'inciting incident'. The image marks a temporal shift from pagan past into Christian history. Edmund's Christian coronation ceremony (MM.4) stands in stark contrast to the warlike depiction of Saxon leaders (MM.3) that precedes it. Yet, the positioning of the images immediately after one another seems to suggest that Edmund's accession as a Christian ruler acts to vindicate all that has come before it.

Rising action:

The second image in group 2 (MM.5), where we see Edmund handing out coins to visiting pilgrims, serves to develop the theme of Edmund's Christ-like nature. East Anglia, the image tells us, at last has a benevolent and worthy king, the future seems bright. Consequently, we can see this scene as representing the 'rising action' in the narrative.

Complication:

At this stage a complication is introduced; this comes in the form of the Danish invasion (Group 3). Edmund's peaceful, Christian reign is interrupted by the arrival of the savage, pagan Danish invaders (MM.6), who sack cities and murder women and children (MM.7). Edmund, it would seem, is powerless in the face of this irresistible and brutal force. The newcomers present the king with a choice, abandon his faith and become a client king or face the consequences (MM.8). Despite contrary advice from his councillors (MM.9), Edmund opts to refuse the terms offered (MM.10); this leads to the climactic sequence of the narrative.

Climax:

Having refused the Danes' demands, Edmund is dragged away by his enemies and subjected to a series of cruel tortures (Group 4). This is the climactic scene; it represents a radical change of direction from earthly power to heavenly. Edmund is physically broken, unmade as an earthly king, marked symbolically by the loss of his crown and yet, as a martyr, he simultaneously becomes more Christ-like in the process. This notional shift from a terrestrial to a heavenly sphere is compounded by the first appearance of the 'heavenly hand' descending from the clouds (MM.14). By showing Edmund's soul as a dove ascending to heaven, the final miniature in this group makes the directional swing unequivocal (MM.16).

Reversal:

The complication represented by the images in group 3 is reversed by the single image in group 5, MM.17. The Danes, who have wrought so much devastation upon the peaceful kingdom of East Anglia, leave the same way they came: by the sea.

Falling action:

The images of group 6 show the aftermath of the Danes departure. Edmund's body, beheaded and defiled, is discovered by a group of his forlorn countrymen. Robbed of their king, over the course of six images Edmund's remains are collected (MM.18-20), assembled (MM.21), miraculously remade (MM.22) and finally enshrined within a reliquary casket (MM.23). This sequence resembles falling action in the sense that it represents a gradual return to normality after the tumult of the crisis. However, as things stand, matters have not yet reached their final resolution. Edmund is still dead and East Anglia has still been robbed of its beloved king.

Resolution:

Resolution is provided by the series of miracle images that follow (Group 7). These images show that while Edmund is no longer an earthly king, he is still able to act in a kingly fashion through miraculous intervention. The administration of justice is a king's primary function and in each of the miracle sequences we are given examples of Edmund's judicious nature made manifest. He assists in the capture of thieves, punishes inhospitable priests, has his cause sanctioned through the miraculous crossing of a bridge and finally and most tellingly is directly responsible for the death of Swein, a thoughtless and headstrong monarch.

Denouement:

The Denouement or final scene is represented through MM.32, where, having undergone the agony of martyrdom and having endured a period in the wilderness, the re-made Edmund is finally able to reaffirm his kingly status. Although no longer an earthly being, Edmund, as proven by the preceding miracles, is now more powerful and effective than ever he was in life. In the scene he continues to wear the trappings of an earthly king, yet he now carries with him the palm of martyrdom.

Overall, through following Freytag's structure, we are presented with the fairly generic narrative of a man who is tested under extreme circumstances, passes said test, before undergoing a transformation. Indeed, from the passion scenes onward, what follows can be seen as a complete inversion of what came before. The Edmund we see in the final heavenly coronation image is a complete mirror of the Edmund we see undergoing his earthly coronation (MM.4); he is older, wiser and more powerful. Whereas the earthly Edmund was tortured and murdered by Inguar, a mere Danish pirate, the saintly Edmund, the transformed Edmund, has the power to kill Swein, a Danish king (MM.30). In this way the narrative is almost circular in that, barring the initial expository sequence (Group 1), at the end we find ourselves back where we

began, with Edmund reigning supreme as the protector of East Anglia. Yet things are not as unambiguous as they first seem. There is evidence that the Morgan artist struggled to reconcile scenes from Edmund's *Passio* with material provided by the later *De Miraculis* tradition.

Although Edmund's apotheosis scene acts as the denouement to the pictorial cycle, the ultimate testament to his newfound power lies in his killing of King Swein (MM.30). The widespread popularity and cultural resonance of this story was explored in chapter four of this thesis, so there is little need to go into this in any detail. Suffice to say that Edmund's posthumous ability to overcome an earthly king was seen as an indicator of his saintly power and marked him out as a model of ideal Christian kingship. Such a scene clearly provides a fitting end to a narrative rife with tumult and tribulation, but there is a problem, a problem which lies not with the story itself, but in its position within the narrative as a whole.

If we return to the table presented in Tab.5.2, we can see that the Swein story is drawn largely from chapter five of Hermann's *De Miraculis*, while the preceding scenes, where Edmund's casket is involved in two miracles, are in fact drawn from chapters ten-twelve. This might be explained on the basis that Hermann's work is a miracle 'collection', an assemblage of discrete stories loosely brought together to reveal the saint's power. This would be a fine way of reconciling the discrepancy, but for the fact that Hermann's work maintains a strict chronological framework. It is manifestly clear that the two miracle scenes (MM.27 and 28) are supposed to post-date the killing of king Swein. Whereas Swein's death took place in 1014, both the miracle scenes take place in 1015. Why then would the artist choose to subvert Edmund's chronology in this way? In order to answer this, we should look more closely at the miracle images themselves.

Taken individually, both the miracle scenes involving Edmund's casket fit securely into hagiographic tradition and serve as ideal examples of Edmund's miraculous power. In the first (MM.27), where the priest's house is seen burning, we are reminded

of the importance not only of hospitality, but of paying due reverence to the saint. In Hermann's story, the priest's house is only burned after he refuses Edmund and his guardian sanctuary. In the second (MM.28), the cart carrying the saint's remains crosses a bridge which is too narrow. Nature would dictate that if a cart is too broad to cross a bridge then its wheels would sink into the water. Not so in Edmund's case. In another example which could be interpreted as a form of *Imitatio Christi*, Edmund and his cart were able, like Christ, to move across the surface of the water unhindered. Such miracles are highly conventional in hagiographic tradition and pose no problems in and of themselves; where problems do arise is in their broader historical context.

It is clear from the setting of the miniatures that both miracles take place outside the confines of Bury St Edmunds. The reason for this is that in 1015, when the miracles are said to have occurred, East Anglia had been invaded by yet another Dane - Thorkel the Tall. Both stories are effectively sub-episodes in the account of Edmund's posthumous flight to London as told by Hermann. Panicked by the depredations that Earl Thorkel was enacting in East Anglia, Hermann tells us, Edmund's wardens decided it best to remove their blessed saint's remains from their resting place and transport them to a more secure location. Such a story, it would seem, provoked accusations of impotence on the saint's part and cowardice on the part of his keepers. In the miracle text included in MS M.736, a heavily redacted version of Hermann's *De Miraculis* (see Tab.5.1 f.23-76), there is a lengthy digression by the author where he defends St Edmund against his detractors.[67] The specific criticism levelled at Edmund was to ask why, if the saint could strike down a powerful figure like King Swein, did he feel the need to flee a mere earl, Thorkel (MM.27-28)?

> 'See how that saint of yours, who destroyed the fiercest king, abandoned his post for fear of an earl, giving savagery free reign... St Edmund not only offered

---

[67] *Gosc.,* p.175f.

no resistance to his barbarity; he even put his own interests first and sought the protection of a very well-fortified city!'[68]

Such accusations clearly caused anxiety amongst Bury's monastic community. Why else would MS M.736's hagiographer address the question at such length in his text? The illustrator was presented with an even greater problem. His cycle of images was in effect a shorthand epitome of Edmund's life and miracles. In this structure, the slaying of Swein represents the ultimate redemption for the martyred king; it is Edmund's defining miracle. Had the illustrator followed the strict chronological sequence of events, he would have been left with a less than satisfactory conclusion i.e. Edmund fleeing Earl Thorkel. It would seem that the illustrator's solution to this problem was simple: he would reorder history. Although it clearly brings a greater sense of balance to the narrative, such a move nevertheless seems highly radical. A more elegant solution would surely have been to simply edit the scenes depicting Edmund's flight out of the sequence.

Why pick these episodes at all as examples? Narratives which involve a saint retreating from a worldly threat have strong hagiographic precedent, for example, the flight of Cuthbert and his monks from Lindisfarne to Chester Le Street and later to Durham. From the removal of Cuthbert's remains in 875, to their deposition in Chester Le Street in 883, to their final repose at Durham in 995, Cuthbert and his monks were effectively in a state of exile. The story of an itinerant group, led, by a spiritual figure, after an extended diaspora, to a 'promised land', evokes clear biblical parallels with the book of Exodus and the Hebrews' flight from Egypt. Indeed, this analogy seems not to have been circumstantial. The Anglo-Saxonist Nicholas Howe has written extensively on the use of the Exodus story, with its migratory connotations, as a metaphor for the Anglo-Saxons arrival in England.[69] And the tribulations of Cuthbert and his 'people' seem

---

[68] *Ibid.,* p.175.

[69] Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Myth Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989)

to serve as one more example of this theme in action. Indeed, Simeon of Durham, who wrote his history of Durham Cathedral in the early-twelfth century, draws a specific comparison between Cuthbert's miracles and the biblical plagues visited upon the Egypt. [70] Such close narrative affinities were evidently meant to highlight the universality of Christian experience and served to illustrate how biblical narratives could be re-enacted at a regional level. It is likely, therefore, that the story of Edmund's flight to London and his later return to Bury was intended to serve a similar purpose. Given the emergent leitmotif of *Imitatio Christi* that resounds in Edmund's hagiography, one could interpret the saint's time spent in London as the equivalent of Christ's forty days spent in the wilderness. Like Christ, whom Satan offers all the kingdoms of the world, Edmund too is tempted. Hermann describes London as 'England's richest city', but a place which 'gives birth to no saints.'[71] Consequently, Edmund, whose arrival is universally heralded, is offered the opportunity to become the city's patron saint, an honour he ultimately refuses so that he might return to East Anglia. During a scene where Aelfhun, the Bishop of London, seeks to forcibly prevent Edmund's return, Aelwine, the saint's keeper, presents Edmund with the choice:

> 'Calling upon the saint, he prayed from the depths of his heart, not wanting his own intentions to conflict with those of the saint this time, but seeking to discover before those present whether it was his wish to leave that place and reclaim his own lands.'[72]

Edmund, who until that point had refused to be moved, allows his coffin to be lifted by Aelwine and his attendants, signalling his refusal of the bishop's advances and his wish to return to Bury. Consequently, the narrative of Edmund's sojourn in and return from London, of which the two illustrated scenes described above form a part, foregrounds

---

[70] Simeon of Durham, 'History of the Church of Durham', in *The Church Historians of England, v.III, pt.II: The Historical Works of Simeon of Durham*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London, 1855), pp.660-1, c.XXVI. Simeon compares a miraculous storm which prevented the monks of Lindisfarne from turning to Ireland with Moses turning the Nile to blood.

[71] *Herm.*, pp.32-5.

[72] *Ibid.,* pp.38-9.

two recurring themes in Hermann's *De Miraculis*. Firstly, it reveals the saint's aversion to episcopal control, and secondly it highlights his enduring love for East Anglia: even when offered the patronage of London itself. In many ways this wider narrative arc is just as conventional as its constituent parts.

Another reason for the selection of these miracles as pictographic examples of Edmund's power may reside in their potential audience. This chapter has suggested elsewhere that these images were likely intended for an audience of high-end pilgrims. If this is the case, then they serve as ideal examples that Edmund's power extended beyond the boundaries of Bury itself: both miracles take place elsewhere. For a pilgrim who has travelled a considerable distance to see their saint, these images serve as the ideal confirmation that Edmund's powers are open to everyone. This, however, comes with a caveat – in both scenes, central to the action is the image of Edmund's sarcophagus - this was no doubt intended to remind the viewer that although Edmund's power had a long reach, its true location was in the saint's earthly remains and, therefore, at Bury. Equally, this further demonstrates, as discussed in chapter two, that pilgrims would encounter the saint through the medium of his sarcophagus/shrine rather than his actual body.

5.7: Conclusion

For any visitor to Bury St Edmunds, rich or poor, figurative images of the saint would have played an important role. Edmund's incorrupt body was the ultimate testament to his holiness. Yet, this holiness remained concealed behind the glittering façade of his shrine. While the magnificence of this reliquary symbolised, even amplified, Edmund's status, it nevertheless did little to humanise him. It was the job of artists to fill this lacuna. Images, such as those found in MS M.736, gave Edmund his humanity. They graphically revealed the type of man he was, how he suffered and died for his people and how, through the power of God, he continued to have an influence upon the world.

If the built environment provided a precise location for the saint, and the narrative a persona, then images gave that persona a believable face.

Images, like those in the Morgan manuscript, assured visiting pilgrims that Edmund was a saint worthy of veneration. Overt representations of Edmund using his power on behalf of those in need can only have redoubled a visitor's belief in the saint's efficacy. Yet, the physical context of the manuscript cannot be ignored. While the Morgan miniatures were certainly designed to permit ready, pictorial access to the saint's narrative and while clues indicate that it was designed for a pilgrim audience, it is unlikely to have been revealed to every person visiting the shrine. An expensive, deluxe object, in all probability it was only shown to a select few of the most prestigious visitors. A personal viewing of these sumptuous, wordless images would have been highly affective and would have instilled an intensified sense of awe in its audience. Less esteemed pilgrims would likely have encountered similar images in a more communal fashion through frescos and wall hangings, which sadly are now lost to us.

We can say with near certainty that, much like Edmund's character in the textual tradition, visual representations of him retain almost nothing of the man he once was. Although it can never be conclusively proven that figural images produced at Bury were not based upon a viewing of Edmund's remains, it seems far more likely that his iconotype was intended to act as a model of righteous, regional, Christ-like kingship. The Edmund of the Morgan cycle is Christ-like in his appearance, Christ-like in his self-sacrifice and Christ-like in his actions. However, the Morgan cycle does far more than simply provide us with a cardboard cut-out of a perfect king, it couches Edmund's character within an intricately wrought narrative. This narrative - the story of a king who, rather than sacrifice his Christian principles, willingly surrendered his own crown, kingdom and life - emphasises the importance and continuity of power, even beyond the grave. The Edmund of the Morgan cycle is ultimately a more effective king in death than

in life. Preserving the piety and compassion which typified his earthly rule, Edmund, as a saint, is armed with new spiritual weapons which he uses to defeat his kingdom's enemies. The death of Swein, a fellow king, at Edmund's hands, positioned at the end of the cycle, acts as the final proof of the saint's efficacy. Yet, it is evident that in constructing this narrative, the cycle's creators were willing to alter established hagiographic chronology. This emphasis on continuity, even enhancement of power tells us that Bury's monastic community were determined to present Edmund to the world as a saint-king, still active and engaged in his kingdom's affairs, still willing to act in defence of his people and still willing to administer swift justice where required. Such an image reflected the abbey's own institutional aspirations as a landholder. The image of Edmund that comes through from the Morgan miniatures is one of a king and saint with '*species digna imperio*' and by implication this suggests that his keepers, the monks of Bury St Edmunds, were also 'worthy of rule'.

Chapter 6: A Saint of Many Faces – Visual Variation in the Cult of St Edmund

6.1: Introduction

This chapter considers how, through the creation of figurative depictions, individuals and institutions could lay claim to a St Edmund of their own. Very few visual representations of St Edmund survive from before the fourteenth century. As such, this chapter, at times, goes beyond this thesis' temporal remit to examine images from later periods. The justification for doing so is simple; although the representations are late, they draw upon earlier material and belong to a visual tradition that boasted older, now lost, prototype images. In so doing, this chapter extends the previous one, both thematically and temporally, to areas beyond Edmund's cult centre.

This chapter argues that, by analysing how the extended community of a saint chose to depict their patron, we can gain insight as to the interpretive variety that existed within that saint's cult. Analysis of the surviving visual material shows that, in the case of St Edmund, figurative representations could be divided broadly into two categories, each displaying the saint at a different life-stage and each foregrounding differing elements of his character. Such variety was not limited to physical appearance. It extended to bodily posture, which could be adapted to communicate a range of messages otherwise embedded within written or oral narratives. This chapter analyses which aspects of Edmund's hagiography proved most popular as subjects for illustration and considers their significance. It is further demonstrated that, like other saints, Edmund's image and narrative could be abbreviated into an emblematic form.

Essential to this exploration is a consideration not only of the different ways in which St Edmund appeared but also of the media used to display those representations. From books to buildings, from costumes to choir stalls, medieval survivals reveal that

Edmund's image adorned a variety of architectural and artifactual settings. By making use of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and Kunera databases, this chapter draws on a range of material sources, not previously considered in the context of Edmund's cult. In so doing, it is shown that the choices made in the creation of cult objects denote a strategic materialisation of the immaterial: a materialisation which can tell us a great deal about how people interacted with their saint. The chapter concludes by returning to the ideas of Alfred Gell and considers how saintly images could be infused with layered meanings.

6.2: The two Edmunds

Like the majority of pre-conquest English saints, there appears to have been little in the way of consensus as to St Edmund's appearance. Surviving visual representations of the saint, across a broad timespan show that his skin tone, eye colour, hair colour and clothing can vary considerably from image to image. In spite of these minor variations, in Edmund's case, there seems to have been two distinct and archetypical ways of representing him. Pictorial sources show that medieval artists imagined Edmund both as a bearded, mature king and as a beardless, virginal youth. Fig.6.1 and 6.2 show examples of these archetypes. One might seek to put these differing forms down to the shifting nature of artistic convention. However, as was seen in the preceding chapter, within the Morgan cycle, Edmund appears in both guises. In this sequence, the presence of both visual forms serves to mark the passing of time and to enhance the sense that the narrative depicted is chronologically progressive. In other contexts, however, where only one icon-type appears, the reason for this lack of homogeneity is less clear. This chapter argues that the two icon types, youthful and mature, each represented different interpretations of St Edmund and his persona: interpretations which had greater or lesser relevance depending upon proximity to the saint's shrine.

Christian art is no stranger to depicting holy figures at different phases of their life. Even today we are familiar with the binary depiction of Christ both as swaddled infant and as a mature, masculine figure. These two images reflect the temporal collapse that exists within the gospel narrative, whereby Christ moves suddenly from the babe of the nativity to a fully grown man. In artistic terms, this division can be taken to reflect nothing more than the two phases of Christ's life with which Christians were most familiar. Symbolically, however, they represent different things. The Christ child brings to mind the miracle of the incarnation, infant purity and youth, whereas images of an adult Christ suggest themes of sacrifice, hope and prophecy fulfilled. Likewise, we can take images of Edmund as a youth and as a mature king to represent different aspects of the saint's character. The origins and purpose of the kingly, bearded Edmund are clear and were discussed thoroughly in chapter five, yet the reasons underlying the choice to depict Edmund as a youth are less evident. In the following few paragraphs, we will explore several sources which may have provided inspiration.

Early narrative treatments of St Edmund's hagiography reveal little about the saint's youth. Abbo of Fleury says only that Edmund, as a boy, already 'grasped with wholehearted endeavour the ladder of virtue, the summit of which he was destined by God's mercy to reach by martyrdom.'[1] Abbo's main narrative begins with Edmund already fully grown and in the midst of his reign. In this way, Edmund, like Christ, had a temporal lacuna surrounding the early phases of his life. Bury's monks seem to have been conscious of these 'lost years' as, by the mid-twelfth century, they had sought to bridge the gap through literature. The work that provides that bridge was Geoffrey of Wells' *De Infantia Sancti Eadmundi*. It paints a picture of Edmund's youth where, from the beginning, he is clearly marked out for sainthood. It is, however, unlikely that Geoffrey's text provided the model for the youthful Edmund we see in wall paintings

---

[1] *Abbo*, pp.16-17.

from across England. *De Infantia* survives only in copies originating from Bury itself.[2] With no evidence that Geoffrey's miraculous, infant Edmund ever developed a broad audience, one is left to look elsewhere for a source of inspiration for Edmund's youthful appearance.

A less obvious candidate for an exemplar comes in the form of a non-English saint who underwent a similar figural transformation during the middle ages: St Sebastian. The image of Sebastian as a scantily clad youth, tied to a tree and pierced with arrows, was a favoured subject for medieval and Renaissance artists and even today ranks amongst the most easily recognisable of Christian devotional images (Fig.6.5). Yet, this archetypal depiction of Sebastian was, in fact, a later artistic innovation. The earliest known representations of the saint depict Sebastian not as an androgynous, arrow pierced youth, but as a mature, bearded man. Two early examples, the first a sixth-century mosaic at Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Fig.6.3) and the second a seventh-century one from San Pietro in Vincoli (Fig.6.4) show Sebastian as a middle-aged man dressed in Roman attire. The earliest known images of Sebastian's martyrdom came from the church of Santa Maria Pallara in Rome, where a tenth-century narrative cycle, in the form of a mural, showed several scenes from the saint's martyrdom.[3] It would seem that after this initial offering, Sebastian's passion became a regular decorative theme within Italian churches.[4] However, the saint had not yet transmogrified into the beardless youth we identify him with today. Until the fourteenth century, Sebastian remained a bearded, mature man.[5]

---

[2] For manuscript provenances see; Thomson, 'Geoffrey of Wells', p.32-3.

[3] Sheila Barker, 'The Making of a Plague Saint: Saint Sebastian's Imagery and Cult Before the Counter-Reformation', in *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester (Kirksville, 2007), p.95.

[4] *Ibid.,* p.94-7. Barker cites several examples of isolated scenes depicting Sebastian's passion.

[5] *Ibid.*, p.95.

As highlighted in chapter three, St Sebastian and his martyrdom may well have had a significant impact on the development of St Edmund's hagiographic narrative. Abbo draws direct parallels between Sebastian and Edmund, stating:

> '*Sicque factum est ut spiculorum terebratis aculeis circumfossus palpitans horreret, velut asper hericius, aut spinis hirtus carduus, in passion similis Sebastiano egregio martyri*'.

> 'And thus, all haggled over by the sharp points of their darts, and scarce able to draw breath, he actually bristled with them, like a prickly hedgehog or a thistle fretted with spines, resembling in his agony the illustrious martyr Sebastian.'[6]

The reference to Edmund appearing as a hedgehog (Latin word *hericius*) mirrors directly the description of Sebastian's passion, provided by his fifth-century *Acta*.

> '*Tunc posuerunt eum milites in medio campo, et hinc inde eum ita sagittis repleuerunt, ut quasi hericius ita esset hirsutus ictibus sagittarum*'.

> 'Then the soldiers put him in the midst of the field, and from there they filled him with arrows, so that like a hedgehog he bristled with the blows of the arrows.'[7]

As Antonia Gransden has commented, it seems likely that Abbo drew the story of Edmund's passion directly from Sebastian's narrative.[8] Yet, the similarities between Edmund and Sebastian are not limited to narrative description. The respective martyrdoms of the two saints were also visualised in ways that made them almost indistinguishable. The standard form was to have the saint bound to a central pillar or tree, pierced with multiple arrows, with archers, bows drawn, on either side. Fig.6.8-9 provide examples of pilgrim badges depicting the saints.

It is clear that there were close parallels between the development of Sebastian and Edmund as artistic subjects. So similar were their iconographic forms during the

---

[6] *Abbo*, pp.34-5.

[7] Originally attributed to Ambrose of Milan, Sebastian's passion narrative can be found in the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum*, BHL: 7543 [http://acta.chadwyck.co.uk/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=4&id=Z400066017&FILE=../session/1443190277_15649&SOURCE=config.cfg&CURDB=acta] (author's translation).

[8] Antonia Gransden, *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England*, (London, 1992), p.86.

high middle-ages that, devoid of context, there can be some difficulty in discerning which of the two is depicted. Yet, despite an evident relationship between the cults, the familiar, boyish representation of Sebastian was a later innovation and therefore cannot have served as the archetype for youthful depictions of Edmund.

The youthful Edmund would seem to have been an independent development that emphasises an often underplayed aspect of his saintly character: his virginity. Chapter two examined how Edmund's purported life-long chastity was thought to be one of the principle reasons for the miraculous preservation of his body. However, as was pointed out during that analysis, virginity was seldom trumpeted as one of Edmund's defining characteristics. For the community that grew up around his preserved remains, Edmund's attributes as a martyr and king took precedence over his role as a virgin. Indeed, the virginity of male saints was often seen as a lesser aspect of their character. As Sarah Salih comments: 'Several male saints are approvingly referred to as chaste or virginal', and yet, 'their sexual status is rarely the locus of their sanctity, as is often the case for women.'[9] Edward the Confessor provides an excellent example. Despite being married for just under twenty one years, Edward was believed to have lived a virginal life.[10] He is remembered, however, for his confessional rather than his virginal status. The virgin was largely a female archetype, embodied most clearly in the image of Christ's mother, Mary.[11] Nevertheless, Edmund's virginity was deemed to be of high significance by Abbo, who placed a strong emphasis on it in his *Passio*. Although later texts would pay scant attention to Edmund's virginal attributes, the continued and widespread popularity of the *Passio* ensured that Edmund's status as a virgin never completely disappeared.

---

[9] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2001), p.17.

[10] Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (Berkley, 1984), p.84. Barlow comments on the unlikelihood that Edward was truly a virgin.

[11] Anke Bernau, *Virgins: A Cultural History* (London, 2007), pp.44-5.

How then does Edmund's purported virginity map onto youthful representations of him? Although the practice of life-long virginity was not entirely unheard of in the middle ages, particularly for men and women living in religious contexts, there was still a general association between virginity and youth. According to Anke Bernau, this was because virginity, for most, was irrevocably lost at the point of adolescence. [12] Furthermore, the maintenance of chastity, a quality closely aligned with virginity, was considered to be at its most potent as an expression of piety during one's youth. To make this very point, John Arnold draws our attention to Gerald of Wales' twelfth/thirteenth-century *Gemma Ecclesiastica*. Gerald, he tells us: 'notes that it is more praiseworthy if men restrain themselves from lust when they are young, because it is much harder then and he quotes (probably apocryphally) Isidore of Seville as saying that if one embraces chastity in old age, when lust has departed, one is not actually practicing continence.'[13]

This thesis suggests that by portraying Edmund as a youth, medieval artists were attempting to invest their work with a visual subtext that implicitly emphasised the saint's virginity. It is perhaps telling that images of a youthful Edmund appear, generally speaking, to have been more popular outside of East Anglia.[14] Depictions of Edmund as a mature man were widely circulated near Bury, while representations of Edmund as a virginal youth seem to have been comparatively more frequent in a broader, English context - the youthful type appears as far away as Pickering in Yorkshire (Fig.6.10) and Weare Giffard in Devon (Fig.6.11).[15]

---

[12] *Ibid.*, p.121-4.

[13] John Arnold, 'The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity', in *Medieval Virginities*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (Cardiff, 2003), p.110.

[14] There are surviving examples of a youthful and beardless Edmund that appear within East Anglia, such as the wall paintings at St Mary's Lakenheath, though they are few and far between.

[15] Matthew Champion, 'Devotion, Pestilence and Conflict: The Medieval Wall paintings of St Mary the Virgin Lakenheath', in *Art Faith and Place in East Anglia: From Prehistory to the Present*, ed. T.A Heslop, Elizabeth Mellings and Margit Thofner (Woodbridge, 2012), pp.88-105.

In a medieval Christian context, maintained post-adolescent virginity was considered to be a virtuous enterprise.[16] However, it was not a virtue associated with good kingship. During the middle ages, virility and the ability to produce viable heirs were viewed as two of the defining characteristics of a successful monarch.[17] As discussed in previous chapters, the monks of Bury St Edmunds, through their control over large swathes of East Anglia, had a vested interest in portraying their patron, and thus themselves, as a successful ruler. Furthermore, within East Anglia, Edmund was culturally and historically significant as the last king of what had once been an independent kingdom. These facts perhaps help to explain why figurative depictions of Edmund from the region tend to mould him into a traditional, monarchic form. As noted earlier, there are few survivals from the period directly studied in this thesis. However, fifteenth-century examples from Norfolk and Suffolk indicate how Edmund was commonly portrayed within the region (Fig.6.12-16). In artistic terms, Edmund's failure to perform his kingly duties by furthering the regnal line was masked beneath a guise associated with the archetypal, successful, male ruler. Outside of East Anglia, Edmund's position as a one-time heptarch held less meaning for those who venerated him. Consequently, beyond the borders of his traditional heartland, where there was less political pressure to render him in an overtly king-like form, Edmund's inconvenient virginity could be rehabilitated as a virtue once more. The youthful rendition of Edmund's form implicitly suggests a sexual purity not found in other representations of him.

In summary, the mature and youthful forms used to depict Edmund emphasise different aspects of his saintly persona. The mature, bearded Edmund, generally preferred in East Anglia, places emphasis on Edmund's role as a ruler, while the beardless youth, more often found outside of the region, encapsulates sexual purity.

---

[16] Bernau, *Virginity*, p.31f.

[17] Christopher Brooke, *Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, third edition (London: 2000), p.193.

This pattern of geographic dispersal is by no means fixed. Examples of both icon types exist both inside and outside of East Anglia. It is, however, notable that the relative frequency of the youthful Edmund seems to be greater in other parts of England. Aside from the bodily form used to portray the saint, another aspect of visual representation needs to be considered; 'narrative posture'. Narrative posture refers to the way in which Edmund was figuratively posed and how this, in turn, could represent aspects of his hagiographic narrative.

6.3: Narrative posture and 'attributes'

A picture tells a thousand words, or so the cliché goes, but does it? Gregory the Great famously wrote:

> 'For to adore a picture is one thing, but to learn through the story of a picture what is to be adored is another. For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read.'[18]

Gregory's defence of images appears in a late-sixth-century letter directed at Serenus, an iconoclast bishop of Marseilles. Though scholars have debated his real meaning, Gregory seems to suggest the possibility that illiterate members of the church community could learn the word of God merely by viewing devotional images. This idea was responsible, at least in part, for the rich visual culture that was such a prominent feature of medieval Christianity. In his 1989 article *Was art really the 'book of the illiterate'?*, Lawrence G. Duggan discusses the impact of Gregory's statement on the history of medieval Christian image-doctrine and art.[19] Duggan, like other scholars in recent times, formed the opinion that medieval Christian art lacked sufficient, independent specificity to act in the same way as a text. In short, presented in isolation, it is difficult to learn anything non-descriptive from an image. Instead, images either

---

[18] Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum:* bk.XI, letter 13, found at *Father* [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/360211013.htm].

[19] Lawrence G. Duggan, 'Was art really the 'book of the illiterate', *Word and Image*, 5:3 (1989), pp.227-251.

function as an illustrative companion to an external source of information or act as mnemonics for information the viewer already has. Nonetheless, as chapter five revealed, wordless, multi-image cycles, such as that in Pierpont Morgan MS. M.736 can achieve a degree of narrative sophistication through rendering complex stories in a purely visual way. That the medieval creators of these cycles intended them to act as visual narratives is attested by the St Alban's Psalter, which contains a paraphrase of Gregory's letter to Serenus in both French and Latin.[20] As discussed in chapter five, the artwork in the St Albans Psalter, which includes an un-glossed, prefatory cycle of forty biblical scenes, shares close, stylistic parallels with the images in the Morgan cycle. Gregory's letter seems to have been incorporated by way of defending the richly illustrated nature of the manuscript.[21] Whether such pictorial cycles could reveal a story unaided is open to question. A degree of external input would have been required to explain the nuances (names/place names/timeframes etc.) of the scenes depicted. Collins, Kidd and Turner, who wrote a companion volume to the 2013 exhibition *Canterbury and St Albans: Treasures from the Church and Cloister*, suggest that for the illiterate and semi-literate: 'Pictures served as mnemonic devices and devotional aids. They could help the reader-viewer recall religious texts that had been committed to memory. They could also provide a focus for those who might otherwise lack the discipline for prayer.'[22] In other words, multi-image sequences, such as the Morgan and St Albans cycles, were intended for an audience already steeped in church culture and already familiar with the narratives depicted. The 'viewer-reader' that they allude to would have been pre-equipped with the necessary knowledge to interpret and understand the scenes pictured. Shorn of such knowledge, or any explanatory

---

[20] The text incorrectly identifies Secundinus, a Sicilian hermit, as the letter's recipient.

[21] Margaret Jubb, 'Commentary On The Old French Translation Of Gregory's Letter' (Aberdeen, 2003) [https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/frenchgreg.shtml].

[22] Kristen Collins, Peter Kidd and Nancy K. Turner, *The St Albans psalter: Painting and Prayer in medieval England* (Los Angeles, 2013), p.54.

framework, the meaning and narrative connotations of devotional image cycles might remain opaque.

If multi-image cycles could not, in and of themselves, tell a whole story, then in the case of single images the problem was further compounded. Aside from the Morgan cycle and John Lydgate's fourteenth-century illustrated life (not discussed in this thesis), there are very few multi-image representations of St Edmund that survive. Three wall paintings found respectively at; St Edmunds', Fritton (Norfolk, twelfth-century), St Helen's, Cliff at Hoo (Kent, thirteenth/fourteenth-century) and St Mary's, Thornham Parva (Suffolk, fourteenth-century), as well as a twelfth-century carved cycle in the crypt at St Denis, Paris, may be the only other surviving examples of picto-narrative sequences illustrating Edmund's life.[23] It is more common for Edmund to appear in a single image format. Unlike narrative cycles which can present a saint's life from start to finish as a series of detailed, usually chronological, vignettes, single image representations do not have the luxury of developing the saint's character in great detail. Instead, the image has to act as a summary of the various facets that mark that particular saint out as an individual. What separates one saint from another are the unique aspects of his or her narrative. All saints lived holy lives; all saints performed pious acts; the nature of those lives and the character of those acts are their defining features. According to Fernando and Gioia Lanzi, in artistic terms, saintly individuality is achieved through a mixture of the saint's bodily posture and the presence of what are termed 'attributes'.[24] Attributes are objects associated with critical points in the saint's narrative. In the case of martyr saints, these are typically the instruments of the saint's passion. St Catherine of Alexandria, for example, is often shown carrying the wheel upon which she was broken, and St Steven is depicted as carrying the basket of rocks

---

[23] For the wall paintings see; Rodger Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches* (Woodbridge, 2008). For the carved cycle at St Denis see P.Z. Blum, 'The St Edmund Cycle in the Crypt at St Denis', in *BSE*, pp.57-68.

[24] Fernando Lanzi and Gioia Lanzi, *Saints and their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Minnesota, 2004), pp.21-2.

used during his execution.[25] Through the use of attributes and posture, single images 'are capable of suggesting to the viewer the entire activity of the saint; as a result, a single image can call to mind an entire history and the virtues embodied in that history...'[26]

Edmund's principle attributes are arrows and a crown. Arrows, of course, represent the tools used during the saint's protracted martyrdom. The crown, however, has a binary meaning. Firstly, it represents Edmund's kingship, both his historical role as a regional monarch and his continued presence as a saintly protector and contemporary land owner within East Anglia. Secondly, it acts as a further reminder of the saint's martyrdom. Within Christian art, martyr saints are often depicted wearing a crown or garland. The idea linking coronation and martyrdom stems from New Testament references the persecution of Christians. One such reference comes from James 1:12:

> 'Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.'

The association of Edmund's crown with martyrdom is made explicit in the final image of the Morgan cycle (Fig.5.32) where it is placed upon him by an angelic host.

A third attribute that is sometimes, though less often, used to identify Edmund is a wolf. The wolf, like the crown and arrows, is taken from Edmund's passion narrative. According to Abbo, after Edmund's execution, his decapitated head was cut off and thrown into the woods. The search party sent to find Edmund only discovered his head after the saint miraculously cried out 'hic, hic, hic' (here, here, here). Following the voice of their dead king they discovered that:

> 'A monstrous wolf was by God's mercy found in that place, embracing the holy head between its paws, as it lay at full length on the ground, and thus acting as

---

[25] Hilarie Cornwell and James Cornwell, *Saints, Signs, and Symbols*, third edition, (London, 2009), p.30 and 66.

[26] Lanzi, *Saint's and their Symbols*, p.21.

sentinel to the martyr. Nor did it suffer any animal whatever to injure its charge, but, forgetful of its natural voracity, preserved the head from all harm with the utmost vigilance, lying outstretched on the earth.'[27]

The protective wolf became a popular motif in visual representations of St Edmund and can be found adorning a variety of media (Fig.6.17-21).[28] Indeed, the story of the wolf protecting St Edmund's head seems to have been something of a personal favourite for some East Anglians, as attested to by the 2013 discovery of a fourteenth-century, copper alloy seal matrix at Worthing (Fig.6.20).[29] This seal, which shows a wolf guarding Edmund's head, is inscribed with the legend *hER hER hER hiCh AM* (here, here, here, here I am), a reference to Edmund's decapitated head speaking. A similarly themed image appears as fifteenth-century graffiti in the 'Bury Bible', now part of the Parker manuscript collection at Cambridge (Fig.6.21).[30] In this case, a monk conducting repair work on the MS. has patched a hole in the vellum and drawn an image of St Edmund's head calling out 'hic hic hic'. That this narrative element has found its way into both functional and whimsical forms of visual expression is a testament to its enduring charm and appeal.

Figurative depictions of St Edmund display a degree of variation regarding the saint's general appearance, and it is likewise in terms of posture. Edmund is generally presented in one of two ways. Firstly, he is often depicted undergoing martyrdom (Fig.6.9-11 and 25-28). In such instances, he is tied to a tree, pierced with arrows, archers shown on either side. This image was popular throughout England. Although Edmund's *Passio* indicates that he was stripped of it before his ordeal, these bloody scenes commonly show Edmund wearing a crown. The inclusion of a crown not only

---

[27] *Abbo*, pp.42-3.

[28] Fifteenth-century bench ends of this type are also found at St Peter's, Walpole, Norfolk. The wolf and head motif has remained popular through to the modern day as attested to by similar carvings on the early-twentieth-century bishop's throne at St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

[29] This find was registered with the portable antiquities scheme (PAS ref: SF-BFFA76). Online record can be found at: [https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/611316].

[30] MS. Parker 2III f.322r.

marks out Edmund's kingly credentials and his status as a martyr, it also differentiated him from other saints. As we saw earlier, images of St Edmund developed in such a way that they closely resembled contemporary representations of St Sebastian. The crown distinguishes Edmund from his fellow saint, who is more often seen mantled by a halo. The second pose used to depict Edmund presents him dressed in full royal regalia and clutching an arrow or arrows (Fig.6.1-2 and 12-16). Unlike scenes from Edmund's life and passion, this posture is not drawn directly from hagiographic texts. Nevertheless, it draws allusions to the saint's hagiography through the presence of his attributes. Without the inclusion of the arrow, the saint would be difficult to distinguish from any other image of a king. Indeed, in instances where an arrow is absent or obscured, Edmund can easily be conflated with Edward the Confessor who wears similarly kinglike attire.

It is clear that St Edmund's attributes were the most important aspect of his visual iconography. Not only did they differentiate images of Edmund from those of other saints, but they also symbolically indicated aspects of his hagiography. In other words, St Edmund's attributes were what made him St Edmund, at least in a visual sense. Indeed, so important were these visual tropes that they need not form part of a figurative depiction at all. It was often the case in medieval art that attributes could stand on their own as a representation of a saint. St Agatha, for example, is frequently represented by a pair of pincers holding an eye, surmounted by a platter bearing a pair of breasts, all references to her passion.[31] In instances where the saint is represented in such a schematic way, the attributes act metonymically. Although the saint is not depicted, they are so closely associated with the objects displayed that those objects can reasonably stand in place of a figurative image. For such metonyms to be correctly interpreted requires extensive cultural knowledge.[32] Saints' attributes formed a sort of

---

[31] Cornwell, *Saints, Signs and Symbols*, p.19.

[32] Sean Hall, *This Means This This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics* (London, 2007), p.40.

picto-narrative language, a language that the viewer needed to comprehend. Edmund too could be distilled down to the status of an iconic motif. In Edmund's case, this took the form either of a crown surmounting a pair of crossed arrows or of a shield surmounted by three arrowed crowns. The former indicates that Edmund was king and martyr, the latter indicates Edmund's three crowns; his earthly crown, his martyr's crown and the crown of his virginity. These emblems were adopted by the abbey of Bury St Edmunds as heraldic devices. The examples shown in Fig.6.22-24, which are all metal detector finds, are examples of pendants hung from horse's livery. Although it is impossible to know for certain, it is possible they were worn by horses from the abbey's own stables. Such small objects act as a reminder of how pervasive the iconography of saints must have been during the middle ages. Indeed, one might imagine that these tokens marked out the identity of Bury's monastic officials as they travelled across East Anglia conducting the abbey's affairs.

This section has shown how visual representation could bring a saint's hagiographic narrative to life either figuratively or schematically. In both cases, the intention was to communicate visual messages to those familiar with the saint. The type of message, however, could vary according to context.

Fig.6.1   Fig.6.2

Fig.6.1: Edmund on the late-14th-century 'Wilton Diptych': National Gallery (ref: NG4451).
Fig.6.2: Detail from a 14th-century retable, St Mary's, Thornham Parva, Suffolk (formerly of Thetford Priory).
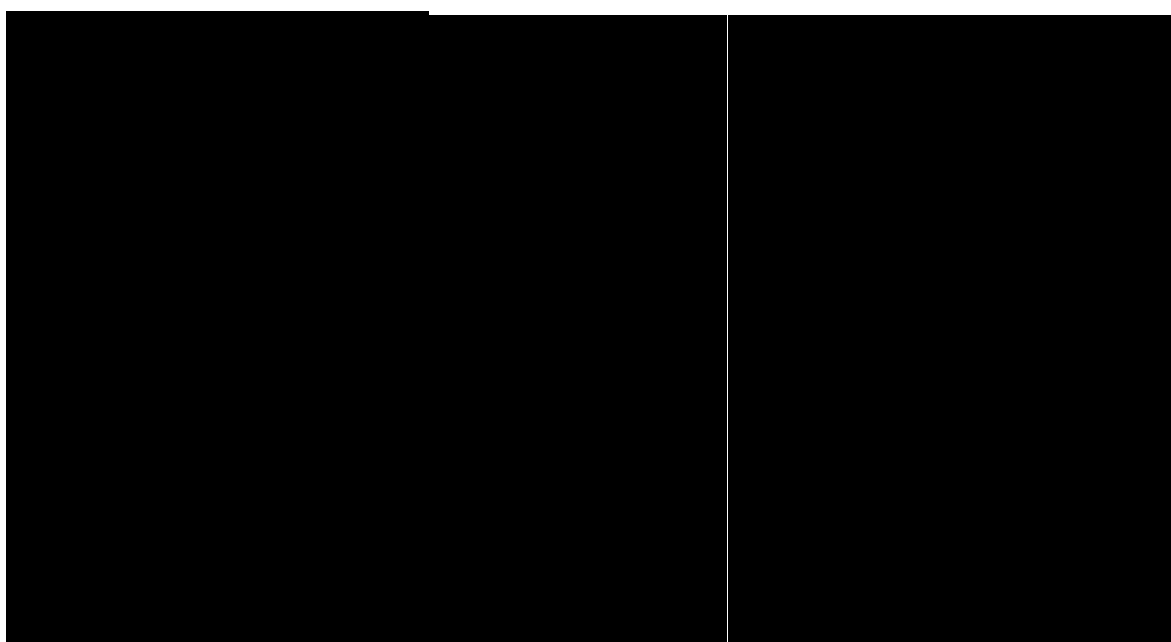

Fig.6.3   Fig.6.4   Fig.6.5

Fig.6.3: 6th-century mosaic of Sebastian, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.
Fig.6.4: 7th-century mosaic of Sebastian, San Pietro, Vincoli.
Fig.6.5: Geovanni Antonio Bazzi's 'Saint Sebastian', 1525, oil on canvass, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
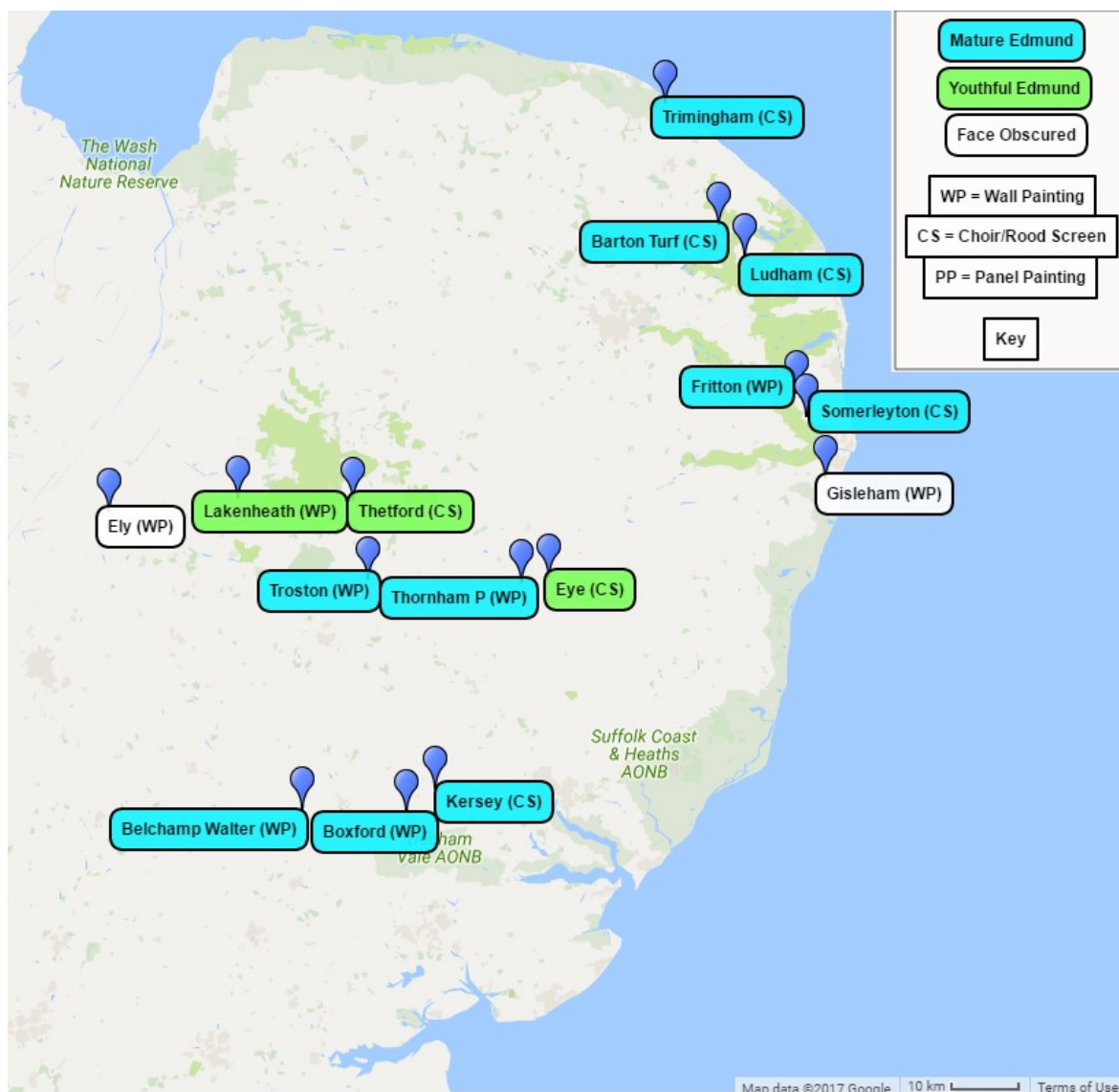
Fig.6.6: Distribution of figurative representations of St Edmund within East Anglia.

Fig.6.7: Distribution of figurative representations of St Edmund within wider England.
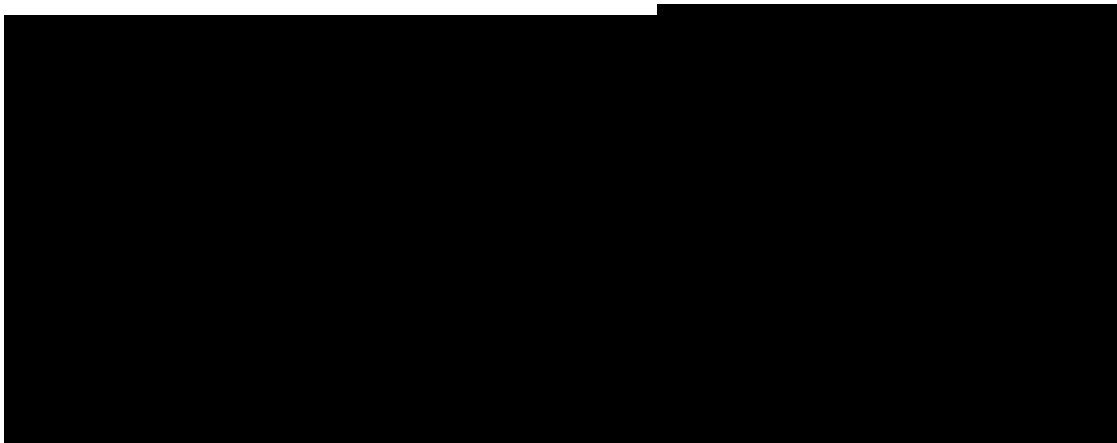
Fig.6.8

Fig.6.9

Fig.6.8: 14th-15th-century pilgrim badge depicting St Sebastian, sold in 2015 to a private collector by www.artancient.com.

Fig.6.9: 15th-century pilgrim badge depicting St Edmund's martyrdom, private collection (PAS ref: BH-CB9BB7).
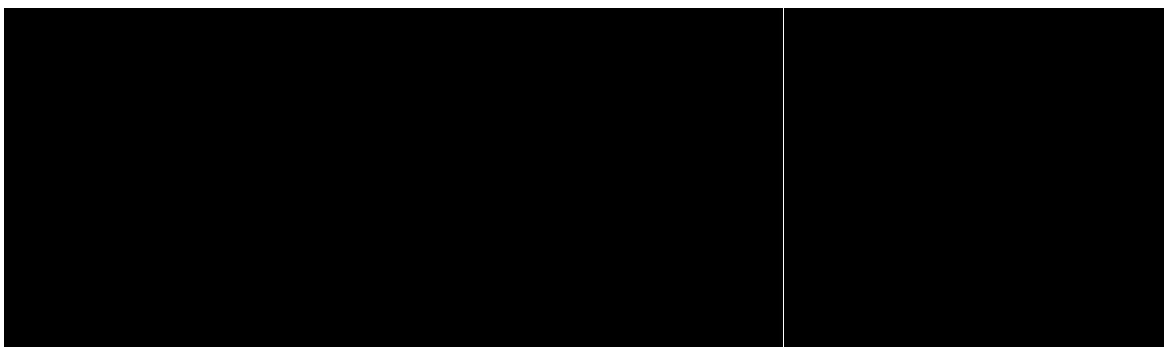
Fig.6.10

Fig.6.11

Fig.6.12

Fig.6.10: 15th-century wall painting, Ss. Peter and Paul, Pickering, North Yorkshire.
Fig.6.11: 15th-century wall painting, All Saints, Weare Giffard, Devon.
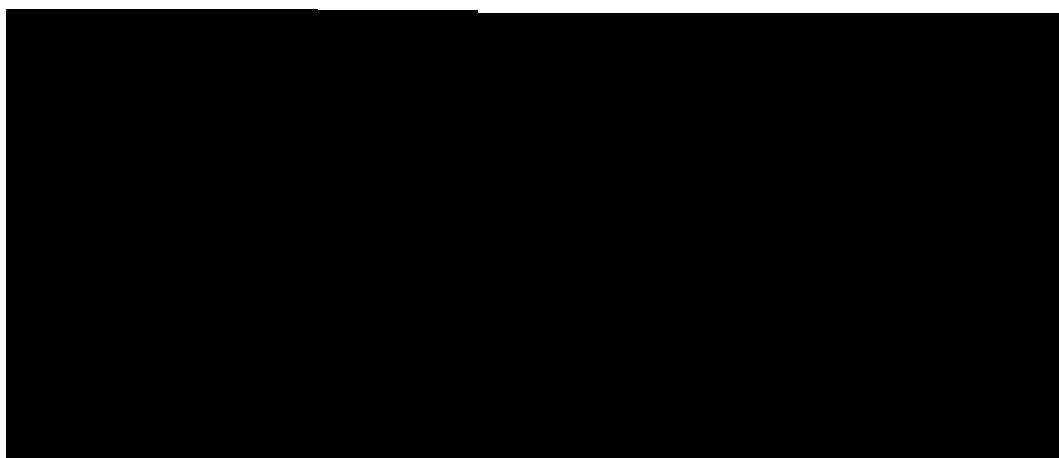Fig.6.12: Edmund on a 14th-century panel painting, York Minster.

Fig.6.13

Fig.6.14

Fig.6.15

Fig.6.16

Fig.6.13: 15th-century rood screen, St John the Baptist's Head, Trimingham, Norfolk.
Fig.6.14: 15th-century rood screen, St Mary's, Kersey, Suffolk.
Fig.6.15: 15th-century rood screen, St Catherine's, Ludham, Norfolk.
Fig.6.16: 15th-century rood screen, St Mary's, Somerleyton, Suffolk.
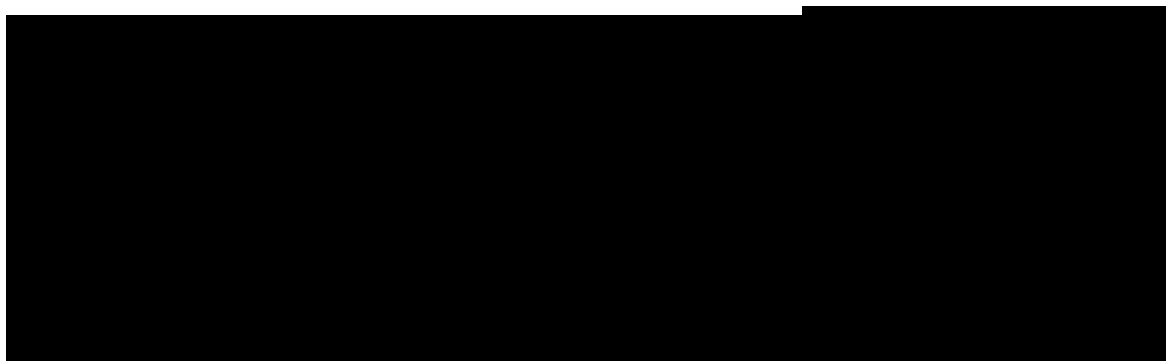
Fig.6.17   Fig.6.18   Fig.6.19
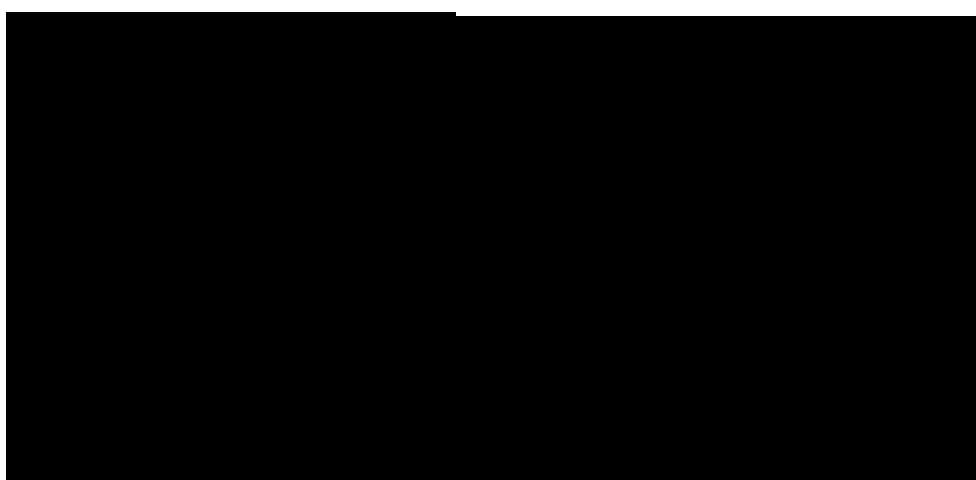
Fig.6.20   Fig.6.21

Fig.6.17: 14th-century wall painting, St Mary's, Padbury, Bucks.
Fig.6.18: Early-14th-century pilgrim's badge depicting Edmund's martyrdom, British Museum (ref: 1871,0714.62).
Fig.6.19: 15th-century carved bench end, Hadleigh, St Mary, Suffolk.
Fig.6.20: 14th-century(?), copper alloy, seal matrix, private collection.
Fig.6.21: 15th-century graffiti in the 11th-century 'Bury Bible'.
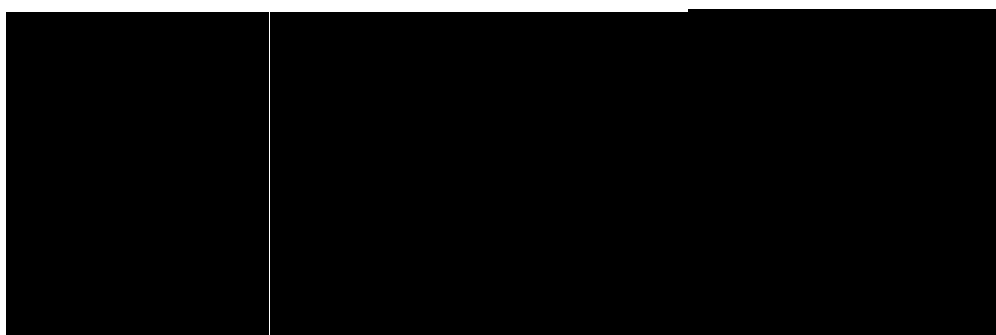
Fig.6.22   Fig.6.23   Fig.6.24

Fig.6.22: 14th-century (?), copper alloy, harness pendant, private collection (PAS ref: SF-6A6245).
Fig.6.23: 15th-century (?), copper alloy, strap end, private collection (PAS ref: SF-A0DCA5).
Fig.6.24: Uncertain date, copper alloy, harness pendant, private collection (PAS ref: SF-6539).
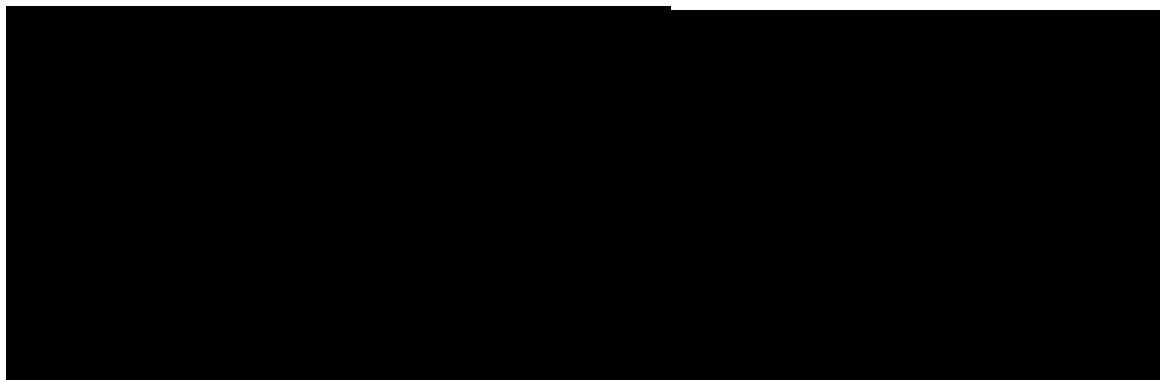
Fig.6.25

Fig.6.26

Fig.6.27

Fig.6.28

Fig.6.25: Illustration from the 14th-century 'Taymouth' book of hours.
Fig.6.26: 14th-century wall painting, St Mary's, Troston, Suffolk.
Fig.6.27: Detail from the 14th-century 'Lateran Cope', now housed in Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca.
Fig.6.28: 14th-century (?), copper alloy, seal matrix, private collection.
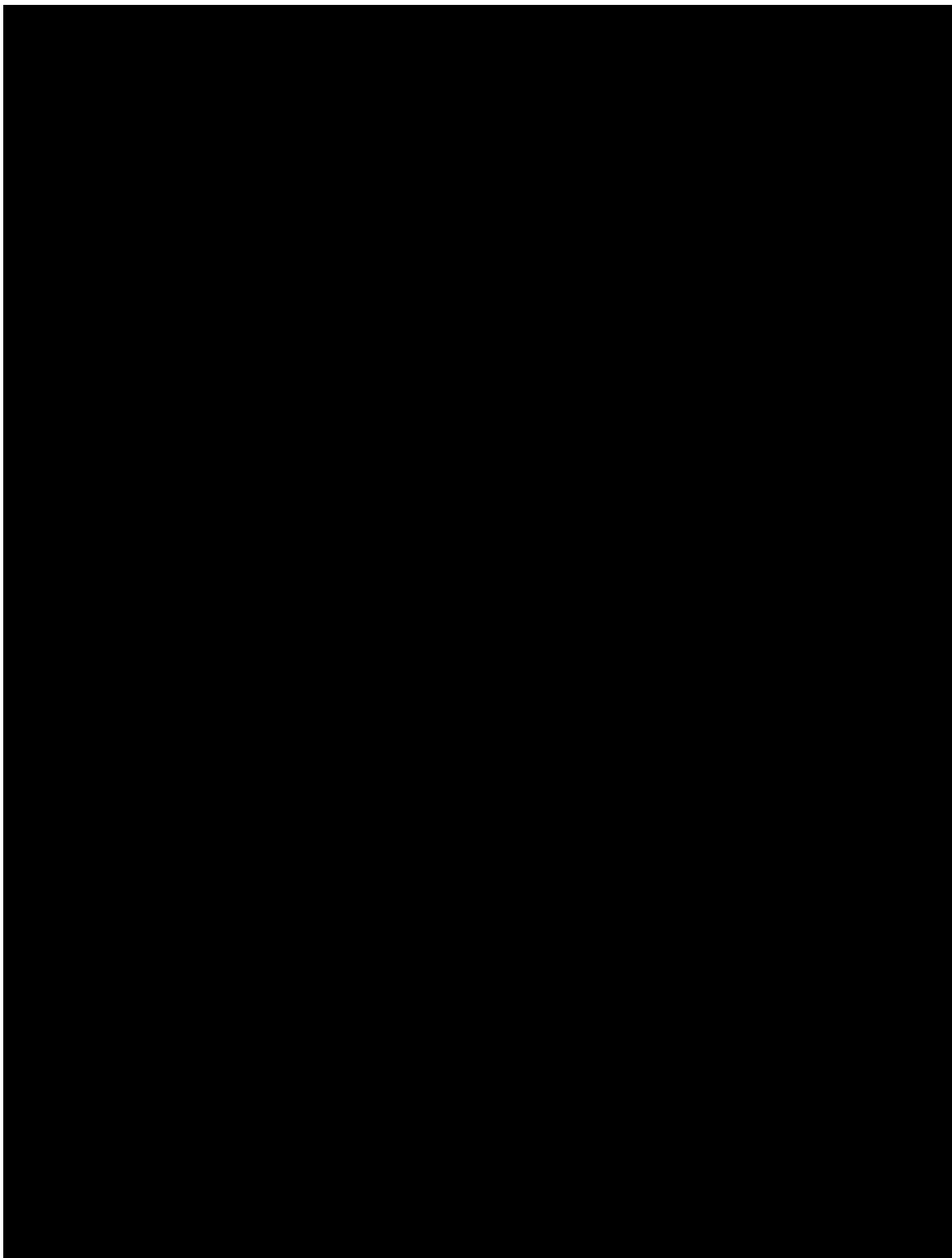
Fig.6.29: Pilgrim badges depicting St Edmund, late-13th to early-16th century.
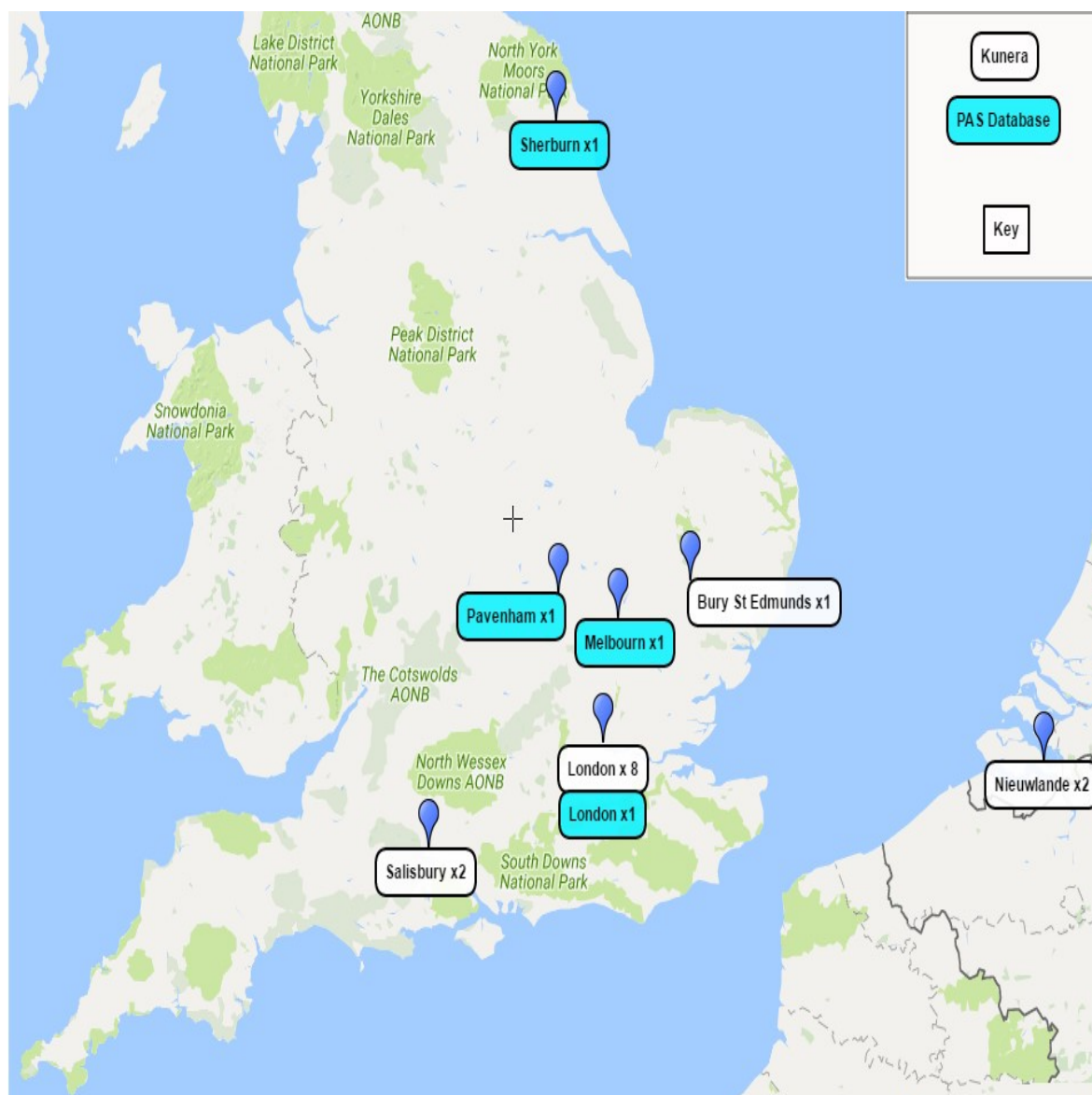
Fig.6.30: Distribution of pilgrim badges depicting St Edmund.[33]

---

[33] This map does not take into account badges with uncertain provenance.
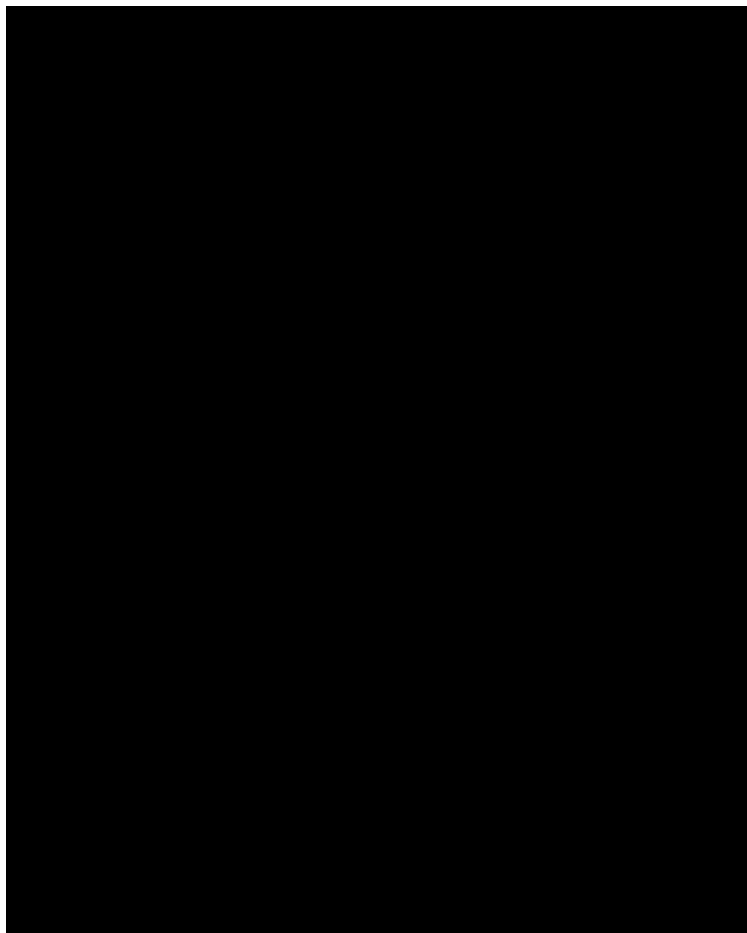
Fig.6.31

Fig.6.31: Artist's interpretation of the Lakenheath scheme.
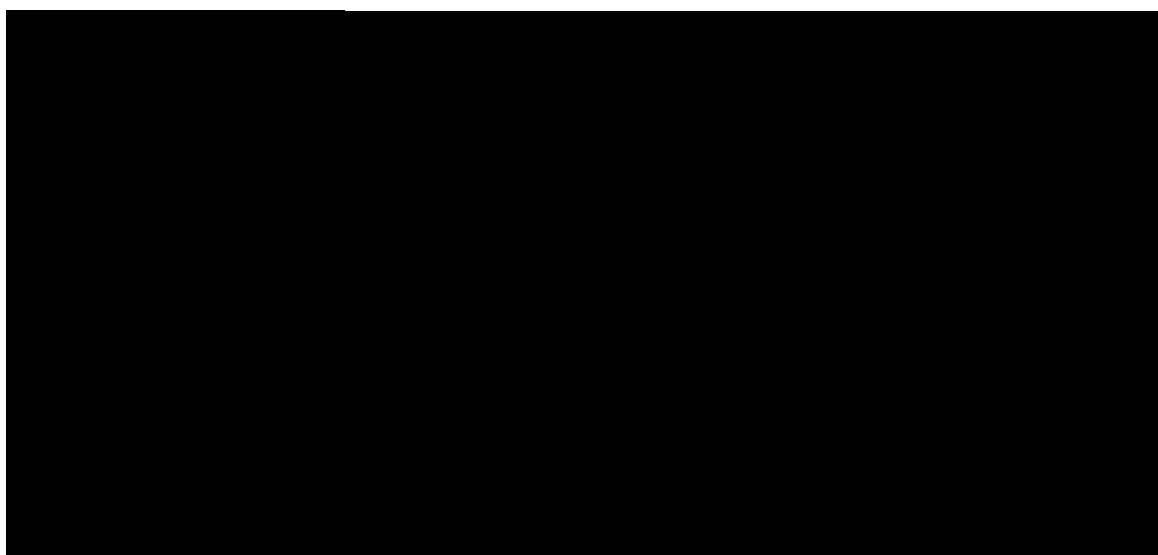
Fig.6.32   Fig.6.33

Fig.6.32: Detail of St Edmund from the Lakenheath painting.
Fig.6.33: Detail showing the Harrowing of Hell from the Lakenheath painting.

6.4: The material context

So far we have examined the compositional and thematic choices open to the artist. Depending upon the preferred arrangement, depictions of a saint could deliver a range of messages. However, analysing the iconography of a saint only tells us half the story. Consider the images represented in Fig.6.25-6.29. All are likely to date from the fourteenth century; all show Edmund in his traditional martyrdom pose. In terms of composition and theme the images are as close to identical as is possible. It would be easy, therefore, to assume that each image carried meaning in the same way. Yet, when we consider the material contexts for these representations it is possible to argue that they do not. For example, the spatially fixed nature of the wall painting shown in Fig.6.26 means that its meaning is very much influenced and dependent upon the architectural milieu of the church. Conversely, the other images all appear on portable objects, easily transported to other locations where they fulfilled differing functions in people's lives. To analyse each, in turn, would be useful.

Fig.6.25: Manuscript illumination[34]

Chapter five examined a set of manuscript illuminations in detail. The Pierpont Morgan miniature cycle, it was argued, was likely intended to provide visiting, high-status pilgrims with the opportunity to experience a visual representation of St Edmund's passion at close quarters. Such an experience, it was suggested, would have been far more personal than viewing a wall painting portraying the same subject. Indeed, in a general sense, the personal nature of encountering manuscript images is what differentiates them from other forms of visual culture. Illuminations are, by nature, contained images. They are obscured from view until the book enclosing them is open.

---

[34] This image comes from British Library, MS. Yates Thompson 13, a mid-fourteenth-century book of hours known as the 'Taymouth Hours'. For further reading see the British Library catalogue entry at:
[http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8148&CollID=58&NStart=13].

Equally, their size is restricted by the physical dimensions of the book. As such, manuscript illuminations were, for the most part, not intended or designed for large-scale public consumption. Instead, they lent themselves to viewing by individuals or small groups of people. For this reason, images found in manuscripts, particularly those found in religious texts, have been broadly associated with the practice of private contemplation and prayer. Mary Carruthers' much-lauded work on medieval memory focuses a great deal upon manuscript images, their relationship with text and their effect upon the mind.[35] One example she cites is the Utrecht Psalter, a ninth-century manuscript which was copied several times throughout the middle-ages. The images in this manuscript, she states, were designed in such a way as to trigger, in the mind of the reader, 'the chief topics and key ideas of each psalm.'[36] In such a way, these images served as an aid to effective meditative practice. Such was certainly the case for images, like Fig.6.25 which were included in books of hours.

Books of hours were small, expensive, portable objects, intended as an aid to individual prayer. They were intensely personal possessions, reserved almost solely for private devotion.[37] Often designed and executed with a particular patron in mind, usually an aristocratic woman, they often contained exhortatory or instructional images, intended to appeal specifically to the book's owner.[38] As books of hours were purpose designed for consumption by discrete individuals, one can postulate that certain images were meant to have a metaphorical value unique to their owner. The 'Taymouth Hours', from which Fig.6.25 was taken, was likely produced between 1325 and 1335 for a

---

[35] See; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, 2007) and Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric and the making of images*, 400-1200 (Cambridge, 2003).

[36] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p.282.

[37] Virginia Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, C.1400-1600* (Cambridge, 2012), pp.71-2.

[38] A. Bennett, 'The Transformation of the Gothic Psalter in Thirteenth-Century France', in *The Illuminated Psalter: Studies in the Content, Purpose and Placement of its Images*, ed. F. O. Büttner (Turnhout, 2004), pp.211-221. Bennett conducted a survey of all the surviving thirteenth-century examples of books of hours from Northern France and discovered that the composition of each was unique.

female member of the English royal family.[39] Considering that the manuscript was produced around the time of Edward II's death (1327), the image of Edmund, a martyred king, is likely to have held highly emotive connotations.

Fig.6.26: Wall painting

Conversely, church wall paintings, such as Fig.6.26, were large-scale images designed to address groups of people. Throughout the middle ages English churches were covered in pictorial representations, depicting both biblical and apocryphal scenes. Stories which might otherwise be told verbally and consigned to memory or inwardly digested through the written word were recreated outwardly, physically and iconically, so that, within the church environment, worshippers were surrounded by visual narrative. Rather than recreating religious scenes cognitively, believers could see, in a very real sense, what those episodes and people looked like and they could take what they saw away with them. The images that adorned medieval church walls were not merely decorative, they were also instructive and were intended to reinforce messages delivered during sermons. Moreover, they were selected to cater to specific audiences. Although church wall-painting was ubiquitous, no two schemes were ever identical. Subjects often reflected regional tastes and images of local saints were a standard feature on parish church walls.[40]

The expected audience in a parish church such as Troston, where Fig.6.26 can be found, was far removed, in terms of social stature, from the owner of the Taymouth hours. Yet, the image adorning St Mary's wall would have had just as much emotional resonance for its viewers. For the parishioners of Troston, Edmund was a local saint, a local protector, a reminder of what it meant to be an East Anglian. In such a way, the image of St Edmund is likely to have engendered feelings of regional pride. Conversely,

---

[39] The most likely candidates for the book's patron are Joan of Scotland, Isabelle of France and Philippa of Hainault. For further discussion, see; Anne Rudloff Stanton, 'Isabelle of France and her Manuscripts', in *Capetian Women*, ed. Kathleen Nolan (New York, 2003), pp.242-5.

[40] Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, p.64-72.

the image would also have served as a reminder of the village's subjection to the authority of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. Troston, situated only five miles from the abbey, was part of Thingoe, one of the eight and a half hundreds over which the monastery held pseudo-palatine jurisdiction. A sense of regional meaning imbued within church wall-art is borne out when we consider that half of the surviving, medieval wall paintings depicting St Edmund are found in East Anglia (see Fig.6.6-7).

Although they were painted on plaster, medieval church wall-paintings were anything but static. The popularity of subjects waxed and waned. Consequently, it was not uncommon for schemes to be adapted or even completely replaced over time. This changeability partially explains why so few early paintings survive. Of the seventeen paintings of St Edmund identified during research for this thesis, only one, at St Edmund's Church in Fritton, predates the thirteenth century. This issue is compounded when we consider the impact of the Reformation. According to Roger Rosewell, owing to the iconoclasm and austerity of the Reformation, fewer than ten percent of the ten thousand medieval churches that stand in England and Wales today retain significant remains of their original painting schemes.[41] The malleability and loss of church wall paintings make it difficult to provide any reliable statistics relating to any given subject. Nevertheless, it is clear that St Edmund's popularity within this medium extended beyond the bounds of East Anglia. Paintings thematically identical to that at Troston appear at Belchamp Walter in Essex; Bishopsbourne in Kent; Charlwood in Surrey; Pickering in North Yorkshire; Stoke Dry in Peterborough and Weare Giffard in Devon.[42] It is likely, however, that geographic distance would dilute the specific local significance attached to such an image in Troston.

---

[41] *Ibid.*, p.1.

[42] This information is taken from Anne Marshall's online catalogue of English, medieval church wall paintings at: [http://www.paintedchurch.org/].

Fig.6.27: Opus Anglicanum[43]

Woven into an expensive *Opus Anglicanum* garment, Fig.6.27 appears in a very different context to the others in that it was worn outside of England. Opus Anglicanum or 'English Work' was the name given to the intricate and highly decorative needle-work that England exported from the thirteenth through to the fifteenth centuries. [44] Although secular examples survive, and although Opus Anglicanum adorned various items, it is most commonly associated with the production of clerical vestments. The decorative motifs employed by embroiderers were more often than not biblical scenes, though images of Pan-Christian saints also featured prominently. It was, however, not uncommon for the weavers who produced these garments to incorporate figures from regional Christian history. [45] In the case of the Lateran cope (Fig.6.27), St Edmund appears alongside St Thomas Becket. Neither St Edmund nor St Thomas figure as the central pictorial element of the garment, they are part of a wide-ranging collection of religious images. The inclusion of these two regional figures on a garment intended for a high-ranking, ecclesiastical official in Italy provided a way for its producer to sign, perhaps even trademark, their object as a piece of 'English work'. St Edmund is known to appear on several medieval copes; two now reside in Italy and two in Spain. [46] The fact that the saint's image appears on these exports tells us that he was seen as an important marker of regional and national identity.

---

[43] The Lateran Cope, believed to have belonged to a fourteenth-century cardinal, is now housed in the Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca. *The Evelyn Thomas Database of Medieval English Embroidery* is a fully searchable, online index of all known examples of *Opus Anglicanum* garments. It is available at [https://ica.princeton.edu/opus-anglicanum/]. For specific discussion of the appearance of saints in Opus Anglicanum see; Susan Leibacher Ward, 'Saints in Split Stitch: Representations of Saints in *Opus Anglicanum* Vestments', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 3, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.41-54.

[44] Gordon Campbell (ed.), *The Grove Encyclopaedia of Decorative Arts,* vol. 1 (Oxford, 2006) p.173.

[45] A.F. Kendrick, *English Embroidery* (London, 1909), p.29.

[46] *Evelyn Thomas Database*: The Spanish garments are found respectively at the Museu Episcopal de Vic and the treasury of Toledo Cathedral. The Italian examples reside at Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca and Anagni Cathedral treasury.

Fig.6.28: Seal matrix[47]

Fig.6.28, like Fig.6.20, shows a seal matrix inscribed with a scene from St Edmund's hagiography, in this case, his martyrdom. According to Andrew Brown of the Suffolk County Council Archaeology Service: 'It is possible that the seal has an association with an individual or position linked with the abbey at Bury St Edmunds, although it is equally possible that the individual who owned the seal had some association with Edmund, perhaps being called Edmund himself.'[48] This thesis has not thus far considered the use of Edmund as a personal name.

Statistical analysis, conducted by Bo Selten, of Anglo-Saxon personal names within East Anglian middle-English sources, suggests, if only circumstantially, that St Edmund had an increasingly important role to play in the social identity of the region.[49] Drawing from a wide variety of documents dating from the beginning of the twelfth century to the end of the fourteenth, Selten was able to map out the diachronic frequency of Anglo-Saxon personal names within East Anglia. Selten presents his findings as a series of statistical lists, divided between Norfolk and Suffolk. For both counties, Eadmund (Edmund) proves to be the most popular name over the course of the period. In Norfolk, the name appears 1,028 times, while its closest rival Godwine (Godwin) only appears 158 times. In Suffolk the picture is similar; there, Edmund appears 817 times among Selten's sources, while Saemann (Simon), the second most popular, only appears 199 times. Edmund was definitively a popular Saxon name within the region, but why?

---

[47] This object was recorded to the Portable Antiquities Scheme in 2012, (PAS ref: SF-3F8353) it was subsequently returned to its finder.

[48] For Brown's description see: [https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/501667]

[49] Bo Selten, *The Anglo-Saxon Heritage in Middle English Personal Names: East Anglia 1100-1399* (Lund, 1972)

The economist Douglas Galbi sees personal names as belonging to an 'Information economy'.[50] A name in any given context has a social valuation affixed to it. Such a value is symbolic in the sense that a name traditionally evokes other persons who have used that name. That person might have been a relative, a reigning monarch, or an aspirational figure from history. In any case, in choosing a name for their child, a parent is influenced by the symbolic values which that name inspires. Such values will vary from place to place and over time the capital of any given name will rise and fall in keeping with social trends. Galbi holds that studying the geographic and temporal distribution of names can provide evidence on changing patterns of symbolic valuation. There is an experiential dynamic to this as well. According to Galbi; 'persons who have the same given name literally share the experience of being called by that name'. Therefore, examining the frequency of any given name 'indicates an aspect of shared symbolic experience'.[51]

The relative symbolic value appended to the name Edmund in medieval East Anglia is readily explained by the cultural prominence of St Edmund and his abbey within the region. The monastery at Bury collected taxes, administered justice and provided military protection, all under the aegis of Edmund himself. Indeed, in many ways, the abbot and his obedientiaries acted much in the same way as royal officials might do for a living king. Equally, as chapters three and four revealed, hagiographic writers at Bury appealed to East Anglian identity by portraying Edmund as an active and benevolent protector for the region. Selten's statistics, at least superficially, suggest that this tactic was successful as an increasing number of East Anglians opted to name their children after the region's patron saint. If the seals seen in Fig.6.20 and 6.28 were owned by persons with the name Edmund, then they provide proof that sharing a name with a saint influenced their sense of personal identity.

---

[50] Douglas A. Galbi, 'Long-Term Trends in Personal Given Name Frequencies in England and Wales' *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, 50:4 (2002), p.275.

[51] *Ibid.*, p.275.

Fig.6.29: Pilgrim badges[52]

Pilgrim badges were tokens, often made from lead, copper, pewter or tin, purchased by or granted to pilgrims upon completion of their journey to a religious centre or shrine. According to Richard Gameson, art fulfilled an: 'important role in the distribution of a cult, and in what we might term the 'appropriation' of saints. The simplest and most common way in which individual shrines 'rewarded' the deserving visitor, and distributed and publicised their holy man or woman was via pilgrim badges and the like.'[53] As material objects, pilgrim badges were both a symbolic and a physical reminder of the journey undertaken. Cheap to produce *en masse*, pilgrim badges and *ampullae* survive from medieval Britain in their thousands; a search of the *Portable Antiquities Scheme* website provides 956 records for the search-term 'pilgrim badges', while Radboud Universiteit's *Kunera* database contains some 3401 entries for badges found or manufactured in the UK.[54] In spite of their mass production, as an assemblage, pilgrim 'signs', as they are often called, were anything but homogeneous. As Brian Spencer comments: 'The imagery on, and configuration of every pilgrim sign were [*sic*] special to a particular place and to the saint or relics venerated there. Successful shrines often produced more than one type of souvenir.'[55] The iconography on pilgrim signs could be emblematic, but was often figurative, displaying a saint or holy figure in a familiar narrative posture. Certainly, as Gameson suggests, the imagery that adorned pilgrim badges would have afforded its originating shrine exposure to a wider audience. As pilgrims returned home, these small trophies would be seen by others and would no

---

[52] This study was built using information from Kunera [http://www.kunera.nl/] as a starting position. K numbers denote catalogue numbers from this database. Where museum object numbers are available, these have also been listed. More recent finds are indicated by their PAS number. The badges shown in Fig 6.27 are respectively: K03319, K03321, K02172, K09620, PAS: DUR-022964, PAS: LON-0DB361 and British Museum, object ref: 1913,0619.9.

[53] Richard Gameson, 'The Early Imagery of Thomas Becket', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 2002), p.47.

[54] Searches on PAS and Kunera were conducted on 25/11/2016. Owing to the emerging nature of the information gathered by these databases, these figures are only likely to increase as fresh finds are reported.

[55] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, p.3.

doubt be tied into the traveller's own, colourful narrative of their journey. However, the existence of pilgrim badges not only reflects the dissemination strategies adopted by religious communities but also of a demand on the part of ordinary cult members. The majority of the figurative depictions of St Edmund thus far examined either appear on high status items: illuminated manuscripts, clerical vestments, etc., or on those designed for communal consumption: church wall paintings, panel paintings, etc. Pilgrim badges were more closely connected to everyday members of St Edmund's cult and thus can be associated with more personal expressions of devotion.

This study has identified seven types of pilgrim badge depicting St Edmund, dating from between the late-thirteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. Kunera lists only sixteen entries for St Edmund.[56] Examples are provided by types one to five in Fig.6.29. There were, however, other badges, which either remain unrecorded by Kunera or are harder to attribute to St Edmund these are represented by types six and seven. Fig.6.30 displays a distribution map of findspots.

Badge type one, of which there are at least six known examples, displays a traditional martyrdom scene. Edmund is positioned facing forward, hands bound in front of him, tied to a tree and pierced with arrows.[57] Badge type two shows a crowned and heavily bearded Edmund, stripped to the waist and bound in a similar way to type one. Only one example of this badge is known.[58] Again, as with type two, no complete example of type three survives, but it was evidently rich with iconography. It again depicts a conventional martyrdom scene, though this time Edmund's arms are bound

---

[56] Eight of these were found in London, two in Salisbury, one at Bury St Edmunds and two in the Netherlands. These are accorded object numbers: K.00331, K.02171-2, K.02754, K.03317-20, K.06237, K.08451 and K.09619-20. A further three; K.03321, K.10539 and K.12993 are of uncertain provenance.

[57] All examples were discovered at London. K.03317-20 belong to the Museum of London, K.10048 is in the London Guildhall Art Gallery and the location of K.02171 is unknown.

[58] The provenance of K.03321 is unrecorded. Museum of London object ref: 78.13.

behind his back, and he stands atop a wolf.[59] Badge type four differs from the others in that it represents Edmund, not in his martyrdom pose, but bearing his attributes: the crown and arrow. Only one example of this badge is known.[60] Five examples of type five, a martyrdom scene composed in a distinctive anchor-like shape, appear in Kunera; these include two badges discovered in the Netherlands.[61] Three further examples of this type were recorded through the PAS database between 2009 and 2012.[62] Type six, which depicts a sheaf of arrows, may either be an emblematic representation of Edmund, or a secular motif.[63] Type seven, on the other hand, confirms the difficulty in discerning between the iconography of St Sebastian and St Edmund. The British Museum, which houses this example, marks it as a representation of the 'martyrdom of St Edmund or St Sebastian', it does not, however, list a find date or location.[64] A similar badge, discovered in France, but again with an undetailed provenance, is attributed by Kunera to St Sebastian.[65]

The number of known pilgrim badges that portray St Edmund compares well with most other medieval pilgrimage centres; sixteen badges are recorded for St Alban, nine for Aethelthryth of Ely, eight for Werburga of Chester and three for William of York. An impressive thirty-two badges are recorded for St Edward the Confessor. All of these,

---

[59] K.08451 and K.02172 were both found in London, K.08451's current location is unrecorded, whereas K.02172 currently resides in the British Museum, object ref: 1871,0714.62. K.09619 was found at Salisbury and is in the collections of the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum object ref: 190d/1987.

[60] K.09620, found at Salisbury and in Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum object ref: 205a/1987.

[61] K.00331 and K.06237 were discovered in the Netherlands, they currently reside in the Van Beuningen family collection in Langbroek, object refs: 1821 and 2376. K.02754 is the only example of a St Edmund badge to be discovered at Bury itself, it is currently in the keeping of Moyse's Hall Museum Bury St Edmunds. K.12993, which of unknown provenance, resides at Museum der Stadt, Worms, object ref: M.3401.

[62] These are respectively PAS: BH-CB9BB7 (Bedford, 2009), BH-589BA2 (Cambridgeshire, 2010) and DUR-022964 (North Yorkshire in 2012).

[63] PAS: LON-0DB361. See; B. Spencer, *Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum Medieval Catalogue, Part 2: Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges.* (Salisbury, 1990), no.102, for another example.

[64] British Museum, object ref: 1913,0619.9.

[65] K12996.

however, are dwarfed by Canterbury and St Thomas Becket, for which Kunera records

eight hundred and twenty-nine badges. Canterbury began to offer souvenirs to its

pilgrims within only a few years of the archbishop's death.[66] The sheer number of

survivals is indicative of the fact that Becket's cult would come to eclipse all other

English devotions.

What, however, were pilgrim badges used for? In her 2011 PhD thesis, Megan

Foster explored how pilgrim badges could be used as more than simple mementoes.[67]

Far from being mere aesthetic indicators of a pilgrim's status:

> 'Pilgrim badges also could acquire sanctification from the saint's shrine, and pilgrims sought the blessing and protection of specific saints and shrines by visiting them. The badges were in close proximity or perhaps even direct contact with the holy shrine, often by being touched or pressed against the shrine to imbue them with miraculous powers, effectually making the badge a contact relic. When worn by a pilgrim, the souvenir could serve a talismanic or apotropaic function, capable of warding off evil and protecting the individual from harm.'[68]

Furthermore, Foster reveals that although these objects were frequently worn on items

of clothing, in later centuries they were also sewn into devotional manuscripts where

they were used as the focus for meditative prayer. In such a way, these tiny,

inexpensive objects could serve not merely as a memorial for a journey undertaken, but

could also perform a continued role in the devotional life of their owner. However, as

Brian Spencer suggests, pilgrim badges need to be contextualised as just one of many

forms of memento offered by religious centres to visiting pilgrims. Pilgrimage journeys

were ritually charged spiritual undertakings; they might be conducted over long

distances and could be dangerous. As Diane Webb describes it, Christian pilgrims:

'sought in particular places the visual and tactile embodiment of a reality other and

higher than themselves, not just a generalised sense of 'the holy', but in the form of

---

[66] Gameson, 'The Early Imageary', p.48.

[67] Megan Foster, 'Pilgrimage Through the Pages: Pilgrim's Badges in Late Medieval Devotional Manuscripts' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: University of Illinois, 2011).

[68] *Ibid.*, p.39.

contact with the continuing presence of the great departed.'[69] It is no wonder that pilgrims should seek to commemorate the fulfilment of their vows by taking some form of physical memento away with them. Ely Cathedral, the home of St Aethelthryth, St Edmund's great regional rival for pilgrim affections, offered its visitors lace necklaces which had been touched to the saint's shrine.[70] In other cases, tomb dust or miraculous oils that exuded from saints' tombs might be collected and sold to pilgrims.[71] Rare examples also exist of illustrated prayer cards displaying combinations of devotional text and images. Three such prayer cards survive from Bromholm Priory in Norfolk where a relic of the true cross became popular in the thirteenth century.[72] Within this context it becomes clear that pilgrim badges were only one form of souvenir offered to pilgrims. In any case, the images of St Edmund, displayed in Fig.6.29, are testament to the fact that those who underwent pilgrimage to Bury often sought to memorialize their visit and take something of the saint away with them.

Summary

Images of saints are often associated with sacred space. Within such spaces, daily ritual and liturgical practice provide a 'living context' that could grant saintly representations meaning.[73] Likewise, the presence of fixed images, such as the wall painting shown in Fig.6.26, helped to *create* a suitable environment for religious activity. Yet, as the above survey has shown, not all images were fixed, not all were permanently located

---

[69] Diane Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage* (Basingstoke, 2002), p.ix.

[70] Diane Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000), p.42.

[71] Saints who exuded oil were known as 'myroblites'. *Gosc.*, p.345, lists a miracle whereby a monks injured shoulder was cured by being drenched in oil emanating from St Edmund's tomb.

[72] The manuscripts which contain these prayer cards are respectively; Stonyhurst MS 57, fol 174, Lambeth MS 545, fol 136v and Fitzwilliam MS. 55 fol 57v. The latter is not in fact a prayer card but a painted replica. For detailed descriptions of these objects see; D.J. Hall, *English Mediaeval Pilgrimage* (London, 1965); Francis Wormald, 'The Rood of Bromholm', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1:1, (1937), pp.31-45 and, Lynda Rollason, 'Spoils of War? Durham Cathedral and the Black Rood of Scotland', in *The Battle of Neville's Cross 1346*, ed. David Rollason and Michael Prestwich (Stamford, 1998), pp.57-65.

[73] Albert C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (London, 1977), p.262.

and not all were associated with demarcated ecclesiastical space.[74] Portability made an image exportable, so that representations, often associated with a particular place, might find their way, as with the cope seen in fig.6.27, to distant localities. Furthermore, images inscribed on portable objects, through their very portability, extended the context of devotional activity: transforming normally mundane spaces through the physical or visual presence of the saint. As Diane Webb has put it:

> 'The *disjecta membra* of medieval private devotion, by no means all of high aesthetic quality, are scattered among the world's museums. Apart from prayer books, they include images in all media… All were in some degree intended to stimulate the devout imagination.'[75]

Images in expensive books of hours (Fig.6.25) or on rustic pilgrim badges (Fig.6.29) could function in such a way: providing an impetus for private devotion and a locus for memory. Similarly, the seal shown in Fig.6.28 reveals how a saint's image could be co-opted and used to express personal identity. The contrasting materialities within which Edmund's image appeared reveal that meaning could vary markedly dependent on context; such meaning could resound both in deeply personal and communal ways. Equally, a visual representation of a saint could have specific local connotations while, at the same time, appealing to the sensibilities of royalty, pilgrims and others.

6.5 Distributed meaning

The previous section discussed how different objects and spaces could be imbued with meaning through the presence of images. But who was responsible for imparting these meanings? In this section we will return to the ideas of Alfred Gell to help us find an explanation. Chapter one introduced Gell's concept of distributed agency. The tenets of

---

[74] Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present: Sacred travel and sacred space in the world religions* (London, 1995), p.31.

[75] Diane Webb, 'Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages', in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer (Aldershot, 2005), p.43-44.

distributed agency hold that the power of art comes not from the artwork itself, but from the intentions, or at least the perceived intentions of the artist who created it. In the case of medieval Christian art, it is not so much the intentions of the artist that grants the artwork its ability to move its audience, but the power of what it indexes. Christian art, whether through paint, plaster marble, or any other medium, is about giving a physical presence to the intangible. As the philosopher of religion Nicholas Davey has put it: 'Religious art is not a depiction but a coming into picture of a divine presence.'[76] Indeed, as Gell himself states: '… nowhere are images more obviously treated as human persons than in the context of worship and ceremonies.'[77] Images of Christ's crucifixion, for example, have power irrespective of their quality of execution. All figurative crucifixion scenes are intended to resemble something which already has the ability to affect: gospel descriptions of the crucifixion. In this instance the crucifixion narrative fulfils the role of 'prototype'. The Christian artist's job, is not to lend an object agency through pure creative skill, but is, instead, to distribute meaning from one medium (religious narrative) into another (art). In this way, the production of medieval religious images was as much a process of interlocution between mediums as it was a creative act. The arrows in the diagram below (Tab.6.1) represent the distribution of meaning from one medium to another.
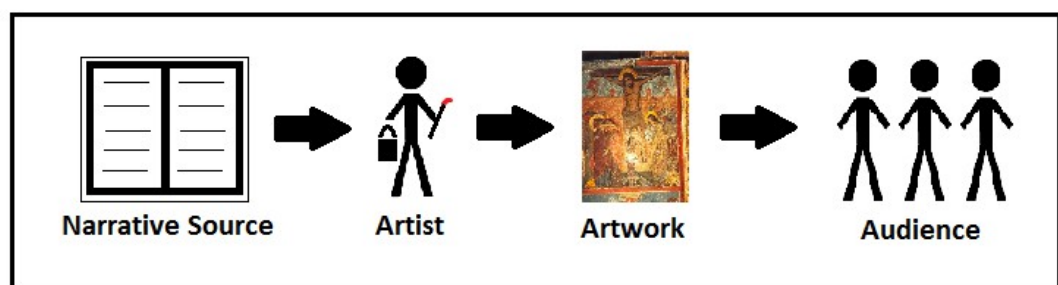

Tab.6.1: Basic diagram of agency distribution in Christian art.

---

[76] Nicholas Davey, 'Art, Religion and the Hermeneutics of Authenticity', in *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge, 1999), p.91, n.14.

[77] Gell, *Art and Agency*, p.96.

This diagram, however, oversimplifies the process in two ways. Firstly, although it correctly positions the narrative (prototype) as the originating source of agency, it does little to emphasise the contribution of the artist. The artist makes conscious choices as to which scenes to depict and how these scenes ought to be composed. If the function of religious art is to presence the divine, then it does so in a prescriptive manner. By making strategic, compositional choices, in terms of medium, location, appearance and posture, an artist can seek to emphasise a particular message to be taken from the scene in question. Secondly, the diagram places the audience in a purely passive role: as the 'patient'. In order to decode the intended meaning of the artwork and to perceive the indexical link between the artwork and the narrative source, the audience (recipient) first needs to be familiar with the narrative (prototype) itself. In so doing the audience, like the artist, draws directly from the narrative source, to which they will have applied their own interpretations. These interpretations, in turn, will influence the meaning a person draws from an artwork representing that source. Indeed, this can reach the point where the artwork can come to represent something entirely different from that which the artist intended: this interpretive action is itself a form of agency. Likewise, the above diagram does little to emphasise environmental factors. Social, personal, cultural, ideological and material factors are likely to influence both how the artist constructs their representation and how the audience receives it. Tab.6.2 displays what may be a better way to model this process.
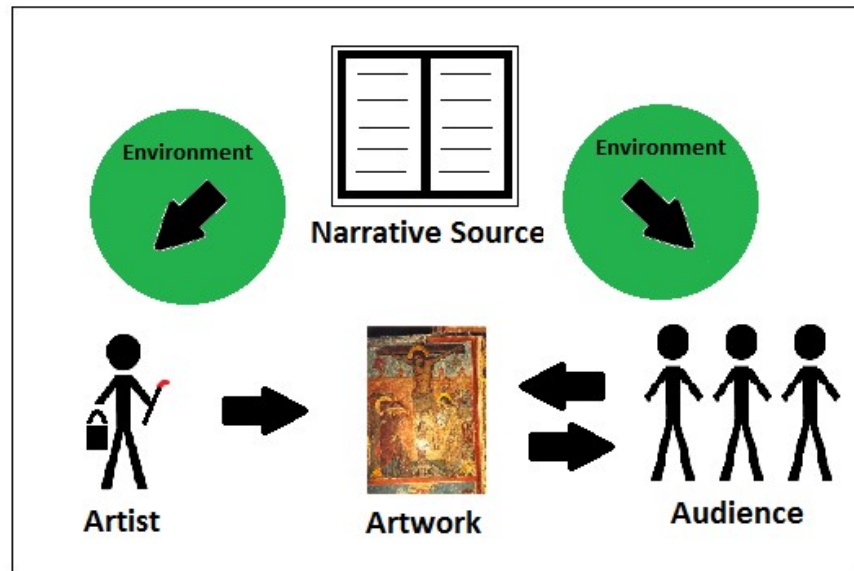
Tab.6.2: Environment, personal agency and the interpretation of holy images.

The images examined in this chapter, irrespective of their iconographic form and irrespective of the media used to portray them, each drew upon Edmund's hagiography as a source of inspiration. Whether the images were direct figurative recreations of scenes from the saint's written life, or whether they were idealised images built from the saint's attributes, each represented an attempt to recast narrative through a physical medium. Not all representations of the saint were, however, drawn directly from hagiography. The cult of saints was itself but an aspect of broader Christian tradition; individual saintly narratives could only ever make full sense within the context of Christian culture. Consequently, visual representations could conflate elements from hagiography with aspects of the Christian metanarrative. One, highly unusual fourteenth-century wall painting from St Mary's, Lakenheath in Suffolk provides an example.[78] The images in question, which date from c.1350, form part of an artistic palimpsest and appear on a large pier in the church's north arcade. Divided into a series of self-contained sections, the painting provides visual interpretations of several key

---

[78] Much of the information gleaned for this discussion of Lakenheath's wall art comes from [http://www.lakenheathwallpaintings.co.uk/]. This website was established after the conclusion of a large-scale conservation project, co-funded by, amongst others, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Church of England. For more information on the paintings and their conservation see; Matthew Champion, *Devotion, Pestilence & Conflict*.

episodes from Christ's life and passion. As the images form the midpoint of the palimpsest, the quality of their preservation varies considerably (Fig.6.32-33). However, during conservation, a tentative reconstruction of the scheme was made (Fig.6.31). The scenes are marked out as unusual not so much in their choice of subject but in their inclusion of a figure who has no place in such a passion cycle: St Edmund. In the painting's lowest register, Edmund is seen standing next to the Madonna and child, his left hand held up in benediction. The crown he wears and the arrows he holds make him readily identifiable. It was not unusual for a patron saint to be depicted in the company of the virgin and child. Yet, in the topmost register, Edmund also seems to appear in a depiction of the harrowing of hell.[79] Although largely apocryphal, the harrowing of hell was a popular motif within medieval ecclesiastical wall art and generally featured Christ leading Adam and Eve out of the gates of hell.[80] In the Lakenheath scene, however, a figure, larger than the rest, is seen leading the others. This figure wears a crown and bears more than a passing resemblance to the St Edmund depicted in the lower register. Nowhere, in Edmund's written hagiography, is he in any way associated with the harrowing of hell, or any other biblical event. Although the precise significance of this panel is lost, it is nonetheless clear that the Lakenheath artist has drawn upon two prototypes to compose his image: one hagiographic, the other biblical/apocryphal (Tab.6.3).

---

[79] This suggestion, made by Matthew Champion, is cited in Pinner, *King and Martyr,* p.320.

[80] Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, p.51
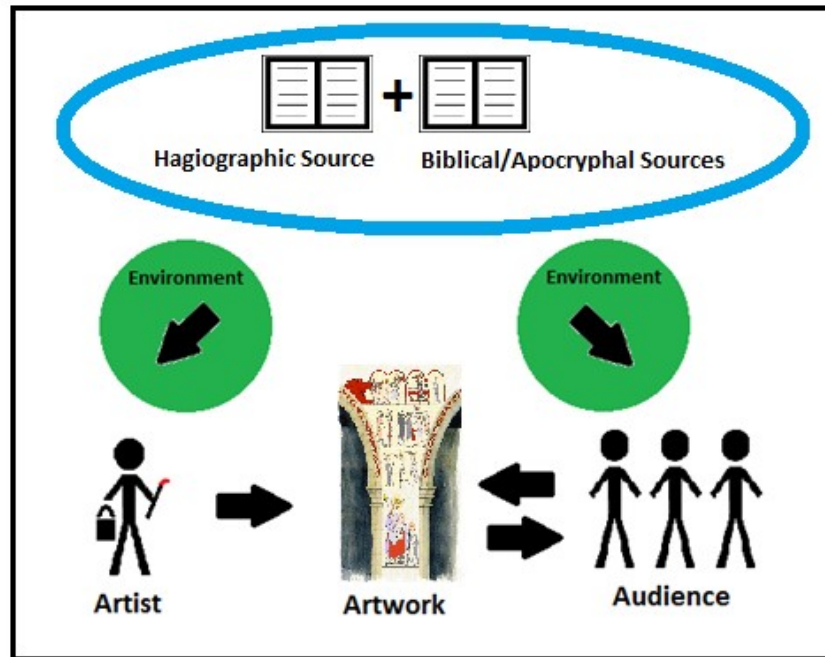
Tab.6.3: Visual representations drawing on dual narrative sources.

In order to correctly interpret the scene, the painter's audience would need to be familiar with both prototype sources. Images such as that at Lakenheath reveal how hagiography and the cult of saints were firmly ensconced within wider Christian tradition and did not stand apart from it.

6.6: Conclusion

Images of Edmund were part of the broader materiality of his cult, yet they were as much the product of hagiographic narrative as they were of the artist's technique. Saintly images were not self-explanatory. Prior knowledge of the saint, on the part of the viewer, was a pre-requisite for decoding any intended message. That St Edmund was understood in a variety of ways can be seen through the visual representations of him that survive. Through surveying these images, this chapter has shown that medieval, figurative depictions of St Edmund took on two principal forms: the bearded king and the virginal youth. Both of these archetypes reflected different understandings of the saint and foregrounded different aspects of his character. The figurative form of these images varied in accordance with the environment. Images that came from East Anglia

tended to place more emphasis on the saint's kingly persona, thus emphasising the notion of just rule: an association that had much to do with the political position of Bury St Edmund's abbey. Conversely, depictions from further afield, where the unique circumstances within East Anglia had less influence, drew more from the original, universalising narrative of Abbo of Fleury, which placed greater significance on the saint's virginity. Yet, despite this figurative duality, a largely uniform iconographic pool came to be established for Edmund. By analysing how this imagery was composed and how it was employed, this chapter has revealed that visualisations of St Edmund were recreated in many different material and spatial contexts and those contexts, in turn, influenced their meanings: both private and public.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1: Introduction

For structural reasons matter and narrative have, throughout this work, been treated as a binary. In reality, however, neither existed entirely separate from the other. As chapters five and six revealed, within St Edmund's cult, matter and narrative were harmonised through 'the visual'. This chapter continues the theme of complementarity between matter and narrative and reflects on how the findings made during this thesis relate, both in the context of the cult of St Edmund and in the wider context of the cult of saints. This chapter will begin with a general discussion of themes, within the cult of saints, concerning the binaries of proximity and distance and the material and the immaterial. It will then proceed to reflect on the relationship of matter and narrative within the cult of St Edmund, before considering how the two combined in the creation of a range of social and personal identities.

7.2: Proximity/distance, material/immaterial.

This thesis has relied heavily on the concept of proximity and distance as it applied to St Edmund's cult. Central to this notion is the special ontological state of the saint. Saints are what the religious historian Stanley K. Stowers has referred to as 'culturally postulated beings'.[1] Such beings are common to most religions and, according to Stowers, are regarded as having: 'human-like agency and other human like features,

---

[1] Stanley K. Stowers, 'Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families', in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan (Oxford, 2012), p.9. "Culturally Postulated being" is borrowed directly from Melford E. Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London, 1966), p.97.

especially of human mind.'[2] They are further characterised by the fact that they are 'normally non-observable.' Culturally postulated beings are: 'typically conceived as not in public view most of the time for various reasons, even if emanations, incarnations, visible instantiations and representations of the full reality are common.'[3] Stowers' views, surrounding 'non- observable', 'culturally postulated beings', echo ideas put forward by the philosopher and historian Krzystof Pomian. Pomian, also recognises the religious need to differentiate between two realms: the visible and the invisible. To Pomian the invisible represents a category; 'containing the most diverse of beings, from ancestors and gods to the dead and to people different to ourselves, as well as events and circumstances.'[4] Pomian goes on:

> 'The invisible is spatially distant, not only beyond the horizon but also very high or very low. It is also temporally distant, either in the past or in the future. In addition, it is beyond all physical space and every expanse or else in a space structured totally differently. It is situated in a time of its own, or outside any passing of time, in eternity itself. It can sometimes have a corporeality or materiality other than that of the elements of the visible world, and sometimes be a sort of pure antimateriality.'[5]

Saints, according to Christian teaching, conform well to both Stowers and Pomian's categories. They are beings of two realms, at once residing immaterially or extra-materially in heaven, yet, at the same time, tied to the earth through their mortal remains.

Today we might characterise such a status as 'supernatural.' As Stowers points out, however, past societies, including that of medieval Europe, did not recognise a substantial barrier between 'a natural order of cause and effect by uniform physical

---

[2] Stowers, 'Theorizing', p.9.

[3] Ibid., p.9.

[4] Krzystof Pomian, 'The Collection: Between the visible and the invisible', in Interpreting Objects and Collections, ed. Susan Pearce (London, 1994), p.173.

[5] Ibid., pp.172-3.

laws' and the 'realm of the spiritual.'[6] For medieval Christians, there was no fixed duality between body and soul, between heaven and earth or, for that matter, between the living and the dead. Indeed, the post-mortem state of saints could be considered a natural extension of the general ontology accorded to deceased persons. Belief in bodily resurrection meant that the body and soul, although separated, remained interconnected. Saints, through their piety, merely had early access to the divine proximity that awaited all Christians at the end of time. How this special status worked in practice remained an open question. St Augustine, who was so instrumental in the development of Western Christian theology, was clear on the fact that when a person died they were cut off from and unable to influence the material world. He was equally clear that saints were the exception to this rule.[7] He was vague, however, on the nature of this status. Augustine reasoned that saints were either present both in the afterlife and in the places where their bodies lay, or they were wholly present in the afterlife but responded to prayers which were then answered by God.[8] Ultimately, he remained ambiguous as to which of the two solutions applied. Helen Foxhall Forbes suggests that the former interpretation was preferred, though not universally. She points to a quotation found in Goscelin of St Bertin's *Translatio S. Mildrethe Virginis* which states: 'By a sign it was revealed that Mildreth should be understood to be present always both in her former and current dwelling place.'[9] John Crook further highlights an inscription on the tomb of St Martin of Tours which delivers a similar message: 'Here lies Martin the bishop of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully present here, made manifest through every grace of miracles.'[10] This idea that saints were somehow present within the vicinity of their bodily remains runs,

---

[6] Stowers, 'Theorizing', p.9.

[7] Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, in *Father*, trans. H. Browne, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009), c.16 and 19.

[8] *Ibid*., c.21.

[9] Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, p.315.

[10] John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West* (Oxford, 2003), p.17, n.82.

according to Crook, 'as an unbroken strand from the Patristic period to the Reformation and beyond.'[11]

The notion that saints had a fixed presence at their tomb naturally leads, as in the work of Peter Brown, to questions of proximity and distance.[12] However, it can equally be viewed as a mode of rendering the immaterial, material. Victor Buchli has recently commented that relics presence 'the absent sacred, thereby becoming an extraordinarily powerful local technique for presencing absence.'[13] Furthermore, he argues that veneration, in a way, renders the relic itself immaterial. The efficacy of relics, he suggests: 'lay not in the objects themselves but in the eye of the beholder and the nexus that eye forms. But this eye is not passive, rather it is an eye that is able to 'touch' and make physical contact with the divine.'[14] In other words, in the presence of a holy object such as a relic, the material nature of the relic fades into the background to be replaced by the 'real presence' of the divine.

While theology might account for the miraculous properties of relics, it cannot alone explain the prestige and value in which these objects were held. In Arjun Appadurai's introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, he offers a reading of Patrick Geary's study of the relic trade in the early middle ages.[15] According to Appadurai, Geary sees relics as belonging 'to a particular economy of exchange and demand in which the life history of the particular relic is essential, not incidental to its value… the verification of this history is also essential to its value.' In other words, it is the relic's story, its biography, which positions it as an object of value. Without the requisite biography, the relic loses its connection to the

---

[11] *Ibid.*, p.17.

[12] Brown, *The Cult of Saints*.

[13] Buchli, *Archaeology of the Immaterial*, p.49.

[14] *Ibid.*, p.49.

[15] Arjun Appadurai, `Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986) p.23 See also; Geary, *Living with the Dead*, particularly chapters 9 and 10.

saint and therefore its value. If we adopt this perspective, we can see that it is not merely the object itself that presences the divine, but the narrative appended to it. In the case of St Edmund where many things contributed to the materiality of his cult, the same logic is applicable to other objects. While books, badges and signet rings might not, like relics, have any metaphysical connection to the saint, they were, nevertheless, capable of presencing him iconically as a subject for veneration, something which, without an understanding of narrative, was not possible.

7.3: Matter, narrative and St Edmund

It is easy, through the lens of temporal distance, to imagine St Edmund's reliquary casket standing in isolation, a monolithic edifice acting as a singular juncture between heaven and earth. This view, however, ignores the broader cultic environment. A relic and its reliquary can no more be divorced from their surroundings than can any other object. Indeed, although it was considered to hold remains imbued with a special spiritual significance, in many ways, Edmund's reliquary and its contents were simply one more assemblage amongst a mass of entangled objects. The relic may have been the ingredient that added the sacred spice, yet it did not and could not function alone. The web of objects, the web of things that enmeshed it both augmented the relic's symbolic and emotional power, and at the same time ensured that the relic had a clear meaning. Wall hangings, books, statues, candles and all manner of liturgical instruments each played their part in creating a coherent and consistent sense of place. Yet, all these objects, relics or otherwise, remained meaningless unless encoded with ideological purpose. The ideas embedded in narrative supplied this purpose. Familiarity with the narratives that underpinned St Edmund's cult provided the means through which visitors to the saint's shrine could interpret and engage with the material environment. And so the web becomes more complicated as we realise that, when

examining cult, we are not only looking at a mass of entangled objects but an entanglement of objects *and* ideas. This section will explore the ways in which narrative and object symbiotically interact to create the necessary conditions for a saint's cult to thrive.

When thinking about the relationship between narrative and matter within St Edmund's cult, we must consider what type of narrative we are talking about. Robyn Malo, in her *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England*, talks about what she terms 'relic discourse'. Relic discourses are, for Malo, a framework of meanings and shared ideas that inform how a relic and/or its shrine ought to be understood. As Malo puts it; 'the meaning of a shrine may not be immediately apparent… there is no absolute sense in which a bejewelled casket denotes the ethereal or miraculous. Instead relic discourse explains and enforces what the shrine and its holy object signify.'[16] The truth of this statement at first seems self-evident, however, when she later contends that 'relics depended upon shrines and ultimately upon writing for their meaning', Malo reduces the idea of 'relic discourse' to something purely literary.[17] As this thesis has shown, relics, or any other cult object, relied upon a broad range of interlinked narratives, written, oral, cognitive and iconographic for their meaning.

We should begin by contemplating that the Christian meta-narrative almost entirely underpinned the culture and cosmology of the medieval West. All matter, sacred or profane, was contextualised, through the theology that extended from this narrative. In other words, the Christian meta-narrative gave the physical world its meaning. All saints' cults were but regional expressions of this narrative, therefore, St Edmund's cult, and all the material manifestations it produced functioned within this larger Christian, narrative context.

---

[16] Malo, *Relics and Writing*, p.6-7.

[17] *Ibid.* p.86.

Concerning Edmund's particular hagiographic narrative, there are, as chapter four pointed out, two aspects to consider: older, traditional narratives and newer, topical ones. Traditional narratives, such as Abbo's *Passio* and some of the pre-conquest stories in Hermann's *De Miraculis*, formed the lasting core of the saint's legend and in many ways dictated the material form of his cult. Edmund's body, and its treatment before, during and after his martyrdom, loom large in traditional accounts of his life and miracles. Without this emphasis, it is unlikely that Edmund's incorrupt, corporeal remains would have held quite the same significance that they did. Edmund's hagiography validated the central role of his body and shrine within the cult. Likewise, traditional hagiography – in particular the stories of *De Miraculis* - played an important role in localising the saint at Bury St Edmunds. Edmund's narrative was, of course, continuously subject to revision and addition and each addition, each new story, did successively more to validate Edmund's sanctity and the material environment that surrounded him. New narratives could also, at times, expand the material dimension of the saint's cult, incorporating fresh objects and spaces into Edmund's material repertoire. Such was the case with Edmund's relic cup, discussed in chapter two, which, despite not featuring in his early hagiography, would later come to be a highly significant object. Edmund's hagiography also had a significant effect on the forms taken by complementary material culture. For example, the archaeological finds, examined in chapter six, could not have taken on the shapes that they did without the influence of hagiography.
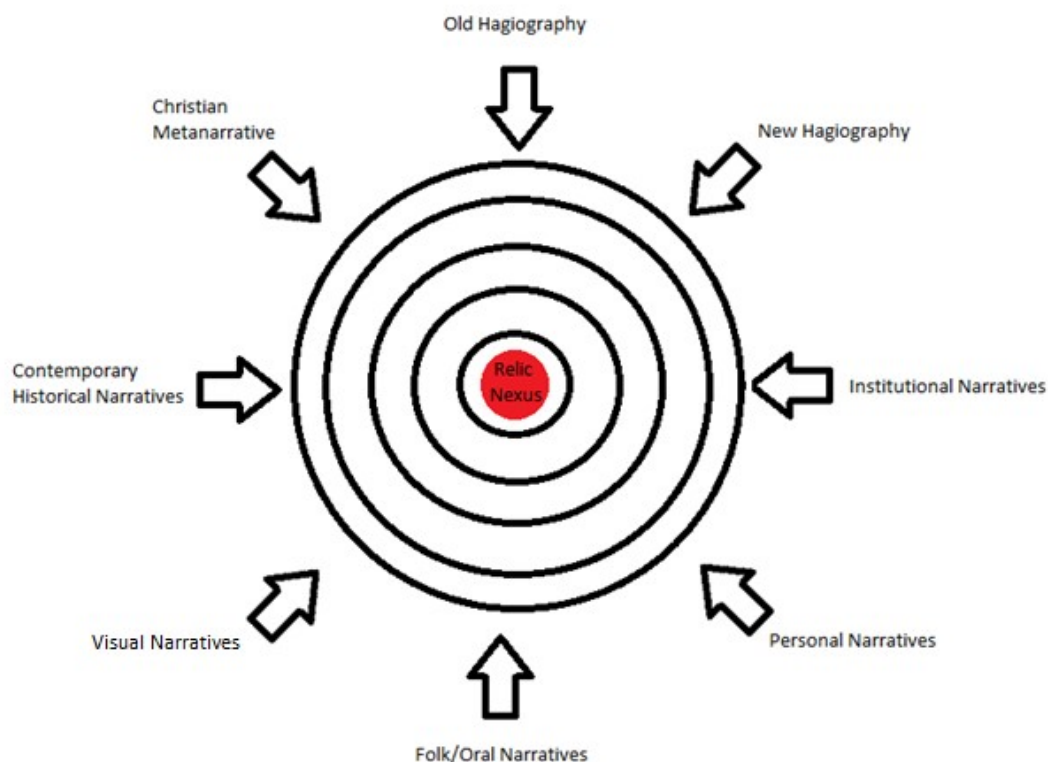
Tab.7.1: The Influence of narrative on the material aspects of cult.

Narrative within St Edmund's cult was not limited to hagiography. As chapter one revealed, Edmund's cult was part of the broader framework of medieval English society. Social ties meant that Edmund's cult both influenced and was influenced by, other narrative forms (see Tab.7.1). These, in turn, had a significant bearing on the materiality of his cult. As chapter three showed, from the mid-eleventh century onwards, the history of Bury St Edmunds Abbey, as both an institution and a built environment, became intimately interwoven with the saint's identity. Through the arrangement of hagiography and tenurial documents, Bury's monastic community authorised itself as the saint's interlocutor and thus mediated access to the cult centre. Equally, contemporary historical narratives in the form of annals, histories and chronicles, situated St Edmund in the grand scheme of national temporal progression. By including the saint in their works, these writers authenticated him not merely as a

'culturally postulated being', but as a 'culturally accepted being'. Early histories such as the Winchester Chronicle or Aethelweard's Chronicle may not have acknowledged Edmund's sanctity, but they affirmed the circumstances that led to his creation as a saint. Bloody and violent death was an essential component not merely in the creation of Edmund's legend, but also in defining the materiality of his cult. The writing of this feature into early histories validated its centrality. Through their becoming conflated with hagiographic sources, later histories further authenticated the saint's cult, thus placing greater emphasis on Bury St Edmunds as a material *locus* of sanctity. Oral, folk and personal narratives were equally important in their implications for Edmund's materiality. Comprising the 'lost' bulk of Edmund's narrative environment, stories such as these provided the vital, energetic context that kept the material heart of the cult beating. Narratives of personal experience came to feature strongly within the saint's hagiography. These stories, when mediated through the hagiographer's pen, speak of material encounters, where the saint intervened or took action on their behalf. Where such stories are absent from hagiography, their effects can prove harder to trace, but it is likely they would have had a significant influence on how the physical landscape of the East Anglia was itself enfolded into Edmund's cult. We can also think of visual representation as a form of narrative. Visual representations imprinted stories, either figuratively or iconically, onto portable objects and static spaces. In such a way, they could act either as material extensions of the saint's cult centre or as the physical focus of personal devotion. All the narrative threads discussed here were woven together in a variety of configurations, by a variety of people, in a variety of places and times to produce the interpretive fabric that not only gave the material aspects of Edmund's cult meaning but validated those meanings.

When thinking about how matter influenced narrative, we have to consider whether we're talking about matter in a broad sense or matter in a constrained and objectified sense. In a broad sense, all forms of narrative need to be mediated through

'the material'; whether this is through ink and parchment, plaster and paint, or through the biological medium of the human senses, 'the material' is an ever-present and unavoidable reality. In an equally broad, but more abstract way, all narratives require a sense of materiality to be coherent. As the historian David J. Bodenhamer puts it; 'all narratives imply a world of spatial extension... Narrative space, however, is not a simple construct... It is the setting or physically existing environment in which actions occur and through which people move...'[18] In other words, to perform their function of imparting structured information and ideas to their audience, all narratives need to evoke a sense of a material world or at least a comprehensible analogue to a material world. In a narrower sense, when we encounter individual objects, places or persons that feature both in narrative and in observable reality, 'the material' can be seen to evoke and embody narrative. If the object is geographically fixed, this process of embodiment can, in turn, lead to a sense of localisation.

The material fulcrum of St Edmund's cult, his shrine, both embodied all the narrative elements that had built up around him and, at the same time, localised him within a broader geography. At this material centre-point, Edmund was at his most accessible. However, Edmund's shrine merely formed a part of a larger material whole. There were other objects, both sacred and profane that contributed to the cult's materiality. Some of these objects, such as fragments of the saint's shirt or pilgrim badges, were both alienable and portable. The spread of these objects beyond Bury St Edmunds allowed them to embody narratives in other ways. A gifted relic fragment, for example, might develop its own series of narratives, unique from those at the cult centre. Equally, a memento from a visit to the saint's shrine could come to function as an embodiment of personal narrative.

---

[18] David J. Bodenhamer, 'Narrating Space and Place', in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M Harris (Bloomington, 2015), p.13.

Matter/narrative and encountering the saint

Sherry Turkle deals with the power of matter to evoke in her *Evocative Objects*.[19] As editor, Turkle collates a series of autobiographical texts offering a range of individual experiences with and responses to objects. Each account is deeply personal, confirming the notion that material objects mean most when enrolled in human narratives. In one example, particularly relevant to this thesis, Jeffery Mifflin, who at the time of writing worked as an archivist at the Massachusetts General Hospital, provides his reaction to discovering that amongst the hospital's collections was an Ancient Egyptian mummy. Encountering this preserved body, whose 'senses had once worked as mine now did', Mifflin recounts how the mummy presented both a tangible link to the past and a filter through which he could think about his own mortality.[20] To the author, the mummy at once evoked and embodied stories of the lost culture of ancient Egypt and the inevitable march of time. Although self-confessedly non-religious, Mifflin's experience, in some ways, mirrors that of a medieval pilgrim encountering the body of St Edmund. Medieval Christian relics were at once reminders of the past, while at the same time being indicators of what was to come. As was shown in chapter two of this thesis, St Edmund's miraculously incorrupt body was seen as a portent of the physical perfection that awaited Christians at the end of days. To those who visited Edmund's relics and who heard of his preservation through stories, the experience must have been one of comforting reassurance that, regardless of the ailments they suffered in the present, in the future they too would return to bodily perfection. Indeed, one can, to an extent, draw an analogy between a pilgrim shrine and the modern museum. Both are socially designated spaces, powered by a combination of narrative and matter. Both attract

---

[19] Sherry Turkle (ed.), *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (London, 2007).

[20] Jeffrey Mifflin 'The Mummy', in *Ibid.,* p.270-78.

visitors from great distances. Both are places where people simultaneously come to 'experience the past' and 'experience themselves'. Likewise, both museums and pilgrim shrines are physical environments, to a greater or lesser extent, purposefully designed to reinforce a set of prescriptive narratives. The Egyptian mummy in its glass case does not only tell an individual story of the ancient past; it is a physical relic of that past. Consequently, in its presence the world of ancient Egypt itself becomes somehow more real, less distant, more tangible. We must be careful, however, not to overstretch the analogy. In the medieval cult of saints, religion provided a sense of meaning which is absent from its modern counterpart. Unlike the dry, dead, mummified bones of the ancient Egyptian, which ceased to be a living person some 5000 years ago, the bones of a saint, however dry, remained vital. Visitors to Edmund's shrine came in search of more than just knowledge or entertainment; they came to experience the 'real presence' of the divine.

7.4: Matter, narrative, truth and identity

'Physical evidence' is a powerful tool in what folklorist and anthropologist Elliott Oring calls 'the rhetoric of truth'. In a 2008 article for *American Folklorist,* Oring analyses the methods employed by storytellers to convince their audience of the truth of their narrative. One powerful technique at the storyteller's disposal is to present physical evidence supporting their story. 'Physical markers and artefacts', Oring states, can be used by the narrator as a means of buttressing the truth of their story.[21] By presenting an audience with an object which purports to have been involved in their narrative, no matter how fallacious the connection may be, the storyteller can help to predispose his or her listeners to belief. In the cult of St Edmund, matter and narrative were used to configure a range of personal and social truths. These truths were told through narrative and manifested and supported through the material environment.

---

[21] Elliot Oring, 'Legendary and the Rhetoric of Truth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 121: 480, (2008), pp.127-166.

Truth narratives are an important factor in how individuals and societies develop and enact identities. As the ethicist, David Massey has put it: 'Just as spiders spin webs to ground and support their existence, humans spin tales to compose and nourish who they are and what they stand for… Stories are important not only because they are identity constitutive, but also because they are "identity preservative".'[22] In the case of medieval saints' cults, the notion of narrative as identity constitutive and preservative is of particular importance. Not only were the stories told about a given saint constitutive and preservative of the saint's identity, but they were often constitutive and preservative of a range of other lived identities both personal and social.

We can view material things in a similar light. It is perhaps a universal truism that possessions, built environments and natural landscapes can be considered extensions of the self, or, at least, to be indicative of one's selfhood. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's famous discussion of the blind man and his walking stick serves as an excellent case in point.[23] Through allowing the blind man to navigate the world, his stick acts not only as an extension of his physical person but of his perceptual set. The stick, therefore, becomes an essential component of the blind man's selfhood. This notion of objects as key contributors to identity is also manifested through our urge to collect. On the surface, there are many reasons why we collect material things; for pleasure; for personal gain; in the case of saint's relics, for the accrual of supernatural power. In all cases, collections are tied to the formation of identities. In the introduction to their volume *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices and the Fate of Things,* Kevin M. Moist and David Banash make the observation that: 'Collecting is both deeply enmeshed in the basic processes of cultural meaning and found in the roots of almost every

---

[22] David Massey, 'Identity Pragmatics: Narrative/Identity/Ethics', in *Confessions: Confounding Narrative and Ethics*, ed. Eleanor Milligan and Emma Woodley (Newcastle, 2010), p.46.

[23] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London, 1962). For discussion see; Phillip Brey, 'Technology and Embodiment in Ihde and Merleau-Ponty', in *Metaphysics, Epistemology and Technology: 19 (Research in Philosophy and Technology)*, ed. Carl Mitcham (Bingley, 2000), pp.45-59 and Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Plymouth, 2010), pp.130-33.

personal history.'[24] In other words, we surround ourselves with the things that reflect who we are, where we've been and what we aspire to. On a personal level, each of these is a relative truth which, although self-evident to the individual, may be interpreted differently by others. The same applies on a social level. We populate our museums with artefacts that reveal socially constructed truths not only about our own culture but the cultures of others. Similarly, medieval shrines, such as St Edmunds, formed collections of significant objects that reinforced theological, historical and social truth narratives. As a focal point for the saint's presence, Edmund's corpse embodied his narrative. Therefore, it could be said that, through their very existence, these remains both constituted and preserved the multiplicity of identities associated with his cult. To the monks of Bury St Edmunds, the inviolability of their saint's body was a reflection of their institutional inviolability. To the inhabitants of East Anglia, Edmund's material remains were a reminder of their regional uniqueness. To pilgrims, the corpse was emblematic of a goal, the physical endpoint of a journey both geographical and spiritual.

As this thesis has been at great pains to point out, neither the materiality nor the narrative of cult should be considered as limited to the centre. Stories were mobile and subject to change and so too were the meanings appended to material objects. Within a saint's cult, not everybody's truth was necessarily the same. To make better sense of this, we will briefly return to our model of concentric circles and consider it from polar perspectives: from the centre and the far margins. In either case we can say that the subjects are 'cult members', yet the ways in which they configure matter and narrative differ.

---

[24] Kevin M. Moist and David Banash (eds.), *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices and the fate of Things* (Plymouth, 2013), p.xi.

The centre

The monk at Bury St Edmunds, who, on a daily basis, enjoys the closest possible proximity to the saint's remains and who is most directly involved in the cult is likely to place considerable emphasis on the centrality of the saint's body to their own religious and lived experience. The lasting quality and presence of the saint's remains acted as a reminder that they were part of something which had endured for hundreds of years. Equally, a monk would have been highly familiar, not only with long established hagiographic traditions such as Abbo's *Passio*, but also with the cult's ongoing narrative production. Indeed, it is possible that they were actively engaged in collecting stories of the saint's miracles. To a person whose involvement was this close and this continuous, Edmund's cult would appear to have significant institutional cohesion, institutional cohesion centred on the abbey and its relics. To the monk, the reliquary casket and the body it contained were a testament not only to the truth of the saint's hagiography but to the institutional history of the monastery and the identity of its inmates. Within this context, the surrounding physical environment, the architecture, the fixtures and fittings, the artworks were all designed to reinforce these truths. As such, it is no surprise that among the sources that survive we find Edmund, both in narrative and material form, closely aligned with the political and social identity of the monastic community.

The margins

On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are those least directly 'involved', those who revere the saint from great distance. We might consider the nameless pilgrim who carried a badge all the way from Bury St Edmunds to the Netherlands. We must be careful about supposing too much about this person's background. Nevertheless, we can assume that they were operating in an environment largely divorced from the history and culture of Bury St Edmunds and East Anglia. At a distance from the cult centre, the

pilgrim's understanding of Edmund was likely less adulterated by regional politics and geared towards the more generic, Christian aspects of his character. Their badge would have become totemic not only of Edmund's life and passion but of their experience while on pilgrimage. For this person, the cult centre and St Edmund's body would likely have featured prominently only during their pilgrim journey. With their vow fulfilled, any devotional activity directed at the saint and any memories of their pilgrimage would be transferred to the badge they carried with them. Prior to losing it, this individual may have cherished this 'sign' as a keepsake and possibly even engaged with it as an apotropaic or spiritually potent object. Behaviour of this kind, as we saw in chapter six, where we examined the work of Megan Foster, is testified by the sewing of pilgrim badges into devotional books. Such practices suggest that individuals accorded pilgrim badges a position of prestige amidst their material environment. Furthermore, the badge could also function as a form of evidence supporting the veracity of the personal narrative they told him/herself and others.

Thinking speculatively about these two cases reveals that not only do individual truth narratives vary across space, they also vary across time. For example, to the reformers of sixteenth-century England, who destroyed Edmund's relics, these objects confirmed a very different truth, the truth of Protestant superiority and the narrative of Catholic superstition. Despite the fact that the cult of St Edmund effectively came to an end some five hundred years ago, the ghosts of those powerful material/narrative connections survive even through to today. Our familiarity with the expression of Edmund's narrative helps us attribute freshly uncovered artefacts to the saint's cult. Likewise, objects and illustrations that once belonged to Edmund's cult help to ground our textual sources in a sense of lived reality. Matter and narrative, those 'things left behind', are even now helping us construct truths.

General Conclusion

This work began with the notion of 'things left behind', the idea that matter and narrative are the deceased's legacy to the world of the living. At the conclusion of this thesis, however, it is apparent that a third category should be added: people. The ways in which the living interact with, curate and dispose of these 'things' ultimately determines the nature of the deceased's legacy. In the case of the cult of St Edmund, generations of people, from all walks of life, engaged with the saint's material and narrative legacies, using them both to interact with the divine and with each other. They built upon, developed and changed these legacies in complex and interrelated ways: ways that reflected discrete needs and identities. This concluding section will examine the lessons learned from this thesis and will consider how the approach taken here might benefit future research.

Lessons learned

The principal lesson learned from this thesis is that when approaching matter and narrative within saints' cults, we should not limit ourselves to the consideration of relics and hagiography. Scholarly engagement with an array of objects and artefacts not only permits us to think about the wider, material implications of saintly veneration but also allows us to make use of an ever increasing body of material evidence. Regularly updated resources such as the online database for the Portable Antiquities Scheme and Radboud Universitiet's *Kunera* database provide a wealth of contextual information on medieval objects that might otherwise remain unknown to the wider public. By thinking through and with objects, and by considering their associations, we can gain fresh insight into the devotional lives of those who lived in the middle ages. Equally, when it comes to narrative, hagiography should be viewed as the tip of the iceberg. Hagiographies were an intrinsic part of Edmund's cult, but they were in constant dialogue with a fluid realm of oral, historical, institutional and religious narratives.

In line with traditional views on saint's cults, particularly the notion of *Praesentia,* this thesis has underlined the undoubted importance of proximity and distance. Yet, while Edmund's cult was at once highly centralised, it was simultaneously knitted into broader social and spatial patterns. The evidence presented in this study suggests that St Edmund's cult was a more mobile institution than has thus far been acknowledged. Veneration of the saint spread through a variety of means. Through the dispersal of significant matter; through the transmission of narrative, be it literary, oral or visual; and through the movement of people, conceptions of the saint were atomised across a broad geography. Indeed, the further one moves from the centre, and away from the political influence of Bury St Edmunds, the less idiosyncratic become narrative versions of the saint's life. This shift in emphasis was, in turn, reflected in the way that Edmund was visually interpreted. From the kingly paragon found in the illustrations of Bury's twelfth-century *libellus* to the virginal youth commonly found on church wall paintings outside of East Anglia, there was division concerning how people imagined Edmund. This thesis suggests that Edmund's cult and the material, and narrative patterns it made, can be realised diagrammatically as a series of scaled concentric circles. These concentric circles do not simply conform to narrative and material dispersal, they equally represent a hierarchy of involvement. Involvement in Edmund's cult, on a greater or lesser scale, was important in the building of a range of personal and social identities. These identities, in turn, were supported by both matter and narrative.

The fresh perspectives offered by this thesis would not have been possible without a close engagement with current theories surrounding material culture. This thesis has been selective in its choice of theoretical tools, but the work performed here suggests that there are indeed benefits to be had for the historian who moves beyond 'comfortable interdisciplinarity' and engages with the wider realm of ideas surrounding 'the material'.

Applying a matter/narrative model to other cults

The purpose of this study was not to highlight the uniqueness of Bury St Edmunds as a cult centre or of St Edmund as a saint. Instead, it was to show how the function of a cult could be more fully appreciated through the use of a particular method of analysis. Not all cults were structured in the same way as St Edmund's. St Edmund's cult, entrenched within regional history and politics, had a highly developed hagiographic tradition. Other cults placed a lesser emphasis on literature, or were geographically situated in contexts far-removed from their point of origin. It stands to reason that the approach adopted here may not be fully applicable in such circumstances. These challenges would necessitate the adaptation of the model presented within this study, but they are challenges that present opportunities. Where we know of the existence of a saint's cult, but have no surviving hagiography, analysis of materially based venerative practices might help us gain insight as to how the saint was characterised. For cults that blossomed far from their point of origin, the techniques adopted in this thesis could be adapted to help realise how localities came to accommodate devotional practices developed elsewhere. Such an approach would demand scrutiny of both the historical and material record.

Future directions for research

One area that this study has only briefly touched upon is the relationship between St Edmund and other cults within East Anglia. The monks of Bury St Edmunds shared a complicated and often ambivalent connection with their counterparts at Ely, whose saintly patron was St Aethelthryth. A future study, comparing the material and narrative dimensions of these two cults, could prove particularly fruitful. The geographical proximity of the two centres coupled with their shared regional history would likely reveal points of confluence. The competitive nature of their association and their

differing institutional histories are also likely to manifest through material and narrative production.

Another potential avenue for research might be to apply the techniques developed here to a saint whose impact was more geographically dispersed. Itinerant, proselytizing saints, such as Patrick and Columba, left their mark across broad topographies and spawned multiple idiosyncratic 'centres'. Use of the model developed in this thesis would offer the possibility of gauging the relative homo/heterogeneity of these devotions, both in terms of their approach to embodying the saint and in terms of how narrative was constructed. Furthermore, the concept of concentric circles might be used to highlight points of overlap, where competing narrative traditions, emanating from different locations, met and perhaps even integrated.

As a final thought, it might also be interesting to consider whether this model might be applicable across faith boundaries, or to see how it might be adapted for use in non-religious, past contexts. After all, the study of the past is always a study of 'things left behind'.

Bibliography

Manuscripts Consulted

British Library

MS Cotton Tiberius B.ii

MS Cotton Titus A.viii

Oxford Bodleian Library

MS Bodl.240

MS Bodl.297

Printed Primary Sources

Abbo of Fleury, *'Passio Sancti Eadmundi'*, in *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, ed. Francis Hervey (London, 1907), pp.6-60

Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 2 vols, *Early English Text Society* 76, 82, 94, 114, ed. and trans. W.W. Skeat (London, 1881-1900)

Aethelweard, *The Chronicle of Aethelweard*, ed. and trans. A. Campbell (London, 1962)

A Late Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University, ed. Jan Hendrik Hessels (Cambridge, 2011)

Apologiae duae, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, with intro by Giles Constable (Turnholt, 1985)

Ambrose of Milan, 'The Martyrdom of St Sebastain' (Acta Sanctorum DB, BHL: 7543) [http://acta.chadwyck.co.uk/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=4&id=Z400066017&FILE=../session/1443190277_15649&SOURCE=config.cfg&CURDB=acta]

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle a Collaborative Edition, v.17: The Annals of St Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1985)

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London, 2003)

Arnold, Thomas (ed.), *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, 3 vols (London, 1890-96)

Asser, 'Life of King Alfred', in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London, 1983)

Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge. 2002)

-----, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda,* in *New Advent: Fathers of the Church*, trans. H. Browne, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009) [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1316.htm]

-----, *De Virginitatis,* in *New Advent: Fathers of the Church*, trans. C.L Cornish, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009) [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1310.htm]

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D.H. Farmer (London, 1990)

Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Oxford, 2009)

Chronica Buriensis: The Chronicle of Bury St. Edmunds, 1212-1301, ed. Antonia Gransden (London, 1964)

Calendar of Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII, 21 vols, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R. H. Brodie (London, 1862– 1932)

Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory, ed. Barbara Dodwell (London, 1975)

Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis, ed. W. Dunn Macray (London, 1886)

Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: *The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, ed. Francis Hervey (London, 1907)

The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, ed. Antonia Gransden (London, 1973)

Denis Piramus, *La vie seint Edmund Le Rei*, ed. D.W. Russell (Oxford, 2014)

Die Irishche Kanonensammlung, ed. Hermann Wasserschleben (Giessen, 1874)

Egeria, *The Pilgrimage of Etheria*, ed. and trans. M.L. McClure and C.L. Feltoe (London, 1919)

Douglas, D.C (ed.), *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (Oxford, 1932)

Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ed. and trans. by Ian Short (Oxford, 2009)

'Geoffrey of Wells De Infantia Sancti Eadmundi', ed. R.M. Thomson, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 95 (1977), pp.25-42

Gesta Sacristarum, trans. W.L North (Minnesota) [https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/mars/Translations/primary_sources/]

Goscelin of Saint Bertin, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, ed. and trans. R.C. Love (Oxford, 2004)

-----, *Miracles of St Edmund*, in *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. Tom License (Oxford, 2014), pp.127-305

Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity,* in *New Advent: Fathers of the Church,* trans. William Moore and Henry Austin, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009) [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2907.htm]

Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, trans. Raymond Van Dam (Liverpool, 1988)

Gregory the Great – *Registrum Epistolarum:* bk.IV: Epist.30 in *New Advent: Fathers of the Church,* trans. James Barmby, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009) [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/360204030.htm]

----- *Registrum Epistolarum:* bk.XI, Epist.13 in *New Advent: Fathers of the Church,* trans. James Barmby, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight (2009) [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/360211013.htm]

Guibert of Nogent, *Monodies and on the Relics of Saints*, ed. and trans. Jay Rubenstein and Joseph McAlhany (London, 2011)

Harmer, F.E. (ed. and trans.) *Anglo-Saxon Writs,* (Manchester, 1954)

Hermann the Archdeacon, *Liber De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi,* in *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund,* ed. and trans. Tom License (Oxford, 2014), pp.1-127

Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon, 2 vols., ed. John Hudson (Oxford, 2002-2007)

Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway and Jane Sayers (Oxford, 2008)

John Lydgate, *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund and Extra Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. Anthony Bale and A.S.G. Edwards (Heidelberg, 2009)

-----, *The Life of St Edmund King and Martyr: A Facsimile of British Library MS Harley 2278*, (London, 2004)

John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge, 1990)

John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. ii, ed. and trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1995)

Le Passiun de seint Edmund, ed. Judith Grant (London, 1978)

Liber Eliensis, ed. and trans. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005)

Osbert of Clare, *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster*, ed. E.W. Williamson (Oxford, 1929)

Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, ed. James Raine (London, 1835)

Samson, *Opus De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*, in *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, I., ed. Thomas Arnold (London, 1890), pp.105-208

Simeon of Durham, 'History of the Church of Durham', in *The Church Historians of England*, v.III, pt.II: The Historical Works of Simeon of Durham, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London, 1855), pp.619-712

Snorri Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, ed. and trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson (Harmondsworth, 1966)

Whitelock, Dorothy (ed. and trans.), *Anglo Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930)

Winterbottom, Michael (ed.), *Three Lives of English Saints*, (Toronto, 1972)

William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998-1999)

-----, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. by R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 2007)

Secondary Sources

Abou-El-Haj, Barbara, 'Bury St Edmunds Abbey between 1070 and 1124: A History of Property, Privilege and Monastic Art Production', *Art History*, 6 (1983), pp.1-29

-----, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge, 1994)

Abrams, Lesley, 'Conversion and Assimilation', in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and J.D. Richards (Turnhout, 2000), pp.135–53

Adams, Henry, 'The Anglo-Saxon Courts of Law', in *Essays in Anglo Saxon Law*, ed. Henry Adams (Clark. N.J., 2004), pp.1-55

Aird, William M., *St Cuthbert and the Normans: The Church of Durham, 1071-1153* (Woodbridge, 1998)

Ambrose, Kirk, '"Cunningly hidden": Invisible and Forgotten Relics in a Romanesque Work of Art', in *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jenner (New York, 2010), pp.79-96

Antrobus, Abby L., *Urbanisation and the Urban Landscape: Building Medieval Bury St Edmunds*, 2 vols (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: Durham University, 2009)

Appadurai, Arjun, `Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986) pp.3-63

Arthur, Ciaran, 'Giving the Head's Up in Aelfric's Passio Sancti Eadmundi: Postural Representations of the Old English Saint', *Philological Quarterly*, 92:3 (2013), pp.315-333

Arnold, John, 'The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity', in *Medieval Virginities*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (Cardiff, 2003) pp.102-118

Ashby, Steve, *Artefact Biographies: Implications for the curation of archaeological ivories* (2009), [http://www.ebur.eu/index.php?q=27&s=3&t=3]

Azaryahu, Maoz and Kenneth E. Foote, 'Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites', *GeoJournal*, 73:3 (2008), pp.179-194

Mark Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk: An Economic and Social History 1200-1500* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010)

Bale, Anthony, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350-1500* (Cambridge, 2006)

-----, (ed.), *St Edmund King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint* (York, 2009)

Barber, Karin, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics Oral and Written in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2007)

Barker, Sheila, 'The Making of a Plague Saint: Saint Sebastian's Imagery and Cult Before the Counter-Reformation', in *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester (Kirksville, 2007), pp.90-132

Barrow, Julia, 'The Chronology of the Benedictine 'Reform'', in *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), pp.211–23

-----, 'Ideas and applications of reform', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, v.3: Early Medieval Christianities, c.600-c.1100*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge, 2008), pp.345-62

-----, 'Danish Ferocity and Abandoned Monasteries: The Twelfth-century View', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. Martin Brett and David A. Goodman (Abingdon: 2015), pp.77-93

Bartlett, Robert, *Why Can the Dead do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Woodstock, 2013)

Bateman, Katherine, 'Pembroke 120 and Morgan 736: A Re-examination of the St. Albans Bury St. Edmunds Manuscript Dilemma', *Gesta*, 17:1 (1978), pp.19-26

Bates, David, 'The Abbey and the Norman Conquest an unusual case?', in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, ed. Tom License (Woodbridge, 2014), pp.5-21.

Bennett, A., 'The Transformation of the Gothic Psalter in Thirteenth-Century France', in *The Illuminated Psalter: Studies in the Content, Purpose and Placement of its Images*, ed. F. O. Büttner (Turnhout, 2004), pp.211-221

Bernau, Anke, *Virgins: A Cultural History* (London, 2007)

Biggam C.P., 'Knowledge of whelk dyes and pigments in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 35 (2006), pp.23-55

Black, W.H., *Catalogue of the Arundel Manuscripts in the library of the College of Arms* (London, 1829)

Blackburn, M. and H. Pagan, 'The St Edmund coinage in the light of a parcel from a hoard of St Edmund pennies', *BNJ*, 72 (2002), pp.1-14

Blair, John, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford, 2002), pp.495-567

-----, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005)

Blanton, Virginia, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Aethelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park, 2007)

Blick, Sarah and Laura Gelfand (eds.), *Push Me Pull You: Imaginative, Emotional, Physical, and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, v.2 (Leiden, 2011)

-----, 'Votives, Images, Interaction and Pilgrimage to the Tomb and Shrine of St Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral', in *Push Me, Pull You: Art and Devotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand (Leiden, 2011), pp.21-58

Block Friedman, John and Kristen Mossler Figg (eds.), *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (London, 2011)

Blum, P.Z., 'The St Edmund Cycle in the Crypt at St Denis', in *Bury St Edmunds Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy*, ed. Antonia Gransden (Leeds, 1998), pp.57-68

Blunt, C.E., 'The St Edmund Memorial Coinage', *PSIAH,* 31 (1969), pp.234-55

Boddington, Andy (ed.), *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo Saxon Church and Churchyard* (London, 1996)

Bodenhamer, David J., 'Narrating Space and Place', in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M Harris (Bloomington, 2015), pp.7-28

Bolin, Paul E. and Doug Blandy, 'Beyond Visual Culture: Seven Statements of Support for Material Culture Studies in Art Education', *Studies in Art Education*, 44:3 (2003), pp.246-63

Brett, Martin, 'John of Worcester and his Contemporaries', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R.W. Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace Hadrill (Oxford, 1981), pp.101-26

Brey, Phillip, 'Technology and Embodiment in Ihde and Merleau-Ponty', in *Metaphysics, Epistemology and Technology: 19 (Research in Philosophy and Technology)*, ed. Carl Mitcham (Bingley, 2000), pp.45-59

Briggs, Brian, *The Life and Works of Osbert of Clare* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: University of St Andrews, 2004)

Briggs, Keith, 'Was Haegelisdun in Essex?: A new Site for the martyrdom of Edmund', *PSIAH*, 42:3 (2011), pp.277-291

Brooke, Christopher, *Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, third edition (London, 2000)

Brooks, Nicholas and Catherine Cubitt (eds.), *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence* (London, 1996)

Brown, Peter, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1982)

Brubaker, Leslie and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the iconoclast era c.680-850: a history* (Cambridge, 2001)

Buchli, Victor, *An Archaeology of the Immaterial* (London, 2016)

Callon, Michel, 'The Sociology of an Actor-Network: The Case of the Electric Vehicle', in *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World,* ed. Michel Callon, John Law and Arie Rip (Basingstoke, 1986), pp.19-34

Campbell, Gordon (ed.), *The Grove Encyclopaedia of Decorative Arts,* (Oxford, 2006)

Carey Evans, Margaret, 'The Contribution of Hoxne to the cult of St Edmund King and Martyr in the Middle Ages and Later', *PSIAH*, 36:3 (1987), pp.182-195

Carruthers, Mary, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric and the making of images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, 2003)

-----, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, 2007)

Cavill, Paul, 'Analogy and Genre in the Legend of St Edmund', *Nottingham Medieval Studies,* 47 (2003), pp.21-45

Champion, Matthew, 'Devotion, Pestilence and Conflict: The Medieval Wall paintings of St Mary the Virgin Lakenheath', in *Art Faith and Place in East Anglia: From Prehistory to the Present*, ed. T.A. Heslop, Elizabeth Mellings and Margit Thofner (Woodbridge, 2012), pp.88-105

Chapman, John, *Fragmentation in archaeology. People, places, and broken objects in the prehistory of south-eastern Europe* (London, 2000)

Chua, Liana and Mark Elliot (eds.), *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell* (New York, 2013)

Clanchy, M.T., *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307, 2nd Edition* (London, 1993)

Coatsworth, Elizabeth, 'The Material Culture of the Anglo-Saxon Church', in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. Helena Hamerow, David A. Hinton and Sally Crawford (Oxford, 2011), pp.779-797

Cobb, L. Stephanie, 'Polcarp's Cup: *Imitatio* in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*', *Journal of Religious History*, 38:2 (2014), pp.224-240.

Cohen, Adam, 'The Historiography of Romanesque Manuscript Illumination', in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. C. Rudolph (Oxford, 2006), pp.357–81

Coleman, Simon and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present: Sacred travel and sacred space in the world religions* (London, 1995)

Collins, Kristen, Peter Kidd and Nancy K. Turner, *The St Albans psalter: Painting and Prayer in medieval England* (Los Angeles, 2013)

Cornwell, Hilarie and James Cornwell, *Saints, Signs, and Symbols*, third edition, (London, 2009)

Cownie, Emma, 'The Cult of St Edmund in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: The Language and Communication of a Medieval Saint's Cult', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 99:2 (1998), pp.177-199

Crawford, Cassandra S., 'Actor Network theory', in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory, v.1,* ed. George Ritzer (London, 2005), pp.1-4

Crook, John, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West* (Oxford, 2003)

-----, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge, 2011)

Cruikshank, Julie, *Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Vancouver, 1998)

Cubitt, Catherine, 'Review article: The tenth-century Benedictine Reform in England', *Early Medieval Europe,* 6:1 (1997), pp.77-94

-----, 'Folklore and Historiography: Oral Stories and the Writing of Anglo-Saxon History', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West,* ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout, 2006), pp.189-225

Darvill, Timothy, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* (Oxford, 2003)

Davey, Nicholas, 'Art, Religion and the Hermeneutics of Authenticity', in *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts,* ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge, 1999), pp.66-95

Davies, Paula and Deborah Howard, 'Introduction', in *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond,* ed. Paula Davies, Deborah Howard and Vendy Pullan (Farnham, 2013), pp.1-21

Davis, G.R.C., *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland,* rev. Claire Breay, Julian Harrison and David M. Smith (London, 2010)

Davis, H.W.C., 'The Commune of St Edmund', *EHR,* 24 (1909), pp.313-317

-----, 'The Liberties of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR,* 24 (1909), pp.417-431

Davis, R.H.C., 'The Monks of St. Edmund' 1021-1148', *History,* 40:140 (1955), pp.227-39

Dean, Caroline, 'Fame of Thrones: Seats, Sights, and Sanctity among the Inka', *Journal of Material Religion,* 11:3, (2015), pp.355-385

Demidoff, Lene, 'The death of Sven Forkbeard – in reality and later tradition', *Mediaeval Scandinavia,* 11 (1978), pp.30-47

Diprose, Rosalyn, 'Toward an Ethico-Politics of The Posthuman: Foucault and Merleau-Ponty', *Parrhesia,* 8 (2009), pp.7-19

Douny, Laurence, 'The Materiality of Domestic Waste: The Recycled Cosmology of the Dogon of Mali', *JMC,* 12:3 (2007), pp.309-331

Duggan, Lawrence G., 'Was art really the 'book of the illiterate', *Word and Image,* 5:3 (1989), pp.227-251

Eliade, Mircea, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York, 1959)

Farmer, David, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 2004)

Faulkner, Mark, '"Like a Virgin": The Reheading of St. Edmund and Monastic Reform in Late-Tenth-Century England', in *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination,* ed. Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (Leiden, 2012), pp.39-52

Fernie, Eric, 'The Romanesque Church of Bury St Edmunds Abbey', in *Bury St Edmunds Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy*, ed. Antonia Gransden (Leeds, 1998), pp.1-15

-----, *The Architecture of Norman England* (Oxford, 2002)

Ferris, Iain, 'A severed head. Prologema to a study of the fragmented body in Roman archaeology and art', in *Roman finds: context and theory,* ed. R. Hingley and S. Willis (Oxford, 2007) pp.116-127

Finlay, Alison, 'Chronology, Genealogy and Conversion: The Afterlife of St Edmund in the North', in *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint*, ed. Anthony Bale (Woodbridge, 2009), pp.45-62

Finucane, Ronald C., *Miracles and Pilgrims*: *Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (Basingstoke, 1995)

Foot, Sarah, 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record or Story?', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout, 2006), pp.39-67

-----, 'The Abbey's Armoury of Charters', in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, ed. Tom License (Woodbridge, 2014), pp.46-48

Foster, Megan, 'Pilgrimage Through the Pages: Pilgrim's Badges in Late Medieval Devotional Manuscripts' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: University of Illinois, 2011)

-----, 'Pilgrimage Through the Pages: Pilgrims' Badges in Late Medieval Devotional Manuscripts', in *Push Me, Pull You: Art and Devotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand (Leiden, 2011), pp.227-276

Foxhall-Forbes, Helen, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (London, 2013)

Freeman, Charles, *Holy Bones Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 2011)

Freytag, Gustav, *Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, third edition, trans. by Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago, 1900)

Galbi, Douglas A., 'Long-Term Trends in Personal Given Name Frequencies in England and Wales' *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, 50:4 (2002), pp.275-288

Galbraith, V.H., 'The East Anglian see and the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 40 (1925), pp.222-228

-----, 'The St Edmundsbury Chronicle, 1296–1301', *EHR*, 58 (1943), pp.53–78

Gameson, Richard, 'The Early Imagery of Thomas Becket', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 2002)

Geary, Patrick J., *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1990)

-----, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (London, 1994)

Gell, Alfred, *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams*, ed. Eric Hirsch (London, 1999)

-----, 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology' in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, 2009), pp.208-229

-----, Alfred, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 2013)

Gilchrist, Roberta, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, 2012)

Gosden, Chris and Yvonne Marshall, 'The Cultural Biography of Objects', *World Archaeology*, 31:2 (1999), pp.169-178

Gottfried, Robert, *Bury St Edmunds and the Urban Crisis 1290-1539* (Princeton, 1982)

Gransden, Antonia, *Historical Writing in England: 500-1307* (London, 1979)

-----, 'Baldwin Abbot of Bury St Edmunds', in *Anglo Norman Studies 4*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge, 1982), pp.65-76

-----, 'The Legends and Traditions concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 100:394, (1985), pp.1-24

-----, *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England*, (London, 1992)

-----, 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*', *Revue Benedictine*, 105 (1995), pp.20-78

-----, 'The Composition and Authorship of De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi, Attributed to Herman the Archdeacon', *JML*, v.5, (1995), pp.1-52

-----, (ed.), *Bury St Edmunds Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy* (Leeds, 1998)

-----, *A History of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds 1182-1256: Samson of Tottington to Edmund of Walpole* (Woodbridge, 2007)

-----, *A History of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds 1257-1301*: *Simon of Luton and John of Northwold* (Woodbridge, 2015)

Grodal, Torben, 'Film Narrative', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (Abingdon, 2010), pp.168-172

Gubrium, Jaber F. and James A. Holstein, *Analysing Narrative Reality* (London, 2009)

Gurevich, Aaron J., 'Oral and Written Culture of the Middle Ages: Two "Peasant Visions" of the Late Twelfth Early Thirteenth Centuries', *New Literary History*, 16:1 (1984) pp.51-66

Hagan, Jacqueline, *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope, and Meaning on the Undocumented Journey* (London, 2012)

Hall, D.J., *English Mediaeval Pilgrimage* (London, 1965)

Hall, Mark, 'A Roman Pilgrim' *Peregrinations*, 2:4 (2009), pp.183-4

Hall, Sean, *This Means This This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics* (London, 2007)

Hahn, Cynthia, 'Peregrinatio et Natio: The Illustrated Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr', *Gesta*, 30:2 (1991), pp.119-39.

-----, 'The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries', *Gesta*, 36:1 (1997), pp.20-31

-----, 'What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?', *Numen, 57 (2010)*, pp.*284-316*

Hamilton, Sarah and Andrew Spicer, 'Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space' in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer (Aldershot, 2005), pp.1-27

Hamling, Tara and Catherine Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham, 2010)

Hardy, Thomas D., *Descriptive catalogue of materials relating to the history of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. (London, 1862-71)

Hauglid, Roar, *Norwegian Stave Churches*, trans. R.I. Christopherson (Oslo, 1970)

Hart, Cyril, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992)

Hayward, Paul Anthony, 'Geoffrey of Wells' Liber de infantia sancti Edmundi and the 'Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign', in *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint*, ed. Anthony Bale (Woodbridge, 2009), pp.63-86

Head, T., *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (Cambridge, 1990)

Hearn, Jonathan, *Theorizing Power* (Basingstoke, 2012)

Heywood, Stephen, 'Aspects of the Romanesque Church of Bury St Edmunds Abbey in their regional context', in *Bury St Edmunds Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy*, ed. Antonia Gransden (Leeds, 1998), pp.16-22

-----, 'Stone Building in East Anglia', in *East Anglia and the North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Robert Liddiard (Woodbridge, 2013), pp.256-269

Hicks, Dan, 'The Material Cultural Turn: Event and Effect', in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford, 2010), pp.25-98

Houlbrook, Ceri and Natalie Armitage (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic: An artifactual investigation into ritual practices and popular beliefs* (Oxford, 2015)

Howe, Nicholas, *Migration and Myth Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989)

Howlett, D.R. (ed.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources, fascicule IV, F-G-H* (Oxford, 2013)

Hüwelmeier, Gertrud, 'Cell Phones for the Spirits: Ancestor Worship and Ritual Economies in Vietnam and its Disporas', *Journal of Material Religion*, 12:3, (2016), pp.294-321

Ingold, Tim, 'Materials Against Materiality', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14:1 (2007), pp.1-16

James, M.R., *On the Abbey of S. Edmund at Bury* (Cambridge, 1895)

Jahn, Manfred, 'Freytag's Triangle', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (Abingdon, 2010), pp.189-90

Jankulak, Karen, *The Medieval Cult of St Petroc* (Woodbridge, 2000)

Jenkins, David H., *'Holy, Holier, Holiest': The Sacred Topography of the Early Medieval Irish Church* (Turnhout, 2010)

Jensen, Robin M., 'Jesus in Christian art', in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (London, 2010) pp.477-504

Jones, Andrew and Nicole Boivin, 'The Malice of Inanimate Objects: Material Agency', in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford, 2010), pp.333-351

Jordan, Timothy R. W., 'Holiness and Hopefulness: The Monastic and Lay Audiences of Abbo of Fleury's Passio Sancti Eadmundi and Ælfric of Eynsham's Life of St. Edmund, King and Martyr', *Enarratio*, 19 (2015), pp.1-29

Jubb, Margaret, 'Commentary On The Old French Translation Of Gregory's Letter' (Aberdeen, 2003) [https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/essays/frenchgreg.shtml]

Kendrick, A.F., *English Embroidery* (London, 1909)

Kerr, Mary and Nigel Kerr, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (Aylesbury, 1989)

Kershaw, Paul, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011)

Keynes, S., 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A.R. Rumble (London, 1994), pp.43-88

Kidd, Peter, 'Cambridge, Pembroke College Ms 120: Overlooked and New Observations', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 13:3 (2006) pp.289-299

Klaniczay, Gábor, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge, 2000)

Knappett, Carl, 'Materiality in Archaeological Theory', in *Encyclopaedia of Global Archaeology, v.7*, ed. Claire Springer (New York, 2007), pp.4700-4708

Koopmans, Rachel, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2011)

Kopytoff, Igor, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), pp.64-91

Landes, Richard, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes, 989-1034* (London, 1995)

Lang, James, *Corpus of Anglo Saxon Stone Sculpture, vol.III, York and East Yorkshire* (Oxford, 1995)

Lanzi, Fernando and Gioia Lanzi, *Saints and their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Minnesota, 2004)

Lapidge, Michael, 'The Saintly Life in Anglo Saxon England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Michael Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), pp.243-263

-----, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford, 2003)

Latour, Bruno, 'On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications', *Soziale Welt*, 47 (1996), pp.369-381

-----, 'Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artefacts', in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, 2009), pp.229-254

Laugerud, Henning, Salvador Ryan and Laura Katrine Skinnebach (eds.), *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe* (Dublin, 2016)

Law, John, 'Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity', *Systems Practice*, 5 (1992), pp.379-393

Lawson, M.K., *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993)

License, Tom, 'History and Hagiography in the Late Eleventh Century: The Life and Work of Herman the Archdeacon, Monk of Bury St Edmunds', *EHR*, 74:508 (2009), pp.516-44

-----, 'Herbert Losinga's Trip to Rome and the Bishopric of St Edmunds', in *Anglo Norman Studies 34*, ed. David Bates (Woodbridge, 2012), pp.151-68

-----, (ed.), *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 2014)

-----, 'The Cult of St Edmund', in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, ed. Tom License (Woodbridge, 2014), pp.104-131

Little, Katie and Anne Lester (eds.), *Medieval Materiality: English Language Notes*, 53:2 (2015)

Love, Rosalind, 'Folcard of Saint-Bertin and the Anglo-Saxon Saints at Thorney', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. Martin Brett and David A. Woodman (London, Routledge, 2015), pp.27-47

Lowe, Kathryn, 'Bury St Edmunds and its Liberty: a charter text and its afterlife', in *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* (17), ed. A.S.G. Edwards and O. da Rold (London, 2012), pp.155-172

Lucas, Gavin, *The Archaeology of Time* (London, 2005)

Luscombe, David, 'John of Salisbury', *ODNB*, (Oxford, 2004),
[http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14849]

MacDougall, Ian, 'Serious Entertainments: An Examination of a Peculiar Type of
Scandinavian Atrocity', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 22 (1993), pp.201-25

Malo, Robyn, *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England* (Toronto, 2013)

Massey, David, 'Identity Pragmatics: Narrative/Identity/Ethics', in *Confessions:
Confounding Narrative and Ethics*, ed. Eleanor Milligan and Emma Woodley
(Newcastle, 2010), pp.35-67

Matthews, Thomas F., *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*,
rev. edition (Princeton, 1999)

McGurk, P., 'John of Worcester', *ODNB* (Oxford,2004)
[http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48309].

McKinlay, J.B., *St Edmund King and Martyr* (London, 1893)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London, 1962)

Mifflin, Jeffrey 'The Mummy', *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, ed. Sherry
Turkle (London, 2007), p.270-78

Miller, Daniel, (ed.), *Materiality* (Durham, 2005)

Moist, Kevin M. and David Banash (eds.), *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices
and the fate of Things* (Plymouth, 2013)

Moore, Albert C., *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (London, 1977)

Morgan Library, *Curatorial Description of M.736* (New York, 1951)
[http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0736a.pdf]

Mostert, Marco, *The Political Theology of Abbo of Fleury: A Study of the ideas about
society and law of the tenth-century monastic reform movement* (Hilversum,
1987)

Murray, Alexander, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2002)

Mytum, Harold, 'Artefact Biography as an Approach to Material Culture: Irish
Gravestones as a Material Form of Genealogy', *Journal of Irish Archaeology*,
12/13 (2003/2004), pp.111-27

Naismith, Rory, 'Coinage in Pre-Viking East Anglia', in, *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Robert Liddiard (Woodbridge: 2015), pp.137-151

Nederman, Cary J. and Catherine Campbell, 'Priests, Kings and Tyrants: Spiritual and Temporal Power in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*', *Speculum*, 66:3 (1991), pp.572-590

Nilson, Ben, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2001)

Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps, *Living Narratives*: *Creative Lives in Everyday Storytelling* (Massachusetts, 2001)

Olsen, Bjørnar, *In Defence of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Plymouth, 2010)

Ong, Walter J., 'Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualisation', *New Literary History*, 16:1 (1984), pp.1-12

-----, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 2002)

Oring, Elliot, 'Legendary and the Rhetoric of Truth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 121: 480, (2008), pp.127-166.

Owen-Crocker, Gale R., *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England, Revised and enlarged edition* (Woodbridge, 2004)

Pallister, D.M., 'Review Article: 'The minster hypothesis': a case study', *Early Medieval Europe*, 5:2 (1996), pp.207-14

Parkes, Henry, 'St Edmund between Liturgy and Hagiography', in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest,* ed. Tom License (Woodbridge, 2014), pp.130-159

Parsons, David, 'Liturgical and Social Aspects', in *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo Saxon Church and Churchyard*, ed. Andy Boddington (London, 1996), pp.58-66

Phelpstead, Carl, 'King, Martyr and Virgin: Imitatio Christi in Ælfric's Life of St Edmund', in *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint*, ed. Anthony Bale (Woodbridge, 2009), pp.27-44

Pickles, Christopher, *Texts and Monuments: A Study of ten Anglo-Saxon churches of the pre-Viking period* (Oxford, 1999)

Pinner, Rebecca, *St Edmund King and Martyr: Constructing his Cult in Medieval East Anglia* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of East Anglia, 2010)

-----, *The Cult of St Edmund in Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge: 2015)

Plant, Richard, 'Romanesque East Anglia and the Empire', in *East Anglia and the North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Robert Liddiard (Woodbridge, 2013), pp.270-286

Pomian, Krzystof, 'The Collection: Between the visible and the invisible', in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce (London, 1994), pp.160-174

Porter, Cheryl, 'The use of Alum in the preparation of tawed skin for book covers in the 11th-15th centuries: advantages and disadvantages for the book structure', in *L'alun de Méditerranée*, ed. Philippe Borgard, Jean-Pierre Brun and Maurice Picon (Naples, 2005), pp.293-298

Rahtz, Philip and Lorna Watts, 'Three Ages of Conversion at Kirkdale, North Yorkshire', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge, 2005), pp.289-309

Rawcliffe, Carole, 'Curing Bodies and Healing Souls: Pilgrimage and the Sick in Medieval East Anglia', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 2002), pp.108-40

Reinburg, Virginia, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, C.1400-1600* (Cambridge, 2012)

Ricoeur, Paul, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London, 1991), pp.20-34

Ridyard, Susan J., *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1986)

Rigold, S.E., 'Finds of St Edmund Memorial and other Anglo-Saxon coins from excavations at Thetford', *BNJ*, 29 (1958), pp.189-90

Robertson, Elizabeth and Jennifer Jahner (eds.), *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred* (New York, 2010)

Rodwell W., 'Anglo-Saxon Church Building: Aspects of Design and Construction', in *The Anglo Saxon Church: Papers on History, Architecture and Archaeology in Honour of Dr H.M. Taylor*, ed. L.A.S Butler and R.K. Morris (London, 1986), pp.195-233

Rollason, D.W., 'Lists of saints' resting places in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 7 (1978), pp.61-93

Rollason, Lynda, 'Spoils of War? Durham Cathedral and the Black Rood of Scotland', in *The Battle of Neville's Cross 1346*, ed. David Rollason and Michael Prestwich (Stamford, 1998), pp.57-65

Rose, E.M., *William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2015)

Rosewell, Rodger, *Medieval Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches* (Woodbridge, 2008)

Rudloff Stanton, Anne, 'Isabelle of France and her Manuscripts', in *Capetian Women* ed. Kathleen Nolan (New York, 2003), pp.225-252

Salih, Sarah, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2001)

Sawyer, John F., *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 1996)

Scanlon, Larry, *Narrative, Authority and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007)

Selten, Bo, *The Anglo-Saxon Heritage in Middle English Personal Names: East Anglia 1100-1399* (Lund, 1972)

Shaw, Philip, 'A Dead Killer? Saint Mercurius, Killer of Julian the Apostate, in the Works of William of Malmesbury', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 35 (2004), pp.1-22.

Sigal, Pierre-André, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale, XIe-XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1985)

Slater, Candace, *Trail of Miracles* (Berkeley, 2006)

Smith, Julia, 'Portable Christianity: relics in the Medieval west (c.700-c.1200)', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 181, (2012), pp.143-167

Smyth, Alfred, *Scandinavian kings in the British Isles 850-880* (Oxford, 1977)

Spencer, Brian, *Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum Medieval Catalogue, Part 2: Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (Salisbury, 1990)

-----, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London, 1998)

Spiro, Melford E., 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London, 1966), pp.85-126

Stahl, Sandra Dolby, *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (Bloomington, 2008)

Steane, John, *The Archaeology of Medieval English Monarchy* (London, 1993)

Stevenson, F.S., 'St Botulph (Botwulf) and Iken', *PSIA,* 18 (1922), pp.29-52

Stowers, Stanley K., 'Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families', in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity,* ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan (Oxford, 2012), pp.5-19

Tatton-Brown, Tim, 'Canterbury and the architecture of pilgrimage shrines in England', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 2002), pp.90-107

Terpstra, Nicholas, 'Civic Religion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Religion,* ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford, 2014), pp.148-166

Trentmann, Frank, 'Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 48:2 (2009), pp.283-307.

Thomas, I.G., *The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of London, 1974)

Thomson, Rodney M., 'Early Romanesque Book-Illustration in England: The Dates of the Pierpont Morgan "Vitae Sancti Edmundi" and the Bury Bible', *Viator*, 2 (1971), pp.211-226

-----, 'Two versions of a saint's life from St Edmund's abbey: changing currents in twelfth century monastic style', *Revue Benedictine*, 84, (1974), pp.383-408

-----, *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (Woodbridge, 1980)

-----, 'John of Salisbury and William of Malmesbury: Currents in Twelfth Century Humanism', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford, 1984), pp.117-127

-----, 'The Music for the Office of St. Edmund King and Martyr', *Music and Letters*, 65:2, (1984), p.189-93

-----, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2003)

-----, 'William of Malmesbury', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29461]

Tinti, Francesca, 'Si litterali memorie commendaretur: memory and cartularies in eleventh-century Worcester', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, David Pelteret (Farnham, 2009), pp.475-499

Townsend, David, 'The *Vita Sancti Eadmundi* of Henry of Avranches', *JML*, 5 (1995), pp.95-118

Turkle, Sherry (ed.), *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (London, 2007)

Twyning, John, 'Walsingham and the Architecture of English History', in *Walsingham in Literature and Culture from the Middle Ages to Modernity*, ed. Dominic Janes and Gary Waller (Farnham, 2010), pp.167-84

Tys, Dries, 'Medieval Archaeology' in *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*, 2nd edition, v.I, ed. Neil Asher Silberman (Oxford, 2012), pp.290-4

Van Eck, Caroline, 'Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response and the Sublime', *Art History*, 33:4 (2010), pp.642-659

Vansina, Jan, *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985)

Vauchez, André, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997)

Von Moos, Peter, 'The Use of *Exempla* in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford, 1984), pp.207-263

Waldman, Thomas, 'Charters and Influences from St Denis c.1000-1070', in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, ed. Tom License (Woodbridge, 2014), pp.22-30

Walker Bynum, Caroline, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995)

-----, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (London, 2011)

Waller, Gary, *Walsingham and the English Imagination* (London, 2016)

Walton-Rogers, Penelope, *Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England: AD 450-700* (York, 2007)

Ward, Susan Leibacher, 'Saints in Split Stitch: Representations of Saints in *Opus Anglicanum* Vestments', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 3, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.41-54

Warner, George (ed.), The New Palaeographical Society: Facsimiles of Manuscripts and Inscriptions, ser.1, vol.2 (London, 1903-12)

Webb, Diane, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000)

-----, *Medieval European Pilgrimage* (Basingstoke, 2002)

-----, 'Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages', in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer (Aldershot, 2005), pp.27-49

Wells, Emma J., 'Making 'Sense' of the Pilgrimage Experience of the Medieval Church', *Peregrinations*, 3:2 (2011), pp.122-146

Wesler, Kit W., *An Archaeology of Religion* (Lanham, 2012)

West S.E., 'A New Site for the Martyrdom of St Edmund', *PSIAH*, 35:3 (1983), pp.223-5

White, Caroline L. (ed.), *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives* (London, 2009)

Whitelock, Dorothy, 'Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St. Edmund', *PSIAH,* 31:3 (1969), pp.217-234

Williams, Gareth, 'Coins and Currency in Viking England: AD 856-954', in *Early Medieval Monetary History: studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*, ed. Rory Naismith, Martin Allen and Elina Screen (Farnham, 2014), pp.13-39

Williams, Howard, *Valorising Viking Valhalla? Rethinking the Hogback Tombs* (Annual Sue Margeson Memorial Lecture, 1st March 2014) available at: http://www.nnas.info/sites/default/files/downloads/NNASLecture1March2014_Williams.pdf

Williamson, Beth, 'Material Culture and Medieval Christianity', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford, 2014), pp.60-76

Wormald, Francis, 'The Rood of Bromholm', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1:1, (1937), pp.31-45

-----, 'Some Illustrated Manuscripts of the Lives of Saints', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 35 (1952-3) pp.248-266

Yarrow, Simon, *Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England* (Oxford, 2006)

-----, 'Narrative, audience and the negotiation of community in twelfth-century miracle collections', *Studies in Church History*, 42, (2006) pp.65-77

-----, 'Miracles, Belief and Christian Materiality: Relic'ing in Twelfth-Century Miracle Narratives', in *Contextualizing Miracles in the Christian West 1100 – 1500: New historical Approaches*, ed. Matthew M. Mesley and Louise E. Wilson (Oxford, 2014), pp.41-63

Yates, Richard, *History and Antiquities of the Abbey of St Edmund's Bury* (London, 1843)

Ziolkowski, Jan, 'Saints in Invocations and Oaths in Medieval Literature', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 87:2 (1988), pp.179-92

Digital Databases and Sources

Bollandists, *Acta Sanctorum database,* [http://acta.chadwyck.co.uk/]

British Museum, *British Museum Collection Online* [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx]

British Museum, *Portable Antiquities Scheme* [https://finds.org.uk/]

Church of England, *Lakenheath Wall Paintings Project*, [http://www.lakenheathwallpaintings.co.uk/]

King's College London, *Electronic Sawyer* [http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html]

Marshall, Anne, *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church* [http://www.paintedchurch.org/]

New Advent, *Catholic Encyclopaedia* [http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/]

New Advent, *Fathers of the Church* [http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/index.html]

Oxford University Press, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/]

Oxford University Press, *Oxford English Dictionary,* [http://www.oed.com/]

Princeton University, *The Evelyn Thomas Database of Medieval English Embroidery*, [https://ica.princeton.edu/opus-anglicanum/]

Radboud Universiteit, *Kunera* [http://www.kunera.nl/kunerapage.aspx?From=Default]