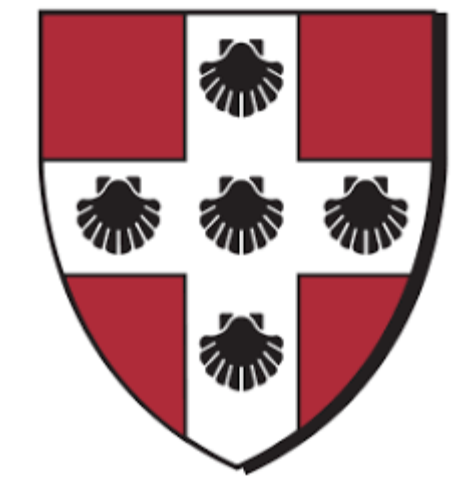


The Geography of Indulgence: A Historical and Geographic Analysis of Indulgence Grants in 15th Century England



Julia G. Gyourko

Department of History, Quantitative Analysis Center
Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06459

Introduction

This project centers on the geographic analysis of 130 indulgences granted by two 15th Century Archbishops of York, *John Kempe (1426-1452)* and *William Booth (1452-1464)*, to gain further insight into the lives of both Medieval ecclesiastical figures and their society at large. By analyzing these indulgences based on distance criteria, geographic density, action categories and more, this research contributes to a growing body of evidence showing that interactions and institutions within Medieval society were much more extensive, well-connected, and complex than first meets the eye.

Indulgences Explained

An indulgence is a formal decree by the Catholic Church allowing individuals to complete specific actions in order to either shorten their time in Purgatory or complete non-purgatorial penance, in turn speeding their ascent into Heaven. In the 15th Century, an indulgence could be granted by the Pope or the overseeing bishop of any Catholic diocese following a formal petition process. Once approved, an indulgence typically removed 30-40 days from any Purgatorial sentence. The decision to grant an indulgence was generally rare, and doing so represented each bishop's keen belief that aiding these causes earned meaningful benefits in the afterlife.

Methodology

Preliminary analysis was conducted on the indulgence grants listed in each bishop's register. Longitude and latitude data were generated individually from original 15th Century place names, as close readings of indulgence testimonial comments determined proper categorization. Indulgences were then mapped using ArcGIS Pro. Distances were calculated in miles using the geodesic method on the British National Grid projection.

Indulgence Explorations

1. Geographic Extent

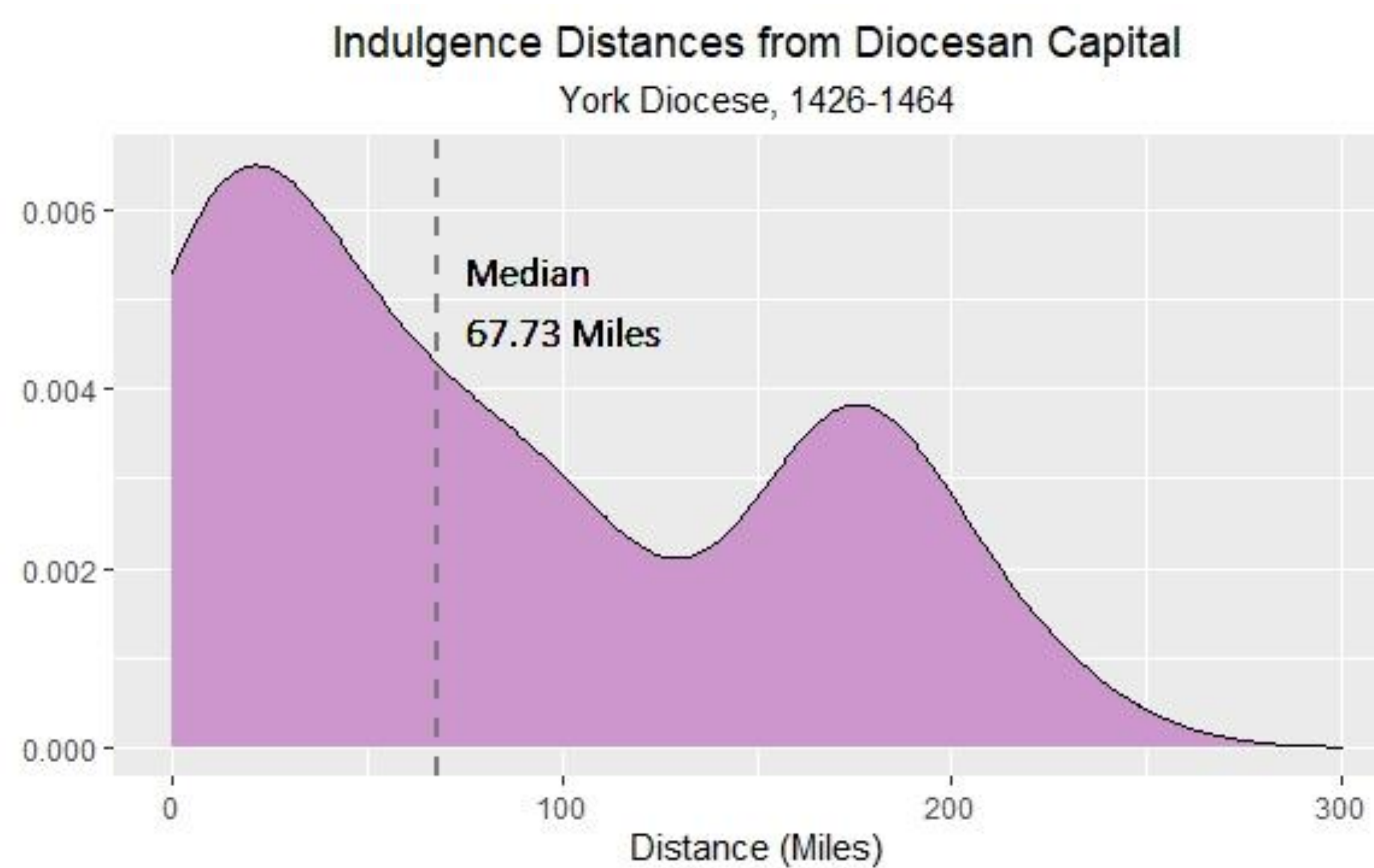


Fig. 1. Shows the calculated distance from each indulgence recipient to the diocesan capital in York. With a median distance of more than 67 miles, this shows the massive geographic reach of these indulgences. For context, an indulgence petitioner travelling 67 miles in the 15th Century would take nearly 3 days of efficient travel on horseback.

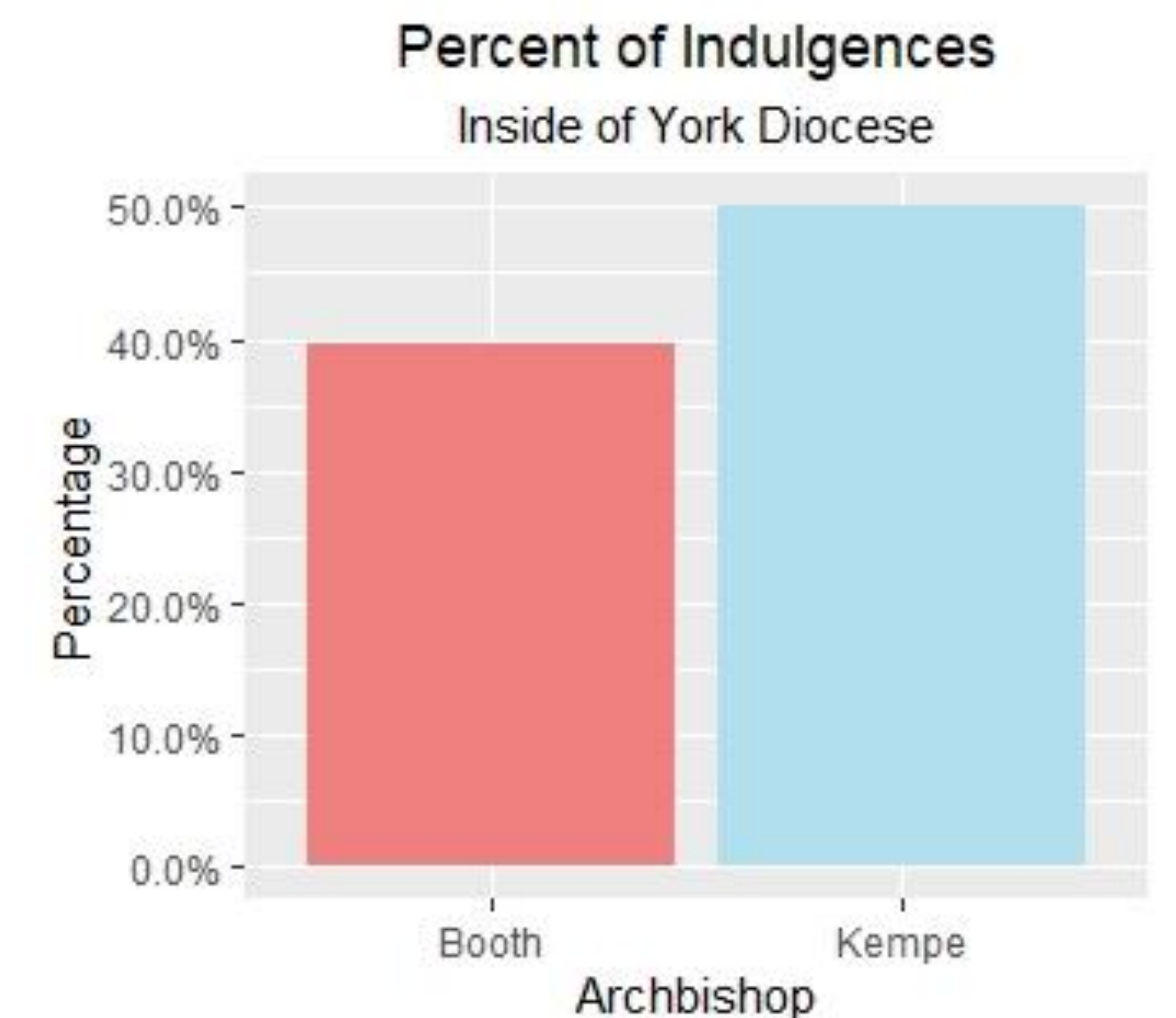


Fig. 2. Shows the breakdown of indulgence locations for each Archbishop, where for both men fewer than half of their indulgence grants went to causes inside of their own diocese. This shows both the influence of these Archbishops throughout Medieval England, but also the interconnected nature of the society at large.

2. Categorical Variety

Indulgences in York Diocese By Category, 1426-1464

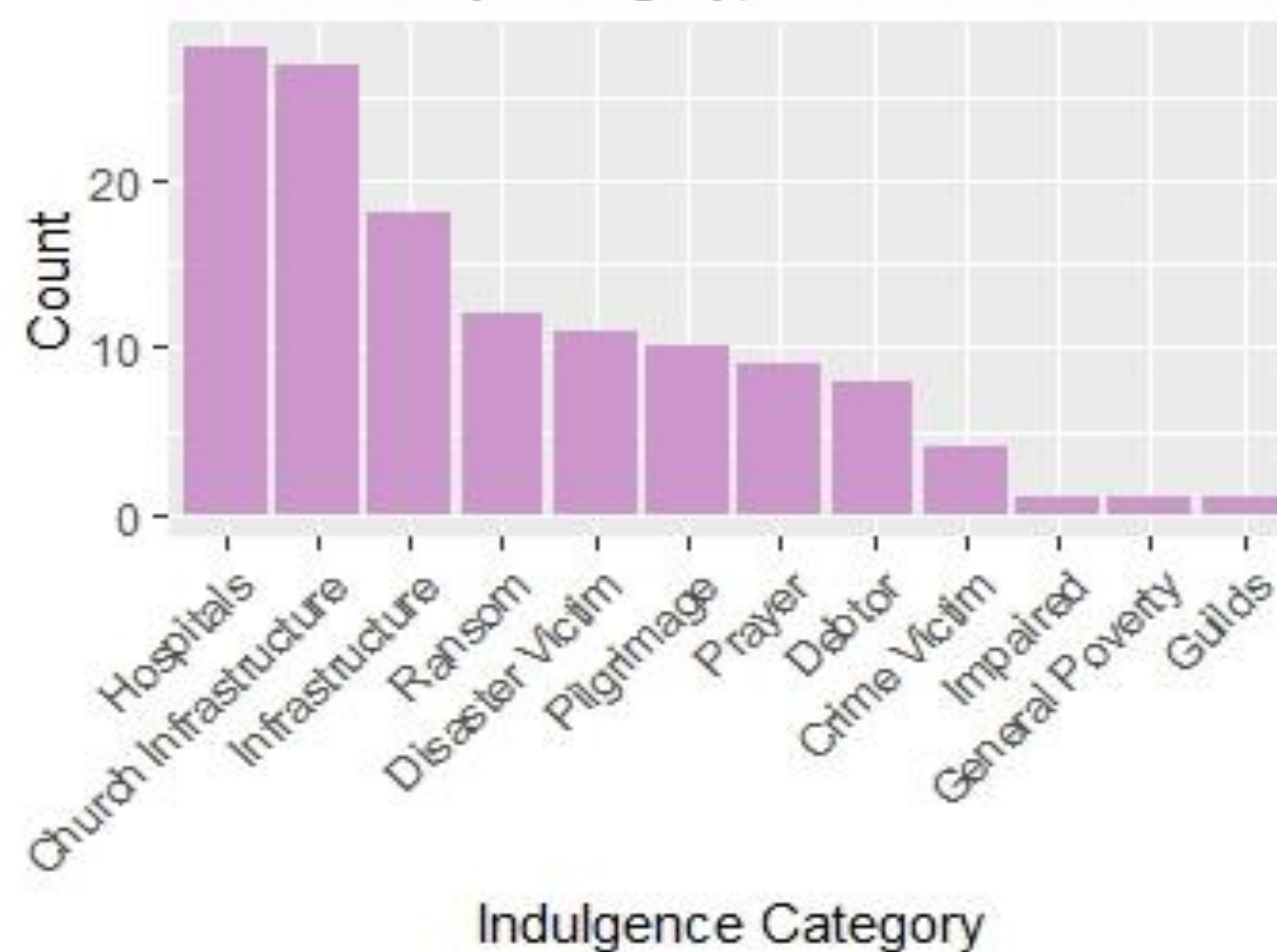


Fig. 3 shows the distribution of all indulgences granted by Kempe and Booth into 12 action categories.

Indulgences Meant for Communities	Indulgences Meant for Individuals
Church Infrastructure	Crime Victim
Guild	Debtor
Hospital	Disaster Victim
Pilgrimage Location	General Poverty
Transportation Infrastructure	Physically Impaired
-	Prayer
-	Ransom

Fig. 4. Separates the indulgence categories into two distinct groups, those designed to address individual versus community concerns. Clearly, bishops found ample room to address both.

3. Distinct Models of Giving

Indulgences by Category

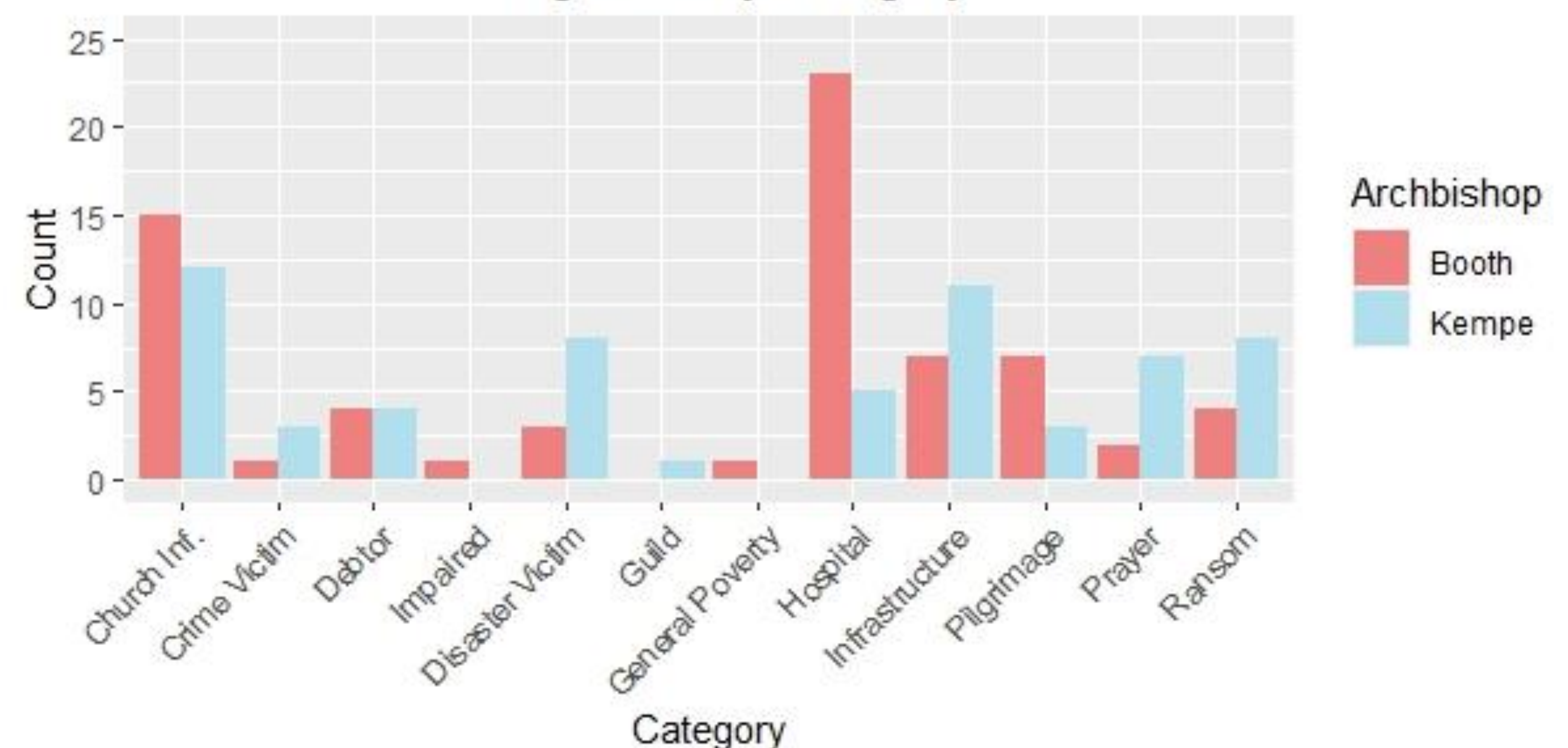
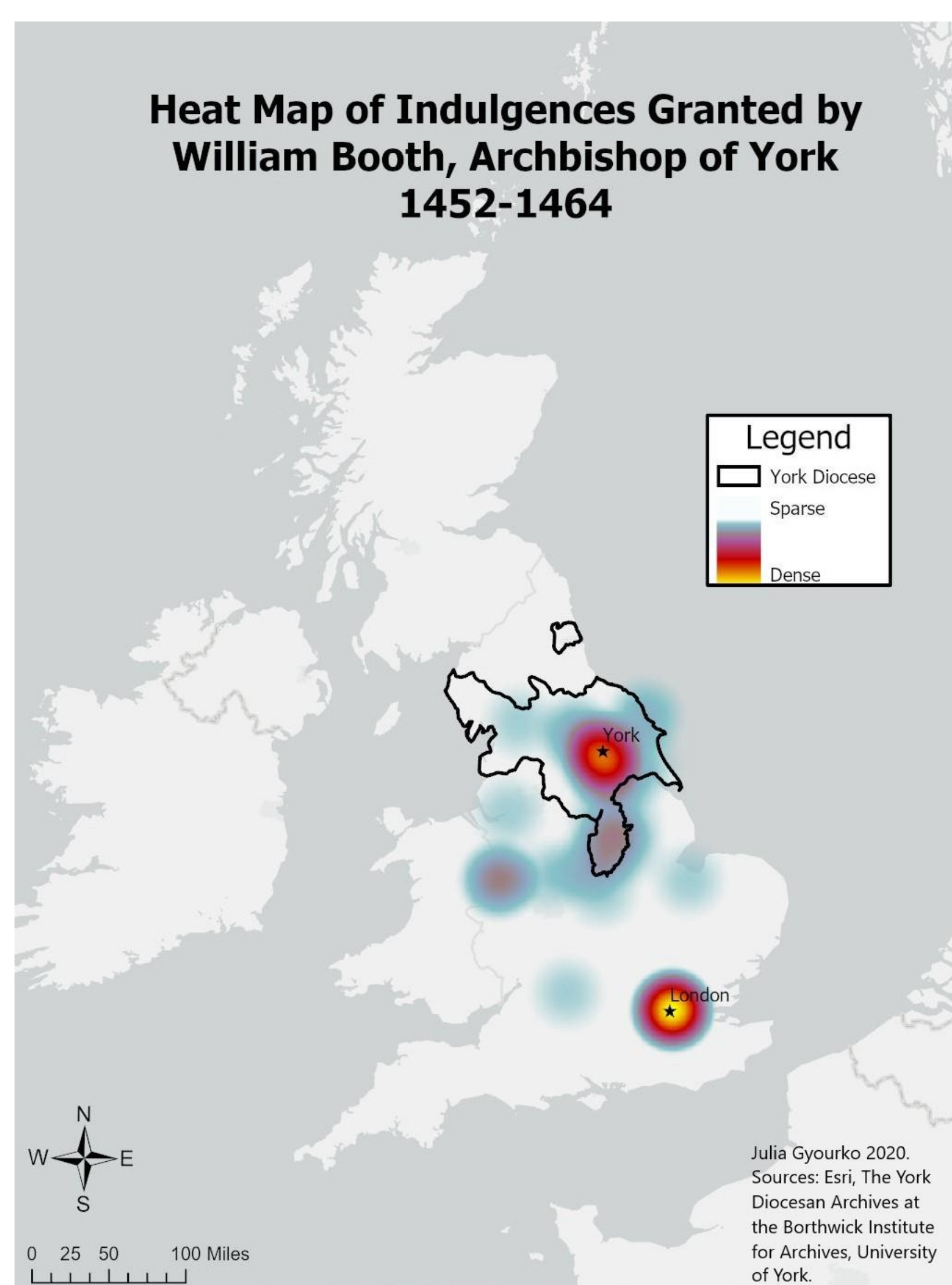
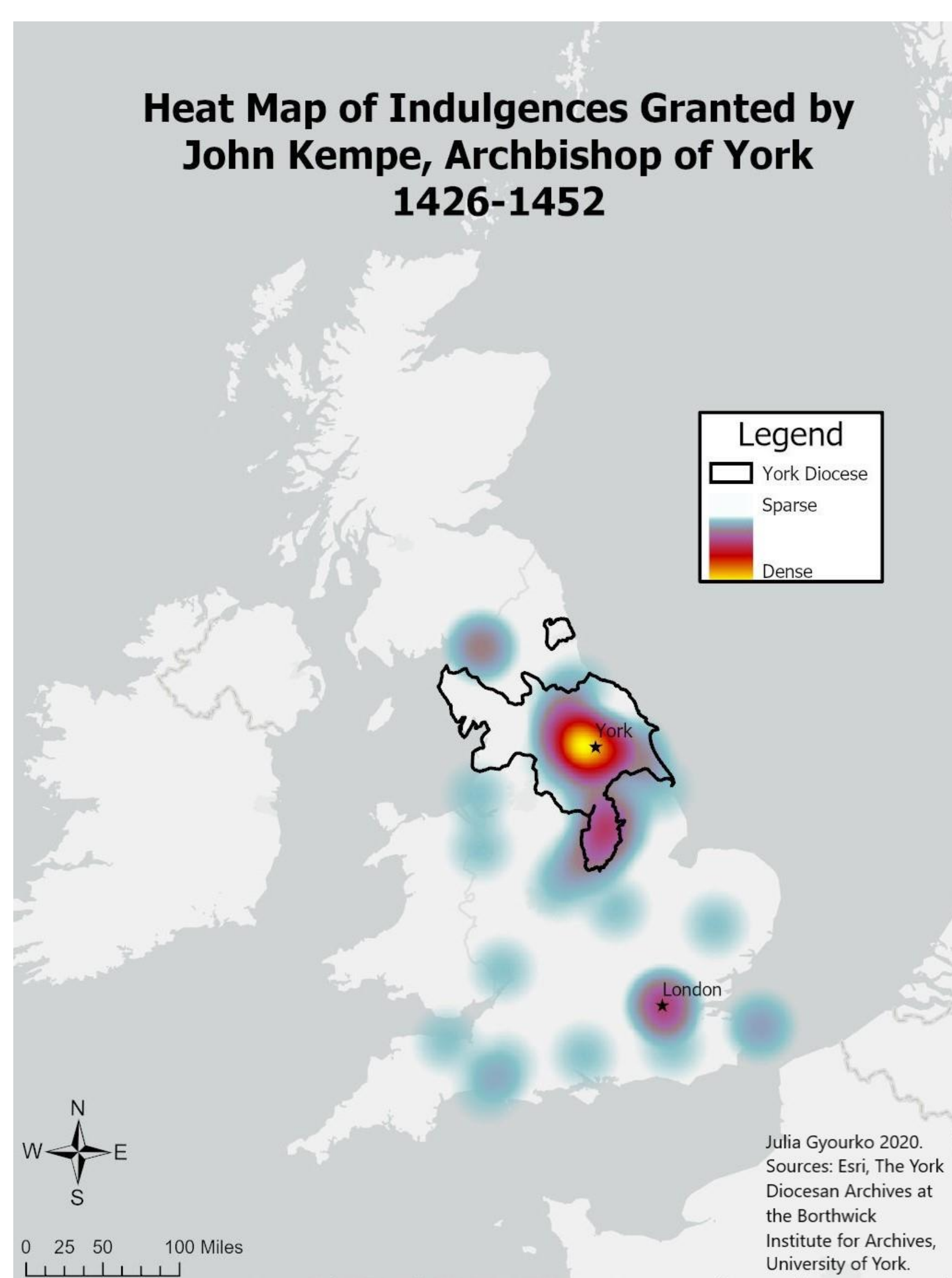


Fig. 7 Compares each archbishop's indulgences by category. Here, we see that Booth typically outnumbers Kempe in community-based grants like hospitals, church infrastructure, and pilgrimage destinations. Contrastingly, Kempe tends to lean more heavily towards individually-based indulgences compared to Booth, drastically outnumbering him in areas such as ransom payments, prayer requests, and disaster relief.



Figs. 5 & 6. Show the geographic distribution of Archbishops Kempe & Booth's individual indulgence grants. Here, we see that Kempe had a strong presence in York and its diocesan capital, but maintained a presence throughout most of England. Booth's map shows that his most heavily concentrated area was in London, outside of his diocese, and with far less connection to the rest of the country.

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Conclusions

- The geographic spread of indulgences granted from 15th Century York Diocese extended across Medieval England, demonstrating both the influence of the archbishops and the interconnected nature of Medieval society.
- Indulgence grants were very specific and had the power to address a wide range of social issues and individual causes.
- Booth and Kempe—two archbishops serving the same diocese in similar time-periods—engaged in thematically different types of indulgence granting, where Booth focused primarily on serving institutions, while Kempe focused primarily on serving individuals.