

The Life of John Capgrave, O.E.S.A. (1393-1464)

I

The received biography of John Capgrave is characterized as are many other medieval lives by errors and uncritical accretions, most of them results of confusion, lack of information, and the acceptance of unsubstantiated traditions. Only a few dates in Capgrave's life may be given with certainty: his birth on April 23, 1393; his promotion to the final pre-degree status of *lector* on April 8, 1421; his appointment as a student to Cambridge on April 13, 1422; his formal completion of the bachelor's degree on March 20, 1423; his reception of Henry VI while he was prior at the Austin convent in Lynn on August 1, 1446; his election as prior-provincial of England on July 22, 1453 at Winchester and his confirmation in the office on May 8, 1454; his re-election at Lynn on August 15, 1455 and reconfirmation on February 14, 1456; his recognition of Edmund Rede as the founder of the Austin convent at Oxford in 1456; and his death on August 12, 1464. For the rest there is little sure evidence. Some problems have been convincingly resolved in recent years, and it is hoped others will be settled or clarified here.

There are no further records of a public role which would account for the great reputation Capgrave apparently enjoyed in his own time and certainly had attained by the time the literary biographers began to take note of him in the next century. He is little help himself, for he makes only minimal and bare references to a few of the people he met, and he makes no comment at all on the internal conditions of contemporary England. To come to some understanding of how he could have reached a prominence which is not reflected in his vernacular works, it is important to realize that he always lived not in a rural monastery but in convents in the centres of busy towns, that he came into contact with many of the important religious and political figures of his time, that he travelled abroad, and that he rose to the highest post in the English province of his order. Some aspects of this knowledge, especially the study of his educational course, aid in the interpretation of his works, but chiefly they administer a corrective to the view of Capgrave as a sequestered figure, unaware of or uninvolved in the life about him.

In *The Chronicle of England* Capgrave gives his birthdate as April 23, 1393¹), and in *The Life of St. Katherine* he specifically says; "My cuntre is of northfolke, of þe town of lynne"²). Apart from these bare statements, the only genealogical relationship which has ever been suggested for Capgrave is that he was the nephew and namesake of a fourteenth-century Austin friar, who was appointed to study at Oxford on the recommendation of the masters, bachelors, and priors of the Oxford *limit* (administrative district) and who received his doctorate in theology in 1390. Unfamiliar with the Augustinian archives, the early biographers were unaware that there had been two men of the same name; and in the only instance where they are both mentioned before Alberic de Meijer's 1955 biography, the literary productions are assigned to the earlier man³). It is possible to use the few details known about the first John Capgrave to remove certain errors in the author's history.

Apparently the biographies of the two men, one obscure and the other renowned in his own age, were soon confused; and they were certainly conflated as early as the sixteenth century. Without exception until the eighteenth century, the commentators name Oxford as the writer's university. After his own works with their references to Cambridge were discovered, it became customary to describe Capgrave as a «doctor of both the universities». In itself this description is suspect, for the places at the universities were few and zealously guarded in the middle ages. Now that a John Capgrave who did attend Oxford is known, the anomaly is resolved.

This new awareness of the first John Capgrave also helps answer the question of the author's birthplace. In absolute terms, the statement in the *St. Katherine* that he was a man of Lynn, Norfolk, may mean no more than that he was a resident of the Lynn convent at the time of the poem's composition while he originally came from Kent as his first biographers say. But, although there is no mention of his unusual surname in the lists of guild members and borough officials or

¹) Ed. F.C. Hingston (London, 1858), p. 259.

²) Ed. C. Horstmann, E.E.T.S., O.S. 100 (London, 1893), *Prologue*, l. 240.

³) L. Torelli, *Secoli Agostiniani*, VII (Bologna, 1682), 314. A. de Meijer comes to the same conclusion in his three part article on Capgrave. Under the title, "John Capgrave, O.E.S.A.", the three parts were published in *Augustiniana*, V (1955), 400-440; and *Augustiniana*, VII (1957), 118-148, 531-574. They will be cited subsequently as de Meijer, Part I, Part II, or Part III. De Meijer discusses the relationship of the two John Capgraves in Part I, 405-406.

in any of the legal documents extant in the town records, there is reason to assume that he was born either in Lynn itself or in the immediate vicinity.

In the first place, one of the statutes of the Austin friars required that a novice enter and thereafter be considered a conventual of the convent nearest his parental home⁴). Since Capgrave was sent to Cambridge, it is reasonable to assume that he belonged originally to the *limit* which it served, that is, to one of the houses at Cambridge, Norwich, Clare, Lynn, Little Yarmouth, Orford, Huntingdon, or Thetford. Because he was made prior at Lynn by 1446 at the latest, kept the house as his permanent residence even during the period when he was prior-provincial, and remained there until his death in 1464, it seems most likely that he had also entered the order there.

Second, there are internal indications in his works which reveal a familiarity with Norfolk, and particularly with Lynn, in his early years. Most important are the references to local events which he makes in *The Chronicle of England*. Throughout the book, he takes note of disasters such as fires in the county and gives more specific accounts of the actions of the various bishops of Norwich than of any others. More particularly, for the year 1400, between the notice of the death of Richard II and the report of the rebellion of Owen Glendower, he records the capture of some Scottish fishing boats by men of Lynn and their being brought to the town (pp. 276-277). In 1404, when he was eleven, he was apparently an eyewitness to the departure of Princess Philippa from Lynn for her marriage to King Eric of Norway (*Chronicle*, p. 292, *De Illustribus Henricis*, p. 109). And, finally, among the more national events of 1416, he reports the stealing of three children of Lynn by beggars and their later recovery in London (*Chronicle*, p. 316).

Finally, since the elder Capgrave was nominated to the university by the senior members of the Oxford *limit*, he clearly came from one of the eight convents under their jurisdiction. One of these was in Kent, at Canterbury, and it may well have been his home. In any case, though this explanation does not help place the writer in Norfolk, it makes it more likely that it was the first John Capgrave who was "in Cantiorum comitatu natus".

⁴) F. Roth, *The English Austin Friars, 1249-1538*, I (New York, 1966), 47.

Since the medieval populace was not highly mobile and since these pieces of evidence strongly suggest that the fourteenth century Capgrave was from the south and Capgrave the author from East Anglia, the hypothetical uncle-nephew link between the two is questionable. In the face of the historical evidence, de Meijer's literal reading of "faders" as "kinsmen" in the following lines is exceedingly tenuous :

Owt of þe world to my profyte I cam
 On-to þe brotherhode quech I am Inne—
 Godd 3eue me grace neuyr for to blynne
 To folow þe steppes of my faders be-for,
 Whech to þe rewle of Austen wer swore.

(*The Life of St. Katherine, Prologue*, 11. 241-245)

Thus, while it is tempting to provide Capgrave with some bond in the past, it is more practicable to regard him autonomously and look first at the town where he spent so much of his life.

Whether he was born in the town itself or in one of the nearby hamlets, Lynn would have provided Capgrave with opportunities to view the full range of medieval economic, social, and religious activities. Although it is no longer a prominent centre, Lynn's geographical position made it an important port and market town in the fifteenth century. By 1377 it was ninth in size among the cities of England⁵); and a petition in 1422 for additional chapels to serve the public gives evidence of the numbers who frequented the town⁶). In

⁵) J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque, 1948), p. 142. He estimates Lynn's population as 4,691. The eight towns larger than Lynn and their estimated populations in 1377 were: London, 34,971; York, 10,872; Bristol, 9,518; Plymouth, 7,256; Coventry, 7,226; Norwich, 5,928; Lincoln, 5,354; and Salisbury, 4,839.

⁶) The contents of the petition are known from the reply to it contained in the *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, Vol. VII, A.D. 1417-1431*, ed. J. A. Twenlow (London, 1906), 441-442:

To the bishop of Ely. Mandate as below. The recent petition of the townsmen of Bishop's Lynn (*opidanorum ville de Lenne episcopi*) in the diocese of Norwich contained that within the bounds of their parish church of St. Margaret, appropriated by papal authority to the prior and convent of Norwich, and served by four monks thereof, one of them called prior, who are removeable at the pleasure of the said prior and convent, and by a hired chaplain, a secular priest, the parishioners built at a time immemorial a chapel of St. James and another of St. Nicholas, in each of which a chaplain has hitherto been and still is/ placed by the said prior and convent, who celebrates therein mass and other divine offices and administers to a number of the parishioners by old custom all ecclesiastical sacraments, but not baptism, marriage nor churching of women; and adding that in the said town the multitude and devotion of the said parishioners has

the same way, the total of fifty-two churches, chapels and oratories shows that there were great resources available for private endowment. That one of the four remaining English factories of the Hanseatic League was in Lynn demonstrates its continuing involvement in the Baltic trade. And, while much of England's international trade was destroyed by the wars with the French, by the shifting alliances in the Low Countries, and by the increasing isolation and eastward turning of the Baltic merchants, the merchants of Lynn entered the newly developing Icelandic ventures by 1420 and continually sought to preserve their rights in it by negotiations on their own behalf with the king of the Danes⁷⁾.

As concomitants of this busy trading activity, Lynn not only had a relatively large alien population for an English town⁸⁾, but also felt the struggle for political strength on the part of the middle class. The increasing prosperity of the members of the seventy-five trade guilds in Lynn finally brought them into open conflict with the local merchants in the early years of the fifteenth century while John Capgrave was a student friar. And though Lynn was to become "one of the closest of the close boroughs"⁹⁾ in the end, for the moment the small oligarchy controlling the guild of the Holy Trinity was forced by the general class of burgesses in conjunction with the privileged group of episcopal tenants to allow greater participation in the choice of officials. The increased democracy the townsmen had earned did not last long, but their capacity to get their grievances heard and to force agreements reflects the communal power and, therefore, their relative affluence. Many of the meetings at which corporate affairs were discussed and compromises established were held within the Augustinian convent. Such intrusions of the outside world upon their religious life were of

increased so much that on Easter day every year about 1,600 persons receive the communion (*sacramento Eucaristi communicantur*) in the said parish church, and in the said chapels of St. Nicholas and St. James about 1,400 and 900 respectively. The pope orders the above bishop, if he finds the facts to be as stated, to grant to the parishioners that they may in the said chapels hear mass and other divine offices by the said chaplains and receive from them the said sacraments, and that the said chaplains may freely administer to them the same; saving the right of the parish church and of any other. *Ammonet nos suscepti cura.*

⁷⁾ B. Power and M.M. Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1933), p. 166.

⁸⁾ H.J.M. Kerling, "Aliens in the County of Norfolk, 1436-1485", *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXXIII (1962), 200-212.

⁹⁾ J. Tait, *The Medieval English Borough* (Manchester, 1936), p. 148.

course characteristic of the mendicant orders in the late middle ages, and witnessing the struggle at close range, Capgrave must have become aware of political realities early.

With so large a population and so much prosperity, Lynn enjoyed dramatic entertainments similar to those in other large centres. There is no evidence for a mystery cycle, but plays of St. Thomas and of Mary and Gabriel were certainly acted¹⁰); and the various public records of Lynn mention several payments for plays or to players (including minstrels) during the first half of the fifteenth century¹¹). Since the Augustinian convent was located in the centre of the town and frequently housed visiting dignitaries, it is likely that Capgrave saw both the public spectacles in the nearby streets and market place and the private entertainments occasionally staged for guests. Two aspects of Capgrave's style in his saints' lives bear considerable resemblance to the techniques of the medieval stage. Everywhere, he focuses on central, objective and dramatically realizable episodes, and whenever an occasion arises in the narrative for a debate, an exorcism, or a conversion, the scene is either carefully described or, at least, established by some prominent object.

Probably Capgrave had joined the Augustinian order no later than 1410¹²). Why he chose the Augustinians over the Franciscans, Dominicans, or Carmelites, all of whom were represented in Lynn, cannot be determined. Certainly, his order was an important one in the

¹⁰) E. K. Chambers says, in *The Medieval Stage*, II (Oxford, 1903), 374:

There was a Corpus Christi guild as early as 1400, and the Tailor's *Ordinances* of 1441 require them to take part in the Corpus Christi procession; but I do not find evidence of regular annual plays. The Chamberlain's Accounts for 1385, however, include:

'iijs^siiij^d to certain players, playing an interlude on Corpus Christi day'.

'iijs^siiij^d paid by the Mayor's gift to persons playing the interlude of St. Thomas the Martyr'.

and those for 1462 —

'iijs^s paid for two flagons of red wine, spent in the house of Arnulph Tixonye, by the Mayor and most of his brethren, being there to see a certain play at the Feast of Corpus Christi'. In this same year the Skinners and Sailors 'of the town' received rewards 'for their labour about the procession of Corpus Christi this year'. In 1409-1410 Lady de Beaufort came to see a play.

and Chambers, *ibid.*, p. 384, also records:

In 1444 the corporation of Lynn showed a play with Mary and Gabriel before Lord Scales. [at Middleton, Norfolk].

¹¹) Further payments are recorded in the extracts from the Lynn records published in the *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Eleventh Report, Part III* (London, 1887), 162-163.

¹²) de Meijer, Part I, 407.

town, with a house large enough to entertain Bishop Arundel and his retinue in 1383¹³) and the Duke and Duchess of Clarence with three hundred horses in 1413¹⁴). Moreover, it was chosen as the arena for the meetings of the representatives of the town and of the Bishop of Norwich which have been referred to earlier. As prior, Capgrave was to receive Henry VI there in 1446¹⁵).

There were many differences in the original intentions of the founders of the great mendicant orders, but within a few generations, they had grown essentially alike. For instance, at the command of the pope — inspired in a vision by St. Augustine, according to Capgrave¹⁶) — the Augustinians left their rural convents for the urban life of the other friars. The Minors soon neglected St. Francis' injunction to renounce human learning and with the other orders followed the Dominicans in developing advanced schools for the study of theology and allied arts. Moreover, all the orders of friars sought to disseminate the basic Christian beliefs to the people, and in order to discourage concern for local interests and large estates such as occupied so many monastic establishments, they denigrated worldly possessions and created centralized controls ultimately vested in the pope. Finally, despite the Great Schism and the attempts of secular authorities to gain their support for nationalistic goals, they all remained committed to the authority of Rome. Among them, the Augustinian theologians provided the chief arguments for the pope's dominion.

In the late middle ages the spiritual state and moral authority of the friars weakened; and they became subject to charges of worldliness as they fell away from absolute poverty¹⁷). Medieval sources point to a

¹³) M. Aston, *Thomas Arundel* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 184-185.

¹⁴) H. J. Hillen, *A History of the Borough of King's Lynn*, (Norwich, 1907), p. 165.

¹⁵) As he reports in his *De Illustribus Henricis*, ed. F. C. Hingston (London, 1858), pp. 137-139.

¹⁶) In *The Chronicle of England*, p. 157.

¹⁷) Throughout his work, Father Roth mentions individual cases of lapsed friars and he discusses frequently recorded cases of the abuse of the vow of poverty (I, 186-189). In addition, he seeks to refute charges of Lollardry made against the Austins. He agrees that the two masters who "spoke against the shirking of taxes by the higher clergy" in 1374 were on the royal or nationalist, as opposed to papal side — "while it is true that they voiced only the popular sentiment it also indicates the inroads Wyclif's teaching had made among those whose first allegiance should have been to the Pope" (I, 64). But, he says later, "It has often been said that some English Austins sided with Wyclif's social teaching. Whatever their ideas in the matter might have been, his attack upon faith turned them against him" (I, 66). Finally, while he suggests there was a

general decline in their intellectual activity as well. The change from great strength to weakness is perhaps less noticeable in the case of the Augustinians because they were third in size among the orders of friars in England, and because they did not produce any scholars at Oxford and Cambridge as important in the shaping of medieval thought as the Franciscans Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham or the Dominican Nicholas Trivet. It must also be remembered that what appears on the surface as a sudden increase in the number of Augustinians attending the universities in the last decades of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, and might be taken as evidence of an upsurge in the academic level, is in fact one of the results of the Great Schism (1382-1417). Since France supported the Anti-pope, the Paris *studium generale* was closed to the other European friars whose countries still adhered to Rome. In consequence, they were drawn to Oxford, Cambridge, and London, and their names in the rolls of students hide the continuing decline to a certain extent¹⁸).

decline in scholarship after Capgrave's death (I, 430), he does not see spiritual desuetude until about forty years before the Act of Supremacy (I, p. 431 ff.). For a more generalized view of the possible truth behind charges made against the friars, see A. Williams, "Relations between the Mendicant Friars and the Secular Clergy in England in the Later Fourteenth Century", *Annuaire Medievale*, I (1969), 22-93.

¹⁸) A survey of the data in A. B. Emden's two biographical registers substantiates these conclusions. These two monumental works, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to 1500*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1957-1959) and *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1963), include notices of some 434 Augustinian friars. (This number was arrived at by reducing the combined total of 212 at Cambridge and 224 at Oxford by the 22 who are either repeated in the Oxford volumes — Abyndon, de Venezia, de Lucca, Hervy, and Schwarzenberg — or who occur in the registers of both universities — Berewyck, Newbigging, Herford, Godwick, Owenby, Cressall, Constanx, Colchester, Marpes, Benit, Sharyngton, Penketh, Galyon, Curteys, Thwaytes, Rose, Toneys.) Of these, 135 received the *magisterium*, the doctorate in theology. The proportion completing the degree reached nearly 50 per cent in the generation immediately prior to Capgrave's (35 of 76 English friars between 1360 and 1400). In addition, none of the 66 foreign friars — primarily Italian and German — appears before 1358, and there are only 17 after the beginning of the fifteenth century. Even more obvious than these indications of the isolation of the English province of the Augustinian order is the sharp decline in the number of friars who are listed as licensed to preach after c. 1352. Between 1274 and 1352, 42 of 84 are licensed, but only 4 of 113 between 1360 and 1400. Certainly more would have been covered by the blanket licenses issued by some bishops; and, of course, Emden's registers do not include any of the friars who received enough theological training to be licensed to preach but who did not attend either of the universities.

Such data provide a meaningful comment on the men who were Capgrave's teachers and senior colleagues. When one-third of those recorded at the convents in

For all this, although the period which saw scholasticism developed to its greatest subtlety by a series of brilliant English friar doctors had ended a century before, it was still among the mendicant rather than the monastic orders that the leading theologians were found in the fifteenth century; and, in this respect, the Augustinians were not unimportant. They provided their share of bishops, particularly to Irish sees; the Augustinian Geoffrey Hardeby was foremost in replying to Archbishop Fitzralph's attacks on the friars; and members of the order were given equal place with other orders in the great meetings on the heretical teachings of Wyclif which were held at Blackfriars under Archbishop William Courtenay and at Oxford¹⁹) and in the fifteenth century heresy trials which followed the passage of the statute *De Haeretico Comburendo*²⁰).

Augustinian historians do not discuss the connection in detail, but the order, or at least the Oxford convent of it, had good reason to sympathize with Wyclif's opinions in the early stages of the controversy. Since disputations were regularly held in the Austin convent, it is not especially important that Wyclif was lecturing there when he received the news of his condemnation. But many of his beliefs were derived from the greatest of the Augustinian theologians, Giles of Rome²¹); and the later prior-provincial, Thomas Winterton, was one of his close associates. In addition, the appearance of Wyclif's *Determinatio* in the collection of works made by another Austin friar, Adam Stocton, in the 1370's also reflects interest in Wyclif's ideas²²).

After the authoritative condemnation of Wyclif's opinions by the mendicant theologians and by Archbishop Courtenay at the Blackfriars (or "Earthquake") Council of 1382, there is, with the single exception of Peter Pateshull²³), no occasion to question the orthodoxy

university towns were foreigners and nearly one-half continued to the final degree, there can be no doubt that their view extended well beyond the insular and that the disputations they undertook were sophisticated and diverse.

¹⁹) H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church*, II (Oxford, 1926). At the Blackfriars Council each of the mendicant orders had two representatives.

²⁰) One of the most famous was the trial of William Taylour in 1423. At that time John Lowe, later Bishop of St. Asaph, was one of the Augustinian doctors.

²¹) A. Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif* (London, 1940), pp. 230, 235.

²²) *Ibid.*, pp. 236-239.

²³) *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275. Capgrave mentions his defection in *The Chronicle of England*, p. 244.

of the English Augustinians. In fact, their reaction was as immediate and severe as might be expected in the atmosphere of fear and shock which developed when essential doctrines were questioned. Wyclif's friend Thomas Winterton, for example, answered Wyclif's treatise *Confessio* in a work entitled *Absolutio*, relying heavily on the characteristic Augustinian doctrines of lordship and grace; and, in a revision, the words of praise for Wyclif in Stocton's collection were removed. Cambridge, where Capgrave was to go, never had significant contact with the heresy though the theological students must have been aware of the controversy; and few attempts were made to raise the issues at Oxford after Archbishop Arundel's visitation in 1411.

Persecution was moderate in England and most heretics recanted²⁴); but the severity of the penalties ensured that orthodoxy was at pains to demonstrate itself. Yet if only his English works were considered, Capgrave would seem to have had little interest in debating theological points. Apart from notes on the doctrinal issues raised in the early days of the church, condemnations of Wyclif and Oldcastle, a few references to Lollard activities in the years before his *Chronicle* ends in 1417, and explanations of the specific heresies the saint combatted in *The Life of St. Augustine*, he does not touch the subject. In fact, however, this is another instance where the literary personality and the public man are widely divergent, for Capgrave must often have been in close contact with the disputes. For example, he cannot have been unaware that suspicions of the Lollard heresy were several times raised in Lynn; and investigations which must have been part of the common gossip were frequently carried out in the diocese of Norwich. A single illustration will suffice to show to what extent he covered his own opinions with an anonymous style. In 1401, when Capgrave was a boy of eight, a townsman, William Sawtre, was the first man executed under the new statute; and later Capgrave recorded the event in his *Chronicle*. He gives not a single detail which suggests any personal knowledge:

In the third 3^{ere} of this Herry was a Parlement at London, wher was mad a statute ageyn Lollardis, that where evyr thei were founde preching her evel doctrine, thei schuld be take, and presentid to the bischop; and if thei meynten here opiniones, thei

²⁴) See J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414-1420* (London, 1965).

schuld be committed to the seculere hand, and thei schuld brenne hem and her bokes. This statute was practized in a prest that sone aftir was brent at Smythfeld.

(*Chronicle*, p. 277)

Given the position he attained, it is unlikely that the attitude displayed in his written work reflects either apathy or cautious time-serving on Capgrave's part. Certainly, when Capgrave entered the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine, he found himself in a community of men who were officially committed to the authority of the church both by their Rome-centred government and by their newly tested and newly strengthened intellectual convictions. The self-discipline their rules required and the education their most promising students underwent enabled them to provide many of the foremost defenders of the faith. The events of the immediately preceding decades must have deeply affected the men who taught Capgrave, and Wyclif's opinions must have been answered and condemned in the lectures he heard. In addition, as the next section will show, even if he was not himself involved in heresy trials or public answers to heretical opinions, a number of his fellow conventuals were.

II

This survey of some of the more important events in the town of Lynn and in the religious orders during this period helps to place Capgrave in his historical context. Similarly, an examination of the available materials on theological education at the time reveals both the content of the works which were his frame of reference and the analytical method which is such an important aspect of his literary style. However, although scholars in the last two decades have unearthed a large body of facts, there is still uncertainty about the details of courses pursued by medieval students and the periods of time necessary to complete the various requirements. For example, the full grammar course apparently took four years, but in their regulations, the Augustinians mention only one after entry²⁵). On the other hand, they also expected the novice to be able to read and sing distinctly when he entered, and, therefore, the young friars had presumably already had

²⁵) Roth, I, 143.

some elementary training. In fact, there are frequent references to boys who do not seem to be members of the order studying grammar in the convents²⁶); and it may well be that there were provisions for a period of pre-training which would resolve the anomaly. Accepting these limitations, it is possible to provide a reasonably accurate picture of the course of Capgrave's education.

Father de Meijer chooses the first of the two possibilities inherent in Capgrave's statement that he was ordained four or five years before the birth of Henry VI in 1421 (*De Illustribus Henricis*, p. 127) and places the ordination in 1417. Then he subtracts seven years from this date and puts Capgrave's entry into the order in 1410. There is in fact no evidence to confirm or refute his choice. The average age of entry was fourteen; but the Austins were allowed to accept boys as young as eleven and some cases of ten year olds being admitted are known²⁷). As the following discussion will show, the most that can be said is that to have become a *lector* in 1421, Capgrave cannot have joined later than 1410 and that if he were seventeen (as he was then), he had probably previously completed the full grammar course. So far as the effect on his later work is concerned, the systematic division of the material into orthography, prosody, syntax, and *ethimologia*, using compilations such as those of Donatus, Priscian, and Alexander de Villa Dei²⁸), would have been much the same whether Capgrave studied in his own convent²⁹), the Lynn grammar school, or at the school of one of the other orders.

Having entered, Capgrave spent his novitiate learning the observances of the rule. Their constitutions required the Austins to celebrate five canonical hours, and they had in addition a conventual mass which all of the brothers attended. For the purposes of self-

²⁶) *Ibid.*

²⁷) *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁸) The terms had specialized meanings in the middle ages. Thus, orthography taught the student to spell and write Latin words; and prosody, to read aloud correctly. Then he proceeded to syntax, a study of the rules of grammar and their application to the construction of sentences; and, finally, he studied the parts of speech by themselves in the division known as *ethimologia*. Brother Bonaventura discusses these divisions and many of the texts in his article, "The Teaching of Latin in Later Medieval England", *Medieval Studies*, III (1961), 1-20. Father Roth specifies the three books mentioned in the text as the basic grammars used by the Augustinians (I, 142).

²⁹) When Capgrave was prior at Lynn more than thirty years later, he mentions that sixteen boys were studying at the convent (*De Illustribus Henricis*, p. 189), and it is reasonable to assume that the practice was a long-standing one.

discipline, they held a chapter of faults twice a week, kept strict silence (except for the reader at the lectern) during their two daily meals, and observed a great many obligatory fasts.

After his novitate, a young friar was to take grammar for an additional year; but, being older than the average, Capgrave had doubtless finished the course, and he probably studied dialectics³⁰). This second year done, the constitutions of the order provided for three years of study at what was known as a *studium particulare*, a school of elementary philosophy. For the Cambridge *limit* this school was located in Norwich; and if Capgrave did follow the course outlined above, he must have been sent there by the end of 1412. Apart from the fact that it was a well-known *studium*, frequently attended by foreign friars, little is known about the school in Norwich³¹). If the three-year courses in the Old and New Logic were given concurrently as they seem to have been³²), Capgrave would have completed his term at Norwich and returned to Lynn about the end of 1415³³). His recording of two Norwich events of 1415 (a fire and the death of the bishop, p. 303) in the *Chronicle* provides at least circumstantial confirmation.

The methods of instruction in these lower schools were essentially the same as in the universities. Texts were read; problems were isolated, explicated, and argued in detail; and then the individual parts were reintegrated. Disputations were made on grammatical points just as

³⁰) Father Roth sees a conflict between the order's prescriptions for education and what is known of medieval education. Thus, he says of the first year following the novitiate: "Only one year of grammar school was prescribed though both the course in logic (dialectics) and that in grammar lasted one year. From an analogy with the course in philosophy we must surmise that the missing course was taught at the next higher *studium* or had been anticipated in the novitiate" (I, 143). In Capgrave's case it is possible to resolve the problem in another way and suggest that, as he appears to have been older than the average entrant, he had studied his grammar earlier.

³¹) Roth, I, 314.

³²) *Ibid.*, p. 145. In addition, he lists the texts Capgrave probably used; "The textbooks for the Old Logic were the *Isagoge* of Porphyrius, the *Categories* or *Praedicamenta* of Aristotle and his *Perihermeneias*, all of them in the translation of Boethius. The New Logic comprehended in particular the teaching of syllogisms as propounded in the *Topica*, *Analytica Priora* and *Posteriora* of Aristotle".

³³) N. Toner, "Augustinian Spiritual Writers of the English Province in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", *Sanctus Augustinus, vitae Spirituales magister* II (1959), 508. Because Capgrave does not mention the Duke of Clarence's visit to Lynn in 1413, Father Toner doubts whether he had yet joined the order. If he was in Norwich, he would not have seen it himself.

they were on theological. In fact, in the schools of the friars, the basic training in "arts" was intended to prepare the student for his higher studies. The literal sense of the Bible could not be understood without a thorough grounding in language and grammar. Arithmetic was essential for number symbolism; and natural history for the symbolism of birds and beasts. Finally, rhetoric was required both in the student's own work and for his later teaching and preaching³⁴).

Similarly, the rules of religious observance went far beyond the inculcation of piety and self-discipline. The public examinations of conscience held twice-weekly and the heavy penalties for errors in liturgical recitation encouraged both a critical attitude and precision in performance. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Capgrave's works bear the impress of his early training, since he had spent thirty years in the order as a student and teacher before he wrote his first extant English work in 1440³⁵).

Though none of the published registers contains his name — and few exist for the whole diocese of Norwich in any case³⁶) — Capgrave must have been entered upon the various degrees of ordination from first tonsure — through acolyte, subdeacon, and deacon — to priest during his years in Lynn and Norwich. Given the vagueness of Capgrave's dating of his final vows, it is quite possible that they were taken in 1416, perhaps even in 1415. In fact, an earlier date than 1417 is more likely, for ordination normally followed soon after the completion of pre-theological studies³⁷), and Capgrave must have been entered upon the six years course as student and *cursor* by early 1416 at the latest in order to have completed it by 1421 when he was made a *lector*.

Concessimus venerabili viro Willelmo Wellis provinciali provincie Anglie ut completa forma debita fratrum Iohannis Capgrave cursoris Londonis ac Gilberto Grey possit ipsis conferre gradum lectori in universitate Oxoniensi vel

³⁴) B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952), p. 26.

³⁵) *The Life of St. Norbert*.

³⁶) *Sede vacante registers* for the see of Norwich in the period 1415-1417 appear in *The Register of Bishop Chichele*, ed. E.F. Jacob, III (Oxford, 1945), 347-425, but Capgrave's name does not appear.

³⁷) Roth, I, 141, n. 253. The age of ordination varied, the candidate usually being 22 in Capgrave's time. If Capgrave may be allowed some further looseness in his account, perhaps he was ordained six years before Henry VI's birth, i.e. in 1415, the year he was 22 and the year he finished his pre-theological studies in Norwich.

Cantabriggensi, prout ipsi coniunctim vel divisim elegerint, habita tamen depositione quatuor magistrorum etc. Et si ipse provincialis non posset dictos fratres lectorare, committat alteri vices suas auctoritate nostra. Concedentes insuper dictis iuvenibus et volentes, ut scilicet primo, videlicet fratri Iohanni, quod annus primus lecture sententiarum computetur pro primo anno universitatis, et quartus annus lecture naturalium commutetur similiter in annum theologie dicto fratri Gilberto Grey de gratia speciali³⁸).

By the time he had finished at the *studium particulare* in Norwich (c. 1415) Capgrave's scholastic abilities must have been recognized, for the prior-provincial had to recommend promotion to the few places available in the higher schools. Though there can be little doubt that the masters of Capgrave's own area supported him, there is an additional factor which cannot be ignored in accounting for Capgrave's extra-ordinarily rapid preferment³⁹). The long-time prior-provincial (1402-1417; 1419-1422) William Welles was himself originally a member of the Lynn convent, and he is known to have spent much of his time there. Since he must have met Capgrave, he may have personally sponsored him.

For most students the universities offered the only avenue for the pursuit of advanced studies, but after a series of disputes early in the fourteenth century the friars won certain privileges. The university faculties of arts preserved their rights to the extent that the theological degrees of the friars were subject to the approval of all the regents and that only one member of each order could receive the doctorate every two years; but the friars were customarily exempt from the requirement that the arts programme be fully satisfied, and they were allowed to study elsewhere and yet receive Oxford and Cambridge degrees⁴⁰). The result of this compromise was that there were two kinds of schools in which the requirements of the first years of the theological programme could be fulfilled by a member of the mendicant orders. The lesser of these was the so-called *studium generale provinciae*, a school of theology under the control of the prior-provincial. The major ones, the *studia generalis ordinis*, under the direct control of the prior-general, were located in the university towns, and

³⁸) General Archives, O.E.S.A., Register Dd 4, f. 55 as printed by de Meijer, part I, 408, n. 40.

³⁹) Roth, I, 174.

⁴⁰) D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 190-191.

they were more international in character. But since the Augustinians, like the others orders of friars, did not enter the faculty of theology proper and studied instead at their own houses with their own *lectors*, the courses given in the university towns varied little from those provided by the other established *studia*.

Lynn and London were among the three known *studia provinciae* in the English Augustinian province, and it was in them that Capgrave followed the theological course. In all probability, he spent the first two years (1415-1417) at Lynn, where there had been a *lector* in theology since at least 1382⁴¹), and then moved to London for the period 1417-1422. The basis of the assumption that Capgrave was at Lynn for his first two years in theology is that, following the statutes of the order, he would not have been permitted to spend more than five years in London and that he is known to have remained there until 1422. Accordingly, he passed through the three pre-degree grades of student, *cursor*, and *lector* with their increasing degrees of responsibility for responses and lectures before he reached Cambridge. Two of his student years were at Lynn, and then he was one year a student, three a *cursor*, and one a *lector* at the London convent, long the largest and most important one in the country.

Perhaps of less relative importance than the one in Lynn so far as the citizenry was concerned, the Austin convent in London was nevertheless imposing. It was located against the city walls at Bishopsgate, and its enormous church, built in 1354, was not much smaller than Canterbury Cathedral. Large crowds — including the water-bearers whose guild church it was — filled the preaching apse on Sundays, and rooms were frequently let to them and others for offices, meetings, and entertainments. Guild members as well as prominent citizens and members of the royal family were buried there⁴²), and bequests, conditional or otherwise, were frequent. All of these details emphasize the many connections the friars had with the outside world.

The particulars of Capgrave's life in London cannot be precisely reconstructed. Unfortunately for the historian, the friars were exempt from episcopal visitation; and records which would doubtless have revealed some of the more characteristic trials of group living are not

⁴¹) Since he was nominated as a *lector* in 1421, had been at London only since 1417, and was required to spend a total of six years (three as a student and three as a *cursor*) before he was eligible for this rank, there can have been no break in his studies.

⁴²) Roth, I, 280-291 lists some of the better known.

available. Surely there were complaints (ranging from the foul meat supplied by the kitcheners's relatives to the favouritism of the prior) such as were made to Bishop Alnwich when he visited the abbey of St. James at Northampton, where Capgrave's friend, the Augustinian canon regular John Watford, was abbot. If so, they were unrecorded or lost, and only more prosaic accounts of conventual life are left.

One specialized rule for the government of an Augustinian *studium generale* which has been published is the *Mare Magnum* produced about 1354 under the direction of the prior-general, Thomas de Strasbourg, for the Paris convent⁴³). Since the extant copy is dated 1468, it was clearly in force in the fifteenth century, and probably the rules for London were similar. Much is concerned with the handling of expenses, diet, choice of officials, and punishments allotted for failure to comply with the regulations. Hearing or reading of the mass was a daily requirement for all the brothers, with ordained students below the rank of master or bachelor ordered to celebrate it at least three times weekly⁴⁴). This is the only religious observance specifically mentioned, but certainly the hours would also have been celebrated.

Some additional details about the organization of studies are also found in the *Mare Magnum*. Two elected bachelors of theology or *lectors* were to examine the student within six days of his entry to determine that his Latin was not merely conversational but according to the rules of grammar; that he adequately understood the principles of logic and philosophy; and that he was sufficiently versed in theological terms to complete the course in the specified time⁴⁵). The whole course is not outlined, but the actual lectures on the books of the Bible were to be finished in two years — the first devoted to a study of the Pentateuch; the second, to the prophets and the New Testament⁴⁶). Disputations, with the students who were to argue and respond appointed by an elected master of studies, were held weekly, and they were attended by all the bachelors and masters.

According to this rule, the student was to be admitted as a *lector* when he had finished the three-year course. However, it seems likely that here the term *lector* reflects the usage of an earlier period, for by Capgrave's time an intermediate three years as *cursor*, when the

⁴³) Ed. E. Ypma, *Augustiniana* VI (1956), 275-321.

⁴⁴) *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁴⁵) *Ibid.*, p. 310-311.

⁴⁶) *Ibid.*, p. 308-309.

student had to lecture on the Bible and the *Sentences* as well as continue his studies, was required⁴⁷). Obviously, the three daily lectures and the disputations were not the student's total occupation. Each had a study, of which he might be deprived for various faults, and it was there that he read privately. Each student was allowed to borrow three books at a time from the library, and the rules to protect these after their heavy use are a further indication that these theological studies were not mere rote exercises but allowed for, and indeed required, individual interest and initiative.

Some of the other items the author of this rule felt obliged to include are reminders that these students were not ascetics divorced from the world outside, but high-spirited young men living in the centre of a bustling city. Punishments are enjoined for "immoderate laughing, whistling, shouting, hand-clapping ... and beating of dishes"⁴⁸) in the dormitory, chapter-room, cloister, church, or refectory, for staying overnight in the city, and for frequenting taverns. Similarly, the insertion of rules against eating in the cells or entertaining seculars there, even against removing or selling items of furniture from the rooms, suggests that a good deal of misbehaviour was either expected or known to exist.

By the fifteenth century, biblical study had evolved to a point where the theological questions had been separated from the study of literal meanings or moral applications⁴⁹). The debates to resolve apparent contradictions in doctrinal questions had led to the establishment of disputations as a teaching method and to the systematization of doctrine in such works as Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, which with the Vulgate and its glosses were the standard textbooks of the period⁵⁰). In practice this separation meant that in his first years of theological study the student heard lectures on the books of the Bible and the *Glosses*, often given by a *cursor* or *lector* rather than a master. Each passage of the text was explained at the literal and moral level, phrase by phrase, or word by word if necessary, and homely examples were frequently given. During the course of the lecture, the theological *quaestiones* (doctrinal problems) would be pointed out and these would frequently be set for the disputations of

⁴⁷) Roth, I, 160.

⁴⁸) Ypma, pp. 304-305.

⁴⁹) Smalley, p. 209.

⁵⁰) Roth, I, 147-170.

the senior students. These disputations were intended not just to be scholastic exercises but to make more clear the reason for accepting proven truths. In the later years, of course, the student's primary focus was doctrinal and the *Sentences* his major study.

These exercises had considerable effect on Capgrave's style. Throughout his works there is a tendency to state opposing views which he sometimes, in Origen's fashion, refuses to choose between and, sometimes, tries to resolve as the Lombard and his successors did. Similarly, his constant pauses for literal explanations, etymologies, and moral and symbolic applications all clearly show the shaping force of his long years of biblical study.

The most important political events of his years in London could not have escaped Capgrave's notice, but the only direct reference he makes in his works is to the birth of Henry VI in December of 1421 and the public rejoicing on that occasion⁵¹). His *Chronicle* stops before the period he was in London; and his *De Illustribus Henricis* demonstrably relies on popular reports. He may have had opportunities to meet John Kemp, who was later one of his patrons, and some of the other dignitaries who frequented the Austin convent; but there is no evidence that he did.

Certainly he would have been concerned with the scandalous disputes over the election of the provincial in 1419 and with the resulting turmoil in the order; but his primary occupation was almost certainly with his individual duties as student and conventual in London. The record has disappeared, but Capgrave must have been made a *cursor* early in 1418 in order to complete the full three-year term before his appointment as *lector* in 1421. When he assumed the position of *cursor*, he enjoyed some special privileges and shared the lecturing duties; but in a convent as large as London there were friars of senior rank.

The little that is known about his fellow friars in London reflects the climate in which he lived. Some twenty, including the prior, are merely names from ordination lists or from the registers of the prior-general; but others, like Henry of Colchester who was a mediator in the 1419 dispute, Nicholas Bonet who sat at the heresy trial of William Taylour in 1423, and the *lector* John Stocton who later became the prior at Oxford, were figures of some significance in the order. The

⁵¹) *De Illustribus Henricis*, p. 127.

man who was to become Capgrave's successor as prior-provincial, John Bury, came to London from Clare in 1417, about the same time as Capgrave arrived from Lynn. With his illegal trip to Rome and adventures in France, Bury was clearly a less serious student than Capgrave. Nevertheless, he eventually received his doctorate and had reputation enough to be appointed by Bishop Bourghier, at the instance of John Lowe, to write an answer to Reginald Pecock's *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* in 1457. John Lowe, the only Austin friar elevated to an English see during Capgrave's lifetime, was himself appointed to London in 1420. With Bonet he was a judge at Taylour's trial, and he went on to become prior-provincial from 1427-1433, confessor to the king in 1432, Bishop of St. Asaph in 1433, and Bishop of Rochester in 1444. While he was Bishop of St. Asaph, he was one of Capgrave's patrons, and it may have been he who commended Capgrave's exegetical skill to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. To complete the catalogue, mention should be made of the far less important but equally interesting Thomas Southwell, one of the few friars whose training was in arts and medicine rather than theology. Southwell was instrumental in the founding of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in London in 1423, and he was later arrested with Duke Humphrey's wife, Eleanor Cobham, on charges of necromancy.

After Capgrave was made a *lector*, he would normally have spent an additional four years before being admitted as a bachelor of theology⁵²). In the first years he was to give lectures on the Bible and the *Sentences* and in the last year, the one known formally as the "opponency", he was expected to engage in a series of difficult formal disputations. However, numbers made it impossible for all candidates to give a full course of lectures, and Capgrave had already been a *cursor* for three years. Consequently as the document cited above states, he was granted exemption from the lectures on the *Sentences* when he was appointed a *lector* on April 8, 1421.

There was apparently no place immediately available at either university, for Capgrave was still in London eight months later when Henry VI was born on December 6, 1421; and a second letter of appointment, this time specifically to Cambridge, appears in the prior-general's registers for April 13, 1422:⁵³)

⁵²) Roth, I, 166-169.

⁵³) General Archives O.E.S.A., Register Dd 4, f. 75v as printed by de Meijer, Part I, 409, n. 42.

Assignavimus fratri Iohanni Capgrave, lectori formato provincie Anglie, proximum bacchalariorum, promoti locum alienigenis debitum in universitate Cantabriggensi eiusdem provincie, ita quod cum promotus pro limite Cantabriggensi debeat commutari et quartus annus ab anno presenti oppositione sibi deputetur in eadem universitate. Eoque ordine procedat usque ad gradum magisterii inclusive, non obstante quacumque ordinatione aut statuto quomodolibet huius oppositum dictante, super quibus omnibus dispensamus.

This appointment is in the standard form, assuming that the student will not be presented for the bachelor's degree for four years and then will proceed to his *magisterium* (doctorate in theology) without any impediment. However, not only must Capgrave's earlier exemption from the *Sentences* have been honoured, but his additional year in London must also have been construed as his year on the Bible, for, as he himself confirms, he entered the year of opponency immediately and was promoted to the baccalaureate on March 20, 1423:⁵⁴)

Fecimus fratrem Iohannem Capgrave lectorem provincie Anglie Bacchalariorum auctoritate nostra, assignantes ei promotum Bacchalariorum promoti locum alienigenis debitum in nostro conventu et universitate Cantabrigensi de gratia speciali.

Because no documentary evidence exists, it is not possible to date Capgrave's final degree with certainty. It is clear from the form of his appointment to Cambridge in 1422 that it was assumed that Capgrave would proceed directly from the baccalaureate to the *magisterium*. And both that document and the one awarding him his bachelor's degree assigned him to a "locum alienigenis debitum", a phrase which indicates that Capgrave was among the select group of four students in the convent at various stages in their studies for the highest degree. Since each order of friars was permitted only one promotion to the *magisterium* every two years, the Austins restricted the number preparing for the degree at each university to four; two from the English province, one from Italy, and one from another foreign country. After the Schism had ended and the number of other *studia*

⁵⁴) In his Prologue to *The Life of St. Gilbert of Sempringham*, ed. J.J. Munro, E.E.T.S., O.S. 140 (London, 1910), 61 Capgrave mentions a sermon he wrote "þe 3er befor myn opposition", and at the opening of the sermon itself (*Ibid.*, p. 145) he gives the precise date. Clearly, he means by "opposition" the end of the year of opponency, for his bachelor's degree was awarded early in 1423. The document is preserved in the General Archives O.E.S.A., Register Dd, f. 106.

generalia for the order had increased, it was less necessary for foreigners to come to Oxford and Cambridge. Consequently, Capgrave was assigned one of the two places formerly reserved for foreign friars when he was made a *baccalarius formatus*; that is, when, having completed all the requirements as a *lector*, he was waiting to be able to incept as a *magister*.

To this point the evidence is relatively uncomplicated, but, unfortunately, missing details make a definitive chronology or catalogue of the Austin *magisters* at Cambridge impossible. It is known that a Geoffrey Schale was the Austin *magister* in 1421; but whether or not the Thomas Lassell who was directed in 1420 to qualify for the degree ever did is uncertain, for there are no further references to him⁵⁵). If he did take the degree, it was probably in 1423; if he did not, there is one other possibility for that year — the poet Osbern Bokenham. Bokenham was made a *baccalarius* the day after Capgrave had been (March 21, 1423), and it is possible as Father Roth suggests that the words “*incorporari possit*” in the document conferring the degree on him meant he was to incept as *magister* directly⁵⁶). Some circumstantial evidence that he did so comes from the fact that he applied for and received permission to go to Rome later in that same year. If he had become a *magister*, he would not have been interrupting his studies, although he could not then have performed the two-year tour of duty as a regent performing academic functions that was required of each new master. Because, in fact, Bokenham did not go to the continent until about ten years later, in all probability he did take the degree in 1423, act as regent until 1425, and then return to his home convent of Clare where he is to be found by 1427. Following him, Capgrave would have incepted in 1425 and remained at Cambridge as a regent until at least 1427⁵⁷).

⁵⁵) According to the General Archives O.E.S.A., Register Dd 4, f. 18, as printed in F. Roth, *The English Austin Friars, 1249-1538*, II (New York, 1961), 295, he was directed to take the *magisterium* at either Oxford or Cambridge, but A.B. Emden assigns him to Cambridge in his *Register*.

⁵⁶) Roth, I, 172.

⁵⁷) The matter of Capgrave's progression from *lector* to *magister* is somewhat confused in the earlier biographies, largely as a result of the handling of recorded dates. While the civil year began on March 25 in England, the dates in the registers of the Augustinian priors-general accord with modern usage as the foliation makes clear.

Father de Meijer states (Part I, pp. 408, 409) that Capgrave was first appointed a *lector* in 1422. But in his evidence, the entry in Register Dd 4, f. 55, he gives the date as “8 Aprilis 1421”. That this is the correct year for the initial appointment de Meijer seems

During his first three years at Cambridge Capgrave must have engaged in public disputations, for sixteen were required in the year of opponency before the bachelor's degree was awarded and two more were part of the formalities surrounding the inception as *magister*. However, there is no record of them; and, in fact, no bachelor's *Responsiones* (the ideas he presented in answer to the question which was set for the disputation) or master's *Determinationes* (the pronouncement of the correct answer at the end of the disputation) have survived for any English Austin friar⁵⁸).

Capgrave's one required sermon, which he preached in 1422, exists in his own later English redaction appended to his *Life of St. Gilbert*. His subject, the orders under the rule of St. Augustine, is not typical of the moral and doctrinal points on which most sermons were based, but it was timely. The dispute between the canons regular and the hermits over their respective antiquity and relationship to the communities founded by St. Augustine was longstanding; and an Augustinian canon had published a tract ridiculing the direct descent of the order of hermits from St. Augustine's desert establishments in the same year⁵⁹).

to have recognized, for when he cites the document of April 13, 1422 from Register Dd 4, f. 75v assigning Capgrave specifically to Cambridge, he says it is "a year later" and goes on to say "This year was 1422" (p. 410), using Capgrave's own date in the sermon cited in n. 54 as further evidence.

In his two references (part I 406-407, 409) to the notice of the celebrations in London at the time of Henry VI's birth in December 1421 found in *De Illustribus Henricis*, de Meijer accepts Capgrave's self-denomination *studens* in a strict rather than a generic sense. But, as the document of April 8, 1421 shows, Capgrave was already a *cursor* when he was made a *lector*. At either of these ranks, Capgrave was responsible for certain lectures; and though space apparently prevented him from gaining immediate preferment to one of the universities, there was nothing to prevent him from undertaking the required lectures at the London *studium*. Indeed it is presumably because he did so that he was dispensed from the lectures on the *Sentences* and proceeded to the bachelor's degree with such rapidity.

Father Roth derived most of his biographical information from Father de Meijer's articles, although he does place the document of 1421 in the proper context. In one sentence (I, 111) of his discussion of Capgrave as prior-provincial, however, he doubles the length of Capgrave's stay in London and as a consequence places the completion of Capgrave's academic training in 1433. In turn, this date does not coincide with his conclusion on p. 174, that "The fastest promotion on record is that of John Capgrave, the author, who obtained the *magisterium* ten years after his ordination and just within the prescribed time limit". In this instance he has no additional evidence for the date of either ordination or of the inception; and he is not following de Meijer, who places the ordination in 1417 and the *magisterium* in 1425, a period of only eight years.

⁵⁸) Roth, I, 169.

⁵⁹) *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Within its brief compass, this sermon demonstrates the ingenuity of practitioners of the exegetical method; and it provides a developed example of the kind of contrived analogy which become characteristic brief digressions in Capgrave's vernacular works. It begins by likening Augustine to Jacob in three ways; but the specific purpose of the comparison is to prepare for the use of the twelve tribes of Israel, Jacob's sons, as a schema on which to arrange the twelve orders. Following this introduction, Capgrave proceeds in logical order, mentioning one of Jacob's sons, giving the etymology of his name, and adducing a reason why a certain order may be likened to him.

As a bachelor and then master, Capgrave enjoyed privileges denied those of lesser academic rank. He was entitled to at least one servant, to additional books for his personal use, and even to larger portions at meal times. More important, however, were the dispensations from the rules which allowed him opportunity for private conversations with his own brothers and freedom to meet and entertain acquaintances from outside the order. Only one other Austin friar present at the Cambridge convent during these years is still a familiar name, the poet Bokenham. If he had indeed shown such promise as a theologian that he was preferred to the *magisterium* before Capgrave, there is no evidence of it in his later works. Bokenham spent most of his life in the Clare convent, and though he had a circle of friends among the Suffolk gentry who commissioned his works, he never achieved the reputation for learning or the distinguished patronage that Capgrave did. Provincial chapter meetings ensured the continuing contact of the two friars, and Bokenham is known to have seen Capgrave's *Life of St. Katherine* before he began his own. However, there is no clear evidence of influence — reciprocal or unilateral.

Capgrave may have known the Premonstratensian canon John Wygenhale before he came to Cambridge, for all four of the Norfolk towns called Wiggenhall lie within close proximity to Lynn. Since the priory of the white canons was directly across from the Austin convent, they certainly had every opportunity to meet at the university. It is also possible that Capgrave faced such future bishops as William Ayscough, Marmaduke Lumley, and Robert Fitzhugh in the disputations and that he was able to use such associations to advantage later. The first two were close friends of the Duke of Suffolk, who was, in turn, the protector of Sir Thomas Tuddenham, who financed Capgrave's trip to Rome.

There can be no doubt that Capgrave sharpened his critical senses in the wider field of the university's theological halls and that as a regent he became expert in the resolution of debated points. When he was replaced as regent by whoever became the new Austin *magister* in 1427, Capgrave was ready to move back into the system of his order and begin training younger men in the laborious course he had just finished.

III

From the completion of his Cambridge studies in 1427 until 1437, there is no reference to Capgrave's activities. Furnivall speculated that it was during these years that he travelled to Rome⁶⁰), but his hypothesis was invalidated by the discovery of Capgrave's *Solace of Pilgrims*, his guide-book to the holy city, which can be conclusively dated c. 1450 on internal grounds. De Meijer thinks "it is possible that Capgrave returned to his native friary, dedicating himself to historical studies and theological commentaries"⁶¹). It is equally possible that he was appointed to lecture at one of the other convents in the province and that the biblical studies he superintended for young friars provided the basis for his earliest writings. One convent where he may well have gone was the one in Northampton. It was so short of brothers by 1427, the year in which Capgrave finished his term as regent, that the prior-general empowered the superior of the house to "receive and keep four brethren from each English limit and six brethren from each ultra-marine province"⁶²). Because he had just finished his academic duties and had not embarked on any other course, it is quite likely that Capgrave was chosen to swell its members. Residence in Northampton would account for Capgrave's otherwise unexplained acquaintance with the abbot of the abbey of St. James there, John Watford, to whom he addressed his *Concordia*, a work intended to reconcile the differences between the Austin friars and the Augustinian canons regular⁶³). In addition, if he were living at Northampton rather than

⁶⁰) *The Life of St. Katherine*, Forewords, p. viii.

⁶¹) Part I, 411.

⁶²) General Archives O.E.S.A., Register Dd 4, f. 220v as printed in Roth, II, 308.

⁶³) This work is now lost. Capgrave describes its contents in his *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, ed. C. A. Mills (Oxford, 1911), p. 92; John Bale once had it in his possession and noted the *incipit* with the dedication to Watford. See de Meijer, Part III, 548.

Lynn, his trip to Woodstock in 1439 to present his Genesis commentary to Duke Humphrey of Gloucester would have been far more feasible.

The list of works no longer extant which are attributed to Capgrave is lengthy. All of them are presumed to be in Latin; and, with the exception of a life of Duke Humphrey, they are all theological in content, but the authorities for their existence are of unequal value. For example, Bale gives *incipits* for the three missing commentaries on books of the Pentateuch and for commentaries on the Psalms, the Pauline Epistles, and the Apocalypse, but none for those on Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Daniel, the twelve minor prophets, the canonical epistles, or the four evangelists; and, thus, these may well be ghosts. Capgrave certainly wrote commentaries on the four books of Kings. He mentions them in his dedicatory letter to the Genesis commentary; books I and III were among the works given to the Oxford library by Duke Humphrey in 1444; and Leland notes that he saw commentaries on Kings, presumably to books II and IV⁶⁴), dedicated to John Lowe, both at a former library of the Austin friars in Cambridge and at Walsingham monastery.

Two of the lost manuscripts, those of the *Manipulus Doctrinae Christianae* and of the *Concordia* or *De Augustino et Suis Sequacibus*, were in the library of Leland's friend Thomas Key; and the *Concordia*, which is mentioned by Capgrave in two of his other works⁶⁵), found its way into Bale's possession⁶⁶). The early biographers further credit Capgrave with five works of a scholastic character: *Commentarii Quattuor Super Sententias*, *Determinationes Theologiae*, *Ordinariae Disputationes*, *Ad Positiones Erroneas*, and *Orationes ad Clerum*. There is not a single *incipit* preserved for any of these works, however, any more than there is for a book of sermons some have attributed to him; and given the tendency of early bibliographers to take the various kinds of scriptural and scholastic works and assign them at random to swell the catalogues, there seems little reason to perpetuate these titles

⁶⁴) The dedication to the Genesis Commentary is printed as an appendix in *De Illustribus Henricis* and the reference in it to the commentary on Kings appears p. 231; Leland's note appears in his *Commentarii de scriptoribus britannicis*, ed. A. Hall, II (Oxford, 1709), 453.

⁶⁵) In *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes* (see n. 63) and in the sermon delivered at Cambridge (see n. 54) pp. 146, 147.

⁶⁶) de Meijer, Part II, 120, n. 8 and part III, 548.

in Capgrave's canon. And, finally, a history of the illustrations Augustinians which may correspond to the *Concordia* mentioned earlier is usually attributed to him⁶⁷).

Capgrave is generally regarded as a patronized writer⁶⁸), but he was never as fashionable as John Lydgate nor did he enjoy a coterie fame comparable to that of his fellow friar, Osbern Bokenham. Theological commentary was not the genre sought after by the new patrons or by the humanists, and they did not entreat the man Bale was to describe as "the most learned of the Augustinians" to write for them. Patrons normally paid for the elaborate dedication copies of manuscripts, and those who received Capgrave's may well have done so too, especially since books made in the convent *scriptorium*, as his were, were not to be alienated unless they were sold with special permission. However, Capgrave never petitions for more money; at most he includes a plea to be remembered in his patron's prayers as he does at the end of his *Life of St. Augustine*⁷⁰).

In the few works which Capgrave is known to have written on request, the subject is always appropriate to the recipient. The *St. Norbert* was written for a canon of his order, John Wygenhale; the *St. Augustine*, for an unnamed lady born on the saint's feast day; and the *St. Gilbert* for Nicholas Reysby, the master of the order of Sempringham. These volumes contain neither the long dedications of the Latin works nor the sycophantic tone which Furnivall condemns and others apologize for⁷¹). In each case, Capgrave praises the piety of his patrons, but only in modest terms.

Some of his biblical commentaries were also written on request, but as in his *De Illustribus Henricis*, *The Chronicle of England*, and *The Solace of Pilgrims*, he was basically drawn to the task of explication through his own interest in the subject matter. In the commentaries the

⁶⁷) de Meijer, Part III, 548-549.

⁶⁸) As such he is discussed by S. Moore in his article, "Patrons of Letters in Norfolk and Suffolk c. 1450", *PMLA*, XXVIII (1913), 97-100 and by K. Holzknecht in his *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1923), pp. 55, 69, 94n, 104n, 112, 121, 145n, 146, 151, 160, 178 among others; and it is standard for the biographers to refer to Duke Humphrey and John Lowe especially as Capgrave's patrons.

⁶⁹) Roth, I, 371-378 discusses the various rulings.

⁷⁰) Ed. J.J. Munro, E.E.T.S., O.S. 140 (London, 1910), 60.

⁷¹) See Furnivall in the *Forewords to The Life of St. Katherine*, pp. xv-xvi, Hingston in the *Preface to De Illustribus Henricis*, p. xvi, de Meijer, Part I, 439-440, Roth, I, 417-418, and D. Brimson in "John Capgrave, O.S.A.", *Tagastan*, IX (1946), 110-111.

dedications are compliments on the attainments of the man addressed and expressions of esteem for the position he holds.

Capgrave dedicated all or part of his commentary on Kings to the former prior-provincial of the order, John Lowe, during the years (1433-1437) when Lowe was the bishop of St. Asaph. The manuscripts are lost, but the form was the same as he later used in the Genesis and Exodus commentaries which he presented to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. As he explains to the duke at the beginning of the Genesis, Capgrave's method involved a "triple exposition" for each passage, giving the literal, allegorical and moral interpretations. Capgrave points out that the exegesis in these works is not original and that he regards himself merely as the selector and organizer of the fruits of his research. But, while this is true, in examining his sources critically, choosing and selecting his materials in terms of his own beliefs, Capgrave was employing the same scholarly method as is evident in his English works.

Because Duke Humphrey owned two volumes of the commentary on Kings, it has often been assumed that they were dedicated to him⁷²). However, since John Lowe had been the young king's confessor while Gloucester was his guardian and since it was at least partially through Humphrey's intercession that he obtained his bishopric⁷³), he may well have forwarded Capgrave's work to the Duke.

Humphrey of Gloucester was certainly the most important English patron of his day, supporting both native and continental writers. He received dedications from many of the contemporary English poets and chroniclers including John Whethamstede, John Lydgate, John Russell, George Ashley, and Thomas de Norton. Studies of fifteenth century humanism have revealed his correspondence with Decembrio, who translated the *Republic* for him; he commissioned a number of other translations into Latin from Greek by his secretary Beccaria and by Leonardo Bruni; and he gave financial support to Tito Livio Frulovisi among many others. Moreover, his large gifts of books were

⁷²) It is certain Humphrey owned two volumes (1 and 3) of the commentary on Kings, because they were among the books he donated to Oxford in 1443. (See the record of the bequest as printed in the *Introduction to Chronicle of England*, pp. xiv-xv). However, the *incipits* for these are nowhere recorded, while the other two volumes were seen by Leland before their disappearance and their dedication to Lowe noted.

⁷³) Roth, I, 106.

essential to the growth of the library at Oxford. For all this, it is easy to overemphasize Humphrey's role and literary character. When the contents of his library are analysed, it is clear that his interests were primarily theological and historical, and thus John Capgrave fits easily into the mainstream of those the duke patronized.

On the other hand, it is improbable that their relationship was as close as biographers since the seventeenth century have implied when they state that Capgrave was the duke's confessor. It may be that Humphrey chose Augustinians for this capacity in his personal retinue; and certainly an Austin friar named John South was his confessor in 1446. But that Capgrave ever was is not demonstrable. Leland says only that Humphrey "*toties literatissimi Capogrevi prudentissimo consilio utebatur*"; and Bale does not necessarily mean more than that the two men discussed moral problems in private when he says:

*Illum igitur prae aliis elegit piissimus sui temporis princeps
Umfridus Glocestriae dux praedictus, Henrici quinti frater, ut ei
adesset a concientiae secretis.*

or

*Illum ergo prae aliis multis elegit piissimus eius temporis princeps,
Hunfridus Glocestriae dux, illustrissimi Henrici quinti Anglorum
regis frater, ut sibi interdum esset a conscientiae colloquio.*

It was John Pits who finally introduced the word "confess" into the standard biography in 1619:

*Singularum habuit patronum Humfredum Glocestriae Ducem,
princepem optimum, apud quem multum valuit gratia nec minus
auctoritate. Erat enim illi a confessionum secretis ...*

And, finally, in a work published in 1644 a Spanish Augustinian friar, Tomas de Herrera, makes the relationship clearly sacramental:

*Fuit a sacris confessionibus Hunfrido Duci Glocestriae, Henrici
V Anglorum regis fratri⁷⁴).*

⁷⁴) The comments of Leland, Bale, Pits and Herrera have all been collated against xeroxed copies of the originals; for convenience, however, they are here cited as they appear in de Meijer, Part II, 119-128. After the seventeenth century, it was standard to call Capgrave Humphrey's confessor as Father de Meijer did as late as 1955 (Part I, 419). Without explicitly disagreeing, Father Roth suggests that such a formal relationship was improbable:

Within the English province Capgrave is not known to have done anything against the ever growing tendency for personal independence, though his dislike is evident from his attitude towards honorary papal chaplains. For the same

These quotations demonstrate the gradual alterations in a written record which was unsubstantiated in the first instance; and there is, in fact, no evidence that Capgrave met Humphrey more than once, in January, 1439, when he presented his dedication copy of the Genesis commentary to the Duke at Woodstock.

The reasons Capgrave gives for dedicating the Genesis to Humphrey do not suggest that the two had any personal relationship earlier:

Meditationes meas, quibus in Scripturarum campo ludens delectabar, scriptis mandare intendens, aliisque communicare cupiens, nulli alio melius destinandas putabam, serenissime Princeps, quam Dominationi vestrae, quippe qui, acumine intellectus subtilissimi vicens, studiosissime, ut fertur, in scrutandis veterum auctorum opusculis indulgetis. Et, quia excellentior via humani studii Sancta Scriptura esse dinoscitur, ideo ad eam specialissime invisendam Spiritus Ille Supremi Patris vos, ut audivi, inspiravit.

O quam gloriosum mihi est videre Principem, in his diebus malis, quibus ab ecclesiasticis quasi repellitur scientia, scientiae insudantem et tamquam iis, qui in ecclesia sunt et studium negligunt sanctum, ...

... Causa ergo studii vestri, qua occupatissime animum libris impenditis, me maxime movit ut illuc opusculum parvitatit meae mitterem, ubi scientia iudicandi de litteratura invenitur.

Sed et, Annualia mea revolvens, aliud inveni quod me monet. Scriptum enim in iis reperi, quod anno Domini M. CCXLVIII. fundatus fuerat Ordo Heremitarum Sancti Augustini in Anglia per Ricardum de Clara, filium Gilberti de Clara, comitemque Gloverniae. Quia igitur per gloriosos progenitores vestros in hanc ubertatis terram ducti sumus, digne ad illum, qui generalis fundator noster est, ego totius Ordinis novissimus hoc opus meum direxi, ut si qua Catholice, et ad Fidem aedificandam, ibi inventa fuerint, ipse non tantum fundator, sed et protector eorum habeatur. Si qua vero inculta, aut piis moribus dissona, illic inveniantur, ipse correctionis lima benignissime emendet.

reason he probably disliked the constant recruiting of his best men for the service of noble families. (I, 115)

And, on grounds similar to my own, Peter Lucas has denied the possibility, "John Capgrave, O.S.A., (1393-1464), Scribe and 'Publisher'", *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, V, Part I (1969), p. 31.

John South's dispensation to act as Humphrey's chaplain is reprinted from the *Calendar of Papal Registers* in Roth, II, 328.

Movit me etiam hoc tertium, quod contra venenosas linguas modernorum Dominatio vestra murus sit, qui tunciones excipiat ... Non ignoramus, inclite Domine, quod ex bona voluntate vestra optimoque desiderio tota salus nostra debeat, nec sumus apti ad reddendas vices tuarum sanctarum meditationum, quas Deo offerimus ⁷⁵).

In this passage Capgrave makes clear, first of all, that he had no dedicatee in mind when he undertook his exegesis; and then he enumerates three considerations which prompted his choice of Humphrey. He pays tribute to the duke for taking an interest in theology in a time when many clerics themselves are seeking more worldly rewards; he recalls that an earlier Duke of Gloucester was a founder of the Augustinian order in England; and finally he points to the present duke as their guardian against "poisonous tongues". This last item seems to be a reference to Humphrey's intervention at Oxford in 1438 when he threatened to withdraw his support after an Austin friar and then the whole convent had been suspended; and it may be, therefore, an indirect expression of gratitude to the duke from Capgrave and his order. At all events, the author and his work were well enough recommended that Capgrave was allowed to make a personal presentation of the book on January 1, 1439; the reception apparently being favourable, he began his commentary on Exodus a little more than two weeks later ⁷⁶) and dedicated it to the duke as well.

Capgrave probably worked on these scriptural exegeses systematically in the hours he had free from his teaching and canonical duties. In addition to them, he also wrote the lost *Concordia*, commonly called *De Augustino et suis sequacibus* by the biographers, during this first period of literary activity ⁷⁷). Dated c. 1440, the *Concordia* was dedicated to the Augustinian canon regular John Watford, who headed his priory in Northampton from 1430 until his death in 1445. Capgrave provides a précis of its contents in *The Solace of Pilgrims* where he calls it "a maner of concord betwix þe chanonys and us", that is, between the canons regular under the rule of St. Augustine and the Austin friars. And he also says it contains some

⁷⁵) *De Illustribus Henricis*, Appendix IV, 229-231.

⁷⁶) See the colophon as printed in De Meijer, Part III, 539: *Incepit hoc opus frater iohannes capgrave in festo sancti antonii confessoris que occurrit mense ianuarii anno domini m. cccc. xxxviii.* [i.e. 17 Jan. 1439].

⁷⁷) de Meijer, Part III, 548. The assumption is strengthened by the evidence that suggests Capgrave returned to Lynn c. 1440.

additional material concerning how "monica came thider [to Rome] and in whos tyme". Obviously the work was part of the same long literary dispute over the priority of the Augustinian orders which Capgrave had used a few years earlier as the topic of his university sermon. In keeping with his avowed desire for "concord", Capgrave would have avoided the polemical tone in his treatise, although his conclusion there as elsewhere was doubtless that "heremites of this ordre be the very childyrn of seynt Austyn"⁷⁸). His methods in his other works suggest that he cited the various arguments, expressed scepticism about some, and resolved others to his own satisfaction.

Besides continuing with his religious pieces, Capgrave wrote six of his seven English works between 1440 and 1453; and it is chiefly from a knowledge of their backgrounds and from a few internal references in them and in the Latin *De Illustribus Henricis* that it is possible to describe his non-literary career. For example, the fact that he completed his long poetic *Life of St. Norbert* in August, 1440⁷⁹), shortly after he finished work on the Exodus commentary, is important on the literary level because it provides a reminder that the methods of biblical exegesis were natural to him and that they are bound to be apparent in his vernacular works as well. But also what is known about the dedicatee of the *Life of St. Norbert* is the basis for the conjecture that by this time Capgrave was again a member of the Austin convent at Lynn. It was produced at the request of John Wygenhale who had been his contemporary at Cambridge and had become the abbot of the Premonstratensian Priory at West Dereham, Norfolk. The renewed association of the two men which the commission of the poem assumes would be most likely if Capgrave had returned to Lynn, for West Dercham is less than ten miles away.

The only direct evidence Capgrave provides of his movements in the early part of the decade occurs in *De Illustribus Henricis* (p. 133) when he mentions his presence in Cambridge at the laying of the cornerstone for King's College in 1441. While it would not have been

⁷⁸) *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, p. 93.

⁷⁹) As Capgrave says in his epilogue:

the freris name þat translate þis story

Thei called Ion Capgraue, wech in Assumpcion weke

Made a end of all his rymyng cry

The 3er of Crist our Lord, wit3-ouren ly,

A thousand, four hundred & fourty euene.

difficult for him to go to Cambridge from Lynn for such an occasion, the reference is too vague to be used to confirm or refute any conjecture about his home at the time. However, he was certainly in Lynn by the time he undertook his second and last poetic work, *The Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, for it was there that he says he found his source. And since Osbern Bokenham had seen Capgrave's work when he wrote his own version of the life for Katherine Denston, Capgrave must have completed his poem by 1445. All four of the manuscripts of it are dated in the mid-fifteenth century;⁸⁰) and none is the author's original. The number of extant manuscripts probably reflects less Capgrave's popularity than that of saints' lives in general and lives of St. Katherine in particular, but that there should be so many so close in date suggests that it was copied rapidly.

The *St. Katherine* is the only one of the English works which bears neither a dedication nor words of praise for some titled person, and this fact substantiates Capgrave's statement that he was modernizing an older version which was the work of a priest who died at Lynn⁸¹). It also suggests that Capgrave had a broader purpose than the satisfaction of a single patron when he wrote the poem. What evidence there is about the provenance of the manuscripts gives no indication that the *St. Katherine* ever spread beyond Norfolk and Suffolk or that it was ever read or heard by any but a religious audience. Even the copy with the fewest of Capgrave's linguistic forms was presented to the Augustinian canonesses at Campsey Ash, Suffolk⁸²). Throughout the work there are summaries and comments on the method of composition which indicate that the poem was intended to be heard by an audience rather than read privately; and it may have been designed to be read as a work of devotion during mealtimes in convents.

Because both his Latin and English works were either requested or at least gratefully received by important as well as lesser figures, it is clear that Capgrave's theological reputation was established by this time. There is also evidence that he had become a highly regarded member of his order, for by 1446, and perhaps as early as 1440,

⁸⁰) See P. Lucas, pp. 4-5, for the following dates: BM. MSS. Arundel 20 (1460-1500); Arundel 168 (1460-1500); Arundel 396 (1445-1460); and Bodley MS. Rawlinson poet. 118 (1460-1500).

⁸¹) *The Life of St. Katherine*, Book I, Prologue, 11. 218-219.

⁸²) Arundel 396, See *The Life of St. Katherine*, Forewords, pp. xxix-xxx and de Meijer, Part III, 564-565.

Capgrave was elected prior at Lynn. In this capacity he would have continued to attend the provincial chapters as he presumably had done since, on obtaining the *magisterium* in 1425, he became eligible to vote. His office as prior had to be confirmed at each meeting of the provincial chapter, but this confirmation was largely a formality. As a prior, his influence would have been greater than it had been when he was simply a master, and probably he held various offices subordinate to the provincial before his later election to that highest office, as those who succeeded him, including Bury, Halam, and Penketh, are known to have done. Unfortunately, however, the leaves in the prior-general's register which should cover this period in the history of the English province are missing. It is not even certain who the priors-provincial were, much less the minor officials and the places where the meetings were held.

In his *De Illustribus Henricis* (pp. 137-139), Capgrave records the visit of Henry VI to Lynn in 1446 and the conversation they had on their tour around the convent. He also says that the house numbered thirty priests and sixteen boys, evidently attending grammar school, and an unspecified number of brothers in minor orders. Such a population makes Lynn one of the largest of the Austin convents; and the presence of so many junior members suggests that it was at this time a *studium provinciae*⁸³). The administration of the financial and religious activities in the convent, including the appointment of confessors and preachers to the well-attended church, agreements with servants, tenants, and public officials, and the supervision of students and studies left Capgrave little time for literary work.

Nevertheless, he apparently inserted a chapter on Henry VI and finished the *De Illustribus Henricis* soon after the king's visit. The holograph manuscript with its different coloured inks and marginal additions makes clear that Capgrave composed the parts sporadically; and marked changes in the script, ink, and ruling demonstrate that the seventh gathering on Henry VI was added later⁸⁴). It should also be noted that this work contains the only reference to Capgrave's intention to write a life of the Duke of Gloucester (p. 109), and it is possible that Leland and Bale and others following them credited Capgrave with such a work without any further manuscript evidence. As the title

⁸³) Roth, I, 291.

⁸⁴) Lucas, pp. 12-16.

indicates, the book is thoroughly adulatory and uncritical in tone even of such recent figures as Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich, with whose true character and history Capgrave must have been familiar.

Sometime during his years as prior or earlier, Capgrave became acquainted with the notorious extortionist Sir Thomas Tuddenham, who with his fellow justice of the peace, Thomas Heydon, blackmailed and terrorized many among the Norfolk gentry, including notably the Paston family. Tuddenham's estate at Oxburgh was near Lynn, and he doubtless frequented the borough. Not only was he a man whose enmity was to be feared and, therefore, whom Capgrave would seek to mollify, he was also evidently a benefactor of the Augustinian friars, for he was buried in the church of their London convent after his execution for treason in 1461⁸⁵). The precise association Capgrave had with him is not known, but it was at Tuddenham's expense that Capgrave made his only documented visit outside England, a pilgrimage to Rome.

Since Capgrave himself does not date his trip and no record of an exit for him has been discovered, only the general dates c. 1447-1452 can be given for the composition of *The Solace of Pilgrims*. The *terminus a quo* reflects his notice of the April 1447 death of Cardinal Beaufort; the *terminus ad quem*, the fact that he refers to John Kemp as cardinal titular of St. Balbina and Archbishop of York rather than as cardinal bishop of St. Rufina and Archbishop of Canterbury as he became in 1452.

There was a steady stream of English travellers to Rome during the middle ages, several hundred a year by Capgrave's time⁸⁶), both on business to the papal curia and on pilgrimages. De Meijer speculates that Capgrave's trip was in 1450, the year of Pope Nicholas' jubilee, on the grounds that Capgrave several times mentions large crowds⁸⁷), but there are a number of reasons for suggesting that 1449 is a more likely

⁸⁵) Roth, I, 291.

⁸⁶) G. Parks, *The English Traveller to Italy*, I (Roma, 1954). Park's figures are inexact because precise records are scanty and the data scattered. It is interesting that he says of 1450, the year many assume Capgrave made his trip to Rome:

In 1450 all records were said to be broken when 40,000 pilgrims were thought to arrive daily; during this year nearly 200 persons were trampled to death in a panic on the crowded bridge.

Such a crowd would indeed have been one to reckon with. I find no evidence of so great a crush in the *Solace of Pilgrims*.

⁸⁷) Part I, 422.

year. Not only would Capgrave surely have noted the special celebrations of a holy year, but also the crowds at certain shrines on days of indulgence would have seemed large to an Englishman who had spent most of his life in smaller, less holy centres regardless of the year. There are, however, two stronger reasons for choosing 1449. First, it is known that there was a meeting of the General Chapter of the order in that year; since there is no evidence of another English representative having been sent, it is not unlikely that Capgrave, who was appointed prior-provincial only four years later, was chosen. Moreover, Capgrave's patron Tuddenham immediately fell from his position of prominence on the death of the Duke of Suffolk in 1450, and he and Heydon were the subjects of a great series of lawsuits during that year. While the charges were ultimately dismissed and Tuddenham restored, Capgrave would not have been likely to commemorate Tuddenham at the beginning of the *Solace* in the year of his disgrace.

Capgrave left no description of his trip to Italy, but he probably stopped at Paris which was a major *studium generale*, and he may have seen there the manuscript of Jordanus of Saxony's *Vita Sancti Augustini*, the source for his own *Life of St. Augustine*⁸⁸). Travelling through Italy, he no doubt visited other major Augustinian houses, including Lecceto where the English Austin friar William Flete, a confidant of St. Catherine of Siena, lived his hermit existence. His stay in Rome was long enough to enable him to see all the major shrines; and it was extended by an illness.

While he was ill, he was befriended by William Gray. They may have met more than a decade earlier when Capgrave entered the circle surrounding Duke Humphrey and Gray was a Balliol student. Gray's lineage would have given him entry into the group, and his own theological interests and knowledge of Humphrey's first gift to the university would have attracted him to Woodstock. By the time Capgrave came to Rome, Gray was himself a distinguished collector of manuscripts and a well-known patron as well as Henry VI's proctor at the papal court. It is a significant indication of Capgrave's reputation and further evidence that he was not acting in a private capacity on the

⁸⁸) R. Arbesmann, "Jordanus of Saxony's *Vita Sancti Augustini*, the source for John Capgrave's *Life of St. Augustine*", *Traditio* I (1943), 353.

trip that he should be attended by a man whom the pope personally, albeit unsuccessfully, was to try to promote to a bishopric in 1450.

Capgrave may have had access to Gray's extensive library where he would have seen many Italian works not often found in England⁸⁹), and he probably made at least the outline of his *Solace of Pilgrims* during his period of recuperation. Apart from the recollection of scenes in considerable detail, the many inscriptions which he records suggest that he worked on the book while he was still in Rome.

One authority suggests that Capgrave remained in Rome for a year and a half⁹⁰). If so, he must indeed have begun his trip in 1449 and worked on the *Solace of Pilgrims* during his absence, for he had returned to England and completed his last two saints' lives by 1451⁹¹). For an Augustinian author, a life of the founder was a natural project, and Capgrave's *Life of St. Augustine* reveals a close familiarity with both the genuine and spurious writings in the saint's canon, especially in the early chapters where he is not depending on his main source. The *St. Augustine* is in every way superior to the hastily composed *Life of St. Gilbert* which followed it. When the master of the order of Sempringham, Nicholas Reysby, made known his admiration for the *St. Augustine* and requested a similar work on his patron, he may well have provided the Latin manuscript which Capgrave took as his source. It is an ill-conceived work containing two recensions of the life. Capgrave applied little of his usual critical judgment in his translation; he made few additions; and there is no indication that he tried to remove the repetitions in it.

The only other work which has been assigned to this period immediately before his election to the provincialate is the lost *Manipulus doctrinae Christianae* which, according to Bale, was dedicated to John Kemp. Bale's note on it is ambiguous, however, for he refers to Kemp as both Cardinal of Balbina and Archbishop of Canterbury, titles he did not hold concurrently. It is more likely that Bale added the better known title than that Capgrave erred in his

⁸⁹) R. Weiss, *Humanism in England in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 86-96.

⁹⁰) Toner, p. 508. He offers no documentary evidence, however.

⁹¹) *The Life of St. Gilbert*, which Capgrave says was composed shortly after *The Life of St. Augustine* (p. 61), ends with a precise date:

Thus endith þe lif of Seint Gilbert translait in-to our moder tonge, þe 3ere of þe incarnacioun of our Lord a Mccccli.

(p. 142)

dedication, and consequently the work can be dated anywhere between 1439 and 1454. Circumstantial evidence for a date closer to 1454 is provided by Bale's cryptic note "Poggio allegat", indicating that Capgrave makes some allusion to the Italian humanist. Poggio had visited England between 1418 and 1422, and he was well known after that time. Moreover, Duke Humphrey owned at least one of his works, and Capgrave could have seen it. However, since Capgrave so infrequently refers to contemporaries and since Gray was friendly with Poggio during his stay in Italy⁹²), it is most likely that Capgrave's reference to the scholar would follow his lengthy exposure to the humanist group in Rome.

In 1453 Capgrave was elected provincial at Winchester, and the choice was confirmed by the prior-general the following year⁹³).

Confirmavimus in priorem provincialem fratrem Iohannem Capgrave provincie Anglie electum unanimiter et concorditer in capitulo provinciali Veyntonie celebrato 1453 in festo Marie Magdalene approbando electionem ac confirmationem eius per vicarium nostrum de eo factam, dando sibi auctoritatem in temporalibus et spiritualibus ut aliis provincialibus dare consuevimus, precipiendo singulis fratribus dicte provincie, ut sibi sicut legitimo pastori obediant. Confirmavimus acta predicti capituli precipientes prefato provinciali ut illa observari faciat.

Two years later the chapter met at Lynn, where Capgrave made his permanent home, and re-elected him:⁹⁴)

Confirmavimus in priorem provincialem huius provincie magistrum Iohannem Capgrave electum unanimiter et concorditer in capitulo Lynie celebrato 6a die mensis Augusti 1455, approbando electionem et confirmationem eius per vicarium nostrum de eo factam dando sibi omnem auctoritatem et potestatem sicut alias habuit in huiusmodi officio provincialatus et confirmavimus omnia acta et diffinitiones in dicto capitulo, precipiendo ut observaret et observari faceret similiter diffinitiones capitulorum generalium.

The only record of his public duties appears in two documents concerning the recognition of Sir Edmund Rede as a founder of the Oxford convent⁹⁵). Capgrave attended the formal services at the

⁹²) Weiss, p. 90.

⁹³) General Archives O.E.S.A., Register Dd 6, f. 16, as printed by de Meijer, Part I, 401.

⁹⁴) General Archives O.E.S.A., Register Dd 6, f. 16, as printed by de Meijer, Part I, 400.

⁹⁵) Printed in *The Chronicle of England*, Appendix II, 329-334.

convent church on that occasion and many of his activities must have been of a similar functional kind. He was also responsible for ensuring that the general rules of the order were observed in the thirty convents of the province, and to that end he made visitations and heard complaints like those noted by the author of the Augustinian rule *Mare Magnum*. Other duties were the recommendation of students to the *studia generalia*, the provision of lectorships, the arbitration of disputes, and the awarding of special dispensations and licenses.

Recent scholars agree that Capgrave finished his term as provincial in 1457 and returned to a quiet life at Lynn, carrying on with his last commentaries and *The Chronicle of England*. Only two of these commentaries are extant; those on the Acts of the Apostles and on the Creed. Both of them are dedicated to William Gray, and they still remain at Balliol College where Bishop Gray deposited them. With the Apocalypse of John, Capgrave finished his gathering of "eld exposiciones upon scripture into o collection" (*Chronicle*, p. 1), and turned to an enlargement of the *Annualia* which he had mentioned as early as 1438 in the Dedication to the Genesis commentary. Capgrave's dedication of this book to the new king, Edward IV, earned him the contempt of F.J. Furnivall, and Furnivall's condemnation of him as a time-server has too long been part of the standard characterization.

The power struggles which resulted in the civil war had their origins in events which took place before Capgrave's birth; and they were not concluded until two decades after his death. The older historical interpretation which placed all fifteenth-century figures on either the Lancastrian or Yorkist side has been supplanted by a far more complex view. It is now clear that the battles with the Percies, the rivalries of Henry V's brothers (the Dukes of Bedford and Gloucester) for influence in the councils of the young king Henry VI during the 1420's, the disgrace of Gloucester in the 1440's and of the Duke of Suffolk in 1450, as well as the battles of the next three decades were all manifestations at the courtly level of the struggle for the control of wealth and policy which is seen not only in the alliances formed by aristocratic families but also in borough activities.

Many of the lesser known disputes, important for their effect on the social and economic stability of fifteenth-century England, took place in the Northern counties and in East Anglia. The troubles in Lynn itself were mentioned earlier; severe riots took place in Norwich in the 1420's, and the general lawlessness in the county is reflected in reports in the Paston Letters.

The administration of justice was dependent on influence, and the cost of appeals was so great that there was little the average person could do if he were injured. Moreover, without wealth, he had little chance of effecting any change in the situation. In such circumstances the loyalty of the individual lay with those who could protect his interests, and, obviously, his concern was primarily on a local level. There is no doubt that the office of the king was respected, but it is equally certain that the general populace was willing to support whoever could gain the throne.

The source of the conflict was not the justice of either side's claim to the crown. In addition, the small numbers involved in actual battles forcibly demonstrates that the mass of people were not moved by the issues. Most of Capgrave's associates have been described as violent adherents of one or the other side; but in fact they were moved by considerations of advantage rather than principle. What their actions show above all is that Capgrave, without family or high ecclesiastical position, would not have been required to take sides and that he had little reason to do so. And it is hardly surprising, nor a matter for condemnation, then, that Capgrave, among many others, should laud Henry VI in the dedication to one work and Edward IV in another.

Whether his *Chronicle* was cut short because of his death, because he was concerned not to indulge in controversy, or because he had partially covered the ground in his *De Illustribus Henricis* cannot be definitively determined. While his sources are well known and he added little, the work is an interesting pastiche of medieval interests and beliefs. Moreover, there is individuality in the characteristic scepticism of many of his comments.

Capgrave died in Lynn, where he had spent most of his life, on August 12, 1464. His reputation for learning, enhanced by the report that Henry VII tried to have him beatified⁹⁶), was passed from annalist to annalist, but for nearly four hundred years the only work considered to be his that was ever printed was a version of John of Tynmouth's *Nova Legenda Angliae*⁹⁷), and even in his own day his

⁹⁶) The origin of this report is not ascertainable: de Meijer gives the *Introduction* to Mills' edition of *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes* p. xii as his only source. I have found no evidence that Henry VII made any petition to Rome.

⁹⁷) This legendary has been printed under Capgrave's name since 1516, although it was long ago conceded that little of the material was original. In fact, none of the

works do not seem to have been as well known as he was. With the recent publication of *The Life of St. Norbert*, however⁹⁸, all of his vernacular works are finally in print, and through them, a new perspective on certain aspects of fifteenth-century letters may be achieved, for Capgrave is the only recognized scholar of the time with a large vernacular canon.

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manuscripts contain Capgrave's name For a survey of the connection between Capgrave and this legendary, see Peter J. Lucas, "John Capgrave and the *Nova Legenda Angliae*: a Survey", *The library*, XXV (1970), pp. 1-10.

⁹⁸) Ed. C.S. Smetana (Toronto, 1977).