NOTICE OF SCULPTURES OF ORIENTAL DESIGN AT BREDWARDINE AND MOCCAS, HEREFORDSHIRE.[1]

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Two years ago, when visiting the beautifully situated Norman church at Bredwardine, Herefordshire, my attention was attracted by a remarkable design sculptured over the Norman north door. The doorway is of the usual Norman character, semicircular, with plain chevron mouldings. In the centre of the arch are two roundels containing sculptured subjects,the right-hand one of which, being familiar with the forms of ancient Egyptian mythology, I at once recognised as an unmistakable representation of Bes or Besa, the Typhon of the Greeks, who is usually pourtrayed as a deformed and nude male figure with bandy legs, tongue lolling out of the mouth, pendant beard, and protruding eyes. A lion's skin with the tail hanging down behind is thrown over the otherwise naked body. The Bredwardine sculpture reproduces with very tolerable fidelity most of these characteristics, and close examination reveals that there is even an attempt to represent the set of ostrich plumes with which Bes is almost invariably crowned.

Altogether, the resemblance of this sculpture to a statuette or amulet of Bes, whereof many specimens may be seen in the British Museum, is so great that it is plainly evident that the Bredwardine sculptor had either seen or been possessed of a veritable specimen, which had been brought either by himself or some pilgrim friend from Egypt, and which he copied as an appropriate design for the *north* side of a church.

The neighbouring figure in the roundel to the left is of inferior execution, and has suffered more from the ravages

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of time than the one already described. On the occasion of my first visit I was puzzled as to its proper appropriation, but, having recently inspected it a second time I have now little doubt that it represents a Cynocephalus ape, the well-known emblem of the lunar gods Khonsu or Khons, and Thoth, to whom he was held sacred. The curious fact has, therefore, come to light that an English church of the twelfth century was adorned with sculptures representing, certainly *one* and probably *two*, Egyptian religious subjects.

This, however, is not all. Proceeding from Bredwardine to the still more curious and unaltered church in the neighbouring parish of Moccas, I found further evidence of the influence of ancient Oriental art.

The Tympanum of the Norman south door at Moccas is occupied by a very curious and unusual design. In the centre rises a conventional tree, in the centre of whose stem a cross is formed by the addition of a well defined and carefully executed cross bar. Above this crop out branches, right and left, which terminate in spiral ornaments, which with other detached branches, if such they may be called, fill up the portion of the design. On the side of the stem below are two beasts, disposed heraldically, whose divers tails show that they are intended to indicate different species, perhaps a lion and a bull. Each of these monsters is engaged in devouring the draped figure of a man, of whom each protrudes his arm and hand from the very jaws of his devourer and clutches at the central cross for safety.

I have no doubt that this design was copied from some Babylonian or Assyrian cylinder, which also was in the collection of this twelfth century Herefordshire sculptor. The central tree, Christianized by the introduction of the central cross bar, and probably connected in the sculptor's mind with the Tree of Life, bears strong resemblance to trees on both Assyrian sculptures and Babylonian cylinders in the British Museum. For example, offerings are being carried to a very similar tree on a slab of the time of King Assur-Nasir Pal, B.C. 580. Hitherto little seems to have been known of the meaning of these many branched trees which are of such frequent occurrence in Mesopotamian art. Dr. E. Tylor, of Oxford, however, in an interesting

letter in the "Academy,"[1] claims to have discovered their meaning, and identifies the objects like fir-cones which winged deities bear in baskets to conventional palm trees, with the efflorence of the male trees, when divested of its sheath, and ready to dust the pollen over the female flowers. This operation was of course one of vital importance in a country like Assyria, whose inhabitants depended so much upon dates for their daily food. I may add that the work upon the doorways of Moccas and Bredwardine are manifestly by the same hand.

And here I might stop, but I cannot help calling attention to another point, which *may* be only a co-incidence, or *may not.*

Upon the lintel stone which supports the tympanum of the south doorway at Moccas, are several roundels containing conventional designs of a star-like shape. I believe I have seen similar designs upon other Norman doorways, and of Norman origin they perhaps are in this instance, but I cannot refrain from pointing out that these star shaped ornaments most closely resemble those found on stone sarcophagi discovered near Jerusalem, and of which, if I mistake not, some specimens are engraved in "The Recovery of Jerusalem," published by the Palestine Exploration Fund; and roundels of similar type have, I believe, been found cut upon rock-tombs in other localities in the Holy Land. If this resemblance be not accidental, another indication is afforded that the Herefordshire carver or his friend had visited Palestine as a pilgrim, had jotted down what he saw in his rude vellum note book, and had reproduced the designs that pleased him on the banks of the eddying Wye.

[1] June 8, 1890.