

Image Commentary

John Cooper-Hammond

Student No: 2022129

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

For completion by the student:		
Student Name: John Cooper-Hammond		
Module code: HPHI7016 Module title: Past Peoples, Present Societies: Research Methods & Skills	Student ID number: 2022129	Educational support needs: No
Module tutor: Alex Scott		
Assignment due date: 14 th November 2021		
If your module has multiple submissions, please indicate which piece of work this is.		
1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th ☒ 5 th ☐ 6 th ☐ Assessment 4: Image commentary		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed ...John Cooper-Hammond...		
Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☐ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		
Assignment Mark		
1 st Marker's Provisional mark		
2 nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark		
External Examiner's mark (if relevant)		

Image Commentary

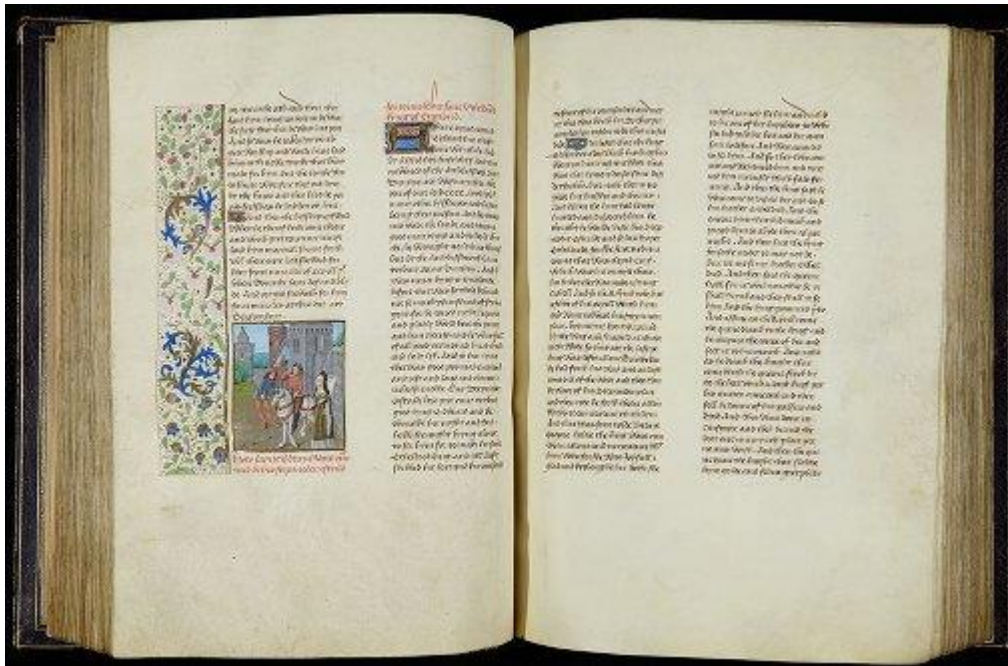
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Final Mark	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.	
For completion by Marker 1: Comments:	
Marker's signature:	Date:
For completion by Marker 2/Moderator: Comments:	
Marker's Signature:	Date:
External Examiner's comments (if relevant)	
External Examiner's Signature:	Date:

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle



Saint Alban's Chronicle, Lambeth Palace Library/Courtauld Institute, MS6 f91v, "15th century Page detail. Saint Edward on horse drinks and is stabbed. Elgiva on right with castle behind. Illuminated manuscript on vellum"¹

Preamble

Clare Brown² says that:

The St. Alban's Chronicle ... is a deluxe copy of the prose *Brut*, a popular mediaeval chronicle recounting the history of Britain from the legendary

¹ Lambeth Palace Library website at: - [Manuscripts \(lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk\)](https://manuscripts.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk) description of image from website

² Clare Brown), [St. Alban's Chronicle | A Monument of Fame](#),

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

times of Brutus, great grandson of Aeneas. MS 6 dates from the last quarter of the fifteenth century and was probably written by an English scribe; the text interspersed with illuminations relating to the action of the narrative probably produced in Bruges. The entire manuscript has been digitised and is available in 'turn the page' format on the Library's [online image gallery](#).

The Chronicle was originally produced in the scriptorium of Saint Alban's Abbey, James Clark³ comments:

The Abbey of St. Albans has always occupied a central position in discussions of monastic culture in postconquest England... it was recognized that from this one Benedictine house had emerged perhaps the most sustained tradition of learning and literary production in the country.

This book was probably produced when Thomas Walsingham was master of the scriptorium, but its contents also relied on the earlier chroniclers at Saint Alban's. as David Thorold⁴ notes:

The monks of St Albans were creating, copying, and preserving historic, scientific and philosophical texts that helped to define their world. At a time when writing was unusual and books were rare, Matthew Paris, Thomas Walsingham, Richard Wallingford, and their fellow scribes preserved a record not just of the medieval world, but also its mindset. Without them, our knowledge of our own history would be significantly poorer.

Walsingham is considered to be the last of the great medieval chroniclers and was a prolific author of manuscripts and collector of information, certain characters and events are only known to history from his writings⁵

Commentary

³ James G. Clark, Thomas Walsingham reconsidered: books & learning at late-medieval Saint Albans,

⁴ David Thorold, curator of the Verulamium Museum and curator of the exhibition *Chroniclers of History* at Saint Alban's Museum 30th July – 31st October 2021

⁵ Pitts (Leadam 1899 no other reference to this work found), remarks, according to Wikipedia "...that we owe to him the knowledge of many historical incidents not recorded by other writers. He is the principal authority for the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V. Our acquaintance with John Wycliff's career is largely due to his information... He is also the chief authority for the insurrection of Wat Tyler in 1381... Walsingham's admiration for Henry V... led him to follow with minute detail the progress of that king's campaigns in France."

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

This book is written in English in a dark brown ink, with headings in red at the start of each episode of history. For the most part the text is in two tightly written columns, although some capitals have patterned illumination and there is some penmanship shown on the margins of the text. In the main pages are just text. Every few pages a small illustration is used to alleviate the uniformity and to illustrate the story about to be told, accompanying each of these is a florally decorated margin. These illustrations usually occupy, as is the case of this one, the width of one column, although in a few instances they stretch across two. This image is of the death of Edward king (975 - 978) and martyr, at Corfe in Dorset on 18th March 978.

Following a disputed succession, Edward followed his father Edgar as king, he was the son of Edgar's first wife Æthelflæd of Devon. After his death, the throne passed to his half-brother Æthelred, son of Edgar's third wife, Ælfthryth of York. Whilst hunting nearby Edward went to Corfe to see his brother who lived there in his mother's household. At the gates he was assassinated whilst still mounted, his horse bolted dragging his body away. The image shows the assassination taking place. The king is on his horse, taking a drink whilst 'Elgiva' stands by him, and the assassin attacks him with a sword. Behind the figures are the walls of Corfe Castle. The image is in a gilded and black frame and the floral margin in green and blue with gold highlights. The painting is a miniature scene, solidly painted using a range of colours.

The scene depicted is from late Saxon period of English history, but the artist has shown in it a style that is contemporary in the first half of the 15th century, which is at the time of production of the manuscript. The illustration can offer no information about the late Saxon period, for example at that time there was no castle at Corfe. Archaeological evidence has shown there was a superior Saxon hall built on the hill for use by the royal family, but no castle. The first castle was built by William the Conqueror in the late 11th century, partly in stone and partly wooden, the castle whose ruins now dominate the village was begun by Henry I and further developed later. The name Corfe Castle associated with Saint Edward was not used at the time. In fact the castle shown in the image is pure artistic licence bearing no resemblance to the actual structure. The Lambeth Palace Library say that the illustrations may have been done in Bruges and the architecture of the castle could indicate this. The castle illustrated has many similar architectural features in common when compared to 15th century examples from Belgium, for example the Château de Vêves, "one of the most remarkable specimens of 15th century military architecture".⁶ The assignment of

⁶ [The Castle of Vêves - Le Château de Vêves \(Dinant\) \(chateau-veves.be\)](http://chateau-veves.be)

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

the illustrations in this book to Bruges must have been made on stylistic ground and there are other exemplar and comparative manuscripts extant that are known to have been decorated by a school of artists from Bruges in the 15th century.⁷ Whilst not giving the viewer information about pre-Conquest England it does provide ideas of castle styles and architecture of the 15th century, be it that of the Burgundian Netherlands.

The text below the picture mentions his stepmother, called 'Elgiva' by Clare Brown,⁸ but the text alongside, in the second column appears to read 'Efrude'. The former would seem to indicate Æthelred's wife, Ælfgifu, whilst the latter is more akin to Ælfthryth, with a possible reading of the lower case, old/middle English letter 'eth' [ð] as a 'd'. The author and the illustrator are certainly implicating Edwards step-mother in his death, as does local Dorset folklore,⁹ this is widely accepted and is, for example, mentioned in the Penguin Dictionary of Saints.¹⁰ The nearest contemporary record, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*¹¹ record his death, the A, D (E) versions say he was killed, and the C version says he was martyred; only the D (E) version tells of him becoming a saint. At no point is anyone mentioned as being his killer. But popular lore adds Ælfthryth to the many story-tale 'wicked step-mothers'. No-one can now know what really happened, however the murder and treachery associated with Edward's demise can be seen to have had incredible repercussions for the kingdom in the years that followed

Although historically anachronistic for the period of the story, the clothing of the three figures is very much in the style of the first half of the 15th century when the illustration was done, the men in brimless hats, short doublets and hose, and pointed shoes. The woman, in kirtle and over-kirtle with a hennin and veil on her head, are all dressed in a contemporary fashion. The background of sky and trees is formulaic, and topographically inaccurate.¹² The harness of the king's horse also corresponds with that in use in the 15th century.¹³ Again, the information that can be gleaned from the image concerns clothing styles of the aristocracy, and possibly their servants, for the 15th rather than the 10th century.

⁷ For example – *Book of Devotions*, use of St Donatian

⁸ Clare Brown *op cit*.

⁹ John Symonds Udall, 1989, *Dorsetshire Folk-lore*, Exeter: p 162 - Corfe Castle

¹⁰ Donald Attwater, 1965, *The Penguin Book of Saints*, p111

¹¹ Dorothy Whitelock, 1961 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles: a revised translation* pp 79 - 80

¹² I can attest this from many personal visits to Corfe castle

¹³ Vide the 15th century miniatures in the *Hunting Book* by Gaston Phébus. ALSO Wagner, E, Drobná, Z & Durdik, J, 2014, *Medieval costume, armour & weapons*

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

The miniature clearly shows the moment of Edward's assassination in a way that supports the believed folk-lore story of how Æthelred came to the throne aged less than twelve years through the machinations of his mother¹⁴. She, incidentally, along with archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury and bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, managed royal affairs until his majority.

The care and attention taken when producing this image reflects the value placed on the work, this is a complete picture in miniature form with particular attention to detail. It clearly illustrates the story that follows in the text and shows a crucial event in history. The whole is painted using at least six main¹⁵ colours and tonal shades of those colours, and gold is used for visual effect. Such work would have been time-consuming and therefore costly. The whole book contains fifty-one of these miniatures and twenty-four larger pictures across both columns. Each page with an illustration, seventy-five in all, has a floral border too. In addition are the illuminated capitals and fine penmanship. This was an expensive book to produce. The illustrations reflect the culture of the 15th century in dress, arms and armour and architectural detail

The written text of this book is in Middle English rather than the scholastic Latin of religious writing, would indicate a wider audience than the church, during the 15th century there was a move from French to English in courtly circles (indeed Lincoln Barnett¹⁶ noted that when the Dean of Windsor wrote to Henry IV in 1403, the language drifted between French and English.) However literacy was only to be found amongst the religious and the aristocratic and wealthier classes at that time, but reading was becoming more popular amongst the literate as is evidenced by Chaucer's fictional works.

The author(s) of this work set out to provide a history of England and the descent of its kings, from earliest times. At the time of writing the succession had been contested by the children of the sons of Edward III following the death of the childless Richard II, with, through agnatic primogeniture, Henry IV usurping the

¹⁴ Richard Abels, 2018, *Æthelred the Unready*, London Allen Lane pp 8 & 17: states that was unusual that justice had not been sought for Edward's death under *hlafordswice* law; and that it was Anglo-Norman ecclesiastical writers who ascribed blame to Queen Ælfthryth' ruthless ambition.

This conspiracy theory developed and by C12th Henry of Huntingdon in his *Historia Anglorum*, c 1140, has he personally stabbing Edward [Greenway pp324-5]. Int the *Liber Eliensis* [Fairweather, 2005, p 154] in Book II, 57, written between 11345 & 1154, has her confessing to her guilt along with sorcery and being a witch.

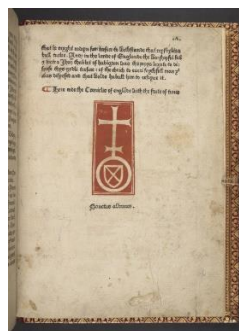
¹⁵ Colours noted are: red, blue, white, black, green, grey, and brown and tones of these colours

¹⁶ Lincoln K. Barnett, 1970, *The History of the English Language*,

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

throne from Edmund Mortimer, the heir presumptive. This takeover of the throne by the House of Lancaster would, later in the century, precipitate the 'Wars of the Roses'. It was, perhaps a appropriate time to produce a history of England and reinforce the line of succession from earliest times. It is known that Thomas Walsingham wrote the *Ypodigma Neustriæ* for Henry V to provide him with information about his ancestral Dukes of Normandy, and to provide him with validation for his invasion of France. It is possible that the Chronicle was written to help justify the Lancastrian reign.

The writings of Thomas Walsingham have provided a source of knowledge for the period from the death of Edward III to the birth of Henry VI, providing a political commentary and evidence of the social and cultural aspects of a turbulent time in English history. The Chronicles of Saint Albans were printed by Caxton in 1480 but also in Saint Albans circa 1486. Whilst the abbey was known for its production of handwritten books the town had an early printing press, one of the first English printers outside London and Westminster. The printer is anonymous but '...One of the only hints we have originates from ...Wynkyn de Worde (d. 1534), who once described him as a 'Sometime schoolmaster'. Since then, he has typically been referred to as the 'Schoolmaster Printer'¹⁷. This edition has on its last page a printer's mark with the arms of the Abbey and the town.



Word count: 2,169

¹⁷ British Library Medieval manuscript blog [Chroniclers of History at St Albans Museum - Medieval manuscripts blog](#)

Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

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Image Commentary

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Chosen topic: Folio from the Saint Alban's Chronicle

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