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MARGERIE KEMPE, *VIATRIX*

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ABSTRACT

Margery Kempe journeyed on pilgrimage from England to Compostela in 1417, a visit briefly noted in her quasi-autobiographical *Book*. This article examines and contextualises that journey as a facet of a life and a text marked by many similar pilgrimages. In addition, it fits pilgrimage into her life as *viatrix*, engaged on a spiritual journey not to terrestrial shrines, but to heavenly salvation.

KEY WORDS: Kempe, pilgrimage, Lynn, Compostela, *viatrix*.

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RESUMEN

Margery Kempe peregrinó desde Inglaterra a Compostela en 1417, una visita de la que dejó constancia en su cuasi-autobiográfico *Libro*. Este artículo analiza y contextualiza esa travesía como una parte de una vida y un texto marcados por peregrinajes similares. Además, integra la peregrinación en su vida como *viatrix*, comprometida con un viaje espiritual no hacia santuarios terrenales, sino a la salvación celestial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Kempe, peregrinación, Lynn, Compostela, *viatrix*.

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RESUMO

Margery Kempe peregrinou desde Inglaterra a Compostela en 1417, unha visita da que quedou constancia no seu case-autobiográfico *Libro*. Este artigo analiza e contextualiza esa travesía coma unha parte dunha vida e un texto marcados por peregrinacións semellantes. Ademais, integra a peregrinación na súa vida coma *viatrix*, comprometida cunha viaxe espiritual non cara a santuarios terreaus, senón á salvación celestial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Kempe, peregrinación, Lynn, Compostela, *viatrix*.

Among the many ecclesiastical anniversaries commemorated in 2017, that marking 600 years after the pilgrimage to Compostela by a middle-aged English housewife probably does not rank very highly. Compared to the impact of the posting of Luther's ninety-five theses, treated as the start of the Reformation, Margery Kempe's two weeks in Spain do not amount to much. Indeed, her pilgrimage was not even known to have taken place before 1934. It can be marked because it is now known, but in many ways is marked only because it is known. 2017 is, after all, also the 600th anniversary of the pilgrimages of Thomas Marchale and another man whom she names who accompanied her on the same boat; but they leave no literary traces to attract scholarly attention as she does, and are known only because she mentioned them.

Margery and her travelling companions were among the thousands of English pilgrims, most of them unknown, who visited Compostela during the two centuries before the Reformation¹. Few – named or unnamed – have left accounts of their journeys. Margery Kempe stands out largely because of the prominence she has achieved since 1934, when the text now known as the *Book of Margery Kempe* was found in a cupboard in an English country house. Now well known, and often called the first English autobiography, it revealed a woman who has become celebrated for her religious and spiritual experiences. Yet her prominence is problematic, mainly as a consequence of the eruption of academic feminism which has put her at the heart of a distinct academic sub-discipline of 'Kempe Studies'; but that is not a major issue here².

¹ Constance Mary STORRS, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St. James of Compostella, from the Early Twelfth to the Late Fifteenth Century*, Santiago de Compostela, Xunta de Galicia, 1994 / London, Confraternity of Saint James, 1998, listing pilgrims at pages 157-169 – only a fraction of those for whose transport by sea licences are listed *ibid.*, pages 173-183. Many others went without licences.

² For "Kempe studies", Marea MITCHELL, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism*, New York, Peter Lang, 2005, page 5 (also more concretely elsewhere in the volume, e.g. pages x-xi); also e.g. Ruth EVANS, "The *Book of Margery Kempe*", in Peter Brown (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2007, page 513; Robert N. SWANSON, "Moulding Margery: The Life and Afterlives of Margery Kempe", in Anders Jarlert (ed.), *Spiritual and Ecclesiastical Biographies: Research, Results, and Reading*, Stockholm, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och

The availability of her *Book* allows Margery Kempe's pilgrimage to Compostela to be considered as one among her full set of devotional journeys. It also offers an opportunity to set pilgrimage itself within the context of her fuller life, allowing her to be examined not just as 'pilgrim', *peregrina*, but more extensively as '*viatrix*', one travelling through life in search of salvation.

However, an immediate qualification is needed: the reconstruction of Margery Kempe's life is very incomplete. All that is known of her existence – apart, possibly, from one further minor fact – must be excavated from the *Book* as a text written on her behalf, supposedly at her dictation, in the last years of her life³.

Antikvitets Akademien, 2017 (Konferenser, 94), pages 24-36. Indications of the range and complexity of the scholarship are provided by collections of essays like Sandra J. McENTIRE (ed.), *Margery Kempe: a Book of Essays*, New York and London, Garland Publishing Inc., 1992, and John H. ARNOLD and Katherine J. LEWIS (eds.), *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2004. Useful introduction to Margery as pilgrim in Caroline M. BARRON, *Pilgrim Souls: Margery Kempe and other Women Pilgrims*, London, Confraternity of Saint James, 2004 (Confraternity of Saint James: Occasional Paper, 6); for more extensive contextualisation Clarissa W. ATKINSON, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe*, Ithaca NY and London, Cornell University Press, 1983; Charity SCOTT STOKES, "Margery Kempe: her Life and the Early History of her Book", *Mystics Quarterly*, 25, 1/2 (1999), pages 9-67; Anthony GOODMAN, *Margery Kempe and her World*, London, Pearson Education, 2002. For general comment on English pilgrims, Robert Brian TATE, *Pilgrimages to St James of Compostella from the British Isles during the Middle Ages*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1990 (E. Allison Peers Publications: Lectures, 4), pages 9-24. A dedicated website on Kempe is now being developed at: Joel FREDELL (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe* [online], available on <<http://english.selu.edu/humanitiesonline/kempe/>> [Accessed: 07/11/2017].

³ The work survives in a single manuscript, now LONDON, *British Library*, MS Add. 61823, digitised at <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_61823> [online] [Accessed: 23/10/2017]; this is also available with a transcription at the website mentioned in note 2. The text was first edited in Sanford Brown MEECH and Hope Emily ALLEN (eds.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1940 (Early English Text Society, Original Series, 212). This was intended to be complemented by a second volume containing further notes and commentary; but that never appeared. Subsequent editions with modernised orthography include Barry WINDEATT (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Harlow, Longman, 2000 (Longman Annotated Texts) / Woodbridge and Rochester NY, D. S. Brewer, 2004; Lynn STALEY (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Kalamazoo MI, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996 (Teams Middle English Texts) (now available online at <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/staley-the-book-of-margery-kempe>> [Accessed: 15/10/2017]). There have been several English translations, including Barry WINDEATT (trans. and ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985 (Penguin Classics); Lynn STALEY (trans. and ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe: A New Translation, Contexts, Criticism*, New York and London, Norton, 2001 (Norton critical edition) (which includes a selection of extracts from recent criticism); and Anthony BALE (trans. and ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015 (Oxford World's Classics). The version in Tony D. TRIGGS (trans. and ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe: A New Translation with an Introduction*, Tunbridge Wells, Burns and Oates, 1995, radically transforms the text into a first-person narrative as 'The Autobiography of the Wise Woman of God' (the sub-title on the cover of the paperback version), and in the process significantly distorts the reading. A Castilian translation is available: Salustiano MORETA VELAYOS (trans. and ed.), *Libro de Margery Kempe: la mujer que se reinventó a sí misma*, Valencia, Universitat de València, 2012. For convenience of access, future page references are to the Windeatt and Bale translations, cited jointly as 'WINDEATT' / 'BALE'). The chapter is also indicated, to aid use of the Castilian translation (all chapter references are to Book 1, unless Book 2 is specified). As the *Book* necessarily underpins any discussion of Margery Kempe, I have not supplied references to it for absolutely every point made here.

That life centred on the English port town then known as Bishop's Lynn (it was renamed King's Lynn in the early sixteenth century). She was a daughter of one of the town elite, probably born around 1373, and well aware of her social position. Her marriage was probably intended to maintain her status, but her husband was less successful as a merchant than had been hoped. She gave birth to fourteen children, but says almost nothing about them in her text. At some point during those years of child-bearing she experienced a kind of religious conversion, which is the real starting point for her record of her life⁴. The *Book* recounts her following religious and devotional experiences, in which she increasingly asserts her independence from her husband and then – as a separated wife and husbandless widow – lives her life as she and fate shape it. The full range of her experiences need not be considered here; immediate attention must focus on her pilgrimages.

Margery's repeated pilgrimages are prominent in her text⁵. Many occur within England: to Canterbury, to York and Beverley, and elsewhere as places passed through at either end of her ambitious continental journeys. In 1414 she embarked on a grand tour lasting over two years, going through Germany to Venice, and from there to the Holy Land, returning through Rome and Assisi⁶. In the 1430s she accompanied her German daughter-in-law back to her home city of Danzig, and then toured pilgrimage sites in Germany – she particularly mentions Wilsnack and Aachen – as she returned overland to Lynn, crossing the Channel and visiting the recent Brigittine foundation at Syon to collect its indulgence on the way⁷.

Such lengthy travels suggest a hardy soul, despite Margery's frequent self-depiction as a weak and fearful vulnerable woman. Obviously, there is one more expedition to add to the catalogue: her visit to Compostela. As a record of the pilgrimage, of a journey by land and sea to Santiago and the time she spent at her destination, what she says about her visit to Galicia is rather disappointing. It is described within a much longer narrative: Margery left Lynn with the intention of going to Santiago; after some delays she took ship from Bristol to complete the pilgrimage; returned to Bristol; and then followed a roundabout route across England which eventually ended back in Lynn. The record of the full journey starts in chapter 44 of the *Book*, her return to Lynn occurs in chapter 55⁸. In that

⁴ WINDEATT, page 46 / BALE, page 15 [chapter 3].

⁵ For Margery as a pilgrim, Diana WEBB, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, London and New York, Hambledon and London, 2000, pages 204-207; Dee DYAS, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature 700-1500*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2001, pages 220-226; Susan Signe MORRISON, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000 (Routledge Research in Medieval Studies, 3), pages 128-141.

⁶ WINDEATT, pages 96-143 / BALE, pages 57-96 [chapters 26-44].

⁷ WINDEATT, pages 269-292 / BALE, pages 205-224 [book 2, chapters 2-10].

⁸ WINDEATT, pages 143-175 / BALE, pages 96-124 [chapters 44-55].

lengthy chunk of text, the actual visit to Compostela – from boarding the ship through to her return to Bristol – occupies just four sentences:

and so she took ship in the name of Jesus and sailed forth with her fellowship, to whom God sent fair wind and weather, so that they came to Saint James on the seventh day. And then those who were against her in Bristol [where, as so often, she had encountered some hostility] now made her good cheer. And so they stayed there fourteen days in that region, and there she had great delight, both physical and spiritual, high devotion, and many great cries in remembrance of Our Lord's Passion, with plentiful tears of compassion. And then they came home again to Bristol in five days⁹.

This is not much to go on; and is certainly an inadequate foundation for meaningful comment on her experience. Yet she is not alone among the English pilgrims who did record their journeys in providing few insights into the experience of the pilgrimage as a devotional and spiritual journey. William Wey, whose account of his journey made in 1456 is considerably longer and much more detailed, is almost equally unsatisfying. Wey provides factual information, of the kind useful in a tourist guide for those who might follow him, but little sense of spiritual achievement¹⁰.

The blunt brevity of Margery Kempe's remarks about her time in Galicia is perhaps the most striking feature of her report on the pilgrimage. Her earlier trek to the Holy Land and back had been a journey of trials and tribulations, with momentous emotional and psychological impact. At Calvary she received the gift of tears which, accompanied by shrieking and roaring, made her a disruptive influence once she got home and perhaps made her life a misery until the tears ceased ten years later¹¹. The narrative details the rebuffs and discomforts she received (and, in some cases, brought on herself) from fellow travellers who doubted her holiness and were annoyed by her behaviour. This was also the journey on which she collected many indulgences, including the Portiuncula pardon of Assisi¹². Something similar, but with less drama, might also be said of her later visit to Germany.

⁹ WINDEATT, pages 147-148 / BALE, pages 199-101 [chapter 45] (the wording here is my own translation, with slight differences from Windeatt and Bale which I think better reflect the voice).

¹⁰ Wey's record is published, in Latin and English, and with additional commentary, in Francis DAVEY, *William Wey: An English Pilgrim to Compostella in 1456*, London, Confraternity of Saint James, 2000 (Camino de Santiago: Historic Texts) (the *Itinerarium peregrinationis* at pages 20-37).

¹¹ Santha BHATTACHARJI, *God is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997, pages 39-50.

¹² WINDEATT, page 115 / BALE, pages 73-74 [chapter 31].

Despite her emotional outbursts at Compostela, Margery's recollection of her visit seems unsatisfying. If anything, it makes her experience of the shrine seem almost anticlimactic. She does not seem to respond specifically to her location and its own sanctity (her mind being fully occupied with Christ's Passion), but even that response seems almost routine in terms of her overall spirituality. She says nothing about the sea crossings, although both were probably very uncomfortable¹³. In the full account of the journey from and back to Lynn, the sea crossing and her stay in Galicia appear almost as an intrusion. She says a lot about the challenge of finding a ship in Bristol, and the anxieties of other pilgrims to do the same – 1417 was perhaps a bad year to travel; in the end the ship she boarded may have been French. She also notes the hostility she faced from people unwilling to travel with her. The record of her wanderings as she returned to Lynn is also lengthy, and proved dramatic: she was repeatedly arrested and examined on suspicion of heresy¹⁴. For part of her journey she was accompanied and assisted by two of her companions to Compostela, Thomas Marchale and another man named only as Patrick¹⁵. It is as though the Santiago visit provided the context for the events before and after, but she did not consider it particularly important in itself.

The lack of detail about Margery's experience as a pilgrim of travelling through Galicia and then at the shrine of St James has often made it difficult for scholars to incorporate discussion of the journey to and from Compostela into their analyses. It has to be briefly mentioned, but once mentioned is frequently then ignored. It receives little attention even in attempts to analyse the significance of pilgrimage within Margery's devotional life¹⁶. While Margery may have spent her time in Spain more securely as one of a group than she did on her other overseas journeys, the practical and linguistic challenges of that pilgrimage were not necessarily any

¹³ For conditions on the boats, R.B. TATE, *Pilgrimages to St James...*, pages 15 and 18. A wider examination of the sea journey in Wendy R. CHILDS, "The Perils, or Otherwise, of Maritime Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the Fifteenth Century", in Jennie Stopford (ed.), *Pilgrimage Explored*, Woodbridge, York Medieval Press, 1999, pages 123-143.

¹⁴ On these trials, and their broader context, John H. ARNOLD, "Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent", in John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (eds.), *A Companion ...*, pages 75-93.

¹⁵ This stage covered in WINDEATT, pages 148-174 / BALE, pages 101-123 [chapters 46-55]. For Patrick see WINDEATT, pages 155-157 / BALE, pages 107-108 [chapter 49]. Both Windeatt and Bale modernise his name, which gives it the appearance of a Christian name. In the Middle English text it is given as 'Patrik', which could be a surname. For a postulated identification on that basis, see A. GOODMAN, *Margery Kempe ...*, page 149.

¹⁶ As in Ruth Summar McINTYRE, "Margery's 'Mixed Life': Place Pilgrimage and the Problem of Genre in The Book of Margery Kempe", *English Studies*, 89, 6 (2008), pages 643-661, where Compostela is named among her pilgrimage goals at pages 644 and 648, but not otherwise integrated into the argument. Likewise, in Diane WATT, "Faith in the Landscape: Overseas Pilgrimages in *The Book of Margery Kempe*", in Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (eds.), *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, University Park PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, pages 170-187, the Compostela journey receives cursory treatment in a single paragraph (page 183).

less daunting than on those other expeditions, but they receive little scholarly comment¹⁷. While the *Book* records the weeks in Compostela as briefly as it notes her stay in Danzig, the time in Compostela has not received the elaboration given to the Danzig visit¹⁸.

Yet more can be said about Margery's journey to Santiago. It had, at least, to be planned and prepared for. What motivated her to undertake the trip is unknown, and probably cannot be known. It would almost certainly be wrong to ascribe it to a strong and fixed devotion to St James: he does not appear elsewhere in her *Book* as a feature of her devotional life. However, it would also be wrong completely to discount devotion to St James. As well as its main parish church, Bishop's Lynn also contained a separate chapel of St James, intended to serve a specific area of the town¹⁹. The *Book* mentions her presence at a few sermons preached there²⁰; but what attracted her there was the sermons, not the site or its saint. Whether she was a regular visitor to the chapel at other times is unknown. In general, the *Book* is disappointingly uninformative about Margery's normal life within Lynn. When placing her within a parish context, it concentrates attention on her connections with the parish church; but unmentioned contact with the chapel of St James, and devotion to its saint, cannot be entirely ruled out²¹. The *Book* does link her pilgrimage to Compostela with recovery from a major illness which almost caused her death, during which she prayed to be healed in order to visit St James, and was. Her pilgrimage may then be seen as completion of a sickbed vow²².

As her pilgrimage occurred in 1417²³, another motivation becomes possible, but cannot be assumed. The tradition of Jubilee years at Compostela, when the feast of St James fell on a Sunday and the indulgences offered to pilgrims were greater than usual, congealed only in the fifteenth century; but precisely when is

¹⁷ The chapter on Margery Kempe ("Travel and Language Contact in *The Book of Margery Kempe*") in Jonathan HSY, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature*, Columbus OH, The Ohio State University Press, 2013, pages 131-156, mentions the Compostela pilgrimage only as the context for Margery's prayer for a safe sea-crossing (pages 152-153).

¹⁸ Notably in David WALLACE, *Strong Women: Life, Text, and Territory, 1347-1645*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pages 84-119.

¹⁹ Dorothy M. OWEN (ed.), *The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey*, London, Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1984 (Records of Social and Economic History, new series 9), pages 27-29.

²⁰ WINDEATT, pages 187-188 and 191 / BALE, pages 135 and 137-138 [chapters 61-62].

²¹ Her experience as a parishioner at Lynn is discussed in Katherine L. FRENCH, "Margery Kempe and the Parish", in Linda E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French, and Douglas L. Biggs (eds.), *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, Farnham and Burlington VT, Ashgate, 2011, pages 159-174.

²² WINDEATT, page 142 / BALE, page 96 [chapter 44].

²³ Although she does not supply the year. The only real indication of the year is a reference to royal requisitioning of shipping which had reduced the number of pilgrim vessels (WINDEATT, page 144 / BALE, page 97 [chapter 44]), which is taken to refer to actions preparatory to King Henry V's invasion of France in 1417.

not yet clear²⁴. 1417 met the key criterion of the feast day falling on a Sunday, but no firm evidence yet seems to confirm that it was actually commemorated as a Jubilee year. Margery Kempe was certainly an eager collector of indulgences, which are mentioned regularly as aspects of her pilgrimages – but, perhaps annoyingly, or oddly, not in connection with her Compostela visit²⁵. The timing of her visit would coincide precisely with the feast day, but that was probably accidental²⁶. She spent several weeks waiting for transport in Bristol, so set off later than she had expected.

Yet if 1417 was being commemorated as a Jubilee year, and Margery knew of the increased indulgence which would then be offered, that begins to raise questions about her pilgrimage (although they become, of course, irrelevant if 1417 was not a Jubilee year). Did she know in advance that 1417 would be such a year, and if so, how did she know? As she was already planning the journey before she returned from Rome in 1415, did she deliberately delay her pilgrimage to gain the benefit of the Jubilee indulgences? The records which allow some comment on Compostela's appeal to pilgrims from England confirm that the traffic increased significantly in Jubilee years²⁷, but how news of an imminent Jubilee was distributed or received remains hidden in obscurity. The frequent occurrence of Jubilees may have made them fairly common knowledge; but the cycle was not totally straightforward, and the challenge of forward planning to benefit from the precise coincidence in the calendar would be considerable.

If the *Book* is reliable, a direct link between Margery's pilgrimage and the Jubilee may have been accidental, even if she had long intended to make the journey in that year²⁸. Such intent is suggested by the arrangements she made while in Rome to repay money borrowed there to her creditor at Bristol in the week of Pentecost – but in an unstated year. The money was indeed repaid at Bristol, two years later, as she awaited her departure for Santiago. The comment on the repayment asserts that the meeting was deliberate and pre-planned on both

²⁴ For the emergence of the Compostela jubilees, see Bernhard SCHIMMELPFENNIG, "Die Anfänge des Heiligen Jahres von Santiago de Compostela im Mittelalter", *Journal of Medieval History*, 4, 3 (1978), pages 285-303, esp. page 292. I am also grateful to Dr Carlos A. González-Paz for discussing this point with me.

²⁵ Barron comments that she had no need for indulgence, having been promised salvation by Christ (C.M. BARRON, *Pilgrim Souls...*, pages 16-17), but this seems to me to ignore how Margery actually behaves.

²⁶ She was clearly unable to leave Bristol as soon as she hoped, but precisely how long she was delayed for is not clear. Had she not been so delayed, she might have returned earlier in July, and before the saint's feast day.

²⁷ C.M. STORRS, *Jacobean Pilgrims...*, pages 111, 114 and 118 (for the fifteenth century – although the caveat has to be applied that the records may not be reliable). For the fourteenth century Storrs's comments (pages 111 and 113) assume that the Jubilees were being celebrated then, which is not confirmed by evidence from Compostela itself.

²⁸ W.R. CHILDS, "The Perils, or Otherwise...", page 135.

sides; but that such foresight actually worked for an informal arrangement seems remarkable²⁹. Her illness is deduced to date to 1415, not long after her return from Rome (but may have been in 1416); her departure was no impulsive decision (unlike her later trip to Germany)³⁰. Yet that she would depart from Bristol need not have been assumed when she was in Rome in 1415: ships carrying Santiago pilgrims did occasionally leave directly from Lynn, one having been licenced in 1413 to go with sixty passengers³¹. The journey was going to take time, and cost money. Time was not a problem, but money was, at least she says it was – leaving aside any administrative problems. In general, Margery does seem to exaggerate her poverty. She was probably not as poor as she often says she was, but that does not mean that she always had easy access to cash when she needed it. She may have been profligate in her charity, or simply cash-strapped in an economy which ran mainly on credit. She protests, anyway, that she lacked the funds for the journey³².

How Margery funded her pilgrimages – or where any of her money came from – is something rarely mentioned in her *Book*. With the Compostela journey she does give some detail, probably incomplete. She records that her problem was solved by charity, and by attitudes to pilgrimage which reduced the emphasis on the individual pilgrim and made it more of a collaborative effort.

As Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* suggest, and Margery own text confirms, medieval pilgrimage was often a shared group experience and (as Margery indeed complains) a jolly one. Concerned for her safety, she always travelled with others if she could, usually until they became fed up with her company and her negative attitude to their holiday-making. The spiritual goals make it natural to emphasise

²⁹ WINDEATT, pages 128-129 and 144 / BALE, pages 84-5 and 97 [chapters 37 and 44]. Such pre-planning might provide justification for the statement of Päivi SALMESVUORI, "Birgitta of Sweden and her Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela", in Carlos Andrés González-Paz (ed.), *Women and Pilgrimage in Medieval Galicia*, Farnham and Burlington VT, Ashgate, 2015 (Compostela International Studies in Pilgrimage History and Culture), page 121, that St Birgitta was the inspiration for Margery's Santiago pilgrimage, as she had visited sites associated with the saint during her stay in Rome (WINDEATT, pages 131-132 / BALE, pages 86-7 [chapter 39]); but while Margery clearly was influenced by the model of St Birgitta while in Rome (see Naoë Kukita YOSHIKAWA, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2007, pages 54-62), the connection seems too tenuous to draw that inference for her pilgrimage to Compostela. For further discussion of St Birgitta as an influence on Margery, see also Gunnel CLEVE, "Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence in Medieval England?", in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium V: Papers read at The Devon Centre, Dartington Hall, July 1992*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1992, pages 163-178, with consideration of the pilgrimages at pages 167-171.

³⁰ For the decision to go to Germany, WINDEATT, pages 269-273 / BALE, pages 205-208 [book 2, chapter 2].

³¹ C.M. STORRS, *Jacobean Pilgrims...*, page 175. The list is probably not complete; the next two Lynn ships which are recorded would have sailed in 1434 (20 pilgrims) and 1451 (30 pilgrims): *ibid.*, pages 178 and 181.

³² WINDEATT, page 143 / BALE, pages 96-97 [chapter 44].

a pilgrimage's personal significance, and see it as a self-absorbed or self-focussed activity. However, that view is strongly challenged by the practice of vicarious pilgrimage, in which individuals paid others – some of them people who were almost semi-professional pilgrims – to undertake such journeys on their behalf in order to share in the spiritual benefits. Most English evidence for this practice derives from wills, including one which survives from Lynn.

William Lok made his will as burgess of Lynn in October 1408. The connections and status implied in its contents make it a reasonable supposition that Margery Kempe was at least aware of him, and may even have known him. His will contained legacies for three pilgrimages to be undertaken on his behalf, all of which resonate with the travels of Margery Kempe. One required a chaplain to go to Rome to celebrate masses there for a year for Lok's soul; another was for a pilgrimage to Santiago; the third was a tour of shrines in England. The Santiago pilgrimage is most significant for immediate concerns. While little detail is provided, the bequest did stipulate that the pilgrim should receive 5½ marks for his labour (the equivalent of £3 13s. 4d. in sterling), and be provided with 6s. 8d. as offering. The final legacy requested a pilgrimage to a series of English shrines (Canterbury, Hailes, Beverley, Bridlington, and St Michael's Mount), offering 3s. 4d. at each³³. This has some similarity with Margery Kempe's own travels: her extended route back to Lynn on return from Santiago included visits to Hailes (the Holy Blood), and Bridlington (St John)³⁴. She also went to Beverley, but that was a forced detour from her planned route, taken there as a prisoner, not going voluntarily as a pilgrim³⁵.

The funding of such vicarious pilgrimage could also occur during a lifetime, and was indeed encouraged by grants of indulgences to reward donations given to named prospective pilgrims³⁶. Similar financial support could also be given in a less formal way, as Margery's *Book* reveals. When she was contemplating her forthcoming journey, Christ told her not to worry about money³⁷; but she could not have gone without it. She mentions four gifts – one small, three much larger³⁸. The first (40d.) may not be directly tied to the pilgrimage, but bought her a coat; the second, of seven marks (£4 13s. 4d.), was from an inhabitant of Lynn who asked

³³ King's Lynn, *Borough Archives*, KL/C58/1. The pilgrimage bequests are among those in the extract printed in D.M. OWEN, *The Making of King's Lynn...*, page 251.

³⁴ WINDEATT, pages 148 and 167 / BALE, pages 101 and 117 [chapters 45 and 53].

³⁵ WINDEATT, pages 167-173 / BALE, pages 117-123 [chapters 53-54]. She may have visited the shrine of St John of Beverley at this point, but does not say so. An earlier visit to Yorkshire, which may have included a tour of shrines, is noted at pages WINDEATT, pages 58 and 60 / BALE, pages 25-27 [chapter 11].

³⁶ E.g. R.B. TATE, *Pilgrimages to St James...*, page 23; Robert N. SWANSON, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, page 235.

³⁷ WINDEATT, page 143 / BALE, page 97 [chapter 44].

³⁸ WINDEATT, pages 143, 145 and 147 / BALE, pages 97, 99-100 [chapters 44-45].

in return that Margery should pray for her at Santiago. That was probably more than enough to cover her basic costs for the start of the journey³⁹. The third – the substantial sum of ten marks (£6 13s. 4d.) – is harder to interpret. She received it at Bristol from the man who became her fellow pilgrim, Thomas Marchale. She says he respected her as a holy woman, and gave his gift as straightforward charity, to spend as she wished. He also paid her passage money to Santiago and back⁴⁰. In addition she received ‘gold’ from the bishop of Worcester as a parting gift after she had spent some time as his guest while waiting for a boat. That was presumably intended to cover costs, or to be offered at the shrine on his behalf (she does not say)⁴¹.

Margery Kempe’s visit to Compostela is but one episode in her life, recounted in a few sentences in a much longer book as only one of her many pilgrimages to shrines and holy sites scattered across England, Europe, and the Holy Land. She certainly earns the title of pilgrim, *peregrina*; but perhaps deserves the more meaningful and equally justified qualification as *viatrix*. Her *Book* details her wanderings within the world, most of which are indeed pilgrimages; but it also conveys another sense of Margery, as someone on a journey through life. Here she fits into the tradition in which life as a whole is a journey in a strange land, following Christ as model, or at least trying to meet his demands and expectations⁴². Ultimately she is a woman in search of salvation, perhaps more precisely of redemption, even though fortified and reassured by Christ’s direct confirmation of her future salvation. As such a *viatrix* Margery is more challenging, both to modern readers and (she suggests) to her contemporaries. If the medieval tradition of *homo viator* was constructed around the twin poles of desire for God and alienation from the world⁴³, then this *mulier viatrix* manifests both. Her *Book* shows her desire for God being satisfied. Initially intensely aware of her distance from God, and from salvation, and profoundly aware of her sinfulness (particularly one sin whose precise nature is never disclosed, and which she was unable to confess), she was rewarded with visions, direct contact with Christ,

³⁹ The amount which might be needed for the trip cannot be estimated, given the paucity of detailed information, and would of course vary with duration and degree of luxury (for the voyage costs, see W.R. CHILDS, “The Perils, or Otherwise...”, page 129). Some bequests were of 10 marks (R.B. TATE, *Pilgrimages to St James*..., page 23), which was presumably considered a realistic amount, but perhaps somewhat on the high side (others were lower, but might have been intended only as partial funding).

⁴⁰ Formal restrictions on export of money make the amount actually needed uncertain. Some of Margery’s money was used to repay a debt incurred during her return from Rome, clear evidence that some pilgrimage was funded through credit.

⁴¹ WINDEATT, page 147 / BALE, page 100 [chapter 45]. In addition to these specific donations, see her comment on funding for her travels at WINDEATT, page 173 / BALE, page 122 [chapter 54].

⁴² The following comments are in part inspired by Gerhart B. LADNER, “*Homo Viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order*”, *Speculum*, 42, 2 (1967), pages 233-259.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pages 237-238.

spiritual marriage with the Godhead, and a guarantee of salvation⁴⁴. This can create a sense of Margery as self-proclaiming saint, almost deliberately matching herself against templates of sainthood and marks of divine favour to tick appropriate boxes⁴⁵. Admittedly, this also poses the challenge of working out how intentional that picture is: how much shaped by her scribe rather than by Margery herself, or by the selectivity of a text which in fact reveals only a fraction of her life. Long stretches of that life are passed over without comment – particularly her time in Lynn, as wife and mother both before and after she embarked on her quests⁴⁶.

The other sense of *viatrix*, as one alienated from the surrounding world, runs as a constant theme throughout the *Book*⁴⁷. It can be discerned in the numerous tales of Margery's experience of rejection and contempt, against which (while often fearful and uncertain) she maintained her steadfastness, assured by supporters both divine and human. She suffered for Christ, being accused of heresy, rejected by fellow travellers as an intolerable travelling companion, sneered at by monks and housewives, criticised for her ostentatious piety by preachers infuriated by having their sermons disturbed by her noisy cryings, and condemned as a hypocrite when she seemed to turn her ostentation on and off at will. Yet others recognised her holiness – or she says they did (and says it in ways which suggest a degree of self-satisfaction which grates against her self-presentation as *viatrix*). The priest who read to her secured a good benefice; laypeople sought her advice and spiritual aid in ways which suggest her fulfilment of the Seven Spiritual

⁴⁴ For these as components of her spirituality, S. BHATTACHARJI, *God is an Earthquake...*, pages 84-114 and 126-132.

⁴⁵ Jennifer R. BRAY, "Concepts of Sainthood in Fourteenth-Century England", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 66, 2 (1984), pages 72-77; Katherine J. LEWIS, "Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England", in J.H. Arnold and K.J. Lewis (eds.), *A Companion...*, pages 195-215. For Margery as a failed "living saint" see Aviad M. KLEINBERG, *Prophets in their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pages 149-152. See also the persuasive nuancing of Rebecca KRUG, "The Idea of Sanctity and the Un canonized Life of Margery Kempe", in Andrew Galloway (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pages 129-145.

⁴⁶ John C. HIRSH, "Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*", *Medium Ævum*, 44, 1/2 (1975), pages 145-150; Lynn STALEY, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, University Park PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, pages 33-38. For the scribe as a 'secretary' see Diane WATT, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500*, Cambridge and Malden MA, Polity Press, 2007, pp. 119-124. The suggestion that the first scribe should be identified with Margery Kempe's son is significantly boosted, but perhaps not convincingly confirmed, by the discoveries and argument in Sebastian SOBECKI, "'The writyng of this tretys': Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book", *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 37 (2015), pages 257-283.

⁴⁷ Its constancy makes precise referencing to the text of the *Book* impractical; the points raised in the following paragraphs appear so frequently, and so often, that a consolidated reference would be meaningless, and separate ones too many to be useful. For similar reasons I have refrained (with one exception) from providing secondary references for the individual elements mentioned; they feature regularly in the historiography surrounding Margery and in commentaries on the *Book*.

Works of Mercy⁴⁸; bishops approved her orthodoxy. Indeed, she says that she gained nationwide recognition as someone touched by God, but that claim is not supported by any other sources. Alienated from the world, yet closely involved in it, she challenged it and her fellow Christians to live up to their faith and its moral and spiritual demands. While fearful, she fearlessly reprimanded bishops for employing uncouth and blasphemous servants – and also monks guilty of similar behaviour. She proclaimed Christ, in effect preaching (yet insisting that she was only teaching). She resisted her confessor when he tried to assert his authority over her, arguing that Christ’s instructions took priority. She wore white, claiming a virgin status belied by her fourteen children.

It is as *viatrix* that Margery is and was at her most challenging: to current scholarship; perhaps to the sixteenth-century editors who reduced her to a docile devout woman mistaken for an anchoress over the following three centuries⁴⁹; possibly also to her contemporaries who both accepted and rejected her self-fashioning. Attempts to meet her challenges, of both the life as apparently lived and her *Book* as the record of it, underpin the explosion in ‘Kempe studies’ of recent decades, but here cannot be addressed beyond bare acknowledgement.

Margery *peregrina* made the trip to Compostela in 1417, one among a shipload of English pilgrims which was only one of that year’s shiploads, among even more across the medieval centuries. Her journey to Compostela was a pilgrimage with a specific goal and an identifiable duration. Margery *viatrix* – like every other Christian, then and now – faced a much more difficult and uncertain pilgrimage, that of life. That pilgrimage had a goal, but not in this world; it had a fixed end point, as all human lives do. Her *Book* ends before that pilgrimage was over; when and where she died remains unknown. Whether she reached the final destination she hoped for is something that cannot be known.

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⁴⁸ See discussion in Mary Beth L. DAVIS, “‘Spekyn for Goddys Cawse’: Margery Kempe and the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy”, in Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebök (eds.), ... *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways ...: Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 1999, pages 250-265. See also, in terms of *viatrix*, G.B. LADNER, “*Homo Viator...*”, page 243.

⁴⁹ R.N. SWANSON, “Moulding Margery...”, pages 27-28.

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