

# **Looking at T'Other: Robert Thornton's Yorkshire Oryent, c.1400-1473**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the place of the “Oryent” in the socio-cultural milieu of Robert Thornton, a member of the North Riding gentry, circa 1400-1473. Using the figure of Thornton, and his two manuscripts, Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 and London, British Library MS Additional 31042, as a way of entering into this cultural landscape, it situates them in their historical and geographical contexts in order to explore the representations, reception of, and attitudes towards the people and material culture of the “Oryent” (employing Thornton’s own orthography and usage to define this region) as found in Thornton’s socio-cultural sphere. By then exploring both the cultural landscape, and the ideas presented by the manuscripts themselves, this thesis argues that, counter to much current critical thinking, those of Thornton’s circle possessed a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the “Oryent,” and its people, the Jews and so-called “Saracens.”

Firstly it examines the real contemporary presence and usages of “Oryental” foodstuffs, fabrics and animals throughout Yorkshire. It then explores the remembered presence of the Jews, the evoked presence of the Holy Land in the city of York, and how these cultural memories influenced the experience of reading the alliterative romance *Siege of Jerusalem*. Finally it investigates the imagined literary figure of the Saracen, as located in Thornton’s manuscripts, how this figure was informed by scholastic ideas, and how these ideas impacted upon thoughts concerning Saracen conversion to Christianity. The thesis concludes that the Yorkshire literati enjoyed a sustained, informed and positive interaction with “Oryental” material culture that contrasted strongly with their hostile —yet still deeply considered—attitude towards the Jews, whilst their attitude towards the Saracens was more nuanced and, again, had been thought through thoroughly.

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No infinitives were split during the writing of this thesis.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is entirely the result of my own work and I am the sole author. This work has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of York or any other institution. All sources are explicitly acknowledged and referenced as such.

## INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF ROBERT THORNTON

*The trout undoubtedly reeked. Under his breath he cursed the sudden rain shower that had forced him to take shelter, and his own ill luck that the nearest cover had been provided by a stall in the fish market. As each gust of wind gathered pace, flustering the flames of the lamps and shuddering the timber frames of the stalls under which he sheltered, the sour note of rotting trout rose above the thick smell of the fish market and caught the back of his throat. He wrinkled his nose fastidiously and unconsciously wiped his fingers on the black fur trim of his robe, as if to erase the taint of the market along with the scent of the blood and scales. Still, at least the rain looked to be easing.*

*As he looked up, just catching the bells of the Minster marking the hour over the noise and bustle of the market, the windows of the Mercers' Guild hall glowed bright against the darkening gloom. The porters and servants were already gathering beyond the bridge and the market edge, up in Fossgate with the final crates and barrels, laughing and joking despite the long night of labour that awaited them and the even longer stretch of clearing and cleaning that would come with the dawn. For those who served at table the Mercers' feasts were not leisurely occasions. The preparations had been going on all week now, the barrows heading down from Thursday Market piled high with tantalisingly fragrant and lumpy sacks; the butchers' apprentices staggering down from their stalls in the Shambles, skinny shoulders bowed under the weight of the meat-laden trestles. In a couple of years they'd have filled out and become strapping great lads, made bulky and brawny by the work but for now they were scrawny imps, swamped by the pigs and peacocks they bore. His mouth watered slightly, in spite of the fishy stench, at the thought of the dishes that would be placed before him later that evening, and the conversations that would flow as freely as the wine. They could chew over the latest scandal from the Micklegate crowd; someone might have a new romance from the stationers to share. Soon the Mercers and the rest of their guests would come, picking their way over the cobbles so that their robes wouldn't get smirched by the foulness littering the city streets, their wives chattering away, squealing over the threat to their silks and spangles from the puddles left by the now-vanished rain. Perhaps even the mayor himself would come, strolling down from the High Jewry, through the crowds packed into the market square and then past the big stone houses on Jewbretgate—not that the Jews were there any more, God be thanked.*

*Over towards the west the last rays of the dying sun struggling through the clouds caught the white brooding outline of the castle and prison, stark against the sky, and he shivered in spite of himself. It was inevitable really; in a city this big, heaving and teeming with life, with people coming from far and near, and folks from half a dozen other nations beyond the seas, then you were bound to get some disagreements, but even so, he avoided looking at the building that testified to the city's darker hours and its residents' blacker moments. He shivered again, the wind growing more insistent and bitter now, and he turned, a small and elegant silhouette heading into the warmth and society of the guild hall, one more figure in this bustling whorl of activity: a frenetic and multicultural world of education and violence, of fashion and piety, of learning, culture, and crime.*

This world, then, was the world of Robert Thornton: husband, father, avid reader, and failed tax collector. Thornton is best known to the academic community today as the scribe and compiler of the so-called Thornton manuscripts: two large miscellanies or household manuscripts that he assembled in the mid-fifteenth century, and which are now known respectively as Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, or the Lincoln Thornton,<sup>1</sup> and London, British Library MS Additional 31042, or the London Thornton.<sup>2</sup> For well over a century these manuscripts have occupied a preeminent position in scholarship on medieval literature. It is really very difficult to overstate the historical importance of the Thornton collection; not only are both manuscripts fairly large in terms of contents—91 texts in the Lincoln Thornton and 34 texts in the London codex—but they also provide a significant number of unique textual witnesses, with the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* being perhaps the most renowned.<sup>3</sup> A further crucial

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<sup>1</sup> Available in facsimile as D.S. Brewer and A.E.B. Owen, eds., *The Thornton Manuscript (Lincoln Cathedral MS 91)* (London: Scolar Press, 1975). The Lincoln Thornton is the earlier and larger of the two codices, probably compiled between 1420 and 1440. Like the London Thornton it is written on paper in black with some rubrication. There are occasional drolleries and illustrated initials, mostly in the opening two texts, the Prose *Alexander* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. For a fuller description see *ibid.*, vii-xvi.

<sup>2</sup> The London manuscript likely dates from between 1430 to 1450. It has only 179 folios to Lincoln's 312, and again includes some minor decoration. For more details see John J. Thompson, *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript: British Library MS Add. 31042* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), which includes a partial facsimile. See also John J. Thompson, "Robert Thornton and His Book Producing Activities: aspects of the transmission of certain late medieval texts in the light of their present context in Thornton's manuscripts" (unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of York, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> For a complete list of contents see Appendix One. The most authoritative description of the manuscripts' contents, including incipits and explicits is Susanna Fein, "The Contents of Robert Thornton's Manuscripts," in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press,

uniqueness of these codices is the level of exactitude with which we can identify both their compilation circumstances and their compiler: Robert Thornton, lord of the manor of East Newton, fl. c.1400-73. To have two large household miscellanies still extant, that were copied and compiled by the same individual would be extraordinary enough; to be able to locate that compiler geographically (right down to the individual house in fact), as well as chronologically, and then within a specific socio-economic sphere is unheard of elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

A further peculiarity of Thornton's books, one that we must presume was intentional rather than subject to the same whims of chance that ensured their survival, is their immensely broad world view and wide-spanning outlook. Although a large amount of both manuscripts is given over to meditative devotional texts and material focussing on affective Christian piety, racial and religious others have a very heavy presence throughout both codices. Thornton was obviously not unique in choosing texts that feature non-Christian personages but their prevalence throughout his texts is extremely marked.<sup>5</sup> A reader of his manuscripts is taken on a vast-ranging journey

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2014), 13-66. Throughout this thesis I refer to texts by the name by which they are currently known in academic circles, i.e. the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, or the Prose *Alexander*, and which is typically—although not always—in modern spelling. A notable exception to this latter point is *Sege of Melayne* which retains Thornton's own orthography. Generally the title of the edition used also follows this convention, although not always. In certain circumstances, such as *Bevis of Hampton* and *Octavian*, for example, the title of an edition I have used follows a different orthography, specifically *Beves of Hamtoun* and *Octovian*. In these cases, the text is still referred to by its current academic name. Where the work has little or no scholarly currency then I have followed the title given by the text's editor, which in most cases follows Thornton's titles or takes its name from the text's first line. To avoid ambiguity, *Siege of Jerusalem* is referred to as *Siege* whereas *Sege of Melayne* is named in full throughout. Unless stated otherwise all translations are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Comparisons can be made with the fourteenth-century Auchinleck Manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1), although it contains no typical "household" material such as prognostications or recipes; the vast Vernon Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng poet. a.1); the Simeon Manuscript (London, British Library MS Additional 22283), although this latter has a far stronger devotional and pious bias; and the contemporary West Midlands romance compendium British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii. Whilst these codices can all be roughly assigned to a respective geographical location, and an approximate time period, the level of knowledge and accuracy of that knowledge pales in comparison to the available information we have with regard to Thornton.

<sup>5</sup> The Auchinleck Manuscript, in particular, has attracted attention for the presence of Saracens in its narratives. See, for example, Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 108-141; and Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). Saracens or references to the east occur in an astounding fifteen of the extant forty-four Auchinleck texts. However, the manuscript contains no reference to non-Biblical Jews. BL MS Cotton Caligula A.ii contains Jews in one text also found in the London Thornton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, and has Saracens in the romances *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Libeaus Desconus* and *Sir Eglamore of Artois*, all of which are in Thornton's collection, except *Libeaus Desconus*. London, Lincoln's Inn MS 150 contains Classical Pagans in *King Alisauder* and *The Seege of Troy*, and Saracens in *Libeaus Desconus*; British Library MS Egerton 2862 contains *The Seege of Troy*, *Sir Eglamore of Artois*, and more Saracens in *Bevis of Hampton* and *Richard, Coeur de Lion*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61 contains *Libeaus Desconus*, *Sir Isumbras*, and four texts on the Passion, including Thornton's *The Northern*



through the realms of time, space, and other worlds; from west to east, from Antiquity to Agincourt, from Carlisle to Calvary, and from Hell to the Holy Land. In the course of this journey we encounter Jews, Saracens, pagans, the dead, Christians, converts, Brahmins, and Zoroastrians.<sup>6</sup> Here indeed are gods a-plenty.

So what are we to understand from this particular aspect of Thornton's books? More importantly, what might Thornton himself have understood from this particular aspect, or wished to achieve by including it? How were these racial and religious others conceived of or imagined? What other environmental factors might have impacted on the representations Thornton preserved in his folios? How else did Thornton encounter these peoples and their worlds, if he did indeed encounter them elsewhere? And should the presence of Jews, Saracens, and other non-Christians in a fifteenth-century Yorkshire household manuscript collection even come as a surprise to us?

### **Thesis Aims and Methodology**

This thesis aims to explore the place that the "Oryent"—a term I will interrogate below—occupied in the socio-cultural world of Robert Thornton. It examines the representations, reception of, and attitudes towards both the people—specifically the Jews and the so-called Saracens—and also the material culture of the Oryent within the Thornton manuscripts as well as outside of them, in the cultural and physical landscape of the Yorkshire gentry during the fifteenth century. By then exploring the cultural landscape alongside the ideas presented by the manuscripts themselves, this thesis argues that, counter to much current critical thinking, those of Thornton's circle possessed a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the Oryent, and of its people, although their attitude towards the differing aspects of Oryental manifestations on Yorkshire soil was not uniform.

The particular orthography of this term is not accidental. Instead it has been chosen for two specific reasons. Firstly, it is Thornton's own orthography and, since I am investigating Thornton's conceptions of the Oryent rather than a broad nation-wide perception, it makes sense to adopt his specific terminology. The second reason is historiographical rather than historical. Since Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* was

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*Passion*. In comparison, however, Thornton's codices reference religious others in an impressive seventeen texts.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the identification and distinctions between these creeds see this thesis, 161-2.

published in 1978 it has become almost obligatory for any study of the east during any time period to reference Said in some way, shape or form, be it positively or negatively.<sup>7</sup> Here is not the place to comment on the validity of the various applications of Said's thirty-five year old theory in current academic scholarship; what matters to me is that Robert Thornton had not read Said. In adopting Thornton's orthography of Oryent it is my intention to distance myself from the theoretical debates and approaches that rage around Said's work, and consciously to employ a different concept of the east from the geo-politically loaded, fraught and, in many ways, anachronistic one found in *Orientalism*. What we are dealing with here is Robert Thornton's fifteenth-century Oryent.

So what, then, do I mean by "Oryent"? What did Robert Thornton himself understand by the term? On a very basic level Thornton seems simply to mean the lands in the east, that today would roughly correspond with the Near East, the Middle East, and North Africa, and extending into what would then have been known in the west as Persia, but not much beyond. The closest we can approach to any level of geographical exactitude comes from the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. When Arthur's men gain control of the Emperor of Rome's camp they find:

Kamelles and sekadrisses, and cofires fulle riche,<sup>8</sup> [crocodiles]  
 Hekes, and hakkenays, and horses of armes,<sup>9</sup> [Hacks; hackneys]  
 ...  
 They drewe owt of dromondaries dyuerse lordes.  
 Moyllez mylke whitte, and meruayllous bestez, [Mules]  
 Elfaydes, and arrabys, and olyfauntez noble, [Camels; Arabian horses]  
 Ther are of the Oryent.<sup>10</sup>

The Oryent, at least from this text, is the area whence originate camels, crocodiles, dromedaries, Arabian horses, and elephants. From *Thomas of Erceldoune* and *Sir Degrevant*, we learn that the Oryent also produces toadstone and pearls.<sup>11</sup> As such, it

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Suzanne Conklin Akbari best encapsulates and articulates the many pitfalls of adhering to the rather imprecise and frequently all-too-casually applied "medieval Orientalism" in her own study of Islam and the Orient. Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 1-19, especially 5-11.

<sup>8</sup> "sekadrisses" appears to be a scribal error for "cokadrisses" or crocodiles.

<sup>9</sup> Hacks are riding horses, whereas hackneys are small saddle horses.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Brock, ed., *Morte Arthure, or The Death of Arthur*, EETS OS 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871), 2283-9. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>11</sup> James Murray, ed., *Thomas of Erceldoune*, EETS OS 61 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1875), 52; L.F. Casson, ed., *Sir Degrevant*, EETS OS 221 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 641. All references to these texts are by line number.

would potentially include North and Saharan Africa, the Arabian Peninsula including Iraq, and the region around Iran up to the Caspian Sea, possibly extending as far as Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. The elephants pose a slightly greater problem as they could theoretically be Indian or African. While I am loth to claim blithely that Thornton and his fellows were lacking in exact knowledge of the grazing range of *Loxodonta africana* and *Elephas maximus*, there is a fairly large probability that their knowledge of the subject was less than complete. They were, however, aware that elephants did originate in certain parts east.

Yet Thornton's Oryent did not simply extend unbounded towards the rising sun and the earthly paradise. According to the Prose *Alexander* and *Three Kings of Cologne*, the lands beyond the Oryent are those of Ynde, which is commensurate with the supposed Nestorian Kingdom of Prester John found in texts such as *The Book of John Mandeville* and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal*. Only one of Thornton's texts, *Three Kings of Cologne*, mentions Prester John, but it is quite clear in both the Thornton codices that progression into Ynde means that a religious divide has been crossed. As both sets of protagonists—Alexander and his armies and the three kings themselves—head eastwards, the Holy Land and the lands of the Saracens give way to the lands of the Brahmins and the lands where the three kings rule.<sup>12</sup> The religions followed in these realms are quite different from the Abrahamic creeds of the Jews and Saracens. I will discuss the specificities and nuances of these latter two faiths in the second and third chapters but it is worth noting here that although Thornton's Oryent may be a little blurry around the edges, especially with regard to his knowledge of elephantine habitats, it was not completely undefined and it also consciously differed, both in terms of its flora and fauna and again in theological terms, from the regions that bordered it on both west and east.

Equally the Oryent was not, for Thornton, a homogenous zone. As is evident from the array of items produced there and creatures originating there, the Oryent was a capacious and complex place. It was clearly understood to be an umbrella term, encompassing considerable variation and divergence within it, and I have employed it

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<sup>12</sup> The Nestorian kingdom of Prester John is, according to the *Three Kings of Cologne*, brought about by the kings' experiences in Bethlehem and their subsequent following of Christ. During both their outward and return journeys the kings cross a religious boundary, first from their own religion (literary Zoroastrianism at this point) to Judaism, and then back again from Judaism to their own religion, which is now what will eventually become Nestorian Christianity through their actions and those of their descendants.

throughout this thesis as such. I have used it as a term of classification for negotiating this heterogeneous geographical and conceptual realm. Yet I have not divided the physical geography from the mental one because to do so would be both anachronistic and to run the risk of getting too close to Orientalism. Said's declaration that "we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself ... because it is not even trying to be accurate" does not apply to Robert Thornton.<sup>13</sup> For Thornton the Oryent was not simply a place in the mind; it was simultaneously most certainly a real place and he confronted the material evidence for it on a daily basis. Obviously, using a single word to stand in for such a diverse concept means that the term can be slightly unwieldy and does not necessarily express similitude: a camel and a crocodile are both acknowledged by Thornton to be Oriental animals, but it does not follow that they met with similar receptions or were engaged with in the same manner. The Oryent operated on a sliding scale, interrogated more thoroughly in this thesis's first chapter, with each type of item or concept encountered in differing spaces or ways, and granted its own particular reception accordingly.

The terminology I have used for Thornton's home landscape similarly requires a little explanation. Thornton lived in the manor of East Newton in the wapentake of Ryedale, which covered approximately the same area as the Ryedale non-metropolitan district does today. Ryedale formed part of the North Riding of Yorkshire, with Northallerton as the county town. The city of York was a separate administrative entity at that point and not part of the North Riding. Nevertheless, given that these borders were administrative only, and that the North Riding gentry were mobile individuals, the use of Yorkshire throughout this thesis is understood to comprise predominantly the city of York and the North Riding, where Thornton would have spent the majority of his time, but also to extend into the East and West Ridings.

However, the intention of this thesis is not to create a dichotomy of Oryent positioned against Yorkshire, but instead to explore the confluence of the two and how the latter reacted to the former's presence on its soil, both in physical manifestations and in the world of the cultural imagination. This thesis, therefore, straddles and melds the realms of the imaginary and the material. The obvious differences between the two notwithstanding, I make no divide or claim that the imaginary is only encountered in the imaginative literature, or that historical documents are necessarily the site of

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<sup>13</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 71.

encountering the real. Analysis of the Thornton texts has been informed by historical evidence, both material and documentary. Throughout I have explored both the manuscript material and the potentials and possibilities of the particular environment in which the Thornton manuscripts came into being, with no hierarchical distinction between the literary and the historical, or between documentary sources and material culture.

My approach is very firmly interdisciplinary, investigating and combining the available material, and compiling a narrative from a very wide and, in places, disparate range of evidence. I have attempted not only to give a voice to every piece of evidence, irrespective of its medium, but also to situate that voice in its environment, whilst simultaneously interrogating that environment. It is a peculiar tendency of scholarly investigations to grant a certain sterility to historical figures and situations. Noting names and places, possibly ages and occupations, is frequently considered sufficient without interrogating these notions any further. In a great deal of academic discourse it sometimes seems as if historical figures do not exist *hors de* documentary source. They are not subject to emotion, personal preference, or idle whimsy, and they rarely seem to have any connection or response to their environment, or even to their known actions. Robert Thornton spent a great deal of time and effort (and probably money too) in constructing his manuscripts yet the most that has so far been imputed to him is that “he must have been known as a man of probity and strength of character, as well as a man of bookish piety.”<sup>14</sup> And Thornton’s piety is the only personal quality attributed to him. Whilst his piety does seem undeniable, there has been no acknowledgement yet that possessing piety is not necessarily a barrier to also possessing a decent sense of humour, for example, or for liking exciting stories. In attempting to counteract this tendency, however, I am not engaging with the discourse of historical fiction or re-enactment. This thesis is emphatically not an attempt to construct an imaginary autobiography, nor is its aim to insert words into Thornton’s mouth. Instead this thesis is an exploratory work of cultural history; a social history of his literary texts. It is a walk through his physical and socio-cultural world.

Chapter One is primarily new historical research into three aspects of Oriental material culture found throughout Thornton’s Yorkshire: imported foodstuffs, textiles,

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<sup>14</sup> George R. Keiser, “Robert Thornton: Gentleman, Reader and Scribe,” in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 71.

and animals (or rather, as we shall see, their representations). It reveals the extent of a physical Oryental presence on Yorkshire's soil, concluding that there was sustained, multifaceted, informed and positive interaction with Oryental material culture throughout many areas of Thornton's world. The second chapter explores a different aspect of this world by shifting its focus to the texts circulating within it. This chapter examines the implications of reading and copying *Siege of Jerusalem*, a text in which Christians annihilate Jews, in fifteenth-century York. Thornton's York was a city that had not only annihilated its own Jewish population back in 1190, and was still living with the legacy of its Jews, but that also regularly evoked the Biblical Holy Land through the *Corpus Christi Plays*. The third and final chapter takes a more literary approach and explores the imagined figure of the Saracen found in the manuscripts, focussing particularly on physicality and conceptions of the Saracen body. It concludes that although there was not the overt and total hostility towards Saracens that was displayed towards Jews, Christians still expressed anxieties over Saracens, viewing them as potential wasted Christian matter.

This idiosyncratic methodology allows us to grasp a much deeper picture of attitudes towards racial and religious others, but that picture is very strictly chronologically, socio-economically and geographically limited. Robert Thornton's Yorkshire Oryent is not, and is not intended to be, synonymous with "what people thought about the East in the Middle Ages." It is disingenuous to suggest that the Thornton manuscripts are merely the product of a generic fifteenth-century gentry interest in literary culture.<sup>15</sup> In generalising, emblemising, or expanding Robert Thornton and his books we lose a vast amount of their richness and potential. After all, manuscripts are not written in a vacuum. Whether we like it or not, and irrespective of the damage it does to our wishful extrapolations, the manuscripts are the product of certain chronotopic collisions: they were written by *that* man, in *that* time, living in *that* specific cultural and socio-economic milieu, who had access to a particular range of exemplars, and from which range he made *those* exact choices, some of which are no longer visible to the twenty-first century codicologist. Furthermore, many of those choices have never been visible. Given the care with which he clearly compiled his manuscripts it seems unlikely that Thornton simply copied down every single text that

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Joel Fredell, "The Thornton Manuscripts and Book Production in York," in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 109.

came his way. We will almost certainly never know, for example, which texts he left out.

There is no shortage of scholarly work on Thornton's choices and his manuscripts but it has naturally tended to fall into very distinct categories. In their 2014 edited volume, *Robert Thornton and His Books*, for example, Michael Johnston and Susanna Fein identify five specific strands that have provided the backbone of Thornton Studies.<sup>16</sup> Many extremely detailed codicological and palaeographical studies have been undertaken on the physical structure of the manuscripts, ranging from the initial identification of Robert Thornton as the scribe back in the nineteenth century to analysis of the paper watermarks, the order in which the texts were copied, and even down to Thornton's formation of certain graphemes.<sup>17</sup> The identification of the East Newton Thornton as the scribe obviously led to a body of historical work on his biography, which has developed into an area that focusses predominantly on Thornton's involvement in the Northern book trade and the methods by which he may have obtained his exemplars.<sup>18</sup> In the field of literary scholarship the analysis has been more

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<sup>16</sup> These categories are those that explicitly engage with the Thornton aspects of the material, rather than literary analysis of the texts, or authorial studies, such as those of Richard Rolle's works. The five categories are palaeographical, codicological and Thornton's working methods; Thornton as compiler; Thornton and manuscript decoration; Thornton's biography and literary networks; and Thornton as pious reader. Michael Johnston, "Introduction: The Cheese and the Worms and Robert Thornton," in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 7-10.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Sarah M. Horrall, "The Watermarks of the Thornton Manuscripts," *Notes and Queries* 27 (1980): 385-386; John J. Thompson, "The Compiler in Action: Robert Thornton and the 'Thornton Romances' in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91," in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study: Essays From the 1981 Conference at the University of York*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 113-24; Thompson, *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton*, passim; Mary Hamel, "Scribal Self-Corrections in the Thornton *Morte Arthure*," *Studies in Bibliography* 36 (1983): 119-137; Ralph Hanna, "The London Thornton Manuscript: A Corrected Collation," *Studies in Bibliography* 37 (1984): 122-30; Ralph Hanna, "The Growth of Robert Thornton's Books," *Studies in Bibliography* 40 (1987): 51-61; Joel Fredell, "Decorated Initials in the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript," *Studies in Bibliography* 47 (1994): 78-88; Phillipa Hardman, "Windows Into the Text: Unfilled Spaces in Some Fifteenth-century English Manuscripts," in *Texts and Their Contexts: Papers From the Early Book Society*, ed. John Scattergood and Julia Boffey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 44-70; Phillipa Hardman, "Compiling the Nation: Fifteenth-century Miscellany Manuscripts," in *Nation, Court and Culture*, ed. Helen Cooney (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 50-69; John Finlayson, "Reading Romances in Their Manuscript: Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 91 ('Thornton')," *Anglia* 123 (2005): 632-66; John Ivor Carlson, "Scribal Intentions in Medieval Romance: A Case Study of Robert Thornton," *Studies in Bibliography* 58 (2007): 49-71; Michael Johnston, "Robert Thornton and the *Siege of Jerusalem*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 23 (2009): 125-62; John Finlayson, "The Context of the Crusading Romances in the London Thornton Manuscript," *Anglia* 130 (2012): 240-63; Keiser, "Gentleman, Reader and Scribe," 67-108. For a more complete bibliography see Michael Johnston, "Introduction," 7, n.14; 8, n.16; 9, n.17-19.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, A. McIntosh, "The Textual Transmission of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*," in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. N. Davis and C.L. Wrenn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), 231-40; George R. Keiser, "Lincoln Cathedral MS 91: Life and Milieu of the Scribe," *Studies in Bibliography* 32 (1979): 158-79; George R.

uneven. Understandably, given the immense and varied quantity of texts, there has been no concerted attempt to treat multiple themes across the manuscripts as a whole. However, it is only relatively recently that the manuscript texts have been seen as having a degree of relation to or interaction with each other, rather than only connections to other variants of the same narrative found elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> Certain texts, particularly the unique alliterative works, have become literary behemoths. Most notably amongst these latter is the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which has attracted a vast amount of attention as a result of its relationship to Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. The political debate poem *Wynnere and Wastoure* has similarly been subject to close scrutiny, but predominantly for the context of its composition in the mid-fourteenth-century rather than its appearance in the London Thornton around a century later.<sup>20</sup> Others have slipped almost completely under the critical radar; since it was edited in 1885, there has been only one piece of published research that discusses more of *Ypokrephum* than just its title.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* rarely receives more scholarly attention than a passing footnote.<sup>22</sup> In many cases, it is in the older and more technical works, such as Carl Horstmann's 1895 edition of the Rolle material and Henry MacCracken's editions of so-called "Lydgatiana,"<sup>23</sup> that actually provide the

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Keiser, "More Light on the Life and Milieu of Robert Thornton," *Studies in Bibliography* 36 (1983): 111-9; Michael Johnston, "A New Document Relating to the Life of Robert Thornton," *The Library* 8 (2007): 304-13; and Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 159-205.

<sup>19</sup> Some texts have been examined together—*Wynnere and Wastoure* and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* are sometimes considered to function as a pair—but there has been very little comparison between texts that are not bound directly next to each other in the manuscripts.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Thorlac Turville-Petre, "Wynnere and Wastoure: Where and When?" in *Loyal Letters: Studies on Alliterative Poetry and Prose*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994), 155-66; Lois Roney, "Winner and Waster's 'wyse wordes': Teaching Economics and Nationalism in Fourteenth-century England," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 1070-1100; and Britton J. Harwood, "Anxious Over Peasants: Textual Disorder in *Winner and Waster*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006): 291-319.

<sup>21</sup> Julie Nelson Couch, "Apochryphal Romance in the London Thornton Manuscript," in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 205-34. For more on *Ypokrephum*, see this thesis, 132-4.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Carlson, "Scribal Intentions," 63 n. 53; Keiser, "Gentleman, Reader and Scribe," 68 n. 5; and Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 175 n.51.

<sup>23</sup> Carl Horstmann, ed., *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and his Followers*, 2 vols. (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1895-6); Henry Noble MacCracken, "Lydgatiana," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 131 (1913): 40-63; John Lydgate, *John Lydgate: The Minor Poems, Vol. I: Religious Poems*, ed., Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS OS 107 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911); John Lydgate, *John Lydgate: The Minor Poems, Vol. II: Secular Poems*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS OS 192 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); and Henry Noble MacCracken, "Lydgatiana: The Three Kings of Cologne," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 129 (1912): 50-68. In a similar vein is Karl Brunner, "Handschrift



most representative overview of the manuscript material, its immense variety and the sheer quantity of individual texts of which it consists. Conversely though, these works do not engage in consistent literary analysis; rather, they typically focus on linguistic patterns or grammatical issues.

Where this thesis differs from previous scholarship, both on Thornton himself and also on the manuscripts, is that it traces a particular theme across the whole of the manuscript contents as well as through Thornton's life and cultural milieu. It is as concerned with Thornton's reading habits as it is with his shopping, and not just his shopping for books. No such attempt to interrogate the Thornton manuscripts in conjunction with Thornton's lived environment has been made on this scale before. Johnston employs a comparable concept, though on a much smaller basis, when reading the gentry and landowner concerns in *Sir Degrevant* alongside Thornton's documentary record.<sup>24</sup> Siobhain Bly Calkin engages with a slightly similar enterprise in her study of the Auchinleck manuscript's Saracens, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*.<sup>25</sup> However, the Thornton collection offers the opportunity for a far richer cultural investigation on account of the amount we know concerning Thornton and his life; Calkin is obviously restricted in her study by the lack of specificity concerning the Auchinleck manuscript's origins and owners. On a wider scale, there have been other concerted efforts to take a holistic approach to Middle English manuscripts, including those of Thornton. Indeed, Fein and Johnston's volume specifically claims to follow the principles laid out by Derek Pearsall in 1995 with regard to the Vernon manuscript: focussing on "a single, late medieval English manuscript, putting it under the microscope of a team of scholars working from different scholarly perspectives."<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, their avowed purpose is to contextualise the Thornton manuscripts as objects; it is to shed light on book production and Thornton's idiosyncratic working methods. As expressed above, my aim for this thesis is different. This thesis is not a manuscript study in the traditional sense. Instead it takes a prosopographical approach to a highly specific socio-cultural milieu, that of Robert Thornton and his peers, which employs a variety of sources as it tracks the place of the Oryent within this milieu. It combines the documentary record of the Thornton family, historical evidence

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British Museum Additional 31042," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 132 (1914): 316-27.

<sup>24</sup> Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 190-2.

<sup>25</sup> Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, passim.

<sup>26</sup> Johnston, "Introduction," 12.

concerning Yorkshire during Thornton's lifetime, material culture from medieval Yorkshire, and the imaginative world entered into through the manuscripts themselves in order to reconstruct an environment where east encountered west: Robert Thornton's Yorkshire Oryent.

### **Putting Thornton in his Place**

Before we turn to the matter of the Yorkshire Oryent however, we must look at the man around whom this investigation centres: Robert Thornton. Paradoxically, for all the quantity of information in his manuscripts, the man himself remains an enigmatic figure. No images or descriptions of him have been discovered; we have no idea if he was tall or short, blond or brown-haired, plain or good-looking, a bit of a dandy, or not at all sartorially inclined. Perhaps he had more to recommend him to his two wives than his Ryedale estates; for all we know, he may even have been a bit of a local heartthrob in his youth. Speculation aside however, the available store of information is very small. Robert Thornton made some impact on the documentary record, but not a great deal. The historical evidence for his specific life is fairly sparse, and, in places, rather uncertain. Partly this uncertainty is a result of the very common name he bore—there were at least seven different individuals called Robert Thornton in Yorkshire during this time—and so unless specifically described as “Robert Thornton de Newton” or similar then there is always a level of ambiguity. Even allowing for some margin of error generated by misidentification, there remains very little verifiable information available. Even the time period spanned by his life, c.1400-1473, is only conjecture. He was evidently alive and well in 1468 when he was witness to a land grant of property.<sup>27</sup> He was also almost certainly dead by the start of 1474; a Robert Thornton is described as deceased in a deed dated 10 March of that year but it is unclear if this particular dead Thornton is the desired one.<sup>28</sup> Providing a birth date is equally approximate. As Johnston has noted, Thornton cannot have been born later than 1407.<sup>29</sup> However, Keiser places his birth around 1395, and it certainly seems more probable that Thornton was born under Ricardian rule rather than Henrician. He evidently inherited the estate from

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<sup>27</sup> *CCR: Edward IV*, ii. 1468-76, 28-29.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Travis Clay, ed., *Yorkshire Deeds vol. viii*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 102 (Leeds: Knight and Forster, 1940), 125. No place of origin is given for this Robert Thornton so it may not refer to the scribe. However, by this point “our” Thornton would have been well in to his seventies and so his death around this time is probably to be expected.

<sup>29</sup> Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 161.

his father, another Robert Thornton, so he was presumably the eldest surviving son.<sup>30</sup> He had at least one brother, Richard, and he may have had three more brothers and a sister, John, Thomas, William, and Alice, but otherwise next to nothing is known about his immediate family.<sup>31</sup>

If we look at the absolute bare bones of his documented life there is nothing particularly remarkable to be found. According to the seventeenth-century family pedigree—whose reliability and veracity are, as noted, extremely suspect—his parents died around 1418, the same year that he married a woman called Agnes.<sup>32</sup> For Thornton to have attained his majority (and thus be able to enter directly into his inheritance) by this date he would need to have been born around or before 1397. Thornton certainly married at some point though, and according to the Close Rolls he had three sons: William, Thomas and Richard.<sup>33</sup> Just after his marriage he potentially went to war; a Robert Thornton, *armiger*—which could well have been him—is listed in the Muster Rolls as having fought in France in 1420.<sup>34</sup> Thornton was twice noted in tax assessments as holding lands in Ryedale in 1428,<sup>35</sup> and was a witness to property transactions in 1436 (a quitclaim relating to property in Newton-le-Willows);<sup>36</sup> again in 1443 (recorded on three separate quitclaims);<sup>37</sup> in 1449 (on one quitclaim along with his sons),<sup>38</sup> and finally on the abovementioned occasion in 1468 (on a charter along with

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<sup>30</sup> Although “our” Robert Thornton was one in a line of three Robert Thorntons to be lord of East Newton, the Thornton family did not reserve Robert exclusively for the eldest son. The first of these three Roberts was, according to an extremely dubious family pedigree of very questionable accuracy, located in the seventeenth-century *Autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton*, the second son, and heir to his brother William who died at some point after 1360. Thornton’s own eldest son was called William and, if the pedigree can be trusted, there was a fairly even sprinkling of Richards, Roberts and Williams throughout the family, with no clear precedent for the name of the eldest son. Charles Jackson, ed., *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton of East Newton, Co. York* (Durham City: Surtees Society, 1875), 344, insert 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; York, BIHR York District Probate Registry, vol. 2, f.26<sup>v</sup>-27<sup>r</sup>. See also Keiser, “Life and Milieu,” 160-1.

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, 344, insert 2. Johnston claims that the *Autobiography* only notes the marriage of Robert Thornton, Lord of East Newton in 1418, and that he could therefore either already have inherited, or it could mean his future position. Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 160, n. 3. However, the pedigree lists Robert Thornton senior as dying in 1418, so although the scribe may have already inherited by a matter of months (or even less) on the occasion of his marriage it cannot have been by a great deal.

<sup>33</sup> *CCR: Henry VI*, v. 1447-1454, 111.

<sup>34</sup> Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 161.

<sup>35</sup> *Inquisitions and Assessments Relating to Feudal Aids 1284-1431*, vol. vi: *York and Additions* (London: HMSO, 1920), 314, 316.

<sup>36</sup> M.J. Stanley Price, ed., *Yorkshire Deeds vol. x*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 120 (Leeds: Knight and Forster, 1955), 122.

<sup>37</sup> *CCR: Henry VI*, iv. 1447-1454, 159, 189.

<sup>38</sup> *CCR: Henry VI*, v. 1447-1454, 111.

his eldest son William).<sup>39</sup> In September 1441 he acted as an executor of Sir Richard Pickering's will, and he was commissioned as a tax collector for the North Riding in June 1453.<sup>40</sup> Some unspecified problem arose during his tenure of this latter; he and three fellow collectors were removed from their posts as a result of "certain sinister information" (*sinistris informacionibus*). However, all four were reinstated and re-commissioned in May 1454 so the issue cannot have caused irrevocable ructions. Around the same time Thornton was sued in the Court of Chancery by one William Thornton for withholding proof of ownership (presumably a land deed) from him.<sup>41</sup> No outcome of this dispute is recorded. Finally, Thornton was distrained for knighthood in 1458.<sup>42</sup> As we saw above, Thornton was definitely alive and of sufficiently sound mind and reputation to act as a documentary witness in 1468, and he was probably dead by early 1474. The above described records comprise all the directly recorded and verifiable life events of Robert Thornton, squire of East Newton in the mid fifteenth-century.

Quite frankly, it is not a great deal of material or information. Various attempts have been made to expand on these details but it is George R. Keiser, Thornton's most assiduous biographer, who has been the only scholar who has attempted to augment the documentary record of Thornton's life to any great extent and to gain an idea of Thornton's day to day life. His most recent publication provides his fullest treatment of the subject.<sup>43</sup> Keiser certainly provides the most comprehensive summary of Thornton's life but the thread that Keiser traces through the Thornton records has a specific bias; Keiser's interest in Thornton lies almost entirely in Thornton as scribe and book compiler, rather than Thornton as, for example, a member of the North Riding gentry or as a tax collector. Johnston's extremely thorough work situating Thornton in his socio-economic stratum, and within the literary circles of his time, presents a different aspect of Thornton's life but Johnston extends this expansion of the documentary evidence only as far as it pertains to the concerns of the so-called "gentry romances" which are his primary area of interest. Consequently, the available scholarship on the man Robert

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<sup>39</sup> CCR: *Edward IV*, ii. 1468-76, 28-29.

<sup>40</sup> York, BIHR York District Probate Registry, vol. 2, f.26<sup>v</sup>-27<sup>r</sup>. London, TNA C60/260; TNA C60/261.

<sup>41</sup> Johnston, "A New Document," 307.

<sup>42</sup> TNA E370/2/22 m.2<sup>r</sup>. Denizens holding land to the value of £40 per annum or more were required, or distrained, either to become knights (and therefore fulfil all the financial and martial requirements of that office), or to pay a fine in order to avoid these obligations. Thornton's holdings, then, were presumably above this amount. See also Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 164-5.

<sup>43</sup> Keiser, "Gentleman, Reader and Scribe," 67-108.

Thornton (which is, without exception, based upon Keiser's seminal studies) almost universally employs Thornton to facilitate access to the literary networks of book production in the north of England.

Such an approach has obviously widened our knowledge of these literary networks, but an unfortunate side effect has been that Thornton's literary exploits carry all before them. The idea of Thornton having some form of life outside of his manuscripts has somehow not been fully considered. Keiser even goes so far as to claim that "[t]he establishment of a private chapel in 1397 by the Thornton family of the manor of East Newton in Ryedale, Yorkshire, initiated a series of events that likely culminated in the copying of the two most important and well-known Middle English miscellanies," namely the Thornton manuscripts.<sup>44</sup> Keiser's assertion is based on two documents: an entry in the York Archbishopal Register granting permission for "Robert Thornton de Neuton" (the scribe's father) to have masses celebrated at a chapel at East Newton,<sup>45</sup> and the aforementioned dubious family pedigree. Keiser suggests that, "Robert Thornton the elder, seeing his son and heir passing from infancy to boyhood, thought this a fit time to arrange for regular visits by a cleric, possibly a chantry priest from Helmsley, who would celebrate mass and other services for the entire family and conduct the education of the scribe."<sup>46</sup> Thornton senior could indeed have had his son's pedagogical needs uppermost in his mind, although to be passing into boyhood in 1397 in time for his father's putative train of thought regarding his education, the young Robert needs to enter the world in about 1393 or 1394, making him almost eighty years old by the time he died. Keiser may well be completely correct in his surmises, although it seems a little reductive to imply that the final result and crowning glory of Thornton's education—assuming, of course, that the chapel at East Newton was established with this intent and that Thornton junior did indeed commence his education under the aegis of the chaplain—was the creation of the two Thornton manuscripts. It is self-evident that without an education of some variety Thornton junior could never have embarked on his literary enterprise. Nevertheless, if we look more closely at the documentary records concerning the Thorntons at the turn of the fourteenth century and then flesh that out a little more, we find that completely different interpretations can be placed on the material. I am not saying that these interpretations

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. Taking Keiser's argument to its logical extreme implies, therefore, that Thornton's life after the completion of the manuscripts was utterly devoid of intellectual endeavour.

<sup>45</sup> York, BIHR, Archbishopal Register 5A, f. 253<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Keiser, "More Light," 112.

are necessarily correct, but it reveals that the lives of the Thornton family members were far richer, more complex, and far more deeply embedded in their environment than has so far been acknowledged.

1397 was a busy year for Robert Thornton senior to feature in documentary records. Apart from requesting permission to build a chapel, he was also involved in a somewhat less pious endeavour. At some point before 2 May 1398 he and eleven companions, besides “other armed malefactors,” were accused of breaking into the houses and close of Hugh Gascoigne, the parson of Stonegrave.<sup>47</sup> In the course of this raid they allegedly assaulted Gascoigne and his servants, fished in his fishponds, and absconded with fish and goods worth 200 marks, as well as a thousand marks in money. On 2 May a commission of *oyer et terminer* was established to enquire into these supposed events. As the commission members included a certain William Gascoigne, later chief justice of England and probably related to Hugh, it is unclear just how impartial the enquiry was. Unsurprisingly, the commission found in favour of Gascoigne and the perpetrators were required to pay four marks in the hanaper. A large part of the reported raid follows formulaic outlines; assault of servants or stripping a fishery of fish is a standardised feature in reports of such violence.<sup>48</sup> As tempting as it may be to imagine a snoozing trout rent so cruelly from his muddy repose, the circumstances were probably very different. What we can take from the Patent Roll entry, though, is that Stonegrave’s parson Hugh Gascoigne did not enjoy cordial relations with the family at East Newton. Robert Thornton senior, his former servant William Cok, a leper, and a Richard Thornton of Brawby (who may or may not have been a relation), are all alleged to have taken part in this raid on Gascoigne’s property. Potentially, at least a quarter of the raiding party—and possibly more; after all, Robert Thornton senior was clearly on close terms with these individuals—had direct links to East Newton. The interesting point for us, though, is that this incident occurred less than a year after Robert Thornton senior had received permission to hold mass in his private chapel.

Was Robert Thornton senior really motivated to build his chapel by the pedagogical needs of his extremely infant son (who was most likely not even crawling or on solid foods by this point)? Was Thornton senior acting as part of a wider

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<sup>47</sup> *CPR 1396-9, Richard II vol. 6*, 365.

<sup>48</sup> As Johnston notes, a very similar scene is found in *Sir Degrevant*, right down to the emptying of the fish stocks. Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 190-2.

devotional turn inwards amongst the gentry to a more private and personal religious piety?<sup>49</sup> Or did he perhaps just not get along with the local clergy? Was the unfortunate Hugh Gascoigne not to Thornton senior's liking and, possessing the financial wherewithal to avoid Stonegrave Minster, did Thornton senior simply vote with his feet? Whatever breach there may have been between Thornton senior and the minster was certainly healed by 1418 when both Thornton senior and his wife were interred in the minster's north aisle. Their tomb somehow survived the extensive renovations of the nineteenth century, of which their son's tomb was a casualty, and it is still there today. One might also cynically suggest that Thornton senior's funding of the new church roof in the early fifteenth century probably aided any necessary reconciliation process.<sup>50</sup> According to Alice Thornton's questionable pedigree, the eldest Robert Thornton (father to the chapel builder and grandfather to the scribe) died around 1401-2 so it may even have been the previous generation rather than the younger one that provided the impetus. If his parents were infirm or invalids then having a chapel and priest on site would be an obvious addition to make in Thornton senior's domestic arrangements. Conversely, having a pregnant wife, or the expectation thereof, may also have been a factor. If Mrs Thornton did indeed bear the six children listed in Alice Thornton's pedigree (and possibly more if we consider the potential for miscarriage or stillbirth) then not having to attend the village church some distance away must have come as a great relief to her.

However, we do have to remember that these circumstances may be completely unrelated to each other. Thornton senior may just have fancied having a chapel at home. We also have to remember that although the Thornton manuscripts have been of incredible importance to the academic community since the mid-nineteenth century, they were probably not Robert Thornton junior's sole *raison d'être*. I may be rather cynically appropriating "Robert Thornton, fl. 1400-73, member of the Yorkshire gentry and failed tax collector" as a convenient puppet around which to anchor this study but

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<sup>49</sup> Christine Carpenter, "Religion," in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 138. See also Malcolm Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy Among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480*, Borthwick Papers 50 (York: Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, 1976); and C. Richmond, "Religion and the Fifteenth-Century Gentleman," in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Barrie Dobson (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), 199.

<sup>50</sup> Rosalind Field with Dav Smith, "Afterword: Robert Thornton Country," in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 263. The corbels of the minster's fifteenth-century ceiling are still decorated with the Thornton family crest of a chevron and three thorn buds, identical to those on Robert Thornton senior's tomb.

that Pinocchio-esque usage should in no way elide the fact that once upon a time Robert Thornton was a real boy. I cannot ignore that Robert Thornton was once walking through the same streets, treading the same spaces as I do today, and possessing an entirely extratextual existence. Literature and reading, or scribal activity, was clearly something about which he felt strongly enough to spend a considerable amount of time in pursuing but he did have other demands on his time. The manuscripts were a major facet of his life, allowing him to travel into the realm of the imaginary; to encounter the distant past, other times, spaces, peoples, and even other dimensions, but Yorkshire played a similarly large role in constructing Thornton's world. Robert Thornton's life was not defined by his manuscripts, and as such we should not restrict him just to that world. It is very easy to picture Thornton as some genial old buffer having a chuckle over a particularly pleasing pun in one of his romances. Given the quantity of devotional material in the codices, it is equally simple to construe him as a pious middle-aged devotee of authors such as Richard Rolle or Walter Hilton, perhaps contemplating the Passion or his mortality in his chapel at East Newton. However, when Robert Thornton began compiling his manuscripts he was not a pious (and possibly plump) father, grandfather and stalwart pillar of the North Riding gentry.

In the early 1420s when Robert Thornton started work on what would become the Lincoln Thornton manuscript he had everything going for him. He was a young man about town, newly married, potentially just back home from active service, in full possession of his considerable inheritance and free to do exactly as he pleased with his time. What is more, he was part of the established and fashionable gentry social scene of England's second city and the surrounding area. He lived in exciting and turbulent times; the Hundred Years' War raged through much of his life, and his latter years were darkened by the so-called Wars of the Roses. Thornton would have been a teenager when the young Henry V led the field at the Battle of Agincourt, and an old man when Edward IV seized the crown in 1461. Yorkshire was not somehow divorced from the events that were played out on the national stage. As a young boy in 1410 Thornton could easily have seen Ralph Hastings' head displayed in neighbouring Helmsley; Hastings had made the fatal mistakes of joining Scrope's rebellion and continuing to support Owen Glendower.<sup>51</sup> However, life in the North Riding was not all martial doom and gloom. Yorkshire was emphatically not some isolated and rural cultural backwater.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 259.



Instead, those of Thornton's sphere formed a sophisticated, urbane, and highly educated cultural elite.

Before we delve too deeply into Thornton's socio-cultural sphere it is worth briefly discussing Thornton's socio-economic position. He has previously been described as "fit[ting] the pattern of the typical member of the middling gentry;"<sup>52</sup> as "a prosperous member of the minor gentry,"<sup>53</sup> and as "a man of such relatively low social standing."<sup>54</sup> But what do these descriptors actually mean? Thornton was a member of the lesser or minor gentry. However, it does not necessarily follow that he and his circle considered themselves to be lesser in any way, shape, or form, or even that they acted as such. As Nicholas Orme notes, the gentry were "leaders of fashions imitated by those beneath them."<sup>55</sup> Financially Thornton was certainly very comfortably off; Johnston estimates him to be one of England's thousand richest men, and probably among the top forty-five or so of York and the North Riding.<sup>56</sup> His distraint for knighthood in 1458 also indicates a considerable level of secure comfort as the distraint was linked to the value of his lands rather than to other financial assets. As a member of the North Riding's lesser gentry, Thornton would have been in a very strong position—should he have so chosen to embrace it—to be quite the social mover and shaker. He obviously did not possess the political influence of the nobility as is quite evident from his brief career as a tax collector; unlike the positions of Justice of the Peace or Sheriff, being a tax collector was not an especially prestigious position. Johnston wryly notes that "what emerges unambiguously from [the tax collector] sacking is a reminder that, in the fraught world of the late medieval North Riding, [Thornton] was very much a back bencher."<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, we must remember that one's political standing and one's fashionable standing were not necessarily the same thing. He may not have been involved in the courtly circles of the Nevilles and the Percys but, especially as a young man, Thornton was most definitely able, should he have so desired, to take up a place in the ranks of the North Riding fashionable set.

The North Riding in the fifteenth century was quite the place in which to be a man of means and fashionable tastes. Both literally and figuratively it was the beating

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<sup>52</sup> Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 162

<sup>53</sup> Keiser, "Gentleman, Reader and Scribe," 71.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Orme, "Education and Recreation," in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 80.

<sup>56</sup> Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 165.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

heart of the north. The county town of Northallerton benefitted by being under the control of the Prince Bishops of Durham. Although relatively small, especially when compared to York or the neighbouring borough of Darlington, it acted as the nucleus for the bishop's holdings in Allertonshire, which consisted of over thirty vills and small townships. Consequently, Northallerton was the economic and social hub of the area, as well as being the administrative centre.<sup>58</sup> It was also a convenient resting place and trading centre on the Great North Road, being almost exactly halfway between York and Durham. The Great North Road undoubtedly acted as an artery for the area, bringing travellers and the resultant hostelry trade, migrant workers, dealers, and traders to the towns through which it passed. However, Northallerton also had strong links to the fish trade in the coastal towns of Cleveland, a weekly market (which still takes place, as it did then, on a Wednesday), and a thriving leather industry.<sup>59</sup> Apart from the assizes and quarter sessions, at which the Yorkshire gentry would often have been present, Northallerton also had the annual St Bartholomew fair which would have been a major social occasion for the whole of the north. By the sixteenth century the fair was one of the largest in the country, so large in fact that it was attracting visitors and dealers from as far away as Middlesex.<sup>60</sup> Even if they were not buying cattle or other livestock themselves, Thornton and his friends would almost certainly have joined the crowds; trading news and jokes with the stallholders, listening to the players and musicians, laughing at the jongleurs and fools, and possibly picking up the odd trinket for Agnes that caught his eye.

Ryedale itself, though, was no rural backwater, and nor was East Newton. As Rosalind Field has recently indicated, Thornton's manor lay at the crossroads of Hambleton Street (running between the Vale of Mowbray and the Humber) and the road south from Pickering and Helmsley.<sup>61</sup> Though, as we saw above, a man of some substance, Thornton was socially dwarfed by his powerful neighbours; five miles away in Helmsley was the castle of the Percy-supporting Roos family, who had considerable

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<sup>58</sup> Christine M. Newman, "Economy and Society in North-Eastern Market Towns: Darlington and Northallerton in the Later Middle Ages," in *North-East England in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Christian D. Liddy and Richard H. Britnell (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 139. For more on Northallerton see Christine M. Newman, *Late Medieval Northallerton: A Small Market Town and its Hinterland, 1470-1540* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>61</sup> Field, "Afterword: Robert Thornton Country," 259.

wealth and influence throughout England.<sup>62</sup> The de Ettons, who were retainers of the Nevilles and whose members included the Sheriff of Yorkshire, had a castle at Gilling, around three miles away,<sup>63</sup> and the mighty Neville family were based at Sheriff Hutton, around ten miles south of East Newton.<sup>64</sup> However, not all of Thornton's neighbours were above his touch; the Pickerings, who were retainers of the Neville family, resided in the next parish of Oswaldkirk and Thornton was on terms of some intimacy with them. He acted as an executor of Richard Pickering's will in 1441, for example, and even received Pickering's "nigram togam furratum cum foynes" as a bequest, which we can only hope provided him with an elegant respite from Yorkshire's occasionally less than charming climate.<sup>65</sup> The Pickerings also lent Thornton their version of the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* to copy, which includes remedies supplied by the rector of Oswaldkirk, and this loan has led to speculation concerning a local literary network.<sup>66</sup> There was indeed a great deal of "active book circulation among the gentry and clerics of the North Riding who shared Thornton's intellectual curiosity and zeal,"<sup>67</sup> of which more anon, but perhaps we should not be so hasty in constructing an intellectual or literati sphere around the sharing of this particular text. The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is an extremely prosaic collection of household recipes and treatments for common minor ailments, the type of day-to-day thing that comes up in idle chit-chat with friends and neighbours.<sup>68</sup> It, along with a now-fragmentary herbal, also forms the entirety of the Lincoln Thornton's fourth booklet, coming right at the end of the manuscript, which

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Roos, or Ros, the ninth baron, was a strong supporter of the Percy family and Henry VI, and the stepson of Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset. He was executed by the Yorkists in 1464. Thornton's contemporary, Sir Richard Roos was a courtier and poet. For more details see Keith Dockray, "Ros, Thomas, ninth Baron Ros (1427–1464)," in *ODNB*, and Douglas Gray, "Roos, Sir Richard (c.1410–1482)," in *ODNB*.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas de Etton (d.1404) was a famous military campaigner. His son, Sir John de Etton (d. 1433), was the steward of the royal forest of Galtres between 1405 and 1431; he served as Sheriff of Yorkshire twice (1406–7 and 1412–13), entered Parliament in 1411, and was a Justice of the Peace from 1420 until his death in 1433. For a more complete biography of these two men see J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe, eds., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421*, vol. 3 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1993), 36–8.

<sup>64</sup> For more information on the Nevilles and their potential participation in Thornton's literary networks see Field, "Afterword: Robert Thornton Country," 261–2.

<sup>65</sup> "my black robe with squirrel fur." Richard Thornton, probably the younger brother of Robert, received "meam nigram togam furratam & vi s. viij d. argenti," which hopefully was adequate compensation to Richard for the lack of squirrel fur. York, BIHR, Yorkshire Probate Register vol. 2, f. 27<sup>r</sup>. See also Keiser, "Life and Milieu," 160.

<sup>66</sup> See Keiser, "More Light," 114; Field, "Afterword: Robert Thornton Country," 261–2; and Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 167, 172.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>68</sup> Health concerns are a feature throughout Thornton's texts as is evident by the inclusion of Lydgate's *Dietary* in the London Thornton and the numerous charms for toothache in the Lincoln codex, as well as the presence of the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* itself.

could imply that Thornton did not consider it as part of the overall compilation structure but instead was simply looking for a convenient place to keep it safe. Thornton, the rector of Oswaldkirk, the Pickerings, and their other Ryedale friends might well have sat around debating natural philosophy and the scientific validity of their various cures for toothache and conjunctivitis but the reality could well have been a less scholastic and more practical enterprise. Thornton may just as easily have turned hypochondriac and spent his time pouring over the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, requesting all sorts of remedies for imagined ailments and probably irritating his wife beyond belief. After all, by the time he copied the text he was likely a good few years older than when he started work on the Lincoln codex, and perhaps the black squirrel robe was rather more stylish than waterproof.<sup>69</sup> By its very mundanity, what the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* does indicate is that there was certainly a friendly and neighbourly set of relationships throughout the gentry of Ryedale, probably based on more than intellectual curiosity although it certainly played a major part, and which could have granted the Thornton family a rich and varied social life right on their doorstep.

However, it was the city of York that was the region's cultural, social and financial megalith.<sup>70</sup> Despite the wavering economic fortunes suffered by most of the North Riding throughout the fifteenth century, with the downturn in the wool trade hitting York especially hard, England's second city was still a thriving, bustling and bubbling cultural powerhouse.<sup>71</sup> Standing at the confluence of the River Ouse and the River Foss, York occupied a powerful central position. There was a major road network across Yorkshire that linked York in all directions to the county's market towns: Malton, Pickering, Scarborough, Knaresborough, Selby, Ripon, Beverly, Howden, Pocklington, Richmond, Leeds, and Ilkley. Easily accessed by the old Roman road through Tadcaster, the Great North Road led to Northallerton, Darlington, Durham, and

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<sup>69</sup> Ralph Hanna suggests that, according to the watermarks, the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* was copied at an early point in the Lincoln codex's construction. Hanna, "The Growth of Robert Thornton's Books," 59. Through palaeographical analysis and identifying the morphing of Thornton's graphemes over time, Keiser places the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* at a much later date, probably when he was also working on the latter stages of the London codex. Keiser, "Gentleman, Reader and Scribe," 92.

<sup>70</sup> The most recent and comprehensive studies of medieval York are Sarah Rees Jones, *York: The Making of a City, 1068-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Gareth Dean, *Medieval York* (Stroud: History Press, 2008); and D.M. Palliser, *Medieval York 600-1540* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), but see also *VCH City of York*, 54-116 for a more general overview.

<sup>71</sup> The seminal article for York's fortunes in this period is still J.N. Bartlett, "The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. 12 (1959): 17-33; but see also P.J.P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 22-6, 39-81; and Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley, and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7-9.

the port of Newcastle in the north; southwards it led to Pontefract and then eventually to London. Thanks to the Ouse, which is tidal as far as York, the city had direct routes to the north Midlands and the Pennines and was able to function as a port; via the Humber it was linked to the port of Hull, and thence to the Low Countries with their great mercantile cities, the Hanseatic League, and other overseas trade. Quays and landings, wharves and warehouses lined the banks of the Ouse, the silhouettes of the cranes jostling with those of the church spires and water gates for space on the city's skyline.<sup>72</sup> For its residents, medieval York could be a gateway to the world.

The medieval world, however, was willing to come to York. As well as those who migrated to the city from throughout the rural north, between 1400 and 1480 York was home to hundreds of immigrants from all across Europe. Though the majority of those whose nationality is known came from Scotland, there were also Flemings, Frenchmen, Icelanders, Belgians, Germans, Dutch, Orcadians, Manx, Irish, and the suggestively-named William Maltesse who was listed as a householder in the city in 1443.<sup>73</sup> The immigrant population was not restricted just to the city either. In the same time period there were at least sixty-eight immigrants living in Ryedale.<sup>74</sup> Many of these aliens were taken to the heart of the Yorkshire community; letters of denization were granted to the German Henry Wyman on 26 January 1388, and it was noted that he had "long lived there with wife and house."<sup>75</sup> Wyman served as mayor of York in 1406 and his countryman Henry Market, who received his own letters of denization on 26 February 1430, served as sheriff from 1442-3.<sup>76</sup> Importantly, these external links were not severed with the move to the North Riding; "[t]o the end of the Middle Ages the population of the city was a fluid one, with roots and enduring connexions in many

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<sup>72</sup> For more on the Ouse banks and their infrastructure see Dean, *Medieval York*, 22-7 and "The Later Middle Ages: Communications, Markets and Merchants," in *VCH City of York*, 97-9.

<sup>73</sup> *CPR 1401-5, Henry IV vol. 2*, 204; *CPR 1413-6, Henry V vol. 1*, 194; *CPR 1429-36, Henry VI, vol. 2*, 43; TNA E179/217/45; TNA E179/270/31; TNA E179/217/51; TNA E179/217/50; TNA E179/217/60; TNA E179/217/63; TNA E179/217/68; *CPR 1461-7, Edward IV*, 333; TNA E179/217/71; TNA E179/217/74; TNA E179/217/76; TNA E179/217/77; TNA E179/217/79; TNA E179/217/80; TNA E179/217/51, m.5. *EIDB*. These results were generated by the search terms "Place of residence = York" and "date range = 1400-1480."

<sup>74</sup> TNA E179/270/31, m. 40; TNA E179/217/55, m. 2; TNA E179/217/59, m. 6; TNA E179/217/70, m. 4; TNA E179/211/92; TNA E179/217/59, m. 5; TNA E179/217/55, m. 3. *EIDB*. These results were generated by the search terms "Place of residence = Ryedale" and "date range = 1400-1480."

<sup>75</sup> *CPR 1385-9, Richard II vol. 3*, 463.

<sup>76</sup> For details of Wyman's and Market's biographies see Meg Twycross, "Some Aliens in York and their Overseas Connections: up to c. 1470," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 29 (1998): 359-80. Wyman may have come from Gdansk, while Market was a native of Cologne.

places,”<sup>77</sup> both within and outwith England’s borders. Fifteenth-century Yorkshire was a cosmopolitan and outward-looking place to be.

Even the places that today we might consider to be inward in focus—religious houses—were rich and varied. The North Riding had considerable numbers of large religious establishments, many of which were very wealthy and had extremely strong ties to the local community. The Carthusian Mount Grace Priory near Northallerton was only eighteen miles from Stonegrave, and was the source of one of the fifteenth century’s most popular texts, Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, as well as Richard Methley’s translations and John Norton’s works.<sup>78</sup> There were the Cistercian abbeys at Byland and Rievaulx within Ryedale itself, as well as the Augustinian priories of Newburgh and Kirkham either side of Stonegrave. Further west, Malton had its Gilbertine priory.<sup>79</sup> In the city of York there were houses belonging to all four of the major mendicant orders,<sup>80</sup> nearly fifty parish churches, the north’s wealthiest abbey, the Benedictine house of St Mary’s, the great hospital of St Leonard’s, the Gilbertine house of St Andrew, appropriately enough situated on Fishergate,<sup>81</sup> the Benedictine alien priory of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, the Benedictine nunnery in Clementhorpe,<sup>82</sup> and of course York Minster, the seat of the archbishop. York was absolutely heaving with religious houses and churches, and as an ecclesiastical stronghold it ranked second only to England’s other archiepiscopal city, Canterbury.<sup>83</sup>

York’s civic landscape was just as diverse and multifaceted as the religious sphere. Though the cloth industry was extremely important to the city, and gradual loss of the export trade to textile towns such as Leeds and Wakefield may have led to its economic decline in the later fifteenth century, York was certainly not an economic one

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<sup>77</sup> “The Later Middle Ages: City and Citizens,” in *VCH City of York*, 110.

<sup>78</sup> It is worth noting that Mount Grace was one of the few religious houses founded between the Black Death of 1348-9 and the Dissolution of 1539, another indication of its strength. For Mount Grace’s contribution to devotional and mystical writings see James Hogg, “Mount Grace Charterhouse and Late Medieval English Spirituality,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 82 (1980): 1-43; James Hogg, “Life in an English Charterhouse in the Fifteenth Century: Discipline and Daily Affairs,” in *Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julian M. Luxford (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 32-5.

<sup>79</sup> Field, “Afterword: Robert Thornton Country,” 260. Field includes a convenient map of Ryedale’s religious houses.

<sup>80</sup> The Augustinian Friary was next to the mayor’s residence on Coney Street and Lendal (under what is now the Post Office), and had its own staithe on the Ouse. The Dominicans eventually established themselves just off Micklegate, opposite Gregory Lane (now Barker Lane), and the Carmelites had their friary between the King’s Fishpool and Stonebow Lane (now under the modern Stonebow). It too had a staithe, although on the Foss. The Franciscan friary formed part of York Castle’s western defences and also had access to the Ouse. Dean, *Medieval York*, 90-2. See also Appendix Two.

<sup>81</sup> For details on the excavation of this site see Dean, *Medieval York*, 93-6.

<sup>82</sup> For more on the nunnery and its nuns see *ibid.*, 92-3.

<sup>83</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, 22.

trick pony.<sup>84</sup> The city's tripartite role as administrative centre, commercial hub and ecclesiastical core drew large numbers of visitors leading to a strong hostelry and catering-based service industry. Its considerable infrastructure and communal fabric supported a consistent demand for skilled and unskilled labour. Above all, its numerous markets sustained a wide range of producers, artisans, merchants, dealers, and mongers, including many who were part of specialised or luxury trades such as glaziers, goldsmiths and silversmiths, bell-founders, spicers, embroiderers, lorimers and spurriers, stationers, limners, and furriers. An impressive 126 different occupations are listed in the 1381 poll tax returns and, as Goldberg identifies, "[i]t is to this range of specialist and general crafts, trades, and services that York as a regional capital owed its economic vitality."<sup>85</sup>

But Robert Thornton was neither cleric, nor merchant, nor alien, and his income was generated by his rural land holdings rather than through commerce so what impact did all these urban economic circumstances have on his life? York was a stimulating and exciting city, and with the level of financial independence that he possessed, it is difficult to believe that Thornton was not a regular visitor there. Living only seventeen miles from England's second city, and having the financial wherewithal to make staying at one of the religious houses an easy possibility, it seems unlikely that Thornton would not avail himself of the myriad social, cultural, and literary opportunities that York offered. His eldest son William would later have such strong links to the city that he was described as being "William Thorneton of Yorke" in his will and chose to be buried in the church of St Cuthbert on Peasholme Green.<sup>86</sup> Robert Thornton may not have gone to these lengths but as a young man he would have had every opportunity of experiencing every social pleasure and thrill the city could offer.

Markets and fairs may have originated as primarily commercial affairs but they provided men like Thornton with ample opportunities for socialising. The larger fairs brought in traders from considerable distances, and held a similar draw for the local (and often not so local) gentry. Like the quarter sessions and the assizes they were

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<sup>84</sup> For a thorough survey of the city's economic diversity see *ibid.*, 22-6. For York's contextualisation within the regional and national economies see *ibid.*, 39-81, and Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages, 1348-1500* (London: Penguin, 1990), 84-92.

<sup>85</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, 24.

<sup>86</sup> William did not cut all ties to East Newton however; he bequeathed 6s 9d to the north aisle of Stonegrave Minster, the burial place of the majority of his forebearers, and left his new mass book to serve in the chapel of St Peter at East Newton, the self-same chapel that his grandfather had established in 1397, "until the world's end." York, BIHR, York District Probate Register 5, f. 353<sup>r</sup>. William's will is printed in Jackson, *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, 324-5.

effectively networking events; one could be seen, and be seen to be seen. In a less cynical vein, Thornton and his acquaintances probably simply found them fun occasions. They were opportunities to catch up with friends; to exchange the latest *on-dits* and news; perhaps to compare notes on a new play or manuscript that had recently arrived in the area.<sup>87</sup> Minstrels, entertainers, mummers, and jesters would all have been present, providing a carnival and, appropriately enough for the big church or liturgical feast day fairs, festival atmosphere.<sup>88</sup> Shopping, both in the markets and in the city's shops, would also have been an enjoyable and sociable, but nevertheless extremely important, activity. Even the least sartorially-minded individual has to dress, but for those at the forefront of North Riding society clothing was a highly conspicuous and emphatic method of asserting one's social standing. The Statutes of Apparel meant that one could wear one's wealth and status literally on one's sleeve, but cut, shape and style were equally important ways of distinguishing the fashionable from the merely rich.<sup>89</sup> Whether the young Thornton was indeed a dedicated follower of fashion who had a penchant for "sleves longe and wyde" like Chaucer's Squire,<sup>90</sup> and who sported his *en vogue* pyked crakowes with panache, we shall (perhaps fortunately for his later dignity) never know.<sup>91</sup>

The diversity of occupations to be found in York would also have had important implications for another aspect of Thornton's socio-cultural environment. It resulted in at least 57 craft and religious guilds of York, and possibly as many as 80,<sup>92</sup> all of whom played a role in the civic social and cultural sphere. The religious fraternities often

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<sup>87</sup> Almost all scholarly work on the gentry's cultural networks focuses predominantly on the textual: book ownership and lending, reading groups, or manuscript circulation. See, for example, Keiser, "Life and Milieu," 166-77; Keiser, "More Light," 111-9; D. Youngs, "Cultural Networks," in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 119-33; Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 159-205; and Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy*, passim. It is surely not too much to presume, however, that men and women like the Thorntons or the Pickerings formed friendships with their peers that were not exclusively based around manuscript swapping, and that they were capable of discoursing with each other on numerous other subjects and shared interests.

<sup>88</sup> Often these musicians were provided for by bequests from the gentry. Tim Shaw, "Music," in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 157.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the Statutes of Apparel and textile usage in Thornton's milieu see this thesis, 67-8.

<sup>90</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *General Prologue*, in *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 93. All references to *The Canterbury Tales* are by line number.

<sup>91</sup> For more on gentry fashion see Thomas Tolley, "Visual Culture," in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 170-1; F.E. Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1926); and A. Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996).

<sup>92</sup> "The Later Middle Ages: Craft Organisation and the Guilds," in *VCH City of York*, 91.



celebrated the feast day of their dedication by holding processions, sometimes torch lit, through the town. On these occasions the gentry, and perhaps important visitors from other towns, would be the guild's guests of honour. The procession would almost certainly end in a feast, thus neatly "displaying religious respect for a church festival, upholding the worship of the guild in the city and oiling the wheels of commerce and sound connections."<sup>93</sup> These celebrations may also have included musicians and dancing.<sup>94</sup> The guilds, both craft and religious, were also responsible for other civic performances such as pageants and holy feast day processions, which the gentry would attend. However, they did not always remain as bystanders; in 1441 gentlemen performed a pageant as part of the Beverly *Pater noster* cycle.<sup>95</sup>

The major event of the year for the guilds, though, was the festival of Corpus Christi. In York the procession was a great civic moment uniting the guilds, the civic government and the ecclesiastical powers. York's powerful and wealthy Guild of Corpus Christi led the way, followed by the liveried craft guilds, then the civic authorities with the mayor and the consecrated host bringing up the rear.<sup>96</sup> However, the procession was positively dwarfed by the ambitious and dramatic *Corpus Christi* or *Mystery Play* cycle that depicted the history of the world according to the Bible.<sup>97</sup> The cycle was not the only one that the city staged; occasionally the *Creed Play* or the *Pater Noster Play*, which have since been lost, would be preferred.<sup>98</sup> It is hard to believe that the gentry did not flock to witness the scenes and to take part in the celebrations; after all, if the plays were sufficient to attract Henry VII, who attended in 1486, then surely they would have been a major social occasion for the lesser gentry. But for the youthful Robert and his friends there were also potentially other, far less pious activities to be embraced on a hot summer's night. The dark and fetid alleys and lanes around the Minster Quarter offered a subculture of stews and taverns where a group of young men could seek adventures and entertainment in the city's teeming underbelly.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Keen, *English Society*, 105.

<sup>94</sup> Shaw, "Music," 158.

<sup>95</sup> Rosemary Horrox, "The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century," in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J.A.F. Thomson (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), 24.

<sup>96</sup> Keen, *English Society*, 105.

<sup>97</sup> For a full discussion of the *Corpus Christi Plays* in York see this thesis, 94-102; 106-8.

<sup>98</sup> Richard Beadle, "The York Cycle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85.

<sup>99</sup> For more information on prostitution in York see Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, 149-57, especially 151-3. Goldberg notes that young, unmarried men did not constitute the majority of prostitutes' clients (that distinction belonged to the religious), but both married and unmarried members of the laity are recorded as forming part of the clientele.

Moving back to more salubrious concerns, the other major area that formed part of Thornton's socio-cultural sphere is the one by which Robert Thornton (whether or not it was his intention) inscribed himself into posterity, and the one that has received the most critical attention: the North Riding's literary scene. Understanding of the strength and depth of this element of Yorkshire gentry life has undergone a dramatic revision in recent years; writing in 1979, Keiser could be mildly taken aback that there was "a lively interest in books even in rural Yorkshire."<sup>100</sup> In the most recent investigation into this area, however, Joel Fredell confidently states that York was "a centre of book production that by the end of the fourteenth century rivalled London" and that York during Thornton's lifetime was "a vital place and period for the reproduction of literary texts in England."<sup>101</sup>

York's book industry appears to have had a considerable sense of its own community identity; Kathleen L. Scott, John Friedman, and especially Fredell have identified various decorative features in York manuscripts that form the "distinct and exclusive flourishing style" unique to book production in late medieval York and that are present in a multitude of verifiable York textual witnesses.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, there appears to have been several separate production units operating simultaneously in or around York during the first quarter of the fifteenth century,<sup>103</sup> which is of course when Thornton was initiating his own textual project. The presence of this professional regional style in the Thornton codices themselves opens up a whole range of exciting new avenues for thinking about Thornton's literary networks. As Fredell indicates:

Rather than point to [Thornton's] family associates in the minor gentry nearby as a source of the poems, noting his contact with a major center like York makes far more sense ... the connection to York as a bookmaking center remains crucial: we have to consider the possibility that many more manuscripts and texts than we have previously thought were passing through the literary nexus of York ... the Thornton texts may well have come from York and/or returned to its book professionals available for copy. York thus may have been a center not just for

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<sup>100</sup> Keiser, "Life and Milieu," 167.

<sup>101</sup> Fredell, "Book Production in York," 109.

<sup>102</sup> Joel Fredell, "The Pearl-Poet Manuscript in York," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36 (2014): 19. See also Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490*, 2 vols. (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), 2: 37-9, 97-8, 117-21; and John Block Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners, and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 116. The most important feature is the unique strings of decorative so-called "bubbles," but Fredell notes that York productions also occasionally employed a particular "happy crew-cut lion" that also features in the St William window of York Minster. Fredell, "The Pearl-Poet Manuscript in York," 19.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

devotional writing, the focus of so much scholarly attention recently, but also for the great romance poems moving through the Midlands and north of England then.<sup>104</sup>

Robert Thornton compiling his manuscripts as part of a literati scene that also produced *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the other poems of the Pearl Manuscript puts a very different slant on the majority of research—and as noted earlier there is a great deal—that has previously examined Thornton and his literary networks. It especially calls into question the presence of a previously unassumed relationship between devotional works of piety and secular romances. And yet, because of the extremely large span of Thornton's material, none of these new avenues is necessarily incompatible with other suggestions that have been put forward regarding Thornton's textual procurement or the role of literary circles in gentry recreation.

This York-based professional book production scene was not happening in a regional vacuum. The professional scene would probably have been largest in York as it was the regional economic hub and books were still luxury items, but York was not unique in Yorkshire for having a reading population. The vast numbers of religious houses detailed above, many of which possessed immense libraries, contributed heavily to the North Riding's intellectual world, particularly the mendicant orders who "came to dominate the highest levels of English academic and intellectual life."<sup>105</sup> Some texts, such as the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, obviously circulated on an ad hoc basis between friends and neighbours, whereas others, such as the romances, perhaps required more codified channels for their circulation. However, romances could circulate away from the professional or commercial sphere; Rosamund Allen's hypothesis concerning the transmission of *Awntyrs off Arthure* via the Neville family households could well be valid.<sup>106</sup> With this state of affairs in mind we must then consider the aspect of book production as fashionable trend or societal norm. Did Thornton start compiling to keep up with the Joneses (or perhaps in his case the Pickerings)? What we can state is that there was a complex and multifaceted network of

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5.

<sup>105</sup> Dean, *Medieval York*, 91. For the Augustinian friars' participation in York's artistic and scholarly circles see this thesis, 116-7.

<sup>106</sup> See Rosamund Allen, "The Awntyrs off Arthure: Jest and Jousts," in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Jennifer Fellows et al. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 137-8; and Rosamund Allen, "Place-Names in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture, Coincidence," in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 189, 193-5.

readers, scribes and decorators—professional and amateur, secular and religious—and authors across the North Riding. They were able to transmit their texts through one or more of several channels, and Robert Thornton was an active, although possibly not abnormally so, participant in this network. Whilst this literati sphere did play an important role in the lives of the Yorkshire gentry, it did not represent their cultural or social lives in their entirety. Especially as a young man, but also into his middle and old age, Robert Thornton would have benefitted from living in a thriving, exciting, fashionable and cosmopolitan milieu, with a rich and varied intellectual and social scene. In such a socio-cultural environment, it should perhaps come as no surprise that a young man in possession of a good fortune should have an interest in exploring the world beyond his doorstep. If we look more closely at his physical environment, however, we find that the world was, in fact, coming to him.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE MATTER OF THE ORYENT

**I admit that a grocer's shop is one of the most romantic and thrilling things that I have ever happened upon, but the romance and thrill are centred in the groceries, not the grocer.<sup>1</sup>**

Robert Thornton's geographical and social worlds may have been centred on the North Riding but his cultural and material worlds were far more wide-ranging. A cursory glance through any of his romances reveals an environment littered with items "alien" to England: costly wines, rich spices, Oriental stones, luxuriously patterned carpets, and armoured elephants. Yet just how truly alien were these products to Thornton? And in which ways could he have encountered and interacted with the complex and multifaceted Oryent on a daily basis? This chapter examines three different areas of Oriental material culture: food, textiles, and animals, in order to present a deeper and more nuanced picture of the Oryent's presence in Thornton's milieu, the different ways in which it was received, and the extent to which the Yorkshire and Oriental spheres were intertwined.

### **Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice**

When Robert Thornton's contemporary Thomas Gryssop died in 1446 he left behind his personal effects, several debts, and, as befitted a chapman thriving in fifteenth-century York, the extremely varied contents of his shop. In amongst his wares, which ranged from hats and gloves to paper, knives, and fabrics, lay a considerable quantity of spices. Gryssop's shop had stocked sugar, saffron, pepper, "saunders" or sandalwood, powdered cinnamon, a second type of cinnamon (presumably in stick form), the ginger and cinnamon mix known as cameline, root ginger, green ginger, powdered ginger, the closely-related aromatic rhizome galingale, cloves, mace, and nutmeg.<sup>2</sup> All of these items were imported from distant lands, shipped across oceans and deserts, from far beyond the reaches of Western Christendom. They had sailed halfway round the known world in the dark belly of a merchant's galley; perhaps changing hands on the sun-bleached wharves of the Levant, perhaps being traded for

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<sup>1</sup> Saki, "Clovis on the Alleged Romance of Business," in *Saki Short Stories 2*, ed. Peter Haining (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1983), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Stell, trans., *Probate Inventories of the York Diocese, 1350-1500* (York: York Archaeological Trust, 2006), 569-73. For details of these products and their places of origin see Appendix Three.

silks on a Dutch quay. Finally they were carted overland through drizzly Yorkshire, stacked and sorted in a York shop. And there these foreign spices waited, hopeful of purchase, until they were ignominiously prodded, poked, and catalogued by a prosaic auditor going through a dead man's stores.

"Spices," Paul Freedman has claimed, "were everywhere in medieval gastronomy,"<sup>3</sup> but he need not have been so specific. Spices were simply everywhere in fifteenth-century society.<sup>4</sup> As a key component of incense, they played a major part in religious practice, appearing daily (or even hourly, depending on the size of the church) in ceremonies from baptisms to funerals. For the average worshipper, the smell of Mass, or the scent of a church was, ironically, imported from non-Christian lands. Some spices featured in common medical practice, including in Thornton's own texts: a mixture including cloves, cinnamon, and galingale was used to cure dropsy;<sup>5</sup> ginger was employed in countering the effects of red eyes.<sup>6</sup> Besides these more specialised uses, on a basic level there clearly was also a genuine and sustained societal preference for highly flavoured and piquant cuisine. Up to ninety per cent of fourteenth-century English recipes call for the use of one or more spices;<sup>7</sup> provisioning for a guild feast could involve up to ten different types of spice,<sup>8</sup> and even sugar (itself classed as a spice) came spiced. Spiced food was consumed with enjoyment and relish, and not only in palaces or guildhalls. In fact, a supply of spices may well have been considered a fairly standard requirement for those on business travel. When the mayor of York, the chamberlains, and their retinue sailed down the Ouse to inspect the fishgarths between York and Blacktoft in 1444 they spent the sum of 3s 2d on spices to flavour their

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>4</sup> For overviews of medieval spice usage, introductions to the spice trade, and the social treatment of spices see Freedman, *Out of the East*, and Jean Favier, *Gold and Spices: the Rise of Commerce in the Middle Ages* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1998). For a working definition of "spices" I have followed Bruno Laurioux's description: "De façon générale, les épices sont des substances aromatiques d'origine orientale et donc produits du grand commerce international [In general, spices are aromatic substances that originated in the East, and are therefore products of large-scale international trade]." Bruno Laurioux, "De l'usage des épices dans l'alimentation médiévale," *Médiévales* 5 (1983): 16.

<sup>5</sup> M.S. Ogden, ed., *The Liber de diversis medicinis in the Thornton Manuscript*, EETS OS 207 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Spices were not, however, as commonly used as herbs which were both less expensive and more readily available.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Laurioux, "De l'usage des épices," 16. Laurioux notes that this figure is dependent on categorising sugar as a spice, as it would have been treated at the time.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Rycraft, "Can We Tell What People Ate in Late Medieval York?," in *Feeding a City: York*, ed. Eileen White (Trowbridge: Cromwell Press, 2000), 70.

provisions on the five-day journey.<sup>9</sup> As the total food budget for the trip was £3 17s 2d, including labour, dispensing this sum on mere flavourings was a not inconsiderable outlay. Of the food purchased before departure in York, the amount spent on spices is greater than that spent on wine, pigeons, bread, ale, or flour, and second only to the 8s spent on meat. Obviously, fresh provisions were acquired along the way but the mission mainly stayed in small settlements where only bread and meat were available or, at least, where only bread and meat were purchased. On a second, smaller trip later in the year 8d was spent on procuring an ounce of saffron. Evidently the civic delegates were not prepared to forego seasonings with their food. Yet this prevalence of piquancy in cooking was not entirely innocent. It often became a target for satire or criticism, acting metonymically for wider social critique. Chaucer's Franklin, that well-known arbiter of gastronomy, demanded his sauces be "Poynant and sharp,"<sup>10</sup> but we must remember that Chaucer's Franklin was also an unabashed and inveterate social climber.

To return to Gryssop though, it is worth briefly considering the implications of such a man having such a stash of spices. Details as to the specifics of the occupation of chapman are, at best, somewhat hazy. Acting as the established means of transmitting mercers' goods to the provinces, chapmen could range in status from itinerant pedlars to more established and prosperous merchants with their own premises, trading in some high-end items as well as more basic commodities, rather like our modern department stores. Their trade encompassed a variety of different identities; they served as local merchants and general storekeepers, besides acting as carriers and mercers.<sup>11</sup> Judging by the total value of his estate when he died, some £152 13s 7d, Gryssop was certainly no

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<sup>9</sup> Ann Rycraft, "Messing About in Boats: The York Chamberlains' Accounts, 1444-5," in *Food on the Move: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 1996*, ed. Harlan Walker, (Totnes: Prospect Books, 1997), 260. Rycraft estimates that the entire expedition consisted of around thirty people. This amount need not be particularly unusual for spices. Durham Cathedral Priory spent just over £25 a year on spices, or around 1s 4d per day, for about forty monks. This figure is far more than that spent on the York officials' journey. However, Westminster Priory only spent £9-12 a year on spices for their fifty monks, which makes the mayoral outfit appear hedonistically spice-mad in comparison. As a point of comparison a 2 lb loaf of bread cost around 1/4d. A penny a day could just about feed an individual, assuming that the allowance provided by guilds or almshouses was actually sufficient. Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c.1200-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 274; 253. During this period the average wage for a labourer such as a thatcher's mate was around 3d for a day's work. *Ibid.*, 206. An artisan or skilled worker like a weaver could expect something more like 5d a day, and upwards. A.R. Myers, *London in the Age of Chaucer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Franklin's Tale*, in *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 354.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods, and People 1130-1578* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 213. With the implementation of the London Mercers' protectionist trading policy in 1376, chapmen from the provinces had increased their journeying into London and so increased the supply and range of goods that came out of London.

mere pedlar. The salient point here though is that Gryssop was neither a specialised trader restricted to one individual product, nor was he catering for a market sector available only to those with large incomes. His products ranged from the cheap and basic to the luxurious and costly, and it makes sense to assume that his customers were correspondingly spread out across the socio-economic scale. Gryssop dealt in everyday products available for purchase and consumption by any fifteenth-century Yorkshire resident with disposable income.<sup>12</sup> And herein, I would contend, lies the great paradox of spices during this period. They were simultaneously the aromatic and costly “fruit of Orient” and yet also deeply, deeply normal, even ubiquitous, quotidian commodities. Spices were certainly costly, but they were not necessarily rare. As noted above, spices were not confined to one usage. Equally they were also not necessarily confined to one social or geographical sphere. The catalogued appearance of Gryssop’s spices therefore, casually entangled with his other wares for sale, epitomises their position as a staple background commodity and feature of everyday life, albeit an expensive one.<sup>13</sup>

Did Gryssop and his customers stand in his shop and marvel at the distances these fragrant substances had travelled? When they saw the ginger piled into its barrel and smelled the cinnamon as it spilled from its bag, were they transported to the far-flung lands of the Saracens? Or did Gryssop view such flights of fancy as a waste of time? Was he a seller of Oryental dreams, or were spices and other imported foodstuffs just another set of products to shift, “reduced to pounds, shillings and pence; invoiced, double-entried, quoted, written off, and so forth”?<sup>14</sup> Such questions may be somewhat facetiously dichotomous, but the trade in these products was a practical and commercial enterprise, often resulting in prosaic consumption. Robert Thornton may well have spent his recreational hours in the fictional and fantasy lands of romance Saracens, but in his daily life almonds featured as the antidote to the distinctly unglamorous and mundane malaise of heartburn.<sup>15</sup> For the monks of Durham Cathedral Priory, imported dried fruit played an essential part in their Lenten fasting and it heavily compensated for the absence of meat.<sup>16</sup> Further afield in Ripon, Margaret Pigott consumed spices on

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix Three.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix Three. This list follows the order of goods as set out in the inventory. The spices were apparently kept together, as one would expect, but they were not in any separate area nor were they classified as something different to any of the other products. They were simply saleable commodities from his shop.

<sup>14</sup> Saki, “Clovis on the Alleged Romance of Business,” 77.

<sup>15</sup> Ogden, *Liber de diversis medicinis*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> The Durham monks were not peculiar in this substitution. In Westminster the monks only ate dried fruit during Lent. Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, “Durham Cathedral Priory’s Consumption of Imported



such a regular basis that she considered it worth keeping a spice grater in her parlour.<sup>17</sup> Back in York, the mayor of York's fishgarth trips were not state occasions and the civic dignitaries were not cruising the Ouse to impress the local populace with their pomp and circumstance. Instead they were acquiring evidence for the long-running financial and legal dispute over the fishgarths' upkeep. They ate reasonably simply throughout; they consumed no game, and probably ate in the open on at least one occasion.<sup>18</sup> Their mission was purely one of practicality. The presence of the spices *is* a gesture to the mayor's rank, just as the Franklin's preferences gesture to his social-climbing ambitions, but it also indicates a basic subsistence level considered acceptable for such journeys. Consuming unspiced food on this journey was apparently not a valid option.

It is tempting to speculate that the mayor's spice supply came from Gryssop's shop, but Gryssop did not have a monopoly on York's imported foodstuffs, nor did his death impede York's residents from acquiring such items. When William Duffield, a Canon Residentiary of York, died in 1452 he owed the spicer Thomas Barton of York £3 10s 4½ d specifically for spices, rather than for other reasons.<sup>19</sup> Even assuming that it was only the very rich and the socially aspirational who purchased these products, there was sufficient demand in York to support a Guild of Spicers, whose members were numerous and wealthy enough to mount the (admittedly small) *Annunciation and Visitation* scene of the *Corpus Christi Plays*.<sup>20</sup> In 1466 the executors of Richard

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Goods: Wine and Spices, 1464-1520," in *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Cambridge: Boydell, 2001), 150-1. In this context it is hard to see how dried fruit could have been somehow dangerously other or pagan.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 652-3. Although Pigott could have kept the grater in her parlour (as opposed to her kitchen, larder, or storeroom) for display purposes, the parlour also contained small raisins, half a pound of dates, and white sugar, so the grater was not out of place. Her store room contained mostly household fabrics, although her salt cellar was also kept there, but her larder held only preserving equipment such as kinnels and vinegar. Pigott's estate before payment of her debts came to £118 17s so it seems unlikely that she used a 4d spice grater to enhance her social prestige. Admittedly no actual spices are listed in her inventory but this circumstance means nothing. Comestibles are mentioned infrequently and irregularly throughout these inventories, presumably with only untouched or saleable produce having an assessment value, so unless we are to infer that the vast majority of York residents kept empty salt cellars on display and had larders completely devoid of food, the apparent lack of spices in Pigott's residence does not necessarily indicate a lack of consumption on her part.

<sup>18</sup> Rycraft, "Messing About," 261.

<sup>19</sup> Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 601.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play As Recorded in British Library Additional Manuscript 35290, Volume 1*, EETS SS 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 78-85. All references to the plays are by page number within the edited text, and then by line number within the individual play. Titles of the individual plays, if in English, are not taken from the manuscript itself but were those given to each pageant by Lucy Toulmin Smith in her 1885 edition and that have since passed in to common scholarly use. The spicers are a little tricky to identify exactly as they often overlapped with merchants, apothecaries and other venders such as chapmen or grocers—those who sold products by the gross. Rycraft, "What People Ate," 69; 69 n. 36. The London Company of Grocers, for example, was formed in 1345 out of the Pepperers' Guild, the equivalent of York's Spicers'

Hawkesworth's will spent 2d on "wine, lemon, raisins and salt" for his funeral.<sup>21</sup> Thornton's own son William left 1d for incense to be used in his obsequies.<sup>22</sup> Produce from the lands of the Oryent was flowing into York and its markets from many directions. The nearby seaport of Kingston-Upon-Hull was obviously a major source of imported goods but for those with a little disposable income who could benefit from economies of scale, the inland trade in England was by no means limited to one's immediate vicinity. The spices that seasoned the students' suppers at King's College Cambridge were purchased in London, rather than Lynn or in Cambridge itself.<sup>23</sup> Despite having Newcastle almost on his doorstep, the cellarer of Durham Cathedral Priory bought his wine from Hull as it was considerably cheaper than that available on Tyneside.<sup>24</sup> Whilst Thornton's purse strings were probably not quite as loose as those of the bishop, he was certainly possessed of some buying power and so could well have purchased goods from various sites across the north of England on a regular basis. However, he need not have ventured that far afield for his shopping. If and when Thornton suffered from heartburn, he could have acquired his curative almonds from a variety of nearby sources.

On 2 November 1464, the year before Thornton's death, a merchant called Richard Symson imported 213 lbs of almonds into the port of Hull on the *Magdalene*, along with six barrels of white herring, one bale of liquorice, two barrels of oil (type unspecified), a further pipe of oil, and 6000 lbs of iron, for all of which he paid £25 in duty.<sup>25</sup> The *Magdalen*'s homeport was Veere in Zealand, and when she docked in Hull she was carrying a variety of materials and foodstuffs, from Rhenish wine and madder to soap, bitumen, and seal blubber.<sup>26</sup> Although Symson never specialised in importing Oriental produce, he clearly thought it was an area worth dabbling in from time to time:

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Guild, although they were not legally incorporated until 1428. Sylvia Thrupp, "The Grocers of London: A Study of Distributive Trade," in *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Eileen Power and M.M. Postan (London: Routledge, 2006), 248-50.

<sup>21</sup> Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 624.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, 325.

<sup>23</sup> John Lee, "The Trade of Fifteenth-Century Cambridge and its Region," in *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks, (Cambridge: Boydell, 2001), 130.

<sup>24</sup> Threlfall-Holmes, "Consumption," 146.

<sup>25</sup> Wendy Childs, ed., *The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453-1490* (Leeds: Yorkshire Archaeology Society, 1986), 70. A pipe measures half a tun, or around 125 gallons.

<sup>26</sup> In comparison, madder grows all across Western Europe and could come from anywhere, whilst soap, bitumen and seal blubber likely came from Scandinavia. Iron probably came from the Baltic region, although Spanish and Scottish iron was also imported through Hull. Herring are found in the Baltic and North Seas, as well as the North Atlantic.

on 2 April 1465 he shipped in three sortes of dried fruit, at a cost of £2,<sup>27</sup> and on 27 January 1472 he imported one pipe of nuts, as well as three barrels of white herring, six barrels of pitch, and a basket of clay pots, again for £2.<sup>28</sup>

Three months after Symson had received his shipment, on 23 February 1465, another English merchant, Richard Dawson, imported 100 lbs of almonds. Dawson seems to have been more inclined to specialise than Symson as he also imported 100 lbs of Corinth raisins, 12 lbs of aniseed, two barrels of oil, 60 lbs of rice, 24 lbs of pepper, two frayles of dried fruit, and 160 lbs of wax, for which he paid £10 in duty.<sup>29</sup> That particular ship, the *Peter* of Hull, also carried considerable quantities of dried fruit, nuts, red wine, sweet wine, seal fat, rosin, and madder. Dawson only used Hull on one other occasion, less than two weeks later on 4 March, at which point he took receipt of a barrel of oil, four barrels of soap, and six barrels of seal blubber, which cost him £13 6s 8d in duty.

Oriental food products were being imported by several merchants, and, although there was not a constant and reliable flow of any individual product entering Hull, as a composite body they feature reasonably regularly. More importantly, they feature in commercial quantities. Our stereotypical modern image of a lone medieval traveller drawing a few withered nutmegs from his robe and causing his audience to gaze in wonder at their desiccated splendour simply does not apply. Two days after the *Peter* arrived, on 25 February, the *Jacob* docked at Hull carrying three barrels of pomegranates and oranges, four barrels of nuts, and six pipes of fruit, besides rosin, linen, wine, white herring, and bitumen.<sup>30</sup> On the same day a second *Jacob* docked with 200 oranges and eighty pomegranates, three pipes and twenty-four bushels of nuts, and 23 lbs of green ginger, as well as oil, wine, madder, white herrings, ash, bitumen, and steel. Such quantities indicate a viable market for such items; perhaps not one so large that it was worth specialising purely on Oriental produce, but certainly one thriving to an extent that validated a merchant's occasional involvement.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 78. Three *sortes* (a type of basket) could represent anything from 270 to 675 lbs of fruit.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 72. A *frayle* or *frail* is a rush basket used for dried fruit, and representing between 30 and 75 lbs of fruit. Corinth raisins come from Greece, predominantly the island of Zakynthos; aniseed is native to the eastern Mediterranean and southwest Asia; rice was probably imported from China or southeast Asia.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

And there were certainly plenty of merchants willingly to involve themselves on this occasional basis.<sup>31</sup> Thornton's heartburn would have stood no chance against the deluge of almonds, nuts, and dried fruit that streamed past the watchful eyes of Hull's customs' officers. When the *Trinity* of Hull arrived in port on 12 January 1463 she was laden predominantly with non-foodstuffs, but William Brounflete imported a barrel of raisins with his alum, kettles, trenchers, and hemp, and Thomas Wrangissh imported madder, soap, oil, and onion seeds alongside his 160lbs of almonds.<sup>32</sup> William Pateryck had an even more eclectic range: alum, wax, felt hats, kettles, sallets, and a roll of buckram accompanied his 100 lbs of almonds; and John Cleybrook partnered a barrel of almonds with iron, wax, and a poke of madder.<sup>33</sup> Thomas Beverley had 400 lbs of dates, as well as four pokes of madder, iron, winter squirrel skins, steel bars, alum, and forty dozen felt hats.<sup>34</sup> Much like in Gryssop's stores we find these alien products casually intermingled with more typically humdrum commodities, having already been integrated to a certain degree by the deals struck overseas and the exchange of cargoes in European ports. By the time these foodstuffs reached England they had been mixed and mingled to the extent that individual items had lost their geographical specificity. They merely contributed to a safely arrived cargo of profit.

This wave of imports is just that which we can trace through Hull, which was by no means the country's leading port. London, Newcastle, Bristol, and Southampton far outstripped Hull in terms of quantity and range of mercantile activity. The accounts of Durham Cathedral Priory reveal that the monks regularly purchased sugar, pepper, aniseed, figs, liquorice, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, mace, and raisins from Newcastle merchants, and occasionally added nuts and saffron to their stores.<sup>35</sup> In the 1470s and 1480s, around 120 lbs of dried fruit every year made its way south from the Tyneside docks to the monks' refectory, and towards the end of the century this figure

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<sup>31</sup> Dawson's abovementioned shipment is anomalous in being reasonably uniform both in terms of geographical origin and being mostly comestibles.

<sup>32</sup> Childs, *The Customs Accounts of Hull*, 53-5.

<sup>33</sup> A *poke* is a bag or bale of no fixed weight. However, a poke of hops weighed four hundredweight, around 400 to 448 lbs.

<sup>34</sup> Beverley was both a resident of Hull and one of the port of Hull's most frequent payers of customs duty during this period. He used Hogg's ship, the *Trinity*, on at least one other occasion (14 October 1462); he had shipments carried on both of the abovementioned *Jacobs*, and his name appears regularly in the records from 1453 to 1473. However, he only imported fruit [fructus] on two occasions, and the abovementioned shipment on the *Trinity* was the only time he imported dates. In fact, he rarely imported any foodstuffs, instead choosing mainly lead, steel, un-dyed cloth [pannis sine grano], and, occasionally, soap. In such choices he was not alone. As the above examples demonstrate, importing Oriental food products directly to Hull was apparently not an area in which one concentrated one's efforts. *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>35</sup> Threlfall-Holmes, "Consumption," 150.

had risen to 225 lbs. Threlfall-Holmes reads these victualling choices as the Durham monks “clearly showing that they considered themselves to be near the top of the social ladder,”<sup>36</sup> but the social awareness and penchant of forty-odd monks for imported foodstuffs is clearly insufficient to explain Newcastle’s prosperity at this time. There was evidently a wider audience in the north-east that also demanded such items.

Looking further south, we know Gryssop himself had professional links with London tradesmen: he died owing money to a spicer and a cap-maker, both of whom were “of London.”<sup>37</sup> He may well have had personal links and personal (rather than professionally incurred) debts, as well: he owed Ralph Verney and Hugh Wyche of London £14 2s in total, and an Alice Gladman of London owed 6s 8d to Gryssop himself.<sup>38</sup> In 1481 London cloth merchants were restricted to entering into wholesale transactions, and these with merchants of York only, as part of the York merchants’ protectionist policies.<sup>39</sup> One must presume then that there were sufficient Londoners (and other non-York traders) active in York’s commercial spheres to constitute a threat. As such, it is perfectly feasible that products that landed on the docks of London could have been consumed off platters in Yorkshire. Unlike fresh fish or meat, the overland transport of spices or dried fruit was not time-critical—some of these products had conceivably spent at least a year just reaching the shores of the British Isles, and even a few weeks on the Great North Road would not have been an issue.

London was naturally the centre for the extremely high-end luxury market, and Venetian glassware, cloth-of-gold, precious stones and spices did all come up the Thames, but London was not unchallenged as the zenith of importation. Nor was the importing of foreign foodstuffs direct to the provinces peculiar to the north. For over a hundred years Southampton had been a cosmopolitan, thriving and multicultural centre, reaching the peak of its prosperity by the mid-fifteenth century. The denizens traded freely with the multitudes of foreign merchants who were a constant feature of the town. By 1447 Edward IV could claim that “Southampton abounds in merchants, sailors and mariners who flock from distant parts to that town with an immense quantity of cargoes, galleys, and ships plying with merchandise to the port there.”<sup>40</sup> The Italians, who monopolised the Mediterranean trade, brought wine, silk, oils, cumin, raisins, fruit,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>37</sup> Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 572.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “The Later Middle Ages: Communications, Markets and Merchants,” in *VCH City of York*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> H.W. Gidden, ed., *The Charters of the Borough of Southampton Volume 1* (Southampton: Southampton Record Society, 1909-10), 70-1.

walnuts, figs, and saffron up Southampton Water, and in return sacks of high-quality English wool headed south, to be sold in Venice or Genoa. More to the point, this process had been an established one for over two hundred years. As Colin Platt points out, the sixteenth-century Bristolian *The Marchants Avizo*, a handbook containing guidelines for judging foreign foodstuffs was “the product of centuries of experience” possessed by merchants across the land.<sup>41</sup> Southampton was sending almonds, galingale, cumin, ginger, figs, raisins, dates, cinnamon, saffron, and pepper to the king in 1255.<sup>42</sup> In 1300 the levels of local customs to be paid on pepper, ginger, zedoary, cinnamon, galingale, mace, cubeb, cloves, saffron, almonds, cumin, rice, and liquorice were inscribed in the so-called *Oak Book of Southampton*, the city’s compilation of its laws, ordinances and customs, and guild regulations.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore not too great a step to presume that these products were, in fact, entering the port, and that the customs officials could subsequently identify them. Yet the vast majority of these foods did not stay in Southampton. The monks of Winchester requested figs, oranges, and almonds; dates, ginger, and raisins headed west to Salisbury and Bristol.<sup>44</sup> From these cities, traders looked north to Coventry and Leicester, especially for dyestuffs such as madder. Oriental comestibles had not only infiltrated the coastal cities and ports; they were also a regular feature of England’s heartland.

With such a proliferation of Oryental and Mediterranean produce permeating Yorkshire’s, and indeed England’s, alimentary world, can these products really be described as “exotic”? If Richard Dawson ever indulged in daydreaming then did he revel in his 60lbs of rice, and perceive himself as a merchant of the strange and glamorous, trading in mysteries and marvels? Or did he look ahead, beyond the port of Hull, to the tables of York, London, and Boston, where his rice and almonds from the Oryent would reappear, sometimes cooked into a dish that bore overt witness to their foreign antecedents, as in *test de turt* or *sawse Sarzine*,<sup>45</sup> but frequently featuring in

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<sup>41</sup> Colin Platt, *Medieval Southampton: The Port and Trading Community, A.D. 1000-1600* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1973), 81.

<sup>42</sup> *CCR: Henry III*, ix. 1254-6, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Studer, ed., *The Oak Book of Southampton* (Southampton: Southampton Records Society, 1911), 9. Zedoary, sometimes referred to as white turmeric, is another aromatic rhizome native to India and Indonesia. Cubeb is a form of pepper, often called tailed pepper, grown mostly in Java and Sumatra.

<sup>44</sup> Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, 159-60.

<sup>45</sup> Constance Hieatt and Sharon Butler, eds., *Curye on Inglysch*, EETS SS 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 48, 86. C. Anne Wilson notes that the names of dishes such as *bruet sarasyns* signalled to their Eastern origins on two levels, “combining the method [of breading, frying and then boiling beef in wine seasoned with ground cloves and sugar] with some typical Saracen ingredients.” C. Anne Wilson,

more innocuously named dishes such as *blawmanger in lenten*,<sup>46</sup> or even *pesoun of Almayne*.<sup>47</sup> The very ubiquity of these products would surely by this point have tempered the strangeness and glamour requisite for terming a product “exotic” as it is understood in academic discourse. As John M. Fyler notes, “familiarity breeds indifference if not contempt,”<sup>48</sup> and a large sector of the population, larger than perhaps we might initially think, were very familiar with these foodstuffs. Of course, any surviving medieval cookbooks are from high status and wealthy kitchens where there was a wide array of ingredients available, besides time and writing materials to spare. These books obviously are not representative of the eating habits of the general populace. Nevertheless, one does not have to subsist on a diet of imported products to be aware that these products exist. In fifteenth-century York one simply had to walk past Gryssop’s shop. On a wider scale, those involved in the provisioning of the feasts where such recipes were used encountered these products, albeit not by orolingual means. The porters and stevedores unloading the ships in Hull, or the carts in front of Gryssop’s shop; the bakers, cooks, and kitchen workers who served the feasting guild officials; the spicers, chapmen, apothecaries, and hucksters who sold these wares elsewhere; even the passing vendors in Thursday Market had some form of interaction with Oryental foodstuffs before anyone had even placed a morsel on their tongue. Chaucer never informs us if Roger the Cook consumes his own wares (perhaps wisely given the state of Roger’s kitchen and hygiene habits) but even Roger knows how:

To boille the chiknes with the marybones,  
 And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale [a spice mix]  
 ...  
 He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,  
 Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.<sup>49</sup> [a spiced meat dish]

Added to which, the sheer quantity of these products and the rate at which spice imports to Europe increased during the fifteenth century is dramatic, to say the least.<sup>50</sup> Ginger imports increased by 257 per cent; those of cinnamon by 395 per cent, and Moluccan

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<sup>46</sup> “The Saracen Connection: Arab Cuisine and the Mediaeval West Part 1,” *Petits propos culinaires* 7 (1980): 15.

<sup>46</sup> Heiatt and Butler, *Curie on Inglysch*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. *Pesoun of Almayne* is a form of pease pudding made with white peas, almond milk, rice flour, saffron, ginger, and salt.

<sup>48</sup> John M. Fyler, “Domesticating the Exotic in *The Squire’s Tale*,” *Journal of English Literary History* 55 (1988): 1.

<sup>49</sup> Chaucer, *General Prologue*, 382-6. Mortreux is a meat dish that requires pepper, cloves, and saffron.

<sup>50</sup> C.C.H. Wake, “The Changing Pattern of Europe’s Pepper and Spice Imports, ca.1400-1700,” *Journal of European Economic History* 8 (1979): 372, 393-4.

spices (cloves, nutmeg, and mace) by 292 per cent. By 1500 Western Europe was demanding (and presumably also consuming) around 1200 tonnes of pepper per year, and about the same amount of other spices combined.<sup>51</sup> Western Europe may not quite have been awash with these products but they were most certainly a familiar presence to a widening range of people, including the residents of the North Riding, and especially to those of Thornton's social standing or higher.

Furthermore, the cooking process itself was one of domestication as well as one of heating. While some dishes such as *rosee* required "thyk mylke ... sugur; pynes, dates ymynced, canel, & powdour gynger; flours of white rosis, and flour of rys,"<sup>52</sup> all of which could only be imported at this time, other recipes drew their ingredients from less geographically specific sources. Foreign foodstuffs were mingled and mixed with locally sourced material, tempered and adjusted to cater for local tastes,<sup>53</sup> and all came out of the proverbial (and actual) melting pot to be devoured with relish and gusto. Pike and haddock went into tarts with pears, figs, and cloves; beef was stewed with onions, raisins, and saffron; lampreys were baked with ginger and pepper.<sup>54</sup> Almonds may have originally been "symbols of the Creator and of life,"<sup>55</sup> but they lose something of their impact when milled into milk or spiced into false hedgehog spines. The culinary discourse of fourteenth and fifteenth century England was literally one of assimilation in motion.

These products held glamour, but it was not the glamour of the unknown. Cooks had been bending these spices to their culinary wills for centuries; apothecaries were well aware of the medicinal knowledge and value these dried husks and seeds contained. The extant Western European cookery books bear witness to increasing Arabic influences and traits in Western cuisine, from obvious items like ingredients to more subtle factors such as the method of frying or browning meat in fat before boiling

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 392. Sugar imports are not included in these figures.

<sup>52</sup> [almond milk ... sugar, pine nuts, minced dates, cinnamon, powdered ginger, flour made from white rose petals, and rice flour]. Heatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> Laurioux concludes that English cuisine in general exhibited a stronger preference for sugar, whereas in France it was reserved for medicinal use. The French palate seems to have been inclined towards ginger and long pepper, with the English opting for cubeb instead of the latter. The Italians meanwhile favoured saffron over all of these other seasonings. Laurioux, "De l'usage des épices," 18.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Austin, ed., *Two Fifteenth-century Cookery-books*, EETS OS 91 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 47, 71, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, "The Saracen Connection," 22.



it, or a penchant for bright colours and dyes.<sup>56</sup> However, these influences can be seen from the thirteenth century onwards, so by Thornton's time they were practically cooking staples. We will never know whether the royal cooks saw the irony inherent in serving *bruet saraseyns* "In Paschal tempe flessheadays," but it seems unlikely.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps as guests sat down to *test de turt*, or *sawse Sarzyne*, they registered that the principal ingredients for these dishes were indeed "Saracen," but these dishes appear in numerous recipe collections and may not have been unusual enough to encourage reflection in their audience, much like we may not automatically register that shepherd's pie is made from animals tended by a shepherd. The sense of wonder engendered by viewing or tasting Oryental produce for the first time had faded to anticipatory pleasure; the cooks responsible for the catering of guild banquets and royal feasts did not serve spiced meat and fish baked in almond milk to astonish and enrapture the taste buds of the guests. I imagine they knew their flavours would be recognised and enjoyed, and the value of the spices appreciated, but they also knew that orolingual reception was less important than visual. Meat and dairy substitutions were interchanged with impunity: "What was essential here was how the dish looked, not how it tasted."<sup>58</sup> As Freedman indicates, these cooks were perpetrators of "a splendid, even vulgarly ostentatious cuisine whose aesthetic principles were based on delight and innovation."<sup>59</sup> Simply ladling in spices and dried fruit was, by this time, insufficient to create such pageantry or spectacle. Instead, they turned to *trompe l'oeil entremets* for the element of astonishment and rapture, such as *Coqz Heaumez*, or *peacock enhackled*. The initial novelty and naive amazement experienced by the crusaders when they encountered sugar for the first time in the eleventh century had been completely lost.<sup>60</sup> By this point in time, products that had once only been imported to the Holy Land from India and the Far East (and were consequently completely unknown in Europe) had begun to be cultivated in the Holy Land, and thence imported into Western Europe.

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<sup>56</sup> The almonds on urchins for example, were often painted pink; meat and fish sauces could be coloured bright red, pink, or yellow, regardless of their original hue. *Ibid.*, 15. For more on urchins see this thesis, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Heatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 40. *Bruet saraseyns* is a venison-based stew thickened with almond milk and rice flour, flavoured with cloves, wine, and sugar, and then coloured deep red with alkanet root.

<sup>58</sup> Christopher Woolgar, "Fast and Feast: Conspicuous Consumption and the Diet of the Nobility in the Fifteenth Century," in *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 20.

<sup>59</sup> Freedman, *Out of the East*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, 1095-1127*, ed. H.S. Fink, trans. F.R. Ryan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 130-1.

Farming of these crops then spread further north throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By the later Middle Ages sugar, rice, saffron, citrus fruits, and pomegranates were cultivated throughout the Arab west, and into southern Europe.<sup>61</sup> Their propagation became more and more widespread, with saffron eventually establishing itself as a trade crop in the less than far-flung reaches of North Essex.<sup>62</sup>

As such, the word “exotic” is problematic when applied to these items. Strictly speaking, “exotic” means “Belonging to another country, foreign, alien; Introduced from abroad, not indigenous ... with added sense of ‘not naturalized or acclimatized’.”<sup>63</sup> In this sense, Oriental foodstuffs were indeed exotic but, as we saw with saffron, such criteria can swiftly become outdated and inaccurate. A further meaning can be “Outlandish, barbarous, strange, uncouth. Also, having the attraction of the strange or foreign, glamorous” but the presence of these foodstuffs throughout society in their domesticated (i.e. cooked) forms, especially at the highest stratum, would seem to negate the first part. Conversely, the cooking and consuming processes could render exotic the most mundane of Insular products. The 1465 feast for the inauguration of George Neville as archbishop of York, a much-cited example of the heights that conspicuous consumption in late medieval England could reach, was a spectacular, lengthy, and costly culinary extravagance lasting up to a week and serving between two and three thousand people. However, it was “unusual more by reason of its length than the elaborateness or novelty of what was actually served.”<sup>64</sup> There were admittedly great quantities of high status meats, including swans, peacocks, and venison, but there were also rather banal and quotidian meats such as chicken, pigeon, beef, and pork.<sup>65</sup> The basic ingredients were not what imbued this auspicious occasion with its glamour and prestige; it was the ostentatious context and scale of the event at which these ingredients were consumed. And context is key. When Chaucer sends his much-mocked Sir Thopas out adventuring, he canters through a forest of “lycorys and cetewale, / And

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<sup>61</sup> Wilson “The Saracen Connection” 14. It is worth noting here that the citrus fruits were primarily the citron, lemon, and sour orange. Sweet oranges, probably the result of grafting between pomelos and the sour orange, only seem to have become known in Europe during the fifteenth century, with the first recorded mention of them being in 1483. S. Tolkowsky, *Hesperides: A History of the Culture and Use of Citrus Fruits* (London: J Bale, Sons and Curnow, 1938), 238.

<sup>62</sup> Walden only adopted the prefix of “Saffron” in the early sixteenth century, but cultivation had probably started much earlier to supply the dye works which were extant in the 1380s. D. Cromarty, “Chepyng Walden 1381-1420: A Study from the Court Rolls,” *Essex Journal* 2 (1967): 109-11.

<sup>63</sup> *OED*, s.v. “exotic, adj. and n.”

<sup>64</sup> Freedman, *Out of the East*, 29.

<sup>65</sup> Woolgar, “Fast and Feast,” 7, 23. As we only have the procurement lists, rather than a specific menu, it is impossible to say exactly how the provisions were prepared and what the final dishes actually were.

many a clowe-gylofre, / And notemuge.”<sup>66</sup> Freedman reads this scene as a critique of the “fatiguing luxury” perpetrated by medieval romance narratives, and claims that it portrays spices as conventional “ornaments of such adventures.”<sup>67</sup> However, we must remember that a large part of *Sir Thopas*’s comedy is generated by the slippage between the hero’s actions and the setting. Throughout the narrative the familiar and safe is inserted where there would normally be threat. Consequently Thopas’s actions, and by extension those of the romance heroes satirised by Chaucer, are a source of ridicule. A forest in medieval romance, as in Ovid, is (or at least should be) an inherently dangerous place.<sup>68</sup> By stocking Thopas’s forest with spices, Chaucer implies that spices are not only somewhat passé, but that Thopas’s campaign through this landscape is about as exotic or dangerous as the proverbial walk in the park. After all, it is difficult for the reader to feel apprehension for a hero surrounded by the antidote for flatulence.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, to describe Oriental imported products as “exotic” simply because they are from the Oryent is to conflate and collapse their accepted characteristics and to impose an anachronistic academic Orientalism on their reception. Fifteenth-century audiences did not make hierarchical distinctions based solely on geographical origin. A dish involving English peacocks or swans would convey greater status on a table than would one of chicken, regardless of the spices with which it was garnished. Similarly, simply importing a material did not instantly imbue it with glamour and wonder. Thomas Beverley regularly imported Swedish steel, but it is hard to imagine him regarding it as emblematic of anything other than steel or profit. Using pepper as an example, Freedman has tracked the contemporary demystification of its origins from Isidore’s pepper forests, which were guarded by vipers and suffered occasional immolation as a consequence, through Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone’s accounts of sun-dried pepper untrammelled by serpents, to John of Marignolli’s scornful

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<sup>66</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Tale of Sir Thopas*, in *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 71-3.

<sup>67</sup> Freedman, *Out of the East*, 156.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Carmélia Opsomor-Halleux and William T. Stearn, eds., *Livre des simples médecines, Codex Bruxellensis IV. 1024: A 15<sup>th</sup>-Century French Herbal*, trans. Enid Roberts and William T. Stearn (Antwerp: De Schutter, 1984), 229. It may also be worth remembering that at the time of writing Chaucer had retired from his post as comptroller of the port of London, but was perhaps still feeling a little jaded towards imported products. The son of a vintner and merchant, who had himself derived his income from importing (albeit done by others), Chaucer provides an excellent example of an Englishman whose everyday life was practically saturated with foreign items.

dismissal in 1353 of the involvement of any snakes, fires, and indeed forests, in the pepper harvest.<sup>70</sup> However, Freedman also notes that the serpents and other mythical factors that prevent the procurement of Oryental products, such as diamond-carrying eagles or cinnamon-stealing phoenixes, linger on, at least until the dawn of the sixteenth century. For Freedman, the attraction of such stories is patent: “An already exotic commodity was further enhanced by being thought of as strangely difficult to acquire.”<sup>71</sup> Consequently, the aforesaid commodity could be traded at an inflated price. Whether these tales were actively believed by Thornton’s time, or whether they were simply engaging and convenient fictions used much like we would refer to the Moon being made of cheese, or to babies arriving via stork, we will probably never know. However it is interesting to note that dried fruit and nuts were not subject to such legends or myths yet were also fairly expensive, came from similar regions, and were consumed in preference to fresh local fruit.<sup>72</sup> In short, these Oryental food products retained an allure and an attraction for medieval European consumers but not because they, as raw materials, were somehow other, strange, or caused wonder in their audience. Explaining the popularity of dried fruit during Lent amongst the rather abstemious monks of Westminster would be difficult if this were so. Instead, the glamour came from their cost. The economic factor was, of course, a product of, and therefore inextricable from, the distance these products had travelled. Their quality of alterity was important, but not in and of itself. It was important for what it signified: namely that the fifteenth-century host had money to throw on the midden. This expression is not entirely facetious; Woolgar raises the very interesting question of just how much food arriving at a table (especially *entremets*) was actually intended to be ingested rather than simply admired, either for its quality and spectacle, or for its sheer quantity.<sup>73</sup>

Although we cannot know if Thornton himself ever gazed in wonder at a table laden with ostentatiously presented Oryental foodstuffs, we do know that he was intimately familiar with the concept, and indeed with the finer details. Arthur’s magnificent and lavish hosting of the Roman delegation at the beginning of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* reveals Thornton to be comfortably *au fait* with such

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<sup>70</sup> Freedman, *Out of the East*, 133-7

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>72</sup> For more information on fruit consumption see Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England*, (London: New Continuum, 1994), 113-31, especially 128 for dried fruit as status items.

<sup>73</sup> Woolgar, “Fast and Feast,” 18.

proceedings. The description of particular dishes requires a certain amount of ‘insider information.’ Even if Thornton had never actually dined on so-called hedgehogs, his inclusion of the line “Pygges of porke despyne, that pastured neuer,”<sup>74</sup> with neither gloss nor comprehension error would imply that he knew precisely what these “pygges” were.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the presence of “herons in hedoyne, hyled fulle faire” relies on the knowledge that birds were often re-feathered after cooking, thus appearing at the table in all their previously beplumed glory with the meat hidden or “hyled.”<sup>76</sup> Such an abundance of dishes would obviously not have been served at East Newton Hall on a regular basis (if, in fact, at all), but Thornton was clearly acquainted with this lexicon. It is likely that some food like this, though probably on a more moderate scale, was eaten at East Newton, and Thornton could easily have been partial to the odd urchin from time to time.

In mimetic terms Arthur’s feast positions itself as the zenith of medieval gastronomy’s best traditions of spectacle, sumptuousness, and extravagance. In order to fulfil his claim of the feast as being “largesce one lofte, and no lake foundene” the poet has embraced and included opulence on all sides.<sup>77</sup> Precious metals litter the table: boar heads are “burnyste with syluer;” pheasants are similarly “enflureschit in flammande siluer;” peacocks and plovers are served on gold platters, swans on silver chargers.<sup>78</sup> All of the king’s plate is made from precious metals; the cups are studded with gemstones; wine runs in silver conduits; even the king himself is robed in cloth of gold. The whole scene is almost painfully dazzling, but the inclusion of so much metal adds a curiously inorganic or manmade element to the feast. The abovementioned hedgehogs and re-

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<sup>74</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 183.

<sup>75</sup> Larry Benson glosses these as two separate items, piglets and porcupines, but I think it more likely that they are “hedgehogs” or “urchins,” (i.e. spined pigs made of pork, rather than piglets and porcupines, which—as artificial confections—have obviously never pastured). Larry Benson, ed., *King Arthur’s Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Mort Arthur and the Alliterative Morte Arthure* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 183. “Urchins” were made by moulding minced pork into the shape of a hedgehog and then adding spines by setting coloured almonds upright in the hedgehog’s back, giving it “the look of a small Stegosaurus.” Freedman, *Out of the East*, 38. My reading is also more in keeping with the theme of dominance and Arthur’s efforts to use the feast as a site of culinary imperialism.

<sup>76</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 184.

<sup>77</sup> In this respect the feast is completely in keeping with the rest of the narrative’s opening. From the outset, the text is one of excess and ostentation. The countries through which Arthur rampages and whose people he subdues cover eighteen lines (30-47); the list of dishes served at the first feast take another 31 (177-207), and that is before the serving dishes and cups are described. It is worth noting, however, that although Arthur’s hosting is completely over the top, not one of the dishes and accoutrements is unique to this text. Again, the novelty and glamour of this scene is located in the scale of the event rather than its fundamental components.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 177; 198; 182; 185. Although the Thornton text is unadorned it is interesting to consider the impact of reading this section of the text in an illuminated presentation copy-type manuscript.

plumed herons testify to the mastery over species and natural form that Arthur's cooks possess. Rabbits in "cretoyne" have been "colourede fulle faire;"<sup>79</sup> the wine in the silver conduits is being forced to run or spout in various directions, rather than simply being poured from a vessel. In fact, mastery and power are the two axes around which this feast is based. Arthur's wealth is clearly displayed on the table. The description of the cups as "pyghte with precyous stones / That nane enpoysonne sulde goo preuely ther-vndyre" neatly unites an ostentatious display of wealth and medicinal functionality,<sup>80</sup> but it also highlights the undercurrent of tension and disharmony engendered by the presence of the alien Romans. By having these poison-proofed goblets, Arthur is attempting mastery over death.

The foods he is able to lay before the Romans could be interpreted as testifying to his geographical power, but predominantly they bear witness to his immense disposable income. The wine is "Osay and algarde [Alsation and Spanish] ... Rynisch and Rochelle," but most importantly, "richere was neuer."<sup>81</sup> Vernage "vertuose" has come from Venice and Crete.<sup>82</sup> Rather than being an explicit gesture to the breadth of Arthur's reach, the "Tartes of Turkey, taste whame theme lykys" are used to emphasise the vast quantity of food that has been laid on to gratify the guests' every possible whim.<sup>83</sup> Aside from Turkey, the only locations that are named are from Western Europe, rather than the Oryent, and these places are all used in connection with wine. All of the food items are being lauded for their material value and for the status they convey as a result. There seems to be little hierarchical distinction made between the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 197. *Cretoyne* is a milk-based sauce flavoured with ginger, galingale, and pepper then coloured with saffron.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 212-3.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 202-3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 204. Vernage, or vernaccia, is a very fine sweet Italian wine although it has not always been considered virtuous. Dante criticised Pope Martin IV for eating eels that had been drowned and pickled in vernaccia. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume 2: Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24.22-4. All references to this text are by canto and then line number.

<sup>83</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 186. Brock anachronistically describes these as "tarts of turkey" while Benson opts for "tarts of Turkey," without further explanation as to what these might entail. The ambiguity concerning these Turkish tarts raises some intriguing possibilities. The only other foodstuff I can locate which makes reference to Turkey, as opposed to the more general "Saracen," is *test de turt*, or "Turk's head." This dish, found in three manuscripts, consists of a pastry case (a "tart" perhaps?) filled with spiced meat, dried fruit and honey, and decorated on top with the face of a Turk formed from pistachios. If Thornton were familiar with the dish (names can, after all, become distorted over the centuries, and it is a small step from *test* or *tête* to tart, especially when the object in question is indeed a tart), then the feigned anthropophagy, and his recognition of such, not only underlines Arthur's culinary imperialism in *Morte Arthure*, but also has important implications for the Thornton manuscripts overall. These become especially important when read in conjunction with *Richard, Coeur de Lion* and Lydgate's *Dietary*, and when *Morte Arthure*'s position as the original opening text of the Lincoln manuscript is taken into consideration.

geographical origins of these products. The cost and quality of the ingredients are more important than their country of origin. In order to serve yolk-glazed daries (small custard-like tarts) Arthur's cooks must have sugar and cinnamon, but the poet does not go into detail about these cooked-up ingredients just as he does not go into detail about the ingredients of the flaming azure gravy that encircles the pork fillets.<sup>84</sup> Sugar, cinnamon, and the colour for the rabbits are placed on an equal footing with the herons' plumage and pork. The saffron and almond milk required for the "frumentee noble" are implicitly understood to be present rather than explicitly referenced like the fatted venison they accompany.<sup>85</sup>

This lack of according alterity of Oryental foodstuffs, however, does not mean that Thornton would have been blind to the value and enhancement that importing products could have on Arthur's might and prestige. The text is insistent that this meal happens on Arthur's home territory, specifically in Carlisle. In order to host such a feast, Arthur is clearly importing the alien and foreign, and the domesticating enterprise is one of complete subjugation. In this respect the imported foodstuffs offer Arthur an ideal vehicle through which to display his power and ambitions. His subsequent pseudo-self-deprecating speech to the Romans boldly admits to the foreignness of these products but in doing so it implicitly draws attention to the breadth and power of his influence:

We knowe noghte in this countre of curious metez  
In these barayne landez bredes none other [no others breed]  
ffore-ty wythowttyne feynynge enforce 3ow the more  
To feede 3ow with syche feble as 3e be-fore fynde.<sup>86</sup>

Arthur is mostly telling the truth—Britain cannot produce the spread set before them all, though his description of the meal as "feble" is clearly insincere. Whether Rome could do so is a moot point—so far it has not seen fit to do so: "There ryngnede neuer syche realtee with-in Rome walles."<sup>87</sup> As the Romans admit, Arthur's hospitality is world-class: "There ne es prelatte, ne pape, ne prynce in this erthe / That he ne myghte be wele payede of these pryce metes."<sup>88</sup> In order to be world-class, though,

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-6. [Therefore, without feigning, force yourselves all the more / To feed yourselves with such feeble fare as you find before you].

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-30. [There is no prelate, nor pope, nor prince on this earth / Who would not be well pleased with these prized foods].

Arthur must draw on the world's resources. Arthur's social prestige might be, emphatically and gleefully, imported but it is his ability to afford to do this importing, and especially on this epic scale, that gives him his peerless status.

In some respects Arthur's disingenuous "humble brag" loses something of its ostentation when we remember that Thornton could saunter down to Gryssop's shop, or to whichever of York's grocers, chapmen and spicers enjoyed his patronage, and purchase most of the ingredients for himself. What he could not do was afford to host on this sort of scale, and it is in the economic power of this scene that the alterity is to be found. Imported Oryental foodstuffs had indeed once been "foreign," but by Thornton's time it seems highly unlikely that they still retained their alterity in any great measure, if indeed at all. The poet of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* is more concerned with the shiny, golden yolk glaze on the dariels than he is with their cinnamon content. The transmission of agricultural techniques meant that the edible Oryent could be cultivated on European soil, and by the sixteenth century it would have become so strong a presence, even in England, that it could rename towns, thus normalising it even further.<sup>89</sup> These Oryental foodstuffs were a familiar physical presence; they could be grasped, tasted, smelled, crushed, reshaped, and bent to the will and whims of their purchaser, and then ingested, swallowed, and devoured. They could be utterly consumed and subsumed; they could be processed and conquered completely.

However, not all material is created equal, and the alimentary was not the only sphere where the Oryent possessed a material presence. In fact, even at events like Arthur's feast or the inauguration of Archbishop Neville, foodstuffs were not the only means by which the Oryent made its presence felt. These occasions were multisensory attacks on those who attended them.<sup>90</sup> There would have been music playing, or perhaps poetry being recited; the scent of flowers, spices, and the food itself would have filled the air. Besides the elaborately fashioned *entremets* to satisfy the guests' eyes, the hall walls would have been decorated with hangings and tapestries, or painted cloths. Be-gowned, beribboned, and bedecked in their finery, the guests themselves would have contributed to the visual feast with their sartorial splendour. If we turn now to these fabrics and textiles, and move away from the domesticated foodstuffs, we find

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<sup>89</sup> See the example of Saffron Walden, this thesis, 50.

<sup>90</sup> Timothy J. Tomasik and Juliann M. Vitullo, *At the Table: Metaphorical and Material Cultures of Food in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), xvi.



that these Oryental materials—despite sometimes being encountered in exactly the same time and space as Oryental foodstuffs—met with a different reception.

### **Silks and Stuffs**

Whilst Robert Thornton's position as heir to East Newton, rather than its owner, was (whether he knew it or not) drawing to a close, the aging Henry Bowet, York's long-serving archbishop, was making his laborious way south from Berwick-Upon-Tweed back to his home at Cawood.<sup>91</sup> Well into his seventies and extremely infirm, Bowet could only travel by litter but had courageously chosen to make the journey north to support the Duke of Exeter's men against the invading Scots. The risk to his health had paid off; the English forces had been inspired by Bowet's addresses and been victorious but, even so, the elderly cleric must have breathed a large sigh of relief when he finally reached Cawood Castle and was able to relax. Perhaps he felt the need to go and lie down straight away, seeking rest beneath a canopy and bedcover of cloth of gold, his peace assured by the thick curtains of red sendal that enclosed the bed.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps, having washed away the dust and grime of the road, he wrapped himself in his violet chemour and, pulling the hood with its green tartarin lining around his head against the cold (although the bitter Yorkshire winter had not yet set in, autumn was well advanced by this point), shuffled off down the hallway to attend to the more pressing of the matters that had arisen in his absence.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps, not being completely exhausted by the journey, he headed into the chapel to offer up a prayer of thankfulness for the success of his intervention, where his weary eyes were met by the dazzling blue of the baldachin lectern cloth and the shining gold damask rebans.<sup>94</sup> Or, perhaps feeling that he deserved a bit of a break, he picked up the copy of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* that he kept with his bible and missal in the chapel and, clipping his silver and gilt spectacles on his nose, he settled down into the velvet and silk cushions in his chamber for a quiet read.<sup>95</sup>

Of course, Henry Bowet may have adhered to none of the above courses of action, but every time he entered the doors of Cawood Castle he walked into a world

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<sup>91</sup> T.F. Tout and J.J. N. Palmer, "Henry Bowet (d. 1423)" in *ODNB*.

<sup>92</sup> Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 535. For the entirety of Bowet's inventory, see 535-45, particularly 535-9 for his vast textile holdings.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 538-9.

that was practically overflowing with luxurious imported textiles. His chamber contained silk, taffeta, sendal, cloth of gold, and tartarin; the robes in his wardrobe were lined with tartarin and byssus; he had a camlet and gilt doublet. The list of ecclesiastical garments in the chapel is staggering in its own right: Bowet had chasubles of cloth of gold, of red, black, and blue baldachins, of black, blue, and white cloth of gold, of white damask, and red tartarin.<sup>96</sup> For many of these chasubles he also owned the matching dalmatic, frontal, subfrontal, lectern cloth, amice, stole, and maniple. The set of red cloth of gold clothes that he bequeathed to York Minster alone were valued at £53 and the fourteen whole cloths of black cloth of gold that joined them were assessed at £58. York Minster understandably benefitted financially the most from these textiles but Bowet had sufficient fabric at his disposal to leave handsome legacies elsewhere: the sets of clothes of white damask that went to Topholme Abbey in Lincolnshire were worth £12 6s 8d, and the blue baldachin sets that went to the parish church of Penrith were valued at £15 6s 8d.<sup>97</sup>

Like *sawse Saracen*, these textiles, and all other luxury fabrics that made their way to the North Riding, boldly declared their origins. The opulent silk-based fabric tartarin was first imported through Tartary, probably from China. Damask, which at this time was a rich silk fabric woven with elaborate designs and figures, was originally from Damascus.<sup>98</sup> Boge, or budge, was black or white lambskin that took its name from Béjaïa, then known as Bougie, in Algeria.<sup>99</sup> North Africa also supplied byssus, an extremely fine and costly textile fibre and fabric. Its Egyptian origins were well known in Thornton's time; John Trevisa's translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* declared that "Ther be many manere flexe but the fayrest of al growyth in Egypte: for therof is Bissus made ryght fayre and whyte as snowe."<sup>100</sup> Another silken cloth was sarcenet, from the Latin *pannus saracenicus*, literally "saracen cloth." Bokkara or Bukhara, a city in modern Uzbekistan on the silk route, reappears in buckram, a type of fine linen.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 539.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 544.

<sup>98</sup> Damask later came to mean any twilled linen fabric with self-coloured figured woven designs that show up by opposite reflexions of light from the surface; this fabric is the material we now typically associate with table linen. True damask however is woven from silk, and wool woven into this damask pattern was known as *bordall* in the Middle Ages.

<sup>99</sup> Childs, *The Customs Accounts of Hull*, 236. Budge was later extended to include skins from North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.

<sup>100</sup> John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum: A Critical Text*, vol. ii, ed. M.C. Seymour (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), XVII. xcvi. 664.

<sup>101</sup> *OED*, s.v. "buckram, n." This etymology is by no means certain.

Baldachin bears witness to further involvement with the silk route: this richly embroidered and brocaded fabric derives its name from *Baldacco*, the Italian name for Baghdad whence it originated. Tarse, or cloth of tars, again gestures to Tartary and the striped silk known as bord Alexander started out in Alexandria. Finally, the intriguingly named camlet does indeed betoken that most irascible of quadrupeds: the camel. From 1400 onwards it was thought that camel hair was the primary component though whether this costly and luxurious mix of silk and wool did actually involve the hair of a camel is unclear.<sup>102</sup> Certainly by the sixteenth-century angora wool was being used.

However, the use of toponyms is not limited to foreign fabrics, or even to cloth of a particular quality or level of luxury. Medieval textile nomenclature was not blessed with originality. Arras work, lyre, lewyn, and tulle take their names from the towns of Arras, Lier, Leuven and Tulle. Holland cloth is, exactly as described, cloth from Holland. In England too, we find the same approach; the woollen cloth kendal originated in, unsurprisingly, Kendal. As such, these non-European textiles were not being singled out in some manner. They were classified under the same system as domestic or European textiles, i.e. geographically. At first glance, the very precise taxonomy of textiles would seem to demonstrate a keen sense of space and place, and, as such, to enforce the respective foreignness or Englishness of many types of fabric. Yet whilst these names may gesture to Oryental origins for these fabrics, textile production was not an easily quantifiable or divided industry. Between the harvesting of the raw materials and the completion of the final product—the archbishop slipping into his blue and gold chasuble, for example—there was a series of complicated and convoluted steps which makes the process of definitive geographical delineation almost impossible to carry out.

The base material for many of these Oryental-seeming fabrics is silk, and so it is there that our initial focus lies. First produced in ancient China, with the earliest extant example dating from 3630 BC,<sup>103</sup> silk has always been associated with the east. It is thought that the Old English *sioloc* (first attested around 888AD), the Latin *sericus*, and the Old Norse *silki*, from which we get the Middle and Modern English *sylke* and silk, all derive ultimately from the Greek *σηρικός*, or *serikos*, referring to the Eastern peoples

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<sup>102</sup> *OED*, s.v. “camlet, n.”

<sup>103</sup> Shelagh Vainker, *Chinese Silk: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 17.

who first produced this fabric.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless silk, and perhaps more importantly sericulture, did not remain within China's borders. Writing in the middle of the sixth century, the Byzantine historian Procopius relates how two Nestorian monks smuggled silk worms hidden in bamboo out of China and brought them to the Emperor Justinian, thus giving sericulture to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>105</sup> The validity of Procopius' tale of industrial espionage is understandably open to debate, but irrespective of its origin there evidently was a burgeoning sericulture industry in sixth-century Byzantium. From these dramatic, if probably apocryphal beginnings, sericulture slowly spread throughout Western Christendom, aided by the Crusades and the 1204 sack of Constantinople that left many silk workers and artisans homeless, to the extent that in 1466 Louis XI could plan to establish a French national silk industry in the city of Lyon.<sup>106</sup> Although, as Janet Snyder has demonstrated, the twelfth-century audiences passing the Old Testament figures carved round the doors of cathedrals in north-west France would have recognised their Holy Land provenance in spite of their French contemporary dress by the stone rendering of the sartorial peculiarities generated by Oriental fabrics,<sup>107</sup> Thornton was not living in the twelfth century. He was living three hundred years later and in a world whose horizons were much broader but whose geo-political borders were much more porous. The main global producer of silk in Thornton's time was still China, and it would remain so until the eighteenth century, but as sericulture had already spread throughout much of the western world, and was an especially important industry in the city states of medieval Venice, Lucca, and Florence, attempting to declare even raw silk as an Oriental textile in the same way that nutmeg was an Oriental spice presents certain self-evident problems.

And geographical inexactitude is not just limited to the raw material and the unspun threads. By the 1480s, considerable amounts of raw silk were being imported to

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<sup>104</sup> *OED*, s.v. "silk, n. and adj."

<sup>105</sup> Procopius, *Procopii Caesariensis Historiarum Temporis Sui Tetras Altera. De Bello Gothico*, trans. Claudius Maltretus, reprinted in *A Source Book for Medieval History*, ed. Roy C. Cave and Herbert H. Coulson (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1965), 244-5. See also H.B. Feltham, "Justinian and the International Silk Trade," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 194 (2009): 3.

<sup>106</sup> Georges Duby, ed., *Histoire de la France : Dynasties et révolutions, de 1348 à 1852*, vol. 2 (Paris : Larousse, 1999), 53.

<sup>107</sup> Specific features include very fine pleating and folds, which indicate silk, and pointed creases that are typical of linen. Janet Snyder posits that, recognising these fabrics as extremely expensive and coming from the east, the audience would have associated the contemporary elite who wore such clothes with the Old Testament figures they knew decorated their church. Janet Snyder, "From Content to Form: Court Clothing in Mid-Twelfth-Century Northern French Sculpture," in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images*, ed. Desiree G. Coslin and Janet E. Snyder (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 95-6.

London.<sup>108</sup> The Italians were again the main force behind these shipments, but Hanse and other alien merchants were also involved. The availability of raw silk, a mass of sartorial and decorative potentiality, leads to questions of style, embroidery, working, and decoration which muddy the metaphorical waters. Just as the almonds of Arthur's urchins had been mixed in with pork and their Oryental origins obscured, so the raw silk that formed the basis of Archbishop Bowet's chasubles (even assuming that we could declare it identifiably and irrefutably to be from the Oryent) would have been spun, dyed, woven, pieced, and tailored before it even began to be decorated. Rather than plunge too deeply into the specifics of Europe's silk-weaving, silk-processing, and embroidery industries, taking a single Yorkshire example serves to illustrate the blurring of boundaries and borders, even when dealing with a fabric that appears to announce its origins as unequivocally as baldachin. In 1389 Richard Storrer, a mercer of York, sold two cloths of green baldachin to the Minster for seven marks, and two cloths of gold for 106s 8d.<sup>109</sup> The cloths of gold were specifically designated as being for the high altar, but we know less about where the green baldachin ended up. What is important, though, about these four pieces of fabric is that they were not finished articles. They were evidently not the raw material of the silk that we last saw entering London, but they were not yet completed altar cloths or chasubles, for example. Clearly, then, these intermediate pieces of fabric were processed and became fit for the Minster's purposes in York or the surrounding area. The city of York and its myriad ecclesiastical establishments just about managed to support a specific vestment industry, although the guild was too small to mount a pageant in the *Corpus Christi* performances.<sup>110</sup> What York also had, though, was a considerable community of embroiders, gold workers, parmenters and setters who would all have been perfectly well qualified to have worked on ecclesiastical textiles, albeit not exclusively.<sup>111</sup> The cloths of gold presumably were worked up and appeared in splendour on the high altar, but the baldachin could have gone through numerous iterations before it became a heavily embroidered cope or a chasuble. Was it then Oryental? Even if it could be

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<sup>108</sup> In 1480-1, London welcomed 2750 lbs of raw silk. Henry S. Cobb, ed., *The Overseas Trade of London Exchequer Customs Accounts 1480-1* (London: London Records Society, 1990), 14-69. In 1384, 400 lbs of raw silk was imported over the course of three months so in the course of a century the trade had roughly doubled. Henry S. Cobb, "Textile Imports in the Fifteenth Century: The Evidence of the Customs' Accounts," *Costume* 29 (1995): 7.

<sup>109</sup> Sylvia Hogarth, "Ecclesiastical Vestments and Vestment Makers in York, 1300-1600," *York Historian* 7 (1986): 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>111</sup> For examples of these individuals and the work they carried out for the Minster see *ibid.*, 4-6.

proven that a vestment had been imported from the Oryent in its finished state, what happened when it was repaired? Two vestry clerks were employed by the Minster to oversee the upkeep of its textile collection and repairs were probably completed locally.<sup>112</sup> Thomas Setter, who lived in the (extremely local) parish of St Michael le Belfry carried out quite a lot of repair work on the Minster's garments between 1371 and 1392. Decoration causes further issues. Many of the textiles were embroidered with fairly generic and secular motifs such as stars, flowers, animals, or crowns, but it was not unknown for wealthy donors to include heraldic devices such as ostrich feathers or even their own coats of arms.<sup>113</sup> Did Thornton and his circle contemplate the complexities of assigning a place of origin to an item that had, hypothetically, been generated from Chinese silkworms, bought by Lucchese, shipped by Venetians, woven and dyed by Londoners and then embroidered with the English arms of George Neville by Yorkshiremen using golden thread and pearls from somewhere else entirely?<sup>114</sup> Whence came a linen altar cloth, depicting Christian narrative scenes couched in Chinese silk and gold thread and decorated with pearls by English needle-workers in the style known as *Opus Anglicanum*? Just as the Oriental foodstuffs were assimilated into supposedly "English" dishes, so these imported textiles were also fusions of English and Oryental input, English and Oryental raw materials, and English and Oryental labour. However, they differed from the foodstuffs in two important ways. Firstly their names still singled out their hypothetical Oryental origins. Secondly, they were nothing like as ubiquitous or available.

Moving onwards from the rather vexed question of pinning down a single site of origin for these materials and looking instead at their presence throughout fifteenth-century England provides us with a very different picture from the one we saw with regard to Oryental foodstuffs. Oryental textiles were emphatically *not* everywhere in medieval society. And this exclusivity started from the moment these fabrics arrived, right at the ports. Part of the problem is the patchy nature of the records and their survival but it is striking that, given the influx of other Oryental products that came

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<sup>112</sup> Sylvia Hogarth, "Ecclesiastical Vestments at York Minster Before the Reformation," in *Thread of Gold: The Embroideries and Textiles in York Minster*, ed. Elizabeth Ingram (Andover: Pitkin Pictorials, 1987), 13.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>114</sup> See Hogarth, "Vestments and Vestmentmakers," 8, for the arms of George Neville, but see also Stephanie Trigg, "Ye Louely Ladyes With Youre Longe Fyngres": The Silkwomen of Medieval London," *Studia anglica Posnaniensia* 38 (2002): 469-484, for more information on London's silk workers.

through Hull and Newcastle and other ports, Oryental cloth importation should be so very limited. Only London and Southampton (plus very occasionally Sandwich, which tended to serve as an outpost of London anyway) show any evidence of importing these textiles.<sup>115</sup> Even then, the consignments are notably small, though highly valuable. Most of the trade seems to have been driven by Italian merchants but there are very occasional references to English merchants doing the importing. Geoffrey Faldyng of London imported one hundred pieces of tartarin via a Venetian galley in 1440, and John Crosby did the same in 1464 with damask and figured silk.<sup>116</sup> Henry S. Cobb surmises that the court were the most likely consumers for this rather niche market and from the high costs involved, coupled with the relative lack of English participation, and the at least nominal restrictions of the sumptuary legislation, it seems logical that the bulk of the trade should be London based.<sup>117</sup>

The costs involved in purchasing such cloth were astronomical. Cloth of gold was regularly priced “at a staggeringly high £2 per yard.”<sup>118</sup> More modest—although modest is a relative term here—were crimson velvet at 12s 6d a yard, black velvet at between 8s and 10s a yard, blue velvet at 7s a yard, and black sarcenet at a “mere” 3s 4d per yard.<sup>119</sup> Considering that the average skilled building worker could reasonably expect to earn around 4-5d per day, it is not all that surprising that these fabrics were not being imported in vast quantities.<sup>120</sup> Of course, as we saw from the examples of York Minster’s vestments, silks, sarcenet, and other luxury imported textiles were not unknown outside of a mythical medieval M25 that divided the country into a cosmopolitan London zone and a provincial swamp encompassing the remainder of the realm. What we do find though, is that outside of the court the major sphere of encounter for these textiles was the ecclesiastical.

For this state of affairs two factors were largely responsible. Firstly, the church and its senior (often high-born) churchmen were immensely wealthy and formed about

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<sup>115</sup> Cobb, “Textile Imports,” 3. There is one exception to this rule, the import of “6 pece hathyn selkys” to Hull in 1490. Childs, *The Customs Accounts of Hull*, 207. A pece or piece was between 10 and 30 yards. Childs believes this silk to be “from an unknown source” or possibly silk for hat making. *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>116</sup> Cobb, “Textile Imports,” 6.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. For the court’s consumption of these fabrics see Kay Staniland, “Medieval Courtly Splendour,” *Costume* 14 (1980): 7-23.

<sup>118</sup> Cobb, “Textile Imports,” 7.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Dyer, *Standards of Living*, xv.

the only market for such material outside of the secular court.<sup>121</sup> And this market operated on an astronomical financial scale. The textiles in Bowet's personal chapel at Cawood alone were valued at over £200.<sup>122</sup> In 1406 the Minster was bequeathed a set of vestments by Walter Skirlaw, the bishop of Durham, that had been purchased in London for an eye-watering £80. Hogarth estimates that, at 1987 prices, these vestments would have cost somewhere in the region of £30,000, figures that would normally be reserved for property.<sup>123</sup> Given that a doublet required four yards of fabric, with cloth of gold retailing for a minimum of £2 per yard, even Thornton—one of the thousand richest men in the country—would had to have made a considerable dent in his £40 plus income just to have purchased the fabric for one gown—assuming that he could flout the sumptuary legislation so blatantly.<sup>124</sup>

The second factor was the tradition of the mortuary. In order to pay for the establishment of a mortuary it was traditional to bequeath an expensive item to the church where one was to be buried. Often such an item would be a beast—most likely a horse—a single, easily transferable unit that had considerable relative value. However, horse ownership was not widespread and a frequent substitute, particularly in York, would be one's best gown.<sup>125</sup> Thomas Setter, who had worked on the Minster's textile holdings during his life, added to them after his death by bequeathing "one gown of better quality ... by usual custom for my mortuary fee."<sup>126</sup> York Minster especially benefited from this practice as the archbishop of York reserved the privilege of crowning the queen consort, and remained her perpetual chaplain.<sup>127</sup> Both Eleanor of Castile and Philippa of Hainault, in 1290 and 1369 respectively, bequeathed their bed hangings to the Minster's fabric coffers. Philippa's hangings alone provided an additional thirteen copes, six tunicles and one chasuble for the vestry clerks to look

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<sup>121</sup> There was inevitably considerable overlap in the personnel between the courts of church and state but nevertheless, the different estates accessed different geographical and social spheres. Taking Bowet as an example, whilst he and his personal apparel did journey up and down the country, the bulk of the items belonging to his office and the churches in which he served would have remained in the churches themselves, potentially being used by other presiding clergy.

<sup>122</sup> Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 539-40. The total figure is £204 2s 10d.

<sup>123</sup> Hogarth, "Ecclesiastical Vestments," 12. In 1987, a three bedroomed house within commuting distance of London was around £60,000 so £30,000 on one set of clothes was an absolutely staggering amount of money.

<sup>124</sup> Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 175-6.

<sup>125</sup> See also Hogarth, "Ecclesiastical Vestments," 12.

<sup>126</sup> Hogarth, "Vestments and Vestmentmakers," 6.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



after.<sup>128</sup> The Minster also expected its canons to pay the *mortuaria canonicorum* when they died. This payment took the form of bequest consisting of a cope and palfrey, or the financial equivalent. The Minster cope chests, one of which is still extant, benefitted accordingly from these opulent items, as did the Minster coffers. In 1370, for example, the canon David de Wooler left “a cope of black velvet decorated with gold embroidery thickly set between with gold stars, another with a silver morse decorated with gilt with an image of the Blessed Mary surrounded with stones of coral, various items of silver, and £20 in lieu of the palfrey.”<sup>129</sup> As such, ecclesiastical store cupboards became fabric repositories, acting as a sort of textile river basin draining the surrounding community of its luxury material. A curious side effect of this practice, though, was that for the majority of English people with no access to the houses and wardrobes of the nobles, the textile Oryent, the fabric from the lands of heathens, pagans, infidels and non-believers, was encountered in the house of God.

Despite being a place to which Thornton and his circle had regular and sustained access, the house of God was not a domestic space, and—especially in York Minster, throne of the archbishop—the rich surroundings, glowing windows, luxurious robes of the clergy, and sparkling jewels on the reliquaries all contributed to create an environment that was startlingly different to that of the city outside. As the priests processed along the aisle slowly chanting and thurifying the incense from shining censers, candlelight would have glinted off the thick bands of ornate orphrey across their backs. The jewel-encrusted silk apparels at their wrists would have contrasted dramatically with the simpler weave of their rich baldachin chasubles and the gleaming albs of the deacon and sub deacon as they moved, the heavy damask rustling faintly, towards the altar. If the archbishop were present then his embellished and stone-studded mitre would have caught the flickering candlelight and sparkled, giving him a glittering crown, marking him as the mysterious lord of this holy, alien realm.<sup>130</sup> Even without the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 7-8. See also Hogarth, “Ecclesiastical Vestments,” 12. Eleanor’s bed hangings were apparently not quite in the same league as they supplied a mere four albs and one chasuble. Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Hogarth, *Vestments and Vestmentmakers*, 7.

<sup>130</sup> It is interesting to reflect that a bishop or archbishop was probably the closest someone like Thornton would get to the figure of the Faerie King in *Sir Orfeo*. The king’s crown, symbol of his sovereignty and his realm is “nas of silver, no of gold red, / Ac it was of a precious ston - / As bright as the sonne it schon.” The material signifier of his authority is the only physical description given for the King and it instantly identifies him and his realm as being not of this world. The crown’s exact material is unidentified, but it is neither of the precious metals familiar to Lady Heurodis, and, by implication, the audience. The only analogous material is the Sun, which is also not terrestrial. The correlation of the crown with domain is reinforced later in the text when Orfeo enters the hall to find it lit by the glow of

archbishop, though, the sartorial splendour of York Minster's clergy was assured. The 1510 inventory (the last one before the Reformation) reveals that the Minster possessed a total of 475 ecclesiastic garments, most of which were probably heavily embroidered, including 71 white copes, 76 red copes, 70 blue ones, 34 green ones, and 26 that were black. There were robes of cloth of gold, and of baldachin; tunics of sendal and chasubles of red samite; cloths of gilded white silk and Tartary silk.<sup>131</sup> The cope chests and almeries of York Minster were practically overflowing with luxurious imported fabrics.

And these were just the sacerdotal garments. Robert Thornton would not have needed to attend mass at the Minster; had he just slipped in briefly while in town between appointments his eyes would still have met a blaze of silken colours. Tombs were embellished with cushions and banners, especially those of former archbishops. Walter de Gray's was adorned with golden and black banners; Richard de Scrope's fifteenth-century sepulchre was decked with rich cloths, attached to which were offerings of precious metal and jewels.<sup>132</sup> Brightly coloured lectern cloths, shining altar cloths (such as those of cloth of gold that came via Richard Storrer), frontals and sub-frontals to match the velvet or baldachin chasubles would all have been visible. The choir was hung with carpets and other rich fabrics; the vestibule was packed with cushions of velvet, damask, silk, figured satin, and cloth of gold.<sup>133</sup> The bold patterns and exquisite delicacy of the famed *Opus Anglicanum* gold work (so prized that the Vatican had more of it than any other type of fabric work),<sup>134</sup> adorned altar cloths and frontals in the chantry-chapels as well as covering the copes, sudaries and chasubles. Red silks were embroidered with gold animals and flowers; amices were pearl studded; golden griffins, squirrels, dragons, and lions leapt across hangings and cushion covers; the delicately fashioned heraldic arms of benefactors hung besides images of saints, crowns, and stars in a glorious riot of golden threads inspiring awe and wonder at their richness and skill.<sup>135</sup>

Few of Yorkshire's medieval material treasures survive today, predominantly as a result of the Reformation. Between 1541 and 1553, almost all of the luxury fabrics

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precious stones. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., "Sir Orfeo," in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 150-2.

<sup>131</sup> Hogarth, "Vestments and Vestmentmakers," 11.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, *Opus Anglicanum* (London: Arts Council Publication, 1963), 5.

<sup>135</sup> Hogarth, "Ecclesiastical Vestments," 12.

that had been amassed through the centuries were looted, sold, or destroyed. However, even the pathetic fragments that have survived still vividly testify to former opulence and glory. The scraps and shreds remaining from Walter de Gray's 1255 tomb reveal an intricately designed, gleaming fabric that, when new, must have literally dazzled the observer.<sup>136</sup> Imported, luxurious and costly fabrics were festooned about the Minster, enrobing the priests and clergy, adorning the altars and tombs, in full view but, unless one were a high-up ecclesiastical, always tantalisingly just out of reach.

Sumptuary legislation assisted in this restriction of Oryental textiles to a certain extent although it would be disingenuous to claim that the laws were rigidly obeyed. As noted earlier, the sheer cost of these fabrics probably had far more influence on their limited circulation than any desire to adhere to the law in a spirit of civic vestimentary virtue. Ostensibly to counter moral delinquency, ostentation and the *graund displeasure Dieu, empoverissement de cest dit Roialme & enrich[issement] des Roialmes & pais estraunges a finall destruccion del husbondrie de cest dit Roialme*,<sup>137</sup> sumptuary legislation took advantage of clothing's role as a signifier and effectively acted as a means of distinguishing between social groups by limiting certain fabrics to those of certain ranks.<sup>138</sup> In theory one could tell at a glance where a stranger fitted into the complex social hierarchy as one wore one's socio-economic status literally on one's sleeve.<sup>139</sup> Extensive and luxurious adornment was supposedly restricted to the privileged (and rich) few.<sup>140</sup> Instead of avoiding the opulent clothing denied their rank,

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<sup>136</sup> For a facsimile recreation of these fabric banners see Elizabeth Ingram, "Embroideries and Textiles in York Minster," in *Thread of Gold: The Embroideries and Textiles of York Minster* ed., Elizabeth Ingram (Andover: Pitkin Pictorials, 1987), 19-22.

<sup>137</sup> [the great displeasure of God, impoverishment of this said realm and enriching of foreign realms and countries]. *The Statutes of the Realm, From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts, Volume 2, 1377-1504* (London: Records Commission, 1816), 399.

<sup>138</sup> See also Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, "Reconciling the Privilege of a Few with the Common Good: Sumptuary Laws in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39 (2009): 597-617.

<sup>139</sup> Technically Edward III's first sumptuary law of 1336, which forbade anyone except the immediate royal family wearing cloth from outside of the British Isles, was not officially repealed until 1482 but it does not seem to have been adhered to in any great way. Only part of the law (regarding import and export freedom) was repealed the following year, but the whole thing appears to have become "merely a dead letter" long before 1482. Kristen M. Burkholder, "Threads Bared: Dress and Textiles in English Wills," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 1*, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 144-5.

<sup>140</sup> Sacerdotal and ceremonial church garments, like copes, were exempt from the legislation but religious were not necessarily exempt from criticism concerning their sartorial choices. Chaucer's snide remarks about the Monk's "sleves purfild at the hond / With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond," for example, critique the Monk's worldliness and insistence of his own material comfort. Geoffrey Chaucer, *General Prologue*, 193-4. Those in the secular sphere who ostentatiously flouted the legislation were also heavily criticised. Martial Rose notes that mystery play cycles frequently "exposed not just the extravagance and absurdity of fashionable dress but often identified the wearers, especially those who overreached their

people clearly attempted to negate these restrictions: Edward IV's 1474 legislation specifically prohibits the wearing of *ascun Velewet ou satain fugeree ascun contrefet drap le soie resemblant a le mesme, ou ascuns Corses overez resemblantz a velewet ou a satain fugeree*,<sup>141</sup> which would imply that there was a certain degree of trade in counterfeiting the textile Oryent and sufficient familiarity with it to approximate it. Even so, possessing it remained a step too far.<sup>142</sup>

And it is this latter point that makes all the difference. Rather than being very familiar, in fact almost quotidian, like the edible Oryent, the textile Oryent was more unobtainable. It was not necessarily strange—after all, in order to fake an item one tends to have to know what one is faking, and it was encountered in large quantities on at least a weekly basis—but it was not experienced, known, and possessed in the same way as the foodstuffs. Some access to these fabrics was evidently possible but it was on a much smaller scale. Thomas Gryssop had some awareness of Oryental fabrics, as did at least one of his customers: a piece of tartarin valued at £1, an ell valued at 1s 8d, and a further remnant of 6d were all assayed in his shop.<sup>143</sup> He also had seven ounces of silk ribbon. When Richard Symson of Bishop Burton died in 1494, a woman's long scarlet gown lined with tartarin and worth £1 was amongst his belongings.<sup>144</sup> The wealthy Beverley mason John Cadeby owned several silk belts, ranging from the rather hefty red and green one decorated with silver bosses, weighing seventeen ounces and worth £1 12s 8d that he left to his son, to the star-spangled belt of bastard silk—probably low quality or silk-like fabric—that was only worth 3s. These materials were clearly circulating in the secular sphere but nothing like to the same extent as they were in

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class and pocket, as sinners beyond redemption.” Martial Rose, “Robing and its Significance in English Mystery Plays,” in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 342.

<sup>141</sup> [any velvet or figured satin, any counterfeit silk cloth resembling the same, or any fabric worked to resemble velvet or figured satin]. *Statutes of the Realm* 2, 399. From her analysis of wills and inventories, Kristen M. Burkholder concludes that the majority of the merchant classes adhered to the sumptuary legislation, probably because they were businessmen, and as such were unlikely to wear clothes that could attract criticism from potential customers. The London gentry, however, “seem to have transgressed the legal limitations of their apparel rather more,” especially with regard to wearing velvet, but it was still only a small minority who can be proven to have breached these laws. Burkholder, “Threads Bared,” 150.

<sup>142</sup> A York stringer named Thomas Baker, far below Thornton on the social and economic scale, owned a codd or cushion of silk ware valued at 1s. 8d. when he died in 1436. Whether this codd was of proper silk, or simply of silk-like stuff is unclear. From its value, and from Baker's other items, it could be either. Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 553.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 570. Presumably if he only had a remnant someone (or, more likely, several others) had bought the rest of the piece.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 673. No explanation immediately presents itself as to why a nominally celibate churchman would possess female attire, unless it were for a mistress or it had been inherited.

ecclesiastical environments.<sup>145</sup> Margaret Pigott of Ripon (she of the spice grater) stands out among the surviving probate inventories for the quantity of Oriental textiles she possessed, but her holdings pale in comparison to the amount held by Archbishop Bowet or William Duffield, the canon residentiary who had not paid his spicer.<sup>146</sup>

There were undoubtedly more examples of the textile Oryent throughout Thornton's secular environment but tracking them down proves almost as difficult as ascertaining whether they were considered Oriental. According to their remaining legal documents, the successful and illustrious Blakburn family of York did not own a single scrap of Oriental fabric in all of their considerable holdings.<sup>147</sup> Given their wealth, social prominence and evident delight in life's finer touches, this state of affairs seems unlikely. It is far more likely the case that the items were there but that the fabric was not noted. Thornton himself (or perhaps his wives) probably had silk ribbons or other small pieces of the textile Oryent but there is no way to prove this hypothesis. Part of this problem is generated by the records and medieval bureaucratic practice: inventories and wills were not museum catalogues. Instead they were designed to help differentiate between visible items and to assign a value to items, not to record the exact specifications of that item. If one robe is blue and another is red then there is no need to record if the red robe were trimmed with baud-alexander or that the blue robe were lined with sarcenet. The same lack of specificity applies to household textiles; often fabric is simply listed as "cloth" or *pannus*. The vast majority of textile occurrences in records outside of the court simply tell us that textiles were involved, not what type of fabric was present.<sup>148</sup>

With regard to the identifiable body of material that we do know circulated throughout Thornton's sphere, for all its visibility it still remained at a distance. Of course, there was obviously also a sort of trickle-down effect in terms of experiencing these large-scale Oriental cloths; the vestry clerks who tended them; the washerwomen who cleaned them; the embroiderers, setters, silk weavers, gold-workers, and other

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<sup>145</sup> For other contemporary secular examples in Yorkshire see J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia: Wills Registered at York*, vol. 2, Surtees Society 30 (Durham City: Andrews and Co., 1855), 84 (a silk purse in 1442); 156 (a girdle of purple silk in 1449).

<sup>146</sup> Margaret owned eight ells of black bocasin (2s 8d), a black silk belt (16s), a mantle lined with sarcenet (£1 6s 8d), a bocasin-lined cloak (10s), two hoods lined with velvet and satin respectively (13s and 5s), and fifteen ounces of "silk of various colours" (4s 2d). Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 653-4. The total of £3 12s 6d would have bought very few of Bowet or Duffield's individual items.

<sup>147</sup> Ann Rycraft, ed. and trans., *The Blakburns in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages* (York: The University of York Latin Project, 2006), passim.

<sup>148</sup> Burkenhalter, "Dress and Textiles," 140-1.

artisans who decorated and repaired them, but at the end of the day they all handed the material back. The textile Oryent was only really held fleetingly. It was neither strange nor new, but it was estranged from the everyday; it could be seen but less frequently touched.

This peculiar distance is borne out by the treatment of these fabrics in the romances. Initially we might think that romances would be littered with references to opulent textiles and luxurious materials, given that romances provided an ideal space in which to explore fantasies of possession, yet specific details are not always provided. Particularly in Thornton's texts, references to "fine clothes" or "rich clothing" are far more prevalent than, for instance, robes of silk or samite. Velvet is mentioned in Thornton's *Sir Degrevant*, but in both cases the corresponding Findern text reads "vyolet" in place of "veluet:" at 641 (Melidor's velvet and pearl dress) and 1199 (Degrevant's horse blanket).<sup>149</sup> Even in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, where the poet spends several lines going into great detail describing the intricacies of the Queen of Faerie's saddle, all we learn of the Queen's clothing is that "scho schone."<sup>150</sup> We could perhaps interpret this shining as evidence of orphrey or baldachin but as the Queen is not human and from the Otherworld, such a step seems a little like wishful thinking. This descriptive reticence may in part be due to the prescriptive sumptuary legislation, or it may be a way of negating rapidly changing fashions; tight embroidered Hainaulter-style gowns or long Bohemian shoe picks date quickly whereas rich clothing is always *en vogue*. What we find instead throughout Thornton's reading material is that, just as excessive possession of these sorts of sumptuous fabrics in the 'real' world was limited to exclusive spheres such as the church and the court, in the imaginative literature excessive ownership of these Oryental textiles belonged to rarefied realms that are somehow otherworldly.<sup>151</sup>

In *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, the one major exception of Thornton's texts where individual fabrics are identified rather than generalised as rich cloths, the introduction of the demonic Cassodoren is prefigured by several uneasy circumstances. Although an

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<sup>149</sup> Casson, *Sir Degrevant*, 641; 1199. Even Melidor's chamber of love is surprisingly reticent on the textiles involved. We are told that there are marvellous paintings and are given details of the crystal, brass mullions, and the paved floor; we are informed that was "neuer bed rehere" and that it is spread with "riche clothes" but the only named fabrics are the silk and sendal of the codd's or cushions. *Ibid.*, 1503; 1558; 1504-7.

<sup>150</sup> Murray, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, 48.

<sup>151</sup> Similarly, in many mystery play cycles the costume of God the Father was the most sumptuous. See Rose, "Robing and its Significance," 333-352.

otherwise fine and bold young man, King Henry is strangely reluctant to wed; we are reminded that Thomas Beckett was slain in this period; the courtiers' ship becomes oddly becalmed in the open sea. Into this unsettling environment sails a wondrous ship, unlike any the courtiers have ever seen:<sup>152</sup>

For alle it was of ruelle bone [walrus ivory],  
 And euery nayle was golde wyre,  
 Off betyn golde topcastelle and are [oar],  
 The maste it was of yvorye,  
 Off white satyne þe sayle was, sekerly,  
 And the fane also was of tuly silke. [flag or pennant; crimson silk]  
 Als white als any mornnes mylke  
 This noble schipe was all withowte,  
 With clothis of golde sprede alle abowte.<sup>153</sup>

Cassodoren's father is seated in a chair formed from carbuncles,<sup>154</sup> and Melidor's Aylesham tablecloths would be put to shame by the "clothis of silke" that the servants spread over the tables as they prepare to host Henry's courtiers. The narrative will later continue this association of Oryental material riches with Cassodoren. When she arrives in England, cloths of gold are spread before her, and her daughter—the only one of her children to escape with her—is named "Topyas," or Topaz.

From the moment the ship appears it is obviously demarcated as being supernatural. The construction materials are atypical; the ship is an unusual colour, and, apart from anything else, white satin is a highly impractical choice of sail cloth. The audience is clearly meant to understand the ship as being otherworldly, and as not being subject to the laws of normal life. The specificity of the satin, a fabric that would rapidly be ripped to shreds were it to be used as a sail, augments this sense of peculiarity. The interesting point for our purposes, however, is that the satin and silk of this ship are tied to neither the church nor the establishment. Without the court or ecclesiastical sphere to legitimise the otherworldly aspects of these fabrics, their alienness becomes disturbing. Cassodoren, sailing under a silk pennant and boldly treading on the cloths of Heaven as she disembarks in London, is clearly not to be trusted.

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<sup>152</sup> Cristina Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion: An Edition from the London Thornton Manuscript*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2009), 60-1. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-70.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

We find a similar effect created by the Saracen pavilions. We are told that Saladin's is made of sendal and silk, wildly embroidered with beasts, flying gold and silver pennons, and it is shaped like a castle.<sup>155</sup> The emperor of Cyprus also has an elaborate pavilion; this time "Of silke, & sendelle, & syclatoun."<sup>156</sup> On one level the fabrics signal unimaginable material wealth that is clearly highly desirable, and when the English loot the Saracen camps it is understandable that the tents should be annexed. However, the text is careful to keep the textiles to their habitual rarefied sphere. Saladin's pavilion is taken by Richard himself.<sup>157</sup> The fabric of Saracen royalty goes straight into the hands of English royalty.

Unlike the Oryental foodstuffs that, at least by the fifteenth century, had been absorbed into English cuisine, medical practice, and daily life, Oryental textiles remained one step removed from tangible experience. They could frequently be seen, but not touched; if held, they often had to be returned. They could be possessed only in relatively small quantities such as belts or purses. In this respect they differed greatly from spices. Spices were held in small quantities by non-trading individuals because that was all that was required; even the most daring of medieval gourmards would probably have balked at ladling pepper onto their plate by the ounce. With fabrics in the secular sphere, however, there could always be more, and any desired expansion tended to be limited by financial factors rather than by personal preference. Consequently the vast bulk of the textile Oryent belonged to the realms of the kings of England and of Heaven, thus furnishing it with an alterity that was not generated by geographical distance, but instead by cost. And as we saw with Arthur's feast, cost was key. When Melidor entertains Sir Degrevant in her exaggeratedly opulent chamber of love, she has covered her tables with tablecloths from Aylesham, hardly the most exotic of locations.<sup>158</sup> However, during this period Aylesham cloths were a byword for quality, easily able to compete with Melidor's pearls of the Oryent and velvet cushions in terms of luxury. In spite of this financial alterity, in some ways these Oryental cloths were extremely well domesticated. They were present in the absolute heart of the English Christian community, robing the ecclesiastics and the court. They probably also had a

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 5231-6.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 2329.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 5230. It is also worth bearing in mind that Richard himself can be seen as slightly demonic. See, for example, Nicola McDonald, "Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of *Richard, Coeur de Lion*," in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 124-50.

<sup>158</sup> Casson, *Sir Degrevant*, 1401.



presence in civic public life; any occasion that required the donning of one's glad-rags would have been the natural environment in which to wear one's silver-embossed silk belt. As early as the twelfth century these fabrics, and their place in the cultural awareness, could ally their Oryental origins with the ruling elite of Western Christendom. At the same time, though, they remained paradoxically slightly alien—neither exotic nor strange, but nevertheless estranged—despite being accessed, often in considerable quantities, in sites such as churches that were regularly visited by the majority of the population.

If we turn now to the third area of Oryental material culture that occupied a place in Thornton's socio-cultural milieu we find that it presents quite a different angle on the matter of the Oryent. Whilst Oryental textiles may have been removed and intangible, perpetually signalling through both their uses and their nomenclature to some otherworld or region 'over there,' when we examine the animal kingdom we shall find that the reverse is also valid; an item did not necessarily need to be present in the flesh in order to be 'over here.'

### **Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!**

"I saw [a Heffalump] once," said Piglet. "At least, I think I did," he said. "Only perhaps it wasn't."

"So did I," said Pooh, wondering what a Heffalump was like.

"You don't often see them," said Christopher Robin carelessly.

"Not now," said Piglet.

"Not at this time of year," said Pooh.<sup>159</sup>

Around the time of Thornton's death, the Gilbertine community at Old Malton, about eleven miles east of Thornton's house at Stonegrave, decided to revamp the interior of their priory church, St Mary's. The renovations they carried out included fitting thirty-five new choir stalls in the chancel, complete with carved misericords below the new seats, and on one of these misericords they chose to have carved a camel. The camel appears to be fairly relaxed; he is kneeling down, or *couchant*, with his rather plummy tail swept over onto his back, and his simple bridle and reins curl round by his feet. The plumes of his tail aside, (which are a little more luxuriant and well-groomed than perhaps might have been found on a contemporary animal residing

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<sup>159</sup> A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (York: Methuen, 1989), 51.

in the desert) said camel is a mimetic beast. His bridle and reins indicate a level of domestication; unlike the lion on the northern side of the stalls, this camel is a working animal. The camel is not adorning his misericord in splendid isolation; there are thirty-four differing carvings on the other seats (ranging from wyverns and jugglers to a pinecone) but the camel is of particular interest among the St Mary's misericords. He is both a non-imaginary denizen of the Oryent, and also actively recognised as such at the time.<sup>160</sup>

St Mary's, Old Malton, was not the only church in Yorkshire to have an Oryental animal carved onto its misericords. St Mary's Church in Beverley boasts a set of misericords carved in 1445 which includes a rather stately looking elephant proudly carrying his dual-turreted castle or *howdah* on his back. Insufficient evidence has survived to be able to claim that carving Oryental animals on misericords was fashionable, but it was certainly not uncommon. From the survival rates, which obviously cannot be taken as consistent with the original distribution, elephants on misericords seem to have held a universal level of appeal during the fifteenth century at least; seven remain across the country.<sup>161</sup> Camel misericords in particular seem to have been more popular in the north of England than in the south: besides Old Malton, Manchester Cathedral, Beverley Minster, and Boston all have them, whereas only two remain south of the Midlands. It may have been as a response to this local interest or tradition—or as a culmination of it—that the interesting tableau carved in 1520 on a misericord in Beverley Minster came into being. The scene depicts an elephant, complete with *howdah*, being whipped by an ape and led by a porcupine, all of which seem to have been associated with India. The misericord's supporters are a camel *couchant* on the left-hand side, and a lion on the right, making it the largest extant medieval misericord depiction of foreign but real animals, animals who might never have set foot in any of the Ridings but which nevertheless featured in the cultural and artistic landscape of fifteenth-century Yorkshire.

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<sup>160</sup> Of the thirty-five carvings, only eight are original. The majority, which were severely decayed, were replaced with “very good copies” around 1880 as part of a comprehensive restoration project. The camel, however, is one of the originals. G.L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 180.

<sup>161</sup> Remnant claims there are eight, but while seven of these misericords are obviously recognisable as elephants, the eighth bears very little resemblance to one. If anything it looks like an anteater or tapir. Remnant gives no rationale for this choice, but the animal in question is entangled with a serpent so presumably Remnant was guided by the bestiary tradition of elephants fighting serpents. However, this identification is by no means certain, especially given the accuracy of the other seven.

As every zookeeper knows, animals must be approached with caution. As we continue to explore the extent of Oriental impact throughout Thornton's world and move our focus to animals, the same advice applies. Sentient beings and their images cannot, and did not, receive the same treatment as apricots and velvets. Unlike almonds, animals bite back. As we saw earlier, the imported fabrics and foodstuffs were welcomed and valued without fear. Foreign animals, however, contained an element of menace. The beasts and birds that ranged the reaches of the medieval East mostly made their way to England in bestiaries and travel narratives, then reappearing in English-made tapestries, pictures, shields, and cushions, in carvings, on beds, on walls, and in churches. Some appeared in romances; others featured in heraldic contexts. Still more pranced their way across maps. As such, they were subject to more imaginative constructions than the foodstuffs and fabrics which were present, as it were, "in the flesh."

These creatures, unlike indigenous Insular mammals, were also subject to a sort of hierarchy. Griffins played an important role in guarding the gold hoards of Scythia, for example.<sup>162</sup> According to *Sir Eglamour of Artois* they were also in a position to deposit children where they could be conveniently retrieved by the King of Israel, but griffins did not occupy the same spaces as camels. For a heraldic creature that regularly bears away the sons of emperors, and who frequents the company of lions and leopards, perhaps the camel was an insufficiently noble companion. Alternatively, rather than concerns over noble congruence, camels and griffins may not have occupied the same textual spaces owing to a clearer distinction between heraldic creatures and what we would now term 'real' creatures. I am not claiming that griffins, manticores, and unicorns were greeted with complete incredulity whenever they were textually encountered, but that by the fifteenth century there was a sophisticated understanding that the romance, heraldic, and above all symbolic sphere was not necessarily inhabited by the same creatures acting in the same way as the sphere inhabited by the reader.

Distinctions were made between real animals and allegorical appropriations of them, and the situations in which they were used. The residents of fifteenth-century Yorkshire were very well aware that the real lions prowling round Africa did not resemble the azure lion rampant of the Percy family. The difference between the heraldic and real spheres, and a clear understanding of the two, is perhaps best

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<sup>162</sup> Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans., Stephen A. Barney et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XIV.3.32.

exemplified by Albrecht Durer's early sixteenth-century images of lions. His 1520 study is a mimetic reproduction of the creature he saw, whereas the beasts in his earlier St Jerome pictures, which do not resemble real lions to the same extent, were intended for symbolic use and therefore conform to differing conventions.<sup>163</sup>

An additional problem in attempting to reconstruct how Oriental animals figured in the cultural landscape of fifteenth-century Yorkshire is that descriptions of animals are limited and often fail to specify which particular conventions were being followed. We can surmise that the tapestry cover embroidered "with a crowned lion in the middle" that lay over the large bed in York Canon Residentiary William Duffield's principal chamber in 1452 probably showed a heraldic animal.<sup>164</sup> However, the York parson, Thomas Symson, also had a bed cover with a lion upon it, and of the same apparent value.<sup>165</sup> This lion is not described as crowned and so we cannot tell to which set of conventions the image conformed. Furthermore, we frequently have little idea as to the true extent to which household accoutrements were decorated, let alone whether animals (domestic or Oriental) formed part of that decoration. When recording a person's goods and chattels for a will or an inventory, a primary aim was distinguishing each item so that it could be identified from its surroundings rather than detailing it per se. If the York vicar Robert Danby had not possessed several sets of patterned cushion-cloths and cushions, we would probably never have known that one set of six cushions was decorated with griffins and another set was done with pelicans.<sup>166</sup>

When the two spheres collided and animals did follow unusual patterns of behaviour, there were frequently extenuating or abnormal circumstances at play to justify the disjunct between the two. In *Sir Isumbras*, another of Thornton's romances where a griffin abducts a child, Isumbras's three sons appear mounted on "thre wyld bestes:" a unicorn, a lion, and a leopard respectively.<sup>167</sup> Audiences were well aware that lions and leopards were not simply larger and fluffier versions of domestic cats, and that such beasts did not make particularly safe playfellows for young boys, especially

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<sup>163</sup> Daniel Hahn, *The Tower Menagerie* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 51.

<sup>164</sup> Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 595.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 669.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 642. Given Danby's profession it seems likely that the pelican motif was of the pelican in her piety, plucking her breast and bleeding to feed her offspring, and so could have been there for devotional reasons. The griffins could be a heraldic emblem, or they could also be a devotional device, griffins sometimes being considered to represent Christ's fusion of human and divine in their unity of terrestrial lion and aerial eagle.

<sup>167</sup> J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps, ed., *The Thornton Romances: Sir Eglamour* (London: The Camden Society, 1844), 743. All references to this text are by line number.

not leopards.<sup>168</sup> The narrative then informs us that this event is the result of direct divine intervention, a symbol of Isumbras's worthiness and righteousness. Presumably it is this worthiness that then enables him, his wife, and their sons to tackle a rampaging army of thirty-two thousand Saracens, and to slay them all while they themselves receive no hurt.

This episode in *Sir Isumbras* offers us an interesting way of distinguishing the two spheres as it provides us with the ultimate animal fantasy, the taming and mastery of the "wylde bestes." To a certain extent the appeal of these creatures such as unicorns and griffins was that they were untamed and untameable. As such, they almost had to remain in the unknown lands beyond Jerusalem, in the pages of the bestiaries, and in the romance world. Some material imprint of their existence made it to Western Europe in the form of "unicorn [narwhal] horns and "griffins' [ostrich] eggs," but how seriously these were taken to be unicorn or griffin relics is unclear.<sup>169</sup> The heraldic and romance sphere allowed English audiences, for whom the largest indigenous mammal was the less-than ferocious red deer, the space in which to indulge fantasies of bestial danger, tension, and drama. The heraldic creatures were a source of entertainment and interest, but were probably a source of fear only to little children. After all, griffins and unicorns never made it on to England's soil. Furthermore, being untameable unless God was involved, they were unlikely to menace her shores. Paradoxically, it was the less violent animals, the domesticated Oryental animals that had the potential power to terrify. As such, it is on these animals, such as the camel in Old Malton, that our focus lies.

Camels and elephants provide what may be the most illuminating area of investigation. Not only do they appear in sufficient quantities for us to gain some idea of their reception, but they occupy a unique space, one in which they are both tamed and menacing. Syrian cats, for example, were highly prized as domestic pets in Europe, with Queen Isabella going to extreme lengths to acquire some for her household, but they were in no ways considered threatening.<sup>170</sup> Lions, on the other hand were just plain dangerous unless one were of royal blood. This belief neatly permitted lions to

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<sup>168</sup> Leopards especially were believed to be "a beast most cruel." Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Medieval Lore from Bartholomeus Anglicus*, trans. Robert Steele (Fairford: Echo Library, 2006), 63.

<sup>169</sup> Cobb, *Overseas Trade*, 49. The particular ship, owned by a Venetian, that carried the griffin's egg was laden with Oryental fabrics, foodstuffs, and jewels. An ape was also on board. For more griffin parts, their reception, and for the narwhal horns see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 69, 74-5.

<sup>170</sup> For the much-tried Isabella's endeavours to attain a tabby see Kathleen Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 29-34.

approach closer in the cultural imagination than the griffins and unicorns, but still dictated that safe interaction between man and beast be dependent on the unusual circumstance of the man in question being royalty. To what extent this supposition was genuinely held though remains unclear. Having faith in the contents of his veins, Edward III allegedly challenged Philip VI of France to a lion-based test for the French throne in 1340.<sup>171</sup> Not having a kingdom at stake, Bartholomeus Anglicus credited the lion with universal nobility and a disinclination to attack man.<sup>172</sup> Certainly in *Richard, Coeur de Lion* when the Emperor of Almayne's lion attacked Richard it demonstrated no such respect for England's bloodline. Unlike large cats, camels and elephants had few noble qualities and, when used symbolically, tended to depict humbleness and servitude rather than power or splendour. They were by no means unknown in fifteenth-century heraldic devices—Kintyre Pursuivant Adam Loutfut was detailing camels' heraldic uses in his 1494 translation of *Deidis of Armorie* from French to Middle Scots—but they are far less common than lions or leopards, for instance.

In the case of elephants and camels however, the heraldic animals bear greater resemblance to the real ones than do lions. There is also evidence, particularly with elephants, that the symbolic traditions were actively being rejected or ignored. The bestiary tradition depicts elephants engaged in deadly struggles with serpents, or leaning against trees, unable to bend their legs. Interestingly though, apart from the famed Exeter cathedral elephant—which, dating from the thirteenth century, is far older than the others—all extant elephant misericords depict these elephants as carrying *howdahs*.<sup>173</sup> These elephants are military animals, armed and ready for war, which seems a little at odds with their ecclesiastical locations. Elephants were not used by Western forces as weapons or beasts of war, but they featured in the *Alexander* cycle, and other narratives set in the East in precisely that context. From this circumstance, we can perhaps assume that these elephants have been adjusted to fit contemporary perceptions, knowledge, and possibly also cultural preoccupations. The proud elephant's legs in St Mary's, Beverley, also bear witness to the sustained nature of this knowledge transfer. This elephant clearly can be seen to have identifiable knees that, if the various bestiaries are to be believed, he should not possess. I am not claiming that

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<sup>171</sup> W.M. Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 226.

<sup>172</sup> Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Medieval Lore*, 62-3.

<sup>173</sup> Sarah Wells, "Seeing is Believing," in *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Alexander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 71. Wells does not believe that Remnant's eighth "elephant" is, in fact, an elephant.

these animals were never used allegorically or symbolically outside of a bestiary or coat of arms; our camel *couchant* in Old Malton may well be a reference to Christ humbly accepting a burden; the reins and bridle would certainly encourage such a reading. Nevertheless, depictions of these animals are more likely to mirror the contemporary perceptions of their real-life equivalent than those of creatures more frequently found in heraldic contexts.

Despite the plethora of animal imagery in this environment, not all of the animals that featured in Thornton's cultural milieu were representations. Oriental paws, hooves, and feet had all padded about on English soil at various points in the previous two hundred years, and were in fact doing so during the period in which he compiled his manuscripts. Although it is extremely unlikely that Thornton ever encountered a camel in the flesh, he may well have been aware that there had been a camel in the country during his father's lifetime, and possibly even when he himself was born.<sup>174</sup> Robert Thornton senior had quite probably heard of the events of 1392, when the people of London gifted a pelican to Anne of Bohemia, and a camel to Richard II on Twelfth Night.<sup>175</sup> The contemporary spread of this information is impossible to gauge, and we have no way of knowing how many people in Yorkshire were aware of Richard's camel, but there is a clear precedent for the camel having had more cultural impact than we might initially think. The Exeter elephant misericord, which is the earliest-known English wooden representation of an elephant, dates from the mid-thirteenth century, between 1220 and 1279. Kate M. Clarke first indicated in 1920 that, rather than being a design brought home by the misericord-commissioning Bishop Bruere (1224-44) from his time in the Holy Land, the Exeter elephant was likely to have been inspired by England's first elephant, a present to Henry III from Louis IX of France in 1255.<sup>176</sup> Clarke claims that the elephant bears little resemblance to bestiary illustrations, but has many features in common with the well-known and oft-quoted mid-thirteenth-century drawings by Matthew Paris. The Exeter elephant serves as an example, alongside Paris's pictures, of how these imported real animals did impact on

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<sup>174</sup> Although the Tower Menagerie had a fairly appalling track record of keeping its inhabitants alive for any sustained period of time, camels are fairly resilient creatures and can live for up to forty years. In the Middle Ages it was believed that they could reach one hundred. It is perfectly possible that the camel survived the tender ministrations of its keepers, made it to the turn of the century, and was in still alive when Robert Thornton junior was born.

<sup>175</sup> L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey, eds. and trans., *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381-1394* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 510-11.

<sup>176</sup> Kate M. Clarke, "The Misericords of Exeter Cathedral," *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 11 (1920): 13.

those members of society who were not intimately involved in their upkeep but, unlike Paris, who had not necessarily seen them in the flesh. If information about an elephant's appearance could be transmitted reasonably accurately and swiftly from thirteenth-century London to thirteenth-century Exeter, then communication concerning a camel between the major cities of York and London two hundred years later can have posed few problems.

More conceivably, either through the North Riding grapevine or perhaps when he was in London, Thornton may have heard stories circulating about the Royal Menagerie's recent fortunes, such as the death of the lions in 1436.<sup>177</sup> This information would have been worthy of public notice and repetition as it had potential consequences for the strength of the monarchy. Thornton would have been visiting around 1453, the time of his appointment to the office of tax-collector, so both the lions' annihilation and the menagerie's subsequent resurgence would have been common knowledge. After lying empty of large animals for seven years, the menagerie started coming back to life in 1443. Nicholas Jone, a Bolognese merchant married to an English woman, brought Henry VI three camels and an ostrich from Turkey.<sup>178</sup> An ostrich keeper had been appointed in 1437, but whether he and his charge were still in residence when Jone's gift entered is unclear.<sup>179</sup> Certainly no camel-keeper was appointed when Jone's camels made their appearance, unlike for Richard II's camel, so perhaps these Turkish immigrants did not survive for long. The lion population had started to be revived in 1445 with the presentation of a lion cub to Margaret of Anjou as a wedding gift from one of Henry VI's courtiers.<sup>180</sup> From this point onwards the menagerie was slowly re-established.<sup>181</sup> In all probability it cannot have contained more than half a dozen

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<sup>177</sup> All the lions died within the space of a few months, most probably from disease. Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France, in Two Parts, by Robert Fabyan, Named by Himself the Concordance of Histories and reprinted from Pynson's 1516 Edition*, ed. Henry Ellis (London: F.C and J. Rivington, 1811), 612. Like today's ravens leaving the Tower is meant to herald the fall of the Crown and the kingdom with it, the lions were closely allied to the royal family. They were frequently named after them, and it was believed that the strength of the monarchy was linked to their survival. Hahn, *The Tower Menagerie*, 67.

<sup>178</sup> *CPR 1441-6, Henry VI vol. 4*, 166. Henry apparently felt this gesture worthy of reward as Jone was awarded the office of brokerage of the exchanges and securities of carracks, ships, and galleys coming to England, for life.

<sup>179</sup> *CPR 1436-41, Henry VI vol. 3*, 92.

<sup>180</sup> Having virtually grown up with a menagerie, her father Rene being a keen collector of animals, the young queen was apparently delighted. Hahn, *The Tower Menagerie*, 76.

<sup>181</sup> The annual instructions issued to the Keeper of His Majesty's Lions and Leopards were changed in 1445, presumably to reflect the circumstance that there were now lions to keep. It is unclear whether the keeper, Richard Manfeld, (who had held the post since 1436 in spite of this lack of big cats) had any jurisdiction over the camels. Ostriches at least were outwith his remit, and he was not accorded an allowance per camel as he was in the case of the lions.



creatures by the time of Thornton's visit to London, and it is highly unlikely it had more than two or three. The important point, though, is that the Royal Menagerie had some cultural currency, and Thornton would have known that it was there.

Even allowing for some cultural impact though, during Thornton's lifetime the Royal Menagerie was not an influential force that affected or modified people's bestial perceptions by granting them access to the animals in question. There was indeed a considerable tradition of menagerie owning amongst the English royal family dating back to at least the early thirteenth century, and it is extremely tempting to entertain the thought that, on his sojourn in London, Thornton took himself off to the Tower of London to "go to see the lions" as Samuel Pepys and so many after him would in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sadly, it is an extremely remote possibility. Even if he had wanted to see the lions, it is unlikely that Thornton would have had sufficient social cachet or connections required to see the beasts. The Keeper of His Majesty's Lions and Leopards had been charging a fee to view the inhabitants of the Royal Menagerie since the 1420s, but it was only the privileged few—court members or personal friends—who would have been granted admittance.<sup>182</sup> Henry VI was willing to be a little more democratic in granting the populace access to the menagerie; the entrance fee was waived if one were willing to donate one's dog or cat to the lions' dinner table, but unless Thornton had acquired such an animal during his stay this option was also barred to him.<sup>183</sup>

In this respect, life in London was as devoid of beast-sightings as North Yorkshire. The animals were less geographically distant, but their empirical impact was limited. Bestially speaking, the inhabitants of London did not possess any cosmopolitan advantage over their provincial contemporaries. The criminals who entered the Tower "to the accompaniment of roars, squawks, screeches and growls from the beasts and birds" aside,<sup>184</sup> catching a glimpse of these creatures was not possible for the vast majority of the population. At times it had even been illegal. On 4<sup>th</sup> December 1364 Edward III issued a proclamation to the City of London concerning the welfare of his beast, known as an "Oure," and its keepers.<sup>185</sup> Having learnt that "certain persons" had

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 29, 73.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>184</sup> Nigel Jones, *Tower* (London: Random House, 2011), 76. As the exact location of the majority of the animal enclosures is unknown, we cannot assume that the criminals got any closer to them than hearing them. Equally, it may have been that at least some of the animals were partly or fully visible from the entrance.

<sup>185</sup> The "Oure" was probably an aurochs.

threatened to attack the keepers and “atrociously to kill the said beast,” Edward threatened forfeiture of all goods for anyone who damaged either the keepers or the animal, or who “presume[d] to intermeddle for getting a sight of the said beast, against the will of them, the keepers thereof.”<sup>186</sup> W. M. Ormrod suggests that such desire for the animal’s death indicates a popular sentiment that the beast was dangerous, but the second part of the proclamation bears closer investigation for our purposes.<sup>187</sup> Whether the mere sight of this creature was sufficient to arouse one’s fear and bloodlust, or whether the keepers were simply fed up of being annoyed by curious passers-by, this aurochs was quite clearly not for public consumption.

Large-scale menageries, such as those owned by Frederick II, René of Anjou, and Henry III were, understandably, whimsicalities in which only the very privileged, very rich (and perhaps rather eccentric) few indulged themselves. To a certain extent, this circumstance was reflected in the animals that featured in them. Some animals were there as pure curiosities; in the early seventeenth-century a beaver arrived from the New World and was so unfamiliar to his keepers that he was fed on vast quantities of bread.<sup>188</sup> Other creatures were there for symbolic purposes; Edward III received three leopards to act as the living representative of his shield. Lions, which were better known than beavers and provided fewer problems in terms of upkeep and diet, had long been associated with royalty. In *Richard Coeur de Lion*, the reader’s eyebrows are raised by Richard devouring the still-throbbing heart of the Emperor of Almayne’s pet lion (without bread, no less!), rather than by the Emperor having a pet lion about the palace.<sup>189</sup>

Outside of these exalted spheres there were other instances of non-English animals being kept in private hands, though like many royal habits these were enacted on a smaller scale.<sup>190</sup> The Countess of Westmorland owned a bear that she kept as a pet, primarily because of the bear on her coat of arms. The parrot illustration in the fifteenth-century English Bestiary of Anne Walshe (now Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Gl. kgl. S. 1633 4°) shows a green parrot sporting a belled collar and a

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<sup>186</sup> Henry T. Riley, ed., *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries: Being a Series of Extracts, Local, Social, and Political, from the Early Archives of the City of London, A.D. 1276-1419* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1868), 320.

<sup>187</sup> W.M. Ormrod, “John Mandeville, Edward III, and the King of Inde,” *The Chaucer Review* 46 (2012): 334-5.

<sup>188</sup> Hahn, *The Tower Menagerie*, 107.

<sup>189</sup> The owners were under no illusions over their pets’ docility however: the Emperor attempts to use his lion as the means of killing Richard.

<sup>190</sup> For a detailed study of animals in domestic settings see Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*, passim.

seriously disgruntled expression, from which we can assume that parrots were frequently, and recognisably, kept as pets. Archaeological work in Norwich has revealed parrot bones in fifteenth-century deposits; from comparison with bestiary images it seems reasonable to presume that these bones were once a pet parrot, rather than an unusual snack.<sup>191</sup> In Southampton, always a leader in foreign imports, the skeleton of a small Barbary ape was found during the excavation of Richard of Southwick's (d. c.1290) house, again implying that Richard, or his tenant, kept this little foreigner as a pet.<sup>192</sup> Across the country in Cambridge, the senate of King's College not only banned the keeping of birds and dogs in college but, "clearly fearing their students' imagination, added badgers, foxes, deer, monkeys, wolves and bears to the list of prohibited animals."<sup>193</sup> Presumably then, the more inventive scholars were capable of laying their hands on such creatures if they really applied themselves to the task. At Trinity the senate had less foresight and only banned dogs, which subsequently allowed Lord Byron to keep a bear in his rooms five hundred years later. Lions, leopards, camels, elephants, and any other large Oriental creatures, however, were left off the King's College statute, from which we may conclude that some things were beyond even the ingenuity and grasp of the enterprising Cambridge men.

The important point here, though, is that these large Oriental animals were kept in private spheres to which Thornton, his Yorkshire peers, his London contemporaries, and the Cambridge students, would have had little or no access. The small pockets of Oriental animals about the country did not greatly domesticate perceptions of camels, elephants, or lions in the way that almonds and pepper had been domesticated. Even those who could not afford spices could access them visually in shop windows, by smelling them in church, or by working for those who could afford them. Despite their images being found on Old Malton's misericords, flesh and blood camels were emphatically not part of everyday life.

Conversely, though, images of camels and other Oriental animals *were* a feature of everyday life. Depictions of non-English animals roamed freely across religious and secular spheres, through domestic and public spaces, and across a range of media. Even Thornton's own manuscripts bear witness to familiarity with these creatures and their presence in his cultural milieu. In *Siege of Jerusalem* Caiaphus rides an elephant to

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>192</sup> Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, 103-4

<sup>193</sup> Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*, 73. See also *Documents Relating to the Universities and Colleges of Cambridge Vol 2* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852), 542.

meet the attacking Romans, and camels and elephants are used in later scenes. In the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* elephants are mentioned several times as steeds for the Saracens when the army initially gathers, and by the end of the war it would seem that this multicultural Saracen-Roman alliance is mounted on a positive menagerie of beasts. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, the Oryent is conjured on European soil predominantly through bestial means. The camp of the Roman-Saracen coalition stables:

Kamelles and sekadrisses, and cofires fulle riche,<sup>194</sup> [crocodiles]  
 Hekes, and hakkenays, and horses of armes, [Hacks; hackneys]  
 ...  
 They drewe owt of dromondaries dyuerse lordes.  
 Moyllez mylke whitte, and meruayllous bestez, [Mules]  
 Elfaydes, and arrabys, and olyfauntez noble, [Camels; Arabian horses]  
 Ther are of the Oryent.<sup>195</sup>

The text provides no explanation as to what these beasts are; the manuscript has no glossing marginalia or drolleries at this point, and so we must assume that Thornton and his audience already possessed a cogent perception of these creatures, which required no further clarification.<sup>196</sup>

The surviving images from the misericords and religious decorations left to us from the fifteenth century support this assumption. Less easily identifiable to modern eyes than our misericord camel from Old Malton, but probably a more common location to find medieval images of camels is wrapped around the shoulders of St John the Baptist. The saint was frequently depicted as wearing the camel skin from his time in the wilderness; in fact it is often only the camel skin that enables his identification.<sup>197</sup> The church of St Denys on Walmgate, for example, has a fourteenth-century image of John in this guise on the right panel of the window nearest the font on the left side of the north aisle. The dead camel's head, complete with an understandably mournful expression on its face, can clearly be seen drooping between the saint's legs, while his

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<sup>194</sup> For more on this passage see this thesis, 10.

<sup>195</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 2283-9.

<sup>196</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the *Morte Arthure*'s drolleries and their relevance to the text see Thomas Howard Crofts, "The Occasion of the *Morte Arthure*: Textual History and Marginal Decoration in the Thornton MS," *Arthuriana* 20 (2010): 5-27.

<sup>197</sup> Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 94. John B. Friedman notes that camel-skin garments are particularly prevalent in Yorkshire depictions of saints. Friedman, *Northern English Books*, 197-8.

bipartite hooves dangle outside John's knees.<sup>198</sup> Presenting, in these cases, a textual rather than physical appearance, camels are mentioned by name elsewhere in the Bible. Consequently they were discussed in patristic works and Biblical exegesis.<sup>199</sup> Matthew 19:24 (putting the camel through the eye of a needle) and Matthew 23:24 (the Pharisees as blind prophets who strain out gnats but swallow a camel) in particular attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, although Old Testament camels—albeit not to the same degree—were also considered.<sup>200</sup>

In a secular environment, medieval chessboards contained the *alfyne* or *aufin*, “the elephant,” which has since been replaced by the more versatile bishop.<sup>201</sup> The chessboard was to some extent in a state of flux at this point in time, with both elephants and bishops being valid pieces, depending from where one took one's influence.<sup>202</sup> Importantly, these *alfynes* did indeed look like elephants. Unlike most chess pieces today, they were not abstract or minimalist figures; they were mimetic (or at least attempted mimetic) representations. We cannot know if Thornton himself played chess but he was certainly familiar with *alfynes* and their strategic weaknesses. In the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Sir Gawain travels to the camp of the Emperor of Rome on a diplomatic mission from King Arthur and—somewhat rashly losing his temper—calls the Emperor an *alfyne*, a remark that is clearly intended as an insult. Several York residents left painted playing boards in their wills so perhaps Thornton

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<sup>198</sup> There may also have been stained glass images of animals in scenes depicting Noah's ark as found in the beautiful Noah Window in Chartres Cathedral, which contains a large griffin on one roundel and camels, elephants, and lions on two others. Unfortunately the few surviving English glass representations of this Biblical story are mostly like that of York Minster's Great East Window, which shows Noah releasing the dove from a window in a closed boat, with no other animals (or humans for that matter) visible. Consequently we cannot place any great reliance upon this hypothesis. One notable exception to this rule is the mid-fifteenth-century main light panel of the south window in the south aisle of St Anne's chapel in Malvern Priory (CVMA window sIV-3b). It depicts a contemporary Noah and his ark surrounded by animals including two boars, two horses, a rabbit, a goat or long-horned quadruped of similar appearance, a lion, and—most importantly—a camel.

<sup>199</sup> Although they are often depicted as the mounts of the Magi, the Bible does not specifically state that the Magi are mounted on camels. The following mentions of camels seem to exist only in textual form, rather than being depicted in statues or stained glass, whereas the coming of the Magi, Noah's ark, and John the Baptist's cloak have visual and well as textual representations. See Nigel Harris, “The Camel: Perspectives and Meanings in Medieval Literature,” in *Fauna and Flora in the Middle Ages: Studies of the Medieval Environment and its Impact on the Human Mind: Papers Delivered at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, in 2000, 2001, and 2003* (Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 8), ed. Sieglinde Hartmann (Frankfurt: Lang, 2007), 117-9.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> For more information on the *alfyne* see H.J.R Murray, *The History of Chess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 23 n. 23; 424-5; 791-2.

<sup>202</sup> The famed Lewis Chessmen date from the twelfth century but have a demonstrably ecclesiastical bishop. The equally famous Charlemagne Chess Set from the end of the eleventh century has elephants, so the two were existing contemporaneously.

had observed the *alfyne*'s fallibility first hand.<sup>203</sup> Images or models were not the only way that textiles could evoke Oriental animals; as discussed earlier, camel hair was believed to be a key component of the fabric camlet. When (and if) Thornton saw a bishop or noble dressed in camlet, camels would have been brought to mind, even if he were aware that no camels had necessarily been involved in the garment's creation.

However, in spite of the profusion of images, and the lack of encounters with the "genuine article," far from remaining as two-dimensional images or descriptions, these Oriental animals were understood to be commensurate with the flesh and blood creatures kept by England's kings. They did not need to be seen to be conceived of as carnal entities. In *Siege of Jerusalem* the narrative grants considerable space to the animals employed on both sides, and from the outset they are depicted as being a fundamental and integral part of the major battle that occupies Passus Three. On the eve of the battle:

Was noght while the nyght lastede,    bot nehyng of stedis  
 Strogelyng with stele werke,    and stuffyng of helmes,  
 Armyng of olyfauntes    and other arwe bestes [Sluggish or fearful]  
 Agen the Cristen to come    with castels on bakkes.<sup>204</sup>

The armouring of the restless horses is later echoed by the "Cameles closed in stele" ridden by the Jews.<sup>205</sup> The elephants are obviously being readied by the Jewish forces, as are the camels. However, the struggling armoured horses could belong to either the Jewish or Christian forces; the text notes that there are a hundred thousand Jewish cavalry being deployed, and that the Christians are all mounted on horses. This blurring of divisions between the two armies, and stress on the actions happening to the animals (as opposed to the human combatants) concentrate the focus solely on the animals, making them the locus on which the battle is played out.

Michael Livingston has suggested "it might be that, for the poet and his audience, elephants simply have the ring of Alexander and of the distant East, and that their presence at such a battle is therefore expected," but these animals are not merely one-dimensional token gestures to Eastern battle imagery.<sup>206</sup> The poet has clearly

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<sup>203</sup> See, for example, Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 512, 549.

<sup>204</sup> Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, eds., *Siege of Jerusalem*, EETS OS 320 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 425-8. All references to this text are by line number. These camels recall the elephant misericords sporting their *howdahs*.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>206</sup> Michael Livingston, ed., *Siege of Jerusalem*, (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 97. All references to this text are by page number.

conceived of them as being sentient creatures, alive to pain and reacting to their environment. As the battle rages, the Romans:

... Eghtillede to those olyfauntes that orible were, [Charged at]  
 And girdes out thayre guttes with scharpe growndyn speres:  
 Rappis rispen owte that redles an hundred  
 Scholde be busy to bere that on the bent leuyde.<sup>207</sup>  
 Castels claterd down, camels thay Brustyn,  
 Dromedaries to the deth drowen als swythe;  
 Tha the blode fomed hem fro in the flattis aboute  
 The kne-depe in the dale dasschyne thaire stedes.<sup>208</sup>

The agonies these beasts suffer as they are attacked and disembowelled are understood as being those of fleshly living creatures, just like the horses' neighs and struggles as they are enclosed in their armour. Once combat has ceased we again experience the field through the actions of the animals:

The fals Jewes on the felde ware fallyn so thicke  
 As hail fro the heuen, in hepes over other;  
 So was the bent ouer alle, bloody by-runne,  
 With those dede bodies aboute alle that brod vale.  
 There myghte no stede doun stap bot on schene wede,  
 Othir on brene, or on breste, ells on bright heuedis.<sup>209</sup>

As Christine Chism has indicated, “even in a genre where battle eviscerations are more or less de rigueur, *The Siege of Jerusalem* has the dubious distinction of being the most gratuitously and imaginatively vicious poem of the Alliterative Revival.”<sup>210</sup> The viciously bloody and violent imagery adds a visceral physicality and sentient nature to these foreign creatures, taking them from a token presence that adds local colour, to active participants in the narrative. It makes them real.

Nevertheless, the “local colour” factor cannot be ignored. As Nigel Harris has demonstrated with regard to medieval German literature, in secular imaginative contexts we find camels “frequently mentioned in narratives with an Eastern setting.”<sup>211</sup> The important circumstance is that these camels are not employed for any allegorical

<sup>207</sup> [Such] entrails break forth that a hundred ridders (i.e., field-strippers) / Would be hard-pressed to bury what was left upon the field.

<sup>208</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 569-76.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 601-6.

<sup>210</sup> Christine Chism, “*Siege of Jerusalem: Liquidating Assets*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 317.

<sup>211</sup> Nigel Harris, “The Camel,” 125.

purpose but rather functioning in ways and carrying out actions that real camels did in everyday life. Harris then lists several German texts where camels are indeed just camels, arguing that a camel provides mimetic background material and “local colour.” In Middle English narratives—particularly romances—the situation is perhaps a little more complex but the mimetic element is still present to a certain extent. In Thornton’s *Three Kings of Cologne* for example, the Magi are mounted on camels as would be expected.<sup>212</sup>

Unlike spices or almonds, which had been domesticated almost beyond recognition of their non-Insular origins, and the Oryental fabrics which were rendered other through their holy yet Western setting, these animals remained distinctly foreign and were recognised as such. Although they were certainly a familiar feature of everyday life, appearing everywhere on walls, on windows, in sermons, in books, on cushions and armour, and on chess sets, they did not appear in the flesh, and could not be experienced directly. Despite clearly being understood to be living, breathing entities, they could only be experienced by proxy, through mediated images or descriptions, unlike spices or foreign textiles which Thornton and his ilk could ingest or occasionally touch. As such, they still retained a hint of alterity.

Yet “foreign” is not necessarily synonymous with “exotic” or “outlandish,” or even “strange.” It is also important to stress that just because animals could be employed theologically or referentially (and indeed, had often been), it does not necessarily follow that all such animals were always used in this manner. These animals formed part of the natural order of things, generated by natural causes, a result of what Gerald of Wales termed “the wonderful works of nature at play.”<sup>213</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Magi are frequently depicted astride their camels. It seems unlikely that the camels’ presence here is for any subversive or allegorical reasons; it is simply that the Magi were perceived as coming from the East and, as such, would have ridden camels. Fifteenth-century readers were fully cognisant of climatic differences and the natural variation in species, including humans, these caused. As Akbari has indicated, in *The Book of John Mandeville* “climate is adduced as the cause of the physiology of the inhabitants... The reason for this, says Mandeville, is that ‘the nature of the lond is

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<sup>212</sup> The kings travel by a variety of conveyances, “One horse, one fote, or ells one dromedarye,” depending on the terrain that they encounter. MacCracken, “*Three Kings of Cologne*,” 140.

<sup>213</sup> Gerald of Wales, *History and Topography*, trans. John J. O’Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 1.11-2, 42.



such.’ (Chapter 22).”<sup>214</sup> Thus, the Ethiopians have been burnt black by the fearful heat of the sun; as a result of their birth under the Moon the cold English have “wyll to be moch steryng and to go into diverse contreis of the worlde;”<sup>215</sup> and a Sciapod’s one massive foot is an impressive method of avoiding sunburn as it “covert to his body for the sonne.”<sup>216</sup> Just as all humans were products of their environments, so were all creatures. The camel’s environment was clearly recognised as being the Eastern desert, as is evidenced by the location of a dual humped Bactrian camel in the upper left quadrant of the Hereford world map, not far from the tower of Babel. The elephant, lion, and leopard all reside in Africa, exactly where a modern reader would suppose them to be. William of Tyre, who had more experience of the East than most, famously referenced Tripoli as the land or place “of the camels.”<sup>217</sup> Camels were firmly delineated as being an established part of the Eastern world, just as horses and dogs formed part of the Insular world.<sup>218</sup>

From the sheer profusion of these animals across the cultural landscape it is clear that they held considerable interest and attraction for the residents of North Yorkshire. Foreign they may have seemed, but these animals were also used for their entertainment value, for the extent to which they could make a bed, a misericord, a wall, or a window more aesthetically pleasing. The images of the Oryental animals, their environmental context, and their employment by humans were all carefully reappropriated in order to serve the artistic purposes of the author, glazier, or artist. On a less sophisticated level, the craftsmen who created the windows, the carvings, the

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<sup>214</sup> Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “The Diversity of Mankind in *The Book of John Mandeville*,” in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>215</sup> Tamara Kohanski and C. David Benson, eds., *The Book of John Mandeville* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 1552. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 1501-2.

<sup>217</sup> [*Heliopolim ... quae vulgo Camela dicitur*]. William of Tyre, “Historia Hierosolymitana,” in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens occidentaux Vol. 1:2*, (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844), 1013.

<sup>218</sup> The Worshipful Company of Grocers includes a camel as part of its crest, which seems to be a gesture to the company’s origins as the Ancient Guild of Pepperers, dealing in Oryental products, for which the camel, a sign blatantly recognisable as Eastern, would be very appropriate. However, the camel could also recall the Pepperers original function as garblers—those who policed the spice quality—and therefore act as a marker of authenticity, implying that the spices sold were of genuine Oryental origin and unadulterated by Western ingredients in any way. See also Thrupp, “The Grocers of London,” 247-92. Either way, the camel does appear to have been an important part of the Grocers’ identity. As recently as 2013 the Grocers paraded with a live camel in the Lord Mayor’s Show. There are also rumours that it was this tradition of camel parading that led to the Grocers being second in importance in public processions and similar occasions. Allegedly they took precedence over the other livery companies until the coronation of Elizabeth I in 1559, when the queen was singularly unimpressed by the odours and noises emitted by their current camel, and the order of precedence was subsequently adjusted to put the Grocers second behind the Mercers. However, no obvious verifiable documentation is available to support (or indeed refute) this claim.

embroideries, the paintings, as well as those who commissioned such items, all had a high level of familiarity with these animals and were clearly comfortable and skilled at working with this material. These animals formed part of their repertoire; they were a tool or device that could be employed at the whim of the patron, artisan, or artist. In short they were, literally, part of the furniture.

However, because they were understood to be obviously and intrinsically foreign, it was incredibly easy to use these animals as a method of signifying alterity. Consequently they became appropriated as a romance trope, ironically demonstrating their familiarity to the authors who handle them with ease. One of the troubling points in the closing scenes of the Auchinleck *Bevis of Hampton* is when Bevis's sons go into battle in Cheapside. Guy swiftly mounts an Arab stallion, but Miles leaps upon a dromedary. Both the presence of a convenient dromedary in central London and Miles's ability to leap onto it and canter seamlessly off into the *melée* signify a destabilising foreign presence in the capital, especially as Miles will later be the one to marry the King of England's daughter. In the fifteenth-century Middle Scots romance *The Tail of Rauf Coilzear*, a great deal of humour is generated in an encounter between the eponymous hero and his Saracen opponent. The two have battled for some time before Rauf realises that his adversary is a Saracen, despite this gentleman being mounted on a camel in the middle of Charlemagne's France. Failure to recognise a horse despite being a supposed knight is in itself also an established motif; in both *Cheuelere Assigne* and Thornton's own *Percyvell of Gales*, the heroes' total lack of knowledge as to what a horse is signifies their complete divorce from chivalric culture. In *Rauf Coilzear* we see the camel used to reveal Rauf's own chivalric shortcomings as well as the alterity of the Saracen. The appearance of the camel on French soil, to say nothing of the armed and hostile warrior astride it, again reveals a land vulnerable to outside influence and threat. This threat is reified in Thornton's *Sege of Melayne* and *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spain* with the Saracen invasion of Western Europe.

These examples of camels being used to signify unease may seem slightly at odds with the otherwise cordial reception accorded them, but the important point here is twofold. Firstly these camels are martially employed (ideally to the detriment of Christians) and secondly, these martially-employed camels would not naturally be

found in Western European locations.<sup>219</sup> Camels, in and of themselves, did not possess some foreign danger or pose an outlandish threat to the residents of fifteenth-century Yorkshire. We find the wonder and menace in the above situations is the same as any danger generated when the natural order is upset, when the camel is not round St John's neck but is between the legs of the future king of England galloping up the Cheap, or bearing its armed and hostile rider through Paris. Herein then we find the problem with these domesticated Oryental animals. While griffins and lions required divine intervention to menace England, Oryental animals required only a rider. To an audience well aware of the very close relationship between one's mount and oneself, when a camel or elephant stopped being an animal and became a steed the dynamic surrounding the animal changed completely.<sup>220</sup> The point at which the Oryent turned dangerous was when its human residents became involved.

### **Conclusion: The Yorkshire Oryent**

**The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land.**<sup>221</sup>

It is clear, then, that those living in Thornton's cultural milieu had lengthy, profound, and sustained interaction and interest with objects and concepts that originated from the Oryent. Although the North Riding was replete with actual and representational items from the Oryental world, its citizens were not saturated to the point of ennui with this material. Theirs was an exciting and cosmopolitan world, shot through with Eastern riches. Yorkshire bore witness to a sophisticated manner of living, and a greater familiarity with the non-Insular world than it is normally accorded. Five hundred years before Saki's Clovis would describe a British grocer's as the nexus of the world's harvest, York's denizens could, on a regular basis, purchase products that had traversed half the globe, without thinking it incredible. The parishioners of St Denys

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<sup>219</sup> The depiction of these camels has interesting implications for interpreting the military elephants and their *howdahs* found on the misericords.

<sup>220</sup> The link between a rider and his steed in Middle English romance was extremely close. Bevis's horse Arundel, for example, can only be ridden by him and Arundel recognises him on his return even when his wife does not. Similarly Bucephalus, Alexander the Great's horse, will only bear Alexander. In *The Carle of Carlisle* Gawain is the only knight to treat the Carle's palfrey with kindness and so he is the only knight to escape a beating from the Carle. Conversely, Clement's peculiar ability to ride the Sultan's horse in *Octavian*, who until then has only permitted the Sultan to ride him, shocks all onlookers.

<sup>221</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 93.

could watch the sunlight illuminating the face of St John in the glass, and reflect on his desert wanderings and suffering, rather than being dumbfounded by the luxuriantly shaggy skin across his shoulders. The Minster, accepting a bequest of *Opus Anglicanum*, could admire the quality of the workmanship, and the intricacy of the design, without necessarily contemplating the alterity or source of the underlying silken threads.

It is also clear that the term “exotic,” blithely applied to items simply because they are, or once were, of foreign, non-European origin is an anachronistically inappropriate term that erroneously imbues these items with an aura of glamour and wonder that their fifteenth-century North Riding audience simply did not experience. Rather than being wholly “over there,” the Oryent was being happily ingested, viewed, and consumed through a variety of media on a regular, if not daily, basis. Some objects, such as almonds or rice, had been assimilated to the extent that they were staples of the pantry or medicine cupboard and had lost almost all foreign connotations. In other areas, particularly with regard to animals such as camels and elephants, where the ideas and concepts were well known but the physical object itself had not (or had only rarely) crossed onto English soil we find that representations of these ideas still announced their overseas origins and were indeed employed as signifiers of geographical alterity and distance. In certain situations, at the other extreme from the restorative and curative spices, we find that foreign animals could even be dangerous as they could be used against Christian interests.

To complicate the picture slightly, by virtue of their expense, Oriental objects were also used to express alterity and differentiation within English society. Rich textiles adorned the backs of archbishops and important clergy; nobles and ladies of the court decked themselves in silk, samite, and baldachin in a glorious display of their financial and social standing. Holy relics were encased in reliquaries of imported gold and studded with foreign precious stones to reflect the hidden majesty and holy difference of the biological matter within. Spices were laden into dishes and wines at guild feasts and important civic gatherings. Imported products were conspicuously consumed and employed in these situations to define and highlight wealth, importance, and success. However, the crucial element here is that other, domestic and “home-grown” products were also used to create such an effect. The origin of the item was almost immaterial; alterity in and of itself counted for naught. Cost was a far more important factor. Of course, geographical scarcity inflated prices, but home-grown

expense was equally celebrated and just as welcome to the burgess wishing to flash his cash.

It is tempting to think that only those with the disposable income to afford such luxury items would have any kind of access to them but, as we have seen, there are two reasons to reject this hypothesis. Firstly there was the trickle-down effect, with smaller-scale Oriental goods, such as silk belts, ribbons, purses, and pinches of pepper or sugar, being available for purchase by the less financially well-endowed residents. More important though, was the huge social and cultural role that Oriental objects played in Thornton's environment. Congregations saw the samite robes of the bishops; they walked past the stained glass camels; they smelled the incense during the services. When York's inhabitants entered Gryssop's shop they smelled the ginger and the cinnamon; if they worked in the guildhalls and large houses they served the highly spiced dishes, and polished the coconut cups and griffin eggs. Oriental items were not just visible; they formed an intrinsic part of fifteenth-century Yorkshire's fabric. In G.K. Chesterton's eyes, Thornton would have had no need to travel. Thornton's own world was itself made of imports and Oriental substances; it was filled with foreign items. By striding through the streets of York, Thornton walked through a foreign universe whilst remaining firmly on Yorkshire soil.

## CHAPTER TWO: LAYING SIEGE TO THE JEWS: THORNTON, YORK, AND *SIEGE OF JERUSALEM*

As Robert Thornton strode along the streets of fifteenth-century York, it was not only the products imported from the Oryent that rendered the city foreign. Almost every year the guildsmen, some of the leading pillars of the community, summoned the Oryent to England's second city through their enterprise of the *Corpus Christi Plays*.<sup>1</sup> Yet what were the effects of these performances on those like Thornton, who were living and reading in this exciting and multicultural world? What other kinds of experiences did York's residents bring to their texts, both as readers and as scribes? How did attitudes towards other peoples and places impact on their views of their own environment? This chapter examines how York's inhabitants reconfigured the civic landscape as that of the Holy Land by staging the *Corpus Christi Plays*, and then explores the repercussions that this invocation, combined with the echoes of the city's Jewish past, might have had on Thornton's reading and copying of *Siege of Jerusalem*.

### **The *Corpus Christi Plays*: Introducing York as ... Jerusalem**

The full cycle of the York *Corpus Christi Plays* is a vast set of forty-seven pageants detailing the history of the world according to the Biblical narrative. Each pageant was staged by a particular guild and was trundled around the city on large waggons, being performed at twelve different stations. At every station the Biblical world took shape before the watching audience, literally in some cases. Both *Play 2: The Creation* and *Play 3: The Creation of Adam and Eve* call for various elements of the world to come physically into being during the course of the pageant. In *Play 8: The Building of the Ark* the shipwrights actually constructed a wooden ark on the waggon whilst the audience watched.<sup>2</sup> However, this process did not just work one way. As the

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<sup>1</sup> As Alexandra F. Johnston has shown, the plays were a civic initiative, decided on annually by the town government, rather than by clerical insistence. There was clerical involvement and consultation, but the production was firmly under the control of the lay civic authorities and the guilds. Alexandra F. Johnston, "The Guild of Corpus Christi and the Procession of Corpus Christi in York," *Medieval Studies* 38 (1976): 372-84. There is written evidence of 27 performances between 1399 and 1572, but a lack of documentary evidence does not necessarily indicate that the plays were only held every six or seven years.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Beadle, "The Shipwrights' Craft," in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. Paula Neuss (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 50-61. For the effects on the audience, and the inherent validation of the shipwrights created by the play see Kathleen Ashley, "Sponsorship, Reflexivity, and Resistance: Cultural Readings of the York Cycle Plays," in *The Performance of Middle English Culture: Essays on*

Holy Land was crafted in York, so York built itself into the Biblical landscape. Rather than a specific area being set aside as a site for theatrical transfiguration—as our fixed theatre buildings are today—the circulation of the waggons allowed the boundaries between the diegetic and real spheres to blur: the city itself continually transformed and mutated. York became a pliable medium, moulded and shaped by the plays themselves, which brought forth a world and time wildly different from that of the audience.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this conjured world inhabited the same civic space and was inhabited by the same civic members, albeit briefly, generating a tension between the Biblical geographies and the contemporary city streets.<sup>4</sup> The diegetic world both challenged and united with the real, and for those brief summer hours, York *was* the Biblical landscape.<sup>5</sup> Here was a world of change and transformation: the gates of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, started as the gated Garden of Eden, then became Mount Ararat, and then formed the Garden of Gethsemane. Noah built his ark and sailed through the flood waters by the banks of the Ouse, but also in Coney Street, and outside All Hallows, Pavement.<sup>6</sup> And Christ entered Jerusalem, was tortured, died, rose again, and emerged triumphant all across York's city centre. As the Blessed Sacrament, the symbol of mutation from death to life and humble bread to holy body was borne through the streets, God became Yorkshire man and English Christian artisans became Jews.

Transmutations of all types form the backbone to this Biblical history of humanity: ignorance to knowledge; unfallen to fallen; Old Law to New Law. An essential discourse throughout the work as a whole is the transformation of the Jewish people from good to bad; during the course of the performance they morph from God's Chosen People created on the Sixth Day and brought out of Israel by divine guidance, to the Christ killers and disbelieving caitiffs of Doomsday. In the same brief period—a

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*Chaucer and the Drama*, ed. James J. Paxon, Lawrence M. Clopper, and Sylvia Tomasch (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> See also Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relations and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>5</sup> The extent to which the real time and space were obliterated remains difficult to gauge. In *Play 14: The Nativity*, for example, Joseph complains that "It waxis right myrke vnto my sight, / And colde withal." Richard Beadle, *The York Plays*, 97: 41-2. Whether the audience took this reference completely seriously, bearing in mind that the solstice and high summer were a mere two weeks away, is debatable. Yorkshire summers may not be noted for their clemency but even they do not resemble the weather conditions of Christmastide. On the one hand there was obviously a sober side to these plays; on the other hand there was a very tongue-in-cheek-element. In the same play Joseph also bemoans the fact that the stable roof is in bad repair, clearly a jocular reference to the Tilers who performed *Play 14*. *Ibid.*, 96: 18.

<sup>6</sup> All Hallows is now All Saints, Pavement.

mid-summer's day for the fifteenth-century audiences<sup>7</sup>— the Christians not only supersede the Jews as the true believers, they also demonstrate, with ample evidence in the form of the gore-laden tableaux, apparently irrefutable proof of Jewish perfidy and evil.

That the York *Corpus Christi* Jews were not always conceived of as unilaterally sinful is clear; after the Harrowing of Hell in *Play 37*, Adam, Eve, Moses, Isaiah, Simeon, and David are all taken up to heaven. This notion of the so-called “Virtuous Jews” and their translation to a Christian Heaven is not particular to the York cycle, or even to England; in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, for example, Virgil describes how the Hebrew forefathers were conducted heavenwards by Christ, thus indicating their virtuousness.<sup>8</sup> Obviously the Jews in the plays relating to the Old Testament are greeted with approbation, but even in the New Testament material the disgust displayed towards Herod for his Slaughter of the Innocents—as much as the term “Innocents” itself—presents us with a moment when the Jews were most definitely not the enemy. Instead it is Herod, anachronistically but intriguingly depicted as a follower of Mahoun, or Muhammad, who is the recipient of the audience’s antagonism. Nevertheless, by the closing pageants of the *Corpus Christi Plays* the audience is in no doubt that they have witnessed a dramatic shift. They, like Pontius Pilate, have been presented with the evidence and bear witness to the Jews’ crimes. The audience has seen Christ mocked, tortured, crucified, dead, and buried.<sup>9</sup>

The presence and emphasis of such a shift should come as no surprise. The *Corpus Christi Plays* are based on Biblical rather than Tanachic narrative history and these plays were staged to celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, the overriding symbol of Christ’s Passion. It is, of course, belief in the Passion and subsequent Resurrection that demarcates Christianity from Judaism, and that generates the New Testament as a

<sup>7</sup> For the debate over how and where the plays were staged, and the complete route for the 1569 plays see Eileen White, “Places to Hear the Play in York,” *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 49-72.

<sup>8</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume 1: Inferno*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4. 52-63. All references to this text are by canto and then line number. Although there is no scriptural basis for Christ’s visit to the underworld, the Harrowing of Hell is briefly mentioned in the Apostles’ Creed, it features in the N-town and Chester mystery cycles, and receives its fullest treatment in the immensely popular *Gospel of Nicodemus*, (also known as the *Gesta Pilati*, the *Evangelium Nicodemi*, the *Acta Pilati*, or the *Descensus de Christi ad Infernos*) where again the Jewish patriarchs are admitted to heaven. For the European circulation of this work, both in Latin and vernacular languages, see Zbigniew Izydorczyk, ed., *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997). For clarification on the text’s various titles see *ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> That Christ refused to stay dead is, in some respects, almost immaterial. It was the Jewish refusal to believe he was the Messiah, and the intent and attempt to kill him that were the crimes, rather than actually bringing about his death.



wholly “new” scripture, rather than simply a continuation of the previous texts. In all ways, the Passion forms the plays’ main focus.

The events around which the transition of the Jews from good to bad occurs—namely the events of Holy Week: the arrest, trial, and subsequent self-sacrifice of Christ—occupy eleven of the forty-seven plays. This concentration is significant, especially when we consider that the whole of the Creation—a transformation of abyss and nothingness into the world, and nominally an equal chronological period to Holy Week—is dealt with in a single pageant.<sup>10</sup> Holy Week is granted a disproportionately large space, which suggests it provided a crescendo to the cycle that culminated in Christ’s Passion and the Harrowing of Hell, even if it were not presented as the great finale to the overall performance.<sup>11</sup> The narrative then moved swiftly on to cover the aftermath, the resurrection, and the death of the Virgin. Even in that aftermath, Christ’s damaged (as opposed to healed) body remains the focus; as Sarah Beckwith notes, it “reappears in the Resurrection sequences as the very proof of the sacramental system it underwrites, to become the vehicle of a drama of doubt, disbelief, and evidential testing” through Thomas’s extensive groping.<sup>12</sup> In all ways, the Passion is central to the plays. The major consequence of this intense focus on the Passion is that the actions of

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<sup>10</sup> The narrative as a whole treats the life of Christ more intensively than anything else: only the first eleven plays deal with Old Testament material, with the final six treating Pentecost, the death and assumption of the Virgin Mary, and Doomsday.

<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the only two plays that are specifically named in the manuscript are *Play 35: Crucifixio Christi* and *Play 36: Mortificacio Christi*, implying that at least the scribe, and more probably the wider community for whom he was recording the plays, attached particular significance to these two scenes. The intense focus on the Passion and Crucifixion is particularly marked in the York cycle. Partly this focus is due to the massive size of the York cycle; the other surviving mystery cycles are all smaller. The *Towneley Plays* has 32 scenes, the Chester cycle 25, the *N-Town Plays* is the second largest with 42, and the Coventry cycle is believed to have had a mere ten scenes. Even allowing for this circumstance, the particularisation of each element of the story and rendering it as a separate pageant performed on a separate waggon, accentuates the importance of the Holy Week narrative in a way that the other plays do not. The N-Town cycle merges the Calvary procession and the Crucifixion together, before going directly to the Harrowing of Hell; the Towneley cycle devotes two scenes to Christ’s tortures, but breaks up the momentum with Judas’s hanging before the Crucifixion scene, and the Chester cycle merges Christ’s trial with his tortures, and then has the Passion and his death in a second scene. How the Coventry cycle presented the scenes is unknown as the only surviving text comes from a nineteenth-century copy of a single play, originally held and performed by the Shearmen and Tailours Guild. For these cycles see Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Arthur Clare Cawley, ed., *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958); Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson, eds., *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 2000); Robert Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 2 vols., EETS SS 3, 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 23. Miri Rubin also makes the point that even after the Resurrection, “Christ’s suffering body was not serene: its wounds, its interstices, fascinated large numbers in the dramatic, public presentation.” Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi; the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 267.

certain Jews, particularly Caiaphas and Annas, the agents of Christ's torture and death, are similarly writ large for the audience's scrutiny.<sup>13</sup> Though these two leaders are not taken as representative of all Jews, their depiction is important as they are evidently in a position of power. Their actions, as much as their authority, signify that something is inherently rotten in the state of Judea.

Whether the audience was also encouraged to act as judge and jury to the Jews probably depended on the individual watching. It would be inaccurate to claim that the *Corpus Christi Plays* overtly whipped up a fervour of anti-Jewish sentiment or transmitted a wider anti-Jewish message at the expense of other Biblical teachings. Although they are narratives that deal with the Jewish role in bringing about the Crucifixion, the plays are in a separate tradition to that of Vengeance of Our Lord literature, for example.<sup>14</sup> Instead the plays carried out an array of functions, ranging from visual entertainment and spectacle to a devotional act of worship and contemplation that may not even have required the audience to be in direct line of sight of the pageant.<sup>15</sup> Worship was naturally a key component to the festival. The plays were, after all, a civic complement to the religious Corpus Christi processions of the consecrated host through the city, and the lavish ceremonial parade that accompanied it.<sup>16</sup> And this hierarchy cannot be dismissed. Although they were important factors in the celebration and glorification of Corpus Christi, or the "Real Presence," the plays were absolutely subservient to the ritual and worship of the host itself.<sup>17</sup> Seen in such a

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<sup>13</sup> See also Alexandra F. Johnston, "His Language is Lorne: The Silent Centre of the York Cycle," *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 188.

<sup>14</sup> The so-called Vengeance of Our Lord or *Venjançe Nostre Seigneur* tradition details the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and depicts it as an act of revenge carried out as a direct retaliation against Christ's crucifixion at the hands of Jerusalem's Jews. In Middle English the tradition is extant today in only three texts, the romances *Titus and Vespasian* and *Siege of Jerusalem*, and a translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's *Bible en François*. Thornton's personal experience of this tradition is shown by his possessing a copy of *Siege of Jerusalem*, although he may have owned, read, or seen performed other texts. During the mid-fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries there was a huge appetite for plays and poems in this tradition right across Western Europe. For overviews of this tradition see Stephen K. Wright, *Vengeance of Our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989), 1-2; 6-35. For examples of texts in French, and how they circulated in England as well as France see Alvin E. Ford, ed., *La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions, The Version of Japheth* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> White, "Places to Hear the Play in York," 74-5.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the relationship between the two commemorations see Alexandra F. Johnston, "Review of *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*," *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003): 187-188.

<sup>17</sup> For a history of the York procession and the mutations that it underwent see Erik Paul Weissengruber, "The Corpus Christi Procession in Medieval York: A Symbolic Struggle in Public Space," *Theatre Survey* 38 (1997): 117-138. For a more detailed exploration of Corpus Christi processions in general see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 243-71, especially 255-7, 261-3, 268, where she discusses the York procession.

context, as part of the wider cultural moment, it is difficult to assess the precise importance attached to the change in the attitude towards the Jews. As a dramatic theme this change pales into insignificance before the might and majesty of Christ's resurrection. The Jewish failure to believe in Christ ironically provides the essential means of facilitating the resurrection, and thus is crucial to the saving of humanity. If the Jews had remained as God's Chosen People and had not killed Christ, then there could have been no resurrection and subsequent salvation. We find this argument played out in the drama by the explicit involvement of the Devil, and his attempts to prevent Christ's death.<sup>18</sup> The Jewish leaders' refusal to believe Pilate's wife frustrates the Devil's plans for world domination, and so saves humanity (albeit perhaps unintentionally). Seen in this light, the Jews appear positively. On the other hand, a less tolerant observer might have viewed the Jewish refusal to recognise Christ as the Messiah and their subsequent crimes as magnified all the more. For an audience inclined to follow this interpretation, an intrinsic part of the Corpus Christi worship thus involved the vilification of the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

However, the response of the audience was dependent on more than the script of the plays. In addition to the effects of the actors, costumes, and the waggon decoration, the role of the city was also a factor, and its impact fluctuated with every staging. The general route taken by the waggons remained fairly stable for two centuries but, as numerous scholars have indicated, the individual performance stations changed over the

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<sup>18</sup> See Beadle, *The York Plays, Play 30: The Dream of Pilate's Wife*, 256-76, especially lines 157-79.

<sup>19</sup> A further complication comes with the style of the plays relating to the Crucifixion, which are believed to be the work of the so-called "York Realist." In "true alliterative verse," they were revised by the York Realist at some point after 1415. The Realist "did not change the subject matter of any of the plays and for this reason he is not to be credited with any fundamental structural work." J.W. Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," *Modern Philology* 60 (1963): 241-2. Although early twentieth-century literary scholars consider them to be of markedly better quality to the rest of the plays, their arguments are unlikely to have been considerations for a fifteenth-century audience. However, there is a difference in language, form, and emotiveness—this latter partly generated by the subject matter—in these plays. They also draw more heavily on other texts that were circulating at the time, such as the *Northern Passion*. The watching audience probably did notice that the plays dealing with the Passion were somehow different and that the Passion sequence was given an intense focus, but it is almost impossible to distinguish whether, considering the intensity of the moment, the (possible) heat of the sun, and the heightened religious sentiment that the audience were feeling with regard to this particular sequence, the audience would also have recognised the plays as being somehow different from the surrounding plays in terms of writing technique. However, given that these eight plays were influenced by the *Northern Passion* (amongst others) it is possible that Thornton and any other readers of this text, had they been watching and listening carefully, would have picked up on the references. As such, the referential qualities of these eight plays may have further distinguished them from the others and heightened the focus on the Passion and, by extension, the focus on the Jewish shift from good to bad. For the *Northern Passion's* role in the *Corpus Christi Plays* see Frances A. Foster, ed., *The Northern Passion*, EETS OS 145 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 81-6. For more on the York Realist and the differences between his work and the surrounding plays see Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," 241-51.

years, as did those members of the public who funded various aspects of those stations.<sup>20</sup> The exact placing of each annual performance was, to a certain extent, subject to the whims of the benefactors who wanted their houses to form a physical part of the route. Providing they paid the highest subscription, householders were able to erect scaffolds from which spectators could see the plays. They then proceeded to charge for seats upon these scaffolds which, presumably, covered the cost of the scaffold and made sufficient profit—whether fiscal or devotional—to justify the effort. By paying for their property to feature in the route the waggons took, these householders could almost write themselves into Biblical history.<sup>21</sup> Inscribing one's property into the city's evocation of the Holy Land potentially functioned as a sort of building baptism, or consecration. More practically, and more immediately, it also confirmed one's civic and financial standing. As this route annually morphed, the whole of the city centre was incorporated then removed, subsumed into playing its part, and then perhaps distanced the following year, again establishing a slippage between York and the Holy Land that a fixed theatrical sphere would not allow.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from the more cynical aspects—officials were perfectly willing to exploit this tradition of scaffold renting<sup>23</sup>—what can be seen from the various repeated efforts by citizens and officials to inscribe their property in the waggon procession is that York's population was very aware that the city itself played a major role in the performance. Contemporary associations and rituals provided a geographical framework onto which the Biblical narrative could be grafted. The Skinners staged the procession of *Play 25: Entry Into Jerusalem*, for example, in the style of a royal entry processional. The route taken covered the same ground, and involved similar status people. Where Jesus is greeted by “the chiffe of þe Jewes” the actor was met by the

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<sup>20</sup> See Anna J. Mill, “The Stations of the York Corpus Christi Play,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 37 (1948-51): 492-502; White, “Places to Hear the Play,” 23-63; and David Crouch, “Paying to See the Play: The Stationholders on the Route of the York Corpus Christi Play in the Fifteenth Century,” *Medieval English Theatre* 13 (1991): 64-111.

<sup>21</sup> See also Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 31-7. Beckwith compares the placing of the stations by the civic body to the beating of the bounds; the waggon stations become a territorial marker between church and civic community. However, the interplay of the performance between private houses, civic buildings and church land can also be viewed as demonstrating the transcendental and all-encompassing power of Christ's sacrifice. Rubin notes that in Germany the ceremonies of beating the bounds and Corpus Christi were, in fact, incorporated. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 247.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Rogerson identifies evidence of some off-waggon performances, again increasing the slippage between the two spheres. See Margaret Rogerson, “Raging in the Streets of Medieval York,” *Early Theatre* 3 (2000): 105-25.

<sup>23</sup> Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 33-4.

city's Aldermen who were, of course, York's civic leaders, or chiefs.<sup>24</sup> The plays successfully blurred the boundaries between the world of fifteenth-century York and that of the first-century Holy Land, eventually causing the associations of fifteenth-century York to inform the dramatic events that the Skinners were enacting. York and Jerusalem became one. By performing Christ's entry procession in a manner familiar to the watchers:

[T]he spectators saw him take possession of their city much as they had secular kings and queens. There was no more powerful a link to be found between [fifteenth-century] York and historic Jerusalem than this dramatic setting provided... The Passion is taking place here and now. The characters are Yorkshire people. The place is York. And yet the spectators in the streets gradually recognise that they are really in Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

Martin Stevens applies the above remarks only to the Skinners' pageant but the same effect can be seen throughout the whole of the cycle. The physical fabric of the city itself evidently made a vast contribution to the effect and impact of the *Corpus Christi* narrative. Whilst each pageant was repeated at each station, certain plays resonated more in certain locations.<sup>26</sup> When the Last Judgement was enacted next to the

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 59. For a fuller description of the parallels see 52-62, especially 59-60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 52. Although Stevens' argument is strengthened particularly by the Skinners' pageant's evocation of royal processions, his reasoning is applicable to the whole of the play cycle. The royal association again calls forth an older tradition of thinking of one's city in Hierosolymitan terms. Gordon Kipling has demonstrated that "long before European cities began decorating their streets with pageantry, they imagined themselves transformed into another Zion, a celestial Jerusalem, whenever a king made his ceremonial entry." Gordon Kipling, "Richard II's Sumptuous Pageants and the Idea of the Civic Triumph," in *Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theatre*, ed. David M. Bergeron (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 88. See also Gordon Kipling, *Enter The King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 38. Beckwith does not make a connection between the players and the plays, but in many places there clearly is a link, frequently identified by other scholars. It is no coincidence that it is the Shipwrights who build the ark, the Fishers and Mariners who play out the Flood, the Playsterers [plasterers or builders] who are responsible for the Creation, the Armourers who expel man from Eden, the Vintners who oversee the marriage at Cana, and the Pinner and Butchers who portray the Crucifixion and death of Christ. Other links are not as immediately obvious, but are still there. Stevens, for example, notes that the Skinners, makers of furred garments and civic ceremonial costumes, were the perfect guild to take on *Play 25: Entry Into Jerusalem*, Christ's triumphant processional, which mirrored the route of civic and royal processions. If the "actors playing the Aldermen were splendidly decked for their procession," as one would assume Aldermen to be, then the Skinners and their work "obtrude prominently upon their own performance." Presumably there were also more worldly considerations at play as well, and the pageants provided a rather nice advertisement for the Skinners' work. Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 60. The major exploration of this relationship throughout the whole play cycle remains Alan D. Justice, "Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle," *Theatre Journal* 31 (1979): 47-58, but see also Richard Homan, "Ritual Aspects of the York Cycle," *Theatre Journal* 33 (1981): 314-15, and Ashley, "Sponsorship, Reflexivity, and Resistance," 16-21. For the

prisons at the end of Ouse Bridge, did the audience feel differently to when it was performed in front of the large and wealthy residences of Coney Street in the centre of the city? How did the proclamation of Christ's sentence differ when it was announced on Pavement, the site where York's civic and judicial proclamations were announced?<sup>27</sup> Such ruminations are equally valid for other sections of the *Corpus Christi Plays*, and other times. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King suggest that by beginning the cycle at 4:30am with *The Creation*, "the dramatist achieved a master stroke of theatrical effect, combining the themes of creation and light with the dawning of the Corpus Christi day."<sup>28</sup> Noah's family fleeing the rising waves on the junction of North Street and Skeldergate, a few feet from a frequently flooding River Ouse, must have seemed to have a greater sense of urgency and impact than when the flight was enacted on Micklegate, at the top of a hill. The sight of Jesus being sold in Pavement where servants regularly sold themselves for hire surely evoked a more empathic response from an audience familiar with the practice than the sight of Jesus being sold outside the Minster gates.<sup>29</sup> When these especially harmonious situations combined, York and the Biblical landscape became even more deeply fused and, in a sort of geographical transubstantiation, York actively became the Holy Land.

Yet, productive as it is to focus on the audience's quotidian contemporary practices, we cannot forget that fifteenth-century York was not a brand new city, devoid of history. Both past and contemporary practices had roles to play. When the physical city participated in the play it was bringing all its known historical connotations as well as its contemporary associations to the fore. Although York's medieval Jewish population were long gone by the time Thornton and his ilk were viewing the *Corpus Christi Plays* in the fifteenth century, echoes of its Jews still abounded. As we shall see, York wore certain aspects of its Jewish past very firmly on its sleeve.

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relationship specific to the Shipwrights see Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, eds., *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>27</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Equally, Jesus being sold by the Minster gates raises an array of interpretive associations. Rather than seeing the sold Jesus as being allied to their own social practices, the audience may well have contemplated wider aspects of theology such as such as Jesus' sacrifice being the ultimate cost or the wages of sin being death. Alternatively, the audience may have entertained thoughts about the church's implication in simony or the practice of indulgences. Each station would have had a complicated impact on the scenes portrayed there, some of which would have been more personal and specific to the fifteenth-century audience than others.

The earliest verifiable (and statistically probable) recorded Jewish presence in York actually comes relatively late.<sup>30</sup> The first concrete reference specifically to a *Iudeus de Everwich*, one Josce of York, appears in Henry II's Pipe Rolls in 1176-7.<sup>31</sup> From comparison with the documentary records of other medieval English Jewries, and studying the economic borrowing practices of the northern population, Barrie Dobson locates the decade between 1170 and 1180 as being "the decisive period for the creation of an economically active Jewry in the city."<sup>32</sup> We are therefore presented with a Jewish population resident in York on a reasonably continual basis for roughly the 120 years between 1170 and 1290, when Edward I issued the Edict of Expulsion and England's Jewish population was sent into exile.<sup>33</sup> These years were not ones of untroubled harmony or peaceful coexistence however. Relationships between the Jewry and the Christian population could be tense. They reached their nadir in 1190, when York witnessed a horrendous pogrom resulting in the deaths of almost all of the city's Jews.

England's medieval Jewries did not resemble East European ghettos, and the Jews were not, geographically speaking at least, side-lined or segregated. There was no one area designated as the specifically Jewish quarter. The term "Jewry" refers to the community, rather than a geographical area. Instead, Jewish property placement seems to have been based mostly on market forces and personal inclination, with the result that the Jewish population was interwoven with the Christian one, often at very close quarters. Aaron of York's house, for example, on Coney Street, was only one tenement away from the church of St Martin's.<sup>34</sup> Benedict of York had a grand house in Spenn Lane, not far from the Jewish cemetery, whilst the earlier mentioned Josce of York lived in a similarly magnificent house on Coney Street. He also owned property in Fossgate. Although the Jewish cemetery was over towards the city's north-eastern edge, the synagogue seems to have been right in the heart of York, again on Coney Street

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<sup>30</sup> Some dubious claims are made for the existence of a Jewish community resident in York before 1066. For these arguments and the case against them see Barrie Dobson, *The Jewish Communities of Medieval England: The Collected Essays of R.B. Dobson*, ed. Helen Birkitt (York: Borthwick Publications, 2010), 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. There are some claims made for occupation earlier in the twelfth century, but these are founded on the identification of names such as Benedict and Aldred as being exclusively Jewish, which they were not. Of course, the 1176-7 Pipe Roll reference to Josce of York does not necessarily indicate that there was no Jewish presence in the city before 1176, merely that by 1176-7 one had definitely been established.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Although the majority of the city's Jews perished in the 1190 massacre, a Jewish presence was firmly re-established by 1201 as there were resident Jews then acting as moneylenders. *Curia Regis Rolls of the Reign of Richard I and John*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1922), 390-1.

<sup>34</sup> "The twelfth and thirteenth centuries: The Jewish community," in *VCH City of York*, 47-9.

amongst other large private residences, both Jewish and Christian.<sup>35</sup> The land purchased in order to extend the Jewish cemetery in 1230 was sold by John le Romeyn, Subdean of York Minster, whose lands ran adjacent to the original cemetery.<sup>36</sup> York's Jews and Christians lay separately in death but in life they walked the same streets, crossed the same squares, and mingled in the same civic spaces.

Despite lasting only 120 years, York's medieval Jewry successfully etched its presence firmly into the city's fabric. Even today, over seven centuries after the final medieval Jew left the city walls for the last time, the area around the medieval Jewish cemetery is still known as Jewbury. This usage appears to have been continuous; after the 1290 expulsion, the land around Barkergate (which the abovementioned land deed of sale in 1230 references as the *antiquum Cimiterium Iudeorum*<sup>37</sup>) was assessed as "Le Jeubry."<sup>38</sup> The name "Jewbury," literally "the Jewish borough or area," remained firmly lodged in the collective consciousness of the later Christian residents, even though the more specific terms of "Old Jewbury" and "New Jewbury" were melded into the indiscriminate "Jewbury" during the fifteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Although the specifics of the connection were being lost, the connection between the area and its former residents was still in place. That area of town remained (and indeed remains) known as the Jewbury. Coming into York from the north, Thornton would have passed very close to, or even right through, this area to get to the city centre and the castle.

Another part of the city that still bears witness to Jewish residency is Jubbergate, right in the city's heart. Although not quite as etymologically secure as Jewbury, the street is believed to have originally been called Jewbretgate, presumably to differentiate it from another Bretgate located somewhere else in the city.<sup>40</sup> Dobson identifies the "-bret" as providing certain perplexities for historians but adds that "it is fortunately a good deal simpler to conclude that the *Ju-*, *Jeu-*, *Jou-* prefix (which makes its first recorded appearance at more or less exactly the time when the Jews were expelled in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Michael Adler, *Jews of Medieval England* (London: Jewish Historical Society, 1939), 165; and Barrie Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York and the Massacre of March 1190* (York: St Anthony's Press, 1974), 47, 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> Adler, *Jews of Medieval England*, 165.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, E101/249/27 nos. 4,5. The area in question was granted to Thomas de Stodelay of York, to hold until the following Michaelmas.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Rees Jones, "Historical Survey," in *The Jewish Burial Ground at Jewbury*, ed. J.M. Lilley et al. (Dorchester: Council for British Archaeology, 1994), 310. Rees Jones tracks the ownership and name-mutation of the area from 1290 until 1872.

<sup>40</sup> The current Bretgate, just off Navigation Road in the Walmgate area, is a twentieth-century construction.



1290) must derive from the Middle English *Jewe*.<sup>41</sup> It seems perfectly feasible that this prefix would be given to a thoroughfare adjoining Coney Street at a point where, as we have seen, there were several prominent Jews living, as well as the synagogue and perhaps other Jewish buildings.

And these Jewish buildings did not somehow crumble one day in 1290 with the Edict of Expulsion's issue. Shortly before the Expulsion, in 1283, John Peckham, the archbishop of Canterbury, ordered the destruction of all Jewish synagogues in London. Despite this command, several were repurposed and rededicated as churches, or the stonework was redeployed elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> This recycling impulse was obviously not born out of the Expulsion; the Brethren of St Anthony were granted a converted synagogue for their usage in 1243, so there was evidently an established precedent for reusing buildings rather than simply razing them.<sup>43</sup> Occupying a prominent spot on Coney Street, and mere yards from St Martin's church, there is no reason to believe that the York synagogue suffered any such ignominious fate. Jewish private residences in York remained standing and in private hands, albeit Christian ones. Occasionally, and especially after Edward I permitted Jewish converts to retain half their wealth after conversion, converts from Judaism continued to live in their own houses.<sup>44</sup> While there is no record of the synagogue's exact fate, it could well have become just another house, either in Christian or convert ownership, a quiet material witness to York's multifaith past.<sup>45</sup>

In other parts of the city the cultural memory of Jewish residence lasted longer than the residence itself. As late as 1350, new debts to the Crown for rent on houses *quo fuerunt Iudeaorum* were being recorded in the Pipe Rolls.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere in the administrative memory the Jewish presence lingered on, possibly to the chagrin of

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<sup>41</sup> Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 108. For more on medieval London's civic structures as palimpsests of previous eras and cultures see especially "The Writing on the Wall: London's Old Jewry and John Stow's Urban Palimpsest," 95-118. Throughout, Harris describes London as being formed of polychromic matter: material which, through both physical design as well as origin, simultaneously bears witness to a multitude of time periods.

<sup>43</sup> *CCR: Henry III*, v. 1242-7, 142.

<sup>44</sup> Robert C. Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 67 (1992): 279.

<sup>45</sup> For the assessment and reallocation of Jewish possessions in York after the Expulsion see TNA, E101/249/27.

<sup>46</sup> TNA E372/196.

York's sheriffs.<sup>47</sup> In his 1438 will Thomas Gare, junior, the mayor of York, bequeathed a tenement in Coney Street, describing the street as the *Hyjudee*: what we might term the high or main Jewry.<sup>48</sup> Whether it struck the fifteenth-century York townspeople as odd that the most important political street in York, site of the town hall and the residence from which the mayor and his supporters watched the *Corpus Christi Plays*, was still referencing a group that were political outcasts we will never know.<sup>49</sup> And though we cannot be absolutely certain that those watching the waggons were aware of the political troubles and financial issues that led Edward I to issue his 1290 Edict of Expulsion, it was obvious to any fifteenth-century resident of the city who showed any vague awareness of their surroundings that York was a place where there had been a tangible Jewish presence, and where there was one no longer.<sup>50</sup>

And it was this awareness of a previous Jewish presence in their city that the residents would have brought to mind when they watched the *Corpus Christi Plays*. Obviously we cannot presume to know the exact reactions of every audience member or each player, and their reflections on the manner in which Jews were represented by the *Corpus Christi Plays* throughout the two centuries during which the plays were performed. However, some conclusions—some tentative, others less so—can be drawn. Establishing a connection between the York of the plays and the Biblical Holy Land was a key factor of the *Corpus Christi Plays*. In some cases it was easy; strong links

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<sup>47</sup> In 1219, one Hugh de Selby had incurred a debt of 2s on the farm of a house that had been held by Aaron the Jew—the same Aaron who had property on Coney Street. TNA E372/63. De Selby failed to pay the debt and it continued to be recorded as outstanding in the sheriff's accounts for the city of York until at least 1450, each time registered as being for the property *quam tenet de Aaron Iudeo*. TNA E372/296. The debt is similarly recorded one hundred years earlier on TNA E372/196, for example. These entries do not mean that the fifteenth-century residents were referring to specific houses as being "Aaron the Jew's house" in common parlance (though they may well have done so). However, these entries, and thus an awareness of York's Jewish past, would have been known to the clerks of the Exchequer in the royal administration and also to the sheriff and his staff in York's civic administration at the very least.

<sup>48</sup> R.B. Cook, *Some Early Civic Wills of York*, Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers 35 (Lincoln: Lincolnshire Chronicle, 1919), 63.

<sup>49</sup> White, "Places To See The Play," 64. See also Eileen White, "The Tenements at the Common Hall Gates: The Mayor's Station for the Corpus Christi Play in York," *REED Newsletter* 2 (1982): 14-24.

<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere in the country there were similar Jewish echoes, though not perhaps as persistent as those of York. For other material ways in which the so-called "absent Jew" could be evoked see Robert A. Rouse, "Emplaced Reading, or Towards a Spatial Hermeneutic For Medieval Romance," in *Medieval Romance and Material Culture*, ed. Nicholas Perkins (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 50-1. The trope of blood libel, and the resultant cults of the child saints, also called forth a time when Jews and Christians had lived together on England's soil. The cults of St William of Norwich, Adam of Bristol, Little St Hugh of Lincoln, and St Robert of Bury all implicitly recalled a Jewish presence in England. John Lydgate's fifteenth-century *Prayer to St Robert*, for example, resurrected "the long-vanished Jewish community and stag[ed] or reiterat[ed] its repeated villification." Antony P. Bale, "House Devil, Town Saint: Antisemitism and Hagiography in Medieval Suffolk," in *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*, ed. Sheila Delany (New York: Routledge, 2002), 198.

were created by using the York guild members in place of their Biblical “ancestors,” as we saw with the shipwrights. Sometimes the dialogue made explicit references, as with the remarks about the roof in the Nativity scene. In other places the connections were more dependent on the time of day, or the associations brought to that station by the audience. York’s residents were aware that they were blurring the historical and geographical boundaries separating the two distinct spheres, and creating slippage between the Holy Land that they constructed and evoked, and their present-day city. Consequently, the plays achieved what Stevens terms their implicit purpose: “to associate York with the old Jerusalem, a place of corruption and injustice, the city in which Jesus was to undergo the Passion.”<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, the audience was clearly very aware of the tension between the plays and the physical city, with both the city’s heritage and its contemporary habits being brought to bear on the plays’ meaning. Although the specific nuances of each scene would have been dependent on the exact location of the waggon station that year, there was clearly an acknowledgement on the part of the citizens, best demonstrated by their evident desire for their houses to feature in the procession, that the city interacted with the performances and had a significant role to play. The population was also aware of that civic heritage, and that Jews had at one time resided in their city.

Before the eyes of the watching audience, then, the Jews in the *Corpus Christi Plays* underwent a drastic change from Chosen People to Christ killers. The audience saw Pilate ignore his wife’s pleas to spare Jesus. They saw Caiaphas and Annas conspire to bring about Christ’s death minutes after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup> They heard Christ subjected to wicked blasphemies; they heard the Jews call him “a ranke swayne,”<sup>53</sup> a “caytiffe,”<sup>54</sup> and a “warlowe.”<sup>55</sup> They spent a considerable amount of time, both in absolute terms and in the context of the play cycle, seeing and hearing their God in agony right in front of them, being brutally tortured, mocked, and eventually being killed in a gruesome and horrific manner for their sakes. All these factors combined to present York as an environment where it was comprehensively demonstrated to the populace on a regular basis that the Jew could, and did, go bad.

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<sup>51</sup> Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 57.

<sup>52</sup> Beadle, *The York Plays, Play 26: The Conspiracy*, 213-23 passim.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-23, 33.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-23, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Beadle, *The York Plays, Play 33: Christ Before Pilate 2, The Judgement*, 305-20, 171.

## The Matter of the Jews

York was, of course, not unique in its less-than-tolerant attitude towards the Jews. The civic involvement in the *Corpus Christi Plays* meant that any Jewish criticism displayed in the plays had considerable local impact, but the rest of fifteenth-century England was not a haven of tolerance. This was, after all, a culture that likened the Jews to the owl, a dirty bird that hated the light and fouled its own nest.<sup>56</sup> The analogy was not entirely allegorical; bestiary and misericord images of owls showed them with long hooked “Jewish” noses. Two seats up from the camel at Old Malton, a hook-nosed owl with very human eyes can still be seen. Similarly, images of Jews also depict them with noses that are verging on beaks. In an early fourteenth-century image of Samuel the Jew crucifying the child Adam of Bristol, Samuel’s nose is distorted almost beyond recognition into a weird protrusion that resembles some kind of beak or snout.<sup>57</sup> Often these owls were depicted being mobbed and attacked by other birds. In terms of formulating a collective attitude towards the Jews, the message is crude and simplistic. A similarly blunt theme is to be found in secular romance material. In the four Middle English romances that feature Jews, *Siege of Jerusalem*, *Titus and Vespasian*, *The Wars of Alexander* (Alexander Fragment C), and Thornton’s own *Prose Alexander* there is only one instance of a Jew who converts: the Jewish historian, Josephus.<sup>58</sup> All the other Jewish characters, like the hunted owls, are attacked, and slain in various ways.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For further examples see Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97-8, and Mariko Miyazaki, “Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism,” in *Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig (London and New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 27-8.

<sup>57</sup> British Library MS Harley 957, f. 22r.

<sup>58</sup> Admittedly the *Alexander* romances are set before Christ’s birth so the Jews have not yet undergone the transition we saw so clearly in the *Corpus Christi Plays*. Even so, there is still a certain level of hostility exhibited towards them. In the *Prose Alexander*, for example, Alexander attacks the city of Jehoshaphat as the Jews there refuse to break their oath of allegiance to Darius and follow the new world conqueror, Alexander. The parallels between this refusal and the refusal to convert to Christianity are clear. Later, Alexander marches on Jerusalem and only allows the Jews to survive because they are crypto-Christians saved by an angel of God. However, the bishop of Jerusalem expressly requests permission from Alexander that the Jewish people retain the use of their fathers’ laws. On all levels it appears that the Jews were not for turning. J.S. Westlake, ed., *The Prose Life of Alexander, from the Thornton MS*, EETS OS 143 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 16-17, 18-20. All references to this text are by page number.

<sup>59</sup> A single extant literary example, at least in Middle English, of (supposed) Jews who do convert successfully is found in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*. The play details the various attempts at host desecration undertaken by a group of nominally Jewish characters who eventually convert, having empirically demonstrated that the consecrated host genuinely is the Real Presence. However, these figures are not generally considered “Jewish,” even though the text names them as such; instead they are

Conversely, Middle English romance narratives almost uniformly grant Saracens the opportunity to convert.<sup>60</sup> Whilst not every character avails him or herself of this opportunity—Vernagu in *Roland and Vernagu*, the eponymous *Sowdane of Babylon*, and King Yvor of Mombraunt in *Bevis of Hampton* being notable exceptions—many romances display no anxiety over welcoming former Saracens into the fold.<sup>61</sup> Otuel of *Otuel and Roland*,<sup>62</sup> the Sultan of Babylon's son Firumbras, and Magog from *Rauf Coilzear* are all embraced by their erstwhile Christian opponents, and even go on to fight on their behalf against the Saracens. Nor is gender a barrier to conversion. It seems, rather, that the opposite is true. In Middle English romance conversion for a female Saracen is a great deal easier than for a male. Female converts typically get to convert when they so choose, rather than having to go through the rigmarole of a brutal battle almost to the death against Christian paragons of martial prowess. As well as male converts, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Octavian*, and *Sowdane of Babylon* all feature female Saracen converts to Christianity who, instead of being shunned, marry the Christian hero and do very well out of their conversion.<sup>63</sup> With regard to the Jews however, the romance message is painfully stark. If one is Jewish and alive after the birth of Christ then there can be no quarter. The Jews must die.

Why there should be this discrepancy between literary treatments of the two religions is unclear. After all, by the fifteenth century the Muslims were the greater hindrance to Christian possession of the Holy Land. There were some Jews residing in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, but it was held and controlled by the Muslims. One

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taken to represent a generic non-Christian Other employed to work through Christian anxieties concerning transubstantiation. The most obvious evidence in the case against their being Jewish is that they worship Mahoun, or Muhammad. See David Lawton, "Sacrilege and Theatricality: the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003): 281-309. For more on the deaths of literary Jews see Steven Yeager, "The Bodies of Jews in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*, ed. James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 301-23. Yeager argues that the dismemberment of the Jewish body represents the fragmentation and destruction of the Jewish community. As Akbari summarises, "Christian wholeness, then, is necessarily built on the ground of Jewish fragmentation." Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 134.

<sup>60</sup> For the distinction between Muslims and Saracens, and usage of the two terms see this thesis, 157-9.

<sup>61</sup> For discussion of the circumstances under which Saracens are welcomed into Christianity see this thesis, 183-90.

<sup>62</sup> Though similar, *Otuel and Roland*, which is found in British Library MS Additional 37492, should not be confused with Thornton's *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*.

<sup>63</sup> Some anxiety is displayed in *Bevis of Hampton* as the son of Bevis and Josian, a Saracen princess, ends up on the throne of England through his marriage to the King of England's daughter. See Robert A. Rouse, "For King and Country? The Tension Between National and Regional Identities in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*," in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjević (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 114-126, and Claire Sponsler, "Alien Nation: London's Aliens and Lydgate's Mummings for the Mercers and Goldsmiths," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 229-42.

possible explanation for the lack of fictional Jewish conversions is that the mass conversion of the Jews was thought to herald the end of days.<sup>64</sup> The Biblical rationale for this belief is found in Paul's Letters to the Romans. Originally written to counteract Gentile hostility and arrogance towards the returning Jews, this text details the importance of the Jews as the first followers of God, as the "cultivated olive trees" with the Gentiles as the wild olive shoots grafted onto the Jewish root. The key passage for our purpose is Romans 11: 25-31. There Paul claims:

that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.<sup>26</sup> And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:<sup>27</sup> for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.<sup>28</sup> As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.<sup>29</sup> For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.<sup>30</sup> For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:<sup>31</sup> even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

Here then we have a complicated situation. Theologically, the Jews are simultaneously beloved and enemies. Setting aside the immediate confusion, and taking a longer term perspective, according to Paul "all Israel shall be saved." It was presumed that conversion would provide the means for this salvation. The timescale is provided by the appearance of "the Deliverer," Christ's second coming, which in turn is linked to Judgement Day. In this context then, a fictional narrative that depicts mass conversion of the Jews is, in effect, hastening the Apocalypse. To convert a Jew textually is to play God. It is also worth noting that in the narrative fictions Jews only appear *en masse*. Whereas Vernagu and Magog, for example, are named individuals engaged in individual pursuits and encountered singly, the Jews never appear alone.<sup>65</sup> As such, the only conversions that can be enacted are, by necessity, mass conversions.

Outside of the narrative texts though, and in spite of Augustine's and Gregory the Great's teachings to the contrary, Jewish conversions did happen; the *Domus Conversorum* in central London and the scholarly literature we have on it is testament

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<sup>64</sup> Kenneth R. Stow, "Hatred of the Jews or Love of the Church?" in *Anti-Semitism Through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog, trans. Nathan H. Reisner (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 71-89.

<sup>65</sup> The sole exception to this rule is the character of Josephus but he, at least in *Titus and Vespasian*, is allegedly a secret Christian and he can safely be treated as either anomalous or, indeed, not actually Jewish.

to a convert presence in England both before and after the 1290 expulsion.<sup>66</sup> But whether the Christian population outside of London actually believed these former Jews had truly converted remains less clear. Jews were known to have seen the light of Christianity at suspiciously convenient times, including whilst awaiting execution.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps rather too close to home for Thornton and his North Riding circle, York's best-known Jew, Benedict of York, famously recanted his Christianity in public the day after his forced conversion at Richard I's coronation in 1189, before dying of his injuries mid-way through the return journey to York.<sup>68</sup> Instances such as this example of apparent Jewish perfidy may have encouraged the later romance emphasis on Jewish death as opposed to conversion. Conversion always included an element of doubt, whereas, to put it bluntly, a dead Jew meant there was definitely one fewer Jew around.

If we turn now to examine Benedict's York, the York that would impact upon Thornton, his circle, and their attitudes towards the Jews, then we find that the Christian citizens were taking no chances on converting their Jewish neighbours. As the twelfth-century Augustinian chronicler William of Newburgh (c. 1136-98) described, "neither by the fear of a most courageous prince, nor the vigour of the laws, nor reason, nor humanity, were [the people of York] prevented from satiating their personal fury in the general destruction of their perfidious fellow-citizens, and sweeping away the whole race in their city."<sup>69</sup> In Easter 1190, shortly after Benedict's death, a mob led by Richard Malebisse set fire to Benedict's house, burning his wife and children alive, an event which culminated in the deaths of around 150 Jews—almost York's entire Jewish population—in the keep of York Castle.<sup>70</sup>

The events of *Shabbat ha-Gadol* (the night of 16 March 1190) must rank as the worst atrocity perpetrated against Jews on English soil. The various surviving contemporary chronicle accounts—of which more later—do not accord exactly, but a

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Lauren Fogle, "The *Domus Conversorum*: The Personal Interest of Henry III," *Jewish Historical Studies* 41 (2007): 1-7; Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews," 263-283; and Henry A. Kelly, "Jews and Saracens in Chaucer's England: A Review of the Evidence," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005): 125-65.

<sup>67</sup> For examples of dubious conversion see Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews," 270-2, 276-8.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Jacobs, ed. and trans., *The Jews of Angevin England: Documents and Records From Latin and Hebrew Sources, Printed and Manuscript* (London: D. Nutt, 1893), 101, 105-6.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph Stevenson, trans., *The Church Historians of England, Volume 4, Part 2* (London: Seeleys, 1853), 565.

<sup>70</sup> For William of Newburgh's account of these events see Richard Howlett, ed., *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I: Volume I* (London: Roll Series 82, 1884-9), 312-22, and Stevenson, *Church Historians*, 565-72. Howlett's edition is still the only edition to contain Book IV of William's work (the one covering the massacre). The modern edition and translation by P.G. Walsh and M.J. Kennedy only covers Books I and II.

considerable amount of consensus provides us with a fairly detailed narrative of the massacre.<sup>71</sup> It came against a national backdrop of both burgeoning anti-Jewish sentiment and the so-called *annus confusionis* engendered by Henry II's death on 6 July 1189 and Richard I's accession to England's throne.<sup>72</sup> Richard left for northern France in December 1189 and was absent for six months. Tensions between the two communities mounted during Lent and anti-Jewish riots broke out across the country. Jews were assaulted or killed in Norwich, (King's) Lynn, Stamford, Bury St Edmunds, Colchester, Thetford, Ospringe in Kent, and Lincoln, as well as York. These riots followed a typical pattern:

A phase of vindictive Jew-baiting led almost inevitably to murder and then to a concerted attempt by the mob at the complete extermination, usually by arson, of the urban Jewries: the Jews themselves had no defence but hurried flight to the local royal castle [as they came under the direct protection of the king and his agents]. To this general pattern the great York massacre was clearly no exception.<sup>73</sup>

The factor (apart from the sheer scale) that set the York massacre apart from the preceding pogroms was Newburgh's assertion that the massacre was "a calculated conspiracy on the part of impoverished local notables intent on liquidating their debts"

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<sup>71</sup> Stating this information is not necessarily the primary purpose of the accounts. Anthony Bale informs us that both the Jewish and the Christian accounts "are commemorative in character: Christian chronicles or Jewish laments, in which writing *serves* the audience rather than historical fact, wherein the main concern is an emotionally involving recollection in an authorised and communally recognised form." Both Jewish and English Latin accounts of the massacre are self-consciously aware of their audience and the acts of interpretation that the chroniclers have undertaken. The Jewish accounts in particular were not intended for English Jews, but for those who lived in France or the Rhineland. These accounts "gave York an importance that transcended time and space, and may even have made such details irrelevant," in order to enhance the cultural connection between the massacred Jews and the audience. Anthony Bale, *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 170-4.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Paris, *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum, Volume II*, ed. Frederic Madden (London: Rolls Series 44, 1866-9), 9. For a full review of the Jewish massacre, from which this summary is drawn, and its national context see Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York*. Although this work is not recent, it remains, as Sethina Watson has noted, "the definitive scholarly treatment of the massacre." Sethina Watson, "The Moment and Memory of the York Massacre of 1190," in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*, ed. Sethina Watson and Sarah Rees Jones (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2013), 6. Watson's own account makes greater reference to William of Newburgh's suppositions, especially Yom Tob's imagined speech, but the particulars of the known events do not differ. *Ibid.*, 1-14. For more on the national context, and for details of the pogroms across the country, of which the York one was the most severe, see also Joe Hillaby, "Prelude and Postscript to the York Massacre: Attacks in East Anglia and Lincolnshire, 1190," in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*, ed. Sethina Watson and Sarah Rees Jones (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2013), 43-56.

<sup>73</sup> Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York*, 25-6.



in addition to liquidating the Jews by any means possible.<sup>74</sup> Religious fervour, already heightened by its being Holy Week, also played a major part in increasing the level of violence. Swept up in devotional mania and frenzy, the mob was all too ready to fall prey to the ranting and “hysterical ravings of a maverick white-robed hermit from a Premonstratensian canonry.”<sup>75</sup> This hermit was supposedly crushed by a stone from the castle keep (but more likely by a mob-launched missile), thus becoming the only Christian casualty of the siege.<sup>76</sup> The Jews held out for a significant period, at least twenty-four hours and possibly as long as several days. However, the York mob eventually brought in siege engines and the inevitable ending ensued. Exactly what happened at the end of the siege is unclear. At some point Rabbi Yom Tob of Joigny, a noted French scholar who was visiting York, appears to have suggested that the Jews seek death at their own hands rather than conversion or death at those of the mob.<sup>77</sup> According to William, men slew their wives and children, and Yom Tob himself seems to have slain around sixty of the 150 who died, rather than have them commit suicide. The castle was set alight, possibly to create a distraction, possibly to repel the besiegers, but inevitably a number of Jews perished in the flames. Yom Tob apparently ended the mass slaughter by killing Josce, the community leader, and then finally himself. The few survivors surrendered on the morning of 17 March and left the castle, declaring their willingness to accept baptism in accordance with the mob’s demands. They were slaughtered almost immediately.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 26, 33-7. The Pipe Roll from 1192 records fines levied against the perpetrators in return for permission to reclaim the lands they abandoned when they fled. These men were connected to each other and had considerable debts.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 27. Dobson notes that this hermit was almost certainly an associate or in the retinue of Malebisse who had strong links with the Premonstratensian order. The Premonstratensians, Norbertines, or White Canons, were approved by the pope in 1126 and came to Britain around 1143. As canons regular they followed the Rule of St Augustine, although this particular hermit does not seem to have sufficiently grasped Augustine’s doctrine of Jewish witness: that the Jewish people—as living testament to the creation of Christianity—should be allowed to live and practise as Jews. See Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defence of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). However, adherence to Augustine’s teachings was by no means consistent and, as Jeremy Cohen has argued, throughout the thirteen and fourteenth centuries Augustine’s ideas gave way to intolerance and anti-Judaic sentiment. See Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Mediaeval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and see also Stacey, “The Conversion of Jews,” 263-283 for the effectiveness of fraternal efforts in converting Jews.

<sup>76</sup> Whether the hermit actually existed or whether he was simply a plot device constructed by William in order to balance the narrative is unclear. His death is certainly convenient.

<sup>77</sup> William describes Yom Tob as a “most mad elder” [*insanissimi senioris*]. Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns*, 319. Partly this description must stem from his orthodox beliefs concerning suicide, but perhaps an element of this accusation is to demonstrate that there was madness in the leaders on both sides of the religious divide, in both Yom Tob and the hermit, and that this massacre was fuelled by men under “mental blindness” [*caecata mente*]. Ibid., 318.

Malebisse and the other perpetrators then entered the Minster, demanded various documents—believed to be bonds and records of their debts—and burnt them on the spot. They then fled, some to Scotland, others on the Third Crusade, to avoid the rapidly forthcoming royal enquiry. No individual was ever brought to justice for their part in the massacre, but each citizen of York was fined according to their wealth, regardless of their participation or lack thereof.

Whether Benedict's spurious conversion, Yom Tob's suicide or Malebisse's actions were uppermost in the minds of the audiences watching the *Corpus Christi Plays* must remain a matter for sheer speculation. Yet there is a very real probability that the gathered citizens were aware of the massacre. Though detailed information concerning these events is perhaps more accessible to twenty-first-century international academic circles than it was to the residents of fifteenth-century York, who lacked both a continued Jewish community and several centuries of historical and archaeological research on the subject, York's Jewish massacre was most emphatically not a closed book.<sup>78</sup> The events were recorded by several chroniclers across the country whose works are extant today, including Richard of Devizes—who actually opened his narrative with the 1190 York pogrom<sup>79</sup>—and the compiler of the Meaux chronicle. Presumably there were also other recordings of the events—both written and oral—that we do not have today, such as writings of secular chroniclers, alternate clerical works no longer extant, and the public consciousness itself. As Sethina Watson identifies, “Medieval chroniclers ... recognised the anti-Jewish violence, and the challenge confronted by Christians living with Jews, as a defining element of their age.”<sup>80</sup> These events were not simply swept under the proverbial carpet.

The two most important of these chroniclers for us, though, were themselves contemporary Yorkshire natives: Roger of Howden (fl. 1174-1201) and the abovementioned William of Newburgh. Roger's chronicle was perhaps the more influential at the time; both Roger of Wendover (d. 1236) and Matthew Paris (c.1200-

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<sup>78</sup> The massacre was recorded by Ephraim ben Jacob of Bonn in his *sefer zekhira* (martyrology of the Second and Third Crusades), and three Hebrew elegies feature it, one by Jacob of Chartres and two by Menahem ben Jacob of Worms. For details see Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 171-4, and Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York*, 20-2. Dobson notes that “the York massacre is virtually the only episode in the history of the medieval English Jewry to have been recorded in some detail by contemporary or near-contemporary Hebrew sources.” *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Richard of Devizes, *The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First*, ed. and trans. John T. Appleby (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 2-4. Devizes' chronicle is particularly noteworthy as he is the first to use the word “holocaust” in association with Jewish deaths.

<sup>80</sup> Watson, “The Moment and Memory,” 4.

59) later adapted his story when writing their own works in the thirteenth century.<sup>81</sup> However, William's text is the more relevant for our purposes here, although it too was probably based in some part on Roger's narrative. William expanded upon Roger's popular base text but it was the adding of his own agenda and the particular qualities with which he invested his written work that also impacted upon its reception. Dobson declares that "William's treatment of the York riots shows him at his very considerable best: well-informed and emotionally involved, he was yet sufficiently detached from the atrocities to provide a comparatively impartial and well-balanced if sometimes over-calculated story."<sup>82</sup> And this over-calculation is crucial to how the text may have been received by later audiences. As well as Roger's basic narrative structure, in part William drew on older existing Latin works, such as Josephus's *Bellum Judiacum*, and the Vulgate Bible, in order to create his narrative: one that would not be forgotten.<sup>83</sup> William expressly declared that his responsibility and purpose as a chronicler or historian was, as Watson puts it:

to transform public knowledge of recent happenings into a full report to be transmitted beyond living memory and into posterity ... to take those things that are great and memorable in his own times and commit them, on the page, to lasting memory.<sup>84</sup>

And as Watson stresses, this mission is only referred to twice in his chronicle: before the coronation riots (that resulted in the death of Benedict), and before the York massacre. By explicitly referencing his mission in these two places, William draws our attention to the fact that in crafting his accounts, he was not simply recording details. Instead he was providing a loaded narrative, redolent with references to an older historical tradition, invoking echoes of another massacre, deliberately casting the York pogrom as parallel to Titus's AD70 attack on Jerusalem.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, his account

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<sup>81</sup> Dobson, *The Jews of Medieval York*, 23.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> For a full and in-depth analysis of William's source texts and the extent to which he was influenced by early historical and patristic texts see Nicholas Vincent, "William of Newburgh, Jerusalem, and the New Titus," in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*, ed. Sethina Watson and Sarah Rees Jones (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2013), 57-90; and Peter Biller, "William of Newburgh and the Cathar Mission to England," in *Life and Thought in the Northern Church c.1100–c.1700: Essays in Honour of Claire Cross*, ed. D. Wood (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 10-30.

<sup>84</sup> Watson, "The Moment and Memory," 5.

<sup>85</sup> William expressly mentions *Bellum Judiacum* as providing another example of the Jewish superstition that resulted in their mass-suicide: "whoever reads the *History of the Jewish War*, by Josephus, understands well enough that madness of this kind, arising from their ancient superstition, has continued

gives more than four times the detail and focus on this episode than Roger's, and, more importantly, its circulation history is both relatively easy to trace and relatively sizeable. As such it provides us with one very good example of how a considerable amount of detailed information from a twelfth-century chronicle could be disseminated to a fifteenth-century audience.

William wrote his chronicle between 1196 and 1198 at Newburgh Priory, fifteen miles north of York and a scant eleven miles from Thornton's home at East Newton. Until the Dissolution of the Monasteries the priory even possessed a copy of the text that may well have been corrected in William's own hand (now British Library MS Stowe 62).<sup>86</sup> Nine manuscripts of his *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* survive today, and his other works also enjoyed widespread circulation in religious houses of varying denominations.<sup>87</sup> Augustinian Dover Priory owned a copy of his sermons,<sup>88</sup> and in the Cistercian Furness Abbey, one enterprising scribe adapted and extended *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* up to and including 1298.<sup>89</sup> The Cistercian houses at Rufford, Nottinghamshire, and Buildwas, Shropshire, owned copies of his chronicle, and the Cistercian annals of Stanley, Wiltshire are based on an incomplete version of his work.<sup>90</sup> Another Augustinian house, Osney Priory in Oxford, had an early thirteenth-century copy of the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* that is now British Library MS Cotton Vespasian B.VI.<sup>91</sup> And all these texts are just the ones that survived so it seems almost certain that there would originally have been many more copies in existence. Not only, therefore, was William's work widely dispersed about the country during the fifteenth century, but it was also still being read and copied. British Library MSS Additional 24981 and Royal 13. B. ix both date from the fifteenth century, for example, and MS Stowe 62 bears fifteenth-century annotations.<sup>92</sup>

Although the manuscripts whose provenance we can identify are all products of religious houses, they (and specifically the information they contained) were not

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down to our times, whenever any very heavy misfortune fell upon them." Stevenson, *Church Historians*, 570.

<sup>86</sup> Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns*, xl. Howlett provides a fairly comprehensive overview of the nine manuscripts and their histories; however London, British Museum MS Stowe 857 is now British Library MS Stowe 62.

<sup>87</sup> William additionally authored a commentary on the Song of Songs, and several sermons on saints.

<sup>88</sup> William P. Stoneman, ed., *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 5: Dover Priory* (London: The British Academy, 1998), 307.

<sup>89</sup> This manuscript is now British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra A.i. See N.R Ker, ed., *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964), 89.

<sup>90</sup> John Taylor, "Newburgh, William of (b. 1135/6, d. in or after 1198)," in *ODNB*.

<sup>91</sup> Howlett, *Chronicles*, xliii.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxix.

necessarily confined within the friary walls, or even to the immediate vicinity. The notion of a religious house, and more specifically its texts, being somehow divorced from the rest of literate and thinking society is a false one. After all, *Siege of Jerusalem* was, like *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, originally a Yorkshire Augustinian production yet Thornton himself owned a copy in a codex that was certainly not compiled in a cloister. Another equally applicable example is to be found in the text of the *Corpus Christi Plays*. As Johnston has demonstrated, the plays show heavy Augustinian influence. For every non-scriptural reference in the plays that can be traced to a text, there was a copy of that text held in the extensive library of the Augustinian friary next door to the Common Hall in York.<sup>93</sup> From this circumstance we may surmise that the Augustinians were deeply involved with the writing and performance of the Mystery Plays. The authors and redactors may have had direct access to the library and the texts themselves, or alternatively the canons may have acted more as a sort of consultancy service to the civic government regarding the finer theological points of the *Corpus Christi* narrative. Either way, the information did not remain chained to the shelves like the codices, but made its way out into the streets of York.<sup>94</sup>

It is almost irresistibly tempting to entertain the possibility that Thornton read of *Shabbat ha-Gadol* from William's own copy but, sadly, there is no conclusive (or indeed inconclusive) evidence for such an occurrence. However, as Keiser has suggested, Thornton may well have borrowed his exemplars from religious houses further from East Newton than Newburgh,<sup>95</sup> and so a more local priory that possessed a

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<sup>93</sup> Alexandra F. Johnston, "The York Cycle and the Libraries of York," in *The Church and Learning in Late Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of R.B. Dobson: Proceedings of the 1999 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Caroline Barron and Jenny Stratford (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2002), 355-70, passim.

<sup>94</sup> This flow of books into the world from religious houses was not particular to the mendicant orders. As an order the Carthusians lived in a manner about as separate from secular lay society as was possible, but still had great influence on the reading public. Nicholas Love's *Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* was composed in Mount Grace Priory near Northallerton yet enjoyed considerable popularity outside of Carthusian circles. Love's text is obviously not completely analogous to William's as its circulation was endorsed by the archbishop of Canterbury and promulgated from professional book production centres like London. Nevertheless, Love's work shows us a way in which texts created in Yorkshire monasteries were successfully transmitted to the world outside of the abbey walls and provides a useful comparison point for William's works. Michael G. Sargent, "What do the Numbers Mean? A Textual Critic's Observations on some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission," in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2008), 238-42. See also Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love's "Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ"* (Salzburg: *Analecta Cartusiana*, 1974), 17-8 for the text's presence in bequests and wills as a measure of its external circulation.

<sup>95</sup> Keiser, "More Light," 115-7.

large library would certainly have held an attraction for him.<sup>96</sup> As a member of the local gentry with an interest in narratives, particularly concerning the Jews, he would be the obvious recipient of information about a Jewish massacre in York itself, whether that information came from the Newburgh canons, the nuns at Nun Monkton, or from a fellow gentry member or cleric who shared—or even just knew about—his literary inclinations. After all, as we have seen, Thornton was just one of a sizeable literate lay population in the North Riding at this point, and he had to have obtained his exemplars from somewhere.<sup>97</sup>

From the extent to which William's chronicle—as well as the other accounts of the massacre—was dispersed, the evidently successful circulation and transmission of Augustinian texts in a lay environment across the country, and the presence of a literate gentry community in the area, there is no reason why Yorkshire's fifteenth-century population would not have known about the events of 1190 from William's text alone. And of course, William's was not the only account of the massacre to be circulating textually. Furthermore, although there is no way of proving it, there is also the possibility (if not the probability) that the massacre was simply common knowledge, and information about it was passed on by word of mouth. Admittedly the massacre is not mentioned in the Middle English prose *Brut*, the most popular lay chronicle in the fifteenth century, but it seems peculiarly odd that a city's collective cultural memory could successfully preserve "Le Jeubry" and the "Hyjudee" in a legal, rather than colloquial, context well into the fifteenth century, but yet gloss over a dramatic massacre that included the combustion of the royal castle.<sup>98</sup> The instigation of the serious rebuilding programme that was undertaken immediately after the massacre alone would have been enough to provoke comment.<sup>99</sup> Thornton and his contemporaries may not have been totally *au fait* with the finer nuances of the underlying political tensions, or Malebisse's monetary woes (although they may well have been), but there

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<sup>96</sup> For information concerning the Newburgh Priory library see T. Webber and A.G. Watson, eds., *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 6: The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons* (London: The British Academy, 1998), 401-2.

<sup>97</sup> See this thesis, 15, 34-6.

<sup>98</sup> York's civic cultural memory does appear to be remarkably tenacious, even today. Many of the streets still bear names that attest their Norse roots or usage, particularly Skeldergate (the street of the shield makers) and Feasegate (cow-house street), but any of the numerous other streets ending in -gate come from "gata," the Norse word for street. Given this propensity to inscribe the city's history in its nomenclature, a public consciousness or memory of the 1190 massacre does seem more than likely.

<sup>99</sup> Until the massacre, York castle typically required only a few shillings a year in upkeep as it was still a timber building. By September 1190 however, a total of £190 had been spent on repairing and reinforcing the keep. T.P. Cooper, *The History of the Castle of York* (London: Elliot Stock, 1911), 24.

is every chance that they knew that a large number of Jews had been besieged in York Castle's keep, and then killed. The information was certainly circulating, and whilst it may not always have been readily accessible on the page, it was definitely available to a significant section of the populace. Perhaps it even crossed their minds as they hurried past the castle to stake out a decent vantage point from which to watch the waggons process through the junction of Coney Street (now Spurriergate) and High Ousegate. Enacting the past and the process of active communal remembering, however, would almost certainly have been at the forefront of their consciousness. After all, they were celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi.

The essence of Corpus Christi is encapsulated in Christ's injunction "Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>100</sup> The Feast of Corpus Christi, as well as the enactment of the Mystery Plays, demands the use of ritual to repeat and recall the same actions previously performed in order to both remember the past and to formulate the future. The ritual of mass and the celebration of the Eucharist is a theatrical performance of a past event, the Last Supper, and a powerful summoning of that past event to the point where, according to the doctrine of transubstantiation, the key figure of that original meal is literally and physically present at the re-enactment. Celebrating the Eucharist calls forth the body of Christ. So too do the *Corpus Christi Plays*. Performing the plays gives Christ a corporeal form; he literally appears in front of the audience.

It is difficult to over-stress the importance of the *Corpus Christi Plays* to the people of York. Similarly, both having a tradition of the plays, as well as maintaining that tradition of having the plays, were crucial enterprises for the civic leaders.<sup>101</sup> It is clear from the contemporary official records that the civic leaders were extremely committed to the plays' continual promulgation, and they completely recognised the prestige, financial benefits, and honour that York gained by continuing to stage them.<sup>102</sup> Just as calling forth the Christian past was essential for the celebration of the Eucharist,

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<sup>100</sup> Luke 22:19.

<sup>101</sup> For a summary of "what place the plays held in the city's self-esteem" see Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 19-21. The Mystery Plays were seriously major events for the city, requiring the input, involvement, and co-operation on numerous levels from a significant part of the population. The cast had to collectively declaim about 14,000 lines of dialogue, and 24 different men were required to act the role of Jesus Christ. Aside from those who acted and those who watched, there were those who had supplied fabrics and materials for the performances; those who helped build or repair the waggons and sets, and—at the other end of the spectrum—those who had no direct involvement in the plays but whose days were interrupted by the noise and commotion throughout the city. The plays' impact was immense. See also Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 7.

<sup>102</sup> Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 20.

so too was calling on the tradition for the plays. Even the commitment of the words to the pages of the 1467 civic “master copy” was the creation of a definitive set past that was revived and created anew each time they were performed.<sup>103</sup>

Nor was York’s investment in recalling its past limited to the *Corpus Christi Plays*. The spectacular Great East Window of York Minster, John Thornton’s 1408 masterpiece, illustrates the same narrative as that told by the plays, the history of the world. The Minster’s 1414 St William Window similarly relates a historical episode, and here the focus is much more locally-specific. The saint himself and the donors, the Roos family (who appear in the bottom row of panels), were Yorkshire folk. The Chronicles of the Archbishops likewise show an interest in preserving York’s heritage, as does the Bolton Book of Hours, now York, York Minster Library MS Additional 2, which includes two images of archbishop Richard Scrope (d. 1405), and one of William of York, who features in the abovementioned window. It also records memorials to four York residents who died in 1445 and 1472.<sup>104</sup> Thornton’s own collections include a large number of texts by Richard Rolle, who was likewise a resident of the North Riding. Rolle’s presence in these codices has traditionally been read as further evidence of Thornton’s piety, but the texts may have been selected as much for their author’s origins and some sort of “local history” enterprise as for their specific choice of subject. Fifteenth-century York was clearly an environment aware of its place in history and, more importantly, it advertised that awareness and knowledge to its population.

Each year as the guildsmen and artisans melded past and present, celebrating this feast of Corpus Christi that recreated the past and enforced the paradigm of Christian living for the future, they pulled the residents of York through time and space, from fifteenth-century York to the Holy Land in the first century and back again, to make the city a site where history both reached back and flowed forwards. York became a space where historical events—even those that originally occurred in a distant

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<sup>103</sup> Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 4. Here Beckwith is primarily concerned with twentieth and twenty-first century revivals of the plays reaching back to the medieval performances but her arguments are equally applicable to the medieval performances reaching back to the Biblical narrative.

<sup>104</sup> For more details on how this manuscript commemorates York’s past see Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy, “The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere,” in *Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 222-3; and John Osbourne, “Politics and Popular Piety in Fifteenth-Century Yorkshire: Images of ‘St’ Richard Scrope in the Bolton Hours,” *Florilegium* 17 (2000): 1-19. For more on the commemoration of archbishop Scrope in material culture, and his cult, see P.J.P Goldberg, ed., *Richard Scrope: Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), especially Sarah Rees Jones, “Richard Scrope, the Bolton Hours and the Church of St Martin in Micklegate: Reconstructing a Holy Neighbourhood in Later Medieval York,” 214-36.



land—could, and did, recur.<sup>105</sup> It was as a member of this community and as a participant in this complex, loaded environment that Thornton was compiling the material for his manuscripts.<sup>106</sup> More to the point, it was in this space that was not only burdened with the weight of historical events but also was a location where the citizens actively engaged with recreating the history of another land in order to configure the present and the future, a space where history could—and was actively encouraged to—repeat itself, that Thornton was copying and reading *The Siege of Jerusalem*.

### **Reading *Siege of Jerusalem* in Thornton's York**

The alliterative poem *The Siege of Jerusalem* details the attack on the city in 70AD by the Roman emperor Vespasian and his son Titus. After they both are healed from hideously disfiguring skin complaints, Titus through his belief in Christ's greatness and Vespasian through the miraculous vernicle, the two convert to Christianity and march on Jerusalem, ostensibly to punish the Jews for the death of Christ. Midway through the siege Vespasian is called upon to take up the throne of Rome and he departs, leaving Titus to finish the job. After besieging the city for some time Titus eventually sacks it successfully, slaughters the majority of the inhabitants, and sells the rest into slavery.

*Siege* is unashamedly and unabashedly crude, violent, and anti-Semitic. In it we find a narrative of racial hatred that, particularly for the post-Holocaust reader, is hard to stomach. Although it has recently risen in scholastic vogue it still remains relatively unstudied, with only one full-length monograph dedicated to it.<sup>107</sup> Even then, that work carefully focuses on the manuscript culture rather than the romance's message. Nevertheless, *Siege* is perhaps the one key text that lets us enter into the perceptions of Jews held by Thornton and his social circle during the fifteenth century. In a world

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<sup>105</sup> It is worth remembering that Biblical history was seen as a shared history belonging to and pertaining to all Christians in a way that we do not often recognise as relevant to Christian communities today. Whereas today we tend to split our historical investigations by geographical region—French history, British history, history of the United States etc.—and see ourselves as products of a geographically specific tradition, the medieval viewpoint was less tied to these secular legislative areas. Medieval residents of York would have seen themselves as part of a wider Christian heritage, albeit an English branch thereof.

<sup>106</sup> The idea that Thornton never saw the plays is possible but extremely unlikely. Even Henry VII saw them, specifically requesting that they be delayed until Lammas so that he could watch them. "The Later Middle Ages: Richard of Gloucester and Henry VII," in *VCH City of York*, 61-65.

<sup>107</sup> Bonnie Millar, *The Siege of Jerusalem in its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

where there was no longer a sustained physical Jewish presence, where the Jews had been banished from the realm—an action against an ethnic group that would remain unparalleled for two and a half centuries until the 1531 Egyptians Act—and where practically the only place on Yorkshire’s soil to encounter Jews regularly was in the folios of a manuscript or in the *Corpus Christi Plays*, *Siege* provides us with the perfect opportunity to explore the attitudes, depictions and myths that were being perpetrated throughout Thornton’s sphere. Furthermore, it is itself a Yorkshire text, most probably composed at the Augustinian Bolton Abbey in the late fourteenth century, a mere fifty miles or a good day’s ride from Thornton’s home.<sup>108</sup>

In order to explore the presence, and absences, of Jews in Thornton’s cultural milieu, though, and the ramifications of reading such a text in the highly charged environment of fifteenth-century York, we must deliberately set aside our twenty-first-century lens. Although with hindsight we can perhaps trace in *Siege* the stirrings of the attitudes that would allow Hitler’s Final Solution, Thornton and *Siege*’s medieval audience were unburdened by such concerns. For Thornton, his circle, and the wider audiences who were circulating, copying, and otherwise enjoying the narrative, *Siege* was not the “chocolate-covered tarantula” it is today.<sup>109</sup> Instead it was simply chocolate. Furthermore, we cannot just push the anti-Semitism to one side as an inconvenient historical truth and privilege an alternate reading, more palatable to twenty-first-century sensibilities. The anti-Semitism forms a major part—if not the pre-eminent focus—of the narrative and is the key to interrogating what *Siege* can tell us about contemporary attitudes towards the Jews. By carefully exploring the complexities of fifteenth-century York’s engagement with the Holy Land through, amongst other things, the *Corpus Christi Plays*, and by situating *Siege* within this environment we find an intriguing and disturbing relationship established between the reader, the past, and the text that not only calls into question many scholarly assumptions about *Siege* and its reception, but that also presents us with a new and deeper interpretation of how Thornton’s circle constructed their Jewish imaginary, and how they acted against that construct.

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<sup>108</sup> See Ralph Hanna, “Contextualising the *Siege of Jerusalem*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 114-6, and Elisa Narin van Court, “*Siege of Jerusalem* and Augustinian Historians: Writing About Jews in Fourteenth-Century England,” *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 239-40.

<sup>109</sup> Hanna, “Contextualising *Siege*,” 109.

By the time Thornton was writing out his own copy in Ryedale, *Siege* had come far further than the fifty miles or so from Bolton Abbey.<sup>110</sup> The work has famously (and frequently) been described as a poem that “even its editors cannot love,” but it would appear that fifteenth-century audiences were not of the same opinion.<sup>111</sup> Six largely complete manuscript copies, two substantial fragments, and one single leaf of the text are extant today, which would imply that it enjoyed considerable popularity.<sup>112</sup> In terms of Middle English romance survival rates, *Siege* is outshone only by *Titus and Vespasian*, another text belonging to the Vengeance of Our Lord tradition, which survives in twelve copies of various levels of completion. In short, *Siege* and its dead Jews were wildly popular. Interestingly for a text that is so concerned with enacting divine vengeance, there is little in the manuscript tradition to suggest that *Siege* was a devotional text.<sup>113</sup> Its manuscripts support readings of it as historical narrative, as theological tract, and as crusade romance, often within the same codex.<sup>114</sup> It has even been claimed as a text helping national identities to coalesce.<sup>115</sup> Perhaps one reason for its popularity was that it could be many things to many people. The histories of the codices in which *Siege* is found are similarly inconclusive in defining a specific audience. Thornton’s copy was evidently for personal or household use. Bolton Abbey’s copy (now Princeton, Princeton University Library MS Taylor Medieval 11) was obviously originally housed in a religious context, but—as we saw with the *Corpus Christi Plays*—there was a considerable flow of information out from Augustinian books into the secular world and a religious setting for a manuscript does not necessarily entail a purely religious audience. Equally we can presume that the religious also read texts dedicated to subjects outside of Biblical exegesis or affective piety too.

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<sup>110</sup> Ralph Hanna and David Lawton provide c. 1340 and the 1390s as the *terminus ante quem* and *terminus ad quem* respectively for *Siege*’s composition, although they note that sometime between c.1354 and 1391 (dates generated by the majority and life of Roger de Clifford, fifth Baron de Clifford, and *Siege*’s presumed initial addressee) is more probable. Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, xxxv, lii-v.

<sup>111</sup> David Lawton, “Titus Goes Hunting and Hawking: The Poetics of Recreation and Revenge in *Siege of Jerusalem*,” in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O.S. Pickering (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 105.

<sup>112</sup> As a useful comparison, one of the most popular secular romances, *Bevis of Hampton*, exists in three fragments and only six copies, although *Bevis* was definitely *en vogue* from the end of the twelfth century until well into the eighteenth, and also possessed a large extra-literary existence. See Jennifer Fellows, “Sir Bevis of Hampton in Popular Tradition,” *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 42 (1986): 139-45.

<sup>113</sup> For a survey of the manuscripts in which *Siege of Jerusalem* is found see Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: Fink, 1976), 109, and Millar, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 15-41.

<sup>114</sup> See Millar, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 30-4.

<sup>115</sup> Rouse, “Emplaced Reading,” 53.

Other extant copies may have been for monastic use but this supposition is by no means certain.<sup>116</sup> What is evident, though, is that *Siege* was well-read on a regular basis. Although two of the extant copies are high quality productions, even these were commissioned as reading or working texts, rather than as display copies.<sup>117</sup> In fact, from dating the manuscripts' colophons and marginalia, all of the texts seem to have been well-read over a period of some time, again attesting the narrative's popularity. That Thornton, a member of the laity with an interest in written material, owned a copy was not then an extraordinary circumstance.

As noted above, for a text that enjoyed such rampant popularity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries *Siege* remains disproportionately understudied. What recent scholarship there has been on the poem has mostly sought to reclaim *Siege* from the morass of anti-Judaic sentiment it initially appears to express.<sup>118</sup> This criticism has been predominately focussed on the circumstances and immediate aftermath of *Siege*'s composition, and typically seems to be motivated by the conviction that *Siege* does not simply offer a one-dimensional, unambiguous anti-Judaic statement. Instead, there has been a critical movement to rehabilitate *Siege* by reading it as a text that explores Christian anxieties and ambiguities concerning relationships with other religions and differentiating Christianity from those religions. Briefly, *Siege* has been cast as the ethically nuanced product of a Christian existential crisis.

In his *City of God*, Augustine put forward what he termed his "Doctrine of the Witness" as a reason for the continued existence of the Jewish faith. This doctrine

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<sup>116</sup> Bonnie Millar, for example, suggests that British Library MS Cotton Vespasian E.xvi may have been produced for a monastic audience, "as such an audience would have been interested in both the scientific and religious items which it contains: *Three Kings of Cologne*, *An Account of Prester John*, and three treatises on the calendar, science and physiognomy." *Ibid.*, 29. However, Thornton's own copy includes *Three Kings of Cologne*, and we know he also owned scientific and medical texts, as well as other religious texts, several of which could be termed more religious in content than either *Three Kings of Cologne* or *An Account of Prester John*. Millar's suggestion may well be correct, but there is no reason to rule out MS Cotton Vespasian E.xvi from being personal rather than institutional reading.

<sup>117</sup> Millar, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 29.

<sup>118</sup> See especially Narin van Court, "Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians," 227-48; Elisa Narin van Court, "Socially Marginal, Culturally Central: Representing Jews in Late Medieval English Literature," *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 293-326; Elisa Narin van Court, "The Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians Writing About Jews in Fourteenth-Century England," in *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*, ed. Sheila Delany (London: Routledge, 2002), 165-84 (an updated version of her 1995 article); and Elisa Narin van Court, "Siege of Jerusalem and Recuperative Readings," in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2004), 151-70; but see also Suzanne M. Yeager, "Jewish Identity in *The Siege of Jerusalem* and Homiletic Texts: Models of Penance and Victims of Vengeance for the Urban Apocalypse," *Medium Aevum* 80 (2011): 56-84 and Chism, "Liquidating Assets," 309-40. Notable exceptions to this trend are Michael Johnston, "Robert Thornton and *Siege*," 125-62, and the in-progress work of Timothy L. Stinson.

stated that the continual presence of the Jews, albeit in a reduced state, was necessary as they provided a living testimony to the coming of Christianity and its subsequent supremacy. The Jews conveniently possessed the Scriptures, thus demonstrating that these texts were not some spurious and retrospective invention on the part of opportunistic pseudo-Christians wanting to legitimise Christ's coming through back-dated prophecies. Furthermore, the Jews' position as an oppressed minority also bore witness to the consequences of their rejection of Christ's teachings. By continuing to occupy a marginal position within Christian society, the Jews provided what Augustine considered to be an excellent example of what not to do. As such, it was desirable that the Jews were neither converted nor exiled. Instead they were ideally to be retained within Christian societies, albeit in a limited and powerless capacity.

Situating the poem as the product of an Augustinian house influenced by Augustinian theology, specifically this so-called "doctrine of tolerance," Elisa Narin van Court has been the leading voice attempting to nuance and refine *Siege*'s message.<sup>119</sup> Her scholastically influential argument is that *Siege* "invites and deserves a full and nuanced reading which recognizes that what animates this narrative is *not* a univocal and monolithic anti-Judaism, but an ambivalent and, at times, profound confusion about Jews, and Christians, and violence."<sup>120</sup> Where these arguments can not apply, however, is with regard to the slippage between the anonymous fourteenth-century poet—who was possibly Augustinian and possibly a cleric, but who was definitely an artist of some considerable talent, and who created a complex text that reveals a multiplicity of interpretations—and the man who concerns us, the fifteenth-century Robert Thornton.

Thornton may well have been a man who had a finely nuanced ear for the deeper multifaceted polysemantics of *poésie*; indeed, we can presume that he was deeply appreciative of literary works. He obviously spent considerable time and effort in compiling his manuscript collection. However, Thornton was not an Augustinian

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<sup>119</sup> See especially Narin van Court, "Recuperative Readings," 151-70.

<sup>120</sup> Narin van Court, "*The Siege of Jerusalem* and Augustinian Historians," 244. Emphasis mine. Providing a counterpart to this approach, Alex Mueller has similarly focussed on Christians rather than Jews by examining the depiction of Rome. Although offering a form of contrast with the Jerusalem that is (at least according to the poem's logic) fully deserving of divine vengeance, Rome is not presented as the pure counterpoint to the contaminated Jerusalem. Mueller reads the poem's portrayal of Rome and its imperial enterprise as a critique of the "bullion-hungry Romans," with violence enacted against the Jews designed to draw attention to "the horrors of war and empire-building." He does not seek to deny the anti-Judaic sentiment the poem expresses, but instead to reveal the critique of physical violence throughout the poem. Alex Mueller, "Corporal Terror: Critiques of Imperialism in *The Siege of Jerusalem*," *Philological Quarterly* 84 (2005): 288.

grounded in (and more importantly, actively following) the doctrine of tolerance towards the Jews.<sup>121</sup> Instead, he was a member of the laity who lived and worked in the area around York. And York, as we have seen, displayed an attitude towards the Jews that was anything but tolerant. In fact, as Michael Johnston has demonstrated, Thornton may well have arranged the first eight texts, or the opening section of British Library MS Additional 31042 in order to construct a manuscript that was particularly anti-Jewish.<sup>122</sup> Whilst *Siege*'s position certainly merits closer investigation, it is worth bearing in mind at this point that manuscripts were not necessarily read cover to cover. They were dipped into, put aside, returned to, reread, and reread again at different points in the reader's or audience's life. If we look, as we will later do, at the overall contents of the London Thornton we find that *Siege*'s Jews can be placed in a deeply considered and thought-out context that combines black humour and extreme levels of violence to articulate an overarching narrative of intense anti-Judaic sentiment.

The opening of the London Thornton manuscript has long been recognised as exhibiting what Phillipa Hardman terms “an intelligible structure to the sequence of texts.”<sup>123</sup> Both Hardman and Johnston are in agreement on this point, as is John Finlayson, who recently argued for a coherent logic to the majority of the manuscript.<sup>124</sup> Hardman argues that the sequence is designed to focus on the Passion and encourage affective meditation on the Passion: the reader is supposedly impressed by Christ's life, sorrowed by his suffering, and understands the revenge taken against Christ's enemies—Jews and Muslims—by the latter texts, *Siege*, *Sege of Melayne*, and *Rowland and Otuell*. Conversely, Johnston places the emphasis on the latter texts. He claims that “Thornton's compilation renders the Jews' destruction as a piece of triumphalist and imperialist historiography, turning the complexities of *Siege*...into a monolithic statement [of] worldly power and imperial ambitions.”<sup>125</sup> This statement, according to Johnston, then sets the scene for Christian imperialism to be rolled out onto the Saracens of the latter two texts as the fulfilment of a Christian imperialist fantasy.

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<sup>121</sup> In fact, as Jeremy Cohen has indicated, there is considerable evidence that by the mid-fifteenth century even the Augustinians themselves were not adhering to the doctrine of tolerance. See Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, passim.

<sup>122</sup> Johnston, “Robert Thornton and *Siege*,” 125-62. Not all of Johnston's arguments are entirely convincing, particularly with regard to Christian imperialism and the latter part of the manuscript.

<sup>123</sup> Hardman, “Windows into the Text,” 58.

<sup>124</sup> Finlayson, “The Contexts of the Crusading Romances,” 240-263.

<sup>125</sup> Johnston, “Robert Thornton and *Siege*,” 128.

Rather than either of these two interpretations, though, I contend that Thornton's ordering of the opening section does something different. Like Johnston I believe that the textual emphasis is firmly placed on *Siege* as enacting a justified vengeance on the Jews. However, instead of *Siege* justifying the manuscript's Christians continued rampaging triumphant over all non-Christians "so that by the end of *Roland and Otuel* the reader has seen the fantasy of a militaristic triumphant Christianity that stands alone in the world, unopposed,"<sup>126</sup> I believe that *Siege* acts as a pivot point in the manuscript's narrative. Apart from anything else, *Sege of Melayne* is hardly the ideal vehicle for the imagined successful spread of the Church Militant. During one battle, Bishop Turpin is so maddened by bloodlust that he attacks his own soldiers, which seems a little off-kilter for the work Johnston declares the text to do.<sup>127</sup> The reason that *Siege* is so pivotal for the London codex is that it transfers the reader's attention outside of the physical manuscript. Rather than conflating the Jews and Saracens into one homogenous heathen soup that then receives the textual enactment of Christian imperialism, I would argue that Thornton's copy of *Siege* places the impetus for enactment firmly on Thornton himself.

In order to understand fully the implications of the textual ordering, though, it is worth looking at the specific texts before *Siege* in some detail.<sup>128</sup> The manuscript opens with two extracts from the Southern Version of the *Cursor Mundi*,<sup>129</sup> starting with the births and childhoods of Mary and Christ, before detailing Christ's entry into public life.<sup>130</sup> As the narrative develops, a strong wave of Jewish antipathy to Christ becomes a constant theme throughout the text. The tension between Christ and the Jewish leaders mounts throughout the period of his ministry, until "At þe laste þay hangede hym þe one þe Rode."<sup>131</sup> Exacerbating and crystallising any anti-Jewish sentiment that the reader may be feeling by this point, the narrative then ends with a promise to move on and tell the story of the Passion. The second extract concludes with an extracted

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>127</sup> For more on this subject, and for *Sege of Melayne* as a parody see Elizabeth Berlings, "Sege of Melayne—A Comic Romance; or, How the French Screwed Up and 'Oure Bretonns' Rescued Them," in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 57-70.

<sup>128</sup> For details on the incipits and editorial variations of the *Northern Passion* and *Cursor Mundi* undertaken by Thornton see Johnston, "Robert Thornton and *Siege*," 143-52.

<sup>129</sup> See Roger R. Fowler, ed., *Southern Version of the Cursor Mundi Volume II* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), 10630-14933. All references to all texts of the *Cursor Mundi* are by line number.

<sup>130</sup> Much of this material is also covered elsewhere by Thornton in *Ypokrephum* and *Three Kings of Cologne*.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 14879.

description of the Passion told from Christ's perspective,<sup>132</sup> which relates the physical effects of the sufferings he underwent in some detail, and ends with a prayer that Christ protect the reader and help them to his bliss.

Christ's personal trials and suffering at the hands of the Jews are immediately followed by the *Northern Passion*. From the outset the Jews are depicted as Christ's enemies on an institutional level. As early as line 15, "The Iewes hafedene at hym Envie" and he is contrasted with the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, especially Caiaphas.<sup>133</sup> Swiftly the other Jews are actively depicted as Christ's deliberate murderers: "The Iewes fra þat Ilke daye / Ihesu to sle þay thocht aye."<sup>134</sup> Even at the Last Supper, no opportunity to critique the Jews is passed up. Judas is heavily criticised, and cast as sly and petty to the extent that when the disciples start eating, Judas "stale owte of his lordis dysche / The beste Morselle of his fysche."<sup>135</sup> As Judas is explicitly the agent of the Jewish authorities, they are implicitly tarred further. The narrative then reaches the Passion, which is described in particularly bloody and detailed terms over fifty lines (1589-1639) even to the extent of how far short of the holes Christ's hands come,<sup>136</sup> and the subsequent Jewish reluctance "opir bores to make."<sup>137</sup> Eventually Christ dies, and is resurrected. In contrast to the close focus on Christ's crucifixion and torture, the description of the resurrection is brief and somewhat prosaic: "vp he rase the thirde daye / the our stane he putt by syde / Ne wolde he thare no langere habyde."<sup>138</sup>

In the meantime the Jews who have been guarding the tomb realise the body is gone (the presence of an angel also helps) and, despite an inclination to flee, they go to Pilate and inform him of the resurrection. He suggests they gloss over the resurrection part and claim instead that armed men stole the body. He will help them in this deception, thus sparing their lives. They are relieved and:

swore by þaire god Mahowne  
 Þay ne sold it telle in feldene in towne  
 Pat Ihesu was resyne thorow his myghte

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<sup>132</sup> See Henry J. Stauffenberg, ed., *Southern Version of the Cursor Mundi Volume III* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), 17111-87.

<sup>133</sup> Foster, *Northern Passion*, 15.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-4.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 1609.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 1613.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 1974-6.



Bot þat men come for hym to fyghte.<sup>139</sup>

The text then ends with an exhortation to Christ to help the reader keep the Passion narrative in mind as protection from the devil, and a message to the audience that all who hear the narrative shall have a thousand years of pardon.

Here then we have a text that almost obsessively details the Jewish role in Christ's death. Rather than a focus on the Passion itself, as Hardman claims, we have instead a remorseless insistence on the cause and agent of the Passion: Jewish evil. We also have evidence of the Jews actively denying Christ's resurrection and seeking to cover the evidence of his godliness with a rather pathetic false story about armed men stealing his body. The Christian reader is aware of the falsity: aside from their own religious upbringing, they are explicitly informed by the text that the Jews know Christ has been resurrected. In this section we find two key reasons behind medieval anti-Semitism: causing Christ's death, and denial of his resurrection. Both are writ large throughout this text whereas the resurrection itself—arguably the most important feature of the Passion narrative—is brushed over in three matter-of-fact lines. By this point in the manuscript the Christian reader's emotive response has been so heightened that the reader has been brought to the point of thirsting for revenge. The Jews have been portrayed in such an abhorrent light that the awful vengeance wreaked upon them in *Siege* is seen as a justified enterprise.<sup>140</sup> However, the *Northern Passion* also adds a coda to this justification in its final lines. What this coda introduces, and which is a crucial point neglected by both Johnston and Hardman, is an example of the role that circulating texts can play in the matter of religious action and salvation. The text of the *Northern Passion* is explicitly a stairway to Heaven. Reading Thornton's version of the *Northern Passion* gains the reader a thousand years of pardon, whereas other versions of the *Northern Passion* only garner a mere hundred years. Whether this disparity comes from Thornton's exemplar, scribal error, or an advanced case of wishful thinking on Thornton's part, we will never know. Either way, the introduction of a considerable

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 2073-6. Although swearing by Mahoun, these guards are specifically described as Jews, rather than Roman soldiers and are not identified as being affiliated with Pilate or the Romans in any way. Why they should swear by Mahoun is unclear, as there is no other sign that they have been conflated with the Jews into a generic non-Christian enemy. They are identified as Jewish, and their desire to cover up the resurrection is in keeping with the tropes of Jewish perfidy and Messiah-denial. It could be that the exhortation to Mahoun is a compromise on the part of the poet. If the Jews were to swear by God the Father, or the God of Abraham, then the extremely close religious links between the Christians and the Jews are highlighted. This way, their religious differences are underlined without undermining the Biblical narrative. Christ's killers are still Jewish, rather than Saracen or pagan.

<sup>140</sup> Johnston, "Robert Thornton and *Siege*," 149.

amount of time towards attaining salvation for the reader transforms the text from a bigoted, but inactive, text to a serious devotional endeavour. From this point onwards, the action of reading anti-Judaic texts such as the *Northern Passion*, and—by extension—*Siege*, is not an act that idly indulges fantasies of Christian superiority and imperial power. Instead it becomes a powerful, affirmative, and above all *active* step towards making the reader a better Christian.

If we hold that thought for a moment and now turn our attention to the contents of *Siege*, rather than the act of transmitting it, we find that making the reader a better Christian comes at an excessively high price to the textual Jews. Nevertheless, although the narrative's message today reads extremely seriously, we cannot forget that works like *Siege* were not only conceived of as didactic material preaching anti-Jewish sentiment. One of the probable reasons why *Siege* was so popular is that it provided considerable amounts of entertainment. The text of *Siege* is exciting: there are miracles, a dramatic storm, cunning ruses, armies of elephants, gory and gruesome battles, moments of doubt for the hero, and in the end the “bad guys” lose. Several elements, such as the battle descriptions, are couched in the language of secular romances like *Guy of Warwick*. When Guy has finished fighting the Saracens in Eastern Europe, for example, there were so many slain that “That fiftene forlange men might see / Men wade about the hemme of their shoon / In the blode that of them coom.”<sup>141</sup> We find a similar image of the survivors wading through the sea of blood in *Siege*. After the battle in Passus Three, there is so much carnage that “There myghte no stede doun stap bot on schene wede, / Othir on brene, or on breste, ells on bright heuedis.”<sup>142</sup> The descriptions of the banners echoes those found elsewhere in romances, such as *The Sowdane of Babylon*. Billowing over the heads of the Christians as they make camp is a “gay egle of gold on a gilde appul.”<sup>143</sup> In *The Sowdane of Babylon* Savaris bears a banner with a gold eagle with its wings spread against a red checked background.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Julius Zupitza, ed., *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, EETS OS 42, 49, 59 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1883-91), 3662-4. This edition is dual-text but, unless noted otherwise, the text quoted from is that of Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 175/96, a variant contemporary with Thornton's works. Although not as complete a narrative as the so-called “Later Couplet” or “Fifteenth Century” version, the “Couplet Version,” to which the Gonville and Caius text belongs, comprises five of the six extant texts so can be taken as reasonably representative of audience knowledge of the text. All references are by line number.

<sup>142</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 605-6.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>144</sup> Emil Hausknecht, ed., *The Romance of the Sowdone of Babylone and of Ferumbras his Sone Who Conquered Rome*, EETS ES 38 (London: Truebner and Co., 1881), 189-90. All references to this text are by line number.

These two brief examples are, obviously, not exhaustive but serve to demonstrate that *Siege* is closely allied to secular romances.<sup>145</sup> As such, and in spite of its apparently dominant religious and didactic preoccupations, *Siege* cannot be considered to be divorced from popular secular romances that provided their audiences with entertainment, amusement, and enjoyment. On many levels then, *Siege* is undoubtedly a recreational text. Thornton himself must have been aware of this, and treated it accordingly. Given the sheer range of material with which he was familiar, and the quantity of religious and romance texts included in his manuscripts, it seems a little far-fetched to imagine that he would not have noticed *Siege*'s links to the genre of romance.

Johnston has described the current scholarly trend in studying *Siege* as “suggesting that this romance has as much to tell us about late medieval Christianity’s conception of itself as it does about its conception of Judaism.”<sup>146</sup> I, in turn, would suggest that current academic work on *Siege* has as much to tell us about twentieth- and twenty-first-century academic anxieties concerning Jews as it does about *Siege* itself. For scholars working in the field today it is impossible to consider medieval anti-Judaic texts through the lens of anything other than the Holocaust.<sup>147</sup> For Thornton and his circle, though, the death of a Jew did not resonate in the same way. They were unburdened with the knowledge of what centuries of persecution would wreak. Consequently, if we wish to explore fully the attitudes to Jews that *Siege* displays we must—however distasteful it may seem—set aside our twenty-first-century lens and entertain the concept that fifteenth-century Christian readers found the death of Jews actively entertaining and enjoyable.

Discussing these “entertaining” elements of *Siege* is a particularly fraught endeavour. It should not require stating that the deaths, massacre, and mutilation of any people should not be a source for amusement. What I would contend though, is that—in certain circumstances—for Thornton and his ilk they clearly were. *Siege*, which takes its very identity from a prolonged and deliberate act of war that was intended to result in multiple deaths, was read for pleasure. Furthermore, I maintain that there is sufficient evidence elsewhere in the Thornton manuscripts of this violent anti-Semitism combined with farcical and bizarre descriptions or happenings to justify reading similar

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<sup>145</sup> Further similarities between *Siege* and several of the Thornton texts can be found. I have not included them here as I wish to demonstrate that *Siege* is connected to the wider world of romance, rather than the specific world of Robert Thornton’s romances.

<sup>146</sup> Johnston, “Robert Thornton and *Siege*,” 127.

<sup>147</sup> John Finlayson gives what is perhaps the most balanced review of *Siege*'s reception in recent and current scholarship. Finlayson, “The Contexts of the Crusading Romances,” 251-2.

episodes in *Siege* as intended to provide humour to a fifteenth-century audience. This comedic attitude is extremely black and goes far beyond what we would consider acceptable, especially given the racial element involved.

Before we go any further, though, it must be made clear that in his choice of reading material Robert Thornton does not reveal himself to be some loathsome form of sadistic anti-Semitic monster. Or, if he does reveal himself to be so to our minds then it is worth stressing that he was certainly not atypical of his time. In her work on the intersections between violence, brutality, and humour, Larissa Tracy reminds us that “Medieval comedy is often the refuge for gratuitous violence where pain is inflicted without any consequences.”<sup>148</sup> Tracy predominantly focuses on the French fabliaux tradition but she notes that Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*—which, incidentally, enjoyed far, far greater popularity than *Siege*—creates a large amount of humour from what was a malicious desire and intent on the part of Absolon to cause a serious amount of pain and permanent disfigurement to Alisoun.<sup>149</sup> Absolon’s revenge is itself generated by being the butt (pun intended) of Nicholas and Alisoun’s joke. As an audience we are expected to find this episode funny, a viewpoint confirmed by the pilgrims’ laughter after they hear of Nicholas’s branding. The laughter glosses the serious underlying violence which is not denied; it simply hides in plain sight. Looking to the modern era and on a less cerebral plane for a point of comparison, the very popular antics of Tom and Jerry pull humour and enjoyment from a brutal and abusive interaction. It is remarkably simple to forget (or strategically ignore) the fact that much of the cartoon’s plot is generated by Tom wanting to kill and eat Jerry. The enjoyment of violence may be unpalatable, but it is very well-established and is by no means limited to the medieval period. If we turn now to the Thornton manuscripts then we find this enterprise of black humour and Jewish deaths combined not only in *Siege*, but also in *Ypokrephum*.<sup>150</sup>

*Ypokrephum* has managed to avoid the attention of scholars far more successfully than *Siege*. When it is mentioned in criticism it is almost always in conjunction with the questioning and defining of romance as a genre, thanks to Thornton’s incipit. At times it can seem as though critics have examined the title, but completely ignored the contents of the narrative. Suzanne Conklin Akbari has

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<sup>148</sup> Larissa Tracy, *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 2012), 191.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>150</sup> Carl Horstmann, “Nachträge zu den Legenden,” *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 74 (1885): 327-39. Hereafter referenced as *Ypokrephum*. This article contains several edited texts, of which *Ypokrephum* is the first.

described *Ypokrephum* as “a narrative walk through Jesus’ childhood,” yet a “fantastic romp and scamper” might be more apposite.<sup>151</sup> John Thompson remarks upon the “unlikely pairing of the bloodthirsty Richard with a story about the childhood of Christ” but the youthful Jesus of *Ypokrephum* is, in fact, a worthy companion in arms to the mass-murderer Richard.<sup>152</sup> *Ypokrephum*’s Jesus develops such a habit of killing off his playfellows and any other citizen who crosses his will that his harassed mother Mary is eventually forced to remonstrate with him. After Jesus has become embroiled in a disagreement with the local populace, and the Holy Family has been forced to move house,<sup>153</sup> Mary reaches the point of exasperation and demands “dere sone, this foly late pou cesse / I pray the, if it be thi wille, / Thou late vs somewhere lyfe in peese!”<sup>154</sup> The “foly” in this particular case is seating himself on a sunbeam over a hill, and encouraging the other Jewish children to follow suit. They (inevitably) fall through the air and those who survive end up with an assortment of broken thighs, necks, shanks, arms, backs, and knees. In fact, “Pare skapede nane with-owttene harme.”<sup>155</sup> Jesus’ response to this heap of shattered children is to laugh, and carry on playing.<sup>156</sup> The Jesus of *Ypokrephum* is far more guilty of causing death and destruction than the Jews indicted by *Siege*.

In spite of typological, Biblical and didactic elements, Jesus’ “wild abandon” establishes *Ypokrephum* as a narrative of amusement and playfulness.<sup>157</sup> Within the text children and childhood become a space in which this apocryphal material can be enjoyed and legitimised. Julie Nelson Couch notes that the Thornton text appears to offer “a reading experience different from sombre affective meditation, one that is entertaining and didactic,” and cites the text’s “sheer relish of play” as the key evidence for this statement.<sup>158</sup> If we examine this play in which Jesus is engaged, however, we

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<sup>151</sup> Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Incorporation in *The Sege of Melayne*,” in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 39.

<sup>152</sup> See also Couch, “Apocryphal Romance,” 214-6.

<sup>153</sup> They will later move again, and the implication is that Jesus’ behaviour has led to them being run out of town.

<sup>154</sup> Horstmann, *Ypokrephum*, 506-8. All references to *Ypokrephum* are by line number.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 480-3.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>157</sup> Julie Nelson Couch, “Apocryphal Childhood in the London Thornton Manuscript” (paper presented at the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 10-13, 2012). Couch’s interest lies in the narrative’s depictions of childhood, rather than in religious literature, Thornton, or Jews. She even terms it an “Infancy poem,” as opposed to a religious poem or apocryphal literature.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

arrive at some disturbing conclusions. The “play” that is being relished consists primarily of arranging for the deaths of his playmates.

As we will see later in *Siege*, there is a strong element of the ridiculous present. Judas, allegedly a playmate of Jesus during the exile in Egypt, meets an (albeit brief) death at Jesus’ hands because he messed up Jesus’ mud pie.<sup>159</sup> Judas is eventually revived by a sulky Jesus at Mary’s instigation. Jesus regularly laughs at the outcome of his escapades, and, despite being run out of town twice, annoying the local populace at least five times, and having to resurrect individuals in whose death he was complicit three times, Jesus’ actions are referred to as mere “play.” Nevertheless, there is also a darker undertone. After initially pleading for the revival of Salomone, another child who managed to break his neck in play, Mary then justifies Salomone’s continued death as the saving of her son.<sup>160</sup> Salomone and his companions, it emerges, will be the ones to denounce Jesus as an adult. In spite of the superficial intentionally slapstick veneer, serious issues lie not far beneath the surface. When the Jewish townsfolk decide to hide their children away from Jesus (the previous time they had played with him, a jumping game resulted in them falling into a crevasse and dying), they hide them in a fold. Jesus then turns the hidden children into pigs.<sup>161</sup> This moment is as marked and obvious as the conflation of Saracen and pork we find later on in the London Thornton, in *Richard, Coeur de Lion*. Rather than simply amusing anecdotes, here we have explicit cultural mockery. The Jews—who are expressly referred to as Jews at regular intervals throughout the text—are to be mocked and killed for the entertainment of the Christian reader. Jesus’ “werkes wilde,” which, in the eyes of the poem’s rabbi, are so brutal as to disqualify him from being the Messiah,<sup>162</sup> his insouciant childish pranks of murder, and culturally insulting transmogrification, are not simply the comic products of a boy unused to his own omnipotence, but instead are intended to form an uncompromising message. This message is one that is rendered worse by Jesus’ laughter: dead Jews can be funny.

*Ypokrephum* and *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, then, give us a flavour of the type of episode that Thornton apparently found entertaining and enjoyable. However, before we examine the supposedly comic sections of *Siege* in more depth, it is worth briefly reviewing the text’s overriding dominant theme in order to situate the humour within

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<sup>159</sup> Horstmann, *Ypokrephum*, 153-5.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 569-72.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 372-89.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 460-7.

the wider narrative. *Siege* is a narrative of infestation. And at the centre of this narrative lies Jerusalem, a city portrayed as infested by Christ's killers as a house can be infested with rats. From the opening image of Titus's jaw, deformed and distorted by its hideous canker through to the penultimate stanza depicting an unrepentant Pilate withering away in a Viennese prison, still rotten to his core, we are faced with a tale laden with filth, infection, and pollution. Abominations abound. The first sustained narrative section, lines 6-24, contains the worst abomination: the torture and death of Christ, ostensibly caused by a rotten and corrupted political and judicial system. To augment the horrors of Christ's Passion, the text makes no reference to his resurrection, the Harrowing of Hell, or the Ascension. Instead the last image of Christ is his broken and rent body hanging on the cross. Whilst the reader may fill in the narrative gaps from his own knowledge, by leaving Christ on the cross the poet lets this image linger across the following forty winters, during which time nothing was done against "þat pepill that hym þose paynes wro3t," thus augmenting the horror of their actions and their stubbornness in not repenting these actions.<sup>163</sup> However, Western political regimens are not safe from this putrescence either. Nero, perhaps the most depraved and debauched of all Rome's emperors, is poisoning the throne (if not yet his senate) when the narrative proper commences. When he learns of Vespasian's accession to the imperial throne, and thus his own appointment as heir, Titus is filled with such extreme joy at his rise to power that his body warps and cripples him until he can only be cured by a more pure sentiment: rage against the Jews. Throughout, the reader is faced with a tide of moral filth.

The counter narrative to this abject morass is the theme of purgation and erasure. Stronger and more forceful than simply cleansing, this theme is inextricably entwined with the superiority of Christianity, to the extent that they announce themselves at the exact same moment: the healing of Titus's canker. David Lawton proffers sickness and healing as two driving themes in *Siege* but a mere cure is an unsatisfactory description for the forces at play.<sup>164</sup> Cleansing improves the original substance; purgation removes all trace of it. It is insufficient for the canker to be

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<sup>163</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 24. Suzanne M. Yeager notes that this period of time has important apocalyptic implications, and that it was allegedly the period of time in which the Jews had the option of repenting their role in Christ's death. However, she does not mention that this lack of repentance is worsened by the poet's leaving Christ remaining on the cross, presumably in full sight. Yeager, "Jewish Identity," 57.

<sup>164</sup> Lawton, "Titus Goes Hunting and Hawking," 114-5.

removed; Titus's face must appear as though the lump were never there.<sup>165</sup> All evidence for the past defouling of his face must be removed. Again this purgation has political ramifications; Titus's canker does not heal because he suddenly believes that Christ was a great man, or even that he was divine. Titus is healed because he is able to condemn the ironically introduced system of "Iewen iustice" and the rottenness of the entire imperial structure. The locus of his blame is in fact Caesar:

A Rome renayed! quod thou kyng ...  
 Thou Cesare, sinful wrecche, þat sent hym fra Rome,  
 Whyen hade thi leghame be leyd low vnder erþe  
 Whan Pilat prouost was made þat suche a prynce Iuged?<sup>166</sup>

It is Rome that is the source of the problems and Rome that—like Jerusalem—must be cleansed to avenge Christ's suffering. Titus's recognition of this state of affairs is what not only allows him to be purged of his canker but also announces him as worthy of enacting the cleansing Vengeance of Our Lord.

This above-outlined preoccupation with purgation drives the narrative and heavily informs our reading of each episode. When we thus encounter scenes that are intended to be amusing in this narrative whose primary concern is so grim, the humour is highlighted by the starkness of the contrast. These instances are all the more shocking as they are not mere periods of light relief, or amusing sub-plot, in a more intense or serious larger piece. These scenes deal with material that would have been extremely important for Thornton and his circle, but they employ a grotesque and black humour to enforce their message. Within this narrative of purgation, the presence of Jewish deaths takes on greater impetus and so to find them treated with humour is all the more troubling. Nowhere is this approach more evident than in the treatment of the second generation of Jews.

### **The Jewish Second Generation**

In his *Confessions* Augustine stresses the importance of children, and so it is here that we shall turn our focus. After all, Christianity is the religion of the child. Where Christianity differs from Judaism is in its worship of Christ the Son, rather than solely God the Father. However, what we find when we look at the depiction of the

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<sup>165</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 178-80.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-6.



Jewish second generation in *Siege* is highly inconsistent with the current critical movement. What we have instead of a bigoted but ethically nuanced text is in fact a large-scale fantasy of sustained Jewish extermination.

As we saw with the *Corpus Christi Plays*, there was a point at which the destruction of Jewish infants could be condemned by fifteenth-century audiences as a work of atrocity. That situation is commemorated as the Slaughter of the Innocents. In Thornton's copy of *Siege*, however, we find a warped inversion of the Slaughter; one that the reader is encouraged to greet with textually justified glee and laughter. The scene that best exemplifies this inversion is that which for the purposes of disambiguation I am terming the episode of the ballistic baby. This section has been, to the best of my knowledge, completely neglected by previous scholarship.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, I argue that it—read in conjunction with a later episode—is key to understanding *Siege*'s message concerning Judeo-Christian relations. Furthermore, I suggest that its inclusion in the text casts *Siege* (instead of being merely a bigoted anti-Semitic romance) as a horrific extermination fantasy, one that was both recognised as such and avidly consumed by Thornton and his circle in the name of being a good Christian.

The episode in question is located towards the end of Passus Four. Following the terrible carnal battle of Passus Three that I discussed in the previous chapter, the Jews have fled into the comparative safety of the city walls.<sup>168</sup> The Romans have unleashed a dreadful barrage of siege engines, flaming arrows, and assault towers, and the Jews have responded by pouring down pitch and brimstone on the attackers.<sup>169</sup> In the midst of this *melée* and after several violent skirmishes—one resulting in the capture, torture, and death of Caiaphas—the Romans gain the upper hand, renewing the assault during which time:

A womman bounden with barn was on þe body hytte  
 With a ston on a stayre as þe storyj telleþ  
 [Þat þe barn out brayed fram þe body clene]

<sup>167</sup> Alone among critics, Suzanne M. Yeager mentions this episode in passing as one of several supposed marvels or “selcouths” throughout the siege, but she describes it erroneously as “a pregnant woman and her unborn baby who are killed [by a stone from a siege engine].” In fact, the baby is born and although it is probably safe to presume that the mother does die from this trauma, the text is not actually explicit on this point. Yeager, “Jewish Identity,” 64.

<sup>168</sup> See this thesis, 86-7.

<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, after the visceral imagery of Passus Three, Passus Four is marked by a definite turn towards more industrial and mechanical imagery throughout.

And borne as a bal ouer þe burgh walles.<sup>170</sup>

This scene is simultaneously both harrowing and outright ridiculous. The image of a new-born child released from the womb with such hyperbolic velocity that it sails into the sky and over the city walls like a toy ball [*bal*] is, on one level, clearly intended to be very funny to the audience. This scene is meant as a comically visual slapstick episode, gleefully oblivious to the fundamentals of biology, gravity, and statistical probability. However, it is not intended to be purely comical. It also possesses extremely dark and serious undertones, for fifteenth-century and twenty-first-century readers alike. Even taking the scene at face value, the reader is fully aware that the baby currently soaring over the battlements is going to land with a less-than-comic splatter.

A further consideration is best shown in the ambiguous word “bal.” A *bal* can mean, as mentioned above, a toy ball which adds to the comic effect of this scene and ties in nicely with a new born baby. It is quite fitting that an innocent baby should be likened to a toy which, in the usual way of things, one would expect him to be playing with in the near future. Again, we are reminded of Jesus’ “play” in *Ypokrephum*. However, *bal* can also mean a shot or a missile. The child’s trajectory will take him from the Jewish territory within the city walls towards the Christian besiegers. By constructing his flight as that of a *bal*, the poet reconfigures this innocent and helpless child as a missile, aimed towards the Christian forces. The child becomes, quite literally, a weapon of war used against the Christians and therefore becomes a threat that must be annihilated.

This reconfiguration in the narrative’s logic thus justifies the baby’s inevitable end splattered across the landscape. The juxtaposition of *bal*’s two meanings—each of which is perfectly applicable to this scene—exacerbates the demonization of the Jews, particularly if we remember that Jews were often believed to be perfidious or false. The reader is presented with a vision of ruined innocence. That the child could be compared to a harmless plaything as well as an airborne missile at the same time renders the episode more shocking than if the child had just been compared to a weapon. A deadly projectile in the guise of an innocent newborn is surely the height of perfidy. And if a Jewish infant can be so false, the reader is led to ask, then how bad must the adults be?

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<sup>170</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 829-32. The Thornton text omits line 831, presumably a scribal omission rather than a faulty exemplar as there is no attempt made to insert another line in place or to adapt line 832 so that the passage makes sense.

However, the complexity of this scene does not end there. For this ballistic baby, even the method of his birth is rendered devious. By causing the child to be born in such a way the poet neatly negates the question of whether or not a child is born without sin. The ballistic release from the mother's womb means that for this child to pass from womb to world, to be born, is to commit a sin as that passage is instantaneously configured as a violent attack on the Christian army. Within these four lines then, we have an uncomfortable message. The child is both the plaything of the Christian readers, provoking amusement and entertainment as he flies to his death, and also a horrendous weapon, a ballistic missile, with the manner of his death being used to justify and encourage the annihilation of his people. He becomes not just a casualty of war but the embodiment of, and justification for, a genocide wish-fulfilment. The destruction of the Jewish second generation therefore, rather than simply a massacre like the Slaughter of the Innocents, becomes a justifiable form of Christian self-defence. A key point to be made here is that besieging Jerusalem has until this moment in the text been legitimised as a direct retaliation to the killing of Christ, specifically against those individuals who killed Christ. Pilate and Caiaphas both feature in the narrative, and the reader is left uncertain as to the level of involvement from the other inhabitants. The ballistic baby, however, can have had absolutely no involvement or responsibility in Christ's death. Consequently its death heralds in an entirely new conflict.

If we turn now to the child's mother, we find that a slightly different angle is presented. Instead of the threat apparently posed by the Jewish second generation, the mother's body is used as a site over which the Christians exercise power. Her body is Jerusalem in miniature; her purged womb foreshadows the eventual Roman occupation and the expulsion of the remaining Jews from the city. The woman's womb emits the child as a direct result of the Christian aggressors' action. They possess the power to make her give birth; they exercise absolute control over her internal organs. Her body is subject to their will and, by emitting the child in such farcical fashion, it becomes an object for the reader's entertainment. Furthermore, the Christians can make the anonymous Jewess give birth in a manner that will prove fatal to the child, prefiguring the central motif of unnatural motherhood that we will later discuss. By forcing the Jewess to jettison her child outside of Jerusalem in a manner that both causes the reader entertainment and also kills the child, the poet uses this scene to demonstrate the utter subjugation of the Jews to the Christians. In four lines the Christians are shown literally

to wield the power of life or death over the Jews. Jewish lives are subject to the Christians' caprice, according to where they choose, or happen, to throw their stones.

Despite the lack of attention that this scene has garnered, it does have a recognised precedent. In the writings of Paulus Orosius on the 70AD siege there is a description of Titus briefly suffering from uncertainty just before he destroys the temple.<sup>171</sup> However, as he looks on its noble aspect he realises that the temple has to be destroyed as it has fulfilled its purpose. It is like a womb “emptied by the act of giving birth and [so] void,” with its child, the Church of God, *Ecclesia Dei*, “germinating in a fecund way across the whole world.”<sup>172</sup> Once Christianity has come forth then Jerusalem has no purpose and can be discarded. The anonymous author of *Siege* relied upon several accounts of the siege, including Josephus' *De Bello Judaico*, but Orosius did correspond with Augustine so it is almost certain that the Augustinian poet and his audience were familiar with this image. What makes this particular image so shocking, though, is that in the case of the pregnant Jewess the womb has been violently and forcibly emptied as an act of vengeance. It is also a warping of the Orosian simile; rather than the salving Church of God being issued forth from the Holy Land, *Siege* presents us with the loaded weapon of the Jewish baby being forcibly emitted, along with all it connotes. In place of the Christ child generated in the centre of the world and saving humanity, we have an attacking force born of a Jewess who refused to surrender and who must therefore be destroyed. This image not only evokes the original justification for destroying Jerusalem, (i.e. that Christianity has already emerged triumphant and so Jerusalem has served its uterine purpose) but also legitimises further struggle. The womb of Jerusalem may no longer be needed to emit the saviour of humanity, but the wombs in Jerusalem are not staying empty. Instead, in a twisted parody of the Orosian simile, they are spewing forth children that are actively attacking Christians.

The determination to wipe out the second generation of Jerusalem recurs later on in the siege and again we find that mutilation of the mother-child relationship is the chosen method of enacting the child's death. By this point in the narrative, the Romans have abandoned the direct attacks on the city and have besieged it instead. This phase of

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<sup>171</sup> Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos libri vii*, *Library of Latin Texts – Series A* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 7.9.5.

<sup>172</sup> [*Sed Ecclesia Dei iam per totum Orbem uberrime germinante, hoc tamquam effetum ac uacuum nulli que usui bono commodum arbitrio Dei auferendum fuit*]. Ibid. Translated in Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 120.

the siege has lasted for four days.<sup>173</sup> In this second scenario Maria, a Jewess who is maddened with hunger, takes her son and, in an echo of St Lawrence's martyrdom, roasts him over burning coals and eats his shoulder before genially offering the rest of his remains to her neighbours.<sup>174</sup> This death has frequently been employed by critics such as Narin van Court and Mueller to nuance and question the levels of supposed anti-Semitism found in the work. Maria's actions have been interpreted as garnering the reader's sympathy, and demonstrating the desperation felt by the besieged Jews, thus implicitly critiquing warfare.<sup>175</sup> It has certainly not been read by critics as provoking amusement and entertainment. Nor has it been interpreted as working in unison with the earlier scene, which I believe prefigures it in several important ways. As we saw, the episode of the ballistic baby includes grotesque physical comedy. In this scene, there is not the same emphasis on the ridiculous. However, certain sly elements of humour do creep in. As she is roasting her son, Maria remarks "Enter thare þou owte come .../ And ilke a side our sorrow is newe."<sup>176</sup> St Lawrence's famed, and famously funny, call of "turn me over, I am done this side" is mutated into the black humour but bitter truth of "on each side our sorrow comes anew." These words are spoken as she turns her child over and over on the coals so that each side does indeed come into contact with the heat anew. Her words are also a reflection on her own position; the Christian side has already caused her son pain and now the Jewish side, embodied by Maria herself, is also causing him sorrow.

Critics have so far tended to place the emphasis of this episode firmly on the mother. Mueller notes that the text itself "offers no moral evaluation of Maria's act and emphasizes the pitiable nature of her state."<sup>177</sup> Merrall Llewelyn Price, who has done a great deal of work in this area, tracks the motif of Maria from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries and the repercussions of cannibalism or monstrous motherhood. And

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<sup>173</sup> Although five manuscripts attest this reading, two others claim that the siege has lasted forty days. Hanna and Lawton emend their edition to forty, claiming that it is "clearly commonsensical." Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 145. On the one hand, Hanna and Lawton have a point. It seems highly exaggerated that a mere four days of hunger should reduce the entire population of the city to the point of falling down "Ded as a dore-nayl." Ibid., 1078. On the other hand, being reduced to a drivelling mass of self-pity after a mere four days does help depict the Jews as unworthy to occupy the Holy City.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 1081-88.

<sup>175</sup> See, for instance, Narin van Court, "Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians," 233; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 131; and Mueller, "Corporal Terror," 299-302. Mueller claims that the use of *myld* as a descriptor garners sympathy, translating it as "noble." However, whilst it tends to signify meekness, kindness, or mercy, *myld* can mean merely humble or lowly. Alternatively, the poet could be aiming for a more shocking interpretation: if even the *myld* are resorting to cannibalism, then the levels of depravity amongst the rest of the population must be considerable.

<sup>176</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 1083-4.

<sup>177</sup> Mueller, "Corporal Terror," 301.

again, the fact that this trope is labelled “motherhood” with the emphasis on the consumer, rather than the consumed, is quite telling. Price describes how the poignancy of the monstrous mother trope and its relationship to Marian imagery simultaneously creates horror and pity. She also claims that the reader is encouraged to share the horror of the Jews witnessing Maria’s actions, and that the reader does not judge these Jews too harshly because they have reacted in the right way.<sup>178</sup> Although Price has detailed many of the Christian associations that are obviously being subverted and bastardised in the Maria motif, she has left out one important element for understanding this motif that is specific to *Siege*: the element of humour. Maria’s remarks as she barbecues and ingests her son were originally an ironic but solemn restructuring of the *lex talionis*; an invocation to her son to “return to that secret place of nature, where [he] took up the spirit.”<sup>179</sup> With our Maria, however, the mutation from this latter into an echo of St Lawrence’s last words turns her son’s death into a jest for the audience, rather than a tragedy of siege warfare. However, they also render it a reconfiguration of a mocked Eucharist, an empty and futile attempt to gain salvation through ingestion of her son. Maria goes through the motions but, as the reader is fully aware, her actions will not create the same effect as taking the Eucharist. Consuming her son will not bring her life, in either this world or the next.

No critic though, to the best of my knowledge, focuses on the child, let alone links him to the earlier Jewish baby that vanishes from the reader’s vision as he soars over the walls. As noted with the ballistic baby, the question of that baby being innocent was negated by the manner of its birth. As it was born, it sinned by attacking the Christians and therefore its death was a cause for Christian celebration. This second child, although born without sin, loses its innocence (at least in the fifteenth-century Christian reader’s eyes) through the manner of its death. This child is eaten to appease the ravening hunger of its starving mother, a Jewess, and to prevent her from dying. The consumed baby is the bulwark between Maria and certain death; he foils the Christians’ plan for defeating their Jewish enemies, and bolsters this particular Jewish defender by fuelling her in her fight to survive. Like the ballistic baby he acts against the Christians

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<sup>178</sup> The reader here is not necessarily the reader of *Siege*, but the reader of the Monstrous Mother trope, which was popular between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. Merrall Llewelyn Price, “Imperial Violence and the Monstrous Mother: Cannibalism at the Siege of Jerusalem,” in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 274-6.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

through dying. This act of refuelling, then, is this child's sin and the reason why his death can be greeted with puns and laughter.

Thornton in particular is more likely to have laughed than blanched at the suggestion of cannibalism. Maria's cooking of her child is one of two anthropophagic instances within the London Thornton, the second occurring in *Richard, Coeur de Lion*. In the Lincoln Thornton, the giant in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*—the original opening text—is said to dine on seven boy children, roasted then served on a silver platter accompanied by a highly spiced wine *jus*.<sup>180</sup> Elsewhere in the London manuscript the alleged anthropophagy of Richard I is referenced in the *Verses on the Kings of England*, and the inclusion of Lydgate's *Dietary* serves to confirm ingestion as a major preoccupation of the complete codex.<sup>181</sup> On their own, these instances would form an interesting grouping. However, the London Thornton's opening sequence that, as we have seen, is structured in order to encourage certain emotive responses also insists on setting the ingestion agenda by its intense focus on the Passion, which would engender and subsequently be evoked by the most important moment of Christian consumption: the Eucharist.

If we are to presume that *Siege* was not read acontextually by the Thorntons, but that their readings were informed by their situation and the manuscript context, then it follows that we cannot read an instance of anthropophagy except in the shadow of the *Northern Passion, Cursor Mundi*, and the emotive circumstances that inform Thornton's copy of *Siege*. In this context, then, the idea of taking the Eucharist, taking the highly visual bloody and brutal suffering detailed in the manuscript's opening texts and reappropriating it into an act of salvation, becomes an act of retaliation against the textual Jews. Whereas eating the son of Maria results in damnation, the reader will ingest the son of Mary and in doing so be saved.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 1025-8.

<sup>181</sup> I use ingestion, as opposed to the more usual consumption, as the final two texts in the codex, *The Parliament of the Three Ages* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, are concerned with the theme of a more materialistic, rather than a physical, consumption.

<sup>182</sup> An interesting aspect of the London Thornton manuscript is that the Eucharistic episode, literally the crux of Christian worship, is refashioned into two subsequent scenes, both involving religious others, and both occurring within the holy city of Jerusalem, the location of the Passion itself. Price notes that Maria's position is "disturbing" as she is in the centre of the world, rather than in the marginal lands where outlandish behaviour and the grotesque are less threatening to the world order. Price, "Imperial Violence," 287. McDonald also notes that instances of anthropophagy are typically distanced in some way, be it geographical or cultural. McDonald, "Eating People," 125. Both of the consumers, the ostensibly Christian Richard and the definitely Jewish Maria, are condemned for their actions, but for different reasons. Richard's refuelling actually supports the Christian cause, whereas Maria's is potentially to the detriment of it. McDonald has indicated how "horribly brilliant" Richard's

To conclude *Siege*'s representation of the Jewish second generation, both scenes concerning Jewish babies completely dehumanise the infants. In each case we see the text co-opting the child into a weapon of war. The first baby becomes a weapon against the Christians; the second child becomes a tool aiding the Jews. In both cases we can see the Christians forcing these circumstances onto the Jews but then using the inevitable outcome to justify and strengthen the Christian cause. Both babies are employed to reveal just how deeply imbedded the infestation of evil is within the Jewish people. In both cases the mother and child relationship—so crucial and central to Christianity—is bastardised and perverted to the point at which the reader must be overwhelmed with abhorrence and demand that this corruption is purged. The inclusion of these two babies explicitly shifts the Christian struggle from one that is allegedly revenge for the treatment of Christ during his trial, and the conviction that resulted in his tortuous death, to one against all Jews. However, instead of visiting the sins of the mothers on the sons, it makes the sons complicit and transgressive in their own right. These babies are not shown to be inheriting transferred guilt; they have already inherited the capacity to fight against Christians which, according to the narrative, they exercise directly from the womb onwards. *Siege* informs us that Jews are not somehow misguided individuals who live wrongly—as Saracens are frequently categorised in other texts—but that their anti-Christian sentiment is inborn; it is effectively genetic. The second issue presented by these babies is the supposedly empty womb. The dual problem, as the ballistic baby shows us, is that the womb not only is not remaining empty but also that what is born is antagonistic towards Christianity. Jerusalem remains a threat. Rather than tolerance, *Siege* preaches a complex and multifaceted attack on Judaism; it shifts the struggle from book to bloodline, from religious difference to race.

Perhaps the most distasteful aspect in this attack is that, in both cases, the baby's destruction is also specifically showcased for the reader's entertainment. The death of the second generation of Jews—and crucially these are the Jews who were most definitely not implicated in the trial and death of Christ—is paradoxically treated lightly and with a deadly seriousness. In a way, it is this seemingly careless mingling of life,

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anthropophagy is, and more importantly, the narrative's endorsement of the scheme. *Ibid.*, 134. Where Richard does not escape censure is in his appalling table manners. Richard's anthropophagic antics will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that Maria—starving to death rather than simply feeling a little queasy—receives far more narratorial condemnation than does Richard. Neither links the two instances together in the manner outlined above. Read alongside each other they echo the *Corpus Christi Plays*' depiction of Jerusalem as a site that had not dealt with its Jews "correctly," thus paving the way for Thornton to look around him for a site that had managed to do so.



laughter, and death that renders *Siege* so chilling for modern readers. The wholesale destruction of Jerusalem, it could be argued, is justified by the treatment of Christ during his trial and conviction that resulted in his tortuous death. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this blatant targeting and enjoyment in the destruction of the second generation which, we must recall, was prefigured short years before by the Slaughter of the Innocents, transforms *Siege* from a bigoted anti-Judaic text into a large-scale fantasy of sustained Jewish extermination.

Although the two babies and the manners in which they die form the crux of this fantasy, we find it played out throughout the rest of the text. As was discussed above, the theme of purgation is crucial to *Siege*'s narrative. If we now turn to examine the final scenes, we find that the theme of purgation continues to battle with that of infestation right up until the narrative's last lines. The temple, the most potent symbol of the Jewish religion, is not simply sacked, but utterly obliterated:

Thare was no ston in the stede    stondande ston lefte,  
Morter ne mude-walle    bot alle to mulle ȝode:  
Nowthir tymbre ne tre,    Temple ne other,  
Bot doun betyn and brynte    to the blake erthe.

Whan the Temple was overytt,    Tytus comandide  
In plowes forto putte    and alle the place to Erye;  
And sythen þey sewe hit with salt,    and seiden thies same wordes:  
“Now is this stalwourthe stede    stroyede foreuere.”<sup>183</sup>

Most importantly though, Jerusalem and its temple are obliterated in the name of justice. After the ground has been sown with salt and rendered infertile, Titus seats himself on the temple site and explicitly sets himself up in judgement of Pilate and the remaining Jews. We must remember, of course, that it is Titus' ability to judge both Jesus' worth and Pilate's inadequacy to judge that results in his miraculous conversion. Titus sells the Jews at thirty for a penny in a scene that reverberates with Biblical references. None of these slaves is allowed to enter Jerusalem ever again. Although Josephus is spared the indignity of slavery, he “*aloynde* was [connects himself, both physically and politically] to Rome,” where he ends his days writing books.<sup>184</sup> The text is not explicit, but there may be the unexpressed hope that residence in the Holy City will counter Josephus's Jewish origins. In his exile we see further evidence of *Siege*'s

<sup>183</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 1289-96.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 1325.

preoccupation that Jerusalem has to be purged. The desolation decreed in Daniel 9:26 has to be created.<sup>185</sup>

In the final stanza the besiegers depart, erasing their presence from the landscape: “And when alle was demed and don þey tuke vp thaire tentis, / Trossen vp thaire tresour and trompen vp þe sege.”<sup>186</sup> This final image shows us not an army of occupation, bent on physical possession and with an imperialist agenda, but instead an army intent on obliteration. As they depart the soldiers sing lightheartedly, confident in the knowledge that they have done God’s work. By leaving the reader with Jerusalem’s landscape empty of life, devoid of treasure and purged of its human habitants, the poem ensures that the theme of erasure and purgation triumphs over that of infestation. The reader is left with only himself. It also firmly reinforces the central inescapable (and to modern readers utterly distasteful) message of *Siege*: in order to fulfil one’s Christian duty, Judaism is an excrescence that must be obliterated.

### **Conclusion: Crusading Through Literature**

If we now step back and remember that Thornton was reading this heavily loaded and complex text in an environment that, as we saw earlier, carries the burden of its Jewish past in a prominent manner, the whole enterprise can be assessed in a way that no other academic reading of *Siege* has considered.<sup>187</sup>

Thornton’s copy of *Siege* draws to a close leaving the reader on his own. The city has been obliterated and its residents scattered. The Romans depart and even the temple’s treasures are taken with them. Nothing remains. The poem wipes clean the landscape leaving a striking narrative gap between the empty Jerusalem and the totally different world of the following text into which gap the reader is forced to step. Although the siege of the textual city is over for both Romans and reader, Thornton would have been fully aware that the world still contained a Jewish presence and therefore that the struggle against the Jews was not yet completed. This narrative

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<sup>185</sup> The destruction of Jerusalem is prophesied in Daniel 9:26. It is also mentioned in more detail as prophesied by Christ in Luke 19: 43-4 although, as Price notes, this latter is most probably a *vaticinium ex eventu*. For more information on *Siege* as fulfilling the Biblical prophecies, and as an apocalyptic text see Bonnie Millar, “The Role of Prophecy in *Siege of Jerusalem* and its Analogues,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 13 (1999): 153-178, Yeager, “Jewish Identity,” and Price, “Imperial Violence,” 275-6.

<sup>186</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 1337-8.

<sup>187</sup> The closest approximation would be Rouse, “Emplaced Reading,” but Rouse does not actually explore the words of the texts.

absence and the inevitable reflection on the disparity between the empty textual landscape and Thornton's knowledge of the world has not been acknowledged by previous scholars, who have instead put forward the belief that the impetus against the generic infidel is carried on in the London Thornton by the Charlemagne romances of *Sege of Melayne* and *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*.<sup>188</sup> As noted earlier though, such a viewpoint coalesces both Jews and Saracens into one homogenous heathen soup; an amalgamation that fails to differentiate between those who had not yet been converted (but could theoretically convert from Islam), and those who had actively killed Christ. This amalgamation is simply not present in the manuscript. Instead the manuscript actively separates the two by means of this empty landscape where Jerusalem once stood, and the eradication impetus is passed not to the two Charlemagne romances but to the reader. And the reader, Robert Thornton, was not just reader but also scribe and compiler. And Robert Thornton was living near York.

Thornton's York regularly and self-consciously performed acts of geographical transubstantiation, deliberately configuring itself as the Holy Land. Productive and provocative links were evoked between the cobbled streets and the Biblical landscape, and between the medieval artisans and their scriptural counterparts. York was a place where the Jews had killed Christ. However York was also a place that had, in turn, killed its own Jews. The stone keep of York Castle bore perpetual witness to the spring night in 1190 when York's citizens had enacted their own purgation of the Jewish populace. And, unlike fifteenth-century Jerusalem, York's Jews had not returned. York, therefore, was a place where besieging the Jews could be, and had been, successful. It offered a terrestrial opportunity in which to construct a New Jerusalem; an opportunity to get the job done right.

Uniting a location in fifteenth-century England with the besieged first-century Jews was not specific solely to Thornton. As Suzanne M. Yeager indicates, sermons delivered on Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday (the Tenth Sunday after Trinity) encouraged the drawing of an affinity between the Jerusalem population of 70AD and the sermons' fifteenth-century English audiences. One sermon actually mentions *Siege* by name.<sup>189</sup> The apocalyptic elements of *Siege* provided the common ground between

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<sup>188</sup> See especially Johnston, "Robert Thornton and *Siege*." However, both Rouse and Akbari acknowledge that *Siege* ends with an empty landscape and stress the theme of erasure. Rouse, "Emplaced Reading," 51-6; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 131-4.

<sup>189</sup> Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, eds. *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 2563.

the two groups, with the later Christians potentially (or, in the minds of the preachers, ideally) learning from the Jews' mistakes, thus avoiding a hypothetical shared ruin. Yeager posits that this concept of a looming shared ruin generated thoughts of a shared humanity.<sup>190</sup> However, I would argue that for Thornton, *Siege* did not represent dire warnings of his own mortality or the means to reflect on a shared humanity. Instead it represented the opportunity to gain Christian redemption by continuing the anti-Jewish struggle. The guilds had assured York was already the Biblical landscape, but the violent annihilation and then eradication of its Jews a hundred years later bound it to the city of 70AD in a way that no other English city could rival.<sup>191</sup> For Thornton, this circumstance added greater piquancy and impetus to his transmission of *Siege*. Rather than simply gaining years of pardon in the next life, like all those who heard the *Northern Passion*, copying *Siege* in York also gave him an active and enjoyable role in this one. For him in this situation the redactor's pen truly was as mighty as the Crusader's sword.

Unlike other audiences of *Siege* whose reactions must remain unknown, Thornton possessed pen and paper. These items gifted him the wherewithal to act, and thus *Siege* itself was the means to avoid that supposed shared ruin. It also meant that he could have fun at the same time. Consequently Yeager's arguments are simply inapplicable to Thornton, regardless of their appropriateness to *Siege*'s other audiences in or outside of York. He was not akin to a passive listener awaiting impending doom like the besieged Jews awaited the end of the siege fifteen centuries before. Instead, as is evident from his organisation of the material *and the fact that it was he himself who was organising the material*, Thornton effectively allied himself to Titus and Vespasian through his act of writing and copying.

To find a precedent for this behaviour, we need look no further than that set by the text itself. The internal logic of *Siege*, a recreational artistic work that repeats instances of historical violence, boldly declares that art and recreation can be acts of war. When the Christian army amasses before Jerusalem's walls for their imminent attack, considerable narrative space is given over to describing the army's banner. This banner, under which Titus and Vespasian march, is so heavily embroidered with

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<sup>190</sup> Yeager, "Jewish Identity," 56, 73-4.

<sup>191</sup> See Rouse, "Emplaced Reading," 51-3. Rouse notes that London allied itself to Jerusalem, but the links that York was able to forge between itself and Jerusalem form a far stronger bond.

historical violence that it is “Stoked ful of storijs,” and “stayned myd armys.”<sup>192</sup> Artistic representations of military endeavours and prowess are reformatted in the romance to create both an exemplar for martial activity and also an intrinsic part of that activity. The Jews carry out a similar enterprise. Caiaphas sits atop his gloriously decorated elephant relating Old Testament narratives, and his recounting of these tales is an essential preparation for the Jewish forces before they go into battle. *Siege* thus informs us that the reformulation of historic violence generates and legitimises future violence. Furthermore, in this precedent for the promulgation of military stories and artistic depictions of war that act to guarantee future military success, those who do the actual promulgation are in important positions of power. It is Caiaphas who recounts the stories, rather than his anonymous clerks. It is the imperial banner flying high over the battlefield and visible to all the troops—as opposed to small and personal coats of arms on individual anonymous knights—that depicts the triumphs against foreign foes. It is Thornton then, gentry and social leader, the compiler and copyist in charge of the manuscript, who bears the textual banner.

The implications for any reader, and more particularly for any copyist, are then obvious. The reader is engaged in a literary crusade, becoming a contemporary Titus and with each reading he re-enacts the siege of 70AD. Participating in this activity expunges any inner canker (or “inner Jew”) in the reader’s heart and reconsecrates the reader as a victorious Titus, ready to ascend to the empire’s throne. Thus this promulgation and circulation of *Siege* forms a way of participating in a moral crusade every bit as valid as setting off for the Holy Land, sword in hand. Just as hearing the *Northern Passion* would guarantee the listener a thousand years of pardon, so copying *Siege* offered the chance of redemption, of regaining Jerusalem, and not in simply idealistic or pacifistic terms. *Siege* uses the art of poetry, both writing *and* reading it, a form of recreation, as an art of war. Lawton first raised the idea of recreation as a military tactic in *Siege* when he noted that “hawking [in the poem] has already figured as an act of war: when the Jews fled into Jerusalem (314), they “flowen as þe foule doþ þat faucons wold strike.”<sup>193</sup> However, Lawton does not identify poetry being an act of

<sup>192</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 334.

<sup>193</sup> David Lawton, “Titus Goes Hunting,” 108-9. Lawton’s argument is worth quoting here in full: “Jousting, hunting and hawking may complement war or contrast with it: they represent its peacetime equivalents, the civilising of the warrior, ‘a movement from war to the imitation of war.’ In this they are especially close to what the poet of war habitually does, as in *The Siege of Jerusalem*, taking war, sea-storm and siege, subduing them to the ictus of alliterative line and turning them into courtly [or in Thornton’s case, gentry] entertainment.

recreation and thus see *Siege* as participating in its own agenda. Instead of the hunt depicted in the poem becoming a metaphor for anti-Jewish violence, the poem itself becomes a tangible method of creating metaphorical anti-Jewish violence. Lawton claims that the affinity between recreation and violence is unproblematic here but I would contend that, in fact, the reverse is true. *Siege of Jerusalem* wears its anti-Judaic heart very firmly and very brazenly on its sleeve. The arts of peace are, quite simply, not present. Lawton's final sentence does not go far enough. *Siege* is indeed "redolent with the desire for historic violence" but as such, by its own logic, it uses that desire and the promulgation of that same to generate the desire for future violence. It writes itself into the same paradigm as the banners and Caiaphas's book, and so acts martially against the Jews. For Robert Thornton, creating metaphorical anti-Jewish violence was the mark and duty of a good fifteenth-century Christian.

Of equal importance though is that Thornton was bearing this textual banner and carrying out this metaphorical crusading endeavour in an environment that told and retold its own stories. The self-presentation of York as a location where the Jew "went bad," its physical reminders of its Jewish past, and its intense focus on re-enacting the Passion, legitimised *Siege*'s circulation by reinforcing the immediacy of the Jews as antithetical to Christianity and so encouraged the text's anti-Jewish sentiment. In this environment the almost cartoon-like bogeyman Jews of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, or the theological version of the missing link argued for by Narin van Court, have no place. A hypothetical, nebulous Jewish imaginary Other onto which one can project the anxieties of one's time requires an empty space into which it can step. Where even the names of major streets bear the legacy of Jewish inhabitation, or infestation, that space is already occupied. And it is occupied by the memory of real Jews. With regard to the interpretation of *Siege* in this environment at this time and written by this man, therefore, the genocide wish-fulfilment becomes paramount. The ballistic baby and all that it signifies have to take precedence.

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The heightening of the poetry at such times, like the overt involvement of the audience immediately after the hunting, records that affinity, with the poem itself as another mode of recreation. The affinity is quite unproblematic when, as here, the arts of peace are no more than disguised arts of war: they are the heroic pretence of peace, and therefore especially honourable, used none the less to press defeat on the enemy. Likewise in the language of the poem, It follows that the poem's deployment of hunting is equally strategic, sharing with the depiction of war itself qualities of overcoding and theatricality. The poem recognises itself, and its audience, as less than pacific, as crusading, as redolent with the desire for historic violence." Ibid., 109, quoting Louise Olga Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 194.

As a consequence, circulating and promulgating *Siege* in York retrospectively authorised the massacre of 1190 for readers and writers such as Thornton. *Siege* demonstrates that not only do Jews go bad, they stay bad. It then becomes the Christian reader's duty to continue the struggle against Jewish wickedness and perfidy. Just as the richer audiences of the *Corpus Christi Plays* wrote themselves and their property into the Biblical narrative landscape, Thornton was therefore writing himself and his crusade into a long tradition of anti-Jewish violence which includes the 1190 York pogrom. Richard Malebisse and his cronies had delineated York as a site, like first-century Jerusalem, where Jews could be, and were, destroyed. As we saw, even at the time William of Newburgh was actively drawing links between the 1190 massacre and Josephus's account of the siege in 70AD. Robert Thornton, lacking any physical Jews to besiege, continued that heritage through his literary violence and scribal crusade and so consecrated York as a battleground in the Vengeance of Our Lord tradition. York, as we have already seen, was first-century Jerusalem, both besieged and Biblical. What Thornton brought to the table was the chance for the city fully to become an English Jerusalem, a terrestrial new Jerusalem, out of the old one. Although this would not be the Heavenly City of Revelation, Thornton's actions gave York a legitimised future in the tradition of constructing a city of God, but this time on earth. The city could become a corrected terrestrial Jerusalem with the potential to be the New Jerusalem inherent within it. By continuing the anti-Jewish violence, by writing himself in this manner into two traditions— that of Christians against Jews, and that of York's particular conflict against the Jews—Thornton ensured that York could be the place where the flame of vengeance could be kept burning, where the struggle could eventually, one day, be won.

### CHAPTER THREE: A FINE BODY OF MEN: THE MATTER OF THORNTON'S SARACENS

Byfore my baptyme was I thane  
A sarazene & a cursede mane,  
And sen my baptyme hafe I bene  
A crystyne mane, als þou may sene.<sup>1</sup>

As Thornton obliterated non-believers and wrote his way to future salvation, he was able to call on the violent echoes of York's Jewish past, but the second people of the Oryent, the so-called "Saracens," had never made it to England's second city, let alone made their mark on it. Yet Thornton's circle could, and did, encounter them almost daily in the imaginative literary spaces found between the folios of manuscripts. We saw with the Oryental animals in Chapter One that a lack of material presence was not necessarily a barrier to knowledge, understanding, or conceptualisation, but we also saw that the reception of an animal could be negatively informed by its relationship or proximity to Oryental humans. So how did Yorkshire's reading community wrestle with the contemporary matter of the Saracen? What kind of concepts informed their ideas about Saracens, and how did these concepts manifest themselves in the Saracen characters that this community encountered? This third chapter examines those Saracens that Thornton considered worth saving—the Saracens of his own manuscripts. It explores their depiction in the texts, and—in contrast to the figure of the supposedly inconvertible Jew we met in the previous chapter—how these Saracens can shed light on late medieval thoughts and anxieties concerning conversion, as well as attitudes towards non-Christian others more generally.

#### **Surveying the Saracen Body**

In Thornton's unique copy of the *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, the oversized Saracen who will later take the name of Christopher asks a hermit how he may succeed in his quest to serve the greatest master in the world.<sup>2</sup> The hermit recommends that he refuse good food and drink, eschew warm bedding, and then further limit his food intake to

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<sup>1</sup> Carl. Horstmann, ed., "S. Cristofer," *Altenglische Legenden, Neue Folge* (Heilbronn: Verlag von gebr. Heininger, 1881), 658-61. All references to this text are by line number. Hereafter referred to as the *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, the title given to it by Thornton.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 454-66.



half what it could be.<sup>3</sup> The colossus mulls over this advice, but returns the opinion that “Alle this penance I may noghte do; / My body es so grete & lange / Pat mete I ne may no while forgane.”<sup>4</sup> The hermit then suggests that he say prayers constantly, which proposal is again rebutted; the otherwise willing disciple is apparently unable to do worship to Christ in this way. He states quite specifically that he “ne couthe / Pat lorde wirchipe with my mouthe! / For, & I couthe, I walde full fayne.”<sup>5</sup> Finally the hermit advocates that he use his massive strength in Christ’s service by acting as a ferryman across a wild and dangerous river nearby, which action he readily undertakes.

This exchange presents us with some interesting reflections on the process of becoming a Christian.<sup>6</sup> There is absolutely no anxiety over intention or perfidy exhibited by the hermit when this oversized human declares his desire to become a follower of Christ. On the contrary, the hermit seems only too eager to welcome the future Christopher into the faith. Furthermore, the hermit proffers several methods of entering into Christianity; each one, we must suppose, is ultimately as efficacious as the others. Nevertheless, by suggesting bodily deprivation initially—a course of action that will result in physical reduction—the hermit implies a certain level of hierarchy or importance in the steps to be followed. These processes need not all be followed simultaneously, as the hermit suggests a new method each time the previous one is rejected. Also of interest are the differences between the courses of action. Christopher declares that he wants to serve Christ “With alle my witt & all my myghte” but it appears from the hermit’s responses that Christopher need not devote both mind and body at the same time to Christ’s cause. Bodily deprivation is suggested to be as valid a method of serving God as hard physical labour, but spiritual contemplation coupled with cerebral devotion is also of equal merit to the former two methods. In other words, if Christopher’s physicality will not cooperate in furthering his conversion then it is not really an issue. Theoretically, he has the option of his mind doing the job for him. It is telling, though, that this option is not exercised. Christopher’s conversion is wrought through physical means.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 186-97.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 207-9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 240-3. It is possible that the future saint’s peculiar inability to pray orally is as a result of him not having a humanoid mouth (i.e. he has the head and muzzle of a dog), but as he is perfectly able to converse freely with the hermit, and is always described as saying or speaking, as opposed to howling or yelping, this explanation seems unlikely to be valid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 182-267. Lasting eighty-five lines in a work of just over a thousand, this discussion represents just under ten per cent of the text; a not inconsiderable amount.

Irrespective, though, of the faith, race, or physical state into which the future Christopher has been born, there is no bar to his total and complete conversion to Christianity that cannot be surmounted through sincere endeavour of some variety. This theme is repeated throughout the text. It is one's will to love God that counts, rather than one's birth or even one's previous manner of living. When asked of his past history, Christopher replies that he had been "A sarazen & a cursed mane," a fairly damning indictment of his previous conduct, yet this natal state does not prevent him serving Christ in an exemplary fashion.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Christopher's service is so exemplary that it extends to martyrdom and subsequent sainthood. Similarly, the sultan who orders Christopher's execution—which could very easily be construed as a serious transgression—manages to redeem himself and his immortal soul through twenty years of devotional living. Indeed, he is so successful in mending his ways that after his death he is "samene in heuens blysse" with the saint himself.<sup>8</sup> During the course of the narrative, several thousand Saracens also turn to Christianity without either impediment to their conversion in this world, or restriction of access to Christian salvation in the next. Even death itself seems to be negotiable. At the start of Christopher's ministry, a strong and powerful Saracen priest called Joas, who guards the Saracen mammals, attacks Christopher, impaling him with a mace and beating his face. Christopher calls out to Christ for the buffet to be "venged sare," and Joas is promptly struck down, before turning black and dying.<sup>9</sup> Christopher then calls out to Christ again, this time for mercy and for the man to be resurrected, so that "alle may knawe the in this stede, / Pat þou arte lorde of lyfe & dede!"<sup>10</sup> Joas is miraculously resurrected and immediately starts praising Mary and the Trinity, announcing that he has been in Hell but has been saved through God's grace. He then takes an iron maul to the mammals that he has hitherto guarded and proceeds to smash them. Christopher baptises him Sebastian, and he proceeds to accompany him on his evangelising mission. As the text makes very clear from Sebastian's example, Hell is only an option for those who insist on remaining Saracens and who refuse to convert.

Unfortunately a folio is missing from the manuscript, resulting in a large textual lacuna between lines five and six of Horstmann's edition. As such, we cannot draw too many definitive conclusions regarding Christopher's description (or lack of it).

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 659.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1012.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 521.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 530-1.

However, it certainly seems that Thornton's particular version of the Christopher narrative does not portray the saint as monstrous, or as a giant in a pejorative sense. Of course he is somewhat outsized—by definition Christopher has to be on the large side otherwise he cannot be considered as a viable ferryman. Similarly, the hermit's initial suggestion that he curb his appetite, and so reduce his body, as the first step towards conversion signals to his size being a notable feature.<sup>11</sup> However, in the surviving text he is never described as “a giant” or as horrifying in any way. Nor is he apparently dog-headed, a feature traditionally attributed to him.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the text presents him simply as a very large-scale man, without any bodily peculiarities or abnormalities apart from his height. Christopher apparently is just “big-boned.” Rather than being a hindrance, his size is celebrated; it can become the vehicle for his salvation. His only real problem seems to be that he is not a Christian, an issue that the reader soon discovers to be surmountable in a variety of different ways.

Although covering a scant seven (though originally eight) leaves of the more than three hundred folios that comprise the whole Lincoln manuscript, the Christopher text offers us a remarkably broad window onto the ways that Thornton's cultural world engaged with Saracens. From a strictly structural standpoint, the text seemingly occupies an unusual position in the codex. The eighth text from the beginning, it follows the text we know as *The Earl of Toulous*, and precedes *Degrevant*. It is, therefore, right in the centre of Thornton's romance collection. The previous three texts are, in fact, all labelled respectively as *The Romance of Octovyane*, *The Romance of Sir*

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<sup>11</sup> The *Legenda Aurea* and *South English Legendary* versions of the Christopher legend similarly stress the importance of reducing Christopher's body by suggesting fasting as the first step to his salvation. See Richard Hamer, ed., *Gilte Legende*, vol. 2, EETS OS 328 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 500, and Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*, vol. 1, EETS OS 235 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 342. All references to these texts are by page number.

<sup>12</sup> Even so, having the head of a dog did not necessarily mean that readers conceived of Christopher as literally being a Cynocephalus before his conversion. Possessing canine or lupine attributes was also understood allegorically during the Middle Ages as signifying that one was not entirely in accordance with God, and that one had given one's heart over to anger. In Book Three of the *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, anchoresses are warned that anger transforms a man “into the nature of a beast,” and that “an angry woman is a she-wolf” who should shed the rough pelt around her heart. Elaine Treharne, ed. and trans., *Old and Middle English Literature c. 809-1450, An Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 2009), 319. In the Middle English Romance *Sir Gowther*, the eponymous protagonist must serve out his silent penance (for gratuitous rape, pillage, and nun-burning) by living effectively as a hound, fed only from the mouths of dogs and residing under a table. Depicting Christopher in this semi-canine manner seems to have been a predominantly Eastern Orthodox tradition. As Zofia Ameisenowa notes, there are only two representations of the saint as dog-headed that have survived in the west. Zofia Ameisenowa, “Animal-Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints, and Righteous Men,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949): 42. One of these is in a twelfth-century text of the *Martyrology of Usuard*, now Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek cod.hist 2° 415. The second forms part of a sixteenth-century window in bay 105 of Angers Cathedral. For a fuller survey of the St Christopher dog-head tradition see Ameisenowa, “Animal-Headed Gods,” 42-45.

*Ysambrace*, and *The Romance of Dyoclicyane* (more widely known as *The Earl of Toulous*).<sup>13</sup> The Christopher text is therefore physically separated from the more meditative and devotional works, and seems to belong with the more entertaining romances. However, the incipit to the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* warns us against making such dichotomous assumptions: “þe heryng or þe [red]yng of þe whilke storye langes [...]te mede.”<sup>14</sup> What is more striking is the incipit’s final injunction, that the consumption of the Christopher text “be donne with deuocioune.” Clearly then the Christopher text fulfils a more devotional function than its position in the manuscript would initially suggest, though we should bear in mind that the romances themselves do not form a homogenous group and cannot be categorised in such stark terms as secular rather than devotional.<sup>15</sup> As we saw with the *Northern Passion* and *Siege of Jerusalem*, reading (and by extension copying) lively and entertaining texts functions as a pleasurable means of spiritual progression and Christopher’s *vita* can be seen to work in a similar way.

In this manner, the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* echoes the Saracen converts found within it and, in fact, the Saracens of the overall Thornton corpus. Difficult to categorise, containing varying elements that could be interpreted in a number of ways, and found in somewhat peculiar locations, Thornton’s Saracens form a more nebulous and fluid body, with a more ambiguous identity, than either the Jews we saw in the previous chapter or the happily consumed Oriental products with which this thesis commenced. However, certain strands or particular features can be identified with some certainty, and here again reading the Christopher text proves exceptionally useful. The *Vita Sancti Cristofori* supplies us with a microcosm of the Thornton Saracens. The narrative deals with a large amount of violence; conversion is perhaps the text’s strongest preoccupation; and from the outset there is a sense of excessive physicality that requires negotiating. These latter concerns—physicality and conversion—lie at the heart of Thornton’s Saracen texts. They provide the linchpins or keystones around

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<sup>13</sup> Whilst the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* is within the romances, that manuscript booklet (Booklet 2) also holds some short religious material after the romance section. See Appendix One.

<sup>14</sup> Although part of the text is damaged, sufficient remains to provide a translation along the lines of “the hearing or the reading of the which story makes it suitable (or appropriate) for spiritual reward.”

<sup>15</sup> For example *Sir Isumbras*, generally considered to be a “homiletic romance” or a narrative halfway between a secular romance and a hagiography, focuses on very different themes to the more worldly *Degrevant*, which is more concerned with land management and protection of property than with pride, the testing of faith, and conversion. See also Harriet Hudson, “*Sir Isumbras*: Introduction,” in *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), ed. Harriet Hudson, 3-7.

which the Thornton Saracens as a group are constructed, acting as a means of uniting and negotiating the seemingly disparate figures within the pages. It is through these two concerns and their relationship, therefore, that we shall interrogate what a Saracen signified to Robert Thornton and his cultural milieu.

Before we plunge too deeply into Thornton's manuscripts and explore the representations found within them, though, it is worth pausing briefly to discuss in more general terms what "being a Saracen" actually meant in the fifteenth century, and how it compares to the way in which the word is used today.<sup>16</sup> A Saracen is not simply a medieval Muslim. During the medieval period the word Saracen had several valences, and was surprisingly loose in definition. The *Middle English Dictionary* claims that it only specifically denoted Muslims, rather than pagans, heathens, or any other type of non-Christian infidel, after around 1300, although this dating is not uncontroversial.<sup>17</sup> By Thornton's time, however, the word had principally come to signify an Arab, Turk, or Muslim, as well as the conception of these people held by those residing in the Christian west. For Thornton and his circle, a Saracen was from the lands of the Oryent.

Current academic discourse differentiates between "Saracen" and "Muslim" in a highly self-conscious manner. The latter, especially in literary as opposed to historical scholarship, is used to delineate an individual who adheres to the tenets of Islam, following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and taking the Quran as the textual manifestation of the word of God. The former refers to the literary construct or stereotype that features in medieval writings.<sup>18</sup> Features or typical motifs of the concept of Saracens include worship of physical idols, and polytheism, particularly a devotion to "Mahomet," or "Mahoun," although Jupiter, Termagaunt, and Apollo are also

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<sup>16</sup> For longer and more detailed studies of Saracen stereotypes see Akbari, *Idols in the East*, particularly 155-9; Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*: 1-2; Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 209-10; and Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the "chansons de geste"* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1984), 3-4, 72-3.

<sup>17</sup> *MED* s.v. Sarasin. Diane Speed tracks the development of the word "Saracen" from its first appearance as a Latin and Greek loan word used in Old English in the ninth century. As it takes its derivation from the Latin and Greek word for Arab or Muslim, and is consistently applied throughout the Middle Ages to these peoples, Speed refutes the *MED*'s insistence that "Saracen" was widely used in a more generic fashion, applicable to any infidel, regardless of their geographical origin. See Diane Speed, "The Saracens of *King Horn*," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 566, and *OED*, s.v. Saracen. William Wistar Comfort also provides a detailed historical account of the etymology and derivation of "Saracen." William Wistar Comfort, "The Literary Role of the Saracens in the French Epic," *PMLA* 55 (1940): 629-31.

<sup>18</sup> This distinction is explained in further detail by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 136, n. 3 and by Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 1-2. Calkin also differentiates between Mahoun and Muhammad; the former being the object of Saracen worship, the latter the historical prophet.

frequently invoked as Saracen deities.<sup>19</sup> Mahomet is a derivation of the Middle English *maumet*, meaning idol or mammet, complicated by and conflated with the erroneous assumption that Muhammad was worshipped as a god.<sup>20</sup> Given the emphasis placed on physical idols, the singularity of Mahomet is unclear. He is sometimes referred to as a nebulous, quasi-omniscient force, presumably functioning as somewhat akin to the Christian God; at other points he is peculiar to a specific geographical location and specific mammet. Both variants are found within Thornton's material.<sup>21</sup>

During Thornton's lifetime the term "Saracen" would have been used indiscriminately to cover both the real people and the imagined ones; it was not until the seventeenth century that the appellation "Muslim" (or more typically for that period "Moslem" or "Mussulman") came into use.<sup>22</sup> Whether Thornton himself actively differentiated between the two concepts seems unlikely; certainly there is nothing explicit just in the terminology that would distinguish the two as separate entities.<sup>23</sup> Equally confusing is the lack of contemporary vocabulary available for the creed of Mahomet detailed above. The term "Islam," aside from being anachronistic, is obviously reserved for the "real" world religion it refers to today. The noun *Sarasine* was used rarely (the *Middle English Dictionary* contains only a single attestation of its

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<sup>19</sup> In Henry Lovelich's *History of the Holy Grail*, for example, a Saracen knight informs Joseph that "We han foure Goddis bothe goode & fyne / Mahownd and Termagaunt, goddis so fin; / Anothir hihte Iubiter and Appolyn." F. J. Furnivall, ed., *The History of the Holy Grail by Henry Lovelich*, vol. 2, EETS ES 24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1875), 49: 52. References to this edition are by chapter then line number within that chapter.

<sup>20</sup> *MED*, s.v. "Mahoun."

<sup>21</sup> In the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* the future convert Sebastian (formerly Joas), who is one of the Saracen priests, is described as the "kepare ... of paire Mahowne," implying that the mammet has a specific place. Horstmann, *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, 513. In *The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*, however, when the Saracen knight Clariell is slain, "His saule went vn-to Mahoun," implying that Mahoun has some currency as a force, rather than being a simply a tangible idol or mammet. S.J. Herrtage, ed., *The English Charlemagne Romances II: The Sege of Melayne and The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*, EETS ES 35 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1880), 1340, hereafter referenced as *Rowland and Otuell* or *Sege of Melayne* respectively. All references to these texts are by line number.

<sup>22</sup> *OED*, s.v. "Muslim."

<sup>23</sup> Whilst Thornton himself may not have distinguished between the character of the Saracen and real-life Muslims, there were certainly many medieval Christians who did. William of Tyre, for example, was fully aware that Muslims were not polytheistic. See Benjamin Z. Kedar, "De Iudeis et Sarracenis: On the Categorization of Muslims in Medieval Canon Law," in *Studia in honorem eminentissimi Cardinalis Alphonsi M. Stickler*, ed. Rosalius Josephus Castillo Lara (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1992), 207-8. Roger Bacon, again not perhaps representative of the population at large, was very familiar with Muslim philosophy that bore little resemblance to Saracen-Islam, as he shows in his *Opus Maius*. For more on Roger Bacon's thoughts concerning Islam see Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 261-78. Both these men belonged to educated and rarefied circles, but those circles were wide-ranging and international. Though neither can be taken as typical, it is worth indicating that not all of medieval Christian society blindly or wilfully conflated Saracens and Saracen-Islam with the Islamic faith and its adherents.

usage) and refers to generic pagandom.<sup>24</sup> *Saracynesse* was again infrequently employed, but described the strictly geographical, as opposed to theological, territories inhabited by the Saracens.<sup>25</sup> Again, it seems to have been imperfectly and inexactly used, given that the Middle French *sarazineis* (with the same meaning and orthography as the Middle English term) is mistranslated at least once as *saradyns*, the precious stone sardonyx.<sup>26</sup> In her comprehensive study of European perceptions of Islam, Akbari refers to the Saracens as “followers of the so-called ‘law of Muhammad’,”<sup>27</sup> an appellation taken from Roger Bacon’s works, but Bacon was far more discriminating and precise in his knowledge of Islam than is called for by the majority of Middle English texts in which Saracens appear. Most other scholars simply avoid giving a name to this constructed creed of Mahomet. Given the lack of either medieval or scholarly consensus to provide a convenient precedent, I shall be referring to the Saracen system of belief as “Saracen-Islam,” thus differentiating it from the “real” faith of Islam, but not restricting it to one particular genre of text as may be the case with a term like “romance-Islam.” Similarly I shall be applying the term “Classical paganism” to the Greco-Roman belief system, in order to distinguish it from other forms of paganism such as the Norse or Germanic pre-Christian creeds.

Continuing the question of distinguishing, but returning now to Thornton’s reading material and the Saracens within it, we find only one place in a diegetic post-Christian world (thus excluding the Prose *Alexander*) where Jews and Saracens are mentioned by name in the same context: *A Revelation Concerning Purgatory*.<sup>28</sup> When the dreamer questions Margaret, a former nun whom she encounters in Purgatory, as to why she only sees Christians, Margaret replies that “Iewes and Sarazenes dyes & oþer heythene pople and þay sall neuer come þere bot sall streghte to þe paynes of helle, for þay sall neuer be sauede.”<sup>29</sup> Margaret’s statement confirms the experiences of Joas in

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<sup>24</sup> *MED*, s.v. “Sarazine.”

<sup>25</sup> *MED*, s.v. “Saracynesse.”

<sup>26</sup> In the Later Couplet version of *Guy of Warwick*, the Old French *un auncien mur sarazineis* [of an ancient wall of Saracen work, or in the Saracen style] is mistranslated in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff 3.38 as “wallys wyth saradyns” [walls of sardonyx]. J. Zupitza, ed., *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: The Second or Fifteenth-Century Version*, EETS ES 25, 26 (London: Trübner, 1875-76), 11406. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>27</sup> Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> This text is that which provides the *terminus post quem* for Thornton’s completion of the Lincoln Thornton manuscript, as the purgatorial vision is recorded as having occurred on St Lawrence’s Day (August 10), 1422. In *Tract on the Lord’s Prayer*, Jews are mentioned alongside pagans, [“paynymmes i. paganorum, and Iewes and ... þe mystrowande,”] again as all being excluded from a Christian sphere. Horstmann, *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, 262.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

the *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, but although she identifies the Jews, Saracens, and other non-Christians as those who cannot enter Purgatory (a space solely accessible to Christians), her grouping of them together does not constitute an acceptance that they were all equal. Jews and Saracens do seem to have occasionally been grouped together in the contemporary popular imagination, though by no means as frequently as they are by modern scholars. In 1376, for example, the Commons stigmatized the Lombard population in London as being usurers, sodomites, and of harbouring “Jews, Saracens and secret spies” who masqueraded as Lombards in their midst.<sup>30</sup> This grouping clearly implies that Jews and Saracens were commensurate not only with all forms of iniquity, but also with each other. As we saw in the previous chapter, the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* has Jews that worship Mahoun.<sup>31</sup> In *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, as Geraldine Heng notes, Saladin’s Saracen army is accused of well-poisoning, a venture more traditionally conceived of as a Jewish transgression.<sup>32</sup> Heng provides an interesting overview of this conflation, claiming that:

Medieval habits and means of thinking by means of analogy, coupled with an historical tendency in the Latin West to perceive conspiracies among infidel nations when Christian territory was invaded, contributed to a mindset, in England as in Europe, that Jews and Muslims in their difference from Christian folk were proximately alike: two alien communities against the West.<sup>33</sup>

Heng’s somewhat sweeping generalisation, though, simply does not apply to the texts in Thornton’s manuscripts. As we saw above, the views concerning conversion and salvation expressed in the Christopher text differ greatly from those we saw in the previous chapter pertaining to Jewish conversion or, crucially, its impossibility. While Jewish conversion was greeted by the literary world with distrust and suspicion, in Christopher’s *vita* we have Saracen conversion apparently not even causing the odd raised eyebrow. Saracen conversion is welcomed; it is perfectly feasible and achievable by an array of methods; and it seems to be a sufficiently everyday occurrence for the hermit to accept Christopher’s request as a matter of course. As facile as it sounds, then,

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<sup>30</sup> W. Mark Ormrod, ed., *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England 1275-1504 Volume V, Edward III ii 1351-1377* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 318.

<sup>31</sup> See also this thesis, 108-9. As I noted earlier, however, the Jews from the *Croxton Play* were not understood to be exact or mimetic representations.

<sup>32</sup> Geraldine Heng, “Jews, Saracens, ‘Black Men,’ and Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference,” in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature, c. 1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 255.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 255-6.



from this presentation we can conclude that Thornton and his like did not group Jews and Saracens into one homogenous or monolithic mass of non-believers. And, possibly more importantly, they did not consider Jews and Saracens as interchangeable. There has been a recent scholarly vogue for reading these religious others in medieval texts as standing in for one another, or as for different national others.<sup>34</sup> In such a reading the Jew or Saracen is reduced to a blank or generic non-Western, non-Christian screen onto which English Christian anxieties are projected. However, as productive and interesting as these readings can be, in Thornton's milieu they have no place. Instead, for Robert Thornton, a Saracen was most definitely a Saracen.

That Thornton had some credible conception of the differences between Judaism, Islam, and other religions, and thus the different valences and treatment each creed should incur, is perfectly clear from the manuscript evidence. In *Siege of Jerusalem*, for example, Caiaphas reads to his clerks from the Old Testament, and recounts the exploits of King David, Judas Maccabeus, and Joshua.<sup>35</sup> The text specifically notes that the adventures of these Jewish heroes are being read from psalters and psalms, demonstrating awareness that the Jews directly shared a large part of Christian textual history. Though Caiaphas is clearly vilified and demonised for his part in Christ's death, the performance of his Jewishness is what we might term realistic. In contrast, the Saracens in *Otuell*, to give just one example, call on Mahomet and Apollo, and there are physical idols involved in the performance of their religious rituals.<sup>36</sup> More mimetically, the pretence and replacement of pork to sate Richard's cravings with a Saracen youth in *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, gestures towards an understanding that Muslims avoided pork. Additionally, the Classical pagan status of Titus and Vespasian in *Siege of Jerusalem* before their conversion gestures towards an awareness of Islam's geographical and historical limits. The presence of the Brahmins in the *Prose Alexander* demonstrates Thornton's cognisance of a fourth separate creed

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, especially 13-60, and 207-11; Robert A. Rouse, "For King and Country?" in *A Companion to Bevis of Hampton*, ed. Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjević (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008); Narin van Court, "Socially Marginal, Culturally Central," 293-326; and Geraldine Heng, "Jews, Saracens, 'Black Men,' and Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference," in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature, c. 1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), especially 255.

<sup>35</sup> Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 477-84. Caiaphas follows up these tales of valiant warriors with an account of Pharaoh's army drowning in the Red Sea, presumably to remind the Jews that God has a well-documented history of looking after his chosen people. The Christian reader of this section, though, is possibly encouraged to find this scene amusing as by the diegetic time (70AD) the Christians have replaced the Jews as God's chosen ones.

<sup>36</sup> Herrtage, *Rowland and Otuell*, 1204.

or faith system outside of Christianity, all described in different terminology, as following different practices, and present in differing geographical (and occasionally different temporal) spaces. These peoples may all have been non-Christian, but in Thornton's lexicon they were emphatically not all the same.

Thornton was not alone in making such a distinction. On a broader stage, canon law also distinguished between the two faiths. Saracens may have been incorrectly classified as *pagani* or heretics, rather than as monotheistic infidels, but they were certainly not conflated with Jews.<sup>37</sup> It seems unlikely that they were actively melded together in other spheres too. In the Commons' plea it is far more telling that religious others are grouped with usurers and sodomites than that they are grouped with each other. Jews and Muslims may have been perceived in certain spheres as, to use Heng's abovequoted phrase, acting "against the West," but they were not typically perceived as acting together or as a combined unit.

A similar standpoint is borne out by the legal position of Muslims in England at the time. The Jews, as we saw, were officially absent from England by Thornton's day, banished from the land by order of the king under the 1290 Edict of Expulsion. Of course, England's shores were not watertight against a Jewish presence and individual Jews did re-enter the realm, at least one of whom had close links to Stonegrave, but the established community and occupancy was never reinstated.<sup>38</sup> Foreign-born converts from Judaism took up residence in London's *Domus Conversorum* throughout the fourteenth century, and even into the fifteenth, but they were bound by the restrictions placed on them by the rules of that institution.<sup>39</sup> Muslims, on the other hand, were technically free to come and go (or stay) as they pleased throughout the Middle Ages, although if they had not been baptised they did not have the same freedoms or status as a Christian subject. Some clearly did so; the 2010 identification of a skeleton from Ipswich Friary as that of a Tunisian Muslim who came to England after the ninth Crusade gave testimony to a Muslim presence in England centuries before the Thornton

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<sup>37</sup> Kedar, "De Iudeis et Sarracenis," 209-10, 211.

<sup>38</sup> CPR 1317-21, *Edward II* vol. 3, 254. A Levantine Jew named Isaac, or Isaak, stood surety for Roger de Stanegrave's ransom payment in 1318 and travelled to Yorkshire with him once his safe conduct was granted. It took de Stanegrave two years to raise the requisite funds, during which time Isaac had royal leave to remain in the realm. See also Timothy Guard, "Stanegrave, Sir Roger, (fl. 1280s-1331)" in *ODNB*, and Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 132-3.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly, "Jews and Saracens," 133-4. Kelly notes that Jewish converts could still live outside the *Domus* and receive the maintenance grant, as potentially could converts from Islam, but that only Jewish converts could live inside it.

family were lords of East Newton.<sup>40</sup> Whilst Jewish conversions were greeted with mistrust and suspicions of perfidy, Muslim conversion met with a far more tolerant reception. When a member of Peter I of Cyprus's entourage calling himself the "lord of Jerusalem" converted at the English court in 1363-4, Edward III not only stood godfather to the newly baptised man but also, perhaps not entirely acting out of sheer Christian altruism, bestowed his own name—Edward—on him.<sup>41</sup> It is hard to imagine any greater disparity of treatment than that between Edward and Benedict of York who, 174 years earlier, had been hauled before Richard I at his coronation, forced to convert and savagely beaten. Other members of Edward's family were apparently equally keen to have a presence in conversions. Richard II acted as godfather to Richard of Sicily and William Piers, who were almost certainly Muslims.<sup>42</sup> Henry IV, the most prolific royal sponsor, went to significant lengths to include converts at his court, eventually having former Jewish, Muslim, and Lithuanian pagan godchildren.<sup>43</sup> Although some of these converts were brought into England from abroad, there was also a small and transient population of non-Christians coming into England throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries under their own aegis.<sup>44</sup>

However, I am not suggesting that Thornton and his sphere harboured ideas of universal brotherhood and harmonious interfaith communication. On the contrary, the basic dichotomy baldly stated by Roland in *La Chanson de Roland* three centuries before still underpins Thornton's religious framework; the pagans are indeed wrong for Thornton, and the Christians are still very definitely in the right.<sup>45</sup> In a study of the Thornton codices such as this one, which privileges the large number of texts that focus on non-Christian peoples from outside Christian Europe, it is remarkably easy to forget that an even greater part of the two manuscripts is given over to pious and devotional Christian texts. Six differing creeds (Christianity, Judaism, Classical paganism,

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<sup>40</sup> Gillian Passmore, "Medieval Black Briton Found," *The Sunday Times*, May 2, 2010; Neil Ferguson on behalf of BBC 2, dir. and prod., "Episode 1: Ipswich Man," *Cold Case Series 1*, broadcast May 6, 2010. This research has yet to be published outside of press reports.

<sup>41</sup> Ormrod, "John Mandeville, Edward III, and the King of Inde," 335-6.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly, "Jews and Saracens," 147-9. Edward's I's daughter Eleanor, and Edward II's wife Isabella chose to sponsor Jewish converts within the *Domus Conversorum*, thus going against the cultural stereotypes of perfidy. *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-4, 157.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 152, 157. See also TNA E179/144/54, m.10; TNA E179/235/23, m.2; TNA E179/242/9, rot. 4; TNA E179/95/126 Part 1, m.3; and TNA E179/242/25, m.10 (*EIDB*).

<sup>45</sup> *Paiens unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit*. Glyn Burgess, trans., *The Song of Roland* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), line 1015. I am not claiming by any stretch of the imagination that Thornton was aware of *La Chanson de Roland*'s existence, although he was certainly familiar with parts of the Matter of France corpus, most obviously *Sege of Melayne*.

Saracen-Islam, Brahmanism, and what, for want of a better name, may be termed literary Zoroastrianism<sup>46</sup>) may have been granted space in the manuscripts, but Christianity takes absolute precedence.

Similarly, the attitudes displayed towards the death of a religious other confirm Christianity's supremacy. Aside from the gleeful delight discussed in the previous chapter that greeted the violent deaths met by the Jews in *Siege of Jerusalem*, the casual slaughter of Saracens mentioned in several romances, almost as an irrelevancy, attests that non-Christians remained a problem to be rectified, potentially in a violent manner.<sup>47</sup> In both *Sir Degrevant* and *Sir Eglamore of Artois* the eponymous hero goes off to fight against the Saracens for no apparent reason other than seemingly to take the protagonist away from the central narrative for a period of time so that the plot can develop. Little to no information is provided about their time away; all the reader knows is that Eglamore dwells in the Holy Land "The hethyn men amange," for fifteen years, and does great deeds of arms "Agaynes þam þat did wrange."<sup>48</sup> There is an equal paucity of information concerning Degrevant's exploits. He is noted as being in the Holy Land almost as an afterthought; his estates have been invaded and ravaged by the neighbouring earl, whose violations are detailed for twenty lines before the narrative notes by means of explanation that Degrevant conveniently happened to be absent at the time seeking deeds of arms and felling "Hethyn folke."<sup>49</sup> Unlike *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, for example, where the destruction of the Saracens is a primary and expressed aim of the narrative, *Eglamore* and *Degrevant* are not texts that are concerned with Saracens. *Degrevant* especially deals predominantly with domestic preoccupations.<sup>50</sup> As such, the very slightness and casual nature of the references to their violent deaths confirms the Thornton Saracens' position as having the potential to be a romance trope.

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<sup>46</sup> In *Three Kings of Cologne* the kings follow an astrological and astronomically founded creed that is not commensurate either with Brahmanism, as depicted in the Prose *Alexander*, or with the Classical paganism of *Siege of Jerusalem*. Their faith is only articulated through their actions; it is never named, and they do not call upon their deities by name. The kings themselves are also not described as Saracens.

<sup>47</sup> The Prose *Alexander*, which contains both Brahmins and Jews, is set before the birth of Christ and therefore negates the need for conversion to Christianity. Even so, the Jews are not depicted in a particularly flattering manner.

<sup>48</sup> F.E. Richardson, ed., *Sir Eglamore of Artois*, EETS OS 256 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1017, 1020. All references to this text are by line number. The Cotton text of *Sir Eglamore* (British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii) is more explicit on this point, noting that Eglamore does great deeds of arms "Agayn þem þat lyued wrong," a more typical description of non-Christians. Technically the Thornton Eglamore could be acting against ill-living Christians.

<sup>49</sup> Casson, *Sir Degrevant*, 117-20.

<sup>50</sup> See Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, especially 5-6, 66-7, and 70-74; and Sheryl L. Forste-Gruppe, "For-thi a lettre has he dyght": Paradigms for Fifteenth-Century Literacy in *Sir Degrevant*," *Studies in Philology* 101 (2004): 113-135.

Slaying Saracens can be a valid literary means of expressing that the character in question is a brave and good Christian knight. Elsewhere in the manuscripts, such as in *Richard, Coeur de Lion* and to an extent in *Sege of Melayne*, where the Saracens have taken possession of erstwhile Christian territories, the narratives specifically set up the two armies—Christian and Saracen—in opposition to each other. In all cases the Saracens are emphatically in the wrong. Nevertheless, whilst Roland’s aforementioned declaration certainly provides us with a useful framework for comparison, the apparent binary of Christian and non-Christian is by no means as dichotomous, nor as inexorable, in Thornton’s reading material as it is in Roland’s call to arms. For Thornton, although Saracens can be, and in some cases are, slaughtered without consequence, it does not necessarily follow that such an outcome is either inevitable or even necessarily desirable.

Thornton encountered Jews, Saracens, and members of other creeds in a variety of ways. Whilst it must be stressed that it is extremely unlikely that Thornton ever physically came face to face with anyone who was not a white Christian, he experienced this absence of Jews, Saracens and other non-Christians in different ways and in different spheres. Whereas the Jews were encountered throughout Thornton’s physical and geographical sphere as a haunting presence, the Saracens were literally “people of the book.” And through his editorial enterprises Thornton perpetuated their literary existence and made sure that they remained so. We saw in the previous chapter, with regard to *Siege of Jerusalem*, that he was a reader and compiler who was heavily invested in the texts he copied and who engaged with them on a deep and regular basis.<sup>51</sup> In his position as compiler, then, he wielded a great deal more power and influence over the concept of the Saracen than he did over the memory of the Jews. In spite of his best efforts, the Jews remained a persistent lingering memory across Thornton’s world, perpetually haunting York’s streets. It is possible, therefore, that the element of control he had over the Saracens gave Thornton the freedom to indulge his whimsy and imaginary powers; the manuscripts provided a domesticated space in which he could encounter and explore a multi-faceted infidel in a manner not possible with the unyielding and uncontainable Jews of York’s past.

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<sup>51</sup> See this thesis, 129; 146-51. It is not just *Siege of Jerusalem* that points to Thornton’s investment. A small but pertinent example of his engagement with his work lies in *A Revelation Concerning Purgatory*: Margaret is informed that “Euer-ilke mane and womane þat were lettirde þat were in any temptacioune” can say the *Miserere* and *Veni creator spiritus* and in doing so “voyde [the devil and temptation] fra him.” Horstmann, *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, 391. Thornton places both these two prayers, the *Miserere mei deus* and *Veni creator spiritus*, directly after the Purgatorial text.

The Saracens of the Thornton manuscripts are a diverse and wide-ranging group. They vary from the faceless, formless martial nebulae combatted by Degrevant and Eglamore, subordinate to the construction of these latter as worthy Christian knights, to the exemplary and unique Christopher: bearer of Christ, evangelist, and ultimately saint. They encompass the crypto-Christian and eventual convert Otuell in *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*, who obtains martial honour and the lordship of Lombardy, as well as the libidinous and promiscuous Garcy in *Sege of Melayne*, who remains sunk in his debauchery and sin. Equally disparate are the wicked sultan found in *Sir Isumbras*, whose lust and rapaciousness are condemned by the narrative, and the abused Saracen nobles invited to dinner in *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, who garner the reader's sympathy in the face of Richard's anthropophagic voracity. Different again are the giants featuring in *Octavian, Eglamore*, and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*.<sup>52</sup> Even more interestingly, the Saracens are not restricted by genre or form. Although most of the Saracen Thornton texts can be (very) broadly classified as romances, they do not all fall neatly together as one group. Instead the texts come in a range of poetic forms and have highly divergent foci. The *Vita Sancti Cristofori* is, as we saw earlier, predominantly a devotional and hagiographical text; *Richard, Coeur de Lion* is an historical romance; *Sir Eglamore* and *Sir Degrevant* are what Michael Johnston terms "gentry romances,"<sup>53</sup> deeply concerned with domestic preoccupations such as social advancement and husbandry. *Sege of Melayne* and *Otuell* are Matter of France romances dealing with parody and set in mainland Europe; and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* is an alliterative Arthurian romance epic.

In presenting a multi-faceted and nuanced range of Saracens, Thornton is unusual but not necessarily unique. Akbari writes of a broad spectrum of Saracens, rather than a simplistic dichotomy of good and bad, ranging from "those who are white, well proportioned, and assimilable [to] those who are dark-skinned, deformed or of grotesque stature, and doomed to destruction," with all gradated varieties in between.<sup>54</sup> However, Akbari is referring to the whole corpus of extant European medieval literature, rather than the personal manuscript collection of a member of the North Riding gentry. Both in terms of range of Saracens, and also in terms of quantity and type of Saracen, the Thornton manuscripts appear to offer an unusual collection.

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<sup>52</sup> Giants are typically perceived of as followers of Saracen-Islam across the whole Middle English romance corpus.

<sup>53</sup> Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 5-6.

<sup>54</sup> Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 156.

Obviously our points of comparison are limited to the manuscripts extant today—it is perfectly feasible that Thornton’s collection was utterly typical for its time or that he possessed other works elsewhere—but from a survey of surviving manuscripts containing romances Thornton’s two codices do seem to be verging towards the remarkable. The three closest comparative collections are Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Gg 4.27, dating from the early fifteenth century; British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii., contemporary with the Thornton codices; and the fourteenth-century Auchinleck manuscript, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Advocates MS 19.2.1, whose Saracens have already attracted significant scholarly attention.<sup>55</sup> CUL MS Gg. 4.27 has six texts featuring Saracens, while Cotton Caligula A.ii has four. The Thornton manuscripts between them have eleven.<sup>56</sup> Another marked characteristic of the Thornton compilations is the lack of female Saracen figures. Only one Saracen woman, Marsabelle in *Octavian*, appears in the folios, whereas CUL MS Ff. 2.38 contains at least two female Saracens, both of whom, like Marsabelle, convert to Christianity.<sup>57</sup> The trope of the female Saracen convert has been subject to a great deal of scholarly focus, particularly because the hypothetical union of the Christian and Saracen inevitably produces offspring, providing an ideal site in which to work through questions of hybridity and assimilation.<sup>58</sup> The Middle English romance *The King of Tars* has been the locus of much of this work, as the progeny resulting from the union of a Christian princess and Saracen sultan in this narrative is born without form; it is instead a lump of flesh that cannot take on human shape until the sultan converts to Christianity.<sup>59</sup> *Bevis of Hampton* has garnered similar attention; as we saw in in the first

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<sup>55</sup> The most comprehensive of these studies is obviously Calkin’s *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, but see also Robert A. Rouse, “Expectation vs. Experience: Encountering the Saracen Other in Middle English Romance,” *Selim: Journal of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature* 10 (2002): 125-140, and Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 108-142.

<sup>56</sup> The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Octavian*, *Isumbras*, *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, *Degrevant*, *Eglamore*, *Percyvell*, *Cursor Mundi*, *Sege of Melayne*, *Rowland and Otuell*, and *Richard, Coeur de Lion*. Saracens are also mentioned, but do not feature, in *A Revelation Concerning Purgatory*.

<sup>57</sup> The characters in question are Josian in *Bevis of Hampton* and Marsabelle in *Octavian*. The Auchinleck manuscript contains Josian, who is a much larger character than Marsabelle.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (London: Psychology Press, 1998); Calkin, *Saracens and the Makings of English Identity*, 61-95; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 173-89; Jennifer R. Goodman, “A Saracen Princess in Three Translations,” in *The Medieval Translator: Proceedings of the International Congress of Conques (26-29 July 1993)*, ed. Roger Ellis and Rene Tixier (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 432-47.

<sup>59</sup> See especially Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 189-99; Siobhain Bly Calkin, “Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization, and *The King of Tars*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104 (2005): 219-238; Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 97-166; and Jane Gilbert, “Putting the Pulp into Pulp Fiction: the Lump Child and its Parents in *The King of Tars*,” in *Pulp Fictions of*

chapter, the son of Bevis and the erstwhile Saracen princess Josian ends up inheriting the throne of England, again expressing anxieties over foreign presence and destabilisation in the realm.<sup>60</sup> In Thornton's manuscripts, however, the focus is very firmly laid on the figure of the male Saracen, leading to an unusual stress being placed on the martial and military. This slant is evident across the Saracen spectrum, extending right to the obscure and anonymous Saracens of *Degrevant* and *Eglamore*, with the majority of the Saracens in the eleven texts partaking in this martial tendency.

In summary, then, Thornton's manuscripts present us with a wide panoply of Saracens that still manages to be curiously biased in spite of its breadth. The majority of the Saracens are male, martial, and in direct opposition to Christian forces—whether as part of an armed force, as in *Isumbras*, or in single combat, as in *Rowland and Otuell*. Nevertheless, this bias is not uniform, nor is it the only trend in the collection. There are also many Saracens who become converts to Christianity, all for very different reasons. It requires an act of supposedly divine intervention for Otuell to abandon the faith of his birth; for Marsabelle it just takes a pretty face. There is an underlying current of conversion as a theme to the texts, but conversion does not provide the driving narrative impulse, or have a similar intensity to, for example, the theme of Jewish destruction we saw exhibited in *Siege of Jerusalem*. The Saracens do not perform the role of universal antagonist across the manuscripts; on the contrary, in *Richard, Coeur de Lion* they are portrayed with a sympathy and tolerance that the Lionhearted king, quite clearly, does not receive. Thornton, then, did not conceive of the Saracens as a monolithic, anti-Christian entity, but instead as a multifarious and nuanced people of various shapes, sizes, characters, colours, and attitudes. In spite of the varied nature of his Saracens, though, and the diverse receptions they meet within the texts, they are united by two common features: their Saracen faith, and their bodies. My contention is that these two features are, in fact, symbiotic.

### **The Body Saracen**

For a man who probably never saw a Muslim, Thornton's texts show him to be surprisingly concerned with the Saracen body. And if we examine the particular

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*Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 102-123.

<sup>60</sup> See this thesis, 90-1.



Saracen bodies in question we find that they are disproportionately physical and fleshly entities. The Saracens may be people of the book, but Thornton's are visceral figures. The locus of what constitutes a Saracen for Thornton is most definitely found in the body, and it is in a specific kind of body. If we focus closely on the textual evidence for this premise, then we find the same preoccupation with outsized, ill-formed, or uncontrolled physicality right across the Saracens of the two manuscripts. The linkage between great physical size and certain Saracens is neither new nor unstudied—Jeffrey Cohen devotes an entire monograph to giants who are Saracens in *Of Giants*<sup>61</sup>—but what is interesting about the Thornton Saracens is that it is not just those designated as giants who share this particular quality of fleshliness, which is not the same thing as simply being big.

As we discussed earlier, the Saracen body could vary tremendously, from grotesque giants to an almost idealised proto-Christian body, and could often do so within the same text. In *Octavian* for example, the beautiful Saracen princess Marsabelle appears alongside the hideous and fearsome Arageous. Marsabelle is declared to be “bothe feyre and fre /The feyrest þynge alyue ... / ... / And semelyest of syght.”<sup>62</sup> At the other end of the Saracen spectrum we find that Arageous is “so foule a thyng.”<sup>63</sup> He stands twenty-two feet high, so massive that no horse can carry him, and he towers above the bridges and city walls of Paris instilling panic and fear in the hearts of the inhabitants.<sup>64</sup> Otuell, the phenomenally powerful knight who fights with Roland in *Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne* and who will eventually convert to Christianity, may not quite be of the stature of Arageous but he is still large enough to draw comment. He is “full doghety,” “so hardy and so wighte [sturdy and powerfully stalwart],” “a man of mekill myghte,” and, most tellingly, “breme as bere,” or as huge and sturdy as a bear.<sup>65</sup> This final comparison heavily modifies Otuell from being merely “doghety” or strapping, a positive attribute that is frequently invoked when describing Christian knights’ martial prowess. In being “breme” he becomes huge and hulking; in

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<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Frances McSparran, ed., *Octovian*, EETS OS 289 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 783-6. All references to this text are by line reference. Due to a textual lacuna (there is a folio missing in the manuscript) the above quoted lines are from Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38 printed in the same edition. The Cambridge text corresponds well to the Thornton text, although the Thornton text is much fuller. All other quotations are taken from the Thornton manuscript version.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 737.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 693-5.

<sup>65</sup> S.J. Herrtage, *Rowland and Otuell*, 56, 512, 515, 167.

being bear-like the comparison is taken to another level. During the Middle Ages it was believed that bear cubs were born as formless lumps or chunks of ursine matter that were, quite literally, licked into shape by the mother bear.<sup>66</sup> Bestiary images frequently depict she-bears in the act of forming their cubs from these amorphous blobs.<sup>67</sup> By coupling this descriptor with Otuell, the text therefore imbues him with connotations of bulky, excess flesh, and unwieldy mass that can barely be moulded into, or contained within, a human outline. Although Otuell is evidently an adult male, rather than a cub, the description of him as “breme” implies that he still has this unwieldy quality inherent in his physical make-up. His body is unrefined and, as we will soon see, requires licking into shape. For the moment though, he remains hulking.

The coupling of bears with uncontrolled matter is of long standing. The fact that we still employ the colloquialism of “licking into shape,” which originated in this notion of the malleable bear cub, is testament to the strength of cultural currency that the connection had.<sup>68</sup> A similar phrase, *un ours mal léché*, is used in French to describe someone who has been brought up poorly. It was not just bear cubs that were unrefined; an adult bear was not necessarily a completely or perfectly formed entity. In a wider sense too, bears were seen as uncontrolled, ill-formed, and unruly. Bartlett Jere Whiting notes attestations of the phrases “As foully [ugly] as a bear” and “as rough as a bear.”<sup>69</sup> These descriptors seem to have been used of character and manner rather than in terms of physical texture. Whiting also notes several individual uses of bears as comparisons for anger, crudity, and boisterousness.<sup>70</sup> Bears were clearly not viewed as being refined of manner, character, or form. To find a specific example of this coupling in Thornton’s own sphere we need go no further than the opening text of the Lincoln Thornton, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. As he sails out of Sandwich at the start of his campaign, Arthur suffers a terrible nightmare concerning the raging battle between a dreadful dragon and a ferocious bear, the epitome of untamed and untameable body mass:

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<sup>66</sup> Florence McCullough, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 94-5. The idea itself stretches back to Pliny, and is also repeated in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*, XII.2.22, and Bartholomeus Anglicus’s *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, Book 18.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 88, f.85<sup>v</sup>; Bodleian Library MS Douce 151, f.17<sup>r</sup>; Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1511, f.21<sup>r</sup>; Bodleian Library MS Bodley 533, f.6<sup>v</sup>; and British Library MS Harley 4751, f.15<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> *OED* s.v. “lick.” The phrase dates back to at least 1400 when it is attested in *The Pilgrimage of the Soul*.

<sup>69</sup> Bartlett Jere Whiting, with Helen Wescott Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases From English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), s.v. B96; B97.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, B99. See also B101 for the bear’s inability to be controlled and B103 for the she-bear’s uncontrollable rage.

A blake bustous bere abwene in the clowdes,  
 With yche a paw as a poste, and paumes fulle huge,  
 With pykes fulle perilous, alle plyande thame semyde,  
 Lothene and lothely, lokkes and other,  
 Alle with lutterde legges, lokerde vnfaire,  
 ffiltyred vnfrely, wyth fommande lyppez,  
 The foulleste of feigure that fourmede was euer!  
 He baltyred, he bleryde, he braundyschte ther-after;  
 To bataile he bounnez hym with bustous clowez:  
 He romede, he rarede, that roggede alle the erthe!  
 So ruydly he rappyd at to ryot hym seluene!<sup>71</sup>

Not only is the bear of outrageous size, with sufficient mass to shake the earth, but every possible feature is ill-formed and misshapen. His pads are distended; his legs and claws are crooked and twisted. Furthermore, he seems to have no control over his trajectory: he lurches about; he is “bustous,” a word which conveys both his boisterous actions and also his crude, awkward, and inelegant movement. His unquestionable power and might have no precision or direction; he is a turbulent and wayward force. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this black bear though, is that he explicitly comes “of the Oryente.”<sup>72</sup> When he awakes, Arthur immediately runs to his learned philosophers to interpret this dream. They inform him that he is the dragon, and that the bear “Be-takyns the tyrauntez that tourmentez thy pople; / Or elles with somme gyaunt some journee salle happyne, / In syngulere batelle by 3oure selfe one.”<sup>73</sup> As the battle with the giant of Mont St Michel follows swiftly after this dream (and the multicultural Roman army of Saracens, giants, Greeks, witches, warlocks, and Italians is gathering to attack Arthur’s troops), then on a superficial level the philosophers’ interpretation certainly seems valid, although Karl Heinz Göller has demonstrated that the dream is more complex than Arthur believes.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 775-85. [A rampaging and wild black bear in the clouds above, / With each paw as mighty as a post and pads full huge / With very perilous claws, all crooked they seemed, / Hateful and loathly, his fur and the rest, / With legs all bowed and misshapen, fur curled in a hideous manner, / Tangled and writhing *unfrely*, with foaming lips, / The foulest figure that ever was formed! / He lunched, he bellowed, he reared about threateningly thereafter; / He bounded battlewards with strong and brutal claws: / He prowled, he roared, so that all the earth trembled! / So violently did he smite it and revel in the violence.] For discussion of the term *unfrely* see this thesis, 174-8.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 774. For more on the bear see this thesis, 175-6.

<sup>73</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 825-6. For a full analysis of this dream see Karl Heinz Göller, “The Dream of the Dragon and Bear,” in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem*, edited by Karl Heinz Göller (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 131-9.

<sup>74</sup> See Karl Heinz Göller, “The Dream of the Dragon and Bear,” especially 136-9. For more on the function of the battle between Arthur and the giant see Kateryna A. Rudnytzky Schray, “The Plot in

Before we get too carried away, though, we must remember that the qualities of immense physical size and misshapen matter should not necessarily be equated with the hideous, although, as we saw with Arageous, they do frequently overlap. Big bodies have the potential to be good things. Christopher is of vast proportions, yet the surviving text does not indicate that such an excessive physicality is indicative of an irreversibly sinister or abhorrent nature. His “grete & lange” body is an instrument that can be used in a specific manner in the service of God.<sup>75</sup> As I noted earlier, there is a textual lacuna at the beginning of the narrative so this point cannot be stated unequivocally but Christopher’s massive stature does not seem to be to his detriment. Instead it becomes the means by which he will work towards achieving redemption. Otuell’s great size and strength are similarly attractive features for Charlemagne and his companions, albeit presented in Otuell’s initially crude and coarse form. The douzepers are constantly depicted as more refined in contrast with Otuell: Roland, for example, offers baptism to Otuell in stanza 44 “full curtaysly,”<sup>76</sup> whereas Otuell’s response in stanza 45 is stated “full stoutly.”<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere Roland, when armed, is described as “a lofely creatoure” and Oliver is “þe gentile Erle.”<sup>78</sup> Otuell, on the other hand, is loud voiced, and has a harsh or bellicose [*steryn*] countenance.<sup>79</sup> Where Roland is lovely, Otuell has rolling eyes and “a full hawtayne steuen.”<sup>80</sup> Despite Otuell’s outwardly unrefined appearance and his ursine physicality, however, Charlemagne prays for Otuell’s conversion, rather than for Roland’s martial victory, just as Roland attempts to convert his opponent rather than overcome him in combat. They want Otuell alive.

However, there is more at stake in the bodies of Thornton’s Saracens than mere magnitude. As I noted earlier, it is the majority of the Saracens in the codices who possess this particular type of body, not just the giants. In order to establish firmly the precise physicality of the Thornton Saracens we need to turn, perhaps counter-intuitively, to a Christian character. This particular step is rather convoluted but it is worth taking time over it in order to explore fully the complexities and valences of how Thornton conceived of the Saracen body. In *Octavian*, Clement (the mercantile foster-

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Miniature: Arthur’s Battle on Mont St. Michel in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*,” *Studies in Philology* 101 (2004): 1-19.

<sup>75</sup> Horstmann, *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, 208.

<sup>76</sup> Herrtage, *Otuell*, 517.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 529.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 365, 88.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

father of Florent) dresses up as a Saracen to aid Florent in his impending battle with the invading sultan. Having learned that the sultan will be dramatically weakened by the loss of his wondrous, if temperamental, horse, Florent confides in Clement who promises to acquire said animal the next day.<sup>81</sup> Clement's plan is simple and efficiently executed. Donning a disguise, he heads into the thickest press of the Saracen host where he asks for food within the hearing of the sultan. Clement claims to be both Saracen and a great—though hungry—horseman. The sultan duly tests Clement's horsemanship by mounting him on a succession of difficult horses, culminating in his own steed. Unsurprisingly, Clement promptly hightails it down the main road to Paris and presents the horse to a delighted Florent. The narrative glosses over Clement's somewhat uncharacteristic ability to pass as a Saracen warrior—this is, after all, a man so mercantile and bourgeois that he beats minstrels at other people's parties so as to keep down the price—and encapsulates Clement's (apparently very convincing) disguise in one simple phrase: "Clement gan hymself dyghte / Lyke an vnfreyly fere."<sup>82</sup>

Clement is not alone in Middle English romance in passing as a Saracen. Both Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton masquerade as Saracens in their respective eponymous romances and, although neither of these two scenes appears in the Thornton texts, they were fairly well known across the entire country.<sup>83</sup> Bevis is imprisoned in a well at the time and thus needs no physical concealment. What the text does recognise, though, is that there has to be some form of linguistic disguise on Bevis's part.<sup>84</sup> This linguistic element is explicit in Bevis's exhortation to the second gaoler to descend "For the love of Sein Mahoun."<sup>85</sup> Although we may feel that such a disguise is a little flimsy,

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<sup>81</sup> McSparran, *Octovian*, 1401-12.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1414-5.

<sup>83</sup> The two romances in question, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*, are notable for the large number of copies that survive, as well as for their continued popularity into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

<sup>84</sup> When imprisoned, Bevis manages to fool his two gaolers into descending to his level, one after the other, whereupon he beats them to death. In order to pass as the first gaoler crying for reinforcements Bevis has had to call to the second one, potentially in a non-English language. The text is unclear on the specifics of this latter point; from the moment he sets foot in Ermonie Bevis has been able to communicate with the residents, conversing freely with the Armenians of *hethenesse* since line 539, so perhaps his Anglophone status is not a problem. The text makes no mention of his being taught the Saracen tongue, for example. By the time of his imprisonment, however, he has been in Ermonie for almost a decade so might reasonably be supposed to have picked up the language. Eugen Kölbing, ed., *Beves of Hamtoun*, EETS ES 46, 48, 65 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885, 1886, 1894), 1597-1636. All references to this text are by line number. The version cited throughout is the Auchinleck text, from Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1625.

it proves sufficient to outwit the second gaoler and Bevis eventually makes his escape.<sup>86</sup> In the second instance, Guy of Warwick wishes to enter Pavia in disguise and conceals himself as a man “o fer cuntre,” the cousin of a Saracen, by blackening his white face and blond hair with a recently purchased ointment.<sup>87</sup> Any linguistic dissimulation is not strictly necessary as Guy is not attempting to fool a Saracen, merely the Lombard Duke Otous. Nevertheless, Guy claims that the horse he proffers Otous is faster than both leopards and dromedaries, potentially in an attempt to convey a sort of Saracen cultural vernacular.<sup>88</sup> Primarily though, Guy adopts a physical disguise, effectively donning a medieval form of blackface.<sup>89</sup> What these two instances demonstrate is twofold. Firstly, and somewhat simplistically, they demonstrate that disguise is necessary. Christians and Saracens are physically distinct. Secondly, they reveal that considerable effort is undertaken in order to disguise the Christian as Saracen; romances take dressing-up seriously.

Clement’s ability to converse with the Saracens and their sultan does not seem outwith the bounds of possibility. However, by the time Clement opens his mouth and speaks Saracen, he has already made it “into þe heythen oste / Thore þe presse was alþirmoste [thickest].”<sup>90</sup> In other words, the bourgeois Clement is parading himself in front of the maximum number of hostile eyes before he has even uttered a sound. And yet he remains unharmed, which would imply that his physical disguise is sufficient. Yet the description of Clement’s appearance is limited to being “Lyke an vnfreyly fere.” Clearly then, if we take *Guy* and *Bevis* as paradigmatic (and given their popularity there seems to be no reason why we should not), disguising himself as this “unfreyly fere” is easily sufficient for Clement to appear as a convincing Saracen.

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<sup>86</sup> Clement’s linguistic cover is more robust. The narrative deliberately states that “Full well he couthe þaire speche speke,” presumably because he has been on pilgrimage in the Holy Land for seven years. McSparran, *Octovian*, 1423, 535. When Clement purchases Florent for twenty pounds he is bargaining with outlaws who are presumably native to the Holy Land where he is on pilgrimage, and who probably are not native speakers of either English or French (Clement being a denizen of Paris). The text gives no specifics on this point.

<sup>87</sup> Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, 6117, 6105-8. Although the same episode appears in the Gonville and Caius manuscript, the later text does not mention Guy’s claim to have a Saracen cousin nor does it include the detail concerning the blackening of his blond hair.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 6123-6. See also this thesis, 87-88.

<sup>89</sup> Here I follow Michael Rogin’s definition of blackface “as a form of cross-dressing in which one puts on the insignias of a sex, class, or race that stands in binary opposition to one’s own.” Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>90</sup> McSparran, *Octovian*, 1416-7.

*Unfrely* has caused numerous problems for *Octavian*'s editors. Frances McSparran translates it as "wretched or unsightly,"<sup>91</sup> whereas Harriet Hudson prefers "ugly" in her edition.<sup>92</sup> Maldwyn Mills renders the complete descriptor of *unfrely fere* as "wretched pilgrim,"<sup>93</sup> presumably interpreting "fere" as meaning one who fares, but it would perhaps tax even Clement's talents to portray "a Sarsyn stronge" convincingly whilst looking like a pilgrim, a figure engaged on a specifically Christian enterprise.<sup>94</sup> Like McSparran and Mills, the *MED* goes with wretched, but adds "churlish," and the *OED*, referring to a sixteenth-century textual witness, opts for the rather vague term of "not beautiful." All of these glosses are, presumably, derived from the antonyms *frelī* and *fre* which, amongst other things, can mean beautiful, noble, or refined of appearance.<sup>95</sup> They do somewhat fit in the context of *Octavian*, but are imprecise terms.

For Robert Thornton, however, it posed fewer problems. *Unfrely* survives in three medieval texts—twice used adverbially and used the once in *Octavian* as an adjective<sup>96</sup>—all of which appear in the Thornton codices. It is only logical, therefore, to conclude that Robert Thornton was familiar with the word. So what did it mean, in Thornton's world, to be *unfrely*?

If we examine Thornton's adverbial usage things become clearer. In each use, *unfrely* is explicitly connected with Saracens and has a very specific meaning that is not captured by any of the abovementioned glosses. The first appears in line 780 of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* as we have already seen. When Arthur dreams his nightmare, the Oryental bear has "lutterde legges, lokerde vnfaire, / ffilyrde vnfrelly."<sup>97</sup> Editors of the *Morte Arthure* have faced similar problems to those of *Octavian*. Although it does fit the context in some ways, in 1871 the best attempt that Edmund Brock and W.W. Skeat could manage was "(?) ignoble," but this gloss is insufficient to

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, page 218.

<sup>92</sup> Harriet Hudson, ed., "Octavian" in *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), note to 1556. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>93</sup> Maldwyn Mills, ed., *Six Middle English Romances* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973), note to 1503. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 1516.

<sup>95</sup> The adjective *unfre* has a wider spectrum of meaning, from the legalistic "un-free," indicating that an individual does not have the same privileges as a freeman, to indicating that an individual is actively imprisoned and not at liberty. It can mean ignoble, or evil, but this usage seems to be of character rather than of form; *unfre* does not appear to have been used in a physical context whereas *fre* certainly was.

<sup>96</sup> *MED* s.v. "unfrely." The two adverbial uses are in the *Cursor Mundi* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Obviously there may be instances of it elsewhere, although neither *Manuscripts Online* nor the *Corpus of Middle English* reveals other occurrences. However, as we are examining Thornton's world and its valences within that sphere these three uses are the important ones.

<sup>97</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 779-80. [legs all bowed and misshapen, fur curled in a hideous manner, / Tangled and twisted *unfrely*.]

capture fully just how raw and unrefined the bear is.<sup>98</sup> Over a century later, Larry D. Benson's choice of "churlishly matted,"<sup>99</sup> though awkward, better conveys a sense of roughness and wildness than the rather imprecise "ignoble," and is a better fit with the rampaging untamed ferocity of the bear that we saw earlier on in this chapter.<sup>100</sup> In being "ffiltyrde vnfrely" then, the bear's shaggy fur is tangled and knotty rather than sleek; it is unkempt and dishevelled, all in keeping with his "bustous" nature.

Equally interesting is the second adverbial occurrence. The text of the *Cursor Mundi* describes a group of rich Saracens encountered by King David on a road, just after he has found the wand of salvation. This scene is not currently included in the London Thornton extracts, which start at line 10630 but as the initial folios of the manuscript are missing it seems highly probable that Thornton was familiar with it.<sup>101</sup> Even if he were not, though, the scene is valuable in itself for the light it can shed both on "unfrely" and on conversion.

The description of the Saracens presents us with four men warped and mutated almost beyond recognition:

blak and bla als lede þaire ware  
 mykil riches wiþ ham þai bare.  
 þat sagh men neuer of na cures,  
 sa misshapen creatures.  
 of þaire blaknes hit was selcoupis,  
 on þaire brestes stode þaire mouþis,  
 þaire browes ware grown side with heres  
 and razt alle a-boute þaire eres.  
 þaire mouþis wide, þaire eyen brade,  
 vn-frely was þaire fas made!<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., page 202.

<sup>99</sup> Benson, *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, n. 77.

<sup>100</sup> See *OED* s.v. "churlish."

<sup>101</sup> See Thompson, *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript*, 7, 10. See also Keiser, "Gentleman, Reader, Scribe," 93-4. Keiser notes it is "very likely" that Thornton copied all of the *Cursor Mundi*. He certainly copied at least a large chunk of it. Ibid., 93.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Morris, ed., *The Cursor Mundi*, EETS OS 57, 59, 62, 66 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1874), 8073-8082. All references are to the text of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 14, and are by line number. I have chosen to use the Fairfax text rather than that of London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian A.iii as it is slightly closer in age to the Thornton text. [Black and blue as lead they were / much riches they bore with them. / Men never saw any cure for / such misshapen creatures. / Their blackness it was remarkable / on their breasts were set their mouths, / their brows were completely overgrown with hair / which wrought all about their eyes. / Their mouths wide, their eyes bulging, / unfrely were their faces made!]. *Unfrely* is used in both the Fairfax text and that of British Library MS Cotton Vespasian A.iii. Lines 8081-2 are not included in the text of Cambridge, Trinity College Cambridge MS R.3.8, and Göttingen, Göttingen University Library MS Theol. 107 reads "Ful wonderful" in place of *unfrely*. Ibid.



Although these men could be described as “ugly,” “wretched,” or “ignoble,” they are more deformed and mangled than simply unattractive. They have been actively rendered hideous. Their mouths and eyes are all oversized; their facial hair is rapaciously abundant. We are specifically informed that they are “misshapen.” The “unfrely” nature of their looks is generated by the serious disfigurement and incorrect alignment of their bodies. Their facial features cannot be contained within their faces. Physically speaking, they are poorly formed on every level, which forms a stark contrast to their politeness and courtesy.<sup>103</sup>

These contexts, then, are those in which Thornton understands *unfrely* to operate. We know that, at least in Thornton’s world, it is especially suited to a Saracen camouflage. It is also clear from all three instances that *unfrely* is connected with severe physical morphing, distortion, and mutation, rather than simple aesthetics. It describes disfigurement. When Clement dons his Saracen guise, therefore, he is not merely making himself look ignoble by blackening his face like Guy. He is distorting his physical form to the point that it is hulking and utterly misshapen beyond refinement.<sup>104</sup> What we learn from *unfrely* and from these rather convoluted steps is not simply that some Saracens can be big or ugly. As I noted earlier, that statement has long been established. Instead we learn how they are ugly. We learn that their (often excessive) bodies are misshapen, warped and malformed on a deeply fundamental level and, most importantly, that this disfigurement is explicitly linked to being a Saracen.

Returning now to the Thornton manuscripts more generally, this key Saracen characteristic of surplus flesh and uncontrolled bodily mass can also be revealed through action as well as through the narrative description we have already seen. The sultan Garcy’s ascension in *Sege of Melayne* provides us with an interesting example of this abundance of corporality. One of Garcy’s first actions to celebrate his coronation as

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 8092.

<sup>104</sup> As Renée Ward identifies, in the Southern *Octavian* Clement is expressly allied to the Egyptian giant Guymerraunt (that text’s version of Arageous) “through parallel descriptions of each character’s physical appearance, strength, and martial skills.” Renée Ward, “To be a Fleschewere: Beheading, Butcher-Knights, and Blood Taboos in *Octavian Imperator*,” in *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 165. Clement is described as being ten feet tall; he is mightily strong and powerful, and “boystous of syzt.” Frances McSparran, ed., *Octavian Imperator* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1979), 403-8. All references to this text are by line number. Interestingly, in the Southern *Octavian*, when Clement goes to master the sultan’s steed he does not attempt to disguise himself as a Saracen. Instead he claims to be a man of Arthur’s court, warden of his horse, recently come from pilgrimage in the Holy Land. Ibid., 1376-86. In short, he disguises his social class rather than his race and religion.

sultan is to take the virginity of sixty maidens, who are then given over to his knights.<sup>105</sup> The text explicitly condemns such “mekill luste of lechery,” claiming that it is to the severe detriment of the Saracen court.<sup>106</sup> Garcy commemorates the occasion by carnal means, enacting his physical possession of the city of Milan on the bodies of the women which he then secures by marrying them to his knights. The excessive quantity of women, and the prolonged period of time which is required to accomplish such a feat of stamina, generates a greater sense of the impact, remit, and range of his physical body. Presumably such an impact is intended to be felt by the knights who then espouse the erstwhile virgins (besides, of course, the virgins themselves) as well as by the reader. In sum then, whether through lust, through physical force, through inordinate size, or through extraneous bodily bulk, throughout the whole of the manuscript material the Saracens are marked out as being physically excessive and malformed.

### **Keeping Body and Soul Together**

Clearly then, there was a serious concern in the late medieval cultural imagination over the Saracen being a figure of excess physicality or incorrectly ordered and constrained bodily matter. But why should we find this deep preoccupation? And what purpose, or indeed purposes, does it serve? On the one hand we cannot discount the evident absence of actual Muslims from Thornton’s Yorkshire sphere and so the emphasis placed on Saracen bodies can, perhaps, be seen as an attempt to reify, explore, and flesh out the idea of the living, breathing Saracen. On the other hand an insistence on Saracen physicality could reflect a very keen awareness that Muslims were living, breathing, and in possession of the Holy Land. However, with Thornton’s Saracens we are dealing with a very specific type of physicality—unrefined, excessive, and bulky—which cannot be entirely explained by either of these two circumstances. Instead of examining the contemporary geo-political situation, however, in order to investigate this concern further we must turn back to earlier scholastic discourses concerning the body, to thinkers such as Aristotle, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas, in whose works the place of the human body and its relation to human consciousness featured heavily. Such a step is not meant to suggest that Thornton and his cultural circle were necessarily reading these texts directly and in undiluted form, although they may well

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<sup>105</sup> Herrtage, *Sege of Melayne*, 865-70.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 871, 871-3.

have been. Instead, Thornton and his fellows had access to these scholastic concepts from a variety of sources, some more mediated than others. Aristotelian ideas were certainly circulating throughout the textual landscape, and were actively attributed to “the philosopher.”<sup>107</sup> In the fabulously popular *Book of John Mandeville*, for example, the Mandeville author explicitly states “therefore seith the filosofre thus: *virtus rerum in medio consistit*. That is to say: vertu of thynges is in the myddel.”<sup>108</sup> Aristotle’s tomb and the reflections on his work that are engendered by looking at the tomb are also recounted later in the text.<sup>109</sup> They appeared in sermons preached in church services and at public events, often with Aristotle or Aquinas mentioned by name.<sup>110</sup> The works of these philosophers were taught in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge; the mendicant orders were also well-versed in these texts and used them in their pastoral duties. We know that Thornton had access to religious libraries as a source for his exemplars, and presumably he entered into conversation with at least some of the residents. At a bare minimum he must have talked to the librarian. Similarly, we only have to look at the *Corpus Christi Plays* to see how knowledge and information could be transmitted from a learned library environment literally to the man in the street.<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, allegorical dialogues and debates specifically between the body and soul had a strong presence throughout the medieval period, dating from those found in the Anglo-Saxon Vercelli and Exeter Books to the fifteenth-century *A Disputacioun Betwyx þe Body and Wormes*.<sup>112</sup> Obviously the Anglo-Saxon texts pre-date Albertine and

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<sup>107</sup> For examples see Rita Copeland, “Pathos and Pastoralism: Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in Medieval England,” *Speculum* 89 (2014): 96-127; Caroline Barron and Jenny Stratford, eds., *The Church and Learning in Late Medieval Society: Studies in Honour of R.B. Dobson* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2002), passim, and John O’Malley, “*Fides quaerens et non quaerens intellectum*: Reform and the Intellectuals in the Early Modern Period,” in *Reforming the Church Before Modernity*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto and Louis I. Hamilton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 69-86.

<sup>108</sup> Kohanski and Benson, *John Mandeville*, 22-3. This particular concept comes from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-3. As Kohanski and Benson indicate, this information is “also noted in the widely circulated tradition of sentential materials rooted in the Arabic *Mokhtâr el-Hikam*, translated into Spanish as *Bocados de Oro*, which was in turn translated into Latin as *Liber Philosophorum Moralium Antiquorum*, the source for Guillaume de Tignonville’s French translation, *Dits Moraux*. It appears in Middle English, for example, in *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers*, as part of the background for Aristotle.” *Ibid.*, Explanatory note to 210-3.

<sup>110</sup> For examples see Siegfried Wenzel, trans., *Preaching in the Age of Chaucer: Selected Sermons in Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 41, 78, 151, 208, 275, 285-6.

<sup>111</sup> See Johnston, “The Libraries of York,” 357-70, and this thesis, 116-7.

<sup>112</sup> Boethius first linked the two when he defined man as “the individual substance of a rational nature.” Boethius, *Contra Eutychem*, in Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand and S.J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 85. For more on this tradition see Masha Raskolnikov, *Body Against Soul: Gender and Sowlehele in Middle English Allegory* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2009); John Bossy, “Medieval Debates of Body and Souls,” *Comparative*

Thomistic thought by three centuries, but the later works were heavily influenced by their teachings. Closer to home for Thornton the genre of Middle English romance was also a forum in which more academic preoccupations were reflected upon and worked through. As Jane Gilbert has demonstrated with regard to the much-discussed *The King of Tars*, the world of romance provided a sphere where scholastic thought could be applied, explored and tested.<sup>113</sup> In the case of *King of Tars* it is specifically Aristotle's theories concerning the offspring of miscegenation that are considered but we can find a similar enterprise—albeit with other areas of scholastic discourse—carried out in Thornton's reading matter.

The scholastic debates that particularly concern us now are those concerning the relationship between the soul, and the physical body. As mentioned previously, these subjects were under constant discussion throughout the whole of the Middle Ages and, in certain genres, body and soul were even supposedly in discussion with each other.<sup>114</sup> The various debate poems often cast the figures of the Body, which is granted the power of speech, and the embodied Soul as perpetually bickering and conjoined in less-than-harmonious unity, yet the relationship emerging from the wider tradition is less antagonistic. Thornton was himself no stranger to the genre of debate poetry: *Wynnere and Wastoure* is found towards the end of the London Thornton. The text that perhaps best codified these distinctions between body and soul for the medieval period was Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>115</sup> Not only does this work take an extremely comprehensive approach to categorising and qualifying the question of how the body and soul relate to and interact with each other, but the text was also widely circulated and debated from the moment of its appearance. Aquinas was heavily influenced by

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*Literature* 28 (1976): 144-63; John W. Conlee, ed., *Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1991); Douglas Moffat, ed. and trans., *The Old English Soul and Body* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990); Piero Botani and Anna Torti, eds., *The Body and the Soul in Medieval Literature: The J.A.W. Bennett Memorial Lectures, tenth series* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999); Michel-André Bossy, "Medieval Debates of Body and Soul," *Comparative Literature* 28 (1976): 144-63; John J. Haldane, "Soul and Body," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 293-304.

<sup>113</sup> Gilbert, "Putting the Pulp into Fiction," 102-23, particularly 105-7. Akbari explores similar ideas in Wolfram's *Parzifal* with reference to Gilbert. Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 189-99.

<sup>114</sup> See Raskolnikov, *Body Against Soul*, especially 70-104.

<sup>115</sup> Aquinas was not the only thinker for whom such questions were worthy of investigation, but he is perhaps the most accessed throughout the later Middle Ages. Albertus Magnus, for example, Aquinas' own teacher, was also a major contributor to these ongoing debates about the relationship between body and soul, and during their lifetimes had far greater influence than Aquinas. However, by Thornton's time, Aquinas had become the more widespread of the two. For a discussion of Albertus' approach see Henry Anzulewicz, "Anthropology: The Concept of Man in Albert the Great," in *A Companion to Albert the Great: Theology, Philosophy, and the Sciences*, ed. Irven M. Resnick (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 325-46, especially 338-40.

Aristotelian and Socratic thought. His working life as a prominent philosopher, and his subsequent position as a doctor of the Church, meant that the *Summa Theologiae* was one of the most influential works of the Middle Ages, and indeed in Western philosophy since.

According to Aquinas, man was composed of both a spiritual and a corporeal substance, the soul and the body, united in the person of man.<sup>116</sup> These two substances had to be separate entities as the soul was able to have knowledge of other bodies and could not do so if it were to have the nature of any sort of body within it.<sup>117</sup> As the soul was able to operate in its own right—i.e. it partook of operations in which the body was considered to take no part—Aquinas believed that it was both incorporeal but still subsistent, even if that substance was not corporeal. The human soul was incorruptible being, according to Genesis 2:17 and Ecclesiastes 12:7, a direct gift from God, and the most perfect of forms.<sup>118</sup> The body, on the other hand, was corruptible by death. However, the soul and body were not totally independent of each other. Instead, Aquinas is emphatic that man is the composite of these two mutually dependent parts, following Aristotle in comparing their union to that of wax and the shape of that wax.<sup>119</sup> He also stresses several times that the soul provides the form for the union, whereas the body supplies the matter. In Thomistic thought, then, the body and soul are engaged and united in a finely balanced alliance with the shape and state of the body being informed, quite literally, by the condition of the soul. Ideally, both body and soul are in perfect balance, thus allowing a union of perfect harmony.

This paradigmatic structure of an alliance between the corporeal body and the incorporeal soul applied to all members of humanity: Jews, Christians, pagans, and Saracens alike. Nevertheless, not all of these alliances were harmonious or completely balanced. If we look at the Saracens, those that are featured in the romance texts are required to convert or to die.<sup>120</sup> According to the narrative logic of Middle English romance, it seems the Saracen body was not an entity that possessed long term viability;

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<sup>116</sup> *ex spirituali et corporali substantia componitur*. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.pr.Q75. Throughout this discussion I take Aquinas' concept of a corporeal substance as being any physical bodily matter of the individuals in question, and the range of language I use reflects that. Unlike Alain Boureau I do not distinguish between body and flesh. See Alain Boureau, "The Sacrality of One's Own Body in the Middle Ages," trans. Benjamin Semple, *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 5-17.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Library of Latin Texts – Series A* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), Q75, a1. arg.2.

<sup>118</sup> *anima intellectiva est perfectissima animarum*. Ibid., I. Q76, a5. arg.4.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., I. Q76 a7.s.c.

<sup>120</sup> The one exception to this rule is *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, which leaves some, though certainly not all, Saracens still living.

it was not stable. It could not remain unaltered. The mutation undergone by the Saracen body in the case of death is, I trust, sufficiently obvious as to require no further explanation for the moment, although there are certain exceptions which will be discussed below.<sup>121</sup> Regarding conversion, however, the transition from Saracen to Christian and the subsequent physical transformation is more complex. And although we will explore this transition more fully later, it is worth indicating here that unlike a Jewish body that had to be destroyed, a Saracen body had potential. In order to access that potential though, the body had to stop being Saracen and become Christian.

As noted earlier, the bodies of Thornton's Saracens were characterised by physical excessiveness; their bodies and bodily desires seem to be imperfectly contained within their skins. And, as we saw in scholastic thought, in a balanced physicality, body and soul would ideally unite in one harmonious and perfect whole. Consequently, if we apply such strictures to the Saracen body we find some interesting results. In Christopher's case he explicitly states that his body is an active hindrance, preventing him from achieving his ideal state of Christianity: union with Christ. For Christopher, maintaining his life within his body is "a grete taryinge / Fro þat Joye þat es withowtyne endyngē."<sup>122</sup> Union with the divine can only come once he is rid of the flesh that ties him to the earth. For Christopher, like all Christians, the most fitting end is for him to have no flesh; the most harmonious balance that he can achieve is for all bodily matter to be utterly excluded. Ideally he will die in God's service, eschewing all terrestrial and physical presence. However, when he makes this statement, Christopher is referring to his Christian body. Before he could even begin to contemplate this idealised fleshless union with God, though, Christopher has already had to alter his Saracen physicality in order to become Christian.

Once Christopher has learnt the necessary steps to perform Christian rituals—the Paternoster, the Creed, and so on—he is taken to the river and becomes the ferryman. During this time "sufferde he penance many-falde."<sup>123</sup> His clothing is insufficient against the cold; he struggles through hail and snow until he loses feeling in his feet; he starves on a regular basis, all of which may be considered to have a negative impact on his body.<sup>124</sup> When eventually called upon to carry the Christ Child, the physical suffering increases. As he crosses the river he has "no fele on fote ne schanke;"

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<sup>121</sup> For more on Saracen bodily mutation in death see this thesis, 193-6.

<sup>122</sup> Horstmann, *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, 934-5.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-99.

he collapses before he has even seen the child, and once he does carry him across the flood, the child's weight crushes him until he is at risk of drowning.<sup>125</sup> Remarkably, it is only at this point in time, after his body has undergone severe deprivation, starvation, pain, and hard physical labour—eventually almost to the brink of death—that this ferryman is actually baptised, granted the identity of Christopher, and formally welcomed into the Christian *communitas*.<sup>126</sup> Despite knowing the Creed and Paternoster and serving travellers on a daily basis, Christopher is only permitted to call himself a Christian once his body has been radically altered. Working backwards from this circumstance, then, it follows that adjustment of the flesh is necessary to facilitate Saracen entry into the Christian Church. I contend that the unconverted Saracen, therefore, is basically an unbalanced entity; the quiddity of a Saracen is an excess of physical flesh. Saracen bodies just have too much bodily mass. As befits a saint, Christopher is obviously an extreme example; like Titus and Vespasian in *Siege of Jerusalem*, his actions after his conversion are shown to be fiercely and wholly committed to the Christian cause—potentially more so than those who are Christian born. However, if we look more closely at the questions of conversion, union with Christ and union with the Christian community, we see that the figure of Christopher sets up a template that we can follow with regard to other Saracen converts in Thornton's material. As we have already seen, Saracen excess can be in the actual body itself, or it can be in sins of the flesh; that is, it can be sexual desire as in the case of Garcy, or it can be great strength and pride in martial prowess as we saw with Otuell. In both cases, though, the matter of the unconverted Saracen is somehow ill-formed, or unequally distributed. Following Thomistic thought in this situation, then, I argue that this state of physical unrefinement is because the Saracen body is informed by a distorted soul, specifically one that is not “righte trowande.”<sup>127</sup>

The adjustment and reordering of the Saracen body into a more balanced and stable entity is therefore relatively straightforward and evident, at least in theory. The subject must convert to Christianity and, in so doing, join the body of the Christian church. Such a union is obviously considerably less than that achieved by Christopher, but saints act as exemplars rather than as everyday instances of the average convert.

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 339-40, 365-7.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 410-3.

<sup>127</sup> G.G. Perry, ed., “The Mirror of St Edmund,” in *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*, EETS OS 26 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867), 20. All references to this edition are by page number. This phrase is a common descriptor of Saracens.

The other Saracen converts are not saints and, at least in the romance diegetic world, they are not aiming for direct and immediate union with Christ in Heaven. Instead they are realising union with the body of the church, with the Christian community on Earth. In order for this concordance to be accomplished, the Saracens must lose or reorder their excessive bodily matter but they need not lose their terrestrial lives.<sup>128</sup> Through converting to Christianity the distorted soul that informs the body can be smoothed out. As a consequence the body informed by this newly perfect soul is then modified or realigned and can ally itself with the newly composed soul. The body and soul can be reconciled in a balanced and stable Christian figure whose lifespan can then be legitimately long and prosperous.

Not all of the converted Saracens in the Thornton manuscripts exhibit precisely the same features, but the transformation outlined above provides us with a paradigm through which we can explore the particulars of the conversion process as imagined in Thornton's cultural world. Rather than the specific technical minutiae, our focus here is on the wider trend of physical adjustment and excision of surplus Saracen flesh that occurs as part of the overall mechanism of conversion. Perhaps the most straightforward, as well as the most revealing, conversion scenario in the manuscripts is that of Otuell, so it is there that we shall begin. Otuell's conversion comes about in the middle of single combat with Roland. Roland has already attempted to convert him through words, with arguments about the superiority of Christianity to Saracen-Islam.<sup>129</sup> He even offers Belisaunt, Charlemagne's daughter, to Otuell in marriage, with the additional attraction of eternal friendship and fellowship with Oliver and himself. Otuell however rejects this offer. It eventually requires divine intervention in the form of a white dove alighting on his helmet to convince him of Christianity's worth. Once convinced, though, Otuell's transformation is dramatic. Up until the point of his baptism he remains "hym þat was doghety," an identity that is entirely founded on his

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<sup>128</sup> Should they wish to lose their lives though, the option is always open to them. The converted Saracen soldier sent to martyr Christopher is informed by the saint that if he carries out the slaying then he will "come to Joye." Horstmann, *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, 939. Christopher prays that the Saracen will be brought to God's bliss; a heavenly voice grants his prayer, the saint is slain, and the souls of him and the Saracen (who instantaneously drops dead) ascend to heaven. *Ibid.*, 960-4, 974-5.

<sup>129</sup> Roland's role in the Middle English romance corpus does seem to involve frequent failed attempts at conversion. In *Roland and Vernagu*, for example, he essays to convert the enormous Vernagu, (who is revealed to be Otuell's uncle in *Rowland and Otuell*) again through pedagogical means, but again he fails. Otuell's successful conversion is dependent on heavenly intervention rather than any arguments Roland can employ. See also John Tolan, "Looking East Before 1453: The Saracen in the Medieval European Imagination," in *Cultural Encounters Between East and West 1453-1699*, ed. Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock (Amersham: Cambridge Scholars, 2005), 26. Tolan argues that the inability to convert by argument demonstrates the alleged irrationality of Saracens.



physicality.<sup>130</sup> However once Otuell has become a Christian, a mere five lines later, he is utterly reconfigured as “þat noble knyghte,” a descriptor that encompasses his inward character as well as his outward appearance.<sup>131</sup>

Divine intervention may be the deciding factor in Otuell’s conversion, but it is preceded by two important steps that pave the way for the arrival of the dove: one affecting the body and the second affecting the soul. In the course of the fighting Roland raises Durandale and strikes a massive blow to Otuell, resulting in the loss of quarter of his helmet and “halfen-dele his one Ere.”<sup>132</sup> Otuell’s excessive and hulking body has been physically reduced; he has effectively been cut down to size in order to prepare him for admission into the Christian world. The bear we saw earlier has been metaphorically licked into shape, with the lost ear functioning metonymically as his excess, incorrectly aligned flesh. Where once he was “breme” he is now noble; he has literally been refined. Secondly, Otuell’s rejection of even more extraneous flesh—in the form of Belisaunt’s body, offered to him by Roland—foregrounds his movement away from the purely physical sphere he inhabits at the start of the narrative and into a more balanced union between his body and his contemplative soul. Had he shown himself to be motivated purely by physical lust then his conversion could not have happened. His acknowledgement that the physical sphere (represented by Belisaunt’s beauty) is not the be all and end all renders him eligible for entry into the Christian community.<sup>133</sup> His rejection of the physical continues until the conflicting impulses of body and soul can be successfully realigned under his new identity of Christian soldier. Otuell refuses to take Belisaunt in marriage, and presumably to engage in and enjoy sexual intercourse with her, until he is more fully domesticated and absorbed into the sphere of militant Christianity. Once his crude physicality has been tamed then, and only then, is he able to partake of the marriage sacrament, secure in his body and soul realignment, and in a physical relationship that is sanctioned by the church.

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<sup>130</sup> Herrtage, *Otuell*, 610.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 615.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>133</sup> The physical as a method of foregrounding and signalling one’s validity as a potential convert is not specific to Otuell. Akbari notes that Floripas’s idealised white body in *Fierabras* “is desirable and assimilable in a way that her counterpart [a black giantess] is not ... Floripas’ ability to be assimilated [into the Christian community] is expressed through her appearance, a precursor of the normative behaviour that she will embrace following her full incorporation into the Christian community upon being baptized.” Akbari, *Idols in the East* 166. Jacqueline de Weever makes a similar point with regard to female Saracens who convert in de Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters*, xiii, 3-29, and 39-54.

With Marsabelle, the only female convert in the Thornton collections, a slightly greater problem of interpretation is presented. Unlike Josian in *Bevis of Hampton* or, more noticeably, Floripas in the *Fierbras/Firnumbras* cycle, Marsabelle does not feature greatly in *Octavian*.<sup>134</sup> Ironically she still makes two very large contributions to the narrative, with the first one, her request of the head of the King of France before she will kiss her father's loathly and libidinous giant, Arageous, acting as a major narrative stimulus.<sup>135</sup> This demand sets in motion the conflict that grants Florent his chance to escape the mercantile sphere of his upbringing and eventually be reunited with his birth family. Her second impact on the romance is in advising Florent to steal her father's magical steed, an action carried out by his step-father. However, as we saw earlier, this scene is primarily notable for the surprising ease with which Clement assimilates himself, to the extent of successfully mastering a magical horse, speaking the Saracen language, and convincing the Sultan's guards that he is a Saracen warrior rather than a socially inept member of the Parisian merchant class.<sup>136</sup> In terms of a battle strategy enabling Florent's martial success, though, Marsabelle's suggestions are not helpful as Florent gets captured by the Saracens anyway the instant the steed is slain.<sup>137</sup> Whilst these two developments are very important for the narrative, the text is rather reticent on actual physical descriptions of Marsabelle herself, other than that she is "The feyrest pyngge alyue þat was/ ... / And semelyest of syght."<sup>138</sup>

Such a description initially seems at odds with a body informed by a distorted soul. However, if we look at Marsabelle's actions then we gain a better idea of her imbalance. What little the text does reveal is that she is a woman of excessive lustful

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<sup>134</sup> For a closer look at Floripas, especially with regard to her physicality, see Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 173-89. For Marsabelle's lack of role in the narrative, and how that shifts in the various textual versions see Nola Jean Bambray, "Evolution of the Popular Hero in the English *Octavian* Romances," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990): 363-88.

<sup>135</sup> Hudson notes that in the Old French source for *Octavian*, Marsabelle is not as unwilling to kiss Arageous as she is in the Middle English text. Hudson, "Octavian," textual note to 1123. In the Middle English text Marsabelle declares that when Arageous presents her with the king's head she will kiss him and "full lefe to me it were," but it is unclear if she will find the kissing or the king's death "lefe." McSparran, *Octovian*, 832.

<sup>136</sup> For more on Clement's role see John Simons, "Northern *Octavian* and the Question of Class," in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 105-11.

<sup>137</sup> McSparran, *Octovian*, 1515-20. Florent's strength whilst on the horse is noted by the narrative, but his steed is slain under him and Florent is captured, along with the Emperor of Rome (his biological father), the King of France, and many other knights.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 783-6. The Thornton text is damaged at this point so this quotation is taken from the Cambridge text.

desire. Her objective in transporting herself to the wall of Paris is explicitly to watch the actions of the Christian knights, and to watch them for her own enjoyment:

To the castell sche went swythe  
 And sevyn nyghtes þere sche lay;  
 For sche thocht yoye and pryde  
 To see þe Crystyn knyghtys ryde,  
 On fylde them for to play.<sup>139</sup>

Seven days of gazing lustfully upon young men—in the plural no less—practising their jousting manoeuvres is a considerable amount of time. Marsabelle next falls in love with Florent, who occupies all her waking thoughts; all her actions are dictated by her exorbitant and disproportionate desires. For all that Marsabelle drives the narrative of *Octavian*, Marsabelle herself is propelled solely by immoderate physical wants. Helen Cooper has carefully explored the narrative impetus of female desire in romance and concludes that “[s]pontaneous and active female desire, *rightly directed*, becomes a driving force in the larger providential scheme.”<sup>140</sup> It is a positive attribute benefitting narrative, plot resolution, and characters, and can be found in a range of European romances from the twelfth-century *Roman d’Eneas* in French to the fourteenth-century Middle English *William of Palerne*.<sup>141</sup> However, the problem with Marsabelle is that—for at least that first week, and possibly longer—her desires are not rightly directed. Like Garcy’s deflowering of the virgins her desire lacks specificity and direction. Like a Saracen body, it is uncontrolled, completely unfocussed, and uncontrollable. It is only through Florent, who demands her conversion, that her desire is given a right direction and form.

When talking with Florent she readily expresses her eagerness to convert, perhaps assuming that conversion will result in her marriage to him. However, Florent’s request for her conversion is not as a prerequisite for marriage. He states that Marsabelle is beautiful, but then expresses the wish that she “wolde cristenede be/ And sythen of herte be trewe.”<sup>142</sup> Marsabelle interprets this wish as Florent desiring her heart to be true to him, but marriage is never actually mentioned by him. Strictly speaking, Florent desires her conversion rather than her hand; he wants her heart to be true, and it

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 800-4 (Cambridge text).

<sup>140</sup> Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 220. Emphasis mine.

<sup>141</sup> See also *ibid.*, 224-9 for more examples, and for a more detailed discussion of correct desire’s positive power.

<sup>142</sup> McSparran, *Octovian*, 1369-70.

could just as easily be true to Christ as well as to Florent.<sup>143</sup> In the manuscript logic of the Christian Thornton, where those who “lyve wrong” are Saracens and those who are “righte trowande” are devout Christians, having a true heart—particularly when referenced directly after baptism—is a call for Marsabelle to restrain her physical desires and turn to Christianity, the one thing that can rebalance her currently unbalanced, or untrue, soul. Like other beautiful Saracen princesses her physical beauty signifies her potential for conversion and realignment, but her excessive desire for the other young men signals a need for the flesh to be reined in. Like Otuell, once she has been baptised and her heart (and soul) rendered “trewe,” she can legitimately enjoy Florent’s body within the marital sacrament. Interestingly, the narrative notes that there was “joye” in her baptism,<sup>144</sup> but it is silent on her marriage. With her marriage being dependent on her joining the Christian community, the Marsabelle who weds is more moderate and balanced. Her wrong beliefs that had manifested themselves as excessive lust have been excised by the realignment of her now “trewe” soul and body, a circumstance reflected in the text.

If we now step back and view all of Thornton’s works then we can clearly see that such an imagining of the conversion process is not limited to the Saracens. In *Siege of Jerusalem* the physical forms of both Titus and Vespasian mutate, losing the excess corrupted flesh that has plagued them since their youths.<sup>145</sup> Before his healing and subsequent conversion, Titus’ face had been so deformed by the massive canker that he was unable to open his lips properly and his cheek was completely concealed. Similarly Vespasian’s nose was infested with wasps—hence his name—to the point of being considered “lazare.”<sup>146</sup> The greatness of their flesh-bound afflictions and the severe disfigurement they possess before their conversion is mirrored in their dramatic response and exertions for the Christian cause after they are healed. Nevertheless, the narrative implicitly suggests that this physical correction and remedying is an integral step in the process of conversion. Indeed, the healing is directly engendered by their conversion: as soon as Titus’s soul is “right trowande,” (a moment that comes when he rues Caesar’s appointment of the allegedly unworthy Pilate to the governorship of Judah) then his body is informed by the Christian correctness of his soul and his

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<sup>143</sup> The Southern version of *Octavian* demonstrates a more marked narrative emphasis on Marsabelle’s conversion rather than her marriage, and her role in the narrative is severely reduced. Bamberry, “Evolution of the Popular Hero,” 364-76.

<sup>144</sup> McSparran, *Octovian*, 1811.

<sup>145</sup> See Hanna and Lawton, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 177-80, 253-6.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

physical body morphs to reflect this. Both Titus and Vespasian convert almost instantaneously upon healing, suggesting that once body and soul are correctly aligned then conversion to Christianity is the inevitable conclusion to the process. Similarly the crypto-Christians of the *Cursor Mundi*, who prophesy Christ's coming and eventual martyrdom on the cross made of David's wand, undergo this physical re-shuffling. When they kiss the wand "als milk þaire hide become als quite / and of fre blode þai had þaire hew. / and alle þaire shap was turned new."<sup>147</sup> By asking David's permission to pay homage and through their subsequent show of devotion to Christ, in the medium of the wand, they are given the opportunity to prove, and in doing so reify, the correct form of their souls and their bodies align themselves accordingly.

If we then look outside of the Thornton manuscripts to other texts then we find a similar imagining of the conversion process being enacted. The giant Ascopard, from *Bevis*, considers conversion to Christianity but declares himself to be too big for the font. Specifically described by the baptising priest as "þis wiþ þe grete visage,"<sup>148</sup> Ascopard is so large that a "kove," a vat or a tub, has to be specially constructed in place of a font in order to baptise him.<sup>149</sup> Until this point in the narrative Ascopard's size has been a comic thread; although a giant he is only a little one. The supposed champion of the Emperor Garcy, Ascopard claims to have been driven from his native land because:

Al for þat ich was so lite,  
Eueri man me wolde smite;  
Ich was so lite and so meru3 [delicate],  
Eueri man me clepede dweru3 [dwarf].<sup>150</sup>

Ascopard's size makes him a source of humour for both fellow characters and the reader. However, when confronted with the makeshift font that will demonstrate the flawed excess of his bodily construction, Ascopard's great size becomes a matter of seriousness. Not only does he fail to recognise the ritual aspects of baptism, declaiming in outrage "Prest, wiltow me drenche?"<sup>151</sup> but he proceeds to leap upon a chair out of the priest's reach, emphatically announcing that "Icham to meche te be cristine!"<sup>152</sup> The comedy of the scene cannot be denied, but underneath the ludicrous image of a

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<sup>147</sup> Morris, *Cursor Mundi*, 8120-2.

<sup>148</sup> Kölbing, *Beves of Hamtoun*, 2585.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 2591.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 2526.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 2594.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 2596.

quivering giant perched precariously on a chair lies a serious undertone. Ascopard is prevented from converting to Christianity by his excess of flesh. The orthography of “cristine” is such that it can mean baptized, but can also mean a Christian; it can be both past participle and noun. Ascopard’s outburst and refusal to be shoved into the vat is normally interpreted as him being too big for it, the irony and subsequent humour of course being that the replacement font has been purpose built to hold him. However, Ascopard is also stating that his body is simply too excessive for him to be a Christian at any point in time. In the first interpretation of “cristine,” the door is left open for a hypothetical future baptism. The second denies this opportunity. Ascopard’s body is informed by an imperfect soul and so he will always be too big for any font, a circumstance that prefigures his later betrayal of Bevis, which is an action obviously unbecoming a Christian.<sup>153</sup>

The realignment of body and soul into a holistic united form was, then, the central locus of the conversion process. It was the pivotal point in the transition between non-belief and Christianity. Either through physical removal of bodily mass, such as we saw with Otuell’s ear and Christopher’s entire body, or through the metaphorical neutralising or taming of fleshly desires as in Marsabelle’s case, the body was brought into line with a “right trowande” soul and the former Saracen entered into their life as a Christian. However, the process of conversion did not stop there. This holistic unity, engendered by the belief in Christ’s Passion and Resurrection, reflected the holistic unity and alignment of the disparate followers of Christ into a single Catholic body engendered by their participation in the Eucharist. By ingesting the Host and wine the celebrants are partaking of, and making part of themselves, the perfect body (i.e. that of Christ) and in doing so they enter into, and indeed reify, the Christian community. Converting a Saracen, therefore, is not simply about saving the soul of an unbelieving individual, although the *Vita Santi Cristofori* certainly shows us the ramifications inherent on the individual level in the resurrected Saracen priest’s sojourn in hell. Converting a Saracen is also about absorbing balanced matter into the Christian *communitas* and putting that matter to work in the Christian cause.

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<sup>153</sup> For more on Ascopard’s betrayal of Bevis see Melissa Furrow, “Ascopard’s Betrayal: A Narrative Problem,” in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjević (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 145-60.

## Body Parts and Being Part of the Body

However, the Thornton manuscripts do not necessarily promote an idealised evangelist wish fulfilment in which the erstwhile Saracens are happily absorbed any old how into the body of the Christian church. The balanced manner in which Richard's anthropophagous actions are received in *Richard, Coeur de Lion* should be sufficient to alert us to the idea that some methods of absorbing the Saracen into the Christian body are more fraught than others. In fact, the manuscript texts exhibit a considerable degree of anxiety expressed about the close proximity of Christians and Saracens. *Percyvell* presents us with an additional perplexity concerning the position of the Saracens and Christian interaction with them. The sultan Gollerothirame has a brother who is a giant, "The stalwortheste geant of one."<sup>154</sup> The Black Knight, lover of the woman Percyvell kissed when first setting off on his adventures, presented this giant with the ring the Black Knight's lover had received from Percyvell in place of her original magic one. In convoluted fashion, the giant had, in turn, proposed to give Percyvell's ring to a woman who lived nearby. It is then revealed that this woman is Achefflour, Percyvell's mother. On seeing the ring she instantly concludes that her son has been slain, and she runs off to the woods in a fit of insanity. The troubling part of this scene, though, is that Achefflour has presumably entertained the idea of becoming the giant's lover, at least to the point of receiving gifts from him. The widow of one of Arthur's court has, therefore, contemplated sexual union—which presumably has inherent within it the threat of impregnation—with a Saracen giant.

Such a circumstance is not what one might expect to find, bearing in mind the previous encounters between Saracen men and Christian women. We only have to look 71 folios away to find the parallel situation of Marsabelle (who at that point still adheres to Saracen-Islam) and Arageous, which initially seems to be resolved quite differently.<sup>155</sup> What, then, should we conclude from such a scene? I suggest that there are two factors that should be taken into account when reflecting on these events. The first is the parodic nature of *Percyvell* as a whole.<sup>156</sup> Percyvell's own chivalric aptitude

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<sup>154</sup> Maldwyn Mills, ed., *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, in *Ywain and Gawain, Sir Percyvell of Gales, and The Anturs of Arther* (London: J.M. Dent, 1992), 1963. All references to this text are by line number.

<sup>155</sup> Arageous's visit to Montmartre is on f. 103<sup>rb</sup> and the episode of Gollerothirame's brother and Achefflour is on f. 175<sup>rb</sup>.

<sup>156</sup> The most comprehensive and influential account of this interpretation of *Percyvell* is Caroline D. Eckhardt, "Arthurian Comedy: The Simpleton-Hero in *Sir Percyvell of Gales*," *The Chaucer Review* 8 (1974): 205-20, but see also Glenn Wright, "Comic Ambivalence in *Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Allegorica*

is the most obvious source of humour, but there are clearly other elements at play that subvert romance stereotypes. Mary Flowers Braswell gestures towards an explicit link between *Percyvell* and Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*, for example.<sup>157</sup> We need not head off on a tangential exploration of *Percyvell*'s genre subversion and humorous interludes here, but it is certainly worth bearing in mind that *Percyvell*'s tongue is firmly inserted in its cheek.

Following on from this situation brings us to the second factor, which is the marked instability of Achefflour herself. If Percyvell can be an unfit knight, then there is nothing to disqualify Achefflour from being an unfit lover. From the narrative's outset she has rejected the martial code of her late husband and attempted to prevent her son having access to the chivalric and courtly sphere into which he was born. Percyvell's own body reflects his rude ignorance, and the distortion Achefflour's upbringing has wrought on him. He is "burely of body and thereto right brade,"<sup>158</sup> and coarse to the point of being considered a "foull wyghte" by Arthur's court.<sup>159</sup> Although he has potential, Percyvell has been deprived of the chivalric world; he is not completely familiar with the courtly sphere and he does not always live according to courtly conventions, a state that is reflected in his occasionally goat skin-clad body. As the agent who has brought about Percyvell's disconnection from his natural sphere, Achefflour is effectively comparable to the ape in *Octavian*. It should therefore come as no surprise that she is unable to conduct her love affairs with appropriate judgement. As comparison with the parallel situation in *Octavian* demonstrates, engagement and interaction between Christian and Saracen can be successful but the Christian side has an active role to play and an unstable Christian like Achefflour cannot play that part.

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21 (2000): 47-61. Francis X. Baron, "Mother and Son in *Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 8 (1972): 3-14 is another prominent article advancing the argument that Percyvell does not develop into a chivalric hero but reverts to goat skin-clad rustic, thus subverting romance convention. Glenn Wright, "Pe kynde wolde ouet sprynge: Interpreting the Hero's Progress in *Sir Perceval of Galles*," *Studia Neophilologica* 72 (2000): 45-53 provides some important nuances and qualifications to both Eckhardt and Baron's arguments concerning the extent to which *Percyvell* can be seen as a straightforward parody.

<sup>157</sup> Mary Flowers Braswell, ed., *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 2.

<sup>158</sup> Maldwyn Mills, *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, 269.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 532. Mills notes that Arthur later states that Percyvell "arte so semely to see, / And thou were wele dighte" (543-4), and assumes that it is Percyvell's condition rather than his appearance that is "foull." *Ibid.*, note to 532. Presumably we can see, in this scene, an interesting companion to *Octavian*'s Florent, whose innate nobility is revealed through his recognition of courtly accoutrements, as well as his complete ineptitude in mercantile life. In particular the scene where Florent, wearing second hand armour and to the sound of many scornful words, rides through the city of Paris to attack Arageous shows several parallels. The text is clear, however, that Florent's garb does not reflect his inner self, whereas that of *Percyvell* is less definite. McSparran, *Octovian*, 816-51.



Until now, the majority of this discussion has predominantly focussed on the converted Saracen body, like that of Otuell, which is transmuted into the *communitas* of the Christian church. However, as I noted above, conversion was not the only pathway available to the Thornton Saracens. Death was always a viable option. In these circumstances the soul of the deceased was believed to go “vn-to Mahoun,” as in the case of the Saracen Clariell in *Otuell*,<sup>160</sup> presumably then to be tormented in the endless pains of Hell that the Saracen mammet guardian experienced in *Vita Sancti Cristofori*.<sup>161</sup> The body, however, remained in the hands of its Christian slayers and subject to their whims.

The treatment that these bodies receive initially appears to be collateral damage from the way in which the Saracen meets his end. If we remain with the text of *Percyvell* and take the death of Gollerothirame’s giant brother, for example, then his injuries and subsequent death at Percyvell’s hands at first seem entirely straightforward: Percyvell has killed Gollerothirame and the giant, understandably, challenges Percyvell to armed combat from which Percyvell emerges triumphant. The interesting factor, though, is the type of injuries Percyvell inflicts. The giant is basically carved up into pieces, both during and after the fight. Initially “His honde he [Percyvell] strykes hym fro / His lefte fote also,”<sup>162</sup> and then, as such dismemberment does not appear to impact on the giant’s ability to carry on fighting, Percyvell proceeds to strike “off the [other] hande als clene / Als ther hadde never none bene,”<sup>163</sup> and then finally decapitates him. The giant is basically carved up where he stands.

Decapitation was practically an occupational hazard for medieval giants, both within Middle English romance and beyond. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen noted this circumstance back in 1999 when he declared that “Battles against inimical giants that culminate in a decapitation uncannily recur in myth, literature, and historiography of the West.”<sup>164</sup> Removing the head from a giant’s body in a romance narrative was understood to be taking the ultimate trophy; it was displaying incontrovertible evidence

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<sup>160</sup> Herrtage, *Rowland and Otuell*, 1340.

<sup>161</sup> Horstmann, *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, 538-9. Saracens could not redeem themselves after death through trials and tribulations in Purgatory; Margaret in *A Revelation Concerning Purgatory* is quite insistent on that point. At this period in time Hell was perceived of as being cold, rather than the fiery pits we think of today. In *The Divine Comedy*, for example, Dante depicts Lucifer at the very centre of Hell, imprisoned in ice. Dante, *Inferno*, 34. 50-2.

<sup>162</sup> Mills, *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, 2068-9.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 2090-1.

<sup>164</sup> Cohen, *Of Giants*, 66, but see 62-95 for a wider discussion on decapitating giants and the ramifications of doing so.

that the boy who had faced the giant had been successfully transfigured into the man that had killed him.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, decapitation figured in the cultural imagination as more than an initiation ritual or rite of passage demonstrating martial ability or prowess. As Cohen notes, “It is not enough simply to kill the giant, however; the aberrant body [typically representing an aberrant social body] must be decapitated, *fully rebuked*.”<sup>166</sup> Removal of the giant’s head signified the complete and permanent destruction, beyond all reasonable doubt, of the body, the organisation, and the threat.

However, Gollerothirame’s brother is not simply decapitated; his whole gigantic body is deliberately and systematically dismembered. He is literally cut limb from limb. And this dismemberment of a Saracen is not an isolated incident in Thornton’s collection. Within the same text, *Percyvell*, we find another instance of gratuitous Saracen carvery. In Percyvell’s first battle against the Saracen host, on behalf of Lady Lufamore’s besieged castle, the hero sets against the Saracens so violently and wildly that he “Made þe Sarazenes hede bones / Hoppe als dose haylestones / Abowte one the gres.”<sup>167</sup> Arageous’s head is delivered to Marsabelle, after Florent has carved away a chunk of his shoulder and breast.<sup>168</sup> Although the text gives few specific details, Arageous’s injury is such that he probably loses at least his arm, if not half of his torso as well. During the course of his fight with the giant of Mont-St-Michel, Arthur manages to hack lumps out of the giant’s forehead, castrate him, and disembowel him, then eventually—once the giant has died—he commands his men to behead the body.<sup>169</sup> Such butchery is far more than the almost ritual decapitation designed to demonstrate that the romance hero carrying out said beheading had passed from boy to manhood.<sup>170</sup> The Giant of Mont-St-Michel is not so much dismembered as shredded. In *Eglamore*, the hero’s gigantomachia causes body parts to be positively strewn across the landscape. Arrak is blinded and then eventually decapitated.<sup>171</sup> His brother Marasse undergoes similar bodily division; like Florent with Arageous, Eglamore severs the right arm at the shoulder bone and although Marasse, like Gollerothirame’s brother,

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<sup>165</sup> Ward, “To Be a Fleschewere,” 159-64.

<sup>166</sup> Cohen, *Of Giants*, 84.

<sup>167</sup> Mills, *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, 1190-2.

<sup>168</sup> McSparran, *Octovian*, 891-95, 901-2, 918. Florent’s sword enters Arageous at the shoulder bone and runs right through him down to “pappe,” which probably means into the generic chest area but could also be the more specific nipple. Either way, Florent’s sword goes through a considerable part of Arageous’s torso.

<sup>169</sup> Brock, *Morte Arthure*, 1111-3; 1120-3; 1129-31; 1178.

<sup>170</sup> See also Cohen, *Of Giants*, 71-4.

<sup>171</sup> Richardson, *Sir Eglamore*, 318, 331-5.

carries on fighting with his remaining hand, he eventually bleeds to death by sunset.<sup>172</sup> Even Marasse's "littill spotted hoglyn" is not exempt from this bloody mutilation.<sup>173</sup> The boar is first cleaved along his spinal cord, and then beheaded whereupon Eglamore impales the head on a spear and prominently displays it on the city walls.<sup>174</sup> Although decapitation is the common denomination in all of these instances, such a large catalogue of random dismembered Saracen appendages that litter the folios of Thornton's manuscripts should serve to demonstrate that, contrary to Cohen's assertions, romance was certainly not content with mere decapitation.<sup>175</sup>

Instead, these romances inform us that the body shaped by the soul that chooses to remain Saracen must not remain intact. However much the Christian *communitas* may wish to acquire physical attributes like Otuell's doughty might or Marsabelle's powerful desire, without the realignment of the soul towards Christianity these properties become actively dangerous. Like the Oriental animals that morph into threats once they are used in the service of human adversaries, these attributes must be deployed correctly. Man, or more precisely his sword, must do the work of physical reduction that God's grace was not given the opportunity to do. Decapitation, in Cohen's view, corrects or neutralises the societal transgressions of "excess, superfluity, and abnormal strength,"<sup>176</sup> but dismemberment has a more desperate role to play, and greater concerns than societal physical normativity.<sup>177</sup> It is not about physically cutting people down to a "normal" size. The brutal and bloody fragmentation of these resolutely Saracen bodies reminds us that the body that cannot, or will not, be absorbed

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 590-7.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 548.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 540-3. When he sees the boar's head on a spear sticking over the ramparts (eerily resonant of the heads of traitors), Marrasse vows that "By þe laye þat I leue in / My littil spotted hoglyn / Dere boghte þi dede sall be." Ibid., 547-9. The obvious associations with Christ, whose redemption of humanity through agonising death is frequently described as being "dearly bought," combined with Marasse's religious vow and the fact that Hoglyn is swine and therefore taboo for Muslims, make for a complex, and in places disturbing, scene. Vowing by Muhammad to avenge the death of a boar seems to imply both knowledge of Islamic custom and a desire to mock that custom (cf. Richard's pork cravings in *Richard, Coeur de Lion*).

<sup>175</sup> Cohen, *Of Giants*, 63.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>177</sup> D.S. King analyses the trope of Saracen dismemberment and its socio-political implications in D.S. King, "Mutilation and Dismemberment in the *Chanson de Roland*, a Question of Faith?" *Romance Notes* 45 (2005): 247-60, concluding that physical dismemberment has little to do with the religious leanings of the Saracens but instead is a reflection of their feudal treachery. Dismemberment or amputation was a common Germanic punishment for treason, betrayal, or *lèse-majesté*. Ibid., 258-9. However, the dismembered Saracens of the Thornton texts do not betray their liege lords. Nor, strictly speaking, do they fail to adhere to the Christian God as the majority of the incidents outlined here do not include a demand for conversion such as that which Roland demands from Otuell.

into the Christian *communitas* to support it must not be allowed to continue to bulk up the physical and political body Saracen.

**Conclusion: “Take a Sarazyne, Zonge and Fatt”**

This great concern over available body mass and the service to which it is put can be traced in the textual anxieties regarding blurring or leaching between Christian and Saracen. Although the earlier-discussed case of Clement’s charade results in Christian victory, both it and the parallel examples of Bevis and Guy demonstrate just how easy it is for a Christian to successfully inhabit an apparently Saracen body. Whilst the potential for Christians “going native” on crusade in the Holy Land had been greatly reduced by Thornton’s time, the literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reveals that this slippage between Christian and Saracen was acknowledged to flow both ways, and obviously remained a source of unease. In Thornton’s own texts *Sir Isumbras*, *King Richard*, *Alantyne of Milan*, *Roland*, *Oliver*, *Gawther*, and *Guy* (in *Sege of Melayne*) are all pressured to convert to Saracen-Islam, Isumbras with the promise of food when he is starving, Richard and Alantyne with the lure of territories, and the others with the threat of violence. Outside of the Thornton texts, Bevis is similarly pressed to convert by King Ermin of Armonie,<sup>178</sup> and Sir John Mandeville is given the twin incitements of sex and money to renounce Christianity by the Sultan of Babylon, who “wolde have y-weddid me to a greet princes doghter ful richely, if Y wolde have forsake my byleve.”<sup>179</sup> For the sake of diplomatic relations and a ceasefire, the princess in *King of Tars* goes one step farther and actually marries the sultan, pretending to adhere to Saracen-Islam until her lump son is born.<sup>180</sup> These narratives indulge the conceit that conversion from Christianity to Saracen-Islam would require some sort of serious push-pull factor, but nevertheless they acknowledge that such a conversion is perfectly possible and potentially even probable.

This threat of slippage has a dual function. Primarily it validates these resistant characters as good Christian knights, much like we saw with the killing of *Degrevant* and *Eglamore*’s distant anonymous Saracens. Secondly, however, it acts as a warning to the reader not to be seduced into sin, and to be a better Christian. The Mandeville

<sup>178</sup> Kölbing, *Beves of Hamtoun*, 531-4, 557-68.

<sup>179</sup> Kohanski and Benson, *John Mandeville*, 450-1.

<sup>180</sup> For analysis of the Princess’s actions see Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, 110-2.

example, especially, forms part of a larger literary theme that uses the supposedly “righteous heathen” to critique lax Christians.<sup>181</sup> Although they all remain faithful to Christianity, thus demonstrating its supremacy, the implication is that, were these men lesser in any way, they could easily give in to temptation and convert. As we saw above, the romances do at least gesture towards a need for realism and mimesis and so—whilst none of these scenes can precisely be called dramatic cliff-hangers—there has to be at least some possibility entertained that these characters could well reject Christianity. Indeed, in *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, we find the character of the traitor Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat who has succumbed to the lures of gold and has actually converted to Saracen-Islam.<sup>182</sup> The text is explicit on this matter: “He was Crystene ... / And sippen he has renayyd his lay, / And is becomen a Saraȝyn.”<sup>183</sup> Herein, then, lies the deep unease of romances concerning Saracens in their interactions with Christians, and what differentiates Saracens from other non-Christians such as Classical pagans. Saracen-Islam not only could deplete the Christian body in two ways, conversion and death, *but actively did*. Unlike Classical paganism, Saracen-Islam had a contemporary real-life presence; Islam was a living breathing religion during Thornton’s lifetime, and clearly constituted a threat of some variety. After all, Jerusalem had been in Muslim hands for over a century before Thornton was even born. On the one hand engagement was encouraged. Both Christians and Saracens were considered to be of the same clay and Saracens could be, in certain circumstances, successfully absorbed into the Christian body. On the other hand, though, this very simplicity engenders the realisation that a reversal of the process could be equally simple to facilitate, especially with the added temptation of worldly luxuries, power, or territories. Such a circumstance would entail not only eternal damnation for the soul of the individual concerned but crucially also a depletion of the Christian *communitas* and destruction of the Church body. Seen in this light, then, the potential for converting Saracens is grounded in something far stronger than mere wish-fulfilment or fantasies of Christian imperialism. There was

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<sup>181</sup> For more on this trope see Frank Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), particularly 45-55 which discuss Mandeville’s interactions with the Sultan of Babylon.

<sup>182</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 1297. The text describes him as a “treytour highte Markes Feraunt.” The historical Conrad, or Corrado, became Conrad I of Jerusalem in 1192 but was assassinated on 28 April of the same year. Although he certainly negotiated with Saladin and his forces, there is no historical record of any conversion to Islam. However, he was an open opponent of Richard’s campaign and of Gui de Lusignan, whom Richard supported. Jonathan S.C. Riley Smith, “Corrado, Marchese Di Monferrato,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 29 (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1983).

<sup>183</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 3255-7.

obviously a sense of deep uneasiness about the risks encountered with close Christian and Saracen engagement, but what stands out is that the desire to reinforce the Christian body is fulfilled in Thornton's texts through the medium of the human body, rather than through land. Although I imagine Thornton (or any other fifteenth-century Christian) would not have objected to Jerusalem being returned to Christian possession, what his manuscripts reveal is a desire for the people and their bodies rather than the place.

To conclude this chapter, it seems appropriate to turn to the final Saracens of the Thornton manuscripts: those of *Richard, Coeur de Lion*. In *Richard*, the themes of body and place are entwined, with Jerusalem as their locus. Whilst on crusade in the Holy Land, the English monarch is struck with a mysterious illness that can only be remedied by the satiation of his desperate craving for pork. Unable to find any available source of swine, Richard's steward is advised to "Take a Sarazyne, zonge and fatt" by a knowing old soldier as a suitable replacement.<sup>184</sup> The Saracen youth is promptly slain, boiled up, and presented to the king as a joint, accompanied by a highly seasoned soup. Richard instantly perks up; gobbling down the flesh and gnawing on the bones faster than the knight waiting upon him can carve the meat.<sup>185</sup> Our first concern is the old campaigner's initial instruction demanding a young and fat Saracen. Already the focus is on the physical state of the Saracen body. The qualification of "young and fat" combined with the tone of command gives the soldier's suggestion the register of a cookery book.<sup>186</sup> The Saracen youth is reduced to nothing more than fresh meat. His thoughts, his life, his desires, even his potential and skill as a warrior who could fight for the Christian cause, which in the case of Otuell were such a powerful attraction for Charlemagne's army, are utterly discounted.<sup>187</sup> What his body could do is irrelevant; it is enough that the body is wholly available for Richard's restoration. The Saracen youth's physicality becomes his sole source of meaning: he is only a body.

And this body, just like that of Otuell or of Christopher, is rapidly employed to serve the Christian cause. As the Saracen body is absorbed into the Christian physique, Richard makes a miraculous and instantaneous recovery. The implications of this

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<sup>184</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 3086.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 3107-10.

<sup>186</sup> McDonald, "Eating People," especially 135. For more on medieval recipe books see this thesis, 47.

<sup>187</sup> To continue the comparison with Otuell, it is worth briefly noting that the way in which this Saracen is reduced to bestial matter is far worse than in Otuell's case. This Saracen replaces a dead pig, a substitution that is obviously troubling on account of Muslim views with regard to pork. However, even in the Christian world the pig was not favoured. According to Isidore of Seville, the pig [*porcus*] takes its name from the Latin *spurcus*, or unclean, "for he gorges himself on filth, immerses himself in mud, and smears himself with slime." Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, XII.i.25.

rehabilitation for the longer term, though, are phenomenal. As Nicola McDonald notes: “eating people is an inspired resolution of the crusaders’ military ambitions and their alimentary needs ... All eaten up, the threat of the infidel is eradicated. Richard’s strategy of anthropophagic annihilation is horrifically brilliant.”<sup>188</sup> In one fell swoop Richard can defeat and deplete his enemies, and furnish his men with a ready food supply. In fact, as he later declares, “Wiþ oo Saraȝyn I may wel fede / Wel a nyne or a ten / Off my goode Crystene men.”<sup>189</sup> If we examine this episode in its manuscript context, we find a deeper significance than simply military strategy. There are instances of, and references to, anthropophagy throughout the London Thornton, as well as one scene in the Lincoln Thornton, all of which can be read as interlinked. In the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the giant of Mont-St-Michel barbecues infants. In *Siege of Jerusalem*, as was discussed in Chapter Two, Maria barbecues her own infant and attempts to ward off starvation by consuming him.<sup>190</sup> Richard, as we have just seen, dines on Saracens, and the text of *Verses on the Kings of England* specifically refers back to Richard’s alimentary choices.<sup>191</sup> Throughout both manuscripts there is a deep preoccupation with the Passion, which obviously engenders and is then subsequently evoked by the Eucharist. The key concern for us here is the episode from *Siege of Jerusalem*, principally for the Eucharist resonances. Both times in the city of Jerusalem, non-Christians have been unable to access the Eucharistic consumption that creates Christian identity. Maria ate her son but failed to gain salvation; the Saracen nobles simply failed to eat their sons. McDonald has indicated that the Saracens’ rejection of Richard’s feast, and their refusal—or perhaps inability—to consume “a morsell of brede, / Ne drynke no wyne,”<sup>192</sup> deliberately enforces Richard’s identity as a Christian king, whilst purposefully excluding the Saracens themselves.<sup>193</sup> As she states, Richard’s “holy anthropophagy (Saracen flesh consumed in the service of God) performs the same function as conventional Catholic theophagy.”<sup>194</sup> In Thornton’s textual world, though, with its deep awareness of the power that human consumption can have, as well as the concern over strengthening the Christian *communitas* by means of partaking in the Eucharist, Richard’s Christian identity gains even greater significance. His actions

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<sup>188</sup> McDonald, “Eating People,” 135.

<sup>189</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 3540-2.

<sup>190</sup> See this thesis, 141-3.

<sup>191</sup> MacCracken, *Lydgatiana Minor Poems II*, 714. All references to this text are by page number.

<sup>192</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 3631-2.

<sup>193</sup> McDonald, “Eating People,” 141-2.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

allow for an ideal method of dealing with the Saracen that refuses to join the Christian *communitas* as the Christian body can still be sustained and enlarged by Saracen bulk even though the Saracens in question have not actually converted. The final scenes of the romance present us with a Holy Land opened up for Christian pilgrimage; the few surviving Saracens so cowed by Richard's extreme warmongering that:

Cristyn men bothe ferre and nere  
 3ode the wayes to Jerusalem,  
 To the holy sepulcre & to Bedelem,  
 And to alle othir pilgremage,  
 Withowtten harme or any damage.<sup>195</sup>

Eschewing historical exactitude in favour of rampant Christian forces triumphing over Saladin's armies, metaphorically (and possibly even literally) swallowing all before them, *Richard, Coeur de Lion* closes with a fantasy of brief Christian supremacy over Saracen-Islam. It is not an accident that Thornton's explicit terms the text "The Romance of Kyng Richerd þe Conqueroure" rather than giving Richard the more standard sobriquet of "Coeur de Lion." In other words, Richard is the only one that gets this whole "eating people" thing right.

And yet, for all that McDonald claims the narrative endorses Richard's brilliant strategy "100 per cent,"<sup>196</sup> the anthropophagy is not greeted with entirely universal textual approbation. Indeed, it cannot be. Whereas we can find amusement in Marasse's mourning of his rampaging, murderous, horse-slaying, "littill spotted hoglyn," the reactions of the Saracen nobles when they are served their sons command our pity. In these final Saracens of the manuscript we find painted a far more nuanced and human portrait of religious others than at any other point in the entire body of text.<sup>197</sup> And it is important to remember that these Saracens at the feast do indeed remain Saracen. *Richard, Coeur de Lion* does not indulge in fantasies of mass conversion, merely those of mass slaughter. As I have discussed elsewhere, Thornton's rather black sense of humour is not perhaps always to twenty-first century taste, but even the text itself makes no joke of this scene. The Saracens are (one might say naturally) scared, but they do not cry from fear. They cry "Fore here frendes ... / Ðat þey hadde lost for

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<sup>195</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 6969-73.

<sup>196</sup> McDonald, "Eating People," 134.

<sup>197</sup> A positive depiction of the three Literary-Zoroastrian kings is found in *Three Kings of Cologne* but the kings are proto-Christians, which obviously impacts on their reception.



eueremore.”<sup>198</sup> At the same time as recognising the desire for Christian supremacy in one form or another, the text freely acknowledges that the Saracens are not always abhorrent monsters or the personification of evil. After all, if they were such monsters then how could they be of any positive use to the Christian *communitas*? The very fact that Richard is restored by Saracen soup introduces the potential of the Saracen body, but it is confirmed and validated by the physical manifestation, the tears and sighs, of their effectively “Christian” reaction in the (quite literal) face of loss. On a more personal level we are presented with both sides of the negotiation process; the Saracens return to Saladin and relate the events of the dinner, a narrative that is filled with references to their state of mind and their emotions. We learn that the Saracen spokesman “standes on awe for to lye,” or was struck with fear on seeing the first head arrive at the table.<sup>199</sup> After the names of the dead have been listed, the spokesman admits that “ylkon off vs hys eyen wypte, / ... / For sorwe þoo we gan to syke; / Vs þouȝte oure herte barst ryȝ insunder.”<sup>200</sup> He describes how they prayed to Mahoun to protect them; how they trembled in terror and how eventually they are in such a state that they actually confound the impulse of ingestion that drives the narrative: “Ther myghte nane ete a morsell of brede, / Ne drynke no wyne, noþer white ne rede; / So sore þan were we bysett with drede.”<sup>201</sup> In some respects we gain far greater access to the sentiments of the Saracens than we do to those of Richard, the romance’s eponymous protagonist. Though the narrative voice tells us of Richard’s mysterious sickness and his frequent bouts of anger, we are never granted deeper ingress into Richard’s character, and certainly not from the position of Richard himself. The dual narrative of the scene through the retelling additionally stresses the importance of this episode, as does its position in the very heart of the text. Although we will never know precisely why Thornton chose to include *Richard, Coeur de Lion* in his manuscripts, that act of inclusion enriched, broadened, and deepened Thornton’s overall perspective on the Saracens, revealing him to be capable of more sophisticated and nuanced interaction with religious others than we might have supposed from his choice of material concerning the Jews.

Of course, I am not trying to claim that these texts centring on Saracens promulgate ideas of universal brotherhood or religious tolerance. The Saracen body

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<sup>198</sup> Figueredo, *Richard, Coeur de Lion*, 3467-8.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 3586.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 3598-601.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 3631-3.

count of the Thornton manuscripts runs into hundreds of thousands of casualties and few, if indeed any, of those deaths are of natural causes. However, rather than an attitude of straightforward racist intolerance, of the kind we might recognise today in right-wing political literature and of the kind we saw exhibited towards the Jews, these texts display a different concern with a slightly different emphasis. The preoccupation with the physical Saracen form is not a crude form of estranging or demonising the Other, but rather a concern over the wasting of potential Christian matter. The emphasis on the physicality of the Saracen is potentially a concern over the physical military threat posed by the Muslims, but it also represents an anxiety that all this imperfectly aligned flesh that is theoretically capable of partaking of the same fulfilment through the Eucharist, the same satiation of spiritual hunger, and that could be deployed in the Christian cause is just out there running around without direction, informed by an untrue soul. Ideally one should indeed take a young and fat Saracen, but rather than turn him to soup one should convert him to Christianity. In the textual logic of the Thornton manuscripts, whether you convert the Saracen body, dismember it, eat it, or marry it, it's not what you've got; it's what you do with it that counts.

## CONCLUSION: FROM HEARTBURN TO HELLFIRE: A READER DIGESTS

### There's no taking trout with dry breeches<sup>1</sup>

We began with a trout, to wit, a smelly one. And whilst such an opening may not be traditional in studies of manuscript owners and their worlds, the trout is not there by chance, or just to add a whimsical piscine presence to the proceedings. We left it, quietly reeking, in Fossgate fish market, an English fish lying on a stall in the geographical centre of England's second city, sold to York's shoppers, to be consumed by Yorkshire mouths and for its bones to rot into the Yorkshire soil. The scene could not seem any more outwardly provincial. And yet, as we have seen continually throughout this thesis, where the trout lay was actually in the middle of a complex network of trade routes, concepts, images, material objects, imaginative constructs, literary texts, civic rituals, historical connotations and future endeavours that formed a rich and varied fusion of the foreign and the domestic. Our trout lay at the heart of the Yorkshire Oryent.

Thornton's North Riding had a sophisticated and sustained long-term engagement with Oryental material culture, one that was not founded exclusively on *curiositas*, or on the appeal of the unknown. There was considerable knowledge—both first and second hand—of the Oryent's products, and this knowledge was found throughout the varying strata of society on a regular basis. In Thornton's particular sphere the Oryent was present in books, in foodstuffs, in fabrics, in images, and in medicines. He could, and did, encounter the Oryent at the dining table and at the high altar; he found it in civic processions and he found it in church. More importantly, the Oryent was welcomed and encouraged in all of these locales. There was no generic fear or mistrust of it, at least in terms of the material culture. It is clear that the idea of the Oryent having some kind of exotic draw on the basis that it was further away than mainland Europe is simply invalid. Some Oryental products were accorded a certain level of status, but that was mostly for reasons of cost and value. Luxury Insular products were treated in a similar manner. Nor was there an exotic draw on the basis of scarcity or novelty. These products were both widespread and readily available, and had been for decades. In these cases the space that the material Oryent occupied was on a

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, vol. 2, trans. Charles Jervas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), 560.

level with English products, seamlessly integrated into the food chain, luxury textile market or medicine cabinet, with the edible Oryent literally sharing shelf space with home-grown items. As such, the ways in which we deal with Oryental and Insular interaction in the later Middle Ages require some serious rethinking. The material Oryent was not being othered or distanced in some way. Instead it was being grabbed with both hands and actively engaged with. It was being melded, without necessarily being neutralised or domesticated, into the fabric of the North Riding.

As well as occupying a space in the cupboard or on the misericord, the Oryent also took up a space in the mind, as we saw with regard to the Saracens. The Saracen body was clearly understood as being an object of desire, to be metaphorically hungered after and then devoured and consumed, although actively ingesting it would have proved a step too far. Thornton may have enjoyed the feigned anthropophagy of Arthur's guests munching on their "tartes of Turkey," but he was unable to stomach Richard gorging on the flower of Saracen nobility. Although the theme of conversion in the manuscripts is played out conceptually, Thornton's books are not devoid of pragmatism. The Saracen body could be killed just as easily as it could be converted and absorbed into the body of the Church. It was viewed—if not precisely with approbation—then with some level of acceptance. The Saracens had the potential to be integrated fully into Christian society, much like the material culture of the Oryent. Nevertheless, they also had the potential to be as reviled and loathed as the Jews, depending on the manner in which they reacted to the idea of conversion. The idea of a homogenous heathen soup, where any religious other acts indiscriminately as a place-keeper for any other religious other does not apply in Thornton's socio-cultural milieu. In fact, there was not even a uniform response to members of the same faith. Saracens could (and did) vary in their reception, according to whether they had converted, were noble, or had rejected the opportunity of salvation through Christian conversion.<sup>2</sup> Instead, what emerges from this thesis is the idea of a spectrum of Oryentalism and, consequently, an exceedingly aware, informed and discretionary public. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Part of this variety may have been that the tensions between Christians and contemporary Muslims were current and active. The narrative of Christian-Muslim interrelations could develop and be rewritten. Unfortunately for Judeo-Christian relations, the perceived crime of killing Jesus had already been committed and could not be altered. Interestingly enough, there seems to have been no discrimination based on colour or physicality; it was only religion that got in the way. The physical aspect of the Saracen does alter with conversion in these texts, but these mutations can be understood to function metaphorically.

particularly this latter point that we need to bear in mind when rethinking the position of the Oryent in late medieval England.

This spectrum ranged from the highly acceptable material substances such as saffron (that would eventually be so integrated as to be cultivated on English soil), through the conceptualised Saracens, who were welcome in certain circumstances, to the extremely unacceptable Jews—both literal and literary—who had been banished from the realm and who were to be written into oblivion by texts such as *Siege* at every opportunity. The Jews were found at the far end of the Oryental spectrum, and were not physically welcome in the North Riding. In fact, there is very strong evidence to suggest that Thornton saw himself and his scribal activities as participating in an anti-Judaic crusade, metaphorically killing Jews through his literary actions. Unlike the Saracens, or contemporary Muslims who were in a position to have a fresh narrative or to forge new memories, the Jews were always hidebound by their Biblical past and—at least in York—by the memories of the twelfth century. In some ways, the fact that the Jews had already been on England's soil meant that they could not safely return. Crucially, there was hatred of the Jews across the temporal span: it was both the Biblical Jews and the Jews of twelfth-century England whose suffering was evoked. As we saw with regard to the Jewish babies, the sins of the fathers were most definitely being visited on the sons and, given the emphasis that the London Thornton texts place on scribal compilation activity and textual circulation, we can assume that the situation was unlikely to change any time soon.

However, it is important to stress that this hatred of the Jews was not undertaken lightly or blindly. As discussed earlier, this audience was informed and discretionary. Texts such as *Siege of Jerusalem* demonstrate that there was considerable effort invested in reflecting upon the Jews' position, just as there was with regard to the Saracens. The civic endeavour and labour tied up in the *Corpus Christi Plays* reveal the value of Jerusalem and parts of Jewish history to fifteenth-century audiences; simultaneously the plays reveal the ways in which any place the Jews might have had in late medieval York were completely erased. Christianity triumphed totally. We know that certain historical Jews did meet with a degree of recognition and welcome after the 1290 Edict of Expulsion; Roger de Stanegrave's tomb in Stonegrave Minster (rather than an unmarked grave somewhere in Cairo) is itself a witness to Judeo-Christian cooperation in the North Riding, but the specifics seem to have been lost in broader, though deeply considered, anti-Judaic feeling. A major incongruence lies between the

reception accorded to the Oryental material culture and that accorded the Jews and the memory of the Jews. York was actively embracing the Biblical history, the future as a New Jerusalem, the imagined geography, and the material culture of the Oryent, but was just as actively doing its best to obliterate the Jewish people.

The second important conclusion we can draw from the evidence found in Thornton's cultural milieu is that engagement with the Oryent was not played out in some imagined and distant Oryental landscape. Yorkshire's landscape had a large role to play. The enterprise of land-grabbing wish-fulfilment that scholars have seen in some romances is—for the most part—absent from Thornton's texts.<sup>3</sup> Those Christians who, like Sir Degrevant and Percyvell, do head east do not recapture Jerusalem and build a Christian kingdom. They die. Even Richard's occupation and the uneasy truce that grants Christian access to Jerusalem is only transitory. The sacked Jerusalem of *Siege* is not re-peopled or inhabited. It is abandoned. Thornton's texts do not push Western Christendom into the Oryent. Instead, through figures such as Otuell and Marsabelle, they actively pull the Oryent west. I noted in Chapter Three that Thornton did not want the Oryent's lands, only its people. For an explanation of this circumstance we need only look to his actions that we saw in Chapter Two. Thornton was a man of the North Riding. He already had the land. As his endeavours with *Siege* demonstrated, and as the entire civic populace of York was ready to confirm, the principal seat of God's Own County was ready and waiting to be a new Jerusalem.

York regularly conjured the historical Oryent through geographical transubstantiation and became Jerusalem, but in fifteenth-century Yorkshire terms. The Biblical narratives were configured and updated to fill contemporary patterns of civic living and civic behaviour. The imagined Oryental land itself, as well as the tangible material culture of that land, was so acceptable to York's inhabitants that they took on great financial and time commitments in order to recast the city as the Holy Land. The *Corpus Christi Plays* were an extremely important civic undertaking and the centrality of the Holy Land to their staging cannot be underestimated. They imbued York with a divine past, but simultaneously gave that past historical narrative a Yorkshire present. To that present, Thornton then added a Yorkshire future. Most importantly, both this present and the future included Oryental material culture, and potentially Oryental peoples. Conversion of the Saracens followed by acceptance of the new Christians is a

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Vincent DiMarco and Carolyn Collette, "The Matter of Armenia in the Age of Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 317-58, and Akbari, "Incorporation," 22-44.

major theme throughout the manuscripts, and it is worth remembering that the final Saracens of the London Thornton are those with whom a truce and peace have been reached. We may never know for certain, but a converted Saracen may well have been welcomed to the North Riding with open arms, right before he were seated on a silk cushion, fed trout in *sawse Sarzine* and then offered almonds to ease his postprandial heartburn.

When we set out through the damp streets of late medieval York, it was to provide insight into the cultural moment and social sphere of Robert Thornton, and the place that the Oryent occupied within that moment. We have tracked his engagement with the Oryent and its people through his cultural environment, walking in his footsteps and moving through his world. We have travelled from the heartburn-curing almonds that Thornton munched in East Newton Hall to the Saracen priest who escaped the fires of Hell to convert to Christianity. We have encountered the Oryent being nibbled, consumed, swallowed, devoured, and even spat out again. The full spectrum of the Oryent, from the ginger and cinnamon in Gryssop's shop and the conspicuously consumed silks of the bishops to the barbecued Jewish infant and the chubby Saracen youths we saw ingested in the folios of the London codex, found a place in Robert Thornton's milieu.

Thornton's sphere embraced the Oryent as being hugely beneficial, from the gastronomic delights on sale in Gryssop's shop to the reviled Jews of *Siege*. Some parts of the spectrum offered pain relief; others, even through rejecting them, offered redemption. Effectively Thornton and his circle could not lose. Furthermore, the Christianity expressed in these tales of Jews and Saracens is not some grim and dour Church Militant, struggling against a wall of evil, sin, and oppression formed by Christianity's opponents. The Oriental aspects of Thornton's texts offer us instead a Church Bellicose but Jocular, revelling in the gore and violence and gleefully enjoying the black humour and dark jokes. The Oryent allowed Thornton not only to cure his heartburn, flavour his dinner, and bedeck his halls, but also to read salacious material; he could read violent, funny, and witty literature, and still gain benefits in the afterlife at the same time. Jews and Saracens allowed Thornton the perfect excuse to delight in images such as the ballistic baby and the decapitated Saracen heads from *Percyvell* bouncing "als dose haylestones." Mary Michele Poellinger has previously indicated that the close congruence between military and affective piety imagery in Thornton's texts meant that he could use the martial narratives, particularly the Alliterative *Morte*

*Arthure*, as part of his devotional practice.<sup>4</sup> However the reverse holds true as well. Reading the devotional literature in light of the romances means that the former texts became another arena where Thornton could watch the good fight, and relish it, rather than actually having to fight it. Bloodlust and black humour were completely legitimised. Thornton's was no priggish piety; instead the Oryental elements of his manuscripts tell us that he had access to an exciting, robust, and enjoyably hearty Christianity. The Yorkshire Oryent provided a space in which Robert Thornton, as an orthodox Christian, could have some fun.

Yet the Oryent was not simply a playground for Thornton. As fun and lively as these aspects may have seemed to the North Riding gentry, they were not blithely taken at face value. The bellicose side cannot simply be glossed over as an inconvenient truism. Thornton's armchair crusading may have involved chuckling over the rascalion Jesus in *Ypokrephum* but it was no less earnest an endeavour for that. There is nothing casual about the anti-Semitism of these texts, or the fierce impulse of dismemberment enacted on the Saracens who will not convert. As horrendous as it sounds, Thornton and his circle took dead baby jokes very seriously indeed. And yet, it is this evident digesting of the material, this thinking through concepts, and this intense engagement with the Oryent on all levels that gave Thornton's Yorkshire Oryent its richness and its depth. Oryental material played a large and complex role in Thornton's cultural milieu; it fed him; it clothed him; it entertained him; it healed him spiritually and it healed him physically. The Oryent played a major role in his life. He truly lived in a Yorkshire Oryent, a world where east met west on a far deeper, more regular, and engaged basis than has previously been acknowledged, and where the two united to form a colourful, exciting, and cosmopolitan environment. It offered him redemption; it offered him entertainment; it affected him on a daily basis. More importantly, he and his circle were aware that the Oryent did all these things. Thornton's York had yet to build Blake's "dark, Satanic Mills," but, as we have seen, Thornton was already very consciously engaged in building his own Jerusalem in a green, pleasant Yorkshire Oryent.

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Michele Poellinger, "The Rosselde Spere to his Herte Rynnes: Religious Violence in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript," in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 157-75.



## APPENDIX ONE: THE CONTENTS OF THE THORNTON MANUSCRIPTS<sup>1</sup>

**Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 (the Lincoln Thornton). 321 ff.**

### **Booklet 1 (Quires A-C; ff.1-52)**

1. The Prose *Alexander* (unique)
2. Latin notations concerning the birth of Thornton's grandson. Originally blank.
3. *Prognostications of Thunder*
4. Folio originally blank, now bearing later pen trials.
5. *Lamentacio Peccatoris*
6. Sketch of a knight and a slaughtered horse, based on a scene from the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*.

### **Booklet 2 (Quires D-K; ff. 53-178)**

7. Scribal notation, possibly including the motto of the Percy family.
8. The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (unique)
9. Scribal signature in couplet form.
10. *Octavian* (Northern version)
11. *Sir Isumbras*
12. Latin aphorism (unique)
13. *The Earl of Toulous* (MS: *The Romance off Dyoclicyane*)
14. *Vita Sancti Cristofori* (unique)
15. *Sir Degrevant*
16. *Sir Eglamour of Artois*
17. *De Miraculo beate Marie* (unique)
18. *Lyarde* (unique)
19. *Thomas of Erceldoune*
20. *Awntyrs off Arthure*
21. *Sir Percyvell of Gales* (unique)
22. *Thornton Toothache Charm* (unique)
23. *Three Good Brothers Charm* (unique)

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<sup>1</sup> This list is based on Susanna Fein, "The Contents of Robert Thornton's Manuscripts," 13-66 but the titles are those used throughout this thesis, which are predominantly those accorded the works by their editors. In case where the work has no title and no other manuscript witnesses are known then I have followed Fein's nomenclature. Any major variations between the manuscript titles and scholarly use are noted. See also this thesis, 7-8, n.3.

24. *Latin Toothache Charm* (unique)
25. *Epistola Sancti Salvatoris* (unique)
26. *O crux Christi* (unique)
27. Prologue and occasions for *Prayer for Deliverance*
28. *Prayer for Deliverance*
29. *Lady for Thy Joys Five*
30. *Prayer on Mary's Five Joys* (unique)
31. *A Meritous Collect* (unique)
32. *Adoro te crucem* (unique)
33. *Prayer on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost* (unique)
34. *Sancta Maria mater Cristi* (unique)
35. *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus* (unique)
36. *O virtutum Domine* (unique)

**Booklet 3 (Quires L-P; ff.179-279)**

37. Latin prose of one line invoking the Trinity (unique).
38. *The Privity of the Passion*
39. English verse of three lines in a hand other than Thornton's (unique)
40. William of Nassyngton's *Tractatus de Trinitate et Unitate*
41. *Lord God Jesus Christ, God Almighty*
42. *Almighty God in Trinity*
43. *Lord God All-Wielding*
44. *Jesus That Diede on the Rood for the Love of Me*
45. *Jesus of Whom All True Love Springs* (unique)
46. Richard Rolle's *Oleum effusum in English*
47. Richard Rolle's *A Tale of Hampole's Temptation*
48. *Jesus the Son of the Glorious Virgin* (unique)
49. Richard Rolle's *Deus noster refugium* (unique)
50. *Ihesu nostra redempcio amor* (unique)
51. Richard Rolle's *Imperfect Contrition* (unique)
52. Richard Rolle's *True Contrition*
53. Richard Rolle's *The Bee and the Stork*
54. Richard Rolle's *A Woman Enclosed for Love of Christ* (unique)
55. Richard Rolle's *Meliora sunt* (unique)
56. Richard Rolle's *O quam delectabile* (unique)

57. Richard Rolle's *Commentary on the Decalogue* (Shorter Version; unique)
58. Richard Rolle's *Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*
59. Scribal prayer-couplet in Latin (unique)
60. Richard Rolle's *Desire and Delight*
61. *The Mirror of Saint Edmund*
62. *Tract on the Lord's Prayer* (unique)
63. *Jesus Christ Saint Mary's Son* (unique)
64. *Father and Son and Holy Ghost*
65. *Prayer to Christ* (unique)
66. *Adoro te piissime Ihesu* (unique)
67. *O crux frutex* (unique)
68. Latin prayer invoking Jesus, concluding with scribal couplet (unique)
69. *When Adam Delved*
70. *Jesus Christ, Have Mercy on Me* (unique)
71. *John Gaytryge's Sermon*
72. *Jesus Thy Sweetness*
73. Walter Hilton's *Of Angels' Song*
74. Richard Rolle's *Thy Joy Be in the Love of Jesus*
75. Richard Rolle's *All Vanities Forsake*
76. Walter Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life*
77. Walter Hilton's *Epistle of Salvation*
78. *Hymn to Saint John the Evangelist* (unique)
79. *On Prayer*
80. *Holy Boke Gratia Dei*
81. *A Revelation Respecting Purgatory*
82. *Miserere meus deus*
83. *Veni creator spiritus*
84. *Saint Jerome's Psalter*
85. *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*
86. *Extract from Prick of Conscience*
87. Later addition of a trial alphabet. Column originally blank.
88. *Gaude flore virgenali* (unique)
89. *Gaude virgo mater Cristi* (unique)
90. *Benedicto et claritas* (unique)

91. *Tuam crucem adoramus Domine* (unique)
92. *Domine Ihesu Criste Fili Dei* (unique)
93. Scribal composition of two lines, invoking Vulgate Psalm 50 (unique)
94. *Crucem coronam spiniam* (unique)
95. Latin prayer-couplet (unique)
96. *A Preyere to þe Wounde in Crystis Syde* (unique)
97. *Earth upon Earth*
98. *For the Sciatica* (unique)

**Booklet 4 (Quires Q-R; ff. 280-321)**

99. *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* (unique)
100. Fragmentary *Thornton's Herbal*

**London, British Library MS Additional 31042 (the London Thornton). ff. 179.**

**Booklet 1 (Quires a-b; ff. 3-32)**

1. Extract from the *Cursor Mundi*
2. Connecting bridge between extracts from the *Cursor Mundi*. Possibly Thornton's own composition. (unique)
3. Extract from the *Cursor Mundi*

**Booklet 2 (Quires c-e; ff. 33-96)**

4. *The Northern Passion*
5. *Amen, Amen, per Charite* (unique)
6. *The Siege of Jerusalem*
7. Latin scribal signature composed as a couplet (unique)
8. *Sege of Melayne* (unique)
9. John Lydgate's *O Florum Flos*
10. *The Romance of Duke Rowland and of Sir Otuell of Spayne* (unique)
11. Aborted copy of John Lydgate's *Complaint That Christ Makes of His Passion*
12. Fragmentary Nativity carol, in a later hand
13. Fragmentary Passion carol, in a later hand
14. John Lydgate's *Complaint That Christ Makes of His Passion*
15. John Lydgate's *Verses on the Kings of England*
16. John Lydgate's *Dietary*
17. Latin aphorism

- 18. Latin aphorism
- 19. Latin aphorism
- 20. *Song: This werlde es tournede vp so downne* (unique)

**Booklet 3 (Quire f; ff. 98-124)**

- 21. *Quatrefoil of Love*
- 22. *Prayer to the Guardian Angel*
- 23. *Paraphrase of Vulgate Psalm 45* (unique)
- 24. John Lydgate's *Virtues of the Mass*
- 25. Latin aphorism (unique)
- 26. *The Rose of Ryse* (unique)
- 27. *The Three Kings of Cologne* (unique)
- 28. *Cantus Cuisdam Sapientis (A Lovely Song of Wisdom)*
- 29. *Song: How Pat Mercy Passeth Rightwisnes*
- 30. *Song: How Mercy Comes Bifore*
- 31. *Song: How Mercy Passeth Alle*

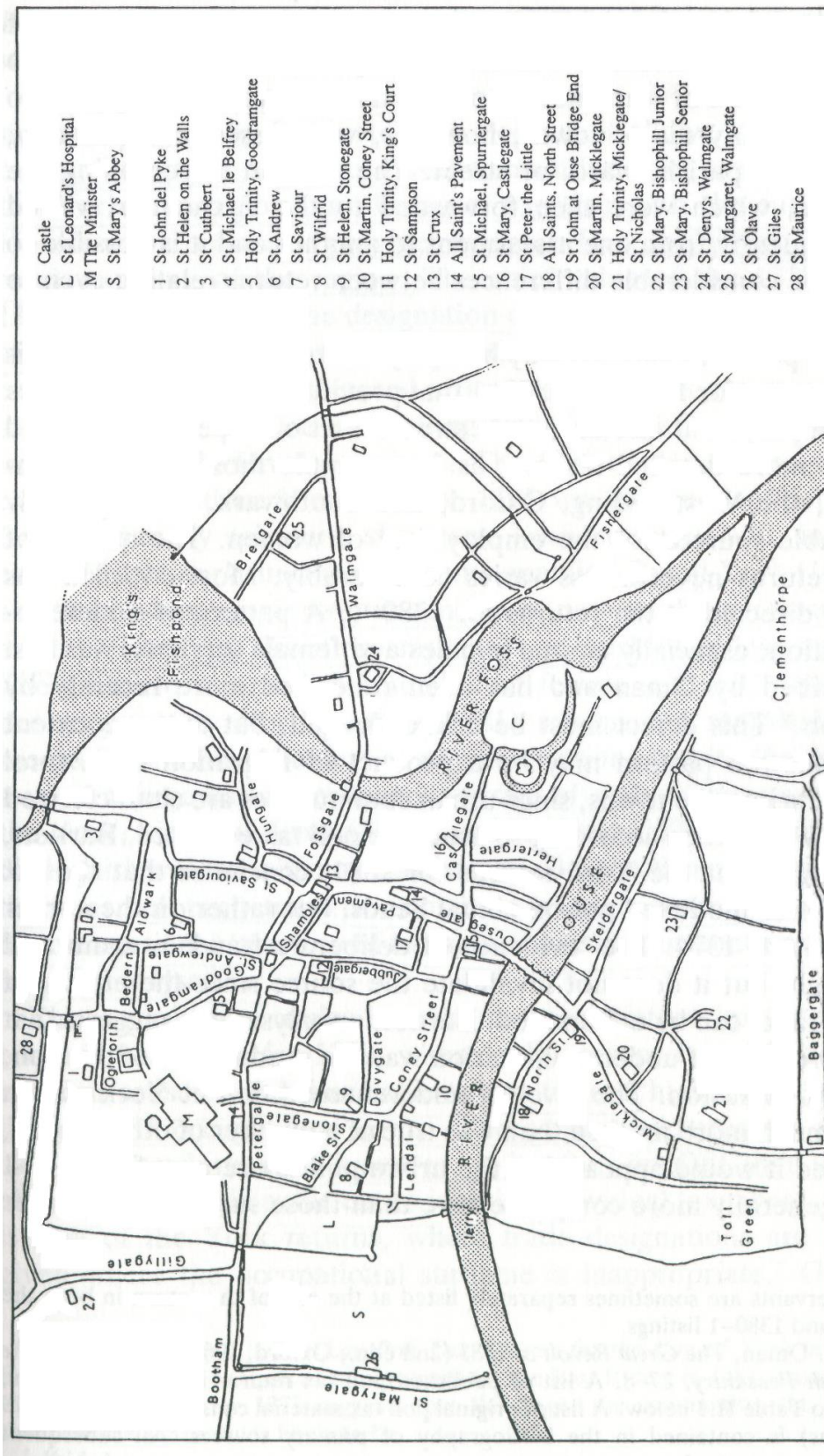
**Booklet 4 (Quires g-h; ff. 125-68)**

- 32. *Richard, Coeur de Lion* (MS: *The Romance of Kyng Richerd þe Conqueroure*)
- 33. *Ypokrephum* (MS: *The Romance of the Childhode of Ihesu Criste*)

**Booklet 5 (Quire i; ff. 169-81)**

- 34. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*
- 35. *Wynnere and Wastoure* (unique)

APPENDIX TWO: MAP OF YORK IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 41.

APPENDIX THREE: INVENTORY OF THOMAS GRYSSOP'S SHOP<sup>1</sup>

Item	Quantity	Total Value			Place of Origin <sup>2</sup>
		£	s	d	
Brabant cloth	37 ells	-	13	10½	Brabant
Brabant cloth	38.5 ells	-	12	8	Brabant
Brabant cloth	44 ells	-	15	9	Brabant
Brabant cloth	19 ells	-	7	11	Brabant
Brabant cloth	7.5 ells	-	6	8	Brabant
Brabant cloth	26.25 ells	-	13	9	Brabant
Chaumpan cloth	26.25 ells	-	14	6½	Champagne, France
Chaumpan cloth	44 ells and 4 quarters	1	8	-	Champagne, France
Chaumpan cloth	22.5 ells	-	18	9	Champagne, France
Lawn	5 plights	-	2	6	
Lawn	7 plights	-	3	6	
Lawn	7.75 plights	-	3	9½	
Lawn	13.25 plights	-	13	3	
Lawn	2 half pieces	1	6	8	
Lawn	5 plights	-	8	4	
Lawn	4.25 plights	-	6	8	
Lawn	8.75 plights	1	6	3	
Umple <sup>3</sup>	6.5 ells	-	7	-	
Umple	5 ells	-	3	4	
Umple	2 ells	-	3	4	
Blue bocasin <sup>4</sup>	3 pieces plus				
Green bocasin	1 piece	1	-	-	
Bocasin	3 pieces and 3 ells	-	16	8	

<sup>1</sup> This information is adapted from Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 569-71, collated with J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia, or Wills Registered at York*, vol. 3, Surtees Society 45 (Durham City: Andrews and Co., 1865), 101-5, with origins given where possible, and glosses provided from *MED*.

<sup>2</sup> All places of origin are given as approximate, or as the location originally signified by the item. Where possible the modern name and state is given. In some cases, such as Brabant for example, this designation is not possible as the medieval state is now part of several modern countries. "Tartary" is understood to be the vast region stretching from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

<sup>3</sup> A fine linen cloth

<sup>4</sup> A cotton cloth, resembling taffeta, often used for linings

Fustian <sup>5</sup>	1 piece	1	4	-	
Fustian	0.5 piece	-	6	-	
Fustian	1 piece and 3 ells	-	13	3	
Fustian remnant	8.5 ells	-	2	6	
Tartarin <sup>6</sup>	1 piece	1	-	-	“Tartary”
Black buckram <sup>7</sup>	1 piece	-	1	8	
Buckram	4 ells	-	1	4	
Tartarin	1 ell	-	1	8	“Tartary”
Tartarin	remnant	-	-	6	“Tartary”
Red leather	36	-	9	-	
Cushion cloth	24.5	-	6	3	
Lewyn	120	-	15	-	Leuven, Belgium
Lined Lewyn	120	1	10	-	Leuven, Belgium
Lewyn	60	-	15	-	Leuven, Belgium
Single Lewyn	12	-	1	3	Leuven, Belgium
Fustian	8 ells	-	3	4	
Lewyn store	43 ells	-	5	-	Leuven, Belgium
Table cloth	1 plus				
Towels	2	-	4	-	
Pauteners of Dornet <sup>8</sup>	4	-	2	8	Tournai, Belgium
Skin of senys leather <sup>9</sup>	2	-	-	8	Seine region, France
White paper	1 ream	-	1	-	
Black paper	1 ream	-	-	8	
London chest	4	-	2	8	London, England
Book of paper	1	-	-	8	
Glass	6	-	-	4	
Powder box	2	-	-	2	
Ink horn	11	-	-	11	
Black skin	1	-	-	1	

<sup>5</sup> A coarse cloth, typically made from a mix of cotton and flax

<sup>6</sup> See this thesis, 58.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> A small bag, pouch, wallet, or purse from Doornik, now known as Tournai

<sup>9</sup> Leather from the Seine region of France



Roan skin	1	-	-	1	
Spectacles	1	-	1	8	
Cheverell gloves <sup>10</sup>	12	-	2	4	
Cordwainer's skin	2	-	-	4	
Pruce pautener	1	-	-	3	Prussia
Barber's mirror	2	-	-	2	
Red thread	0.5 lbs	-	-	8	
London purse	2	-	-	8	London, England
Old tissue <sup>11</sup>	-	-	-	6	
Thread girdles	-	-	-	3	
Red purses	-	-	-	3	
Bairn's pouch <sup>12</sup>	-	-	-	11	
Red purse	4	-	-	3	
Pair of gloves	2	-	-	3	
Yellow leather pautener	1	-	-	1	
Vessel of copper gilt <sup>13</sup>	1	-	-	6	
Pointels <sup>14</sup>	-	-	-	4	
Tin chapes <sup>15</sup>	36	-	-	6	
Herte of jet <sup>16</sup>	-	-	-	4	
Latten rings and ulyettes <sup>17</sup>	-	-	-	6	
Chyne <sup>18</sup>	12	-	-	6	
Red purse	6	-	-	6	

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<sup>10</sup> Kid leather

<sup>11</sup> A rich cloth interwoven with silver or gold

<sup>12</sup> A pouch for children

<sup>13</sup> Stell lists this item as "copper gold" with no gloss. The original entry is for "coper golde," which is presumably a vessel of some kind. Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia III*, 102. The inventory of Henry Bowet lists "a cross of copper gilt" [*una cruce de copir deaurato*] and so, especially given the low value, this item is probably a vessel of copper gilt, rather than a cup or a copper (like a washing copper) of gold. See Stell, *Probate Inventories*, 539 and Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia III*, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Spear points

<sup>15</sup> The metal, in this case tin, plate of a scabbard

<sup>16</sup> A heart-shaped ornament made from jet

<sup>17</sup> Rings and armour studs of latten, a yellow metal alloy similar to brass

<sup>18</sup> Chain, presumably chain links as opposed to chain metal

Pair of lined pruce gloves for men	2	-	-	6	Prussia
Single gloves	6	-	-	4	
Pair of gloves	2	-	-	2	
Coveracles <sup>19</sup>	-	-	2	-	
White sheepskin	1	-	-	3	
Small coveracle	3	-	-	3½	
Lacing-points <sup>20</sup>	60	-	-	5	
Bocasin	1.25 ells	-	-	6	
Black paper book	7	-	-	10	
Grey skin	2	-	-	3	
Chaplet <sup>21</sup>	3	-	1	-	
Red cap	5	-	2	6	
Bonnet cap	8	-	2	-	
Lined bonnet	5	-	3	4	
Paper	3 quires	-	-	9	
Lined cap for chaplains	2	-	3	4	
Men's bonnet	3	-	3	-	
Unlined priests' cap	6	-	2	-	
Lined priests' cap	2	-	1	6	
Single priests' cap	12	-	4	-	
Pouch	2	-	-	4	
Bonnet	6	-	1	6	
Red purse	6	-	-	9	
Naperon tabbes <sup>22</sup>	-	-	1	-	
Small cloth of gold purse (worn)	3	-	-	4	
Point	48	-	-	4	
Kell <sup>23</sup>	5	-	-	7½	

<sup>19</sup> A lid or cover for a vessel

<sup>20</sup> A tagged lace or cord, much like a modern treasury tag, for lacing clothing together, especially the hose and doublet

<sup>21</sup> A headband or diadem, sometimes worn as a badge of office

<sup>22</sup> Apron strings

Paper	6 lbs	-	-	9	
Small Flanders chest	1	-	-	2	Flanders
Painted paper	12	-	4	-	
Towel of twill	1	-	-	10	
Canvas	4.5 ells	-	-	9	
Canvas pokes <sup>24</sup>	-	-	-	6	
Canvas	3.5 ells	-	-	7	
Poke	1	-	-	4	
Canvas	1.25 ells	-	-	3	
Canvas	5 ells	-	-	7½	
Canvas	2 ells	-	-	5	
Pack-cloth	1, measuring 4 ells	-	-	5	
Canvas	1.5 ells	-	-	2	
Painted paper	8	-	2	2	
Old pack-cloth	1	-	-	3	
Lewyn	4 ells	-	-	4	Leuven, Belgium
Canvas	1	-	-	1	
Old pack-cloth	1	-	-	2	
Pack-cloth	1	-	-	2	
Rosary	3	-	-	1	
Dog leash	2	-	-	3	
Black bocasin					
pautener	1	-	-	2	
Horn	12	-	1	10	
Spice plate	1	-	-	3	
Stock-balances and					
lead	1	-	-	2	
Pair of bone knives	5	-	2	-	
Pair of Doncaster					
knives	5	-	2	11	Doncaster, England
Pair of Doncaster					

<sup>23</sup> A net, or cowl, for the hair

<sup>24</sup> A bag or small sack

knives	12	-	12	-	Doncaster, England
Chest	1	-	-	9	
Belt of London ware	1	-	-	2	London, England
Images	14	-	-	7	
Trenchers	1 stock	-	-	10	
Woman's cap	1	-	-	6	
Standing cap for boys	1	-	-	1½	
Small bonnet	1	-	-	1	
Locker	2	-	-	5	
Ballock-purse <sup>25</sup>	2	-	-	2	
Purse of halfpennyware	6	-	-	2	
Red girdle	7	-	-	3	
Black girdle	3	-	-	4	
Girdle	3	-	-	2	
Pair of balances bound in black leather	1	-	-	4	
Mirror of halfpennyware	60	-	-	9	
Comb	6	-	-	1½	
Cologne raisins <sup>26</sup>	64	1	-	-	Greece
Cloves	4 lbs	-	9	4	Maluku Islands, Indonesia
Mace	6 lbs	-	16	-	Banda Islands, Indonesia
Galingale	4.5 lbs	-	5	4	Thailand
Ginger	2.75 lbs	-	2	9	China / south-east Asia
Ginger	1.25 lbs	-	1	-	China / south-east Asia
Green ginger	1 barrel, weighing 31 lbs	1	11	-	China / south-east Asia
Pot for green ginger	8	-	-	8	

<sup>25</sup> A purse resembling the scrotum of an animal

<sup>26</sup> Raisins, more usually known as Corinth raisins, from Greece

Pot for green ginger	4	-	-	4	
Powdered ginger	2 lbs	-	2	-	China / south-east Asia
Pepper	95 lbs	2	15	6	India / Sri Lanka
Galingale	6 lbs	-	7	-	Thailand
Saunders	1 lb	-	1	-	Indian sub-continent
Ginger and cinnamon mix	2 lbs	-	2	-	Sri Lanka / China
Sugar	4 lbs	-	4	-	Arabian peninsula
Casson sugar <sup>27</sup>	1 lb	-	-	6	Arabian peninsula
Powdered ginger	2 lbs	-	2	-	China / south-east Asia
Galingale	2 lbs	-	2	4	Thailand
Cinnamon	2 lbs	-	2	4	Sri Lanka
Saffron	3 lbs	1	16	-	Greece / Iran
Saffron	5 oz	-	4	-	Greece / Iran
Powdered cinnamon	2 lbs	-	1	8	Sri Lanka
Powdered cinnamon	1 lb	-	1	-	Sri Lanka
Powdered cinnamon and saunders mix	6oz	-	-	9	Indian sub-continent
Black skin	12	-	4	-	
Paper	2 reams	-	6	8	
Dornik pautener	16	-	10	8	Tournai, Belgium
Felt hat	36	1	1	-	
Lined horseman's gloves	12	-	5	6	
Black gloves for women	24	-	5	-	
Pair of lined cheverell gloves for men	6	-	2	6	
Black ray band	12	-	1	4	
Roan purse for women	6	-	1	3	

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<sup>27</sup> Lump sugar

Pautener	3	-	2	-	
Fringes	-	-	2	-	
True-love purse <sup>28</sup>	7	-	-	9½	
Swan-wing purse <sup>29</sup>	8	-	3	4	
Cheverell skin	11	-	2	4	
Embroidered purse	6	-	2	6	
Pair of leather gloves for women	9	-	1	6	
Pair of cheverell gloves	3	-	-	4½	
Points	864	-	10	-	
Points	288	-	2	8	
Points	432	-	2	-	
Points	132	-	-	11	
Points	144	-	1	8	
Pair of women's fur-lined gloves	10	-	2	6	
Pair of men's gloves trimmed with grey fur	2	-	3	-	
Large glass	2	-	-	6	
Pruce coffer	1	-	2	2	Prussia
Otter skin	3	-	1	8	
New Year gift	288	-	2	-	
Silk ribbons	7oz	-	8	2	Potentially China
Tissue	8.5oz	-	19	10	
Vessels	-	-	-	6	
Ivory combs	4oz	-	2	-	Scandinavia
Lawn	2 plights	-	2	-	
Latten herte <sup>30</sup>	36	-	-	6	
Cotton roll	4 ells	-	2	8	

<sup>28</sup> A purse decorated with a design that symbolised the Trinity

<sup>29</sup> A purse made from a swan's wing

<sup>30</sup> A heart-shaped ornament made from latten

London chest	7	-	5	3	London, England
Sytterdenar box <sup>31</sup>	10	-	1	3	Sittard, Netherlands
London glass	6	-	-	4	London, England
Warry shell <sup>32</sup>	7	-	-	7	
Mazer shell <sup>33</sup>	1	-	2	-	
Writing paper	1 ream and 3 quires	-	4	1	
Paper book	12	-	1	5	
Lined cap for chaplains	9	-	15	-	
Lawe bonnet <sup>34</sup>	6	-	7	-	
Bonnet	5	-	5	10	
Lined cap for chaplains	6	-	6	-	
Lined cap for chaplains	5	-	5	10	
Bonnet	12	-	10	-	
Bonnet	12	-	10	-	
Lined cap for chaplains	12	-	8	-	
Grained red cap	12	-	8	-	
Bonnet (various colours)	84	1	3	6	
Bairn's cap	24	-	5	-	
Bonnet	18	-	5	3	
Lined bonnet	7	-	4	8	
Lined bonnet	3	-	3	6	
Lined cap for chaplains	2	-	2	8	
Lined cap for chaplains	2	-	2	-	

<sup>31</sup> A box from Sittard in the Netherlands

<sup>32</sup> A drinking vessel made from *warri* [knotty] wood

<sup>33</sup> A drinking vessel made from *maser* or *mazer* [maple], or another highly grained wood

<sup>34</sup> A bonnet that *laves* [droops or hangs]

Unlined cap for chaplains	3	-	1	-	
Lined bonnet	2	-	1	8	
Grained bonnet	5	-	3	4	
Women's cap	4	-	2	-	
True-love purse	12	-	1	6	
Ink horn	24	-	2	4	
Burgon thread	1 lb	-	-	7	Burgundy, France
Cheverell skin	11	-	2	4	
Copper bowl	1	-	2	-	
Full box	2	-	-	2	
New Year gift	18	-	-	2	
Old painted cloth	6	-	5	-	
Lock	1	-	-	8	
Pair of bulges <sup>35</sup>	1	-	2	6	
Spelt-hat <sup>36</sup>	10	-	2	6	

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<sup>35</sup> A wallet, typically made from hide

<sup>36</sup> A hat made from strips of wood, especially willow



## ABBREVIATIONS

BIHR	Borthwick Institute for Historical Research
CCR	<i>Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1272-1509.</i> 47 vols. London: HMSO: 1869-1963.
CPR	<i>Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1232-1509.</i> 53 vols. London: HMSO, 1891-1971.
EETS ES	Early English Text Society, Extra Series.
EETS OS	Early English Text Society, Original Series.
EETS SS	Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series.
EIDB	<i>England's Immigrants 1330-1550 Database.</i> <a href="http://www.englishimmigrants.com">www.englishimmigrants.com</a>
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary.</i> Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001.
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.</i> Edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford University Press, 2004 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. <a href="http://www.oxforddnb.com">www.oxforddnb.com</a>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary.</i> 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. 20 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
VCH City of York	Tillot, P.M., ed. <i>A History of the County of York: The City of York.</i> London: Victoria County History, 1961.

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London, British Library MS Egerton 2862

London, British Library MS Harley 4751

London, Lincoln's Inn MS 150

London, TNA C 60 Chancery: Fine Rolls

London, TNA E 101 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer: Accounts Various

London, TNA E 179 Exchequer: King's Remembrancer: Particulars of Account and other records relating to Lay and Clerical Taxation

London, TNA E 370 Exchequer: Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer and Pipe Office: Miscellaneous Rolls

London, TNA E 372 Exchequer: Pipe Office: Pipe Rolls

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1511

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 533

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 88

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 151

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng poet. a.1 (Vernon)

York, BIHR Archiepiscopal Register 5A

York, BIHR York District Probate Register 5

York, BIHR York District Probate Registry, vol. 2

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