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Piety and Politics: John Capgrave's The Life of Saint Katherine as Yorkist Propaganda

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Thomas J. Heffernan, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Laura L. Howes, Roy Liuzza

Accepted for the Council:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
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Vice Chancellor and Dean of Graduate Studies
PIETY AND POLITICS:
JOHN CAPGRAVE'S THE LIFE OF SAINT KATHERINE
AS YORKIST PROPAGANDA

A Thesis
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Michael M. Baker
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the political undertones of John Capgrave's *The Life of Saint Katherine* of Alexandria. In recent years, various scholars have regarded the *Life* as political propaganda for either the House of Lancaster or the House of York. I have attempted to reach my own conclusion regarding Capgrave's political beliefs by navigating some of the primary arguments purported by those scholars and adding some observations of my own.

I have considered not only the text itself, but also some of the aspects of Capgrave's life that were most likely to have influenced him: the geographical region in which he lived (Lynn, Norfolk, East Anglia), the Order of Friars Hermits of Saint Augustine to which he belonged, and the political landscape of the fifteenth century. I have also contextualized related topics, such as the figure of Saint Katherine of Alexandria and Capgrave's vacillating reputation over the centuries.

Determining Capgrave's own political beliefs will help to situate him more precisely in the tumultuous world of mid-fifteenth-century England, and will provide a foundational context from which to approach his other works.
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INTRODUCTION

In the east window of the West Horseley Church in Surrey is a remarkable twelve-inch stained-glass roundel dating from the early thirteenth century. To the right stands the figure of a woman dressed in red and white, her head surrounded in a saintly glow. Just behind her looms a bright form (though somewhat darkened by age), obviously an angel. The angel is striking a wheel, which is prominently positioned in the upper left. Underneath this wheel are the remains of other, similar wheels. Several curious figures, their heads bowed and hands clasped, huddle around these remains. The vibrant colors (reds, blues, yellows, whites, oranges) stand out against the translucent background. It presents a curious scene. To the medieval Christian, however, it is a very familiar one: a moment in the passion of Saint Katherine of Alexandria.

I first encountered Saint Katherine while trying to decide on a topic for a paper to be written on the subject of martyrdom. When I began to consider possible topics, I started with my primary time period of interest, the fifteenth century. Several years ago, I became interested in fifteenth-century England, largely due to the intricate political turmoil of the time. Contained in that period are such fascinating historical events as the end of the Hundred Years War (and the drama of the Joan of Arc episode), the back-and-forth Wars of the Roses between the Houses of Lancaster and York (which include such figures as Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, “The Kingmaker,” and mysteries like the one surrounding Richard III and the fate of the
Princes in the Tower), and the establishment of the Tudor dynasty in 1485. With such good stories prevalent in the period, I understood the historian’s interest in it.

However, the English Department is my home, and unfortunately the literature of the fifteenth century has long been considered a wasteland. Many authors of the day were dismissed as imitators of Chaucer, and even the best of them were not as good as their master. Even though for several decades many scholars have been steadily adding to the field of fifteenth-century literary studies, it is still not uncommon, for undergraduate English majors to be familiar with no period writers other than Sir Thomas Malory. Upon entering graduate school, I knew that I wanted to learn more about these (largely) unrecognized authors who lived during the century that so intrigued me. I quickly discovered a handful of writers who have been the focus of the recent fifteenth-century studies trend. Of them, I became interested in a trinity of contemporary East Anglian writers: John Lydgate, John Capgrave and Osbern Bokenham.

The fifteenth century, however, has intrinsic disadvantages for a student who wishes to write on the subject of martyrdom: by that time in history there were few true martyrs. But hagiography – writings about the lives (and deaths) of the saints – was still immensely popular. Coincidentally, I soon learned that each of the three authors I had become interested in had written works which featured Saint Katherine of Alexandria: she is included in Lydgate’s “Prayers to Ten Saints,” Capgrave wrote The Life of Saint Katherine, and Bokenham wrote her passio. The selection of a late-antiquity virgin martyr may seem a strange choice for one interested in fifteenth-century England, but she is, in fact, a most appropriate choice. Saint Katherine had a
remarkable presence in fifteenth-century England. Indeed, Katherine J. Lewis has called her “the most important saint in late medieval England” (2). This assertion is upheld by the number of extant English literary lives of Saint Katherine, the number of depictions of her in stained glass and other art forms, and the wide range of groups and people who claimed her as their patron.

It soon became clear to me that the legend of Saint Katherine was also very applicable to political propaganda purposes. In a century when the question of whether a woman had the ability to transmit the right to rule played an important role – in the Hundred Years War the English claimed the French throne through Edward III’s matrilineal line, and in the Wars of the Roses the House of York claimed the throne of England through theirs – the story of Saint Katherine, a queen, was germane. Several previous scholars, such as Sheila Delany and Karen Winstead, have looked at this very issue. The issue, however, proves to be a divisive one, particularly concerning John Capgrave.

Many believe Capgrave was a Lancastrian; a few assert that he criticizes the ruling Lancastrian king, Henry VI. I decided to read the text and reach my own conclusions, but soon realized that the issue could not be thoroughly treated in a seminar paper. Thus, I decided to take that paper and build upon it for my M.A. thesis. I cannot say the current treatment is comprehensive; I continually discover new ideas and facts that could be integrated. However, I do believe that the evidence I have processed points strongly to the fact that Capgrave was indeed criticizing Henry VI, and that the text actually supports – if not as blatantly as Bokenham’s work – the rising House of York.
CHAPTER I
THE FIGURE OF SAINT KATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA

Section I: Hagiography in the Middle Ages

Hagiography, the writing about the lives of the saints, has been called “the most popular genre of medieval narrative” (Winstead, “Introduction” 1). The number of extant manuscripts supports this assertion: hagiographies “survive in greater volume and variety than any other writing” (Heffernan 13). In Sacred Biography, Thomas J. Heffernan notes that the Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina lists 8,989 texts, and that hundreds of English lives remain (13). Hagiography was certainly a durable and flexible genre. The first lives of the saints were written in late antiquity, and yet at the close of the Middle Ages new versions of these age-old tales were still being written. Perhaps the spread of vernacular literature helped the durability of these tales; both Capgrave and Bokenham express a desire to make these stories more available to readers. Capgrave, for instance, claims to be translating The Life of Saint Katherine from an older source, one written in a “dyrke langage” (P.62), with the specifically-stated goal to “more opynly make” the text (P.64). In the Prolocutory to his Lyf of Marye Maudelyn, Bokenham recounts a conversation he had with Lady Isabel Bourchier, Countess of Eu. They spoke “Of dyuers legendys, which my [Bokenham’s] rudnesse / From latyn had turnyd in-to our language” (5038-5039). Lady Bourchier tells him of her devotion to Mary Magdalene, “Whos lyf in englysshe

1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Bokenham’s Legendys come from Mary S. Serjeantson’s edition.
I desire sothly / To han maad…” (5072-5073). As literacy increased in the late Middle Ages so too did the demand for works of vernacular literature and, consequently, vernacular hagiographies.

The genre survived the passage of time not simply by retelling old tales, but by updating them and making them relevant to current audiences. In *Chaste Passions*, Karen Winstead notes, “Vernacular lives did not render Latin vitae literally, but rather tailored them to appeal to lay readers and listeners, subsequently retailoring them as the tastes and interests of the laity shifted” (4). Hagiographers began adapting their tales to their contemporary audiences by expanding the *passiones* into complete *vitae*, and even borrowing certain narrative techniques and elements from another major medieval genre, the romance (Smith 1-2).²

And yet, there was another layer to hagiography – it was not simply for entertainment and instruction. Frequently, hagiographers had political agendas as well. Bokenham is a good example of a writer who combined hagiography and propaganda, as illustrated in his *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*. In her discussion of this work, Sheila Delany observes, “In bending his pious work to the uses of a mild propaganda, Bokenham in no way betrayed the genre, for hagiography had for centuries been allied with polemical or political projects” (*Impolitic* 129).³ Gail Ashton also states that an examination of hagiography “is likely to reveal something

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² For example, Smith notes the “common image of the saint as a ‘soldier of Christ’ called to the ‘God’s chivalry’” became common by the fourteenth century (2).

³ Indeed, Lady Isabel Bourchier, mentioned above, was sister to Richard, Duke of York, one of the major political figures of the day. Bokenham’s allegiance to the House of York has been well documented by Delany.
about late medieval culture, its power relations, its discourse, its ideology” (2). In this light, Capgrave’s *The Life of Saint Katherine* can also be read for its politics.

There has been much research on the various versions of Saint Katherine’s legend in recent years. Scholars such as Katherine J. Lewis have established that Katherine was one of the most important saints in late medieval England. It is only fitting, then, that this once-ubiquitous saint is now receiving so much attention in modern hagiographical studies.

**Section II: Saint Katherine of Alexandria: The Woman and the Legend**

Whenever embarking on an in-depth study involving a saint, it is a good idea to begin with a brief retelling of the “standard” version of the saint’s legend. Variations, of course, exist, but the following account highlights the most common and salient features of the legend of Saint Katherine of Alexandria. The details provided come from both her *passio* and her *vita*.

The only child of King Costus of Alexandria, Katherine receives the best education. A remarkably apt student, she loves learning and easily masters the seven liberal arts. Whenever new teachers or tutors are sent to her, she quickly surpasses them in knowledge. Costus, unfortunately, dies when Katherine is fourteen years old. Her nobles, wanting a man to take control of the government, encourage her to marry. She refuses, insisting that she can govern with the aid and advice of her nobles just as effectively as a man. She does, however, agree to marry a man that surpasses all the virtues her nobles attribute to her (wealth, beauty, nobility), and who is so pure he

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4 Lewis bases her conclusion primarily on “literary and visual sources” (2).
was miraculously born of a virgin. Meanwhile, Katherine continues to study her books.

Soon, the hermit Adrian is sent by Christ (or, the Virgin Mary) to bring Katherine to him. After Adrian baptizes Katherine, she is joined with Christ in a mystical marriage. Christ tells Katherine to stay with Adrian for ten days so that she may be instructed in the ways of God (an angel impersonates her in Alexandria so that she will not be missed). At the end of her instruction, Katherine returns home. Eventually, the emperor Maxentius comes to Alexandria and forces everyone to sacrifice to his pagan gods. Katherine rebukes him for worshipping false gods, and tells him about the one true God. Nonplussed, he summons fifty of the wisest philosophers to defeat her in a debate. She promptly out-argues them, and they all convert and are martyred. Despite various tortures (starvation, scourging, and an interrupted attempt to shred her between spiked wheels) and temptations (power, adoration), Katherine continues to stand up to the emperor. After she has converted the emperor’s wife and his second in command (Porphyrius), as well as hundreds of soldiers, Maxentius finally orders her execution. Before she dies, Katherine prays that any who are in peril and call on her name may receive aid, and Christ grants this request. Katherine is decapitated, and milk, not blood, flows from her severed neck. Angels then transport her body to Mount Sinai.

Such is the legend of Saint Katherine of Alexandria. Most modern readers would discount the fantastic elements of the story, but even the removal of these

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5 Maxentius seems to lament Porphyrius’ s loss more than that of his wife (see Capgrave’s Life, V.28), much as Malory’s Arthur laments the loss of his knights (particularly Lancelot) more than the loss of Guinevere (see Morte Darthur, XX.9).
aspects is not enough to preserve the idea of a historical Katherine. Though tradition
dates her martyrdom to the early fourth century, there is, in fact, no real evidence for
her existence. As will be discussed below, the earliest version of her legend dates to
the mid-eighth century, four-and-a-half centuries after the date given for her death.6
Perhaps the best early evidence of her existence is an inscription ("sancta Catharina")
on a fresco in the Cyriaca Catacomb in Rome, which Anneliese Schröder dates as
"the product of the fifth or sixth century" (6). Though such an inscription does not
prove her historicity, it at least indicates that a "Saint Katherine" was being
reverenced at a fairly early date. The date for the inscription, though, has recently
been disputed, and has been placed as late as the eighth century (Lewis 48). However,
if the later date is correct, the inscription would likely be a forgery, as the Cyriaca
Catacomb had not been in use for quite some time by the eighth century.7

Regardless, neither an inscription nor an early cult is considered sufficient
proof for Saint Katherine's existence. Consequently, Rome suppressed her November
25 feast day in 1969, though it was subsequently restored in 2002. There have,
however, been several attempts to link Saint Katherine to other figures. One of these,
Saint Dorothy, is also historically dubious, though her legend can be traced back
further than Katherine's. More intriguing, perhaps, are some possible connections
with two historical women.

6 Though this technically does not preclude her existence, lack of contemporary
evidence does not help the case for Katherine's historicity.
7 Catacombs around Rome mostly fell into disuse after the sack of 410 A.D. A brief
account may be found at http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03417b.htm.
Eugen Einenkel is among those who have linked Saint Katherine to Hypatia, a learned pagan woman of Alexandria who was “martyred” (ironically, by a Christian mob) ca. 415. Hypatia was a renowned mathematician, who in many ways came to symbolize learning and education. Apparently, some Christians of the day felt threatened by the teachings of Hypatia and killed her. Though she was pagan, it is easy to see how scholars such as Einenkel could associate her with Saint Katherine: an educated woman killed for her religious beliefs. But, Hypatia is not the only potential proto-Katherine.

In Book VIII of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius of Cæsarea describes the following scene:

A certain Christian lady, for example, most famous and distinguished among those at Alexandria, alone of those whom the tyrant ravished conquered the lustful and licentious soul of Maximin by her brave spirit. Renowned though she was for wealth, birth and education, she had put everything second to modest\(^8\) behavior. Many a time he importuned her, yet was unable to put her to death though willing to die, for his lust overmastered his anger; but punishing her with exile he possessed himself of all her property. (309-311)

Scholars date this event at 307 A.D., during the reign of Diocletian, intriguingly close to the time frame most frequently given for the martyrdom of Saint Katherine. Certainly, this story could provide the framework for the later Saint Katherine legend,

\[^8\] Thomas J. Heffernan pointed out to me that the name “Katherine” in Greek means “chaste, pure, modest.”
as many of the primary ingredients are present: a Christian woman of substance (if not royalty) and education persecuted (if not executed) for her chastity. Einenkel, however, insists that this passage refers not to Saint Katherine, but to Saint Dorothy. Any connections between the unnamed woman of Eusebius and Saint Katherine of Alexandria, he says, “can be safely dismissed as unfounded” (vii).9 Of course, if the woman in Eusebius is Saint Dorothy, and Saint Katherine is derived from Saint Dorothy, then the woman in Eusebius is of some relevance to Katherine studies.

As interesting as these possible sources are, there is no direct evidence linking Saint Katherine with any of these women, leading some scholars to question whether she had any true source at all. A more recent theory is that Katherine is, to use Pierre Delooz’s terminology, a “constructed” saint. Some scholars point out that many standard literary and hagiographical motifs permeate Katherine’s legend. Her story is filled with details that appear throughout various saints’ lives. Saara Nevanlinna and Irma Taavitsainen catalogue many of these in the introduction to St Katherine of Alexandria: The Late Middle English Prose Legend in Southwell Minster MS 7. They note, for instance, that the Katherine Wheel so often associated, and indeed named after, Saint Katherine “also occurs in the legends of St Charitiana, St George, St Euphemia, St Timothy, St Christina, St Paphnutius, St Pantaleon, St Barbarus, and St Mocius” (17). There are many other standard features as well, including: the appearance of angels while imprisoned, being fed by a dove, death by burning (but appearing unharmed), milk flowing from the saint’s body, and so on (17-18). Given

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9 The editorial team of Ecclesiastical History, led by T. E. Page, notes that Rufinus also identifies this woman as Dorothea.
the lack of historical evidence and the abundance of standard features in Katherine’s legend, it is easy to perceive her as a “constructed” saint.

Section III: The Textual Tradition

Katherine cannot, however, easily be discounted from the historical and literary record. Perhaps she did not exist, but her legend most certainly did; and, it left its impact throughout Christendom. Perhaps nowhere was her presence more keenly felt than in England. Indeed, Lewis asserts that “St Katherine was the most important saint in late medieval England” (2). Lewis notes that there are fourteen extant Middle English lives of Saint Katherine, as well as twelve Latin and three Anglo-Norman lives found in England (2). She contrasts this with Saint Margaret (eleven lives) and Mary Magdalene (ten lives) to illustrate Katherine’s enormous popularity. By the fifteenth century, Katherine’s legend and passio had grown into a full vita. Below is a brief account of the history of Saint Katherine’s legend and its textual development.¹⁰

The Greek writer John of Damascus has been attributed with making the oldest known reference to Saint Katherine of Alexandria in a fragmented martyrology which dates to the mid-eighth century (Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen 5). It was shortly after this, about 800, that the monks of the Monastery of Saint Katherine at Mount Sinai claimed to find her relics. Lewis claims the next important version, the one by Simon Metaphrastes, was written ca. 960 (47). Lewis’s chronology depends on the dating of the Menologium Basilianum, which she dates (following Jennifer Relvyn

¹⁰ A thorough treatment of the textual tradition is not within the scope of this study. The works included are some of the ones that are important to the initial development of Katherine’s legend and its development in England.
Bray) to the reign of Basil II (976-1025). Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen, however, date it to the reign of Basil I, who died in 886 (5). If the earlier date is correct, the *Menologium* would predate the Metaphrastes version by nearly a century. Regardless, the Metaphrastes version contains almost all of the events of Katherine’s *passio* which are found in later versions. Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen also note that Hermann Varnhagen claims that Saint Athanasius wrote the so-called “Psuedo-Athanasian” text by the end of the tenth century (5).

The eleventh century is of the utmost importance in the spread of Katherine’s cult. It is also important in the development of her legend. About mid-century, at least one, possibly two, versions came out of the Rouen area: the one written by Ainhard, and the version that became known as the Vulgate. Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen claim that Ainhard’s version is the Vulgate (5), though Lewis disagrees and differentiates the two (52). Saint Katherine was known in England by about 1050, the approximate date of British Library Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, which contains a liturgical calendar from Winchester that mentions Katherine (Lewis 53). Nearer the end of the century, at a time when the Duke of Normandy had become king of England, there is also an Anglo-Norman version written, one “intended to propagate the cult of St. Katherine in England” (52).11

If there were conscious attempts to spread the cult of Saint Katherine from Normandy to England, these efforts paid early dividends. In the first decade of the

11 William the Conqueror brought Norman nobles, churchmen, language, etc. to England after his conquest in 1066; it is not unreasonable to conclude that the cult of Saint Katherine, which was so strong in Rouen (where some of her relics were housed), might also have been used to strengthen the Norman presence in England.
twelfth century, Geoffrey de Gorham wrote and put on a miracle play, *Ludus Sanctae Catharinae*, in Dunstable. Later, as the Abbot of Saint Albans, he would also write about her miracles. The *Passio Sanctae Katerine*, in MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 375, was composed by one Richard of Saint Albans, c. 1150. Toward the end of the century, John of Tynemouth had included Saint Katherine in his *Historia Aurea* and Clemence of Barking, a Benedictine nun, added an Anglo-Norman poem, *Vie de Seinte Catherine d'Alexandrie*.

Either at the end of the twelfth or at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Peter of London included Saint Katherine in his collection of tales known as *Liber Revelationum*. A couple far more influential versions would soon follow. In the early part of the thirteenth century, *Seinte Katerine*, an alliterative prose work, was written for a group of women-recluses as part of the so-called “Katherine Group” (it also included *Hali Meiðhad, Sawles Warde, Saint Juliana* and *Saint Margaret*). Jacobus de Voragine added his version of the *passio* to his *Legenda aurea* by 1270. It greatly influenced later versions of Saint Katherine's legend. Around 1280, she was included in the *South English Legendary*.

The verse *Seynt Katerine*, based on the *Legenda aurea*, was written in the London area in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Sometime before 1340, Jehan de Vigny translated the *Legenda aurea* into French. Though by this time French was declining as the language of the nobility and educated in England, there

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12 Farmer adds that this is the “earliest recorded example of a miracle play” (89).
was still a lot of interplay between the literatures of the two nations.\textsuperscript{13} Two other English (or Scottish) versions of the Katherine legend based on the \textit{Legenda aurea} were written in the fourteenth century: the \textit{Shorter Vernon Collection} attached to \textit{The Expanded Northern Homily Collection} and \textit{The Scottish Legendary}.

John Mirk, an Augustinian canon (Capgrave and Bokenham were Augustinian friars), included Saint Katherine in his sermon cycle \textit{Festial}, probably written c. 1400-1415.\textsuperscript{14} About the same time, Richard Spalding also composed his so-called \textit{Alliterative Katherine Hymn}. These two works helped inaugurate a rich century in the legacy of Katherine texts. In the early part of the fifteenth century, she was included in John Lydgate’s “Prayers to Ten Saints” and in the \textit{Speculum Sacerdotale}. A \textit{vita} in sermon form can also be found in the \textit{Red Book of Bath}. Sometime in the first half of the century, the prose \textit{Katherine} appeared (c. 1420), one of the first examples of Saint Katherine’s extended \textit{vita}. The English translation of the \textit{Legenda aurea}, \textit{The Gilte Legende}, was made by 1438, as evidenced by Bodleian Library Summary Cat. #21947. The 1440s saw two more versions: Capgrave’s \textit{vita} and Bokenham’s \textit{passio}. Finally, in 1483 William Caxton printed \textit{The Golden Legend}, based on Latin, French and English models.

Naturally, there are more extant records (of all sorts) from later centuries, but Saint Katherine’s legend does seem to reach a pinnacle of popularity in the fifteenth century.

\textsuperscript{13} See Chapter 6 of Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable’s \textit{A History of the English Language}.
\textsuperscript{14} The dating is disputed, ranging from c. 1390 to c. 1420, though most scholars seem to situate the work in the early part of the fifteenth-century.
century. Many scholars, including Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen and Lewis, note that the fifteenth century is the peak of her popularity. The question is, “Why Katherine?”

Section IV: The Cult of Saint Katherine

As the review of the textual tradition indicates, Saint Katherine was extremely popular. She was, in fact, not only selected to be “the” bride of Christ (sponsa Christi), but was often placed just below the Virgin Mary in Heaven.15 As mentioned above, the monks of the Monastery of Saint Katherine at Mount Sinai claimed to find her relics around 800. A common conception is that Katherine’s cult, which started in the east, spread westward with the Crusades, the first of which Pope Urban II called in 1095 (Lewis 49).16 And yet, the westward migration of Katherine’s cult actually started more than a half-century earlier. As Lewis points out, “The most important factor in the ultimately successful propagation of the cult of St Katherine in Europe, was the arrival of her relics in Rouen” in the first half of the eleventh century (50). Lewis goes on to recount the story of the monk Symeon, who supposedly spent nine years at the monastery at Mount Sinai and is said to have brought back relics (some finger joints) in 1026. These relics were placed in the Abbey of Ste. Trinite-du-Mont, near Rouen (Lewis 50-51).17

15 Capgrave says, “But next that lady a-boue alle other in blys / ffollowyth t is mayde weche we clepe kateryne” (P.12-13).
16 Lewis argues that a minor cult must have existed in the west earlier, and that the Crusades merely reintroduced her to the west (49).
17 Lewis also points out that though this story is in the Legenda Aurea, Christine Walsh has demonstrated that Symeon was not in Rouen at this time. She adds, though, that Bray has shown in “Legend of St Katherine” that there were connections between Rouen and Mount Sinai, so the basic story is credible.
The cult seems to have spread from Rouen to England even before the Conquest. Edward the Confessor lived in Normandy for some twenty-five years before assuming the throne of England in 1042, and his friend Robert Champart, abbot of the Norman abbey Jumiéges, was appointed Bishop of London in 1044 (Patournel 22). Indeed, Edward the Confessor is said to have presented a phial of Saint Katherine's oil to Westminster Abbey. It is also about this time (c. 1050) that Saint Katherine’s name first appeared in England, in a liturgical calendar (Lewis 53). It is reasonable to conclude that the nascent English cult of Saint Katherine, with its roots in Rouen, would have been bolstered by the Norman Conquest and the increased interaction between Normandy and England.

In light of these details, it is also reasonable to agree with Lewis’s assertion that the cult of Saint Katherine spread from the “top” (royalty) down, and from the “center” (Winchester) out (63). She points out that most of the early English references to Katherine “are found in the south of the country” and the possible connections with Edward the Confessor are intriguing (53). Katherine continued to be popular with the kingdom’s elite throughout the Middle Ages. It is thought that Queen Matilda, Stephen’s wife, may have named the hospital located near the Tower of London after Saint Katherine in 1148 (Lewis 55). Henry III and his queen, Eleanor of Provence, also revered Saint Katherine. Either individually or as a couple they decorated numerous chapels with scenes of Katherine’s life, including: St Katherine’s

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18 Champart would later become Archbishop of Canterbury.
19 Katherine’s relics were said to excrete a healing oil. Lewis notes that “the only reference to the phial... is given by Flete, writing in the mid-fifteenth century” (52).
20 British Library Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII, mentioned above.
chapel at Winchester (1222), the St Peter ad Vincula chapel in the Tower of London (1240), and the palace chapel at Guildford (1251). They also named one of their daughters (who was born in 1253 on November 25, Katherine’s feast day) after her.  

In 1396, Katherine Swynford adopted three Katherine wheels among her heraldic devices when she married John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (69). In 1420, Henry V married Katherine of Valois, and the following year Saint Katherine’s image “played a prominent role at the banquet given to mark the queen’s coronation” (70). Several other important fifteenth-century women revered Saint Katherine, including Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, and Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy (78).

Another member of the House of York, Richard III, also had a special devotion to Saint Katherine: at Christmas 1484, Pietro Carmeliano, a visiting Italian scholar, dedicated a Latin *Life of St. Katherine* to him (Sutton 69).  

These few examples illustrate the fact that Saint Katherine held a prominent place with England’s nobility.  

There is another factor in Saint Katherine’s popularity. Schröder lists the wide range of people and areas which considered Saint Katherine a patron: “Universities, professors, theologians, philosophers, notaries, the fine arts, students, spinners, coachmen, potters, navigators, turners, millers, wheelwrights, wet-nurses, maidens”

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21 See Lewis, pages 63-66 for more evidence of Henry and Eleanor’s devotion to Saint Katherine.
22 Lewis also notes that Richard III’s illegitimate daughter was named Katherine and that she was among the eight saints he chose as patrons (77-78).
23 Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that Katherine was a queen herself, and as will be discussed below, by the fifteenth century she was genealogically linked with Britain through her supposed kinship with Constantine the Great (whose mother Helen was reputedly British).
 Granted, many saints have multiple spheres of influence, but Katherine’s list is inordinately long. Even Mary Magdalene is only listed as “patron of both repentant sinners and of the contemplative life” (Farmer 330). With so many groups claiming her as patron, Katherine permeated medieval English art. David Hugh Farmer notes that sixty-two medieval English churches and one hundred seventy extant bells bear her name; there were at least fifty-six murals of her; she was also depicted in stained glass, ivories, panel paintings, embroidery, and other art forms (88-89). Of particular relevance to the fifteenth-century is the founding of St. Catherine’s College, Cambridge in 1473. And, of course, other institutions, such as the hospital mentioned above, bore her name as well. In short, evidence indicates that the cult of Saint Katherine was one of the most popular and prevalent in late medieval England.
CHAPTER II

JOHN CAPGRAVE’S LIFE, WORKS, AND WORLD

Section I: John Capgrave’s Life

Some of the most basic facts of John Capgrave’s life can be gleaned from his own words. In his *Abbreuiacion of chronicles*, he gives his birthday under the entry for the year 1393: “In tis °ere, in t e xxi day of Aprile, was t at frere bore which made t ese annotaciones” (203). In the prologue to *The Life of Saint Katherine*, he identifies his home: “If °e wyll wete qwat t at I am: My cuntre is northfolke, of t e town of lynne” (P.239-240). He also provides his occupation in the preface to his *Cronicles*, calling himself “a pore frere of t e Heremites of Seynt Austyn in t e conuent of Lenne” (7).

It is a good thing that Capgrave provides us with this basic information, because not much is known about his family otherwise. His surname is virtually unknown in Norfolk during this period, giving rise to the theory that his family immigrated to Lynn from the village “Copgrove” in Yorkshire (Lucas, “Introduction” xix). There is, though, one other attestable case of the surname Capgrave: another Austin Hermit named John Capgrave began studying at Oxford in 1390 (Seymour 207). M.C. Seymour notes that Augustinian archives name this John Capgrave as the uncle of the later one (208). The uncle was almost certainly responsible for his

24 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Capgrave’s *Cronicles* are taken from Peter J. Lucas’s edition.
25 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Capgrave’s *The Life of Saint Katherine* are taken from Carl Horstmann’s edition.
nephew's entry into that order: after the Black Death, Seymour observes, "each Hermit was encouraged and later obliged... to recruit a novice to the order, and nephews were obvious choices for such recruitment" (208).

Few specific dates are known concerning Capgrave’s early life (e.g., when he entered the order, etc.). He does, however, record certain events which confirm that he spent his boyhood in Lynn. In 1406, he saw the departure from Lynn of the Princess Philippa, who was leaving to marry Eric IX, king of Denmark: “Unicam filiam hujus excellentissimi regis ego vidi in relinquens, ad conjugium regis Norwegiae festinavit... Hæc est quidem regalis progenies, quam ego oculis conspexi” (Henricis 109). 26 He also pays special attention to Lynn in his Chronicles, noting not only the departure of Princess Philippa again, but also such events as the capture of the Scottish admiral Robert Logan by ships of Lynn in 1400 (217) and the kidnapping of three children from Lynn in 1416 (249).

It is likely he was ordained in 1416 or 1417. Capgrave again provides this information, saying in his Liber de illustribus Henricis: “Audivi enim, cum nota esset Londoniae nativitas Regis nostri, vocem ecclesiarum, et strepitum campanarum, quoniam et tunc studens ibi eram, in quarto anno vel quinto ex quo ad sacerdotium promotus sum” (127). Peter J. Lucas notes that the normal training time for ordination was six or seven years, so he proposes that Capgrave entered the order c. 1410

26 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Capgrave's Henricis are taken from Francis Charles Hingeston's edition. Since Henry VI was born in 1421, this would place Capgrave's ordination in 1416 or 1417.
(“Introduction” xix). Shortly after his ordination, he went to the studium generale in London in 1417 and advanced to cursor in 1420 (Seymour 211-212). From there, Capgrave proceeded to Cambridge in 1422 to continue his studies (212). In the same year, he preached a sermon in Cambridge, from which he later composed his Tretis of the Orders tat be vndyr te Reule of oure Fader Seynt Augustin (Lucas, Author 8). He received his BTh. in 1423, and his DTh. in 1425 (8).

After his Cambridge studies, little is known of Capgrave’s whereabouts or activities until 1439. The most prevalent thought is that Capgrave was either studying or teaching during this “blank” period. However, on January 1, 1439, Capgrave was at Woodstock and presented Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester with a copy of his In Genesim (Lucas, Author 9). He was apparently back in Cambridge in 1441 for the laying of the foundation stone of King’s College (Henricis 133). From 1441-1453, he was Prior of Lynn, during which time he likely served as host for King Henry VI’s visit to Lynn in 1446 (Seymour 224). Also during this time, he traveled to (and fell

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27 Seymour points out that Capgrave would have been eligible to enter the order as early as 1404, when he was eleven years old.
28 Smetana notes that this is Capgrave’s only original work; the rest are translations and compilations (3). According to Frederick J. Furnivall, Capgrave preached at least seven sermons in 1422 while in Cambridge (viii).
29 According to Delany, this would have been March 20, 1423. She notes that Capgrave received his BTh. one day ahead of his fellow Augustinian Osbern Bokenham (Impolitic 7). And, as mentioned, in the 1440s, Bokenham wrote a passio of Saint Katherine of Alexandria shortly after Capgrave wrote his vita of that saint.
30 Seymour says Capgrave incepted in 1427.
31 This seems likely, and Seymour’s note that Capgrave had begun In Genesim in October 1437 would support this view (214).
32 Following Francis Roth, Lucas says Capgrave was still in office in 1456; perhaps he continued to hold this post while acting as Prior Provincial.
ill in) Rome in 1449 or 1450, and later composed a “travel guide” of the city, *Solace of Pilgrimes*. In 1453, Capgrave was elected Prior Provincial, a position he served in until 1457 (Seymour 228). After this, he apparently returned to his writing. Capgrave died on August 12, 1464 (234).

Section II: John Capgrave’s Works and Reputation

Capgrave was a prolific and versatile writer. His works were written in both verse and prose, in Latin and in the vernacular, and range from biblical commentaries to historical chronicles, from hagiographies to a travel guide. He dedicated works to several powerful individuals, including Henry VI, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Edward IV. He appears to have started writing when he was fairly young – Lucas says he started writing his verse *Life of St Norbert* before 1422 (“Introduction” 8) – and continued until his death, having completed his *Chronicles* c. 1462 (11). In all, Furnivall lists four extant vernacular works, five extant Latin works, and lists fifteen other lost works that have been attributed to Capgrave (xiii-xv). As noted above, he was not so much an originator of material as a translator, compiler and commentator. This tendency is apparent in many of his works. In the preface to his *Chronicle*, for example, he mentions his goal of compiling biblical commentaries:

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33 Seymour, following Jane Fredeman, gives 1449 as the year of the journey (226), though Lucas, following Herbert Thurston, suggests 1450, the year of the Holy Jubilee (*Author* 10).
34 Furnivall includes the *Nova Legenda Angliae* among Capgrave’s Latin works, but recent scholars dispute the extent of his involvement with this collection. Indeed, Lucas says, “Capgrave’s part in the making of the work was probably nil” (*Author* 295). Smetana also allows for the possibility that other titles attributed to him may not have actually been written by Capgrave, either (3).
It is sumwhat diuulgid in þis lond þat I haue aftir my possibilite be occupied in wryting specialy to gader eld exposiciones vpon scripture into o collection, and þoo þat were disparplied in many sundry bokis my labour was to bringe hem into o body, þat þei which schal com aftir schal not haue so mech labour in sekyng of her processe. (7).

Later in the preface, Capgrave discusses the variations in such chronicles as those by Eusebius, Jerome and others; again, his purpose is to compile information into one convenient source. His conscientious manner is revealed in his explanation of the reason he leaves so many years blank. Quite simply, he could not locate any information about them: “forsoth I coude non fynde, notwithstand þat I soute with grete diligens” (7). In the prologue to The Life of Saint Katherine, he explains that he is merely translating an older source because of the “straungenesse of his dyrke langage” (P.62). Also in the prologue to his Life of Saint Augustine, he says that he is translating it for an unnamed “gentill woman... treuly oute of Latyn” (15). Clearly, Capgrave felt that one of his specific roles as a writer was to make works more accessible to others.

Unlike his older countryman, Geoffrey Chaucer, Capgrave’s reputation has fluctuated drastically over the centuries. In his introduction to Capgrave’s Life of Saint Augustine, Cyril L. Smetana highlights some of the oddities found in early references to Capgrave. First, he notes that Capgrave’s name “does not appear in
contemporary catalogues of recognized authors” (1). Smetana then notes that a century later, Capgrave “is listed among eminent British writers” by both Leland and Bale (1). This erratic movement of Capgrave’s early reputation was a sign of things to come.

For much of the modern age, Capgrave has been maligned by scholars. Furnivall says Capgrave was “a flunkey, and had an inordinate reverence for kings and rank” (xv). This and subsequent similar views reflect a criticism of Capgrave’s apparently vacillating politics. Many scholars have noted Capgrave’s seeming praise of Henry VI in his Liber de illustribus Henricis (1446) and his later obsequiousness to Edward IV in the preface to his Abbreuiacion of cronicles (1462). Indeed, Seymour describes this preface as both “a nauseating performance” and “abject” (233). Additionally, both Furnivall and H. S. Bennett dismiss Capgrave’s The Life of St. Katherine as “worthless” (Bennett 152). In Sacred Biography, Heffernan considers Capgrave an antiquarian, who is not as “forward-looking” as his contemporary writers (171), and notes that Capgrave has been attacked for “his uncritical reverence for the traditions of the past” (173).

More recently, however, Capgrave has been reevaluated on many fronts. Attempts have been made to attribute him with more solid political beliefs. Scholars such as Elizabeth Leigh Smith view him as a Lancastrian, and ascribe his dedication

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35 However, Capgrave’s contemporary Bokenham, in his passio of Saint Katherine, refers his readers to “My fadrys book, maystyr Ioon Capgrae, / Wych t at but newly compylyd he” (lines 6356-6357).

36 Unlike the other scholars, though, Heffernan is not hostile to Capgrave.
to Edward IV as political expedience (128).\textsuperscript{37} Others, such as Winstead, believe that Capgrave implicitly criticizes the Lancastrian Henry VI and, much like his fellow Augustinian Bokenham, was always of the Yorkist camp: she states that “Capgrave’s political views are not as inconsistent as they seem” (“Gynecocracy” 369-370).\textsuperscript{38} Ralph A. Griffiths, too, believes that Capgrave does not blindly toe the Lancastrian party line, even in his \textit{Henricis}. He says that there is in the \textit{Henricis} a “reproof, embedded in eulogy” (Henry VI 242). Bertram Wolffe agrees with this reading of the \textit{Henricis}: “Apparently there was little positive Capgrave could say in appreciation of his king” (15).\textsuperscript{39} Artistically speaking, Winstead also argues that “Capgrave was far from the backward-looking cleric Heffernan envisages” and that actually “he constructs a radically new kind of saint’s life” (“Piety” 60).\textsuperscript{40}

On the whole, this pendulum view of Capgrave illustrates the difficulty in studying the history and literature of the past (and even more so, the interplay between the two). After all, Smith says, “Capgrave’s situation is perhaps easier to

\textsuperscript{37} Smith, for example, follows Furnivall’s explanation that “Capgrave had still to be Prior of Lynn, and Provincial of his province” (qtd. in Smith 128). She notes that Henry VI had been patron of the Austin Priory at Lynn, and after the accession of the throne by the Yorkist Edward IV, the Priory needed to secure a new royal protector/patron.

\textsuperscript{38} Which, given her assertion that Capgrave implicitly criticizes Henry VI in both \textit{The Life of Saint Katherine} and the \textit{Liber de illustribus Henricis}, suggests his praise of Edward IV in the preface to his \textit{Cronicle} is genuine.

\textsuperscript{39} Wolffe continues, saying that Capgrave merely praises the facts that Henry “had founded colleges, was an example to his subjects in his adoration of the holy cross and had married a wife” (16).

\textsuperscript{40} In brief, Winstead argues that Capgrave departs from hagiographical conventions by acknowledging “the saint’s human limitations and endorses her involvement in the world”; by creating “characters who are motivated by political ambitions and private desires instead of inherent goodness or villainy”; and by having Katherine’s own limited views “shaped by personal experience rather than divine grace” (60).
imagine than that of Katherine’s other biographers because we know the most about
him” (123). Clearly, however, there is little consensus over many of the most
important and basic questions concerning Capgrave studies, such as his authorial
ability and political views. A microcosm of this conflict and uncertainty is present in
the scholarship of Capgrave’s extensive rendition of *The Life of Saint Katherine.* As
noted above, it has been both dismissed as “worthless” and praised as “a radically
new kind of saint’s life.” Politically speaking, Smith believes the *Life* reflects
Capgrave’s Lancastrian politics: “Katherine’s elaborate defense of her ability to
govern alone could easily be a defense of the child king who became the pious Henry
VI” (129). Her assertion centers around associating both the female Katherine and the
weak Henry as rulers “who cannot personally serve as a military chief” (129). As
indicated above, however, Winstead takes the *Life* as a critique of Henry VI: “Writing
during the reign of a monarch who was especially sensitive to criticism, [Capgrave]
used the legend of Saint Katherine to voice misgivings that might be dangerous to
express openly” (“Gynecocracy” 376). Certainly, reading and interpreting this work is
problematic at best.

To accurately interpret the *Life*, it would be beneficial to attempt to establish
Capgrave’s intended audience. Lucas says, “Most of Capgrave’s works seem to have
been written at the behest of a particular individual or are addressed to a specific
dedicatee” (*Author* 14). It may be, though, that Capgrave hoped that his dedicatees
would help his works gain a wider audience. Lucas points out that the dedication of *In

41 Interestingly, Winstead notes that Capgrave’s *Life* is likely “the longest and most
intricate Katherine legend written during the Middle Ages, either in Latin or in any
vernacular” (*Life* 3).
Actus Apostolorum to William Gray, Bishop of Ely indicates this kind of hope: “ut sic liber, a dominatione vestra praecedens, asterisco vel obelo consignatus, securius ad alios descendat, tanta auctoritate vallatus” (qtd. in Lucas 15). Similarly, his Solace of Pilgrimes, though dedicated to Sir Thomas Tuddenham, says, “Onto all men of my nacioun †at schal rede †is book…” (qtd. in Lucas 16). Capgrave seems to have intended his Life for a wider reading audience as well. He writes:

Now wyl I, lady, mor openly mak †i lyffe
Owt of hys werk, if †ou wylt help †er-too;

It schall be know of man, mayde & of wyffe

What †ou hast suffrede & eke qwat †ou hast doo. (P.64-67; emphasis added)

Interestingly, the Life survives in more manuscripts – four – than any of Capgrave’s other works (14). Lucas also argues that Capgrave headed a small scriptorium at the chapterhouse in Lynn (37). It would seem, then, that Capgrave was ideally situated to compose and disperse works of mild propaganda.

Before examining the Life and its political undertones, a brief overview of Capgrave’s world is required. First, Capgrave was an Augustinian Hermit, a group that we are now beginning to associate more with composition in the vernacular. Second, Capgrave lived in East Anglia, a surprisingly “cosmopolitan” region of England, in which he was exposed to a wide variety of influences. Third, the volatile

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42 It should be noted that, unlike most of Capgrave’s works, the Life is not dedicated to a particular person.
43 For example, see Heffeman’s “The Authorship of the ‘Northern Homily Cycle’: The Liturgical Affiliation of the Sunday Gospel Pericopes as a Test.”
political landscape of fifteenth-century England affected all aspects of society: the situation drew members of all classes into the discussion of governmental affairs, and Capgrave certainly added his voice.

Section III: The Augustinians

The very roots of the Austin Friars are to be found in Italian-based eremitical groups. C. H. Lawrence notes that in 1244 Pope Innocent IV “instructed Cardinal Richard Annibaldi to organise the hermits of Tuscany into a regular order” (273). In 1256, at the initiation of Pope Alexander IV, Annibaldi combined the new Augustinian Hermits with the Bonites, Williamites and Brettini, forming the Order of Friars Hermits of St Augustine (273). Aubrey Gwynn suggests that this unusual beginning worked in favor of the young order: “Its expansion was probably made easier by the fact that it was expanding at first, not from one centre, but from many” (13). The new order adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, and the former hermits began moving into towns. Within the next fifty years, the order moved into Spain, Germany, France and England, though the center of the organization remained in Italy (Lawrence 273).

In the mid-thirteenth century, Henry III welcomed the Austins into England, and it is believed that they first settled in Stoke Clare (Gwynn 15)44. Though the true center of the order would always be in Italy, and Paris was indisputably the order’s intellectual center, the Austin presence in England grew rapidly. By the end of the

44 Gwynn also notes that in 1255, Henry “granted special protection throughout the kingdom to the priors and Friars Hermits of the order of St. Augustine” (16).
century, they had spread to Woodhouse (c. 1250), London (1253), Sittingbourne (1255), Cambridge (1293) and Lynn (1295) (Gwynn 15-20). Under Edward III, the English Austins continued to grow, and a 1355 royal grant in Cambridge reads, “for the special affection which [the king] bears to the friars” (qtd. in Gwynn 23). The Austin presence in England was noted by Pope Innocent VI, who in 1355 limited the order’s number of *studium generale* to three: Paris, Oxford and Cambridge (31).45

One of the early leaders of the Austin Hermits was Giles of Rome, whom Capgrave says is one of the men responsible for the introduction of the friars into England: “It is saide among us comounly tat t is Gilbert [Earl of Gloucester] graunted onto Gylis tat he schuld make a hous of oure orde in Ynglund” (*Cronicle* 119).46 Giles is extremely important in the history of the order, as in 1287 his writings “were officially accepted as embodying the doctrine of the order” (Gwynn 37). Giles, who was once the tutor of the future Philip IV of France, played an active role in defending the papacy during the conflict between Philip IV and Boniface VIII (38).47

Another prominent early Austin leader was Thomas of Strassburg. He also became involved in a struggle between the church and state. Lewis the Bavarian (later elected as the Holy Roman Emperor) faced off with a number of popes, and an interdict was eventually placed over Germany. Not all orders strictly obeyed the

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45 This situation did not last, though; a decade later Pope Urban V added more (Gwynn 31).
46 Capgrave notes that though Gilbert died before this was done, his son Richard followed through with the plan. Gwynn, however, points out that Capgrave makes several errors in this passage: Giles did not enter the order until 1265, for example (16-17). Gwynn does grant that Capgrave is correct in identifying Stoke Clare as the first English foundation, though.
47 One would expect, then, that his views conflicted with Dante’s. In *Monarchia* (c. 1310), Dante argues that the emperor should have temporal authority.
interdict, but Thomas of Strassburg insisted that the Austins did so. He argued that “at all costs ecclesiastical authority must be maintained” (Gwynn 46-47). His strict stance was appreciated by Rome, and Thomas was elected as prior provincial and later as prior general of the order (47). He also opposed the new ideas of the Franciscan William Ockham, instead supporting the position of a 1345 decree which expressly limited theological studies to the Scriptures and church fathers:

...but let [the masters, bachelors, lecturers and students] hold and teach those theological conclusions which they can support and evidently prove from the sentences of canonical scriptures or of those canonical doctors whose works are known to be approved by the Holy Roman Church. In philosophy and logic let them hold and follow those conclusions alone, which the learning of holy philosophers and commentators has left to be followed and held by posterity in their philosophical and logical writings; and let none hold conclusions that are repugnant to the Catholic faith. (qtd. in Gwynn 50)

In many ways, Strassburg continued the Austin traditions started by men such as Giles of Rome.

One Austin who broke ranks, to an extent, was the fourteenth-century’s Gregory of Rimini. He actually had some similarities with Ockham, though he did not carry things too far in that direction; he still followed Augustine more than anyone else. And, very much in line with his fellow Austins, for Gregory “all

48 For example, he places the will above the intellect and he is interested in empirical science. Gwynn briefly recounts the similarities, and also discusses where they end (55-56).
theological truth is to be found in God’s scriptures” (57). In many ways, the presence and thoughts of these men can still be found in the Austin order of Capgrave’s day.

In a sense, the Hermits maintained a little of their eremitical roots, and a desire for the contemplative and solitary life (Lawrence 274). 49 The Cambridge friar William Flete, for example, who spent many years in Italy with Saint Catherine of Siena, wrote to his fellow English Austins in 1380 that they should avoid traveling: “in the cell is peace; outside it nothing but strife” (qtd. in Lawrence 274). Echoes of this can be seen in Capgrave’s *The Life of Saint Katherine*. King Costus builds his daughter a palace, “In wiche he wolde t at she shuld lere” (1.305). After she surpasses her instructors in learning, he builds her another place, a solitary garden in which to study. Capgrave observes that “Solitary life to stodiers is confort” (1.350). Also, though at first Katherine studies pagan works, after her conversion she devotes her studies to the Bible. This aligns with the beliefs of the Austin Friars as expressed both in the 1345 decree quoted above and in Gregory of Rimini’s stance. Smetana points out that “as patroness of studies in the Augustinian Order,” Saint Katherine of Alexandria was a particularly relevant subject for Capgrave to write about (4). And, Katherine’s life lends itself well to the Austin order in many other ways. Not only was she a patron of the order’s scholarship, but she also embodied some of its basic beliefs: she possessed a preference for a solitary life (but could preach when called upon), she studied the scriptures above all else, and she maintained orthodox beliefs.

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49 It would seem, though, that by the fifteenth century the English Austins had largely lost their eremitical roots, and that a solitary life would have been little more than an ideal. In her discussion of Bokenham’s social interactions, Delany suggests, “It was no hermitlike existence that Bokenham led among the friar hermits of Clare” (*Impolitic* 15).
During the fifteenth century, another thing to keep in mind concerning the Austin Friars is their political alignment. Delany claims that they “were, by and large, of Yorkist sympathies” (“Introduction” xxx). As such, one could expect that Capgrave might share the organization’s preference. There is another factor to consider when trying to ascertain Capgrave’s personal politics: England’s relationship with the papacy. Recall that the Augustinians tended to have close ties to Rome; the English crown, however, did not. In fact, the two powers disputed over such issues as taxation of the clergy and ecclesiastical appointments (DuBoulay 215). And of course, in 1405 Henry IV executed Richard Scrope, archbishop of York for his actions against Henry’s regime. This action also caused friction. While there is some evidence that Henry VI viewed the pope favorably, “politics were paramount” (214). For example, in 1434 Cardinal Beaufort redirected three thousand men from a crusade against the Hussites in order to prevent the fall of Paris; he did this “in defiance of Pope Martin V” (Wolffe 55). Certainly, a supporter of the pope could find fault with English policy toward Rome, and as the king, Henry would have been the one to help solve the problem. The fact is, he did not. Moreover, there is evidence that Rome showed favor to Richard, Duke of York. The 1460 compromise which named York as Henry’s heir – the Act of Accord – seems to have been promoted by the papal legate Francesco Coppini, who in turn had the support of Pope Pius II (Wolffe

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50 In the late 1420s and 1430s, there were a couple prominent disputes over English ecclesiastical appointments, such as the one involving Thomas Bourghchier (Griffiths 100).

51 Cheetham notes that the illness that struck Henry shortly after this was attributed by some as God’s retribution for executing the archbishop (22).
If the papacy did, in fact, favor the House of York, it is reasonable to conclude that Capgrave would have as well.

**Section IV: Lynn and East Anglia**

As mentioned above, John Capgrave lived in the city of Lynn in Norfolk. Politically speaking, East Anglia was both important and contested. Paul Murray Kendall says that the area “was crammed with potentates and exhibited an intenser political rivalry, national and local, than most other regions” (189). It was also one of the stages for the escalating feud between Richard, Duke of York and William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk (189-190). One reason for this was probably the fact that, during the fifteenth century, East Anglia was one of the most prosperous regions of England. Delany remarks, “It is sometimes difficult to realize... how very rich East Anglia was in the Middle Ages” (*Impolitic* 11). One of the primary reasons for this was England’s burgeoning cloth industry. Gail McMurray Gibson observes that Norfolk and Suffolk alone were responsible for a “quarter of the late-medieval cloth production in England” (19). Norwich was the second largest city in England, and the village of Lavenham was one of the twenty wealthiest cities in the kingdom (19). Other industries flourished as well, including such lucrative ones as shipbuilding and construction (26). Two common results of booming economics are leisure time and education, and East Anglia showed signs of both. Indeed, “There were numerous

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52 Interestingly enough, Delany argues that the House of York was particularly “responsive to the mercantile, expansionist, and nationalistic interests of the urban and provincial commercial and business groups... who tended to support it” (“Introduction” xxxiii).
grammar schools in Suffolk” alone (Delany, *Impolitic* 6). Additionally, Gibson comments about a “new female literate public” that influenced East Anglian literature (which, naturally, may have influenced the period’s subject matter) (21). John C. Coldewey adds that East Anglia was “a uniquely rich and dense rural society – and one with very definite literary pretensions” (193). Education would have appealed to the studious Austins, and there are certainly signs that they capitalized on East Anglia’s growing literacy. Capgrave and Bokenham, both of who had several wealthy and influential patrons during their writing careers, flourished in East Anglia.53

East Anglia’s thriving businesses affected more than just the area’s wealth and education. Traditionally, East Anglia had always been somewhat isolated. Gibson calls the region “distinctive and self-sufficient,” by choice as much as by geography (19). However, with prospering businesses came foreign influences. In fact, a “huge influx of Flemish weavers and craftsmen” settled in the area (Gibson 22). Religious beliefs were one of the primary aspects of East Anglian culture that was affected. This convergence of the English and continental versions of spirituality created an oddly incongruous religious culture: an entrenched native English orthodoxy alongside a recusant foreign spirituality (21). In the introduction to her translation of Bokenham’s *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, Delany says, “Lollardy, though a heresy and capital crime,54 was particularly strong in East Anglia” (xxvii-xxviii). On the

53 Capgrave dedicates works to such figures as Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; Henry VI; Edward IV; John Lowe; William Gray; etc. Among his patrons, Bokenham lists Elizabeth de Vere, Countess of Oxford; Isabel Bourchier, Countess of Eu (and sister of Richard, Duke of York); John and Katherine Denston; John and Isabel Hunt; Katherine Howard; etc.
54 Lollardy had been declared a capital crime in 1401 (Delany, “Introduction” xi).
whole, officials were tolerant of the various beliefs found in the region, particularly “if those nonconformists were discreet and if they presented no threat to the state” (Gibson 30). This, of course, conflicted with the previously discussed, strong Austin tendency to support Rome. Another sign of East Anglia’s religious complexity, and its connections to the continent, is illustrated by the fact that only known Beguinages in England were in Norwich (22).55

The town of Lynn was part of this diverse commercial, religious and political culture in East Anglia. Seymour describes Lynn as a “flourishing port” and as “one of the major towns of England” (207). This was due in part to its contribution to England’s woolen cloth exports (Gibson 22). Additionally, the religious richness of East Anglia was certainly to be found in Lynn: the controversial figure Margery Kempe provides a striking example.56 Politically speaking, Lynn could also be counted among East Anglia’s important towns. Some evidence indicates that Lynn may not have been fully supportive of Henry VI: there are signs that by 1452, Richard, Duke of York had the impression that the city may be receptive to his agenda. In September of that year, “Edward Clere esq. of Stokesly (Norfolk) received, at King’s Lynn, treasonable letters from the Duke of York, intended for the town and for notable persons of the shire” (Johnson 101). Capgrave was at that time the prior of the Austin house at Lynn, and in the following year would be elected

55 Though a discussion of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe is beyond the scope of this study, they certainly illustrate East Anglia’s religious complexity as well.  
56 Saint Katherine of Alexandria was among the figures whom Margery claimed spoke to her. See Book I, Chapter 17 of The Boke of Margery Kempe.
Prior Provincial. As a prominent member of the community, he may very well have been one of the men for whom York’s “treasonable letters” were intended.

**Section V: The Political Landscape of Fifteenth-Century England**

The political landscape of fifteenth-century England was one of disarray. The first half of the century found England immersed in the last, and mostly unsuccessful, half of the Hundred Years War, and the second half found England torn asunder in the dynastic conflict now called the Wars of the Roses. Perhaps no man was more responsible for this than Henry Bolingbroke. In 1398, he was banished from England for ten years by his cousin and king, Richard II. His rival, Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, was banished for life. However, in February 1399, not long after the death of Henry’s powerful father – John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster – Richard extended Henry’s exile indefinitely and seized Gaunt’s lands (Cheetham 17). Richard was already facing criticism, and this proved to be a disastrous miscalculation. In July of 1399, while Richard was in Ireland attempting to quell some Irish troubles, Bolingbroke returned to England in the guise of reclaiming his inheritance (18).57 According to Capgrave’s *Chronicles*, discontented nobles flocked to Henry’s side, including Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, his son Henry “Hotspur” Percy, and Ralph Neville,Earl of Westmoreland (212). Capgrave also notes that though Edmund of Langley, Duke of York (who remained loyal to Richard II) attempted to gather men against Henry, many considered Henry “a good lord and a trewe, and a man

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57 The so-called *Davies Chronicle*, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS 21608, notes that Henry said he came to reclaim his inheritance, and “for no other entente” (22). All quotes from this chronicle come from William Marx’s edition.
which had suffered mech wrong” and would not oppose him (212). The Davies
Chronicle also says of Langley’s attempt that “no mon wolde folowe hym” (22). In
the next couple months, Richard was captured and Henry’s claim to the throne
(through his father) – put forth to Parliament in September 1399 – was accepted
(Cheetham 18).

The first half of Henry IV’s reign was not peaceful. Within the year, “t e erlis
of Kent, Salesbury, and Huntingdon, onkende onto t e kyng, risin ageyn him”
(Capgrave, Chronicles 216). Then, in the autumn of 1400, “began t e rebellion of
Walis ageyn t e kyng, vndir a capteyn cleped Howeyn Glendor” (217). The Owen
Glendower rebellion was not as easily defeated as the previous one; it eventually
brought the mighty Percy family, which had helped place Henry on the throne,
against the king. The reasons for this are uncertain. However, Glendower was
connected to the Percys by marriage. Additionally, tensions had been growing
between Henry and the Percys, as Henry had repeatedly broken promises to the
family and instead had given honors to their primary rival, the Nevilles (Rose 430).
Cheetham also points out that Henry had refused Hotspur the ransom of the Scottish
Earl of Douglas (21). In 1403 Henry “Hotspur” Percy faced off with Prince Henry at
the Battle of Shrewsbury and lost. But the king’s troubles did not end there; not only

58 Richard II died – almost certainly murdered – in 1400, without a direct heir.
Though both Capgrave and the Davies Chronicle say he died of sorrow and hunger,
by 1405 Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York, publicly accused Henry of murdering
Richard.

59 Alexander Rose notes that in the 1403 Percy rebellion, the Percys proclaimed that
Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March was Richard II’s rightful successor (430). This is
an early indication that the Mortimer claim was a very real threat to the Lancastrian
dynasty.
did the Welsh remain troublesome until 1409, but in 1405 Thomas Mowbray, Earl Marshal of England, attempted to remove the young Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March – who was the son of Roger Mortimer, Richard II’s recognized heir – from Henry’s custody. The danger of this was that Mortimer was descended from Edward III’s second son: Henry himself was descended through Edward III’s third son, and therefore had an inferior claim to the throne. All these troubles weighed heavily on Henry, and as his health began to fail, his son and heir began to take a larger role in the government. Even this caused trouble, though, as rumors arose that the prince would depose his father (Cheetham 24). However, when Henry IV died on March 20, 1413, he left his son a kingdom intact.

The meteoric reign of Henry V was certainly the highpoint of the Lancastrian dynasty. Henry himself has been called “a paragon of medieval kingship” (Wolffe 25). His victories in France, such as the triumph at Agincourt in 1415, created “a period of national euphoria” (Winstead, Virgin 156). In 1416, Henry hosted the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund and received his support for Henry’s claim to the French crown (Cheetham 36). By 1419, England again controlled Normandy, and in May 1420, the Treaty of Troyes gave Henry V a French wife – Katherine of Valois – and recognition as Charles VI’s heir. However, even Henry’s reign saw signs of the turbulent times ahead. In 1415, Richard, Earl of Cambridge – Richard, Duke of York’s father – attempted to place Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March on the throne (Griffiths, Henry VI 666). Mortimer himself betrayed the plot, though, and Cambridge was executed. Then, to the kingdom’s dismay, Henry contracted an illness
(possibly dysentery) in the winter of 1421; he died on August 31 the following year, leaving his nine-month old son, Henry VI, as king of England.

Henry VI’s reign achieved the pinnacle of English dreams: he is the only monarch to have been crowned as king of both England and France. However, he lost both crowns, and his reign has been described as “the most calamitous in the whole of English history” (qtd. in Hicks 211). During Henry’s long minority, a council governed England, and by most accounts they performed well. The late king’s brothers held prominent roles, with John, Duke of Bedford acting as regent in France and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester acting as Protector in England. Sometime around 1437, Henry’s minority came to an end. There are differing views concerning Henry’s involvement in the daily governance of the kingdom even after he reached adulthood. John Watts points out that the traditional view of an inactive Henry (maintained through the twentieth century by K. B. McFarlane) was challenged in the early 1980s by both Griffiths and Wolffe (103-106). Regardless, as king and final authority, Henry is ultimately responsible for the failures of his reign.

One of the most common flaws attributed to Henry VI is found in his distribution of patronage. Cheetham says, “Henry gave too freely and he often gave to the wrong people” (52). Charles Ross argues that the result of Henry’s selective lavishness was “to create an entrenched court party which had a vested interest in keeping control of the king’s person and excluding all its rivals from access to him” (Wars 24). As will be discussed below, both Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and

60 Charles VI of France died about two months after Henry V.
61 The English did, however, steadily lose their French territories, until at the end of the Hundred Years War in 1453, at which time they held only the port city of Calais.
Richard, Duke of York complained at various points about not being in the king’s “inner circle” of counselors. Some scholars attribute York’s break with the crown to his financial status: he virtually impoverished himself while paying the bills as the king’s lieutenant in France, and yet he watched as Henry’s favorites, such as William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk and later Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset were given lucrative rewards (Seward 5). Indeed, Storey points out that in 1446 the Exchequer owed York £38,666, and that York “renounced £12,666 of this in return for adequate provision for payment of the remainder” (75). Even in the mid-1450s, Griffiths notes that finances still plagued York: “York’s debts had increased alarmingly of late, not least because his salary and expenses as protector in 1454 had not been paid” (Henry VI 754).

Whether it was because of financial motives, personal ambition, or self-defense from the attacks of Queen Margaret, York eventually turned against Henry VI. An armed uprising was quelled in 1452, perhaps through subterfuge. In May 1455, York and his allies defeated their rivals at the first Battle of St. Albans, killing several of them: Somerset, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and Thomas, Lord Clifford. In April 1459, York and his allies were summoned to appear before the Great Council; sensing a trap, they declined to appear and another violent encounter

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62 After the birth of her son Edward of Lancaster in 1453, Margaret seemed to view York as a threat to the security of her son’s inheritance.
63 Neillands says that York agreed to put down arms if Somerset was arrested, and that these terms were agreed to; however, when York arrived before Henry VI, Somerset was there and York was required to swear an oath of loyalty (59-60).
64 Henry VI also was slightly wounded in the neck by an arrow.
seemed imminent. In October 1459, though, the Yorkists were forced to flee, with York going to Ireland and several of his key allies going to Calais (Neillands 85-88). Upon York’s return from Ireland in 1460, he submitted his claim to the throne. Though a compromise was reached in the Act of Accord in October 1460 – in which York and his sons were officially recognized as Henry’s heirs – the queen continued to fight for her son’s inheritance rights. In December of that year, Margaret’s forces defeated York’s at Wakefield, and both York and Salisbury were killed. 66

Such was the political quagmire of Capgrave’s day. It was a time of “over-mighty” subjects or (according to McFarlane) at least of “under-mighty” kings. It was a time of factionalism and quarrels among the nobility. Historians continually reinterpret the events and motives which lay behind the origins of the Wars of the Roses, and one scholar’s scapegoat is another’s villain. Yet, it is because of this, the equivocal nature of fifteenth-century studies, that so many scholars are drawn into the period. And, increasingly, it is the interplay between fifteenth-century politics and fifteenth-century literature that is demanding attention.

65 Later that year, Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury did defeat a Lancastrian army at the Battle of Blore Heath in September 1459.
66 Of course, York’s son Edward, Earl of March then took up his father’s cause, and deposed Henry in 1461. After years as a prisoner and an exile, Henry was briefly restored to the throne in 1470-1471; however, after this short-lived readeption, Henry was quietly murdered in the Tower of London on May 21, 1471.
CHAPTER III

JOHN CAPGRAVE’S LIFE AS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

Section I: Capgrave’s Life as Lancastrian Propaganda?

There are many potential arguments for interpreting Capgrave’s *The Life of Saint Katherine* as a piece of Lancastrian propaganda. First, there is the matter of timing to consider. Capgrave’s *Life* is dated to the first half of the 1440s, shortly before Osbern Bokenham’s *passio* in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*. In her consideration of Bokenham’s writings, Delany notes that this period is “an earlier date than most historians have acknowledged as possible for overt Yorkist sympathies” (*Impolitic* 4). As for the Yorkist claim to the throne, Ross says, “The dynastic issue was not clearly raised until the return of Duke Richard of York from Ireland in the autumn of 1460” (*Wars* 43). Delany, however, disputes such sentiments, arguing that “Bokenham was a committed partisan of Richard, Duke of York” (*Impolitic* 4). She could very well be correct. Though York did not make his first overtly aggressive move until an ill-fated raising of arms in 1452, there are earlier indications of trouble. In *The Wars of the Roses*, Ross notes that in 1451, “one

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67 Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen actually allow an earlier range than most, dating Capgrave’s *Life* to c. 1438-1445; for Bokenham’s *passio*, they offer 1443-1447 (8).
68 Mortimer Levine holds similar views, though he is willing to move the date up to 1455. See *Tudor Dynastic Problems, 1460-1571*.
69 In Delany’s 1996 article, “Bokenham’s Claudian as Yorkist Propaganda,” she warns that Bokenham’s Yorkist “support is not explicitly for a claim to the English throne” (83), but two years later in her book *Impolitic Bodies* she seems more confident with interpreting Bokenham as a dynastic propagandist. There, she adds that the words of Bokenham’s Katherine “help validate the claim of the Yorkist matrilineal line” (179).
of York's supporters in Parliament, Thomas Young, MP for Bristol, put forward a petition that York should at least be recognized as heir apparent to the still childless Henry VI" (28). Young was immediately imprisoned in the Tower of London, but P. A. Johnson asserts that "the initiative clearly came from the duke" himself (98).

Furthermore, Johnson observes that York has been linked to Jack Cade's rebellion of 1450 since at least the sixteenth century (80). Cade's agenda certainly seemed sympathetic to York, and he reportedly "called hymselfe Mortimer forto gete and haue t e more fauour of t e peple" (Marx 67). The use of the name Mortimer (that being the line through which came York's maternal claim to the throne) in order to gain the favor of the people indicates that the political intricacies of the forthcoming Lancastrian/Yorkist conflict were known even among the lower classes. In fact, in that same year when York returned early from his post as Lieutenant in Ireland, "Henry VI evidently had a deep-seated fear that Duke Richard intended to return to England and claim the throne" (Johnson 78).

York's ten-year appointment as Lieutenant in Ireland in 1447 has been traditionally interpreted as a form of political exile, used to get him out of the way (70). Certainly at this same time there is evidence that York "had reason to believe that his legitimate claims [to the throne, as

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70 In 1580, John Stow makes this connection in his *Annales*.
71 Anthony Cheetham also follows this point of view, which dates back to pro-Yorkist chronicles in the fifteenth century, in *The Wars of the Roses*. Take, for example, the following line from MS BL Cott. II 23, one of the petitions during Cade's Rebellion: "the hye and myghty prince the Duke of Yorke, late exiled from our soueraigne lorde presens" (Harvey 191). However, many modern scholars, such as Griffiths (in *The Reign of King Henry VI*) and Helen E. Maurer (in *Margaret of Anjou*) dispute this view. It should be noted that York did not actually leave for Ireland until 1449. It may, though, be interesting to note a parallel: in 1423, Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, had also been appointed as lieutenant in Ireland, perhaps at a time when he, too, was making Lancastrians nervous (Wolffe 35).
Henry’s heir-apparent] were being submerged by the patronage shown to other members of the royal family” (Griffiths, *Henry VI* 675). And although scholars such as Michael Hicks believe that York “benefited as much as anyone from the fall of the Duke of Gloucester [in 1447]” (261), Johnson believes that the evidence “seems to exonerate him of complicity” (66). Robin Neillands, in fact, calls York “Gloucester’s protégé” (34). In the 1450s, when his name was constantly associated with treasonous plots – unjustly, Wolfe argues (242) – York did actively begin to identify himself with Gloucester, who was also “falsely accused of treason” (Wolfe 297). Undoubtedly, Gloucester’s death underlined York’s position as heir presumptive at a time when other powerful men (some related to Henry VI) were being lavished with rewards.

More roots of discord can be traced to the mid-1440s, during York’s lieutenancy in France. Not only did the government fail to reimburse York for much

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72 Griffiths also notes that Henry VI was raising up a group of men close to him, such as John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, John Holand, Duke of Exeter, and Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. Later, in 1450, when Margaret Beaufort married a son of the Duke of Suffolk, “it was regarded as a manoeuvre... to place a de la Pole on the throne” (Griffiths, *Henry VI* 675).

73 Johnson adds that York’s later claim that “those who had murdered Gloucester proposed to murder him” could not have been made had he been involved personally (66).

74 Gloucester had taken care of York’s land during York’s minority (Wolfe 35). There are also several interesting political parallels between York and Gloucester. Both Gloucester and York complained about being excluded from Henry VI’s inner circle of counselors; Gloucester in 1439 included York in his complaint (Cheetham 52), and even the commons requested an increased role in the government for York (Harvey 191). Also, as Neillands points, there were rumors that “[t]he newly crowned Queen Margaret was said to have been implicated in [Gloucester’s] death” (34). Certainly, Margaret’s relentless pursuit of York, who in October 1460 had replaced her son as Henry’s heir per the Act of Accord, led to York’s death at the Battle of Wakefield in December 1460.
of his expenses, leaving him deeply in debt, but in 1443 John Beaufort, Earl of Somerset, was placed in charge of an army, independent of York’s control, in Gascony. Griffiths says that “this commission was regarded by York as a derogation from his own position as lieutenant-general” (Henry VI 674).\(^{75}\) In his article “The Sense of Dynasty in the Reign of Henry VI,” Griffiths argues that dynastic issues would have been much in the public eye during the 1440s. He points out that by 1440, there was a distinct lack of Lancastrian heirs: Thomas, Duke of Clarence had died childless in 1421; John, Duke of Bedford had died childless in 1435; Henry VI was still unmarried at the age of nineteen; and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester had no legitimate heirs (17).\(^{76}\) In fact, Griffiths labels this as “the parlous situation of the Lancastrian royal family” (24). Regardless, Griffiths adds, “There are indeed indications that in the 1440s Henry VI and his advisers chose to ignore the duke of York as a possible heir to the throne. Instead, they seem to have espoused the Beaufort, Holand and Stafford families” (“Sense” 20). Bertram Wolfe even argues that from an early time Henry seemed “to have been reluctant to employ York in any capacity. His name was conspicuous by its absence from the new council appointed by Henry in November 1437 to mark his own assumption of power” (153).

This is not to say that there was an active dynastic struggle taking place in the mid-1440s. On the surface at least, most evidence which predates this period indicates

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\(^{75}\) Johnson, too, discusses the possibility of York resenting Somerset’s expedition, but warns that it is “impossible to demonstrate” whether this led to “any breach between York and the English council” (45). By the 1450s, however, he was certainly excluded from the council (100).

\(^{76}\) In 1441, Gloucester’s wife Eleanor Cobham was convicted of witchcraft and exiled, effectively eliminating the chances of Gloucester producing an heir (Griffiths, “Sense” 18).
an affable relationship between king and duke (Griffiths, *Henry VI* 666-669). For example, York’s first son (who was born in 1441 but died in infancy) was named Henry. More importantly, there is no evidence that the treasonous actions of York’s father, Richard, Earl of Cambridge, were ever held against him. In 1415, Cambridge was executed for treason after an attempt to replace Henry V with Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March (Griffiths, *Henry VI* 666). In the fifteenth century, there are few examples of the children of attainted traitors reaching the heights of power attained by York. Regardless, though, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the issues of pedigree and royal succession were of extreme interest to the kingdom in the early 1440s, well within the timeframe in which Delany argues that Bokenham divulges “overt Yorkist sympathies” (*Impolitic* 4). It is, then, conceivable that Capgrave, too, could have had similar political views during the same period.

A second potential argument against Capgrave’s Yorkist bias is his possible Lancastrian allegiance. As mentioned above, scholars such as Smith believe Capgrave was unquestionably Lancastrian. There are several details that would seem to support this assertion. For one, as discussed above, there were many connections between

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77 As mentioned above, Mortimer actually betrayed the plot himself. Later, York’s uncle Edward died fighting for Henry V at Agincourt, an act that Johnson says “somewhat redeemed the House of York” (1). It was Edward’s death that left the four-year-old Richard as the Duke of York. Later, his placement into the care of Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmoreland, in 1423 laid the foundations for the powerful York/Neville alliance in the mid-1450s. In fact, York married Westmoreland’s daughter, Cecily Neville, c. 1429.

78 Capgrave and Bokenham also attended Cambridge University at the same time, being made *baccalarius* within a day of each other (Delany, *Impolitic* 7). And, in his *passio* of St. Katherine, Bokenham directs his readers to Capgrave’s *Life*, a fact that could very well support a Yorkist reading of the text. While personal relationships are no indication of individual politics, Capgrave clearly had associations with individuals and organizations with Yorkist inclinations.
Saint Katherine and various Lancastrian royal figures. Recalling Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen’s dating of Capgrave’s *Life* (c. 1438-1445), it is interesting to note that Henry VI’s mother, Catherine of Valois, died in 1437. And while there is no evidence that Capgrave intended his *Life* as a memorial to the late queen, Lewis does point out that in 1421 (also the year of Henry VI’s birth), Saint Katherine’s image “played a prominent role at the banquet given to mark [Catherine of Valois’s] coronation” (70). It is not unreasonable to suppose a steadfast Lancastrian might write a work that could be nominally connected with a recently deceased queen. And recall, Lewis also notes that after her marriage to her longtime lover John of Gaunt, Katherine Swynford adopted three Katherine wheels among her heraldic devices (69). The House of Lancaster certainly had ties to Saint Katherine. Additionally, Paul E. Gill argues that in the fifteenth century, “propaganda was used not to win support for a forthcoming revolutionary dynastic change, but rather was intended to serve as a justification for a dynastic change already effected” (333-334). In this light, any political element to Capgrave’s *Life* would need to be Lancastrian. However, the writings of authors such as Bokenham clearly defy Gill’s assertion, therefore allowing a potential Yorkist reading of Capgrave’s text as well. Also, as will be seen, the House of York had its own connections with Saint Katherine.

Smith also makes much of Henry VI’s position as patron of the priory at Lynn, where Capgrave lived. She says, “In 1445, when Capgrave was writing *St. Katherine*, Henry VI was ruling, and he was a strong supporter of the Austin friars in general and of Lynn priory in particular” (140). If Henry did support the friars, he did so no more than his predecessors. Recall that Henry III granted special protection to
the friars in 1255 (Gwynn 16); they also seemed to have held special favor from Edward II (21); and, Edward III expressed a “special affection” for them (23). As far as Henry’s supposed fondness for the Lynn priory in particular, Capgrave records this himself in his *Henricis*, upon the occasion of Henry VI’s visit to Lynn:

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Hic rex devotissimus in XXIII. anno regni sui, in illa solemni
peregrinatione qua Sanctorum memorias visitavit, locum Fratrum
Heremitarum Sancti Augustini in villa de Lenne in suum accepit
favorem, promittens sacerdotibus suis ibidem manentibus, vivo vocis
oraculo, quod amodo locus ille sibi et successoribus suis de corpore
suo legitime procreandis immediate pertineret. Ipse quoque et
successors sui, ut præmittitur, fundator sive fundatores non solum
nominee essent, sed rei veritate. Acta sunt autem hæc in Ad Vincula
Sancti Petri, sub anno Domini M.CCCCXLVI.; regni vero incliti
domini nostri, ut præmissum est, anno XXIII. (137)
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Henry’s promise that the priory should be closely connected with himself and that he (and his successors) should be regarded as its true founder(s) does give reason to believe that the residents there would view Henry as their patron. However, careful attention should be paid to the date of this entry: 1446. Henry’s “close connection” with the priory of Lynn seems to post-date Capgrave’s composition of the *Life*. In that light, using the *Henricis* to support a Lancastrian reading of the *Life* is simply not justifiable.

There are, of course, details within the *Life* itself that could support the view of Capgrave as a Lancastrian. For example, as Smith points out, there is a remarkable
similarity in the reactions of the nobility upon the ascension of both Katherine and Henry VI. At the death of King Costus, his nobles ask, “Wythoute a kyng hov shulde a contre stoned?” (I.860). In his *Henricis*, Capgrave recalls a proverb derived from Ecclesiastes that apparently was said upon the ascension of the infant Henry VI in 1422: “Væ tibi, terra, cujus rex puer est...” (129). Both Katherine and Henry faced questions about their ability to govern the kingdom effectively, and Smith interprets this as a sympathetic connection which Capgrave draws between them. However, the proverb from *Henricis* may have also had some negative connotations in 1445: Wolfe recounts a Dutchman’s 1449 critique that “Henry looked more like a child than a man” (17).

There are some possible similarities between Henry VI and both Katherine and her father, Costus. Some of the admirable qualities which Capgrave attributes to King Costus are: “ffre of his speche, large of his expens” (I.27). While there may be some disagreement on how “well spoken” Henry VI was, his generosity is fairly well-documented. One may argue, however, that Henry VI took his generosity too far on the one hand and not far enough on the other: his repeated gifts to his court favorites may have bred jealousy with other magnates such as York.

Smith’s argument revolves around “a surprising parallel between Katherine and Henry VI” (Smith 128). Most of her points hinge on a reading sympathetic to Henry (focusing on the fact that he was a defenseless child when he inherited the

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79 This proverb is derived from Ecclesiastes 10:16: “Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child...” It was popular in late medieval England; various forms were also used “retrospectively” by Henry IV (Richard II had been ten years old when he became king), and later by Richard III (whose nephew Edward V was twelve when he became king).
throne, and that as a woman Katherine was also vulnerable). There are certainly some strong connections between Capgrave’s Katherine and Henry VI. For one, Katherine was known to be a lover of learning. One of the biggest concerns her nobles had was that “Sche loueth not ellys but bokys & scole” (I.863). Likewise, Henry’s dedication to education has been well-documented. For example, he had a special interest in King Alfred the Great, a ruler known for the cultivation of education (Griffiths 242). Wolfe mentions his “well-known bent for studying old writings” (324). He also founded Eton in 1440 and King’s College, Cambridge in 1441, acts one could fancifully imagine St. Katherine approving. But educational pursuits are not the only things these monarchs have in common.

As befitting a saint, Katherine was known for her purity even before her conversion to Christianity. Capgrave says, “There was neuere wrong fovnde in tat may” (I.799). He goes on to add, “She was a very seynt, trewely, as I wene” (I.803). Griffiths notes, “The most marked feature of the popular conception of Henry today is his extraordinary piety” (249). Hicks says, “Henry VI was exceptional in putting piety first. He was obsessively religious” (213). Cheetham recounts an incident reported by John Blacman of Henry fleeing when partially nude dancers entered the hall. And, Wolfe observes that “Henry’s scrupulous regard for Sundays and feast days had been remarked” on as early as 1443 (34). Even though Griffiths warns about giving too

80 See Griffiths, 242-248 for more on Henry’s educational interests.
81 It is uncertain whether Blacman authored the “Compilation of the Meekness and Good Life of King Henry VI” or if he merely owned it. Its reliability has been questioned, though, and some believe it is part of Tudor propaganda efforts to paint Henry VI as a saintly man. See John A. Wagner’s Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses for a brief overview of this text.
much credence to this popular view, pointing out that such an image of Henry was greatly influenced by Tudor propaganda, he also relates that “in 1440, [Henry] expressed himself publicly and uncompromisingly a firm opponent of idolatry and heretics” (249). When first confronting the emperor Maxentius, Katherine says, “Thou takest here fro [Jesus] his hy honour, / And yeuest it to maumentys,82 as is weel seene” (IV.562-563). She goes on to preach against idolatry on several other occasions. However, in “Capgrave’s Saint Katherine and the Perils of Gynecocracy,” Winstead says that when Capgrave’s Life and Henricis are read together, “the message is unmistakable. In De illustribus Henricis, Capgrave characterizes the king as a follower of the saints; in the Life of St. Katherine, he demonstrates that saints are poor rulers” (371). Elsewhere, Winstead claims that Capgrave criticizes Katherine’s piety, stating that it has “deleterious political consequences” (Virgin 173). Both Smith and Winstead believe Capgrave associates Henry VI with Saint Katherine, and this clearly appears to be so. However, Winstead’s belief that this is a critical comparison is the view that withstands critique.

Regardless, there are phrases scattered throughout the Life that could be interpreted in a pro-Lancastrian light. Katherine herself warns her subjects that no one person can accomplish everything which consists of the ruler’s duty. She argues that

... t e power is not his

To amend a-lone all t at is a-mys:

His lordes must help to his gouernayle,

And elles his labour it wil lytyl a-vayle.

82 Idols
help ọ e on your syde as I shal on myn!
Look ọ e be trew on-to my crowne & me,
Lete no treson in ọ our hertys lyn:

Than schal t is lond ful wele demened be. (II.494-501)

In a sense, this is a call to support the ruling monarch, which in England during the 1440s was Henry VI. Arguments to the effect that Henry was a weak king83 could be countered by the fact that even a strong king needs the support of his people.

Katherine also points out that even during her father's lifetime captains were chosen to direct armies and to punish criminals at times when and places where Costus was not available. She asks, then, "Whi may ọ e not doo now as ọ e did t anne?" (II.300). This call to remember the recent past could also remind readers of the council that governed England during Henry's long minority.84 And again, Katherine declares, "A kyngys myght ful small is ha[r]dyly / With-outen swiche helpe, ye wote as weel as I" (II.802-803). This passage probably lends itself to a Lancastrian reading better than most others in the text. However, this passage is a small part of a larger conversation.

In response to concerns that men may rise against her, Katherine reminds her lords that "If there ryse ony, ye may youre-seelf it cees; / And but ye doo, ye ben on-trewe to me" (II.710-711). This could be interpreted as a jab at the nobility in Richard II's day: the usurper Henry IV initially found little opposition when he seized Richard's throne. In a sense, the Lancastrian dynasty was built upon a foundation of treason.

83 See below.
84 Henry VI assumed the throne in 1422 at the age of nine months. Until he assumed his majority in 1437, England was governed by a council which consisted of several of the most prominent spiritual and temporal authorities.
Another possibility of Lancastrian support is found implied in a comment Capgrave makes concerning the hermit Adrian:

Thus wyll god wyth ful onlykly ſting,
As to ſe werld, werk whan ſat hym leest;
he chesyth sume-tyme on-to hys hye werking
fful febyll & sekely, & a-wey can kest
ťe strong & wyse... (III.365-369)\(^8\)

As will be discussed below, Henry VI did not match anyone’s image of an ideal medieval king. Yet, this phrase encourages people to remember that kings came with an amount of divine sanction, and that God could use a “febyll & sekely” instrument to perform His will. It is difficult to imagine a mid-fifteenth-century reader not connecting this with Henry VI. However, there is another interpretation to be made. In the Middle Ages, women were often represented in literary compositions as the lesser sex, weak and flawed.\(^8\) Capgrave could just as easily be intimating that even a woman can transmit the right to rule: God can use a king born from a “weak” woman’s line just as easily as He can one born from a man’s line.

Perhaps the most flagrant piece of anti-Yorkist propaganda that can be attributed to Capgrave’s *Life* comes at the end of the Marriage Parliament. After Katherine has frustrated her noblemen’s attempts to convince her to marry, they all

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\(^8\) Winstead translates lines 365-366 thusly: “Thus God will work, when He pleases, / With what looks to the world like a very unlikely instrument” (*Life* 117).

\(^8\) Even Saint Augustine, who stated that a woman’s sex was not a defect but was natural in *De Civitate Dei* (XXIII.17), believed the woman was physically subject to the man (see *Confessiones*, XIII.32, for example). It is interesting that the namesake of the Austin Friars, however, did tend to have a more balanced view of women than some of the other Church Fathers.
cry, "God send neuyr rem kyng † at wereth a calle!" (II.1482).\textsuperscript{87} Such a plea not to allow a woman to be involved in politics could easily be interpreted as a warning about allowing one to transmit the right to rule. In that case, it would clearly support the Lancastrian line over their Yorkist rivals. However, such a sentiment would adversely reflect on the English claim to the French crown, so such a reading must also be supported elsewhere in the text. The English, after all, took such concerns seriously very seriously during the Hundred Years War, as will be discussed below.

**Section II: Capgrave’s *Life* as Yorkist Propaganda**

It is indeed possible to see why scholars such as Smith can associate Henry VI sympathetically with Saint Katherine: similarities exists. Scholars such as Winstead, though, are adamant that Capgrave criticizes Henry. A careful examination of the text suggests she is correct. And, given the long-standing relationship between politics and hagiography,\textsuperscript{88} it would be difficult to imagine an anti-Henry text in the mid-1440s without attributing to it a Yorkist agenda. It is in that light that Capgrave’s *Life* will now be examined.\textsuperscript{89}

Despite the connections between Saint Katherine and the House of Lancaster mentioned above, there are also several intriguing connections between her and the House of York. According to tradition, established by such writers as Geoffrey of

\textsuperscript{87} Winstead translates line 1482 thusly: "May God never send any realm a king who wears a caul (woman’s cap)" (*Life* 104).

\textsuperscript{88} See Delany and Heffernan, among others.

\textsuperscript{89} As mentioned, such an examination calls Gill’s previously noted assertion into question. While he may be correct for the majority of fifteenth-century propaganda, writings such as Bokenham’s indicate that subversive propaganda was also written during that period.
Monmouth, the Roman emperor Constantine had British roots: his father was a Roman, but his mother Helen was British. And, upon the death of his father in 306, he was crowned emperor in the city of York. In 312, he defeated Maxentius, who persecuted Saint Katherine. But the Constantine/Katherine connection goes deeper: later versions of Katherine’s life would even claim that her father, Costus, was Constantine’s half-brother (Lewis 45-46). Therefore, by the fifteenth century, Katherine had a specific link not only to England, but also to York itself. It is also interesting to recall that the cult of Saint Katherine spread to England via Rouen. Johnson notes that Richard, Duke of York spent most of the first term of his lieutenancy of France in Rouen (29). In fact, it was there that his second son, Edward (the future Edward IV), was born. Later, Edward would even be referred to as “the Rose of Rouen” (Ross, Edward IV 30-31). Also, as discussed above, several later members of the House of York revered Katherine.

The most obvious way, however, in which Capgrave’s Life could be interpreted as Yorkist propaganda (and Bokenham’s passio, for that matter) is the fact that it deals with a female monarch. As discussed earlier, if a woman could transmit

90 See Historia Regum Britanniae, Part III. Interestingly enough, Constantine’s mother Helen sounds very similar to Saint Katherine: “Her name was Helen and her beauty was greater than that of any other young woman in the kingdom... Her father had no other child to inherit the throne, and he had therefore done all in his power to give Helen the kind of training which would enable her to rule the country more efficiently after his death” (132). Though Constantius does seize Coel’s crown after that king’s death, he also marries Coel’s daughter Helen, perhaps in an effort to establish legitimacy. This certainly lends an element of authority to Helen’s claim to her father’s throne, or at least her ability to transmit the right to rule.

91 Interestingly, Constantine’s presence on genealogical rolls such as Philadelphia Free MS Lewis E201 (c. 1461) suggests that the Yorkists may have considered themselves related to him as well.
the right to rule, Richard, Duke of York actually had a better claim to the throne than
King Henry VI. Whereas Henry was descended from Edward III through Edward’s
third son, John of Gaunt, York’s mother, Anne, was descended from Edward’s second
son, Lionel, Duke of Clarence.92 Henry IV foresaw that someone could eventually
claim the throne through this line. In 1406, a parliament passed a statute that specified
the right of succession was through the male heirs of Henry IV; however, the statute
was soon repealed when it was pointed out that the English claim to the French throne
(the cause of the Hundred Years War), came through the female line (Delany,
*Impolitic* 145-146).

The legend of Saint Katherine fits nicely into this debate, particularly if one is
a Yorkist. On the one hand, Katherine’s noblemen sound like they will not accept her:

Who schall ber t e crown, now [Costus] is deed?

he left vs non eyre for to be our heed,

But a ounge mayde; what schal sche doo?

Sche is but a woman... (1.454-457)

Even with these reservations, though, Katherine is accepted as queen. This is in spite
of the fact that there are other able-bodied men of the royal family available. In the
Marriage Parliament, it is clear that Katherine has both an uncle and a male cousin
who are in positions of authority:

...e wote ful wele, her em,93

The duke of tyre, mote rede know t is ting,
The duke of antioche eke, her owne cosyn;
If we shul haue a lord or ellys a kyng,
† ei mote consent, † ei mote make † e fyn. (I.1015-1019)

Perhaps more surprising in a Lancastrian context, is the later observation that
Katherine's uncle cannot rule because he cannot wed her:

...& for my lord o our Em
May not wed o ow neyther in wecc ne drem,
Therfor he may not her as in † is place
Ber noo crown, for it stant in o our grace
Who schall it ber, it longeth on-to o our ryght. (II.753-757)

Obviously, not even Katherine's uncle, the Duke of Tyre, can pass over her right to
the crown. In fifteenth-century England, such a statement would lead the critical
reader to a single thought: Richard, Duke of York's maternal claim to the throne.

A warning issued earlier in the text supports this thought. After the death of
Costus, the people of Syria are frightened. Indeed, they question, "Wyth-owte a kyng
how schuld a cuntre stand?" (I.860). Yet, they also realize, "And if we chese to
captain any o t er lorde, / Enuye & rancor wyll cause sone dyscorde" (I.902-903).
Perhaps having a queen on the throne leaves the kingdom vulnerable, but replacing
her with another lord invites envy and discord. Such a warning strikes at the very
inception of the Lancastrian dynasty – the usurpation of Henry IV – and adds more
weight to the dangers of not allowing the rightful monarch, even if it is a woman or
the descendant of a woman, to sit on the throne. Certainly, in the aftermath of Henry
IV’s usurpation, and later during the Wars of the Roses, England suffered from the discord brought about by envy.94

And yet, Capgrave’s Life readily admits that there is a place of honor for other members of the royal family. When Gaufron, Katherine’s uncle, stands to speak, the narrator comments: “he was the nexte of hir kenerede there, / he might more boldly seyn al his entent” (II.1055-1056). This narrative aside endorses the right of members of the royal family to have their input on issues of great importance. It also directly calls to mind the complaint by both Gloucester and York, alluded to earlier, concerning their right to be involved with Henry’s council. Anthony Cheetham recounts one such instance:

In 1439 Gloucester complained to the King that Beaufort and his friends had cut off ‘me, your sole uncle, together with my cousin York… and many other lords of your kin from having knowledge of any great matters that might touch your high estate and realm’. (52)95

After the death of Gloucester, York would have been the next closest of kin to Henry V in the event of Henry VI’s death, even through his father’s line (disregarding the maternal claim) – unless the legitimized Beaufort line was taken into account, though they had been excluded from inheriting the throne in 1407 (Johnson 99). Later, York would also voice concerns about being left out of the king’s council, and in 1450 the

94 Consider, for example, that in 1327 when Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer forced Edward II to abdicate, the crown at least passed to his son, Edward III. However, in the fifteenth century, after Henry IV’s usurpation of Richard II’s throne, the crown changed eight times but only thrice by natural succession: to Henry V, Henry VI, and the short-lived Edward V.

95 Johnson contends that at this time, there is no evidence that York wanted to be a part of Henry’s inner circle (32).
Commons picked up his cause. One of the items in Cade’s Rebellion requested Henry to disassociate with the Duke of Suffolk and “to take abowte hym a nobill persone, the trewe blode of the Reame, that is to sey the hye and myghty prince the Duke of Yorke” (Harvey 191). In light of this atmosphere, Capgrave’s narrative comment takes on more weight than it otherwise would; it also is yet another indication that there are Yorkist underpinnings to The Life of Saint Katherine.

Capgrave’s Life suits a Yorkist agenda in that it deals with a woman’s inheritance rights and the rights of the members of the royal family to have a say in the governing of the land. Such genealogical aspects, however, are not the only elements of the work that support a Yorkist agenda. The Life also implicitly criticizes the ability of Henry VI to rule. For example, in the very first stanza of the prologue, Capgrave subtly sets up a theme of leadership:

Iesu cryst, crowne of maydenys alle,
A mayde bar t e, a mayde °aue t e soke;
A-mong t e lilies that may not fade ne falle
Thou ledyst t ese folk, ryth so seyth our boke,
Wyth all her hert euer on t e loke;
Here loue, her plesauns so sore is on t e sette,
To sewe t e, lord, & folow t ei can nott lette. (P.1-7; emphasis added)
The next line also adds to this theme: “Ryth tus be ordyr we wene tou ledyst te daunce” (P.8; emphasis added).\textsuperscript{96} Whereas Smith bases her interpretation of Capgrave’s Lancastrian politics on the belief that he sympathetically connects Henry VI to Saint Katherine, Winstead claims that Capgrave actually criticizes Henry VI through the same comparison. Recall her assertion that Capgrave demonstrates that “saints are poor rulers” (“Gynecocracy” 371). Her argument comes down to a view of leadership.

Even by the mid-1440s, Henry VI was not considered an effective leader. In the \textit{Life}, Capgrave points out Costus’s military record, something for which Henry was certainly not known or respected. Costus was “Gracious in feld”\textsuperscript{97} (I.26), and “To many a kynydom made he a-sayle, / And many a castell beet he ryth down / Whan tei to his lawes wold not be bown” (I. 33-35). Henry, meanwhile, stayed in England while his French territory slowly diminished, and when faced with rebellious subjects he preferred accepting promises of peace to taking military action against them (Storey 184). But Henry’s military record was not the only criticism leveled against him; his overall fitness as king was publicly questioned. In \textit{Jack Cade’s Rebellion of 1450}, I. M. W. Harvey recounts the following comments as being expressed in the 1440s:

\begin{quote}
[Henry VI] was a fool, a simpleton; he looked like a child; he had murdered his uncle, the duke of Gloucester, in 1447; he was losing all
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{96} In the notes to her edition of Capgrave’s \textit{Life}, Winstead points out that in the OED one of the meanings of the phrase “to lead the dance” is “to take the lead in any course of action” (287).

\textsuperscript{97} Winstead translates this phrase: “Honorable on the battlefield...”
the wealth of the crown; he was grasping; he was no soldier; it was the earl of Suffolk and the bishop of Salisbury who really had power; indeed, it was because of their influence that Henry was still childless; Henry were better dead... (31-32)

R. L. Storey mentions charges brought against a Kentish yeoman in 1442 for saying “the king is a lunatic, as his father was” (34). Indeed, Ross characterizes Henry as “a man of limited mental capacity who was too much influenced by those around him” (Wars 21).\(^9\) In Capgrave’s Life, the lord of Nicopolis says:

\begin{quote}
The astate of regalte is of suche apryse,
There may no man, sothly, to it atteyne
But he haue bothe pouer and wytte, certeyne.
Therefore sey I yet that we nedes must
Be rewled on whiche †at hath these too,
Bothe witte in sadnesse, and pouer in lust,
And ellis ourle rewle shal breke and asunder goo. (II.1146-1152)
\end{quote}

Katherine herself then confirms that “The feble may not, the fool eke ne kan /
Demene suche †ing” (II.1180-1181). As demonstrated above, there were many concerns about Henry VI’s “pouer and witte” (II.1148). Clearly, there are indications that by the time Capgrave was writing, Henry VI did not fit the image of a true king for many people. With Henry’s leadership abilities in question, the fact that the opening lines of Capgrave’s Life mention leadership is surely a telling detail.

\(^9\) Other modern scholars, such as Griffiths and Storey, dispute depicting the young Henry as mentally limited, and maintain that he seemed mentally healthy until his first breakdown in 1453.
Henry VI compares poorly to Costus in other ways as well. Though he is generous like Costus, Capgrave categorizes Costus’s openhandedness and makes it clear that subjects who defied him soon regretted it: “Was no lorde be-syde him †at hym wold do wrake, / whath man †at dede he shuld it sone wayle, / Whan †at he gan veniaunce to take” (I.29-31). This is in stark contrast to Henry, who had a “penchant throughout adulthood for pardoning even traitors and murderers” (Griffiths, *Henry VI* 249). Interestingly, one of the concerns that Katherine’s subjects express is her ability to deal with traitors. One lord says that a king needs “[t]o be to traytourys both cruel & row” (II.262). He goes on to say that Katherine is unable to do this:

ffro ouch kend †is gouernauns is full ferre,

Your blod is not so myty for to abyde

To se man be slayn be ouch owyn side,

To se †e boweles cut oute hys wombe

And brent be-for hym, whyll he is on lyue,

To se man serued as †ei serue a lombe,

Thorow-oute hys guttys bo †e rende & ryue,

To se hem draw oute be four & be fyue.

In fact, this lord wants a king who can “[s]uffyr [men] to smert whan †ei do a-mys” (II.277). This lord realizes that when a king opts not to punish lawbreakers, lawlessness soon reigns. In fact, Henry’s willingness to forgive trespasses, such as York’s uprisings in 1452 and 1455, certainly came back to haunt him.
Capgrave himself addresses this very issue in a narrative aside in Book I, Chapter 15:

What is a lond whan it hath non hed?
The lawes arn not kepte, the lond is desolate,
The hertys hanging as heuy as leed,
The commouns grutchynge and euere at debate,

There is kepte no revle, ne kepte noon astate. (I.848-852)

A fifteenth-century reader would surely recognize in these lines a description of contemporary society. Lawlessness was one of the primary complaints ("grutchynges," one might say) of Henry's reign (Cheetham 57). Griffiths adds that because of Henry's aforementioned penchant for pardoning, "a number of the nobility especially were emboldened to resort to criminal activity and to thumb their nose at the common law and the king's council" (Henry VI 562). Storey speaks of "the corruption of the legal system in Henry VI's reign" (192). To make matters worse, it seems that things actually worsened after Henry reached adulthood: "circumstances during Henry VI's majority made the vital questions of lawlessness and disorder of more urgent concern than for some time past" (Griffiths, Henry VI 567). During Henry's minority, his uncle John, Duke of Bedford was actually "praised for upholding the law and for bringing criminals to justice" (Wolffe 117). It is one matter for a kingdom to be tested during a king's minority ("Alas, for thee, O land...") , but for such conditions to continue, and worsen, under an adult king is a cause for harsh criticism.
One way for a medieval king to quell unrest in his kingdom was to travel. After his usurpation in July 1483, for example, Richard III immediately departed on a lengthy procession from London to Gloucester to York. During and after Buckingham's Rebellion that autumn, Richard also traveled throughout the southeast, reaching Exeter by November before returning to London (Pollard 112). Pollard describes this journey as "a carefully orchestrated piece of propaganda," and part of its purpose was surely to make Richard's royal presence known (107). In Capgrave's *Life*, Sir Hercules, the Prince of Paphon, also says a king should:

Doo al this labour, bothe in flesh and goost,

Ride and sayle, laboure to see his [the king's] lande,

Somtyme here, somtyme at famagoost—

Thus shal he gouerne the lande, the see and t e sande. (II.596-599)

Storey echoes this sentiment: "It was also advisable for a king to show himself to his subjects in various parts of the realm, and to be accessible to them" (35). However, during the time period that Capgrave wrote his *Life*, Storey notes, "but for ten years after 1436 Henry rarely left the Home Counties" (35). The effects of Henry's inertness could likely be summed up by Griffiths' observation that

Those parts of the realm that were furthest from the centre of government and the king's presence, and large conurbations like London, were still the most turbulent regions and posed special

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problems for those responsible for executing the law and maintaining peace. (*Henry VI* 563)

Wolffe adds that the most troublesome regions of the kingdom were those where the lords were absent (118). Clearly, a semblance of the royal presence played a large part in maintaining order. Given this, Capgrave’s comment that a king needs to travel can only be a criticism of Henry VI’s tendency not to travel, and perhaps it was recognized as such: interestingly enough, in the years after Capgrave’s *Life* was written, Henry traveled through East Anglia and to Durham in 1448, and to the south and west in 1451-1452 (Storey 35-36).100

Henry VI’s inactivity was not only constrained to his travels, though. At the time Capgrave was writing his *Life*, Henry was in his early twenties. In most versions of the legend of Saint Katherine, Katherine is only fourteen when her father dies.101 And yet, despite the fact that Katherine is considerably younger than Henry VI, her people throughout the land question, “‘Why is our qwen t us long with-owte a kynge?’ / Bo t e hye & lowe all had t is on honde, / ‘Why is sce vn-weddyd, t is o ung, t is fayr thynge?’” (I.905-907). As mentioned above, most scholars date Capgrave’s *Life* to around or before 1445. Considering that Henry VI married Margaret of Anjou in May 1445, it is likely that Henry was still unmarried at the time Capgrave wrote

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100 Henry’s stay at Lynn in 1446, hosted by Capgrave, also postdates this apparent criticism, though suggesting that Capgrave’s *Life* affected Henry’s travel habits is likely too ambitious a statement. Wolffe, in fact, argues that Henry VI’s court was “peripatetic” after 1437, and traveled to various royal residences (93-94). Even so, Henry did not take his judges with him on these trips (125). Wolffe also points out, however, that Henry’s more extensive journeys occurred after 1448 (94), and that after Cade’s rebellion in 1450 he began taking judges with him (125).

101 However, in most versions, as in Capgrave’s, she is “of yeeris eytene” at the time of her martyrdom (IV.1306).
this work.\textsuperscript{102} Recall that by 1440 there was a distinct lack of Lancastrian heirs. The king's bachelor status was a cause for concern. Even though Gloucester would have been the clear heir-apparent (until his death in 1447), he had many enemies.\textsuperscript{103} And, as seen, there was developing a logjam of potential successors (York, Beaufort, Holand, Stafford). Indeed, concerning the importance of securing succession, it was a valid question to ask: why was Henry not married?\textsuperscript{104}

Another thing to consider about Capgrave's narrative is his declaration that he is merely translating an older text. He claims to have found an old text about Katherine's life which was difficult to read because of its "dyrke langage" (P.62), and that he intends to "more opynly make" it by updating the language (P.64). This text, if it ever existed, is not extant. Such a claim was nothing new; Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, had also claimed to be translating from an older source in his \textit{Historia Regum Britanniae}. And yet, there is an advantage for an author to say that he is translating from an older source, even if it is not true: it removes any responsibility from the author should someone point out any subversive interpretations of the text. This detail alone does not allow a Yorkist label to be put on Capgrave, but it certainly

\textsuperscript{102} Griffiths does point out that plans were underway to negotiate a marriage to a French princess as early as January 1444 (\textit{Henry VI} 483). It was not, however, a universally welcome proposal (482). Additionally, previous potential marriages (to the daughter of James I of Scotland in 1430, and a daughter of the count of Armagnac in 1442) had already fallen through.

\textsuperscript{103} The trial of his wife, mentioned above, has been interpreted as an attack on Gloucester's political power. His subsequent arrest -- and possible murder -- underline the reality of his precarious position as a feasible heir.

\textsuperscript{104} Even after the birth of Henry's son, Edward of Lancaster, stories would develop that Henry was not the father. By 1461, a story circulated that when Edward of Lancaster was first presented to Henry, he remarked in wonder that the child must have been conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mauer 47-48). This could be an example of Henry's reputed piety actually being used \textit{against} him.
adds an extra layer to the argument that he was a Yorkist supporter. After all, no one shirks responsibility for supporting the reigning king.

Capgrave’s *Life* should not be read superficially. Heffernan observes that it contains “some apparent surprises” (178). He particularly notes the “apparent incongruity” present in the *invocatio*, the placement of the pagan Apollo alongside the Christian Paul: “Godd send me part of † at heuynly reyne / † at apollo bar a-bowte, & eke sent poule” (236-237). Heffernan also points out the oddity “of calling on Apollo in a work of sacred biography whose central character, the young Roman maiden Katherine, was tortured and beheaded for refusing to worship Apollo” (178). Curiously, Winstead states that “the *Life of Saint Katherine* is a text in conflict with itself” (“Gynecocracy” 375). She argues that though the text has a “conservative message” regarding the place of women in society, it also “lends itself to – indeed, practically invites – more radical interpretations” (“Gynecocracy” 375). These structural and thematic incongruities invite readers to examine the text for other ones as well. Therefore, I propose that even though scholars such as Smith see clear and simple associations between Henry VI and Saint Katherine, one must look beyond the easy answer and consider the evidence discussed above – in the end, a closer analysis of the text supports a Yorkist reading more than a presumptive Lancastrian one.

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105 Heffernan concludes, “Capgrave intended that what Apollo was to the Greek, Paul was to the Christian… [both are] symbols of the hermeneutic struggle for explaining divine revelation” (178-179).
**Section III: Capgrave’s *Life* and the Prose *Lyt***

There is one potential argument against interpreting Capgrave’s *Life* as Yorkist propaganda. The fact is, Capgrave’s *Life* was but one of many versions of Katherine’s legend. Even though Capgrave wrote “the longest and most intricate” version of the legend (Winstead, “Introduction” 3), he “did not originate the events he narrates; all are found in earlier Katherine legends” (6). A skeptical reader could easily question whether Capgrave could have had any political agenda if he is merely, as he avers, translating an older source. Typically, when an author interpolates a contemporary significance onto an old story, he or she changes particular elements of the story. Often, these very changes illuminate the author’s agenda. And yet, as Winstead points out, Capgrave does not change the events of Katherine’s legend. In fact, about twenty-five years earlier, another *vita* of Saint Katherine had been written, the anonymous Prose Katherine (c. 1420). Some of the elements examined above appear in that version as well.

First, Katherine’s connection with Constantine the Great is found in the prose legend. It tells how Constantine’s father (Constantine I) had a son, Costus, by his first wife; after she died, he married the king of Britain’s daughter, Helen. And, she “conceyvid / and bar a son that hyOt Constantyne, the whiche aftyr- / ward was emperour of Rome by processe oftyme” (lines 53-55).106 Capgrave, therefore, did not create the link between Saint Katherine and Constantine, nor the accompanying link to the city of York. While he may have chosen to retell Katherine’s story because of

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106 The text is in prose, but Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen supply line numbers to aid with identification.
its inherent Yorkist connection, it does not preclude the potential Lancastrian elements, either. Perhaps, then, he was faced with a crucial element of the legend that he could not alter. Despite all her assertions that Capgrave criticizes Henry VI, Winstead also believes that “Capgrave passes up the opportunity to exploit the relationship between Katherine and Constantine for nationalist/royalist ends” (Virgin 168). Conversely, she argues that the earlier prose Lyf does emphasize the Constantine/Britain connection for propaganda purposes, and that these purposes are Lancastrian in nature (Virgin 160). Winstead says of the Lyf, “Evidence of a specifically Lancastrian bias may be discerned in the hagiographer’s preoccupation with political legitimacy” (Virgin 158).

Overall, her argument is cogent. There is, however, one disturbing element in the text that demands a reevaluation. The prose Lyf has this to say about the accession of Constantine the Great to the British throne: “Not long / aftre dyed Constance, the fadre of Constantyne. And his son, / by ryght of his modre, was crownyd kyng of Brytayne, / † at now ys callyd Englond” (55-58; emphasis added). Yes, the prose Lyf was written in the early 1420s, long before Capgrave’s Life – which, recall, was written at a time most historians consider too early for “overt Yorkist sympathies” (Delany, Impolitic 4) – but it was not too early for anti-Lancastrian sentiments. Henry IV dealt with multiple rebellions and plots during the early years of his reign, including ones in the years 1399, 1400, 1403, and 1405 (Cheetham 21-22). Also, as previously mentioned, in 1406 Henry IV legally tried to limit the inheritance of the throne through his male heirs. And, of course, during the reign of Henry V Richard, Duke of York’s father, Richard, Earl of Cambridge, was executed in 1415 after the
The aforementioned Mortimer plot. The dormant Mortimer claim to the throne was not unknown in the 1420s, and such a blatant statement concerning Constantine’s right to the throne requires a deeper analysis. In respect to Richard, Duke of York, Johnson even notes that the “Mortimer legacy was a real one, alive throughout Richard’s minority, and it could not be readily swept under the carpet” (27). In fact, in February 1424 John Mortimer was executed after attempting to escape his imprisonment, prompting Wolfe to observe, “At this most critical time for the Lancastrian House no hint of the rival Mortimer claim to the throne, however faint, could be ignored” (34-35). And, recall that in the previous year, Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, had been sent into virtual political exile as lieutenant of Ireland. Clearly, the prose Lyf was written at a time when the potential of female transmission of authority was an important issue.

Winstead argues that there are “noteworthy” parallels between Constance and Henry IV, though she admits that they “are by no means exact” (Virgin 158-159). She points out that Constance had originally come to England “to reclaim kingdoms that had been driven to rebellion by the emperor’s tyranny and ineptitude,” and connects that with some of the reasons Henry IV gave for his own taking of the throne (Virgin 159). This rings true; after the death of John of Gaunt, Richard II seized his lands, effectively disinheritting Gaunt’s exiled son, Henry Bolingbroke. And, as Cheetham notes, “No man could feel safe when the laws of inheritance could be so arbitrarily flouted” (17). The impetus for Henry IV’s usurpation is indeed very similar to Winstead’s observations about Constance’s arrival in Britain. And yet, from an anti-
Lancastrian point of view, it was Henry IV who had bypassed inheritance laws by seizing the crown.

There are too many details in favor of Winstead’s conclusion to challenge it successfully at this time. Indeed, her point that Thomas Hoccleve compares Henry V to “a new Constantine” in one Balade is germane (Virgin 157). The fact that one early manuscript of the Lyf has been linked to the Carthusian monastery at Sheen, a pro-Lancastrian institution to balance Delany’s pro-Yorkist Augustinians, is also relevant (Virgin 160). However, the question remains: why would a work that makes the “same use of history [that] is found in the writings of professional propagandists” (Virgin 158) include such a blatantly incendiary remark as, “And his son, / by ryght of his modre, was crownyd kyng of Brytayne” (Lyf 56-57)? It would be understandable if this reason was offered for how Constantine became king of France – the English claim to the French throne was through the female line. But, the Lyf specifically states that Constantine became king of “Brytayne” through his mother. Though it is beyond the scope of this study, perhaps a reevaluation of the prose Lyf is required in order to eliminate the possibility that it, too, is a politically subversive text.

The consideration of the prose Lyf, however, does enhance our understanding of Capgrave’s Life. The aforementioned observation that Capgrave does not change the events of Saint Katherine’s vita can, as mentioned, detract from a particular political reading of the text. The key to unlocking Capgrave’s personal agenda is not to be found strictly in his relation of the events of Saint Katherine’s life; instead, the key is in how he relates the age-old events. Capgrave’s narrative asides, such as the
ones discussed above, reveal much about his view of England’s contemporary situation. He asks, “What is a lond whan it hath non hed?” The poignant answer: “The lawes arn not kepte, the lond is desolate” (I.848-849). The comment reflects England’s situation at the time, criticizes (or at the least laments) it. As king, Henry VI was ultimately responsible for allowing such lawlessness to reign. Also, because Gaufron is the king’s uncle “he might more boldely seyn al his entent” (II. 1056). Again, this line is a narrative aside that fits a contemporary problem very well: the complaints of Gloucester and York to have more say in the governance of the realm.\footnote{Gloucester, of course was a member of the House of Lancaster himself, but interestingly many of his enemies were also Lancastrian adherents. In fact, Henry VI might have harbored fears that Gloucester intended to usurp his throne (Wolffe 129-130). Under such a scenario, one might wonder if “Gloucester’s protégé” – Richard, Duke of York – might have been his intended heir (Neillands 34).} As a whole, Capgrave’s narrative asides are both relevant to contemporary politics and revealing about his own views. And almost exclusively, they point to a Yorkist reading of The Life of Saint Katherine.
CONCLUSION

In this study, I have attempted to demonstrate that John Capgrave’s *The Life of Saint Katherine*, when taken into the wider context of Capgrave’s life and world, reveals the author’s Yorkist inclinations. However, I freely acknowledge that in many ways this study is incomplete. Though I have briefly examined some of the most influential factors in Capgrave’s life (e.g., the region in which he lived, the religious organization of which he was a member), and analyzed passages from the text itself, much more could have been done. For example, a complete study would include an analysis of all of Capgrave’s writings, and not just his *Life*. It would also be interesting to examine in detail the nature of Capgrave’s relationship to various prominent fifteenth-century figures: Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; Osbern Bokenham; Henry VI; Edward IV; other English Austin leaders; Pope Nicholas V; and others. Establishing his interaction with such men could reveal much about his political views.

Regardless of this study’s flaws, it has deepened my interest in the literary side of the fifteenth century. Certainly, it allowed me to incorporate my interest in fifteenth-century English history by examining one of the most interesting intersections of history and literature – propaganda – but it also gave me a stronger foundation in East Anglian literary circles c. 1450. It has also brought me into contact with a variety of other literary authors, works and issues of the day, and I look forward to learning more about them in the years ahead.
To end this study, however, I would like to return briefly to the figure of Saint Katherine of Alexandria. I thought I would share one of the more interesting references to her that I have thus far encountered. In Mandeville’s Travels, a description is given of the Church of Saint Katherine on Mount Sinai. Included is an interesting account of a strange yearly event:

...for the ravenes and the crowes and the choughes and other foules of the contree assemblen hem there euery yeer ones and fleen thider as in pilgrymage, and euerych of hem bryngeth a braunche of the bayes or of olyue in here bekes instede of offryng and leven hem there, of the whiche the monkes maken gret pletee of oyle. And this is a gret maruaylle. And sith that foules that han no kyndely wytt ne resoun gon thider to seche that gloriouse virgyne, wel more oughten men than to seche hire and to worschipen hire. (43)

Mandeville’s Travels presents an “if/then” statement of sorts: if the birds make obeisance to Saint Katherine, then men should, too. I am reminded of the statement I made in Chapter I that perhaps Saint Katherine did not exist, but her legend certainly did: in that statement is a defense for studying a figure whose historicity is questionable. A modern “if/then” could read, “If medieval people thought Saint Katherine was important, then modern scholars should, too.” It is interesting, though, that for a long time, Katherine scholarship seemed about as barren as the stereotypical view of fifteenth-century literature. Hopefully, the increasing attention these two subjects have enjoyed over the past several decades will continue for a long time.
WORKS CITED


VITA

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