

A ROMANESQUE CAPITAL FROM CANTERBURY AT CHARTHAM

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A freestanding Romanesque capital, which was re-used in the nineteenth century to support a sun-dial in the garden of Deanery Farm at Chartham near Canterbury, has recently been correctly identified by Mr. Tim Tatton-Brown of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. He very generously invited me to write the present note, and for this, I am most grateful to him. I am also indebted to the owners of Deanery Farm, Mr. and Mrs. D. G. Day, who allowed me to inspect and photograph the capital. The drawings reproduced here as Fig. 1, a-d, were made by Mr. David Gilbert, of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, to whom my thanks are due for permission to publish them.

The capital is fairly large, each face measuring 58 cm. at the top; the present height is 33 cm. but, originally, it was some 5 cm. or more taller, before the bottom portion, including the necking, was cut away. The carved decoration is well preserved on two of the adjoining sides (faces no. 1 and no. 4, Fig. 1a and d, Pls. I-IV), but the weathering of the other two sides, particularly of face no. 3 (Fig. 1c, Pl. III) is well advanced.

The motifs used for the decoration are well-known in Romanesque art in all media. On face no. 1 (Fig. 1a & Pl. I), two addorsed birds turn their heads inwards, preening their wings. Birds and animals in Romanesque art are seldom sufficiently individualized for their species to be satisfactorily identified.¹ The birds on the Chartham capital have the appearance often given by Romanesque artists to eagles, and yet the closest parallel for them is provided by a relief from Reading

¹ An interesting recent study by C. Dauphin, 'Byzantine Pattern Books' (*Art History*, i (1978), no. 4, 400 ff.) deals with the identification of animals, birds, fish, insects etc. on mosaic pavements of the fourth to seventh centuries. For a brief discussion of the same problem in Romanesque art, see my paper 'Late Romanesque Fountain from Campania', *The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin*, ix (1971-3), 7-17.

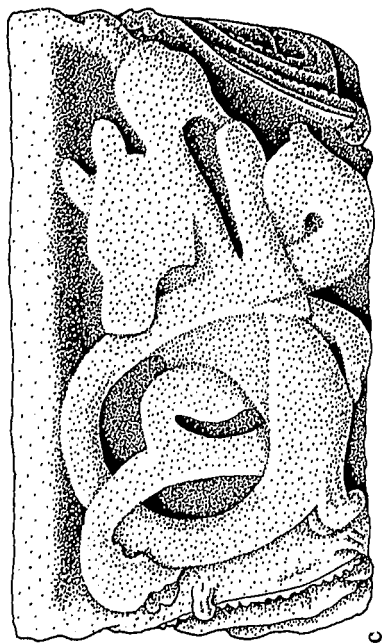
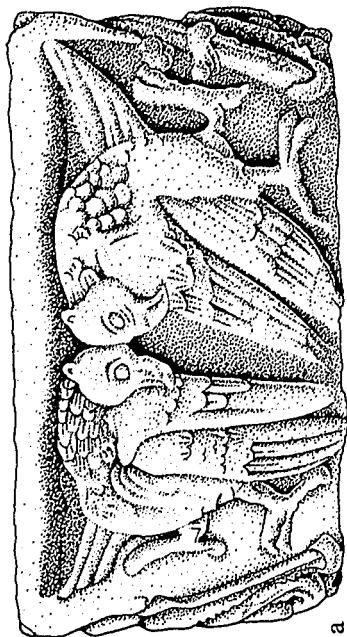
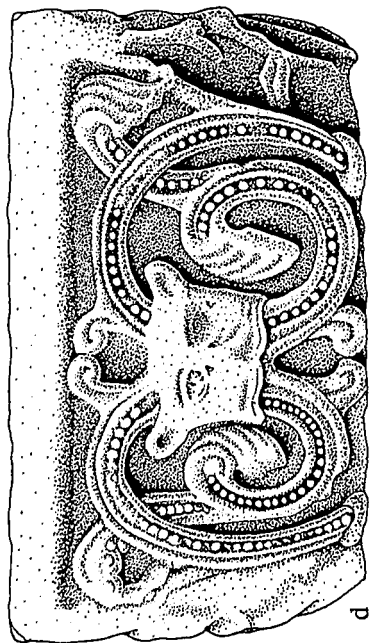
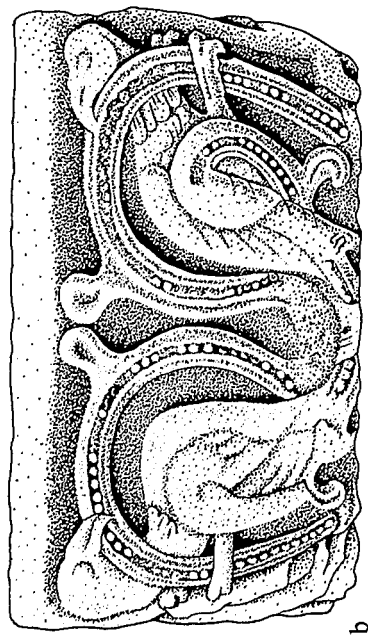


Fig. 1. Romanesque Capital from Chartham (Scale: 1/5)

Abbey, formerly in the Victoria and Albert Museum, but now in the museum at Reading (Pl. V), which, in all probability, is a "pelican in its piety".

According to medieval bestiaries, the pelican fed its young with its own blood from a self-inflicted wound, thus symbolizing Christ's love for the Church.² In a late twelfth-century bestiary from Revesby Abbey in Lincolnshire, there is a representation of *fulica*, the coot, preening its wing (Fig. 2).³ The Chartham representation uses a very similar design, merely adding one more bird in a mirror-image composition. Such doubling of representations of birds and animals in bestiaries is quite frequent, and undoubtedly the result of influences exercised by oriental textiles on Romanesque art.⁴ Whether the Chartham birds are derived from bestiaries cannot be proved. There is still a bestiary preserved in the Cathedral Library at Canterbury, but it is of a late thirteenth-century date.⁵ The earliest (c. 1120) surviving bestiary (as distinct from the *Physiologus*, from which the medieval

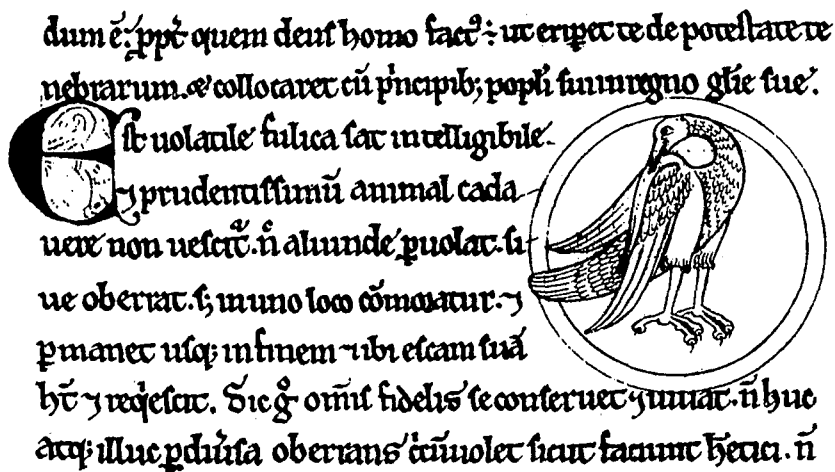


Fig. 2. From the Bestiary in Revesby Abbey, Lincs.

² Except for a variant, in which the pelican kills its young and, stricken by remorse, brings it to life with blood from a self-inflicted wound, see M. R. James, *The Bestiary*, Oxford, 1928, 45 and fol. 38 recto.

³ James, *op. cit.*, 44, fol. 35 verso.

⁴ The influence of oriental textiles on Romanesque sculpture has been convincingly demonstrated by E. Mâle, *L'Art religieux du XI^e siècle en France*, 4th ed., Paris, 1940, 340-59, while the same influence on illuminations painted at Canterbury is discussed by C. R. Dodwell, *The Canterbury School of Illumination 1066-1200*, Cambridge, 1954, 75-8.

⁵ James, *op. cit.*, no. 30, 19.

bestiary is derived), is preserved in the Bodleian Library.⁶ The manuscript was given to Oxford by William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, so a Canterbury provenance for the book is a possibility.

In any case, it must be assumed that such an important monastery as Christ Church, Canterbury, already had a bestiary in its library in the twelfth century. It is well-known that the capitals in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral are closely related to the local illuminations,⁷ and at least one of the crypt capitals is carved with a subject derived from a bestiary, namely the caper biting its foot.⁸ Thus, there is every likelihood that the birds of the Chartham capital are derived, in their composition, from a bestiary, even if the sculptor did not intend to endow his work with any particular moral message.

The adjoining face to the right (Fig. 1b, Pl. II), is unfortunately badly weathered, and so it is difficult to interpret some details of the carving. It consists of two beaded scrolls, each forming a circular frame enclosing a bird-like creature. As on the previous side of the capital, the creatures are addorsed and their heads turned inwards, but instead of preening their wings, they grip scrolls of foliage with their long, hooked beaks. The scrolls stand out from the background in prominent relief. They appear to end in large leaves and there are additional small, curving leaves at the top and bottom.

The face further to the right (no. 3, Fig. 1c, Pl. III), is badly worn, and all that can be said is that it represented a creature with the head of a quadruped and a snake-like body intertwined with branches of foliage. This is the only face of the capital with an asymmetrical composition.

Finally, on the remaining, fourth face (no. 4, Fig. 1d, Pl. IV), two beaded foliage scrolls, ending in two large leaves, are joined together by a clasp in the form of a head. The scrolls penetrate the head from above and emerge through the large mouth. In the main crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, one capital is decorated with heads placed at angles and each head has two beaded scrolls emerging from the mouth (Pl. VI). These scrolls are much finer, crisper and more elegant than those on the Chartham capital. However, in both cases, they terminate in similar leaves and the heads have long, pointed ears in common. Such ears are usually the attributes of devils and this interpretation is further suggested by two sharp fangs protruding from the mouth of one of the angle heads.

⁶ Laud, Misc. 247; see C. M. Kauffmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1066-1190*, London, 1975, no. 36, 75-6.

⁷ This subject was discussed in detail in my doctoral thesis (University of London, 1950) and mentioned briefly in my *English Romanesque Sculpture 1066-1140*, London, 1951, 22.

⁸ Dodwell, *op. cit.*, 75, James, *op. cit.*, fol. 12 recto & verso.

In the side crypt under the chapel of St. Andrew, there are two carved capitals, somewhat different from those in the main crypt. One of these capitals (Pl. VII) presents an interesting parallel to the carving under discussion at Chartham. Here too, a devil's head links two scrolls of beaded foliage. As at Chartham, the two scrolls grow out of the ground but, instead of curving outwards, they curve inwards, passing through the devil's mouth and emerging from the top of the head, behind pointed ears and two upright horns.

The two curving forms above the head at Chartham may well also be horns. The style of the carving of the Canterbury capital is a little coarser and heavier than that of the capitals in the main crypt, but it is very close to the treatment of the relief on the Chartham capital. There is, however, one fundamental difference between the two capitals, for while the form of the Canterbury capital is cubic, at Chartham it is block-shaped.

Amongst the carved capitals of the Canterbury crypt, only three are cubic, the rest being block-shaped. Only two of these block-shaped capitals received a decoration which links the four faces harmoniously (for instance Pl. VI), in all other cases, the sculptor treated each side as an independent composition, leaving an awkward, almost clumsy space between each face. The same feature is found on the capital at Chartham.

It is obvious from these comments that the Chartham capital is closely related to the early twelfth-century capitals at Canterbury in the style of their execution, in the method of the application of the sculpture to the capitals and in the subject-matter. There can be no doubt that the Chartham capital was originally at Christ Church, Canterbury, and was brought to Chartham in the nineteenth century to be used in its present position as a base for a sun-dial. Since the ninth century the manor and the church at Chartham were the property of Christ Church⁹ and Deanery Farm was sold to the present owner only some twenty years ago.

The capital was probably found lying somewhere within the precincts of the Cathedral. The fairly careful trimming of the capital at its base suggests that, at some time, the capital was discarded and re-employed as masonry and had to be cut to the required thickness. Such re-use could have occurred during the Middle Ages,¹⁰ or at any time after the dissolution of the monasteries when so many buildings became obsolete, were pulled down, or were altered.

Because of the close resemblance of the Chartham capital to those in

⁹ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, i, London, 1817, 88 & 92 and *Arch. Cant.*, 89 (1974), 169-182.

¹⁰ As for instance, the carved stones from the screen of 1180 which were re-used in the fourteenth century in the cloister, and were re-discovered in recent years.

the crypt of the Cathedral, it is tempting to assume that the capital came from the crypt, for several Romanesque capitals were removed during various alterations and are now missing.

However, the measurements of the Chartham capital do not support such a possibility, since it is considerably larger than the crypt capitals.¹¹ The date of the crypt capitals is not recorded. So far it has always been assumed that the carving was executed *in situ*, some time after the completion of the crypt in c. 1100. I shared this view and dated the capitals to c. 1120.¹² I now believe that the capitals were executed in the workshop before c. 1100, so hurriedly that one capital had to be placed in position before it was finished.

Judging by the illuminations produced at Canterbury at that time the style established towards the end of the eleventh century continued to be employed during the first three decades of the twelfth. Thus, although the Chartham capital is so closely connected with the Canterbury style of c. 1100, its date need not be so early. I have discussed earlier, the similarity of one side of the Chartham capital (Pl. I) to a relief with a pelican from Reading Abbey (Pl. V), a royal foundation of 1121. The relief comes from the cloister (it is a springer of the cloister arcade), and dates to c. 1130. One of the cloister capitals also presents a fairly close parallel to the Chartham capital, in that it uses two beaded foliage scrolls linked by a mask. The Reading scrolls enclose rampant animals, absent at Chartham, but nevertheless the two capitals are fairly close stylistically. I would suggest between 1100 and 1120 as a likely date for the Chartham capital. However, it is impossible to know in which of many buildings erected at that time at Canterbury the capital could have been used. All that can be safely said is that it was used in a free-standing position, in a substantial structure, requiring a capital larger than those employed in the cathedral crypt.

The capital has suffered from weathering and probably from rough handling and, if further deterioration is to be arrested, it should be immediately put under cover, and cleaned by an expert.

¹¹ The height of the crypt capitals is 33–34 cm., which is practically the same as the Chartham capital *after* its trimming. The width at the top of the Chartham capital is 58 cm., while the corresponding measurement of the crypt capitals is 51 to 53 cm. The capitals which survive from the choir of Ernulf (wrongly called ‘the Conrad choir’) are so considerably larger that there can be no question of the Chartham capital originating in that part of the cathedral.

¹² G. Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Sculpture 1066–1140*, London, 1951, 22.

PLATE I



Chartham Capital: Face a

PLATE II



Chartham Capital: Face b

PLATE III



Chartham Capital: Face c

PLATE IV



Chartham Capital: Face d



Relief from Reading Abbey



Capital from the Crypt, Canterbury Cathedral



Capital from the side Crypt, Canterbury Cathedral