Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe 1350–1550

Packaging, Presentation and Consumption

edited by
Emma Cayley and Susan Powell

LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS
Picturing the King
or Picturing the Saint

Two Miniature Programmes
for John Lydgate’s
Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund

Sonja Drimmer

The efficacy of a hagiography lies in its ability to move devotees to venerate and emulate its protagonist. This end is achieved through radically different pictorial means in two manuscripts of John Lydgate’s Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund, a double hagiography based on two royal saints. The c.1434–39 dedication manuscript (London, British Library MS Harley 2278), a gift to King Henry VI containing a cycle of 120 miniatures, has been described as ‘one of the most remarkable surviving illustrated manuscripts of Middle English verse in the fifteenth century’. In contrast, the producers of a copy made in the 1460s for an East Anglian family (London, British Library MS Yates Thompson 47) have been compared unfavourably with their predecessors, referred to as ‘cruder and brash in their drawing and use of colour’, having created fifty-three images whose backgrounds are ‘rendered with relentless dullness’. Yet the close associations between the two copies—and the ease with which illuminators copied from models—indicate that, far from originating in technical inequality, their differences in execution are due to the circumstances of their commissions. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate how two different pictorial cycles for the same poem could radically alter audiences’ receptions and experiences of the subject of that same poem.

It is now widely accepted that the notion of an ideal text is inapplicable to the medieval and early modern eras; rather, the text was an embodied thing, bearing the marks of its moment(s) of (re)-inscription. In essence, each
time a text was composed, it was ‘packaged’ in its unique physical form and temporal circumstance. The pictorial content that accompanies much of later medieval literature can be understood as a further (and further-removed) layer of this packaging, not in subservience to the text, but rather as an equally powerful partner in shaping the reception of a story or idea. What we find in the two manuscripts addressed in this essay is evidence for precisely how the same narrative took on new meanings and orchestrated different experiences by dint of its distinct visual packages.

In particular, I will show how the later copy of Lydgate’s Lives presents motivated and strategic alterations to an earlier, equally motivated illustrative cycle for the poem. For an abbey whose right to land and self-rule hung in the balance, sumptuous manuscripts recounting the Life of its patron saint were a crucial tool in fortifying his cult as a bulwark against royal encroachment and local resentment. Of course, a project with appeal to both royal and local audiences demanded sensitivity to the individuality of these audiences: an exact replica of a manuscript originally designed for a specific royal recipient could not be counted on to rouse the desired response from a different, non-royal audience. Charged with making the subject of Lydgate’s hagiography compelling to distinct audiences, the illuminators of this poem confronted a crucial question of packaging centred on the saintly and royal identity of its main protagonist: to picture the king or to picture the saint? In answering this question, the illuminators modelled their manuscripts on two very different paradigms, each suggested by the poem itself: the prince’s mirror, and the saint’s relic.

Lydgate’s Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: the poem and its commission

In 1433 Abbot William Curteys commissioned John Lydgate, a monk of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, to write an English version of the Life of their patron saint as a gift to Henry VI for his visit from Christmas of that year to Easter 1434. Lydgate records this commission in the prologue to the poem, writing that:

Thabbot William, his humble chapeleyn,
Gaf me in charge to do myn attendance
The noble story to translate in substaunce
Out of the latyn aftir my kunnyng,
He in ful purpos to yeue it to the kyng. (I. 108–12)

The occasion promised to be mutually advantageous. For Henry’s part, the sojourn constituted a ‘cost-saving measure for the royal household’ as well as a deft show of accord between the monarchy and one of England’s wealthiest and most influential religious institutions. For a king whose
claims to the thrones of England and France were under threat, the significance of the latter should not be underestimated.16

From the perspective of the abbey—or, more accurately, of Abbot Curteys17—the event offered a chance to showcase its impressive grounds, architecture, significance to the local community and, by extension, its right to self-rule. Just twelve years prior, Henry V had issued a strong assertion of religious subordination to royal authority. In a direct confrontation with the Benedictine Order, he summoned its leaders to Westminster in May 1421, demanding a number of reforms that included the suppression of personal accumulation of wealth and a curtailment of the number of days abbots could dwell outside their convents.18 Henry VI's extended visit thus presented a rare opportunity to redress such encroachments and impress upon such a young king (he was twelve years old at the time) the abbey's vital role in the nation's spiritual and political well-being. The composition and gift of an illustrated Life of their patron saint must be seen against this background of royal and religious competition and interdependence.

Lydgate's task, then, was to compile, compose, translate and embellish his sources in a way that would resonate with both its intended recipient and its donors. Recounting the lives of, and successive miracles performed by, SS Edmund and Fremund, the narrative is a collation of various oral and written versions of the two legends.19 The earliest known record of St Edmund, included in the ninth-century Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, is remarkably terse, relating the following under the year 870:

Her rad se here ofer Mierce innan Eastengle and wint[er] setl namon aet Æodforda. and þy wint[re] Eadmund cyning him wiþ feaht. and þa Deniscan sige namon. and þone cyning ofslogan. and þaet lond all geeodon. (and fordiden ealle þa mynstre þa hi to comen) (þara heauod manna naman þa dane cing ofslogan waeran Ighware and Ubba).

In this year the army rode across Mercia into East Anglia and settled at Thetford for the winter. King Edmund fought against them that winter, and the Danes were victorious. They slew the king, completely conquering the land. (Also, they destroyed all the monasteries they came to.) (The names of the chieftans who killed the king were Ighware and Ubba.)20

Over the ensuing five centuries the legend became the subject of great elaboration as the figure of St Edmund rose to the status of national saint, trumped only by Thomas Becket. Collectively, the Edmund corpus 'reflect[s] an abiding concern to foster the cult [of St Edmund] and spread its influence',21 and in Lydgate's rendition, as well as in a Latin version by Abbot Curteys himself, there appears 'that familiar theme of the Abbey's traditional exemptions from outside control'.22 Bury St Edmund's's objective
to affirm its legitimacy as an independent organisation is thus evident in the
steady additions to the mass of Edmund literature, as well as in the content
of these two most recent accounts.

While the addition of St Fremund’s *Life* might strike one as ‘puzzling’, there is reason to consider it as one of these additions intended to affirm
the abbey’s pre-eminence. The earliest extant record of Fremund’s history
is in a Latin poem of about 1220, but he is not linked to Edmund until
the literature of the late thirteenth century, in which he assumes the role
of Edmund’s nephew and avenger. Although Lydgate’s reason for joining
the biographies of these two saints is unknown, there are several aspects of
Fremund’s narrative that suggest that its inclusion may have resulted from
a desire to glorify further the reputation of Edmund. First, Fremund is a
secondary protagonist to whose biography are devoted fewer verses than
that of Edmund. Second, his story is something of a sequel to Edmund’s,
as he takes up the earlier martyr’s cause and retaliates against his assassins.
Furthermore, because so many episodes in Fremund’s legend are similar
to incidents in Edmund’s history, they provide a retrospective spotlight,
bringing Edmund’s story to the minds of those reading or hearing the tale
of Fremund. It is important to point out this aspect of the *Lives* because, in
echoing the legend of Edmund, it champions, both implicitly and explicitly,
the monastery in his name. By reiterating the miraculous history of the saint
whose relics it houses, the legend embellishes its own miraculous history,
enhancing its own reputation.

What the text of the *Lives* presents, then, is a dual agenda to which
Lydgate was admirably suited. As the perennial ‘poet-propagandist’ for the
Lancastrians (or, at the very least, a ‘regal ideologue’) he was the obvious
choice for the author of this work. Renoir and Benson observe that,
throughout the work, ‘Lydgate ... takes the opportunity to discuss proper
political rule as well as sainthood’. In a general sense Lydgate uses the
narrative of the *Lives* to convey the most estimable traits in a monarch: he
devotes large sections of the work to descriptions of the noble characters of
Edmund and Fremund, both kings before they were martyred and beatified.
More pointedly, Lydgate manipulates his sources to advocate, both implicitly
and explicitly, Henry VI’s legitimacy. The poet is dexterous in attending
to several contingencies, ensuring that Henry is portrayed as the natural,
genealogical heir to the thrones of England and France, asserting that
adoptive heirs are equally legitimate and insisting that a king’s legitimacy
is evidenced by the numerous virtues he espouses. At the same time, as
a representative of Bury St Edmunds, Lydgate takes ample opportunity to
prioritise pious obligation over royal prerogative. And he is especially keen
to praise a monarch’s respect for monastic self-determination. As in many
royal hagiographies, it is the conflict between a king’s duties to his people
and to God that predominates in this text.
The prince's mirror and the saint's relic
Like Lydgate, the team of scribe and book artists charged with producing the presentation manuscript took into account the desires of both donor and recipient. As John Lowden has argued, it is this presence of a double agenda that defines the 'royal-imperial book [which], if going to the ruler, presents us with the perceptions that others had, or wished to promote'. As I will show, the combination of Lydgate's text and the manuscript's illustrations achieves this end by deploying a specular paradigm that encourages Henry to envision himself as Edmund and to match both the monarchical and saintly ideals he embodies.

The dedication manuscript, henceforth referred to as Harley, contains two frontispieces that initiate this process of conflation between reader/viewer and protagonist. Emblazoned on the verso of its first folio is one of Edmund's two standards, a token 'that no vices never maad hym erre' (General Prol. 28). Within a vertically oriented, rectangular, unframed space, Adam and Eve stand against a deep crimson ground. They flank the Tree of Knowledge, whose shape is transformed by the surmounted Agnus Dei into both a Holy Cross and a Eucharistic monstrance. It is significant that this, the first image in the manuscript, is placed on the verso of the first folio, leaving the recto blank. Presumably, this placement was chosen to allow the frontispiece to face its accompanying text. Indeed, allowing the king to find, upon opening the volume, an image of Original Sin might have set for the legend an unduly pessimistic tone. Instead, the manuscript's producers positioned the frontispiece alongside the opening lines to the prologue, which declare:

Blyssyd Edmu[n]d/kyng martir and vyrgyne
hadd[e] in thre vertues/by g[ra]ce a soureyen pryss
& which he venquysshed al venymes serpentyne
Adam baserpent/banysshed fro paradys
Eua also/be cause she was nat wys
Eet off an appyl/off fleschly fals plesance
Which thre figures/Edmund by gret auys
Bar in his ban[n]er/for a remembrance

(General Prol. 1–8)

The words are visualised later in the manuscript, where we see Edmund warring under this very standard and sporting over his armour a tunic bearing the same image (f. 50'). Because the frontispiece is likely to have been a late addition to the manuscript, it seems that the artist was inspired by the miniature of Edmund charging into battle: as a result, he devised a frontispiece that attempts to reify the very object that the miniature describes. In lacking a frame, the frontispiece draws attention to itself not
as an image but rather as an object, intimating the shape and scale of an actual banner. As Victor Stoichita writes, 'All picture frames establish the identity of the fiction. To give a painting a painted frame, in addition to its actual frame, indicates that the fiction has been raised by the power of two'. Conversely, to deprive the image of a frame, particularly when it is surrounded by a gallery of images within frames, is to un-mediate it and insist upon its object-hood. Thus, while the verses accompanying the frontispiece pledge protection for the king who fights under such a standard, the manuscript itself provides the audience—that is, Henry—with a facsimile of the material with which to do so.

The following image relies even further upon interpictorial citation to consolidate the identities of Edmund and Henry (Figure 4.1). Replicating
the shape of the first frontispiece, it shows three crowns in a descending triangular formation against an azure ground. Also a standard borne by Edmund, the crowns, we are told, signify Edmund’s martyrdom, virginity and royal dignity (General Prol. 50–54); they served, in fact, as the arms of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. At the same time, they prognosticated the future, prophesying Henry’s destiny and right to wear the crowns of England and France in this world and the crown of heaven in the next (General Prol. 65–72). As before, the image reappears later in the manuscript, hung from the trumpets of attendants who lead Edmund to his coronation. Once again, the manuscript presents the audience with a simulacral prop whose use is illustrated in a later, narrative scene.

But the frontispiece truly derives its force from its allusion to imagery that was central to Lancastrian propaganda during the king’s minority. During this precarious period in the monarchy, poster art, poetry and a rash of newly minted coins comprised a public relations campaign aimed at convincing the English and French public of Henry’s right to both thrones.36 Key among the emblems were the twin crowns, the twin arms and the double-branched lineage converging in the single figure of Henry. Lydgate himself deployed this imagery widely, penning an exhaustive supply of verse that invokes the double crown. Among such works is his piece commemorating Henry’s return from France in 1432:

The [p]degree be iust[e] successioun,
As trewe cronycles trewely determyne,
Vnto the Kyng ys now dessended dovn
From eyther partye riht as eny lyne;
Vpon whos heede now ffreshely done shyne
Two riche crownes most sovereyn off plesaunce
To brynge inne pees bitwene England and Fraunce.37

Verbal genealogies such as this were given pictorial form as well, as in an illumination that copies poster art meant to accompany Lawrence Calot’s poem on Henry’s legitimacy.38 In this illumination from a manuscript given to Margaret of Anjou (London, British Library MS 15 E vi, f. 3r), a column of roundels runs down either side of the folio: on the left, against a ground of fleur-de-lis, is the French royal line; on the right, against a ground of leopards, is the English. At the bottom of the folio the two lines converge in a point over which is a roundel framing the figure of Henry VI. An angel hovers on either side, each holding a crown over Henry’s head. In this instance, it is the figure of Henry who completes the triangular formation of crowns imaged on the Harley frontispiece. Likewise, among the new coins minted early in his reign was the blanc aux deux écus, featuring the two arms of England and France side-by-side, centred above which is Henry’s name.39 What all these pieces of propaganda share is a strong visualisation
of Henry as the locus of unification. Moreover, in a brilliant fusion of royal support and monastic self-promotion, the Bury illustrators have subsumed the icons of Henry VI's monarchical lineage under the aegis of St Edmund. The frontispiece of the three crowns flags the recipient of the manuscript through potent visual allusion to the abbey's support, while predicking that support on Henry's commitment to their monarchical ideal.

The manuscript's producers, in appending the two frontispieces, promote this ideal effectively through a manipulation of specular politics. Lydgate's poem, certainly, positions Henry as the rightful heir to Edmund and his legacy, but the two frontispieces, as quasi-props, encourage Henry to be Edmund, not just succeed him. Such a precedent guarantees that, in every mention of Edmund's name, Henry hears his own name implied; in every picture of Edmund, Henry sees a reflection of himself. According to Lacan's famous formulation, the mirror stage

is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual's formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an 'orthopedic' form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. Thus, the shattering of the *innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits.40

A formative phase in the development of the self, the mirror stage occurs when the child identifies himself with the image reflected back at him in the mirror. This identification causes a startling rupture in the child's experience of the world, as he becomes aware that it is experienced not only first-hand, through his own eyes, but also second-hand, as the world looks back at him. What he finds in the mirror is himself, but not himself, a version that differs from his own perception of himself but which offers the possibility for curatory practices that shape how he might appear to the world. Lacan's notion is, in essence, a twentieth-century update of the Augustinian conception of the *speculum* as a paragon, in which the viewer sees both what she should be and what she is.41

In the hands of its intended pre-adolescent recipient, the Harley manuscript of the *Lives* functions perfectly according to this paradigm. Edmund does not merely represent himself but he also mirrors the prince who, in gazing upon him, is made to understand that he is gazing too upon himself. The artists of these two frontispieces crafted images that would reflect back at the twelve-year-old Henry a promise of the perfectibility of his present imperfect self: and if the cult that sprang up around Henry
after his death is any indication of the identity that he himself cultivated, the Harley illustrators were successful in their efforts.\textsuperscript{42}

When, approximately thirty years later, another team collaborated to produce a manuscript of the \textit{Lives}, a vastly different set of expectations shaped its appearance. Yates Thompson 47, henceforth referred to as YT, was probably made at Bury St Edmunds between 1461 and 1465.\textsuperscript{43} There is no internal evidence identifying its original owner, but I believe there is sufficient information pointing to Elizabeth Fitzwalter of Attleborough.\textsuperscript{44} As a member of a wealthy family with deep roots in Essex, her ownership of a manuscript of a local saint's life would have been entirely typical. The absence of a patron portrait or even the Fitzwalter arms suggests, further, that this manuscript was not specially commissioned, but rather purchased by or gifted to Elizabeth shortly after the death of her first husband.\textsuperscript{45} Though this final suggestion cannot, at present, be proved, there is every reason to believe that its destination (whether via commission or speculative production) was for a wealthy local family with ties to the abbey.

Equally unverifiable is the relationship between YT and Harley 2278. The text of the majority of the poem is largely unaltered from Harley, but its order differs from the prototype and the poem has been expanded. Apart from minor discrepancies in orthography, the text proceeds almost entirely unchanged from Book I to the final line of Book III in Harley.\textsuperscript{46} Forty-one additional stanzas (1521–62) are appended to Book III, and accounts of miracles occurring between the time of the completion of the presentation manuscript and 1444 are included in fifty-eight eight-line stanzas. These later miracles are composed in the style of Lydgate, although their authenticity has been questioned.\textsuperscript{47} Significantly, the \textit{General Prologue} was moved to the final pages of the manuscript, where it is followed by the envoy.\textsuperscript{48} Although the illustrations of YT and Harley are drastically different in style, their shared images and a number of remarkably similar compositions suggest some affiliation, whether via another copy of Harley, a set of preparatory drawings for it or a maquette. Furthermore, it is probable that Harley 2278 left the royal collection once Henry VI had reached adulthood: it was during this time that he gave away many of his books in acts of largesse. Perhaps the subsequent owner of Harley showed the manuscript to the producers of YT.\textsuperscript{49}

Of YT's fifty-three images, forty-nine depict episodes represented in Harley, with minor variations in composition.\textsuperscript{50} Only the four pictures that accompany the additional miracles in YT are not illustrated in the earlier manuscript. As Kathleen Scott has shown, five miniatures in particular exhibit the strong influence of Harley over the later copy, as they are near duplicates in their compositions and minutiae:

1. John Lydgate kneels at the shrine of St Edmund, beseeching the saint's aid in composing the legend (Harley 2278, f. 9'; YT 47, f. 4').
2. The scene of Alkmund’s pilgrimage, with the widow’s prophecy and the king genuflecting at the feet of the pope (Harley 2278, f. 12r; YT 47, f. 6v).

3. Edmund’s arrival in Eastern England, with the miraculous five springs (Figs 6, 7).

4. Edmund shot with arrows (Harley 2278, f. 61r; YT 47, f. 49v).

5. Fremund and cohorts, travelling as pilgrims (Harley 2278, f. 79v; YT 47, f. 65v).51

The remarkable similarities between these images indicate not only that the deviser of YT had access to images in the earlier manuscript (whether from the original manuscript itself or in an intermediary volume or maquette form) but also that the lack of correspondence between other miniatures resulted from the artist’s decision not to adhere to the model.

Perhaps the most profound distinction between Harley and YT is the latter’s rejection of the earlier manuscript’s royal-political agenda.52 Here the alliance forged between Henry VI and St Edmund in the presentation manuscript is entirely absent, an omission achieved not through emendation of Lydgate’s text but rather through the manipulation of its order and illustration. As mentioned above, the General Prologue was moved to the end of the manuscript, a sign that the manuscript’s producers were sensitive to the influence of narrative order and the powerful precedent set by this introductory text. After moving the General Prologue, the production team reduced the overwhelming frontispieces to final insignias (Figure 4.2). Cast as escutcheons and located centrally at the foot of the page, Edmund’s standards have been assimilated to marks of ownership. In so doing, the arms proclaim that this is not merely a book about Edmund but that it is also a book of Edmund, one that he in some manner possessed and declared as his own. As Hans Belting has argued so eloquently, the coat of arms, as a proto-portrait, assumes the status of a place-holder, which in this instance articulates a rhetoric of saintly presence.53 The simulation effected here enacts the ‘indwelling personality’ of the medieval image, manifesting the divine person in his material representation.54 In transforming Edmund’s standard into a mark of ownership, the illustrators of this manuscript liken the book not only to Edmund’s own possession but also, like contact relics, to a prosthesis of his self. As such, the book becomes a reliquary, the flesh of its folios proxying the body of the saint whose story they relate.55

Reader response confirms the reliquary nature of the manuscript. Beneath Edmund’s arms the second-generation owner of the manuscript included her own name and dedication of the book to her daughter, writing: ‘thys boke gyftan to my lady beaumoun[t] by har lovfynge moder margaret
ffyrz wauter w[i]t[h] all my hart’. Margaret Fitzwalter’s decision to write this dedication beneath Edmund’s arms is telling. While the Fitzwalter arms are nowhere to be seen in this manuscript, the space beneath the heraldic insignia of its holy protagonist has become the site of its owner’s personal stamp. Making contact with St Edmund’s surrogate body, his marks of ownership have become her own. Structurally, this process of imitation and transference parallels Eucharistic absorption, so that, partaking of the body of the saint, Margaret herself shares a measure of the divine.

In comparing the two treatments of Edmund’s standards we see how changes in shape, placement and frame dictate the visual references they deploy and, in turn, the reader’s/viewer’s encounter with the saint: for Henry VI the manuscript functions as a hand mirror in which he sees himself and
as a prop with which he broadcasts that image. For Margaret the manuscript functions as a relic and the vehicle through which she unites her own self with the object of her devotion. While Lydgate’s text lends itself congenially to both the specular and the reliquary models, it is the text’s appearance in an illustrated manuscript that determines which of these models is at work.

The saint’s shrine and the king’s throne

With these two paradigms established, I would like to observe figural representations of Edmund to assess how they further orchestrate the viewer’s experience. Because, generally speaking, the manuscript that is considered technically ‘inferior’ plays second fiddle to its ‘superior’ counterpart or model, I want to reverse the trend and analyse YT first, outside the Harleian shadow.

Lifting the cover to the volume, it is an iconic image of King Edmund that first confronts the viewer (Figure 4.3). The image corresponds to the verses it precedes, which declare the subject of the poem, ‘the noble story ... of saint Edmund martyr, maide, and king’ (l. 1). It likewise conforms to an audience’s expectations by figuring the object of interest according to compositional conventions of iconic frontality: Edmund is both at the front of the book and frontally facing the viewer. Furthermore, the miniature’s frame evokes the shape of a triptych, with the canopy to Edmund’s throne extending above the border and creating a tripartite space. The crowned figure enthroned before the viewer is undoubtedly a king, but, with the instrument of his later martyrdom—an arrow—in his right hand, the depiction has a memorial resonance. Unveiling this first folio of the manuscript, we are not so much looking at an illustration as contemplating an altarpiece.

What is most conspicuous about this image is a certain lack. Far from filling the stage of space in which he sits, Edmund is flanked by a figural absence. He is the sole occupant of the picture plane, accompanied by neither attendants nor devotees. Viewed within the common visual context of the donor portrait—often seen on lateral wings of triptychs similar in shape to this miniature—this absence is so prominent that it demands to be filled. A favoured prefatory miniature in several Lydgate manuscripts, other images of Edmund unanimously include supplicants, usually Lydgate himself. In light of the commoner format, I would argue that this space is a lacuna meant for the reader/viewer to fill. Corresponding to the simulacral relationship between hagiography and reliquary, this gap assimilates the foramina, or portals, common on saints’ shrines such as Becker’s and Osmund’s at Salisbury. These apertures were designed to allow worshippers physical access to relics, enabling bodily contact with the saint’s body. Certainly, in a visual sense, the wings of this miniature do not imitate foramina, but rather they rest on an embedded material
Figure 4.3 Edmund Enthroned.
John Lydgate, Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund.
Bury St Edmunds, c.1461–1465.
London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 47, fol. 1r.
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infrastructure that motivated supplicants to insert their bodies where a gap presented itself. Lacking any kind of hermetic encasement, the image begs the viewer to draw near.

Once again, reader/viewer response indexes the saint's magnetism. The manuscript remains in excellent condition, although erosion on the present miniature and deliberate damage to three others record an early audience's visceral connection to the subject of this hagiography. The opening miniature shows heavy signs of wear and rubbing in isolated and pictorially significant locations. The gold filigree on either side of Edmund has flaked off, the paint over his shins and the adjacent drapery over the throne is completely absent, revealing the pencilled underdrawing, and the paint over his face, chest and shoulders has likewise worn away. The erosion of paint
in these locations discloses the kind of digital engagement that mimics how a devotee would kneel in reverence before a holy statue. Placing her fingers beside Edmund, embracing his legs as a supplicant, and daring even to caress his face, the pious audience's tactile response to this tiny altarpiece attests to its irresistible allure. Three other miniatures in the manuscript reveal a further consequence of this allure: a devotee appears to have indulged in an emotional outburst against Edmund's aggressors, smudging and rubbing their faces, even tearing at the page. This act of aggression was, as I am arguing, encouraged by the 'packaging' of Lydgate's text in YT, which through visual associations made the saint's presence seem to inhere in the folios of this book.

A very different set of associations is sparked by the page on which the same introductory verses appear in the dedication manuscript. Text, image and graphic intertwine here to conflate the subjects of our, or, more accurately, Henry VI's, gaze. A half-page miniature (Figure 4.4) that intromits Henry VI into the narrative itself rests above the opening lines to Book I, which declare:

The noble story to putte in remembraunce  
Of saynt Edmund martir maide & kyng  
With his support my stile I wil auunce  
First to compile aftir my kunyng  
His glorious lif his birthe and his gynnyng  
And be descent how that he that was so good  
Was in saxonie born of the roial blood (I. 81–87)

While the verses announce Edmund as their focus, the image illustrating them displays Henry enthroned. Seated against a chancel screen, or perhaps within a chapter house, the king is surrounded by both retainers and the Black Monks of Bury. In his analysis Nicholas Rogers has argued that the scene 'embodies features of presentation iconography ... [and] should rather be interpreted as a depiction of the admission of the king and leading courtiers into the confraternity of St Edmund's, just before their departure, an event described in the poem'. Rogers is right to note both aspects of this miniature, but, rather than insisting that it represents only a single moment, I would argue that the miniature is much more (deliberately) ambiguous. Henry rests his right hand on a book extended to him by a kneeling monk, a tell-tale feature of presentation iconography. At the same time, the book being presented to Henry is doubled in the form of the blue codex flanked between two officiating monks and lying on precisely the same vertical axis that Henry himself occupies on the picture plane. Collapsing the activities of indoctrination and presentation into a single visual event, the image suggests that it is Henry's very acceptance of the book which guarantees his absorption into the brotherhood.
Figure 4.4 Presentation of the Book / Henry’s Admission to the Confraternity.
John Lydgate, Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund.
Bury St Edmunds, c.1434–1439.
London, British Library, MS Harley 2278, fol. 6v.
Copyright © The British Library Board.

More than that, an image found further on in the manuscript asserts that such an induction cements more than fraternity and launches a transformation whereby Henry becomes the subject of the lines his image illustrates. The presentation/induction scene reappears in a modified form several folios on, in the coronation ceremony of Edmund (Figure 4.5). As before, Henry is confronted with an enthroned king beneath a pink-and-white patterned canopy, surrounded by attendants and officials of the faith. However, while a distinction between clergy, nobles and king is maintained in the image of Henry VI, an affinity between these groups is forged in the depiction of King Edmund. With almost all members clad in white, with the scene set in an ambiguous locale and with no participants kneeling,
the relationship between monarch and clergy is imaged as one of equality and harmony. Moreover, the scene is set at eye level, entreating the viewer to enter the space, whereas the image of Henry enthroned is viewed from a disembodied eye hovering above the scene and set off from it by a stone wall, submitting it to a colder and less inviting form of inspection. Through the visual cross-reference between the presentation/induction ceremony and Edmund’s coronation, Henry is encouraged to embrace the Bury monks’ idealised vision of kingship and led to believe that it lies entirely within his grasp. In exchange he is, in the words of Sartre, relieved of ‘the burden of imagining his divine right’.
The five springs: a monarch’s right or a saint’s miracle?

Finally, I would like to compare a set of images whose differences mobilise the specular and reliquary paradigms established early in each manuscript’s programme in order to inspire two different kinds of reverence. In the episode they illustrate Edmund arrives in East Anglia to accept the crown and sceptre bequeathed to him by his deceased uncle, Offa. As a token of His approval, God causes the earth to become verdant and flow with five springs where once there was only barren earth (II. 747–59). The images that illustrate this scene in each manuscript are so similar in composition as to intimate a direct line of influence from Harley to YT. Yet their stylistic differences and minor discrepancies speak volumes about their respective attitudes towards Edmund’s sanctity and his supernatural faculties.

The artists of the Harleian manuscript illustrated this scene with an image that carefully avoids over-empowering its protagonist (Figure 4.6). At the top of the miniature God emerges from within a cloud in the sky, His hand raised in a gesture of benediction, and with golden beams radiating out from His form towards earth. Edmund, just below, gazes in His direction, guiding the viewer’s eye not only towards God in the heavens but also towards the verses above the image, which open with the words, ‘thoruh goddis myht’ (l. 666). Edmund is placed at the centre of the miniature’s lower register, situated between his attendants on the left and the five streams on the right. His gestures, pose and garb distinguish him particularly from his companions: donning a gold crown and a sumptuous black surcote with gold trim, Edmund clasps his hands together in prayer. Divided from him by a sliver of negative space between their heads, his six companions, all clad in white, gesture variously in surprise and conversation. To the right each of the five springs gushes forth independently from the land, compartmentalised by the vertical axis stretching up the outline of the hill and culminating in the face of God. To the left of this line Edmund kneels with his left knee bent and his right knee touching the ground. The significance of this pose is clarified throughout the manuscript’s miniature programme where figures kneel in such a manner before those of higher rank, whereas those at prayer kneel with both knees touching the ground. It is clear that King Edmund, as he is here portrayed, bends not as a pious devotee but rather in fealty, as a vassal to his Lord, God. This image, made in the awareness of its recipient’s gaze, is cautious to maintain the distinction between monarchical and divine pre-eminence, expressing it in the gestural conventions of courtly service. In short, Edmund is the lord of his men, but the man of his Lord.

While the image of the five springs in the Henrician manuscript negotiates the sovereign’s position between two worlds, its later counterpart situates Edmund confidently as the fulcrum of an earth kinetic with an autochthonous divinity (Figure 4.7). Preceding, and visually above the
verses that declare 'thoruh goddis myht', the miniature of the five springs omits God's face, focusing instead on the kneeling figure of Edmund. The distinction between him and his companions is less pronounced in the mundane details of rank and wealth, hinging instead on one attribute in particular: the proleptic blue halo around his crown, anticipating his beatification before the fact. Beyond this, the colours of the patterned red and gold robe he wears are picked up and echoed in the garb of his four companions. There is no negative space between them, so that, while it is clear that Edmund is king, the terms of his kingship are attributive only: the crown and the pattern on his garb. In gaze, pose and comportment he is a member of a group. Cynthia Hahn has remarked upon the importance of a royal saint's identification with his subjects in 'divorcing [him] from his
aristocratic origins', an effect that was achieved in an earlier depiction of St Edmund, also made at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds and still housed there in the fifteenth century. Moreover, in addition to minimising mundane distinctions of rank, the miniature denies naturalistic incidentals in favour of an almost hallucinatory vibrancy and symbolic view of this realm. Vivid swatches of emerald, sapphire, ruby and canary yellow cover the surface of this image and burst beyond its frame, suffusing it with frenetic brushstrokes of technicolour. And, while in the earlier image the number of companions joining Edmund lacks value, the number here, along with Edmund, totals five, duplicating the number of springs flowing from the land. All five of these springs have their source, visually, in Edmund himself, whose body divides the spatial plane in three. Behind Edmund, and to the right of the
image, his boat floats in the salty water over which he sailed. At first this might appear to be a superficial detail added for narrative content, but it plays a figurative role here, reminding the viewer of the undrinkable water and the sandy terrain that were. As a result of these features, the land is transformed into a map of divine signs: at its axis is Edmund and his retinue, rending the fierce and inhospitable from the fresh and pure. This image typifies the aims of the pictorial programme, staging Edmund as the embodiment of sanctity, the cause of miracles and the object of devotion.

King Edmund the Luxurious; St Edmund the Crude

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that we look beyond style in order to penetrate the differences between two miniature programmes for the same poem. But in concluding I would like to return to style, itself a potent carrier of meaning. In demanding an imitative response the Henrician manuscript depended upon mimesis as far as possible in order to convince the king that he is, in these pictures, seeing a more perfect picture of himself. At the same time, the mirror-images, resting on the mundane, ensure vigorously that the image on which the king models himself is always an earthbound one, whose power never exceeds that with which a religious institution could remain comfortable. Utterly transforming this naturalism into a visual language of inspecificity, stylised gesture and supernal jewel-like colour, the reliquary manuscript insists upon the ever-present possibility of divinity in this world, a divinity that erupts forth through contact with the saint. Far from reliable indicators of skill, the naturalism of Harley and the supernaturalism of its later counterpart direct their respective readers to evaluate their own position in relation to St Edmund. Wrapping the same hagiography in two very different visual and codicological packages, the producers of these manuscripts ensured that each of their respective audiences would have very different experiences of St Edmund’s legend. And so, in answering the question ‘to picture the king or to picture the saint?’, the illustrators of the Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund choreographed how the audience would picture himself or herself.
29 Huot p. 266 (n. 21).
30 It is worth noting that E is considered such an unreliable source that the attribution of the two *unica* lays to Machaut has been questioned (Earp, *Guillaume de Machaut* p. 337, ‘Scribal Practice’ pp. 310–26). Earp notes, however, that Bent (‘The Machaut Manuscripts’ pp. 72–73) supports the attribution to Machaut.
31 McGrady p. 83.

4: Sonja Drimmer Picturing the King or Picturing the Saint: Two Miniature Programmes for John Lydgate’s *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund*

1 This chapter originated in my MA Dissertation for the University of York (2004). I am grateful to Professor Richard Marks and Professor Tony Edwards for their advice, guidance and support.


3 The most comprehensive art historical survey of hagiographies to date is Cynthia Hahn’s *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley CA, 2001). See also Barbara Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (Binghamton NY, 1994).


5 For a full description of this manuscript, see Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts* II, no. 112. A nearly identical manuscript to YT is housed in Arundel Castle and is described at length in Kathleen L. Scott, ‘Lydgate’s “Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund”: A Newly Located Manuscript in Arundel Castle’ *Vitae* 13 (1982) pp. 335–66. Select images from this manuscript have been digitised and made accessible to the public via the British Library’s catalogue of illuminated manuscripts: <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/>.


7 Scott, ‘Lydgate’s “Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund”’ p. 360. I have not had an opportunity to examine the Arundel Castle manuscript.


9 While the civil disturbances in fourteenth-century Bury are well known, less
frequently discussed are the events of the fifteenth century, which witnessed the rise of Bury’s burgher class and their intense competition with the abbey for control of the region. See Robert S. Gottfried, Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290–1539 (Princeton NJ, 1982).


After a long period of relative disdain and neglect, there has been a surge of interest in Lydgate and his poetry in both monographs and collected essays. Of note are: Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (eds) Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century (New York, 2008); Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (eds) John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England (Notre Dame IN, 2006); Maura Nolan, John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture (Cambridge, 2005); Derek Pearsall, John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-bibliography (Victoria BC, 1997).

A fuller account of the commission and Henry’s visit to Bury can be found in Edwards’s introduction to the Life (pp. 1–3). It is possible, as he suggests, that the commission actually succeeded Henry’s visit. Nicholas Rogers and Michael Seymour have surmised, independently, that it was likely to have been composed at some point between 1434 and 1439. See Seymour p. 10 and Nicholas Rogers, ‘The Bury Artists of Harley 2278 and the Origins of Topographical Awareness in English Art’ in Antonia Gransden (ed.) Bury St Edmunds: Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy (London, 1998) pp. 219–27 (pp. 215, 224).

All quotations and line-references, except where otherwise noted, are from Bale and Edwards.


William Curteys (abbot 1429–1446) had a reputation as an ardent defender of the abbey’s rights, demonstrated, significantly, in his ‘prowess as an administrator’ and the fact that ‘from [his] reign no fewer than 15 archival books survive’ (Thomson p. 34). See also Walter F. Schirmer, John Lydgate; A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley CA, 1961) chapter 2.

For a summary and transcription of letters between Henry V and Abbot Excetre of Bury, as well as the relevant acts and statutes issued at Westminster, see


20 Cited in Loomis p. 83. My translation, with thanks to the editors of this volume for their revisions.

21 J.I. Miller p. 62.

22 J.I. Miller p. 65.


25 Interpreting this doubling more broadly, Somerset writes, ‘Lydgate’s narrative creates a dynastic succession that is not patrilineal (for nephews succeed, rather than sons): it is not even linear (for the dead return to intervene in succeeding events, and the poem begins in and repeatedly reminds us of the present). It is founded instead on the martyric furthering of God’s will’ (Fiona Somerset, “Hard is with seynitis for to make affray”: Lydgate the “Poet-Propagandist” as Hagiographer’ in Scanlon and Simpson (eds) pp. 258–78 (p. 266)).


27 Somerset p. 261.


30 Lydgate’s support for Henry is most emphatically stated in the closing prayer to the poem, which beseeches the protection of St Edmund, with the refrain that he should safeguard Henry VI, “thenherytour off Inglond and France” (III. 1464, 1472, 1480, 1488, 1496, 1504, 1512, 1520).


32 This conclusion is further supported by the location of the second standard
(f. 3r) after a blank recto and facing the text that describes it. The text, in its use of deictics, is, in fact, inseparable from the image it describes, e.g. ‘This other standard’ (General Prol. 49).

33 Edwards notes the anomalous nature of the first gathering (of six folios, as opposed to the standard eight throughout the remainder of the manuscript, excepting the last quire), suggesting that ‘it may have been a late addition to the manuscript ... added in the final stages in the manuscript’s preparation’ (The Life p. 13).


35 Every other miniature in the manuscript, with the exception of the second frontispiece, is bound by a pink-and-mauve frame.


42 Based on stylistic similarities with manuscripts affiliated with the Abbey, Scott claims Bury St Edmunds as its place of origin (Later Gothic Manuscripts, II, no. 112). Because several references to Henry in the manuscript have been replaced with the name of Edward IV the manuscript must have a terminus post quem of 1461. Moreover, owing to the fire that devastated the Abbey in 1463 it is unlikely to have been produced after that date. That Henry’s name remains in earlier parts of the manuscript suggests to me a date early in Edward’s reign, perhaps even straddling Henry’s deposition and his accession.
A reader’s note on f. 107, which I discuss in further detail below, records one owner of the book as Margaret Fitzwalter (d. 1496), the second wife of Sir John Ratcliffe of Attleborough. Margaret was raised in the north of France and relocated to England only upon her marriage to Ratcliffe in 1476. She is thus likely to have received the manuscript from a member of John’s family, most probably his mother Elizabeth Fitzwalter, who herself came from a family with deep roots in Essex, and thus potentially strong links to Bury Abbey. Other details regarding her biography support this conclusion. See ODNB [accessed 14 January 2012]: Ian Arthurson, ‘Ratcliffe, John, sixth Baron Fitzwalter (1452–1496)’, Christopher Starr, ‘Fitzwalter family (per. 1200–c.1500)’; see too ‘Elizabeth FitzWalter’ in The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom (London, 1926), V, 484–86.

Both this manuscript and the Arundel Castle manuscript, its ‘almost identical twin’ (Scott, Later Gothic Manuscripts, II, 308), were joined by a number of other copies of the Lives, all produced by the same scribe (Scott, ‘Lydgate’s Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund’ pp. 335–36)—ample support for the conclusion that they were produced as part of, or comprising, a raft of speculative copies for the local market. For evidence of speculative manuscript production in England see Linne R. Mooney and Lister Matheson, ‘The Beryn Scribe and his Texts: Evidence for Multiple-Copy Production of Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England’ The Library, 7th series, 4 (2003) pp. 347–70.

I. 646–89 have been excised. These lines recount the initial preparations for Edmund’s departure to East England, and his father’s sadness at his impending absence.

Seymour p. 10. Anthony Bale has recently reviewed the nature of these stanzas, concluding that they are, at least in part, genuine Lydgate productions, though not produced at the same time: ‘St Edmund in Fifteenth-Century London: The Lydgatean Miracles of St Edmund’ in Bale (ed.) pp. 145–61.

The final lines of the General Prologue (73–80 and two stanzas of Latin prayer) have been excised. These verses guarantee two hundred days’ pardon to anyone who recites the included prayer to St Edmund.

Scott discusses briefly the relationship between Harley 2278 and YT 47 (‘Lydgate’s “Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund”’ pp. 357–60). A sixteenth-century inscription in Harley, ‘Audelay baron’ (f. 119r), places the manuscript in the hands of John Touchet (d. 1559), eighth Baron of Audley. James Carley, The Libraries of Henry VIII (London, 2000) p. xlvii, postulates that Harley was a gift from Touchet to the king in appreciation for the restoration of his titles c.1512. In the years between Touchet’s acquisition of the volume and its donation to Henry VIII it escaped the royal collection and may have served as a direct model for YT, whose place of production is almost certainly Bury. See my catalogue entry for this manuscript in: Scot McKendrick, Kathleen Doyle and John Lowden (eds), Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination (London, 2011), no. 30.

Many of those images from Harley not selected for illustration in YT are those which expand a given episode into two or three pictorial moments. In a decision driven, perhaps, by economy, the YT producers provided only one illustration for any given episode. For example, three miniatures in Harley illustrate Edmund’s departure for, journey to and arrival in East Anglia (ff 26r; 27r; 27v), whereas the YT artist collapsed departure and journey into a single miniature (f. 26r).

A number of illustrations from Harley not included in this manuscript support this conclusion. For example, YT omits the Harleian illustration that accompanies the episode in which Bishop Kunbertus proves Edmund’s legitimacy before a doubtful crowd of his prospective subjects (f. 29v). Even more significantly, the climax of Edmund’s legend, before his martyrdom, is the inner conflict he experiences between his duty to his people and his duty to God (II. 512–611). Harley illustrates this episode with images of Edmund consulting his bishop, foreshowing violence by laying down his sword before an altar; replying to the messenger of Hinguar, his enemy, and then kneeling in surrender to Hinguar (ff. 54v, 55v, 56r, 58r). YT is pictorially silent on every one of these episodes, skipping from Edmund’s earlier battle with Hinguar (f. 54r) to his capture and assault by Hinguar’s soldiers (f. 60v).


Leslie Ross, Text, Image, Message: Saints in Medieval Manuscript Illustrations (Westport CT, 1994) has observed that ‘[i]n preserving the memory of ... an Abbey’s saintly founder, the libellus itself often assumed the role of a precious relic’ (p. 42). See also Seeta Chaganti, The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance (New York, 2008).

Images of St Edmund enthroned with devotees at his side include Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 46, f. 1r and London, British Library, MS Harley 1766, f. 5v.

If I am correct that this manuscript was produced as a speculative venture (see above), it would make sense that a space next to Edmund was left empty: either, as I argue here, it was meant for the reader/viewer to envision himself, or herself, occupying, or it was intended to be painted over with a donor portrait.


One other image is soiled (apparently accidentally), and has succumbed to subsequent flaking (f. 12v). There are also heavy annotations to this manuscript, mostly executed by the antiquarian John Stowe. See A.S.G. Edwards and J.I. Miller, ‘John Stowe and Lydgate’s St. Edmund’ Notes and Queries 228 (1973) pp. 355–69, and Alexandra Gillespie, ‘The Later Lives of St Edmund: John Lydgate to John Stow’ in Bale (ed.) pp. 163–85.

This sort of tactile engagement was apparently widespread enough (and presumably censured enough) to prompt a defence from Reginald Pecock, who wrote (c.1455) that it ‘ought not to be scorned or rebuked’, asking, ‘Why, in like manner, may not the more love and good affection be engendered towards God or a saint by touch?’ (quoted from James Hall, ‘Desire and Disgust: Touching Artworks from 1500 to 1800’ in Robert Maniura and Rupert Shepherd (eds) Presence: The Inference of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects (Aldershot, 2006) pp. 145–60 (pp. 147–48).
61 On f. 49v the archers are rubbed. On f. 51v the soldier threatening Edmund with a sword has been scratched and smudged, and on f. 51v (Edmund's martyrdom) the face of the soldier who raises his sword over Edmund's head has been rubbed. This last folio even has a significant tear on the upper margin.


65 The distinction between kneeling with one knee and kneeling with two is addressed in several contemporary texts. In Dives and Pauper, Pauper explains that 'to God men shuldyn knelyn wyt bothe knees in token of hys in al oure principal helpe, but to man only wyt þe to [one] kne' (Dives and Pauper, Priscilla Heath Barnum (ed.), EETS 275 (1976), I, part 1, 106). J.A. Burrow discusses this and several other texts that address kneeling in: Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative (Cambridge, 2002) pp. 19–25.


5: Yvonne Rode  Sixty-three Gallons of Books: Shipping Books to London in the Late Middle Ages


3 James Raven, The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade