

Rezensionen

DEBORAH KAHN, *Canterbury Cathedral and its Romanesque Sculpture*, London, Harvey Miller Publishers 1991; also University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. 230pp.; 290 illustrations. ISBN 0-905203-18-6.

Dr Kahn's unpublished doctoral thesis *Romanesque Architectural Sculpture in Kent* (1982) prepared her well for the present book, for although its principal subject is sculpture in Canterbury Cathedral from 1066, the year of the Norman conquest of England, to about 1180, it makes frequent comparisons with other carvings in Kent and even further afield. The author claims that because of the status of the Cathedral Priory of Christ Church as the metropolitan church of England, its sculpture is of consistently high quality. The book is divided into four chronological chapters, coinciding roughly with the terms of office of three archbishops, Lanfranc, Anselm and Theobald, with the final chapter dealing with the decade after the death of Thomas Becket in 1170.

It was Lanfranc (1070-89), the Italian abbot of Saint-Etienne at Caen, who built the first Romanesque cathedral at Canterbury, of which only scanty but significant remains survive, and it is in this context that the author brings into discussion the five reliefs found as recently as 1985 and which she believes come from one of Lanfranc's buildings. The motifs employed on them are strikingly similar to those on the borders of the Bayeux Tapestry, which modern scholars agree was made at Canterbury between 1070-80. Dr Kahn dates the reliefs, cautiously, to 1080-90. The five reliefs display great vigour and provide a welcome addition to our knowledge of late eleventh-century sculpture in England.

The enlargement of the cathedral by a new choir and a second transept during the years of Anselm's rule (1093-1109) and his immediate successors gave the opportunity for a far richer sculptural decoration of the building. Anselm, another Italian archbishop, formerly abbot of Bec in Normandy, was helped in his building enterprises by two successive priors, Ernulf and Conrad. The choir was consecrated in 1130. From this campaign two very important groups of carved capitals survive, those of the crypt (started in 1093) and the exterior arcades of the transepts.

Although the capitals of the first group are well-known, they have never been analyzed so thoroughly. We learn that their subject matter was borrowed from astronomical manuscripts, Bestiaries, illustrations of the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius and from books of fables. The style of these capitals is so flat and linear and the similarities to the local illuminated books so compelling, that there is a possibility that the sculptors of these capitals and painters of manuscripts at Canterbury, were the same people. If one reflects on the fact that all those capitals were not only carved but also painted (considerable traces of pigments still survive), bringing the two techniques so closely together, there is nothing improbable in this hypothesis. The author makes a further convincing suggestion that the use of spiral columns on either side of the crypt's altar is an allusion to the shrine of St Peter in

Rome, thus hinting at the special relationship between Rome and Canterbury under Archbishop Anselm, when the supremacy of ecclesiastic *versus* secular power became a burning issue.

The capitals of the external arcades were recently cleaned and a thick crust of dirt removed, revealing sculpture of high quality, if considerably weathered. In subject matter and dynamic power, the capitals are closely related to the crypt capitals but they are more three-dimensional and deeply undercut. While in the crypt each side of a capital is a separate unit, as a page in a manuscript, here the scenes of combat, chase and struggle between monstrous creatures spread frieze-like across all three faces of each capital. The date suggested for them, c. 1120 seems reasonable and is confirmed by the strong influence this sculpture had on the capitals from Reading Abbey of c. 1125.

During the years of Archbishop Theobald (1139–61) Canterbury became an important intellectual centre, with many outstanding men, amongst whom was John of Salisbury, residing at the *curia*. Headed by the able Prior Wibert, building activity at Canterbury in the third quarter of the twelfth century was very extensive. The two famous drawings of c. 1165, depicting the Christ Church buildings and the pipes bringing water to them, help considerably in reconstructing what was done under Wibert. His buildings included two water towers, one of which still stands very little altered, the *aula nova* with its unique external staircase, the *vestiarium* vaulted by octopartite ribs and the *porta curie*, the gateway, still in use as the principal entrance to the old monastic precinct. In addition, Wibert altered two chapels flanking the choir, built two transept towers and heightened the crossing tower. Some of these structures are remarkable for their engineering skill and the author provides conclusive evidence that some of the builders came from Normandy and, oddly enough, the sculpture they employed was rather old-fashioned, very similar to that used at La Trinité at Caen some twenty years earlier. The far more ambitious sculpture of the *porta curie* is inspired by works in Picardy, Flanders and even Burgundy, where Becket spent some years in exile. Some of the similarities between the sculpture at Canterbury and the Continent are indeed striking, reflecting the cosmopolitan character of Theobald's court.

The title of the final chapter *Sculpture after the Death of Becket* deals with the decade after the murder of the archbishop in 1170. During the turbulent years of Becket's rule (1162–70), no new building activities were initiated. It was only after the martyr was canonized three years after his death and a fire damaged the choir of the cathedral in 1173, that a feverish activity started. Dr Kahn subscribes to the theory that the fire was deliberately started by the monks to enable them to build a choir worthy of their new saint and capable of accomodating large numbers of pilgrims. The new choir was of course in the Gothic style and its fine sculptural decoration is dealt with only briefly. More attention is paid, however, to the excellent fragmentary remains of the screen finished in 1180, for their style is still largely Romanesque. Convincing comparisons with Mosan metalwork suggest that the principal influence on this once magnificent work, came from across the Channel.

This book, written by a former Consultant on sculpture to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury and at present Assistant Professor in the History of Art at Princeton University, is most welcome. It does provide a scholarly assessment of the various groups of sculpture produced in just over one hundred years in an important ecclesiastical and artistic centre. It is based on an intimate knowledge of the monuments discussed and the relevant documents. There are 290 excellent illustrations, some in colour. The author and the publishers deserve high praise.

George Zarnecki

Varia

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