



THE ADORATION.

In the possession of Mr. Lionel Harris.

## SOME EXAMPLES OF ENGLISH MEDIAEVAL ALABASTER-WORK.<sup>1</sup>

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Since I had the privilege of reading a paper before the Institute a year ago on mediaeval alabaster-work, several additional examples, which not improbably emanated from Nottingham workshops, have been brought to my notice : I therefore take this opportunity of placing these various panels on record. The two panels depicting the Adoration of the three kings, which I am enabled to publish by the kind permission of the owner, Mr. Lionel Harris, are of unusual interest, since the ordinary mode of treatment is here completely reversed, the figure of St. Joseph occurring upon the right-hand side of the groups. Of this style of execution, only two other examples are known to me, neither identical in design with those under discussion : one is in the church of Saint-Michael at Bordeaux, the other, but a fragment, was discovered near Selby abbey, and is now in the British Museum.

These Adoration panels are as follows :

In the first (plate 1) our Lady, crowned, nimbed, and wearing a close-fitting gown and loose cloak, is sitting in a bed facing to the left, beneath a pinnacled and curtained tester, on the front of which is a rayed star. Seated upon her lap is a draped figure of our Lord, turning to the right and looking over the right shoulder towards the foot of the bed, where Balthazar kneels in a loose garment, uncrowned and offering a knopped chalice of gold with a square base, which Christ touches with his extended right hand. Behind the bed stand crowned figures of Caspar and Melchior, holding in their right hands standing knopped cups with square bases, and calling attention to the presence of the star with the left. Caspar wears a

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Institute, 1st July, 1914.

scalloped tippet and a close-fitting tunic with long sleeves girt about with a richly-jewelled belt, while Melchior is clothed in a long full robe, jewelled belt and loose mantle. In the foreground are the ox and ass, eating from a moulded trough: in the right-hand corner the seated figure of St. Joseph holds in his right hand a scroll, and in his left his crutch-staff, the latter placed diagonally across the body from right to left. In this panel, which measures 16 by  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches, the kings are all represented as bearded men of mature years.

In the second panel (plate II) is the nimbed figure of our Lady wearing a gown and loose cloak and lying in a bed facing to the left, beneath a pinnacled and curtained tester, having above it a blazing star. She holds on her lap the naked seated figure of her Son, facing to the left with the right hand raised in blessing. At the foot of the bed kneels Balthazar, clad in a loose gown and short tippet, with his crown in his right hand, and in his left a chalice of gold with a knopped stem and round bowl and foot; this he presents to our Lord, who is touching it with the outstretched left hand. Behind the bed stand Caspar, here portrayed as a young unbearded man, and Melchior, both crowned and girdled and pointing to the star: Caspar holds in his right hand a covered cup with knopped stem, while Melchior carries in his left hand an incense-ship. In the middle of the foreground are the ox and ass, here feeding from a pile of fodder, and in the right-hand corner is the seated form of St. Joseph, clad in a loose garment, and sunk in slumber, supporting his bowed head on his crutch-staff, which he holds with both hands. This panel measures  $16\frac{1}{4}$  by  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches.

The third panel (plate III, no. 1) is a figure of the Trinity, found a few years ago in the Upper House, Madeley, Salop, when the floor at the top of the staircase was undergoing repairs. There is a tradition in the neighbourhood that Charles II, after his defeat at Worcester in 1651, stayed there on his way to Boscobel. The house was subsequently closely searched, and it is probable that this group of the Trinity was hidden at the time, to avoid destruction at the hands of the Puritan soldiery, and has



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NO. 1. THE TRINITY.

From The Upper House, Madeley, Shropshire :  
Now in the collection of Dr. Nelson.



NO. 2. THE TRINITY.

British Museum.



NO. 3. THE TRINITY.

Victoria and Albert Museum.

thus survived to the present day in an excellent state of preservation.<sup>1</sup>

The panel, which measures  $20\frac{1}{4}$  by  $10\frac{1}{4}$  inches, represents the Almighty seated with extended hands upon a throne and supporting between his knees the crucified figure of the Son. The Father wears a full cloak lined with scarlet, the outer surface being diapered with quatrefoils having green petals and golden centres, ornaments which are remarkable in that the design is lightly incised upon the surface of the alabaster. The Father wears an elaborate crown, and hair, beard, moustache and crown are gilded.

Our Lord, whose face closely resembles that of the Father, is curiously carved, and the markedly exaggerated anatomical details of the figure point to the decadence in the art of carving. I would therefore suggest the date of the work as being the early part of the sixteenth century. The hair, two curls of which depend upon the breast, the beard and moustache are gilded, whilst the torse is painted green. In place of the usual loin-cloth, this figure wears short drawers. The cross, which springs from an architectural base, has a small hole above the head of Christ, which perhaps afforded attachment for a metal figure of the Dove, now unfortunately missing. The ground beneath the figure is painted green and is sown with flowers having red centres and six white petals. From the marked resemblance which the head of the Almighty bears to the head of the Trinity upon the St. John's head panel in the possession of Lord St. Levan<sup>2</sup> I should certainly attribute this work to the Nottingham school of carving.

Additional examples of the Trinity, of somewhat similar design, are to be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, the Musée de Cluny, and in the collections of Mr. Holmes Jewitt and Mr. G. R. Harding, whilst on the tomb of precentor Bullen, in Wells cathedral church, another panel still remains in place.

<sup>1</sup> At the same time that the alabaster group was brought to light, several much-decayed wooden figures were also discovered, but these were unfortunately

destroyed before they could be submitted to expert examination.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia*, lii, pl. xxvi.

The effigy of the Trinity in the Victoria and Albert Museum (plate III, no. 3) is a most remarkable one, in that the Almighty holds up, above the cross, a group of six souls within a conventional napkin.

The specimen in the British Museum (plate III, no. 2) shows us a nimbed figure of the Saviour, with the Dove hovering above and the orb of the world beneath his feet : at the left foot of the Almighty is a kneeling cowed figure of a clerk, holding a scroll.

The Trinity in the collection of Mr. Holmes Jewitt (plate IV, no. 1), unfortunately somewhat mutilated, has at the base of the cross two angels, represented as swinging censers or holding chalices : being injured at this point their action is somewhat uncertain.

The specimen formerly in the possession of Mr. G. R. Harding (plate IV, no. 3), shows the Almighty wearing an elaborate crown : above the head of Christ is the Dove, whose head faces the Father.

The group on the tomb of precentor Bullen (plate IV, no. 2) depicts the Almighty as having hair curiously curled and rayed, its treatment suggesting the same hand that executed the St. John's head in the Ashmolean Museum.

The first of the St. John's heads (plate V, no. 1) was once in the possession of Mr. S. Richards, by whose courtesy it is illustrated. Including the canopy it measures 13 by 8½ inches, and depicts the head of the saint with flowing hair and beard, enriched with painting, lying upon the charger. Beneath it, in the middle line, upon a green ground bearing five cinquefoils, is a naked half-length representation of our Lord's Pity showing him in the tomb. He has a green torse about his head, the right hand rests against his side, and the left hand is raised. On each side of the panel is a standing figure, that on the left is St. Peter with key and an open book ; that on the right is St. William of York, holding a cross-staff and a clasped book. Above this is a fine canopy, with three panels of openwork tracery, and four pinnacles under an embattled



NO. I. THE TRINITY.

In the possession of Mr. E. Holmes Jewitt.





*[Dawkes & Partridge, phot.]*

NO. 2. THE TRINITY.

From precentor Bullen's tomb,  
Wells Cathedral church.



NO. 3. THE TRINITY.

In the possession of Mr. G. R. Harding.

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PLATE IV.



NO. 1. ST. JOHN'S HEAD.



NO. 2. ST. JOHN'S HEAD.

Both examples formerly in the possession of Mr. S. Richards.

cornice: the ribs of the coving beneath are indicated in colour. This canopy is almost identical with that preserved at Amport church.<sup>1</sup>

The next example (plate v, no. 2), which measures 10 by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches, is also illustrated by the courtesy of Mr. S. Richards, and, so far as I know, it is unique. In the centre is the head of St. John Baptist upon a charger, the hair and beard being treated in a forked style bilaterally symmetrical. Beneath the head is our Lord's Pity, showing his naked figure within the tomb and wearing the torse, surrounded by a rayed semi-ellipse: his right hand points to his wounded side, whilst his left hand is placed on the edge of the tomb in the middle line. Above the head of St. John is a small kneeling figure of a soul with the hands clasped in prayer, borne up by two angels upon a cloud. On either side of the panel are two saintly figures, those on the left being St. Peter, in front, bearing in his left hand an open book and in his right a large key; behind is St. Jude, carrying in his right hand a halberd and in his left an open book. Upon the right is St. William of York in alb and cope, mitred and wearing tasselled gloves, giving the blessing with his right hand and holding a crozier in his left; behind is St. James Major, wearing a hat, on which is a scallop-shell, and holding in his right hand a book and in his left hand his staff.

The last panel to be described belongs to Mr. Aymer Vallance: it measures  $13\frac{1}{2}$  by  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches and depicts St. Ursula. So far as I am aware, it is unique: the saint is crowned and habited in a gown and cloak: in her right hand she bears her emblem, an arrow reversed, and in her left hand a closed book. Upon the right of the saint is a group of five kneeling male figures including a king, a pope and a cardinal, whose hands are raised in prayer; and upon her left are six kneeling women in similar attitudes of devotion. Above these kneeling groups upon either side were angel-figures with hands uplifted in adoration; that upon the left is unfortunately broken away. This panel is unfortunately in a very poor state of preservation.

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia*, lii, pl. xxv.

It is, in fact, so much cracked and broken that it has been found necessary to mount it on a slab of slate in order to hold together the separate portions. Its original provenance is unknown ; but at one time it was in the 'museum' of the late Mr. G. M. Arnold, F.S.A. of Milton Hall, Gravesend. On the death of Mr. Arnold the collection was dispersed and the panel was purchased by its present owner.

It is interesting to observe the marked similarity between this panel and the mural alabaster slab in memory of Robert Gylbert (d. 1493) at Youlgreave church, Derbyshire (plate vi), both in the treatment of the central figure of our Lady, as also of the lateral figures kneeling in adoration.

The three shields at the foot of the Youlgreave slab afford as good an example as could be found of the system of impalement. The husband's arms on the left-hand or 'dexter' side, and the wife's on the right or 'sinister' side, are impaled in the middle shield ; and the treatment of the lozenges in the husband's shield, horizontal in the one case, and vertical when impaled, illustrate the free and natural way in which mediaeval heralds adapted the charges to suit the particular spaces available.



ALABASTER SLAB



[Aymer Vallance, phot.]

IN YOULGREAVE CHURCH, DERBYSHIRE.