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The La Selle Retable:
An English Alabaster Altarpiece in Normandy

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This thesis is an examination of the form, iconography and history of a highly unusual multi-panelled carved altarpiece, featuring cycles of the life of St George and of the Virgin Mary, probably dating to c.1485. The author sets the work in the context of current research into English alabaster panels, and presents an analysis of all extant documentary evidence relating to the retable. Comparisons are drawn with both visual cycles and individual subjects of the lives of St George and the Virgin in both alabaster and other media, and also hagiographical writing, to demonstrate that the atypical iconography of the work is likely to have arisen as the result of a direct commission from a Norman patron. The medieval cult of St George in Normandy is considered, also the distribution of English alabasters in the region, and the likely source of the commission is named as the Abbey Saint-Sauveur of Evreux, a community of Benedictine nuns. Consideration is given to the historical links between Saint-Sauveur and the hamlet of La Selle, and various possibilities are considered which may explain the reasons why the retable was moved to the hamlet. Finally, possible areas for future research are outlined.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter considers alabaster as a material and then gives an overview of research into alabaster panels, with particular attention to dating schemes. The centres of panel production and the iconographic sources used by carvers are discussed, as is the geographical distribution of English alabaster retables in Europe. Finally, all known research on the La Selle retable is considered.[1]

Alabaster: the material and its uses.

Alabaster is a form of gypsum, or hydrated calcium sulphate ($CaSO_4.2H_2O$), a near-surface deposit probably formed under interglacial conditions.[2] It occurs widely throughout the world in a fibrous or granular form, but the massive or rock form occurs primarily in the Upper Keuper beds of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire.[3] Late medieval records demonstrate that alabaster was quarried in two areas primarily, the Castle Hayes-Fauld ridge, south-west of Tutbury (Staffordshire), and in Chellaston Hill, south-east of Derby and about ten miles east

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1. The name of the hamlet where the retable is housed is sometimes given by commentators as 'La Celle', but the form used locally is 'La Selle'. The origin of the name is obscure. It has been suggested that it may indicate the ancient site of a hermitage, or possibly simply a small rural settlement: Clément (avril 1932) pp.11-12.

2. At deeper levels the alabaster deposits give way to gypsum suitable only for making Plaster of Paris. For detailed analysis of the formation and location of alabaster deposits see the articles by R.J. Firman [Firman (1984), Firman (1989)]; in the first paper Firman suggests peri-glacial conditions were required for the formation of alabaster, but he revises this opinion in the subsequent work.

3. Alabaster is slightly soluble in water (defined as 1 part in 495), and outcrops will only be exposed in a geologically unusual situation where the surrounding rock erodes at a faster rate than the alabaster itself. Firman suggests that discovery of unexposed alabaster at Tutbury and Chellaston may well have happened by chance, when digging wells or foundations for buildings: Firman (1984) p.164.

of Tutbury.[4] The Tutbury quarries are likely to be the oldest, as the first known use of

alabaster in this country occurs in part of the inner moulding of the Norman west

doorway at Tutbury priory church, dated to c.1160.[5] The stone came into more

general sculptural use in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, and after the

Black Death its use increased rapidly.[6] Alabaster's popularity is attributable, to a

degree, to its relatively low cost,[7] but it also has a symbolic quality: the biblical

reference to the pot of alabaster, which contained ointment used to anoint Christ's

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4. Nigel Ramsay notes that both the Tutbury and Chellaston quarries lie within John of Gaunt's honour of Tutbury: Ramsay (1991) p.31. Other places yielding this type of alabaster have been noted at Gotham, Ratcliffe-on-Soar, and Wheatley (near Newark): Fellows (1907) introduction (no pagination). Firman suggests that alabaster slabs suitable for smaller works, such as panels or small statues rather than tombs and life-sized effigies, may have been obtained from other areas too, such as Burton-on-the-Wolds (Leicestershire), the Somerset Coast and the Permian Marl deposits in Yorkshire: Firman (1984) p.175.

5. Firman notes two further 'inappropriate' use of alabaster at Tutbury, which imply an early lack of understanding about the properties of the material: Firman (1984) p.164. It was used as a building stone to support buttresses in the south aisle, and an alabaster coffin has been unearthed in the churchyard.

6. Between 1350 and 1500 the total output of the Castle Hayes-Fauld and Chellaston quarries was probably some 70 tons per annum: Lindley (1995) p.24. However, Firman has claimed that at least 50 panels could be carved from a 4 ton block of alabaster, which implies that one year's production could account for all the extant medieval English alabaster panels: Firman (1984) p.175. He goes on to argue that this suggests that alabaster quarrying was carried out on a very small scale; however, a much more likely explanation is that a combination of iconoclasm, theft and other losses have left us with a tiny fraction of the original output of the medieval English alabaster industry.

7. Francis Cheetham comments that alabaster for tombs initially commanded a high price: in 1374 the tomb of John of Gaunt's wife Blanche cost a remarkable £486. However, by the 1420s there had been a considerable fall in the price of alabaster tombs, and in the fifteenth century alabaster altarpieces were valued at £1 to £1 10s. This low price probably reflects the economies of scale which were achieved by workshops using standardised designs: Cheetham (1984) p.31. We should also note Nigel Ramsay's critique of W.L. Hildburgh's contention that alabaster panels were cheap enough to have been made for popular devotional use: they would never have cost less than several shillings, which would have been many weeks' wages for a peasant, and they are certainly not to be classed with genuinely cheap tin and plaster images: Ramsay (1998) pp.60, 62.

feet at Bethany,[8] ensured that this stone was perceived as a very suitable medium for religious imagery, and perhaps particularly for imagery associated with Christ himself.[9]

The physical nature of alabaster as a material will also have contributed to its popularity: when first quarried it is a soft stone which is easily cut.[10] Detailed carving is a relatively easy matter, but the stone gradually hardens as it is exposed to the air. It can then be polished in the same way as marble, but it accepts both polychromy and gilding with no need of a preparatory layer of gesso. However, the stone is delicate and easily bruised, and can be damaged by exposure to water or fire.[11] The peculiar properties of alabaster ensured that it was used for decorative rather than architectural purposes, most notably tombs and tomb effigies,[12] standing

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8. Despite the name attached to it, this pot was not alabaster in the English sense, but a related Middle Eastern form, alastrites. John Young observes that small bottles of this stone, called 'lacrymatories' and used to hold mourners' tears, were placed in tombs with Egyptian or Oriental alabaster sarcophagi, reflecting the high status attached to the stone: Young (1990) p.5.

9. It is interesting to note that there is a decided lack of imagery derived from the Old Testament extant in English alabaster. This could be due to a number of factors, such as accidents of survival, or production decisions related to the huge interest in the lives of Christ and the Virgin, but it is conceivable that the stone was thought to be particularly suitable for imagery derived from the New Testament because of the mention of Mary Magdalen's 'alabaster' box, or pot, of ointment.

10. The ease of working almost certainly enhanced the popularity of alabaster, as it will undoubtedly have contributed to the relatively low price of finished pieces.

11. This vulnerability may help to account for the near wholesale destruction of alabaster imagery in England at the hands of iconoclasts, for it took little physical effort to destroy this material, unlike some other stone. Plate 10 shows the devastating effect of water on an alabaster panel, hidden in the River Seine by an unsuspecting thief.

12. The only surviving alabaster tomb where a contract is also still extant is found at Lowick church, near Corby (Northamptonshire). The contract for the work was drawn up in 1419 with carvers in Chellaston: Lindley (1995) pp.25-26, plate 12. Alabaster was used for tomb sculpture outside the immediate area of the alabaster quarries from c.1330, and Nigel Ramsay suggests that the early fourteenth century alabaster tomb effigy at Hanbury (Staffs) may have been particularly significant in this development of the alabaster trade, perhaps because Tutbury was under the

figures of saints,[13] and relief panels.[14] The stone seems to have achieved a remarkable degree of popularity: it has been suggested that nearly every parish church and chapel, and almost all monastic churches, would have had an alabaster image or a series of alabasters during the fifteenth century.[15] Another form of relief work was the very popular 'St John's Head', a panel of the saint's head on a charger which was sometimes presented in a painted box, with doors that opened to form a kind of triptych.[16]

Research into alabaster panels.

Research into alabaster panels has tended to be the preserve of antiquarians who have been primarily concerned with tasks of cataloguing, recording and dating

jurisdiction of John of Gaunt, and this may have led to aristocratic and royal interest: Ramsay (1991) p.31. On the Hanbury tomb see also Blair (1992).

13. For example, the figures, c.1380, found at Flawford, near Nottingham and now preserved at Nottingham Castle Museum, illustrated in Stone (1972) figure 145. They are also illustrated and discussed by Nicholas Dawton in the exhibition catalogue *Age of Chivalry* (1987) pp.511-13.

14. Alabaster panels appear on tombs as well as in retables and as individual devotional panels, for example, a panel of combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin on the tomb of Richard Herbert of Ewyas (d.1510) at Abergavenny. Arthur Gardner has observed that an alabaster panel of the Annunciation, c.1450, on the tomb of William ap Thomas, also at Abergavenny, is very similar to some other panels of the subject, and he asserts that this demonstrates that the production of tombs and panels took place in the same workshops: Gardner (1951), p.314. However, this seems to be a rather ambitious assertion, for it is quite possible that a tomb workshop could simply 'borrow' a popular design from a panel workshop, or perhaps buy in a panel from a specialist panel workshop.

15. Ramsay (1983) p.611. St John Hope notes that the 1538-39 Suppression Inventory of the London Charterhouse mentions no less than three alabaster altarpieces: St John Hope (1913) p.13.

16. In 1491 the image maker Nicholas Hill brought a legal action against his salesman for the value of 58 heads of St John the Baptist, which gives some indication of the scale on which these images were produced. See Nottingham, Nottinghamshire Archives, call number CA 1375, also Lindley (1995) p.27.

works; this fundamental process is undoubtedly needed to underpin the thorough study of individual works, which obviously requires full use of comparative material, but this more sophisticated kind of research has generally failed to happen.[17] This parlous situation seems to have arisen for a number of reasons, notably the fact that the extant alabaster panels discovered in this country have invariably been found in a fragmentary state, and often in isolation. Some alabaster panels do seem to have been intended to be used as individual devotional objects (see below, p.9), but the vast majority of examples take a different form, one which indicates that they were generally intended to be be framed in wood, and presented either singly or grouped together with other panels to create altarpieces.[18] No complete altarpieces have survived in this country *in situ,* thanks to the depredations of time and iconoclasts, although many examples are known abroad,[19] and this absence of immediate contextual evidence has affected the way that alabaster panels have been understood, and the importance afforded to them, by English medievalists, who

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17. Some commentators have included alabaster panels in general surveys of medieval sculpture, but this approach has tended to be limited to generalised observations, treating alabasters as a group, usually with reference to chronological variation, rather than focusing on specific images or motifs. See, for example, Prior and Gardner (1912), pp.470-506; Stone (1972) pp.180, 189-92. A similar criticism can be made of Cheetham's catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984)], which generally fails to tease out the significance of particular motifs: his careful analysis of the development of Annunciation forms in alabaster panels is the exception rather than the rule (on this development, see below, p.164). More recently, however, some researchers are beginning to look closely at particular forms and specific works. For example, Jennifer Alexander has made a detailed analysis of the Scarsoe (Lincolnshire) panels: J.S. Alexander (1998).

18. The most common groupings were cycles of Christ's Passion or the Life of the Virgin, and there tended to be a standardised set of subjects for each of these cycles. One of the most interesting aspects of the Life of the Virgin cycle of the La Selle altarpiece is that it does not conform to the 'standard' format: see below, p.190.

19. A list of English alabaster altarpieces in Europe is given in an appendix to Cheetham, (1984) pp. 57-59.

have been primarily concerned to simply classify and date them. Furthermore, the panels would originally have been highly decorative, with much use of polychromy and gilding; these features are now almost entirely lost, and it is very difficult to recreate the impression that these altarpieces would have made when confronted by a single fragmentary panel with only the barest traces of colour and few clues to show its original role within a particular grouping of subjects. Meanwhile, the large numbers of alabasters extant abroad are very widely distributed.[20] This distribution makes clear comparisons difficult, as researchers are largely dependent on photographs taken by antiquarians working in the early years of the twentieth century, with all the inherent drawbacks of the photographic and printing technology of the time. Another issue is the general scarcity of concrete evidence, such as pattern books and contracts, which would facilitate study of the iconographic sources employed, the production techniques used and the degree to which works were commissioned.[21]

The vast majority of research on alabaster panels was carried out in the early years of this century by a small group of dedicated antiquarians. Alabaster scholars today are heavily indebted to the work of Sir William St John Hope, Philip Chatwin, Philip Nelson, and perhaps particularly to Walter Hildburgh. Between them these men published a quite incredible number of papers in journals such as

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20. A location map of alabasters in Europe is given in Cheetham (1984) p.46. This distribution is interesting in itself, particularly with regard to the questions surrounding the export of alabasters (see below, pp.15-17).

21. The situation is made worse by the fact that in the past alabasters have often been mis-attributed as Flemish work, as small alabasters were produced in the Malines (Mechelen) area in the sixteenth century. This mis-attribution of panels as products of a minor branch of Flemish work, rather than of a significant English industry, will not have helped to bring them to the attention that they deserve, and it is quite possible that further unrecognised English alabasters are languishing in obscure churches and private collections.

Archaeologia, the *Archaeological Journal*, and the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, treating both isolated images and groups of panels, as well as altarpieces, in churches and collections throughout Europe.[22] Around the same time Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner devoted a significant proportion of their survey of English figurative sculpture to alabaster panels.[23] In recent years important research has been carried out by Nigel Ramsay and Lynda Rollason,[24] but the main force for developing the study of alabaster panels has been Francis Cheetham.[25] His catalogue of the alabasters held by the Victoria and Albert Museum is buttressed by a thorough-going introduction to the development of the panel-carving industry, a technical analysis of the polychromy used and a survey of the most important alabaster altarpieces outside Britain. He also enumerates the survivals of treatments of different saints, and gives figures for all known subjects drawn from the Life of Christ and the Life of the Virgin.[26]

22. For details of these papers, and many other works, see the excellent bibliography in Cheetham (1984) pp.339-47.

23. Prior and Gardner (1912) pp.470-506.

24. See, for example, Ramsay (1983), (1991) and (1998); Rollason (1987).

25. Cheetham has published various articles, monographs and exhibition catalogues, but his most important work is undoubtedly his catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection [Cheetham (1984)]. The bibliography of this work gives full details of his other publications.

26. Perhaps due to pressure of space, Cheetham does not give the location of the subjects he enumerates, nor any notes to indicate published or unpublished material relating to the images. This is a serious problem for the student who wishes to compare, for example, cycles of the Life of St George, for there is no reliable way of tracking them all down other than trawling through the entire literature given in Cheetham's extensive bibliography. The situation is not improved by the (very occasional) errors in Cheetham's work: for example, he claims that there are ten known cycles of the Life of St George, when there are actually only two (La Selle and Borbjerg, the latter discussed below, pp.118-22); he also claims that the Kermaria-en-Isquit panels of the Life of the Virgin are unpublished, when they actually appear in Prior and Gardner (1912) figure 579 (this partial cycle is discussed briefly below, chapter 4, note 140). In her critique of the book, Rollason has also noted that Cheetham's listings would be improved by the inclusion of approximate

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Dating alabaster panels.

One of the most signficant questions addressed by researchers has been the dating of panels; in default of contracts and other external evidence dating has been based on the internal evidence of the shape of the panel, the treatment of the subject and the various qualities of the sculpture. In their survey of medieval sculpture in England, Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner proposed four distinct classes of panels, which were dated according to their shape and the presence or absence of headings and canopies. The first class, dated c.1350-1420, is divided into two sub-groups.[27] Class Ia panels are orientated horizontally with finished edges, a style exemplified by the panel of the Adoration of the Magi at Long Melford church;[28] class Ib panels are upright and feature canted, or sloping, sides and an embattled top edge. The panels of the third class,[29] dated c.1400-c.1460, have rough, rather than finished, edges and a wide variety of headings, embattled and canopied, attached and detached, and rather more varied subject matter than seen in classes Ia and Ib. The final class,[30] c.1460 onwards, is characterised by panels with rough edges and detached canopied headings, and intended to be grouped in wooden frameworks as altarpieces. These panels exhibit a more perfunctory sculptural style, which they suggest indicates some degree of commercialisation.

datings: Rollason (1986), p.87.

27. Prior and Gardner (1912), pp.470-82.

28. This panel is illustrated in Cheetham (1984) p.18, figure 5.

29. ibid, pp.482-88.

30. ibid, pp.489-506.

Prior subsequently retained the four classes of panels, but proposed some modifications to the dating scheme.[31] Class I panels, dated c.1340-1380, have varied shapes; Class II panels, dated c.1380-1420, feature an embattled top edge. Class III panels, dated c.1420-1460 have no headings; Class IV panels, from c.1460, have traceried canopies. This analysis included five stylistic subsections for the third class of panels (c.1420-60), three of which he tentatively assigned to different geographical areas. Prior suggested that panels in Classes I and II were intended to be used as devotional works, probably individually rather than in a group. The edges of these panels were carefully finished so no further framing was needed; Prior offered the panel of the Adoration of the Magi at Long Melford Church as an example of a single devotional panel. By contrast, panels from Classes III and IV were left quite rough at the edges, and seem to have been intended for use as altarpieces with groups of panels framed together in wood. Prior also suggested that two-tiered retables, as found at La Selle, Compiègne and Génissac, are of a later date than single-tiered alabaster altarpieces.[32]

Cheetham deviates from the pattern established by Prior and Gardner, as he does not use numbers to differentiate between the four classes. He designates them as the Early Period, c.1340-c.1380, the Middle Period, c.1380-c.1420, the Later Middle Period, c.1420-c.1450, and the Late Period, c.1450-c.1540.[33] The Early Period includes early statues and horizontal panels, such as the Long Melford

31. Prior (1913) pp.24-25.

32. Prior (1913) p.50. However, as the larger form is so rare, it seems impossible to make a definitive statement on this point. Francis Cheetham has stated that two-tiered retables were intended to be fixed to a wall: Cheetham (1984) p.23; again, given that the Génissac work has lost its frame and that the Compiègne frame may well be a replacement, it seems equally impossible to be certain about the ways that these retables were designed.

33. Cheetham (1984) pp. 41-44.

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Adoration, whilst the Middle Period groups together all the upright panels from Prior's Class I and adds them to Prior's Class II. The attributes of the Later Middle Period and the Late Period correspond to Prior's Class III and IV respectively, although Cheetham assigns a rather narrower date range to the works he includes in his designations.

Class IV, or the Late Period, covers a very wide time frame of almost a century, and Lynda Rollason has proposed that this grouping can be divided into classes that she designates IVa and IVb.[34] Class IVa is characterised by rather lifeless figures with relatively small heads and thin limbs, drapery that is sculpted rather cursorily, and panels that measure around 40cm high.[35] Class IVb consists of panels which exhibit dynamic carving of figures and drapery, with relatively realistic detailing, and larger panels, usually over 50cm high.[36] She further suggests that many of Prior's Class III panels could be reassigned to Class IVa, on the basis that they have been separated from their headings and hence have no real claim to be part of Class III.[37] She concludes that Class III should be considered to be a brief experimental phase in the development of alabaster panel carving, dating it c.1415-c.1420/25. Class IVa is then dated to c.1420/25-c.1480/85, and Class IVb, which she claims represents a resurgence in sculptural style, to the period from

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34. Rollason (1987) p.246.

35. Ibid, pp.246-8. Rollason cites the Swansea altarpiece, in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection, as an example of Class IVa (p.252). The Swansea altarpiece is illustrated in Cheetham (1984) plate 1.

36. Rollason's claims regarding the changing size of panels is in direct opposition to Nigel Ramsay's findings. He asserts that there was no significant change in the size of panels over time, but finds that a progressively higher relief was employed: Ramsay (1983) p.618. This dispute serves to underline the difficulties associated with dating alabaster panels.

37. Rollason (1987) p.251.

c.1485.[38]

Rollason's assertion that panels from the very late phase of production are of relatively high quality is at odds with other commentators' views. In a general discussion on Class IV panels, Prior and Gardner note 'a very mannered and summary treatment of detail...forced gestures, as in the crooked knees of the tormentors, and the sprawling attitudes of the fainting Virgin, are frequent; but especially the protuberant anatomies of the male nude, and the big busts of the female saints, mark an extraordinary decline of artistic sense...[with a] triviality of conception and vulgarity of execution'.[39] Gardner subsequently rather modified this rather harsh judgement, commenting that this sculptural style may well have arisen because the panels were intended to be viewed from a distance, and a finer style may well have been lost against the effect of rich polychromy.[40] Nigel Ramsay has also argued that there was a general decline in standards during the fifteenth century, with caricatures and stereotyping creeping into the carving of panels, and he singles out Passion retables as particularly poor.[41] He suggests that the continuing popularity of alabaster altarpieces, as attested by the large number of extant panels, is testament to 'the triumph of the needs of piety over aesthetic values'.[42]

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38. Rollason suggests that the evidence of armour represented on the panels points to the 1480s as the end of Class IVa, and IVb as after beginning after c.1485, but she does allow that the two styles could have been produced concurrently: ibid, p.249.

39. Prior and Gardner (1912) p.504. They note that alabaster tomb effigies generally maintain a high standard, and attribute this difference to the probability that tombs were produced in London but panels were provincial works.

40. Gardner (1935) p.332.

41. Ramsay (1983) p.611.

42. ibid, p.617. Cheetham's view is rather more ambivalent: he notes that in the 'late period' (c.1450-c.1540) designs generally become rather crowded, but also

The Production and Export of Alabaster Panels

Whilst the general areas where the stone was quarried are well-known, the centres of production where it was worked are very poorly documented. Nottingham is often considered to be the centre of alabaster carving, following the identification first made by St John Hope;[43] given the proximity of the quarries the town would seem to a logical site. In 1367 an alabaster tabula or reredos valued at £200 was commissioned for the high altar of St George's Chapel, Windsor, from Peter Mason of St Mary's Street, Nottingham,[44] which implies that the production of alabaster altarpieces was already established in the town. However, there are no further records of alabaster workers in the town until 1478-9, although from this time until the 1530s Nottingham was clearly a centre of both production and distribution.[45] Alabaster carvers are known to have worked in York, Burton-upon-Trent and

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observes that well-designed and well-executed panels continue to be produced: Cheetham (1984) p.43.

43. St John Hope (1904) pp.4, 10.

44. Given the dedication of the chapel it seems reasonable to assume that this altarpiece may have featured scenes from the Life of St George. However, it was evidently on a considerably larger scale than the La Selle retable, for ten carts were required to convey it from Nottingham to Windsor in 1371: Nelson (1921) p.151.

45. Ramsey (1991) pp.35-36. Nigel Ramsey is particularly suspicious of the identification of Nottingham as the focus of alabaster carving, and maintains that the city was probably important as a distribution centre rather than as a site of production. He suggests that the carving of panels may have taken place in the vicinity of the quarries just as tombs were -- he cites the 1419 contract for the Lowick tomb (see above, n.12) with two named carvers in Chellaston to support this thesis (ibid p.32), and also claims that other towns, such as Lincoln, may have been important centres of production. However, it should be borne in mind that the absence of documentation relating to Nottingham during the fifteenth century need not necessarily imply that alabaster carving was not taking place there, although it does seem rather surprising.

Lincoln;[46] London, Bristol, Gloucester and Norwich have also been suggested as centres of production.[47] Some commentators have suggested that stylistic differences between panels could have arisen from different schools of carvers operating in these various geographical locations,[48] but in default of supporting evidence it is impossible to make these claims with any confidence.

Another area of interest is the question of the iconography used by the alabaster carvers. Various sources have been proposed by different authors, including manuscript illumination,[49] block prints and medieval drama, and the standardisation of subjects strongly suggests that designs were traced from pattern

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46. Seven 'alabastermen' are recorded at York between 1457-58 and 1487-88; alabaster workers are also recorded at Burton in 1462 and 1481, and a guild of painters, gilders, stainers and alabastermen was founded at Lincoln in 1525-26: Ramsay (1983) pp.612-14; Ramsay (1991) p.36.

47. See Prior and Gardner (1912) pp.471-73, 499; Gardner (1935) p.342. The existence of a half-finished panel of the Crucifixion, found in Kent, may also suggest an alabaster carving workshop in that area, and provides strong evidence that alabaster panels were carved at sites outside the quarrying area: Prior and Gardner (1912) n.p.470.

48. Prior and Gardner have tried to link certain panels to regional schools on the basis of similarities in style between the alabaster carvings and local sculpture in other material. For example, they suggest that details on the Long Melford Adoration of the Magi are reminiscent of effigies at Westminster, dated to c.1350, and are hence likely to have been made in London; that alabaster panels from Ripon, c.1400, are similar to work in York, c.1390, and hence are likely to have been made in York; and that elements of St Cuthbert's reredos at Wells appear in some alabaster panels, which suggests that a school of alabaster carvers may have been centred on Gloucester or Bristol [Prior and Gardner (1912) pp.471, 477, 499]. Considerably more research will have to be carried out on such similarities for any firm conclusions are to be drawn.

49. For example, Prior and Gardner suggest that manuscript illumination is the source of the conventional decoration of daisies on a green ground used as a background in many alabaster panels, and cite the Bedford Hours, c.1430, as an instance of the motif in manuscripts: Prior and Gardner (1912) p.481. Inspection of the flowered grounds in the Bedford Hours suggests that the link is rather tenuous. However, it has been demonstrated that English misericord carvers used manuscript illuminations as a source of imagery [Grössinger (1997) pp.59-64]; it may well be the case that alabaster carvers were influenced in a similar way.

books.[50] The use of block prints as a source for the imagery of alabaster panels is a relatively recent suggestion, first mooted by Cheetham, who highlights the pictorial, rather than strictly sculptural, style of the carvings.[51] By contrast, the influence of medieval drama was initially suggested by Edward Prior,[52] and the idea was developed at some length by W.L. Hildburgh and Margaret Anderson.[53] These authors highlighted aspects such as the dark faces and demon-shaped headgear routinely given to villainous characters in the panels,[54] and also suggest that the armour depicted in panels is likely to have been modelled on armour used in dramatic presentations.[55] As the armour used in these plays was likely to have been

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50. Occasional examples of reversals of subjects may well be due to the tracing designs from pattern books: Cheetham (1984) p.19. Two of the nine panels of the Adoration of the Magi in the Victoria and Albert Museum show the magi entering from the sinister side rather than the dexter side, and this tends to imply the reversal of the standard format [see Cheetham (1984) catalogue numbers 112 and 113].

51. Cheetham (1984) p.19. It has been demonstrated that misericord carvers used block prints in addition to manuscript illuminations as a source of imagery; indeed, prints may well have been more important [see Grössinger (1997) pp.64-71; Jones (1998)]. As Lynda Rollason observes, further research is required to make a strong case for a relationship between block prints and alabaster: Rollason (1986) p.87.

52. Prior (1913) p.21.

53. See, for example, Hildburgh (1933); Hildburgh (1946); Anderson (1969), pp.153, 161, 162 etc.

54. An example is the presentation of the heathen ruler in the La Selle cycle of the Life of St George (see below, p.37). Hildburgh suggests that the darkened faces are derived from a Muslim belief that the wicked will rise to be judged with blackened faces, and links this idea to the influence of the crusades: Hildburgh (1946) p.76.

55. Hildburgh (1946) p.55. There is little evidence for the link between alabaster and drama beyond the resemblance between some panels and the effect of stage directions in certain plays, for example, the La Selle Purification of the Virgin panel and the stage directions of the Hegge Play (see below, p.174). This proposed link is not assisted by the unquantifiable lost panels and lost plays: we do not know the extent to which the surviving examples are a representative sample of the original corpus in either idiom. Furthermore, there is no evidence to back up Hildburgh's assertion about the use of archaic costumes in drama, although it should be admitted that his argument does at least have the virtue of logic: why should a group of players go to the expense of procuring the lastest fashions when there could well

obsolete, and replaced only rarely, this suggests that great caution should be exercised in the dating of panels on the basis of armour styles.[56] None of these iconographic sources can be proved conclusively to have been used, but it is possible that each may have been used, perhaps by different workshops at different times.

One of the most interesting aspects of alabaster work is the distribution pattern of panels and altarpieces outside Great Britain.[57] Individual pieces will have been exported for one of three reasons: as the result of a direct commission by an overseas patron,[58] as a ready-made work carried by a merchant to sell abroad, or as

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be perfectly serviceable, if out-moded, costumes at their disposal?

56. However, Lynda Rollason is very suspicious of the idea that the armour depicted in alabasters is archaic, and uses armour styles as a key to dating the end of her Class IVa to the 1480s, and her Class IVb to post c.1485: Rollason (1987) p.249. Rollason may be correct to claim that armour styles are likely to have been up-to-date, as the presentation of 'knights' on the medieval stage would undoubtedly have been only one means for carvers to see armour: the strong link between alabaster tomb carving and panel production certainly suggests that other models were available. However, effigies of knights were not always presented in the most up-to-date armour: one notable example is the alabaster tomb of Sir William Martyn (d.1503) at Puddletown (Dorset), who is depicted in armour that is dated to c.1470 [this tomb is mentioned in Charlton (1998)]. It is also important to note that Rollason overlooks La Selle, where two very different armour styles are represented in the Life of St George cycle (see below, p.66).

57. See above, notes 19 and 20.

58. English alabaster seems to have found a ready market abroad: in 1382 figures of the Virgin Mary, SS Peter and Paul, and a small Trinity, were exported by the papal tax collector Cosmato Gentilis: Lindley (1995) p.27. Overseas patronage of English alabaster could reach the very highest levels, for in 1408 an alabaster tomb for John IV, duke of Brittany, was exported to Nantes. John had been the first husband of Joan, who was the second wife of Henry IV of England: Nelson (1921) p.150; Lindley (1995) p.26 and plate 13. Lynda Rollason has commented on the high concentration of alabaster retables in areas of France that were under English occupation in the first half of the fifteenth century, which may imply that some of these retables were produced for English patrons living in France, whilst others may have been exported by merchants who wished to take advantage of this expatriate market: Rollason (1987) pp.253-54. However, we do know of at least one example of a direct commission from a French patron: on 7th June 1534 Anthoine de Noyelle, the abbess of a nunnery at Bourbourg, a few miles south of Gravelines,

a piece 'saved' from the depredations of iconoclasts during the Reformation by

traders who sought to make a profit by shipping artefacts from English churches and

religious foundations to foreign markets.[59] In default of documentation it is often very

difficult to be certain which of these scenarios correctly explains the location of any

particular work, but the presence or absence of several factors can suggest which

one is likely to be correct. For example, peculiarities in iconography or unusual

combinations of subjects may imply a specific commission,[60] and a coincidence

wrote to Lord Lisle 'to do me the pleasure to let me have x or xij pieces of alabaster from a place in England, paying well for them...I send you written in a bill the height, size and length that I would wish them to be'; she offers in return for this favour two dozen couples of *bioreaux* (which is probably a term for snipe) [Byrne (1981) volume V pp.172-73]. Unfortunately the bill outlining the specifications is lost, but it is possible that the abbess would have made some mention of the desired iconography. A parallel may be found in the briefs given by patrons to glaziers, which tend to set out very precise details of iconography [see, for example, the instructions relating to the glazing of the Observant Friars' church, Greenwich, c.1490-94, published in part in Marks (1993) pp.23-24], although we should be aware that the wording of the letter may indicate that the abbess was interested only in the sizes of the panels.

59. Two further scenarios also suggest themselves, but it is likely that they were relatively rare. One is where an English person commissioned a work and then had it shipped overseas to adorn a particular shrine: an example is the altarpiece of the Life of St James at Santiago de Compostella, where documentary evidence shows that it was made for an English parish priest who made a pilgrimage to the shrine in 1456 [Gardner (1951) p.303]. The other possibility relates to the export of unworked alabaster, which would then be carved by local sculptors. It is known that Alexandre de Berneval, a prominent architect-mason of Rouen, travelled to Chellaston in 1414 to purchase blocks of alabaster which he had been commissioned to carve for the abbot of Fécamp. Although no trace remains of de Berneval's work, it is virtually certain that the style of the carving would allow it to be clearly distinguished from native English alabaster work. Two documents relating to this transaction, the contract for the transport of the alabaster to Fécamp and a record of the actual journey, are held in the Departmental Archives of Seine-Maritime, call numbers 7H 2151 and 7H 2191. See also Bilson (1907); Lindley (1995) p.26.

60. The evidence relating to specific commissions is rather difficult. The piece which seems to be the most obvious example of a commission is an altarpiece of the life of a relatively obscure saint, St Seurin, which is still in the church of St Seurin at Bordeaux. However, opinion is sharply divided as to whether or not this is actually English work: Ramsay and Rollason both believe that it is English [Ramsay (1991) p.38; Rollason (1986) p.88], whilst Cheetham asserts that it is locally carved, in imitation of the style of English alabaster work [Cheetham (1984) p.51]. The only comprehensive study of these panels undertaken to date argues very persuasively

between the subject of a cycle and the dedication of a church may also be suggestive. By contrast, several similar images, panels or cycles in a given geographical area may imply that an alabaster merchant was selling a consignment of ready-made works as he or she travelled around;[61] a distribution of panels in communities closely associated with one another, or with a major road or navigable river, may be particularly significant.[62] It is difficult to differentiate this kind of distribution from one that may have arisen as the result of post-Reformation trading, although it could be argued that stylistic similarity is less likely to be seen in these later exports, where cargoes of panels and altarpieces will have been likely to include works with a range of dates, subjects and styles.[63]

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that the panels are local work [Doonan (1976), pp.127-28]. Three of the panels are illustrated in the exhibition catalogue D'Angleterre en Normandie (1998) catalogue numbers 8, 9 and 10.

61. Nigel Ramsey has suggested that the existence of three very similar statues of the Virgin and Child at neighbouring churches in the Manche department of Normandy (at Cherbourg, Saint-Martin-de-Varreville and Teurthéville-Hague) is very likely to be be indicative of pre-Reformation export by an alabaster merchant: Ramsey (1998) p.63.

62. Hildburgh has commented on the distribution of panels and retables in Spain, and suggests that this is the result of pre-Reformation trading. He notes a legal document, relating to a case of piracy in 1390, which mentions a mixed cargo of alabasters, cloth and other goods sent by merchants from Dartmouth, with Seville as its ultimate destination: Hildburgh (1944), p.34. Eric Maclagan observed that there is very little documentary proof of pre-Reformation alabaster exports, but does quote from a 1480 document which recount custom dues paid by ships carrying alabasters from Poole harbour [Maclagan (1920), n.p.63]; more recent research has shown that this example is just one among many [see Ramsey (1998) pp.58-59, on evidence of the export of alabasters from London, Bristol and Southampton, and possibly Hull].

63. St John Hope discovered a letter of 1550 stating that three or four ships laden with images had arrived in France, and that their cargo had been sold in Paris, Rouen and various other places [Gardner (1951) note p.302]: it seems very unlikely that this kind of trade would have resulted in a pattern of distribution where several works of similar date, style and subject can be found relatively close together. As Nigel Ramsay notes, these alabasters were often exported as part of mixed cargoes, and would almost certainly have been poorly marketed and distributed, but the large number of panels and figures in France certainly suggests an active pre-Reformation trade [Ramsay (1991) p.38]. The records of the fabic of the church at Anglequeville-la-Bras-Long [Rouen, Departmental Archives of Seine-Maritime,

Research on the La Selle Retable

Despite its obvious interest as what may well be the only extant example of a two-tiered alabaster retable retaining its original framework, the La Selle retable (plate 1) has virtually escaped serious academic attention. It is likely that its out-of-the-way location has served to compound the habitual scant regard that alabaster has been afforded by art-historians, if not by collectors and, sadly, thieves. Until its inclusion in the 1998 exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie*,[64] just seven papers concerned with the retable had been published, three in French and four in English, in addition to a few references in general works. Only three of these papers, including the two most recent, focus purely on the La Selle retable, whilst the others tend to consider it amongst a group of other alabasters, a group which seems to be defined by location rather than by any inherent similarity of theme or form.

The earliest paper to discuss the La Selle retable in its current form was a French monograph published by Adolphe de Bouclon in 1882.[65] De Bouclon was the

call no. G. 7921; this document featured in the exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998)] record the purchase of a number of alabasters, including images of the twelve apostles, for £40 between 1555 and 1557. We should note that there is also evidence of French traders coming to England to buy alabaster work during the Reformation: an entry in the accounts of St Andrew's Church, Lewes, records that altars of alabaster were purchased by Frenchmen in 1548 [Prior and Gardner (1912) p.469]. It is possible that such traders will have been rather more selective about their acquisitions than were English exporters, a factor which would further complicate the situation.

64. *D'Angleterre en Normandie. Sculptures d'albâtre du Moyen Age.* Curators: Laurence Flavigny and Christine Jablonski-Chauveau. (Rouen, Antiquities Museum, February-May 1998; Evreux, Bishop's Palace Museum, July-October 1998).

65. De Bouclon (1882). The only earlier paper was an anonymous article, illustrated by an engraving, which was published in a French journal, the *Magasin Pittoresque*, in 1849. It was republished, translated and amended, in an English journal, the *Illustrated Exhibitor*, three years later. These articles pose various problems, not least because the retable is presented in an arrangement which is drastically

priest of Ambenay, a neighbouring parish of La Selle, commissioned to write about the retable by Abbé Jouen, the vice-president of the Comité des Beaux-Arts in the Eure department. In his introduction to the paper Jouen comments that de Bouclon had not previously been aware of the existence of the retable,[66] something which speaks volumes about the extent to which the work had been forgotten at that time, even in the local area. Despite his lack of prior knowledge, de Bouclon produced an admirable paper, with a detailed description of the retable panels, a review of the development of the cult of St George, and an examination of the history of the community of La Selle and its links with the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Sauveur at Evreux. He closes with a brief comment on the local tradition that the retable had been moved to La Selle from the abbey during the French Revolution.[67] Around the end of the nineteenth century a local antiquarian, Louis Régnier, visited La Selle and made notes and drawings of the state of the retable. This work has not been published, but it has been preserved in the archives of the Eure department at Evreux,[68] and serves to substantiate de Bouclon's findings.

The first paper in English to discuss the La Selle retable in its current form

different from its current format, and much of de Bouclon's monograph is taken up with a detailed refutation of this 'evidence'. The articles are considered at some length in chapter 2, and transcribed, and the French article translated, in Appendix 1; the engraving is reproduced in plate 36.

66. Introduction to de Bouclon (1882) p.ii.

67. De Bouclon (1882) p.17. This theory is discussed in detail below, pp.246-54.

68. Régnier's papers relating to La Selle are grouped together under the call number 3F 204 356 (Juignettes). It is difficult to date Régnier's visit accurately, but a letter to Régnier dated 26th November 1898, from A. Dufour of the Société Historique et Archéologique de Corbeil, shows that the two men were planning a trip together to view the retable, and gives the clear implication that neither of them has already seen it. Régnier's notes also give the impression that he was not familiar with de Bouclon's monograph: he comments that one Father Guéry claims that the retable originated in the abbey at Conches, but makes no mention of the theory concerning Saint-Sauveur.

was an article by the French antiquarian Count Paul Biver, published in 1910.[69] This

long work considers various alabaster triptychs and also four larger altarpieces, at

La Selle, Compiègne, Bordeaux and Génissac. The La Selle, Compiègne and

Génissac works are all two-tiered, but no attempt is made to discuss them as a

group: there is no comparison of iconography, form or style, and the possibility that

they all come from the same workshop, perhaps one specialising in two-tiered

retables, is not considered. Biver's work is essentially descriptive, and it is very

useful as a means of establishing the state of the retable and its framework in the

early years of this century.[70] In addition, Biver identified some panel paintings in the

church at La Selle which he believed were the original doors of the retable.[71] Biver

published photographs to illustrate his work (see plates 2, 4, 7, 9, 13 and 35): these

appear to be the earliest photographic record of the La Selle retable, and contribute

a great deal to the paper's importance. For example, it is notable that in the

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69. Biver (1910), pp.66-90. This paper does not seem to have been published elsewhere in the original French.

70. Biver does make a few mistakes in his paper, which may suggest a lack of rigour in his research. For example, he infers from the iconography of the retable that the chuch at La Selle is dedicated to St George [ibid p.72]; in fact it has been dedicated to St Peter since at least 1231 (see below, p.266), and this fact alone suggests that the retable was not made for this church. He also gives a curious description of the 'Assumption' which he feels sure was the subject of the 'missing panel' indicated by the lacuna in the central section: 'It was doubtless treated in the same way as the rare specimens known of the Assumption by alabastermen: Mary awakes in her tomb surrounded by angels and a luminous cloud hides her body from the apostles' [ibid p.76]. Not only does this description differ markedly from all examples of the Assumption currently extant [see Cheetham (1984), p.199, for a list of examples] but it also overlooks the fact that the presence of the Assumption in the panel immediately above the lacuna suggests that the panel has been resited (see below, chapter 2, note 78).

71. Biver (1910) pp.77-78. Biver is followed by most later commentators in this identification, but it is interesting to note that neither de Bouclon nor Régnier comment on these 'doors'. In his resumé of the church contents Régnier does mention paintings, but he does not seem to identify any as doors of the retable, but this could be simply due to the fact that he was not looking for such items.

photograph showing the entire retable (plate 2) the central panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity extends up above the level of the other panels, breaking through the cresting above, in complete contrast to the current format of the retable (plate 1).[72] Aside from the description and photographic evidence, the paper is rather limited in its approach. Biver briefly discusses the suggestion that the retable was made for an English church and exported during the Reformation,[73] but it is evident that he had not considered the possibility, as previously suggested by de Bouclon, that the retable was made for a local church or religious foundation, and subsequently moved to La Selle.

In 1912 Prior and Gardner republished Biver's photograph of the entire retable in their volume *An Account of Medieval Figure Sculpture in England*. It is clear from their brief description of the retable that they had not seen the work at first-hand, for they speak in rather general terms of 'the usual four Christmas scenes'[74] with the addition of panels of the Birth and Presentation of the Virgin and a panel of the 'Circumcision',[75] and six scenes from the St George legend. Prior and Gardner were primarily interested in the La Selle retable as an example of a late form of alabaster altarpiece, and restrict their comparison of the work with the other

72. The evidence provided by plate 2 is discussed in detail below, pp.26-27, 82.

73. Biver (1910) p.78.

74. Prior and Gardner (1912) p.502. The 'usual four Christmas scenes' seems to mean the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi, the Assumption and the Coronation of the Virgin, as they list this as a standard grouping in a discussion of such groups [ibid p.464]; they fail to comment on the fact that in the La Selle retable the Assumption and Coronation are combined, claiming instead that the central panel shows merely the Assumption [ibid p.466].

75. The lettering on the retable frame clearly labels the scene as the 'Purification': this mistake substantiates the suggestion that the authors had not seen the work themselves, but were relying on a photograph. Biver correctly describes this scene as the Purification, so this may suggest that Prior and Gardner did not have access to his paper.

two-tiered examples, at Compiègne and Génissac,[76] to the observations that the

panel canopies on each retable feature 'three-light windows between the gablets',[77]

which they characterise as a late development in the canopy form. They also

suggest that the cresting along the top of the retable was probably characteristic of

the two-tiered format.[78] They date the La Selle retable to c.1480 on the basis of the

armour, but do not give details of their analysis.[79] Prior also published Biver's

photograph in his article in the catalogue of the exhibition of English medieval

alabaster work held at the Society of Antiquaries in 1910.[80] He comments here that

the armour worn by St George dates the work to post-1475, and also notes a

similarity between the sculptural style and the handling of the angels on the

alabaster tomb of the Duchess of Suffolk at Ewelme (c.1475).[81]

Philip Nelson published a paper focusing on the wooden framework of the

retable in 1920,[82] and discussed it in the context of other extant frameworks. A

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76. These altarpieces are discussed below, pp.59-61, 82-83, 215-17.

77. Prior and Gardner (1912) p.502. Further errors are evident in this discussion of the other two-tiered altarpieces: they wrongly claim that the frame of the Compiègne retable is original, and erroneously identify a panel of the Mass of St Gregory at Génissac, although, as Biver points out, it is actually an image of St Martin celebrating Mass [Biver (1910) p.86].

78. Their comments on the cresting of retables are rather questionable. Prior and Gardner appear to believe that the cresting at La Selle was made of alabaster [Prior and Gardner (1912) p.504], but Nelson claims that it was made of oak [Nelson (1920a) p.55]. Given that, contrary to their claim, the Compiègne frame is not original it seems impossible to characterise all two-tiered retables on the basis of the La Selle framework.

79. Prior and Gardner (1912) p.502.

80. *Society of Antiquaries exhibition catalogue* (1910) figure 16.

81. Prior (1913) p.49. On the Ewelme tomb see Goodall (1994) p.42.

82. Nelson (1920a) pp.50-60. The conclusions of this paper are discussed below; see chapter 2, notes 77, 78, 83, 91, 92.

further paper, by the American antiquarian Augusta S. Tavender, was published in 1949.[83] This article was chiefly concerned with the iconography of the St George cycle of the La Selle retable, and it seems to be the first time that a comparison is drawn between this work and the only other extant alabaster cycle of St George, the Borbjerg retable, and the cycle in glass at St Neot in Cornwall.[84]

Two further French papers on the retable have been published, both in relatively obscure journals. The first describes a visit made to La Selle during the congress of the Association Normande in 1956 and draws heavily on Tavender's paper in its brief description and analysis of the retable.[85] The second paper was published by Léonce Moutardier some five years later,[86] and gives the reader a good sense of the state of the retable at that time through its description and photographic evidence. This paper restates de Bouclon's observation concerning the local tradition that the retable was relocated from Saint-Sauveur during the French revolution, although the author does not refer explicitly to de Bouclon's work.[87]

More recently, Francis Cheetham includes La Selle in his list of alabaster

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83. Tavender (1949), pp.397-402.

84. Tavender (1949) p.398. The Borbjerg and St Neot cycles are considered below, pp.118-22, 128-31.

85. Anonymous account of the 144th congress of the Association, held at Evreux. *Annuaire des cinq départements de la Normandie*, (L'Association Normande, Caen, 1956), pp.60-62.

86. Moutardier (1961) pp.26-28. This article is particularly important because it testifies to the state of the retable shortly before the catastrophic thefts of 1966 which precipitated the extensive restoration work of the late 1960s [see below, pp. 28-29]

87. Moutardier (1961) p.26. Like Régnier, Moutardier also suggests that the retable could have come from an abbey at Conches: this possibility is discussed below: see chapter 6, note 66.

retables outside Great Britain,[88] and cites it where appropriate in the comparative versions he offers for each panel he discusses in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection, but he has not carried out any research on the retable itself. The first work on the retable to be published since Moutardier's 1961 paper was undertaken by the current author: a paper outlining the findings of my early researches, given to the 1995 conference of the British Archaeological Association,[89] gives a description of the current state of the retable and puts forward an argument for what seems to be the most likely original format, along with an examination of the iconography of the work and a discussion of the possibility that it was made as the result of a Norman commission. The author also contributed an article to the catalogue of the exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie*, which develops this latter argument further, and names the abbey of Saint-Sauveur at Evreux as the most likely source of such a commission.[90]

In this thesis all these questions are explored further, particularly the form of the retable, the iconography of the individual cycles of the life of St George and the life of the Virgin, and the ways that these two cycles are interrelated. The possibility that the retable was commissioned by a Norman patron is fully considered, with

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88. Cheetham (1984) p.58.

89. Riches (1998a).

90. Riches (1998b). The descriptive entry on the retable was written by Christine Jablonski-Chauveau [*D'Angleterre en Normandie* pp.89-98]. This article generally accords with my views, although Jablonski-Chauveau opines *en passant* that there would have been an additional panel in the central section, and overlooks the important comparative two-tiered alabaster retable of Génissac. She also puts forward an interesting theory on the question of the putative doors of the retable, which is discussed below (pp.61-64).

particular emphasis on the context of late medieval devotion to St George in Normandy, and the history of both the community of La Selle and the abbey of Saint-Sauveur.

Chapter Two: The La Selle Retable, Past and Present

The La Selle retable now comprises thirteen alabaster panels, twelve with canopies and one without, four statuettes with integral canopies and two canopies for statues which are now missing. The alabasters are housed in a wooden framework.[1] Some of the panels, statuettes and canopies have been the subject of restoration work, carried out in the late 1960s following a theft. This work is described below in a detailed description of the current state of the retable; the numbering system used to identify the positions of panels and statuettes refers to figures 1 and 2. This description is followed by an analysis of evidence for the date of the work, an examination of documentary evidence for earlier forms of the work, and a conjectural reconstruction of the original format.

The earliest photographic record of the altarpiece dates from c.1910, and is reproduced in plates 2, 4, 7, 9 and 13. These photographs were taken by Count Paul Biver and used to illustrate his paper on alabasters in France.[2] Together they provide a wealth of information on the state of the retable at the beginning of this century. A comparison with the current retable as it appears today (plate 1) demonstrates that the retable was relatively complete in c.1910, with three of the four terminal saints and three further small statuettes *in situ*,[3] although several of the

1. The exact dimensions of the retable in its current state are:
     Case: 119cm high x 225 cm wide.
     Cycle panels: 37cm high x 24cm wide;
     Cycle canopies: 13cm high x 24cm wide;
     Assumption panel: 65cm high x 27.5 cm wide;
     Lacuna: 38cm high x 27.5 wide;
     Statuettes, with integral canopy: 23.5cm high x 6.5cm wide;
     Terminal saints' canopies: 13cm high x 16cm wide.
The terminal saints' niches measure 50cm high x 16cm wide, which implies that the lost saint figures measured 37cm high x 16cm wide.

2. Biver (1910).

3. There is no record of the date of the loss of the fourth terminal saint, and no

canopies were in a poor state of repair and the cresting across the top of the framework was seriously damaged. Two of the statuettes, St James (niche iii) and St Mary Magdalen (niche vi), had evidently been broken, as their canopies are missing. There are also signs of damage to the central panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity (panel A) and the Resurrection of St George (panel I). A further point of difference between the current state and Biver's image is the position of the central panel (panel A). Plate 2 shows this panel protruding above the the level of the cycle panels, to the height of the cresting on either side, in contrast to its current position where the top edge is aligned with the top of the canopies over the cycle panels. However, it is unclear whether either of these arrangements is authentic.[4] The lacuna underneath this panel is clearly the result of a loss or theft which predates Biver's photographs.

Plates 24-26 are unpublished and undated, but the clarity of the images suggests that they are likely to be post-World War II. The details of these images are consistent with Biver's work. Large cracks are visible: on the dexter side of the central panel, between the figure in the corner, who is probably God the Father, and the Virgin, and across the top right-hand corner of the panel of the Annunciation. The date of this damage is unclear, but it is likely that this was the result of an

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concrete evidence for the date of the loss of the eighth statuette. An inscription on the framework locates St Barbara to niche viii (see p.59, below). A letter dated 18th February 1966 from the director of archives services of the Eure to the Minister of State for Cultural Affairs, preserved in the records relating to La Selle at the offices of the Conservator of Antiquities and Objets d'Art for the Eure Department, in Evreux, claims that a figure of St Barbara was stolen from the retable between 1882 and 1911, and de Bouclon's paper of 1882 notes the presence of a figure of St Barbara at that date [De Bouclon (1882) p.6]. Two alabaster figures of St Barbara are illustrated in a paper by Hildburgh; at 42cm and 45cm high respectively, they are considerably larger than the missing statuette, but they may give us some impression of its form. See Hildburgh (1924), figures 7 and 8.

4. The question of the original format of the central section is discussed in some detail below, pp.59-61; 81-86.

attempted theft. This may have been the same incident which led to the loss of the terminal saints on the left of the retable (niches 1 and 3). This certainly occurred before 1961, as the figures do not appear in the photographs which illustrate Moutardier's 1961 paper.[5]

In early February 1966 a serious theft resulted in the temporary loss of six of the panels:[6] St George and the Dragon (panel III), St George baptising converts (panel IV), the Trial of St George (panel V), the Nativity of the Virgin (panel VII), the Presentation of the Virgin (panel VIII) and the Adoration of Christ (panel X). Several of the statuettes were also stolen, St Andrew (niche i), St Paul (niche iv) and a figure who was probably St Dorothy (niche vii); sadly, these figures were not recovered. Other statuettes were also damaged: the figure of St James lost his head and canopy, St Bridget lost her canopy, and the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin suffered some damage, with the the head and left arm of God the Father becoming detached. Photographs taken of the panels and statuettes before restoration (plates 10, 14, 16, 18, 22 and 27) reveal that the extent of the damage was remarkably varied.[7] The panel of the Presentation of the Virgin (plate

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5. Moutardier's paper does not illustrate the extreme right-hand side of the retable, and there is no commentary on this area in the text. He mentions the theft of a figure of St Christopher from the retable, and claims that this image was one of the statuettes around the central panel, but there is clear evidence that the St Christopher belonged in niche 2 (see below, p.58). This error strongly suggests that the figure in niche 2 had also been lost by this time. The letter of 18th February 1966, noted above, states that the figures of St John the Evangelist and St Anthony, which seem to belong to niches 3 and 4 respectively (see below, pp.58-59), were stolen in 1951.

6. The exact date of the theft is apparently unknown. The letter of 18th February 1966, noted above, seems to be the first extant record of the event. It notes that the local 'gardiennage' drew all their information about the theft from an elderly local person who had not been into the church for some fifteen days.

7. It seems that no photograph survives to attest to the damage caused to the panel of St George baptising converts. It is unclear where the portions of arch and canopy shown in plate 27 originate from.

18) survived virtually unscathed, and demonstrates that a good standard was achieved in the carving of the drapery and architectural elements, and that a considerable quantity of colour was extant on the alabaster at this time. The quality of carving can also be seen in the panels of the Trial of St George (plate 14) and the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (plate 16), which have each lost a small portion of alabaster. Two of the panels were considerably less fortunate, as the thieves put them into the River Seine, doubtless in attempt to hide them, or perhaps to lose them altogether.[8] Plates 10 and 22 show the catastrophic damage caused by the water to the panels of St George and the Dragon and the Adoration of Christ. During the cleaning of the retable undertaken for the 1998 exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie* it was discovered that these two panels have been replaced by plaster copies; the whereabouts of the original panels is unknown, but comparison with the Biver photographs demonstrated that, in general, these 'reproductions' are faithful. Restoration work was undertaken by Marcel Maimpointe of Bagnolet, probably at the behest of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and the retable was returned to the church at La Selle in June 1971.[9]

The panel of the Nativity of the Virgin was subsequently damaged again by a

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8. A letter of 4th October 1966 from Antoine Bernard, a civil servant in the department of cultural affairs to Colonel David, the commander of the Gendarmerie of Seine-et-Oise, expresses thanks to the police for their efforts to retrieve the panels. It is unclear how long the panels were submerged, but their state suggests that they spent several months in the river; as M. Bernard comments, the water was 'malodorante et vaseuse, empêchant toute visibilité', and it is possible that poor water quality may have hastened the disintegration of the alabaster. The letter is preserved in the records relating to La Selle at the offices of the Conservator of Antiquities and Objets d'Art for the Eure Department, in Evreux.

9. A newspaper report of the return of the retable to La Selle is preserved in a cutting, dated 1st June 1971, in the records pertaining to La Selle at the offices of the Conservator of Antiquities and Objets d'Art for the Eure Department, in Evreux. The title of the newspaper is not recorded.

further attempted theft in the late 1980s,[10] when the upper dexter side of the panel was broken away. The detached fragment is shown in plates 28 and 29; it is mainly plaster restoration-work, and comparison with plate 16 demonstrates that its form is inaccurate, as the lamp which should hang down above the heads of the midwives is missing.[11] Aside from this damage the current state of the altarpiece is generally good. Each element of the retable will now be considered in turn, with a detailed description, stylistic observations and commentary on restoration work.

The St George Cycle[12]

Panel I   The first subject is the Resurrection of St George (plate 3), a relatively obscure episode in the iconography of the saint.[13] The Virgin is shown on the dexter side of the panel; she is crowned and nimbed, wears a dress with fitted sleeves and a full-length cloak, and a shoe is visible as she steps forward to assist St George to rise. She blesses St George with her right hand whilst her left clasps St George's left hand. The Virgin's hands effectively occupy the central axis of the panel, with the blessing hand situated above the clasped hands. A scroll appears to issue from the fingertips of the blessing hand, curving up towards the top corner of the panel on the

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10. There seems to be no record of the date of this theft.

11. The fragment was re-attached for the exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998), but the photograph used in the exhibition catalogue (pp.90-91) shows the retable with the fragment still missing.

12. The legend of the life of St George and the implications of the way that it is presented here is discussed below, in chapter 3.

13. It may be significant that all the extant or recorded examples of this subject are English: it is found in the alabaster retable of Borbjerg and the glass at St Neot, and is known to have formed part of the Stamford glass cycle (see below, chapter 3 notes 53 and 54). It seems to be an unusual subject for the opening of any saint's cycle, as it appears to demand a preceeding death; to my knowledge it is unparalleled in Georgian iconography. The possible significance of the placement of this subject is discussed below, pp.146-47; 204-05.

dexter side. No inscription is now visible, but it is likely that the scroll bore some words addressed to St George as he is resurrected. St George is depicted sitting up amongst the graveclothes of his coffin. His torso is naked, he is beardless, and his right hand has been broken off. The coffin slopes down across the panel from sinister to dexter; the Virgin's dress hides its right-hand extremity, and St George's feet. Three angels look on from the background, two stand behind St George, and a third behind and to the dexter side of the Virgin. The angels each wear long robes with loose sleeves, and a bare foot is visible on the right-hand angel. They each have wings painted with the conventional red and black teardrop design;[14] the wings appear to be quite small as only their tops are visible above the shoulders (the two angels on the sinister side), or around the head (the angel on the dexter side). The angels all hold their hands up in front of their chests, in an attitude of surprise or wonder. Their hair is identical to St George's: it seems to curl into the face, and conceivably reaches the shoulders at the back of the neck. Traces of gold paint are visible on the hair of each angel and St George, and also on the Virgin's long hair and crown and in the background behind the heads of the angels and the Virgin's nimbus. Some blue paint survives on the front of the Virgin's dress, and also in her nimbus. There is some green paint on the ground of the panel around the feet of the Virgin and angel, but there is no sign of a daisy pattern.

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14. Angels' wings are nearly always decorated with this design in English alabaster. See, for example, the angels in an Assumption of the Virgin at the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) p.203, catalogue number 130].

Panel II   The second panel shows a scene of the Arming of St George (plate 5), another rarity in the iconography of the saint.[15] The saint occupies the centre of the panel. He kneels in prayer, facing to the dexter side, wearing plate armour with tassets over a short coat of mail, leg harness and pointed sabatons. He wears a sword; the pommel is painted with a design in red, but the scabbard appears to be unadorned. The Virgin, dressed as in the previous panel, stands on the dexter side. She lowers a great bascinet over the saint's head,[16] assisted by an angel standing in the background on the sinister side, whilst a second, rather small, angel in the foreground of the same side is placing spurs on his heels. Two further angels carry a lance (on the sinister side) and shield (on the dexter side: the edge of the shield is just visible behind the Virgin's back: see plate 6).[17] The angels are dressed in the same loose robes and their wings are again painted with the teardrop design, but are shown somewhat larger in this panel; note especially the lance-carrying angel on the sinister side whose right wing appears to be full-length. The hairstyles worn by St George and the four angels are identical to those in the previous panel, and again there is surviving gold paint. There is further gold paint in the upper background, and a considerable quantity of green paint in the lower background. A little blue paint survives on the Virgin's robe, and the 'inside' of the helm is painted black, presumably to give the impression that it is hollow.[18]

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15. Like the Resurrection of St George, this subject is generally confined to English work, appearing in the cycles of Borbjerg and St Neot (see below, pp. 118-22; 128-31). However, unlike the Resurrection, it also appears in a non-English cycle, the Valencia altarpiece (plate 65; see below, pp.140, 142).

16. The significance of the great bascinet is discussed below, p.66.

17. The position of the shield seems to be unparalleled, and is potentially highly significant. It is discussed further below, chapter 3, note 146.

18. The helm in the comparable scene in the Borbjerg retable, the only other extant English alabaster cycle of St George (plate 44), has been fashioned so that it actually is hollow.

Panel III   The third panel shows the battle with the dragon (plate 8), undoubtedly

the most common scene in Georgian iconography, and in most respects this version

is quite conventional [see plates 39-41 for comparative works]. The princess is

shown kneeling in prayer towards the top of the sinister side of the panel; she wears

a robe rather like the Virgin's, and a headress rather than a crown. Her parents, who

are crowned, watch the battle from a crenellated tower in the background of the

dexter side. The lamb on the rock next to the princess is also typical, recalling that

the dragon was fed with sheep as well as human victims. The lamb also seems to

have a symbolic role, for may well signify of the innocence of the virgin princess. St

George occupies the centre of the panel. He wears a sallet and bevor rather than

the great bascinet shown in the arming scene; his body armour is similar to the

previous panel although the tassets are suspended from three rows of scaled

armour, topped with a belt like a twisted rope, rather than a skirt of plates.[19] He is

mounted, a presentation which is equally conventional, although the subject of St

George killing the dragon on foot is also quite common.[20] St George is stabbing the

dragon in the mouth with a lance; again, this is absolutely conventional.[21] Perhaps

the most interesting feature of this panel is the dragon itself. Its lizard-like, unwinged

appearance is unusual, although not unparalled,[22] but its positioning is quite possibly

unique.[23] The dragon is usually shown being trampled by the hooves of George's

19. The significance of this type of armour is discussed below, p.66.

20. A standing figure of St George and the dragon appears as a terminal saint in the Borbjerg retable, where it is paired with a figure of St Michael (plates 43 and 45).

21. St George can also be presented cutting off the dragon's head with a sword, but in these images the dragon has invariably been wounded in the mouth or throat already. See, for example, plate 41.

22. There is a considerable variation in the depiction of St George's dragon in late medieval art, but similar unwinged, lizard-like dragons appear in a Spanish panel of 1468-70 (plate 40) and the Valencia altarpiece (plate 65).

23. A well-illustrated Swedish paper on a specific sculpture of St George [Roosval

horse [see plates 39-41], but here it rears up on hind legs, turned in a three-quarters stance. This allows a striking use of space in the panel, with the intricate corkscrew tail occupying the area usually taken up by the whole of the dragon. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it permits a curious display of the dragon's pudenda.[24]

This panel was very badly affected by immersion in the River Seine following the 1966 theft, and, effectively, everything except the dragon was lost (see plate 10). As noted above (p.29), it has recently been discovered that the entire panel is a plaster copy, but this 'restoration' seems to have been largely faithful. Comparison with Biver's photograph of this panel (plate 9) demonstrates that there are some problems with the armour on the restored panel, particularly a curious scale pattern between the belt and the tassets which is not visible in Biver's image, and a rope pattern on the side of the sallet which seems to have replaced a line of prominent rivet-heads. Plate 9 also reveals that the dragon was originally painted with a spotted design, as seen in the Borbjerg cycle on both St George's dragon and the dragon attribute in the cup of poison (see plates 43 and 44).

(1924)], containing in the region of a hundred images of the saint and dragon, amply demonstrates the wide variety of treatments of the dragon. Only a handful of these images show a dragon that is at all similar to the La Selle version, but none is truly comparable.

24. The significance of this motif within the overall scheme of the La Selle retable is discussed below, pp.147-48, and its place in the iconography of St George is considered in Appendix 3.

Panel IV   In the fourth Georgian panel St George is baptising three converts,[25] who are shown in a large tub, or bath (plate 11). The saint stands on the dexter side. He is shown bareheaded, dressed in the same armour as Panel III; he holds aloft a vase from which water cascades onto the head of the nearest convert. All the converts are shown without clothes and it is evident that two are female and one is male: the convert on the dexter side is bearded, whilst the others have long hair and what seem to be breasts. It is likely that the converts are intended to represent the princess and her parents, a reading confirmed by the presentation of two bystanders in the background who hold crowns. The bystander on the sinister side is wimpled, and hence female, whilst the one on the dexter side is bareheaded, and hence likely to be male. He is not bearded, but has a similar hairstyle to St George and the angels in the first two panels. A third bystander is positioned on the sinister side of the panel. She is wimpled and wears a dress similar to the Virgin's and the Princess's in previous panels, although it is rather shorter than the Virgin's full length robe, and reveals feet wearing thick-soled, backless clogs. One hand is held out towards the nearest convert, as if presenting her to St George.[26] Perhaps the most

25. This subject is drawn from the later part of the dragon episode in the legend of St George, when the king and his citizens agree to convert to Christianity in exchange for the despatch of the dragon. This subject is relatively common in the iconography of the dragon legend and examples are found throughout Europe, such as in Altichiero's fresco cycle in the Oratorio di San Giorgio, Padua, c.1378-84 and the 'Valencia altarpiece' of Marzal von Sax, c.1410-1420 (see below, p.140), to name but two examples. There is a further cognate in Dugdale's illustrations of the Stamford cycle (see below, p.124); in this version the parallel between the baptism of the royal family and the conversion of the entire city is made explicit, as a group of other converts wait to be baptised in the same tub. One respect in which the La Selle version does seem to be unique is the presence of the female figure on the sinister side of the panel. This figure undoubtedly acts as a balance to the baptising St George, but she may also have a deeper significance that relates to the patronage of the work.

26. The gesture is reminiscent of a patron saint presenting a donor, for example St John the Baptist presenting Richard II to the Virgin and Christchild in the Wilton Diptych (National Gallery, London, c.1395).

striking aspect of this panel is the disparity in size between the figures. St George and the three bystanders are carved on a considerably larger scale than the three converts, who appear almost childlike by comparison. The bath, or tub, is also worthy of note: it is convincingly three-dimensional, carved with horizontal bands which taper outwards towards the top. The upper edge of the bath is covered with drapery, which could perhaps be interpreted as a towel. Some blue paint survives on the wide central band on the tub, and also a little gold on the hair and crowns of the female converts. There is also some green paint on the background around the feet of St George and the lower part of the the tub. The panel has almost certainly been restored, as it was stolen during the 1966 theft, but no photographic evidence survives of any work.

Panel V   The fifth panel shows the trial of St George before the heathen ruler (plate 12).[27] The use of space in this panel is particularly striking: there are three standing figures, plus a small idol on a column, in addition to George and the prefect. The latter is seated on a very solid throne on the sinister side of the panel, complete with drapery and cushions, and there is a further figure lying on the floor, yet there is no sense of clutter or crowding. St George is again wearing armour and bare-headed. He stands on the dexter side of the panel with his hands raised in a gesture that indicates he is speaking. Two bearded male figures stand behind him, both wearing armour that seems to be rather less clearly defined than the saint's. The figure on the dexter side has one hand on St George's left shoulder, as if to restrain him from moving towards Dacian. The bearded ruler wears a loose robe which falls to mid-thigh; it features turned-back cuffs, a low-slung belt and shows

27. The subject is very common in cycles of St George, appearing in similar forms in virtually all known versions (for examples see below, pp.119, 124, 129, etc).

some naturalistic detailing. By contrast the legs and feet are carved quite simply, with no apparent effort to represent the footwear, whether shoes, boots or sabatons. His villainy is clearly underlined: he wears a dog-crested hat, holds a very obvious sword, and sits in a conventional cross-legged pose. This presentation of the enthroned heathen tyrant is absolutely standard in alabaster,[28] although the inclusion of the 'human footstool' under the cushion does not appear to have any direct parallels.[29] This bearded male figure may be intended to represent a defeated enemy, although it is unclear whether he is wearing armour or clothing. He seems to have ear-like protruberances on either side of his headgear, and his right hand is stretched up to hold what seems to be the point of this headgear. These factors may indicate that he is the ruler's fool; whoever this figure is, his position gives a clear message that the ruler is a cruel tyrant. His heathen beliefs are underlined by the presence of the cloven-hoofed idol on the column.

This idol is particularly interesting: it is clearly presented as a grotesque figure, with a grinning mouth, horns and protruding ears in addition to four cloven hooves. It is thus quite unlike the classical figures which are generally used as signifiers of pagan gods, whether in the legend of St George or other saints,[30] and seems to be a type that is specific to alabaster.[31] The object these figures hold has

28. See, for example, two panels in the Victoria and Albert Museum: St John the Baptist before Herod Antipas [Cheetham (1984) p.117, catalogue number 46) and the damaged St Katherine before Maxentius [Cheetham, (1984) p.85, catalogue number 14].

29. There is a prostrate figure in a similar position in the panel of the Trial in the Borbjerg St George cycle (see plate 44), although this figure has been beheaded. It is discussed further below, pp.119-20.

30. See, for example the falling idol in Friedrich Herlin's altarpiece of St George of 1462 (plate 46). Michael Camille has claimed that sculpted idols tended to be presented in a squashed or grotesque form in order to clearly distinguish them from other figures [Camille (1989) p.15].

31. Two other examples of this motif are known in English alabaster, one in the Borbjerg cycle of St George, where the idol stands on top of the temple of Apollo,

been variously described as a violin and a key, but neither seem to be an accurate description. The object appears to be a flesh-hook, as held by demons in works such as the Doom painting at the fifteenth-century Guild Chapel at Stratford-on-Avon, which seems to be a kind of diabolical weapon.[32]

The final figure in the scene stands to the dexter side of the ruler and wears a loose robe, which appears to be full-length, and a deep collar. Some hair is visible above the forehead, but he wears some kind of hood or close-fitting hat, possibly a cowl. He holds an object, which may well be a scroll, and the implication is that he is a civilian, as opposed to a military, attendant to the ruler.

Following the 1966 theft this panel was heavily restored (see plate 14), particularly the lower corner on the dexter side where St George's feet and the background are completely restored. The tip of the ruler's sword has also been restored, and St George's right hand. A small quantity of gold paint is found on St George's hair, some black paint on the idol, and also the green paint in the lower background around the prone figure and the base of the ruler's throne.

Panel VI   The final panel of the George cycle shows the saint's martyrdom (plate 11).[33] The ruler stands on the sinister side, again holding a large sword in his right and the other in a panel of St Katherine in the British Museum (see below, p.122).

32. Flesh-hooks were used in medieval kitchens for testing stewed meats and other foods, and often appear in art as demonic warders' weapons. For a discussion of this implement see Palmer (1992) p.25. Palmer includes an illustration of a flesh-hook in the collection of the London Museum (plate 14), and a detail of the Stratford-upon-Avon Doom wall painting which shows a flesh-hook (plate 7).

33. The execution of the saint, like the battle with the dragon, is an almost ubiquitous subject in the canon of cycles of St George. This is due in no small part to the need to conclude the story with the vindication of the saint through the visial imagery of the overcoming of death by the removal of the soul to heaven. There are some instances where it does not appear, such as Borbjerg and Windsor (see below, pp.121, 138) but it is likely that this is due to the loss of a panel rather than deliberate omission.

hand. He is dressed differently to the previous panel: the robe is rather longer and fuller, with a separate short cape, or tippet, which covers the shoulders, and he wears a bag or purse attached to a waist belt. His hat still features a dog-shaped crest, but the crown of the hat is rather deeper than in the previous panel. With his left hand he gestures towards the decapitated body of St George, which still kneels in prayer in the foreground of the dexter side, orientated towards the dexter edge of the panel. St George's body is still dressed in the same armour, although the mail skirt beneath the tassets seems rather longer than in previous panels. His head lies on the ground in the bottom corner on the dexter side, the eyes seem to be closed and the mouth is open: the expression is not a mask of agony or even a grimace of pain, but seems to be a stoical acceptance of the inevitable. His soul is borne away to heaven by two angels in the top corner on the dexter side of the panel; the head, with its familiar hairstyle, can be seen above shoulders and praying hands, all held in a kerchief in the conventional manner.[34] Only the upper bodies of the angels are visible, but they are dressed in the same loose robes, and have the same hairstyle, as the angels in first two panels of the cycle. Their outer wings (ie on the extreme left and extreme right of the group) are rather truncated, but the wings behind the saint's soul are shown at virtually full-length. The executioner stands on the dexter side of the panel behind the decapitated head and body of St George. He is dressed in a short tunic over a shirt, the sleeves of which are pushed or rolled up to his elbows. He is bearded and has a mass of curly hair, reminiscent of the ruler's hair where it is visible under his hat. The executioner also holds a sword; it is placed in his left hand, presumably so that it can balance the ruler's sword on the opposite side of the panel.

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34. The visual trope of a cloth holding souls is found in other English alabasters, for example the form known as the Bosom of Abraham Trinity. For a discussion of this form see Sheingorn (1987).

The central figure is very similar to the ruler's civilian attendant in the previous panel: he wears a long robe with a cowl and also holds a scroll or similar object. This figure is apparently dressed in clerical robes,[35] although it is likely that this mode of dress is intended to identify him as the ruler's secretary rather than as an ordained Christian.[36] The ruler, the executioner and the secretary all bear the blackened faces common to villains in alabaster panels.[37] Black paint is also seen on the hair of these three characters and on the pointed shoes of the ruler and his secretary. Futher colour is found on the angels' wings (the conventional use of red and black to create a teardrop pattern), and there is red paint on the area of the inside of the ruler's robe, visible around his ankles, and the turned-back sleeve on the executioner's right arm. Some gold colour is also visible on the hair of St George's decapitated head, the hair of the angels and St George's soul, and parts of the background behind the heads of the ruler, the clerk and the executioner.

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35. This treatment probably indicates how the ruler's apparently civilian attendant was envisaged in the previous panel.

36. This seems to be a kind of visual shorthand, as the term 'clerk', as a secretary, derives from 'cleric'. Similar figures occur in other images of martyrdom, such as the martyrdom of St Erasmus in wallpaintings at Ampney Crucis church, Gloucestershire (c.1450) and the Commandery, Worcester (c.1480); both illustrated in Moore (1940), plate lxxxvi, b and c. A further example occurs in a fragmentary alabaster panel depicting an unidentified martyr bishop, a king, his 'clerk' and torturers, described and illustrated in Iago (1871-1873), pp.c-ci. I am indebted to Miriam Gill for these references.

37. For other examples of this treatment see various panels in the Victoria and Albert Museum: a panel of John the Baptist before Herod Antipas, as above, note 28; St Edmund shot with arrows [Cheetham (1984) p.97, catalogue number 26]; the legend of St Katherine: the burning of the philosophers [Cheetham (1984) p.86, catalogue number 15]. This coloration seems to be based on the practice of medieval drama: see above, chapter 1, note 54.

The Life of the Virgin Cycle

Panel VII   The first subject is the Nativity of the Virgin (plate 15). St Anne, the mother of the Virgin, is the dominant figure in this panel. She lies with her head on a pillow in a sumptuous canopied bed, her right hand under her cheek and a wimple covering her hair. She is covered with a sheet, or possibly wrapped around with a cloak; the shape of her body is clearly visible under this coverlet.[38] Three midwives or serving-maids appear in the panel; one stands in the background behind St Anne's shoulder, possibly to arrange the bedclothes, and touches St Anne's shoulder in what seems to be a gesture of comfort. A second female attendant stands to the dexter side of the panel and holds the swaddled infant, who is un-nimbed, whilst a third, in the foreground of the sinister side, reaches out as if to take the baby and place her in the bed she has prepared.[39] All three of these women wear long dresses with close-fitting sleeves, similar to the robe worn by the Virgin in the first two panels of the Georgian cycle, and have their hair covered; the two women at the back are wimpled, but the woman at the front seems to wear a more elaborate headdress.[40]

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38. This technique is also seen in alabasters of the Adoration of the Magi where the Virgin has her legs extended on a bed, such as an example in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) p.183, catalogue number 110], and a panel in the Antiquities Museum at Rouen [*D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998) p.112. catalogue number 25], but it is in contrast to a panel of the Nativity of Christ at the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) p.177, catalogue number 104] where the Virgin lies on a similar bed under a heavily draped cloak, but only her feet seem to be delineated.

39. It is noteworthy that the infant's bed is not a crib, but rather a scaled-down version of an adult bed: pretty to look at but entirely impractical. A similar small bed appears in a panel of the Nativity of Christ in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) p.177, catalogue number 104].

40. Biver claims that one of the midwives in the Nativity of the Virgin at La Selle is in fact St Joachim [Biver (1910) p.75], possibly because he was reading the figures as counterparts to St Joseph and the two apocryphal midwives at the Nativity of Christ. The current identification of all the figures in this panel as female seems to be entirely congruent with our knowledge of medieval midwifery, when men were generally excluded from the labour room unless their presence was absolutely

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As noted above (p.30), this panel is in a rather damaged state. It was restored with the other panels in the late 1960s but was subsequently damaged again during a robbery in the early 1980s. The detached piece (plates 28 and 29) shows a canopy which is a virtual mirror-image of the surviving canopy; it has been extensively restored with plaster, but the lamp which is visible suspended from the canopy in plate 2 and plate 16 is missing. The right hand and lower arm of the midwife in the foreground is also a restoration. There is little paint on the panel, but the upper background retains some gold and the lower background, around the base of the two beds, shows some green coloration.

Panel VIII   The second Marian panel shows the Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple (plate 17). The Virgin is shown wearing a full-length dress with close-fitting sleeves, ascending the fifteen steps of the Temple. She wears a fillet headdress but is unnimbed. St Anne also stands on the steps, holding her daughter's right arm at the elbow, as if supporting her. She wears a similar dress to the Virgin, with the addition of a wimple which is elaborately folded or pleated under her chin. Two further wimpled women stand at the back of the scene. They could simply represent bystanders, or be included to balance the two standing women in the previous panel, but it is noteworthy that the Kinwarton alabaster table of the Presentation (plate 68) contains five people in the background of the scene, all of them women.[41] The bearded male figure on the sinister side is almost certainly St Joachim, the father of the Virgin. He wears a long robe which is belted at the waist, and a rather ornate hat.[42] He carries a crutched staff in his right hand, and gestures towards the

necessary (for example, to perform an emergency baptism).

41. The Kinwarton panel is discussed below, p.162.

42. A similar hat is found in the Trial scene in the Borbjerg retable (plate 44), and it is

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Virgin with his left hand. The bearded priest who awaits the Virgin at the top of the steps wears a bi-lobed hat,[43] and a robe under a cape. He holds the Virgin's outstretched left hand in his left hand, and raises his right hand in a gesture of blessing. The small bearded figure in the niche under the stairs is dressed as a religious and is telling beads. He may be functioning as a bedesman,[44] drawing attention to the Gradual Psalms which Mary is reciting as she mounts the steps, whilst filling in some otherwise wasted space.[45]

This panel is relatively well preserved (see plate 18), and shows detailed carving in the architecture of the Temple. The arch over the priest is ornamented with small crenellations and lobed details, and two small crenellated turrets mark the ends of the arch. A wall is indicated by the carving of the extreme dexter side of the

possible that this kind of hat is used to denote a non-Christian.

43. This treatment of the priest seems to be conventional too, as the bi-lobed hat appears in the Presentation panels from Mondoñedo and Kinwarton (see below, pp. 160-62).

44. St John Hope notes a group of alabaster tombs dating from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, that is, roughly contemporary with the La Selle retable, which feature small figures of bedesmen. The tombs include those of Sir Nicholas Fitzherbert (d.1473) and his wife, and Sir Ralph Fitzherbert (d.1483) at Norbury (Derbyshire), and Sir John Exton (d.1524) and his wife at Exton (Rutland) [St John Hope (1913) p.9]. The presence of the motif of bedesmen on the tombs of laypeople tends to suggest that its principal role was as a visual reminder of the chantry priest's prayers for the deceased, although it almost certainly had a decorative function too.

45. There does not seem to be any standard treatment of this part of the subject, with a censing angel appearing in the versions at Madrid and Kinwarton (see below, p.162 and plate 68), whilst a decorative motif occurs in the Mondoñedo panel (see below, p.158). Louis Régnier identifies the figure as St Dominic, but gives no evidence for this assertion. The essentially decorative motifs used in this area of the composition have an interesting parallel in some early sixteenth-century treatments of the subject, where figures who are not mentioned in the narrative are used to fill in the space below the temple steps. David Rosand has noted an elderly woman selling eggs in Titian's *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* in the Scuola della Carità (1534-1538), whilst an early sixteenth-century print by Dürer of the same subject shows a group of merchants in the equivalent position [Rosand (1976) figures 1 and 27; Rosand (1982) pp.94, 113-114]. I am indebted to Catherine Lawless for these references.

panel: incised lines signal the masonry, although the facing edge of the wall is unmarked, and a third turret stands at the top of the rear edge of the wall. All fifteen steps are shown leading up to the arch;[46] an area around the niche is decorated with a pointed-leaf trefoil and a group of three small roundels and a pointed leaf-shape. Some gold survives on the upper background, around the heads of the bystanders, and on the steps and architecture of the temple arch, as well as on the hat, hair and beard of the priest and the beard of Joachim. There is also a little red paint on the latter's hat and in the background around the skirt of the Virgin's dress, and some green paint on the lower background around the feet of Joachim and the bedesman.

Panel IX   The third Marian panel shows an Annunciation (plate 19), with a comparatively large figure of the Virgin occupying her usual kneeling position on the dexter side of the panel beneath a canopy.[47] The canopy is ornamented with crenellations and little towers which are reminiscent of the architecture of the Temple in the previous panel. The Virgin is shown nimbed for the first time in the cycle, and wears a fillet headress that is similar to the one she wears in the previous panel.[48] Her dress is obscured by a voluminous mantle which is falls in many detailed folds around her body and across the floor. Her hands are raised in a

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46. The depiction of all fifteen steps appears to be standard in English alabaster panels (see below, p.161).

47. Her position is very similar to several cognate images. See, for example the Annunciations in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection [Cheetham (1984) pp.170, 171, 173; catalogue numbers 97, 98 and 100].

48. The presence of the fillet headress is unusual, as the annunciate Virgin is invariably shown crowned in alabasters of the late fifteenth century; see, for example, Cheetham (1984) pp.169-71, catalogue numbers 96-98. The closest cognate to the La Selle image is a fragmentary panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum, where she is shown bareheaded. Cheetham dates this piece to the second half of the fifteenth century [Cheetham (1984) p.173, catalogue number 100].

gesture of awe; as usual she has been surprised whilst reading, for a book lies open on the rather ornate draped lectern on the extreme dexter side of the panel. Her signifying pot of three lilies takes up the centre of the panel; this too is conventional;[49] there is a pattern of masonry in the background of the panel in this area. The lilies are wrapped around with a scroll which possibly bore the opening words of the *Ave Maria*.[50] The angel Gabriel is shown in a semi-kneeling posture on the sinister side of the panel,[51] gesturing towards the Virgin with his right hand. He wears a rather short mantle which is draped around his upper body but leaves his legs and feet bare. God the Father stands behind Gabriel; he is nimbed and crowned, wears a loose robe, and holds an orb in his left hand. His right hand is raised, probably to bless the Virgin. The end of this figure's beard has been restored, apparently inaccurately as close examination of photographs taken before the thefts of 1966 reveal that it had a different shape. It is very likely that the breath of God with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove was originally shown in this area, attached to the beard: a further attachment point was formerly visible in the Virgin's nimbus.[52] There is a red cross on a blue ground in God the Father's nimbus, some red and black paint on Gabriel's rather truncated wings, and some gold in the hair of all three figures, God the Father's crown, and on the lectern. There is also some green colouring on the stems of the lilies and in the lower background around

49. This motif also appears in two of the Annunciations in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection [Cheetham (1984) pp.169, 174; catalogue numbers 96 and 101].

50. Louis Régnier commented that the scroll 'probably' bore 'la Salutation', but there seems to have been no physical remains of the inscription.

51. Gabriel's position also appears to be standard, as demonstrated in five Annunciations in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection [Cheetham (1984) pp.169-172, 174; catalogue numbers 96-99 and 101].

52. I am indebted to Christine Jablonski-Chauveau for this observation, which allows the panel to be securely assigned to Cheetham's Annunciation Type D [Cheetham (1984) p.162].

Gabriel's legs and feet.

Panel X   The fourth Marian panel is an Adoration of Christ (plates 20 and 21).[53]

The large Virgin kneels on the sinister side in an attitude of prayer, nimbed and

wearing a fillet headress. Once again she wears a full-length dress with close-fitting

sleeves. St Joseph stands in the background on the dexter side wearing a loose

robe and holding a crutched staff in his left hand. His right hand is raised with the

palm facing out, rather like the Virgin's gesture of awe in the Annunciation, and his

head is inclined towards it. The naked, rather chubby, Christchild lies in the

foreground on two sheaves of corn; these are placed in cruciform, as an archetype

of the crucifixion, and the ears of one sheaf form a halo effect behind his head.[54] An

angel in a loose robe flies overhead with a scroll;[55] the forefinger of the right hand is

extended, and may well have indicated a significant word in a text which is now lost.

There are two further onlookers. An adult female prays on the extreme sinister side

of the panel, behind the Virgin; she is wimpled and wears a mantle over her

full-length dress. On the dexter side a smaller female figure reaches out to the baby,

53. The inscription on the framework identifies this panel as the Nativity, but it is clearly a Brigittine Adoration of Christ. The significance of this treatment is discussed below, chapter 4, notes 63 and 65.

54. The area behind the Christchild's legs and feet should be carved to resemble stalks, but has been left untouched; Biver's photograph (plate 2) demonstrates that this restoration is authentic. This motif of the cruciform sheaves does not seem to paralleled in any other works.

55. This is the only panel in the retable where the device of a scroll held by a hovering angel is used. It should be noted that speech scrolls are used inconsistently throughout the retable, appearing only once in the St George cycle (in the Resurrection panel), and three times in the Virgin cycle (in the Annunciation and Purification of the Virgin panels in addition to the Adoration), although there are other opportunities for their inclusion, with the Trial scene being perhaps the most obvious example as St George is clearly shown speaking. Christine Jablonski-Chauveau has claimed that the scroll will have read "gloria in excelsis Deo" [*D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998) p.95], although she does not provide any substantiation for this assertion.

she has long loose hair with neither wimple nor headress, and wears a dress similar to the Virgin's, although it seems to be a little shorter as her feet are exposed. The ox and ass also feature: they are housed in a peculiar construction that seems to have some kind of roof. As St Joseph appears to be leaning his forearms on it, and hence pressing down on top of the animals, the effect is rather unsatisfactory.

This panel has also suffered considerable damage as the result of the 1966 theft (see plate 22). As noted above (p.27), it was recently discovered that the entire panel is a plaster copy, but comparison with the Biver photograph demonstrates that this 'restoration' has been faithful.

Panel XI   The fifth Marian panel is an Adoration of the Magi (plate 20) . The conventional treatment of the subject in English alabaster shows the Virgin sitting up on a bed under a canopy,[56] but here she is enthroned on a rather spindly chair, albeit on a substantial pedestal, under a draped and crenellated canopy. She is nimbed and crowned,[57] and wears the familiar full-length dress, but sculpted lines at her right shoulder may indicate that she wears a mantle over it. The Christchild, apparently naked, sits on his mother's lap and reaches out his left hand to touch the cup offered by the kneeling mage.[58] The three magi all wear full-length robes and mantles, and have crowns that are noticeably larger and more ornate than the

56. See below, p.170.

57. Two panels of the Adoration of the Magi in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) pp.182 and 188; catalogue numbers 109 and 115] also show the Virgin wearing a crown. However, it is more common, among the Victoria and Albert Museum panels at least, for the Virgin to wear a headress rather than a crown.

58. By contrast with the handling of the Virgin, the Christchild's position seems completely conventional. He is sometimes shown clothed, for example in some Victoria and Albert Museum panels [Cheetham (1984) pp.180, 183, 184, 187, 188; catalogue numbers 107, 110, 111, 114 and 115] but also appears naked, as here, in other panels [Cheetham (1984) pp.181, 182, 185, 186, catalogue numbers 108, 109, 112, 113].

Virgin's. The kneeling mage is bearded and holds his crown in his left hand; his right hand holds a large cup or chalice which he offers to the Christchild.[59] Pointed shoes or boots are visible beneath the hem of his robe. The two other magi stand behind him. The mage on the sinister side is bearded and holds a decorated box with a roof-like lid in his left hand,[60] and gestures upwards with the index finger of his right hand, possibly to a star which may once have been attached to, or painted onto, the canopy of the Virgin's throne.[61] The third mage, on the dexter side, is beardless.[62] He holds in his left hand an object which may be a lidded cup, and also points upwards with his right hand.

The use of space in this panel is quite convincing, particularly the naturalistic legs of the kneeling mage, in contrast to the rather less well-judged spacing of the preceeding panel. Again, a little paint survives. Some gold is found in the upper background around the heads of the standing magi, and also on the hair, crowns, gifts and robes of all three magi. There is also some gold on the Virgin's crown and on her hair and the Christchild's hair. Some green paint is found on the lower

59. Usually this figure identified as Caspar, the old mage who brings gold as symbol of kingship. The traditional names of the three magi and their gifts are expounded in *The Golden Legend* volume I, pp.79, 81-83.

60. This figure is probably to be indentified as Melchior, who brings myrrh as a symbol of death.

61. Several panels of the Adoration of in the Magi in the Victoria and Albert Museum feature a carved star on the canopy over the Virgin (for example: Cheetham (1984) pp. 180, 182, 185, catalogue numbers 107, 109 and 112). Others, like the La Selle panel, have no visible star, although two of the magi are pointing upwards (for example: Cheetham (1984) pp. 183, 187, catalogue numbers 110 and 114).

62. The magus occupying this position in alabaster panels is usually identified as Balthazar, whose gift of frankincense is symbolic of divinity. In one panel of the Adoration of the Magi in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) p.187; catalogue number 114] this figure has a blackened face, following a tradition that the three magi represented the three known continents of the world, with Balthazar standing for Africa. Louis Régnier claimed that one of the magi was dressed 'en negre selon l'usage legendaire'; no trace of dark colouring seems to survive on any figure in this panel.

background, around the legs of the kneeling mage and on the seat of the Virgin's throne.

Panel XII   The sixth Marian panel is the Purification of the Virgin (plate 20). Simeon, the bearded priest, stands on the dexter side of the panel, beneath a canopy which is rather less ornamented than the others in the cycle. He wears a long, loose-sleeved robe, belted at the waist, with a full-length cloak covering his shoulders and back. A pointed shoe is visible beneath his robe, and he wears a bi-lobed hat which seems to be considerably more ornate than the similarly-shaped hat worn by the priest in the panel of the Presentation of the Virgin. Curiously, he seems to be nimbed, unlike any other figure in this panel; he is also distinguished by a speech scroll issuing from his mouth towards the canopy above, on which the first letters on the *Nunc dimittis* are still visible.[63] The Virgin is shown in profile in the foreground of the sinister side, facing Simeon with St Joseph behind her. She is dressed in her usual full-length robe, with the addition of a mantle which falls from her shoulders in a similar manner to the priest's cloak. Her head is bare of any headress; like Simeon's nimbus, this is rather surprising.[64] St Joseph, in profile on the sinister side of the panel, is dressed in a long belted robe which is similar to the priest's robe, although it seems to have the addition of a cowl, or at least a heavy collar. As with Simeon, a pointed shoe is visible beneath the hem of the robe. Joseph holds in his right hand the conventional basket of doves for an offering. Two

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63. Interestingly, Régnier's notes go no further than claiming that the scroll *probably* bore the words of the *Nunc dimittis*; he does not suggest what could be on the scroll in the panel of the Adoration of Christ.

64. The Virgin is shown generally crowned alabaster cognates of this image, such as the Nuremberg Purification and the panels of the Circumcision from Madrid, Pisa and the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection: all these panels are discussed below, pp.173-75.

wimpled female figures at the back look on, each holding a tall candle in her left hand.[65] One is probably meant to represent the prophetess Anna, who was present at the dedication of the infant Christ. The other woman is an unidentified bystander who may well be included to balance the other figures.[66]

The Biblical account of this episode implies that the Virgin placed the Christchild in Simeon's arms.[67] However, this panel follows the dramatic tradition of showing Simeon and the Virgin holding the Christchild on top of an altar,[68] which is indicated by a simple box-shape with two layers of drapery, raised on a pedestal. It is unclear how the Christchild is dressed; he certainly wears something approximating to a cloak, which is visible around his body and legs, but it is likely that he is otherwise naked. This panel is relatively well-preserved, and a considerable quantity of gold paint survives in the upper background, around the heads of the women and Simeon's nimbus, as well as on the Christchild's body and on Simeon's hair. Dark paint, probably black, appears on the shoes of Joseph and Simeon, and also on the latter's hat. There are traces of red on the receding sides of the altar, and in an area below Simeon's outstretched arms that seems to indicate the inside of his cloak. As usual, some green coloration occurs in the floor area of the panel.

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65. The significance of the candles is discussed below, pp.172-73.

66. Régnier's notes on the retable identify these women as Levites, but it is unclear why he draws this conclusion.

67. See below, p.174.

68. This presentation, which is reminiscent of medieval ideas concerning the Christchild as sacrifice, and miracles where the host was seen to change into a child during the Elevation, is discussed further below, p.174.

Panel A   The larger central panel of the retable is the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity (plate 23). The Virgin is shown wearing a full-length robe, cinched in at the waist, pointed shoes, and a mantle which is fastened at the breast with a long, elaborately tied cord. The ends of the cord hang down the front of her dress, virtually to the area where the knees would be, and are held together by a knot (or woggle) below the waist. The extreme ends are tied and twisted into a decorative knot.[69] The Virgin's hands are raised in an orans gesture, very similar to her pose in the Annunciation panel, and her expression appears serene. She is surrounded by a mandorla which is carved to resemble rays or flames, and a team of nine angels support the mandorla as she ascends to heaven. The angels are all dressed in loose robes which are long enough to completely cover their feet; four are positioned on either side of the panel, and one more is at the base pushing the Virgin's feet. On the sinister side the bearded figure of St Thomas kneels in an attitude of prayer, with the Virgin's girdle draped over his wrists.[70] The girdle is presented as a detailed belt, with a buckle and holes for the pin. St Thomas wears a long loose robe which seems identical to the angel's robes.

At the top of the panel a three-person Trinity perform the Coronation of the Virgin with an elaborate, three-tiered crown topped by a cross. The seated figure on the sinister side is Christ; he is bearded and wears a long mantle, which is tied at the throat with short cords. This garment covers his shoulders and is drawn across his legs, but his chest and feet are bare. His left hand rests on the lowest tier of the Virgin's crown whilst his right hand is held in front of his chest in a gesture of

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69. A similar treatment is found in two panels of the Assumption of the Virgin in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) pp.203-04, catalogue numbers 130 and 131].

70. Régnier identified the figure of St Thomas as a donor, but the presence of the girdle makes this impossible.

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blessing. Christ's crown sits on a twisted band which is reminiscent of the fillet headdress worn by the Virgin in the panels of the Presentation of the Virgin, the Annunciation and the Adoration; it is perhaps intended to be read as the crown of thorns. The central figure is also bearded and is dressed in a loose robe. He is almost certainly the Holy Spirit;[71] his left hand rests on the cross at the top of the Virgin's crown, and his right hand is raised to the sinister side of his head in the same gesture of blessing. The figure on the dexter side is also bearded, and dressed in a loose robe with a mantle fastened at the throat with a large circular clasp or brooch. This figure is likely to be God the Father; like Christ his feet are bare. His left hand holds a large orb on his lap,[72] and his right hand touches the lower tier of the Virgin's crown, in a mirror image of Christ's position. All three figures are nimbed, with a red cross on a blue background in each halo.

As noted above (pp.27-28), this panel has been damaged on at least two occasions, particularly the top corner on the dexter side (see plate 24), where the head of God the Father, his left arm and the orb have been reattached. Otherwise the condition is reasonably good, and there is a considerable quantity of gold paint on the mandorla, the hair and beards of the Trinity, the hair of the angels and the crowns of the Trinity and the Virgin. The angels' wings display the conventional red and black teardrop design; further red paint is found on the lower edge of the Virgin's robe, presumably to demarcate the 'inside' of the cloth, whilst black or dark

71. The identification of the central figure as the Holy Spirit is substantiated by the presence of the dove, the conventional symbol of the Holy Spirit, in this position in other English alabasters of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity. Examples are found in the Swansea altarpiece at the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) p.206, catalogue number 133] and a panel in the Thermes-Cluny collection (plate 69).

72. God the Father holds an orb in the Annunciation panel, which substantiates the identification of this figure. Curiously, Régnier identified this figure as Christ; again he offers no evidence.

blue paint is found in a similar position on Christ's mantle. This dark paint also occurs on the edge of the Virgin's mantle, on her shoes, on St Thomas' hair and beard, and on the neck of the mantles of Christ and God the Father.

Other alabaster elements

The small statuettes alongside the panel of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin and the canopies over the panels have, in general, been heavily restored. The four extant statuettes can be identified as St Peter (niche i), a female saint, probably St Bridget (niche ii), St James the Great (niche iii), and St Mary Magdalen (niche iv); it should be noted that the two female figures do not occupy their original niches. St Peter is bearded and dressed in a loosely draped robe and holds a large key of heaven in his right hand.[73] The photograph of this figure in plate 27 demonstrates that this statuette and its canopy were carved together from a single piece of alabaster, and plates 24-26 demonstrate that the other statuettes were carved in the same way. 'St Bridget' is wimpled and wears a long, loose-fitting draped robe which is belted above the waist and leaves her pointed shoes visible. She carries a large rosary in her right hand and a restored book in her left hand. The canopy over the saint is also restored. St James is dressed as a pilgrim, with a staff in his left hand and a bag on his right hip: the strap crosses his body and falls from the left shoulder. He holds a book in his right hand. The front of his robe is decorated with four conch shells, which seem to take the place of buttons. The head and canopy of this statuette are restorations, as demonstrated in plate 27. St Mary Magdalen is dressed in a full-length, very loose, draped robe and mantle. Her long hair flows over both shoulders and she holds some of the hair in her left hand. Her right hand holds

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73. The shape of this key demonstrates that the object held by the idol in the panel of the Trial of St George is almost certainly not intended to be read as a key (see above, p.38).

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her conventional attribute of an alabaster pot.[74] Her canopy is a restoration. Some

traces of gold paint are found on the edges of the robes of the saints, and their hair

and St Peter's beard.

As Biver's overview (plate 2) demonstrates, the canopies above the statuettes

and the panels have been much restored. They can be characterised as a tracery

design of five pierced gothic arches. The central and terminal arches incorporate

four trapezoid shapes and an elongated trefoil motif; the other two arches feature a

design of a three-light window under three elongated quatrefoils. The underside of

the carved area is painted with a design of trapezoid shapes in red, gold and black;

variations on this design appear on the canopies of the Montréal retable and the

Eure retable of the life of the Virgin.[75]

The framework of the retable.

The wooden framework is constructed in three sections, two 'wings', which contains

the cycle panels and the terminal statue niches, and a narrower central section

which houses the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin

by the Trinity and the statuettes. It is unclear whether the three-section construction

was intended to allow the position of the 'wings' to be altered, or simply for ease of

transportation. Francis Cheetham has claimed that all two-tier retables were

intended to be fixed to a wall;[76] he does not specifically mention the La Selle work,

74. St Mary Magdalen would seem to be particularly suited to alabaster sculpture, as her attribute is an alabaster pot (see above, chapter 1, note 9).

75. The Montréal retable is illustrated in the *Society of Antiquaries exhibition catalogue* (1910) plate VII, figure 15, facing p.47; the Eure retable was exhibited in *D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998) and is illustrated in the catalogue of the exhibition, pp.78-79.

76. Cheetham (1984) p.23.

but he is likely to be correct as the relative sizes of the central section and the 'wings' indicate that the 'wings' could not physically close across the central section. The whole framework is surmounted by a row of carved oak cresting, painted gold. The current cresting has two breaks, each one situated above the junction of the central section and a 'wing' section.[77] As noted above (p.21) Biver's overview of the retable c.1910 (plate 2) demonstrates that the central panel has been moved downwards and the cresting restored over each of the 'wings' and extended to cover the top edge of the central section.

The vertical spars of the framework between the panels have a slightly flattened V-shaped profile, constructed from two pieces of wood with a triangular section placed on either side of a narrow rectangular spar. The facing edge of this central spar is unpainted, but the diagonal faces are painted with a pattern of five alternating bands of gold and black paint, beginning and ending with gold. The horizontal spars that run between the Georgian and Marian cycles are 2cm wide and painted gold on the upper surface and red on the lower surface, whilst the facing surface carries inscriptions (transcribed below). The lower edge-section of the framework runs below the Marian cycle, with breaks at the junction of the central section and the 'wing' sections; it is painted and inscribed in the same manner as the horizontal spar, but it is considerably wider at 9cm. The facing edge of the left and right edge-sections of the framework are painted red, but the internal edge is unpainted. The top edge-section has a squared C-shaped profile that houses the cresting; the framework itself is painted red here. Small horizontal spars, 2cm wide, are intruded into the central section of the framework to support the upper pair of statuettes on each tier. Unlike the other horizontal spars, which are entirely flat,

77. Philip Nelson erroneously claims that the cresting is continuous [Nelson (1920a) p.55]; Biver's photograph of 1910 (plate 2) shows it incomplete, and entirely missing over the central section.

these spars are have been fashioned so that they protrude in a three-sided, semi-hexagonal shape. The inscriptions naming each saint extend round all three facing surfaces, and no other surface seems to have been painted. A further horizontal spar, 2.5cm wide, supports the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity. It has traces of red paint on the facing edge, and the lower edge is painted red.

The framework of the retable has been greatly restored, but parts of it appear to be original, that is, made to house these panels at a time contemporary with their manufacture. A thorough examination was carried out under the direction of Laurence Flavigny during the preparations for the exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie* in 1998, and this demonstrated that some of the vertical spars have retained a gesso pattern under the gold paint whilst others have been painted to resemble this pattern. It was concluded that the gesso patterned spars are original parts of the framework; they are located in the following areas:

(1) to the right of panel II;

(2) to the left of panel III;

(3) and (4) both sides of panel IV;

(5) to the right of panel V;

(6) to the left of panel VI;

(7) to the right of panel IX.

These areas are shaded on figure 1, along with the horizontal spars inscribed with text which also seem to be original.[78] The outer case and the back of the retable frame are all modern, work that seems to have been undertaken during the restoration campaign of the late 1960s.[79]

The framework features inscriptions which name the statues and statuettes and give short descriptions the subjects of the panels. They are greatly abbreviated, and are written in black Gothic miniscule lettering with red Lombardic majascules;[80] the lettering under the panels of the upper cycle and the statuettes is smaller that the lettering below the lower cycle, to fit the much narrower horizontal spar. The inscriptions are in varying states of legibility. The only really well-preserved inscription is at the centre of the lower range, below the lacuna, where it has been protected by a tabernacle (see plate 19). All the inscriptions are transcribed below, with reference to the notes of the local antiquarian Louis Régnier where the surviving lettering is in poor condition. Reference to figure 1 will assist in locating the inscriptions.

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78. It is particularly significant that the spar bearing the inscription "Assumpcio Beate Marie" seems to be original. The length of this spar, which spans the whole of the width of the central section, precludes it from being positioned higher up in the section, where the width is curtailed by the statuette niches, and this supports the contention that the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity belongs at the base of the central section (see below, pp.84-85).

79. The loss of the outer frame is a particular problem, as no evidence remains of how any shutters or doors may have been attached (see below, p.63).

80. This lettering style appears to be entirely conventional: Nelson (1920a) p.54.

Upper range

Statue niche 1: "Scs Johis"

Panel I: "Hic Sca Maria suscitat..."

Panel II: "Hic Sta Maria armatat [sic] Georgium"

Panel III: "Hic Georgi ....Dracone ...."

Statuette niche i: "Scs Andre"

Statuette niche ii: "Scs Petris"

Panel IV: blank[81]

Statuette niche iii: "Scs Jacobus"

Statuette niche iv: "Scs Paulus"

Panel V: "Hic Rex et Regina ...."

Panel VI: "Hic Georgi....".

Panel VII: "Decollacis Sti Georgii"

Statue niche 2: "Scs ...fori"

Lower range

Statue niche 3: "Scs Johis"

Panel VIII: "Nativitas Bet Marie"

Panel IX: "Presentacio Be Marie"

Panel X: "Salutacio Be Marie"

Statuette niche v: "Sca ....a"

Statuette niche vi: "Sca Magdalena"

Panel XI: "Assumpcio Beate Marie"[82]

81. There is no inscription visible on the framework beneath the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, which tends to imply that this piece of wood is not an original part of the framework.

82. The position of this inscription implies that the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity was originally placed

Statuette niche vii: "Sca ...."

Statuette niche viii: "Sca Barbara"

Panel XII: "Nativitas Ihu..... hri"

Panel XIII: "Oblacio trium Magoru"[83]

Panel XIV: "Purificacio Be Marie"

Statue niche 4: "Scs Anto..." [sic]

Whilst the framework has clearly been modified since plate 2 was taken in 1910 ~ the central panel has been moved downwards so that the top edge is flush with the canopies on either side ~ it is difficult to be be sure how authentic the current format of panels is as a whole. In particular, the lack of comparative material is a problem, as only two other examples of two-tier retables are known. The Compiègne retable (plate 30) seems to have a replacement framework,[84] whilst the Génissac retable lacks any framework,[85] which is undoubtedly a serious problem. However, they seem to be otherwise largely complete, and thus do have some usefulness as comparative works, although they are strikingly different from each

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immediately above it. See below, p.81.

83. A face is visible in the majascule "O" of "Oblacio". It has a sad expression, with a down-turned mouth. A similar face has been observed in the "C" of "Crucifixus", on the woodwork of the retable at Ecaquelon, and it has been suggested that the inclusion of a face in an inscription was a trademark of a particular workshop, whether a 'whole retable' workshop, responsible for both the wooden and alabaster elements, or a workshop which dealt with only the framework. See: Nelson (1920a) p.54. A face also appears in the "N" of "Nativitas" on the frame of the Eure retable of the life of the Virgin, illustrated in the catalogue D'Angleterre en Normandie, pp.78-79.

84. Nelson (1920a) p.55.

85. The Génissac retable is published in Biver (1910) plates xix, xx and xxi. It is discussed further below, pp.215-17.

other.

To consider the question of the central section first, we should note that in the Compiègne retable the terminal saints on the upper tier are considerably larger that their counterparts on the lower tier, and hence protrude up through the cresting to balance the protruding central panel. Even though the central panel at La Selle may have protruded up through the cresting, it is certain that the upper terminal saints will not have protruded too, as plate 2 demonstrates that these saints were the same size on both the upper and lower tiers. Meanwhile, there are no extant terminal saints at Génissac, but it seems very unlikely that the central panel here protruded upwards: Biver's photograph shows no canopy over the lower central panel, but the addition of a canopy would bring the top edge of the upper central panel's canopy into line with the statuettes on either side.[86] Given that all the panels of the Génissac retable are the same size, in contrast to the larger central panels at La Selle and Compiègne, it seems implausible to suggest that this retable would have had a protruding central section. Additionally, we should note that all the other panels in both the Génissac and Compiègne retables have their canopies extant, which underlines the oddity of the lack of a canopy over the central panel at La Selle.

A further point of difference between the retables is the treatment of the panels: at Compiègne each panel is placed on top of a carved dais, a feature absent from both Génissac and La Selle. The layout of the statuettes is also inconsisent: there are sixteen statuettes dispersed between the panels at Génissac and Compiègne, but only eight at La Selle. These differences suggest that the three retables were produced in different workshops, or perhaps developed by different designers, almost certainly at different dates, and it is thus difficult to generalise very

86. See also the discussion below, chapter 5, note 36.

far from one to the other. However, the existence of the Compiègne and Génissac retables does demonstrate that two-tiered retables could be designed in a variety of forms. The iconography of the retables is also interesting: all the subjects of the Compiègne panels are drawn from one narrative, the Passion of Christ, but the Génissac panels, like the La Selle panels, are derived from two narratives, in this case the Life of Christ (on the upper tier) and the Life of St Martin (on the lower tier).[87]

An argument has been advanced concerning putative doors for the La Selle retable, which would have been closed across the alabaster panels during Lent, for example. There are four painted panels which are still to be found in the church, albeit in a poor state of repair (plates 31-34); these panels have been claimed as doors for the retable by Laurence Flavigny.[88] The subjects are the Flagellation, Christ nailed to the cross, the Crucifixion and the Ascension; this emphasis on the Passion of Christ does not seem to tie into the iconography of the retable,[89] and there is a problem with the size of the panels: at 109cm x 69cm (giving an overall width of 276cm) they do not seem to have been made to fit panels which now inhabit a case measuring 119cm x 225 cm.[90] The style of these panels indicates that

87. The iconological implications of the two narratives of this retable are discussed below, pp.216-17.

88. Personal communication, June 1996.

89. Philip Nelson notes the existence of four painted panels at Compiègne, which he suggests are original, in contrast to the framework of that retable. The subjects of the panels are Christ bound to the column, the harrowing of Hell, Christ bearing the cross and the Last Judgement, subjects which certainly fit in with Passion iconography of the retable [Nelson (1920a) p.56].

90. If these panels are the doors they seem to assume a differently shaped framework; alternatively, the panels may have been reset in new frames, which could give a misleading impression of their size.

they are French manufacture, rather than English, so even if these panels are the doors of the retable it is likely that they were made locally and hence form a separate commission.

There is also a possiblity that some other panels may have been the doors: Biver, Nelson and Tavender all discuss some panels in the church whose subjects are entirely different.[91] Biver names the subjects as 'Christ before Caiaphas', 'Christ laden with the cross', and the 'Last Judgement' (plate 35); Nelson agrees, and states that there was a fourth subject, which he does not name. Tavender almost certainly saw the same four panels: she names them as the 'Mocking', 'Carrying the Cross', the 'Crucifixion' and the 'Ascension', but the photograph she publishes, which is identical to that published by Biver, is clearly 'the Last Judgement' and not the 'Ascension'. Tavender notes that the panels were displayed on supports above the altar, and Nelson comments that the dress of the characters suggests a date of c.1520.[92]

In her description of the La Selle retable for the exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998), Christine Jablonski-Chauveau posits a reconstruction of doors using four double-faced panels with subjects drawn from Christ's Passion, which she asserts are French work and dates to c.1540-1550.[93] She names the subjects as the 'Mocking' backed by the 'Flagellation'; 'Christ awaiting torture' backed by the 'Agony

91. See Biver (1910) pp.77-78; Nelson (1920a) p.56; Tavender (1949) p.400. Sadly none of these authors state the size of these panels, so it is impossible to determine whether or not the panels would have fitted the case.

92. Nelson (1920a) p.56.

93. *D'Angleterre en Normandie* p.96; diagram p.97. Assertions on the origin and dating of the panels are ascribed to Nigel Ramsay. It seems that these are the same panels as those claimed as the doors by Laurence Flavigny, given that the size of the panels noted by Jablonski-Chauveau [ibid, p.89] are almost exactly correspondant. There is no photographic record or commentary on the backs of the panels in the Departmental archive, and the state of the panels suggests that Jablonski-Chauveau may be intuiting the subjects she proposes.

in the Garden'; the 'Ascension' backed by the 'Deposition'; and the 'Last Judgement' backed by the 'Lamentation over the dead Christ'. The panels are arranged in an accompanying diagram so that the first subject in each pair is visible when the doors are open, reading from left to right in the order given, and the second subject in each pair is visible when the doors are closed. There are several problems with Jablonski-Chauveau's contention, most obviously that these panels do not accord with those described by Biver or Tavender; Jablonski-Chauveau makes no reference to the panels described by these authors, even though she cites their papers in her description of the retable. There are two further problems, notably the apparent absence of an image of the Crucifixion, surely a very unlikely omission from a cycle of Christ's Passion, and the fact that there seem to be no traces on the frames of the panels to show how they were affixed to each other or to the retable frame.[94]

Whether or not any of these reconstructions of the putative doors are correct, the most interesting aspect seems to be that none of the panels have been claimed as English work. This may imply that English alabaster retables were not routinely produced with doors and that the French owner, whether commissioner or simple purchaser, decided to add doors to the work.[95] Alternatively, it may have been that

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94. These problems are highlighted by Jablonski-Chauveau herself [ibid]. She notes that the panels may have been reset in different frames, which would account for the absence of holes or other traces of fixings, but she does not offer any solutions to the problem of the missing Crucifixion. If my contention that she is intuiting the subjects of the panels (note 93, above) is correct, it is likely that the subject she names as the 'Deposition' is that named as the 'Crucifixion' by Flavigny (plate 33); I would also suggest that the subject named by Jablonski-Chauveau as 'Christ awaiting torture' is the same panel as that named by Flavigny as 'Christ nailed to the cross' (plate 32).

95. Nelson suggests that single-tiered retables (which do not seem to have had doors) would have been covered by a veil during Lent, and notes the purchase of such a cloth in Leverton (Lincolnshire) in 1523. He also comments on one example of a retable (formerly in the abbey of Cluny) where the 'wing' sections can be folded across the central section and their reverse sides are painted, with the Crucifixion on the left wing and a figure of St Edmund on the right wing [Nelson (1920a) p.53].

the doors which came with the retable were deemed unsuitable for some reason and replaced with local work.

Evidence for the Date of the La Selle Retable

Dating the retable with any degree of reliability has been a difficult procedure. Various aspects of the work have had to be considered, and some of the evidence seems to conflict. The main areas of interest are the style employed in the design of the panels, the style of the canopies, and the framework.

The predominant difficulty with dating the retable by the design of the panels is the dearth of comparative alabaster panels which are dated incontrovertibly. Dating systems used for alabasters have an unfortunate tendency to be self-referential, that is, with little supporting evidence beyond the date 'generally' attributed to a work, and it has thus far been impossible for commentators to achieve consensus.[96] A complicating factor is the contention, particularly associated with Hildburgh,[97] that alabaster carvers took their inspiration from dramatic presentations, and that the costumes used in small-scale provincial drama was likely to be archaic.

The Abergavenny tomb panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity is the only alabaster cognate of a La Selle panel which has a definite date, 1510.[98] However, this merely tells us that this design was in use in

96. There is a clear difference of opinion between Linda Rollason and Francis Cheetham, for example. Cheetham dates this retable to the early sixteenth century but provides no evidence [Cheetham (1984) p.58]. Meanwhile, whilst Lynda Rollason does not discuss this particular retable, it does seem to fit into her class IVa of alabaster panel types, which she dates to the period c.1420/5 to c.1480/5 [Rollason (1987)].

97. See above, p.14.

98. On the Abergavenny panel see above, chapter 1, note 14.

1510, and we do not know for how long the design had already been in use in alabaster,[99] or for how much longer it was used. Meanwhile, Cheetham's discussion of the different versions of the Annunciation in alabaster assigns the La Selle panel of the Annunciation to Type D, which he dates to the period 'from the 1430s until 1470s or later'.[100] This is a very long time span, not to say open-ended, and again the 'evidence' for dating this group of Annunciations seems to rely on internal rather than external evidence.

The other potentially important stylistic aspect of the panel design is the armour worn by St George; as developments in armour were relatively well documented, particularly through tomb effigies,[101] the dating of St George's armour should be relatively straightforward.[102] However, there is a serious discrepancy in the armour shown in the second panel of the Georgian cycle, specifically the great bascinet which the Virgin is lowering over St George's head, and the body armour, which seems to be of a much later date. The great bascinet is not usually depicted with field armours after the middle of the fifteenth century, and the specific form of helm which is depicted in the Arming scene indicates a date of 1450.[103] Meanwhile,

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99. A cognate image of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity exists in manuscript illumination, in the *Book of the Fraternity of Our Lady's Assumption*, made for members of the Worshipful Skinner's Company, London, c.1470 onwards, folio 41r [this image is discussed further below, p.178]. The very loose dating of the work makes it very difficult to suggest when the motif was introduced, and it is possible that this version is actually later than the Abergavenny panel.

100. Cheetham (1984) p.162.

101. It is, however, important to remember that tomb effigies do not always show knights in up-to-date armour in tomb effigies (see chapter 1, note 56).

102. I am very grateful to Philip Lankester, Claude Blair and Karen Watts of the Royal Armouries, Leeds, for their advice on dating St George's armour.

103. Karen Watts has noted that a similar bascinet, c.1450, is in the armoury collection at Churburg Castle [Personal communication, June 1998]. She also

the body armour worn by St George in this scene and subsequent panels suggests

a date of 1480. The most obvious indicative feature is the presence of small tassets

(cusped triangular plates) attached to a short skirt of plates, which is worn with a

skirt of mail underneath.[104] The fact that St George wears pointed sabatons, rather

than the later bear-paw form, suggests a date nearer to 1480 than 1500; the earliest

instance of the bear-paw sabaton on an effigy seems to be 1487.[105] The hairstyle

worn by St George may also indicate a date before 1490, as effigies of 1490-1500

tend to show shoulder-length hair.[106]

The dating evidence offered by a stylistic analysis of the panels is

undoubtedly confused, although the presence of tassets does seem to give us a

terminus post quem of 1480. But the great bascinet of the Arming panel must not be

overlooked: it tends to support Hildburgh's contention that archaic dress could be

used as a model for alabaster carvers, with perhaps the rider that old tomb effigies

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comments that the visor appears to be down, as the vision slits are missing, and this implies that part of the visor is missing. Philip Lankester has suggested that a great bascinet is shown because it is an arming scene, which would seem to require a 'proper helmet' which completely enclosed the head: it would have been difficult to achieve the same dramatic effect with an open-fronted sallet [Personal communication, June 1998]. Richard Marks has commented on the iconography of the arming of a knight: Marks (1993/94). His examples are drawn from a rather earlier period, but it is interesting to note the prominence given to the helm in a German image, from the end of the thirteenth century, of the arming of Schenk von Limburg by his mistress [Manesse Codex, Heidelberg, UB, MS cpg 848, fol. 82v; illustrated in Marks (1993-4) figure 9].

104. Comparative armour occurs on the brass of Simon Norwiche (1476) at Brampton Ash (Northamptonshire) and the brass of Paul Dayrell (c.1483) at Lillingstone Dayrell (Buckinghamshire) [illustrated in Emmerson (1978) plates XIV B and XV A]. I am indebted to Philip Lankester for these references.

105. Brass of Sir Walter Mauntell (d.1487, engraved c.1495) at Nether Heyford (Northamptonshire) [illustrated in Norris (1978) plate 204].

106. See, for example, the effigies of Sir Henry Pierrepoint, d.1499 at Holme Pierrepoint (Nottinghamshire); John Pole, c.1500 at Radbourne (Derbyshire); Sir Richard Redman at Harewood (Yorkshire) [all illustrated in Gardner (1940) plates 246, 257, 258, and 243 (this latter effigy is now thought to date to c.1510)].

might provide a model more usefully available than the costumes used for dramatic presentation. Given the existence of this complicating factor, we should be wary of placing too much emphasis on the exact date of the features of the armour: there is no reason why the La Selle retable cannot have been carved at the same date as the Abergavenny tomb panel, or even later.

The style of the canopies, characterised by their gabled design and their detachment from the panel below, locates the work within Class IV, according to the classification system for alabaster panels formulated by Prior and largely followed by Cheetham and to a lesser extent by Rollason.[107] This gives us another rather vague dating, of c.1420-c.1530. The framework is unable to provide any further direct evidence, mainly because there is no adequate comparative work.[108] To conclude, the retable could date to any point in the range 1480 to 1530. The evidence of the armour and hairstyle of St George points to a possibility of c.1480/5, which fits in with Rollason's end date for Class IVa, but the Abergavenny tomb panel may suggest a date nearer to 1510. On balance I would argue for the earlier date, given that the dimensions of the cycle panels clearly locate the retable in Rollason's Class IVa,[109] but it is to be hoped that further evidence will come to light which will allow the retable to be dated more securely.

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107. See above, pp.8-11. Rollason asserts that this canopy design could be used for both Class IVa, c.1420/5 to c.1480/5, and Class IVb, c.1485 to the Reformation.

108. As noted above (chapter 1, note 32), neither of the other two-tier English alabaster retables retain their original framework.

109. The cycle panels are 37cm high; Rollason comments that panels in Class IVa are up to 40cm high, whereas panels in the later Class IVb are around 50cm high (see above, p.10).

The La Selle Retable in earlier formats

The retable as it appears today is evidently incomplete, and it is difficult to construct a design for the original appearance with real confidence. The earliest (relatively) reliable source that we have is a monograph describing the retable written by Adolphe de Bouclon in 1882, yet even at this date the retable was lacking at least one element, for the lacuna beneath the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity was already present.

De Bouclon gives a very detailed description of the retable in his paper, but he concentrates chiefly on the panels and gives only a brief mention to the statuettes and the wooden framework. In particular he neglects to identify all the statuettes, and does not specify their positions or note missing figures, or even distinguish between the large flanking saints and the small saints on either side of the central panel.

De Bouclon identifies the following nine saints among the statuettes:[110]

St John the Evangelist, with a chalice containing a small dragon

St Matthew, with a book and an apostle's staff

St Peter, with the key of heaven

St Andrew, with a saltire cross

St Paul, with a book of epistles and a sword

St Barbara, with a palm and a tower

St Anthony, with a bell and a pig

St Bridget, with a rosary

St Christopher, carrying the Christchild on his shoulders.

110. De Bouclon (1882) p.6.

Given that there is room for four large saints and eight small saints, de Bouclon's tally must be three short; we should note that St James is missing from his list. The notes of the Norman antiquarian Louis Régnier shed a little more light on the saints. When he saw the retable three of the four large saints were *in situ*, although one of them seems to have been moved. He identified the saint in niche 1 as St Anthony, although the inscription on the frame below referred to 'Scs Johis'. This figure held a baton with a bell attached in one hand, a book in the other, and had a pig at his feet. St John the Evangelist was in niche 2, pointing with one hand to the dragon in the chalice held by his other hand, and again the inscription 'Scs Johis'. In niche 3 was St Christopher, with the inscription 'Scs ...fouri'. He was shown up to his knees in water, holding the Christchild on one shoulder, and a palm in his other hand. Niche 4 was empty, but the inscription 'Scs Anto...' identifies this as the original home of the St Anthony figure. Régnier goes on to identify the following small saints:

niche i: St Andrew, with his cross and the inscription 'Scs Andre'

niche ii: St Peter with keys and the inscription 'Scs Petris'

niche iii: St James, with a book, a bag and a pilgrim's badge, and the inscription 'Scs Jacobus'[111]

niche iv: St Paul, with a book and a large scimitar, and the inscription 'Scs Paulus'

niche vi: St Mary Magdalen, holding a vase and a handful of hair, with the inscription 'Sca Magdalena'

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111. St James also holds a pilgrim's staff, but Régnier failed to note this.

In addition there were two saints whom Régnier could not identify. One was a female saint in niche v, holding a large rosary and a book, with the inscription 'Sca ....a'. The other could have been either a male or a female saint, occupied niche vii, held attributes that Régnier was unable to identify, and had an indecipherable inscription. Niche viii was empty, but had evidently been occupied by St Barbara, as it bore the inscription 'Sca Barbara'. These two unidentified saints, the lost St Barbara, the five identified small saints and the four named large saints give us the expected total of twelve saints.

Régnier does not record the presence of St Matthew, noted by de Bouclon. Given that de Bouclon does not record the presence of St James, noted by Régnier and still extant, it seems likely that de Bouclon mistook St James for St Matthew. However, de Bouclon does record the presence of St Bridget, and it seems very likely that she is the saint in niche v whom Régnier was unable to identify. This figure is now located in niche ii. This leaves only one unidentified saint, in niche vii, now lost, but visible in Biver's overview (plate 2). Plate 26 gives a relatively clear view of this figure. It seems to be a woman with long hair and some kind of headdress, holding a bunch of flowers in her right hand and a laden basket in her left hand. Donald Attwater notes that a miraculous child holding a basket of apples and roses appeared to St Dorothy, and her usual emblem is a laden basket;[112] it is thus very likely that this figure is St Dorothy.

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112. Attwater (1983) p.106. St Dorothy only rarely depicted in extant alabaster. She does appear as a terminal saint on a retable of St Katherine at Venice [illustrated in Nelson (1920a), plate facing p.52], but she is presented quite differently, with a basket in her right hand and a palm or flower in her left.The fact that the La Selle figure also holds a bunch of flowers need not be a problem: it seems that all the statuettes, with the possible exception of St Peter, have both hands occupied (for example, St Paul with his book and sword, St Mary Magdalen holding her pot in one hand and her hair in the other), so the carver may have decided to show the legendary roses separately to continue the theme.

On the basis of the evidence of the inscriptions, the observations of de Bouclon and Régnier, and the evidence of Biver's photographs it seems reasonable to identify the saints, and their original sites, as follows:

large saints:

      niche 1: St John the Baptist

      niche 2: St Christopher

      niche 3: St John the Evangelist

      niche 4: St Anthony

small saints:

      niche i: St Andrew

      niche ii: St Peter (extant, but moved to niche i)

      niche iii: St James (extant)

      niche iv: St Paul

      niche v: St Bridget (extant, but moved to niche ii)

      niche vi: St Mary Magdalene (extant, but moved to niche iv)

      niche vii: St Dorothy

      niche viii: St Barbara

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic reconstruction of the retable following de Bouclon's and Régnier's descriptions. As we can see, all the extant panels occupy the same positions, but we can now add in the missing saints, and reposition the extant saints, with a fair degree of confidence. It is interesting to note that the eight small saints seem to have been sorted according to their gender, with the four male saints placed in the top range, alongside panels from the Life of St George, and the four

female saints in the lower range, alongside panels from the Life of the Virgin. The larger terminal figures are all male, and hence do not reflect this pattern, but this could be due to the fact that terminal figures of saints on English alabaster retables were almost invariably male.[113] The only real problem is the space below the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity...what did it originally contain?

A Four-Tiered Format?

Before addressing the question of the lacuna we need to consider a somewhat maverick source of information on the retable. The earliest description of the work, whether written or visual, is given in the February 1849 edition of a French periodical called Le Magasin Pittoresque.[114] An identical engraving was published

113. Whilst retables of the Passion and other 'male' subjects always seem to have male terminal saints, there are some examples of retables of the Life of the Virgin where one or both terminal saints are female, but there does not seem to be any definite rule. For example, the Swansea altarpiece has figures of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, the Majori altarpiece has figures of St Margaret and St James, and the Avilés altarpiece has figures of St Katherine and St Margaret (these retables are all discussed further below, pp.183). By contrast, extant altarpieces of the life of St Katherine do always have female terminal saints. One example, dated c.1470, in Vejrum church, Denmark [illustrated in Cheetham (1984) p.25, illustration 15] has SS Barbara and Mary Magdalen as terminal saints; another, dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, formerly in the church of Santa Caterina, Venice, and now in the Cà d'Oro [illustrated in Biver (1910) plate ii], has figures of SS Mary Magdalen and Dorothy. No other retables dedicated to female saints survive, so it is impossible to generalise with any certainty, but it seems that, with the exception of retables dedicated to the Virgin, terminal saints on English alabaster retables generally reflected the gender of the protagonist in the narrative panels.

114. Anonymous engraving and text in Le Magasin Pittoresque, 17 (1849) p.49 (engraving); p.50 (text). The only earlier reference that I have come across is very slight and apparently misinformed. A topographical dictionary of the Eure department published in 1840 notes that the church at Juignettes contains a dozen alabaster reliefs of the life of Christ. Given that La Selle was still a separate community at this time (La Selle was not annexed by Juignettes until 1844 [see below, p.250]), it is possible that there was a second, entirely different, alabaster retable at Juignettes, but there appear to be no other references to it. It seems likely that the author was confused about the iconography of the retable and which church

with a slightly different text in 1852 in an English periodical, *The Illustrated Exhibitor and Magazine of Art*. The engraving is reproduced in plate 36, and the two texts are transcribed, and the French text translated, in Appendix 1. As the date of the *Magasin Pittoresque* version indicates that it is the original form it will be considered first; the variant text presented in the *Illustrated Exhibitor* will be treated latterly.

The engraving and description presented in the *Magasin Pittoresque* are quite startlingly different from the current format of the work. The extant panels are all present, but they are arranged in four tiers rather than two, with the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity occupying a prominent position at the top of the retable, placed centrally above the panels of the other three tiers. The second tier contains the first four subjects of the Marian cycle (the Nativity of the Virgin, the Presentation of the Virgin, the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ); the third tier contains the final two Marian subjects (the Adoration of the Magi and the Purification of the Virgin) and the first two Georgian subjects (the Resurrection and the Arming); the fourth and lowest tier contains the remaining four Georgian subjects (the Dragon scene, the Baptism, the Trial and the Execution). Eight statuettes of saints are depicted: one on either side of the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, apparently St John the Evangelist and St Anthony, and three on each of the next two tiers, in niches between the panels. The saints on these tiers that can be identified by their

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contained it. This explanation is supported by references in two later works, published in 1868 and 1869, which claim that the church at La Selle itself contains a dozen alabaster panels of the life of Christ, and go on to state that they are published in the *Magasin Pittoresque*...if the writers had checked the journal itself they would certainly have been aware that the alabasters at La Selle were not concerned with the life of Christ! The overall impression is one of confusion and poor standards of research, and it would be unwise to put too much faith in any of these three references. See: Gadebled (1840) pp.486-87; Charpillon and Caresme (1868) t. II, p.424; Delisle and Passy (1869) p.234.

appearance in the engraving are St Andrew (upper left) and St Barbara (lower right). A female saint with a rosary, almost certainly St Bridget, appears in the lower left niche; a bald-headed, bearded saint, likely to represent St Paul, appears in the upper centre niche, and another bearded saint appears in the upper right niche. The lower central niche is occupied by a saint of indeterminate gender, who seems to be turbaned and is holding a book and something that may be intended to represent a sword. The niches between the panels in the bottom tier are left empty.

Given that Adolphe de Bouclon's paper of 1882, and all subsequent descriptions and photographs, generally accords well with the current state of the retable, there are several possible explanations for its appearance in the *Magasin Pittoresque*:

(1) The *Magasin Pittoresque* version represents the original form of the retable, which was subsequently changed to the present format.

(2) The *Magasin Pittoresque* version represents a second, or intermediate, form of the retable, that is, occuring between an earlier, unknown form and the current format.

(3) The *Magasin Pittoresque* version is a confabulation.

The first possibility suggests a deliberate decision to change the framework of the retable from a four-tier arrangement to its current format, taken at some point between 1849 and 1882. This seems unlikely for several reasons:

(a) Most significantly, some parts of the current framework are considered to be contemporary with the panels, as noted above (p.56). Whilst it is possible that these elements are derived from a framework that was made for a different set of panels

and figures, and that the La Selle alabasters were installed in the mid-nineteenth century, this scenario seems highly unlikely given the fact that the current arrangement of the panels seems to have been carefully worked out (see below, pp.202-14).

(b) Furthermore, there is no evidence that alabaster retables were ever constructed in a four-tier arrangement.[115] As observed above (p.9), two-tier retables are unusual, but they do exist elsewhere.

(c) Even if the La Selle retable was originally designed as a four-tier work, it seems surprising that anyone should go to the trouble and expense of constructing an entirely new framework for it in the mid-nineteenth century. This observation is made all the more valid when we note that by 1882 the retable was so obscure that even the priest of the neighbouring parish was unaware of its existence.[116]

(d) It is difficult to imagine a scenario where anyone would want to replace the framework: if the retable had been damaged by fire or water it is probable that the alabaster panels and figures would have suffered just as much as the wood.[117]

(e) Finally, even if a new framework was needed, it would seem sensible to replicate

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115. There is one documented example of an English alabaster retable where the panels have been reset in a three-tier framework which is quite similar to the *Magasin Pittoresque* arrangement. This retable is at Afferden in the Netherlands [Hildburgh (1932); Hildburgh (1937), p.181, plate xlviii]. There are six panels from a Passion sequence, now arranged in two rows of three, with a larger panel of the Crucifixion above, and a total of sixteen statuettes of saints arranged in pairs, one above the other, on either side of each of the cycle panels. Each cycle canopy and statuette has a canopy; the larger Crucifixion panel lacks, or has lost, a canopy. Hildburgh dates the current framework to the seventeenth century, and notes the existence of an old account of the piece which claims that *'anno 1542'* can be seen 'op de figuren'. This seems a very late date for the manufacture of the retable panels, but it may relate to the date that the retable was moved to this church. The fact that these panel and figures have clearly been reset strongly suggests that the *Magasin Pittoresque* arrangement is not the original form of the La Selle retable.

116. See above, p.19.

117. As noted above, p.3, alabaster is easily damaged by fire and water.

the original form rather than design something so completely different.

The second possibility, that the engraving represents an intermediate form of the retable, is subject to similar criticisms to those levelled at the first possibility, above all the likely date of some elements of the current framework, and the improbability that two patrons would separately go to the trouble and expense of changing the framework.[118] The four-tier construction seems to make slightly more sense when viewed as an early-nineteenth century whimsy rather than a genuine late-medieval design, but we are still left with the question why someone would want to change the framework. If a retable did not suit the taste of a patron it seems more likely that the whole work would have been consigned to a cupboard, or sold, rather than that the panels should be entirely reset.

The third possibility, that the *Magasin Pittoresque* version is a confabulation, seems the most likely explanation. Several factors point to this solution, and the nature of the publication itself is a key element. We should note that the *Magasin Pittoresque* is by no means a scholarly work, but can be usefully summarised as light reading for the leisured classes. It provided a means for a certain class of people to gain a small amount of knowledge about many different subjects, with no expectation that the reader will ever wish to pursue any subject in greater depth. The date of the publication is also significant: it is unlikely that more than a handful of the readership would have considered making a long and potentially arduous journey to see the retable for themselves. La Selle is remote now, but how much more remote would it have been for a mid nineteenth-century Parisian, or other urbanite, without

118. The fact that the Afferden panels have retained their seventeenth-century framework (see note 115, above) also argues against the possibility that the La Selle panels were reset for a second time in the mid-nineteenth century.

the benefit of modern transportation? Given that the *Magasin Pittoresque* piece would have been commissioned and written with these kinds of considerations in mind, it seems quite reasonable to assume that a certain amount of artistic licence was taken with the engraving and description. Furthermore, the very format of the retable in the engraving gives an additional reason to deduce that this is not a true likeness, as it is notable that the four-tier format fits very conveniently onto the page. By contrast, the current, two-tier format would fit very awkwardly, necessitating either a reproduction that was so small as to be unreadable, or a reproduction that was set at right-angles to the page. It seems very significant that in the entire bound volume of the publication held by the Bibliothèque Nationale, amounting to over 410 pages, there are no illustrations which require the reader to reorientate the page: again, the implication is clearly that the retable has been 'adapted to suit'.

The proposition that the *Magasin Pittoresque* paper is seriously flawed was first put forward by Adolphe de Bouclon; part of his monograph is concerned with a detailed refutation of it.[119] In his consideration of the engraving he points out the difference in framework, the rearrangement that places the Marian cycle above the Georgian cycle, and the reordering of the statuettes. He also notes that the geographical description of the hamlet is wrong: the author claimed that La Selle lies in the Risle valley when the river actually passes through Rugles, the town 7km away.

Close examination of the engraving allows us to expand on de Bouclon's criticisms, and we can find many points of disagreement between the *Magasin Pittoresque* version and the current form:

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119. De Bouclon (1882) pp.4-5.

(1) There are only eleven saint niches in total, which is one short of the required tally of twelve.

(2) Only eight saint statuettes are depicted, although de Bouclon and Régnier later attest to the presence of nine and ten respectively.

(3) Only two large saints, St John the Evangelist and St Anthony, are depicted, although de Bouclon and Régnier later attest to the presence of St Christopher too. Reference to Biver's 1910 overview (plate 2) shows that these larger saints should be the same height as the cycle panels, but they are somewhat smaller. All the saints are represented at half the height of the panels they stand next to, which is correct for the small figures, but makes the large figures too small.

(4) All the saint statuettes are shown with detached canopies, although the small figures should have integral canopies.

(5) The panel of the Nativity of the Virgin shows stairs leading up to the foot of bed, which are not found in reality, and the lamp above the bed, found in Biver's photograph, is missing.

(6) In the panel of the Nativity of Christ St Joseph is shown holding a feather rather than a crutched stick. The scroll held by the hovering angel is represented at approximately half the correct length.

(7) In the panel of the Annunciation God the Father does not hold his orb.

(8) In the panel of the Purification of the Virgin the priest is shown standing under an arch rather than a canopy, and the Christchild is erroneously shown nimbed.

(9) In the panel of the Trial of St George the cushion on top of the prostrate figure is missing. The figure of the idol on the column is presented as a small human, rather than grotesque, form, playing a violin rather than holding a flesh-hook.

(10) In the panel of the Martyrdom of St George the soul appears to have a single

wing on the left side.

(11) The lower background, or floor area, of six panels is erroneously shown with a pattern. Tiled floors (that is, with a pattern of horizontal and vertical lines), are depicted in the Adoration of the Magi, the Purification of the Virgin, the Resurrection of St George and the Baptism of Converts by St George. Meanwhile, planked floors (that is, with horizontal lines only) are shown in the Trial of St George and the Martyrdom of St George. In reality there is very little floor area visible in any panel, and these areas appear to be unmarked.

(12) The upper background of five panels is erroneously given a pattern of stars. The affected panels are the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, the Resurrection of St George, the Arming of St George and the Baptism of Converts by St George. Again, very little background is really visible in these panels, and these areas appear to be unmarked.

These discrepancies point towards a probability that the engraver had not personally seen the retable, and was perhaps working from someone else's notes and sketches. Furthermore, there are some strong indications in the description of the retable that the author had not seen the retable either, or that only a cursory inspection had been made. It is significant that the description does not name any of the saints, despite claiming that they are of a higher quality than the panels, or even comment on the fact that the bottom three niches are empty, something which indicates a rather unscholarly approach. The author demonstrates a considerable unfamiliarity with the iconography of the subjects depicted, misidentifying St Joseph as God the Father in the panel of the Nativity of Christ, and claiming that the scene of the Purification of the Virgin is actually the Circumcision. The mistakes made with

the iconography of the Georgian cycle are even more profound, particularly with the panel of the Dragon scene. The king and queen are misidentifed, somewhat bizarrely, as Christ and the Virgin, and the princess (who is said to be merely 'une femme') is erroneously said to be nimbed. In the Trial scene Dacian is not named, but is merely referred to as 'un juge', again, this points to a lack of knowledge about the legend of the saint.[120]

When we turn to the text of the *Illustrated Exhibitor* further inconsistencies come to light. The *Magasin Pittoresque* article has clearly been used as the basis of the piece, although the English author has declined to acknowledge this plagarism, but the emphasis of this paper is rather different. For example, no mention is made of the possibility that monks were responsible for the creation of the retable, something which the French article stresses, and far less attention is paid to describing the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity. The English author's knowledge of the St George legend is slightly better than the French author, as he or she correctly identifies the king and queen in the dragon scene. However, the English text still claims that St George is merely ill in the first scene, rather than being resurrected.[121]

Taken together these factors form a rather damning indictment of the evidence presented by the *Magasin Pittoresque* and the *Illustrated Exhibitor*. In the absence of any evidence to support its treatment, it seems safe to generally discount it as evidence for an earlier format of the retable. However, it does have

120. The first subject is described as the Virgin visiting St George because he is ill, a further error, but understandable given that this subject is apparently not known outside England (see below, chapter 3, note 53).

121. This misinterpretation is particularly interesting in view of the fact that the subject is supposed to derive from a lost English tradition (see below, chapter 3, note 53), and indicates that this putative legend was already lost by the mid-nineteenth century.

one significant contribution to make to our understanding of the history of the work: there is no extra panel shown that could occupy the lacuna under the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, which is now covered by the tabernacle. This lacuna has been identified by commentators as a missing panel, although there is no evidence to support this assertion.

The 'Missing Panel'

One problem with the theory of the missing panel is the size of the lacuna: it measures 38cm high x 27.5cm wide, and hence is 12cm shorter and 3.5cm wider than the space taken up by the other panels and their canopies (50cm high x 24cm wide). The 'missing panel' may have varied from the standard size, but it is also possible that the current arrangement of panels does not accurately reflect the original format. The Biver photograph (plate 2) shows the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity pushed up through the framework, breaking through the row of cresting which tops the framework. The lacuna is still shorter than the space taken up by a cycle panel with its canopy, albeit marginally, and it is still 3.5cm wider. Thus, the insertion of a panel under the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity is certainly possible, but it would have to be a non-standard size. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that the format shown in plate 2 reflects the original format of the work. One important factor is that this format leaves spaces above the uppermost of the small saints on either side of the central panel: these spaces could have been filled by cresting which was lost before the photograph was taken, but the effect of such small areas of cresting may have been somewhat unsatisfactory. A second problem is that a protruding central panel tends to give an overall impression of a lack of

balance. The small corpus of extant two-tiered alabaster retables makes it very difficult to establish conventions of design, but we should note that the central panel of the upper tier of the Compiègne retable (plate 30) does indeed protude above the level of the cycle panels on either side. However, the central panel is balanced by the terminal saints in the upper tier, which are larger than those of the lower tier and also protrude above the level of the upper cycle panels.[122] Given that the terminal saints of the La Selle retable were all the same size (demonstrated in plate 2), it is very unlikely that the saints on the upper tier would ever have protruded to balance the central panel. Another problem is that the central panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity is the only panel without a canopy: if we add in a canopy for this panel, as found at Compiègne, the lack of balance becomes even clearer. It is difficult to quantify how great the problem the lack of a canopy over the central panel presents: some single-tiered retables also lack a canopy over the central panel,[123] but it seems significant that both extant two-tiered retables, at Compiègne and Génissac, seem to have had a canopy over every panel.

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122. Although the framework of the Compiègne retable is almost certainly not original, the observation about the protruding central panel balanced by the protruding terminal saints still holds good, as it is based on the relative sizes of the panel and figures rather than on any element of the framework.

123. For example, Nelson refers to a five-subject triptych formerly in the abbey of Cluny, in which the tall central panel has no canopy and the whole triptych is surmounted by a band of oak tracery [Nelson (1920a) p.52]. Biver's photograph of the Bordeaux altarpiece shows a similar arrangement, with no canopy over central panel and a tracery band over the whole work, but Biver comments that the upper part of the framework does not seems to be original [Biver (1910) p.84; plate xviii], and a similar process of rearrangement and 'restoration' may lay behind the appearance of Nelson's Cluny retable. The Magasin Pittoresque engraving of the La Selle retable (plate 35) certainly shows a canopy over the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation by the Trinity, but this evidence is hardly reliable: not only because of the many errors in the engraving and description, but also because the canopy (whilst larger and more ornate than the other canopies) seems insufficiently large to fill the lacuna in the current format.

If there is a missing panel there are various possibilities for the subject matter, the likelihood of each depending to some extent on the panel's correct position. It seems clear that the extant cycle panels are correctly placed, as they are arranged chronologically and reflect established narrative patterns for the two legends. However, the central section could be arranged with the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity either above the lacuna, as it now appears, or below the lacuna. If the current layout does reflect the original format, the 'missing panel' would form part of the Marian cycle (see figure 3). An obvious candidate for the subject of the 'missing panel', from an iconographic standpoint, is the Visitation, as this subject logically fits into the narrative sequence, falling between the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ. However, this subject is notably rare amongst extant English alabaster panels of the Life of the Virgin, with only five examples known,[124] and where it does occur in a sequence of other subjects it is not given any special prominence,[125] as a central position below the dominant subject, and in close proximity to the centre of the altar below, would seem to imply. Meanwhile, if the central section is rearranged so that the lacuna occurs above the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, the 'missing panel' would form part of the Georgian cycle (figure 4). There is certainly no shortage of subjects to fit into the narrative of St George: the iconography of the saint provides subjects such as the harnessing of the dragon with the princess's girdle,[126] the beheading of the dragon by St George,[127] and the offer of

124. Cheetham comments that this subject is rather rare in English alabaster work, noting only five examples in total (see Table 6, below). This figure could be due to losses and hence may underestimate contemporary output, as it does not seem to reflect the level interest in the subject in other media.

125. The only retable of the the Life of the Virgin featuring a panel of the Visitation seems to be at Pisa, which has a central panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity (see below, p.184).

126. A fifteenth-century example of the subject is attributed to Hugo van der Goes

a reward to St George.[128] However, the insertion of an additional cycle panel in the upper tier (figure 4) tends to sit uneasily with the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, as it appears to disrupt the reverence due to the main subject.

There is also a possiblity that the 'missing panel' was not drawn from the iconography of either the Marian or Georgian cycle, but was a separate subject. The Resurrection and the Trinity are common subjects for the central panel of alabaster retables of the life of the Virgin,[129] but if we were to introduce either of these subjects there would certainly be a discordance between the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity and the second subject, and again a problem of reverence.

If we accept that the current format of the framework is original, the evidence it provides is by no means clear cut. The first significant factor is that the lettering on the framework below the lacuna is very well preserved, and it relates to a panel of the Assumption of Mary. At least one commentator has concluded that the missing panel was an Assumption,[130] but this is patently wrong because the Assumption is clearly present in the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation by the Trinity. The inscription implies that the central panel may well have been intended to be placed in the lower range of the retable, with the 'missing panel' above it, and it

(Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.). This image is illustrated in Didi-Huberman (1994) p.93.

127. A version of this subject was painted by Vittore Carpaccio, 1502-07 (Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice); illustrated in Didi-Huberman (1994) p.87.

128. This subject may well appear on a damaged desk-end in the stalls of the choir at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle (see below, p.137).

129. See p.183, below.

130. Biver (1910) p.76; see also above, chapter 1, note 70.

seems likely that when the missing piece was stolen the framework was broken, and the retable was reconstructed with the 'Assumption' panel in the wrong place.[131]

Given the evidence of the inscription, it seems clear that the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation by the Trinity belongs in the lower part of the central section, with the lacuna above it. To my mind the strongest contender to fill the lacuna in this position is a canopy. Admittedly, there is little direct evidence to support this assertion, but it does seem to make more sense in the context of the overall iconography of the work than a panel with any of the possible subjects proposed above. One factor that militates in favour of this theory is that the current lack of a canopy seems distinctly odd.[132] As observed above, both the Compiègne and Génissac retables have canopies over the central panels, and this convention is also observed in most extant single-tier alabaster retables. Admittedly, the dimensions of the lacuna would require a very large canopy, but its size can be reduced somewhat by the introduction of a dais-piece under the central panel. The use of dais-pieces under panels does not seem to have been researched at all, and a thorough examination of all surviving panels with this feature would be required to establish any rules of use. The Compiègne retable (plate 30) includes dais-pieces under every panel, but it is notable that the central panel alone is raised on a dais in several single-tier retables,[133] and it is certainly possible that this format may have

131. It is notable that there seems to have been a policy to resite the statuettes (see above, p.53). This may be due in part to a wish to retain some sense of the original appearance of the retable, by grouping the extant statuettes together. However, it may also reflect a feeling that placing these elements towards the top of the framework would help to secure them from opportunist thieves: when the retable was *in situ* at La Selle it would be necessary to stand on the altar to reach the upper elements, whilst the lower elements could be reached from the floor.

132. For example, Régnier comments on the lack of a canopy over the central panel, and the apparent lack of an inscription for this panel, but he fails to draw a link between the panel and the inscription on the lower edge of the framework.

133. Examples include the Majori retable [see Hildburgh (1955) 182-186, plate xxix] and two Passion retables in Italy, one dating from the late fifteenth century, in the

been used at La Selle. Figure 5 is a proposition for the original format of the retable,

based on the evidence of the inscriptions and Biver's photographs, and the

observations of de Bouclon and Régnier, with the addition of a canopy over, and a

dais under, the central panel. Unless a previously unknown drawing, photograph or

description of the retable comes to light it will remain impossible to know how

accurate this version is; in the absence of such evidence this version stands as the

most likely original format.

Museo Schifanoia, Ferrara, and one dating from the early sixteenth century, in the Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples [both illustrated in Papini (1910) figures 3 and 4]. The device of using a dais to raise a central panel to a position of reverence is also found in carved wooden altarpieces, such as a Life of the Virgin retable in oak, c.1520, from Brussels, in the Victoria and Albert Museum and illustrated in Woods (1996) figure 14.

Chapter Three: The Iconography of the St George Cycle

St George is enigma personified. He is one of the most widely recognised hagiographical figures in the canon of the Church ~ the legend of his encounter with the dragon is common currency ~ yet he is far more than a mere romantic hero "skilled in Dragon Management and Virgin Reclamation".[1] Close investigation of the literature and iconography of his cult soon reveals that this saint is a highly complex figure. There have been innumerable, sometimes startling, variants of his legend, found in both literary and visual records of devotion to him. Furthermore, he has a variety of curious analogues throughout the cultures of the world which help to illumine this mythic hero; the roots of his cult penetrate the deepest realms of religious belief. This chapter considers the genesis of the cult of St George and its development in England, with particular reference to the visual presentation of the saint. The legend of St George's encounter with the dragon and its allied motifs are then discussed in some detail. All extant English medieval cycles of the saint, both literary and visual, are considered, and a comparison is drawn with those cycles which are known to have had English patronage, and also the Valencia altarpiece, a work which seems to have had no connections to England. Finally the La Selle cycle is considered in the light of these other cycles, and the possible implications of its iconography are discussed.

The Origins of the Cult of St George.

In the subtitle of his 1983 study, David Scott Fox calls St George "the saint with three faces";[2] I fear that he does our hero an injustice with a partial truth. For St

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1. 'Not My Best Side (Uccello, S. George and the Dragon, The National Gallery)' in Fanthorpe (1986) p.29.

2. Fox (1983).

George appears in many more guises than three. He is, of course, the chivalrous knight who rescues the fair lady from certain death, but he is also an ancient symbol of light and power engaged in perpetual struggle with the forces of darkness and chaos.- He is the Christian hero who demands the conversion of an entire town before he will despatch the dragon who has claimed so many lives, yet he is also El Khedir, the mythic hero of Islam.[3] His legend is deeply concerned with the power of chastity to overcome evil, yet he is also a strong symbol of fertility. Equally, he is the patron saint of England, and is often thought to be an honorary, if not actual, son of this country, with several English towns claiming to be the site of the encounter with the dragon.[4] Yet he is also patron of places ranging from Catalonia to the Danish town of Holstebro, whilst the Black Sea state of Georgia is actually named in his honour. In her study of 1908, Margaret Bulley notes that George was claimed as patron saint of Germany, Portugal, Barcelona, Genoa, Ferrara, Armenia, Antioch, Constantinople, various parts of France, and of the Coptic Christians, whilst 'St George for Holy Russia' was the battle-cry of the Czar.[5] How many of these places

3. It has been noted that El Khedir ('the living') is used in the Middle East as a name for a figure who is a conflation of St George and the Prophet Elias: Hoade (1967) p.354.

4. Dragon Hill in Berkshire, which stands alongside the White Horse of Uffington, has a bare patch at the summit; it is said to have been made barren by the dragon's blood spilt there by St George. Other places, such as Dunsmore Heath (Warwickshire), Brinsop (Herefordshire) and the hamlet of St George in Denbighshire also claim the encounter, but they seem to a follow a seventeenth-century tradition which claims that St George was born in Coventry and killed his first dragon in Egypt in order to rescue a princess named Sabra. He then marries her and brings her home to England where they have three sons, one of whom is Guy of Warwick. After Sabra's death St George fights a second dragon which is terrorising an English town, and in the battle both dragon and knight are killed. This tradition, which is related in Richard Johnson's *Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendome* (1576-80), underlines the romantic aspects of the dragon legend and also demonstrates the extent to which St George has changed over time: there is no mention of a martyrdom at the hands of a heathen emperor in this version.

5. Bulley (1908)pp.21-22.J. Lewis André adds Aragon, Hungary, Lithuania, Hannover and Schleswig to Bulley's list, underlining the wide geographic spread of St George's

claimed to be the scene of the dragon episode is not recorded, but the Danes were

certainly one people who thought that the combat had happened on their soil.[6]

Given that St George embodies such a diverse group of themes and

patronages, we need to be certain which aspects are being presented when we

examine the role he plays within any one image, play or poem. We need to be

careful to consider not only the provenance of the work, but also the audience for

which it was intended. Even something as important as his attribute is by no means

straightforward. The red cross emblem is used as the patriotic symbol of England,

but it is certainly not confined to English depictions: it appears in Altichiero's fresco

cycle in the Oratorio di San Giorgio, Padua, c.1378-84 and the 'Valencia altarpiece'

of Marzal von Sax, c.1410-1420 (plate 65), to name but two examples.[7] However,

George does not *always* carry this insignia, for in the early sixteenth century Hans

Holbein presents St George with a banner of a white cross on a red field (plate 37)

and in the early fourteenth century glass at Coutances he carries a shield with a

black cross on a gold field.[8] Given that there is this multiplicity of factors at work in

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cult: André (1900) p.206.

6. Bulley (1908) p.21. Interestingly, the Danish version of the story claims that the dragon ate two eggs each day rather than two sheep. When the supply of eggs began to fail, one human and one egg were offered ~ if anything, this version seems to be even more fantastical than the standard legend.

7. It has been noted that the German romantic poem *Der Helige Georg* by Reinbot von Durne, dated to 1225, related an angel brought St George his armour and a white banner with a red cross; shortly afterwards a similar banner was claimed as a relic of the saint in the Wartburg, and was subsequently translated to San Giorgio in Velabro, Rome. It could be that Reinbot's poem is the source of the identification of St George with the red cross device: Hulst (1909) pp.54-55.

8. A polychromed Byzantine relief of the legend of St George, dated to the thirteenth century, shows his shield quartered with black and red. This image is illustrated in Didi-Huberman (1994) p.39. This treatment may indicate that the saint is not given the red cross in Byzantine tradition, but this question is beyond the scope of my current research.

the presentation of the saint, it is essential to have a grasp of the history of the cult in order to be able to make some sense of it. It is perhaps prudent to begin with an examination of the largest source, the hagiographical material.

St George's legend was popular throughout the medieval period, but it was subject to a great deal of reinterpretation. Tables 1, 2 and 3 summarise the various accounts in English, along with two Latin versions, the *Golden Legend*, widely used as source for both literary and visual cycles, and the *Georgius* of Baptista Spagnuoli 'the Mantuan', which is the source of Alexander Barclay's version.[9] It is readily apparent that there is a marked disparity between the different versions. For example, the dragon episode, which is now generally assumed to be *the* legend, does not appear at all in Ælfric's version, and the tortures inflicted on St George vary a great deal. Yet some aspects are relatively consistent, and the basic medieval legend can be summarised as follows:

9. The literary cycles summarised are:
(a) 'Saint George, martyr' from *Æelfric's Lives of Saints* [Skeat (1881) pp.307-19].
(b) 'Saint George' from *The Golden Legend* (1993), volume I, pp.238-42.
(c) 'George' from *The South English Legendary* [Horstmann (1887) pp.294-96]. A second fragment is published in Parker (1923). Charlotte D'Evelyn and Frances A. Foster identify this frament as pertaining to the *South English Legendary*, hence the apellations 'SELa' and 'SELb'; Parker, by contrast, does not seem to link this fragment to the *South English Legendary* [D'Evelyn and Foster (1970) volume 2, part V, p.589].
(d) 'George', from *The Scottish Legendary* [Metcalfe (1891) pp.176-203].
(e) 'The Legend of St George' from *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate* [MacCracken (1911/ 1962) pp.145-54].
(f) 'De Festo Sancti Georgii, Martyris' from *Mirk's Festial: a collection of homilies by John Mirk* [Erbe (1905) pp.132-35].
(g) 'S. George' from *Speculum Sacerdotale* [Weatherly (1936) pp.129-33].
(h) 'Georgius' by Baptista Spagnuoli 'the Mantuan' [Nelson (1955)].
(i) 'The life of St George' by Alexander Barclay [Nelson (1955)].
(j) 'The life of St George' from *The Golden Legend* trans. William Caxton [Nelson (1955), appendix, pp.112-/18].
The approximate datings given in table 1 are derived from D'Evelyn and Foster (1970) p.589. These literary versions are considered in an attempt to contextualise the visual cycle of the La Selle retable. Tables 4 and 5 summarise other visual cycles of St George created in England, or for English patrons, and provides the Valencia altarpiece as a comparative scheme. These cycles are discussed fully below, pp.117-44, but they also provide a useful comparison for the literary cycles.

St George, a Christian and an officer in the Roman army, is called upon to sacrifice to the Roman gods. He refuses to do this, and is then detained and tried by a heathen ruler (usually called Dacian). St George is tortured on the rack and the wheel, and is subjected to other improbable torments such as being dismembered and boiled. He steadfastly refuses to sacrifice, and many onlookers are converted to Christianity. He is also given a poisoned drink by a powerful magician; when this fails the magician himself is converted. St George is ultimately beheaded, and the heathen ruler is often said to die immediately afterwards. The story is enhanced by variations such as the conversion of the heathen ruler's wife and an episode where St George pretends to recant, visits the heathen temple and then throws down the idol.

In most versions an episode is included where St George rescues a princess, but the order in which this occurs relative to the other events is often unclear. The basis of the story is that a water-dwelling dragon has been threatening a town in Libya with its pestilential breath, and in order to keep it away the people have been giving it sheep. When the supply of sheep begins to fail the people agree to sacrifice one child and one sheep each day. Lots are drawn, and eventually the king's only daughter is chosen. The king asks for her to be spared, but the people threaten to burn him and his palace if he refuses to give her up to the dragon. In most accounts a grace period is agreed, and then the princess is sent out with her sheep. She is wearing her best clothes, but sometimes is explicitly said to be dressed as a bride. St George, the knight-errant, then arrives and offers to kill the dragon. The princess protests but the saint insists on fighting the monster, and succeeds in wounding it with his lance or spear. He then instructs the princess to fasten her girdle around the dragon's neck, and she leads it back to the city as if it were a dog. Everyone is very

frightened, but St George says that he will kill the dragon if all the people will convert to Christianity.[10] He then baptises the king and many thousands of his subjects, and asks for a church to be built. The king offers the saint a reward, usually money but sometimes land or the princess's hand in marriage. St George refuses, but teaches the king about Christian belief and then goes on his way.

In common with those of most other early saints, St George's legend has little grounding in historical accuracy. But not everyone has been dissuaded from belief in him, however slight the evidence. "That St George is a veritable character is beyond all reasonable doubt, and there seems no reason to deny that he was born in Armorica, and was beheaded in Diocletian's persecution by order of Datianus, April 23rd, 303."[11] Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* could hardly be more wrong. Far from being a definitive statement on the saint, this commentary merely provides an opportunity for dissent amongst the cognoscenti, for there is no aspect of St George's life that is incontrovertible, whether his birthplace, profession, the year of his death or details of his tortures. Despite Brewer's bold assertion, St George is rarely hailed as a native of Armorica (an ancient name for Brittany), but is strongly associated with the Palestinian towns Joppa (the modern-day Jaffa) and Diospolis (or Lydda). Both claim to be the site of his martyrdom, and the latter claims to be his birthplace too. Furthermore, the saint is often given the appelation "St George of Cappadocia" is recognition of a tradition that he he originates from this area of eastern Turkey. Confusingly, there is also an historical figure called "George of Cappadocia", a character of somewhat different pedigree who is never likely to be canonised. He is quite well-documented, and is known to have pursued a career

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10. As Table 3 demonstrates, in some cases the dragon is already dead when the baptism takes place.

11. Brewer (1894) p.510.

selling questionable pork to the Roman army, later rising to the position of Archbishop of Alexandria. A known adherent of the Arian heresy, he was murdered in AD 362 by an angry mob. A small group of commentators, notably Edward Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, have attempted to identify St George with this George of Cappadocia, and succeeded in sullying the the saint's reputation to a considerable extent.[12] However, it seems unlikely that such a heretic could become a saint of orthodox Christianity, and the discovery during the nineteenth century of two churches dedicated to St George, dated to around AD 346, at Shaka and Ezra in Syria,[13] effectively closed the question. But this dubious archbishop did at least have the advantage of definitely having existed, something that cannot be claimed with any veracity of the "actual" St George.

The story of the 'real' St George which seems to have the widest currency is set in Nicomedia, the town on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus which was the official residence of Emperor Diocletian (ruled AD 284-305).[14] Towards the end of the third century Christianity was generally tolerated in the Roman Empire, with the faith openly professed by many people of rank, up to and including Diocletian's wife and daughter.[15] However, there was ill-feeling amongst non-believers, which seems to have been particularly directed at Christian soldiers who were thought to be breaching disciplinary codes as a consequence of their religion. Several were executed at the turn of the century, but then a subversive plot was discovered in

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12. Fox (1983), pp.19-22, provides a useful synthesis of Gibbon's erroneous argument.

13. An inscription at the Ezra church stated that it contained "the cherished relic of the glorious Victor, the holy Martyr George": Hole (1948) p.107.

14. Fox (1983) p.11.

15. Hole (1948) p.104.

which believers were said to be involved. All soldiers were ordered to sacrifice to the Roman gods, and on February 23rd AD 303 the Praetorian Guard razed the Cathedral of Nicomedia. The next day saw the issue of an edict effectively outlawing Christianity: churches and writings were to be destroyed, meetings for worship were forbidden, and Christians who held office were deprived. The edict was ruthlessly enforced throughout the Empire, and many believers were martyred; in Britain St Alban was amongst those who suffered.

Eusebius, an ecclesiatical historian and Bishop of Caesarea who lived in the mid-fourth century, writes that when the decree was published in Nicomedia an unnamed man of high rank tore it down and publicly destroyed it.[16] Eusebius records that he was the first Christian in that district to be martyred under the tems of the edict, and that he was tortured, imprisoned and executed but bore every torment with great courage. It is this man who is usually identified as St George. Established facts about the hapless martyr are undoubtedly in short supply in this story, but little time elapsed before extra material was grafted onto these bare bones. St George is said to have been a soldier native to Cappadocia, or perhaps Lydda, and early writers tend to picture him as a Roman officer of some rank. It has been claimed that after his destruction of the edict he went to the Temple of Bacchus and threw down the statue of the deity. He is said to have later refused to sacrifice, and was then tortured and martyred on a date identified as April 23rd, AD 303.[17]

The earliest extant account of St George's martyrdom is a fragmentary manuscript dated to c.350-500, found under a fallen pillar in the cathedral of Q'as

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16. Hole (1948) pp.105-06.

17. Budge argues that the martyrdom is likely to have taken place some 50 years earlier, on the basis of inferences he draws from the *Chronicon Paschale*, a Byzantine work of the early seventh century: Budge (1930) pp.46-47. However, he seems isolated in this view.

Ibrim during the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1964.[18] St George is identified as a Cappadocian Christian who entered the imperial service and was martyred when he challenged the pagan beliefs of the king at Diospolis. Of considerably greater influence is a fragmentary fifth-century palimpsest in Vienna which is presented as based on an earlier document written by, or at least with the assistance of, a servant of the saint called Pasicrates.[19] He claims to have witnessed St George's passion, which he says endured for seven years and led to the conversion of 30,900 people, including the Empress Alexandra. The villainous emperor is a Persian named Datianus, or Dadianus, a name that transmogrifies into the Dacian of later medieval tradition. This detailed version had an enormous impact on the hagiography of St George: it is the source of the traditions that St George was killed four times, only to be resurrected on the first three occasions, that he was given poison by a magician named Athanasius who subsequently converted to Christianity and was himself martyred, and that the saint was suspended over a fire, sawn in two, and so forth. The problem with this apparent eye-witness account, aside from the somewhat fantastical nature of the saint's experience, is that "Pasicrates" was almost certainly an invention of hagiographers.[20] A Vatican manuscript, almost certainly of a somewhat later date, and possibly as late as the eighth century, names Diocletian as the heathen emperor, and incorporates three miraculous cures rather than actual

18. Frend (1993) pp.51-52.

19. Wilson (1976), pp.9-10. F. Cumont has observed that there are serious inconsistencies in Pasicrates' version of the legend: a Cappadocian should not be answerable to the king of Persia, for example [Cumont (1936) p.15]. However, such 'problems' could arise from a simple lack of knowledge about geography, or a tendency to treat all foreign races as interchangeable.

20. Hulst (1909) p.45.

resurrections.[21] Otherwise it is very similar to the earlier work, but the problem of its date throws into question the proposition that the anonymous martyr of Nicomedia was in fact St George...if this identification is accurate, why was Diocletian not named in the earliest source? In an attempt to resolve the problem Datianus/Dacian is sometimes identified with the historically authentic Maximian, Diocletian's co-emperor,[22] but this re-naming theory seems somewhat contrived. The net result is that none of the competing camps are able to offer a truly convincing explanation of who St George was, or, indeed, if he actually existed at all. Gelasius, a late-fifth-century pope, recognised the extent of the problems associated with the saint, and decreed that the hagiographical legends should be treated with extreme circumspection. His Church Council of 494, which formulated the first *Index* of forbidden books, trimmed the number of George's tortures and removed all references to resurrection.[23] As we can see from the evidence of later images and literature concerned with the lengthy martyrdom, their efforts were not well rewarded.[24]

Despite this uncertainty over the precise nature of the physical saint, there is clear evidence that there was a cult of St George in existence from the earliest times, regardless of the veracity of his legend. We have already mentioned the mid-fourth-century churches at Shaka and Ezra, but Lydda was undoubtedly the most famous seat of his devotion. Unfortunately the evidence here is relatively late:

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21. Hulst (1909) p.46. We should note that miraculous cures, but no resurrections, occur in the literary versions outlined in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

22. Wilson (1976) p.10.

23. Hulst (1909) p.46.

24. The 'English' motif of the resurrection of St George by the Virgin (see below, note 53) seems to be an example of resistance to this official proscription.

around AD 530 Theodosius, a deacon and pilgrim, wrote about the saint's tomb at Lydda, and mentioned the miracles that were said to have been witnessed there,[25] but it is at least possible that pilgrimage had already been taking place for many years. Certainly the shrine here is generally recognised as the epicentre of the medieval cult; Constantine was said to have built a basilica over the saint's tomb.[26]

Lydda was to prove important in fostering St George's devotion during the Crusades, but it is clear that even in the sixth century the saint's cult had spread to the West. St Gregory of Tours (died c.594) wrote of the veneration of St George's relics in France,[27] and also of miracles that were said to have occurred as a result of his intercession.[28] Early in the century Clovis, King of the Franks, dedicated a monastery near Cambrai to St George, and his wife Clotilda dedicated a nunnery near Paris to him. Chilebert, the son of Clovis, placed a relic of St George in a monastery which he erected near Paris to St Vincent.[29] There was a church dedicated to George at Mainz in the middle of the sixth century.[30] By the eighth century his veneration was general throughout Christendom; in 751 Pope Zacharias discovered the saint's head in Rome and presented it to San Giorgio in Velabro.[31]

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25. Wilson (1976) p.11.

26. Fox (1983) p.12.

27. Wilson (1976) p.11.

28. Marcus (1929) p.36.

29. Bulley (1928) p.25.

30. Wilson (1976) p.11.

31. Hulst (1909) p.46. Other heads of St George are also known. Hulst notes that a head of the martyr was given by Pope Formosus to the Abbot Hatto, and was held at Reichenau, in S Georg zu Oberzell. As recently as 1971 St George's skull was rediscovered at the Abbey S Giorgio Maggiore, on the island of S Giorgio in Venice: Setton (1973) p.11. Another head is recorded in Syria [Delehaye (1909) p. 49]; there may also have been a similar relic at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, for a 'St

The Cult of St George in England.

The saint was also recognised in England well before the Norman conquest.

In 679 Adamnan, abbot of Iona, related a miracle of St George which he had heard

from a traveller named Arculf, concerning a man who had made a vow to give his

horse to St George in return for protection on a journey from Diospolis: the man

broke his vow and St George took revenge by making the horse unbiddable until he

repented.[32] St George is mentioned in Bede's martyrology;[33] he appears in a

ninth-century Anglo-Saxon ritual at Durham,[34] and a Saxon martyrology from around

the mid-tenth century.[35] Æelfric's *Passion of St George* was written at York between

1020 and 1051. There is also some evidence of pre-Conquest foundations

dedicated to St George. The church at Fordington (Dorset), mentioned in King

Alfred's will, was dedicated to George, and Knut founded a house of regular canons

at Thetford under his patronage.[36] A church in Southwark was dedicated to him in

Anglo-Saxon times,[37] and a church in Doncaster was dedicated to St George in

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George's head with an helmet of gold' was recorded in 1552: Fisher (1960) p.18, citing *The Inventories of St George's Chapel* ed. Maurice Bond (Windsor, 1947) p.167.

32. Hulst (1909) p.26. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* includes this story, which is found in Adamnan's *De Situ Terrae Sanctae* [cited in Bengtson (1997) p.319].

33. Budge notes that in his martyrology Bede uses the name Dacian, or Datian, for the Persian king, which indicates that this is the source of the 'English' name of the tyrant: Budge (1930) p.25.

34. Hulst (1909) p.47.

35. Pegge (1787) p.23.

36. Marcus (1929) p.38. The late eighteenth-century commentator Samuel Pegge credited Ulvius, the first abbot of Bury, with this foundation: Pegge (1787) p.23.

37. Hulst (1909) p.47; Gordon (1907) p.44, referring to Selden's *Titles to Honour.*

1061.[38]

Robert d'Oiley, a Norman nobleman, continued this trend after the Conquest. He built a castle in Oxford in 1074, complete with chapel dedicated to St George.[39] The 'Lewes Group' of wall paintings in Sussex, dated to c.1080-1120 include the earliest cycles of St George in England, probably based on Byzantine wall paintings.[40] As the cult became more firmly established through the later medieval period, strange variations on his legends began to spring up that seemed to confirm his links with the country. He was said to have visited this country as tribune of Beirut, on the orders of Diocletian, and to have formed a friendship with Queen Helen, Empress of Britain.[41] It is claimed that he went to Glastonbury and Caerleon, and doubtless it was on this same trip that he also killed the dragon at one of the places to claim the combat. By the early seventeenth century St George was said to have been born in Coventry, to have killed the dragon in Egypt and to have married the Egyptian princess and returned to Coventry with her to raise their children.[42] It

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38. Cross and Livingston (1974) p.557.

39. Wilson (1976) p.18. Hulst (1909), p.47, and Gordon (1907), p.44, both claim that the St George dedication was held by a parish church built by d'Oiley close to his castle, and do not mention a chapel within the castle.

40. One of the better known images from the 'Lewes Group', at Hardham on the north wall of the nave, shows St George in battle. David Park has demonstrated that it is likely to represent the saint's appearance at Antioch [Park (1984)]. E.W. Tristram, working before serious conservation was carried out on the image, interpreted this scene as the combat with the dragon [Tristram (1944) p.131], and this error has been followed by other writers, such as Braunfels-Esche (1976) p.94, and Gilchrist (1994) p.181.

41. Gordon (1907) p.13. Gordon supports this story with the interesting, if somewhat bizarre, idea that the friendship with Helen forged on this trip led her to found a church adjoining the Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre with a dedication to St George.

42. Bulley (1908) pp.20-1. St George's children included, apparently, Guy of Warwick, a development which underlines the all-inclusive nature of these romantic treatments. Johnson's *Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendome* (see note 4, above), largely based on the poem *Sir Bevys of Hampton*, was the source of most of

was later claimed in an eighteenth-century chapbook that he was descended from Æneas, though of English birth, and that he was buried at Windsor.[43]

St George is primarily recognised now by English people as their patron saint, but it is by no means clear when he was assigned this particular role. Edward I may well have been responsible for adding St George to the canon of 'English' saints, for he instigated the practice of displaying St George's banner alongside those of the native patrons St Edmund and St Edward the Confessor.[44] Richard I is said to have invoked St George as his personal patron during the Third Crusade,[45] but it was not until the reign of Edward III that he was officially recognised as a national patron. Edward had a strong interest in St George; he owned a relic of the saint's blood,[46] and the Milemete treatise (1326-7), which was made as a gift for Edward, shows St George arming the young king.[47] Paintings dated to c.1350-63 in St Stephen's

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these later variants. It has been observed that a carving, c.1533-36, on the provost's stall in King's College, Cambridge, which features an image of St George in conjunction with a lion carrying off a new-born child, indicates that some of the imagery employed by Johnstone (and not deriving from *Sir Bevys*) was already associated with the saint some fifty years earlier: Fellows (1976) p.262. Taken in conjunction with the English version of the legend of the resurrection of St George by the Virgin, visible in the fifteenth century (see below, note 53), this indicates that there was a strong, and longstanding, tradition of embellishment of the basic narrative in England.

43. Bulley (1908) p.33. The assertion that the saint is buried at Windsor was presumably based on the dedication of St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle.

44. Bengtson (1997) p.317.

45. On Richard I and St George see De Laborderie (1995).

46. Ormrod (1989) p.856. The blood is included in an inventory of royal relics made in 1331-2. Ormrod also notes that Edward was devoted to the Virgin, with several foundations dedicated to her, and the Virgin and Child appearing alongside St George on Edward's great seal in the later years of his reign. Given the clear links between the Virgin and St George (see below, pp.113-16), it is possible that St George was of interest not only because he was a knight, but specifically because he was the Virgin's knight.

Chapel, Westminster feature the king, his wife and children with St George as their patron saint,[48] and during the winter of 1347-8 Edward founded the Order of the Garter with George as patron, and also the Chapel of St George at Windsor Castle. A large alabaster reredos was commissioned for the chapel; its subject is unclear, but there was certainly at least one cycle of the life of St George in the chapel.[49] The first formal celebration of St George's Day at Windsor seems to have taken place in April 1349;[50] Jonathan Bengston notes that the order was founded under the patronage of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin and Edward the Confessor in addition to St George, but St George soon became the dominant patron.[51] The first explicit

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47. Fol.3r, illustrated in James (1913), p.5. St George and the king have a very similar presentation, both wearing armour covered by a tabard and epaulettes. The saint's tabard and epaulettes bear his red cross, whilst the king's are charged with lions, as is the shield presented to him. A second manuscript dating from the earliest years of Edward's reign features St George as a prominent subject. The Douce Hours (c.1325-30), fol.1r, shows Thomas, Earl of Lancaster (d.1322) with St George. Lancaster was a leading figure in the opposition to Edward II, and was executed for treason following the Battle of Boroughbridge. Edward III unsuccessfully pressed the pope to canonise Lancaster, and Lucy Freeman Sandler claims that the placement of an image of him at the head of a series of images of saints was intended to suggest his sanctity: Freeman Sandler (1986) pp.95-6. She further claims that the juxtaposition of Lancaster and St George was intended to suggest the reading of Lancaster as a symbol of England ~ 'England and St George' ~ but this is perhaps overambitious. The connection between Lancaster and St George could be based on chivalry, perhaps indicating that he was a favoured saint of (a) Lancaster, and (b) his champion Edward III. The fact that this rather modest manuscript was not intended for royal use ~ it was apparently created for use in the diocese of Lincoln ~ seems to indicate that interest in the saint was by no means confined to Edward's immediate circle.

48. Tristram (1955) pp.206-09 and plate 5. The figures are disposed in an arcaded framework; St George leads the males of the royal family towards the high altar.

49. '.j. tabula lignea...cum platis et ymaginibus cupreis deauratis, continens passionem sancti Georgii' was placed on a small altar opposite the high altar. There was also a reliquary, previously in the possession of the bishop of Lincoln: '.j. vas oblungum de berillo clausum ex utraque parte cum argento, et .j. crux desuper et arma sancti Georgii in que continentur .iij. ossa' [Vale (1982) p.195, citing Ashmole, Roll 47, m.2].

50. Vale (1982) p.83.

51. Bengtson (1997) p.321.

reference to George as the patron saint of England occurred in 1351, when it was written that 'the English nation...call upon [St George], as being their special patron, particularly in war'.[52]

It seems that there was an explosion of interest in St George's cult in the early and middle years of the fourteenth century, and military imagery was a dominant feature. The early fourteenth-century sculptures in the Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral include images of St George raised from the dead and armed by the Virgin, apparently to fight the apostate emperor Julian;[53] images of the saint and the emperor are found in the contemporaneous Queen Mary Psalter and Smithfield

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52. Wilson (1976) p.21, citing Elias Ashmole, The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter (London, 1672). Baring-Gould notes that Thomas of Walsingham claims that Edward called on St George's aid at the siege of Calais in 1349; the rout of the French which followed may have directly led to St George replacing St Edward the Confessor as patron saint of England: Baring-Gould (1888) pp.314-15.

53. The same image occurs on a boss, c.1382, in the west walk of the cloister at Norwich cathedral: James (1911) p.13. This story seems to have come to western Europe through a collection of miracles of the Virgin and originally involved the Greek soldier-saint Mercurius; in England St George seems to have been substituted for this little-known saint [Rushforth (1937) p.174], although this incident does not occur in any written life of St George and is not alluded to in the Acta Sanctorum, even in the section specifically on England. The Golden Legend gives an account of the assassination of Julian the Apostate by St Mercurius, stating that Julian had threatened to raze the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia following an argument with St Basil over a gift of barley loaves. St Basil had a vision of the Virgin summoning St Mercurius to despatch Julian, and the following day he visited the soldier's tomb to find that his lance was covered in blood; shortly afterwards he was informed that Julian had been murdered by a mystery assasin: The Golden Legend (1993), volume I, pp.128-30. Versions of the legend of St Mercurius circulated in England from the thirteenth century in collections of miracles of the Virgin, the Speculum historiale of Vincent of Beauvais and Gerald of Wales' Gemma ecclesiastica, amongst other texts: Lewis (1995) pp.275-76. The Lambeth Apocalypse, c.1250-55, illustrates a legend of the Virgin resurrecting the soldier-saint [fol.45, illustrated in Lewis (1995) figure 214]; the device on his shield is very close to the cross of St George, and this may indicate the source of the English visual tradition which substitutes St George for St Mercurius [see also Hildburgh (1933) part I, p.124]. Suzanne Lewis notes that the origin of the motif of the Virgin arming her miles christianus probably lies in St Paul's use of terminology such as the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation: Lewis (1995) p.276.

Decretals, and the rather later Carew-Poyntz Hours (c.1360).[54] The fragmentary

brass commemorating Sir Hugh Hastings (d.1347) at Elsing features an equestrian

image of St George in a strongly military context,[55] and a standing image of St

George without his dragon in stained glass at Barton-on-Humber (Lincolnshire),

dated to c.1334-40, presents St George as a purely military figure.[56] An image of St

George in glass at Heydour (Lincolnshire), dated to c.1360, also shows the saint

without his dragon, but accompanied by the traditional English patrons SS Edward

the Confessor and Edmund. All three are wearing armour, and this unique

presentation tends to emphasise their joint role as the protectors of England from its

earthly enemies. Edward III's adoption of St George as patron of his Order of the

Garter was perhaps a reflection of this military interest;[57] St George's presentation as

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54. James (1895) pp.48, 63-65. In later visual cycles of St George Julian the Apostate seems to disappear from the narrative: at St Neot, Stamford and La Selle St George seems to be resurrected in order that he should kill the dragon (on the St Neot and Stamford cycles see below, pp.119-28). However, it is interesting to note that the late fifteenth-century wall paintings of the miracles of the Virgin on the north side of Winchester Cathedral Lady Chapel include three subjects from the story of St George resurrected to kill Julian the Apostate; M.R. James has suggested that the subject probably also appeared in the wall paintings on the north side of Eton College Chapel, dated 1479-1488. The re-emergence of this form of the narrative in English material at this late date tends to imply that the two forms co-existed. On the Winchester and Eton imagery see James (1907).

55. Hastings was a distinguished leader in the early years of the Hundred Years' War, and the military weepers on his brass are known to have been his companions in the Gascony campaign of 1345-6. The brass is illustrated in Stone (1972) pp.164-6, figure 4; a detail of the St George roundel is illustrated in Hartshorne (1906) plate iv.

56. A standing figure of St George in armour, again without his dragon, appears in a South English Legendary, c.1400-20, which probably originates from Cambridgeshire [Bodleian Library, ms Turner 17, fol.91v]. The relatively late date of this work indicates the longevity of interest in the iconography of the saint as an isolated armed knight. This image is reproduced in Scott (1996) catalogue number 45, figure 186.

57. Penny Hebgin-Barnes links the Heydour glass to the success of Edward's military campaigns, and suggests that the design may have been inspired by the Battle of Poitiers (1356), when the huge ransom obtained for the release of the

an armed equestrian figure made him particularly attractive as a patron to knights who fought on horseback.[58] St George's military associations also made him popular with Edward III's successors, most notably Henry V.[59] When Harfleur was captured Henry set up the banner of St George alongside the royal standards over the town gates, and under the terms of a statute of 1388 he declared that English soldiers must wear St George's cross, and that they had the exclusive right to do so.[60] The Bedford Hours (c.1423) features an image of Henry's brother John, Duke of Bedford with St George in Garter robes, an apparently unique treatment (fol. 256v) (plate 54). It has been plausibly argued that this is actually a deathbed portrait of Henry, presented as his favourite saint, entrusting his kingdom of France to the regency of his brother.[61] Edward IV too was interested in the saint: a window in the north-west transept at Canterbury Cathedral, c.1482, shows Edward kneeling at a prie-dieu decorated with an image of St George. In 1475 he began to rebuild St George's Chapel at Windsor, possibly in thanks for the saint's aid in the recovery of his

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French king led to a period of considerable prosperity. The window's patron, Henry Scrope, was actively involved in this victory: Hebgin-Barnes (1996) p.xlviii.

58. Juliet Vale has commented that the Order of the Garter was based on the concept of two finely balanced tournament teams which could provide the apogee of chivalric encounter: Vale (1982) p.91. This observation helps to explain the dominance of St George among the patrons of the Order noted by Bengtson (see note 51, above).

59. Richard II has also been linked with St George, notably in the Wilton Diptych, where the king is shown about to receive a red-cross banner from the infant Christ. The banner can be interpreted as either the emblem of St George, or the flag of the Resurrection, or as standing for both. The presence of the apparent map of England, 'the Virgin's Dowry', on the orb on top of the banner tends to underline the association of St George's flag with England: Gordon (1993), p.58.

60. Bengtson (1997) p.325.

61. Rowe (1962) pp.61-62, 64.

crown.[62]

St George's appeal to these English kings, and to the knights who served them, seems to be based on his status as a model of chivalry. Quite why he was perceived in this way is unclear, as St George has no well-founded claim to be a military saint, merely being reputed to have been a tribune in the Roman army. Certainly there is little to link this pseudo-historical figure with the dashing knight on a white charger so beloved of the popular imagination. As with so many other aspects of his cult, it is difficult to be sure when the chivalric ideal became important as an adjunct to his legend. The Crusades certainly added impetus to the growth of his cult in Western Europe, as some crusaders visited his shrine at Lydda, and stories abounded of soldier saints appearing to aid the Christians at critical moments. These heavenly warriors included SS Theodore, Demetrius, Maurice and Mercurius,[63] but St George was perhaps the most famed, especially for his appearances at Jerusalem and Antioch in 1098. Besides the 'Lewes Group' wall paintings, the earliest image of St George in England is found on the tympanum of St George's church at Fordington (Dorset), dated to c.1100, almost exactly contemporaneous with these ghostly appearances. Like the Hardham image, the saint is shown engaged in battle with an enemy army. Interestingly, at Fordington, St George is not himself wearing armour, but he holds a lance which is thrust into the mouth of a fallen knight.[64] A cognate image occurs on a Norman tympanum at Damerham (Hampshire) (plate 38); this time St George appears to be wielding a

62. Bengtson (1977) p.327.

63. Wilson (1976) p.13. It has been claimed that these four warrior saints were identified as the assistants of the Archangel Michael, and were all believed to have died in the persecutions of Decius and Diocletian: Frend (1993) p.50.

64. Gordon (1907), n.p.129. This may have been a copy of a similar carving on the tympanum of Constantine's Church at Lydda which is said to have been there in the Crusaders' time.

sword rather than a lance.[65]

The Motif of St George and the Dragon.

The subject of St George attacking a fallen human enemy seems to be generally superseded by the saint fighting a dragon. The extension of the legend to include the dragon episode seems to have been essential in the development of St George in the chivalric model, as it presents him in the guise of a gallant Christian knight who defeats the ultimate enemy. The motif of St George fighting the dragon is by far the most frequently depicted subject drawn from his iconography; indeed, it is one of the most popular images in Christian art, with several hundreds of medieval examples extant.[66] Plates 38 and 39 show two typical examples of the motif drawn from the fifteenth century, with the dragon placed in the conventional position under the horse's hooves and the saint spearing it in the mouth with his lance. The kneeling princess looks on, whilst her watching parents are visible at a window in the distant city. Plate 40 shows a variant form: the wounded dragon has broken the lance, and St George holds aloft his sword, ready to strike the fatal blow. A further variant shows St George on foot rather than mounted, trampling the dragon underfoot; plate 41 is an example in early sixteenth century glass in Leicester. In

65. A further example of this subject may well occur on the capitals of the chancel arch at Wakerley (Northamptonshire) [Anderson (1938), p.195]. We should note that the Damerham image shows the human enemy being trampled by the hooves of the horse: this is very similar to the conventional position of the dragon in later images (see plates 39 and 40). I am grateful to Duncan Givans for providing the Damerham photograph, and for discussing it with me. He notes that it is impossible to be sure that this is actually St George, as there are no clear identifying attributes (a very common problem in images of this date), and suggests (rightly, in my view) that the trampling of the fallen human figure is the strongest means of providing an identification.

66. Two particularly useful studies of the motif of St George and the dragon have been published, which consider various aspects of the iconography of this image. Roosval (1924); Didi-Hubermann (1994).

English alabasterwork there are four examples of the subject known or documented,[67] and, with the notable exception of the La Selle panel,[68] they generally seem to correspond well to the treatments in other media. Examples include a panel exhibited in the mid-nineteenth century, once owned by Miss Rogers of Egremont (an engraving of the panel is reproduced in plate 40);[69] a panel, now lost, formerly held by the church of Saint-Ouen in Pont-Audemer (Normandy);[70] and a panel noted by Nelson in 1927, then owned by Messrs Harding of St James, London.[71] The Pont-Audemer panel corresponded well to the Rogers panel (plate 40), and showed St George on horseback, with his sword raised above his head, about to strike a blow against the winged dragon which is trampled by his horse's feet in the conventional manner. The princess stands in prayer near the horse's head, whilst her parents looks on from the town, signified by architecture in the background.[72] There are some differences in the Harding version: the dragon is apparently wingless, the princess stands on the sinister side of the panel, and masonry is indicated in the architecture, but the overall effect is very similar.[73] Standing figures

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67. Cheetham (1984), p.55. Note that the number of lives of St George in alabaster given on the same page is incorrect; there are only two (La Selle and Borbjerg [plates 43-45]), not ten as stated [Francis Cheetham, personal communication, March 1994].

68. See below, p.144, on the treatment of the dragon.

69. This panel is described in Moss (1848-9), 112-116, engraving facing p.114.

70. A photograph of this panel is held in the Departmental Archives of the Eure, Evreux.

71. This panel is described and illustrated in Nelson (1927) pp.115-117, plate II 2.

72. Unlike their position on the dexter side of the Rogers panel (plate 41), the king and queen in the Pont-Audemer version are on the sinister side; there are also some differences in the treatment of the architecture.

73. There is also an alabaster group of St George, the dragon and the princess, dated to c.1370, which originates from northern Spain but appears to be English

of St George and the dragon are also known in English alabaster, for example the terminal saint in the Borbjerg altarpiece (plate 43).[74]

St George is by no means alone among saints in battling with a dragon, but there are significant differences between the legends which make his version unique. A comparison with the legends of SS Margaret and Martha offers some useful insights into the nature of 'standard' dragon narratives.[75] Like St George and many other martyrs, St Margaret was the victim of a heathen emperor who wished her to renounce her Christianity. Whilst imprisoned, she asked God to show her the enemy who was opposing her, and a hideous dragon appeared in her cell. According to some sources it swallowed her, but all are agreed that it vanished when she made the sign of the cross. Margaret's dragon is presented as unreal, with an almost hallucinatory quality,[76] but Martha's was quite different. The beast, said to

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work. This group is rather damaged, but is sufficiently different from these panels to suggest that it represents an earlier form of the iconography in alabaster. Now held in the Kress Collection, Washington U.S.A, it is described and illustrated in Nelson (1926) p.44, plate ix.; we should note that W.L. Hildburgh opines that this group is a Spanish piece inspired by English work [Hildburgh (1944) p.37] However, it is perhaps more significant that the La Selle panel of St George and the dragon does not correspond to either this group or the other panels, particularly in the positioning of the dragon and the fact that St George is wielding a lance rather than a sword, which certainly suggests that this treatment has arisen as a consequence of a specific commission, or to suit the overall design of the retable (see below, p.206).

74. A second example a standing figure of St George and the dragon is in the reserve collection of the Castle Museum, Nottingham [Cheetham (1973), p.52, illustrated p.53; it is also discussed in Hildburgh (1930) p.44]. Like the Leicester dragon in plate 42, the Nottingham beast is an amphisbaena, a dragon with a second head in its tail. M.D. Anderson has commented that the tail-head is bestowed on a monster in order to enhance its horrific qualities as it is then able to move in either direction, and says that it may also be read as a commentary on people who lead a double life. She notes a further example on a boss of St George and the dragon at St Andrew's, Worcester: Anderson (1938) p.64.

75. The most accessible versions of these saint's legends are found in the *Golden Legend* (1993) volume I, pp.368-70; volume II, pp.23-26.

76. Jacobus notes the tradition that the dragon swallowed Margaret and subsequently burst when she made the sign of the cross, but discounts it as

be a whelp of Leviathan, was living in a forest in the Rhone valley near Arles, terrorising those people who wished to use the river. St Martha was living in the area, and was implored by the locals to help. She subdued the dragon by means of holy water and the sign of the cross, and tied him up with her girdle, then stood aside whilst the locals killed him with lances and stones. It is significant that in the earliest written version of his dragon legend, dating from the twelfth century, St George is said to have subdued the dragon with the sign of the cross,[77] but this tradition quickly gave way to a full-scale battle between the two foes, where the emphasis is on brute force and knightly skill rather than supernatural intervention. In this respect George's story is diverted away from the model provided by SS Margaret and Martha, and is perhaps more resonant with the legend of St Michael, who is often illustrated overcoming a dragon in battle. St George and St Michael make a useful pairing, as in the Borbjerg retable, but, again, they are not strictly comparable. Like St Margaret, St Michael faced not a 'real' dragon, but a creature that is explicitly said to be the Devil in the guise of a dragon.[78]

Whilst it seems clear that in the later medieval period St George's dragon was generally perceived as being a 'real' animal of flesh and blood that required more than the sign of the cross to subdue it, we should be aware that this tradition almost certainly sprang from the same source of ideas about good and evil that gave rise to

apochryphal [ibid, volume I, p.369]. The dragon does appear more 'real' in this version, but it is still essentially an embodiment of the devil, rather than a literal dragon such as the monster defeated by St Martha.

77. Hole (1948) p.110. The reference occurs in a Prologue to his *Passion*. Interestingly, there is no sign of the princess's girdle at this point; she gives St George a strand of her hair and he ties it around the dragon's neck to lead it into the town. It seems quite possible that the girdle reference is 'borrowed' from St Martha's legend, or that both instances derive from the same source.

78. In the *Golden Legend* (1993), volume II p.205, it is made clear that the 'dragon' St Michael fought was actually the devil.

the dragons of SS Margaret and Michael, amongst many others. The first English image of St George and the dragon, a crudely carved depiction on a tombstone in Conisborough parish church, is roughly contemporary with the first written account of the dragon episode, but it is significant that visual references elsewhere in Europe and Asia are much older. A seal of St George and the dragon was adopted as the arms of Moscow in the ninth century, and in the first years of the tenth century the same subject was carved in St George's Church, Prague.[79] This iconography seems to be derived from a Byzantine symbol of a double-headed black eagle holding a shield charged with a scene of St George and the dragon;[80] Constantinople had several monuments to the saint, including a ninth-century bronze door representing St George in combat with the dragon. These examples are likely to have been influenced in turn by Greek iconography. From very early times the Greek church represented St George trampling the dragon of the Apocalypse, representing the devil, accompanied by a crowned virgin, representing the Church.[81] Here we have the kernel of the tradition of St George's combat: it began as a stylised way of representing the saint overcoming evil, in almost exactly the same way as St Michael with the Devil/dragon, but gradually came to be treated as a legend in its own right. The evidence is even clearer when we return to the disputed testimony of "Pasicrates". In this earliest written source there is certainly no literal dragon, but the

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79. Hulst (1909) p.43. Hulst's findings are particularly interesting in the light of the frequently-made claim that the first image of St George and the dragon with a certain date is a coin of Roger of Antioch (1112-1119): see, for example, Lapeyre (1936) p.322.

80. Hulst (1909) p.44. This badge is said to have entered Russia with Slavic pilgrims to Constantinople, and it may also have been the source of the motif in France. The arms of the Russian princess Anne, who was a daughter of the King of Russia and Muscovia, and who married the French King, Henry I, in 1051, were St George killing the dragon.

81. ibid, p.13.

heathen emperor is explicitly called a dragon.[82] It is easy to imagine that this slight allegory, taken with the biblical references to the Devil as dragon, gave rise to the early Greek images. Add in the Church represented as a crowned virgin, and the legend of George and the dragon is born, if only as a way of explaining the visual images.

Whilst the actual process may not have been quite so simple, it is noteworthy that Georgian iconography bears a strong similarity to pre-Christian legends of combat between heroes and monsters, and it is likely that the legend of St George and the dragon is a manifestation of these ancient ideas. Christina Hole, in her essay on the myth of St George, has listed no fewer than ten pre-christian archetypes of the dragon slayer, ranging from the Greeks Perseus and Hercules, through Mithra and Indra of Asia, to Sigurd and Grettir of northern Europe.[83] As G.J. Marcus observed in his study of the saint, analogy is no proof of evolution,[84] but even if there was no direct developmental link with St George, it does seem reasonable that his story may have common roots with these classical myths. One analogue that Hole neglects to discuss is the Egyptian deity Horus, who is often depicted overcoming a crocodile; it has been suggested that this manifestation was a direct influence on the Greek image of St George and the dragon.[85]

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82. ibid, p.10.

83. Hole (1948) p.113. It may be significant that Perseus is said to have slain the sea monster at either Arsuf or Joppa, towns which are both close to Lydda, the acknowledged site of St George's tomb: Cross (1974) p.557. Sigurd's battle with Fafnir has also been identified as a parallel to Samson's struggle with the lion [Talbot (1984) p.21, citing Martin Blindheim (details not given)], which itself presents another possible analogue for St George.

84. Marcus (1929) p.5.

85. Hulst (1909) p.13.

In his study of the role of St George in English folk culture,[86] Bob Stewart observes that the monster/dragon is a universal symbol of primordial chaos which must be controlled by an intelligence of Light, a struggle which was Christianised in order to harness the pre-existing belief system of newly converted peoples. If we turn back to the early legend of George, we find further evidence for this argument. The motif of death and resurrection that is so important in Pasicrates' and some later medieval accounts is strikingly reminiscent of ancient customs concerned with the fertility of both soil and animals. The archaic Spring Festival featured dramatic practices such as the King of Year, a male figure who was said to symbolise the annual cycle of seasons. At his ascendancy he killed his predecessor, and was killed in turn one year later. Originally this tradition was practised literally, but later it was treated in a metaphorical sense, with a symbolic battle between the outgoing and incoming kings, and a recognition that this was the eternal essence of spring, rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the winter death. The haunting image of the 'Green Man', the pagan foliate face which sits so uneasily in Christian churches, is really St George in a pre-Christian guise. It acts as a reminder of his role as an icon of fertility; in fact 'Green George' is a name sometimes given to him.[87] The surviving Mumming plays, in which St George or his analogue 'King George' takes a leading role, emphasise this aspect of the tradition, and tend to make great play of the death of George and his resurrection by a St Michael figure, usually in the guise of 'the Doctor'.[88]

Another aspect of St George's role in folk culture highlighted by Stewart is the

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86. Stewart (1977) p.63.

87. ibid p.68.

88. On this motif in the traditional 'sword dance' see Hulst (1909) p.109.

fight between the hero and various human foes, such as the Turkish Champion,[89] an element which may well inform the motif of the combat with dragon. Stewart likens this dramatic trope to the ancient theme of 'the two brothers', symbolising light and dark, summer and winter, mutually dependant forces locked in a struggle where each temporary victory is merely the forerunner of temporary defeat. The motif of the battle between George and a human enemy does not appear in extant medieval legends, but it is a feature of visual cycles of St George, such as Borbjerg, St Neot, and the Valencia Altarpiece (see below, pp.118; 128; 139), as well as the early imagery at Hardham, Damerham and Fordington. E.K. Chambers notes that in Northern English folk drama the Turkish Champion is generally substituted by a similar character known as the Black Prince of Paradise, Paradine or Paladine, who is also known as the 'Morocco Dog' or 'Morocco King'.[90] This seems to be another allusion to the visual imagery, or, more credibly to common literary sources, for St George's human foes vary according to where the tale is told. The glass at St Neot (Cornwall) (plate 53) apparently shows St George fighting the Gauls (see below, p.128), but this episode is conspicuously absent from French cycles. Meanwhile, in the Valencia altarpiece he fights the Moors, a very suitable opponent for work with a Spanish audience. It could be that a version of this tradition influenced the Northern English folk drama.

St George's presentation as a knight in his combat with the dragon and his human enemies is allied to another aspect of his cult: his role as the champion of the Virgin Mary. The precise origins of this motif are unclear, but the link is certainly evidenced in the late twelfth-century *Golden Legend* version of his story, for it is stated that the king of Silene built a magnificent church in honour of St George and

89. Stewart (1977) p.64.

90. Chambers (1966) p.28.

the Virgin following the saint's victory over the dragon and conversion of the city.[91]

Altars with a compound dedication to St George and the Virgin are known, for example in the mid sixteenth century at the church in Towcester (Northamptonshire)[92] and the link is also evidenced in pairings of St George and the Virgin in artefacts such the Great Seal used by Edward III towards the end of his reign,[93] a fifteenth-century latten candelabra recorded at the Temple church in Bristol,[94] which combined a figure of St George and the dragon with a statuette of the Virgin and Child, and the pairing of St George and the Virgin and Child on the decoration of a tomb niche at Ratcliffe-on-Soar (Nottinghamshire).[95] The connection also appears in various medieval carols,[96] and it has been suggested that St George's banner appears in the Wilton Diptych specifically to highlight the association of the Virgin with England.[97] Furthermore, the motifs of the resurrection

91. *Golden Legend* (1993) volume I, p.240. The motif of the double dedication occurs in virtually all the English versions of the dragon legend (see Table 3), and their relationship is also stated explicitly in some versions: 'men callis hym oure lady knycht' (*Scottish Legendary* I.14); 'oure ladyes owen knyght' (Lydgate I.85). It is also noteworthy that the French chronicler Fontenelle relates that when a relic of St George was discovered washed up on a beach in Normandy in the eighth century three churches were built, one dedicated to St George, one to the Virgin and one to St Cross; it is certainly possibly that the choice of the first two dedications is a reference to the link between St George and the Virgin (see below, p.222).

92. The altar is mentioned in the will of James Glastebery, 1534, who leaves 2 shillings to the light [Serjeantson and Isham Longden (1913) p.418].

93. See above, note 46. The seal is illustrated in *Age of Chivalry*, catalogue number 672.

94. The candelabra, which was destroyed during the Second World War, is noted in Cook (1961) p.204.

95. The tomb in the niche is that of Ralph Sacheverell (d.1539) and his wife, but the niche decoration is clearly part of a different scheme as the tomb effigies obscure the figures of St George and the Virgin and Child.

96. For occurences in carols see Child (1956) volume III p.294; volume IV p.499.

97. Bengtson (1997) p.324; see also note 59, above. Bengtson also comments that

and arming of St George by the Virgin are a clear indication of the perceived link between the two: as noted above (note 53), the English narrative associated with these subjects underwent considerable change, with St George appearing to have been substituted for St Mercurius.[98] Unlike the resurrection of St George by the Virgin, the arming of St George by the Virgin does occur in a non-English work, the Valencia altarpiece (see below, p.137), which implies that the motif was known outside England.[99] Associated subjects also exist, such as the obeisance of St George before the Virgin, found at Windsor (see below, p.140), and there is also an instance of the Virgin knighting St George with a sword whilst a pair of angels hold his shield and horse, in a late fifteenth century wall painting at Astbury church (Cheshire), where it is combined with an image of St George on foot, encountering the kneeling princess. Significantly, the Virgin is not shown arming the saint, by placing a helm on his head, but in rather dubbing him a knight as an earthly monarch might do; Maurice Keen observes that the presentation of arms was a direct equivalent of

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there was a tradition claiming that St George had been 'brought up' by the Virgin: this seems to be a misunderstanding on his part of the term 'raised' as a synonym for 'resurrected' [ibid].

98. We should note that the link between St George and the Virgin was probably not restricted to the English tradition. A late fifteenth-century alabaster statuette now in Krakov, Poland, which does not appear to be English work, shows the Virgin and Child alongside a crucifix draped with a dead serpent; on the predella of the composition is a relief carving of St George, mounted, spearing the dragon whilst the princess looks on [Guldan (1966) catalogue number 108].

99. St George is also showed armed by angels alone in several continental examples, such as a relief panel on the pedestal of the St George group in the St Nicholas Church, Stockholm [Hildburgh (1933) part II, p.123], and the predella of a Netherlandish altarpiece, c.1525, at Vreden [Dorsch (1983) p.372]. The subject of the saint armed by angels may originate in Reinbot von Durne's early thirteenth-century poem Der Helige Georg (see above, note 7), which claims that an angel brought St George his armour and banner; the existence of this motif in addition to the subject of the saint armed by the Virgin demonstrates that the imagery of the arming of St George was not drawn from a single source.

being made a knight.[100]

It seems likely that the connection between St George and the Virgin may also be an intimation of the association between the saint and the concept of chastity, for the virginal Queen of Heaven would surely require a virginal champion. St George's sexual status is never identified explicitly in medieval narratives of his life, but several elements combine to give this impression. One notable factor is that in Barclay's version of the legend St George is said to be offered the princess's hand in marriage as a thank-offering following the defeat of the dragon (see Table 3). This casts him in the heroic mould of Perseus, who does indeed marry Andromeda, and his refusal to accept the offer clearly marks him out as chaste.[101] Furthermore, the emphasis on many and varied tortures in his legend is at odds with the construction of the vast majority of male martyrs, but completely in accordance with the standard narrative of the female virgin martyr.[102] An identification of the dragon as a

100. Keen (1984), p.67. It is also noteworthy that the Virgin holds the Christchild, a motif which also appears in the Windsor subject of the obeisance of St George. On the Astbury image see Gill (1995a); Gill (1995b).

101. It is notable that in post-medieval versions, such as Johnson's *Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendome* (see note 4, above), St George does marry the princess, a reversion to the 'original' narrative device which seems to underline changes in contemporary attitudes to chastity and the importance of family.

102. In these legends there tends to be a strong emphasis on physical suffering, to the extent that they have been described as pornography for the contemporary mediaeval sado-masochist. This trope is discussed in Wogan-Browne (1994) and Salih (forthcoming, 1999); I am grateful to Sarah Salih for discussing her research with me. Wogan-Browne makes a strong argument in her paper, but draws a distinction between female virgin martyrs and male martyrs such as St George: she notes that in the *Passio* of women there tends to be an emphasis on the suffering of the entire body, whilst tortures applied to men tend to be more specific, such as feet shod with red-hot shoes or nails driven into the head [Wogan-Browne (1994) p.177; p191 n.44]. However, I would argue that this construction is not a feature of later medieval narratives of St George, and certainly does not appear in visual material where motifs such as being boiled and being dragged by a horse clearly suggest a whole-body experience [see Tables 3 and 5]. It may be possible to extend this argument to other male saints too, such as St Lawrence; I am grateful to Robert Mills for discussing with me his research on the possible homo-erotic overtones of

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sexualised creature also tends to highlight St George's antithetical state (see Appendix 3).

Medieval versions of the legend of St George.

If we are to fully understand the La Selle retable, it is important that we should be able to make some assessment of how conventional its iconography is, to ask the question: "If a late-fifteenth century English alabaster worker were asked to carve a six-panel cycle of St George, what subjects would he or she expect to include, and how closely does the La Selle cycle conform to this model?" Given the wide variation of subject matter that was included in both written and visual lives of the saint,[103] it is crucial that we try to establish some baseline of which subjects were most likely to be included in a cycle of this date, and the manner in which these subjects were conventionally presented. A huge number of medieval visual cycles of St George are extant, covering a long chronological period and a wide area of Europe.[104] In order to keep my terms of reference within manageable bounds, I propose to restrict my argument to those works which, by virtue of their provenance or patronage, form the most effective comparative works. Of these, the most important is the only other extant English alabaster retable of St George, at Borbjerg

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this imagery.

103. The variety of motifs of torture, outlined in Tables 2 and 5, are a particular example of this trait.

104. A list and precis of 102 surviving medieval cycles is given in Dorsch (1983). This is a PhD dissertation presented at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, which provides a useful source of factual information and bibliography, but only limited analysis. The cycles are organised chronologically, from a Passional at Stuttgart (dated to 1120-25) through to a table at Colmar from the late seventeenth century. However, Dorsch does omit several cycles, including the La Selle retable, the Bedford Hours roundels, stained glass at Coutances, and the woodwork at St George's Chapel, Windsor. The Stamford cycle is included, but it is incomplete, omitting the first four subjects.

in Denmark (plates 43-45). The two other known cycles of the life of the saint produced in England, both in glass, have each suffered some degree of loss but are sufficiently well recorded to allow comparisons to be made. The window at St Neot in Cornwall (plate 53) survives in a restored form; the cycle at Stamford in Lincolnshire is now totally lost but was fortuitously recorded before its destruction during the seventeenth century (plates 47-50).[105] Three medieval cycles of the life of St George are known to have been made for English patrons: images in wood at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle (plates 56-61), and sequences in two French manuscripts, the Bedford Hours (plate 54) and the Salisbury Breviary (plate 55), and they are also considered below.[106] These works are all compared with the Valencia altarpiece (plates 65 and 66), a large cycle which seems to have had no link with England and hence forms a useful 'control' which helps to establish which subjects or motifs, if any, can be ascribed to English influence. The subjects depicted in all these works are summarised in Tables 4 and 5, for ease of comparison.

The Borbjerg retable, dated to c.1480,[107] consists of five panels and two

105. There may well also have been a further cycle of St George in fifteenth-century glass in Norfolk. Two scenes of St George, (1) the saint, mounted, meeting the princess and her lamb, and (2) St George in combat with the dragon as the princess looks on, occupy the third panel of the west window at North Tuddenham church, although they seem to originate from another church. In addition there is part of a decollation scene in a window on the north side of the nave; this need not be St George, but it may well imply a lost cycle [Woodforde (1940) pp.19-20, 23; the first two scenes are illustrated in plate iv. See also Woodforde (1950) pp.59, 62-63].

106. A few other medieval English cycles of the saint do exist, but they have been omitted from this study because of a fragmentary state (the North Tuddenham glass, see above, note 105), or because they are entirely concerned with the dragon story and hence are not comparable with the La Selle cycle (for example, a fifteenth-century carved chest in the Chapter House at York Minster, noted in Davidson and O'Connor (1978) p.156, and a second chest, apparently carved from the same design, in the Victoria and Albert Museum).

107. Cheetham (1984) p.58. Philip Nelson, who also dates the work to c.1480, discusses the retable in the context of devotion to St George, and briefly mentions the La Selle retable: Nelson (1920b) p.199.

terminal statues (plates 43-45):

(1) A standing figure of St George with the dragon under his feet. The saint wears armour and his left hand holds a shield charged with a red cross on a white field. His right hand holds a lance which is thrust into the dragon's mouth.

(2) St George, who wears only a loin cloth, is tortured by three men. The torturers hold small implements which they are applying to the saint's limbs. This could be read as a scene of flaying, or perhaps as burning with torches; the loss of colour on the body of the saint makes it impossible to know which reading is intended. A crowned and bearded figure with arms upraised looks on from the background, on the dexter side; this is clearly the emperor Dacian, as he is presented in an identical way in the next panel. A second bearded figure stands beside Dacian.

(3) This is a scene of the trial before Dacian, combined with the torture of the poison. Dacian is seated on a throne, with crossed legs, a gold crown and a large sword, on the sinister side of the panel. At his feet lies a decapitated male figure in a robe figured with a gold pattern. St George, who wears a short white robe with gold trimmings and pointed red shoes, stands in the centre of the composition, turning towards a bearded figure on the dexter side. This man wears also wears a robe figured with a gold pattern, but in addition he has a red hat. He holds a golden chalice containing a red dragon: this identifies him as Athanasius, the magician who tries to poison St George. The saint's right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing over the chalice and a speech scroll, the lettering lost, is placed above his head: this implies that he is depicted in the act of nullifying the poison. A fifth figure kneels in the foreground of the dexter side. He is also bearded and wears a gold-patterned robe. It is possible that this is an entirely separate person, but, given the resemblence between the robes, it seems likely that we are shown Athanasius three

times in this panel: trying to poison St George, then, having failed and then converted to Christianity, about to be executed by Dacian, and finally, beheaded.

(4) In the central, taller, panel St George is shown before a heathen temple. He again wears the white robe and red shoes, and kneels in prayer on the sinister side of the panel. A speech scroll, lettering lost, rises vertically before him. Behind him stand three bearded men: Dacian in his gold crown, holding a short red wand with gold ends, and two others, both wearing hats, one red, one black. Alongside them, on top of a temple structure painted to resemble flames, is a grotesque idol holding a flesh-hook. In the lower part of the temple, under an arch supported by twin pillars, stands a bearded man in a long white robe, who is presumably the heathen priest.

(5) This panel combines scenes of the Resurrection of St George and the Arming by the Virgin. St George kneels in full armour on a grassy hillock in the centre of the panel. On the dexter side stands the Virgin, who holds a large helm over the saint's head.[108] An angel holding the saint's spear and shield stands behind the Virgin, whilst a smaller angel kneels to attach his spurs. The saint's horse, wearing a red saddle and bridle, stands in the background on the dexter side of the panel. The sinister side is occupied by an angel holding a large sword in a scabbard figured with a blue floral pattern. The end of the sword is obscured as it enters an empty chest-tomb; the graveclothes are patterned with a blue trefoil motif, and a similar design is picked out in the gold area which indicated the lower part of the tomb. The presence of the empty tomb is a clear indication that the Virgin has resurrected St George in order to arm him as her knight, as seen at La Selle.

(6) St George, fully armoured and mounted on his horse, plunges his lance into the

108. The helm has been entirely hollowed out by undercutting, a feature consistent with the high quality of carving in this cycle, in contrast to the La Selle cycle where the sense of the helm's hollowness is merely conveyed by the application of dark paint.

breast of a fallen knight, who lies sprawled in the foreground on the dexter side. This figure is bearded and holds a shield in his left hand (device lost). He is mounted, but his horse has fallen beneath him. Behind the fallen knight is a tower with a portcullis, and three men armed with sticks emerge. It is unclear whether these men are allied with St George or with his antagonist, although the style of their helmets tends to suggest the latter.[109]

(7) St Michael, identifiable by his prominent red-feathered wings, stands with a dragon under his feet. His position is a mirror image of St George at the other end of the cycle: his right hand holds a shield,[110] and his left holds a lance which is thrust into the mouth of the dragon.

Despite their apparent chronological proximity, the Borbjerg version of the life of St George is very different that to contained in the La Selle cycle. One of the most obvious differences is the choice of subjects. The Borbjerg cycle includes several episodes in the saint's legend that are missing from La Selle: torture, the casting down of the idol in the temple, the survival of poison, the fight with human foes. Likewise, La Selle includes scenes of baptism and execution which are missing from Borbjerg, and the dragon episode is accorded a far higher status with one panel devoted to it rather than a mere visual reference in a terminal figure.[111] Some subjects are common to both cycles, but the treatments are very different. For example, at La Selle the Resurrection and Arming of St George by the Virgin are

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109. As St George is the patron saint of the nearby town of Holstebro (indeed, an annual festival of St George is still held in February each year), it seems likely that the Borbjerg retable was made as the result of a specific commission. It is thus likely that St George's enemy is intended to be read as Swedish in this version, as he is said to have aided the Danish in their battles against Sweden.

110. The device on this shield is abraded, but it seems to be a small red cross on an oval boss.

111. For other treatments of St George in English alabaster see above, pp.106-07.

treated on two separate panels, whilst in Borbjerg they are combined in one panel; this tends to have the effect of diminishing the importance of the Resurrection as it is literally sidelined by the Arming scene. Another good example of the differences between the two English alabaster cycles is the figure of the demon idol, bearing an object that appears to be a flesh-hook. This seems to be a conventional rendering of an idol in alabaster ~ a very similar idol stands on a pedestal in an alabaster panel of St Katherine at the British Museum[112] ~ but the effect of positioning the idol in a strategic place on the roof of a temple in the central panel is quite different from placing it on a pole in among a group of men in the Trial scene. In the La Selle retable the idol seems to function as little more than a signifier of Dacian's heathen beliefs, but in Borbjerg it is used in a more complex way, demonstrating not only Dacian's error but also St George's power: anyone familiar with the legend would know that he cast down the idol from its position of honour, as seen in Friedrich Herlin's version of this episode (plate 46). A third significant difference between the two cycles is the overt presence of St George's red cross device at Borbjerg, a motif which is notably absent at La Selle.

The cycle of the life of St George, formerly in the chancel windows of St George's Church, Stamford (Lincolnshire), and dated to the middle of the fifteenth century, is lost, but was largely recorded in the seventeenth century.[113] It is

112. Illustrated in *Society of Antiquaries exhibition catalogue* plate xxii, no.60.

113. This cycle, commissioned by William Bruges, the first Garter King of Arms, is recorded in the herald William Dugdale's *Book of Monuments*, now in the British Library [Add. ms. 71474, fols 152-162]. The St George cycle formed the upper level of the chancel windows; the lower level was occupied by figures of the Founder Knights of the Order of the Garter. This lower level has received a considerable amount of attention, notably in the form of debate over the identities of the figures, and in consequence it has entirely overshadowed the upper scheme in the literature concerned with the glass. For example, the historical background on William Bruges and the commissioning of the chancel windows is fully discussed in London (1970), although no attention is given to the St George cycle itself.

comprised of 21 subjects, but it is likely that there were a further eight subjects; the evidence concerning the placement of the lost images is inconclusive,[114] but it seems likely that three or four are missing from the beginning of the cycle.

(1) This is an apparently unparalleled subject of St George standing before a well, with a woman and a water jug lying on ground. It is unclear whether St George has cast them down or is about to raise them up. The saint is nimbed, but is not identified by his red cross device: despite the presence of the sword he does not wear armour. It seems likely that this is a subject drawn from the obscure early part of St George's career, and perhaps reflects a lost English tradition associated with the narrative of the resurrection of the saint by the Virgin, a subject which appears shortly afterwards.

(2) St George, still nimbed but now wearing armour with a red cross tabard and shield, is depicted on foot (plate 47). He uses a sword to fight a group of six armed men, who are not identified by any device. Two of the figures are already falling, but the other four men threaten the saint with lances and swords.

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114. Dugdale travelled around the Midlands, East Anglia and Yorkshire during the summers of 1640 and 1641, in company with the limner and arms painter William Sedgwick, recording monuments, epitaphs and heraldry. It seems likely that they made notes and sketches on the spot, and that Sedgwick later worked up the sketches into the illustrations that we now have. The time delay involved, which seems to have been no less than three weeks in the case of St George's, Stamford, must lead us to question the reliability of this source. The legends that Dugdale wrote on Sedgwick's illustrations suggest that the first four lights are omitted, also three from the eastern window and the first light from the southern side, but the absence of certain scenes, particularly the arming of St George, seems to indicate that Dugdale may not have been entirely accurate in his scheme. The omission of an arming scene at Stamford seems especially strange in the context of a patron who is so concerned with the role of the knights. Three otherwise unrecorded scenes occur in what purports to be a drawing of the window made in September 1716 [Devizes, Wiltshire Archaeological Society, William Stukeley's Commonplace Book (1721) fol.100] (plate 51); the drawing seems to suggest two scenes in a kitchen, or possibly a baker's shop, and an outdoor scene with two figures, one standing and one kneeling. All three scenes are unparalleled in the iconography of St George, and there are good grounds for doubting the authenticity of the image. The question of the reliability of the evidence relating to the Stamford cycle is, discussed further in Riches (1997).

(3) St George, wearing armour and a red cross tabard, kneels before an altar bearing a figure of the Virgin and child (plate 48). He is about to be beheaded by a bearded man in armour and a plain red tabard who wields a large axe.

(4) St George is resurrected by the Virgin and three angels from a stone tomb-chest, which is depicted in an outdoor site beneath a substantial archway (plate 49).[115]

(5) St George, mounted and armed as a knight, fights the dragon. In the main this is a very conventional treatment, with the dragon in the classic pose, under the horse's hooves, the princess kneeling in the background and her parents watching from a fortified building. The only exceptional aspect is the lack of a lamb.

(6) This subject shows the baptism of the king, queen and princess by St George, who still wears his armour but now has a sleeved tabard. A group of five other converts are waiting their turn; they are all naked, and the foremost, a woman, covers herself rather ineffectually with a white sheet.

(7) A scene of the trial of St George, who is still in armour and tabard and escorted by three armed guards. Dacian does not seem to be enthroned, but is seated before a cloth of honour. This is a rather unusual treatment, as Dacian has his hand on the head of a woman who appears to be denouncing the saint. Her identity is a mystery, as there is no known tradition which corresponds to this image.

(8) This subject is in two parts. On the sinister side St George is shown being pushed into a prison by a guard whilst Dacian, holding a sceptre, looks on; on the dexter side he is in prison, preaching to a wimpled woman who kneels in prayer outside. She is almost certainly to be identified as the Empress Alexandra, who was converted by St George.

(9) St George, now stripped and wearing only a loincloth, lies on a rack. Two

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115. As noted above (note 114), the lack of a scene of the Arming of St George following this subject is a curious omission, and tends to suggest that it may be a loss.

torturers pull on the ropes tied to his body, and Dacian looks on amid a group of six other men.

(10) St George is tied to a cross and scourged by two torturers. Dacian and another figure look on.[116]

(11) This subject appears to be St George raked or burnt by torches. He is seated and assaulted by three torturers, who hold indistinct implements against his body.

(12) St George is boiled in a cauldron, which seems to contain water rather than lead, placed on a fire. Two torturers stir the liquid whilst a third, seated on the ground, looks on.

(13) The torture of the millstones, in a rather unusual version. Rather than being suspended by his hands, St George has been seated on a mechanism with a large blade, a millstone tied to each foot. Two torturers are present, one of whom appears to be operating the mechanism in order to raise the blade and cut the saint in half. Dacian also looks on.

(14) St George is bound to a post and a torturer holds a chalice to his lips. This image is probably the poisoning of St George, although there is no sign of the conventional dragon in the chalice. Three other torturers, armed with large axes, look on.

(15) This is a curious image which shows St George baptising a figure of indeterminate gender whilst two people, one a bearded man, look on. It seems likely

116. According to Dugdale's scheme the next three images are missing. The implication is that all are tortures, but, given that these lost subjects include the central image from the East window, it is possible that this one may have had a different subject. A sketch which was probably prepared for Hollar's *History of the Garter* [Oxford, Bodleian Library ms Ashmole 1131, fol. 162, c.1664-72] shows the central image of the lower scheme as a standing figure of St George in armour, accompanied by a squire who holds his horse, standing before a canopied tent (plate 52). If this sketch is accurate it suggests that the composition of this central light was quite different from the others, and it seems likely that its counterpart in the upper scheme may have been a specifically complementary image, such as Christ blessing the scene, for example, rather than an image from the life of St George.

that the convert is Athanasius, the magician who became a christian when his poison failed to kill the saint, but the fact that St George wears armour is rather troublesome. The purple of the robe held by the bearded man could be significant, although the only royal or imperial figure converted by St George, apart from the rescued princess and her family whom we have already seen, was Dacian's consort the empress Alexandra. The short hair on the baptised figure, in stark contrast to the princess and queen's long hair in the previous baptism, makes it unlikely that this figure is female, although the short hairstyle on the near-naked woman in the first baptism scene (subject 6) could imply that this figure is a short-haired woman, or a woman with her hair tied up in some way.

(16) St George, again wearing only a loin-cloth, is suspended by his hands and sawn vertically in half by two torturers. It is interesting that the saw is not shown passing through the saint's chest; the torturers here are defying logic as they apparently float in mid-air to hold the saw at his head.[117]

(17) This seems to be a second scene of resurrection (plate 50). St George is shown lying a similar chest tomb to that in subject 4 (plate 49), but wearing a loin cloth rather than graveclothes. St Peter stands on the sinister side, holding his key, and next to him stands a male figure, who is almost certainly Christ, raising the saint.[118] Two angels also assist.

(18) St George is shown on the wheel. This version of the wheel torture is unusual in that there are no knives or spikes, but seems to work on a ratcheting system operated by two torturers. A third torturer, holding a large axe, looks on, as does the

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117. Comparison should be made with the versions of this torture in the Bedford Hours and the Valencia altarpiece (see below, pp.132; 141).

118. This scene is problematic as it seems to have no analogues. St Michael, angels and the Virgin are variously credited with resurrecting St George, but there does not seem to be a tradition of Christ performing this function.

Emperor Dacian.

(19) St George, who kneels and has his hands tied to a post, is scourged be a torturer with a seven-headed whip. Two other torturers look on. Dacian is also present, holding a sword rather than a sceptre, and next to him is a man dressed in clerical robes.

(20) St George kneels, awaiting his beheading by an executioner holding a large sword. Dacian and another figure, of indeterminate gender, look on from within a building in the background.

(21) The final scene is of a golden reliquary, which presumably contains relics of St George. It is displayed on an arcaded structure, with four male religious of two different orders in the background and three lay people kneeling in the foreground.[119]

The Stamford cycle forms an interesting counterpart to the English alabaster treatments of the life of St George at Borbjerg and La Selle. Almost all the narrative elements of these cycles are present; only the episodes of the Arming of St George by the Virgin and the casting down of the idol in the temple are omitted, or perhaps lost. Perhaps more striking is the extra dimension that this version adds to the alabaster treatments: there is a strong emphasis on torture, with 9 of the 21 documented subjects are concerned with some form of torture, whilst torture only appears in two panels at Borbjerg, in the form of burning and poison, and seems to be entirely absent from the La Selle version. Furthermore, there is an expansion of the narrative strand which begins with the resurrection by the Virgin in both alabaster cycles, for St George is shown in combat with an enemy army and being beheaded before an altar bearing an image of the Virgin and Child immediately

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119. It may be significant that this scene, with its sudden change of theme, is the only subject which has women in the image immediately below -- William Bruges' wife and their three daughters -- rather than a knight.

before the resurrection (plates 47-49). There are also several other additional subjects, notably the initial subject of St George and a woman at a well, the second baptism, the second resurrection (plate 50) and the final subject of the reliquary of St George. As at Borbjerg, the red cross device is prominently displayed.

The latest English cycle of the life of St George occurs in the north window of the west aisle of St Neot's church in the village of St Neot, Cornwall.[120] It dates from the early years of the sixteenth century and contains twelve scenes (plate 53):

(1) St George fights the 'Gallicani'.[121]

(2) He is beheaded before an altar bearing an image of the Virgin.[122]

(3) St George is resurrected from a chest-tomb by the Virgin, who is crowned and wears a red mantle.

(4) He is armed by the Virgin and angels, one of whom holds a lance and shield whilst the other, kneeling, holds a sword and spurs.

(5) St George fights the dragon, watched by the princess, who kneels with her lamb, and her parents, who are in a tower of the city wall.[123]

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120. The cycle originally occupied the fifth window from the east end of the south aisle. The images are arranged in three rows of four images, reading from the top left. All the windows in the church are discussed in detail in Rushforth (1937) pp.150-190

121. The legend in the glass reads 'Hic Georgius pugnat contra Gallicanos': Here George fights against the Gallicani. Rushforth (1937), p.174, identifies the Gallicani as the Gauls, and gives the plausible explanation that this story may have arisen during the Hundred Years' War, when France was the national enemy, as a variant of the story of St George and the Emperor Julian mentioned above (note 53).

122. The legend reads: 'Hic Gallicani mactant Georgium': Here the Gallicani slay George.

123. The legend reads: 'Hic mactat draconem': Here he slays the dragon.

(6) The trial of St George before a king,[124] robed in red and seated on a throne.

(7) The saint is assaulted by two torturers, apparently using rakes.[125]

(8) St George is ridden as a horse by the emperor's son, who holds a whip above his head. One torturer stands in front of the saint and strikes him with a club; a second stands behind and thrusts a spear into his leg.[126]

(9) St George is hung from a gibbet with a millstone tied to his feet.[127] The emperor looks on from the sinister side of the composition.

(10) A torturer throws the saint headfirst into a cauldron of molten lead,[128] as the emperor looks on.

(11) St George's feet are tied to a horse, and he is dragged through the city. One

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124. Rushforth observes that this ruler cannot be the emperor Dacian, who is distinguished by the arched imperial crown which he wears in later scenes [Rushforth, (1937) pp.175-6]. However, this subject has been heavily restored, and it is possible that an inaccurate restoration is giving a misleading impression. The legend reads 'Hic capitur et ducitur ante regem': Here he is arrested and brought before the king", but this should not be taken as evidence for the identification of the ruler.

125. According to Rushforth, the original form of the legend is 'Hic corpus gu(?)etro [lac]eratur': Here his body is torn with (?). Hedgeland substituted 'eius' (his) for the third word, but this is clearly incorrect as it must be the name of the torture instrument. It cannot be 'rastro' (rake), but it may be the Latinized form of a vernacular or local name of the tool [Rushforth (1937) p.176].

126. The legend of this subject is 'Hic filius imperatoris e(q)u(i)tat super eu(m)': Here the emperor's son rides on him. The panel is largely restored, but the subject and text were recorded in pre-restoration accounts [Rushforth (1937) p.177]. This may be part of an otherwise lost version of the saint's life, perhaps the same version that contained the story of the fight with the 'Gallicani' and the subsequent execution and resurrection by the Virgin.

127. The legend reads 'Hic pendant molarem ad eum': Here they hang a millstone on to him, but this, along with virtually all the rest of the composition, has been restored on the basis of very scant knowledge [Rushforth (1937) p.176].

128. The legend reads 'Hic ponitur in furno cum plumbo': Here he is put into a furnace with lead. Rushforth notes that most of this panel is authentic, but he does question the presence in the foreground, on the dexter side, of a seated monk dressed in blue, and claims that this may originally have been another torturer. [Rushforth (1937) p.176].

man rides on the horse whilst a second holds its bridle.[129]

(12) St George, wearing armour, is about to be decapitated by an executioner wielding a sword. The emperor stands on one side and an official on the other.[130]

· The first two scenes of this cycle are perhaps the most interesting, as they appear to explain the narrative strand of St George resurrected by the Virgin seen in the other English cycles. The first scene shows St George fighting an enemy identified as the "Gallicani"; in the second scene St George has been taken prisoner by them and is beheaded as he kneels at an altar, behind which is an image of the Virgin. St George is then resurrected by the Virgin, is armed by her and goes on to fight the dragon. This explanation of the resurrection and arming of the saint is very interesting, as it entirely omits any reference to the apostate Emperor Julian, the story which appears at Ely and in the Queen Mary Psalter, the Smithfield Decretals and the Carew-Poyntz Hours (see above, p.102). The chronological difference between these works may well indicate the loss of the story relating to Julian and its replacement by the story of the 'Gallicani', a development which evidently occurred sometime between the late fourteenth century, when the Carew-Poyntz Hours includes Emperor Julian, and the mid-fifteenth century, when the Stamford cycle appears to use the 'Gallicani' version.[131] Another point of interest at St Neot is the

129. Rushforth notes that the existing legend is confused, and cites an earlier commentator, Gorham, who gave the unrestored text as 'Hic trahitur cum equo indomito': Here he is dragged with an untamed horse [Rushforth (1937) p.176]. He also asserts that Hedgeland has altered the composition of the two torturers, an interesting observation in the light of the problematic Windsor version of this subject (see below, p.135).

130. The legend reads 'Hic Georgius decollatus est': Here George is beheaded. It is possible that the official standing opposite the emperor is intended to be read as a secretary in cleric's robes, as at La Selle and Stamford.

131. It is perhaps useful to note that in the earlier version of the resurrection story emphasis is placed on the idea St George being resurrected in order to kill Julian the apostate (see note 53, above), with no reference to the question of how the hero died initially. In the later version it is made clear that he died because of his devotion

preoccupation with images of torture seen at Stamford: if we discount the beheading, five of the twelve images here are concerned with torture. Given the fact that the dragon story is passed over in only one image, this seems a very remarkable skewing of the cycle. The only obvious omission from the St Neot cycle is a scene of the baptism of the rescued princess and her parents; the implication seems to be that the dragon story and its associated imagery was of little interest to the patron or designer of this window. There seems to be a desire to show St George as a believer who suffered for his faith, not a valiant Christian hero who overcomes the evil dragon and converts the heathen. As at Stamford and Borbjerg, the red cross motif occurs in several of the images.

There are three cycles of the life of St George which are known to have been commissioned by an English patron but are not of English manufacture. The two earliest are both found in manuscripts created in France in the early fifteenth century for John of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford. The Bedford Hours were created to mark Bedford's marriage to Anne of Burgundy in May 1423, and the portrait image of John, Duke of Bedford and St George (fol. 256v) is surrounded by five roundels depicting various tortures undergone by St George (plate 54).[132] Reading down the left side of the folio the first four subjects are:

(1) St George, wearing white shorts, is seated on a horse, leaning forward so that his torso rests on the animal's neck. Two torturers beat the saint's back with sticks.

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to the Virgin, and that she resurrected him in tribute to his devotion, to be her champion generally rather than for any more specific assignment.

132. London, British Library, Add. ms 42131. Janet Backhouse observes that, in the absence of text, it is impossible to be sure that these roundels do depict St George. She claims that it has been suggested that the images represent the torture of the patron saints of the five leading members of the Order of the Garter, but, as these tortures all appear in various literary versions of the legend, this explanation seems unlikely [Backhouse (1990) pp.55-56, source not given].

(2) St George, again wearing white shorts, is shown tied to a saltire cross. A torturer holding a long thin stick or wand stands on the dexter side, whilst Dacian looks on from the sinister side.

(3) St George, now dressed in a white robe, is seated facing to the dexter side, with a torturer standing on either side of him. The torturers hold a two-handed saw at the saint's head, and are preparing to saw him in half vertically.

(4) St George is shown in a large cauldron over a fire, his hands in an attitude of prayer. On the dexter side a torturer stirs the fire with a long pole, whilst Dacian stands on the sinister side, and holds his right index finger out towards the saint as if addressing him.

The final subject is placed in a roundel on the top right of the folio:

(5) St George, again wearing white shorts, is shown being thrown headfirst into a well by two torturers.

This treatment of the saint's life is apparently unique: with the exception of very early works like the Hardham wall painting, it is extremely unusual to present St George without any reference to the dragon story, and it is rather surprising to find an apparently complete cycle of a saint's life that makes no reference to either the trial or the death of the saint. The cycle is clearly not intended to be read as a narrative, as no chronological order is implied by the arrangement of the roundels, but presumably acts as an illustration of the Christian forbearance exhibited by the saint. Whilst St George is not presented with his red cross device in the images of torture, the motif does occur several times in the main image of the folio.

The Salisbury Breviary,[133] dated to 1424-35, gives a much fuller version of the saint's life (fols 447v-449). The dragon story is treated in three episodes, all in the same large panel (fol. 448), and the narrative of St George's trial, torture and

133. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 17294.

execution is related in a further ten small images:

(1) Fol. 447v, top left. The first subject shows St George in the heathen temple. He has a speech scroll, 'O(mne)s dij gencium demonia',[134] and is perhaps deriding the idol, a golden image on a pedestal, rather than actively throwing it down. Two other figures are shown. One kneels on the sinister side in front of St George, with his hands in prayer. This is probably Dacian: the figure is not crowned, but wears a red and gold patterned outfit that the emperor wears later. The second figure also kneels.

(2) Fol. 448. The main subject on this folio is the dragon story (plate 55). On the sinister side in the background the king, queen and princess look out of the window of a castle labelled 'Silene'. In the centre St George, mounted, speaks with the princess who stands in the gateway of the castle. They each have a speech scroll; George's reads: 'Filia quid p[rae]stolari', the princess's reads 'bone iuvenis fuge'. In the background St George, still mounted, spears the dragon in the mouth, whilst the princess kneels in prayer behind him. In the foreground the princess leads the dragon with a girdle, whilst St George, having dismounted, spears the dragon through the neck from behind. A group of five citizens flee from them. St George wears armour throughout and has a little crest of a red cross on a white background on his helmet. He carries a shield bearing the same device in the scene of the combat with the dragon.

(3) Fol. 448, bottom left of page. This seems to be the trial of St George before Dacian. The saint, who is nimbed and wears a white robe, stands before Dacian, who is now crowned. The latter has a speech scroll reading '(Statere tamen) ex q(ua) provincia huc advenisti'. A second figure stands behind Dacian; he is dressed exactly like Dacian's companion in the first roundel.

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134. The transcriptions of speech scrolls is taken from Dorsch (1983) pp.316-17.

(4) Fol 448, top right of page. This appears to be a second version of the trial, almost identical to the previous subject. This time the saint has a speech scroll, reading 'Christianus et deï servus sum', which seems to indicate a continuation of the conversation between the saint and the emperor.

(5) Fol. 448, middle right of page. A second scene in the heathen temple. The image of the idol is identical to the previous temple scene. Dacian, who has a speech scroll reading 'Erras georgi accede (et immola deo apollini)', gestures at the saint with his left hand, and up at the idol with his right hand. St George turns his head away from idol.

(6) Fol. 448, bottom right of page. St George stands on the left. Dacian on, the right, has a second figure behind him. In the centre at the top is a nimbed head looking down on St George, identified as Christ in the saint's speech scroll: 'D(omi)no ih(es)u ch(risto)'. This appears to be a confrontation between the saint and the emperor; it does not seem to be paralleled in English material.

(7) Fol. 448v, top left of page. St George is prepared for torture. Bending forward, wearing white drawers, a blue robe is pulled over his head by a torturer dressed identically to the second figure in the previous scene. Dacian stands to his right, and a woman in behind St George, holding his shoulders. She has a speech scroll, reading 'Dacianus ira repletus (missit et extentium membratum ungulis lacerari)'.

(8) Fol. 448v, middle left. St George has salt (or some other substance) poured into his wounds. He kneels in prayer, with his torso smeared with blood. A torturer leans forward with a white bottle in each hand and pours something onto George. Behind him are Dacian and another figure. A scroll bears the legend 'Deinde lateribus (eius lampades applicare)'

(9) Fol. 448v, bottom left. St George is scourged. He stands in the centre with his

hands behind him, evidently secured to a large grey post. There is no visible blood. The saint looks over his shoulder at the scourger. On the sinister side, a torturer recognisable from scene 7, the preparation scene, holds a container [of salt?], with his right hand inside it. A second torturer has a scourge raised above his head ready to strike. Dacian observes from the dexter side, holding a long grey feather in his right hand. A scroll bears the legend 'Salem vero (in vulnera aspergi)'

(10) Fol. 448v, bottom right. A scene of the breaking of the wheel. St George kneels in prayer on the left, and Dacian, a sword at his waist, stands on the right. His speech scroll reads: '(Sanctus dei) p(er)mansit illeus'. In the centre is a broken wheel, without swords or hooks.

(11) Fol. 449, bottom left. The execution. The headless body of St George, dressed in a white robe rather than drawers, kneels at the bottom right. His head is nimbed in red.[135] An angel, with white wings, holds the saint's naked soul. Two executioners stand on the left; the first may be intended to be Dacian, as the robe is the same colour as in previous scene, though it is much shorter here. There is a speech scroll between the second executioner and the angel, reading 'Dacianem vero (cum suis ministris ad palacium properantem)'.

The ordering of the subjects seems slightly unusual, particularly the placement of a scene of St George in the temple before the trial of the saint. The repetition of the temple and trial scenes also appears odd, particularly given the fact that other subjects from the life of the saint have been omitted, such as St George in battle and various other tortures. However, the general sense of the standard narrative is retained, and the red cross device also features.

The final cycle commissioned by an English patron but not of English manufacture is found at St George's chapel, Windsor Castle. The stalls in the choir

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135. The saint is nimbed in gold in all the other panels.

were erected during the period 1477 to 1484, the closing years of the reign of Edward IV. Today there are on the south side of the choir a total of 20 subjects on double-sided carved desk-ends featuring imagery of the lives of St George and the Virgin Mary, of which 16 are apparently original. The entire cycle is considered below, in chapter 6, but the imagery of the ten extant subjects which relate to St George can usefully be summarised here, according to the logical narrative sequence:

(1) lower row, first desk-end, facing east (plate 56). The subject which seems to begin the sequence is an image of the obeisance of St George before the Virgin and Child. This particular motif seems to be unparalleled in other cycles in England, but can perhaps be read as an analogue of the Arming of St George by the Virgin.[136]

(2) upper row, second desk-end, facing east. The next subject seems to be the princess taking leave of her parents. The king stand in the centre of the composition facing towards his daughter who stands on the dexter side. A lamb wearing a collar and lead stands in the foreground, and the king passes the end of the lead to the princess. The queen, who is wiping tears from her eyes, stands behind the king, and two other figures look on from the background. There is no known analogue for this subject in English work concerned with St George.

(3) upper row, second desk-end, facing west (plate 57).This subject shows St George mounted and in full armour, apparently talking with the princess, who stands on the sinister side, partly obscured by the horse's head. She still has her lamb, who looks out from underneath the horse. Presumably the saint is offering to slay the dragon; the only cognate images of this subject in English work are found in the

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136. There is nothing to suggest that a scene of the arming once formed part of this cycle, but we should note that the subject does appear in a desk front at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, on the north side in the west block.

glass of North Tuddenham church and in the Astbury wallpainting.[137]

(4) lower row, second desk-end, facing west. Here St George, mounted, spears the dragon in the lower part of the neck, whilst the princess looks on from the background on the sinister side.[138]

(5) upper row, third desk-end, facing west (plate 58). The next subject shows St George standing astride the dragon whilst the princess leads it towards the town, indicated by a tower on the sinister side.

(6) upper row, third desk-end, facing east. The dexter side of this subject has been heavily damaged, with only a pair of shoes surviving to indicate where St George presumably stood. The king stands in a central position, facing towards the dexter side, and two further men stand behind him. The subject may well be St George demanding the conversion of the town to Christianity as recompense for slaying the dragon. Alternatively, it could be the king offering his daughter's hand to St George, which is a feature of some textual versions, but the absence of the princess from the scene would seem to militate against this.

(7) upper row, first desk-end, facing east (plate 59). St George, wearing armour, appears to be seated on the edge of some kind of board. He is threatened by a group of five evil-doers. This may well be a scene of the stripping of St George, as it seems that he is about to be divested of his armour and placed on the board. Again, this subject is unparalleled in English cycles of St George.

(8) lower row, third desk-end, facing west (plate 60). We now see St George wearing only a loincloth, his usual mode of apparel during torture scenes. He is lying on a board, which is possibly the board indicated in the previous scene, and is being

137. On North Tuddenham see note 105, above; on Astbury see p.112, above.

138. This subject also appears in a misericord on the lower row, west block, of the south side of the choir.

dismembered, with his body parts boiled in the adjacent cauldron. This torture does appear in some textual versions of the life of the saint, but the more usual visual representation is to show St George boiled entire. Three torturers are in attendance in addition to the Emperor Dacian.

(9) upper row, first desk-end, facing west (plate 61). In the next subject St George is shown tied on a hurdle which is drawn by two horses; a rider is falling backwards from one of the horses. A further four torturers or bystanders look on from the background. The torture of being dragged is textual, and appears in the St Neot cycle, but the motif of the figure falling from the horse is apparently unparalleled in written or visual sources on St George.

(10) lower row, second desk-end, facing east. The final subject of the St George imagery seems to be the poisoning. Dacian stands in the background, with a demon on his crown, his right hand raised, a bowl in his left hand. Four attendants stand around him. In the foreground St George stands over the legs of a prostrate man; it seems that the bowl contains poison which has been tested on this unfortunate.

It appears that several subjects have been lost from this cycle. Logic dictates that there really should be an image of the execution of St George, with the saint's soul taken up to heaven. Equally, there is no scene of the baptism of the king, queen and princess, nor of the trial of the saint before the emperor; both these subjects are virtually ubiquitous in extant medieval cycles of St George and their omission seems odd in a cycle of this size. Furthermore, there is no imagery associated with the resurrection of St George by the Virgin, with the possible exception of the obeisance scene. The absence of this imagery may also reflect a loss, but it is perhaps more likely that it derives from the probability that the carvers responsible for the work were English, but working under the direction of a Flemish

designer: the overall impression of the imagery of the desk-ends is that they are outside the established English tradition of the life of St George. However, the four carvings on the desk-ends of the returned stalls are all modern replacements; the subjects they originally contained are unknown, and it is possible that some of these 'missing' subjects were located here. Meanwhile, the number of unique subjects, particularly those associated with the dragon legend, is quite remarkable. There is a sense of disjointure about the cycle, as the evident chronology found in texts and also visual cycles such as Stamford and St Neot, for example, is not borne out by the rather haphazard placement of the Windsor imagery. This presentation could perhaps be due to a rearrangement of the desk-ends, but a more likely explanation would seem to be that the cycle was intended to be decorative rather than didactic. The apparent omission of the red cross device may be deliberate, but the extent of damage suggests that St George's shield may have been lost from several of the scenes (see, for example, plate 58).

The Valencia altarpiece, attributed to the German artist Marzal de Sas and dated to c.1410-20,[139] devotes two large panels and sixteen smaller panels to the legend of St George (plate 65 shows subjects 1, 2, 6 and 10; plate 66 shows subjects 7, 9, 12 and 16). The central panel of the retable shows St George amid a group of mounted knights, assisting James the Conqueror, King of Aragon, to defeat the Moors at the battle of Puig (1237).[140] The lower central panel shows St George, still presented as a mounted knight, spearing the dragon. The princess looks on with her lamb from the background on the sinister side, and the hand of God blesses him from above.

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139. Kauffmann (1970) p.80.

140. The historical background of this image is outlined by Kaufmann (1970) pp.85-86.

The subjects of the smaller panels are as follows:[141]

(1) St George is armed by the Virgin and angels. Unlike the English versions of the subject the Virgin is touching the saint's sword rather than lowering the helm onto the saint's head: this role is performed by an angel. Christ looks down from above and blesses the saint.

(2) This subject depicts the sacrifice of a child and a lamb to the dragon. A man leans through a door in a wicker fence and lowers the child feet first into the unwinged, lizard-like dragon's mouth.

(3) The lot falls on the princess, who stands in the foreground on the dexter side, next to the king on his throne amid a throng of citizens.

(4) Having subdued the dragon St George harnesses it. The princess stands alongside him with her lamb.

(5) The baptism of the king, queen and princess.

(6) The trial before Dacian. The emperor sits with crossed legs on the dexter side, amid a group of attendants.

(7) The first scene of torture shows St George tied to a saltire cross. He now wears white shorts; two torturers rake his flesh whilst a third tighten his restraints and a fourth uses a hammer to work on the cross. Dacian, holding a sword, looks on from the dexter side with two companions.

(8) St George is depicted nailed and tied with chains to a table. Two torturers secure the bindings whilst Dacian and a group of attendants observe from the background.[142]

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141. The ordering of the small panels has evidently been disrupted at some point in the altarpiece's history. The ordering here is that used by Kaufmann.

142. Kaufmann notes that this scene is paralleled in a textual source, a Catalan version of the life of St George found in two late fourteenth-century manuscripts: Kaufmann (1970) p.84.

(9) St George is shown imprisoned, visited by Christ and a bevy of angels. Three guards sleep outside the prison on the sinister side.

(10) The torture of the poison. St George, still in armour and a long robe, stands in the centre before Dacian and a group of attendants. He holds a small chalice. In the foreground a man kneels in prayer; he is being strangled by an executioner standing behind him. This seems to be the execution of the magician Athanasius when he converted to Christianity.

(11) St George is tortured on a mechanism of two large wheels with sharpened points. One torturer operates the mechanism whilst Dacian and his attendants observe from the dexter side.

(12) This particularly gory scene depicts St George sawn in half vertically. He has been tied to a wooden frame, and is being cut apart by two torturers wielding a double-handled saw; his intestines are spilling from the lower part of his abdomen. Dacian and a group of attendants look on from behind a low wall, and the hand of God blesses the saint from above.

(13) St George is shown in prayer, in a cauldron of molten lead over a fire. One torturer tends the fire whilst a second stirs the cauldron. Dacian and a group of attendants look on from the background on the sinister side.

(14) This subject shows the episode in the heathen temple. St George, in a long robe, stands in the foreground looking up to heaven. The idol topples from its pedestal and fire from heaven burns the temple, the idol and its priests.

(15) St George is dragged naked through the city. His feet are tied to a horse, which is ridden by a torturer. Dacian observes from the dexter side.

(16) St George, kneeling in prayer, is beheaded by an executioner; his soul is carried up to heaven by two angels on the sinister side. On the dexter side Dacian

looks up to see the fire from heaven which is descending to kill him and his companion.

Comparison of this very full cycle with the English (produced or commissioned) visual cycles and the written legends of St George allows us to draw several important conclusions about the ways that veneration of St George were expressed through narrative in the late medieval period (all cycles referred to are summarised in Tables 1-5). The most obvious conclusion is that devotion to the saint was very widespread, with considerable interest in both the dragon and martyrdom legends.[143] A second conclusion is that the red cross device is very commonly used (it occurs in several scenes of the Valencia altarpiece, demonstrated in plate 65), and this highlights the omission of the device at La Selle. Another conclusion is that local traditions inform the iconography of individual works: hence we see the Catalan legend of St George tortured on a table in the Valencia altarpiece, and the English legend of the resurrection of St George by the Virgin at Borbjerg, Stamford and St Neot. However, we should also note that the arming of the saint by the Virgin appears in the Valencia altarpiece as well as English works, and that the apparently related image of the obeisance of St George before the Virgin occurs at Windsor, where it is almost certainly the work of a Flemish designer. This may well imply that the motif of the arming was free-standing, *ie* that it was not necessarily associated with the resurrection legend, but reflected the generally recognised link between the Virgin and St George where he functioned as 'our Lady's knight'.

We should also note the huge variation in the nature of the tortures included in these versions: a comparison of the different treatments in the visual cycles is

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143. This finding can be further substantiated by reference to the catalogue of cycles of St George given in Dorsch (1983).

given in Table 4, and it is clear that there is no one torture that appears in all versions. Even allowing for losses, a factor of particular relevance in the Windsor cycle and probably Borbjerg too, it is still remarkable that there is so little consistency. The tortures most commonly included are the rack, with or without simultaneous burning of the flanks with torches, and the wheel, but these tortures are mentioned in most of the literary versions but only a few of the visual cycles. Even more surprising is the number of lives or cycles of the saint that include a unique torture; for example, at St Neot he is ridden like a horse by the Emperor's son and in the Bedford Hours he is thrown into a well. Whilst it seems unlikely that the designers or makers of these cycles deliberately invented new tortures, and may well have been influenced by lost works or even the simple misinterpretation of other traditions, it is clear that there was a wide range of torture motifs available to be used in the construction of any one cycle. The same observation can be made of the treatment of other episodes in the legend: consider the frequency with which the subject of St George throwing down the heathen idol is used, or the baptism of converts. It seems that the Trial scene and the beheading are the only constant factors, although it must be admitted that it would be a very inadequate version of a martyrdom that dispensed with these two vital subjects.[144] It is notable that, unlike many martyrs, St George does not appear to have a specific torture associated with him; on the contrary the many tortures he is variously subjected to can all be found

144. Whilst the Trial scene is indeed ubiquitous, the decollation of George does not appear in either the St George's Chapel, Windsor, or Borbjerg cycles. I would contend that the scene has almost certainly been lost from the former of these, and possibly from the latter, although there is a likelihood that the beheaded figure at Dacian's feet in the Trial scene at Borbjerg is intended to stand as an archetype of the fate that will befall St George himself. It has been suggested to me that the figure is actually intended to be St George, that is, he appears twice in the same panel, but I am inclined to think that this prostrate figure is a parallel to the man under Dacian's feet in the La Selle version. The fact that his clothes are not painted in the way that St George is depicted in the other panels, and indeed as he stands before Dacian in the same panel, seems to lend credence to this theory.

in the legends of other saints. Some, such as scourging and beating, are fairly general, but others tend to be linked to one martyr in particular. For example, the poison is associated with St John the Evangelist, the wheel with St Katherine, and the saltire cross with St Andrew, but St George is allotted each of these torments in various versions of his legend. Quite why this happened is unclear: it is possible that the patrons of works relating the life of St George, or perhaps the artists or writers, tended to select the tortures they assigned to him, perhaps on the basis of other saints they were interested in. Given the fact that the legend of the resurrection of St George by the Virgin does not appear in extant literary sources, it is quite possible that an oral tradition of the saint's life allowed episodes to be freely grafted onto his legend, in a way that may have been less acceptable with other saints whose legends were more firmly fixed.

To return to our question about the subjects that a late fifteenth-century English alabaster carver would expect to include in a cycle of St George, it seems clear that there are no strict rules. The trial and beheading scenes would almost certainly be included, as would a reference to the dragon legend, because they appear to be a vital part of the narrative. The resurrection by the Virgin is also likely to be included, because it is a peculiarly English subject. But the other scenes can be drawn from a range of options, including many gruesome tortures, the baptism of converts, the throwing down of the heathen idol, and combat with human foes. Doubtless chronology and geography will have had roles to play, as a motif such as the battle with the Gauls or the Moors is likely to have been more or less popular at certain times or in certain places. Sadly, insufficient English (or English-commissioned) cycles of St George survive to enable us to construct a firmer aetiology of presentation or motif.

The La Selle cycle of St George.

The extent to which the La Selle retable conforms to any 'standard' presentation is thus very difficult to determine, but in some respects the cycle does seem to stand alone. One reason for the differences between the La Selle cycle of St George and other treatments is a simple matter of space: with only six panels it is clearly far smaller than the St Neot or Stamford cycles, and hence the carver has fewer subjects available in which to cover the essentials of the legend. Yet this cannot totally explain the choice of subjects. A technique that we could usefully designate as the 'Borbjerg solution' could have readily been used: push two closely related subjects, such as the resurrection and the arming by the Virgin, into the same panel, and hence free up a whole panel for another subject.[145] The other, more significant reason for the difference, is that the 'essentials' of the legend are by no means clear cut. As we have already observed there is seems to be little congruence between the different versions of the life of St George, whether literary or visual, and thus it would appear that the determining factor in the choice of subjects is personal preference, or prejudice. The wishes of the patron are likely to have been the main influence, but in the absence of records of commission it is impossible to do more than theorise. What is clear, however, is that the artist or craftworker is unlikely to have been given an entirely free hand in the choice of subjects and presentation.

Given that we are almost certainly looking at the product of a commission, it would seem permissible to theorise about the agenda that lies behind the St George cycle. Comparison with the other English cycles, and cycles made for English

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145. This 'combined presentation' of two subjects could account for the lack of an execution scene in the Borbjerg retable (see above, p.121).

patrons, makes it clear that several important, not to say *typical*, subjects are neglected, of which a torture scene is perhaps the most glaring omission.[146] However, it should be noted that, even in the absence of torture, the cycle still makes good narrative sense. The resurrection of St George by the Virgin leads naturally into the arming scene. By moving directly from the arming scene to the combat with the dragon, a strong visual link is made in terms of the armour: in one scene the knight is being armed, in the next he is putting the armour to good use in the chivalric tradition. Again, the transition from the dragon scene to the baptism is made to seem natural. The male and two female converts are easily read as the king, queen and princess of the preceding panel: they are becoming Christians in fulfilment of their bargain with St George so that he would kill the dragon. Then we move into the Trial scene, which reads as if the Emperor has found out about St George's evangelism with the princess' family, and challenges his Christian beliefs. The saint refuses to recant, and so we arrive at the final scene of execution. The only real sense of jarring comes in the first scene: why do we start with a resurrection, with no mention of the preceding death? The explanation for this apparent anomaly may lie in the fact that at St Neot it is the Gauls who are credited with the first execution of St George: if the La Selle retable was a Norman-French commission (as argued below, in Chapter 6), the inclusion of this subject could have been a potential source of embarrassment. The absence of the red cross device at La Selle can also be explained by a Norman-French commission: during the Hundred Years' war the red cross device was strongly identified with English soldiers, and it has been observed that St George is usually given a white cross in

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146. The reasons for the omission of images of torture in the La Selle retable are obscure, as are the reasons for the emphasis on torture in the Stamford cycle, for example. However, it is possible that these very different approaches may reflect quite specific patronage agendas, perhaps as expressions of particular devotional responses to the hagiography of St George.

Watts, D. (1999), *Small worlds : the dynamics of networks between order and randomness*, Princeton University Press.

Watts, D. J. & Strogatz, S. H. (1998), 'Collective dynamics of 'small-world' networks.', *Nature* **393**(6684), 440–442.

Xulvi-Brunet, R. & Sokolov, I. (2005), 'Changing correlations in networks: Assortativity and dissortativity', *Acta Physica Polonica B* **36**(4), 1431–1455.

Yuan, B., Chen, K. & Wang, B. (2004), 'Growing Directed Networks: Organization and Dynamics', *Arxiv preprint cond-mat/0408391* .

Zhang, Z., Rong, L. & Guo, C. (2005), 'A deterministic small-world network created by edge iterations', *ArXiv Condensed Matter e-prints* .

arrangement is discussed in detail in chapter 5, which considers the resonances set

up by the juxtaposition of the two cycles of St George and the Life of the Virgin.

Chapter Four: The Life of the Virgin Cycle

This chapter considers the development of the cult of the Virgin, with particular reference to the iconographic subjects featured in the La Selle retable. The textual sources of the subjects are discussed, and parallels for each panel, in both alabaster and other media, are offered. The significance of the combination of subjects at La Selle is also considered, with reference to cycles of the Life of the Virgin in alabaster and other media.

In contrast to the panels of St George, the cycle of the Life of the Virgin may appear to be a rather predictable choice of subject matter for an altarpiece. Mariolatry was, of course, a cornerstone of western Christianity throughout the Middle Ages, and the surviving English alabaster work of the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is ample testament to the popularity of the cult.[1] In this sense the respect accorded to the Virgin in the La Selle retable is hardly surprising, yet we must be wary of dismissing treatments of the Life of the Virgin too lightly. The subject matter may be familiar, but it should not be assumed that works concerned with the Virgin are always simple to interpret, or that they are devoid of meaning beyond the *hyperdulia* of which the Mother of God was deemed to be worthy.

Close examination of the iconography of individual works featuring the Virgin may reveal a considerable amount about the nexus of concerns of the patron, and of the wider society in which he or she lived. Such interests may be more immediately evident in a work concerned with a less ubiquitous figure, where the imagery may be obviously related to some aspect of the patron's life,[2] but the Virgin

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1. Table 6, which notes the numbers of extant English alabaster panels with subjects drawn from the life of the Virgin, gives some impression of the popularity of the cult. In addition, over 30 alabaster retables devoted to the Virgin are known (see below, p.182).

2. The Hastings family's interest in St George as a knight is an example of this. On Hastings and St George, see above, p.103

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too can be a useful vehicle for expressing this kind of personalised approach. The Gospels testify to her historical existence, but the information given about her is notoriously limited to a few confused references.[3] In some respects this paucity of evidence has had a beneficial effect on the 'construction' of the figure of the Virgin. She is more malleable than many saints: she is not tied to the formulaic narratives of the early martyrs or the biographical requirements of later saints, but is apparently free to be constructed in many different forms.[4] Within her cult she appears in roles as diverse as intermediary with Christ, perfection of womanhood, purveyor of mercy, and guardian of the poor; many of these roles are attributed to her in visual or literary idioms which seem to be bear only a tangential relationship to the early sources of the narrative of her life.[5] The chosen mode of representation of the Virgin in any given work is likely to be deeply resonant, particularly where it veers away from a standardised approach, such as an unusual combination of subjects, and it can give us important clues to the patron's concerns.

Initially, we should be aware of the way that devotion to the Virgin changes

3. For example, the 'fact' of the Virgin's attribute of virginity appears to be based on a simple mistranslation. As Julia Kristeva has noted, the Semitic term which denotes the socio-legal status of a young unmarried women was rendered into Greek as 'parthenos', a word which carries specific connotations of the psychological and physiological condition of virginity. Kristeva comments that the failure to correct this mistranslation is indicative of the problematic nature of the western Church's attitude to women and female sexuality: Kristeva (1986) p.166.

4. The Virgin is not unique in this respect, but other saints who fulfil such a variety of roles are rare. One example is the Virgin's mother, St Anne, who fulfils roles as diverse as the embodiment of the Immaculate Conception and a symbol of money-making. For a full discussion see Riches (1992).

5. References to the Virgin in the Gospels are famously rare, but a considerable amount of information is contained in the Apocryphal Gospels, particularly the second-century *Book of James*, or *Protevangelium*, and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*. These works can be found in James (1926). The *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, a slightly later amplification of these works, was the basis of the version used in the *Legenda Aurea* and other written narratives: Lafontaine-Dosogne (1967) p.371. A useful account of the early sources is given in Warner (1990), pp.25-33.

over the medieval period: any one work associated with her cult will inevitably be a product of its own time as well as simple reverence. Feasts dedicated to the Virgin first appeared in the fifth century, but the reasons for this development are obscure. Geoffry Ashe has noted a trend in the Byzantine Church for the Virgin to annexe some of the feasts which were originally dedicated to Christ.[6] The feast of the Circumcision was already known as the Purification at the time of the Council of Ephesus in 431; in the fifth century a similar transition is seen, with the Feast of the Conception of Christ being transformed into the Annunciation. In the second half of the sixth century the Byzantines decreed holy days in honour of the Virgin alone, and in the seventh century the Roman Church followed this example: the Purification was observed from around 600, the Assumption from 650, and the Nativity and Presentation of the Virgin were introduced between 650 and 700. Independent litanies of the Virgin did not develop until the thirteenth century,[7] although the Ave was used as a hymn of praise for the Virgin from the twelfth century.[8] The introduction of printing led to a significant increase in the diffusion of literature concerned with devotion to the Virgin, such as the sermons of Bernard of Siena (d.1444). The writings of Jean Gerson (d.1429) were also very important in encouraging meditation on the Virgin as a way of developing a richer spiritual life. The motif of the mantle of the Virgin as a symbol of Mercy was also an innovation of the fifteenth century,[9] and it is indicative of the broadening range of ideas associated with the mother of Christ.

The narrative of the life of the Virgin would have been well known to both the

6. Ashe (1976) pp.199-200.

7. Carroll (1967) p.366.

8. ibid p.366.

9. ibid.

patron(s) and carvers of the La Selle retable, and their knowledge would have been based on traditions that informed popular drama as well as the visual arts, literature and sermons.[10] The *Mary Play*,[11] a mid fifteenth-century work now forming part of the N-town manuscript, is probably quite representative of versions of the first part of Virgin's life which would have been known throughout Europe.[12] Meanwhile, other cycles of mystery plays contain episodes associated with the Nativity of Christ, the Adoration of the Magi, the Purification, and the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin as part of the overall schema of the Redemption teleology. Together these plays form a useful source of comparative material for the iconography of the Virgin cycle at La Selle,[13] and it will be useful to begin by reviewing the narrative presented in these sources and comparing it with the evidence of visual treatments, in both alabaster and other media, for each subject.

The Nativity of the Virgin

The *Mary Play* outlines the story of the Virgin's life up until the time just before the Nativity of Christ, beginning with her own conception. Her parents, Anne

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10. The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew has been identified as the principal source for the narrative of the life of the Virgin, and its influence is clearly apparent in both medieval French and English mystery plays: Lafontaine-Dosogne (1967) p.371.

11. The edition referred to is *The Mary Play from the N. town Manuscript*, ed. Peter Meredith (London, 1987).

12. The *Mary Play* is likely to be an East Anglian work, but, given that it follows so closely the narrative of the 'standard' European texts, the *Legenda Aurea* and the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, it seems reasonable to assume that it is indicative of works that would have been performed elsewhere.

13. As noted above, p.14, there has been some debate on the question of the influence of drama on the iconography of English alabaster work. The following comparison of the *Mary Play* with the La Selle cycle is not intended to suggest that the play had any *direct* influence on the design of the retable, but merely tries to establish the type of narrative of the life of the Virgin which was in circulation in England in the period from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century.

and Joachim, were a wealthy, pious couple who longed for a child. Their faith was still strong after twenty years of infertile marriage,[14] but when Joachim went to sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem he was turned away because God had still not given him a child. In his shame he retreated to his flocks in the hills, and, hearing nothing of him, Anne despaired. Thinking he must be dead, she bewailed her childlessness and her widowhood. Joachim was then visited by an angel who told him that Anne would bear a child to be named Mary,[15] who would be the mother of the Messiah, and instructed him to go home to Jerusalem. Anne was the subject of a similar annunciation; she proceeded to the Golden Gate of the city,[16] where they met. They kissed, and the Virgin was thus conceived.[17]

The Nativity of the Virgin is omitted from the *Mary Play*, possibly because of

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14. The period of infertility is not mentioned in the *Mary Play*, but the Angel's speech at the Annunciation to Joachim draws a comparison with Old Testament characters, such as Isaac and Sara, who were granted a child after ninety years [ll.181-7]. This tends to imply a long period of infertility; and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, I, states that the period was twenty years. The *Trinity College Life of St Anne* [MS Trinity College, Cambridge 601, printed in Parker (1928)] makes a direct comparison between Anne and Hannah, using the same name for both characters:
> But thow, Anne, that art reserued
> loye now togedyr long tyme happyer
> Then Anne the modyr of Samuel fer. [ll 628-30]

15. Louis Réau claims that the angel involved in the annunciations to Joachim and Anne was Gabriel: Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.155. He gives no source for this information, but it does form an interesting link with the annunciation to the Virgin.

16. The meeting at the Golden Gate appears in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, III.

17. The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin is now a dogma of the Church, but in the late medieval period it was a highly contentious subject. The author of the *Mary Play* neatly sidesteps the issue by stating, through the mouth of Contemplacio, the narrator, that time constraints precluded any mention of the niceties of the conception and birth:
> How Our Lady was conseyvid and how she was bore,
> We passe ovyr at, breffnes of tyme consyderynge [ll.256-7]
However, Joachim's description of the kiss at the Golden Gate as a 'kusse of clennesse' [l.241] does serve to underline the lack of carnality associated with the conception of the Virgin.

difficulties of staging a convincing birth.[18] A full description is given in the Apocryphal

Gospels, however, complete with references to the bevy of attendants and luxurious

surroundings which are routinely depicted in images of the event in various media

throughout the later medieval period.[19] At Ely, the Nativity of the Virgin in the Lady

Chapel sculptural cycle, dated to the early fourteenth century, shows two attendants

with St Anne, and a trestle to support the baby's bath.[20] In the Lovell Lectionary,

c.1408, two midwives are shown behind the canopied bed, one holding the baby,

and a table with chest on it is depicted in the foreground.[21] A similar treatment is

used in European versions of the image. For example, in the version by the Master

of the Scots Altar (Benedictine Abbey of the Scots, Vienna),[22] c.1470, two midwives

in the foreground are bathing the baby whilst St Joachim offers food to his wife as

she lies in bed. Three midwives appear in a painting of the Nativity of the Virgin,[23]

dated to 1510/11, by Hans Süss (Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig); one, in

the foreground, bathes the baby, a second offers the new mother a drink, whilst the

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18. Likewise, it seems that the actual birth of Christ is rather passed over in plays of the Nativity. For example, in the Coventry Shearmen and Tailors' play there is no indication in the dialogue or stage directions to indicate the actual moment of birth, which appears to take place whilst the action concentrates on the Annunciation to the shepherds. Peter Happé comments that there is considerably more emphasis on the Passion than on the Nativity in the cycles [Happé (1975) p.230]; he makes this observation in connection with the miracle of the unbelieving midwife's withered arm, but it is possible that the theological emphasis was due to some extent to the technical difficulties of presenting a convincing birth on stage.

19. Réau suggests that the motif of three women at present at the Nativity of the Virgin is based on the classical concept of the three Parcae, or Fates: Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.162.

20. James (1895) p.26.

21. BL Harley 7026. This image is illustrated in Scott (1996) figures 58, 59, catalogue number 10.

22. Illustrated in Uitz (1990) plate 43.

23. Illustrated in Uitz (1990) plate 18.

third looks on.[24]

Other panels of the Nativity of the Virgin in English alabaster seem to conform to the same basic form as the La Selle treatment, which tends to suggest that this subject was highly standardised. St Anne is invariably shown lying in a canopied bed whilst the swaddled baby is held by a midwife; the number of other attendants and their positions is variable. The best-preserved panel was purchased by the Antiquities Museum in Rouen in 1997 and was exhibited in the exhibition *D'Angleterre en Normandie* in 1998.[25] It shows four midwives standing behind St Anne's bed, one arranging the bedclothes, a second holding a lidded jug, a third holding the baby, who is wrapped in a cloth, and a fourth looking on from the backgound. A fifth midwife is stirring a long-handled cooking pot which she holds over a small fire in the centre of the foreground. A large screen, painted black, shields the bed from the fire. A little bed, rather more ornate than its equivalent at La Selle, stands on the dexter side, whilst a small chair occupies the sinister side. The bed is surmounted by a double canopy, with a pendant lamp hanging in the centre. A similar example was recorded in a retable of the Life of the Virgin at Mondoñedo, Spain;[26] this featured three standing midwives behind St Anne's canopied bed. The

24. A much earlier work, a late fourteenth-century minature from a Pseudo-Jaquemart, also shows three midwives, two of whom are bathing the baby in the foreground, which would tend to demonstrate the longevity of the motif. However, the midwives are augmented by a group of St Joachim in conversation with another man, presumably a doctor, behind St Anne's bed. This feature does not appear to have become standard. This minature appears in BN Ms. lat. 919, fol. 28; illustrated in Uitz (1990) plate 44.

25. The panel, accession number 97-14, is illustrated in the exhibition catalogue *D'Angleterre en Normandie* (1998) p.69.

26. A lithographed sketch of this panel is published in Villa-amil y Castro (1865) plate 3. The panel is discussed in Hildburgh (1944) p.29. It seems that Hildburgh did not actually see the panels at Mondoñedo, but worked from Villa-amil y Castro's article. Hildburgh draws a loose comparison between this Nativity of the Virgin and the La Selle version, although he neglects to mention the figure of the small midwife in the La Selle panel; he also draws a comparison with the Versailles Nativity of St John

first arranged the bed-clothes, the second seems to have had her hands clasped in prayer, and the third held the swaddled child. A fourth midwife stirred a long-handled pot over a fire towards the foot of the bed, with a screen shielding the bed exactly as in the Rouen panel, whilst St Joachim sat beside the head of the bed.

A fragmentary panel in Madrid also depicts St Anne with three women standing behind her bed.[27] The first arranges bedclothes around the new mother's upper body, the second holds the swaddled infant, whilst the third arranges the bedclothes at the foot of the bed. A bed for the infant occupies the foreground, just as in the La Selle treatment, but a small parturition chair, shown face-on, has been added in the right foreground. The left foreground has been lost when the panel was broken, but there is certainly room for kneeling figure to parallel the La Selle kneeling midwife. A further panel of the Nativity of the Virgin at Rouen has been badly damaged,[28] but three figures are indicated behind St Anne's bed. The figure nearest to the new mother is arranging the bedclothes, the second holds the swaddled child, and the third stands in prayer. The head of a fragmentary fourth figure in visible in the left foreground, and may well indicate an attendant cooking.

Interestingly, alabaster panels of the Nativity of John the Baptist seem to follow a very similar model to the Nativity of the Virgin. A panel in the Louvre depicts two midwives behind the recumbent St Elizabeth, one arranging the bedclothes and the Baptist (see p.157 and note 30, below), despite the fact that it has only two standing midwives. Hildburgh does not, however, mention the panel of the Nativity of St John the Baptist which he described as French (see p.157 and notes 31-32), although the form of this panel is clearly reminiscent of this Nativity of the Virgin. Hildburgh does mention the Madrid fragment of the Nativity of the Virgin (see note 27, below), which also features three standing midwives, but the damage in the lower part of the panel makes it impossible to draw definite conclusions about the presence or absence of comparable figures of a small midwife or Joachim.

27. Hildburgh (1916-17) illustrated figure 1; described p.77.

28. Antiquities Museum, Rouen, accession number 1082.2; no provenance, and apparently unpublished.

the other holding the swaddled baby.[29] The kneeling midwife in the foreground has been replaced by Zacharias with his scroll, but the infant's bed still appears. Like the Rouen Nativity of the Virgin, this panel is damaged at the top, so there is no equivalent to the canopy over St Anne's bed in the La Selle panel, but canopies do appear on two other, apparently complete, panels of the Nativity of St John. One panel, in the library of Versailles, features the three midwives in addition to the seated figure of Zacharias with his scroll;[30] this time the infant's bed is missing, as Zacharias occupies the right-hand foreground, and the smaller, kneeling midwife is occupied with stirring a pot which is heating on a tripod-like object. The two other midwives are employed, as usual, in arranging the bedclothes and holding the swaddled child. The other panel,[31] which Hildburgh identifies as French work,[32] shows a total of four midwives in addition to the seated Zacharias, who again occupies the right foreground. The small midwife kneels to stir her pot, which is balanced this time on a rather better-defined tripod over a small fire, whilst three midwives stand behind St Elizabeth's bed. Two of the midwives have their usual occupations, arranging the bedclothes and holding the swaddled child, whilst the

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29. This panel is depicted and briefly described in Hildburgh (1930), p.34 and plate V2.

30. This panel is described and illustrated in Nelson (1920c), p.213, plate 1, and in Hildburgh (1928) pp.58-61 and plate XVI 1.

31. This panel is described and illustrated in Hildburgh (1928) pp.61-2 and plate XVI 2.

32. Hildburgh does not specify why he believes this panel to be French work. He comments that there is evidence of the export of unworked alabaster, alluding to Bilson (1907), but given that he dates this panel to 1550 the link does seem rather tenuous from a chronological standpoint. Furthermore, the coincidence of form between this panel and the other nativities of John the Baptist and the Virgin would tend to imply that the English form of the non-Christ nativity was a very strong influence on the carver of this work, which may suggest that the carver was actually English, and the size of the panel is, as Hildburgh admits, entirely congruent with the panels of English alabaster altarpieces.

third stands in an attitude of prayer.

The coincidence of form of these three panels of the Nativity of John the Baptist and the panels of the Nativity of the Virgin is strongly indicative of a practice among alabaster carvers of using standardised images for particular themes.[33] However, we should note that standardisation does not go so far as to preclude the use of variants, such as the inclusion of additional figures or replacement of furniture by a person.[34] However, these variants by no means undermine the basic form: in this case the recumbent mother in a bed, a midwife arranging the bedclothes, another holding the swaddled child and a third person in the foreground engaged in a related task.[35]

33. Hildburgh does note the similarity between the Nativity of St John the Baptist panels and the La Selle Nativity of the Virgin, although he follows Biver in mis-identifying the small midwife as St Joachim (see above, chapter 2, note 40). This confusion rather weakens his argument about the similarity of form, as he overlooks the significance of the number of attendants. Hildburgh is further troubled that there is no figure at La Selle corresponding to Zacharias, but this seems to be an unnecessary difficulty. I would interpret the La Selle form as the 'basic' version of a Nativity, whilst Zacharias is intruded onto this form, either as a replacement for the small midwife or as an additional figure, simply because the legend of the nativity of St John the Baptist requires the father to be present with his scroll. However, Hildburgh does usefully observe that these panels of the Nativity of John the Baptist have little in common with images of the subject in other media: this seems to underline the probability that the carvers drew on a standardised non-Christ nativity.

34. Another example of difference is the depiction of a lamp suspended from the ceiling. This motif appears in the La Selle and first Rouen panels of the Nativity of the Virgin and the Versailles Nativity of St John, but is absent from the 'French-carved' Nativity of St John. (The fragmentary second Rouen Nativity of the Virgin and the Louvre Nativity of St John are too damaged to enable any conclusions to be drawn.)

35. Another interesting parallel is with some panels of the Nativity of Christ. The panel from the fragmentary reredos at Génissac is a case in point [see Biver (1910) p.86, plate xix]. The Virgin, who is nimbed, sits up in bed holding the swaddled Christchild, with two midwives looking on from the background. St Joseph squats or kneels in a rather truncated position in the left foreground, stirring a pot which rests on a tripod-like object. The ox and ass, or rather their heads and shoulders, occupy the right foreground, where they are engaged in feeding from a low trough. The presence of the animals proves beyond doubt that this subject is the Nativity of Christ and not the Nativity of the Virgin or St John the Baptist, but the coincidence of form with these other Nativities is quite remarkable. This tends to suggest that the

<u>The Presentation of the Virgin</u>

The action of the *Mary Play* resumes when the Virgin is taken to the Temple,

at the age of three years, to be dedicated to God by her parents in fulfilment of a

vow.[36] To the amazement of bystanders, the child walks unaided up the Temple

steps towards the priest who waits to welcome her into her new home. The *Mary*

Play follows the tradition that this climb was accompanied by a recitation of the

Gradual Psalms by the Virgin; this tradition is signalled visually by the fifteen steps.[37]

The apparent age of the Virgin ~ who seems to be an adolescent rather than a

three-year-old ~ in the La Selle panel is problematic, but this visual trope commonly

occurs in other media.[38] For example, an embroidered version on an English alb,

dated to 1320-40, in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the early sixteenth-century

window of the Presentation of the Virgin at King's College Chapel, Cambridge both

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'stock' form of a Nativity could be adapted to suit any need.

36. The Presentation of the Virgin occurs in *Protevangelium* VII and *Pseudo-Matthew* IV.

37. The fifteen Gradual Psalms (numbered 120-134) were said to have been chanted by the people of Israel as they went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem: Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.164. The *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* IV is the first extant written source of the recitation of these psalms by the Virgin as she climbed the Temple steps. It has been observed that the motif of fifteen steps is restricted to imagery of the Western Church [Kishpaugh (1941) p.134], but even in Western art the number varies between three and fifteen. For example, the mid-fourteenth century sculpture in the Lady Chapel at Ely shows all fifteen steps [James (1895) p.26], but the image in the Hours of the Duchess of Clarence, dated to 1419-1439 and probably London work, has nine steps [Estate of Major J.R. Abbey, JA 7398, illustrated in Scott (1996) figure 226, catalogue number 56] and a sixteenth-century tapestry at Reims cathedral shows only six steps [Lafontaine-Dosogne (1967) p.371].

38. The trope can also occur in other subjects too. A Sarum use missal, dated to c.1385-95, includes an image of the Nativity of the Virgin where the 'infant' is almost adult-sized [Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican City, ms Pal Lat 501s, fol 219v; illustrated in Scott (1996) figure 14, catalogue number 3].

show an adolescent Virgin.[39] It has been suggested that this reflects the staging

conventions of medieval drama but the evidence is by no means clear cut, and the

geographical area where the image is produced may be important.[40] St Anne is

shown aiding her daughter; this too is textually inaccurate, but understandable in the

light of the practicalities of staging a steep flight of fifteen steps in a restricted area.

Again, treatments of this subject in alabaster tend to be standardised to some

extent, but there is no absolute form. The best-preserved panel is recorded by

Hildburgh at Mondoñedo, Spain.[41] The Virgin is shown approaching the top of the

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39. This window, in the north-west of the chapel, is numbered 2.2 in Hilary Wayment's system of reference [Wayment (1972), p.49, plate 54].

40. The Virgin is sometimes presented as the 'correct' age, as in a mid fourteenth-century window of the Presentation of the Virgin from Strassengel, Austria, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum [illustrated in Brown (1994) p.83], and a minature in the Tres Riches Heures, fol. 137, c.1410-16 and 1485. Whilst these examples of an adolescent Virgin are all English there are occasional European examples, such as the fresco of the Presentation of the Virgin by Giotto in the Arena Chapel, Padua (c.1305/6), and a fresco by Taddeo Gaddi in the Baroncelli Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence (1332-33); further research is required to determine the true significance of geography and chronology. Hildburgh has suggested that medieval drama may have influenced the visual treatment of the Presentation of the Virgin, on the basis that a small child would not have been able to cope with the demands of taking on such a demanding role [Hildburgh (1946) pp.69-70]. Whilst this explanation for the Virgin being presented as much older than three years seems attractive, there is a record of a dramatic performance before Mass on the feast of the Presentation in Avignon in 1385 when the role of Mary was taken by a little girl who really was three or four years old [Young (1933), volume II, p.227]. Furthermore, she was accompanied by 14 other young girls of similar size, who presumably played the parts of the other virgins who lived in the Temple. Thus it was indeed possible to stage a 'realistic' representation of the Presentation of the Virgin, and at least one commentator on the Mary Play has claimed that the Virgin was indeed played by a young child, although without citing any evidence [Twycross (1985) pp.101-2]. Another interesting question is whether the infant actor at Avignon was expected to recite the Gradual Psalms, as Twycross claims of the staging of the Mary Play. Given the fact that the other English alabaster panels treat the figure of the Virgin in exactly the same manner as the La Selle panel, it seems reasonable to claim that representing the Virgin as an adolescent is typical of English alabaster workers, if not necessarily of the approach of English drama.

41. Hildburgh (1944) p.30, plate 10c.

fifteen steps which lead up to the top of a draped altar.[42] She stands looking back at her parents, her hands in the orans gesture. A priest stands behind the altar; he wears a bi-lobed hat, and has his hands open as if to receive the Virgin. A canopy occupies the space over his head. St Joachim occupies the left foreground, holding a staff as at La Selle, whilst St Anne stands alongside him with her hands in an attitude of prayer. Three bystanders of indeterminate sex stand behind the parents, the centre one prays whilst the other two hold their hands in the orans gesture. The space beneath the stairs is filled by an elongated tri-lobed shape, whilst the side of the altar is decorated by a rectangular incised plaque.

A fragmentary panel of the Presentation of the Virgin is recorded by Hildburgh at the Germanic Museum, Nuremburg.[43] The Virgin's parents watch the Virgin as she mounts the steps to the top of the altar; St Anne's hands clasped in prayer, but in this instance Joachim holds a basket of offerings. The priest (head missing) stands behind the altar to await her, and a group of two women and one man stand behind the parents with their hands clasped in prayer. The area under the stairs is lost, but the side of the altar is preserved and apparently undecorated. This panel is similar to a panel recorded by Hildburgh at the Archaeological Museum in Madrid.[44] The Madrid panel of the Presentation of the Virgin is damaged, as the top of the panel is missing, but it is otherwise complete. Fifteen steps lead up to the top of a draped altar, with the high priest standing behind it, and a narrow broken column

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42. By contrast, the La Selle treatment does not include an altar, but shows the steps leading up to an arch. This seems to be logical architecturally, but it is unusual. The motif of steps leading up to the top of the altar seems to be derived from the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary VI: '...since the temple was set upon a mount, the altar of burnt offering, which was outside, could not be approached except by steps' [cited in Hildburgh (1916-17) p.78].

43. Hildburgh (1925) p.56.

44. Hildburgh (1916-17) p.78, figure 2.

stands on the altar on the right, which may be intended to indicate the architecture of the temple. A censing angel kneels under the stairs, and a recessed niche in the side of the altar contains shapes which may well indicate sacred objects for use in temple rites. St Anne stands watching her daughter with raised hands and St Joachim holds a basket of offerings; the Virgin seems to be looking back towards her parents. Two spectators behind the parents are indicated by fragmentary hands in prayer.

Another fragmentary panel of the Presentation of the Virgin at Kinwarton (Warwickshire) has lost the lower part of the panel and the top right corner (plate 68).[45] In this version St Anne is assisting the Virgin to mount the stairs, as at La Selle, which lead up to the top of a draped altar. St Joachim looks on, and seems to have the remnants of a staff. The priest wears a bi-lobed hat, and has his hands open to welcome the Virgin. Five women stand in prayer in the background, and a fragmentary censing angel is visible in the foreground. In his comments on the panel, Philip Chatwin asserts that the censing angel is in the spandrel under the stairs, although it seems to occupy the space in front of and below the altar. He further comments that the angel is 'always' an accessory in this subject, but comparison with the treatments at La Selle, Mondoñedo, Nuremburg and Madrid clearly demonstrate that this is untrue. In fact, the panels in the small corpus of extant English alabasters of the Presentation of the Virgin are remarkable for their variation, with differing treatments of the altar, the space beneath the stairs, the position of the Virgin, the position of St Anne, and the number and gender of spectators. Thus, the fact that the La Selle panel seems to be unique in two respects ~ the absence of an altar and the presence of the bedesman under the stairs ~ may not be particularly significant, as this treatment could simply reflect

45. See Chatwin (1932).

other motifs from the range of options available to the carvers.[46] The fragmentary version of the Presentation of the Virgin in the sculptured narrative cycle at Ely provides further demonstration of the variation of motifs in this subject.[47] All 15 steps are present, but they run from the bottom right of the panel to the top left, inverting the form of the alabaster panels. St Anne has her left hand on the Virgin's shoulder, as if to assist her daughter, whilst her right hand is raised as if speaking to the priest who stands at the top of the steps. A fragmentary figure, almost certainly Joachim, stands behind St Anne.

The Annunciation

The Virgin spent her childhood living in the Temple with a group of other virgins, until it was deemed necessary for her to marry.[48] The *Mary Play* relates the story of the suitors and the miracle of Joseph's blossoming branch, a narrative which is used to explain the Virgin's 'unsuitable' bethrothal to a much older, possibly widowed, man,[49] and follows this with the Annunciation, in a version based strongly on Luke's Gospel. The Annunciation is one of the most popular subjects in medieval

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46. The Presentation of the Virgin in the glass of King's College, Cambridge (see note 39, above) also lacks an altar. The late date of this work may be significant, as it could imply that the altar disappears from later versions of the Presentation, but further research is necessary to allow a definitive statement to be made.

47. This subject is described in James (1895) p.26.

48. The *Mary Play* treats the episode of the Virgin's life in the Temple as an opportunity for expounding Christian doctrine, and omits the legend of the young Virgin weaving purple cloth for the Temple which is recorded in the *Book of James* X - XI and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* VIII - IX. These detailed accounts of the Virgin's childhood seem to have been intended to uphold the dogma of her virginity, but this episode is rarely recorded in the visual arts, and unknown in extant alabaster [Lafontaine-Dosogne (1967) p.371].

49. The story of the Marriage of the Virgin is rarely recorded in extant visual art, at least in England (although it does appear at Ely) and also seems to be unknown in alabaster.

art generally, and the survival of over 80 alabaster panels and fragments of this subject tends to underline its ubiquity. Francis Cheetham has analysed the extant alabasters of the Annunciation and has drawn up six different categories based on the form of different types. He has allocated the La Selle panel to Type D, a 'crowded' form which appears to date from the 1430s through to the 1470s and later.[50] This type is characterised by the angel Gabriel and the Virgin being presented on the same level, in the lower part of the panel, and a standing figure of God the Father in the top left-hand corner. The Virgin has a reading desk, and is usually presented under a canopy, and her pot of lillies is twined around with a scroll. God the Father appears crowned and bearded, with his breath carrying the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove towards the Virgin's right ear. Cheetham records this form in around forty panels, including the five Annunciations in the Victoria and Albert Museum,[51] the reredos at Génissac,[52] the Virgin triptych at Danzig,[53] and the fragmentary reredos at the church of Kermaria-en-Isquit, Plouha (Calvados).[54] The dove and the breath of God have been lost at La Selle, but close analysis of early photographs of this panel demonstrate that it did correspond to Cheetham's typology.[55] A similar motif is found in treatments of the Annunciation in fifteenth-century manuscript illumination. The version in a French manuscript of the

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50. Cheetham (1984) p.162.

51. Cheetham assigns three panels of the Annunciation and two fragments to type D: Cheetham (1984) pp.169-173, catalogue numbers 96, 97, 98, 99 and 100.

52. Biver (1910) p.86, plate xix.

53. Nelson (1919), illustrated plate 1.

54. Cheetham erroneously claims that these panels are unpublished [Cheetham (1984) p.207]. They are illustrated, but not discussed, in Prior and Gardner (1912) figure 579.

55. See above, p.45.

1420s shows God the Father in the upper part of the background on the sinister side breathing the dove towards the top of the Virgin's head,[56] whilst the an analogous treatment in the Bedford Hours (c.1483) shows God the Father outside the main image, breathing the dove towards the Virgin's heart.[57]

The Adoration of Christ

The narratives of the Nativity of Christ and the Adoration of the Magi found in the English mystery plays are based largely on accounts in the Gospels, but they also draw on apocryphal sources. The play of the Nativity of Christ in the *N-town cycle* includes the characters 'Zelomy' (sometimes Zelami, Zalamitha, Zebel or Tebel in other traditions) and 'Salome', the apocryphal midwives who exemplify belief and disbelief in the Virgin Birth. Zelomy accepts the miracle without question, but Salome refuses to believe. She touches the new mother, apparently in an effort to check her virginal state, and is horrified to see her hand wither. She repents of her doubt, and on the instructions of an attendant angel worships the Christ child and touches the cloth he is wrapped in. Her hand is then cured.[58] The midwives do not, of course, appear in the Gospels of Matthew or Luke, but they are found in the

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56. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, ms. 287, fol. 24, illustrated in Wieck (1988) plate 18.

57. BL Add ms 42131, fol. 32. This is illustrated in Backhouse (1990) plate 12.

58. Peter Happé has noted the link between the Salome's disbelief and the Incredulity of St Thomas: like the apostle her doubt can only be overcome by the act of *touching* [Happé (1975) p.666, note 10]. However, a wider point can be made, because in the N. Town Nativity *both* midwives touch the Virgin, one in a state of belief and one in a state of disbelief. The penalty paid by Salome for her disbelief is overcome by another form of touching. This emphasis on tactile experience may serve to underline the fact that the audience is being presented with a *concrete* vision of the Nativity, and may help to explain the popularity of this treatment in alabaster and other visual media. Note also that she is cured by touching what is effectively the Christchild's *clothing,* just like the haemorrhaging woman much later in Christ's career.

Book of James and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.[59] Midwives sometimes appear singly in manuscript illustrations of the Nativity of Christ, for example in the Sherbourne Missal,[60] dated to c.1396-1407, and the Wollaton Antiphonal,[61] c.1412-1438, but the depiction of two midwives seems to be very rare.[62]

The apocryphal midwives commonly appear in alabaster panels of the Adoration of Christ; Cheetham notes 22 versions of the Adoration with midwives.[63] The larger, wimpled figure on the left of the La Selle version does seem to be intended to represent one of the apocryphal midwives, almost certainly Zelomy, the believing midwife. But the smaller figure is more enigmatic. Biver identified her as Salome, the disbelieving midwife,[64] but it is possible that something more complex is

59. Only Salome, the doubter, is named in the *Book of James*, XIX. The believing midwife is named as Zelomi in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, XIII. The prevalence of the midwives in images of the Nativity of Christ forms a powerful demonstration of the influence of these apocryphal gospels: as noted below (note 63) the subject of the Adoration of the Virgin and Joseph with the midwives is twice as common as the simple Nativity form in extant English alabaster.

60. BL loan ms 52, p.36; illustrated in Scott (1996) figure 46, catalogue number 9.

61. Nottingham, University Library ms. 250; illustrated in Scott (1996) figure 277, catalogue number 69.

62. In each of these examples the midwife is shown holding the child, which seems to place these images much closer to the conventional format of the Nativity of the Virgin than the 'Brigittine' Nativity of Christ (the iconographical form which shows the Virgin kneeling to adore the Christchild, who lies on the ground, or on the edge of her robe).

63. Cheetham (1984) p.55. By comparison he notes only 10 Nativities of Christ. Cheetham seems to use the term 'Nativity of Christ' to identify the subject of the birth of Christ where the Virgin lies in a bed in a similar position to St Anne in panels of the Nativity of the Virgin [catalogue number 104]. The subjects that Cheetham designates as 'Adoration of Mary and Joseph' [catalogue numbers 105 and 106] are effectively Brigittine nativities (see note 62), usually with the Christchild presented in a mandorla. For the sake of clarity, I follow Cheetham's convention, and refer to an 'Adoration' even when the author of a paper refers to a 'Nativity' if the form is Brigittine. It is interesting to note that Cheetham's Nativity [catalogue number 104] includes only one midwife, whom he identifies as Salome. Meanwhile, the Nativity in the Génissac retable is far closer to the standard format of the Nativity of the Virgin panels (see note 35, above).

64. Biver (1910) p.76.

happening. When Salome appears together with Zelomy they always seem to occupy the same side, invariably the left of the panel, with Zelomy standing and Salome kneeling in front of her, as if to emphasise their different states of faith.[65] This construction is seen in both Adorations at the Victoria and Albert Museum,[66] and also in the fragmentary Adoration in the Madrid Archaeological Museum,[67] the Adoration in the Life of the Virgin reredos at Bordeaux,[68] and the Adoration from the collection of the Marquess of Ripon exhibited at the Society of Antiquaries in 1910.[69] But at La Selle the smaller midwife kneels in an isolated position on the right of the panel. We should also note that the figure here is touching the Christchild, whilst Salome is invariably shown praying, as she is in each of the Adorations at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and also the Madrid, Bordeaux and Ripon versions. Her hair is uncovered and unrestricted, impractical for a midwife, and unlike any other rendering of Salome that has so far been identified. It is possible that she is actually St Anastasia, a saint who was recognised throughout many areas of Europe, but who seems to have been particularly popular in France.[70]

65. We should note that this construction seems to be restricted to English alabasterwork, for in other media the midwives (when they do appear) tend not to be given different positions but often are undifferentiated. There seems to be a tradition in German fifteenth-century work of showing the two midwives occupied with a lamp, for example in an image of the Nativity of Christ in the Breviary Homoet, (Utrecht or Cologne, c.1475) by the Master of the Year 1466 [image held in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute, London].

66. Cheetham (1984) catalogue numbers 105 and 106.

67. Hildburgh (1916-17) p.78, figure 2.

68. Biver (1910) p.85, plate xviii.

69. Hildburgh (1916-17) p.83, figure 6; Society of Antiquaries exhibition catalogue (1910) plate XVIII, no. 40.

70. St Anastasia is discussed further below, in Appendix 4. Paul Biver claims that on the scroll in this panel "is written the counsel given to Salome": Biver (1910) p.76. If he can be believed then it is almost certain that Salome is the kneeling figure, as her posture echoes the Salomes of other alabasters far more closely than the figure of

Another interesting aspect of the La Selle Adoration of Christ is the position of

St Joseph. In other Adorations in alabaster he occupies a central position in the

composition, standing between Zelomy, the believing midwife, on the left and the

kneeling Virgin on the right. This form is found in each of the Adorations at the

Victoria and Albert Museum, and also the Madrid, Bordeaux and Ripon versions

amongst others. A fifteenth-century panel of the Adoration recorded by Nelson at

Marseilles is the reverse of the usual treatment, with the midwives on the right and

the Virgin on the left.[71] However, Joseph still occupies the centre of the composition.

The La Selle treatment stands in obvious contrast to this standard form, as Joseph

occupies the right background of the panel, in a rather compressed position above

the ox and ass.[72] A third point of interest in this panel is the two sheaves of corn that

the Christchild lies on; these are placed in cruciform, as an archetype of the

Crucifixion, and the ears of one sheaf form a halo effect behind his head. This motif

appears to be unparalleled in other treatments of the Adoration, whether in alabaster

or other media: the usual form is to present the Christchild in a mandorla.[73] It is

the other midwife on the left. However, given the number of errors in his paper, and
in the absence of any supporting evidence, such as a mention in the notes of Louis
Régnier or other earlier commentators, one should be cautious about taking this too
literally: Biver may be writing about what he assumes was on the scroll. Equally, he
could have been unaware of the tradition of St Anastasia, and may have assumed
that the small figure is intended to be identified as Salome.

71. Nelson (1919) p.136, plate IV, 1.

72. The treatment of the animals also deviates from the standard form to some
extent. The position they occupy, the middle section of the right of the panel, above
the Christchild, is paralleled by the Victoria and Albert Museum Adorations and also
the Bordeaux and Ripon versions, but the curious box-like construction they inhabit
in the La Selle panel seems to be unique in extant alabaster.

73. The Christchild is presented in a mandorla in both of the Victoria and Albert
Museum's Adoration of the Virgin panels, and also the Madrid, Bordeaux and Ripon
panels. The only exception I have come across is a very unusual, if not unique,
panel of the Adoration of the Virgin noted by Hildburgh in the library of the seminary
at Santiagio. This very crowded panel includes the Virgin, Joseph, two midwives,
two shepherds and the ox and ass, with the three magi arriving in the (damaged)

possible that the presence of this motif may be a conscious gesture towards the adult life of Christ, a theme which is conspicuously absent in this cycle in comparison with other alabaster retables of the life of the Virgin.[74]

The Adoration of the Magi

Plays of the Adoration of the Magi, such as the York Goldsmiths play, generally accord well with the description of the Epiphany given in Matthew II, 1-12, but also draw on some apocryphal material.[75] The Adoration of the Magi was an extremely popular image throughout the medieval period, and it is one of the most numerous subjects in extant alabaster with over 100 panels known. There seem to be two distinct types, with earlier treatments characterised by the Long Melford (Suffolk) slab of around 1350.[76] This panel shows the Virgin semi-recumbent in a bed, holding the infant Christ who stands on her lap. The Magi stand behind the bed, the first mage offering his gift to Christ. On the extreme right St Joseph observes from a chair at the foot of the bed, and a female attendant stands on the upper section. The swaddled Christchild lies in a basket-work object at the base of the panel, presumably a motif intended to be read as a manger: Hildburgh (1944) p.33, plate d.

74. The central panels of cycles of the life of the Virgin are predominantly concerned with the Resurrection or the Trinity with Christ crucified, and the La Selle retable is unusual in having a central panel of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin (see p.183, below).

75. For example, the magi are welcomed by a maid when they arrive at the stable (*York Goldsmith's Play*, ll. 229-232). It has been suggested that the maid may be derived from a liturgical version of the play [Chambers (1903) volume II p.46], but the coincidence with the presentation of the subject in alabaster panels should not be overlooked. Réau has observed that even the number of the magi is apocryphal: Matthew does not give a number, and three became the standard for symbolic reasons only [Réau (1957) volume II, part 2 p.237].

76. This panel was almost certainly was an individual devotional object rather than part of a retable (see above, p.8). It is rather broader than it is high, in marked contrast to panels from cycles, and the edges are finished as if it was not intended to be framed. It is illustrated in Cheetham (1984) figure 5.

extreme left, holding the bedhead behind the Virgin's back.[77] Fifteenth-century

alabaster panels tend to show the Virgin on a canopied chair, holding the Christchild

in her lap. She is approached by the magi, generally from the right, with the first

mage kneeling and holding his crown as he presents his gift and the other two

standing behind, one indicating the star above. In the foreground St Joseph is

slumped in sleep, and the ox and ass are shown feeding.[78]

The La Selle Adoration of the Magi is conventional in the presentation of the

Virgin, the Christchild and the Magi, but it lacks depictions of St Joseph and the ox

and ass, a treatment which seems to be very unusual.[79] This aberration may arise

from the fact that the 'conventional' fifteenth-century form may be characterised as

the Adoration of the Magi combined with the Adoration of the Virgin and St Joseph,

77. Hildburgh (1923) p.30. There are a total of ten similar treatments known, enumerated in Cheetham (1984) pp.42, 62, notes 218, 219. A similar panel from the second half of the fourteenth century at Paderborn Cathedral includes the ox and ass in the background, and thus more clearly reflects the combined themes of the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi; it is illustrated in Cheetham (1984) figure 24.

78. This description is applicable to many panels of the Adoration of the Magi, including all nine in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection [Cheetham (1984) catalogue numbers 107-115, although the layout of panels 112 and 113 is reversed so that the Magi approach from the left]. As with the standardised presentation of the midwives (see p.167, above), the motif of the sleeping St Joseph in the foreground of alabaster Adorations of the Magi is not found in other media. He has a tendency to lurk behind the Virgin, for example in the Adoration of the Magi in a Flemish Book of Hours, dated to c.1450-1500, in the Salting Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and in the scene in a New Testament dated to 1461, Bibliotheque Royale MS 12001-2, Brussels, fol.109 [both images held in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute, London]. In her study of the iconography of St Joseph in the Netherlands, Marjorie Foster does not comment on the position of the saint in the images she discusses, but she does note that the treatment of St Joseph with his head on his hand emerged in the sixth century but began to disappear in the fifteenth century, under the influence of the reform of the perceived character of Joseph, from aged buffoon to virile foster-father, led by Jean Gerson [Foster (1978)].

79. I have been unable, as yet, to locate a parallel treatment of the Adoration of the Magi. Hildburgh has noted an Adoration of Virgin at Cordova which also lacks the ox and ass, but the rather suspicious presence of a plaster arch in the space conventionally occupied by the animals may well indicate the loss of these figures: Hildburgh (1916-17) pp.84-86, figure 8.

a combination which would be superfluous in the La Selle retable as the Adoration of the Virgin and St Joseph is already present.[80]

The Purification of the Virgin

The Purification of the Virgin is a far less common subject, both in alabaster and other media, than the ubiquitous Nativities and Adorations. It is part of a visual tradition based on an account given in Luke II, 22 -39 or -40.[81] Dorothy Shorr has noted that this passage misrepresents Mosaic law, as it conflates two ceremonies, the Presentation of the first-born and the Purification of the mother.[82] The Presentation, a ritual where the parents offer their child to God and then redeem

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80. Hildburgh has noted a panel of the Adoration of the Magi at Zuckau, a cognate of the Long Melford panel (above, p.169) which also lacks St Joseph, the ox and ass [Hildburgh (1923) p.32]. He explains the absence of these figures by suggesting that the panel may be 'a reversion toward a simple Adoration', although he does not offer any examples of this 'simple Adoration', or explain why he thinks 'reversion' is an appropriate term. However, it is does appear plausible that a 'simple' Adoration of the Magi may have existed before, or perhaps alongside, a 'combined' Adoration of the Virgin and Adoration of the Magi, with perhaps other variants of the subject also available to the carver. It thus seems reasonable to advance the idea that when a panel of the Adoration of the Magi is presented in company with a panel of the Adoration of the Virgin, the form of the Magi panel will tend to deviate from the standard 'combined' treatment. Given the standard combination of subjects in an alabaster cycle of the Life of the Virgin (see below, p.180), the presentation of both the Adoration of the Virgin and the Adoration of the Magi is only likely to occur when more than the usual five panels are present, as at La Selle. An interesting comparison is presented in the Bordeaux cycle (see n.72, above), where there is also an Adoration of the Virgin as well as an Adoration of the Magi. This Magi panel also deviates from the standard 'combined' form, but it is more complex rather than more simple. In the Bordeaux panel not only does St Joseph take his place alongside the Virgin and the Magi, but two pages and Herod appear too. The conclusion that the carvers are seeking to show variance in this panel from the form of the preceding Adoration of the Virgin panel seems unavoidable, and the same search for variation may well have informed the La Selle treatment.

81. The feast of the Presentation in the Temple, a subject closely allied to the Purification, was initially celebrated in Jerusalem and was not introduced into Rome until the late fifth century. It then spread through the eastern Roman empire during the sixth century under Justinian: Shorr (1946) pp.17, 19.

82. ibid p.17.

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their offering with a payment of 5 shekels, should occur 30 days after the birth. By contrast, the rite of Purification is held 40 days after birth, with a lamb as burnt offering and pigeon or turtledove as a sin offering, or, in the case of poorer families, an offering of two birds. A third ceremony, Circumcision, should occur 8 days after the birth of a male child, and this ritual too is often conflated with the Presentation in visual representations.[83]

The passage in Luke is quite detailed, and mentions the presence of Simeon, the prophetess Anna and the offering of turtledoves carried by Joseph.[84] However, the basic narrative has been augmented in the La Selle panel by some additional imagery, notably the candles held by the bystanders and the position of the Christ-child. The presence of candles reflects the alternate name for the feast of the Purification: Candlemas. One explanation for this motif is that it symbolises the entry of Christ as 'the light of the world',[85] but Réau claims that the tradition of bearing candles at the Purification of a mother may originate in an ancient pagan rite where light is used to frighten away evil spirits.[86] Meanwhile, Shorr notes that Pope Sergius I introduced a procession with candles on the Feast of the Purification in the seventh century, and that in the ninth century it became customary to bless candles for the following year at this time, which gave rise to the term Candlemas.[87] Candles are

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83. Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.256.

84. The La Selle panel shows the offering of two birds, which may be read as a sign of either humility or poverty, but this visual motif is not invariable. Shorr comments that a lamb is occasionally depicted as a variant offering, but does not cite any examples: Shorr (1946) p.26.

85. Young (1933), volume II, pp.250-55, quoting Luke 2, 32.

86. Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.262.

87. Shorr (1946) p.18. Shorr also notes that Bede commented that the feast of the Purification was a christianisation of pagan rites held in February, and described both priests and people carrying candles in church [*De temporum ratione*, cap. xii, cited by Shorr, ibid].

depicted in visual treatments of this subject from at least the twelfth century: examples include the treatment in a French Book of Hours c.1425-30 where a woman attendant holds a candle and two birds in a basket,[88] a version in scenes from the Life of Christ in a late fifteenth-century English prayer book where a candle is visible in a group of nimbed onlookers, four women and one man,[89] and an early sixteenth-century English glass roundel formerly at 18 Highcross Street, Leicester where two women hold candles.[90] Candles are held in a fragmentary panel of the Purification of the Virgin in the Germanic Museum, Nuremberg,[91] by all the figures except the priest: the Virgin, Joseph and four bystanders, at least two of whom are women. The motif also appears in medieval drama: in the Chester *Blacksmith's Play* Joseph refers to the 'virgine waxe' he offers.[92]

The position of the Christchild on the altar in the La Selle panel is also

88. Walters Art Gallery, ms. W.288; illustrated in Wieck (1988) plate 6.

89. BL ms Harley 2887, fol. 58; illustrated in Scott (1996) figure 478, catalogue number 109.

90. Jewry Wall Museum, Leicester. Not all English treatments of the Purification include candles: a Carmelite missal illustrated in southern England c.1438 has five onlookers, three female and two male, but no candles [BL Add. ms 29704-05; illustrated in Scott (1996) colour plate 2, catalogue number 2]. Whilst the candle motif does occur throughout Europe, Hildburgh observes that it is relatively uncommon outside England: Hildburgh (1925) p.58. He attempts to argue that this 'proves' that the custom of carrying candles at a churching was only general in England, a rather questionable conclusion as visual imagery by no means necessarily reflects contemporary reality. However, the relative rarity of candles in non-English treatments does seem to require further investigation.

91. Hildburgh (1925) pp.56-59, plate XI figure 2. Hildburgh notes that this panel may have formed part of a cycle with the Nuremberg Presentation of the Virgin (see above, p.161). He also comments that in pre-Reformation England women routinely carried lighted candles during their churching ceremony as an allusion to the Purification, and that the sculptor of this panel had imposed candle-holding on the Virgin herself in a kind of back-formation (ibid, p.57). However, this treatment does not seem to be general: other versions follow the La Selle form and show only bystanders holding candles.

92. I.144. For the Chester *Blacksmith's Play* see Happé (1975) pp.318-31.

paralleled in other visual works, but the motif is by no means universal. The biblical

text states that Simeon takes the Christchild in his arms,[93] and this subject is found

in some visual treatments, for example an eleventh-century Evangelistery from St

Peter's Stiftbibliothek, Salzburg, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library,[94] and

fifteenth-century glass at East Harling church, Norfolk.[95] But the motif of the

Christchild on the altar is far more common. It first appeared on the tympanum of

the twelfth-century Royal Portal at Chartres, and became common during the

thirteenth century.[96] The *Biblia Pauperum,* c.1460, shows the Christchild standing on

the altar;[97] Leah Sinanoglou has commented that this motif is common to all extant

plays of the Purification.[98] In the Hegge, or N-Town, Play the stage directions call for

the Virgin to walk forward amid lighted candles and lay the Christchild on the altar; in

the York version this visual trope is explained when Joseph explicitly states that the

Christchild is a sacrificial lamb. Sinanoglou goes on to suggest that when Simeon

lifts the Christchild from the altar the action would mimic the priest's elevation of the

host, a motif which would clearly underline the sacrificial image.[99]

93. Luke II, 28. A text of the Pseudo-Matthew also describes Simeon taking the child in his arms: Shorr (1946) p.20, note 21.

94. Pierpont Morgan Library ms. 781, cited by Shorr (1946) p.20.

95. This glass is mentioned in Hildburgh (1925) p.58. The early sixteenth-century glass roundel formerly at 18 Highcross Street, Leicester (now in the Jewry Wall Museum, Leicester) shows Simeon holding out his arms over the altar towards the Virgin and child; the priest's arms are covered with a cloth which seems to emphasise the sanctity of the Christchild.

96. Shorr (1946) p.24. Shorr also comments that it is very rare for the Christchild to be shown at the 'correct age', that is, as a baby. He usually looks like a three- or four-year-old, a motif which makes an interesting parallel to the equally 'illogical' age of the Virgin in images of *her* Presentation: ibid, p.26.

97. Illustrated in Henry (1987) p.53.

98. Sinanoglou (1973) pp.501-02.

99. Miri Rubin has commented on the use of sacrificial imagery in her study of the

With one exception, extant alabaster panels of the Purification, Presentation and Circumcision invariably adopt the motif of the Christchild on the altar, for example the Victoria and Albert Museum Circumcisions,[100] the Madrid Circumcision,[101] the Stoneyhurst College Circumcision,[102] and the fragmentary Mondoñedo Purification.[103] The exception is the Nuremberg alabaster panel of the Purification, where the Christchild does not appear; neither is there an altar nor an offering of birds. As a result there is no question that this panel is a Purification, rather than a Presentation or Circumcision, for the emphasis is solely on the Virgin. Hildburgh has commented that the La Selle panel of the Purification "is clearly" an intermediate form between a 'true' Presentation and a 'true' Purification like the Nuremberg panel,[104] but the basis for this claim is obscure. Given that the Mondoñedo Purification also includes the Christchild on the altar, it seems likely that the La Selle and Mondoñedo Purifications exemplify one standard form of the subject, whilst the Nuremberg Purification exemplifies a variation.

The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin

Like the legend of the infancy of the Virgin, the story of the Assumption and

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eucharist, and with regard to the image of the Christchild in the Host she specifically cites the Presentation in the Temple as one of a number of correlations of the Mass used in sources such as the Biblia pauperum: Rubin (1991) p.136.

100. Cheetham (1984) catalogue numbers 116 and 117.

101. Hildburgh (1916-17) p.83, figure 7.

102. Society of Antiquaries exhibition catalogue (1910) catalogue number 65, plate XXIV.

103. A lithographed sketch of this panel is published in Villa-amil y Castro (1865) plate 4; it is briefly discussed in Hildburgh (1944) p.30.

104. Hildburgh (1925) p.57.

Coronation of the Virgin is entirely apocryphal. It is related in various sources including Coptic, Greek and Syriac versions,[105] which seem to be based on a fifth-century Greek narrative.[106] Widely disseminated Latin versions include the Pseudo-Melito, which also dates from at least the fifth century; these legends were incorporated into the *Legenda Aurea* and some of the mystery plays.[107] The standard legend relates that an angel announces to the Virgin that she will be reunited with Christ, and she asks to see the apostles again before she leaves earth. The apostles, plus St Paul, duly appear, carried on clouds to her deathbed. Christ then appears, and the Virgin's soul passes visibly into his hands. Her body is placed in a tomb, but it then miraculously disappears. In the Western tradition the Virgin is resuscitated after three days and is then bodily assumed up to Heaven to be crowned, whilst in the Byzantine tradition only the soul is taken up.[108] The Coronation of the Virgin is the ultimate glorification of the mother of Christ, the culmination of, and reward for, her role in the teleology of redemption. The legend of the death, burial, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin seems to have formed an important part of the English mystery plays, and it seems that the basic legend was considerably elaborated. There is some evidence that the York version of the play was performed separately as well as part of the whole cycle, which would tend to imply that there was particular interest in this legend of the Virgin.[109]

The Assumption of the Virgin and the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity

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105. The various versions are printed in James (1924) pp.194-227.

106. Ashe (1976) p.208. Ashe notes that the Greek narrative is ascribed to John the Evangelist, an attribution which seems to stretch credulity to its limits.

107. Lafontaine-Dosogne (1967) p.371.

108. Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.615.

109. Happé (1975) p.625.

often appear as separate images in alabaster retables of the fifteenth century, for example at Avilés,[110] Montréal and Bordeaux.[111] In these cycles the form of the Assumption panel is very similar to the La Selle panel, with the Virgin standing in a mandorla held by angels, and St Thomas receiving the girdle at her feet. God the Father appears in the upper part of the panel,[112] but he is shown awaiting the Virgin rather than actually crowning her. Meanwhile, the form of the Coronation by the Trinity panel is rather different to the Coronation element in panels that combine the subjects, for the Virgin is shown seated rather than standing.[113] The Trinity are assigned a relatively large amount of space in the standard form of the Coronation by the Trinity panel, and there seems to be an equality of emphasis that is missing from the combined form, where the Virgin's size ensures that she is strongly emphasised. Many single panels of the Assumption of the Virgin and the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity are extant, and they generally conform well to the forms of the panels of the cycles at Avilés, Montréal and Bordeaux.[114] In some versions of the

110. Hildburgh (1944) pp.31-32, illustrated facing p.31.

111. The Montréal and Bordeaux cycles are both featured in Biver (1910) pp.67-8, plate I; pp.83-5, plate XVIII. In a discussion of panels of the combined Assumption and Coronation, Cheetham incorrectly describes the panel of the Assumption of the Virgin at Bordeaux as forming the central panel of the retable: the central panel is, in fact, a Resurrection [Cheetham (1984) p.207].

112. Occasionally God the Father and Christ are both shown, for example in the Bordeaux panel.

113. This treatment may derive from the standard fourteenth-century form of the Coronation of the Virgin, where the Virgin sits alongside Christ on a bench as he crowns her, a subject which is superseded by the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity. A panel of the Coronation of the Virgin by Christ in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 135], dating from the late fourteenth century, is a variation on this form, as the Virgin kneels in front of the bench to receive her crown.

114. For example, there are seven panels, two fragmentary, of the Assumption dated to the second half of the fifteenth century in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) catalogue numbers 126-132] and a further two panels of the Assumption in the *Society of Antiquaries exhibition catalogue* (1910) (catalogue

Assumption of the Virgin, in both alabaster and other media, the Coronation is

alluded to through the chronologically inaccurate device of showing the Virgin

already crowned, or with a crown held above her head by angels.[115]

The visual motif of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by

the Trinity first appeared in the last years of the fourteenth century,[116] as the final

stage in the development of the Coronation of the Virgin.[117] A version dated to after

c.1470 appears in the Book of the Fraternity of Our Lady's Assumption,[118] with six

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numbers 53, 59); there are two panels of the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity in Douai Museum [ibid, plate V, b and d] and a further example exhibited in the same exhibition [ibid, catalogue number 38]. The only truly exceptional panel is an Assumption in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 131] which is rather larger than the standard size, and hence likely to have been the centre panel of a retable.

115. An example of the prematurely crowned Virgin is found in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 132]. The Virgin with a crown suspended over her head is found in the group of alabaster panels at the church of Kermaria-en-Isquit, Plouha (see note 140, below); a parallel image is found in glass at East Harling church (Norfolk) [on the East Harling glass see Woodforde (1940) p.5]. The Kermaria panel demonstrates that there were several possibilities available to carvers who wished to produce a panel including both the Assumption and the Coronation of the Virgin. We can perhaps envisage a workshop pattern book which would present this motif amongst a range of alternatives: the separate Assumption and Coronation; the combined Assumption and Coronation with a Trinity including the Dove; the combined Assumption and Coronation with a humanistic Trinity; and the combined Assumption and Coronation with angels instead of the Trinity.

116. Morgan (1994), p.223. The panel of the Coronation of the Virgin by Christ in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 135] is an example of the earliest form. Réau gives a list of different treatments of the Coronation of the Virgin; the earliest version he gives of the Coronation of the Trinity is dated to around 1410 [Réau (1957) volume II, part 2, p.625].

117. The Sherbourne Missal, c.1396-1407, has the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, with the Holy Spirit as a dove, as a main image, with smaller images ascending the left side of page: the Death of the Virgin, the Assumption and the Coronation of the Virgin by Christ alone. The treatment thus includes both earlier forms of the Coronation [BL Loan ms 52 p.524; illustrated in Scott (1996) figure 51, catalogue number 9].

118. Worshipful Company of Skinners, London, fol. 41; illustrated in Meale (1989) plate 22. This treatment omits the small angel pushing at the Virgin's feet.

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angels supporting the Virgin, one holding a gold 'MARIA' emblem and another an ermine cap, the badge of the company. Besides the La Selle panel, there are at least eight versions of this subject extant in alabaster,[119] all but one of which occur on large panels.[120] The most obvious use for the large panels would be to form the centre panel of a retable, as at La Selle and Pisa,[121] but at Abergavenny a similar panel appears in the recess of the tomb of Richard Herbert (d.1510).[122] Other large panels, such as one in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum,[123] and another in the Thermes-Cluny collection (plate 69),[124] are likely to have been intended for use as either the central panel of a retable or as part of a tomb monument. The exceptional panel in this group of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity forms part of the Swansea altarpiece.[125] The

119. Cheetham gives a list of panels of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity in his discussion of the Victoria and Albert Museum panel [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 134, p.207], and implies a total of eleven. However, he appears to omit the Thermes-Cluny panel (plate 69), but includes a panel from the Bordeaux retable. I have been unable to examine this work at first hand, but the photograph of the retable published by Biver (see above, note 111) suggests that the small figures of God the Father and Christ are observing the Virgin, perhaps awaiting her, rather than actually crowning her. The fact that the Virgin is shown wearing a crown in this panel is not necessarily problematic (see note 115, above), and given that there is a separate panel of the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity in the retable it is likely that this panel is simply a slightly unconventional Assumption.

120. For example, the large combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 134] measures 73.8cm x 35cm, considerably larger than its equivalent in the La Selle retable which measures 61cm x 28cm.

121. The Pisa retable is described and illustrated in Papini (1910) p.204, figure 2. This retable is considered further below, p.184.

122. The Abergavenny panel, noted above, chapter 1, note 14, is described and illustrated in Nelson (1919) p.136, plate VI.

123. Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 134.

124. This panel seems to be unpublished.

125. Cheetham (1984) p.206, catalogue number 133, measuring 41.8cm x 26.2 cm.

size of this panel is typical of other cycle panels from retables, but in other respects

it is very similar to the larger treatments of the subject. The existence of this panel is

interesting, as it reflects the fact that the subject was not restricted to central panels

for retables and panels for tomb monuments; this in turn implies that the subjects

used for these large panels were interchangeable to some extent with subjects used

for cycle panels, and that central panels were not necessarily restricted to the few

subjects that are still extant but could perhaps have been chosen from a wide range,

if not the complete range, of subjects treated by carvers.

In contrast to the unusual treatments of some of the cycle panels, the La

Selle panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity

seems to be quite conventional given the variation evident in the group of alabaster

panels of the subject. The Holy Spirit sometimes appears as a dove, for example in

the panels from the Thermes-Cluny collection (plate 69) and the Swansea

altarpiece, but other treatments mirror La Selle by showing all three members of the

Trinity in human form, for example at Abergavenny and the larger Victoria and Albert

Museum panel.[126] Nine angels are depicted supporting the mandorla,[127] four on each

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The entire Swansea altarpiece is illustrated in Cheetham (1984) plate 1.

126. Cheetham (1984) p.207; catalogue number 134. This panel is somewhat damaged but generally quite similar to the La Selle panel. However, there are only two angels on either side of the mandorla, a pair of angels supporting the Virgin's crown and a pair of angels with musical instruments behind the Trinity. At 73.8cm high x 35cm wide this panels is considerably larger than the La Selle panel, which implies that it is a tomb panel, as the Abergavenny panel certainly is, rather than a retable panel. A complete list of extant version of this subject is given by Cheetham in his commentary on this panel. Nigel Morgan argues that later treatments are characterised by the presentation of the Trinity in human form, but he does not give evidence for this assertion nor suggest reasons why this development may have occurred: Morgan (1994) p.226.

127. The depiction of the Virgin in a mandorla is possibly related to the description in Revelations XII, 1, of 'a woman clothed with the sun'. This image and its relation to pagan mythology is discussed in Benko (1993) pp.87-136, although the specific iconography of the Assumption is not considered.

side and one holding the Virgin's feet. This treatment is mirrored in the Cluny panel,

but only seven angels support the mandorla in the Abergavenny panel, and five in

the larger Victoria and Albert Museum panel. Meanwhile the Swansea altarpiece

panel has six angels, with no angel under the Virgin's feet.[128] This degree of

variation is also evident in treatments of Assumption of the Virgin: there can be as

few as four angels, for example on a mid fifteenth-century misericord said to

originate from Malmesbury Abbey,[129] whilst in the Lady Chapel of Exeter Cathedral

there is a late fifteenth-century wall painting of the Assumption, distinguished by the

portrayal of the angels lifting the Virgin in her Assumption in the form of the nine

Orders of Angels.[130] Below the Virgin, in the left foreground, kneels St Thomas

receiving her girdle.[131] This motif is absolutely typical of alabasters of both the

Assumption and the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the

Trinity, but in a few cases it can be augmented by additional imagery. In the Pisa

retable St Thomas is mirrored by a figure of St Francis on the right side of the

panel,[132] whilst at Abergavenny figures of Richard Herbert and his wife appear in the

128. The absence of the angel at the Virgin's feet may be due to the small size of the
panel relative to the other extant treatments. Interestingly, there are roles for six
angels in the York play of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, but it is
unclear whether they were expected to support a mandorla for the Virgin. [For the
York play see Happé (1975) pp. 625-30.]

129. This misericord is illustrated in Tracy (1988), p.69, plate 69. (I am indebted to
Miriam Gill for this reference.) There are also several alabasters of the Assumption
in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection which feature only four angels
supporting the mandorla [Cheetham (1984) catalogue numbers 126, 129, and 130].

130. This wall painting is illustrated in Stone (1937) pp.121-25. Nigel Morgan has
observed that this treatment mirrors the Legenda Aurea account of the Assumption,
which specifically describes the Orders of Angels: Morgan (1994) p.235.

131. Réau has commented that the Virgin's gift of her girdle to St Thomas is an
antitype of Elijah leaving Elisha his mantle as he ascends to heaven: Réau (1957)
volume II, part 2, p.618. It is also possible that the 'flames' of the mandorla may be a
reference to Elijah's fiery chariot.

132. Papini (1910) p.204.

positions occupied by St Thomas and St Francis at Pisa, with a figure of St Thomas appearing behind Richard Herbert.[133]

Cycles of the Life of the Virgin

As it stands, the La Selle retable contains seven panels drawn from the Life of the Virgin.[134] The number may itself be meaningful, but we should note that the subjects depicted do not conform to any obvious grouping, such as the 'Joys' or the 'Sorrows' of the Virgin,[135] and they do not appear to be paralleled by any other cycle. Cheetham includes 29 retables with cycles of the life of the Virgin in his list of English alabaster altarpieces in Europe.[136] This list does not include retables in England, such as the Swansea altarpiece and the Scartho (Lincolnshire) panels,[137] so we have a total of over 30 extant or documented Virgin cycles in alabaster. It has proved impossible to trace publications on all these cycles, but the literature suggests that the 'standard' form of a life of the Virgin retable consists of four cycle

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133. Nelson (1919) p.126.

134. It has been suggested that there was an eighth panel of the Life of the Virgin, sited in the lacuna below the panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity. This possibility is discussed above, pp.81-84, where it is concluded that there is little evidence to support the contention, so this chapter treats only the extant panels.

135. The 'Joys of the Virgin' are variable in number, but traditionally include the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, Finding in the Temple and Resurrection. Donald Attwater notes an English carol which includes the Virgin suckling her son, and Jesus curing the lame, curing the blind, reading the Bible, and raising the dead among the Joys, along with the Resurrection and the Ascension: Attwater (1961) p.269. The 'Sorrows' are usually identified as the Prophecy of Simeon, the Flight into Egypt, the three days' disappearance of Jesus, his progress to Calvary, the Crucifixion, the Deposition and Entombment [ibid, p.470].

136. Cheetham (1984) pp.57-59.

137. The Swansea altarpiece is illustrated in Cheetham (1984) plate 1; the Scartho panels are mentioned briefly in Hildburgh (1930) p.42, and are discussed at greater length in Alexander (1998).

panels distributed around a larger central panel, with the addition of terminal saints, a pattern which exactly mirrors the design of retables of other saints' lives, such as the Borbjerg St George retable (plates 43-45), the Santiago St James retable and the Vëjrum St Katherine retable.[138]

The usual subjects in the second half of the fifteenth century are the Annunciation, the combined Adoration of the Virgin and Adoration of the Magi, the Assumption and the Coronation of the Virgin, with a central panel of the Resurrection.[139] This format is found in retables at Avilés (Spain), Majori (Italy) and Châtelaudren (France).[140] An alternative form replaces the panel of the Resurrection with another subject, for example the Trinity, in the Swansea altarpiece, or the Mass of St Gregory, in the Montréal retable. Earlier retables of the Life of the Virgin may show some variations. A retable which features a central panel of the Resurrection at the Marienkirche, Danzig, substitutes a panel of the Ascension for the Assumption;[141] a retable from the monastery church at Munka verà, Iceland,

138. The Santiago retable is discussed in Hildburgh (1926) 304-07, plates xlii and xliii; the Vëjrum retable is discussed in Nelson (1920b) pp.197-99, plates iv, no.2; v; and vi no.1.

139. Philip Nelson has commented that the Resurrection is depicted in the central panel of all retables of the Life of the Virgin in the late fourteenth century [Nelson (1918) p.315]; this form seems to continue well into the fifteenth century.

140. The Avilés retable is considered in Hildburgh (1944) pp.31-32, illustrated facing p.31. Hildburgh comments that the retable framework is probably not original as it lacks wooden cresting and hinge points between the second and third panels, and the fifth and sixth panels. The Majori retable is considered in Hildburgh (1955), pp.182-186, plate xxix. The Châtelaudren retable is considered in Nelson (1927) p.123, plate ix. The retable formed from the alabaster panels at the church of Kermaria-en-Isquit, Plouha (see notes 54 and 115, above) is likely to have conformed to this standard format: the Annunciation, Adoration, Assumption and Coronation are preserved, but the central panel is lost.

141. Nelson (1919) pp.139-42, illustrated in plate 1. This triptych features embattled cycle panels, which tends to suggest a late fourteeth-century date. However, the central panel has a gabled canopy breaking through the oak cresting, an anomaly which suggests either a transitional form between the embattled and canopied styles, or a later confection.

includes a Nativity rather than an Adoration of the Virgin and Magi.[142]

A few cycles of the Life of the Virgin differ from this standard five panel format. The Bordeaux retable consists of seven panels plus terminal saints; it retains the central panel of the Resurrection, but includes separate panels of the Adoration of the Virgin and the Adoration of the Magi rather than a single panel with a combined subject, and adds a panel of the Ascension before the Assumption. The format of this retable suggests that it is effectively an augmented standard five-panel cycle, with one subject divided across two panels and one additional subject, rather than any substitute subjects.[143] By contrast, the five-panel cycle of the Pisa retable does include substitute subjects.[144] The most striking variation is the central panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, the same subject used at La Selle. On the left side of the central panel are the Visitation and the Annunciation (evidently out of their logical sequence); on the right are the Adoration of the Virgin and the Circumcision. The Pisa retable thus contains only four of the standard subjects (the Annunciation, the Adoration, and the Assumption and Coronation combined together), and introduces two relatively rare subjects (the Visitation and the Circumcision) in place of the Resurrection.

Eight fragments of panels from what appears to be a retable of the Life of the Virgin, dating from the second half of the fifteenth century, were known at

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142. Cheetham (1984) figure 10. The panel of the Coronation of the Virgin reflects the early date of this panel, c.1420, as it shows Christ crowning the Virgin with both figures seated.

143. It has been plausibly suggested that the arrangements of subjects in the fragmentary Scartho cycle originally corresponded to the Bordeaux retable: Alexander (1998). If correct, this could imply that there was a standard format for seven-panel cycles of the life of the Virgin.

144. Papini (1910) figure 2.

Mondoñedo, Spain and are discussed by Hildburgh.[145] This group of panels also shows some unusual subjects; the sequence of panels is indicated by numerals on the reverse of some of the fragments and titles in Spanish.[146] Panel 1 is untitled, and Hildburgh asserts that this was a terminal figure of a saint.[147] Panel 2 is the Conception of the Virgin, with the Annunciations to SS Anne and Joachim and the Meeting at the Golden Gate;[148] panel 3 is the Nativity of the Virgin.[149] There is no panel 4, but three unnumbered fragments survive which almost certainly form part of a large panel of God the Father holding the crucified Christ. The first fragment shows Christ crucified with angels holding chalices under his hands and feet, between the draped knees of God the Father; the second fragment shows a large head of God the Father and a censing angel; the third shows another censing angel in a mirror-image position. It is very likely that this panel formed the centre of the retable.[150] Panel 5 is the Presentation of the Virgin. Only the right-hand part of the

145. Hildburgh (1944) pp.28-31, plate 10, a-c; Villa-amil y Castro (1865) plates 3 and 4.

146. As Hildburgh observes, the presence of these titles is very unusual and it is very unlikely that they were inscribed by the English alabaster carvers: Hildburgh (1944) p.28. They could, however, have been copied from inscriptions on the lost wooden framework of the retable, perhaps when the altarpiece was dismantled. As other wooden cases tend to be inscribed in Latin the titles on the panels could well be translations of the original inscriptions.

147. Hildburgh (1944) p.28. Hildburgh does not seem to have seen any image of the panel, nor a description, so this assertion is pure hypothesis. He does not consider the possibility that there were no terminal figures, nor that any terminal figures may have been numbered by a different system. However, given the inclusive nature of the panel of the Conception of the Virgin, it is difficult to suggest any subject for a panel to open the cycle. The standard layout of the five-panel cycles (see above, p.183) would tend to imply that Hildburgh may well be correct in his assertion.

148. Cheetham notes only two other examples of this subject in English alabaster Cheetham (1984) p.55.

149. See observations on this panel above, pp.155-56

150. This panel would seem to have been very similar to the central panel of the Swansea altarpiece (see above, p.183), although the positioning of the angels is

panel numbered 6 is extant; it is labelled as the Purification of the Virgin and shows the Infant Christ on an altar with the high priest behind. There is no seventh panel to balance the first panel, but, as Hildburgh asserts, it is likely that there was a second terminal saint.[151]

If the Mondoñedo fragments do derive from one retable of the life of the Virgin, the subjects are quite markedly different from the standard format. The most glaring omissions are the Annunciation and the Adoration of Christ: the narrative leap from the Presentation of the Virgin to the Purification is enormous, and it seems highly unlikely that these vital subjects concerned with the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth will have been omitted by simple oversight. It is possible that this putative retable is the result of a rather curious commission, but it seems more likely that the fragments are actually part of a larger work. If we discount the evidence of the numerals and inscriptions, which may have been added to the fragments at any time in their history, it seems likely that we are looking at the remnants of a retable that was probably designed on a similar scale to the Bordeaux seven-panel cycle. It is quite possible that panels of the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Virgin may have been removed and resited when the retable was dismantled, particularly given the theological importance of these subjects.[152] The inclusion of these subjects at the most logical point in the sequence of panels would give us an interesting cycle consisting of the Conception of the Virgin, the Nativity of the Virgin, and the Presentation of the Virgin on the left of a central panel of the Trinity, and the slightly different.

151. Hildburgh (1944) p.28.

152. A similar fate seems to have befallen some panels from the putative Scartho retable: comparison with the Bordeaux retable suggests that panels of the Resurrection and Assumption are missing, and Jenny Alexander has suggested that their imagery may have meant that they were reused rather than buried with the other panels: Alexander (1998).

Annunciation, the Adoration of the Virgin, and the Circumcision on the right. This format would give us three panels concerned with the conception and childhood of the Virgin, and three panels concerned with her adulthood, and the conception and childhood of Christ, centred around a panel of the most significant moment of the adulthood of Christ, the Crucifixion.

Even if this reconstruction of the putative Mondoñedo retable is incorrect,[153] it is still possible to compare the fragments with known retables in order to draw some conclusions about the treatment of the life of the Virgin in cycles of alabaster panels. The most obvious conclusion is that, whilst a standard format five-panel clearly existed, variations could and did arise. This may well have been due to specific commissions, although this is difficult to substantiate in the absence of documentary evidence, and it may also reflect developments in fashion and taste. The fact that the only the Resurrection seems to have been used for the central panel of retables of the Virgin in the late fourteenth century is a good example: the introduction of the motif of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity in the mid fifteenth century was not only an expression of the introduction of this subject in other media, but may well also be indicative of an increasing interest in the person of the Virgin herself among the patrons and/or producers of alabaster retables. The

153. Hildburgh has suggested that the Mondoñedo and Avilés panels could have originally been one large cycle, which would have told the story of the Virgin's life from her conception through to her coronation. This would certainly account for the fact that no subject is common to both sets of panels, but given that there seem to be two central panels, the Crucifixion at Mondoñedo and the Resurrection at Avilés, which is a wholly conventional grouping (see p.183, above), a more likely explanation would seem to be that the Mondoñedo retable is simply an unusual combination of subjects. However, Hildburgh does present stronger evidence concerning the Madrid panels, which were formerly part of a retable at the church of Santa Maria le Vieja at Cartagena (Murcia). Hildburgh suggests that this retable was probably a composite of at least two, and possibly three, retables, with the panels of the Nativity of the Virgin, the Presentation of the Virgin and the Circumcision appearing to originate from one retable, whilst the Education of the Virgin, the Betrothal, the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ seem to derive from at least one other retable [Hildburgh (1916-17) pp.75-76].

Resurrection is certainly a very important subject theologically, but a central panel that concentrates on the Virgin's final reward is surely a more fitting motif for the centre of an altarpiece devoted to her life. Likewise, the Ascension may well have given way to the Assumption as a subject of choice in the light of increasing emphasis on the Virgin herself.

Another important factor that emerges from a study of these retables is that all but two of the cycles are entirely concerned with the adult life of the Virgin: only the Mondoñedo fragments and the La Selle retable contain subjects that occur before the Annunciation in the narrative of the life of the Virgin. Furthermore, all these subjects (the Conception of the Virgin, the Nativity of the Virgin and the Presentation of the Virgin) are very rare in extant alabaster generally: this is, in itself, by no means a fool-proof guide to the levels of production of these subjects, but in default of other evidence it is difficult to argue that the Mondoñedo fragments and the La Selle retable are anything other than highly unusual cycles. The conclusion that patrons have had a significant role to play in the design of these two cycles seems inescapable: unless the survival of different forms of alabaster cycles of the Virgin has been badly skewed, these are not standard, production-line retables. Rather, they were each created for a patron who was particularly interested in the cult of the Virgin and some of the less common subjects which formed part of the alabaster carvers' corpus of designs.

Comparison with cycles of the life of the Virgin in other media tends to confirm the impression that the combination of subjects in the La Selle retable is very unusual. Plate 70 shows a very full version by the engraver Israhel von Meckenem, dated to the late fifteenth century, which presents the narrative in eight main subjects with a further accessory subject in each background, making a total of

sixteen subjects. The cycle thus begins with the rejection of the offering of Joachim

and the subsequent annunciation in the first image, and passes through the meeting

at the Golden Gate, the birth of the Virgin, the Presentation, the weaving of the

purple, the suitors and the marriage to Joseph, all in the four images on the left. On

the right, the narrative encompasses the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity,

the annunciation to the shepherds, the Adoration of the Magi and their journey

home, and finishes with the Presentation of Christ and the Circumcision. This cycle

includes all the key elements of the story, and gives equal weight to the apocryphal

early part and the later, Gospel-based, account. By contrast, an engraving from the

Florentine School,[154] c.1460-70, is much closer to the La Selle version. It features

images of the Birth of the Virgin, the Presentation of the Virgin, the Marriage, the

Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity combined with the Adoration of the Magi,

the Presentation of Christ, the Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the

Innocents,[155] arranged around two central images of the Death of the Virgin and the

Assumption. This cycle is rather fuller than the La Selle treatment, although the

omission of the Coronation of the Virgin seems odd, but it is significant that they

both commence with the Nativity of the Virgin. This is an unusual starting point, for it

seems much more common for cycles to begin with the rejection of Joachim's

offering (for example, Israhel von Meckenem's work) or the Annunciation, as in the

fifteenth-century cycles in stained glass in the church of St Peter Mancroft, Norwich,

and East Harling church (Norfolk).[156]

154. Image held in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute, London.

155. The latter four subjects are incorrectly sequenced in the image.

156. On the East Harling and St Peter Mancroft cycles see Woodforde (1940) p.12. It should be noted that the *Biblia Pauperum* (c.1460) also commences with the Annunciation [see Henry (1987) p.48]. By contrast, a sculpted altarpiece of the Life of the Virgin dated to 1519, at the Wienhauser monastery near Celle (Germany), begins with the Presentation and includes the Annunciation, the Visitation, the

The Rationale of the Programme of the La Selle Retable

Whilst some of the subjects in the Virgin cycle of the La Selle retable are very rare, none of them is unique, but, as we have seen, the combination of subjects does seem to be unparalleled.[157] This programme would appear to be far from arbitrary; indeed there seems to have been a very careful choice of subjects,[158] a finding which is all the more persuasive in the light of the clearly unusual treatment of several of the subjects, most notably the Adoration of Christ panel (see above, p.164). The logic of the combination begins to become apparent when we observe that all the panels of the Virgin cycle include a small child ~ the only exception to this is the Annunciation, which is, of course, purely concerned with the incarnation of God as a child. Furthermore, by omitting all reference to Christ's earthly life as an adult, by excluding scenes such as the Resurrection or the Trinity with the Crucified Christ, we are confronted with an altarpiece that has an emphasis on the Mother of Nativity and Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation of Christ, the Death of the Virgin and the Coronation of the Virgin, although the logical sequence is not always applied. [Image held in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute, London; medium not recorded]. The existence of this cycle demonstrates that there was considerable variation in the combination of subjects used in depictions of the life of the Virgin. This finding tends to underline the degree to which English alabaster cycles were stereotyped, with the obvious exceptions of the groupings at Mondoñedo and La Selle.

157. We must, of course, allow for the fact that we are working from a corpus that is very incomplete. It seems likely that the vast majority of alabaster retables have been lost, and hence we must remain circumspect in our assessment of the peculiarity of the iconography.

158. As we will see in chapter 5, the resonances set up by the vertical relationships between the panels of the two cycles are vitally important in understanding the way that the retable functions. However, in the absence of any direct evidence about the commissioning of the retable, or the process by which it was designed, it is impossible to determine the extent to which the choice of subjects in one cycle will have been determined by a need to form a link with the other cycle, as opposed to the need to maintain consistency within each cycle. That said, the narrative forms of the individual cycles seem to be sufficiently sophisticated to allow an argument to be made for the existence of an underlying rationale in the unusual combination of subjects in the life of the Virgin cycle, above and beyond the requirements of vertical integration with the St George cycle.

God, rather than God himself. The fact the central panel is the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, rather than a Resurrection or Trinity with the Crucified Christ, would appear to lend weight to the thesis that the cycle of the Virgin is concerned with motherhood and small children, for the Assumption and Coronation can be said to stand as a reward for the way she performed her role as the mother of Christ.

The fact that the La Selle cycle commences with a panel of the Nativity of the Virgin is potentially highly significant. The choice of this subject as a starting point, rather than the (almost inevitable) Annunciation, would seem to indicate that the patron desires to underline the importance of the Virgin as a subject in her own right, rather than using her simply as a functionary of the Redemption. Equally, it may be said that by starting with her birth, rather than with her conception (as appears to happen at Mondoñedo), a large part of the mystique, or 'holy mystery', of Mary is removed; she appears like any other baby. Even for an observer with a strong grasp of the textual and traditional background to the Life of the Virgin, it would perhaps seem unusual to begin in this way, with a scene that could be birth of any child. There is nothing particularly spiritual about the style of this panel: there are no angels, no saintly attributes, not even the Virgin is nimbed.[159] There are no clues here that this baby is destined to be the Mother of God. In some ways the Meeting at the Golden Gate would seem to have made a better starting place, for a strong element of religious mystery is present in the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. But here we begin with a simple Nativity. Could it be that the patron expected the observer to read all that had gone before into this first panel? A rather more interesting interpretation is that the patron was simply more concerned with this

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159. There is a possibility that a painted nimbus may have been used, but the device of a sculpted nimbus is used in other panels, such as the Annunciation.

subject as a depiction of a birth, or rather the time shortly after a birth, when the baby has been bathed and swaddled and the mother tries to regain her strength, than in a more conventional rendering of the Life of the Virgin. The presence of the midwives undoubtedly bears witness to the wealthy (and hence noble) family that the Virgin was born into, but it also gives rise to a sense of female fellowship, that important solidarity that exists between the mother and the midwife during labour and the post-partum period.

The obvious counterpart to the Nativity of the Virgin, both in terms of subject matter and the structure of the retable, is the Adoration of Christ. Whilst this subject is one of the most common in Christian art generally, as well the specific case of alabaster panels,[160] we should be clear that this particular example has some highly unusual features. The position of St Joseph is particularly interesting: comparison with other versions of the subject demonstrates that he should be in the centre of the panel (see above, p.168). Whilst he is physically present in this panel, his position behind the animals means that he is kept well away from the focus of the action. The three main players are the baby, the Virgin and 'St Anastasia', with 'Zebel' taking a supporting role by echoing the posture of the new mother. If Joseph took his usual, central position, it could be argued that the emphasis would shift from maternity to parenthood, by including ideas of (step-)paternity too. By restricting the focus of the action to the female characters, plus the baby, the theme of the sanctity of motherhood is undoubtedly strengthened.

Like the two Nativities, two other panels in the cycle are obviously linked by theme, if not by their positioning: the Presentation of the Virgin and the Purification of the Virgin (which can also be understood as the Presentation of Christ).[161] Each

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160. See Table 6.

161. A Flemish Book of Hours, dated to the early sixteenth century, explicitly pairs

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panel evidently deals with the dedication to God of the main character, but there are deeper resonances also at work. In particular we should note that each panel contains two female figures standing behind the parents of the child. In the Purification of the Virgin panel one of the women is almost certainly the prophetess Anna, whose presence is biblically authenticated, but the identity of the other three women remains an enigma.[162] They could simply be intended to represent bystanders, but the fact that they are all women seems worthy of consideration. In fact all the nameless characters in this cycle are women, whilst all the male figures are definitely identifiable: Joachim, the High Priest, Joseph, the Three Magi, Simeon the priest, and of course God and the archangel Gabriel. Effectively, the characters with whom the observer will empathise most, *ie* the bystanders, are all female. It is interesting to compare these treatments with other panels of the Presentation of the Virgin and the Purification, which almost always contain female bystanders (see above, pp.161-62; 173). The implication is that there is a theme of female witness in all of these panels, reminiscent of the deep empathy experienced by Margery Kempe when she visualised acting as the Virgin's handmaid and helping to bathe the Christchild;[163] the prominence of female bystanders in the La Selle cycle may

the Presentation of the Virgin and the Purification: Bodleian Library MS Douce 112, fol. 71, illustrated in Twycross (1983) p.103. The two images appear on the same page, with the Purification and the associated text intruded into the illustration of the Presentation of the Virgin. The priest in each image appears to be the same man, which clearly underlines the connection between the two subjects.

162. Hildburgh identifies the two bystanders as Simeon and Anna, but this seems to be wrong. They are clearly both dressed as women, whilst Simeon is traditionally the name of the priest. We should note that there are no less than five women in the background of the Circumcision panel of the Pisa retable, which would tend to imply that women bystanders may be a standard addition to images of the Purification, Presentation of Christ and Circumcision [Papini (1910) p.204, figure 2].

163. *The Book of Margery Kempe* pp.52-54. Margery's visualisations are in the style of those encouraged by the *Imitatio Vitae Christi*, although this work does not seem to have been aimed at a specifically female audience.

suggest that particular scenes were chosen not least because they offered the possibility of including female witnesses.[164]

The two remaining cycle panels, the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi, may not initially seem to share the theme of the sanctity of motherhood. Both subjects are vital to the Redemption Narrative, as well as being extremely common in English alabaster, and hence are very likely to be included even when they are not strongly linked to underlying themes.[165] However, it is quite possible to interpret both these subjects in the light of a theme of maternity. The Annunciation is concerned with the incarnation of God as a child. and the image represents the moment when the Virgin is told that she is to become a mother. Whilst no other woman will have experience of a completely analogous situation, *ie* being informed of her pregnancy by a visiting angel, there are resonances which any mother will recognise. The resonances will also be apparent to a woman who wishes to bear a child, who eagerly anticipates that moment of realisation of pregnancy. In fact, this scene could easily be used as a source of hope, as a subject for devout meditation for the would-be mother, for the Virgin and her mother, St Anne, were often called on in cases of infertility.[166] The Adoration of the Magi could also be interpreted in

164. There is also an argument to be made for the preponderance of female bystanders occurring for purely stylistic reasons: the two women in the background of the Presentation of the Virgin could be merely balancing the two standing midwives in the Nativity of the Virgin, and are in turn balanced by the two women in the background of the Purification of the Virgin. Like the problem of the bedesman under the stairs, this deployment of figures could be little more than an imaginative use of space.

165. It seems that the Mondoñedo group of panels is the only (putative) alabaster cycle of the Life of the Virgin which omits these subjects. However, it seems quite likely that the set is incomplete: see above, pp.186-87.

166. The Virgin and St Anne were invoked in various ways. Osbern Bokenham's 'Life of St Anne' in his *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* [Bokenham (1971)] was written for a woman, Katherine Denston, who sought to bear a son. Katherine already had a daughter, named Anne in honour of the saint, which seems to be a rather suitable manner for currying favour with a saint who had herself been infertile. The Virgin's

terms of the joy attending the birth of a child, when gifts are often given and visits made to see the child.[167] Again, meditation on this subject could give comfort and hope to infertile women, and also perhaps to pregnant women who feared the very real dangers of childbirth.

The central panel of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity can be interpreted as the symbolic reward for both the Virgin's exemplary life in general, and specifically for the way that she conducted herself as Christ's mother. Its position as the dominant subject of the entire work reflects the importance given here to the Virgin as an individual in her own right, with a vital role to play in the Redemption narrative. The motif of the combined Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity is by no means unparalleled, but it is far more common for the two subjects to be treated separately. By putting them together the patron, or designer, has allowed the Virgin to be shown (almost literally) in all her glory. She is surrounded by a mandorla and a team of angels, whilst the Trinity, who are noticeably smaller than the Virgin, perform the Coronation. There is no mistaking

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aid seems to have been invoked rather more directly. There were many legends current in the medieval period relating to the Virgin's intervention in difficult births. The tunic of Chartres, the relic of a garment believed to have been worn by the Virgin during her pregnancy, was the object of veneration from at least AD 911 [Sharborough (1981) pp.74-5], and more than 30 similar tunics are recorded. The Virgin's girdle was also used to aid childbirth, and there is record of silken girdles, supposedly the same size as the Virgin's waist being given to girls at their first communion for use later in life during childbirth [Réau (1957) volume II, part 2 pp.61-62].

167. The *Huy Nativity*, a Flemish play written by a Belgian nun in the fifteenth century, contains an account of a visit to the Virgin by St Anne and her two younger daughters shortly after the birth of Christ. There is no other extant account of this episode, but the message is clearly one of female piety and family bonding. A visual representation would certainly have been too obscure to have replaced the Three Magi, but even within this masculine form there is still a marked resonance with the wider theme of celebrations attending the birth of a child. [For a discussion of the *Huy Nativity* see Ashley (1990) pp.111-30.]

the message that the Virgin is extremely important to the patron of this altarpiece.[168]

Whilst ideas concerned with maternity do seem to inform this cycle, it is important to realise that this theme would not only be of interest to mothers and would-be mothers. Women who did not want to bear a *physical* child, but who wished to deepen their religious experience by empathising with the Virgin, could also have found inspiration for their meditation in these panels. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has written about the phenomenon of 'holy dolls', which were given to young women as they married, or as they entered convents, in Florence in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[169] Whilst some of these dolls seem not to have had a specific devotional purpose, others of them almost certainly did: there is good documentary evidence that dolls in the image of the Christchild were given to these women. There are clear parallels here with the common experience of 'vicarious motherhood' amongst female saints and mystics. Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that these different phenomena are triggered by 'women's somatic social responsibility',[170] that late medieval women often felt the need to express their feelings and aspirations physically. She cites the mystics Lidwina of Schiedam and Gertrude of Delft, who so strongly wished to mother the Christchild that milk flowed

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168. The fact that the Coronation is being performed by the Trinity, rather than by Christ alone, can be said to re-emphasise the theme of her motherhood, for the Trinity effectively represent the father of her child, the child himself, and the instrument by which she was impregnated. Admittedly, the effect of this 'family grouping' would be heightened if the Holy Spirit was presented as a dove rather than in human form, as in the Thermes-Cluny panel (plate 69) for example, as this is the form in which the 'impregnator' is usually presented. However, we should note that the figure of God the Father in the Trinity holds an orb in a clear parallel of God the Father in the Annunciation panel.

169. Klapisch-Zuber (1985) p.311. Klapisch-Zuber comments that these dolls were only said to be given to women [ibid, p.317].

170. Bynum (1991) p.198.

from their virginal breasts,[171] and also writes of the liturgical cradles known in the convents of northern Europe at this time.[172] A further example is found in the *Book of Margery Kempe*: Margery relates that whilst in Rome she met a woman travelling from Jerusalem who possessed an image of Christ in a chest.[173] Margery travelled with her for a while, and found that the woman would take out her image pass it around amongst groups of 'respectable wives' who would dress it up and kiss it reverently. Whilst Margery does not state that the image is of Christ as a baby, this is implied by the fact that she says that she was inspired by these scenes to 'sweet' meditations on the birth and childhood of Christ. As the women are explicitly said to be 'wives', it is possible that there was some desire for actual pregnancy in the group, but in Margery's case there is no doubt that she had already fulfilled any desire to bear children ~ one of her most strongly expressed desires is to live in chastity. It seems that she longed for spiritual, rather than physical, motherhood, and it is likely that the enclosed nuns who played with images of the Christchild would have had similar aspirations to a cathartic, vicarious experience of parenting.[174]

It has also been observed that certain iconographic subjects, such as the Visitation and St Anne with her family, seem to have found especial favour with women, both religious and lay, and stories of the childhoods of Christ and the Virgin

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171. ibid (1991) p.190.

172. A liturgical cradle from the Grand Beguinage in Louvain, dated to the fifteenth century is illustrated in Bynum (1991) p.199, figure 6.2.

173. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.113.

174. Klapisch-Zuber comments on documented instances where the 'holy dolls' were bathed, dressed and played with, which certainly tends to imply a form of vicarious parenting [Klapisch-Zuber (1985) p.324].

seem to have been similarly popular.[175] Whilst the Visitation is missing from the La

Selle retable,[176] it is clear that the subjects of the Life of the Virgin cycle can be

understood to be concerned with motherhood. It is certainly possible that the design

of the cycle was influenced by a patron's wish to create an aid for meditation on the

Virgin's motherhood, and to assist the vicarious experience of mothering the

Christchild. If this is correct, this may indicate that the La Selle retable was

commissioned by a woman or a group of women, or perhaps was commissioned as

a gift for a community of women, such as a convent.

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175. Bynum (1991) p.200. She does, however, add the rider that individuals are not necessarily attracted only to images of their own gender, as the 'Christ and St John group' (a devotional object which seems to be concerned with male love) is found predominantly in women's religious houses in the late medieval period [ibid, p.378, n.73].

176. As noted above, p.83, this could have been the 'missing panel', as it is the only subject which logically fits between Annunciation and Adoration of the Virgin. However, the reconstruction presented in figures 3-5 demonstrates that it is very unlikely that any narrative panel has been lost, and it is possible that the Visitation was omitted because of pressure of space, or, more interestingly, because no subject could be found in the narrative of St George which could be paired with it whilst maintaining the clear vertical resonances and 'super-cycle' outlined below, in chapter 5.

Chapter Five: The Resonances Between the Cycles.

Given the evidence of the construction of the La Selle retable discussed in Chapter 2, and the evident iconographic coherence of both cycles, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, it is clear that the altarpiece was designed in a format that was not too dissimilar to its appearance today. This chapter looks more closely at the retable as a whole and tries to uncover the decision-making processes which may lie behind the design. Each vertical pair of panels is assessed in turn, and the themes of the overall iconographic scheme are then considered. Comparisons are drawn with the fragmentary two-tiered English alabaster retable at Génissac, and there is also a brief discussion of works in other media which utilise vertical resonances in addition to a horizontal narrative. The imagery of the desk-ends of the south side of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, which also combines imagery of the St George and the Virgin Mary, is also considered, and the possible significance of the particular design used at La Selle is discussed.

At some point in the commissioning or construction of the La Selle retable an individual chose to include two separate cycles of the Virgin and St George, and there must also have been a selection of the specific iconographic subjects. There could have been an element of randomness at work: the patron may have required scenes from the Life of the Virgin and another cycle which would be complementary, and left the final decision to the carvers. Alternatively, the patron may have stipulated the cycles to be used, and perhaps even the individual subjects. It is quite conceivable that the patron may have had divergent interests which could have been fulfilled by these two cycles: for example, he or she may have had a devotion to the Virgin but also wished to commemorate a husband, father or son named for St

George, or someone with a devotion to that saint. In default of contemporary evidence the 'true' explanation will remain beyond our reach, but it is still possible to examine the internal evidence of the retable to try to establish the decision-making process. The complexities of the iconographic programme of the retable, as outlined below, strongly suggest that it was designed from the start to integrate the two cycles, and it demonstrates a thought-process rather more sophisticated than a simple chronological ordering according to the prescriptions of contemporary hagiography and legend.[1]

One factor which strongly supports the analysis of the retable in terms of an integrated iconographic programme is the unusual nature of the two cycles themselves. As we have seen, the St George cycle is manifestly different from the vast majority of other medieval cycles of the saint in that it omits any mention of his tortures, the grisly procession of physical torments that informs the hagiography of St George, and becomes the virtual *raison d'etre* of cycles such as those of Stamford, St Neot and the Bedford Hours.[2] This omission may be accidental, the result of a random grouping of six scenes of the saint's life, but it seems far more likely that the bias of the cycle is deliberate. The Virgin cycle is equally exceptional: the inclusion of apparently rare subjects, such as the Nativity of the Virgin and the Presentation of the Virgin, at the expense of images which occur rather more frequently in cycles of her life in English alabaster, notably the Resurrection and the Ascension, leads to an apparent emphasis on imagery featuring small children rather than an adult Virgin

1. As noted above, chapter 1, note 17, English alabaster panels and altarpieces have tended to be described rather than analysed in any deeper way, such as through a discussion of the evolution of the iconographic form. The La Selle retable, as a very rare example of an apparently virtually complete, or at least reconstructable, two-tiered work, is particularly important because an examination of its iconographic structure may allow us to gain some insight into the nature of lost or fragmentary retables.

2. See above, p.146.

with her adult son.[3] The unusual selection of episodes from two such well-known legends is undoubtedly significant, and it implies a deliberate decision on the part of a patron, or possibly the carvers' workshop. This would tend to suggest that a quite specific agenda, or set of agendas, may have informed the iconography of the work, and hence given rise to these peculiarities.

The presence of motifs and themes that are common to the two cycles is also suggestive of an integrated design, particularly where the iconography of comparative works implies that the use of these motifs is exceptional. A reading which is able to establish connections between the two cycles may lead us to an understanding of the motivations that lay behind the commissioning of the retable, both in terms of the progression of subjects which has been employed, and the specific way that individual subjects are treated in the panels. The first train of connection to be investigated arises from the layout of the subjects, for the retable can be read not only as two sets of six panels, ranged one above the other, but also as six sets of two panels, ranged side by side in vertical pairs.[4] This layout evidently offers an entirely new set of iconographic possibilities to both designer and patron.[5]

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3. See above, p.190.

4. The central section is not considered in this vertical reading. As argued above, p.85, it is unlikely that there ever was an additional subject panels in the lacuna; even if there was a 'missing panel', it is impossible to do more than speculate on its subject-matter.

5. It is interesting to note that this two-tiered, two legend format is very rare, despite the possibilities it offers. Of the other extant examples in English alabaster, only the Génissac retable uses two legends (see below,pp.215-17), whilst the Compiègne retable (plate 30) is entirely concerned with Christ's Passion. Meanwhile, this format does not seem to have been used in very often in other media. There are some examples in wall painting, for example Giotto's fresco cycle which pairs the life of St Francis with the life of Christ, in the lower church at Assisi (dated to 1260), and also the fifteenth-century Eton Chapel and Winchester Lady Chapel cycles (see above, chapter 3, note 54) which make some attempt to pair a cycle of the life of the Virgin with other legends. Fifteenth-century carved wooden altarpieces from the Low Countries often utilise a multi-tiered format, but generally with only one narrative (usually the life of the Virgin).

Reading the retable vertically

The resonances between the panels can be either formal or thematic, and the following examination of each pair of panels will consider both strands. The formal connections can be verified objectively rather more easily than the thematic, by simple comparison of the two panels in question; it can be argued that the primary importance of formal connections lies in the sense of aesthetic integration that is achieved. The thematic connections are rather more speculative,[6] as their successful correlation is dependant on the viewer's familiarity with the medieval legends of St George and the Biblical and Apocryphal sources on the life of the Virgin.[7]

The first pair of panels, the Resurrection of St George and the Nativity of the Virgin, has several clear formal links. Perhaps the most obvious is the parallel between the bed of the recumbent St Anne, below, and the tomb of the resurrected St George, above; her bedlinen clearly echoes his graveclothes, and evokes imagery of sleep as a forerunner of death ~ the bed becomes a tomb, the sheet becomes a shroud. The presentations of the bed and tomb are paralleled in an even more significant way, for each slopes downwards and across the panel, from left to right.

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6. Furthermore, this kind of reading is clearly subjective, and runs an obvious risk of plausibility giving way to over-ingenuity. In default of a contract for the work or other concrete evidence about the design process it is impossible to offer a definitive statement on the resoning which lies behind the apparent thematic links, and the various readings offered here are presented as *possibilities* rather than as anything which pretends towards the status of truth. Some of the iconographic connections discussed here may seem quite convincing as evidence of a designer's decisions, whilst others are considerably less strong: the fourth and fifth pairs of panels in particular demonstrate less obviously successful vertical links. However, this in itself need not be a problem as late medieval designers need not have been overly concerned with a rigid schematic system: one or two 'rough fits' amongst other 'good fits' may well have been quite acceptable.

7. We should note that visual imagery may have been drawn from dramatic as well as literary sources. See p.174, above.

This diagonal alignment serves to heighten the sense of immediacy of the upper panel, for if St George were still dead his head would occupy the same part of the visual field as St Anne's. Thus the emptiness of the tomb highlights the fact of his resurrection. This brings us to the second formal link between the two panels, which is concerned with a sense of activity. The upper panel is full of action, for St George is shown in the act of sitting up, and the Virgin is shown in the act of resurrecting and blessing him. Meanwhile, St Anne is shown as an island of stillness in the midst of great activity: she is resting, having completed the strenuous physical 'labour' of giving birth, whilst her attendants are shown in active poses, with a sense of mobility -- one attendant reaches out to touch her in a gesture of comfort, or perhaps to arrange the bedclothes, a second is leaning forward to present the swaddled baby, whilst the small midwife in the foreground is shown in the act of rising to her feet, reaching out to take the new baby and place her in the prepared bed. In each panel these stylistic devices give the viewer a sense of being a privileged spectator at an important event, where we see the action unfolding before us. The presence of other spectators heightens the sense that we are witnessing something real. Notice the positioning of the angels behind St George: their heads are inclined slightly, as if to exchange a word or two, or perhaps to gain a better view of proceedings. In both panels the bystanders, angels or midwives, are functioning as active witnesses, rather than static figures who are merely filling in space.[8] We also see a mirroring of the gesture of the Virgin, holding out her left hand to assist St George to rise, in the gestures of the midwives: their arms are all in similar curved positions as a mark of their activity.

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8. A similar effect is seen in other panels too, especially the Presentation of the Virgin, the Adoration of the Virgin and the Purification of the Virgin. There are various allied effects in panels of the St George cycle, although bystanders there are predominantly not Christian, and hence are not positive witnesses but threatening figures.

Iconographically, the primary link between the panels seems to be concerned with ideas about birth, and resurrection as rebirth. For both protagonists, St George and the Virgin, this is the first step on the path of holy destiny that leads to suffering on Earth ~ martyrdom for the former, and the sacrifice of a son for the latter ~ but ultimate vindication with a Heavenly reward.[9] In another sense these subjects themselves present an image of vindication and reward: St Anne is rewarded, after her twenty years of patient, pious infertility, with a longed-for child, and St George is rewarded with resurrection at the hand of the Queen of Heaven, having suffered execution for worshipping before an image of the Virgin with her son.[10] The presence of bystanders emphasises a theme of witness in the panels, and the presence of the Virgin in both panels forms another thematic link. The lower panel shows her at the beginning of her life on earth, but immediately above she appears as a vision, or as a heavenly visitation; this episode is understood to have occurred some centuries after her death and Assumption.[11] This device has two effects: firstly, it allows a chronological link to be made between the two cycles, for the Purification of the Virgin was followed (in due course) by the Assumption and Coronation, and the Resurrection of St George clearly follows this, if only because the Virgin is shown crowned. Secondly, it forms a symbolic continuum between the two cycles, as St

9. This reading offers another reason why the cycle of St George begins with a scene of resurrection (see above, pp.146-47): it makes good iconographic sense in the overall scheme of the retable.

10. This reading is based on the evidence of the imagery at Stamford and St Neot (see above, pp.124, 128).

11. It is now accepted that St George was martyred in the early fourth century (see above, p.93) but, in the absence of any dating of events in medieval texts on St George, it is impossible to know when contemporary people thought these events occurred. Admittedly, the historically authentic emperor Diocletian is sometimes mentioned, but this is probably insufficient grounds to suggest that many people would have been able to date the events, or that this would have been an important consideration.

George is marked out as being in the service of the Virgin, as 'our lady's knight'.[12]

This theme is further evidenced by the panel of the Arming, and the Virgin can be construed as an unseen presence throughout the remaining St George panels as he fulfils her commission.

The second pair of panels, the Arming of St George and the Presentation of the Virgin, is concerned with the protagonists' acceptance of sanctification and a role in the divine plan. This acceptance is demonstrated in each panel by physical acts. In the upper range St George kneels at the feet of the Virgin to receive his helm, shield, lance and spurs. In the lower, the Virgin willingly leaves her earthly parents and mounts the steps of the Temple, a building which can be interpreted as the house of God, where the priest waits to welcome the Virgin to her new home. On another level, each panel can be read as an essentially *public* declaration of submission to God's will: the arming of a knight is a visual, public statement of the man's willingness to live by the chivalric precepts, whilst the Virgin's miraculous climbing of the Temple steps was an equally public affirmation of both her special status, and her willingness to assume this role.[13] In the upper panel the attendant angels are not only assisting the Virgin in the arming of St George, and drawing attention to the specific accoutrements of the knight (lance, spurs, shield and helm), but are also acting as witnesses of the dedication. Likewise, the Virgin's parents and the two female bystanders are witnesses of her dedication; this again underlines the public nature of

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12. See above, pp.114-16.

13. This scene, and indeed the cycle as a whole, can also be read as public in the sense that the contemporary spectator may well have had the experience of being part of the audience of a dramatic version of this event, such as the *Mary Play* (see above, p.152).

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the ceremonies depicted.[14] Another aspect of the statement of acceptance of the divine plan is that one character within each panel seems to act as the representative of God: in the upper panel the Virgin has this function, as she arms St George as a Christian knight, whilst in the lower panel the priest takes the role, blessing the infant Virgin as he awaits her arrival.

The clearest formal link between the panels is the echo between the shape formed by the arms of the Virgin and the angel as they support the helm, and the arch of the temple. Whilst the depiction of the temple is by no means unparalleled,[15] it is possible that the panel of the Arming of St George was modelled on the conventional shape of the Temple arch.[16] Alternatively, the decision to include this subject, or perhaps to pair these two panels, may have been based on the similarity of shape. Another resonance of shape between the two panels is the left-right diagonal formed by St George's lance and St Joachim's staff. The objects are of similar dimensions, and both are placed at the left side of their respective scenes. Meanwhile, the positioning of the adult Virgin and the priest underlines their shared roles as the representative of God, for they are placed in similar positions on the right of their subjects.

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14. Another aspect of the figure under the stairs is that he could be interpreted as a witness, perhaps a contemporary medieval witness, which imparts a sense of immediacy. As observed above (p.43), he may be intended to draw attention to the Gradual Psalms that the Virgin is reputed to have recited as she mounted the steps; this recitation itself can be interpreted as a public act.

15. See above, pp.160-63, for comparisons with other versions of the Presentation of the Virgin.

16. It may be significant that the Borbjerg arming (plate 44) shows the Virgin alone holding the helm, which gives a quite different shape to the composition. However, as this panel also features St George's tomb, and hence is a combination of the Resurrection and the Arming, it would be unwise to draw any firm conclusions about the 'typical' shape of an Arming in alabaster. The arming scene in the Valencia altarpiece (plate 65) is different again, as the Virgin is not involved with the helm, but it is notable that the two angels holding the helm also form an arched shape.

The third pair, the panels of St George slaying the dragon and the Annunciation, contains ideas about good overcoming evil. The dragon operates here both as a conventional symbol of generalised evil and also as a particular type of evil, the ravening monster who devours all without regard for status; it is shown being subjugated by a good Christian knight. The Annunciation can be interpreted in similar terms as a landmark moment in the struggle between God and the Devil, for it is a necessary precursor to Christ's Redemption of the world, and through the Incarnation evil will be overthrown. Another, perhaps less obvious, strand concerns the presentation of the dragon in relation to the Virgin. The dragon can be read as a type of the serpent in the Paradise Garden ~ its corkscrew tail and lack of wings give it a particularly reptilian feel. Its upright stance, coupled with its position on the extreme right of the panel (rather than in the conventional position under the hooves of St George's horse), allows it to be placed almost directly above the Virgin Annunciate, quite possibly in order to be contrasted with her.[17] As we have noted, the dragon may be intended to be read as female, and specifically a type of femininity that is sexual and bestial, everything that is worst about women to the late medieval mind.[18] Within the panel the dragon is placed in opposition not only to St George but also to the acceptable face of femininity, one that is noble and virginal: the princess. A spatial comparison appears to be drawn between the evil, sexual dragon and the holy and pure Virgin, the nadir and the zenith of womanhood.[19] A third point of comparison

17. Only the presence of the conventional lectern on the extreme right of the Annunciation panel prevents the Virgin occupying the space immediately below the dragon. Given that the upper panel would be cramped even if the dragon was placed under the horse's hooves, it seems reasonable to propose that the dragon's apparently unparalleled positioning was at least partly inspired by a desire to draw a comparison between these two figures.

18. See appendix 3 for further remarks on the motif of St George and a feminised dragon.

19. The dragon may also be read as a figure of Eve, a figure who is often contrasted

between the panels is the presence of parental figures: in the St George panel the king and queen watch from the tower, and in the Annunciation God the Father observes from behind Gabriel. Both treatments are conventional, but the pairing of these two subjects allows for an additional emphasis to be placed on the parents, and arguably on the role of God the Father *as a father*. He is presented in this subject as a true, caring parent, even to the extent that he is shown as physically present at the (albeit sexless) conception of his child.[20]

A formal link between the panels lies in the emphasis on motion from left to right across the subject. Gabriel's conventional entrance from the left of the Annunciation is mirrored in the upper panel by St George's charge, a movement which is highlighted by the lance-thrust into the dragon's mouth.[21] A second point of similarity is the presence of a kneeling virgin in each panel (the princess, above; the Virgin, below); again, the presentation of these figures is conventional, but the pairing of these subjects does seem to be particularly suitable.

The fourth pair of panels, the Baptism of Converts and the Adoration of the Christchild, can be understood to demonstrate a fulfilment of divine commission. St George has acquitted himself well as a Christian knight, has overcome evil in the shape of the dragon, and has asked for, and achieved, the conversion of nonbelievers.[22] The upper panel clearly shows a baptism by St George, presumably

with the Virgin in a 'good woman, bad woman' paradigm.

20. Another possible aspect of the emphasis on the role of God the Father is the consequent presentation of Christ as fully divine as well as fully human.

21. The unusual position of the dragon allows the lance thrust to be depicted on a horizontal plane rather the more conventional vertical plane, that is, a downwards motion into the dragon's mouth as the animal lies under the horse's hooves.

22. Admittedly, in default of written versions of the legend of the Virgin resurrecting St

of the king, queen and princess of the previous panel. Meanwhile, the Virgin has safely given birth to the Christchild. The lower panel is also concerned with conversion, for the two female bystanders in the lower panel are identifiable as the Apocryphal midwives, and are thus, according to their legend, converts to Christianity.[23] Taking the two panels together, it can be argued that there is an emphasis on the acceptance of the reality of the revelation of Christ's role as Son of God. The midwives see Christ for themselves, and one has a direct experience of his divinity that causes her to believe. The Georgian converts are not so lucky, yet they believe in Christ just as if they had first-hand knowledge of him.[24] The crowns held above the two female converts help to identify them as the rescued princess and her mother, but they may also operate as markers of the heavenly reward that awaits the converts: like the midwives below, they will one day see Christ for themselves. Another thematic strand is the birth-rebirth comparison, seen also in the first pair of panels, although baptism as rebirth is perhaps a slightly less obvious parallel than resurrection as rebirth.[25]

The unusual box-like construction that houses the ox and ass seems to be a formal echo of the baptismal tub of the panel above. Although the shape is different ~ the baptismal tub has a smoothly rounded curve whilst the animal-house has definite planes ~ the detailing is similar, particularly the use of the ribbed motif. This appears

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George, it is impossible to be sure what Herculean labours the Virgin was understood to have set for her champion, but these tasks seem to be reasonable in view of the narrative outlined at La Selle, St Neot and Stamford (see above, pp.122-31).

23. See above, p.167.

24. This reading is a good example of the role of a saint's life as an exemplar: like the converts, we should believe even though we have only indirect experience of Christ.

25. It is interesting that this birth-rebirth motif is the same one used in the first two panel, a particularly suitable comparative as this fourth pair of panels 'begin' the right-hand wing section, just the first pair begin the left-hand wing section.

on the lower section of the tub and on the upper edge and 'roof' of the animal-house. The width of both objects changes where the ribbed areas occur: the tub tapers towards its base, whilst the animal-house features a wider, stepped sill. Another formal connection between the two panels is the inclusion of a standing female on the extreme left of the composition. In the lower panel the midwife occupies a conventional position,[26] but there seems to be no parallel for her counterpart in the St George panel in other versions of the subject: it is quite possible that this unidentified female was included simply to balance the composition, acting as a counterweight to both the standing St George and the standing midwife. Alternatively, this standing figure may be understood as a witness of the baptism, mirroring the midwives' role as witnesses of the Nativity of Christ.

The fifth pair of panels, the Trial of St George before Dacian and the Adoration of the Magi, are again concerned with conversion. The Magi can be understood to be converts to Christianity, but the conversion message of the Georgian panel is rather less obvious. The various treatments of the legend of St George place some emphasis on the number of converts he made, not only as a result of despatching the dragon, but also during the course of his torture and martyrdom. In some versions his converts include the Emperor's wife, Alexandra, and a magician named Athanasius, but hundreds, or thousands, of other converts are also claimed. A significant factor about these converts is that they are invariably martyred themselves, and the figure at the feet of Dacian could be interpreted as a recently-killed convert.[27] A second

26. See above, p.167.

27. This figure is one of the most perplexing in the entire work, and it is difficult to give an interpretation of him which is not open to many questions. There is nothing intrinsic to identify him as a convert, or even as a dead body, although we should note the similarity to a figure in the Trial scene of the Borbjerg retable (see above, p.119) He may simply be a human footstool, included as a marker of Dacian's

theme of these two panels could be bearing witness. St George is depicted in the act of proclaiming his faith to the tyrant Dacian; the position of his hands seems to indicate that he is speaking. The presence of the idol on the pole reinforces the fact that he is bearing witness to heathen idolaters, and Dacian's sword shows that this puts him in imminent danger. Meanwhile, the Magi demonstrate what Dacian's reaction should be when faced with Christian belief: he should demean himself from his exalted position and submit to the Lord of Lords, just as if he had witnessed the Incarnation himself.[28] The Magi's gifts to the infant Christ are thematically mirrored by St George's gift of fearless witness.

A clear visual link between the panels is provided by the two draped thrones, which occupy the left sides of their respective panels. The presence of these thrones is hardly exceptional, but, as with the arch shapes in the Arming of St George and the Presentation of the Virgin, their presence does make for a particularly happy pairing of panels. The throne occupied by the Virgin and Christ child is rather more ornate, as befits their station, but the profile position and the curve of the drapery is clearly echoed in Dacian's throne. This similarity tends to reinforce the thematic message about false rulers and the one true ruler: Dacian is a heathen usurper who is told by St George that he should give his throne to Christ.

The sixth pair, the Martyrdom of St George and the Purification of the Virgin, is apparently concerned with the fulfilment of destiny. St George has carried out his commission by overcoming evil, represented by both the dragon and Dacian, to be

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perfidy. He can also be interpreted as a fool, as he has large ears which seem to be on the outside of his headgear.

28. There may also be an implication that the Magi would bear witness by spreading Christianity when they returned to their homelands: it was understood that the Magi represented the three races of humanity: Mâle (1961) p.215.

vindicated by the angelic deputation sent to escort his soul to heaven. Meanwhile, the Virgin has produced a son to redeem the world, and she is shown to dedicate him publicly to God in the Temple.[29] Again, there is an emphasis on witness, with bystanders in each panel: Dacian and his secretary witness the executioner's blow and St George's soul being carried heavenwards, whilst Joseph and two women watch the Virgin holding the Christchild on the altar. Another common theme is sanctified ground: the Temple evidently functions as a sacred space, and St George kneels in prayer not only to receive the executioner's blow, but also to sanctify the place of his martyrdom.

There is an interesting formal link between the two swords in the upper panel, held up by Dacian and the executioner, and the two candles held by the female bystanders in the lower panel. As with the thrones in the previous pair, the presence of swords and candles is not exceptional, but they make a good symbol of the contrast between the subjects: the evil heathen lord and his henchman with their swords, the holy women with their candles as a marker of Christ as the light of the world.

Reading the retable as a whole

Having established connections between the panels in each vertical pairing, we should now look for resonances that may occur throughout the entire retable. One useful starting point is to examine the six pairs of panels all together, as a 'super-cycle', to see whether there are any common themes: some of the thematic connections highlighted in the discussion of each pairing may well spread beyond an

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29. The Virgin holds the Christchild on the altar, not only as a parent supporting her infant, but also as a symbol of a willing sacrifice. This has obvious overtones of the story of Abraham and Isaac, and also prefigures the sacrifice to come ~ the unmentioned Crucifixion.

individual pair. As chapters 3 and 4 indicate, the individual cycles adhere well to the chronology of their respective legends, but the choice of subjects depicted may have been influenced by a coincidence of theme: does a chronological progression apply to the 'super-cycle' too?

Consideration of the themes outlined above may suggest that the retable designed can be understood in terms of a teleology of redemption. Each protagonist, St George and the Virgin, is presented as a chosen individual who moves through a series of challenges, is not found wanting, and ultimately fulfils their divinely ordained role.[30] It is also possible to discern a theme of 'witness' running throughout the scheme. Looking at the panels, or pairs of panels, in isolation, the presence of bystanders, assistants and observers is not exceptional, but when the panels are considered in the light of the 'super-cycle' there may be an implication of a deliberate decision to include subjects with witness figures, or perhaps to modify subjects to include witness figures. Again, the appeal of this theme is obvious: it encourages the audience to identify with the bystanders and to experience an immediate, profound response to the subject matter in the panels.

As we saw in chapter 4, there is some evidence that the iconography of the Virgin cycle may have been manipulated to include references that were of specific interest to a female audience.[31] If we consider the whole retable in this light, we find that the choice of subjects in the St George cycle may also betray an interest in portrayals of women: the presence of the anonymous female figure on the left of the Baptism panel is particularly striking, especially as there seem to be no parallels in

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30. The St George cycle fits into this teleology more easily than the Virgin cycle, because he achieves a complete narrative from (re)birth to death, and the subsequent transferral of his soul to Heaven, but if we include the Assumption in the Virgin cycle we can see her receiving an equivalent reward at the time of her death.

31. See above, pp.190-98.

artistic or literary sources for her presence.[32] Furthermore, the inclusion of an apparently feminised dragon is potentially very revealing. As we have seen, the upright stance of the dragon and its position on the extreme dexter side of the panel are very unusual, possibly even unique, and these factors tend to suggest that implicit comparisons are being drawn between the dragon and the Virgin, immediately below. However, it is possible that the dragon is also intended to be read as an antithetical figure of St George, specifically because of his links with ideas about chastity,[33] and it seems logical to conclude that the feminised dragon may not be intended as a comment on women *per se*, but as a comment on a particular type of woman. In the St George panel, a chaste woman is rescued by an embodiment of chastity, who saves her from an embodiment of sexual evil. When we view this chastity paradigm in the context of the apparent teleology of redemption, it seems clear that the iconography of the retable is not only multi-layered, but also rather didactic: it is suffused with messages about how Christians should behave, and, perhaps more tellingly, about how Christian *women* should behave.[34]

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32. Aside from the princess, who is already present, the only significant women in legends of St George are the Virgin, the Empress Alexandra (whom St George converts, and who is subsequently martyred), and an unnamed widow in Pasicrates' version (St George performs various miracles at her home, such as healing her crippled son and causing architectural timber to flower and bear fruit). None of these women make sense in the context of the baptism scene: the Virgin would be shown crowned, as in the first two scenes of the cycle, the Empress would hardly appear *before* her husband had been introduced, especially as the narrative demands that St George should meet her during his trial; the widow also figures in the trial narrative. As there is a default of other candidates, it seems possible, if not probable, that the woman is an anonymous spectator who has been made female in order to fit in with an overall agenda, just as the anonymous bystanders in the Virgin cycle have all been presented as women.

33. See above, p.116.

34. This explanation of the retable's imagery is obviously conjectural, but it does seem to tie in with the probable patronage of the retable: see below, pp.251-54.

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The Génissac Retable

The ten panels and sixteen statuettes which form the fragmentary retable at Génissac were photographed and discussed by Biver in 1910.[35] There seems to be no record of the wooden frame which would have housed the alabaster elements, but the narrative presented in the panels is sufficiently coherent to indicate the form that the retable would have taken.[36] There are five panels with subjects drawn from the life of Christ, and a further five with subjects of the life of St Martin; Biver's photographs show the statuettes distributed between the vertical pairs of panels in a manner identical to the Compiègne retable (plate 30).[37] It is unclear which cycle would have occupied the upper tier of the framework: Biver's photographs show the panels arranged with the Christological cycle at the top, but the arrangement at La Selle would suggest that this cycle would be placed on the lower tier: this is reflected in the conjectural reconstruction presented in Figure 6.[38]

35. Biver (1910) pp.86-87, plates xix, xx, xxi. The panels were not arranged for the photograph by Biver himself; as he comments (p.86) the subjects from the life of St Martin are not shown in the logical order.

36. We should note that, although only nine of the panels are shown with canopies, the apparently consistent size of the panels indicates that the inclusion of an additional canopy (over the Mass of St Martin) does not require the central section to protrude above the height of the 'wing sections' (see above, pp.59-60). Comparison of Biver's plate xx (the central section) with the plates ixx and xxi (the wing sections) demonstrates that it is quite possible to insert a canopy (of the standard size for the whole work) without causing any disruption of the layout.

37. The absence of terminal statues seems surprising, given their presence at Compiègne and La Selle as well as in single-tiered retables. It is possible, but seems unlikely, that the original format did not include terminal statues, and the most probable explanation is that these elements were removed and resited, possibly when the framework was dismantled.

38. The rationale seems to be that the most important cycle would be placed in the position of greatest reverence, nearest to the altar. However, it is possible that the St Martin cycle would have occupied the lower tier: the central image is the Mass of St Martin, which would be well suited to a position immediately above the altar. When considering the vertical resonances between the two cycles the significant factor is

As at La Selle, the two cycles seem to follow a clear chronology. The scenes from the life of Christ are (1) the Annunciation, (2) the Nativity,[39] (3) the Crucifixion, (4) the Resurrection and (5) the Ascension; those from the life of St Martin are (1) St Martin divides his cloak with the beggar, (2) St Martin, dressed as a monk, cures the sick, (3) he celebrates mass as bishop of Tours, (4) his death, with angels bearing away his soul, (5) his burial. If the two cycles are arranged one above the other (as in Figure 6) vertical resonances can be drawn out of the juxtaposition of the two schemes, just as at La Selle. The first pair are both subjects associated with the beginning of their respective narratives: the Annunciation involves the conception of Christ, and the episode of the cloak reflects the moment when St Martin was recognised as a holy man.[40] The second pair invoke the commencement of a new life, lived according to God's will: Christ is shown having taken human form, and St Martin has laid aside his soldier's garb and taken holy orders. The third pair show an exact parallel: the Crucifixion, and St Martin's re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice through the office of the mass. The fourth pair show the victory over death: Christ is resurrected, whilst St Martin's soul is borne off to heaven by two angels. The final pair draw an analogy between the Ascension of Christ and the burial of St Martin: the link seems to be the fate of the body, and the belief that everyone will rise from the grave to be judged, with the elect accompanying Christ to heaven. If we read the retable as a whole it is clear that, just as at La Selle, there is a consistent narrative theme. Both protagonists express their submission to God's will, and are ultimately rewarded in the horizontal ordering of the subjects in each cycle, rather than which cycle is placed where, so this specific question will not be addressed further here.

39. This scene is a 'real' Nativity, not a Brigittine Adoration of Christ (see above, chapter 4, note 62).

40. This recognition takes the form of a vision of Christ, who reveals himself as the poor man whom St Martin had helped. For the legend of St Martin see the Golden Legend volume 2, pp.292-300.

heaven.

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Vertical resonances in other media

As noted above,[41] the specific form of the pairing of two parallel cycles is surprisingly

rare, but individual narratives can be arranged in many different ways to allow

comparisons to be drawn between different subjects, a device that has been called

'visual rhymes'.[42] One example is the St Nicholas window in Auxerre Cathedral

(c.1200-1225), where there are three rows each with three subjects, give a total of

nine subjects.[43] It has been observed that the design can be read along the diagonal

(scenes 1, 5 and 9), which each show a rich man with an image of St Nicholas; there

is also a symmetry of subject matter in the first and third lines (scenes 1, 2 and 3 are

inverted to become scenes 7, 8 and 9). Another example is an early fifteenth-century

tapestry of the story of the Prodigal Son,[44] which has eight narrative panels arranged

in two columns of four subjects. This cycle gives a negative weighting to subjects in

the left-hand column and a positive weighting to subjects in the right-hand column:

the Prodigal Son arrives at a brothel in panel 3, for example, and arrives home in

panel 7.[45] Whilst these types of arrangement are clearly different to that used at La

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41. See above, note 5.

42. This term was coined by Madeline H. Caviness and is used by Kemp (1997) p.65.

43. This cycle is discussed in Kemp (1997) p.28.

44. Marburg University museum, discussed by Kemp (1997) pp.15, 34-37.

45. The layout of narrative forms can be considerably more complex than these relatively simple forms. Lavin (1990) discusses many very complicated forms, but does not seem to note any parallels drawn between different subjects within the cycles, or any parallels inherent in any two cycles presented in the same building. There seems to be some scope for further research here: Lavin's book is undoubtedly ambitious, but her analysis is not helped errors such as mis-drawn diagrams, and the fact that she writes that she will discuss Altichiero's St George cycle at Padua and then fails to do so.

Selle, they still provide a useful comparison. These examples demonstrate that, whilst this type of polyvalent design is by no means common, the presentation of complex iconographic concepts underlying narrative found in the retables of La Selle and Génissac is not unparalleled, and can be found for several centuries before these alabasters were sculpted.

The Windsor Cycle of St George and the Virgin

Whilst the evidence provided by these designs in other media is quite persuasive, it is necessary to compare the iconographic scheme of the La Selle retable with other works which combine cycles of St George and the Virgin in order to demonstrate that there has been a deliberate choice of subjects at La Selle, and that the vertical parallels have not arisen entirely by chance. Unfortunately there is only one work which combines *cycles* of the Virgin and St George,[46] the double-sided carved wooden desk-ends on the stalls on the south side of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.[47] The work is incomplete, with only 16 of the 20 images surviving, and no records of the lost subjects exist. The surviving images are as follows, reading from the east end of the chancel (see figure 7):

lower row: (1) facing east. The Nativity of Christ (plate 63).[48]

(2) facing west. The Visitation.

46. Works which combine individual images of St George and the Virgin are considered above, pp.114-15. The St George subjects in the Windsor cycle are also considered above, pp.135-39.

47. As noted above (p.136), accounts show that the stalls were erected between 1477 and 1484. This makes them roughly contemporary with the La Selle retable if an early 1480s date is accepted. The desk-ends are described in James (1933) pp.14-18 (where he calls them 'popeys'). The desk-ends are not strictly comparable to the La Selle cycle, as they also feature a subject of Christ in Judgement, a scene which is not usually classed as part of the life of the Virgin.

48. There is only one midwife in this version of the subject, holding the swaddled child.

upper row: (3) facing east. Christ in Judgement.

(4) facing west. The Adoration of the Magi.

lower row: (5) facing east. The Annunciation (plate 62).[49]

(6) facing west. St George is dismembered and boiled (plate 60).

upper row (7) facing east. St George demands the conversion of the people.

(8) facing west. The princess and St George lead the dragon to the city

(plate 58).

lower row (9) facing east. The trial of the poison.

(10) facing west. St George fights the dragon.

upper row (11) facing east. The princess takes leave of her parents.

(12) facing west. St George negotiates with the princess (plate 57).

lower row (13) facing east. The obeisance of St George before the Virgin (plate 56).

(14) facing west. The Assumption of the Virgin (plate 64).[50]

upper row (15) facing east. St George threatened by torturers (plate 59).

(16) St George dragged on a hurdle (plate 61).

The Windsor carvings form an interesting contrast to the La Selle retable in several ways. The first point of interest is that the subjects are not arranged in any logical order; in fact, the distribution of subjects seems almost random, even to the extent that the Adoration of the Magi is presented on the reverse side of Christ in Judgement, and the Annunciation is backed with an image of St George

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49. God the Father does not appear in this version of the subject.

50. The Virgin is depicted in a rayed mandorla, supported by an angel at the base. A layman kneels in prayer on the sinister side, and a broken figure kneels on one knee on the dexter side. Behind them stand two figures, one wearing an amice and alb (on the sinister side), the other wearing a cope (on the dexter side). An angel flies at the top of the composition on the sinister side; the remains of a companion figure are visible on the dexter side.

dismembered and boiled. As a consequence it is very difficult to see how any parallelism can be read into these images.[51] A second point of interest is that the subjects depicted are quite different from those found at La Selle. This may be due in part to losses at Windsor,[52] but the inclusion of scenes of the torture of St George, conspicuously absent from the La Selle imagery, indicates that the Windsor cycle drew on the standard iconography of the lives of St George in a way that is clearly different from the unusual La Selle cycle. Likewise, the iconography of the Virgin at Windsor seems standard: the Visitation is present (absent at La Selle) whilst the Nativity, Presentation and Purification of the Virgin are all absent (present at La Selle). Thirdly, it is difficult to determine any overall theme running through the images. This may be partly due to the number of losses, but the 'conformity' of the subjects at Windsor tends to suggest that the overriding factor in the selection of images was familiarity rather than a specific message.

The Agenda of the La Selle Retable

Comparison with the Windsor desk-ends demonstrates that it is very unlikely that the choice of subjects and the layout of the La Selle retable was based on a traditional or standardised late fifteenth century form of artwork including cycles of the lives of St George and the Virgin.[53] Rather, it is very clear that considerable thought went into the choice of imagery, particularly in the light of the vertical resonances set up

51. As observed above (p.139), it is likely the cycle was intended to be decorative rather than didactic; given the wide spatial distribution of the images it is unlikely that the cycle was intended to be read as a whole.

52. The four images on the desk-ends of the return stalls have all been lost (see above, p.139).

53. It should also be noted that the choice of imagery also seems to be very unusual when each individual cycle is compared to other cycles of the life of St George and the life of the Virgin (see above, pp.145-48; pp.190-91).

between the two cycles. It is impossible to know who would have been responsible for formulating the design: it could have been the carver (or workshop designer), or the patron, but perhaps the most likely explanation is that the designer and patron worked together. As argued below,[54] there are several features of the iconography of the retable which strongly suggest Norman patronage (most notably the absence of the red cross device), and we can imagine a series of letters and sketches passing between the patron and the designer, perhaps with a travelling alabaster merchant acting as a go-between.[55] The fortunate survival of the Génissac retable demonstrates that the polyvalent design of the La Selle retable was not unique, but the extent to which such complicated layouts were used in the production of English alabaster altarpieces is a question which is, sadly, unanswerable with such a small corpus of extant works.

The rationale which lay behind the choice of imagery at La Selle is undoubtedly informed by the need to establish an overall scheme as well as two coherent narratives, but it seems unlikely that this was the only salient factor. In particular we should consider the ways in which certain subjects or images are presented, especially where it is demonstrable that the form employed is not standard. For example, why does 'St Anastasia' appear in the Adoration of the Virgin panel,[56] and why does a woman appear on the sinister side of the Baptism by St

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54. See below, p.236.

55. There is very strong evidence for pre-Reformation export of English alabasters to Normandy, and a clear implication that itinerant merchants were involved in this trade. The presence of such individuals would undoubtedly have facilitated the commissioning of alabaster works. We should also note the letter from the abbess of Bourbourg (see above, chapter 1, note 58), which was accompanied by a bill giving the dimensions of the alabaster panels which she wished to order; this enclosure may well have discussed the required iconography too.

56. See above, p.167, and Appendix 4.

George panel?[57] One possible explanation is that the portrayal of women was of particular interest to the patron who commissioned the work; as noted above,[58] the combination of subjects in the life of the Virgin cycle may reflect a concern with images of motherhood, and it is quite possible that this agenda has influenced the entire retable. In this regard the inclusion of the apparently feminised, sexualised dragon is particularly interesting, as it seems to underline the didactic nature of the work: if a woman lives in the right way she can be acceptable to God. The La Selle retable seems to have been designed to fulfil the specific criteria of a sophisticated iconography, with a strong emphasis on the example set to Christian women by the Virgin herself.

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57. See above, p.35.

58. See above, pp.190-98.

Chapter Six: The Norman Context.

This chapter considers evidence for the possibility that the La Selle retable was the product of a Norman commission. The extent of the late-medieval cult of St George in Normandy is examined, and the iconography of cycles of St George from the region and elsewhere in France is considered in relation to the La Selle retable. Attention is also given to the medieval English alabaster export trade with France. The history of the hamlet of La Selle is then outlined, in particular its links with the abbey of Saint-Sauveur of Evreux, in an attempt to uncover the reasons why the retable is now in this particular community, and various possibilities for the agenda which underlay the commissioning of the work are considered.

The Cult of St George in Normandy

St George was an immensely popular figure in Normandy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The evidence relating to the cult of St George in Normandy comprises both visual imagery and historical evidence, and the work of the religious historian Jean Fournée is a particularly useful source of information.[1]

St George was known and venerated in Gaul from at least the sixth century,[2] and in the middle of the eighth century an apparently miraculous event took place which seems to have led to a marked upsurge in the cult.[3] The contemporary *Gesta Sanctorum Patrum Fontanellensis Coenobii* relates that during the abbacy of Austrulph (743-753), a coffer was washed up on the beach near to Portbail in the

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1. Fournée (1986) pp.105-27.

2. A relic of St George is recorded at a monastery near Paris in the sixth century. See above, p.97.

3. Fournée (1986) p.105.

Cotentin region of Normandy, and was retrieved by the local people.[4] When opened by the religious and civic authorities, the coffer proved to hold a beautiful parchment book of the Gospels in Latin, and a reliquary, which contained part of the jawbone of St George, relics of various other saints, a piece of the True Cross, as well as letters to authenticate all the treasures. Suitably impressed, Count Richwin, the governor of Cotentin, and the religious leaders decided to allow God to choose where these gifts should be taken. They placed the coffer and its contents in an ox cart, let the animals wander at will, and followed as the cart was pulled inland to the hilltop settlement of Brix. It was decided to build a church to the honour of St George there, and at Richwin's insistence two further sanctuaries were built, one in honour of the Virgin,[5] and one to St Cross; many miracles were witnessed at the new church complex.

The Norman cult of St George developed throughout the medieval period, and became geographically widespread. Appendix 5 is based on Fournée's research, and locates all the documented sites of interest in the saint throughout the region. It is important to note that the cult seems to have been a significant part of the belief system of all levels of society, both noble and common: he was a popular dedicatee of the chapels of chateaux,[6] but was also the patron of many churches, fairs and healing springs. A total of sixty-six parish churches in Normandy are dedicated, or are known to have been dedicated, to St George, making him the tenth most popular dedicatee in the region.[7] A further twenty-four chapels of St George are documented,

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4. Lohier and Laporte (1936) pp.72-76.

5. The choice of dedication of this chapel may well reflect the strong connection between St George and the Virgin (see above, pp. 114-16), particularly given that no relics associated with the Virgin were found.

6. St George was, of course, an especially obvious choice as patron of a chateau chapel on the basis of his links with chivalry.

7. He is less popular than the Virgin and John the Baptist, and 'typically French' saints, such as St Martin, St Denis and St Germain, but more popular than St

of which eight are chapels attached to parish churches, fourteen are private chapels attached to chateaux, and two are isolated chapels. In addition, four monastic communities were dedicated to the saint.[8] The dates of their foundation demonstrate that there was a sustained interest in St George over the centuries: the benedictine abbey of St-Georges-de-Boscherville (Seine-Maritime) was founded by Raoul de Tancarville between 1050 and 1066, and around 1060 the knight Onfroi de Bohon ceded to the Abbey of Marmoutier (Manche) the priory which he had founded to St George. Meanwhile, the priory of St George at Cauley-le-Patry (Calvados) was founded during the reign of Richard Coeur de Lion (1189-99), and the priory of Saint-Georges-Motel (Eure) was founded as late as 1403.[9]

A further significant aspect of the cult of St George in Normandy is the widepread involvement of the laity, through pilgrimage, confraternities, fairs and so forth. Relics of the saint are documented at Caen (Calvados), Blangy and Rouen (Seine-Maritime),[10] and Mont-St-Michel (Manche),[11] but pilgrimage is also known to have taken place at Pontchardon (Orne), almost certainly to the spring named in his honour, and at Fontaine-le-Bourg (Seine-Maritime), where there was a local legend

Laurence, St Michael, St Andrew and St Etienne: Fournée (1986) p.114.

8. There is a possibility that the La Selle retable could have been commissioned for one of these foundations, but there is no demonstrable link with the hamlet or church at La Selle other than the dedication to St George.

9. A nearby church, entirely separate from the abbey, was founded under the patronage of St George before 965, although the current building dates from the early twelfth century [see Baudot (1963) p.44]. This implies that veneration of the saint was well established locally long before the foundation of the abbey in 1403.

10. In 1504 Henry VII received a gift of a relic of St George's leg from Rouen cathedral: Gill (1995b) p.102.

11. Fournée (1986) p.115. Further French relics of St George are also known, including a reference to four reliquaries at Sens, one holding relics of St George, given by Alexander, chaplain of Etienne II, count of Blois (d.1102) [Lapeyre (1936) pp.321-2]. This record tends to underline the saint's chivalric connection, also evidenced by Henry VII's gift (see above, note 10).

of St George as well as a spring. Confraternities in honour of St George existed in many places, both devotional and professional, often where the parish church was dedicated to him. The records of these foundations do not always extend back very far, and the earliest recorded as a purely religious confraternity was at Bréauté in the diocese of Rouen, established by 1472. Professional confraternities selecting St George as patron tended to reflect his image as a knight: he was popular with armourers and horse-riding groups (known as 'les escadrons Saint-Georges').[12] At Rouen there was a guild of arbalétriers which met at the church of Saint Sépulcre but was dedicated to St George, and he was the patron of la Cinquantaine, a kind of bourgeois militia group set up at the end of the English occupation, which was also based at Saint Sépulcre. This organisation was still in existence in 1520, in a form scarcely different from its original conception.

A rather different role for St George among the Norman laity was as a healer. He seems to been one of the lesser rank of healing saints, certainly not as important as St Roch or St Eloi, but he was particularly associated with skin problems. His aid was invoked for scabrous conditions, such as herpes, at Pontchardon (Orne), Montchaton and Orbehaye (Manche), Blangy, Colmesnil and Fontaine-le-Bourg (Seine-Maritime), but at Fiquefleur (Eure) a fountain of St George was reputed to relieve fever.[13] The saint was also venerated in a more general way throughout

12. St George is said to have displaced St Martin as the patron of choice for those working with horses: Fournée (1986) p.116. The fact that he was not always considered the most obvious dedicatee may reflect the relatively late introduction of the dragon story into his legend: until St George was presented as a knight, there was no reason to link him with horses.

13. St George is perhaps particularly suitable to be associated with both water and illness, as the dragon which he overcame invariably inhabited a lake and caused illness with its breath (see Table 3): the reputation of the fountain of St George at Fiquefleur for the cure of fever may well derive from this legend. The link with skin conditions is perhaps less obvious, although there could be a connection with a dragon's scaly skin, especially as alabaster versions of St George's dragon tend to show a pink creature with reddish markings (the version on the Borbjerg retable, for

Normandy. Fairs and festivals in honour of St George are known to have been held in Lison, Morteaux-Couliboeuf, Saint-Sever and Saint-Julien-le Faucon (Calvados), Airel, Beauchamps, Les Pieux and Le Teilleul (Manche), Flers (Orne), and Louviers (Eure). At Colomby (Manche), an undated patronal song survives, which relates several of the main episodes of St George's legend and seems to have been inspired by the *Legenda Aurea*.[14] Interestingly, the dragon story is not presented as the main reason for honouring him; the emphasis is far more on the saint's exemplary life, with references to the distribution of alms, the refusal to worship a false god, and the patient suffering of torture.

In addition to these historical references to the veneration of St George, there is a considerable amount of extant art historical evidence throughout the region. Freestanding statues of St George overcoming the dragon are perhaps the most common, such as the early sixteenth century example in stone at Saint-Georges-du-Mesnil (Eure). Sculpted versions of St George survive at Canteleu, La-Chapelle-St-Ouen and Vibeuf (Seine-Maritime); Bézu-Saint-Eloi, Broglie, Louviers and Verneuil-sur-Avre (Eure); Pontchardon and Sept-Forges (Orne); Falaise and Reux (Calvados); Montaigu-les-Bois, Mortain and Précorbin (Manche). There are images of him in glass at Damville, Evreux, Saint-Jean-de-Thenney and Louviers (Eure), and painted versions at Fresney-le-Puceux, Léaupartie and Martigny (Calvados). In addition, there is an interesting font at Saint-Georges-Motel (Eure) dating from the beginning of the sixteenth century.[15] The relief carving has a curious combination of three subjects: the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan, Charlemagne mounted on a horse, and St George overcoming the dragon. St

example: see plate 43).

14. The text of the song is given in Fournée (1986) p.118.

15. This font is illustrated in Fournée (1986) p.121.

George is shown mounted, with his horse trampling the dragon, a rather dog-like creature with decidedly vestigial wings, which crouches low to the ground. St George has his sword raised behind his head ready to deliver a mortal wound (exactly as in plate 41), and the princess, who has elaborately coiled hair, kneels to the left of the scene, looking out into the spectator's space. She has her lamb on a lead, but seems to be paying little attention to the saint; in the absence of her parents there are effectively no witnesses to the combat, which is very unusual.

There is one other extant cycle of St George in Normandy, in addition to the La Selle retable.[16] The cycle in glass at Coutances Cathedral dates to the end of the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and is comprised of seven roundels arranged vertically. It appears to read from bottom to top, although at least one subject seems to have been relocated incorrectly. The first two roundels incorporate a scroll which merely identifies the saint with his name. The subjects are as follows:

(1) This subject, which is largely modern restoration, is a standard scene of a mounted St George killing a wingless dragon which is trampled by the horse. He carries a golden shield with a device of a black cross. The princess kneels to the right of the scene, praying.

(2) This is an interesting version of the subject of the saint before Dacian. St George's horse is present, which makes a clear link with the previous panel, and the saint is invited to worship two idols, rather than the usual one, who are presented as classical statues on an altar.[17]

16. There is also a fragmentary cycle in the stalls of the choir of the Abbey of St-Denis which originate from the chateau at Gaillon (Eure) (plates 71-74). This is described below, pp.234-35.

17. This rendering of the idol is far closer to that used by Herlin (plate 46) than in the alabaster treaments at La Selle and Borbjerg (plate 44), which tends to substantiate the suggestion that there is a specific form used for idols in English alabaster (see

(3) St George takes the poisoned brew of Athanasius the magician, in the presence of Dacian.

(4) St George is flayed by three torturers.[18]

(5) This seems to show St George alone with Athanasius, who appears to be handing something to him. If the identification of the second figure as the magician is correct this subject is evidently out of sequence, and is apparently unparalleled in other versions.

(6) This is again rather difficult to interpret, but it appears to be a further torture scene, possibly showing St George's flanks being burnt with torches. Dacian looks on from the back of the scene.

(7) The final subject shows the decapitation of St George. There are no spectators, which is unusual as Dacian is invariably present in other versions, but this could be simply due to lack of space as this roundel is rather smaller than the others.

This cycle is clearly very different to the La Selle treatment of the life of St George. In particular we should note the scenes of torture and the throwing down of the idol in the temple, which ally the Coutances imagery far closer to the 'standard' cycle of St George dicussed above.[19] However, the absence of the red cross device is also interesting, as it echoes the La Selle treatment and tends to support the contention that this motif was not used in Normandy, and was excluded from La Selle at the request of a Norman patron.

Taken together, the historical and art-historical evidence presents a strong

above, p.122).

18. This subject is identified by Fournée as the decapitation of Athanasius: Fournée (1986) p.120. Quite why he claims this is unclear; if he is correct this is a unique subject, although the Borbjerg cycle may provide a parallel (see above, pp.119-20).

19. See above, pp.145-46.

argument for the popularity of St George in Normandy. To return to the question of the patronage of the La Selle retable, it seems clear that the person or people who commissioned the work were living in a milieu where this saint was very widely venerated, and would have been a natural choice for a shortlist of saints when considering who to choose for the secondary saint of a new retable.

Other Cycles of St George in France

Whilst this historical and art-historical evidence from Normandy undoubtedly demonstrates a significant interest in St George, it is important to try to put this regional veneration into a wider geographical context. Specifically, we need to consider whether the La Selle retable can realistically be thought of as a product of this Norman cult, as opposed to a work which shows purely English influences. The La Selle retable is one of only two extant cycles of the saint in Normandy, so we need to look further afield to other parts of France in order to draw comparisons with other cycles. It is important to view the La Selle retable in the light of other French cycles, to look for echoes which may strengthen the assertion that the retable is a Norman French commission, rather than an English commission imported during the post-Reformation period.

A second cycle in glass, from the mid-thirteenth century at Clermont-Ferrand cathedral is considerably larger than the Coutances cycle, with 36 panels. Again, there seems to have been some disturbance of the sequence of subjects, and it is very likely that the five roundels relating to the dragon story are misplaced in relation to the basic story of the trial and torture of the saint. There has been some restoration: affected roundels are marked here with an asterisk. The subjects are described here following the interpretation given by Abbé Berger:[20]

20. Berger (1968) p.9. This interpretation is somewhat at odds with that given by Dorsch in his description of the glass [Dorsch (1983) pp.287-290], which is

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(1) St George before Dacian and his wife Alexandra.

(2) St George protests against the persecution of Christians by Diocletian and is tortured.

(3) St George in prison

(4) St George disputes with Dacian and Alexandra.

(5) Alexandra converts to Christianity.

(6) Alexandra is arrested;

(7) decapitated;

(8) and the executioner takes her head to Dacian.

*(9) The dragon story intervenes at this point, as the princess leaves the town of Silene.

(10) She meets St George.

*(11) He goes with her to face the dragon.

*(12) St George fights the dragon whilst the princess prays for his success;

*(13) she then leads the vanquished dragon back to Silene.

*(14) The story of Dacian now recommences, with the scene of Athanasius failing to poison St George.

*(15) Athanasius converts to Christianity and throws down the idols.[21]

(16) Dacian offers a banquet to his high priest if he will remove St George.

(17) The priest goes to thank the idols for his sucess;

(18) and converses with them in a satanic manner.

(19) St George asks to be taken to the temple, where he makes the sign of the cross and the idol of Apollo falls.

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apparently based on Du Ranquet (1932). I have not had the opportunity to examine the glass at first-hand, but Berger's descriptions seem to accord well with the photographs published in his book.

21. If this reading correctly reflects the original version it is unparalleled elsewhere.

(20) St George is taken back to prison.

(21) He is given to the torturers;

*(22) burnt with torches;

*(23) dragged through the streets;

(24) and thrown into quicklime.

(25) But he jumps out unharmed, and a demon jumps into the limepit in his place.

(26) St George is seen entering the prison again.

(27) He is stripped naked and shod with hot iron shoes.

(28) A woman prays and a strange king and an angel remove the shoes.

(29) Starved by Dacian, he is brought food by a holy woman.

(30) Dacian decrees that St George must die.

(31) He is decapitated;

(32) and as a precaution his body is dismembered.

(33) After his death St George appears to a woman and heals her son.

(34) Angels reassemble St George's body on a waggon;

(35) and bury his body;

(36) whilst other angels bear his soul off to heaven.

In French manuscript illumination there appear to be three extant cycles of St George. The Bedford Hours roundels and the Salisbury Breviary have been discussed above, in the context of English patronage;[22] the former consists of five images of torture, whilst the latter combines the dragon story with the trial, torture and execution of the saint. A further fifteenth-century manuscript version, in the Hours of Louise de Savoie,[23] treats the saint's legend in seven subjects. The images are

22. See above, pp.131-35.

23. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 9473.

arranged like a window or retable, with a taller central panel and three panels arranged vertically on each side:

(1) The story begins in the upper left panel with St George meeting the princess as the dragon emerges from its cave.

(2) The action then moves to the central panel where St George fights the dragon.

(3) In the middle panel on the left side the princess leads the dragon towards the city, with St George following behind on his horse.

(4) In the lower left panel the saint baptises the king, queen and princess.

(5) The upper scene on the right side is the trial before Dacian, who has an idol on a pedestal alongside him.

(6) In the middle panel on the right side St George is tortured on a wheel with knives.

(7) In the lower right scene he is beheaded.

Two further French cycles of the saint's life survive in fragmentary form. The first, a cycle of wall paintings also in the cathedral at Clermont-Ferrand, and dating from around 1300, includes a series of six subjects from the life of St George:[24]

(1) St George is bound to two trees, with the dove of the Holy Spirit over him.

(2) St George is cut into pieces on a wheel of blades, watched by the emperor and a group of some eight onlookers. Two men remove body parts from the wheel and pass them on to a group of three men standing by a well.

(3) The body parts are put into the well.

(4) St George appears restored, before the emperor and three companions seated behind a table, with an angel and a servant working to replace the saint's feet. A

24. This cycle is illustrated in Braunfels-Esche (1976) pp.14-15.

second angel is shown retrieving body parts from a cauldron.

(5) Christ, seated with an angel in a horse-drawn waggon, blesses the revived saint.

(6) St George is bound to a wooden beam and attacked with hooks by two torturers.

The absence of subjects of either the trial or the execution of the saint strongly suggests that these images are drawn from the central section of the original cycle. The fact that none of these subjects appear in the slightly later cycle in glass indicates that this cycle was probably not used as a source by the designer of the St George window, but the existence of two cycles in the same building is certainly indicative that the saint was very popular in other parts of France besides Normandy.

A second fragmentary cycle of the legend of St George, dated to the early to mid sixteenth-century, survives on carved wooden stalls which are now in the choir of the abbey of St-Denis but originate from the chateau at Gaillon [Eure], where the chapel was dedicated to St George.[25] There are five images (plates 71-74):

(1) Three men force St George to worship at a heathen altar; he casts down the idol.

(2) St George, his hands tied together, is led towards a door by two men dressed as Roman soldiers and a third man who holds a large key. The subject is evidently St George cast into prison.

(3) St George is shown tied to a saltire cross. Two men hold torture implements next to the saint's upper body; on the left a man with a beard, a hat with a turned-back brim and a distinctive rosette on the sideseam of his robe holds what may be a flaming torch, whilst on the right a cleanshaven man holds what seems to be a small flail or rake. A larger flail or rake lies on the ground below the saint. Two further men stand in the background, one behind each torturer.

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25. De Blosseville (1877) p.194.

(4) St George has been beheaded; his prostrate body lies next to the severed head, with the hands still in prayer, and the gates of the city in the distance. In the centre stands the executioner, who is sheathing his sword. On the left stands the bearded man with the rosette on the sideseam of his robe, gesturing towards the right of the panel. This man is probably the heathen emperor Dacian; he again wears his distinctive hat. A third man stands between him and the executioner, apparently listening to the emperor.

(5) Dacian, wearing his hat and a similar robe, is led or carried by two demonic figures, whilst a winged demon prepares to attack him with a flesh-hook. A small winged dragon hovers above the emperorer's head. This subject seems to be demons leading Dacian to Hell, in contrast to the usual version of the punishment of the emperor by fire from heaven.

By contrast with the Clermont-Ferrand wall paintings, this cycle evidently retains the latter part of the narrative, with both the execution of St George and the subsequent damnation of the emperor Dacian.

Both these latter cycles are evidently incomplete, as they lack several of the fundamental scenes, notably the trial of St George before Dacian; the dragon story is also a very odd omission. However, the fragments which do survive demonstrate that all the extant French versions of the life of St George are generally very faithful to the textual sources. Despite the differences in date they are remarkably consistent; notably they all contain images of the torture of St George, something which is a clear omission from the La Selle cycle. Furthermore, these French versions are quite distinct from the English visual tradition found in the glass of St Neot and Stamford, for example, as the whole narrative section concerned with the initial beheading of St George, the Resurrection and Arming by the Virgin is missing. This omission seems

to label the cycles as French, or at least non-English. Comparison with La Selle shows that it forms a half-way house between the two types: there is no death at the hands of the Gauls, but the Resurrection and Arming are present. Indeed, these subjects may well have appeared to be interesting and exotic to a Norman audience, a positive aspect that was not marred by any overt references to the Gauls.

English Alabaster in France.

We should now consider the material that the retable is made from in the context of Normandy and France: why would a Norman patron choose alabaster over wood or other stone, especially when this involved commissioning an English workshop to produce a retable that could almost certainly have been made locally at rather less inconvenience, and possibly less cost. The reasons begin to become apparent when we consider the known distribution pattern of alabaster panels and altarpieces in France.[26] As we can see, this material was surprisingly popular through much of the country during the late medieval period, so the use of alabaster for the La Selle retable fits into a clear pattern of consumption. The distribution pattern seems to have arisen partially as a result of trading routes along navigable rivers, and perhaps also major roads. As Nigel Ramsay has observed, it seems likely that traders in alabaster panels and figures travelled along these routes selling their wares, and there are several areas where the churches of neighbouring parishes have alabaster panels which are stylistically very similar.[27] Table 9 shows the geographical distribution of English alabasters in the Eure department, and lists the frequency of different subjects: this sample area demonstrates that even with an unquanitifiable

26. A distribution map of English alabaster in Europe appears in Cheetham (1984) p.46.

27. See above, chapter 1, note 61.

number of post-medieval losses, the extent of 'market penetration' in ready-made pieces was quite remarkable.

However, not all of these pieces were necessarily 'pret-a-porter', and there is good evidence that some alabasters in France were commissioned pieces. The cycle of St Seurin, still housed in the church of St Seurin, Bordeaux, is one example,[28] and there is also documentary evidence of a commission from the abbess of Bourbourg in June 1534.[29] Quite why the patrons chose to commission their altarpieces from the English alabaster workshops, rather than to use local stone, is unclear, but it is likely that fashion was an important contributory factor: as an imported artistic medium alabaster would have had a quality of 'otherness' about it, possibly to the extent that it was viewed as exotic and desirable.[30] Additionally, the price may have been an influential aspect: the relative cheapness of finished alabasterwork would mean that a patron could buy a quite acceptable piece of religious art without having to pay a fortune for it. Taking these aspects together with our knowledge of the distribution pattern of alabasters throughout France, let alone other parts of Europe, we can see that alabaster would have been an obvious choice for the patron of the La Selle retable. Bearing this in mind, we should now consider the historical evidence relating to La Selle itself, and try to discover some reasons why the altarpiece is now in this particular location.

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28. Even if (as seems likely) the St Seurin altarpiece was carved locally (see above, chapter 1, note 60), it was certainly made to order. It evidently uses unworked stone imported from England, which implies an established trade in English alabaster wider than the simple export of ready-made panels. Another example of the importation of unworked alabaster is the case of Alexandre de Berneval (see above, chapter 1, note 59).

29. Cheetham (1984) p.47; see also above, chapter 1, note 58.

30. As noted above (p.236), this 'exotic' quality could also have been a factor in the decision to include an English treatment of the legend of St George.

The Hamlet of La Selle and its retable

La Selle is a very small community of scattered farmsteads on the western extremity of the Eure département in *Basse Normandie*, 7km from the town of Rugles and 50km from Evreux, the chief town of the department, and the hamlet has a sense of remoteness about it even today. The historical records of La Selle go back to the eleventh century,[31] and this evidence allows us to construct a picture of a settlement that seems to have changed remarkably little over time. It has remained a predominantly agricultural community, and whilst it seems to have generally escaped real poverty it has never been wealthy. The early history of La Selle is very sketchy, and is mainly contained in charters concerned with the gift of Yves de la Celle of 1085, when he gave the church and its appurtenances to the abbey of Saint-Sauveur in Evreux. This gift was reaffirmed by a papal bull of Eugene III in 1152, and extended in further charters of 1210, 1227, 1231, 1235 and 1254. The earliest documents do not mention a dedication of the parish church; the charter of Jean de la Celle of 1227 is the first to mention *sancti Petri de la Celle*, and it had been suggested that the dedication to St Peter was imposed by the abbey.[32] The first recorded priest of the hamlet was Raoul, mentioned in a document of 1242 regarding a land transaction with Saint-Sauveur,[33] but no more names are recorded until the surveys of the sixteenth century. La Selle was clearly an agricultural community that has never really developed; in 1763 the parish had 39 hearths;[34] this is likely to have been close to the

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31. These records are held in the departmental archives at Evreux. Transcripts of the charters referred to are given in Appendix 1.

32. Clément, no.98 (avril 1932) p.11.

33. Clément, no.102 (janvier 1933) p.10.

34. Clément, no.106 (avril 1934) p.12. In 1840 the community comprised 220 souls in an area of 791 hectares, and at the time of the Revolution a total of 55 workers in differerent trades were recorded, although agriculture was undoubtedly the primary occupation: Clément no.98 (avril 1932) p.11; no.82 (juillet 1927) p.10.

maximum size that the parish ever attained.

The church has some thirteenth-century work, including fragments of a window of St Peter, the patronal saint, amid eighteenth- and nineteenth-century restoration, and a fifteenth-century font, but little of real interest survives. Whilst the alabaster retable is not 'high art', and is unlikely to have been very expensive, it is an unexpected find, particularly given the fact that its unusual iconography would argue that it is a commissioned work rather than a production-line piece.[35] To date, no obvious candidates for the position of benefactor of the church fabric have come to light within the community during the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, although there is good evidence for the patronage of work carried out from 1694 onwards.[36] It is arguable that, as the retable is unlikely to have been made or purchased specifically for the church at La Selle, it probably came to the hamlet as the result of a deliberate decision to resite it at some point in the history of the community and its church.

The Abbey Saint-Sauveur d'Evreux

One of the most important facts to emerge from the historical evidence relating to the hamlet is the striking relationship between La Selle and an abbey of Benedictine

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35. Alabaster is relatively common in this region (see Table 8), but the La Selle retable stands out because the panels elsewhere tend to be very conventional. For example, Conches and Louviers are relatively large towns, and have churches that are far larger and more ornate than that at La Selle, yet their alabaster panels of Christ's Passion are unexceptional.

36. This work has been discussed in some detail by Clément 109 (janvier 1935) pp.9-12; 111 (juillet 1935) pp.9-12. These paper forms part of a series of studies on the history La Selle and the neighbouring communities of Juignettes and Saint-Antoinin-de-Sommaire, all published in various issues of Le Petit Semeur, a parish newsletter, from no.98 (avril 1932) to no.111 (juillet 1935). The same author also wrote a series of articles about the same communities during the French Revolution in various issues of Le Petit Semeur, from no.50 (juillet 1919) to no.61 (avril 1922); these articles are discussed below, pp.249-51.

nuns in Evreux, known as Saint-Sauveur d'Evreux. This abbey was founded around the year 1060 by Richard, count of Evreux,[37] and in 1085 Yves de la Celle presented the church of La Selle and its appurtenances to the abbey.[38] This gift seems to have been occasioned by the entry into the abbey of Yves' wife and three daughters, and it was confirmed and added to in subsequent charters through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There is a dearth of extant information on the relationship between the Saint-Sauveur and La Selle during the later medieval period, but we do know that the abbey was involved in a scheme to reroof the chancel at the church in 1694-1695, and that in 1713 the nuns requested that the chancel walls should be repaired;[39] these incidents tend to suggest that the abbey still took an active interest in the physical nature of the church as well as appointing priests to the living. Given that the retable does not seem to originate at La Selle, is it possible that the retable was made for Saint-Sauveur, and was moved to La Selle during a time of crisis?

The possibility that Saint-Sauveur was the original home of the retable was first proposed in print during the late nineteenth century,[40] and was apparently based on local tradition, but until now no serious research has been carried out to test this proposition. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to establish the argument beyond reasonable doubt: indeed, there is no concrete evidence at all, and the theory relies on a combination of circumstantial evidence and inferences made from the iconography of the work itself. But the theory has one important argument in its favour: whilst another local religious community has been proposed as the original

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37. Anchel (1909) p.26.

38. This charter, and other charters referred to below are transcribed in Appendix 1.

39. Clément, no.109 (janvier 1935) pp.10-11.

40. De Bouclon (1882) p.17.

home of the retable, the abbey of Conches,[41] there is no evidence to link either the retable or the church with any other patron besides Saint-Sauveur, whether an individual or an institution.[42]

One potential problem with the suggestion that the retable was commissioned by or for the abbey of at Saint-Sauveur is the question of the extent to which the nuns of an enclosed order would have had access to an altarpiece. In theory nuns had always lived secluded from lay people, but the visitation records of Eudes Rigaud, archbishop of Rouen (1250-55), demonstrate the extent to which enclosure was routinely flouted. The rules were subsequently tightened under the terms of the papal bull *Periculoso* (1298), when nuns were ordered to live an entirely enclosed existence. As the laity generally had access to nunnery churches a separate area of the church was reserved for use of the nuns, an area which often gave only very restricted visual access to the high altar. Furthermore, it has been argued that nuns did not have secondary altars in their churches;[43] if correct, this bold assertion indicates that the La Selle retable almost certainly could not have belonged to Saint-Sauveur. However, research on female religious houses shows that there was

41. Both Régnier (see above, chapter 1, note 68) and Moutardier, (1961) p.26, suggest that the abbey at Conches may be the original home of the retable, but neither offer any supporting evidence. Moutardier also notes the tradition that relates the retable to Saint-Sauveur.

42. For example, there are no records of chapels or altars dedicated to St George at Conches, and no record of an alabaster retable in the sale of the abbey's goods during the French Revolution (see below, note 66).

43. Gilchrist (1995) p.121; Gilchrist does not present any evidence to support this assertion. It seems to be something of an overstatement, akin to Gilchrist's equally unsupported assertion (based on Power's comment) that 'for medieval nuns enclosure became a fourth cardinal vow, as significant to their spirituality as poverty, chastity and obedience' [ibid, p.121; Power (1922) p.342]. It could be argued that enclosure *should* have had this significance in the later medieval period, and that it probably did for some nuns, but there is considerable evidence that enclosure was routinely broken [see, for example, Hamburger (1992) pp.1-9, and Julian Gardner's delightful anecdote about Florentine nuns leaving their convents in order to see a giraffe in 1487 [Gardner (1995) p.55].

a considerable degree of geographical, as well as chronological, variation in the ways

in which enclosure was enforced: for example, Italian convents tended to enclose

nuns in a choir behind the high altar,[44] whilst in Germany the usual solution was the

provision of a nuns' gallery above the nave.[45] In other areas nuns were sometimes

confined to a transept arm, or to part of the nave divided from the laity by some kind

of screen.[46]

No plan of Saint-Sauveur survives, and it is uncertain whether or not the

abbey church served a lay community in addition to the nuns, but it would seem

unwise to rule out the possibility that the nuns could have had visual access to the La

Selle retable. The retable could have been a gift from a patron, perhaps to mark the

profession of a nun, but we should note that there is good evidence for nuns

themselves commissioning altarpieces: an inscription on the high altarpiece of a

Franciscan convent, Santa Maria in Monticelli outside Florence, records that the nuns

commissioned the work, dated 1383,[47] and we know that the abbess of Bourbourg

commissioned some English alabaster panels that may have been intended for an

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44. Gardner (1995) p.30. However, Gardner also notes two documented Italian examples where nuns were enclosed in front of the high altars of their churches: ibid, p.52.

45. Hamburger (1992) p.112.

46. Hamburger comments that nuns and laity could also occupy parallel aisles: this arrangement pertained in Gilbertine churches, for example [ibid]. An even more interesting architectural solution is found at the coincidentally-named Benedictine female abbey of La Celle, near Brignolles in Provence. An eighteenth-century map of the convent shows two churches, one for the nuns and one for the laity, divided by a lobby area containing the conventual doorway [reproduced in L'Hermite-Leclerq (1989), plan V].

47. The work shows the Virgin and Child in majesty with SS Clare and Katherine, and four male saints. It is illustrated in Gardner (1995) figure 19. Gardner also cites two other Italian altarpieces commissioned by nuns, dated to 1395 and 1443 respectively [ibid, pp.40-41].

altarpiece in 1534, via Lord Lisle.[48] Nuns even helped to make altarpieces: in 1530

three nuns of the convent of Poor Clares at Ribnitz, near Rostock, helped their

confessor Lambrecht Slagghert to paint a winged altarpiece for the nuns' choir,

commissioned by the abbess;[49] two years later, a panel of St Francis was also

created. Taken together, this evidence suggests that it was by no means impossible

for the nuns of Saint-Sauveur to have owned the La Selle retable, and even to have

commissioned it themselves. In default of documentary evidence the question of who

commissioned the work cannot be resolved entirely: it is also possible that an

external patron wished the retable to remind its spectators of the perils of female

sexuality. Given the uncertainty about visual access to an altarpiece it is impossible

to say whether these 'spectators' would have been the nuns themselves or lay

worshippers at their church. However, this type of agenda could be meaningful to

both groups, in the former case as a clearly didactic tool and in the latter as a

commentary on women in general and also perhaps on the enclosed, and hence

invisible, nuns in particular.[50]

The history of Evreux is riven with conflict and destruction, and the story of the

abbey Saint-Sauveur reflects this experience. Founded by Count Richard of Evreux

for his daughter Godehilde,[51] who went on to become the second abbess of the

community, the abbey was initially situated in the centre of the city. It occupied

buildings in the Rue Saint-Nicolas close to the junction with Rue de la Petite-Cité,[52]

48. Byrne (1981) volume 5 pp.172-73. See also above, chapter 1, note 58.

49. Hamburger (1997) p.202.

50. The putative agenda of the retable relating to female sexuality is discussed above, pp.190-98.

51. Charpillon and Caresme (1868) p.133.

52. Anchel (1909) p.26.

an area which was devastated by fire several times during the course of the twelfth

century. Henry I of England (who was also duke of Normandy) burned the city in

1119, during the abbacy of Osberte.[53] Amauri I, Count of Evreux, contributed to

Saint-Sauveur's rebuilding costs by donating to the abbey the rights of the Pentecost

fair which was held in the parish of Saint-Léger.[54] However, the destruction was

repeated in 1125 under Abbess Alboride, during the ongoing conflict between Henry I

and Amauri, and as a result a new church was dedicated in 1130.[55] Then in 1195,

during the tenure of Abbesse Cecile, King Philip-Augustus burned the abbey yet

again as he recaptured the town for the French.[56] Perhaps taking pity on the nuns,

Bishop Garin de Cierry gave the abbey a new site outside the town, at the foot of a

hill known as Saint-Michel near to the river Iton, an area that was to become known

as the Quartier Tilly. In return the community allowed the church of their former

abbey to become a parish church, dedicated to St Nicholas.[57] The nuns reserved the

right to take refuge in the church in case of war, fire or other difficulties, and also to

nominate the parish priest or chaplain and to retain his services on certain festivals at

their new church. Simon de Montfort is known to have played an important role in the

relocation of the abbey, possibly making a financial contribution towards the costs of

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53. Diard (1978) p.2.

54. Lamiray (1927) p.152. The bull of Eugene III reflects a tradition for members of the aristocracy making donations to Saint-Saveur, as it notes the donations of land made by Héliance d'Auteuil and Richard, son of Hellouin: Charpillon and Caresme (1868) p.133. Pope Innocent II also seems to have participated in the fund-raising effort, and it has been claimed that it was his decision that the dedication of the abbey should be St Saviour [ibid, p.170]. This cannot be correct as Yves de a Celle's charter of 1085 already refers to the dedication of the abbey.

55. Diard (1978) p.2.

56. Anchel (1909) p.26.

57. Anchel (1909) p.26. The relationship between Saint-Sauveur and the church of Saint Nicolas was confirmed in a charter of 1474: Charpillon and Caresme (1868) p.137.

building work.[58]

The abbey seems to have prospered on its new site, and there is evidence that the nuns commanded a considerable amount of revenue. At the time of Rigaud's survey the abbey had an income of 1,000 livres and a community of over sixty nuns.[59] However, the inquiry found that the conduct of the nuns under Abbess Jeanne II was less than praiseworthy: it records that there were instances of women owning squirrels and small dogs, wearing ornate girdles, leaving the abbey without permission, sometimes to watch hunting, and generally behaving in a questionable fashion.

The Hundred Years War was a period of profound turbulence for Normandy, and Evreux suffered a great deal. The city was captured by the English in 1418, an occupation that was to last for some thirty years, and this led to great hardship for the inhabitants: the occupying forces exacted heavy taxes, and there were many instances of iniscipline amongst the troops with predictable results for the unfortunate

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58. Delisle and Passy (1869) volume 2, p.69. There is a problem with identifying which particular Simon de Montfort was involved in partonage of Saint-Sauveur: the name was common to at least five different members of the same family in a relatively short period. Dan Power has suggested that Simon V, the leader of the Albigensian crusade (k. 1218), often referred to as Simon IV in older history books, is the most likely candidate [personal communication, September 1996].

59. Anchel (1909) p.28. Penelope Johnson's research into female religious houses in northern France during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries demonstrates that Saint-Sauveur was exceptionally large. The average number of nuns in Norman communities visited by Rigaud was 37; male houses tended to be even smaller, with an average of 23.6 monks. The only foundations on a par with Saint-Sauveur, in terms of size at least, were the Benedictine monasteries at Bec and Saint-Etienne, with 79 and 62 inhabitants respectively: Johnson (1991) Appendix B, pp.269-72. Johnson also notes that English nunneries tended to be somewhat smaller, and have been estimated at around 20 nuns per house at this time [ibid, p.173]. Eileen Power's research into Rigaud's visitations notes that Saint-Sauveur was relatively wealthy but still indebted, with debts varying between £200 and £600 recorded at Rigaud's four visits to the abbey. In 1258 he ordered the nuns to procure more books; he also criticised the extent to which the nuns had personal property and forbade the holding of private drinking parties: Power (1922) pp.636-37, 646, 652, 655.

locals.[60] It seems that the abbey experienced a long period of general decline, which lasted until the elevation of Madeleine d'Estouteville to the abbacy in 1531.[61] She undertook a major campaign of building and restoration work, which was particularly concerned with the abbey church. The abbey suffered a schism at the end of the sixteenth century, with four women all claiming to be abbess at one particularly colourful stage. The situation was finally resolved in 1594 with the accession of Judith de Pons, who is remembered as a reformer who restored much-needed discipline to the abbey.[62] The 43rd and final abbess was Madame de Narbonne-Lara, who oversaw the complete evacuation of the abbey in September 1792.[63] The buildings were commandeered to serve as stores for the revolutionary army, and also used for target-practice. As a result, the buildings had to be demolished in the early years of the nineteenth century.[64]

Little is known about what happened to the furnishings and goods belonging to the abbey when the nuns were forced to leave Saint-Sauveur in 1792. It has been claimed that on 26th July 1793 all the precious objects were taken to the *maison commune* (now the *Hotel de Ville*),[65] but the records of the city archives relating to such confiscated goods refer only to humdrum goods such as sheets and beds; there is no reference to anything of value.[66] It is quite possible that everything should have

60. An interesting, and possibly rather partisan, analysis is presented in Mabire and Ragache (1986) pp.197-200.

61. Anchel (1909) p.33.

62. ibid p.28.

63. Lamiray (1927) p.24.

64. 'G.d'Y' (1954) p.4.

65. Charpillon and Caresme (1868) p.139.

66. Evreux, Municipal Archives, call numbers 5N4, 5N7. Two inventories seem to have made within 3 days in 1791. The former is concerned with curtains, chasubles

been taken to the maison commune, but that some of the goods had already been spirited away. The abbey certainly did have at least one precious object: their high altar, which was described in glowing terms in a work of 1722:

...le grand Autel brille par l'or, l'argent et l'ébene dont il est orné: c'est une piéce digne de la curiosité des voïageurs.[67]

This phrase cannot be describing the La Selle retable, because there would have been no ebony in it, even if parts of it had been gilded with gold and silver, and it is likely that a relatively cheap alabaster retable would have been used as a secondary altarpiece, perhaps on a side altar or in a chapel, in all but the humblest community. The high altar has disappeared without trace, for there is no record of it after the dissolution of the abbey, and it seems likely that many other items may have 'disappeared' as well. A plausible scenario is that as the Revolution was gaining momentum the nuns realised that their abbey could be threatened, and they sent their treasures out of the abbey to places of safety. The most obvious places to use would be parishes where the right of presentation of the priest to the living lay with Saint-Sauveur: the priests would be well-known to the abbess, and the strong relationship between the parish and the abbey would virtually ensure the safe

and similar goods; the latter considers objects in a cellar, including pieces of wood and marble and a 'mauvaise table'; the total value of these goods was reckoned at 4.5FF. By contrast, a very full record survives of the sale of goods of the abbey of Conches, held on 30th March 1791, with prices and the names of purchasers noted. Two wooden altars from the abbey church were sold to M. Fromageau, for the sum of £141, for example, also the church clock, bell, various charters and quite possibly the abbot's throne [Lampérière (1888) pp.89-90]. There is no reference to an alabaster altarpiece, which certainly makes it very unlikely that the La Selle retable originated at Conches.

67. Le Brasseur (1722) p.7. This altar is also mentioned in an inventory made on 27th November 1790 [Evreux, Municipal Archives, call number 5N4]: its disappearance from later inventories seems very meaningful.

recovery of the item when the Revolution had finished, or at least when the abbey was no longer threatened. La Selle was one of 15 parishes where the abbey held the right of presentation,[68] and it is possible that many or all of these churches were sent some valuable or treasured item.

This theory of secret convoys of ecclesiatical goods slipping out of Evreux in the early years of the Revolution may seem rather romantic, but it is a rational explanation for the fact that the retable does not appear in any pre-Revolutionary records of La Selle,[69] and, indeed, for the existence of such an unusual work of art in this tiny community. The retable is undoubtedly a chance survival; indeed the fact that the hamlet is so remote probably goes some way towards explaining why it has survived so well, despite the best efforts of opportunist thieves. As Michel Vovelle has observed, the sack of churches and religious houses was not accomplished overnight.[70] Indeed, the process of 'dechristinisation' took many months in 1792-3, with a notable slowing through the winter before a final push in the spring. This

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68. Baudot (1978) p.45. This fits in to a local picture of high levels of monastic patronage: in Norman dioceses an average of 44% of patronages were monastic, with a maximum of 57% for Sées and a minimum of 31% at Lisieux. In the diocese of Evreux abbeys tended to hold many patronages of churches: Lyre had 38, Bec-Hellouin had 25, and Saint-Taurin, like Saint-Sauveur, had 15 [ibid, p.44].

69. Régnier's notes, citing Abbé Guéry (1912). Elizabeth Rapley suggests that it could have been feasible for the nuns to move some of their valuables if commissioners were in the area for some time before they visited Saint-Sauveur. It would have been almost impossible once official inventories had been taken, as it is clear that the revolutionary authorities were very vigilant. However, there may have been some kind of collusion, and there are documented cases of 'trades' being allowed, for example a less valuable chalice substitued on an inventory for a more valuable chalice. Professor Rapley also comments that the retable may have left the abbey earlier, for example after the Law Crash of 1720 when the community at Saint-Sauveur, in common with many religious houses, was probably in financial difficulties [personal communication, August 1998]. Whilst this latter theory is interesting, it does not explain how the retable came to be at La Selle: as observed above (p.238) there are no obvious candidates for the position of church benefactor in the local community at the time that the retable was made, and this is equally true during the eighteenth century, both before and after the Revolution.

70. Vovelle (1988) p.85

scenario certainly suggests that the abbess of Saint-Sauveur may have had enough time to enable her to plan the dispersal of the abbey's treasures. It could be argued that La Selle would have been an obvious place to hide something of value from the abbey: a journey to the hamlet from Saint-Sauveur would not have aroused suspicion, and once safely installed, it is unlikely that any Revolutionary official would have been moved to make the very long journey from Evreux to look for it. In fact, the biggest threat to security probably came from any Revolutionaries living locally: at this point it will be interesting to consider the nature of the community at La Selle before, during, and after the Revolution.

The Hamlet of La Selle during the French Revolution

A series of papers on the history of La Selle, Juignettes and Saint-Antonin-de-Sommaire during the French Revolution, published in the parish newsletter,[71] paints a fascinating picture of life in these small communities throughout the years of turmoil. There is evidence about many aspects of their experience: the imposition of grain taxes, conscription, the closure of churches. Perhaps the most striking feature of this material is the differences between these three communities: geographically they are very close, but their leading inhabitants' attitudes to the Revolution seem to have been far apart. The authorities at Juignettes seems to have been strongly in favour of the Revolution, although some of their fellow villagers may have been less enthusiastic: it is recorded that in 1795 two municipal officers arrived at the 'Temple de la Raison' (the church) in order to ring the bell to convene the people and lecture them on the new laws, and were surprised to discover that the keyhole had been blocked, presumbly to forestall just such an event.[72] However, at La Selle the

71. See above, note 36.

72. Clément no.56 (janvier 1921) p.11.

community seems to have been united in their opposition to the new regime; in December 1794 the hamlet was subjected to a 'tyrannical garrison' (of two individuals!) as a punishment for failure to deliver grain for the use of Revolutionaries.[73] Official attitudes to desertion were also markedly different: on 30th March 1794 the municipality at Juignettes arrested and turned in seven Breton deserters, apparently of their own free will,[74] but only three months later a party of gendarmes had to be sent to La Selle to search for a cavalryman named Jaques Piel. His brother and the members of the council delared 'with all the innocence in the world' that they didn't know where he lived.[75]

La Selle was also distinguished during the aftermath of the Revolution, as the municipality was one of the first in the area to press for the reopening of the church. Their priest, Pierre Godin, declared that the building would be used for 'les fonctions sacerdotales du culte catholique, apostolic et romain, en se conformant aux lois civiles et politiques de la Republique',[76] a carefully-worded argument that seems to indicate a degree of willingness to pay lip-service to the Revolutionaries' agenda. But it seems that the hamlet was ultimately to pay the price for its resistance to the Revolution, for in September 1844 La Selle was formally joined to the neighbouring village of Juignettes by an official ordinance, and effectively lost all independence.[77]

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73. Clément no.53 (avril 1920) p.9.

74. Clément no.50 (juillet 1919) pp.6-7.

75. Clément no.53 (juillet 1919) p.7. Attitudes to the Revolution obviously varied from place to place, but in general it seems that rural areas were less keen on the Revolution. Clément notes that in the town of Neubourg in 1792 many of the young single women declared that they would not marry any man who had not 'paid his debt to the fatherland', adding the wry comment that such a vow would have been somewhat imprudent in many villages [ibid].

76. Clément no.61 (avril 1922) p.12.

77. Clément no.98 (avril 1932) p.11. There is some evidence that the church at La Selle was targeted by the municipality of Juignettes -- an ordinance of June 1813

But during the first years of the Revolution all this was unknowable, and La Selle may well have appeared to be a safe place to hide one of the treasures of the abbey Saint-Sauveur. Indeed, if this was what happened, the choice proved to be a good one, as the retable has survived relatively intact, unlike the other treasures of the abbey, all of which are apparently lost without trace.

Saint-Sauveur and the Agenda of the Retable

Having established a plausible case for Saint-Sauveur as the original home of the retable, we should now consider why an abbey of nuns would choose to have an altarpiece with the unusual iconography of the La Selle retable. The presentation of the Marian cycle seems well suited to female patronage, particularly in the context of an enclosed, celibate female order; to some extent this arguement can be extended to account for the iconography of the retable as a whole. However, it should be recognised that the cycle of St George does demand further explanation. This saint seems a logical choice for a commission by a knight or a martial order, not what we might expect a community of women to choose.[78] Yet there are several possible explanations which may account for the selection of this specific saint:

(a) the choice of St George reflects a pre-existing dedication of the abbey, or a chapel or altar where the retable was intended to be displayed;

(b) St George was not chosen by the nuns themselves but was the choice of a patron, whether a woman entering the abbey, the family of a nun or some other

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gave permission for the roof to be removed -- but it is unclear whether this was ever acted upon.

78. We should, however, note the existence of a female religious house dedicated to St George, the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Georges at Rennes. This house was founded in the early eleventh century by Alain III, duke of Brittany, for his sister Adèle, who became the first abbess, but there is no obvious explanation for the dedication [Villeneuve (1896), p.8].

benefactor;

(c) the choice of St George reflects some other aspect of the history of the abbey.

To consider the first possibility, the brief answer is that it is currently impossible to know. The abbey building was comprehensively destroyed during the Revolution, and no plans of the building appear to survive. The only incidental reference to a chapel that I have come across alludes to a Lady chapel in the abbey church,[79] a completely conventional accessory, and I have found no references to altar dedications. So we are left with the tantalising thought that there may have been a chapel or altar dedicated to St George, or even a chapel or altar with a compound dedication to the Virgin and St George.[80]

The second suggestion ties in with the putative chapel or altar of St George: if such a thing existed in Saint-sauveur it could have reflected the interest of a patron. Equally, a patron with an interest in St George could have paid for the retable alone, and it could have been set up for any secondary altar. Again, we have little evidence for particular patronage of the abbey, with the exception of the early gifts of Amauri and Simon de Montfort, and the relationship with La Selle, but this by no means precludes the possibility, indeed the likelihood, that such patronage was an extremely important source of income for Saint-sauveur. It is quite conceivable that a widow entering the abbey would wish to commemorate her dead husband, or even her son, and any woman entering could have wished to commemorate her father. And the man in question need not have borne the name Georges, for the choice of this saint would have been suitable for any knight. Likewise, the gift could have been made by the family of a nun, just as Yves de la Celle gave his church to the abbey when his

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79. Charpillon and Caresme (1868) p.137.

80. See above, p.114, on compound dedications to St George and the Virgin.

wife and daughters entered the community.

When we turn to the third possibility, that the choice of St George reflects some other aspect of the history of the abbey, we are again confronted by an imponderable. Almost anything could have given rise to an interest in the saint: an abbess could have had a father or brother named Georges, or a benefactor whom the abbey wished to honour could have borne that name.[81] Furthermore, there is the possibility that the dedication is a commemoration of a knightly patron. The evidence relating to Simon de Montfort as a benefactor, outlined above, is a case in point: could the secondary dedication of the retable be a recognition of his patronage of the abbey? As ever, there is little to support this hypothesis, but it is interesting to note a carved stone roundel depicting Simon, which is one of the few extant parts of the abbey.[82] It originally decorated the vault of the choir in the abbey church, and depicts a knight in full armour on horseback. The legend, partly defaced, reads 'Simon Comes Ebrocencis'. The piece seems to have formed part of the building and restoration campaign of Saint-Sauveur during the early sixteenth century, carried out under Abbess Madeleine d'Estouteville, and is certainly not contemporary with Simon de Montfort's benefaction of the abbey towards the end of the twelfth century. If this roundel can be construed as a post-hoc commemoration of a benefactor, it would seem quite possible that the dedication of the retable could be something similar. Whilst Simon de Montfort is an appealing, and easily identified, candidate for a commemoration through a cycle of St George, he is unlikely to have been the only noble male benefactor of the abbey, indeed, the cycle could even operate on one level as a general recognition of all the male benefactors of the abbey, with perhaps

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81. There is also a possibility that there may have been a relic of St George at the abbey: other relics of the saint are recorded elsewhere in Normandy (see above, p.225).

82. The roundel is displayed in the Bishop's Palace Museum, Evreux.

the Marian cycle acting as the counterpart recognition of female benefactors. Even if such a commemoration was not the real reason, such a theory could still provide some important clues to the processes that lay behind the choice of a specific saint or saints in the commissioning of any given 'anonymous' work.

Drawing together these different strands, we arrive at what seems to be a cohesive argument for the Norman-French patronage of the La Selle retable. As yet, little of the evidence is more than circumstantial: there is no contract for the work, there seems to be no record of the retable in any inventory other than post-Revolutionary catalogues of the church of La Selle, and there is no other surviving testimony to its history. However, the background of the Abbey Saint-Sauveur's strong links with La Selle, the way that the iconography of the retable may suggest an agenda of female piety, and the manner in which French and English iconographic influences are combined militates strongly that this work was a specific commission for or by the nuns at Evreux, and that it came to rest in the obscure church of La Selle for reasons of security at a time when religious conviction threatened to be ousted by political ideology.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

In many ways it has been my good fortune that the La Selle retable has been almost entirely overlooked by art historians, even the relatively small number who have developed an interest in English alabaster work; those commentators who have published on it have generally done little more than record, more or less accurately, its subject matter. This general absence of serious study by no means reflects the inherent interest of the altarpiece, but it has left the field open for the many inferences and interpretations offered in this thesis. Furthermore, the serious study of a large-scale work in English alabaster has presented an opportunity to challenge one of the most pervasive ideas in this area of art history: that the standardisation and crowding found in later alabaster panels was necessarily accompanied by a lack of thought and affect on the part of the carver and/or designer. The format of the La Selle retable demonstrates conclusively that the overall design of alabaster altarpieces could be very complex, even when the carving of individual panels was not of the highest quality, and it gives some hint of what may have been lost to us through the degradations of time, iconoclasts and thieves. In this way the La Selle retable provides a very important counterbalance to collections and exhibitions of individual panels, where virtually all sense of their original use is lost, particularly in the light of the finding that an unusual combination of subjects can be just as meaningful as the unusual treatment of a subject.

An equally fortuitous situation has arisen with the survival of circumstantial evidence surrounding the patronage of the retable. Whilst it would have been very convenient to have been able to establish with rather more certainty the name of the commissioner, the motivation that lay behind the choice of iconography, the price

paid and the date the work was executed, the very opacity of these topics has proved rather more rewarding. The local tradition linking the retable to Saint-Sauveur d'Evreux has given me the opportunity to consider the role of women as patrons, the question of the extent to which nuns would have been able to view their altarpieces, and the ways in which cloistered women sought to express their religiosity through iconography. The same tradition has also led to an exploration of the pre-Reformation export trade in English alabaster, specifically where there is reason to believe that works may have been commissioned, and a survey of extant and documented examples of English alabaster work in the Eure. Each of these areas demands further research, and it is to be hoped that other medievalists will undertake to push back the boundaries of knowledge on the subject of English alabaster. In particular, a world-wide database of English alabaster images is needed to enable effective comparisons to made between different versions of the same subject. This would allow credible dating schemes to be established, with concomitant study of the development of specific motifs, and would greatly facilitate the mapping of pre-Reformation trading.

On a personal level, the most interesting aspect of this study has been the research into the iconography of the Virgin and, especially, St George. The discovery of the motif of the feminised dragon has been particularly exciting, as it has opened up a wealth of possibilities for future research into the multiple meanings of the gendered dragon and the ways in which 'standard' visual forms were manipulated by medieval people to fit alternate agendas. The figure of St George himself has proved to be a fascinating blend of idioms, with ideas of chivalry, sexuality and the *imitatio christi* converging with localised narrative forms; again, the patron's agenda seems to

have been paramount in the formation of motif.

Finally, this thesis goes some way towards demonstrating the possibilities of reseach into apparently 'anonymous' artworks. The iconography of an individual work can reveal a considerable amount about the motives of a patron, designer or artist, and even, by extension, suggest other aspects inherent in works where the patron or audience may be easily identifiable. The extent to which such theorising is desirable remains a moot point, but I would assert that this is one important way for historians to develop an insight into the motivations and concerns of our forebears.

(a) *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, 17 (1849) p.50

La Celle est un petit village situé sur les limites des départements de l'Eure et de l'Orne, dans la vallée de la Rille. L'église, petite, mal bâtie, sans style, s'élève au milieu de rares maisons séparées par des champs fertiles et de vertes clôtures. On ne la citerait guère, si ce n'était qu'elle possède un beau retable composé de divers bas-reliefs d'albâtre assez habilement rapprochés, mais qui primitivement devaient faire partie d'une série de compositions dont quelques-unes n'existent plus. Ces bas-reliefs, comme tous les albâtres du seizième siècle, sont remarquables par certaines qualitiés d'exécution qui contratent fréquemment avec une maladresse naïve. Dans ce beau temps de la renaissance, les ateliers des monastères, sans être restés étrangers aux progrès de l'art, avaient encore coutume de suivre trop scrupuleusement certaines traditions du style primitif chrétien. La chasteté des figures drapées, la simplicité des plis, l'expression placide des physionomies, le peu de vérité des attitudes et des gestes lorsque le mouvement ne se rapporte point aux habitudes de la vie monastique, l'ignorance anatomique dans quelques parties, enfin la monotonie des accessories, autorisent à attribuer cette oeuvre d'art à des moines, disciples de ceux qui, aux douzième et trezième siècles, exécutaient les chasses et les reliquaires en orfévrerie émaillée. Parmi ces treize bas-reliefs, le premier se recommande surtout à l'attention par son étendue et son mérite: il représente au milieu du ciel le Vierge, le Père éternel, le Christ, le Saint-Esprit et les anges. Le Père est au milieu; il est mitré et il fait geste de bénir. Le fils et le Saint-Esprit touchent à la couronne de la Vierge. Les anges, qui soutiennent la Vierge, sont vêtus d'habits serrés au cou et sur la poitrine, comme ceux des novices dans les couvents. Les

draperies des trois personnes de la Trinité sont fouillées et repliées comme dans la vieil art allemand. Il en est de même dans la plupart des bas-reliefs. En général, les mains, un peu sèches et roides, ne manquent cependant ni de grâce ni d'une certaine distinction. On voit encore sur les draperies et sur les fonds quelques traces de peinture où dominent le bleu, le rouge et l'or. Les autres sujets des bas-reliefs sont les suivants: -- Naissance de la Vierge. -- Présentation de la Vierge au temple. -- L'Annonciation. La pose de la Vierge est d'une naïveté étonnante; l'ange qui lui présente un lis est vêtu en page; il porte un toque et un pourpoint. -- Jésus dans la crèche; le Père éternal regarde; il en est de même dans l'Annonciation. -- Adoration des rois; la figure de la Vierge est d'une jolie exécution. -- La Circoncision. -- St Georges malade, visité par la Vierge. -- Saint Georges armé chevalier par la Vierge; un ange lui attache les éperons, un autre tient son épée, un autre son bouclier. -- Saint Georges combattant le dragon; la Vierge et Jésus-Christ sont au fond; une femme avec un nimbe est en prière près de l'agneau. Dans ce dernier bas-relief, la mauvaise exécution du cheval, l'inéxperience complète qui se trahit dans l'arrangement de l'armure et de la selle, peuvent servir de preuves à l'appui de la conjecture que l'artiste était plus familier avec le cloître qu'avec les tournois et les hauts faits des chevaliers. -- Saint Georges baptisant. -- Saint Georges devant le juge, aux pieds duquel un bouffon gesticule, tandis qu'un nain, accroupi sur une colonne, joue du violon. -- Saint Georges décapité; le juge est témoin du supplice et porte sur son bonnet un petit chien qui semble exprimer l'idolâtrie. -- Le corps de Saint Georges décapité reste à genoux; au dessus, deux anges emportent au ciel son âme nue et ailée. -- Les petits statuettes qui décorent les niches de chaque côté des compositions, sont d'une exécution très supérieure à celle des bas-reliefs.

Translation:

La Celle is a little village situated on the limits of the departments of the Eure and the Orne, in the valley of the Rille. The church, which is small, poorly built and without style, stands in the middle of scattered houses separated by fertile fields and green closes. One would not mention the place at all if it did not possess a beautiful retable composed of various alabaster reliefs fairly skilfully brought together but which originally formed part of a series of compositions of which a few no longer exist. These reliefs, like all alabasters of the sixteenth century, are remarkable for certain qualities of execution which often contrast with a naive clumsiness. During the fine epoch of the Renaissance, the workshops of the monasteries, without remaining strangers to the progress of art, have still the custom of too scrupulously following certain traditions of the primitive Christian style. The purity of the draped figures, the simplicity of the folds, the placid expression of the faces, the slight truth of the attitudes and gestures when the movement does not correspond exactly to the habits of the monastic life, the anatomical ignorance of some parts, and the monotony of accessories, authorise an attibution of this work of art to monks, followers of those who, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, created shrines and reliquaries in enamelled goldsmith's work. Amongst these thirteen reliefs, the first above all demands attention because of its size and its merit: it represents in the middle of heaven the Virgin, God the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the angels. The Father is in the middle; he is mitred and he makes a gesture of benediction. The Son and the Holy Spirit are touching the Virgin's crown. The angels, who support the Virgin, are dressed in habits which are close-fitting at the neck and over the chest, reminiscent of those worn by novices in convents. The draperies of the three persons of the Trinity are detailed and fall in folds just as in old German art. It is the same in

most of the reliefs. In general, the carvers' styles, somewhat dry and stiff, are, nevertheless, not lacking grace and distinction. One sees also on the draperies and on the background some traces of paint, where blue, red and gold dominate. The other subjects of the reliefs are the following: -- Nativity of the Virgin. -- Presentation of the Virgin in the temple. -- The Annunciation. The Virgin's pose has a striking naivety; the angel who presents her with a lily is dressed as a page; he wears a cap and a doublet. -- Jesus in the manger; God the Father watches; he is the same as in the Annunciation. -- Adoration of the Kings; the figure of the Virgin has been prettily executed. -- The Circumcision. -- St George ill, visited by the Virgin. -- Saint George armed as a knight; an angel attaches his spurs, another holds his sword and another his shield. -- St George fights the dragon; the Virgin and Jesus Christ are in the background; a woman with a nimbus is in prayer next to the lamb. In this latter relief, the poor execution of the horse, the complete inexperience which is revealed in the arrangement of the armour and the saddle, can serve as proof to support the conjecture that the artist was more familiar with the cloister than with tournaments and the high deeds of knights. -- St George baptising. -- St George before the judge, at whose feet a buffoon gesticulates, whilst a dwarf, crouching on a column, plays a violin. -- St George decapitated; the judge witnesses the punishment and carries on his hat a little dog which resembles a symbol of idolatry. -- The decapitated body of St George rests on its knees; at the top, two angels carry to heaven his soul which is naked and winged. -- The little statuettes which decorate the niches of each side of the compositions, are far superior to the reliefs in their execution.

Bas-Reliefs in the church of La Celle.

The village called La Celle is situated upon the boundary line of the departments of Eure and Orne, in the valley of the Rille, in France. The church of this village, which is small, ill-built, and destitute of the graces of style, rises amid scattered houses and verdant pastures. In itself it is scarcely worth mention; but it has in it a large tablet or slab of alabaster, covered with figures in half-relief, which is not only curious, but ingenious in design, and somewhat clever in execution. Owing to its great age, and the softness of the material, some of the figures are mutilated, and a few nearly obliterated. These bas-reliefs, like most of those executed during the sixteenth century, have considerable interest, in spite of their imperfect execution. The artist will look in vain for anything approaching to grandeur of design or boldness of imagination; they are, on the contrary, remarkable for a simplicity bordering on childishness, and, occasionally, on the ludicrous. The bas-reliefs now presented to the reader furnish an apt illustration.

At that most interesting period termed the *Renaissance*, or revival of art, though the studios and workshops connected with the monasteries were not wholly uninfluenced by the general progress, yet the artists continued too scrupulously observant of the traditions and the *mannerisms* of former ages. Both objections may be urged against the object under consideration. The draperies are modest and simple in their folds; the expression in the countenances is calm and placid; but the attitudes in general are destitute of vigour, and, in may instances, untrue to nature. There is an absence of anatomical precision, and most of the accessories are stiff and monotonous. In point of design and execution, they bear a near resemblance to

the ancient shrines and reliquaries in enamelled jewellery.

It is not necessary here to make many remarks on the *subjects* of these relieved sculptures. Genius and art may be eminently displayed in any subject. It is natural to expect that the subjects selected for illustration would be *religious*, taken either from the Bible or from the history of the Church; but, on most occasions, we find the representations mixed up with much that is legendary, mythological or aphocryphal. This is the case in the sculptures now before us. The *upper* compartment consists of a representation of the sacred Trinity, under which stands the Virgin Mary, surrounded by worshipping angels. In the *next* compartment are representations of the birth of the Virgin Mary; her presentation in the temple; the annunciation, and the birth of Christ in the manger. The *third* compartment represents the adoration of the infant Saviour by the Eastern Magi; and the circumcision of Christ in the Temple. Here the narrative breaks strangely off, and the legendary history of St George commences. The first division represents him as lying ill upon a couch, visited by the Virgin Mary, and attended by angels; and the second represents the same personages conferring upon him the honour of knighthood after his restoration to health. The *fourth* compartment represents his celebrated encounter with the dragon, while the king and queen are looking on from a sort of gallery, and the Virgin is praying for his success. The horse and the dragon, and indeed the whole of this division, must have been drawn by an artist little acquainted with the deeds of knightly enterprise, or even the forms of animals. Next we have St George in the act of baptising infants; then cited before the judge, at whose feet, curiously enough, a merry-andrew, or buffoon, is playing strange antics, while a dwarf, seated on a high stall, is performing on the violin. The last compartment represents the decapitation of the martyr, in the presence of the judge and a sort of

priest, while angels are seen above, bearing his winged soul upwards into heaven.

In nearly all the figures in these bas-reliefs the hands are made conspicuous, and, though thin and dry, they are not destitute of grace. The draperies of nearly all the figures are full, and some of them rather remarkable as to the mode in which are disposed. The small statues which decorate the niches on each side of the compositions are executed in far better style than the bas-reliefs themselves. The traces of painting are visible throughout the whole; the prevailing colours of the draperies are blue, red and gold.

The memorials of the past, recovered from ancient monastery or ruined church, are doubly interesting to us as evidences of the progress of art in various ages of the world. Here a sculptured column or a blazoned window, there a cross-legged knight upon a tomb, or a dim rusty monumental brass upon a mouldering wall, and elsewhere in buildings dedicated to religious services, the past comes back again to the minds of the curious, bringing with it instruction always. They were an industrious, painstaking race, the artists of old. The loved their art for the art's sake, and in few things does their work show nobler than in the decorations which the hung about God's houses in the world.

Note: italics and punctuation are preserved from the originals.

Appendix 2: Transcripts of documents in the archives of the Eure Department relating to La Selle and Saint-Sauveur d'Evreux

[All these documents have the call number H1363]

(a)   Ivo, the son of Goman, gives the church of La Selle and its appurtenances to the abbey of Saint-Sauveur in 1085:

Sciant omnes pariter presentes et futuri quod ego Ivo filius Gomanni dedi et concessi Deo et ecclesie Sancti Salvatoris Ebroicencis et sanctimonialibus ibidem Deo servientibus, pro salute anime mee et antecessorim meorum, in puram et perpetuam elemosinam, ecclesiam de Cella, cum decimis ad eamdem ecclesiam pertinentibus, et unam carrucatam terre et quatuor hospites, assensu, concessu et voluntate domini mei Willelmi filii Osberti, in cujus feodo sunt. Predicta abbatissa vero et conventus dicte ecclesie Sancti Salvatoris uxorem meam et tres de filiabus meis in suum collegium suscipiunt caritative et faciunt moniales. Ut autem hec mea donatio inviolabilis et inconcussa in perpetuum perseveret, presenti scripto sigillum meum apponere dignum duxi. Testibus hiis: Roberto fratre meo, Normanno preposito meo, et Odone fratre suo Anquitillo [Angicillo] de Altolio [aetolio, actolio], et Radulfo fratre suo, Hermero et pluribus aliis. Actum anno gratie millesimo octogesimo quinto, septimo kalendas novembris."

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(b) A papal bull of Eugene III, dated 1152, mentions La Selle in relation to Saint-Sauveur:

"...ecclesiam de la Cella cum decima et terram ibi ad unam carrucam et hospites quos ibidem habetis..."

(c) In 1231 Jean de la Celle gives to the abbey all rights he holds in the presentation of the church of St Peter at La Selle:

"Notum sint universis presentibus et futuris quod ego Johannes de la Cele, pro salute anime mee et antecessorum et heredum, donavi et in perpetuam elemosinam concessi Deo et ecclesie Sancti Salvatoris Ebroicensis et sanctimonialibus ibidem Deo servientibus totum jus quod habebam et quod habere poteram in jure patronatus ecclesie Sancti Petri de la Cele [Lacele]. Volo et concedo quod predicte moniales dictum jus patronatus libere, quiete et pacifice in perpetuum possideant, ita quod nec ego nec aliquis heredum meorum in eo de cetero aliquid poterimus reclamare. Si forte, quod absit, aliquis super predicto jure predictis monialibus inferret injuriam vel gravamen, ego et heredes mei eas pro posse nostro tenemur defendere. Pro hac autem donatione et concessione mea et juris quod me habere dicebam in dicto jure patronatus remissione, dicte moniales mihi quatuor libras Turonensium contulerunt. Quod ut ratum et firmum in perpetuum perseveret, predictam donationem et concessionem me servaturum in perpetuum, present officiali Ebroicensi, jurament firmavi, et ad majorem securitatem sigillum curie Ebroicencis cum meo sigillo presenti cartule apponi postulavi. Actum anno gratie millesimo ducentesimo trigesimo primo, mense novembris."

(d) In 1235 "Nicholaus de Cella" gives his land holdings to Saint-Sauveur:

"totum illud jus tam in auxiliis quam servitiis quod apud Cellam in tenemento dictarum sanctimonialium dominii ratione clamabam vel clamare poteram...Actum apud Britollium, in plana assisia, anno Domini millesimo ducentesimo trigesimo quinto, Radulpho Arundel tunc temporis existente ballivo..."

(e) In 1242 "Radulfus presbyter de Cella" gives to the nuns, through the mediation of Henri, the priest of "beate Marie de Valle de Conchiis" land in Egremont and la Sarazinere "et omnes decimas terrarum in parochia de Cella de novo redactarum et culturam".

Appendix 3: St George and the Female Dragon

The motif of St George and the Dragon was one of the most significant and popular medieval saintly representations, with many thousands of versions surviving in a range of media. My research on the iconography of the La Selle retable has uncovered a small but significant subset of around forty images featuring a dragon which appears to be gendered female by the inclusion of genitalia;[1] less commonly, dragons can also be gendered with breasts or dugs. Plates 42, 67 and 75 show three versions of the female-gendered dragon; the first two feature genitalia and the third shows dugs.[2] These treatments define the dragon in a quite specific way, both as an obscene creature and also, crucially, in her relationship to St George.

It is possible to interpret the apparent orifice on the dragon in a number of ways. It may be a intended to be read as a wound, but St George is invariably shown stabbing the dragon in the mouth, or less commonly the neck, with a lance, or having already wounded the dragon in this area, and all these images are conventional in this respect. I have yet to discover an image of St George wounding the dragon in the genital area; this does not, of course, preclude the possibility that such images exist, but even if the orifice is intended to be understood as a wound its position is very suggestive of a sexual undertone. Equally, the orifice can be read as an anus. Given that dragons are fabulous beasts, and presented in a wide variety of forms, it is

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1. The vast majority of dragons, whether with St George or in other contexts, are either shown in an attitude that obscures this area of their anatomy, or positioned so that the genital area is visible but entirely unmarked.

2. Plate 76 shows a further way of gendering the dragon, by making her a mother (the tail of the baby dragon is visible to the right of the horse's head; plate 77 shows a detail of this area). However, this visual trope seems to be extremely rare, with only two other examples so far identified; the motif may have been felt to be somewhat problematic as the dragon seems to be justified in her predation on human beings, as she has a family to support. Furthermore, there is an implication that the dragon may have other progeny elsewhere, which undermines the analogy between St George killing the dragon and Christ's ultimate overthrow of the devil.

impossible to know with any certainty how their pudenda should be represented, and it is quite possible that the orifice on some of these Georgian dragons is intended to be read as an anus. This is interesting in itself: the obvious presence of an anus would seem to underline the bestial, or perhaps earthy, nature of the dragon, and links with ideas concerning the poisoning of water supplies by dragons' body products.

Whilst these interpretations may have some substance, the existence of images where the Georgian dragon is presented with breasts or dugs clearly denote that the beast is female, and indicate that it is likely to be understood as female in at least some other treatments. The way that the orifice is drawn on the 'feminised' dragons may also be significant: it often has an almond shape, or is represented as a slit, which is quite unlike the normal shape of the anus but similar to the shape of human female genitals.[3] This humanisation is a particularly interesting characteristic, as it allows the dragon to be interpreted as a symbol of 'bad', unchaste women, especially given that the gendered dragons are often presented lying on their backs,[4] ostensibly in a position for the face-to-face copulation which is associated with humans but not with animals. This sets up a dynamic between the dragon and St George, whereby the dragon appears to be offering herself sexually to her attacker, doubtless in an effort to save her own life. St George, who wields weaponry which is undeniably phallic, is shown refusing her sexual advances, and this may reflect on his

3. The shape of the orifice is also unlike a cloaca, the genital form which a dragon, as a reptile, should have.

4. The La Selle dragon is an obvious exception, as she stands up on her hind legs before St George as he charges towards her. As discussed above (p.33-34), the dragon's position appears to be unparalleled, and may well have been employed here as a means of drawing a comparison between the dragon and the Virgin Mary, who is placed almost directly below the dragon in the panel of the Annunciation. The La Selle dragon is also interesting because it is the only feminised dragon that I have come across to date which features in a cycle of St George's life, as opposed to an isolated image. Again, the presentation of the dragon seems to be part of a wider agenda, apparently concerned with a glorification of chastity.

inherent status as a figure of chastity. By presenting the dragon as female, bestial and sexual, the masculinity, humanity and chastity of St George are thrown into sharp relief, and the image of the battle between the two, and specifically St George's victory, can be read as a visual representation of the saint's sublimation of his sexuality. This interpretation is underlined by the strong visual link between the mouth and the vulva: simply by spearing the dragon in the mouth St George is making a sexual statement towards the dragon. A second sexualized dynamic involves a comparison between the dragon and the rescued princess: St George rescues the virginal woman, who is understood to be dressed as a bride, from the predations of a clearly sexual female figure.

The motif of the female-gendered dragon has strong overtones of the feminised serpent in the Garden of Eden,[5] and the image of Lilith, the first wife of Adam in some Jewish traditions, who is characterised as half-serpent, half-woman. These concepts are clearly related to misogynistic attitudes, and particularly negative attitudes to female sexuality. The feminised dragon seems to have been particularly popular with German Reformation engravers, such as Israel von Meckenem and the Master of the Calvary. It seems likely that the image of the evil, sexual female being overthrown had a particular appeal to certain social or religious groups, and the Reformers may have been one such group. This may well connect with an apparent tradition for femaleness to be cast as the unfavoured state and for evil animals to be presented as female. For example, the Papal Ass, a fictitious creature used as a allegory of papal failings by German propagandists, is clearly feminised by obvious breasts and a swollen belly; in his interpretation of the figure Phillip Melanchthon

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5. Bestiaries make it clear that the dragon is a form of serpent, sometimes calling it a 'winged serpent', and in the train of meaning that to the feminised dragon clearly relates to the feminised serpent. The Serpent in the Garden is often female and is certainly evil; dragons are serpents and they are certainly evils, so a feminised dragon as a symbol of evil is a logical progression.

draws attention to the whorish lifestyle that this display represents. An allegorical engraving of St George and the Dragon by Peter Gottland, dated to 1556, presents the dragon as an embodiment of the papacy, but genders the creature with a breast, apparently to underline its awful depravity.

One of the most interesting aspects of the gendered dragon is that it does not appear to be constrained either chronologically or geographically: examples range in date from 1372, on a civic document in Ferrara, through to Gottland's work of 1556, and there are extant examples from England, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and France. Media used includes stained glass, sculpture in wood, manuscript illumination, woodcuts and engravings. Whilst there is, as yet, no evidence as to the original use of the feminised dragon, I would suggest that the image was probably used early in its life as an illustration on a manuscript version of the life of St George. To date I have only discovered one textual reference to a female dragon in a St George legend, in the version by Barclay dated 1515, which is an English translation of a slightly earlier Latin version. There are no sexual references in this work, and no mention of the dragon's dugs, offspring or genitalia, but it is definitely spoken of as female. This work, or its own source, may well have influenced Spenser, for the Error monster, one of the dragons fought by Red Cross Knight, is referred to as 'she'.

Given the vast numbers of medieval images of St George and the Dragon where the dragon is clearly not gendered, it is important that we do not attempt to generalise too far on the basis of these few works. However, they are interesting as an indication of the ways in which visual or written hagiography can be manipulated to make a specific point, or to suit a specific audience, and taken together they point toward a minor but nevertheless powerful theme in the iconography of St George.

<u>Appendix 4: St Anastasia</u>

The 'true' identity of the small midwife in the foreground of the panel of the Adoration of the Virgin may lie in a French romance on the Life of St Anne, the *Romanz de saint Fanuel.*[1] This relates that at the time of the Nativity of Christ St Joseph went to look for a midwife, and met a pretty girl carrying two buckets of water on a yoke. She had no hands, but Joseph persuaded her to come back to the stable. There she tried to do what she could, and the moment she touched the new-born infant she received a beautiful pair of hands. The girl is named as Anastasia. Her legend is clearly no more than an amplification of the legend of Salome, the apocryphal midwife whose hand was withered when she expressed doubts about the Virgin's sexual status and tried to examine the new mother, and who was subsequently cured when she touched the Christchild. St Anastasia's story is rather more involved, for in the *Romanz de saint Fanuel* we learn that her heathen father tries to cut off her hands and is then blinded; in other versions of the legend he succeeds in beheading her.[2] The name of the saint and her martyrdom seem to be due to the fact that another St Anastasia, a Roman matron and martyr, was commemorated on 25th December, the feast of the Nativity of Christ.

Louis Réau relates that in French mystery plays Salome is often replaced by Saint Anastasia, a name which is variously rendered as Honestasse, Onnestase and Nélasse,[3] and there are literary references to her in the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.[4] She appears in a Provençale version of the Marriage of the Virgin and Nativity of Christ, where she is the daughter of the innkeeper who offered his

1. James (1896-7). I am indebted to Miriam Gill for this reference.

2. James (1922-3) p.4.

3. Réau (1957) volume 2, part 2, p.220.

4. Duine (1906) p.92.

stable as a lodging to the Virgin and St Joseph.[5] St Anastasia was undeniably popular in France, but she also appears elsewhere, in three early fourteenth-century illuminated manuscripts of English origin, Holkham ms 666, the Taymouth Hours (Yates Thompson no.57) and the Carew-Poyntz Horae (Fitzwilliam Museum),[6] for example, and she is mentioned in MS Egerton 1993 and a thirteenth-century German poem.[7] M.R. James has argued that she may also appear in the sculptural cycle of the Ely Lady Chapel, where a man about to behead a woman appears in a niche immediately below the Nativity of Christ.[8]

One factor which would tend to argue against the identification of the La Selle midwife as St Anastasia is that in the incontrovertible images she appears alone, whereas in this alabaster she appears with a second midwife. However, given the existence of several alabasters of the Nativity or Adoration of the Virgin where only one midwife appears,[9] there may well be a certain flexibility in the use of midwives in this subject. The most significant factor in the identification of the smaller La Selle

5. This unpublished manuscript is held in the collection of the Laurentian Library, with the call number 105. It is described in Meyer (1885); Meyer does not date the manuscript. Meyer notes the presence of Anastasia in other Provençale plays, as published by A. Jubinal in *Mystères inédits du XVe siècle* (Paris, 1837), but he suggests that some unique scenes in this manuscript may indicate that it has a Latin, rather than a local, source [Meyer (1885) p.498].

6. See James (1922-3) pp.1-27.

7. These references to St Anastasia are noted in Morgan (1992), p.23.

8. James (1896) p.202. Additionally, there seem to be two Breton legends of the saint, which have been identified by F. Duine as a transference of the cult of the Roman martyr St Anastasia, and a variation on the legend of St Anastasia the midwife martyred by her father following the restoration of her hands. In one version she she comes from Landivisiau, is daughter of the seigneur de Coetmeur, and is killed by her father because she refused to marry the count Arthur de Penhoat. However, at Brielles, close to Landivisiau, she was honoured during the sixteenth century as an indigenous saint, and was said to have been burned by her husband [Duine (1906) pp.81-93].

9. For example, the panel of the Nativity of Christ in the Victoria and Albert Museum [Cheetham (1984) catalogue number 104]; the panel of the Adoration of the Virgin in the Pisa retable, illustrated in Papini, 1910, figure 2.

midwife is the unconventional presentation of her hair, which is shown is loose and uncovered. This would seem to accord with the idea of a young girl pressed into service as a midwife, someone who was certainly not a professional in the field. The girlish figure before us may well be intended to be read as St Anastasia, perhaps as the result of a specific, French, commission.

<u>Appendix 5: Sites associated with the cult of St George in Normandy, arranged by</u>

<u>department.</u>[1]

<u>1. Parish churches dedicated to St George</u>

(a) Seine-Maritime: Boisgautier, Le Bourgay, Bréauté, Le Catelier, Colmesnil-Manneville,

Grainville-la-Renard, Le Houlme, Orival, Saint-Georges-des-Gravenchon,

Saint-Georges-sur-Fontaine, Val-Martin

(b) Eure: Aubevoye, La Ferrière-sur-Risle, Ferrières, Fiquefleur, Le Gros-Theil,

Mézières,

Montreuil-l'Argillé, Romilly-sur-Andelle, Saint-Georges-du-Mesnil,

Saint-Georges-du-Vièvre, Saint-Georges-sur-Eure, Surcy

(c) Orne: Godisson, Orgères, Saint-Georges, Saint-Georges-d'Annebecq,

Saint-Georges-des-Groseillers, Les Ventes-de-Bourse

(d) Calvados: Les Authieux-en-Auge, Basly, Bayeux, Caen, Chênedollé, Hotot-en-Auge,

Isigny-sur-Mer, Lison, Maisoncelles-Pelvay, Morteaux-Couliboeuf, Moulines,

Pennedepie, Saint-Georges-en-Auge, Villiers-le-Sec

(e) Manche: Airel, Boisbenâtre, Brix, Colomby, Coudeville, Etienville, Gourbesville,

Hautmesnil, L'Orbehaye, Montaigu, Montchaton, Néhou, Raids,

Saint-Georges-de-Bohon, Saint-Georges-d'Elle, Saint-Georges-de-la-Rivière,

Saint-Georges-de-Livoye, Saint-Georges-de-Rouelley, Saint-Georges-Montcocq,

Saint-Jores,[2] Sortosville-en-Beaumont, Yvetot-Bocage

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1. This list is derived from Fournée (1986) pp.107-13.

2. 'Saint Jores' is a variant of the name 'Saint Georges'.

(2) Monastic foundations dedicated to St George

(a) Seine-Maritime: Boscherville

(b) Eure: Motel

(c) Orne: n/a

(d) Calvados: Culey-le-Patry

(e) Manche: Marmoutier

(3) Private chapels

(a) Seine-Maritime: Barentin, Hautot-sur-Mer, Mesnil-Esnard, Rouelles

(b) Eure: Gaillon

(c) Orne: Origny-le-Roux, Pervenchères, Verrières

(d) Calvados: Cesny-Bois-Halbout, Thury-Harcourt, Caen

(e) Manche: Chalendrey, Sacey, Sainte-Pience

(4) Chapels in parish churches

(a) Seine-Maritime: Hautot-sur-Mer, Valliquerville

(b) Eure: n/a

(c) Orne: n/a

(d) Calvados: n/a

(e) Manche: Avranches, Coutances, Denneville, Saint-Lô, Val-Saint-Père, Vessey

(5) Isolated chapels

(a) Seine-Maritime: n/a

(b) Eure: Bourneville (putative)

(c) Orne: Perrou, Saint-Germain-des-Grois (putative)

(d) Calvados: Ouilly-le-Basset, 'Vouilly'[3]

(e) Manche: n/a

(6) Confraternities, pilgrimages and relics of St George, healing 'fontaines'[4] and fairs dedicated to St George

(a) Seine-Maritime: Blangy (pilgrimage and relics), Calleville (confraternity),

Fontaine-le-Bourg ('fontaine' and pilgrimage), Rouen (confraternities and relics)

(b) Eure: Louviers (fair), Tournedos-Bois-Hubert (confraternity)

(c) Orne: Flers (fair), Pontchardon ('fontaine' and pilgrimage)

(d) Calvados: Caen (relics), Saint-Julien-le-Faucon (fair), Saint-Sever (fair)

(e) Manche: Beauchamps (annual feast), Cérences (fair), Mont-Saint-Michel (relics),

Les Pieux (fair), Le Teilleul (fair)

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3. Fournée observes that the similarity of names suggests that this may well be a confusion with Ouilly-le-Basset: Fournée (1986) p.112.

4. The term 'fontaine' can imply a spring or well rather than an actual fountain.

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The La Selle Retable:
An English Alabaster Altarpiece in Normandy

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Volume II
Tables, Figures and Plates

Work	Aelfric	Golden Legend	South English Legendary[2]	Scottish Legendary	Lydgate
Date	c.1020-51	c.1260	early 14th century	1400-1450	c.1425
Birthplace	Cappadocia	Cappadocia	Cappadoce	Capadoce	Cappadoce
Status	rich noble	tribune[3]	holy man[4]	tribune	knight
Heathen ruler	Datian, emperor	Dacian, prefect	Dacian, prince	Dacyane, emperor	Dacyan, president
Heathen deity	Apolline	unnamed	---	Appollony	unnamed
George 'recants'	yes	yes	---	yes	yes
Temple fire	yes	yes	---	yes	yes
Imprisonment	yes	---	yes	yes	---
Appearance of Christ	---	yes	---	---	yes
Magician converts	yes	yes	---	yes	yes
Ruler's wife converts	---	yes	---	yes	yes
Heavenly voice	---	yes	yes	yes	---
Beheading	unclear	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ruler killed by fire	yes	yes	---	yes	yes

Table 1: Comparison of Literary Versions of St George's Legend[1] [for tortures and dragon story see tables 2 and 3].

Work	Mirk's Festial	Speculum Sacerdotale	Mantuan	Barclay	Caxton
Date	1400-50	15th century	1,505	1,515	1,522
Birthplace	not stated	Capadoce	Cappadocia	Cappadocia	Capadoce
Status	not stated	tribune[3]	knight[3]	tribune[3]	knight[3]
Heathen ruler	Emperor Dyaclisian	Dacian, no status given	Dacianus	unnamed king; Dacian is a judge	Dacyen, provost
Heathen deity	unnamed	Appolini	unnamed	unnamed	unnamed
George 'recants'	---	unclear	yes	yes	yes
Temple fire	---	yes	yes	yes	yes
Imprisonment	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Appearance of Christ	yes	---	no, but angel heals St George	no, but angel heals St George	yes
Magician converts	yes[5]	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ruler's wife converts	---	---	yes	yes	yes
Heavenly voice	---	---	no, but angels appear	no, but angels appear	yes
Beheading	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ruler killed by fire	yes	yes	yes	Dacian dies, king's fate not stated	yes

Table 1: Comparison of Literary Versions of St George's Legend[1] (continued) [for tortures and dragon story see tables 2 and 3].

Work	Aelfric	Golden Legend	South English Legendary	Scottish Legendary	Lydgate
millstone	---	---	---	---	---
lime kiln	---	---	---	---	---
scourged	yes		yes	---	yes
hooks/claws	yes	yes	---	---	---
burnt with torches	yes	yes	---	yes	yes
salted	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
rack	---	yes	---	yes	---
wheel	yes	yes, with knives	yes	yes, with swords	yes
poison	yes	yes	---	yes	yes
boiled in molten lead	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
beaten	---	---	---	---	yes
dragged	yes	yes	yes	---	yes

Work	Mirk's Festial	Speculum Sacerdotale	Mantuan	Barclay	Caxton
millstone	yes	--	---	---	---
lime kiln	yes	---	---	---	---
scourged		---	---	---	
hooks/claws	on wheel	---	yes	yes	---
burnt with torch	---	yes	yes	yes	---
salted	---	yes	yes	yes	yes
rack	---	yes	yes	yes	---
wheel	yes, with hooks and swords	yes, with swords	yes, with iron teeth	yes, with iron teeth	yes
poison	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
boiled in molten lead	---	yes	---	---	yes
beaten	yes	---	---	---	yes
dragged	---	yes	dragged by bulls	dragged by bulls	yes

Table 2: Comparison of Tortures in Literary Version of St George's Legend.[1]

Work	Aelfric	Golden Legend	South English Legendary[2]	Scottish Legendary	Lydgate
Comments	Does not appear	Baptism occurs before dragon killed.	Unclear when baptism occurs.	Baptism occurs before dragon killed.	Baptism occurs after dragon killed.
Country		Lybia	Iyby	Iyby	Lybye
Town		Silena	Gylona	sylena	Lysseene
Water		pond or lake	'gret water'	'locht'	---
Creature		dragon	'dragone'	'serpent fel'	'dragoun'
Foul breath		yes	yes	yes	unclear
Sacrifice		two sheep	two sheep	two sheep	two sheep
Lots drawn		yes	yes	yes	yes
Threat to burn king		yes	yes	yes	---
Grace period		one week	eight days	eight days	---
Bridal dress		---	---	yes	---
Wounds dragon		yes,[6] with lance	yes, with with spear	yes, with spear	yes, with spear
Girdling		yes	yes	yes	yes
Kills dragon		with sword	sword	sword	sword
Baptism[7]		20,000	20,000	over 20,000	unnumbered
Church dedication		Virgin and George[8]	Christ and George[9]	Virgin and George[10]	Virgin and George[10]
Healing spring		yes	---	yes	yes
Offer of marriage		---	---	---	---
Offer of money		yes	---	yes	---

Table 3: Comparison of literary versions of the legend of St George and the Dragon.[1]

Work	Mirk's Festial	Speculum Sacerdotale	Mantuan	Barclay	Caxton
Comments	Baptism occurs before dragon killed.	Baptism occurs before dragon killed.	Baptism occurs after dragon killed	Baptism occurs after dragon killed	Baptism occurs after dragon killed
Country	not stated	Libie	Libie	Lybia	Lybye
Town	not stated	Silena	Silena	Sylena	Sylene
Water	---	river or lake	moat	dyche	'stagne' or pond
Creature	dragon	edder or dragon	'monstro'	dragon[11]	dragon
Foul breath	---	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sacrifice	sheep and child	two sheep	one person[12]	one person[12]	two sheep
Lots drawn	---	yes	yes	yes	yes
Threat to burn king	---	yes	---	unclear	yes
Grace period	---	eight days	---	yes, unnumbered	eight
Bridal dress	---	---	---	---	yes
Wounds dragon	with spear	with spear	with lance	with spear	with sword
Girdling	yes	yes	---	---	yes
Kills dragon	method unclear	sword	method unclear	second spear[13]	method unclear
Baptism[7]	20,000	20,000	unnumbered	unnumbered	15,000
Church dedication	---	Virgin and George[8]	not stated	Virgin[8]	Virgin and George[8]
Healing spring	---	yes	yes	yes	yes
Offer of marriage	---	---	---	yes	---
Offer of money	---	yes	no, city offered	no, kingdom offered	yes

Table 3: Comparison of literary versions of the legend of St George and the Dragon[1] (continued).

Work	La Selle retable	Borbjerg retable	Stamford chancel glass	St Neot window
Date	c.1485-1510	c.1480	c.1450	c.1500
Medium	alabaster	alabaster	glass	glass
Origin	English	English	English	English
Patronage	Norman?	Danish?	English	English
Red cross device	---	yes	yes	yes
Fights human foes	---	yes, unspecified	yes, unspecified	yes, 'Gallicani'
Beheaded before altar	---	---	yes	yes
Resurrection	yes, by the Virgin	yes, presumably by the Virgin	yes, by the Virgin and subsequently by Christ	yes, by the Virgin
Arming as a knight	yes, by the Virgin	yes, by the Virgin	---	yes, by the Virgin
Dragon story	yes	yes	yes	yes
Baptism scene	yes	---	yes, twice	---
Heathen temple scene	---	yes	---	---
Motif of idol with flesh-hook	yes, in trial scene	yes, in temple scene	---	---
Trial	yes	yes	yes	yes
Imprisonment	---	---	yes	---
Execution	yes	---	yes	yes

Table 4: Comparison of visual cycles of the life of St George[1] [for tortures see table 5].

Work	Bedford Hours	Salisbury Breviary	Windsor stalls	Valencia altarpiece
Date	c.1422	c.1424-35	c.1477-84	c.1410-20
Medium	manuscript illumination	manuscript illumination	wood	tempera
Origin	French	French	Flemish	German
Patronage	English	English	English	Spanish
Red cross device	yes, in main image	yes	uncertain	yes
Fights human foes	---	---	---	Moors
Beheaded before altar	---	---	---	---
Resurrection	---	---	---	---
Arming as a knight	---	---	no, but obesiance subject	yes, by Virgin
Dragon story	---	yes	yes	yes
Baptism scene	---	---	---	yes
Heathen temple scene	---	yes, twice	---	yes
Motif of idol with flesh-hook	---	---	---	---
Trial scene	---	yes, twice	yes, with poisoning?	yes
Imprisonment	---	---	---	yes
Execution	---	yes	---	yes

Table 4: Comparison of visual cycles of the life of St George[1] (continued) [for tortures see table 5].

Work	La Selle	Borbjerg	Stamford	St Neot	Bedford Hours	Salisbury Brv.	Windsor	Valencia
millstones	---	---	yes	yes	---	---	---	---
lime kiln	---	---	---	---	yes (or well)	---	---	---
scourged	---	---	yes	---	---	yes	---	---
hooks/claws	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
burnt	---	yes [or raked]	yes [or raked]	---	---	---	---	---
salted	---	---	---	---	---	yes	---	---
rack	---	---	yes	---	---	---	---	---
wheel	---	---	yes	---	---	yes	---	yes
poison	---	---	yes	---	---	---	yes	yes
boiled in molten lead	---	---	yes [or water]	yes	yes	---	yes [or water] dismembered	yes
beaten	---	---	---	---	yes	---	---	---
dragged by horse	---	---	---	yes	---	---	yes	yes
raked	---	[yes]	[yes]	yes	---	---	---	yes
sawn	---	---	yes	---	yes	---	---	yes
ridden	---	---	---	yes	---	---	---	---
saltire cross	---	---	---	---	yes	---	---	yes
chained and nailed to table	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	yes

Table 5: Comparison of tortures in visual cycles of the life of St George[1]

Conception of the Virgin	3
Birth of the Virgin	6
Presentation of the Virgin	7
Annunciation	over 80
Visitation	5
Nativity	10
Adoration of Mary and Joseph (with the midwives)	22
Adoration of Magi	over 100
Presentation of Christ	2
Purification	2
Circumcision	6
Crucifixion	well over 100
Lamentation	12
Pentecost	4
Assumption[15]	over 70
Coronation[15]	over 100

Table 6: Frequency of subjects pertaining to the Life of the Virgin in English alabaster panels, extant or documented.[14]

Town/village	Church	Description	Date
Barville	Notre-Dame	Group of Virgin and Child and John the Baptist	C16th
Brestot	Chapel of Brumare Chateau	Reliefs of the Trinity, Annunciation, Nativity and Coronation of the Virgin	C15th
Bus-St-Rémy	Oratory	Relief of Trinity	C15th
Conches	Ste-Foy	Four reliefs of the Passion (stolen July 1978)	C15th
Coudray (Le)	St-Martin	Passion retable with figures of St Christopher and St Anthony	C15th
Conteville	St-Maclou	Statue of Virgin and Child	C16th
Courdemanche	St-Pierre	Statue of the Virgin and Child	C14th
Croix-St-Leufroy	St-Paul	Statuette of St Peter	C15th
Ecaquelon	Notre-Dame and St-Jacques	Passion retable (stolen 1973)	C15th
Eturqueraye	St-Martin	Panels of the Flagellation (lost) and the Entombment	C15th
Evreux	Cathedral	Statuettes of SS Margaret and Katherine	C15th
Ferrières-St-Hilaire	St-Hilaire	Reliefs of the Crucifixion, Virgin and Child, St Michael, a bishop and an unidentified saint	C14th
Forêt-la-Folie	St-Sulpice	Relief of the Pieta	C14th
Fresne-l'Archevêque	St-Martin	Relief of the Coronation of the Virgin	C16th
Juignettes [La Selle]	St-Pierre	Retable of the life of the Virgin and the life of St George	C15th or C16th

Table 7: English Alabasters in the Eure Department of Normandy.[16]

Town/village	Church	Description	Date
Louviers	Notre-Dame	Six reliefs of the Passion; statue of the Virgin and Child	C15th
Pont-Audemer	St-Ouen	Relief of the Trinity; relief of St George and the dragon (stolen 1978); statue of St Katherine	C15th
	Hospice	Relief of God the Father and Apostles	C15th
Puchay	Notre-Dame and St-Julien	Relief of the Crucifixion	C15th
St-Nicolas-du-Bosc	St-Nicolas	Fragmentary retable of the life of Christ	C15th
Tosny	St-Sulpice	Statue of the Virgin and Child	C14th
Troncq (Le)	St-Pierre	Statue of St Peter	C15th
Venables	Notre-Dame	Relief of the Assumption	C15th
Vernon	Notre-Dame	Fragmentary relief of Tree of Jesse (stolen 1971)	C16th

Table 7: English Alabasters in the Eure Department of Normandy[16] (continued).

Notes to Tables

1. The layout used in these tables does not imply that the order of events is consistent between the different versions.

2. Two forms of the South English Legendary narrative exist, SELa and SELb. The martyrdom legend appears in SELa, the dragon legend in SELb.

3. This status is mentioned only in relation to the dragon story. When the legend gives an account of the martyrdom he is said to have laid aside military trappings.

4. St George is a holy man, not a soldier, but he arms himself with the Holy Spirit 'within and without' [l.10].

5. The poisoner is not identified as a magician, but simply as a man.

6. An alternate version is also given where the dragon is killed outright.

7. Numbers are given for the men baptised; women and children are mentioned but not numbered.

8. The only expression of a link between the Virgin and St George is through the joint dedication of the church; there are no references to the resurrection by the Virgin or the arming by the Virgin.

9. The final sentence of SELb, which relates to the founding of the church is unfinished. It is possible that it could also have been dedicated to the Virgin, though it seems unlikely that she would be mentioned after St George.

10. In this version St George is identified as the Virgin's knight in addition to the joint dedication of the church; this may reflect a lost English tradition.

11. This dragon is explicitly referred to as female. See appendix 4 on the motif of the female dragon.

12. The sacrifice is made morning and evening.

13. A sword has already been used.

14. Frequencies are derived from Cheetham (1984) p.55.

15. Cheetham does not specifically mention panels that combine these two subjects, such the panel of the Assumption and Coronation by the Trinity at La Selle.

16. Information derived from records held at the Departmental Archives of the Eure, Evreux.

i		A	iii				
I	II	III	ii	iv	IV	V	VI

VII	VIII	IX	LACUNA	X	XI	XII

Figure 1: Diagrammatic reconstruction of the current format of the La Selle retable, with panels and statuettes numbered.

1	I	II	III	i	A	iii	IV	V	VI	3
				ii		iv				
2	VII	VIII	IX	v / vi	LACUNA	vii / viii	X	XI	XII	4

Figure 2: Diagrammatic reconstruction of the La Selle retable; format suggested by de Bouclon, Regnier and Biver.
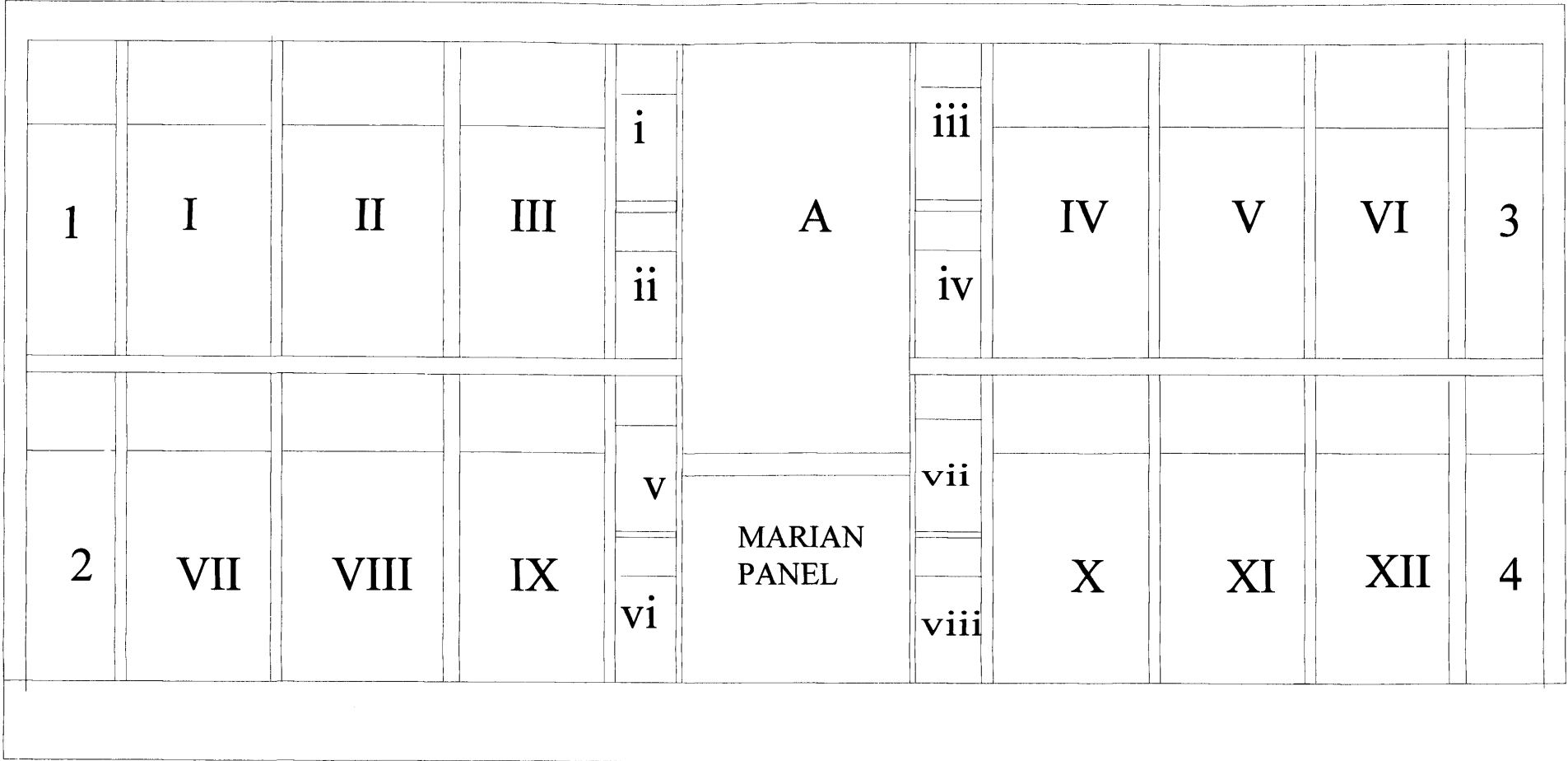
Figure 3: Diagrammatic reconstruction of the La Selle retable showing insertion of extra panel in the lower tier.

1	I	II	III	i	GEORGIAN PANEL	iii		IV	V	VI	3
				ii		iv					
2	VII	VIII	IX	v	A	vii		X	XI	XII	4
				vi		viii					
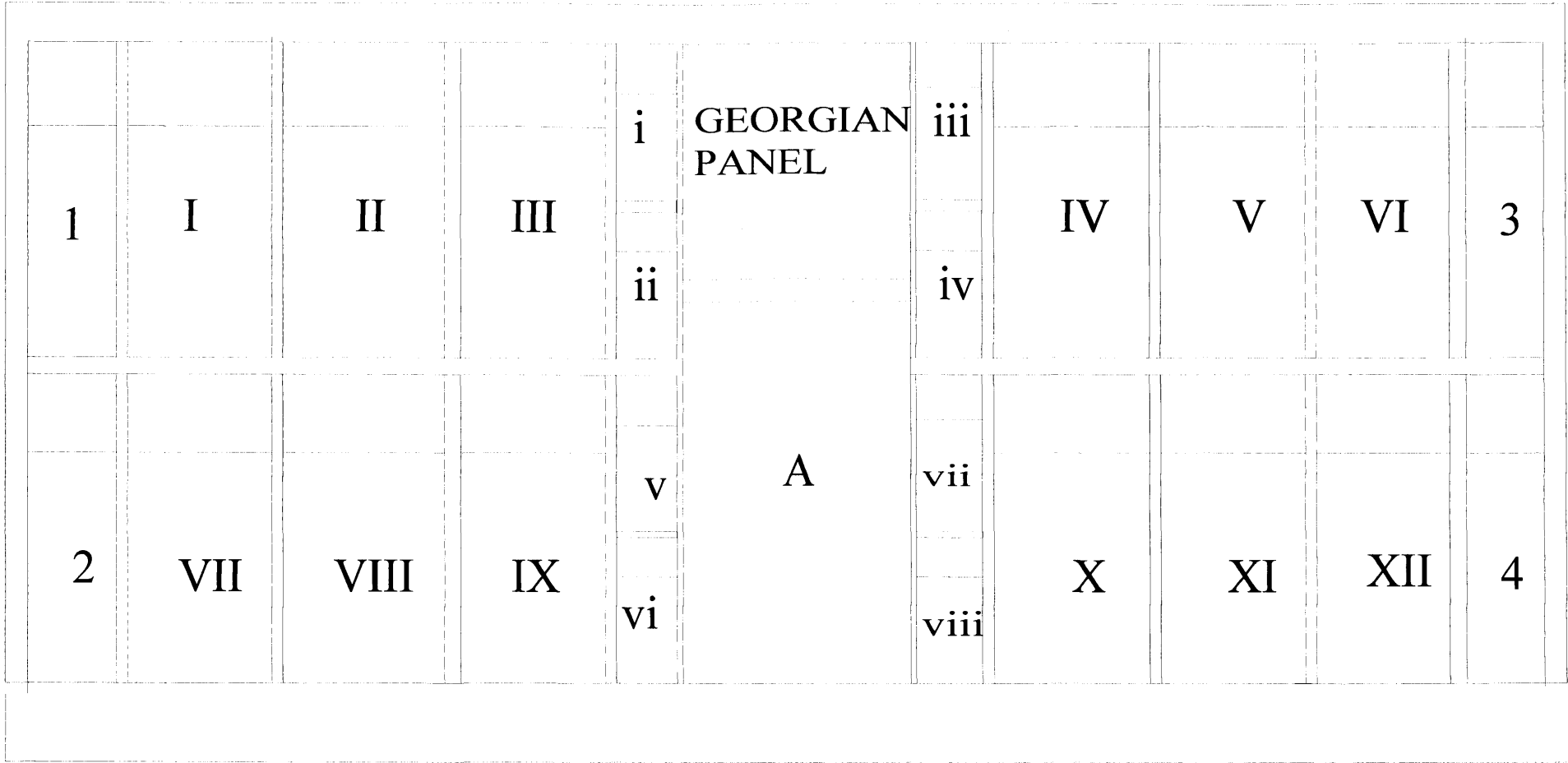
Figure 4: Diagrammatic reconstruction of the La Selle retable showing insertion of extra panel in the upper tier.
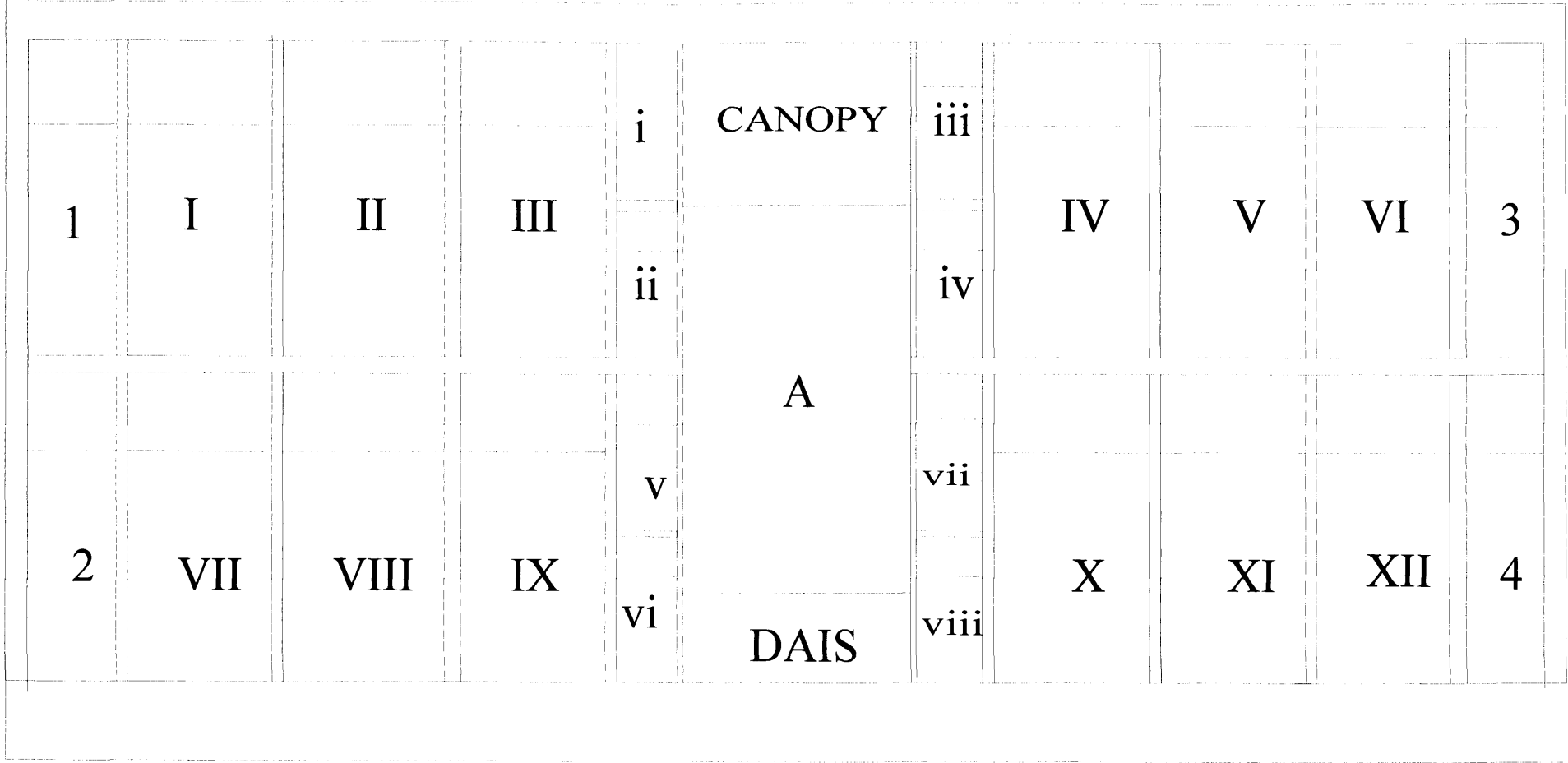
Figure 5: Diagrammatic reconstruction of the La Selle retable showing insertion of dais-piece and canopy.

Annunciation	Nativity	Crucifixion	Resurrection	Ascension
St Martin's Cloak	St Martin Cures the Sick	Mass of St Martin	Death of St Martin	Burial of St Martin

Figure 6: Diagrammatic reconstruction of the narrative panels of the Génissac retable.

West End

Upper Row	Lower Row

St George is dragged
1. _____

St George is threatened

The Assumption
1. _____

The Obeisance of St George

St George meets the princess
2. _____

The princess leaves her parents

St George fights the dragon
2. _____

St George is poisoned (?)

The dragon is led to the town
3. _____

St George before the king (?)

St George is dismembered
3. _____

The Annunciation

The Adoration of the Magi
4. _____

Christ in Judgement

The Visitation
4. _____

The Nativity

East End

Figure 7: Plan of the images on the desk-ends of the south side of the choir at
St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.

Plate 1: Overview of the La Selle retable, current state.
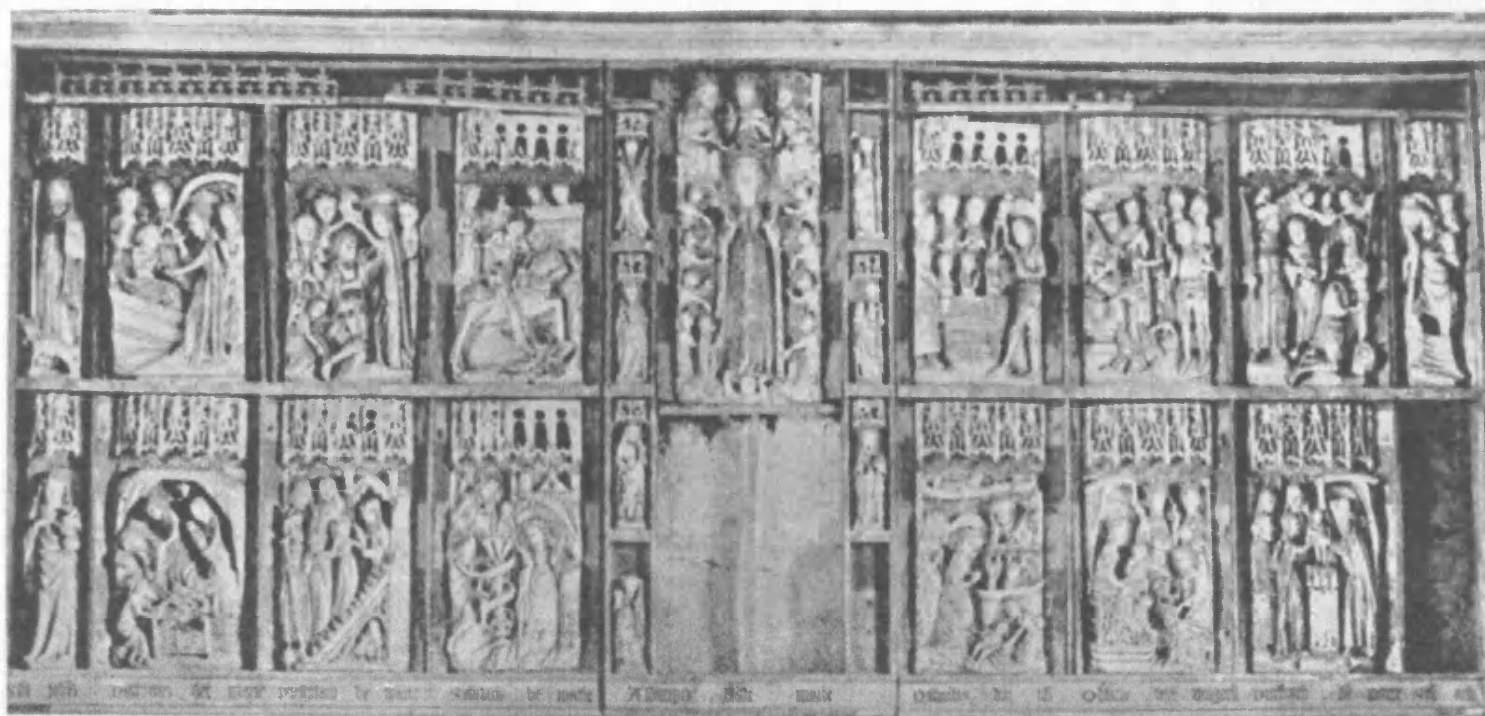
Plate 2: Overview of the La Selle retable, state c.1910.
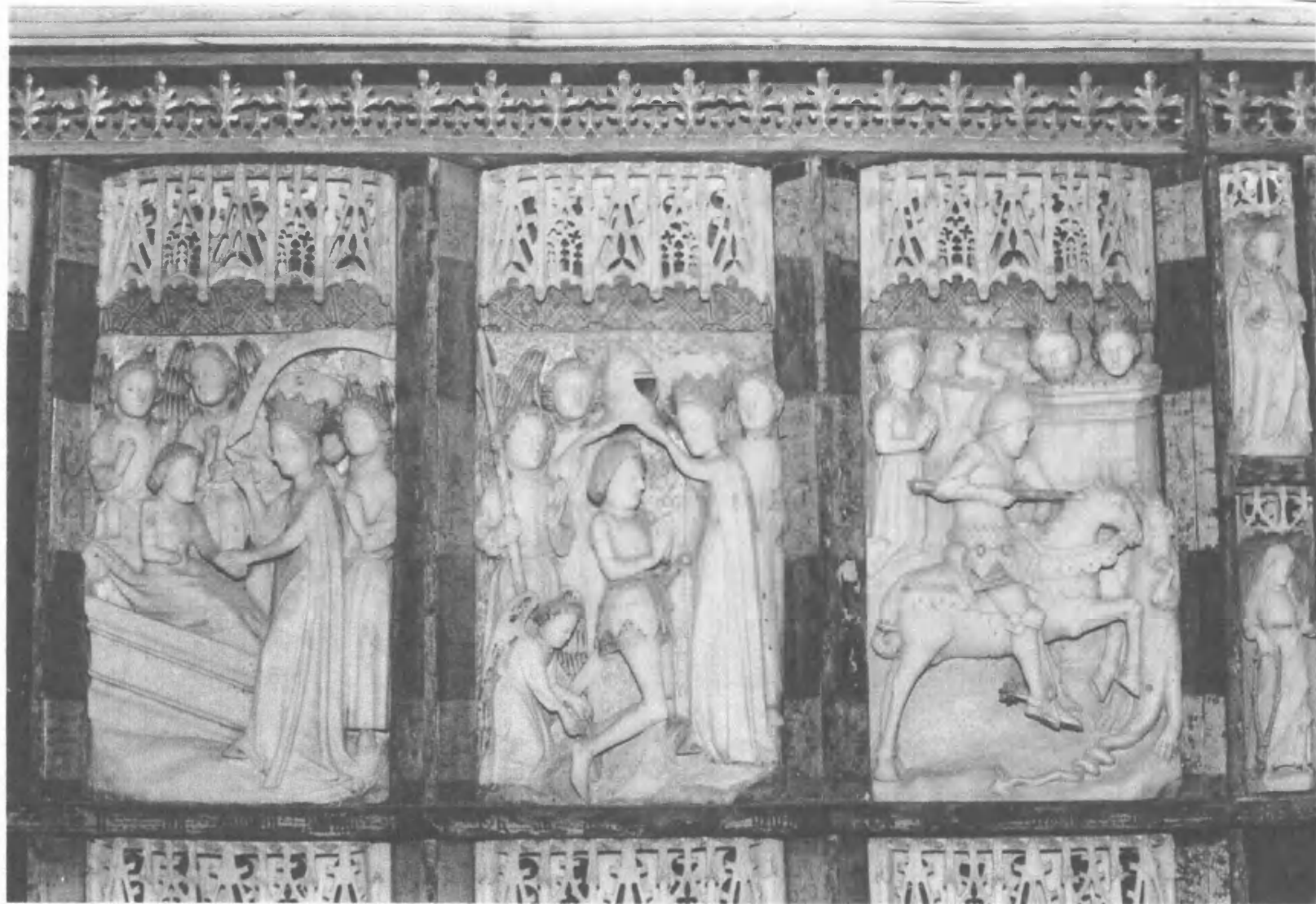
Plate 3: Resurrection of St George, Arming of St George and St George and the Dragon panels, current state.

Plate 4: Resurrection of St George panel, state c.1910.
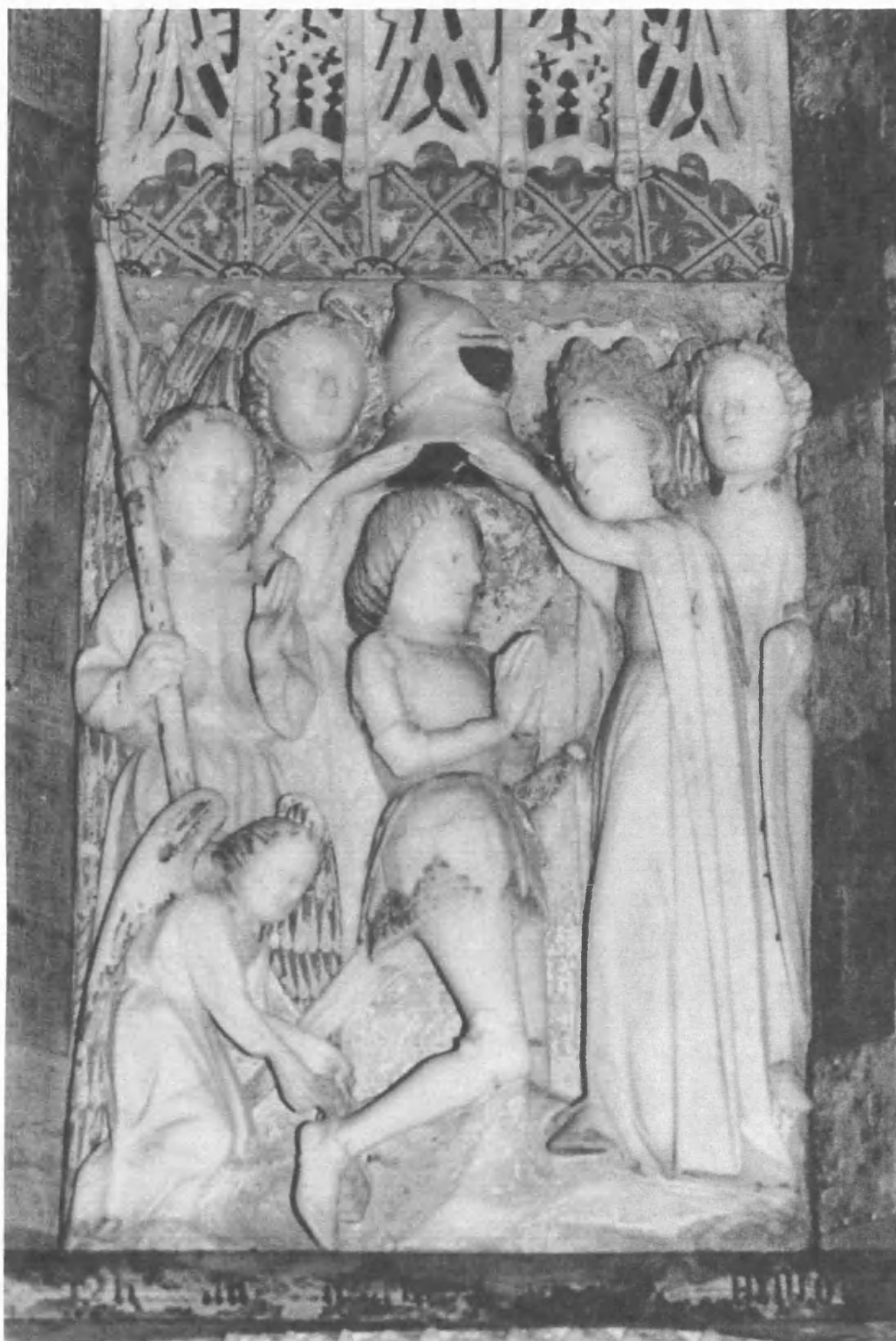
Plate 5: Arming of St George panel, current state.
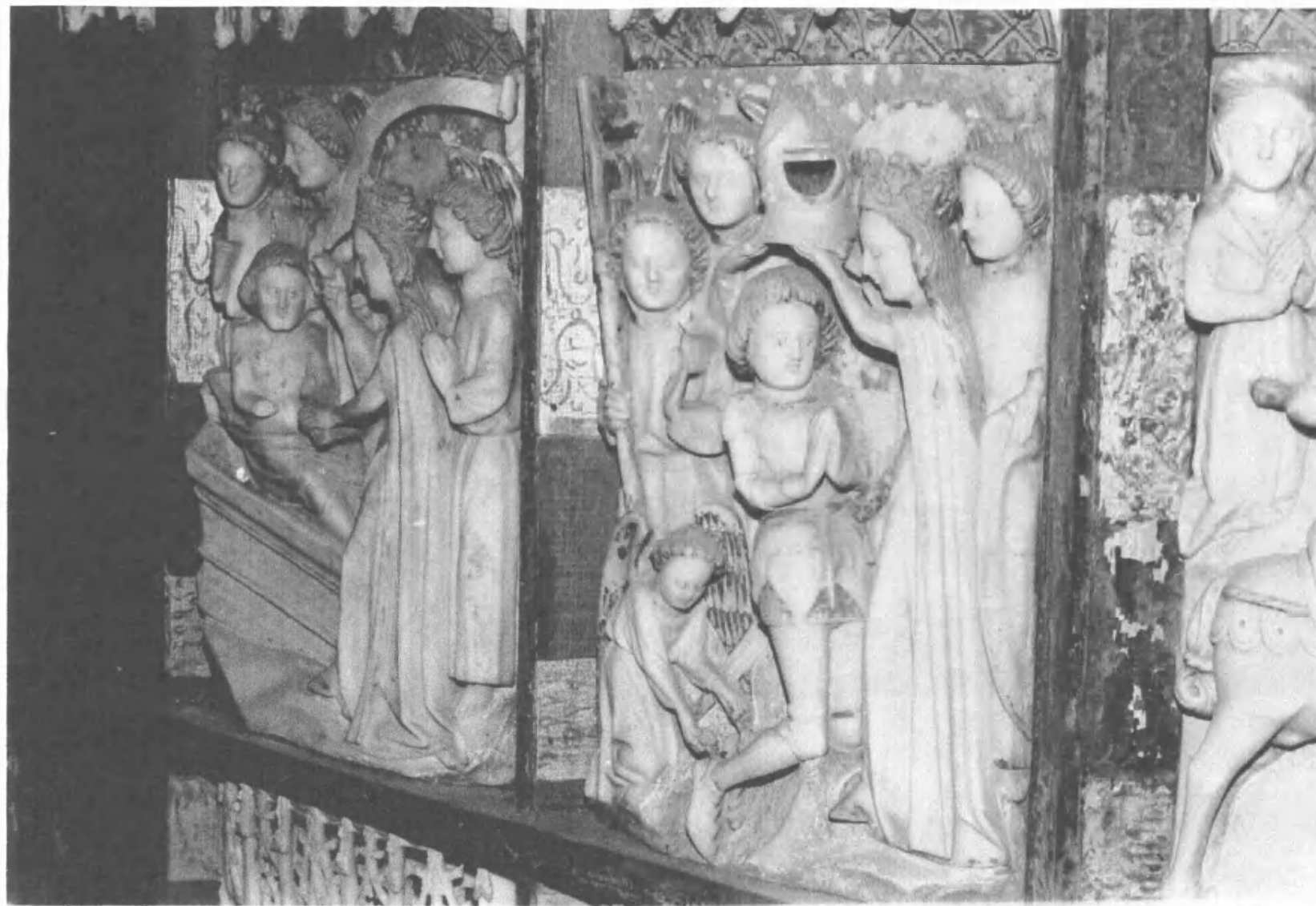
Plate 6: Arming of St George panel, current state, raking view from dexter side.

Plate 7: Arming of St George panel, state c.1910.
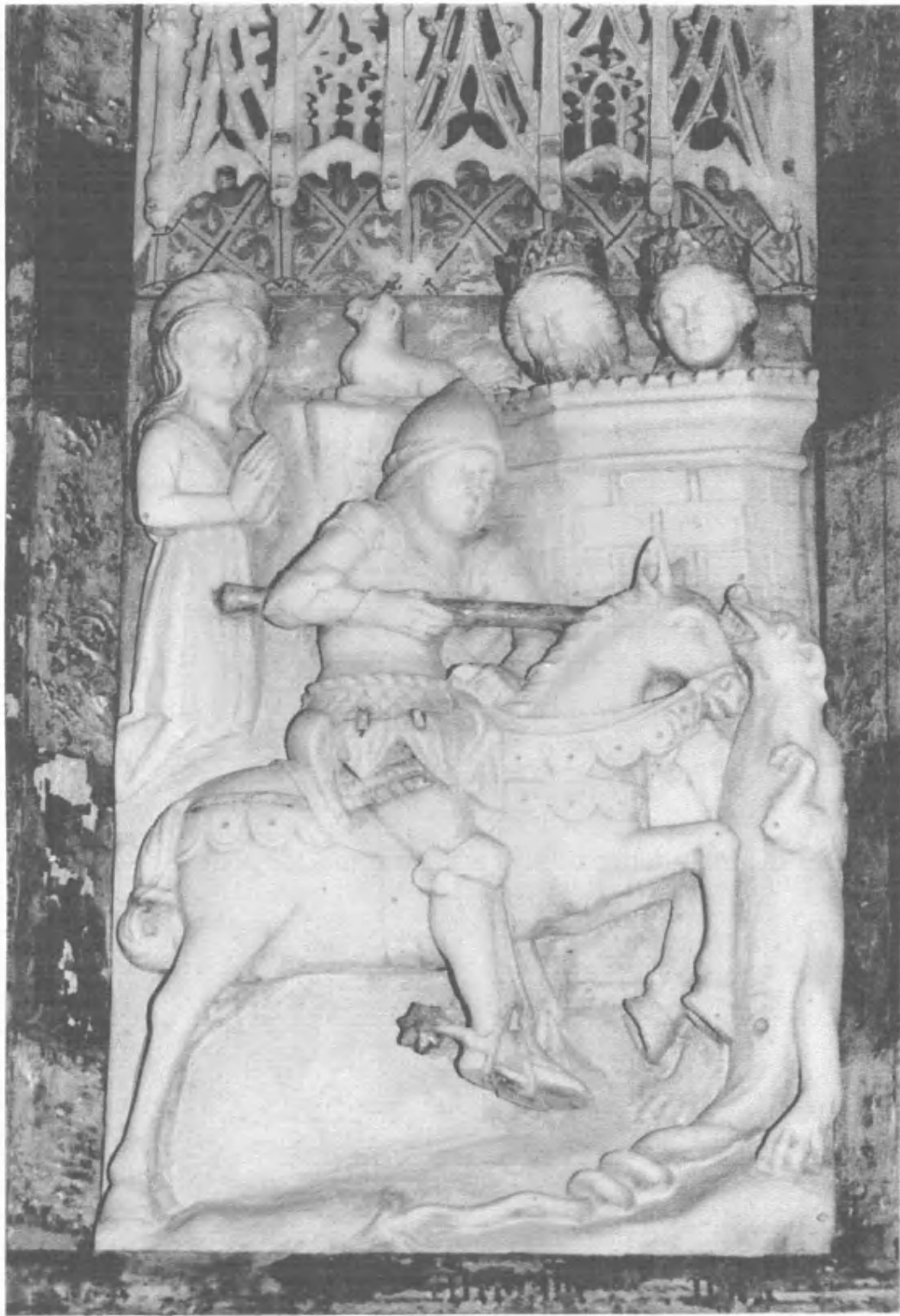
Plate 8: St George and the Dragon panel, current state.

Plate 9: St George and the Dragon panel, state c.1910.
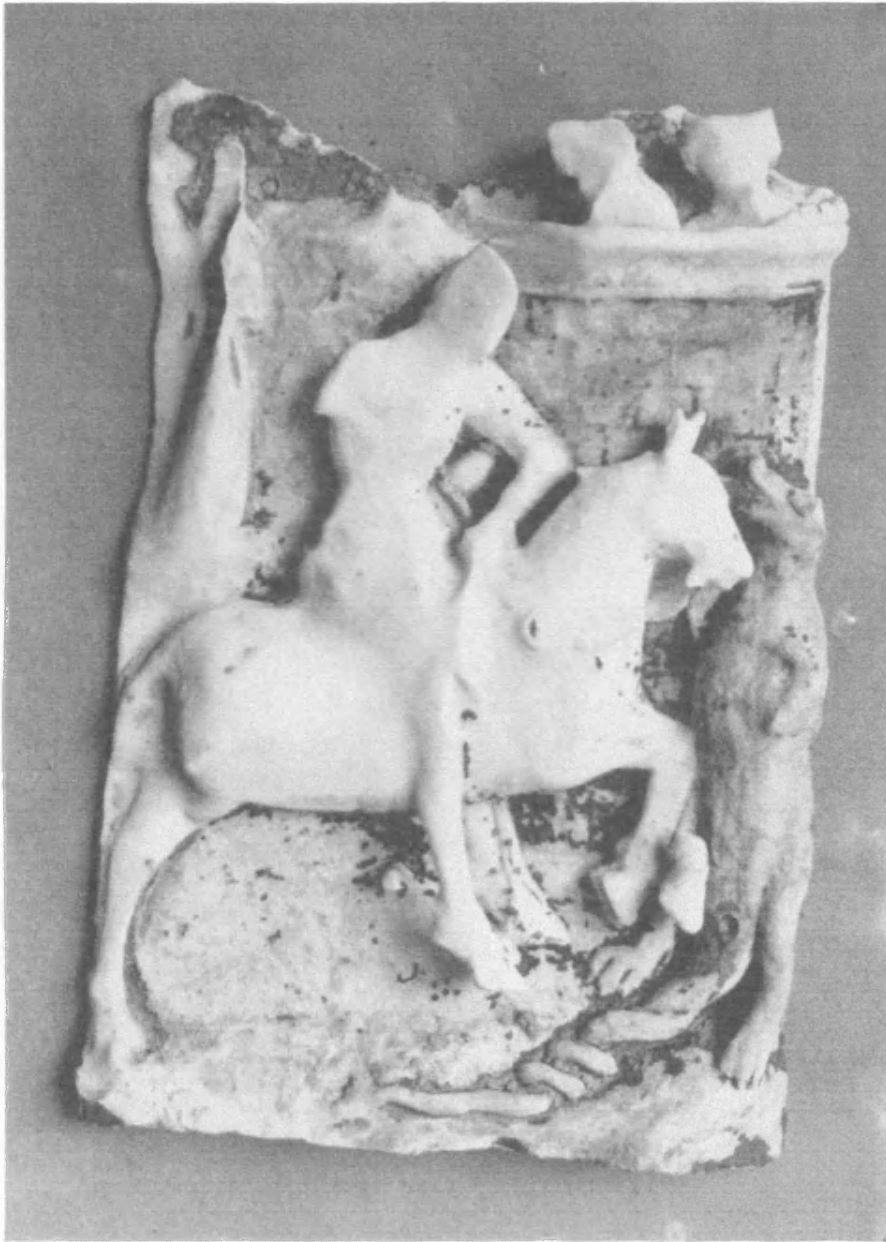
Plate 10: St George and the Dragon panel, state pre-restoration 1966-67.
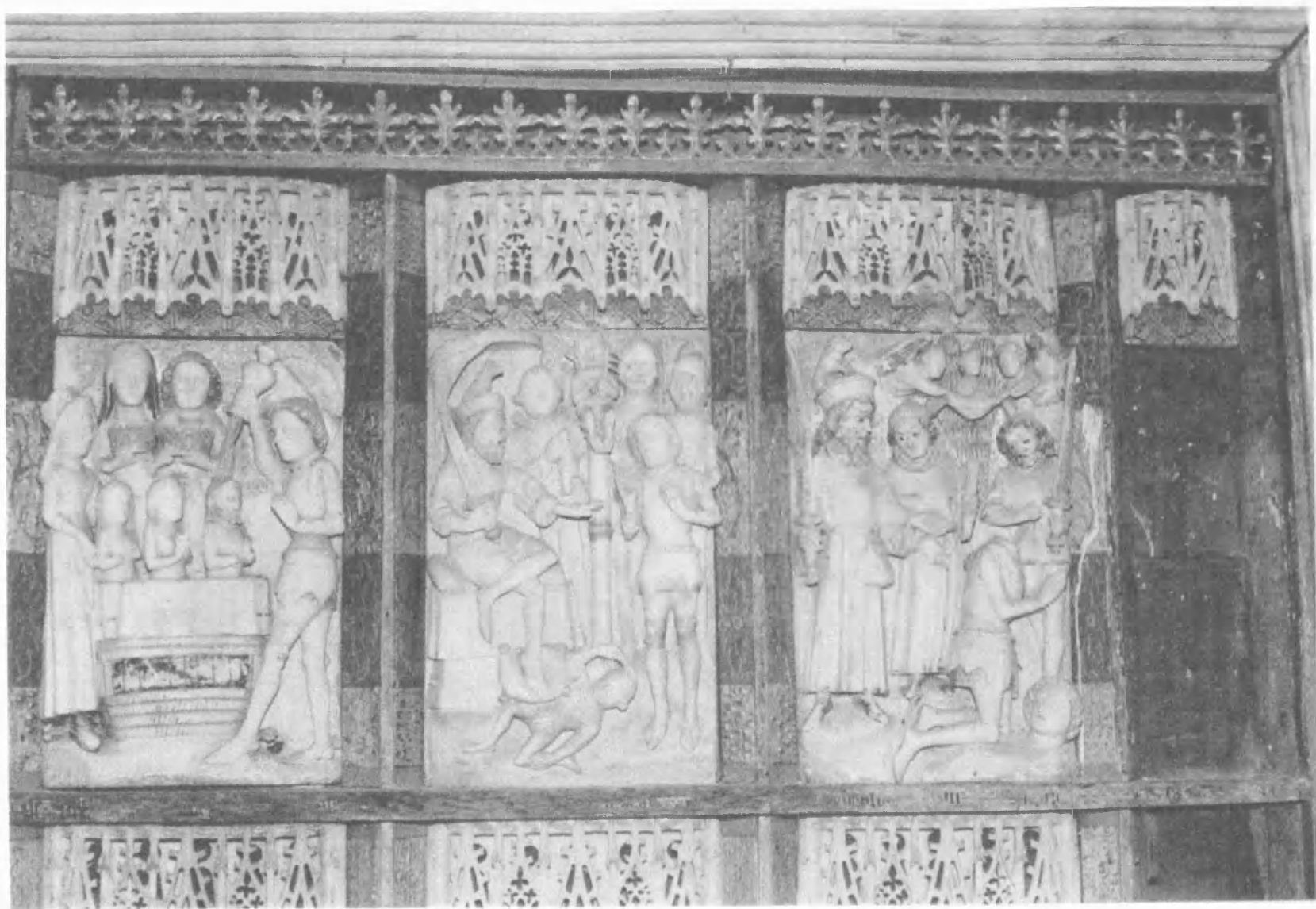
Plate 11: Baptism by St George, Trial of St George and Beheading of St George panels, current state.
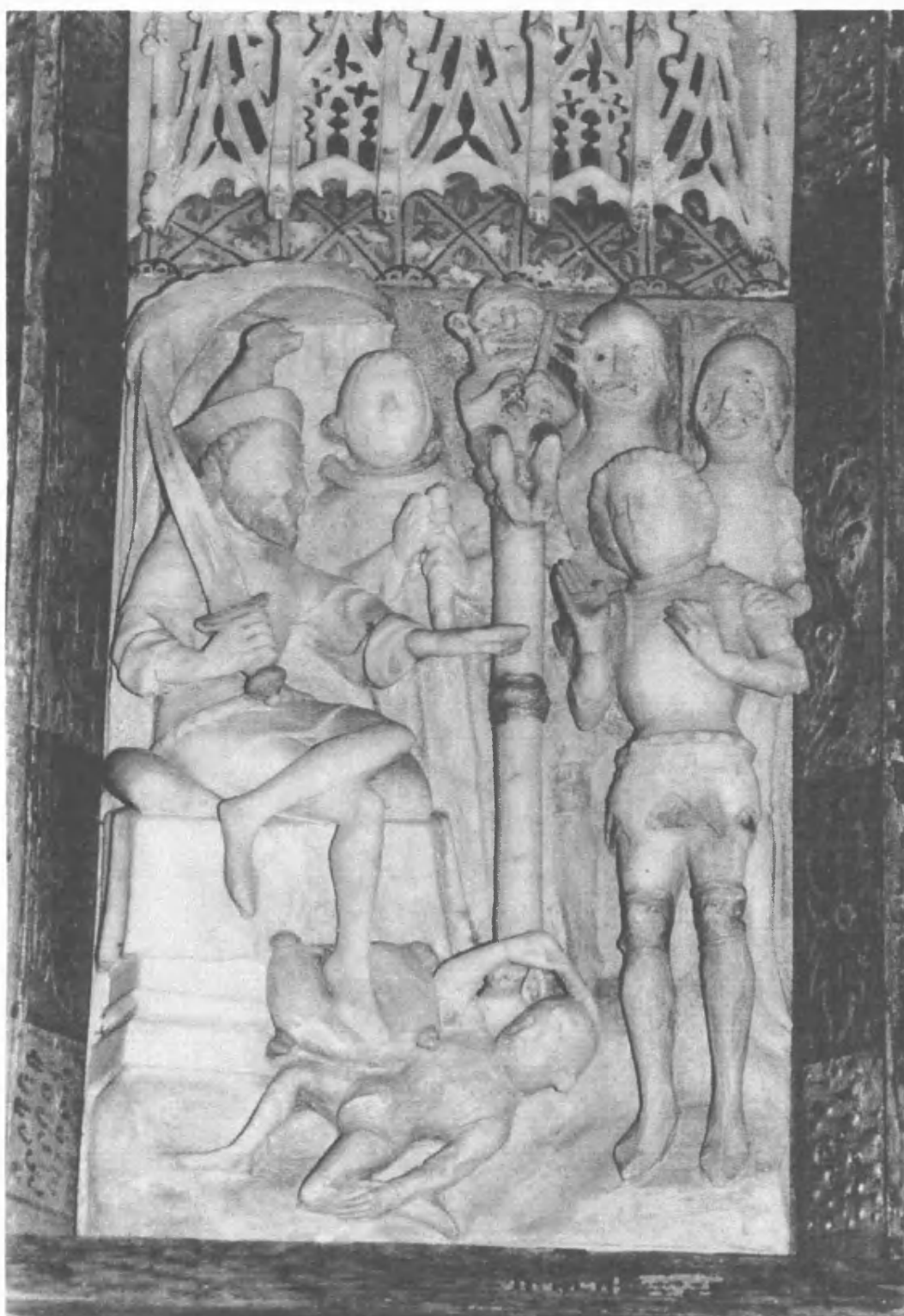
Plate 12: Trial of St George panel, current state.

Plate 13: Trial of St George panel, state c.1910.

Plate 14: Trial of St George panel, state pre-restoration 1966-67.

Plate 15: Nativity of the Virgin, Presentation of the Virgin and Annunciation panels, current state.

Plate 16: Nativity of the Virgin panel, state pre-restoration 1966-67.
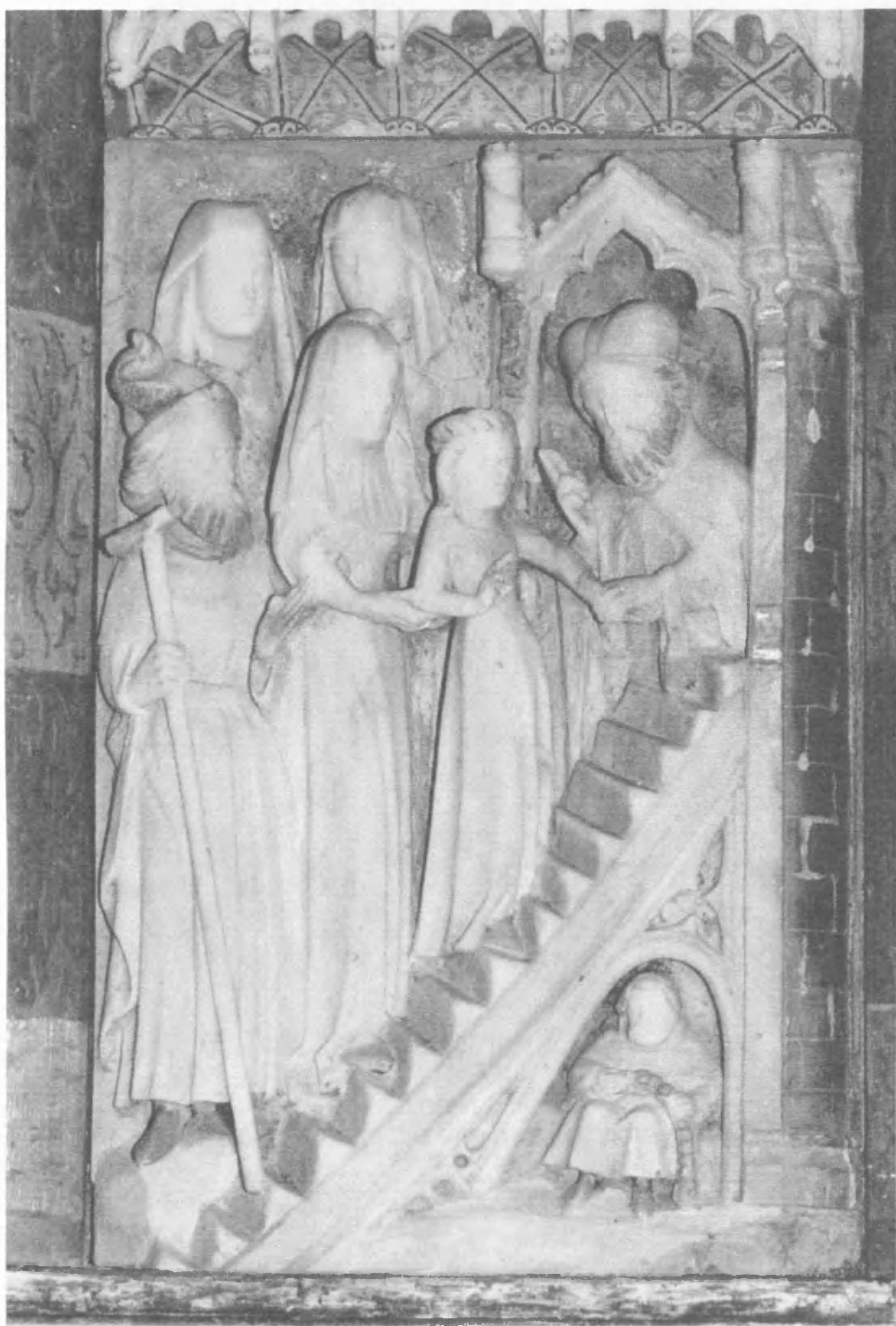
Plate 17: Presentation of the Virgin panel, current state.

Plate 18: Presentation of the Virgin panel, state pre-restoration 1966-67.

Plate 19: Annunciation panel, current state, showing original lettering on framework under lacuna.
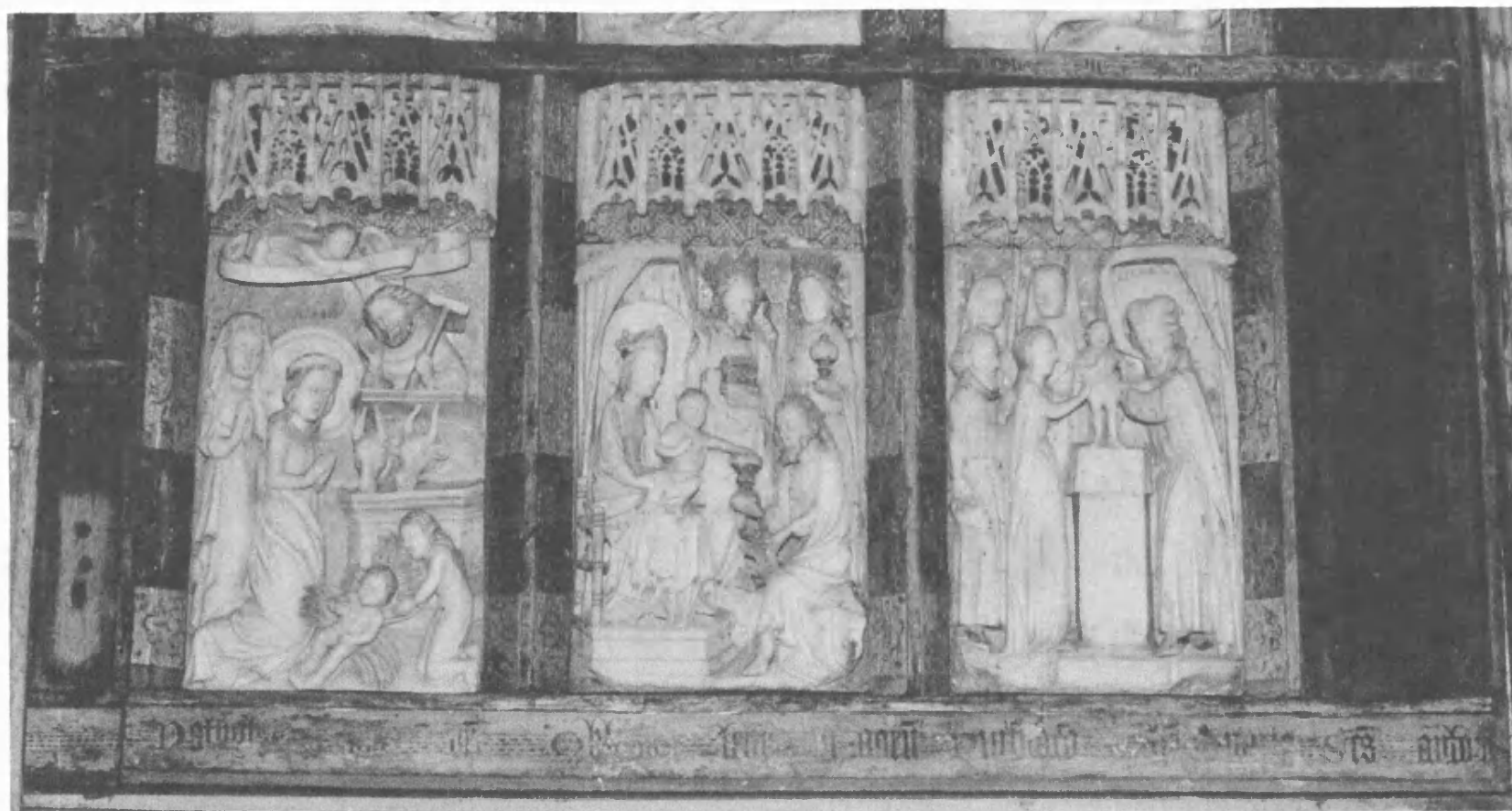
Plate 20: Adoration of Christ, Adoration of the Magi and Purification of the Virgin panels, current state.
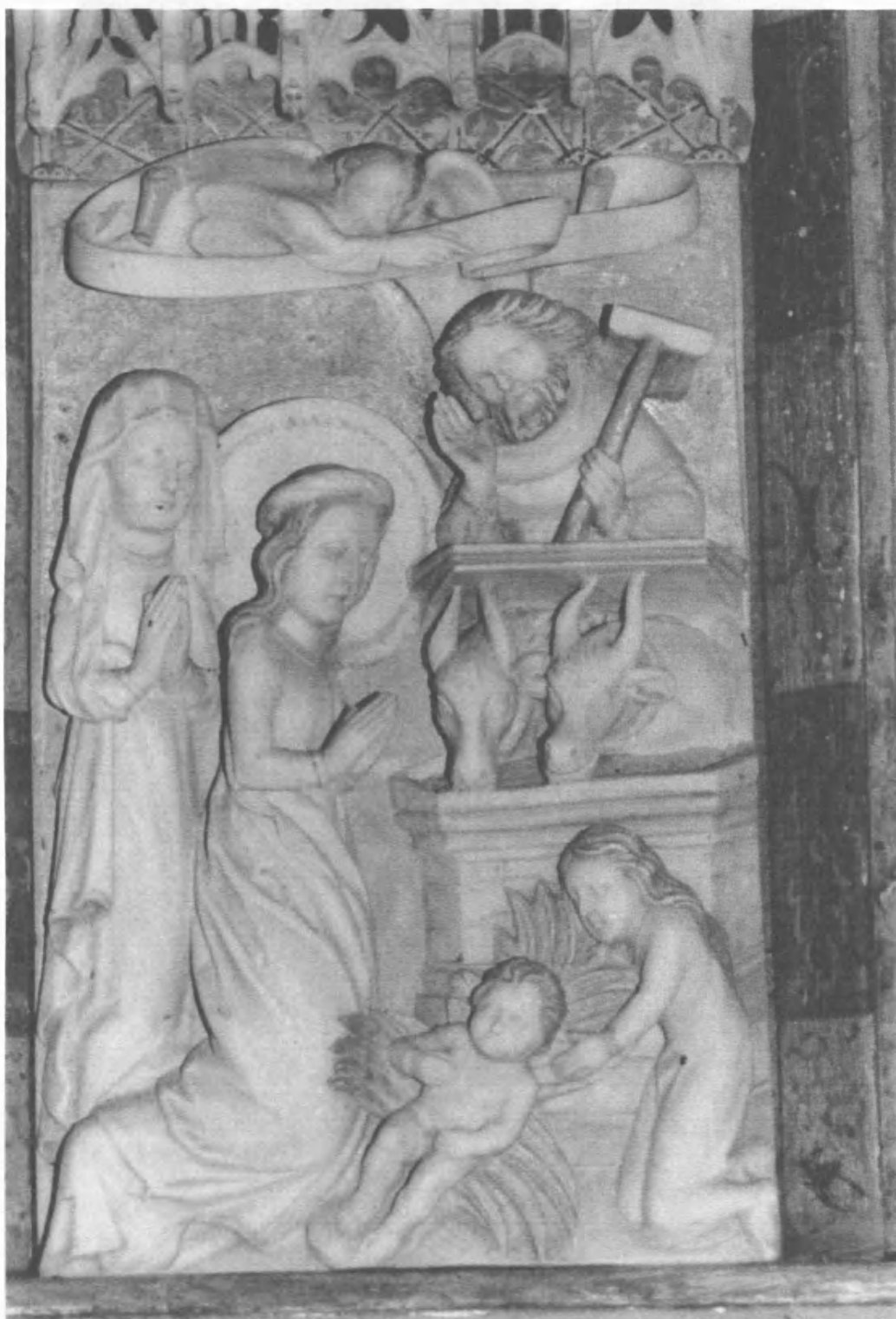
Plate 21: Adoration of Christ panel, current state.

Plate 22: Adoration of Christ panel, state pre-restoration 1966-67.
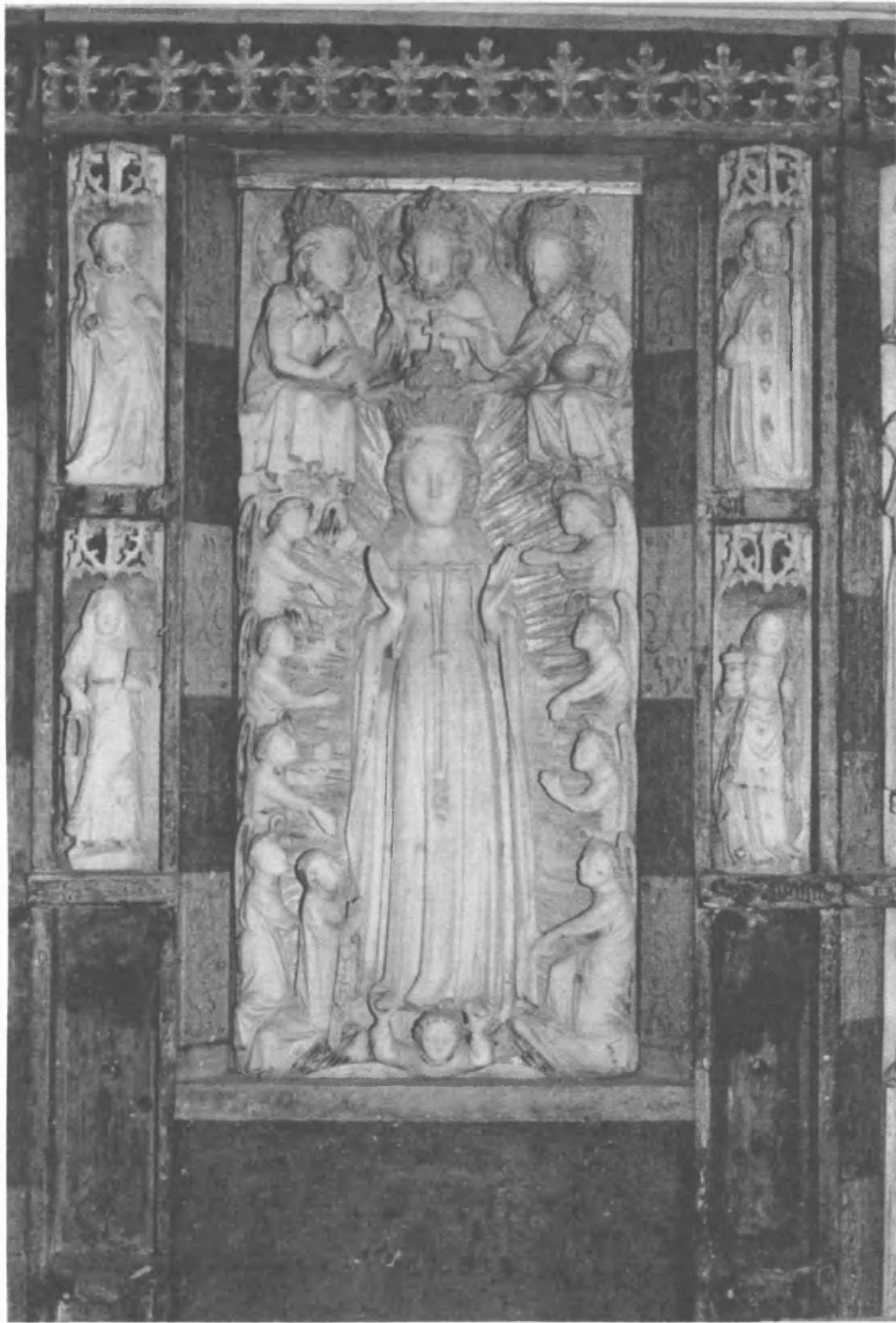
Plate 23: Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity panel, current state

Plate 24: View of statuettes on the dexter side of the central section
on the upper tier, showing damage to the central panel (state c.1950?).

Plate 25: View of statuettes on the sinister side of the central section on the lower tier, showing damage to the Annunciation panel (state c.1950?).

Plate 26: View of statuette on the dexter side of the central section on the lower tier, showing detail of the Adoration of Christ panel (state c.1950?).

Plate 27: Fragments of statuettes and other alabaster elements, state pre-restoration 1966-67.

Plate 28: Detached area of bed canopy, from the Nativity of the Virgin panel, state in 1995.

Plate 29: Detached area of bed canopy, from the Nativity of
the Virgin panel, state in 1995, rear view.
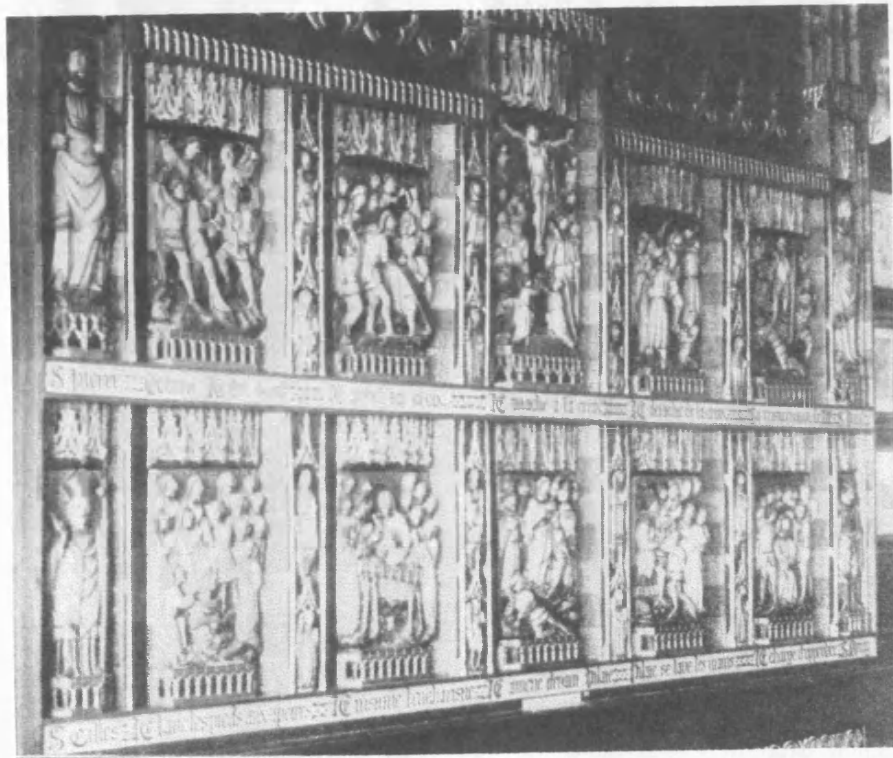
Plate 30: Overview of the Compiègne retable, state c.1910.

Plate 31: Flagellation of Christ shutter, state in 1978.

Plate 32: Christ Nailed to the Cross shutter, state in 1978.

Plate 33: Crucifixion shutter, state in 1978.

Plate 34: Ascension shutter, state in 1978.

Plate 35: Christ in Judgement shutter, state c.1910.
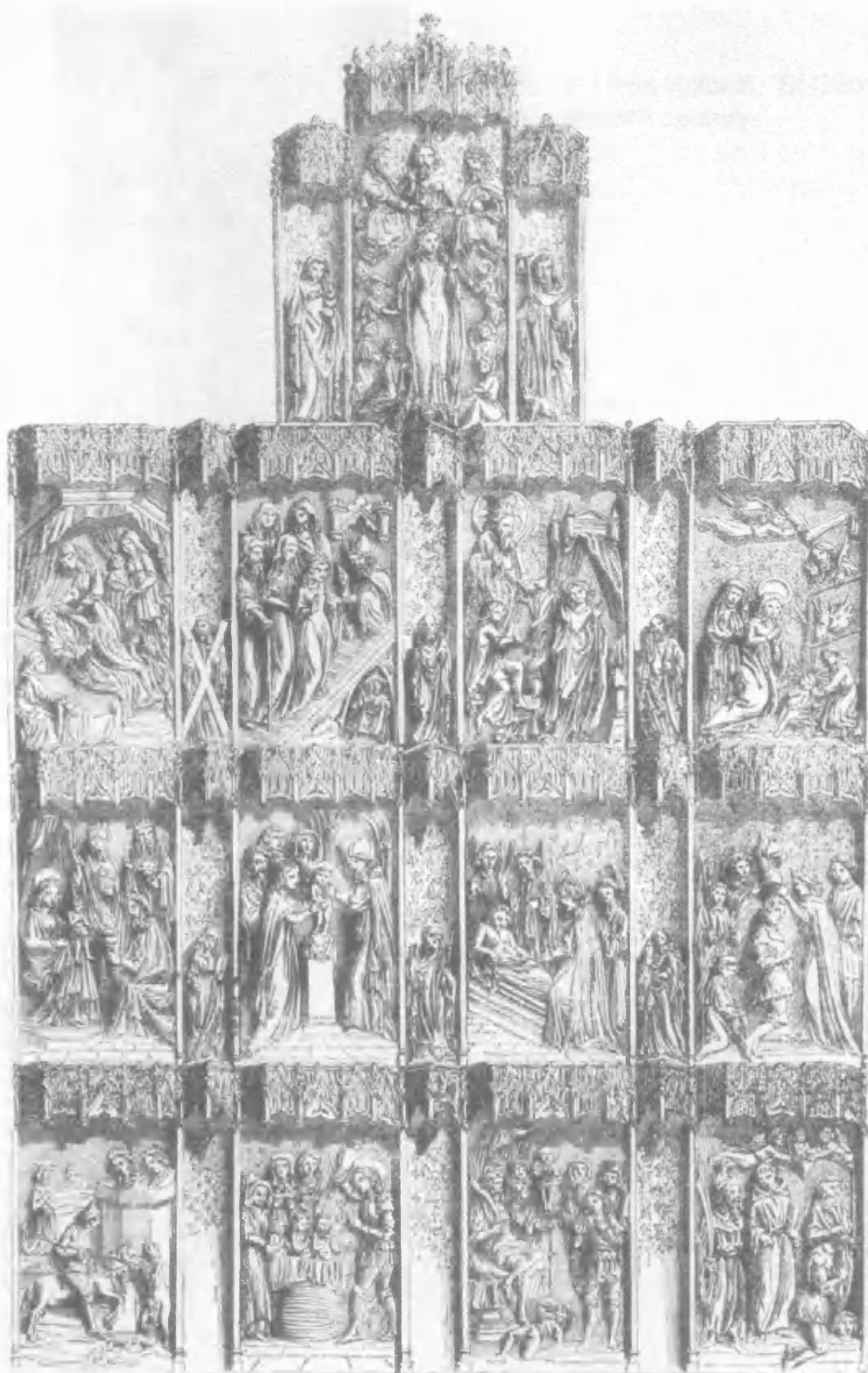
BAS-RELIEFS IN THE CHURCH O' LA CELLE.

Plate 36: Anonymous engraving of the La Selle retable in a four-tiered format, c.1849.

Plate 37: Hans Holbein, 'St George', early sixteenth century.

Plate 38: Tympanum of St George in Battle, Damerham (Wiltshire), c.1100.

Plate 39: Master of the Retable of St George, 'St George and the Dragon', c.1470.

Plate 40: Pere Nissart and Rafael Moger, 'St George and the Dragon', 1468-70.
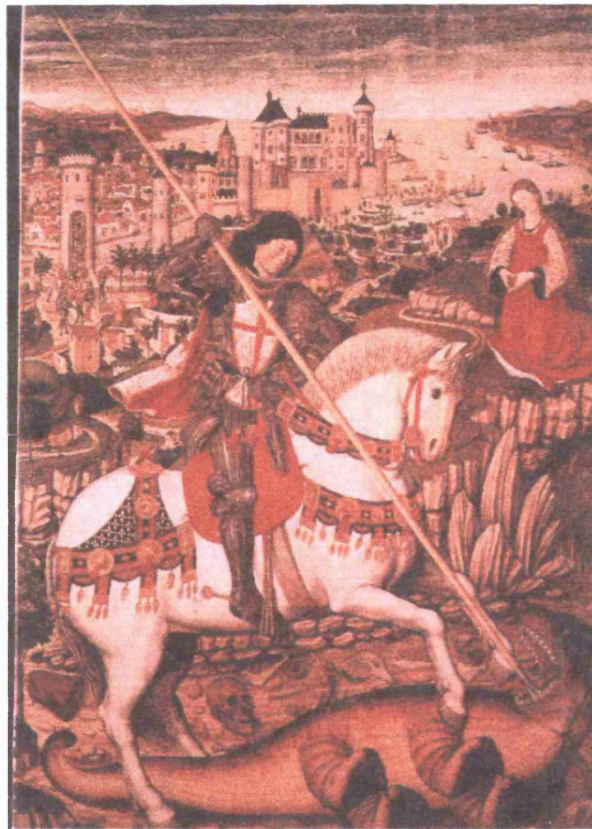
Plate 41: H.C. Moss, engraving of an English alabaster panel of St George and the Dragon, c.1848.

Plate 42: 'St George' glass roundel, formerly
at 18 Highcross Street, Leicester, c.1510.
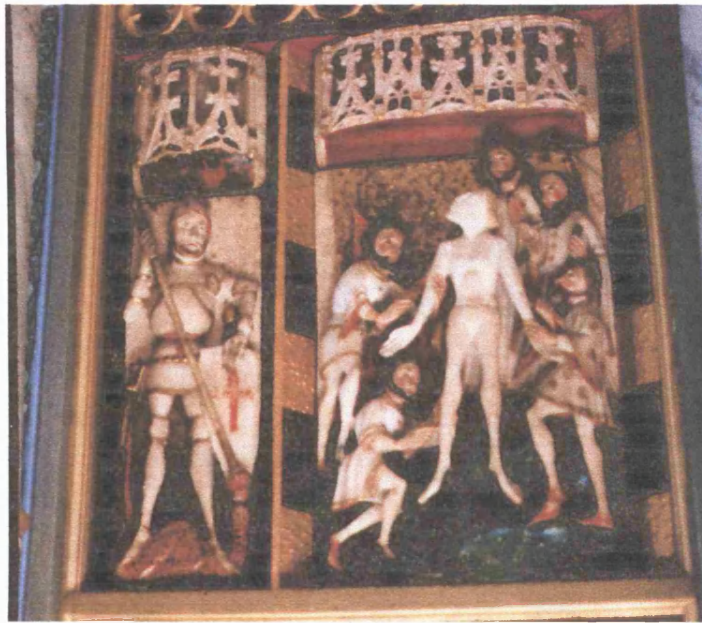
Plate 43: The Borbjerg retable, c.1480, detail of left wing: standing figure of St George and the Dragon; the Torture of St George.

Plate 44: The Borbjerg Retable, detail of central section: the Trial Of St George; St George before the Heathen Temple; the Resurrection and Arming of St George.

Plate 45: the Borbjerg retable, detail of right wing:
St George in Battle; standing figure of St Michael
and the Dragon.
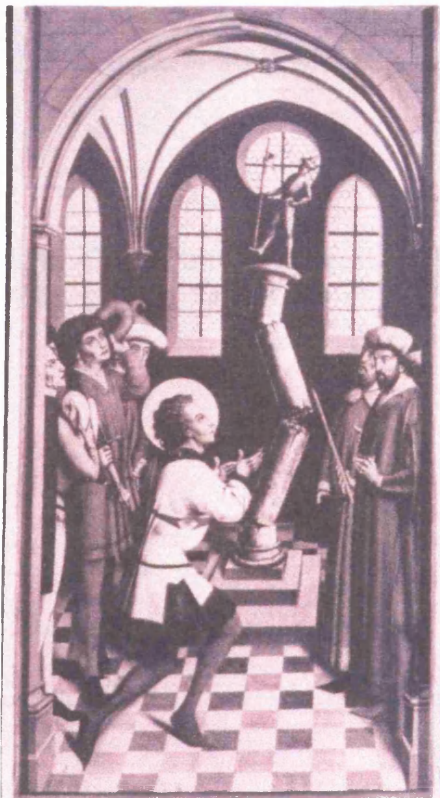
Plate 46: Friedrich Herlin,
'St George in the Heathen
Temple', 1462.

Plate 47: William Sedgwick, sketches of the Stamford St George cycle, c.1641: St George in Battle.

Plate 48: The Stamford St George cycle: St George Beheaded.

Plate 49: The Stamford St George cycle: St George resurrected by the Virgin.

Plate 50: The Stamford St George cycle: St George resurrected by Christ.

Plate 51: William Stukeley, sketch of the first window of
the Stamford St George cycle, 1716.
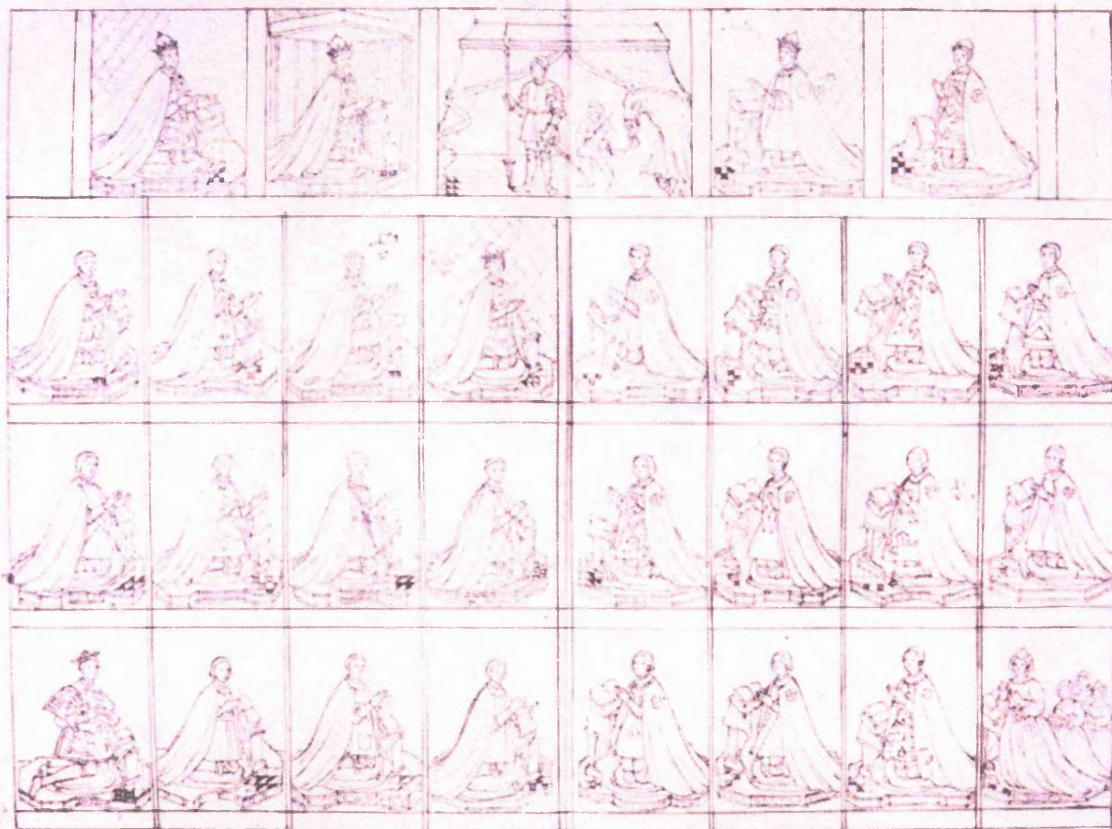
Plate 52: Anonymous sketch of the lower scheme of the Stamford St George cycle (the 'Founder Knights of the Order of the Garter'), c.1664-72.
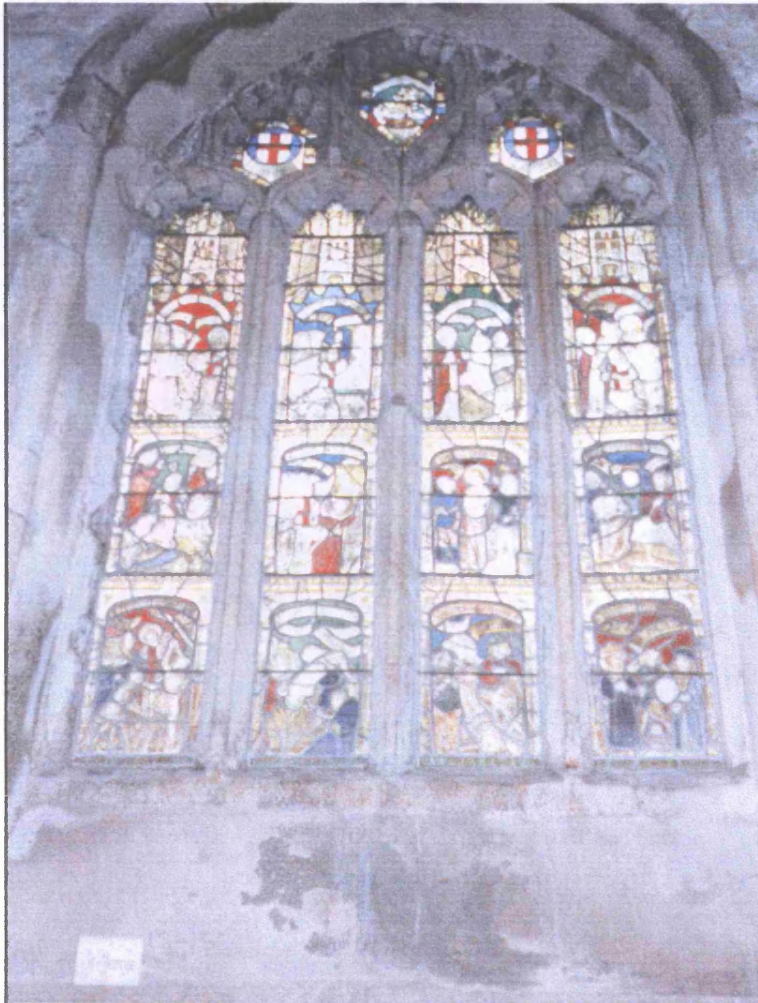
Plate 53: The St George window, St Neot's church, St Neot (Cornwall), early sixteenth century.
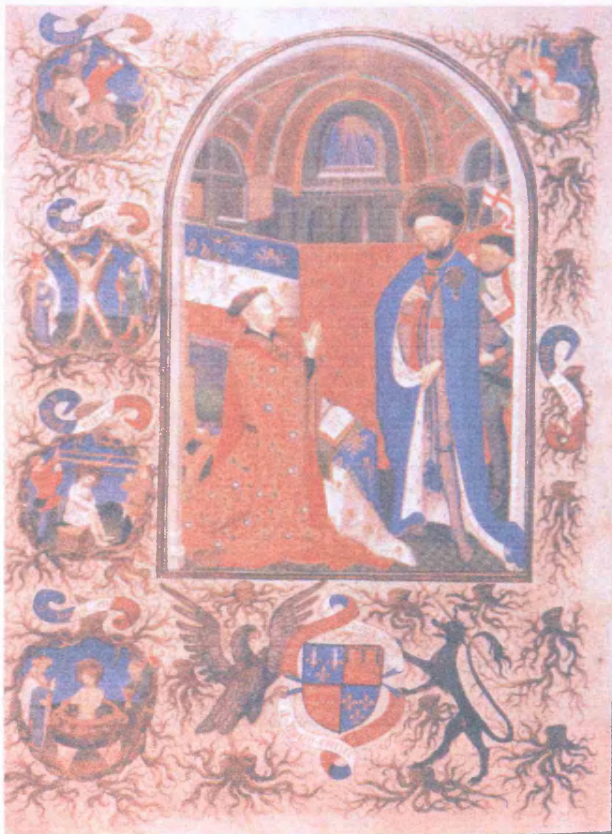
Plate 54: The Bedford Hours (London, B.L. Add. ms 18850) fol.256v: roundels of the Torture of St George, 1423.

Plate 55: The Salisbury Breviary (Paris, B.N. ms lat. 17294) fol.448: the narrative of St George and the Dragon, 1424-35.

Plate 56: St George's chapel, Windsor Castle: the cycle of St George and the Virgin in the desk-ends of the south side of the choir, c.1477-84: the Obeisance of St George.

Plate 57: St George's chapel, Windsor Castle: St George meets the Princess.

Plate 58: St George's chapel, Windsor Castle: the Dragon is brought to the City.

Plate 59: St George's chapel, Windsor Castle: St George is threatened.

Plate 60: St George's chapel, Windsor Castle: St George is dismembered and boiled.

Plate 61: St George's chapel, Windsor Castle: St George is dragged.

Plate 62: St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle: the Annunciation.

Plate 63: St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle: the Nativity of Christ.

Plate 64: St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle: the Assumption of the Virgin.

Plate 65: Marzal de Sas (attributed), the 'Valencia Altarpiece', c.1410-20: St George is Armed by the Virgin; the Sacrifice to the Dragon; the Trial before Dacian; the Torture of the Poison.

Plate 66: The 'Valencia Altarpiece': St George is Tortured; St George is Visited in Prison by Christ; St George is Sawn; St George is Beheaded.
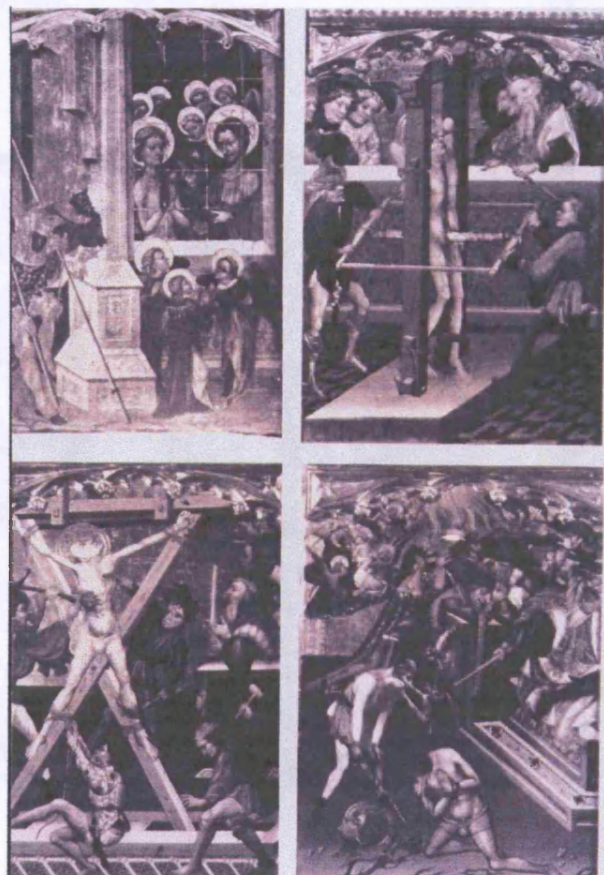
Plate 67: Israhel van Meckenem, 'St George and the Dragon', c.1500.

Plate 68: The Kinwarton Alabaster of the Presentation of the Virgin, mid-fifteenth century.

Plate 69: The Thermes-Cluny alabaster panel of the Assumption and Coronation of the Vigin by the Trinity, mid-fifteenth century.

Plate 70: Israhel von Meckenem, 'The Life of the Virgin', late fifteenth century.

Plate 71: Abbey St Denis, stalls formerly in the chapel of the Chateau Gaillon (Eure), early to mid-sixteenth century: St George Casts Down the Heathen Idol.

Plate 72: Abbey St Denis: St George Imprisoned.

Plate 73: Abbey St Denis: St George Tortured; St George Beheaded.

Plate 74: Abbey St Denis: Dacian Tormented by Demons.

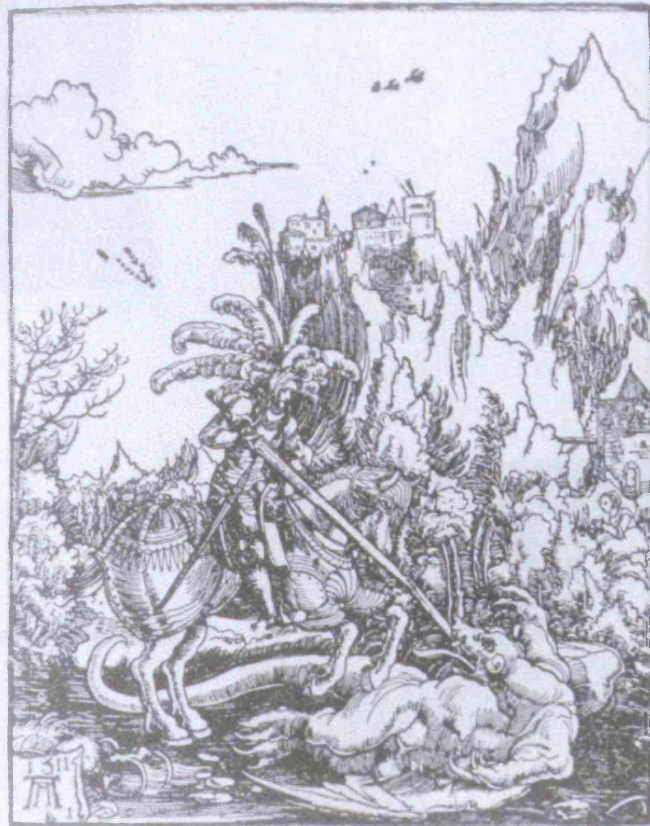Plate 75: Albrecht Altdorfer, 'St George and the Dragon', 1511.

Plate 76: St Gregory's Church, Pottergate, Norwich: 'St George and the Dragon', fifteenth century.

Plate 77: detail of plate 76, showing the baby dragon.