

# PROCEEDINGS

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In some cases also on coins of the later Western empire we find, in conjunction with CONOB in the field of the coins, RM for Rome, RV for Ravenna, AR for Arles, MD for Mediolanum (Milan); this seems to shew that not even can the CON be considered as the mint-mark of Constantinople.

It would seem, then, that the presence of the word CONOB on a medallion of this weight does not cast any doubt on the genuineness of it.

I mentioned the seal-ring of King Childeric as having been carried off with the coins. It was melted up, and the only traces remaining of it were a mutilated plaster impression and some incorrect engravings, till in 1857 one of the assistants in the Paris coin-room (M. Dauban) found a sealing-wax impression of it fastened into a MS. of a life of Ste-Geneviève in the Library of Ste-Geneviève. This impression was very well made, and is in perfect preservation; it had been made 200 years before by Père du Molinet, the author of the above life. Thus this wax impression and the moulds of the British Museum fortunately restored to students the true appearance of the two interesting monuments of antiquity, the seal of the Frankish King Childeric, and the medallion of the Roman Emperor Justinian.

Dr JAMES made the following communications :

#### ON THE SCULPTURES ON THE SOUTH PORTAL OF THE ABBEY CHURCH AT MALMESBURY.

The south portal of Malmesbury Abbey Church is a very famous monument of Ancient English sculpture. Over and over again has it been engraved, and a good deal has been written about the interpretation of the reliefs with which it is covered. I venture to come forward with a fresh interpretation of some of these subjects; and of course I do not doubt that mine is the only one possible. I am at any rate quite certain that my predecessors are wrong in several cases.

The great door is surrounded by three rows of medallions containing figured subjects. Two detailed descriptions of these are known to me. One was made in 1634 by an anonymous tourist whose notes are preserved in Lansdowne MS. 213, and are reproduced in Mackenzie Walcott's *Guide to the Abbey* (1897). The other is in Professor C. R. Cockerell's *Iconography of the West Front of Wells Cathedral* (1851: Appendix D, pp. 40—46). In both an attempt is made to identify the subject of each sculpture.

These two authorities are at variance with me and with each other as to the number of medallions, to begin with. The possibility of a discrepancy is due to the very mutilated condition—I might almost say annihilation—of the sculptures on the lower part of the portal. Towards the bottom several of them are absolutely undecipherable. The surface of the stone has entirely perished. There need, however, be no uncertainty as to the number of medallions which originally existed. In the two inner arches these medallions are of two kinds: small circular ones on the upright piers, and larger ones, approaching an oval form, round the arch. It is important to note that "there is no impost-moulding to divide the upright or pier ribs from the voussoirs," to use Cockerell's words; but the form of the medallions effectually separates off arch from pier in the case of the two inner cordons.

In the innermost cordon there have been 8 small medallions on each side of the piers, and 11 large ones on the voussoirs: in all, 27. So far I agree with Cockerell: the tourist of 1634 counts 28.

The second cordon has the same number of small medallions, 8 on each side on the uprights, and 14 on the voussoirs: in all, 30. Cockerell agrees here: the tourist makes 27.

In the third or outermost cordon all the medallions are large ellipses of uniform size throughout. On the uprights there are 4 on each side, on the voussoirs, 13; in all, 21. Cockerell agrees again: the tourist makes 23.

My reckoning of the total number of medallions for the

several arches is therefore 27 for the innermost arch, 30 for the second, and 21 for the outermost. In all 78. The tourist accidentally agrees in this total, but is wrong in detail. Cockerell agrees in detail with me, but when he comes to speak of the whole he reckons 70 subjects only, omitting by accident the eight subjects on the uprights of the outermost arch. There is therefore no real discrepancy between his calculation and mine: and my disagreement with the tourist causes me no uneasiness, for he is very wild in his reckoning and in his identification.

One preliminary remark of a general nature must be made at this point. The medallions on the uprights are not connected in subject with those on the voussoirs. In the two inner arches they are marked off from these by their different form and size. In the case of the outer arch the size is uniform throughout: but the internal evidence of the subjects themselves is decisive. This has been seen by Cockerell, but not by the tourist: the latter tries to make a consecutive series of subjects run through the whole of each cordon, and fails disastrously.

We will now take the arches one by one and go through the sculptures of each in detail.

I. *Innermost arch.* We begin at the bottom on the left-hand side, and take in one group the eight medallions on the upright piér. My description is as follows, reading upwards:

1. Mutilated seated figure.
- 2, 3. Quite gone.
4. Single human figure, mutilated.
5. Peacock, with head to *L.*, looking back to *R.*
6. Man with head and hands on the ground to *L.*, apparently about to turn a somersault.
7. Two beasts, back to back, with their heads turned inwards.
8. An angel, full-face.

The tourist of 1634 also reads the subjects upwards. He interprets thus:

1. Defaced.
2. Light from chaos.

3. Sea divided from land.
4. The Lord sits and beholds.
5. He makes fowls.
6. He makes fish.
7. He makes the beasts.
8. The Spirit moves on the face of the waters.

Cockerell, reading downwards, sees generally, in the 32 small medallions on the uprights, a scheme of the signs of the Zodiac and occupations of the months. In detail, he reads our medallions thus:

8. The Almighty.
7. Capricornus, for January.
6. Defaced: action unintelligible, perhaps Aquarius.

The remaining medallions he characterizes as "too degraded and imperfect to attempt an illustration."

I now pass to the eleven larger medallions on the voussairs of this same cordon. There is a general agreement that they represent the early history of man, and read from left to right.

1. Christ creating Adam, who is an inanimate figure on *L*.
2. Christ creating Eve from Adam's side. Adam sleeping on *L*.
3. The Prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge. The Tree is on *L*, then Christ, then Adam and Eve.
4. The Fall. Adam on *L*. Eve takes the apple from the mouth of the serpent coiled round the Tree on *R*. The serpent is not human-headed.
5. Adam and Eve crouch behind two trees, and face *R*.
6. (Key-stone.) Christ stands facing *L* with hand raised. In His *L*. hand He holds a curious curved object, probably a scroll.

These two medallions (5 and 6) form one subject, the Detection of Adam and Eve.

7. The Expulsion. Christ, on *L*, thrusts Adam and Eve away to *R*.
8. An angel, standing in the centre, gives a spade to Adam on *L* and a distaff to Eve on *R*.
9. Eve sits spinning on *L*: Adam, on *R*, digs.
10. A seated figure (probably Eve) on *L* with a child (Cain or perhaps Seth) on her lap. Adam (?) on *R*, facing *L*, speaks. Most likely this is the Birth of Cain.
11. Much mutilated. A figure on *L* leans on a staff. A mutilated figure in the centre. A smaller figure on *R* faces *L*.

I suspect that this represents the death of Cain, who was accidentally shot with an arrow by the blind Lamech, guided thereto by the youth Tubal Cain, who mistook the movements of Cain, concealed in a bush, for those of a wild beast. It is almost as common a subject in the cycles of Genesis-illustrations as any that are derived directly from the canonical text. I may be wrong here, but I cannot see that the medallion can possibly represent either the sacrifice of Cain or the death of Abel. In my view, the figure on the *L.* would be Lamech leaning on his bow, that in the centre the dying Cain, and that on *R.* the young Tubal Cain.

The tourist of 1634 gives the following interpretations :

- (9) 1. Adam made.
- (10) 2. Adam sleeps and woman made.
- (11, 12) 3. Paradise. (12) Adam left there.
- (13) 4. Devil tempts Eve.
- (14) 5. They hide themselves.
- (15) 6. God calls to them.
- (16) 7. God thrusts them out.
- (17) 8. A spade and distaff given.
- (18) 9. Adam digs: Eve spins.
- (19) 10. Eve brings forth Cain.
- (20) 11. Abel tills the earth.

An error in numbering has here crept into the tourist's notes. He makes two scenes out of the third medallion, and calls them (11) Paradise, (12) Adam left there. Otherwise the only disagreement with me is in his interpretation of the last, very much mutilated, subject.

Cockerell's interpretations are as follows :

1. The creation of Adam.
2. The creation of Eve.
3. The Paradise.
4. The temptation.
5. The fall, Adam and Eve hide in the garden.
6. The Almighty (in the key-stone) discovers them.
7. The condemnation.
8. The expulsion from Paradise, the gate of which is seen.
9. Adam delves and Eve spins.

10. The Almighty enthroned and a small figure before Him, possibly the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice.

11. Much defaced, may be the murder of Abel or the lamentation over his body.

The description of nos. 7, 8, 10, 11 I take to be certainly misleading.

Next come the eight smaller medallions on the right-hand pier. These I read downwards :

- 1, 2, 3. Single mutilated figures.
4. Two figures stand and converse.
5. Single figure, mutilated.
- 6, 7, 8. Quite gone.

The tourist tries to continue the series of Biblical subjects :

- (21, 22) 1, 2. Two angels for keepers.
- (23) 3. Abel walks in the field.
- (24) 4. Cain meets him.
- (25) 5. Cain kills Abel.
- (26, 27, 28) 6, 7, 8. Demolished quite.

There is nothing to be said in favour of these interpretations.

Cockerell speaks in general terms, reading the two uprights (of the first and second cordons) together. He says :

"On the east side, the sixteen are scarcely more intelligible (than on the west); here are five human figures, and groups, and we trace Leo, Virgo, Gemini, and Sagittarius (like a Centaur) sufficiently to confirm the belief that the corresponding months, and perhaps their labours and productions, were intended."

II. *The second arch.* The eight small medallions on the left-hand pier, reading from the bottom, are as follows :

1. Crouching figure, mutilated.
- 2, 3. Quite gone.
4. Two fish (?).
5. Seated figure.
6. Figure with knees somewhat bent.
7. Two figures standing.
8. An angel.

The tourist only enumerates five medallions, evidently the five uppermost :

- 1, 2. God sits and beholds the world (=my nos. 4, 5).
3. Cain is a fugitive (=my no. 6).
4. He comes to Eve (=no. 7).
5. An angel (=no. 8).

Cockerell's identifications, picked out of his continuous text, are (reading from above):

8. An angel, which may probably signify "the Spirit of God which moved upon the face of the waters."
7. A male and female figure, the latter draped: on which I offer no other conjecture than the possibility of their meaning "the morning and the evening were the first day."

He offers no other explanations of the individual medallions.

We continue with the larger medallions on the voussoirs, fourteen in number. It is agreed that these illustrate Old Testament history, and read from left to right.

1. Christ (on *L.*) gives an axe to Noah, commanding him to build the Ark.
2. Noah, facing *L.*, works at the ark with an adze.
3. Seven or eight figures (one with a paddle) in the ark.
4. An angel on *L.*, flying down, holds the blade of Abraham's sword. Abraham holds the hand (?) of Isaac (mutilated) on *R.*
5. Abraham, stooping, holds the horns of the ram (on *R.*).
6. A nimbed figure on *L.* stands and speaks to a seated figure on *R.* with staff. Over the head of the latter and outside the medallion is a rounded mass of broken carving, which might represent either sun, moon, and stars, or the heads of cattle.

I believe that this scene is either God shewing Abraham the stars (Gen. xv. 5) and promising to make him a great nation: or, more probably, Joseph telling his dream to Jacob (or interpreting Pharaoh's dream). If it represents the promise to Abraham, there has been a confusion made between the promise of Gen. xv. and that of Gen. xxii.

7. The Burning Bush. God in a tree on *L.* Moses on *R.*: one hand to his face, the other taking off his shoe.
8. Moses (Aaron on *L.*) strikes the rock on *R.*
9. On *L.* two figures seated on the top of a battlemented enclosure. They look up. On *R.* Moses (horned) stretches his hand to *L.* and

takes the tables of the Law (?) from a head or hand on the edge of the medallion.

10. Samson rends the lion.
11. Samson, with the gates of Gaza on his back, goes to *R*.
12. Samson pulls at columns supporting a roof on which are seen figures.
13. David, with his knee on the back of a lion or bear, takes a lamb out of its mouth.
14. David on *L*. with sling, Goliath (broken) on *R*.

The tourist of 1634 :

- (6) 1. God delivers Noah the axe.
- (7) 2. Noah works in the ark.
- (8) 3. Eight persons saved.
- (9) 4. Abraham offers Isaac.
- (10) 5. The lamb caught in the bush.
- (11) 6. Moses talks with his father.
- (12) 7. Moses keeping sheep.
- (13) 8. Moses and Aaron striking the rock.
- (14) 9. Moses reads the law to the elders.
- (15) 10. Samson tearing the lion.
- (16) 11. Samson bearing the city gates.
- (17) 12. The Philistines put out his eyes.
- (18) 13. David rescues the lamb.
- (19) 14. David fights with Goliath.

I am in agreement with the tourist in all but four cases.

Cockerell's interpretations are :

1. The command to Noah.
2. Noah builds the ark.
3. The family in the ark, which is supported by many pillars.
4. Noah's sacrifice.
5. The sacrifice of Isaac; the ram caught in the thicket, etc.
6. The promises to Abraham.
7. The Almighty in the burning bush.
8. Moses and Aaron: these two last forming the centre and key-stones of the arch, not without their symbolical meaning.
9. Moses stretches his rod over Egypt.
10. Samson rends "the lion as he would a kid."
11. He carries off the gates of Gaza.
12. He diverts the Philistines.
13. David slayeth the lion and the bear.
14. David slays the Philistines.

The explanations of nos. 4, 8, 9 are not successful.

The small medallions on the right-hand pier :

1. A man on *L.* about to kill a beast on *R.*
2. Perhaps an angel.
3. A single figure mutilated.
4. Gone.
5. A single figure.
- 6, 7, 8. Quite gone.

The tourist draws on his fancy and continues the series of subjects from the life of David, thus :

- (20) 1. Goliath slain.
- (21) 2. An angel.
- (22) 3. David rests himself.
- (23) 4. Defaced quite.
- (24) 5. David walks to Beth-horon.
- (25) 6. David's entertainment there.
- (26, 27) 7, 8. Demolished quite.

We have already seen what Cockerell says of these medallions. He appears to recognize Leo, Virgo, Gemini, and Sagittarius as a centaur, amongst them : but I own I cannot follow him.

III. *The outermost cordon.* As has been already stated, the medallions on the uprights number only four on each side ; they each occupy two stones, and are twice as large as those on the inner piers. Those on the left hand are the only ones decently preserved : but it is impossible not to see that the *motif* of those on the right was a similar one. In each we have an upright figure, sometimes armed, standing on a prostrate one. I have no doubt that these are meant for Virtues conquering Vices, a theme derived from the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, and exceedingly popular in early mediæval art. It is well known that the poem in question occurs copiously illustrated in a good many manuscripts. One, perhaps the finest of all, now at Corpus Christi College, belonged to the Abbey of Malmesbury.

There appears to have been originally eight of these groups in our sculptures. In the *Psychomachia* only seven contests are described at length : but this is not really a stumbling-block. Where more than seven Virtues and Vices were

required by the artist, it was the habit to supply them. Thus on the portal of the Chapter House at Salisbury there are fourteen such groups, and in a window of the Collegiate Church of St Florentius at Niederhaslach there are twelve.

The individual groups on the portal hardly admit of being assigned specially. I describe them as following, from the bottom:

1. Quite defaced.
2. A Virtue strikes a Vice on the head with a club (which projects outside the medallion). Trace of a figure on *L*.
3. A Virtue stands on a Vice and pierces her with a spear.
4. A Virtue with shield and spear stands on a Vice.

Of the four corresponding reliefs on the right I can say no more than I have already said: that they are very badly defaced, but evidently represented groups like those on the left pier.

The tourist is not fortunate in his explanations of these eight reliefs. He says:

- 1, 2. Defaced quite.
3. John the forerunner of Christ.
4. Michael the archangel.

On the right he tries, as usual, to connect the reliefs with those above them, and in this case he allows for six scenes instead of four. Thus:

- (18) 1. Michael overthrows the devil.  
 (19) 2. Mary mourning for Jesus.  
 (20, 21, 22, 23) 3, 4. Demolished quite.

Cockerell is on the right track, but comes to a wrong conclusion. He says:

"We now proceed to the subjects of the outer rim (of the New Testament) and its corresponding uprights or piers. These contain four angels in each, who are vanquishing vices or demons in various attitudes; and these eight, together with the Gabriel in the annunciation, of which they form suite, complete the nine angels, the constant accompaniment of ecclesiastical symbolism, and the fitting guardian of every sacred right (*does he mean rite?*) and locality."

The reliefs on the voussoirs of this arch are thirteen in

number, each occupying two stones, and they illustrate the New Testament history:

1. The Annunciation. Gabriel on *L.* The Virgin on *R.*
2. The Nativity. The Virgin in bed, her head to *R.* Joseph at her feet. The manger above in the centre.
3. The lower halves of three draped figures (the surface of the upper stone is quite gone). The scene may have been the angel and the shepherds: less probably the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. They are almost always mounted.
4. Three figures looking to *R.* In Basire's engraving in the *Vetusta Monumenta* one of them appears to be carrying a cup. This, if correct, would make it pretty certain that they are the Magi, which is in any case probable.
5. Joseph (?) on *L.* The Virgin carrying the Child towards a building on *R.* The Presentation, probably.
6. Baptism of Christ. John, on *L.*, pours water on the head of Christ. Water surrounds His feet. There seems to have been a third figure on *R.*, most likely an angel holding the clothes.
7. Entry into Jerusalem. Christ riding to *R.* on an ass.
8. The Last Supper. Christ, a larger figure than the rest, in the centre.
9. Christ on the Cross. The Virgin on *L.*, St John on *R.* The crucified figure projects obliquely (to *R.*) outside the medallion.
10. Entombment. Two bearded figures bury the body. Three lamps hang above.
11. The Resurrection. Christ steps out of the tomb. The lid lies obliquely across it. No other figure remains.
12. The Ascension: a group of seated figures. Christ's feet seen in the cloud above.
13. Pentecost. A similar scene to the last, but with the dove above.

The tourist of 1634 says:

1. The angels come to Mary.
2. Mary in childbed.
3. The three wise men come to Christ.
4. They find Him.
5. Joseph, Mary and Christ go into Egypt.
6. Christ curses the fig-tree.
7. He rides on an ass to Jerusalem.
8. He eats the Passover with His twelve apostles.
9. He is nailed to the cross.
10. Laid in the tomb by Joseph.
11. He riseth again.
12. He ascendeth into heaven.
13. The Holy Ghost descending on the Apostles.

Cockerell:

1. The Annunciation.
2. The Nativity.
3. The Adoration of the Magi.
4. The Flight into Egypt.
5. The Dispute with the Doctors.
6. The Saviour betrayed (singularly unfortunate, as it precedes the Entry into Jerusalem).
7. The Saviour's Entry into Jerusalem, in the centre or key-stones.
8. The Last Supper.
9. The Crucifixion.
10. The Entombment.
11. The Resurrection.
12. The Ascension.
13. The Day of Pentecost.

I will only add that in my opinion the assignment to an earlier period of the two great reliefs of the Apostles in the inner porch and the tympanum of the inner door is very likely to be correct.

There is only a fragment of the western portal remaining: but from this fragment we can see that, like the south porch, it had an arch surrounded by medallions. Three of these remain on its southern side. Beginning from above, they show:

1. A figure on *L.* On *R.* an object resembling the carcase of a beast hung up.
2. A man with a bar to which buckets are attached across the middle of his body. A figure on *R.*
3. A man seated, full-face, at a table. A figure on each side.

It seems to me likely that the series of medallions represented the occupations of the months and signs of the Zodiac. The third would do very well for the man feasting, who is usually the emblem of January, but sometimes of December. The second would be Aquarius with his buckets. The third might be the man slaughtering or curing a pig, which usually typifies December. It is not unheard of that the series should end, instead of beginning, with January.

On the *N.* face of the capital below is a Centaur, who may stand for Sagittarius. The west face is now obliterated.

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