

SOME ADDITIONAL SPECIMENS OF ENGLISH ALABASTER CARVINGS

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Since I was permitted to address the Society on the subject of English medieval alabaster carvings, not a few examples of this phase of native artistic activity have come under my notice and I am therefore taking this opportunity of placing them on record.

My attention was kindly directed by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh, F.S.A. to the existence in the Museo de Reproducciones Artísticas, Madrid, of four casts of remarkable panels of the 'Embattled type.' The originals of these formed part of a five scene Passion reredos of *circa* 1420, the panel of the Betrayal being lost, and from the similarity of their workmanship, they apparently came from the same shop as the St. John Baptist set in the Marienkirche, Danzig.¹ The originals of these casts, which measure 17½ inches by 11½ inches, were formerly in the old oratory of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at Palma de Mallorca and are now in private hands.

The panels are as follows :—

1. The carrying of the cross. This is the earliest known example of this scene. In the centre, facing to the right, stands our Lord, wearing the loincloth and bearing over His left shoulder the cross. Behind Him are two attendants, with scourges, the one in the foreground, who wears a chaperon and a short tunic, strikes Him on the leg. In front of Christ are two others, the one in the foreground drags upon the rope which encircles the Saviour's waist, whilst the other appears to lean upon the transom of the cross.

2. The Crucifixion. This panel is somewhat similar to that in the Museum at Perigueux. To the left of the cross are Longinus, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Mary Cleopas and the Holy Mother, the last falling to the ground, whose left

¹ *Arch. Journ.* vol. LXXV, p. 328, plates XVIII-XXII.



Photo : A. Gardner

I. THE DECOLLATION OF ST. CATHERINE



2. ST. PETER



3. THE BURNING OF THE PHILOSOPHERS



I. THE BURIAL OF ST. KATHERINE



2. ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

hand is held by St. John the Divine, who is seated, holding a palm, to the right. Behind the Evangelist are, the Centurion, who points to a scroll with his right hand whilst with his left he holds a pole-axe. Behind him is another figure.

3. The Deposition. Only two examples are known of this incident. Upon the left of the cross stands Joseph of Arimathea, wearing a conical hat, who receives the body of our Lord and behind whom are the Holy Mother and St. John the Divine, the latter bearing a palm. Upon the right, at the foot of the cross, kneels Nicodemus, in the act of withdrawing the nail from the feet of Christ, whilst behind upon a ladder, stands a young man, who has a pair of pincers thrust through his girdle and supports our Lord's left arm.

4. The Resurrection. This panel, which is of Type I,¹ resembles very closely the corresponding carving preserved in the Museum at Beauvais.

In a paper read before the Institute on 'English Alabasters of the embattled type,'² reference was made to a small terminal figure of St. Peter. Since that paper was published this example has passed into my possession and I am enabled to illustrate it herewith. This figure is very similar in treatment to the corresponding figure of St. Paul illustrated therein on plate xxviii. The saint, who stands beneath an embattled canopy, is clad in a long robe and ample cloak, edged with gold and lined with scarlet. He carries in his right hand two large keys, and in his left a closed book. The background was of gold studded with gesso knobs. The reverse of this panel and that of St. Paul is chiselled out following the figures. (Pl. i, 2.)

Of the same period is an embattled example of a subject hitherto unknown to me and now in private possession. This panel depicts the Deposition. Upon the left of the cross stands St. Mary Magdalene, the Holy Mother and Joseph of Arimathea; the latter supports with both hands the figure of our Lord, who is nimbed and wears a loincloth. Over the shoulder of St. Joseph, who wears a round cap, hangs the shroud. Upon the right-hand arm of the cross rests a ladder, upon which stands St. John the Divine, who wears a pointed hat and long robe, and is curiously enough

¹ *Arch. Journ.* vol. LXXV. p. 319.

² *Arch. Journ.* vol. LXV. p. 378.

depicted as bearded ; in this following a Greek tradition. Through his belt is thrust a large pair of pincers. At the foot of the cross kneels Nicodemus, who is clad in a long robe and wears a round hat ; he is represented in the act of withdrawing the nail from the feet.

In the British Museum, dating from about 1420, is a remarkable panel representing the Decollation of St. Catherine. The saint, who is nude to the waist and crowned, kneels with hands upraised at the feet of the Emperor Maxentius, between the headless bodies of the Empress Faustina and Porphyry. Above her stands an executioner clad in a short jerkin girt about the hips, who swings aloft his sword. On either side of him are two other figures who wear short girt jerkins and chaperons. The Emperor, from whose crown proceeds a dragon's head, has a curiously twisted beard. He wears a short, full-sleeved court-pye and carries in his left hand a falchion. This panel is of interest as being probably one of the earliest of the Nottingham School, i.e., a panel with detached canopy. (Pl. i, 1.)

In the Museum at Dieppe is a St. Katherine panel representing 'The Burning of the Philosophers.' At the feet of the saint, who is crowned and nimbed, are seven martyrs in the flames, the logs in the fire are being stirred up by a torturer, with a two-pronged fork. Beside him is the emperor, and above, supported in a napkin, by two angels (missing), are the seven souls of the victims. (Pl. i, 3.)

By kind permission of the owner, Mr. G. E. Johnson, of Shaftesbury, I am permitted to publish the illustration of a St. Katherine panel, recently discovered in that town.

The carving represents the terminal scene from a St. Katherine reredos, the 'Burial of the saint on Mount Sinai,' by angels. The saint, who is crowned, is being lowered in a shroud, into the tomb, by two angels, whilst another who kneels in the foreground supports the middle of her body. Behind the tomb stand two other angels, one of whom is censuring. (Pl. ii, 1.)

This is an uncommon St. Katherine subject, another example of which was published in the *Journal*, vol. LXX, p. 134.

By the courtesy of Messrs. Harding, St. James, S.W., I am enabled to illustrate a panel representing St. George slaying the Dragon. The saint, who is clad in complete



I. THE EDUCATION OF THE VIRGIN



2. A MIRACLE OF ST. BAVON



I. MARTYRDOM OF ST. ERASMUS



2. MARTYRDOM OF ST. ERASMUS, FROM NORTH CREEK

armour with a standard of mail, wears square-toed sabatons and swings above his head his falchion. Beneath his charger lies the prostrate dragon. In the background, looking over the walls of the city of Libya, are king Zevius and his queen, whilst in the left upper corner is a kneeling figure of their daughter, Cleodelinda. Two other panels of this subject are known to me, one in the large reredos at La Celle,¹ in which a lamb also appears, the other, formerly in the possession of the Rev. J. J. Moss, is illustrated in the Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, vol. 1. (Pl. ii, 2.)

There is in private possession an interesting statuette of the Blessed Virgin and Child, which dates from the latter end of the fifteenth century. The Virgin, who is crowned and wears a long robe and mantle, carries in her left hand a large mace-like sceptre, whilst on her right arm she supports a crowned figure of our Lord, who plays with a bird, which, standing on His knee, rests against the body of the Virgin. This statuette is remarkable, and so far as I know unique in that both figures are depicted as crowned.

By the courtesy of M. Bacri, I am permitted to illustrate the interesting panel depicting the 'Education of the Virgin,' which measures 16 inches by 10 inches. (Pl. iii, 1.)

Upon the left stands St. Anne, who wears a kerchief, barb, cloak and robe. In the centre stands the Virgin, who is crowned, reading from a book, which rests upon a sloping reading desk, supported on a circular pillar, on which she lays her right hand. Upon the right of the panel stands her father, Joachim, wearing a curious conical hat, a hooded tippet and a robe, who holds in his left hand a paternoster, whilst his right hand rests on a cross-shaft.

By the kindness of Mr. Lionel Harris, I have the opportunity of illustrating a panel of the martyrdom of St. Erasmus, which measures 12 inches by 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. This panel is surmounted by a triple-gabled canopy, identical with that over the St. John's Head published in the *Archaeological Journal*, vol. LXXI, p. 165, plate v, 1.

Across the lower part of the panel, resting upon a trestle table, lies the saint, wearing a mitre and nude save for a pair of short drawers, beneath which table is a figure dragging upon a rope tied to the ankles of St. Erasmus.

¹ *Arch. Journ.* vol. LXVII, p. 73, plate viii.

Above is a windlass, round which two tormentors are winding the intestines of the martyr. Seated above, with legs crossed, holding a drawn sword in his left hand, is the emperor, to whom a lawyer, who holds a scroll, explains the case, whilst behind Diocletian is an attendant, who holds a drawn sword in his left hand. (Pl. iv, 1.)

St. Erasmus, otherwise known as St. Elmo, was a patron saint of sailors and was martyred under Diocletian, A.D. 304. He was a bishop who had retired to Lebanon and on account of the character of his sufferings was wont to be invoked for the relief of colic. Important relics of this saint were preserved at Leffe, near Dinant. He was venerated on June 2. A fragment of a very similar panel is in the collection of the writer, which was found at North Creek, Norfolk.

The following extract from the will of Thomas Hewitt, of London, dated 23 February, 1532, is of interest: 'to be buried in the Grey Friars, London, in the body of the Church, whereas is a table hanging of St. Erasmus, on the north side as you come out of the west door.' (Pl. iv, 2.)

I am enabled, by the kindness of Mr. Lionel Harris, to illustrate the panel of the Annunciation, which is surmounted by a unique canopy of five four-light windows. The scene is almost identical in treatment with the same subject in the reredos of the Virgin in the church of St. Benedict, at Pisa. The panel, which measures 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches by 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, represents the Blessed Virgin as crowned, and nimbed, kneeling before a reading desk supported on a curiously contorted pillar. Facing her is the archangel, who holds a scroll, which twines about the lily. Above is The Father, from Whose mouth descends The Divine Child, Who bears over His shoulder a cross encircled by the crown of thorns. At the top is an angel, with hands raised in adoration, whilst beside the cushion, on which the Virgin kneels, is another angel who holds one of the tassels.

It will be noted that the coving of the canopy is enriched with painted double sprigs, such as occur on the panels of the Virgin triptych in the Victoria and Albert Museum. (Pl. v, 1.)

Since describing the panel of St. Eloi, at Freckenham, in the *Archaeological Journal* vol. LXXIV, page 108, pl. III, two further examples in English fifteenth-century alabaster have come before my notice. The first is in the possession of Messrs. Harding, who have kindly allowed me to illus-



I. THE ANNUNCIATION



2 NATIVITY AND ADORATION



I. ST. ELOI



2. ST. ELOI



3. THE LAMENTATION OF THE
VIRGIN

trate it, the second, till recently at Essen, Germany, has passed into my collection. The specimen belonging to Messrs. Harding, which measures 17 inches by 11 inches, represents the saint in cope, mitre and alb, shoeing the horse, which is restrained in a travis by an attendant, who holds the halter in his left hand, whilst in his right he grasps a hammer; upon his left foot is a shoe, the other shoe lies beside him on the ground. Behind the horse stands an onlooker, holding in his left hand a staff, whilst he raises his right hand in surprise. In front of the anvil is a trough, below which is a hammer. Upon the chimney of the forge hang three horse-shoes and behind the saint's head are two pincers with another horse-shoe between them. (Pl. vi, 1.)

The Essen carving is singularly small in size, measuring only $12\frac{7}{8}$ inches by $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches. It contains much of its original colouring. The saint, behind whom is a figure blowing the bellows, shoes the horse's fore-leg upon the anvil, hanging beneath which is a blacksmith's hammer, and in the water trough below lie the pincers. Behind the horse, which is bound within the usual travis, is a small figure wearing a round black hat, who raises his hands in an attitude of surprise. Upon the ground in front of the travis are two hammers, whilst hanging upon the roof are four horse-shoes. The back of this panel is chiselled away in the three most prominent places of the carving in order to diminish its weight for purposes of transit, and it would appear from its small size that this piece was intended for individual devotion. (Pl. vi, 2.)

There are in the British Museum two unusual panels of St. John Baptist Heads. The first is very similar to that illustrated by me in the *Archaeological Journal*, vol. LXXIV, p. 111, plate v, 3, and, like it, includes figures of St. James Major and St. Anthony. This panel is unusual, however, in that St. James is represented as a bishop, wearing a mitre and holding in his right hand his crozier, whilst with his left he points to the soul of the Baptist. Our Lord below displays the wound in His side.

The second resembles very closely the panel illustrated by me in the *Archaeological Journal*, vol. LXXI, p. 165, plate v, 2. Like it, it shows us St. Anthony and St. James Major, but the figure of our Lord in the tomb in the

foreground is exceptional in that He has His hands bound in front of Him, crosswise, by means of a piece of rope. The only other instance of the hands of Christ being bound occurs on a panel formerly in the possession of the Rev. Dr. Stukeley, in which case however, our Lord is represented as seated upon rock-work between St. Peter and another figure probably incorrectly represented as St. Paul.

By the courtesy of Messrs. Harding, I am enabled to illustrate a panel of the Annunciation, which is very similar to the example shown in the *Archaeological Journal*, vol. LXX, plate IV, p. 136. In both cases the Virgin kneels before a remarkable reading desk, the top of which is enhanced with trefoil tracery, whilst the stem is interrupted by a curious rectangular recess. The robe of the Virgin is deflected from the knee at a remarkable obtuse angle. Behind her is a feathered figure of the Archangel, clad in a white cloak, the end of which may be seen hanging over the left shoulder and upon his head is a cross-ornamented head-dress. Above St. Gabriel is The Almighty, from whose mouth proceeds The Sacred Dove. The Virgin, who is nimbed and crowned, kneels beneath a curtained canopy.

Possibly from the same reredos is another carving, also the property of Messrs. Harding, which represents a combined Nativity and Adoration of the Magi. In the centre is the nimbed Virgin kneeling before The Child, who is represented within a rayed mandorla, above Him are the ox and the ass, also St. Joseph, who leans his head upon his cross-staff. In the background are the three kings, Gaspar, Baltassar and Melchior, who point to the star with their left hands, whilst in their right they carry respectively, a covered cup, a navette, and a covered vessel. Of this curious combined subject only two other examples are known to me, namely, that at Sitjes, near Barcelona, and the example in the Museum at Dieppe. (Pl. vii, 1, 2.)

The former is described by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh, F.S.A. in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, vol. xxxii, p. 12. In this St. Joseph and the animals are in the foreground, beneath which lies the Child within the manger covered by a cloth, and to the left is a seated figure of a midwife. Above, in the centre, kneels the crowned and nimbed Virgin, whilst to the left stand Gaspar and



1. THE ANNUNCIATION



2. THE NATIVITY AND ADORATION



ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

Baltassar and to the right Melchior, the first and the last having large bells hanging from their belts.

The example in the Museum at Dieppe is as follows :— In the foreground kneels the crowned Virgin, before The Divine Child, who, within a mandorla, bestows His blessing, His feet resting upon an orb. Behind the Virgin is seated a midwife, beside whom stands St. Joseph, bearing a staff. Above our Lord are the ass and the ox feeding from a moulded trough, whilst across the top of the panel are the three kings crowned, bearing respectively, crowned cups and a navette, in their right hands, whilst with their left they point to the star. (Pl. v, 2.)

In the Museum at Amiens is preserved a panel representing a miracle from the life of St. Bavon of Ghent. St. Bavon was Count of Hesbain, circ. 657, and entered the Monastery of St. Peter at Ghent. He is best known from having restored to life a labourer, who had been thrown from a cart laden with gravel, which he was driving to the cell then being erected for the saint. The horses had been startled by the barking of dogs. St. Bavon was commemorated on October 1, and is named in the Hereford, Sarum and York calendars. (Pl. iii, 2.)

‘Cum autem sive ex amicitia particulari, sive ex Regulæ præcepto obedientiali fratres accingerentur in ædificanda cellula Viri Dei, ad declarendum electi sui meritum omnipotens virtus tale ostendit miraculum. Laica persona Attinus, sabulum & lapides carrucatuos, plastro vehebatur, sed latratu canum impediēbat. Cumque gravius urgeretur & longiori mora teneretur, ore procaci murmurare, & nescio cujus susurrii maledicta in sanctum Virum evomere: permissus diabolus, qui dolebat, fana dirui & ecclesias Sanctorum erigi, hominem vehiculo proturbatum, mole desuper ponderis & Jumentorum incursu reliquit mortuum, Evocatur populus, cadaver conclamatum navi imponitur non sine miseratione, & in domum suam perdueto aliud nil erat, quod cogitarent, nisi de sepulchro. Ibi id Bavoni nunciatum est, vix trium horarum spatium intercesserat, orationem necdum terminaveret, cum mors non legem pati coacta revomit quem rapuerat. Attinus surgit & ambulat, etc.’¹

¹ Vita tertia S. Bavonis Para. 11. Acta Sanctorum, October, Tom. 1, p. 247.

The panel may be described as follows :—At the lower part of the carving lies a man clad in a short tunic, whose head rests beneath the wheel of a cart having ten spokes, below which lie two pieces of wood. The cart is driven by a man who holds in his right hand a whip and in his left hand the reins. Three horses are harnessed, one behind the other, the two leaders have turned about and are standing above the level of the cart. The side of the cart is made by a wooden frame of seven uprights joined together by rails, the lower of which is prolonged forward to form the shafts. A fragment of a similar panel is at Whittlesford.

Among the rarer saints of whom we have records as occurring in English alabaster, is a most remarkable saint viz. St. Uncumber or St. Wilgefortis. In 1524, we find John Wickynden, of Cowden, Kent, bequeathing 'four shillings to buy an image of St. Uncumber (vel St. Wilgefortis) to stand in Cowden Church, of alabaster,' whilst he also provided for, 'a light to burn before St. Uncumber.'

It is related that St. Uncumber¹ was a beauteous princess, who, desiring to remain unmarried, besought in her prayers the gift of a beard. Her wish was duly granted and her father, incensed, perhaps justly, at this very effective means of hindering the attentions of her hitherto numerous admirers, crucified her. Sir Thomas More, writing of this saint, says that she was of much help to unhappy wives since, 'for a peck of oats she would not fail to uncumber them of their husbands.'

No example in alabaster is now known, but two images survive in England, in stone and in wood, the former in the chapel of Henry VII, the latter in the possession of the writer.

The Westminster statue has a long beard and reads from a book which rests upon the cross which she holds before her. The example in the collection of the writer, which was formerly the property of Welby Pugin, shows us the saint as wearing a short bifid beard, and as clad in a full cloak, bodice and mantle. She has on her head a crown and is bound to the cross with three ropes.

Mr. Lionel Harris has kindly allowed me to publish an important figure of St. John the Divine in his possession.

¹ St. Wilgefortis was evolved from a E. Mâle, *L'art religieux du xii^e Siècle*, misappreciation of the Crucifix at Lucca. p. 254, fig. 169.



Photo: Cit. Paul Brer

VIRGIN REREDOS AT CHATELAUDREN

This carving, which measures 29 inches by 10 inches, depicts the saint standing and holding in his left hand the poisoned cup, whence emerges the dragon, supporting with his right arm the palm, whilst with his right hand he gives his benediction. At his feet kneels the donor, who holds with his clasped hands a descending invocatory scroll.

The nimbus of the saint is elaborately decorated. (Pl. viii.)

A fragment of a unique carving, in English alabaster, is preserved in the church at Hacheston, Suffolk, being part of a panel representing 'The Incredulity of St. Thomas.'



THE INCRECULITY OF ST. THOMAS.

The saint, who kneels before our Lord, holds in his left hand a closed book, whilst he thrusts his right hand into the wound in the side of the Saviour, Who supports with His right hand the elbow of the saint.

In the church at Châtelaudren, is a Virgin reredos, consisting of five scenic panels, flanked by unusually wide terminal figures of saints, all beneath gabled canopies.

The subjects are as follows :—

a. St. Michael, armed with falchion and shield, overcoming the dragon.

1. The Annunciation.

2. The Nativity, with two angels and two midwives.

3. The Resurrection, with polyhedral foliage.
4. The Assumption.
5. The Coronation with the Trinity, in human form.

b. St. Christopher, crossing the water, supporting with both hands the flowering palm, and bearing on his right shoulder the Divine Child. (Pl. ix.)

This reredos should be contrasted with those at Ecaquelon and at La Celle.

There has recently been found in Italy a panel of the Lamentation of the Virgin, which measures 18 inches by 11 inches. In the centre is the Virgin, nimbed and veiled, seated in front of the cross, who, wearing a mantle and robe, supports on her knees the body of our Lord, Who has about Him the loincloth. In the background are St. Mary Cleopas and St. Mary Magdalene, who holds the pot of ointment. In the foreground at the feet of the Virgin are a number of bones, including two skulls, two lower jaws, a shoulder blade, etc. Behind the figures is the cross. (Pl. vii, 3.)

In conclusion, I desire to thank all those who have so kindly assisted me in the preparation of this paper by the provision of photographs.