

SCULPTURAL DISCOVERIES AT WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

By P G LINDLEY

ABSTRACT

This paper publishes for the first time a fragmentary medieval image of the Risen Christ and identifies it as the central sculpture from the revedos of the Guardian Angels Chapel of Winchester Cathedral. Secondly, a large head and a fragment of another are provenanced to Bishop William of Wykeham's chantry chapel. The very considerable problems in dating all these images are discussed and it is argued that the stylistic context for the Risen Christ may be the late fourteenth century. The evidence for the provenance of the sculpture from Wykeham's chapel tends to conflict with the sculptures' stylistic features, which would favour an earlier date, and it is suggested that the criteria by which pieces of ex situ sculpture are assigned to dates in the fourteenth century may need to be re-examined.

The process of sorting the fragmentary remains of late medieval figure-sculpture at Winchester Cathedral, in preparation for the establishment of a new gallery displaying the cathedral collections, has recently led to some important discoveries. Perhaps the most remarkable is the damaged torso of a partly clothed male figure (Fig 1). The fragment is 48 cm high and 28.2 cm wide, and has been broken at the top of the chest and half way up the thighs. The radiating tubular folds of the loin cloth which is stretched across the thighs, and the pleat of the cloak hugging the right hand side of the chest, accentuate the nakedness of the torso, stomach and legs. The protuberant abdomen and the gaunt chest with its prominently articulated ribs have little in common with the other two images of partly clothed figures in the stone store at Winchester. These statues, carved in very high relief, probably represent Adam and Eve (Figs 2 & 3) (Blunt 1969, 27) and apparently belong to the tomb of Thomas Mason (d.1559): Vaughan (1919, 220–5) relates how, during the “restora-



Fig 1. Male torso fragment, Winchester Cathedral (after conservation). Photo J Crook.

tion” of the tomb by Dr Nott and Mr Garbett in the early nineteenth century, the canopy (from which these figures presumably come) was removed and the width of the tomb, now standing at the east end of the north choir aisle, was reduced. These Franco-Italianate figures have a soft sensuality and smoothly mannered elegance which contrasts markedly with the stark features of the newly discovered torso fragment. Instead, the latter evokes, both stylistically and iconographically, medieval



Fig 2. Sculptural fragment (Adam) from the tomb of Thomas Mason, Winchester Cathedral (after conservation). Photo J Crook.



Fig 3. Sculptural fragment (Eve) from the tomb of Thomas Mason, Winchester Cathedral (after conservation). Photo J Crook.

images of the Risen Christ. He is seen standing, with his cloak supported by angels, in the reredos of the early sixteenth century chantry chapel of Prince Arthur at Worcester Cathedral (McClure 1911–12) and, striding from his tomb, is a common subject in late medieval alabaster panels: some examples of the subject recently published by Francis Cheetham (1984, 274–6) from the Victoria and Albert Museum collections are strongly reminiscent of our figure. That the Winchester figure was itself an image of the Risen Christ is indicated by the stumps on the right hand side of the figure – at the upper chest and on the thigh – and the damage to the draperies immediately below: these point to the existence of a lost attribute, the crossed staff with a pennant.

What appears to be a cloak worn by the figure must, then, actually be the burial shroud.

It is surprising that the Winchester image of the Risen Christ [gallery accession number 94] has escaped the published attention of previous scholars, chief amongst whom should be numbered Prior and Gardner (1912), Atkinson (1936) and Stone (1972), for it is an accomplished work, which exhibits a highly refined surface treatment. A number of characteristics align this sculpture with four headless figures and one upper torso fragment [93, 88, 89, 90 and 188] (Figs 4 & 5) recently shown (Lindley 1987) to have come from the reredos in the Guardian Angels Chapel. In the case of the four headless images, the manner in which they had been treated by sixteenth-century



Fig 4. Fragmentary statue of St John the Baptist, Winchester Cathedral, (before conservation). Photograph by courtesy of the Courtauld Institute of Art.



Fig 5. Fragmentary statue usually identified as St Elizabeth, Winchester Cathedral (before conservation). Photography by courtesy of the Courtauld Institute to Art.

iconoclasts reinforced purely stylistic criteria in grouping them together: their shoulders had been sawn from the back at an angle of 45 degrees, whilst their bases were cut at the same angle in the opposite direction, so that, as Atkinson (1936, 160) first observed, they could be reused as double quoins in a wall. Although only a small upper section of a fifth figure survived, its shoulders had also been

sawn at the same angle, a treatment apparently reserved at Winchester for images from this one programme. While neither the shoulders nor the base of the figure of Christ survive to give this type of clue to its former provenance, it is nevertheless clear that the image belongs to the same scheme.

First, it is of the same scale as the other images, and is carved from the same high-

quality oolitic limestone: in colour and texture it is identical to one figure which can be securely identified on the basis of his bare legs and the camel-skin (the head rests between his feet) which he wears under his cloak, as the Baptist (compare Cheetham 1984, 114–6 and Hardacre 1987, 12–14). Secondly, like the other images from this group, it is exceptionally shallow (depth 14 cm): out of all the hundreds of fragments at Winchester, this group of images, (which vary from approximately 14 to 16 cm in depth from the flat back to the highest point of the surface), contains the only pieces of a comparable shallowness. Thirdly, like the four large images, its thin (c. 1.5 to 3 cm in depth) sides have been chiselled off by the iconoclasts, prior to its reuse: these traces of iconoclastic activity therefore give a valuable indication that the fragment came from the same group of images. Fourthly, the stumps remaining from the supports of the lost staff resemble the similar remains on other figures, such as the one generally identified as 'St Elizabeth'. However, it is the style of the image which finally proves its common origin in the Guardian Angels Chapel reredos. The flat folds of the loin cloth loop over at the waist and stomach: this same feature is displayed by all four of the more complete figures, particularly on their upper torsos. The flat, wide pleat of the shroud which follows the contours of the chest is closely paralleled by the other images, one of which [98], in fact, identically repeats it. And, when intact, the figure of Christ must have had the same thin and bony legs as the Baptist [90] (Fig 4).

The diaphanous draperies and swaying poses of this group of figures closely align them with alabaster imagery. Indeed, Lawrence Stone (1972, 203) has highlighted a stylistic correspondence between these images and perhaps the only closely datable retable of English alabaster panels from the fifteenth century, that presented to Santiago de Compostela in May 1456 by an English pilgrim, Johannes Gudguar (Goodyear?), rector of Chale in the Isle of Wight (Hildburgh 1926 and 1944). The pleating of the draperies over the upper torso, the dragging of the cloak

across the chest, and the turning over of the cloth at the stomach are indeed remarkably similar to the Winchester figures, and Stone's case for assigning the freestone images to a mid-fifteenth century date initially seems a strong one. Two problems, though, have to be faced. The first, which I have highlighted elsewhere (1987), is that it is difficult to believe that freestone sculptors working at so important a centre as Winchester in the mid-fifteenth century could have been ignorant of the bulky, Flemish-influenced style of the imagery of Henry V's chantry chapel at Westminster Abbey, which was probably being carved in the 1440s (Hope 1914, Perkins 1940, Colvin 1963, 488–9), or the near-contemporary sculpture of the Beauchamp chapel at Warwick (Chatwin 1928, Stone 1972, 205–10). Secondly, the stylistic features which Stone noted are not unique to alabasters of the mid-fifteenth century. In fact, the pleated draperies of the upper torsos and the swirling folds of the silky garments, dragged across the body and turned over at the stomach, can be precisely paralleled in alabaster images generally dated as early as the 1380s, such as the figures of Sts Peter and Paul now in Sta Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome (Figs 6 & 7). W L Hildburgh (1955) connected these figures with the licence, given by Richard II in 1382, to Cosmato Gentilis, Pope Urban VI's tax collector in England, to export 'three large alabaster images – one of the Blessed Virgin Mary, another of St Peter, and the third of St Paul' – from Southampton (Rymer 1869, 146). Hildburgh's identification is supported by stylistic evidence, notably the evident connection with the Flawford figures for which a date of c. 1340–80 was recently advanced by Nicholas Dawton (Alexander & Binski 1987, nos 699–701). The Roman St Peter (Fig 6) is very close in the articulation of its face and in the handling of the draperies, which fall in V-shaped folds, to the Flawford St Peter, whilst the busy swirling folds of the Flawford Madonna and Child's garments, as well as her swaying contrapposto, closely resemble that of the Santa Croce in Gerusalemme St Paul. The vertically ridged draperies of thin cloth stretched over



Fig 6. St Peter, from Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. Photograph by kind permission of Francis Cheetham.



Fig 7. St Paul, from Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. Photograph by kind permission of Francis Cheetham.

the chest and turned over at the stomach, the swaying poses, flat modelling and elongated proportions of the two Roman alabasters are all extremely close to the Winchester freestone images; the St Peter also has the stick-like toes in common with them.

Such considerations suggest that Stone's dating of the Winchester freestone figures may need to be re-examined. Hitherto, it has seemed that the Guardian Angels Chapel images must postdate the swirling draperies exhibited by William of Wykeham's statuary at Winchester College (Chitty 1932, Lindley 1987). However, the possibility should also be considered that they first adumbrate ideas subsequently taken up by the college figures: in other words, the college figures may have been influenced by the chapel reredos statues rather than the reverse. There is no strong reason why these smooth, flat, highly stylised figures should not be attributed to c. 1380-90 rather than to the first half of the fifteenth century. This suggestion receives some support from the fact that the belt, studded with fleurons, slipping from the 'St Elizabeth' can be partly paralleled by that worn by the Annunciate angel from the hall of the Vicars Choral at Wells, dating from c 1363 (Alexander and Binski 1987, nos 526-7). Secondly, the close dependence of this group of images on the style of the alabasterers cannot be doubted, and such an influence is perhaps more likely for high-quality freestone imagery in the late fourteenth century, when alabaster panels were highly prestigious, than in the fifteenth century by which time they had become a good deal more common (Cheetham, 1984, 49-51).

Finally we should note that the distinctly symmetrical arrangement of the loin-cloth of the figure of Christ contrasts strongly with the pronounced swaying poses of the four other large fragments. This suggests both that the figure of the Risen Christ occupied the central niche and also that the position of the other figures may be determined by the direction in which they sway and by the drapery treatment, which accentuates their poses (Fig 8). The fact that the Winchester figures are shown with bare feet implies that they should be identified

as saints but the image identified as St Elizabeth, on the basis of Sir Alfred Clapham's suggestion (Atkinson 1936, 163) that the loose belt signified pregnancy may instead represent the Virgin of the Assumption, as shown in an alabaster assigned by Mr Cheetham (1984, 202; also 204 and 206) to the second half of the fifteenth century. (The bare feet, though, remains a problem with this identification.)

II

Although the dating of the Guardian Angels Chapel figures is still uncertain, and in view of the very considerable difficulties in dating the related alabaster panels (Hildburgh 1950, Rollason 1986), is likely to remain controversial, other discoveries at Winchester Cathedral tend to reinforce the evidence for attributing to Bishop William of Wykeham's c. 1399-1403 chantry chapel three heads (Figs 9 & 10) shown in the *Age of Chivalry* exhibition. Three further fragments from the heads of extremely large figures [69, 70 & 74] are presently housed in the north transept. Two pieces [70 & 74] (Fig 11) are parts of the same head and had already been united by T D Atkinson, although they were subsequently separated again. Atkinson's (1936, 165) dating of this head to the sixteenth century is entirely unconvincing. The rolls of highly stylised, symetrically disposed curls, with a pair of parallel gouges outlining the strands, on either side of this balding head are remarkably similar to those of the head of Christ attributed (Lindley 1987) to Wykeham's chantry chapel (Fig 10); also similar in the manner in which the beard is separated into two thick tubes, the handling of the moustache, and the proportions of the face. The eye shape of the balding head is identical to that of one of the queens [56] from the same group (Fig 9).

This gigantic head (height 41 cm (34 cm to the chin), width 30 cm, depth approximately 30-34 cm), together with the one from which the single fragment of a tonsured scalp survives, is so huge that it can only have come from an image at least seven feet high. It is

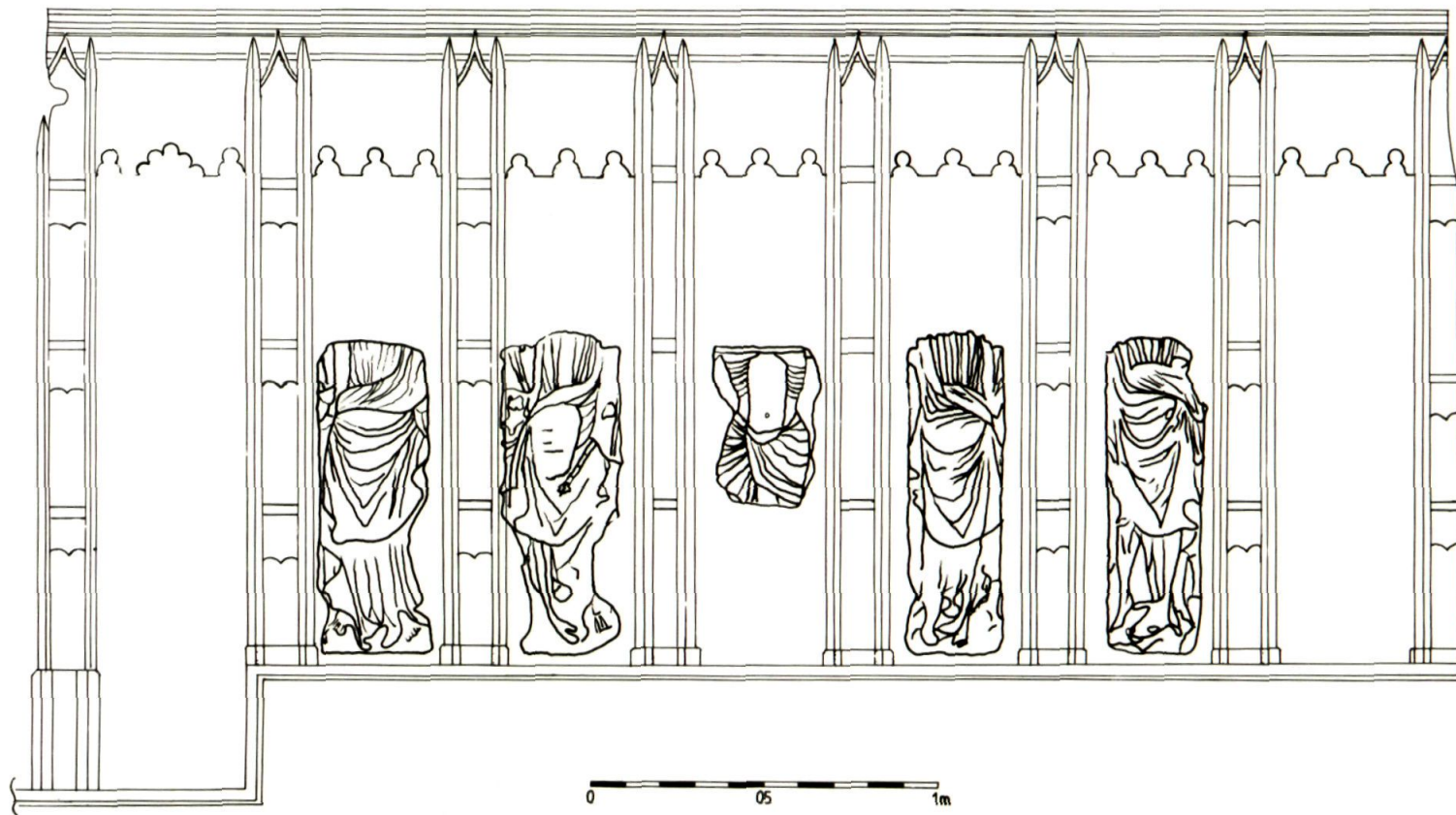


Fig 8. Reredos, Guardian Angels Chapel, with figures to scale. (Drawn by Richard McGrand and John Hardacre)



Fig 9. Head of a queen, Winchester Cathedral (after conservation). Photo J. Crook.



Fig 10. Head of Christ, Winchester Cathedral (before conservation).

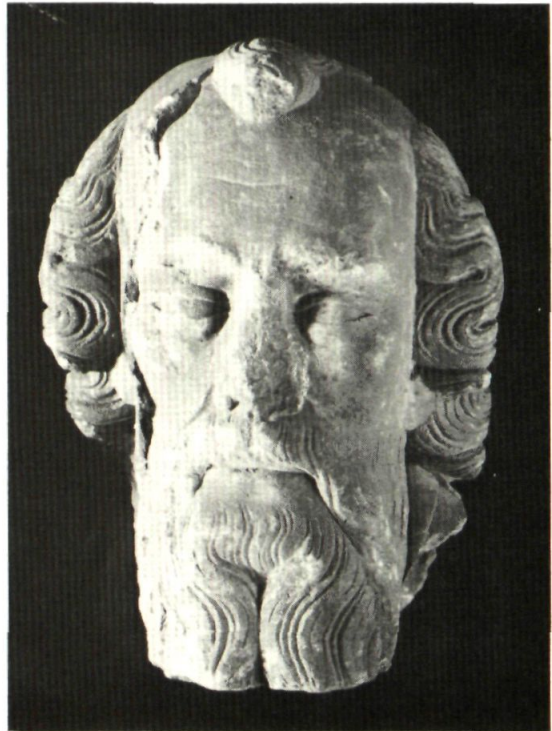


Fig 11. Unidentified head, possibly representing St Paul, Winchester Cathedral.

highly improbable that this figure can have stood in one of the three niches at the west end of the cathedral: not only are they too small to house a figure this tall, but they were also probably filled with images by Bishop Edington (d. 1366) to whose episcopate this part of the cathedral belongs (Willis 1984, Atkinson 1934). The surface crispness of this head also indicates that it is extremely unlikely to have come from an external niche. The only alternative location for it is in the tall niches at the west and east ends of William of Wykeham's chantry chapel. This is of interest because the argument for assigning the three heads, of Christ and two queens, to Wykeham's Chapel was itself based primarily on the grounds of provenance and only secondarily on the basis of style: all of these sculptures seem remarkably conservative stylistically when compared to the exciting

and adventurous imagery of Winchester and New College and instead appear to be deeply indebted to sculpture of the second quarter of the fourteenth century. If the dating advanced here is correct, then we may need to re-examine the stylistic assumptions on which the dating of a number of other *ex situ* fourteenth century pieces of sculpture, such as the heads of queens at Cobham in Kent, are based. Some sculptors, even in important regional centres may, at the end of the fourteenth century, have still been working in styles which would not have been out of place before the Black Death. This problem is implicitly recognised in the very wide dating bracket (c. 1340–80) given by Dawton (Alexander & Binski 1987, nos 699–701) to the Flawford alabasters: he views them as a homogeneous group and sees the immediate source for their style 'in a group of English sculpture dating

from the second quarter of the century and associated with the master responsible for carving the bosses of the Percy tomb in Beverley Minster'. On the other hand, Paul Williamson (Alexander & Binski 1987, no 698) assigns the recently conserved Sutton Valence altarpiece in the Victoria and Albert Museum to the mid-fourteenth century, although its stylistic proximity to works of the last quarter of the century could be interpreted as implying a rather later date.

The balding, bearded head probably belongs to a figure of St Paul, whilst the fragment of a tonsured head may come from an image of St Peter, or, perhaps St Swithun, patron saints of Winchester Cathedral. All three of these saints would certainly have been represented in the imagery of the bishop's chantry chapel, and they were specifically mentioned in his will as intercessors (Lowth 1777, Appendix XVII). The rediscovery of these fragments, then, serves not only to reinforce the argument that the three smaller heads belong to Wykeham's chantry chapel, but also to remind one that the rather austere

impression given by the chapel's architecture would once have been modified by the large sculpted figures which formerly occupied the niches. Wykeham's chantry chapel may, indeed, have been influential in inaugurating the tradition of sculpture-encrusted chantry chapels, a tradition which arguably receives its finest expression at Winchester, in the chapels of Cardinal Beaufort (d. 1447) and Bishops Waynflete (d. 1486) and Fox (d. 1528).

Postscript: since this paper was written (1988), the Winchester Cathedral Triforium Gallery has opened. Many of the images referred to here can be seen on display, and are in the catalogue by Mr J Hardacre.

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