TRUE TO GOD AND KING: Alabaster Heads of St. John
in Late Medieval England

by

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ABSTRACT

Sculpted alabaster tablets depicting the head of St. John the Baptist on a charger, such as the Spilsbury alabaster now in the collection of the University of Victoria's Maltwood Museum and Gallery, were produced in large numbers in fifteenth-century England. Important as examples of private devotional art, they were probably first made as minor works subsidiary to alabaster monument and altarpiece production.

This thesis introduces and describes the Spilsbury tablet in detail; compares this example with other surviving alabaster St. John's Heads; discusses the development and end of the alabaster industry in late medieval England; describes how the St. John's heads are related to other alabaster works; and proposes possible explanations for the popularity and iconography of the St. John's Heads. These alabaster panels may have functioned in part to promote orthodox beliefs and behaviours in late medieval English society, or to counter the influences of heresy. As such, they may be seen as badges of orthodox attitudes in both religious piety and secular politics.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page i

Abstract ii

Table of Contents iii

List of Figures iv

List of Maps xi

Acknowledgements xii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: The Spilsbury Head of St. John the Baptist 3

Chapter 2: Typological Schemes for Alabaster Heads of St. John and Catalogue of Published Examples 15

Chapter 3: The Alabaster Industry in Medieval England 78

Chapter 4: Social Function and Iconographic Change 113

Bibliography 169

Figures 195

Maps 283

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. Spilsbury Head of St. John the Baptist, General View

Fig. 2. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. John

Fig. 3. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Neck

Fig. 4. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. John from above

Fig. 5. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. Peter

Fig. 6. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. Peter and Agnus Dei

Fig. 7. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. Peter

Fig. 8. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Archbishop and St. John

Fig. 9. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Archbishop

Fig. 10. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Archbishop

Fig. 11. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Agnus Dei

Fig. 12. Spilsbury Head, General View, Reverse Side

Fig. 13. Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. W. L. Hildburgh, acquired in Paris and previously in Spain), Victoria and Albert Museum; Francis Cheetham, English Medieval Alabasters: With a catalogue of the collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, (Oxford: 1984), 319.

Fig. 14. Head of St. John the Baptist, (North German (?)), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 337.

Fig.15. Head of St. John the Baptist, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Philip Nelson, "Some Unpublished English Medieval Alabaster Carvings," Archaeological Journal, LXXXII (1925), 33, plate 2.

Fig. 16. Parker Head of St. John the Baptist; W. H. St. John Hope, "On the Sculptured Alabaster Tablets Called Saint John's Heads," Archaeologia, LII (1891), 14.

Fig. 17. Head of St. John the Baptist, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Ibid., 15-16 and plate XXI.

Fig. 18. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist; Philip Nelson, "Some Unpublished English Medieval Alabaster Carvings," Archaeological Journal, LXXVII (1920), 219 and plate VII, 2.

Fig. 19. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist, (believed to have been found at Wells; ex. col. Nelson and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 320.

Fig. 20. Huddesford fragment of a Head of St. John the Baptist, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Hope (1891), 17.

Fig. 21. Head of St. John the Baptist, Orléans; Nelson (1925), 33 and plate I, 1.

Fig. 22. Spilsbury Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Lever and Spilsbury), Maltwood Museum.

Fig. 23. Ratcliffe College Head of St. John the Baptist, Leicester; Hope (1891), 18-19.

Fig. 24. Stokes Head of St. John the Baptist (Weston Underwood, Olney); Ibid., 20.

Fig. 25. Richards Head of St. John the Baptist; Philip Nelson, "Some Examples of English Medieval Alabaster Work," Archaeological Journal, LXXI (1914), 164-5 and plate V, 1.

Fig. 26. Leicester Head of St. John the Baptist, Leicester Museum; Hope (1891), 24.

Fig. 27. Wolsey Head of St. John the Baptist (London); Clement F. Pitman, "Reflections on Nottingham Alabaster Carving," Connoisseur, CXXXIII (1954), plate opposite 217.

Fig. 28. Nichols Head of St. John the Baptist; Hope (1891), 26-27 and plate XXII, 2.

Fig. 29. Caldicott Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Caldicott Collection (Hastings), Nelson and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 325.

Fig. 30. Yarnton Church (Oxfordshire) Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Jewitt), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 324.

Fig. 31. Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society Head of St. John the Baptist; W. L. Hildburgh, "Miscellaneous Notes Concerning English Alabaster Carvings," Archaeological Journal, LXXXVIII (1931), 242-3 and plate X, A.

Fig. 32. Yarnton Church (Oxfordshire) Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Jewitt, Nelson, and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 323.

Fig. 33. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist, (believed to have been found at Wells; ex. coll. Thomas, Nelson, and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 331.

Fig. 34. Amport Church (Hampshire) Head of St. John the Baptist; Hope (1891), plate XXV.

Fig. 35. Scarisbrick Hall (Lancashire) Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. A. E. Nelson, Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 322 and plate VIII.

Fig. 36. Head of St. John the Baptist, (acquired in London, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 321.

Fig. 37. Nightingale Head of St. John the Baptist, (found near Old Sarum, ex. coll. Nightingale of Wilton), Salisbury Museum; J. B. Nightingale, "Notes," Archaeological Journal, XII (1860), 185.

Fig. 38. Burrell Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Thomas), Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries.

Fig. 39. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist, (believed to have been found at Wells, ex. coll. Thomas, Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 329.

Fig. 40. Calamocha Head of St. John the Baptist, (acquired in Teruel province, Spain, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 326.

Fig. 41. Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Nelson and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 330.

Fig. 42. Head of St. John the Baptist, (acquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 327.

Fig. 43. Head of St. John the Baptist, Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 328.

Fig. 44. Duke (Lake House, Salisbury) Head of St. John the Baptist; Hope (1891), plate XXIII, 2.

Fig. 45. Richards Head of St. John the Baptist, (ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 332.

Fig. 46. St. Levan Head of St. John the Baptist, (St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall; Hope (1891), plate XXVI.

Fig. 47. Head of St. John the Baptist, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'art et d'histoire; Jean Squilbeck, "Quelques Sculptures anglaises d'Albâtre consevées en Belgique," Antiquaries Journal, XVIII (1938), plate XXVI, 1.

Fig. 48. Alabaster tomb of King Edward II, Gloucester Cathedral; Philip Clucas, England's Churches, (Guildford, Surrey: 1984), 102.

Fig. 49. Alabaster tomb of John of Eltham (c. 1337), Westminster Abbey. Dean and Chapter of Westminster, Westminster Abbey Official Guide, (London: 1971 revised edition), 57.

Fig. 50. Alabaster effigies of Henry IV and Joan of Navarre, Canterbury Cathedral; Jonathan Keates, Canterbury Cathedral, (Canterbury: 1988), 27.

Fig. 51. Alabaster monument of Sir Ralph Neville and his wives, Margaret Stafford and Joan Beaufort at Staindrop (Durham); Michael Jenner, Journeys into Medieval England, (London: 1991), 174.

Fig. 52. Alabaster effigies of William Lord Bardolph and wife, Joan, in the Bardolf Chapel at Dennington Church, Suffolk; Colin Platt, The Architecture of Medieval Britain, (New Haven and London: 1990), 179.

Fig. 53. Alabaster monument of Alice (Chaucer) de la Pole, Duchess of Suffolk at Ewelme Church; Ibid., 162.

Fig. 54. Detail of angels on side of de la Pole monument; Clucas, 106.

Fig. 55. Detail of head and supporting angels on de la Pole monument; Jenner, 102.

Fig. 56. Freestone Neville screen (reredos), 1379, Durham Cathedral; Cheetham (1989), 21.

Fig. 57. Alabaster carving, the Trinity, c. 1375-85, Burrell Collection, Glasgow; Ibid., 42.

Fig. 58. Alabaster panel, Nativity and Adoration, late 14th century, Paderborn Cathedral; Ibid.

Fig. 59. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 14th century, (found in Chester); Ibid., 244.

Fig. 60. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 14th century; Ibid., 245.

Fig. 61. Alabaster Passion altarpiece, late 14th century (formerly in Bordeaux); Ibid., 67.

Fig. 62. Alabaster Passion altarpiece, early 15th century (formerly in Spain and Netherlands); Ibid., 68.

Fig. 63. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, 15th century (discovered in Hampshire); Ibid., 252.

Fig. 64. Alabaster altarpiece from church in Iceland, c. 1420, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen; Ibid., 22.

Fig. 65. Alabaster altarpiece from church in Hólar, Iceland, 1450-70, National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavik; Ibid., 44.

Fig. 66. Swansea Altarpiece (Joys of the Virgin), 15th century, (formerly in Munich and in Lord Swansea's collection at Singleton Abbey, Swansea), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., plate I.

Fig. 67. Alabaster two-tiered alabaster Passion reredos, early 16th century, Hôtel de Ville, Compiègne; Ibid., 23.

Fig. 68. Alabaster panel, St. John the Baptist, late 15th century (aquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 115.

Fig. 69. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 258.

Fig. 70. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 253.

Fig. 71. Alabaster altarpiece, Life of St. James, c. 1456, Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela; Ibid., 23.

Fig. 72. Alabaster panel, St. John the Baptist Preaching, second half of 15th century (acquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 116.

Fig. 73. Alabaster panel, Fifth Sign of the Last Judgment, 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., plate VII.

Fig. 74. Alabaster panel, The Harrowing of Hell, 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., plate V.

Fig. 75. Stone boss, The Harrowing of Hell, Norwich Cathedral Nave; C. J. P. Cave, Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches, (Cambridge: 1948), plate 162.

Fig. 76. Stone boss, The Ascension, Norwich Cathedral Nave; Ibid., plate 163.

Fig. 77. Alabaster panel in housing, The Ascension, 15th century (housing from 17th century), (found in ruins of a house near York), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), 290.

Fig. 78. Manuscript Illustration, The Ascension and Herod's Feast/Beheading of St. John the Baptist (Cambridge, Pembroke College 120, f. 5v.); Evans, M. W., Medieval Drawings, (London: 1969), plate 48.

Fig. 79. Alabaster panel, St. Michael Attacking the Dragon and Weighing Souls With the Virgin Interceding, 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham (1989), plate III.

Fig. 80. Alabaster panel, St. John the Baptist Reproves Herod Antipas, late 15th century, (formerly in Genoa, ex. coll. Nelson and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 117.

Fig. 81. Alabaster panel, The Beheading of St. John the Baptist, late 15th century, (acquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 118.

Fig. 82. Manuscript illumination, Herod's Feast, Arundel B.L. MS 157. British Library, The Illuminated Manuscript, (London: 1993).

Fig. 83. Manuscript illustration, Herod's Feast, Holkham Bible, B.L. MS. Add. 47682, f. 21v.; Coghill, Nevill, trans. The Canterbury Tales, (London: 1992 reprint of 1986 edition) 150.

Fig. 84. Manuscript illustration, Herod's Feast, Oxford, Bodl. Lib., Auct. D. 2. 6, f. 166v.; C. M. Kauffmann, Romanesque Manuscripts, (London: 1975), 208.

Fig. 85. Stone boss, Norwich Cathdral. Tasker, Edward G. Enclyclopedia of Medeival Church Art, (London: 1993), 48.

Fig. 86. Wall painting, Hunting Scene and History of St. John the Baptist, Idsworth Chapel, Charlton, Hampshire; E. W. Tristram, English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century, (London: 1955), plate 42.

Fig. 87. Manuscript illumination, The Baptist Beheaded, Belles Heures, fol. 212; Millard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson, The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, (New York: 1974).

Fig. 88. Manuscript illumination, The Presentation of the Head, Belles Heures, fol. 212v; Ibid.

Fig. 89. Engraving of relic of St. John the Baptist at Amiens; H. Arndt and Renata Kroos, "Zur Ikonographie der Johannesschűssel," Aachen Kunstblätter, XXXVIII (1969), 247.

Fig. 90. Fragment of alabaster panel, The Presentation of the Head, Ripon Cathedral; Tasker, 48.

Fig. 91. Alabaster panel, Burial of St. John the Baptist, late 15th century, (formerly in Genoa, ex. coll. Nelson, Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Cheetham, 119.

Fig. 92. Alabaster panel, Quenching of the Ashes of St. John the Baptist(?), late 15th century, (formerly in Genoa, ex. coll. Nelson, Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum; Ibid., 120.

Fig. 93. Manuscript illustration, Christ Enthroned between the Eucharist and the Tablets of the Law (Penintential Psalms), Walters 99. fol.79, 15th century, northern France; Roger S. Wieck, Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life, (New York: 1988), 98.

Fig. 94. Stone font, The Baptism of Christ, St. Michael's, Castle Frome; Clucas, 10.

Fig. 95. Manuscript illustration, Sir Humphrey Kneels Before the Man of Sorrows; Hallam, Elizabeth, ed., The Wars of the Roses, (New York: 1998), 193.

Fig. 96. Pilgrim sign from Amiens; George S. Tyak, "Pilgrim's Signs," The Church Treasury, William Andrews, ed., (London: 1898), 149.

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1. Centres of the medieval alabaster industry in the English Midlands; Cheetham, 12.

Map 2. Original locations where known of surviving 14th- and 15th-century alabaster altarpieces exported from England; Cheetham, 46.

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Introduction

The alabaster St. John's Head donated to the University of Victoria's Maltwood Museum is an example of a class of minor stone sculpture produced in fifteenth century England. Although these tablets have been the subject of scholarly research since the middle of the last century, study has been limited primarily to establishing relative chronology and place of production. Only a few tentative theories have been suggested as to the purpose of the tablets or development of their iconographic schemes. The goals of this thesis are to introduce the Spilsbury alabaster; to summarize the previous research; to draw together as many examples as possible to compare to the Spilsbury tablet and to reassess the typological schemes proposed by previous scholars; to discuss the development of the St. John's Head tablets within the late medieval English alabaster industry; and to propose a possible explanation for the purpose of these carvings in English society of the fifteenth century.

The thesis, therefore, is divided into four major sections. Chapter 1 describes and illustrates the Spilsbury Head of St. John, and recounts its history as far as is known to date. An object such as this cannot be considered nor understood in isolation. Thus, before discussing the iconography of the tablet, and its possible meaning in the religious and political history of late medieval England, a comparison will be made to a number of other known Heads in terms of stylistic and typological considerations. These will be examined in detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 will summarize the development of the alabaster industry in England, and discuss how the manufacture of St. John's Heads is an outgrowth of the production of

monuments and altar-pieces, possibly as apprentice practice-pieces. This chapter will also look at technical considerations such as the pigments used, workshop locations, and chronology for English alabasters. The discussion of records relating to export and smuggling of alabasters from England to the Continent, and of the mobility and connections of merchants is of importance to the conclusions made in Chapter 4. The St. John's Heads will be of lesser prominence in this chapter, where more emphasis is placed on more general aspects of the alabaster industry.

Finally, in Chapter 4, the iconography of and uses for the St. John's Heads in medieval English society will be proposed. The complexities of the political events of the day, the importance of the guild system to religious and economic concerns, and the possible role of the St. John's Heads in countering Lollard heresies will be included. This broad and somewhat speculative discussion will examine documents related specifically to the alabaster St. John's Heads, possible origins for the iconographic scheme and its changes, and connections between the St. John's Heads, alabaster altar-pieces, medieval religious drama, guilds, and interpretations within the society of orthodoxy in politics and religion.

Chapter 1

The Spilsbury Head of St. John the Baptist

In October 1990, Mr. Richard Hugh Spilsbury of Victoria, B.C. donated a late medieval English alabaster plaque to the Maltwood Museum and Art Gallery at the University of Victoria. This sculptured tablet (U990.6.1) depicts the severed head of St. John the Baptist on a charger flanked by two standing saints (figure 1). The Holy Lamb, seated on a closed book, is below the dish. One of about ninety such pieces known,[1] the Spilsbury alabaster is an outstanding example of this class of devotional objects which was produced in large numbers in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, probably in workshops at Nottingham. This plaque is 22.5 cm tall, 17.3 cm wide, and 4.5 cm deep.

The earliest published reference to this piece was by Rev. J. Charles Cox in a notice in the Transactions of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society of 1886, at which time it belonged to the Rev. Benjamin Ward Spilsbury, vicar of Findern, Derbyshire. The Rev. Spilsbury was the grandfather of Richard H. Spilsbury.[2] Five years after Cox published this notice, the tablet was one of the twenty-seven known to and discussed by William H. St. John Hope in his major study delivered to the Society of Antiquaries in London. A photograph of the Spilsbury tablet was included in Hope's subsequent article published by the Society in 1891, "On the Sculptured Alabaster Tablets

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[1]Francis Cheetham, English Medieval Alabasters, (Oxford: 1984), 55. In his Appendix of Saints represented in English alabasters, Cheetham lists 87 Heads of St. John the Baptist, 31 Lives of St. John the Baptist, and 32 images of St. John the Baptist as saint only.

[2]Personal communication from Mr. Spilsbury. William St. John Hope refers to the Rev. Spilsbury as W. B. Spilsbury, but letters confirm that the order of the initials should be reversed.

Called Saint John's Heads."[3] Hope states that the plaque had been acquired from the sale of Sir Ashton Lever's museum by the Rev. B. W. Spilsbury's great-grandfather.[4]

Photographs of the Spilsbury St. John's Head were published in books by E. S. Prior and A. Gardner[5] and by Gardner[6] to accompany a description of the St. John's Heads as a particular class of medieval English sculpture. In each of these texts, the authors suggest the St. John's Heads show a marked decrease in the standards of quality, which they ascribe to mass production and a lack of care fostered by a workshop mentality. In neither text is the Spilsbury Head specifically mentioned, but in each, a photograph of it is paired with that of a similar tablet of lesser quality in both the design and skill of carving. The Spilsbury Head, by implication, seems to represent the earlier, finer work when

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[3]W. H. St. John Hope, "On the Sculptured Alabaster Tablets Called Saint John's Heads." Archaeologia, LII (1891), 1-38.

[4]Ibid., 18. This was confirmed in a personal conversation with Mr. Richard H. Spilsbury; the tablet would have been purchased by his great-great-great grandfather, probably a Francis Ward Spilsbury. He also mentioned that Sir Ashton Lever was of the family connected to Lever Soaps. According to Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XI, 1016-1017, Sir Ashton Lever was born at Alkrington, near Manchester, on 5 March 1729 and educated at Manchester and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. His collection, begun about 1760, consisted primarily of shells, fossils, stuffed birds, and curios (including "all kinds of natural objects and savage costumes and weapons," p. 1016). The museum was called "The Leverian Museum" by the local inhabitants, but Sir Ashton gave it the name "Holophusikon." In 1774, he moved the collection to London, where he filled sixteen rooms and passages of the Leicester House in Leicester Square and charged an admission fee. Eventually, the cost of the collection exceeded his fortune and he offered it in 1783 to the British Museum for 53,000 pounds. The Museum trustees declined the offer and in 1788, Lever obtained an act of parliament to dispose of it by a lottery of 36,000 tickets at a guinea each. Only 8,000 were sold, however. Lever died suddenly, possibly from committing suicide, at the Bull's Head Inn, Manchester on 24 January 1788. The remainder of the collection went to a Mr. James Parkinson, who exhibited it in a building called the Rotunda, erected near Blackfriars Bridge. It remained open for a number of years, but eventually became neglected. The collection was dispersed by auction in 1806. The sale took 65 days to dispose of the 7,879 lots.

Lionel Stevenson states in a biography of the author Charles Lever (who claimed to be a grand-nephew of Sir Ashton), "Not wholly neglectful of his public duties, Ashton Lever served as High Sheriff of the county, and was knighted, as his father had been before him; but he eventually grew so eccentric that many people regarded him as the chief specimen among his curios." Dr. Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever, (New York, 1969 reissue of 1939 edition), 1.

[5]E. S. Prior and A. Gardner, An Account of Medieval Figure Sculpture in England, (Cambridge: 1912), 505.

[6]A. Gardner, English Medieval Sculpture, (Cambridge, 1951), 313, first published under the title A Handbook of English Medieval Sculpture, (Cambridge, 1935).

compared with the later works of lower standard and careless production.[7]

This St. John's Head has been exhibited frequently since coming into the possession of the Spilsbury family. The first of the exhibitions for which documentation exists was one sponsored by the Royal Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for its Nottingham Meeting, 23-30 July 1901.[8] The next one noted in the file was the Church History Exhibition, 27 June to 8 July 1905, in St. Albans.[9] The Society of

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[7]It is possible to account for this variable quality of work in the St. John's Heads in quite a different manner, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

[8]The documentation includes a Memorandum from the Secretary, dated 19 July 1901, to Rev. B. W. Spilsbury in which C. R. Reers states that a paper on Nottingham alabasters is to be read by Mr. S. John Hope on Wednesday evening, July 24th. He notes his understanding that Rev. Spilsbury has a St. John's Head in his possession and requests its loan to the Institute for the exhibition "among other specimens of the kind."

A note written in pencil on 23 July by BWS to The Secretary, Royal Archaeolog[ical] Institute informs C. R. Reers that he has sent the St. John's Head by train addressed to him at the George Hotel, Nottingham, and would Mr. Rees send him a line to say that it has arrived safely.

A small card from Reers written 24 July confirms the safe arrival of the Head the previous evening, and that "it shall be returned in due course."

The last item of documentation relating to this exhibition is a letter of 31 July, thanking the donor for the loan of the St. John's Head of alabaster for the Nottingham Meeting.

[9]Documentation for this exhibition includes several letters from Margaret A. Wix, Secretary of the Exhibition with responses by Rev. Spilsbury. In the first of these, dated 9 April 1905, Miss Wix writes on behalf of the Committee to ask for the loan of the "alabaster tablet with S. John's Head" for exhibition. She explains that the exhibits will be fully insured against all risks and during transit, and that arrangments "as regards police and detective supervision have been made, so that as far as is possible we can promise safe custody." She encloses an exhibit form for the catalogue.

The second document is a form letter of May 1905, which accepts the offer of the "Alabaster Tablet, called St. John's Head, early 15th Cent." for the exhibition, and requests that it be sent to the Committee by June 15th with a letter to her to tell when and how the exhibits "were dispatched." She also encloses an admission ticket to the Exhibition, included with the document file today. On the reverse of this letter, Rev. Spilsbury writes in pencil a note saying that the Head was sent June 14th, 1905 and "Copy of letter to Miss Wix, June 14th." He explains that he is sending the St. John's Head that day by passenger train (5:45 from Derby), and asks if he might request that on the return transport, she might insure it for L. 50. He states he has enclosed stamps for that purpose, and thanks her for the ticket of admission which she enclosed in her letter.

Two receipts are included in the document file. The first is for the insurance value issued by the Midland Railway (No. 64740), Repton & W. Station, 14/6, 1905 for "1 Box Statuary" consigned to St. Albans - M. A. Wix, signed by H. E. James. The second is that issued by Miss Wix dated June 15, 1905 (no. 46) to Rev. Spilsbury showing the receipt of the St. John's Head on loan to the Church Hist. Exhibition.

A undated form letter from Miss Wix requests an extension of the Exhibition until 15 July, owing to the "evidence of a desire on the part of the public to visit the Exhibition, and a general expression of opinion that it should be open a few days longer than announced."

A printed card filled in with pencil and dated 18 July 1905 states that Miss Wix is returning the Head by Midland Rail.

The last item of correspondence is a form letter dated 16 August 1905, thanking the donors for the assistance given to the Exhibiton "as an exhibitor." She states, "I am happy to inform you that the Exhibition quite fulfilled the expectations of its promoters, and it was visited by many thousands of people from

Antiquaries included it in its London exhibition of medieval alabasters in 1910[10], and it was on extended loan to the British Museum's Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities from November 1972 until July 1982, during which time it was periodically displayed.[11] The Maltwood Museum and Art Gallery exhibited it in the fall and winter of 1992-93[12] and in March 1994.[13]

The tablet's central image is the severed head of St. John the Baptist on a round plate or charger (figure 2). John's head is elongated, and retains much of the original gilding of the hair, beard and moustache. Traces of red pigment are also visible on the lips. The long straight hair is parted in the centre of the Head. It frames the face, and the ends are hidden by the flanking saints. The beard is spade-shaped and straight. The

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all parts of the country."

The final documents pertaining to this exhibition are a clipping from the Standard of 1 July describing the types of items on display, a flyer advertising the Exhibition, which lists the lectures to be given each day and the prices of admission, and a three-page open letter explaining the goals of the Exhibition, naming the officers and various committees involved in the planning, and providing a summary of how the objects are to be arranged and supervised.

[10]Stamp on reverse of tablet.

[11]Three letters in the document file relate to the Head's loan to the British Museum. The first, dated 10 November 1972, is from Rupert L. S. Bruce-Mitford, Keeper of Medieval and Later Antiquities, to R. H. Spilsbury by which Mr. Bruce-Mitford informs Mr. Spilsbury that the "Trustees have agreed to accept the offer on indefinite loan of your most interesting Nottingham alabaster relief of the head of St. John the Baptist. In accordance with your wishes, the relief will be kept on public display as continuously as conditions permit." He goes on to thank Mr. Spilsbury "for having agreed to entrust this delightful relief to our safe-keeping. As you know the subject is a rare one and is not otherwise represented in our collections."

The second letter is dated 1 December 1972 written to Mr. R. H. Spilsbury by the Director and Principal Librarian, J. F. Wolfenden, thanking Mr. Spilsbury on behalf of the Trustees of the British Museum for the loan of the "15th century Nottingham alabaster relief of the head of John the Baptist."

The last document in this series certifies in a letter by John Cherry, Deputy Keeper, "To Whom It May Concern" that "the alabaster of St. John's head on a platter owned by Mr. R. H. Spilsbury has been on loan to the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities...from 1972 until July 1982."

It should be noted that a customs stamp on the reverse of the tablet indicates the entry of the item into Canada in August 1972. Mr. Spilsbury recalled that the sculpture first arrived with other objects from England and when he decided to loan it to the British Museum, he had the object stamped by customs so that he could bring it back at a later date without difficulty.

[12]Maltwood Museum document file.

[13]Personal communications with the Maltwood Museum and Gallery.

moustache, like that on many of these Heads, only extends above the outer edges of the mouth, giving the impression of a half clean-shaven upper lip. The hair and beard show the deep incised detail typical of much of the English alabaster work.

The Spilsbury Head has several unusual features that helped Hope determine the main iconographic theme of this class of carvings. Thus, before continuing the description of these characteristics, a brief summary of Hope's research into the identity of this central image will highlight the importance of certain elements on the Spilsbury alabaster.

In the earliest literature concerning the few tablets then known, several different theories about the identity of the central image were proposed.[14] Five major explanations for the central image of these carvings resulted from these early discussions, and these were summarized by Hope:[15]

1) They represented the head of St. John the Baptist on a charger, with figures of saints;[16]

2) The central image was that of the legend of the Lord's face given to Abgarus (or Abgar) after the siege of Edessa;[17]

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[14]Hope cites an early notice in 1746 by Dr. Stukeley in Palaeographic Britannica, No. ii, p. 52; an exhibition of a tablet to the Society of Antiquaries by the Rev. John Pridden in November 1789, which was also published in Schnebbelie's Antiquaries Museum in 1791 and in Nichols' History of Leicestershire in 1811; a notice by J. B. Nichols and its response by Rev. Edward Duke in issues of Gentleman's Magazine in 1824; a note on the tablets by John Gough Nichols in 1850 in a volumne of Bury Wills and Inventories; the notice by J. E. Nightingale of an alabaster exhibited to the Archaeological Institute in 1855 and described in the Archaeological Journal, vol. 29, p. 93; and remarks in 1871 by Albert Way communicated to the Royal Archaeological Institute.

[15]Hope, 3-4.

[16]Hope cites Dr. Stukeley, Rev. John Pridden, John Gough Nichols, J. E. Nightingale, and Albert Way as adherents to this theory, pp. 1-3.

[17]Proposed by Dr. Meyrick and recounted by Hope, p. 2, that "the carving represents the Syrian legend of the image of Christ, which originated probably soon after the siege of Edessa in 540, and which asserts that Christ gratified the faith of King Abgarus by granting to him his picture, the perfect impression of his face on linen, his having invoked his healing power, and offered the strong city of Edessa to protect him against the malice of the Jews." Averil Cameron, "The Sceptic and the Shroud," Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium, (London, 1981), 7-13, discusses several variations of the legend and proposes that the "finding" of the Image in about 544 is related to controversies within the Eastern church at that time. According to Leonid

3) That the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are represented;[18]

4) That the central head and disc represent the vernicle;[19] and

5) That the sculpture represents a variety of "St. Gregory's Pity."[20]

Hope easily discounted the theory that the tablets represented the three Persons of the Trinity, as many of the carvings had no third subject.[21] The idea that the principal subject represented the Lord's face seemed possible, but there is no evidence of a cruciferous nimbus nor the abridged name of Christ found on icons of this type. Hope also thought the theory that the tablets represented "St. Gregory's Pity" possible, but found much stronger evidence for identifying the central figure as the head of St. John the Baptist.

Not only did all of the earliest writers identify the subject as St. John the Baptist, but specific characteristics of several tablets seemed, without doubt, to support this identification. A unique feature of the Spilsbury head is the clearly severed neck (figure

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Ouspensky in The Meaning of Icons (New Haven 1989), 72, note 1, this type is similar to the western legend of St. Veronica.

[18]Hope, p. 2, cites Edward Duke as the originator of this theory.

[19]Proposed by two writers of letters to Gentleman's Magazine for 1824, part ii, 292, 293. Hope, p. 2, notes that the two writers sign only their initials, "T.A." and "E.I.C." The "vernicle" is closely related to the legends of Veronica and Abgar of Edessa. It is called the image "made without hands" or the "Holy Face." Ouspensky, page 72, describes the iconographic type which "shows us only the face of Christ, with neither neck nor shoulders, framed in long hair, which falls in locks on either side. The beard is sometimes single, ending in a point, sometimes forked....In the nimbus that surrounds the head of Christ is inscribed the sign of the Cross. This cruciferous nimbus will be found on all the representations of Christ....It is obligatory for inscriptions of the [abridged] Name [of Jesus Christ - IC XC] to appear on all icons of Christ...."

[20]Hope, p. 3, noted that this theory was proposed by J. Charles Cox in a description of the Spilsbury Alabaster. The St. Gregory's Pity refers to a Eucharistic miracle, in which St. Gregory saw the elevated Host become the body of the wounded Christ rising from the sepulchre. In a footnote, also on p. 3, Hope states that "Since the present paper was written Dr. Cox has expressed to me his entire concurrence with my explanation of these sculptures."

[21]Hope, 4.

3), and none of the other theories could account for this particular element. A clearly defined cut in the neck would be completely consistent, however, with a depiction of the head of St. John the Baptist on a charger.[22]

Another important clue to identifying the subject is the wound seen above the figure's left eye. Unlike the severed neck, this is a feature common to many of the English heads. As Hope argues, this wound almost certainly refers to a legend about St. John the Baptist connected to a relic of his head preserved at Amiens Cathedral.[23] According to this legend, a hole in the part of the skull venerated at Amiens was made by Herodias when the severed head was brought to the table by her daughter, Salome. She was so angered by the words of John in his life that she stabbed the head with her dinner knife. The legends surrounding the head of St. John, and the arrival and significance of the relic at Amiens, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

A few of the tablets had remnants of inscriptions on the edge of the dish, which indicate a direct and explicit identification as St. John the Baptist.[24] In the years which have passed since Hope conducted his study, other examples have come to light in which the inscription around the plate, identifying the object as the head of St. John, is still clearly visible. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

In addition to the specific elements in the carvings themselves, Hope cited other evidence to support his proposed identification. He notes, for example, the popularity of

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[22]Ibid., 7.

[23]Ibid., 4-6.

[24]Ibid., 6-7.

the iconographic theme in sculpture, seals, paintings, and domestic ornaments; the references to various types of St. John's heads in church and domestic inventories; and to the large number of wills and legal documents dealing with St. John's heads, some of which seem to be the same type of alabaster devotional carvings being discussed.[25] Some of these wills and legal documents will be mentioned again in Chapter 3, in the section concerning the alabaster industry and the dating of the tablets.

According to Hope, the eyes of the central image on the Spilsbury alabaster were painted as open, but that is now difficult to determine visually as the paint has disappeared.[26] In general, the face is smooth and well-executed. As both Gardner and Prior noted, many of the tablets are carelessly worked and show little skill. Hope notes in his description of the Spilsbury alabaster that it is one of the finest examples of the class, both in its execution and in its level of preservation.[27]

The dish is undecorated except for the gilded rim. It is clearly meant to represent a plate or charger, as is evident from the depression of the centre. This depression is enhanced by the shadow cast from the light above as in figure 4.

The dexter figure is St. Peter, identifiable by the large, gilded key he holds in his right hand (figure 5). His head appears to be tonsured, and his long straight hair and beard, like John's, are gilded. His face and figure are also somewhat elongated. He wears an alb and amice with gilded edges, over which is a cope or cloak with red lining and

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[25]Ibid., 6-12.

[26]Ibid., 18.

[27]Ibid., 17.

gilded trim. The book which he holds in his left hand has a blue cover and gold leaves. One of his bare feet extends from beneath the hem of his cloak (figure 6). The narrow, belted waist may point to a relatively early date.[28]

Hope suggested that the cope might show indications of having at one time some additional colour.[29] This probably refers to the traces of colour seen above and below the figure's right sleeve in figure 5 and on the left sleeve seen in figures 6 and 7. It is indeed possible that some colour has been lost, but it is no longer certain if the garments originally had more colour or if these are bits applied unintentionally. Although this alabaster is more carefully worked than many St. John's Head, it shows indications of the generally rapid production of these tablets.

The sinister figure is that of an archbishop (figure 8), whose identity is somewhat speculative. It most probably represents St. Thomas the Martyr (Thomas Becket), archbishop of Canterbury, but other possible identities have also been proposed. Philip Nelson, for instance, identifies this figure in all of his writings as St. William of York.[30] Yet Hope cites a will published in the Camden Society's Bury Wills and Inventories,[31] dated 2 September 1522, by which Agas Herte of Bury St. Edmunds, a widow, bequeaths

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[28]Cheetham, 31-44; Gardner, 323-343; Prior and Gardner, 460-505, 677-713; Hope, "On the Early Working of Alabaster in England", The Archaeological Journal, LXI (1904), 220-240; and Clement F. Pitman, "Reflections on Nottingham Alabaster Carving", Connoisseur. CXXXIII (1954), 219-220. Stylistic considerations for dating are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

[29]Hope, "St. John's Heads", 18, note a.

[30]For instance, in Philip Nelson, "Some Examples of English Medieval Alabaster Work", Archaeological Journal, LXXI (1914), 164-165; Nelson, "Some further Examples of English Medieval Alabaster Tables", Archaeological Journal, LXXIV (1917), 111; and Nelson, "Some Unpublished English Medieval Alabaster Carvings", Archaeological Journal, LXXVII (1920), 213-215.

[31]Tymms, ed. Bury Wills and Inventories, (Camden Soc. 49), 115-116.

to her son Richard Jaxson, a "Seynt Johis hede of alabast(r) w(t) Seynt Pet(r) and Seynt Thom(a)s and the fygur of Cryst, w(t) a cloche of red sarsnet and grene ffrengyd."[32] In the Camden Society publication, the notes on this will were provided by Mr. John Gough Nichols, whose discussion of the tablet mentioned in it was later recounted in a brief notice by B. Nightingale.[33] The relationship of the archbishop's identity to the possible significance of the St. John's Heads will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The archbishop, like St. Peter, wears an alb and amice trimmed in gold, over which is a cope. The cope or cloak is also gilded along the edge but, unlike St. Peter's, it is lined in blue. The book in his right hand has a red cover with gilded page edges. The archbishop's long straight hair, the trim on his mitre, and his archiepiscopal cross are gilded. There are traces of red pigment on his lips. The top of the archbishop's cross-staff and the back of the plaque behind his mitre have been damaged and are missing (figure 9). Much of the colour on the bottom half of his cross-staff has flaked away, and there is some damage at the base of the plaque (figure 10). A pointed gold slipper is just visible beneath the hem. The edges of the cope have lost some of the gilding, but show some of the base colour over which the gold was applied.[34]

At the base of the plaque, directly below the Head of St. John, is a long-tailed lamb seated on a book and looking back towards the Head above (figure 11). The lamb's feet are black, and the book on which it rests has red covers and gilded page edges. The clasp

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[32]Hope, 10.

[33]B. Nightingale, "An alabaster tablet found near Salisbury", Archaeological Journal, XII (1855), 185-6.

[34]Cheetham, Appendix IV: Paint Analysis, 56-57. Additional comments about the type of pigments and their application follows in Chapter 3.

is uncoloured.

The background, both above and below the Head, is painted a dark green. Hope states that there are "characteristic daisy patterns" in white and red on the green background.[35] These are no longer visible, although in the right light it is possible to distinguish "bumps" along the bottom edge of the plaque that may have been part of this pattern. We must, for lack of better evidence, take Hope's word that the patterns were visible when he examined the tablet a century ago.

The back of the plaque shows vertical scratches and marks probably resulting from its production (figure 12). The base, like many of the St. John's Heads, has been cut away to make a semi-circular depression. This was likely a standard practice, for many of the tablets show the same treatment. It probably increased ease of handling, both during and after carving, by providing a convenient hand-hold.[36] There are two lead-filled holes which would have secured the latten wire used to fasten the tablet into a painted wooden housing, which no longer survives.[37] There are several extant examples of these housings, however, which will be examined in greater detail in the following chapters.

The reverse side of the tablet includes two additional elements of more recent date. In the upper right portion of the back is a tag from the Society of Antiquaries exhibition of 1910. A Canadian Customs stamp is in the centre-left section of the back. These are important in establishing the provenance of the tablet.

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[35]Hope, 18. These patterns are visible on many English alabaster relief carvings of all types and consist of five white dots surrounding one red spot.

[36]Cheetham, 25.

[37]Ibid., 24-25, and Hope, 13-14.

The Spilsbury Head of St. John is an outstanding example of the class of alabaster tablets with this iconographic theme. The next chapter will examine the typological schemes developed by early scholars of alabaster St. John's Heads, and provide a detailed description of other examples of these tablets.

Chapter II

Typological Schemes for Alabaster Heads of St. John and Catalogue of Published Examples

Two major typologies have been developed for St. John's Heads, one by William St. John Hope and the second by Francis Cheetham. Hope based his on the twenty-seven tablets known to him.[1] He divided these into the following four types:

A. Those in which the head appears alone, with an accessory at the base;

B. Those in which the head is flanked by two figures, with an accessory at the base;

C. Those with accessories added at the top; and

D. Those with other saints added to the original pair.[2]

Hope observed that the central subject always represented the head of St. John the Baptist on a dish. In each of his examples of those tablets with flanking saints, the dexter saint always represented St. Peter, usually standing but occasionally sitting or kneeling. He is nearly always tonsured and bearded, and sometimes wears the triple tiara of papal authority. The opposite figure in every instance but one was an archbishop in an alb, cope and mitre. In most examples, he carries a cross-staff with his left hand and holds a book in his right, but in some carvings he is shown blessing with his right hand instead. St. Paul replaces the archbishop in the one known exception.

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[1]Hope, 14.

[2]Ibid., 12-13.

The base accessory, again with one exception, is either the Holy Lamb or the half-length figure of the Lord standing in a sepulchre. This latter representation is also called the "Lord's Pity." In a single example of variance from these two normative schemes, the base accessory depicts a seated figure of the Virgin and Child.

The figure of Christ in those carvings with the "Lord's Pity" always wears a crown of thorns or torse (a heavy material twisted around Christ's head representing the crown of thorns). His hands are arranged in one of several standard formats conveying the idea of the Suffering or imprisoned Christ. The variations include: those in which the hands are bound and extend before the body or the sepulchre; those with the hands extended palms-out to display the nail-prints; those with one or both hands pointing to wounds on the body; those with one hand raised in benediction and the other extended down or pointing to the side wound; and a similar type where one hand grasps the rim of the sepulchre while the other touches the breast or points to the wounds. Hope realized these images clearly depict the Passion rather than the Resurrection, and he noted that the Holy Lamb at the base would convey the same meaning.[3] The Lamb always either looks up to the Head on the dish or is recursive - where the head is turned backwards, as on the Spilsbury alabaster.

As Hope and Cheetham describe, there are three general forms of upper accessories. These consist of examples with a single angel above the dish, those with two angels holding a cloth or napkin from which a small head emerges, or those with two angels conveying a soul to heaven, represented by a small naked figure within a pointed

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[3]Ibid., 13.

oval or mandorla. Variations of this theme include one example with a row of five angels spread across the top of the tablet, and a very unusual example with the individual crowned figures of the three Persons of the Trinity.[4]

In Hope's Type D tablets, other saints in addition to St. Peter and the archbishop also flank the dish. On the tablets of this type studied by Hope, St. Catherine appeared on four, St. James the Great and St. Margaret on two each, and St. Christopher on one. Two other tablets had one saint each which he could not easily identify.[5]

By the time Francis Cheetham wrote his 1984 book, English Medieval Alabasters, over a century had passed and many additional St. John's heads were available for study.[6] His typology is similar to Hope's, but is arranged somewhat differently, for it emphasizes the differences in base accessories, and gives less importance to the number of flanking saints used. Although he agrees that complex compositions are probably later than the simple ones, Cheetham believes the substitution of the "Lord's Pity" for the Holy Lamb "does not necessarily...suggest a chronological sequence."[7] He uses six, rather than four categories in his typological scheme:

A. Those with the carved head only, with no dish, background panel, or additional figures.

B. Tablets which show the saint's head with the dish as the background, but without base accessories or saints. In some examples, however, two angels support the dish, standing or kneeling on either side of it.

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[4]Ibid., 13.

[5]Ibid., 13 and 38.

[6]Cheetham, 28-30, 55.

[7]Ibid., 317.

C. Those of relatively simple composition which have the Lamb, or Agnus Dei, as the base accessory, but may include upper accessories.

D. Those of relatively simple composition, but with the "Lord's Pity" replacing the Holy Lamb as the base accessory. Like Cheetham's Type C, these tablets might also have upper accessories.

E. The more complicated versions with the Lamb as the base accessory, but including flanking saints or other accessories.

F. The most common type, with the figure of the "Lord's Pity" replacing the Lamb, but including flanking saints and other accessories.

Neither Hope nor Cheetham discussed stylistic differences or similarities of the tablets they described, aside from the fact that upper accessories or additional saints might be added. A closer examination of stylistic treatments may provide clues that might assist in formulating a relative chronology for the tablets or for identifying particular workshop styles.[8] In addition, a different approach to interpreting the significance of the upper accessories and additional flanking saints might lead to different conclusions about iconographic changes and the social context of the St. John's Heads. Thus, it is important to look at as many examples as possible to make the conclusions that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

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[8]Discussion of both chronology and stylistic analysis of the St. John's Heads introduces complex problems. The relative chronology for dating the St. John's Heads rests on stylistic similarities to altarpiece carvings. The basis of the dating scheme will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but can be briefly summarized as consisting of four categories. The Early Period (c. 1340-1380) is assigned to free-standing images and the earliest horizontal reliefs. Panels of the Middle Period (c. 1380-1420) have a standard shape and design, and are distinguished by the "embattled" tops. The earliest St. John's Heads, some of which are similarly "embattled" are assigned to this period. The altar panels of the Later Middle Period (c. 1420-1450) have more diverse subject matter and often have separate traceried canopies. Some St. John's Heads are assigned to this period, based largely on their similar carving style and canopies. Based on the relatively simple composition and similarties in carving style, some Heads lacking canopies are thought to have once possessed them, and these may also be assigned to this period. Most St. John's Heads are assigned to the Late Period (c. 1450-1540) because of similarities to the altar panels of this date. These have crowded and complex compositions and deeply carved relief. Based on the simple composition and fact that it is similar in style and technique to many of the Heads with canopies, the Spilsbury Head should probably be dated to the Later Middle Period (perhaps circa 1430 - 1460).

Hope and Cheetham based their schemes on very limited numbers of examples of the alabaster Heads of St. John. There are, therefore, some examples of tablets that do not fit into any of their categories. By building on a slightly modified version of both Hope's and Cheetham's works, the known Heads can be categorized according to their different iconographic elements. To some degree, stylistic variations can also be useful in helping distinguish similarities to altarpiece of a known date and workshop. Alabasters in Cheetham's Type A and Type B, both categories of types unknown to Hope, will be discussed before describing tablets which fit in both of their typologies.

Cheetham's Type A carving has the most simple composition and consists of the Head alone, with no background, dish, or accessories. A striking example of this type came into the collection of W. L. Hildburgh in about 1926 (figure 13) and was published in articles by him in 1928 and 1937.[9] Cheetham also included the head in his English Medieval Alabasters, where he records the information that Hildburgh acquired the piece in Paris, and that it had been previously in Spain.[10] This is a most unusual piece, and quite unlike most English alabaster work. In his 1937 article, Hildburgh compares this head with one that is probably of German origin (figure 14).[11] A photograph of it also figures in a 1963 article which compares a number of Heads of St. John that the author, Y. Balogh, ascribes to English origins.[12] Cheetham explains some of the points of disagreement in his

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[9]W. L. Hildburgh, "Some Unusual Medieval English Alabaster Carvings," Antiquaries Journal VIII (1928), 62-63; and Hildburgh, "A Curious Type of Stone St. John's Head," Antiquaries Journal XVII (1937), 419-423.

[10]Cheetham, 319.

[11]Hildburgh (1937), 421.

[12]Yolande Balogh, "Une Tête de Saint Jean Gothique d'Origine Anglaise" Bulletin du Musée hongrois des beaux-arts 22 (1963), 33-39.

discussion of the Head in figure 13, the origin of which is still in some doubt. Most English St. John's Heads occur as the central feature of a class of panel relief sculpture, and only rarely as isolated objects.[13]

In many of the English St. John's Heads, the details of the eyes are often painted rather than carved, and the upper lip is represented as half clean-shaven, with the moustache just covering the edges of the mouth. In some examples the mouth is open, but many are closed. Figure 13, now at the Victoria and Albert Museum (A79-1946) has carved eyes, open mouth, darkened flesh around the eyes, bluish lips, and the painted details of the blood trickling down the face. This combination of features makes it unusual. The bluish lips, darkened flesh and trickling blood may have been added while the piece was in Spain, and these details give the Head a much different and more dramatic appearance than most English alabasters.[14]

The treatment of the hair, beard and moustache and some other details support the claim for an English origin, however. The shaven upper lip, the wound above the eye, and the high relief of the hair and beard are characteristic of English alabaster work.[15] The Head is flat at the back and there are four holes carved into the back, although none looked original to Cheetham.[16]

The isolated Head illustrated in figure 14 was also discussed in Hildburgh's 1937

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[13]Cheetham, 319.

[14]Hildburgh (1928), 62.

[15]Ibid., 62-63, and Hildburgh (1937), 421.

[16]Cheetham, 319.

article, where he notes some of the important differences between this example and the one just described.[17] It also belongs to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A31-1950) and is included in Cheetham's catalogue, but as a non-English alabaster.[18] Cheetham, like Hildburgh, believes it probably originated in Germany. The carving has a rectangular opening into a cavity at the back of the head, into which the mouth opens directly.[19] This feature is found on many of the isolated Heads from the Continent, thought to be German, but is never found on English examples. The flat surface of the neck has three holes which may suggest that the Head was designed to sit upright in a dish. English heads are always shown with the back of the head resting against the dish, rather than as upright in the dish. Hildburgh had no certain explanation for the opening, nor did he know why the mouth was carved to open into the hollow, but he suggested this might have made the heads lighter, or perhaps allowed them to act as reliquaries.[20] At least some of these heads, which Hildburgh believes originated in Westphalia,[21] were blackened with smoke, suggesting to him the possibility that candles may have been sometimes placed inside the head, illuminating the stone and shining out through the open mouth.[22] Some of the heads do not show any evidence of this blackening, however. He states that the half-open mouth may have been simply a normal development associated with the process of hollowing out

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[17]Hildburgh (1937), 419-423.

[18]Cheetham, 337.

[19]Ibid., and Hildburgh (1937), 419.

[20]Hildburgh (1937), 422-423.

[21]Ibid., 420.

[22]Ibid., 423.

the back, at the same time giving a measure of reality and horror to the representation.[23]

Both Hildburgh and Cheetham conclude that because of the differences in the treatment of the back, the absence of neck holes, and the stylistic features more typical of English work, the Head shown in figure 13 is very likely of English origin in spite of its peculiarities.

Cheetham indicates that most of his Type A St. John's Heads are on the Continent, and like figure 14, are probably not English.[24] He cites one example each of this type at the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, and in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.[25]

In addition to the Type A Head in figure 13, the only other English alabaster head of this type known to Cheetham is at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. It, however, shows evidence of having had an original background which may have been chipped away.[26]

Hope had no opportunity to study any examples of Cheetham's Type B. In this category, the Head has no base accessory, but is shown on a dish alone or on a dish upheld by supporting angels. Cheetham cites as an example a Head in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (figure 15).[27] This alabaster was published with a

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[23]Ibid.

[24]Cheetham, 317.

[25]Ibid. A brief description and photograph of this head, which looks like the German style, is published Jean Squilbeck, "Quelques Sculptures anglaises d'Albatre conservees en Belgique," Antiquaries Journal XVIII (1938), 65 and plate XXVI, 2.

[26]Ibid. A photograph of the head is published in Balogh, 36, #20.

[27]Ibid.

photograph by Nelson in 1925.[28]

The dish shows the remains of an inscription, identifying the subject, "Caput iohannis baptiste." The hair is arranged in three points across the forehead, and divided into three pointed curls on each side of the head. The beard has two long pointed curls. The wound appears to have been painted on the forehead, and much of the colour has flaked off the eyes. Nelson states that the background is green, like that on most St. John's Heads including the Spilsbury alabaster.[29] Although the photograph is not very clear, the groups of daisy-like flowers are still visible. The only other two examples of this type known to Cheetham are located in the Ipswich Museum and in the Castle Museum at Norwich.[30]

Cheetham's remaining categories are based on the same elements that Hope used for his typology, with a slightly different emphasis. Hope's method built from the simplest to the most complex composition. Thus, his first category includes those tablets with the central Head and a base accessory, regardless of whether that accessory was the Holy Lamb or the "Lord's Pity." He believed, in fact, that these two images conveyed the same idea.[31] His remaining three categories add other elements, beginning with the two flanking saints - nearly always St. Peter and the archbishop; then those with upper accessories, such as the angels or the soul; and finally, those with additional flanking saints. Hope does

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[28]Nelson (1925) 33, and plate 2.

[29]Ibid., 33.

[30]Cheetham, 317.

[31]Hope, 12-13.

not specifically state that the increasing complexity of design indicates a relative chronology, but this seems implied.

Clement Pitman, in his 1954 article on Nottingham alabaster carving states, "The earliest format of the plaque was the saint's head alone; then alone on a dish. This was evidently followed by the Baptist's head on a dish above an Agnus Dei, perhaps at first no more than a concession to an illiterate clientele."[32]

That this was a concession to an illiterate clientele is debatable. This combination probably had more significance than Pitman allows. Pitman, however, believes that the tablets can be dated according to whether they have the Lamb or the "Lord's Pity" as the base accessory. According to his theory, the "Lord's Pity" replaced the Holy Lamb "somewhere between 1444 and 1450."[33] He arrives at this date through his belief that the "Lord's Pity" reflects direct Franciscan influences, and that the death and canonization dates of the Franciscan, St. Bernardino of Siena, provided the impetus for the change in representation in the base of the tablets. He claims that Franciscan friars had been in Nottingham since 1230, and that it was a result of their influence that the change in iconography took place.[34] If the Fransiscan influence had been so strong since such an early date, however, it seems unlikely that this alone could account for an iconographic change a mere twenty or thirty years after the St. John's Heads were first produced.

Cheetham also clearly disagrees, explicitly stating that the choice of base

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[32]Clement F. Pitman, "Reflections on Nottingham Alabaster Carving" Connoisseur CXXXIII (1954), 223.

[33]Ibid., 224.

[34]Ibid.

accessories cannot be used as an indication of chronological development.[35] He uses the base accessory, combined with the relative complexity of design for his typology. In addition to the two types with examples not known to Hope, the rest of the carvings are divided into four categories according to whether they have the Holy Lamb alone or with an upper accessory, the "Lord's Pity" alone or with upper accessories, the Holy Lamb with saints added, or the "Lord's Pity" with additional saints.[36] Thus, his Type C includes relatively simple tablets with the Lamb and Head, just as Hope's does; but his also includes those with accessories at the top, as long as it is the Lamb, rather than the "Lord's Pity" found below the Head. Those tablets with the figure of the "Lord's Pity" and possibly including upper accessories, are assigned to Cheetham's Type D.[37] The more complex tablets with flanking saints, regardless of the identity or number shown, are assigned to Cheetham's Types E and F. Those of Type E have the Lamb as the base accessory, and those in Type F have the "Lord's Pity" in its place.[38] Since some very complicated compositions in Type E have the Holy Lamb as the base accessory and some very simple compositions in Type D have the "Lord's Pity," the choice of base accessory does not seem to suggest a chronological sequence.[39]

Figures 16-20 illustrate St. John's Heads that roughly conform to Hope's Type A and Cheetham's Types C and D. The tablet shown in figure 16 was owned by John Parker

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[35]Cheetham, 317.

[36]Cheetham, 317.

[37]Ibid., 317-318.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 317.

when Hope included an engraving of it in his study of St. John's Heads.[40] It fits Hope's Type A, and Cheetham's Type C.[41] Hope noted that it differed in style and excution from other examples, and suggested that it might be earlier in date. This implies that Hope believed some chronological sequence could be inferred from the relative complexity of composition.

The beard is short and rounded, but it is not quite possible to tell how the moustache is depicted. The eyes appear to be closed, but this may be because painted detail is missing. Hope notes the absence of the wound over the eye, but again, it is not known if a cut had been painted rather than carved and has since disappeared, or if the feature was ever present on this Head. The long hair is parted in the middle and hangs down on each side where it ends in points. The Holy Lamb is seated directly on the ground and looks up toward the head in the centre. There is no book.

Another of Hope's Type A panels is shown in figure 17.[42] This tablet is mentioned by Cheetham in the discussion of his Type D figures.[43] In his description of the piece, Hope points out the typical English manner of depicting the moustache above the corners of the mouth. The hair on this carving is arranged in five pointed locks across the forehead, and is straight at the sides. Unlike the long hair in figure 16, however, that in figure 17 is cut straight across just beneath the ears. The beard is straight and rounded,

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[40]Hope, 14.

[41]Cheetham, 317.

[42]Hope, 15-16.

[43]Cheetham, 317.

but both the hair and beard show the deep carving typical of English alabaster work. Gilding on the hair and beard has been applied over red-brown paint, and much of the colouring remains. Like figure 16, there is no evidence of a wound above the eye. The eyes are painted as open. The dish is plain except for red paint around the edges. The base accessory in figure 17 is the half-length figure of Christ rising from a plain sepulchre, which is flanked by two rather odd-looking trees. The figure of Christ has black hair, and wears the crown of thorns or torse. His left hand is upraised, and his right is pressed against his side. The tablet remains in its original housing, but the doors are missing.

Another tablet of striking similarity to figure 17 is mentioned by Cheetham[44] and was published by Nelson.[45] This St. John's Head belonged to Grosvenor Thomas when Nelson published it (figure 18). Much of the upper right side of the table has been chipped away, but it seems evident from the photograph in Nelson's article that it had neither upper accessories nor flanking saints. The "Lord's Pity" is shown as the base accessory, and this tablet is similar to figure 17 in many of its stylistic elements. Although the hair on the Thomas alabaster is arranged in three rather than five points, it uses this particular device, as well as the straight cut of the hair just below the ears. The beard and moustache are also similar, showing the same incised carving to represent the hair. The "Lord's Pity" rises from a plain undecorated sepulchre which is flanked by an odd double-sprig plant. The placement of the arms is different, however, in that the hands are crossed in front of the tomb in the Thomas tablet.

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[44]Ibid., 317.

[45]Nelson (1920), 219 and plate VII.

A Head of relatively simple composition cited by Cheetham in his discussion of the Type C tablets was not known to Hope (figure 19). This tablet, like that in figure 18, once belonged to Grosvenor Thomas. It is thought to have been found in Wells and was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum by W. L. Hildburgh, who acquired it about 1926 from Philip Nelson.[46] It differs from Hope's Type A in that it has an accessory added at the top. The head of an angel peers over the top of the dish, which has a scarlet rim. The edges of the angel's wings are shown above and behind the dish. The wings are red with flecks of white and black. Cheetham states that the top of the panel appears to have been repaired with new alabaster and that some of the paint on the angel's wings looks modern.[47] Nelson describes the angel's hair as yellow and the book as red with a darker red clasp. He also noted that the background of the lower half of the panel was green with large flowers having white petals and red centres. The upper half was decorated at the time of his publication with black floral sprays.[48] The illustration which accompanied Nelson's description in 1917 shows that much of the red leaf pattern then visible near the rim of the plate has almost completely disappeared. Very little of this design can be seen in the photograph in Cheetham's catalogue. Similarly, many of the painted facial details are less clearly defined in the later photograph.

Although the shape of the face differs from the Parker tablet in figure 16, this Head has many elements in common with it. In addition to the common base accessory of the

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[46]Cheetham, 320.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Nelson (1917), 110.

Holy Lamb, some stylistic features are quite similar. The hair is represented as long and straight, parted in the centre and extending down on each side of the head to form points. The beard is straight and rounded, although that in figure 19 is somewhat more rounded and deeply incised than that in figure 16. In each, the Holy Lamb is seated directly on the ground, with its head turned up to view the Head above it. In figure 19, the clasped book has been set up on its edges behind the Lamb, and a cross is visible behind the Lamb. In spite of the additional elements in figure 19, these two tablets are more alike stylistically than either is to the alabasters in figures 17 and 18.

This, of course, is not to imply that the straight hair, rounded beard, and Holy Lamb are always found together, and that the disposition of the hair across the forehead in points always goes with the base accessory of the "Lord's Pity". The combination of various elements might, however, indicate the individual styles used or choices made by different workshops.

A tablet having a slightly different treatment is discussed by Cheetham. This design, which fits in Hope's Type A and Cheetham's Type C, shows the dish with the Head of St. John being held by two angels, and the Holy Lamb seated on the ground beneath. A fragment of this type was published by Hope.[49] As it is only a small portion of a tablet showing the remains of the lower sinister side (figure 20), Hope admits the possibility that if complete, the panel might be of the more elaborate type. An inscription on the reverse describes the item as a fragment of a representation of St. John's head in a charger, and notes: "Powder of it is said to have done great service to sore eyes, especially where there

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[49]Hope (1891), 17.

was a white speck. Given by Dr. Huddesford, President of Trin. Coll. and keeper of y(e) Museum [Ashmolean Museum, Oxford] Oct. 11. 1746. in whose family y(e) whole formerly was."[50]

The most striking feature of this tablet is the clothing of the angel. He is covered with gold feathers or scales. One pair of wings is attached to his shoulders, and a second, with what looks like peacock feathers, painted red, is attached to his hips.[51] This costume is found on many of the representation of angels on the English alabaster altarpiece tablets. The possible derivation and significance of this feature will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3.

The Lamb at the base, like that shown in the previous examples, lies directly on the ground, but here the head is recursive, turned backwards rather than upwards. It is also clear that the beard and hair is treated quite differently than in any of the examples noted above. The beard is divided into two long curls, and the hair seems to be disposed along the sides of the head in pointed curls.

A similar, but more complete head of this style can be seen in figure 21, which at the time of its publication by Nelson in 1925 was in the Museum at Orléans.[52] The top has been damaged, so it is impossible to determine if there might have been upper accessories in the original composition. This head was not known to Hope, nor is it mentioned by Cheetham. This plaque, which seems to be of extremely fine quality and detail, has two

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[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Nelson (1925), 33 and plate I-1.

angels in feathered costumes supporting the charger holding the head of St. John. Beneath the dish is the Holy Lamb. Like the fragment in figure 20, the Lamb is seated directly on the ground and the head is reverted. An unusual feature of this tablet is the scroll above the Lamb's head, the words of which are no longer visible.

The details on the head of St. John appear to be finely carved. His beard is divided in the centre and falls into two soft, long curls. The hair about his head is also a mass of curls, but rather than a part in the centre, the hair seems to be disposed in curls across the forehead, although these are much less stylized than those points in figures 15, 17, and 18. The hair and beard are more naturalistic than those seen before, with the exception of the head of probable German origin in figure 14.

The Spilsbury alabaster (figure 22) is the only example of Hope's Type B with the Lamb as the base accessory. All others in his Type B have the "Lord's Pity" replacing the Lamb. This plaque would be classed by Cheetham as his Type E, although it is not specifically mentioned by him. The stylistic elements of this tablet show a combination of those in figures 16 and 19 on one hand, and figures 20 and 21 on the other. The treatment of the hair and beard is quite similar to the former, while the reverted head of the Lamb at the base is closer to the latter. It differs from both previous sets in that the Lamb is seated on a clasped book rather than on the ground, and in the inclusion of the two flanking saints.

The rest of the tablets described by Hope in his Type B have relatively simple compositions with the central Head, the two flanking saints, and the figure of the "Lord's Pity" at the base. Three examples of this type can be seen in figures 23-25. Each of these

is assigned to Cheetham's Type F. Cheetham specifically refers to the example in figure 23 as a tablet of this class that omits the upper accessory.[53]

When Hope published his description and photograph of figure 23, the tablet was at Ratcliffe College, Leicester.[54] The dish is plain, without any decoration on the rim. The treatment of the hair, beard, and features of the central head resembles that of figures 17 and 18. Like the latter two, the Ratcliffe College Head has the hair arranged in pointed locks over the forehead and cut straight just below the ears. The side locks are curlier, and the beard shows a slight division into curls at the bottom, but the stylistic elements are similar to the other examples.

Hope described the colouring as original and almost perfect.[55] The hair and beard were painted a dark colour and then gilded. The eyes were painted as open, and the wound over the left eye was carved into the stone. The base accessory is the figure of the "Lord's Pity," the half-length figure of Christ standing in the tomb, clothed in a loincloth and wearing a crown of thorns or torse. The disposition of the hands in this example is the variation in which the left hand is extended to show the palm wound, while the right hand touches the breast. According to Hope, the tomb was painted blue, with groups of white spots.[56] The figures of the flanking saints were richly coloured. St. Peter's robe was red with a gold collar and border. His book, unlike that on the Spilsbury alabaster, is

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[53]Cheetham, 318.

[54]Hope (1891), 18-19.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid., 19.

open. The archbishop on the Ratcliffe College tablet wears a gold amice, white alb, and blue cope. His book is closed and has a floral spray on the cover. The field below the central Head is dark green, with daisy patterns of white and red spots.[57]

The example illustrated in figure 24 belonged to the Rev. Canon Stokes of Weston Underwood, Olney, when Hope described it in his paper.[58] Several of its stylistic features are unusual. The hair, while parted in the middle, is curled back to the sides and away from the face. The facial features are carefully carved, and the eyes are shown as half-open.[59] Yet, in spite of the care given to the expression and craftsmanship of the central head, the proportions of the flanking saints are uneven, giving a rather strange, unbalanced appearance. The figure of Christ at the base emerges from the tomb and as in figure 18, the hands extend and cross in front of the sepulchre. Another similarity is the deep carving of the hollow of the top of the tomb on either side of the figure of Christ.

St. Peter wears a robe and cope originally lined with red and edged with gold.[60] The closed book in his left hand has a green cover, and he holds a large gold key in his right. The archbishop has a large mitre, plain alb and cope, the edges of which have traces of gilding. His pointed shoes and the book he holds in his right hand are painted dark green. Like many of the other tablets, the lower portion of the background is dark green with white and red dots. The field above the head is plain.

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[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid., 20.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

This tablet is one of the "Embattled" types. Nelson believed this class of alabasters with a battlemented canopy or cornice projecting from the top of the tablet could be dated to about 1430 at the earliest and assigned to workshops in York or Nottingham.[61] The same date and workshop location applied to both altar-pieces and devotional tablets such as the St. John's Heads. This theory will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. The double canopy of figure 24 has an embattled cornice and short round pinnacles. The coving is red and the canopy has traces of gold.[62] The names of some of the former owners of this tablet are scratched on the back, most with seventeenth century dates.[63]

Figure 25 illustrates another of the embattled St. John's Heads. It was not known to Hope, who would have placed it in his Type B, nor is it mentioned by Cheetham. Like the examples above, this tablet would fit into Cheetham's Type F. This alabaster was once owned by Mr. S. Richards and was published by Nelson in 1914.[64]

The treatment of the hair and beard show similarities to figure 24 in that the hair is long and flowing, parted in the centre, and curled back away from the forehead. The dish appears to be plain, and Nelson makes no comment about any decoration or colour on it. The figure of Christ standing in the tomb is close in style to that in figure 17, however. The tomb does not have a carved hollow at the top of the sepulchre, but like figure 17, it has the appearance of a rectangle from which the figure emerges. Like the "Pity" in figure

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[61]Nelson, "English Alabasters of the Embattled Type" Archaeological Journal LXXIV (1917), 105-21.

[62]Hope (1891), 20.

[63]Ibid., among the names are "Thomas Warren fecit 1635," "William Lambert 1638," "Henry Brown 1640," "John Rodgers 1640" or "1649," "ffrancis ffryth 1652," and "S. Hynam."

[64]Nelson, "Some Examples of English Medieval Alabaster Work" Archaeological Journal LXXI (1914), 164-5, and plate V, no. 1.

17, figure 25 has the left hand uplifted and the right holding or pointing to the side. The torse on the head is green.[65]

Nelson does not mention any colours on the garments of either flanking saint, but he notes the green background with white spots beneath the dish. He also mentions the open book in St. Peter's left hand. Unlike the canopy of figure 24, this example has three panels of openwork tracery and four pinnacles beneath the embattled cornice.[66]

Figure 26 illustrates an example of Hope's Type C St. John's Head - similar to Type B except for the addition of an accessory at the top. Like figures 23-25, this tablet fits in Cheetham's Type F category. This alabaster from the Leicester Museum[67] is unusual in that it retains its original wooden (oak) housing, and much of its original colouring, giving a good idea of the way these tablets must have looked, and how they might have been displayed when the doors were opened. This housing, like most that survive, has two hinged doors attached to the main box which has a gabled top. Hope states that the outside of the case is quite plain.[68]

The long hair of the central head is parted in the centre, and the beard is slightly divided at the end. Both hair and beard are gilded. The eyes are painted as open, and the wound on the forehead is painted rather than carved. Trickles of blood have been painted on either side of the nose, recalling the painted details on the isolated Head in figure 13.

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[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid., 165.

[67]Hope (1891), 24.

[68]Ibid.

The figure of Christ rises from a light brown tomb, upon which are black spots.[69] The inside has been carved or painted to indicate a hollow, like that in figures 18 and 24. In this case, however, the figure raises his left hand, but the right is held down in front of the tomb, or perhaps grasping the edge of it.

The figure of St. Peter is clothed in a white robe with gold buttons, and a white cloak or cope edged with gold and lined with red.[70] His key appears to be red rather than gold, and decorated with black spiral details. The book he holds is black with gold edges. The archbishop wears a white mitre with gold orphreys, amice, and alb with gold edges and red buttons, and a white cope with gold edges and red lining.[71] The staff of his cross is red with black spiral decorations much like St. Peter's key, and the cross itself is gilded. His closed book appears to be green.

Like figure 19, the head of an angel with outstretched wings has been added as an upper accessory. The hair and wings of the angel are gilded, and the wings appear to have feather details or simply spots painted in a darker colour. The embattled canopy above the angel is gold and powdered with black spots. The background beneath the central head is dark green, but the daisy pattern is absent. The painting on the interior of the housing consists of red and black leafwork on a white background. The doors are divided into upper and lower panels separated by a band of leafwork. The upper and lower panels are painted dark green with red tracery outlines. A raised boss is in the centre of each of the

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[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Ibid.

four motifs. The upper motif on the dexter door and lower motif of the sinister door consists of a ring within which is a white rose with red centre on a black ground. The lower dexter and upper sinister motifs are gold stars of alternating straight and wavy rays over a red ground. Hope notes, "These devices possibly represent the white rose and blazing sun of the House of York."[72] The possible significance of these designs, both in terms of dating and context, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The next examples show how some of the same stylistic elements are used in increasingly complex compositions. The tablet illustrated in figure 27 was not known to Hope, nor does Cheetham mention it specifically in his examples of different types of St. John's heads. It would be classed as Hope's Type C, with its central Head and base accessory, flanking saints, and the added accessory at the top. Cheetham would class it as his Type E - one of the more complicated versions of the Agnus Dei tablets. This carving was published by Clement Pitman in 1954[73], when it was owned by S. W. Wolsey of London. He describes it as an example of the fully developed type of Agnus Dei tablet whose combined iconography and technique suggest a date from about 1450-1460.[74]

The central head shows the hair arranged in points across the forehead, like that in figures 17, 18, and 23. In these previous examples, however, the base accessory was the figure of the "Lord's Pity." The beard in figure 27 is divided into two curls which are more pronounced than any examples seen before, with the possible exception of that in the

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[72]Ibid., 25.

[73]Pitman (1954), 222-224.

[74]Ibid.

fragment illustrated in figure 20. There does not appear to be any cut on the forehead.

The base accessory is the Holy Lamb, seated directly on the ground, and like that in figures 20, 21, and the Spilsbury tablet, the head is recursive. The background is dark green with the characteristic groups of spots clearly seen behind the Lamb. St. Peter holds the key in his right hand, and the book in his left is closed. The archbishop is also typical of other tablets, except that he is shown blessing with his right hand instead of holding a book.

The upper accessory in this case shows three heads which appear to represent two angels holding a napkin containing a soul. Only the head is visible above the edge of the napkin. Visually and compositionally, this is similar to the idea of the angel head flanked by wings above the plate, as seen in figures 19 and 26. Iconographically, however, it may represent a change or distinct variation from the latter. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

A very similar tablet (figure 28) was illustrated by Hope as another example of his Type C.[75] It is not mentioned specifically by Cheetham, but it would be classed as his Type F. The tablet once belonged to J. B. Nichols and figured in the research pertaining to the identification of the central Head as St. John the Baptist.[76] Like figure 27, the hair is arranged across the forehead and around the head in "corkscrew" curls, and the beard is similarly divided into two tight, pointed curls. Hope notes the absence of the cut on the forehead.

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[75]Hope (1891), 26-27 and plate XXII, no. 2.

[76]Ibid., 26, where Hope notes that it is one of two referred to by Nichols in the Gentleman's Magazine for 1824, Part ii, 209.

The Holy Lamb at the base is seated directly on the ground, and like that in figure 27 and others noted above, it appears to be recursive rather than looking up. It is not possible to be certain about this as the head has been damaged. The field behind is painted dark green and the characteristic spots are visible in the photograph. St. Peter wears an amice, alb, and white cope edged with gold and lined with red. His authority is symbolized by the triple-tiered mitre. Like other examples, he holds a key in his right hand and a closed book in his left.

Like figure 27, this tablet has an upper accessory consisting of two angels holding a napkin, from which issues a small human figure with gilded hair. Hope states that the wings of the angels are red and their hair is gilded.[77] The archbishop is very similar to that on figure 27 in that he is shown blessing with his right hand rather than holding a book. Like other examples, he holds a cross in his left hand. According to Hope, his white cope, like St. Peter's, is lined with red. This tablet, like figures 24 and 25, has a projecting embattled canopy which, according to Hope, is painted with black stripes on top and splashed with black underneath.[78]

Two examples unknown to Hope but described and illustrated by Cheetham show some striking similarities to figures 27 and 28 except for the substitution of the "Lord's Pity" in place of the Holy Lamb as the base accessory. They are both classed by Cheetham as Type F tablets. The first of these, shown in figure 29, was given to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A127C-1946) by W. L. Hildburgh in 1946. He had

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[77]Ibid., 27.

[78]Ibid.

acquired it from Philip Nelson in 1926. It was formerly in the Caldicott Collection (Hastings).[79]

The treatment of the hair and beard is almost identical to that in figure 27, but the beard is not so tightly curled as that on the Head in figure 28. The hair is arranged similarly to both former examples. The forehead wound, however, is clearly shown on the tablet in figure 29, and it is missing on the two previous examples. The edge of the dish is coloured red.[80]

St. Peter does not wear the triple crown, but is tonsured and bearded, wearing an alb, amice, and cloak or cope fastened with a brooch. Cheetham describes the folds of St. Peter's cloak as red. He holds the key, which has been damaged, and a closed book in his hands. The archbishop also wears the girded alb and amice with cloak or cope fastened with a brooch. Cheetham does not mention the colors. The archbishop's slippered feet can be seen beneath the hem of his garments. He holds his cross in his left hand, and like the examples above, he blesses with his right. The same type of upper accessories and embattled canopy are above the central Head. The head of the soul appears above the napkin held by the two angels with their red wings decorated with black and white spots. The canopy has four turrets, but no mention is made of any remaining colour.

The significant difference between figure 29 and the two that precede it is the substitution of the "Lord's Pity" for the Holy Lamb as the base accessory. The disposition of the hands is quite similar to that in figure 23 except that the left hand seems to be

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[79]Cheetham, 325.

[80]Ibid.

grasping the edge of the tomb rather than showing the nail-print in the palm. Like figure 23, there is no hollow in the tomb around Christ's figure. An important difference in this tablet is the addition of a mandorla surrounding the figure of Christ. The back of the mandorla is green, according to Cheetham.[81] The background beneath the dish is also dark green with the characteristic groups of white and red spots.

Another very similar tablet is illustrated by Cheetham (figure 30) and is also in the Victoria and Albert Museum (AII-1914).[82] This carving came from the church at Yarnton, Oxfordshire, and was bought by the Museum from E. Holmes Jewitt in 1914.[83] It is almost identical to figure 29 and has many features in common with figures 27 and 28. Like figure 29, the projecting embattled canopy has four turrets. The upper accessories are the same, with the head of the soul emerging from the centre of the napkin held by two angels with red wings, upon which remain flecks of white. In figures 28-30, the angels have one hand holding the napkin and one outstretched.

The shape of the face, treatment of the hair, beard and moustache are very similar to figure 29. The major difference between these two tablets is the apparent absence of the head wound clearly seen in figure 28. The dish has the words "(C)aput sci Johis Baptiste" painted in black on the rim.[84]

St. Peter, in his usual garb, is bearded and tonsured. He holds the key in his right

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[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid., 324.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid.

hand and a closed book in his left. The archbishop holds the cross staff in his left hand and, as in the last three examples, blesses with his right. The figure of Christ, standing in a grey-black tomb, is surrounded by a dark green mandorla edged with red.[85] The hands are held in the same position as in figure 29.

The similarity of compositional and stylistic devises chosen for the last four tablets would seem to support Hope's theory that the Holy Lamb and the "Lord's Pity" are interchangeable. It also adds weight to Cheetham's belief that the use of the Lamb or "Pity" should not necessarily be interpreted in terms of chronological development. These carvings are close enough stylistically to have been products of the same workshop, and yet combine some different elements, including the base accessories.

Figure 31 shows another example of Hope's Type C and Cheetham's Type F, although it was unknown to Hope and Cheetham makes no specific mention of it. When it was published by W. L. Hildburgh in 1931,[86] the carving was in the museum of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society which had received it from a local family in whose home it had long been. This alabaster is unusual in two respects. It still retains its wooden case, which Hildburgh mentions as "practically in its original condition."[87] He does not describe the painting on the doors or within the housing itself. The poor quality of the photograph makes any definite comparisons to the housing in figure 26 impossible. There appear to be some general similarities, however. For instance, the two doors are

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[85]Ibid.

[86]Hildburgh, "Miscellaneous Notes Concerning English Alabaster Carvings" Archaeological Journal LXXXVIII (1931), 242-243 and plate X-A.

[87]Ibid., 243.

divided into three sections each, with motifs in the upper and lower corners of each panel and a floral or leafy band between the corner motifs. Furthermore, the red tracery outline that surrounds the four corner motifs of the housing in figure 26 is very much like the design formed by an outline in the the corner motifs of figure 31. The central element of at least two of the motifs in figure 31 appears to be comparable to the sunburst pattern in the figure 26 housing.

The second unusual feature of this tablet is the substitution of St. Paul for St. Peter. Instead of the keys, the figure holds a sword in his right hand and a book in his left. Hildburgh states that in his experience, this is a unique example where the dexter figure is not St. Peter.[88] Hope mentions a different St. John's Head, which he knew only from an engraving, having St. Paul in place of the archbishop in the sinister position.[89]

The other elements of this tablet are like many discussed above. The eyes, however, appear to be closed. The hair is arranged in three points across the forehead much like that in figure 23, and the treatment of the beard is also similar. Although much of the original colouring remains, there is no trace of the wound above the eye. The base

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[88]Ibid., note 1.

[89]Hope (1891), 31-32. Hope notes that the engraving was published in 1746 when it belonged to Rev. W. Stukeley. This piece will be discussed in greater detail in the section of examples described by Hope but not illustrated in his survey. Hope mentions several peculiarities in this tablet - the whole-length naked figure of Christ is seated on a rock or seat with his hands bound. St. Peter has the triple crowned mitre as bishop of Rome and holds in his left hand a model of a church with a spire rather than the ususual book. The key is in his right. The sinister figure is St. Paul with an open book. Additional saints include a crowned St. Catharine above St. Peter, and a crowned St. Margaret above St. Paul. He quotes Mr. J. G. Nichols' note in Bury Wills and Inventories, which suggests the substitution of St. Paul is "probably the draughtsman's misapprehension, from the crosier of St. Thomas having been broken in the original." This seems most unlikely. As more records about the Heads of St. John have come to light, as well as additional tablets themselves, it is now obvious that the tablets were made in very large quantities over a relatively short period of time. If the "crosier of St. Thomas" had been broken, it seems probable that many other examples would have been available to the craftsman, or that fellow workers in the shop would have noticed and corrected the error. An alternative explanation will be discussed in Chapter IV.

accessory is the "Lord's Pity" and like that in figure 23, the hands are arranged so that the left is extended with the palm facing out and the right is pointed to the breast. The upper accessory shows two angels with the napkin from which a small head emerges. This was one of the embattled carvings, but much of the pierced tracery has been damaged. Hildburgh believed it would have been the triple-gabled kind, similar to that in figure 25. The archbishop is like that on other tablets. It is not possible to determine if he holds a book or blesses with his right hand, but he seems to carry a cross-staff in his left, and is wearing the usual attire.

Figure 32 illustrates a tablet given to the Victoria and Albert Museum by W. L. Hildburgh in 1946 (A127D-1946) and published in Cheetham's catalogue. Hildburgh had acquired it from Philip Nelson, and it had formerly been in the collection of E. Holmes Jewitt. It was found in the church at Yarnton, Oxfordshire.[90] It was unknown to Hope, but should be assigned to his Type C. It belongs to Cheetham's Type F.

This example has long straight hair parted in the centre and ending in points below the chin like that in figure 16. The eyes also appear to be closed. The hair and the spade-shaped beard have gilding applied over a browinsh primer. There is no indication of the head wound. The figure of Christ rises from a rectangular tomb which has been hollowed out to form an edge. The disposition of the hands of the figure is similar to figure 31, with the left hand extended in front of the sepulchre and the right pointing to the side or breast. The background is green with the usual daisy pattern.

The flanking saints are in the standard form, except for one feature. Each holds a

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[90]Cheetham, 323.

closed book, but the sleeve of each figure's cloak covers the hand carrying the book. The upper accessory is that of the two angels holding the napkin from which the head emerges. These angels wear ecclesiastical garments, and Cheetham notes that their wings are red flecked with white around black dots.[91]

Another example not known to Hope, but published in Cheetham's catalogue is one given to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Hildburgh in 1946, and on loan since 1926 (A127B-1946). This alabaster (figure 33) was also acquired by Hildburgh from Philip Nelson. It was formerly in the possession of Grovesnor Thomas and is believed to have been found at Wells.[92] Nelson first published it in 1917.[93] It should be assigned to Hope's Type D since it has additional flanking saints. Cheetham assigns it to his Type F.

The head of St. John has a rounded beard, and the moustache is shown in the usual manner with the upper lip half clean-shaven. The eyes are painted as open and there is no indication of the head wound above the eye. The hair, like that in figure 15, is arranged in three corkscrew curls on either side of the head. There are three points of hair across the forehead such as that in figures 15, 18, and 23. The hair and beard have traces of brownish paint, over which gilding has been applied.

The base accessory is the "Lord's Pity". Similar to figure 32, the left hand is extended in front of the moulded edge of the tomb, but his right indicates the wound at his side. The daisy pattern on the green ground beneath the charger is quite clear. The upper

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[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid., 331.

[93]Nelson (1917), 110-111 and plate V-2.

accessory has the two angels holding a cloth containing a soul, with the head only visible above the edge of the napkin. St. Peter carries the key in his right hand and a closed book in his left. Like figure 32, the sleeves of the saints' cloaks cover the hands that hold the books. The archbishop carries the cross-staff in his left hand. Unlike any examples seen before, the two flanking saints are shown kneeling rather than standing. The half-length figure of St. James the Great stands behind St. Peter. He wears a pilgrim's hat, gown and cloak and holds a closed book in his left hand and a staff in his right. The bearded half-length figure behind the archbishop is probably St. Anthony, holding a closed book in his right hand and a staff in his left.[94]

The tablet illustrated in figure 34 was published by Hope as an example of his Type D alabaster.[95] It is not specifically mentioned by Cheetham but would be classed as his Type F. When Hope described the tablet, it was in the Amport Church, Hampshire. According to Hope, it was found in a house at Amport around 1860 or 1870, and was at the time of his writing "cemented to a black marble slab and fixed to the wall in the south transept of the church over a fire-place in the Marquess of Winchester's pew."[96] Like figures 25 and 31, this carving is of the embattled type with triple gables of open tracery. This canopy would have been carved separately and then attached to the main tablet within its housing. Thus, it is possible that many other examples have lost their canopies, just as they are missing their housings.

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[94]Ibid.

[95]Hope (1891), 33-34 and plate XXV.

[96]Ibid., 34.

The Head of St. John has the hair arranged in three points across the forehead (as in figures 23, 27, 31, and 33). The long hair hangs down each side of the head in soft curls. The beard is divided into two pointed curls (as in figures 15, 27, 28, 29, and 30). Hope states that the hair and beard are gilded, the eyes painted open with blue irises, and that the lips and eyebrows are also painted.[97] Although he notes that the whole of its original colouring is in an unusual state of preservation, there is no cut on the brow. The dish behind St. John still retains an inscription: "+ Caput --- + --- [S]ancte + 'istorie +" which Hope translates as "The head of holy writ."[98] The rim of the dish is red.

The base accessory is the half-length "Lord's Pity" standing in a tomb which is painted black with white drops. This combination of colours, like the oblique angle of the tomb, is similar to that in figure 26 which has a grey-white tomb with black dots. The tomb in figure 31 shows similar patterns as well. The disposition of the hands is like figures 29-33. The left hand grasps the edge of the tomb, which has a carved hollow around the figure. The right points to the side or breast. Hope states that the eyes of the central Head and edge of the loincloth on the "Lord's Pity" are painted blue, and the torse a dark green.

As usual, the dexter figure is St. Peter, who wears a white robe and mantle, both of which have a gold border edged with blue. The mantle is lined with red. The book in his left hand is dark blue with a white leaf pattern and gilded edges. The key in his right

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[97]Ibid., 33.

[98]Ibid.

hand is gold.[99] The archbishop has a gold-edged mitre, and wears an alb and white cope, which like St. Peter's vestments are bordered with gold and blue, with the cope lined in red. Like the tablets in figures 27-30, the archbishop carries no book but raises his right hand in blessing. In this example, however, his hand is covered with a white glove with blue tassel. He carries his tall gold cross in his left hand as usual. The upper accessory is the same combination seen in figures 27-33, where the two angels hold a cloth edged with red, from which emerges the head of a soul. Like most of the previous examples, the angels wear white albs and amices and have red wings with dots, which Hope compares to the eyes of peacock's feathers.[100]

Like figure 33, this tablet includes two additional saints, but in this case they represent half-length figures of St. Margaret and St. Catharine. St. Margaret is shown above St. Peter, holding a large gold cross-staff in her right hand and a book with red cover and gilded edges in her left. Her hair and crown are gilded. St. Catharine, also crowned, stands behind and above the archbishop. She holds the spiked wheel in her right hand and the sword of her martyrdom in her left. Her hair and crown, like St. Margaret's, are gilded. The wheel is painted dark brown. The sword has a green hilt and sheath with a decorations in white in gold. The white dresses of both saints are laced up the front with blue, and their white mantles are edged with gold and lined with blue.[101]

The daisy pattern on the green field beneath the dish is still visible. According to

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[99]Ibid., 34.

[100]Ibid., 34.

[101]Ibid.

Hope, the background above the dish is deep yellow with red branches and a narrow black border at the top. The pierced tracery has gilded gables with alternately green and red set-offs and brown pendants. The embattled cornice at the top is decorated with blue, red and gold. The coving beneath the cornice is red with yellow strips imitating ribs and white branches in the interspaces.[102]

The final example of tables with an upper accessory of the angels holding the cloth and soul is illustrated in figure 35. This carving appears in Cheetham's catalogue (A164-1946) as an example of his Type E alabaster. Hope was unaware of this tablet, but it is like his Type D. The carving was given to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Hildburgh in 1946, having been on loan since 1929. It was previously loaned to the Museum by Mrs. A. E. Nelson before Hildburgh acquired it. The first record of it is at Scarisbrick Hall, Lancashire.[103]

This alabaster, which has several unusual features, is a very fine example of the St. John's Heads assigned by Cheetham to the late 15th century. The central Head has the forked beard seen in figures 21, 27-30, and 35. The hair is arranged in the three points across the forehead as in many previous examples. Like figures 21, 28, 29, 30, and 33, the hair falls in locks around the face. The eyelids are carved rather than painted, as is the wound above the eyebrow. The details of the eyes are painted, however, and the eyes are shown as open. Paint has also been applied to the wound. The mouth, which also has colour applied, is shown as half-open. The dish has a painted inscription around the rim in

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[102]Ibid.

[103]Cheetham, 322.

black, except for the capital C, which is red. This inscription makes the identity of the figure unmistakable: "Caput sci ihohanis [sic] baptiste i disco."[104] The decoration between the words is painted red.

The upper accessory shows the two angels with the figure of the soul in the napkin. There are some striking differences, however, between this example and the previous tablets. First the figure of the soul has a halo. Although the two angels wear vestments like earlier examples, only one angel has red wings which seems to be the standard colour in the other tablets. The dexter angel's wings are black or dark green with white spots. Another difference in the upper accessory of this carving is the addition of a flanking angel with hands pressed together in prayer. A similar angel probably occupied the space on the opposite corner, which has since been damaged. The base accessory is the Holy Lamb, but it has the unusual addition of two flanking angels supporting the dish from beneath. In previous examples with angels supporting the dish (figures 20 and 21), they are the sole flanking figures. In each case, they are associated with the Holy Lamb as the base accessory. In those examples, however, the angels wear feathered tights rather than ecclesiastical vestments. Like figure 21, the Lamb has a scroll.[105] The head is not recursive in figure 35, but looks up at the dish like the Lamb in figures 16 and 19. Another similarity to figure 19 is the cross-staff behind the Lamb.

The two usual flanking saints, Peter and the archbishop, are placed in a different

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[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid., note 2. Cheetham compares this to the wording of the will of Agas Herte of Bury St. Edmunds (1552), which was discussed above. In addition to the alabaster naming Thomas as the archbishop, there is a second tablet as well: "...a lytyll Seynt John's hed a alabaster wt a scriptur, Caput S'c'i Joh'is Baptiste"...(Bury St. Edmunds' Wills and Inventories (1850), 116.

position than seen on any previous tablet. Instead of their customary places in front and below additional saints, they take the positions of secondary flanking figures. St. Peter wears a gilded papal triple crown (as in figure 28), and a gown and cloak edged with gold and lined with red. He carries the gold key in his right hand, and a closed book with a red cover in his left. The archbishop wears a girded alb and holds a cross-staff in his left hand. Like figures 27-30 and 34, he blesses with his right hand rather than holding a book.

The two additional figures are seated in the lower corners of the carving. The sinister figure is St. Catherine enthroned, wearing a crown, gown and cloak with gold details. The wheel is in her right hand and a gold sword with black hilt is in her left. The dexter figure is the Virgin enthroned. She is also crowned, and holds the Christ Child on her lap. He holds the edge of the her veil with his right hand and an orb in his left. Her gown is also edged with gold. Cheetham notes that this panel is of the most congested design and is unusually crowded, even for a St. John's panel. Yet, its base accessory is the Holy Lamb, indicating that this accessory was not restricted to early carvings alone.[106] The presence of the Virgin and Child, according to Cheetham, suggests "the body of Christ and reinforce[s] the symbol of the Agnus Dei."[107]

The remaining examples of St. John's Heads illustrated and discussed here are similar to previous tablets in their basic composition. They differ in the design of the upper accessory. Figure 36 shows an example of this type which includes the lamb as the

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[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid. He goes on to cite an example which in 1971 was in a private collection in County Dublin, with the enthroned Virgin and Child seated in the centre beneath the Head, with the Lamb behind them to the right. Two other examples he notes with the Virgin in the bottom centre but no Lamb are in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, and an example in the chapel of St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall, formerly in the collection of Lord St. Leven, which was published by Hope and discussed below.

base accessory and flanking angels rather than saints. It is illustrated in Cheetham's catalogue as an example of his Type C.[108] It was not known to Hope, but it would probably be assigned to either Type C or Type D. It has flanking angels rather than saints, and there appear to be an additional set holding the top of the dish in addition to the angels that convey the soul in the oval. The panel was given to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A204-1946) by W. L. Hildburgh in 1946. He acquired it in London.

The Head is finely worked and includes the carved details of the half-closed eyes and closed mouth. The moustache is shown with the upper lip half clean-shaven. The hair is arranged in points across the forehead and in ten curly, pointed, radiating locks. The beard is divided into two loose, pointed curls, similar to many of the previous examples. The Holy Lamb is seated directly on the ground, and its head is missing as is part of the cross-staff behind it. The angels are dressed in ecclesiastical garments, like those on figure 35, rather than in the feathered tights. Part of the mandorla and the lower part of the soul enclosed by it extends over the rim of the dish on which the Head rests. Although the upper corners have been cut away, there are edges of garments and hands that indicate that the oval was supported by two figures, probably angels. The back of the panel has a carefully carved and elaborate coat of arms incised, dated 1656, and bearing the initials REM.[109]

The alabaster in figure 37 was published by J. E. Nightingale of Wilton in 1860, in

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[108]Cheetham, 321.

[109]Ibid.

a notice of its discovery near Salisbury at Old Sarum.[110] An engraving of the tablet was included with the article. Hope included it in his study of St. John's Heads as an example of his Type C.[111] It would be classed as Cheetham's Type F, although he does not specifically refer to this example. The Head was given to the Salisbury Museum by Mr. Nightingale.[112] The hair of the central head is parted in the centre but is arranged in wavy curls that give a plaited or braided appearance. This is similar to the treatment of the hair in figure 24, except that in it, the curls are smaller and one can see the straight hair on the top of the head. The moustache on figure 37 is unusual in that it covers the whole of the upper lip and appears to be long and drooping. The beard seems to be slightly curled, but it is nearly covered by the figure of Christ in the base accessory.

This half-length figure of Christ is shown from the waist up issuing from a slightly oblique rectangular tomb. Unlike any previous examples, both hands of the figure are raised with palms facing outward. The two flanking saints represent St. Peter, in a girded robe and cloak and holding a key and book, and the archbishop, in mitre, alb, and unclasped cope, holding a book and the cross-staff. Like figure 36, the upper accessory has angels holding a pointed oval with a naked standing figure of the soul, whose hands are pressed together in an attitude of prayer. In this example, there are only the two angels at the top of the panel, like most of the tablets discussed above having the napkin and soul. The top corners of the alabaster are broken away.

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[110]J. B. Nightingale, Archaeological Journal XII (1860), 184-186.

[111]Hope (1891), 27-28.

[112]Ibid., 28.

Figure 38 shows another of the few alabasters that remain in their painted wooden cases or housings. The tablet was not known to Hope who would have classed it in his Type D. It should be classed with Cheetham's Type F tablets, although he does not specify it. He does, however, include a photograph of this panel at the close of his introductory essay.[113] This St. John's Head, like several previous examples, once belonged to Grosvenor Thomas. It came into the possession of Mr. W. Burrell and now comprises part of the Burrell Collection of the Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries. A description and photograph of it were published by Philip Nelson in 1925.[114]

The finely worked central Head has the less common feature of carved eyelids, shown open. The treatment of the hair and beard is similar to figures 27-30, and 35. The beard is divided into two pointed curls, and the hair about the head falls into pointed locks. The hair is arranged across the forehead, but the curls are naturalistic rather than abstracted into downward pointing triangles. Much of the gilding has worn off the hair and beard. The wound above the eyebrow is deeply carved, but is not painted.

The base accessory is the figure of Christ standing in a tomb which projects outward to show three sides. This feature is similar to the tomb in figure 33. The hands are shown as bound, crossing in front of the sepulchre. This same attitude was seen in figures 18 and 24. The ground behind is painted dark green with the customary white dots surrounding a red one to form a daisy pattern. Leafwork is also visible, and Nelson notes

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[113]Cheetham, 54.

[114]Nelson (1925), 213-215 and plate II.

this is a feature in the background of the Amport Church alabaster (figure 34) as well.[115] The upper accessory is similar to figures 36 and 37 with the standing image of the soul, hands clasped together in prayer, surrounded by a mandorla held by two angels garbed in vestments.

There are several unusual features on this alabaster in addition to the fact that it retains its wooden case. Instead of the extra pair of angels in the top corners of the tablet, such as in figures 35 and 36, an extra pair of flanking saints has been added. St. Peter and the archbishop are in their customary positions, but St. Peter carries two keys in his right hand. Both saints carry closed books with dark coloured covers, and each wears his usual attire edged with gold and clasped at the neck. St. Catharine, holding a wheel in her right hand and a sword in her left, and wearing the crown of martyrdom, stands above and behind St. Peter. Behind her is St. James the Great, wearing a pilgrim's hat and carrying a staff in his right and closed book in his left hand.

The sinister saints above the archbishop are St. Margaret and St. Anthony. St. Margaret, like St. Catharine, is crowned and holds a cross-staff in her left hand and a closed book in her right. St. Anthony's head is missing, but his name is painted on the doors of the housing, leaving no question about his identity. Only the names of the four additional saints are painted on the doors of the case. There are two names on each door, separated by painted leafy scroll-work. Neither St. Peter nor the archbishop are named.[116]

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[115]Ibid. 214.

[116]The names of the additional saints are noted in Nelson (1925), 215. If the carvers or patrons saw no need to identify the two primary saints, they must have been well-known and easily recognized. If this is the case, it seems more likely that the archbishop should be identified as Thomas Becket rather than William of York. Many tablets seem to have been sold in areas some distance from York, and while William might have been an important local saint, his fame never compared to Becket's. The question of the archbishop's identity

Like figures 25, 31, and 34, this tablet has a pierced, triple-gabled canopy, over which is an embattled cornice. The canopy is partially gilded, and the coving beneath is red with yellow groins. The case itself is painted black, red and white and is very similar in overall design to figures 26 and 31, except for the addition of the saint's names. Each door is divided into three sections, the central one of which has a white background for the leafy design in red and green. The corner elements of the door panels on figure 38 are the same as those on figure 36 except that the motifs are reversed in order. The doors on the Burrell Head have the sunburst pattern in red with yellow lines in the upper left and lower right corners, and the white rose design in the lower left and upper right corners. Nelson suggests the date for this alabaster is about 1485, due to the presence of "the Yorkist badges and the relationship of this panel to the Swansea reredos, which I have dated as of 1492."[117]

Nelson compares this case to the example from the Leicester Museum (figure 26), and concludes "it is evident that both came from the same workshop."[118] Although the cases are indeed very similar, the carving styles and elements chosen for the composition of the alabaster are quite different. One is of the embattled type while the other is not. The upper accessories are different. The hand positions and shapes of the tomb vary in each of the base accessories. The treatment of the beard and hair differs. Although both show the wound above the eye, one is carved while the other is painted. St. Peter carries

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will be discussed in full in Chapter 4.

[117]Ibid.

[118]Ibid.

two keys in one example, and only one in the other. The garments differ slightly, in that one example has buttons while the garments are clasped in the other. The choice of saints is quite different.

It is certainly possible that both pieces came from the same workshop, but it may also be that the alabasters and the housings were made by different workshops - i.e. both housings made by one workshop and the two alabasters made by two different workshops, or that the housings followed a standard design or pattern, regardless of the workshop where they were produced.

The tablet illustrated in figure 39 was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A127-1946) by W. L. Hildburgh in 1946 after having been on loan since 1926. It, like others, was formerly in the collection of Grosvenor Thomas, and is believed to have been found at Wells.[119] First published by Nelson in 1917,[120] it was not known to Hope, but should be considered an example of his Type D. It is classed by Cheetham as his Type F.[121]

The central Head is unique in the treatment of the hair, which is cut as a straight fringe across the forehead. The moustache is also unusual, as it is full across the upper lip. The beard is rounded, like the Spilsbury alabaster, and in figures 32 and 33. Traces of the gilding remain. St. Peter and the archbishop are in their customary places. St. Peter wears the girded alb and cloak and holds his key and a closed book. The archbishop is

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[119]Cheetham, 329.

[120]Nelson (1917), 111-112 and plate V-3.

[121]Cheetham, 329.

similarly garbed, and carries a cross-staff and closed book. There are traces of red and gold on the garments. Behind St. Peter stands St. James the Great, wearing a hat and cloak and carrying a closed book in his left hand and a staff in his right. Opposite him, above the archbishop, is another saint, called St. Anthony by Nelson[122] and identified as "perhaps St. Antony" by Cheetham.[123] The bearded figure holds a staff in his left hand and a closed book in his right.

The upper accessory consists of the two angels, wearing albs and amices, who support between them a mandorla encircling a small naked kneeling figure with its hands upraised in prayer or supplication. Thus, it differs from the previous examples with the soul in the oval in the attitude of its hands and body. The mandorla is painted black with gold rays. The base accessory is the "Lord's Pity" with the hands held together, but not crossed, in front of the sepulchre. As usual, Christ wears a green torse. The background is green, with the white and red daisy pattern visible.

Figures 40 and 41 are strikingly similar to figure 39 in many respects. They were both unknown to Hope, but would be examples of his Type D and Cheetham's Type F. Figure 40 was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A36-1946) in 1946 by Hildburgh, after an initial loan in 1922. He acquired it in Spain, where it was found in a house in Calamocha, a hamlet in the province of Teruel.[124]

The shape of the head and style of carving is similar to figure 39, although the

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[122]Ibid., 111.

[123]Cheetham, 329.

[124]Cheetham, 326.

treatment of the hair around the forehead differs somewhat. Both have rounded beards and full moustaches, and the mouths are slightly open. St. Peter looks directly outwards rather than toward the central Head as in figure 40. He wears a robe and cloak and carries his key and closed book. The archbishop wears his usual attire, and carries a cross-staff and closed book. The base accessory, the "Lord's Pity" is similar in design and carving to that on figure 39, except that the hands are separated so that the right hand rests on the edge of the tomb. Above the dish, two angels support a pointed oval mandorla with a kneeling soul, but the hands are joined together in prayer rather than uplifted in supplication. The head of the sinister angel is missing and both corners have been broken away. There appear, however, to have been half-length figures of two additional saints in these corners. The surface is badly worn, and there are no traces of paint left. The tablet has been stained dark brown.

Hildburgh acquired the tablet in figure 41 from Philip Nelson and loaned it to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1926. He donated it to the Museum in 1946 (A127A-1946).[125] Like the previous two examples, the beard is full and rounded, the straight hair ends in points along the sides of the head, and the moustache covers the upper lip. The three faces are also similar in their proportions and modelling, and the wound on the forehead is omitted in each. This example has two locks of hair on the forehead. If the surface was not so badly worn on figure 40, it is quite possible that this same feature might be seen. Gilding remains on the hair and beard of the Head in figure 41. Cheetham

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[125]Ibid., 330.

notes that the eyes on this carving are coloured blue with a paint that looks modern.[126]

The lower accessory, again the "Lord's Pity," is almost identical to the two previous examples, except for the placement of the hands. In this case the left hand is lifted with the palm facing out and the right hand is pointing to the side or breast. This is the form seen in figures 17 and 25. The hair and beard of Christ are brown, and his torse is green. The background, as usual, is dark green with groups of white and red spots forming daisy patterns. The upper accessory is nearly the same as figure 40. In each example, the lower point of the mandorla extends just over the top of St. John's head, and the angels hold the oval with both their arms. The figure of the kneeling soul holds its hands pressed together in an attitude of prayer. In each of these examples, the hair appears to be shoulder-length. According to Cheetham, some of the gilding on the mandorla and the red paint on the angels' wings remains intact.

The images of St. Peter and the archbishop are very similar to figure 40 in attitude and proportions. Like the St. Peter on figure 40, this tablet's St. Peter looks directly out toward the viewer. Both have a "roll" of hair that is different from the standard way of showing his tonsured head. He carries his key and closed book. The archbishop carries a cross-staff and closed book. There is red paint on the key and cross-staff (like figure 26) and in the folds of the saints' robes.[127] A half-length figure of St. Dorothy, wearing a gown and cloak and holding a martyr's palm in her right hand and a basket in her left, stands behind and above St. Peter. The sinister figure above the archbishop has been

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[126]Ibid.

[127]Ibid.

broken away, but it is thought to have represented St. Mary Magdalene. It is a female saint, dressed like St. Dorothy, and holding in her right hand an ointment pot, the emblem of Mary Magdalene.

These last two examples, and possibly figure 39 as well, have many stylistic traits in common, and it seems possible that they might have been produced by the same workshop. Figures 42 and 43 also have many common elements. Both show far less skill in execution and design than those tablets just discussed. Neither was known to Hope, who would have classed them as Type C alabasters. Cheetham classes them as examples of his Type F tablets.

The panel in figure 42 was another of the gifts of Hildburgh to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A73-1946) in 1946, and on loan since 1925. He acquired it in Paris.[128] The long straight hair is parted in the middle and the beard is rounded. The moustache, unlike the previous three examples and more typical of the majority of St. John's Heads, extends just above the edges of the mouth, giving the impression of the half clean-shaven upper lip. Traces of gilding remain on the hair and beard. There is no forehead wound.

At the base, Christ rises from the rectangular tomb, his hands in the same position as in figures 17, 25 and 41. The upper accessory is also similar, with the soul kneeling and hands pressed together in prayer. As before, two angels with red wings support the mandorla, with carved rays emanating from the figure of the soul. The two flanking saints are in their customary positions. St. Peter, wearing a girded alb, amice and cloak, holds a key and closed book in his hands. The archbishop holds the cross-staff in his left, and like

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[128]Ibid., 327.

figures 28-30, blesses with his right.

The alabaster in figure 43 was bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1902 (275-1902), and its previous history is unknown.[129] It would have been classed by Hope as Type C, and represents another of Cheetham's Type F tablets. The long straight hair is parted in the centre and the beard is full, rounded, and wavy. The upper lip is half clean-shaven. Traces of gilding and black paint remain on the hair and beard. There is no wound in the forehead.

The figure of Christ at the base is in the same attitude as figures 17, 25, 41, and 42, with the left hand raised and the right at the side. The tomb is set at a slightly oblique angle. The naked figure in the mandorla and the two angels are slightly different than the previous examples. The figure in this carving has the hands together in prayer, but the legs appear to be turned as if the figure was meant to be seated. The angels wings are red, but they also have red on the folds of their garments. The two flanking saints are attired as usual. St. Peter holds the key and closed book, and the archbishop his cross-staff and closed book.

The alabaster illustrated in figure 44 is one of Hope's Type D and Cheetham's Type F tablets. It was published by Hope in his study of St. John's Heads.[130] The plate in his study is mistakenly placed in the description of a tablet formerly in the possession of a Miss Knight and later acquired by the British Museum.[131] The photograph, however, fits a

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[129]Ibid., 328.

[130]Hope (1891), 32-33 and plate XXIII-2.

[131]Ibid., 30-31.

description of the tablet formerly owned by Rev. Edward Duke of Lake House, Salisbury, and sold for L 48 at an auction in Sotheby's room in Wellington Street on 10 July 1895.[132]

The hair of the central Head is arranged in pointed curls across the forehead and along the sides of the head. The beard is divided into two parts and each side curls up into a roll at the ends. The upper lip is half clean-shaven, but the moustache is long and curls into rolls just above the spiral ends of the beard. There is no cut over the eyebrow. The figure of Christ rises from a oblique tomb. His hands are in the same position as those examples immediately above, his left raised and the right at his side or breast. The angels supporting the narrow oval mandorla reach down over the top of the dish on which the Head rests to lift up the soul, which has its hands pressed together and legs in a sitting position. The small naked figure has long hair and Hope says of it, "This perhaps represents the soul of the lady who originally owned the tablet."[133] It more likely represents the soul of St. John the Baptist. In his discussion of a different tablet, that of Miss Knight, he describes a similar accessory, "a pointed oval formed of rays, on which is a small naked figure with long hair of the fashion prevalent in the reign of Edward IV."[134]

St. Peter and the archbishop are dressed in ungirded albs with cope or cloak. St. Peter holds the key and closed book. The archbishop holds his cross and blesses with his right hand. The additional pair of flanking saints are St. Catharine and St. Dorothy. St. Catherine is shown above and behind St. Peter. She is crowned and holds a wheel and

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[132]Newspaper clipping from The Standard included in Maltwood file on the Spilsbury alabaster, and a handwritten note in the margin of the journal containing Hope's article.

[133]Ibid., 33.

[134]Ibid., 31.

sword. St. Dorothy's hair is encircled by a fillet. She carries a basket of flowers in her right hand and a spray of three roses on a stem in her left.

The alabaster illustrated in figure 45 was first published by Philip Nelson in 1914.[135] It was published then by the courtesy of a Mr. S. Richards. The tablet came into the possession of Hildburgh, who loaned it to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1928 and donated it to the Museum in 1946 (A159-146). Cheetham states that the previous history is unknown.[136] The tablet has several unusual features.

The treatment of the hair and beard of the central head is similar to many other examples. The hair is arranged in five points across the forehead and is nearly straight along the sides of the head. The beard is divided into two pointed curls. The moustache is full and covers the whole of the upper lip. The figure of the "Lord's Pity" stands in a tomb of unusual shape. It is carved with a hollow around the figure of Christ, but rather than appearing to be rectangular, it has an almost circular appearance. This is made more obvious by the addition of a deeply incised mandorla around Christ. His hands are positioned so that his left grasps the moulded edge of the sepulchre and his right points to his wounds. This is similar to figures 29-34. Figures 29 and 30 also have mandorlas surrounding the figure of Christ, but these are painted rather than carved. The upper accessory has the two angels conveying the soul, but it is also surrounded by a carved, rather than painted, oval. The hands are pressed together, and the figure is kneeling with the knees turned to the dexter side.

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[135]Nelson (1914), 165 and plate V-2.

[136]Cheetham, 332.

St. Peter and the archbishop are in their usual positions, and both wear girded albs and cloaks. St. Peter is barefoot, carries his key in his right hand and a closed book in his left. The sleeve of his cloak covers the hand with which he holds the book. The depiction of the archbishop is unique, however, in that he carries a crozier rather than a cross-staff. He blesses with his right hand, which like figure 34, is covered by a tasselled glove. St. James the Great is above and behind the archbishop. He wears a hat, on which is a scallop shell, and holds a staff in his left hand and a closed book in his right. The figure behind St. Peter also represents a male saint, but Nelson and Cheetham give different identifications. Nelson believes it to be St. Jude,[137] while Cheetham calls him "a bearded saint, perhaps St. Antony"[138] who holds a book (open according to Nelson and closed according to Cheetham) in his left hand and a staff in his right.

The alabaster in figure 46 is unique. This tablet was owned by Lord St. Levan and is now in the chapel at St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall. It was published by Hope as an example of his Type D[139]. Cheetham mentions it in his discussion of the tablet in figure 35, but he does not indicate how he would classify this carving in his typology.[140]

The central head has many features in common with other tablets, such as the hair arranged in points across the forehead, the half clean-shaved upper lip, the beard divided into two pointed curls, the eyes painted as open, and the omission of the wound above the

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[137]Nelson (1914), 165.

[138]Cheetham, 332.

[139]Hope (1891), 35-36 and plate XXVI.

[140]Cheetham, 322.

eyebrow. The dish had a narrow red border and the remains of an inscription in black was recorded by Hope: "[Caput] sci johis B[aptiste]."[141]

Many other elements of this carving are unique. St. Peter and the archbishop are in their usual places, but they are seated. St. Peter has a closed book with red cover and key, and the archbishop has his cross-staff in his left hand. His right, covered by a glove with blue tassels (like the Amport Church tablet in figure 34), is raised in blessing. The figure above the archbishop is St. James the Great, wearing his pilgrim's hat with a shell in front. He holds a book with red cover and a staff, which has been broken. His outer garment was originally painted red. The opposite figure is different from any other examples. St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child across the water is the figure above St. Peter. St. Christopher wears a cap, and his robe is lined with red and edged with gold. The Child is in his left hand, and the branch of a green tree, which is broken, is in his right. The Christ Child holds an orb in his left hand and raises his right in blessing.

In place of the Holy Lamb or the "Lord's Pity," the base accessory is the seated figure of the Blessed Virgin, wearing a crown and holding a sceptre in her left hand. The lining of her gown was red as was the mantle over her gown. Her hair, crown, and sceptre were gilded. The infant Christ is seated on her knee. He holds an orb in his left hand and touches it with his right. As Cheetham mentioned in his description of figure 35 above[142], this image might convey the same meaning - the suggestion of the body of Christ - as the Holy Lamb or the "Lord's Pity."

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[141]Hope (1891), 35.

[142]Cheetham, 322.

Another unique feature of this tablet is the upper accessory. Instead of angels, or angels and souls, there are half-length crowned figures of the three Persons of the Trinity, each with beard and long hair. Each has a large flat nimbus behind with traces of red paint. According to Hope,[143] the figure of God the Father is on the sinister side, holding the orb in his left hand. The right hand, which would have been raised in blessing, has been broken. God the Son is on the dexter side, his left hand upraised and the right grasping a broken cross-staff. He has a torse around the temples, representing the crown of thorns. The central figure is that of God the Holy Spirit. The right hand is raised in blessing and the left has been broken. Hope notes that the ground between the figures is gilded. The ground behind the enthroned Virgin at the base is similar to other tablets with the dark green colour sprinkled with white and red spots forming a daisy pattern.

Hope describes an additional fifteen carvings which he does not illustrate. Of these, two are of his Type A. One was then at Stonyhurst College and has the Holy Lamb lying on a mount as the base accessory.[144] According to Hope, the straight hair is parted in the centre and the beard has but a single point. There seems to be a cut over the eye in spite of the rubbed surface. The second Type A was at Beaumont College, Old Windsor, with the "Lord's Pity" as the base accessory.[145] The hair and beard are described by Hope as "disposed in wavy locks, now painted brown, but probably originally gilt."[146] No

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[143]Hope (1891), 36.

[144]Hope (1891), 15.

[145]Ibid., 16.

[146]Ibid.

wound is apparent, although if it had been painted, it might not remain intact. The hands of the half-length figure of Christ are arranged so that the left is held up and the right touches the side.

Four additional Type B tablets are described. The one which then belonged to the Rev. Bishop Butt, St. George's, Southwark,[147] has the hair of the central head parted in the middle and hanging down on each side. The moustache is long and curly and the beard divided into two curly locks. There is no wound above the eyebrow. The base accessory, the "Lord's Pity," has the arms extended full length and crossed in front of the sepulchre. The flanking saints are St. Peter, with closed book and key, and the archbishop, with closed book and cross. This tablet had been formerly owned by a Rev. Dr. Rock.[148]

The Gloucester Museum example is broken at the top and painted white.[149] The hair is parted into three locks on the forehead and the beard is divided into two parts. No wound is mentioned. The Lamb, seated on the ground, is the base accessory, and St. Peter and the archbishop flank the central dish. The tablet which at the time of Hope's publication was owned by Rev. Bishop Virtue of Portsmouth has the figure of Christ as the base accessory.[150] He grasps the tomb with his left hand and touches his side with the right. The central head has no wound over the eye; the hair is divided into pointed locks and the beard is divided. St. Peter's book is open, and his garments seem to have been

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[147]Ibid., 19-20.

[148]Ibid., 20.

[149]Ibid., 21.

[150]Ibid., 21-22.

painted red and lined with blue. The archibishop raises his right gloved hand in benediction while holding the cross with his left. This alabaster panel was discovered lying on a beam in the cellar of a house at Waltham Holy Cross, but Hope does not record the date of the find.[151]

The last of the Type B examples described but not illustrated by Hope was known to him only from a coloured drawing made by James Holland then in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries.[152] Holland described the item in the drawing as a "Fresco painting in the church of St. John the Baptist, Bristol, 1828,"[153] but Hope was certain it actually depicted one of the alabaster Heads of St. John. The tablet is not preserved in the church, and its location is unknown.[154] The representation in the drawing shows the type with the "Lord's Pity" at the base, hands crossed in front of the tomb. The hair of the central head is parted off the face and the beard is full and round. St. Peter has a key and closed book, and his garments are white with red lining. The archbishop's white cope has a gold border and red lining. He carries his cross and a closed book. This was apparently one of the embattled tablets with the pierced tracery. The pinnacles alternate between red and green, and the coving of the canopy is red patterned with yellow.

Hope describes five Type C tablets that are not illustrated in his study. The first of these came from the site of Pershore Abbey and was badly damaged from burial in moist

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[151]Ibid., 22.

[152]Ibid., 22-23.

[153]Ibid.

[154]Ibid., 23.

ground. At the time Hope saw it, it belonged to Rev. W. K. Chafy-Chafy.[155] The hair of the central Head hangs down to the sides, and the beard is divided. The forehead is too damaged to determine if the wound in the head was present. The base figure is the Holy Lamb beneath a canopy. St. Peter, who (as in figure 46) is seated, wears the triple-crowned mitre, but his hands and the objects in them have been damaged beyond recognition. The archbishop is also seated and carries a cross. There is no description of his right hand or what might have been in it. Hope mentions the mutilated figures of two angels, who support the dish on which the Head rests, above the two seated saints.

An example Hope states "is missing"[156] was owned by T.[homas] A.[dderly] in 1824 and was described in a notice by "T.A." in the Gentleman's Magazine for 1824.[157] This gentleman had purchased the tablet about fifty years before at a sale of the effects of the Rev. Wickham of Horrington, Somerset. The hair and beard of the central Head were arranged in corkscrew curls, and there was no wound on the forehead. The Holy Lamb was at the base and the head of an angel, probably similar to that of the Leicester example in figure 26, was over the top of the dish. St. Peter and the archbishop were on either side.

A tablet now in the possession of the British Museum was another of those formerly owned by Mr. J. B. Nichols and one of two described by him in the 1824

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[155]Ibid., 23.

[156]Ibid., 25.

[157]Ibid., citation noted by Hope as part ii., p. 292.

Gentleman's Magazine description of the carvings.[158] The Head on this example has hair arranged in short curly locks and the beard is short and rounded. The wound is over the left eye. The figure of Christ is at the base, with the left hand grasping the edge of the tomb and the right pointing to the side. St. Peter and the archbishop are placed on either side of the charger. The upper accessory is that of the two angels holding a napkin bearing the soul, of which only the head is visible. An embattled canopy has been attached to the base, but this was apparently a mistake and it should have been attached to the top instead.[159]

An example of Type C in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford[160] has the hair of the central Head parted in the middle and hanging straight on each side. The beard is formed of two portions each turned outward, but not actually divided. The eyes are open and there is no wound on the forehead. The figure of Christ is at the base, and he grasps the edge of the tomb with both hands. The upper accessory is that of two angels, now headless, supporting a mandorla with the naked figure of a soul.

The last of the Type C examples Hope describes without illustrations is at the Rouen Museum.[161] There is very little information provided aside from the fact that it is, in Hope's opinion, clearly an English alabaster, with the Head in the centre, the figure of the "Lord's Pity" below, five angels in a row at the top, and the two flanking saints, St.

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[158]Ibid., 25-26. Hope refers to part i, page 397 of the 1824 Gentleman's Magazine for Nichols' description of this tablet.

[159]Ibid., 26.

[160]Ibid., 28.

[161]Ibid.

Peter and the archbishop.

Four Type D tablets are described without plates in Hope's study. The location of the first of these is no longer known. It was formerly in the possession of a David Wells and was exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries in November 1789 by the Rev. John Pridden.[162] An engraving was published in 1791 by Schnebbelie in his Antiquaries Museum, and by Nichols in his History of Leicestershire.[163] The same plate by Nichols appeared in Fosbroke's Encyclopaedia of Antiquities[164] published in 1825, where it was described as representing the face of Christ in the legend of Abgarus. John Pridden, however, called it the head of St. John the Baptist on a discus and surrounded by five figures.[165] In addition to St. Peter and the archbishop, Pridden identifies the saint above St. Peter as St. Catherine by the wheel she holds. The opposite flanking saint had been broken off. There is no mention of any upper accessory, although Pridden describes the figure at the base as "the figure of a Person rising out of a tomb, the head gone intended for Lazarus there being no traces of a nimbus."[166] When Wells died in 1790, his property went to his nephew, who sold the carving in 1795, after which its location was lost.

The next Type D described by Hope is the alabaster formerly owned by Miss Knight and now in the possession of the British Museum.[167] The article states that this

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[162]Ibid., 29-30.

[163]Ibid. Hope gives the reference for this volume in a footnote as vol. IV, part ii, page 461.

[164]Ibid. Reference given by Hope is Vol. ii, page 683.

[165]Ibid., 29.

[166]Ibid.

[167]Ibid., 30.

description coincides with Plate XXIII. fig. 2, but this is an error as the plate belongs to the description of the tablet owned by Rev. Edward Duke (figure 44). In the Knight example, the hair is arranged in pointed curls across the forehead and at the sides of the face. The moustache is long, full, and drooping, and the beard falls in two wavy curls. There is no cut over the eye. The hands of the base figure of Christ are bound with a cord in front of the body. In addition to the flanking saints, Peter and the archbishop, St. James the Great, above the archbishop, is shown as a pilgrim with a shell on the front of his hat, and a second, damaged saint of unknown identity is on the dexter side above St. Peter. The upper accessory is that of the two angels supporting a mandorla with a small naked figure of the soul, "with long hair of the fashion prevalent in the reign of Edward IV."[168]

Another of the Type D tablets was known to Hope only through an engraving in Stukeley's Palaeographica Britannica, published in 1746.[169] The hair is shown hanging straight down. In an unusual variation, the whole-length figure of Christ is depicted as sitting on a rock or seat, rather than emerging from the tomb, with hands bound with a long cord. St. Peter is wearing the triple-tiered mitre and holding a model of a church with spire in his left hand, rather than the book. Instead of the archbishop, the sinister figure is that of St. Paul, holding an open book, and presumably a sword, although this latter attribute is not specifically mentioned by Hope. St. Catherine is above St. Peter, and St. Margaret, with a long cross and open book, is behind St. Paul. The upper accessory is that of the two angels supporting the pointed oval with the naked figure of the soul. Hope

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[168]Ibid., 31.

[169]Ibid., 31-32.

quotes J. G. Nichols' note in Bury Wills and Inventories[170] which suggests the replacement of the archbishop by St. Paul is due to the "draughtsman's misapprehension." The objections to this theory are outlined above.

The final tablet discussed by Hope is what he terms a "doubtful example" known only from a notice of it in an account of the St. John's Hospital, Winchester.[171] The notice simply states that a figure of St. John the Baptist's head in the dish - being the bust of the holy patron of the house - was located in the dust hole near the apartment of the widows after having been formerly over the principal doorway. An additional note states that about 1808, it was removed from its "disgraceful situation" and placed in one of the cloisters by an order of the Mayor.

Hildburgh cites an "incomplete (and somewhat puzzling) 'St. John's Head' table in a painted wooden housing in the Galleria Borromeo" which he states was published by R. Papini in 1912.[172] He does not give any further description of the piece, nor his reasons for calling it "puzzling."

An alabaster with the Lamb at the base and two flanking saints now at the Musées Royaux d'art et d'histoire in Brussels was published by Jean Squilbeck in 1938.[173] It appears to have been damaged, especially at the base and along the upper corners which have been chipped away (figure 47). The hair was arranged in three points across the

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[170]Ibid., 32 - the reference given by Hope is (Camden Society, 49), 255.

[171]Ibid., 36. The reference for the work Hope cites is Milner, The History civil and ecclesiastical, and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester (Winchester, 1809), ii. 208.

[172]Hildburgh, "Some English Medieval Alabaster Carvings in Italy," Antiquaries Journal XXXV (1955), 183.

[173]Squilbeck, 65 and plate XXVI, 1.

forehead, but the sinister point is now missing. The beard is disposed in pointed curls, and the moustache ends just above the outer edges of the mouth, indicating the half clean-shaved upper lip. The flanking saints appear to be Peter and the archbishop, although the sinister figure is unusual in its treatment. The garment looks like a dress rather than an ungirded albe. A book is in the figure's right hand, but the attribute in the left is damaged, but it appears to be a flower and the figure may represent St. Dorothy (or Dorothea). If so, this is another rare example where one of the usual flanking saints is replaced by a different saint. If the saint is female, then this tablet is quite extraordinary in being the sole example in which one of the flanking saints is replaced by a figure other than St. Paul.

There are other unusual features as well. The Lamb at the base has been broken, but it appears to have been facing foreward, so that all that remains is an oval shape with two extensions at the bottom, representing the Lamb's legs. Since the top is damaged, it is no longer possible to say with certainty that there were no angels or upper accessories, but from what remains, this tablet seems to have had a circular extension at the top so that it could be hung from a hook. The tablet is also unique in this respect.

From this survey of fifty-two of the eighty-seven known Heads of St. John, several conclusions can be drawn. Hope, for instance, is correct in his belief that the base accessory always carries the same meaning in spite of the particular form. Only three basic forms are seen, although there may be certain stylistic changes - the Holy Lamb, the "Lord's Pity" and the Virgin holding the Christ Child. Aside from the few examples cited by Cheetham which show the Head alone, all types share the important combination of the Head and the base accessory. Thus, Hope is likely correct in attaching importance to the

relationship of these two elements.

In all examples where flanking saints are included, at least two of the saints are Peter and an archbishop - with the two exceptions where Paul replaces one or the other of these figures, and one possible exception where a female saint might replace the archbishop. There must, then, be some significance to this choice of primary saints. The additional saints sometimes vary, and their inclusion which crowds the composition seems to imply a later date for these carvings. Often, the saints are among the most popular of the fifteenth century, such as St. Catherine and St. Margaret, or important pilgrimage saints, such as St. James. In any case, the choices do not seem to be random.

The upper accessories range from a simple form with an angel head above the dish, to the various representations of angels conveying a figure of the soul to heaven, either in a napkin or a mandorla. The only exceptions to this are an example with a row of five angels, and the table with the depiction of the three Persons of the Trinity. The latter alabaster has a more complex composition, implying a somewhat later date as well.

The wound above the eye does not seem to be a mandatory feature, as it appears on some simple types as well as obviously late examples, but is not present on other carvings of either early or late date. This may reflect a preference of the workshop or patron. The choice of specific accessories may likewise reflect workshop or patron preferences. The individual treatment of hair and beard styles probably indicates various workshop styles.

The Spilsbury alabaster has a relatively simple composition, and this, with its more elegant style of carving, would seem to place it among the earlier heads. Because it lacks

a housing, it is impossible to know if it might have once had an embattled canopy attached above the top of the carving. The likely date for the piece, therefore, is probably between 1430 and 1460.

Finally, the decoration of the wooden cases is enigmatic. All the examples illustrated have roughly the same motifs and styles. Whether this is a result of workshop similarities or perhaps some other reason, it is strange to find such important symbols used if they are merely decorative. It seems more likely that these may have more importance, both as a means of establishing dates, and as clues to the possible significance of these alabasters, than has previously been thought.

Before proposing possible reasons for the choices of attributes and housing decorations and discussing the specific iconography of the St. John's Heads, the next chapter will summarize the origin and development of the English alabaster industry, with some attention given to transportation, relative costs, dates of production, analysis of paints used, and sources of the iconography of altar-pieces.

Chapter 3

The Alabaster Industry in Medieval England

The Saint John's Heads represent only one minor aspect of the medieval English alabaster industry. The earliest carved work in alabaster in England that survives is the Norman arch of the west doorway of Tutbury Church, Staffordshire, dated from about 1160.[174] The cross-legged effigy of Sir John de Hanbury in Hanbury Church, Staffordshire, as late as 1240-1300, is the earliest known monument made of alabaster.[175]

Alabaster, a form of gypsum (a hydrous calcium sulphate),[176] is abundant in the red marl of the Upper Keuper beds in the Midlands.[177] The mineral is soluble in water,[178] and a large number of altarpieces and private devotional tablets may have been destroyed during the Reformation in making plaster of Paris, or were damaged in the unfavourable conditions of their hiding places.

Many counties in England have gypsum deposits of a fibrous or granular form of alabaster suitable only for making plaster of Paris, such as the quarries at Dorset, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, and Purbeck.[179] There were fewer deposits where alabaster

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[174]Edward Richardson, "Mediaeval Sculpture and workings in Alabaster in England," Archaeological Journal X (1853), 116; Pitman (1954), 217; Francis Cheetham, "English Medieval Alabaster Altarpieces with special reference to Nottingham," Museums Journal LXI, 4 (March 1962), 234; Cheetham (1989), 12; Hope (1904), 221-222; Nigel Ramsay, "Alabaster," English Medieval Industries (London, 1991), 30-31.

[175]Richardson, 116-117; Cheetham (1989), 12; Hope (1904), 222.

[176]Cheetham (1989), 12; Ramsay, 30.

[177]Hope (1904), 221.

[178]Ramsay, 30. Ramsay gives the solubility at 15 degrees C or 59 degrees F (1 part in 495 parts of water). At higher temperatures (128 to 163 degrees C or 262 to 325 degrees F), gypsum is converted into plaster of Paris.

[179]Cheetham (1989), 12.

suitable for carving could be found. During the Middle Ages, the most important of these were along the ridge to the south-west of Tutbury in Staffordshire, and Chellaston Hill, about four miles south-east of Derby, Derbyshire (Map 1).[180] Tutbury and Chellaston are only about twenty and fifteen miles, respectively, from Nottingham.[181] The quarries at Tutbury were apparently the oldest, for both the Tutbury church door moulding and the Hanbury effigy are thought to have been worked in alabaster from Tutbury.

It is not possible to determine the exact location from which an alabaster has been quarried, although several recent scientific studies have investigated the problem.[182] Cheetham discusses two analytic techniques - neutron activation analysis and atomic absorption spectroscopy - but notes the results produced only limited results.[183] English alabasters differ in appearance from those quarried on the Continent, however, as the English stone has a softer quality that can usually be disinguished by eye and touch. Some general observations can be made about English alabasters. The stone ranges from pure white, which can be polished to resemble marble, to greenish or reddish coloured varieties. The alabaster from the quarries near Hanbury and Tutbury tends to have a reddish-orange or reddish-brown mottled appearance due to iron-oxide staining. That from Chellaston tends to have a green mottling, caused by iron-sulphide staining, but also has some with the red-orange-brown colour like the Tutbury stone.[184]

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[180]Hope (1904), 221; Cheetham (1989), 12.

[181]Cheetham (1989), 12.

[182]Ramsay, 30-31; Cheetham (1989), 13.

[183]Cheetham (1989), 13.

[184]Ramsay, 30; Cheetham (1989), 12.

Alabaster's admirable qualities as a material for carving include its translucence and ability to take colour and gilding well. It is also soft and easily cut. It hardens somewhat when exposed to air, after which it can be polished to resemble marble. Its softness, however, also means it can be easily scratched or broken. In addition to its solubility in water, it can be destroyed by fire.[185]

Medieval quarrymen used drills or saws to detach blocks of stone from the alabaster beds. Iron wedge-shaped picks from eight to twelve inches long and saws used by medieval quarrymen have been found at the sites of medieval quarries.[186] There is some evidence that alabaster could either be worked on site at the quarries, or that blocks could be shipped to workshops in other locations. Raw alabaster, as well as carved pieces, could be shipped by water or transported along roads by horse and cart.[187]

Most medieval English alabaster carvings are described as "Nottingham alabasters." Nottingham was, indeed, an important centre for the alabaster industry. It was near the major sources of the stone, and the documentary records for later periods are relatively extensive. Early records are more sketchy, but those that survive imply Nottingham had an established reputation for its alabaster carving.

Several of the later references that mention Nottingham workers note the granting of licences to trade, and others describe legal actions - both contracts and lawsuits. Nicholas Godeman "aleblasterer," is listed in the records of the Borough of Nottingham as

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[185]Cheetham (1989), 11.

[186]Cheetham, 12; Richardson, 122.

[187]A detailed study of land carriage of alabaster and other goods in medieval England is found in D. Hey, Packmen, Carriers and Packhorse Roads, (Leicester, 1980).

having paid 8d. in 1478-9 for "licence to traffic."[188] In 1482, Walter Hilton, an alabasterman, brought an action against Emma Sherwood "for 8/8d. for the gilding and painting of a tabernacle of St. Philip in the Church of the Blessed Peter."[189] In 1491, Nicholas Hill, another alabasterman, brought a complaint against William Bott for 10d, for the "painting and gilding of three alabaster salt-cellars, with two images."[190] Some of these documents mention actions that refer specifically to the St. John's Heads, as in a 1529 record of a lawsuit:

> John Nicholson, stainer, complains of John Cottingham, imagemaker, of a plea that he render him a head of Saint John the Baptist and half a quarter of gold, price 10s., which he unjustly witholds from him, etc., And wherupon the same plaintiff complains in his own proper person that whereas he, on Monday next after the feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, in the 21st year of the reign of our Lord the present King, here at Nottingham etc., delivered to the aforesaid John Cottingham, the aforesaid head of St. John to paint before Christmas then following and then to re-deliver it to the aforesaid John Nicholson.[191]

This John Nicholson was a defendant in another suit the same year brought against him by William Walsh of Chellaston for 18d., for the cost of transporting uncarved alabaster from the Chellaston quarry to Nottingham.[192]

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[188]Hope (1904), 234. It should be noted that Hope was involved in extensive research of the Borough of Nottingham records at the time he was first writing about the St. John's Heads and other alabaster works. The idea that the Nottingham alabastermen made a specialty of the St. John's Heads came largely from Hope's conclusions based on the Nottingham references. It is possible that the records of other sites of alabaster work might yield similar references to St. John's Heads. In any case, the records provide much information about the production and marketing of alabasters in England.

[189]Cheetham (1962), 238.

[190]Ibid.

[191]Ibid. Cheetham's wording of the text it slightly different from that found for the same document in Hope (1891), 11-12.

[192]Cheetham (1962), 240; Hope (1891), 12; Hope (1904), 235.

Nicholas Hill and William Bott were involved in a suit brought on October 31, 1491, in which Hill sued Bott for the "value of fifty-eight St. John's heads, part of them in tabernacles and 'howsynges,' delivered to him to sell, and of which the said William will not render his account...."[193]

The same Nicholas Hill appears as the defendant in actions of January 1494-5 and 1499. In the first, Robert Tull, husbandman,

> complains of Nicholas Hill, alablasterman, in a plea of debt upon a demand of 12d. which he owes and unjustly detains...That whereas the aforesaid defendant, on the sixth day of June, in the eighth year of the reign of King Henry the Seventh, hired the aforesaid plaintiff to carry divers images and heads of Saint John the Baptist from Nottingham to London for the wages of 3s., and he there upon paid the aforesaid plaintiff 2s., and so there remain 12d., unpaid now in demand.[194]

The second suit in 1499 was brought against Hill by "Thomas Grene of Beeston, 'playsterer,' for a head of St. John the Baptist, price 16d."[195]

Nottingham was not the only site where alabaster was worked. Contemporary references indicate important workshops in York,[196] London,[197] Burton-on-Trent, Lincoln, Coventry, and Chellaston itself.[198] There is some possibility that there were alabaster

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[193]Hope (1891), 11; Hope (1904), 234.

[194]Cheetham (1962), 240. Also mentioned by Hope (1891), 11 and Hope (1904), 234.

[195]Hope (1891), 11; Hope (1904), 234.

[196]C. Esdaile, "Sculpture and Sculptors in Yorkshire," Yorkshire Archaeological Journal XXXV (1943), 362-88. Much of the article discusses later work in York, but includes on pages 365-366 the names of alabasterers among the York freemen listed between 1457 and 1524.

[197]G. M. Bark, "A London Alabasterer in 1421," Antiquaries Journal XXIX (1949), 89-91, for the text of a contract for the erection of a tomb in Bisham Priory. The carver is described as dwelling in London.

[198]Cheetham (1989), 14; Hope (1904), 233; and Ramsay, 32-35.

workshops in Norwich and Bristol as well, though the evidence for this is less secure.[199]

From the documentary evidence that survives, it is almost certain that, aside from the Tutbury church door mouldling, alabaster was first used for monuments. The effigy of Sir John Hanbury was probably made by local carvers from local material. The decision to use alabaster was probably a matter of convenience rather than the recognition of the qualities of the material itself.[200]

Royal patronage under King Edward III a few years later marks the real beginning of the alabaster industry in England.[201] Among the important commissions, probably carved of stone shipped from the Midlands and worked by the London workshops, are the monuments for Edward's relatives: his father, Edward II, at Gloucester Cathedral (d. 1327, figure 48); his brother Prince John of Eltham, whose effigy is at Westminster (d. 1334); and his son Prince William of Hatfield, whose monument is in York Minster (d. 1344). Though Edward II was murdered in 1327, his monument was not completed until sometime later. The effigy of John of Eltham (figure 49) was probably the earliest, finished about 1334.[202]

The use of alabaster spread rapidly, as a brief summary of other tomb effigies of this general date suggests - John de Hotham, bishop of Ely (d. 1348; Ely Cathedral); John Stratford, archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1348; Canterbury Cathedral);[203] Ralph, Bishop of

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[199]Cheetham (1989), 14.

[200]Gardner (193 and 195), 325.

[201]Ibid.; Prior and Gardner, 672-675; Richardson, 116-123; Ramsay, 36; Hope (1904), 222-226.

[202]Prior and Gardner, 672-673.

[203]Ramsay, 36.

Shrewsbury (d. 1363; Wells); Queen Philippa (d. 1369; Westminster); Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (d. 1370; Warwick) and his countess (shown hand in hand and having "weepers" surrounding the tomb); Thomas de Vere, Earl of Oxford (d. 1371, Earl's Colne); Archbishop Simon Langham (d. 1376; Westminster Abbey); Bishop John Harewell (d. 1386; Wells); and the destroyed tomb of Queen Isabel, consort of Edward II (d. 1358; formerly in church of the Grey Friars in London).[204]

Royal and ecclesiastical commissions have been invaluable in tracing the development of the alabaster industry, for these provide reliably dated documents that give details about the conditions of the commission, and sometimes include the names of carvers, locations of specific quarries, the means of transport used for stone or completed monuments, and the cost of the work. The analysis of nearly 520 surviving tomb monuments[205] has made it possible to establish the relative dates of certain styles of carving or iconographic motifs, and to recognize changes in details such as hair, clothing, and jewelry styles current in contemporary society.[206]

The earliest documentary reference for the Tutbury quarry is in 1362, when Queen

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[204]Hope (1904), 223.

[205]Cheetham (1989), 32.

[206]The largest single collection of alabaster tomb monuments contained in any parish church in England is that at Harewood Church, Yorkshire. These include the monuments of the Lord Chief Justice, Sir William Gascoigne and his wife, Elizabeth Mowbray, dated about 1419; Sir William Ryther and his wife Sybil Aldburgh, c. 1425; Sir Richard Redman and wife Elizabeth Aldburgh, c. 1425; Sir William Gascoigne, grandson of the Judge, and his wife Margaret Clarell, c. 1465; Edward Redman (formerly ascribed to Sir Richard Redman) and wife Elizabeth Huddlestone, c. 1510; and Sir William Gascoigne (formerly ascribed to John Neville of Oversley) and wife Margaret Percy, 1487. The monuments were studied and drawn to scale between 1917 and 1927 by Herbert D. Pritchett and their conservation was undertaken between 1979 and 1981 by the Redundant Churches Fund. The drawings and notes are reprinted, along with an introduction, in Richard Knowles and Pauline Routh, The Harewood Alabasters, (Wakefield, 1983), 1-19.

Philippa arranged for six cartloads of alabaster to be brought from Tutbury to London.[207] Tutbury was within the Duchy of Lancaster, and it is possible that this royal connection encouraged the Crown's interest in alabaster.[208] Queen Philippa's son John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, sent his agent to Tutbury in 1374 with instructions to send six cartloads of alabaster for the tomb of his wife, Blanche, who had recently died. The cost for Blanche's monument is given as £ 486.[209]

A text of a writ from 1407-08 survives which commissions the effigy of John, duke of Brittany (d. 1399) by Joan of Navarre, his wife and later queen to Henry IV. The tomb, completed early in 1408, was formerly in the church of St. Peter at Nantes but was unfortunately destroyed in the French Revolution.[210] The text of the writ provides for safe conduct by the King to John Guychard, merchant, to convey the monument to Nantes. Three alabastermen are mentioned in the document - Thomas Colyn, Thomas Holewell, and Thomas Poppehowe - but it is not known if they were from London or Derbyshire.[211]

The effigy of the Duke of Brittany probably resembled those of King Henry IV and Queen Joan at Canterbury Cathedral (figure 50), which are thought to be representative of either London work or from the Chellaston workshop of Thomas Prentys.[212] Prior and

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[207]Cheetham (1989), 12.

[208]Ibid.

[209]Cheetham (1989), 15 and 31.

[210]Hope (1904), 229.

[211]Ibid., 230.

[212]Prior and Gardner, 696-696, consider it an example of London work; Gardner, 335, classes it with the the Green monument at Lowick ascribed by documents to Prentys and Sutton at Chellaston. Hope (1904), 232, implies that the memorials of Thomas, Earl of Arundel, Henry IV and Queen Joan, and the Nevill monument were "sent out from these Chellaston works." H. M. Colvin, ed., The History of the King's Works (London,

Gardner believe that at least in the case of royal commissions, true portraiture was likely.[213] The jewels of the crowns, the clasps of the mantles and carved borders on the robes display the level of detail possible in alabaster work. Most altarpieces, and certainly most St. John's Heads, seldom achieved this level of intricacy.

The tomb at Staindrop (Durham) of Sir Ralph Nevill, Earl of Westmorland, and his two wives (only one of whom is shown in figure 51) is thought by Prior to be another export from London using stone from the Midlands - possibly Chellaston.[214] It uses many of the same stylistic conventions as the monuments of Henry IV and Joan, and of Joan's first husband, John, including the niches and traceried panels at the sides of the tomb-chest.

Another tomb with many similar characteristics still exists at Lowick church, Northamptonshire. In addition to the fact that it has been well-preserved, it is also known from the text of a contract in the form of an indenture, dated 14 February, 6 Henry V (1418-19), between Katharine, the wife of Ralph Greene, esquire, and Thomas Prentys and Robert Sutton of Chellaston, to make this monument for her husband. The original contract has been lost, but the full text was reprinted in French by Mr. Albert Harthshorne in an appendix to his Recumbent Monumental Effigies in Northamptonshire. Hope provides a literal translation of the document,[215] which states that the cost for the tomb

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1963), 488, states, "in the absence of documentary evidence its authorship must remain an open question."

[213]Prior and Gardner, 695-96.

[214]Ibid., 696.

[215]Hope (1904), 230-231.

was to be £ 40, that it was to be completed within a little more than a year, was to be decorated with painting and gilding, and that only the faces and hands were to be left free from colour. The fact that so much of the document is concerned with colour indicates how brilliant many of the monuments and altarpieces must have been in their original condition.

An example of a memorial that still retains much of its original colour is that of Lord Bardolf (d. 1441) and his lady at Dennington, Suffolk (figure 52). Gardner considers this monument, along with that of Sir Richard Vernon (d. 1451; Tong), as among the most imposing and highly ranked examples of fifteenth-century sculpture.[216] Details such as the Lancastrian SS collar and the Garter strapped below Lord Bardolf's left knee, the construction of the plates protecting his shoulder and elbow, the cut of Lady Bardolf's garments, and the style of her hair, and the carving on the sides of the tomb table have been used to provide relative dates for alabaster altarpieces.

The colours used on the Bardolf monument are similar to those found on isolated standing images, altarpiece panels, and devotional tablets such as the St. John's Heads. Cheetham provides an appendix in his book giving an analysis of paints and media used for colouring medieval English alabasters.[217] The colours used on alabasters included red, pink, gold, blue, green, black, white, and possibly silver.

The pigments were often painted directly on the surface of the alabaster, which is non-absorbant, but sometimes a ground was used, such as the dark green ground for the

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[216]Gardner, 334.

[217]Cheetham (1989), 56-57.

daisy-pattern found so frequently below the dish on the St. John's Heads. Grounds were also often applied for gold, green, or silver. The grounds used for gold might consist of red lead in oil, red iron oxide in oil, red lead with an underpainting of iron oxide, yellow brown bole and white lead in an oil medium, or red bole in a glue medium. Brown iron oxide and white lead in an oil medium used as an underpaint, or copper resinate with yellow lead oxide or lead white as an underpaint to copper resinate glaze were used as grounds for green. Silver was applied to a white ground, or over azurite to form the flames of a halo.

For the white spots forming the daisy pattern, the paint was lead white in an oil medium. Black samples analyzed were made from carbon black, applied directly onto the alabaster in a glue medium, or combined with a little lead white and terre verte in a glue tempera.

The blue samples were made three different ways. Azurite was mixed with white lead in a glue medium; applied alone in a glue medium; or in cases where it represents the flames of a halo, applied beneath white lead. Azurite can deteriorate to a green.

The green pigments were made two different ways: copper resinate glaze over an opaque undercoat of copper resinate mixed with lead white or pale yellow lead oxide; or by combining blue and blue-green smalt, yellow ochre, white lead and carbon black in a resin varnish. Cheetham notes that the latter is probably not original because of the use of smalt.

Red samples showed four different methods of production: red mercuric sulphide in a medium of animal glue painted directly on the alabaster giving a vermilion colour; red

iron oxide in mineral vermilion painted directly on the surface; red iron oxide, used both as a pigment and a ground for gold; and red lead, used as a pigment and a ground for gold, either by itself or mixed with yellow massicot in an oil medium and applied directly to the surface. Pink samples were made of lead white with red, or red-brown iron oxide in a glue medium.

The gold samples were applied in five different ways: a broken layer of gold leaf above an orange-red layer of red lead, with possibly some yellow massicot in an oil medium and below it, a layer of iron oxide in an oil medium; gold with some silver in it; gold over a yellow iron oxide on a ground containing some lead and probably lead white mixed with bole (yellow-brown ferric oxide with aluminium and silicon); gold over a red iron oxide ground; and broken gold over a yellowish layer of lead white in an oil medium.

Cheetham notes four types of media used with colour on the alabasters analyzed. Water glue was used for vermilion, azurite, azurite and white, lead white tinted with red iron oxide, and carbon black. Glue tempera (water glue and egg) was used with carbon black mixed with lead white and terre verte, red lead, and brown iron oxide. Two type of resin varnishes were used in the samples. Venice turpentine was used with copper resinate. In the other, smalt, yellow ochre, lead white and carbon black were mixed together in a resin to make a substitute green. Oil, probably linseed but possibly walnut, was used with gold and grounds of red lead, red and yellow ochre, and white lead.

Though Cheetham's analysis is concerned with the paints found on altarpiece panels, it is probable that the same pigments and media were used on tomb monuments and isolated figures, since altarpiece and devotional tablets are thought to have been an

outgrowth of the tomb monument industry.

The carving of the memorials was related to the sculpture of stone baptismal fonts. Both required the shaping of a stone slab where smaller pieces were cut away. Each contributed to the carvers' expertise in carving relief and figures in the round. An example of a relatively late tomb illustrates some of the elements adapted by alabastermen to the production of reredos figures and altarpiece tablets. The tomb of Alice de la Pole, Duchess of Suffolk (d. 1477; Ewelme) shows angels carved in relief on the sides of the tomb-table (figure 53). These are directly related to the early "Weepers" found on table tombs of alabaster. Early weepers could be depicted as relatives of the deceased (as in the tomb of Edward III at Westminster), as saints or apostles, or as on the Duchess of Suffolk's tomb, as angels carrying heraldic shields (figure 54).[218] The angels are alternately garbed in albs and in feathered tights, similar to those that support the charger on several of the St. John's Heads discussed in Chapter 2. The large wooden angels at the roof seen in figure 53 also wear the feathered costumes. Others, similarly clad in feathered clothing, support the pillow beneath the Duchess' head (figure 55). She wears a coronet over her widow's weeds, and the Garter on her left wrist.

Her tomb is important in several respects. The quality indicates that in spite of the late date, fine work was still being produced by the workshops. Alice de la Pole was the grand-daughter of the poet Chaucer and widow of William, 4th Earl and 1st Duke of Suffolk, a descendant of a wealthy fourteenth-century merchant. His murder at sea in

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[218]Gardner, 314.

1450 is recounted in the Paston Letters.[219] Her tomb reflects the changing status of former merchant families in medieval England as they rose to the ranks of the gentry and were able to influence affairs of state. Finally, the details of execution and design, such as the angels at the cushion, relate the tomb to some of the later alabaster tablets.[220]

By at least 1425, other expressions of relief-sculpture were found along with "weepers" and "angels" on the sides of the monuments. Religious themes appear, such as the Annunciation, having the same design and iconographic program found on the earliest of the altarpiece panels. The two industries appear to have developed together, and initially at least, workshops may have produced both altar tablets and monuments.

Aside from tomb effigies and monuments, some of the earliest records concerning alabaster carving are the commissions for sculptures within architectural settings. In 42 Edward III (1367-8 to 1368-9), Peter Maceon (Peter the Mason) was paid £ 166 13s. 4d. for making an alabaster tabula or reredos for the chapel of Canons at Windsor.[221] Peter Maceon is described as being from Nottingham in the Issue Roll of 45 Edward III (1370-1 or 1371-2), where it is recorded that he was paid "the further sum of 50 marks, or £ 33 6s. 8d., in discharge of 300 marks which the King owed to the same Peter 'for a table of alabaster made by him and placed upon the high altar within the free chapel of St. George

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[219]Gardner, 338; Roger Virgoe, ed. Private Life in the Fifteenth Century, (New York: 1989), 54 and 201. William was instrumental in arranging the marriage of Henry VI to Margaret of Anjou, but his policy required that Henry cede the provinces of Maine and Anjou. William was created Duke of Suffolk in 1448, but impeached when the French took Normandy in 1449-50. He was murdered by sailors near Dover on his way to exile.

[220]Prior and Gardner, 704.

[221]Hope (1905), 224.

at Windsor.'"[222] Hope calculates the sum for this reredos as £ 200, a "huge sum (for that time),"[223] and he infers that if the Nottingham carver could command such royal patronage, the reputation of Nottingham workshops must have been well established by this time.

The reredos no longer exists, but it must have been quite large judging from the fact that it took ten carts, each drawn by eight horses under the care of two men, to transport it from Nottingham to Windsor. The trip took seventeen days (from 20 October to 6 November 1367) and cost £ 28 6s. 8p.[224]

In 1372, John Lord Nevill of Raby paid more than £ 200 for "the new work of marble and alabaster beneath the shrine of St. Cuthbert."[225] It was sent by sea from London to Newcastle, and then on to Durham. In 1380, John gave £ 500, to which the prior and others added 200 marks, for a freestone reredos in Durham Cathedral (figure 56).[226] It, too, was sent by sea from London. The screen has niches for 107 painted and gilded figures and remains one of the most impressive settings for alabaster sculpture, although the sculptures no longer survive.[227]

The free-standing alabaster figures such as would have decorated the Nevill screen at Durham are generally thought to date slightly earlier than altarpiece relief sculptures.

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[222]Ibid., 225.

[223]Ibid.

[224]Ibid.

[225]Ibid.

[226]Ibid.

[227]Cheetham (1989), 21.

Prior had established a dating classification system by 1913 which has been only slightly modified.[228] According to Cheetham's modified version, there are four categories that can be defined by certain stylistic generalities. The Early Period (c. 1340-c. 1380) is mostly concerned with the free-standing images, although the earliest of the horizontal relief panels can also be assigned to this category.

Panels of the Middle Period (c. 1380-c. 1420) are of a standard shape and design, and most belonged to altarpiece sets representing either the Passion or the Joys of the Virgin. The earliest of the "embattled" altarpanels may also belong to this period. During the Later Middle Period (c. 1420-c. 1450) there is greater diversity of subject matter. In addition to the altarpieces representing the Life of the Virgin and the Passion, altarpieces show lives of other popular saints such as St. Catherine and St. John the Baptist. The complex pierced gabled headings and more crowded compositions are typical of this period. The earlier St. John's Heads probably belong to this category as well.

Alabasters from the Late Period (c. 1450-c. 1540) are the most difficult to date precisely. On the whole, the compositions tend to be more crowded, and the relief more deeply carved than in other periods. The altars themselves become more complex with the addition of taller central panels or second tiers. Most of the St. John's Heads belong to this period.

The earliest documentary records for carved alabaster free-standing images date from about 1341 to 1382.[229] John Fossor, the prior of the monastic house at Durham,

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[228]Prior and Gardner, 461-506; Cheetham (1989), 41-44; Pitman (1954), 217-228.

[229]Cheetham, 41.

gave two images of the Trinity and the Virgin to the Cathedral sometime between 1341 and 1347. The image of the Trinity might have been similar to that in figure 57, now in the Burrell Collection at Glasgow.[230] An inventory of 1360 mentions alabaster figures of the Virgin and St. Stephen belonging to Queen Isabella.[231] In 1382, Cosmato Gentilis, Pope Urban VI's representative, was given a permit by Richard II to take four alabaster images of the Virgin, Saints Peter and Paul, and the Trinity from Southampton to Rome.[232] The two large flat-backed images of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome are thought to be two of the images mentioned in this document.[233]

Three figures representing the Virgin, St. Peter, and a bishop were found in 1779 hidden beneath a chancel floor at Flawford, near Nottingham. These are also thought to be contemporary with the figures in Rome and the figure of the Trinity in the Burrell Collection (figure 57).[234]

In addition to the Flawford images, there are a large number of free-standing alabaster figures representing a variety of themes and dated to the Early Period. Hildburgh has published several articles on the iconography of images of the Virgin and

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[230]Cheetham (1989), 42; Nikolaus Pevsner, "An Exhibition of British Medieval Art," Burlington Magazine LXXV (July-Dec., 1939, reprinted 1968), 14.

[231]Cheetham (1989), 41.

[232]Ibid., Hildburgh (1955) "Italy," 186.

[233]Cheetham (1989), 41; Hildburgh (1955), 185-186.

[234]Cheetham (1989), 41. The Flawford alabasters are illustrated in Clement F. Pitman, "Speculations on Fourteenth-Century English Alabaster Work," Connoisseur CLV (February 1964), 82; and in Hope (1905), facing 225, 226, and 227.

Child,[235] and images of a less common type, such as St. Barbara, St. Michael, St. Anne teaching the Virgin, and an unnamed bishop.[236]

The earliest surviving panels differ significantly from those of later date. They are thought to date from the middle to second half of the fourteenth century, are horizontal rather than vertical like the later panels, and all represent the Nativity combined with the Adoration of the Magi (figure 58). Cheetham mentions ten examples - five in England and five in northern Germany and the Baltic.[237] He believes the panels may have been used in conjunction with standing figures in a reredos,[238] while Philip Nelson considers it probable that these "were devotional panels, rather than parts of retables...."[239]

Even with these earliest panels, the composition is standard. In each of the ten horizontal tablets of this type, the subject combines the Nativity, with Mary reclining on a draped couch and holding the standing figure of the Christ Child. The midwife stands behind the couch, or as in figure 58, behind a curtain. St. Joseph is also sitting to one side. The heads of an ox and ass are seen beneath the couch on some carvings, or in the case of the Paderborn panel, in the upper center. The Adoration of the three kings is added to the

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[235]Hildburgh, "Medieval English Alabaster Figures of the Virgin and Child," Burlington Magazine LXXXVIII, pt. 1 (1946), 30-35 and pt. 2 (1946), 63-66; Hildburgh, "Some Further Medieval English Alabaster Images of the Virgin & Child," Burlington Magazine XCVII (1955), 338-342.

[236]Hildburgh, "Notes on some English Medieval Alabaster Carvings," Antiquaries Journal III (1923), 24-36.

[237]Cheetham (1989), 42. On page 62, footnotes 218 and 219, he lists the following sites: Stonyhurst College; Long Melford Church, Suffolk; Treslothan Church, Cornwall; St. Lawrence's Church, Reading; a fragment in the British Museum; Paderborn Cathedral, Westphalia; Zuckau Church near Gdansk; Marienkirche in Gdansk; Stadtmuseum Kaliningrad (formerly Konigsberg); and a panel formerly in the Catholic Church at Bottenbroich near Cologne, now removed to a church at Grefrath.

[238]Ibid.

[239]Nelson, "Earliest Type of English Alabaster Panel Carvings," Archaeological Journal LXXVI (1919), 88.

scene. In most panels, the Christ Child's hand rests on a gold chalice offered to him by one of the kings. The other two kings stand in the background.

The Paderborn panel was published by Hans Kornfeld, who considers it the product of the London school of carvers and one of the latest of this type, probably no earlier than 1370.[240] The panel from Long Melford Church, Suffolk, was found buried in the church in 1790. It was published by Nelson in 1919.[241] Nelson's article includes discussion and photographs of the similar panels from St. Lawrence Church, Reading, Treslothan Church, Cornwall, and Stonyhurst College.

One of Cheetham's modifications to Prior's system concerns the earliest of the vertical altarpiece panels. Prior classes many of these with the horizontal tablets calling them all "Flat Slabs with Finished Edges."[242] He assigns dates to these panels about thirty years earlier than Cheetham accepts. Cheetham, however, agrees there are some similarities in relatively low relief, carefully finished edges, handling of the draperies, and simple, uncrowded compositions.

Cheetham chooses to assign these early vertical slabs to his Middle Period because they are of the same size and shape they will retain throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, their designs become standard, and they evidently formed complete altarpiece sets

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[240]Hans Kornfeld, "An English Alabaster Relief," Burlington Magazine LXI (September 1932), 126-7. A photograph of the panel and general discussion of the type is also found in Pitman, "Speculations," (1964), 84-86.

[241]Nelson, "Earliest Type", (1919), 88-90. A photograph of the Long Melford panel is also published in Fred H. Crossley, English Church Craftsmanship (London, 1941), 49.

[242]Prior and Gardner, 470-475.

rather than being isolated tablets as the horizontal slabs had been.[243]

The range of subjects depicted was limited in the Middle Period, however. Tablets depicting the Annunciation, the Ascension, the Coronation of the Virgin, and a Trinity, apparently all part of one set, were discovered in 1882 at Kettlebaston in Suffolk. Prior assigns these fragments to about 1350[244] while Cheetham calls them "late fourteenth century," stating that the earliest vertical panels should be assigned to a period between 1380 and 1420.[245] By the 1390s, according to Cheetham, the panels were being designed as a series, such as the Kettlebaston fragments.

In addition to tablets showing the Joys of the Virgin, the only other subject for altarpieces in the Middle Period seems to have been the Passion of Christ. Two early examples of Crucifixion scenes (figures 59 and 60) show the carefully worked edges and simplified compositions of the late fourteenth-century carvings. The tablet in figure 59 is the most simple design recorded for an English alabaster. It is now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, to which it was donated by W. L. Hildburgh in 1946. He acquired it from Philip Nelson who found it in Chester.[246] Nelson published a photograph and description of the piece in 1920,[247] where he describes the robes of the Virgin and St. John as lined with scarlet and edged with gold, and the background as perhaps originally

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[243]Cheetham (1989), 43.

[244]Prior and Gardner, 472.

[245]Cheetham (1989), 43.

[246]Cheetham (1989), 244.

[247]Nelson, "Some Unpublished English Medieval Alabaster Carvings," Archaeological Journal LXXVII (1920), 221-222.

scarlet. Cheetham notes that no paint now remains on the panel. Nelson observes the similarity of this tablet to a font at Burford and suggests that it was probably built originally into a table-tomb or font rather than fitted into a retable. Cheetham states that the absence of the usual holes for latten wire required to fit the tablet into the wooden frame of the altarpiece, and the slab's unusual thickness supports this theory.[248]

The Crucifixion panel in figure 60 has lead-filled holes on the reverse and certainly must have been from an early retable set. It, too, was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Hildburgh in 1946 after he acquired it from Philip Nelson.[249] Nelson published a photograph and description of this tablet in 1919 at which time it was in his collection.[250]

Seven additional figures have been added to the composition. These include the two flying angels with basins held beneath Christ's hands, and another angel with a basin kneeling at His feet. Rather than the conventional depiction of Mary and John flanking the cross (as in figure 59), both these figures are placed on the dexter side. Mary is supported on her right by one of the other Marys (Cleophas or Magdalene), and a young, beardless John stands to her left. Three new sinister figures are added. According to Cheetham, that closest to the cross holding a vertical scroll represents the Roman centurion. The inscription is still visible and reads "Ihs nazarenus rex iudeorum filius dei vere."[251] The

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[248]Cheetham (1989), 244.

[249]Ibid., 245.

[250]Nelson, "Earliest Type," 92 and plate VII-b.

[251]"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, truly the Son of God," Cheetham, (1989), 245.

figure with the sword standing next to the centurion is presumed to be a soldier. The third figure behind them with the long beard is not identified.

Unlike the free-standing images (such as the Trinity in figure 57) which were made to sit upon an altar or within the niches of an architectural setting (like the freestone screen in figure 56), the vertical alabaster panels were of uniform shape, size, and theme. Together, a series would form the altarpiece by being fitted into a wooden framework. Many of the lead-plugged holes on the reverse of panels still have remains of latten wire used to secure the tablets into the wooden frameworks or housings. Latten was made of copper-based alloys, a type of combinations of brass and bronze.[252] The wire would be drawn through a drawplate, and the ends attached by placing lengths of wire into the the holes on the reverse of the carving, and pouring molten lead into the hole to secure the wire. The lead probably came from north Derbyshire, where it had been produced since Roman times.[253] The wires were then pushed through holes in the wooden boards at the back of the framework, and small wedges of wood were pushed through the loops, thus securing the tablet into the frame.

The fragments of an early altarpiece, minus its framework, are illustrated in figure 61. It was a gift from Hildburgh to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A48-1946 - A62-1946) in 1946, after he acquired it from a collector in Bordeaux.[254] The panels represent the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, the Deposition, the Three Marys at the Sepulchre, and

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[252]Cheetham (1989), 24.

[253]Ibid.

[254]Ibid., 67.

the Incredulity of St. Thomas. If all the tablets were complete, they would have the same dimensions, and it is possible that the Crucifixion would have originally been in the centre, as in the embattled set in figure 62.

The Passion set in figure 62 is from the early fifteenth-century, and was another of Hildburgh's gifts to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A171-1946 - A172-1946 and A152-1946 - A154-1946) in 1946.[255] The panels had been at one time in the old oratory of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Palma de Mallorca, and later in the Musee Van Stolk, Haarlem, Netherlands. It is the only nearly complete embattled Passion altarpiece known,[256] but the subjects of the tablets are typical of Passion sets. The panels represent the Betrayal, the Carrying of the Cross, the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and the Resurrection. The panels already show more of the characteristics of the later English alabasters - deeper relief of the carvings, more crowded compositions, and more theatrical or dramatic depiction of the scenes.

The Crucifixion panel in figure 63 has an embattled top, but may be one of the later examples of this class. It was given by Hildburgh to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946 (A184-1946). He acquired it in London, but it was probably discovered at either Breamore Priory or Friern Court, Hampshire.[257] The composition of the scene is more crowded and theatrical than in figure 60. There are still angels beneath Christ's arms and at his feet, but another, also carrying a chalice, is at his side. Both Marys now support the

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[255]Ibid., 68.

[256]Ibid.

[257]Ibid., 252.

Virgin, whose style of dress is different from the previous tablet as well. St. John is seated on the ground on the opposite side. The figure above the Marys is thought to be the Roman soldier known, according to The Golden Legend, as Longinus, whose eyes were cured by the blood of Christ. Another centurion stands above St. John and has his hand resting on the top of a battle-axe. His right hand points to a scroll, its inscription now missing, that once extended from his hand to the top of the battlement. An unidentified bareheaded civilian stands next to the centurion, his left hand resting on the latter's shoulder.

The increasing complexity of the altarpieces, both in the individual panels and in the wooden frameworks, can be seen in figures 64-67. Figures 64-66 show how the tablets were arranged to form a triptych with one or two additional flanking tables, making a five or seven panel altarpiece with flanking standing images. The end panels could be closed over the centre to hide the panels from view during Lent. Most of these altarpieces had a single standing image of a saint flanking the panels of the set. Figure 68 shows one such flanking saint representing St. John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei.

The smaller altarpieces, such as figures 64-66, may have been designed to sit upon the altar table.[258] In addition to the changes in panel composition, the later altarpieces show some variation to the small triptych format. First, the central panel of the set becomes taller, a difference which can be seen in comparing figure 64 to figures 65 and 66. In figure 65, the central panel actually has two scenes represented simultaneously - the Mass of St. Gregory or "Lord's Pity" - similar to the image at the base of some St.

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[258]Cheetham (1962), 235.

John's Heads, and a Trinity. The altarpiece of the Joys of the Virgin ("Swansea Altarpiece, figure 66) has a large representation of the Trinity alone as the central panel. Purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum from Lord Swansea's collection at Singleton Abbey, Swansea in 1919, it is one of the few complete altarpieces in England. No complete altarpiece in England remains in its original location.[259]

By the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, altarpieces were constructed in fixed, non-hinged, two-tiered frameworks (figure 67). Instead of five or seven scenes, these elaborate altarpieces could have ten to fourteen scenes and four flanking saints. These larger single- or double-tier altarpieces were designed to be fixed to the wall behind the altar, more like the earlier fourteenth century architectural reredoses.[260]

The composition of these later tablets, like those of the later St. John's Heads, are complex and crowded, and their quality varies from piece to piece. Figures 69 and 70, again panels representing the Crucifixion, show the variation in skill and the complex compositions of the late fifteenth century tables.

The panel in figure 69 is finely carved and very detailed. It was a gift of Hildburgh to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A162-1946) in 1946. He bought it from Sir Lancelot Crawley-Boevey.[261] Unlike the earlier examples of this scene, Christ has a halo. The wounds in his hands and feet are shown as holes, without representations of nails. Mary is still at the lower left of the panel, but is now seated. One of the other Marys and St. John

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[259]Ibid.

[260]Cheetham (1989), 22-23.

[261]Ibid., 258.

stand behind her, but the third figure on her right is St. Dorothy, identified by the flower in her hand.[262] Longinus, touching his eye with one hand and holding the lance with his other, is still behind the group on the left. The two figures of the thieves flanking the cross have been added, and the soul of the dexter thief emerges from his mouth into the hands of an angel. The soul of the sinister thief is being received by a winged devil. The two angels above the thieves probably held chalices, as in the previous examples. The sinister centurion is shown, unusually, on horseback. The two soldiers behind him wear pointed basinets with tippets of mail, and carry contemporary weapons. The angel at the base of the cross holds a chalice as before.

The Crucifixion scene in figure 70 has essentially the same composition as figure 69, with the exception of the centurion on horseback and the addition of St. Dorothy in the previous example. Figure 70 actually contains fewer figures, yet has a crowded, unskillful appearance. It was a gift of F. L. Pearson to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1943. It had been in his family for about sixty or seventy years and was previously owned by Pearson's father.[263]

Both of these panels are dateable to the late fifteenth century. Though their compositions are similar, they clearly show different levels of skill. The less refined carving of later alabasters is usually explained as a result of slovenly workshop practices - and this explanation is usually applied as well to St. John's Heads. It seems possible, however, that other reasons might also be important.

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[262]Ibid.

[263]Ibid., 253.

The manufacture of tomb monuments continued until after the Reformation, and these continue to display a high quality of workmanship. Likewise, some altarpiece tablets and St. John's Heads show skill and care in their production, in spite of the complexity of their compositions. It seems possible that as the demand for alabaster altarpieces and devotional tablets increased, some of the less expensive of these may have been produced by apprentice carvers, while the more experienced and skilled workmen were responsible for the items of higher value or intended for more prominent patrons.[264]

By the middle of the fifteenth century, the English alabaster altarpieces were reasonable in price and in demand for export to the Continent. Much of the information about how the altarpieces were designed comes in fact from the extant examples outside of England. Although it is not certain how many of the alabasters on the Continent were exported from England before the Reformation, contemporary records prove that English alabasters were in demand in Europe. Additional references imply that others were exported - sometimes unofficially - to prevent their destruction in the fervor of reform, or in some cases for personal gain, during the later years of the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI.

Cheetham observes that the early alabaster export trade was confined mainly to the Baltic and north Germany, and that it may have coincided with the developing trade in cloth.[265] The records of the Merchant Adventurers' Company confirm the connections of

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[264]This possibility was supported in a conversation with Mr. Spilsbury concerning the St. John's Heads. He mentioned that one of the family stories about the St. John's Head was to the effect that apprentice carvers made these items as practice pieces from slabs cut away from fonts and tombs in the course of their production.

[265]Cheetham (1989), 45.

York, Norwich, London and Hull to centres in northern Germany and the Baltic and a relationship to the Hanseatic League.[266] The cloth trade of Hull expanded during the last half of the fourteenth century, and sailing records from the early 1390s show that London and Hull were carrying "the greater part of the Baltic, North Sea and Low Countries trade."[267] An English community was established in Gdansk by 1391, and it is here that one of the altarpieces of the Life of St. John the Baptist, dated from the late fourteenth- to early fifteenth-century, still exists.[268] As Cheetham observes, most of the earliest horizontal panels, which may have formed part of the first exports for trade or have been used by the English community established as part of the trading industry, are found in the restricted area of Paderborn, Zuckau near Gdansk, Gdansk, Konigsberg, and Bottenbroich near Cologne (Map 2).[269]

The earliest permit for the export of English alabaster was that granted by Richard II to Cosmato Gentilis on behalf of Pope Urban VI in 1382 for the alabaster images taken to Rome.[270] Other permits granted in 1391 and 1392 show at least some export of alabaster images by merchants from the port at Boston.

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[266]Toulmin Smith, ed., English Gilds: The Original Ordinances of more than one hundred Early English Gilds (London, 1870); Maud Sellers, York Memorandum Book: Part II (1388-1493) (London, 1915).

[267]Cheetham (1989), 45.

[268]Hildburgh (1948) "Nantes", 11-12.

[269]Cheetham (1989), 45. Other sources of information on alabasters found in Germany, the Low Countries, and the Baltics include: Hildburgh, "An English Alabaster in Holland," Antiquaries Journal XII (1932), 24-26 (Afferden Passion altarpiece); Hildburgh, "Further Miscellaneous Notes on Medieval English Alabaster Carvings," Antiquaries Journal XVII (1937), 181-191 (Afferden, Holland and others); Hildburgh, "Notes on some English Alabaster Carvings in Germany," Antiquaries Journal V (1925), 55-62 (Nuremberg, Berlin, Cologne, Aix-la-Chapelle, Gross-Gronau, Bottenbroich, Emmerich, Paderborn, Zuckau, and Danzig-Gdansk); and Martin Conway, "An English Alabaster figure in Leningrad," Burlington Magazine XLVI (June 1925), 245.

[270]Ibid.; Cheetham (1962), 241-242; Hildburgh (1955), "Italy", 182-186.

The merchant, John Guychard, was granted a safe conduct in 1408 for the export of John, Duke of Brittany's alabaster monument to Nantes. Though this tomb was destroyed in the French Revolution, many of the alabaster altarpieces survive intact, and these provide information about the construction and design of the English alabaster works. There are, in fact, probably more surviving English alabasters in France than in any other location.[271] Cheetham states that the majority are concentrated in Normandy, but as many as 116 alabasters are in the region near Bordeaux (held by the English from 1152 to 1453). A variety of customs accounts and ship inventories between 1465 and 1534 indicate the level of trade between England and France and the large number of English alabasters sent to France prior to the Reformation.[272] Certain iconographic peculiarities have made it possible for scholars such as Hildburgh and Paul Biver to find correlations between these altar sets and sets or isolated tablets elsewhere. In some cases, certain altarpieces can even be ascribed to a specific origin.[273]

Two documents of 1414 describe the export of unworked alabaster to France.[274] According to these, the mason Alexandre de Berneval travelled to England on behalf of the abbot of Fécamp in Normandy to select and purchase the alabaster. The first

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[271]Cheetham (1989), 47.

[272]Ibid.

[273]For instance, Hildburgh attributes a group of carvings at Nantes to the alabastermen working at York, and connects them as well to the Life of St. John the Baptist altarpiece at Gdansk (pages 11-12). Discussions of English alabasters in France can be found in the following sources: Hildburgh, "A Group of Medieval English Alabaster Carvings at Nantes," Journal of the British Archaeological Association XI (1948), 1-12; Paul Biver, "Some Examples of English Alabaster Tables in France," Archaeological Journal LXVII (1910), 66-87; Hildburgh, (1937), "Further Misc. Notes," 181-191; and Augusta S. Tavender, "Three Medieval English Alabasters in French Churches," Speculum XXIV (July 1949), 397-402.

[274]Cheetham (1989), 45; John Bilson, "A French Purchase of English Alabaster in 1414," Archaeological Journal LXIV (1907), 32-37.

document is the contract between the abbot for the services of a ship and its master to sail from Harfleur to the port of Hull. The second document describes de Berneval's journey. After arriving at Chellaston, he and his party met with the same Thomas Prentis mentioned in a later document as responsible for the Lowick church monument for Ralph Greene mentioned above.

In 1456, an English parish priest, John Goodyear, rector of the church of Cheil (now Chale, Isle of Wight), made a pilgrimage to the great shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela, taking with him a gift of "an English retable of wood with panels of carved alabaster, and gave it to the cathedral containing the shrine."[275] This altarpiece (figure 71), because it can be so closely dated, has made a valuable contribution in establishing relative dates for English alabaster carvings. The subjects of this altarpiece include the Calling of St. James; the Charge to the Apostles; the Preaching of St. James; the Martyrdom of the Saint before Herod Agrippa; and the Translation of the Body of the Saint from Joppa to Iria Flavia, before its final overland journey to the site of Santiago de Compostela.[276] In addition to its practical importance for the dating and style of alabaster carvings, the conditions surrounding and records pertaining to the commission of this altarpiece emphasize the importance of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the mid-fifteenth-century. This may explain in part the presence of St. James on so many of the later St. John's Head carvings. Other English alabasters are also found in Spain, including eight fragments found in the last century in the vault of the cathedral of

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[275]Hildburgh, "A Datable English Alabaster Altarpiece at Santiago de Compostela," Antiquaries Journal VI (1926), 304-307.

[276]Ibid., 306.

Mondonedo; an altarpiece in honour of the Virgin Mary at Aviles; and panels at Pontevedra, Bilbao, San Sebastian, Barcelona, Sampedor in Catalonia, Cartagena, Madrid, Navarra, Palma de Mallorca, and Daroca among other sites.[277]

Other documentary references pertain to English alabasters in Iceland and Denmark. English merchants had connections to Iceland, and many of the bishops there in the fifteenth-century were English as well.[278] The cult of Thomas of Canterbury had long been actively promoted in Iceland as well.

Licensed trade between England and Iceland was inaugurated in 1427, but ships were already sailing from Bristol and other ports bound for Iceland in the fourteenth century.[279] In 1450, William Canynges, a merchant of Bristol, was granted a licence under Henry VI to trade for fish and other goods with Iceland.[280] Hull developed a trade with Iceland as a civic venture during the reign of Edward IV (1461-83).[281] Licences are recorded for merchants to trade with Iceland in 1478 and 1483. Richard III was said to have "encouraged trade, and especially voyages to Iceland and the northern fisheries."[282] As many of the alabasters preserved in Iceland date from the Later Period, it is probable

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[277]Hildburgh, "Some Presumably Datable Fragments of an English Alabaster Retable, and some Assembled Notes on English Alabaster Carvings in Spain," Antiquaries Journal XXIV (1944), 27-37; Hildburgh, "Studies in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings, Part I: Six Tables at Daroca," Journal of the British Archaeological Association, XVII (1954), 11-23.

[278]Cheetham (1989), 47.

[279]Cheetham (1989), 47.

[280]Nelson, "English Medieval Alabaster Carvings in Iceland and Denmark," Archaeological Journal LXXVII (1920), 192.

[281]Cheetham (1989), 47.

[282]Nelson (1920), "Iceland," 192.

that they came during this period of active trade in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Two early records refer to altarpieces surviving in Iceland. The first, from 1463, mentions "a fine retable" in the church at Hítardalur. The second, from 1471, records the name of the donor, Margrethe, of a gilded albaster retable for the church of Möðruvellir.[283] Other fifteenth century examples of English alabasters found in Iceland are a Passion altarpiece in the Reykjavik Museum, formerly at Reynistaar church in Skagafiord, and a small fixed reredos in the Tingore church.[284] A devotional panel representing the Trinity, now at the Reykjavik Museum, is encased in its original wooden housing painted with the same blazing sun motifs that are found on the doors of the surviving housings of the St. John's Heads.[285]

A Passion triptych (figure 65) also in the Reykjavik Museum, formerly in the church at Hólar, has two supplementary panels and flanking saints to make a five panel altarpiece. The flanking saints are St. John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei, and St. Catherine holding a wheel and sword. The central panel represents the Trinity, beneath which is a figure of the "Lord's Pity" flanked by angels, and much like the same image found on the St. John's Heads. Nelson notes that the close connection between "this Eucharistic symbol and the Saint John's Head is remarkable, and points to Nottingham as the source of the somewhat crude and late triptych."[286]

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[283]Cheetham (1989), 47.

[284]Nelson (1920), "Iceland," 192-206. I have not been able to consult Bera Nordal's recent thesis on English alabaster altarpieces in Iceland.

[285]Ibid., 197 and plate IV, no. 1.

[286]Ibid., 195.

The church at Borbjerg, Jutland, Denmark has a triptych altar dedicated to St. George with five panels and two standing figures. This, along with other examples of English alabasters in Denmark, is discussed in detail in Nelson's article.[287]

The Reformation brought about the end of the thriving alabaster industry. Though tomb monuments continued to be made for many years afterwards, the production and sale of altarpieces, which had become an increasingly important aspect of the industry, was discontinued. Suppression inventories, such as that from the London Charterhouse (1538-39), include specific references to alabaster works: "from the high altar 'the nether fronte of the alter of albaster wyth the Trinitie and other Imagys'; in St. John's chapel 'an alter and a table of the Resurrecyon of alabaster wyth ij imagys of Saint John Evaungelist and the other of Saint Augustyne at eyther end of the sayd alter'; in the chapter house 'An altar wythe a table of alabaster wythe vij yoies of our ladye.'"[288] Many of the alabasters seized during the reign of Henry VIII were exported to the Continent, creating a two-fold damaging effect for the English carvers. Since as many as 3,000 religious houses were destroyed, the number of potential customers was severely reduced. Older church furnishings seized were at least sometimes released for sale, cutting further into the market of contemporary alabastermen.[289]

Edward VI's Act of January 1550 against "superstitious" books and images ordered the destruction of images in churches, and specifically mentions images in

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[287]Ibid. 199-206.

[288]Cheetham (1989), 51.

[289]Ibid., 51-52.

alabaster.[290] As memorial tombs were not regarded as "images," they were exempt, and a larger proportion of the St. John's Heads may have survived in England because they were objects of private devotion, rather than church furnishings.

It is certain some of the images commanded to be destroyed found their way to the Continent, for church accounts from 1548 mention three altars purchased by Frenchmen for thirty shillings,[291] and a letter from the English ambassador to France notes the sale of images there.[292]

The development and destruction of the medieval English alabaster industry coincides with a time of great change and upheaval in English society. In addition to the expansion of trade with Continental Europe, the English were involved in continental politics as a result of the events of the Hundred Years War, and they were surely exposed to religious changes emerging from their neighbours' territories. Domestic conflicts, including border disputes with Scotland, unrest and instability in England's northern regions, heresy trials and insurrections, and the military and political conflicts that became known as the Wars of the Roses, had an impact on the society that created and used the

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[290]Ibid., 52. Cheetham includes part of the text as follows: "And be if further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person or persons of what estate, degree, or condition soever he, she, or they be body politic or corporate, that now have or hereafter shall have in his, her, or their custody any books or writings of the sorts aforesaid, or any images of stone, timber, alabaster, or earth, graven, carved or painted, which heretofore have been taken out of any church or chapel, or yet stand in any church or chapel, and do not before the last day of June next ensuing deface and destroy or cause to be defaced and destroyed the same images and every of them...and be thereof lawfully convict, forfeit and lose to the King our Sovereign Lord for the first offence twenty shillings, and for the second offence shall forfeit and lose being thereof lawfully convict four pounds, and for the third offence shall suffer imprisonment at the King's will..."

[291]Ibid., 52.

[292]Ibid., 52-53. The letter, dated September 1550, is from Sir John Mason to the Privy Council and reads in part, "Three or four ships have lately arrived from England laden with images, which have been sold at Paris, Rouen and other places, and being eagerly purchased, give to the ignorant people occasion to talk according to their notions; which needed not had their Lordships' command for defacing of them been observed."

St. John's Heads and other products of the alabaster industry. These issues will now be examined, exploring the role of the St. John's Heads in English society on the eve of the Reformation.

Chapter 4

Social Function and Iconographic Change

The St. John's Heads were produced for only 100 to 125 years at most. Yet, these were years of great change in political, economic, social, and religious spheres of medieval English life. The reversals of fortunes in France near the end of the Hundred Years War contributed in part to the beginnings of domestic conflicts that came to be called the Wars of the Roses by later propagandists.[293] This series of battles and related disputes reflects the complexity of society in which power struggles between local gentry, dynastic succession, changes in social classes, and fears of religious heresies combined to provide confusion and frequent shifts of loyalties.[294]

The merchant class, with its guilds and overseas connections, became ever more effective in influencing political and diplomatic events. Some found it possible to marry into the gentry and aristocratic classes, whose own economic power was greatly strained by various conflicts, divisions through inheritance, and the costs of their retainers. The occupational guild provided regulation for the crafts and social support for members. Religious and social guilds ensured that care would be taken for the souls of members, and

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[293]The Tudor propagandists were the first to give the conflicts the name, and it was they who attributed the red rose to the Lancastrians. Although the white rose was a well-known badge of York, the badge of Lancaster was the swan.

[294]For the unrest in the north, the division of the Neville family over inheritance, and the beginning of the rivalry between the junior branch of the Neville family and the Percies, and how this contributed to the dynastic conflicts, see A. J. Pollard, North-Eastern England During the Wars of the Roses: Lay Society, War, and Politics, 1450-1500, (Oxford, 1990). Similar issues are discussed in Ralph A. Griffiths, "Local Rivalries and National Politics: The Percies, the Nevilles, and the Duke of Exeter, 1452-55," Speculum XLIII (1968), 589-632.

also gave access to members of other social strata of society than usually encountered.[295] For all classes of society, religion could not be separated from political or economic considerations. The connection of the guilds to civic and state governments, and to the Church, made them a significant force in the support of orthodoxy in both religious and secular matters. Both occupational and religious guilds were responsible, with the civic government and local church authorities, for the production of the religious plays and processions that were a prominent feature of fifteenth century England.

International influences contributed to interpretations of piety and heresy in England. In addition to the trading connections of the merchants, pilgrimages to Spain, France, Jerusalem and Rome exposed even the lower classes to new social and religious ideas. Merchants had settlements throughout Europe, where they might have come into contact with different interpretations of orthodoxy. The greater availability of books and their translation into the vernacular also contributed to the formation of Lollard ideas in England.

This complex society with its prominent display of one's lineage with heraldry, of one's political alliances with livery badges, and of one's religious beliefs as manifested in the display of images of saints, through guild membership, or through donations of books, windows, sculptures, and paintings, both created and used the alabaster St. John's Heads.

The earliest reference to these tablets in alabaster is in the 1432 will of Isabella

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[295]For instance, the York Corpus Christi guild included among its members many merchants, tailors, widows, and others from the working class, but also members of the gentry, and even Cicely, Duchess of York, her son Richard, Duke of Gloucester and later King Richard III, and his wife, Anne Neville. For civic roles of religious guilds, see Ben R. McRee, "Religious Gilds and Civic Order: The Case of Norwich in the Late Middle Ages," Speculum LXVII (1992) 69-97.

Hamerton, a widow from York who bequeathed an alabaster Head of St. John the Baptist to a chaplain, Dan John Branthwate.[4] Hope mentions an even earlier notice of a St. John's Head in the inventory of St. Kerrian's Church, Exeter dated 1417. The inventory describes two images of alabaster and then mentions "unum discum cum capite Johannis Baptistae," but whether this is also of alabaster is not stated.[5] Other wills and inventory lists leave no doubt about the importance of these tablets as possessions of value to the owners, nor of the predominance of the theme of St. John's Head in late medieval English society.

The popularity of the image of St. John's Head was not limited to one class of society or medium of depiction.[6] Hope mentions that the inventory of Henry VIII's plate and jewels contained several rich examples of St. John's Heads:

> Item a litell tablet of golde of Saynte Johns Hedde (f. 139b)
> Item an Image of saynt Johns hedde set in a disshe of Agathe garnysshed w(i)t(h) golde and set w(i)t(h) divers small rubies (f. 195b)
> Item Saynt Johns hedde in disshe of Agathe garnysshed w(i)t(h) silver guilt and set upon foote of silver guilte (f.196)[7]

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[4]Hope (1891), 10; Hope (1904), 234; Cheetham (1989), 28.

[5]Hope (1891), 10.

[6]It was often featured on seals. The founding charter of the Tallow-Chandlers' Company, issued in 1456, has an angel bearing a charger upon which is the head of St. John, showing the same wound above the eye as is found on many of the alabaster plaques. A photograph of the charter is found in Anthony Cheetham, Richard III, (London, 1972), 154. A later (1634) grant of supporters to the Tallow-Chanlers' Company also has a head of St. John, but in this case it is not borne by an angel and is surrounded by a sort of sunburst design. It is discussed in Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, The Art of Heraldry, (London, 1986 reprint of 1904 edition), 446 and plate CXX. St. John was also the patron of Tailors and Barbers. The alabaster tomb of Sir William Ryther at All Saints, Ryther, has the interesting feature, now badly mutilated, of a footrest for the knight that has the forepart of a dog wearing a collar decorated with roses, and hindquarters merging with a face thought to represent St. John and have a direct relationship to the St. John's Heads. Ryther became a member of the York Corpus Christi Guild in 1473, and it is supposed that this might account for the presence of the figure on his tomb. A discussion of the tomb is found in Pauline E. Routh, Medieval Effigial Alabaster Tombs in Yorkshire, (Ipswich, 1976), 87-91 and plate 52.

[7]Hope (1891), 8.

The 1542 inventory of James V, King of Scotland included a "sanct Johnis heid with ane perle."[8] At the other end of the social scale, a volume in the British Museum contains an entry for a "picture of Sainte Johns headde in a dish of earthe," thought by Hope to be one of the terracotta tablets made in large numbers at Lyons at the end of the fifteenth century, possibly in imitation of the alabaster heads of St. John.[9]

Hope provides a number of other examples from contemporary wills that mention St. John's Heads in alabaster and other media:

> 1446. Will of Joan, widow of Nicholas Blackburn of York, citizen and mercer. To her maid Joan Gray, A St. John's head with all its appendages (possibly a housing).
>
> 1453. Inventory of King's College Chapel, Cambridge. An old pall for Saynt Johnys hedd.
>
> 1446. Inventory of Ewelme hospital, Oxon. Item a Seynt Johes hede, peynted with silver foill.
>
> 1468. Inventory of Elizabeth Sywardby. In the chapel: De j capite Sancti Johannis Baptistae depicto iijd.
>
> 1472. Will of John Baddesworth, rector of Laxton, Notts. Communitati cantariarum (apud Suthwell) j magnum caput Sancti Johannis Baptistae in uno tabernaculo.
>
> 1479. Goods of Henry Higgin of Nottingham, butcher. Unum caput Sancti Johannis Baptistae....
>
> 1499-1500. Goods of Nicholas Wildgoos of Nottingham. j cofera et vj. capita Sancti Johannis Baptistae valent viij d.
>
> 1523. Will of John Drake of Rochester. Item lege dompno Nicholao Dersingham monacho capud Sancti Johannis Baptistae.

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[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

1524-5. Inventory of John Grene of York, glover. A Sancte John hede ij s.

1534. Inventory of goods of John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, in his palace at Rochester. In the brode galary. Item a saint Johnes hedde standing at thende of the altere. Item a boke pontificall lying vnder the same saint Johnes hedde.

1536. Letter from Ann Ronand (Madame de Bours) to Lady Lisle, March 24th. Mentions that her daughter "sends you a little silver cup and a head of St. John to put in a cabinet."

1538. Inventory of Grey Friars, Winchester. ij seynt John headys ij d.

1539. Will of Nicholas Metcalfe, archdeacon of Rochester. Item I bequeth to Mr. psone [sic] of Westham field the table of seynt John baptist in the hall.

1554. Inventory of Thurstan Tyldisley. In the chapel at Myerscough, One saincte Johns Hedde.[10]

The will of Agas Hert of Bury St. Edmunds, September 2, 1522, has been mentioned above in Chapters 1 and 2, whereby she leaves an alabaster St. John's Head with "Seynt Pet(r) and Seynt Thom(a)s" to her son Richard Jaxson and another with an inscription and cloth of gold and black velvet letters to a different person.[11]

Cheetham records a notice of a St. John's Head in a list of household goods in Nottingham for April 1492, "'price 5s., to be safely and securely taken care of for the use of the aforesaid Margery' (Copeland)."[12]

Norman P. Tanner noted that the objects of piety owned by citizens of Norwich cannot be described fully because the inventories of only two of them survive. One of

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[10]Ibid., 7-10.

[11]Ibid., 10.

[12]Cheetham (1989), 28.

these, however, the inventory of goods belonging to John Baker, notes a "Saint John's head in alabaster."[13]

Susan Foister records alabaster heads of St. John in the inventories of Robert Waryn, a shopkeeper (1494), who had one, and Roger Wynter (1536), who had two. She also notes a painted cloth depicting the head of St. John the Baptist in the possession of John Myles in 1501.[14] William Raignold in 1500 had "i image of seynt John the Baptists hed and small Javelyn" (referring presumably to an instrument of the Passion).[15] Foister notes that until about 1520, references to the St. John's Heads occur very frequently, sometimes with a St. John's cloth, which may have been used to drape the heads (perhaps with or without housings since no further mention is made). Both a St. John's Head and a cloth are mentioned in the inventory of Agnes Browne of 1539.[16] Cheetham also lists a 1492 inventory of William Atce, petty canon of St. Paul's which includes "In the lowe parlor: Itm a lyttyll clothe for seint Johns hed ...iiijd."[17] An unnamed and undated inventory also lists "in the halle: Item an old cloth of Bawdkyn for Saynte Johns hede ... xiijs iiijd."[18]

The cloths were often of precious material worth more than the alabaster itself and

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[13]Norman P. Tanner, The Church in Late Medieval Norwich: 1370-1532, (Toronto, 1984), 90.

[14]Susan Foister, "Paintings and other works of art in sixteenth-century English inventories," Burlington Magazine CXXIII, 938 (1981), 273-276.

[15]Ibid., 275. Also noted by Cheetham (1989), 28.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Cheetham (1989), 28.

[18]Ibid.

sometimes painted. Foister notes that a London mercer, Robert Stodley, had in 1536 a "saynt Johans cloth of sarcenet staynyd wyth the Image of saynt John", worth three shillings.[19] At this time, an alabaster carving probably cost about one shilling.[20] Of course, these can only represent relative costs of goods, for surely the "cloth of St. John Baptist of sarcenett painted" singled out for special mention in the will of Cicely of York, the mother of Edward IV and Richard III, cost far more than three shillings. Cicely's cloth probably had a painted representation of St. John's martyrdom, "upon which the eyes might rest while the mind was directed in prayer."[21] Armstrong notes her special veneration for the saint, and states that she also left a cloth with the Life of John the Baptist to the Duke of York.[22]

By the 1520's, the St. John's Heads seem to have become less fashionable, and were perhaps already becoming "antiquities." Richard Gough's inventory in 1525 shows he had "a old Seynt Johns hed" in his house in London, and the two alabaster sculptures possessed by Henry, Lord Cobham in his house in 1603 "were displayed in the long gallery with his extensive collection of paintings and maps."[23]

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[19]Foister, 275.

[20]Ibid. and Cheetham (1989), 30-31. Kay Staniland provided in lectures at a Workshop on Medieval Textiles, February 1994, the probable average daily wage of a tailor as about 3 to 6 pence. Cheetham, 62, note 199, states that 12 silver pennies equalled one shilling, 160 equalled one mark and 240 equalled one pound. If the alabaster heads of St. John were worth between about six and twenty (old) pence, then they would equal somewhere between two and seven days' wages for a tailor. Cheetham gives the general range of prices for St. John's Heads on page 31.

[21]C. A. J. Armstrong, "The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York," England, France and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century, (London, 1983), 155.

[22]Ibid. Armstrong calls this Duke of York "later King Henry VIII."

[23]Foister, 275-276.

While there are numerous documentary references to the alabaster St. John's Heads, their meaning and purpose has never been explained, aside from the general conclusion that they functioned as objects of personal piety and private devotion. In one of the earliest scholarly notices (1855) discussing these tablets, B. Nightingale stated, "The import of this hagiotypic combination has not been explained."[24] Nearly a century later, Terence Hodgkinson said of the tablets, "Sir William St. John Hope disposed of any doubt that they represent the head of St. John on a charger but could give no final explanation of their symbolism or their immense popularity. The matter has never been fully clarified."[25]

Hope admitted the subject was "beset with difficulties, and after much research I am afraid I cannot offer a really satisfactory explanation."[26] He did, however, offer some possibilities. The Holy Lamb is considered the emblem of St. John the Baptist, but "the final meaning conforms to that of the figure of Christ, whether as the suffering Man, or the Infant on His mother's knee."[27] Hope observed the close relation between the principal subject and the base accessory and described how he searched through the old English service-books for clues. He states:

The Sarum books yielded nothing, but in the York porthos[28], in the fourth

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[24]Nightingale, 186.

[25]Terence Hodgkinson, "A Collection of English Alabasters," Burlington Magazine LXXXVIII (1946), 292-6.

[26]Hope (1891), 37.

[27]Ibid.

[28]According to Henry Barclay Swete in the new edition revised by Arthur John Macclean, Church Services and Service-Books Before the Reformation, 40-41, the term porthos derives from the Norman portiforium. This was the book "which the priest carried with him when he went upon his travels. In Anglo-French this word became portehors; in the vernacular it degenerated into porthos, portos, portuisse, portasse, portous, and other forms....the word breviarium was not entirely superseded by portiforium; the latter, as its derivation indicates, belonged in strict use to the portable book which was the constant companion of the ecclesiastic; the

> lesson for the feast of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, I found an explanation: 'Caput Johannis in disco: signat corpus Christi: quo pascimur in sancti altari: Et quod ecclesie gentium tribuitur in salutem ac remedium animarum' ('John's head on a tray signifies Christ's body, from which we eat at the holy altar, and which was given to the congregation of nations in salvation and remedy of souls').[29] But though this explains the association of the head with the figure of Christ or Holy Lamb, I cannot see any connection between St. John the Baptist's head and the Sacrament of the altar.[30]

As to the other elements of the composition, Hope expressed uncertainty. He thought the accessory or accessories at the top of the panels had no special significance; it may have referred to the saint, but more likely was meant to represent the soul of the donor. He could offer no explanation for the choice of saints, nor why the head of St. John should be surrounded by figures of other holy men and women. Hope suggested the following reasons for choosing St. Peter and the archbishop:

> [St. Peter was chosen as the] chief of the apostles, and St. Thomas of Canterbury as the saint whom Englishmen looked upon with such profound feelings of veneration. It is, however, possible, that St. Peter was selected from his association with the church of York, and that the archbishop is St. William; in which case the two York saints would form fitting supporters for a subject derived from the York porthos, and carved by Nottingham 'alabastermen' in the York diocese.[31]

It is from this latter interpretation that Nelson derives his identification of the archbishop

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former was chiefly employed for the great MSS., written for use in choir, which gave the Mattins lessons at full length....The smaller book was the one which the laity were accustomed to see in the priest's hand, and the numerous corruptions of portehors which occur in English texts show how familiar the word must have been to all classes of the English laity."

[29]Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture, (Cambridge, 1991), 315. Rubin's translation. She states that the verse is from the fifth reading on the feast of the Decollation of St. John the Baptist in the York breviary, while Hope credits it to the fourth lesson (p. 37).

[30]Hope (1891), 37.

[31]Ibid., 37-38.

as William of York. Hope, however, always identifies the figure elsewhere as St. Thomas.

Hope suggests that the tablets may have been made as devotional tablets for members of the York Guild of Corpus Christi.[32] Nigel Ramsay recalls Hope's theory that "representations of St. John the Baptist's head...might be associated with York, on the grounds that such representations were seen as standing for Christ and that there was a prominent gild of the Corpus Christi in York."[33] He disagrees, however, and goes on to state, "This theory is not tenable, but Hope's suggestions have nonetheless been used to found the consequent possible political significance of certain of the St. John carvings."[34] He claims the "general identification of St. John the Baptist's death with that of Christ is doubtful, and there were Corpus Christi gilds in many towns."[35] Ramsay gives no alternative theory for the meaning of the tablets.

Clement Pitman merely states that John had long been one of the most familiar and frequently invoked saints in Christendom. Although he recalls Hope's suggestion that they were in some way related to the York Corpus Christi Guild, he tends to add a slightly different slant to the discussion:

> Consequently devotion to him in England, where John was the most popular male Christian name, should cause no surprise, nor even that he was especially regarded so near to Lincoln Cathedral, with its St. John Baptist Chapel, the building of which had been one of St. Hugh's last cares in the world. There was also a chapel of St. John Baptist in St. Mary's, Nottingham's oldest parish church. Consequently, there would have been

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[32]Hope (1904), 240, repeated by Hildburgh (1933), "Iconographical Pecularities," 144-145.

[33]Ramsay, 34.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

> no difficulty in selling these alabaster tables of The Head of St. John the Baptist in Nottingham even if, in the first instance, they had been brought into being by York's Corpus Christi Guild.[36]

There were far more chapels and churches dedicated to St. John the Baptist than the two which Pitman mentions. The importance of the saint is beyond dispute, as will be discussed below. Pitman's suggestion that the popularity of the tablets, or the location of their production, can be accounted for by the proximity of two chapels in the vicinity of Lincoln and Nottingham is weak.

Hildburgh is the only other scholar to propose a theory about the possible origin and meaning of the tablets. In an article from 1949, he gave a summary of his belief that "they may well, I think, be monuments to some now-forgotten folk-belief."[37] These might have been "masked expressions of the, by then shadowy, remains of some ancient solar cult, made acceptable to the ecclesiatical authorities by the portraying on them of certain saintly persons."[38] He suggested further that the tablets probably had some calendrical implications suggested by the position of the elements in the most common forms:

> the face at the centre, above it a little figure representing St. John's soul, SS. Peter and Thomas Becket flanking the face, and Christ in His tomb below it. Each of those four persons was a victim of murderers, on dates accepted in medieval times as, beginning with the Saviour and continuing clockwise round the face, 25th March, 29th June, 24th September and 29th December - dates so close to those of the equinoxes and the solstices as to suggest that they might have been selected because of their relations to them, while the long-standing association of St. John (whose birth was celebrated, as it still is, on 24th June) with Midsummer Day, suggests the

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[36]Pitman (1954), 222-223.

[37]Hildburgh, "Folk-Life Recorded in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings," Folk-Lore LX (1949), 261-262.

[38]Ibid.

> further possibility that the circular dish whose centre is occupied by his face may have symbolized either the sun or the round of the year.[39]

Hildburgh had developed his theory, working out the dates and general concept some years before.[40] In his earlier article, he recalls Hope's suggestion that the tablets might have some connection with the Corpus Christi guild or some other large guild in Yorkshire. He states that while many additional alabaster St. John's Heads have come to light, the suggestions Hope made as to the purpose of the tablets had not been disputed, nor had any more satisfactory explanation of them been propounded. This was in spite of the fact that Hope ended his own paper with some doubt, stating, "[u]nfortunately neither the records nor inventories of the Corpus Christi gild afford any further help, and so the case must stand where it does."[41]

Hildburgh then sets forth his argument: in each case where there is some image in addition to the central Head itself, there is either Christ in the tomb or the Agnus Dei - a likeness or a symbol of Christ as victim. In the next form of the tablets, the head is flanked almost invariably by St. Peter and St. Thomas Becket - each a martyr. Hildburgh concludes:

> Thus in the commonest form of the tablets, the four persons represented were all victims of murderers. Then, there seems to be more than chance coincidence in the fact that the dates commonly accepted in medieval

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[39]Ibid., 262. These sorts of interpretations were fashionable earlier this century, and like some contemporary theories of grail lore to be discussed below, have been largely discredited in more recent scholarship. Hildburgh bases part of his theory about the meaning and uses of the St. John's Head on now "discredited" interpretations of folklore and grail literature, and yet some recent scholars favour his interpretation over Hope's (which they "discredit"). Some review of the earlier scholarship, including the theories no longer accepted, is relevant and important in reassessing the validity of Hope's interpretation as well as Hildburgh's.

[40]Hildburgh, "Iconographical Peculiarities in English Medieval Alabaster Carving," Folk-Lore XLIV, part II (1933), 143-149.

[41]Ibid., 144.

> England as those of the deaths of the three human victims all fall on the 29th day of a month.[42]

He notes that the deaths of St. Peter and St. Thomas Becket are celebrated on June 29th and December 29th, or 183 days apart, and that these two are shown directly opposite each other on either side of the head. Hildburgh claims that the the feast of the Decollation of St. John was celebrated on several different dates, and was in medieval York and Salisbury celebrated on August 29th, although August 24, April 13th and September 24th (which Hildburgh called the octave of June 24th) "have been in other times or in other places accepted respectively as the date of the beheading."[43]

Through a complex process of reasoning, Hildburgh concludes that through the analogy of March 25th as the date for both the Annunciation and the Crucifixion, the date of the conception of St. John is

> generally taken as September 23rd or 24th and that of his death seemingly occasionally...as September 24th. Now, if we could take, as the date of the beheading, September 24th instead of August 29th, we should find a somewhat curious situation, for September 24th has precisely the relation - that is, it is just half a year later - to March 25th, the date commonly assumed in medieval England as that of the Crucifixion, as December 29th has to June 29th; for then not only are the four dates of the four deaths - March 25th, June 29th, September 24th, and December 29th - read clockwise round the dish just in their order in the calendar, but they are so near to the dates of the equinoxes and the solstices as to suggest that they held some symbolical reference to the four seasons.[44]

He believes, then, that the reason for the tablets might be found "either in the medieval tendency to discover religious symbolism in the division of the year, or in that

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid., 146.

[44]Ibid., 147.

latent paganism which found vehement expression at the popular Christian festivals of the year."[45] As to the supplemental images, he believes that these must reflect late examples, and takes them "to be elaborations made at a time when what I suppose to have been the basic principles of the St. John's Head tables had been forgotton."[46] Hildburgh even suggests that St. Thomas Apostle's Day is December 21, a date even closer to the Winter Solstice than December 29th, and "that thus is suggested the possibility that some ancient calendrical grouping of saints preceded the one adopted for the St. John's Head tables, and that in that ancient grouping St. Thomas Apostle held the place occupied on the alabaster by his exceedingly popular English namesake."[47]

Hildburgh's theory is certainly intriguing, but there are some problems that must be admitted. While the calendrical significance of the pairing of St. Peter with St. Thomas was probably not lost on the medieval audience, there seems to be no evidence of the precedence Hildburgh seeks in earlier models nor in literary references. Nor does this account for the tablets with simpler compositions. His theory does not provide any reason for the sudden emergence of the form in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, nor for the sudden disappearance of this type of object in the early sixteenth century. The fact that the Nativity of St. John the Baptist is celebrated at Midsummer derives from the information that he was born six months before Christ, whose own Nativity was more or

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[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid., 149. Yet, it does not seem possible that more than about 25 years could have elapsed between the earliest compositions and those with the flanking saints. It seems unlikely that the "basic principles" could have been forgotton so soon.

[47]Ibid., 148, note 75.

less arbitrarily set near the Winter solstice. The fact that many pagan midsummer activities and celebrations were absorbed by the feast of the Nativity of St. John is undeniable, but this does not mean necessarily that the depiction of his head should be read as the substitution for an ancient solar god, especially in this rather late occurrence in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

There are, of course, the possibilities that vestiges of the ancient Celtic religion indirectly influenced the development of the iconography. The severed human head was an important symbol for the Celts. According to Anne Ross, they could serve not only as important trophies, but had inherent powers and would act to protect the home or fortress and ensure good luck and success.[48] The head was believed to be the seat of the soul and symbol of divinity. It could remain alive after the body had died and had power to tell the future, avert evil, entertain guests at feasts, and otherwise act.[49] The many heads of wood and stone attest to the importance of the head cult among the Celts. The problem again is one of time, for the period between any possible Celtic model and these late medieval tablets seems too great.

Some Arthurian and Grail legends are related to Celtic lore of talking heads and tales of the beheading of heroes. Hildburgh refers to the theory of J. L. Weston, suggesting that the same verse in the York Breviary might in some way be related to a

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[48]Anne Ross, The Pagan Celts, (London, 1986, revised from 1970 edition), 121. Ross has an extensive discussion of the cult of the head with numerous illustrations in her Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition, (London, 1967), 61-126 and figures 8a-41b.

[49]Ibid., 122.

local cult which associated the Holy Grail with St. John.[50] The general idea seems to be the substitution of St. John for the Celtic god, Bran, where the severed head is kept as a talisman and presides over a feast.

Other connections might be cited. According to Norma Goodrich, Perlesvaus, written by an anonymous Benedictine author, describes how after the rule of several Grail Kings in Britain, the Grail and other relics including the sword that had beheaded John the Baptist, could no longer be seen.[51] This latter relic, according to the story, had been procured by Gawain from Gurgalain.[52] The popularity of Grail lore may, in fact, have influenced medieval interpretations of St. John's role, but it generally must relate more to the Eucharistic symbolism than to beheaded Celtic gods.

While such Celtic, folk-lore and literary connections are certainly possible, they have the same weakness as Hildburgh's theory in that they fail to explain the sudden rise in both the popularity of the subject and the iconographic form with its variations.

Another difficulty in Hildburgh's theory is the requirement to substitute September 24th for the Decollation of St. John. He credits the date to use in the Gallican Church, yet both the date and the specific practices of the Gallican Use seem somewhat obscure. Swete states that no complete Mass of a purely Gallican character has survived; reconstructions must be made from scraps of mutilated Service-books and notices of

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[50]Hildburgh (1933), "Peculiarities," 144-145, note 67. Roger Sherman Loomis, "The Head in the Grail," Studies in Medieval Literature, (New York, 1970), 35-58, discusses Weston's theory but considers it fanciful. He identifies "the Head in the Grail" stories as that of "the severed head of the sea-god Bran" (56).

[51]Norma Lorre Goodrich, The Holy Grail, (New York, 1992), 205.

[52]Ibid., 291-292. Sir Gawain is said to swear by St. John, and there are possible parallels between a banqueting/beheading scene with Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (as in Cotton MS. Nero A. x., fol. 90v.) and Herod's Banquet/Decollation of St. John Baptist.

Gallican writers.[53] The liturgy was apparently one of the early forms used in Gaul, and may have come into Britain before the arrival of St. Augustine in 597.[54] It seems unlikely that this use could have provided the impetus for the widespread popularity of the St. John's Heads, especially if they are to be connected to Nottingham or possibly to York, based on documentary and stylistic evidence. It also seems unlikely that the Gallican use could be the origin if Maskell is correct in his claim that the Anglo-Saxon church (that possibly adopted the Gallican use in early Britian) was "most anxious to fight against the introduction of any pagan rites."[55] Thus, some other explanation is required.

There is little doubt that St. John the Baptist was one of the most popular saints in all Christendom. As the forerunner, baptizer, and cousin of Christ, he played a unique role. The manner of his life, ministry, and death was dramatic and left open the door to many interpretations about his significance as a figure standing, like Christ Himself, between the Old and New Covenants. At least 500 English churches alone were dedicated to St. John the Baptist.[56] As to one reason for the saint's popularity, Francis Bond notes, was that John was "connected above all other saints with the great sacrament of Baptism, which in the mediaeval world still vied to some extent with the sanctity of the Lord's Supper."[57]

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[53]Swete, 69-70.

[54]William Maskell, The Ancient Liturgy of the Church of England: According to the uses of Sarum, York, Hereford, and Bangor and the Roman Liturgy arranged in parallel columns with preface and notes, (3rd ed.) (Oxford, 1882), lvii.

[55]Ibid., lxi-lxii.

[56]Francis Bond, Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches, (London, 1914), 17.

[57]Ibid., 42.

Alison Binns has studied the dedications of monastic houses in England and Wales between 1066 and 1216, from which interesting patterns related to the increasing popularity of St. John can be found.[58] Only one dedication is noted for John the Baptist in monasteries founded in the pre-Conquest period which continued to exist beyond 1066. For monastic churches between 1066-1216, St. John the Baptist has 21 dedications and has moved into fourth place behind the Blessed Virgin Mary (235), Peter (29 or 47 in joint dedications with St. Paul), and the Holy Trinity (22).[59]

This increasing popularity may coincide with other factors, including Hope's original theory connecting the St. John's Head to the York reference about its Eucharistic symbolism. It seems possible that the importance of the Eucharist in society (seen through literature, drama, and art, designed for the dual purposes of promoting veneration and countering heresies) combined with political and economic factors (England's role in France and the Merchants' Staple at Calais) may provide a solution to the origin and meaning of the St. John's Heads.

The stab wound above the eyebrow on the Spilsbury alabaster, like many of the other tablets discussed in Chapter 2, was connected by Hope to the relic of St. John's head at Amiens. He was able to cite yet another will that seems to confirm this relationship. The will of John Fell, a chantry priest of St. William's altar in York Minster, dated 1506, contains the entry: "To my lord Robert Wannop, abbot of Sanct Mary Abbay at York, to dispose aftur his mynd, a Sanct John Baptist heid of Amyas, liying in a plature of tree,

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[58]Alison Binns, Dedications of Monastic Houses in England and Wales: 1066-1216, (Woodbridge, 1989), 18-47.

[59]Ibid. 21 and 18.

gyltid and gratid with stonys."[60]

The relic of the head of St. John at Amiens is only one of at least ten recorded throughout Europe.[61] The possible reasons the English alabaster St. John's Heads reflect the influence of the particular cult at Amiens may help provide clues to the original reason for the production of the tablets and to at least one aspect of their meaning. The translation of relics to and development of the cult at Amiens is only one part of the complicated and often contradictory legend about the life, death, and remains of St. John the Baptist. Certain of these events are illustrated in the surviving alabaster altarpieces showing the Life of St. John and give an example of what was surely a common theme given the popularity and importance of the saint.[62]

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[60]Hope (1891), 7.

[61]D. J. Hall, English Mediaeval Pilgrimage, (London, 1965), 9. Among these were two heads of John in Constantinople, one in Rome and an important cult at St. Jean d'Angely. An amusing story is told of a sixteenth-century traveller who visits several French shrines, and uponbeing shown the skull of St. John the Baptist, remarks that he has seen the skull of the same saint the previous day at a different site. The custodian replies that he must have seen the skull of John as a young man, whereas this one is his skull after he was "fully advanced in years and wisdom." References to this story are found in Sidney Heath, Pilgrim Life in the Middle Ages, (Port Washington, N.Y. and London, 1st edition 1911, reissued 1971), 36; and David Sox, Relics and Shrines, (London, 1985), 46. Sox, pp. 56-57, also quotes a twelfth-century abbot of Nogent-sous-Coucy, Guibert, who deplored the trade in relics and wrote about the multiple heads of St. John: "Some say they have such and such relic, and others loudly assert that they have it. The citizens of Constantinople claim the head of John the Baptist, while the monks of St. Jean d'Angely confidently believe that they have it. Now what could be more absurd than to suppose that this great saint had two heads. Let us therefore take this matter seriously and admit that one of them is wrong."

[62]Strangely, the scene of the Baptism of Christ does not seem to have been a common theme of the altarpieces. There is one tablet of three remaining panels from a reredos in the south-east chapel of St. Mary's church, Shrewsbury, which shows the baptism in the Jordan (Nelson (1925), 37). The Baptism appears on some baptismal fonts and other forms of art, but it does not seem to have been as common as in Continental and Byzantine art. The relics of the Baptist's fingers, however, seem to have been second only to the Head in importance (as the right hand was that which baptized the Lord). There seems to have been a proliferation of fingers as well as heads, as a brief summary of a few attests: one is recorded in the Church of St. John at Rhodes (Heath, 64); an archdeacon of Archbishop Rufus of Turin was struck dead (presumably by St. John) while attempting to remove a finger of the saint from the church of Maurienne (Sox, 45 and Patrick J. Geary, Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages, (Princeton, 1978), 139 and 186); Richard, the custodian of relics at Reims gave a joint of the saint to Giradus of Florennes, later bishop of Cambrai, so that he could build a church in the saint's honor (Geary, 82-83); "Sir John Fastolf possessed an arm of St. George and a finger of John the Baptist" (Maurice Keen, English Society in the Later Middle Ages: 1348-1500, (London, 1990), 278. King Edward III also counted relics of the Baptist among his possessions: "He was heir to one of the largest relic collections in England, which included a thorn from the Crown of Thorns and a fragment of the

Some isolated tablets from altarpieces suggest that at least some cycles began with the Naming of St. John. Hildburgh considered the subject relatively rare, but mentioned two examples, one of which was at the time of his writing in the Versailles Library, the other formerly in Paris but then in London, although he does not give a specific location for this tablet.[63] He concludes that the latter tablet is actually a French copy from about 1550 of the Versailles panel.[64] The iconography follows that of the Nativity scenes, with Zacharias replacing the figure of Joseph.

Most of the altarpiece cycles seem to have had as the initial subject St. John preaching. An example of this theme, illustrated in figure 72, was a gift to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A161-1946) from Hildburgh in 1946, and on loan to it since 1929. Hildburgh acquired it in Paris. This tablet, like similar examples in the Basilica at Daroca, Spain, in the Marienkirche, Gdansk, in St. Mary's Church, Shrewsbury, and in Issac-la-Tourette, represents the gospel accounts of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of St. John preaching in the wilderness, shown on the panel by the animals and trees.[65] Hildburgh notes that the bulbous foliage and depiction of the animals on many of these St. John Preaching tablets is closely associated with "Fifth Sign" tables from "Last Judgement" sets,

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True Cross known as the Neith Cross. In addition, he owned diverse relics of Sts. Leonard, John the Baptist, James the Less, Agnes, Margaret, Mary Magdalen, Agatha, Jerome, Adrian, Sylvester, and the eleven thousand virgins as well as the chasuble and alb of Edward the Confessor, a bone from the arm of St. Amphibalus, the blood of St. George, and the blood and hair of St. Stephen." (W. M. Ormrod, "The Personal Religion of Edward III," Speculum LXIV (1989), 855-856.

[63]Hildburgh (1928), 58-62. He also discusses the Versailles tablets in (1949), "Folk-Life," 256.

[64]Ibid., 61.

[65]Cheetham (1989), 116; Gardner, 304; Nelson (1918), 328-331; Nelson (1925), 37; Hildburgh (1948), "Nantes," 11; Hildburgh, "Representations of the Saints in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings," Folk-Lore, LXI (1950), 74-75; Hildburgh (1954), 11-20.

such as the one illustrated in figure 73.[66] This tablet, another of the gifts of Hildburgh to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946 (A118-1946), represents the fifth sign of the Last Judgement as described in The Golden Legend when "The trees and herbs shall give dew of blood" and "all the birds of the air shall assemble in a field."[67] Hildburgh believes this strange padded foliage and rounded, odd depiction of animals and birds may reflect an influence of medieval religious drama, especially from the York and Townley plays.[68]

This is not an isolated example of the influence of the stage on art. Hildburgh wrote extensively on the importance of medieval religious drama to the development of the iconography of English alabasters.[69] While he believed vernacular religious drama influenced alabaster art greatly, he claimed that the carvings were little influenced by paintings, book illustrations, or windows.[70] Other scholars, including Cheetham[71], Anderson[72], Stanley Kahrl[73], and Clifford Davidson[74] have confirmed the influence of

[66]Hildburgh (1948), "Nantes," 10-12.

[67]Cheetham (1989), 314.

[68]Hildburgh (1948), "Nantes," 11-12. In (1949), "Drama," 99, Hildburgh proposes that the dog-like appearance of the lions and other creatures at the feet of the Baptist might indicate that suitably trained dogs were used on the English stage. M. D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches, (Cambridge, 1963), 140, agrees with the theory.

[69]Ibid.; Hildburgh, "An Alabaster Table of the Annunciation with the Crucifix," Archaeologia LXXIV (1923-24), 203-232; Hildburgh (1933), 32-56 and 123-151; Hildburgh, "Notes on Medieval English Representations of the Resurrection of Our Lord," Folk-Lore XLVIII (1937), 95-98; Hildburgh, "An English Alabaster Carving of St. Michael Weighing a Soul," Burlington Magazine LXXXIX (1947), 129-131; Hildburgh (1949) "Folk-Life"; Hildburgh, "English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval Religious Drama," Archaeologia XCII (1949), 51-101.

[70]Hildburgh (1949) "Folk-Life," 253.

[71]Cheetham (1989), 18-20, where he argues not only for dramatic influences but that of woodcuts, glass, and paintings as well.

[72]Anderson also mentions windows, manuscripts, paintings, and even the eloquence of the pulpit in addition to dramatic influences on sculptural representations.

[73]Stanley J. Kahrl, Traditions of Medieval English Drama, (London, 1974).

drama, but have demonstrated how all types of art drew from similar sources and contributed to the conventions found in both art and drama. Two such examples can be seen, for instance, in scenes of the Ascension and the Harrowing of Hell.

Although the Harrowing of Hell is a relatively rare subject in English alabasters, at least nine are known.[75] The example in figure 74 was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum (AI-1955) by Hildburgh in 1955. Its previous history is unknown.[76] A scroll issues from the mouth of Christ, but the painted text has been lost. He grasps Adam's right arm with His left hand. Among the figures behind Adam are the naked figure of Eve and that of St. John the Baptist clothed in camel-skin. St. John was thought to be the forerunner sent to preach about Christ to the souls in limbo, as well as the forerunner of Christ on Earth. The panel illustrates an apocryphal story from the gospel of Nicodemus, retold in The Golden Legend, which describes how Christ descended into the underworld and led out of Hell the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament who had died before He redeemed mankind.[77] Cheetham, Anderson, and Hildburgh note the close association in the design of the hell-mouth with the arrangements and requirements of the medieval stage. The "belly of hell" is usually depicted as a great marine monster, spewing out fire and smoke. Both Anderson and Hildburgh describe the similarity of depictions in manuscripts and sculpture and Hildburgh concludes, "it is hard to know whether the

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[74]Clifford Davidson, From Creation to Doom: The York Cycle of Mystery Plays, (New York, 1984). Davidson concentrates especially on glass, but also mentions the importance of paintings.

[75]Cheetham (1989), 270; Hildburgh (1948), 9-10; Hildburgh (1949) "Drama," 88-90.

[76]Cheetham (1989), 271.

[77]Ibid.

alabaster carvers derived it from pictorial art or from dramatic. But there seem good reasons for believing that they derived it - although possibly not at first hand - from the English stage..."[78]

References to possible stage prototypes include the "hellmouthe" of the Cappers guild at Coventry, the "hell hede" of the Drapers, a Hell Mouth at Veximiel in 1437 which could open and shut for demons to pass out and in, and one at Rouen in 1474 where the great pair of jaws could open and close as required.[79] Stage directions of the Harrowing of Hell play of the York "Sadilleres" mentions "Scene II, Hell; at one side Limbo, enclosing the patriarchs and prophets."[80] Other instructions direct the representing of flames within the gateway. A later notice mentions the cost to the Coventry Drapers for "kepying of fyer at hell mothe."[81] This same type of Hell Mouth can be seen in a stone boss in the nave of Norwich Cathedral shown in figure 75.

Figure 76 shows another of the Norwich Cathedral nave bosses representing the Ascension. The rather odd manner of depiction with the hem of Christ's robe and his feet disappearing into the clouds is also found on an alabaster tablet illustrated in figure 77 and in the manuscript in figure 78a. Hildburgh and Anderson each describe the technical means by which this same effect was achieved in drama. The Towneley "Ascension" and Coventry plays have stage directions indicating how an actual ascension of some kind was

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[78]Hildburgh (1949) "Drama," 89.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., 90.

[81]Ibid.

carried out on the stage. It was likely accomplished through the substitution of an effigy of the Saviour which could be hauled up to the roof, where it would disappear into a ring of curtains, "a device which probably gave rise to the common convention of showing Christ's feet and the hem of His garment disappearing into 'clouds' which look exactly like thickly gathered curtains."[82]

There is evidence that even the altarpieces illustrating the lives of the saints and the depictions of angels or devils show influences of drama through the costumes and symbolic use of colour. Naked figures, such as Adam and Eve, or that of Christ stripped for the scourging, were probably clothed on-stage in tight fitting garments of leather painted various colours. At Coventry for instance, the souls of the saved were represented as white, and those of the damned as black. An entry in the Coventry accounts notes the payment for "payntyng and gyldyng gods cote."[83]

The feathered tights of angels such as those on some St. John's Heads or on monumental tombs are mentioned in the inventory lists and expense accounts of various guilds responsible for the production of plays. The intricate carving on the alabaster of St. Michael in figure 79 shows how such costumes might have been constructed from leather. This example was a gift to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A209-1946) from the Viscountess D'Abernon in 1946, probably acquired by Lord D'Abernon in 1926. It illustrates the saint attacking the Dragon and weighing souls with the Virgin interceding.[84]

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[82]Anderson, 151-152; also discussed in Hildburgh (1949) "Drama," 63-66.

[83]Hildburgh (1949) "Drama," 80 and 79.

[84]Cheetham (1989), 134; Hildburgh (1947), 129-131.

Cheetham notes the red on the saint's wings, which also have a "peacock-feather" decoration of white flecks and black dot.[85] This device is commonly seen on the wings of angels depicted on the St. John's Heads. Anderson cites a seraph shown in the windows at Yarnton with peacock feathers, and notes an expenditure in the account books for a pageant at London Bridge in 1464 for 21d. spent on "nine hundred peacock's feathers for making the angels' wings."[86]

Another of the tablets from a St. John the Baptist altarpiece is illustrated in figure 80. This representation of the Baptist Reproving Herod Antipas was formerly in Genoa, perhaps in the cathedral, and later acquired by Philip Nelson. Hildburgh acquired it in 1926 and loaned it to the Victoria and Albert Museum, donating it (A124-1946) in 1946.[87] The panel not only shows other conventions of medieval dramatic staging, but helps to illustrate a scene that comprised part of the plays based on St. John's life and death. According to Anderson, the play of the Death of the Baptist began with the entry of Herod and Herodias, illustrated in the first of the series of bosses in the cloisters of Norwich Cathedral that recounts the events. The next boss shows them being denounced by the Baptist,[88] the subject shown on the alabaster in figure 80.[89] Hildburgh notes the

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[85]Cheetham (1989), 134.

[86]Anderson, 169.

[87]Cheetham (1989), 117.

[88]The story is found in Matthew 14, Mark 6, and Luke 3, and is also told by Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews, chapter 5. Herod Antipas (4 B.C.-A.D. 39) was the son of Herod the Great and Malthace. He figures prominently in the New Testament as he was the tetrarch over Galilee and Perea, the two territories in which John the Baptist and Jesus ministered primarily. He traveled to Rome in A. D. 29 during which time he fell in love with his niece, the wife of his brother Herod (Philip). Antipas divorced his first wife, the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV, in order to marry Herodias. John criticized the marriage on the grounds that Mosaic law forbade the marriage of a brother's wife (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21) except for levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5; Mark 12:19).

dragon which issues from Herod's crown, marking him as an evil man. His face, like all the figures except the Baptist and Herodias, have been blackened and carved to represent cruelty and wickedness.[90]

One of the Norwich bosses shows the imprisonment of the Baptist following the confrontation with Herod and Herodias, but usually the next scene in the altarpiece sets is Herod's Banquet, the decollation (figure 81) or a combined representation. The banquet and decollation of the Baptist are commonly depicted in a variety of media.[91] A combined scene of the banquet, the decollation and the presentation of the head is seen in illustration 78b (Cambridge, Pembroke College 120, f. 5v.). Figures 82 (Arundel MS 157) and 83 (Holkham Bible, B.L. MS. Add. 47682, f. 21v.) give other manuscript examples of the three scenes. All three scenes are combined in one register in figures 78b and 82, while in figure 83 the banquet and Salome's dance are shown in the upper register and the combined decollation and presentation of the head are found in the lower register. Salome's curious "dance" probably represents the performances of trained acrobats or contortionists[92] but derives ultimately from literary references, such as one in MS. Harl.

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[89]Anderson, 102.

[90]Hildburgh (1949), 79; Cheetham (1989), 117.

[91]The Scriptural accounts state that John was imprisoned because he denounced Herod and Herodias. Josephus implies that Herod feared John because of the power John had over the people and believed he could raise the masses in a rebellion. Only Josephus names the daughter of Herodias, and gives the location of the prison as the Herodian fortress of Machaerus in Perea. The scriptural account gives details of the story and tell how, at the banquet before the dignitaries assembled to celebrate Herod's birthday, Salome danced at the instigation of Herodias and so pleased Herod that he rashly promised her with an oath anything she asked to the half of his kingdom. When Salome consulted her mother about what she should request, her mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod is said to have regretted his promise, but had to fulfill it because of his oath and the because of the presence of his audience. Josephus mentions that John was put to death at Machaerus, and that the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of Herod's army by the Nabateans was sent as a punishment upon Herod from God for having killed John.

[92]Hildburgh (1949), 99-100.

2398, f. 8, where it is said "Herodias' daughter was a tumbestere, and tumblede byfore him and other grete lordes of that contre."[93] The representations in figures 78b (Cambridge, Pembroke College 120, f. 5v.) and 84 (Oxford, Bodl. Lib., Auct. D. 2. 6, f. 166v.) show Salome performing her acrobatic dance with the help of swords. In figure 84, the primary theme is the Banquet and dance. The decollation and presentation of the head decorate the lower and upper spaces formed by the capital initial S. The banquet scene with the presentation of the head is also shown in another of the Norwich series of cloister bosses (figure 85) and in wall paintings such as that from Idsworth Chapel in Charlton, Hampshire (figure 86). The latter opens with the arrest of the Baptist with some curious features possibly deriving from folklore.[94] Other paintings are found at Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire; All Saints', Hastings; St. George's, Windsor; and Wiston, Suffolk.[95]

The subject is carved on a wood Misericord at Ely where the left scene shows a contorted dancing Salome at the Banquet. In the middle, Salome kneels with the bowl and waits to receive the head of the Baptist, whose hair is grasped by the executioner. The scene on the right shows the Head of John on the charger, flanked by a kneeling

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[93]Anderson, 58; G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, (New York, 1961), 117-118.

[94]E. W. Tristram, English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century, (London, 1955), 88-89 and plates 42-45, mentions that some of the ideas about Herodias from at least the twelfth century connected her with witchcraft whose followers claimed the power of changing human beings into "some other semblance or shape." Tristram believes the strange creature in the upper register of this scene may be that of an evil creature signifying possession. He further notes the folklore connections of St. John's Fires lit on the the vigil of the Feast of St. John Baptist, June 23, which had an indirect association with sorcery. The other paintings in the church aside from two angels are the figures of SS. Peter and Paul, who Tristram notes, might have been chosen in part for their connection to the story of Simon Magus. It is probable that some of the same influences contributed to Hildburgh's theory about the meaning of the St. John's Heads.

[95]Andre, 7.

Salome presenting the trophy to a seated Herodias.[96]

The grasping of the hair by the executioner is an odd feature in common with the alabaster tablet in figure 81 and the manuscript illustration in figure 83. Presumably, this is to prevent the head from falling to the ground or to remove the hair for the impending sword cut. Hildburgh believed this to be yet another detail that looked as if it could also have been represented on stage.[97] In the Decollation panel from the altarpiece at Gdansk, the executioner holds the saint's head by the forelock.[98] The tablet illustrated in figure 81 was once in Hildburgh's collection, and was given to the Victoria and Albert Museum (A70-1946) in 1946 after being first loaned in 1925. He had acquired it in Paris.[99]

Hildburgh noted the resemblance of this Decollation scene to the St. John's Head illustrated in figure 31, especially in the representation of the prison gate. The three angels with the napkin waiting to receive the soul of the saint in the Decollation scene closely parallel the two angels with the soul on the St. John's Head. Hildburgh believed the two works might be from the same workshop.[100]

Two other manuscript illustrations must be mentioned. The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, has four miniatures celebrating the Duke's name saint. The first shows the Baptist in the wilderness with lions, boars and bears. The second illustrates the Baptism of

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[96]M. D. Anderson, Misericords: Medieval Life in English Woodcarving, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1954), 6, 10, and 25 and plate 8. The stalls were probably begun under the direction of William Hurley in 1338.

[97]Hildburgh (1949), 100. The same motif appears in Sir Gawain and in some illuminations of this story (personal communication with Dr. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton).

[98]Nelson (1918), 328-329.

[99]Cheetham (1989), 118.

[100]Hildburgh (1931), 241-242.

Christ. The two of concern here are the Baptist Beheaded, fol. 212 (figure 87) and the presentation of the Head, fol. 212v. (figure 88). Millard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson note in their commentary to fol. 212 that the posture may represent the influence of early miracle plays, "in which a stuffed torso was thrust out of an aperture and the false head struck off."[101] Anderson also discusses the use of stuffed dummies to represent the slaughtered Innocents, or to give dramatic realism to a pageant about St. Thomas' martyrdom at Canterbury by using a leather bag full of blood.[102] She also confirms the use of modelled and painted dummies, resembling the actor playing the part of a martyr, that were substituted just before the final "execution," and how blood was made to pour from detached heads.[103] Anderson suggests the window of the south choir aisle of York Minster with Herod's Banquet and the presentation of the head shows some peculiarities that might indicate the glazier was remembering a play "in which the feast took place on the upper stage and the decollation of the saint on the ground immediately in front of the curtains of the lower room through a gap in which the substitution of a dummy for the living actor could have been achieved with some verisimilitude."[104]

Figure 88 shows Salome bringing the head to her mother, Herodias, and it is important in that it may be the earliest representation of Herodias stabbing the head of the Baptist. It is this feature that so strongly connects the English alabaster St. John's Heads

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[101]Millard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson, The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, (New York, 1974), commentary opposite fol. 212.

[102]Anderson, 136.

[103]Ibid., 137.

[104]Ibid.

to the cult at Amiens. The legend was not recorded in the Golden Legend, and seems not to have been well known, but was recorded in Jerome.[105] Hope cites Du Cange, who published an engraving of the relic in 1665 in his Traité historique du chef de s. Jean Baptiste (figure 89).[106] Although in this case, it is the head rather than the tongue that is pierced, the curious hole above the left eyebrow of the skull fragment at Amiens is supposed to be the result of Herodias' vengeful anger against John which she exacted by stabbing the Head with her dinner knife when it was presented to her by Salome.

Jean de Berry almost certainly would have seen the relic at Amiens. The chapel of the Baptist had been recently rebuilt by Cardinal Jean La Grange, a member of the Court of Charles V, Jean's brother.[107] During the winter of 1407, during the time the Belles Heures was in progress, Jean spent a week at Amiens. Meiss and Beatson propose the

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[105]Meiss and Beatson, commentary opposite fol. 212v. Philip Nelson "Some Fifteenth-Century English Alabaster Panels," Archaeological Journal, LXXVI (1919), 84, note 2. Nelson notes that the origin of the story is related to that of the treatment of Cicero's head by Livia. This reference, provided to me by Dr. John Osborne, is to Apologia contra Rufinum III, 42: "Fecerunt haec et Fulvia in Ciceronem, et Herodias in Joannem: quia veritatem non poterant audire, et linguam veriloquam diseriminali acu confoderunt." (Migne, PL 23, col. 510). John Hritzu's translation is found in Saint Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works, (Washington, 1965), 215: "Fulvia did the same thing to Cicero and Herodias to John, because they could not bear to hear the truth; and they pierced with a slitting needle the tongue that spoke the truth."

[106]Hope (1891), 4-5.

[107]Ibid. The date is given by Arthur Kinsgley Porter as 1375 for the building of the chapel of St. Jean Baptiste in Medieval Architecture: Its Origins and Development: Vol. II, (New York, 1966 reprint of 1909 edition). It was apparently rebuilt again around 1462, according to B. Winkles, French Cathedrals, (London, 1837) 32, who states that the chapel of St. John the Baptist was founded by the corporation of the city of Amiens in the year 1462. "It is in this chapel that the actual head of the saint is still carefully preserved, and exposed annually with much ceremony to the veneration to the faithful, on the 24th of June....The relic at present consists only of the frontal bone and upper jaw, placed in a splendid reliquary, which has been renewed since the revolution, the original sumptuous case having been despoiled in 1793. The basin or cap of solid gold was formerly enriched with numerous pearls, precious stones, and valuable medals, given at various times by devout persons; amongst which was a famous balass ruby, sent by Louis XI., in 1474....Gold medals struck for the purpose, which had touched the relic, were once a precious and highly-valued gift to kings, princes, and persons of the highest rank; silver medals bearing the head of John the Baptist, and having touched the real scull [sic], were also formerly given to pilgrims on different solemnities during the year."

miniature in the manuscript may have been suggested by Jean himself.[108]

The relic had been at Amiens Cathedral since 1206.[109] However confused the previous history of the head of the Baptist might have been, there is consensus that the relic at Amiens was brought there by Wallon de Sarton, who being present at the assault of Constantinople, on the 12th of April, 1204, found amongst the ruins of the palace of the arsenal two great dishes of silver, in one of which was the head of John the Baptist, and in the other that of St. George, each testified by an inscription. The dishes were large and heavy, and the discoverer sold them, but reserved two smaller vessels, which immediately contained the sacred relics. What became of the head of St. George is not related; but that

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[108]Meiss and Beatson, commentary opposite Fol. 212v.

[109]There are several accounts of what happened to John's head before it, or part of it, arrived at Amiens. A good summary is found in J. L. Andre, "Saint John the Baptist in Art, Legend, and Ritual," Archaeological Journal L (1893), 9-16. He cites the Anglo-Saxon Aelfric's belief that the head was buried at Jerusalem, and that it was afterwards manifested to two eastern monks who bore the treasure to Edessa. His bones were then brought to Alexandria and deposited there. Roger of Wendover claimed that the two monks discovered the head in 458 "near the house where Herod formerly lived" and brought it to Edessa where it was buried. Sir John Mandeville wrote that Sebaste was the site of the beheading, and that the head was "inclosed in the wall, but the Emperor Theodosius had it drawn out, and found it wrapped in a little cloth all bloody," and carried it to Constantinople, where it was divided. The "hinder part" of the head remained in Constantinople while the "fore part to under the chin" was sent to Rome and placed under the church of S. Sylvester. The "jaws beneath, which hold to the chin and part of the ashes and the platter in which the head was laid when it was smitten off," were sent to Genoa. The account concludes with some ambiguity about the Amiens head: "And some men say that the head of S. John is at Amiens in Picardy, and other men say that it is the head of S. John the Bishop. I know not which is correct, but God knows; but however men worship it, the blessed S. John is satisfied." Another early writer, Maundrell, said of St. John's Church in describing Damascus in 1696 that it had been converted into a mosque, and in it "was pretended to be kept the head of S. John, and some other relics, esteemed so holy, that it is death, even for a Turk, to enter the room where they are deposited." Of the portion of the head preserved in the church of S. Sylvester in Rome, Alban Butler remarked that there was some dispute about its validity as it might be that of S. John the Martyr of Rome. "Pope Clement VIII, to remove all reasonable doubt about the relic of this saint, procured a small part of the head that is kept at Amiens for S. Sylvester's Church." Butler added that the head had been discovered in 453 at Emissa [sic], and was "kept with great honour in the church of that city till about the year 800" and then taken to Constantinople, where it - that is the face except the lower jaw - was acquired by Wallo de Sarton, the Canon of Amiens in 1204.

Winkles 5, note 10, gives a slightly different version in that John was beheaded in the prison of the castle of Macheronte or of Sabaste of Samaria. The emperor Valens tried in vain to transfer the head to Rome, but Theodosius brought it from the village of Cosilaon, in Siberia, to enrich Constantinople, where it remained until taken to Amiens.

Christopher Walter, Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church, (London 1982), 183, mentions that the cult of St. John the Baptist, always held in high regard in the Byzantine Church, became more fervent when "his Head was 'invented' for the third time in the reign of Michael III (842-867), and enshrined in the monastery of Saint John Studios. Henceforth he regularly takes a place to the left of Christ, with the Virgin to the right [in the Deesis compositions]."

of St. John the Baptist was transported to Amiens, where it arrived on the 17th of December, 1206, during the prelacy of Richard de Gerberoy, the predecessor of Evrard, and was received by a grand procession of the clergy and citizens.[110]

The relic was listed in an inventory of 1347 as "caput beati Johannis Baptistae," but as "faciem beati Johannis Baptistae" in the inventory of 1419.[111] By that time, it had been set in a silver dish adorned with precious stone and furnished with a cover of silver in the form of a man's face. The inventory in 1535 describes it as enclosed in a covered vessel of gold given by king Louis XI (1461-1483), and adorned with jewels and pearls, all of which are enumerated.[112] This is probably similar to the engraving seen in figure 89.

The Vengence of Herodias is included as one of the eight scenes of the carved screen on the north side of the choir-stalls at Amiens, finished in 1531.[113] The theme was apparently included in at least some of the sets of the Life of St. John the Baptist, for a fragment of an alabaster tablet is preserved in the vestry of Ripon cathedral (figure 90). It was published by Nelson in 1919,[114] and shows Herodias thrusting her knife into the forehead of the Baptist's head. The figure of Salome, who would have been to the

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[110]Winkles, 5, note 17, quoting Maurice Rivoire, Description de la Cathedrale d'Amiens, (Amiens), 1806, 8vo.

[111]Hope (1891), 4.

[112]Ibid.

[113]Ibid., 6. Ann Mitchell, Cathedrals of Europe, (Feltham, Middlesex, 1968), 114, includes a photograph of two scenes from the bay nearest the transept - The Baptism and St. John Preaching, but says in the caption that they date from 1490. The other two scenes from this bay are St. John showing the Lamb of God; and St. John revealing his mission to Herod's messengers. Porter, illustration 289 opposite p. 389, has a photograph of four scenes of the bay nearest the apse - Vengeance of Herod's wife; Beheading of St. John the Baptist; Herod's feast; and Imprisonment of St. John the Baptist. The dates of the stone carvings above the enclosure walls of the bays of the north and south choir aisles are given as 1489-1530 in an anonymous guide to the Cathedral and city called Amiens Before and During the War, (Clermont-Ferrand, 1919), 29.

[114]Nelson, "Fifteenth-Century Panels," (1919), 133-134 and plate I, number 2.

spectator's right, is now missing. Herod holds his hands together palm to palm. Hildburgh believes this scene might have been performed on the English stage, as it is known to have been in French medieval plays of the saint's life.[115]

The next scene in the Life of the Baptist series also shows some curious features (figure 91). This tablet showing the Burial of the Baptist was a gift of Hildburgh to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946 (A125-1946). He had acquired it from Philip Nelson in about 1926 and loaned it to the Museum at that time. Nelson acquired it in Genoa.[116] It belonged to the same set as the tablets in figures 72 and 92. The panel shows the shrouded body of the saint being lowered into a tomb, before which are some of the same bulbous plants seen in figures 72 and 73. Remarkably, however, the body still retains its head, although the legend has Herodias, or Herodias and Salome, bury the head separately from the body, which is buried by John's disciples. Both Hildburgh and Anderson comment on this oddity, and believe it may also recall the way the Burial was enacted on the stage.[117] Cheetham knew of no other alabaster panels with this scene, although the St. John altarpiece in the Marienkirche, Gdansk, includes a panel of the Burial of the Head.[118] That set also has a scene called the Requitement of the Crime, supposedly illustrating events described in a letter from Herod to Pilate telling of the terrors that descended upon

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[115]Hildburgh (1949), 100. Anderson notes on p. 108 that "the stage directions of both the Mysteire de la Passion played at Arras in the early fifteenth century and the Passion of Jean Michel state that Herodias shall wound the brow of the saint's head with her knife." She also states that the scene occurs in a stained glass at Gresford (Denbigh), p. 109 and plate 23b.

[116]Cheetham (1989), 119.

[117]Hildburgh (1949), 100; Anderson, 138. She notes that this might indicate that dummies were not always used for executions in English plays, although they were at least some of the time.

[118]Cheetham (1989), 119.

his household because of "the evil things were done by me to John the Baptist," and other crimes.[119]

The final scene included in some of the St. John's altarpieces is the representation of Julian the Apostate Burning the Remains of the Baptist, or the Quenching of the Ashes of St. John the Baptist (figure 92). Cheetham states that no other representations of this latter scene were known to him at the time of his writing, but that the Marienkirche altarpiece has a tablet of the burning of the body followed by one of the scattering of the ashes with many details similar to the representation in figure 92. This panel was also in Genoa and acquired by Nelson. Hildburgh acquired it from Nelson and loaned it to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1926, giving it to the Museum in 1946 (A126-1946).[120]

It seems certain that the alabaster men, and the parishioners who would have seen the altarpieces and owned the devotional tablets, were familiar with medieval drama and with the cult of the head of St. John at Amiens. It is probable that these two influences share a common factor that may provide some insight into the origin and meaning of the St. John's Heads. If the interpretation is correct, it would also lead back to part of Hope's original conclusion connecting the St. John's Heads to the verse in the York Breviary. That common factor is the late medieval preoccupation with and devotion to the Eucharist.

Visual evidence supports the theory that some special connection between Christ and St. John existed in medieval England, although it might not be possible to determine

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[119]Nelson (1918) "Embattled," 330. He gives the complete text of the letter and another account of a similar fate that befell Julian the Apostate for burning the bones of the saint.

[120]Cheetham (1989), 120.

exactly how or why the relationship was made. A paten with the head of the Baptist is noted among the goods of John, Duke of Bedford.[121] Stratford notes the extraordinary choice of this subject for a paten, and the explicit Eucharistic connotations, crediting the selection in part to Bedford's special devotion for his patron saint. In his 1429 will, Bedford made a bequest to Amiens Cathedral, ordering the foundation of a chapel in honour of the Virgin, the Baptist and St. Anne (the patron of his wife, Anne of Burgundy).

Although the depiction of the Baptist's Head on a paten may be unusual, a very similar composition and technique is found on patens from East Anglia, except that they show the Head of Christ (Vernicle). P. Lasko calls this "the most commonly used motif in the surviving medieval patens in Norfolk."[122]

The same device is found on other Eucharistic equipment. For instance, the Swinburne Pyx, made to contain the reserved consecrated Host, has representations on both inner and outer surfaces. The outer lid shows a standing Virgin and Child, while the inner surface represents the Nativity. The base, however, is of some greater interest, for the inner surface has the head of Christ, and the exterior base encloses an Agnus Dei.[123] A painted linen burse, the bag used to contain corporals or linen cloths used in the celebration of the Mass, from possibly East Anglia or London and dating from about 1400-1430, has the Head of Christ on one side and the Agnus Dei on the other. Lasko

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[121]Jenny Stratford, The Bedford Inventories. The Worldly Goods of John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France (1389-1435), (London, 1993), 201, 313. This reference was brought to my attention by Dr. John Osborne.

[122]P. Lasko and N. J. Morgan, eds., Medieval Art in East Anglia: 1300-1520, (London, 1973), 65. Illustrations with the Head of Christ are given for a paten from 1450 (p. 54), one from London from 1496 (p. 65), and another, possibly from Norwich from about 1520 (pp. 65-66).

[123]Ibid., 13.

states that this iconography is "traditional for burses."[124]

The connection between St. John the Baptist and the Agnus Dei is ancient and frequently represented in art. The lamb is the attribute of the Baptist, and is also an Old Testament type for the acceptable sacrifice brought by Abel and for the redemption brought about by the offering of the Passover lamb. These are both seen as types for Christ Himself, who at the time of His baptism, is introduced by John in John 1:29 as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," the same words repeated at the most solemn moment of the Mass.[125] In the Towneley Plays, Jesus hands a lamb to St. John after the Baptism, and says,

> By this beest knowen shall thou be
> That thou art John Baptyst.

To this John replies, "I have sene the lamb of god."[126] It would be but a small step to associate the attribute of St. John with the Agnus Dei, with all its Eucharistic symbolism.

Other curious representations of the Baptist or events in his life exist that lend support to the idea that John should be associated with the "body of Christ at the altar."

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[124]Ibid., 40.

[125]Medieval bell-ringing traditions tend to support a correlation between the singing of the Agnus Dei and the Elevation of the Host. H. B. Walters discusses the uses of bells in Medieval services in Church Bells of England, (Wakefield: 1977 reprint of 1912 edition), 123-129: "...when the Preface of the Holy Trinity or other ordered preface was said, then three strokes of a bell were given at the first three words sung by the choir...The bell was called the 'Sancte' or 'Saunce' bell....A little later in the service came the Elevation of the Host, when again a bell was rung. This was called the 'Sacring' or 'Sackering' bell. At Hemswell in Lincolnshire it was known as the 'Agnus Bell,' because at this part of the service the Agnus Dei was sung....When the parish had no sanctus or sacring bell, another alternative was to toll one of the ordinary bells in the tower. This is clearly contemplated by Archbishop Peckham in his Constitutions of 1281. He says, 'At the Elevation of the Body of Christ the parishioners...shall adore with all devotion and reverence; wherefore let them first be warned by ringing the little bell, and at the Elevation let the great bell be thrice knolled.' At Bayeux Cathedral a small sanctus bell is rung at the Elevation, and then all the bells in the tower are clashed together or 'fired' for some minutes till the whole cathedral trembles with the roar and vibration."

[126]Anderson (1963), 161-161.

Nelson describes a portion of the first panel from a reredos of St. John the Baptist in the vestry of Mulbrton church, Norfolk that represents an unusual rendering of the Annunciation to Zacharias.[127] Zacharias is clad in a cope and alb and elevates in his hands a wafer before an altar, upon which is a chalice. The archangel Gabriel hovers above the altar, holding a scroll that descends to the altar. This anachronistic depiction of Zacharias' priestly role accentuates the connection between the Old Testament and the Eucharistic sacrifice of the New, and the intercessory function of the priest in both. The same concept might be intended in the fifteenth-century manuscript illustration of Christ enthroned between the Eucharist and the Tablets of the Law, from northern France (Walter 99, fol. 79, shown in figure 93). In it, Christ sits on an altar, flanked by the Tablets of the Law to his left, and a Host and chalice on his right.

Another strange depiction of the Baptism is found on the font of St. Michael's, Castle Frome (figure 94). The figure of the Baptist is much larger in scale than that of Christ, who stands in water surrounded by two pairs of fish. A maniple with crosses at each end is draped across John's right arm,[128] and the fingers of his hands touch those of God extending through the clouds of Heaven. The beak of the dove, now damaged, touches the hand of God on the opposite side.[129] The inclusion of the maniple would seem to imply the priestly function of John (or perhaps his role as the assistant in the Eucharistic

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[127]Nelson (1925), 36-37.

[128]According to John David Chambers, Divine Worship in England in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, (London, 1877), 53, the maniple is "the peculiar token of the Sub-deacon" and should be worn over the left, rather than right arm. Since about A.D. 735, it has been considered a special vestment for the celebrants at Holy Communion, and is given to the sub-deacon after the empty Chalice and Paten are delivered to him.

[129]Philip Clucas, England's Churches, (New York, 1984), 10.

sacrifice); the scale of the figures and the disposition of John's hands give the impression of John as the intermediary, as Christ submits Himself before John to receive the sacrament of Baptism, perhaps again recalling the intercessory and sacramental authority of the priest.

Other visual representations related to the Eucharist are evident on the St. John's Heads. As noted in Chapter 2, with only one exception, either the Holy Lamb or the Lord's Pity was used as a base accessory. The Eucharistic significance of the Lamb is found in the Old Testament types and in the Baptism. The explicit Eucharistic meaning of the latter image can be seen in figure 95, a manuscript illustration of Sir Humphrey kneeling before the "Man of Sorrows."[130] Miri Rubin discusses the development of this iconography and how it converges with eucharistic themes in the late medieval representations of the Mass of St. Gregory (the same "St. Gregory's Pity" once proposed as the meaning of the Spilsbury Head of St. John).[131] The popularity of the scene coincides with various tales and representations of Host miracles. Geary observes that the Eucharist was itself a relic "differing only in its being 'the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,' rather than the body and blood of one of his saints."[132] In this way, the Host and representations such as the Lord's Pity or the Lamb were both objects of devotion and

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[130]A similar representation with Christ's hands extended and crossed in front of the tomb can be seen in an illustration of Henry VI Adoring Christ as the Man of Sorrows, BL MS Domitian A XVII, folio 98. J. J. G. Alexander, "Painting and Manuscript Illumination for Royal Patrons in the Later Middle Ages," English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages, (London, 1983), plate 10.

[131]Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 308-310.

[132]Geary, 39.

a means to "help men understand more difficult and central aspects of Christianity."[133]

Several seemingly unrelated events seem to have converged to contribute to the initial development of the iconography of the St. John's Heads. Alongside the common thread of the increasing importance of the Eucharist in both its devotional and didactic aspects are the political and economic contributions. The Feast of Corpus Christi was instituted by Urban IV in 1264, although it had its beginning in Liège in 1246.[134] Urban IV, the former archdeacon at Liège, raised the feast to universal observance on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday, thus a moveable feast occuring between the 21 of May and the 24th of June (which might provide another association with John the Baptist).

The first mention of the feast in England is in 1318, and it was introduced to the province of York in 1322.[135] Processions and the institution of plays provided for popular devotion, teaching and preaching about the doctine of transubstantiation, and required municipal interest and activity in production of the plays, promotion of the processions, and other aspects of the feast. The first Corpus Christi Guild was founded in Louth in 1326, followed in 1328 by the Tailors' Corpus Christi guild of Lincoln.[136] A surge in the number of foundations in the 1350's and 1360's corresponds to the expansion of similar

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[133]Ibid.

[134]Miri Rubin, "Corpus Christi Fraternities and Late Medieval Piety," Voluntary Religion, (Worcester, 1986), 98-99.

[135]Ibid., 100-101.

[136]Ibid., 102.

fraternities on the Continent, and is probably related to outbreaks of the Black Death.[137] While this might seem too early to account for the iconography of the St. John's Heads, it indicates how well established the teachings about the Eucharist, the traditions of the Feast of Corpus Christi with its processions and plays, and the active participation of the trade guilds and civic leaders in the productions of these events would have been by the beginning of the fifteenth century.

These are almost the same years that alabaster is first used in tomb production, and the iconography of the altarpieces from the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries seems to reflect many influences from the Corpus Christi and other play cycles then reaching their full development.

These, too, are the years when Edward III established the Wool Staple at Calais, important for the merchants and cloth industries, but also important to the foreign policy of the English in the Hundred Years War. It might be of some significance that in the diocese of Norwich alone there were 120 guilds dedicated to the Baptist. Anderson notes that this should not be surprising in a city which depended for its prosperity upon the wool-trade.[138] Likewise, the proximity of Calais to Amiens may be significant, for surely many of those who had special devotion for the Baptist would have made a pilgrimage to the site, or might have had the opportunity to see pilgrims' signs such as the one illustrated in figure 96.

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[137]Ibid., 103.

[138]Anderson (1963), 91. St. John the Baptist was the patron saint of tailors, and Hope (1891), 6, notes that "among the subjects embroidered on one of the splended herse-cloths belonging to the Merchant Taylors' Company are four figures of angels, each holding a charger with the head
of St. John Baptist, the patron saint of the Comapny. In each case the head has a bloody wound over the left eye, and on an accompanying scroll are the words: CAPAT (sic) IOHIS BAPTEST (sic) - I - DISCO."

Two additional related issues may contribute to the discussion - the rise of Lollard heresies, and the reversals of fortunes in France under Henrys IV to VI. The problem of the Lollards is complex. Some activities of the early Lollards, culminating in the uprising of 1415 led by Sir John Oldcastle can be tied to the ideas of John Wycliffe. Lollardy's later forms were less unified, tended to prevail among the merchant and trade classes rather than the gentry or nobility, and were less apparent as a political force than as a local or even underground phenonemon. There is evidence, however, that both the church and state continued to maintain vigilance against the heresy, and trials were occasionally conducted throughout the fifteenth century.[139] For the most part, the York Diocese was relatively free of Lollard influences until the early sixteenth century, but Lepow and Thomson mention that this was probably because of the active efforts made by the clergy to ensure orthodoxy.[140] Lollardy remained active in Bristol and the West Country,[141] the mid-Thames valley from the Chilterns in the north to Hampshire in the south,[142] in the

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[139]Discussions about the general fear of heresy and actions taken to respond to or prevent it can be found in John A. F. Thomson, The Later Lollards: 1414-1520, (Oxford, 1965). Thomson includes a survey of Lollard activity region by region, the variations in Lollard beliefs, and records of the major heresy prosecutions recorded for 1414-1522. Norman P. Tanner, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich: 1428-31, (London, 1977) gives a detailed discussion of the trials and the texts of the manuscripts from the Westminster Diocesan Archives MS. B.2 of the proceedings against sixty men and women prosecuted between 1428 and 1431. Lauren Lepow, Enacting the Sacrament: Counter-Lollardy in the Towneley Cycle, (Cranbury, NJ, 1990), argues persuasively that the Towneley Cycle (which seemed to have such parallels in the the iconography of some alabaster altarpieces) functioned as a counter-Lollard force. Margaret Aston, England's Iconoclasts, Vol. 1: Laws Aagainst Images, (Oxford, 1988) discusses some of the general features of Lollardy with respect to images and some of the actions taken by orthodoxy to defend the use of images. She also includes some of the influences the Lollards had on non-Conformists and Protestant views during the Reformation. Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England: 1400-1580, (New Haven and London, 1992) touches on specific beliefs of the Lollards, but discusses in detail the later Protestant attacks on traditional religion. Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi, devotes much of her discussion on heresy to various Lollard views on transubstantiation.

[140]Thompson, 192-201; Lepow, 22-23. Both mention a nervousness about Lollardy, and this seems to be reflected as well in literary references.

[141]Thomson, 20-51.

[142]Ibid., 55-94.

Midlands, especially around Coventry and Leicester,[143] London,[144] and in Kent and the Southeast.[145] It is perhaps of interest that it is in some of these centres that the St. John's Heads are recorded as being sent for sale or delivery, noted in wills, or found in more recent times.[146] Nottingham, the presumed site of production, is near Coventry. Very likely, the craftsmen would have been aware of such influences in the region, in addition to their direct connection to York through membership in the diocese. As makers of images, they would have had an economic stake, as well as a religious one, in responding to heresy, for a common aspect of Lollardy was the assault on images as idols. The response to Lollard scepticism about the Eucharist combined with the verse in the York Breviary could have provided the immediate impetus for the production of the St. John's Heads as affordable devotional objects for orthodox members of the trade and merchant classes.

The iconography might have been based on, or at least have alluded to, the familiar and important relic at Amiens, for the cult of St. John's Head at Amiens seems to have come into greater prominence at this time as well, as evidenced by the refurbishing of the chapel and cover for the relic. Access to the cult at Amiens, probably increased as a result of the military activities of Henry V, seems to have coincided with activities taken to counter Lollardy in England. The first heads may reflect this convergence of religious and

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[143]Ibid., 95-116.

[144]Ibid., 139-171.

[145]Ibid., 173-191.

[146]This might be coincidence, but it might support the interpretation that St. John's Heads functioned in part as counter-Lollard devices.

political strands in early fifteenth century English life.[147] The dates are possible as well, as the earliest St. John's Heads are usually placed in the first quarter to first half of the fifteenth-century; the evidence of the wills and inventories lends additional support.

The majority of the Heads are usually dated to about 1450 to 1520, and these usually have more complex compositions with flanking saints and upper accessories. There has been little explanation for the upper accessories or the choice of saints, especially those in addition to St. Peter and the archbishop. They may, in fact, represent various responses to local heresies or reflect specific guild activities related to medieval drama. Some evidence supports the speculation.

As Thomson points out, one cannot talk of a single Lollard creed, as the beliefs varied from group to group and from individual to individual. It is more accurate "to consider Lollardy as a set of more or less consistent attitudes than as a set of carefully worked-out doctrines."[148] One of the most important commonly-held views was the denial of transubstantiation. According to the Proceedings Against Lollards in 1457, recorded in the Lincoln Diocese Documents, the heretics' views on transubstantiation were quite clear:

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[147]Political aspects of Lollardy are important, as heresy came to be seen as a danger to the state as well as the established church. Although actual uprisings were few and generally early, as in the threat by Sir John Oldcastle in 1414 or the outbreak of violence in 1431, the propaganda surrounding the treasonable aspects of Lollardy were exploited by both the Lancastrians and the Yorkists prior to and during the Wars of the Roses. For the connection between the Lancastrian handling of Lollardy, the manipulation of popular feeling over the loss of Normandy in 1449-1450, and the support of the merchant class for the Yorkists after 1450, see D. McCulloch and E. D. Jones, "Lancastrian Politics, the French War, and the Rise of the Popular Element," Speculum, LVIII (1983), 95-138. Derek Pearsall's forthcoming article (provided to me in draft form by Dr. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton), "Hoccleve's Regement of Princes: The Poetics of Royal Self-Representation," discusses Henry V's use of English as a form of propaganda to win support for the French wars from the London merchants who were initially his financial backers (8), the importance of orthodoxy for the king (12), and Henry's handling of the Lollard heresies (13-14). For additional information on the handling of the early Lollards by the Lancastrians see Peter McNiven, Heresy and Politics in the Reign of Henry IV: The Burning of John Badby, (Bury St. Edmunds, 1987) and K. B. McFarlane, Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights, (Oxford, 1972).

[148]Thomson, 239.

> A priest has no more power to make 'the body of Christ' than the wheat-stalk has. After the words of consecration the bread remains only bread as before; and, in fact, is debased by having had such spell-words pronounced over it.[149]

Lepow argues that teaching the orthodox position on this doctrine was one of the primary concerns of Corpus Christi plays, at least in the Towneley Cycle.[150] If Hope is correct in seeing the primary function of the St. John's Heads as a Eucharistic devotional object, and the evidence seems to support him, then the central features of St. John's Head and the base accessory may reflect the orthodox position on transubstantiation (or perhaps, emphasize a conscious counter-Lollard stance).

The Eucharist was not the only sacrament to come under attack by the Lollards. Baptism was seen as unnecessary by some, although not always for the same reasons. Some believed that if the parents were baptised, the benefit passed on to the child with no further need of baptism.[151] Others drew their convictions from literal interpretations of scripture, such as one that counselled against baptism ministered by the church, saying

> that there should be no such things: for there is no baptism, but of the holy ghost, and that he learned in the new testament in English: whereas John saith, 'I baptize you but in water, in token of repentance; but he that shall come after me, is stronger than I, he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost.'[152]

St. John, as the Baptizer, might also be seen as an orthodox response to the

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[149]Andrew Clark, Lincoln Diocese Documents, 1450-1544, (New York, 1971, reprint of 1914 edition), 93.

[150]Thomson (234) states that "a man who had said that the cross should not be venerated was obliged to adore it in the course of his penance, and it is possible that an obligation to take part in a Corpus Christi procession may have been imposed on offenders who had denied transubstantiation.

[151]Thomson, 247-248.

[152]Claire Cross, "Popular Piety and the Records of the Unestablished Churches: 1460-1660," The Materials, Sources, and Methods of Ecclesiastical History, ed. by Derek Baker, (Oxford, 1975), 273.

Lollard opposition to baptism, in addition to whatever connection his head might have to the Eucharist.[153]

The presence of St. Peter on the tablets might be explained merely by the fact of his popularity and importance, or as suggested by Hope, because he was the patron of York Minster. Other possibilities are worth consideration as well, however. For instance, the connection between St. John as the last prophet and St. Peter as the first pope is of some interest. More importantly, in the complex and probably later compositions of the tablets, he is often represented wearing the papal tiara. If the St. John's Heads assumed a type of counter-heretical function, St. Peter would be a significant saint to include as a response to the anti-clerical and anti-papal stance of many Lollards. In the 1457 proceedings against Lollards recorded in the Lincoln Diocese Documents, one of the heretical tenets maintained by those charged was

> The Pope is Antichrist; priests are the disciples of Antichrist. All persons in Holy Orders are incarnate devils.[154]

Thomson notes a number of trials in which the authority of the Church and the clergy were issues, or where St. Peter figures in connection with concepts of papal authority. In 1431, one of the defendants is charged with having called the pope "Father

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[153]It may be of some significance that one of the Gospel readings (Matt. 20-22a) includes the story of the sons of Zebedee coming to Jesus with their mother, who asks that her two sons may sit on the right and left of Jesus in his kingdom. His answer is, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup which I am about to drink, and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?" As this statement just precedes the Passion, (the reading for Passion Sunday in current prayerbooks), it might provide some connection between the Baptism, the cup of which Jesus speaks during the Agony in Gethsemane, the Chalice said to contain His blood, and the Baptism as a type of his Passion and death. Other scriptural references make similar connections between the Baptism and the Passion, as in Romans 6:3, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with him by his baptism into death so that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of God the Father even so we also should walk in newness of life."

[154]Clark, 93.

Antichrist," and having claimed that bishops and other clergy are the disciples of Antichrist. Furthermore, he is charged with claiming that there was no pope after St. Peter's death.[155] The same types of charges are noted in trials in 1443,[156] 1491,[157] 1499,[158] and 1508.[159]

Related charges include in 1448 a denial of the authority of Rome and the powers of bishops or the pope,[160] and in 1470 charges of hostility to indulgences, confession to priests, and a denial of the Church's power to excommunicate.[161] In 1491, a heretic claimed that St. Peter had received his tonsure at the hands of Simon Magus.[162] The image of St. Peter, then, could be a symbol of the orthodox position on the role of the clergy and on spiritual authority of the church.

The archbishop could represent St. William of York, as Nelson concluded, for he had an important local cult in York which received official recognition in 1384.[163] There is also some connection between St. William and the York Corpus Christi Guild. Although the Corpus Christi feast first appears in the cathedral statutes of 1325, from which time

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[155]Thomson, 128.

[156]Ibid., 65.

[157]Ibid., 76.

[158]Ibid., 80.

[159]Ibid., 84.

[160]Ibid., 37.

[161]Ibid., 42.

[162]Ibid., 76.

[163]Douglas Cowling, "The Liturgical Celebration of Corpus Christi in Medieval York," Records of Early English Drama, 2 (1976), 5.

processionals were held, the Guild of Corpus Christi was founded only in 1408, incorporated in 1458,[164] and finally received royal incorporation as late as 1478.[165] Nor did it have have a permanent home until 1478, but rented the hall of the Mercers (Holy Trinity Hall) for its annual feast.[166] Initially, the city rather than the guild was responsible for the Procession of Corpus Christi, but in 1431-32, the Guild of Corpus Christi entered into an agreement with the city making the Guild responsible for carrying the civic shrine containing the Host in the procession. The shrine had been, and continued to be housed in St. William's Chapel, the civic chapel on Ousebridge.[167]

There is far stronger evidence, however, that the archbishop represents Thomas of Canterbury. In 1478, the "master, wardens and brethern of the hospital of St. Thomas of Canterbury, without Micklegate Bar, transferred their house and possessions to the master and brethern of the guild of Corpus Christi."[168] It may be more significant, though, that a very large number of the members of the Guild were merchants, of whom Thomas was a patron saint.[169]

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[164]Robert H. Skaife, ed. The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York; with an Appendix of Illustrative Documents, containing some account of the Hospital of St. Thomas of Canterbury, without Micklegate-Bar in the Suburbs of the City, (London, 1872), vii. The Register affords abundant proof of the Guild's popularity. From the time of its inception until it was suppressed in 1547 by the Act of Dissolution, more than 16,850 persons joined the fraternity (xii). In 1473 alone, 592 persons were admitted into the guild.

[165]Cowling, 6-7.

[166]Alexandra F. Johnston, "The Guild of Corpus Christi and the Precession of Corpus Christ in York," Mediaeval Studies XXXVIII (1976), 372.

[167]Ibid., 378.

[168]Skaife, x.

[169]The occupational guild, the Merchant Adventurers of England probably counted among its membership some of the same people, for there were at a slightly later date large numbers of "wealthie and well experimented Merchants, dwelling in diverse great Cities, Maritime Townes and other parts of the Realme, to wit, London, Yorke, Norwich, Exeter, Ipswitch, Newcastle, Hull, etc." W. E. Lingelbach, The Merchant Adventurers of England: Their Laws and Ordinances with Other Documents, (New York, 1971 reprint of 1902

Aside from this connection with the York Corpus Christi Guild and the merchants' special veneration, Thomas was one of the most popular saints in England, and Canterbury was a famous and accessible centre of pilgrimage. His biographers had also related events of his martyrdom in a manner that created special reminders of both St. John the Baptist and to Christ. These latter points may provide the connection to the Lollards and indicate the choice of this saint as a response to Lollardy.

First, there was a strong opposition on the part of many Lollards to pilgrimages in general and to the veneration of relics related to pilgrimages. Some considered the travels a waste of time and money:

> Pilgrimages ought not to be made to places where the bodies of saints rest. The expenditure incurred in such pilgrimages is wasted, and the toil undergone is profitless.[170]

For others, there was the more important assault on the belief that earthly objects could be made holier by their association with heavenly or saintly persons. This was probably the principal reason for the attacks on pilgrimages.[171] Three shrines were singled out for special ridicule, often with puns - Our Lady of Walsingham ("The Lefdy of Falsyngham"), Our Lady of Woolpit ("The Lefdy of Foulpette"), and St. Thomas of Canterbury ("Thomme of Cankerbury").[172] Thomson notes several instances where charges against

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edition), xvi.

The Fellowship of Merchants Adventurers claimed to originate in a Brotherhood of St. Thomas of Canterbury, but whether this was merely invented is not known. A charter of 1462 provides for fines to maintain two chapels in honor of St. Thomas and by this time, he is certainly established as a patron saint of the Adventurers (Ibid., 199).

[170]Clark, 92.

[171]Tanner (1977), 13-14.

[172]Ibid., 14.

Lollards involved special hostility toward Thomas of Canterbury, as in a case in 1429,[173] or in 1431 where it is said of Becket that he "was a false traitor and is damned in hell, and that the priests lie in saying that he faced death patiently at the altar, as he was slain at the church door while attempting to flee."[174] Others claimed there was simply no merit in his death.[175] In a 1464 case, the charged affirmed that he believed pilgrims going to Canterbury

> were offering their souls to the Devil, that the blood of Hailes was but the blood of an animal, that the sacrament of the altar was a great devil of hell and a synagogue, as was the pope who should lie nine times deeper in hell than Lucifer, that confession was ordained so that priests should understand the lives of women, and that the King and all who supported the Church were going to the Devil.[176]

Sermons in honour of the Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury provide insight into the importance of this saint in orthodox thought and the literary reaction against such attacks by heretics. Early biographers had called Thomas, the "Lamb of Canterbury" and it was his blood mixed with water that was supposed to effect miraculous cures. A fourteenth-century manuscript from Hereford Cathedral (MS. Heref. Cath. Libr. P. 5. 2, fol. 99b-107) includes a sermon that emphasizes further the Eucharistic analogies to Thomas' death:

> ...the sacrifice of this day which Thomas offered excelled all others...Assuredly this high priest enetered into the temple on this day to offer a sacrifice. 'Not with the blood of goats and calves, but through his

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[173]Thomson, 29.

[174]Ibid., 126.

[175]Ibid.

[176]Ibid., 71.

> own blood entered he into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption', as it is said of Christ, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (ix, 11-12)". He was "a lamb before the throne of God without blemish...this same sacrifice of Thomas was made at the evening hour, according to history, when the monks were celebrating Vespers."[177]

The author later compares the death of Thomas to that of the Baptist because of the former's refusal to sanction the marriage proposed between William of Anjou, brother of the king, and the widow of Earl Warenne on the ground that William's mother and the father of the countess's first husband were cousins. This was said to be the reason Richard Brito struck the archbishop.

> Our preacher's own comment is that thus Thomas was martyred in an even nobler cause than that for which John the Baptist was done to death....' For John merely prohibited an act of adultery which is always unlawful'; but Thomas not only prohibited this, but also declared unlawful by statute of the Church a marriage 'which nevertheless could have been legalized by dispensation.'[178]

St. Thomas is lauded by the preacher as the special head and protector of the clergy of England, and the defeat of the English by the Scots on St. John's Day, 1314, is attributed to divine retribution for his death.[179] In light of this political role of St. Thomas, Christopher Wilson notes the Lancastrian and later Yorkist propaganda surrounding the burial of Henry IV in Canterbury Cathedral, and a curious legend about "St. Thomas's oil"

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[177]G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, (New York, 1961, revised from 1933 edition), 126-127.

[178]Ibid., 128-129.

[179]Ibid., 130-131. While this is earlier than the alabaster St. John's Heads, it demonstrates the long-standing veneration of St. Thomas, and an apparent pairing of St. Thomas with St. John long before the production of the St. John's Heads.

which came to be used for coronations of both Lancastrian and Yorkist kings.[180] If Wilson is correct in considering St. Thomas as a patron of the kings of England, the juxtaposition of SS. Peter and Thomas on the Saint John's Heads may in some way also reflect an orthodox view of the divine ordering of the authority of both Church and State.[181]

Other aspects of the St. John's Heads might be explained as a response to local, though not always common, heresies as well. The upper accessories nearly always represent angels, or angels receiving a soul of the dead. This might be a response to Lollard denials of the resurrection of the dead or immortality of the soul. Thomson notes such denials with variations throughout the fifteenth century trials, as in 1422,[182] 1448,[183] 1470,[184] and 1509.[185] In one tablet, the upper accessory was the representation of the

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[180]Christopher Wilson, "The Tomb of Henry IV and the Holy Oil of St. Thomas of Canterbury," Medieval Architecture and its Intellectual Context, ed. by Eric Fernie and Paul Crossley (London and Ronceverte, 1990), 181-190. Wilson states that one of the elements of the propaganda to reinforce Henry IV's shaky title was the claim that his anointing fulfilled a "well-known" prophecy revealed by the Virgin Mary to St. Thomas during the latter's exile in France. According to this prophecy, a future, unnamed king would be anointed with the oil in a small stone phial which she enclosed within a golden eagle and presented to the archbishop. "The first of these kings would recover peacefully the lands lost by his predecessors, including Normandy and Aquitaine...." (182). Wilson discusses the "recovery" of the oil by the Lancastrians and later propaganda by the Yorkists after they came to power. The oil of St. Thomas "continued to be used in the coronation of English kings at least until 1483 and probably until 1509" (189). He concludes with a description of a window which also includes images of the Trinity and Edward IV, "That the iconography reinforced Thomas's role as patron of the king by showing him as purveyor of the coronation oil is very likely, for in the surviving glazing of the tracery lights, where he occupies the central dexter position, he holds in his left hand a small conical vessel which must surely be the stone phial containing the oil inside the golden eagle." (190).

[181]The relationship between Church and State is also explored in a variation of the connection between Thomas and the Baptist. Both were executed by wounds to the head as a result of rash words by unwise kings who later regretted what their immoderation had caused. Chaucer, in "The Pardoner's Tale" cites King Herod as an example - "Take Herod, too, his tale is worth pursuing./ Replete with wine and feasting, he was able/ To give the order at his very table/ To kill the innocent Baptist, good St. John." Nevill Coghill, trans., The Canterbury Tales, (London, 1951, reprinted 1992), 153.

[182]Thomson, 27.

[183]Ibid., 36.

[184]Ibid., 41.

[185]Ibid., 160.

Trinity, another of the elements of orthodoxy that came under the attack of the heretics, as in 1448,[186] and 1502-3.[187]

The substitution of the figure of St. Paul for SS. Peter and Thomas on two tablets might reflect the Lollard refusal to accept St. Paul as an apostle on the grounds that he is not mentioned in the account of the calling of the twelve.[188]

The appearance of the Virgin on later tablets might also be a response to the attack on her images and some of the irregular views about her adopted by Lollards. In 1440, a heretic was charged with the intention to burn an image of the Virgin.[189] Actions in 1486 concerned special hostility to the Virgin in the Tower of Coventry.[190] In 1482,[191] 1488,[192] and 1491.[193] Thomson describes some of irregular views about the Virgin, including a denial of the virgin birth and charges of blasphemy against the Virgin and the saints.

Although nothing specific has been found to account for the additional flanking saints aside from the general hostility toward the veneration of saints, there are some possible connections to elements of medieval drama, especially in the Pater Noster Play.

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[186]Ibid., 36 and 45.

[187]Ibid., 82.

[188]Ibid., 49. The fact that St. Paul was beheaded may also be significant.

[189]Ibid., 64.

[190]Ibid., 104.

[191]Ibid., 154.

[192]Ibid., 106.

[193]Ibid., 77.

In 1446, the York Pater Noster Guild merged with the St. Anthony's Guild[194] and it maintained the responsibility for the play. In 1495, the Corpus Christi Guild was instructed by the city to produce the Creed Play and the St. Anthony's Guild charged to prepare the Pater Noster Play.[195] The frequent appearance of St. Anthony on the later St. John's Heads might be explained by his being the patron of another of the important guilds charged with a companion didactic drama designed to encourage orthodoxy and prevent heresy.[196]

In addition to his important cult and pilgrimage centre at Santiago, St. James featured prominently in the Creed play, where he was associated with the scene of the Nativity and the petition, "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."[197] St. Christopher, in addition to being the patron of travelers, shared a feast day with St. James, and William Revetour's will from 1446 makes a bequest to the "brotherhood of Corpus Christi in York a certain book called the Creed Play with books and banners beloning to it And to the Guild of St. Christopher a certain play concerning St. James the Apostle compiled in six pages."[198]

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[194]Johnston, 73.

[195]Ibid., 73.

[196]Several of the alabaster tomb monuments include representations of St. Anthony. It is possible some of those represented by the effigies had some connection to the St. Anthony Guild (Routh, 86). St. Anthony was also represented at times as the founder of monasticism, and so his connection to St. John the Baptist, the patron of anchorite hermits, may be of significance in this respect (Routh, 60).

[197]Ibid., 68-69.

[198]Ibid., 80-81. Clifford Davison, "The Middle English Saint Play and Its Iconography," The Saint Play in Medieval Europe, Clifford Davidson, ed. (Kalamazoo, 1986), 32-33, mentions that the St. Christopher Guild utilized the Guild Hall and facilities for several days surrounding the feast day of St. James on 25 July, also St. Christopher's Day. According to Gertrude Grace sill, A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art, (New York, 1975), both Sts. James and Christopher were beheaded (10, 182).

The connection of the female saints is still uncertain, although St. Dorothy or Dorothea carries a rose or wears a rose crown - the rose also being a symbol of the Passion. She appears in some of the later crucifixion scenes in Passion altarpieces as well. She was beheaded, as were Sts. Catherine and Margaret, who was also a shepherdess,[199] and this association might have suggested the connection with St. John the Baptist and St. Thomas.[200]

Finally, there is the mystery of the Yorkist symbols on the surviving housings.[201] It seems almost inconceivable that such symbols would have been used casually, and must denote their production during Yorkist rule. Unfortunately, very few remain, and none from the apparently early tablets. The fact that both Lancastrians and Yorkists sought financial and popular support is not surprising.[202] The combination of issues and causes of conflict were varied and complex.[203] Margaret Aston notes that both Lancastrian and

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[199]Sill, 184, 180, and 192.

[200]Davison suggests that the veneration of St. Catherine may have stemmed from the Crusades (which might have provided a source for her relics). In any case, she was a very popular saint in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and is often included in guild associations, such as the notation of her image in the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist, and St. Catherine at Coventry. She is frequently paired with the Baptist flanking altarpieces, or in paintings and windows. Davison discusses the plays of her life and some other aspects of her cult in England in "Middle English Saint Play," 45-52. An Elizabethan era play of St. Dorothea is discussed on pages 252-254. St. Mary Magdalene (pages 69-70) might be included because of her association to Christ's Passion, or perhaps because of her 30 years of penance in the wilderness as a hermit (Sill, 194).

[201]The white rose had long been a badge of the House of York. The sunburst, or Sun in Splendour, became Edward IV's favourite personal badge after his victory over Jasper Tudor and the Welsh Lancastrians at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross in the Welsh Marches on February 2 or 3, 1461. Charles Ross, The Wars of the Roses, (London, 1989 reprint of 1976 edition), 53-54.

[202]Caroline M. Barron, "London and the Crown 1451-61," The Crown and Local Communities in England and France in the Fifteenth Century ed. by J. R. L. Highfield and Robin Jeffs, (Gloucester, 1981), 88-109 discusses the shift of support from the Lancastrians to the Yorkists and some of the financial aspects involved.

[203]Aspects of using religion for propagandistic purposes can be found in J. W. McKenna, "Popular Canonization as Political Propaganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope," Speculum XLV (1970), 608-623, and Richard Marks, "Yorkist-Lancastrian Political and Genealogical Propaganda in the Visual Arts," Family History: The Journal of the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies XII, 65-66 (1982), 149-166.

Yorkist apologists (and Tudor propagandists as well) attributed the loss of French possessions, the outbreak of the civil disturbances and and the "seas of calamities, as were never seene in our countrey before"[204] to the mishandling of the Lollards.[205] In either case, religious heresy was tied to the possibility, if not reality, of treason against the king.[206]

It is of some interest perhaps that four of the five original theories to explain the central image on the St. John's Head are in some way connected directly to St. John or to Eucharistic imagery. The St. Gregory's Pity is specifically Eucharistic; the Vernicle is associated with the Passion, and also is found on patens or other Eucharistic equipment sometimes in association with the head of John or the Holy Lamb; the Holy Face from the Edessa legend is indirectly connected by the legends also placing St. John's head there. The Spilsbury tablet, like the others, was primarily an object to promote devotion to the Eucharist, but it may have encouraged and supported orthodoxy in other aspects of relgious and secular life.

If this interpretation is correct, then, and the St. John's Heads reflect the religious and political turmoil of the century in which they were produced, they are far more important than simple, cheap, mass-produced goods hawked about the country (as they

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[204]Margaret Aston, "Richard II and the Wars of the Roses," Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion (London, 1984), 292, quoting Robert Parsons A Treatise of Three Conversions of England From Paganisme to Christian Religion, 1603-4.

[205]Protestants and Catholics had different interpretations of the religious causes of the troubles as well, but both tended to blame the Lancastrians. For Fox and Tyndale, the dissentions came because the leaders of the church and state failed to heed the call to repentance and persecuted the martyrs. For Parsons, the troubles were the result of the leaders' failure to take stronger actions against the heresies at the beginning. Ibid., 287-293.

[206]Margaret Aston, "Lollardy and Sedition, 1381-1431," Lollards and Reformers, 1-47; Ritchie D. Kendall, The Drama of Dissent: The Radical Poetics of Nonconformity, 1380-1590, (Chapel Hill and London, 1986), 14-89; Tanner, 1-31; Thomson, 1-19, 59-65, 211-250. For the different accounts of Richard II's role and subsequent dealings with Lollards and other issues from the viewpoints of Yorkist and Lancastrian writers, see Louisa Desaussure Duls, Richard II in the Early Chronicles, (The Hague and Paris, 1975).

are sometimes described). They might instead be objects that were affordable, designed for the merchant and trade classes to provide a focus for devotional piety; to act as a reminder of social obligations through participation in didactic drama and other responsibilities; and to act as a badge of orthodoxy - a symbol of fidelity to God and king.

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Fig. 1. Spilsbury Head of St. John the Baptist, General View



Fig. 2. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. John



Fig. 3. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Neck



Fig. 4. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. John from above



Fig. 5. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. Peter



Fig. 6. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. Peter and Agnus Dei



Fig. 7. Spilsbury Head, Detail of St. Peter



Fig. 8. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Archbishop and St. John



Fig. 9. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Archbishop



Fig. 10. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Archbishop



Fig. 11. Spilsbury Head, Detail of Agnus Dei

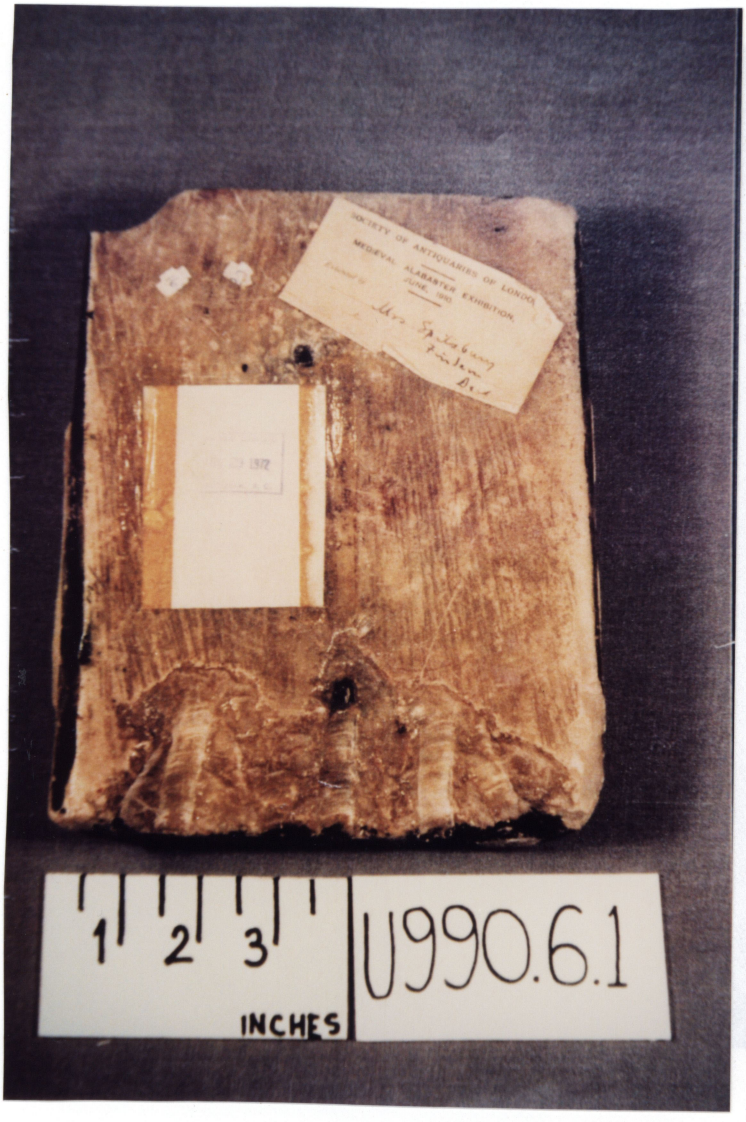


Fig. 12. Spilsbury Head, General View, Reverse Side

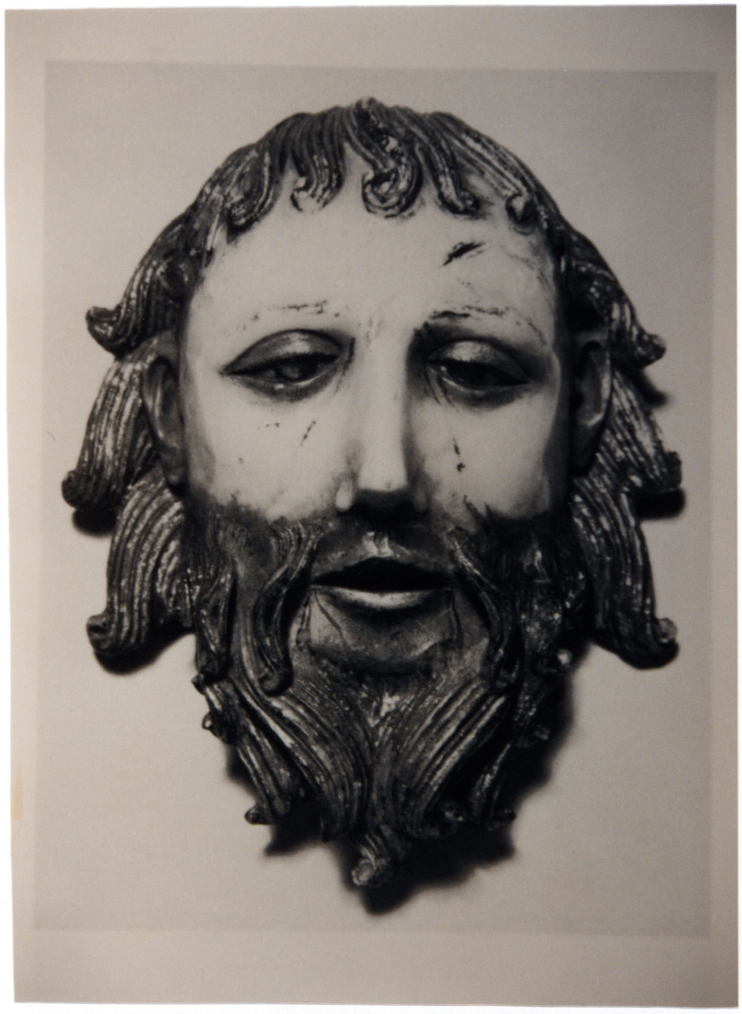


Fig. 13. Head of St. John the Baptist

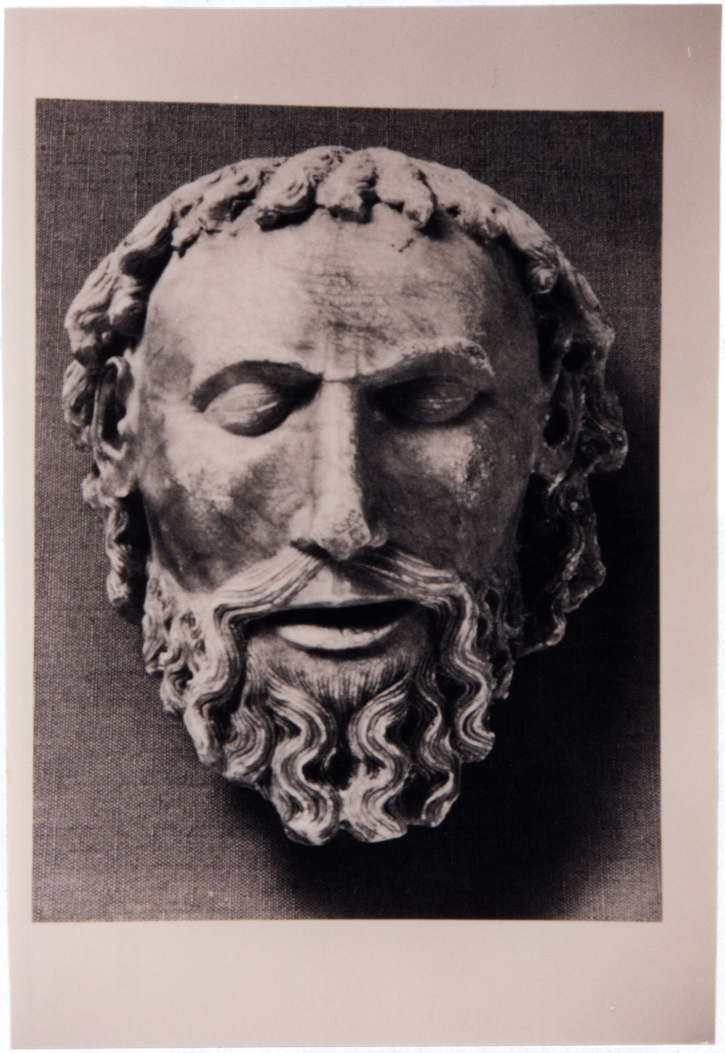


Fig. 14. Head of St. John the Baptist, North German (?)



Fig.15. Head of St. John the Baptist, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

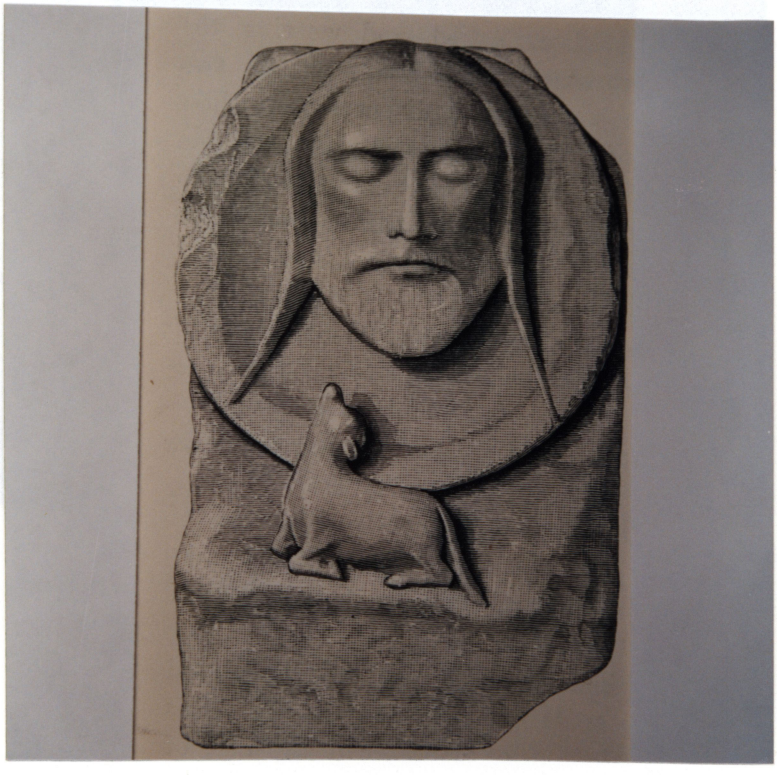


Fig. 16. Parker Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 17. Head of St. John the Baptist, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Fig. 18. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 19. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist, (believed to have been found at Wells)

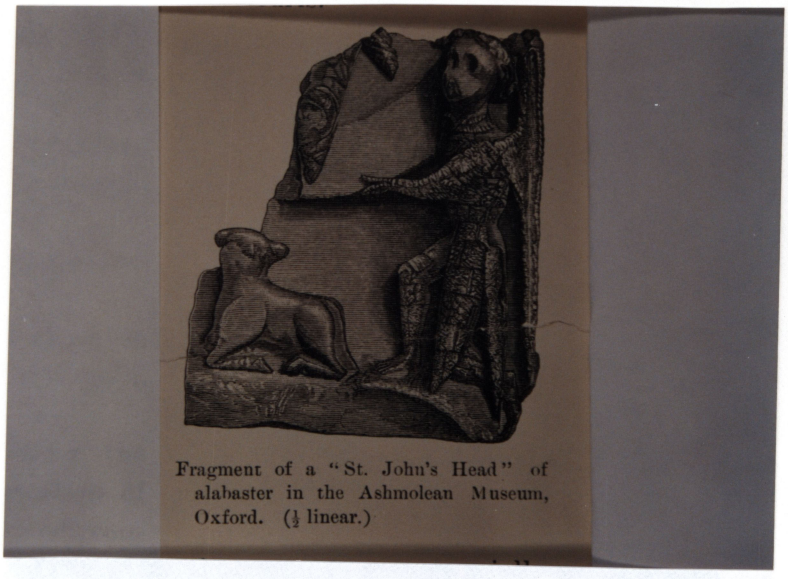


Fig. 20. Huddesford fragment of a Head of St. John the Baptist, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

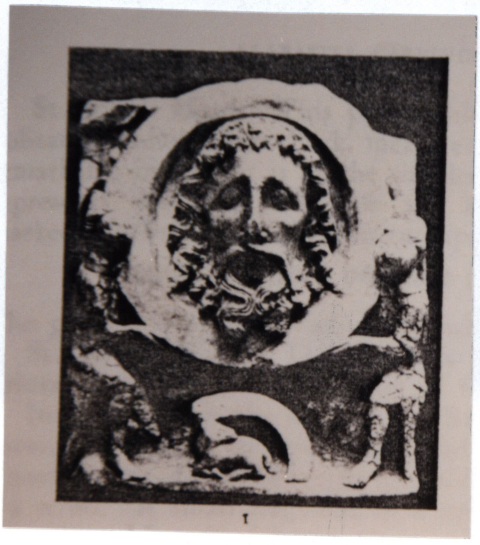


Fig. 21. Head of St. John the Baptist, Orléans



Fig. 22. Spilsbury Head of St. John the Baptist

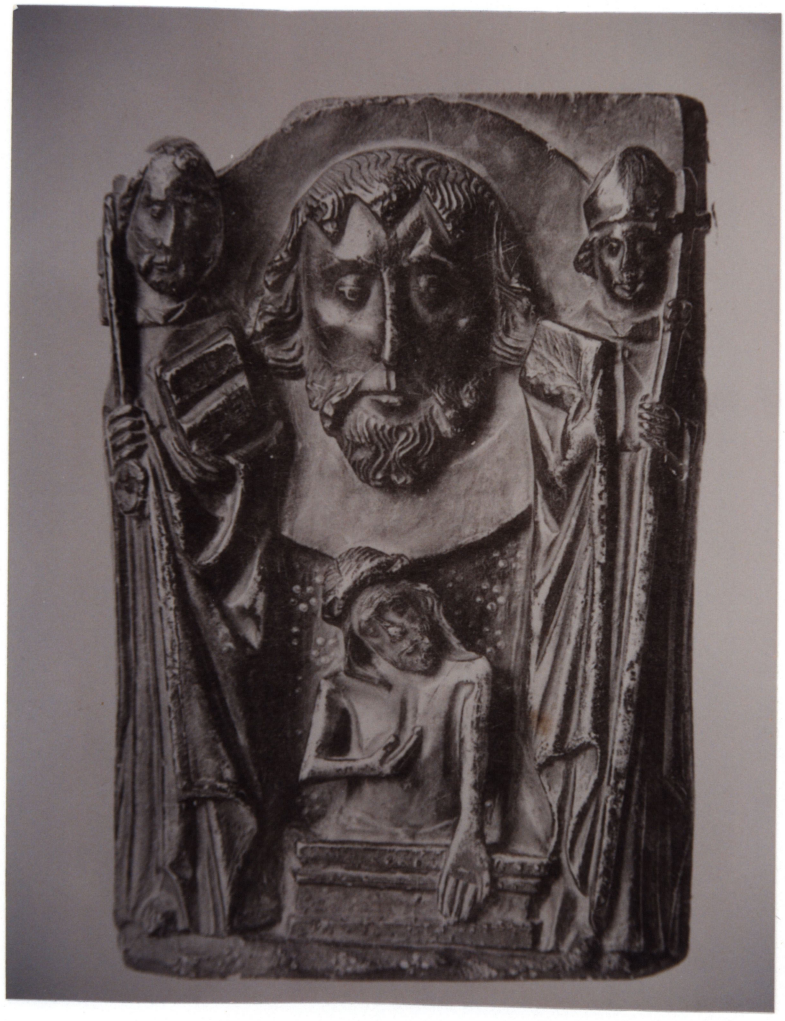


Fig. 23. Ratcliffe College Head of St. John the Baptist, Leicester



Fig. 24. Stokes Head of St. John the Baptist (Weston Underwood, Olney)



Fig. 25. Richards Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 26. Leicester Head of St. John the Baptist, Leicester Museum



Fig. 27. Wolsey Head of St. John the Baptist (London)



Fig. 28. Nichols Head of St. John the Baptist

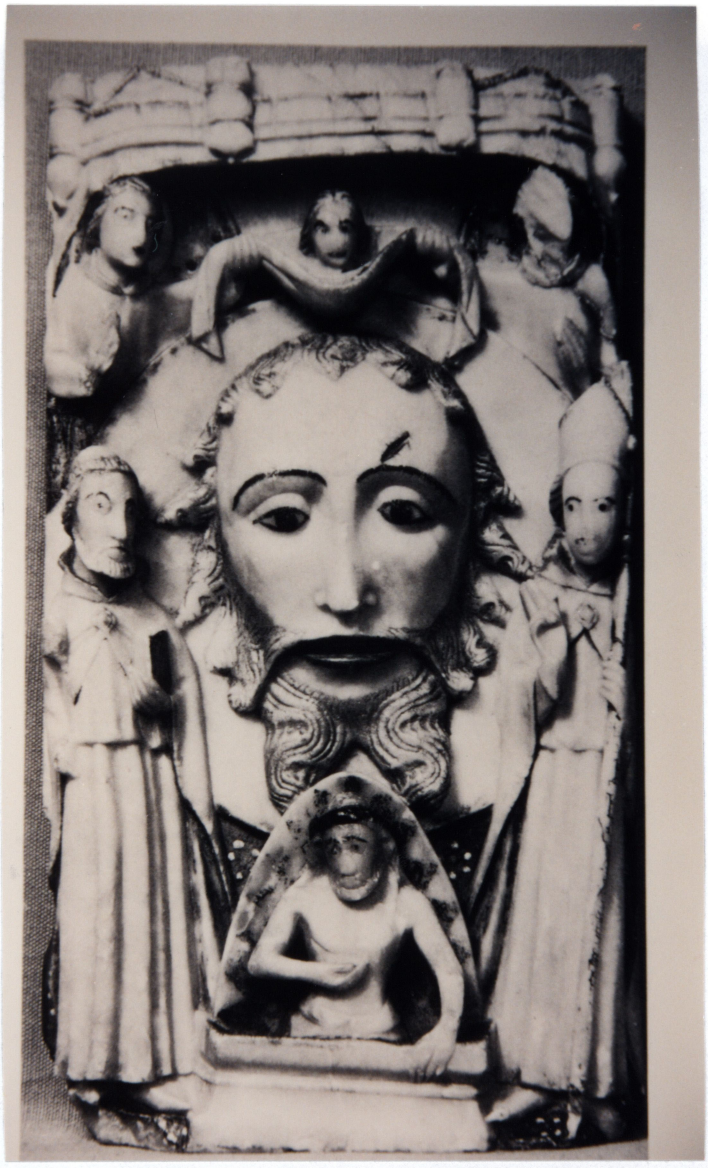


Fig. 29. Caldicott Head of St. John the Baptist, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 30. Yarnton Church (Oxfordshire) Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 31. Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 32. Yarnton Church (Oxfordshire) Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 33. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist, (believed to have been found at Wells)



Fig. 34. Amport Church (Hampshire) Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 35. Scarisbrick Hall (Lancashire) Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 36. Head of St. John the Baptist, (acquired in London)



Fig. 37. Nightingale Head of St. John the Baptist, (found near Old Sarum), Salisbury Museum



Fig. 38. Burrell Head of St. John the Baptist, Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries.

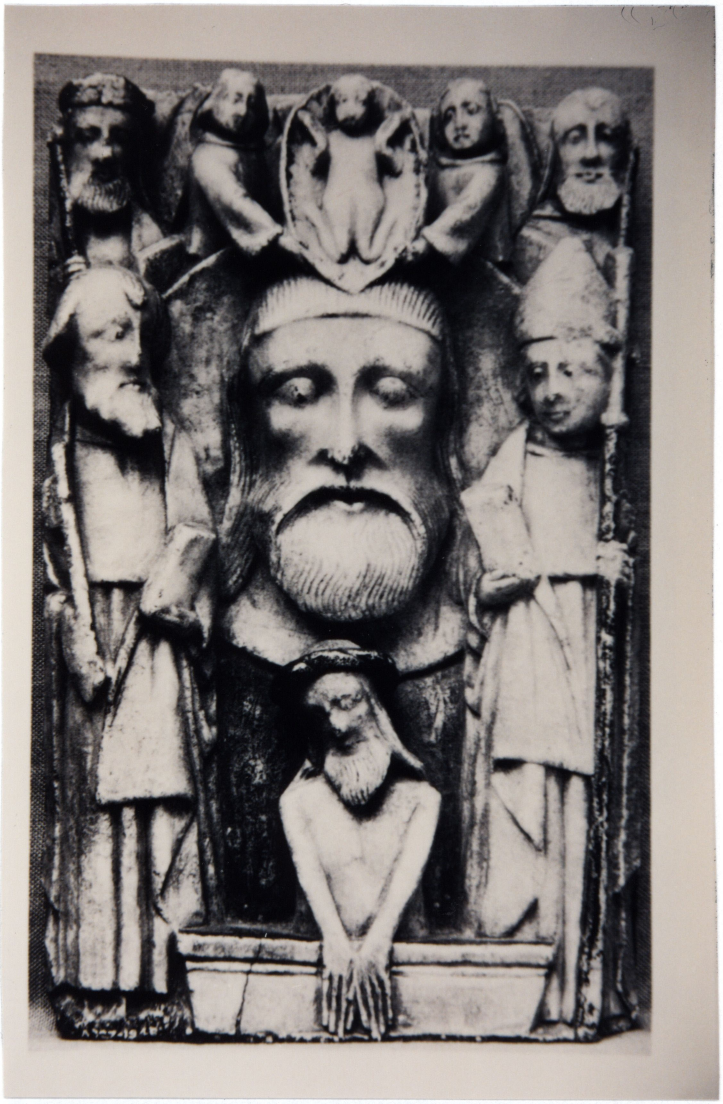


Fig. 39. Thomas Head of St. John the Baptist, (believed to have been found at Wells)



Fig. 40. Calamocha Head of St. John the Baptist, (acquired in Teruel province, Spain)



Fig. 41. Head of St. John the Baptist, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 42. Head of St. John the Baptist, (acquired in Paris)



Fig. 43. Head of St. John the Baptist, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 44. Duke (Lake House, Salisbury) Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 45. Richards Head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 46. St. Levan Head of St. John the Baptist, (St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall)



Fig. 47. Head of St. John the Baptist, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'art et d'histoire



Fig. 48. Alabaster tomb of King Edward II, Gloucester Cathedral



Fig. 49. Alabaster tomb of John of Eltham (c. 1337), Westminster Abbey

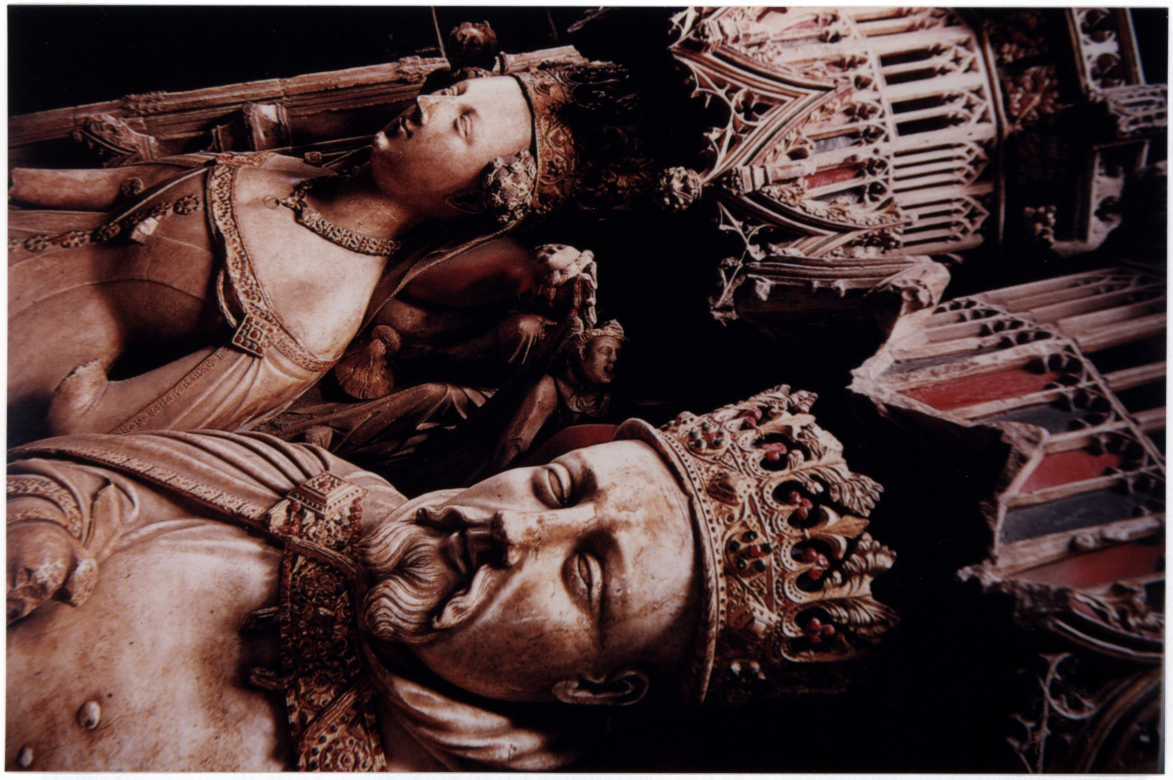


Fig. 50. Alabaster effigies of Henry IV and Joan of Navarre, Canterbury Cathedral



Fig. 51. Alabaster monument of Sir Ralph Neville and his wives, Margaret Stafford and Joan Beaufort at Staindrop (Durham)



Fig. 52. Alabaster effigies of William Lord Bardolph and wife, Joan, in the Bardolf Chapel at Dennington Church, Suffolk



Fig. 53. Alabaster monument of Alice (Chaucer) de la Pole, Duchess of Suffolk at Ewelme Church



Fig. 54. Detail of angels on side of de la Pole monument



Fig. 55. Detail of head and supporting angels on de la Pole monument



Fig. 56. Freestone Neville screen (reredos), 1379, Durham Cathedral

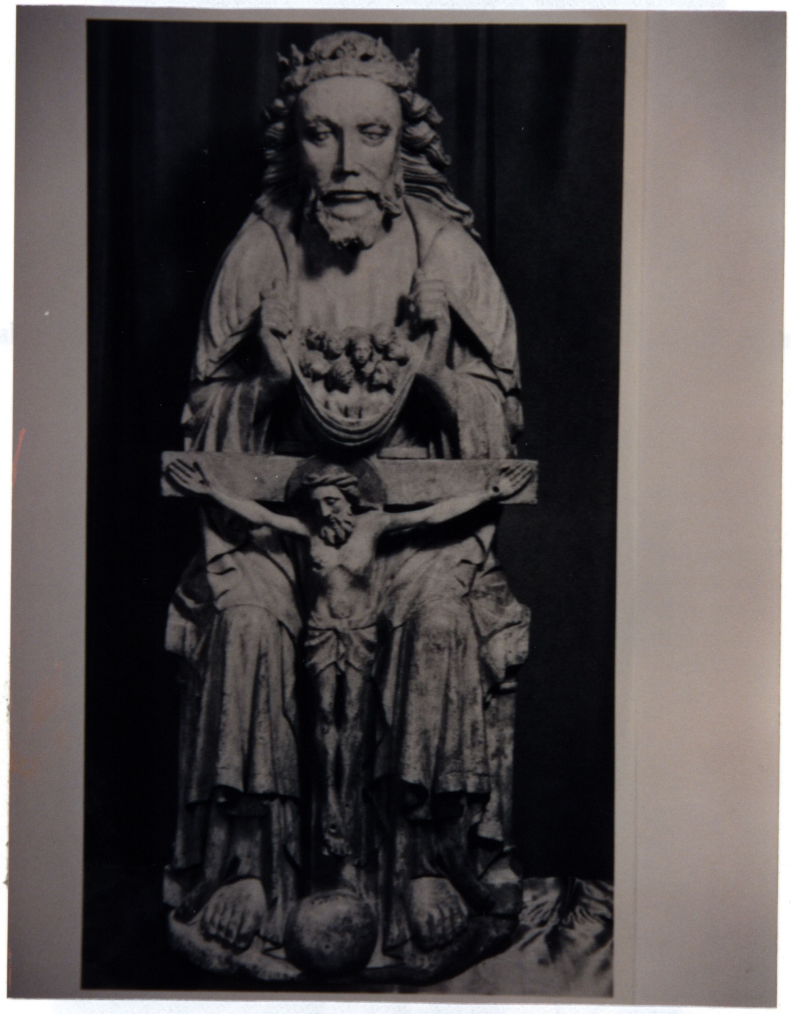


Fig. 57. Alabaster carving, the Trinity, c. 1375-85, Burrell Collection, Glasgow



Fig. 58. Alabaster panel, Nativity and Adoration, late 14th century, Paderborn Cathedral



Fig. 59. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 14th century, (found in Chester)



Fig. 60. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 14th century



Fig. 61. Alabaster Passion altarpiece, late 14th century (formerly in Bordeaux)



Fig. 62. Alabaster Passion altarpiece, early 15th century (formerly in Spain and Netherlands)

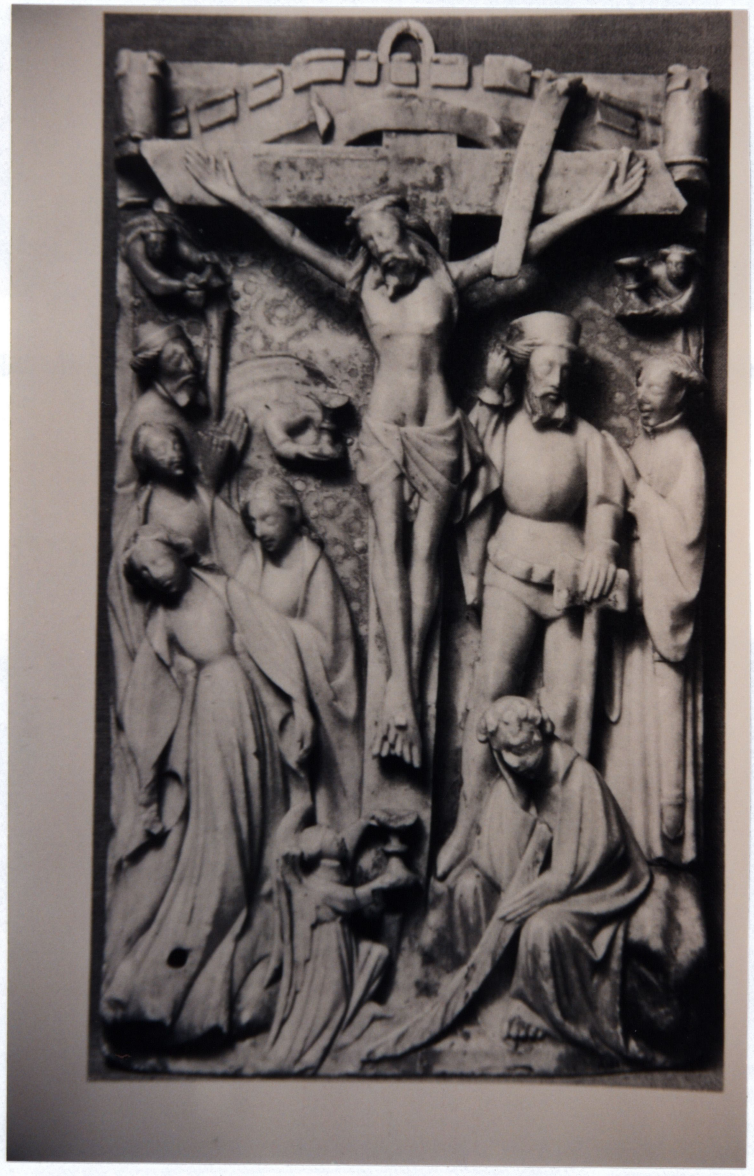


Fig. 63. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, 15th century (discovered in Hampshire)



Fig. 64. Alabaster altarpiece from church in Iceland, c. 1420, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen



Fig. 65. Alabaster altarpiece from church in Hólar, Iceland, 1450-70, National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavik

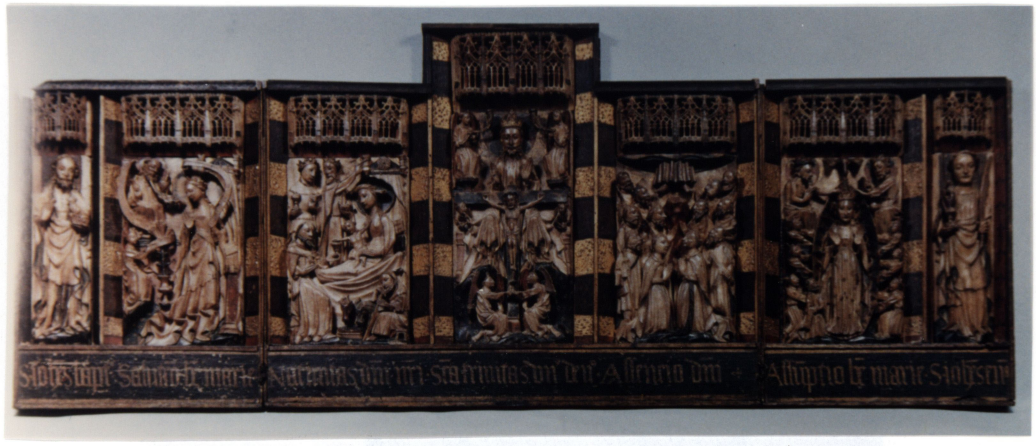


Fig. 66. Swansea Altarpiece (Joys of the Virgin), 15th century, (formerly in Munich and in Lord Swansea's collection at Singleton Abbey, Swansea), Victoria and Albert Museum

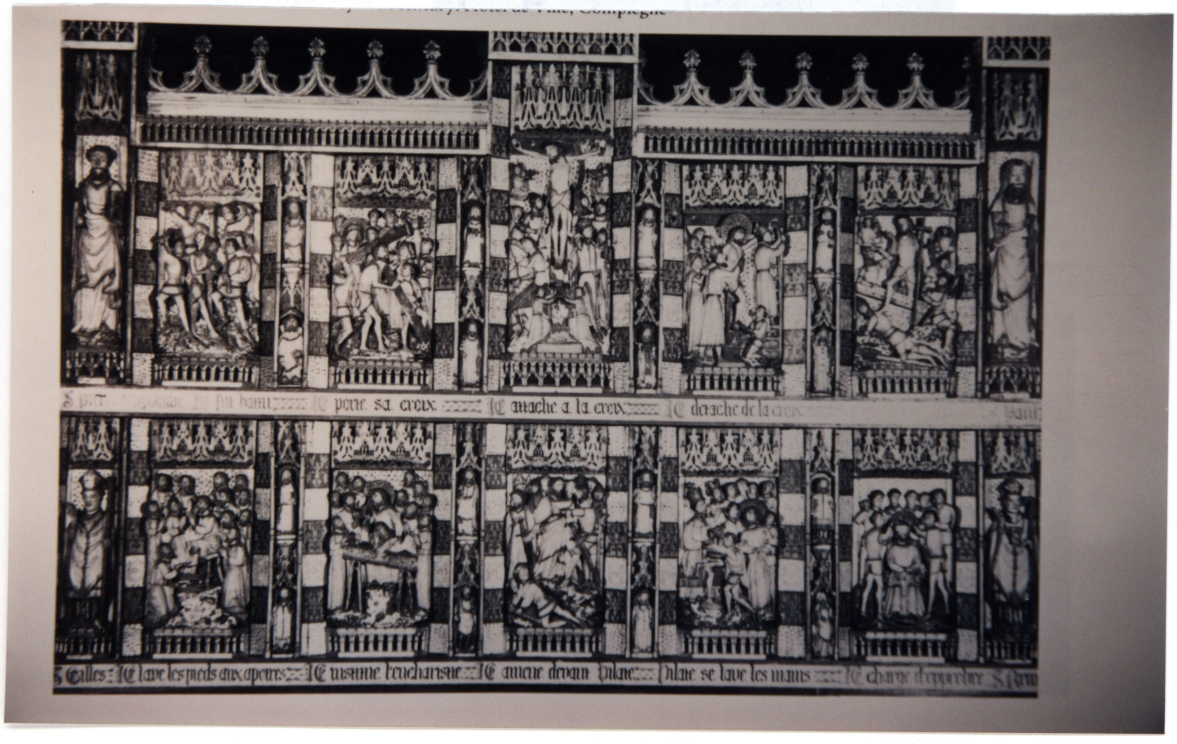


Fig. 67. Alabaster two-tiered alabaster Passion reredos, early 16th century, Hôtel de Ville, Compiègne

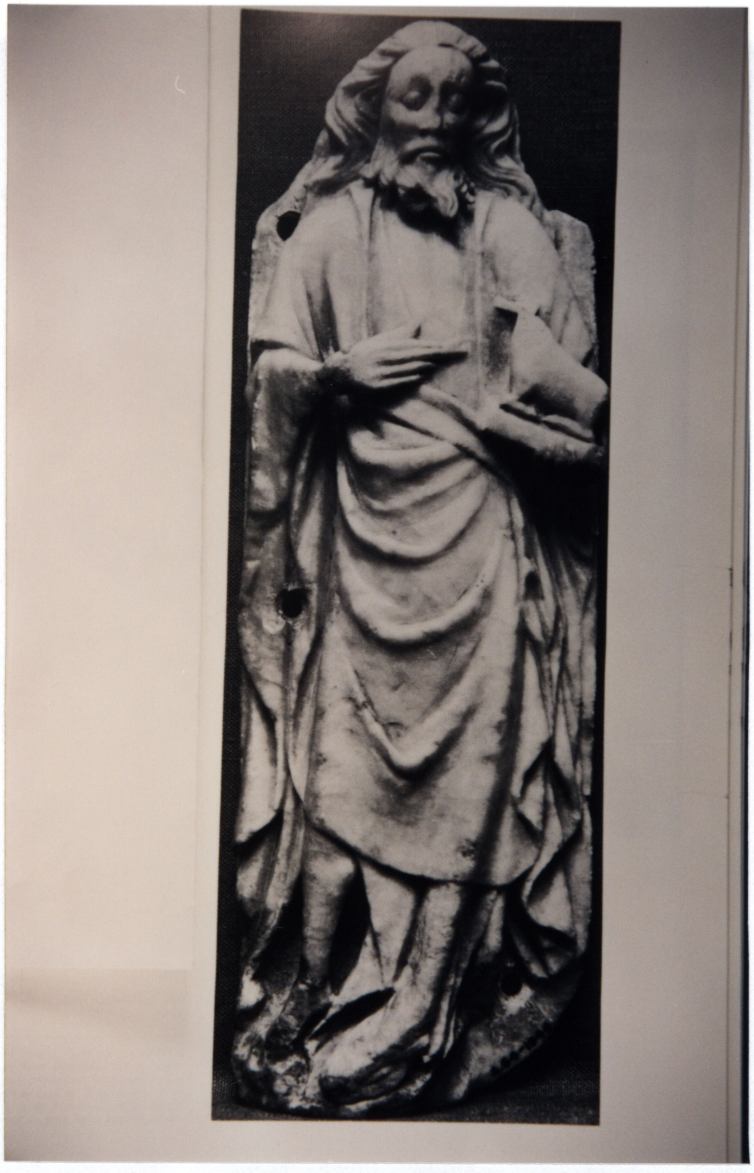


Fig. 68. Alabaster panel, St. John the Baptist, late 15th century (aquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 69. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 70. Alabaster panel, Crucifixion, late 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum

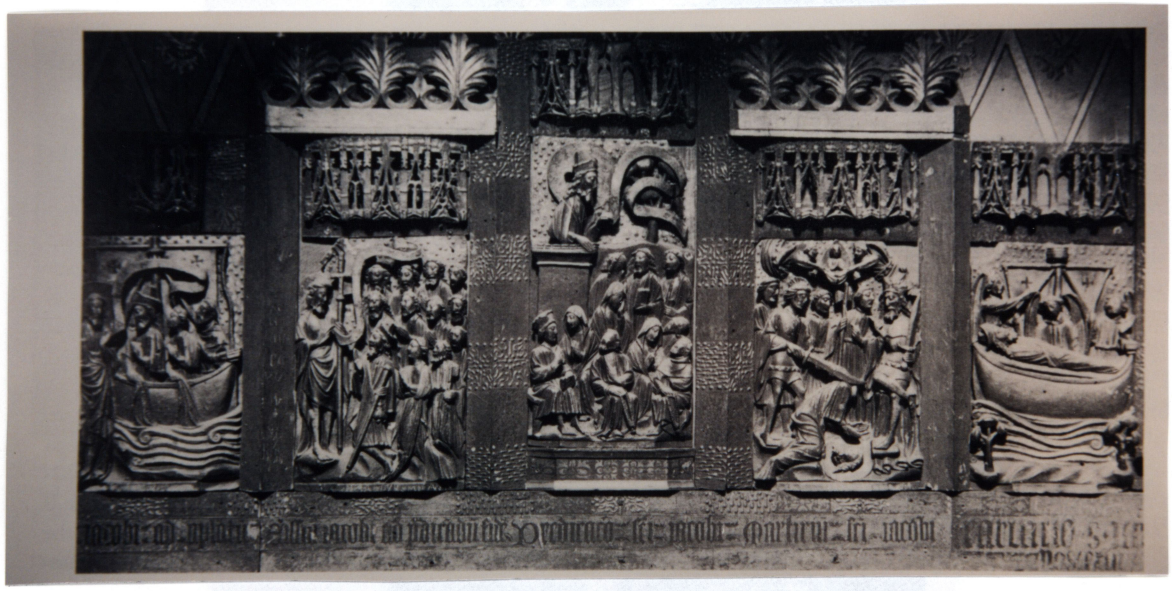


Fig. 71. Alabaster altarpiece, Life of St. James, c. 1456, Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela



Fig. 72. Alabaster panel, St. John the Baptist Preaching, second half of 15th century (acquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 73. Alabaster panel, Fifth Sign of the Last Judgment, 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 74. Alabaster panel, The Harrowing of Hell, 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 75. Stone boss, The Harrowing of Hell, Norwich Cathedral Nave



Fig. 76. Stone boss, The Ascension, Norwich Cathedral Nave



Fig. 77. Alabaster panel in housing, The Ascension, 15th century (housing from 17th century), (found in ruins of a house near York), Victoria and Albert Museum

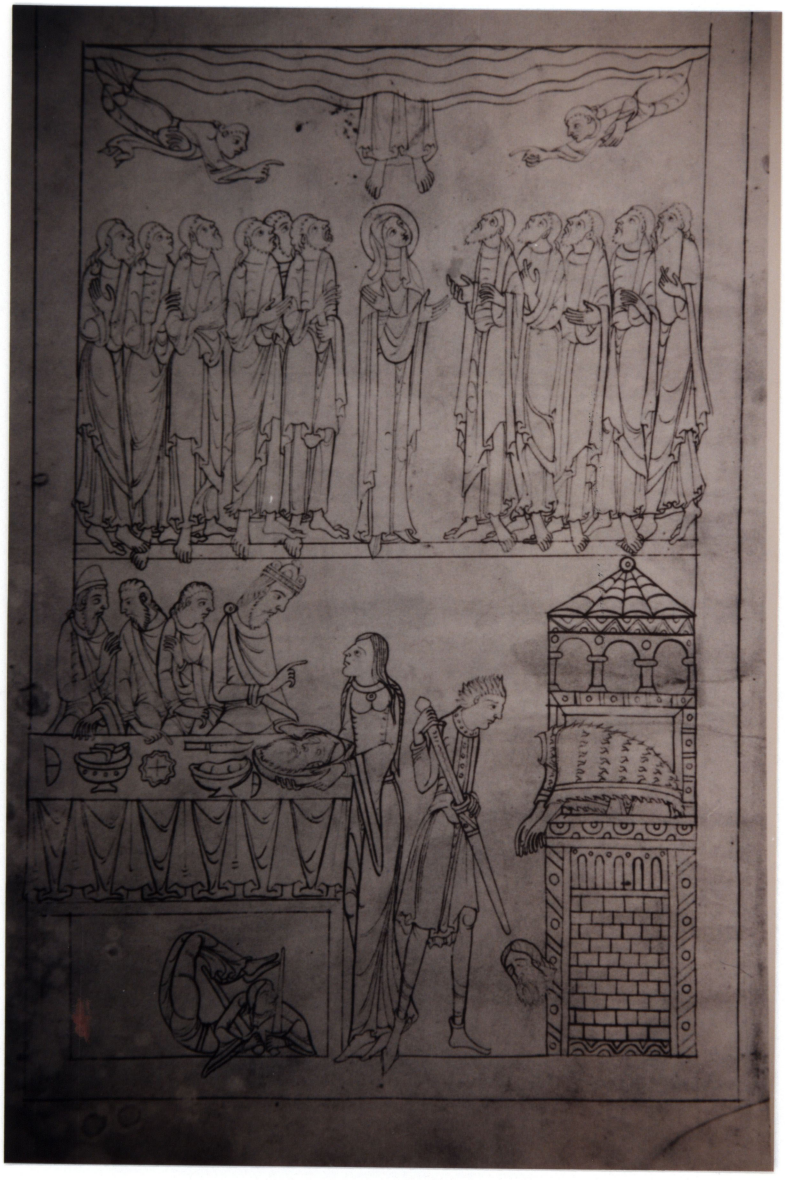


Fig. 78. Manuscript Illustration, The Ascension and Herod's Feast/Beheading of St. John the Baptist (Cambridge, Pembroke College 120, f. 5v.)



Fig. 79. Alabaster panel, St. Michael Attacking the Dragon and Weighing Souls With the Virgin Interceding, 15th century, Victoria and Albert Museum

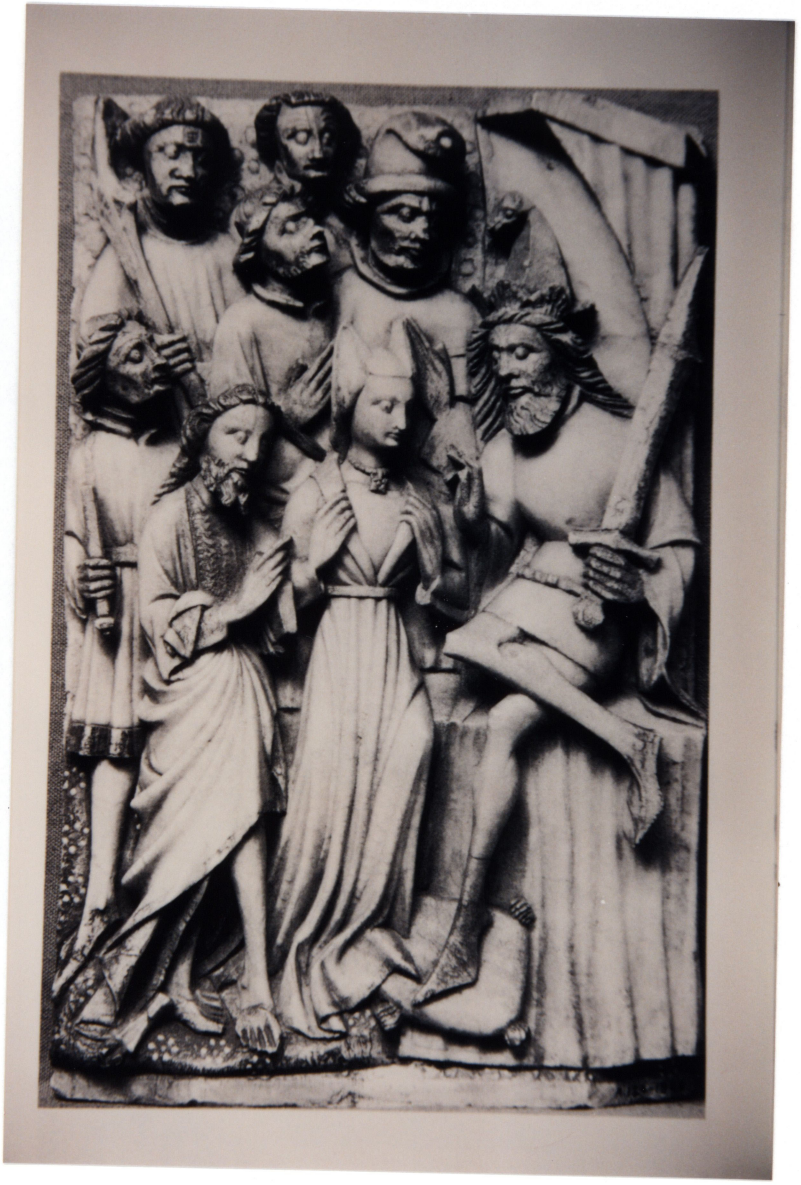


Fig. 80. Alabaster panel, St. John the Baptist Reproves Herod Antipas, late 15th century, (formerly in Genoa, ex. coll. Nelson and Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 81. Alabaster panel, The Beheading of St. John the Baptist, late 15th century, (acquired in Paris, ex. coll. Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 82. Manuscript illumination, Herod's Feast, Arundel B.L. MS 157



Fig. 83. Manuscript illustration, Herod's Feast, Holkham Bible, B.L. MS. Add. 47682, f. 21v



Fig. 84. Manuscript illustration, Herod's Feast, Oxford, Bodl. Lib., Auct. D. 2. 6, f. 166v



Fig. 85. Stone boss, Norwich Cathdral; Medieval Church Art



Fig. 86. Wall painting, Hunting Scene and History of St. John the Baptist, Idsworth Chapel, Charlton, Hampshire



Fig. 87. Manuscript illumination, The Baptist Beheaded, Belles Heures, fol. 212



Fig. 88. Manuscript illumination, The Presentation of the Head, Belles Heures, fol. 212v



Fig. 89. Engraving of relic of St. John the Baptist at Amiens



Fig. 90. Fragment of alabaster panel, The Presentation of the Head, Ripon Cathedral



Fig. 91. Alabaster panel, Burial of St. John the Baptist, late 15th century, (formerly in Genoa, ex. coll. Nelson, Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum

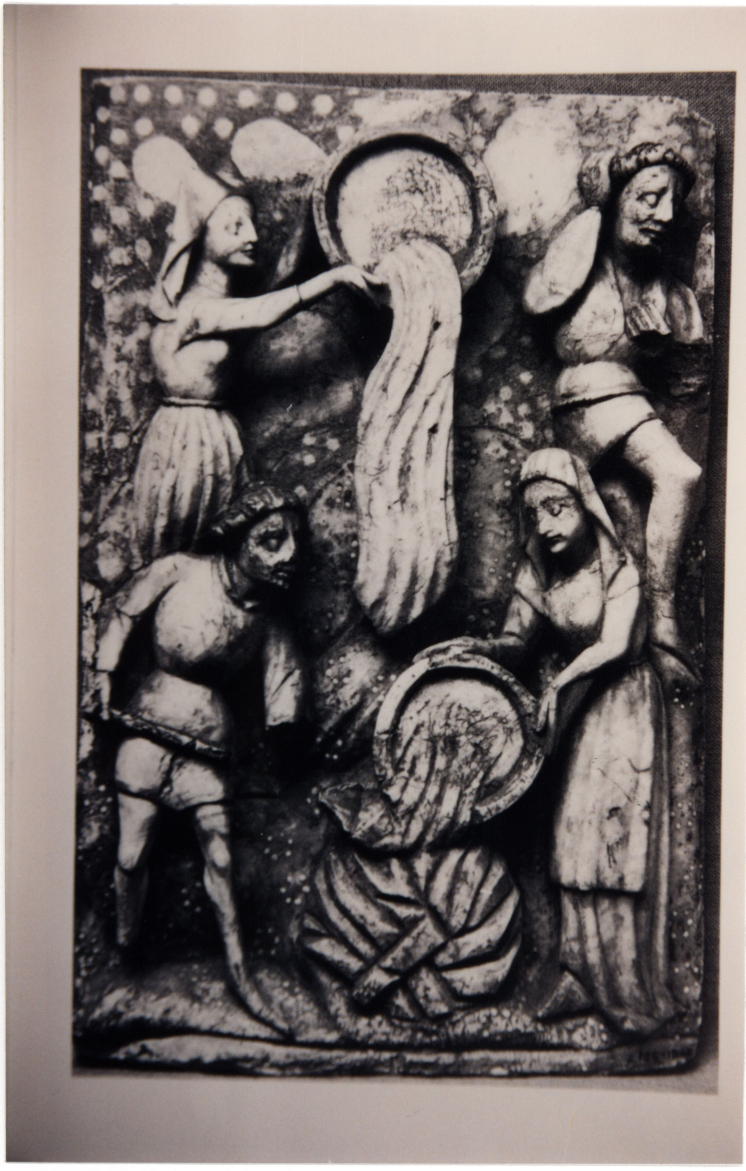


Fig. 92. Alabaster panel, Quenching of the Ashes of St. John the Baptist(?), late 15th century, (formerly in Genoa, ex. coll. Nelson, Hildburgh), Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 93. Manuscript illustration, Christ Enthroned between the Eucharist and the Tablets of the Law (Penintential Psalms), Walters 99. fol.79, 15th century, northern France



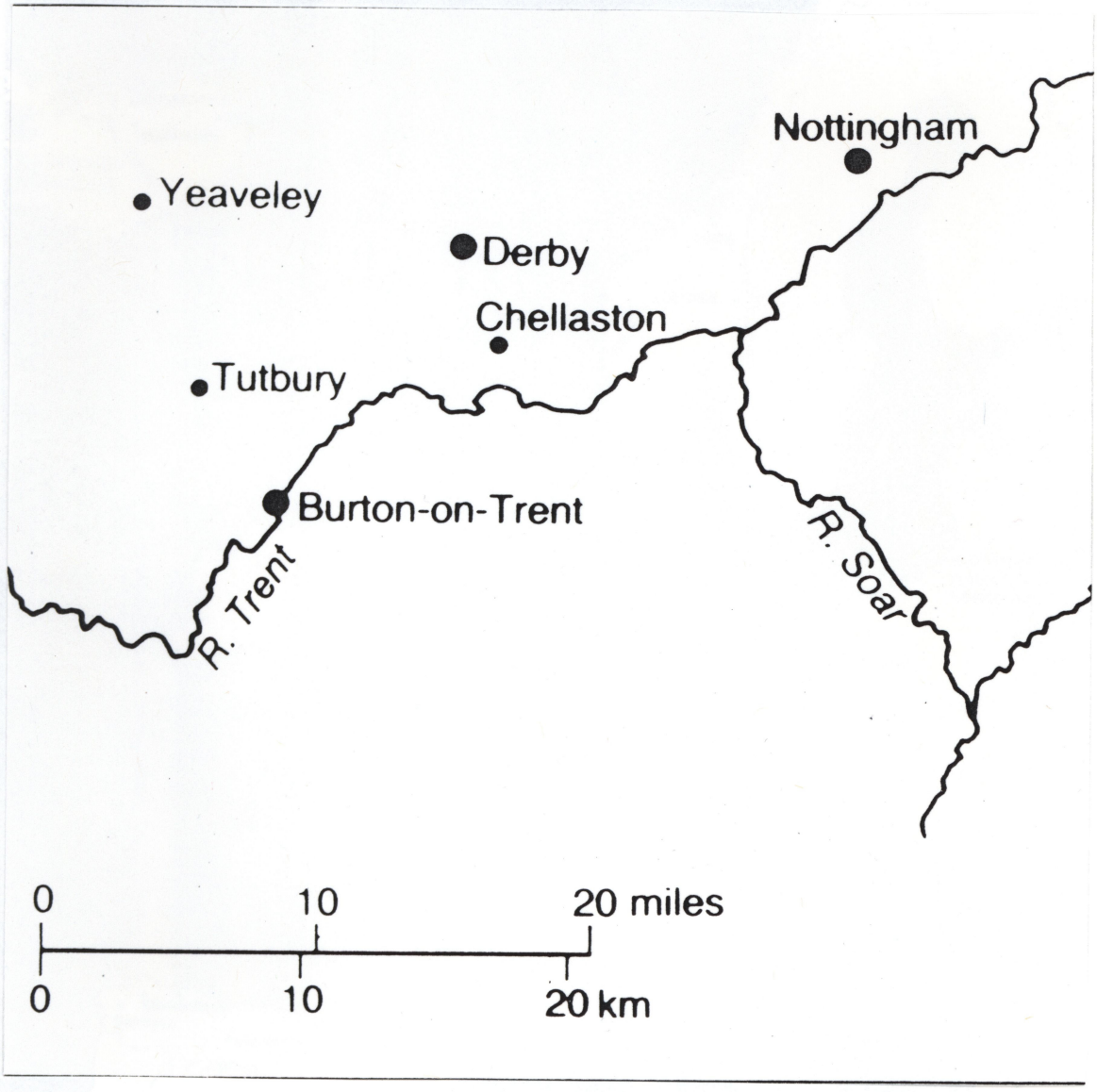
Fig. 94. Stone font, The Baptism of Christ, St. Michael's, Castle Frome



Fig. 95. Manuscript illustration, Sir Humphrey Kneels Before the Man of Sorrows



Fig. 96. Pilgrim sign from Amiens



Map 1. Centres of the medieval alabaster industry in the English Midlands



Map 2. Original locations where known of surviving 14th- and 15th-century alabaster altarpieces exported from England