“The pardon the wiche I purchased”: Commemorative Strategies in the Mercantile Communities of Late Medieval England, 1350-1520

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Abstract

Throughout the Middle Ages, members of the nobility donated land, money and material objects to the church by the nobility in order to secure intercessory prayers for their souls. This practice frequently incorporated artistic commissions in the form of funerary chapels, monumental tombs and altarpieces designed to perpetuate the memory of the deceased. With the rise of urban centers in the late Middle Ages and the emergence of a wealthy merchant class, this practice spread beyond the ranks of the aristocracy and clergy to the burgeoning bourgeoisie. This dissertation examines patterns of artistic patronage and gift-giving among English merchants involved in the overseas wool trade in the period leading up to the Reformation (1350-1520) in order to illuminate how the rise of international trade and mercantile economies re-shaped practices and discourses related to death and commemoration during a period of radical social and economic change. During the late Middle Ages, merchants spent lavishly on material gifts to the church ranging from funerary monuments and altarpieces, to books and luxurious personal effects in order to ensure that their memories endured after death and to secure intercessions for their souls. Making their preparations for death within a social and economic landscape that was undergoing dramatic shifts, merchants negotiated between a pre-modern economy based on gift exchange, which relied on established networks of kin and feudal relationships, and the modern market economy based on commercial exchange within an increasingly atomized, urban society. Through a study of the complexes of material objects given by the merchant and middle classes in urban centers of England during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this
dissertation seeks to understand the strategies employed by this segment of the population for ensuring their own commemoration and securing intercessions for their souls in the centuries leading up to the Reformation.
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Introduction

In 1516 or shortly thereafter, John Fayrey of Dunstable, a mercer and Merchant of the Staple, commissioned a splendid funerary pall in memory of his parents, Henry and Agnes Fayrey.† Fashioned from velvet cloth of gold imported from Florence and worked with opus anglicanum embroidery, the cloth was an opulent memorial to the wealthy merchant's parents. (Fig. 0.1) The top panel of the pall displays an undulating pattern of pomegranates and ogival palmettes in red and gold silk. The side panels of violet velvet were embroidered in England in silver and gilt threads. On the short side of the pall, John and his wife, Mary, kneel in prayer on either side of the figure of St John the Baptist preaching in the desert. The figures are flanked by bales of wool inscribed with John's initials and merchant's marks. St John the Baptist appears again on the long sides of the pall. On either side of the saint, Henry and Agnes Fayrey lead two processions of robed guild members. The arms of the Mercers' Company and the Staple of Calais flank the processions. The hearse cloth was most likely given to the Fraternity of St John the Baptist in Dunstable, Bedfordshire, and was intended for use at the funerals of Fraternity members.‡ Symbols of religious guilds such as hearse cloths and banners, along with guild members themselves, commonly accompanied the body of the

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† The funerary pall is described in B Chambers, “The Fayrey Pall,” *Bedfordshire Magazine* IX (1965 1963): 311–315. Scholars have thought the pall to have been commissioned by Henry Fayrey himself, however Sally Badham presents a convincing argument in favor of his son, John, as the patron. See “The Fayrey Family of Dunstable, Their Brass and Their Involvement with Bedfordshire Religious Guilds,” *The Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society* 119 (2012): 375.

deceased guild member during the funeral rites. Gervase Rosser describes these “arts of solidarity” providing “reassuring promises that the soul would continue on its way toward salvation, not in perilous isolation, but as a member of the greater community of the blessed.” When situated within these collective rites of remembrance the strategic value of the commission becomes apparent. The cloth adorned coffin of every guild member as it was processed from the home to the parish church and displayed before the altar. The magnificent cloth effectively transformed every funeral into a commemoration of the Fayreys and ensured their memories were preserved in perpetuity. Less than half a century after its commission, the pall escaped the destruction wrought by the Dissolution of the Guilds and passed into private hands.

A memorial brass commissioned in memory of the same Henry and Agnes Fayrey presents a stark contrast to the opulence of the hearse cloth. On the brass, now housed in the Victoria & Albert Museum, Henry and Agnes appear as naked corpses wrapped in burial shrouds. Their hands are raised in a posture of prayer and their eyes gaze outward, creating the sense of souls caught between life and death. Their five sons stand beneath them clad in simple robes, likewise adopting an attitude of prayer. Originally the brass incorporated the couple’s four daughters, mirroring the poses of the five sons, along with symbols of the four evangelists. An inscribed plate beseeched the viewer, “Of yo[u]r charite p[ra]y for the soule of henry Fayrey & Agnes his wife the which lyeth

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buried under this stone & the said henri decessid the xxviii dai of december A[nno] d[omi]ni M[ccccc] xvi. Together, the hearse cloth and memorial brass highlight the tensions and contradictions underlying the commemorative practices of mercantile patrons. The desire to display wealth and social standing, evident in the luxurious, imported textiles and fine opus anglicanum embroidery of the hearse cloth seems at odds with the shrouded corpses' stark reminder of the transience of worldly riches. The individual identity of the deceased is asserted through portrait likenesses and merchants' marks alongside reminders of the continued importance of communal practices in the images of kin and guild brethren.

Common to both Fayrey memorials is a desire to secure intercessions for the deceased to assure safe passage of their souls through purgatory. During the late Middle Ages, patrons employed increasingly sophisticated visual methods in their gifts and commissions to ensure that their names would be remembered in prayer. This period was witness to a rapid increase in lay investment in chantry masses and indulgences during the late Middle Ages across a broad cross section of society. In addition to direct requests for prayers and masses, the laity commissioned a wide array of memorial objects - ranging from devotional books to altarpieces, stained glass windows and funerary monuments - that worked to petition prayers from passers-by. Until recently,
the desire to preserve the memory of the dead was understood as a symptom of late medieval anxiety. Following the promulgation of the doctrine of purgatory in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council Christians in Western Europe were increasingly preoccupied with securing the aid of the living in interceding on behalf of their souls. Philippe Ariès’ magisterial work on Western conceptions of death argued that deep seated anxieties concerning purgatory constituted such an unbearable burden on the laity that they ultimately revolted against the church, leading to the Reformation. 7 Scholarship on these lay practices of commemoration position such bequests within a supposed atmosphere of heightened fear which drove late medieval Christians, entirely dependent upon the living for their prayers, to invest in chantries, masses, prayers and monuments as reminders of familial and clerical obligations to the dead. 8

Studies positioning late medieval commemorative practices within the wider debates around late medieval anxieties concerning the afterlife have enriched our understanding of the social and religious forces shaping the commissioning and design of these objects. However, as Laura Vivanco points out, scholars need to recognize a more complex range of emotions and motivations than has been allowed in discourses of death in the late Middle Ages. 9 Seeking to redress the historiographical tendency to view the late Middle Ages as a period of decadence inevitably sliding toward the Reformation, scholars such as Eamon Duffy and John Bossy have proposed the category

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of “traditional religion” – the religion of the conservative, Catholic majority - in order to understand key trends in late medieval devotionalism. Bossy refuted the claim that provisions for death and for the dead represented a major resource in the conflict against the Reformers. Where Ariès identified the popularity of donating money to establish perpetual chantries and make provision for pious fraternities to commemorate the names of the dead as evidence of individual panic and self-regard, Bossy argued that the real impetus arose from came from social pietas toward family and friends. Similarly, while Duffy acknowledged that the fear of purgatory “loomed large...in lay awareness,” he emphasized the importance of memorials, both physical and in the form of chantries, masses and recitations of bede-rolls, in serving to integrate the deceased into the community of the parish. Duffy’s conception of traditional religion remains a contested category, however his characterization of late medieval religion as “vigorous, adaptable, widely understood and popular” rather than moribund provides a useful, though at times too tidy, interpretation of the period. Clive Burgess similarly carves out a nuanced middle ground in the historiographical landscape. Avoiding Duffy’s somewhat rosy picture of late medieval religion, Burgess describes the durability of the system for ensuring the perpetuation of benefactors’ memories. He argues for an “indissoluble nexus of altruism and self-interest” at the heart of memorial practices.

10 Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, xiii.
13 Ibid., 5.
Peter Marshall’s critique of revisionist positions represented by Duffy and Bossy questions the “seamless dovetailing of self-interest and altruism, and the reciprocal character of a flow of spiritual and material benefit” between the living and the dead.\(^\text{15}\) Rejecting both the traditional historiographical narrative of a culture overwhelmed by the burden of remembering the dead, pursuing mechanistic remedies to avoid purgatory, on the one hand, and the revisionist historiographical trends emphasizing reciprocity and mutual exchange, Marshall’s account uncovers the ambiguities and paradoxes of late medieval commemorative practices. He argues that while the obligation to remember the dead was undoubtedly a burden upon the living, it is methodologically difficult to establish that the obligations of the living were experienced as so onerous as to have fundamentally undermined the Catholic faith.\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, the increasingly inventive strategies deployed to compel commemoration are evidence of the tensions within the social framework of mutual obligations between the living and the dead. Clive Burgess details the ways in which benefactors made provisions to ensure that their benefactions would be forfeit should they be forgotten, speaking at once to the fear of oblivion and strenuous efforts to counteract this eventuality.\(^\text{17}\) What is clear from the literature is the wide range of strategies and technologies for salvation available to the late medieval Christian motivated by a wide range of oftentimes contradictory impulses to remain perpetually present in the memories of the living and secure


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 45–46.

\(^{17}\) Burgess, “Death and Commemoration in an English Parish,” 53.
intercessions for the soul.\textsuperscript{18}

Material objects were central to these efforts to preserve the memories of the dead. Recent studies in the fields of art history and archeology reveal the complex ways in which spatial settings and material objects were carefully designed to fix memory and facilitate the recollection, through prayer, of the dead.\textsuperscript{19} Iconographic elements designed to heighten awareness of death, judgment and purgatory pricked the conscience of the viewer and reminded them of their intercessory obligations to the dead.\textsuperscript{20} Forestalling against the possibility that even these measures might fail, those who commissioned memorial monuments carefully manipulated the spatial geography of churches and chapels in such a way as to incorporate the viewer, both consciously and unconsciously, in the intercessory prayers and rituals of chantries by placing tombs, heraldic devices and other prompts for memory on visual sightlines juxtaposed with the chantry altar and intercessory symbols.\textsuperscript{21} The Fayrey family's matrix of commemorative objects represents a prime example of the varied strategies employed to perpetuate the memory of the dead. Where the shroud brass provides viewer a stark reminder of the transience of life alongside an exhortation to remember the deceased, the sumptuous funerary pall relies upon a wider complex of spatial and liturgical elements for its mnemonic effect.

\textsuperscript{19} Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast, eds., \textit{Memory and the Medieval Tomb} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 2.
\textsuperscript{20} Burgess, “Death and Commemoration in an English Parish,” 52.
By commissioning an object that incorporated symbols and likenesses of the Fayrey family for use by the Guild of St John the Baptist, the Fayreys ensured that prayers and masses would be said for them at every subsequent funeral mass by members of a religious fraternity with particular obligations to care for their souls.

The incorporation of merchants’ marks and portrait likenesses into the Fayrey family’s memorial objects was part of a larger historical shift in the visual focus of tomb monuments and memorials. The design of tombs and funerary monuments changed dramatically between the high and late Middle Ages as patrons employed increasingly sophisticated visual strategies in order to safeguard their memory through their gifts. In line with the eschatological character of the Christian faith, funerary monuments were concerned not with what the deceased had done during his or her life but with what would happen to them in the world to come. Where pagan tombs were designed to keep the deceased’s memory alive on earth, the Christian tomb aimed to secure a place in Heaven with the help of the intercessory prayers of the living and the saints in heaven. While the function of the tomb remained the same, from the twelfth century tombs and sarcophagi became increasingly personalized and the sarcophagus, previously decorated with narrative scenes and Christian symbols made way for the life-size effigy. By the late Middle Ages, patrons and artists regularly sought to represent the deceased’s status, familial ties, profession and other markers of social differentiation

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through memorial objects such as monumental tombs and altarpieces. Erwin Panofsky situated these developments - the emergence of the life-sized effigy and the increasing emphasis on the worldly identity and status of the deceased – with a slow reorientation toward to the “retrospective mode” that would dominate commemorative art during the early modern period.\textsuperscript{24} Much of the foundational literature on death conforms to this overarching narrative of a shift from burial practices emphasizing the solidarity of the community of the faithful into which the dead were absorbed, to an increasing realization of individuality and concern with personal salvation.\textsuperscript{25} Jacques Chiffoleau argued that together the processes of urbanization, commercialization and migration uprooted the individual from families, neighbors and lineages, that is, the very social connections traditionally responsible for praying for the dead. The atomization of the individual in life, he argued, coincided with novel approaches to preserving individual identity after death in order to secure prayers for souls no longer knit into a secure social fabric.\textsuperscript{26} Within this schema, late medieval beliefs concerning death, and their expression in funerary monuments and memorial objects, are easily placed on the familiar trajectory moving away from traditional society, in which the communal whole is the paramount value, toward modernity and the development of the autonomous individual.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Panofsky, \textit{Tomb Sculpture}, 39.
\textsuperscript{26} Jacques Chiffoleau, \textit{La Comptabilité de L’au-Delà. Les Hommes, La Mort et La Religion Dans La Région d’Avignon à La Fin Du Moyen Age (vers 1320-Vers 1480)} (Rome: École française de Rome, 1980).
More recent scholarship has questioned the tendency to position key developments in memorial practice, including the growing popularity of funerary monuments highlighting the individual identity and status of the deceased, as evidence of the emergence of the modern individual. Andrew Brown examined evidence of wills in the city of Bruges and noted a decline in perpetual chantries from the 1370s onward, possibly as a result of a decreasing availability of altar space. Instead, testators turned to the endowment of feast days as a commemorative practice. Brown highlights the complexity and detail of the foundations of this period compared to the period when chantries were the most popular form of endowment.  

In accounting for these changes in commemorative practice in late medieval Bruges, Brown argues that “Fear of death and oblivion can only provide a partial explanation for these trends.” He argues that the increase in endowments was part of a more wide-reaching tendency toward lay involvement and investment in the parish. Endowments were not intended solely to generate suffrages for the individual, but to benefit the collective community through increase in the Divine Service.  

Moreover, the anxieties prompted by the social upheavals of the late medieval period, contrary to Chiffoleau, did not universally drive late medieval mercantile elites toward acts of monumental self-aggrandizement. Phillip Morgan identifies a “powerful counter-current of burial practices” amongst heirless clerics, merchants and pilgrims, many of whose wills requested modest interments stripped of any displays of wealth or social standing and disposal of the body ‘wherever

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29 Ibid., 107 – 108.
it may please god.\textsuperscript{30} What emerges most strongly from a study of late medieval death and commemoration is not a single, overarching narrative leading inexorably toward the Reformation and the rise of the modern individual, but multiple, often contradictory, responses to a rapidly shifting social and economic landscape.

The very assumption that markers of identity – from coats of arms, to merchants' marks, to portrait likenesses in commemorative objects – can be interpreted within the framework of modern conceptions of the individual is open to question. Examining the wills of the merchant and middling classes in Douai and Flanders following the Black Plague, Samuel K. Cohn noted increasing tendencies in both cities toward specifying the place of burial and individuating it through commissioned art works and memorials, along with an increased demand for masses. He argues convincingly that it was not the individual \textit{per se} commemorated through these efforts, but rather the family and the male line.\textsuperscript{31} Cohn's assertions are part of a wider historiographical shift toward interpreting the renewed sense of the commemorated individual as a reflection of an emerging desire to represent the deceased as a socially and culturally constructed human being, still incorporated into the social fabric of the living community even after death. Tombs presented the deceased as an individual only insofar as she or he was member of a corporate group.\textsuperscript{32} Though the merchant class was increasingly mobile,

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their kin groups and local networks remained central to their devotional life. In addition to maintaining lasting records of ties of kinship and lineage, tombs and other memorial monuments visually linked the dead to a range of collective organizations within societies, such as guilds and fraternities, charged with the care of souls. By preserving the memories of the deceased within networks of commemoration, memorial objects knit the dead into the social fabric of the community of the living. Far from perceiving themselves in the moment of death as atomized individuals, this dissertation argues that late medieval merchants positioned themselves within robust networks of kin and associates through complexes of memorial gifts and monuments.

Moreover, recent interpretations of funerary monuments have complicated Erwin Panofsky's iconographic categories of retrospective and prospective tombs, the former commemorating the dead as they were when living, the latter looking forward to the rewards awaiting the living in the afterlife, in order to emphasize the complex interactions between memory and the visual components of tombs. When examined through this lens and in light of the late medieval doctrine of purgatory, self-representation served a specific function - to perpetuate the deceased's memory in order to secure intercessory prayers for the dead. In this vein, Paul Binski has emphasized the "existential complexity" of death in the Middle Ages, noting that tombs were not merely memorials, but sites that allowed transaction between the living and the dead, provoking both memory and action.\(^{33}\) Emblems of identity performed a function beyond

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 71.
the display of status by recalling to mind the name of the deceased in order to prompt intercessions from the viewer.\textsuperscript{34}

As sites of transaction between the living and the dead, commemorative objects mediated between the spiritual and material realms. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall note the fundamentally economic nature of the ties between the living and the dead, involving as they did the dedication of wealth and property in order to secure intercession and commemoration.\textsuperscript{35} The abundance of financial metaphors in the literature on late medieval death reflects this reality. Eamon Duffy, for example, describes the wealth channeled into the church as a kind of "post-mortem fire insurance."\textsuperscript{36} Peter Marshall describes the “portfolio of different types of intercessory options” available to late medieval testators.\textsuperscript{37} For merchants, preparations for death presented the opportunity to transform worldly riches, accumulated through trade, into spiritual credit by exchanging it for intercessory prayers, masses and indulgences.\textsuperscript{38}

Carlos Eire, in his work on sixteenth century Catholic Spain, argues that these

\textsuperscript{34} This conception of the tomb as prompter for prayer has received significant attention in recent years following the publication of Mary J. Carruthers' influential works on memory including Mary J Carruthers, \textit{The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture}, 2nd ed, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 70 (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Mary J Carruthers, \textit{The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200}, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).\textit{The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). In particular, Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast's volume of edited essays, \textit{Memory and the Medieval Tomb} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), builds on Carruthers' explication of mnemonic strategies developed during the Middle Ages to explore a wide range of visual strategies employed in funerary art to aid in the recollection of the dead.

\textsuperscript{35} Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds., \textit{The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

\textsuperscript{36} Duffy, \textit{The Stripping of the Altars}, 305.

\textsuperscript{37} Marshall, \textit{Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England}, 27.

transactions were the means by which the wealthy were able to circumvent the biblical injunctions against the accumulation of worldly riches as a hindrance to salvation. In the act of drawing up a will and bequeathing goods to the church, possessions normally considered suspect could be sanctified. The result was the intersection of two realms which scholars have tended to place in opposition to one another - the spiritual domain of the church and the economic domain of the marketplace. The composition of a will was at once an act of spiritual and financial accounting, a moment when an individual tallied debts and credits and disbursed their worldly possessions in preparation for death.

This cleansing of wealth through its transformation into posthumous gifts to the church was particularly important for the merchant class who occupied an oftentimes precarious position in the spiritual hierarchy of late medieval Europe due to their involvement in new credit and banking practices. Popular literature of the time written to prepare lay readers for death warned those involved in these suspect commercial enterprises against improper transactions. The Fasciculus Morum, a fourteenth century collection of sermon stories, recounts the story of a usurer who ordered his wife to bury him with money tied to his body to buy his way out of hell. When his body was later disinterred, "they found in the place where the money had been turned into ugly toads that gnawed at his miserable body and countless worms instead of armbands of

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money. Yet, church treasuries during the Middle Ages were filled with luxury objects endowed for the perpetuation of the giver’s memory, and wealthy patrons endowed splendid tombs and monuments for the commemoration of the dead. Material objects and worldly wealth circulated within a spiritual economy that tied together the communities of the living, the dead, and the saints in order to ensure the salvation of the souls of the deceased. The writer of the *Fasciculus Morum* was not, as the modern reader might imagine, repudiating the use of material wealth to secure spiritual salvation. Christopher Daniell notes that where burial rendered objects useless, wealthy individuals might convert material possessions into prayer. He offers the story of a rich man who gave money to the poor whose grave, when opened, revealed a charter with a seal in his hand, in marked contrast to the usurer whose money had been turned to toads. The capacity of gifts to transform worldly riches into spiritual wealth was predicated on the understanding that such a gift compelled a reciprocal counter-gift in the form of intercessory prayers and masses. Throughout the Middle Ages, gifts given to the church were reciprocated with the prayers for the dead. The memory of the deceased, in the form of the recital of his or her name during the mass, was thereby entrusted the clergy. By ensuring the names of the deceased, and through their names, the deceased themselves, continued be present at the sacrifice of the Mass after their death, the gift performed a fundamentally integrative function, enabling the dead to

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have an ongoing presence within the community of the living.\footnote{Ibid., 87.}

In the context of Western Europe’s gradual yet inexorable shift from an economic system in which goods circulated primarily through gift giving to one based on the movement of goods through mercantile exchange, the story of the usurer speaks to the more widespread disquiet concerning the commercial revolution and the social effects of the cash economy. As Lester Little argues, the fourteenth century saw a profound structural transformation to society ushered in by the early capital markets, increasing urbanization and the increasingly widespread use of money. These shifts were accompanied by the replacement of pride with avarice as the principal vice – a sin closely associated with the merchant class.\footnote{Lester K. Little, “Pride Goes before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom,” The American Historical Review 76, no. 1 (February 1, 1971): 16.} According to Little the social effect of the cash economy was to weaken ties of personal obligation and replace face-to-face transactions with impersonal exchanges of money.\footnote{Ibid., 29–30.} Depictions of avarice, personified as the wealthy man at his counting table counting his money, presented dire warnings to those involved in the money economy.\footnote{Ibid., 39.} Though censure remained the prevailing attitude of the church toward profit economy, usury and cash transactions, they had become necessary parts of commercial enterprises.\footnote{Taryn E.L. Chubb and Emily Kelley, “Mendicants and Merchants in the Medieval Mediterranean: An Introduction,” Medieval Encounters 18 (2012): 163.} Merchants developed instruments and institutions including business letters, merchants’ handbooks, foreign exchange and insurance. These innovations, necessitated by the demands of long distance trade,
shaped their daily practices to a far greater extent than church doctrine concerning money and usury. Merchants were, therefore, compelled to navigate a route to spiritual salvation in such a way as to reconcile the manner by which they acquired their wealth with the teachings of the church. It is essential, therefore, to consider the ways in which secular exchange and circulation, and in particular, mercantile exchange, inflected the gift-giving practices of the merchants and bourgeoisie, in order to explore the ways in which displays of worldly wealth and status functioned in processes of spiritual exchange and strategies for salvation.

While official church doctrine may have had difficulty accommodating mercantile realities, in practice, both the church and mercantile laity found ways to adapt to new economic and social developments. Arnoud J. Bijsterveld, Esther Cohen and Mayke B. De Jong outline the ways in which the church itself began applying principles of the payment economy to relationships with the holy so that gift exchange became a commercial transaction in disguise. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for example, gifts increasingly took the form of annuities, hereditary rent charges and leases, or cash. Perhaps the most telling example of the paradoxical refutation of and adaption to commercial exchange on the part of the Church can be found in the increasing influence of the friars in urban life, particularly for the merchant class. As Barbara H. Rosenwein and Lester K. Little argue, the great achievement of the friars

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“consisted in their confronting and eventually demystifying the taboo of the monetary commercial transactions, starting by outright rejection, then incorporating elements of commercial practice into their spirituality, and finally by helping justify worldly commerce in a modified and carefully circumscribed form.” In vernacular literature, too, there is evidence of a complex and ambivalent process of social negotiation centered on the position of merchant both within society and within the eschatological structure of the Christian faith. In Helen Fulton’s words, “commerce is both normalized and interrogated” in a number of vernacular texts previously interpreted as either simply condemnatory or redemptive toward capitalism and the forces of commercialization. Roger A. Ladd details English vernacular writers’ – principally Langland, and also Chaucer, Margery Kemp and others - deployment of the language of money in a manner that on the surface appears anti-mercantilist, but in practice reveals the extent to which the structure of the spiritual economy paralleled the material economy.

Given the central place of the merchant in the social and religious imaginary at this critical juncture in history as the personification of a new, and suspect, economic order, and the precarious position in which this put the merchant’s soul, it is surprising that so little attention has been payed to the English merchant class’s material preparation for death. Nigel Saul provides one of the few studies specifically focusing on

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memorial commissions of the English merchant class in his examination of monumental brasses for wool merchants. He characterizes late medieval woolmen, on the basis of the iconography of extant monumental brasses, in which imagery related to the wool trade, such as merchants marks, bales of wool and sheep, as “not naturally given to expressions of deep spirituality.” Their bequests, he argues, support this conclusion. These largely conventional texts, he asserts, by and large lack any evidence of a desire for inward self-examination. I will move away from interpretations of funerary objects and material gifts as merely reflecting church doctrine in order to argue that late medieval merchants actively manipulated processes of gift-giving and deployed material objects in ways that constituted a form of vernacular theology – a working out in practice of a set of unspoken beliefs concerning what constituted a good death for a merchant. The material gifts of the mercantile elites, therefore, offer an opportunity to study how individuals from the emerging bourgeoisie carved out a position for themselves within the spiritual economy in preparation for their death. From this study, the mercantile class will emerge not as figures of shallow spirituality, but as individuals actively engaged in constructing religious beliefs and practices that prepared the mercantile soul for its passage through purgatory.

The case studies presented here are intended to trace the ways in which mercantile mentalités shaped practices of commemoration between 1350 and 1520.

54 Ibid., 332.
The dominant historiographical narratives of the twentieth century tend to be accounts of radical rupture, positing a direct causal relationship between the rise of capitalism, the emergence of “the merchant” and the Protestant Reformation. Certain sets of beliefs, practices and social formations were coincident with and necessary for the rise of long distance trade, and these undoubtedly reshaped society in dramatic ways. These developments included the establishment of colonies of foreign merchants in large, international trading centers, innovations in banking such as the bill of exchange and the emergence of strategies to mitigate risk including systems of insurance.\(^\text{55}\) It is also essential to remember that while traditional social formations and their attendant ties of obligation were weakening, new forms of social obligation were taking their place. A wide range of novel financial and legal arrangements were developed in order to accumulate capital and mitigate the risks of international trade. Previously, oaths of fealty, ties of vassalage and bonds of kinship served to bind traditional medieval society together. In the late middle ages partnership agreements, notes of credit and contractual agreements began to create new networks of obligation.\(^\text{56}\) The newly wealthy mercantile elites found avenues to social distinction in civic government, the provision of credit to kings and lords, and investment in acts of piety.\(^\text{57}\)

This dissertation will present three case studies in late medieval England in order to...
to understand how complexes of material and monetary gifts given to the church mediated relationships between the living and dead. In particular, this dissertation examines the impact of overseas trade and trade routes on religious belief and practice. This dissertation is not, however, an argument for radical rupture and does not seek present the figure of the merchant as emblematic of the rise of a modern, rational mentality. Rather, it challenges narratives positing a causal relationship between the rise of capitalism, the emergence of “the merchant” and the Protestant Reformation. By focusing on individual merchants and embedding their preparations for death within the historical, social and geographic specificities of their lives, this dissertation uncovers the dynamic process of negotiation between “traditional” and “capitalist” modalities evident in lived religious belief and practice. By examining death and strategies of commemoration at a key historical juncture in the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes of circulation, this dissertation project underscores the continuities between pre-modern and modern economies and societies. Merchants emerge as individuals engaged in an active process of adapting existing frameworks of kinship and gift giving in dialogue with emerging mechanisms and networks of exchange in order to construct strategies of commemoration capable of meeting the demands of new economic and social realities. Moreover, in studying mercantile forms of commemoration this dissertation does not suggest that there were beliefs and practices around death and memorialization that were exclusive to the merchant class. Indeed, the case studies presented here demonstrate the increasingly porous boundaries between the mercantile elites and the aristocracy. Furthermore, the involvement of
those outside the merchant class in trade and capital markets, along with the radical re-ordering of social formations and economic practices, meant that mercantile mentalités permeated all levels of society and reshaped religious belief and practice in important ways.

Through three case studies, this dissertation examines the multiple "strategies of commemoration" employed by late medieval merchants and contextualizes them within the specific local and historical circumstances which shaped mercantile communities' preparations for death. Each case study presents quite different complexes of gifts and memorial objects. Rather than studying monuments in isolation, the case studies examine networks constructed through the accretion of complexes of memorial objects – including altarpieces, liturgical objects and tomb monuments – that accumulated through programs of gift-giving over the course of the late medieval period. These complexes of memorial objects will, in turn, be framed within the web of devotional practices, liturgical gestures and social relationships that shaped medieval experiences of and responses to these works in order to build up a picture of the material, liturgical and devotional strategies employed by late medieval members of the middle classes in the face of death. Together, the complexes of memorial objects worked to construct and maintain the intercessory networks necessary for the interchange of material wealth and spiritual merit between living, the dead, and the community of saints in heaven. These networks, which underpinned the spiritual economy of late medieval England, paralleled the trade networks crucial for the operation of the material economy. The case studies are not intended to present a homogeneous mercantile way of dying, nor an
exhaustive account of all the options available to merchants for perpetuating memories of the deceased and securing intercessions for the soul. Rather, through close analysis of the ways in which sites, material objects and networks of commemoration interacted, this dissertation will illuminate the highly adaptive and creative responses necessitated by both general social and economic trends and to local circumstances to safeguard the soul as it made its way through Purgatory.

Centered on the Blackburn family and their associates, the Boltons, Thorntons, de Pointfrays and Bawtres, Part I maps the intersection of networks of trade and networks of intercession onto the topography of the city of York. In order to establish the role played by material objects in mediating relationships between the living, the dead, and the saints in heaven, Part I positions funerary monuments, stained glass windows, altarpieces, illuminated books and other gifts in relation to the web of familial, religious and commercial ties that constituted the merchant class's commemorative networks. The five families were extensively involved in the wool trade and over the course of multiple generations their gifts and artistic commissions of the left their mark on the fabric of churches and religious institutions throughout the city of York. Chapter 1 will consider an interrelated series of artistic commissions. Iconographic elements and common thematic components unite a series of stained glass windows in All Saint’s North Street to an illuminated Book of Hours known as the Bolton Hours. They bound together both family members and business associates through deliberate strategies of co-commemoration, pointing to the importance of merchants' commercial associates beyond the arena of economic activity as a kind of extended kin group. Through portrait
likenesses of deceased and images of saints, the program of stained glass window and
Book of Hours worked together to simultaneously prompt prayers for the deceased,
maintain their presence in the religious rites of the church, and provide the parish with
a focus for saintly devotion and pious contemplation. Drawing on art historical models
of donor portraits as surrogates for the deceased, the chapter examines the way in which
merchants were able to continue the charitable activities undertaken during their life
through the agency of these commemorative objects in ways that highlighted the
transformation of mercantile wealth into spiritual credit.

Chapter 2 expands upon the idea of object surrogacy as a means for ensuring
merchants’ ongoing presence after death and incorporation into the social fabric of the
community of the living. Through an examination of the wills of the merchants of York
and surrounding towns, it traces the circulation of personal effects and aligns mercantile
use of proxies in commercial operations with commemorative objects that functioned as
surrogates for the deceased, through direct representation as well as indirect accrual of
the giver’s identity. This chapter will argue that merchants adapted medieval conception
of images as presences with agency to a wide range of personal artifacts. Where in life
merchants operated in international markets through a variety of commercial agents
and material proxies, allowing them to be legally present in multiple locations at once,
in death they were likewise able to draw upon a geographically distributed intercessory
network in order to maximize the spiritual profits from their investment in prayers. In
the process, merchants appropriated conceptions of credit and investment in order to
construct a “spiritual economy” in which material objects, prayers and masses circulated
between the living and the dead. This hybrid model of circulation visible in merchants’
wills challenges previous historiographical frameworks that have positioned modern,
capitalist societies over and against pre-modern social orders based upon gift exchange.

Part II establishes the intersection between networks of circulation and networks
of commemoration through an examination of monumental brasses imported from
Flanders to commemorate merchants in a number of key trading centers in England –
Lynn, Newark-on-Trent and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The brasses commemorated English
wool merchants and their wives, who through the League of Merchant Adventurers, the
Hanseatic League and the Merchant Staplers, were linked to markets across the
Channel, around the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas. Where Part I examined
complexes of gifts and memorial objects bound together by a network of tightly knit
merchants within a single town, Part II brings together imported funerary monuments
produced in a single location in Low Countries whose pattern of dispersal point to
wider, transnational networks of trade. Strikingly, the brasses incorporated motifs
derived from Byzantine and Islamic silks, similar to the motifs likewise translated from
eastern models on the Fayrey Pall, which served to embed the merchants
commemorated on the brasses into wider maritime routes of circulation even in death.
Through a study of the Flemish brasses these chapters will consider the visual rhetoric
of circulation which shaped the reception of these objects in order to unpack the ways in
which merchants negotiated between traditional, gift-based modes of circulation and
emerging frameworks of commodity exchange, both in their business dealings and in
their conceptualization of the spiritual economy. Drawing upon the recent work on
circulation and the social biography of things, Chapter 4 situates the brasses within the wider culture of eastern silks as prestige, courtly gifts. Contextualizing the production of Flemish brasses within contemporary art historical developments in the Low Countries, it examines the symbolic vocabulary of luxury silk and its intercessory and commemorative potential as a conduit between the earth and heaven. This chapter will argue that brasses deliberately evoke a category of Eastern objects with a long established tradition of Western appropriation in order to exploit the multivalent possibilities of these potent symbols. In so doing, this chapter establishes the merchants commemorated by these objects as fluent in a visual vocabulary intimately tied to courtly *milieux* and the dynamics of gift exchange.

Chapter IV considers the implications of the circulation of silk as a commodity and in place of cash as a form of currency for the reception of the Flemish monumental brasses. The representations of silk on monumental brasses harnessed the fabrics remarkable capacity to circulate across networks of gift exchange and networks of trade as both social and economic currency. Their ability to evoke multiple modes of circulation and kinds of value provided the allowed the deceased to project their identity and reputation as international merchants possessing both great material and spiritual value. Read alongside the other iconographic and symbolic elements of the memorials – the merchants’ marks affixed to the borders, images of the saints and crowning image of Abraham drawing the souls of the deceased into the his bosom – the representations of silk were central to the monuments assertion of the spiritual credit amassed by the deceased through the conversion of excess wealth into gifts to the church.
Part III presents a quite different complex of memorial objects to the preceding two case studies as a monument to a single merchant. The tomb and chantry chapel of John Baret in the parish church of Bury St Edmunds captures many of the tensions and contradictions of late medieval mercantile spirituality and exposes the complexities of late medieval subjectivity and individual identity. With its emphasis on the one hand on the deceased's self-identity and worldly aspirations and on the other on the graphic reminders of mortal decay, the chapel lends itself to interpretation as an example of the individualistic merchant with pretensions to aristocratic status driven by fear of Purgatory to secure prayers and masses for his soul. In a discussion of the agency of memorial objects within commemorative networks Baret's chantry chapel does not readily offer up the same tightly knit circles of kin, guild members and business associates for examination. Rather, it is a study the capacity of memorial provisions to compel intercessory prayers even in the absence of strong ties of kinship or communal relations of obligation. It speaks at once to the persistence of the old orders and their symbolic modes in strategies of commemoration and the disintegration of established networks of commemoration as processes of urbanization, migration and social mobility uprooted individual from families, neighbors and lineages. Critical to the success of Baret's memorial complex in securing intercessions was its participation in in a broader visual and textual traditions of the *memento mori* – the graphic and confronting reminders of the death and transience of worldly possessions that were held up as mirrors to teach the living how to die well. The *memento mori* tradition was closely tied to novel practices aimed at cultivating intense interior contemplation, particularly
Northern European forms of piety to which merchants were exposed through trade. This chapter draws on archaeological theories of spatiality and embodiment to analyze the interactions between the central cadaver tomb, the opulent chapel furnishings, decorations and inscriptions and the viewer. It explores the bodily experience of the viewer in the context of new devotional techniques of interiority and affective piety in order to argue that John Baret presented himself as a mirror for spectators to confront their own mortality and so be prompted to reform themselves and offer prayers for his soul just as they hoped the living would pray for them after their passing.
PART I:
The Blackburns of York and the Topography of Urban Commemoration
Chapter One
Networks of Trade and Charity

Introduction

On March 24, 1425, Nicholas Blackburn the Elder, a wealthy and influential merchant from York, drew up an indenture giving prior John Wessington ten pounds to procure a 'memorial jewel' with the image of St Anne, St Christopher or St John the Baptist on his behalf. The jewel was to 'abide perpetually in the shrine of St Cuthbert at Durham Cathedral.' Over the course of multiple generations the Blackfirms strengthened their devotional investments in St Anne, St Christopher and St John through a series of bequests and commissions that left their mark on the fabric of churches and religious institutions throughout the city of York. The bequests and commissions acted, as C.M. Barnett argued, as "a powerful focus of commemoration, capable of expanding across more than one parish and acting as a net cast wide to encompass new alliances and generations." Best known among the artistic commissions are the stained glass windows at All Saint's, North Street in the City of York. The Blackburn Window incorporated donor portraits of Nicholas Blackburn the Elder and his wife Margaret, along with the very same saints listed in Blackburn's indenture. The exact date of manufacture for the Blackburn Window is uncertain. Some scholars

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attribute its patronage to Nicholas Blackburn the Elder, placing its manufacture
between 1412 and 1427. Others associate it with Nicholas Blackburn the Younger and
assign a later date of around 1440.³ The same trio of saints appears again in the Bolton
Hours, produced in a local workshop sometime between 1405 and 1420.⁴ Obits inscribed
in the calendar tie the book to Alice Blackburn, daughter of Nicholas Blackburn the
Elder and her husband, John Bolton.⁵

The iconography of the Blackburn window, the Bolton Hours and the memorial
jewel along with certain provisions in the will of Nicholas Blackburn the Elder suggest a
particular affinity for St Christopher and St Anne. In February 1432, Margaret and
Nicholas Senior set up two perpetual chantries at the Dominican conventual church.⁶
Nicholas' will of the same year makes further provision for two wax torches, each
weighing twenty pounds, for the chantry chapel of St Anne on Foss Bridge in York.⁷ A
codicil to the will further gifts his best vestment, best missal and best chalice to the
chantry in perpetuity.⁸ In 1435 Margaret, his wife, bequeathed a green vestment, two

³ Richard Almond, “All Saints’ Church, York, the Blackburn Window: A Medieval Conundrum,” Medieval Life 1
⁴ York Minster Library MS Add. 2; fol. 35 St Anne teaching the Virgin with two young female saints; fol. 39 St.
John the Baptist carrying the Agnus Dei; fol. 205v St. Christopher in waters with fish, holding the Christ Child
⁵ Pamela M. King, “Corpus Christi Plays and the ‘Bolton Hours’ I: Tastes in Lay Piety and Patronage in Fifteenth-
⁶ Sarah Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” Northern History: A Review of
⁷ Et ii tortis’ Cantarie mee in Capella sanctissime Anne super Ponte Fosse in Ebor. Trans in Black, The Blackburns
in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages, 15.
⁸ Ibid., 21.
painted cloths and two other cloths to hang near the High Altar to the same chantry.\(^9\) Requiem masses were also to be celebrated on the feast days of St Anne and St Christopher.\(^10\) St Anne was an appealing saint for the merchant class as an exemplar of the pious mixed life. Gail McMurray Gibson, in her discussion of the cult of St Anne in the mercantile towns of East Anglia, states that "it is hard to imagine a saint with more obvious bourgeois appeal" and traces the elaboration of Anne as a model East Anglian matron engaged in the activities appropriate to a pious merchant's wife in art and vernacular literature.\(^11\) Sarah Pedersen has speculated upon the reasons why these particular holy figures held such appeal for the family and tied their devotion to St Anne and St Christopher to their interests as merchants. Her cult was promoted enthusiastically by the Dominicans who, along with the other mendicant orders, exerted a powerful influence in York, particular among the wealthy mercantile elite who frequently had mendicant confessors tend to their spiritual needs.\(^12\) The friars played a central role in the spiritual well-being of the men and women of York in life and in death. Wills document the practice of inviting friars from all four orders to celebrate Masses for them in their parish churches widespread up until 1530s.\(^13\) St Christopher

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\(^9\) Ibid., 31.
\(^10\) Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” 36.
\(^11\) Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 84.
\(^12\) Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” 36.
\(^13\) Michael Robson, “Benefactors of the Greyfriars in York: Alms from Testators, 1530-1538,” *Northern History* 38, no. 2 (September 2001): 223–4. The preference for the intercessory ministrations of the friars over the abbey of St Mary's reflected deep-seated conflicts between the civic and ecclesiastical authorities of York. Choices concerning the role of the Friar's in funerary and memorial provisions, therefore, were closely tied to a desire to express a civic, mercantile identity rather than align oneself with the older aristocratic or ecclesiastical orders. For a full account of the tumultuous relationship between the city and the abbey during the late middle ages and
was likewise a saint with strong mercantile associations. As patron saint of travelers and protector of roads and bridges, St Christopher held a natural pull for merchants.\textsuperscript{14}

Additionally, one of the three great religious guilds of York, alongside the famed guild of Corpus Christi and lesser known guild of St Anthony, was dedicated to St Christopher and St George.\textsuperscript{15}

Delving further into the gifts and commissions of the Blackburns and their associates unearths complex spatio-temporal webs connecting the deceased with multiple generations of the living and with the sacred remains and images of the saints scattered across the city of York and beyond. In All Saints parish church alone, marital and business ties uniting the Bolton, Thornton, de Pountfray and Bawtre families and other members of the York mercantile elite shaped patterns of gift giving over multiple generations. Following the installation of \textit{Blackburn Window} other leading mercantile families installed four additional windows in the parish church of All Saints, North Street. Nicholas Blackburn the Elder appears again in each of the panels of the \textit{Corporal Acts of Mercy} window performing each of six acts of mercy outlined in Matthew 25:41.\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{Prykke of Conscience} window illustrates the account of the Last Days given by Richard Rolle in his poem of the same name. In addition to the fifteen apocalyptic

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\textsuperscript{14} Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” 37.

\textsuperscript{15} Tillot, “The Later Middle Ages: The City and the Ecclesiastical Franchises,” 481.

\textsuperscript{16} The window depicts Blackburn feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, offering hospitality to strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and relieving those in prison. It omits the seventh act corporal mercy - the burial of the dead - found in the Book of Tobit. This absence will be discussed in greater detail below.
scenes, the window incorporates donor portraits of the Henryson and Hessle families. Finally, Reginald Bawtre, a city merchant, left one hundred shillings to complete the *St Thomas Window* above the altar dedicated to St Thomas Becket in 1429. Relationships were forged and negotiated between the dead, the living and the saints through material objects, which mediated the ongoing presence of the dead. Between donor portraits and funerary monuments, masses celebrated to ensure the name of the deceased was on the lips of the living in multiple locations throughout the city, and gifts ranging from the extravagant to the humble cramming the altars of every church in York, the sacred topography of the city was redolent with absent presences.

**Urban Religion in Late Medieval York: A Historical Overview**

Complexes of memorial gifts willed to churches and monasteries operated within a spiritual economy that employed mechanisms of gift exchange to establish and maintain relationships between the living, the dead and the saints. Burial near altars and images of saints, candles lit before images, commissions of new artworks including altarpieces, stained glass windows and devotional objects, and monetary contributions to the repair and upkeep of religious and civic buildings associated with patron saints ensured a lasting relationship between merchants and saints after their death. In return

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for these gifts, testators expected saints to intercede on their behalf to speed the passage of their souls through purgatory. This chapter will examine the complexes of material gifts of the elite, mercantile families of York in order to study the deployment of material objects as proxies or surrogates for the dead and to suggest that the strategy of using material objects to stand in one's place after death was both a development from pre-existing practices, and also a peculiarly mercantile approach to commemoration.

Scholars have characterized mercantile mentalities as "modern" and "rational," positioning the emerging mercantile elites of late medieval Europe on an historical trajectory pointing toward the rise of the modern, capitalist individual. The ways in which material objects structured networks of commemoration binding together the living, the dead and the saints reveal a more complex picture of mercantile mentalities. The sources discussed in this chapter do not constitute explicit statements of religious belief linking mercantile practices to the cult of the saints. Rather, they provide an insight into the lived religion which reveals the often unconscious ways that social and economic structures shaped religious belief and practice. The act of writing a will was moment in which financial and spiritual concerns intersected. For a community accustomed to account keeping, operating through networks of associates and business agents and mitigating risks through diversification of investments, these mental habits may well have informed the moment of final accounting.\textsuperscript{18} It is also important to note

\textsuperscript{18} In conceptualizing both strategies and habits I draw on Erwin Panofsky by way of Pierre Bourdieu, who drew on Panofsky's idea of "mental habits" transmitted by institutions, practices and social relations – in this case the practices and social relation arising from mercantile activities – that generated deeply interiorized schemas for thought and action. From these habits arose the strategies for commemoration employed by medieval merchants.
that while this chapter focuses on the evidence to merchants in York these trends can be found to a greater or lesser extent in testamentary and material evidence from outside the mercantile classes. Given that the aristocracy was increasingly involved in trade and familiar with merchants' business practices, the phenomena described here point to a broad shift in society in which mercantile mentalities provided new frameworks for positioning interactions between Christians and saints.

York’s rich material and documentary record has provided scholars ample evidence of late medieval merchants' memorial provisions. From these sources emerges a picture of a wealthy urban center, dominated by its mercantile elite, in which civic and religious networks were deeply intertwined. Though York Minster was the sacred center of the city, lay mercantile spirituality tended to focus on the parishes, monastic houses and friaries. The city generally saw little of the Minster's titular head and the canons who theoretically administered the Minster were often granted their appointment for services to the king and never had direct connection with the city. The Minster's chantry priests, on the other hand, tended to be local men who lived in the city. Nicholas Blackburn the Elder was unusual among the merchants of York in selecting a burial place in the Minster. His son, Nicholas the Younger, chose to be buried in the family's parish church of All Saints, North Street rather than alongside his father, in

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20 Ibid., 18.
keeping with mercantile tendencies of the time. The commemorative strategies of the merchants of York followed broad trends in late medieval English provisions for death responding to the doctrine of purgatory. Medieval merchants built up networks of saintly protectors to intervene on their behalf after death by donating their wealth to multiple religious foundations, and contributing monies for altars and images dedicated to a number of different saints. Numerous wills request burial in a prestigious part of the church. The most sought after burial spot was the High Altar. A position in the choir before the High Altar guaranteed the deceased would maintain a bodily presence near both the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the relics of the patron saint of the church. As subsidiary altars proliferated, more options became available to those who wished to maintain proximity to the rites of the Mass. Nearness to an image of Christ, the Virgin or a favorite saint was also considered efficacious. Those who could not afford to purchase one of these prized locations could instead bequeath garments and jewelry to clothe statues of the saints.21 Another common strategy for securing ties to saints, and one available to individuals from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, was to donate candles to be lit before images.22

Late medieval Christians vied for burial spots in prestigious parts of the church. Some requested interment before the high altar or one of the subsidiary altars. Others requested burial before an image of a saint. Nicholas Blackburn the Elder was among

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22 Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, 155.
those who specified a burial place. He instructed his executors that he should be buried in the south choir aisle of St Peter’s Cathedral, before an image of Jesus and made provision during his lifetime for a marble tomb to be made for the site.23 A number of other individuals likewise asked to be buried before sacred images. Richard York, merchant and alderman, wished to be buried before the image of the Trinity in the church of St John the Evangelist, Ouse Bridge.24 Richard Rawson, a mercer of London, in his will requested to be buried before the image of the Virgin in the parish church of St Mary Magdalene, Milkstreet.25 This practice continued up to the eve of the Reformation. John White of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (d. circa 1537-8), for example, left instructions for his body to be buried before the image of the Virgin in St Nicholas Church.26 This desire on the part of testators that their earthly remains maintain physical proximity to a sacred image of a saint is related to the more common phenomenon of testators requesting burial before the high altar or Easter sepulcher. This guaranteed the deceased would maintain a bodily presence near both the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the relics of the patron saint of the church. Careful selection of one's burial site before an image or altar dedicated to a specific saint could direct particularly efficacious prayers and masses to the deceased. Though the deceased would no longer be in the position to apprehend the image of the saint, many individuals provided explicit and detailed instructions for maintaining proximity to

23 Coram ymaginem domine nostre ibidem sub lapide meo marmorio ad hoc in eodem loco preparato.
these sacred images. Recollection of the names of the dead in the context of particular masses and devotions was thought to be especially efficacious. The sermon *In die sepulture alicuius mortui* in Mirk’s *Festial* explains that masses the deceased loved most and was most efficacious to him or during his life, such as the mass of the Trinity, or the Holy Ghost or Our Lady, would also aid him or her the most in purgatory.²⁷

What is interesting about the wills of York merchants is that physical proximity to a single saint was, for many testators, not sufficient. Even after they had secured a position for themselves before a sacred image or before the high altar, they sought to establish further links to other saints. A striking feature of merchants’ wills of the period is the sheer number of altars, churches, religious foundations, guilds and so forth amongst which testator’s divided their property. Each of these was associated with a patron saint, with whom a relationship was established through these gifts. For example, Richard Russell, a citizen and merchant of York who died in 1435, made provision for two new altars for his parish church of St John the Baptist in Hundgate. One was to be installed in the northern part of the church before the images of the Virgin and St Anne and another in the southern part of the church before the image of St Katherine and Mary Magdalene. Eight candles were to be burnt in his memory at the high altar, two at the altar of the Virgin, two at the altar of St Katherine in addition to

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candles to be burnt at the elevation of the Host.\textsuperscript{28} As a result of his bequests, the
topography of the parish church became a physical manifestation of the deceased's
intercessory network. These kinds of bequests had a profound impact on the space of
parish church in late medieval York. The emerging emphasis on subsidiary altars, along
with increased popular participation in guilds and fraternities, opened up multiple
possibilities for interacting with the space of the church, shaped by rank, occasion and
occupation.\textsuperscript{29} 

As altars, images, chapels and chantries proliferated more choices were presented
to late medieval testators for distributing their benefactions. Mental habits developed
through the practices of trade informed York merchants' approach to building a network
of saintly intercessors. For a community accustomed to account keeping, operating
through networks of associates and business agents and mitigating risks through
diversification of investments. The tendency toward diversifying spiritual investments,
evident in the merchants' distribution of moveable property amongst multiple altars,
churches and religious foundations has parallels in the measures merchants took to
mitigate commercial risks. In order to protect themselves against the vagaries of
overseas trade, merchants frequently diversified their activities and took part in several
ventures simultaneously.\textsuperscript{30} They divided goods up amongst multiple ships as a strategy

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{28} Test. Ebor. II, 53
\end{thebibliography}
to protect their investments against piracy, shipwreck and other dangers of the seas. By donating their wealth to multiple religious foundations, and contributing monies for altars and images dedicated to a number of different saints, late medieval merchants built up a network of saintly protectors that paralleled their networks of trading and business contacts. The Blackburn family’s strategy differed in focus, but operated according to the same logic. Rather than distributing assets among a network of saintly protectors, through their commemorative gifts the Blackburn family seek to direct prayers, the currency of salvation during the Middle Ages, from multiple locations throughout the city of York to a select trio of saints who were the objects of particular devotion for the Blackburns.

A network of intercessors, both earthly and divine, was essential for a social class who, unlike the aristocracy, had difficulty guaranteeing the continuation of remembrance down through the generations. Mortality rates and the failure to produce male heirs prevented the formation of dynastic oligarchies based on inherited wealth. As a result merchants could not depend upon the survival of individual families for security. Instead, merchants in York and elsewhere in England relied on the strength of interconnections within generations. Intermarriage between mercantile families was one strategy that ensured capital, investments, real estate and the goodwill of business were retained. As complex interconnections between mercantile families were

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32 Jennifer Kermode, “The Merchants of Three English Towns,” in Profession, Vocation, and Culture in Later
established, merchants formed networks that functioned in place of kin networks. This, in turn, shaped commemorative strategies previously reliant on kinship ties. Joint chantries commemorating multiple merchants from different families, for example, increased the likelihood that any one of the individuals would be remembered by tapping into multiple kin networks and tying them together through links forged in business.\textsuperscript{33} Merchants were not alone in their concerns that the end of familial lines spelt the obliteration of memory. Nigel Saul argued that the consistent commemorative style present in the monumental brasses of the Cobhams in the town of Cobham constituted “carefully managed fictions of continuity” for a family whose future was uncertain due to a lack of heirs.\textsuperscript{34} Concerned to ensure that the memory of the Cobhams lived on the commissioners of the brasses relied on the funerary objects themselves to act as a stimulus to prayer and to stand substitutes for the subjects themselves as a physical link between the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{35} For merchants, however, the need to rely on non-kin networks and deploy objects as surrogates was all the more pressing as urban, mercantile environments saw high levels of mobility and immigration.\textsuperscript{36}

Anxieties concerning the likelihood of intercessors with ties to the deceased continuing down through subsequent generations shaped late medieval merchants’ preparations for death. There were a number of groups besides kin who were bound by

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{34} Saul, \textit{Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England}, 237.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 234.
ties of mutual obligation to which the deceased could appeal to for intercessory prayers and masses. Commemoration in York largely fell to the parish church and the city's gilds. Barrie Dobson's study of chantry certificates and wills in York notes that, with only one or two exceptions, the city's mercantile elite chose to establish perpetual chantries either in one of the two civic chapels or in their parish church. In contrast to the Minster, the mayor and citizenry had some level of oversight over proceedings in parish churches and civic chapels. Anxious to ensure their provisions for chantries were indeed carried out, Dobson argues that York's testators relied upon their civic networks to ensure that intercessory provisions were maintained.37 Religious gilds, which were separate from the craft gilds, were founded to honor their patron saints through feasts, masses and the maintenance of lights and provide mutual aid for members in the form of charitable relief, burial and intercessory prayers.38 Craft gilds also bore responsibility for a range of activities more often associated with religious gilds, including the maintenance of lights at altars associated with their patron saints and charitable provisions for members who fell into poverty, such as the provision of an appropriate funeral.39 However, in York the wealthiest merchants focused their attentions on the religious gilds of St Christopher, St George and Corpus Christi while the protectionist

craft and trade gilds served the business, social and religious needs of the middling classes.\textsuperscript{40}

Though care must be taken to avoid conflating religious and craft gilds, there was significant overlap between the social and political function of religious and craft guilds especially where the membership of the former tended to be drawn from the latter.\textsuperscript{41} In York the relationship between religious guilds, professional guilds and the merchant classes was more complicated than in other regions of England. By 1420 the Mercers of York had absorbed most of the wool merchants into its ranks. Together, mercers and merchants of York were members of the Gild of Holy Trinity in Fossgate. Like other craft and professional guilds in the city the Mercers’ gild performed charitable acts and held religious services in a chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Some merchants preferred not to be incorporated into the Mercers’ Guild. Instead, they remained Staplers overseas and were members of the Corpus Christi Guild, a religious fraternity,

\textsuperscript{40} King, “Corpus Christi Plays and the ‘Bolton Hours’ I: Tastes in Lay Piety and Patronage in Fifteenth-Century York,” 39.

\textsuperscript{41} Gervase Rosser, “Big Brotherhood: Guilds in Urban Politics in Late Medieval England,” in \textit{Guilds and Association in Europe, 900-1900}. Ed. Ian A. Gadd and Patrick Wallis (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2006), 27. Benjamin R. McGee argued for a significant role of religious gilds in trade and business dealings, providing “a ready-made network of potential clients.” See “Religious Gilds and Civil Order: The Case of Norwich in the Late Middle Ages,” \textit{Speculum} 67, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 93. A recent examination by Richard Goddard of gilds in Norwich calls into question the extent to which membership in religious gilds created a sense of gild solidarity capable of providing the kind of business networking opportunities argued for by McRee. Goddard argues that the fact that most English gilds gathered only a few times per year and members frequently belonged to more than one gild militates against commercial networking as a significant benefit of gild membership. See “Medieval Business Networks: St Mary’s Guild and the Borough Court in Later Medieval Nottingham,” \textit{Urban History} 40, no. 1 (2013): 3–27. Nevertheless, by bringing together business and trade associates in a communal framework of mutual spiritual obligation, religious gilds ensured a tight connection was maintained between economic and spiritual networks.
when in York.\textsuperscript{42} The Company of the Merchant Adventurers played a central role in the lives of wool men and mercers who traded with the Low Countries. The Merchant Adventurers established the fraternity of St Thomas Becket sometime around 1300, and the Company's devotion to the saint continued through to the later middle ages. They founded chapels dedicated to the saint in the major trading centers of Northern Europe to care for the spiritual well-being of English merchants doing business in Bruges, Middelburg, Antwerp, Bergen op Zoom and, when they left the Low Countries, Calais.\textsuperscript{43}

The focus of spiritual activity within both religious and craft guilds was the maintenance of a devotional relationship with the organization’s patron saint. Herbert Westlake's foundational study of the religious gilds of medieval England, based upon the gild returns of 1389, identifies the doctrine of purgatory as the principal motivating force behind the formation of, and ongoing support for, these organizations. According to Westlake, belief in the efficacy of masses and prayers for the dead constituted the primary bond that united brethren to one another.\textsuperscript{44} More recent scholarship has questioned the centrality of purgatory and the provisions for death to medieval gilds. David Crouch's examination of Yorkshire gilds acknowledges the importance of the doctrine of purgatory and justification by works in shaping the ethos and activities of gilds but notes that the fundamental purposes of any religious gild was the celebration


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 220.

\textsuperscript{44} Herbert Francis Westlake, \textit{The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England} (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), 129.
of the saint's cult of its dedication.⁴⁵ Ken Farnhill rejects entirely Westlake's assertion that fraternities were concerned almost exclusively with intercessions for the dead and the broader characterizations of the middle ages as a cult of the living in service of the dead arising from such distortions of the motivations of gilds.⁴⁶ Like Crouch, he argues that guilds were above all devoted to their patron saint and all activities performed by the gild, including masses for the dead, revolved around the saint. As organizations dedicated to maintaining a relationship with the patron saint in order to secure the saint's favor, both in daily life and in the afterlife, the gild was as much in service as the living as the dead.⁴⁷ This emphasis on the centrality of patron saints to religious fraternities is part of a broader historiographical reaction against accounts of late medieval religiosity that dwell on the doctrine of Purgatory. Purgatory, according to revisionist accounts of late medieval religion, was not as important as the belief in the efficacy of contact between the living and the dead. Reciprocal contacts between the living, the dead and the saints created what Brian Patrick McGuire described as a "universal society providing mutual aid and protection with reciprocal bonds and obligations."⁴⁸ These devotional ties to particular saints built up over the course of an individual's lifetime could be called upon in the hour of death to intercede for the sinner.

Though the commemorative provisions of York's merchants have been studied in

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⁴⁷ Ibid., 59.
great depth, very often these discussions of lay religiosity in York treat religion as an epiphenomenon of another interpretive category such as social class, economics or politics. Very often, interpretations focusing on conspicuous consumption, prestige and political influence as driving factors elbow out considerations of religious devotion in its own right. For C.M. Barnett the emphasis on professional status, political office and family connections in funerary monuments suggests representation of status symbols was as important as pious display. Where piety and religious belief are taken seriously in studies of material and visual culture, art objects are seen as mirrors of belief. Duffy, for example, sees benefactions, images, altars, ritual arrangements as crucial evidence for the devotional preferences and relation between individual pious motivation, choice and initiative and corporate activity and consciousness of the parish. For Richard Almond, studying the Blackburn Window in All Saints North Street, the pressing question concerning mercantile patronage revolves around what the stained glass window can reveal about social class and attitudes in fifteenth-century England. Sarah Pedersen's examination of the Corporal Acts of Mercy Window in the same church likewise sees the art object, particularly its iconographic components, as a means for the historian to gain understanding about the donor's personal piety. These approaches treat commemorative objects as static reflections of an individual's religious beliefs and

53 Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York.”
social milieu, an approach which Michael Camille criticized as 'art as text' and 'art as mirror.' It is not enough to say that particular iconographic choices - a saint associated with one or other of the gilds, or the inclusion of a merchant's mark - reflected an individual's identity as a merchant and documented the religious, social and economic networks on which a merchant relied for intercessions. Rather, the material objects that were deployed in merchants' strategies of commemoration were constitutive of such identities and networks. As ideological agents art objects actively shaped the form of social relations.

The capacity of material objects to construct networks of commemoration and to act within these networks is most apparent in commemorative objects bearing a likeness to the deceased. The conception of the donor portrait as surrogate which underpins this chapter is predicated on the absence of the subject. Art historical discussions of the portrait as a genre are deeply invested in questions of absence and surrogate presence. Memory, even in the case of portraits of living subjects, is the primary motivation for likeness. In Andrew Martindale's work on the re-emergence of portraiture during the middle ages, memory is a flexible activity encompassing a range of scenarios. He argues that the appearance of "counterfeits" of individuals emerged around 1300 in order to fulfill a variety of functions. Portraits could make an absent living person present, recall

the memory of the dead or aid in the memorization of genealogies. Lucy F. Sandler has argued that donor portraits in books could function in place of actual supplication on the part of the individual in whose likeness they were created as "a kind of permanent effigy of repeated acts of devotional piety." Laura F. Gelfand and William S. Gibson likewise argue that a portrait likeness in the form of a donor portrait and other visible signs of identity like coats of arms could act as medium through which the faithful communicated with the divine and could receive the benefit of Masses, prayer and the power of relics even after death. As such, they constituted "active and engaged surrogate[s] working efficaciously toward [the donors'] salvation." Likenesses in the form of donor portraits and tomb monuments bearing likenesses of the deceased were not, however, the only material objects capable of functioning both as constitutive of and as surrogates for human subjects within commemorative networks. Analyzing non-mimetic objects such as jewelry, clothing and personal effects alongside commemorative objects possessing mimetic likeness to human subjects, this chapter builds upon anthropological approaches to art history which argue that art objects occupy positions in networks of human social agency almost equivalent to humans themselves.

59 Ibid., 122.
Commemorative Networks and the Agency of Objects

This chapter will examine data gleaned from wills and chantry certificates alongside documentary and material evidence of commemorative objects and gifts in order to map out the commemorative network that came into being in late medieval York and examine how this network functioned in late medieval merchants' strategies of commemoration. Gifts, whether documented in writing or extant, which either implicitly or explicitly establish or maintain a relationship with either living individuals or saints predicated on the expectation of a counter-gift in the form of intercessions for the soul of the deceased will form the evidence base for this chapter. This method builds upon existing scholarship on the processes by which merchants transformed their worldly riches, accumulated through trade, into spiritual credit by exchanging it for intercessory prayers, masses and indulgences. In the gifts of these merchants we see the trace of a commemorative network linking together the dead, the living and the saints overlaid on the topography of the city itself. This commemorative network constituted "a strange virtual world in which the living were brought together with the dead in a relationship of mutual dependence and obligation." The networks of relationships crisscrossed the city and created chains of interdependence spanning multiple generations and knitting together the heaven, earth and purgatory. The complexity of these networks demands a methodological framework capable of

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encompassing such intricacies. Network theory provides tools to study entities and subjects whose collective interactions form complex structures. Through the application of social network analysis to historical data, scholars have successfully analyzed kinship ties, friendship links and trade routes to reveal how interconnected collectivities shape individual behavior and how these networks mediated the interchange of information and objects. The fundamental building blocks of any network are nodes and the relational ties that link nodes together. The methodological advantage of network thinking is its capacity to study relationships between entities and incorporate people and objects within a framework that has sufficient flexibility to encompass spatial, temporal and social dimensions within a given network.

Commercial exchange emerges from network theory as a phenomenon embedded in and productive of social relationships. The nascent credit economy of the late Middle Ages operated on ties of mutual obligation and the establishment of networks and relationship just as much as did gift exchange economies. James Murray’s work on medieval Bruges, for example, employs the concept of neural networks as a heuristic device in order to do justice to the complexity and dynamism of interactions in a location previously viewed simply as a place where commodities were traded at the

63 Ibid., 635.
64 Ibid., 635–636.
meeting point between geographical zones. Among the most important network making institutions in the city of Bruges were religious houses founded and frequented by merchants. An examination of the commercial topography of the city central reveals merchant organizations began with the area traced out by the four mendicant houses of the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Augustinians. These houses and, to a lesser extent, parish churches and charitable institutions, served as meeting places, archive repositories, places of worship and were thus critical for organizing merchants and conditioning their trading and social contacts. Murray's use of network theory reveals the intersection of and co-dependence between the spiritual domain of the church and the economic domain of the marketplace. Likewise, the commemorative network that bound members of York's mercantile elite to one another and with their saintly protectors intersected with and was shaped by trade and commercial networks.

Network analysis is an essential tool for unpacking the complex, intertwined relationships mediated through material objects in late medieval York. Donations involving material objects circulated as gifts lend themselves to a network theory approach due to the relational dynamics of gift exchange. Where the goal of commerce was the acquisition of commodities, the goal of gift-giving was to establish bonds between giver and receiver that had to be reaffirmed by counter-gift. Using the

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68 Ibid., esp. 5, 10.

69 Patrick J. Geary, “Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Things,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in*
terminology of network analysis, a node could be any human subject; the deceased, a living individual or a saint. The relational links connecting these nodes were ties of mutual obligation established through gift giving. Those preparing for death gave material gifts with the implicit understanding that these gifts would be reciprocated with a counter-gift of masses, prayers and indulgences. What is "traded," so to speak, via these links are those sacred commodities that constitute the late medieval economy of commemoration. Gifts given to the kin, friends, religious institutions and the saints did not circulate independently of the commercial realm, but, especially in cases where the donor was a member of the merchant class, were deeply enmeshed in the mercantile economy. As David Morgan argues, "Practices of negotiation with transcendent powers may be regarded as an economic behavior. In fact, religious forms of exchange not only resemble formal systems of economic value, but frequently operate in tandem with or even as economic relations."\(^70\)

The sheer complexity of interrelationships between deceased and living individuals and the saints in a late medieval commemorative network calls for a network theory approach. In earlier periods, reciprocal ties between donor and recipient tended to be fairly simple, largely as a function of the social class of donors and the kinds of gifts given. A key difference between late medieval merchants’ wills and earlier wills and charters of the aristocracy and nobility lay in the kinds of gifts they documented. The

nobility tended to secure intercessions from the church through gifts of real estate to a single religious institution – the local monastic house or cathedral, for example. These gifts gave rise to an interconnected system of social relations and reciprocities that operated in exclusive, narrowly-defined familial and local frameworks. They tied a family to a single religious foundation over the course of multiple generations. The peculiar legal status of real estate in the Middle Ages gave these gifts their power to compel certain kinds of reciprocal relationships with the church. Northern European law, recognized a clear distinction between moveable and immovable property that hinged on its alienability. Real estate, as property that produced income, in contradistinction to moveable goods such as money, jewels, goods and produce which were income, was understood to have a perpetual life. As such, it could not be subject to individual possession but was entailed from generation to generation. As land was understood in law to be inalienable from the family, the gift of real estate created permanent bonds of reciprocity between the family and the religious foundation, with prayers and suffrages for the dead offered as the counter-gift.

From the tenth century to the fourteenth century a fundamental shift occurred in gift giving practices from mainly unilateral relationships established between a single family and a religious foundation that is maintained over the course of multiple generations, to a complex web of interdependencies that can only be untangled with the

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aid of network theory. Aristocratic wills documented the same categories of gifts as are evident in mercantile wills, namely the establishment of perpetual chantries and religious foundations, endowments to burial churches and charitable provisions. However, these continued to operate within exclusive, narrowly defined familial and local frameworks. They did not reflect a similar tendency to distribute moveable property amongst multiple altars, churches and religious foundations both local and further afield apparent in the wills of York merchants.

The fragmentation of gift giving patterns that was the hallmark of mercantile wills can be linked to a number of different factors. Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld associates the late medieval tendency toward the diversification of one's spiritual portfolio with the increased social diversity of donors and the emergence of new forms of religious and monastic spirituality which saw mendicants and confraternities vie with traditional parochial and monastic recipients of lay largesse. Merchants’ wills, with their reliance on discrete, quantifiable gifts of money and goods in return for precisely articulated spiritual commodities represent a shift away from an economy of salvation based upon the perpetual exchange of gift and counter-gift through familial lines of inheritance. In its place arose a conception of salvation as the discharging of spiritual debts which relied on complicated processes of accounting in order to measure time, in terms of years in Purgatory, against intercessory prayers and masses, which were assigned monetary

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value. This conception of salvation was supported by a confessional apparatus which inculcated in lay Christians techniques of self-examination centered on a regular accounting of itemized wrongdoings before a confessor, who in turn enumerated precise numbers of penances to offset each sin.

Wills accounted for many different kinds of things of value; real estate, rents, money and moveable goods were all redistributed among family members, the church and networks of friends and business associates. These forms of wealth were redistributed in death to a number of different ends. Debts had to be discharged upon death, heirs needed to be accounted for and unmarried daughters set up with dowries. When these considerations had been dealt with, the remainder of one’s wealth could be given away to secure spiritual credit. Certain spiritual commodities were available for purchase for set values. Prayers, masses, perpetual chantries, could all be secured in exchange for donations of land, money or goods. The recital of lands, money and moveable property and their recipients in wills seems straightforward enough, but a close examination of the texts reveals complex social, religious and economic practices and underlying assumptions about the nature of worth, the commensurability of spiritual and economic value, and the ability of things to shift in status between commodity, gift and currency in order to mediate between the commercial and spiritual realms. The capacity of goods and money to operate in this way was dependent upon an underpinning logic late medieval Catholicism. Notions of quantifiable value and commensurability had by this period become central to Catholic conceptions of sin and
salvation. Spiritual debts could either be paid off in the purchase of prayers, masses and Indulgences or worked off in the cleansing pains of purgatory.

The wide range of material gifts recorded in the historical and material record enables an assessment of the efficacy of particular memorials and gifts in generating intercessions. The power of a chantry chapel versus a donation of wax is not solely a function of monetary value, though this certainly plays a part. The location of a memorial object within the larger space of the parish church, cathedral or religious house in relation to lay traffic and liturgical action, factors such as size and visual impact, and the length of time that a memorial object remained on display all factor into ability to capture the attention of intercessors. Kate Giles's and Pamela Graves's work on the archeology of York reveals sophisticated way in which late medieval benefactors strategically manipulated liturgical space in order to generate greater intercessions for themselves. Kate Giles' study of late medieval visuality and spatiality argues that "past spaces were actively used to structure particular senses of place, forms of identity and political power."75 She emphasizes the importance of considering not only relationships between spaces but also access patterns within spaces and explores the way that visual cues embedded in standing fabric were used to signal or elicit particular modes of behavior.76 Guild hospitals provide an illustrative example of the way in which medieval benefactors exploited space in order to maximize efficacy of prayers. The hospitals, which functioned as a type of chantry in which inmates prayed for the souls of the guild

75 Giles, “Seeing and Believing,” 106.
76 Ibid., 109.
members in return for charity, were designed so that the inmates could see the Elevation of the Host from their beds. In this way the spatial dynamics encouraged inmates to participate, visually and orally, in liturgy of the chapel and so increase the spiritual benefits to those whose charity housed them.\textsuperscript{77} In Giles words, through carefully manipulation of space through charitable giving, "the poor were exploited as a source of spiritual labor."\textsuperscript{78} Her argument overstates the coercive force of such arrangements and underestimates the agency of the hospital inmates in participating in the liturgies of the hospital, nonetheless, her analysis of dynamics is helping for understanding the ways in which architectural space and visual objects were manipulated in such a way as to increase prayers and suffrages.

The relative efficacy of particular memorial objects is not necessarily straightforward. For example, a monument in a restricted space such as a guild chapel or a private chantry chapel may have been more efficacious than a memorial in the general body of the church. Though fewer people would be prompted to offer prayers to the deceased the individuals who interacted with the memorial were more likely to have had direct personal tied with the deceased. The compulsion to offer prayers would have been felt more keenly by those with kin relationships or ties of mutual obligation laid out in guild regulations. In contrast, a memorial in a heavily trafficked location may attract a greater number of passers-by, but each with a weaker tie to the deceased if they

\textsuperscript{77} Kate Giles, “Reforming Corporate Charity: Guilds and Fraternities in Pre- and Post-Reformation York,” in \textit{The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580}, by David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (Leeds: Maney, 2003), 331.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 332.
had no pre-existing link to the individual beyond a general obligation to pray for the Christian community. Objects could strengthen the power of a tie. A co-commemorative object visualizing, for example, one containing donor portraits or inscriptions alluding to two or more families, could be used to maintain ties of mutual interdependence between kin groups. Wealthy donors could obtain a certificate of indulgence to be attached to an image. The image would thereby attract greater attention from passers-by and effectively place a burden of debt to be repaid upon a passer-by who otherwise was not joined in a tie of mutual obligation with the deceased. Objects could also shift the pre-existing dynamics of a space. A new stained glass window program or altarpiece invited viewers to venerate the holy subjects depicted therein and attracted further donations. At the same time, donor portraits, emblems of identity such as merchants’ marks and coats of arms, and inscriptions elicited prayers for the deceased. As a result, sites witnessed an accretion of complexes of memorial objects including altarpieces, liturgical objects and tomb monuments that accumulated through programs of donation over the course of the multiple generations.

Material objects occupied an ambiguous position in late medieval strategies of commemoration which complicates the process of mapping the commemorative topography of York’s mercantile community. It is now something of a commonplace in studies of sepulchral art to state that funerary monuments sustained the presence of the dead amongst the living. Nigel Llewelyn’s study of monuments unpacks the ambiguity

79 Nigel Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
of presence and absence in medieval monuments. "By convention, the dead are held to reside 'in' monuments, which contain and locate the dead despite the fact that they may be thought of as 'in' several places at once. The material remains, the monument and the soul of the body might occupy three distinct locations." For Valdez del Alamo and Pendergast, this presence was symbolic and functioned as part of the artwork's strategy of commemoration. The deceased was present insomuch as the monument called the deceased to mind. Depending on the formal qualities of the funerary monument, according to this framework, it might function iconically or symbolically, in the terminology of semiotics. Building upon this idea of the funerary monument acting as a proxy for the deceased, recent work on funerary monuments emphasizes the "existential complexity" of these sites which, by functioning as surrogates for the dead, allowed them to speak to the living. By provoking both memory and action, tombs and memorials mediated transactions between the living and the dead. The provisions for chantries, masses and prayers, erection of sepulchral monuments, bequeathing of gifts to religious foundations and to family and friends all worked toward ensuring the names of the dead were preserved in the memory of the living. For late medieval and early modern subjects remembering was an act manifested in a variety of ways including the saying of a mass or a prayer, a rehearsal of genealogy, an expression of grief or a

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81 Valdez del Alamo and Pendergast, Memory and the Medieval Tomb, 1.
83 Binski, Medieval Death, 71.
recollection of familial duties.\textsuperscript{84}

The fundamental link between monuments and memory has prompted art historians to reassess the formal qualities of sepulchral art in light of recent scholarship on medieval memory. Memory formation in the Middle Ages was highly spatial in nature, enabling the development of a wide range of strategies process of memory formation designed to activate and manipulate human memory through the interaction between monuments, their setting, and the visitor to the tomb. Specialists such as monks and priests were trained to create a matrix of "things" to be stored in carefully designed mnemonic frameworks or architectures.\textsuperscript{85} When situated within this culture of remembering, an analysis of the formal features of funerary monuments reveals visual elements and inscriptions of worked together to trigger the process of remembrance by helping viewers store and retrieve information.\textsuperscript{86} Anne McGee Morganstern, for example, drew on Carruthers' study of the mental architecture of memory to argue that mortuary art deliberately employed particular compositional and iconographic devices in order to call to mind those who were to be prayed for. She argued that arcading on tombs, for example, combined with figures and shields, allowed monks and priests with a trained memory to call to mind those on whose behalf they were offering prayers.\textsuperscript{87}

Much of the existing scholarship examining the use of donor portraits, tombs,

\textsuperscript{84} Peter Sherlock, \textit{Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1.
\textsuperscript{85} Carruthers, \textit{The Craft of Thought}, 8.
\textsuperscript{87} Anne McGee Morgenstern, “”The Tomb as Prompter for the Chantry: Four Examples from Late Medieval England,” in \textit{Memory and the Medieval Tomb}, by Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 85.
seals, heraldic motifs and other material objects as proxies for ordinary Christians frames these objects as a symbolic presence that acts as a surrogate in a relatively limited fashion. The capacity of the object to exercise agency on behalf of the deceased is activated through the intermediary of the living spectator. The memorial object, within this paradigm, maintains the presence of the dead symbolically. The strategies of York merchants, however, speak to an underlying assumption that certain classes of material objects possess instrumentality and historical agency. James Murray relates the last wishes of John Goldbeter, a York Merchant whose business frequently took him to Bruges from the 1330s to the 1370s. During the 1360s he established a residence in Bruges in which he spent half the year along with his wife and household. His close connection with this Low Countries' trading city is demonstrated in the chapel he founded in the church of St Donation in Bruges as a final resting place for himself and his wife. As with many merchants, however, there was a high risk that he could meet his final hour while traveling and so he made provisions that if he should be buried elsewhere, the chapter of St Donatian would perform the same funerary rites, substituting a box for the body. John Stockdale, a merchant and sometime alderman of York, expected his physical body to be present in his tomb, but his will, too, suggests something more than a symbolic presence. In his will of 1506-7, he requests to be buried in St Michael's Church of Belfray "byfor our Lady awter in ye Lady qwere, so yt ye prest

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89 Murray, “Of Nodes and Networks,” 5.
when he doth Masse there may stand upon ye end of thrugh." These provisions reveal more complicated and ambiguous existential reality at the site of the tomb than a framework of 'symbolic presence' can encompass. Simon Roffey describes these kinds of material strategies as "technologies for salvation" which often deployed techniques that would ensure "subconscious memorialization." The spatial geography of the chapel, including the placement of tombs, heraldic devices and so forth on visual sightlines, often juxtaposed with the chantry altar or intercessory symbols, ensured that the viewer was drawn into the intercessory rituals and prayers of the chantry, whether consciously or unconsciously.

In examining the material objects that were central to merchants' strategies of commemoration, this dissertation draws on recent theories of materiality which seek to challenge the binary opposition between subjects and objects and assert, rather, that "the transactions that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations." Material objects did not simply passively reflect particular beliefs about death and dying, but were understood by those who deployed them to have real effects within the networks, both human and divine, that were critical to the salvation of their souls in the afterlife. Recent work incorporating the insights of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory into art historical examinations of patronage are critical of approaches which relegate objects to a subordinate and passive position within the social sphere and

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90 Will of John Stockdale, Feb 25 1506-7 Test. Ebor. Vol. IV, CXLVII. 256
fail to adequately consider the role of objects as participants or actors in creating, sustaining and extending social ties.\textsuperscript{93} Objects emerge from this perspective as critical, mediating agents in the networks of relations that compose the social world.\textsuperscript{94} Thing Theory, likewise, exposes the blurred boundaries between subjects and objects, challenging scholars to consider the ways in which inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects.\textsuperscript{95} The notion that objects possess agency would not have appeared out of the ordinary to a late medieval viewer. It is well established that saints channeled their power and presence through relics and images. Hans Belting's magisterial work on the image before the era of art established icons, statues and relics as the site wherein the presence and power of the saint was "condensed in a corporeal image."\textsuperscript{96} For Belting, the fact that medieval images did not merely represent subjects, but were treated as subjects in and of themselves - venerated, kissed and petitioned - radically distinguishes them from modern, disenchanted works of art.\textsuperscript{97}

The ability of objects to act as proxies for their givers has long been recognized by scholars of gift-giving. According to Mauss, whose scholarship continues to form the basis of current theories of gift exchange, "to make a gift of something is to make a

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 2. \\
\textsuperscript{95} Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” \textit{Critical Inquiry} 28, no. 1 (October 1, 2001): 7. \\
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., xxi.}
present of some part of oneself." Wealthy Christians had long given gifts of property to the Church in order to assure perpetual prayers for the departed. Geary argues that by entrusting the clergy with the *memoria* of the dead assured that names of the deceased, and therefore the deceased themselves would continue be present at the sacrifice of the Mass after their death. The incorporation of artistic representations of the donor, in the form of both donor portraits and effigies - served as both a reminder to the clergy of their obligations to the dead and as a surrogates for the dead themselves who became present not only in the recitation of their name in memorial masses and suffrages, but through their representations.

It will be my contention that ways of understanding and interacting with objects such as sacred images and relics, which blur the boundary between subject and object, shaped how late medieval Christians conceived of and deployed tombs, commemorative objects and memorial gifts in ways that are articulated through material practices rather than explicitly stated. For merchants, sacred objects and images were not the sole source of these unstated practices of object surrogacy. The use of proxies of all kinds, from agents who conducted business on their behalf, to merchants' marks that spoke to the reputation of a merchant and guaranteed the goods they stamped, to bills of credit all contributed to an understanding that networks of business relationships could be built and maintained through surrogates. This, in turn, shaped the way merchants established commemorative networks between the living, the dead and the saints.

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Chapter Two
The Windows at All Saints, North Street

The fourteenth century was a period of growth and change for the parish of All Saints, North Street, driven by demographic shifts that brought an influx of cash into the church. Until the late fourteenth century, it was a modest parish church serving a small community of tanners.¹ Between 1390 and 1420 the building underwent a significant period of expansion in response to an influx of wealthy patrons from among the ranks of York's mercers and merchants. The north aisle was widened between 1390 and 1410 and a series of chantries established which fundamentally altered the spatial arrangement of the church. In 1407 William Vescy, mercer, left 100s. for improving and ornamenting the choir and founded a chantry at the altar of St. Thomas the Martyr, probably located in the north aisle by the third window from the east. In 1410 Adam del Bank, dyer, founded a chantry at the altar of St. Nicholas in the south aisle. He also left money to fund repairs to the altar of St. James in the same aisle and the stonework of a window in the vicinity of the altar.² In addition to the structural changes which significantly enlarged the interior of All Saints the bequests of the mercantile parishioners funded an extensive program of stained glass windows.³ The patterns of donations at All Saints North Street reflect a wider trend in the city of York during the

³ Gee, “III.—The Painted Glass of All Saints’ Church, North Street, York.”
early to mid-fifteenth century toward increasing involvement by the merchant class in the establishment of chantries and commissioning of windows.⁴

Unraveling the intertwined strands of patronage and commemoration in All Saints North Street stained glass window program is complicated by the co-commemoration of multiple generations and of different families linked by business rather than kinship ties, oftentimes with gaps in documentary evidence hampering efforts to identify who commissioned the windows and who was commemorated in them. The Blackburn Window, commemorating Nicholas Senior and his wife Margaret along with his son Nicholas Junior and his wife, also named Margaret may have been commissioned by either of the men or both jointly.⁵ The Corporal Acts of Mercy Window corresponds with a bequest by the merchant Reginald Bawtre of 100s for a window depicting the works of mercy in the south aisle commemorating Nicholas Blackburn the Elder and his wife Margaret along with Reginald Bawtre and his family.⁶ The Pricke of Conscience Window, depicting the Fifteen Last Days of the World drawn from the popular vernacular poem by a Yorkshire author, is associated with a chantry founded by John Bolton and his wife Alice (nee Blackburn) Bolton in the parish church.⁷ Inscriptions recorded but now lost commemorate two merchants, Roger Henrison of Ulleskelf who was granted freedom of the city in 1401, and Abel de Hesyl who served as

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⁶ York Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Prb. Reg. 2ff. 572r-572v
chamberlain 1329–30, and bailiff 1336–7. This kind of co-commemoration amongst merchants was not uncommon in York. C.M. Barnett notes a number of joint chantries and monuments for which professional and business contacts, rather than familial ties, provided the common link. Barnett attributes the prevalence of joint memorials among the merchant class to a number of factors including lack of progeny and a general emphasis on professional status and civic office rather than pious devotion. The emphasis on monuments primarily as markers of social status fails to recognize the intersection of networks of trade and networks of commemoration and the role visual signifiers of secular status played in constructing networks of commemoration and prompting commemoration through a symbolic language of identity legible to specific audiences who bore responsibility for the memory of the deceased.

Characterized by elaborate tracery frames, panes of white glass with yellow stain juxtaposed with jewel-like panes of deep red and blue, and highly expressive treatment of facial features and gestures, the windows of All Saints' North Street represent some of the finest examples of stained glass executed in the International Gothic style in England. John Thornton of Coventry's York workshop, the same workshop responsible for the Great East Window of York Minster Cathedral, produced the majority of the fifteenth century glass in the parish church. Donor portraits, merchants' marks,

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8 Gee, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York.*
armorials and inscription incorporated into the stained glass windows all served to maintain the presence of the dead among the parishioners and petition intercessory prayers for their souls. Positioned near altars or in proximity to the sacred images included in the painted glass themselves these visual signifiers of identity received the spiritual benefits of the masses and prayers directed toward the relics and images of the saints.¹¹ One patron drew passers-by to the windows with the promise of indulgences. Robert Swanson reconstructed textual fragments in the base of a window in the south aisle representing the Mass of St Gregory offering indulgences in return for five Ave Marias and five Paternosters recited before the image.¹² These elements are characteristic of late medieval strategies of commemoration; those means by which "human memory could be activated or manipulated through the interaction between monuments, their setting and the visitor."¹³ Two windows directly connected with the Blackburn family and their associated, the Blackburn Window and the Corporal Acts of Mercy Window, reveal the way in which commemorative objects mobilized visual codes embedded in late medieval devotional practices and performances in order to construct and maintain the very networks of commemoration they implicitly addressed.

**The Blackburn Window**

The east window at All Saints North Street is a testament to the intercessory

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economies of late medieval spirituality. The Blackburn Window, as it is known, was originally positioned in the northeast corner of the church in what was then the Lady Chapel. Composed of three lights framed by elaborate Gothic tracery, the window’s iconographic program is rendered in the sophisticated, delicate tracing characteristic of the stained glass programs of the York school. Architectural frames composed of finials, twisting colonettes, vaulted canopies and decorative corbels all rendered in fine black brush strokes and white glass surround each panel. The upper two thirds of each light is dedicated to full figure images of three saint. In the left-most light, John the Baptist wears a deep red cloak over his hairsuit and bears the Agnus Dei upon an open book. The central light depicts St Anne, cloaked in sapphire blue, teaching the Virgin Mary to read from a book containing the verse Domine exaudi orationem meam auribus percipe obsecrationem meam. St Christopher stands with his staff in the right-hand light. He looks up at the Christ-child on his shoulder as he carries him through the river. Delicate lines impart emotive quality to the hands and faces of the figures. Pale gold glass in the main canopies above each of the saints and in the niches and lancet windows in the shafts draw the viewer into an interior suffused with ethereal light. The alternating red and blue patterned grounds behind each of the figures patterned grounds in alternating shades of deep red and sapphire blue contrast with the monochromatic grisaille work of the figures and frames. In the lower register beneath John the Baptist, Nicholas Blackburn the younger kneels facing the center panel with his

14 Knowles, Essays in the History of the York School of Glass-Painting, 90.
15 Psalm 142:1 'Hear, O Lord, my prayer: give ear to my supplication...’
wife kneeling behind him. The lower right hand register contains Nicholas the elder and
his wife likewise facing toward the center panel in attitudes of prayer. The two men hold
their palms pressed together in prayer while their wives of each hold open books
inscribed with verses from Psalms. An image of the God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
in the iconographic form of the Trinity-Crucifix appears between the two donor portrait
panels. The inscriptions below each of the donor portrait panels have been considerably
altered since the fifteenth century. In their present state they contain conventional
requests for intercessions for Nicholas Blackburn the elder and younger and their wives.
Antiquarian sources record the words *itaque pro animabus omnium benefactorum
istius fenestre* [blank] *luminare vitrio* beneath the portraits of the younger Nicholas and
Margaret Blackburn, suggesting a group commission.\(^{16}\)

Richard Almond dates the window, produced in the workshop of John Thornton
of Coventry, to between 1412 and 1427 and identifies the likely patron as Nicholas
Blackburn the Elder. This places the manufacture of the window a few years before
Blackburn’s death in 1432 and that of his wife in 1434. It predates by nearly a quarter of
a century the death of his co-commemorated son and daughter-in-law, who died in 1448
and 1453-4, respectively.\(^{17}\) Noting that the donor portraits show both Nicholas
Blackburn the Elder and Younger as young men, Almond argues that Nicholas
Blackburn the Elder deliberately created a retrospective portrait of himself alongside a

\(^{16}\) "...and so for the souls of all the benefactors of this window [blank] light in glass." Quoted in Black, *The
Blackburns in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages*, 75.

\(^{17}\) Almond, “The Blackburn Window,” 27.
contemporary portrait of his son in order to portray himself at the height of his success around the time of his 1406 appointment as Admiral of the Fleet by Henry IV.¹⁸

Interpretations of the Blackburn Window donor portraits and, indeed, merchants' donor portraits in general, tend to be preoccupied with issues of social status and secular display. Nigel Saul argues that while every medieval funerary monument functions both as a witness to status and as a spur to intercession, wool merchants' memorials place particular emphasis on the former. He goes so far as to conclude on the basis of the imagery on merchants' brasses that "woolmen saw investment in the trappings of piety principally as an expression of personal or communal pride. Reflection, contemplation, and the rigors of penitential piety appear largely to have passed them by."¹⁹ Clive Burgess's study of the parish of All Saints, Bristol, on the other hand, integrates the drive to secure an afterlife in memory into the wider patterns of penitential and charitable giving which he describes as "self-interested altruism."²⁰ Burgess's framework for examining preparations for death within patterns of giving established over the course of a lifetime highlights the fact that the act of writing the will did not represent the inauguration of a new commemorative network. Rather, preparations for death were woven through the entire course of a late medieval individual's life. As Burgess argues, relying on wills as our primary source for assessing

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¹⁸ Ibid.
²⁰ Clive Burgess, “‘An Afterlife in Memory’: Commemoration and Its Effects in a Late Medieval Parish,” in The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul: Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, ed. Tony Claydon, Studies in Church History 45 (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2009), 203.
commemorative practices provides only a partial picture. While wills disclose details about a testator’s plans for the distribution of moveable gifts and immediate provisions for burial they tell us nothing about pre obit benefactions.\(^{21}\) This observation is borne out in the case of the Blackburn family. Nicholas Blackburn the Elder donated both the Blackburn jewel and the Blackburn Window donated during his lifetime rather than posthumously. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the ways in which the Blackburn Window worked to establish a commemorative network during the lifetimes of those the window commemorated and the implications of the living subject being present before the donor portrait for our understanding of the reception of commemorative likenesses before moving on to examine the role the Blackburn Window played in maintaining the memory of the Blackburns after their deaths.

Interactions between textual inscriptions, devotional images and donor portraits suggest particular affinities between individual members of the Blackburn family and the devotional cults referenced in the Blackburn Window's iconographic program. A scroll held between Nicholas Blackburn the Elder's hands extends over the kneeling figures and breaches the border between the compartment containing the two patrons and the panel above. Inscribed on the scroll are the words *Det venie munus nobis rex trinus et unus*.\(^{22}\) This text references the iconography of the lower register of the central light which depicts God the Father seated on a gold throne, his right hand raised in

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 202.
\(^{22}\) ‘May the three and one King grant us the gift of pardon.’ Black, *The Blackburns in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages*, 75.
benediction. The Son is displayed before him on the Cross and the dove of the Holy Spirit mediates between the two in the space between their heads. The tie established through the inscribed scroll between the Nicholas Blackburn the Elder and the image of the Trinity points toward Nicholas Blackburn the Elder’s civic associations as well as his pious preoccupations. The image of the Throne of Mercy Trinity in the central lower panel was a popular devotional aid and one with particular appeal for other merchant members of the Guild of the Trinity.  

The Crucifix-Trinity iconography appears on the seal of the Trinity Gild which depicts the crucified Christ in the lap of God the Father flanked by two ships. By the time of manufacture of the Blackburn Window, the Trinity Guild was emerging as one of the most powerful in the city of York. The mercers were organized around the Gild of Holy Trinity in Fossgate and by 1430 the Mercer's gild was the wealthiest guild of the city and numbered among its ranks the majority of mayors, alderman and leading citizens if York. As York merchants increasingly focused on trade with Low Countries and shifted their commercial interests from raw wool to cloth exports the old urban elite and wool merchants were absorbed into the Mercer's company.  

The subject appears in countless Books of Hours and Psalters from the Low Countries as a stand-alone image designed for private contemplation. Well over one

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23 For the development of the Throne of Grace iconography see Sara Jane Pearman, “The Iconographic Development of the Cruciform Throne of Grace from the Twelfth-Century to the Sixteenth Century” (Case Western Reserve University, 1974).

hundred surviving English alabasters depicting the Trinity, primarily in the form of the
Throne of Mercy, attest to the enormous popularity of the subject and the thriving
market for affordable, devotional figures of the Trinity. References to the Trinity in
tomb sculpture, epitaphs and images associated with the *ars moriendi* had gained
widespread popularity in over the course of the fourteenth century, particularly in
Flanders, England and Germany and, to a lesser extent, in Italy. Documenting this
phenomenon, François Bœspflug noted a link between the emerging emphasis on the
individual judgment at the hour of death and the iconography of the Trinity. The
Throne of Grace, which alluded at once to the majesty of God the King and the suffering
of Christ Crucified, owes its popularity to iconographic formulation of the Trinity, rather
than Christ alone, as agent of redemption. The iconography's affirmation of the
efficacy of atonement through its visual declaration of Christ's dual natures and the
acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice by the Father and the Holy Spirit profoundly
influenced English vernacular culture. Denise Nowakowski Baker identifies the origin of
the imagery of Julian of Norwich's Fifth Showing as the Throne of Grace iconography,
demonstrating both its widespread incorporation into English art and its dissemination
to the laity.

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25 For the list of 125 surviving Trinities see Francis W. Cheetham, *Alabaster Images of Medieval England*
26 François Bœspflug, “La Trinité à L'heure de La Mort: Sur Les Motifs Trinitaires En Contexte Funéraire à La Fin
27 Ibid., 2.
Allusions to the judgment of souls combined with careful manipulation of space and composition transform the iconography of the Throne of Mercy into a powerful image of intercession. In contrast to the often cramped composition of alabasters of the same subject, which merely hint at a throne beneath the folds of the Father's robes, the Blackburn Window gives over a large portion of the panel to the throne of God. Appropriately, given the references to the Book of Hours elsewhere in the Blackburn Window, the image of the Trinity most closely resembles Throne of Mercy miniatures in contemporary Continental Books of Hours and Psalter. Where in other panels yellow stain is used to pick out small details in the garments clothing the figures or in the architectural frames around each scene, in the Trinity panel the entire throne is rendered in gold. Placed at eye level and utilizing an intimate scale in contrast to the large, standing figures of the saints in the upper panels the image presents itself as a subject for prolonged contemplation and devotion. The seat of the throne recedes from the viewer as it draws the viewer into the niche-like space created beneath the stone canopy. God the Father gazes implacably out toward the viewer as he holds the cross bearing the Son aloft with his left hand and raises his right hand in benediction. In the context of a commemorative window, both the hieratic treatment of the figure of the Father and the emphasis on the gleaming throne immediately call to mind God in the aspect of Judge. Interposed between the seat of judgment and the viewer, however, is the body of Christ on the Cross. His head slumps forward onto his chest. Sensitive lines

University Press, 1997), 57.
draw taut the muscles of his arms, which strain under the weight of his dead body. Inward pointing feet twist the legs awkwardly and highlight the suffering that has gone before. It is an image designed to provoke an affective response from the spectator. The donor portrait of Nicholas Blackburn models the appropriate response to the sight of Christ's sacrifice. As he kneels and gazes at the Throne of Mercy he implores the three and one King by means of an inscribed scroll to grant him pardon. The saving sacrifice of Christ on the Cross physically intercedes between the spectator and the Judge and opens up the possibility of intercession before the throne of judgment.

The imagery of the Throne of Mercy, as well as being a broadly popular devotional image, held special appeal for specific corporate groups within the city of York. Any image of the Trinity would have immediately resonated with Merchant Adventurers who were members the Gild of Holy Trinity Fossgate and whose seal incorporated a Throne of Mercy Trinity between two sailing ships. As noted above, while this was a professional rather than strictly religious gild, members nevertheless shared in common devotions and had obligations to remember deceased members in their prayers. David Crouch also notes that the iconography of the Trinity, particularly the Throne of Mercy and images of God the Father holding the Man of Sorrows, was also associated with the gild of Corpus Christi. 30 Similar images would have been central to the gild liturgies and remembrances and reminded confreres of their specific obligations through the guild to pray for Nicholas.

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30 Crouch, Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389 - 1547, 98.
The wives of Blackburn father and son are aligned with the image of St Anne teaching the Virgin Mary through the motif of the book. Like St Anne and the Virgin, both the women in the donor portrait panels read from open books. The books are angled in such a way as to present their open pages with textual inscriptions to the view. Margaret, Nicholas Blackburn the Elder's wife, holds a book clearly marked as a Book of Hours by the textual inscription *Domine labia mea aperies et os meum*. These are the same words of the opening versicle of Matins in the Hours of the Virgin and the same text is frequently found in images of St Anne teaching the Virgin. Inscribed on the pages of the younger Margaret's book are the opening words of Psalm 6, *Domine mei in furore tueo [sic] arguas me neque in ira tua*. This psalm appears in the standard text of the Book of Hours as one of the Seven Penitential Psalms and in the Office of the Dead. The iconography of the patron holding an open book increased in popularity in English art from the 1360s onward. Until the mid-fourteenth century lay patron were usually depicted with hands clasped together in prayer accompanied by scrolls, inscriptions and heraldic devices. By the late fifteenth century images of donors as readers of books became the predominant mode of representation. David Griffith ties the development, which he traces to Flemish manuscript art, to the growth of lay literacy

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31 Psalm 50:17 ‘O Lord, thou wilt open my lips and my mouth...’
33 Psalm 6:1 ‘O Lord, rebuke me not in thy indignation, nor in thy wrath...’
and book ownership among the urban middle classes. The image of St Anne teaching the Virgin, a theme known as the Education of the Virgin, gained popularity in England during the fourteenth century. Following the papal approval of the feast of St Anne in England in 1378 liturgical books including psalters and books of Hours began to incorporate images of the saint, usually illustrated teaching the Virgin to read. Books of Hours, or 'Primers' as they were known in England, were the primary medium through which lay literacy and devotion was disseminated within mercantile circles in York. Michael T. Clanchy situates the popular images of St Anne teaching the Virgin to read from a psalter and the parallel portraits of donors as readers in terms of an exemplary relationship between donor and saint designed to shape particular kinds of literate devotion. Pamela Sheingorn has emphasized the culture of women's literacy

38 Kathleen Kennedy's comparison of patterns of bequests in merchants wills from York and Bristol reveals that where children were educated within chantry chapels by priests in Bristol, reflected in gifts of books to the clergy, in York children were educated at home with primers that were then passed down within the family. Kennedy notes that in York, the children of artisans were educated in chantry schools and argues that York merchants wished to maintain clear class distinctions through their educational choices in light of the frequent challenges by members of the artisan classes to the power of the merchant oligarchy. See Kathleen Kennedy, “A, B, C Is for Chantry? Fifteenth-Century Provincial Merchant Education,” Medieval Perspectives 14 (1999): 125–39.
that shaped patronage and reception of the iconography of the education of the Virgin
by St Anne. St Anne functioned as an exemplar for bourgeois and aristocratic mothers
who were responsible for instructing children, male and female, in reading.\textsuperscript{40} Although
the textual inscriptions create explicit links between the female donor portraits and the
central image of St Anne teaching the Virgin, on the one hand, and the male figures and
the Throne of Mercy Trinity, on the other, it would be a mistake to draw too marked a
gender distinction between the domestic, civic and religious spheres. As Kathleen Ashley
and Pamela Sheingorn point out, the public/private dichotomy which underlies many
traditional assumptions about late medieval society serves is too limiting to encompass
the varied roles that St Anne played in the devotional lives of men and women.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed,
the broader commemorative provisions of Nicholas Blackburn speak to the saint's
appeal to the merchant as much as his wife. Nonetheless, the composition and
iconography of the Blackburn Window constructed specific dynamics of interaction
between certain donors and devotional images that must guide interpretation of the
window's reception.

A Primer housed in York Minster Library with links to the Blackburn's social
milieu gives a sense of the kinds of practices of reading and devotion centered on the
book that shaped the reception of the iconography of St Anne teaching the Virgin in the
Blackburn Window. Containing over seventy images including forty full page

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
    \item Sheingorn, “‘The Wise Mother’: The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary,” 76.
    \item Ashley and Sheingorn, Pamela, \textit{Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society}, 3.
\end{itemize}
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miniatures, the Bolton Hours is one of the most densely illustrated English books of hours. A number of textual and iconographic elements point definitely toward a York patron and workshop. The Bolton Hours follows the Use of York and incorporates images of popular local saints. St Peter, the patron saint of the Minster, and St William of York, both appear prominently in the opening sequence of miniatures. Although of local manufacture, the manuscript speaks to the city's international connections through the wool trade. The main sequence of Hours follows the pattern of a number of manuscripts produced in Flanders for the English market at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Each of the full page miniatures is painted on a single leaf and inserted into the manuscript where needed - another distinctive feature of Flemish books produced for the English market. Although the artistic commissions that are the focus of this chapter are all local productions, unlike the Flemish brasses in Chapter Two, it is nevertheless apparent that merchants' access to Continental markets shaped their taste and positioned them as conduits for the transmission of techniques and styles into England.

The Bolton Hours offers tantalizing clues to its ownership but no definitive answers. It certainly circulated within the same elite mercantile families responsible for the stained glass windows at All Saints North Street and there are close parallels between the iconographic choices in the Book of Hours and the windows. Based upon

stylistic analysis Kathleen Scott places the manufacture of the book between 1405 and 1415.\textsuperscript{44} Other scholars estimate its production sometime in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, possibly closer to 1420.\textsuperscript{45} The calendar includes handwritten obits to John Bolton (August 1445) and his wife Agnes Bolton née Blackburn (September 1472) and Thomas Scauseby (November 1482).\textsuperscript{46} There is uncertainty concerning the patronage of the manuscript. Patricia Cullum and Jeremy P. Goldberg suggest that Margaret Blackburn, the wife of Nicholas Blackburn the Elder, had the book made for her daughter, Alice, whose obit appears in the calendar.\textsuperscript{47} Pamela King rejects this argument on the basis of stylistic and iconographic elements which place the manufacture too early for this to be the case.\textsuperscript{48} Instead she argues that the obits were a much later addition to the manuscript, which likely passed through multiple local hands via the tightly interconnected web of familial and business connections that made up the circle of York's mercantile elite.\textsuperscript{49} She offers as a possible solution to the problem of York MS Add. 2's ownership the suggestion that this was the \textit{primerum largum cum ymaginibus intus scriptus ad modum Flandriae} willed to Isabel, John Bolton's fourth daughter, by William Revertour, the parish priest who executed Nicholas Blackburn's

\textsuperscript{44} Scott, \textit{Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390-1490}, 2:119–121.
\textsuperscript{46} King, “\textit{Corpus Christi Plays and the ‘Bolton Hours’ I: Tastes in Lay Piety and Patronage in Fifteenth-Century York},” 46.
\textsuperscript{47} Cullum and Goldberg, “How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours,” 225.
\textsuperscript{48} King, “\textit{Corpus Christi Plays and the ‘Bolton Hours’ I: Tastes in Lay Piety and Patronage in Fifteenth-Century York},” 52.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
It seems unlikely, however, that Revertour was the original patron of the manuscript given the donor portraits. Furthermore, although Cullum and Goldberg undoubtedly overstate the security of their identification of Margaret Blackburn as the commissioner of the manuscript, their assertion of a secular, bourgeois context and likely female patron is well-supported by textual, iconographic and codicological evidence.  

Likenesses in the form of donor portraits appear in four of the miniatures accompanying the Book of Hours. Patricia Callum and Jeremy Goldberg suggest a mother-daughter joint commission, specifically Margaret Blackburn and her daughter Alice, partly on the basis of the two older female portraits and one younger female portrait. A mother figure positioned outside the border kneels before images of St Sitha in the lower left corner of the page with a prayer scroll emerging from her clasped hand. A second mother figure kneels before St Michael. A younger maiden appears alongside the image of Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York. Both the kneeling figure and

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50 York, Borthwick Institute, Prob. II, 137v: Testamenta Eboracensia 2 116–118. Discussed in King, Ibid.  
51 Cullum and Goldberg argue that the three single donor portraits, all of which are female, and the unusual iconography of St Anne and the Virgin point toward the book being passed from mother to daughter, a pattern of gift giving reflected in testamentary records from York which frequently record matrilineal transmission of devotional books. See Cullum and Goldberg, “How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours,” 221–222. Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy similarly highlight the single, female donor portraits, stating that the visibility of women in the program of illuminations positions female domestic piety as a critical context for understanding the manuscript. See Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy, “The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere,” in Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 225.  
52 Cullum and Goldberg, “How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours,” 225.  
53 York Minster Add. 2, fol. 40v  
54 York Minster Add. 2, fol. 123r.
the Archbishop's mitre and processional cross overlap the frame. A scroll addresses the archbishop directly with the prayer, *Sancte ricardus scrope ora pro nobis.* Finally, a group of four donor portraits composed of two couples accompanies the full page miniature depicting the Trinity. The full page miniature depicts God the Father seated on a stone structure whose shape more closely resembles an altar or tomb than a throne. He holds aloft the crucified Son who bleeds profusely from the wounds on his hands, feet and side. Where the Father's eyes look directly outward toward the viewer, the Son's eyes are closed, implicitly directing the viewer to gaze upon the wounds of the Passion. The dove of the Holy Spirit is positioned between the heads of the Father and the Son. At the base of the cross, positioned outside the frame of the miniature, kneel four figures. On the left are two men, one clothed in a reddish brown surcoat, the other wearing a deep blue robe. Facing them are two women, likewise clad in deep blue and reddish brown, most likely indicating two married couples. Scrolls unfurl from the clasped hands of the donor figures, reading, from left to right, *O pater Orate tu spiritus alme vocate* 'O father, you the spirit called the nourisher'; *Quod petimus a te concede tua pietate* 'That which we ask of you, grant in your compassion.'; *Celica magestas trinus deus una potestas* 'High sovereign, triune God, one power'; and *Premia qui prestas castas fac et honestas* 'You who grant gifts, make us chaste and true'. The Trinity appears to have been of particular devotional interest to the patron. A second full

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55 York Minster Add. 2, fol. 100v.
56 York Minster Add. 2, 36r.
57 Black, *The Blackburns in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages*, 78.
page miniature is devoted to a different iconographic treatment of the subject. Here, all three persons of the Trinity are rendered as human figures seated beneath a triple Gothic canopy. On the right, God the Father, crowned, holds the globe of creation on his lap and raises his right hand toward the Spirit. God the Son, also crowned, is seated on the left and raises both hands toward the Spirit who hovers in the center, winged and clad in white. The Spirit is pictured from the torso up, emerging from a semi-circular undulating cloud form. An inscription reads, "The holy Trinitie one God have mercy on us."58 The similar Trinity image with donor portraits incorporated into the Blackburn Window, along with the full page miniature dedicated to St Cuthbert, for whose shrine Nicholas Blackburn the Elder commissioned the aforementioned memorial jewel, lend further weight to Cullum and Goldberg’s assertions of a link between the Blackburn family and the Bolton Hours.59

Books of Hours or Primers were a central part of late medieval lay practices of devotion and religiosity. Originally owned by religious, Psalters and Books of Hours became important manuscripts in the rise of literate lay devotions during the High Middle Ages.60 Cheaper production methods and trade connections made Primers accessible to the merchant classes and offered opportunities for private devotion previously available only to the clergy, religious and the aristocracy.61 In addition to the Office of the Virgin, which formed the core of the Book of Hours, these compendia of

58 York Minster Add. 2, 37r
61 Ibid.
devotional material incorporated the Seven Psalms of Penitence, suffrages to individual saints, and the Office of the Dead. The Office of the Dead has particular relevance for our discussion as it was intended to remember the dead by name in prayer and also to prepare the reader’s own soul for death. At a time when the rites of the High Altar were inaccessible and largely inaudible to the congregation literate members of the laity were able to follow the service in their Primers. They also offered opportunity for private devotion and contemplation centered upon the image and for personalization with many Psalters and Books of Hours including depictions of their patrons in supplication before an image of God, Christ or the Virgin Mary. The popularity and ubiquity of Primers, which included the Office of the Dead, make these compendia of devotional texts and images valuable sources of evidence for religious mentalités and essential for understanding late medieval discourses of death and commemoration. As tools for devotion, Primers helped late medieval readers prepare themselves for the "good death". As aids to commemoration, they ensured the memories of the deceased did not pass into oblivion. Where funerary monuments and donor portraits ensured the continued physical presence of the dead within the space of the parish, Books of Hours were the physical medium that preserved the memory of the deceased within kin groups as they

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were passed down through generations via the names recorded in their calendars that acted as a prompt to prayer and remembrance.

Though their precise identification with any individuals within York’s mercantile elite remains speculative, the donor portraits in the Bolton Hours speak to the ways in which portrait likenesses interacted with both the living and the saints in processes of commemoration and intercession. The three individual donor portraits attached to the miniatures of St Sitha, St Michael and Archbishop Scrope point to particular devotional affinities to these saints. Such portraits, along with the books that contained them, functioned within late medieval practices of interiority and are characteristic of what Sixten Ringbom and other scholars have identified as an increasingly personal, private and individualistic late medieval lay piety. Jennifer Bryan’s study of devotional reading and the development of the private self explores the imaginative disciplines practiced by late medieval lay women and men. She focuses on the role of literary texts in shaping devotional subjectivities but the link between the techniques of visualization used to carve out an interior “space” for contemplation and self-reflection Bryan describes and pictorial elements in Books of Hours and Psalters. Each time the donor opened the book and gazed at her own likeness while engaged in prayers directed toward the Christ, the Virgin and the saints, she established and strengthened the bonds that tied supplicant and the object of her devotions. The donor portrait, by enabling the

imaginative projection of the subject into the book, was central to the maintenance of these reciprocal relationships bridging heaven and earth.

The gap between the installation of the window and the deaths of the donors ensured Nicholas Blackburn, his wife, their son and daughter-in-law, like the owners of Books of Hours which incorporated donor portraits, interacted with their own likenesses in the form of the donor portraits in the Blackburn window during their lifetimes. Certainly in the case of the Blackburn Window, and quite possibly in the case of the Bolton Hours first stage of the art objects’ lifecycle involved a present subject. This complicates how we conceive of the object surrogacy of the donor portrait and the kind of relationship set up between the living subject, his or her representation and the saint to whom the subject offered supplication. It is essential to consider how this dynamic unfolded during the lifetime of the subject even though we are principally concerned with death and commemoration. Considered over the course of the book’s lifecycle the interactions between reader and portrait take on additional complexity. While the original owner and subject of the donor portrait, if the two were the same, was alive, the image essentially performed a three-fold function. Lucy F. Sandler argued that donor portraits depicted in prayer before devotional images of saints included transformed the object of owner’s devotion into a visible apparition capable of being sensibly apprehended over and over. At the same time, the donor portrait acted as surrogate for actual supplication and stood as a permanent effigy of repeated acts of devotional piety. According to Lucy F. Sandler, a donor portrait documented the owner in acts of prayer, made the object of owner’s devotion visible so that he or she could experience it over
and again, and reinforced the prayers uttered. Where the image functions to make the object of owner's devotion is made visible and available to repeated acts of devotion prompted by identification of the reader with the portrait surrogate, it relies on the presence of a reading subject who projects him or herself onto a pictured likeness. When the book is closed and in the absence of a reading subject, the portrait continues to offer prayers to the object of devotion through the combination of portrait likeness and textual inscriptions which continually enact devotions. Finally, the portrait acts to document the donor at prayer. In this mode, we must consider the afterlife of the manuscript as it passed down through subsequent owners. According to Lucy F. Sandler, a donor portrait documented the owner in acts of prayer, made the object of owner's devotion visible so that he or she could experience it over and again, and reinforced the prayers uttered.\(^67\) What occurs, then, is a shift in both the function of the donor portrait and the relationship between portrait and subject, depending on whether or not the reader (when the reader and the portrait subject were one and the same) was in the presence of the image. When the reader opened the manuscript and contemplated his or her own image the portrait acted as an ideal form of the self. Through the image of the patron, the viewing subject projected him or herself onto the page, reading him or herself into the visual representation of the kneeling donor, as part of multisensory devotional exercise. The reading subject did not simply cerebrally \textit{reflect} upon the words of the prayers but embodied them in the act of recitation at the same time by

\(^{67}\) Sandler, “The Image of the Book Owner in the Fourteenth Century: Three Cases of Self Definition.”
conforming him or herself to the posture of the portrait likeness which represented an ideal exemplar of the self. This enabled the viewer, by gazing upon a portrait likeness of the self while engaged in a series of devotions centered on self-examination and confession to objectify his or her subjecthood. Through the portrait the viewer might quite literally examine him or herself through the act of gazing upon the image. The act of viewing the image becomes an act of self-examination. As he or she assumed the same posture of prayer as the figure on the page, the portrait likeness acted as a pious prompt for prayer and contemplation aided by the texts inscribed in scrolls clasped between the portraits' hands. Laura D. Gelfand and Walter S. Gibson argue that scrolls inscribed with words of well-known prayers allowed the portrait, and through it, the subject to engage in endless prayer. Upon closing the codex, the donor portrait offered perpetual prayers as surrogate for the subject. After the donor passed away the reader, prompted to recollect the deceased through the combination of written obits and pictured likenesses, embodied the voice of the donors as he or she read aloud the inscribed prayers and thereby offered intercessions on their behalf.

The individual donor portraits in the Bolton Hours construct and maintain an intercessory relationship with various saints in a fairly straightforward manner. In the Trinity miniature the artist visually thematizes the principles of intercession and mediation through a series of interplays between reader and page and between the central and marginal zones of the miniature. The artist manipulates the framing device

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68 Gelfand and Gibson, “Surrogate Selves: The ‘Rolin Madonna’ and the Late Medieval Devotional Portrait.”
of the border in order to reiterate the intercessory function of the image. The four donor figures kneel outside the thin border that contains the Crucifixion-Trinity. The figures mediate between the reader and the central image of the Trinity by breaking the boundaries of the border. The poses of the donors in the Trinity miniature transform the marginal space of the page into a floor upon which they kneel. The gap between the left hand and right hand pairs of figures provides a point of access for the viewer. If we imagine the reader likewise kneeling and holding the book of hours in his or her hands the composition serves to incorporate the reader into group of supplicants. The reader takes up the position of the fifth person kneeling before the crucified Christ and offering up prayers to the triune God. The placement of donor portraits outside the frame in a position mediating between the space of the reader and the pictoral plane of the enframed miniature was a common strategy in medieval illumination. Joan Naughton, in her examination of the relationship between donor portraits and images of the Virgin in Books of Hours the formal separation of patron and sacred image through manipulation of composition and incorporation of borders, compartments and other devices served to establish the kneeling patron as an exemplar who directed attention toward the object of devotion. This preserved the integrity of the devotional image while still incorporating the patron into the program in such a way as to allow the image to be used by individuals other than the patron.  

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This excursus on the dynamics of viewing engendered through the program of miniatures in the Bolton Hours helps reconstruct the contemporary modes of reception of the Blackburn Window. In order to understand the ways in which the Blackburn Window constructed and maintained the Blackburn family's commemorative networks it is necessary to examine the relationships between window, the space of All Saints North Street and liturgical and devotional activities with which the Blackburns were engaged and surrounded. Archaeologist Kate Giles explored the way church spaces and the art objects and furnishings contained therein were consciously designed to structure particular senses of place, forms of identity and political power, a project critical for understanding the agency of objects and the ways in which they are activated through their engagement with the spectator's entire sensorium within the context of socially and culturally situated modes of sensing. She builds on previous scholarship that considered not only relationships between spaces but also access patterns within spaces, which shaped and were shaped by social hierarchies with visual cues used to signal or elicit particular modes of behavior.\(^{70}\) Missing from these methodologies, Giles argues, is a means for accessing embodied and somatic qualities of pre-modern sight and space. In order to encompass these qualities, Giles suggests that time-space geography, phenomenology and mental templates provide promising avenues for research.\(^{71}\) In its original location in the Lady Chapel access to the Blackburn window was limited to elite members of the parish including the Blackburn family who were afforded a privileged

\(^{70}\) Giles, “Seeing and Believing,” 108.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 109.
spot in the church in which to participate in the liturgical activities of the church. In this spatial setting, the sight of lay individuals kneeling and reading from a primer would have been commonplace.\textsuperscript{72} To others seated near the Blackburns' the portrait, along with the subject who was present before them, performed an exemplary function in which the prayerful poses of the donors in the window with books in hands provided a model of pious leadership.\textsuperscript{73}

The Blackburn window negotiated a series of complicated relationships between the private and the public self and between interior, individualistic forms of piety and public, communitarian worship. The two wives of Nicholas Blackburn the Elder and the Younger are depicted participating in an act of devotional reading. At the same time the Blackburn Window itself provided the visual apparatus for the kind of devotional meditation encouraged by illustrated Primers. The composition of the window, with individual compartments separated by architectural frames presenting the images of St John the Baptist, St Anne and the Virgin, St Christopher and the Holy Trinity, encouraged contemplation of the devotional subjects while the textual inscriptions explicitly link the act of viewing to the act of prayer. The contrast between the hieratically frontal treatment of the saints and the profile portraits of the patrons, along with a composition which relegates the patrons to a lower, separate position plane, ensures that the figures of the Blackburn family do not interfere with the efficacy of the

\textsuperscript{72} Eamon Duffy notes that, contrary to characterizations of Books of Hours as predominantly domestic items made for private contemplation, it was common for lay people to recite one's Matins in the church itself. See Eamon Duffy, \textit{Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 58.

\textsuperscript{73} Griffith, “Portrait of the Reader.”
image as focus of contemplation. The emphasis on the devotional relationship between saint and supplicant is heightened by the artist’s treatment of facial features. The York School of glass painting is renowned for the dramatic expressiveness of faces. In particular, the whole iris is shown, rather than appearing slightly covered by the upper eyelid, creating a distinctive, wide-open gaze. This is especially apparent in the treatment of St Anne where the artist has used dark, feathered lines and front and back stippling around the eyes to suggest lashes and the upper and lower folds of lids in such a way as to draw attention to the size and expression of the eyes. The result is a figure who invites prolonged, intimate engagement of the kind encouraged by late medieval practices of devotion centered on Book of Hours.

The location of the Blackburn Window in the Lady Chapel of All Saints Church ensured that the donors portraits were viewed by a select group of people; members of the Blackburn family, members of other wealthy families who were permitted access to this privileged space and clergy who celebrated masses at the altar. In such a setting, the image of women holding books is generally interpreted from a purely symbolic perspective as an indication of the prestige and status of the donor. Such images simultaneously display the piety, patronage and purchasing power of the donor and establish their status as wealthy citizens who possess the funds to purchase prayer books for personal use. Without denying display of social status as an important element of

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74 Ibid., 118.
75 Knowles, Essays in the History of the York School of Glass-Painting, 90–92.
donor portraits such as those found on the Blackburn window, recent scholarship on the
function of medieval art calls for an examination of these portraits within the wider
context of practices of reading and imaginative devotion. The medium, scale and spatial
setting of the images of the Blackburn family offering prayers to St Anne and the Virgin,
St John, St Christopher and the Trinity, though they reference and participate in these
late medieval practices of imaginative devotion based on private reading, give rise to a
different set of intersubjective interactions between donor, portrait and devotional
image. As outlined above, donor portraits contained within Books of Hours depicting
the donor reading from a book assume a particular bodily attitude in relation to the
viewing subject. Kneeling down and holding the book in her or his hands the viewer
looks upon the image of her or himself as if gazing upon a mirror. Artistic manipulation
of pictorial space and architectural forms in books such as the Mary of Burgundy Hours
served to create a portable private space into which the reader was able to retreat
through imaginative visualization.\textsuperscript{77} The Blackburn Window demonstrates a very
different dynamic between architectural frame and the space it encloses. At the interior
edge of the frame composed of Gothic columns and tracery space disintegrates into light
rather than receding into the distance. The figures stand or kneel on carved plinths that
recede away from the viewer but rather than open out into illusionistic space the
background dissolves into jewel-like expanses of shimmering glass in an interplay
between depth and surface. Considered in its original spatial setting, the drama of the

\textsuperscript{77} Duffy, Marking the Hours, 53.
*Blackburn Window*'s light effects become more pronounced. The combination of the no longer extant screens, which fragmented the interior of All Saints into a series of semi-private spaces in the north and south aisles, and the lack of clerestory windows created a dramatic contrast between the dark nave, separated from east window by screens and the light filled Lady Chapel. The experience of moving from the nave into the chapel was a progression from dark to light which culminated in the vision of the *Blackburn Window*. The donor portraits completed the final step from terrestrial to celestial light on behalf of the viewer, giving a foretaste of the rewards to come. Those not afforded access to the Lady Chapel would nonetheless be able to catch a glimpse of the Blackburns kneeling beneath the shimmering, jewel-like forms of the saints.

In this way, the dematerializing effects of stained glass functioned within the architecture and furnishings of the church to create a space that anticipated the heavenly reward of the faithful. Where in the preceding examples of donor portraits in Books of Hours and Psalters, saint and supplicant were frequently united in the same picture plane, the composition of the *Blackburn Window* separates donor and saint into upper and lower panels demarcated by Gothic vaulting. Instead, the materiality of the stained glass works to elevate and incorporate the donor portraits into the realm of the saints while the overall composition of the stained glass window separates individual elements into discrete panels. The spatial setting collapses earthly deeds and heavenly

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reward. The hints of setting at the feet of the saints speak to their earthly existence where their sacred deeds took place. John the Baptist and St Anne and the Virgin stand upon stone plinths while St Christopher walks through a swirling river. Foliate patterns in the brilliant red and blue glass behind the saints evoke cloths-of-honor.\textsuperscript{79} Below the saints the donors kneel on the ledge created by the lower border of the Gothic tracery frame. The same ground of saturated color embellished with forms reminiscent of luxury textiles presses on the surface of the image. While the abrupt shift from the plasticity and three-dimensionality of the architectural frame to the dematerializing surface and color effects of the stained glass suggests a movement from the tangible realm of the living to the ineffable realm of the saints, backpainting techniques deployed in the figures make present the saint on earth. The technique, which involves the application of paint to both the front and back of the glass panel, gives a sense of three dimensionality to the St Anne’s veil and the waters rushing past St Christopher’s feet.\textsuperscript{80} The constant interplay between absence and presence, the here-and-now and the hoped-for reward beyond creates a different kind of space for encounter with the saints. Rather than constructing an exterior, visible exemplar for an interior, imagined space for meditative devotion, the Blackburn Window elaborates in visual form the dynamic chain of intercessory relationships mediated through prayer and penitential gifts which anticipates the reciprocal counter-gift of saintly intervention on behalf of the sinner before God at the Final Hour.

\textsuperscript{79} The phenomenon of cloths-of-honor will be treated in greater detail in Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{80} Gee, “III.—The Painted Glass of All Saints’ Church, North Street, York.”
This interplay between saint and donor played out before an audience that initially comprised the donors themselves. Those who would one day be charged with their remembrance initially encountered the donor portraits juxtaposed with the donors themselves engaged in pious activity before their own likenesses. For this reason, it is essential to consider liturgical and devotional actions taking place within and around the Lady Chapel and acted as a counterpoint to the intercessory processes unfolding in the window. The nave of All Saints’ was widened to include a north and south aisle around 1420, placing the manufacture of the Blackburn Window contemporaneous with new private spaces including the Lady Chapel.81 Nicholas Blackburn the Younger’s will makes clear that the family sat in the Lady Chapel when they attended Mass when he requests that he be buried in the Lady Chapel "where I was accustomed to sit."82 In addition to hearing the Mass from where they were seated in the Lady Chapel, a position which afforded the Blackburn’s family a privileged view of the elevation of the Host on the high altar, the Blackburns and other individuals seated in the Lady Chapel would have been engaged in prayers and devotions. It was not uncommon for late medieval Christians to read from a personal copy of the Primer within these semi-private chapel spaces during the Mass and the various Offices. Their devotions blurred the boundary between private and public, emphasizing a form of interiority that was still nonetheless thoroughly integrated into the communal devotions of the parish through spatial setting.

82 Will of Nicholas Blackburn
and shared gestures and spoken words. The donor portraits in the Blackburn Window, therefore, both modeled and documented specific acts of prayer and contemplation performed by the subjects of the portraits while in the presence of the portraits. Combined with the suffrages to the saints pictured in the windows, these devotions incorporated the stained glass window into a commemorative, intercessory economy before those pictured in the window were, themselves, the objects of commemoration.

The long-standing relationships established between late medieval Christians and their saintly intercessors over the course of their lives were intimately tied up with preparations for death and salvation. Burgess notes the cumulative penitential activities of late medieval parishioners, including the provision of new artworks such as the Blackburn family, especially where they incorporate likenesses of the benefactor, all worked toward the end of ensuring commemorative activity. Readers of Psalters and Books of Hours acquired devotional literacy through the process of reading psalms and through repeated devotional practice. Likewise, preparations for death, including the establishment and maintenance of networks of commemoration and the accrual of spiritual merit, unfolded over time through repeated acts of devotion. In order to unpack the reception of the Blackburn Window by the Blackburns themselves it is necessary to consider visual and textual elements of stained glass window as an integral part of a technology of the self. According to Foucault, technologies of the self, in

83 Duffy, Marking the Hours, 57–58.
84 Burgess, “‘An Afterlife in Memory’: Commemoration and Its Effects in a Late Medieval Parish.”
contrast to technologies of signification, are "techniques that permit individuals to
effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their
own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in...so as to transform
themselves...and to attain a certain state of perfection." This process can be likened to
that outlined by Foucault, when he describes the function of hypomnemata, which
constituted “a material and a framework for exercises to be carried out frequently:
reading, re-reading, meditating, conversing with oneself and others.” The element of
daily repetition worked to embed the words of the psalms, the devotional gestures that
accompanied them and the images that mediated between the two not only into the
memory, but into the very soul of the practitioner.

Pierre Hadot points out that spiritual exercises of this kind do not merely
constitute the self as an individualized subject, as Foucault’s model proposes, but rather
change the level of the self by incorporating the self into a universal Other. AS Michael
Camille argued, “[the] inner self was not sought because it was in any way unique, but
because it allowed one to see one’s likeness to God.” The donor portraits functioned as
exemplary, ideal versions of the self as devout Christian to which the donors to conform
themselves through repeated practice of spiritual exercises. After death, the portraits
retained the trace of repeated piety in the memory of intercessors. Memory crystallized

87 Ibid., 210.
88 Ibid.
89 Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault, ed. Arnold J. Davidson,
around an image of the deceased as a pious Christian worthy of intercessory prayer. Seen in this light, the donor portraits in the Blackburn window within the Lady Chapel of All Saints, North Street are not emblematic of an increasingly privatized religion of atomized individuals. Rather, they individualize the donors only as a means to prompt the recollection of the donor's names in prayer. The purpose of the donor portraits was not verisimilitude but exemplarity. They are images that call for corporal engagement through conformity of the viewer's body to the exemplar offered by the donor portrait.

The spatial relationships between window, architecture and spectator reinforced this intimate, embodied memory of the deceased engaged in acts of devotion. Jill Stevenson's discussion of the Pricke of Conscience Window in All Saints' parish church contrasts the impact of scale on a spectator's experience of donor portraits in the parish space to a comparable experience in a space like York Minster Cathedral. Where the donor portraits in the Bellfounders' Window in York Minster Cathedral hover above the head of the spectator, in All Saints' church the donors appear at eye level, alongside the parishioners as they go about their devotions. The figures "inhabit the viewer's physical space, kneeling and praying alongside his or her body...The window collapses the donors into the church's "thingness," thus incorporating them into the church's ongoing devotional rhythms."91 The portrait likenesses of the donors were not only a physical presence but also an aural presence through textual inscriptions activated by the spectator spoke. When we situate the inscriptions within late medieval reading practices

their ability to compel commemoration and intercession emerges. Alison R. Fleet’s study of the relationship between visual images and text scrolls in manuscript illustrations emphasizes their agency as "speech-acts" that play a vital role in the processes of signification. Robert S. Nelson, in his discussion of inscriptions in Byzantine art, points out that in societies like medieval Western Europe where reading aloud, rather than silent reading, was the normal mode the spectator becomes the agent of commemoration through the act of reading which is an oral performance. Reading from the inscribed open books in the Blackburn Window, the spectator vocalized the first person prayers of the psalms, reiterating the prayers the donors spoke over and over during their lives and thereby maintaining the relationships they established with particular saints and devotional images after they passed away.

**The Corporal Acts of Mercy Window**

The Corporal Acts of Mercy window, currently situated in the western window in the chapel, it was originally installed in westernmost window opening of the north wall. It is constructed of three lights and illustrates the six acts of mercy outlined in the Gospel of Matthew. Each light is divided into three, vertical registers separated by

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94 Matt. 25: 35-6, "For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me."
gothic tracery and surmounted by an elaborate vaulted canopy decorated with crockets and finials. The architectural surround is rendered in muted tones of white and pale gold with details traced out in black. This almost *grisaille*-like simplicity draws the eye to the saturated scarlet and blue used in the central images of each of the registers. In each of the scenes above a bearded figure wearing a red and blue cape performs one of the six corporal acts of mercy. Reading from top to bottom, the left hand light shows him feeding the poor and clothing the poor, the central light illustrates the acts of giving water to the poor and visiting the sick, and the right hand light depicts the bearded figure receiving strangers to offer them hospitality and freeing prisoners. Burying the dead, which ordinarily appears in the full list of seven acts of mercy but not in the gospel of Matthew, is omitted. The current donor portraits depicting two couple kneeling in the bottom left and bottom right panels are later additions. Antiquarian sources attest to one male donor portrait along with the undifferenced arms of the Blackburn family along with an inscription beneath the donor portrait reading *Orate pro anima Nicholai Blakborne cuius anime propicietur deus* identifying the figure as either Nicholas Blackburn the Elder or his son. The current arrangement of donor portraits in the base compartment includes a portrait of Reginald Bawtre on (d. 1429) in the left hand panel, previously in the St Thomas Window next to the Corporal Works of Mercy Window, and two seventeenth century donors.

The seven works of corporal mercy were well known to lay folk in the late

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95 Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” 38.
96 Gee, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York.*
medieval period. Following the promulgation of the Arundel Constitutions 1407 the seven acts of corporal mercy became a central part of lay instruction. Images of the works of mercy were a significant subject of art patronage of art in late medieval parish churches and reinforce this pastoral program laid out in the 1407 synod. Artistic representations of the works of mercy were particularly popular among the merchant and yeoman classes. In examples scattered throughout East Anglia and the North Country the corporal acts of mercy appeared both as part of larger programs detailing the Last judgment, where the link between the seven charitable acts and salvation was counterposed with that between the seven deadly sins and damnation, or as stand-alone pieces inviting contemplation of a single act of mercy. Sarah Pedersen notes two textual accounts of the works of mercy specific to the York context. The first is the popular *Lay Folks Catechism* by Archbishop John Thoresby, written for the instruction of lay parishioners throughout Yorkshire. The second appears in the Doomsday Play performed annually by the Mercer's Guild, with which the Blackburns were undoubtedly familiar. Speaking to the blessed destined for heavenly rewards at the Last judgment Christ says:

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When I was hungre ye me fed,
To slek my thrist ye war fulle fre,
When was clothles ye me cled,
Ye wold no sorowe on me se;
In hard prison I was sted
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99 Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” 41.
On my penance ye had pyte,
Fulle seke when I was broght in bed
Kyndly ye cam to comforth me.¹⁰⁰

The extent to which the works of corporal mercy shaped pious action and contemplation
is demonstrated in a number of documents associated with the Blackburn family. The
same list of six mercies depicted in the stained glass appears in Blackburn's will.¹⁰¹ This
was not unusual in York, where the Seven Works served as a model for testamentary
charitable provision for a significant proportion of later medieval wills drawn up in the
diocese up until the Reformation.¹⁰² In addition, a hand written confession based upon
the seven acts appears in the Bolton Hours, a primer closely associated with the
Blackburn family.¹⁰³

The male figure performing each of the acts of mercy is a deviation from the
standard iconography found elsewhere in England. Wall painting and manuscript
illustration were the most common media for representing the Corporal Acts of Mercy.
Ordinarily, a female figure performed each of the acts often in a circular format around
a central female personification of the virtue Mercy.¹⁰⁴ A late fifteenth century program
of domestic glass roundels in Leicester provides one of the few other extant examples of
iconography of the Corporal Acts of Mercy in stained glass that also incorporates a male

¹⁰⁰ Mercer's Play, lines 285-292 Lucy Toulmin Smith, York Plays: The Plays Performed by the Crafts Or Mysteries
¹⁰¹ He requests that his executors take one hundred pounds of his estate to be given in foci et pannis lineis aligis et
sotularibus dandis pauperibus hominibus et mulieribus et infirmis cecis claudis et leprosis et male habentibus et
in grabatis iacentibus aceciam in cibo et in potu prisonis Archiepiscopu et Castri ac le Kydcote super Pontem
Use per Civitatem Ebor et suberbia eiusdem et ad deliberandum de carcerum bonos difeles homines propter
debita incarcerated qui inihi iacent.
¹⁰² P. H. Cullum and P. J. P. Goldberg, “Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: ‘To the Praise of God and the
¹⁰³ Pedersen, “Piety and Charity in the Painted Glass of Late Medieval York,” 41.
¹⁰⁴ Marks, Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages, 80.
figure performing the acts of charity. Alice Hamilton argues that the protagonists were intended to represent the patron, Roger Wyston and his family through implied or symbolic portraiture. Likewise, the repeated figure enacting each of the works was in all likelihood understood to be a donor portrait of Nicholas Blackburn the Elder, or his father, Nicholas Blackburn of Richmond.

The Corporal Acts of Mercy Window thereby incorporates two modes of portraiture. The first closely resembles that of the images of patrons in the surrounding windows which depict kneeling donors in profile and separate them from the sacred subjects of the main window. The second mode incorporates the patron into the action of the devotional iconography. As in other cases discussed in this chapter, the active portrait works to both document the subjects’ personal acts of piety and in an exemplary manner to spur others on to similar works of piety. The kneeling donor portraits have a less complex relationship with the overall program of the Corporal Acts of Mercy window than the Blackburn Window as the Corporal Acts of Mercy Window lacks elements that could be considered the focus of devotional attention. Nonetheless, these portraits are more than a simple statement of the identity of those responsible for the gift of the window. When considered in relation to the iconography of the upper panels, the space of the chapel and the wider confessional culture of the late Middle Ages the donor portraits serve to compel the spectator to perform specific commemorative acts.

106 Gee, An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York.
The contrast between monochromatic grisaille and saturated panes of red and blue glass characteristic of John of Coventry’s workshop creates a visual syntax that elaborates the dynamics of giving and receiving. For the most part, with the exception of the panel depicting the act of ransoming prisoners, those who are the recipients of charity are rendered in delicate grisaille-work. Delicate black brushstrokes on white and muted gold grounds outline the figural forms, iconographic elements identifying each of the charitable acts such as loaves of bread in baskets, pitchers and drinking vessels and walking sticks, and details of landscape and architecture in each of the scenes. Gestures and facial features are treated with sensitive attention to emotion and expression. The sharp angle at which faces turn up to beseech the main figure, the wide open eyes that look unerringly toward his face and hands clasped together in a gesture of imploring are eloquent visualizations of need. Though deeply emotive and expressive the emphasis of the artists is not on the individual figures but how they function as a signifying unit. The uniformity of the grisaille-work and the use of figures, objects and architectural forms work against identification with the recipients of charity. Instead, they serve to elicit compassion for the suffering of classes of humans; the hungry, the thirsty, the travelers and so forth.

Comparative scale, gesture, clothing and, most importantly, color serve to separate the performer of acts of mercy from the clusters of figures denoting the recipients. In each panel, the figure performing each of the acts is depicted on a slightly larger scale than the rest of the figures. The contrast in heights is emphasized by his upright stance, large hat and voluminous robes. The deep blue folds and rich red hood
of his cape, in particular, capture the viewer's attention. Here and there, a hint of blue in
the garments of a secondary figure will create a momentary break in the otherwise
uniform zones of grisaille, but in the upper panels color is largely reserved for the main
figure. This creates an immediate visual tie to the donor portraits also clothed in
swathes of blue and red. In the right hand panel in the middle register the main figure
clothes the naked. He holds out a deep red robe toward the group. Stretched out
between his two hands the tunic, with deep folds and long, draped sleeves, the robe
takes up the entire middle portion of the panel. Beside him, a page drapes another red
robe over his arm, at the ready for his master to bestow it upon the next recipient. The
restricted use of color emerges as a deliberate strategy to render clothing a metonym for
charitable giving and thereby immediately identify the individuals performing acts of
charity both in the fictive world of the upper panels and in the donor portraits of the
lower panels whose act of charity is the gift of the window itself.

The use of color to establish garments as the primary signifying unit within a
visual explication of charitable giving is highly significant given the central role of
garments and the act of clothing the poor in funerary rites. Clothing features heavily in
late medieval wills. It was common for individuals of middling status and above to give
clothing as alms to the poor with the stipulation that they accompany the coffin of the
deceased in the funerary procession.\textsuperscript{107} The performative potential of the act of clothing

the poor opened up a range of possibilities for social and pious display. Gifts of clothing simultaneously marked social and economic distinctions between rich and poor and bound the wealthy and the worthy poor in an interdependent relationship. Late medieval audiences would have been familiar with the dramatic sight of poor men and women dressed in robes of black, white and russet and carrying candles as they gathered about the coffin of wealthy individuals and offered prayers in return for doles. In general, there was a strong emphasis on the visual symbolism in testamentary provisions for clothing the poor. P.H. Callum and P.J.P. Goldberg highlight a number of cases in which testators chose to clothe specific, theologically significant numbers of poor men and women. Robert Gray (d. 1438) for example, requested thirteen men receive russet robes and shoes in honor of Christ and the apostles. Richard Croull (d. 1460) gave five shirts, ten pairs of shoes and seven pairs of russet hose to the poor signifying the Five Wounds, the Ten Commandments and the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy, respectively. It was also customary in urban centers for an individual’s best garment to be given to the parish as a mortuary fee - a standard payment to the parish for forgotten tithes. The Blackburn family wills reflect this practice. Nicholas Blackburn the elder left his "best garment with a hood tailored for my body." Identical

111 Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550, 54.
112 Black, The Blackburns in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages.
requests appear in his wife's will and his sons' wills.\textsuperscript{113} Transformations of garments into vestments, altar cloths and shrouds for sacred images in late medieval wills, dealt with in greater detail below, likewise inflected the image of clothing as a signifier for post obituary gift giving.\textsuperscript{114}

The repeated use of garments as a metonym for gifts and gift giving in the window provided a gloss on the well-known teaching of the Corporal Works of Mercy. It was a visual strategy carefully deployed to create a link between the generic categories of merciful acts and particular charitable works performed on behalf of the deceased in and around the parish church after death. This link is made all the more explicit by the artist's choice to clothe the donor portraits in brightly colored robes. Where the figure performing each of the works of mercy is cloaked in sapphire and red but otherwise clothed in garments delineated in the muted shades of the surrounding \textit{grisaille}-work, the kneeling figure in the base compartment of the window was draped from neck to ankle in swathes of pigmented fabric. His entire identity is subsumed into that of the gift giver. In this way the vocabulary of clothing integrates the gift of the stained glass window into a broader program of social charity.

The visual syntax of clothing established through contrasts in monochrome and color perform a vital role in the didactic function of the Corporal Works of Mercy Window. Any analysis that recognizes the agency of art objects must not be content with

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\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Kathleen Ashley documents a number of wills that stipulate luxury clothes owned by testators were to be made into vestments and altar cloths. See Ashley, “Material and Symbolic Gift-Giving: Clothes in English and French Wills,” 145.\textit{“Material and Symbolic Gift-Giving: Clothes in English and French Wills,”} 145
\end{flushleft}
iconographic or semiotic interpretations along. Only when we situate the window within the social and architectural space of the parish church can we begin to reconstruct the ways in which the rhetorical structure of the visual program functioned to compel the spectator to perform reciprocal acts of charity. At the center of the interactions and actions mediated by the stained glass window is an absence filled by the spectator. As outlined above, the seventh work of mercy - the burial of the dead - is missing from the sequence of corporal works. I propose that this omission was not the result of adherence to the gospel text, but a deliberate strategy designed to spur the spectator to take on the burden of performing the seventh act of charity.

A phenomenological approach to the act of viewing is necessary in order to fully realize the commemorative strategies at play in and around the window. Engaged in prayer and liturgical activity before the window, the spectator's body conformed to the pose of the donor portrait. The visual congruence between the represented body and the body of the spectator established an intersubjective exchange between the two experienced corporally in a mirroring of poses. A scroll, positioned at eye level, spoke directly to the spectator, exhorting him or her, *Orate pro anima Nicholai Blakborne cuius anime propicietur deus.*  

Bearing in mind Michael Camille's observation that “reading was an act of hearing and speaking, not of seeing” in the Middle Ages, as the spectator, already having assumed a prayerful pose, read aloud the words of the

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115 “Pray for the soul of Nicholas Blackburn to whose soul God may be merciful.”

inscription he or she at once made present the voice of the deceased and offered a prayer for his soul.

A moral imperative directed toward the spectator arose from the encounter with the surrogate body of the deceased situated within a visual discourse on works of charity. As established above, the represented body of the deceased is carefully marked as both performer of works of charity and patron of an expensive gift of stained glass to the church of All Saints. Joel Thomas Rosenthal urges scholars to avoid making distinctions between charity and bequests for spiritual purposes as all forms of medieval philanthropy ultimately worked toward the end of securing intercessions for the dead. Combined, the likenesses of Nicholas Blackburn document the spiritual credits accrued during his life and in his provisions for death that demanded reciprocal counter-gifts in the form of prayers and intercessions. The stained glass window thereby implicates the spectator in its intercessory economies and compels engagement of the entire body in the act of remembering the dead. In this way the spectator completed the seventh work of corporal mercy not by literally burying the dead but by offering the intercessory prayers upon which the dead relied to speed their journey through purgatory.

The window worked in this way to compel remembrance from all passers-by but its iconography held particular resonances for the Mercers' Guild. Every year the Mercers' Guild was responsible for the annual performance of the Last Judgment Play of the Corpus Christi Cycle. The yearly cycle of pageants tracing the history of the world

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from Creation to Last judgment, along with its references to the Corporal Works, were thus designed to prompt existential reflection on the part of the individual spectator and meditate upon his or her own mortality in relation to the divine order.\(^{118}\) To this end, the play situates the works of mercy within the scheme of judgment and salvation. As the resurrected dead are gathered before the throne of judgment, Christ addresses the saved, assuring them that performance of the works of corporal mercy afforded them a place among the elect.\(^{119}\) It was a moment that dramatized for a lay audience the theological equivalence between the performance of acts of charity for one's fellows and performing them for Christ. The urgency of performing these works is underscored in the scene when Christ dispatches those who failed to show mercy into the Hellmouth.\(^{120}\) This link between acts of charity and ultimate salvation or damnation is re-articulated within the space of All Saints church in the stained glass window program. The proximity of the Corporal Works of Mercy window to the Pricke of Conscience window, with its vividly realized account of the cataclysmic events of the fifteen days before the Day of Judgment, serves as a forewarning to the spectator of the perils of neglecting one's charitable obligations. Thus, for the wealthy merchants of All Saints' Church, familiarity with the broader eschatological context of the Corporal Works of Mercy as participants and spectators in the Corpus Christi plays informed their reception of the


windows and vice versa.

The Mercers' play thematizes charity in such a way as give a sense of individual immediacy to the sweeping narrative of salvation history. Kate Crassons argues that the power of the play's discourse on charity derives from its invocation of the *memento mori* tradition in the pageant's opening speech;

> Men seis the worlde but vanite  
> Yitt will manne beware therby  
> Ilka day ther mirroure may thei se,  
> Ytt thynke thei noght that thei schall dye.\(^{121}\)

The mirror-trope acts as an entry point into the drama, effectively framing the narrative of the Last Judgment in terms of the kinds of practiced self-reflection integral to preparing for a good death. Though no direct connection can be established between the play and the window in terms of influence, both shape and were shaped by common concerns with self-examination before the final accounting.\(^{122}\) A late fifteenth to early sixteenth century confession written into the margins of the Bolton Hours reveals how the Corporal Works of Mercy continued to shape the contours of self-examination through subsequent generations of York merchants. In addition to transgressions of the Ten Commandments and commission of several of the Seven Deadly Sins, the confession records the author's failure to perform the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy. Pamela M. King characterizes the confession as distinctly lay and mercantile on the

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basis of the systematization of its content around the content of devotional works such as the York–produced *Lay Folks Catechism* aimed at the urban middle classes, the very same milieu from which the plays emerged.\(^ 123\) Taken together, stained glass window program, mystery play and confession all point to habits of thought in which York merchants were disciplined, in large part through the artistic and theatrical productions of the theme themselves.

For the mercantile spectator, the window provoked a deeply individual, interiorized form of self-examination at the same time as it invoked communal bonds of charity compelling intercessory prayers for the deceased. Gervase Rosser positions the York guilds' production of dramatic spectacles as one among a number of social performances generated within the structure of the guild designed to shape the Christian subject and integrate him or her into a Christian society. He argues "the theatrical importance of the medieval guilds lay in the fact that, within the same context of a dominant Christian culture as informed contemporary plays, these societies educated their members in a range of ritualized strategies for the formation of personal identity and social bonds."\(^ 124\) Ritualized activities such as guild feasts deployed charitable performance in the construction, legitimation and articulation of social relationships.\(^ 125\) In these contexts charity was in large part symbolic, taking the form of a


\(^{125}\) Gervase Rosser, “Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England,”
ritualized, exemplary almsgiving, and served to construct a morally respectable identity for the collectivity. At the elite levels of society, including the emerging urban elites, charity was a performance of social distinction as much as a genuine effort to alleviate suffering. Judith M. Bennett’s study of charitable giving in late medieval England emphasizes the integrative function of middling-class charity in contrast to elite giving which served to underscore the boundaries between wealthy and poor. Thus, the performance of the mystery plays and the performance of acts of charity forged horizontal bonds within social classes as well as vertical social relationships through the provision of largesse to one’s lessers.

It is essential when situating the *Corporal Works of Mercy* window within these social dynamics to avoid construing the art object as a mere reflection of underlying social realities. Particularly when framing art objects within a wider literary tradition there is a danger of subordinating the image to the text and reducing the role of the image to mere representation. Objects created by a society, like texts, both constitute and reflect the nature of that society. Discussing the architectural form of charitable foundations like hospitals, Kate Giles argues “buildings do not simply reflect attitudes towards the provision of corporate charity, but were rather one of the mechanisms through which contemporary discourses about the relationship between society and the

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126 Ibid., 436.
poor were structured and reproduced. Likewise, Corporal Acts of Mercy window reproduced bonds of charity and mutual obligation. The performance of social distinction through visual markers of difference in the window was central to this process. Nicholas Blackburn's large, fashionable hat, his cloak and his robe patterned with gold quatrefoils and edged with gold cuffs set him apart as a member of the urban oligarchy. He is accompanied by a squire, dressed in parti-colored hose and a patterned tunic. The poor to whom he extends charity wear simple, unadorned clothes. In the panel illustrating Blackburn clothing the naked the deep red robe Blackburn holds out toward the huddle of men in under drawers dominates the composition, further underscoring the class distinctions between donor and recipient expressed through attire. In the middle panel of the middle register clothing and fabric mark the recipient of Blackburn's charity, the sick man lying in his bed, as an equal. The bed itself divides the panel diagonally in two. The folds of the counterpane fill the lower half of the panel and its gold roundels and embroidered hem correspond closely to the embellishments on Nicholas Blackburn's tunic. The sickbed, which in the middle ages could rapidly turn into the deathbed, was a highly public spectacle with the sick and the dying gathered the members of their household, friends and clergy about them. Positioned in the center of the nine panels making up the Corporal Acts of Mercy window, the image speaks directly to other members of the urban elite through social markers of cloth and clothing, impressing upon the spectator Blackburn's fulfillment of charitable obligations.

130 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, 18.
toward his equals.

The performative nature of late medieval charity and its capacity to construct and articulate horizontal social relationships as well as alleviate suffering for those on lower social rungs are key to unlocking the function of the donor portrait as surrogate for the dead. Scholarship on gift giving points to a shift in the function and social implications of the last will and testament around the fourteenth and fifteenth century when it was revived and adopted by the middle classes and mercantile elites. Bijsterveld argues that the predominance of gifts in the form of annuities, hereditary rent charges and leases, cash, rather than land, combined with the legal status the will as a unilateral, revocable act whose effects only came into effect after death resulted in gifts from the dead no longer possessing the same associative or binding value as in earlier generations. The primary concerns of testators, expressed through their gifts, were commemoration and personal prestige.\(^{131}\) However, construction of group identity in the late Middle Ages was enacted by individual forms of display.\(^{132}\) The inclusion of the portrait likeness of the deceased along with the appearance of his name in the inscription accompanying the donor portrait constituted the identity of the deceased and evoked him as a presence among the living. This, in turn, rendered him as a subject of social relations.\(^{133}\) Through his donor portrait, Nicholas Blackburn symbolically performed the Corporal Acts of

\(^{131}\) Bijsterveld, Cohen, and de Jong, “The Medieval Gift as Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power.”
Mercy in perpetuity. In the context of highly visible gift giving practices aimed less at the alleviation of suffering than the public display of largesse and demarcation of social boundaries the window acted to forge bonds between the deceased and subsequent generations of mercers and merchants, whose annual performance of the Last Judgment play lent the theme particular significance.

Both the Blackburn Window and the Corporal Acts of Mercy window preserved the memories of the deceased not merely as names attached to generic donor portraits but as individuals engaged in acts of piety, devotion and charity. These acts embedded them within saintly and earthly networks and accrued spiritual merit for their souls. The complexity of the processes of constructing and maintaining earthly and heavenly networks of intercession only emerges when we situate the windows within the spiritual preparations for death that were part of the daily disciplines of late medieval Christians throughout their lives rather than restricting the activity of the donor portrait to posthumous commemoration. Analysis of the two Blackburn Windows within their original spatial, devotional and liturgical setting and in relation to the wider topography and civic activities of the city of York reveals subtle references within the iconography of the stained glass programs tying the donors to civic and religious institutions and activities, all of which served to strengthen the reciprocal ties of commemoration and intercession essential for speeding their souls' passage through purgatory.
Chapter Three
The Blackburn Memorial Jewel and the Adornment of the Saints

Few "jewels" of the kind commissioned by Blackburn survived the iconoclastic ravages of the Reformation though pictorial records of such engraved pendants exist in stained glass and painting. A small number of engraved gold pendants dating from roughly the same period give us a picture of the kind of jewel that Blackburn may have had in mind. A reliquary pendant manufactured in the fifteenth century in the British Museum collection shows an image of John the Baptist on the reverse. The engraved, full length image of the nimbed saint stands barefoot on a small mound and holds the angus dei in his arms. He is flanked by two white, enameled roses and beneath him is a French inscription reading, "A MON + dERREYNE."¹ A more crudely engraved rectangular pendant in the same collection, also from the fifteenth century, shows St George killing the dragon beneath framed beneath an arch.² One rare survival, representing the luxury end of the market, is the Middleham jewel, created circa 1450 which was found buried in Yorkshire.³ This diamond-shaped gold jewel is engraved with an image of the Trinity. On the obverse the crucified Christ is borne on the lap of God the Father while a dove, representing the Holy Spirit, mediates between the two. The words Ecce Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis tetragramaton

¹ Reliquary Pendant, England, c. fifteenth century, BM AF.2765
² Reliquary Pendant, England, fifteenth century BM 2002,0404.1
ananizapta are engraved in the border around the central image. A Nativity scene is engraved on the reverse with God the Father above and the Agnus Dei below. Rather than textual inscriptions the border of this image is filled with the images of fifteen saints. The inscription strongly suggests an apotropaic, rather than purely devotional, function for this engraved jewel.⁴

It is unclear precisely what Blackburn intended in his phrasing "a memorial jewel." No mention is made of any relic, but the reliquary pendants mentioned above nonetheless give some indication of the probable appearance of an engraved, gold "jewel." There are certainly examples of items designed for personal adornment that incorporate images of saints but are not relic containers. An enameled diptych pendant in the Victoria and Albert collection, made in either Flanders or England during the latter part of the fourteenth century, depicts St Catherine and St Anne as full length figures holding their attributes. Such an object would have been used to display the wearers' affections for these particular saints, as an object of private devotion and as a form of spiritual protection.⁵ John Blackburn's indenture does not specify text to be inscribed on his jewel, but its explicitly memorial function suggests that words commemorating Blackburn and perhaps other members of his family may have been included.

Blackburn's gift of an item of jewelry to a saint's shrine was by no means a

singular occurrence among the merchants’ of York. In 1490, John de Whettlay, a woolman of York, gave a gold ring with a ruby to be hung above the shrine of St William of York.\(^6\) Mathilda, wife of York merchant John Holbek, requested her silver and gemstone necklace be placed on the shrine of St John of Bridlington.\(^7\) Not only relics but also sacred images were the beneficiaries of such gifts. In his will dated April 28, 1444, Thomas Carr, a draper from York, requested that his gold chains be placed around the image of Mary and Christ (presumably a sculpture) in the Lady Chapel altar in York Minster Cathedral. He asked also that a gold ring also be placed on the image of Mary.\(^8\) John Carre of York, who was Lord Mayor of the city in 1448 and 1456 bequeathed "my gold ryng wt the dyamone to hyng aboute the nek of the ymage of oure Lady yt standes abowne oure Lady alter in the mynster where they sing oure Lady messe. Also I bewit an other yng wt a ruby and one torcos to hynge aboute oure Lorde nek that is in the armis of the same ymage of oure Lady."\(^9\) Isabella, wife of William Belgrave one pair of "lawmberbedes" and a silver and gold ring to hang in front of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Abbey of St Mary in York.\(^10\) The provision of gifts of personal items like jewelry to be displayed on shrines and sacred images in the raises questions concerning the function of such gifts in practices of commemoration. In particular, the evidence from these wills suggests that material objects were deployed by late medieval

\(^7\) Lego i monile argenti et deauratum cum gemmis ad impenendum super tumbam S. Johannis de Brydlyngton.” Will of Mathilda, wife of John Holbek, February 20, 1304. *Test. Ebor.* Vol. 1. no. 129, p. 331
\(^8\) *Test. Ebor.* Vol. II
\(^9\) *Test. Ebor.* Vol. II
Christians in such a way as to establish and maintain relationships with a network of heavenly intercessors. Pamela Graves sees gifts of clothing and jewelry made to images of the saints as evidence that late medieval Christians experienced a personal tie to images which she likens relationships of clientage.\textsuperscript{11}

Reliquary pendants and inscribed jewels and their associated devotional and magical practices date back to the early centuries of the cult of the saints. As pilgrims journeyed to and from sacred shrines they left material traces of their passage in the archaeological record. In the earliest centuries of Christian pilgrimage the holy, in the form of the sacred remains of the saints, was localized to shrines often far removed from the pilgrim's ordinary place of residence. Pilgrimage, according to Peter Brown, played on the tension between the longing engendered by this distance and joy of proximity once such distances were overcome through the act of journeying to the \textit{loca sancta}.\textsuperscript{12}

The yearning for physical proximity to the saints fundamentally shaped pilgrims’ interactions with the architectural and material apparatus of pilgrimage. Where a modern audience might be conditioned to privilege visual reception of art and architecture, there was a far greater emphasis on touch and physical proximity for late antique and medieval pilgrim.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, in the Christian West archaeological evidence reveals strategies for mediating tactile experiences of the sacred such as tomb-shrines

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constructed over grave incorporating apertures that allowed pilgrims to insert an arm or a leg into the structure and contact the sarcophagus itself.\footnote{14}{John Crook, \textit{The Architectural Setting of the Cult of the Saints in the Early Christian West C. 300 - 1200} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 178.}

The tension between longing and proximity gave rise to a demand for ongoing closeness to the sacred \textit{praesentia} of the saints after the pilgrim returned home. Gary Vikan traced the process by which the sacred, initially localized at the site of burial, became susceptible to fragmentation and circulation. Once the saint's power was believed to be physically concentrated in the objects or holy person associated with the \textit{locus sanctus}, the capacity for the sacred to be objectified was established and relics. Corollary to this belief was the idea that belief that the power of that localized sacred could be transferred through touch. Furthermore, theological elaboration in texts such as \textit{De laude sanctorum} by Vitiricius, bishop of Rouen established that relics were not simply vehicles for the sacred; they were one and the same with it. With the emergence of these principles of the economy of sacred power, the objectified sacred in the form of primary and secondary relics distributed the presence of the saints throughout the Christian world. Even the smallest scrap of cloth, having once been in physical contact with the remains of a saint, was understood to metonymically partake in the whole saint and was thus endowed with his or her miraculous powers.\footnote{15}{Gary Vikan, \textit{Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art}, Rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 2010), 23–25.}

The desire to remain in the presence of the saints after pilgrims returned home from the \textit{loca sancta} gave rise to a burgeoning trade in pilgrim souvenirs. These took multiple forms, from vials containing
oil or soil from the gravesite, often decorated with images of the shrine, to the strips of cloth known as *brandea* that had touched the shrine, to pilgrim tokens and badges. Fragmentary portions of the saints’ bodies were not the only material objects that established an indexical relationship with these sacred subjects. Portable copies of the holy sites, in the form pilgrim tokens and souvenirs, were understood to be essentially identical with the holy site in terms of spiritual and miraculous efficacy resulting in the replication of saint’s shrines in miniature in a multitude of locations separated from the original by thousands of miles. What emerges is a constant interplay between presence and absence. The saint was at once resident in the Heavenly Kingdom and present on earth through this or her bodily remains; bones, soil and stones providing a point of access to the divine that was accessible not just to the eyes, but to the entire sensorium of the pilgrim.

The interaction between venerator and venerated, and between subject and index, was not a one way transaction between pilgrim and the material objects and sites that mediated the presence of the saints. Not only did pilgrims return home with fragments and replicas of holy places and holy people, they behind material objects that, likewise, functioned as surrogates of themselves. The interactions between saints and supplicants took on a transactional character with *eulogia* taken away by the pilgrim and votive offerings left in their place. Vikan groups votive objects into two categories.

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16 Ibid., 3.
17 Laura Elizabeth Veneskey, “Alternative Topographies: Loca Sancta Surrogates and Site Circulation in Late Antiquity and Byzantium” (Ph.D., Northwestern University, 2012), 25.
Charisteria, or thank offerings, that acknowledge the receipt of saintly gifts such as healing or protection in child birth. A second group, under which the objects discussed here may be classified, are proactive offerings anticipating future blessings such as the salvation of souls after death through the intercession of the saint on behalf of the giver. 19 The ways that late medieval supplicants deployed material objects in preparation for death share a common underlying logic or structure with votive objects. Hugo van der Velden’s study of votive gifts as a category of objects highlights the structure of reciprocity as the defining feature of this class of objects. A material object’s role in establishing or confirming transactional relationships centered on processes of action and reciprocation, gift and counter-gift classify it as a votive gift. 20 Van der Velden’s framework for defining votive gifts distinguishes sharply between objects and acts as the first step in classifying a votive offering. Pilgrimages, acts of abstention and so forth, according to this heuristic, form an entirely separate category of votive gifts from candles, vestments, tokens, art works and other material items. 21 Robert Maniera, in his discussion of a votive gift of wax and silver given by Prato lawyer, Giuliano di Francesco Guizzelmi in thanks for the miraculous healing of his infant nephew, argues that this is an artificial distinction. For Maniera it is the act of giving which defines the object, not its material form. Consequently, he argues, any framework for analyzing

19 Ibid., 75.
21 Ibid., 213.
votive gifts needs to center upon the gift as act, rather than the gift as object. Gifts from the dead highlight the capacity of the gift as act not only to join an individual supplicant and saint in reciprocal relationship, but to mediate a many relationships and actions spanning across multiple generations. The gift’s social agency must, therefore, be situated within community, broadly defined. By entrusting the clergy with the memoria of the dead, medieval Christians assured that names of the deceased, and therefore the deceased themselves would continue be present at the sacrifice of the Mass after their death. In this way, gifts enabled the dead to have an ongoing presence within the community of the living.

It is significant that the gifts of York’s mercantile elite to shrines of the saints were objects of personal adornment and, as such, operated according to a logic that was the inverse of the touch relic. As outlined above, objects that had been in physical proximity to the sacred remains of the saints became imbued with the power of the saint to such an extent that, in the economy of medieval sacrality, they became identical with the relics of the saint and thereby with the saint herself. Though by definition ordinary Christians lacked the charisma - that very potency which activated primary and secondary relics - that set apart the saints from the wider Church, they had by the late middle ages so internalized this existential tie between absent subject and surrogate object that they considered objects that had been in intimate proximity to their own bodies to be efficacious proxies for themselves, capable of mediating an ongoing

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23 Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, 91.
relationship with a heavenly patron in their absence. Beatrix Bastl argues that objects such as jewelry and clothing, which adorned the human body, have a particular connection to memorial rituals because of their close connection to piety and personal life. She also notes that there is an implication of magical contact between the wearer and the object.\(^ {24}\) The economics of cloth and clothing contributed to the intimate ties between clothing and wearer in the early modern period. Items of clothing, an expensive, precious commodity, were worn throughout their owner's lifetime.\(^ {25}\) This sense of an intimate connection between the person of the deceased and the garments they leave behind is addressed in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. The theologian alludes to a symmetry between saints' bodies, garments and adornments, and those of ordinary Christians when he writes:

> [A]s Augustine says (De Civ. Dei I, 13): "If a father's coat or ring, or anything else of that kind, is so much more cherished by his children, as love for one's parents is greater, in no way are the bodies themselves to be despised, which are much more intimately and closely united to us than any garment; for they belong to man's very nature." It is clear from this that he who has a certain affection for anyone, venerates whatever of his is left after his death, not only his body and the parts thereof, but even external things, such as his clothes, and such like.\(^ {26}\)

Not only precious objects such as rings and necklaces but also robes and linens were given to the saints. Katherine French documented the phenomenon of female parishioners bequeathing robes and linens to the church to dress images of the saints.

\(^{24}\) Bastl, “Clothing the Living and the Dead,” 367.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 364.
\(^{26}\) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part III, Question 25, Article 6
Noting that women gave personal items such as rings, kerchiefs, veils and clothing, with specific instructions that they be used to adorn the saints, in far greater numbers than did men, she interpreted these acts through the lens of gender as evidence of the way on which homely roles framed women's relationships to the parish and shaped their pious requests.27

The evidence of York wills does not so easily lend itself to a gendered interpretation, as the examples above demonstrate. Further afield, in the nearby trading center of Hull, documentary evidence reveals a fascinating practice surrounding the feast day of St George. Thomas Wood, a draper from Hull, left to the Trinity Church:

To the Trinity churche one of my best beddes of Arreys werk, upon this condicion suyng, that after my decease I will that the same bedd shall yerely cover my grave at my Dirige and Masse, done in te said Trinite churche wt note for evermore; and I also will that the same bedd be honge yerely in the aid churche at the feste of Seynt George Martir among other worshipful beddes; and when the said beddes be taken downe and delyvered, then I woll that the same bedd be re-delyvered in to the revestre, and there to remayne wt my cope of golde.28

The "beddes" to which the will refers were textile bed hangings popular in late medieval bed chambers.29 Though numbered among the various items used to dress a medieval bed, these textiles were not unfitting as gifts to the saints. Tapestry, embroidered and

29 Samuel K. Cohn, Jr documents the donation of beds in Central Italy painted with devotional images, coats of arms and inscriptions. These appeared to have been commissioned posthumously by the executors of the deceased's will to be given to hospitals, rather than coming from the existing household inventory of bedclothes. See Samuel K. Cohn, The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 236–237.
"steyned" beddes appear in numerous wills and inventories and were luxury items of significantly value. Some incorporated pictoral and symbolic elements such as images of saints, the Five Wounds and initials IHS. Thomas Hull's bedde, constructed as it was of imported Arras work, was doubtless a prized possession that lent itself to visual display among the other beddes that adorned the church on the feast day of St George. The common thread of bodily intimacy that ties together the gifts of items of personal adornment, clothing and bed linens by both men and women in wills of the Northern mercantile classes calls for an engagement with gift giving practices on the level of the materiality of the objects given. These items have in common a bodily proximity to the wearer in life that allowed them to act as surrogates for the deceased in their absence and maintaining proximity to saints with whom they had built particular devotional affinity.

In addition to the gifts of jewelry from ordinary Christians to shrines and images of the saints, there are numerous instances of gifts of miniaturized images of the saints in the form devotional rings and pendants to ordinary Christians. Some were passed down through lines of kinship as in the case of Alicia Catryk, wife of Thomas Catryk, citizen and mercer of York, who left a piece of silver stamped with the image of St Christopher to her son William and a piece of silver with the image of St John the Baptist to her grandson John on May 16, 1440. Others, like merchant Henry Market

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30 Jennifer Eileen Floyd, “Writing on the Wall: John Lydgate’s Architectural Verse” (PhD, Stanford University, 2008), 167.
Vikan, “Pilgrims in Magi’s Clothing,” 98.
who gave two gold rings, one with the image of the Virgin, one with the image of St John, to fellow merchant William Gaunt, demonstrate the importance of commercial networks in practices of commemoration. Richard Thornton, alderman of York gave not jewelry but another kind of personal item that was in close proximity to his body on a daily basis. His will of December 10, 1506 mentions a cup with an image of the Virgin Mary and St Anthony to his wife, and a second cup with and image of St George to Nicholas Ratcliffe, a business associate. Where a large scale commission such as a stained glass window, altar piece or image of a saint served to attract devotees within the space of the church, these more affordable gifts promoted the saints' cult at an intimate level. Both approaches wove together the deceased's saintly and earthly networks of intercession.

These various strategies for achieving proximity to saints by proxy suggest a deeply embodied, tactile sensibility underpinning lay Christians' understanding of sanctity despite an ever increasing emphasis on optic modes of accessing the divine. Over the course of the Middle Ages lay access to both saints’ shrines and the high altar was increasingly restricted. In the early Middle Ages pilgrims placed far greater emphasis on the importance of touch and physical proximity than on sight. Over the course of the Middle Ages, the spatial setting of the saints changed dramatically. These translations also involved a shift from tomb-shrines that mediated a tactile experience of

31 *Test. Ebor.*
32 *Test. Ebor.*
33 Vikan, “Pilgrims in Magi’s Clothing,” 98.
the locus sanctus, to high-shrines, that emphasized visual reception.\textsuperscript{34} In the Carolingian West, pilgrims were permitted to touch the relics of the saints in their burial place within the crypt through a fenestella on certain occasions such as feasts days.\textsuperscript{35} During the Romanesque period, the relics shifted from the crypt to the main body of the church. The elevation of relics into the main body of the church often made them highly visible at the same time that it precluded physical proximity.\textsuperscript{36} Architectural, liturgical and theological changes associated with the promulgation of the doctrine of transubstantiation in 1215 saw a similar trend toward the visual rather than physical access to the High Altar. Direct participation in the Mass by the congregation was radically reduced as emphasis shifted to the sacrifice performed at the by the priest who was physically divided from the parishioners by the rood screen.\textsuperscript{37} The new emphasis on the Elevation of the Host, that is, on lay visual reception of the Host, resulted in a range of spatial and architectural innovations such as squints and tracery rood screens which directed and framed the experience of the Mass.\textsuperscript{38} Yet the increased emphasis on the visual did not replace haptic modes of engaging the sacred with purely scopic regimes. Rather, the increasing physical restriction of the laity from the high altar seems only to have spurred yet more creative methods for 'touching' the bodies of the saints, as


evidenced in the numerous material proxies and surrogates used to mediate the physical presence of the deceased in late medieval York.

Nicholas Blackburn's commission of the memorial jewel for the shrine of St Cuthbert is a curious combination of these trends in late medieval religiosity. He achieved proximity after death through the act of gift-giving to the saint's major shrine of Northern England. However, rather than donate an item of clothing or jewelry worn during life, he had made an object that he quite possibly never saw in person. The numerous gifts documented above dedicated to St Anne and, to a lesser extent, St John the Baptist and St Christopher, over the course of his life and after his death speak to a deep personal tie to these particular saints. There is, however, nothing that points to a particular affinity to St Cuthbert's shrine. The closest parallel for Blackburn's unusual act can be found in the tradition of surrogate pilgrimages - a reasonably common provision in late Medieval wills which enabled an individual to gain vicarious indulgences through the actions of a proxy. For example, John Radcliffe, a York merchant asked that a pilgrimage to Rome be undertaken on his behalf after his death and Thomas Graa, Lord Mayor of York, requested his executors arrange to make an offering of a gold coin engraved with holy images at the shrine of Santiago de Compostela. Ingeniously, instead of a humble pilgrim Blackburn sent an image of a

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40 "Item lego x li. dandas capellano ad proficiendum peregre' pro me ad Curiam Romanam, et ad celebrandum in Scala Celi unum trentrale missarum pro anima mea." Test Ebor. LXXXII, April 28, 1444.
41 "Et volo quod immediate post sepulturam meam executores mei faciant ex meliori modo quo poterint perquiri de sanctissimo patre et domino nostro papa unam sufficientem dispensacionem de quodam voto meo, quod nuper feci, ad oblendum Sancto Jacopo in villa de Compostella in Galicia infra regnum Spanie unum quadrantem auri,
saint to intercede on his behalf at the shrine of St Cuthbert. Any one of the saints he asked the goldsmith to engrave on the memorial jewel could attest to the reputation and spiritual credit-worthiness of Nicholas Blackburn, having been the recipients of numerous prayers and masses in his name as the result of his many benefactions. In this way, Blackburn's intercessory and commemorative networks, centered on the parish church of All Saints, North Street extend outward through interconnected sites within the city of York and beyond, the epicenter of sacred power in the North at St Cuthbert's shrine.

Conclusion

Scholars have characterized mercantile mentalities as "modern" and "rational," positioning the emerging mercantile elites of late medieval Europe on an historical trajectory pointing toward the rise of the modern, capitalist individual. The picture that emerges from this discussion of the ways in which new economic practices and social forms contributed to merchants' conceptions of their relationships with commemorative and intercessory networks, particularly the saints who interceded on their behalf with God, reveals a more complex picture of mercantile mentalities. The strategies of the Blackburns' and their associates should not be positioned as mercantile over and against earlier practices that were framed by feudal social orders. Rather, practices tied to the gift economy of early medieval Europe continued to persist within and interact with the

"nondum per me completem et quod oblatus fuerit dictus quadrans ymagini predicto." North Country Wills, Will of Thomas Graa, 26 May, 1417.
newer commodity-based economy. The sources discussed here do not constitute explicit statements of religious belief linking mercantile practices to the cult of the saints. Rather, they provide an insight into the lived religion and reveal the often unconscious ways that social and economic structures shaped religious belief and practice. Certain strategies for using material objects as a medium for constructing and maintaining networks of intercession, developed out of earlier social and economic forms, found particular favor with merchants because of their affinity with mercantile forms and practices, in this case, the use of proxies and agents to act on behalf of merchants. For a community accustomed to account keeping, operating through networks of associates and business agents and mitigating risks through diversification of investments, these mental habits may well have informed the moment of final accounting.

PART II:

Foreign Goods and Trans-regional Identities
Chapter Four

A Flemish Brass for an English Merchant: Commemoration as Cross Cultural Encounter

Introduction

Scattered through the north and east of England are a group of elaborately engraved monumental brasses commemorating merchants involved in the wool trade. These brasses were produced in Flanders and imported into England via the same trade routes that were central to the merchants' commercial activities during their life. Stylistic similarities identify the brasses of Adam de Walsoken and Robert Braunche in Lynn, Norfolk, and of Alan Fleming in Newark, Nottinghamshire and Thomas de Topcliffe in Topcliffe, Yorkshire as the products of the same Flemish workshop. These de luxe monuments were produced between 1349 and 1391 and bear a strong resemblance to brasses produced on the continent either in Bruges or in Lübeck.¹ The brass of Roger Thornton, in All Saints, Newcastle-on-Tyne, dating to 1411, appears to be the product of the same center, though it is set apart somewhat from the other examples on the basis of style.

From the mid fourteenth to the early sixteenth century workshops in Flanders produced elaborately engraved monumental brasses for export as memorials for patrons throughout Western Europe. Each monumental brass was composed of multiple engraved brass laten plates, roughly fifteen inches square and one eighth to one quarter

of an inch thick. The individual plates were worked with a chisel and mallet to produce an engraved surface onto which pigment was applied. The brasses were installed in parish churches and cathedrals where they were either placed over a tomb or affixed to the wall and stood as a memorial to the deceased, represented in the central effigial figure. These large scale monuments depict the deceased as life-sized figures in the center of the composition framed by an intricate architectural border composed of Gothic tracery. The elaborate architectural forms, with their Perpendicular tracery, vaulted canopies and niches containing standing saints, prophets and weepers are unique to the products of Flemish brass workshops. Each of the brasses contains two or more figures - the merchant and his wife or wives. Shafts separate the figures and contain niches which are occupied by saints, prophets and mourners. The soul of the deceased, depicted as a swaddled infant, is lifted up into the bosom of Abraham, who sits enthroned in the vaulted canopy above the heads of the figures. While the earlier brasses render the Gothic canopy as flattened, two-dimensional forms, the later exponents of the workshop feature architectural structures that stand out in relief from the background. A base compartment beneath the feet of the central figures provides space for a range of scenes drawn from saints’ lives or, more unusually for funerary art, secular romance. Similar brasses have been found in key trading centers throughout the Low Countries, around the Baltic Sea and on the Iberian Peninsula, pointing to a

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4 Ibid.
widespread export market for brasses of the "Flemish school." Imported at considerable expense from the Low Countries, the monuments stood as a testament to the merchants' wealth and social standing and tied them in perpetuity to the networks of exchange that connected the major trading centers of Western Europe.

Densely patterned backgrounds resembling rich brocades framed by elaborate, Gothic tracery are a distinctive feature of the Flemish school of monumental brasses. On some monuments the intertwined floriate forms, repeating pomegranates and vines, and roundels containing exotic and fantastical creatures create the impression of a funerary pall or bier cloth fabricated of silk brocade laid out beneath the body of the deceased. On others, the artist defines the lower edge of the patterned ground with tassels to suggest a hanging curtain or tapestry. A number of scholars have noted a striking similarity between the patterned backgrounds and silk textiles produced in Islamic and Byzantine workshops during the Middle Ages, with suggestions that the patterns were either copied directly from examples of eastern silks available locally to the engraver, or were drawn from paintings that depicted imported silks and brocades.5

5 H. K Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses at King’s Lynn,” Archaeological Journal 136 for 1979 (1979): 157. The search for models for the background designs has been a matter for some debate. H.K. Cameron earlier suggested both eastern silks and western tapestries as possible sources. See H.K. Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century School of Flemish Brasses,” Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society 11, no. 87 (1970): 50–81. Hans Eichler argued for Western models, asserting that the grotesques and drolleries found in the trifoil-type background and in the orphreys of the monuments to ecclesiastics have close parallels in the glazing at the cathedral of Evreaux and the church of St Ouen at Rouen. See Hans Eichler, “Flandrische Gravierte Metallgrabplatten Des XIV. Jahrhunderts,” Jahrbuch Der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen 51 (1933): 214. Malcolm Norris acknowledges the all these possibilities but notes there exist equally plausible parallels in Limoges enamel tombs and German textiles. He concludes that a variety of sources should be presumed and suggests the engravers combined many sources and to create inventive adaptations in their own style to the medium of brass. See Malcolm Norris, Monumental Brasses: The Craft, vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 30.
The close parallels between the Flemish brass workshops' interest in depicting luxury textiles and contemporary artistic developments, particularly the emergence of Early Netherlandish Realism lend some support to the latter interpretation. Though there has been some work on the art historical context of the Flemish school of monumental brasses, scholars have largely overlooked the relationship between monumental brass production and broader art historical developments in the Low Countries and Europe, more generally.\(^6\)

Two trajectories of circulation are at play in the Flemish brasses. The physical distribution of the funerary brasses follows the contours of major late medieval trade routes. The portability of the individual components allowed the brasses to be transported relatively easily, though still at some cost, by land or sea, accounting for their widespread distribution. These paths of circulation brought Western European merchants into contact with monumental brasses of the Flemish school in the churches and art markets of Bruges and facilitated the export of brasses once purchased by mercantile patrons. Scattered throughout the Low Countries and England, with examples found in trading towns up and down the Baltic, the locations of extant and

\(^6\) Linda Dennison's article on the artistic context of the Flemish brasses is one of the few works examining the relationship between minor ornament in illuminated manuscripts and subsidiary decoration on brasses. She argues that parallels between Flemish monumental brasses found in England and the fourteenth century Bohun manuscripts produced for members of the English Bohun family in Flanders both emerged out of the milieu of the fourteenth century Tournai illuminators and engravers at a time when the political, economic and social climate was favorable to interchange between England and Flanders. See Dennison, “The Artistic Context of Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses,” 29–30. For a broader examination of monumental brasses generally as art objects see also Jerome Bertram, ed., Monumental Brasses as Art and History (Stroud: Allan Sutton/Monumental Brass Society, 1996). However, while specialists in monumental brass production have argued for greater art historical analysis of these works, Flemish brasses have not yet been fully integrated into studies of the art of the Low Countries.
documented brasses of the Flemish school point to close ties with the Hanseatic League. The Flemish school reached the zenith of its production and artistic development in the mid fourteenth century at precisely the same point as the expansion of Hansa sea traffic from the Baltic, westward to Flanders and England, solidifying the argument for a Hanseatic distribution network. A cluster of brasses on the Iberian peninsula are the exception to the Hanseatic connection. The lack of direct ties between Spain and Portugal and the Hanseatic League, points to Bruges as the likely site from which the brasses were marketed after production in Tournai. Bruges attracted the Spanish and Portuguese merchants who brought raw wool from the peninsula along with spices, figs and oil from the around the Mediterranean and returned home with worked Flemish cloth. At the same time the richly patterned surfaces of the brasses point to farther flung visual traditions mediated to the West via costly Byzantine, Islamic and Chinese silks and Western representations of the same textiles in manuscripts and panel paintings. The representation of foreign, luxury textiles on merchants' memorial brasses raises two important questions. Firstly, why did late medieval English wool merchants choose to commemorate themselves through identifiably foreign brasses representing


8 There is some debate regarding the likely location of the workshops involved in the production of the Flemish school of brasses. Herbert W. Macklin, who produced one of the earliest comprehensive antiquarian studies of monumental brasses, rejected the designation "Flemish" and argued in favor of Lübeck as the site of production. Herbert Walter Macklin, *Monumental Brasses* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1890), 93. H.K. Cameron, on the other hand, provided compelling evidence based upon the distribution patterns of the brasses and documentary evidence in contemporary wills which consistently describe the brasses as "Flemish" in favor of production and distribution in the Low Countries. See H. K Cameron, William Lack, and S. G.H Freeth, “Four Civilian Brasses of the Flemish School,” *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society* 14, no. 2 (1987): 64 ff.

exotic decorative motifs associated with the eastern visual culture and imported at great expense from northern Europe rather than through the products of local workshops? Secondly, how were these imported brasses and, specifically, the eastern textile patterns incorporated into the backgrounds, received by contemporary audiences? In order to answer these questions, this chapter will situate merchants’ patronage of memorials incorporating representations of eastern textiles within broader artistic practices of appropriation, adaptation and re-use of eastern textiles in Western art.

This chapter will focus on the development and reception of the patterned backgrounds within the broader context of the circulation of luxury textiles in late medieval Europe. At the same time that the overall composition of the silk brocade patterns unites the Flemish brasses as the product of a single workshop, they incorporate an extraordinary variety of motifs. Dennison notes that the backgrounds of the brasses, often overlooked by scholars, are the site of innovation and invention. Where the central effigies of the deceased and framing figures of saints, prophets and weepers are marked by a high degree of stylistic and iconographic stability across the group, in the patterned backgrounds the engravers delight in presenting a dazzling array of birds and beasts, none of which are repeated from brass to brass. A pattern evocative of silk brocade forms the backdrop to the effigies of Adam de Walsoken and his wife, Margaret. The overall structure of the pattern is defined by rows of cusped, double trilobed cells. Each row is offset, forming a triangular negative space between the cells.

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each of which contains the repeated image of a winged creature resembling a butterfly. The cells frame an extraordinarily rich array of human and animal forms, no two alike. The creatures include a stag, a lion, a bear, rabbits and birds. The human figures are occupied in a range of activities, including horse riding and hunting. There are also a mermaid, a man with an animal's head and other fantastical beasts. The pattern is visible in the space behind both figures and on the outer edge of the brass, between the architectural shafts containing images of saints and the inscribed border around the edge the memorial. The impression given is of a sumptuous textile, hanging behind the tracery that frames the composition. A similar pattern of inhabited, trilobed cells forms the background to Robert Braunche's brass, though less space is devoted to the textile backdrop and the forms contained within the cusped frames are largely obscured by the drapery of the figures. A tapestry of grotesques within trilobed cells, alternating with trefoil ornaments in the negative space formed between the cells appears again on the brass of Alan Fleming in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Newark-on-Trent.

These patterns are important not only as evidence of decorative virtuosity, but also as bearers of meaning in and of themselves. Jeffrey Hamburger drew attention to the way in which "medieval images structure what they want to frame as the viewer's experience."¹¹ In his discussion of the use of architectural frames, often similarly dismissed as merely decorative, Hamburger argues that framing devices can carry an

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ideological charge that shapes our experience of the image contained within the frame.\(^{12}\)

The patterned grounds on the Flemish brasses similarly convey ideological and symbolic meanings that frame the viewer's interpretation of the iconographic content of the monuments. They signified through their evocation of materials that were identifiable to a contemporary audience as the product of particular geographic locales and markets. As products imported from the Low Countries that represent the commodities that circulated around the trade routes that stretches to the Mediterranean and beyond, the Flemish brasses were embedded in networks of trade. Evidence from wills shows that luxury textiles were an integral part of mercantile "spiritual economies" and were frequently given as gifts to the church with the unspoken understanding that they would be reciprocated with prayers for the dead. Eastern textiles depicted on Flemish brasses were simultaneously embedded in the networks of commercial exchange that defined merchants' daily activities and in the networks of commemoration that were responsible for their souls after death. To a mercantile audience the geographies of overseas trade—evident in these art objects both as products of the Flemish market, and in the eastern textiles depicted therein—would have been legible in specific ways that shaped their patronage of and responses to the brasses.

To date, studies of monumental brasses as a class of objects have been dominated by antiquarian methods that have used stylistic analysis and studies of costume to

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 389–90.
isolate individual workshops. Nigel Saul’s more recent work has employed methods
drawn from social history in order to place the monuments in the context of the social
and religious functions which they performed in order to address the lacunae in the
study of this class of objects.\textsuperscript{13} However, in the turn away from costume history, analysis
of the meaning and function of the textiles depicted on brasses has been neglected and
the rich symbolic vocabulary of silks dismissed as mere decoration. Yet the textiles
represented on Flemish brasses are integral to an understanding of the social and
religious function of the brasses. The choice of specifically Eastern textiles on these
commemorative objects was not accidental. Rather, the evocation of Islamic and
Byzantine silks served to embed the deceased in a web of networks, at once commercial
and commemorative, that stretched across the seas.

**Visual Languages of Exchange**

Studying the reception of Flemish brasses imported into England poses some
methodological problems as products of the Flemish brass workshops do not appear to
have had a long lasting effect on either the style or the technique of brasses produced in
English workshops. Lynda Dennison’s work on the artistic context of fourteenth century
Flemish brasses provides the most complete analysis of the processes of influence and
transfer of style that shaped the minor decorative elements of the brasses. She notes the
parallels between the monsters and grotesques that adorn the backgrounds of the

\textsuperscript{13} Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England*, 5.
brasses and similar motifs found in manuscripts produced in the Bohun manuscripts - a group of liturgical manuscripts produced in Tournai for the English Bohun family.¹⁴ According to Dennison, the parallels provide evidence of the transfer of stylistic and iconography motifs from monumental brasses to illuminated manuscripts. Both imported brasses and manuscripts were popular in England, but where English illuminators were highly receptive to Flemish influence and drew upon the models presented by these imports, Flemish brasses had little influence on local workshop production.¹⁵

Attempts to locate models for the motifs by isolate the individual motifs and trace their migration from points of origin in China and the Eastern Mediterranean into Western Europe immediately reveal the problems inherent in this kind of taxonomy of style and pattern. The very processes of trade and exchange that brought patterned silks to the West militate against a project of definitively identifying models and copies. The visual affinities between luxury portable objects, particularly textiles, from the Mediterranean are often so close as to defy scholars’ attempts to definitively point to a point of origin. From 1000 onward Byzantine and Islamic silks were almost indistinguishable from each other both stylistically and technically resulting in an "International style" common to silks produced in the eastern and western Mediterranean.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 33.
the Latin West from Byzantium, the Levant and the Far East and were available only to a highly restricted circle of ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Though existing centers of silk production guarded tightly the secrets of sericulture and silk manufacture, appropriation and imitation of silk designs and weaves became increasingly common. For example, ninth and tenth century Byzantine ateliers adopted Persian color combinations, motifs and decorative designs with such regularity it is often difficult or impossible for scholars to establish definitively the place of manufacture. As sericulture and silk manufacturing spread west into Spain, Sicily and later Italy, geographic names once indicating the origin of silks became terms defining the type of textile. Often these new production centers deliberately marketed their wares with inaccurate geographic monikers. Such was the case with two extant silk taffetas inscribed with text identifying them as "Baghdadi" which analysis has revealed were produced in Almeria. In time, the reputation of new manufacturing centers created markets and patterns of demand and, along with them, new poetics of silk. Almeria was soon so famed as the leading producers of tirāz silks that medieval French epic and romance poetry began to deploy the term “gold Almeria silk” as a signifier for luxury and nobility.

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Spanish and Byzantine silk trade routes, became the first Western Christian center to produce high end silks.\textsuperscript{21} Here, the patterns of the east were not simply copied but were reinterpreted. The distinctive medallion structure of Islamic and Byzantine was abandoned in favor of a more fluid composition consisting of equally weighted units and traditional ornamental animal motifs were reworked to incorporate Christian symbols such as the Lamb of God.\textsuperscript{22}

Examination of possible models for the phoenix and pomegranate motifs found on a number of brasses reveals the convoluted paths of trade, exchange, adoption and adaptation that brought patterned silks to the West. In some cases, close parallels are apparent between patterns found on individual monumental brasses and extant textiles fragments. Of the pattern types found on the Flemish brasses the phoenix pattern is immediately recognizable to a viewer familiar with vocabulary of decorative forms circulating throughout the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages. The earliest extant brass to incorporate this motif was the shroud brass of 1387 in Bruges cathedral dedicated to the memory of Wouter Copman. Pedro Zatrylla’s brass of c. 1400 originally in Solsona Cathedral in Catalonia now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, features an identical background of phoenixes in offset, vertical columns of ogival cells constructed of intertwined floral and foliate forms. Drawings of the no longer extant shroud brass commemorating Jacob Blandereel and his wife, Barbara van der Beke (c. 1451) and of

\textsuperscript{21} Jane Burns, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 66.
\textsuperscript{22} Jacoby, “Silk Economics,” 228–229.

the canopied brass commemorating Pieter van Zynghene and his wife (c. 1372) appear to depict the same ogival repeats enclosing phoenixes. Ronald van Belle suggests the route for the transmission of the phoenix in this form from its origins in China or the Middle East was most likely via Sicilian lampas silk. The phoenix itself easily lent itself to funerary art having been incorporated into Christian iconographic traditions as a symbol of resurrection.\textsuperscript{23}

The processes of trade and exchange that communicated these motifs from East to West militate against a project of definitively identifying models and copies. From 1000 onward Byzantine and Islamic silks were almost indistinguishable from each other both stylistically and technically resulting in an "International style" common to silks produced in the eastern and western Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{24} Byzantine ateliers adopted Persian color combinations, motifs and decorative designs with such regularity it is frequently impossible to determine definitively the place of manufacture.\textsuperscript{25} As sericulture and silk manufacturing spread west into Spain, Sicily and later Italy, geographic names once indicating the origin of silks became terms defining the type of textile. Often these new production centers deliberately marketed their wares with inaccurate geographic monikers. Such was the case with two extant silk taffetas inscribed with text identifying them as "Bagdhani" which analysis has revealed were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Van Belle, \textit{Laudas Flamencas En España}, 108–109.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Muthesius, “Silk in the Medieval World,” 327.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ertl, “Silkworms, Capital and Merchant Ships European Silk Industry in the Medieval World Economy,” 250.
\end{itemize}
produced in Almeria. In the early thirteenth century, Lucca, poised at the intersection of the Spanish and Byzantine silk trade routes, became the first Western Christian center to produce high end silks. Pomegranate and palmette motifs became ubiquitous during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The elaborate pomegranate motif on the late fifteenth century brass dedicated to Pedro López de Vitoria and his wife María Sánchez de Salynas, housed in the Museo Vasco de Bilbao, and a number of other extant brasses are evocative of Eastern silks in both iconography and the formal structure of offset ogival repeats. Pomegranate patterned velvets from the Middle East were readily adopted for funerary rites where the classical pagan significance ascribed to pomegranates, associating the fruit with regeneration and immortality was Christianized as symbolic of resurrection. Eastern silks incorporating the motifs remained objects of desire in their own right while the new Italian centers of production adapted and rearticulated the formal structure of the pomegranate within ogival repeats, as in the example of a bier cloth constructed of Florentine cloth-of-gold with an undulating pattern of pomegranates donated by the merchant Henry Fayrey to the guild of St John the Baptist in Dunstable, Bedfordshire around 1516 for use at the funerals of its members, both responding to and creating new demands and markets, particularly

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27 Ibid., 228–229.
among the emerging urban elites.

Other pattern types are less easily linked to eastern textiles, raising questions concerning processes and routes of transmission. Rectilinear repeats with lions and fantastical beasts in the diamonds, birds and floral designs have parallels in Byzantine and Italian lampas silks. Repeats of trilobes enclosing fantastical beasts which emerged in the mid-fourteenth century appear on the brasses commemorating a number of merchants in England. The lions and fanciful creatures resembling dragons and gryphons are evocative of the birds and beasts that covered the surface of all manner of luxury goods circulating the Mediterranean. The trilobed cells, however, are a distinctively Western interpretation of medallions that composed Eastern textiles. In terms of composition, the trilobes function identically to isolate individual pictorial elements within a repeating framework but Islamic and Byzantine examples exclusively use circular or ogival forms to frame their textile menageries.

Further complicating attempts to trace the migration of motifs from silks to monumental brasses were the parallel developments occurring in the production of illustrated manuscripts and panel paintings associated with Early Netherlandish Realism. The processes of creative assimilations underlying the composition of the textile backgrounds find close parallels in contemporary artistic developments associated with Early Netherlandish Realism with its interest in captivating depictions of lavish textiles laid out on the surface of the picture plane.\(^3\)\(^0\) Manuscript illuminators

\(^3\)\(^0\) Robert Baldwin, “Textile Aesthetics in Early Netherlandish Painting,” in Textiles of the Low Countries in
and panel painters working within this tradition incorporated representations of sumptuous imported textiles in panel painting and illuminated manuscripts as 'cloths-of-honor' which hung behind figures of Christ, the saints and royalty and in decorative borders surrounding manuscript miniatures. The earliest paintings in this mode drew from Chinese and Islamic textiles, with exotic animals, floating bands of pseudo Kufic and sunbursts combined in open, asymmetric compositions. Later paintings reflect changed in the silk market. Italian silks characterized by larger, simplified designs and an interest in effects created by surface texture began to appear around 1430 and quickly migrated into the visual repertoire of Netherlandish painters. The difficulties in definitively identifying models, whether in the form of specific, extant textiles or identifiable points of geographic origin are exemplified in a full page miniature of the Madonna and Child in Prayer Book of Charles the Bold (Getty MS. 37). A black textile fragment covered with ogival medallions in staggered rows divided by curved lattice

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picked out in gold and silver detailing, similar to the ogival patterns found on a number of the Flemish brasses, frames the central image. Margaret L. Goehring identified the decorative motif as a Yuan Dynasty design transmitted through the Middle East via Mamluke and Byzantine weavers before its reception into Italy. The designs on these cloths-of-honor were not translated wholesale from textiles into their new medium. Rather, artists recombined motifs in a such a way as to produce creative re-imaginings of luxury textiles incorporating motifs from geographically disparate regions. In this miniature depicting saint St Alexis from the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (c. 1440), for example, Spanish style lozenges and Chinese-style winged dragons are contained within an ogival framework of Italianate foliage. Jan Van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* marks the apogee of this development in Early Netherlandish Art. Though unmistakably modeled on imported *lampas* silks, the iconographic specificity of the motifs, which the artist carefully selected for their symbolic resonances to the holy figures they frame, refutes the argument that the Van Eyck faithfully copied known textiles. Rather, it is apparent that the motifs were artistic inventions created as part of a coordinated symbolic program. Thus, by the time Flemish brass engravers were working to incorporate textile motifs into their compositions, the distinctive motifs of eastern silks had undergone multiple processes of translation and re-articulation, moving across

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33 Lieven van Latham, *Prayer Book of Charles the Bold*, Getty MS. 37, fol. 10r.
35 Master of Catherine of Cleves, *Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, Pierpont Morgan MS M. 917, fol. 290v.
geographical boundaries and artistic media alike.

**Evoking the East: Indeterminate Exoticism**

The search for definitive models obscures the true signifying value of the textile motifs. Artists and patrons sought not to represent specific textiles but rather to evoke an entire category of commodities and the social and economic circumstances of their circulation and use. The geographic ambiguity, or, "indeterminate exoticism," of silks and, more generally, luxury portable objects necessitates an approach which acknowledges the central role of circulation and networks of connection rather than singular sources of origin in the construction of meaning and identity. For this reason, any analysis of the signifying potential of representations of foreign silks on Flemish brasses calls for methodologies that emphasize the power of things-in-motion to illuminate their human and social context.

Medieval art historians working with luxury medieval objects embodying this kind of deliberate indeterminacy of form have exposed the problematic nature of traditional art historical attempts to localize objects to singular sites of production and contain art objects within national boundaries.

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37 Thanks to Nancy Um for her illuminating articulation of the concept of “indeterminate exoticism” in her lecture, “Rites of Entry at the Maritime Threshold: Material Culture and Commercial Privilege in Eighteenth-Century Mocha,” Getty Research Institute, February 3, 2014.


39 For a historiographical overview of the shift from shift away from origins and localities as the defining factors of history to an interest in the movement of people, objects and ideas across boundaries traditionally defined by language, religion, ethnicity and geography see Alicia Walker, “Globalism,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 183–96.
category to reveal how the act of moving an object changes its meaning and argue that
the very mechanisms of circulation and exchange inflected objects with specific
meanings.\(^\text{40}\)

The mercantile context of these brasses exposes the limitations and assumptions
of current scholarship on circulation. While the past decade’s fruitful art historical
scholarship on the transmission of luxury objects across political, religious and ethnic
boundaries in a courtly milieu has provided valuable insights into the negotiations of
power mediated through gifted exchange, the implications of circulation via commercial
exchange have remained a largely unexamined.\(^\text{41}\) Oleg Grabar’s foundational work on
the common art of courtly luxury describes "a culture of objects shared by all those who
could afford them and transformed by their owners or users into evocations of sensory
pleasures."\(^\text{42}\) Circulated as diplomatic gifts and tribute and worn in displays of courtly
pageantry, the objects that constituted Grabar’s "shared culture of courtly luxury" were
intimately tied to the processes by which potentates constructed, maintained and
articulated their power. Anna Muthesius describes the "silken hierarchy of dress"
established from at least the tenth century in Byzantine and Islamic, and later Western
European courts. Gifts of lavish silks from visiting dignitaries and the purposeful
displays of luxury cloth in the courts that received them were part of an ongoing

\(^{40}\) Leslie Brubaker, “The Elephant and the Ark: Cultural and Material Interchange across the Mediterranean in the
\(^{41}\) For an overview of recent contributions to the study of gift exchange as a framework for examining art objects see
Iconography} 33 (2012): 171–82
\(^{42}\) Oleg Grabar, “The Shared Culture of Objects,” in \textit{Islamic Visual Culture. 1100-1800: Constructing the Study of
competition between centers of power. The legibility of the luxury materials was critical to these complex negotiations power and supremacy. As Grabar argues, "the objects shared by the Byzantine and Muslim courts were used as expressions of a competition, but one that... involved the same functions, forms and values." This shared hierarchy of value imputed to particular goods and sub-sets of goods was, in short, an essential component of their ability to function as symbolic capital across cultural boundaries.

When examining the reasons why particular motifs were especially susceptible to cross-cultural appropriation scholars building upon Grabar's work have sought to explain their appeal in terms of universal meanings. Francisco Prado-Vilar, for example, described the imagery of paired animals, birds and human figures feasting amongst paradisal arabesques as a universalizable “iconography of peace and well-being” ideally suited to diplomatic gifts. There is a risk of flattening and homogenizing the meanings articulated through the shared repertoire of motifs and patterns in order to explain their legibility across cultural borders. Eva Hoffman, on the other hand, suggests that the mobility and legibility of the shared forms speaks rather to an adaptability and mutability of meaning. She argues "While the shared emblematic themes of animals and court activities were ubiquitous throughout the Mediterranean, this common vocabulary was used to frame particular messages and representations of specific

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identity...produced through the balance between the local and international spheres.”

In these discussions of the shared vocabulary of luxury portable objects, scholars position merchants, if they are discussed at all, as mere conduits for luxury goods rather than consumers or taste makers. Moreover, the implications of circulation by means of trade in the reception and interpretation of objects and motifs go largely unrecognized as the anthropological models of gift exchange undergirding these studies assume "neutral" mechanisms of commerce in contradistinction to the reciprocal bonds created by giver and receiver through acts of gift giving. Indeed, Phillipe Ariès noted that "in order for material possessions to become important to the dying man, they had to be become both less rare and more sought-after, they had to acquire a value of utility or exchange.” There is a tendency to assume an unreflective process of adoption of aristocratic modes of display reflected in a process of downward diffusion of taste from the upper to middle classes when considering mercantile patronage. The complex negotiations of power and status mediated through courtly objects in the tenth through thirteen centuries are replaced by a taste for exoticism among the emerging bourgeoisie.

But merchants had intimate, first-hand knowledge of the silk and textile markets. For

47 Oleg Grabar’s work on cultural exchange rightly rejects the idea of two “worlds” of East and West and emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of society and culture within these geographical designations. He contrasts the social order of princes and kings who shared skills, habits and tastes to that of merchants who “sold silks, spices and slaves wherever needed and learned from each other navigational techniques, market information.” The reduction of the mercantile social order purely economic functions and motivations is typical of scholarship on circulation and exchange in the Middle Ages. See Oleg Grabar, “Patterns and Ways of Cultural Exchange,” in *Islamic Visual Culture, 1100-1800: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, ed. Oleg Grabar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 441–46.
merchants choosing Flemish brasses representing luxury textiles the specificity of market knowledge suggests something more than a generic "bourgeois desire for exotica."

Rather than representing a dilution of semiotic potential, the new markets for silk textiles layered new meanings tied to commercial modes of exchange on top of the established symbolism of nobility and courtly power. The critical lens for interpreting these new layers of meaning is the notion of *value*. For Igor Kopytoff the category of *value* allows us to differentiate between gift and commodity. Where commodities have a use value and can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for something of an equivalent value, gifts or "singularities" are culturally excluded from this kind of exchange. The commodity, as a thing that can be exchanged in a discrete transactions, is marked by its equivalence to the thing for which it is exchanged. The singularity, on the other hand, is inalienable. It cannot be sold or otherwise exchanged because it is unique. This is the fundamental categorical distinction underpinning Kopytoff’s analytical frame; the distinction between commodities, which have a use value and can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for something of an equivalent value, and singularities, which are culturally excluded from this kind of exchange.  

This is not to say that any given object is fixed as either commodity or gift, rather it is the context of exchange that determines its value. The drama in a cultural biography of things arises from those moments when

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things are reclassified as commodity or singularity.\textsuperscript{51} Arjun Appadurai, in his introduction to the volume in which Kopytoff’s essay appears, makes the important point that we need to distinguish between social and cultural biographies of things. The cultural biography model proposed by Kopytoff, he argues, is useful principally for tracing the narrative of individual objects and the ways in which they meet and defy cultural expectations of their category as they pass in and out of the states of commodity and singularity. A social biography of things, on the other hand, establishes the expectations and narrative frameworks for entire categories of objects and traces their change over time in history. Bringing these two forms of biography together is essential as the social biography of things functions as the frame for understanding the cultural biography of particular objects.\textsuperscript{52} Appadurai’s key insight into things in circulation holds that the transactions, both gift-based and commercial, that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations.\textsuperscript{53} This dissertation will first consider ways in which social relations inflected luxury textiles themselves as they were traded between merchants, and, later, when given as gifts to kinsfolk, friends and to the Church. It will then argue that these complex patterns of circulation, and the social relations embedded within and mediated through them, frame the patronage and reception of Flemish brasses which incorporate representations of such textiles.

For the purpose of a discussion of the representation of textiles in monumental

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 68–69.
\textsuperscript{53} Appadurai, “The Thing Itself,” 15.
brasses, I will emphasize the social biography of Eastern silks as a category of objects. The practice of representing exotic textiles on monumental brasses has close parallels with the incorporation of "cloths-of-honor" in Netherlandish panel paintings and manuscript miniatures as backdrops for Christ, the saints and royal personages. Jane Cottrell argued that the silks and velvets depicted in Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* were probably not based on specific examples of cloth, but were rather imaginative inventions of the artist. Though identifiable as Italian *lampas* silk none of the cloths-of-honor have been positively identified as reproducing an extant fabric. Moreover, van Eyck carefully selected motifs as part of a coordinated symbolic program.\(^{54}\) Even if specific silks were used as models by the artists who produced the Flemish brasses, the act of representing such a textile and then circulating the representation across the seas severed the indexical link between model and copy. The viewer would have recourse, then, only to general classes of textiles. Rather than pointing toward a single textile, they patterned backgrounds evoked through their formal language the textiles of a particular geographical location generally. As Robert Baldwin notes of the luxurious garments depicted in Netherlandish paintings, the specific textiles did not represent a mirror of reality but rather functioned as a complex "text" embedded with different messages about contemporary money, class, religion, human nature, and the role of art.\(^{55}\) It is the strands of this complex text, interwoven with the narratives of circulation, exchange and display, that a social and cultural biography of foreign silks seeks to expose.

\(^{54}\) Cottrell, “Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck’s Cloths of Honor,” 187–188.
\(^{55}\) Baldwin, “Textile Aesthetics in Early Netherlandish Painting,” 32.
Obviously, there were degrees to which the geographical origins and established routes of circulation would have been legible to any single medieval viewer, depending on their familiarity with the textile trade. A merchant would read the threads of biography very differently from someone who did not have intimate knowledge of the mechanisms of exchange that brought textiles from the East to Western markets. However, evidence suggests that even outside the mercantile elites there was a high degree of familiarity with origins of particular textiles, especially among the aristocracy and wealthy, urban bourgeoisie. References to specific kinds of cloth, such as the use of "gold Almeria silk" in French epic literature as a visual code signifying luxury and nobility or the visual appropriation of Islamic tirāz bands on sculptures of Crusader knights to designate a connection to the east and the Holy Land speak to a sophisticated vocabulary of cloth that permeated multiple levels of society. The rich, associative symbolism of imported textiles crossed over from literary and artistic forms into the commemorative practices of the laity. Kathleen Ashley’s examination of the wills of the urban elites in London, Bury St Edmunds, Canterbury and Burgundy reveals that testators often explicitly stated the foreign origin of gifts of luxury clothing and textiles. The fabrics enumerated in these wills functioned as "polysemic signifiers" capable of "conveying multiple meanings, from personal affection to pious almsgiving

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58 Ashley, “Material and Symbolic Gift-Giving: Clothes in English and French Wills,” 144.
and maintenance of social orders." The cultural and social meanings encoded within luxury, foreign textiles inflected the decorative backgrounds, evocative of the same eastern silks and brocades, on the Flemish school brasses found in English parishes. Their connection primarily with wool merchants engaged in the international cloth trade suggests a deliberate choice on the part of these patrons to draw visual connections to the commercial markets and networks that shaped their daily lives. At the same time, these visual elements of the brasses are layered with a range of literary and religious significances that arose from the movement of luxury textiles through the routes of circulation that crisscrossed the Mediterranean Sea, meanings that went beyond concerns of trade and commerce though they were tightly linked to the realities of mercantile activity.

In constructing a social and cultural biography of the textile trade in order to understand the reception of the textiles represented on late medieval monumental brasses I will draw on three categories of evidence. Firstly, the history of the textile trade itself. It will be necessary to establish the contemporary routes and mechanisms of exchange that circulated the kinds of textiles depicted on the brasses from their centers of production to Northern Europe and England. I will examine mechanisms of mercantile commerce and gift exchange and also look at the reception of such textiles by buyers and recipients in courts, religious institutions and domestic spaces. Secondly, I will consider other examples of the representation of Eastern textiles in Western art to

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59 Ibid., 141.
understand the impact of processes of translation across media and the kinds of symbolic readings evoked by the presence of Eastern textiles in Western Art. Finally, I will draw on the equivalent phenomenon in textual sources in which references were made to specific kinds of cloth in contemporary literary works. Together, these provide the framework within which to build a social biography of the kinds of textiles depicted on the Flemish brasses. These factors, together, trace the boundaries of expectations for this category of objects which informed how they were received by contemporary viewers.

**Gifts of Previous Silk**

Silk textiles had unusually complex social biographies, often shifting status between commodity and singularity multiple times during their life-cycle. During the early to high Middle Ages, the production and circulation of Eastern silk was closely controlled. Both Islamic and Byzantine ateliers were effectively run as a state monopoly. They produced silks at the behest of the ruler primarily to be given as diplomatic gifts. Moreover, legislation prohibited their sale and, thereby, their transformation into commodities, though once outside the control of the giver many silks moved outside patterns of gift-giving and were circulated through processes of theft or trade. As objects that circulated principally as diplomatic gifts, Eastern silks in Western contexts accrued courtly and royal associations. Even when silks produced in these tightly

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regulated workshops were subsequently resold, only a small circle of individuals belonging to the same social and economic strata were able to purchase them, and thus they remained a marker of wealth and prestige.\textsuperscript{61} Over the course of the Middle Ages, eastern objects found their way into the royal and church treasuries and the homes of the aristocracy.

Current scholarship on cross-cultural exchange emphasizes the role of diplomacy in creating this pan-Mediterranean culture of courtly display. Portable objects circulating as diplomatic gifts participated in a shared visual vocabulary that, in many instances, defies localization. Though scholars have acknowledged the importance of trade routes and mercantile commerce in mediating this shared visual culture, the Flemish brasses illustrate the need for greater attention to be paid to the patronage and reception of motifs that are principally associated with a courtly \textit{milieu} within mercantile communities. Indeed, Robert Bartlett, in his examination of the role of trade and colonization on the formation of Western Europe, argues that maritime trading cities bound together the far reaches of the northern and southern seas in such a way that the unity of the medieval West was, at least in part, a traders' unity.\textsuperscript{62}

Circulating within this elite \textit{milieu}, luxury eastern commodities captivated the Europe \textit{imaginaire} throughout the middle ages. A large number of extant medieval silks, many incorporating kufic and pseudo-kufic inscriptions, have survived in

\textsuperscript{61} Jacoby, “Silk Economics,” 214.
Christian church treasuries, having been repurposed as ecclesiastical vestments, furnishings, reliquary wrappings and burial shrouds.\textsuperscript{63} These sumptuous textiles, embellished with foliate arabesques, palmettes, lions, peacocks, gryphons and scenes of the hunt, made their way into church treasury through processes of gift exchange and as spoils of war. Many are readily identifiable as originating in Islamic workshops by their \textit{tir?z} bands, strips of embroidered inscriptions incorporated into the pattern that displayed the name of the ruler in whose reign they were made, a place of manufacture and Quranic inscriptions. The silk wrappings for the body of St Cuthbert at the saint's Durham Cathedral shrine, dating to the tenth or eleventh century, establish a long standing mortuary practice for silks in England. The holy remains of England's northern saint had been wrapped in numerous embroidered and printed silks from Byzantium and the Islamic world, including the ‘Peacock’ silk which incorporated an unusual repeated motif of a frontal double-headed peacock with a pseudo-kufic inscription across its breast.\textsuperscript{64} In many instances, close examination of repurposed textiles indicates a deliberate retention of Arabic inscriptions. A semi-circular cloth constructed from light blue silk, purported to be the chasuble of St Thomas Becket incorporates an oblong panel containing a generic blessing in kufic lettering placed in the center of the back panel.\textsuperscript{65} The chasuble was created by piecing together fragments of a pre-existing fabric,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{63} Jacoby, “Silk Economics,” 203.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Anna Muthesius, “Silks and Saints: The Rider and Peacock Silks from the Relics of St Cuthbert,” in \textit{St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to Ad 1200}, ed. George Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 359.
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but the in the process of repurposing the fabric for an explicitly Christian use the kufic
inscription was retained and placed in a prominently visible position. The inscription
would have been clearly displayed whenever the wearer faced toward the altar.

This was not an isolated practice. David Jacoby lists a number of similar cases in
which silk fabrics were remodeled to serve new purposes while retaining kufic
inscriptions.66 Likewise, Dorothy G. Shepherd reconstructed the fragmentary chasuble
of San Juan de Ortega in 1957 from pieces preserved as relics in various locations in
Spain. The chasuble of San Juan de Ortega displays strong formal and iconographic
parallels to Fermo chasuble. Repeated roundels cover the chasuble against a dense
background of stylized palmette motifs. These roundels circumscribe paired rampant
lions, symmetrically arranged on either side of a central tree and turning to look
backward at one another.67 In the process of fabricating the chasuble from a pre-
existing, most likely rectangular, bolt of fabric, its Christian maker chose to retain the
tirāz bands of Kufic text. Like the Fermo chasuble, the chasuble of displays these bands
prominently, in this case as borders along the opening at the front of the garment.68 This
suggests a conscious and deliberate incorporation of identifiably Islamic textual
fragments in the process of appropriating tirāz silks for explicitly Christian purposes.

Though it has been argued that these objects were highly susceptible to imitation

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67 Dorothy G. Shepherd, “A Dated Hispano-Islamic Silk,” _Ars Orientalis_ 2 (1957): 376.
68 Ibid., 374.
and appropriation,\(^69\) in practice these distinctive silks were never absorbed fully into a Western artistic repertoire. Janet Snyder’s study of the appropriation of tirāz bands in twelfth century French dress and French sculpture emphasizes the fact that even when copied in sculpture, tirāz bands were intended to be legible as silks from Spain or the Holy Land. She notes that courtly dress did not include entire foreign costumes, but were rather fragments were reworked into European styles.\(^70\) In order to perform this function, the silk textiles must have been immediately visually recognizable as the product of a particular geographical region.

The inclusion of luxury portable objects such as silks, which displayed their Islamic origins, in explicitly Christian settings has long puzzled scholars. Objects with explicitly Islamic associations, such as those that incorporated Kufic calligraphy in their decorative schemes, have posed particular problems for Western scholars working within a traditional framework positioning the Christian West in inimical opposition with the Islamic East. Recent scholarship has begun to break down the strict, binary opposition between the two civilizations, often on the basis of evidence drawn from the material record which complicates this antagonistic view of cross-cultural interaction. Jerrilynn Dodds, for example, points out the paradoxical tension between textual evidence, on the one hand, that reveals antipathy for Islam on the part of the church and the material evidence of church treasuries, and on the other hand, that reveals an


\(^{70}\) Snyder, “Cloth from the Promised Land,” 149.
admiration for Islamic artistic traditions.\textsuperscript{71} The representation of eastern silks on Flemish brasses is perhaps less problematic than examples of objects manufactured in Islamic regions appropriated for use in Christian settings for a number of reasons. Scholars have tended to view these objects that moved across confessional boundaries, passing from Islamic to Christian hands, through the lens of inter-religious animosity.\textsuperscript{72} Firstly, the decorative motifs are examples of quotation rather than direct reuse and, though recognizably eastern in style, they do not incorporate overtly Islamic elements such as Kufic or pseudo-Kufic script. Secondly, by the time Flemish brass engravers were mimicking eastern textiles in patterned backgrounds of their funerary monuments the manufacture of silk had moved outside the restricted ateliers of the Islamic and Byzantine worlds. During the Crusades disruptions to trade networks between the western and eastern Mediterranean shifted the manufacture of silk to Italy. Here local craftspeople gradually took over the entire process from the establishment of sericulture to the weaving and dying of finished cloth.\textsuperscript{73} However, the localization of silk production in southern Europe does not wholly eradicate the problem of accounting for the use of recognizably Islamic-style patterns in Christian settings as Italian designers adopted Islamic designs and motifs in their textile patterns, suggesting a continued desire for


\textsuperscript{72} Avinoam Shalem, for example, argued that Islamic inscriptions on carved ivory caskets from Islamic lands that bore the names of their royal or aristocratic owners that appear marked the containers as symbols of triumph over the Islamic enemy as they passed into Christian hands. See \textit{Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West}, 2nd rev. ed, Ars Faciendi, Bd. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 25.

\textsuperscript{73} Trench, “Italian Silks in Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Painting,” 59.
eastern goods.\textsuperscript{74} Finally, funerary monuments such as the Flemish brasses functioned to display the worldly wealth and social standing of the deceased, though this aspect of lay funerary art has tended to be overstated in the literature to the detriment of analysis of the symbolic and religious meanings of luxury goods depicted on brasses.\textsuperscript{75}

The semiotic load of textiles represented on Flemish brasses must be contextualized within the broader visual culture of the Low Countries. Robert Baldwin argues that rather these textiles should not be taken as a direct reflection of reality. Rather they functioned "as a complex 'text' embedded with different messages about contemporary money, class, religion, human nature, and the role of art."\textsuperscript{76} The representation of eastern textiles operated within this wider context of appropriation and adaptation of eastern products and motifs in western Europe that arose from the circulation of luxury portable objects around the Mediterranean and into northern Europe. This took the form of both the re-use of portable objects originating in Eastern workshops ranging such as ivories, metalwork and textiles, and the representation of objects and motifs from Arabic, Byzantine and far eastern visual traditions in western art objects such as the Flemish brasses discussed on this chapter. Representations of Islamic and Byzantine textiles appeared in a variety of media, particularly in panel painting and illuminated manuscripts, throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth century. In particular, there are close stylistic and functional parallels between the patterned

\textsuperscript{74} Anne E. Wardwell, “Flight of the Phoenix: Crosscurrents in Late Thirteenth- to Fourteenth-Century Silk Patterns and Motifs,”\textit{ The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art} 74, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 5.
\textsuperscript{75} Saul, “Parchment and Tombstone,” 99.
\textsuperscript{76} Baldwin, “Textile Aesthetics in Early Netherlandish Painting,” 32.
backgrounds of the Flemish brasses and the depiction of sumptuous imported textiles in panel paintings and altarpieces produced in the Low Countries and Italy as 'cloths-of-honor' behind holy and royal personages and as clothing and furnishings. The phenomenon of representations of imported textiles in Netherlandish and Italian painting and manuscript illumination has been the focus of significant scholarly attention in recent years. The placement of richly patterned silk and velvet hangings behind a central figure directly corresponds with the relationship between the repeated motifs that appear behind the effigies of the deceased on the Flemish brasses found in England. The parallel phenomenon in monumental brasses, however, has only received passing mention. The most likely reason for this oversight is the continued dismissal of monumental brasses as minor, decorative art objects; the subject, at most, of antiquarian curiosity but not deserving of attention as art objects in their own right. Embroidered and bejeweled textile borders also adorned the pages of luxury devotional books produced in the Low Countries after the death of Mary of Burgundy up to the 1520s. These do not directly parallel the organization of the Flemish brasses, but point to a broader tradition of textiles as framing devices.

77 For an overview of the depiction of cloths-of-honor see Monnas, Merchants, Princes and Painters.
78 In addition to Monnas' book, articles by Cottrell, “Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck’s Cloths of Honor.” Trench, “Italian Silks in Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Painting.” and Baldwin, “Textile Aesthetics in Early Netherlandish Painting” among others demonstrate the widespread interest in the aesthetics of luxury cloth in European painting at the time.
79 Cameron and Denison both identify the patterned backgrounds on Flemish brasses with luxury textiles from the east, but neither make the connection to the cloth-of-honor tradition in manuscript and panel painting. See Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century School of Flemish brasses” and Dennison, “The Artistic Context of Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses.”
Cloths-of-honor in Netherlandish painting drew upon the courtly associations of exotic, luxury textiles with secular authority and kingship in order to establish the divine authority of the holy personages they framed. They signified status through the materiality of the textiles they represented and tapped into western desires for eastern commodities and the association of eastern objects with the Holy Land. Textiles were an important part of the culture of courtly display throughout Europe and the courtly associations of luxury cloth would have been legible to an English audience. Eleanor of Castile's arrival in London in the thirteenth century marked the beginning of the transmission of luxury silk hangings into English court culture and established Islamic and Byzantine silks as part of the vocabulary of prestige within an English context.\textsuperscript{81} This practice is reflected in contemporary miniature and panel paintings from Italy and the Netherlands in which artists translated textiles into painterly representations first in images of secular rulers, both contemporary and biblical, and then in images of Christ and the saints.\textsuperscript{82}

The place associations of Islamic silk textiles were not necessarily an accurate reflection of their true origin. Rather, as the cloths changed hands and the narratives associated with the place of manufacture were slowly eroded, new histories were constructed for the objects. During the Crusades Islamic silks became associated with the Holy Land. As well as traveling through gift exchange and trade, Islamic silks were

\textsuperscript{81} Anne E. Wardwell, “A Fifteenth-Century Silk Curtain from Muslim Spain,” \textit{The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art} 70, no. 2 (February 1, 1983): 58.

\textsuperscript{82} Cottrell, “Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck’s Cloths of Honor.”
taken as spoils of war in both Spain and the Holy Land. William of Tyre recorded that after the fall of Antioch 1098:

Gold and silver were taken as spoils from the enemy were brought for making candelabra, crosses, chalices, inscriptions from Holy Writ, and all other things necessary for the service of the church. Silken stuffs were also offered for priestly vestments and altar covering.  

Extant Islamic silks preserved as chasubles, altar cloths and a variety of other liturgical textiles attest to the popularity of such cloths in the Christian West following the crusades. William of Tyre’s account emphasizes the fact that such silks were consciously received as spoils of war and were threaded through with the victorious narrative of the Christian conquest of the Holy Land. As such, they functioned as a kind of secondary relic, accruing value from their contact with the holy places freed from Islamic rule by the Crusaders. In this sense, their use as altar cloths and vestments grew logically out of the processes of exchange that brought them to the West. It may also be the case that Kufic and pseudo-Kufic scripts became associated with the Holy Land, regardless of their actual place of manufacture. Snyder’s study of the mimicking of Islamic tirāz bands on twelfth century French column-figure sculptures makes a powerful case that these bands had become a symbol of the crusading warrior pilgrim. It is apparent, therefore, that it was in large part the ability of Islamic silks to evoke the Holy Land that rendered eastern textiles suitable for representation as cloths-of-honor for images of

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84 Snyder, “Cloth from the Promised Land,” 158.
saints.

The mechanisms of exchange which brought luxury textiles into the courts were fundamental to their visual function in courtly display. Textiles from the east came to western courts principally as diplomatic gifts. The products of foreign markets were prized above local objects, and those from 'Eastern' lands were accorded particularly high status.\(^\text{85}\) When publicly displayed within the court these fabrics mapped the ruler's ties to distant empires and in so doing displayed messages of the ruler's power and influence abroad.\(^\text{86}\) Precious textiles threaded with gold acted as frames for royalty in courtly presentations. They were hung behind the throne in order to elevate and separate the enthroned figure from those in attendance.\(^\text{87}\) Miniature and panel painters appropriated the function of the cloths-of-honor as a frame that establishes hierarchical relationship between viewer and viewed when they represented courtly scenes. The capacity of textile panels to designate a space set apart and elevated from the viewer, established through courtly display, was exploited in images of sacred personages. In the *Ghent Altarpiece*, for example, painted by Jan van Eyck in 1432, single fabric panels are placed behind the seated figures of the Virgin, Christ and John the Baptist. Mirroring the cloths draped behind royal thrones, the textile panels in images of Christ and the saints drew upon the courtly associations of exotic, luxury textiles with secular authority and kingship in order to establish the divine authority of the holy personages they

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\(^{85}\) Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability,” 25.

\(^{86}\) Snyder, “Cloth from the Promised Land,” 149.

\(^{87}\) Cottrell, “Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck’s Cloths of Honor,” 176.
framed. Donna M. Cottrell argues that these associations, combined with Neoplatonic theories of materiality, which ascribed divine properties to the gold and gems that sumptuous woven textiles evoke, and legends of miracle-working cloth so that luxury fabrics came to possess an innate sense of sacredness and connection to the heavenly realms. Thus, luxury textiles and representations of the same were ideally suited for framing images of Christ and the saints, particularly when we consider the function of the frame in medieval art which, as Glenn Peers argues, was to act as a threshold where the divine and human meet.

The intricate brocades represented on the Flemish brasses participate in this visual tradition, but their use as backdrops for effigies of lay merchants rather than holy saints inevitably alters their meaning. Iconographic interpretations of the patterned backgrounds identify them variously as tapestries or funeral palls. The shroud brass types explicitly reference funeral palls. Brasses memorializing Wouter Copman (c. 1387), Joris de Munter and his wife Jakemine (c. 1423), and Jacques Blandereel and his wife Baebele (c. 1451) in St Sauveur, Bruges depict the deceased wrapped in a winding cloth and laid out on an expanse of silk brocade. These brasses, however, represent a significant departure in form and conception from the canopy brasses which make up the majority of the corpus. There are close visual parallels between the composition of the funerary brasses and monumental tomb sculpture of the same period. On examples of late medieval table tombs, carved effigies of the deceased, regaled in finery, often

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88 Ibid.
rested on embroidered cushions and swathes of brocaded cloth with hands clasped together in prayer. Gothic arcades around the base of the tomb enclose mourners and saints and provide a structure for the display of coats of arms. In these courtly and ecclesiastical examples, the luxury textiles could be construed as bedclothes on which the body was laid out in state for public viewing. The monumental brasses transpose the constituent elements of sculpted tombs into a two dimensional form by transforming the arcaded base into an architectonic frame. It is not unlikely that a wealthy mercantile parish, particularly one associated with a powerful religious or trade gild, would have owned a funeral pall of luxury imported silk. Magnificent examples of opulent funeral palls donated by wealthy merchants for collective use by members of their religious fraternity are extant in a number of parish churches in England. Henry Fayrey donated a funerary cloth constructed of Florentine cloth-of-gold with side panels of embroidered opus anglicanum to the guild of St John the Baptist in Dunstable, Bedfordshire around 1516. Its undulating pattern of large-scale pomegranates in crimson and silver has close visual affinities with the patterns found on monumental brasses. Problems arise, however, when we position the brass as a realistic document of late medieval funerary practices. Not least of these is the fact that at no point during the funeral and burial

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90 Erwin Panofsky argues that monumental brasses drew as much from funerary sculpture as incised slabs. The compositions were linear or graphic abstractions of three dimensional effigies which incorporated the architectural framework for the raised effigy in planimetric projection. See Tomb Sculpture, 53.

91 Marks and Williamson, Gothic, cat. no. 349.

92 This is a problem pointed out by Sarah Schell in her discussion of representations of funerals in English Books of Hours. While she asserts that these images do, indeed, reflect contemporary funerary rites they do not depict someone's funeral but rather incorporate details of funerals such as pall cloths, hearse and candles in order to present the components of the ideal funeral as a space to demonstrate the social ordering of society. It is
rites would the body of the deceased have been displayed in this way. The body of the
deceased was wrapped in a winding cloth, the cross placed between his or hands, and
the body transferred into a coffin before it was processed through the town to its final
resting place. Once inside the church the coffin was placed in a bier before the altar and
covered with the funerary pall.

By the early sixteenth century the patterned background had transformed from a
funerary pall into a hanging tapestry as in the example of the brass memorializing the
Merchant Adventurer, Thomas Pownder, his wife, Emme and their sons and daughters.
A damask with a tasseled lower edge hangs between two classical columns behind the
standing figures of Thomas and Emme. This reorientation of the relationship between
figural forms and architectural framework coincided with the shift from floor to mural
installation. Rather than flattening out the sculpted elements of a raised tomb, the
architectural forms on the Pownder brass project a fictive space behind the surface of
the brass in which the members of the Pownder family are arrayed as if in life. The
figures clasp their hands in prayer and their open eyes gaze at one another. At their feet
their six daughters and two sons kneel in prayer. Rosary beads strung from the waists of
Emme and her eldest daughter and the fashionable but simple attire of family carefully
construct an image of the Pownders as pious members of the urban elite. Together these

essential, therefore, to understand these images as ideological rather than documents of reality. See Sarah Schell,
“Death and Disruption: Social Identity and Representation in the Medieval English Funeral,” in Art and Identity:
Visual Culture, Politics and Religion in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ed. Sandra Cardarelli, Emily Jane
93 Brass described in Malcolm Norris, Monumental Brasses: The Memorials (London: Faber and Faber, 1978),
elements signal the shift in Western funerary art from the existential confusion of earlier decades with effigies poised between life and death to the retrospective mode that would dominate commemorative art during the early modern period. The costly fabrics do not serve to elevate the individual they frame to the status of a saint or secular ruler. Rather, they designate a space that is hierarchically distinct from the space of the viewer. Combined with the manipulation of spatial and perspectival elements on the brass, the textiles draped behind the merchants' effigies create the sense of the deceased hovering between the realm of the beholder and a realm beyond the picture plane of the brass, hinted at by the architectural structure that beckons the viewer into the space beneath its arches, but veiled from sight by the brocade the hangs just at the threshold the Gothic tracery creates. The sense that the deceased is betwixt and between the two worlds is heightened by the treatment of the effigial figure. There is a stark contrast between the linear, almost calligraphic treatment of the drapery folds of the deceased's clothing and the dense, verdant arabesques of the background. Mediating between the two zones are the brocade trims incorporated into the clothing of the effigies that echo the sumptuous fabric hung behind the effigy.

The treatment of compositional elements and illusionistic space in the Flemish brasses highlights the liminal function of the brocade backgrounds. The Gothic canopies and shafts that frame the central effigial figures of the brasses and provide niches for the secondary figures of saints, prophets and weepers create a sense of illusionistic space

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94 Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture.*
receding from the viewer. Starting with Alan Fleming's brass, the artists of the Flemish workshop demonstrate an increased interest in creating a sense of depth in their treatment of the architectural forms, with vaulted canopies and molded niches.\textsuperscript{95} The treatment of the canopied frame is in marked contrast to simple, two-dimensional canopies and strong emphasis on line characteristic of local monumental brass workshops. The gabled forms project out in relief from the background on Flemish brasses and the niches and canopies are tipped upward to reveal groined, star-studded vaults.\textsuperscript{96} Recent art historical discussion has drawn attention to the signifying function of frames, previously overlooked as largely decorative. Glenn Peers contrasted the medieval frame to the modern frame. Where the modern frame asserts the art work's status as illusion, distinct from the reality of the viewer, the medieval frame is "a threshold where human and divine meet."\textsuperscript{97}

Within the space of the late medieval English parish church, these architectural frames of the Flemish brasses bore a close affinity to the rood screens that divided the chancel from the nave. These wooden or stone partitions were generally solid up to waist height and then pierced with squints to allow the laity to see to the liturgical rites celebrated in the chancel. A doorway in the center of the partition gave the clergy access between the chancel and nave.\textsuperscript{98} Above the doorway the Crucifixion, flanked by the figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist provided the focal point of the

\textsuperscript{95} Dennison, “The Artistic Context of Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses,” 3.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Peers, \textit{Sacred Shock}, 132–133.
\textsuperscript{98} Duffy, “The Parish, Piety and Patronage in Late Medieval East Anglia,” 136.
rood screen. Many rood screens also included multiple images of saints below the crucifixion. Eamon Duffy notes that the hierarchical arrangement Christ and the saints positioned the saints as intercessors mediating between the people on earth and Christ in heaven.\textsuperscript{99} Until recently, the rood screen and the choir screen, marking the dividing line between clerical and lay spaces within the church, have been interpreted as evidence of the non-participatory nature of pre-Reformation Catholicism in England.\textsuperscript{100} Jacqueline Jung’s work on the Gothic choir screen has questioned these assumptions and emphasized the complexity of screens as architectural structures fraught with paradox. She argues that choir screens fulfilled a variety of incorporative functions. As much as they asserted the spatial integrity of the choir and nave as separate units, elements such as doors also united the two spaces. Marking the liminal zone between nave and chancel they represented "highly charged site[s] of transition and passage."\textsuperscript{101}

The connection between the architectural frames of the Flemish brasses and the rood screen is most apparent in the case of the brasses commemorating Adam de Walsoken, in Lynn and Roger Thornton in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, whose niches contain images of saints and prophets. Both the composition of the brasses, with multiple saints contained within niches in an architectonic structure, and the selection of particular saints on these two brasses closely parallels the structure of the late medieval rood screen. On both brasses, apostles and prophets are joined by saints who were the focus

\textsuperscript{99} Duffy, \textit{The Stripping of the Altars}, 158.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 110.
of local or personal devotion. It is important to note that Jeffrey Hamburger, in his discussion of the use architectural frames in English miniature painting, notes that their ubiquity in Gothic architecture limits our ability to assign any specific meaning to them or to associate them with particular architectural settings.\textsuperscript{102}

The nature of these archways as thresholds between this world and the next is heightened by the ambiguous treatment of the figures of the deceased which appear poised betwixt life and death. They are laid out as if on a bier, yet their eyes are open, their gazes meeting that of the viewer. Bearing in mind Hamburger's caution against over interpreting architectural frames, a case can still be made that the rood screen, as the "most important single focus of imagery in the people's part of the church"\textsuperscript{103} and with its iconographic and structural affinities to the Flemish brasses shaped viewers expectations and responses to these monuments. Building upon recent scholarship by The architectural frames of the Flemish brasses, when viewed within the space of English parish churches, visually evoked the rood screen in ways that established the brass likewise as a site of mediation and intercession. In so doing, they facilitated the chains of intercession linking the living, the dead and saints in heaven. Further, the brasses positioned the deceased in a moment of transition between life and death, between secular and sacred space, and between this world and the next. By representing the deceased framed within a hierarchical scheme of intercessors at a critical liminal moment, the brasses placed the deceased within the network of earthly and heavenly

\textsuperscript{102} Hamburger, “The Medieval Work of Art,” 308.
\textsuperscript{103} Duffy, “The Parish, Piety and Patronage in Late Medieval East Anglia,” 136.
mediators charged with ensuring their safe passage from earthly to eternal life.

The plasticity of the border combined with its allusions to liminal sites like the rood screen invites the beholder in to the image, through the opening created beneath the vaulting, but the cloth suspended between the shafts prevents us seeing in to the imagined space behind toward which architectural border gestures. The textile thus functions as veil, occluding our vision of what lies beyond. The effigy of the deceased is caught in the narrow space carved out by the architectural canopy and suspended betwixt the world of the beholder and the world beyond. The celestial associations of Eastern silks suggest that the world behind the richly patterned silk is the heavenly realm of the saints to which the deceased aspires. The textile, far from being merely decorative, expresses through the materiality of the cloth the intertwined emotions of hope and anxiety that defined late medieval beliefs about the afterlife. One the one hand, it alludes to the eternal reward that awaits the penitent Christian. On the other hand, by truncating the receding space the artist leaves the deceased poised between earth and heaven in such a way as to visually highlight the precarious position of the dead who rely on the intercessions of the living to speed their journey through purgatory and on to their ultimate reward.
Chapter Five

Gift, Commodity, Currency: Exchanging Material Wealth for Spiritual Riches

Networks of Trade

The capacity of eastern textiles to evoke the saintly protectors as part of a broader soteriological message about the hopes of the deceased for admittance in to the heavenly realms and the need for viewers to participate in an economy of salvation between the living, the dead and the saints in heaven was dependent upon a tradition of depicting luxury silks within the context of courtly mechanisms of gift exchange. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the last decade has produced fruitful scholarship within the field of art history on the transmission of luxury, portable objects across political, religious and ethnic boundaries through processes of gift exchange, particularly in a courtly *milieu*. These studies provide valuable insights into the complex negotiations of power mediated through objects in acts of gift exchange. While the association of the richly patterned backgrounds on the Flemish brasses with a broader visual culture that associated eastern textiles with sacredness and saintliness is an important facet of this element of the memorials, it is critical that we turn attention to the other meanings layered through the representation of eastern textiles that may be overlooked within a discussion that focuses largely on gift-exchange within courtly circles at the expense of considering the ways in which other modes of circulation shaped the reception of luxury cloth in the late Middle Ages. Most important to note is the fact that while courtly practices of exchange and display were central to the establishment of the cloth-of-
honor tradition in Italian and northern European painting, the Flemish brasses adapted this tradition for merchant class patrons. Imported textiles held specific resonance for merchants as commodities that were central to their commercial activities. To a mercantile audience the geographies of overseas trade—evident in these art objects both as products of the Flemish market, and in the eastern textiles depicted therein—would have been legible in specific ways that shaped their patronage of and responses to the memorials. Patrons who commissioned and imported Flemish brasses into England did so within a cultural and economic landscape that was undergoing radical change. Previously long distance exchange, particularly of luxury goods, was primarily transacted through mechanisms of gift exchange. However, during the late Middle Ages Western Europe saw a rapid scaling up of long distance mercantile trade and with it, then development of new economic infrastructures and social networks necessary for carrying out overseas trade on a large scale. These economic developments along with new methods of artistic production and distribution opened up the market in memorial objects to the newly wealthy merchant class. Wool merchants, as we have seen, became frequent patrons of funerary art that had previously only been within reach of the aristocracy. Within this social and economic context, it is essential to explore how the reception of imported brasses was shaped not only by their function within networks of gift-exchange but also their circulation through commercial networks.

Drawing on anthropological models of gift exchange which emphasize the reciprocal bonds created between giver and receiver through acts of gift giving, art historians have argued gift exchange inflected objects with social significances in ways
that commercial exchange did not. However, such models which construe commerce as neutral, in binary opposition to gift exchange, overlook the way in which commercial exchange was similarly embedded in and productive of social and devotional relationships. In these discussions, commercial exchange stands as the largely unexamined counter-point to gift giving. Patrick Geary, in his influential work on the circulation of sacred objects, argues that the act of gift exchange inflected objects in specific ways that commercial exchange did not. Where the goal of commerce was the acquisition of commodities, the goal of gift-giving was to establish bonds between giver and receiver that had to be reaffirmed by counter-gift.¹ According to anthropological models of circulation the key difference between gift giving and commercial exchange lies in the capacity of the gift to establish ongoing an ongoing obligation to provide a counter-gift which, in turn, creates a persisting tie between giver and receiver. The paradox, or "enigma," at the heart of the gift is the fact that the debt created by a gift is not canceled or erased by an identical counter-gift because the gift is, in some way, identical with the giver, and can therefore never be totally alienated by the giver.² In contrast, at the completion of a commercial transaction each party owns what he or she has bought or traded. It has been fully alienated from its original owner and, as no lasting debt exists between seller and buyer, the exchange created no lasting relationship of obligation. Godelier argues that even in the case where the buyer purchases a commodity using credit, he or she does so on the assumption that the

commodity is, in theory, completely alienable. As soon as the debt is paid the buyer is no longer entangled in a relationship with the seller.³

Fundamental differences exist between gift giving and commercial exchange in terms of the capacity of individual transactions to create ongoing relationships between giver and receiver. However, mechanisms and networks of commercial exchange did inflect objects with social significances that tend to be overlooked if we consider the biography of the thing only from the narrow perspective of individual transactions. Anthony Cutler's work on gift exchange in the Byzantine world avoids drawing a sharp line between gift giving and commercial exchange. Rather he rather sees the two modes of circulation as deeply intertwined, noting the involvement of merchants in processes of gift exchange and the ways in which gifts and commodities both responded to economics of supply and demand.⁴ Returning to Kopytoff's insight into the key role played in the cultural biography of things by shifts between commodity and singularity, it essential to turn our attention to the way in which merchants, and the objects whose movement they facilitated, operated betwixt and between multiple modes of being and circulation and how these ambiguities played into mercantile strategies of commemoration.

The patrons of the Flemish brasses made conscious choices to source the memorials from the same markets in the Low Countries with which the deceased would

³ Ibid., 43.
have had commercial dealings during his life. The deceased, or the executors of his will, transported the brass to England via the same routes that had circulated his goods that he traded. Certainly, a part of the reason for the preponderance of merchants who patronized Flemish monumental brasses was simply access to markets and familiarity with the products of these markets through the merchants' trade activities in the Low Countries. The Flemish brasses crossed boundaries, both real and metaphorical. They traveled across the sea to English parishes via the trade routes that connected England and northern Europe. Their decorative schemes juxtaposed eastern and western visual traditions. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the merchants who commissioned these brasses, whose professional lives were likewise characterized by a capacity for crossing geographical and cultural boundaries, were drawn to these magnificent objects. The narrative of these objects and their patrons is a prime example of what David Abulafia has described as "decentered history." The merchant, in Abulafia's examination of Mediterranean history, in the process of traveling in search of commodities unavailable locally and global markets for commodities produced at home, crossed boundaries to emerge with an identity shaped by encounters with foreign ideas, beliefs and cultures.  

It is my contention that the choice to perpetuate their memories through an imported Flemish brass that incorporated motifs derived from commodities originating even further afield speaks to a desire to capture the complexity of the decentered mercantile identity. We see in the Flemish brasses, as in the lives of the merchants commemorated

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by them, the converging lines of local and global networks and identities.

The *function* of the monumental brass as a tangible supplication for intercession on behalf of the departed soul is key to unpacking the significance of commercial exchange in the reception of the Flemish brasses.\(^6\) There were two, intersecting communities who bore responsibility for the care of the souls of the deceased represented on the brasses at King's Lynn. Through a combination of textual inscriptions and visual forms the brass communicated appeals for prayers and masses to the members of merchants' local parish, both lay and clerical, and mediated relationships with an international community of merchants. One of the more obvious way in which brasses appealed to a specifically mercantile audience was through merchants' marks. The Walsoken brass incorporates a shield with his merchant mark - the letter 'A,' surmounted by a cross and surrounded by six cinquefoils - beneath the feet of Adam Walsoken.\(^7\) The Fleming brass in Newark-on-Trent likewise includes the brass of Alan Fleming, placed on the shaft between the figures of Fleming and his wife.\(^8\) These marks were used to designate goods belonging to particular merchants when they were transported for trade. Nigel Saul has documented the widespread practice of using merchants' marks on funerary monuments in a similar fashion to aristocratic coats of arms, as signifiers of identity, among wool merchants in England.\(^9\)

More subtle were the formal qualities that set the Flemish brasses apart from

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\(^7\) Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses at King’s Lynn,” 157.


\(^9\) Saul, “The Wool Merchants and Their Brasses.”
local brasses and identified the deceased with a foreign market that played a pivotal role in their commercial activities during their life. To a mercantile audience the geographical origin of the object would have been legible in specific ways that shaped their response to the brass. The distinctive stylistic forms of the brass tied it to similar monuments that were scattered in merchant's churches throughout Western Europe. The manipulation of spatial effects used to structure relationships between the living, the dead and the saints in heaven, discussed above, stood in marked contrast to the compositional techniques displayed on brasses produced in English workshops. Where the Flemish brasses' all-over engraving technique created dense, patterned backgrounds, brasses produced in local workshops employed a cut-out method. The formal differences between the Flemish and English brasses, when considered side-by-side within the space of the parish church served to heighten the sense of an individual set apart. Where the plasticity of the architectural canopy contains the deceased within a pictorial plane that was separated from the larger parish space through the use of illusionistic space, the stones of the church structure, itself, form the backdrop to English monumental brasses, serving to incorporate the deceased visually into the congregation of parishioners, even in death. In this way the funerary monuments of the congregation reproduced the hierarchies in play in the broader social sphere, within the space of the church. Both as luxury products of foreign markets, and through the formal qualities of the memorials, the Flemish brasses clearly differentiated the wool merchant from other individuals memorialized within the space of the church as wealthy members of the urban oligarchy. The two groups of spectators, merchants and local parishioners,
would have interpreted these visual distinctions according to the kinds of everyday and commemorative relationships that were established within these networks of associations.

When we look at the broader social and economic context, and at the networks of exchange that stretched from England to northern Europe and to the Mediterranean beyond, it is clear that at this stage in the development of early capitalism the establishment of relationships and reputations was fundamental to a merchant’s ability to do business and establish credit. Moreover, a merchant's network of commercial associates formed an extended kin group that took over from local networks of family and parish the responsibility of making provisions for the body and soul of their colleagues after death. Precious, foreign textiles – produced in restricted ateliers, exchanged as high-status gifts, and displayed in courtly ceremonial as robes and cloths of honor - were embedded within the networks of diplomacy that circulated luxury portable items between courts. Rulers deployed them within courtly contexts precisely because of their legibility as products of foreign markets and restricted routes of circulation. They displayed the recipient's imperial reach and influence by speaking to ties to far-flung lands and powerful leaders.

With the shift in the production of silk to the West and the increasing availability of luxury silks to the wealthy bourgeoisie, came an end to the era of pan-Mediterranean silken hierarchies of the courts, tightly controlled by ruling elites. Nonetheless, Eastern-style silks continued to be prized and retained the resonances of courtly luxury and exotic cachet. The merchants' brasses drew upon this rich history and the new
mechanisms by which silk was exchanged in order to point to the patron's commercial reach by deploying similar visual strategies to those seen orchestrated in the centuries prior at the courts. In order to understand how the Flemish memorial brasses functioned as objects with the capacity to mediate relationships within merchants' commercial network it is important to underline the fact that commercial networks were not simply mechanisms of economic exchange, but were also conduits for social, cultural and religious interchange between an international community of merchants.

There were originally at least three imported brasses installed in St Margaret's church, King's Lynn. They commemorated Adam Walsoken and his wife Margaret, Robert Braunche and his wives Letitia and Margaret, and Robert Attelath and his wife Joanna, all Hansa merchants. The Walsoken and Braunche brasses were installed in the choir of St Margaret's. Attelath's was placed in the Trinity Guild chapel.\textsuperscript{10} Attelath's monument is now known only through a partial rubbing of the effigy of the deceased. Based on this fragmentary rubbing it is possible to identify the brass as a product of the same workshop in the Low Countries as produced the other brasses in this chapter.\textsuperscript{11} Another mercantile brass installed in the chapel of St Nicholas in the same city commemorating William Bittering and his wife Joanna is known only through descriptions in antiquarian source. Benjamin Mackerell's \textit{History and Antiquities} describes the Bittering brass:

"Tis 10 feet-inches long and 6 feet - inches broad, all cover'd with brass plates finely engraven with ye effigies of the person and his consort interred in the middel at full length, embellished with figures of ye 12 apostles and many other saints etc. Adorned likewise with artful decorations round ye verge where see also ye same - the like is in a south window just near it, and under their feet is a hexatick of monkish Rhythiming verses for ye epitaph, intimating their qualifications and distinctions, etc.\textsuperscript{12}

Based on this description alone, which suggests a similar scale, all-over engraving technique and iconographic scheme to the other brasses discussed in this chapter, it is likely that this brass was also of Flemish origin. The extant and conjectured Flemish brasses in the churches of Lynn, speak to a pattern of mercantile patronage of imported memorials which is noteworthy in a town known for its close affiliations with the Low Countries through the involvement of its wealthiest citizens in the Hanseatic League.

Both Adam Walsoken and Robert Braunch maintained strong ties to the Low Countries during their careers. Adam Walsoken was a highly successful wool merchant with tax returns in 1332 placing him as the wealthiest citizen in Lynn. His influence and standing in the overseas trade saw him serve as collector of royal wool taxes in 1338 and collector of national wool customs in 1340. Robert Braunch belonged to a later generation of merchants, though he would have known Walsoken. Records show he was admitted to the Merchants' Guild in 1328 and carried out regular trade with the Low Countries in cloth and other commodities.\textsuperscript{13}

For a mobile community that was frequently abroad, the merchant's commercial

\textsuperscript{12} Benjamin Mackerell, \textit{The History and Antiquities of the Flourishing Corporation of King's Lynn in the County of Norfolk} (London: E. Cave, 1738), 133–4.

\textsuperscript{13} Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses at King’s Lynn.”
associates formed an extended kin group that took on the responsibility of making provisions for the body and soul of their colleagues after death. Although most of the merchants commemorated on the Flemish brasses were English-born and buried within their parish communities within England, by sourcing their memorial brasses from a specific foreign market they maintained his ties to a mercantile community that was equally responsible for interceding on their behalf after death. Thus, for merchants, commercial networks were not based on relationships of neutrality. Indeed, one of the factors that contributed to the enormous success of cities like Bruges as international marketplaces was the establishment of institutions that organized merchants and conditioned their trading and social contacts, including religious institutions such as parish churches and charitable institutions.14 These institutions became increasingly important as trading centers established core groups of alien merchants who remained in foreign cities on a semi-permanent or permanent basis and acted as market makers for other merchant. Alan Fleming, as his name suggests, is one such merchant who established himself abroad. He was probably among the Flemish immigrant weavers invited to England by Edward III in 1332 who went on to establish themselves as successful merchants. The motivations underlying his choice of an imported memorial from the Low Countries were probably, therefore, slightly different to those of the English-born patrons of the other Flemish brasses. It served as a link to his place of birth in death, even as he ensured that he also established perpetual ties to the networks

of kinship, business and amity in his new home. He established a chantry in 1349, the
details of which demonstrate the overlap between networks of trade and networks of
commemoration.\textsuperscript{15} The chantry certificate makes provision for a perpetual chaplain at
the altar of Corpus Christi in the parish church of Newark to celebrate at that altar for
'Alan Flemyng of Newerk, Alice his wife, Master Simon de Bekyngham, Robert de
Caldewell, and the sons and daughters of the same Alan and Alice and Robert and all
their other ancestors.'\textsuperscript{16} In the absence of immediate kin, Fleming turned to his
commercial associates with whom he would be commemorated in perpetuity.

Even for those who traveled abroad but maintained a permanent base at home
and were buried within their local parish, commercial ties played a significant role. Saul
describes the close-knit communities of wool merchants in late medieval England who
were linked by business ties, intermarried and served one another as executors of wills.\textsuperscript{17}
There were also formal organizations within the mercantile community, in the form of
religious guilds, specifically established to make provisions for funeral processions,
masses and commemorative prayers. Robert Attelath appealed directly to the Trinity
Guild of Lynn by requesting his brass be installed in the chapel set aside for the
exclusive use of the Guild in St Margaret's church.\textsuperscript{18} Though all those apart from
Fleming who were commemorated by Flemish brasses were English rather than alien
merchants, it is important to consider the role of migration patterns in shaping

\textsuperscript{15} Cameron, “Flemish Brasses to Civilians in England,” 425.
\textsuperscript{16} Cal. Pat. 1448-50, 289. Quoted in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Saul, “The Wool Merchants and Their Brasses,” 322.
\textsuperscript{18} Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses at King’s Lynn,” 162.
commemorative networks. Roger Thornton's family had been in Newcastle-upon-Tyne only one generation. His father, John, according to legend, arriving in the mid fourteenth century with "a hap, and a halfpenny and a lamb's skin" before rising in wealth and influence and becoming one of the most generous benefactors of the city. In Lynn, Adam de Walsoken was likewise a relative newcomer. His name suggests that he came to Lynn from the village of Walsoken, ten miles southwest of Lynn and archival sources are silent on any ancestors residing in the town prior to Adam de Walsoken's arrival. Regional migration from rural to urban centers in search of work was a feature of late medieval life and scholars have long recognized the substantial demographic, social and cultural shifts that accompanied the movement of people away from their ancestral communities which traditionally prayed for the souls of the dead.

The products of foreign markets, both real and represented, featured heavily in the gifts and artistic commissions of merchants in England and the representation of Islamic and Byzantine textiles on Flemish brasses should be situated within these wider strategies for displaying mercantile connections to foreign markets. Merchants involved in the cloth trade made explicit references to luxury textiles in their wills that drew attention to the markets from which they were purchased. Thus, material objects given to the church as gifts or memorials construct a map that illustrates the interconnections between merchants’ commercial and commemorative networks. Kathleen Ashley's

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20 Notably, Jacques Chiffoleau examined the processes of urbanization, commercialization and migration that uprooted the individual from families, neighbors and lineages and the impact of these developments on the ways in which the dead were commemorated in late medieval Europe in La Comptabilité de L’au-Delà. Les Hommes, La Mort et La Religion Dans La Région d’Avignon à La Fin Du Moyen Age (vers 1320-Vers 1480).
survey of references to clothing in wills from London, Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge and Burgundy notes that middle and upper class wills often drew attention to the foreign origin of clothing to be given after the testator's decease. She argues that gifts of clothing in pre-modern wills tend to elide clear distinctions between 'gift' and commodity.' As gifts clothing carried cultural codes and involved ritual performances. At the same time, the ability to communicate the social status of the giver depended upon the status of the clothing, prior to its transformation into a gift, as a luxury commodity with a high market value. A few, illustrative examples drawn from the wills of northern English merchants involved in the wool and cloth trade demonstrate similar patterns of gift giving. Richard Russell, citizen and merchant of York, left an extensive array of vestments to the parish church of St John the Baptist in Hundgate in his will dated December 1, 1435. Among them were two tunics of black Arras dusted with Lucca gold and a set of black vestments with red and gold from Cyprus. The material gifts thus created permanent links between the merchant, those entrusted with his memory and the luxury cloth markets of France and the Mediterranean. A number of wills specify that artistic works are to be purchased from abroad and gifted to the church. Thomas Dalton, a merchant from Hull, requested in 1457 that his executors obtain a "tabull bought behond the see" to be installed the Lady Altar in Trinity Church in memory of his brother John and another table of "behond-see" work for himself to be

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21 Ashley, “Material and Symbolic Gift-Giving: Clothes in English and French Wills,” 144.
22 Ibid., 139–140.
set at the Corpus Christi altar. Robert Herryson, also from Hull, followed suit in 1520, making provision for "a table of overse worke" for the chapel of Corpus Christi and specifying that "the story be of Corpus Christi." At the same time as he established a permanent, visible link to overseas markets within the space of his parish church in England, he also left money to be used to purchase a vestment in the chapel of the Merchants Staplers in the church of Our Lady at Calais. Like the patrons of the Flemish brasses, Dalton and Herryson were anxious to display their access to overseas markets in their provisions for death and specified imported goods that were to be purchased and then given to the church in their memory. Herryson's provision for gifts to be given to the Staple chapel, the center of religious life for English merchants doing business in Calais, illustrates the way in which commercial and commemorative networks intersected and the role played by material gifts in establishing connections between these networks. Merchants obtained monumental brasses, painted panels and luxury textiles at considerable cost not merely as signifiers of individual wealth and status, as scholars have commonly argued, but, more importantly, as a way to maintain the ties that bound together merchants in such a way that went beyond commercial expediency to encompass the relationships of mutual obligation that were previously the domain of kin and local community.

The above examples drawn from merchants' wills expose precisely those moments when money and commodities were transformed into gifts. As Kopytoff

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24 Test. Ebor. IV
25 North Country Wills, 98-99
describes it, they point to the central drama of the biography of things in that they describe the reclassification of commodity as singular gift.\textsuperscript{26} These transformations of worldly wealth, in the form of both money and commodities, into gifts necessarily center upon the moment of death. Late medieval didactic literature abounds in admonishments against the sins of covetousness often aimed directly toward the figure of the merchant. The \textit{Disce mori} urges the reader to guard against the sin covetousness by "think[ing] busily on his death...Consider the sepulchres rich and poor, and what they that lie in them were sometime and what now profited them their riches and the vanity of the world that they hunted so busily."\textsuperscript{27} As I outlined in Chapter One, mercantile strategies of commemoration operated within the framework of the late medieval “spiritual economy” in which material objects, prayers and masses circulated between the living and the dead. Through their gifts, merchants were able to transform commercial wealth, still viewed with suspicion because of its association with usury, into gifts that accrued spiritual merit. What the preoccupation with imported luxury commodities in wills, and the representation of foreign silks on merchants' memorials shows is that in the transformation of worldly wealth into spiritual merit, the accretions of meaning derived from the circulation of goods in commercial networks that stretched from England, to northern Europe and to the Mediterranean did not evaporate but were central to the function of material objects as part of the mercantile class's strategies of

\textsuperscript{26} Kopytoff, “Cultural Biography of Things,” 90.
commemoration.

The Currency of Death

Among the luxury objects circulating through the Mediterranean and Western Europe silk stands apart as a peculiar substance capable of negotiating a multiple social and economic relationships. It crossed readily between Christian and Muslim, secular and ecclesiastical spheres, and members of different social classes and functioned as a highly malleable form of social and cultural currency.\(^{28}\) As it traced new paths of circulation it shifted back and forth between commodity and gift as it was bought, exchanged, stolen, reused and recirculated. Fabrics like cloth-of-gold carried such wealth in the delicate strands of gold and silver wire wrapped around their silk threads their owners could and often did transmute them into currency, especially during the various bullion crises of the late middle ages.\(^ {29}\) This potentiality to materialize different kinds of value was central to signifying capacity of silk patterns. Though textiles were commensurate with specific values of coinage and functioned as if they were currency, the materiality of the silk imbued transactions with layers of meaning rarely


acknowledged in economic analyses of currency. As Rosalind Jones points out:

"Payment [was] made not only in the "neutral" currency of money but also in material which is richly absorbent of symbolic meaning and in which memories and social relations are literally embodied."

But what did all this mean on a merchant's funerary brass? What was it about the polysemic potential of silk textiles that made them subjects for a funerary brass designed to preserve the memory of merchants after their death? And what role did "indeterminate exoticism" of form play in the practices of death and commemoration that surrounded the late medieval funerary monument? It must be emphasized that late medieval memorial objects were conceived of as utilitarian objects. They were sites of transaction between the living and the dead. The Flemish brasses evoked the memory of the dead in order to prompt the viewer to offer prayers for the safe passage of the soul through purgatory. The funerary monument also stood at the center of a web of gifts to the church, kin, friends and business associates. Spurred by a desire to shorten their time in purgatory, late medieval Christians converted their wealth, through acts of

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30 Richard Seaford, for example, characterizes coinage as a system of exchange diametrically opposed to aristocratic gift giving. He argues that money meets social obligations in an impersonal manner and this impersonality of currency derives in large part from the fact that in order for coins to function as quantifiable measures of value they must be identical in both material and appearance. See Richard Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Although the neutrality of serialized coinage is often taken as a given, a number of scholars have recently challenged this assumption. Chris Gosden presents a process that in many ways mirrors the transformation of silk from gift or commodity into currency in the case of high value coins produced serially in the late Iron age to early Roman age which facilitated socially charged interchanges with spiritual powers based upon the ethic of reciprocity. See Gosden, “Technologies of Routine and Enchantment,” in *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell*, ed. Lisa Chua and Mark Elliott (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 53.

posthumous gift giving, into masses, indulgences and intercessory prayers.\textsuperscript{32} Wills of this period perform a careful calculus, specifying so many candles to be lit, so many prayers to be offered and so many masses to be said in return for the gifts to the church of textiles, personal effects and money. It was the capacity of silk to parse different kinds of value that made it an ideal subject of representation within this late medieval economy of salvation. The lavish display of luxury cloth was not simply a visible sign of wealth and status, but pointed to the \textit{largesse} of the deceased and operated within the logic of gift exchange in which gifts from the deceased were implicitly understood to prompt reciprocal counter-gifts in the form of intercessory prayers and masses from the living.

George Bataille's notion of value is central to understanding relationship between Flemish brasses incorporating luxury, exotic textiles and the complex calculus of spiritual merit performed in preparation for death. Georges Bataille introduces the term expenditure to designate those goods that fall outside the realm of classical utility. Luxury, mourning, sumptuary display and spectacle, among other categories, can all be classified as being in excess of the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and continuation of productive activity. Contrary to classical models of consumption, these forms of apparently "unnecessary" expenditure perform a critical social function in constructing nobility, rank and honor within a social hierarchy. Social rank in pre-modern and early modern society was linked to the possession of a fortune, but only on

the condition that the fortune be partially sacrificed in unproductive social expenditures.\textsuperscript{33} Moreover, luxury objects, by materializing immaterial social capital symbolized the social network of the elites.\textsuperscript{34} It is my contention that the indeterminacy of silk textiles, both in terms of a deliberate stylistic exoticism that cannot be localized and in terms of the capacity of silk to shift between commodity, gift and currency, is critical to the function of Flemish brasses as funerary monuments. This function, in turn, is directly linked to Bataille's argument that unproductive expenditure was both a social good and an obligation of the nobility. This facet of late medieval social life is overlooked in interpretations of monumental Flemish brasses that position the lavish displays of luxury cloth as evidence of the patrons' self-aggrandizing preoccupation with social status and wealth antithetical to the religious function of funerary art. Anthony Cutler has challenged similar dismissals of luxury in Byzantine art as mere empty display, arguing that scholars have overlooked the close relationships between consumption and devotion.\textsuperscript{35} Consumption, he argues, was "driven by calculated and reciprocal interests in one's earthly station and heavenly aspiration."

Silks did not merely designate wealth, but wealth properly converted into spiritual merit. The luxury brocades and embroidered cloths represented on the


\textsuperscript{34} Wim De Clerq, Jan Dumolyn, and Jelle Haemers, “‘Vivre Noblement’: Material Culture and Elite Identity in Late Medieval Flanders,” The Journal of Interdisciplinary History 38, no. 1 (2007): 28.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 324.
memorial brasses invoke a major category of gifts bequeathed by all strata of late medieval society. Members of the late medieval elites, including wealthy merchants, who had access to imported textiles and clothing frequently left these items to the church to be repurposed as vestments, altar cloths, relic wrappings and shrouds for sacred images. Motifs and patterns evocative of luxury textiles thus stood as a metonym for the host of charitable bequests documented in the last will and testament that transformed material wealth gained through commercial success into spiritual credit which in turn demanded the counter-gifts securing the deceased's safe passage through the afterlife. Representing a category of things that could be transmuted from commodity, to gift, to currency, the patterned backgrounds point to processes of value conversion. Together with the other iconographic, textual and symbolic elements of the composition, the representations of silk constituted the memorial as a kind of spiritual contract documenting the transferal of material wealth into spiritual credit. Inscriptions around the border of each of the brasses frequently reference noteworthy acts of generosity such as contributions to the rebuilding of a church. The polysemic symbol of the textile backdrop implicated the late medieval spectator in the logic of gift and counter-gift by calling to mind the value of the deceased's sumptuary expenditure which demanded of the spectator counter-gifts to secure his or her salvation.

These practices of converting wealth into social and spiritual capital were common to the emerging mercantile elites and urban oligarchs and to the established orders of nobility. Martin Addison Amos argues that the unprecedented wealth and financial power the cloth trade brought to the merchants of fifteenth century London
challenged the capacity of the aristocracy to distinguish themselves symbolically from the emerging elites. "Issues of class image and individual status were foregrounded as each of the groups inhabiting the interlocking social sphere of London's urban patriciate was engaged in a struggle to define and reify its elite class identity." Though illuminating, they do not, by themselves, explain the striking number of wool and cloth merchants who chose to safeguard their memory in perpetuity by purchasing and erecting a memorial brass incorporating representations of luxury textiles. I would like to suggest a particularly mercantile sensibility at play explaining the appeal of these monuments to cloth and wool merchants. The prospect of death while far from home and from the ties of kin and parish traditionally relied upon for intercession weighed heavily upon late medieval merchants. Merchants needed to find ways to signal their good reputation and social standing in a manner legible across language and cultural boundaries. As merchants increasingly divided cargo amongst multiple ships in order to reduce the overall risk to their business they also needed to develop techniques for projecting key indicators of identity over distances of space and time. The primary marker of identity in business transactions was the merchant's mark. Wool and cloth merchants affixed their mark to bales of wool and bolts of cloth as a guarantee of the quality of goods and to identify their goods in mixed shipments for accounting at the receiving end. In this way the merchant's mark functioned similarly to the seal as a strategy of deferred representation operating by materializing the presence of the sealer.

37 Amos, "For Manners Make Man: Bourdieu, de Certeu, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the Book of Courtesy," 23.
in their physical absence. Merchant's marks frequently appear on Flemish memorials. Affixed to these visual testaments to the final account keeping of the soul, the merchant's mark confirmed the value not of goods but of good deeds, the spiritual worth of the merchant. The merchant's mark worked in tandem with the indeterminate exoticism of the textile motifs which would function as a signifier of value whatever the vagaries of the market precisely because it evoked luxury silks generally rather than being faithful descriptions of any one particular textile or silk production tradition.

The capacity of the Flemish monumental brasses to document the transformation of wealth into spiritual credit hinges on the framing of representations of precious silks within the larger compositional structure and iconography of the memorials. The drama of death and salvation and the chain of intercession between earth and heaven unfold along the vertical axis of the brasses. The base compartments of the brasses parallel bas-de-page scenes in English, French and Flemish manuscripts with their depictions scenes of secular romance, fables, hunting and rural pursuits. Alan Fleming's brass transitions from base panel scenes of the hunt, with a boar and hounds, a man with a hunting horn, a hunter shooting a bow and arrow at a stag in the center and wildmen riding animals in the side section, to weepers in secular dress in the shafts and then to

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39 Pamela Graves notes the affinities between concepts of account keeping, weighing and commercial reputation and the weighing of souls during judgment. The image of weighing struck a chord with merchants who incorporated such imagery into the building works, glazing and painting they patronized, resulting in an elision of commercial and spiritual notions of fairness. See Graves, *The Form and Fabric of Belief: An Archaeology of the Lay Experience of Religion in Medieval Norfolk*, 165.
the realm of the saints and angels in the tabernacle and canopy shafts. Roger Thornton's brass lacks a secular scene in the base compartment, but overall composition conforms to the pattern of a vertical transition from secular to heavenly realms via a hierarchical ordered arrangement of intercessors. The side and center shafts filled with small figures of apostles, saints, prophets and weepers in individual niches. Beneath the feet of Roger and his wife Agnes fourteen small figures in contemporary dress stand in a canopied arcade.

The two brasses at King's Lynn feature exceptionally detailed secular scenes. Such is the worn state of Adam Walsoken's brass the base scenes must be reconstructed largely from antiquarian drawings which record figures dancing and playing instruments in the small niches at the base of the shafts, a windmill toward which a farmer rides a horse and men and women engaged in country games and jousting tourneys. Scholars have puzzled over the enigmatic scene at the base of Robert Braunche's memorial brass. A long table laden with serving dishes and goblets is depicted in a separate panel beneath the feet of Robert Braunche and his two wives. Twelve lords and ladies are seated behind the table, flanked by three trumpeters on the right and two musicians on the left playing stringed instruments. From the left hand side of the panel, three serving women approach the table. The woman at the head of

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41 H.K. Cameron identifies the figures in the side panels as weepers, though the identification of them as such is not entirely secure as they lack the hooded head covering traditionally associated with mourning. Cameron explains this deviation from standard iconography as "a more realistic portrayal of those who, in the capacity of so-called weepers, followed the coffin and attended the funeral." See Cameron, “Flemish Brasses to Civilians in England,” 424.

42 Ibid., 430.

43 Cameron, “The Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses at King’s Lynn,” 159.
this procession bears a dish with a bird that has been identified as a peacock. Another male figure kneels before the table bearing another platter with a large bird, and a female figure approaches the far end of the table from the right bearing a third bird. The similarity between this scene and an illumination in a Flemish manuscript of "The Romance of Alexander" has lead scholars to argue that the panel represents the *Voeux de Paon* episode in which Alexander makes a vow on a peacock at during a banquet. Other scholars have attempted to locate the banquet within the events of Robert Braunche's life. Possibilities for this approach include one of the feasts given when Robert Braunche became Mayor of Lynn in 1349 or 1359 or the banquet given in honor of Edward III's visit to Lynn.

The appearance of secular imagery on commemorative objects, particularly the playful drolleries and scenes of feasting and leisure on Fleming, Walsoken and Braunche's brasses, is puzzling. Like the marginal images inhabiting the borders of

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45 John Page-Phillips and Thurston Dart, “The Peacock Feast,” *The Galpin Society Journal* 6 (July 1, 1953): 97, Dennison, “The Artistic Context of Fourteenth Century Flemish Brasses,” 12. However, the small detail of a figure leaping over the table suggests, rather, the *Voeux du Heron*, an anti-English poem in the Picard dialect was the literary source for the scene. This work discusses the Vows of the Heron; a ceremony purported to have taken place at the court of Edward III, marking the king's determination to wage war against the King of France. At a key moment in the feat, Robert of Artois takes up the heron, leaps over the table and demands that the Earl of Salisbury swear a vow to fight against the French. See B. J. Whiting, “The Vows of the Heron,” *Speculum* 20, no. 3 (July 1, 1945): 261–78. It is unlikely, however, that the English viewers of the monumental brass would have associated the imagery with this lesser known poem. On the level of reception, therefore, we can safely suggest a link late medieval English audiences would more readily have associated the scene with the popular Alexander Romance.
47 The literature on marginal drolleries and grotesques is extensive, and its relationship to the sacred art so often accompanied has been debated since Bernard of Clairvaux decried the "ridiculous monsters...unclean apes...[and] fighting knights" adorning cloisters. Major works of modern scholarship include Meyer Shapiro, “Marginal Images and Drôlerie,” *Speculum* 45, no. 4 (1970): 684–86. and most notably Michael Camille's exploration of marginal imagery as a site of Bakhtinian carnivalesque inversion in *Image on the Edge: The Margins of*
Gothic manuscripts, the iconography of the base panels "their purpose is obscure, their relation to the sense of the text often seeming to be one of complete indifference, irrelevance, or even contrariness." The "text" in the case of monumental brasses being the central message of commemoration and salvation expressed through the medium of the funerary object. Scholarship on the Flemish monumental brasses tends fragment the brasses into isolated segments rather than attempt to integrate the secular and sacred iconography into a single, unified program. Uniting these disparate scenes and motifs are the allusions to the kinds of pursuits and literary traditions associated with feudal and courtly orders of power displays of symbolic capital. The base panels and marginal drolleries express the secular counterpart to lavish donations of luxury items to churches - those unproductive social expenditures such as games and feasts which Bataille argues were fundamental to the construction and maintenance of social rank.

On all the Flemish brasses the soul of the deceased is born upward into the Bosom of Abraham. The Bosom of Abraham motif is critical to understanding the iconographic program of the brasses as a whole and functions as a structuring device that gives meaning to both the religious and secular motifs engraved on these monuments, situating the deceased within a hierarchy of mediators. An examination of the development of the iconographic and exegetical tradition of the Bosom of Abraham

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during the late medieval reveals a multivalent motif. Based as it is on the Lucan parable of Lazarus in which the soul of poor Lazarus is carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom while the rich man who refused Lazarus charity languished in Hell the iconography is highly significant within brasses' visual articulation of the transformation of worldly wealth into spiritual merit.\textsuperscript{50} It is also embedded in the broader culture of death and dying. The entire sequence of events from the feast of \textit{Dives}, to the image of \textit{Dives} in Hell and Lazarus in the Bosom of Abraham also accompanies the Office of the Dead in Books of Hours with some regularity.\textsuperscript{51} Moshe Barasch associates the emergence of depictions of the soul departing the body of ordinary mortals in the fifteenth and early sixteen centuries with popular literature on the art of dying and its accompanying pictorial representations of the process of dying.\textsuperscript{52} Over the course of the middle ages the exegetical tradition expounding upon the bosom of Abraham positioned the bosom of Abraham as the place of reunion with Christ after the purifying journey of the soul through Purgatory.\textsuperscript{53} Jérôme Baschet has argued that the iconography of the Bosom of Abraham can be interpreted as a representation of divine kinship and contextualizes the motif within the networks of kinship which played a fundamental structuring role in

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\item Luke 16: 19-3.
\item Moshe Barasch, “The Departing Soul: The Long Life of a Medieval Creation,” \textit{Artibus et Historiae} 26, no. 52 (January 1, 2005): 20.
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medieval society. He posits that the Bosom of Abraham, through its depiction of the afterlife as a reunion with a divine father, should be considered as part of the medieval system of kinship and that Abraham is particularly apt to represent this social formation because he is involved in three kinds of ties of kinship - fleshly, spiritual and divine. As the progenitor of the people of Israel, he embodies traditional blood-ties of kinship that continued to play a key role in medieval social life. In order to extend his paternity to the gentile, Christian theology established the idea of spiritual descent, through which Christians are the sons and daughters of Abraham, in the words of St Augustine, "non de carnali sed de spirituali semine." In this second sense of kinship, the iconography of the Bosom of Abraham illustrates ties of spiritual brotherhood. When read vertically from base to top in relation to the textile background, which performs a mediating role in between the two realms, the monumental brasses emerge as testaments to the transformation of social and economic capital into spiritual capital. The culmination of the program in the soul's journey into the Bosom of Abraham further thematizes the idea of wealth diverted into charity through the implicit reference to the parable of Lazarus. The merchant avoids the fate of the rich man who looks up from hell at Lazarus in Abraham's lap through his careful spiritual investment. At the same time, the iconography of Abraham speaks to the concept of spiritual brotherhood which binds together the commemorative network of the deceased in bonds of mutual

55 Ibid., 741.
56 Augustine, De Civitate Dei, XVI, 21. Ibid., 749.
Conclusion

Death was a significant moment of transformation for material objects as they migrated from commercial to gift networks through the act of bequest to recirculate through the merchants’ commemorative networks. It is important to note that there was a high degree of overlap between one's commercial and commemorative network with trade guilds and fraternities playing an important role in providing funerals, prayers and masses for the departed. Through these material traces, the deceased remained linked to the topographies of trade that delineated his commercial activity. Late medieval visuality was particularly attuned to the signifying potential of the material qualities of objects. Likewise, merchants' wills emphasize the overseas origins of textiles and personal effects that are to be given as gifts and often publicly displayed within the church as permanent reminders of the deceased's generosity. These strategies of commemoration reveal the importance to merchants of invoking their ties to international markets in the memorials which were to safeguard their memories in perpetuity.

The Flemish brasses stood at the center of intersecting threads of gift giving and commercial exchange, but occupy an ambiguous position as either gift or commodity. Like the gifts of luxury textiles and imported devotional art, the Flemish brasses display
the merchants' ties to international trade networks and foreign markets. However, they function less as a gift *per se*, and more as a tangible index to a larger matrix of gifts that invokes the memory of the deceased and of his largesse, and reminds the viewer of commemorative and intercessory obligations that extend from the gifts. The rich brocades do not function simply as a signifier of wealth and social status. Expensive textiles including garments from the deceased's wardrobe constituted a significant portion of the gifts outlined in late medieval wills. Some garments were given to friends and families, others were given to the church where they were fashioned into vestments, altar cloths, shrouds for statues and other textiles used in the liturgy. Many wills also provide instructions to the executors concerning the particular items of clothing in which the deceased wished to be buried. The representation of rich brocades trims suggests both of these common uses of clothing in practices of death. They serve to indicate, along with other motifs discussed above, the funerary rites of deceased. At the same time, they stand as a metonym for the contributions of the deceased to fabric of the church. It is significant that the textiles are shown worn by the deceased, as it visually communicates an important aspect of the practice of transforming clothing into liturgical textiles.

The luxury textiles depicted on Flemish brasses commissioned by merchants and their families speak to a specifically mercantile mode of understanding and preparing for death and salvation. This mercantile sensibility was born out of the lived experience of crossing seas. The indeterminate exoticism of silks and their ability to simultaneously embody multiple modes of circulation and kinds of value provided the perfect medium
for projecting identity and reputation of deceased in their absence, and for attesting to
the spiritual credit amassed by the deceased through the conversion of excess wealth
into gifts to the church. As the mercantile patrons of the Flemish brasses embarked on a
final voyage, the patterns and motifs of luxury silk textiles stood as permanent
reminders to the living of their obligations to pray for the dead spoken in a language of
cloth legible across the expanses of geographical space and time which would separate
them from the realm of living by barriers far greater than any sea.
PART III

Looking upon Death's Mirror
Chapter Six
The Tomb of John Baret and the Construction of Late Medieval Subjectivity

Introduction

If one were to enter the chapel in the south-east corner of the parish church of St Mary in the town of Bury St Edmunds during the late fifteenth century, the presence of the wealthy merchant John Baret, mediated through the sculptural and decorative program in the surrounding fabric of the chapel, would have been all-pervading. Baret’s initials, personal motto and prized "Ss" collar, bestowed upon him by the Lancastrian court, cover the painted wooden ceiling of the chapel and the sides of the tomb that originally stood before the altar of St Mary and St Martin. Not only was almost every available surface utilized to display symbols of his identity, Baret had a "white vestment... with a remembraunce of my armys and my reason thereto 'Grace me governe'" made for his chantry priest.¹ In the midst this lavish display of resplendent self-assertion the medieval spectator would have been brought up short by a stark visual reminder of Death’s rejoinder to the pursuit of worldly glories. On top of the tomb slab a shroud carved from limestone falls open to reveal an emaciated cadaver, its skeletal fingers grasping at the inscribed scrolls wrapped about its body, silently reminding the spectator that death reduces all, rich and poor alike, to dust. Above Baret’s tomb

¹ John Baret’s will is published in Samuel Tymms, ed., Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St.Edmund’s and the Archdeacon of Sudbury, Camden Society Publications 49 (London: Camden Society, 1850), 15–44. All references to Baret’s will are taken from Tymms. Details of Baret's provision of vestments for his chantry priest are found at p. 18.
mirrors, set amongst the repeated symbols of John Baret's identity, capture fragmentary views of limestone corpse in their dark reflections.

The chantry chapel is a study in dramatic contrasts that captures the tensions and anxieties of late medieval beliefs and practices concerning death. To the modern viewer, the graphic display of humility in the face of death manifested in the cadaver tomb is at odds with the decorative program of the chantry chapel, for we are left in no doubt of the wealth and social standing of this successful clothier and burgess. Indeed, if his wishes were followed, not only the chantry chapel of St Mary's, but the parish church Bury St James and the religious foundations in the town, and even his private household chapel would have resounded throughout the year with the sound of priests "rehers[ing] John Barettys name opynly."\(^2\) And yet, in the midst of this immodest assertion of the identity of John Baret, wealthy clothier and close associate of the Lancastrian court, lies Death's rejoinder to the pursuit of worldly glories. Baret chose as the central object of self-representation a cadaver that undercuts the display of earthly glories by showing the deceased reduced to a decaying corpse, as will be all people regardless of rank or accumulated riches. Baret, himself, seemed uneasy about the ambivalence of the memorial's message, asking in his will that the following words be attached to the iron hearse surrounding the tomb; *Non hic manet iste [sic] Corpus ut ornetur sed sepultus ut memoretur.*\(^3\)

This apparent contradiction, which lies at the heart of Baret's memorial, has

\(^2\) Ibid., 18.
\(^3\) "This body remains buried here not so that it may be honored, but that it may be remembered." Ibid., 19.
been the source of consternation to art historians and scholars of late medieval religion alike. Nigel Saul's description of the cadaver effigy of Duchess Alice de la Pole in St Mary's parish church, Ewelme in Oxfordshire, for example, is typical of scholarly attempts to reconcile the worldly display and iconography of humility that so often sit side by side on medieval monuments. He describes the double-tomb as evidence of Alice's consciousness of the need for humility and awareness that her wealth and social standing, ostentatiously displayed in the heraldry of her tomb, would pass.\(^4\) While he acknowledges that tombs were not simply witnesses to worldly ambition, but were integral to individuals’ strategies for salvation, the impression given is of a memorial at odds with itself. Likewise, Ashby Kinch argues that John Baret sought perpetual affirmation of his social status after death. The distinctive form of Baret's tomb offered a space in which to perform an identity transcending death.\(^5\) Philippe Ariès situates these tensions within the context of the rise of the self-aware individual in the late Middle Ages.

The strong individual of the later Middle Ages could not be satisfied with the peaceful but passive conception of requies. He ceased to be the surviving but subdued homo totus. He split into two parts: a body that experienced pleasure or pain and an immortal soul that was released by death...The fully conscious soul was no longer content to sleep the sleep of expectation like the homo totus of old - or like the poor. Its immortal existence, or rather, its immortal activity, expressed the individual's desire to assert his creative identity in this world and the next, his refusal to let

\(^5\) Ashby Kinch, Imago Mortis? Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 149.
it dissolve into some biological or social anonymity.\footnote{Ariès, \textit{The Hour of Our Death}, 606.}

Even his concerted efforts to remain in the minds of the parishioners of Bury St Mary's, which seem to speak to an almost desperate desire to preserve the singular identity of John Baret \textit{qua} John Baret, the evidence of chantry chapel, tomb and will does not accord entirely with Ariès characterization of the late medieval individual confronted by death. The central, and most striking, representation of John Baret is precisely what Ariès argues the late medieval individual was desperate to avoid. Baret has deliberately chosen to represent himself as precisely the body dissolving into biological and social anonymity. The tensions and contradictions inherent in the multiple representations of John Baret in his chantry chapel reveal a complex conception of subjectivity and selfhood expressed through the material objects of commemoration. Rather than awkwardly classify parts of the iconography and decorative program of a memorial as "secular" and other parts "religious," this chapter proposes an integrated analysis of John Baret's tomb in which displays of wealth are considered to be central to the religious function of the monument. The tensions that arise from the juxtaposition of "secular" and "religious" iconography will be positioned as a conscious aesthetic choice on the part of the patron. In this framework, displays of wealth and social emerge as part of a carefully orchestrated strategy for salvation that exploits the rhetorical potential of these tensions in order to make a visual argument concerning the conversion of material wealth into spiritual merit.
John Baret's memorial is remarkable, both in terms of post-Reformation survival and amongst other late medieval English memorial complexes of the mercantile class, but by no means singular. Notable parallels can be found in the chantry chapel and parclose of Thomas Spring III (c. 1456 - 1523) in Lavenham, Suffolk\(^7\) and the Clopton Chantry Chapel at Long Melford, Suffolk.\(^8\) Clopton's chapel, in particular, incorporates devotional verse by Lydgate inscribed on carved scrolls on the wooden chantry ceiling and cornices, suggesting a direct link between the two monuments.\(^9\) Both the Spring and Clopton chantries invoked ties of kinship. Thomas Spring III's widow Alice (d. 1538) stipulated in her will that masses should "be sung daily within the parish church of Lavenham...at which masses I will either my daughter Margaret Rigsby, or else my son (in law) (William Jermyn), or else my son-in-law William Rysley be present and to offer at every of the said masses a penny."\(^10\) The church at Long Melford is famed for its co-commemoration of the family and associates of John Clopton, with inscriptions urging prayers from passers-by for the souls of John Clopton, his family and friends prominently displayed on the exterior walls of the church.\(^11\) The armorial devices prominently displayed on the Spring and Clopton chantry chapels are testament to the social status and identity of these wealthy clothiers, but the identity expressed is a


\(^{8}\) For a full discussion of the Clopton chantry chapel's architecture, furnishings and decoration and on its patron, John Clopton see Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, 79–96.


\(^{10}\) Quoted in Tracy, Harrison, and Wrapson, “Thomas Spring’s Chantry and Parclose at Lavenham, Suffolk,” 224.

\(^{11}\) Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, 80.
collective one. According to Michael Michael, coats of arms deployed within the space of the parish church allowed an individual to fulfill his or her duty to ancestors, family and society by the appropriate display of armorials.  

John Baret, in contrast to these cases, died without heirs and left only token bequests to his widow. Accordingly, according to Gail McMurray Gibson, the displays of identity in his chantry chapel bespeak a preoccupation with his memory rather than any concern for those left behind.  

The extent to which a chantry chapel operated as a restricted space is a matter of some debate. Some scholars have characterized the increasing prevalence of chantry chapels along with family pews and so forth as examples of the privatization of previously communal parish space and positioned this development within a narrative of decline of kin and community-based religious organization which ultimately led to the Reformation and the rise of Protestant notions of individual salvation. Eamon Duffy, in his revisionist study of "traditional religion" concedes that "at one level, the foundation of a chantry at a side altar in a parish church was the ultimate act of individualism." He attempts to renovate the negative image of chantry chapels by asserting that although they were, indeed, acts of conspicuous consumption designed to display the testators wealth and social standing, they were nonetheless embedded in

12 Michael, “The Privilege of ‘proximity,’” 64.  
13 Gibson, The Theater of Devotion, 90.  
15 Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, 139.  
16 Ibid., 328.
traditional networks of kinship and community and provided benefits for the living community of the parish.\textsuperscript{17} While recognizing the importance of chantries and chantry chapels in the social life of the parish, Simon Roffey claims that the mutual prayers offered by the living for the dead worked to dissolve tensions and bind people together in a state of "undifferentiated human affinity" tend to elide the social differences and hierarchies that are, rather, reproduced through the interaction of the spectator with the tomb and other art objects within the space of the chantry chapel through processes of ritual and devotional action.\textsuperscript{18} John Baret's chantry chapel, with its emphasis on the deceased's self-identity and worldly aspirations, lends itself to interpretation as an example of the individual self-regard of the mercantile class. It is an example of the kind of self-representation which has been the focus of considerable debate in the historiography of the late Middle Ages. In the face of such a display of self-advertising it is important to bear in mind Clive Burgess's argument that "in the parish context a 'chantry' was not so much a personal arrangement...but more a means of guaranteeing communal profit and reciprocal benefit."\textsuperscript{19}

John Baret's tomb is one of the few examples of medieval funerary art which we can definitively assert to be an example of self-representation on the part of the deceased. In many other cases, funerary monuments were not commissioned by those they commemorated, but by executors or kin, and scholars therefore argue that they are

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 139.
indicative of the aspirations and preferences of the commissioners rather than the deceased. While it is possible to speculate that the deceased made known his or her wishes for the monument before death, the documentary evidence is usually silent on this matter. Wills rarely include more than a cursory request that the executors purchase a marble stone - a 'lapidem marmoream' or a 'petram marmoream' - as well as indicating in which church they wished to be buried and perhaps specifying exactly where in the church the tomb was to be installed. Baret, however, had personally overseen the erection of his tomb prior to his death and his lengthy will, dated 1463, gives detailed descriptions of the tomb and the chantry chapel in which it was situated.

Taken together, the tomb and the other extant furnishings and adornments in the parish of St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds, along with Baret's will, give us a unique insight into this late medieval merchant's complete complex of strategies of commemoration. Margaret Aston's observation that through these sources scholars may "read the mind of this wealthy merchant, who combined delight in worldly success with a deeply ingrained sense of mortality" highlights the central paradox of late medieval tombs at the heart of this dissertation. How do we account for these monuments that are at once preoccupied with wealth and social status, and focused on the world to come after such transitory things pass away? And what can they tell us about late medieval subjectivity?

This chapter examines the relationship between self-representation and memory

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23 Ibid., 224.
in the design of John Baret's chantry chapel. I argue that Baret's carefully constructed program of self-representation in the tomb, inscriptions and decorative program of the chantry chapel worked toward two interrelated ends. The first was common to all late medieval memorials, and is made explicit in the many inscriptions that beseech the visitor to the tomb to pray for the soul of the deceased. Baret's primary concern was to perpetuate his memory in order to secure intercessory prayers that would speed his passage through Purgatory. The second is tied to the reciprocal relationships established through charitable giving that placed an obligation upon his community to offer these prayers. Binski has emphasized the "existential complexity" of death in the Middle Ages, noting that tombs were not merely memorials, but sites that allowed transaction between the living and the dead, provoking both memory and action.24 When we consider how late medieval visitors to the chapel interacted with the tomb within its original spatial and liturgical setting it emerges that Baret did not conceive of his monument solely in terms of self-representation, but also as a means to elicit particular affective responses in the spectator. Interpreted in this light, the chantry chapel becomes a kind of tangible Mirror-text which worked upon the body of the spectator in order to shape him or her as a Christian subject. The chantry chapel and tomb was not simply an act of self-aggrandizement arising from late medieval anxieties concerning the fate of soul after death. Rather, it marked the culmination of a lifetime of lavish expenditure on the fabric and decoration of his parish church and of pious almsgiving.

24 Binski, Medieval Death, 71.
By representing himself as a man whose transitory glories have been reduced to dust in death, John Baret presented himself at once as a mirror for humble self-examination, and as an exemplar of charitability.

**Materiality and Subjectivity**

In order to unpack the strategies of commemoration employed by Baret it is necessary to frame the chantry chapel and tomb within the web of devotional practices, liturgical gestures and social relationships that shaped spectators experiences of and responses to the memorial complex. Recent studies in the archeology of late medieval churches have emphasized the importance of considering the way in which the materiality of the context in which religious rituals, such as chantry masses, were performed was critical to generating religious experiences and subjectivities. Drawing on these methods and Foucault's concept of techniques of the self, this chapter argues that John Baret's chantry chapel and tomb functioned as an aid to self-reflection and self-transformation. Foucault's study of 'techniques of the self' concentrated on written text and the act of reading and writing in self-formation. Reading practices and new conceptions of interiority informed both the creation and reception of Baret's chantry chapel and tomb and will be brought to bear on the evidence presented by

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26 Michel Foucault contrasted techniques of the self to technologies of signification, describing the former as "techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in...so as to transform themselves...and to attain a certain state of perfection." Foucault, “Sexuality and Solitude,” 177.
Baret's chantry chapel and tomb insofar as these practices shaped habits of the mind that influenced the reception of the space and material objects within it by contemporary audiences.

Within the framework of Foucault's technologies of the self, this chapter considers the capacity of material objects and spatial settings, in and of themselves, to act upon the spectator. David Morgan builds on Foucault's conception of belief as habitual practice but emphasizes the need for a model of religious conviction that understands the term in somatic or material terms. Through engagement with the material culture of religion, Morgan argues, the interdependence of knowledge, conviction, memory, imagination and sensation emerges. Simon Roffey emphasizes the deliberate strategies deployed within chantry chapels focused on the body as a sensing. In particular, he emphasizes the way the spatial topography of chantry chapels and the relationship between tombs, heraldic devices, altars and intercessory symbols elicited but the visual was the most emphasized elicited particular modes of behavior. Kate Giles, for example, has stressed the importance of mapping sightlines between the fittings and fixtures such as screens, statues, altars and chantry chapels within the space of the church in order to understand how visual relationships structured late medieval devotional and social practices. Responding to Giles, Pamela Graves reiterated the need for further study of the ways in which historically specific visualities and

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28 Ibid., 3.
spatialities informed contemporary spectators' experiences of medieval churches. She also expanded the project of elucidating the role of the material and sensory environment in medieval techniques of the self to incorporate the entire sensorium, not just the sense of sight. The methodological approach she proposes for the study of Cistercian spirituality emphasizes the way in which discipline external things apprehended through the senses functioned to regulate internal impulses and desires.\textsuperscript{31}

The chapter emphasizes the way in which Baret's tomb was designed to elicit particular responses from spectators toward the end of shaping them both as Christian subjects and as effective intercessors. Oosterwijk also raises the possibility that tombs like John Baret's which were commissioned by patrons during their lifetime were also intended as objects of contemplation for the patron, serving of reminders of their own mortality in order to help them prepare for their own death.\textsuperscript{32}

**John Baret of Bury, Patron and Benefactor**

A wealth of extant material and documentary evidence affords scholars a remarkably complete picture of John Baret's strategies of commemoration. Baret (d. 1467) was a successful draper from Bury St Edmunds whose life and career present a striking picture of the social mobility of the merchant class in the late Middle Ages. He married Elizabeth Drury, the daughter of Sir Roger Drury, in what was an increasingly

\textsuperscript{31} Graves, “Sensing and Believing,” 522.

\textsuperscript{32} Sophie Oosterwijk, “Food for Worms - Food for Thought: The Appearance and Interpretation of the ‘Verminous’ Cadaver in Britain and Europe”, *Church Monuments* 20 (2005): 44.
common arrangement whereby an up-and-coming merchant gained the prestige of his wife's noble pedigree while his wife's family was provided with much-needed cash. In addition to his lucrative cloth business, Baret established ties to the Lancastrian court and was awarded the Lancastrian livery which he displayed prominently in the decorative program of the chantry chapel. It is unclear when or for what reason Baret was awarded the livery. Antiquarian sources suggest John Baret was assigned to assist Henry VI when he visited Bury St Edmunds in 1433 and was subsequently awarded the Lancastrian collar in gratitude for services rendered at this time. Baret's lengthy will provides a glimpse of his wealth and social connections.

John Baret's pious benefactions left their mark throughout the fabric of St Mary's church. Around 1445, the magnificent hammerbeam roof, which stretches the entire length of the nave, was installed in the church. Baret's personal mottoes, 'Grace Me Governe' and 'God Me Gyde,' appear on the supports between the two carved angels on the eastern end of the roof are evidence of the merchant's involvement in this project, though the extent of his contribution is unknown. Baret's will reminds the people of "alle the werk of the aungellys on lofte wiche I haue do maad for a remembrance of me & my frendys & nevir to put the paryssh to no cost." His

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35 Samuel Tymms, *An Architectural and Historical Account of the Church of St. Mary, Bury St. Edmund’s* (Bury St Edmunds: Barker and Son, 1854), 71.
provisions for death altered the interior of the church significantly. He had the Lady Chapel converted into a private chantry chapel and requested that his body be buried before the altar of St Mary and St Martin.\textsuperscript{38} The chapel itself is no longer extant and the tomb has been relocated from its original position.\textsuperscript{39} However, antiquarian sources allow us to reconstruct the original location of the tomb in the between the piers of the easternmost arch of the nave, with feet pointed to the east.\textsuperscript{40} In its current state, positioned against the south wall of the church, the viewer has a limited view of the monument with one side obscured entirely. Baret's memorial is a table or altar style tomb constructed of Purbeck marble, surmounted by a full-length cadaver wrapped in a winding sheet. The sheet falls open to reveal the body of the deceased, with desiccated skin pulled taut across its skeletal form. Originally, the entire tomb was polychromed. Conservation efforts have uncovered evidence of flesh tone paint on the cadaver, as well as traces of red and green veins that would have once covered the entire body.\textsuperscript{41} The effect of the polychromy must have been visually arresting and strikingly grotesque.

Seven quatrefoils framed within seven rectangular panels are carved into the base of the tomb. In the central quatrefoil there is a second image of John Baret, as he appeared in life. Where the recumbent cadaver shows the deceased stripped of all worldly goods, the very image of the humiliation of the flesh in death, the upright figure is clothed in the finery befitting the wealthy and influential burgess. He wears a long,

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{39} Aston, “Death,” 226.
\textsuperscript{40} Tymms, \textit{An Architectural and Historical Account of the Church of St. Mary, Bury St. Edmund’s}, 184.
fur-lined gown with extravagant sleeves. About his neck hangs the Ss collar given to him for services rendered to the Lancastrian dynasty. In his hands he holds a scroll, upon which the Ss symbol is repeated, framing the word “me” from the inscription "Grace me gyde," Baret’s personal motto which appears on three middle panels of the tomb. The Ss symbol appears again encircling the letters JB, to form a repeated pattern of personal insignia on the roof of the chantry chapel. There are some difficulties reconstructing the original appearance of the tomb and it is difficult to ascertain the relationship between the current components. Margaret Statham speculates that the monument may have been a double-tomb, with a full sized effigy of Baret in his worldly glory, either in the form of a monumental brass or sculpture, as a counterpart to the cadaver. The archaeological evidence is, however, inconclusive and antiquarian sources are silent on the matter. Samuel Tymms account of the architecture of St Mary’s does note two additional details of the original tomb and its surroundings. At the foot of the tomb, there were three panels, the central of which was adorned with a representation of the Lamb of God, within a quatrefoil scroll with the inscription Deus propitius esto michi peccator. At the east end of the monument he also reports that there was installed originally a piscina under a cinquefoil canopy with the collars SS enclosing the monogram J.B. on the back, though this was no longer extant at the time of his writing.

The primary focus of Baret’s largesse was the Saint Mary altar in his chantry

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43 Tymms, An Architectural and Historical Account of the Church of St. Mary, Bury St. Edmund’s, 186.
chapel and reflected his intense devotion to the Virgin. Lisa MacKinney has provided a detailed study of the will and its relationship to Baret’s personal devotion to the Virgin. MacKinney draws out the uneasy relationship between piety and conspicuous consumption displayed in the astonishingly large collection of rosaries and other portable devotional items including painted screens and cloths, many of which must have been put to use during his lifetime in the private chapel he had built within his house at 3 Chequer Square. In addition to the multiple insignia and arms that decorate the roof of the chantry chapel, there are the angels on the hammerbeam roof who hold up Baret’s personal motto, thereby bringing his presence into the chancel for the masses celebrated at the high altar. The other side altars in St Mary’s did not go unnoticed by Baret. Among his many gifts, Baret bequeathed eight pence for eight tapers to light the grave of the Resurrection Gild (i.e. the Easter Sepulcher) each year at his dirige and mass.

John Baret employed similar strategies of juxtaposing signs of identity with sacred images within the civic space of Bury St Edmunds. Like many merchants, John Baret diverted a portion of his wealth to the repair of bridges, leaving money for the repair of Rigsbygate. He left instructions that upon the completion of the work, "in the myddys I wil haue an ymage of oure lady, sittyng or stondyng, in an howsyng of free stoon, and remembraunce of me besyde." It is unclear from the archaeological evidence whether this “remembraunce” took the form of an inscription or Baret’s arms.

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45 Tymms, An Architectural and Historical Account of the Church of St. Mary, Bury St. Edmund’s, 58.
46 Tymms, Wills and Inventories, 37.
In any case, Baret sought to have his memory evoked at the site of the devotional image of St Mary installed on the bridge, effectively soliciting prayers for himself from all who passed by. As with the funerary complex in the chantry chapel, these occasions of artistic patronage reveal how tightly intertwined were charity and intercessory strategies during the late middle ages.

**A Dance with Death**

The focal point of John Baret's chantry chapel is the arresting sight of the emaciated cadaver on top of his tomb. In order to understand why Baret chose this particular iconography it is necessary to situate the tomb within its broader iconographic tradition. The popularity of the cadaver or _transi_ tomb in England had grown over the course of the fourteenth century from the time of its first introduction from the Continent. At the time of Baret's death, it nonetheless remained an unusual choice for a funerary monument. Jankyn Smith, for example, a contemporary of John Baret and likewise a wealthy merchant and benefactor of Bury St Mary's chose for his monument a memorial brass depicting himself and his wife kneeling, their hands raised in prayer, dressed in the typical style of the urban elite with rosaries about their waists.

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to attest to their piety. There exists considerable debate over the function of the symbolism of cadaver tombs during the late Middle Ages. Erwin Panofksy established the traditional view of cadaver or transi tombs as memento mori. He argues that they served a didactic, moralizing purpose to remind the viewer that they, too, would return to dust and to urge them to eschew worldly things and prepare for their inevitable death. Gail McMurry Gibson echoes this sentiment, arguing that Baret's tomb is less a monument to the dead than a dramatic moral lesson to the living. This interpretation is supported by the inscription at the foot of the tomb in which John Baret addresses the spectator;

Ho that wil sadly beholde me with his ie
May he se hys owyn merowr a lerne for to die.
Wrappid in a slure as a ful rewli wreche.

No more of al myn good to me ward wil streche
From earth I kam and to earth I am browht
This js my natur, for of erthe I was wrowht;
Thus erthe on to erthe to gedir now is net
So endeth each creature Q'd John Baret
Qwerfor ye pepil in wye of charite

48 Early scholars demonstrated an inability to comprehend the cadaver effigy as anything other than evidence of a civilization in decline. Émile Mâle viewed the emergence of the cadaver as the subject of tomb art as an artistic misunderstanding of earlier effigies pictured as if both dead and alive. Rather than understanding the mystical meaning of the iconography as a thematization of immortality and the hope of Christian salvation, late medieval artist "transformed [the ancient recumbent statue] into a corpse." See Religious Art in France : The Late Middle Ages : A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 391. Johann Huizinga asked whether such an apparent display of humility was truly a pious denial of worldliness before concluding, rather, that the strong current of macabre imagery running through late medieval art united "the reaction of an all two intense sensuality that can only awaken itself from its intoxication with life in this manner" and "the dread of life that so strongly permeat[ed] the age." See The Autumn of the Middle Ages (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 159. Neither scholar was able to reconcile the transi tomb with Christian theological positions on death and salvation and instead dismissed the artistic form as a distortion, misinterpretation or degradation of earlier forms

49 Panofsky, Tomb Sculpture, 64.
50 Gibson, The Theater of Devotion, 72.
Wt yor god prayeris I prey yu help me  
For lych as I am so schal ye all be  
Now God on my sowle have mercy and pite. Amen.51

Kathleen Cohen's study of the development of the transi tomb, on the other hand, rejects this interpretation of the iconography. Even in the case of John Baret's tomb, which like many other transi tombs incorporates verses that combine admonitions that the spectator should consider his or her own eternal salvation alongside requests for prayers for the deceased she claims that the over-riding motivation was a self-interested desire to elicit prayers from the living.52 Cohen argues that though moralistic poems like this which frequently appeared on transi drew upon the tradition of memento mori literature, they were not intended to be didactic or to be expressions of humility, but rather served to frighten the spectator into offering intercessory prayers for the deceased.53 Her contention that the verses were concerned solely with securing intercessions for the dead rests on the fact that such verses almost invariably end with petitions for prayers, as is indeed the case with Baret's tomb which asks for "yor god prayeris." Cohen brushes aside the didactic element, clearly present at the outset in Baret's offering up of the cadaver as a "merowr a lerne for to die," claiming that the final lines of the inscription provide us with the overriding motivation for the iconography of the cadaver. Pamela King provides a far more convincing reading of the monument by demonstrating how the didactic elements of cadaver tombs furthered the deceased's

52 Cohen, Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 89–90.
53 Ibid., 71–72.
goal of personal salvation. She draws from Thomas Aquinas's defense of funerary monuments which "profit the living also spiritually inasmuch as our belief in the resurrection is confirmed thereby [and] profit the dead insofar as one bears the dead in mind and prays for them." King sees the development of the cadaver tomb as the logical extension of this sentiment. Where Cohen rejects the idea that cadaver tombs were *memento mori* as a radical, and therefore unlikely, shift in orientation from the traditional concern with the salvation of the deceased souls to the edification of the living, King argues that these two functions are intertwined. By providing the viewer with a spiritual exemplar, the deceased performed a meritorious act of charity that contributed to his or her salvation.

John Baret's choice of the cadaver as the central image of his monument was informed by an artistic and literary tradition dating back to the early fourteenth century, though the cadaver or *transi* tomb was a recent development of this theme. Two related traditions utilized the motif and were particularly influential in late Medieval England. The first was tradition of the Three Living and the Three Dead, primarily a visual icon illustrating the encounter of three living kings with their deceased counterparts which also has poetic counterparts in both Latin and vernacular texts. The second was the *Danse Macabre* or Dance of Death. This tradition was introduced into England by John

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55 Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 4.
Lydgate who saw the famed painting and its accompanying verses on the walls of cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris and was subsequently composed an English version of the poem which was inscribed alongside the version of the painting at Old Saint Paul's in London.\textsuperscript{58} The latter tradition was likely the primary source of influence for Baret's tomb design, given Baret's close association with Lydgate and the obvious parallels between the wording of the inscriptions on Baret's tomb and the verses in Lydgate's Dance of Death. However, the pictorial tradition of the Three Living and Three Dead also deserves attention due to its prevalence in art and the likelihood that contemporary spectators would have been familiar with the iconography from the numerous wall paintings and marginal images in popular texts such as Books of Hours.\textsuperscript{59} In the provisions for a new \textit{Magnificat} reredos, John Baret asks that on the panels "there be wretten the balladys I made therefore."\textsuperscript{60} Gail McMurray Gibson suggests on the basis of this evidence that John Baret may have composed the verses found on his tomb.\textsuperscript{61} Lydgate's rendering of the poem at Holy Innocents into English opens with the motif of the mirror. In his explanation of his reason for undertaking the translation, Lydgate writes in the Prologue:

\begin{quote}
Thereof to make a playn translayyon  
In English tonge, of entencion  
That proud folkes been stout and bolde,  
As in a mirrour toforne in her reason
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} Aston, “Death,” 225.  
\textsuperscript{59} Fein, “Life and Death.”  
\textsuperscript{60} Tymms, \textit{Wills and Inventories}, 19.  
Her ugly fine there clearly may behold.  

The trope recurs in the opening of the poem, translated from the French.

In this myrrour every wight may fynde,  
That him behoveth to gone upon this daunce,  
Who goeth toforne, or who shall go behind,  
All dependeth in Goddes ordinance;  
Wherefore lowly every man his chance,  
Death spareth not poor, ne yet Blood-royall,  
Every man therfore have this in remembrance,  
Of oo matter God hath yforged all.  

This conception of the dead as the mirror for the living echoes through visual and literary works of the period. Scholars from Johann Huizinga onward have remarked upon the prevalence of the image of the rotting corpse, held up as a mirror in order to confront the living with the transience of bodily beauty and earthly wealth. For Huizinga, the macabre spectacle of the corpse held up as a mirror to the living is emblematic of an age in decline, an age that knew only the emotional extremes of the horror in the face perishability of the earthly body and joy over the promise of the saved soul. More recent scholarship by Eamon Duffy has called into question this characterization of the image of cadaver as evidence of a theologically questionable emphasis on the corruption of the body and suggests, rather, that the principal function of macabre imagery was spiritual, in that it induced in the viewer a sense of urgency regarding the imminence of death and prompted him or her to prepare for this.

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62 Carol M. Richardson, ed., *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Malden, MA ; Oxford : Milton Keynes, UK: Blackwell Pub. ; In association with The Open University, 2007), 382.
63 Ibid.
64 Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 159–161.
65 Ibid., 172.
eventuality. Paul Binski’s examination of the cadaver-as-mirror likewise presents a compelling counter-argument to modern scholars who, confronted with the grotesque sight of rotting corpses carved in stone or drawn on the pages of illuminated manuscripts, have tended to dismiss the imagery as merely morbid. He draws out the theological sophistication of the mirror metaphor in the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, arguing that the "corpse, as image, stands for the absence that is death, returning to rebuke both the imaged living, and also ourselves as onlookers. The macabre implicates us in a mise-en-abyme, a hall of mirrors. And by means of its defamiliarization, it offers the capacity for self-examination."  

Through his carefully planned alterations John Baret transformed the Lady Chapel of St Mary’s into a spatial Mirror text. The monument sets up a series of mirrors, both real and metaphorical, that translate the ambiguities of the literary trope into plastic form. The mirror trope is explicitly invoked in the inscription at the foot of the stone slab which reads:

Ho that wil sadly beholde me with his ie  
Ion  
May he se hys owyn merowr a lerne for to die.  
Baret  

The format of the inscription, framed within the name of the deceased, reiterates the sentiment of the verse. John Baret holds himself up as a mirror, upon which the spectator is invited to gaze so that he or she may see him or herself reflected back in the desiccated corpse of John Baret. Directly above, the ornate wooden ceiling glitters with  

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literal mirrors. Evoking the opulent pages of an illuminated manuscript, a diaper patterned background covers the six panels of the roof. Circular mirrors, from which golden rays extend outward, mark the intersections of the foliate diamond forms. Each of the spaces created by the repeated pattern contains the initials "JB" framed within a circular band inscribed with the "Ss" collar of Lancastrian court. Textually and visually, the monument establishes an interplay between the person of John Baret and the trope of the mirror.

The mirror was a multivalent, often ambiguous symbol, in medieval literature and art. The mirrors on the ceiling participate in the Gothic aesthetic of light and surface effect. In order to appreciate the visual impact of the ceiling it is important to remember that it would have been illuminated by the flickering light of candles. This ambiance was magnified and multiplied by the mirrored ceiling. The mirrors, polychromy, gold and painted seals create an effect of jeweled resplendence. At the same time, the optical effects achieved by the mirrors lend themselves to a negative interpretation of the symbolism. The mirrored surfaces present fragmented, partial reflections of the tomb below. The body that decays on the tomb, disintegrates further in the myriad, fractured views above. The mirror that comes to the fore is that of 1 Corinthians 13:12 - the speculum in enigmate which symbolizes the partial knowledge that is the mark of humankind's fallen state.  

68 Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known.
The complexity of the interplay between multiple kinds of mirrors only emerges when one considers how the space and the objects that it contained worked upon the body of the spectator. In her study of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, Susanna Greer Fein draws on Paul Binski to argue that the visual imagery in English manuscripts employs a ternary organization which implicates the spectator as living counterpart to the dead. She notes that the Three Living and Three Dead are spatially mirrored in both text and image, often across the binary divide between the pages of the manuscript. At the same time, she argues, the work operates "as a reflection for the viewer (in its ternary aspect described by Binski) by a process that depends on an even more crucial binary divide, that is, the line between the viewer and the work. In this relationship, the page...operates as the demarcated point of encounter. The spectator embodies, in actual living flesh, the living half of the icon, while the artistic work remains a monitory sign frozen in timelessness."69 This provocative analysis alerts us to the importance of considering the materiality of art objects and their relationship the body of the spectator in order to come to a fuller appreciation of their reception. The association of the Baret's memorial with the Dance of Death suggests an embodied act of reflection that encompasses movement as well as sight. In the poem, and its accompanying pictorial tradition, cadaverous figures representing death offer their skeletal hands to dance in turn with the all ranks and vocations of medieval society, from the secular and ecclesiastical powers of king and pope down to the lowly pauper.

69 Fein, “Life and Death.”
Fein notes the juxtaposition in the woodcuts that accompanied the Guyot Marchant's publication of the *Danse Macabre* between the lively postures adopted by the skeletons and the stiff poses of the living, decked in their worldly finery. John Baret's tomb produces movement in the living through the spatial relations of the chantry tomb. Where the skeletons of the *Danse Macabre* proffer their hands, the cadaver's hand on Baret's tomb plucks at the inscribed scrolls about its body. It is the act of reading the text on the scrolls that propels the spectator to circle the tomb in a dance with Death.

The mirrors transform the ceiling of the chantry chapel from a simple display of wealth and social status into a commentary on *Vanitas*. In amongst the symbols of his worldly success, the mirrors reflect the cadaver below. The design of the chantry chapel exploits the surface effects of the materials used in the ceiling in order to startle the viewer, catch them unawares, as Death does each of the living figures as he calls them to the Dance. At first glance, the mirrors add to the resplendence of the ceiling, shimmering amongst the brightly colored insignia and gilded rays of light. Then the viewer catches sight of the decaying corpse below, reflected in the depths of the mirror. They are fragmented, partial views, like an image in the corner of one's eye. In both its literary and visual forms the *Dance of Death* lends itself to moral warnings about the transitory nature of life and the vanity of earthly pleasures and wealth. The elements of shock and surprise are present in both the representation of the responses of each of the

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figures confronted by Death and drawn into his Dance, and as a deliberate device used by the artists and writers. David A. Fein's study of Guyot Marchant's 1485 edition of the *Danse Macabre* and its accompanying woodcuts notes the facial expressions of the living, which register dismay, alarm, fear, and denial when confronted with grinning countenance of Death. A number, including the usurer who is preoccupied with death, are caught unawares and physically dragged from their worldly preoccupations by their skeletal dance partner.\(^2\) The *mors improvisa* was the death most feared in the late Middle Ages for a sudden and unforeseen death left no time to put one's affairs in order.\(^3\) Eamon Duffy attributes the confronting images of decay evoked in sermons, *transi* tombs and depictions of the Dance of Death to the need to persuade late medieval congregations to turn from their worldly preoccupations and prepare for death through deliberate shock tactics.\(^4\)

The central image of the cadaver is framed by symbols of John Baret's identity in the form of the repeated motif of the Lancastrian "Ss" encircling Baret's monogram which appears on the ceiling and the spandrels of the arches and inscriptions of Baret's personal mottos. These recall the heraldic displays that were popular with the aristocracy in their artistic commissions. Kathryn Smith examined the function of such symbols in books of hours. She argued that in addition to their function as markers of ownership, they stood as a reminder to the reader of those deceased members of the

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\(^3\) Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 310.  
\(^4\) Ibid., 306.
family for whom intercessory prayers were needed.\textsuperscript{75} Ann Morgenstern argued that heraldic devices were incorporated on Gothic tombs for a similar purpose. Morgenstern cites a number of Gothic tombs in England upon which figures arranged in niches are identified by shields and suggests that the figures and shields were designed to call to mind the kinsfolk listed in chantry ordinances.\textsuperscript{76} The idea that heraldic devices and other markers of identity served to ensure the continued presence of the dead in the memories of the living by reminding the viewer of the familial ties is compelling, but poses problems in the case of John Baret, who died leaving no heirs. Nigel Saul's study of the brasses of the Cobham family raises the possibility that ostentatious displays of personal identity are in some cases indicative of anxiety arising from precisely this lack of heirs. Comparing the homogeneity and preoccupation with symbols of family identity of the brasses at Cobham with the variety of brasses erected by a more genetically prolific branch of the family at Lingfield, Saul concludes that the Cobhams at Cobham responded to the family's dynastic crisis by constructing "carefully managed fictions of continuity."\textsuperscript{77}

John Baret's commemorative strategies speak to a similar anxiety. Indeed, this anxiety lies at the heart of the juxtaposition of the visually overwhelming display of personal insignia with the cadaver effigy, whose body is stripped of those public markers of status, vocation and lineage that embed individuals within social networks. Baret's

\textsuperscript{75} Kathryn A Smith, \textit{Art, Identity, and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and Their Books of Hours} (London; Toronto; Buffalo [N.Y.]: British Library; University of Toronto Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{76} McGee Morgenstern, ""The Tomb as Prompter for the Chantry: Four Examples from Late Medieval England,"" 81–97.

tomb and chantry chapel at once visually assert the deceased's identity in the repeated motif of the monogram J.B inscribed within a circle of Ss collars, and reflects Baret's anxiety that, along with his body, his memory will disintegrate into oblivion. In order to counter this threat to his spiritual salvation, Baret created ties to his community through his gifts and his funerary monument to ensure that his memory lived on in the intercessory prayers of the living. So anxious was he to ensure that the parish prayed for him, he left instructions in his will that "in sum convenient place by, the day and the yeer of oure lord of my departyng from this wourld and the pardon wiche I purchased to be wretren threw...[that] yt may be redde and know to exorte the pepill rathere to preye for me."  

The impact of the visual symbols of his identity can be understood fully only when considered alongside the gifts outlined in his will. In the absence of any direct heirs, Baret distributed personal items and money widely among nieces, nephews and other relatives, along with a total of fifteen other named individuals and various unnamed monks, chaplains, clerks and priests. A number of these bequests tie the recipient to Baret visually as well as through the reciprocal bonds of obligation that accompanied any act of gift exchange. We can only imagine how much more powerfully the chantry chapel must have compelled the prayers of John Hert, for example, who received from Baret "a girdle with a buckle and pendant of silver, [with] Grace me

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78 Tymms, Wills and Inventories, 19.
govern written thereon.” Or the chantry priest who, as mentioned above, was given a vestment embroidered with the same motto. Baret’s tomb and chantry chapel are at the center of a web of gifts intended to ensure that his memory persisted despite the absence of immediate heirs on whom he could rely for intercessory prayers.

**Contemplating Death: Interiority and the Body**

In his survey of the iconography of monumental brasses in England, Jerome Bertram emphasizes the function of medieval funerary monuments as tangible acts of worship and aids to devotion. Bertram links the iconography of the cadaver tomb to the themes of popular meditation texts such as *The Imitation of Christ*, suggesting that the imagery was intended, at least in part, to provide an aid for devotional contemplation. He also comments that “this meditation on mortality is incomplete and somewhat grotesque without the succeeding meditation on Christ, specifically on the three great 'moments' of salvation history, the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.”

When we consider the entire matrix of devotional and memorial objects in John Baret’s tomb it becomes apparent that the purpose of holding up the cadaver to the spectator as a mirror was first to confront them with their own death and then to prompt them to meditate upon the broader frame of salvation history. In order to read the inscription that frames the tomb of John Baret as a mirror, the spectator had to stand at the base of the tomb and face west. In doing so, she or he turned away from the altar and stood with

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79 Ibid., 16.
80 Bertram, “‘Orate pro Anima’,” 329.
their back to the east end of the chantry chapel. In this movement, the spectator embodied the action of the sinner who turns from Christ, literally turning from the site where Christ's body was made present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The symbolism of this movement was heightened by the presence of images on the altar. John Baret's will requests that "my body to be beryed by the awter of Seynt Martyn, namyd also our Ladyes awter...be fore the ymage of oure Sauyour." The act of turning to read the inscription heightens the tension between the two didactic bodies; one exemplary, the other admonitory. The "ymage of oure Sauyour" is no longer extant, another casualty of the Reformation iconoclasm. There are, therefore, limits to the kinds of conclusions we can draw as John Baret gives us no further details on the particular iconography of this image. It is probably that the image was a panel painting representing one of the popular images of the suffering Christ that were popular as aids to devotion at the time. Without collaboration from antiquarian sources, however, this must remain speculation. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the interplay between the tomb and the image on the altar simply on the basis of the information provided by Baret in his will, sparse though it may be. The image of Christ presents the viewer with the exemplary body which is made in the imago dei and from which humankind fell away in the moment of Adam and Eve's sin. The first act of sin is re-enacted in the gesture of the spectator, who turns his or her body from the imago.

It is the ultimate end of Christian salvation that the believer will be reformed in

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81 Ibid., 15.
the image of Christ. The body of John Baret, set in apposition to the exemplary body, lays out before the viewer the wages of the sins of Adam and Eve. The fallen body that serves as a reminder to the spectator of their fate is made present in the cadaver. But it is also a divided body, for the cadaver is not the sole representation of John Baret. On the north side of the tomb a small, relief figure represents John Baret in his worldly finery within a quatrefoil frame. He is dressed in a long, fur trimmed gown and fur hat. Around his neck hangs a collar adorned with the "Ss" insignia of the Lancastrian court. The secular adornments of this representation of John Baret as he appeared while living simultaneously serves as a marker of his status and to underscore the message of the cadaver, which reduces all worldly achievements to dust. This interplay between bodies - the exemplary body of Christ, the admonitory body of Baret, and the body of the spectator as the site of sensory perception - is critical for understanding the function of the monument. The space and its monuments are not didactic in the limited sense of providing visual illustrations of Christian dogma. Rather, they were didactic in a broader sense, inscribing social practices and encoded systems of moral codes on the body of the spectator.82

In addition to giving physical form to multiple didactic bodies as an aid to contemplation, John Baret's chantry chapel introduces a temporal element that is likewise embedded in contemporary devotional practices. Erwin Panofsky's study of the development of tomb sculpture proposes two temporal schemes for tombs: prospective

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and retrospective. The prospective tomb incorporated iconography and symbolism that looked forward to the moment of resurrection when the salvation of the deceased Christian would be realized. This temporal orientation dominated tombs from the beginning of the Christian Church until the Renaissance. The retrospective tomb, in contrast, preserved the memory of the deceased as they were when they were living, celebrating their achievements on earth. More recent studies of funerary monuments have revealed complex, multilayered temporalities. Robert Ousterhout explored the way in which spatial setting, pictorial program and liturgical movement worked together in the fourteenth century Chora Parekklesion in Constantinople in order to transport the worshipper from transient, linear time into eternal divine time. In this funerary chapel, which housed the tomb of Theodore Metochites, both the visitor to the Chora and the bodily remains of the deceased were spatially located in relation to the pictorial program in such a way that they occupied a temporal "place between past and future events." Ousterhout emphasizes the importance of architectural space in mediating layers of temporality. Biblical scenes on the walls of the eastern bay thematizing resurrection - the Anastasis or Harrowing of Hell, Christ raising the Widow's son and Christ raising the Daughter of Jairus - bring the events of the past into the present when experienced in the context of the funerary liturgy. The representation of the Last Judgment fills the domical vault and supporting walls of the eastern bay and points to future salvation.

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83 Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, 16.
85 Ibid., 72.
This interpretation of the Chora Parekklesion provides a useful model for interpreting the kinds of mental activities facilitated by the interactions between the spectator and the tomb of John Baret within the space of the chantry chapel at Bury St Mary's.

John Baret's tomb, when apprehended in moments of prayer and liturgical action, presents a layered temporality. As the body of the beholder moves about the space of the chantry chapel, seeing the tomb and surrounding furnishings, and reading the texts, there is not so much a convergence or collapse of past, present and future time as an insistent moving back and forth between past, present and future in a manner that speaks to new forms of interiority and inculcates in the beholder particular disciplines of self-examination. Augustine's *Confessions* established the importance of an individual's ability to compare the past, present and future. In Book XI, Augustine writes:

> It might be correct to say that three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things...The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception, and the present of future things is expectation.\(^{86}\)

For Augustine, the ability to hold these moments in time within the mind and examine them was critical for the kind of self-knowledge necessary for Christian salvation. Jennifer Bryan argues reading was the tool that allowed Augustine to negotiate the problems of self-understanding in language and time. Through reading, he could hold

the past and the future in his mind. The same practices of inward reading, developed over centuries of Christian monastic practice, were taken up during the late Middle Ages by pious men such as John Baret. In addition to the vernacular texts which draw on Lydgate's Dance of Death, John Baret's tomb and chantry chapel incorporate a number of scriptural texts in Latin. The verse *Ego nunc in pulvere dormio* is carved directly into the folds of the shroud where it falls away from the head of the cadaver. As the eyes move from the text to look down the body of the effigy they first encounter the closed eyes sunk into the emaciated head of the corpse. The text appears merely descriptive. John Baret, represented in the stone as a decaying corpse, does, indeed, now sleep in the earth. As soon as we move away from considering the tomb as an object in isolation, and frame it within its physical space the complexity of the inscription begins to emerge. The *nunc* introduces a temporal element into art work, the implications of which are revealed in the physical setting. The subject sleeps now, but his feet face toward the altar in anticipation of the time to come when Christ comes again in judgment from the east. There is an unspoken "then" that counterbalances the "now" and situates the monument within the narrative of salvation history.

The text simultaneously looks back in time to the funerary rites of the deceased. In addition to the words *Ego nunc in pulvere dormio* from Job 7:21 on the scroll over the head of the cadaver, a second verse from Job 19:20-27, which was recited as part of

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the Office of the Dead,\(^8\) runs the entire length of the body:

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\textit{Domine secundum actum meum noli me judicare.} \\
\textit{Nihil dignum in conpectu tuo feci. Ideo deprecor} \\
\textit{magestat?m tu?m ut tu deus deleas ?iquitat?m meam.} \\
\textit{John Baret}
\]

(O Lord, judge me not according to my actions. For I have done nothing worthy in your sight. Therefore, I pray, O God, that by your majesty, you might blot out my iniquities. John Baret.)

These would have been spoken by the priest upon the occasion of John Baret's burial.

The inclusion of the name of the deceased at the end of the text is worthy of note. The inscriptions on Baret's tomb and chantry chapel are multivocal. This multivocality is already evident in the verse from Job 7:21. \textit{Ego}, the subject of the inscription \textit{Ego nunc in pulvere dormio}, has multiple referents. These texts speak at once with the voice of John Baret, the chantry priest and the prophet Job. Inscriptions embedded within the architectural space of the chantry chapel alternated between speaking in the indicative with this layered voice and shifting to the imperative to give direct commands to the spectator. Simon Roffey's study of the archaeology of chantry chapels examined the way in which the spatial geography of chapels used a variety of strategies involve the viewer in the intercessory rituals and prayers taking place within the space. He argued that these strategies provided "powerful technologies for salvation and a means by which  

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prayers could actually be 'tricked' out of the viewer.” When we consider how the spectator encountered the inscriptions within the topography of the chapel, the involvement of the entire body in the act of seeing and reading these texts becomes apparent. Samuel Tymms's antiquarian account of the architectural of St Mary's parish church details the location of each of the inscriptions. The exhortation from the deceased *Orate pro anima Johannis Baret* is inscribed on the arch separating the nave aisle from the choir aisle and in this context appears to have been directed toward the chantry priest as he entered the chantry chapel. Over the nave arch, facing the parishioners of St Mary's church, an excerpt from the Hours of the Virgin prays to the Mother of God with the words *Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria. Amen.* This blessing would have been familiar to those members of the parish who owned Books of Hours. As Books of Hours were often taken to church in order that the reader could recite the prayers during the liturgy, the inscription linked the chantry chapel, and its benefactor, to the larger community of the parish and their devotional practices. Indeed, the *nos* implicitly includes John Baret, who continues to pray alongside them through the inscriptions, a point that will be explored in more detail below. The choice of text is particularly appropriate both in terms of Baret's devotion to the Virgin and because it deals specifically with the Virgin's role as an intercessor between the supplicants and her Son.

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The use architectural space to frame the interpretation of inscriptions continues inside the chapel. There are three inscriptions on the principal thrust of the hammerbeam room, each legible from a different viewpoint. The first, on the east face reads *In Domino gaudebit anima mea*. In this position in addition to being legible to the spectator as they moved about the chapel the inscription faces toward the east end of the chapel and the altar. That is, it addresses the Lord, in whom John Baret’s soul rejoices. A second text, *Laudens Dominum Glorioso*, appears on the western face, describing both John Baret and prompting the chantry priest to liturgical recitation. Finally, on the front of the principal truss the third inscription reads *Quae sursum sunt quaerite*. This text exploits the spatial potential of the architecture by placing the instruction from Colossians 3 to "Seek those things which are above" in a position which requires the spectator to look upward, thus taking on the lesson in their bodily movements.

The multivocality of the texts inscribed on the tomb and architectural fixtures of Baret’s chantry chapel, speaking at once with the voice of the scriptures, the voice of the intercessor engaged in liturgy and prayer, and the voice of John Baret point to the use of the tomb to ensure the continued presence of the deceased at the site of the tomb, a function alluded to above. The medieval conception of memory in which the written text makes absent authors present, ensured John Baret continued to speak through these inscriptions. The temporal capacity of the memory, outlined above, functioned to make

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92 Ibid., 173.
93 Ibid.
absent things present. This capacity relied on a somatic understanding of the workings of memory. Concentrating on the written text and its visual apparatus, she draws out the temporal sense of "reproduction" - the ability of the signifier, as a hybrid oral/visual sign, to make present the thing signified. She notes that this ability to re-present absent things to the mind via the sensory organs and the faculty of memory was not limited to the things signified by textual signs. The written word also made the author present to the reader. This was made explicit by the Richard de Fournival, a thirteenth century French cleric. Carruthers quotes de Fournival's discussion of the way in which writing conjures mental images in the mind of the reader so that "when you read this writing with its painture and parole will make me present to your memory, even when I am not physically before you." This understanding of the relationship between reading and memory is predicated on a model of knowledge that is not purely intellectual but is also physiological. The knowledge gleaned from reading is, first and foremost, grounded in the senses. The act of seeing and the act of hearing the oral word unlock the pathways to the memory. In the context of a model of memory that grants to the faculty to power to make absent authors present, the inscriptions on Baret's tomb allow the deceased to establish an intersubjective relationship with the spectator. Just as we saw with the verses on the tomb eliciting somatic responses from the spectator that inscribe particular teachings on the body, the interactions between the spectator and the texts,

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95 Ibid.
material objects and architectural space that make up John Baret's funerary monument work together to shape the spectator as a Christian subject as well as serving as a prompt for intercessory prayers.
Individualism and the Medieval Sense of Selfhood

John Baret's tomb carefully stages a display of humility that nevertheless reinforces existing social hierarchies. The reproduction of social hierarchies is most evident in the display of symbols of status. Although seemingly at odds with the overall thematization of worldly vanity, these symbols are in line with the fourteenth shift from conceptualizing the dead as an undifferentiated mass to representing souls as gendered, ranked, bearing the marks of occupation, status and religious vocation.\(^{96}\) Where the Flemish brasses deployed representations of precious textiles as a visual metaphor for the spiritual efficacious divestment of personal wealth, Baret's memorial dramatizes the transformation of economic value into spiritual value through the references to livery. It is critical to remember that the Lancastrian livery collar which adorned every available surface of the chapel was an item of clothing during Baret's lifetime. Livery originally encompassed all non-monetary forms of payment including housing, food and plate but by the fifteenth century came to mean marked clothing, like the "Ss" collar.\(^{97}\) Livery clothing marked individuals as members of many different kinds of networks including trade guilds, families and knightly orders. Liveried clothing at once displayed the wearer's association with a particular social group and demarcated hierarchical distinctions within such groups. In trade guilds, for example, different fur trimmings distinguished individuals holding governing positions from the ordinary rank and file.\(^{98}\)


\(^{97}\) Jones, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 17.

Ann Rosalind Jones argues that liveried clothing "was more binding than money, both symbolically, because it incorporated the body, and economically, since a further transaction had to take place if you wanted to transform it into cash." Furthermore, and importantly for an exploration of networks of commemoration it constituted "a form of incorporation, a material mnemonic that inscribed and indebtedness obligation on the body [and] bound people in networks of obligation."99

In part, Baret's insistence on his identity can be explained by the demands of memorialization. Visual representations of the dead in effigies and symbols of identity made the presence of the dead tangible to the living. Just as we can expand our reading of donor portraits beyond traditional interpretations positioning them as symbols of the temporal prestige of the giver, so too can we read symbols of identity as "surrogate selves...working efficaciously toward [the donor's] salvation."100 We have already seen how the texts inscribed on the tomb and chantry chapel can be understood to speak for John Baret, offering up prayers on his behalf as well as acting as prompts for those charged with the care of his soul to likewise offer prayers. Situating the tomb and its effigy within the liturgical space of the chantry chapel, we see additionally how this material object allowed the deceased to participate in the masses offered on his behalf. Geraldine A. Johnson takes the example of the effigy of Bishop Pecci, cast in bronze sometime after 1427 by Donatello to argue for the development in the late Middle Ages

of "innovative strategies for trying to guarantee the salvation of their patron's souls."¹⁰¹ Positioned directly in front of the altar, the full meaning of the effigy was only made apparent in the presence of the priest celebrating the Mass. The only points during the Mass at which the priest would have turned to the effigy would have been during the distribution of the elements, or during the censing and asperging of the choir. These liturgical absolutions were central, also, to the funerary rites. In this way, each reiteration in an ordinary Mass, when performed in front of the effigy of the bishop, would have constituted a re-enactment of funerary rites and served to link the mortal remains of the Bishop to the Body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar.¹⁰²

John Baret carefully incorporated signs of identity into the fabric and furnishings of the church both within and beyond the boundaries of the chantry chapel. Various categories of objects were understood to retain a link to the identity of the deceased in such a way as to allow the deceased to maintain a virtual presence through material objects. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak argued images like seals, insignia and arms constituted sign-objects that stood in for the owner or user, producing a duplicate presence, a presence not actual but nonetheless real.¹⁰³ Gelfand and Gibson extend their argument on art objects as surrogates to suggest the faithful could communicate with God and the saints through signs such as coats of arms, and could receive the benefit of Masses

¹⁰² Ibid.
prayer and the power of relics even after death through these material proxies.\textsuperscript{104} Books of Hours, for example, often incorporated armorials adjacent to prayers and indulgenced images so that the person signified by shields could receive their benefits.\textsuperscript{105} Within the space of the chantry chapel, Baret maintains proximity to sacred images through his bequests. His will contains a number of references to bequests related to images within the church. He asks that "there be made a godly newe crowune of metal gilt, or else wel doo in tymbyr, for the ymage of oure lady in the housyng of ye rerdoos of Syent Marie awter."\textsuperscript{106} The act of clothing the image of the Virgin is an especially intimate gesture in an era when sacred images were considered efficacious conduits for sacred power. He also left 10 marks of silver for a new painting for the reredos of Saint Mary's altar, asking also that on the inner doors "be wreten the balladys I made therefore, and the pardon wretyn there also."\textsuperscript{107} This arrangement of verses meant that when the reredos was closed, the words composed by John Baret were in contact with the image of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. As noted above, the written word was understood to make present the absent author, allowing Baret to pray to the Virgin through his "balladys." He added extra inducement to parishioners to pray before the image in the form of a "pardon" or indulgence. The presence of Baret's arms and insignia on the casing of the reredos was carefully calculated to extract prayers for the deceased from those who came before the image in the hope of securing pardons.

\textsuperscript{104} Gelfand and Gibson, “Surrogate Selves: The ‘Rolin Madonna’ and the Late Medieval Devotional Portrait.”
\textsuperscript{105} Michael, “The Privilege of ‘proximity,'” 64.
\textsuperscript{106} Tymms, \textit{Wills and Inventories}, 20.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 19.
from themselves. Individuals in the late medieval period regularly employed these kinds of juxtapositions of intercessory images of with familial devices and constituted an associative catalyst for prayers.  

In previous chapters, the commemorative strategies of late medieval merchants have revealed a drive to preserve the memory of the deceased as an individual worthy of intercession within a web a communal network ties. The renewed sense of the individual commemorated in late medieval reflected a desire to represent the deceased as socially and culturally constructed human being, still incorporated into the social fabric of the living community even after death, presenting the deceased as an individual only insofar as she or he was member of a corporate group. Visually, Baret's tomb and chantry chapel give the impression of a man with an established lineage commemorated within the context of visible representations of ties of kinship. The furnishings and decorations together seem a perfect illustration of the fifteenth century parish church as "vital memorial register of local family history." Armorial shields, insignia and other markers of identity illustrated the relationship between the deceased, their ancestors and other members of the nobility, as much as they stood as surrogates for the individual they represented. Through them, the deceased fulfilled his or her obligation to preserve the memory of one's kin at the same time as commemorating him or

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109 Binski, Medieval Death, 102–103.
herself.\footnote{Michael, “The Privilege of ‘proximity,’” 64.} Bastl positions these commemorative practices as essential not only for the salvation of the dead but also for the reproduction and preservation of the nobility. Nobility, according to Bastl, requires a collective memory and only by partaking in such a collective self-memorialization can an individual be incorporated as a member of an aristocratic family.\footnote{Bastl, “Clothing the Living and the Dead,” 370.}

Baret himself, however, could claim no noble lineage as a self-made man. Nor did he leave behind future generations to carry on the family line. Rather, the tomb carefully manufactures an impression of Baret quite at odds with reality. This was not unusual among the emerging urban elites - the “new men” of Europe. Wim De Clerq, Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, for example, argue that the mercantile oligarchy of Flanders likewise manipulated the symbolic systems of the nobility established in Burgundian courtly circles in order to advance and display their newly acquired status, effectively manipulating material culture in order to create an environment that emanated noble identity.\footnote{De Clerq, Dumolyn, and Haemers, “‘Vivre Noblement’: Material Culture and Elite Identity in Late Medieval Flanders,” 31.} Paradoxically, even the cadaver sculpture which confronts the viewer with the message that Death will come for all, rich and poor alike, reducing all their worldly trappings will be reduced to dust, is an example of conspicuous consumption. Ernst Kantorowicz interpreted the emergence of the double tomb with rotting cadaver below as a visual illustration of the doctrine \textit{Tenens dignitatem est}

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corruptibilis, dignitas tamen semper est, non moritur.\textsuperscript{114} Ashby Kinch’s study of the patronage of images of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, which likewise incorporates the didactic, decomposing corpse as a motif, positioned such commissions within a domestic and social economy connected with display. Kinch concludes that aristocratic patrons were not affronted by the critiques of material power inherent to images of the decay of the body. Rather, they viewed them as an investment in their symbolic capital.\textsuperscript{115} Baret’s tomb appropriates the visual language of eternal dignity and noble reputation to create a kind of commemorative fiction in the absence of enduring networks of commemoration. As much as Baret's commemorative strategies aspired to erase his lowly roots and cement his identity as a member of the nobility, his careful deployment of visual strategies of social emulation are quintessentially mercantile and marked precisely the dissolution of differences of rank that so disturbed contemporary social and moral commentators.\textsuperscript{116}

As McMurray Gibson has emphasized, despite the undercurrent of unease Baret's commemorative monument should not be dismissed as simply a "materialistic demonstration of a merchant's old piety and new wealth."\textsuperscript{117} The nakedness of the cadaver in the midst of surrounding splendor works in comparable ways to previous examples of clothing and textiles, both represented and given, explored in this

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dissertation. In Chapter One, we saw the thematization of clothing as metaphor for charity and the complex ways in which the distribution of clothing to the poor, and its representation in the Corporal Acts of Mercy Window, at once divested wealth in spiritually appropriate ways and inscribed social hierarchies on the bodies of the poor. In Baret's memorial, the representations of nakedness and clothing similarly work to document the transformation of worldly wealth into spiritual credit and to maintain the worldly status and identity of the deceased in the memories of the living. Beatrix Bastl describes dying as a process during which clothing undergoes a change in meaning as the body transitions from life to death. The relationship of clothing to the body and to the 'social body' of the church shifts as the best garments once used to adorn the individual were given to the church to adorn the rites of the Mass.\(^{118}\) Where the Corporal Acts of Mercy window dramatizes the transformation of worldly wealth into spiritual credit through the clothed body of Nicholas Blackburn, who is marked out as a member of the urban elite, with the naked bodies of the poor, the memorial at Bury St Edmunds pivots on the doubled body of John Baret. The small figure of Baret on the side of the tomb reminds the viewer of the deceased's status and position during life. The livery collar carefully marks him as a member of the Lancastrian court. It is a particularly charged item of clothing at once payment and gift whose receipt signals a change in social status for the wearer. His new found rank in society brought with it the obligation

\(^{118}\) Bastl, “Clothing the Living and the Dead,” 371.
to engage in ostentatious social expenditure and acts of largesse.  

119 The livery collar functioned as "a material mnemonic that inscribed indebtedness and obligation on the body" whose presence alluded to the discourses of spiritual credit and debt that characterized late medieval beliefs and practices concerning death. By covering the chantry chapel, its furnishings and vestments with the "Ss" livery collar at the same time as he displayed a likeness of his naked corpse, Baret metaphorically stripped away the earthly garments that clothed his body and used them to cloth the church, thereby performing a spiritual transaction in the hope the perishable body of earthly existence might be clothed with the imperishable on the day of judgment.

**Conclusion**

The tomb acts as the pivot for the perceptual interactions of the visitor to John Baret's chantry chapel. In the act of representing himself in order to perpetuate his memory, Baret also constructed a complex of images, objects and texts that acted upon the beholder in order effect transformation within subjects disciplined in particular modes of viewing. John Baret's tomb, chantry chapel and will provide a singularly rich record of one individuals strategies of commemoration. His lack of progeny may account for the extraordinary lengths to which Baret went to secure intercessions for his soul. John Baret's provisions for his tomb and chantry chapel and the many bequests contributing to the fabric of the parish church of St Mary's Bury St Edmunds

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demonstrate sophisticated strategies for eliciting prayers from the faithful for his soul. Previous interpretations of funerary art and architecture which limit the function of tombs to mere prompts for prayer cannot do justice to the existential complexity of these sites. Both Baret's memorial complex and will display the merchant's extensive strategies for exercising control over those entrusted with praying for his soul. Moreover, the design of the chantry chapel went further than simply eliciting prayers for the deceased from the living and worked upon the spectator in order to reshape him or her as a Christian subject. By representing himself as a man whose transitory glories have been reduced to dust in death, John Baret presented himself as a mirror for the spectator in which to confront their own mortality and so be prompted to reform themselves. This was John Baret's final act of charity.
Conclusion

*Nay, Everyman, I sing another song,*
*I follow no man in such voyages;*

Goods to Everyman, in *The Sommonyng of Everyman*, anon., 15th century

Throughout the Middle Ages, goods and money traversed the world from northern Europe to North Africa, the Maghreb and into the Far East. Though only the intrepid few – pilgrims, merchants, diplomats – ventured far from home, material objects circulated widely through processes of trade, gift exchange and theft. However, there was one frontier that worldly wealth could not cross in the Christian West – the boundary between life and death, this world and the next. In the fifteenth century morality play, *Everyman*, the titular character, having already offered Death a thousand pounds to delay his demise, begs the personification of Goods – who describes himself as treasure locked in chests and tied up in bags – to accompany him in his journey to stand before the ultimate Judge of souls. Goods replies that he cannot follow Everyman across the boundary between the living and the dead. The case studies presented in this dissertation, however, suggest that despite official church doctrine drawing a sharp line between the economic and spiritual realms, popular beliefs and practices assumed a far more porous boundary between the two. The gifts and monuments of late medieval English merchants reveal diverse strategies to secure intercessions for their souls. These strategies were dependent upon the existence of a spiritual economy enabling worldly
wealth to be transformed into spiritual merit. Gifts and monuments formed the material matrix that mediated the relationships between the living, the dead and the saints and enabled transactions between the earthly and heavenly realms.

There existed no single, mercantile way of dying, nor a recognizably mercantile iconography of remembrance. Local specificities profoundly shaped patterns of gift-giving and choices of commemorative monuments. Civic structures peculiar to each locale shaped patterns of gift-giving. The presence of a strong, mercantile oligarchy in York with an established identity that was consciously separate from that of York’s aristocratic elite gave rise to a distinct topography of commemoration. Where the nobility focused their bequests and memorials on York Minster, the merchant class funneled their wealth into the parish churches and a myriad of small chapels, gilds, friaries and hospitals to create a network of intercessory sites. Alliances between mercantile families ensured this intercessory network remained tightly enmeshed, despite being dispersed throughout the city of York. The result was a gradual accretion of bequests, chantries, memorials and artistic commissions down through multiple generations predominantly centered on the cults of St Anne, St John the Baptist and St Christopher. The strength of local connections is reflected in the tastes of patrons. Though foreign goods in the wills from the York and the North Country demonstrate access to international markets, York merchants tended to patronize local workshops for their memorials.

Adam de Walsoken, Robert Braunche, Alan Fleming and Roger Thornton exploited their international trading connections to commission and import de luxe
monumental brasses from Flanders. The brasses of Adam de Walsoken and his wife, Margaret, and of Robert Braunche and his wives, Letitia and Margaret, formed a small cluster of imported monuments within the town of Lynn along with the no longer extant brass dedicated to Robert Attelath and his wife Joanna. The Lynn brasses, however, had no longer term impact on the tastes and habits of patrons in the town. Rather, like the singular monumental brasses commemorating Alan Fleming in Newark-on-Trent and Roger Thornton in Newcastle-on-Tyne, the magnificent, foreign memorials served to set the merchants apart within the space of church and the wider town. The three brasses in Lynn represent a brief interest in the products of a particular overseas market that dissipated without leaving a wider mark on patterns of patronage and commemoration. Visually, the brasses tied the merchants to a wider commercial network accessed through their Hansa ties. At the same time, the placement of the brasses within gild chapels speaks to the continued importance of local mercantile networks.

The spatial setting of John Baret's memorial differed from the other monuments discussed in this dissertation in terms of the relationship between the individual and the wider parish negotiated through the space of commemoration. By converting the Lady Chapel into a quasi-private space filled with multiple symbols of his identity, John Baret set himself apart from the community as an individual marked by wealth and worldly achievements. The Blackburn family's commemorative monuments certainly occupied a restricted space within the parish church of All Saints, North Street, but one that united a number of elite, mercantile families and reworked the ties established through business and marriage into a robust commemorative network. Similarly, Alan
Fleming’s memorial in the church of St Mary Magdalene, Newark-on-Trent was situated in a space which commemorated multiple mercantile families jointly. Adam de Walsoken and Robert Braunche’s monumental brasses were installed in the chapel of the Trinity Guild; again a restricted but nonetheless communal space. John Baret’s chantry chapel, in contrast to the preceding case studies, cordoned off a space within the parish church, in which every surface, furnishing and priestly vestment spoke the name of the founder alone.

Baret also styled himself as a member of the nobility, rather than asserting a mercantile identity through the inclusion of merchants’ marks, wool bales and other symbols popular with late medieval woolmen. The “Ss” livery collar and choice of tomb style popular with the Lancastrian court speak to Baret’s self-consciously aristocratic tastes. Baret’s commemorative strategies are at once thoroughly Gothic and thoroughly early modern. The assertion of the heraldic self constituted an assertion of a social rather than a subjective identity. This focus on the public persona rather than what the modern viewer might recognize as the individual self, was, according to Michael Camille, a quintessentially Gothic understanding of portrait likeness.\(^1\) Baret’s persona was not only aesthetically, but also socially, conservative. His alignment with the Lancastrian dynasty through the inclusion of the livery collar and choice of a cadaver tomb implicitly maintains the aristocratic status quo. At the same time, tensions between worldly wealth and spiritual salvation worked through but never entirely

resolved position the John Baret’s memorial and chantry chapel at the crossroads between continuity and transformation. It is in the bodily interactions of the viewer with the monument, the working out in practice of its discourses of intercession and salvation, that an emerging, mercantile approach to death is revealed.

In examining the written and material evidence of late medieval English merchants, this dissertation has been concerned less with what merchants explicitly stated about their religious beliefs, but rather, how the accounting of debts and the circulation of money and goods between the living and the dead speak to a set of practices born out of particular ways of understanding how value and worth are counted, exchanged and transformed. In each of the case studies, examination of the practices and mental habits underlying late medieval English merchants’ commemorative strategies uncovers a common thread. Commemorative objects formed the material matrix capable of supporting the kinds of transactions necessary to operate between the commercial and spiritual economies and transform worldly wealth into spiritual merit. Preparations for death constituted a final accounting in the broadest sense of the term. This accounting was at once a careful tallying of wealth and spiritual credit and a reflexive, interior process of self-examination before God. It is useful at this juncture to reflect upon accounting as it was practiced at the boundary point between geographical regions; in the counting houses of European entrepôts with which merchants were intimately familiar. Within these spaces gold was weighed, value tallied and noted in books of account, and the currency of different realms was exchanged in order to allow the circulation of goods between disparate systems of valuation. Likewise,
in the space between life and death, merchants developed a series of practices that enabled spiritual debits and credits to be balanced and wealth to be exchanged between material and spiritual economies.

The process of preparing a final will and testament was not merely a dry recital of lands, money and moveable property and their recipients. The wills of York merchants examined in Chapter Three reveal complex social, religious and economic practices and underlying assumptions about the nature of worth, the commensurability of spiritual and economic value, and the ability of things to shift in status between commodity, gift and currency in order to mediate between the commercial and spiritual realms. In Chapter Five, representations of silk, an unusual good prized for precisely its ability to embody multiple kinds of value across the boundaries of international markets, is deployed to make very specific arguments about commensurability of spiritual and material wealth, and the ways in which largesse operated within the late medieval spiritual economy. The capacity of goods and money to operate within a spiritual economy was dependent upon the logic of salvation underpinning late medieval Catholicism. Notions of quantifiable value and commensurability had by this period become central to Catholic conceptions of sin and salvation. Spiritual debts could either be paid off in the purchase of prayers, masses and Indulgences or worked off in the cleansing pains of purgatory.

The practice of accounting was not solely an intellectual exercise, but fundamentally haptic in nature. Determining value involved engagement with the material quality of things. True value, as opposed to face value, could only be measured
by weighing each coin carefully to ascertain whether the weight of gold and silver contained within matches the face value of the coin. Deceptions like clipping coins and shaking coins in bags in order to collect the metallic dust that fell off were common methods of debasing coins at the time. Double-entry book keeping required physical interaction with paper and ink, noting down expenses and credits. These practices, all of which operated as powerful metaphors for the Final Accounting before God, were honed through years of repetition.

Likewise, strategies of commemoration employed by merchants must be embedded within embodied practices at the heart of late medieval memorialization. Both the windows at All Saints, North Street and the tomb and chantry chapel of John Baret, installed during their patrons’ lifetimes, were designed to elicit devotional responses and reflections from both those they commemorated and those who commemorated them. Situating these memorials within networks of interaction between humans and objects, reliant on corporeal modes of beholding, rather than relying on iconological analysis, reveals the social and processual nature of medieval remembering. Markers of identity such as merchants’ marks, insignia and inscriptions, found in all the monuments discussed in this dissertation, served to ensure the name of the deceased was remembered in prayer. This remembrance was not a glorification of the individual and should not be considered as analogous to modern practices of remembering the deceased as a fully fleshed out person. Rather, the monuments, and

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the rituals and devotions that were carried out in and around them, shaped the late medieval merchant as a “civic being,” an individual within a larger community, perfected through a lifetime of charitable action aimed at conforming the self to the exemplar of Christ. The Corporal Acts of Mercy, the representations of pious patrons kneeling before images of saints, and the humbled body of John Baret stripped of all worldly possessions in death were tools by which the viewer worked through the tensions between the mercantile life and the teachings of Church through embodied engagement with the memorials.

A series of persistent dichotomies that have exercised a powerful influence on the field of Religious Studies; medieval versus early modern, gift-giving versus commercial exchange, societies integrated through complex ties of kinship versus societies alienated by commerce, the primitive subject who simply believed because she or he existed in a world that understood no separate category of "religion" versus the self-aware, early modern subject. What is striking, when reading literature from the period in question, is that many of the same oppositions were articulated by clerics during the late Middle Ages. By constructing the early modern subject, epitomized in the usurious merchant with his empty arithmetic piety, scholars have unconsciously reproduced the discourses of the medieval elite.

The case studies presented in this dissertation begin to break down these foundational dichotomies. Rather than representing a mechanistic, empty piety, 

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3 Carruthers, The Craft of Thought, 2.
practices that drew upon discourses of the credit economy demonstrate the adaptability of late medieval religion and the innovations of a merchant class that sought ways to make their religious practices personally meaningful. More importantly, in a deconstruction of the "early modern rupture model" of religion, these case studies reveal a hybridized form of gift exchange, inflected with commercial exchange and shaped by notions drawn from the credit economy, which remained firmly embedded within webs of relationships that defined medieval society. In order to understand the practices and beliefs of the late medieval merchant class it is necessary to move away from conceptualizing the shift from the medieval to the early modern period as a moment of sudden disjunction. Rather, these practices and beliefs show that the shifts happened progressively, dialectically and through active engagement of subjects who were not alienated by the emergence of the credit economy but rather sought ways to spiritualize the new, commercial economy.
Figures

Fig. 0.1

Fig. 0.2 (left) and Fig. 0.3 (right)
Fig 2.3
Fig. 2.4

Fig. 3.1 (left) and Fig. 3.2 (right)
Fig. 4.1 & Fig. 4.2

Fig. 4.3
Figure 6.2

Figure 6.3
Figure 6.8

Figure 6.9
Figure 6.10
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