

Scrubby.

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1930—OCTOBER 1931

WITH
Communications
MADE TO THE SOCIETY



VOLUME XXXII

Edited by E. A. B. BARNARD, F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.

Cambridge :

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**CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
PROCEEDINGS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

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THE ROOF BOSSES IN ELY CATHEDRAL.

By C. J. P. CAVE, M.A., F.S.A.

(Read 19 January, 1931.)

THE PRESBYTERY AND QUIRE.

In Northwold's presbytery all the bosses except three are carved with stiff-leaved foliage (Pl. I, fig. 1); much of it is trefoil, but often an extra lobe is added; the centres of the lobes are often raised into little rounded projections; the foliage resembles the carving at Stone, Kent, c. 1265, in these particulars¹, but it has also some fruit, resembling a raspberry, on slender stems, on many of the bosses. Three of the bosses are carved with figures:

1. The Coronation of Our Lady (Pl. I, fig. 2), on the central rib, in the centre of the fourth bay from the east. The figures are seated, Our Lord on the sinister side; He is dressed in a plain robe, girded with a cord at the waist; the sleeves are very full at the wrists; an outer cloak is seen over the left shoulder and draped over the left arm. He is crowned with a plain circlet, with small points, and in front an ornament like a fleur-de-lys; the feet are bare, the left hand holds a book, and the right hand is placing a crown on Our Lady's head. The latter has her hands joined in prayer, and is inclining her head towards Our Lord; she wears a close-fitting garment apparently, as seen at the sleeves, and a loose outer garment with a waistband; her long hair hangs over her shoulders. The two figures are surrounded by foliage.

2. St Etheldreda (Pl. I, fig. 3), on the central rib, in the centre of the fifth bay, that is in the bay that contained the saint's shrine. She is seated and wears close-fitting sleeves apparently of an undergarment, another garment with full sleeves, and over this a habit which is draped over the arms, and over the knees, but it is so draped over the left knee that the middle

¹ See *English Gothic Foliage Sculpture*, S. Gardner, p. 27 and Pl. 38.

garment is visible here; over her head is a veil with the ends falling over the shoulders, and under the veil is a wimple; on her head is a crown. In her right hand she holds a crozier, and in her left a book. Foliage surrounds the figure.

3. On a side rib on the south side of the second bay is a seated figure (Pl. I, fig. 4) dressed in a loose garment with very full sleeves, and fitting close at the neck; over the head is a hood or cowl with a lappet hanging down on each side. In the left hand the figure holds a church, apparently a cruciform church with a central tower surmounted by a spire; the right hand holds two keys. The figure is surrounded by the usual foliage. It is difficult to know who this figure is meant to represent; the fact that with the exception of the Coronation and St Etheldreda this is the only figure boss in the presbytery points to its being intended to represent someone of importance connected directly or indirectly with the cathedral; any explanation as to who it is must also take into account the peculiar position it occupies, not on the central rib but at the side; the church, which must represent a founder of some church or monastery; and the keys. The best suggestion has been made by Mr S. Inskip Ladds, who considers, from other evidence, that the shrine of St Withburga was in this bay and "it is a significant fact that St Withburga, foundress of an Abbey at East Dereham, comes below a carved boss in the vault representing a nun holding two keys in one hand and a model of a church in the other. St Withburga, although not an abbess of Ely, seems to have been held in high esteem here, and her name is generally mentioned in the second place—following St Etheldreda's—probably because she was a virgin whereas St Sexburga and St Ermenilda were both queens; this fact may account for the figured boss over her shrine, while those over the other two are merely carved with foliage¹." This explanation takes account of the position of the boss and of the church held by the figure. On the other hand it has been objected that the figure looks like that of a monk, and not a nun; if this were so it is difficult to know who it could be meant for; it must be a founder of some sort, and anyone who could be looked on as a founder

¹ *The Monastery of Ely*, p. 11.

PLATE II

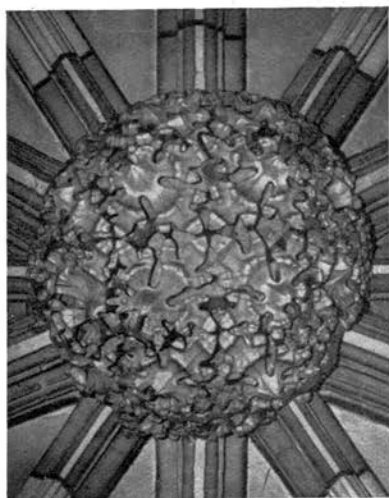


Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the

2. The second part of the paper is devoted to the study of the

3. The third part of the paper is devoted to the study of the

of Ely, or any part of it, would have been an abbot or a bishop and so would have certainly been represented in a mitre. There is, however, one who might possibly have been considered to rank as a founder, and that is the monk Godfrey who was appointed by William the Conqueror to take charge of the monastery; Godfrey in fact ruled over it for seven years but was never abbot, though later he became Abbot of Malmesbury. During his time at Ely he regained the privileges and property of the monastery which had been lost during the Saxon rising; it seems possible that the keys might signify his rule over the abbey in place of the crosier he would have had as an abbot. Any identification, however, must be speculative. There is another point of interest about this boss; Stubbs¹ took the church to be a model of Ely Cathedral as seen from the west and argued from this that at the date when the boss was carved both the western transepts were standing; it can now, however, be seen from photographs that the church is merely a conventional representation and cannot have been intended for anything like an accurate model of the Cathedral.

All three of the above bosses have a very fresh appearance, and were evidently painted in the nineteenth century, and it is possible that they may have been touched up in other ways too.

In Alan de Walsingham's work in the quire all the bosses except four represent foliage. The foliage is conventional (Pl. II, fig. 5), but the leaves have some resemblance to very deeply cut oak leaves; they are represented as crowded on to and closely adhering to the boss, and they are hardly at all undercut. The four bosses other than the foliage ones are all grotesque heads; two of them are in the western bay, and two in the next bay. The two latter are much alike (Pl. II, fig. 6); they are faces which are mostly hidden or made up of leaves, and surrounded by them; both have leaves proceeding from the mouth and one has a stem coming from the left nostril. One face (Pl. II, fig. 7) in the western bay is very similar to the above and has a stem coming from the mouth, but more of the face is visible including the ears; in this case the foliage

¹ Ely Cathedral Handbook, Edition 1904, p. 144.

is obviously meant for oak leaves; the remaining face (Pl. II, fig. 8) has only suggestions of leaves on the chin, and near the outer corners of the eyes, but it is surrounded by a border of what seem to be meant for leaves.

It would be interesting to know the meaning of these heads. While I think that the greater part of the grotesque figures, in which the sculpture and painting of the Middle Ages abound, has no meaning beyond the fancy of the artist, yet I cannot help thinking that these foliate heads must have had some meaning behind them. The motif is so definite, and is so widely spread, both in place and time, that it seems to me to have some significance other than the human proclivity to see faces in clouds or leaves or stones, and in one of the earliest instances I have yet come across, at Boxgrove Priory, the foliage is represented by a very narrow stem coming from the mouth and disappearing under the chin, so that in this early case there was no question of making a face out of leaves. Those cases where the face is hidden except for the eyes, as in the boss in the Lady Chapel mentioned below, and in similar ones I have seen in France and Germany, remind me of the Jack-in-the-Green which was still to be seen in London fifty years ago, and one wonders whether they may not, like the Jack-in-the-Green, be some survival from pre-Christian times. One wonders too whether the carvers at Ely meant the details on these bosses to be seen; they are not at all obvious from the floor without the aid of field glasses.

There are a very few heads among the bosses in the quire aisles; by far the greater number are foliage bosses.

One more boss in the Cathedral must be mentioned, namely the wooden boss in the centre of the lantern tower; it represents Christ in conventional clouds (Pl. III, fig 9); His right hand is raised in blessing, and the left has the fingers placed, through a rent in the garment, into the wound on the right side. Our Lord wears an undergarment with a cloak over it. This boss has obviously been repainted in the nineteenth century and may have suffered restoration as well.

In the south transept there are some wooden bosses along the central rib of the roof; these consist of eight-pointed "stars," the points being composed of conventional leaves;

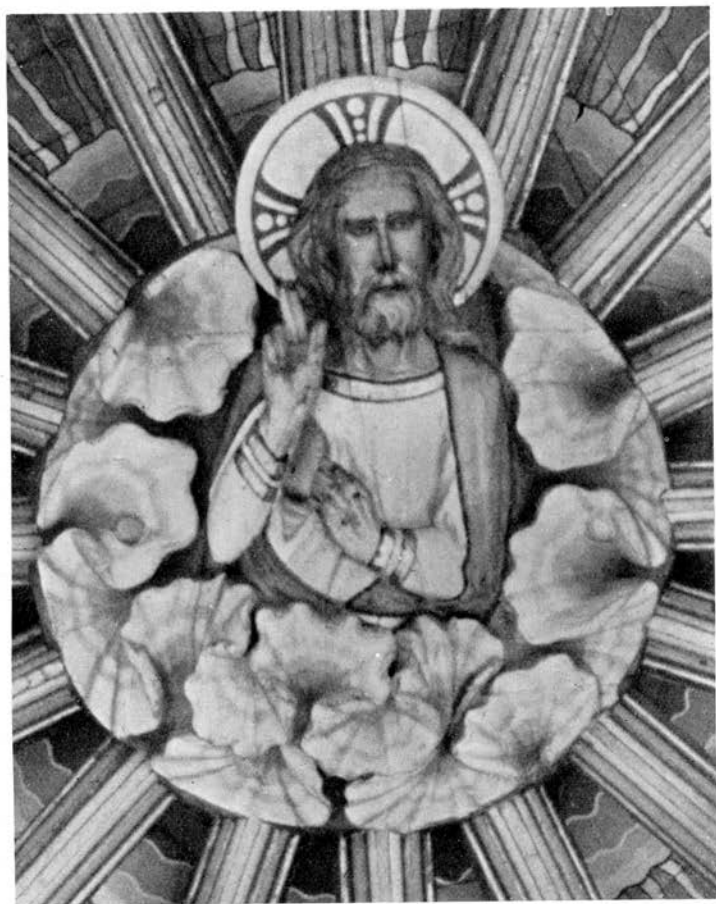


Fig. 9.

the four "rays" along the vaulting ribs are much smaller and less elaborate than the diagonal "rays." In the central space of one of these bosses is the figure of a bear, collared, chained and muzzled, and on another a beast's head with foliage coming out of the mouth and head.

THE LADY CHAPEL.

In the sculptures which are such a feature of the walls of the Lady Chapel every figure has been mutilated, and scarcely a head remains, but on the vaulting there are numerous figures and heads which have all remained intact. There are in all one hundred and twenty-three bosses on the vaulting; fifty-two of these are carved with figures or heads, the remainder with foliage. For purposes of reference I have numbered the bosses as follows: those on the central rib are numbered consecutively from east to west, C 1, C 2, etc. The other bosses are designated firstly by the letter N or S, according as they are on the north or south side of the central rib, secondly by the number of the bay in which they occur, and thirdly by a number as shown on the accompanying diagram (p. 38) of one severy of the roof.

The principal bosses occur as usual on the central rib; there are scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin, two heads, Adam and Eve, the translation of St Etheldreda, and several foliage bosses. There seems to be no particular order in the arrangement of these. The treatment of the sculptures is peculiar, and I have not come across anything quite like them elsewhere; they may perhaps be the work of local carvers. The Assumption (C 4) is quite unusual with the figures of St Etheldreda and a monk supporting the vesica piscis in addition to the angels. In the boss of the Ascension St Peter has a net over his clothes, and another apostle by him, probably St Andrew, has a similar net. Two of the central bosses are heads with foliage proceeding from the mouth. There are also many kinds of foliated heads among the side bosses; some have leaves coming not only from the mouth, but from various parts of the face; one (S 1-3) is a face made up almost entirely of leaves; another (N 2-5) is a face almost entirely

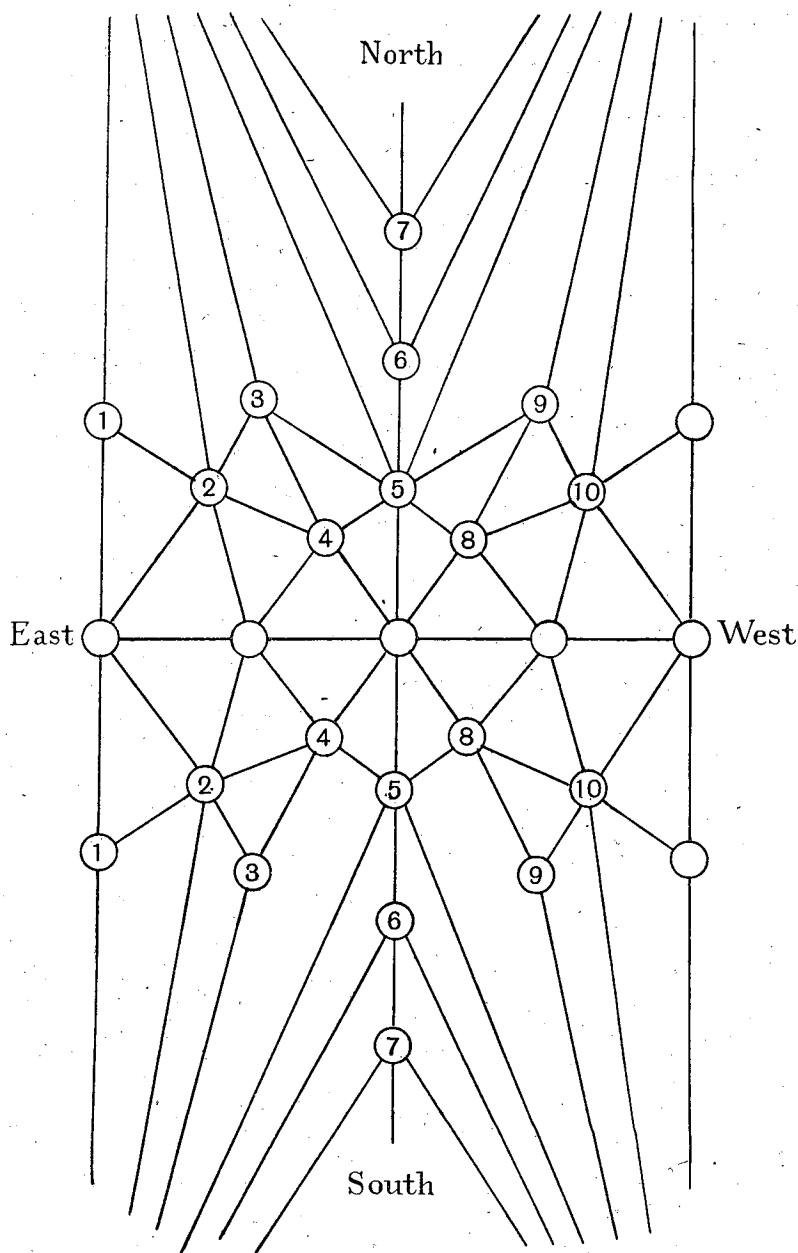


PLATE IV



Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.

Our Lady with the Infant Jesus



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.



hidden by foliage proceeding from the mouth, nothing showing except the two eyes; a very similar face occurs, among other leafy faces, in the church of St Sebaldus at Nuremberg. Among the other heads are several faces of men with quite fine features, as well as a number of grotesques; there is one head of a woman, one of a negro, and many of animals and semi-human animals. Among the bosses on the side ribs is one of Christ with His hand raised in benediction.

The greater number of the bosses represent foliage; there is nothing particular to note about these; they are typically "decorated" foliage.

A DETAILED LIST OF THE BOSSES.

C 1. Head with long hair and beard, surrounded by foliage; there is a broad fillet round the head and over the forehead; this may be meant for the head of Christ with the crown of thorns. The position on the vaulting is the usual one for Christ or God the Father. (Pl. IV, fig. 10.)

C 2. Our Lady with the Infant Jesus; head and shoulders only. Our Lady is crowned and has long flowing hair, but on each side of her face are platted strands; she wears a rather close-fitting garment cut low at the neck. Only the head of the Child is visible. The two figures are surrounded by foliage. (Pl. IV, fig. 11.)

C 4. The Assumption; Our Lady stands full face; her hair falls over her shoulders; she is dressed in a perfectly plain dress with no waistband or cord; her hands are joined in an attitude of prayer; her feet are bare. She stands in a vesica piscis which is supported on the dexter side by a monk, bare-headed with large tonsure; his cowl is shown falling over his shoulders; on the sinister side the supporter is a female figure, crowned and dressed in a very simple robe and a wimple round the chin; probably this is meant for a nun's robes and the figure is that of St Etheldreda. Supporting the vesica piscis above are two angels, little more than the heads and arms being visible. (Pl. IV, fig. 12.)

C 5. The Coronation of the Virgin; demi-figures; Our Lord

is on the sinister side, crowned, with long hair and beard; His right hand is raised in benediction; His left arm bent across His breast; He wears a close-fitting garment cut low at the neck, and apparently an outer cloak; Our Lady, half turned towards Our Lord, is crowned; she wears a veil beneath which her long hair is visible; she wears a close-fitting gown cut low at the neck, and an outer cloak; her hands are together in an attitude of prayer. Foliage surrounds the two figures. (Pl. IV, fig. 13.)

C 6. The Ascension. The lower part of Our Lord's figure is seen, the upper part is hidden in clouds. The feet are bare. Six apostles are below and around; all but one are bearded; the unbearded one in the middle has the head bent back into a horizontal position, looking upwards; this is intended no doubt for St John. Immediately on the sinister side is a figure with the hands raised in prayer; over a close-fitting garment is a net, and over this is a cloak draped round the waist; the net identifies the figure with St Peter, and beyond St Peter is another apostle, St Andrew no doubt, also with a net over his garment. Behind St Peter is seen the head of a seventh figure with a headdress (the other figures are bareheaded) meant no doubt for Our Lady. (Pl. V, fig. 14.)

C 7. The Annunciation; three-quarter figures; Our Lady, on the sinister side, has long hair; the hands are raised in an attitude of prayer. She wears a close-fitting garment cut low at the neck, with a narrow waistband; over this is a cloak open in front but with the sides joined by a cord across the breast and fastened by a clasp in the middle. The angel Gabriel has hair in curls on each side, a close-fitting low-necked robe, and apparently an outer garment; there is a clasp on the breast but no cords are visible. The left hand bears a scroll which hangs vertically downwards and bears the words:

AVE · GRACIA · P

Over Our Lady is some foliage, over the angel the feathers of a wing. (Pl. V, fig. 15.)

C 8. The Visitation; full-length figures; the one on the sinister side is evidently intended for Our Lady as she is bareheaded and has long hair; the other figure wears a veil

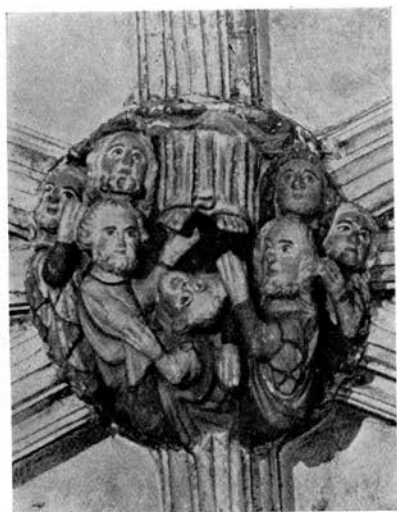


Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.

PLATE VI



Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.



Fig. 20.



Fig. 21.



and a wimple, and curled locks of hair are visible under the veil. Both figures wear rather full robes, probably outer garments with close-fitting robes beneath, as appears from Our Lady's left arm. Between them they hold an open book, to which each is pointing, with the lettering

M A G
N I F I
C A T A

The last letter is probably the initial letter of the next word *Anima*. Round the figures is a narrow border of leaves. (Pl. V, fig. 16.)

C 9. A head with stems growing out of the mouth and ears, the leaves of which surround the head. The mouth is open with the teeth showing; the face has an expression of pain or grief; one eye seems to be half closed. (Pl. V, fig. 17.)

C 10. The Fall; full-length figures, Adam being on the sinister side; both figures are naked except for fig leaves which Adam holds on with his left hand, Eve with her right; in the other hand each holds an apple, and Adam holds his to his mouth; Adam is bearded. Between and round the figures is foliage. (Pl. VI, fig. 18.)

C 11. A head, bearded and with long hair; a narrow band of foliage surrounds the head. (Pl. VI, fig. 19.)

C 12. The Crucifixion; full-length figures; Our Lord is represented with the eyes closed; a loin cloth reaches to the knees; the lower part of the figure is badly proportioned and much too short. On the dexter side Our Lady stands, her right hand clasping her left. Her robes are full and hanging in folds in front; the sleeves seem to belong to an undergarment as in C 8. St John, with very short hair, carries an object, perhaps a book, in his left hand. There are indications of foliage, and two stems run up by Our Lord's figure and pass behind His arms. (Pl. VI, fig. 20.)

C 18. The translation of St Etheldreda. A very confused mass of figures; a woman's figure with a staff, and crowned, is apparently being put into a marble coffin; this has lines painted on it to resemble the veining of marble (cf. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Chapter XIX). Several figures are around,

some in a horizontal position, some upright; three seem to be in armour, and one has a sword in its scabbard. (Pl. VI, fig. 21.)

C 19. A head with stems growing out of the mouth and ears, the leaves of which surround the head. The mouth is open and the upper teeth show, the lower ones being hidden by the tongue which is protruded; the forehead is puckered in a frown.

N 1-3. A head with stems and foliage proceeding from the mouth and surrounding the figure; it is difficult to make out where the face ends and the foliage begins.

N 1-4. The head of a beast with a pointed snout and a protruding tongue; it is surrounded apparently by foliage.

N 1-6. A head with hair hanging down on each side of the face; it is difficult to know whether this is meant for a man or a woman.

N 1-7. A human face with a beast's body; the mouth is wide open, the teeth are showing and the tongue protrudes; the forehead is creased with horizontal wrinkles. Round the neck is a large ruff of hair, that may be meant for a lion's mane; part of the body and a hind leg shows that the figure is half a beast.

N 2-2. A human face, with the mouth open, and the teeth showing; the tongue protrudes; the hair is represented by a large curl on each side of the face; a beard is also shown.

N 2-3. A monstrous beast represented curled up; the ears are long and pointed; it has eagle's legs and wings and may be meant for a wyvern.

N 2-4. A negro's head; the short curly hair, the flat nose, and the thick lips make this unmistakably a negro. (Pl. VII, fig. 22.)

N 2-5. A head with a stem coming from the mouth, and with leaves spreading upwards, downwards, and to each side, so that little can be seen of the face except the eyes. (Pl. VII, fig. 23.)

N 3-1. A grotesque figure with short hair, and a beard. An arm comes from each temple; the hands are held to the sides of the open mouth, the right-hand middle finger being actually in the mouth; perhaps this is intended for a representation of toothache. (Pl. VII, fig. 24.)



Fig. 22.



Fig. 23.



Fig. 24.



Fig. 25.

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PLATE VIII



Fig. 26.



Fig. 27.



Fig. 28.



Fig. 29.



N 3-3. The head and fore-limbs of a lion; the toes are much too long and resemble the talons of a bird of prey.

N 3-4. A human head with long hair, parted in the middle, and a chin beard; the nose is flat and broad; the tongue protrudes and three upper teeth are visible.

N 3-6. The head of a rather old man with a beard; he wears a close-fitting cap with a little point at the top; the arms are represented as coming from somewhere at the top of the head; the face is rather grotesque and has a broad smile; the mouth is open and several of the teeth show.

N 3-9. A clean-shaven face with long hair; not a grotesque; the only part of the dress shown is a low collar; above the head is a little foliage, and two acorns on one stem rest on the top of the head. (Pl. VII, fig. 25.)

N 4-1. A rather grotesque head; clean-shaven; the very high forehead is puckered with horizontal wrinkles; the arms are shown and the left hand is holding the chin; the mouth is open and the teeth are visible.

N 4-2. A clean-shaven face with an expression of surprise; six broad leaves come out of the face and hide all the head except the face; one comes from each side of the mouth, one from under the outer corner of each eye, and two come out of the forehead; one upper and two lower teeth are visible.

N 4-5. Rather like the last, but the face, which is grotesque, has a laughing expression. A stem grows out of the right-hand corner of the mouth and ends in leaves which hide the lower part of the face; leaves too come out of the face from just outside the outer corner of each eye; a narrow flat stem runs up the nose and forehead and ends in leaves over the top of the head. (Pl. VIII, fig. 26.)

N 4-6. A plain rose with three whorls of petals, each whorl having five petals.

N 4-9. The face of a middle-aged man with long hair, moustache, and square beard; the face is in no way grotesque, but foliage, seemingly oak, starts from each side of the beard and runs up on each side of the face to the ear level; there it ends in a wing, and the tip of the two wings meet above the head. (Pl. VIII, fig. 27.)

N 5-1. The face of a man, clean-shaven except perhaps

for a short moustachè. The head is covered with a hood with folds or pleats over the forehead; the hood is fastened under the chin, and covers the ears, but long hair is visible on each side of the face under the hood; the figure is not a grotesque. (Pl. VIII, fig. 28.)

N 5-5. Head of a king, crowned, with long hair, beard, and moustache.

N 5-6. Head with very thick lips but not otherwise grotesque; there is a heavy band round the forehead.

N 5-7. Head with a beard; the forehead is puckered into a frown; a very close-fitting hood is worn.

N 5-9. Head with beard, moustache and long hair; the nose is straight; altogether a very pleasing face of an intellectual man.

S 1-3. A grotesque face made up almost entirely of leaves; the mouth is open and the upper teeth show, while a leaf proceeds out of the mouth and covers the lower part of the face; leaves come from the sides of the nose and cover the cheeks, and another comes from the upper part of the nose and covers the forehead.

S 2-1. A grotesque face with large bulbous nose and very thick lips; the mouth is half open and two lower teeth show; the whole head is surrounded by carving that may be meant to represent hair.

S 2-3. Demi-figure of Christ; the right hand is raised in benediction, the left hand is crossed over the breast, the finger tips being placed in a rent in the garment on the right side, over the spear wound; the stigmata are represented on the hands; the head is bare, long hair falls over the shoulders, and a square beard is shown; the garment has close-fitting sleeves, with wide cuffs and collar, the latter fitting very close at the neck, and coming very high under the chin. Foliage surrounds the figure. (Pl. VIII, fig. 29.)

S 2-9. A grotesque demi-figure; the face has a long snout-like nose; the mouth can hardly be seen and the chin not at all; the head is covered with a close-fitting cap which comes down over the ears, and apparently under the chin; the right hand is holding something close to the mouth, in fact the figure seems to be eating something out of the hand; the left

PLATE IX



Fig. 30.



Fig. 31.



Fig. 32.



Fig. 33.

arm ends at the elbow. Clothes are represented but it is difficult to make out details.

S 3-1. A grotesque head with a bulbous nose; the mouth is open, the tongue is protruding, and three of the upper teeth are visible; the forehead is puckered and there are deep lines from the nose round the mouth; a moustache and beard seem to be indicated, and the whole head is surrounded by hair.

S 3-6. A grotesque beast, coiled up; the mouth is wide open showing upper and lower teeth; there are feathered wings and a dragon's body with very prominent vertebrae.

S 3-9. The head of a man with long hair and flowing moustache and beard; the face has a calm expression; the head has a narrow border of foliage round it. (Pl. IX, fig. 30.)

S 4-1. The head of a man with very depressed nose and wide nostrils; the mouth is slightly open showing teeth; the beard extends almost to the cheeks, but the upper lip is clean-shaven; the forehead is puckered and the face has an expression of pain; the hair is long and extends down on each side of the face.

S 4-4. The face of a man with very regular features and a calm expression; beard and moustache are worn and the hair is long and falls down on each side of the face.

S 4-6. A semi-human face and shoulders; the head is bald; the ears are round and prominent; the eyes are half closed; the face has a malign expression. (Pl. IX, fig. 31.)

S 4-9. The face of a man with rather regular features; beard, moustache, and whiskers are worn; the hair is long and falls down at the side of the face; there is a slight frown.

S 5-1. Head, shoulders and arms of a man wearing a beard but no moustache; the hair is arranged in a twist over each ear. It seems as though there were a covering of some sort over the head; the forehead is puckered and there are deep lines on each side of the mouth; the hands are held up and are half hidden by the beard.

S 5-3. Grotesque head, shoulders, and arms; the ears are very long and pointed, and lie back on the head; the tongue is protruded on the left side of the mouth and is held in the left hand; the right hand is held under the chin; the teeth show; the hair is very short, and there is no hair on the face;

there are two vertical lines on the forehead, and the face has an expression of pain. (Pl. IX, fig. 32.)

S 5-4. Head of a young woman with a veil over the head and a wimple. (Pl. IX, fig. 33.)

S 5-6. Head and shoulders of a beast something like an ox, but with a prominent ridge along the top of the head.

S 5-8. Grotesque head with a very wide mouth and a protruding tongue; round the head is a border of wavy lines radiating away from the face.

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