

SOME NOTES ON MEDIAEVAL ICONOGRAPHY

and also on

THE ORIENTATION OF CHURCHES.

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IN giving you an address a second year in succession I am in some difficulty. I have specialised on roof bosses and I gave you an address on the subject last year. I shall however endeavour to show you slides of subjects which though more or less related to roof bosses are nevertheless on different lines to the slides I showed you a year ago.

First of all I should like to call your attention to a chantry chapel in Boxgrove Priory erected in 1532 by Lord La Warr during his lifetime. This chantry is one of a group of monuments in West Sussex that were probably the work of Italian craftsmen, and they show a mingling of Gothic and Renaissance art. The whole chantry chapel with its beautiful roof is well worthy of study. On the sides are carved panels of angels supporting coats of arms, with smaller panels above carved with curious little figures. I have discovered that some of these are taken from pictures which ornament the sides of the pages in books of hours printed in Paris at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. It seems certain that the Boxgrove carvers took some of their designs from these books of hours, and it is probable that all the panels have a similar origin. Research might discover the actual edition from which they were taken.

A book of hours was the prayer book of the laity in the Middle Ages; the hours were Matins, Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline, and these were recited originally at seven different times of the day. Each hour consisted of certain prayers, a number of psalms, and a hymn. After the hours there usually follow the penitential psalms, an office for the dead, and various other prayers which vary from book to book. In a finely illuminated manuscript we find a whole-page illustration at the beginning of each hour, and at the beginning of each of the further divisions of the book, while there are smaller miniatures scattered through the work and often each page has an ornamented border. Books of hours vary from splendid manuscripts like the Bedford Book of Hours which was found at Lulworth Castle, and was bought by the British Museum for thirty thousand pounds, down to humble books with no miniatures and little ornament save a few

illuminated capitals. All these books are prefaced by a calendar with a list of Saints' Days. Sometimes in the calendar we get a set of twelve miniatures illustrating the occupations of the months ; these vary in different collections ; one set, which I will show you on slides, has for January a scene of feasting, before the strenuous occupations begin ; February shows men digging and hoeing ; March pruning a vineyard, this particular book being French ; April brings a pause in work on the land, and a young man has time to be courting his lady love ; the wooing is short, for in May he is shown bringing home his bride who is riding pillion behind him on a white horse ; June shows hay cutting by two men who use very modern-looking scythes ; in July the corn is being cut with a sickle ; in August men are threshing with flails ; September brings the vintage with men and women gathering grapes into baskets which are emptied into vats in a bullock cart ; October shows ploughing and sowing ; in November men are beating trees to bring down the walnuts, or perhaps chestnuts, to feed the pigs before the winter killing, for in the Middle Ages only the stock which was to be bred from could be kept through the winter, and so the series ends with the killing of the pig in December. These so-called occupations of the months were a favourite subject in the Middle Ages ; some of them appear in roof bosses in the cloisters at Lincoln, others on the tiles in the retro-quire at Canterbury, and some on misericords, as in the January feasting scene at Ludlow.

Another subject on which light is thrown by books of hours is that of Passion Emblems. The finest collection of them in the country is to be seen on the roof bosses in the quire at Winchester. Their origin is I think to be found in the legend of the Mass of St. Gregory, a legend which said that when St. Gregory was saying Mass he saw a vision of Christ on the altar with all the marks of the Passion on Him. In the numerous miniatures of the subject which appear in books of hours Christ is shown surrounded by the instruments of the Passion, the Cross, the pillar of the flagellation and many others. Mediaeval heralds attributed coats of arms to all the heroes of antiquity, including famous characters in the Old Testament. There was nothing bizarre to them therefore in attributing arms to Christ Himself, and they took as charges of such arms the instruments of the Passion that they found in miniatures of the Mass of St. Gregory. These are definitely stated in various places to be the arms of Christ, and if you look at the collection in our Cathedral you will see that they are all treated as charges on shields of arms, and some of them have the crown of thorns placed over the shield in the place of a crest.

The printed books of hours were principally issued from Paris between the years 1490 and 1540. They were got up in the style of

the manuscript books with full-page illustrations and very many smaller ones ; down the margins and at the tops and bottoms of the pages there are often further illustrations, and it is some of these latter that as I have mentioned above were copied at Boxgrove. We find a series of scenes from the Old Testament, and from the Book of Revelation. Sometimes we find New Testament scenes with their Old Testament prototypes ; for instance, the Entombment from the New ; and Joseph being cast into the pit, and Jonah thrown to the whale from the Old Testament. Another series sometimes found is the Dance of Death where a figure of death is accosting the pope, the emperor, the king, the knight, the merchant, the queen, the great lady, the village woman, and very many more. Another series, and a curious one to find in a prayer book, is the triumph of Caesar ; there are some twenty-four scenes showing a Roman triumph with Caesar himself in a triumphal car ; the first of the series is a picture of the Colosseum which is described as Caesar's palace. Among other curiosities we find in some of the books printed in Paris for the English market a picture of Henry VI and an appended prayer as though he were a saint. His canonization had been mooted several times and it was taken up by Henry VII, who built the chapel at Westminster to receive the shrine which was to be erected in the Abbey to a second sainted king. But the expenses of the process of beatification alarmed the very careful Tudor king and the matter was dropped. In the appended prayer are one or two passages that seem rather apposite : "*Rex Henricus sis amicus nobis in angustia*" and "*Pax in terra non sit guerra.*"

I want finally to mention a subject which is quite unconnected with mediaeval iconography. A short time before the War I began to take the orientation of churches by means of a prismatic compass, and I should like to put on record a summary of what I have done up to date, though far more measurements are still needed. It is not easy to measure the orientation with a compass as the majority of churches have their own magnetic field due to hot-water pipes, stoves, organs, and sometimes steel girders. Various devices have to be adopted to make sure that one is measuring the real orientation. Sometimes a measurement is impossible, and some churches, including two in Winchester, have baffled me.

I have so far measured the orientation of over three hundred churches, of which eighty-four are in Hampshire. None of the popular ideas about orientation seem to be substantiated. For instance, there is no sign of the orientation being determined by the place of the rising of the sun on the day of the feast of the dedication. But one point has come out of the investigation ; there is a definite preponderance of churches which are orientated north

of east. Out of 317 churches four point accurately east and west, 197 point north of east and 116 south of east. When plotted on a curve the orientations make a close approximation to what mathematicians call a Probability curve, and it is likely that a larger number of examples, which I hope to obtain some day, will bring the two curves still closer and that a maximum will be shown about five degrees north of east. It looks as though many churches were orientated roughly east and west, perhaps by the rising sun when the church was first laid out, but modified by local conditions. So many ideas of orientation have been put forward only to prove inexact that I do not like making a suggestion ; but I put forward the idea very tentatively that the reason for the preponderance of northerly orientations is that churches were orientated by the rising sun when they were first laid out, and that it would be much more likely for a church to be begun in the late spring or the summer, when the sun is rising north of east than it would be after the autumn equinox when the sun is rising south of east.

Of the churches I have measured, just over 13 per cent. have chancel and nave out of line. In about $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. the chancel is inclined to the north, in a little over $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. to the south. The amount varies from half a degree to seven degrees. There seems to be no set purpose in this ; it looks as though it were the result of errors in alignment when an addition was made to the church, and when probably the chancel arch was blocked up temporarily. There is nothing to suggest that it had any symbolical meaning.

NOTE.—I have deposited a list of the churches whose orientations I have so far measured with the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society, the Society of Antiquaries, the Sussex Archaeological Society, and the Cambridge Antiquarian Society.