



VIRGIN TRIPTYCH : MARIENKIRCHE, DANZIG.

THE VIRGIN TRIPTYCH AT DANZIG.

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In my paper, *English Alabasters of the Embattled Type*, which appeared in vol. lxxiv of *The Archaeological Journal*, reference was made to the Virgin or Christmas triptych preserved in the Allerheiligenkapelle in the Marienkirche, Danzig. Unfortunately, owing to the late arrival of the photographs, it was impossible to insert in that volume the illustrations in time for publication. I therefore avail myself of this opportunity to contribute a short description of this extremely interesting and well preserved example of native medieval art (plate 1). This triptych, which measures about 8 feet in length by 3 feet in height, contains five large panels, representing 'Joys of the Virgin'; flanked by terminal images of saints. The panels are as follows:

1. The Annunciation.
2. The Adoration of the Magi.
3. The Resurrection.
4. The Ascension of our Lord.
5. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin.

All these panels have attached canopies, 1, 2, 4 and 5 being of the 'embattled' type, whilst that over 3 consists of three crocketed gables flanked by buttresses, of which the central ones have animal-head pendants.

Across the entire reredos, save where it is broken by the tall central panel, stretches an oak cresting, carved with open tracery-work surmounted by fleurs-de-lys. Above and on each side of the small panels and on the two sides of the centre-piece are wooden chamfers enriched with blocks of gilt and colour, the former adorned with gesso knobs, the latter with painted leaf-work. Across the base of the triptych is a broad band of wood, the upper third of which is treated in the same style as the chamfers,

beneath which, in contracted Latin, in Gothic characters with Lombardic capitals, are much perished inscriptions descriptive of the various carvings.

The sculptures are as follows :

(a) St. John Baptist. The saint, who wears a camel's skin, complete with head and hoofs, over which is a full cloak, holds on his left arm a closed book upon which is the *Agnus Dei*, to which he points with his right hand.

1. The Annunciation. The Blessed Virgin, who is crowned, kneels before a desk upon which lies an open book: she wears a long robe and an ample cloak. To the left stands the archangel in a girded albe wearing a cross-adorned mitre, holding a scroll, inscribed with the Salutation, *Ave Maria gratia plena*, which scroll twining about the lily, ascends to the Almighty, from whose mouth descends the Child upon a rayed ellipse, holding over His left shoulder a cross (plate II, 1).

2. The Adoration of the Magi. The Virgin is crowned and holds upon her lap the nude Child, within a rayed mandorla, who receives gifts from the three kings. In the foreground are St. Joseph seated, also the ass and the ox (plate III, 1).

3. The Resurrection. This panel, save that our Lord's right hand is held closely to His side, follows Type 1 in my 'Embattled Alabaster' paper and is in general somewhat similar to that at Hopton Hall and, like it, includes two censing angels; in addition, however, we find that the soldier at the head of the tomb supports a heater-shaped shield, charged with two chevronelles. This panel has a triple-gabled canopy in place of an embattled one, as is the case with the other panels in this triptych (plate III, 2).

The occurrence in this period of an attached triple-gabled canopy is of the greatest importance, affording as it does the date of other pieces presenting this peculiar feature, e.g. two panels from the martyrdom of St. Catherine, in the Victoria and Albert Museum and in my collection of alabasters: a Trinity in the



NO. I. THE ANNUNCIATION.



NO. 2. THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN.

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NO. 1. THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI.



NO. 2. THE RESURRECTION.
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NO. 3. THE ASCENSION.



THE ASCENSION : CLARK-MAXWELL COLLECTION.

possession of the writer, which also exhibits two angels swinging censers, and the centre-piece from a Doom series in the British Museum, which latter may have emanated from a York atelier and which, like the triptych under review, dates from circ. 1430.

4. The Ascension of our Lord. In the fore-ground are St. Peter, the Blessed Virgin, St. John the Divine and St. James Major, each of whom holds his emblem. Above, standing on the mount, is our Lord, who wears the loin-cloth, on either side of whom is a group of four apostles¹ (plate III, 3). This panel is very similar to one in the possession of the Rev. Prebendary Clark-Maxwell, F.S.A. (plate IV).

5. The Coronation of the Virgin. Here for the first time we meet with the Coronation of the Virgin by the three Persons of the Trinity, a mode of treatment which was to persist throughout the remainder of the alabaster industry (plate II, 2).

Seated in the centre is the Blessed Virgin, above whom, to the left and right, are the Father and the Son,² the former wearing a golden crown, the latter the torse, whilst between them descends the Sacred Dove. Our Lord, who wears the loin-cloth and shroud, holds in His left hand the Resurrection cross whilst with His right hand he crowns the Virgin in conjunction with the Father.

(b) St. John the Divine. The saint, who holds in his right hand a cup from whence emerges a dragon, and in his left a palm, wears a long robe and full mantle. Behind the heads of both the images is painted a nimbus upon the wooden backframe and over the head of the Evangelist attached to the cross-rail is a delicate piece of tracery in oak, which already suggests the design of the detached alabaster canopies of the succeeding style. The tracery over the image of the Baptist is now missing.

The backgrounds of the several panels are gilt and dotted with gesso knobs, whilst the foregrounds, which are of green,

¹ The treatment of the robes of the Virgin in this panel and that of the Annunciation would suggest that they were the work of the same sculptor.

² The Son seated on the left of the Father contradicts the statement in the Nicene creed: 'And sitteth on the right hand of the Father.'

are strewn with flowers having white petals and red centres.

In conclusion, I think we may regard this triptych as dating circ. 1430 and as being executed at York, and it is thus of much moment in the history of the English alabaster industry, indicating as it does the succession of the treatments of the several scenes depicted.

My thanks are due to the Society of Antiquaries for permission to use plate iv.