'Rule of lyf alle folk to sewe': Lay responses to the cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in late-medieval England, 1300-1530.

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Abstract

This thesis proposes some of the reasons why the cult of St Katherine of Alexandria attained such a prominent place in the devotions of the laity in late-medieval England. It argues that although she was a powerful intercessor, an extremely important part of her appeal was her status as a role model. The texts of her life offer paradigms of religious, spiritual, social and cultural conduct. Using an interdisciplinary methodology this thesis argues that St Katherine was presented as a model of the ideal lay Christian, and explores whether the laity perceived her to be relevant and validating or extrinsic and unattainable. The projected lay readings of St Katherine which this thesis presents have been obtained by considering the setting within which texts of her life and other material relating to her cult would have been encountered by her devotees. St Katherine embodied no one essential meaning but served a variety of functions and had a number of cultural roles assigned to her.

Chapter 1 introduces the various sources upon which the subsequent analysis is based. Chapter 2 provides an account of the early cult of St Katherine, in order to establish the basis for its status in late-medieval England. This chapter also explores the nature of her sanctity. Chapters 3 and 4 consider some possible meanings and functions of the cult within the parish and the household respectively. Chapter 5 explores the relevance of St Katherine for lay women in particular, seeking to establish whether she was a patron and exemplar of positive value to them. By this approach this thesis seeks to demonstrate the value of saints' cults not only for what they can tell us about devotion to individual saints, but for the light they can shed on the societies in which they flourish.

'Than kynge Coste hir Fader had so gret ioy of þe wisdom of his doughter þat he ordeyned hir a toure in his paleys wyth diuerse studyes and chambres þat she myght be at hir oune leyser in hir studye and noon to lette hire bot whanne hir liste'.

For making similarly invaluable provision for my own studies and for the endless support that has allowed me to continue with them I dedicate this thesis with love and thanks to my parents.

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A Note on the Texts

E.E.T.S.-- Early English Text Society

o.s.-- Original Series

E.S.-- Extra Series

S.S.-- Special Series

For ease of reference I shall use the following abbreviations to refer to the various Middle English lives of St Katherine. Page references will then be given within the body of the text.

SEL- The life of St Katherine contained in the *South English Legendary*, volume 2, edited by Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, E.E.T.S. o.s. 236 (1956), pp. 533-543.

NHC- The life contained in the *Northern Homily Cycle*, edited by Carl Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden, Neue Folge* (Heilbronn, 1881), pp. 165-171.

ScL- The life contained in the Scottish legendary, edited by W.M. Metcalf, *The Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century 4*, Scottish Text Society 25 (1891), pp. 442-447.

A- The life contained in the Auchinleck Manuscript, edited by Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 242-258.

CC- The life contained in Cambridge, Caius College 175, edited by Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 242-259.

CUL- The life contained in Oxford, Bodleian Library 14528 (Rawlinson Poet 34) and Cambridge, University Library Ff.2.38, edited by Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 260-264.

RBB- The life contained in Longleat House 62 55, transcribed by Jacqueline Jenkins.

C- John Capgrave's *Life of St Katherine*, edited by Carl Horstmann, E.E.T.S. o.s. 100 (1893).

HW- Life contained in Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, edited by Mary J. Serjeantson, E.E.T.S. o.s.206 (1938), pp. 172-201.

F- Life contained in John Mirk's *Festial*, edited by Theodor Erbe, E.E.T.S. E.S. 96 (1905), pp. 275-277.

SS- Life contained in the *Speculum Sacerdotale*, edited by E.H. Weatherly,

E.E.T.S. o.s. 200 (1935), pp. 243-244.

The prose life- Life of St Katherine excerpted from the *Gilte Legende.*
a refers to the first recension edited by Auvo Kurvinen, 'The life of St Catharine of Alexandria in Middle English prose', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford (1960), pp. 221-343.
d refers to the latest recension edited by H.H. Gibbs, *The Life and Martyrdom of St Katherine of Alexandria, Virgin and Martyr* (London, 1884).

Cx- William Caxton's life of St Katherine, contained in his *Golden Legend,* edited by F.S. Ellis, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton 7* (London, 1900), pp. 1-30.

Preface

The life of St Katherine, written in the 1280s by Jacobus de Voragine as part of the *Legenda Aurea,* ends with a posthumous episode which highlights the perceived intimacy of the relationship between the saint and her devotee.

> ...a man who had been devoted to St Katherine and often called upon her for help became careless in the course of time, lost his devotion, and no longer prayed to her. Then one time when he was at prayer, he saw in a vision a procession of virgins going by, and among them was one who seemed more resplendent than the rest. As this virgin came closer to him, she covered her face and so passed in front of him with her face veiled. Being deeply impressed by her beauty he asked who she was, and one of the virgins answered: 'That is Katherine, whom you used to know, but now, when you do not seem to know her, she has passed you by with her face veiled as one unknown to you'.[1]

The text of the *Legenda Aurea* ends the story rather abruptly at this point and presumably the audience would be left to draw the moral that is made explicit in other texts, namely that despite having upset Katherine thus, the devotee can still regain her affection. John Mirk's version of the story, as preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript changes the sex of the devotee from male to female and concludes:

> ...Then this woman repentyd and turned aȝeyne to hyr deuocyon ƥat scho had don befor, and was a trew seruand to Kateryn euer aftyr, and had ƥe blysse of Heuen to hyr mede [F, p. 277]

That this epilogue was added to the life of St Katherine rather than to that of any other saint is testimony to Katherine's great popularity in the later Middle Ages. Her favour is represented as particularly desirable and something not to be taken lightly. Similar issues may have been at work in the actions of the Lollard knight Sir John Montagu. In about 1387 he had all of the images removed from the chapel of his manor at Shenley in Hertfordshire and hidden away, 'allowing only one, an image of St Katherine, the privilege of being taken to the bakehouse, because many people were fond of it' according to the chronicler Thomas Walsingham.[2]

Such evidence indicates St Katherine's popularity in the later Middle Ages. The purpose of this thesis is to explore that popularity and suggest

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[1] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints 2,* translated by William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 1993), p. 339.

[2] Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts 1: Laws Against Images* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 134-135.

some of the processes by which the cult of St Katherine came to have such a prominent place in the devotions of English lay people.

During the later Middle Ages the religious and devotional life of the laity underwent something of a transformation. Following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 the Church made a concerted effort to improve the pastoral education of the laity. In the wake of this initiative there was a renewed emphasis on knowledge as part of the ideal Christian's spiritual identity. In addition, the growth of affective Christo-centric piety and the developing ethos of the Mixed Life offered those who were unable to pursue a regular life the opportunity to imbue their daily routine with a spiritual structure. This development constituted a rehabilitation of lay religiosity, a recognition that just because one could not withdraw from the world did not indicate a lack of devotion or spirituality.

This phenomenon provides the backdrop for this thesis, which argues that St Katherine, although popular throughout the Middle Ages, took on a new significance and relevance for the laity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The following chapters investigate the proposition that St Katherine functioned as a model of the ideal lay Christian and it is for this reason that I have focused on lay responses to her cult.

This thesis does not provide a strictly chronological survey of this development. Instead it identifies certain narrative themes which seem to have been of particular importance to the appropriation of St Katherine as the ideal lay person, in particular the issue of her education and intellectual ability, and the descriptions of her mystical marriage. These episodes were elaborated upon during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, becoming an increasingly significant part of her legend. No other saint's life in Middle English underwent such elaborate development. This thesis therefore examines whether this development can be attributed to St Katherine's flourishing status as a model for the ideal lay person.

In some instances St Katherine's appeal, whether intercessory or exemplary, may have been particularly strong for virgins or young women, but it was more wide ranging than this, as the prologue to the d recension of the prose life indicates:

> Here in this lyf and passion of Seynt Kateryne virgyn and martir lerneth ȝe alle virgyns and maydens to despyse and flee alle wordly vanyte lerneth myghtly

and treuly to loue oure lord iesu crist. And lerneth to be persueraunt in hys loue vnto the deeth trustynge to that greet counfort and reward that he 3eueth to hys louers lerneth 3e alle cristen puple to be strong and stable in the feyth of crist. lerneth to haue loue and deuocion to seynt Kateryne And lerneth to knowe what help 3e may gete by hire in alle nedes 3yf 3e worscehp hir faythfully and do hir seruyse Amen [p. 65]

The author initially addresses himself to 'virgyns' and 'maydens'. By 'maydens' he could mean chaste young women who may or may not remain virgins, depending on their marriage or vocational prospects. Then he opens his address out to encompass 'alle cristen puple', implicitly female or male. The title quote 'rule of lyf alle folke to sewe' (d, p. 67) suggests that everyone could learn from St Katherine, and she apparently had many lessons to teach, as this thesis will show.

Chapter 1

The cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in late-medieval England: an introduction

This thesis proposes that the figure of St Katherine embodied a variety of roles, both religious and cultural, for her lay devotees. These projected roles have been extrapolated from carefully contextualised readings of the extant literary and visual narratives of her life as well as from documentary evidence of various kinds. The following chapters suggest some of the ways in which St Katherine was presented as an exemplar or role-model to lay people in late-medieval England and explores the ways in which the laity appropriated her example.

1300 seemed the best date to start this interdisciplinary study. Most of the documentary evidence survives from after this date, so it is only from the fourteenth century that I have the resources to attempt a truly interdisciplinary approach. This study is taken up to 1530, to the eve of the Reformation, because it seems that St Katherine remained extremely popular up to (and indeed beyond) this date. However, it will avoid becoming embroiled in the debates and controversies of the 1530s and beyond. This thesis does not provide a chronological survey of the cult between these dates. Instead it focuses on certain themes and issues which seem to account for the importance of St Katherine to the laity.

Much of the work on saints and their cults which has been carried out in the past has focused on literary sources. Historically based research on saints tends to focus on those who actually lived in the period.[1] This thesis is therefore fairly unusual both in attempting an interdisciplinary study of a saint's cult and in carrying out historically based research into a

[1] E.g. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1700* (Chicago and London, 1982); Richard Kieckhefer, *Unqiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984).

non-historical saint's cult in later medieval England.[2] It is a reflection of this phenomenon that while several scholars have undertaken doctoral or masters theses on St Katherine before, all but one are largely concerned with the literary dimension of her cult.[3] The work of these scholars provided an invaluable starting point for my own research, but this thesis adds the dimensions of documentary and visual sources in order to present an interpretation of the cult, rather than solely the life of St Katherine.

The value of studying a saint's cult lies not only in what it can tell us about the beliefs and practices associated with the veneration of the saint, but in the light it sheds on a whole range of matters pertaining to the society in which the cult flourishes.[4] St Katherine's apparent omnipresence on the late medieval English devotional scene makes her cult particularly useful for such an investigation. In studying St Katherine this thesis explores what the materials of her cult can tell us about religious, social and cultural ideology and practices in later medieval England, as well as such issues as the dynamics of authority and gender. Saints' cults are not just about their lives, but also about the lives of their supplicants, whose interpretations were crucial to their changing representations.[5] That the life

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[2] Some very good multidisciplinary anthologies comprising the research of scholars drawn from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds have been published, e.g. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca and London,1991); Stephen Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge, 1983); Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, eds., *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Athens and London,1990). S. J. E. Riches, '"The pot of oure hope". The images of St Anne in the late-medieval world", unpublished MA thesis, University of York (1991) provides a similiarly interdisciplinary study of the cult of a particular saint.

[3] Jennifer Relvyn Bray, 'The Legend of St Katherine in Later Middle English Literature', unpublished PhD thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London (1984); Robert W. J. Boykin, 'The Life of St Katherine of Alexandria: A Study in Morphology Based on Medieval French and English Texts', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Rochester (1972); Catherine Batt, '"These olde appreved stories of holynesse": literary inventiveness in the hagiographic text', unpublished MA thesis, University of Liverpool (1983); Auvo Kurvinen, 'The Life of St Catharine of Alexandria in Middle English Prose', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford (1960). Jaime K. Araujo, 'MS Advocates 19.3.1: A woman's book in a woman's context?', unpublished MA thesis, University of York (1993) attempts to locate culturally one particular text of St K's life.

[4] Stephen Wilson, 'Introduction', in his *Saints and their Cults*, pp. 1-53: p.1; Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 6.

[5] Gail MacMurray Gibson, 'Saint Anne and the religion of childbed: some East Anglian texts and talismans', in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 95-110: p. 95.

of St Katherine developed and became more complex during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, adding descriptions of her early life and mystical marriage to the account of her martyrdom, illustrates its utility in this respect.[6] A whole range of interests became incorporated into the telling and retelling of the bare facts of the legend as the narratives were affected by contemporary social and cultural practices as well as by literary developments. One of the reasons why St Katherine remained so popular is that she never became an outmoded or archaic symbol. Her cult remained a constant part of the devotional landscape of late-medieval England because it managed to incorporate and reflect developing trends.

Hagiographies of different kinds fulfilled a variety of functions. The intention of those who wrote or commissioned a saint's life may have been to provide an example of piety and sanctity to the audience, to further the interests of particular groups and institutions, to promote certain attitudes and social behaviour, or to structure lay spirituality in certain ways.[7] Indeed, the cult of particular saints could be a means by which a certain social order was legitimised and/or sacralised. These texts could thus be seen in certain contexts as instruments of social control.[8]

In the medieval period saints were frequently presented to the lay audience as models of the ideal Christian, exemplary in both word and deed. Martyrs provide particularly powerful examples, unswerving in their faith, ready to defend it to the death and full of compassion for fellow men and women. The prologue to *Speculum Sacerdotale*, an early-fifteenth century collection of short saints' lives in the form of sermons, explains that saints' days were instituted:

> that we, the herers of here blessid commemoracions whiche ben in tymes of here festes redde and songen, myȝt be stired for to folowe hem in the same wey.[9]

The prologue of the late-fourteenth century Scottish saints' lives says that saints:

[6] Magdalena Carrasco, 'Spirituality and historicity in pictorial hagiography: two miracles by St Albinus of Angers', *Art History* 12 (1989), pp. 1-21, for the ramifications of change and development in a hagiographic text. See also her 'Sanctity and experience in pictorial hagiography: two illustrated lives of saints from Romanesque France', in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 33-66.

[7] Wilson, 'Introduction', p. 16.

[8] Ibid., p. 38.

[9] E.H. Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 200 (1935), p. 1.

...as merroure ar vs to,
to kene ws how we suld do.
ƥare-fore, in lytil space here,
I wryt ƥe lyf of sanctis sere,
how ƥat men ma ensample ta
for to serwe god, as did ƥai.[10]

The opening of the early fifteenth-century sermon life of St Katherine contained in the Red Book of Bath tells the audience

ȝe schall a lessoun of helth be tawȝt
how ƥat ȝe schall heuene wynne
hureƥ & lerneƥ and forȝete hyt nawȝt
Of mayde & martyr Seynt Katerynne [RBB, p. 1]

By framing narratives in this way the clerical authors and deliverers of saints' lives sought to control audience response, to ensure that the correct lessons were drawn from the text. These lessons were not only strictly religious in nature, but had ramifications for social and moral conduct, as well as for the relative status of men and women.

This is only one side of the phenomenon, however, telling us about the attitudes of one of the groups involved, the group in charge of the means of propagating the written facts of a saint's life. There is often a gulf between intended meaning and the perceptions of those who are its recipients. Although the Church actively encouraged the status of saints as exemplars there was always the danger that the example could be misconstrued or taken too far. As Alcuin Blamires argues, these texts provided 'potentially disruptive hagiographic precedents'.[11] No matter how strenuous the attempts of authors to circumscribe audience response, the texts of St Katherine's life are not hermetic. Caroline Walker Bynum writes:

> ...medieval hagiographers pointed out repeatedly that saints are not even primarily 'models' for ordinary mortals; the saints are far too dangerous for that.[12]

However, that hagiographers 'pointed out repeatedly' that saints were not to be directly imitated surely indicates a defensive anxiety about the whole issue. It suggests that people were going beyond viewing saints as models of

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[10] W. M. Metcalfe, ed., *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century 1*, Scottish Text Society 22 (1888), p. 1.

[11] Alcuin Blamires, 'Women and preaching in medieval orthodoxy, heresy and saints' lives', *Viator* 26 (1995), pp. 135-152: p. 145.

[12] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Los Angles and London, 1982), p. 7. Bynum does not cite any specific examples in making this observation.

the ideal Christian. Rather than internalising a saint's example in an uncomplicated, one-way process, people also mapped elements of their own lives and experiences onto hagiographic narratives and were apparently aware of the paradoxes that such an activity sometimes brought to light. This is particularly evident in the case of female saints, such as St Katherine, who were said to preach, something which no medieval woman had official sanction to do. Blamires argues that the frequency with which medieval theologians had to explain the special circumstances surrounding the activities of preaching female saints suggests that '*all* such descriptions were more fraught than we are accustomed to suppose'.[13]

It is with these observations in mind that this study approaches the life and cult of St Katherine. In many ways her example is inherently paradoxical. On the one hand she evidently provides a supreme example of faith and fortitude. On the other there are many elements of her life, her education and her mystical marriage, for example, which provide not only opportunities for multiple readings but also potentially problematic models of religious and social conduct, perhaps particularly for women. Although this thesis does have some observations to make on the motives which prompted some men to write and propagate lives of St Katherine, and others to use her as an example in other discourses, it is more interested in the ways in which lay people responded to her life, and remodelled it to fit their own interests.[14]

The life of St Katherine

In order to explore these issues it is necessary to consider the circumstances in which the lives of St Katherine would have been encountered by the laity. The social context and reception of different

[13] Blamires, 'Women and preaching', p. 151.

[14] Only two women definitely wrote lives of St Katherine. Clemence of Barking wrote an Anglo-Norman life of the saint in the late twelfth century, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glynn S. Burgess, *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women* (London and Vermont, 1996) for a modern English translation. Christine de Pisan included a life of St Katherine in her *The Book of the City of Ladies*, translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York, 1982), written in 1405. It seems likely that most if not all of the Middle English lives of St Katherine were written by male clerics.

narratives of the life of St Katherine affect her representation and meaning.[15] The basic facts of St Katherine's life are extant in fourteen Middle English legends and several visual cycles dating from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Some of the lives of St Katherine which will be considered in this study were composed as part of legendary collections: SEL, NHC, F, SS, ScL, GL and Cx. All such collections ultimately derived from the *Legenda Aurea*, which provided the paradigm for *sanctorale* collections all over Europe from the thirteenth century up to the early sixteenth century and beyond.[16] The life of St Katherine which it contains had its main source in the eleventh-century Latin life of the saint known as the Vulgate.[17] The Vulgate probably originated from Rouen, which was a very important centre of devotion to the saint in Europe.[18] The Vulgate was an extremely popular text; there are over one hundred copies of it extant in European libraries.[19] It is found in English manuscripts from the twelfth to the early-sixteenth centuries.[20] This text standardised those elements of the life of St Katherine which had been circulating since the eighth century and it provided the basis for all the medieval lives of the saint, either in its own right, or through the medium of the *Legenda Aurea*. These two lives of the saint provide a useful control for comparing the later Middle English versions, in cases where authors have deviated from the standard account or made additions to the narrative.

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[15] Kathleen Ashley, 'Image and ideology: St Anne in late-medieval drama and narrative,' in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 111-130, for the application of this idea to three different texts of the life of St Anne.

[16] For more on the history, transmission and influence of the *Legenda Aurea*, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints 1*, translated by William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 1993), pp. xiii-xviii.

[17] The text of the Vulgate has been edited by S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne and E.J. Dobson and is to be found in their *Seinte Katerine: reedited from MS Bodley 34 and the other manuscripts*, E.E.T.S. S.S. 7 (1981), pp. 144-203. For a discussion of the text see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 23-34. For the *Legenda Aurea* life of St Katherine see de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, pp. 334-341. Ryan's translation is based on the Latin text edited by T. Graesse, *Jacobi A Voragine, Legenda Aurea* (originally published Leipzig, 1850; reprinted Osnabruck, 1969), pp. 789-797. See Bray, ibid., pp. 87-90.

[18] Saara Nevalinna and Irma Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria: The Late Middle English Prose Legend in Southwell Minster MS 7* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 5-6.

[19] d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, p. xvi.

[20] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 23.

Both the structure of the *Legenda Aurea* and the material it contains had a profound effect on hagiographic composition in England over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Its author drew on over a hundred sources for his compendium and thus his dense and informed narratives assumed the status of model compositions for anyone attempting to compose a saint's life, whether in Latin or the vernacular.[21] Hence the *Legenda Aurea* life almost definitely influenced those versions of the life of St Katherine which were apparently composed outside of a legendary framework: A, CC, CUL, RBB, C and HW. The popularity and influence of the *Legenda Aurea* necessitates a brief examination of the circumstances of its composition.

The *Legenda Aurea* was written in about 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine, a member of the Dominican order of Friars Preachers, who became Archbishop of Genoa in 1292, a few years before his death.[22] It comprises a collection of Latin saints' lives (and some *temporale* material) arranged in calendar order for use throughout the church year. Its popularity is evinced in the number of manuscripts in which it is to be found. There are over a thousand extant manuscripts and hundreds of printed editions.[23] It appears that this hagiographic handbook was originally intended to be used by preachers and teachers of preaching, providing them with a comprehensive source of material for sermons to clergy and laity.[24] The fact that the collection was written in Latin contributed to its utility and its swift dissemination throughout Europe. Translations of the collection into all the major vernaculars are also extant.

The earliest extant manuscript of the *Legenda Aurea* to be found in England, Cambridge, University Library Ff.5.31, dates from 1299 and originally came from Christchurch, Canterbury.[25] John Mirk, writing in the late-fourteenth century acknowledges his debt to de Voragine in the *Festial*, with such comments as 'I tell you thys þat I fynde wrytton yn "Legenda

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[21] de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, p. xiii; Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 87-90.

[22] de Voragine, ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.

[25] Manfred Gorlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary* (Leeds, 1974), p. 22.

Aurea"' and 'I tell you þys ensaumpull þat I fynde wrytton yn "Legenda Aurea"'.[26] Similarly Osbern Bokenham makes several explicit references to the *Legenda Aurea,* demonstrably a major source for his *Legendys of Hooly Wummen,* written in the 1440s: 'More-ouyr as I doo wretyn fynde, In a book clepyd the goldene legende'.[27] In the prologue to the life of St Katherine Bokenham says that 'in þe goldene legende seyth Ianuence' with reference to the etymology of 'Katherine' (HW, p. 172).[28] As stated above, it is likely that all the lives of St Katherine here considered were influenced to some degree by the *Legenda Aurea* account.[29] The *Gilte Legende,* containing the prose life, was completed by 1438, the date given in the colophon to the collection in Oxford, Bodleian Library 21947 (Douce 372). This constitutes the first complete translation of the *Legenda Aurea* into English.[30] Caxton's *Golden Legend* was printed in 1483, indicating the continued popularity of the work and its status as private reading matter.[31] The *Legenda Aurea* life of St Katherine, or some Middle English version of it, would also have provided the source for the visual narratives of her life to be found in the form of wall paintings, stained glass windows, alabasters, manuscript illuminations and so on.

Reading and interpreting St Katherine

The narrative of the life provides the basis for the cultural roles that were assigned to St Katherine. Some of these roles, such as her patronage of education and scholars, are directly linked to the narrative of her life.

[26] Theodor Erbe, ed. *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus,* E.E.T.S. E.S. 96 (1905), pp. 267, p. 278.

[27] Mary S. Serjeantson, ed., *Legendys of Hooly Wummen,* ed., E.E.T.S. o.s. 206 (1938), p. 8.

[28] Ibid., pp. xxii-xxxii, for the influence of the *Legenda Aurea* on each individual life.

[29] Weatherly judges that the *Legenda Aurea* was used as source material for forty-seven out of seventy chapters of *Speculum Sacerdotale,* see pp. xxvii-xxxii.

[30] See Charlotte D'Evelyn, 'English translations of the *Legenda Aurea*', in J. Burke Severs, ed., *A Manual of Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500, 2* (Connecticut, 1970), pp. 430-439: pp. 432-435. For more on the composition and date of the *Gilte Legende,* see Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 214-216.

[31] D'Evelyn, 'English translations of the *Legenda Aurea*', pp. 436-439; N. F. Blake, *Caxton and His World* (London, 1969), pp. 111-123. For more on the relationship between Caxton's *Golden Legend* and the *Gilte Legende* see Auvo Kurvinen, 'Caxton's *Golden Legend* and the manuscripts of the *Gilte Legende*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 60 (1959), pp. 353-375.

Others, such as her patronage of young women, work on a more associative, even metaphorical level. It is important to try and discern the readings and reactions of those who read, heard, or saw these narratives, in order to ascertain whether any of the anxieties noted above were at work. The concept of 'reading' St Katherine is very important to this thesis, and is used to signify the ways in which an audience makes sense of a visual narrative, or responds to the aural delivery of a sermon, as well as referring, more literally, to the ability to read a written narrative.

The briefest narrative of all is that provided by the iconic image of St Katherine, which usually depicts her with a fragment of wheel and a sword. This would have been the most common representation of the saint encountered by the laity and provided the most important focus of devotion to her. Even if a church did not possess a cycle of the life of St Katherine it would almost certainly possess a three-dimensional image of her. It is a symbol of her intercessory power, but it also functions as a mnemonic device, triggering the mental reiteration of the events of St Katherine's passion.

I have considered a variety of approaches to the issue of reading St Katherine, including literary and art-historical reader-response theories, as well as film theory. I understand 'reading' in terms of a dynamic interaction between text and reader which may be complicit or resistant in nature.[32] By 'text' without further qualification I mean both literary and visual

[32] For some useful approaches to reading both literary and visual narratives see Ian Maclean, 'Reading and interpretation', in Ann Jefferson and David Robey, eds., *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*, 2nd edition (London, 1986), pp. 122-144; Roberta L. Kruger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Romance* (Cambridge, 1993); Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, translated by Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle and New York, 1990); Judith Fetterley, 'Introduction: on the politics of literature', in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds., *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, 1991), pp. 492-501; Jonathan Culler, 'Reading as a woman', ibid., pp. 509-524; Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London and New York, 1984); Susan Schibanoff, '"Taking the gold out of Egypt": the art of reading as a woman', in Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson, eds., *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 221-245; Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, 1992); Teresa de Lauretis, 'Technology of gender', in her *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (London, 1987), pp. 1-30; Randi S. Koppen, '"The furtive event": theorizing feminist spectatorship', *Modern Drama* 35/3 (1992), pp. 378-394.

narratives throughout. A single representation of St Katherine, visual or literary, would have served a variety of different functions and been subject to a variety of different readings,[33] according to the status, experience and knowledge of their readers.[34] This thesis will consider the ways in which devotion to St Katherine could be part of the construction of certain identities: the construction of oneself as authoritative, knowledgeable, devout, marriageable or virginal.

I will take the texts which informed St Katherine's devotees about her life and powers as a starting point and try to identify themes within them which may have found resonance with those who had access to them, in their various forms within the parish church and the household, all the while considering whether the form of the narrative affects its function. The devotion to St Katherine exhibited in such sources as wills and gild returns reveals the identity of individuals and groups who have thus responded in some way to the figure of St Katherine. They can be related to the projected audiences of the texts to draw conclusions about devotional patterns determined by such factors as geography, class and gender. In this way the evidence from different disciplines can be combined to enhance the picture of devotion to St Katherine. This facilitates an investigation of the relationship between the material reality presented by documentary sources and the representation provided by literary and visual ones, thinking of visual representations as interpretations rather than reflections of reality.[35]

Therefore the first chapter of the thesis is devoted to introducing the various sources, literary, documentary and visual, upon which the subsequent analysis is based. This will encompass an investigation of the nature of these sources and the light they can shed on the cult of St

[33] Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston, 1985), pp. 6-11.

[34] I have found Miri Rubin's work on receptions of the Eucharist in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), very stimulating in my examination of this issue. See especially p. 288, 'We will find eucharistic interpretations in very different contexts, determined by aspects of experience, gender, region, age, occupation, but never in predictable or univocal ways'.

[35] Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth Century France* (Chicago, 1985), provides a valuable model of interdisciplinarity, in particular the Preface in which she outlines her methodological approach for examining how representations of medieval women relate to their actual experiences, pp. xv-xxi.

Katherine. Chapter 2 provides an account of the early cult of St Katherine and its introduction into England, in order to establish the basis for its status in later medieval England. This chapter also explores the model of sanctity represented by virgin martyrs and St Katherine's place within this class of saint.

Chapter 3 considers some possible meanings and functions of the cult of St Katherine within the parish. Chapter 4 undertakes the same exercise within the setting of the household. This division into parish and household is not intended to construct a dichotomy between the two environments, but it does provide a useful framework for an investigation of the cult. Many of the extant sources, such as sermons or manuscript miscellanies, can be located in one or other of these settings. In this way it may be possible to ascertain how far different settings affect the ways in which the laity read and appropriated St Katherine. The division provided by these two chapters also has the merit of allowing me, as far as possible, to consider men and women drawn from different levels of society.

The majority of evidence for the 'Household' chapter (the conduct of religion within the home, manuscripts, devotional objects) relates to people of gentry or mercantile status and above, but not to those of the highest noble, or royal status. It is far more difficult to draw any conclusions about people of lower status as they have not left comparable kinds of evidence about their religious beliefs and practices. However, working with the premise that churches were the books of the illiterate, which had great currency in the Middle Ages,[36] the 'Parish' chapter examines the various lives of St Katherine which were 'read' (heard or seen) within a parochial context, combined with testamentary evidence. The latter is invaluable for a consideration of the interior decoration of churches when virtually all the three-dimensional images which were found therein have been lost and very little remains in the way of wall and panel paintings. This is not to

[36] An epithet which owes its origin to Gregory the Great. See Lawrence G. Duggan, 'Was art really "the book of the illiterate"?' *Word and Image* 5 (1989), pp. 227-251; Celia M. Chazelle, 'Pictures, books and the illiterate: Pope Gregory I's letters to Serenus Marseilles', *Word and Image* 6 (1990), pp. 138-153; Emile Male, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, 3rd edition, translated by Dora Nussey (London, 1961), especially pp. 1-22.

suggest that the parish was an intrinsically low status space, most parish churches encompassed congregations drawn from a variety of social backgrounds. However, in the absence of any other sources relating directly to lower status people, the evidence provided by parish churches and the mechanics of saints' cults within them is invaluable. For example, information about the observance of feast days provides a very useful indication of the relative popularity of saints for those who could not afford to own books or make wills.

In both of these chapters I shall be concerned above all with the investigation of St Katherine's exemplary potential. The various texts of her life which were encountered in each setting reveal the ways in which St Katherine was constructed as a model. Documentary evidence provides a means of ascertaining whether the laity responded to this aspect of the cult, whether they followed St Katherine's lessons as prescribed by the texts, or whether they went beyond them and reconstructed her as a model in their own image, as one whose conduct and experiences could be directly related to their own. Although the life of St Katherine presents her as a highly educated sovereign queen, it may not be valid to assume that she held no relevance to those who did not share these qualities.

The presentation of St Katherine as a role model involved the conceptualisation of her as one; the selection of certain features of her person and her life which best suited a certain setting, or the interests of a particular individual or group.[37] It is for this reason that the descriptions of St Katherine's education and mystical marriage are central to chapters 3 and 4, as the elaboration of these elements seems to offer both men and women opportunities for identification, emulation and validation. Chapter 5 continues this investigation of St Katherine as model, by examining the ways in which she was presented as a paradigmatic young woman to lay women, both in sermons and in courtesy literature. It seeks to establish whether being told to model themselves on St Katherine involved attempting to live up to unattainable standards of social and moral perfection, or whether St Katherine would have been an exemplar and

[37] See Berenice Fisher, 'Wandering in the wilderness: the search for women role models', *Signs* 13 (1988), pp. 211-233, especially pp. 219-221.

patron of positive value to lay women.

St Katherine held no one essential meaning for her devotees, but rather seems to have represented a range of properties and been subject to a variety of readings, of which I can only hope to suggest a few. Much invaluable material from medieval England relating to saints and their cults has been irretrievably lost and these cults involve many complex patterns of belief and behaviour, many of which remain partially retrievable and then only by implication. Other interpretations of her life are possible than these which I offer. Nevertheless by examining St Katherine with an awareness of the variety of forms which observance of devotion to her took, we can begin to gain access to the meanings embodied in the saint and her symbolic functions for a wide range of social groups.

St Katherine: 'soueryn of heygh de-gree'

John Capgrave begins his mid fifteenth-century *Life of St Katherine* with a prayer to Christ the Crown of Maidens and describes a celestial hierarchy ordered as follows:

> Right thus by ordre we wene thov ledest the davnce:
> Thy moder folweth the nexte, as resoun is,
> And after other, thei go ryght as her chavnce
> Is shaped to hem of ioye that may not mys;
> But next that lady a-bove alle other in blys
> ffolweth this mayde whiche we clepe kataryne [C, p. 3]

St Katherine's primacy among the saints, thus established, is further confirmed by Capgrave's narrative, centred as it is on her mystical marriage. The addition of this episode to the account of her martydom established by the Vulgate and *Legenda Aurea* took place during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England.[38] This development served to confirm her as the most powerful and important female saint, setting her apart from even the most popular of the other virgin martyrs. Katherine alone was worthy to be selected by the Virgin Mary as Christ's bride. Katherine's suitability derives, in part, from her unique status as a highly educated sovereign queen. Consequently her standing as *the* bride of Christ can be seen either as a result of her matchless popularity, or as the

[38] Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 189-206.

explanation for it.

However, if we return to the opening of Capgrave's work, we can see that St Katherine's function as an important religious and cultural figure was related to far more than the identity of her husband.

> Thus wene we, lord, be-cavse that thov and thyne
> have 3ove to hir of grace so greet plente,
> That alle thy pryuileges whiche been in other fovnde
> Arn sette in hir as in soueryn of heygh de-gree
> ffor in alle these rychely dooth she abounde-
> Looke alle these seyntis that in this world so rounde
> Leved here sumtyme, and in som spyce or kynde
> here vertues shal er in this same mayde fynde [ibid., p. 3]

Capgrave goes on to explain how the special privileges that were individually granted to five different saints , John the Evangelist, Nicholas, Paul, Clement and Margaret (ibid., p. 4), were all granted to St Katherine, as described in her legend. St Katherine is thus presented as a uniquely favoured saint, one whose grace and protection is particularly desirable and effective. This presentation of St Katherine as 'super saint' is taken from the *Legenda Aurea,* written before the mystical marriage had become a customary addendum to the narrative of her life, an indication that her saintly as well as her earthly properties were seen to have qualified her to marry Christ, by those who wrote her life in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The life of St Katherine composed by Capgrave suggests that St Katherine was the most important saint in late-medieval England. This is also suggested by literary and visual sources and is confirmed by other evidence. A measure of St Katherine's popularity can be gained by a comparison of numbers of extant Middle English lives of other saints.[39]

St Katherine 14
St Margaret 11
St Mary Magdalene 10
St John the Evangelist 9
St Peter 8
St John the Baptist 7

[39] I have used Charlotte D'Evelyn and Frances A. Foster's survey of Middle English saints' lives to provide a rough guide, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English* 2, pp. 561-635. I have excluded the Virgin Mary from this analysis. Her enormous popularity, proceeding from her status as the mother of God and her concomitant standing as intercessor *par excellence,* sets her apart from all other saints.

St Christina 7
St Paul 6
St Dorothy 6
St Anne 6
St Cecilia 6
St Agatha 5
St Anastasia 5
St Agnes 5
St Eugenia 5
St Ursula 5

By this standard St Katherine does not appear to be very much more popular than any of the others. However, it should be noted that in the case of all the saints noted above, at least half of the versions of their life are to be found only as items in a legendary collection such as the *South English Legendary,* the *Northern Homily Cycle* or *Speculum Sacerdotale* and not as individual items independent of legendaries.

The popularity of St Katherine is confirmed by testamentary evidence. I have found 642 references to chapels, altars, images and lights of St Katherine in late-medieval wills. The same documents contain the following number of references to other female saints:

St Margaret 289
St Anne 141
St Mary Magdalene 114
St Sitha 41
St Barbara 21
St Ursula 10
St Helen 5
St Agnes and St Radegund 4 (each)
St Hilda and St Agatha 3 (each)
St Etheldreda and St Mildred 2 (each)
St Winifred, St Elizabeth, St Faith, St Clare, St Lucy, St Apollonia and St Dorothy 1 (each)

The wills suggest that St Katherine was more popular than any male saints as well.[40]

St Katherine's legend, as written by Capgrave and others, provides a

[40] I cannot be definitive about this deduction, but it is in keeping with evidence of other sources in which St Katherine's paramountcy is unambiguous.

good example of a composite hagiographic creation: the discovery of a mysterious body on Mount Sinai was superimposed onto the *passio* of the virgin martyr St Katherine.[41] There is no authentic St Katherine, indeed, there is no need to search for one. The figure of St Katherine presented in art and literature was a 'real' one for her devotees and she was remodelled in the collective representation which they made for her.[42] Although St Katherine is well known as the patron saint of education and scholars, she represented a much wider range of functions and properties than this attribution suggests. Indeed this is an essential factor in her great popularity.[43]

Middle English lives of St Katherine

I have chosen to focus on Middle English lives of the saint because this is the language with which the lay people with whom this study is concerned would have been most familiar. Some of them may have understood Latin or French, but for the majority English was the first and only language and increasingly so in the fifteenth century. There are fourteen Middle English lives of St Katherine extant.[44] The so called 'Katherine Group' life does not form a part of this study because it was composed in the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century.[45] Of the remaining

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[41] See chapter 2.

[42] Pierre Delooz, 'Towards a sociological study of canonised sainthood in the Catholic Church', translated by Jane Hodgkin, in Wilson, *Saints and their Cults*, pp. 189-216: p. 195. This article makes a distinction between 'real' and 'constructed' saints, using St Katherine as an example of the latter, see p. 196.

[43] It is in this respect that one must be slightly wary of the lists of saints and their patronal interests to be found in many dictionaries of saints. They provide a useful starting point, but are misleading in their tendency to neatly compartmentalise saints, giving the impression that each had one intrinsic function which holds for all times, all places and all people.

[44] According to D'Evelyn and Foster's survey of Middle English saints' legends, *A Manual of Writings in Middle English 2*, pp. 599-602 for St Katherine. See Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 21-214 for a comprehensive survey of all extant medieval lives of the saint written in England, those in Latin and Anglo-Norman as well as English.

[45] d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, pp. xxxviii-xxxix; Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 69-75; Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women: From the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford, 1990), pp. xi-xxxviii for more on the Katherine Group and associated works.

thirteen some will be examined in more detail than others, for reasons which are explained within the body of the thesis. Virtually all of them have been published.[46]

Ten of these texts can be described as 'unexpanded' lives of St Katherine.[47] SEL, NHC, ScL, A, CC, CUL, RBB, HW, F, SS are all *passio* rather than *vita* legends, since they begin when Katherine the queen is forced to defend her faith and her fellow Christians against the evil Emperor Maxentius. It describes the confrontation between these two, taking in along the way her defeat and conversion of the fifty Philosophers, her conversion of the Empress and the captain of the imperial guard, Porphirius, all of whom are martyred. It also describes the threat of the spiked wheels, upon which she is not actually tortured, contrary to popular belief: angels destroy them before they touch her. Katherine's decapitation and the translation of her body to Mount Sinai (where it is believed to rest to this day) provide the finale. This is the version of St Katherine's life which is related by the Vulgate and the *Legenda Aurea.*

The 'expanded' life of St Katherine, represented in this corpus by the prose life, C and Cx, all of the fifteenth century, is a full *vita* as it adds episodes describing Katherine's genealogy, birth, early life, conversion and mystical marriage, before turning to the more familar events outlined above. No other saint's life appears to have undergone such elaboration during the Middle Ages and this development provides evidence of the popularity of the cult.[48] Such a development indicates that the text was responding to contemporary needs and concerns and continued to be relevant both to readers and writers.

This investigation begins by asking under what circumstances each

[46] I am indebted to Jacqueline Jenkins for allowing me to make use of her transcription of RBB.

[47] In fact all of them except for the prose life, C and Cx.

[48] Perhaps the only other saint who undergoes a similar development, or transformation, is St Joseph. Throughout the Middle Ages his identity changed from that of a somewhat marginalised old man, to a younger, more capable husband and father. Joseph came to be far more involved both in the Nativity and in Christ's upbringing as protector and educator. See Wilson, 'Introduction', p. 7. This development has been linked to changing ideas about family structure and gender roles within it, Pamela Sheingorn, 'Appropriating the Holy Kinship: gender and family history', in Ashley and Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols*, pp. 169-198.

life of St Katherine would have been heard, and by whom? The second part of that question will be answered in later chapters, but some salient facts about each life will be introduced here.[49] As explained above, the material has been categorised as fitting into a 'parish' or 'household' setting. This is not to suggest that any of the lives examined here would never have been read in any other setting, but some division was necessary in order to effect an analysis of the cult and attempt to answer the basic question posed by its popularity. The Middle English lives of St Katherine had a variety of purposes, of which the first I shall examine is public use as sermons.

Sermons

Hearing sermons was largely a Sunday occupation for most people.[50] There were three services for the laity on Sundays: Matins, morning Mass and Vespers or Evensong. Sermons would have been delivered during the course of the morning Mass. Sermons on the saints were a recognised alternative to preaching the Sunday lesson.[51] The prologue to *Speculum Sacerdotale* gives precise guidance as to the point in the service at which saints' lives were to be delivered to the congregation:

> Among alle other holy customes of holy churche the whiche oweth to be worschipid with a souerayn deuocion, this semeth right comendable and to be kepid with a good diligence and desire. That is to say that in alle the chirches of the worlde, the prested of hem whiche are sette to the gouernaunce of the parishenus aftur the redyng of the gospel and of the offertorie at masse turne

[49] It is not the purpose of this thesis to make a lengthy examination of each life. I refer the reader to the work of Jennifer Bray for a comprehensive overview of the English lives of St Katherine. The forthcoming PhD thesis of Jacqueline Jenkins will provide a far more thorough analysis of RBB, C and the prose life than any previous study: '"Such peple as be not letterd in Scripture": popular devotion and the legend of St Katherine of Alexandria in late-medieval England', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario (1996). It lends weight to this thesis to discover that despite different approaches we have drawn some common conclusions about projected audiences and possible meanings.

[50] H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993) provides the most comprehensive and recent survey of English sermon literature. G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1966), remains useful. See also L. J. Bataillon, 'Approaches to the study of medieval sermons', *Leeds Studies in English* new series 11 (1980), pp. 19-35, and Vincent Gillespie, '*Doctrina* and *Predicacio*: the design and function of some pastoral manuscripts', *Leeds Studies in English* new series 11 (1980), pp. 36-50. For Sunday sermons see Spencer, ibid., p. 31, also pp. 64-77, 'Audiences and circumstances of preaching' and pp. 91-108, 'Audiences' opinions of sermons'.

[51] Spencer, ibid., p. 31.

> hem vnto the peple and schewe openliche vnto hem alle the solempnitees and festes whiche shall falle and be hadde in the weke folowynge... I haue here disposyd and writen aftur my sympilnes of the solempnytees of all seyntes the whiche schulden worshipfully eche Sonneday be scewid vn-to youre peple that God may be glorified in youre chirches be the maters i-writen aftur, and deuocion and wytt of the peple may be the more informyd to worscepynge and gloryfyinge of him that is almyghty, here God.[52]

It seems likely that the announcement of imminent feast days would give priests the perfect opportunity to preach saints' sermons, thus a saint's life might not be heard only on her or his feast day. However, the feast of St Katherine, the 25th of November, was a day of special obligation when people were required to attend Mass. [53] This is suggested by Mirk's opening to her life, 'Good men and woymen, such a day N. ȝe schull haue Seynt kateryns day. ƥe whiche day ȝe schull come to ƥe chyrch, and worschyppe God and thys holy mayden and martyr Seynt Kateryn' (F, p. 275).

The *South English Legendary*, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the *Festial* and *Speculum Sacerdotale* all appear to have been originally intended to be used by clerics for the public instruction of lay parishioners and all contain lives of St Katherine, apparently for use on or near her feast day. The *South English Legendary* is the earliest collection, probably composed in the 1280s.[54] It has been argued that at least the second half of the collection, which includes the life of St Katherine, was influenced by the *Legenda Aurea*.[55] All of the extant manuscripts of the *South English Legendary* date from the very beginning of the fourteenth century or later.[56]

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[52] Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, pp. 2-3.

[53] For the regulation of feast days see: C. R. Cheney, 'Rules for the observance of feast-days in medieval England', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 34 (1961), pp. 117-147, and Barbara Harvey, 'Work and *festa ferianda* in medieval England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23 (1971), pp. 289-308.

[54] Gorlach, *Textual Tradition*, provides a study of the history and dissemination of the *South English Legendary* and a survey of the extant manuscripts. See also Charlotte D'Evelyn, 'Collections of saints' legends', in *A Manual of Writings in Middle English* 2, pp. 413-429: pp. 413-418; Klaus P. Janofsky, ed., *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment* (Tubingen, 1992); also his 'Entertainment, edification and popular education in the South English Legendary', *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (1977), pp. 707-715; Bella Millett, 'The audience of the saints' lives of the Katherine Group', *Reading Medieval Studies* 16 (1990), pp. 127-148. For the SEL life of St Katherine see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 91-99.

[55] Bray, ibid., p. 87.

[56] Gorlach has identified thirty-six major manuscripts of the *South English Legendary*. See *Textual Tradition* p. 305 for a map detailing the provenance of each.

Seventeen of these manuscripts contain the life of St Katherine. We know very little about the circumstances of this work's composition apart from the evidence of the collection itself.[57] The *Northern Homily Cycle* constitutes a northern counterpart to the *South English Legendary* written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.[58] This collection is extant in two manuscripts, British Library Cotton Tiberius E· vii, which has been dated to about 1400 and the fifteenth-century British Library Harley 4196.[59]

Although we know little about the circumstances of composition surrounding both collections it seems likely that the authors embarked on their work with much the same aims as de Voragine, although in some respects authorial intention is largely irrelevant. The most important fact is that these saints' lives were used as sermon material. However, the career of John Mirk, the author of the *Festial,* provides a paradigm of the parochial clerical hagiographer and his motives in composing and disseminating saints' lives.

Mirk was a member of the Augustinian Abbey of Lilleshall in Shropshire, where he was a canon regular and subsequently prior.[60] The precise dates of his life are not known but it seems that he composed the *Festial* in the late fourteenth century and had died by 1420.[61] Mirk also composed two other works for the use of parish priests, the Latin *Manuale Sacerdotale* and the English *Instructions for Parish Priests.*[62] Mirk's authorship of the *Festial* is attested to by the colophon in British Library

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[57] For a summary of the various arguments as to original author(s) of the collection and its intended purpose see ibid., pp. 45-50.

[58] Saara Nevalinna, *The Northern Homily Cycle: The Expanded Version in MSS Harley 4196 and Cotton Tiberius E vii 1: from Advent to Septuagesima* (Helsinki, 1972). Nevalinna discusses the date, authorship and provenance of the manuscripts, pp. 124-137; see also Thomas J. Heffernan, 'Orthodoxies redux: the Northern Homily Cycle in the Vernon Manuscripts and its textual affliliations', in D. Pearsall, ed., *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 75-87.

[59] For descriptions of the manuscripts see Nevalinna, ibid., pp. 5-17. For the NHC life of St Katherine see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 114-119.

[60] For Mirk's biographical details see Gillis Kristensson, *John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests, edited from MS Cotton Claudius A II and other Manuscripts* (Lund, 1974), pp. 10-11. See also Spencer, *English Preaching,* pp. 62.

[61] Alan J. Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', *Medium Aevum* 56 (1987), pp. 217-224: p. 218; S. Powell, 'A new dating of John Mirk's *Festial', Notes and Queries* new series 29 (1982), pp. 487-489: p, 487.

[62] Kristensson, *John Mirk's Instructions,* pp. 11-12.

Cotton Claudius II which reads 'Explicit tractatus qui dicitur Festial, per Monasterii de Lulshul'.[63] Similarly the Jesus College, Cambridge manuscript of the *Manuale Sacerdotis* contains the following colophon 'Explicit libellus dictus... secundum Johannem Marcus, priorem abathie de Liyshel'.[64] Using the text of the life of St Alkmund as evidence, Fletcher posits that Mirk originally wrote the *Festial* for a specific audience, the congregation of the Church of St Alkmund in Shrewsbury.[65] This church was appropriated to the abbey and canons from Lilleshall occasionally served in the church. Mirk himself may have had the responsibility of preaching there on more than one occasion.[66] The life of St Katherine is to be found in fourteen of the extant twenty six manuscripts of the *Festial*.[67] The popularity of this work is attested to not only by the number of surviving manuscripts, but also by the existence of nearly twenty early printed editions made by Caxton and his successors between 1483 and 1532.[68]

The author of SS, which survives in a unique early fifteenth-century manuscript, British Library Additional 36791, was probably a priest too.[69] He claims to be writing for 'serteyne prestes which ben dere and famyliare vn-to me before alle other', who have asked him to provide them with a vernacular collection to read out to their parishioners.[70] There is no firm evidence to identify the authors of the *South English Legendary* and the *Northern Homily Cycle*, but several scholars have suggested that, like Mirk, they were friars or canons who had responsibility for the pastoral care and instruction of the laity and thus needed comprehensive vernacular

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[63] Ibid., p. 11.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Fletcher, 'John Mirk', pp. 220-221.

[66] Ibid.

[67] For descriptions of all the extant manuscripts see Martyn F. Wakelin, 'The manuscripts of John Mirk's *Festial*', *Leeds Studies in English* new series 1 (1967), pp. 93-118.

[68] Ibid., p. 93. For the F life of St Katherine see Bray, 'The Legend of St Katherine', pp. 120-122.

[69] Weatherly's introduction to the E.E.T.S. edition of *Speculum Sacerdotale* provides virtually the only study of this collection. See pp. xv-xliv. For the SS life of St Katherine see Bray, ibid., pp. 128-130.

[70] Weatherly, ibid., pp. 2-3.

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collections upon which to draw.[71]

Whatever the precise identity of the authors or their intentions, chapter 3 proceeds with the assumption that all four legendaries were written for the public instruction of a lay audience within their parish churches and that the lives of St Katherine which they contain are essentially sermon narratives. The *South English Legendary*, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the *Festial* and *Speculum Sacerdotale* follow the basic structure of the *Legenda Aurea*. The *Northern Homily Cycle*, the *Festial* and *Speculum Sacerdotale* contain more strictly *temporale* material than the *Legenda Aurea* (sermons for Septuagesima, Rogation Sunday and so on) but all four are its vernacular counterparts. Part of the popularity of this structure, apart from ease of reference, lies in its adaptability. Authors or scribes could add or omit narratives according personal or local preferences, or to suit the specific devotional interests or pastoral needs of a projected audience.

The popularity of St Katherine and the suitability of her life for purposes of public instruction are indicated by its inclusion in *Speculum Sacerdotale* and the *Festial* which contain abbreviated forms of the most important saints lives alone. So, for example, St Margaret is included in the *Festial* but not in *Speculum Sacerdotale*, presumably because her day was not usually considered to be a high day. Mary Magdalene is the only other female saint to appear in *Speculum Sacerdotale*. Existing constitutions usually assign high day status to her feast, and St Katherine's day enjoyed similar importance.[72] The *South English Legendary*, and the *Northern Homily Cycle* comprise more extensive collections, including such female saints as Lucy, Agatha and Agnes, whose feasts occur in extant constitutions as minor days.[73]

The other life of St Katherine to which reference will be made in chapter 3 is RBB. It is the only life identified as a sermon text which is not part of a legendary collection. Very little work has been done on this life,

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[71] Gorlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 45-50; Nevalinna, *Northern Homily Cycle*, pp. 128-136; Heffernan, 'Orthodoxies redux', p. 81.

[72] See chapter 3 for further discussion of St Katherine's day.

[73] For the existing constitutions see Cheney, 'Rules for the observance of feast days', passim.

which is contained in Longleat House 62. 55 (The Red Book of Bath), which Guddat-Figge dates to 1412-1428.[74] This manuscript contains a variety of material, mostly in Latin and of a legal or historical nature, such as a copy of the Magna Carta, two texts describing the assise of corn and bread, the Statute of Coroners, a list of the nobles who came over with the Conqueror, the shortened version of the *Brut* chronicle and a life of King Arthur. The manuscript may have served as an oath book for jurors, since it also has the unusual feature of a cavity in its cover where balances for weighing gold were kept.[75] It certainly seems to have been a public, utilitarian manuscript.

The life of St Katherine which it contains also seems to have been intended for public delivery in a church. The life concludes thus:

> Kateryn of maydes martyr & flour
> we prayeþ þe be oure socour
> In alle maner greuaunce
> In worschupp of þe ys oure chapell
> Curtoyse kateryn kepe vs well
> fram descord & meschaunce [RBB, p. 22]

This life contains many specific addresses and exhortations to the audience and also features some unique moralising passages concerning women's appearance and demeanour which are to be found in contemporary sermons.[76]

Both Jenkins and Bray posit that the manuscript was attached to a specific chapel dedicated to St Katherine.[77] Bray suggests it may have been the chapel of St Katherine in the church of St Mary de or atte Stalls in the centre of Bath.[78] This is the parish church of what is now called the Abbey parish and was the church in which the mayor and commuonalty were sometimes expected to perform religious duties, which fits in with the tenor of the manuscript's other contents. This chapel is mentioned several

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[74] Gisela Guddat-Figge, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Middle English Romances* (Munich, 1976), pp. 232-235 for a description of the manuscript. For Bray's discussion of the manuscript and its life of St Katherine see 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 133-144. Jenkins, 'Popular devotion and the legend of St Katherine', will provide the first detailed consideration of this life.

[75] Guddat-Figge, ibid., p. 234.

[76] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 134-140.

[77] Ibid., pp. 133-134. Jenkins is less sure about the precise identity of the chapel than Bray (private communication).

[78] Bray, ibid., p. 134 for the following.

times in fifteenth-century wills, where reference is also made to a gild dedicated to the saint.[79] References to the chapel continue in the sixteenth century indicating its continued importance.[80] Some wills make reference simply to 'the chapel of St Katherine in Bath' and it seems likely that this is the chapel in St Mary de Stalls, a further indication of its importance.[81]

It should be remembered that not all those who wished to attend a service could; even on feast days servants had obligations and responsibilities which could not be shirked.[82] As Spencer points out 'sermon audiences were composed of those who had leisure to hear them'.[83] Many parishioners may not have been free at the times when they could have heard about St Katherine in church. But at any time when they did have the opportunity to visit their churches, wall paintings, stained glass, narrative altar pieces and so on, would have been available to teach them the history and tenets of Christianity, and in particular inform them about the lives of the saints.

St Katherine in household manuscripts

Chapter 3 takes one possible approach to the cult of St Katherine, identifying devotees in a specific, yet public context. Chapter 4 explores an alternative, this time linked to those who could approach, indeed model themselves on, St Katherine's high social status and the learning which is a mark of that status. The texts of St Katherine's life with which this chapter is concerned are to be found in sixteen manuscripts whose format and contents suggest that they were created for and read within the lay environment of the household. Just as the lives considered in chapter 3 can

[79] E.g. the wills of William Hoggekyns made in 1455 and of Thomas Chaunceler (1496), F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills*, originally published by the Somerset Record Society in three volumes (1901, 1903 and 1905), reprinted (Gloucester, 1983), pp. 166-167, p. 343 (1901 volume). Both were citizens of Bath

[80] E.g. the will of William Woodward made in 1513, ibid., p. 171 (1903 volume).

[81] E.g. the will of Robert Drew (citizen of Bath), made in 1450, leaves his best girdle 'to the chapel and fraternity of St Katherine in the said city', ibid., p. 355 (1903 volume). Three other wills refer to the chapel without naming its precise location.

[82] Spencer, *English Preaching*, p. 73.

[83] Ibid., also pp. 70-72.

be linked to the reformation of pastoral education and lay catechesis, so the lives considered in chapter 4 can be located in addition within the context of the rise of lay literacy and developments in vernacular theology.

Four of the lives considered in this chapter were apparently composed individually, rather than as part of legendaries: A, CC, CUL and C.[84] It is impossible to tell whether they were written specifically for any of the manuscripts in which they now appear, since none of these texts offer any details about patrons or intended audience. The earliest life (A) is to be found in the Auchinleck manuscript, which was probably made in the 1330s.[85] A revised version of A is in the early fifteenth century manuscript Cambridge, Caius College 175 (CC).[86] Another version of the life is in two late fifteenth-century manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library 14528 (Rawlinson Poet 34) and Cambridge, University Library Ff.2.38 (CUL).[87] Capgrave's life of St Katherine is to be found in four manuscripts, two of which may have been designed for a private lay readership: the fifteenth-century British Library Arundel 168 and British Library Arundel 20 which is of later fifteenth century date (C).[88]

Ten of the manuscripts in this corpus of sixteen contain the prose life. The prose life of St Katherine is extant in twenty-four manuscripts,

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[84] They certainly seem to come from no extant legendary.

[85] A facsimile of this manuscript has been published: Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham, *The Auchinleck MS: National Library of Scotland Advocates MS 19.2.1* (London, 1979). For a description of the manuscript see Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manucripts*, pp. 121-125. See also L. H. Loomis, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript and a possible London bookshop of 1330-1340', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 57 (1924), pp. 595-627; Timothy A. Shonk, 'A study of the Auchinleck Manuscript: bookmen and bookmaking in the early fourteenth century', *Speculum* 60 (1985), pp. 71-91. For the A life of St Katherine see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 100-104.

[86] For a description of this manuscript see Guddat-Figge, ibid., pp. 82-83.

[87] A facsimile of Ff.2.38 has also been published: Frances McSparran and P. R. Robinson, *Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38* (London, 1979). See Guddat-Figge, ibid., pp. 94-99 for description of the manuscript and pp. 267-268 for Bodley 14528. For the CUL life of St Katherine see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 107-113.

[88] For descriptions of these manuscripts see J. Forshall, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the British Museum. New Series 1, part 1: The Arundel Manuscripts* (London, 1834), p. 6 (Arundel 20), pp. 46-47 (Arundel 168). For Bray's discussion of the life see 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 174-187. See also Derek Pearsall, 'John Capgrave's *Life of St Katherine* and popular romance style', *Medievalia et Humanistica* new series 6 (1975), pp. 121-137; Jane C. Fredeman, 'Style and characterisation in John Capgrave's *Life of St Katherine*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 62 (1979), pp. 346-387.

which indicates its great popularity.[89] It was probably the medium by which the expanded version of St Katherine's life, including the mystical marriage, was disseminated to vernacular readers. It is therefore of great value in an attempt to uncover the meanings attached to the development of the mystical marriage.[90]

The English prose life of St Katherine was originally part of the 1438 *Gilte Legende*. The primary source for this collection was a French translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, the *Legende Doree*, made c. 1333 by Jean de Vignay at the request of Jeanne de Bourgoyne, queen of Phillippe of Valois.[91] The name *Gilte Legende*, taken from the colophon to the collection contained in Bodleian Library MS 21947 (Douce 372), was adopted by Kurvinen to distinguish it from Caxton's *Golden Legend:*

> Here endith the lives of seintis that is callid in latynne Legenda Aurea and in Englissh the Gilte Legende, the which is drawen out of Frenssche into Englisshe the yere of oure Lorde MCCCC and xxxviij bi a synfulle wrecche.

It seems that the *passio* of St Katherine was taken from de Vignay and expanded with an account of her early life, including the mystical marriage, from a separate Latin source, to create the prose life.[92]

Kurvinen argues that the earliest recension of the prose life life (**a**) was written in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, before 1420, because before this date it was revised as **b**.[93] There are six manuscripts of **a** extant, all of which are miscellanies of one sort of another. Five of these manuscripts form part of our corpus: British Library Cotton Titus A xxvi (early-sixteenth century), Manchester, Chetham's Library 8009 (late-fifteenth century), Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.3.1 (second half of the fifteenth century), Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales Porkington 10 (mid-fifteenth century), Oxford, Corpus Christi College 237 (second half of

[89] The primary source of information about the prose life of St Katherine is provided by Kurvinen's comprehensive survey, 'The Life of St Catharine', passim.

[90] For Bray's discussion of the prose life see 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 188-199. See also Nevalinna and Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria*, pp. 11-20, although apart from discovering a new manuscript of the prose life most of their observations are based on Kurvinen's findings.

[91] D'Evelyn, 'English translations of the *Legenda Aurea*', p. 435.

[92] For a list of the *Gilte Legende* manuscripts see Nevalinna and Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria*, pp. xi-xii.

[93] For the following on the recensions see Kurvinen, 'The Life of St Catharine', pp. 1-6.

the fifteenth century).[94]

There are thirteen manuscripts containing **b**. The life of St Katherine is found as part of a legendary in six of these. The other seven manuscripts in which **b** occurs are miscellanies, or contain only **b**. Three of these feature in chapter 4: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 142 (mid-fifteenth century), Cambridge, Trinity College 0.1.9 (mid- to late-fifteenth century), Stonyhurst Archives XLIII (second half of the fifteenth century).[95]

The **c** recension survives only in British Library Harley 4012 dating from the 1460s, but which Kurvinen mistakenly assigned to the early sixteenth century. **c** is however based on a version of **b** and was perhaps specifically composed for Anne Harling, for whom the manuscript was probably originally written.[96] Although more strictly devotional in nature than some of the other more eclectic household manuscripts, Harley 4012 still falls into this category because it was intended for use by a lay reader within her domestic environment.

The final recension, **d** survives in three manuscripts. The late fifteenth-century Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 390/610 is the last to be included within our corpus.[97] **d** was also based on **b** and was written, according to the incipit in Gonville and Caius 390/610, during the reign of Henry V. Kurvinen dates this recension to about 1420.[98] The earliest manuscript copies of any of these recensions are British Library Additional 33410 and Harvard, University Library Richardson 44, both of which contain **d** alone and have been dated to the second quarter of the fifteenth

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[94] For descriptions of the manuscripts: Cotton Titus A xxvi, Kurvinen, ibid., pp. 16-24; Chetham 8009, Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, pp. 238-240; Advocates 19.3.1, ibid., pp. 127-130; Porkington 10, ibid., pp. 73-78; Corpus Christi 237, Henry Coxe, *Catalogus Codicum MSS Qui in Collegiis Aulisque Oxoniensibus 2* (Oxford, 1852), pp. 98-99.

[95] For descriptions of the manuscripts: Corpus Christi 142, M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College Cambridge 1* (Cambridge, 1912), pp. 327-329; Trinity College 0.9.1, M. R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1902), pp. 439-441; Stonyhurst XLIII, Kurvinen, ibid., pp. 110-120;

[96] As argued by Anne Dutton, 'Harley 4012: piety, politics and patronage', a paper given at the Seventh York Manuscripts Conference, July 1994 (forthcoming in the conference proceedings). I have worked from Dutton's description of the manuscript.

[97] M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Gonville and Caius College 2* (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 452-3.

[98] Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', p. 6.

century.[99] The majority of manuscripts containing the prose life date from the mid- to late-fifteenth century.

I have not included Osbern Bokenham's life of St Katherine, contained in *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, written in the 1440s, in chapter 4.[100] This is because although the text of the life itself may well have been read in a lay domestic environment, and indeed, is explicitly addressed to two lay women, the sole manuscript in which it is contained was compiled for a nunnery in Cambridge by one of Bokenham's male patrons, Thomas Burgh.[101] However, just as Mirk provided a paradigm of the hagiographer writing for lay parishoners, perhaps what we know about the relationship between Bokenham and his patrons can be taken as broadly representative of the relationship between the anonymous authors or scribes of the manuscripts considered in chapter 4 and those for whom they wrote.

Like Mirk and Capgrave, Osbern Bokenham (1392- after 1464) was an Augustinian, a friar at the convent at Stoke Clare.[102] He was elected vicar general of the order in 1463, belying the assumption that he had died by the time that the manuscript of *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* was compiled in 1447. Apart from *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* the only work of Bokenham's now extant is his *Mappula Angliae*, a prose translation of Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon*. In the first chapter of this work Bokenham makes reference to an English translation of the *Legenda Aurea* which he has made. Some scholars believe that this may be the *Gilte Legende*, although others are not convinced.[103]

Like Capgrave and Lydgate, Bokenham's patrons were drawn from

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[99] Described by Kurvinen, ibid., pp. 13-15, p. 109.

[100] See Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 145-151 for a discussion of this life.

[101] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. xv; D'Evelyn, 'Collections of saints' Legends', pp. 422-426; A. S. G. Edwards, 'The transmission and audience of Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*', in A. J. Minnis, ed., *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 157-167, argues that the lives probably circulated as individual texts before Burgh made his compilation.

[102] For the following biographical details see Serjeantson, ibid., pp. xiii-xxii; Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 145-147.

[103] D'Evelyn, 'English translations of the *Legenda Aurea*', pp. 435. Interesting though it would be to know whether Bokenham was the original author, it is irrelevant to this study.

the ranks of the East Anglian gentry and nobility.[104] Bokenham's detailed prologues to several of his saints' lives provide us with various reasons why patrons such as Thomas Burgh, Isabel Bourchier, countess of Eu and Elizabeth de Vere, countess of Oxford commissioned these lives from him. The prologues also suggest why they were suitable for dedication to women such as Katherines Howard and Denston, to whom the life of St Katherine is dedicated, but who had apparently not commissioned it from him. At work are processes of petition, gratitude, prestige, edification and identification, among others. For example, Katherine Denston commissioned a life of St Anne from Bokenham in the hope that she would give birth to a son. Her only child was a daughter, Anne, and Gibson suggests that Katherine also intended it to provide exemplary instruction for her.[105]

An example of the prestige or other considerations associated with public reputation which may have been at work in requesting a saint's life are to be found in 'The prolocutorye in-to Marye Mawdelyns lyf'. Bokenham visits one of his patrons, the Countess of Eu, Isabel Bourchier. The Countess asks Bokenham about the female saints' lives which he is writing. He tells her that he has completed seven lives and is currently engaged with the legend of St Elizabeth, 'At request of hyr to whom sey nay I neyther kan, ne wyl, ne may', namely Elizabeth de Vere, Countess of Oxford.[106] Isabel Bourchier announces that she has 'of pure affeccyoun Ful longe tym had a synguler deuocyoun' to Mary Magdalene.[107] She prevails upon Bokenham to leave off his life of St Elizabeth and compose one of Mary Magdalene for herself instead. Issues of personal prestige relating both to herself and to her favourite saint were no doubt at work in Isabel's wish to have her text completed first.

Other individuals commissioned the lives of their name saints, or for saints on whose feast days they were born. Capgrave wrote a life of St

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[104] Samuel Moore, 'Patrons of letters in Norfolk and Suffolk, c. 1450, 2', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (28) 1913, pp. 79-105, provides a detailed survey of the East Anglian literary and patronal network.

[105] Gibson, 'Saint Anne and the religion of childbed', pp. 104-107.

[106] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 138.

[107] Ibid., p. 139.

Augustine for 'a gentill woman' who 'was browt forth in-to þis world in his solempne feste'.[108] Bokenham himself was devoted to St Margaret because she once rescued him from drowning in the Veneto.[109]

I do not wish to imply, through this approach, that texts did not move between household and church. We can be sure that some of these lives of St Katherine were originally intended for public delivery or private reading. However, sermon texts were also being read by the laity for personal edification by the fifteenth century, and the lives contained in household manuscripts were probably also read aloud for the benefit of whole *familia* in a manner not too dissimilar from that of a priest in church. Nevertheless, the approach that I have taken allows us to contextualise the cult of St Katherine in specific locations and among specific groups.

Visual narratives and images[110]

Jeffrey Denton has written that to grasp the significance of visual representations in medieval culture one has to understand the climate of thought in which they were fashioned.[111] To turn Denton's statement around, it is equally true that to understand that climate of thought and belief one must grasp the significance of visual representations within it.

For the medieval Church, art was a universal medium of communication, the one way it could be sure of reaching all, regardless of what language they spoke, or whether they had the ability to read.[112]

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[108] Moore, 'Patrons of letters', p. 198.

[109] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 5.

[110] In the medieval period 'image' (from the Latin *imago*) usually referred specifically to a statue, or other iconic devotional representation, and it is in this sense that it is used in wills. There was a lack of precision in the use of this term even in the Middle Ages. See Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, pp. 17-18. However, I use it in the specific sense of an iconic devotional representation.

[111] Jeffrey Denton, 'Image and history', in Johnathan Alexander and Paul Binski, eds., *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London, 1987), pp. 20-25: p. 20.

[112] Michael Camille, 'The language of images in medieval England, 1200-1400', in Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 33-40, especially p. 33. See also his 'Seeing and reading: some visual implications for medieval literacy and illiteracy', *Art History* 8 (1985), pp. 26-49, for more on the relationship between text and image in a multi-literate society.

Imagery was ubiquitous and pervaded the lives of all classes of person in the Middle Ages, not only through art, but through the liturgy and religious drama as well. Visual representations were the central locus for the individual to establish contact and a personal relationship with God, or whomsoever might be depicted. Such a relationship was particularly important in an age when the majority of people had only rare participation in the sacraments.[113]

There were no ecclesiastical regulations controlling religious devotion through iconography.[114] However, the pronouncements of Gregory the Great on the matter, made in the late-sixth century became almost canonical.[115] Gregory's primary concern was with the educative value of visual representations and images, rather than seeing them as having a direct relationship with the person they represented. However, the Second Nicene Council of 787 asserted as a doctrine of the Church that 'the honour shown to the image is transferred to the prototype, and whoever honours the image honours the person represented by it'.[116] This doctrine provides an explanation for the great devotion shown to images of the saints in late-medieval wills. However, it seems that in the setting of the late-medieval parish people did not necessarily make a distinction between 'image' and 'prototype' as they were supposed to, but perceived that there was some tangible, physical link between the two. The rational behind honouring a particular saint, or saints, was that he or she had the ability to intervene in earthly matters for the benefit of a devotee. Just as the saints could materially affect people's lives, so there was a sense that people could reach the saints through their images, honouring them both with money and with physical displays of devotion.

The following passage, from a fifteenth-century sermon, sheds light on the actual practice of image worship:

> alle thoo that, for any siknesse or sorwe that hem eileth, bihoteth and renneth from cuntre to cuntre to ymage 3oten or graven with mannes hondes of gold or sylver, of tree or of ston, wennyng and tristynge that ther be any dyvyne vertu in

[113] Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, p. 20.

[114] Denton, 'History and image', p. 20.

[115] See works cited on p. 14 above.

[116] Quoted by Clifford Davidson, *Drama and Art: an introduction to the use of evidence from visual arts from the study of early drama* (Kalamazoo, 1977), p. 8.

> hem, or that thei moun any thyng helpen, or oon more than an other, for any maner affeccion or farinesse or coste... *If thei seyen that hei billeeven not that ther is any vertu therynne but oneli in god, that loveth more and worcheth in oo place than in another, it wole seme [as] if it provyd that thei lien falseli.* For if men stele aweie that ymage that thei seche, thei wolen cese of hire pilgrymage in a schort tyme. And 3et is god as my3ti as he was, and the place there stille. And thus thei proven bi hire deddis hire trist was in that ymage [my italics].[117]

The highlighted passage indicates that official teaching on images was being successfully disseminated. However, image worship stemmed not so much from Church teaching, as from popular religious impulses. These established a service of images, certain ritual ways of thinking about and behaving towards them, which gathered a considerable devotional apparatus.[118] The Church tried to control the use of images, but the sheer amount of rhetoric expended on the subject indicates the impossibility of ensuring that people offered the correct sort of veneration to images.

The sermon writer quoted above may have been a Lollard. Attacks on the excesses of image worship are characteristic of this late-fourteenth century heresy. Indeed, Mirk singles out Lollards' opposition to images as their distinctive error in the *Festial*.[119] However, the dividing line between 'heretical' and 'orthodox' opinion on images is often not very clearly drawn. While records of the trials of Lollards tell us that there were those who advocated the destruction of images, Wycliffe himself, and many of his followers, recognised that there was a place for images in the practices of religion, Wycliffe writing that 'images may be made both well and ill'.[120] His concern was that proper veneration should not become excessive and

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[117] Quoted by Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 146-147.

[118] Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, p. 22.

[119] Fletcher, 'John Mirk', p. 219. For more on Lollardy and image worship see Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, especially pp. 96-159; W. R. Jones, 'Lollards and images: the defence of religious art in later-medieval England', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973), pp. 27-50; J. P. H. Clark, 'Walter Hilton in defence of the religious life and the veneration of images', *Downside Review* 103 (1985), pp. 2-25; Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 135-148; T. A. Heslop, 'Attitudes to the visual arts: the evidence from written sources', in Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 26-32; Lollardy was also characterised by its dissentient views on the Eucharist and its deprecation of sacerdotal authority, Margaret Aston, 'Lollard women priests?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), pp. 441-461.

[120] Quoted by Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, p. 99. For Lollard iconoclasts see ibid., pp. 133-143.

inappropriate worship, something of equal concern to orthodox writers.[121] This demonstrates the ways in which the attitudes and behaviour of the Lollards 'rendered suspect aspirations which were in themselves laudably reformist'.[122]

The value of imagery

Lollard attacks on images and visual representations in general led to a backlash in their defence. Men who had some sort of involvement with the laity, were much more aware of their needs and experiences than some of the academic theologians who laid down the theoretical precepts of image worship. Writers such as Mirk and the author of *Dives and Pauper* recognised that some people could not do without images and that this was not necessarily a bad thing.[123] Both *Dives and Pauper* and the *Festial* proceed with the intention of answering and correcting Lollard objections to images. Images could help people to retain the knowledge required of them by the Fourth Lateran Council.[124] Theologians recognised that images could inspire devotion in those who remained unaffected by merely hearing of the deeds of the saints.[125] Visualisations of the events of a saint's life are bound to be much more memorable than verbal renderings and something heard, such as a sermon, is memorised much more easily with

[121] Ibid., p. 99. Lollards were also dismayed at the amount of money which was spent on images, money which they felt would better be spent on the poor, a charge also brought by orthodox writers, ibid., pp. 124-133.

[122] Ibid., p. 157.

[123] In consideration of this issue it is appropriate to bear in mind Nicholas Watson's distinction between 'academic' clerics, who lived in an intellectual Latin speaking community, made up solely of other clerics, and 'pastoral' clerics who lived, or at least worked among the laity and wrote in English for them. Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and cultural change in late-medieval England: vernacular theology, the Oxford translation debate and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409', *Speculum* 70 (1996), pp. 822-864: pp. 851-852.

[124] Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 136-146. For more on the connections between literature and art within the pastoral initiative see A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 21-73; E. W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1955), pp. 95-125, 'The allegories and moralities'; Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages* (London, 1993), pp. 78-81.

[125] This is the second of three points made by St Bonaventura to justify images, forming an argument that became extremely influential; see Paul Binski, *Medieval Craftsmen: Painters* (London, 1991), p. 35. For a Middle English version of these prescriptions see Priscilla Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper 1* E.E.T.S. o.s. 274 (Oxford, 1976), p. 82.

the help of pictures.[126]

People would be able to use visual narratives and iconic images as triggers to recall whole reams of information, sacred history, doctrine and so on.[127] Herein lies the importance of the iconographic emblem which each saint carries (figs. 3-8). Such an emblem can be read metonymically and it also served as a starting point for the mental reiteration of the saint's life. In describing and explaining the image of St Katherine, Pauper provides a summary of the central and visually defining episode of her life:

> Seynt Katerine is peyntyd wyt a qheel in ƥe to hond in tokene of ƥe horrible qheelys qheche ƥe tyraunt Maxence ordeynyd to rendyn here lyth fro lyth. But ƥe aungel distroyid hem and slow manye thowsandys of ƥe hethene peple, and so ƥey dedyn here noon harme. She haȝt a swerd in ƥe tothyr hond in tokene ƥat here hed was smet of wyt a swerd for Cristys sake.[128]

Even if one could read (and especially if one could not) images had the advantage of being far more readily available than books. This fact was recognised and articulated by Reginald Pecock in his vociferous and comprehensive dismissal of Lollard objection to imagery, contained in his *Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of Clergy*.

> Also here with al into the open siȝt of ymagis in open chirchs alle people (men and wommen and children) mowe come whanne euere thei wolen in ech tyme of the day, but so mowe thei not come in to the vce of bokis to be delyuered to hem neither to be red bifore hem.[129]

The Book of Margery Kempe illustrates the proposition that the laity had easy access to their churches. Margery's visions usually occurred within St

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[126] For a wider discussion of memory and memorisation see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 221-257, 'Memory and the book'.

[127] For discussion of the ways in which medieval people were taught to read images see the articles by Camille cited on p. 33 above; also Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings*, pp. 13-21; Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, 2nd edition (Oxford and New York, 1988), pp. 40-56; Belting, *The Image and Its Public*, pp. 41-64; Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The visual and the visionary: the image in late-medieval monastic devotions', in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 161-206; Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The use of images in the pastoral of nuns: the case of Heinrich Suso and the Dominicans', *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989), pp. 20-46; Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford, 1986), pp. 9-11. Petroff asserts that 'to a great extent devotional meditation was the only form of meditative exercise apart from repetitive prayer that was taught to lay people and nuns, to tertiaries or beguines unable to read Latin', p. 9.

[128] Barnum, *Dives and Pauper*, pp. 92-93.

[129] Reginald Pecock, *Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of Clergy 1*, ed., Churchill Babington (London, 1860), p. 214. For more on the life and work of Pecock see Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, pp. 147-154.

Margaret's, her parish church. Descriptions of them are prefixed with an account of the part of the church in which she was praying at the time; in the chapel of St John or of the Virgin, before the sacrament in the choir, before an altar of the cross.[130] Margery's experiences indicate strategies by which it was possible for the laity to appropriate communal images and spaces, in order to enjoy private meditation and communication with Christ and the saints.[131]

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether, or how far, preachers would have referred to artistic representations of the saints and other subjects while preaching. However, in Mirk's sermon for St Margaret's day the description of the saint trampling the devil is given the following coda:

> Herfor margret ys ypayntyd oþur coruen wher scho ys wyth a dragon vndyr her fete and a cros yn her hond.[132]

In his sermon on Corpus Christi he avows:

> I say boldly þat þer ben mony þousand of pepul þat couþ not ymagen in her hert how Crist was don on þe rood, but as þai lerne hit be syȝt of ymages and payntours.[133]

Mirk saw the benefits that could accrue from the contemplation of images and visual narratives. Other homiletic sources such as *Dives and Pauper* also describe images of the saints and provide keys to reading and understanding their iconography. In chapter 6 Dives recognises that imagery is a book to 'lewyd peple' and asks Pauper 'teche me a lytyl betere to knowe þis tokene and to redyn þis book'.[134] By way of explanation Pauper describes and explains the images of a few saints:

> whos ymagys han dyuerse fygurys in her handys & oþer placys for dyuerse vertues & martirdomys þat þo seyntys suffredyn & haddyn in her lyfys.[135]

Pauper picks five saints whose images would probably have been found in some form in most parish churches: saints Peter, Paul, John the Baptist,

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[130] Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds.,*The Book of Margery Kempe*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 212 (1940), p. 16, p. 207, p. 169, p. 206.

[131] For an informative account of this phenomenon in relation to women's devotional practices see Anna Cheifetz, '"Spiritual mansions": female space and the privatisation of piety in late medieval England', unpublished MA thesis, University of York (1992), pp. 26-47, 'Private body: public community'.

[132] Erbe, *Festial*, p. 201.

[133] Ibid., p. 171.

[134] Barnum, *Dives and Pauper*, p. 91.

[135] Ibid.

Katherine (as seen above) and Margaret.

Many of the visual representations of the person and life of St Katherine were on constant display to the worshipper, depending on their form and location. Within churches saint's lives could take the form of wall paintings, stained glass windows, panel paintings, alabaster panels and could be incorporated into the decoration of the vestments worn by priests officiating at Mass.[136] Saints could also be encountered as iconic figures in the same media and as three dimensional images made from stone, wood or alabaster. These provided part of a wider framework for the liturgy.[137] Individual churches would contain differing amounts of imagery depending on size, location and the wealth and inclination of the parishioners.

The architectural constitution of the church and the arrangement of its decoration frequently formed a system of signs and symbols to be read by the congregation.[138] The cruciform shape of many churches served as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice and the Redemption. The convention of placing certain artistic schemae in particular places within the interior, the Last Judgment over the chancel arch, the figure of St Christopher over the north entrance, or lives of the saints in the nave, served to incorporate visually the events of sacred history into the communal observance of religion.[139] The interior decoration of churches described the whole of salvation history to the parishioners, beginning with the Creation, through events of the Old Testament, to the lives of Mary and Christ, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Last Judgment. Representations of these

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[136] The best example of the latter is provided by the early- to mid-fourteenth century Pienza Cope, which includes representations of the lives of saints Katherine and Margaret in its decoration. See A. G. I. Christie, *English Medieval Embroidery* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 178-183, plates 139-142. See also M. B. Freeman, 'The legend of Saint Catherine told in embroidery', *Metropolitan museum of Art Bulletin* 13 (1955), pp. 281-293, for a general introduction based largely on Continental examples.

[137] See Peter Draper, 'Architecture and liturgy', in Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 83-91, and 'The architectural setting of Gothic art', in Nigel Saul, ed., *Age of Chivalry: Art and Society in Late Medieval England* (London, 1992), pp. 60-75.

[138] Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Painting*, pp. 1-3.

[139] Ibid. C. E. Keyser's, *A List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland Having Mural and Other Painted Decorations* (London, 1883), is a useful starting point for locating particular subjects, gauging their relative popularity and establishing the conventions (if any) of their position within churches.

events are paralleled in contemporary sermon literature.[140] The value of such a system did not go unnoticed by those concerned with pastoral reform, Mirk advising in the *Festial,* 'But for mony of you wyttupe noght how ȝe schull pray to God, þe settyng of þe chyrch hyt tellyþe you'.[141]

In order to ensure that they were on the right side at the Day of Judgment parishioners had to follow Christian lives and be familiar with the knowledge required for salvation. Thus churches frequently contain images such as the Seven Works of Mercy, or Seven Deadly Sins, which intensified the impact of catechetical sermons on these subjects.[142] Coming between the Resurrection and the Last Judgment the lives of the saints provided models of exemplary Christian conduct which could be assimilated into the lives of those who heard and saw them.

It is important to locate these images and visual representations within the devotional climate of the later Middle Ages. This environment, with its impetus towards the privatisation of religious experience and the forging of a close personal experience with Christ had a great influence on the function of visual material within devotional life. Some of the most popular literature of the period thus invited the audience to visualise scenes from sacred history and even to include itself in the narrative.[143] The Bernardine tradition of affective meditation on the passion, which the Fransiscans had appropriated and extended, became the central devotional activity of the laity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[144] The laity learned the method of such meditation from works which encouraged the individual to imagine the events of Christ's life episodically and in great

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[140] Representative sermons have been edited by Woodburn O. Ross, *Middle English Sermons,* E.E.T.S. o.s. 209 (1940), pp. 12-19, pp. 110-114, pp. 153-162. The latter contains the miracle of the prostitute who is saved after praying in front of an image of the Virgin and child.

[141] Erbe, *Festial,* p. 9.

[142] Spencer, *English Preaching,* pp. 207-211; W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 235-240.

[143] Sixten Ringbon, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting* (Abo, 1965); 'Devotional images and imaginative devotions: notes on the place of art in late-medieval private piety', *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 73 (1969), pp. 159-170.

[144] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 234-235.

detail. The *Meditationes Vitae Christi* was the most widely circulated work of this kind, which was translated into English by Nicholas Love, as *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, in the early fifteenth century.[145]

The technique of internal visualisation in order to achieve heightened devotion has a part to play in the cult of saints too. It apparently informs the description of Katherine's scourging in RBB, for example,

> Y see ƥe bete in myn herte
> ƥy body all to toore...
> now ys myn herte more wo
> more ƥan hyt was ere [p. 10]

In this way Katherine, rather than being perceived of as a remote celestial entity, becomes a very human being who had lived and suffered, bled and died on earth. She becomes a real, accessible figure who could be reached and petitioned through the images which represented her person, and the narratives which described her life.[146] The visualisation of St Katherine's life involved the audience in the construction of a model for the ideal spiritual life which it could then attempt to follow.[147] This visualisation would have been greatly helped by the visual narratives of her life to which people had regular access.

Extant visual sources

The visual dimension of this study, perhaps more so than any other aspect, has largely been determined by the nature of the surviving sources. Because so much medieval art has been destroyed this study cannot provide a complete survey of the kinds of visual images and narratives of St Katherine and her life which would have been available to her devotees. In addition, most of the surviving visual material relating to the cult of St Katherine is that to be found within parish churches. It is consequently much easier to recreate the visual environment of devotion to St Katherine

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[145] Barbara Nolan, 'Nicholas Love', in A. S. G. Edwards, ed., *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres* (New Brunswick, 1984), pp. 83-95; Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love's Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* (Salzburg, 1974).

[146] See Gail MacMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London, 1989), pp. 1-18 for further general discussion of this development.

[147] Miles, *Image as Insight*, p. 73.

within parish churches than it is within households. However, recreation of the latter is not impossible and testamentary evidence is invaluable for filling in the gaps left by those works of art which do not survive.

This study also focuses in particular upon extant wall paintings because these visual narratives provide a means of understanding the ways in which people would have encountered saints and the function of their cults within parish churches.[148] Reference will also be made to stained glass windows which have benefited from a greater degree of critical attention than wall paintings in recent years.[149] Visual cycles also survive in the form of alabaster altar pieces, surviving either in whole or in parts.[150] This study cannot claim to be all encompassing as it has little to say about panel paintings, or manuscript illuminations for example. However, the ensuing observations may be applicable to images and cycles of St Katherine in other media. To further the study of saints' cults in medieval England more work needs to be undertaken on art-historical sources, in order to restore the visual dimension of worship and veneration which was of paramount importance to devotees.[151] The present study is able, at least, to draw some partial conclusions.

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[148] E. C. Williams, 'Mural Paintings of St Catherine in England', *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3rd series, 19 (1956), pp. 20-33, provides an invaluable, though not infallible, catalogue of wall painting cycles and iconic images of St Katherine. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings*, Keyser, *List of Buildings*, Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, E. Clive Rouse, *Medieval Wall Paintings* 4th edition (Haverford West, 1991) all provide information about additional representations of St Katherine and her life and the nature of the medium itself. David Park is in the process of publishing a survey of English wall paintings for the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. In the meantime see his 'Wall painting', in Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 125-130, also Pamela Tudor-Craig, 'Painting in medieval England: the wall to wall message', in Saul, *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 106-119. Binski, *Painters*, provides a very useful introduction, but makes a wider survey of Western Europe.

[149] Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, provides a comprehensive survey. Sarah Brown, *Medieval Craftsmen: Glass-Painters* (London, 1991) provides a useful introduction, but is not restricted to English examples.

[150] Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters* (Oxford, 1984), provides an excellent introduction to the manufacture, dissemination and function of alabaster figures and altarpieces and a catalogue of extant examples. See also Lynda Rollason, 'English alabasters in the fifteenth century', in Daniel Williams, ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 245-254.

[151] A. G. Little, *Franciscan History and Legend in English Medieval Art* (Manchster, 1937) and H. C. Whaite, *St Christopher in English Medieval Wall Painting* (London, 1929) provide studies of the visual dimension of saints' cults in England.

I have found references to twenty one wall painting cycles of St Katherine dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, and a further four paintings which may have once been part of cycles. As with the literary lives, there appear to be be more wall painting lives of St Katherine extant than of any other saint. The most extensive wall painting cycle of the life of St Katherine extant in England is to be found at Sporle in Norfolk, painted on the south wall of the nave, a standard place for such a narrative (figs. 9-18).[152] This cycle was apparently originally painted in the late-fourteenth century but over half of it seems to have been repainted in the early-fifteenth century.[153] It is divided into twenty-five panels and closely follows the narrative of St Katherine's life as described in the *Legenda Aurea* and the more detailed Middle English versions such as SEL, NHC and the *passio* section of the prose life.

An apparently complete, although much abbreviated three scene cycle is preserved at Castor, Northamptonshire, dating from the early-fourteenth century (figs. 19-22). It describes a debate scene, either with Maxentius or the Philosophers (fig. 20), the burning of the Philosophers (fig. 21) and the breaking of the wheels (fig. 22). Similarly Bardwell Church in Suffolk contains a late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century four scene cycle of the life of St Katherine: the debate with the Philosophers, the burning of the Philosophers, the breaking of the wheels and the beheading of St Katherine.[154] Such concise versions of the life, in common with the short literary lives F and SS give us some idea of the perceivedly essential elements of her life. These narratives are simple but still manage to convey the most important episodes and messages to their audience.

Sporle is not only the most extensive, but also the best preserved example in the corpus. The fourteenth-century cycle of the life of the Virgin and the Passion at Croughton (Northamptonshire) and the thirteenth- to fourteenth-century cycle of the life of St Margaret at Battle (Sussex) are

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[152] I was very fortunate to obtain photographs of the Sporle mural and I am very grateful to Marcus Jones for his mutual perseverance and his photographic expertise. See Tristram, *English Wall Paintings of the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 249-250, for a description of Sporle.

[153] I owe this observation to Christopher Norton.

[154] See Tristram, *English Wall Paintings of the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 136-137 for a description of this cycle.

among the few extant cycles undertaken on a similar scale to the Sporle mural.[155] Many of these cycles have apparently deteriorated since Tristram and Williams described them earlier this century. However, the extant material, in combination with the descriptions of cycles now destroyed, suggests that these narratives, whether they contain twenty-five scenes, or only three, revolve around the debate episodes and Katherine's rhetorical excellence, an emphasis which continues in other media within the parish.

There are several stained glass cycles of the life of St Katherine extant from the same period, also in varying states of preservation. The churches of St Peter Mancroft in Norwich and in Combs in Suffolk both possess panels which belong to lives of St Katherine, while the cycles at Hessett (Suffolk), Clavering (Essex), Balliol College Oxford and in York Minster are more complete.[156] The window including a life of St Katherine commissioned by Peter de Dene, a canon of York Minster, in the early-fourteenth century provides a particularly good example (figs. 36-41).[157] It is considered here despite its clerical patronage, because its position on the north side of the nave would have made it accessible to lay people visiting the Minster.[158] This window comprises six clearly identifiable episodes from the life of St Katherine. We can see the saint before Maxentius, the debate with the Philosophers (fig. 37), St Katherine visited in prison by the

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[155] See E. W. Tristram and M. R. James, 'Wall paintings in Crougton Church, Northamptonshire', *Archaeologia* 76 (1926), pp. 179-204; E. Clive Rouse, 'Wall paintings in St Mary's Church, Battle', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 117 (1979), pp. 151-159. The restored nave of Pickering Church (Yorkshire) gives an idea of the brightly coloured interior which provided the setting for religious observance within the parish. I have not made use of the Pickering life of St Katherine in this analysis because much of it had been completely destroyed when the restorers went to work in the last century and was subsequently imaginatively repainted, see G. H. Lightfoot, 'Mural paintings in St Peter's Church, Pickering', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 13 (1895), pp. 353-370.

[156] Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, p. 73. For pictures of the Balliol College cycle see the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Oxford* (London, 1939), p. 22 and plate 75. There was also a life of St Katherine in glass at St Albans' Abbey and in Bedern Chapel, York, now lost.

[157] Charles Winston, 'On an heraldic window in the north aisle of the nave of York Cathedral', in his *Memoirs Illustrative of the Art of Glass Painting* (London, 1865), pp. 256-284;

[158] There is a stained glass life of St Katherine in the Chapter House of York Minster as well but this would have been seen by a more selective and largely clerical audience. It is further testimony to the popularity of St Katherine that the Minster should contain two windows devoted to her life.

Empress and Porphirius, the breaking of the wheels and the beheading of St Katherine (fig. 38). A scene enclosed in a quatrefoil at the very top of the window seems to show the reception of St Katherine's soul into heaven. The debate with the Philosophers forms the centre of the lower band of the narrative and is given further emphasis by the position of the donor figure Peter de Dene placed below it, gazing up at the action, thus directing the attention of the audience.

English medieval alabasters survive either in the form of free-standing devotional images or as panelled altarpieces and, although they have now lost most of their colour, were originally painted. Some alabaster altarpieces survive intact, others have been broken up over the centuries, but individual panels can still be identified as belonging to the same altarpiece (figs. 26-32).[159] Part of the reason that this amount of English alabaster work has survived is that much of it was exported into the Continent during the medieval period, to countries as far apart as the Low Countries, Scandinavia and Spain. Cheetham's survey of medieval English alabasters confirms St Katherine's popularity. Cheetham reveals that with over fifty alabaster panels and some twenty standing figures of her extant she was by far the most popular saint.[160]

Both stained glass windows and wall paintings were expensive undertakings, which only the rich, or groups of less well off people banding together could afford to pay for.[161] They were also usually large scale works, whereas alabasters were not only cheaper, but often quite small and therefore suitable for use within the home as well as in the parish church.[162] Testamentary evidence indicates that devotional alabasters were to be found not only in chapels within households, but in other rooms as well.[163]

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[159] According to Cheetham there are fifty alabaster altars and two thousand panels and figures extant, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 11.

[160] See ibid., Appendix 1, p. 55 for Cheetham's full list of saints and numbers of surviving alabasters. He acknowledges that some alabasters were made for export and may therefore reflect different devotional preferences, but in the case of St Katherine this does not affect the argument, she seems to have been extremely popular across Europe, in both Western and Eastern Christendom.

[161] Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, pp. 5-6; Binski, *Painters*, pp. 48-52.

[162] Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, pp. 30-31.

[163] These are households enjoying a certain affluence, as will be seen in chapter 4.

The same sources also reveal that such items as jewellery, wall hangings, bed linen and wine bowls could also be marked by their owner's devotion to St Katherine, either by displaying her iconic image, or her symbol: the Katherine wheel. Although few examples of such items have survived the knowledge of their existence contributes to the reconstruction of devotion to St Katherine (and other saints) within the household.[164]

As with the literary lives of St Katherine, the extant visual lives reveal very little about the identity of their 'authors' or those who commissioned the cycles from them.[165] Within this corpus Peter de Dene's window provides a unique extant example.[166] With respect to wall paintings in particular there is very little surviving evidence which can illuminate the precise nature of the relationship between patrons and artists.[167] However, it seems likely that those who commissioned representations of the life of St Katherine had some control over iconography, especially if they themselves were to be included as donor figures. The design of these cycles would be affected by the models available to the artist, the other examples which he (or possibly she) and the donor had seen. Wills provide some evidence for individuals commissioning images and cycles. In addition members of a gild often clubbed together to provide similar works. These sources do not usually provide explicit explanations for the choice of St Katherine, or the particular medium of representing her, but it is likely that patrons were motivated by similar considerations to those of the literary texts which I have already discussed.

There were benefits derived from commissioning a cycle or image to

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[164] Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, catalogues some extant examples, pp. 436-7, pp. 458-456, pp. 481-488, although none of these display representations of St Katherine.

[165] For an introduction to the issue of artistic patronage see Nigel Saul, 'Forget-me-nots: patronage in Gothic England', in his *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 36-47. For the status of women as patrons see Veronica Sekules, 'Women's piety and patronage', in ibid., pp. 120-131, also her 'Women and art in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', in Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 41-48.

[166] Although Winston, 'On an heraldic window', provides a detailed description of the window, at no stage does it question why St Katherine should have been chosen as the subject.

[167] See Park, 'Wall painting', pp. 127-128; Binski, *Painters*, pp. 37-38. A little more is known about the commissioning of stained glass windows, see Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, pp. 1-27 due to the survival of contracts and testamentary bequests relating to windows.

be set up in a parish church which accrued both to the donor and to other members of the parish and which perhaps explain why people would be more likely to commission large-scale cycles during their life times, rather than leaving money for it to be done after their death. Commissioning such a cycle during life would perhaps have been a way of ensuring that it was undertaken precisely according to one's wishes, something which was not as easy with a post-mortem bequest, however detailed the instructions. By providing for a parish church in this way the donor would be assured of the prayers and intercessions both of the saint thus honoured and of other parishioners, for whom the cycle or image would provide a constant reminder of the donor and his or her devotion to the saint. In addition to spiritual and penitential considerations, such donations served to embellish the parish church, reflecting the wealth and honour not just of the donor, but of the whole congregation.[168]

Wills

The documentary source to which this study most often has recourse is the testamentary evidence provided by wills and inventories. I have consulted published material relating to over 5000 wills and inventories, making note of the various ways in which devotion to St Katherine and other saints is manifested in them and the ramifications this has for an investigation of her cult within the setting of the parish and the household.[169] The geographic area covered by these published documents is wide enough to allow for some suggestions about countrywide devotion to St Katherine as well as regional variations.[170] Most extant testamentary evidence dates from the fifteenth century, but there are some earlier survivals.

Those who left wills and inventories were those who could afford to;

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[168] See Judy Ann Ford, 'Art and identity in the parish communities of late-medieval Kent', *Studies in Church History* 28 (1992), pp. 225-237: pp. 234-235.

[169] The actual number is rather greater than this, but the editors of the Sussex and Kent wills presented the evidence under headings determined by the nature of the bequest, or by parish and it is impossible to be precise about the number of wills which they consulted.

[170] For the full list of wills consulted see bibliography, 'Wills'.

those who possessed at least some property or other goods which they wanted to dispose of in precise ways after their death. Those drawn from the upper levels of peasant society, or more affluent urban artisans did leave wills, but the majority which have been consulted for this study were left by those of mercantile or gentry status and above.

The nature of the publications in which many of these documents have been published and the biases of the editors, who in the past have been largely concerned with the testamentary provisions of the well-to-do, or those whose names are recognisable, must be borne in mind when considering the evidence which they provide.[171] One particularly galling practice of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century protestant antiquarians and historians who edited many of these wills, was to omit the preamble as nothing more than a superstitious incantation of saints' names which could be of no interest or benefit to the scholar.[172] However, such preambles (although perhaps sometimes formulaic) do provide invaluable evidence of the religious and cultic preferences of the testator:

> In nomine Sancti et... Patris Filii et S. Spiritus ac beate et gloriose Virginis Marie gentricis Dei nostri Ihu Christi necnon beatissimorum Apostolum Petri Pauli Andree et Johannis Evangeliste atque sanctissimorum virginum Katerine Margarete beatissime Marie Magdalene et Marie Egipican.[173]

Moreover the majority of wills were made by men. Although there are some extant wills made by married women, the majority of female will makers were widows.[174]

Given the circumstances of a will's composition, its status as the last pious act of a Christian usually near death, some have questioned whether

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[171] N. H. Nichols, ed., *Testamenta Vetusta* (London, 1826), provides an example of this phenomenon at work, drawing exclusively on the wills of such notables as Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Oxford, Isabel, Countess of Warwick and John, Duke of Exeter.

[172] Some modern scholars are rather dismissive of their value as well, see J. D. Alsop, 'Religious preambles in Early Modern wills as formulae', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40 (1989), pp. 19-27; Margaret Spufford, 'The scribes of villagers' wills in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their influence', *Local Population Studies* 7 (1971), pp. 28-49. M. L. Zell, 'The use of religious preambles as a measure of religious belief in the sixteenth century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 50 (1977), pp. 246-249 takes the more constructive approach of linking preambles to subsequent bequests in order to draw conclusions about the saintly preferences of individual testators.

[173] Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills* (1901 volume), p. 361; the 1498 will of John Gunthorpe.

[174] P. J. P Goldberg, *Women in England c. 1275-1525* (Manchester and New York, 1995), pp. 50-51.

its provisions can be taken as an accurate representation of the individual's spiritual concerns or devotional preferences. Wills can only give us a partial idea of the pious practices of individuals and communities. As Clive Burgess points out, a brief will does not necessarily indicate lack of funds or religious apathy on the part of the testator. Rather it may be that he or she died with their wishes and estate well in order.[175] However, the methods described in these documents for honouring St Katherine, leaving money for the upkeep of a particular light or altar, ordering the construction of a new image, making a bequest to a particular chapel or gild dedicated to the saint, are evidence for individuals' continuation of practices undertaken throughout their lives, as the evidence of church wardens' accounts and relating to gilds demonstrates.[176]

Despite the fact that wills were made, on the whole, by people of a certain status, they can help us to reconstruct the environment of devotion which, particularly within parish churches, was shared by those drawn from the lower echelons of society as well. Wills are also invaluable for the light they shed on the visual dimension of saints' cults because so much of the material evidence has been lost. This is particularly true of the cult images of the saints which provide the focus for much of the devotion to them displayed in wills.

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[175] Clive Burgess, 'Late-medieval wills and pious convention: testamentary evidence reconsidered', in Michael Hicks, ed., *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later-Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1990), pp. 14-33: p. 21. This article provides a cautionary introduction to the use of wills as evidence for religious customs and practices.

[176] Several scholars have examined wills for evidence of piety and devotion during life as well as after death: J. A. F. Thomson, 'Piety and charity in late medieval London', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1965), pp. 178-195; Peter Heath, 'Urban piety in the later Middle Ages: the evidence of Hull wills', in R. B. Dobson, ed., *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 209-234; Norman P. Tanner, 'Testamentary bequests', in his *The Church and Society in Late Medieval Norwich: 1370-1532* (Toronto, 1984), pp. 113-140; Christopher Marsh, 'In the name of God? Will making and faith in Early Modern England', in G. H. Martin and Peter Spufford, eds., *The Records of the Nation* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 215-249. The work of Clive Burgess provides examples of the ways in which testators' instructions may relate to their status as members of a particular parish and also to wider patterns of piety at work within it: see his '"By quick and by dead", wills and pious provision in late-medieval Bristol', *English Historical Review* 405 (1987), pp. 837-858; '"A fond thing vainly invented": an essay on Purgatory and pious motive in later medieval England', in S. J. Wright, ed., *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750* (London, 1988), pp. 56-84; 'The benefactions of mortality: the lay response in the late medieval urban parish', in David M. Smith, ed., *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England* (York, 1991), pp 65-86.

Wills and devotion to St Katherine

The most significant form of saintly imagery which parishioners would have encountered within their churches is that for which the least tangible evidence survives: three-dimensional iconic images carved from wood, stone or alabaster, painted and set on altars or placed beside lights dedicated to the saint thus represented (figs. 3-8). The evidence provided by wills demonstrates the importance of these images as focuses for devotion to favoured saints, as ways of demonstrating preferences and seeking favours. The images themselves, with very few exceptions, have survived only in fragments however, which is why they are considered here in relation to testamentary evidence. The devotional practices, both individual and collective, which grew up around images, provide a clear indication of the ways in which people responded to the lives of the saints which they heard, read and saw. They provide a means of ascertaining whether the lives which were presented to the laity were indeed those in which they found the most value. While the iconic image of St Katherine serves as a reminder of the events of her passion, the figure it represents is also, in a sense, outside the narrative. She is the St Katherine of now, the St Katherine who is crowned in Heaven at Christ's side attending to the prayers of her devotees and interceding on their behalf.

Any parish church would have contained a number of saints' images placed within chapels, upon altars or surrounded by lights. Wills from East Kent give an idea of the range of images of different saints that could be contained in any one church and allow one to compare the relative amounts of visual material in different churches.[177] For example during the fifteenth century Faversham church contained forty-seven lights, images and altars including eight dedicated to various aspects of the Virgin (our Lady in the Choir, Our Lady of Pity, Assumption of Our Lady etc) and an

[177] Given that many wills are no longer extant and that some images may have benefited rather from gifts made during people's life times and therefore not appeared frequently in wills, this approach is only intended to give an idea of relative church contents. Wall paintings and stained glass windows are rarely mentioned in wills so this aspect is also absent.

image of St Katherine as well as of other popular saints: Anne, Christopher, Erasmus, James the Great, John the Baptist, Michael, Peter, Thomas of Canterbury.[178] The majority of churches however, such as Leysdown, Eboney or Benenden, contain only about ten lights/images/altars. Significantly all of these churches contained images of St Katherine.[179]

The contents of each church reflected the preferences of its parishioners, although bequests to a particular light may not entail specific devotion to the saint in question. Sometimes testators leave money to every light in the church without specifying to whom they are dedicated, or else they give what may be a comprehensive list of all the lights in the church. For example, John Whyte of Holcote made his will in 1501, leaving the following instructions for the upkeep of the lights in his parish church of Cranfield:

> To the sepulchre light of Holcote church 3s 4d; to the Crucifix light there 3s 4d; to the purchase of a candle stick to stand before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary 10s; to the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary a decorated cloth called 'an Awtercloth' 3s 4d; to the light of St Nicholas, St Mary Magdalene, St Katherine and St Margaret a cow; to the light of the Pious Souls another cow; to the light of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist, St John the Evangelist, another; these three cows to be so managed so that these three lights may have three cows forever.[180]

Whyte's devotional preferences can be gauged by the varying amounts of money and resources he bestows upon each light and the practice of selecting particular lights seems to have been commonplace enough for patterns of devotion and the relative popularity of saints to emerge. A survey of wills from other areas bears out the frequency with which images of St Katherine were to be found in medieval churches. She appears to have been a standard feature of the interior of the majority of churches by the fifteenth century.

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[178] For the bequests associated with Faversham, see Arthur Hussey, ed., *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent* (London, 1907), pp. 119-129. For similar amounts of statuary or other imagery see Reculver, ibid., pp. 253-255; Whitstable, pp. 357-363; and the churches of Sandwich, pp. 277-297.

[179] Ibid., Leysdown, pp. 192-193; Eboney, pp. 108-109; Benenden, pp. 16-17.

[180] Margaret McGregor, eds. *Bedfordshire Wills Proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1383-1548*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 58 (1979), p. 55.

Chapter 2

St Katherine as virgin martyr

The early cult of St Katherine in England

According to the later medieval accounts of her life, St Katherine of Alexandria lived and died in the exotic early fourth-century world of Asia Minor. The most widely accepted date for her martyrdom is 307 A.D., but this is by no means a constant.[1] For example, SEL gives the date as 'ƿreo hondred 3er & tuenti after ƿat God was ibore' (p. 533), whereas ScL says '...scho tholit ƿis passione/ fra cristis incarnacione/ thre hundreth & tene yhere' (p. 476). Despite these variations, however, the legend is firmly located in the period which saw the final demise of paganism as the primary belief of the Roman empire, and the triumph of Christianity in the person of Constantine.

In fact the legend of St Katherine came to have special associations with the first Christian emperor. In the earliest texts Katherine's persecutor is named as Maximinus (Emperor of the East), but he was subsequently replaced by the more notorious Maxentius (Emperor of the West), who was defeated by Constantine in 312 A.D. and whose legendary 'bad end' was recounted in the story of the Invention of the Holy Cross.[2] The prose life of St Katherine even goes so far as to formulate a blood relationship between Katherine and Constantine; Katherine's father Costus is said to have been Constantine's elder half-brother.[3] Constantine's identity as a son of Britain was well established by the fifteenth century. Fact had been blended with fiction in order to establish that he was born in England of a noble Roman father (Constantius) and a saintly English mother (Helen). Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century account of Constantine's genealogy and birth contained in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* was probably the most

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[1] See Williams, 'Mural paintings of St Catherine in England', p. 21. Also, F. Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications 1* (London, 1899), p. 117.

[2] As described in the *Legenda Aurea;* see de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, pp. 279-280 which describes the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. de Voragine discusses the confusion between Maxentius and Maximinus at the end of his life of St Katherine; see de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, p. 341. The Sporle cycle contains what may be a representation of the punishment of Maxentius' soul, fig. 15.

[3] a, p. 169, d, pp. 4-7.

influential.[4] This accretion serves to enhance the prestige both of the legend of St Katherine and of the figure of the saint herself. It is significant that the relationship between Katherine and Constantine was made genealogically explicit in a life composed in England, as it linked the saint directly to the country of her half-uncle.[5]

Despite this strong association of St Katherine with the fourth century A.D. there is no historical evidence to suggest that such a woman ever existed. This is true of virtually all virgin martyr saints. As a literary type, if not a historical figure, the virgin martyr seems to have had currency from the earliest days of Christianity, as the life of St Perpetua, who died in 203 testifies.[6] The conception of these saints seems to have grown out of memories of the heroic resistance of actual women to pagan tyrants, and gradually became standardised narratives which outlined the public witness, interrogation, torture and execution of young, high status maidens. We can see this process at work in the figure of St Apollonia, whose legend seems to have been based on the experiences of an actual woman. She was martyred in Alexandria in the mid-third century, and according to the earliest account of her life was an elderly deaconess who threw herself into a fire rather than recite pagan prayers. However, by the later Middle Ages Apollonia has been transformed into a beautiful young virgin who is tortured and killed by the pagans.[7]

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[4] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London, 1966), pp. 131-2. The figure of Helen which Geoffrey presents could be seen as a type for Katherine, as she too is the only child of her royal father, King Coel. 'Her father had no other child to inherit the throne, and he had therefore done all in his power to give Helen the kind of training which would enable her to rule the country more efficiently after his death' (p. 132). This is very similar to the upbringing Katherine receives from Costus. See p. 132-3 for Constantine's defeat of the tyrant Maxentius.

[5] The claim that Katherine has a special tie to Britain can be seen as part of a developing nationalist discourse, which also directs Arthurian narratives in establishing the country as a special locus of sanctity and heroism. This discourse also allowed Anglo-Norman historians to create a continuity between the Norman rulers (and their descendants) and the legendary rulers of Britain.

[6] The life is apparently based on a prison diary written by Perpetua herself, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1-17; also Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, pp. 70-77 for the full text of the life.

[7] For Apollonia's legend see de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, pp. 268-269. This follows the early account. However, the fifteenth century rood screen at Barton Turf (Norfolk), clearly portrays her as a young, beautiful woman. See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, plate 60.

It is not until four hundred years after the date of Katherine's supposed martyrdom that there is any written or visual reference to her or her passion. Katherine's legend is set in Alexandria, but is not of Egyptian origin. Nor does the Coptic Church show any evidence of a cult until the eighth century.[8] Moreover, the first extant text of the life of the saint dates from the late-ninth century. This is a Greek version contained in the *Menelogion Basilianum,* a collection of brief saints' lives arranged in calendar order, written for Basil I (died 886 A.D.).[9] The following is Einenkel's translation of the text:

> The martyr Aikaterina was the daughter of a rich and noble chieftain of Alexandria. She was very beautiful, and being at the same time highly talented, she devoted herself to Grecian literature, and to the study of the language of all nations, and so became wise and learned. And it happened that the Greeks held a festival in honour of their idols; and seeing the slaughter of the animals, she was so greatly moved that she went to the King Maximinus and expostulated with him in these words: 'Why hast thou left the living God to worship lifeless idols?' But the emperor caused her to be thrown into prison, and to be punished severely. He then ordered fifty orators to be brought, and bade them reason with Aikaterina, and confute her, threatening to burn them all if they should fail to overpower her. The orators, however, when they saw themselves vanquished, received baptism, and were burnt forthwith. She, on the contrary, was beheaded.[10]

Apart from the emblematic episode of the razored wheels, which appears to have been added to the legend over the next hundred years or so, the main thematic elements of St Katherine's life are already present: Katherine's noble character and education, her defiance of Maximinus (Maxentius) and the pagan belief system he represents, her debate with the philosophers, the conversion of the philosophers and Katherine's martyrdom for the Christian faith. These elements were subsequently much expanded and elaborated on in many different ways, but the pivotal episodes remained constant. Beatie describes these central events thus:

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[8] d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine,* p. xiii.

[9] For a discussion of this and other Greek versions of the life of St Katherine, see Nevalinna and Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria,* p. 5. This work provides the most recent survey of the early lives of St Katherine and the beginnings of her cult, but does not always agree with Bray's more detailed account, of which Nevalinna and Taavitsainen appear to be unaware. I am inclined, therefore, to follow Bray, unless specified.

[10] Eugen Einenkel, ed., *The Life of Saint Katherine from the Royal MS. 17a xxvii with its Latin Original from the Cotton MS. Caligula A viii,,* E.E.T.S. o.s. 80 (orig. pub. London, 1884; repr. New York, 1973), p. viii. On the same page Einenkel also prints the original Greek version, taken from the oldest existing edition published at Urbino in 1717.

Katherine's unique qualities, her courageous act of faith, the impact of her faith on others, her suffering for the sake of that faith and the confirmation of her sanctity.[11]

Thus this text provides the first extant exposition of the life of St Katherine. However the first known trace of a cult directed at the figure constructed in this text in the Eastern or Western Church, is found in the shape of a mural painted in the Roman catacomb known either as St Lawrence without the Walls or St Cyriaka, dating from 731-741 A.D., and therefore contemporary with the eighth century devotion in the Coptic Church.[12] St Katherine is identified by an inscription, and while no information about her life is given, it is probable that the central elements established above were already circulating in oral tradition among those who would have seen the depiction and used it as a focus for devotion. Indeed, Beatie suggests that the memory of a courageous woman or women, connected with Alexandria, who made some gesture of defiance during the period of the persecutions, was kept alive and lived orally among Greek-speaking Christian congregations in the near East and southern Italy.[13] This story then took on the form of the legend of St Katherine towards the end of the eighth century.

The next reference is to be found in the legendary contained in Munich Library, Clm 4554 which dates from 800-840. The contents page makes reference to a Latin 'passio Ecaterine' which is no longer extant.[14] This sparse evidence indicates that St Katherine was known in the West by the late-eighth or early-ninth century, but it is possible, as Bray suggests, that at this stage the cult was something of a fashionable novelty, inspiring these few surviving memorials.[15] However, there must have been a

[11] Bruce A. Beatie, 'St. Katharine of Alexandria in medieval German illustrative cycles: a problem beyond genre', in *Genres in Medieval German Literature*, ed. Hubert Heinen and Ingeborg Henderson (Goppingen, 1986), pp. 140-156: p. 145.

[12] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 8.

[13] Bruce A. Beatie, 'Saint Katharine of Alexandria: traditional themes and the development of a medieval German hagiograhic narrative', *Speculum* 52 (1977), pp. 785-800: p. 798.

[14] Beatie, 'Saint Katherine of Alexandria: traditional themes', p. 788; Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 9.

[15] Bray, ibid., p. 249. It is possible that survival of the cult and its growth from the eighth to the eleventh centuries is obscured by paucity of evidence.

continuing earlier cult (however minor) for which there is no evidence, as it would seem that the real basis for the flourishing late-medieval cult of St Katherine is the 're-introduction' of her cult in the eleventh century. The Crusades probably had an important role in spreading the cult from East to West. Devotion to the saint consequently entered Europe by way of Italy, and she became immensely popular all over the Continent. It would appear that devotion to St Margaret entered England at about the same time and by much the same means.[16] That St Katherine and St Margaret were by far the most popular of the virgin martyrs in later medieval England may be connected to these circumstances. No such obvious pattern can be ascertained in the case of the cult of 'lesser' virgin martyrs such as Agatha, Agnes or Lucy, who were known in England at a far earlier date, but did not enjoy the same level of popularity.

The focus of St Katherine's cult was Mount Sinai (fig. 46). The Emperor Justinian had established a monastery on the mountain where Moses had received the Ten Commandents and there was a church built on the site by 565 A.D.[17] The church was not dedicated to St Katherine but to the Virgin Mary.[18] However it would appear that a body was discovered and reinterred in the church. This body was identified as that of a virgin martyr who had died for the faith, namely St Katherine, who had enjoyed limited cult status a few hundred years previously, and who was now provided with a feast day (25 November), an exalted pedigree and, most importantly, a legend. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing exactly when this event occurred or under what circumstances, as the earliest account of the invention dates from 1217.[19] This account is contained in the *Iter ad Terram Sanctam anno 1217* written by Thietmar.[20] Bray suggests, therefore, that the historical event of the invention happened at the end of the tenth century; either not long before, or after, the compilation of the *Menelogion*, in

[16] Beatie, 'Saint Katherine of Alexandria: traditional themes', p. 798. For the early cult of St Margaret see Frances M. Mack, ed., *Seinte Marherete ƀe Meiden ant Martyr*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 193 (1934; repr. with corrections, 1958), pp. x-xi.

[17] Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', p. 207.

[18] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 11.

[19] Bray, ibid., p. 12; Kurvinen, 'Life Of St Catharine', p. 209. For a version of the latter account of the invention see d, pp. 25-26.

[20] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 12.

which Katherine is not connected to Mount Sinai, but before the tenth-century manuscript edited by Viteau, in which she is.[21] The discovery of the body led to the addition to the legend of an account of how St Katherine's freshly beheaded body was transferred to Mount Sinai by angels. This is an almost omnipresent episode in the later lives.

Thietmar tells of the monks seeing unnatural lights over the peak of the mountain, and following them, until they are led to a body. They take it back to the monastery, where an old hermit is on hand to identify it as the body of St Katherine. Perhaps not surprisingly, in a later version the monks are aware of the legend that the saint's body was brought to their mountain, and they pray for it to be revealed to them. An angel appears and duly carries out their request: 'Than they wyth gret ioye and reuerence takynge vp thys holy body bare hyt doun to þe chapell that they had ordeyned' (**d**, 63).[22] Sinai subsequently became a very important and wealthy shrine, visited by many pilgrims. Several accounts of the shrine survive from the later medieval period, and visual depictions of it were made too. Perhaps the most famous visitor to Mount Sinai was the German friar Felix Fabri, who left a detailed account of the pilgrimage he undertook in 1483.[23] Two other lesser known pilgrims; Ludolphus of Sudheim and Thomas Brygg, also wrote descriptions of their fourteenth-century pilgrimages to St Katherine's monastery, providing information about the journey to reach it and the appearance of the shrine itself.[24]

The most important factor in the ultimately successful propagation of the cult of St Katherine in Europe, was the arrival of her relics in Rouen,

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[21] Bray, ibid., p. 12. Nevalinna and Taavitsainen assign the discovery of the relics to c. 800 but do not cite a source for this observation (*St Katherine of Alexandria*, p. 5). The later date suggested by Bray would appear to be more likely.

[22] See also Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 13. A coffin containing the relics of St Katherine can still be seen at the monastery on Mount Sinai, but only an arm of the saint remains.

[23] See H.F.M. Prescott, *Once to Sinai: The Further Pilgrimage of Friar Felix Fabri* (London, 1957).

[24] Both these accounts are to be found in *Archives de l'Orient Latin* (Paris, 1884). Ludolphus of Sudheim's account, taken from his *De itinere Terre Sancte*, is on pp. 345-348; Thomas Brygg's account, taken from his *Itinerarium in Terram Sanctam Domini Thomae de Swynburne*, is on pp. 380-2.

brought from Mount Sinai.[25] These bones were believed to be part of St Katherine's martyred body and were thus objects of fervent devotion, a direct link to the saint and her intercessory and patronal power. These relics provided Katherine's devotees with tangible proof of her legend, which came to exist in many different forms and languages.[26] Medieval Europe was home to the relics of other virgin martyrs, however, no other virgin martyr shrine approached the wealth or importance of Mount Sinai as a centre of pilgrimage.

In 1026 one Symeon, monk of Sinai, took three of St Katherine's fingers and brought them to Rouen as a gift to Duke Robert of Normandy, father of the Conqueror.[27] Presumably as a result of this prestige-boosting acquisition, in the mid-eleventh century a certain Ainard, a monk at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Rouen, wrote a life of St Katherine in Latin.[28] This work provided the source for an Anglo-Norman poem, surviving only in fragments, intended to propagate the cult of St Katherine in England, which was by the late eleventh century ruled by the Duke of Normandy. This text was also intended to establish and propagate the 'pelerinage' of Rouen with respect to St Katherine.[29] Presumably she was becoming popular already, and Rouen wished to remind all English devotees of the unique part it had played in bringing this immensely powerful and exceptional figure to them. It is significant that Rouen had established connections with England even before the conquest. An abbot of the monastery, one Robert, became Bishop of London in 1044 and

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[25] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 9; Williams, 'Mural paintings of St Katherine in England', p. 21n.

[26] Lives can be found in Latin and Greek, Old Irish, Welsh, Old Polish, Old Czech and Hungarian, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, according to Boykin; see his 'Life of St Katherine of Alexandria', p. 1.

[27] Beatie, 'Saint Katherine of Alexandria: traditional themes', p. 798. The story of the monk from Rouen and his acquistion of the finger bones is to be found in the *Legenda Aurea*; see de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, p. 339. See also d, p. 63; Cx, p. 27; Mary MacLeod Banks, ed., *An Alphabet of Tales*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 126 (London, 1904), p. 291.

[28] d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, p. xv. Nevalinna and Taavitsainen believe that Ainard's account was the Vulgate version (*St Katherine of Alexandria*, p. 5), but again do not cite the source that led them to this conclusion. Whether or not Ainard was the author of the Vulgate, this text almost certainly originated from Rouen.

[29] d'Ardenne and Dobson, ibid., p. xvi.

Archbishop of Canterbury in 1051.[30]

St Katherine seems to have been known in England even before the Conquest, which would make the invaders all the more inclined to reiterate their personal, physical claims on her. It is possible that Westminster Abbey possessed a relic of St Katherine, a phial of her miraculous oil, presented by Edward the Confessor.[31] This oil was reputed to issue forth from the relics of St Katherine on Sinai, and from the finger bones at Rouen too. It was accredited with great healing miracles. Indeed, Charlemagne allegedly brought back a phial of the oil from Katherine's tomb after his legendary pilgrimage to the Holy Land.[32]

The only reference to the phial presented by Edward the Confessor is listed by Flete, a fifteenth-century historian, in his catalogue of the Abbey's relics. It may not, therefore, have been authentic but, as Bray points out, it does suggest that the connection between Edward and the relic was established by the late Middle Ages.[33] The King was in exile in Normandy in the mid-eleventh century, and if it is assumed that the oil came from or via Rouen, it is entirely possible that he could have obtained such a relic. Nor was it unique in England, a Salisbury Cathedral inventory of 1214-22 lists: 'Item, vasculum unum cum oleo Sca Katerine'.[34]

The first recorded appearance of St Katherine's name in England dates from the mid-eleventh century. It occurs in British Library Cotton Vitellius E. XVIII which is a calendar produced by the scriptorium of the Old Minster at Winchester in about 1050.[35] Winchester was the capital of England at this time and it seems likely that the cult of St Katherine began at the centre of royal government and was spread across the country from there, as most of the references to St Katherine in this early period are found in the south of the country. At about the same time Edward the Confessor returned from exile in Normandy. He and his entourage perhaps

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[30] Nevalinna and Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria*, p. 5.

[31] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p 10.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 223n.

[34] Peter Newton, unpublished 'Iconography index', housed in the Wormald Library, King's Manor, York.

[35] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 215, 223.

brought devotion to St Katherine, as well as a relic of her, back from Rouen.

Fairly soon after this, and perhaps as a result of it, there appeared the first recension of the life of St Katherine to be copied in England. This is the Vulgate life, discussed in chapter 1. The Vulgate probably originated from Rouen, certainly from Normandy, in line with the eleventh- and twelfth-century spread of the cult and was presumably brought to England by the Normans.

The Vulgate is usually found in a long version, but it was also abbreviated. The twelfth-century British Library, Harley 12, among the earliest extant manuscripts containing a life of St Katherine, has this shortened form. The form of this life indicates that it was considered suitable for liturgical use. It is divided into nine lessons, to be read out, presumably as part of a service. This manuscript may well have been produced in a Winchester scriptorium, which would tie in with what has already been noted about the early spread of the cult in England.[36]

The early-twelfth century also provides us with the earliest evidence of individual devotion to St Katherine.[37] Matthew Paris records the following incident.[38] In 1110 one Geoffrey de Gorham who had a school in Dunstable, wrote a play for his pupils entitled *Ludus Sanctae Catherinae* which was to be performed in Dunstable. For the occasion Gorham managed to borrow some copes from the sacrist of St Alban's Abbey, but to his distress these were destroyed in a fire. Apparently to atone for this unfortunate incident, Gorham entered the Abbey as a novice and eventually rose to become Abbot. His devotion to St Katherine remained constant and in later life he composed another work in her honour, a

[36] Ibid., pp. 35-8.

[37] Except for the possible devotion of Edward the Confessor.

[38] Williams, 'Mural paintings of St Catherine in England', p. 21; Einenkel, *The Life of St Katherine*, p. x. See also M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its background*, (Oxford, 1963) p. 311. Also Darryl Grantley, 'Saints' plays', in Richard Beadle ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge, 1994) pp. 265-289. This incident is mentioned as providing the earliest extant record of a saint's play in England. It is not clear whether this play was in English, French or Latin; see Clifford Davidson 'The Middle English saint play and its iconography', in his *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe* (Kalamazoo, 1986), pp. 31-122: p. 31. Legge suggests that as this was a school performance it was probably performed in Latin, but could have been in French if the boys were very young.

treatise on her miracles.[39] This episode provides evidence of a non-extant dramatic version of Katherine's life, and of an already established link between the saint and education. It can be no coincidence that this play was written by a school master for his pupils to perform. It would appear that the episode of Katherine's debate with the fifty philosophers led to her association with education and rhetoric from a very early stage. This would seem to provide an explanation for the interest in her shown by clerics with educational or intellectual concerns.

There is also some indirect evidence to suggest that Gorham propagated his devotion to St Katherine. There is a *Passio Sanctae Katerine* written by a certain Richard, preserved in a unique manuscript, now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 375. The section containing the life, which is based on the Vulgate, was written c. 1140-80.[40] As this life is associated with St Albans and was written soon after the abbacy of Gorham, it seems very likely that his personal devotion to St Katherine spread to the monks in his charge.

Roughly contemporary to this literary evidence of devotion we find the first dedications of institutions to St Katherine. It is to be assumed that her life was by now well enough known to merit her choice as patron of churches, chapels and hospitals. In 1148 Queen Matilda, wife of King Stephen, founded the collegiate church and hospital of St Katherine's near the Tower of London.[41] It is possible, therefore, that Matilda had a particular devotion to St Katherine, perhaps because as a sovereign queen St Katherine was held to be a particularly royal saint.[42] However, without any other corroborative evidence, this suggestion can remain no more than a possibility. At almost the same time a chapel dedicated to St Katherine was built at Westminster Abbey, the most important church in London, and burial place of the Confessor.[43] The fact that a chapel dedicated to Katherine was established here suggests that her cult was seen to have 'arrived' on the

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[39] Williams, ibid.

[40] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 56.

[41] Rotha Mary Clay, *The Mediaeval Hospitals of England* (London, 1909), p. 304.

[42] Ibid., p. 260.

[43] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 220.

devotional scene. Arnold-Foster also names two city parishes of contemporary date dedicated to St Katherine: St Katherine Coleman and St Katherine Cree, i.e. Christ Church, which was in close proximity to Christ Church Priory.[44]

So far the evidence for the early cult of the saint has been located in southern England. However, there is evidence that knowledge of St Katherine and devotion to her had spread further afield. At about the same time that Matilda established her hospital, Bishop Robert Bloet founded the Hospital of St Katherine without the walls of Lincoln, which was run by the Gilbertines.[45] It would appear that both of the earliest hospitals dedicated to St Katherine associated her in particular with the welfare of women; Clay describes St Katherine's-by-the-Tower as 'one of the earliest permanent homes for women',[46] and although by the later Middle Ages St Katherine's in Lincoln was known almost exclusively as an orphanage,[47] there is an implication that its original purpose was to provide birthing facilities for unmarried mothers.[48] It was common practice for hospitals to take in babies whose mothers had died in child-birth, and perhaps, therefore, the same provision was made for the unwanted offspring of unmarried women in Lincoln, with the result that the hospital became a more general house for children.[49] St Katherine's association with childbirth in these specific contexts may be due to her perceived interest in young women and her protection of those who are in sudden life-threatening danger, 'whethir hyt be in passyng of here soule or in what other anguysshe they calle unto me' (d, p. 60). St Margaret was the particular protector of women in childbirth, however, so St Katherine's patronage in this case may have been more

[44] Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications 1*, p. 120.

[45] Clay, *Mediaeval Hospitals*, p. 303.

[46] Ibid., p. 25.

[47] The evidence of Lincolnshire wills supports this observation, providing frequent references to 'the faderles and motherles children of St Katerins', or 'the orphans at saynt Katerens', C. W. Foster, ed., *Lincoln Wills 1: A.D. 1271 to 1526*, Lincoln Record Society 5 (Lincoln, 1914). The quotations are taken from two wills both dated 1513 (to be found on pp. 52 and 53), but references to the hospital occur in virtually every will.

[48] Clay is not explicit on this point, but her description of St Katherine's in Lincoln providing for fatherless children (*Mediaeval Hospitals*, p. 26) certainly suggests this conclusion.

[49] Ibid.

generally associated with her patronage of young women.

There were also at least two twelfth-century chapels devoted to St Katherine in Lincolnshire, one at North Hykeham, the other at Sutton.[50] Further north still, in 1157 records begin for a chapel of St Katherine within the precincts of Hylton Castle, County Durham.[51] As far as the written lives of St Katherine are concerned, this period saw a continued concentration in the London area, but these other traces show that the cult of St Katherine spread fairly quickly to other parts of the country.

Two more lives of St Katherine were written in the late twelfth century. Peter of London, prior of Holy Trinity Aldgate (1197-1221), included St Katherine in his *Liber Revelationum,* a collection of tales giving examples of supernatural intervention and evidence of life after death.[52] Peter used the Vulgate, but retained only those elements of the life which provided him with examples relevant to the overall concern of his collection, for example the appearance of the angels who carry Katherine's body away after her death. This provides an example of the 'adaptability' of St Katherine to the interests of her devotees. The second life, that contained in John of Tynemouth's late twelfth-century *Historia Aurea,* is essentially another version of the Vulgate and had no known influence on any other life. It is nevertheless part of the continuing textual tradition of St Katherine's legend.[53]

There is a temptation to assume that the life and cult of a female saint would be particularly relevant to a female audience. We have seen, however, that the life of St Katherine was initially propagated by male religious and religious communities. Moreover St Katherine could hardly have become so popular, or so widely venerated, if she had been of relevance only to women, who had little direct access to the means of propagating their interests. Nevertheless, in addition to the suggested testimony of the two hospitals, there is early textual evidence that St Katherine was considered an eminently suitable saint for women, perhaps

[50] Dorothy M. Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1971), p. 6, 11.

[51] Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications 1*, p. 120.

[52] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 39-40.

[53] Ibid., pp 53-6.

especially for women in religion.

St Katherine has the distinction of being one of the few saints whose life is known to have been written by a woman. Clemence of Barking's *Vie de Seinte Catherine d'Alexandrie* was based on the Vulgate, but is very different in tenor to the texts previously discussed.[54] The changes introduced by Clemence, the courtly elements she introduces to her treatment of the legend, reveal something of her devotional and cultural interests.[55] The manuscript evidence makes the *terminus ad quem* for the composition of this life 1200. The *Vie* is extant in a manuscript collection of thirteen saints' lives, from the library of Welbech Abbey, known to have been read at meals in the nunnery at Campsey in the fourteenth century. It may well have been used for the same purpose at Barking.[56] It is an exemplary life, but more entertaining than strictly didactic.

Barking was noted for its intellectual climate and the educational attainments of its nuns.[57] This would seem to make St Katherine, the epitome of the learned woman, a very suitable object for veneration at Barking. In fact there is little evidence for any special devotion to St Katherine within the nunnery apart from this; the convent is not named after her, nor are there any records of miracles at her intercession. But Barking did own an Anglo-Norman life of St Katherine as early as 1100. Batt believes that Clemence was motivated primarily by an interest in reworking a vernacular text and adapting the Latin source in a literary exercise which was simultaneously an act of devotion.[58] And presumably no saint was more suitable as the object of such an exercise than St Katherine, especially, perhaps, for a learned female author.

Another late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century life of St Katherine was also originally written for a female audience. This is *Seinte Katerine,* which also has the distinction of being the first known life of the saint in

[54] For the text see W. MacBain, ed., *The Life of Saint Catherine by Clemence of Barking,* Anglo-Norman Text Society 18 (1964).

[55] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 57-68.

[56] Batt, '"These olde appreved stories"', p. vi.

[57] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, '"Clerc u lai, muine u dame": women and Anglo-Norman hagiography in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', in Carol M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 61-85: p. 67.

[58] Batt, '"These olde appreved stories"', pp. 38-9.

English.[59] It pre-dates the first major collection of saints' lives in Middle English, the *South English Legendary,* by almost a century. Middle English remained a vernacular of low written status until the mid-fourteenth century, and was generally considered unsuitable for any work of sophisticated style or content. The saints' lives of the Katherine group are far from being vulgar compositions, however, with their highly worked alliterative and rhythmical prose.[60] These works were written for a small group of female recluses living in the south-west of England, and this is therefore also the first surviving life of St Katherine to have been written outside the London area. It marks the beginning of the tradition which saw the life of St Katherine as particularly suitable reading matter for women.

This life makes clear the major influence that the needs of the intended audience had on the form and content of the lives. *Seinte Katerine* was originally intended as part of a programme of private reading for women in religious life, and especially recluses.[61] In this context the importance of Katherine's wisdom, fortitude and faith is stressed, qualities seen as particularly relevant to these women. But the style of the life makes it equally suitable for reading aloud to an audience as well. Katherine's admirable qualities could be aspired to not only by anchoresses, but by aristocratic laywomen as well. This life is based on the Vulgate, but the hand of the author is clearly visible in his interpretation of events and his insertion of additional, mystically inspiring material.

The early thirteenth century also saw the dedication to St Katherine of three more hospitals: Bedminster near Bristol, 1219, Ledbury in Herefordshire, 1232 and Bradford-on-Avon, 1235.[62] These are all in the same broad geographic area as that in which *Seinte Katerine* was composed.

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[59] See the introductions to the editions by Einenkel and d'Ardenne and Dobson; Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 69-75; and Millett, 'Audience of the saints' lives of the Katherine Group', passim.

[60] Millett, ibid., p. 138.

[61] For more on the Katherine Group, which is made up of the following texts: *Sawles Warde, Hali Meiðhad,* and the prose lives of saints Katherine, Juliana and Margaret, see E.J. Dobson, *The Origins of 'Ancrene Wisse'* (Oxford, 1976); Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women,* passim; Bella Millett, ed., *Hali Meiðhad,* E.E.T.S., o.s., 284 (London, 1982).

[62] Clay, *Mediaeval Hospitals,* pp. 291, 294, 328.

Indeed, it would seem that the early thirteenth century saw the beginnings of a flourishing cult in the west Midlands and south-west which was to become more marked in later centuries. These three hospitals appear to have been established in order to fulfil general charitable purposes, rather than to serve any one particular group of the needy. This may indicate that whereas in the early period during which St Katherine's cult developed in England her protection was perceived to be extended towards women, by this stage her powers and her role had expanded to encompass a much more general body of devotees. Perhaps this is due to the interest in her shown by educated male clerics, who may have created the role of patron of education for her, in response to the intellectual and rhetorical elements in her legend. However, St Katherine continued to be the patron of young women.

This period also sees the first surviving visual renditions of St Katherine and her legend in England. Some of these works give an indication of personal devotion, for the third time from a member of the royal family. It seems that Henry III had a special veneration for St Katherine. In 1235-6 the King gave orders for St Katherine's chapel in Clarendon Palace to be decorated with depictions of her history.[63] Five years later he gave orders for St Peter's church in the Tower of London to be decorated with 'pictures with the story of St Katherine'.[64]

These visual representations would have been seen by a restricted group of people and were presumably of very high quality. Unfortunately neither cycle survives, nor does the 'picture in front of the altar of St Katherine and another with her story', which were ordered to be painted at Nottingham Castle in the mid-thirteenth century.[65] Also lost is the history

[63] Williams, 'Mural paintings of St Catherine in England', p. 30.

[64] Ibid., p. 31. See also Pamela Tudor-Craig, 'Panel painting', in Alexander and Binski,*Age of Chivalry*, pp. 131-136: p.132, where they are described as panel paintings rather than wall paintings. E.W. Tristram also describes this piece as a panel painting in his *English Medieval Wall Painting: the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1950) p. 54 where he mentions the four St Katherine commissions of Henry III. For other examples of Henry III's wall painting commissions see Park, 'Wall painting', pp. 127-8.

[65] Williams, 'Mural paintings of St Catherine in England', p. 32. This 'picture' was also presumably a panel painting.

of St Katherine painted at Guildford Castle.[66]

However, Katherine was not viewed as an exclusive saint, despite the interest in her displayed by the royal family. Some early depictions of her do survive, at least in part, from parish churches of the period. The earliest iconic representation is to be found in a wall painting in Black Bourton church in Oxfordshire and dates from 1250-75.[67] It depicts a small haloed figure of St Katherine holding a spiked wheel in her left hand. The wheel was by now the primary emblem of St Katherine, representing her faith and her fortitude in the face of a terrifying threat to her life. There were similar paintings in Cold Overton, Leicestershire (fig. 1), the Chapel of the Hospital of the Holy Cross, Winchester and the tomb of King Sebert in Westminster Abbey.[68]

The earliest cycle of Katherine's life survives in Little Missenden church, Buckinghamshire, and was painted c. 1270 (figs. 33-35).[69] It originally consisted of nine scenes, and was therefore quite extensive. The following still visible scenes are depicted: St Katherine before Maxentius, the debate with the philosophers and the scourging. The other scenes are very fragmentary and their subjects can only be guessed at. One other cycle survives from this period. This is the cycle, dated to the end of the thirteenth century, painted in the church of Eynsham, Oxfordshire. It represents four episodes: St Katherine before Maxentius, St Katherine in prison, the breaking of the wheels and the execution.[70]

There are two other iconic representations dating from the thirteenth century which are worth describing as they inform us as to the visual perception that the audiences would have had of the saint, the mental picture that they would have recreated on hearing her name or her story. The wall painting of St Katherine at Hailes Abbey dates from c. 1280, and

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[66] Tristram, *Thirteenth Century*, p. 54.

[67] Williams, 'Mural paintings of St Katherine in England', p. 29; Tristram, ibid., p. 508.

[68] Cold Overton: Williams, ibid., p. 30; Tristram, ibid., p. 532. Winchester: Keyser, *List of Buildings*, p. 282. Westminster: Williams, ibid., p. 31; Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, p. 199.

[69] Williams, ibid., p. 23; Tristram, *Thirteenth Century*, pp. 341, 581.

[70] Williams, ibid., p. 30; Tristram, ibid., p. 533.

shows the saint standing with her foot on Maxentius (fig. 2).[71] This represents Katherine's great power and, as at Hailes, was sometimes used as a companion piece to St Margaret trampling the dragon. Both pictures have the same implications: Christianity, represented by the figure of the female saint, triumphs over the masculine figure of evil sprawled abjectly on the floor. The same image was shown in a now destroyed thirteenth century painting in Preston church, Sussex.[72]

Duffy suggests three factors which affected the pattern of lay devotion to specific saints: geographical or historical accident, the devotional initiative of an individual, and news of striking cures or other favours.[73] While it is true that all these factors can be seen to have contributed to the early growth of St Katherine's cult in England, it must be remembered that these factors alone do not provide sufficient explanation for the exalted position that the saint came to occupy in the holy pantheon.

Nevertheless, Duffy's suggested factors do provide a useful starting point. The geographic or historic accident can be seen firstly in the invention of the body on Mount Sinai, which provided devotees of the saint with a physical, earth-bound focus for their supplications. With particular reference to England, the second part of this 'accidental factor' is the translation of some of St Katherine's relics to Rouen and the subsequent invasion of England by the Normans. For while it is true that St Katherine was known in England before the Conquest, it was not until the twelfth century that the great volume of literature composed in her honour begins to appear. As far as the influence of individual devotion is concerned, we have the evidence of Henry III's requests for paintings of St Katherine's history, Matilda's foundation of a hospital dedicated to her and the possible influence of Gorham's devotion on the monks of St Alban's. As for the cures, the invention of St Katherine's body led to Mount Sinai becoming a major pilgrimage shrine, and as we have seen, the saint's relics produced an apparently endless supply of oil, accredited with healing properties; 'whiche

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[71] Williams, ibid., p. 31.

[72] Ibid., p. 32; Keyser, *List of Buildings*, p. 202.

[73] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 165. He actually lists four factors, but the fourth concerns books of hours and is therefore not relevant to this consideration of the pre-1300 cult.

oyle ys of so greet vertu that hyt ȝeueth to alle maner of sykenesse as hyt ys knowe to many a deuout pylgryme that haue visited that ryght holy and deuout place' (d, p. 63). It would appear that the oil was given out to pilgrims, both at Sinai and at Rouen. The oil was venerated for its healing properties and as there was an apparently never-ending supply (whereas the number of bones would have been, at least in theory, finite) the individual pilgrim could obtain a personal, physical relic of the saint. This phenomenon appears to have been unique to the shrine of St Katherine and may, therefore, have contributed to the perceived immediacy and effectiveness of her intervention and hence have increased her popularity. It is only in the very early stages of the cult in England that a coherent pattern can be discerned.[74] While the production of lives of St Katherine remained concentrated in the London area, we have seen evidence that St Katherine was known and venerated in many other parts of the country by the latter half of the twelfth century.

St Katherine was immensely popular not just in England, but all over Europe. Even without the identification of the factors above, which may well have had a role in bringing the cult to England somewhat more swiftly, England could not have remained impervious to its attractions for long. Knowledge of St Katherine, and cultic devotion to her, arrived in England much later than that of all the other virgin martyrs and yet despite this late start Katherine surpassed the popularity of all of them put together. It would seem that there was something universally appealing about the life and cult of St Katherine.

In England it appears that the cult of St Katherine was initially spread from the 'top' (the royal family and members of the court) downwards, and from the 'centre' (London and the South) out. We have seen that members of the royal family displayed a marked devotion to St Katherine and the connection between St Katherine and the royalty continues throughout the later Middle Ages. According to an account of the coronation of Katherine de Valois, wife of Henry V, in 1420, the young queen was presented with several gifts depicting St Katherine, her name saint.[75] There was an image of

[74] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 53-6.

[75] Batt, '"These olde appreved stories"', p. 69 for the following.

St Katherine 'holdynge a booke and disputynge with the doctours', one of her 'with a whele in her hande' and

> a marchpayne garnysshed with dyuerse fygures of aungellys, amonge the whiche was set an image of seynt Katheryne holdynge this reson 'Il est escrit, pur voir et dir, per mariage per cest guerre ne dure'.[76]

As we shall see in chapter 5, this association of St Katherine with the contract of marriage is an aspect of her status as bride of Christ and marriage broker.

Richard III apparently held St Katherine in particular esteem.[77] She and St Barbara were the only female saints among the eight chosen by him, while Duke of Gloucester, to be his patrons and the protectors of the college of priests he founded at Middleham. Katherine was also the first female saint in the list of saints Gloucester professed he 'had devotion unto'.[78] In addition, his illegitimate daughter was named after the saint. This devotion to St Katherine seems to have been well known. In 1485 as a New Year gift, Richard was presented with a Latin life of St Katherine written by Pietro Carmeliano.[79] The manuscript presented to Richard does not survive, but we know of its existence from the dedicatory letters in the two extant copies of the life. These were presented to Sir Robert Brackenbury, Constable of the Tower and John Russell, Bishop of Lincoln and Chancellor of England.[80] This provides further evidence for St Katherine's continued popularity with those of royal status, and their associates. That St Katherine was of royal rank, a sovereign queen, presumably accounts for his phenomenon.

The evidence for the early cult indicates that the life of St Katherine was thought to be particlarly suitable reading (or listening) matter for women, both by a male and female author. However, despite the conspicuous association between St Katherine and members of the royal court, or between St Katherine and women, we must beware of warping

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, 'Richard III's books 14: Pietro Carmeliano's early publications, his *Spring*, the Letter of Phalaris and his life of St Katherine dedicated to Richard III', *The Ricardian* 10 (1996), pp. 346-386: p. 369 for the following.

[78] This is recorded in his book of hours, ibid.

[79] Ibid., p. 362. Bray also discusses this life, but seems to be unaware of its connection with Richard III, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 152-156.

[80] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, ibid. See p. 367 for reproductions of pages from the two extant manuscripts, including miniatures of St Katherine.

the picture by over concentration on only one group which demonstrated devotion to St Katherine. Devotion to the saint can be detected right across the period and among all classes within medieval society. The key to the popularity of St Katherine is in her non-specific nature. She did come to be associated with particular groups and institutions as their patron, but this is part of the same main phenomenon. It is evident that even in this early period the life of St Katherine held a range of meanings for a range of people and this accounts for her long-standing hold over the affections of the people of England.

St Katherine as virgin martyr

St Katherine belongs to that class of saint, to which I have already referred, known as virgin martyr. This includes such saints as Margaret, Agnes, Agatha, Cecilia, Lucy, Christina, Dorothy, Barbara and Ursula. Less well known examples are Faith, Juliana, and Anastasia.[81]

Several scholars have noted that the lives of these saints follow a certain narrative pattern which can be used to identify the protagonist as a virgin martyr and categorise their sanctity.[82] The archetypal legend proceeds thus: somewhere in fourth-century Italy or Asia Minor a high-born, beautiful young girl attracts the attention of the local (and inherently demonic) pagan prefect or governor, who makes her an offer of marriage or concubinage. In the course of rejecting his offer the heroine reveals that she is a Christian. The rest of her life is devoted to a series of interrogations, as the prefect urges her to recant her faith and be his, and inflicts ingenious tortures upon her when she refuses to capitulate. Eventually the prefect is forced to execute her when it becomes apparent that she will never give in, and has in fact begun to infect other pagans with her beliefs. The saint is executed (ususally beheaded but not always) only after having made some

[81] The legends of these saints enjoy varying degrees of historical veracity. For brief surveys of the life and cult of each see David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* 2nd edition (Oxford and New York, 1987).

[82] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' lives and the female reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 37 (1991), pp. 314-322: p. 315; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 172-173.

final statement of faith or prayer on behalf of her future devotees and her soul goes to Heaven to take its place at Christ's side. Such a narrative actually constitutes a *passio* rather than a *vita,* focusing as it does on the saint's torture and death and sketching only the briefest biographical details at the outset.

However, the similarity of these saints should not be overstated. Although superficially identical they are rendered identifiable by the tradition of representing them with emblems, which signify the particular method of torture which they underwent in the course of their passion; Katherine with a wheel (fig. 3), Margaret with a dragon (fig. 5), Ursula with an arrow. This sometimes entails the inclusion of the part of the body which was removed; Agatha with her breasts, Appollonia with a tooth, Lucy with her eyes.[83] Other virgin martyrs have symbols that relate to some other aspect of their lives; Barbara a tower (fig. 4), Dorothy a basket of flowers, Agnes with a lamb.[84]

This iconographic tradition is a reminder that these saints were not perceived as interchangeable by their medieval devotees. If they merely provided an amorphous example of female sanctity and intercessory power there would be no need to identify them specifically. Virgin martyrs were frequently the patrons of particular groups or kinds of supplicants, which further suggests that they were thought of as separate entities with specific types of power. For example, St Margaret was the protector of women in childbirth, and both she and St Barbara could be called on by those

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[83] Lucy does not actually lose her eyes in the course of her passion. This attribution of emblem seems to rest instead on the premise that her name originates from the Latin for light (lux). For an explanation of this etymology see de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, p. 27.

[84] Similarly the adoption of a lamb as Agnes' symbol is related to the similarity between her name and the Latin for lamb (agna), ibid., p. 101.

threatened with imminent death.[85] Barbara, identified by her tower, was also associated with architects and gunmakers.[86] Saints Agatha, Appollonia and Lucy would be prayed to by those afflicted in the part of the body by which each saint was tortured, the breasts, teeth and eyes, respectively.[87] Saints Agnes and Ursula were seen as the patrons of girls, as was St Katherine.[88]

In one sense St Katherine's popularity is due to her status as a virgin martyr, but in another it is a result of the ways in which she is set apart from the other saints which conform to this model. Unlike the lives of all the other virgin martyrs, which did not significantly change throughout the medieval period, the life of St Katherine was elaborated on throughout the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the remainder of this chapter I will explore some of the ways in which the texts of St Katherine's life develop and expand the account of her life established by the Vulgate and the *Legenda Aurea*. Although it is now impossible to chart precisely the course of this development, the fact that the life of St

[85] Before her death Margaret prayed that 'any woman who invoked her aid when faced with labour would give birth to a healthy child', ibid., p. 370.This is a standard element in Middle English versions of her life, although often seems to ensure the safety of the offspring rather than the mother. For more on the life and cult of St Barbara, who was far more popular in the Low Countries than in England see Ellen Muller, 'Saintly virgins: the veneration of virgin saints in religious women's communities', in Lene Dresen-Coenders, ed., *Saints and She-Devils: Images of Women in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London, 1989), pp. 83-100: pp. 96-99. St Barbara's life was not included in the *Legenda Aurea* and occurs only three times in Middle English, as part of the *South English Legendary*, the *Gilte Legende* and Caxton's *Golden Legend*. However, those who were influenced by continental strains of piety were certainly aware of her. See Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 52, where Christ tells Margery that she shall enjoy the same intercessory powers as saints Katherine, Margaret, Barbara and Paul. Barbara, Katherine and Margaret were usually included in the ranks of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, (see Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 167), another continental cult of which Margery may well have been aware.

[86] Several pieces of fifteenth-and sixteenth-century continental armour, as well as early ballistic weapons, display images of St Barbara, an observation derived from a visit to the Royal Armouries in Leeds.

[87] The convention of portraying these saints, and others, with particular parts of the body seems to have given birth to this tradition.

[88] In the case of Agnes this seems to be due to her age; at 13 she is the youngest virgin martyr, de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, p. 102. Ursula's acquisition of a band of eleven thousand virgins seems to account for her patronage of girls, de Voragine, *Golden Legend 2*, pp. 256-260. St Katherine's patronage of girls is probably related to the representation of her as the paradigm of young womanhood, as well as her status as a marriage broker, as will be seen.

Katherine, rather than that of any other virgin martyr, was singled out in this way provides a further indication of her great popularity and utility. It will become apparent that the special elements within the life and its narrative development are an indication of the ways in which it constituted a creative response to the needs and aspirations of contemporary life.[89] This chapter provides the foundation for the rest of the thesis by demonstrating that the popularity of St Katherine seems to be linked to certain elements of her life which were perceived of as setting her apart from all other virgin martyrs as worthy of particular esteem.

The reconstruction of St Apollonia, described above, exemplifies the process by which the criteria for female sanctity were narrowed and the saint's forthright defence of her faith came to be embodied above all in her unsullied sexual status. The saint's virginity was seen both to authorise her public speaking and to explain the miraculous imperviousness of her body to all forms of torture. There were alternative paradigms of female sanctity embodied in the figures of repentant harlot saints, most famously Mary Magdalene.[90] However, the legends of these once sexually active women, who underwent ferocious penance to atone for their sins, only served to underline patristic thought on virginity as the natural and most desirable state of womanhood.[91] Virginity was the ideal state for men as well, but did not constitute the overarching mark of sanctity for male saints as it did for female ones. As Peter Brown observes:

> The virgin body was an exquisitely appropriate mirror, in which human beings could catch a glimpse of the immense purity of the *image of God*. The woman's untouched flesh was both a mirror of the purity of her soul and a physical image of the virgin earth of the garden of Eden.[92]

Male saints were called upon to undergo extremely gruesome tortures in

[89] Cf. Carrasco, 'Spirituality and historicity', p. 2.

[90] For more on this type of saint see Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Holy harlots: prostitute saints in medieval legend', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990), pp. 3-32.

[91] The writings of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine were particularly influential, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 341-365, pp. 366-386, pp. 387-427. An influential early Middle English formulation of such thought is provided by the early thirteenth century text *Hali Meiðhad*. See Millett, *Hali Meiðhad*, pp. xxiv-xlv, 'The theological background'. See also John Bugge, *Virginitas: The History of Medieval Ideal* (The Hague, 1986)

[92] Brown, ibid., p. 299.

order to prove and defend their faith.[93] However, their legends do not contain the element of sexual threat or the challenge to their virtue which is such a commonplace in female saints' lives.[94]

Virginity was thus constructed as the particular treasure of women, as a physical entity which could so easily become irretrievably lost.[95] *Ancrene Wisse* provides a particularly explicit formulation of this notion, during a discussion of why anchoresses should withdraw from the world:

> ...the person who was carrying a costly liquid, a precious fluid, such as balsam is, in a fragile contained, linctus in a brittle glass, would she not go out of the crowd unless she were a fool? *Habemus theasarum istum in uasis fictilbus, dicit Apostulus.* This brittle container- that is, woman's flesh- even though the balsam, the linctus is virginity that is in it (or after the loss of virginity, chaste cleanness)- this brittle container is as brittle as any glass, for it should it once be broken, it will never be mended, mended or whole as as it was before, any more than glass.[96]

One of the aims of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between the presentation of this ideal and the actual meanings which 'virginity' may have held for those reading the life of St Katherine and participating in her cult. It will be seen that virginity is not necessarily to be understood in exclusively physical terms, but could also be taken to encompass a state of mind. The passage from *Ancrene Wisse* allows that chastity can be equated with physical intactness. This certainly helps us to understand why St Katherine should have become so popular not with virgins or nuns alone, but with women who were, would be, or had been married.

As several scholars have noted, it was only from the twelfth century that married women saints, such as St Margaret of Scotland, began to have

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[93] The life of St James the Dismembered provides a particularly unpalatable example, de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, pp. 338-346.

[94] Caroline Walker Bynum discusses the different criteria of sanctity described in male and female martyrs' lives in 'The female body and religious practice in the later Middle Ages', in her *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991), pp. 181-238: pp. 202-205.

[95] The most useful discussion of virginity and chastity and their relationship to the lives and experiences of medieval women is provided by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Chaste bodies: frames and experiences', in Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester and New York, 1994), pp. 24-42. See also her 'The virgin's tale', in Evans and Johnson, *Feminist Readings*, pp. 165-194.

[96] Hugh White, *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses* (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 80. See also Clarissa Atkinson, '"Precious balsam in a fragile glass": the ideology of virginity in the later Middle Ages', *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), pp. 131-143.

currency in the celestial pantheon.[97] However, important though St Anne and saints such as Bridget of Sweden and Elizabeth of Hungary may have been in revising the standards of female sanctity by the end of the Middle Ages, virginity, whether an actual physical state, or a mental ideal, remained the primary benchmark for aspirant holy women throughout the period.[98] Virgin martyrs were no longer the only kind of female saint by the fifteenth century, but they remained, in saints Katherine and Margaret in particular, the most popular.

Several scholars have assumed that this development (or in fact lack thereof) can only be read in negative terms with relation to the status and experience of medieval women. Bridget Cazelles observes that

> Mystics such as Margery [Kempe], Birgitta [Bridget of Sweden], and other married women who aspired to sanctity, were aware that loss of their virginal status irremediably prevented them from emulating these holy models and were correspondingly obsessed with the desire to attain some for of physical *integritas*.[99]

There seems to be an assumption that the popularity of virgin martyrs was due to their being foisted on the laity in order to fortify clerical misogynistic teaching about the nature and capacities of women. It may be that some women read virgin martyr lives in this negative way, internalising their inscribed misogyny. However, that virgin martyrs remained so popular even in the face of alternative saintly models suggests that they could also have performed positive functions for their devotees.[100] Viewing the lack of non-virgin saints as an indication that there was little in the cult of saints for married women, is to ignore the extreme popularity of virgin martyrs with just this class of devotee. It has gone largely unnoticed by scholars that the life of St Katherine contains a devout married lay woman: the Empress, who gives her life to defend Katherine and her new-found faith, and dies in

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[97] Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 220-238, 'Men and women'; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 20-21.

[98] In addition all these saints were of very high social rank. It is only at the very end of the period that the cult of servant saints such as Sitha gained widespread currency, see S. Sutcliffe, 'The cult of St Sitha in England: an introduction', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 37 (1993), pp. 83-89.

[99] Bridget Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1991), p. 73.

[100] Simon Gaunt stresses the importance of audience response in considering virgin martyr lives, see his *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 183.

the knowledge that she too is assured a place in Heaven as Christ's bride.[101] This is not to suggest that the Empress was deliberately presented as a positive model for laywomen by clerics who actively tried to empower or liberate them, but that this may be how women responded to the Empress and her conduct.

Reading virgin martyr lives

The lives of virgin martyrs are often read as representing their heroines as encumbered by their sex, always vulnerable, suffering torture to expunge their weak and inherently sinful femininity. Marina Warner makes the following observation about virgin martyr hagiography:

> ...the particular focus on women's torn and broken flesh reveals the psychological obsession of the religion with sexual sin, and the tortures that pile up one upon the other with pornographic repetitiousness underline the identification of the female with the perils of sexual contact. For, as they defend their virtue, the female martyrs of the Christian calendar are asaulted in any number of ingenious and often sexual ways.[102]

This is one possible approach, but may tell us more about the reactions of the scholar than of the contemporary medieval audience, as it elides the two without further argument.[103] Reading these texts as forms of pornography, crudely written pornography at that, since hagiographic literature is still frequently viewed as compositionally substandard, denudes them of the meanings they may have held for the medieval audience and the uses to which they may have been put. In addition, this reductive reading assumes that all virgin martyr narratives are essentially identical. It stigmatises all male readers as depraved, sadistic voyeurs and all female readers as hopelessly immasculated and full of self detestation, denying the possibility of multiple readings. It refuses to acknowledge the great devotion which so many people displayed to virgin martyrs, and the

[101] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, has recognised the importance of the Empress in this respect, Wogan-Browne and Burgess, *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths*, p. xxiii, p. xxxiv. See below, chapter 5.

[102] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* reprinted with new afterthoughts (London, 1990), p. 71.

[103] Warner observes in 'Afterthoughts', ibid., pp. 340-344: 'I would have tried to pay more attention to the voices raised in Mary's praise and to distinguish more scrupulously between women's and men's conception of the Mother of God', p. 344.

great value with which their patronage and their example was viewed.

Sometimes virgin martyrs are seen to eschew their femininity altogether and adopt masculine traits in order to authorise their activities. This reading is exemplified by Margaret Miles. She writes of female martyrs:

> Christian women accepted 'becoming male' as a characterization of their behaviour that was consonant with their resolute choices, their courageous and triumphant behaviour. 'Becoming male' removed the female body from the realm of secular social and sexual arrangements and made it the ally of the religious self, no longer to be defined by, or associated with, the biological or social functions of women's bodies.[104]

Those who approach the lives of both female martyrs and ascetics thus may overemphasise the pronouncements of patristic writers who held that by transcending or erasing the natural functions and propensities of their bodies women could ascend to the heady heights of becoming men. The writings of Jerome have been particularly influential:

> As long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called man.[105]

This may have been Jerome's opinion, but it was not necessarily how late-medieval men and women perceived female saints. Gender provides a particularly useful tool in the exploration of this issue. St Katherine's legend in fact presents her in wholly feminine terms. Rather than Katherine 'becoming male', her legend describes several pagan men 'becoming feminine' in their conversion to Christianity. This inscribed feminine experience of religion is something to which both lay men and women in the audience would have been able to aspire.[106] The tendency to view virgin martyrs as essentially masculine is further problematised by the observation that in both appearance and conduct their legends and

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[104] Margaret R. Miles, 'Becoming male: women martyrs and ascetics', in her *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston, 1989), pp. 53-77: p. 62. Similarly Allen J. Frantzen argues that St Agatha becomes 'like a man' (although only temporarily) during the course of her torture, 'When women aren't enough', in Nancy F. Partner, ed., *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993), pp. 143-169: pp. 160-165.

[105] From Jerome's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, quoted by Warner, *Alone of All her Sex*, p. 73.

[106] For medieval concepts of sex and gender see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993). My approach to issues of cross-gendered identification has also been influenced by Judith Butler's theory of performative gender, see her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London, 1990).

iconography present them as paradigmatic young women and indeed as models of ideal, marriageable femininity.

Some scholars have read the lives of virgin martyrs as rape narratives. Kathryn Gravdal devotes a chapter to this issue in her study of rape in medieval French literature and law. She writes, 'the representation of seduction or assault opens a licit space that permits the audience to enjoy sexual language and contemplate the naked female body', adding that these texts were 'doubtless aimed at male listeners'.[107] Similarly Elizabeth Petroff in a discussion of virgin martyrs and serpent-dragons writes,

> The fact that the early Christian saints, particularly the women, chose virginity rather than active sexuality or marriage was clearly very threatening to their society, and the kinds of tortures supposedly inflicted on them by their pagan persecutors were obviously someone's sadistic fantasies.[108]

It is not impossible that some medieval men composed or viewed virgin martyr narratives in such a fashion, but there is no direct evidence to support this. The observations of both Gravdal and Petroff share the limitation of being grounded entirely in the texts. The 'audience' which both discuss has not been surmised from any surviving evidence about those who read or owned saints' lives and the ways in which they may have reacted to them.[109]

Some scholars have posited actual or theorised audiences, but there is a tendency to assume that the only relevant audience is made up of women. Bridget Cazelles allows that virgin martyrs are presented as feminine paradigms but interprets this in an entirely negative way. In discussing St Katherine's status as a model for Elizabeth of Hungary- Elizabeth entered an abbey dedicated to St Katherine- she writes:

> Saint Catherine is not here an example of resistance and defiance, but an embodiment of the conventional 'feminine' virtues of meekness and silence that insure women's protection from sexual harassment. The evocation of Saint

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[107] Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia, 1991), p. 24. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg reads the torture as a heroic response to certain sexual assault, see her 'The heroics of virginity: brides of Christ and sacrificial mutilation', in Mary Beth Rose, ed., *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse, 1986), pp. 29-72.

[108] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, 'Transforming the world: the serpent-dragon and the virgin saint', in her *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York and Oxford, 1994), pp. 97-109: p. 99.

[109] The same is true of Cazelles, who talks about 'audiences' without defining exactly what this term encompasses, *Lady as Saint*, pp. 14-15

> Catherine serves to exalt the merit of female enclosure, rather than to inspire Elizabeth into leading an autonomous life.[110]

Meekness and silence may not be our idea of ideal femininity but that is not the point. Virgin martyrs, and St Katherine in particular, provide models of feminine behaviour which do allow that women have the right to a measure of cultural and spiritual autonomy. In exploring such issues we must be particularly careful to view the evidence with an awareness of contemporary beliefs and standards, otherwise any pronouncements can shed scant light upon the actual experiences of medieval women.

In this respect the work of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne is instructive. Her work on early Middle English lives of virgin martyrs has established the importance of exploring resistant readings of these texts, which in particular contexts may constitute relative empowerment or recuperation.[111] Wogan-Browne emphasises the potential for slippage between the texts and the readers' responses, observing that 'saints' lives... suggest interesting areas of freedom within a general picture of constraint' and warning against the kind of judgment which Cazelles makes above:

> To the potential objection that saints' lives merely replace patriarchal constraint by a figurative patriarchy of God the Father and his Bridegroom son, it needs to be said that to problematise the choice *at all* is already to do as much as can be done. Choice metaphorically and allegorically conceived within patriarchal structure still makes choice explicit.[112]

Wogan-Browne's work has focussed almost exclusively on the readings and reactions of the nuns and other women in religion who made up the primary audience to the texts with which she is concerned.[113] Few scholars have considered the male audience of virgin martyrs' lives in anything other than damning terms, as we have seen. Eamon Duffy has approached the issue of virgin martyr cults with an awareness that both men and women displayed great devotion to them. However, Duffy essentialises the function of virgin martyrs (and indeed all saints) as intercessory, writing that devotees of both sexes would have found value in

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[110] Ibid., p. 73.

[111] Wogan-Browne, 'The virgin's tale', passim is perhaps the most stimulating.

[112] Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' lives and the female reader', p. 323.

[113] Michael Goodich also considers virgin martyrs as models for women in religion, see his 'The contours of female piety in later medieval hagiography', *Church History* 50 (1981), pp. 20-32.

these saints only as powerful intercessors and patrons. While recognising that Margery Kempe provides an indication of the 'disruptive potential' of virgin martyr lives,[114] Duffy nonetheless denies the existence of any exemplary dimension to their cults: 'But I suspect that only a handful of men and women actually perceived these holy maidens as *exemplars*'.[115] St Katherine's powers of intercession were undoubtedly an extremely important part of her popularity, but this is only one dimension of her cult and does not account for the fact that she was explicitly constructed as a role model in several texts.

The employment of a variety of sources allows us to discern changes and developments in the cult of St Katherine, rather than assuming that she held one meaning for all her English devotees across the period. In this way it is possible to avoid broad generalisations and to resist the assumption of any universal category of 'audience', or of 'men' or 'women', recognising instead the influence that status, experience, geographic location, age and gender may have had in constructing potential readings.[116]

Reading torture

By restoring virgin martyrs, and St Katherine in particular, to their historical setting, I hope, as I have already implied, to avoid essentialising them as misogynistic constructions or as of relevance only to women. Instead this thesis attempts to reconstruct past subject positions which can allow us to approximate the readings and reactions of both women and men.[117] This is particularly important with respect to the torture and execution of virgin martyrs. The scenes of torture provide a challenge to the modern mind which should be answered with perspicacity rather than

[114] Eamon Duffy, 'Holy maydens, holy wyfes: the cult of women saints in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England', *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990), pp. 175-196: p. 188.

[115] Ibid., p. 189.

[116] For more on the necessity of avoiding universals see Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), pp. 28-50; Gisela Block, 'Women's history and gender history: aspects of an international debate', *Gender and History* 1 (1989), pp. 7-30.

[117] For the advantages and problems entailed in such an approach see Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 1-32, 'The displaced reader: the female audience of Old French Romance'.

with stereotypes and sweeping statements.[118] Maureen Quilligan's observations on Christine de Pisan's virgin martyrs provide an excellent example of the former:

> That a text as sensitively and sophisticatedly engaged as the *Cite des Dames* is in developing a repertoire of strategies for anti-misogynist rhetoric should end on visions of gruesome torture, using the vocabulary of pain, poses critical problems that must be dealt with, most particularly in terms of those very anti-misogynist strategies. Why did Christine decide to write such a conclusion to her self-consciously pro-woman text? The answers to such a question are crucial to our ability to read the *Cite des Dames* not only... in its historical situation as a text written in 1405, but also as a text that may continue to speak to us in the late twentieth century. [119]

Scholars who have focussed on the torture of virgin martyrs at the virtual expense of any other consideration have frequently chosen to concentrate on the life of St Agatha, who suffered the terrible fate of having her breasts removed.[120] However I have found little evidence for a particularly flourishing cult of this saint in late medieval England. The only significant institution dedicated to her was the Premonstratensian Abbey in Yorkshire.[121] For example, although her life is contained in the *South English Legendary*, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the Scottish Legendary, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Gilte Legende*, it does not survive as

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[118] Other scholars suggest alternative approaches to genres and discourses which are often judged to trap the female (and sometimes male) reader/viewer within a negative and deleterious subject position. See Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, pp. 21-64, 'Her body, himself'. She argues that we must 'at least consider the possibility that female fans find a meaning in the text and image of these films that is less inimical to their interests than the figurative analysis would have us believe', p. 54. In the same vein Radway argues that modern romance fiction constitutes an exploration of the meaning of patriarchy, 'By picturing the heroine in a relative position of weakness, romances are not necessarily endorsing her position but examining an all too common state of affairs in order to display strategies for coping with it', *Readers and their Romances*, p. 76. Another body of literature which was particularly popular with a female audience, gothic novels or romances, also seems to do no more than affirm the patriarchal status quo, something which has long posed a problem for feminist critics. But again, these tales of beleaguered heroines, usually on the run from some depraved father figure, or trapped in a menacing fortress by him, can be seen to address the terrors lurking for women within apparently desirable social arrangements. See Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago and London, 1995), pp. 7-8.

[119] Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pisan's Cite des Dames* (Ithaca and London, 1991), p. 192.

[120] Eg., Warner cites Agatha's torture to support her reading of virgin martyrs cited above, *Alone of All her Sex*, p. 71.

[121] Francis Bond, *Dedications and Patrons Saints of English Churches: Ecclesiastical Symbolism, Saints and their Emblems* (London, New York, 1914), p. 17. There are few references to Agatha in wills as we have seen.

an individual text, either as a pamphlet, or as part of a manuscript miscellany.[122] On the other hand the life of St Katherine was written and copied many times, and it is notable that hers is the least gory of any virgin martyr legend. St Katherine is beaten once and this is the sum of the torture she undergoes.[123] The Empress has her breasts cut off, but the extant texts do not linger on this terrible ordeal. If one compares the life of St Katherine to the life of St Christina, who is tortured in a great variety of ingenious ways over a period of fourteen years, the amount of violence is almost negligible. It may be that the medieval audience was not as interested in the graphic torture of young women as the modern audience is.[124] It is perhaps significant that the most popular virgin martyr's life affords far more space to her debate with the Philosophers and eventually her mystical marriage than to her physical suffering.

However, torture was a central part of the virgin martyr's *imitatio Christi*. I am not suggesting that it held no importance, but that it is not necessarily to be understood in negative dualistic terms.[125] Virgin martyrs explictly and joyfully invite the tyrant to torture them as proof of their love for Christ and the truth of the doctrine they adhere to. The prose life of St Katherine exemplifies this reading:

> [Christ] 3af hym self sacrifice to god þe Fader for me and þerfore hit is ioye to me þat I myght offre my self an acceptable oost to hym...
> I am glad and ioyful to be bete wyth scourges and to suffre þe horrour of derke prison in his name þat 3af his body to be scourged for me and holdyng alle þe

[122] D'Evelyn and Foster, 'Legends of individual saints', p. 562. The life composed by Osbern Bokenham for Agatha Flegge was possibly designed to be an independent text in the first instance.

[123] The wheels do not actually touch St Katherine, contrary to popular opinion which seems to hold that she was 'the one who was tortured on the wheel'.

[124] Margaret R. Miles, 'The Virgin's one bare breast: female nudity and religious meaning in Tuscan early Renaissance culture', in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1986), pp. 193-208, exemplifies an approach which is careful not to assume a continuity or even a similarity of meaning between original viewers and modern interpreter. For the life of St Christina see de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, pp. 385-387.

[125] For some similarly positive readings of torture see Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' lives and the female reader', passim; Sarah Salih, 'The performance of virginity', paper given at the Gender and Medieval Studies conference 'Gender and Transgression in the Middle Ages', York, January 1996; Catherine Innes-Parker, 'Sexual violence and the female reader: symbolic "rape" in the saints' lives of the Katherine Group', *Women's Studies* 24 (1995), pp. 205-217. I am grateful to Sarah Salih both for drawing the latter article to my attention and for sharing her research on this issue.

> world in his fist forsoke not the narwe cloyster of ƥe madens wombe...
> Than ƥe turmentours rent that tendir body wyth wondes of yren and scourged hit by moost cruel betynge and whanne some were wery oƥer halpe hem bot ƥe virgyn amongst alle hir betynges abood stably in praysynge and doyng thonkynges to god [d, p. 44-45][126]

Virgin martyrs suffer and bleed, but they feel no pain, and frequently receive celestial medical attention which renders them as unblemished as ever and if anything even more beautiful. When they go to visit Katherine in prison, following her scourging, Porphirius and the Empress are confronted by the following sight:

> Thay aroos and beheld ƥe mayde syttynge and ƥe aungels of god aboute hir anoyntynge hir woundes and betynges wyth moost swete oynement by whiche ƥe flessh and ƥe skyn was turned into merueylous fayrnesse [ibid., p. 48]

If everyone remembers that St Agatha has her breasts cut off, few remember that she is visited in prison by St Peter who restores her breasts, much to the chagrin of her persecutor, Quintianus.[127]

The description of St Katherine's flogging provided by RBB stresses the meekness with which she accepts her unjust suffering:

> Kateryn was caw3t & bounde & bete
> no hole skyn in heore ƥey lete...
> heor fayr body ran all blode
> heo chaunged neuere chere ne mode
> But suffred as a lamb
> ne makyd no wepyng noƥer no cry [p. 9]

The author inserts a lament for Katherine's suffering not to be found in the *Legenda Aurea,* or the Vulgate. This passage is marked in the manuscript by the Latin tag: 'Lamentacio ad excitandum devotionem audientium'.

> y see ƥe bete in myn herte
> ƥy body all to toore
> y wolle y my3t with ƥe smerte
> and stonde ƥe byfore
> to kepe som of ƥy dysese
> and of ƥy strong peyne...
> God wolde y had loue
> as ys now in ƥe [ibid., p. 10]

Katherine's suffering provides an extreme example of the love for Christ which the audience should aspire to share, even if they do not face similar trials.

Julian of Norwich understood the suffering of another virgin martyr in a similar sense:

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[126] This kind of declaration is a standard virgin martyr trope.

[127] de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, pp. 155-156.

> I harde a man telle of haly kyrke of the storye of saynte Cecylle, in the whilke schewynge I vndyrstode that sche hadde thre wonndys with a swerde in the nekke, with the whilke sche pynede to the ded. By the styrrynge of this I conseyvede a myghty desyre, prayande oure lorde god that he wolde grawnte me thre wonndys in my lyfe tyme, that es to saye the wonnde of contricyoun, the wonnde of compassyoun and the wonnde of wylfulle langgynge to god.[128]

Julian wished to share the suffering of St Cecilia not to punish herself, but in order that she should enjoy a closer relationship with God and a greater understanding of him. It is important to recognise that in the later Middle Ages there was an increasing tendency to read and describe Christ's suffering as having been primarily motivated by love. At the Crucifixion Christ sacrificed himself wholly to his humanity as atonement for the sins of the world. In this way the human Christ is feminised; by suffering and dying on the Cross he is the mother who gives birth to salvation and then nurses ransomed souls at the wound in his side.[129]

In the light of this observation the work of Bynum provides an important reevaluation of the ways in which women manipulated their bodies and their physical circumstances.[130] Female asceticism, and by association female martyrdom should not necessarily be seen as primarily motivated by masochism or internalised misogyny.[131] By starving or harming themselves women were not attempting to eradicate the body but to enhance it. My own work on the life of St Margaret of Antioch has indicated that it is valid to draw comparisons between the torture of virgin martyrs and the efforts of real women to use themselves and their experiences as bargaining counters with God, even taking upon themselves the salvation of sinners, as did Christ.[132] Margaret berates those who advise her to give in and stop the torture, telling them that they should turn from worship of their false gods and that 'my counsel if ye wyl do, My soul for

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[128] Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, eds., *A Book of Shewings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich 1* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 204-206.

[129] Cf. Bynum, 'The female body and religious practice', especially p. 222.

[130] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, especially pp. 189-244.

[131] Ibid., pp. 208-218; Jo Ann McNamara, 'The need to give: suffering and female sanctity in the Middle Ages', in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 199-221.

[132] Katherine J. Lewis, '"The ruler of the world is present, woman, in you": the life of St Margaret of Antioch; validation of the female and feminine experience', unpublished MA thesis, University of York (1992), pp. 68-70.

yours, ye shul saf be'.[133] The pagans do not understand that she is suffering in order to ensure not only her own place in Heaven, but theirs as well. The same is true of all virgin martyrs, including St Katherine.

Reading death

Similar considerations determine the moment of the virgin martyr's death. Again, a modern audience often finds it difficult to understand how a heroine who dies can be perceived as a positive model. This is to misunderstand that dying is the point of the exercise. Having made spectacular public witness to the truth of Christianity, usually converting many of the onlooking pagans, the virgin martyr has earned herself a heavenly crown and a place at Christ's side, the ultimate goal of all Christians. In case the audience of the text should be in any doubt about this St Katherine is given the opportunity to make the point explicit, for part of the audience within the text also has difficulty understanding why Katherine has to die. Katherine has been sentenced to death:

> And whan þis decre opynly puplychyd was,
> And þe tormentours hyr lede towert þe plaas
> Where she shulde receyuyn hyr iuwesse,
> Many a matrone of hy wurthynesse,
> Many a wedwe, & many a maydyn ying,
> Aftyr hyr folwyd, ful sore wepyng
> For sorwe þat she þis wys shuld deye;
> To whom benygnely kateryne dede seye:
> 'O nobyl wyuys & wedwys & maydyns ying,
> Leuyth your heuynesse & your wepynge,
> & lettyth no wyse your entencyoun
> Be besy for to lettyn my passyoun;
> But rather ioyith & makyth good chere
> That my lord, my loue, no lengere here
> Wyl me suffryn, but to hys house
> Home wyth hym ledyn as hys owyn spouse [HW, p. 198][134]

Just as Katherine has determined the whole course of her passion, so she remains in total control even of the moment of her death. In common with many martyrs she uses her death, which is offered to God as the ultimate proof of her love for him, as an opportunity to ensure the well being of all

[133] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 17.

[134] Cf. NHC, p. 173; ScL, p.474; A, p. 258; RBB, p. 20; C, pp. 397-398; d, p. 60.

those who show devotion to her in the future:

> Shewe to ƥine handmayd ƥis grace,
> That what man or wumman in ony place
> In wurshype of ƥi name my passyoun
> Remembryth of specyal affeccyoun,
> Or in ƥe oure whan ƥei deed shul be
> Or in ony angwyssh & necessyte
> To me for helpe make her preyere,
> Redyly here bone vouchesaf to here [HW, p. 199][135]

A voice from Heaven agrees to her request and calls her to receive her reward:

> Come loue! com, spouse! come hedyr to me!
> For ƥe gate of blysse opnyd is to ƥe...
> Come forth, for they boonys besy
> Be ne lenger, for certeynly
> They acceptyd been in my courght oonly,
> And controllyd euere-lastyngly to endure,
> That who-so-euere wyth herte pure
> Remembrance haue of ƥi passyoun,
> Or in ony angwyssh or trybulacyoun
> To ƥe clepe, ƥat of me hys boone
> For ƥi sake shal ben herd ful soone [ibid, p. 199]

Assured of this Katherine stretches forth her neck and 'bad hym smyht' (ibid, p. 200). In this way Katherine's execution and death become the moment at which her status as a saint is assured, the well-being of her devotees confirmed and her relationship with God ultimately consummated (figs. 16, 25, 31, 32, 41).

It is perhaps no accident that so many versions of her life contain a group of women explicitly addressed as 'wyuys & wedwys & maydyns'.[136] The implication seems to be that they should understand her sacrifice because it is something they can aspire to. All of them can eventually become brides of Christ, a point that is reinforced in the person of the Empress. Certainly it is a trope of female hagiography that at the moment of death the saint becomes a bride. The life of St Macrina (c. 327-379) written by St Gregory of Nyssa, describes her death thus:

> The day was almost over and the sun was beginning to set, but the zeal in her did not decline. Indeed, as she neared her end and saw the beauty of the Bridegroom more clearly, she rushed with greater impulse towards the One she desired, no longer speaking to those of us who were present, but to that very One towards

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[135] Cf. SEL, p. 542; NHC, ibid; SS, p. 244; A, ibid; CUL, p. 264; RBB, p. 21; C, pp. 398-399; a, p. 335; d, pp. 60-61; Cx, p. 25.

[136] See the references in note 134 above.

> whom she looked with steadfast eyes.[137]

The life of Marie d'Oignies (1177-1213) written by Jacques de Vitry describes her death in these joyful terms:

> On Saturday evening when her wedding day was at hand, the day of joy and gladness (cf Luke 1:14), 'the day the Lord has made' (Ps. 117:24), the day the Lord had foreordained and promised His handmaid, the day of the Lord, the day of the Resurrection, the day of the Vigil of St John the Baptist... on that day, having eaten nothing for fifty-two days, the handmaid of Christ began to sing the Alleluia in a sweet voice and was in jubilation and gladness almost the whole night as though she had been invited to a banquet.[138]

St Katherine as a model of a heavenly bride obviously had particular relevance for women. However, her example was by no means inapplicable to men either. Bernard of Clairvaux's commentaries on the Song of Songs, originally written for a male monastic audience, had a great influence on later formulations of bridal mysticism.[139] An example is provided by a letter which Catherine of Siena wrote to Raymond of Capua.[140] Catherine describes how she provided comfort and spiritual consolation for a man about to be executed. Having made confession and received absolution he is able to approach his death with fortitude, but is afraid of shrinking at the last and asks Catherine to stay with him throughout. She agrees joyfully telling him 'Take comfort, my sweet brother, for very soon we will arrive at the wedding'. She reiterates this language when it comes to the time when he must stretch out his neck for the blade, 'Down! To the wedding, my sweet brother! Soon you shall be in the enduring life'. Catherine actually receives his severed head into her hands and describes seeing his soul received into Heaven thus:

> But he has made a gesture sweet enough to draw a thousand hearts. I do not wonder, for he was already tasting the divine sweetness. He turned back, as does the bride when she has reached the door of her bridegroom, who turns back her glance and her head, bowing to one who has accompanied her, and with that gesture makes a sign of her thanks.

It is an indication of St Katherine of Alexandria's status as the model for Christian soul as bride that Catherine of Siena notes that she waited at the place of judgment 'in the presence of Mary and of St Catherine virgin and

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[137] Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 81.

[138] Ibid., p. 183.

[139] Pauline Matarasso, ed. *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 65-83.

[140] For the following see Petroff, *Medieval Women's Literature*, pp. 274-275.

martyr'. The mystical marriage of St Katherine undoubtedly had a great influence on Catherine of Siena's own marriage to Christ, and it is therefore entirely appropriate that she should stand with Catherine to ensure that her protegée is received into heaven.[141]

St Katherine: virgin martyr *par excellence*

As the most popular virgin martyr St Katherine could be seen as 'typical' of them.[142] However, the fact that she was so popular seems to be linked to the fact that her legend contained some unique elements which set her apart from other virgin martyrs and which lent her a special status. This came to be reflected in the elaboration of her life and her cult. It is difficult to trace a clear-cut line of development with respect to all the extant sources, or to say whether these additional elements accounted for her popularity or were added because of it. There was probably a combination of both factors at work. We have seen the documentary evidence which reveals that St Katherine was the most popular virgin martyr. The texts of her life seem to hold the key as to why this should be so, as we can trace the narrative accretions which the text of her life underwent.

At the beginning of the period with which this thesis is concerned, St Katherine is already set above the other virgin martyrs by means of her status, 'Seinte Katerine of noble cunne com bi olde dawe/ Hire fader kyng hire moder quene' (SEL, p. 533).[143] Margaret is the daughter of Theodosius 'heyman bi ƥulke dawe/ patriarch he was wel hey and maister of ƥe lawe' .[144]

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[141] Raymond of Capua draws a deliberate parallel between the two in this respect, see his *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, translated by George Lamb (London, 1960), p. 100. Martyrdom as marriage still held sway in later centuries. Nicholas Ridley told his friends not to lament his death 'for, said he, tomorrow I must be married, and so he showed himself to be as merry as he had ever been before', Josiah Pratt, ed., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe volume 7* (London, 1877), p. 547.

[142] This is the approach taken by Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 173.

[143] I use the *South English Legendary* for purposes of comparison, partly because it contains lives of all the virgin martyrs mentioned above (except Appollonia) and because of its wide dissemination throughout the period.

[144] Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds. *The South English Legendary 1*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 235 (1956), p. 292.

The *South English Legendary* lives of saints Agnes, Agatha and Lucy make no specific mention of their rank, although they appear to be of fairly high status. Their noble demeanour is seen to mirror an inward nobility of spirit, just as their physical beauty signifies the spotless beauty of their virginity. Their beauty is also a determining factor within the narrative of their lives. Male pagan desire initiates the virgin martyr's passion and her beauty renders the torture far more momentous. If she were not so very beautiful her sacrifice would hold less meaning.[145]

In addition, St Katherine receives an explicitly academic education, in line with her status as the only child of a king: 'gret clerc þat maide was/ þer nas non of þe soue artȝ þat heo gret clerk of nas' (SEL, p. 533). St Agnes apparently attends a 'scole', but she is subsequently presented as an inherently spiritual, rather than a highly educated figure.[146] The other virgin martyrs receive more informal training, as high status girls would have done at the time. St Margaret is fostered out to a nurse, St Lucy is brought up by her Christian mother and we are simply told that St Agatha 'Wel ȝong Cristene heo bicom'.[147]

All virgin martyrs debate the nature of Christianity with an evil pagan authority figure, and all acquit themselves admirably, presenting positive figures of feminine eloquence as they render their persecutors dumbfounded and incensed. Although they are seen to be divinely inspired they are not necessarily to be understood as having no native wit or intellect. There is a sense in which they are intelligent and knowledgeable because they are Christians, but this also works the other way around: they are Christians because they are intelligent. Katherine astounds her persecutor, Maxentius, to such an extent that he is forced to call in reinforcements in the shape of fifty philosophers, 'þe gretteste þat me fond/ As wide as me miȝte siche owhar in eni lond' (SEL, p. 535). Just as Katherine has been educated beyond her fellow virgin martyrs, so she is more strenuously tested. It is a measure of her rhetorical abilities that the

[145] For a detailed discussion of the beauty of virgin martyrs and its importance: Kim M. Phillips, 'Medieval maidenhood: what old men say about young girls', in P. J. P. Goldberg and F. Riddy, eds., *Youth in the Middle Ages* (forthcoming) pp. 12-14.

[146] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary 1*, p. 19.

[147] Ibid., p. 54.

Philosophers are called for, and a confirmation of her intellectual status when she renders them equally speechless.

The final exceptional aspect of St Katherine's life concerns the fate of her body after its death. Virgin martyrs are frequently described as being buried by fellow Christians after their death; in tombs that quickly become shrines. Angels are often on hand to place a divine seal on the proceedings. When St Margaret is executed the bystanders see 'A wiȝt coluere flei out of hure into heuene an hey'.[148] As St Agatha is being buried in her tomb by 'folk ƥat hure louede wel' a procession of three hundred beautiful children arrives to place a plaque on her tomb. The 'children' are actually angels sent to honour the dead saint.[149] St Lucy and her mother visit Agatha's tomb in order to cure the mother's grave illness and the soul of Lucy herself is led to heaven by angels.[150] St Agnes' fellow Christians 'leiȝe at hure buriels in deol & sorwe inou' for seven nights after they buried her, until Agnes herself comes down from Heaven in a company 'Of maidens al of briȝte golde' accompanied by 'A lomb wittore ƥanne eny ƥing' to assure them that she is not dead, but alive in the joy of heaven.[151]

As we have seen, following the late tenth-century invention of the body of St Katherine on Mount Sinai it became a very important pilgrimage site. This undoubtedly contributed to Katherine's prestige and the perceived importance of her cult. No other virgin martyr appears to have had such a shrine in the Middle Ages and the typical end to Katherine's life, which describes angels bearing her body to Mount Sinai establishes her as a figure of unparalleled power among virgin martyrs, for the body is said to be still there to this day, exuding the miraculous healing oil which could be taken away to effect great cures.

> An angel com & nom ƥe bodi among alle ƥe manne
> & bar hit to ƥe hul of Synay tuenti iorneyes ƥanne
> & burede hit ƥer nobliche & faire ynou also

[148] Ibid., p. 302.

[149] Ibid., p. 58.

[150] Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds. *The South English Legendary* 2, E.E.T.S. o.s. 236 (1957), p. 571. Agatha and Lucy appear to be among the more historically verifiable virgin martyrs. The life of St Lucy may therefore provide an indication of the powerful and inspiring example that virgin martyrs presented to other women during the period of persecution.

[151] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary 1*, pp. 23-24.

ƿer3ut to ƿis dai ƿe bones beoƿ ido
Of hire tumbe ƿer vrneƿ 3ut holi oylle wel blyue
Wher ƿurf meni sik man is ibro3t to help & to lyue
Wide alonde hit is ilad ho so hit habbe mote
Noble relik hit is sike men to habbe of bote [SEL, p. 543]

A representation of St Katherine's body being carried to the shrine seems often to have provided the last scene of wall painting cycles of her life. In 1875 what appeared to be the remains of such a cycle was uncovered in Little Kimble church in Buckinghamshire. It was painted in about 1330 and the only legible portion remaining showed the burial. According to Tristram's description of it, two angels, one at her head and one at her feet, with wings outspread, lower her body into the grave. Mount Sinai is represented by some wavy lines.[152] At Sporle the penultimate panel shows the burial (fig. 17). Mount Sinai is represented by a green hill, dotted with flowers, a rather inaccurate representation of the rocky ochre mountains which actually surround the monastery.[153] The hill is surmounted by a brown tomb banded with gold in which can be seen the form of Katherine's body, shrouded in bright red. Two angels hover above the body praying while two more at the foot of the hill wave censers.

The final panel brings the legend of St Katherine into the present just as the words 'ƿer3ut to ƿis day' do in SEL (fig. 18). We are shown Mount Sinai again, as in the previous panel. This time a tree has been added to the left of the shrine, which is now closed and apparently decorated more comprehensively with gold. At the foot of the hill kneel three pilgrims, at least one of whom, the central figure with his back to the audience, is tonsured. He is flanked on either side by two bearded pilgrims, their hands raised in prayer. The man on the left carries a satchel, pilgrim's staff and bears a rucksack, as does the man on the right. The parishioners of Sporle church were perhaps unlikely to emulate these figures and visit Mount Sinai themselves to reap the benefits of touching and kissing the bones of St Katherine, or obtaining some of her oil. However, this representation of the shrine, combined with other descriptions of it would at least allow them to

[152] Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, p. 188.

[153] The depiction of the mountain in the *Tres Belles Heures* is rather more naturalistic, as is the description in the prose life. See Millard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson, *The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry* (New York, 1974), plate 25; d, pp. 61-63.

make a mental pilgrimage. It certainly would have reminded them that although St Katherine had died and gone to her throne in Heaven a thousand years ago, her body remained on earth, still exuding holy oil, as tangible proof of her power, her ability to intervene in earthly matters.

Few saints could boast such an important shrine and the identification of the body found on Mount Sinai as that of St Katherine may have been the single most important factor in the subsequent universal popularity of her cult. Mount Sinai served to give St Katherine a rare immediacy for her devotees, an immediacy that was further emphasised by the inclusion of the account of her invention to the prose life. The **d** recension describes the angelic apparition to the monks and their discovery of the body on 'the coppe of the hylle... where thys holy lady had lay an hondert wynter and thrytty in a stoon' (p. 62). A measure of the importance of the discovery is provided by the observation that the feast of her Invention which the monks ordained 'ys kept of the deuout cristen puple there aboute in tho partyes And the tyme ther of ys aboute the Inuencion of the holy crosse' (ibid). Thus the relic of St Katherine's body is connected with perhaps the most important relic of all, which was discovered by her half-uncle Constantine's mother Helena.

Bride of Christ

The addition of the invention to the prose life of St Katherine in the early-fifteenth century is not the only development which the narrative underwent. It is a further mark of St Katherine's importance that she became known as The bride of Christ rather than any other virgin martyr. It is characteristic for virgin martyrs to describe themselves as the bride of Christ, or Christ's beloved. Bokenham describes St Faith thus:

> And for she nold lesyn hir virgynyte
> Oonly she chese, to be crystis wyfe
> And neuyr noon oþirs to lesyn hir lyfe[154]

St Agnes describes her heavenly spouse in some detail:

> Of þis louer my chaumbyr arayid is,
> Whos organys han maad me melody,
> Whos maydyns here syngyng is uery blys;

[154] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 99.

> And takyn of his mouth many a kys haue I,
> Swettere þan eythir mylk or hony;
> And fulle oftyn in armys he halsyd hath me
> Wyth-out blemyssyng of my uirgynyte
> Hys body to myn now coniuonyd is
> And wyth hys blood my chekys embelyshyd hath he[155]

However, St Katherine alone is singled out as having experienced an actual wedding with Christ, which in the Insular tradition is described as an event which takes place not in a dream or a vision, but as an actual event, which leaves tangible proof in the form of a wedding ring.

The earliest extant version of the mystical marriage of St Katherine is to be found in a Franco-Italian poem 'De sainte Caterine' written at Verona in 1251.[156] The episode seems to have become a standard part of the narrative of St Katherine's life during the course of the fourteenth century.[157] The earliest extant account written in England is an Anglo-Norman text to be found in the mid-fourteenth century British Library Additional 40143.[158] It is with this text, based on a lost Latin source, that the peculiarly Insular tradition of the mystical marriage first comes to light, describing Katherine and Adryan's journey across the desert to participate in an actual ceremony with the adult Christ in a church. Versions of the life to be found in Italy or France describe this episode as a dream vision revolving around an icon which Adryan shows to Katherine.[159] In this version Katherine marries the infant Christ in a dream. It is difficult to tell whether this version was known in England, or whether it found less favour than the more dramatic and erotic Insular version. The only extant Continental rendition of the legend composed in the British Isles is the

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[155] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

[156] William MacBain, 'Cross-cultural adaptations of *The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine*', paper given at the third International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, July 1996; Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', p. 190.

[157] Kurvinen, ibid., pp. 190-191.

[158] ibid., pp. 192-193; William MacBain, 'The place of the "late" Anglo-Norman text (Additional MS 40143) in the development of the *Catherine* legend', paper given at the conference 'Hagiography and Saints' Cults: 1100-1500', University of York, July 1993; Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 160-164.

[159] For more on French versions of the life, William MacBain, 'Five Old French renderings of the *Passio Sancte Katerine Virginis*', in Jeanette Beer, ed., *Medieval Translators and their Craft* (Kalamazoo, 1989), pp. 41-65. See also Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts, Religion and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1964), pp. 105-111.

Latin version contained in the *Scotichronicon* written in the 1440s.[160]

The Additional 40143 life is not the source of the Middle English prose life. Kurvinen posits that both go back to a common Latin source, one that may still be extant but has yet to be identified.[161] Compared to the Contintental version, the prose life also greatly expands upon the coronation and parliament scenes, perhaps a reflection of perceived English custom.[162] Bray suggests that a common Latin source was also used by Capgrave and by Staneborn for his long Latin version of the mystical marriage written before 1425, and found in a unique manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud 205 written before the mid fifteenth century.[163] According to Kurvinen and Bray, who both undertook a detailed examination of the textual history of the mystical marriage, this episode seems to have become a fairly standard prologue to the *Legenda Aurea* account of her life in England by the early to mid fifteenth century.[164] As we saw in chapter 1 the fifteenth-century prose life of St Katherine appears to have provided the main vehicle by which the mystical marriage was disseminated in late-medieval England.

The twin elements of Katherine's education and mystical marriage can therefore be seen to set her apart from other virgin martyr saints. They also provide the departure point for the two central chapters of this thesis because they provide the basis for St Katherine's status as a model of lay piety.

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[160] John and Winifred MacQueen, eds., *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower 1* (Aberdeen, 1993), pp. 286-297. Bower explains that he includes the mystical marriage because it is known to only a few people, p. 287.

[161] Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 195-196.

[162] Ibid., p. 200.

[163] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 179-184; Auvo Kurvinen, 'The source of Capgrave's *Life of St Katharine*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 61 (1960), pp. 268-324.

[164] Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catherine', pp. 214-216; Bray, ibid., pp. 257-270.

Reading St Katherine in the Parish: The acquisition of knowledge and power

An important aspect of the cult of St Katherine was the opportunities it offered devotees for the fashioning of a certain identity or identities. The purpose of this chapter is to examine this phenomenon within the parish church. This chapter argues that devotion to St Katherine could entail the construction of oneself (either individually or collectively) as knowledgeable or powerful and also the assimilation of devotional and spiritual traits appropriate to the ideal Christian.

I shall examine the ways in which St Katherine was presented to parishioners, in sermons and artistic representations of varying kinds. Sermons can tell us what parishioners were taught and expected to know about religion, the Church, and the saints. However, we must look beyond these sources for evidence that they responded to St Katherine in the way that the texts anticipate. Did the laity internalise and act on the information they received?[1]

Documentary sources such as wills and inventories, and gild returns can tell us something about those who have responded to, and found relevance in St Katherine. Those who singled out St Katherine for devotion would have been participating in a cult that had an established set of perceived meanings and rituals, and hence they did not need to explain why they chose to build a chapel for St Katherine, have a life composed in her honour or provide for a candle to be burned in front of her image.[2] However, these sources, in revealing who was devoted to St Katherine allow me to suggest some of the ways in which they may have read, perceived and appropriated St Katherine within two sites of communal

[1] Miri Rubin has explored this issue with reference to eucharistic doctrine, *Corpus Christi,* pp. 108-129, making the point that 'whatever the effort put into teaching from parochial guidebooks which repeated the basic doctrines and prayers, the effective dissemination of a set of ideas, symbols and practices could be achieved only through penetration into the domain of the daily, the usual, the habitual, through the demonstration of its relevance to the experiences which large groups of people lived', pp. 108-109.

[2] I am forced to make some generalisations, but I am aware of Sarah Beckwith's cautions against assuming homogeneity in late medieval ritual practice: see her, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York, 1993), especially pp. 78-111, 'The uses of Corpus Christi and *The Book of Margery Kempe'*.

piety, first the parish church and secondly the gild.[3]

This chapter also uses surviving information about the observation of the feast day of St Katherine, November 25th, to draw some conclusions about her value for those who could not afford to make wills or become members of gilds. This chapter proceeds with an awareness that parish churches usually encompassed people drawn from a variety of social backgrounds, both literate and non-literate. However, the culture of the parish church is largely visual and aural, its religious and didactic discourse public, so to some extent those who could read literary texts did not necessarily have a greater understanding, or knowledge of doctrine or the history of Christianity, than those who could only read visual ones.

In order to examine the ways in which the life of St Katherine related to the religious life of medieval lay men and women it must be contextualised as part of the later medieval pastoral initiative, which sought to improve the education and religious comprehension of clergy and laity alike. This campaign gives an important dimension to the representation of St Katherine as educated and educator. This chapter will explore whether the example of learning which she offered was of relevance to lay people from all levels of society, not just those who could read, or had received some form of academic education. Before examining this issue however, we shall examine the nature of the parish church, the physical location in which so many representations of St Katherine were to be found.

[3] The household of chapter 4 is also to be understood as a communal, but less public space.

The parish church: an introduction

The term 'parish church' encompasses a variety of meanings and functions.[4] It represents the physical space of the building itself, the people who make up its congregation and the ideology which it embodies. The parish church formed the focal point for its local community whether in a village or a large town. It was the immediate representative of the Church as institution, as doctrine and as authority. According to canon law, the parish church was the setting in which lay Christians were expected to and, on the whole, did practise religion. They were required to hear Mass on Sundays and feast days in their own parish churches. The parish church was the primary arena for the transmission of the cardinal tenets of Christianity from clergy to laity, particularly after the pronouncements of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Apart from those of very high status, most people did participate in parish worship, even if they had their own domestic chapels. The corporative dimension of worship was extremely important, since membership of a particular parish church was part of one's social identity. Private devotions were not to be carried out at the expense of the wider community, as Mirk's sermon for St Margaret's day shows.

> God men and woymen, such a day ȝe schul haue Seynt Margretys day. And þagh hit be a lyȝt holyday, saue þeras a chirch ys deynt yn hor name, ȝet I warne you, for as I suppos þer byn some of you þat hauen such a loue to hure, þat ȝe wol fast hor evyn. But þen ȝe þat fastyn hur evyn, ȝe qwyt you not to her as ȝe schuld do, but yf ȝe come to chyrch on þe morow to here a masse of her; for scho wyll con you more þonk forto make a masse sayd yn þe worschip of her þen forto fast mony evenes bred and watyr wythout masse. For þe masse makyth ioyfull all þe angels of Heuen, hit fedyth and confortyþ þe sowlys in purgatory, and sokeryth all þat lyuyt yn erþ and charite. And he þat fastyth þe euyn, he helpeth hymselfe, and no fyrþir.[5]

This passage provides an example of a saint being used to legitimise the

[4] There are several studies investigating the nature of 'the parish', surveying parish churches in particular towns or geographic areas, and exploring the conduct and dynamics of parochial religion and devotion. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 1-18; D. M. Palliser, 'The parish in perspective', in Wright, *Parish, Church and People*, pp. 5-28; Duffy explores the institution and experience of Mass within the parish, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 91-130; Gibson, 'East Anglian religious culture in the Middle Ages', in her *Theatre of Devotion*, pp. 19-46; Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire*, pp. 102-131; R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late-Medieval England* (Oxford, 1987), especially '"Windows on men's souls": orthodox spirituality', pp. 252-308; J. H. Bettey, *Church and Parish: An Introduction for Local Historians* (London, 1987).

[5] Erbe, *Festial*, p. 199.

authority of the Church by emphasising the status of the parish church as the fundamental arena for religious and devotional activities.

Speculum Sacerdotale contains a sermon for use on the dedication of a parish church which provides a priestly definition of the sanctity of the church as building and institution:

> In it are prayers made, in it are askers of grace herd and sped, in it are heuenly þyngis wonne, in it ben þe sacramentis. Deuelis ben out dryven, gilty are delyuered, seke men made hole. In it is halowid þe sacrament of baptyme, the sacrament of the body and blode of God, and the sacrament of wedeloke. In it ben prechid þe gospelles and wordes of God; ympnus and other louyngis of god be songyn. Riȝtwis men are commendid to God, ordynaunces and institucions of holy chirche ben rehersid, wickyd men be acursid. In it is the habitacion of God, concourse of angels, reconsiliacion of man, and the lowenes of erþe is in it fellascipid to the hyenes of heuene. And this place is a holy hous of God and ȝate of heuene. O, Lord, what this place is gretly to be a-dredde.[6]

This description provides a useful introduction to the multifunctional capacities of each individual church and the demands that were put on both priest and parishioners.[7] However, this description delineates only the sacramental and liturgical functions of the parish church, without taking into account its standing as a social space.[8] It provided a focal point for people to meet and conduct all kinds of relationships, spiritual, religious, and even sexual, as Margery Kempe found out one St Margaret's Eve before evensong, when she was propositioned by a fellow parishioner.[9]

People did not only attend church to hear Mass or any other services, such as baptisms or funerals. Parishioners could have access to their churches at other times as well. The devotional activities of Margery Kempe demonstrate that people did make use of their churches for private devotions.[10] While much of Margery's behaviour is seen as excessive by her contemporaries, she was wholly orthodox in her beliefs and practices, and thus *The Book of Margery Kempe* can be used to provide information about

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[6] Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, pp. 163-164.

[7] This is an idealised view, since not all churches would have had the resources (financial or human) to provide such a comprehensive service.

[8] See Pamela Graves, 'Social space in the English medieval parish church', *Economy and Society* 18 (1989), pp. 297-322, for a discussion of the ways in which social identities were constructed within the framework of parochial religious observance.

[9] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 14. Margery's church was dedicated to St Margaret so the congregation would have had an obligation to attend this service, as Mirk's sermon indicates.

[10] See chapter 1, pp. 37-38.

the conduct of parochial religious life.

The parish church and saints' days

One of the most important, yet often overlooked, factors which determined the choice of a favourite saint was the dedication of the parish church. There were about 60 pre-Reformation parish churches dedicated to St Katherine some of which are mentioned in wills, for example, 'the church of St Katherine of Montacute', the 'ecclesie parochialis Sancte Katerine de Scoteis Okolt in comitatu Kancie' and the church of St Katherine at the Tower of London.[11]

Devotion to St Katherine apparently did not become widespread across England until the thirteenth century, by which time most medieval churches had already been built. This accounts for the fact that in number of church dedications St Katherine is surpassed by several other saints. Arnold-Foster claims that only 57 churches were dedicated to St Katherine.[12] By comparison St Peter has 730, St Michael 611, St Andrew 577, St Margaret 230, Mary Magdalene 172, and St Helena 113.[13] Nevertheless it is extremely common to find chapels dedicated to her, both within churches and as independent buildings. For example, in 1443 William Philpys left the

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[11] Frances Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications* 3 (London, 1899), for a comprehensive list and the number of churches dedicated to each saint. Bond, *Dedications and Patron Saints*, pp. 201-219, provides a similar survey county by county. The church of St Katherine of Montacute is mentioned in the will of William Carent (dated 1406), he asks the vicar to sing a trental for him, Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills* (1901 volume), p. 22. The parish church of St Katherine in 'Scoteis Okolt' is mentioned in the will of William Brampton (dated 1405), Leland L. Duncan, *Testamenta Cantiana: West Kent* (London, 1906), p. 44. St Katherine's by the Tower is mentioned in several wills: John Ricart (rector of Westlyford Church, Somerset) requested burial in the church, and also left a vestment, a missal, a silver chalice and other liturgical items for use in the church, in his will of 1448, Weaver, ibid., p. 162.

[12] Arnold-Foster, ibid., p. 5. Bond, ibid., claims that there were 62 dedications to St Katherine, p. 17. I use Arnold-Foster's figures however, because unlike Bond, she lists each parish by dedication and also each saint with the parishes churches that are dedicated to him/her.

[13] I picked the three most popular male and female dedications from Arnold-Foster's list 'Statistical study of dedications', for purposes of comparison, ibid., pp. 1-26. These figures refer to single dedications alone. Apart from St Michael, the Apostles seem to have been the most popular choice, although the Virgin Mary tops the list with 1938 single dedications. All Saints is the second most popular with 1044 dedications.

following instructions in his will, 'I will that my executors complete and finish with all possible haste a certain chapel of St Katherine at Bath lately begun anew by me according to my intention more fully expressed to them by word of mouth'.[14] By the time that the cult of St Katherine achieved a position of prevalence it was more common for people to built chapels or chantries, to found gilds or commission or repair images of saints than it was to found whole new churches. It may also be that many of St Katherine's devotees were neither rich nor powerful and so could only afford to honour her in less extravagant ways.

A church dedicated to St Katherine would have had a particular reason to contain images of her and the narrative of her life, as the parochial patron saint was held to be the especial protector of the church and its congregation. For example, the church of St Katherine at Preston-next Faversham in Kent had an image of St Katherine at the high altar.[15] The observance of her feast day in such a church would have bestowed some form of collective identity on the parishioners as they joined together in the celebration of her life, and showed her the honour that was required of them in return for her favour.

The work of David d'Avray on German sermon lives of St Katherine emphasises the importance of those texts which were delivered on the most important feast days for gauging the impact of sermons on the laity.[16] D'Avray argues that by bearing in mind which saint's days were high days we can arrive at a better idea of which hagiographic sermons the laity actually heard.

However, while the determination of high days may seem to provide a definitive framework from which to work, two further qualifications must be made. First, saints' sermons (in England at least) were not only heard on their feast days. The author of *Speculum Sacerdotale*, evidently aware that not everyone would be able to attend Mass on a feast day that fell in the week, even if it was a high day, makes provision for the sermons to

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[14] Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills* (1903 volume), pp. 338-339.

[15] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, p. 249.

[16] David D'Avray, 'Catherine of Alexandria in Preaching', paper given at the conference 'Feminine Sanctity 600-1500', held at the University of Nottingham, April 1994. I am grateful to Dr D'Avray for giving me a copy of this paper to consult.

be read on the preceding Sunday.[17] So in fact the emphasis that d'Avray places on the sermon lives of high day saints does not provide such an infallible guide to which sermons the laity may have heard. In addition this emphasis does not take into account the laity's access to visual narratives of the saints, which would have been available to people whenever they went into their churches, irrespective of feast days.[18]

Secondly, the evidence provided by diocesan constitutions and the sermon collections, while extremely important, represent the official side of saints' cults, the means by which they were propagated to the laity by clerics. Will evidence gives us some indication of the way people reacted to these cults, and the relative popularity of saints within wills contributes to our knowledge about the reception of the sermons. However, although the overall picture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicates that St Katherine was extremely popular with people drawn from a variety of social backgrounds, individual sources sometimes seem to put this into question. This is particularly true of the lists of *festa ferianda* surviving from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The fifteen extant thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lists of *festa ferianda* demonstrate the extent to which the ecclesiastical authorities thought it possible or desirable to impose the pattern of the liturgical year onto the lives of the laity.[19] That these lists were issued to cover particular dioceses indicates that there was not necessarily a uniform consensus among the authorities as to which feasts merited high status and which lesser or low. Some of the lists go through the year in calendar order,

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[17] Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, p. 2 as quoted in chapter 1; Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp. 31-32, pp. 71-74.

[18] D'Avray recognises that art was 'also a sort of mass medium' but judges that it was 'probably not such an effective one' as sermons, 'St Catherine of Alexandria', p. 12. It is not clear what criteria he has used to draw such a conclusion, for which he offers no supporting evidence. As we have seen, the influence of the pastoral initiative on church art suggests that it was considered to be a useful medium for instruction, especially for people who could not read. It could be argued that the availibility of images, stressed by Pecock, made them if anything more effective than sermons.

[19] See Cheney, 'Rules for the observance of feast day', pp. 117-118 for further discussion of this issue.

describing the feasts and the method of observing them as they occur.[20] The list issued for the diocese of London in the 1240s provides an example of this.[21] Most of the lists divide the feasts up in order of importance, starting with the most solemn days on which no work at all should be carried out, as if it were Sunday, proceeding through days on which only work with the plough is forbidden, and days on which women are to rest but men to work as usual. The earliest extant list, drawn up in 1222 by the Council of Oxford takes this form, as do those for the diocese of Norwich (c. 1240) and the diocese of Hereford (c. 1348-62).[22]

It seems that these lists were intended to provide a guide for both priests and congregations and were to be followed closely.[23] There are regional variations between these lists, reflecting localised saint's cults. For example, the London list specifies that in October, within the deaneries of Tendring and Barking alone, the feasts of St Osyth and St Ethelburga are to have high status. The latter was abbess of Barking, and St Osyth was thought to have founded a convent in Chich, Essex.[24] However, common patterns do emerge as well, giving an indication of more universal observances. The feasts of saints who played a part in Christ's life or the early history of the Church are usually all given high day status. The assignation of lesser feasts is not so uniform but often includes early popes and virgin martyrs such as Lucy, Agatha and Cecilia. Both the Canterbury list and the Worcester list state that women are not to work on the days of saints Lucy, Agnes, Margaret and Agatha.[25] St Margaret is sometimes accorded high day status, in Norwich for example.[26]

St Katherine does not have a constant places in these lists. Out of the 15 lists five assign high day status to St Katherine, four state that only work

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[20] Ibid., 'Appendix', pp. 135-147, where Cheney lists each extant constituion and its content. He discusses each one in turn, pp. 123-134.

[21] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

[22] Ibid., p. 135 (Oxford), pp. 139-140 (Norwich), p. 144 (Hereford).

[23] Ibid., p. 118.

[24] See Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 147, for St Ethelburga, pp. 326-327 for St Osyth.

[25] Cheney, 'Rules for the observance of feast days', pp. 136-137.

[26] Ibid., p. 139.

with the plough is forbidden and the other six do not mention her.[27] Taken on their own these lists present a somewhat confused picture of her status. However, there are other extant sources which provide information about the observance of feast days. Cheney points out that the statutes of boroughs and gilds, as well as manorial custumals and account rolls show that other rules governing the observation of feast days were applied, which could differ from the rules of the ecclesiastical authorities.[28] However, he explicitly avoids consideration of the extent to which the Church's rules were obeyed, or how the lists might relate to the actual practices of the laity.[29]

Mirk's introduction to the life of St Margaret suggests that there could be individual as well as regional variety in the way people chose to observe saints' days. We have seen that although St Margaret's day is a 'lyȝt holy-day' Mirk supposes that 'þer byn some of you þat hauen such a loue to hure' that they will observe St Margaret's Eve by fasting.[30] Mirk encourages them to attend Mass on the day itself, even though they are clearly under no obligation to do so. This indicates that the lists are useful, but do not present the complete picture.

Harvey investigates the relationship between rules and practices. She describes church court cases of people who broke the law and worked on high days.[31] However, the overall impression is that feast days were kept to a great extent in late medieval England.[32] Indeed, it seems that some feast days were kept as high days even if they were not designated as such in the lists. Harvey concludes that the lists seem to have denied the status of full holiday to the feasts of some saints who were secure in popular affection. Using thirteenth- and fourteenth-century villein calendars and other sources Harvey concludes that the feast day of St Katherine was widely

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[27] Oxford (1222), London (1245-59), Exeter (1287) Canterbury (1400) and Lincoln (1329-1362) assign St Katherine high day status. Canterbury (early thirteenth century), Worcester (1218-1236), Norwich, (c. 1240) and Hereford (c. 1348-1362) forbid ploughing on St Katherine's day. Salisbury (1257), Barnwell Priory (1295), Osney Abbey (c. 1300), Farrigdon (after 1336), Bath and Wells (1342) and Canterbury (1362) do not mention St Katherine: ibid., pp. 123-134.

[28] Ibid., p. 118.

[29] Ibid., p. 117.

[30] Erbe, *Festial*, p. 199.

[31] Harvey, 'Work and *festa ferianda*', pp. 298-303.

[32] Ibid., p. 307.

observed as a holiday in both urban and rural areas, despite its not being a standard high day in the lists.[33] This accords much better with the evidence for St Katherine's importance in other sources, than does the evidence of the lists alone. The pronouncements of the ecclesiastical authorities appear sometimes to have had a rather tangential relationship with the actual practices of the laity.

That churches paid special attention to the feast day of their patron saint regardless of whether it was deemed to be a high day or not, is suggested by Mirk's opening to the life of St Margaret, quoted above. This is supported by the evidence of the constitutions. Only two of these fifteen constitutions include St Margaret's as a high day and Mirk explicitly describes it as a 'lyȝt holyday'.[34] However, almost all of the constitutions include the 'festum cuiuslibet ecclesiae in sua parochia, quodlibet festum illius sancti in cuius honore fundata est ecclesia',[35] 'item festum illius sancti in cuius honore ecclesia dedicatur, festum dedicacionis ecclesie'.[36] This fits in with Mirk's comment that St Margaret's (July 20) is not a light day if 'a chirch ys deynt yn hor name'.

Churches were often dedicated to saints whose feast day was a high day, the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, one of the Apostles, St Michael or St Nicholas, for example.[37] However, well over a hundred churches were dedicated to St Helena, whose feast day does not appear in any of the extant constitutions. For these churches her feast day of August 18 would therefore have been a high day. It seems that St Katherine's day had attained the status of a high feast day by the late Middle Ages. This is suggested both by the constitutions and by Mirk's opening to her life, 'Good men and woymen, such a day N. ȝe schull haue Seynt kateryns day. ƿe whiche day &e schull come to ƿe chyrch, and worschyppe God and thys holy mayden and martyr Seynt Kateryn' (F, p. 275).

[33] Ibid., pp. 295-296, p. 307.

[34] Erbe, *Festial*, p. 199. Cheney, 'Rules for the observance of feast days'; the Oxford constitution (1222) names St Margaret's as a high day, p. 135, as does the Norwich constitution (c. 1240), pp. 139-140.

[35] Cheney, ibid., Oxford, p. 135.

[36] Ibid., Canterbury (1400), p. 146.

[37] There were 385 single dedications to St Nicholas, Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications 3*, p. 21.

Displaying devotion to St Katherine in the parish church

One must beware of assuming that even within specific rural or urban churches the congregation would have formed a homogeneous body.[38] While the unitive and corporative dimension of the parochial experience of Mass may have engendered a sense of community in the attendant congregation, this experience was also extremely individualised as each person attempted to make personal reparation to God for their sins. This form of individualised devotion was encouraged by the meditative techniques discussed in chapter one. Worshippers would thus be provided with their own personal knowledge to bring to bear on the Mass, and the saints whom they encountered in church. Thus St Katherine could have held a variety of meanings even for the parishioners within a single church.[39]

It could be argued that the narrative sources, especially the literary ones, the majority of which were composed by clerics, represent an imposition of devotion to the saints that may not necessarily have struck any answering chords in the psyches or religious practices of those in the congregation. However, the evidence provided by wills of individuals commissioning representations of St Katherine and providing for the upkeep of existing ones suggests that they were reacting to some intrinsic aspect of the life of St Katherine that led them to honour her rather than any other saint.

Parishioners of differing status and resources would have been able to express their devotion to the saints with varying degrees of wealth and splendour. Their patronage would determine the interior (and exterior) appearance of the church, and also affect the devotional preferences of other parishioners. Whatever the resources at the disposal of the individual parishioner, there was some manner of expressing devotion to a favoured

[38] Beckwith, 'The uses of Corpus Christi', pp. 103-110.

[39] The extant evidence allows me to suggest only a few of these. I recognise that these recovered readings may perhaps be valid only for a particular church or area, or within a particular period, or for a particular group, rather than characteristic of the cult of St Katherine in England over the whole of the later Middle Ages. However, given the great popularity of St Katherine a certain amount of generalisation seems legitimate, provided that the reader bears these reservations in mind.

saint available to all. This is indicated by the legend of St Margaret. The saint's final prayer usually contains a list of ways in which her favour can be 'bought', or her attention gained:

> Grante me ich bidde ƥe for ƥin wounden viue
> ƥat ȝif enimon haƥ gode munde louerd of mine liue
> And of ƥe pine ƥat ich habbe iƥoled for ƥine grace
> Oƥer write in god entente and red in eni place
> ȝif hi biddeƥ in god entente grante hom milce & ore
> ȝif hi in eny annuy beoƥ bring hom out of sore
> ȝif anymon in onur of me eny chapel deƥ rere
> Oƥer eni weued in churche oƥer eni liȝt find ƥere
> In onur of me up is coust Louerd bidde ich ƥe
> ȝif hi biddeƥ ƥing ƥat is to bidde grante hom for ƥe loue of me.[40]

The most common way of expressing devotion to a saint was to place a candle in front of a cult image. This practice forms the majority of references to any saint found in wills. For example Thomas Bath left 2s to the light of St Katherine in Wanstrow church, Somerset in 1427, Margery Hurpur left 1lb of wax to be burned before St Katherine in Kenardington church, Kent in 1482, and Robert Morley left 12d to the light of St Katherine in Fenhurst church, Sussex in 1514.[41]

The wills of East Kent are conspicuous for the number of references they contain to images and their upkeep. John Taylor leaves 6d in 1479 for 'the painting of St Katherine now in the roodloft' in Biddenden church; in 1484 Alice a Woode leaves 10s towards the repair of the image of St Katherine in the nave of St Mary's, Canterbury. In 1499 Walter Garrard leaves 20s for painting the image of St Katherine in the church of St Mary Northgate in Canterbury.[42] John Spore's will of 1512 contains the following instruction, 'To painting the image of St Katherine at the high altar, 12d; and if any new image be made and put in her stead 4d more'. This image of St Katherine was given such a prominent place in the church of Preston-next-Faversham because it was dedicated to her.[43] Hussey's arrangement of

[40] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary 1*, p. 301.

[41] Thomas Bath: Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills*, (1903 volume) p. 329; Margery Harpur: Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, p. 180; Robert Morley: Walter H. Godfrey, ed., *Transcripts of Sussex Wills* 2, Sussex Record Society 42 (1936), p. 210. Hundreds of similar examples are to be found in wills.

[42] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, John Taylor, p. 19; Alice a Woode, p. 56; Walter Garrard, p. 57.

[43] Ibid., p. 249.

these wills by parish also allows us to trace familial devotion to St Katherine. For example, in 1477 Lawrence Leghe made the following provision: 'An image of St Katherine to be bought for the Church of Brookland, and to the making of a new altar of the said image of St Katherine 16s 8d.'[44] In 1484 one Thomas Leche, perhaps Lawrence's son, leaves 4d to the light of St Katherine, and thirty years later in 1516 another Lawrence Lyghe leaves a ewe for the light of St Katherine.[45]

People would also ask to be buried near St Katherine. In John Venables' will of 1415 he requested burial in the chapel of St Katherine next to the chancel in the church of Congesbury, Somerset.[46] Richard Robart requested burial in the church at Faversham, Kent before 'the great image of St Katherine' in 1487.[47] Alice White displayed particular devotion to St Katherine in her will of 1528, requesting burial before the altar of the saint in Warehorne Church (Kent), also leaving a taper of wax to burn before St Katherine and a cow to her brotherhood.[48] In 1499 Joan Warre left the following instructions:

> I bequeath my body to holy burial in the chapel of St Katherine in the parish church of Illmystre [Somerset]
>
> Item, I will that the body of my mother, where it now lies buried, shall be removed, carried, and buried in the chapel of St Katherine in the aforesaid church as soon as conveniently may be.[49]

Perhaps Joan wanted to ensure that her mother also benefited from the patronage of St Katherine.

Some people honour their chosen saints by leaving items of jewellery to adorn their statues. For example, Dame Joan Chamberleyn of York left the following instructions in her will of 1502:

> I wit my weddyngeringe of golde, a gyrdill the tushoye theroff of gold of vynes hernest with syluer and a payr of corael baydes gaudiett wt syluer, unto yt blessid ymage of Saynt Anne wt in the said monystorie of our lady [St Mary's, York]; I will that the rynge, the day of my bureall, be put on her fynger, the gyrdyll abowt hir, and the baydes in hir hand.[50]

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[44] Ibid., p. 38.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills*, (1901 volume) p. 71.
[47] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, p. 124.
[48] Ibid., p. 398.
[49] Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills* (1901 volume), pp. 377-378.
[50] J. Raine, ed., *Testamenata Eboracensia 4*, Surtees Society 53 (1868), p. 201.

An example of this practice in association with an image of St Katherine is provided by the 1484 will of Joan Mudeford, widow of Glaston, Somerset:

> Item, to the image of the blessed Mary in the chapel of the said church [St John's], one gold ring, with one kerchief.
> Item, to the image of St Katherine of the said church, one gold ring.[51]

Although the will does not state explicitly that Joan was a vowess, if she was it is possible that one of these rings was her wedding ring, and the other the ring which marked her profession of chastity.

Larger scale expressions of devotion to St Katherine are also to be found in wills. In 1450 Robert Rolleston, provost of the collegiate church of John in Beverley, made his will, requesting burial in the middle of the chapel of St Katherine within the church. He also made provision for the chapel as follows: 'In qua quidem capella videlicet in fine orientali ejusdem, volo unam fenestram lapidem fieri de novo et vitreari de bonis meis, cujus partem unam de miraculis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae et aliam partem de historia predictae Virginis Katerinae volo memorari'.[52] This provides rare testamentary evidence detailing the commission of a large scale decorative programme. Other traces of such practices are to be found however; in 1481 John Strigill left 23s 4d for a window of St Katherine in the church at Stone in Oxney, having already requested burial in the chapel of the saint and left 6d to her light.[53] John Auncell left 2 marks to make a window in St Katherine's aisle in Fordwich church, in 1503, which was perhaps designed to display a representation of the saint.[54]

Sir Ralph Shirley evidently held a special reverence for St Katherine. In his will of 1513 he left the rents and profits of some of his lands to the use of the chantry priest of St Katherine in St Michael's church in Melburne, Derbyshire to found a school, which was to charge its pupils a penny each quarter and sing masses for his soul. His devotion to St Katherine is further evinced in his provision for two priests of the house of Gerondon in Leicestershire to say mass for the memory of himself and his wife every year on St Katherine's Eve, or the day before.[55] Shirley's

[51] Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills* (1901 volume), p. 250.
[52] J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia* 2, Surtees Society 30 (1855), p. 139.
[53] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, p. 325.
[54] Ibid., p. 153.
[55] Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta*, pp. 538-544 for Sir Ralph Shirley's will.

foundation of a school associated with a chantry of St Katherine may also provide evidence of a perceived link between the saint and education.

Those of limited means would presumably replicate such practices but at their own level. The generosity of richer parishioners would provide or repair representations of St Katherine to which poorer individuals also had access. This benefited both parties: the poor were provided with images to focus their prayers, and the rich hoped to be included in such petitions. The prayers of the poor were considered to be particularly valuable and thus donors would have encouraged their access to the imagery, especially if their person, arms or name was included in the iconography.[56]

Peter de Dene appears at the bottom of his window in York Minster, in an attitude of prayer, his attention fixed on the figure of St Katherine disputing with the philosophers above him (fig. 37). He is accompanied by a partial inscription which probably originally read 'Priez pur maistre Piere de Dene ceste fenestre fist fere'.[57] The canon was concerned to remind onlookers and St Katherine that he had caused the window to be glazed and thus deserved the prayers of both. Those who could read French would understand this from the inscription and those who could not would nevertheless deduce from the iconography that they were looking at a representation of the donor. In this way the donor could tie himself visually and intimately to his favourite saint. Those who offered prayers as a result of viewing such representations would thus simultaneously honour and commemorate both the saint and the donor.

By arranging the inclusion of his person in the window de Dene was also reminding onlookers of his wealth and status. His importance is further underlined by the depiction of heraldic arms in the window, including those of England, the Emperor, Aragon, Jerusalem, and France. These arms seem to indicate the distinguished alliances and connections of the English royal family.[58] That the life of St Katherine was chosen as the main narrative subject for the window may provide further evidence of a

[56] For a detailed discussion of this issue see Corine Schlief, 'Hands that appoint, anoint and ally: late medieval donor strategy for appropriating approbation through painting', *Art History* 16 (1993), pp. 1-32.

[57] Winston, 'On an heraldic window', p. 258.

[58] As suggested by Winston, ibid., p. 273.

link (or a perceived link) between the saint and the royal family. By including these lofty arms de Dene includes their bearers in the prayers which he will receive from onlookers, marking him as a loyal subject. He also formulates a connection between the bearers and himself which emphasises his own importance. The iconography of the window indicates that it was probably commissioned while de Dene was vicar-general to Archbishop Greenfield (1312-1313) and at the height of his career.[59] The link between the two men is enhanced by the placing of de Dene's window opposite a window on the south side of the nave, commissioned by Greenfield, which contains a similar inscription asking for prayers for the Archbishop. By commissioning a window opposite Greenfield's de Dene emphasised his connection with the Archbishop and hence his own power.[60] The choice of St Katherine, the queenly philosopher, may therefore also have been an expression of that power. This window provides an indication of the different readings that can be applied to a single representation of the saint and her life.

In theory, as St Margaret's speech shows, the attention of the saints was no more likely to be gained by such splendid commemorations than by simple ones. Testators often leave only a few pennies to a favourite image or provide for a single candle. Thomas Pannhurst left 2d to the light of St Katherine in Charing church, Kent in 1473.[61] William Jacob also left 2d to a light of St Katherine in the church of St Mary, Dover in 1481.[62] In 1493 Agnes Mellor left 4d to the light of St Katherine in Faversham church.[63] It was the thought that counted, as Christ reassured Margery Kempe:

> And I knowe wel, dowtyr, þat þu hast many tymys þoet, 3yf þu haddist an had many chirchys ful of nobelys, þu woldist a 3ouyn hem in my name... And þu hast also in þi mende desyryd to han many preistys in þe town of Lynne þat myth syngyn & redyn nyght & day for to seruyn me, worschepyn me, & presyn & thankyn me for þe goodnes þat I haue don to þe in erthe. & þerfor, dowtyr, I behote þe þu xalt haue þe same mede & reward in Heuyn for þis good willys &

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[59] Ibid., p. 268.

[60] Unfortunately for de Dene his window lasted rather longer than his power. In the 1320s he fell foul of Edward II and ended his days as a monk in Canterbury. For a full account see ibid., pp. 269-272.

[61] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, p. 72.

[62] Ibid., p. 100.

[63] Ibid., p. 124.

> ßes good desyrys as 3yf ßu haddist don hem in dede.[64]

The most important thing was to ensure that one harboured proper devotion towards the saints, as this fifteenth-century sermon points out:

> For all ßat ßou doste in ße worshippe of anny seynt loke ßat ßin entent be to worshippe God principally and to pleze hym; so euery good ded ßat ßou dost in ße worshippe of anny seynt, oßur offrynge, lat it be do principally to God, secundarie to ße seynte, or to ßat ende ßat wod be worshippe. And ßan youre offrynge is well do, and ßan God will quyte youre mede, and ße seynte will preye for you ßat 3e so worshippe. And ßan 3e shall haue grace so to gouerne you in ßis world and so to end ßat aftur, we shall mowe come to ße ioye ßat is euer lastynge.[65]

The same point is made in the introduction to *Speculum Sacerdotale* where the author gives a detailed explanation of the difference between worshipping God and venerating the saints. If 'ydolatrie' is offered 'ne seyntis ne angels wole not take it'.[66] As long as people followed prescribed devotions, there was every reason to think that the saints would grant their petitions, regardless of their wealth or status.

1215, the parish church and saints' lives

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was concerned to improve the training of the clergy in the fundamentals of the faith in order that they should be capable of instructing the laity. The annual duty of confessing and being shriven of one's sins, and then receiving the Eucharist was laid upon each individual Christian. Priests were to preach in the vernacular once a week in order to improve the level of catechetical and religious knowledge among the laity. The laity themselves were to communicate once a year at Easter. Before receiving the sacrament they were shriven, and in order to make good confession they had to know right from wrong, to be familiar with the Church's teaching on matters pertaining to the conduct of daily

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[64] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 203-204.
[65] Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, p. 8.
[66] Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, pp. 1-2.

life, as well as the observance of religion.[67]

The Council of Lambeth, held in 1281, was largely responsible for implementing this catechetical enterprise within English dioceses. Archbishop Pecham's *Ignorantia Sacerdotum* laid out the guidelines for the basic instruction of the laity, to be carried out by the parish clergy. In the most influential section of this work, 'De Informatione Simplicium', Pecham established the programme of religious instruction to be imparted from clergy to laity in the vernacular four times a year.[68] This was to become standard legislation on the subject and the prescriptions of this work were to be reiterated in many other English handbooks which were written in the course of the later Middle Ages; William of Pagula's *Oculus Sacerdotis,* Archbishop Thoresby's *Lay Folk's Catechism* and Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests,* probably adapted from the *Oculus Sacerdotis,* were among the most popular of these compendia.[69]

Pantin describes how the purpose of these manuals was carried a stage further by vernacular treatises such as *Speculum Vitae, Handlyng Synne* and *The Prick of Conscience* which assisted the diffusion of religious knowledge among the laity.[70] Those who had access to such texts would thus be able to supplement, within their home, the knowledge which they gained directly from their priest. The concern of this chapter, however, is with the means by which catechetical knowledge was transmitted within the parish church itself, by means of sermons and visual schemae (largely

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[67] For 1215 and the later medieval pastoral initiative see Spencer, *English Preaching,* pp. 196-227, 'The preaching of pastoralia'; Leonard E. Boyle, *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400* (London, 1981); also his 'The Fourth Lateran Council and manuals of popular theology', in Thomas J. Heffernan, ed., *The Popular Literature of Medieval England* (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 30-43; Judith Shaw, 'The Influence of canonical and episcopal reform on popular books of instruction', in ibid., pp. 44-60; Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 189-243; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars,* pp. 53-87.

[68] Duffy, ibid., pp. 53-54.

[69] Leonard E. Boyle, 'The *Oculus Sacerdotis* and some other works of William of Pagula', in his *Pastoral Care,* pp. 81-110; 'Fourth Lateran Council', passim; Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century,* pp. 189-218.

[70] Pantin, ibid., pp. 220-243.

wall paintings and stained glass windows).[71] For example representations of the Seven Sacraments can be found in glass at Cadbury, Devon and Melbury Bubb, Dorset and the Seven Works of Mercy survives in windows at All Saints' North Street in York and at Tattershall.[72] Wall-paintings of the Seven Works of Mercy can be found at Arundel, Cranbourne, Dorset and Edingthorpe, Norfolk.[73] Wall-paintings of the Seven Deadly Sins can be found at Bardwell, Suffolk; Hurstbourne Tarrant, Hants and Padbury, Bucks.[74]

The surviving corpus of works written by Mirk in the late fourteenth-century demonstrates the important position occupied by hagiographic narratives within the pastoral education programme. Mirk wrote two handbooks for priests, one in Latin, the *Manuale Sacerdotis*, the other in English, the *Instructions for Parish Priests*. He also wrote the *Festial* for parish priests.[75] These three works form something of a complete small scale pastoral programme of their own. It would seem that the sermonised saints' lives of the *Festial* were used to illustrate the moral decrees outlined in the handbooks.

The lives of St Katherine which seem to have been originally intended for public delivery as sermons are those contained in the *South English Legendary*, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the *Festial*, and *Speculum Sacerdotale*. Sermons were heard by parishioners as part of the Mass, which was made up of the unchanging order of service supplemented by features which varied according to the day and season.[76] These features, known as the Proper, can be divided into *temporale* and *sanctorale* material. The *sanctorale* set out the propers to be used on saints' days. By the later Middle Ages priests could choose from a variety of legendary collections which

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[71] Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp. 196-227; Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, pp. 78-81; Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 95-125; Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings*, pp. 21-42; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 63-68; Pantin, ibid., pp. 235-243.

[72] Marks, ibid., pp. 79-80.

[73] Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 302-303.

[74] Ibid., p. 303.

[75] As seen in chapter 1.

[76] For the following see Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp. 20-33, 'Organisation and content of sermons'. For saints' lives as sermons see Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 123-148.

provided them with the lives of all of the major saints to be read out on feast days. Extant vernacular examples are provided by the four collections named above. As seen above, the decrees of 1215 emphasised the necessity of preaching to the laity in the vernacular and these collections fulfil that need in a practical fashion. The prologue to the *Northern Homily Cycle* states its intention to make vernacular homilies available to lay people who could understand neither Latin nor French:

> Forthi will I of my pouerte
> Schewe some thinge I haue in hert
> on Ynglihsse tonge, þat all maye
> Vnderstand what I will saye...
> Bot all men can noȝt, I wisse
> Undirstand Latyne ne Frankisse;
> Forthi me think almous it is
> To write some gode worde on Ynglihsse
> þat may kenne lerid and lewde bathe.[77]

Similarly the author of *Speculum Sacerdotale* explicitly states that he is writing to provide an alternative and a counterpart to similar sermons in 'Latyn or Romayne tonge'.[78] Part of the thrust behind the pastoral drive was recognition of the fact that priests were not necessarily any better educated than their congregations, something of which John Mirk was also well aware.

Given the time at which Mirk was writing, it would also seem that for him a saint such as Katherine, who publicly debated the precepts of Christianity with the representatives of alternative belief systems, would have stood as an exemplar and upholder of orthodoxy. Fletcher suggests that one of the primary concerns of the *Festial* is to refute Lollard opposition to images and image veneration.[79] Thus Mirk was concerned not only to educate, but to ensure orthodoxy among parishioners, to correct any burgeoning error and eradicate any taint of heresy. St Katherine's life would have provided a wholly suitable arena for the introduction of such polemics, its debate scene providing a vehicle for the exposition of orthodox doctrine.

In the *Legenda Aurea* de Voragine articulates many reasons why the

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[77] Quoted by Spencer, ibid., pp. 152-153.
[78] Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, p. 3.
[79] Fletcher, 'John Mirk', pp. 218-220.

saints are to be commemorated, honoured and petitioned. In some cases the explanation lies in the specific experiences of individual saints and their perceived interest in or protection of particular groups. However, in his sermon on the feast of All Saints, de Voragine asks the question 'Why is it an established rule that we must mark the saints' feasts on earth?' and goes on to give six reasons in reply, which serve to define and rationalise the cult of saints.[80] Of particular relevance to the present discussion are the fourth and fifth reasons, which explain that the saints are offered as examples for our imitation and that by honouring the saints we are taking care of our own interests and procuring our own honour.[81] In addition Mirk reminds his audience that 'þe seynted þat now ben yn Heuen wern summe tyme, as we ben now, of oure flesch and oure blode and our forme fadyrs'.[82] They are figures of immediate relevance and resonance, not just remote historical entities.[83]

In this way the rudiments of the theology of saints' cults are established, to be illustrated by the lives of individual saints. The parish church was the primary arena for the propagation of saints' cults and the dissemination of their lives, particularly in the earlier part of the period. Saints were also venerated within the home, but the church is the one place where we can be sure that the majority of people encountered saints, against the backdrop of the liturgy. Saints lives were seen to be both didactic and exemplary. As we saw in chapter 1, the author of *Speculum Sacerdotale* presents saints as exemplary models of conduct, as well as powerful intercessors:

> The olde fadres a-fore tymes made fro bigynnyng the festyuites of holy apostles and martires whiche were before hem to be louyd and halowed as is i-seen, and specially in entent that we, the herers of here blessid commemoracions whiche ben in tymes of here festes redde and songen, myȝt be stired for to folowe hem in the same wey and also that we myȝte þrouȝ here prayers and medes be in here euerlastynge fellaschip and holpen here in erþe[84]

These narratives could both promote imitation and stimulate devotion,

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[80] de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, pp. 273-274 for the six reasons.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Erbe, *Festial*, p. 267.

[83] Herein lies the importance of St Katherine's shrine on Mt Sinai, as discussed in chapter 2.

[84] Weatherly, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, p. 1.

honouring a particular saint and demonstrating to the audience her or his significance to Christianity both in the past and in the present.[85]

Part of the relevance and utility of St Katherine was related to specific incidents in her life: the debate with the Philosophers and her marriage to Christ. In common with all saints she provides a model of ideal Christian conduct, but although the following observations are true of many other saints as well, St Katherine's example was particularly visible, due to her popularity.[86] St Katherine's conduct is governed at all times by the knowledge of the debt which she owes to Christ. This knowledge gives her the courage to adhere rigorously and unswervingly to her faith, no matter what Maxentius threatens to do to her, or what temptations he offers her.

> Gode man quaþ þis holi maide þu spext al embe noȝt
> Mid al þi poer þu neschalt fram Iesu wende mi þouȝt
> Alle þi turmentȝ þat þu miȝt þenche of pynes swiþe stronge
> þu miȝt do me if þu wolt iredi ich am to afonge
> For noþing me wilny ich so moche as mi flesch & blod iwis
> To ȝyue for mi Louerdes loue þat for me ȝaf his [SEL, p. 540]
>
> Certes sire quaþ þis maide þis wordes beoþ for noȝt
> þu neschalt me neuere fram him bringe þat haþ me deare iboȝt
> Do what þu wolt & haue ido & bring þi wille to ende
> For þu neschalt mid no turment mi þoȝt fram Ihesu wende [ibid., p. 542][87]

The average Christians living in medieval England were not likely to be called upon to defend their faith through the medium of torture and dismemberment, but they may have been called upon to resist worldly temptations of various kinds and therefore St Katherine's example was a reminder to all Christians, whatever their status, to remember at all times the price of their salvation. St Katherine's life is structured as an *imitatio Christi* and thus her actions serve as a heightened reminder of Christ's life, and more particularly his passion. Significantly, the one element of torture which she is forced to undergo is a scourging which directly mirrors that suffered by Christ before the Crucifixion (fig. 44).

> þemperour hire let strupe al naked to a piler faste ibounde

[85] There was a political dimension to many saints' cults which does not appear to have played a part in the cult of St Katherine in England. For an example of the phenomenon at work see Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'The cult of St Denis and Capetian kingship', in Wilson, *Saints and their Cults*, pp. 141-168.

[86] It is now impossible to judge whether St Katherine was ideal because she was popular, or vice versa. A combination of the two was probably at work.

[87] Cf. NHC, p. 168, p. 170.

> & bete hire sore wiþ stronge scourges & make hire harde wounde [SEL, p. 538]
>
> Then was þe Emperour wode for tene, and made forto do Kateryn nakyd and so beton hor fayre bode wyth scowrges, þat all hor body was full of wondes, and rennyng all on blode [F, p. 276][88]

This episode is frequently to be found in visual representations of her life.[89] The cycle in the early sixteenth century glass of Balliol College chapel, Oxford makes the comparison with Christ's explicit, depiciting St Katherine half-naked and bound to a pillar. The wall-painting at Sporle also includes the scourging (fig. 9, panel 10). Katherine is half-naked and the torture takes place before the throne of Maxentius. A soldier beats her with a vicious looking flail made up of three knotted strands of rope. Katherine has one hand to her breast and the top half of her body is spotted with blood. She inclines towards Maxentius, who sits to the left of the picture, engaging his attention and seems to carry on the debate despite her torture.

The following panel (fig. 10, panel 11) shows Maxentius' evil adviser, who witnessed the scourging, suggesting the device of the spiked wheels to his Emperor. He stands to the right of the picture, his arm upraised in a rhetorical gesture. Maxentius is again seated to the left, also gesturing, presumably threatening Katherine. The saint is in the middle of the picture, her upraised right arm showing us that she continues to defy Maxentius verbally even in the face of this new threat. That she has her back to the adviser further indicates how little heed she pays to him, or to his threats. She is still half-naked and no longer covered with blood, but makes no attempt to cover herself as she berates Maxentius, demonstrating that the gesture in the previous scene should be read as a reaction to the

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[88] Cf. SS, p. 243; NHC, p. 168.

[89] My approach to reading the visual narratives has been influenced by the following studies: Belting, *The Image and its Public*, especially pp. 41-64; Marcia Kupfer, *Romanesque Wall Painting in Central France: The Politics of Narrative* (New Haven and London, 1993), especially pp. 1-16, and her conclusion, p. 150 that 'as viewers appropriate the message of the narrative, applying it to their transient situations, the narrative constantly redefines the goals, if not the practices of collective life'. Influential studies focusing specifically on hagiography: Cynthia Hahn, 'Purification, sacred action, and the vision of God: viewing medieval narratives', *Word and Image* 5 (1989), pp. 71-84; and her 'Picturing the text: narrative in the lives of the saints', *Art History* 13 (1990), pp. 1-33. The work of Beatie on German sources provides the only previous consideration of St Katherine in both literary and visual narrative, see his 'Saint Katherine of Alexandria: traditional themes', passim; 'St Katherine of Alexandria in medieval German illustrative cycles', passim.

severity of the scourging rather than an indication of shame or modesty. Katherine's body is not drawn in in any great detail, but nevertheless she presents a feminine figure, resembling the tortured and dying Christ (see also fig. 23).

St Katherine is portrayed in the literary texts as keeping Christ's sacrifice always present in her mind, and this is signalled in the images by drawing on the iconography of the Passion.[90] The memory of the debt which she owes to Christ informs her actions, as it should do for all Christians. This is as true for a queen as for a peasant and St Katherine's status should not be taken to make her an irrelevant role model for all but members of the high nobility and royalty. Her intense devotion to Christ was something that all could aspire to and be inspired by.

Acquisition of Knowledge

Saints' lives were a part of the catechetical programme and the form and content of the life of St Katherine made it particularly pertinent to such interests.[91] SS says of Katherine that she 'was experte, wyse, and discrete bothe in Godis wysdom and in the prudence of man and wele was i-lettryd' [p. 243]. It is the contention of this chapter that part of St Katherine's popularity lies in the fact that she provided the ideal model of the knowledgeable Christian who is familiar with the tenets of the faith. This reading is predicated on the debates between Katherine, Maxentius and the Philosophers. The description of these provided by SEL, NHC, SS and F will be examined, then located within parochial patterns of learning and knowledge.

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[90] Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (The Hague, Paris, 1973), provides a useful introduction to ways of considering and relating literary and visual versions of the same narrative. The only other models for my approach have been provided by studies using the visual evidence of art-historical sources to illuminate the literary evidence of dramatic texts: Davidson, *Drama and Art*; passim; Pamela Sheingorn, 'On using medieval art in the study of medieval drama an introduction to methodology', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 22 (1979), pp. 101-109.

[91] Boyle makes the place of saints' lives visually explicit in his diagram 'Pastoralia', see 'Fourth Lateran Council', p. 38. It is a measure of Katherine's relevance and importance that she is included in both F and SS, the two most obviously pastoral collections.

Most saints' lives contain some statement of faith on the part of their protagonist. St Lucy has her throat cut by the irate Pascas, but even this cannot silence her:

> ƿo heo was ƿurfout ƿe ƿroate ismyte ƿe bet heo spac ynouȝ
> Ȝe prechede ȝurne of Iseu Crist & wel smere louȝ
> Ȝe heo siede ƿat Cristene beoƿ glade & bliƿe Ȝe beo
> Nou nebeo Ȝe adrad of noƿing for gret ioye ich iseo
> A ioyful teƿinge ich ȝou telle ƿat soƿ is & les noȝt
> ƿat riȝt nou is Holi Churche in god pees ibroȝt
> For oure tuei wiƿere wynes ƿat habbeƿ ibeo so ȝare[92]

However, in the life of St Katherine, debate about the nature of Christianity has a pivotal role, both in the action, and in defining the nature of the saint herself. The debate with Maxentius and with the Philosophers provided writers with the perfect opportunity to rehearse and reiterate some of the central tenets of Christianity. The inscribed doctrine benefits from its location in a compelling narrative and reinforces the lessons of more strictly catechetical sermons. The question and answer sessions between Katherine and the pagans can be directly related to the parochial context and the relationship between priest/preacher and his congregation. St Katherine takes the part of a preacher, and her audience within the text can be seen to mirror that of the text, as it explores basic theological issues such as the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion and the Redemption. Even F, a short life, opens up a space for the discussion of such issues, Katherine telling Maxentius that he should offer prayers to

> ...God of Heuen, ƿat made all ƿyng of noght, and send hym lyfe, and hele, and all ƿyng to hys nede, and preuet hym by open reson ƿat Crist was God, and boght mankynd on ƿe crosse wuth his deth out of ƿe fendes bondage [F, p. 275]

The life of St Katherine lends itself particularly well to such pastoral use as it contains several pagan characters who first question Katherine's beliefs, and then concur with them to the point of death, thus earning a place in Heaven. St Katherine's status as a model for education and knowledge within the parish will therefore be examined through the texts' presentation of her as learned, and through her relationship and debates with three sets of protagonists: Maxentius, the Philosophers, and the

[92] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary* 2, p. 571.

Empress, Porphirius and the imperial guard.[93]

But is St Katherine to be understood as 'really' learned? It could be argued that Katherine's learning proceeds miraculously from God rather than from any effort on her part, in line with Christ's words to his disciples in Matthew 10: 19-20:

> But when they deliver you up take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given to you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

Before exploring the issue of St Katherine's status as a model for learning within the parish it is necessary to examine the ways in which the texts construct Katherine's intellect. Three out of the four texts follow the *Legenda Aurea* in explicitly describing Katherine as having received an academic education: 'Katherine... was fully instructed in all the liberal studies'.[94]

However, the NHC life takes an alternative approach. The figure of St Katherine which emerges from this text is rather different to the saint in SEL, F and SS. This underlines the stability of the tradition from which it departs. Of all the Middle English texts NHC is the only one which does not describe St Katherine as having received an education or as being learned, thus removing any practical explanation for her defeat of the Philosophers. When Katherine is in prison awaiting their arrival she is visited by an angel, sent by God to reassure and fortify her for the coming conflict. The words of the angel in NHC have somewhat different resonances to those in SEL, as we shall see. In NHC the angel tells her:

> Cristes mayden, mekill of might
> Luke þat þou stand stabilly & right!
> For god, þat may þe moste auayle,
> For wham þou sall take þis batayle,
> Es with þe euer in all pi dede,
> Redy to help þe in þi nede;
> *He sall gif his wordes of might*
> *Into þi mowth with speche ful right,*
> þat þe maysters sall haue no mayne
> Forto answer þe ogayne,
> Bot thurgh þe haly wordes of þe

[93] It is possible that congregations would respond vocally to sermons, questioning or commenting on particular passages, in ways described by Krueger in relation to romances, *Women Readers*, pp. 24-31. Or they may at least have discussed what they had heard at the end of the service.

[94] de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, p. 334.

> Vnto Crist sal ƥai turned be [p. 167, my italics]

In this text Katherine effectively becomes little more than a mouthpiece for God's words. The only reference to any intellectual ability on her part comes from Maxentius with his comment to the Philosophers that she is 'so sutill of hir saw' (ibid., p. 167). It is noticeable that in this text, alone of all the sermon lives, St Katherine is presented as intuitively spiritual, rather than academically trained. Thus NHC indicates a shift from the traditional depiction of St Katherine the scholar established in the *Legenda Aurea*. She does not convert the Philosophers by dazzling them with her grasp of pagan rhetoric, by using their own authorities against them, but with a Creed-like statement of faith, which ends with the words:

> He es my god, he es my king
> He es my lord & my liking [ibid., p. 167]

In common with most virgin martyrs St Katherine had been described as the bride of Christ even before the mystical marriage episode was prefixed to her passion. In the *Legenda Aurea*, Katherine's rejection of Maxentius' advances contains the following line: 'He is my God... and my one and only spouse'.[95] The equivalent passage in SEL reads 'God almiȝties spouse ich am' (p. 538). SS uses the term 'his [God's] spouse' (p. 244) to refer to Katherine. F alone makes no direct reference to Katherine's status as bride of Christ. However, the NHC version of her life, may display an awareness of the tradition of the mystical marriage, presenting Katherine as a far more deliberately emotive figure.[96]

The NHC life of St Katherine survives in only two manuscripts, as compared to the 17 of the SEL life and the 14 of the F life. Thus the St Katherine which they present, and which adheres far more closely to the *Legenda Aurea* saint, is likely to have had more currency among late-medieval parishioners. An examination of them reveals that St Katherine was to be understood as 'really' learned, as having an intellectual grasp of pagan and Christian authorities and as privileging the latter over the former. However the words of the NHC 'uneducated', yet divinely inspired St Katherine bear the closest resemblance to extant vernacular pastoral and catechetical sermons being preached in parish churches at the time, an issue

[95] Ibid., p. 338.

[96] This will be discussed in chapter 5.

which will be explored below. The different emphases of these texts remind us that there is no one St Katherine to seek or find, but a figure whose representation entailed many meanings and invited a variety of appropriations.

The excision of any reference to Katherine's academic training in NHC may indicate the existence of problems and tensions surrounding her learning and her status as an educated woman. The St Katherine who emerges from texts such as SEL, F and SS may have posed too many difficult questions for the author of NHC, questions surrounding the ability of women to be educated and expound doctrine.

Education and debate in the life of St Katherine

SEL and F, as well as SS, specifically describe St Katherine as educated and as being possessed of a great intellect, as the quotation from SS above shows. SEL begins with the following description:

> ...gret clerc þat maide was
> Þer nas non of þe soue artȝ þat heo gret clerk of nas
> Þulke tyme heo was old eiȝtene ȝer vneþe [p. 533]

Mirk tells us:

> when scho hadde ben at scole, and was lernet at þe full, and cowth dyspute wyth any clerke þat come to þe scole [F, p. 275]

These lines provide the rationale for Katherine's subsequent performance in the debates. When the angel visits Katherine in prison in SEL it

> ... bad hire noþing drede
> For heo scholde hem alle ouercome & to Cristendome lede
> þat þurf *hire resouns* hi scholde alle afonge martirdome [p. 536, my italics]

There is no doubt that Katherine is imbued with God's power to sustain her throughout her passion, but she is not a puppet being acted upon, or a parrot mouthing words which she does not understand. In this text, and by implication in F and SS, her decision to convert to Christianity was governed by her intellect.[97] Her pagan education ironically allows her to recognise a superior and rational belief system when she sees it. This is underlined by her first speech to Maxentius, in which she is mystified that he has credence in his pagan gods, as there is no sense in worshipping

[97] I shall focus on SEL as the most detailed account. F and SS contain the same basic facts with far less exposition, but the same reading is still possible.

them:

> Sire emperour heo seide ƿu ert noble & hende
> ƿu scholdest ƿi poer & ƿi wit *to som wysdom wende*
> For ƿe folie ich sigge ƿat ƿat ich iseo her do
> So moche folc of furrene londe ƿat ƿu clipest herto
> In gret ioye & wonder in ȝoure hurte of ƿis temple doƿ so
> ƿat is ymaked of Iym & ston & of ȝoure maumentȝ also
> Whi nebiholde ȝe ƿe heȝe temple ƿerof ȝou wondri mai
> Of heuene ƿat goƿ aboute aboue ȝou niȝt & dai
> Of sonne & mone & of ƿe sterres ƿat fram ƿe est to ƿe west
> Wendeƿ & neuere weri beoƿ & neuere hi nabbeƿ rest
> B iƿench ƿe bet & turn ƿi ƿoȝt to som wysdom ich rede
> & whan ƿyn owene inwit ƿe saiƿ ƿat nowhar nis such a dede
> Almiȝti God ƿu him holde ƿat such wonder can make
> Tofore alle oƿere honoure him & youre maumetȝ ƿu forsake
> *Mid oƿer reisouns of clergie ƿat maide preouede also*
> ƿat here godes noƿing nere ƿat he anourede hem to [SEL, p. 534, my italics]

Christianity and belief in God is established as entirely rational, and in using astronomy and 'oƿer reisouns of clergie' to support her argument Katherine demonstrates the knowledge and exploitation of her pagan scholastic heritage, which she continues in the debate with the Philosophers. To further her argument about the foolish emptiness of paganism as compared to the sound truth of Christianity Katherine tries to convince Maxentius that pagan beliefs are unsuited to his person and his status:

> Sire quaƿ ƿis maide ƿo ƿeȝ ƿu lute telle of me
> As god mai ƿe resoun beo of me as of ƿe
> For emperour me saiƿ ƿu ert & echman is also
> ƿat mai hote & his men mote nede his heste do
> Of bodi & soule ƿu ert ymaked as ƿu miȝt ƿe silf iseo
> Mid riȝte ƿi soule maister is & ƿi bodi hire hyne schal beo
> If ƿanne ƿi bodi maister is & ƿi soule his hyne
> Aȝe cunde ƿanne hit is & ƿu worst ƿerfore in helle pyne
> ƿurf clergie ƿis holi maide resouns makede so quoynte
> ƿat ƿemperour ne non of hi necouƿe answerie hire in none poynte [SEL, p. 535]

Throughout the subsequent action Katherine and Maxentius between them illustrate this proposition of Katherine's. Katherine, the Christian is ruled by her mind, caring little for the potential damage that may be wreaked on her body, despite calls for her to have mercy on her tender flesh. Maxentius, on the other hand, after an initial show of intellect which cannot match Katherine's, calls in the Philosophers to deal with her, and becomes much more akin to the archetypal vengeful and lustful virgin martyr villain. He

is entirely governed by his bodily desires and is demonised by his craving to break and possess Katherine.

The visual cycles of the life set up the opposition between Katherine and Maxentius by using the typical iconography of saint before tyrant. The detailed cycle at Sporle follows the legend very closely. Its first panel shows Katherine leaving her palace to investigate the noise of the sacrifice which she has heard (fig. 9, panel 1).

> Maxencius þe Emperour come to þe cyte of Alysaundyr, forto make a solemp offryng to his mawmetys of bullus, and calluure, and othyr bestys, soo þat all þe cyte dynned of þe noyse of hom [F, p. 275][98]

Unusually two crowned figures stand in the doorway of the palace, apparently her mother and father, waving her off. Katherine's parents are not mentioned in any of the sermon lives, except to establish at the very beginning that she is a king's daughter.[99] In showing them alive the artist is similarly able to establish her royal heritage. The next panel shows the pagan sacrifice which is described in the literary texts (fig. 9, panel 2). Maxentius leads a crowd of worshippers in bowing down before the idol of a bizarre satanically horned devil, which grins broadly, secure in the knowledge that all those who do him obeisance will eventually be joining him in Hell. Katherine stands to the right of the picture, her hand to her breast, in sorrow for the Christians that she recognises, compelled to participate. There is a man in brown, holding a spear, standing next to her, who appears to be Porphirius. He is apparently the only pagan not offering sacrifice and this immediately marks him out from the rest of Maxentius' men.

The next panel shows Katherine, on the right, held by a soldier, brought before Maxentius' throne on the left (fig. 9, panel 3). The Emperor's status, and Katherine's eventual fate, are indicated by the sword which he carries. This iconography is common to the representation of a pagan potentate, but in virgin martyr narratives the sword can also be read as an expression of the power of his lust, which determines the course of the heroine's passion. It is the thwarted urges of the villain which lead him to take ever more terrible vengeance upon the body which he cannot possess.

[98] Cf. SEL, p. 533; NHC, p. 165.

[99] SEL, ibid; NHC, ibid; F, p. 275; SS, p. 243.

Maxentius is also surrounded by a group of courtiers. The artist demonstrates that a debate is in progress by showing both Katherine and Maxentius with arms upraised, an archetypal rhetorical gesture.[100]

The iconography of this panel is very similar to that in other cycles. Peter de Dene's window also places the enthroned Maxentius on the left and the standing St Katherine on the right. Maxentius' demonically inspired nature is highlighted by the inclusion of a small green devil, perched on his shoulder, presumably whispering degenerate instructions (fig. 37, light 1). The figure of Maxentius at Burton Latimer does not hold a sword, but he does sit in a splendid throne (fig. 42). Its design conjures up the exotic world of Asia Minor, constructed of two antelope like creatures, back to back, whose heads provide the arm rest, and legs support the seat. Although Maxentius' throne symbolises his power, it also serves to put him at a visual disadvantage to the standing St Katherine who thus towers over him both physically and mentally (see also figs. 23 and 24).

Katherine's intelligence is established through her obvious mastery of Maxentius, who is forced to send abroad for suitable men to contend with her. The Philosophers are presented as the finest minds in the Empire and their defeat further accentuates Katherine's status as supremely knowledgeable.

> ƿis emperour sende anon wel wide aboute his sonde
> To ƿe heȝiste clerkes ƿat were in eni londe
> And bihet hem mede gret to do a lute maistrie
> To susteni vp here lawe ƿurf strenȝpe of clergie
> So ƿat vyfti maistres come ƿe gretteste ƿat me fond
> As wide as me miȝte siche owhar in eni lond [SEL p. 535]

> Then ƿys Emperour made to sende aftyr fyfty scole-maystyrs of ƿe wysest ƿat wern yn any contrey [F, p. 275]

> ...l. wyse philosophers that sputyd with hire at the commaundment of the emperoure [SS, p. 243]

The irony of Katherine facing and defeating fifty Philosophers is played on to good effect, both in their scathing reaction to the news that they have been called together 'aȝen a ȝung wenche/ Whan on of oure knaues miȝte hire resouns sone aquenche' (SEL, p. 536), and by Katherine's self-

[100] For an introduction to some of the visual conventions employed in English medieval wall paintings, see Rouse, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, pp. 16-18.

deprecating (perhaps even sardonic) observation:

> ſus fele maistres of clergis bringest & settest abenche
> To desputi aȝe me one ſat nam bote a fol wenche
> ... ſinȝſ me vnriȝt whan ich am one aȝon hem alle [SEL, ibid].

St Katherine's defeat of the Philosophers provides the crowning, emblematic example of her brilliance, even without any elaboration on the subject of the debate. SS says simply that she 'ouercome and concludyd l. wyse philosophers' (p. 243), F 'But when Kateryn had spoken wyth hom a lytyll whyle, by helpe of ſe Holy Gost scho conuerted hom' (p. 275). However the longer SEL text has the opportunity to further the picture of Katherine's education, and to introduce some central theological points. In order to convert the Philosophers Katherine puts them through the process which presumably led to her own conversion. She outlines the arguments and proofs of the various pagan philosophical sources which were held to contain pre-figurations of Christianity. The reference to Plato in the passage below demonstrates her familiarity with the pagan *majores*, an enlightened group of pagan who, like Katherine were singled out by God for divine Christian revelation.[101] She clearly draws on the technique of her rhetorical training, while rejecting the matter of it, for she combines this erudition with basic statements of faith about the Incarnation, Resurrection and so on. The debate begins when one of the Philosophers questions the central Christian truth, refusing to believe that God could come down to Earth, die, and be resurrected 'Ho so deyeſ he nemai neuere to lyue come' (SEL, p. 536). Katherine's reply is as follows:

> Nai seide ſis holi maide ſu faillest of ſyn art
> ſe netit bote ſu speke bet of ſe maistrie no part
> God hadde euere & euere schal wiſ him his godhede
> & for loue of ous in oure flesch he nom his manhede
> Of tuo ſinges he was ymakyd aiſer moste his cunde afonge
> For in cunde of manhode ous to bugge he ſolede deſ stronge
> Ac to bileue ded hit was aȝe cunde of godhede
> ſerfore he aros fram deſ ſat ſurf Adam we were ibroȝt
> ſurf godhede ymengd in oure kunde nede moste beo iboȝt
> If ſu wiſsaist ſis reisoun anoſer ich wole ſe make
> ſat clerkes seide of ȝoure lawe ȝe nemowe noȝt forsake
> Platon ſe grete philosophe ſat was of ȝoure lawe
> Seide ſat God woulde iscourged beo & eke todrawe
> Loke hou hit miȝte beo soſ in oſer manere

[101] With thanks to Christian Turner for enlightening me as to medieval conceptions of Plato and the ramifications of St Katherine's citation of him as a pagan authority.

Bote þat þe mochele God for ous bicom a lute man here
As god balaham 3oure prophete þat heþene was also
In his boc seide 3e witeþ what if 3e wolleþ loke þerto
þat þer scholde of Iacobes cunde a sterre arise bri3te
þat boþe kinges & dukes scholde bynyme here mi3te
þat was þat oure Louerd wolde of Iacobes cunde beo ibore
& ouercome alle þat euere were siþþe oþer bifore
3ut þreo kynges of 3oure lawe of þulke sterre þo3te
For þe sterre þat God was ibore & þerfore lok him bro3te [ibid., pp. 536-7]

Faced with this barrage the Philosophers are speechless:

þo þe maistres ihurde hire speke of so gret clergie
Ne couþe hi answerie no3t a word ac 3yue hire þe maistrie
Certes sire quaþ þis maistres so gret clerc non þer nis [ibid]

The greatest minds in the Empire are forced to cede defeat, and even worse for Maxentius, they announce that as they cannot argue against her, they must become Christians.

We have already seen how the image of St Katherine debating with the Philosphers is given a place of central importance. Along with the Wheels episode this scene seems to have been central to even the shortest cycle of the life. A damaged fifteenth-century alabaster panel shows the heated debate in full flow (fig. 26).[102] Katherine stands to the left, larger than any of the other figures, dominating the scene. She holds her hands before her, engaged in debate with the philosopher seated to the right, who holds up his right hand, fore-finger extended and pointed towards Katherine. He is dressed in robes and a cap which indicate his clerical status. The remains of another philosopher sit at the right of the picture. Only his legs are visible but he was presumably waving his hand at Katherine as well. Due to the demands of the medium the artist has had to condense the figures into a fairly tight space (30.5 x 23.2 cm). A rather disgruntled Maxentius, crowned and holding a sword or stave sits in the bottom right hand corner of the scene. He ineffectually raises his right hand but none of the other protagonists pay him any attention. There is the remains of a hand on Katherine's shoulder, its arm appears to be coming from above Katherine but breaks off at the elbow. Perhaps this was originally the angel who visits Katherine in prison, making good its promise that she will be invested with

[102] The alabaster panels to which I will refer were in some cases once part of altarpieces depicting the narrative of St Katherine's life. Such altarpieces were probably to be found in the domestic chapels of more affluent households as well as in parish churches.

heavenly power to sustain her during the debate.[103]

The scene as represented at Little Missenden describes a particularly lively debate (fig. 35).[104] An angry looking Maxentius, holding a very big sword, sits crowned to the left, raising his left hand to Katherine, who stands at the centre. She has both hands raised high and looks towards Maxentius. To the right stands a group of at least five Philosophers, all tonsured and waving their hands. They all have rather furious expressions on their faces as well. Katherine's face displays no emotion as she gazes at Maxentius, apparently taking on all the men at once. She remains forthright and impassive, a figure of great strength, marked out as God's chosen representative by the halo which encircles her head (see also fig. 37, light 2 and fig. 20).

The cycle at Sporle represents the moment when the Philosophers are forced to admit their defeat and conversion to Maxentius (fig. 10, panel 4). The Emperor is seated on the left, as he is in the previous panel. The top of the picture is damaged but there appear to be three Philosophers standing before Maxentius. The Emperor gestures angrily at them, passing sentence of death on them. The first philosopher does not gesture back in the same manner, instead he holds his hands before him in prayer, as Katherine does. She is standing behind the Philosophers to the right of the picture. This stance demonstrates that the debate is over, the Philosophers have rejected their pagan rhetoric and chosen to follow Katherine and place their trust in God.

I have been using the term 'debate' to describe the interaction between Katherine and the Philosophers, but in fact there is no debate *per se*. The demands of the homiletic medium may have dictated that Katherine be given a concise, memorable statement of faith. However, it is also appropriate that she should deliver what is, essentially, a sermon, rather than engaging in a dialogue of questions and answers which may have been appropriate for other versions of the life, intended for private

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[103] Cheetham lists three other extant examples of this subject, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 85.

[104] See Tristram's illustration, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, plate 198.

reading and contemplation.[105] In SEL Katherine clearly preaches to the Philosophers, and adopts a sacerdotal role in her relationship with them. Katherine even metaphorically baptises them. She cannot carry out the actual sacrament herself, but she does instruct them in their new faith and reassure them that their martyrdom will count for baptism:

> ƥis maide hem gan to conforti & of Cristendom lere
> & seide here stronge deƥ ƥat hi ƥolede ƥere
> Scholde beo here Cristendom if hi stedfast were [SEL, p. 538]

The visual representations of the death of the Philosophers emphasise the intercessory role which Katherine performs for them (fig. 10, panel 5). The depiction at Sporle shows Maxentius still seated to the left holding his sword, but having developed a rather intriguing three-tiered red crown to replace the simpler one he wore earlier.[106] He presides over the death of the Philosophers who are huddled together at the centre of the picture all kneeling in prayer. Behind them a executioner violently hurls another man down to join them. This may have been a standard element of the iconography of this episode, as the cycle at Croughton shows something very similar (fig. 21). At Sporle the flames have not yet been lit, but Katherine stands to the right, watching over them, her right hand raised in instruction and benediction, as she effects their metaphorical baptism.

Other representations show the pyre blazing away, illustrating the miracle described in the literary lives:

> ƥo hi hadde longe ibrend & ded were atte laste
> & ƥat fur was aqueynt al hol hi leye ƥere
> Whyttere & fairere in heu ƥan hi euere were
> ƥer nas non so lute wem noȝt ƥe lests of hare chere
> Oƥer of cloƥ apeired were hi leye wiƥ faire chere [SEL, p. 538]

F says:

> all leon ded by othyr wyth as fayre chere, as ƥagh ƥay had ben on slepe [p. 276]

A fifteenth-century alabaster panel follows this description very precisely (fig. 27). In the middle of the picture stands the funeral pyre in which only the heads of the Philosophers are visible, surrounded by tongues of flame.

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[105] The longer lives, C and d, both describe an actual debate, with question, answers and counter-questions.

[106] The artist who completed or repainted the cycle in the early-fifteenth century has taken a more elaborate and stylised approach to the subject than the artist who painted the top row.

Maxentius stands to the right, seemingly ordering the central executioner figure to push the Philosophers further into the flames, which he does with a long pole. At the bottom right hand corner another executioner fans the flames with a pair of bellows. St Katherine stands to the left, her left hand held over the Philosophers to counter Maxentius' gesture, her right hand raised in blessing. At the top of the scene the Philosophers souls are seen gathered in a sheet supported by two angels, demonstrating that Katherine was right to promise them a heavenly reward for their deaths. The Philosophers' heads are not harmed by the flames, and in line with the written text, they all look as if they are asleep.[107] This is also to be seen in the Croughton representation and the panel in Peter de Dene's window (fig. 37, light 3 and fig. 24).

The life of St Katherine is unusual in the number of ancillary pagan characters it contains who are converted to Christianity after conversations with the saint. In contrast, although the spectacle of St Margaret surviving a vat of boiling oil does convert many pagans (as she prayed to God that it should), they remain a nameless faceless crowd, and are all instantly executed.[108] The physical example of virgin martyrs, the tortures to which they submit their bodies, frequently inspires onlookers, but only St Katherine converts pagans with her words alone.

Her status as priest and teacher is made even more explicit in her relationship with the third set of protagonists: the Empress, Porphirius and the two hundred guards. The Empress has apparently been much impressed with Katherine, 'ƿemperice ƿo3te on hire & hadde of hire grete care' (SEL, p. 539), or as F puts it 'Then had ƿe qwene a gret longyng forto speke wyth Kateryn' (p. 276). Taking advantage of the absence of Maxentius on Imperial business, the Empress visits the prison at night, taking with her Porphirius, captain of the guard and 'hire priuei kni3t' (SEL, p. 539), F 'a knyght ƿat scho tryst well' (p. 276). They are greeted with the sight of an angel anointing Katherine's wounds (SEL, p. 539; fig 23). They are suitably astonished and fall to the ground, crying out in fear and begging Katherine 'Mi ri3te bileue

[107] Cheetham lists eight other extant alabaster panels depicting this episode, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 86.

[108] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary 1*, p. 300.

tech þu me ynele beo fol namore' (ibid). The saint becomes spiritual adviser to them, and to the 'moche folc' (ibid) who gather at the prison as a result of the uproar caused by Porphirius' loud cries.

> Anon þis maide hem *prechede* of God & of seinte Marie
> So þat Porphirie & þemperice þurf þis maide þere
> & tuo hondred kny3tes ek ibapti3ed were [ibid., my italics]

Although there was much debate about the nature of preaching throughout the medieval period, it was generally held to be one of the attributes of priesthood and it is therefore telling that this term is used to describe Katherine's reported speech to the Empress and Porphirius. It was accepted that female saints and other holy women were allowed to preach under exceptional circumstances.[109] However, as we have seen, the lengths to which some commentators go to stress this may indicate that many people did not view the preaching and other quasi-sacerdotal activities of female saints, in particular St Katherine and St Mary Magdalene, quite as they should.[110] Indeed, Katherine's priestly status is reinforced by the information that the converted pagans are subsequently baptised. It is not clear how this baptism is administered. It is true that there are Christians in Alexandria. Katherine's first public act of Christian witness, and the catalyst for her passion, is to berate Maxentius for his pagan sacrifices at which 'Heo se3 honure þe maumentz meni Cristene men for drede' (SEL, p. 534). Although Katherine recognises these men as Christians, in these texts there is no sense in which she is part of their community.

This is not true of other virgin martyrs. For example, before she dies St Lucy asks to receive the sacrament, and

> Preostes wende forþ anon & þat folc þat þer stod
> & fette to þis holi maide Godes flesch & his blod[111]

Similarly, St Agatha is buried by a sorrowing band of Christians, and St Agnes is born of Christian parents.[112]

St Katherine's own conversion is not described specifically in the sermon lives, but judging from her words to the Philosophers seems to

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[109] See Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 254-255, for discussion of this point taken from the the fourteenth-century trial of the Lollard Walter Brut.

[110] Blamires, 'Women and preaching', passim.

[111] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary* 2, p. 571.

[112] D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary 1*, p. 58, p. 19.

have come about from her philosophical studies, rather than from any interaction with other Christians.[113] It is a decision made in isolation in the face of the spiritually empty grandeur of paganism. As F puts it:

> ßogh scho wer comen of so gentyll blod, 3et for Goddys sake, scho sette noght by ße pompe of thys world; but set al hur hert yn oure Lord Ihesu Cryst [p. 275]

There is scant further reference to the Christians in the sermon lives. In NHC alone do we hear that the Christians have 'mikell ioy' to see the wheels broken and the pagans killed (p. 171). There are no priests to minister to Katherine. When she dies angels, not Christians, carry her body off for burial, and as we have seen, the Philosophers go to their deaths unbaptised, save for Katherine's fortifying words. So perhaps the baptism of the Empress, Porphirius and the soldiers is to be understood in similar terms. In certain circumstances baptism was the one sacrament which could be carried out by an individual other than a priest, namely the midwife. If the new-born child seemed likely to die before a priest could administer baptism it was deemed preferable for the ceremony to be carried out by someone, rather than not at all. Hence the pains taken to ensure that midwives were familiar with the necessary words and gestures.[114] Similarly, in the absence of any suitably qualified male Christian, or any male Christian at all, Katherine functions as midwife to the pagan converts in her legend. She oversees their rebirth as Christians, which entails the painful labour of torture and death before they are delivered safely into Heaven.

Only the Sporle cycle affords much space to the Empress and Porphirius, but the scene of them visiting St Katherine in prison is represented in several cycles. Cheetham provides illustrations of two fifteenth-century alabaster panels from different cycles which use identical iconography (figs. 28 and 29).[115] In the centre of the picture is a prison block. There is a small square window in the front through which we can see the top half of St Katherine. To the left kneel Porphirius and the Empress,

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[113] There is no figure such as Adryan of the prose life to provide instruction.

[114] Mirk's *Instructions* contains a passage dealing with this, see Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London, 1995), pp. 126-127.

[115] Cheetham lists ten other extant alabaster panels of this subject, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 87.

looking up at Katherine, hands clasped in prayer as they listen to her preach. A dove descends from above bearing food for Katherine, as Maxentius had decreed that she be starved. The angels that so astonished the Empress and Porphirius frame the picture, and to the right stands the figure of the resurrected Christ, holding a cross and wrapped in his cere-cloths. He is almost waiting in the wings, watching over Katherine, but waiting until she is alone before visiting her himself, as the written lives describe, to reassure her that he will be with her throughout her trials. A very similar representation of this scene is to be found in Peter de Dene's window (fig. 39).[116]

We have already seen that Porphirius seems to make an early appearance in the Sporle cycle. Fig. 9, panel 8 shows him visiting Katherine in prison. Porphirius stands to the right of the picture. This time the prison is to the left and only St Katherine's head can be seen through the window. This representation is very reminiscent of the illumination of an anchoress receiving the bishop's final benediction to be found in a fourteenth-century manuscript at Corpus Christi College Cambridge. The Ancrene Wisse contains the following injunction:

> Do not hold conversation with anyone through the church window, but reverence it because of the holy sacrament which you see through it and use the house window for speaking sometimes to your women, to others the parlour window. You ought not to speak except at these two windows.[117]

It seems to have been fairly commonplace for people to visit anchoresses for advice and guidance. When Margery Kempe was in Norwich 'sche was bodyn be owyr Lord for to gon to an ankres in þe same cyte whych hyte Dame Ielyan'.[118] Julian evidently had quite a reputation as a spiritual adviser, for when Margery explains that she told the anchoress about her visions, she remarks that 'þe ankres was expert in swech thyngys & good cownsel cowd ȝeuyn'.[119] Margery and Julian's conversation would have been conducted through a window. The visual representations of the life of St Katherine therefore explicitly draw on a tradition of recognised female religious authority. St Katherine is usually taken to be a masculinised

[116] But without Christ.

[117] Hugh White, ed. *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses* (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 37.

[118] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 42.

[119] Ibid.

figure, but although she does receive a man's education this scene explicitly constructs her as a holy woman, sanctioned by Christ to preach and to inspire.

This reading is underlined by the Sporle cycle (fig. 9, panel 9). We are once again before the prison, but now Porphirius kneels before Katherine's face in the window and behind him standing or kneeling in prayer stands a group of soldiers, wearing chainmail and helmets. These are the two hundred soldiers who are all converted along with Porphirius. They acknowledge the veracity of Katherine's words and accept her charismatic authority over them. This state of affairs is divinely sanctioned by Christ who swoops down from Heaven at the top of the picture, extending an affirmatory hand over Katherine and her activities.

St Katherine's quasi-sacerdotal status has relevance to the parochial setting because it buttresses the authority of the cleric delivering the sermon. She is of use both to the priest who wishes to present a model of learning to his parishioners and to the parishioners themselves as they seek to improve their religious knowledge and their understanding of God. However, St Katherine may also have been a problematic paradigm for a priest to present to his parishioners.

St Katherine as model of learning

It could be argued that Katherine's university-style education makes her an unattainable model of learning, but although we are told that she can use 'reisouns of clergie' (SEL, p. 534) the speech with which she defeats the Philosophers is not a sophisticated piece full of rhetorical syllogisms, but a vernacular statement of the fundamental truths of Christianity. SEL, F and SS all present St Katherine as highly educated, but the arguments she uses to defeat and convert her pagan combatants would have been accessible to all parishioners as they encompass the iteration and elucidation of the very elements of the faith which pastoral reformers were so keen to disseminate across Western Christendom. This reading of the life of St Katherine identifies it as a primary tool of the pastoral initiative,

entailing the construction of St Katherine as the ideal parishioner, armed with the knowledge required for salvation. This reading seems to be taken to its logical conclusion in the NHC life of St Katherine. Of all four sermon lives, this gives the most length and detail to Katherine's speeches, despite the fact that, as we have seen, she is seen to receive no education. It may be that the author deliberately chose to excise the references to Katherine's education contained in the Vulgate:

> Hanc pater, ab aniis puerilibis, studiis liberalibus imbuendam tradiderat, quibus decenter ornata, tunc temporis nulla sophitice artis argua poterat supplanti; et quamuis multi, experiendi studio litterati, obiectis eam questionibus attemptassent, stultos se et idiotas recognoscentes eam sane insuperabilem.[120]

Most lay parishioners, and indeed many of their priests, in late-medieval England would have received little or no education, and certainly nothing as specifically academic as this. Thus the author brings St Katherine down to the parishioners' level in presenting her knowledge as a direct product of her Christo-centric piety, rather than as a result of a princely education. There is nothing unattainable about the NHC St Katherine, or the words which she speaks. An investigation of her speeches juxtaposed with some of the pastoral legislation and literature that sought to ensure the laity's comprehension and internalisation of basic theology illustrates this point.

In 1281 Archbishop Pecham decreed that the following should be expounded to parishioners four times a year in the vernacular: the fourteen articles of faith, the ten commandments, the seven works of mercy, virtues, vices, and sacraments.[121] One fifteenth-century vernacular sermon writer summarised the syllabus as follows. He says that his audience of 'Good men and wymmen' believe that priests and prelates forbid 'anny lewde man' to meddle with holy writ. On the contrary, he replies:

> ... itt is forbede anny lewde man to mysvse holywritt, for God hym-selfe biddeþ is peple to vndirstonde itt. þan and is peple shall vndirstonde itt, þei muste entermette þer-of; and ȝiff God bidde you cunne or vndirstonde it, trely I darre nott forbede you to entermete þerof. Of þis lawe þou arte bonde to entermett in peyne of euer lastynge dampnacion, for þou muste cunneþi Pater Noster, þat is in þe gospell; þi Aue maria; and þi Beleue; þe x Commaundementys; þe vij werkes of mercye, bodely and spiritually to fulfill by þi will or þi powere, by all þe determynacion of holychurche. God ȝeue vs grace, þan well to cunne and kepe

[120] d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, p. 148.

[121] Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, p. 193.

ƥis lawe.[122]

In this way people would be well prepared for their annual confession, able to identify and label their behaviour and actions over the previous year, and thus be shriven before receiving Christ's body.

Although it could be argued that the catechetical formulations would be merely memorised by the laity and then trotted out by rote, there is evidence to counter this view. Margery Kempe's knowledge of the Articles of the Faith was examined by clerics on several occasions. In Leicester the Abbot Richard Rothely make her swear to 'answeryn trewly to ƥe Artyculys of ƥe Feyth lych as sche felt in hem'.[123] When she passes a similar test in York the Archbishop is forced to concede 'Sche knowith hir Feyth wel a-now' indicating that she was seen to understand the words that she had been taught.[124] The presentation of Margery as knowledgeable and wise, especially in these public setting is part of the construction of her as a saintly figure and evidently influenced by the example of St Katherine and other virgin martyrs. However, like St Katherine, as well as receiving divine aid Margery has benefited from an education, 'throw heryng of holy bokys & throw heryng of holy sermownys', which she is able to draw on to defend herself.[125] Margery Kempe's appropriation of St Katherine to authorise her acitivities as a woman speaking of doctrine in public provide an indication of the subversive possibilities of the saint's example. Indeed, Margery's knowledge is apparently perceived by another cleric as providing a potentially dangerous (from his point of view) example: 'We knowyn wel ƥat sche can ƥe Articles of ƥe Feith, but we wil not suffer hir to dwellyn a-mong vs, for ƥe pepil hath gret feyth in hir dalyawnce, and peradvuentur sche myth peruertyn summe of hem'.[126] By omitting the references to Katherine's education the author of NHC may have been trying to preempt

[122] Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, p. 13.

[123] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 115.

[124] Ibid., p. 125.

[125] Ibid., p. 144. See p. 143 for a list of books with which Margery was familiar. Spencer discusses Margery's experience of sermons: *English Preaching*, p. 45, p. 54. Rubin discusses the ways in which the laity displayed their knowledge of eucharistic doctrine, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 147-155.

[126] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 125. Margery's catechetical knowledge is also examined on p. 122

any similar appropriation among his audience.

In addition to Pecham's list there was a concern that people should fully understand the basic formulations of faith reiterated in the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed. Several extant medieval sermons elucidate the Lord's prayer line by line:

> Good men and wymmen, oure Lord Ihesu tauȝth is disciples, as þe gospell witnesseþ, Mathei 6to, Luce 11mo, þis preyoure of þe Pater Noster, by wiche þat euery man shuld pareye to God when þat þei preyed... These vij asskyngys of þe Pater Noster putteþ owte þe vij dedely synnes and purchaseþ þe vij ȝeftes of þe Holygooste.[127]

Even before Pecham had issued his definitive guide English bishops were particularly concerned that parishioners know and understand the Nicene Creed, which encapsulates the bare essentials which all Christians need to know about the circumstances of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Second Coming. As early as 1217 Richard Poore, bishop of Salisbury ordered that the Creed was to be taught in the vernacular, and in 1229 a decree was enacted within the diocese of Worcester that all lay people should be instructed in the Creed 'in the language known to him or her' before being admitted to confession.[128]

It would seem to be no accident, therefore, that St Katherine's speech to the Philosophers is often reminiscent of the words and rhythm of the Creed, nor that a particularly good example is provided by NHC:

> ... I am cristend and baptiste
> Thurgh þe sacramentes of Crist
> And oþer cautels none I knaw
> Bot anly lessons of his law.
> All zowre sawes here I forsake
> And to him haly I me take,
> For he has strenkith and wit uerray
> And he has lare þat last sal ay;
> He es beginning and ending
> Of all gudenes and all gude thing,
> He has made al thing of noght,
> And mankind with his blude he boght
> Seþin he rase fro ded to life
> & stegh to heuyn with-owten strife,
> And euer in blis he dwelles so
> With his fader þat he come fro;
> & diuers uertuse schewed he pan
> þat he was werray god & man

[127] Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, pp. 9-10.

[128] Boyle, 'Fourth Lateran Council', p. 35.

> And es & euer-more sall be,
> A mighty god in persons thre [p. 167]

The NHC life also describes the reward that awaits the good Christian who attains salvation. In some texts of her life we are given much more detail about the conversation between Katherine, the Empress and Porphirius which leads to their conversion than is provided by SEL, F or SS. LA simply says that 'Katherine began at once to preach to her [the Empress] about the joys of heaven'.[129] NHC tells us that Porphirius, in keeping with his status as a powerful man with much to lose, asks Katherine:

> I pray ƿe, mayden, tell me right
> What mede giftes god until a knight?
> Erthly harmes here if ƿai take
> & suffers angers for his sake,
> What guftes gifes he ƿam for-ƿi? [p. 169]

Katherine reassures him in a speech that calls to mind the description of the Heavenly City in Revelation.

> Purfuri, I pray ƿe, here:
> And by my saying saltou lere
> ƿat ƿe hegh kingdom of heuyn
> Es like untill a cete euyn
> Whare none angers ne noy esin,
> Bot all mirth ƿat men may of myn;
> &, schortly it forto declare,
> All ƿat gude es ƿat es ƿare,
> And all ƿat unto euil may mene
> In ƿat cete es neuer sene.
> None herted mai think, ne eris here,
> Ne eghen se, ƿe ioyes sere
> ƿat god ordans with-owten striue
> To ƿam ƿat lufes him in ƿare liue [ibid][130]

The way to get to Heaven was to obey God's laws, as our anonymous sermon writer says:

> oure Lorde God Ihesu by is prophete commaunde the all Cristen pepull to vndirstonde and to knowe is laws, by ƿe whiche lawe all ƿat shall come to hevene muste nedis be saued, and by no noƿur veye.[131]

Porphirius understands that he muste submit to the law of God, and this speech renders him 'redy turmentes forto take/ & paines to suffer for Cristes sake' (NHC p. 170), on the promise of a martyr's crown.

Parishioners would have had a visual representation of their goal to

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[129] de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, p. 337.

[130] Cf. ibid., p 337.

[131] Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, p. 12.

consider while they listened to Katherine's description. The Last Judgment, frequently painted on chancel arches, depicted the blessed making their way to the fantastic palaces of Heaven, accompanied by angels, while their doomed counterparts vanished into the rapacious maw of Hell. The repainted Doom in St Thomas' church, Salisbury provides a particularly good example. Christ sits in judgment in the centre, flanked on either side by the towers, spires and walls of the city of Heaven. Saved souls can be seen peering out of the windows, encouraging those making their way towards the gates.[132]

This emphasis on the NHC St Katherine as the ideal model for lay parishioners does not mean that similar readings are not possible for the St Katherine of SEL, F or SS, or the St Katherine of the visual narratives. This reading demonstrates that all of these texts present her as a paradigm of education and argues that in this respect she was of equal relevance to the peasant learning the Creed as to the clerical academic wrestling with the Seven Liberal Arts. Although the NHC St Katherine is exceptional in many ways, she nevertheless seems to prove the point rather than negate it. 1215 and the subsequent pastoral initiative served to give St Katherine, already established as an educated, learned saint, a greater significance. She was ideally qualified to function as a model for the laity as they strove to meet the requirements which Pecham's constitutions laid upon them. St Katherine is presented as a model by these sermon texts, but this reading suggests that her example was of relevance and value to the laity themselves.

The life of St Katherine presents her as a teacher as well as a model, conveying essential and required knowledge to the audience and vouching for its truth. The final piece of evidence to adduce for this reading is provided by a miracle of St Katherine in which her teaching saves one of her devotees from the devil. This tale is contained in the *Gesta Romanorum*:

> ȝere was a man, that ofte sithe was tempted with dyspayre, and prayde seynte Cateryn of helpe, of whome he had grete deuocion. seynt Cateryn Comforted hym and bade hym say thus,
>
> 'Foule fende, away thou flee!

[132] Rouse, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, p. 57.

> Criste with his blode he hathe bought me;
> of his blode the Crowne was redde;
> flee, thou foule fende, that is thy dede.'[133]

This miracle establishes Katherine's status as receptacle of practical theology and indicates that by being devoted to her one could become a more knowledgeable person.

The celebration of St Katherine's day and its significance

An important aspect of the popularity and importance of St Katherine was the intercessory power which she embodied. Rather than investigating the nature of that power per se, the remainder of this chapter will consider the ways in which St Katherine's power and authority, like her learning, were of relevance to the lives and experiences of her lay devotees. We shall explore this issue through the medium of St Katherine's feast day and the observances which grew up around it. Various folkloric practices associated with St Katherine's day which were recorded in the post-medieval period may give us some clues as to the ways in which people celebrated it, and the meanings it held for them in medieval times. Although this evidence must be treated with caution it often describes themes and beliefs which are to be found in medieval sources.

This evidence reveals that there seems to have been a tradition of people dressing up and assuming alternative identities and powers on St Katherine's day. This is indicated by the proclamation for observing the feasts of St Luke, St Mark and St Mary Magdalene, drawn up in 1541.[134] Towards the end it forbids certain rather riotous practices associated with the feasts of St Nicholas, St Katherine and St Clement. St Clement's day is November 23, just before St Katherine's and the two days seem to have seen some similar behaviour.

> And whereas heretofore diverse and many superstitious and childish observations have been used, and yet to this day are observed and kept in many and sundry parts of this realm, as upon saint Nicolas, saint Catherine, saint Clement, the Holy Innocents, and such like; children be strangely decked and apparelled to counterfeit priests, bishops, and women; and so led with songs and

[133] Sidney J. H. Herrtage, ed., *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, E.E.T.S. E.E. 33 (1879), p. 404.

[134] For the full decree see Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor Royal Proclamations 1* (New Haven and London, 1964), pp. 301-302.

> dances from house to house, blessing the people, and gathering of money; and boys do sing mass, and preach in the pulpit, with such other unfitting and inconvenient usages, rather to the derision than to any true glory of God, or honour of his saints.[135]

Duffy assumes that this decree indicates that the custom of installing boy bishops occurred on St Clement's and St Katherine's days, as well as the more traditional dates of St Nicholas's day and the feast of the Holy Innocents.[136] In fact I have found no other evidence to suggest that this was the case. The observances associated with St Clement's and St Katherine's days seem to have been included here because they involved something of a rumpus, but not, apparently, boys dressed up as clerics. Further reference to these practices is made during the trial of Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester in 1550, when he was accused by Nicholas Ridley of adhering to outlawed tenets of Catholicism. The eighth article with which he was charged makes mention of 'the superstitious going about of St Nicholas bishop, of St Edmund, St Katherine, St Clement and such like'.[137] Gardiner's answer to this charge was to pronounce:

> That the counterfeiting of St Nicholas, St Clement, St Katherine and St Edmund, by children, heretofore brought into the church, was a mere mockery and foolishness and therefore justly abolished and taken away.[138]

Later in the trial Sir Thomas Smith confirms Gardiner's statement, saying:

> And where there was an article of St Nicholas bishop and St Katherine and St Clement, he [Gardiner] said that it was but children's toys; he said it needed not to speak of them, it would but make the auditors to laugh.[139]

What seems to be under attack in the 1541 decree is the practice of Catherning, Catterning or Cattening, which Wright and Lones describe as a custom:

> celebrated chiefly by children, of going about, on the 25th of November, to farms and houses where there were orchards and after singing a few verses containing a reference to St Catherine, begging for apples, money, and other gifts with

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[135] Ibid., p. 302.

[136] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 13-14.

[137] For a full account of the trial see Josiah Pratt, ed., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe 6* (London, 1877). The reference to St Katherine is on p. 67.

[138] Ibid., p. 82.

[139] Ibid., p. 187. I am very grateful to Andrew Hope for drawing these references to my attention. By ridiculing the festivities Gardiner distances himself from the perceivedly superstitious and popish beliefs which they entailed. This is not surprising, given that he would have been in danger otherwise, but does not necessarily mean that he thought such observances were a bad thing per se.

which to make merry.[140]

That these two feast days occur in the Autumn, at just the time when apples are ripening provides a practical explanation for this custom. However, there may well have been an element of perceivedly anti-social, or perhaps simply undignified, dressing up involved specifically with St Katherine's day. According to Brand, writing in the early eighteenth century, Catherning entailed 'young women meeting on the 25th November and making merry together'.[141] Wright and Lones also remark that in Buckinghamshire, at the end of the last century, on St Katherine's day 'Girls masqueraded in men's clothes, called at neighbours' houses, and demanded refreshment'. This observation is based on an oral description of a custom which the participants evidently believed to have its roots in the distant past.[142] It is dangerous to take these later observations as direct evidence for medieval practices, but they do seem to fit in with the mid-sixteenth century practices described above. The element of dressing up fits in with the censure of the 1541 act.

These practices were probably banned mainly because they appeared to keep Catholic beliefs and traditions alive. But the tone of ridicule with which they are discussed in Gardiner's trial may be evidence that there was some anxiety about them, which the authorities attempted to eradicate by stigmatising those who participated as children. If boys pretending to be priests found its counterpart in girls pretending to be men, there is a sense in which both masquerades involved its participants in the exercise of powers and behaviour normally closed off to them. Under normal circumstances girls who wandered around outside their houses making such noisy exhibitions of themselves were usually equated with the harlot

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[140] A. R. Wright and T. E. Lones, *British Calendar Customs: England 3, Fixed Festivals* (London and Glasgow, 1940), p. 177.

[141] John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain 1* (this edition New York, 1970).

[142] Wright and Lones, *British Calendar Customs*, p. 178. This seems to be true of many of the customs which Wright and Lones describe.

of Proverbs 8: 'She is loud and stubborn: her feet abide not in the house'.[143] Dressing up as men may have provided these girls with an authorisation for their 'unfeminine' behaviour, although whether the dressing up or the behaviour came first is impossible to say.

St Katherine's public conduct and the power of her speech were sometimes explained in medieval times as God's affront to Christian men.[144] As St Katherine was clearly licensed to put on perceivedly manly strength to defend her faith then the very definition of what it meant to act like a man was called into question. In order to prove themselves, men should be prepared to be even stronger, or risk being bettered by a woman. This was the official reading. But perhaps this is not how young women viewed St Katherine's conduct. They may have read St Katherine simply as a strong woman who turns men's own weapons on them. Dressing up as men may have been their way of enacting this, to invest themselves with a measure of her power, of acting in ways at odds with their actual gender but in keeping with their assumed one. This is compatible with St Katherine's less than clear-cut gender identity. She is a woman, but she is in many respects a woman acting as, or rather in place of a man, in her education, her status as a sovereign ruler, in her preaching and in her other quasi-sacerdotal activities.

Moreover, Katherine is explicitly a young woman. The *Legenda Aurea* establishes her age as eighteen,[145] and SEL (p. 533) concurs with this. NHC, F and SS do not specifically state her age, but she is definitely to be understood as a young woman. SS describes her as 'þis 3onge holy dameselle' (p. 243). This has particular importance for her intelligence and strength, rendering her defeat of the Philosophers and her withstanding of torture all the more remarkable and significant. Maxentius tries to shame

[143] As observed by P. J. P. Goldberg in his paper 'Of pigs and prostitutes', given at the Gender and Medieval Studies conference 'Gender and Transgression' held at the University of York, January 1996. See also his *Women in England*, p. 17, which relates to the depositions made to the Church Court in York in 1396, when Margery Speight sought legal separation from her husband Thomas Nesfield. See pp. 141-142 for translations of the relevant cause papers.

[144] See chapter 4 for further discussion of this issue and the ways in which men could identify with Katherine's femininity.

[145] de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 2, p. 790. This follows the Vulgate's description of her as 'annorum duo de uiginti', d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Seinte Katerine*, p. 147.

the defeated Philosophers in NHC thus:

> ... whi stand ze so for schame,
> & er so grete maisters at hame?
> Here stand ze als ze had no tung,
> To speke ogains a mayden zung [p. 168]

Nor is St Katherine the only 'unnatural' woman presented by her legend. We shall investigate the role of the Empress more fully in chapter 5, but it is important to note that witnessing the wheel episode empowers the Empress to publicly rebuke Maxentius, as SEL puts it 'þe Empresse nolde þo hire stat nomore' (p. 541). She attacks his cruelty and announces that she has converted, 'Ich iseo þis maide is god & of holi lore/ ȝoure maumentȝ ich forsake y nebileue for no fore' (ibid). Maxentius 'for wraþþe loude ȝulle & rore' (ibid) expressing his fury that his wife, who should be obedient and acquiesce to him in all things dares to attack him in public. In refusing to subordinate herself or her spirit to her husband the Empress defies any expectation of proper conduct which her gender or her wifely role bestows upon her. One way of reading her subsequent torture is to surmise that it represents Maxentius' attempt to restore his authority over her, both as a man and specifically as her husband. By tearing off the Empress' breasts he reasserts his marital control over her body in order to restore the 'natural' gender order. All his efforts are ultimately unsuccessful however. Just as the Empress was compelled to announce her conversion by Maxentius' treatment of Katherine, so in turn Porphirius' public avowal of Christianity is triggered by Maxentius' treatment of the Empress' dead body.

It may be that this element of St Katherine's identity, the young divinely inspired woman, doing God's will by showing up the inadequacies of older authoritarian men, provides the key to part of her significance for Joan of Arc. St Katherine and St Margaret were extremely popular and are often represented iconographically as a pair, but this does not mean that they meant no more than this to Joan. The appearance of these two saints, along with St Michael, signalled the start of her vocation to save France, and they were extremely important to the construction of her identity as virgin, warrior, leader, public speaker, and martyr. The Inquisition was evidently aware of the pivotal role that Joan's conception of these saints had to the conduct of her vocation. When Joan was burned her mitre

carried representations of Belial, Satan and Behemoth represented as Michael, Katherine and Margaret.[146] This is indicative of the anxieties that were aroused by her use of these saints as models of conduct, and to authorise her divine revelations. The Inquisition could only fault Joan's behaviour in this respect by stressing that the voices had been those of devils, not saints. It may be that St Katherine's equivocal gender identity provided an authorisation for Joan's own cross-dressing and her identity as a manly woman, forced to become so in order to shame and inspire men into fighting for France.[147]

More generally St Katherine may therefore have functioned as a symbol of transgression, embodying the assumption of an alternative identity, and the exercise of its attributes to force the submission of an apparent superior. Such activities seem to characterise the celebration of St Katherine's day but are not necessarily to be understood as seditious. A temporary, controlled reversal of the *status quo* may be the best way of reinforcing it, while recognising the important and distinct role played within it by each constituent group. I shall explore this proposition through the medium of the parish gild.

Gilds of St Katherine

Although the congregation of a parish church was unified by its membership of that church, the parishioners' parochial identity could be

[146] Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: Image of Female Heroism* (London, 1981), p. 117.

[147] Warner made the not uncommon mistake of conflating St Margaret of Antioch with St Marina of Antioch, one of the 'cross dressing' saints, who enters a monastery disguised as a man. Cross dressing in fact plays absolutely no part in the life of St Margaret. None of the cross dressing saints seems to have enjoyed a particularly flourishing cult and I am not convinced that any such saint had an influence on Joan. For further discussion of Joan's use of both masculine and feminine traits in the construction of her public identity see Lilas Edwards, 'Joan of Arc: empowerment and risk in androgyny', *Medieval Life* 5 (1996), pp. 3-6.

further delineated by membership of a religious gild, dedicated to a saint.[148] Some gilds restricted membership to the inhabitants of a particular parish, while some allowed people from other parishes to join. Some gilds encompassed people from a variety of backgrounds and occupations, whereas others, by dint of high entrance fees, were more socially exclusive. Some gilds were arranged along gender lines, references to lights maintained by the Bachelors, the 'young wemyn', the Maidens, the Women, the Men can be found in late-medieval wills.[149] Some gilds allowed women to join if their husbands were members, while others such as the gild of St Katherine at Aldersgate allowed single women to become members.[150] Membership of a particular gild could be an expression, even an ostentation of one's social standing.

Much of the extant evidence relating to religious gilds is provided by the returns made in 1389, in response to the parliamentary writ of 1388 which requested information about the foundation, constitution and conduct of all religious gilds.[151] However, it seems that the membership of those gilds who made returns was by no means socially homogeneous. Part of the attraction of joining a gild was the provision for funerals and post-mortem prayers that it offered, observances that many members might not have been able to afford otherwise. For example, the gild of St Katherine in

[148] For gilds and their members see Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the lights: late medieval English parish gilds', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984), pp. 21-37; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 131-154; Gervase Rosser, 'Communities of parish and gild in the late Middle Ages', in Wright, *Parish, Church and People*, pp. 29-55. H. F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919), remains the only sizable study of medieval religious gilds and contains an invaluable appendix of the 1389 returns. Some of these returns were edited by Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 40 (1870), including those of St Katherine gilds in Aldersgate (London), Norwich, Lynn and Stamford. George Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (originally published 1908, this edition London, 1963) contains some discussion of the religious gilds. The most recent work on the London gilds is provided by Caroline M. Barron and Laura Wright, 'The London Middle English gild certificates of 1388-9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 39 (1995), pp. 108-145. See also the articles by McCree cited below.

[149] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, p. 18, p. 19, p. 61, p. 127, p. 136, p. 147, p. 255, p. 260 and p. 359 for lights maintained by young men, young women, bachelors, maidens, women and men.

[150] Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds*, pp. 6-8 for the Aldersgate St Katherine gild return; p. 7 for reference to 'a sengle womman'. An edition of the Aldersgate return is also provided by Barron and Wright, 'London Middle English gild certificates', pp. 135-137.

[151] See Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, pp. 36-48.

St Botulph's church, Aldersgate stated that 'ȝif any brother deye, ƥat haƥ nouȝt of his owne to be beried withe, ȝif it may be so ataken, ƥanne schal he be beried wt ƥe moneye of ƥe comune box'.[152] In addition, many gilds undertook to help living members who had fallen into poverty through sickness, old age, or some other accident. The gild of St Katherine at Norwich ordained that 'if eny brother or sister falle in pouert, thurghe auenture of ye werld, his state shal bene holpen, of euery brother and sister of ye gilde, wt a ferthyng in ye woke'.[153] On joining a gild new members paid an entrance fee, for example 3d at St Botulph's, 5s for the gild of St Katherine in Lynn.[154] The money would go towards maintaining the lights, paying for funerals and welfare and for any gild celebrations such as feasts.

Provided the entrance fee could be afforded, membership of a gild thus performed a variety of functions, ensuring physical well being in this world and spiritual well being in the next, thanks to the efforts of fellow gild members. Perhaps the most important aspect of gild membership was that as part of a collective, it increased the chances of gaining divine favour, through the mediation of the gild's patron. The focus and primary raison d'etre for any religious gild was to honour the chosen patron saint, as seen from the gild return for the gild of St Katherine in Stamford:

> ffirst, in the name, honor, and glorye of the Blyssed Trynyte, and of the gloryouse Virgyn and moder oure Lady Seynt marye, and all the companye of heuen, and in especiall of the blessed corseynt and holy Virgyne and Martir Seynt Kateryn, in the Chapell over the parissh Churche durre of Seynt Poules in Stamford, it is sette, ffounded, ordeyned, and also stablysshed, a Gilde off the holy Virgyne and martyr Seynt Kateryn, which shall neuer ffrom that Caple be aleyned, ne done awaye frome thens in noo manner wise, but euer there to abyde, endure, and be maynteyned withoute ende.[155]

It is a measure of St Katherine's perceived importance that so many gilds were founded under her patronage. She features prominently in the extant gild returns. Westlake's appendix containing the gild returns of 1389 can be

[152] Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds*, p. 7.

[153] Ibid., pp. 19-21 for the Norwich return, p. 20 for their charitable provisions. The Aldersgate gild stipulated that needy brethren were to be given 9d a week, ibid., pp. 6-7.

[154] Ibid., p. 7; pp. 67-68 for the Lynn return, p. 67 for the entrance fee. At Stamford (ibid., pp. 187-191 for the return) brethren paid 20d a year for the first four years. After the first year married male members whose wives were not in the gild paid an additional 4d to maintain the lights, while married couples (if both were members) and 'every soole person, preeste and other' paid an additional 2d, see p. 190.

[155] This is taken from the Stamford return, ibid., pp. 187-188.

used as a guide to the relative popularity of dedications:

The Virgin Mary 128
Holy Trinity 56
Corpus Christi 43
John the Baptist 49
Holy Cross 24
St Paul 22
St Katherine 22
All Saints 19
St Thomas Becket 14
St James 12
St Margaret 10
St Anne 4
St Mary Magdalene 2[156]

Apart from the Virgin St Katherine is the most popular female saint. She vies for popularity with St Paul and the only saint who surpasses her is John the Baptist, privileged by his family connection with Christ. Gilds dedicated to St Katherine also appear frequently in wills.[157] For example, the 1403 will of William Barker of Tadcaster leaves 20s to the gild of St Katherine in Tadcaster parish church.[158] In 1470 Thomas Thurland, a burgess of Nottingham left 'Seynt Katerine gilde in Notyngham vjs. viijd'.[159] The will of the tanner Richard Clarke of Horncastle in Lincolnshire, made in 1520, displays his special devotion to St Katherine. This is expressed through several bequests to a gild of St Katherine in his parish church at Horncastle. He seems to have been one of the founders of this gild:

> ..fyue score nobulles to the gild of St Katerine to be paid within the space of v. yeres, euery year vjl. xiijs. iiijd. to the said some be paid... To St Katerine gilde the house that Robert Paynter dwells in, and the house that Alyson Walley dwellys in, sometime Richard Richmond of Horcastr, for ever to be prayde for as a ffounder and a speciall benefactor with the chaunter prestys off the said gylde off saynt Katrine. Also to the said gyld my best counter and the standyng cupp of syluer gylte with the coverynge of the same, and a syluer crosse with the pyctur of our lord and mary and John, and at the fotte of the crosse a Image of Saynt

[156] For the appendix see Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, pp. 137-238. Westlake lists 21 gilds of St Katherine, however, Toulmin Smith contains the 1389 return of the Stamford gild which is not mentioned by Westlake, hence the number is given as 22.

[157] Many of the gilds mentioned in wills apparently either did not make returns or were founded after 1389.

[158] J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia 1*, Surtees Society 4 (1836), p. 327.

[159] J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia 3*, Surtees Society 45 (1865), p. 186.

> Katerine, the valour of the crosse xx marke.

Clarke asks his executors to arrange for a priest to sing for six years in the church, and if his executors die before the end of this period, the gild of St Katherine is a provide a priest.[160] Eight years later there is a further testamentary reference to this gild in the will of Agatha Flemyng. Like Clarke she asks to be buried in Horncastle church. She mentions no husband or heirs in the will, and makes the following arrangement:

> I bequeth all my moveable goodes to Henry Chambers off horncastre off the gylde of Saynt Katherine with in the church of our Lady of Horncastre, alderman, John Barcar of the same, and Oliver Lovell off the same, and off the sayd gylde chamberlainys, to sell my goodes, and to dispose of them in good warkes off pitie.

She also leaves her house to the gild.[161]

The ordinances of a gild such as St Katherine's in Norwich illustrate the function such associations performed as custodians and disseminators of social as well as religious ideologies.[162] The ordinances reveal a concern with the presentation of a united, orderly body of people to the wider commmunity, ensuring that all members attend the St Katherine's day procession wearing 'a lyueree of hodes' and imposing a fine of 'ij. pounde of wax' to absent members.[163] The gild exercised authority over all aspects of its members' lives and conduct, not just their observance of religion, reserving the right to act as arbiter in any 'discorde ... bytwen bretheren and sisteren'. Only if the gild failed to reconcile the two parties were they allowed to take their cases to the public arena of the common law courts.[164] High moral standards were expected of gild members, the gild of St Katherine in

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[160] Foster, *Lincoln Wills: 1*, pp. 84-85 for Richard Clarke's will.

[161] C. W. Foster, ed., *Lincoln Wills: 2, AD 1505- May 1530*, Lincoln Record Society 10 (1918), pp. 107 for Agatha Flemyng's will. This gild is also mentioned in the will of Robert Halgarth of Horncastle, he leaves 10s to it in 1529, ibid., p. 127. In the same year the widow Alice Arnold of Syllesby leaves 12d to the gild, ibid., p. 130.

[162] The work of Ben McCree provides the best introduction to and exploration of this issue, see his 'Religious gilds and the regulation of behaviour in late-medieval towns', in Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond, eds., *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester and New York, 1987), pp. 108-122; 'Religious gilds and civic order: the case of Norwich in the late Middle Ages', *Speculum* 67 (1992), pp. 69-97; 'Unity or division? The social meaning of gild ceremony in urban communities', in Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson, eds., *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe* (Minneapolis and London, 1994), pp. 189-207.

[163] Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds*, p. 20.

[164] Ibid., p. 21.

Stamford requiring that all members should be 'of goode name and fame, of good conuersacon, and honeste in... demeanour, and of goode rule'.[165]

The behavioural statutes imposed by these gilds have been identified by McCree as part of a code of conduct which the upper ranks of later medieval urban society imposed upon themselves.[166] It seems that the wealthier a gild was, the more likely it was to attempt the exercise of control over the conduct and morals of its members.[167] The frequent selection of St Katherine as patron of such gilds may indicate that there was something intrinsic to her life and figure which made her a pertinent model and symbol of an authority and power which was essentially aspirant in nature.[168]

Gilds were not necessarily such elite associations, however. Some gilds were composed of small groups of friends or relations who banded together to maintain a light burning in front of a favourite saint. [169] This is not to suggest that their devotion to St Katherine was more genuine than that of their richer counterparts, but that it may have held different meanings and served different purposes. For a wealthy gild member, perhaps drawn from the mercantile elite, devotion to St Katherine could buttress an identity of influence and respectability. For someone of lower status there is a possibility that St Katherine functioned as a symbol of transgression. Just as St Katherine defeated and trampled upon Maxentius, so the socially and economically disenfranchised could perhaps use the observance of St Katherine's day as a chance to gain recognition from their betters.[170] This is not to be read as necessarily unorthodox, or subversive, but

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[165] Ibid., p. 190.

[166] McCree, 'Religious gilds and the regulation of behaviour', pp. 117-118; 'Religious gilds and civic order', pp. 95-96.

[167] McCree, 'Religious gilds and the regulation of behaviour', p. 116.

[168] This element of aspiration, whether social, cultural or intellectual seems to have been a very important part of the cult of St Katherine and will be further explored in chapters 4 and 5.

[169] The devotion of the Leghe family, seen above p. 108, seems to provide an example of this.

[170] D. H. Sacks, 'The demise of the martyrs: the feasts of St Clement and St Katherine in Bristol', *Social History* 11 (1986), pp. 141-169, draws a similar conclusion (pp. 151-153), but it is derived from a somewhat transhistorical reading of an unidentified life of St Katherine (presumably the *Golden Legend*).

rather as an illustration of Christ's prediction that 'many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first' (Matthew 19:30). This is one way in which this chapter seeks to establish and historicise some readings of St Katherine. Sacks assigns a fixed function to the celebration of St Katherine's day in late-medieval Bristol and then assumes that this will apply right accross the period.[171] However, the meaning of the feast day would have varied depending on the identity of the participants and the nature of other contemporary interests. Chris Humphrey argues that the celebration of St Katherine's day in Bristol could equally be read as a confirmation of social difference rather than as its inversion. It is for this reason that I use the term 'transgression' rather than 'inversion'.[172]

Evidence for this reading is provided by Robert Ricart's description, written in the 1480s, of the celebration of St Katherine's day in later medieval Bristol:

> And on Seynt Kateryns even, in semblable wyse, the saide Maire and Sherif and their brethren to walke to Seynt Kateryns Chapell within Temple Church, there to hire their euensong; and from euensong to walke vnto the Kateryn halle, theire to be worschipfully receiued of the wardeynd and brethren of the same; and in the halle there to have theire fires, and their drynkyngs with spysid Cakebrede, and sondry wynes; the cuppes merelly filled aboute the hous. And then to depart, euery man home; the Maire, Shiref, and the worshipfull men redy to receyue at theire dores, and rewardyng theym for theire playes. And on the morowe Seynt Kateryns day the Maire, Shiref, and theire brethern, to be at the Temple Churche, and fro thens to walke with the procession aboute the Towne, and retorne to the seide Temple churche, there to hire masse, and offre. And then euery man retray home.[173]

It seems that the members of the gild, represented by the person of St Katherine, either in the form of an image, or a dressed up gild member, gained recognition from the most important members of the civic hierarchy. This took place both in the gild's own hall, and at 'theire dores'. It is important that the gild members received rewards for a dramatisation of St Katherine's life. In this way the city's governors acknowledged the divine authority of St Katherine, and the singular status of the community which

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[171] Ibid., pp. 151-153.

[172] See Chris Humphrey's forthcoming DPhil thesis, 'The dynamics of urban festal culture in later medieval England', University of York (1997), I am grateful to him for sharing these observations on the Bristol gild of St Katherine with me.

[173] Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., *The Mayor of Bristowe is Kalendar by Robert Ricart*, Camden Society new series 5 (1872), p. 80.

she represented. Sacks argues that this ultimately served to reaffirm the city's 'ideals of harmony, uniformity and solidarity'.[174] However, it seems that, without being threatening, or anti-social, these rituals had the opposite effect, stressing that the gild of St Katherine was a distinct entity, both on its own ground in the gild hall, and without in the city. This relates to gild custom of wearing a livery and presenting a united front on feast days.

By entertaining these dignitaries and receiving financial tribute and social recognition from them, the gild establishes its unique and privileged identity as the protegee of St Katherine. The mayor, sheriff and other officials recognise and submit to the jurisdiction of St Katherine and her gild without any liability or alteration to their unquestioned civic authority. This interchange is sanctioned by the ruling elite because it is limited to a particular time and place. The event may have had quite a different set of meanings for the dignitaries, who may not have perceived any 'threat' to their position, symbolic or otherwise. This reading seems valid in relation to the specific set of circumstances within which it operated. But it may not necessarily signify a common late-medieval perception about St Katherine's role and function, outside the celebration of her feast day in late-medieval Bristol. Other sources must be examined in order to draw any wider conclusions from it.

The celebrations at Bristol seem to have involved some sort of reenactment of St Katherine's legend, the 'playes' for which the gild members are rewarded. The narrative of the life of St Katherine apparently had an important part to play in gild celebrations of her feast day and this description provides more evidence of its symbolic function as an empowering text. Davidson's work on medieval English saints' plays suggests that St Katherine was a popular subject for the dramatic, as well as the visual arts, although there are no extant St Katherine plays.[175] There are records of such plays being performed on St Katherine's day, however. For example a fifteenth-century chronicle contained in British Library Additional 565 mentions 'the play of Seynt Katerine' being performed in

[174] Sacks, 'Demise of the martyrs', p. 153.

[175] Davidson, 'The Middle English saint play', p. 31. See also Grantley, 'Saints' plays', p. 287.

1393.[176] There is also the record of a play of St Katherine being performed at Coventry in 1490. This play may have been arranged and presented by the gild of St Katherine, founded in 1343.[177] This gild seems to have been one of the most important in the city, one to which those of the rank of sheriff and above belonged. So perhaps the Coventry gild, unlike the Bristol gild, constituted those who actually held power, rather than those who did not.[178]

It seems likely that most St Katherine gilds would have arranged for some reenactment or relation of the life of their patron to mark her feast day. Wealthier gilds could afford to commission and perform full scale plays. Less well-off gilds may have arranged simply for the life of St Katherine to have been read aloud to the assembled members. The statutes of the gild of St Katherine at St Andrew's church in Cambridge contain the instruction that the story of St Katherine is to be related on her feast day.[179] The gild could have drawn on an existing sermon life of St Katherine, or they could have had a life written especially, as the gild of St Katherine at Stamford did in the early-fifteenth century.[180]

The stanzaic life of St Katherine written by Richard Spaldyng in about the year 1400 is based on the Vulgate. Spaldyng was a Carmelite friar based in a friary at Stamford. The Stamford gild of St Katherine met in the church of St Paul's, adjacent to the friary and it seems likely that the life was written for this gild.[181] Kennedy suggests that Spaldyng may have served as chaplain to the gild in the 1390s. The gild is referred to specifically at the end of the poem, where St Katherine's intercession is called on that the members may attain a place in Heaven:

> I grete þe, most gracyous to governe hem al
> þat geder þe to hir giyld, hem for to gyde.
> Feed vs, feer fa[i]þful, þat vs no foly fal,

[176] Davidson, ibid., p. 51.

[177] For information about the Coventry gild and its play see ibid., pp. 46-47.

[178] However, it is not clear whether any of the civic officials were members of the Bristol gild. This once again warns us against assuming any homogeneity of meaning in the appropriation of St Katherine as patron.

[179] Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, p. 139.

[180] The following information about this life is taken from a paper given by Ruth Kennedy at the conference 'Hagiography and Saints' Cults 1100-1500' held at the University of York, July 1993, entitled 'Parish gild connections? Some alliterative texts from the North-East Midlands'.

[181] For the 1389 return of this gild see Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds*, pp. 187-191.

for [f]eynthed and freelte we feel vs besyde.
Saue ƥou our sawles synful qwen ƥei aƥere schal,
and wi[n] vs to ƥi wonnyng fro ƥis woo wyde.[182]

The previous stanza, which forms a prayer to St Katherine, provides us with an idea of why the gild valued her patronage so much:

Schere away charp schowres ƥat schap vs to schrik,
and schaf awey chames ƥat schrunk be in schenchip;
Pales vs with pyte, and pride fro vs pik;
put vs fro ƥis pouert, and put vs to wirchip;
Draw vs to ƥi dygnite fro ƥis deƥe dyk,
and to ƥi dentiwos dool qwere deieƥ euer demschip.
Joyne vs to Jesu, ƥat chesus hym lyk;
chef of our jornay, we chees euer ƥi frenchip.
Now ƥi frenchip to fynde ay,
Oure mede to encresse.
ƥo pynchars vs haf pynd ay,
ƥou kille hem, Kateryn, kynd ay,
And profor vs ƥi pesse.

Katherine is described as the members' friend, one who can ensure that they will ultimately be joined to Christ. The purpose of relating the life of St Katherine is that by having their minds on it they can increase their 'meed'. This is in line with Katherine's pre-execution prayer that all those who remember her passion should receive divine favour through her intercession.

The suggestion that St Katherine's prominence as gild patron is due to her intercessory power is supported by the evidence of the Cambridge gild of St Katherine. In the preamble of its return in 1389 it explains its choice of patron:

> The Rewarder of all men leaves no good deed unnoticed, as the Holy Scriptures testify. Hence it is that the brethren desire to stir the minds of the faithful to His service; that as His servants they may rejoice in good service, and that others may be stimulated from good to better, so that when they are taken away from this light they may deserve to attain eternal life. The brethren desire also that among themselves and their successors love may abound more and more, that dissension be driven far away and divine worship be increased through their means. For the salvation of their souls offerings should be devoutly made to holy and venerable places. With these objects in view they have founded a gild for the praise of God and in honour of the glorious Virgin Katharine, their advocate, whose body was carried by angels to mount Sinai for burial by the order of God. In honour of this Virgin our Lord Jesus had thought it to perform endless miracles. Among these was the defeat by St Katharine of fifty orators who had come at the King's order to destroy the Christian faith by their arguments. The orators, formerly blinded by the devil, had their eyes opened to the truth, were

[182] These two passages are taken from Kennedy's transcription of the life, the complete text is forthcoming from E. E. T. S.

> converted to Christianity and obtained the crown of martyrdom by burning, but their clothes and their hair remained unscathed by the flames. The brethren are obliged to omit any account of other miracles because of their vast number.[183]

The gild recognises that during the course of her life, and afterwards, God has performed great miracles through her, which renders her a particularly beneficial patron. As we have seen the statutes of this gild specify that the life of St Katherine is to be related on her feast day. It is important that the gild members consider not just the miracles that were performed through Katherine, but the way she conducted herself, the manifestation of her devotion to God. Such considerations may also have been a part of the 'meed' that the Stamford gild members could receive by remembering her passion.

The legend sets up a series of false expectations in its audience, stressing the power of Maxentius and his empire and the lonely vulnerability of St Katherine. However, eventually the pagans are forced to recognise Katherine's physical, mental and moral superiority. This sense of reversal, of an anomalous outcome to an apparently straight forward situation, is embodied in the iconic image of St Katherine. Whether she is depicted with fragments of wheel, or with Maxentius trampled under her feet she is a figure of extraordinary, unnatural, yet divinely sanctioned power. The wheel should have torn her apart, instead it is broken into tiny pieces and kills the pagans who came to watch her die (figs. 11, panel 12, 22, 25, 30, 40, 43). Maxentius should have been able to overcome her both physically and mentally, yet his words and actions are rendered thoroughly impotent. This suggests that the choice of St Katherine as patron functioned on a more symbolic level too. By visibly tying themselves to St Katherine devotees could partake of the power implicit in her image and her life. This is perhaps particularly true for those who joined a gild of St Katherine. In this way devotion to St Katherine becomes a means of improving, or confirming, one's social and religious status. By assimilating aspects of St Katherine's experience into the ritual conduct of the gild men and women could strive to become like her, in both conduct and the recognition of others. This element of aspiration which seems to characterise the cult of St Katherine will be explored further in the following chapter.

[183] Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, p. 129.

Reading St Katherine in the Household: education, household managers and the pursuit of the Mixed Life

Introduction: household manuscripts

In this chapter the life and cult of St Katherine will be situated in particular within the context of the rise of lay literacy and developments in vernacular theology. It will argue that the life of St Katherine may have been read as an authorisation of women's educational practices, and as a wider validation of vernacular learning and theology.[1] In order to support this proposition it is necessary to locate both culturally and chronologically the written versions of her life found in 'household manuscripts'. These are manuscripts which were apparently written for, and read within, a domestic lay milieu, rather than that of the parish church.[2]

I have identified sixteen manuscripts, containing the life of St Katherine, whose format and contents suggest that they were created for and read within lay households. These manuscripts date from the early-fourteenth to the early-sixteenth centuries, with the majority of examples

[1] Bray suggested that fourteenth and fifteenth century developments in lay piety may have had an influence on the life of St Katherine, with reference to affective literature and bridal mysticism. See her 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 264-268. It was only after I had written this chapter that Karen Winstead's two articles on Cagrave's *Life of St Katherine* came to my attention. In her 'Piety, Politics, and Social Commitment in Capgrave's *Life of St Katherine*', *Medievalia et Humanisitca* new series, 17 (1990), pp. 59-80 Winstead suggests that Capgrave's version of the legend illustrates that hagiographic genres were influenced by the Mixed Life ethos in the fifteenth century, see pp. 73-75. In her 'Capgrave's Saint Katherine and the Perils of Gynecocracy', *Viator* 26 (1995), pp. 361-376, Winstead makes some observations on the possibilities of a positive female reading of the life of St Katherine. However neither Bray nor Winstead discuss the provenance or contents of manuscripts containing lives of St Katherine in detail.

[2] For a discussion of household manuscripts, their owners and the place of such miscellanies within wider patterns of lay domestic religious practices and lay literacy see McSparran and Robinson, *Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38*, pp. vii-xii. See also Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, 'Anthologies and miscellanies: production and choice of texts', in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds., *Book Production and Publishing in Britain: 1375-1475* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 279-315; Carol M. Meale, 'Patrons, buyers and owners: book production and social status', in ibid., pp. 201-238; Carol M. Meale, '"godemen/Wiues maydnes and alle men": romance and its audiences', in Carol M. Meale, ed., *Readings in Medieval English Romances* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 209-225; Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden, New York etc, 1987); pp. 16-23, Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 68-77; John J. Thompson, *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript: BL MS Additional 31042* (Cambridge, 1987); Phillipa Hardman, 'A mediaeval "library *in parvo*"', *Medium Aevum* 47 (1978), pp. 262-273.

coming from the mid- to late-fifteenth century.[3] The owners were drawn from the ranks of the aristocracy, gentry and, increasingly during the fifteenth century from wealthy urban mercantile families.[4]

The work of several scholars has established that literacy, broadly defined as the ability to read vernacular texts, if not necessarily to have a working knowledge of Latin, was spreading down the social scale during the later medieval period and was also a skill increasingly possessed, and expected to be possessed, by women.[5] Those who could read (or who could be read to) had a progressively wider range of vernacular devotional texts upon which to draw in their pursuit of a sanctified secular life and books came to play an important part in lay religious practices. It would appear that there was a perceived connection in this period between the female

[3] British Library Arundel 327 containing Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, is not included in this corpus because although the individual lives were written for the use of lay men and women, drawn from the local East Anglian gentry and nobility, the manuscript itself was compiled by Thomas Burgh for use in a nunnery. See Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 289 and Edwards, 'Transmission and audience', p. 157. Other manuscripts containing the life of St Katherine could also have been read and used within a lay domestic context. However, this chapter focuses on those manuscripts with a more demonstrably lay provenance.

[4] My approach to the issue of manuscripts and their relation to reading and education within such households has been influenced by the work of Felicity Riddy on the courtesy text for women, *How the Good Wijf Tauȝte hir Douȝtir*: 'Mother knows best: reading social change in a courtesy text', *Speculum* (1996), pp. 66-86, although Riddy's focus is on lower status urban households. See also Johnathan Nicholls' work on courtesy literature, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain Poet* (Woodbridge, 1985), especially the chapter 'Courtesy books in secular society and fiction', pp. 45-56.

[5] See M.B. Parkes, 'The literacy of the laity', in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby eds., *The Mediaeval World* (London, 1973), pp. 555-577; M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford, 1993), especially chapter 7 'Literate and illiterate', pp. 224-252; Franz H. Bauml, 'Varieties and consequences of medieval literacy and illiteracy', *Speculum* 55 (1980), pp. 237-265; Camille, 'Seeing and reading', passim; Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers* (London, 1981); Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984), chapter 4, 'Devotional literacy', pp. 101-133. For specific studies of women's literacy and reading practices, see the collection of essays in Meale, *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*. See also the introduction to Alexandra Barratt ed., *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 1-23. The work of Nicholas Orme also provides a comprehensive survey of the education of men and women from the nobility and gentry, see his *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530* (London and New York, 1984) and *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London and Ronceverte, 1989).

reader and vernacular literature and learning.[6]

The contents of all sixteen manuscripts have been surveyed in order to uncover some common thematic concerns and interests. This indicates the contextual similarities of these manuscripts, which can help us to identify what functions were performed and interests served by the life of St Katherine within them.[7]

A] Early fourteenth-century verse life (A)
1. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.2.1, Auchinleck Manuscript (1330s)
2. Cambridge, Caius College 175 (early-fifteenth century)

B] Late fourteenth-century verse life (CUL)
3. Oxford, Bodleian Library 14528 (Rawlinson Poet 34) (late-fifteenth century)
4. Cambridge, University Library Ff.2.38 (late-fifteenth century)

C] John Caprave's *Life of St Katherine* (C)
5. British Library Arundel 168 (fifteenth century)
6. British Library Arundel 20 (late-fifteenth century)

D] The prose life
7. British Library Cotton Titus A xxvi (early-sixteenth century)
8. Manchester, Chetham's Library 8009 (late-fifteenth century)
9. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.3.1 (second half of fifteenth century)
10. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales Porkington 10 (mid-fifteenth century)
11. Oxford, Corpus Christi College 237 (second half of fifteenth century)
12. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 142 (mid-fifteenth century)
13. Cambridge, Trinity College 0.1.9 (mid- to late-fifteenth century)
14. Stonyhurst Archives XLIII (second half of fifteenth century)
15. British Library Harley 4012 (1460s)
16. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 390/610 (second half of fifteenth century)

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[6] See W. A. Pantin, 'Instructions for a devout and literate layman', in J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson, eds., *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 398-422. The layman is instructed to 'Expound something in the vernacular which may edify your wife and others', p. 400. See also Carol M. Meale, '"... and alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch and frensch": laywomen and their books in late medieval England', in her *Women and Literature*, pp. 128-158.

[7] Riddy, "Mother Knows Best", p. 1. Araujo's comparison of Advocates 19.3.1 with six other household books has provided a useful model of approach for my corpus of St Katherine manuscripts, 'Advocates 19.3.1' , pp. 21-30.

Perhaps the two most famous examples of household manuscripts are the Auchinleck Manuscript, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.2.1 and Cambridge, University Library Ff.2.38, but good examples are also provided by Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.3.1 and Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales Porkington 10. All the manuscripts contain a fairly similar selection of texts, including saints' lives, romances, homiletic and monitory pieces, poems and treatises of religious and moral instruction, chronicles, humorous tales, and so on.[8] Household manuscripts provided their owners with comprehensive collections of texts for education, edification and entertainment. One of their number, Advocates 19.3.1, has been described as a 'medieval library *in parvo*', a description which owes as much to its physical make-up, composed as it is of originally separate booklets, as to its contents.[9] However, the concept of these manuscripts as domestic libraries is a very useful one, as it underlines their compendious nature, and the range of the texts they contain.

I also make use of the term household manuscript to refer to manuscripts such as British Library Harley 4012, Stonyhurst Archives XLIII and British Library Arundel 20, although these collections contain none of the practical secular texts which characterise the manuscripts mentioned above. They are strictly devotional in character containing saints' lives alongside such treatises as Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, The Abbey of the Holy Ghost, Orologium Sapiencie, Pore Caitif* and *The Clensyng of Mans Sowle.*[10] I have included these manuscripts in this analysis because they too may have been read within a lay domestic environment and are similarly concerned with self-education and self-improvement, albeit wholly spiritual in nature.

[8] Although this broad definition of household manuscripts serves for the present study, as it allows comparisons to be drawn between different manuscripts, it should be stressed that there is no established 'blueprint' for identifying household manuscripts. By their very nature they resist simplistic categorisation. Much more work needs to be done on the nature and provenance of such manuscripts and their place within domestic devotional life.

[9] Hardman, 'A mediaeval "library *in parvo*"', passim.

[10] For more on this type of manuscript see Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular books of religion', in Griffiths and Pearsall, *Book Production and Publishing*, pp. 317-344.

Household manuscripts demonstrate the ways in which the programme for pastoral instruction outlined by the Fouth Lateran Council in 1215 became part of the lay domestic observance of religion. The use of such books corresponds with a tendency towards greater personal responsibility for the welfare of the soul. Nevertheless, religious observances practised in the household were always perceived to be in addition to required attendance at church, whether one had a chapel, or other less formal religious space in one's home, or not.[11]

The lives of St Katherine considered here could have been read privately, or aloud, both to members of the family and to the wider household. The life of St Katherine evidently served the twin purposes of education and entertainment admirably, for it appears far more frequently in such manuscripts than that of any other saint.[12] It also appears to have been the life excerpted most frequently from the *Gilte Legende*. That there were many more copies of the life of St Katherine which are no longer extant is indicated by Reginald Pecock's comment: 'marke who so wole in his mynde alle the bokis whiche ben in London writun upon Seint Kateryn's lijf and passiouns, and y dare weel seie that... ther were x. thousind mo bokis writun in Londoun thilk day of the same Seintis lijf and passioun'.[13]

I have restricted myself to a consideration of the Middle English version of the life of St Katherine because this is the language in which the majority of the literate laity read. The contents of household manuscripts are overwhelmingly English. Although there were contemporary versions of the life in Latin they are to be found in manuscripts that seem to have

[11] In the literature which gives us access to the daily religious routines of the laity there seems to be an assumption of daily attendance at Mass. See Pantin, 'Instructions for a devout and literate layman', pp. 399-400 for a translation of the first part of the instructions, where it describes the layman's expected start to the day, including going to church for private prayer and to hear Mass. Courtesy literature gives much the same impression. Caxton presumes that his 'Lytyl Iohn' will go to church every day as well (see Frederick J. Furnivall ed., *Caxton's Book of Curtesye* E.E.T.S. E.S. 3 (1868), pp. 9-11), although it seems likely that those who had a private chapel would in some cases hear daily Mass there instead.

[12] This can be seen, for example, by examining the contents of the various household manuscripts catalogued by Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, passim.

[13] Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of Clergy*, p. 215.

belonged to or been used by clerics.[14] Almost all of the Anglo-Norman lives of St Katherine date from before 1300, and although they were still presumably circulating in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, none occurs in the group of manuscripts I am discussing. By the end of the Middle Ages English had become the primary vernacular, and this is presumably the main reason why someone felt it necessary to translate the *Legende Doree* into English.[15]

It was through the medium of the English prose version that the episodes of St Katherine's early life, conversion and mystical marriage were conveyed to a wide audience throughout the fifteenth century. These events were linked to her passion in England prior to this, but only in Latin or Anglo-Norman texts, or in English versions which do not appear to have enjoyed a wide circulation.[16] There may well have been other English versions of the life with detailed descriptions of her education and mystical marriage which are no longer extant, but these episodes do not seem to have become a standard part of her legend in English until a few decades into the fifteenth century.

It would seem that, on the whole, the presence of a saint's life in such manuscripts, or its existence as an independent text, was due to the devotional initiative of an individual. Its presence was also dependent on its availability to scribes as an exemplar. This is not to say that one could not buy 'off the peg' copies of saints' lives, but this trend seems to have become more prevalent towards the end of the period, with the advent of printing. There are three extant manuscripts which consist solely of lives of St Katherine: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum McLean 129 (mid-fifteenth century), Harvard University, Richardson 44 (second quarter fifteenth century) and a fifteenth-century manuscript at Westminster Abbey

[14] For example the lives contained in MS Bodley 110 and Cambridge Gonville and Cauis College MS 196/102, see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 131-132; pp. 152-156.

[15] On the growing importance of English see Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers* (London, 1981), p. 20; on the distinct social and intellectual functions performed by English, French and Latin in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 198-200.

[16] For example, the Anglo-Norman Mystical Marriage text contained in BL MS Additional 40143, see Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', pp. 160-164; MacBain, 'The Development of the *Catherine* Legend'.

identified by Nevalinna and Taavitsainen.[17] The life in Advocates 19.3.1 and Bokenham's version probably also enjoyed an existence as pamphlets at some point in their histories.[18] In addition two versions of the prose life were printed in this form in the sixteenth century by Pynson (c.1510) and Waley (1555), complete with accompanying woodcuts of the saint trampling Maxentius.[19]

Some of these manuscripts may have been made speculatively for sale, rather than at the behest of specific patrons, and if this is the case it would suggest that the life of St Katherine was regarded as part of the standard contents of such books by scribes and compilers. On the whole, however, it would appear that most of these books were originally designed for use in specific households. The fact that many of them obviously passed through several different readers, men and women who have left marks of ownership upon them in the form of names and signatures, and also through different households indicates the utility of their contents.[20]

Even if a book was owned or used by different families during this period, it would be likely to remain within a broadly similar social and cultural milieu. The defining characteristics of the three groups outlined above often became blurred and indistinct in later medieval England as families of gentry or mercantile background adopted the life-style of the nobility. Reading the life of St Katherine could even have been bound up with the cultivation of an aristocratic identity, especially as the contents of these household books often suggest a training programme of required knowledge and conduct for the well-born.[21] If the ownership of books could

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[17] For the Fitzwilliam and Harvard manuscripts see Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 36-39, p. 109. For the Westminster Abbey manuscript see Saara Nevalinna and Irma Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria*, p. 30.

[18] See Hardman, 'A mediaeval "library *in parvo*"', pp. 264-265; Edwards, 'Transmission and audience', pp. 162-163.

[19] Auvo Kurvinen, 'Two sixteenth-century editions of the life of St Catharine of Alexandria', in Norman Davis and C.L. Wrenn, eds., *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R.Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (London, 1962), pp. 269-279.

[20] See below, pp. 167-168.

[21] For the educational propensities of Advocates 19.3.1 and other household manuscripts see Araujo, 'Advocates 19.3.1', pp. 14-20. For household manuscripts as educating and socialising tools, see Riddy, *Thomas Malory*, pp. 69-74.

be used to construct or affirm social and cultural identities, similar factors may well have been at work in the reading and possession of a life of St Katherine. The possession of books was a measure of social status, partly because of their cost, partly because of the assumption of literacy which it entailed.[22] Medieval authors frequently vilify members of the mercantile elite for flaunting their books of hours in an attempt to appear socially 'better' than they really were. Deschamps singled out bourgeois wives for satirical attack in this respect.[23] The cult of St Katherine appears to be bound to an identity of power and status, as I have already argued. When her cult first appeared in England it apparently found favour with the royal family and spread from the court to the rest of the country. Depending on one's background, then, the choice of St Katherine as a patron could be about the self-affirmation of status for a member of the nobility, or about an assumption of an aristocratic identity for someone a few rungs down the social ladder. This accords with the previous chapter's observations about the membership of St Katherine gilds.

The manuscripts in our corpus were, on the whole, apparently made by professional scribes, some of whom, such as Richard Heege (Advocates 19.3.1) and James Bennett (Corpus Christi Oxford 237) have left their names written inside. While these books are luxury items, they are also utilitarian, and of plain appearance, designed to be handled and read, and frequently showing signs of heavy use. The work of Moore and Edwards on the literary circles of fifteenth century East Anglia provides a useful paradigm of the environment in which these household manuscripts were being read.[24] The surviving works of Lydgate, Capgrave and Bokenham furnish information about the relationships between author and audience and between different members of the audience. They also provide evidence for patterns of familial and regional affiliation between named female patrons and owners of texts, providing evidence for networks of reading and

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[22] H.E. Bell, 'The price of books in medieval England', *The Library*, 4th series 17 (1936-7), pp. 312-332.

[23] Lawrence R. Poos, 'Social history and the book of hours', in Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York, 1988), pp. 33-38.

[24] Moore, 'Patrons of letters in Norfolk and Suffolk', passim; Edwards, 'Transmission and audience', passim.

learning women.[25]

The emphasis on domestic households is partly determined by the nature of the manuscript evidence. However, this chapter proposes a reading of the life of St Katherine which may have been of relevance to those lay people enjoying a certain affluence and status who could afford to own a copy of it, and this has also affected my approach. Episcopal and monastic households are also excluded as they are fundamentally religious rather than lay establishments.

The exclusion of nunneries from this investigation needs justification. Gilchrist has suggested parallels between the lives of women in nunneries and women in gentry households and castles, as they observed many of the same religious and social practices, were drawn from similar backgrounds and inhabited similarly secluded spaces within their respective households.[26] Many nuns had not spent their whole lives as sequestered virgins, and there were often lay women (widows) living in nunneries, either temporarily or permanently. Hutchison has demonstrated certain similarities in reading matter and practices between nuns and women in the late-medieval household,[27] and Riddy argues, using patterns of book-giving between laywomen and nuns as her evidence, that 'the literary culture of nuns in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and that of devout gentlewomen not only overlapped but were more or less indistinguishable'.[28] However, this investigation is concerned with the readings and reactions of lay men and women. In order to introduce the idea that St Katherine could function as a role model for women other than consecrated virgins, a consideration of married women

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[25] Meale, '"alle the bokes that I haue"', p. 138.

[26] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London and New York, 1994); for women in castles see her 'Medieval bodies in the material world: gender stigma and the body', in Kay and Rubin, *Framing Medieval Bodies*, pp. 43-61, especially pp. 50-55. It would appear that women further down the social scale were not secluded to this extent.

[27] Ann M. Hutchison, 'Devotional reading in the monastery and in the late-medieval household', in Michael G. Sargent ed., *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Later Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 215-22.

[28] Felicity Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God": a late-medieval sub-culture', in Meale, *Women and Literature*, pp. 104-127: p. 110; see also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, '"Clerc u lai, muine u dame", p. 61.

and girls who would one day become wives is particularly important.

Women seem to have had a central ideological place within the household, fulfilling a variety of representational functions and allowing the home to act as a theatre for the staging of a family's social position.[29] This observation accords with women's apparent responsibility for education within the domestic sphere and the fundamentally aspirant nature of many of these manuscripts, with their apparent goal of consolidating social and cultural status. It is a contention of this chapter that female saints, and especially St Katherine, may have been of particular relevance to women as household managers.

Clanchy believes that there is a direct connection between women's ownership of books and the growth of literacy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe.[30] The recent body of scholarship investigating women's literacy and book ownership gives an idea of the range of texts which were being read and used by them. The work of Dutton, Meale and Riddy is particularly useful in illuminating patterns of book ownership, and the existence of book reading, giving and lending networks among women.[31] Books sometimes bear the inscriptions of a whole succession of female owners or readers. A particularly good example is provided by Oxford, Bodleian Library Hatton 73, which contains a copy of the *Confessio Amantis*, some short English poems by Chaucer and Lydgate and a few Latin prayers. This book contains the names of a least five different women ranging from the mid fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, including a reference to the book once having been in the possession of 'Quene Margarete' (presumably Margaret of Anjou) and also of 'domina margarete

[29] This approach to the question of the household as a religious and ideological unit has been influenced in particular by the work of Lyndal Roper on the early Reformation household in Germany, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford, 1989). Many of the observations made by Elizabeth Langland on women's place within the middle-class Victorian household have also been applicable, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology* (Ithaca and London, 1995), in particular the idea of the home as a theatre and the signifying practices that are staged within it, p. 9.

[30] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 252.

[31] Meale, '"alle the bokes that I haue"', passim; Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', passim. A comprehensive survey of women's devotional reading and patterns of book ownership in late-medieval England is provided by Anne Dutton's unpublished DPhil thesis 'Women's use of religious literature in late medieval England' (York, 1995). Her observations and encouragement have been invaluable to the composition of this chapter.

more', the daughter of Sir Thomas More, who died in 1544.[32] Testamentary evidence, combined with knowledge about women's activities as literary patrons suggests, among the women whose interests and practices are thus revealed, a shared interest in religious matters and in a female experience of religion.[33]

Five manuscripts containing lives of St Katherine have women's names or signatures written in them. Chetham 8009 has the name 'Elysabet' written in it, which Purdie believes to be the name and signature of an actual woman.[34] Advocates 19.3.1 contains the name 'elsabet Bradshaw', written by the scribe, Heege, on f. 45 at the top of a page of the life of St Katherine. Other contemporary names have possibly been cut off, as the book has been shaved. Araujo argues that Elizabeth's name may have been written in the pamphlet before the life of St Katherine, and suggests that this booklet was written at her behest, or with her in mind.[35] On f. 126 of Cambridge Corpus Christi College 142 is written in a mid-fifteenth century hand, 'Thys ys betrys beuerleys book' and on the last fly leaf, 'Thys Booke ys Wylliam bodleys & Elizabethe hys wyffe' in a late-fifteenth early-sixteenth century hand.[36] Kurvinen posits that Beatrice Beverley was the first owner and that the Bodleys acquired it later on.[37] Harley 4012 contains a fifteenth-century inscription 'Thys ys the boke of dame anne wingfield of ha[r]lyng' and Dutton argues that this manuscript was probably compiled for Anne Harling in the 1460s.[38] Gonville and Caius 390-610 contains the following

[32] Josephine Koster Tarvers, '"Thys ys my mystrys boke": English women as readers and writers in late-medieval England', in Charlotte Cook Moore, Penelope Reed Doob, Marjorie Curry Woods, eds., *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literacy Studies: Essays in Honour of Judson Boyce Allen* (Michigan, 1992), pp. 305-327: p. 317. Further examples are to be found on p. 318.

[33] It is therefore telling that Chaucer draws a connection between the female narrator and the devotional tale in the persons of the Prioress and the Second Nun; for the implications of this connection see Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', pp. 104-106.

[34] Rhiannon Purdie, 'Sexing the manuscript: MS Chetham 8009 and the identification of women's books through internal evidence', a paper given at the Gender and Medieval Studies conference 'Gender and Community in the Middle Ages', Gregynog, University of Wales, January 1995. I am very grateful to Rhiannon Purdie for giving me a copy of this paper to consult.

[35] Araujo, 'Advocates 19.3.1', p. 12.

[36] James, *Corpus Christi College Cambridge 1*, p. 329.

[37] Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', p. 72.

[38] Dutton, 'Harley 4012'.

inscription on f. 32 'Thys ys my boke god geue me grase to follow ye good and godli counseyll therin Alicia Lego Ihesu haue marsy on me myserbel synner'.[39] Book and testamentary evidence furthers the connection between women and vernacular writing; translations of Latin and French religious, devotional and didactic works were often made for and owned by women.[40] The same evidence does also indicate that women may have owned books in more than one language, as the reference in Alice West's will of 1395 to 'alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch', indicates.[41] However, the majority of texts owned, or commissioned by women were written in English.

This is not to suggest that men did not have access to or make use of household books. The only other manuscripts in this corpus to bear medieval names or signatures are Caius 175, which contains the name of 'John Wylsone' several times as well as statements recording his ownership.[42] Cambridge, Trinity College 0.9.1 contains an indenture written in English on its last two pages, which records an arrangement to lease land between Walter Lokington and John Cokerych, wardens of the gild of the Assumption in St Margaret's church, Westminster, and James Fytt, citizen and tailor of London.[43] It is likely that this book belonged to one or other of these men.

A comparison of the texts of the life of St Katherine contained in the Auchinleck manuscript, written in the 1330s, and British Library Cotton

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[39] James, *Gonville and Caius College* 2, p. 452.
[40] Meale, '"alle the bokes that I haue"', p. 138.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, p. 83.
[43] James, *Trinity College Cambridge* 3, p. 441.

Titus A. xxvi, written in the early-sixteenth century,[44] highlights the development of the legend, which appears to have been influenced by the factors noted above. In the two centuries separating the creation of these manuscripts the account of Katherine's birth, early life, education and mystical marriage became a standard part of the narrative of her life, with interesting ramifications for the possible functions of her cult for those reading these lives. It can be seen that the frequency with which she appears in these manuscripts is related to the content of her life.[45]

As we have seen, the *Legenda Aurea* version of the narrative was based on the Vulgate. This contains the familiar elements of her life, beginning with Maxentius' arrival in Alexandria, and ending with Katherine's martyrdom and the translation of her body to Mount Sinai. The lives contained in manuscripts 1-4 and 15 describe this version and are included here for purposes of comparison. The main interest of this chapter lies in the prose life because it provided the medium by which the additional episodes describing St Katherine's early life, added to her *passio* during the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries, were conveyed to a wide audience. It appears that the elaboration of these episodes, when considered in the context of certain developments in lay piety, served to enlarge both St Katherine's meaning and her importance.

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[44] This manuscript falls into three separate sections. The central section, written in English in the early-sixteenth century, contains, among other items, saints' lives, Lydgate's *Fifteen Joys of Our Lady*, the homiletic romance *Ipotis*, and a piece in verse on 'meryta mysse'. The first section of the manuscript comprises an earlier compilation written in Old French, Italian and Latin including some verses on the medicinal properties of plants, and extracts on naval architecture. The third section, also in Latin was written in 1603. Given that the three sections appear to have no interconnection, beyond having been bound together, and the similarity of the English section with some of the other manuscripts examined here, it seems feasible to suggest that the English section (containing the life of St Katherine) originally enjoyed an independent existence. Hence it is included in the corpus of household manuscripts. See Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 16-24 for a detailed description of the manuscript.

[45] I shall quote almost exclusively from the a recension of the Prose Life as this is the version to be found in six of the ten lay copies. Kurvinen edited the text contained in Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 237 as part of her thesis, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 221-343 (the text is on the odd numbered pages). This will be referred to as a i in this chapter. Araujo edited the text in Advocates 19.3.1 as an appendix to her thesis, 'Advocates 19.3.1', pp. 1-17. This will be referred to as a ii in the text. I shall also refer to the d text. As the latest redaction of the prose life, it is the most detailed, and the developments which are outlined in this chapter are to be found in it in full-blown form.

The identity of the household: religion and ideology

The household can be thought of in terms of a social and economic unit, in terms of the physical spaces it entails and the people who lived and worked within it. The concern of this chapter is with the household as an ideological formation, with reference to the conduct of religion and education (moral and spiritual) within it.[46]

Several individual studies of the religious practices of the nobility and gentry have been undertaken recently which have provided useful information about their domestic religious experiences.[47] The most detailed study is provided by the work of Kate Mertes, and places it within a wider survey of noble and gentry households. Her work on these establishments suggests some ways in which the domestic community could function as the traditional, indeed, fundamental unit of worship; a place for religious

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[46] For the Reformation household as a religious and ideological unit which operated through a politics of reinscribing womenwithin the family, see Roper, *The Holy Household*, especially pp. 1-5.

[47] In addition to the works already cited on manuscript ownership and reading practices, the following have all contributed to a survey of the religious and cultural practices of the gentry and nobility: Christine Carpenter, 'The religion of the gentry of fifteenth century England', in Daniel Williams ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium* (Suffolk, 1987), pp. 53-74; Jeremy Catto, 'Religion and the English nobility in the later-fourteenth century', in Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl and Blair Worden eds., *History and Imagination: Essays in Honour of H.R. Trevor-Roper* (London, 1981), pp. 43-55; P.W. Fleming, 'The Hautes and their "circle": culture and the English Gentry', in Williams ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 85-102; Gibson, 'In Search of East Anglian devotional theatre: three lives', in her *Theater of Devotion*, pp. 67-106; Johnathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988), especially the chapter entitled 'The religious character of the nobility of the diocese', pp. 5-63; Colin Richmond, 'Religion and the fifteenth-century English gentleman", in Barrie Dobson ed., *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 193-208; Nigel Saul, 'The religious sympathies of the gentry in Gloucester, 1200-1500', *Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society Transactions* 98 (1980), pp. 99-112; M.G.A. Vale, 'Piety, charity and literacy among the Yorkshire gentry, 1370-1450', *Borthwick Papers* 50 (1976).

training and celebration.[48] The following construction of the setting within which to locate this reading of St Katherine has largely been determined by the nature of the surviving manuscripts, and other evidence for the operation of religion within the lay household.

The concept of the household as 'a little church', is often thought to have its origins in Calvinist doctrine of the sixteenth century, but was in fact taking shape throughout the later medieval period. St Cecilia was extolled for having asked Pope Urban 'þat my place/ To goddys seruyse myht halwyd be/ In-to a cherche perpetuelly by the'.[49] It was an idea which held particular resonance for the Lollards with their emphasis on the reading and transmission of the Scriptures in the vernacular. Arguably Lollardy was confined indoors because of its heretical nature, but the home also provided the perfect environment for such activities, especially for those women involved in the movement.[50]

This emphasis on the Christian identity of the household also had a great influence on orthodox lay piety; indeed it is often difficult to draw a line between orthodox and heterodox religious beliefs and practices in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.[51] The pastoral writings of men such as Mirk and Love demonstrate that the Church recognised and reacted to the growing demand for vernacular devotional literature, appropriating it as part of prescribed religious practice in order that those individuals seeking greater personal responsibility and interiority in their relationship with Christ and the saints could do so within traditional pious parameters,

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[48] Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household 1250-1600: Governance and Politic Rule* (Oxford, 1988), chapter 5, 'The household as a religious community', pp. 139-160. Her article 'The household as a religious community', in Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond eds., *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987), pp. 123-139, contains much the same information, but does extend the discussion to include gentry families. Jennifer Ward's chapter on noblewomen and religion has been of use as a specific consideration of female practices, see her *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1992), pp. 143-164.

[49] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 224; Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, p.128.

[50] Claire Cross, '"Great reasoners in scripture": the activities of women Lollards 1380-1530', in Derek Baker., ed., *Medieval Women: Studies in Church History, subsidia 1* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 359-380.

[51] A perusal of the literature attacking and defending the place of images in religious practice provides a prime example of this phenomenon, as was seen in chapter 1.

rather than resorting to radical doctrinal alternatives.[52]

Both Love and Bokenham construct St Cecilia as a model of the Mixed Life:

> Now, blyssyd Cecyle, syth ye be
> Lylye of heuene by chast clennesse,
> Weye to þe blynde by perfythnesse
> Of good werkys, & wyth actyf lyf
> Endewyd wer [and] wyth contemplatif...[53]

This is an indication of the paradigms which saints could provide. Although St Katherine is never presented explicitly as such a model, this chapter will suggest that the same ethos may have been implicit in the addition of the mystical marriage to her life, describing as it does the affective ways in which a busy lay person may make space in their lives for Christ.[54]

But would the highly educated St Katherine have been a figure with whom the lay people owning, reading and using these manuscripts could identify and perceive as a model in this way? That St Katherine is presented as highly educated seems to be directly linked to her frequent appearance in these manuscripts. This may be related to the suggestion (made by several scholars) that the education and training of children and young people was part of the responsibilities of motherhood and that women may therefore have been responsible or the provision of education in the household.[55] Indeed, it has been argued that the image of St Anne teaching the Virgin to read, which apparently originated in fourteenth-century England, performed the cultural function of recording and communicating the fact

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[52] As we have seen Mirk's *Festial* was apparently written in direct response to the perceived threat of Lollardy in order to arm parish priests against it. Love's *Myrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* also sets out, in part, to directly challenge Lollard doctrine. Its general purpose was non-polemical, but Archbishop Arundel's approval of the work as a corrective to heterodoxy set out in a Latin certificate was affixed to many of the manuscript copies, see Salter, *Nicholas Love's Myrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, p. 47.

[53] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 202. For more on St Cecilia and the Mixed Life see Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', pp. 104-105, and Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change' pp. 853-856.

[54] See Cheifetz, '"Spiritual Mansions"', pp. 48-65, for more on interiority and affective devotion.

[55] E.g. Orme, *Education and Society*, p. 223.

that children's literacy was a mother's responsibility.[56] It is possible that the construction of St Katherine as educated and educator may also have performed a cultural function, regardless of whether, or how far, it reflected the realities of women's education. Meale suggests that icongraphic models may have had an important influence on women's perceptions of themselves as owners and users of books.[57] The words and actions of St Katherine and of the other protagonists in her legend can be read as providing a defence of the ability of woman to learn and an authorisation of her role as teacher, not only of children, but in certain circumstances of men too.

This reading would additionally have been of value to laymen who had not received an academic education. For in these narratives the capacity to expound, recognise and learn from the truth is firmly presented as a feminine trait, both in the figures of Katherine and the Empress, but also in the figures of Porphirius and the Philosophers. The life seems to encompass a defence of more informal vernacular learning and culture at the expense of conventional clerical erudition, creating a feminine space from which to explore theological issues. Julian of Norwich wrote within just such a space, using it to claim representative status: 'And þat I say of me I sey in the person of all mine even cristen'.[58] Bynum has examined the ways in which the feminine can be read as representing the humanity of Christ, and as symbolising the humanness of both men and women.[59] Here the feminine is represented by the vernacular, the masculine by Latin. This dichotomy is also explored in the life and writings of Richard Rolle.

Rolle fled from an academic clerical life at the age of eighteen, wearing his sister's dress, one of the 'symbolic gestures of feminisation' which, as Riddy has shown, are reiterated throughout his subsequent

[56] See Riches, '"The Pot of Oure Hope", pp. 65-68; also Pamela Sheingorn, '"The wise mother": the image of St Anne teaching the Virgin Mary", *Gesta* 32/3 (1993), pp. 69-80; Wendy Scase, 'St Anne and the education of the Virgin: literary and artistic traditions and their implications", in Nicholas Rogers, ed., *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1991 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford, 1993), pp. 81-96.

[57] Meale, '"alle the bokes that I haue"', p. 145.

[58] Watson, 'Censorship and cultural change', p. 851; Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', p. 112.

[59] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 261-269.

writings.[60] In his *Incendium Amoris* Rolle is scathing about the medium of scholarly rhetoric as a means to knowledge of God: 'An old woman can be more expert in the love of God- and less wordly too- than your theologian with his useless studying'.[61] Rolle, who died in 1349, wrote several English devotional works primarily intended for his female friends and disciples, such as *The Form of Living*, written in 1348 for the anchoress Margery Kyrkby.[62] Rolle's works enjoyed great circulation among a lay readership throughout the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *The Form of Living* survives in forty-four manuscripts. In this respect Rolle's works became part of a canon articulating the Mixed Life.

It could be argued that St Katherine's education should be regarded as part of her exceptional nature; part of a textual strategy which elevates women beyond their generally excepted physical and mental potential as a deliberate affront to the men in the audience, to spur them to act in a more 'manly' fashion that women are not forced to act outside their natures.[63] Jerome had the same tactic in mind when he testily remarked that 'If men asked me questions about Scripture I would not be speaking to women'.[64] This chapter suggests an alternative reading, in which the texts seem to present an attack on the masculine, rather than on men *per se*.

In this respect the masculine can be read as members of the clerical Latin speaking community who in the early fifteenth century, as Watson

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[60] Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', p. 107. Nicholas Watson's *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge, 1991), provides the most recent study of the life and works of Rolle.

[61] Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London and New York, 1993), p. 60. See also Watson, *Richard Rolle*, pp. 24-26 for Rolle and the authority of experience.

[62] Glasscoe, ibid., p. 69; for the texts of Rolle's English writings and information about the manuscripts see Richard Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, ed. S.J.Ogilvie-Thomson, E.E.T.S. o.s. 293 (1988). Watson has challenged the traditional chronology of Rolle's works, see *Richard Rolle*, pp. 273-294, but this does not affect my argument.

[63] Cf. A.J. Minnis, 'De impedimento sexus: women's bodies and medieval impediments to women's ordination', paper given at 'This Body of Death: Medieval Theology and the Natural Body' a one day conference held at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, March, 1995. I am very grateful to Alastair Minnis for allowing me to consult this paper in unpublished form.

[64] Joan M. Ferrante, 'The education of women in the Middle Ages in theory, fact and fantasy', in Patricia H. Labalme, *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York and London, 1980), pp. 9-42: pp. 12-13.

has shown, sought to circumscribe the laity's access to vernacular theological texts, endeavouring to crystallise the division between clergy and laity and concentrate the tools of education and debate in the hands of the former.[65] Not all clergymen were opposed to the promulgation of vernacular theology, however, as we saw in chapter 1. The dichotomy between clerical and lay which this reading of St Katherine explores is more applicable to 'academic' rather than 'pastoral' clerics, and should be considered with this definition in mind.

Evidence for the religious and spiritual life of the household

Household manuscripts form part of the attempt to create a Mixed Life. The range of texts which they contain cater for those trying to follow it. Men and women attempting to lead a Mixed Life, combining secular concerns and obligations with a self-negotiated relationship with the Divine, had various means at their disposal depending on predilection and wealth. The possession of a book of hours could enable men and women to structure their day (as far as possible) in an imitation of the regular life.[66] Courtesy literature gives a further indication of the ways in which the laity were expected to incorporate religious observations into their conduct of daily life. Lady Cobham, who died in 1344, apparently spent a great part of her day reciting the hours of the Virgin, matins, the psalms, the litany and the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*.[67] Caxton's 'lytyl Iohn', having said the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria* and Creed on rising, is told to recite 'Oure lady matyns'

[65] Watson, 'Censorship and cultural change', pp. 851-852.

[66] A good introduction to the history, contents and functions of the book of hours is provided by Wieck, *Time Sanctified*. Also useful is *The Prymer or Lay Folk's Prayer Book*, ed., Henry Littlehales, E.E.T.S. o.s. 105 and 109 (1895, 1897), which contains an introduction to the origin of the primer and its form and use in England, and an edition of the English text of the early fifteenth century primer in Cambridge University Library Dd.11.82. See also Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 122-125. For an examination of how people may have read, and the connection between silent reading and the achievement of a personal relationship with God, see Paul Saenger, 'Silent reading: its impact on late-medieval script and society", *Viator* 13 (1982), pp. 367-414.

[67] Hilary M. Carey, 'Devout literate laypeople and the pursuit of the Mixed Life in later medieval England', *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1987), pp. 361-381: p. 364. The description is taken from Bishop Sheppey's funeral sermon for her.

while he is dressing and to say 'pryme and ouris' every day as well.[68] In Caxton's translation of *The Book of The Knight of the Tower*, the Knight advises his daughters 'beware that ye breke not your faste till that ye haue said youre matyns and heures'.[69] The oft-cited daily routines of Cecily of York and Margaret Beaufort show the extent to which religious and secular obligations could be combined in the lives of the high nobility.[70] Similar routines were prescribed for, and followed by those of lower status, as Pantin's work on 'The instructions for a devout and literate layman' shows. This quasi-regular life-style could be further formalised for women, by taking a vow of chastity, yet remaining in the world as a vowess. This was usually considered to be an option for widows, but both Margery Kempe and Margaret Beaufort obtained their husbands' permission to follow this vocation while still married (although it is not clear whether Margery Kempe was ever officially recognised as a vowess).[71]

There is good evidence that aristocratic, gentry and mercantile households had some form of private, decorated space into which members of the family (at least) could withdraw to pursue private devotions. This space may have been merely a closet attached to the bedroom, the 'secret place' of Pantin's 'devout and literate layman'.[72] It could have been a consecrated chapel with its own chaplain who would celebrate Mass daily. Wood's work on the English medieval house lists surviving examples of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century chapels, such as those at Bradley Manor,

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[68] Caxton, *Book of Curtesye*, p. 2, p. 5. For a similar morning routine see Pantin, 'Devout and literate layman', pp. 398-399.

[69] M.Y. Offord, *William Caxton: The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, E.E.T.S. S.S. 2 (1971), p. 17.

[70] C.A.J. Armstrong, 'The piety of Cicely, Duchess of York: a study in late-medieval culture", in his *England, France and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 135-156; for Fisher's Month's Mind of Margaret Beaufort see John E.B. Mayor, ed., *The English Works of John Fisher 1*, E.E.T.S. E.S. 27 (1876), pp. 289-310.

[71] For the apparently unofficial status of Margery Kempe as vowess, see Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (Pennsylvania, 1994), pp. 59-60. For Margaret Beaufort's vow of chastity, taken before John Fisher with the permission of her husband, Lord Stanley, see Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 187-188.

[72] Pantin, 'Devout and literate layman', p. 400.

Compton Castle and Ashby de la Zouche.[73] Increasingly during the later Middle Ages, the domestic chapel was a place in which all the members of the household would gather to worship, with separate entrances and areas for the family and their servants.[74] In very high status households such chapels would contain a space for the ladies of the house, but such sexual segregation would not have been found in most gentry and mercantile households.[75]

Surviving archaeological evidence tells us little about chapels in these households, but references to such chapels can be found frequently in wills as testators, drawn from gentry and urban families as well as the nobility, list their contents; books, vestments, ornaments and all the liturgical paraphenalia necessary for the celebration of Mass. In 1436 Richard Shirburn, a squire from Milton in Craven leaves to the altar of his parish church 'a vestiment of blewe velewett, foure auter clothes, thre towels, a Missall, a chales, a corprax, a paxbrede, a feriall vestimentt, and a kyste for to kepe all yis gere in'; Augustine Hawkyns, a London grocer who made his will in 1449 leaves to the church of St Bride his missal, chalice, two vestments with all fittings, two linen cloths and a paxbrede; Anne Harling leaves the chapel of St Anne in East Harling 'a chalez, a Messe booke and corporas, wt all other apparrell', according to her will of 1498, and she leaves the same items to the altar of Our Lady in the same church.[76] Images and other visual representations of the saints were also to be found in these spaces, whether closet or chapel. Contemporary depictions of domestic interiors provide some idea of the kinds of decoration they

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[73] Margaret Wood, *The English Mediaeval House* (London, 1965), pp. 227-246, esp., pp. 235-239. See also Chiefetz, '"Spiritual mansions"', pp. 9-16.

[74] Wood, ibid., pp. 231-32.

[75] Gilchrist, 'Medieval bodies in the material world', pp. 51-58.

[76] For the will of Richard Shirburn, Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia* 2, pp. 75-76; the will of Augustine Hawkyns, J.R.H. Weaver and A. Beardwood, eds., *Some Oxfordshire Wills Proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 1393-1510*, Oxfordshire Record Society 39 (1958), pp. 17-18; the will of Anne, Lady Scrope of Harling, Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia* 4, pp. 149-154. I have found over forty references in wills to similar items which would have been used to celebrate Mass in a domestic chapel, or at a domestic altar. For the contents of Margaret Beaufort's chapel and the closet next to her bedroom, see Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 177, 189-190.

contained.[77]

The visual dimension of the domestic experience of religion is very difficult to retrieve. The paucity of other evidence for the cult of St Katherine, or for any other saint, is partially responsible for a reliance upon the written sources. Images of the saints, especially small scale domestic ones, seem to have been particularly vulnerable to iconoclastic destruction, thus wills and inventories provide valuable examples of the kinds of religious representations which could be found in the home.[78]

I have found several references in wills and inventories to specific objects depicting St Katherine or her symbol, the wheel. Apart from Christ and the Virgin, there appear to have been more visual representations of St Katherine in the home than of any other saint, and while this may be dictated by the nature of the sources, it does accord with other evidence of her great popularity to be found elsewhere.[79] Some of the depictions of St Katherine mentioned in wills sound very similar to those to be found in contemporary churches: in 1421 William Holton of Brandon left to the altar of St Katherine in Braunspath church 'j tabillett cum ymagine de visione Sancti Gregorii Papae; et tres ymagines de Allabastro, videlicet unam de Sancto Michaele, unam de Sancto Christofero, et unam de Sancta Katerina'.[80] A measure of St Katherine's importance is evinced by her appearance alongside, or incorporation into, Crucifixion iconography; Robert Clarke of Horncastle who made his will in 1520, leaves St Katherine's guild in Horncastle 'a sylver cross with the pyctur of our lord

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[77] E.g. manuscript illuminations can give an idea of the kinds of devotional objects people had in their homes, see Chiefetz, '"Spiritual Mansions"', p. 19.

[78] In the case of images bequeathed to parish churches, unless the testator specifically states that it or they are to be made specially for the church, I am assuming that such items were part of her or his domestic devotional decoration, located on an altar or in a chapel. For more information about the kinds of items found in inventories see Susan Foister, 'Paintings and other works of art in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century inventories', *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981), pp. 273-282.

[79] I have found nineteen references in wills of images of St Katherine or objects bearing a Katherine wheel. I have also found references to images of saints such as Christopher, Margaret, Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, Thomas of Canterbury, Anne and Sitha, but no more than three or four references for any one of these saints.

[80] For the will of William Holton see J. Raine, ed., *Wills and Inventories from the Registry of the Archdeaconry of Richmond*, Surtees Society 26 (1853), p. 66.

and mary and John, and at the foot of the crosse a Image of Saynt Katerine'.[81]

There are also references to tablets of St Katherine, often made of precious metals and decorated with jewels; Edmund, Earl of March mentions in his will of 1380, a tablet with the images of St John and St Katherine, as part of a wider collection of images and relics.[82] Such tablets sometimes took the form of paxbredes, such as that belonging to Lady Jane Harper of York, 'a paxbrede with towe ymages, oon of Saynt Katerine and the other of Saynt Cristofer', which came from the altar in her parlour and was bequeathed to the monastery at Rileston in 1512.[83] In 1465 Margaret Stapilton left 'Katerinae filiae meae j. peciam argenti stantem et coopertum cum ymagine Sanctae Katerinae', a rare example of the association of an individual with her name saint.[84]

Sometimes St Katherine is represented by her wheel, in a couple of cases taking the form of a piece of jewellery: in Maude Parr's will of 1529 she leaves 'to my doughter Anne, ... a Katherine wheale of dyamontes with iiij perles sett in yt'.[85] In another example a Katherine wheel is found decorating the hanging of a bed: 'j. lectus cum tapete blodii et viridis colorum, cum rotis S. Katerinae' is mentioned in the incomplete inventory of John Cadeby of Beverley, which has beeen dated to the mid fifteenth century.[86] Margaret Ecopp of York, leaves a gold ring with a depiction of St Katherine in it to a kinswoman in 1468.[87]

The saints also pervaded domestic life in other ways, such as providing decoration for household objects. I have found four references to cups and other receptacles with images of St Katherine in the bottom:

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[81] For the will of Robert Clarke, Foster, *Lincoln Wills 1*, pp. 84-85.

[82] For the will of Edmund Earl of March, Nicolas,*Testamenta Vetusta*, pp. 110-113.

[83] For the will of Lady Jane Harper, J. Raine,*Testamenta Eboracensia: 5* Surtees Society 79 (1884), pp. 36-39.

[84] Such associations are often assumed by scholars, but are in fact very difficult to document. For Margaret Stapilton's will see, Raine,*Testamenta Eboracensia* 2, pp. 270-272.

[85] For Maude Parr's will, J.W. Clay, *North Country Wills: 2*, Surtees Society 116 (1908), pp. 91-94. Interestingly, in the light of the comment in the previous note, this Katherine wheel is not left to Maude's other daughter, Katherine Parr.

[86] For the inventory of John Cadeby of Beverley see, Raine,*Testamenta Eboracensia* 1, pp. 97-101.

[87] Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Probate Register 4, fol. 146v. With thanks to Anne Rycraft for providing me with this reference.

'unum crateram argenti cum ymagine Sanctae Katerinae in medio', is mentioned in the 1434 will of a Mistress Cromwell and in 1433 Margaret Blakburn left 'unum maser cum ymagine Sanctae Katerinae vocat Fronnce in fundo'.[88] Sir John Nevill possessed 'a standyng cup of silvy and gilt, callyd ye Kataryne' according to his will of 1449, and in 1496 William Came of Newark left a 'maser that hath in the bothom the figor of Saint Katerine', to a female relative.[89]

These few examples help to indicate the ways in which St Katherine may have been visually encountered in the home by the men and women who read her life. The wills do not give us information about possible visual narratives of the life of St Katherine that people may have had in their homes. Such narratives would have existed in the form of wall paintings, stained glass windows, or altar panels, wall hangings and so on, but they are rarely mentioned in wills. Even if the buildings themselves have survived to bear witness to the observance of religious practices within them they are often denuded of all trace of the visual dimension of such observances. A rare survival of domestic interior decoration is provided by the wall paintings (dating from c. 1330) at Longthorne Tower, near Peterborough. These paintings depict biblical, moral, didactic and secular subjects, such as the Nativity, the Three Living and the Three Dead, the Apostles Creed with commentary and figures of St Anthony and St Paul.[90] There are some surviving examples of domestic glass too. For example the mid-fifteenth century panels which originally glazed the ground floor windows of 18, Highcross Street in Leicester and which were probably commissioned by Roger Wigston, three times mayor of the city. They include iconic representations of saints, as well as episodes from the life and joys of Mary.[91] This analysis of St Katherine's life is thus limited by a lack of extant domestic visual narratives to work from. But this does not prevent the suggestion of ways in which it may have been read within the

[88] For the will of Mistress Cromwell see Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia* 2, pp. 39-41; the will of Margaret Blakburn, ibid., pp. 46-51.

[89] For the will of Sir John Nevill see Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta*, pp. 264-266; the will of William Came of Newark, Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia* 4, pp. 117-118.

[90] Rouse, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, pp. 26-27.

[91] Marks, 'Domestic glass', in his *Stained Glass in England*, pp. 92-102: p. 97.

household.

The other religious and devotional objects frequently mentioned in wills are books. Much work has been undertaken over the last few years on the place and use of books within the household.[92] Wills provide us with evidence of legendary collections and saints' lives in the possession of the laity. For example, Oxford, Bodleian Library 21947 (Douce 372), a copy of the *Gilte Legende* contains an inscription recording that the book was bequeathed by John Burton, citizen and mercer of London, to his daughter Katherine Burton 'to haue hit and to occupye to hir owne vse and at hir owne liberte durynge hur lyfe'. After her death the book was to go to the prioress and convent of Holywell in Shoreditch, where Katherine may have been a nun. In 1445 the chantry priest William Revetour left a 'legendam Sanctorum in Anglie tractatene', to his sister Alice Haryngton, a lay woman.[93] Individual copies of saints' lives sometimes occur in wills and inventories too, although such relatively inexpensive pamphlets are not likely to be mentioned as frequently as actual books. Elizabeth Sewerby's inventory includes several of her books, including Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*, an English life of Christ, a pseudo-Bonaventuran meditation on the Passion and a life of St Katherine in English.[94] This provides further evidence for St Katherine's place within a corpus of affective devotional literature.

Household managers and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life

Although ultimate responsibility for the running and welfare of the household was seen to reside in the male figure of husband/father, it must

[92] See the works cited in note 2 above, for examples of texts which were circulating within late medieval households; also Lucy Toulmin Smith ed., *A Commonplace Book of the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1886), Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Aristocratic cultural patronage and book bequests, 1350-1500', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 64 (1982), pp. 522-548.

[93] For William Revetour's will, Raine, *Testamenta Eboracensia* 2, pp. 116-118.

[94] For Elizabeth Sewerby's inventory see ibid., p. 196. It should be noted that whenever the name St Katherine appears without qualification, as it does here, it is almost certainly a reference to St Katherine of Alexandria. References to any other St Katherine (Siena, Sweden) are always qualified. Hughes is thus incorrect in suggesting that the text in question is an English translation of St Catherine of Siena's *Dialogues*; *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 294.

not be forgotten that these households were frequently governed by women during the absence of their husbands, either due to the exigencies of war, diplomacy, or other business which had to be conducted away from the family home, or through death. As Archer points out, virtually all women of property could expect to exercise a measure of administrative responsibility, where and when the need arose.[95] Many men obviously shared Christine de Pisan's opinion on the matter:

> Any man is extremely foolish, of whatever class he may happen to be, if he sees that he has a good and wise wife, yet does not give her authority to govern in an emergency.[96]

It has been suggested by several scholars that such women were held to be responsible, broadly speaking, for the provision of education within the household. We have seen that Clanchy links the rise of lay literacy to women's possession of books, suggesting that women could function as domestic teachers. There is no firm evidence to support this suggestion; indeed, the phenomenon of domestic education is unlikely, by its very nature, to leave any such evidence. However, it is a suggestion that appears to be borne out by a variety of literary, historical and art historical sources, and is very important to this reading of St Katherine.[97] The prose life of St Katherine, as well as the versions by Bokenham and Capgrave, represent her as a household manager, ruling as queen for four years after the death of her father and her marriage to Christ: 'And iiii ȝere aftyr þis sche helde here housholde in here paleys whit full crystyn governaunce' (ai, p. 291). That St Katherine is shown to be running her own household, ensuring that its inhabitants are baptised, 'And all so sone as sche myghte, sche made all here meyne to receyve baptem' (ibid), and taught to conduct themselves as Christians thus has extremely interesting ramifications for the ways in which women may have read her, and appropriated her as a model for their own domestic experiences.

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[95] Rowena Archer, '"How ladies... who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates": women as landholders and administrators in the later Middle Ages', in P.J.P. Goldberg, ed., *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200-1500* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 144-181: p. 150.

[96] Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or the Book of the Three Virtues*, translated by Sarah Lawson (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 80.

[97] See Orme, *Education and Society*, p. 158; Ward, *English Noblewomen*, p. 95.

However, St Katherine provides a model of the ideal head of household, whether man or woman. Katherine manages to combine a life of action and contemplation and in so doing, sets an example for the rest of her household to follow. The ethos of the Mixed Life is most famously articulated in Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life* (written between 1380 and 1396), and *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (written before 1380).[98] The ultimate expression of a lay person's religious inclinations could be found in a convent or monastery, where the individual could give her or himself up wholly to the service of God. But this was not always possible or practical for a majority of the laity, a fact recognised by the late-fourteenth century author of the Scottish Legendary. In the Prologue he discusses the ways in which men of high status, 'lordis... / ßat steris landis and haly kirke', find it difficult not to be distracted by wordly concerns and explains that he has undertaken the present work to provide an antidote to the concomitant 'ydilnes,/ gret foly, quhile, & vantones', instructing his audience:

> ... quhene ßai hafe ßare thing done,
> ßat afferis ßare stat, alsone
> ßai suld dresse ßare deuocione,
> in prayere & in oracione,
> or thingis ßat ßare hert mycht stere
> tyl wyne hewine, tyl ßat ßai are here[99]

The author continues with a recommendation that in addition to setting aside time for prayer and contemplation, his 'lordis', and implicitly ladies as well, should read or hear saints' lives, in order to assimilate the exemplary behaviour which they will thus encounter into their own daily conduct.[100] This anonymous author was probably influenced by the definitive articulation of the Mixed Life ethos provided by Hilton. Hilton's treatise on the *Mixed Life* was written in the late fourteenth century and survives, wholly or in substantial parts in sixteen manuscripts.[101]

> ßis medeled liyf schewed oure lord [in him silf] to ensample of alle oßere ßat han taken ße [state and ße] charge of ßis medeled liyf, ßat ßei schulde oontyme ȝeue

[98] For Hilton see Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics*, pp. 116-123, for the text of the *Mixed Life* see S.J. Ogilvie Thompson, ed., *Walter Hilton's Mixed Life edited from Lambeth Palace MS 472* (Salzburg, 1986). For *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* see G.G. Perry, ed., *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse* , E.E.T.S. o.s. 26 (Oxford, 1867), pp. 51-62.

[99] Metcalf, *Legends of the Saints 1*, p. 1.

[100] Ibid, p. 2.

[101] See Ogilvie-Thomson, *Mixed Life*, p. x.

> hem to bisynesse of wordli ƿynges at resonable neede, and to ƿe werkes of actif liyf in profite of here euen-Cristene whiche ƿei haue cure of and an oƿir tyme ȝeue hem hooli to deuocion and to contemplacion in praieres and in meditacioun.[102]

The audience are encouraged to create space for religion in their lives and saints' lives are presented as part of this construction of the ideal lay religious life.[103] Hilton advises the reader:

> Also for to ƿenke on seyntis of oure lord, as on apostelis, martires, confessours and hooli virginis; bihoold inwardli ƿe hooli lyuynge, ƿe grace and ƿe vertues ƿat oure lord ȝaaf hem here lyuynge, and bi ƿis mynde stire ƿyn owen herte to take ensample of hem vnto betere lyuynge.[104]

St Katherine's life as it was described in the *Legenda Aurea*, provided a suitable model of faith and fortitude but during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries her life developed in ways that made it directly relevant to the Mixed Life ethos. A very important part of the creation of an intimate relationship with Christ was to meditate on his life and passion, through the medium of a text such a Love's *Myrour*. The importance of intense visualisation and mental participation in Christ's passion was 'to stire ƿyne affeccioun̄s more to ƿe loue of him', and 'to norische ƿe fier of loue in his soule ƿat it be not quenchid'.[105] As we shall see, the fire of love was a particularly important feature of the writings of Rolle, and becomes a part of the narrative of St Katherine's life.

The mystical marriage which Katherine undergoes can be read as the ultimate expression of union between the individual and Christ, and as a way of making space for him in one's life. That affective contemplation on the Passion was designed to inspire love demonstrates its connection with erotic and bridal metaphors for such union. This union is usually thought in terms of its relevance to women in religion, but imaginative union was not beyond the experience of the laity. In at least one manuscript, that made for Anne Harling, St Katherine is specifically presented as the ideal lay

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[102] Ibid., p. 18.

[103] The implication of the Scottish author's exhortation is that lay people are not making time in their lives for religious observances. Perhaps there is a sense in which he is proposing an alternative social ethos in opposition to the wordly concerns (as he, a priest, sees them) of the emerging secular elites. Further investigation of this issue is beyond the scope of the present study however.

[104] Ogilvie-Thomson, *Mixed Life*, pp. 54-55.

[105] Ibid., p. 52, p. 39.

reader, imbued with affective piety and inflamed with compassion and love for Christ:

> This holy virgen and martir is remembrid in scripture in so moche that euery man and woman may haue a respecte and se what meret is youen unto them that stedfastly with herte, will and mynde in the laues of allmyghte God be daily and howrely abiding, havyng remembrans on the precius passion of Criste Jhesu [then follows a brief summary of the life of Christ, with a particular focus on the blood and pain of the crucifixion]...
> This must euery creature remember, as did this holy maiden and virgen; for she remeberde this daily and howrely, and printid hit in hir mynde, and thoght on his passion and payne, and rewardid hym with hir consiens and good herte to hir power, and severally chose hym for hir speciall love, and no love but hym, as ye shall finde herafter. Moreover, þis virgen daily remembrid the mekenes and compassion, with þe lamentable teris of pite, whiche the virgen Mare had in the tyme of his precus passion... Thus this virgen mary kyndly loved hir sonne, whiche was a precedent unto this holy virgen...
> here mey mense that intendith and purposith to leve in vertu evydent ensempill of vertus leuyng.[106]

It would appear that such a reading of St Katherine, while not made so explicit in any of the other manuscripts, may account for the frequent occurence of her life within them. We have seen that Bokenham constructs St Cecilia as a model of the Mixed Life, but St Katherine was far more popular than St Cecilia, and I would suggest that her status as bride of Christ was part of her relevance to the lay owners of these manuscripts.

Mystical marriage: an introduction

This reading of the mystical marriage is linked to the contemplative ardour encouraged by such texts as Love's *Mirror* and the erotic metaphors which came to be used increasingly to describe the individual's relationship with Christ.[107] Rolle begins his *Ego Dormio,* possibly written for a lay woman considering the enclosed life,

> I wil becuma messanger to bryng þe to his bed þat hath mad þe and boght þe, Crist, þe kynges son of heuyn, for he wil wed þe if þou wil loue hym.[108]

We have access to much of the prescriptive literature describing such

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[106] The prologue is to be found on ff. 115 r-v. See Kurvinen, 'Life of St Catharine', pp. 59-60. I am very grateful to Jacqueline Jenkins for allowing me to use her transcription of this passage. The life of St Katherine contained in Harley 4012 does not include the mystical marriage, but is nonetheless influenced by the tradition of presenting her as bride of Christ.

[107] Other readings of the mystical marriage are possible, but the following seems most appropriate to a lay domestic setting.

[108] S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse,* E.E.T.S. o.s. 293 (1988), p. 26.

meditative techniques, and we can be sure that they were implemented by contemporary women and men, because much of the visionary writing left by various saints and others, is predicated on these very techniques. In the case of visionaries such as Mechtild of Hackeborn, Catherine of Siena and Margery Kempe, erotic metaphors were taken to their logical zenith as these women saw themselves undergoing mystical union with Christ or God.[109] To experience a mystical marriage with Christ was the most intense form of identification with his humanity, and perhaps to our eyes, an audacious practice in which the visionary imagined not her inclusion in the narrative of Christ's life, but his inclusion in the narrative of hers. For these women the marriage was literal, happening at a particular time and often in a particular place, just as St Katherine's does. In this respect they were building on and progressing from the writings of male clerics who used images of union metaphorically.

The twelfth century saw the composition of several commentaries on the Song of Songs, drawing on a tradition which went back to the days of Origen and beyond, which interpreted the poem allegorically as representing the relationship, for example, between God and his people, Christ and his Bride, the Church.[110] Bernard of Clairvaux wrote eighty-six sermons alone on the Song of Songs, sermons originally intended for monks, but translated into the vernacular and disseminated among a wider audience from the start.[111] Bernard mainly expounds on love and union as

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[109] For the Middle English version of Mechtild of Hackeborn's mystical marriage see Theresa Halligan, ed., *The Book of Ghostly Grace of Mechtild of Hackeborn* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 408-412. I am indebted to Rosalynn Voaden for drawing this text to my attention and for some invaluable discussions of visionary women and mystical marriages. For Raymond of Capua's description of Catherine of Siena's mystical marriage see *Life of St Catherine of Siena*, pp. 99-101. For Margery Kempe's mystical marriage to the Godhead see Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 86-89.

[110] See Matarasso, *The Cistercian World*, p. 65; Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Jesus as mother and abbot as mother: some themes in twelfth-century Cistercian writing', in her *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982), pp. 110-169. See also Wolfgang Riehle, 'The Song of Songs and metaphors for love in English mysticism', in his *The Middle English Mystics*, translated by Bernard Standring (London, etc., 1981), pp. 34-55; Sara de Ford, 'Mystical union in the *Melos Amoris* of Richard Rolle', in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Exeter, 1980), pp. 173-201.

[111] Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, p. 66; three of Bernard's sermons are to be found on pp. 66-83.

the abstract relationship between the Word and the believing soul.[112] This form of exegesis remained popular throughout the Middle Ages, although it too was affected by spiritual and devotional trends. For Rolle the feminised soul was the Bride of Christ, who longed to be eternally united with her bridegroom.[113] This more eroticised formulation of mystical union moves closer to the visionary experiences of several female mystics.

More literal bridal or erotically unitive imagery, where the individual is chosen to undergo actual union with Christ, often in some kind of ceremony, is more prevalent in the writing of women than of men. Most of the texts upon which this argument draws were written by women who had taken vows as nuns, or were leading some form of organised religious life, as beguines for example. The following section will examine the way that the life of St Katherine explicitly presents her as the type of the mystical bride and its relation to the writings and experiences of some of the female visionary writers. The work of Watson on Julian of Norwich draws attention to the dangers of assuming that English spirituality, and in particular the visionary experience of women, was an integral part of the European tradition.[114] However, the example of Margery Kempe and evidence of book ownership from wills illustrates how familiar English women and men were with the lives and writings of continental holy women such as Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden.[115] In addition, those who could travel abroad, as Margery did, would also have learned about women such as Angela of Foligno from visiting the very places where they had lived. Given the great importance which St Katherine appears to have had for the construction of Margery's hagiographic identity, it is no surprise that she too underwent a mystical marriage, which entailed all the typical elements, as will be outlined below.

Margery Kempe also provides a useful introduction to the second part of the argument; that the mystical marriage, in its relation to affective piety could have a wider relevance for lay women and men. We have

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[112] Ibid., p. 65.

[113] de Ford, 'Mystical Union', p. 179.

[114] Nicholas Watson, 'The composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*', *Speculum* 68 (1993), pp. 637-683: pp. 644-657.

[115] Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, pp. 292-295.

already seen that the writings of female mystics could find resonances with lay men and I shall explore the proposition that this apparently 'female' experience of Christ was not inapplicable to, or closed off from them. Given that the feminine can be seen to have represented the human, it was perfectly possible for lay men to identify with Katherine through the feminine. This adds further weight to my argument that St Katherine functioned as a model for the Mixed Life. We have already seen that in one manuscript at least, Harley 4012, she is explicitly constructed as the ideal active-contemplative.

Exemplary bride of Christ

The mystical marriage may have been added to the life of St Katherine as part of the phenomenon of *brautmystik*: bridal mysticism.[116] This assertion cannot be proven, but it is plausible that this episode was intended to provide a narrative blue-print for the would be bride of Christ. That the mystical marriage became an almost 'canonical' part of her life, with Katherine very much cast in the role of the swooning, tearful, lovelorn visionary, suggests that the authors of these texts recognised the important role that nuptial imagery played in female devotions, and even encouraged and endorsed its use. That the life of St Katherine was chosen as the medium for this promotion indicates that it was a widely read text, into which the mystical marriage episode was easily assimilated. This gave the text an exemplary relevance for individuals seeking to formalise imaginatively their intimate relationship with Christ. There is little evidence of women directly acknowledging the example of St Katherine, but in many respects her popularity would have rendered any such acknowledgement unnecessary.

There are some traces of St Katherine's influence however, the most explicit example of which is provided by the life of St Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). Raymond of Capua was evidently aware of the part played by the life of St Katherine of Alexandria in the genesis of Catherine of Siena's own mystical marriage:

[116] For *brautmystik* see Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, pp. 14-18.

> Reader, you may know of another Catherine, a martyr and queen, who, as we read, was similarly married to the Lord after she was baptized. Well, here you have a second, most happy Catherine being solemnly married to the same Lord after achieving great victories over the flesh and the enemy.[117]

By drawing this comparison Raymond provides a paradigm for Catherine's experience and indicates his approval of it. Catherine would have been very conversant with the life of her name saint, and indeed, Catherine feels St Katherine's presence at a later point in her life.[118] A familiarity with the mystical marriage would lead to its internalisation. The episode would thus become part of the individual woman's affective strategy for union with Christ in an apparently uncontrived fashion. In the case of women, such as Catherine, who were canonised, beatified, or at the very least granted a saintly reputation by their official biographers, there is, of course, little indication of a self-conscious process of imitation of St Katherine, or any other mystic. However, given that there is an increasing sense of the necessity and desirability of mystical union in the lives and writings of these women, the possibility of direct imitation should not be ruled out. This is certainly an important factor in the experiences of Margery Kempe.[119]

An interesting side-light is thrown on this issue by an episode in the life of the Florentine nun Benedetta Carlini (1590-1661) whose story is relevant to the study of female mystics and a consideration of their models and motivations.[120] Benedetta was concerned to construct herself as a famous and revered mystic. Apparently greatly influenced by the life of Catherine of Siena, she recognised the importance of mystical marriage to Christ, in order to establish that she had indeed been divinely chosen and to confirm her authority. Thus Benedetta arranged for her wedding to be conducted by the Virgin in her convent church (the Theatines) before a large audience.[121]

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[117] Lamb, *Life of St Catherine of Siena*, p. 100.

[118] At the execution of her protegée, as we saw in chapter 2.

[119] The writings and life of Catherine of Siena were known in early-fifteenth century England, which may also have had an influence on Margery Kempe. For more on Catherine of Siena's works in Middle English see Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, pp. 95-107.

[120] Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 1986).

[121] Ibid., pp. 67-72.

Perhaps sub-conscious imitation provides the most useful way of identifying this process, as there is no way to tell exactly what forces were at work in the mind of the individual visionary. However, by examining the description of Katherine's marriage and the events leading up to it we can see that Katherine is presented in terms which must have found resonance with other female visionaries in addition to Catherine of Siena. St Katherine's experiences can be paralleled in many of their writings, and she seems to have provided a particularly useful model for Margery Kempe. Margery's experiences show us how relevant the mystical marriage could be not only to virgins, but to married lay women as well. This leads us into a wider consideration of lay readings and appropriations of the episode. Not all visionaries who experienced union with Christ underwent an actual ceremony, but Margery Kempe does describe a full wedding, which bears marked similarities to St Katherine's, as an examination of the prose life shows.

Adryan, having been sent by the Virgin, brings Katherine into the desert. For a while they wander, lost, but finally Katherine sees a 'ryall mynster' in the distance (aii, p.10).

> And when þei enterred in to þei body of þe churche sche harde A marvelles meledy of swetenesse þe whych passed all hartes to dyscreue And þer with sche behelde a ryall quene stondyngin hur astate with greyt multytudes of aungelles & seyntes a bowte hur... þen þis nobull company of martyrs with þe felaschyp of virginis þe ledde þis yong quene be twene þem to geder be for thys ryall emprece [ibid., pp. 11-12]

This is the Virgin Mary, who tells Katherine that she has been 'specially choson among all wemen to be soferantly worschypped with þe loue of my son' (ibid., p. 12). Mary first arranges for Katherine to be baptised by Adryan, with herself standing as godparent. Now all is ready for her to meet her groom...

> sche went forþe with hur [Mary] to þei comein to þe quere and as þay entured in þer come so greyt a swetnes a yene þem þat it passed all hartes to þynke it And with þat sche be helde þe semelyst yong kyng standyng at þe auter crovnned with a ryche crovnne havyng a bowte hym greyt multytude of aungells and seyntes [ibid., pp. 13-4]

Katherine is completely overcome and swoons. Christ raises her up and taking her by the hand says:

> Kateryne conye fynde it in your herte to love me best afore all þyng ye lord sche sayd so have y dovne and schall whyle I lyve for Y love no þyng but yow only

> And for all oþer sayde þe kyng of blysse y take yow here Kateryne to my wededewyfe be heytyng yow truly never to for sake you wylys your lyfe lastys And afterþis lyfe y schall bryngyow to endelys lyfe where ye schall dwell with me in blyswith owten ende in tokenyng wherof y sett þis ryng vppon your fynger þe whychye schall kepe in remebrance of me as your weddyng ryng [ibid., p. 14]

Christ tells Katherine that she will be martyred for his sake, which Katherine accepts with equanimity, assured that he will always be with her.

> with þis he made Adryan do vppon his westment & go to masse and say þeservyse over hom þat longes to þe costom of weddyng and þe soferyn lord ofblysse helde his spowse be þe hande knelyng with hur all þe masse whyle be forþe auter... the speritus of hevon ioyed of þis maryage so furþerly þat hit washarde þe same tyme as þei knelyd to geder how þei in heuen song þis verseSponsus amat sponsam Saluator visitat illam Thys was with so greyt melody þa tno tong my3t tell hit and þe was þis a solempne and a soferand maryage [ibid., p.15]

After the ceremony Christ blesses her and leaves, telling her that she shall receive further instruction from Adryan. Katherine swoons again, and when she comes to she discovers that everything has vanished, except Adryan and her wedding ring. It appears that they were in his hermit's cell all along, thus Katherine's marriage takes the form of a waking vision, rather than a dream.[122]

> nowis hur hart bro3t in so gret movrnyng þat sche cowthe do no thyng but wepeand syke tyll at þe laste sche behelde þe ryng þat owre lord seytte on hur fyynger[ibid., p. 16]

It is easy to find parallels between this account and that of Margery Kempe's mystical marriage. Katherine's wedding is witnessed by a great assembly of 'aungellys and seyntes'. Margery Kempe's wedding, which takes place in 'þe Postelys Cherch at Rome' is witnessed by 'alle þe xij apostelys & Seynt Kateryn & Seynt Margarete & many oþer seyntys & holy virgynes wyth gret multitude of awngelys'.[123] Margery is actually married to the Godhead, rather than to Christ. God tells her 'Dowtyr, I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schweyn to þe my preuyteys & my cownselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn end'.[124] God's words here echo those of Christ to Bridget of Sweden, 'I haue chosen þe and taken þe to mi spouse, for it pleses me and likes me to do so, and for I will shewe to þe mi preuai

[122] In this respect it diverges from the Contintental version in which St Katherine is married to the infant Christ in a dream.

[123] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 85-86.

[124] Ibid., p. 86.

secretis'.[125] This also mirrors the Virgin's description of Katherine as 'specially choson'.

Margery is afraid to marry the Godhead, fearing that it might somehow separate her from Christ, but this does not prove to be the case. Throughout the book she is presented as the bride of Christ himself, who refers to her frequently as his spouse. Perhaps marriage to the Godhead is designed to further highlight her singularity, as she is joined to the first, rather than the second person in the Trinity. The rest of the chapter outlines some of the special tokens of grace which are bestowed on her as confirmation of divine favour, such as hearing sweet sounds and smelling sweet odours. The ceremony also serves to legitimise and authorise her intimate relationship with Christ. Chapter 36, placed directly after the mystical marriage chapter uses highly erotic language to describe their relationship. This arrangement could serve to describe the consummation of the marriage just described.

> þerfore I most nedys be homely wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, & þu mayst boldly, whan þu art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth þe modyr & wil þat þu loue me, dowtyr, as a good wife owyth to lous hir husbonde. & þerfore þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as swetly as thow wylt.[126]

Although the life of St Katherine does not use such overtly sexual imagery, it does have a place in the creation of Christ as lover, describing him as 'þe semlyst yong kyng', echoing Margery's first vision of Christ as 'most semly, most bewtyous, & most amyable þat euyr mygth be seen wyth mannys eye'.[127] The Virgin Mary plays a key role in Katherine's marriage, ensuring that she is properly prepared and then presenting her to Christ. Mary frequently takes part in mystical marriages, presenting the visionary to Christ, as she does in the description of Catherine of Siena's mystical marriage.[128]

It is also common for Christ to make some sort of wedding vow to

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[125] Roger Ellis, *The Liber Celestis of Bridget of Sweden*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 291 (1987), p. 8.

[126] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 90.

[127] Ibid., p. 8.

[128] See Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p.11; Lamb, *Life of St Catherine of Siena*, p. 99.

his spouse as he does to Katherine. God tells Margery, in words which echo an actual wedding vow:

> I take þe, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so þat þu be buxom & bonyr to do what I byd þe do. For dowtyr, þer was neuyr childe so buxom to þe modyras I xal be boþe in wel & in wo, -to help þe and comfort þe. And þerto I make þe suyte.[129]

Katherine is given a ring by Christ to seal their union and to act as a constant reminder of it. Margery is not given a ring at her actual mystical marriage, but we hear that:

> The forseyd creatur had a ryng þe whech owyr Lord had commandyd hir to do makyn whil she was at hom in Inglond & did hir gravyn þerup-on, 'Ihesus est amor meus'.[130]

Margery would have worn this ring as token of her vow of chastity (whether or not it was officially sanctioned), but this ring is also intended to serve as a sign of her mystical marriage. Margery refers to it as 'my bone maryd ryng to Ihesu Crist, as ho seyth'.[131] It is of great importance to Margery:

> sche thowt sche wold not a lost þe ryng for a thowsand pownde meche mor because þat sche ded it makyn be þe byddyng of God. & also sche weryd it be hys byddyng, for sche purposyd befor-tyme er þan sche had it be reuelacyon neuyr to a weryd ryng. [132]

The ring which Christ gives to Mechtild of Hackeborn is full of symbolic meaning, as well as being 'in tokenynge of desponsacion'.[133] Christ tells her, 'I schalle gyffe þe a rynge rychelye ande nobelye arayed with vij precyouse stones, which stonys þowe mayste remembre the vij articles of my godhede'.[134]

Even this brief survey of texts shows that St Katherine is presented as the ideal bride of Christ. However, even this apparently most female of experiences should not be essentialised as of relevance only to women in religious orders or indeed only to women. More literal bridal imagery is found more frequently in women's writing or writing about women, but it is by no means absent from men's or from writing about men. Hamburger cites the example of one Friedrich Sunder (c. 1254-1328), chaplain to the

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[129] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 87.

[130] Ibid., p. 78.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Halligan, *The Book of Ghostly Grace*, p. 409.

[134] Ibid.

nuns at Engelthal near Nuremberg.[135] After his death the nuns compiled a spiritual biography, in which Sunder's life is recounted in terms of paradigms and conventions which are generally reserved for the lives of holy women. In particular Sunder's soul is represented as the bride of Christ. It is perhaps to be expected that women writers would use such language, but the fact that they use it to describe the devotional experiences of a man indicates that we must beware of reading such imagery in exclusively male/female terms. The nuns evidently found nothing incongruous in the use of feminine metaphors to describe Sunder's relationship with Christ, and this signals a possible wider application for the mystical marriage of St Katherine, beyond her function as a model for female mystics, or for men in religion such as Sunder.

St Katherine as exemplar of lay piety and the 'medeled liyf'

We have seen how important meditation on the Passion was for the construction of devotional space in the mind of the lay person. To enlarge on this point, it is important to recognise that in the later Middle Ages there was an increasing tendency to read and describe Christ's suffering as having been primarily motivated by love. For the individual seeking to give this a personal relevance and resonance, the crucifixion could be read as the moment of consummation between Christ the Redeemer, and her or his soul. A particularly striking formulation of this image is provided by Mechtild of Hackeborn as Christ tells her to consider the seventh jewel in her wedding ring thus:

> bethenke ƥe in whate manere and howe I wente into the chambre of ƥe crosse. And [as] spowsis gyffen here cloythes to mynstrallys, ryght so I gaffe mye cloythynge to knyghtes, ande mye body to thame ƥat schuldene crucifie me. Ande than I straykede owte myne armes and myne handdys to be naylede with herde nayles, ande than I sange songys of a wunderfulle softenesse in ƥe chambyr of luffe, ande ƥat was on ƥe crosse. After ƥis I openede my herte to the for 3owe schulde comeyn, ande ƥat was whan I toke a slepe of luffe with ƥe deyenge on the crosse.[136]

If Christ had died for love then those whom he had saved owed him a great debt of love and service in return. Thus when Christ tells Katherine

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[135] Hamburger, 'The visual and the visionary', pp. 177-178 for the following.

[136] Halligan, *The Book of Ghostly Grace*, pp. 411-412.

> And nowe me dere wyfe be glade and strong of hart for ye moost do greyt þynges for my name and reyseve greyt tormentyng and payne & moche & sore strokes in your necke [a ii, p. 15]

Katherine replies in exemplary fashion:

> a lord y þanke yow with all my hart of all greyt marces be sekeyng yow my soferent lord þat makes me worþy to be of your lyne þat suffurde so myche for me þat y may in som þyng be lyke to yow þat my hart loues a boue all þyng [ibid]

It is the love which Katherine cherishes for Christ which enables her to stand firm against her parliament, to undertake a perilous journey across the desert, and ultimately to suffer torture and death:

> for hyt was he þat had kyndulled in hur hart a brennyng fyre of loue of hym þe whych schuld neuer be qwenchyd for no payne ne trubilacoun And þat was wele sene after in hur gloryus passyon [ibid., p. 6]

Actual martyrdom was no longer an option for most Christians in the later Middle Ages, although Margery Kempe was not alone in contemplating the ways she could spectacularly die for Christ. Nevertheless, the love which was aroused in Katherine even before she became a Christian, could and should have been emulated by all. With particular relevance to the lay, domestic context, the love shown by Christ, and love for Christ was something which should be regularly meditated on with fervent compassion, as part of a strategy for eschewing worldy concerns, and to provide a space for contemplation. It is through the medium of love that the lay person could be drawn into union with Christ, to participate in the kind of intimate relationship with him enjoyed by those female mystics with whose lives and experiences many of them would have been familiar. That there is a link between the prose life of St Katherine and other devotional works which sought to train the reader in the contemplative techniques of affective piety is demonstrated by the reference to the 'brennyng fyre of loue' which Katherine feels. By using this language the author places Katherine on the highest level of love, the 'synguler' as described by Richard Rolle:

> he or sho þat is in þis degre may wel feele þe fyre of loue brennynge in har soule as þou may fele þi fynger bren if þou put hit in þe fyre. Bot þat fyre, if it be hoot, is so delitable and wonderful þat I can nat tel hit.[137]

Rolle wrote this text *The Form of Living* for the anchoress Margery Kirkby, but it was also widely read by lay women and men, suggesting that the form of living which it outlined could be suitably adapted to the life of those who

[137] Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle*, p. 17.

had to combine contemplation with action. When Adryan comes to Katherine's study he tells her the following about the Virgin Mary; 'Madame, it is ƥe property of ƥat lady to loue and charice moost ƥo ƥat refuse hem selffe & all erthely ƥynges for ƥe loue of hur son' (a ii, p. 9). Later, the Virgin commends Katherine to Christ with these words,

> here i have broȝt yow as your wylle is your meke sarvant and sche hatte maeyden kateryne ƥat for yor loue haƥe for sakyn all erthely kynges and is commyn allon at my sendyng with olde Adryan for yetyng all erƥely gudand hur estate [ibid., p. 14]

This could be seen as exemplary, therefore, only for those who, like Margery Kirkby, were leading some sort of officially recognised, enclosed religious life, as anchoress, nun, or monk. However, as we have seen, Katherine returns to the world. This is partly to prove herself worthy of the Virgin's choice of her as bride for Christ, through the medium of martyrdom. But she has another duty as well, to spread her new faith amongst those over whom she has authority, and for whose wellbeing she has responsibility. She does this partly as any virgin martyr does, through the powerful example of her forthright conduct in the face of torture and death. But, in addition, as we have seen, she is also represented as the exemplary head of a household and is seen to perform this function for four years. During this time although 'all hur ioye was ever to speke and to ƥynke on hur lorde and spowse ther was no ƥyng ellus in hur mynde' (a ii, p. 16) she does not forget her earthly responsibilities, making provision for all her household, and others of her subjects, to be baptised and taught the tenets of Christianity. As we have seen, this provides an ideal model for the owners of these manuscripts containing St Katherine texts.

Women and household education

Within the household 'education' could entail a variety of meanings. From some of the conduct texts contained in household manuscripts it can be seen that education could be as much about the acquisition of social and religious mores as learning grammar or arithmetic. As Orme's work shows, education in late medieval England could be defined as that which children and young people of both sexes learn to fit them for adult life, which

includes two components; firstly the acquisition of knowledge about God, the world, society and their respective laws, and secondly the mastery of techniques such as manners, behaviour, literacy, work and play.[138]

The educational attainments of St Katherine appear to be of prime importance to the frequency with which she appears in these manuscripts. In common with many contemporary literary heroines, such as Melior in *Partenope of Blois*, and Felice in *Guy of Warwick*, Katherine receives the education of a prince, at the hands of masters. This is because all three girls are their fathers' heirs.[139] Katherine must be prepared to rule her father's kingdom, and thus is educated far beyond the normal requirements for a girl of her age and status. The ages assigned to various stages of Katherine's upbringing precisely match contemporary thinking on the matter, as the writings of Giles of Rome testify.[140] Katherine's academic education begins when she is seven, and continues for seven years, until she is fourteen, at which point her father dies, leaving her to rule alone.[141] A further four years elapse, during which she is married to Christ and rules her kingdom wisely, until the arrival of Maxentius. Seven was held to be the age at which children passed from the informal educational training of the nursery to more formal studies.[142] Such a transition was far more marked for boys than girls, as they passed from the care of women into the hands of masters to receive a more specifically academic education.[143] Giles of Rome felt that this education should last for seven years, as does Katherine's.[144] By the late-thirteenth century fourteen was the age in English common law at which noble girls ceased to be minors and could inherit property, and it can be, therefore, no co-incidence that Costus dies once Katherine has reached this

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[138] Orme, *Education and Society*, p. 222.

[139] Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 156-157, for the education of heroines, including St Katherine. See also Ferrante, 'The education of women in the Middle Ages', p. 32. For the education of princes see Orme, ibid., pp. 18-22.

[140] See Orme, ibid., p. 147.

[141] This is made most explicit in d, p. 8.

[142] Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 7.

[143] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[144] Ibid., p. 147.

age.[145]

In this section I shall concentrate on the issue of education in a more narrow sense, as the acquisition of knowledge to effect self improvement (particularly in a religious or spiritual sense) or the training to fit oneself for a particular social or cultural role, such as that of household manager.

Historical and literary evidence appears to reflect the reality of education as a mother's responsibility, implicit in representations of St Anne teaching the Virgin to read, as we have seen. A poem dated c. 1300 and based on the treatise written by Sir Walter Bibbesworth for Denise de Mountchesney to enable her to teach her children the vocabulary of husbandry and management which they would need when they grew up, includes among a list of female occupations the statement that 'woman teacheth child on book'.[146] Several of Chaucer's characters are described as having been taught by their mothers, notably the boys in the Prioress', Pardoner's and Manciple's Tales.[147] Christine de Pisan observes that 'the wise lady who loves her children dearly will be diligent about their education'.[148] The lives of several medieval saints also assign to the mother the role of first teacher, fitting the observation of Proverbs 4: 3-4; 'I was the only son of my mother and she taught me'.[149]

The mother herself, or in higher status households, governesses to whom she delegated responsibility, appear to have been held to be primarily responsible, for the upbringing and training of children and young women. They would teach correct behaviour, deportment, dancing and embroidery, as well as reading and religious tenets and observances. This training encompassed all the social, cultural and practical skills which girls would need to fit them for adult life as wives and mothers, and which

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[145] G.E. Woodbine and S.E.Thorne, eds., *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England* 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), p. 251, p. 320.

[146] Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 16; Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 198.

[147] Orme, *Education and Society*, pp. 223-224.

[148] de Pisan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, p. 67.

[149] Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 251.

they could, in turn, pass on to others.[150] This state of affairs reflects a passage in Titus 2: 2-5

> That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Children often spent part of their childhood in households other than their own: such an arrangement offered them the chance to widen their experience and training and forge valuable connections with other families.[151] Mothers may therefore, on occasion have found themselves responsible for the upbringing of several girls, not just their own, and this arrangement provides an interesting context for use of these St Katherine manuscripts.

The contents of the manuscripts

The saints whose lives appear most frequently in these St Katherine manuscripts are Sts Margaret (six), Mary Magdalene (three), and Anne (three). Several of them contain texts on the Virgin, such as Lydgate's life of our Lady (two) or an account of the Assumption (three). The life of St Dorothy appears in two manuscripts and the life of St Christina also appears in one manuscript and there is an apparent interest in female saints throughout this corpus. This is particularly marked in Chetham 8009 and British Library Arundel 168. Male saints such as Nicholas, Julian and Alexis do appear, but in only one manuscript each. This may indicate that these manuscripts are catering for female, or feminised readers and owners. That there is an interest in the figure of an eloquent, articulate woman, able to argue the finer points of Christian doctrine, and defend her

[150] For the education of medieval women see Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 106-109, pp. 156-163; *Education and Society*, pp. 161-175. Both of these studies present far more evidence and a much more thorough investigation of the issue than is contained in his earlier *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London, 1973), pp. 52-55. Other more general surveys of this issue are provided by Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, pp. 2-7; Sara Lehrman, 'The education of women in the Middle Ages', in Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, ed., *The Roles and Images of Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Pittsburgh, 1975).

[151] Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 59-60; see also Ward, *English Noblewomen*, pp. 93-97.

ability to do so, is underlined by the frequent inclusion of the lives of St Margaret and St Mary Magdalene in these manuscripts.[152] St Margaret is likewise presented as an educated woman, but unlike St Katherine, who receives a male education from masters, she receives a more typically female upbringing from a nurse. St Mary Magdalene provides an exemplar of the female preacher, privileged to be so by her close relationship to Christ. These three saints feature together in a poem written by Lydgate, where they are presented as being particularly dear to Christ for their efforts on his behalf, 'Iesu, for love of thes women thre,/I the beseeke, oonly for ther sake,/Of thy moost merciful gracious bounte'.[153] These three saints with their didactic words and exemplary action, presumably served a similarly educational function.

Household manuscripts frequently contain texts which are specifically concerned with the training of children or young people, and the maintenance of their health. Two of the manuscripts containing lives of St Katherine, Chetham 8009 and Arundel 168, contain the translation of the *Distichs of Cato*, a Latin school poem, made by Benedict Burgh, who subequently became archdeacon of Colchester. This translation was undertaken in the 1440s or 1450s for William, son of Henry Viscount Bourchier, and was published by Caxton in 1483.[154] In its original form the poem would only have been suitable for the education of boys, but its translation into English, albeit originally for a boy, opens up the possibility that it was used in the education of girls, especially in the later fifteenth century, when it appears that the education of girls of noble status, at least, came to mirror that of their brothers much more closely.[155]

The text in this form would also be available to mothers educating their sons. Whether or not that education would then be taken over by clerics or professional masters would depend on the wealth and status of the individual household. Many of these educational texts would have been intended to inform both mother and son of the moral and social

[152] Here the eloquent woman is a positive rather than a negative figure.

[153] Henry Noble MacCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate 1*, E.E.T.S. E.S. (1911; reprinted 1961), pp. 134-135.

[154] Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 104.

[155] Ibid., p. 158; Orme, *Education and Society*, p. 171.

expectations and accomplishments of a young gentleman. For example, Arundel 168 contains a poem of seven stanzas upon 'Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Descrecione, Resone, Plesaunce and GodeWylle, and Curtesye and Norture', which would presumably provide guidance for the requsite social skills of genteel young persons.[156] The possible use of such texts in the training of girls must not be precluded, although this supposition is almost impossible to prove.

Other texts contained in these manuscripts are concerned with the deportment of children aimed at training them in the bearing fitting to their station, or indeed a higher station.[157] These texts could thus be used in the construction of a pseudo-aristocratic identity; the adoption of signifying practices which would distance oneself and one's behaviour from lower status individuals.[158] Three of the manuscripts include texts explaining the terms of hunting and carving game.[159] The acquisition of such knowledge, which is as much about correct table manners and etiquette as it is about the chase, was an essential part of the upbringing of a noble child, or of one who was educated in the ways of the aristocracy that she or he might emulate them in manner and demeanour.[160] That one of these texts is thought to have been written by a woman, Juliana Berners, for her child- 'My dere chylde... lystyn to yowre dame and she shall yow lere'- further underlines the role of woman as teacher and transmitter of essential knowledge to children, and others within her household.[161] Advocates

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[156] For a definition of 'courtesy' and courteous behaviour see Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy*, pp. 7-21. The only equivalent survey of literature directed at women is provided by Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, Conneticut, 1983).

[157] For a general introduction to courtesy literature see Nicholls, ibid., especially chapter 4 'The use of courtesy books in education and private study', pp. 57-74.

[158] This argument was influenced by Langland's discussion of the ways in which middle-class Victorian women 'policed the social borders', *Nobody's Angels*, pp. 24-61. For an example of the use of a text in the construction, indeed imposition, of an identity see Riddy, 'Mother knows best', pp. 6-13. Riddy has also discussed the condition of social uncertainty in which vernacular courtesy texts and household manuscripts have their significance, *Thomas Malory*, pp. 60-83.

[159] Porkington 10, Chetham 8009 and Advocates 19.3.1.

[160] Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 195-196.

[161] Barratt, *Women's Writing*, p. 234. For information on Berners' possible identity see pp. 232-233.

19.3.1 contains two well known educational texts: *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, by Lydgate and *The Lytlle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, both of which catalogue appropriate moral and social conduct for gentry children. Again, the focus is on male children but much of the behavioural 'map' thus laid out would have been appropriate to girls as well.

Both Advocates 19.3.1 and Porkington 10 contain medical recipes which can also be taken as evidence that the manuscipts were intended for use by women, as the practice of medicine in the household seems to have been a female pursuit.[162] As with education, women were evidently expected to have a certain proficiency which could be bolstered by professionals when necessary. For women who were heads or co-heads of households it seems to have been important for them to be knowledgeable in such matters, to be repositories of advice and information, able to intervene in any issue of import to the running of all domestic affairs. This was true even if they did not have a direct involvement in them. This is one of the respects in which St Katherine's position as a learned woman would have been of great relevance to these women.

The educational concerns of these manuscripts are amplified by the inclusion of pastoral/catechetical works, often of a formulaic nature, encompassing lists and expositions of, for example, the Seven Deadly Sins , the Ten Commandments, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Nine Virtues and the Seven Works of Mercy. These works form part of the late medieval catechetical initiative which sought to improve the level of religious education among both clergy and laity. The influence of the code issued by Archbishop Pecham in 1281, after the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, is clearly observable in these manuscripts.[163] These texts would be of particular use for the formative religious education of children. At baptism parents and god-parents were charged with ensuring that the child should learn the elements of the faith expounded upon in these

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[162] Araujo, 'Advocates 19.3.1', pp. 18-19.

[163] See Leonard Boyle, 'Fourth Lateran Council', passim; Marie Denley, 'Elementary teaching techniques and the Middle English religious didactic writings', in Helen Phillips, ed., *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S.S. Hussey* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 223-241. See above, pp. 112-114.

manuscripts.[164] Religious texts were, as we have seen, used as part of wider educative practices as well, in order that children should learn how to recognise letters, and thus use written texts in their devotions.[165]

The inclusion of texts such as these demonstrate that the manuscripts were often catering for people at different levels of education and devotion. Catechetical texts provided the foundation of knowledge which all Christians were required to learn, as we saw in chapter 3 in relation to sermons. Having mastered these formulae, one could progress on to treatises such as *Pore Caitif, Orologium Sapiencie,* or *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost.* Christine de Pisan seems to have a similar idea of spiritual and moral progression in mind when she recommends that after a girl has learned the religious offices and the Mass, 'she can be given books of devotion and contemplation or ones dealing with good behaviour'.[166] This further underlines the utility of these manuscripts.[167]

The manuscript setting of these lives of St Katherine thus suggests a more than haphazard connection between context and content, a connection that it is inextricably bound up with education and the part women played in it. The evidence presented above outlining women's education, book ownership and their apparently conventional status as household teachers provides a useful counterpoint to the great body of contemporary writings expounding the perceived intellectual inferiority of women, which often forms part of much wider rationalisations of their subordinate status.

It could be argued that as Katherine receives the equivalent of a university education such a reading would not be of relevance to the

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[164] Nicholas Orme, 'Children and the church in medieval England., *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45 (1994), pp. 563-587: pp. 564-68 for parents' (especially mothers') role in the informal assimilation of religion in the home.

[165] Orme, *Education and Society,* pp. 171-172.

[166] de Pisan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies,* p. 68.

[167] The other body of texts which these manuscripts have in common are verse romances. These texts, like saints' lives, probably provided both entertainment and edification for their readers. Further consideration of the relationship between hagiography and romance deserves more space than I am able to give it here. See Carol Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, 1987) and Stephen Knight, 'The social function of the Middle English romances', in David Aers, ed., *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History* (Sussex, 1986), pp. 99-122.

women, or indeed, most of the men, within a lay household.[168] This argument fits into a reading of virgin martyrs which sees them 'acting like men', or even as being masculinised. St Katherine provides a useful means of exploring this issue. She can be seen in some ways to be 'male', in her education, for example. The qualities of intelligence and eloquence which she displays are often identified as masculine, indeed, Christine de Pisan believed that for a woman to act in place of her husband it was 'fitting for her to have the spirit of a man'.[169] Given that 'acting as' or 'instead of a man' was a commonplace for the women who read these lives, it is not necessarily to be understood as signifying defeminisation. Katherine demonstrates strategies for subverting perceivedly 'manly' properties and attainments, not least through the exploitation and rejection of her 'unfeminine' education.

The feminisation of knowledge

Male anxiety about the educated and, in particular, the teaching woman has its roots in classical writings in which the educated woman is seen to be (for all her feminine loquacity) unwomanly and thus abnormal. Such reasoning obviously lay behind the unwillingness of Christine de Pisan's mother to have her daughter educated in the sciences.[170] There seems to have been a prevalent consensus that too much education would 'masculinise' a woman, destroying any attractiveness she might hold for the opposite sex, and also losing the respect that demure ignorance accorded to her. Presumably such thoughts were behind Christine's mother wishing her daughter to be kept busy with what Lady Reason lambastes as 'spinning and silly girlishness'.[171] The learned woman was seen to defy normality, to separate herself from the female world and female nature.[172] Attacks on

[168] The only literary heroine whose education comes close to reflecting the reality of an aristocratic girl's experience is Virginia, in the Physician's Tale, whose training is given over to a governess; Orme, *Education and Society*, pp. 229-230. St Margaret of Antioch is also brought up by a nurse.

[169] de Pisan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, p. 128, see also pp. 129, 158.

[170] de Pisan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, pp. 154-155.

[171] Ibid, p. 155.

[172] Labalme, *Beyond Their Sex*, pp. 4-5.

educated women often entail this sense that they are transgressing natural boundaries; roles for men and women which were held to have been established at the beginning of time, ever since 'Adam delf and Eue span'. Lollard women in particular opened themselves up to attack on this front:

> Some women eeke, thogh hir wit be thynne,
> Wele argumentes make in holy writ!
> Lewde calates! sittith down and spynne,
> And kakele of sumwhat elles, for your wit
> Is al to feeble to despute of it![173]

Hoccleve's words here are reminiscent of those of the men of Beverley to Margery Kempe, 'Damsel, forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne and carde as oþer women don'.[174] Lollard women were, of course learning and transmitting inappropriate doctrine, but the sense is that they should not presume to learn anything at all, beyond the required knowledge needed for salvation.[175] Women's intellectual capacities were not only attacked within the context of their heretical practices. The fourteenth-century Fransican Hugh of Digne complained that a friend read in the way 'a woman reads the psalter, who by the time she gets to the end, can't remember what she read at the beginning'.[176] The vicar of St Stephen's in Norwich is similarly caustic to Margery Kempe:

> Benedicte. What cowde a woman ocupyn an owyr er tweyn owryd in þe lofe of owyr Lord? I xal neuyr ete mete tyl I wete what 3e kan sey of owyr Lord God þe tyme of an owyr.[177]

However, Margery can say much, and her words convince the vicar that she 'was wel lernyd in þe lawe of God and indued wyth grace of þe Holy Gost'.[178] He subsequently defends her against her enemies, even the officers of the bishop, thus providing an example of male approval of female learning and knowledge.

It must not be assumed that women automatically internalised all these negative pronouncements on their intellectual abilities, despite the misgivings of Christine de Pisan's mother. The opening chapters of *The Book of the City of Ladies* dramatise Christine's successful struggle not to

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[173] Aston, 'Lollard Women Priests?', p. 443.
[174] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 129.
[175] Cross, '"Great reasoners in scripture"', passim.
[176] Camille, 'The language of images', p. 36.
[177] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 38.
[178] Ibid, p. 40.

succumb under the weight of anti-feminist 'authorities' which threatened to engulf her in self-detestation.[179] Having emphasised the extreme pronouncements prompted by male fear of the intelligent woman, it should also be remembered that a certain amount of education was deemed by many to be wholly appropriate for women; just as one did not tend to become literate just for the sake of it, but rather with some practical end in mind, so it was considered that, in moderation, education for girls could be a good thing.[180] As the Knight of the Tour Landry points out:

> as for redyng I saye that good and prouffytable is to al wymen. For a woman that can rede may better knowe the peryls of the sowle and her sauement than she that can nou3t of it for it hath be preued.[181]

In *The Book of the City of Ladies* Lady Reason tells Christine

> Thus not all men (and especially the wisest) share the opinion that it is bad for women to be educated. But it is very true that many foolish men have claimed this because it displeased them that women knew more than they did. Your father, who was a great scientist and philosopher, did not believe that women were worth less by knowing science; rather, as you know, he took great pleasure from seeing your inclination to learning.[182]

We can draw parallels between the opinions and practices this passage describes, and certain elements of the life of St Katherine. Costus also has great pride in his daughter's intelligence and takes considerable measures to further it:

> the fader havyng so greyt ioye of hur hye bewte And wysdame he Lette ordeyn to hur a large towre in his pallis with diuers chambers and steddeys þat no creature schulde come to hur to let hur of her stedy but when sche lyst [aii, p. 2]

A further parallel can be drawn between the two texts with Lady Reason's division of men into the wisest, who encourage women's education, and the foolish who are afraid of it. In this respect Porphirius and the Philosophers fall into the first category and Maxentius falls into the second. This contrast between the two groups of men has an important part to play in this reading of the life.

That Katherine is 'allowed' to argue publicly with clerks and get the better of them could be justified by the observation that she is the only

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[179] See Schibanoff, '"Taking the gold out of Egypt"', passim.

[180] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 19; Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (Michigan, 1948), pp. 170-171, for the pragmatic education of mercantile girls.

[181] Caxton, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 122.

[182] de Pisan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, p. 154.

available Christian capable of combatting them; they are all pagans that need to be converted for dramatic effect and God makes a point by thus elevating Katherine intellectually. However, an alternative reading sees this device as an authorisation of Katherine's status as a rhetorically able woman. Maxentius makes several attacks on Katherine which fit into an anti-feminist tradition.

During their initial debate Maxentius, rather sarcastically, points out to Katherine that he has trouble believing the truth of her doctrine because she is the only person proclaiming it, and even if she were 'an aungell' or 'an hevenly vertu' she cannot be believed without witnesses to vouch for what she tells him (ai, p. 307). The real reason why no-one should believe her however, is because 'þou art bot a freell womman' (ibid). The Philosophers are similarly scathing at the suggestion that Katherine is wise. Maxentius asks them to try and better her in a public debate:

> Then answerd onwith grete despyte and syde þus: 'This is a fayre counsell of an emperourthat for to confounde a freeall mayde hathe callyd to hym þe wysesste of þe worlde for þe fer parties, when on of owre boyes myght overcome here lyghtly' [a i, p. 311]

Unlike Maxentius, however, the Philosophers acknowledge Katherine's mastery as soon as it becomes apparent.

Maxentius is at pains to demonstrate that Katherine's learning is unnatural and therefore cannot be 'true' either in form or content. He recognises that she is 'whys' but still cannot accept that such knowledge can have been gained naturally. He accuses her of using 'arte magyk' (ibid., p. 335) on the Philosophers, Porphirius and the Empress. Such an accusation clearly reveals the ultimate expression of male anxiety surrounding the figure of woman as educated. In order to de-naturalise, and indeed emasculate her, various strategies are employed which declare her to be both ridiculous and unholy. This observation makes clear the parallel between Maxentius and the clerics who attacked women's intelligence and capacity to learn so vituperously. That Katherine, with the full approval of God, demonstrates that Maxentius, with his doubts and fears, is the unnatural one, is a likely conclusion for the readers of this life to have drawn.

Even a brief survey of the evidence for and about women's education

in the period reveals the dangers of assuming any kind of blanket attitude or practice. It is very difficult to draw firm conclusions about what women may have known because so much of their education was relatively informal and thus left no record. It seems likely that much of the anxiety of many male clerical writers about female learning was actually of a rather defensive nature. Although Christine de Pisan is the only medieval woman who has left written evidence of her belief that women were perfectly capable of being educated and that education could help redress the balance between male and female, she cannot have been alone in this view. It is very significant that the life of St Katherine explores the difference and conflict, not between pagan male and Christian female, but between paganism gendered as masculine and Christianity gendered as feminine. The texts of the life construct the feminine as rational, eloquent and educated and the masculine as intemperate, ignorant and bestial. The construction of the various protagonists can also be seen to explore the following proposition, articulated by Marbod of Rennes:

> Woman ought not to be censured simply because she is female, nor ought any man be heaped with praise simply because he is a man, but rather that vice should be censured in both sexes and virtue deserves praise equally in both.[183]

Herein lies the importance of Porphirius and the Philosophers. In most other virgin martyr narratives all of the male protagonists who play a role in the actual passion are irredeemably evil, or at the very least inherently unsympathetic. The more complex narrative of the life of St Katherine uses gendered distinctions to explore the differences between the sexes and ultimately demonstrates that, despite the fixed nature of biological sex, both men and women can be similarly gendered through properties and qualities identified, through the figure of St Katherine, as feminine. Man is not presented as an automatic paradigm in these texts; the feminine, embodied in both man and woman, is. By embracing Christianity and accepting its concomitant suffering, Porphirius and the Philosophers are feminised, spurred on by the example of St Katherine, and ultimately of Christ. They are also seen to be good men by their ability to recognise the truth of Katherine's doctrine and her ability to expound upon it, unlike Maxentius who cannot see beyond her beauty, or be directed by anything

[183] Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 232.

other than his animal lust. He is impressed by her eloquence, but he is really more interested in her great beauty, and it is this which prompts him to invite her back to the palace on the pretext of a further debate on Christianity:

> He [Maxentius] and all ƥat herd her had gret merveyll of her grete delygence and wyssedome and passynge beaute, for sche was fayre before all women that ƥoo lyved [ai, p. 303]

He is even worse than the usual virgin-martyr villain, because, as we discover, subsequently, he has a wife: 'ƥou schalt be next ƥe quene called lady in my paleys' (ibid., p. 319). Nevertheless, it is telling that there is no indication that the Philosophers, or Porphirius react to Katherine's appearance at all.[184] As shown above, the Philosophers make assumptions about Katherine's intellectual abilities before they have even seen her. Once confronted with Katherine, it is her infallible rhetoric alone which affects them. Porphirius, the soldier, similarly ignores Katherine's appearance in his concern to learn from her what rewards God offers to those who defend him on earth; he asks Katherine to describe the joys of Heaven for him.[185] The Christians forced to sacrifice to Maxentius' gods against their will do react to Katherine's beauty, but it arouses strength and faith in them, rather than lust:

> ƥe crysten ƥat were constreinyd to do sacryfice for dred of dethe tooke sucche corage to hem in the beholdynge of her saddenes and of her reverent beaute that ƥey had levyr suffyr dethe ƥen to forsake her faythe [ai, p. 305]

It can be seen, therefore, that the texts establish that the good men recognise that Katherine's sex has nothing to do with her mind or her capacity to teach and in this they set a forthright example, whereas Maxentius cannot consider her mind without reference to the body which houses it.

This juxtaposition of Maxentius and the Philosophers/Porphirius can be located within the debate on woman as preacher, which is only one part of a wider debate on the priestly functions which woman could (or could not) perform. This debate gained fresh impetus in late fourteenth- and early-fifteenth century England with the showcase trial of the Lollard

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[184] Similarly, during the trial of Joan of Arc several of her male followers testified that, although very beautiful, Joan had aroused no feelings of lust in them, even those who had seen her semi-naked. It is only the evil English guards who view Joan in such a fashion. See Edwards, 'Joan of Arc', p. 4, p. 6.

[185] As seen in chapter 3. See also d, pp. 49-50.

Walter Brut, which took place between 1391 and 1393.[186] Brut believed that women were capable of performing priestly functions; to consecrate the host, to grant absolution, and most importantly for our purposes, to preach. Alastair Minnis has demonstrated that the arguments for and against this belief are part of a long-standing tradition of theological discussion on the issue into which such noted theologians as Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas entered.[187] A representative negative view is provided by Humbert of Romans, who wrote that women had to be excluded from the pulpit because they lacked sufficient intelligence to preach, nor would it be in keeping with the inferior role in life which God has given them, and also because in such a position they would provoke immorality.[188] However, St Katherine is explicitly presented as a preacher and not just a teacher on a number of occasions in her life; the prose life begins by telling us that 'sche conuertyd...Athanasius by her holy prechynge' (ai, p. 221). In prison we are also told that Katherine 'began to preche þe quene of þe joyes of heven' (ibid., p. 321).

There seems to have been a consensus among theologians that it was permissible, in certain specific circumstances, for women to teach, perhaps even preach, provided it was done in private and to an audience of other women and children: 'A woman, because of her female sex, is by nature subject to man, or if not by nature, at least by the command of the Lord. Therefore it is not her place to preach in public'.[189] This is especially true because, according to St John Crysostom, 'The woman taught the man once and made him guilty of obedience, and ruined everything'.[190] By preaching in public to men it can be seen that Katherine apparently transgresses the laws of God and Nature, and is invested with a measure of spiritual

[186] Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 250-260, for some documents relating to the trial. For a specific consideration of the place of female saints such as Katherine and Mary Magdalene in the late fourteenth-century controversy see Blamires, 'Women and preaching', passim.

[187] Minnis, 'De Impedimento Sexus', pp. 1-4 for the sequence of sentence commentaries which deal with this issue.

[188] G.R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1340-1450* (New York, 1965), p. 5.

[189] Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 252, taken from the Walter Brut trial.

[190] Ibid, pp. 58-59, also p. 254; Minnis, 'De impedimento sexus', p. 19.

authority. This was obviously felt to provide a potentially dangerous paradigm, which threatened the doctrine of male-exclusive preaching, for theologians were at pains to establish that Katherine, and other preaching (and prophesying) women, such as Anna, Deborah and Miriam were only allowed so to do in a time of great need when normal laws of nature were suspended by divine sanction and anyone was able to preach, regardless of their condition, age or sex.[191] Thomas of Chobham uses St Katherine as a specific example of this, in fact, indicating the anxieties that her status as preaching woman could provoke.[192] It would seem that her example (and that of other women) needed explanation in some ecclesiastical contexts beyond that of academic debate.[193]

Anti-feminist literature provided plenty of evidence that, natural and divine law notwithstanding, women did not have the intellectual capacity to preach. But just in case, a further caveat was introduced, namely that the publicly preaching woman would enflame lust in her male audience: 'So that men will not be led into sexual desire by the public teaching of a woman it is forbidden to them to teach in public because in so doing they would harm men rather than benefit them'.[194] So, perhaps Maxentius is not to be blamed for reacting as he does to Katherine's speech; he is only acting as any 'real' man would. But just as Katherine can be seen to be rising above the 'natural' disadvantages which her sex has bestowed upon her, so too the Philosophers and Porphirius eschew the 'natural' male reaction to her and appraise her with their minds rather than their bodies. In response to Maxentius' vilification of her sex, quoted above, Katherine makes the following speech :

> I praye þe that þu suffre þi madnesse to be overcome, that so cruell perturbacion be nat in thi corage, þat holdeste þiself so myghti. For yf þu wilte be governed be good corage, thou schalte be a kyng; and yf þu be governed be þi body, thou scahlte be a servaunt [ai, pp. 307-309]

[191] Blamires, 'Women and preaching', p. 151.

[192] Minnis, 'De impedimento sexus', p. 20. Blamires points out how ironic it is that those, like Brut and other Lollards, 'who stood to gain most by insisting on the activities of female saints, were sometimes constrained by sectarian scepticism about such activities', ibid., p. 151.

[193] Blamires, ibid.

[194] Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 252-253, again from the Walter Brut trial.

In fact the subsequent behaviour and actions of Maxentius, the Philosophers and Porphirius serve to illustrate Katherine's argument that the rational man should be ruled by his mind, not his body, and should thus be completely unaffected by her sexual identity, provided that there is value in what she says. Maxentius' nature is thus defined as bestial, a point only underlined by his primeval raging later in the text. He simply cannot touch Katherine in any way at all, much to his frustration, and eventually even language forsakes him, completing his animalisation which is, of course, a demonisation as well. Just as Katherine takes the part of Christ in the narrative, so Maxentius is the devil, especially as the Devil himself, unusually for virgin martyr narratives, does not put in a personal appearance.

The ramifications for this reading, if it is related back to the almost canonical prescriptions against women's public speaking, are potentially heretical, if taken to the lengths of providing a justification for women's assumption of spiritual authority over men. I am not suggesting such a reading, although it is not entirely impossible; we have seen that one Lollard knight allowed his people to venerate, out of all the saints, only a statue of St Katherine.[195] Was this just for their benefit, or did this aspect of her life find resonance with Lollard anti-sacramental views, problematic though it would have been for Lollards to use saints as models? However, this reading suggests that the 'problem' of women preachers, or in a wider sense with the perception of women as learned or knowledgeable, is only a problem because men's nature makes it one. To take it further, if men are enflamed by lust at the sight of a woman speaking publicly, the answer is not to prevent women from speaking, or learning, for great benefits may thus be lost. Rather men should learn to be ruled by their minds rather than their bodies, otherwise they are no better than the crazed and damned Maxentius. The life of St Katherine could thus have been read as constructing an alternative, positive view of the public speech of women, and a condemnation of those who used the 'sexual desire' excuse to disguise their inability to countenance the idea that female speech and

[195] See above, Introduction.

female knowledge could be anything other than foolish and dangerous. It may be in this respect that St Katherine was so important to Margery Kempe.

It was a commonplace of medieval thought to align the male with reason and the female with sensuality.[196] This reading of the life of St Katherine suggests that drawing such a division is unhelpful. It does not seek to turn the principle on its head, but more subtly it demonstrates that sensuality is masculine and reason is feminine. Neither property is the domain of one sex exclusively and it makes no sense to assign them to individuals on the basis of their biological identities. For in establishing Porphirius and the Philosphers' ascendancy over Maxentius, the epitome of masculine sensuality, and conveying their transition from pagan to Christian, the texts clearly feminise them.

Riddy has observed that the feminised suffering Christ provided Julian of Norwich, and other female visionaries, with a way of investing meekness with power.[197] I have already established that in imitating Christ virgin martyrs are presented as wholly feminine and similarly the femininity of Porphirius and the Philosophers is underlined by their willingness to suffer death for Christ. They become meek in eschewing the clerical pride and military power which were the primary badges of their identities as pagan men. In addition to this, elements are added which emphasise that they are no longer to be adjudged 'men' according to the pagan standards established by the texts. In the case of the Philosophers, part of Maxentius' rage stems from the fact that they accept their defeat with such equanimity. They make the same intellectual leap which Katherine made earlier; their pagan education ironically enables them to recognise and unhesitatingly proclaim that Katherine's rhetoric is insurmountable, and that her arguments in favour of Christianity establish that it must be the true faith:

> Syre emperour, wetith well ƥat ƥer was never non ƥat myght holde hym ayeneste us but he were overcome anon but ƥis mayde, in whom ƥe spertye of God spekyth, that yeveth us so grete merveyle ƥat we kannot ne mowe not seye aȝenste Jhesu Criste. And ƥerfore we knowleche sadly, but yf ƥou kanste ȝeve us provable

[196] Cadden, *Meaning of Sex Difference*, pp. 189-191; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 261-262.

[197] Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', p. 112.

> sentence of goddes þat we have worscheped unto now, we ben alle convertyd to Jhesu Cryste [ai, p. 316-317]

They must reject paganism because it cannot be rationally defended. This point is underlined by Maxentius' response to their request that he prove them wrong in their conclusions:

> And when þe tyraunte herde þis þinge, he was fulfyllyd with grete wodnesse and commaunded þat þei were all ibrente in þe medyll of þe cytee [ibid, p. 317]

Thus the mind/body dichotomy which parallels that between Christianity and paganism is established. There is nothing *reason*- able about Maxentius or the faith he represents; language forsakes him as he is overtaken by a murderous rage. That this disparity between Christian and pagan is to be read as one between feminine and masculine (not simply female and male) is evinced by the affront that Maxentius feels has been perpetrated to the 'natural' (actually pagan) order of things by a woman's intellectual defeat of the wisest men in the land:

> The emperour seyng þis was fullfylled with grete wratthe ayenste hem and begonne to blame hem that þei sorfured hemself so foule to be overcome with a mayde [ai, p. 315]

Maxentius cannot understand how they, as men, can endure the shame of their defeat.[198] The answer is, of course, that they can stand it because they are no longer, by pagan standards, 'real men'. Their acceptance of Katherine's words and their acquiescence to Maxentius' sentence of death marks the onset of feminisation, which is finally established as they put themselves under Katherine's guidance in the moments before death. Katherine assures them that their martyrdom will stand in stead of baptism, telling them:

> Drede you not, my dere brotherne, for þe scheding of youre blode schall be counted to you for baptem. Signe 3ou with þe signe of þe crosse, and ye schull be crowned in heven [ai, p. 317]

Katherine thus fulfils a sacerdotal role for the Philosophers, just as she does for Porphirius when she preaches to him. That the Philosophers accept her authority as the representative of Christ's authority, makes manifest their rejection of Maxentius' authority and the value system he represents. They recognise that a woman can embody Christianity, but that Maxentius can only see a woman as a body. The Philosophers are not ashamed to be

[198] It appears that the actual persecutors of the early Christians were similarly ashamed to be defeated by women, see Chris Jones, 'Women, death and the law during the Christian persecutions', *Studies in Church History* 30 (1993), pp. 23-33: p. 33.

defeated by Katherine because in accepting their defeat they are empowered to take on her feminine nature and die for Christ. This theme is elaborated further in the person of Porphirius.

St Katherine's defeat of the Philosophers can be read as an exposition of the shortcomings of masculine, clerical education, which assumes it knows everything without actually examining the basis of that knowledge. This links her life back to the life and experiences of Rolle. In the figure of Porphirius Katherine has the opportunity to contend with the other aspect of pagan masculinity, as it is constructed in the texts; the pinnacle of physical strength and moral honour encompassed in his identity as chief of the imperial guard. Porphirius' position of military power and his close relationship to Maxentius make his conversion strategically important to the course of Katherine's passion. In converting Maxentius' right-hand man a blow is dealt to the Emperor's power and position which is both political and personal in nature. Maxentius' actions in the latter half of the life are determined solely by the ferocious hatred which Katherine's words and actions provoke in him, but nothing affects him so fiercely as her 'corruption' of Porphirius:

> Thanne Maxence began to grynde with þe teþe and trembled as wode and cryed dredfully: 'O thouh cursed knytyf! Se here Porpherie, that was keper of my soule and comforte in all my dyseses, now is deceyvid!' [ai, p. 333]

Porphirius betrays his Emperor and his nature in converting, for his new identity as a Christian prompts him to act 'unnaturally', as Maxentius sees it. Porphirius is the chief knight and should thus be the epitome of masculine strength and virtue and a mainstay of pagan religious and cultural values. However, his betrayal of Maxentius is signalled by his concern for the person not of the Emperor, but of the Empress. From a political point of view Porphirius' behaviour is treasonable; Maxentius had decreed that his wife's body was to be left for the beasts to eat but 'Porphyrie stale þe body and buried' (ai., 331). More importantly than that, Porphirius becomes functionally female, as the d version describes it he 'toke þe queenys body and arrayed it wyth swete spyces and oyntementys and buryed hyt' (p. 57). Illustrations in books of hours often depict women preparing bodies for burial as

part of the Office of the Dead.[199] Significantly, this undertaking of what was perceived of as 'women's work' and also one of the Seven Works of Mercy is Porphirius' first act as a Christian. When called upon to make public defence of his faith his transition from masculine to feminine and his rejection of paganism is fused and complete; as his physical strength and power were part of his pagan identity he does not use either to defend his new found faith, but rather proves its veracity through his willingness to suffer, as the Philosophers did before him. A unique passage in CUL supports this reading: it describes Porphirius taking up arms to defend himself against the Emperor, but Katherine warns him that the only appropriate response is one of feminine passivity:

> Parfory a schylde and a spere nyme
> And sone aȝenst them ranne:
> Of IIII thousande of hys mene
> He lefte alyue neuyr oone.
> Maxent quakyd, there he stode,
> For drede he wexyd nere woode.
> Kateryn can to Parfory grete
> Parfory, let be ƥy fyghtyng! sche seyde,
> Yf ƥou wylt wyth me martyrd be,
> Fyghtynge ƥou muste leue, y telle the,
> And take lyghtly thy payne
> For goddys loue, os y do myne [pp. 262-263]

Porphirius explicitly makes a choice between two norms of behaviour: irrational violence, and calm submission. His actions make manifest the choice between paganism and Christianity, which is constructed as entailing a choice between masculine and feminine. Porphirius signifies his choice by throwing down his weapons and kneeling before Katherine, begging her to pray for him. He thus rejects both the agency and the authority of paganism. This reading can be applied to the other texts too, even if the dichotomy is not made so explicit. In the figure of Porphirius perceived norms of male behaviour are explored and found to be incompatible with a complete acceptance of Christianity. According to the pagan value system which Maxentius exemplifies, the fact of Porphirius' conversion is rendered unnatural and shameful because it does not allow him to act like a man. Nor can Porphirius be dismissed as a unique

[199] See for example Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, p. 130.

aberration, since he manages to convert the entire imperial guard, who all announce that 'We ben crystyn as Porpherye is, and we be redy for to dye for þe love of Jhesu Cryste' (ai, p. 333). So in fact Maxentius' violent masculine persona becomes the anomaly. The soldiers' manly integrity does not suffer, but Maxentius cannot recognise that by suffering for Christ they are defending him far more effectively, and affectively, than by fighting him.

The feminine, Christian nature is constructed as one that can be shared by men and women alike. The masculine (Maxentius) represents blind unexamined faith, sustained by brute force. The conversions of the Philosophers and Porphirius reveal alternative paradigms of manly behaviour; they remain men, but are seen to act in archetypally feminine ways, encouraged to do so by Katherine's words and physical example. Thus it is established that both men and women can die for Christ by dying like Christ, accepting their suffering with the knowledge that it contributes to a higher, salvific purpose. This reading provides the lay audience of these manuscripts with the opportunity to participate in Christ's sacrifice and comprehend it more acutely, just as St Katherine does 'daily and howrely'.

St Katherine and the construction of marriageable and marital femininity

This final chapter will stay with the social groups defined in chapters 3 and 4 but focuses on their female component to make some suggestions about the meaning and function that St Katherine may have had for at least some late-medieval women. I have chosen to focus on women in order to demonstrate that their devotion to virgin martyrs in general and St Katherine in particular can be seen as entailing a positive, rather than a negative choice. We have seen that St Katherine's exemplary identity as a Christian is to be understood as feminine, which in some respects is clearly of relevance to both lay men and women. However, St Katherine's femininity is also put to the specific purpose of providing a model of ideal secular conduct for women, both within the texts of her life, and within the discourse of courtesy literature. This phenomenon relates to many aspects of women's lives and experiences and deserves far more analysis than I am able to give it here. St Katherine can be seen to validate and authorise women's chastity, charity and learning, as well as their ability to govern households and enter religious debate. However, this chapter will focus on one aspect in particular; St Katherine and the construction of the ideal wife. This relates to the observations made in chapter 2 about the lack of married women saints in the hagiographic canon.

It will be see that an extremely important element of the cult of St Katherine for women was her ability to get them husbands. St Katherine apparently accomplished this in different ways for women of different status. For women drawn from the ranks of the lesser nobility, gentry and urban elites she could provide a paradigm of ideal feminine conduct, a way of modelling themselves in line with the most elevated standards of gentility, even if they did not have the natural advantage of very high birth. In this way women could improve their chances of marrying above their station, by demonstrating that they were perfectly capable of moving within the highest circles.

For women of lower rank, but drawn from the upper echelons of peasant society, St Katherine was still extremely important in this respect,

but in a different and more direct fashion, acting as a marriage broker. These women were more likely to suffer parental or familial constraint in their choice of marriage partner than women from poorer families. Therefore praying to St Katherine provided them with a sense of the agency evidently enjoyed by those not constrained by material and familial considerations. By praying to St Katherine for a good husband they could take a hand in the decision making process, which their status as the daughters of landowners denied them. There may have been an element of ideal conduct involved for them too, but the most important factor was arguably St Katherine's power and her ability to affect their lives materially.

In the last part of this chapter I shall turn to consider the relevance that St Katherine may have held for these women once they were married. It seems that the life of St Katherine continued to provide them with a pattern for ideal feminine behaviour, inscribed both in the person of the saint, and in the person of the Empress. I shall argue that these two women provide models of female behaviour which do allow that under certain circumstances women have the right to a measure of autonomy in relation to their husbands. This chapter will conclude by suggesting some of the ways in which St Katherine as virgin and martyr could still manage to be a figure of great relevance and resonance to 'wyuys & wedwys & maydyns ying' [HW, p. 198].

Virgin martyrs and women

The observations of this chapter fit into a wider aspect of virgin martyr cults in the later Middle Ages. Much of the extant evidence, suggests that they were often considered to be of particular relevance to women, both religious and lay. This connection begins within the virgin martyr lives themselves. We have seen that women follow St Katherine and lament her imminent death, and in other virgin martyr lives too those who are most affected by the passion and example of the saint are specifically identified as women. When St Christina is brought before Urban (her father) to be publicly examined women weep for her:

> ...& whan wommen seye

Urban (her father) to be publicly examined women weep for her:

> ...& whan wommen seye
> Thus cruelly tretyd þis feyre mayde yinge,
> Among hem was meny a wepyng eye,
> And wyth a grete woys þai þus dyde preye:
> 'O god of þis mayde, hir helpe, preye we,
> And þus shamefully ne suffre hir for to deye,
> Wych in tendyr age doth to þe fle'.[1]

When Christina's next persecutor, Zyon, orders that her head be shaved and burning coals spread over it the women berate him as follows:

> And when wommen þis seyn of þis cyte,
> Thei cryid, & seyd, 'o juge, þi decre
> Is wroung & wrocht ful vnrychtfully,
> For in [þis] mayde als mych as in þe
> All wommen þou confoundyst utirly'.[2]

At the end of the life of St Agnes we are told that 'many maydyns of Rome cyte, Both hy & lowe and of euerych degre' become Christians and take the veil 'Blyssyd Anneys folwyng wyth deuout corage'.[3] St Ursula gathers around her a formidable band of virgins, eleven thousand in all, and in addition is joined by the Queen of Sicily and her four daughters, and the daughter of the King of Constantinople.[4]

This association between female saints and female followers or a female audience, is also suggested by the circumstances surrounding the composition of some of the extant virgin martyr lives. The late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century corpus of literature known as the Katherine Group, which contains a life of St Katherine, as well as lives of St Margaret and St Juliana, was originally compiled for a group of anchoresses and subsequently disseminated to a wider religious and lay audience. It includes the text *Hali Meiðhad* which argues that a chaste single life is the best course for women to follow, both from a social, as well as an emotional point of view.[5] Ideally this should take the form of consecrated virginity, but the text does allow that this may not be possible for all women. At the end of the text the author exhorts his readers to take example from their

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[1] Ibid., p. 67.

[2] Ibid., p. 75.

[3] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[4] There are some good men involved in the life of St Ursula but they are rather peripheral and completely outnumbered.

[5] Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, pp. xiv-xx.

virginal forebears:

> ƿench o Seinte Katerine, o Seinte Margarete, Seinte Enneis, Seinte Iuliene, Seinte Lucie, ant Seinte Cecille, ant o ƿe oƿre hali meidnes in heouene, hu ha nawt ane ne forsoken kinges sunes ant eorles, wið alle wordliche weolen ant eorðliche wunnen, ah ƿoleden stronge pinen ear ha walden neomen ham, ant derf deað on ende.[6]

These texts were originally intended for women living in chastity and according to religious vows of one sort or another, nuns or anchoresses. However, virgin martyr lives were also read and arguably valued by lay women as well.

The connection between female saints and a lay female audience is indicated by the works of the East Anglian authors Lydgate and Bokenham.[7] Female patrons requested from Lydgate the *Invocation to St Anne*, a life of St Margaret and *The Fifteen Joys of Our Lady*.[8] Bokenham composed thirteen female saints' lives in the mid-fifteenth century, six of which were dedicated to named female patrons. The lives of St Anne, St Mary Magdalene and St Elizabeth of Hungary were apparently requested from Bokenham by Katherine Denston, Isabel Bourchier and Elizabeth de Vere respectively. The lives of St Katherine, St Dorothy and St Agatha are dedicated to female patrons, in the case of the lives of St Katherine and St Agatha to women who share the saint's name.[9] It is not clear whether they actually commissioned these texts, but the fact that Bokenham apparently perceived them to be appropriate reading matter for women is significant. This connection is further suggested by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in which the two female religious narrators, the Prioress and the Second Nun are given hagiographic devotional tales describing the potential powers of female sanctity: a miracle of the Virgin, and the life of St Cecilia.[10]

The connection between female religious and female saints can also be traced in visual sources. Two extant panel paintings depicting virgin martyrs appear to have been made for nunneries. It has been suggested that the fifteenth-century Battel hall panel depicting saints Scholastica, Mary

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[6] Ibid., p. 40.

[7] Edwards, 'Transmission and audience', p. 164; Meale, '"alle the bokes that I haue"', pp. 137-138.

[8] Meale, ibid.

[9] The life of St Agatha is dedicated to Agatha Flegge.

[10] Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God"', pp. 104-106.

Magdalene, Margaret, Katherine, Agatha and Dominic with the Virgin and child standing in the centre was made for Dartford Nunnery, the only Dominican convent in medieval England, which was founded by Edward III in 1346.[11] The fifteenth-century Arbroath panel which depicts saints Barbara, Margaret, Scholastica, Katherine and Mary Magdalene is so far unprovenanced.[12] However, the prominence given to Scholastica, who as the sister of Benedict was the first Benedictine nun, suggests that it was painted for a Benedictine nunnery where her feast would have been accorded high status.[13]

Documentary evidence demonstrates a perceived connection between female saints, specifically virgin martyrs, and lay women. Two of the extant prescriptions governing the observance of feast days, covering the dioceses of Canterbury and Worcester and written in the early-thirteenth century, make provision for days on which women alone are not to work. In both cases the feast days in question are those of saints Lucy, Agnes, Margaret and Agatha:

> Hec sunt ferianda ab operibus mulierum tantum, videlicet: sancte Agnetis virginis et martiris, sancte Margaretae virginis et martiris, sancte Lucie virginis, sancte Agathae virginis et martiris.[14]

It may be that in the case of these 'lesser' virgin martyrs and even Margaret, the patroness of women in childbirth, the association with women in particular was more explicit. This is not to suggest that virgin martyrs did not appeal to men as well,[15] but there does seem to have been a marked association between women and these saints, both as models and intercessors. This certainly seems to have been an important part of the cult of St Katherine.

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[11] Christopher Norton, David Park and Paul Binski, *Dominican Painting in East Anglia: The Thornham Parva Retable and the Musee de Cluny Frontal* (Bury St Edmunds, 1987), pp. 36-38, plate 61.

[12] This panel was drawn to my attention by Christopher Norton.

[13] See Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 380.

[14] Cheney, 'Rules for the observance of feast days', p. 137. This constitution (dated 1218-1236 by Cheney) was issued for the diocese of Worcester. A constitution probably issued for Canterbury at about the same time, also contains the clause about virgin martyrs' days and women. See p. 136. One of these was probably based on the other.

[15] The life of St Anne is dedicated jointly to John and Katherine Denston, Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 57; the life of St Dorothy is dedicated jointly to John and Isabel Hunt, ibid., p. 136, and the life of St Margaret was written for Thomas Burgh, ibid., p. 7.

Virgin martyrs and courtesy literature: paradigmatic young women

Within the debate as to whether saints could and did function as role models for their devotees, the evidence of courtesy literature has been all but overlooked. Kathleen Ashley's article 'Medieval courtesy literature and dramatic mirrors of female conduct' provides a welcome exception to this rule.[16] Ashley explores the ways in which the Virgin Mary was used as a model of moral and behavioural prudence for young women in both courtesy literature and cycle drama. The article posits a paradigm based on cultural deportment rather than natural essence which would therefore, Ashley argues, have been of particular importance to the urban elite, seeking to subsume 'noble' conduct into their social and cultural identities. Chapter 4 argued that a similar form of aspirational appropriation may have been at work in owning and reading a life of St Katherine, and this is also an important element in the construction of oneself as an ideal courtly wife.

Within the discourse of courtesy literature directed at young women, St Katherine and other virgin martyrs were put to a variety of paradigmatic uses. Certainly their words and conduct within the legends provide examples of faith and fortitude, but more than this they are also presented as the epitome of young womanhood. Kim Phillips argues that their beauty, youth and chastity make them the ideal representatives of the perfect age of a woman's life; maidenhood. Although virgin martyrs were presented as models to women by men (with the single verifiable exception of Christine de Pisan), we know that women commissioned and read virgin martyr lives. Indeed, virgin martyr lives are among the only texts that we know for sure were commissioned by or written for married women. Therefore Phillips argues:

> ...is it not possible that through reading about these strong and wilful virgins they in some sense *created* these virgins? Women may or may not have influenced the original writing of these stories- this cannot be known- but they certainly seem to have influenced the reproduction and thus the cultural

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[16] Kathleen M. Ashley, 'Medieval courtesy literature and dramatic mirrors of female conduct', in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds., *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality* (New York and London, 1987), pp. 25-38.

importance of these stories.[17]

She concludes by suggesting that virgin martyrs are much more than an example of what men think women should be like, or how they should behave, and are, in part at least, representative of women's ideal of maidenhood.[18] This argument should be borne in mind throughout the following analysis. St Katherine was presented as a model to women, but that does not mean that they internalised her example in uncomplicated and unresponsive ways. It seems likely that St Katherine was so popular among lay women because they felt that she provided a relevant example, one whose experiences and interests they could relate to and who could help them enhance not only the quality of their inner spiritual lives, but also their social and cultural standing as women, whether maidens, wives or widows.

Before turning to examine St Katherine's appearance as a model within courtesy literature, we shall look at the ways in which the text of her life itself presents her as exemplary in this respect. Perhaps the best example is provided by the early fifteenth-century RBB, which was probably written for a chapel of St Katherine to be read out on her feast day and perhaps on other occasions as well as it injects a distinctly didactic and moral tenor to the narrative. As we have seen the text begins by constructing St Katherine as 'a lesson of helth' which will teach the audience 'how þat ȝe schall heuene wynne' (RBB, p. 1). The opening description of St Katherine reads as follows:

> of vanyte & pryde heo sette full lyte
> Of felyttys in þe forheed noper of hornes
> Of gay gownes & furres noþer reuersse
> he sette hyt & well myght as gyle & (as) skornes
> and put heore herte to vertywe3 busynesse
> Noþer daunced ne trypped as doþ many mon
> þat ys a werk of pryde & rancour & of synne
> And butteþ at helle doore: brekyng har schoon
> huppyng & skyppyng at þey wer þer inne
> þut was þere heore non lyke in any place
> Of connynge of wytt of sadnesse & beawte
> Amyable of chere wommanly of face
> Comfort to gode men: to loky & to see
> Louely to loky on wyþ chere & spech sad
> fetures full fayre werkes deuowte

[17] Phillips, 'Medieval maidenhood', p. 20.

[18] Ibid.

> heore presence made foole3 a drad
> for grace & vertyw þat were hure abowte [ibid., p. 1]

It is plain that St Katherine is indeed the perfect young lady, beautiful, yet soberly dressed, not affected by worldly vanities such as dancing, intelligent, yet reserved and demure. Her excellence puts others to shame. This portrait of Katherine accords well with the perfect femininity constructed in conduct books for women, and it is for this reason that her example was included within them.

There are very few extant examples of conduct books written for girls or women in England. The most popular seems to have been one which was originally written in France and then translated into several European languages, including English. Given its popularity it is perhaps no coincidence that this text makes marked use of virgin martyrs as examples for its audience, and it is particularly valuable for this analysis.

In the late-fourteenth century the Knight of the Tour Landry compiled a handbook of moral, religious and social advice for his daughters, all of whom were evidently intended to be married at some future date.[19] This popular text was translated into English twice in the fifteenth century, Caxton printing his version in 1484.[20] In the prologue the Knight explains that he decided to:

> make a book and an examplayre for my doughters to lerne to rede and vnderstonde how they ought to gouerne them self and to kepe them from euylle[21]

In order to describe correct conduct to his daughters and prepare them for their future as dutiful wives he decided to include in the book:

> ...the good maners and good dedes of good ladyes and wymmen and of theyr lyues soo that for theyr vertues and bountees they ben honoured And that after theyr dethe ben renommed and preysed and shal be vnto the ende of the worlde *for to take of them good ensample and countenance*[22] [my italics]

Virgin martyrs are included in this band of 'good ladyes' and appear several times in the course of the book as exemplars of virginity, charity and education.

In fact virgin martyrs are used as exemplars of sexual abstinence rather than virginity per se, as chapter 62 demonstrates. This chapter,

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[19] Caxton, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, pp. xviii-xix, pp. xxxv-xxxix.

[20] Ibid., p. xiv.

[21] Ibid., p. 13.

[22] Ibid., p. 12. The Knight also includes bad women as negative examples.

entitled 'Of the roper or maker of cordes and kables and of the fat Pryour' tells the salutary tale of the rope maker's wife, who has an unbridled affair with the fat Prior.[23] The guilty couple are eventually killed by the rope maker who is thoroughly exempted from any blame, driven to it as he was by the behaviour of his wife. The wife is clearly damned by her inability to say no to the prior. In order that his daughters should learn how to deal with the enticements of extramarital suitors the Knight exhorts his daughters to remember the legends of:

> saynt katheryn saynt margaryte of saynte Crystyn the enleuen thowsand vyrgyns and of many other of whiche the grete constaunce and feruente courage of them were to longe to be recounted For they surmounted many grete temptacions and vanquysshed many tyraunts wherby they gate & conquered the grete reame of blysse and glorye where as they shalle euer be in perdurable ioye.[24]

The daughters are to remember that these saints, through their courage and constancy, overcame temptation. Maxentius makes several offers of wealth, power and other worldly glory to Katherine. As Caxton's own text of the life of St Katherine describes, he makes the first of these offers after the death of the Philosophers:

> Ah! right noble lady virgin, have pity of thy youth, and thou shalt be chief in my palace next the queen and thy image shall be set up in the midst of the city, and shall be adored of all the people as a goddess [Cx, p. 21][25]

Katherine refuses, telling Maxentius that 'neyther fayer wordes ne tormentys' will compel her to renounce her faith and her spouse. Undaunted Maxentius makes a more generous offer once she has been released from prison:

> We will not hold thee as a chamberer, but thou shalt triumph as a queen in my realm, in beauty enhanced [ibid., p. 23]

To which Katherine replies derisively:

> Understand, I pray thee, and judge truly, whom ought I better to choose of these two, or the king puissant, perdurable, glorious and fair, or one sick, unsteadfast, not noble, and foul? [ibid]

Having killed his wife Maxentius makes a final offer to Katherine in the

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[23] Ibid., pp. 87-92.

[24] Ibid., p. 91.

[25] Caxton's *Golden Legend* was partly based on the *Legende Doree*, partly on a Latin text of the *Legenda Aurea*, and partly on an 'englische boke' which was probably a manuscript of the *Gilte Legende*. See D'Evelyn, 'English translations of the *Legenda Aurea*', pp. 436-439; Kurvinen, 'Caxton's *Golden Legend* and the manuscripts of the *Gilte Legende*', passim. The text of Cx follows the a recension of the prose life extremely closely.

form of an ultimatum:

> Howbeit that thou hast made the queen for to die by thine art magic, if thou repent thee thou shalt be first and chief in my palace, for thou shalt this day do sacrifice or thou shalt lose thin head [ibid., p. 24]

Katherine's response remains unequivocal:

> Do all that thou hast thought; I am ready to suffer all [ibid]

Katherine and the other virgin martyrs are concerned to preserve their virginity which has already been dedicated to Christ.[26] However, the Knight uses these saints as examples of virginity which will become, in the case of his daughters, wifely chastity. He warns them that:

> many grete and euylle [presumably sexual] temptacions shall befyght and assaylle yow Be ye thenne stronge and valyaunt to resiste & ouercome them And loke and behold the place wheroute ye be come of and what dishonour and shame myght some to yow therof.[27]

For his daughters Christ, the heavenly spouse, becomes their actual husband, whereas Maxentius becomes any other man who attempts to seduce them with threats or promises. Virgin martyrs provide a very fitting conclusion to this chapter because from them the Knight's daughters can learn to be staunch in their resistance and also preserve the good reputation both of themselves and of their family, a concern which lies behind the Knight's closing remarks. As in many other respects St Katherine is the most exemplary of all. The conclusion to her life which stresses that she was 'marvellous in five things' (Cx, p. 27) describes the third and fourth things thus:

> Thirdly, she was marvellous in constancy, for she was most constant against the threatenings and menaces, for she despised them all... she was firm when great gifts were offered to her, for she refused all... Fourthly, she was constant in cleanness of chastity, for she kept chastity among those things that chastity is wont to perish. For there be five things in which chastity may perish, that is in pleasance of riches, convenable opportunity, flowering youth, freedom without constraint, and sovereign beauty. And among all these things the blessed Katherine kept her chastity for she had plenty of riches as she was heir of rich parents; she had convenable leisure to do her will, as she that was lady of herself, and conversed all day among her servants which were young of age; she had freedom without any that governed her in her palace, and of these four it is said before, and she had beauty, so much that every man marvelled of her beauty [ibid., pp. 29-30]

Thus St Katherine is presented as an explicitly secular model. If the extraordinarily beautiful and wealthy St Katherine can live chastely in the

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[26] Similar offers and refusals characterise other virgin martyr lives.

[27] Caxton, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 92.

midst of all this splendour, so the Knight's daughters should be able to emulate her in the setting of their marital households. St Katherine is perhaps a particularly appropriate model for those occasions when the daughters' husbands are away, for she governs her household in the absence of her parents, or of Christ but according to his laws, for four years after their marriage.

Katherine's handling of her great wealth also apparently provides the justification for her status as a model of charity. Chapters 51 to 53 tell 'Of the good knyght that had thre wyues and of their lyues'.[28] After the death of each wife the distraught Knight visits his uncle, a hermit, who is able, through visions, to describe the afterlife fate of each woman. The Knight is told that his first wife 'for her pryde and for the grete quantite of gownes and Iewelles that she hadde was loste and dampned for euer'.[29] The Knight of the Tower warns his daughters:

> And therfore euery good woman after she is of estate and degree she ought to hold and behaue her symply and honestly in her clothyng and in the quantite of hit And gyue a parte to god to thende she may in the other worlde be clothed of all ioye and glorye as dyde the hooly ladyes and hooly vyrgyns as in their legende is redercyd As of seynt Elyzabeth of saynt Katheryn and of seynt Agathe and other mothat gaue their gownes to the pourefolke for the loue of god And soo ought to doo euery good woman.[30]

Chapter 110 'How the wymmen ought to be charytable after thexemplary of our lady' includes the example of other virgin martyrs:

> And at thexample of her [the Virgin Mary] dyd saynt Elyzabeth saynte Lucye saynt Cecylle and many other holy ladyes whiche were so charitable that they gaf to the poure & Indygent the most parte if theyr reuenues As reherced is playnly in theyr legendes.[31]

The Elizabeth in question is presumably Elizabeth of Hungary whose legend contains many instances of her concern for the needy, Bokenham explaining that she became known as 'Modyr of pore men'.[32] The legend of St Cecilia recounts that during the three day period between receiving three fatal blows to the neck and her actual death Cecilia preached to the people:

> Amoung whom also wyth hert glade
> She departyd swych thyngys as she had

[28] Caxton, *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, pp. 74-78.
[29] Ibid., p. 76.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., p. 147.
[32] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 270.

In almes-dede...[33]

St Lucy, having vowed herself to Christ, asks her mother for her dowry to be distributed amongst the poor, which the two of them do, much to the chagrin of the man who was expecting to marry Lucy.[34]

However, no extant version of the lives of St Katherine or St Agatha include an account of them distributing their gowns in this way. The prose life of St Katherine does contain descriptions of more general charitable behaviour, again dating from the four year period during which she is left to supervise her palace:

> The puple ƥat was lefte vnder hir cure by enheritaunce She gouerned wyth gret entendaunce. Not for thy ƥat she delited hir in gret seruyce of men and wommen bot for she thought ƥat she myght not wyth oute synne kepe to hir self hir faders lyflode and suffre ƥe puple peryshe for defaute namely syth she had caste hir to haue ryght nought a doo wyth the world. And therfore of al ƥe substaunce of hir faders lyflode she kept bot a lytell to hir self and alle the remenaunt wyth al hir faders tresour she disposed to ƥe sustenaunce of ƥe pore puple [d, p. 22]

This may have provided the foundation for her inclusion in the Knight's list of charitable saints and charity does form a part of other virgin martyr lives. For example St Christina smashed the gold and silver idols which her father ordered her to worship and gave the precious metals to the poor.[35] However, it may simply have been that the Knight felt that this behaviour was appropriate to both Katherine and Agatha, even if it was not precisely described in their legends.[36] This is testament to the power of virgin martyrs as role models.

I have already indicated that their has been some debate among scholars as to whether or not virgin martyrs should be considered as 'educated' or 'intelligent', or whether they are merely vessels into which heavenly wisdom is miraculously poured with no necessity for comprehension on their part. Earlier I suggested that virgin martyrs are indeed intelligent because they are Christian but also Christian because they are intelligent. In some respects their example is non-gender specific, something which women and men can both aspire to. In the Longleat

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[33] Ibid., p. 224.

[34] Ibid., p. 248.

[35] Ibid., p. 64.

[36] For more on the association between women and charity see P.H. Cullum, '"And hir name was charite": charitable giving by and for women in late-medieval Yorkshire', in Goldberg, *Woman is a Worthy Wight*, pp. 182-211.

Sermons, written after 1409 by the author of *Dives and Pauper*, we can see this phenomenon in action. In the 'persecucion of deoclician & marimian' the author exhorts his audience thus:

> Also be ȝe besi to connyn & to mentenyn goddys lawe & takyth example of seynt katerine of seynt lucye & of seynt margarete of seyn agneys & of many oþer whiche in here ȝougthe were wol connyng in cristis lawe[37]

However, I would also argue that the construction of them as learned is as much a part of their identity as virgin martyrs as is their great beauty and high social status. All of these elements contribute to their standing as paradigmatic young women. That they possess some measure of intelligence is therefore an intrinsic part of the ideal femininity which they represent. This argument is supported by the evidence of courtesy literature and other texts.

In chapter 89 'How men oughte to sette and put theyr children to scole' the Knight specifically holds up St Katherine as a model of the benefits which can accrue from having one's daughters educated:

> ...saynt katheryn whiche thurgh her wysedome and by her clergye with the grace of the holy ghoost surmounted & vaynquysshed the wysest men of al grece And by her hooly clergye and sure feythe god gaf her the vyctorye of her martirdome & made her body to be borne by his angels xiiij dayes Iourney for the place where as she suffred her martirdome vnto the Mount of Synay & her holy body rendrid holy oyle And the begynnyng and fundament of the knowledge of god she had thurgh the clergye where as she knewe the trouthe & the sauement of her self.[38]

The Knight is concerned that his daughters should be armed with the ability to recognise good from evil and thus to be responsible for their own salvation. He is not interested in education per se divorced from its religious and moral uses. However, this does not lessen the importance of St Katherine's example as a model of the educated and knowledgeable woman. Nor was she the only virgin martyr to be held up as an example of learning to young women. Humbert of Romans mid-thirteenth century sermon entitled 'For girls or maidens who are in the world', shares the opinion of the Knight that education is necessary for the spiritual welfare of girls and observes:

> Of this knowledge you have an example in Blessed Agnes who went to school, in Blessed Cecilia, Catharine, Lucy, Agatha, who were all learned as their

[37] Watson, 'Censorship and cultural exchange', pp. 855-856.

[38] Caxton, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 121.

> legends bear witness.[39]

The origin of Humbert's remark about St Agnes is to be found in her legend: 'One day she was on her way home from school when the prefect's son saw her and fell in love'.[40]

This is not the only example I have found of a connection between St Agnes and education. The Middle English translation of the life of St Bridget of Sweden written by Bishop Gregersson recounts that in 1377 Bridget went to Rome.

> Fell þat when sho was went oute of hir awne cuntre sho was comforted with mani reuelacions, and was biden hir þat sho suld lere grammere, whare Saint Agnes oft time teched her, and within a litill time sho profeted so gretli þat sho couthe vndirstand and speke wele Latin.[41]

Once again this provides a reminder that we must not place rigid properties or forms of patronage upon individual saints.

It is therefore evident that by learning of and imitating the behaviour and beliefs of virgin martyrs (among other women) the Knight's daughters can conduct themselves according to the criteria of ideal femininity that these saints represent. Once again, St Katherine appears as the model of models, the Knight mentioning her three times in all, as opposed to the one or two mentions enjoyed by the other virgin martyrs. The implication is that reading and utilising St Katherine's life and demeanour is part of a strategy by which the Knight's daughters can construct themselves as ideally suited for marriage.

This is a point that is made explicit by Christine de Pisan in her *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. In the chapter entitled 'Of the instruction for both girls and older women in the state of virginity' Christine is not really concerned with nuns, or women who will be nuns, but with those who will be married.[42] Girls are instructed to be 'in their countenances, conduct and speech moderate and chaste' just as St Katherine is said to be in the Bath life.[43] Having offered various prescriptions as to appearance and conduct at mixed gatherings Christine then says 'A young girl should also especially

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[39] Rosemary Barton Tobin, *Vincent of Beauvais' 'De Eruditione Filiorum Nobilium' and the Education of Women* (New York, Berne, Frankfurt, 1984), pp. 32-33.

[40] de Voragine, *Golden Legend 1*, p. 102.

[41] Ellis, *Liber Celestis of St Bridget*, p. 4.

[42] de Pisan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, pp. 160-162.

[43] Ibid., p. 161.

venerate Our Lady, St Catherine, and all virgins, and if she can read, eagerly read their biographies'. Thus St Katherine becomes part of a training programme for the would be wife, and Christine is quite explicit on this point, saying 'Young girls taught and brought up in this way are much sought after by men looking for wives'.[44]

Thus for women of a relatively high status, and especially perhaps those who would improve that status, St Katherine's importance lies in the blueprint of desirable femininity which her life encodes. This is the way in which St Katherine can help them make a good marriage, one which will benefit themselves and their families. It is entirely possible that lower status women too would imitate St Katherine, but their restricted circumstances meant that many of St Katherine's exemplary properties, charity, learning and so on, would be beyond them. However, it is impossible to come to any definitive conclusions in this respect. St Katherine was certainly presented as a model of devotion and catechetical knowledge to lower status people, and perhaps she did hold value to the women in this group as an exemplary woman and wife.

With respect to the acquisition of a husband it seems likely that the most important factor was that very intercessory power itself. It appears that lower status women were not particularly interested in St Katherine as a highly educated queen, but as the bride of Christ, an argument which is supported by the NHC life.[45] As we have seen, St Katherine is described as the bride of Christ even in those lives written before the development of the mystical marriage episode. Although the NHC life, written in the later fourteenth century and preserved in two fifteenth century manuscripts, does not describe the mystical marriage it may display an awareness of the tradition. Having defeated the Philosophers and seen them to their deaths Katherine makes a protestation of faith to Maxentius imbued with the language of love-longing:

> Crist þat es my lord allane,
> Unto his spowse he has me tane
> In trew faith, þat sall neuer faill;
> He es my ioy and my cownsaill,
> He es my luf, he es my lorde,

[44] Ibid., p. 162.

[45] As seen in chapter 3.

> And we tow er so wele acorde
> ßat nowßer paine ne erthly gude
> Fro his luf may turn my mode [NHC, p. 168]

The language used by Katherine here anticipates the presentation of her as an archetypal female visionary in the fifteenth-century prose life. However, in the prose life, as with the other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century versions which tell of Katherine's upbringing and mystical marriage, St Katherine becomes a figure of formidable intelligence, explicitly receiving a university style education at the hands of masters. However, we have seen that NHC excises all reference to Katherine's education.

Usually we find texts, such as SEL, F and HW, which describe Katherine as educated but make little or no direct reference to the mystical marriage as an event in Katherine's life, even if they were written at or after the period when this tradition became an accepted part of the narrative. NHC is unique in affording Katherine no education or intrinsic intellectual ability, yet arguably makes oblique reference to her status as The bride of Christ.[46]

In chapter 4 I argued that St Katherine, the educated bride of Christ, may have been of great relevance to women who could read and afford to own lives of St Katherine. Conversely, the NHC's anomalous presentation of St Katherine as the uneducated bride of Christ may have found particular resonance with lower status women who perceived her as a marriage broker and whose only education consisted of the basic catechesis discussed in chapter 3.

St Katherine as marriage broker

The nature of the surviving sources dictated that the focus of the first part of this chapter rested firmly on women of mercantile and gentry status or above. However, in this section I shall investigate the significance and function of St Katherine for women of lower status. I shall argue that for these women St Katherine's importance is also related to the acquisition of a husband, but in a much more direct sense. St Katherine's example of

[46] It is likely that people would have been aware of the mystical marriage by the fifteenth century, even if it is not described by all the extant texts.

marriageable femininity could be internalised and imitated by all women, but there were elements within it which were predicated on the possession of a certain status or wealth, entailed in the representation of St Katherine as a young woman of the highest social status.

For women of lower status, drawn from the more affluent peasant families, it seems that St Katherine functioned rather as a symbol of agency. The evidence about peasant marriage practice provided by Church court records indicates that these women were probably in their late teens and early twenties. The same evidence suggests that women of less affluent peasant status did not need to appeal to St Katherine in this fashion because of differences in their habits of courtship and marriage.[47] That these women enjoyed a greater individual freedom in these respects is indicated by the higher proportion of leyrwite associated with daughters in poorer families.[48] More prosperous families would usually meet to discuss and determine a daughter's marriage arrangements, making decisions about the dowry and often taking the initiative in bringing a couple together.[49] St Katherine's family attempts to make similar provision for her marriage, which the saint is able to eschew entirely. These women would rarely have had the ability to take such a dramatic step. Marrying against the wishes of one's family entailed the loss of material and social advantages and even the threat of physical maltreatment.[50] It seems likely that rather than adopt this course of action, women could ameliorate their powerlessness by appealing to St Katherine, in the belief that even if they could not take part in the actual decision making process they could still have some influence on the outcome. Their family may not take into account their wishes, but St Katherine would.

The life of St Katherine describes the saint resisting the attempts of her mother, uncle and parliament to control her choice of marriage partner. As a sovereign queen she must marry someone who will help her to govern her kingdom and cannot be allowed to make a choice based on

[47] I owe this observation to Jeremy Goldberg.

[48] P.J.P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford, 1992), p. 208.

[49] Ibid., pp. 245-246.

[50] Ibid., pp. 247-248.

anything other than political considerations, in so far as she is allowed any choice at all. When Katherine protests and describes her ideal husband, Christ, her Mother berates her behaviour as selfish and unfamilial:

> Allas, doughter! Is þis 3oure grete discrescion þat mentalke of so moche? Moche sorow be ye lyke to do me and to alle 3oures! What! Hoo sawe evere a woman forge her an husbonde with wordis? Soche one as 3e have devysed was never none, ne never schall be; and þerfore, good doughter, leve þis grete folie and doo as 3owre noble eldyrs have doon before yowe [a, pp. 243-245]

The importance of this passage for these young women is that St Katherine, despite her Mother's caustic remark, does indeed 'forge her an husbonde with wordis': Christ. This section will argue that the custom of praying to St Katherine for a husband, recorded in post-medieval sources, is grounded in late-medieval descriptions of her mystical marriage. For young women whose choice of marriage partner was largely governed by their parents and other considerations beyond their control, praying to St Katherine was a way of forging a husband with words, of attempting to ensure that the man chosen for them would be good, kind and handsome.

The earliest piece of firm evidence relating to this aspect of St Katherine's cult in the British Isles is provided by William Camden, one of the founding fathers of antiquarianism.[51] In his *Britannia* first published in 1586, he writes '...girls keep a fast every Wednesday and Saturday throughout the yeare [sic], and some of them also on St Catherine's day; nor will they omit it... The reason given by some for this is, that the girls may get good husbands'.[52] The work of other antiquarians such as John Brand writing in the 1770s and W.C. Hazlitt writing in the early years of this century establishes that young girls, implicitly of fairly low status, were accustomed to call on St Katherine to provide them with a husband as recently as the last century.[53]

Much of the evidence for this phenomenon and the customs associated with it seems to be linked in particular with certain small hill top chapels dedicated to St Katherine and dating from the medieval period,

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[51] For more on Camden see Richard M. Dorsen, *The British Folklorists: A History* (London, 1968), pp. 2-4.

[52] As quoted by John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, p. 410; also W.C. Hazlitt, *Dictionary of Faiths and Folklore: Beliefs, Superstitions and Popular Customs* (originally published 1905; this edition London, 1995), p. 97.

[53] For more on Brand see Dorsen, *British Folklorists*, pp. 13-25.

most of which are to be found in the south or south-west of England. As Stephen Dewar points out most of the evidence, apart from Camden's observation noted above, dates from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[54] However, there are traces of evidence from the fifteenth century which indicate that St Katherine was perceived as a provider of husbands in the late-medieval period. In this section I shall provide a reading of the late-medieval life of St Katherine which at least allows for the strong possibility that her status as marriage broker constitutes a post-Reformation survival of late-medieval beliefs and practices. With this reading in mind I shall then explore the rituals practised by young women at chapels dedicated to St Katherine, as recorded by the antiquarians. I aim to demonstrate that it does not make much sense to regard these practices as having grown up after the Reformation with absolutely no reference to what went before, especially in the light of the observations of the first part of this chapter. It also seems to be significant that devotion to St Katherine was preserved almost up to the present day by this group in particular.

The perception of St Katherine as a marriage broker seems above all to be predicated on her status as the bride of Christ, as described in those versions of her life which describe the mystical marriage. It is very difficult to establish which versions of a saint's life lower status people may have had access to, but it is possible that they encountered the mystical marriage in the form of a sermon. Some of the manuscripts of the *Gilte Legende* may have been owned and used by priests within parish churches.[55]

The description of the mystical marriage and the events leading up to it provides some indication as to why St Katherine came to be seen as a purveyor of husbands. The prose life describes the difficulty the young fourteen year old queen has convincing her parliament that she does not need to marry, having set her sights on the perfect man, Christ, even though she does not yet know his name:

> For he þat schalle be me lord moost be of soo noble a blood þat alle kynges most

[54] Stephen Dewar, 'St Catherine of Alexandria and her cult at Abbotsbury', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 90 (1969), pp. 261-263.

[55] E.g. Southwell Minster 7, contains the prose life of St Katherine (including the mystical marriage), other saints' lives, and a copy of the *Festial*, suggesting that it was used by a cleric for purposes of parochial education. See Nevalinna and Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria*, pp. 50-52.

> worschype hym. And ther wyth soo greet a lord ƥat I schal neuer dore thenke I made hym kynge. And so ryche ƥat he passe alle other in rychesse. And soo full of beute ƥat aungels haue ioye to be holde hym [a, p. 241]

Katherine finishes by saying that he must be born of a virgin, which is perhaps the only quality which our young women would not be looking for. In answer to Katherine's tears and sighs as she tries to find her ideal man, the Virgin Mary sends the old hermit Adryan to bring Katherine to his cell where she shall be wedded to her chosen spouse. Adryan does as he is bidden and persuades Katherine to follow him out into the desert, where after becoming hopelessly lost they finally discover the 'glorious mynstre' where the wedding is to take place (a, p. 267).

The ensuing exposition is just one possible reading of the mystical marriage. Other alternatives were explored in the previous chapter. As with any narrative, the reading of this episode is dependent upon the interests and experiences of its audiences. This reading suggests some of the themes and issues which may have been at work in the adoption of St Katherine as patron for women who did not share her high secular status and had no intention of preserving their virginity, but who still regarded her as their special protector, as one whose experiences related her to them. These women seem to have imbued the mystical marriage with a relevance that was not metaphorical but literal. It is therefore important that unlike the Continental version of her legend in which Katherine marries the infant Christ in a dream, here Katherine marries the stunningly attractive adult Christ in an actual ceremony on earth. Just as Adryan administers the sacrament of baptism to Katherine, so he is now called upon to conduct the wedding mass:

> ƥis glorious kynge [Christ] bad Adryan do on his vestimentes and go to masse and say ƥe seruise ouer hem as longeth to ƥe custom of weddynge [a, p, 285]

As we have seen, several female mystics underwent mystical union with Christ which took the form of an actual ceremony, such as Catherine of Siena, Mechtild of Hackeborn and Margery Kempe. However, in all of these examples Christ seems to officiate himself. Adryan's role in the mystical marriage of St Katherine partly serves to underline sacerdotal authority, but also emphasises the actuality of the event. Christ seals his vow to Katherine with words which echo contemporary marriage vows. Christ tells

Katherine:

> Here I take 3ow to my wedded wyf behotyng 3ou treuley neuer to forsake 3ou whyl your lyf lasteth [ibid., p. 283]

which is reminiscent of the marriage vow, as recorded in the Use of York for example:

> Wylt thou have this woman to thy wyfe and loue her... and all other forsake for her, and hold the only to her to thy lyues end?[56]

The marriage and Katherine's subsequent training at the hands of Adryan takes place in real time, Christ telling her that she will stay with the hermit for ten days, during which a double will take her place at the palace, 'ƥat alle weuen ƥat hyt be 3our owne persone and whan 3e come hoom a3eyn, she shal voyde' (a, p. 289). Such a measure would not be necessary unless all the action had actually taken place on earth. Indeed it transpires that the heavenly court had indeed come down to earth for the wedding for when Katherine recovers from a swoon, induced by Christ's departure, she 'sawe no thyng aboute hir bot a lytil oold celle and Adrian wepyng be syde her' (ibid., p. 289). However, she is left with a token proving that the marriage had actually taken place, 'at ƥe laste she beheld ƥe rynge ƥat our lord sette on hir fynger' (ibid., p. 291). This reading therefore sees the marriage between Katherine and Christ not as that between the soul and God or any other analogous spiritual union, but as the actual joining together of a woman and a man in a bond that will outlast even death. If Katherine experienced an actual marriage with Christ, having created him as the ideal husband in her own words and thoughts, then it seems a logical development to believe that she would be concerned for the welfare of other women who wished to have a husband who shared at least some of Christ's qualities.

There are some traces of a connection between St Katherine and marriage in late-medieval sources. A fourteenth-century Sienese altar piece depicting an adult Christ wedding St Katherine with a ring, includes the representation of two men exchanging a kiss of peace (fig. 45). Although there is no evidence to suggest the precise circumstances under which the altarpiece was commissioned, it was probably intended to commemorate the reconciliation of two opposing parties in a peaceful union, perhaps

[56] Bray, 'Legend of St Katherine', p. 260.

through the medium of a marriage alliance.[57] The mystical marriage of St Katherine provides a symbol for that union.

Similar perceptions seem to have been at work in the inclusion of representations of St Katherine as part of the celebration of the marriage of Henry V and Katherine de Valois. As seen in chapter 2, one of these representations carried a tablet upon which was written 'Il est escrit, pur voir et dit, per mariage pur cesr guerre ne dure'.[58] This acknowledged that the marriage marked the end of the war between France and England and symbolised the union of the two countries. St Katherine's inclusion was no doubt intended as a tribute to the bride. However, as with the altarpiece it also suggests St Katherine's patronage of and involvement in both the marriage and the peace treaty.

The pageant which welcomed Katharine of Aragon into London in 1501, seems to have been governed by similar considerations, but here St Katherine's role as a marriage broker is made more explicit. On London Bridge the princess was met by women dressed as saints Ursula and Katherine, both held to be saints with British connections by this period.[59] Both saints addressed speeches to the princess praising her and her future husband Prince Arthur and rejoicing in her good fortune. The British connection is not the only explanation for St Katherine's inclusion; she was also Katharine of Aragon's name saint, a fact which St Katherine emphasises in her speech. The idea of St Katherine as provider of husbands also has a part to play in the pageant. At one stage the saint tells Katharine:

> And as I holpe you to Crist your first make,
> So haue I purveyed a secunde spouse trewe,
> But ye for him the first shal not forsake[60]

This speech provides further evidence for the concept that married women too could consider themselves brides of Christ. Given that the princess's English was presumably still at a fairly rudimentary level at this stage, St Katherine's speech was perhaps more for the benefit of the watching

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[57] Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena*, p. 110.

[58] Batt, '"These olde appreved stories"', p. 69.

[59] The fifteenth-century Southwell Minster manuscript comprises a collection of saints' lives with British connections such as Oswald, Dunstan, King Edmund the Martyr and Edmund the Confessor and also includes Katherine and Ursula.

[60] Gordon Kipling, ed., *The Receyt of the Ladie Kateryne*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 296 (1990), p. 14.

crowds. The public context of this speech suggests the widespread currency of the idea of St Katherine as marriage broker. As a lady of the highest rank Katharine of Aragon would never have had any doubts that she would get married. The significance of St Katherine's appearance here is to ensure that the princess will have a superb husband, one who will, as the saint says, bring her 'honour temporall'.[61] This fits in with the argument that St Katherine does not so much provide a husband out of thin air, but ensures that the prospective partner meets his future wife's requirements, as well as those of her family.

So far the evidence for St Katherine's association with the contract of marriage relates to those of high status. However, the evidence provided by the records of St Katherine's hospital in Sandhills, Newcastle suggests that the association had a more general currency with those further down the social scale as well. This hospital was founded in 1403 by Roger Thornton, reputed to have risen from poverty to become a very rich merchant. He held the office of mayor of Newcastle nine times.[62] Hospital buildings were sometimes used for public affairs and in 1456 permission was granted for the hall and kitchen of St Katherine's, Newcastle to be used by married couples for their wedding dinner and the reception of gifts.[63] This was perhaps of particular benefit to those families who did not have the facilities to stage such a reception in their own houses, and may even have been intended as a charitable provision. That the hospital should have granted such permission may be co-incidental, but given the other evidence for a connection between St Katherine and marriage, it may be that this was a particularly suitable venue for the celebration of marriage and a recognition of the part that she had played in its arrangement.

Another piece of medieval evidence which indirectly supports the link between the cult of St Katherine and contemporary marriage practice is provided by wills of Alice Durram of York.[64] Alice's first will was made on

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Clay, *Mediaeval Hospitals*, p 83.

[63] Ibid., pp. 110-111.

[64] These wills were drawn to my attention br Cordelia Beattie.

June 24 1390 while she was the wife of William Durram.[65] In it she displays a marked interest in St Katherine above any other saint, making the following bequests to her parish church of St Crux:

> ad luminem S[anc]ti Nich[olas] et S[anc]te kat[er]ine iii.s iiii.d and for the sustenance of candel[um] meum ante altarem s[anc]te kat[er]ine xiii.s iiii.d...
> ad altarem s[anc]te kat[er]ine in p[re]dict[a] ecc[les]ia vnu[m]longu[m]bordclathe dividend ad quatour frontell[?] faciend[a] ad p[re]dict[um] altar xiii.s iiii.d

The will also tells us that Alice's daughter was called Katherine, as was one of Katherine's own daughters, which seems to strengthen the case for familial devotion to St Katherine. Alice's husband William evidently died a few months after this, for on October 25 she made another will, this time as a widow.[66] In this will Alice makes detailed provision for the marriage of her two granddaughters, Katherine and Alice, leaving them ten shillings and five marks respectively. It may be that this bequest was also linked to her devotion to St Katherine. Alice could leave money so that her grandaughters had the means to get married but would not be able to join the rest of the family in the decision making process. Perhaps by leaving money and other items to her favourite saint Alice hoped that St Katherine in return would watch over her granddaughters and ensure that their dowry was spent on a good marriage.

The suggestion that St Katherine was regarded more usually as a marriage broker for lower status young women is perhaps supported by the fact that there are no extant visual representations of the mystical marriage of St Katherine to Christ in any media of English medieval art. There are many surviving examples from the Continent, particularly in Italian and Flemish art. Most of these representations show St Katherine being espoused to the infant Christ in line with the Continental version of her legend, although there are some Italian examples which show her marrying the adult Christ with Mary in attendance (fig. 45).[67] Given the amount of English medieval art which has been lost it may be pure chance that no examples have survived. On the other hand perhaps the image of St Katherine marrying the adult Christ (the version which would have been

[65] Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, probate register 1, fol. 21-21v.
[66] Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, probate register 1, fol. 20v.
[67] See Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena*, pp. 108-111.

depicted if anything was) would have been particularly abhorrent to the Protestant reformers.

However, it may be that the reason that no images of the mystical marriage survive is in fact further evidence that those who were interested in it as a concrete reality rather than as a metaphor could not commission such visual representations. Perhaps those who could afford to commission them (the same people who could afford to own manuscripts) did not want or need to see Christ marrying Katherine because to them the event was to be understood as an interior experience, something to be internalised and applied to their own relationship with Christ or God. The lack of visual representations of the mystical marriage may also indicate that those who did not own a copy of the life had an imperfect understanding of this episode which led them to interpret it literally rather than metaphorically and hence to adapt it to their own needs. Gilds often commissioned images and this would be a way in which less well-off individuals could play a part in their creation. However, it may be that by the time women possessed the resources to commission images, or make a donation to a collective fund, they no longer had any interest in the mystical marriage because they were already married.

Whatever the truth of this matter it seems that we are dealing in this instance with a popular aspect of the cult of St Katherine, something which does not seem to have been part of the official rituals and observances of her cult, or at least, that did not receive more official recognition until the very end of the period, when it became part of Katharine of Aragon's pageant. As we have seen the earliest traces of the custom of young women calling on St Katherine to provide them with a husband is provided by the work of antiquarians who took it upon themselves to record and preserve folkloric practices as part of England and subsequently Britain's heritage and identity. There are all sorts of interests and agendas at work in their writings which I acknowledge, but do not have space to explore fully. Making use of these sources is somewhat problematic, but they may well provide traces of late-medieval practices, which by their very nature were unlikely to be recorded at the time. However, the popular cult which this

reading attempts to reconstruct is not to be understood as isolated from the official dimensions of her cult. Indeed, it evidently derived from certain elements of the life of St Katherine oulined above with which these women would have been familiar. For example, the cult is certainly predicated on the knowledge of St Katherine's resting place, in the monastery at Mount Sinai.

As well as its status as an important pilgrimage site Mount Sinai evidently had a symbolic role to play in the cult of St Katherine. This is despite, or perhaps because of the fact that most people would not have been able to afford such a pilgrimage, or if they could and were women were not allowed inside the monastery. However, representations of the shrine, in both art and literature would at least allow them to make a mental pilgrimage there. It is noticeable that the description of her body taken to Mount Sinai is an almost omnipresent element in the later-medieval lives of St Katherine, unlike for example, the mystical marriage.

The symbolic function of Mount Sinai also seems to have informed the construction of several chapels dedicated to St Katherine from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. It seems to be no accident that these chapels were frequently built on hill tops, as at Winchester, Guildford (Surrey) and Christchurch (Dorset).[68] There were similar chapels at Weymouth, Cerne Abbas, Piddletrenthide, Holworth (all in Dorset) and on the Isle of Wight. The chapels at Milton Abbas (built in the thirteenth century, fig. 47) and Abbotsbury (built in the late fourteenth century, figs. 48 and 49), also both in Dorset, are perhaps the best preserved.[69] These chapels are all located in the south or south-west of England and more precisely mostly in Dorset. This may be an accident of survival. However, it accords with the geographic spread of St Katherine's cult in the eleventh century, and with other later medieval evidence that suggests that devotion to her was particularly strong in this part of the country.

According to the antiquarian sources these chapels provided a particular focus for the custom of praying to St Katherine for a husband.

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[68] M.D. Anderson, *Looking for History in British Churches* (London, 1951), pp. 14-15, pp. 189-191; Martin Biddle, ed., *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1976), p. 258.

[69] Dewar, 'St Catherine of Alexandria', p. 261.

The location of these chapels adds weight to the premise that we are dealing with young women drawn from the upper ranks of rural, peasant society. Apart from the examples at Winchester, Guildford and Christchurch (which may therefore be exceptions although there is no way to know for sure) all of them are to be found within, or just outside, small rural communities. The status of these women is further determined by their practice of calling on St Katherine's aid with respect to marriage, as has been suggested. Appealing to St Katherine for help seems to be predicated on relative wealth and a concomitant lack of freedom in the choice of partner.

The practices associated with the custom of praying to St Katherine as marriage broker have been described in most detail by Dewar and Christina Hole.[70] Most of the extant evidence is related to the chapels at Abbotsbury and Milton Abbas, but there is evidence that at least some, if not all of the other chapels functioned similarly. There is no direct proof that any such rituals were conducted by young women in the later Middle Ages, but I have attempted to demonstrate that there is at least a strong possibility that similar practices were associated with these chapels in the fifteenth century at least. According to Dewar and Hole, on St Katherine's day young women would make their way up to the chapel of St Katherine on foot, sometimes having first drunk from a well dedicated to her. The road at the foot of the hill in Milton Abbas is still called Katherine's Well. On reaching the chapel they would recite a prayer to the saint, one version of which is given by Dewar as follows:

> A husband, St Katherine
> A handsome one, St Katherine
> A rich one, St Katherine
> A nice on, St Katherine
> And soon, St Katherine.[71]

The Dorsetshire folklorist J.S. Udal suggested that this prayer may be an echo of a medieval rhyme.[72] Indeed, it does bear marked similarities to Katherine's description of the perfect husband given above. The man she wishes to marry certainly qualifies as handsome, rich and nice. Although I

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[70] Dewar, ibid., pp. 261-263; Christina Hole, *English Shrines and Sanctuaries* (London, 1954), pp. 159-160; also Anderson, *Looking for History*, p. 15.

[71] Dewar, ibid., p. 261.

[72] Ibid.

have not found a contemporary medieval version of this prayer to St Katherine, the Paston letters bear witness that to pray for a husband was certainly a medieval custom. On the 14th September 1465 John Paston III wrote to Margaret Paston, instructing her:

> I pray yow vysyt ȝe Rood of Northedor, and Seynt Sauyour at Barmonsey amonge whyll ye abyd in London, and let my sustyr Margery goo wyth yow to prey to them ȝat sche may haue a good hosbond or sche com hom ayen[73]

At Abbotsbury it was customary for the women to make their prayer while clinging to three holes in the door jamb, their knees in one hole and their hands in the other two. This custom, like the habit of drinking from the well, presumably lent the whole enterprise an enhanced significance.

There is no suggestion of any institutional involvement in these rituals, the women do not appear to go to the chapel to attend a service of any kind. Instead this phenomenon seems to be genuinely popular in nature, a practice that was born of various elements of the life and cult of St Katherine and was developed in order to respond to the needs of a specific group by that group itself, with reference to the wider cult, but separate from it.[74] As Gurevich argues, in many respects, as far as peasants were concerned, the most important and attractive thing about a saint was her or his ability to affect materially their lives on earth and to perform miracles. This is certainly at the forefront of this incarnation of the cult of St Katherine.[75]

Perhaps these practices took the form of a large-scale ritual involving groups of women on the feast day itself. At other times women made the pilgrimage on their own initiative as circumstances dictated. I use the word pilgrimage to describe this custom because despite its small scale it bears all the hall-marks; making a special journey on foot to a place at which the saint's power was held to be particularly potent, following prescribed rituals

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[73] N. Davies, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century 1* (London, 1971), p. 529.

[74] Robert Hertz, 'St Besse: a study of an Alpine cult', originally published in 1913, then translated and republished by Stephen Wilson as part of his *Saints and their Cults*, pp. 55-100, remains a very useful exploration of the development and dynamics of the official and popular strands in a saint's cult, in particular the ways in which both traditions 'shed a sharp light on the psychology of the profoundly different social groups in which they were elaborated' (p. 79).

[75] Aron Gurevich, 'Peasants and saints', in his *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 39-77.

and asking for a specific favour. The only thing that is missing is a relic of the saint to provide a tangible focus, although each chapel would undoubtedly have housed a cult image of St Katherine which would have served a similar purpose.

Given these circumstances I would therefore argue that the meaning and function of this pilgrimage was encapsulated in the act itself and it is in this respect that the custom links these women to the wider cult of St Katherine. They would have been well aware of the existence of the body and shrine of St Katherine on Mount Sinai. These young women could never hope to visit it themselves, but by undertaking to climb the hill to their local chapel of St Katherine, an imitation Mount Sinai, they could effect a mimetic pilgrimage and one constructed to fit their specific needs. These women did not have access to the actual body of St Katherine, but the hill top pilgrimage and its associated practices was a way of bringing her within reach. Her presence was simultaneously created and affirmed by the supplicatory actions of these women who located her both physically and mentally within the map of their lives and experiences.

In climbing to the hill top these women were making a journey which they hoped would lead them to the perfect husband and in this respect the late-medieval life of St Katherine held direct relevance to their experiences, for as we have seen she too undertook a similar pilgrimage, the end result of which was her mystical marriage. This analysis therefore links back to the actual life of St Katherine. St Katherine's journey to the Minster perhaps finds its parallel in the walk to the hill top. Both are undertaken as acts of faith; Katherine trusting in the words of Adryan and the Virgin, the young women trusting in the power of St Katherine. Just as the young women seem to have followed some sort of ritual (presumably self-regulated) in order to prepare themselves to petition the saint and improve their chances of success, so St Katherine must be taught 'alle þe poyntes of þe feyth' before she arrives at the Minster and must be baptised once she gets there before she is even allowed to look upon Christ.

However, ultimately perhaps the most important aspect of this whole phenomenon was the sense of solidarity which it must have

engendered. Perhaps it provided these young women with a collective identity something akin to the groups of maidens, drawn from the same social background, who sometimes banded together to provide for the upkeep of particular lights within their parish churches, and are identified as such in later fifteenth and early-sixteenth century wills and churchwardens' accounts. Richard Igulden left 6d to 'the young wemyns light' in Biddenden church in 1518, and the following year George a Forde left 6d to the 'maidens' light in his church at Frittenden.[76] Lawrence Sowter of Long Sutton, Lincolnshire left 2d to the 'maydens light' in the Church of Our Lady of Sutton in 1528.[77] The dedication of these maidens' lights is never specified as being that of a particular saint, but there are references from Whitstable to 'our lady light called the wymens light', for example in the 1514 will of Simon Hokking, and 'the light of our lady that the men doth keep', in William Roger's will of 1522.[78] As with any fairly small scale gilds these groups of men and women may have banded together to maintain a specific light of the Virgin, or may have chosen to set up a new light dedicated to her. Whichever was the case, it is not inconceivable that some of the maidens' lights could have been dedicated to St Katherine.

The women who climbed to the chapels were certainly aware that they were participating in a tried and tested ritual. It may have provided them with a sense that there was a way in which they could take a hand in determining or at least influencing the course of their future. Perhaps this practice was passed down from mother to daughter. The fact that it endured for so long is testament to its perceived effectiveness. It is also testament to the ways in which the cult of St Katherine answered the needs and aspirations of her devotees. It seems likely that devotion to St Katherine was preserved right up to the last century by those for whom it had always held the most meaning and power: young women.

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[76] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, Richard Igulden p. 19, George a Forde p. 136.
[77] Foster, *Lincoln Wills* 2, p. 115.
[78] Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent*, both on p. 359.

St Katherine, the Empress and the married woman

In chapter 2 we saw that it was only towards the end of the medieval period that the cults of married female saints became a conspicuous part of late-medieval devotions. It was argued that this is not necessarily to be understood as signifying that saints' cults did not cater directly for married women. We have seen that the popularity of St Katherine can be linked to the additional elements in her life that mark her out from other virgin martyrs. In this concluding section I shall argue that the popularity of St Katherine with lay women, with women who were, would be, or had been married, rests with one final additional element: the Empress.[79]

The Empress and her faithful companion Porphirius, are unique figures in virgin martyr hagiography. Other virgin martyr lives do contain ancillary female characters: Ursula has her eleven thousand virgins; Lucy has a Christian mother; Margaret has a Christian nurse. Nor are these female characters always sympathetic: Dorothy's two sisters vacillate between Christianity and paganism before finally making the right decision; Christina's mother tries to convince her daughter to reconvert to paganism; Agatha is alternately threatened and cajoled by the lascivious Aphrodisia and her nine daughters in an attempt to compromise her virtue. All of these characters, however, are one dimensional, sketched in by the author in one or two lines, often with very little to do or say beyond being present at certain points in the narrative. The Empress alone is given a sustained part to play. We see her captivated by Katherine's words and demeanour, compelled to visit the prison at night and confronted by the sight of Katherine tended by angels. She converts to Christianity, a fact which becomes public after St Katherine has defeated the wheels. Spurred on by her outrage at Maxentius' brutality, she publicly challenges his actions and as a result is tortured and martyred, suffering the loss of her breasts before being beheaded. As we have seen, her body is left unburied and it is Porphirius' concern that it be properly cared for that leads to his own

[79] Some of the lives refer to her as Empress, some as Queen. I have chosen to use Empress as Maxentius is usually described as an emperor. None of the extant Middle English lives give her a name, although she is sometimes called Faustina, see Meiss and Beatson, *The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, plate 20.

martyrdom.

The presence of the Empress within this narrative raises many interesting questions, of which only a few can be considered here. It seems reasonable to posit that the inclusion of the Empress served to make this narrative of particular relevance for married women, and that this provides another explanation for its popularity over other such narratives. We have seen that St Katherine could help her devotees find husbands, either directly or indirectly. It may be that the importance of the Empress and her relationship with Katherine lies in what it has to say about the conduct of the ideal woman once she has found that husband and married him. The Empress broadens the dimensions of the narrative, rendering it more complex and meaningful at the same time. The female audience is provided with not one, but two models of ideal femininity, both of which have something to say about the status of married women, of their relationships with their husbands and their spiritual potential. The figure of the Empress allows us to suggest some of the ways in which the life of St Katherine, virgin and martyr held great relevance to the experiences of women as wives. This adds even greater weight to the argument that the life of St Katherine was of particular value in the training and socialisation of girls.

Although the Empress had been a standard figure within the narrative of St Katherine's life at least from the time of the Vulgate onwards, her role becomes ever more detailed and significant throughout the course of the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is perhaps no accident that her role is particularly expanded in those narratives which describe the mystical marriage. The Empress, as well as Porphirius, functions as a model of the ideal feminised Christian. However, here I am more concerned with her status as a model in a more direct sense.

The part of the narrative which deals with her experiences provides a blueprint for other married women, indicating the ways in which they can follow and imitate St Katherine and the rewards that will await them in Heaven as a result. Indeed, it may be that the greater space which the Empress is afforded in the prose life, especially in **d**, the latest recension,

indicates that authors recognised and responded to her popularity and utility. Especially as several of these manuscripts were demonstrably in the hands of married lay women. However, it seems likely that the Empress' example is not necessarily to be understood as restricted to those who could afford to own the prose life. The wall paintings at Sporle include the Empress and her experiences as an intrinsic part of the narrative (figs. 11 and 12).[80] The model of ideal marital femininity which the Empress and Katherine combine to produce may well have held relevance in some fashion at least for all women, no matter what their rank.

'ƿu art a mayden in ƿi sowle'

The Empress does not appear within the narrative until her husband has temporarily disappeared from it:

> Bot hit fel soƿat ƿe saam tiraunt maxence moost goo to ƿe forthest partyes of his lond for gret causes ƿat he had to do [d, p. 46]

In his absence the Empress assumes authority over the palace and she comes to hear of Katherine and her trials.

> When ƿe queen herde ƿis wood sentence of hir husbond though she were in ƿe errour of hetheness ȝeet of ƿe gentil goodnes of hir hert sche had reuthe of ƿe wykked dissese ƿat was do to so tendir age and ƿerfore sche was in gret anguisse of desir to see ƿe face of ƿe virgyn and to speke wyth hir [ibid., p. 46]

At this stage she is still frightened of her husband so she prevails upon Porphirius to take her in secret to the prison.

It is in Katherine's words to the Empress in the prison, and later before her death, that lie the explanation of how the term 'virgin' could have relevance for married women. Katherine tells her not to fear suffering for Christ, for it will lead her to Heaven. In addition the saint says:

> Ne drede not ƿe temporal kyng ƿat ys ƿy deedly spouse whiche ys now proude in hys power and to-morwe schal be fylthe and wormes. Drede not I say to despise his felouschyp for ƿe euerlastyng kynge and undeedly spouse oure lord iesu crist for he ȝeueth endeles medes for ƿese faylynge worschepe. And for ƿese godes ƿa t abide not he graunteth godes pat abyden wyth outen ende [ibid., p. 49]

These sentiments are reiterated when the Empress, being dragged past Katherine on her way to torture and execution, asks that the saint pray for her. She is afraid of showing fear at the last. Katherine reassures her:

> Drede not... ƿou worscepfulle and welbeloued queene vn to god but do manfully

[80] Several other cycles depict the Empress visiting St Katherine in prison, figs. 24, 28, 29 and 39.

> for þis day schalt þou chaunge an erthly kyngdom for an euerlastynge kyngdom. This day schalt þou gete for a deedly husbond an vundeedly spouse. This day schalt þou receyue endles rest for a lytil peyne and for a schort deeþ endles lyf [ibid., p. 57]

The implication is clear: the Empress is to be counted as one of the brides of Christ. The Empress is a married woman, not a virgin, and virginity, understood as physical intactness, is usually considered to be the prime qualification for marriage to Christ. Katherine's words to the Empress, taken in conjunction with other evidence indicates that virginity was sometimes understood as entailing a mental state of perfection that did not necessarily have to be mirrored in an unpermeated body, simply a chaste one.

St Augustine judged that 'violation of chastity, without the will's consent, cannot pollute the character',[81] words echoed by St Lucy when Pascaas orders her to be taken to a brothel:

> Quod Lucye ageyn: 'ful weel knowe I
> That defoulyd shal neuer þe body
> Wyth-owten assent of þe soule be'[82]

Admittedly Lucy does not suffer physical violation and it could be argued that despite Augustine's observations those who had not been able to preserve their virginity for what ever reason would always be second best to those who had. However, St Katherine's words to the Empress seem to open up the space for an alternative. It seems likely that, patristic rhetoric not withstanding, there were strategies available for married women to reconstruct themselves as virgins and thus negotiate a relationship between themselves and Christ which allowed them to think of themselves as his bride.

Women who were able to eschew sexual relations with their husbands, either through the death of a partner and the ability to remain unmarried, or through a mutual agreement to remain chaste, would perhaps find such an exercise easiest to accomplish. However, we should not assume that women for whom this was not possible were not able to reconstruct themselves internally in similar ways, whatever their physical circumstances. It is certainly a trope of married female saints' lives that they

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[81] Henry Bettenson, ed., *St Augustine: City of God* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 26.

[82] Serjeantson, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, p. 252.

carried out their conjugal duties only with extreme repugnance, or in recognition of the fact that children were a blessing of marriage. Bokenham describes how St Elizabeth of Hungary got married 'Neyther for lust nere lykynge of hir body, But hyr fadrys wyl for she wold do'.[83] Once she is married we are told that:

> Yet not-for-þan in hyr hert secre
> Hyr affeccyoun wyth-owtyn chaungabylnesse
> Was more leef a maydyn to haue be[84]

Here we see that her inner state, within her 'hert secre' is to be taken as a true reflection of her spiritual status. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Elizabeth de Vere commissioned the life from Bokenham, because during her life the saint experienced 'maydenhede, maryage, & also wydewede'.[85] However, virgin martyrs were far more popular than saints such as Elizabeth of Hungary, and I would argue that therefore they, and in particular St Katherine, were actually of far more importance in this issue of reconstructing oneself as a virgin.

It would appear that the equivocal nature of married women's spiritual status was something that individual women negotiated privately in their relationship with God. An example of the kinds of strategies which were available can be found in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The text reconstructs Margery as a virgin by telling us as early as chapter 11 that she and her husband took a mutual vow to live chaste.[86] Margery subsequently assumed the identity of a virgin by dressing in white and by imitating virgin martyrs in her public conduct and willingness to suffer for Christ. St Katherine was evidently a saint of the utmost importance to Margery, something which did not escape the notice of the mayor of Leicester, who upbraids her for imitating the saint: 'Seynt Kateryn telde what kynred sche cam of & 3et ar 3e not lyche'.[87] However, this comparison is drawn because the mayor asks Margery who she is and where she is from, and she answers him. This is the standard opening to the interrogation of a virgin martyr, and perhaps the mayor is rather angry with himself for having allowed an

[83] Ibid., p. 263.
[84] Ibid., p. 264.
[85] Ibid., p. 259.
[86] Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 23-25.
[87] Ibid., pp. 111-112.

obvious similarity between the two to become apparent. By attacking Margery so vehemently, calling her a strumpet and a Lollard and throwing her in prison, he does not diminish the similarity, but rather makes it even more apparent.[88]

I have argued that the Empress demonstrates that married women can be like St Katherine. Like the saint, the Empress speaks out publicly against a tyrant, is tortured and martyred, and is assured that she too will be the spouse of Christ. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Margery Kempe found the life of St Katherine such a valuable text. For despite letting us know early on that she took her vow of chastity, it is apparent that this actually happened only after twenty years of marriage. The *Book* gives us an idea of the ways in which a woman who was married and still sexually active could maintain spiritual union with Christ. Margery laments the loss of her virginity, wishing that she had been taken from the font and killed, thus could she have preserved her maidenhood forever.[89] She also tells Christ, 'Lord, I am not worthy to heryn þe spekyn & þus to comown wyth myn husbond'.[90]

But Christ's reassurances provide Margery with a method of dealing with this:

> 3a, dowtyr, trow þow rygth wel þat I lofe wyfes also, and special þo wyfys whech woldyn levyn chast, *3yf þei myghten haue her wyl*, & donher besynes to plesyn me as þow dost, for þow þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte & mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode & þe state of wededhode mor parfyte þan þe state of wedlake, 3et dowtyr I lofe þe as wel as any mayden in þe world. þer may no man let me to lofe whom I wele & as mech as I wyl, for lofe, dowtyr, qwenchith al synne [my italics].[91]

As happens so often in the *Book*, Christ takes Margery's will for the deed and acknowledges that 'þu art a mayden in þe sowle'.[92] If we consider that Christ's voice was a projection of Margery's innermost thoughts and desires, it provides another indication that women, and married women in particular, did not simply internalise contemporary thought on the nature of their bodies and its relation to their spiritual potential, but could find

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[88] Ibid., p. 112.
[89] Ibid., p. 50.
[90] Ibid., p. 48.
[91] Ibid., p. 49.
[92] Ibid., p. 52.

ways to rationalise and justify a partnership with Christ usually thought to be open only to virgins. Christ tells Margery that wives who would live chastely are particularly dear to him, but he does not shut off those who are quite happy in their conjugal relationships, although it is perhaps telling that Margery distances herself from this latter group.

The *Book* provides evidence that married women could indeed consider themselves to be maidens in their souls, and this not only solves the problem of how virgin martyrs in general could be of relevance to them, but why the life of St Katherine should have been so very valuable. For the Empress provides these women with a direct model of this phenomenon in action and the rewards that can accrue from it.

'...þat oþer matrones of þe Empryre of Rome... schold turne her husbondes from þe worschep of oure goddys'.

Another respect in which the Empress can be seen as an exemplary model for wives is in her attempts to counsel her husband. When she sees Maxentius attempt to kill Katherine on the wheels the Empress can remain silent about her conversion no longer. She is empowered by Katherine's example and 'toke boldly þe way to þe presence of þat wood beste' [d, pp. 55-56]. She berates him for his cruelty and tries to make him see the error of his ways.

> Trowest þou to haue a good ende in batayle þat þou hast take aȝenst god and aȝenst hys seruantes. At þe leest knowe þou now in þis present dede how myghty ys þe god of cristen puple... as þou myghtist here many of þe puple booth hethen and oþir þat come to þis wondrynge... are turned vn to crist [ibid., p. 56]

Maxentius is outraged not only by her words but by her audacity in publicly attacking him. He accuses her of witchcraft (ibid). Another part of his answer relates to the suggestion made above. Maxentius knows that he cannot afford to show even his wife any favour, for it would threaten the stability of the Empire itself:

> Naþeles yf þe loue of wedlock schold softe me so muche þat for þe blamefull chaungeablenesse of þe queene I schold be negligent of þe repref of oure goddes what schold folwe bot þat oþer matrones of þe Empryre of Rome suynge þe ensaumple of þe same errour schold turne her husbondes from þe worschep of oure goddys and so all oure kyngdom schold be bowed to þe veyn fables and foly sect of cristen puple [ibid]

This idea of wives influencing their husbands' faith is in keeping with contemporary ideas about the religious dynamics pertaining to a married couple. Several clerical authors recognised that just as preachers were conduits of divine grace within the public sphere, so wives could perform the same function in private.[93] Thomas of Chobham, writing in the early thirteenth century, suggested that priests should advise women to teach their husbands to lead better lives, because no priest could soften a man's heart as effectively as his wife. Chobham envisioned much of this teaching taking place actually within the marriage bed, the wife lying in her husband's arms, talking to him softly and helping him to improve his conduct.[94]

According to this logic the Empress is wrong to attempt to advise Maxentius in public, but her behaviour is excused by the extremity of the situation, and this does not lessen the applicability of the model she offers. The fact that she is not able to convince her husband is no fault of hers. She is certainly right to try and change his mind and his beliefs. The fact that Maxentius envisions the whole Empire being converted by wives is testament to the important role that women were perceived to have in the dissemination and maintenance of Christian beliefs and mores.

'And the simple, noble ladies, following the example of suffering which God commands, have cheerfully suffered the great attacks which, both in the spoken and the written word, have been wrongfully perpetrated against women by men who all the while appealed to God for the right to do so'

The words of Lady Reason to Christine de Pisan at the beginning of *The Book of the City of Ladies* seem to explain the relevance of Christine's decision to denote martyrs as the highest ladies in the City.[95] As all women suffer, at best harsh words, at worst physical attack, what better models could there be than women who managed to undergo excruciating torture with complete equanimity, in the knowledge that it brought them closer to

[93] Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive voices: clerical images of medieval wives', *Speculum* 51 (1986), pp. 517-543.

[94] Minnis, 'De impedimento sexus', pp. 20-21.

[95] de Pisan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, p. 10.

Christ?[96]

There are many respects in which this example of fortitude relates to the lives and experiences of women. To conclude this investigation of the role of the Empress I shall suggest that the torments she undergoes are not solely the exemplary suffering of a devout Christian to defend her faith, but also the endurance of cruelty inflicted by a brutal husband. Maxentius attempts to reassert public control over his errant wife by tearing off her breasts. He is able to inflict irreparable damage on her body, but manages to have no other affect on her at all. She does not scream or beg for mercy, in fact she 'stured ȝe turmentours ȝat ȝey scholde fulfille ȝe tyrauntys byddynge and not tary' (d, p. 57). The Empress knows that her suffering ensures her a place in Heaven at Christ's side.

There is a strong sense in which the suffering that women underwent in marriage was equated with the experiences of the martyrs, and the Empress, unlike all the other women in virgin martyr narratives, undergoes torture at the hands of the man to whom she is married. This renders her an entirely appropriate model for the kind of fortitude which Christine de Pisan recommends. It can be no coincidence that after describing the exploits of the martyrs Christine addresses her audience with the following words:

> Those women with peaceful, good, and discrete husbands who are devoted to them, praise God for this boon, which is not inconsiderable, for a greater boon in the world could not be given to them... And those women who have husbands neither completely good nor completely bad should still praise God for not having the worst and should strive to moderate their vices and pacify them, according to their conditions. And those women who have husbands who are cruel, mean, and savage should strive to endure them, while trying to overcome their vices and lead them back, if they can, to a reasonable and seemly life. And if they are so obstinate that their wives are unable to do anything, at least they will acquire great merit for their souls through the virtue of patience. And everyone will bless them and support them[97]

If Christine's advice is to endure all with equanimity, it is interesting to notice Camden's observation that when girls pray for good husbands, women pray for 'better by the death or desertion of their present ones, or, at

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[96] For an examination of Christine's reworking of the life of her name saint see 'Kevin Brownlee, 'Martyrdom and the female voice: Saint Christine in the *Cite des Dames'*, in Blumefeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 115-135.

[97] Ibid., p. 255.

least, by an alteration in their manners'.[98] The latter part of this prayer fits in with Christine's recommendation that wives should try to lead errant husbands back to a 'seemly life'. There is also an implication in the first part of the prayer that should this fail St Katherine can be relied upon to deal with problem husbands once and for all.

Whether such factors played a part in the late-medieval cult of St Katherine it seems clear that she was of great value to married women. The Empress demonstrates that their status as wives is no bar to their ability to appropriate St Katherine's example. Similar factors were doubtless at work in the cults of other virgin martyrs too and this is entirely in keeping with Christine de Pisan's observation that they:

> ...demonstrate God's approval of the feminine sex with examples of His giving young and tender women... the constancy and strength to suffer horrible martyrdom for His holy law, women who are crowned in glory and whose fair lives serve as examples for *every woman* above all other wisdom [my italics][99]

[98] Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, p. 410.
[99] de Pisan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, p. 219.

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Newton, Peter. 'Iconography Index'. Housed in the Wormald Library, King's Manor, York.

Phillips, Kim. 'Medieval maidenhood: what old men say about young girls'. Paper delivered as part of the York Medieval Seminar series on 'Youth in the Middle Ages'.

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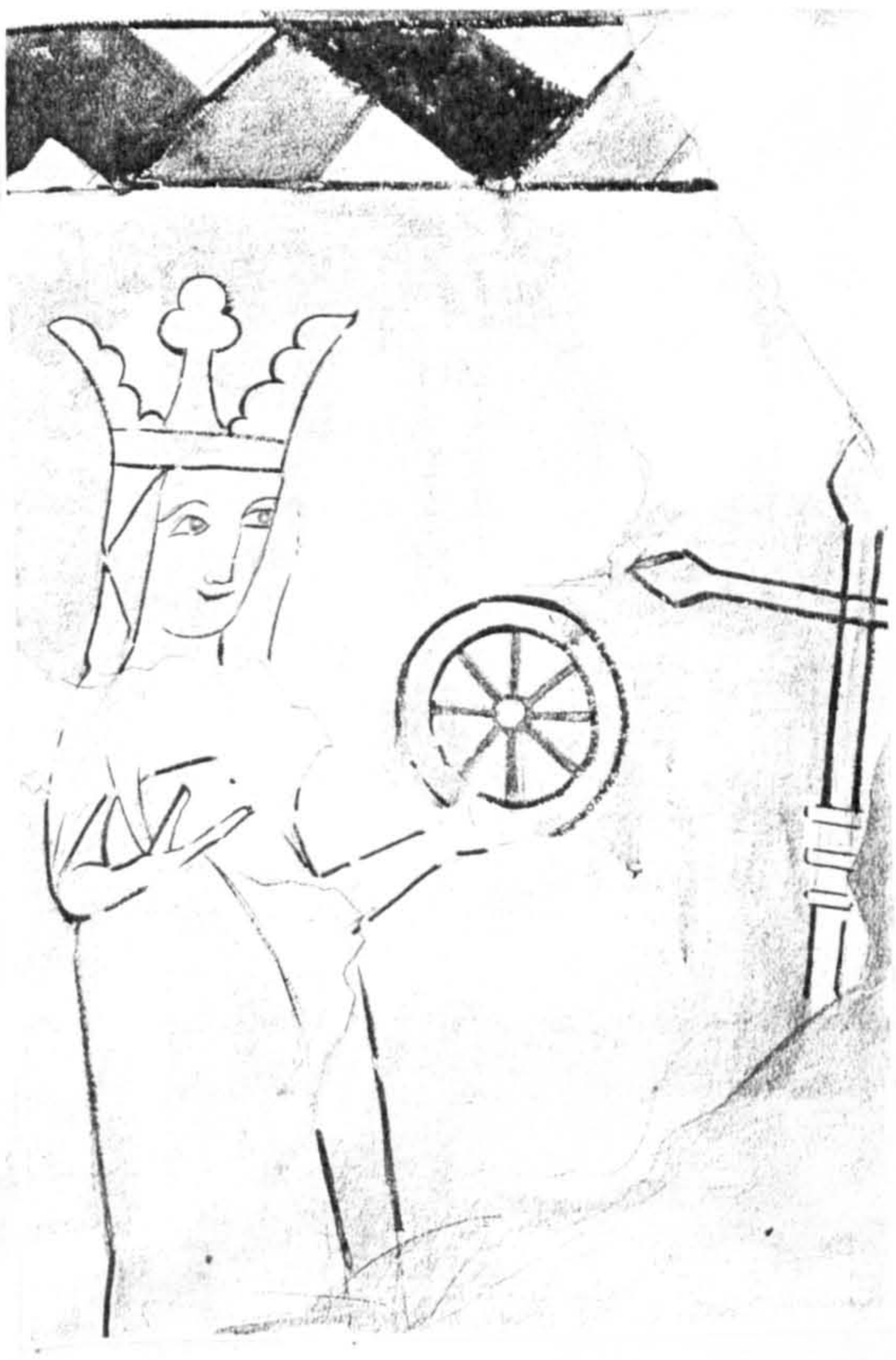
Riches, S.J.E. '"The pot of oure hope". The images of St Anne in the late-medieval World'. MA thesis, University of York, 1991.

Salih, Sarah. 'The performance of virginity'. Paper given at the Gender and Medieval Studies conference 'Gender and Transgression in the Middle Ages', University of York, January 1996.

Fig. 1

a) St Katherine, b) St Margaret, Cold Overton, Leicestershire, c. 1290.
Source: E.W. Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1950), plate 113.



a.

b.

Fig. 2

a) St Katherine, b) St Margaret, Hailes Church, Gloucestershire . c. 1280.
Source: Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century*, plate 112.

Fig. 3

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel of St Katherine, 42.4 x 12 cm.
Source: Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters* (Oxford, 1984), p. 84.

Fig. 4

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel of St Barbara, 41.5 x 14.1 cm.
Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 79.

Fig. 5

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel of St Margaret, 41.5 x 12.9 cm.
Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 128.

Fig. 6

Fifteenth-century alabaster figure of St Mary Magdalene, 70 x 23.4 cm.
Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 129.

Fig. 7

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel of St John the Baptist, 33.7 x 12.5 cm.
Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabaster*, p. 113.

Fig. 8

Fifteenth-century alabaster figure of St Christopher, 44.8 x 15.7 cm.
Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 93.

Fig. 9

The life of St Katherine, Sporle, Norfolk, late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century. The drawings were made c. 1855 soon after the paintings were discovered and while they were in better condition. A copy of the drawings, from which these photographs were taken hangs below the mural.

1. St Katherine bids her parents goodbye.
2. The pagan sacrifice in Alexandria.
3. St Katherine before Maxentius.

8. Porphirius visits St Katherine in prison.
9. The conversion of the two hundred guards.
10. St Katherine scourged before Maxentius.

Fig. 10

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

4. The Philosophers acknowledge their defeat.
5. The death of the Philosophers.

11. The evil counsellor suggests the wheels to Maxentius.

Fig. 11

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

6. Maxentius tempts St Katherine.
7. St Katherine is sent to prison.

12. The breaking of the wheels.
13. The Empress confronts Maxentius and is condemned.

Fig. 12

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

14. The execution of the Empress.
15. Porphirius buries the Empress's body.
16. The two hundred guards announce their conversion.

19. St Katherine is condemned to death.
20. St Katherine led to execution.
21. Maxentius's soul claimed by devils (?).

Fig. 13

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

17. Maxentius passes sentence on his guards.
18. The execution of Porphirius and the guards.

22. St Katherine led to execution.
23. The execution of St Katherine.
24. The burial of St Katherine on Mt Sinai.
25. Pilgrims visit the shrine on Mt Sinai.

Fig. 14

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

Detail of 14 (death of the Empress), 15 (burial of her body) and 19 (St Katherine condemned to death), 20 (St Katherine led to execution).

Fig. 15

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

Detail of 16 (the confession of the two hundred guards) and 21 (Maxentius punished).

Fig. 16

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

Detail of 17 (Sentence is passed on the two hundred guards) and 23 (the execution of St Katherine).

Fig. 17

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

Detail of 18 (the execution of Porphirius and the two hundred guards), 24 (the burial of St Katherine) and 25 (pilgrims visit the shrine).

Fig. 18

The life of St Katherine, Sporle.

Detail of 25, the three pilgrims pray at the foot of Mt Sinai.

Fig. 19

The life of St Katherine, Castor, Northamptonshire, c. 1330.

Fig. 20

The life of St Katherine, Castor.

St Katherine confronts Maxentius/ St Katherine and the Philosophers.

Fig. 21

The life of St Katherine, Castor.

The death of the Philosophers.

Fig. 22

The life of St Katherine, Castor.

The breaking of the wheels.

Fig. 23

The life of St Katherine in the fourteenth-century Queen Mary's Psalter.
Source: George Warner, *Queen Mary's Psalter: Miniatures and Drawings by an English Artist of the Fourteenth Century, Reproduced from Royal MS 2 B. VII in the British Museum* (London, 1912), plates 274 and 275.

1. St Katherine before Maxentius and the death of the Philosophers.
2. St Katherine scourged before Maxentius.

Fig. 24

The life of St Katherine, Queen Mary's Psalter.
Source: Warner, *Queen Mary's Psalter*, plates 276 and 277.

3. St Katherine sent to prison.
4. Porphirius and the Empress visit St Katherine in prison.
5. St Katherine condemned to death.

Fig. 25

The life of St Katherine, Queen Mary's Psalter.
Source: Warner, *Queen Mary's Psalter*, plates 277 and 278.

6. The breaking of the wheels.
7. The execution of St Katherine.
8. The burial of St Katherine on Mount Sinai.

Fig. 26

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 85.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel, 30.5 x 23.2 cm. This panel may have formed part of an altarpiece, but single panels of the subject survive, suggesting that it may alternatively have functioned as an independent devotional image.

St Katherine debates with the Philosophers.

Fig. 27

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 86.

Fifteenth century alabaster panel, 46.3 x 27.9 cm. Part of a cycle. Cheetham suggests that this panel was originally from the same altarpiece as fig. 31, the execution of St Katherine.

The death of the Philosophers.

Fig. 28

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 87.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel, 41.5 x 25.4 cm. This panel is from the same altarpiece as fig. 32, the execution of St Katherine.

St Katherine in prison, visited by Porphirius and the Empress.

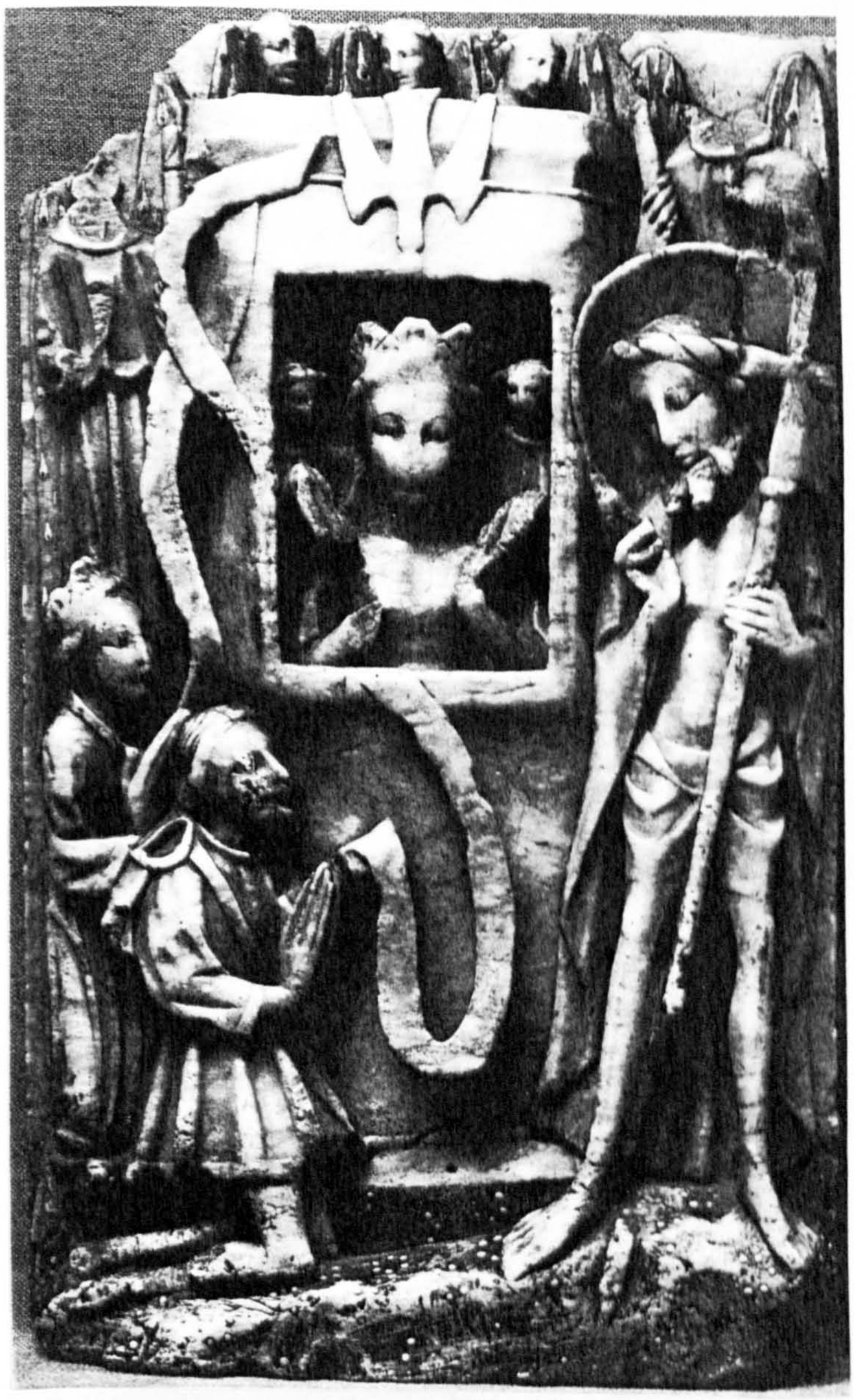


Fig. 29

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 88.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel, 42.3 x 26.9 cm. As with fig. 26 single panels of this subject are also extant, so this panel may not necessarily have formed part of a cycle.

St Katherine in prison, visited by Porphirius and the Empress.

Fig. 30

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 89.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel, 40.5 x 26.2 cm. Representations of this subject survive both in altarpieces and as single panels.

The breaking of the wheels.

Fig. 31

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 90.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel, 43.1 x 27.2 cm. This panel was probably part of an altarpiece with fig. 27.

The execution of St Katherine.

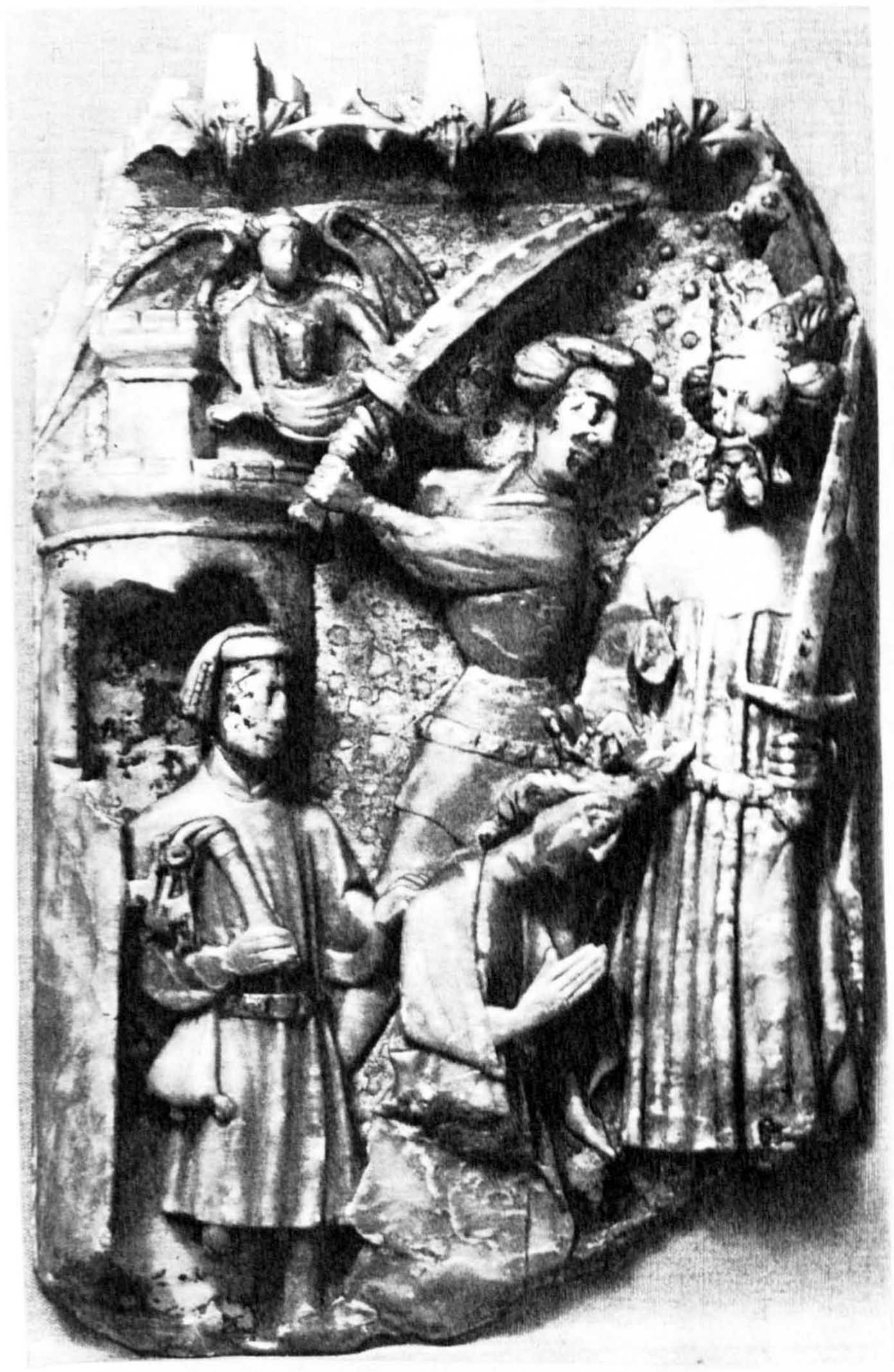


Fig. 32

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 91.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel, 40.2 x 25.8 cm. This panel comes from the same altarpiece as fig. 28, St Katherine in prison.

The execution of St Katherine.

Fig. 33

The life of St Katherine, Little Missenden, Buckinghamshire, c. 1270.
Source: Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century*, plate 197.

Head of St Katherine.

Fig. 34

The life of St Katherine, Little Missenden.
Source: Tristram, *Medieval English Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century*, plate 196.

Head of Maxentius.

Fig. 35

The life of St Katherine, Little Missenden.
Source: Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century*, plate 198.

St Katherine debates with Maxentius and the Philosophers.

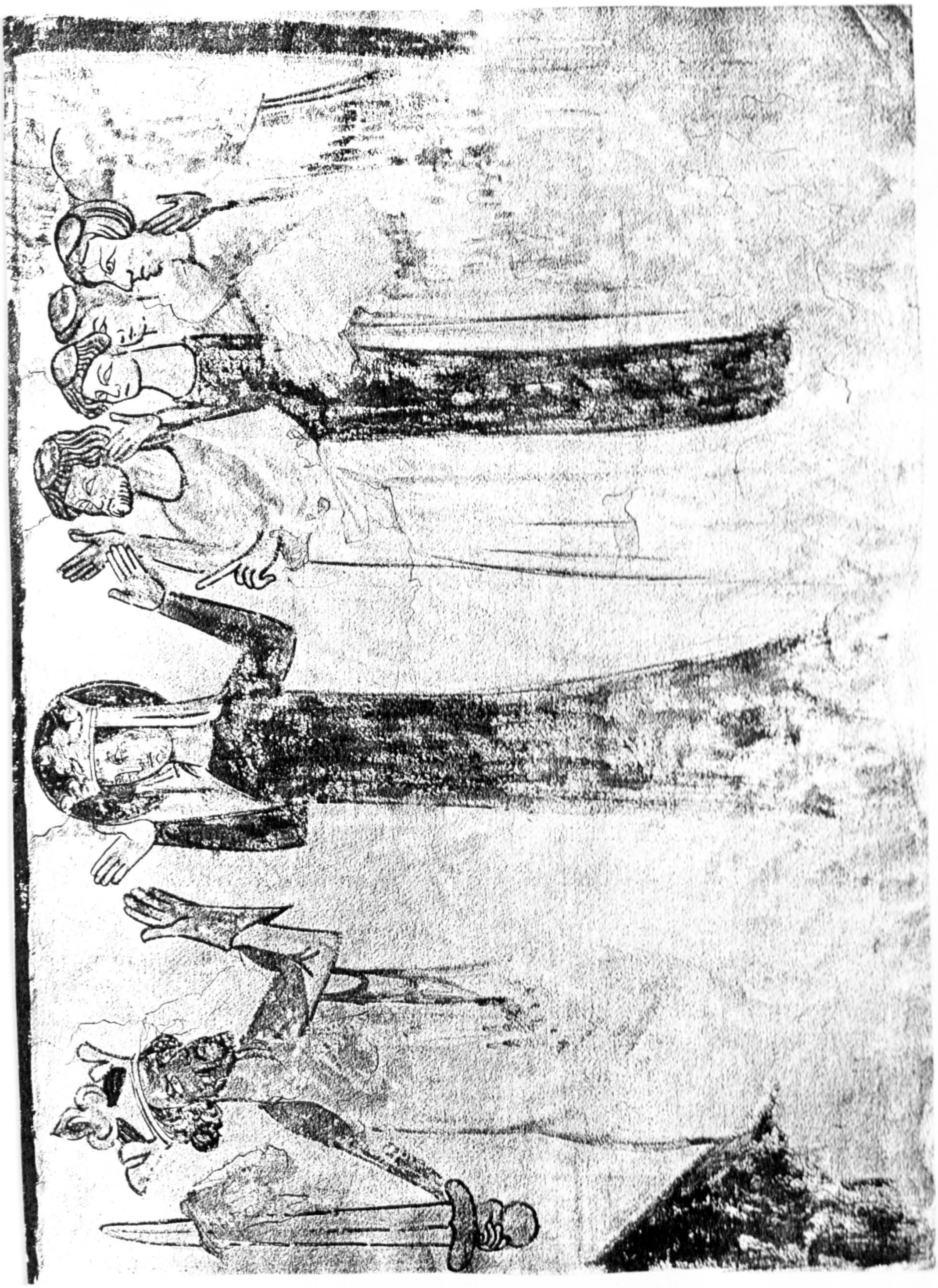


Fig. 36

Peter de Dene's Heraldry Window, including the life of St Katherine, York Minster.
Source: Photographic Collection, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

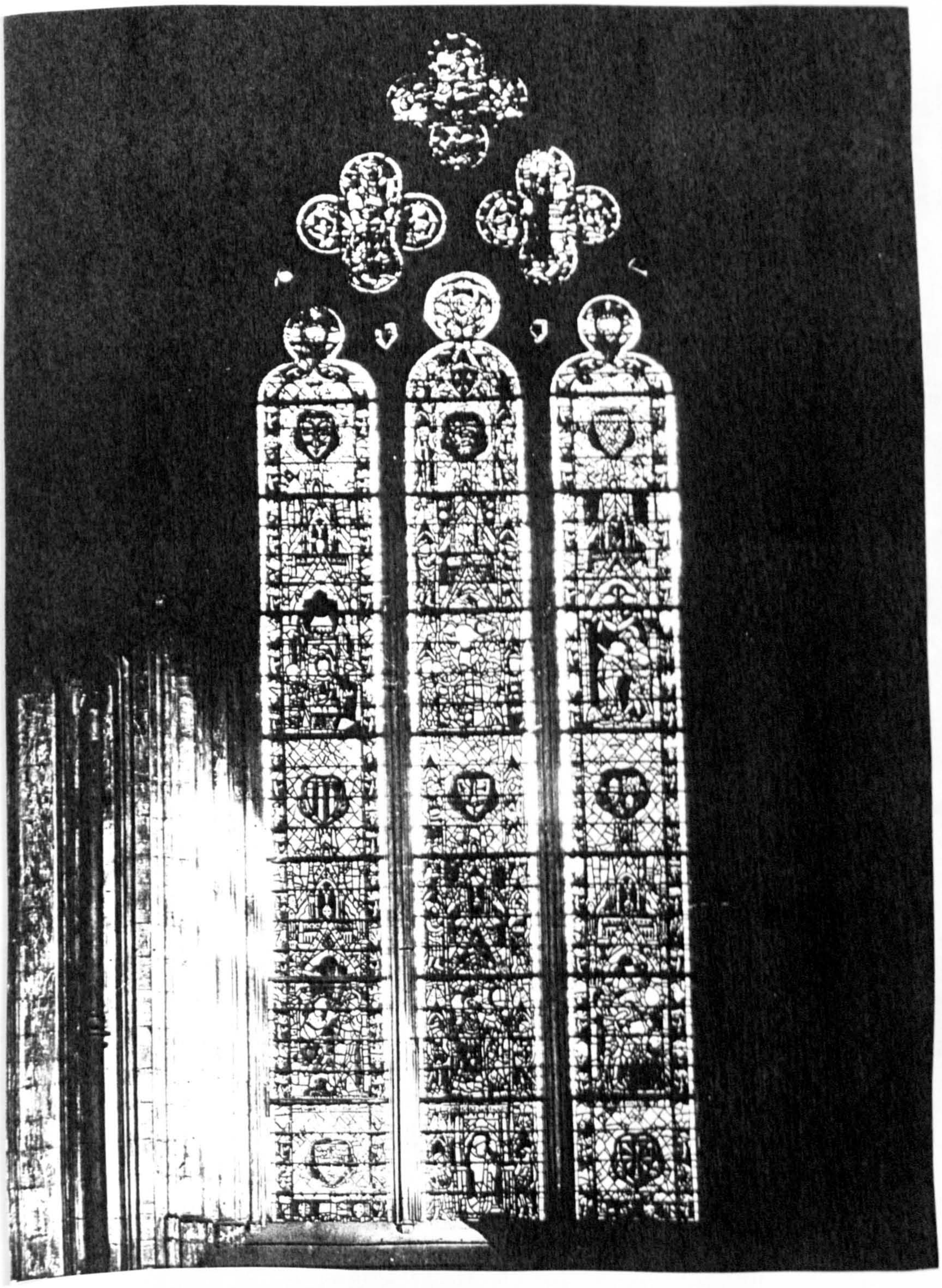
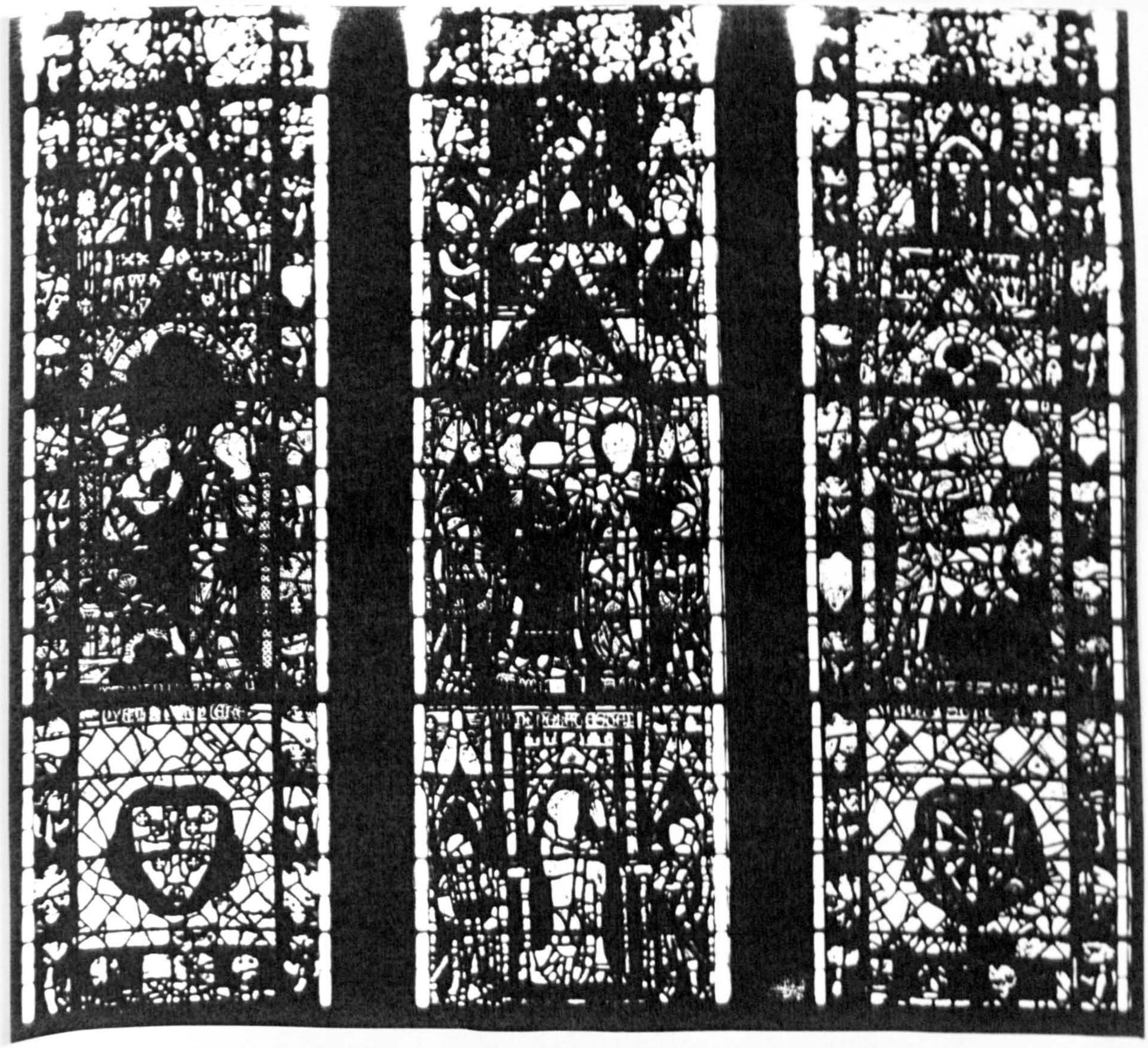


Fig. 37

Peter de Dene's life of St Katherine.
Source: Photographic Collection, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

Lower register,

1. St Katherine before Maxentius.
2. St Katherine debates with the Philosophers (above donor figure of Peter de Dene).
3. The death of the Philosophers.



1 2 3

Fig. 38

Peter de Dene's life of St Katherine.
Source: Photographic Collection, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

Upper register,

4. St Katherine in prison visited by Porphirius and the Empress.
5. The breaking of the wheels.
6. The execution of St Katherine.

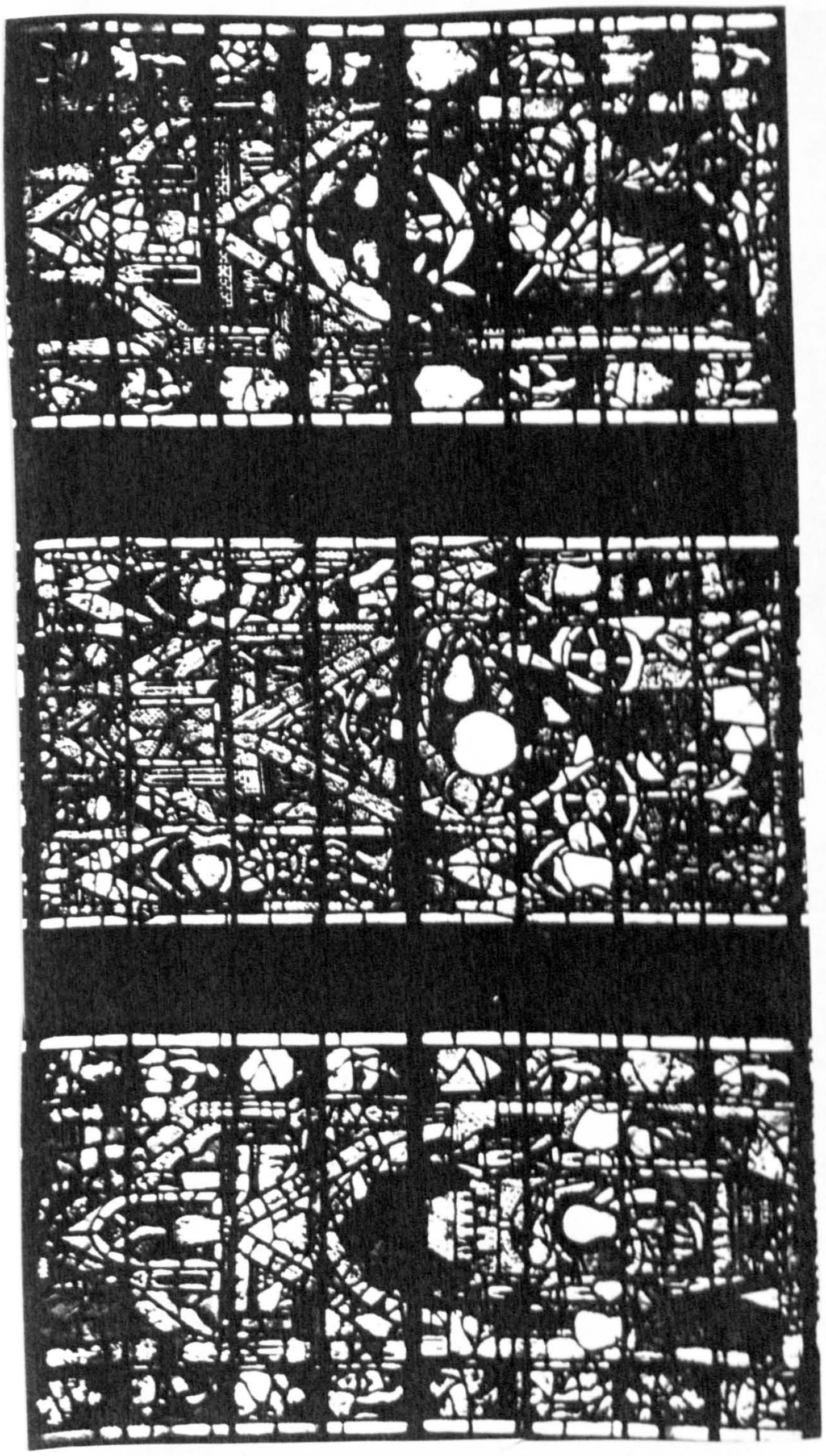


Fig. 39

Peter de Dene's life of St Katherine.
Source: Photographic Collection, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

Detail of 4 (St Katherine in prison).

Fig. 40

Peter de Dene's life of St Katherine.
Source: Photographic Collection, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

Detail of 5 (breaking of the wheels).

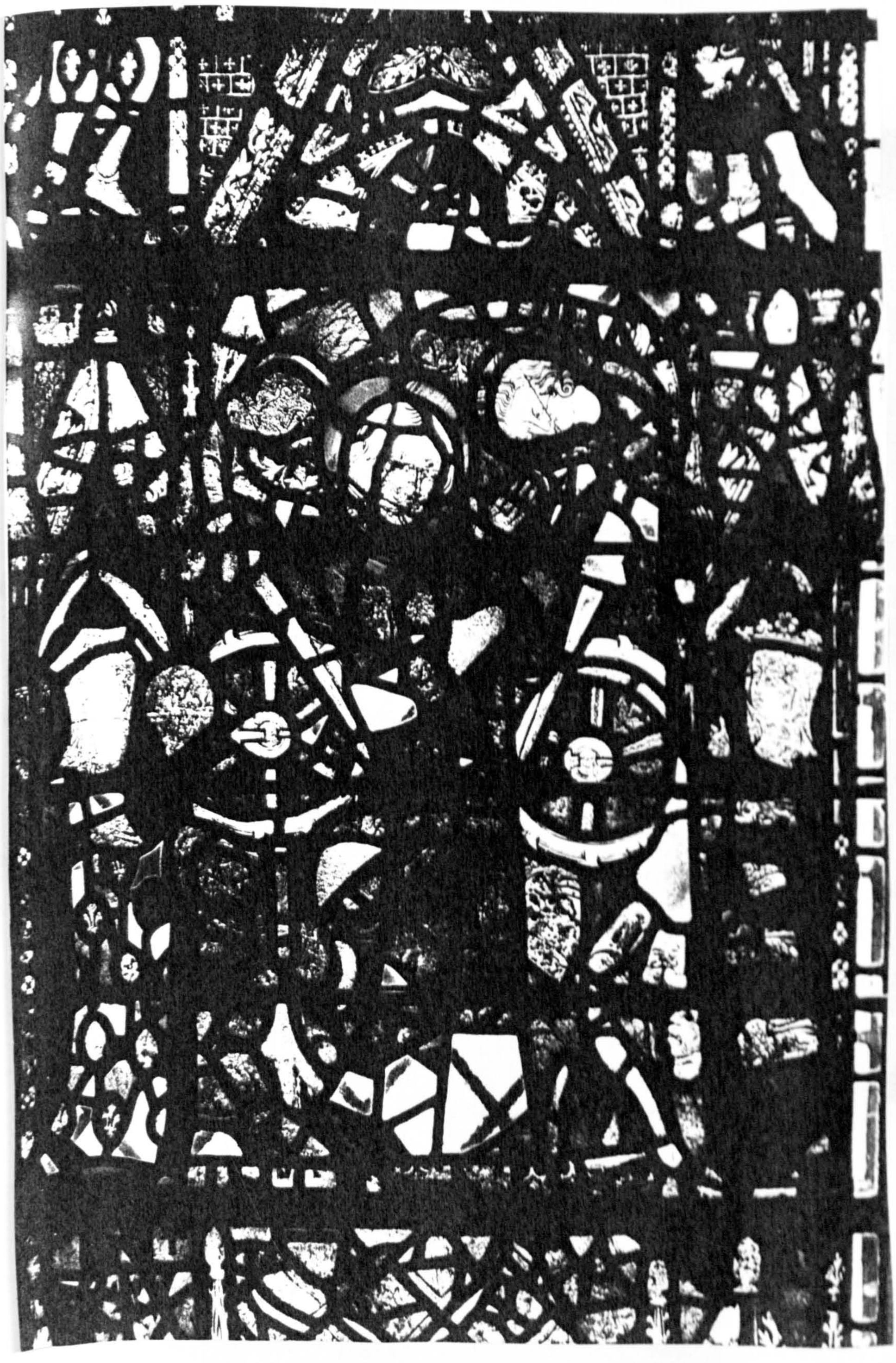


Fig. 41

Peter de Dene's life of St Katherine.
Source: Photographic Collection, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

Detail of 6 (the execution).

Fig. 42

The life of St Katherine, Burton Latimer, Northamptonshire. c. 1300.
Source: E.W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1955), plate 48.

Maxentius sits in judgment.

Fig. 43

The life of St Katherine, Burton Latimer.
Source: Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, plate 47.

The breaking of the wheels.

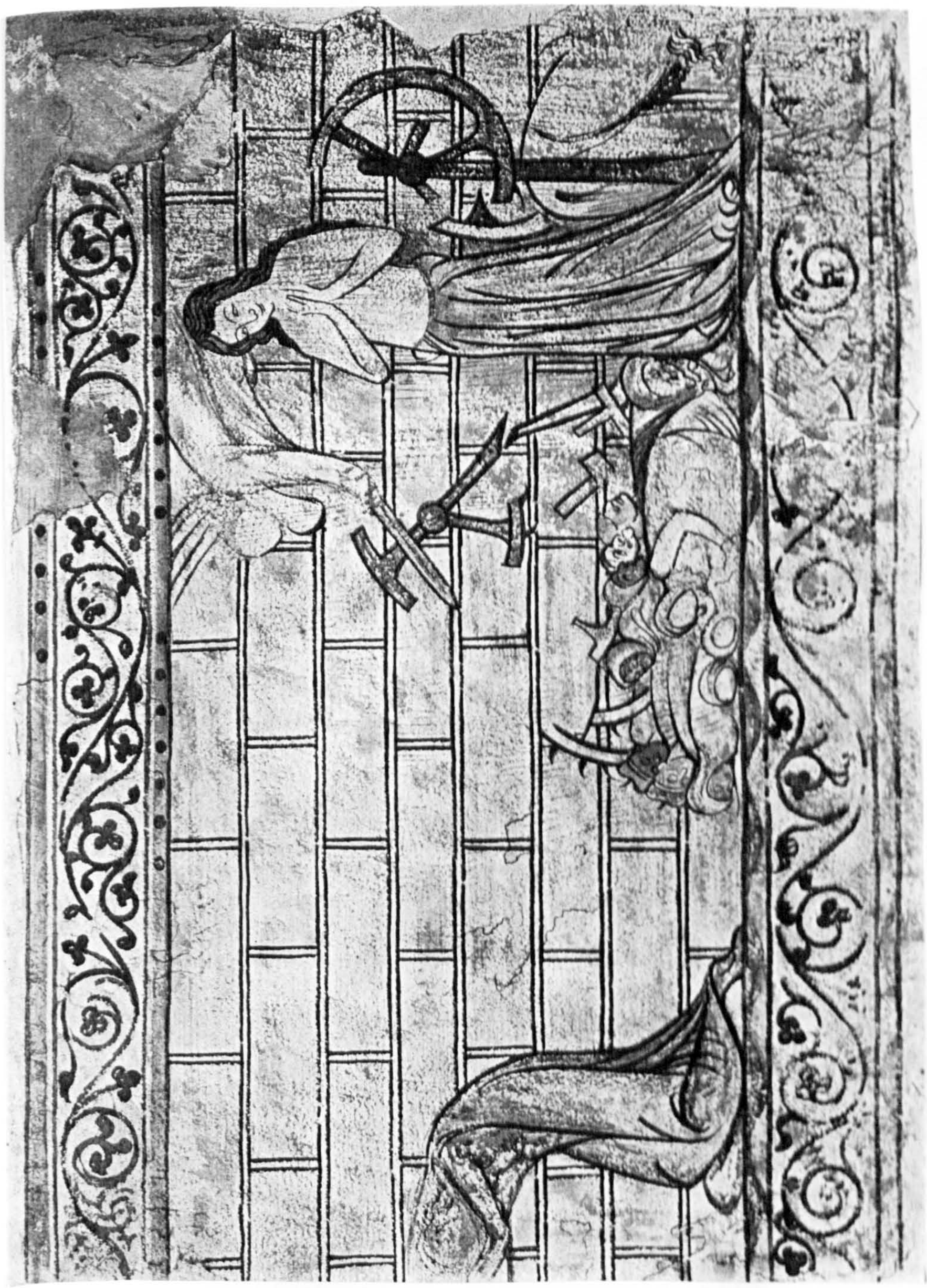


Fig. 44

Source: Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 238.

Fifteenth-century alabaster panel of the Flagellation, 44.3 x 27.5 cm.

Fig. 45

Two fourteenth-century Italian altarpieces depicting the mystical marriage of St Katherine.
Source: Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death: The Arts, Religion and Society in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1964), plates 106 and 107.

Giovanni del Biondo, Marriage of Catherine of Alexandria, Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pa.

Associate of Barna, Marriage of Catherine of Alexandria, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 46

The Monastery of St Katherine at Mt Sinai.

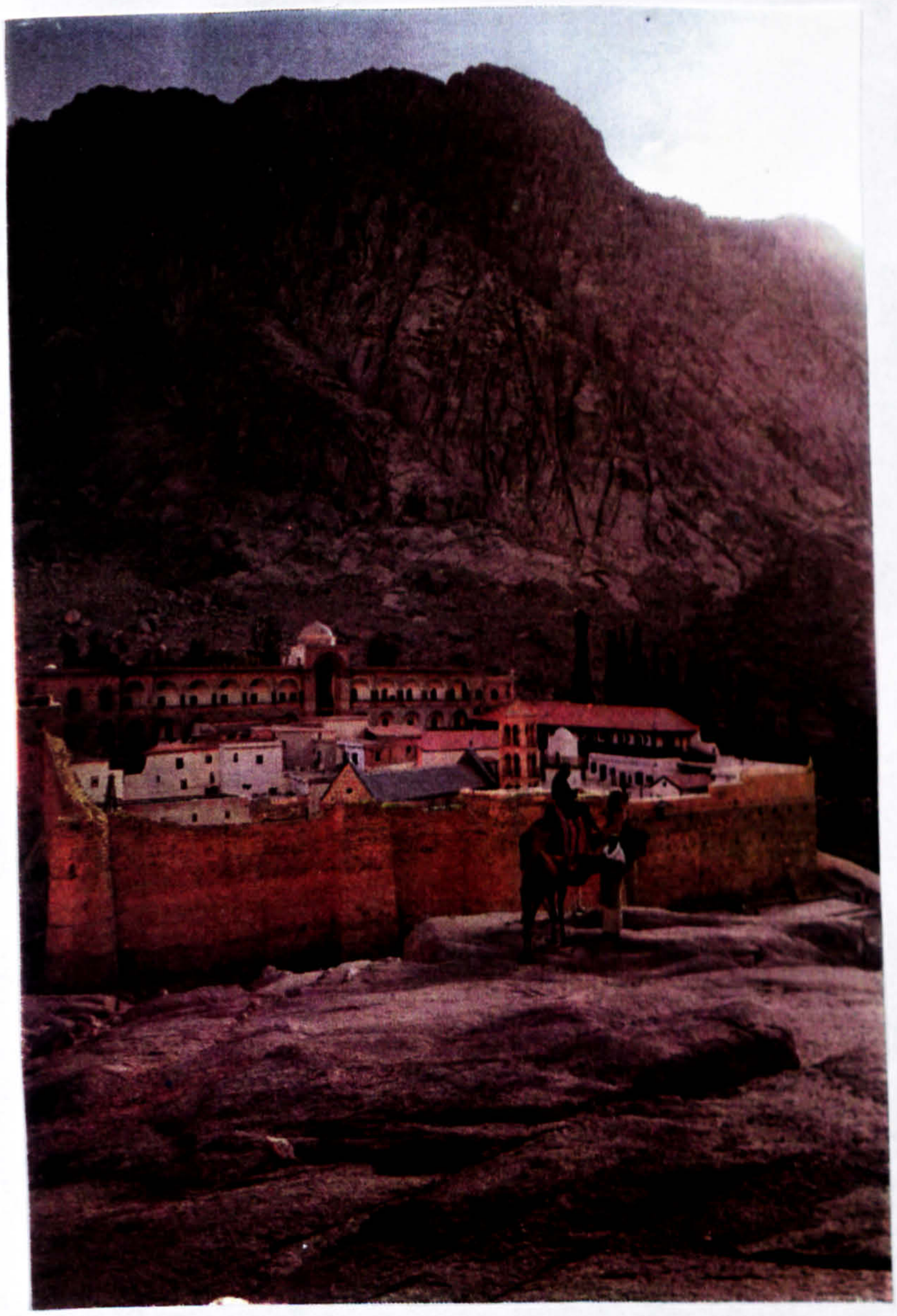


Fig. 47

The thirteenth-century chapel of St Katherine at Milton Abbas, Dorset.

Fig. 48

The late-fourteenth century chapel of St Katherine at Abbotsbury, Dorset.

Fig. 49

The chapel of St Katherine at Abbotsbury.
A stamp showing a mute swan cob and St Katherine's chapel issued by the Post Office in 1993 as part of a set commemorating the 600th anniversary of the swannery at Abbotsbury.