

THE CONFESSOR'S SHRINE IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY CHURCH.¹

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I shall take what is printed on the subject of the Confessor's shrine for granted, only recapitulating enough to link my remarks together. It consisted of a gable-roofed coffin, covered with plates, arcades, and figures, all of gold, set with precious stones. I have seen small shrines at Tournai and Rouen of such precious work (that at Tournai is dated 1247, I believe, that is, it was contemporary with the Confessor's shrine; the one at Rouen must be nearly of the same time), and at Marburg one of full size, but of this the main fabric is of gilt bronze. At Aachen there are two full-sized shrines but they are earlier and have no enamels. Matthew Paris records under the year 1241 that Henry III caused a shrine of pure gold and precious stones to be made; probably it was begun at this time but it was not completed for full thirty years. Up to the time when it was begun the king's favourite man of affairs was Odo the goldsmith, and his son Edward continued in his place. There are two interesting documents regarding Odo in the muniments of the abbey; they show that in 1241 he lived in a big way at Westminster and received a grant of a free chantry in his private chapel.² The other document shows that he was at one time provost of Westminster. Edward, the son, called "of Westminster," is also named goldsmith in another of these documents and as we know from other sources that he was keeper of the shrine from the time of its commencement, we may consider it certain that the shrine was the work of Odo and Edward of Westminster, the goldsmiths. As is well known, in the Cambridge life of the Confessor there are pictures representing scenes

¹ Read before the Institute at Westminster, 20th October, 1911.

² I may remark that this is the earliest instance known to me of the use of the

words chantry chapel. *Chauterie* occurs on a grave slab, c. 1270, in the Ashmolean Museum.

at the Confessor's shrine. Not, however, the translation into Henry III's magnificent new work. Although the shrine as figured is remarkably like the new shrine, it has been said that there could be no chance of its being drawn from it because the book was as early as 1245 or 1250. I have lately examined it with an expert in illuminated manuscripts when we agreed that it could not in fact be earlier than about 1270.

The marble and mosaic basement of Italian cosmati work on which the golden coffin rested still remains to us: it is one of a number of examples of the art of the Roman mosaic worker in the church, a group which has no competitor on this side of the alps, and must, in fact, be one of the most remarkable in the world. An inscription on the presbytery pavement which still in part exists shows that it was laid down in the year 1268 by Odericus from Rome, and the actual name may still be read. A similar inscription on the shrine basement records that it was the work of Peter, citizen of Rome, in the year 1279, and the words *Romanus civis* may still be read. This date is usually given as 1269, because, I suppose, the Confessor was in that year translated, but the original manuscript authorities, Sporley in the British Museum, and Flete in the chapter library read *septuageno* not *sexagena*.

Some twenty years ago the Westminster works were described in Italian archaeological publications. It had long been on record that the tomb of the pope Clement IV (d. 1268) at Viterbo was the work of an artist who called himself Petrus Oderisi. An inscription to that effect remained until 1685, when it was noted by a writer of lives of the popes. In the local guide to Viterbo, published by Penzi in 1894, it is stated that the tomb of this pope was by the same artist who had executed the tombs of the kings in the famous abbey of Westminster. This view has been adopted by Mr. Frothingham, a specialist on Italian mosaics, in his *Monuments of Christian Rome* (1908), and by Mr. Gerald Davies (in 1910), and there cannot be a doubt, I think, that the view is in the main a correct one.

Mr. Frothingham writes regarding Westminster: "It is generally supposed that the Petrus of the first inscription and Odericus of the second were two distinct Roman

artists, but as the man who worked at Viterbo called himself Petrus Oderici, and it was sometimes the habit to call a man by his patronymic, I am inclined to call them one and the same." Mr. Gerald Davies separates them. "The father wrought the pavement of the presbytery, while the son Pietro Oderisi completed and signed the tomb of the Confessor." He adds that "another son of Oderisi, Stephane, is known by name, although his works in Rome have perished." Both these writers adopt the mistaken date 1269 for the basement of the shrine at Westminster. The best reading of the facts would, I think, be that Oderic and his sons were the most famous mosaic workers in Rome, that Henry III, advised by the pope through abbot Ware, attracted the father to Westminster. The pope himself died in the year in which the presbytery pavement was finished by Oderic; and his son Pietro then made the papal tomb. Possibly he had been with his father and was called back to Rome. Later, when the pope's tomb was done, Peter came to Westminster to execute the basement of the Confessor's shrine, which was finished in 1279. In the light of some such facts Mr. Frothingham's account of the author of the pope's tomb must be very interesting to us: "A leader of the Roman school, Peter, son of Oderisius made the first attempt to introduce both sculpture and mosaic decoration in sepulchral art, in his tomb of Clement IV at Viterbo in 1268; if there were any earlier examples of this type they have perished. He also *for the first time* substituted for the antique architrave and classical orders the Gothic trefoil arch and foliated capitals; it was quite a revolution." Of course our shrine basement has trefoil arches and the inquiry suggests itself, did the revolution in the Roman marble workers' style originate in consequence of their contact with Westminster? At this point I began to make a close comparison between the shrine base at Westminster and photographs of the tomb at Viterbo to see if I could find such resemblances as would justify us in saying that they are indeed by the same master; the correspondences are such as in my opinion to prove the theory. One of the arched compartments at Westminster is filled in a singular way by circles at the top and bottom connected by vertical strips,

and the same awkward arch-filling is found at Viterbo. There again we find one of the columns inlaid with an inverted chevron pattern of large scale, and the same pattern appears on the soffit of one of the niche heads at Westminster. On the tomb of Henry III, which was certainly wrought by the same master who made the shrine base, there are large crosses on a plain field in the two recesses; there are similar crosses at the end of the pope's tomb. We may, I think, accept it as proved that the shrine base and Henry III's tomb are the work of Peter, son of Oderic, who made the tomb of Clement IV at Viterbo and another tomb in the same church.

There are one or two other small points to which attention may be drawn. A fragment of the architrave of the basement exists which can only have found a place at the west end over the shrine-altar. It is rebated in such a way as to show that it projected about six or seven inches at each end of the west front. On comparing the record of the whole of the inscription with that which is now apparent on the east front, it is found that space was required at the west end for five or six letters beyond the numbers at the east; such projections would give the space. The projections must have been carried by mosaic columns which also shielded the bare ends of the reredos slab.

Four or five years ago, amongst the fragments stacked in the triforium, I found two fragments of little plain spiral columns of marble with a line of gilding up the recesses of the spiral. I thought they must have belonged to the shrine as they are of Purbeck marble, but there was no proof until I remembered that the shrine at St. Albans had detached pillars set up round it, probably for candles. On visiting St. Albans I found that the pillars there had been twisted like our fragments, and were of the same size. Ten years ago I had written that about 1289 "three marble columns costing 46*s.* 8*d.* were made and placed round the shrine. They may have been isolated, something like those at St. Alban's shrine, and may have supported lights." These must be fragments of them.

I have a vague memory that I once saw fragments of similar twisted shafts at Winchester amongst the stones in what is called the Feretory.