

THE ROOF BOSSES OF NORWICH CATHEDRAL AND THEIR RELATION TO THE MEDIEVAL DRAMA OF THE CITY

By M. Q. SMITH, B.A. (CANTAB)

C'est le theatre chretien, cette image fidele du christianisme de la fin du moyen age, qui a contribue plus que toute autre cause a transformer l'art ; par lui, tout devint non seulement plus emouvant, mais encore plus real.

NORWICH Cathedral has one of the finest displays of medieval roof bosses in England, set in some of the most beautiful vaults. During the last hundred years, these bosses have been restored and closely studied. Descriptions by various authorities are to be found in several separate publications, some of them being the journals of learned societies. With the exception of a short article by M. R. James¹, all these works have been restricted to the study of the bosses in individual vaults. There is no comprehensive description, nor even a unified system of numbering the bosses.

It is the aim of this paper to prove as clearly as possible the relationship between these bosses and the drama of their period, particularly the religious drama of the city of Norwich. The close parallel between the bosses and the Norwich plays is of considerable interest, for the remains of the plays themselves are extremely slight. From the evidence that we have, taken in conjunction with iconographic material, it is possible to suggest a reconstruction in greater detail than before of the form and content of the cycle. In addition, some facts about the lost miracle plays of the area can be deduced from a similar combination of documentary and iconographic remains in the area.

Although it is not possible to reconstruct the dialogues of the plays, the roof bosses provide a valuable picture of the methods of presentation on the players' pageants. This is a subject that has already been partly explored by W. L. Hildburgh in his paper "English Alabaster Carvings as Records of Medieval Religious Drama."² He points out that these tables are important for they are preserved in relatively large numbers, in contrast to the scanty remains of glass, embroidery and other arts. No mention is made of roof bosses, which exist in large numbers, nearly all undamaged either by iconoclast or restorer.

Roof bosses have one important similarity to the alabaster tables. In size they are much alike, and thus impose on the carvers much the same restrictions, which Hildburgh suggests force the carver to present his scenes in the economical manner of the player on his pageant. Both the bosses and the tables were brightly coloured, giving a vivid record of details of costume and properties. From the many bosses that show how scenes were presented, I have tried to select examples not covered by Hildburgh. Three important differences between the bosses and tables should be pointed out. The alabastermen worked as a rule in workshops, with some chance of the development of largely traditional designs. No such workshops are known to have existed for the production of roof bosses, for these were generally carved after they had been

lowered into their position in the vault.³ It is possible that alabaster carvers were employed for this work, but the individuality of the work would be ensured by the varying requirements of the particular vault. The second difference is that although the Old Testament was neglected by the alabastermen, the roof bosses are rich in these subjects. The third difference is the most important. The alabastermen carved their panels for inclusion in reredoses. There are for this reason no extended series of panels. Most remaining examples are of individual panels only, not always in themselves undamaged. Roof bosses, however, are sometimes carved to an extended iconographical system, and those at Norwich are particularly notable for this reason. Not only is it thus possible to see the relationship between the individual carving and the individual play, as it is with alabaster tables, but also between the complete series of bosses and the complete cycle of mystery plays.

I. THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOSSES

The chronology of the vaulting of Norwich Cathedral is of some importance, for it helps to explain some repetitions in the subjects of the bosses which will concern us later. The earliest vaults are those of the east walk of the cloister, dating from 1297-1318, the remainder of the cloister being built with many interruptions during the next hundred and fifty years. The bosses of the north walk, the last completed, date from the early part of the fifteenth century. The bosses of the Apocalypse series in the south and west walks were carved 1312-30 and 1338-48 respectively, and here the influence of illuminated manuscripts cannot be disputed. The nave vault, which contains the main series of bosses illustrating the Bible narrative from Creation to Doomsday was built in 1463-72 by Bishop Walter Lyhart. The transepts were vaulted after the fire of 1509, by Bishop Richard Nix. The Bauchun Chapel bosses of the Constance Saga date from about 1450, and the beautiful vault of the presbytery, which has only two historiated bosses, from thirty years later.

THE BOSSES

The quality of the carving of the bosses is uneven. Not only are changes in style between bosses of different date clearly obvious, but also the relative abilities of different carvers is well demonstrated in the transepts where some bosses are crude in design and execution. The carving of many of the bosses is of great beauty, with perhaps the finest in the low vaults of the cloisters. All the bosses have been cleaned and some recoloured according to remaining traces of the original paint. The majority of the colour is bold and straightforward. For example, in the boss of the overthrow of Pharaoh's army, the sea is bright red; and in the scene of the death of Cain, the dramatic effect is enhanced by changing the colour of his robe to white, so that the blood flowing from his wound is clearly visible.

The bosses in the cloisters, being close to the pavement are the easiest to study, though this also means that many heads have been knocked off, and some bosses badly damaged. Those in the sixty-foot high nave vault can be

seen clearly since their restoration. In contrast, the bosses of the transepts are not easily read, partly because they are not brightly coloured, but more because they are exceptionally small, the largest being only twenty inches in diameter and some only eight inches. In both nave and cloisters, trolleys with mirrored tops are provided to save the strain on visitors' necks. For closer study, a pair of field-glasses is essential, though for a comparative study of bosses in different parts of the cathedral, the use of photographs is the only satisfactory method.

OTHER ICONOGRAPHY

The roof bosses cannot be considered satisfactorily without reference to other local iconography of the same period. There are considerable remains of later medieval art in the churches of Norfolk, although these represent only a fraction of what once existed. Losses caused by "improvements," restorations and the passage of years, as well as by iconoclasts are very high. This is particularly true with regard to wall paintings. Some of the evidence used in this paper has had to be taken from the Bulwer Collection of water-colours in the Castle Museum, which were made as some of these paintings were uncovered, only to fade, be destroyed or re-covered in the following years. It is unfortunately impossible to gain much idea of the losses of glass, carving and panel painting.

The most widely known examples of the religious iconography of the diocese are the many fine painted rood-screen panels. These have recently been catalogued and their iconography explored in a paper by W. W. Williamson⁴. The panels, with a few exceptions, show single saints identifiable by their symbols. Fox, in the *Victoria County History*, suggests reasons for the choice of these figures. They are based on personal, local and trade interests, and on continental influences, particularly Flemish. Nowhere do these relate to the plays except at Loddon and Wellingham.

Throughout this paper, the great cultural influence that Norwich exerted over the surrounding area is taken for granted. The presence of "schools" of artists in glass, stone, brass and of painters on wood has long been recognised. It is reasonable to suspect that the plays in other towns in the diocese were strongly influenced by the ambitious efforts of the Norwich guilds. The chance iconographic remains provide important evidence to supplement the very slight documentary records of the considerable dramatic activity of the diocese.

THE NORWICH CYCLE

Our knowledge of the Norwich cycle of mystery plays rests mainly on a list of the plays, dating from 1527, and on account books.⁵ The only part of the cycle in existence is the play of the Fall, in two versions, as played by the Grocers and Raffmen. In the cycle Hell Cart, that is to say the Fall of the Angels, was played by the "Glaziers, Steyners, Scriveners, Parchment makers, Carpenters, Engravers, Carriers, Colermakers and Wheelwrights," and the Nativity by "Dyers, Calaunders, Goldsmiths, Goldbeaters and Saddlers, Pewterers and Braziers." Now the Gild of Saint Luke, which produced the complete cycle until 1527, when it became too expensive, was composed of "Pewterers, Braziers, Plumbers, Bell-founders, Glaziers, Steyners, and other

occupations." It seems, then, that when the various crafts of the city combined to produce the cycle, the Saint Luke's Gild split to produce two parts, the Hell Cart and Nativity. This Gild was thus intimately connected with the cycle. Its members practised crafts related to the upkeep and decoration of such a building as the cathedral. The same Gild was also officially connected with the cathedral, for it "was kept in S. Luke's Chapel in the cathedral every 2nd Sunday after Trinity, where they hear mass."⁶ The monastery staff would thus have an intimate contact with the players and producers of the cycle. The players themselves were craftsmen who had a personal knowledge of the plays, in every aspect of their contents and manner of presentation, and could use this experience in the pursuit of their crafts for the decoration of the churches of the area. On this evidence alone, it is safe to assert that the bosses of the cathedral at Norwich were very strongly influenced by the plays of the lost mystery cycle of the same city.

II. THE MYSTERY SUBJECTS

THE ROOF BOSSES OF THE NAVE

The presence of an iconographical scheme in the arrangement of the bosses of the different vaults is not at first obvious, partly because the vaults were constructed over the course of two hundred years. But as we consider how the majority of the bosses do in fact fit into a comprehensive scheme their close relationship to the medieval drama will become even more obvious. To start with, we must deal with the major series in the nave vault.⁷ In its scope it is unique, and since its restoration, the bosses can be read with ease. They are arranged in order, bay by bay, from east to west, illustrating the whole narrative of the Bible from the Creation to the Day of Judgement. The following is a list of the main subjects:

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Bay | 1 | The Creation and Garden of Eden |
| | 2 | Cain, Noah |
| | 3 | Babel, Isaac, Esau |
| | 4 | Jacob |
| | 5 | Joseph |
| | 6 | Moses |
| | 7 | Samson, David |
| | 8 | Solomon |
| | | Annunciation to Massacre of Innocents |
| | 9 | Flight into Egypt to Supper at Bethany |
| | 10 | Entry into Jerusalem to Last Supper |
| | 11 | Agony and Arrest |
| | 12 | Trial before Pilate to Harrowing of Hell |
| | 13 | The Tomb to Pentecost |
| | 14 | Last Judgement and Doom. |

The scope of the series is not unique in medieval art, although the treatment is unusually detailed, there being as many as 255 historiated bosses. The only comparable series of bosses is that at Tewkesbury, consisting of fifteen scenes.⁸

It is particularly interesting that we have proof of the possibility of direct inspiration from the Norwich mystery cycle, for the scheme as a whole bears a strong resemblance to the subjects of the plays. These we know from the list made in 1527, when the separate parts were allocated to the various trades of the city.

- Play 1 Creation of the World
 2 Helle Carte
 3 Paradyse
 4 Abel and Cain
 5 Noyse Shippe
 6 Abraham and Isaac
 7 Moises and Aaron, with the Children of
 Israel and Pharo and his Knyghts
 8 Conflict of David and Goleas
 9 The Berth of Christ with the Shepherds
 and iij Kyngs of Colen
 10 The Baptism of Christe
 11 The Resurrection
 12 The Holy Ghost (Pentecost)

This cycle, when compared with that of Chester, the shortest of the four great cycles, is abnormally simple. It is thus important to note how similar in proportion is this cycle to the nave series of bosses. The variations between the two representations, notably the inclusion of a few extra episodes, generally on a single boss, are slight. They may well be covered, as is so often the case in other cycles, by the inclusion in the plays of more than the titles suggest. It is in any case likely, judging from the York plays, that those at Norwich were subjected to frequent revisions and alterations. A major revision may well have been made in 1527 when the organization of the production of the cycle was altered.

THE BOSSES OF THE TRANSEPTS AND CLOISTERS

The general lack of emphasis on the New Testament scenes in the Norwich cycle and in the nave roof bosses is interesting, for the episodes of the Christmas and Passion narratives are not generally neglected. Dealing first with the cycle of the Norwich plays, we may expect, for instance that the popular figure of Herod appeared in the ninth play. It seems impossible that the Crucifixion was omitted, and this could have been included in the eleventh play. These episodes are shown in the nave vault. A fuller account of the early life and ministry of Our Lord is shown in the bosses of the transepts, apparently designed to supplement and show in a more ample manner some of the nave bosses.⁹ This is not a case so much of repetition as of restatement in a less cramped form. Some compression must be made to include the biblical story from Creation to Doomsday in a single vault, even if it is as long as that at Norwich. Among the subjects of the 150 historiated bosses of the transepts are the Nativity, the visitations of the shepherds and kings, the story of Herod and of Saint John the Baptist, the Presentation and Flight into Egypt, the Temptation and a

few episodes of the early ministry of Our Lord. The fact that Saint John the Baptist appears on no less than nineteen bosses, and the popular dramatic figure of Herod on eighteen suggests the difference of scale from the nave series, where only thirty-three bosses portray the New Testament narrative from the Nativity to the Entry into Jerusalem.

The Gospel story of the events of the Passion and Resurrection, leading to the Ascension, had been already represented in the east and north walks of the cloisters.¹⁰ In the five bays of the east walk leading from the now destroyed chapter-house to the Prior's Door, which in abbreviated form represents the Last Judgement, are major bosses of the Flagellation, Christ carrying the cross, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and of the Harrowing of Hell. This series of Passion subjects is continued into the north walk. Here scenes after the Crucifixion lead up to the Ascension. Some of the episodes, such as the Entombment and "Noli Me Tangere" are split up into more than one bosses, being shown in separated dramatic movements.

As we have seen, the main series of the bosses in the cathedral thus have a unity of iconographical order that bears some relationship to the mystery cycles.⁵ The nave series corresponds closely with the list of the cycle in its 1527 form. Both the nave bosses and the cycle, as far as we have record of it, are peculiar in their lack of emphasis on the New Testament narrative, particularly the Nativity and Passion stories, which are not neglected in the more comprehensive cycles. In the cathedral, these omissions are remedied in the bosses of the east and north walks of the cloisters and in the transepts. As the influence of the drama on the transept bosses is very strong, this may be evidence that the Norwich cycle was not always in the form of the 1527 list, but had at about 1509 (the date of the vault), a fuller treatment of these episodes connected with the earlier chapters of the gospels.

In addition to these general similarities between the iconographical scheme and the mystery cycles, there are parallels between individual scenes from the remaining cycles and individual bosses. These are of some importance in a localized study such as this. The first example is of the Nailing to the Cross in Bay 12 of the nave. The cross is shown on the ground with six soldiers around it, nailing the right hand which is tied with a rope, pushing the feet, and pulling with another rope the left hand into position. This scene is strikingly like those in the York and Townley cycles, as well as that in the so-called Ludus Coventriae. The other example is more important for it is of a scene of greater rarity, the Death of Cain, in Bay 2 of the nave. A young man, Tubal-Cain, leads the blind Lamech who with an arrow kills Cain. This episode is derived from a Jewish tradition, found in the Christian service books based on Genesis IV, 18-24. In English art it is rarely found, and only in one of the cycles. It is more common in continental art and plays. It appears in the Ludus Coventriae, that some critics have suggested was a Norwich cycle,¹¹ and even though the inspiration for the boss may not have been derived from this example, it is not unlikely that as in the Ludus Coventriae, the episode appeared in the section of the cycle headed the "Play of Noah."

OTHER ICONOGRAPHY

The importance of the roof bosses is further emphasized by a consideration of the remains of the other iconography of the area. Woodforde¹² makes four direct parallels between the glass of St. Peter Mancroft and the medieval drama. A composite list of the subjects shown in the related glass at Mancroft, East Harling and Felbrigge Hall shows similarities with the subjects of the bosses.

Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Shepherds, of the Magi, Presentation, Circumcision, Flight into Egypt, Massacre of the Innocents, Dispute in the Temple, Marriage at Cana.

All this group appear in the transept bosses. The last eleven, and some of the preceding, are shown in the nave bosses, or in the cloisters.

Last Supper, Betrayal, Crowning with Thorns, Mocking, Preparation for Crucifixion, Crucifixion, Descent from Cross, Entombment, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost.

There are several similarities of detail in these scenes in the glass, in the roof bosses and in the alabasters described by Hildburgh.

Scenes except of the Annunciation are rare on panel paintings incorporated in rood-screens. Only Loddon had a series, of which five New Testament scenes remain, Annunciation, Circumcision, Adoration of the Magi and Presentation in the north aisle with the Ascension in the south aisle. The well-known panels from St. Michael-at-Pleas and the cathedral retable have recently received fresh attention.¹³ The relationships with manuscript sources and continental influences have been fully detailed on the restoration of the former panels. The differences in style and "atmosphere" between these works and those connected with the drama are very significant.

In the field of wall painting there is an almost complete lack of evidence, due to the great losses of this most perishable form of decoration.¹⁴ The life of Christ series at Catfield has now almost entirely disappeared, so that it is impossible to identify episodes with certainty. At Somerton, parts of a large set of paintings can still be identified as the Entry into Jerusalem, the Scourging and Doom. These date from about 1350. Only at Crostwight is there any considerable evidence. Eleven damaged paintings of the events of the Passion, from the Entry into Jerusalem until the Ascension, are arranged in three tiers. The influence of the stage is generally clear. The Bulwer Collection gives little indication of the great losses in wall paintings of Gospel subjects. It includes copies of the Somerton paintings, but besides Dooms and Crucifixions the only other subject is that of the Incredulity of Saint Thomas at Wighton. I have omitted from consideration in the present context the several rood paintings of the Crucifixion such as those at Ludham and Cawston.

Even omitting these occurrences of the Passion in its most common representation, there is yet sufficient evidence to dispute Chambers' suggestion¹⁵ that the Passion was not represented in the Norwich cycle. The frequency of these scenes in the iconography of the county in a manner strongly influenced by the plays makes it almost certain that Norwich did in the fifteenth and probably early sixteenth century, produce these scenes on the pageants.

DETAILS

Having suggested in general outlines the close relationship between the roof bosses and the drama, we can now usefully consider individual bosses both as further proof of this relationship and also as evidence of the methods of the presentation of the plays in Norwich. The medieval player and the boss-carver were faced with much the same restrictions of space. Each had but a small area upon which to represent the Biblical episodes. The player acted upon a pageant or stage, "a House of Waynskott, paynted and builded on a Carte with fowre whelys." The carver had at his disposal a boss measuring at the most thirty inches in diameter. It is, however, necessary to remember that although there are similarities in the restrictions, there is one major difference, that the player was watched from the street by crowds close around while the roof bosses are seen from below by the watcher on the pavement. An additional complication is that sometimes the carver has cut the figures so that looking *up* at the boss, the "audience" is in fact looking *down* on the scene represented. Such is the case in the nave boss of the Last Supper. In the Nativity scene the Child and cattle are seen from above while Mary and Joseph are carved, standing upright at full length.

On bosses as on the pageants, for reasons of space, the locations of the scenes are symbolized and "stage settings" and "properties" are used. An interesting example occurs on the bosses of the Garden of Eden in the first bay of the nave. The Forbidden Tree stands between Adam and Eve to whom the player acting the Devil offers the Fruit. The upper part of his body is human, around the trunk of the tree is wound a false serpentine tail. The Tree itself is decorated like that of the Norwich pageant, for in the Grocers' Account of 1557 is an entry "for oranges, fyges, allmondes, dates, reysons, prenes, and aples to garnish ye tree with, 10d." Later in the series, Noah's ark is of the kind that could be erected on a pageant, as in the Townley cycle. Other ships are shown in a symbolical manner. In one, the impression is of Saint Simon holding up an improbable mast with its sail furled to the yard. Contemporary ecclesiastical furniture is shown in the transepts. Saint John the Baptist preaches from a polygonal gothic pulpit of a type well known in Norfolk, while scenes of the Presentation include a square altar, with frontal and super-frontal. In the Dispute with the Doctors, Our Lord is seated on a high backed sixteenth-century chair. In the south transept the headless body of the Baptist is shown being placed in a tomb with three holes bored in its side. These holes or "foramina" were common features of the shrines of saints, for instance of Saint Osmund at Salisbury Cathedral, and were probably used for some devotions connected with the virtue of a saint's bodily relics. In the north walk of the cloister the Sealing of the Tomb is shown with the lid carved with a fine foliate cross in the medieval manner. What architecture is shown on Biblical bosses (as distinct from those bosses in the cloisters of contemporary or legendary events, where interiors and exteriors of ecclesiastical and secular buildings are shown), is also in the medieval dramatic convention. The Tower of Babel, for instance, is not a complex structure, such as is the delight of the illuminators of manuscripts, but a simple portcullised castle with a crenellated keep.

The characters in the scenes are dressed in the clothes of the period of the vaults, without any attempt at historical correctness. In the transepts, the soldiers wear typical early sixteenth-century armour, with rigid breastplate and broad-toed sabatons. Women are usually shown wearing wimples. Angels, for instance in the first bay of the nave, are dressed in albs or wear close-fitting feathered garments. Similar conventions are found in local glass¹⁶ and on screen paintings, and were derived from the players costumes. The figure of Satan, besides being found in the Tree of Knowledge, also appears on two bosses of the Temptation in the transepts. On one he has a grotesque head, black face and breast, and claws. On the second he has human features on his stomach and besides horns and wings, wears the costume as used in the Norwich cycle, "a cote with hosen and tayle steyned." In the medieval drama, certain characters developed individualities of dress, aspect and personality. This is reflected in the bosses. Almighty God is a benevolent white bearded, golden haired figure in a scarlet robe, holding a pair of compasses in His hand. On two of the bosses in the north transept, one of the shepherds journeying to Bethlehem plays the bagpipes, as in the Second Shepherds' Play of the Townley cycle. In the same play, one of the shepherds has a dog who also appears on one of these bosses. The bosses showing kings enthroned are always dramatically conceived, the figure of Solomon being a predecessor of the kings of the Tudor histories. The immensely popular figure of Herod is shown on eighteen bosses in the transepts, most of which show crude attempts at characterization. He achieved his fame in connection with two other dramatically interesting figures, the dancing Salome, who is shown in a contortionist position, and the Baptist. The Massacre of the Innocents which is repeated on several bosses was also a scene of great histrionic potentiality.

The bosses contain many other interesting details, some of which substantiate the work done by Hildburgh on alabaster tables. These can best be appreciated by a study of the photographs of Cave, or by a direct study of the bosses themselves.

III. THE MIRACLE SUBJECTS

THE CLOISTER BOSSES

If the fact of the close relationship of the Norwich roof bosses already considered with the Norwich mystery cycle is accepted, it is valid to attempt to gain some idea of the miracle plays of the area from other bosses in the cathedral. To supplement the evidence of the bosses, it is essential that notice be taken of the rich remains of miracle subjects in other parts of the diocese. Although we have titles and references to several miracle plays in England, only three examples survive. Nearly all the work to be done to discover what these plays were like, even what were their subjects in a particular area, must be based on remains of the other arts, such as the carving of roof bosses.

From the petition made to the Assembly of the City of Norwich in 1527, we find a unique reference to miracle plays in the city. The Guild of Saint Luke asks that, as the financial burden has become too great for one guild, each craft of the city should take part in the presentation of the plays. Until that date, besides

producing "divers disgisyns and pageaunts," it had also presented "lieffs and martyrdoms of divers and many hooly Saynts, as also of many light and feigned figurs and picturs of other persons and bestes." Taking into account all the evidence given previously of the close connections of the Gild and the cathedral, it seems certain that it was these representations that inspired the strange muddle of subjects carved on the cloister bosses, particularly in the north walk.

The non-religious subjects may be considered first, for they are explicable only in their relation to popular beliefs and dramatic presentation. Mixed in with scenes of the lives of the saints are many "light and feigned figures and pictures of other persons and bestes." As many as five bosses show people riding on the shoulders of men, others of men disguised as horses or other beasts. The musician bosses are well known. There are fine examples of the foliage-sprouting "green man," and of the familiar Norfolk figure of the hairy wild man, known as the woodwose. That these figures derived from the drama should be mixed with miracle subjects further suggests that the miracle bosses themselves were based on the plays of the city.

In the main series of miracle bosses of the north walk of the cloister, twenty saints and David appear. Some of these are shown on more than one boss, for instance Our Lady is shown on nine, and Saint Thomas à Becket on five. In the latter case, the martyrdom is shown in three "movements," but other bosses may show more than one movement. The finest example of this is that of the Feast of Herod, with the dance of Salome and the death of the Baptist. In the treatment of the scenes the technique is the same as it is in the representations of the mystery subjects. The costumes and architecture show contemporary features, and there are the same conventions of a restricted group of figures placed in a relevantly simple setting.

OTHER ICONOGRAPHY

The evidence provided by the remains of other iconography of miracle subjects is of more help than that of mystery subjects particularly in glass and wall-paintings. At St. Peter Mancroft are panels of glass of the following miracle subjects:—

The Death of the Virgin	5 scenes
Life of St. Peter	7 scenes
St. John the Evangelist	3 scenes

Other saints shown in the work of the Norwich glass painters, probably members of the Gild of St. Luke, included a life of the Baptist at Long Melford, now unfortunately lost; two incidents of the life of St. George at North Tuddenham; and either St. Margaret or St. Catharine at Mancroft. The latter was shown in a roundel in the cathedral.

The Mancroft panel of either St. Margaret or St. Catharine has on it an evil character, recognizable by the presence of an attendant devil, in the manner of the plays. This example provides an explanation of the inspiration of the Feast of Herod boss already mentioned, where two monkey-like figures are to be seen behind the king. These little figures can be explained satisfactorily only by

reference to the place of their origin, in a miracle play, probably best considered as being of the life and death of St. John the Baptist.

The supposition of there being a play on this subject in the area does not rest only on this one boss, nor indeed on the several representations of his story on the bosses of the transepts. His life was well known in Norfolk, although there have been losses in the iconography. The series in glass at North Tuddenham has disappeared, and the four scenes in a wall painting at Elsing, discovered in 1860, have been plastered over. These were of the Dance of Salome, the Baptist preaching before Herod, being led to prison and his beheading. Yet another life of the same saint, at Catfield, has been lost and only one complete subject and two fragments remain of a set of about twelve miracle scenes. The three saints represented are SS. Stephen, Lawrence and Catharine. The other subjects have unfortunately not been recorded. The last series of St. John the Baptist that ought to be mentioned is carved on the merlons of the tower of Burnham Market Church. There are the four most popular scenes, the Baptist (preaching?), Salome dancing, the execution, and the bringing in of the severed head.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is represented on eight (or possibly nine) bosses in the cloister, and in a set in the Bauchun chapel of purely literary inspiration. The cloister subjects consist of four legendary-miraculous tales and three more common scenes. These are of the Nativity and Adoration of Our Lord, the Death and Coronation of Our Lady. We have already mentioned the five scenes of the Death of the Virgin at Mancroft. One of these shows the attempt of Fergus to stop the funeral of the Virgin, an episode found in the York play of 1431. The set of scenes of the Life of the Virgin at Potter Heigham are now in very poor condition, and there is dispute as to their interpretation. They stand, however, as corroborative evidence to prove the wide knowledge of these miracle play subjects.

The only other Bible saint to appear in series in the cloister bosses, in glass and in wall-paintings is St. John the Evangelist. Three miracles are shown in the cloister; four stories, one very fragmentarily, at Mancroft. The wall-paintings at Eaton have unfortunately been lost. The seven scenes of the life of St. Peter are perhaps best considered only as being appropriate in a church dedicated to him, although his martyrdom is shown on a lone boss in the cloister.

The next saint to be considered is one who was one of the most popular in mediæval England, but whose representation became rare after the decree by Henry VIII in 1538 for the destruction of his image. The martyrdom of St. Thomas à Becket appears on a set of bosses in the cloister, and in a wall-painting at South Burlingham. A similar painting at Eaton has been lost, but it is recorded by a water-colour copy in the Bulwer Collection. There are records of other representations at Burgh St. Peter and Hingham, while on the merlons of Burnham Market the martyrdom is shown in adjoining panels.

SS. Catharine and Margaret appear frequently as single figures in glass and on rood-screen panels. Although St. Margaret does not appear on the cathedral bosses, she was represented by the Norwich glass painters in two panels from

a larger series, at North Tuddenham. A great loss was caused when the Church of St. Botolph at Limpenhoe was very heavily restored. The Bulwer Collection provides evidence of the style of the work, showing several links with French miracle plays. As Tristram points out, the original inspiration of the narrative is probably derived from such a work as St. Marherete, with extra material to be found in the *Legenda Aurea*. The manner of the painting is, however, entirely under the influence of the drama.

Twenty-five scenes of the complete legend of St. Catharine, who is shown on two bosses in the cloister, still exist on the south wall at Sporle. These date from about 1390-1400. Scenes such as that of the death of the Empress which are not of primary importance or of didactic value, are shown as they were in dramatic form. There is evidence that two painters worked on the series, but throughout the story is shown in a simple, vivid manner, with some very obvious borrowing from the stage. The failure of the attempted martyrdom on the wheels is shown with a fireworks display not unrelated to the scenes in Doctor Faustus (Panel 12). The executioners (Panel 20) reflect the coarseness of the stage as exemplified by the soldiers in the Passion scenes York plays, while the devils fighting for the soul of the saint (Panel 21) are derived entirely from the stage. In Norfolk the only other wall-painting of the saint is at Catfield, badly damaged, while four scenes at Bardwell, near Bury St. Edmunds, remain under a coat of whitewash.

It is unlikely that any conclusions to help in the present study can be gained from the many single, non-dramatic figures of saints and doctors that appear on rood-screens throughout the county. The most common saint depicted in wall-paintings is St. Christopher. The Hemblington representation is the most interesting as it shows not only the usual massive figure but also the full record of his legend. It is thus perhaps related to the two bosses in the cathedral, and possibly to a dramatic tradition.¹⁷

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

We must now consider how far the iconographic remains are supplementary to the very unsatisfactory documentary evidence of miracle plays in the area. Although there was considerable dramatic activity (the list includes besides Norwich, Lynn, Yarmouth, Wymondham and a series of references in the Thetford area), we have few details of the frequency or of the subjects of the plays.

The popularity of the story of St. John the Baptist was undoubtedly caused by the inclusion of his life in the mystery cycle, with the supporting roles of Herod and Salome. There is no reason to suggest that he was not celebrated in a separate miracle play.

The Life of the Virgin could also be a part of the mystery cycle. Iconographic evidence suggests that separate miracle plays were devoted to her, as at York, and it was probably one of these that was played in 1444 by the Corporation of Lynn, under the title of "Mary and Gabriel." The use of false arms by an actor in the Croxton play of the Sacrament suggests that it is perhaps of Norfolk origin, related to a scene requiring the same stage trick shown in the Mancroft panel of the Funeral of the Virgin.

The many representations of St. Thomas à Becket in the county reflect dramatic activity. Yearly processions were made to his chapel on Mousehold by a gild dedicated to him, and on these occasions "interludes" were played. The same term is used, "an interlude of Saint Thomas the Martyr," of a performance in Lynn in 1385.

The legend of St. Catharine, besides appearing in dramatic form outside Norfolk, was also retold towards the end of our period by Capgrave of King's Lynn. It is likely that there were also plays of this saint in the county. No record is known of a play in England of the legend of St. Margaret, who is celebrated in non-dramatic form. She does not appear among the cathedral bosses. It seems likely that SS. Peter and John the Evangelist were the subjects of plays as patrons of major churches in the city. The same is true of St. Nicholas,¹⁸ who is well known in medieval drama and is patron of the parish church at Yarmouth.

This combination of evidence provides a list of saints who were almost certainly the subjects of plays either in Norwich or in the diocese :

Our Lady
 St. John the Baptist
 St. Thomas à Becket
 St. Peter
 St. John the Evangelist
 St. Nicholas
 St. Catharine

To this list may be added St. George, known in the processions of the great gild dedicated to him.

These eight subjects are fairly certain. If Chambers is right in his suggestion that individual parishes produced plays, the list can be extended by the inclusion of those saints who were patrons of city churches and appear in the north walk :

St. Lawrence	St. Edward
St. Stephen	St. Edmund
St. Clement	St. Paul
St. Giles	St. James
St. Martin	

There were chapels to SS. James the Less and Greater, and to St. Michael, and also gilds dedicated to St. Michael and St. James. This leaves two saints of the twenty-one appearing in the north walk. There is a record of a play in England of St. Lucy, but I can offer no reason for the inclusion of St. Denis. The boss identified as being David killing a lion is perhaps better considered as being only a "disgysing."

A total of twenty-one saints celebrated in plays in the city seems perhaps too large. The smaller list of eight subjects can be accepted with some degree of certainty. There seems a strong possibility that some, if not all, of the other saints were also celebrated in dramatic form.

CONCLUSION

The complexities of discovering the relationship of medieval drama and iconography are considerable. Remains of both of the plays and of the visual arts are so fragmentary that it is rarely possible to prove cases of direct influence. Where each town of any size had its own plays, only the famous cycles and a few fragments remain, together with chance mentions in record books and accounts. Of the carvings, paintings and glass only a fraction remains, and few of the losses are recorded in any detail. In fact, medieval imagery is now noteworthy where once it was common, and the English parish church is characterized by its clear glass, white walls and defaced carvings where all was once colour and life.

The religious plays, whether of Biblical or legendary subjects, were primarily concerned with telling a story. In every case, the characters were far more important than the setting, and the emphasis was entirely on the actors and the action. The didactic and moral elements, although considerable, were not highly developed until the morality plays. In the plays of action, of the life of Christ or of His saints, the narrative assumed supreme importance. The same qualities can be seen in the examples of carving and painting that we have considered. Manuscript influence is obviously of great importance, but it can be seen clearly when it exists. It is distinguished by a formality and artfulness that is pale beside the stage inspired work. Some manuscript illuminations were themselves influenced by and became the vehicles for the dissemination of the conventions of the stage.

When we look at the stories told in the glass and stone, on the walls and roofs and in the windows of the churches which we have been considering, we see the familiar tales retold in the idiom of the stage. The original players have long been forgotten, but the inspiration that they gave can be appreciated in the works of their contemporary fellow artists. Formality and awe have been lost. In their place are the simplicity of productions on pageants, and the humanity of the common people of medieval Norfolk. The merchants, the craftsmen and the artists themselves acted the story of their own redemption and the legends of their holy heroes. The prophets and saints, devils and the Persons of the Holy Trinity can be seen in the churches as they were watched in the streets. In some cases the effects have more absurdity than grandeur, for rarely is there any striving for effect. Always the works are inspired with two major qualities, simplicity and sincerity.

By concentrating on the evidence of the religious drama in one city, Salter has made important discoveries about medieval drama in general. He was fortunate in having the text of the Chester cycle and comprehensive documentary evidence. With this material he was able to suggest in some detail how the plays were organized and performed. It is unlikely that the almost complete loss of the Norwich mysteries and miracles can ever be very satisfactorily remedied. Compared to Chester the documentary evidence would seem to be slight; but at Norwich there is something that does not exist at Chester, a pictorial record of the plays as they were produced in the streets. It has been the aim of this essay to show how valuable this evidence can be. The

reconstruction of the lost drama from remains of the art of the church was first suggested over fifty years ago. Little work seems to have been done in this almost unexplored field, a field that surely offers great possibilities for further research.

¹In the *Thirteen Hundredth Anniversary of the Diocese of East Anglia*, Jarrold, 1930, pp. 55-66.

²*Archæologia*, Vol. XCIII, 1947.

³See C. J. P. Cave, *Roof Bosses*, 1948.

⁴*Norfolk Archæology*, Vol. XXI, 1956.

⁵The quotations about the Norwich cycle are taken from the Introduction to the E.E.T.S. volume "Non-Cycle Mystery Plays," with additional references to E. K. Chambers: *The Medieval Stage*, H. Craig: *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*; see also *Norfolk Archæology*, Vols. III, IX.

⁶Blomefield: *History*, Vol. III, p. 207; Salter, in *Medieval Drama at Chester*, in the second lecture suggests that the plays remained under ecclesiastical control until as late as 1511.

⁷Goulburn and Symonds: *The Ancient Sculptures in Norwich Cathedral*, 1876. Contains Nave and Presbytery. Illustrated.

⁸All taken from the N.T.

⁹C. J. P. Cave: "The Transept Bosses," Illustrated, *Archæologia*, Vol. LXXXIII, 1933.

¹⁰M. R. James: "The Cloisters, 1911," *N. & N. Arch. Soc.*; E. W. Tristram: "The Cloisters," 1935-37, *Friends of Cathedral Reports*.

¹¹Craig, *op. cit.*, gives convincing evidence that the cycle is from Lincoln.

¹²*The Norwich School of Glass Painters*, pp. 25, 28, and 31.

¹³P. Fodor-Craig: "Exhibition of Medieval Paintings from Norwich," *V. & A.*, 1956.

¹⁴See E. W. Tristram: *English Wall Painting XIV Century*, for full catalogue of remains.

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 128.

¹⁶See Woodforde, *op. cit.*, *The Clothing of Angels*.

¹⁷In the west walk are bosses of S. Christopher; in spite of the Hemblington painting and the Norwich church, I feel that the position of one of the bosses (above the Guest Room Door) is not indicative of dramatic influence but of the usual practice of placing his image at the door.

¹⁸The Bulwer Collection has copies of several scenes on wood of the life of this saint, from Ingham. Their existence points to a knowledge of the life of the saint, although they seem to me to be derived from manuscript illumination.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The substance of this paper was prepared under the direction of Mr. M. J. C. Hodgart, Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, for submission to my Tripos examiners. I have also received much help from the Rev. E. A. Parr and Mr. A. M. Cotman. To these three in particular I am most grateful.