

Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 25 (2011)

Artikel: "By auctorite of expyience" : the role of topography in Osborn Bokenham's Lives of native saints
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-389642>

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“By Auctorite of Experyence”: The Role of Topography in Osbern Bokenham’s Lives of Native Saints

Alice Spencer

This paper offers a detailed analysis of the lives of native saints contained in the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*. I will focus on the relationship between the legends in question and the geographical treatise known as the *Mappula Angliae*, which Bokenham translated from a section of Higden’s *Polychronicon*. I will argue that topography serves to locate, both diachronically and synchronically, not only the saintly corpse, but also the literary authority of the hagiographical corpus. In choosing to focus to such an extent on native saints and their geographical origins, Bokenham was endeavouring to establish a specifically “English” identity for himself as poet. Bokenham’s stress on national topography serves to sustain the *auctoritas* of his own literary output on three counts. Firstly, as Lavezzo has demonstrated, England’s status as a “global borderland” or “angle” enabled national authors to claim an elite or “angelic” status. This elevation of geographical margins enables Bokenham to legitimise his own marginal position in the literary canon. Secondly, Higden’s condemnation of the contamination of English by French enables Bokenham to claim a greater authenticity for his own plain “Suthfolke speche” when compared to the classicising, Francophile style he associates with Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate. Finally, as Galloway has suggested, emphasis on physical geography can serve to elevate an empirical, experiential perspective over the precepts of literary *auctoritas*.

The as-yet-unpublished legends of native saints which I will be dealing with in the current paper have only been accessible to us since 2004, when Bokenham’s long-lost *magnum opus*, his vast translation of Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea Sanctorum* was found at Abbotsford House and

identified by Simon Horobin. The manuscript had been purchased by Sir Walter Scott in 1809, but had never been studied or attributed. Until 2004, Bokenham's only known surviving works were the collection of vitae of female saints in the British Library Arundel 37 MS and published by the EETS with the title *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, the so-called *Clare Roll*, a verse translation of Claudian's *Stilicho* and the *Mappula Angliae*, a translation of the section of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* devoted to the description of Britain. The *Mappula*'s tantalising reference to another "englische boke" containing a translation of the *Legenda Aurea* together with various lives of native saints, quoted below, had provoked a good deal of speculation, but most scholars had assumed that the legendary in question was lost for good:

For as moche as in the englische boke the whiche y haue compiled of *legenda aurea* and of oper famous legends at the instaunce of my specialle frendis and for edificacioun and comfort of alle tho þe whiche shuld redene hit or here hit, is oftene-tyme in lyvis of seyntis, of seynt Cedde, seynt Felix, seynt Edward, seynt Oswalde and many oper seyntis, of Englonde mencyoune made of dyuers parties, plagis, regnis & contreis of this lande Englonde, þe whiche, but if þey be declared, byne fulle harde to knowene: Therefore, for þe more clerere undirstandyng of the seid thyngis and othur, y haue drawe owt in to englische XV chapturs þe whiche Arnulphus Cistrensis in his pollicronica of this landis descripcioun writethe in the laste ende of his furst boke; the which welle knowene & cowed, hit shalle byne easy ynoughe to understande alle þat is towched þer-of in the seyd legende. (6)

The term topography derives from the Greek "*topo-*" (place) and "*graphia*" (writing). The "places" referred to in Bokenham's topographical references will prove to be not only geographical, but also textual spaces, located spatially and temporally. I will argue that topographical reference functions on several different levels in the *Mappula* and the legends of native saints. Firstly, as Bokenham's own words just quoted to some extent indicate, it serves to append the little-explored land of English Christian history onto the more authoritative and established *mappa mundi* of global salvation history. In so doing, it also eases the passage of its author into the canon. However, as work on the Arundel collection by Delany and others has already amply demonstrated, Bokenham's deferent lip-service to canonicity is not to be taken at face value. By claiming to speak in an "authentic" English voice, Bokenham invents and situates his work within what Sanok refers to as a "transhistorical national community" (84). He seeks to assert his own literary *auctoritas* against that of his literary forebears (specifically Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate) by, somewhat paradoxically, claiming precedence over them. He counters their chronological primacy by presenting them

as deviants from an originary, spiritually pure linguistic order. Finally, he also, paradoxically again, uses the spatial / synchronic dimension to counter the precepts of literary genealogy, opposing the synchronic to the diachronic, experience to authority. Bokenham's narration and localisation of native saints will ultimately prove to offer some fascinating insights into the complex and often contradictory strategies which he deployed in vindication of his own vernacular voice.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of the above quoted passage from the *Mappula* is Bokenham's stress on the unfamiliarity of "this lande Englonde" as a literary subject and setting. England is an obscure literary location – "fulle harde to knowene." As Lavezzo, among others, has illustrated medieval maps and topographical writings tended to stress England's geographical and historical marginality. Medieval *mappae mundi* typically positioned England on the furthest borders of the earth, whereas the central position was occupied by imperial Rome, in the case, for example, of the Beatus map, or by Rome, Mount Olympus and Jerusalem on the Higden map (*Angels* 2-3). In Book Fifteen of the *Etymologies*, Isidore of Seville gave the etymology of "Anglia" as "angulus," as England stands in a corner of the world. Gaius Julius Solinus went further, referring to Britain as "nomen paene orbis alterius" (the name of almost another world) (*ibid.* 3). Both of these formidable authorities are cited by Higden and translated by Bokenham in "Chapter Two" of the *Mappula*:

Ysidorus in þe XV boke of his ethymologis will haue hit cleped Anglia of angulus, þe wch is a Cornere for Englonde, quod he, stant in a cornere of the worlde . . . As Alfrede seithe, Englonde is cleped a noþer worlde [. . .] Solinus seithe þat þe margyne & þe brynk of the see past Fraunce shulde be þe ende of the worlde, ne were þe yle cleped Brytayne, þe whiche is worthy þe name of a noþer world: hec ille. (7)

By inserting texts from this obscure "British" hagiographical tradition into the hallowed, authoritative pages of the *Legenda Aurea*, Bokenham is claiming a place for the "national" tradition in which he situates himself in the better-trodden literary map of the canon. The lives of Christian martyrs all hark back typologically to the passion of Christ. Thus in his *Life of Seynt Thomas of Canterbury*, typological parallelism enables Bokenham to link the nerve centre of British Christianity, Canterbury, with the centre-point of the Christian world, Jerusalem:

This glorious and gracious frende of God arrived at Sandewiche and was there received of the comoun peple with as grete ioye and gladnesse as an angel had comen doun from heven and also in euery towne from sandewiche unto Caunterbury the curates with her parissheyus received hym processionally crying and seyeng as the peple did which received criste goyng o Ierusalem a few daies before his passion. Blissed be he which is comen in the name of our lorde. (fol.23v)

Through his focus on the national identity and geographical location of the native saints, Bokenham is engaged in creating what Benedict Anderson terms an “imagined community” – a “transhistorical national community,” as Sanok puts it, within which to situate his own literary output (Sanok, *Her Life Historical* 83). On the cohesive, nation-building function of saints, the following passage from the *Life of St. Audrey* is particularly telling:

Within the [. . .] circuyte of a yere
 That this noble geme closed ben had
 The bright bemys therof shyne of clere
 That fer aboute the bemys is sprad
 And not oonly northumbirlonde is made glad
 But thurghoute al Ingelond in length and brede
 The fame therof did sprynge and sprede. (fol.118r)

Yet if Bokenham seeks to “reinvent” national literary identity, saving native traditions from the dusty corners of literary history and geography, he also revels in the “marginality” of his own projected community. It may appear curious that an English author such as Bokenham appears so keen to emphasise the marginality and obscurity of his own nation and his own literary subject matter. Yet, as Lavezzo demonstrates, otherness and marginality frequently formed the grounds for exceptionalism and exaltation in writings on England. After quoting Isidore, Higden cites a popular Anglo Saxon myth referring to Pope Gregory the Great’s admiration for some pagan English slave boys. The relevant passage in the *Mappula* is missing, presumably, only as a result of damage to the manuscript. To quote Trevisa’s English translation:

Other elles, after Bede in his firste booke, blessedde Gregory seenge childer of Englonde to be sette furthe to be solde at Rome seide: Now truly thei may be callede Engliche men (Angells or Angellysmen) [. . .] Soþeliche aungelis, for her face schyneþ as aungelis; for þe nobilite of þe lond schone in þe children face. (II, 5-6)

To quote Lavezzo:

While the pun does authorize the translation of the strange English into the Christian family, it also imagines the English as an elect and blessed people, whose geographic detachment is of a piece with their religious elevation above the ordinary members of the universal religious siblinghood. Setting the slave boys and their people apart from ordinary Christians – including, indeed, even Pope Gregory the Great himself – the legend extols the English as angels on the edge of the world. (*Angels* 11)

I would argue that some interesting parallels can be drawn between the geographical and historical “angularity” or marginality of England outlined above and Bokenham’s location of himself on the margins of literary history – his repeated expressions of anxiety that he will be cast into “the angle of oblyuyoun,” as he writes in the Arundel “Prologue” to the “Life of St. Margaret”:

Certeyn the auctour was an austyn frere,
Whos name as now I ne wyl expresse,
Ne hap that the vnwurthynesse
Bothe of hys persone & eek hys name
Myht make the werk to be put in blame,
And so, for hate of hym and eek despyht,
Perauenture fewe shuld haue delyht
It to redyn, and for this chesoun
Throwyn it in the angle of oblyuyoun. (32-40)

Bokenham’s strange mixture of deference and defiance to what Delany refers to as the Chaucer-Gower-Lydgate triumvirate has been much documented and discussed. Delany, Price and Lawton have all demonstrated that Bokenham’s overt professions of inferiority to his poetic forebears are countered by his implicit assertions of moral and spiritual superiority, by what Price refers to as his “tactic of trumping poetic tradition with piety” (169).

I will suggest that national identity plays a crucial role in Bokenham’s exaltation of his own literary “angle.” Delany opposes Bokenham’s plain style to the Chaucerian “poetics of the classicising courtier” (54). From a linguistic point of view, we should perhaps add “Francophile” to “classicising,” as I will now suggest that Bokenham’s implicit claims to literary authority rest in part on his assertion of linguistic primacy. Despite the historical primacy of Chaucer and Gower, Bokenham asserts a precedence for his own language on the grounds of its authenticity. In the penultimate chapter of the *Mappula*, Bokenham translates Higden’s

complaint on the corruption of the “firste speche,” “first natif tounge” or “modre tounge” as a consequence of the Norman Conquest:

Thei hane corrupte her first natif toungeis and usyn now Ine wot what straunge and pilgryms blaberynge & cheterynge, noþynge a-cordynge on-to here firste speche. And Dis corrupcion of englysshe men yn þer modretounge, begunne, as I seyde, wt famylyar commixtion of Danys firste & of Normannys aftir, toke grete augmentacioun & encrees aftir þe commynge of William conquerore. (30)

The English language to be found in Bokenham's *Mappula* and, presumably, throughout the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*, is implicitly presented as an antidote to this linguistic corruption. This is not to say that Bokenham thinks he is writing pre-Danelaw and pre-conquest English. He is rather claiming for his purportedly “plain” vernacular the illustrious status which Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate implicitly asserted for their own aureate styles (cf. Wogan-Browne et al. 319-20). If, for Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, aureate, self-consciously literary language represented a fixed standard – a rigid linguistic system divorced from the vagaries of everyday speech in a manner somewhat recalling Saussure's “langue” / “parole” dichotomy (ibid. 319-20), Bokenham instead sited this fixity in the uncontaminated, natural “modre tounge.”

This situation of literary authority in linguistic authenticity – this rooting of authority in an originary language – is further demonstrated, although in a rather different and potentially contradictory manner, in Bokenham's treatment of the etymology and genealogy motifs. In his *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*, Howard Bloch argues that the medieval fascination with etymology and genealogy can be seen to reflect a naturalist, as opposed to a conventionalist, theory of the origins of language, which dates back to Plato's *Cratylus*. Etymologies, such as those translated and elaborated upon by Bokenham from the *Legenda Aurea* and from Higden's *Polychronicon*, serve an authenticating function, stressing the aptness of sign to signified. Where they provide the (usually spurious) Latin or Greek origins for vernacular words, they function diachronically and can be seen to represent an attempt to trace words back to their universal, unambiguous pre-lapsarian roots. Genealogies essentially provide the same diachronically-oriented authentication for historical individuals. In tracing linguistic and human lineages back through time, Bokenham can be said to be engaged in an act of diachronically-founded self-authorisation, presenting himself as reclaiming and even redeeming the geographical setting and the language which he has inherited in a corrupted form from his literary forebears. Herein, of course, Bokenham rather contra-

dicts his assertions of a pristine, originary status for the common "mother tongue," appealing instead to the more orthodox and implicitly patriarchal authority of Latin.

The *Mappula Angliae*, like its source in Higden's *Polychronicon*, is a text replete with etymological expositions of place names. The only one of the *vitae* to cite the *Mappula* is the *Life of Seynt Wenefride* which, in its opening stanzas, refers etymologically curious readers back to the *Polychronicon*:

At the westende of Brytayne the most
 Lyth a Province, a ful fayre cuntre
 Wich aftyr Policronicas lore
 Sittyth o the gret Ottyan see
 Wich is distinct in to partys three
 Wyth dyuers watrys & ful of hillys & valys
 And in oure Vulgare now ys clepyd Walys

But how thys name cam of Gualesia
 Kyng Ebrankys doughter wich ther was quen
 As yt of Cambro was fyrste clepyt Cambria
 Wer of the comodytes wich in that cuntry been
 As bestys and fouys hony & been
 And many other thyngus here spekyn ny y
 Wich seyde Policronica declaryth opynly. (fol.214v)

Elsewhere in the Abbotsford manuscript, Bokenham's fascination with etymologies comes to the fore most clearly in the lives of non-native saints which he translated from the *Legenda Aurea*. Bokenham translates and elaborates considerably upon eighteen of Voragine's etymological prologues. While this means that Bokenham only translated a relatively small proportion of the prologues (for something like fifteen percent of the total number of legends translated from Voragine), we should not forget that the near-contemporary and local translator of the *Gilte Legende* omitted all of the etymologies. Moreover, in the lives of Margaret, Agnes and Anselm, Bokenham provides an elaborate translation of the etymological preface from Voragine even though he does not use the *Legenda* as his source for the main body of the *vita*. Interestingly, Bokenham also appends a *Legenda*-style etymological exposition to his life of the English St. Felix:

The first man that taught cristis feith to the peple of EstInglonde was oon clepid felix the which was born in the boundys of Burgundye. And worthily was this man clepid felix which is asmoche to seyn in englissh as happy or gracious for he was gracious and fortunate bothen in the sight of god and of man and al the werkys which he wrought were graciously begunnen and graciously brought to an ende. (fol.72r)

Brief genealogical backgrounds for the saints and / or the monarchs under whom they lived abound in the legends. Thus, for example, Bokenham begins *The Life of Seynt Dunstan* by telling us that “this holy and blissid man seynt Dunstan was brought forth of wuch fadir and modir in this worlde which afterward he shuld mow seen for her uertus amonge the queres of angels in that other worlde” (fol.109r). The *Life of Seynt Audre* dedicates two stanzas early on in the poem to a description of Audrey’s family “pedegrue” preserved at Ely. Moreover, I would argue that genealogy is a somewhat less vexed issue in the lives of native saints than it is elsewhere. Virgin martyr legends frequently involve the rejection of a pagan father. Whereas genealogical expositions may be introduced in order to root the legend historically, there is thus frequently a certain tension between fallen human lineages and the more holy paternity of spiritual counsellors or, indeed, the divine genealogy of the Trinity. In Bokenham’s legends of native saints, by contrast, although biological fathers are frequently superseded by spiritual father figures, the figure of the rejected or, indeed, tyrannical pagan father who appears in the lives of Margaret and Christine is absent. Thus, although Winifred’s father Tyfid is largely upstaged by her spiritual guide and counsellor Beuno throughout the main body of the legend, his genealogy is nonetheless accompanied by praise for his virtuous Christian living. Similarly, although Wilfred, Audrey’s spiritual teacher, appears to have defied Annas by encouraging Audrey not to consummate her marriage, Annas’ treatment is sympathetic and he is again praised for his Christian virtue.

The etymology and genealogy motifs share a preoccupation with original, incorruptible purity, which is also reflected in Bokenham’s stress on the incorruptibility of the *corpora* of native saints. Thus, in Chapter Five of the *Mappula Angliae* he writes:

Hit is to be considered devoutely how moche cleere brightnes of goddis mercyfulle pite hathe syngulerly illumined & iradied þe peple of Ynglond from the bygynnyng of the feithe recevid, þat no-wheere of no peple in oo prouynce be foundyne so many seyntis bodies liynge hool aftur hur dethe, incorrupt & hauynge þe examplary of finalle incorrupcioun, as byne in Yngelond. (11)

Two of Bokenham's longest verse lives – the lives of Winifred and Audrey – deal with incorruptible female bodies. Winifred is restored to life after being decapitated by her would-be rapist, Caradog. Winifred is remarkable in surviving decapitation, a “violation of physical integrity” which, as Delany points out in the passage quoted below, represents the definitive *coup de grâce* for many saints:

Considering the vast ingenuity of torture and its lethal apparatuses, it is curious that decapitation accounts for so large a proportion of martyrs' deaths. Take two samples closest to hand: five of Bokenham's ten martyrs die of decapitation, and the same proportion holds for the South English Legendary in which, by my count, seventeen martyrs are decapitated and another seventeen die by various other means – burning, stoning, crucifixion, stabbing, hewing to pieces, roasting, drawing by horses – even though these other means have failed with those who are finally decapitated. It is as if this violation of physical integrity, unlike any other, is universally acceptable to God as a cause of death. (71)

Audrey, instead, manages to preserve her virginity despite being married twice, definitive proof of which is presented in the form of her incorruptible corpse after death. The trope of the incorrupt, virginal female body as figuring forth a transhistorical spiritual and national identity had a long history before Bokenham (cf., for example, Brown 69-85, Sanok 99-105). In Bokenham's case, it is not hard to equate this image of the pristine female body with the purity he asserts for the “modre tonge” in which he writes.

This association of an incorrupt national language with an incorrupt female body points to the central role played by gender in Bokenham's self-authorising strategies. Although the fact that all of the so-called *Legends of Hooly Wummen* probably also appeared in the mixed-gender Abbotsford manuscript (cf. Horobin, “A Manuscript” 140) undermines Delany's assertions of the primacy of gender in that text – her reading of the text as a kind of literary City of Ladies – I would argue that gender nonetheless emerges as a key motif throughout the Abbotsford *Legenda*. The fact that Audrey and Winifred are the only native saints to have their lives versified and that these two *vitae* are among the longest in the collection is surely no coincidence. The elite yet marginal linguistic community in which Bokenham situates his own textual output can in certain respects be seen to be gendered feminine. The legendary as a whole reveals a significant tendency to foreground the mother figure, together with recurrent references to fertility, childbirth and prenatal miracles. This is scarcely surprising, considering Bokenham's readership. We know from the various addresses and accounts of commissions in-

cluded in the Arundel manuscript (although largely omitted in the Abbotsford – cf. Horobin “A Manuscript” 142-44) that Bokenham’s network of patrons was predominantly female. Horobin presents a convincing argument that the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea* may have been presented to Cecily Neville, wife of Richard, Duke of York.¹ Furthermore, Hilles has underlined the importance of female fertility and matrilineage to Yorkist succession (201). Yet to this we should surely add the feminine “modre tonge” of Bokenham’s literary corpus, which comes to be aligned to the sacred female corpora of whom he writes. Unlike Voragine, Bokenham begins his *Life of St. Thomas of Canterbury* by including the apocryphal narrative of Thomas’ mother, a Saracen princess who followed his father back from the Crusades, which is almost as long as the treatment of Thomas himself. As anticipated by Delany, Bokenham includes a *Life of St. Monica*, mother of the founding father of his order. In addition to the already mentioned *Life of St. Thomas of Canterbury*, both the *Life of St. Dunstan* and the *Life of St. Clare* refer to pre-natal miracles witnessed by the mother. Finally the legends of St. Margaret, St. Nicholas of Tolentino and St. Anne (assuming it was in the collection) are very much concerned with female fertility.

As we have already seen, Bokenham’s sacralisation of the physical spaces in which his legends occur is closely linked to the legitimisation of the language in which they are written. To this we should now add that the autochthonous functions which Bokenham attributes to physical, geographical spaces are mirrored in the spatial distributions of his texts. While Delany’s assertion to the effect that the so-called *Legendys of Hooley Wummen* were linked within a complex and meticulously planned structure designed to associate the textual corpus with the female body has been undermined with the discovery of the Abbotsford manuscript, I would argue that numerological and, specifically, Trinitarian structures are recurrent at the level of the individual legends. I have already pointed to the centrality of the trinity motif elsewhere in Bokenham’s legends, arguing that it unites and concretises the complex mesh of temporal and spatial axes within which Bokenham is seeking to locate his own authorial output (“Etymology” 329-34). Diachronically, the Father-Son / Word – Word made flesh lineage forms the foundation for Bokenham’s assertions of authority through linguistic primacy and authenticity. The eternally and universally present Holy Spirit unites and dissolves the synchronic and diachronic trajectories. I have already demonstrated how Bokenham tends to expand upon and foreground

¹ Horobin refers to Cecily Neville’s will of 1495, wherein she bequeathes “the boke of *Legenda Aurea* in velem” to her grand-daughter Bridget” (Horobin, “A Manuscript” 150-1).

any tripartite structures he finds in Voragine's introductory etymological passages and how Trinitarian structures and references abound throughout his oeuvre in general. With specific reference to the lives of native saints, we might consider the *Life of Seynt Audre*, which is divided into three sections clearly signalled by authorial interpolations: the *vita*, the translation of the relics and post-mortem miracles and the envoy, which refers to the resurrection and the Apocalypse (fols.117v-120r). Somewhat more intriguingly, the *Life of Seynt Thomas of Canterbury* contains the following reference to another lost Bokenham text, a more extended life of Beckett, in which the significance of the number three is repeatedly underlined:

Of which hate and dissention how thre thyngis were the first originall cause and what thise thre thyngis weren of the parlementis also of charyngdon and Northampton and what was doon there and of blissid thomis troube-lous exile vii ere in fraunce and of his grievous persecucion in the mean tyme forasmoche as the matier is longe and diffuse and may nat be declared ner tolde shortly I oversitt it in this werk and wil oonly declaren the processe and circumstaunce of his passion which was the fine and ende of his longe persecution. And who so wil han notes and knowleche of these seid min boke which I compiled and translated oute of latyn into englissh of seynt Thomas life in especial which is distinct into thre parties and the parties into chapitres he shal mown fynde bothe that is seid and that eke which is left diffusely and plenerly aftir the sympilnesse of my rude witte tolde and declared. (fol.23v)

My focus thus far has been on how Bokenham seeks to overcome his historical disadvantages as a literary latecomer by stressing his own authenticity – laying claim to a kind of historical precedence over his predecessors. In layman's terms, so far I have been examining how Bokenham seeks to beat his literary forebears at their own game, redefining the diachronic axes along which literary genealogies and hierarchies have been formed. However, I will now suggest that Bokenham's topographical emphasis also serves to counteract the verticalist, diachronic principles on which literary *auctoritas* is based. His emphasis on physical, spatial realities in the here and now introduces a horizontalist trajectory which disrupts and undermines traditional hierarchies. Writing on Higden's *Polychronicon*, Bokenham's source for the *Mappula*, Galloway argues that:

[Higden's writings] bespeak present-looking, rather than past-looking collectivity [. . .] Like the personal voice of fourteenth-century vernacular "public poetry" that Anne Middleton has described, the dissenting personal voice of fourteenth-century monastic Latin chronicles is another trope for a collective contemporary English voice, capable of addressing a "common" audience "now" whose limits are implicitly national. (In Lavezzo, *Medieval English Nation* 64)

He goes on to assert that "Chaucer's Wife of Bath is a compiler very much in Higden's vein" (*ibid.* 69), and that Higden's focus on natural sites and phenomena enables him to adopt an empirical, critical attitude towards authorities. Bokenham's experientialist leanings certainly come to the fore in both the *Mappula* and the lives of native saints. In the lives of native saints, Bokenham repeatedly calls on his readers to visit the pilgrimage sites referred to and experience them for themselves. Such is the case with his description of Audrey's "pedegrue" at Ely:

This nobyl kyng and his worthy queen,
Ioyned togider in perfite charite
As the lawe of marriage wolde it shuld bene.
Bitwix hem of issue had fair plentee,
The pedegrue of whom, who so list to see,
At Ely in the munkys bothe in picture
He it fynd mow shal, and in scripture. (fol.117v)

In the *Life of Seynt Wenefride*, Bokenham grounds his description of the miraculous properties of Winifred's Well not on an authoritative text, but on the oral, anecdotal testimony of his host at Holywell:

Of this laste balade y haue no euydence,
But oonly relacyoun of men in that cuntre,
To whom me semyth shuld be youyn credence
Of alle swyche thyngys as ther doon be.
For whan y was there myn hoost told me
That yt soth was wythowte drede,
For himself had seyin yt doon in dede. (fol.217r)

Perhaps most interestingly, in the passage from the *Mappula* already quoted on the abundance of incorrupt saintly bodies, Bokenham concludes by interpolating a further example – that of Joan of Acre (the subject of the dialogue at the grave in the Clare Roll) – which, in a paradigm which dramatically dissolves the Wife's famous binarism, is justified "by auctoryte of experyence":

& y dar boldly by auctoryte of experyence addyne her-to kynge Edwardis doughtre þe furst aftir þe conqueste, Dame Jone of Acris, whos body lithe hool & incorrupt in þe frires queere of Clare one þe sowthe side, for whome oure lordis grace booth of old tyme & newe hathe shewid þer many gret miracles and specially in III thynges, as in tothe-ache, peyne in þe bake, & also of þe acces. (11)

To conclude, in this paper I have sought to investigate how Bokenham deploys the topographical localisation of native saints in an attempt to locate his own authority temporally and spatially. More particularly, I have sought to illustrate the role played by Bokenham's narration and localisation of native saints in vindicating his own vernacular voice. Topography functions both diachronically and synchronically, as Bokenham, somewhat paradoxically, at once lays claim to a diachronically-rooted authority founded on authenticity / precedence and to a synchronically-rooted authority opposed to the superficial hierarchies of literary history.

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