

Reassessing English Alabaster Carving: Medieval Sculpture and its
Contexts

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Abstract

Alabaster sculptures in the form of panels for altarpieces or free standing images were one of the most significant artistic outputs of late medieval England, but they remain poorly understood. They have, moreover, featured only rarely in wider art-historical studies of the later European Middle Ages. On one hand this is a historiographical predicament. For ideological and aesthetic reasons, English alabaster was quarantined; it was seen as an isolated and provincial phenomenon by a series of scholars writing from the late nineteenth century onwards. The narrow picture they formed has remained firmly in place. On the other hand the destructive consequences of the English Reformation continue to obscure our view. Many hundreds of panels are broken or dispersed as a result of sixteenth-century iconoclasm, and there is little surviving documentary evidence to identify who made them or where they were made for.

The central aim of this thesis is to reassess English alabasters by exploring them in their proper European contexts. Chapter One sets the scene by outlining the status and significance of English alabaster carving after the Reformation. From here the discussion moves on in Chapters Two and Three to explore the production of altarpieces and free-standing sculptures. Chapter Four builds on this approach by reuniting a single altarpiece, before zooming out to address the trade, reception and functions of Continental prints and sculptures circulating between England and the Low Countries. This chapter demonstrates the complex interplay between printed and sculptural forms. Chapter Five looks at the post-medieval reception and reuse of English alabasters on the Continent, specifically in Denmark and Holland. By considering English alabaster sculpture in a broader European context, a new history of

the corpus and a new framework for understanding its status and significance is proposed.

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Volume One: Text

Introduction:

They know not alabasters who only alabasters know.¹

Nigel Ramsay provided this tautological warning in his review of Francis Cheetham's 1984 catalogue of medieval English alabaster sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum (hereafter the V&A).² It was as much a personal indictment of Cheetham's view of the material as it was a cover-all for the historiography of medieval English alabasters. What irked Ramsay about Cheetham's catalogue was his seeming lack of awareness that the sculptures were part of a wider European context, mostly ignored by scholars working on English alabasters. They were presented in the catalogue as if they were originally produced in provincial isolation, which is strange given that they were traded across Europe during the Middle Ages. Stranger still, the V&A's collection of English alabasters was primarily formed from collecting activity taking place across Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Cheetham failed to discuss, at much length, Walter Leo Hildburgh, the major collector and donor of the vast majority of the V&A's alabasters; a fascinating individual with a deep interest in English folklore.³ Why the alabasters were desired and how they might have functioned was beyond the scope of Cheetham's catalogue. His project was one of collation and classification, organising the alabasters by type and arranging those types in a relatively vague chronological order. Cheetham went so far, Ramsay stated, as to break up whole, or partially complete altarpieces into iconographic groups which reduced the images to a simple typology. Readers of the catalogue are thus required to navigate complicated cross-

¹ Nigel Ramsay, "Review: English Medieval Alabasters. With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, by Francis Cheetham (Oxford: Phaidon-Christie's, 1984)", *The Antiquaries Journal*, 66(2), 1986, 472-473.

² Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters. With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Oxford: Phaidon-Christie's, 1984).

³ Catherine Oakes, "Dr Hildburgh and the English medieval alabaster", *Journal of the History of Collections*, Volume 18, Issue 1, (1 June 2006), 71-83.

referencing to reunite the panels and make the altarpiece whole again. In effect, this makes any attempt to see beyond the iconography of the sculptures a difficult task. For Cheetham, each sculpture was practically the same as others in the corpus and the method by which they were presented in the publication worked to reinforce this premise.

If the study of English alabasters in the 1980s was hampered by a decontextualized - or typological - approach, then it has yet to be rectified in any serious way. All of the most important sculptures remain poorly understood and there has been, as yet, little attempt to situate any of the many thousands of English alabasters within a wider European framework, which has been done for several groups of Continental sculpture made during the same period, roughly 1300 to 1550.⁴ This fact is reflected in the display of English alabaster sculpture in museums across Western Europe and the United States. Those with the largest collections: the V&A, the British Museum, the Burrell Collection, Nottingham Castle Museum, the Musée des Antiquités Rouen, the Musée de Cluny-Musée national du Moyen Âge, and the Musée du Louvre, all display their English alabasters in isolation, sometimes with very little

⁴ This list is not intended to be exhaustive but is produced to emphasise the range and depth of research into Continental altarpieces. For the Low Countries see: Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Brigitte d'Hainaut-Zveny, *Miroirs du sacré: Les Retables sculptés à Bruxelles, XVe-XVIe siècles: Production, Formes et Usages* (Bruxelles: CFC-Éditions, 2005); Kim Woods, *Imported Images: Netherlandish Late Gothic Sculpture in England, c.1400-c.1550* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007). For France see: Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, *Les Premiers Retables (XIIIe-début du XVe siècle): une mise en scène du sacré* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2009). For Italy see: Eve Borsook and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi, *Italian Altarpieces 1250-1550: Function and Design* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). For Spain see: Maeve O'Donnell, "The Castilian Altar in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: a Material and Social History" (PhD thesis, the Courtauld Institute of Art, 2018). For Norway, see: Magne Malmanger, Laszlo Berczelly, and Signe Horn Fuglesang, *Medieval Altar Frontals and Related Material: Papers from the Conference in Oslo 16th to 19th December 1989* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1995). For a volume addressing the Pan-European popularity of altarpieces, see: Justin Kroesen and Victor Michael Schmidt, *The altar and its environment, 1150-1400* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

information.⁵ Didactic labels at the Cluny simply state: “Panneaux de retables d'albâtre, Angleterre, XVe siècle”, and the situation is not much better elsewhere.⁶ A recent opportunity where the sculptures might have been brought into context with altarpieces made across Europe was the redisplay of the Medieval and Renaissance galleries at the V&A. Curiously, English alabaster is missing from the room focusing on altarpieces in Europe between 1400 and 1550. This is not due to a lack of material - the V&A has three complete altarpieces, one in its original frame - or a fear of displaying fragmentary or English sculpture; a partially broken limestone altarpiece from Sutton Valence, Kent, is proudly exhibited in the same gallery.⁷ Cataloguing and museum displays are the two cornerstones by which works of art can be brought to scholarly and public attention. In both cases English alabasters have remained mostly on the margins, separated from the wider narrative. One reason why alabaster has been mostly left out of this story is its lack of integration into a Pan-European history of art, which this thesis seeks to rectify.

⁵ The majority of these sculptures have not been published in catalogue form, except for the collections at the V&A, Nottingham Castle and the Cluny. For the V&A see: Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*. For Nottingham see: Francis Cheetham, *Unearthed: Nottingham's Medieval Alabasters* (Nottingham: Nottingham City Museums & Galleries, 2004). For the Cluny see: Christine Prigent, *Les Sculptures Anglaises d'Albâtre au Musée National du Moyen Âge Thermes de Cluny, Paris* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998). A full catalogue for the collection in Rouen has never been published but a large number were included in an exhibition which took place there in 1998, see: Laurence Flavigny, *D'Angleterre en Normandie, Sculptures d'Albâtre du Moyen Âge* (Rouen: 1998).

⁶ The British Museum and the V&A include several English alabasters in their thematic displays of wider medieval material. For instance, the Swansea alabaster altarpiece is on display in the British Galleries at the V&A alongside a chalice, paten, candlesticks and other liturgical items. This is done in order to provide context for an original function of the alabaster altarpiece, there, as a backdrop to the English liturgical performance. Still, it is highly likely that the Swansea altarpiece was made for a Continental church, rather than an English one, and so it is an example of how, on one hand, context matters, and on the other, it does not. For the Swansea altarpiece, see: Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 70-71.

⁷ Sutton Valence altarpiece, V&A accession number: A.58:1-1921. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski, eds., *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), 511; Paul Williamson and Peta Evelyn, *Northern Gothic Sculpture 1200-1450* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988), 139-141.

Ramsay's warning that alabasters cannot be "known" if they remain isolated appears to have gone almost entirely unheeded. This is not without fair reason. The corpus of English medieval alabasters is vast, comprising well over 2400 sculptures spread across twenty-three countries.⁸ Many of these sculptures have moved location in the course of time but others remain in the churches for which they were originally made or bought. Studies of English alabaster abroad have operated on a regional or national basis but never trans-regional or trans-national. A problem, now endemic to the study of English alabaster, has arisen from this approach. It further served to isolate English alabaster within modern Continental geographic boundaries and so historical links between territories are left unexplored. This is particularly felt in the relationship between the Scandinavian countries or those of the Iberian Peninsula, and overall between the place of making - England - and the rest of Europe. Geographical distance and numerical complexity underpin the entire historiographical approach towards the surviving material. It is, ultimately, the vastness and complexity of this corpus which has, at times, dissuaded previous scholars from seeking the reunification of objects which have been separated from each other. What this means is that apart from Cheetham's distinctly isolated and Anglo-centric approach there has never been a synoptic study of the corpus, and certainly not one which sought to understand English alabasters in their widest possible contexts.

These issues lie at the heart of this thesis which is concerned with many of the most basic principles of art historical interpretation as it relates to English alabaster

⁸ For summaries of geography and numbers see: Francis Cheetham, *Alabaster Images of Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 179-208. An issue arises from Cheetham's method of cataloguing alabasters. By recording each panel as a single object - distinct from an altarpiece ensemble - the impression he creates is one of many thousands of sculptures isolated and separated from each other. In truth, if more work were undertaken to reconnect pieces which have become separated, the number of complete or partially complete might be far lower. Instead of there being thousands of individual sculptures, the actual picture might be more in the region of hundreds of altarpieces.

sculpture, including production, context, trade and mediation. It is wide-ranging both chronologically and geographically and its central aim is to re-evaluate English alabaster sculpture in order to situate it within a wider European art-historical framework. Given the enormous surviving corpus, the approach taken is qualitative not quantitative, and focus is directed towards instances where formats can be reconstructed, provenances discovered, and in rare cases original patrons identified. I do this in order to indicate links in the chain and identify areas for further exploration but not to paint a comprehensive and accurate picture of the whole, if indeed this were possible. This gradual process is important as a first step toward reassessing an enormous body of sculpture, especially one which has been neglected in recent years. However, this thesis is not solely concerned with the reconstruction of original context or the identification of patrons or workshops. Longer life-cycles of the sculptures will be addressed and are shown to be of equal value in understanding how English alabaster sculpture was re-interpreted for different audiences over time.

English alabaster sculpture has almost always been treated with broad brush strokes and so, at its heart, this thesis is an investigation into what close looking can tell us. It is empirically motivated and aims to challenge the historical ambivalence surrounding these sculptures, part of which stems from a basic lack of information or ability to move beyond the iconographic typology.⁹ In comparison, there has never been anything like Raymond Koechlin's *Les Ivoires gothiques français*, for English alabaster.¹⁰ Koechlin's project sought to locate, identify and date all gothic ivories. His findings are now much disputed but he provided the platform from which other

⁹ Julian M. Luxford, "Review: Object of Devotion: Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture from the Victoria and Albert Museum ed. Paul Williamson, with contributions by Fergus Cannan, Eamon Duffy, and Stephen Perkinson (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2010)", *The Catholic Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (2014): 137-138.

¹⁰ Raymond Koechlin, *Les Ivoires gothiques français* (Paris, 1924).

scholars such as Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, Peter Barnet, John Lowden, Paul Williamson, Glyn Davies, Sarah Guerin and many others were able to build their synoptic work on gothic ivories.¹¹ This work has in turn opened up new avenues for scholarship. *The Gothic Ivories Project* which ran from the Courtauld Institute of Art between 2008 and 2015, described itself as a “Koechlin for the twenty-first century” and is an online catalogue of every known gothic ivory.¹² During the time in which it was active the project added thousands of sculptures on top of Koechlin’s original calculation. An online catalogue for English alabaster sculpture, like *The Gothic Ivories Project*, would revolutionise any future approach to the genre.

Technological developments which allowed for the construction of online catalogues have helped to promote access to gothic ivories, but took place after Francis Cheetham’s death. Still, he was well aware of similar issues related to the study of English alabaster. He sought to rectify the problem of available information when, in 2003, he published his lifetime’s worth of accumulated data as *Medieval English Alabasters*. Made up of a series of indexes, the book contains all geographical locations for English alabasters known by Cheetham and where possible includes measurements and relevant bibliographic information.¹³ In the intervening years between his

¹¹ Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivories du Moyen Age* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1978); Peter Barnet, *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); John Lowden, *Medieval and Later Ivories in The Courtauld Gallery: Complete Catalogue* (London : Paul Holberton Press, 2013); Paul Williamson and Glyn Davies, *Medieval Ivory Carvings, 1200–1550* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014); Sarah Guérin, *Gothic Ivories: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection* (Lisbon and London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Scala, 2015).

¹² http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/insight/yvard_aboutus/yvard_aboutus01.html (accessed 13/10/2018)

¹³ The data Cheetham provides is not always correct. In the course of my research I have often corrected his measurements and locations. In some cases this is because the location of the sculpture has changed over time. It is clear from Cheetham’s correspondence that he was being sent images, measurements and locations by a number of individuals from all over the world, thus the errors are not his alone. The V&A Archive of Art and Design holds papers from the personal archive of Cheetham which were given to them in 2009 after his death. See: V&A AAD/2009/18.

cataloguing of the V&A's collection and his publication of *Medieval English Alabasters*, Cheetham's scholarly approach remained the same. Regardless, by publishing this information there was now a relatively comprehensive reference work to prompt larger questions.¹⁴ One recent example of this has been Karin Land's work on English medieval alabaster images of the Virgin and Child.¹⁵ Yet, even in Land's recent publication, and despite a greater availability of information there remains a common way of thinking about alabasters which has its roots deep in the historiography. It is the ambition of this thesis to place English alabaster in a broader European art-historical context. To do so we must first address how they came to be seen as isolated in scholarship, and what effect this has had on how they have been interpreted and understood.

Historiography, an Introduction to the Issues:

English alabasters were rediscovered from as early as the mid sixteenth century and were recorded in a variety of contexts.¹⁶ In some of the earliest cases they were discovered in the months and years after Reformation concealment and were swiftly destroyed. Over time, they were collected by private individuals and ultimately made their way into early museum collections. This was piecemeal and until the twentieth

¹⁴ Prior to Cheetham's publication, most scholars working on English alabasters published regional or national lists of English alabasters but never anything like the international scale he attempted. For examples of this approach see: Abbé Bouillet, "La Fabrication Industrielle des Retables en Albâtre", *Bulletin Monumental* LXV, 1901, 45-62; Francis Beckett, "Engelske Alabasttavler i Danmark", *Tidsskrift for Industri*, parts I and II, January 1905, 19-24, 45-48; A.S., Tavender, "Medieval English Alabasters in American Museums - Pt I", *Speculum* XXX, Jan 1955, 64-71; A.S., Tavender, "Medieval English Alabasters in American Museums - Pt II", *Speculum* XXXIV, 1959, 437-9; Bera Nordal, "Skrá um enskar alabastursmyndir frá miðöldum sem varðveist hafa á Íslandi", *Árbók Hins íslenska fornleifafélags* 1985, 85-130; Gorguet Pascale, "Répertoire des albâtres anglais du XIVe au XVe siècle dans le Sud-Ouest" (PhD Thesis, Université Toulouse Le Mirail, 1984).

¹⁵ Karin Land, *Die Englischen Alabastermadonnen des Späten Mittelalters*, (Düsseldorf, 2011).

¹⁶ See Chapter One of this thesis for a detailed account of iconoclasm, burial and concealment of alabasters during and after the English Reformation.

century there was no major push to collect them in the way more historically desirable decorative arts were collected, such as Limoges enamels or Gothic ivories.¹⁷ In chapters one and four I show that whole groups of English alabaster were passed down through generations of English families – primarily Roman Catholic - from the Reformation onwards. It is undeniable that a large quantity of English alabasters were hidden or buried in churches and homes at various points during the second half of the sixteenth-century. Recording of the discoveries grew in volume during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially with the overhaul of parish churches taking place during the Gothic revival which brought forth many hidden sculptures.¹⁸ Often appearing in early antiquarian journals, *The Gentleman's Magazine* or regional newspapers, these discoveries and their descriptions followed a formula which was primarily descriptive. Confronted with a growing corpus of data and in light of the lack of available provenance and solid dating evidence, antiquarians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, promoted stylistic periodization as a means by which to understand the large number of sculptures being discovered in England. This approach is unsurprising and completely in line with the picture for the overall development of archaeology and art history in Europe.

¹⁷ No English alabasters were included in the *Ancient and Medieval Art* exhibition which took place in 1850 at the Society of Arts, London. This was the first public exhibition of medieval art in the United Kingdom. See: Augustus Wollaston Franks, *Catalogue of Ancient and Medieval Art Exhibited at the House of the Society of Arts* (London: The Society of Arts, 1850); Philip de la Motte, *Choice Examples of Art Workmanship Selected from the Exhibition of Ancient and Medieval Art* (London: Cundall & Abbey, 1851). It is probably true to say that there has never been a serious impetus to collect English alabasters in any British national museum. Before W.L. Hildburgh's donation in 1946 of over two hundred English alabasters to the V&A, their collection comprised fewer alabasters than the British Museum. I make this point to indicate the lack of enthusiasm for collecting English alabaster, even in the national collection devoted to sculpture.

¹⁸ See: William Anderson, "Re-discovery, Collecting and Display of English Medieval Alabasters", *Journal of the History of Collections*, 2004, Vol. 16 Issue 1, 47-58.

At the same time, Continental collectors and antiquarians developed an interest in English alabaster sculpture.¹⁹ But, there was still uncertainty about where the sculptures were originally produced: England or the Continent? It was only after the pioneering work of W.H. St John Hope (d.1919) that the situation began to be properly rectified.²⁰ In a genre-defining essay he united tombs, altarpieces and freestanding sculptures by means of their material similarity and surviving documentation. Hope laid out what documentary proof he could find for the English origin of the alabasters. He drew on wills, contracts, churchwarden's accounts and Suppression records which showed beyond doubt that England was the place of manufacture, active from the second quarter of the fourteenth century onwards. Hope stressed the different areas where alabaster was worked, including Chellaston, York and Lincoln but settled on Nottingham as a major – perhaps *the* major - centre for the production and sale of the panels. "Nottingham" has stuck as a synecdoche, particularly in the art trade, which still, on the whole, describes all English alabaster sculptures as "Nottingham School". Understanding the persistent survival of this synecdoche is important. It underpins the historical perception of English alabaster as "provincial" and I will return to it in due course. For now, let us consider how the classification of English alabaster sculpture by those who followed Hope further served to isolate it as a provincial phenomenon.

The Classification of English Alabasters and its Implications:

¹⁹ For example, see: Bouillet, "La Fabrication Industrielle", 45-62; Beckett, "Engelske Alabasttavler", 19-24, 45-8.

²⁰ W. H. St. John Hope, "On the Early Working of Alabaster in England", *Archaeological Journal*, 61:1 (1904), 221-240. Hope's article was republished in 1913 in the volume associated with the 1910 exhibition of English alabasters at the Society of Antiquaries, see: W.H. St John Hope, ed. *Illustrated Catalogue of the Exhibition of English Medieval Alabaster Work* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1913) 1-15. For a full bibliography of Hope's scholarship, see: A. Hamilton Thompson, *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sir William St John Hope* (Leeds: John Whitehead and Sons, 1929).

Dating English alabasters has always been problematic. Although Hope was able to locate sufficient documentation he was unable to link any extant sculptures to makers or secure specific dates for particular panels. This made things difficult. With a large corpus of surviving sculptures and such a wide date range of documented activity for the carving of alabaster in England, dating simply on stylistic analysis alone would prove tricky. For the earliest scholars the offer of a date went little beyond a general temporality - time of Edward the Third, for instance - but by the twentieth century there was a desire to place the objects firmly into a chronological developmental trajectory. Hope's work had firmly established production location through documentation, but it was now the job of other scholars to refine and interpret the corpus. Edward Prior (d.1932) was the first to attempt this in a systematic way.²¹ He devised a "Class" system comprising four chronologically arranged groups based on superficial traits he saw in the sculptures - not on documentary evidence - including, as he states: shapes and edgings, measurements, composition and colour.²² Prior's constructed chronology for these groups ran from 1340 to 1500. A *terminus* of c.1500 is strange, especially given that his publication appeared for the first time alongside a reprint of St John Hope's important article, which contains plenty of documentary evidence for English alabaster sculptors working up to the 1530s.²³ The refusal to engage with the period after 1500 is indicative of a prevailing uneasiness amongst nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, primarily related to the interpretation of medieval art and architectural patronage in the

²¹ Edward Prior, "The Sculpture of Alabaster Tables" in *Illustrated Catalogue*, ed. Hope, 16-50.

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ Hope, "Early Working", 10-11.

three decades before the English Reformation. Only recently has the issue started to be properly addressed.²⁴

Prior was wedded to the developmental chronology and in particular to a narrative wherein chronology and quality were linked. In his view the earliest sculptures were better, linked as they were in his stylistic grouping to other works of art in alabaster, such as the tomb of John of Eltham at Westminster Abbey, dated to c.1336. The sculptors of “Class I” practised a style which according to Prior was “not found elsewhere in the general run on (*sic*) alabaster carving.”²⁵ There is an issue here which cannot be overlooked and it concerns patronage and production location. By linking the earliest “Class” to Westminster - a suggestion already put forward by Hope - Prior was emphasising that these early panels had a metropolitan, and in connection to Westminster, an aristocratic - a word he often employed - character to them. He goes on to emphasise the imagined Westminster connection again in his description of “Class I”: “Such expressions are plainly typical of a school of sculpture, which a comparison with the angels on the Westminster tombs, like those of Edmund Crouchback and Aymer de Valence, or those on Edward II’s monument at Gloucester, fixes as that of Westminster.”²⁶

Prior could not escape the fact that most of the evidence for production, as outlined by Hope, pointed towards the English Midlands and North, which at the time

²⁴ For an in depth study see: Phillip Lindley, *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship: Medieval Monuments in Early Modern England* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007); Julian M. Luxford, “Art and Ideology on the Eve of the Reformation: the monument of Osric and the Benedictines of Gloucester”, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 120(1), Jan 2003, 177-211; Julian M. Luxford, *The Art and Architecture of English Benedictine Monasteries, 1300-1540: A Patronage History* (Woodbridge 2005); Michael Carter, “‘It would have pited any heart to see’: Destruction and Survival at Cistercian Monasteries in Northern England at the Dissolution”, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 168:1 (2015), 77-110.

²⁵ Prior, “Alabaster Tables”, 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

of his writing contained a number of highly industrialised centres engaged in mass production of goods. Nottingham, the primary focus of Hope's article, was extremely industrialised in the early twentieth century and was a major centre for textile production. The picture of a modern industrial centre in the form of *fin de siècle* Nottingham was ripe to be reinterpreted, layered as it were, textually and visually over Prior's perceived mass-production of alabaster sculptures in the fifteenth century. In Prior's view the earliest sculptures were 'good' rather than 'bad' and so this discrepancy of quality needed to be addressed. For Prior, these early panels could not have been made by the same workshops who produced the later panels and so he built up a geographical separation. To do this he had to suggest, or build on the notion, that the earlier panels had to come from somewhere else which was not Nottingham, thus a Westminster link was invented based on tenuous stylistic connections. Ultimately this was connected to Prior's pejorative views of workshop culture. His dislike of modern industrial method was implicitly and explicitly interwoven through his interpretation of the developmental trajectory of English alabasters.

The extent to which Prior's approach to the corpus of English alabaster sculpture was motivated by his own ideological principles can be traced through his various scholarly publications. He was first and foremost an architect linked to the Arts and Crafts movement and his ethos followed on from John Ruskin and William Morris, who raged against machine-made objects.²⁷ Both Ruskin and Morris had highly idealised and deeply held concepts about the nature of the medieval craftsman, which profoundly affected Prior.²⁸ In his work as a scholar and architect he was wedded to the

²⁷ Lynne Walker, "E.S. Prior 1852-1932" (PhD thesis., Birkbeck College, London University, 1978). For context, see: Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Studio Vista, 1980), 23-112.

²⁸ Martin Godfrey Cook, *Edward Prior: Arts and Crafts Architect* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press, 2015), 154-155. For the legacy of William Morris, see: Tanya Harrod,

promotion of contemporary, hand-crafted objects against the repetition of mass-produced, industrial products. One of his students, Graham Dawbarn recalled these values: “he had a horror of the machine and of commercialism in architecture.”²⁹ Prior applied this *modus operandi* to his interpretation of English alabasters, but it can be seen across his scholarship, which broadly covered all aspects of English medieval art and architecture. At the exact same time as he devised his class system for English alabasters, Prior was completing, with Arthur Gardner, their extremely influential book: *An Account of Medieval Figure Sculpture in England*, which was published in 1912.³⁰ In it they devised and promoted a teleological argument wherein English sculpture reached its zenith in the thirteenth century:

For the fifty years from 1250 to 1300 the Gothic art of sculpture in England achieved representative works that were the triumphant expression of a craftsmanship new in the history of the world. The generation living about A.D. 1300 saw a golden age in the arts of West Europe: a purity of idea, a perfection of exact execution pervade the works of the sculptor.³¹

Based on the periodization apparent in Johann Winckelmann’s eighteenth-century work on Greek sculpture, except here exported to an English context, Prior and Gardner suggested that England’s past, like other ancient civilisations, must have had its own Golden Age. Conscious of this, they attended to its differences. Gothic sculpture

The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 15-27.

²⁹ Cook, *Edward Prior*, 155.

³⁰ Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner, *An Account of Medieval Figure-Sculpture in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).

³¹ Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure-Sculpture*, 1. To this Prior and Gardner add brass engraving, wall paintings, illuminated manuscripts, stained glass and architectural mouldings. For them it was clearly a wider cultural phenomena amongst artists working in all media.

was brought into a debate alongside and juxtaposed with contemporary concepts of Greek sculpture:

We do not expect for it the unbounded reputation of the Greek sculpture. The delicacy and smoothness of the Greek development of votive statuary in white marble and bronze; the detached individuality of such objective realisation as the Greek and Renaissance ideal aimed at; the picturesque personality which interests us in modern statue-work – all these were by the nature of things outside of the sphere of the Gothic sculptor.³²

Alongside Wincklemann and just thirteen years before *Medieval Figure Sculpture* was published, Henrich Wölfflin delivered his ground-breaking *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, published in 1899, which revolutionised art historical study. Prior and Gardner were surely aware of it. In *Medieval Figure Sculpture* they played out the trope of the “rise and fall” of a civilisation à la Wincklemann but they did this via a stylistic analysis à la Wölfflin. In England’s case the “rise” was registered as the thirteenth-century, which for the authors was the age of great church building and ambitious patronage, epitomised by Wells cathedral, Ripon minster and Westminster abbey. The “fall” on the other hand, was registered as a decline in the production of works of art in the two centuries or so before the English Reformation. Thus the *end* of medieval sculpture coincided with the beginning of a process leading towards modernity, which was itself facing issues relating to art and craft, and especially new revolutions challenging embedded class structures in European society.³³

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Harrod, *Crafts in Britain*, 19-20.

Prior applied the same ideologically motivated chronology for another of his publications from 1905, *Cathedral Builders of England*: “All that masonic invention which had run hotfoot from Romanesque to Perpendicular comes to a standstill with the inventions of the Gloucester mason.”³⁴ Prior needed a historical turning point to mark this change and he found it in the Black Death. It became a seismic shift in the perfect harmonies at work between “high” culture and the development of English art and architecture. For his chronology Prior situated the origin of the English alabaster industry in the decade leading up to the Black Death. This allowed him to project his own contemporary ideological anxiety retroactively onto the sculptural processes of the past: “As far as England is concerned workshop repute has to be called a symptom of the decline of the Gothic era.”³⁵ The production history of English alabasters, marked as it were by workshop production, therefore occupied the entire period of the proposed decline in quality which took place chronologically after the Black Death.

Prior’s argument was one motivated by his perceptions of changing societal structure and the infiltration of the “lower” classes into the “higher” classes. Art, like classes, could be mixed and it was to be avoided. That this deeply worried Prior is clear. It can be traced across all areas of his scholarship, including monasticism: “Apart from decrease in numbers, the effect was one on discipline and repute – the monasteries and canons’ houses, that had been aristocratic establishments with traditions of prestige, saintly and worldly combined, now with the dearth of membership admitted a lower social grade, and a coarser practice of rule.”³⁶ In Prior’s mind a work of art was conditioned by the class of those who paid for it. Alabasters, in Prior’s view, were made

³⁴ Edward Prior, *The Cathedral Builders in England* (London: Seeley & Co., Ltd, 1905), 93.

³⁵ Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 92; Prior, *Cathedral Builders*, 89-97.

³⁶ Edward Prior, *A History of Gothic Art in England* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 427.

for parish churches and were objects produced for the new “Middle Class” arising out of, and gaining power after the Black Death. Prior selectively used this information to describe a collapse in the “aristocratic” patronal system. Alabasters became in Prior’s hands the work - both as crafted things, and as influenced by a classless patron - of the unthinking and tasteless, and this was motivated by their link to industrial workshop practice.

Prior would sometimes make comparison with other object types in his discussions of English alabaster, but he was not particularly concerned with a contextual approach and even less so a Pan-European one. His “classes” served to further separate and isolate English alabaster sculpture into subsections of isolation which were somehow related but problematically so. Yet, his system was influential and can be traced implicitly or explicitly in the work of many scholars who followed. Some, like Francis Cheetham or Lynda Rollaston, even sought to refine and enlarge its structure, unknowingly reproducing and reinforcing what was a flawed and ideologically biased process to begin with.³⁷ Beyond the clear ideological issues, a major problem with this approach is that it denied difference and promoted similarity within an artificially homogenous group, linked superficially by material. In many ways Prior’s scholarly discussions of medieval English alabaster say more about his feelings towards contemporary craft and industrial production than they do anything useful about the subject at hand. His system is not useful in helping to answer questions about why alabasters look the way they do nor how they might have functioned. It is also not particularly accurate as a dating tool. The classification of alabasters by a “Class” structure was used by Prior to describe a kind of movement or flow in workshop

³⁷ Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 32-44; Lynda Rollaston, “English Alabasters in the Fifteenth Century” in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1994), 245-254.

practice, effectively eliminating the role of an artist or patron. It produced an image of unthinking artists and clueless patrons who could not, or did not need to update their designs. This has been a powerful and long-lasting message. Its legacy can be traced across numerous publications and has conditioned the way many scholars have come to think about English alabaster sculptures: especially via the idea that they were made via an industrial process. Laurence Stone, writing after Prior, lamented the majority of English alabaster work, and seeing it as repetitive, he summarised the genre as: “the poverty of invention.”³⁸ Around the same time, Joan Evans remarked that the period “was remarkably sterile in the history of English art.”³⁹ Potent words like “sterility” and “poverty” would have been equally at home in Prior’s writings, or contemporary commentaries on issues surrounding mass-produced goods in the early twentieth-century. Prior’s work reinforced ideas which over time became the Gospel truth or anyway unquestioned. However, he could not do this alone and following on from him W.L. Hildburgh would reinterpret his work over and again, often drawing on the industrial aspect as a starting point.

Industry, the Problem of Englishness and the Psychology of the Past:

This new industry was democratic in character, rather than aristocratic as was the craft wherefrom it came.... Presumably it was, like a number of other medieval industries, organized on lines somewhat resembling those of modern factory production, and probably most of the pieces turned out by it were worked upon by several craftsmen in turn, each of whom specialized in some particular kind of task which was repeatedly allotted to him; that is, it was not a

³⁸ Laurence Stone, *Sculpture in Britain in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), 191.

³⁹ Joan Evans, *English Art, 1307-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 110. For her discussion of alabasters see: 107-110.

fine art, each of whose final products was mainly, if not entirely, the result of one brain expressing itself through its own pair of hands, but, it was a handicraft in each of whose final products several persons, presumably, had been jointly associated.⁴⁰

Alongside W. H. St John Hope and Edward Prior, W. L. Hildburgh (d.1955) made an enormous contribution to the study of medieval English alabaster sculpture during the first half of the twentieth century. The quote above demonstrates his reinterpretation of Hope and Prior's work, taking it one step further and cementing "industry" as a core component of understanding English alabasters. Hildburgh would go on to repeat similar ideas in future publications:

Since an export trade normally is founded upon, as it usually continues to be supported by, internal trade, it would seem reasonable to believe that in the third quarter of the fourteenth century there was already in England an industrialized manufacture of carved alabaster retables. We do not know whether the craftsmen who did industrialized work of that kind were the ones called upon to carve such magnificent reredoses as the one made, a little before 1370, for the Garter Chapel at Windsor Castle, or a few years later for the cathedral church of Durham, but I am inclined to think that they probably left tasks of that sort to hands more skilled than their own. However that may have been, it is clear that within a few more decades the production of alabaster retables had become thoroughly industrialized; the craftsmen engaged in their manufacture were for the most part repeating stock patterns, and not

⁴⁰ W. L. Hildburgh, "Iconographical Peculiarities in English Medieval Alabaster Carvings. Part One", *Folklore*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Mar., 1933), 32-56.

improbably were working under some system comparable to our contemporary mass-production⁴¹

W. L. Hildburgh painted a picture for his reader of an industry where sculptures were produced by modern factory methods. Both of the quotations above are taken from articles which Hildburgh published in *Folklore*, a journal he helped to fund and an organisation of which he was president. At first, Hildburgh's scholarship might appear derivative of Prior's and Hope's, and in many ways it was, but it was the angle of his publications - and especially his collecting activity - which departed radically. His belief was that by the 1340s there had sprung up a new industry in alabaster which was "democratic" in character as opposed to the early alabaster tombs which were "aristocratic". This probably precluded, as he says, any documented alabaster production for royalty or nobility such as that of Peter the Maceon at Windsor. Whereas the perceived "democratic" character of alabaster production had troubled Prior, Hildburgh embraced it and saw it as a way of accessing "folk art". In his scholarship, Hildburgh performed a kind of mental backflip, a feat of twisting the industrial concept laid out by Prior - somewhat confusingly in my view - into something both mass-produced and at the same time folksy. He would eventually settle on and mobilise his perceived folksiness of English alabaster as a way of accessing English character.

What exactly constituted "Englishness" was a major scholarly question in the early twentieth century.⁴² Hildburgh's contribution to the study of English alabaster

⁴¹ W. L. Hildburgh, "Folk-Life Recorded in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings", *Folklore*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Jun., 1949), 252.

⁴² For a discussion of these issues see: William Vaughan, "The Englishness of British Art." *Oxford Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1990), 16. William Vaughan, "Behind Pevsner: Englishness as an Art Historical Category", in *The Geographies of Englishness*:

sculpture can be situated within a wider scholarly culture engaged in the description of *Zeitgeist*, which grew in popularity during the twentieth century, epitomised by the work of Nikolaus Pevsner, who in his 1955 publication *The Englishness of English Art* famously stated that: “The English are not a sculptural nation”.⁴³ Does this mean that England did not produce sculpture in the Middle Ages or that sculpture was destroyed at the Reformation because there is something un-English about it?⁴⁴ Sitting at odds with a Britain looking to modernise - and modern thoughts about Englishness - English alabasters, and to some degree the late medieval past, was hard to square, particularly as much of the historiographical process had already sought to demote rather than promote them. In 1929 J. S. Memes and Allan Cunningham both produced survey books in which they took a broadly negative view of the medieval past. William Vaughan has pointed out was the same year as the Roman Catholic Relief Act.⁴⁵ Situating Hildburgh’s alabaster scholarship alongside these developments exposes how English alabaster was mobilised in favour of ideological ends. But if the alabasters were not, as Michael Baxandall was later to express it “a deposit of a social relationship”, then how exactly were they to be studied?⁴⁶ Hildburgh focused on what he saw as their peculiar features. In effect, this allowed him to detail iconographic or stylistic traits in the alabasters which he could map onto peculiar English folk behaviour. For him the

Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940, eds. David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002), 347-68.

⁴³ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (London: Penguin, 1993), 137.

⁴⁴ J.J.G Alexander, “Medieval art and modern nationalism” in *Medieval art: recent perspectives, A memorial tribute to C.R. Dodwell*, eds. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Timothy Graham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 206-223; Richard Marks, “The Englishness of Gothic Art?” in *Gothic: Art & Thought in the Later Medieval Period, essays in Honour of Willibald Sauerländer*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 64-89.

⁴⁵ William Vaughan, “The Englishness of British Art.” *Oxford Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1990), 16; J. S. Memes, *History of Sculpture, Painting and Architecture* (Edinburgh: Constable and Co., 1929), 209; Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British painters and sculptors* (London: John Murray, 1929).

⁴⁶ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

alabasters contained: “iconographical expressions which would seem to have been peculiar to medieval England, and illustrations of the material culture of the English folk.”⁴⁷ Although it is *avant le lettre*, this approach is Pevsnerian in its application, and highlights Hildburgh’s ambition, which was to distinguish what characteristics an alabaster had which would make it English.

To do this Hildburgh followed a method. He would discover some aspect of an alabaster which he thought peculiar and then juxtapose it with Continental art - which did not have any of the same traits - to show its supposedly English character. This approach was paradoxical given that his own personal collecting activity was taking place almost entirely on the Continent. Although English alabasters were a truly European art form, traded and desired across the Continent, for Hildburgh, they were peculiarly English and they have remained so ever since. By this line of thinking English alabaster sculpture evolved in a vacuum and no other genre of art had any effect on it, especially works of art from the Continent: not painting, sculpture, stained-glass nor book-illumination.⁴⁸ This helped Hildburgh to produce a picture of an isolated group of sculptors who were different from their European counterparts, and further, from all artists everywhere:

As a body, then, the alabaster carvers differed from most of the skilled craftsmen engaged in other forms of contemporary artistic activity. Whereas the greater part of the work of those other craftsmen - the production of sepulchral monuments or of architectural ornament, the painting of devotional pictures or of portraits, the inscribing or the illumination of manuscripts, rich embroidery, the carving of ivory, or the fashioning and bejewelling of gold or silver, for

⁴⁷ Hildburgh, “Folk-Life Recorded”, 249-265.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

example - was done to suit the tastes of aristocratic or other wealthy patrons, theirs was largely intended for the edification and enjoyment of humble folk like themselves. We may, therefore, look upon it as inherently a folk-art - one devoted mainly to the making of things by the folk for the folk, although on occasion applied, like other arts essentially of the common people, to the production of costly objects embodying exceptionally fine craftsmanship.⁴⁹

Hildburgh's legacy is, as John Pope-Hennessy described in his obituary, linked to his collecting activity, which "made possible in the future a systematic study of this characteristic English medieval art."⁵⁰ Yet, Hildburgh's scholarly contribution, wherein he characterised alabaster sculptures as peculiarly English, forces a reassessment of his approach and its historical effect. Meyer Schapiro, writing at the same time as Hildburgh, cautioned scholars looking to link race, nationality and art, which was becoming a heated debate due to the rise of National Socialism in Germany: "It is taught that the great national art can issue only from those who really belong to the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 252. This quote is repeated from an earlier publication where Hildburgh states: "The alabaster employed for the carvings was so soft that it could be cut with ease and quickly, and frequent repetition of the subjects most needed was thus facilitated, resulting in more or less standardized dispositions of the component parts of many of the scenes depicted, and the production of pleasing, well-designed, and effectively balanced compositions by people who were, after all, only craftsmen and not artists in the modern sense, and whose output seems mainly to have been the product of a sort of organized folk-art rather than the individualized expressions of a group of independent artists." See: W. L. Hildburgh, "Iconographical Peculiarities. Part One", 36. In the same publication, Hildburgh repeats himself to drive the message home: "I spoke also of certain popular customs or beliefs, some of them apparently peculiar to England of the time, of which the tables seemed to furnish records. I emphasized that the English alabasterman's art was essentially a folk-art, created and carried on by humble craftsmen whose trade was the manufacture of church-furniture of a particular kind, in quantity and presumably by methods to some extent industrialized, mainly for the contemplation and edification of persons as humble as himself." See also: W. L. Hildburgh, "Representations of the Saints in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings", *Folklore*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Jun., 1950), 68-87.

⁵⁰ John Pope-Hennessy, "Dr W. L. Hildburgh: Obituary", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 98, No. 635 (Feb., 1956), 56: "Hildburgh not only restored to this country a large number of exported works of British origin, but made possible in the future a systematic study of this characteristic English medieval art."

national, more specifically, to the Anglo-Saxon blood; that immigration of foreigners, mixture of peoples, dilutes the national strain and leads to inferior hybrid arts; that the influence of foreign arts is essentially pernicious”.⁵¹ Hildburgh was in no way arguing that medieval English alabasters constituted “great national art” but his approach was problematically tied to a wholly fictitious image of provincially isolated groups of English sculptors with no engagement outside of their workshop and especially not across Europe. This allowed Hildburgh to structure and create pure folk notions of medieval England, which appeared harmless but are in fact troubling, especially considering how the entire notion of “folk art” was manipulated across Europe at the time.

Beyond Hope, Prior and Hildburgh:

Hilburgh pursued the folk aspect of alabasters alone, yet the industrial concept can be traced from Prior through Hildburgh and into mainstream scholarly thinking. Lawrence Stone’s *Sculpture in Britain: The Middle Ages*, published in 1955, was the last scholarly attempt to write a long history of British medieval sculpture. For his discussion of English alabaster sculpture he repeated, almost *verbatim*, the work of Hildburgh and others: “by the middle of the fourteenth century there are documentary proofs that the manufacture of alabaster panels was becoming a distinctive national industry”.⁵² Stone outlined how English alabaster sculptures were apparently traded from England across Latin Christendom. Yet he struggled, as others have, to explain why foreign patrons would have been interested in English alabasters. His solution was an economic argument. Each location for English alabasters abroad was simply another zone won over by English merchants flogging cheap wares: “the reason for their popularity were

⁵¹ Meyer Schapiro, “Race, Nationality and Art”, *Art Front*, (1936), p.10

⁵² Stone, *Sculpture in Britain*.

(*sic*) their cheapness.”⁵³ For Stone, like those before him, the idea of a “national industry” was attractive. It could easily be linked to workshop practice, repetition and an industrial scale of production, all of which worked to influence if not create the idiosyncratic *look* of an English alabaster. Eric Maclagan went so far as to compare them to modern plaster casts made on the Rue Saint-Sulpice in Paris:

The Nottingham workshops must have been rather like a mediaeval equivalent of the Rue S. Sulpice which often shows a tendency to be a little behind the times. The English- man of the early years of Henry VIII was quite ready to see the soldiers asleep round the grave of the Risen Christ dressed in such armour as he found worn in the street; but it is very unlikely that he would have objected to see them in armour which had gone out of fashion many years before. And the not too independent craftsman who executed his order for a "table of alblaster" at five marcs or so was probably glad enough to go on copying a time-honoured design which was recommended to him by having sold well in the past.⁵⁴

Stone must have found this statement compelling as he reiterated the idea of alabasters as casts made on the “Rue S. Sulpice”. He continued the tradition begun by Prior of retroactively applying contemporary concerns about industrialisation, specifically in relation to the concept of the artist. Further, he followed Prior in suggesting that industrial scale affected quality, which he also perceived negatively:

It cannot be denied that there is a bourgeois quality of mediocrity, of latent vulgarity, and of unadventurous smugness about much late fourteenth-century

⁵³ Stone, *Ibid.*, 180, repeating Hildburgh from: Hildburgh, ‘Iconographical Peculiarities. Part One’, 34.

⁵⁴ Eric Maclagan, “An English Alabaster Altarpiece in the Victoria and Albert Museum”, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 36, No. 203 (Feb., 1920), 53-57, 60-65, 63.

sculpture. Nor is it entirely accidental that these qualities should coincide with a period in which increased proportion of sculptural output was being devoted to satisfying the demands of a new class.⁵⁵

In this first part of the introduction I have highlighted how certain issues embedded in the historiography, such as classification, or concepts of industrial production and “Englishness”, have affected the perception of English alabaster sculpture. By the second half of the twentieth century scholars were becoming less concerned with dating and attribution, and the distinctly isolated genre of English alabaster sculpture would have no part to play in the New Art History, despite its supposed interest in production, consumption and social class. However, alabasters would partly become valuable tools for revisionist histories focused on Catholicism and iconoclasm in England, and the art historical turn towards devotional interaction with objects.

The current situation:

Over the past thirty years English alabasters have generally fallen into three different historiographical camps. They are: [1] Evidence of the development of iconographic types, [2] Evidence of iconoclasm or iconoclastic behaviour, [3] Evidence of devotion to images in the late Middle Ages. In rare cases these themes are connected. For instance, in *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, Richard Marks combined thorough research into late medieval wills with surviving material evidence to reconstruct patterns of behaviour before and around the time of the English Reformation.⁵⁶ Similarly, in

⁵⁵ Stone, *Sculpture in Britain*, 178. See also: Arthur Gardener, *A handbook of English medieval sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 332: “Many of the panels, or tables as they were called, are crude in execution, and the harsh cutting and shop mannerisms are not attractive on close inspection.”

⁵⁶ Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

The Stripping of the Altars Eamon Duffy situated English alabaster sculptures within a rich pre-Reformation image-culture focused on devotion to the saints.⁵⁷ Both authors brought English alabasters into a wider - but still relatively nationally segregated - discussion focused on transitional image culture at the Reformation. Neither of these projects engaged with the making of English alabasters or sought to rethink the sculptures in any formal way. In fact, Richard Marks argued against it: “The minute and unrepresentative fraction of extant carved representations rules out a formalist approach; to pursue this methodology would be akin to attempting a jigsaw puzzle with 99 per cent of the pieces missing”.⁵⁸ It was the quality and quantity of the alabasters, sometimes in very poor condition, which dissuaded Marks, as it had many others, from devoting too much time to thinking about their formal differences. For Marks it was a case of the haystack being too large and the needle being too small. Instead, he chose to focus on what people might have done with them. This is, of course, a valuable approach but I see a problem between interpretation and material evidence. When discussing the alabaster hoards discovered at Whittlesford and Toft, Marks treats the groups as a collection of fragments rather than separating them into their constituent parts. The alabasters are therefore isolated by way of historical circumstance. Broken at the Reformation, their history was lost and cannot be recovered. When the assemblage from Whittlesford was displayed in the exhibition *Art Under Attack: Histories of*

⁵⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Eamon Duffy, “The Reformation and Alabastermen” in *Object of Devotion: Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture from the Victoria and Albert Museum* ed. Paul Williamson (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2010), 54-65.

⁵⁸ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 2. Phillip Lindley has been the only scholar to question Marks’ comments, see: Philip Lindley, “The Visual Arts and their Functions in the Pre-Reformation Church”, in *Art Re-formed: Re-assessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts*, eds. Tara Hamling and Richard L. Williams (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 15.

British Iconoclasm at Tate Britain, they were shown as a mixed hoard rather than reconstructed altarpieces or freestanding sculptures.⁵⁹

Marks and Duffy took English alabaster sculpture in a new and promising scholarly direction, yet, even in these much admired publications, the sculptures remained isolated. For instance, when discussing the cult of St George in England, Marks chose to illustrate his point with an English alabaster of St George, which I discuss in detail in chapter three. It was made by an English sculptor but it is unlikely to have spent much time in England. It was produced for a high ranking Continental patron, probably Pedro López de Ayala of Castile, chancellor of Castile. Further, the sculpture is unique and can be situated at the forefront of iconographical developments in Bohemia and France. Simply put, it is like using a work of art as luxurious as the Wilton Diptych to illustrate what kinds of panel paintings were available and seen in the majority of English parish churches around 1400. Here we can see the work of Prior and Hildburgh in action, diluting difference and promoting similarity. This is a minor point. I make it only to demonstrate that recent publications which have included English alabaster would have benefitted from a study engaging with them as physical objects, beyond an iconographic type, or with real interrogation of their physical characteristics and provenance. Through a variety of methods this thesis argues against Marks' belief in the impossibility of reconstruction, and shows that not only is it possible but that in doing so there is much to learn. Yet it also shows that this need not distract from addressing other important histories, such as that of the Reformation, or an analysis of late medieval devotional structures. In any case it strengthens both approaches.

⁵⁹ Tabitha Barber and Stacy Boldrick, *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013), 60-61.

Personal History and Approach:

I first began thinking about medieval English alabaster sculpture as an undergraduate, several years before a PhD proposal was put together. My BA dissertation focused on English medieval art and architecture and was titled *Revelations of Unknowing: English Mysticism and the Visual Arts*. It was supervised by Sandy Heslop, who has also supervised this thesis and it included a number of alabaster sculptures. I next encountered English alabasters when I started a trainee curatorship at the British Museum in 2012. My project was to catalogue the collection of medieval alabaster sculpture which had, until then, received very little attention. Unlike the V&A's collection, it was formed primarily in the nineteenth century and mostly from English collections, which in several instances came with an archaeological provenance.⁶⁰ During my traineeship at the BM I realised that there was scope for a larger project on English alabasters beyond the walls of the museum. Two factors played a part in this. First, although there was a relatively large existing bibliography – comprising antiquarian style reports, catalogues, etc. – there had never been anything like a major synoptic study of the material. Second, English alabasters had mostly been discussed in an English context and were missing from larger Pan-European surveys of the period. Simply put, whatever contribution English alabasters made to the European Middle Ages was unrecognised. I saw this as a lacuna in the historiography that needed addressing.

This thesis is structured around four main research areas which are woven through the chapters: [1] destruction, survival and reuse, [2] re-evaluating the importance of patrons and sculptors, [3] reconstructing altarpieces, [4] the place of alabasters within the wider European trade of images. Each of these areas is pertinent to

⁶⁰ See Chapter Two of this thesis, 94-140.

the entire thesis, so rather than simply dedicate a chapter to each, they are brought into the debate where relevant. Each chapter contains sculptures in a fragmentary state and so it is essential to understand why this happened and how before moving on to discuss the individual pieces. In this way, Chapter One, a broad analysis of the status and significance of English alabaster after the Reformation, sets the scene for the following chapters. It addresses issues such as iconoclasm, concealment of sculptures, and post-Reformation trade in English alabasters. Apart from it, the rest of this thesis is structured chronologically, beginning in the fourteenth century and ending in the late sixteenth. Chapter Two begins with a case study of the Kettlebaston altarpiece at the British Museum. From the surviving fragments at Kettlebaston – and with comparisons – it is possible to reconstruct what is probably the earliest surviving complete fourteenth-century Marian altarpiece in alabaster. It is also amongst the earliest surviving complete multi-panelled narrative altarpieces. Beyond simple description it has yet to be fully explored. Through an analysis of the Kettlebaston sculptures wider issues concerning the status of imported images into England in the mid-fourteenth century will be questioned. A number of other works of art are discussed alongside the Kettlebaston group, including ivories, painted and carved altarpieces, tombs and manuscripts. This leads on to a discussion about the development and format of English alabaster altarpieces alongside altarpieces more widely as a genre, opening up questions of iconographic complexity. Chapter Three focuses on the internationality of English alabaster in the fourteenth century by looking at two sophisticated free-standing sculptures with important Continental provenances. It is the first of two chapters which discuss English alabaster abroad. The first sculpture is a Virgin and Child with a Belgian provenance. It is amongst the best preserved fourteenth-century English alabaster images but in previous studies it has been isolated within an iconographical taxonomy.

By situating it within the developing taste for marble and alabaster carved Virgin and Child images on the Continent and in England, the sculpture is repositioned outside its English manufacture and within a European nexus of image-making. The same is true of the second sculpture addressed by Chapter Three, which is an image of St George and the Dragon with a provenance situating it in Ayala, Northern Spain. When both of these sculptures are placed in the European context for which they were made, it is possible to remove them from their entanglement within the historiographical issues outlined in this introduction. Chapter Four is a case study of a single late fifteenth-century altarpiece, the constituent parts of which have become separated over time. It begins with a reconstruction of the altarpiece and an identification of the patrons but broadens out to a discussion of the sculptor and workshop responsible for its making. For the first time, a group of English alabasters is brought together and attributed to a single workshop, which I will argue produced altarpieces and free-standing alabaster sculptures for patrons across England and France, possibly elsewhere too. This workshop's working method categorically disproves any constructs of provincial isolation set out by Prior or Hildburgh, particularly shown through access to printed images from Continental Europe. It is the access to printed images which opens up a wider discussion in Chapter Four, detailing how alabaster sculptors in England were working in the years around 1500. Chapter Five deals with English alabasters abroad but specifically explores how they were reframed in Denmark and Holland after the Reformation. This chapter opens up questions and addresses temporal issues beyond the moment of creation. It argues that English alabaster sculptures continued to be valued in a variety of different contexts across Continental Europe long after they stopped being produced in England. The aim throughout this thesis is to suggest that context matters. By starting with the material evidence of the alabasters themselves a

new history of English alabaster sculpture can be written, one which argues against fabricated concepts of sculptors producing work in provincial isolation, and situates English alabaster sculpture in a wider, European history of art.

Chapter One

The Status and Significance of English Alabaster after the Reformation:

Iconoclasm, Concealment and Rediscovery

A number of alabasters which are central to this thesis were broken, hidden or moved abroad during the years following the English Reformation.⁶¹ It would be difficult to discuss them without first outlining the process that mediated their change in status from devotional images to targets of destruction. This chapter will examine sixteenth-century changes in English religious doctrine and describe how this affected alabaster sculpture in four different ways: [1] iconoclasm; [2] concealment or burial in churches; [3] concealment or continued use in houses; [4]; images taken abroad. It builds on the work of Richard L. Williams, who over the course of his as yet unpublished MA and PhD, greatly nuanced our understanding of religious sculpture and painting in the age of Elizabeth I.⁶² Further, this chapter engages with the work of William Anderson, who in an exemplary article, dealt with similar material but focused on English alabasters.⁶³ The scope of Anderson's article was too limited to do justice to the long and complicated history of alabaster after the Reformation. It is my aim to provide as comprehensive a picture here as possible, setting the scene for what follows. But first, some background.

⁶¹ For the most recent survey of the treatment of English alabaster during this period, see: Duffy, "The Reformation and Alabastermen", 54-65.

⁶² Richard L. Williams, "Religious Pictures and Sculpture in Elizabethan England: Censure, Appreciation and Devotion" (PhD Thesis, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2003); Richard L. Williams, "Domestic religious painting in England, c.1530 - c.1600" (MA Thesis, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 1993). See also: Richard L. Williams, "Collecting and Religion in Late Sixteenth-Century England", in *The Evolution of English Collecting: The Reception of Italian Art in the Tudor and Stuart Periods*, ed. Edward Chaney (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 159-200.

⁶³ Anderson, "Collecting and Display", 47-58.

English alabaster was popularised as a luxury sculptural material from the early fourteenth century onwards. A variety of object types were made in alabaster including tombs, panels for altarpieces and freestanding sculpture. Two of the best documented quarries were located in Tutbury, Staffordshire, and Chellaston, Derbyshire, but there must have been numerous other smaller quarries given the large quantity of the material in the Midlands and North of England. Yet Tutbury and Chellaston were located near to the river Trent, which gave easy access to a transport network, allowing for the movement of alabaster up towards Nottingham or elsewhere by boat or barge. Nottingham's primacy as the largest city on the Trent swayed earlier scholars to define it as *the* centre for production but it is clear that sculptors worked in towns across the Midlands and North including Burton-on-Trent, Lincoln and York.⁶⁴ Like the sixteenth-century limewood sculptors of southern Germany who operated out of Ulm, Nuremburg, Wurzburg or Augsburg, material availability combined with skills, knowledge and trade networks dictated centres of production. Yet unlike those limewood sculptors, very little documentation survives in England to help establish who exactly the alabaster sculptors were and what kind of status they held. The picture is further complicated by destruction and dispersal during and after the Reformation, which this chapter seeks to outline in detail.

Tomb effigies are the earliest surviving English alabaster sculptures and that of Edward II at Gloucester cathedral is frequently cited as the earliest known example.⁶⁵ Tombs fared better than devotional images at the Reformation and so the perceived

⁶⁴ See Introduction, 14.

⁶⁵ This tomb has been the source of much discussion. For the most recent publication to deal with it, see: Jill Barlow, et al., *Edward II: his Last Months and his Monument* (Gloucestershire: Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and Past Historic, 2015).

material isolation of Edward's alabaster effigy is supported by this fact.⁶⁶ It often appears that devotional images in alabaster took a few decades to appear after the tombs, yet, inventories and donations for smaller freestanding images certainly suggest that early sculptors working in alabaster produced more than just tombs.⁶⁷ A tomb, especially a royal one, would have been an exceptional, rather than a regular commission. Edward's alabaster effigy is often discussed alongside contemporary white marble tombs of French or Scottish kings, but it should also be seen as part of a wider European interest in alabaster; sculptors from France, Spain and Italy were all experimenting with the material at around the same time.⁶⁸ When viewed within this material network, Edward's tomb, and by proxy many of the other earliest English alabasters, do not appear isolated but are united by Europe-wide fourteenth-century sculptural experimentation with marble and alabaster. However, the isolation of Edward's tomb and many other English alabaster sculptures is due to the historical shifts which took place during the sixteenth century. It is essential to outline the historical events which have contributed to their perceived isolation and diminished status.

Part One: Changes to Religious Doctrine and Iconoclasm in the Sixteenth Century

At the bottom left hand corner of Herman Moll's 1724 map of Monmouthshire is a engraving of an alabaster image of St Michael, described as 'The alabaster sculpture found near Poreh Shini' [fig.1.1].⁶⁹ Produced for his volume *Moll's England and Wales*, the alabaster image, along with many other regional "archaeological" discoveries, situate

⁶⁶ See Lindley, *Tomb Destruction*.

⁶⁷ See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of these early donations/commissions, 141-178.

⁶⁸ I discuss this further in Chapter Three.

⁶⁹ My sincere thanks to Jeremy Warren for drawing this sculpture at the Ashmolean to my attention. See: Jeremy Warren, *Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture: A Catalogue of the Collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, vol.II (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum Publications, 2014), 716.

the cartographic present within an historical past. The image of Michael is amongst the earliest antiquarian depictions of an English alabaster but the discovery happened long before. Moll records that around 1660 “some labourers digging in a Quarry between *Kaer Leon* Bridge and *Christ-Church*, near *Porth Sini Kran*, discovered a large Free-Stone Coffin...A gilded Alabaster Statue of a Person in a Coat of Mail was also found near the Coffin.”⁷⁰ He locates and describes the sculpture as “pretty well preserved in the Ashmolean repository”, which suggests that he might have inspected the alabaster himself [fig.1.2]. Moll’s account of the sculpture and its discovery paraphrase the 1695 revised edition of William Camden’s *Britannia*: “the account of the coffin and statue I receiv’d from the worshipful Captain Matthias Bird who saw both himself; and for the farther satisfaction of the curious, was pleas’d lately to present the statue to the Ashmolean Repository at Oxford.”⁷¹ Matthew Bird’s donation of the sculpture is recorded in 1693, in the Book of Benefactors at the Ashmolean:

Matthew Bird, a ship's master from Caerleon in Monmouthshire, gave the Museum a figure in a coat of mail, sculpted from alabaster, which was once covered in gold leaf, holding a sword, still fully preserved, in its right hand and, in its left, a pair of scales. The right pan of the scales, which is the heavier, shows a girl's face, the left one shows the globe of the Earth. It was dug up in about 1660 near the town of Caerleon or, in Latin, Isca Legionum (where the Second Augustan legion used to be stationed) near the spot known as Porth Siny Kran.⁷²

⁷⁰ Herman Moll, *A New Description of England and Wales* (London: 1724), 252

⁷¹ William Camden, *Britannia* (London, 1695), 607, 607, fig.5.

⁷² AMS [Ashmolean Manuscript] 2, ‘Ashmolean Museum, *Book of Benefactors, 1683-1766*’.

It is clear from the revised *Britannia* – and Moll’s lack of identification – that no one who sought to publish it was able to date or identify the image: “at first view it might seem to be the Goddess Astræe, yet I cannot satisfie my self as to the device of the Globe and Woman in the scales.”⁷³ Astrea was commonly linked allegorically with Elizabeth I or Queen Anne, and the misidentification here shows how far reaching the impact of the Reformation had been.

There are a number of puzzling aspects to the story. Why labourers were digging at the place of discovery and how Captain Bird came into possession of the alabaster is not recorded. Yet, the inability to decipher the identity of the figures speaks to the success of Reformation image legislation in England. Before 1550 it would have been inconceivable that someone would identify the figure as anyone other than St Michael, the archangel who weighs the souls of those to be judged. Parishioners across England would have been familiar with his image, which abounded in wall paintings, sculpture and on screens in churches great and small. By 1660 this knowledge had been lost, or more accurately, it had been erased. It was no accident that collective memory of certain types of religious images had vanished with time. Memory was specifically mentioned as one of the reasons for removal and destruction in the injunctions against images.⁷⁴ The phrase “so that no memory remains” was frequently repeated as a legislative clause.

Changes in religious doctrine during the sixteenth century fundamentally altered the way in which people in England were legally permitted to engage with particular images both publically and privately. This field of study – Reformation studies and the history of iconoclasm – is enormous and is well trodden ground. The work of Margaret

⁷³ Camden *Britannia*, 607.

⁷⁴ David Dymond and Clive Paine, *The Spoil of Long Melford Church: The Reformation in a Suffolk Parish* (Suffolk: The Salient Press, 1988), 36.

Aston, Eamon Duffy, Christopher Haigh, Alexandra Walsham and Richard L.

Williams looms large over much of what I will say about the post-Reformation history of English alabaster.⁷⁵ Yet it is worthwhile reviewing the evidence specifically to examine the treatment of alabaster sculpture.

An Outline of the Changes: The case of Long Melford and Parish Compliance:

In the two centuries after the English Reformation, the majority of English medieval alabaster sculptures were removed from the altars, image niches, or tomb chests where they were situated, and were either completely destroyed, left broken in the churches or sold on to other parts of Europe; a portion of these sculptures survived in England, in some cases as undamaged whole pieces and in others as mutilated carvings, or collections of broken fragments.⁷⁶ These objects survived by being buried or walled-up in areas of the church and church-yard or through purchase, confiscation and confinement in houses. The majority lay concealed for centuries, later to be discovered in alterations to late medieval churches and private dwellings. Pinpointing exactly when alabasters were removed, mutilated or broken is complicated and can only be done with certainty in the rare instances where documents or descriptions exist. Changes and reversals in the law between the years 1536 and 1558 further complicates the picture.

Proclamations against certain images began during the reign of Henry VIII, at which time alabasters were first removed from suppressed monasteries. These sculptures were

⁷⁵ All of these authors have published prolifically on the Reformation in Britain. For examples of their work in this field, see: Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Duffy, *Altars*; Williams, "Religious Pictures"; Alexandra Walsham, *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain* (London: Ashgate, 2014); Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁷⁶ Margaret Aston, "Public Worship and Iconoclasm" in *The archaeology of reformation 1480-1580*, eds. David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (Leeds: Maney, 2003), 9-28; Philip Lindley, "The Visual Arts and their Functions in the Pre-Reformation Church" in *Art Re-formed: Re-assessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts*, eds., Tara Hamling and Richard L. Williams (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 15.

not, however, destroyed but likely taken elsewhere. In January 1537 during the suppression of Coxford Priory, Norfolk, the alabaster from the choir was sold for five shillings and purchased by Sir Thomas Lestrangle.⁷⁷ Lestrangle of Hunstanton, Norfolk, was appointed as Sheriff of the county in 1530 and acted as Royal commissioner for the *Valor ecclesiasticus* in Norfolk. He was involved in the suppression of Coxford, Westacre, Great Massingham and Walsingham.⁷⁸ Perhaps the alabaster altarpiece which now no longer survives was somehow connected to the Lestrangle family, or perhaps Sir Thomas spotted a bargain. In Lestrangle's case the purchasing of alabaster should be seen within the wider context of his re-appropriation of monastic property; he purchased land at Massingham, Westacre and Coxford.

No legislative measures were put in place during the 1530s to prevent individuals like Lestrangle from purchasing alabaster tables from suppressed houses, except those representing St Thomas Becket or the Man of Sorrows which were now forbidden under law.⁷⁹ Yet there is evidence to suggest that images and objects were removed from some churches before the royal commissioners could document the interiors. At the Grey Friars in Plymouth "the rest of the stuff was like to have been "brybeyd" away,"⁸⁰ and at the Grey Friars of Dorchester it was recorded: "divers images

⁷⁷ "Item sold, the table of alabaster in the quire to Sr. Thomas Strange, five shillings", see: William Page, ed., "Houses of Austin canons: The priory of Coxford", in *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2* (London, 1906), 378-380. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/norf/vol2/pp378-380> [accessed 6 June 2015]. For Lestrangle, see: Cord Oestmann, *Lordship and Community: The Lestrangle Family and the Village of Hunstanton* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 249.

⁷⁸ Joy Rowe, "Lestrangle, Sir Thomas (c.1490-1545)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16515>, accessed 6 June 2015]

⁷⁹ Aston, *Broken Idols*, 367.

⁸⁰ James Gairdner, ed., "Henry VIII: September 1538, 16-20", in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 13 Part 2, August-December 1538* (London, 1893), 141-154: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no2/pp141-154> [accessed 25 January 2015].

stolen”.⁸¹ Certain cases suggest there were personal connections between individuals and the alabasters removed. At a similar time to Lestrange’s removal of the alabaster altarpiece at Coxford, a late fourteenth-century alabaster showing the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket was removed from a Derbyshire church – Beauchief Abbey has been suggested – and kept by the Foljambe family in whose care it remains to this day [fig.1.3].⁸² The heraldic shields at the base of the alabaster document the marriage between Sir Godfrey Foljambe (d.1376) and Avena Ireland (d.1382). Another alabaster sculpture at All Saints, Bakewell, commemorates Godfrey and Avena, and is possibly by the same sculptor [fig.1.4].⁸³ The alabaster of St Thomas’ martyrdom might have carried some special significance, and perhaps served as evidence of their union. Therefore a later Foljambe retained it rather than allowing it to be broken, as was directed by the change in the law. Philip Lindley has shown that the purchasing and removal of alabaster sculptures from churches and monasteries under threat was not confined to panels for altarpieces or free standing sculptures, but that alabaster tombs were also removed, often resituated at another location.⁸⁴ Tomb sculptures, like devotional alabasters, were part of a matrix of devotion and interaction with images that characterised much of late medieval Christianity in England. For those individuals removing sculptures from churches, especially ones which bore their family heraldry, there must surely have been some awareness that these were historical artefacts as much

⁸¹ Ibid., 164-194: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no2/pp164-194> [accessed 26 January 2015].

⁸² My sincere thanks to Michael Foljambe and Ralph Foljambe for providing access to the sculpture, for showing me documents associated with it and for sharing their views and enthusiasm for the piece. See: Hope, *Illustrated Catalogue*, 72, pl.XXVIII; Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 210-211.

⁸³ Arthur Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs of the Pre-Reformation Period in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 13.

⁸⁴ Lindley, *Tomb Destruction*, 8-18; Phillip Lindley, “Disrespect for the Dead? The Destruction of Tomb Monuments in Mid-Sixteenth-Century England”, *Church Monuments*, 19 (2004), 53-79.

as they were venerated images. It is unsurprising that in the early years of the Reformation they would be cherished by those who paid for, used them, or whose ancestors were memorialised through them.⁸⁵

After the death of Henry VIII, governmental efforts to remove idolatrous images were dramatically increased. The first major Parliamentary act which affected all alabaster images was issued under Edward VI. This law, article twenty-eight from the King's Injunction of 1547, dealt specifically with images in churches and homes. It ordered the removal of:

All shrines, covering of shrines, all tables, candlesticks, trindles or rolls of wax, pictures, paintings, and all other feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition: so that no memory of the same remains in walls, glass windows or elsewhere within their churches or houses.⁸⁶

At Long Melford, Suffolk, the churchwardens accounts for 1547 reference this injunction explicitly in a heading from part of an inventory of goods removed or sold from the church, and the payment to individuals for the task:⁸⁷ “the gere takyn down by the Kynges commandymnt & vysytors, as in the Kynges iniuncyon doth appere in the 28 artyckle & other places, as of the other goodes longyng unto Melford Churche that

⁸⁵ Removing sculpture from churches has mostly been explored in connection to the devotional context of the object. Recent studies suggest that sculptures functioned in a variety of ways outside of strict devotional contexts. Julian Luxford, “English Medieval Tombs as Forensic Evidence”, *Church Monuments* 14 (2009), 7-25; Jessica Barker, “Monuments and Marriage in Late Medieval England: Origins, Function and Reception of Double Tombs” (PhD Thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2015), 147-182.

⁸⁶ Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 36. For a summary of this period under Edward VI, see: Duffy, *Altars*, 448-478; Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Volume I: Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 246-277.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40: “Item, payd for the having down of the imagys & tabernacles & oder tabylles, Rafe Borom & hys lad...[7 shilling 1 pence]”. For an in depth account how far this injunction impacted parishes across England, see: Duffy, *Altars*, 478-504.

was to you delivered.”⁸⁸ Underneath this heading there is a list of ‘goodes takyn & solde by William Dyke & William Marsshall’, churchwardens at Long Melford. This list includes brass, wax, clothes, bells *et al.* Three references mention alabaster. They describe the sale of several sculptures in the church to Master Clopton:

Item, sold to Master Clopton the greateste image[s] aboute the chyrche & chappelles, of alabaster for [3 Shillings].⁸⁹

Item, sold to Mr Clopton the alter of alabaster in Owr Ladys chapel [6 shillings, 8 pence].⁹⁰

Memorandum, lefte unto Master Clopton 2 stonys at the end of the alter in Master Clopton’s yelde [aisle], & the tabyll of allebaster in the sayd yelde, & a lytell tabyll in Sent Annys chappell, & all the gere therin to dres up the chappell, & discharge the church wardens & to do yt hys plesur.⁹¹

Master William Clopton (d.1562) was responsible for removing all of the alabaster from the church. Why was this? Did he, like Lestrangle or perhaps a member of the Foljambe family, feel connected to the sculptures due to a long history of patronage involving his family and the institution?⁹² It is worth noting that he was primarily concerned with the alabasters rather than painted images or those in wood. Other inventory descriptions record such transactions: “Item, sold to John Sparpoynt all the greate imagys [6 shillings 8 pence].⁹³ These actions are possibly an indicator of the high

⁸⁸ Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 36.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

status of the material in some cases, the alabaster altar in ‘Owr Lady’s chapel’ being as expensive as ‘all the greate imagys’.

A long history of patronage between William Clopton’s family and Long Melford church can be traced. Besides the Clopton chapel and separate chantry chapel for his father, the family are additionally referred to by name on the fabric of the church. This time it they are named in connection to an altarpiece commissioned for the high altar. The evidence comes from an inscription on the exterior of the south clerestory dated 1481:

Pray for the sowles of Rogere Moryell, Margarete and Kateryn his wyffies, of whose goodis the seyde Kateryn, John Clopton, Mastr Wyllem Qwaytis and John Smyth, ded...make the tabill at the hye awtere, anno domini millesimal quadringentesimo octogesimo p’mo.⁹⁴

Clopton’s recorded purchasing of the alabaster sculptures was surely linked to this patronal history between his family and the church, but he was not alone in removing objects. Roger Martyn, who was the churchwarden of Long Melford, famously admitted in his 1580 account of the interior of the church that “there was also in my ile, called Jesus Ile, at the back of the altar, a table with a crucifix on it, with two thieves hanging, one every side, which is in my house decayed, and the same I hope my heires will repaire and restore again, one day.”⁹⁵

Long Melford’s accounts expose the uneasiness in some parishes surrounding mid-sixteenth-century changes in religious doctrine, and indicate that several amongst them acted distinctively against their will but in compliance with the injunctions set out

⁹⁴ Kim Woods, “The Pre-Reformation Altarpiece of Long Melford Church”, *The Antiquaries Journal*, Vol.82, 2002, 93-104; Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 94.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

by parliament in 1547. Roger Martyn's feelings about his hidden crucifix, which he hoped would be brought back into the church are enticing, yet they cannot speak for every image removed from a church and taken into a house during the course of the Reformation. They give voice to the voiceless and indicate that at least some individuals hoped to see pre-Reformation images returned for use.

Three years after the 1547 injunction, and in direct reference to the actions described above, an additional clause was issued to address the well-documented process of removal of images from churches:

Anye Images of Stone Tymbre Alleblaster or Earthe graven carved or paynted, which heretofore have bene taken out of anye Churche or Chappell, or yet stand in any Churche or Chappell, and doe not before the laste daye of June next ensuyng deface and destroye or cause to be defaced and destroyed the same Images' would first be fined and subsequently imprisoned.⁹⁶

This new injunction implies that the government was well aware of what was taking place, both through the resistance to dismantling images in churches, and in the concealment of objects through removal and private ownership.⁹⁷ Richard L. Williams has argued for a closer analysis between what is defined in the legislation as an "abused" image and other types of object. He linked the injunctions to a wider context, exploring theological approaches alongside documentary evidence for the ownership of images. For Williams it was the way in which an image was actually used, or might continue to be used, that distinguished whether or not it was 'abused'. This dictated whether or not

⁹⁶ *The Statutes of the Realm, IV*, London, Record Commission, pt.1, 111, reference extracted from Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 316.

⁹⁷ For a detailed investigation into these injunctions see Duffy, *Altars*, 448-477; Williams, "Religious pictures", 18.

it needed to be damaged in some way to prevent use. For his study Williams looked beyond the material evidence towards the writings of individuals like Archbishop Cranmer who stated: “Here you see how he is cursed of god, that setteth but one ymage in a secret corner of his own house to worshippe it. But much more daunger it is, to set up ymages in the temple of God which is ye open & commen pace (sic) to honor the only living god.”⁹⁸ Cranmer’s 86th Article ordered the removal of all images from churches in 1548 and included a clause about houses: “Whether you know any that keep in their houses undefaced, any abused or feigned images, any tables, pictures, paintings or other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, or superstition.”⁹⁹ How far these injunctions were followed countrywide is difficult to determine, although as will be shown it was probably somewhat sporadic. The regional or local context is important and must always be taken into account alongside the weight of official legislation.

After the death of Edward VI (d.1553) and the reinstatement of Catholicism under Queen Mary (d.1558), the churchwardens’ accounts at Long Melford, dated 1554-58 detail alabaster images either procured for or returned to the church: “item, receyed of John Gawger abovesaid in partye of a payement of his father’s legacye, thre sylke pelowes, two candelstickes, 2 ymages of alabaster, a booke...[15 shillings].”¹⁰⁰

Across the country images returned to prominent places. An Italian merchant present in London during Mary’s formal entry in 1553 records: “Images of the saints and the

⁹⁸ Williams, “Religious pictures”, 42.

⁹⁹ Williams, “Religious Pictures”, 42; *Visitations and Injunctions*, vol.II, 189.

¹⁰⁰ This was in fulfilment of a gift of £5, given in 1528 by Robert Gawger, father of John Gawger. “The gifts comprised miscellaneous church goods which were probably “second-hand””, see: Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 43, 57. For a summary of this period under Mary Tudor, see: Duffy, *Altars*, 524-564. For two in depth studies of this period see: Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven: Yale, 2009); Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts*, 277-294.

Virgin appeared in the windows of the people's houses after years of concealment."¹⁰¹

The list from Long Melford records the purchasing of wax, the 'wasshyng' of images, the making of new images, the painting of objects, and the purchasing of new cloth and vestments. Yet it also records, as in the case of John Gawger, the fulfilment of payments relating to bequests made before the Edwardine injunctions.¹⁰² These accounts document an institution which was in the process of reinstating a Catholic aesthetic which had been dismantled during the previous seven years.

With the sudden death of Mary and the subsequent return of Protestantism under Elizabeth I¹⁰³, the previous injunctions against imagery were renewed in 1559:

take away, utterly extinct and destroy all shrines, all tables, candlesticks, trindals, and rolls of wax, pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition, so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glasses, windows, or elsewhere within their churches and houses, preserving nevertheless or repairing both the walls and glass windows. And they shall exhort all their parishioners to do the like within their severall houses.¹⁰⁴

The 35th order built on the wording of the injunction stating that: "they shall not set forth or extol the dignity of any images, relics, or miracles; but declaring the abuse of the same".¹⁰⁵ Once again the accounts at Long Melford describe parish compliance with the reversal in the law. In the same year as the injunction the list of church goods for

¹⁰¹ M. Florio, *Historia de la Vita e de la morte de l'illustrissima signora Giovanni Graia* (1607), quoted by Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 278.

¹⁰² Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 55-65.

¹⁰³ For a summary of this period under Elizabeth see: Duffy, *Altars*, 565-593; Margaret Aston, *The Kings Bedpost: Reformation and Iconography in a Tudor Group Portrait*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 97-127; Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 294-342.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, "Religious Pictures", 39-68; *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, vol. iii, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 299; Anderson, "Re-Discovery", 48.

1559 state: “Item, of all suche thynges as synns the spoyle ar browght in ageyne unto the churche.”¹⁰⁶ This list goes on to describe in detail payments for work done to the church to cover up or take down imagery, including: the whitening of the chancel, lime to mend the holes where the rood loft had been, payment for removing the rood loft, and payment for a copy of the injunctions which were to be read out publically in church.¹⁰⁷

It is likely that during the Elizabethan phase of iconoclasm an alabaster sculpture of the Adoration of the Magi was buried or concealed inside of the church [fig.1.5].¹⁰⁸ The alabaster was discovered c.1790 and subsequently described and illustrated in *Archaeologia* of September 1796 [fig.1.6]:

give me leave to communicate a drawing of a Table (as we find these carvings called in ancient wills) now remaining in the North wall of the church of Melford, in the county of Suffolk, and which a few years ago was dug up from beneath the pavement, where it is not improbable it had lain many years.¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately no formal descriptions were included in the churchwarden’s accounts, making it impossible to prove with certainty whether or not Clopton purchased this specific alabaster and then returned it during Mary’s reign. He had passed away six years before the death of Mary and as he was no longer around to secure its further protection, there were possibly no members of the parish willing to undertake the task. Long Melford’s accounts for the period of the Edwardine injunctions list the sale and removal of all the images from the church and their subsequent return under Mary.

¹⁰⁶ Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 73.

¹⁰⁸ “Since William Clopton is known to have taken charge of the alabaster work during the Edwardine Reformation it seems very likely that the Adoration was concealed during the second dismantling of images”, see: Woods, *Long Melford*, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Craven Ord, “Description of a Carving in the Church of Long Melford”, *Archaeologia* Vol. 12, 1796, 92–95; Duffy, *Altars*, 1993 p.490.

There appears no reason why the alabaster would have been buried during the period 1547-1554 when other sculptures were not. In other cases alabasters were still being discovered long into Elizabeth's reign. For instance, in 1562 an alabaster table was discovered and destroyed in Haconby, Lincolnshire, and a hoard of alabasters were discovered in the glebe of the vicar in Preston in Lancashire in 1574.¹¹⁰ Searches for objects were relatively common. As bishop of Norwich, John Parkhurst's interrogations for his diocese were directed towards "any abused images, namely such as be removed out of the church".¹¹¹

In the following section of this thesis I will focus on evidence for the concealment or burial of alabasters in churches. Antiquarian reports of sculptural discoveries often state that the depositor must have buried the object with the desire for it to be resurrected, repaired, and once again put to use at a future time. Surviving material evidence contradicts this homogenising approach. Just as there is no single history of English alabaster sculpture in the Middle Ages, there is no single monolithic history of iconoclasm or iconoclastic treatment of sculpture during and after the Reformation. Many if not most of the alabasters discovered in English churches were damaged in a way that makes reuse implausible and probably impossible. Several scholars have advanced new theories of medieval reuse in the Early Modern period. Margaret Aston and Sarah Tarlow, for instance, have suggested that there are possible

¹¹⁰ John Thomas Micklethwaite, *The Ornaments of the Rubric* (London: Alcuin Club, 1897), 25. Aston, "Public worship", 20-21; Philip Caraman, *The Other Face: Catholic Life under Elizabeth I* (London: Longmans & Green, 1960), 270.

¹¹¹ R.A. Houlbrooke, *The letter of book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich: compiled during the years 1571-5* (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1975).

other ritualistic reasons why the sculptures might have been buried, beyond simple concealment.¹¹² I will take these approaches into account in my analysis of the material.

Part Two: Concealment or Burial of Alabaster in Churches:

In 1877, during renovations of the church of All Saints in Breadsall, Derbyshire, a large and impressive fourteenth-century alabaster *Pieta* was discovered under the pavement of the west end [fig.1.7].¹¹³ When found, the sculpture was broken into two pieces; the major break situated above the horizontal and recumbent figure of Christ. Almost a century later at Layston Church, Hertfordshire, a similarly large and impressive fourteenth-century alabaster sculpture of the Crucifixion was found face down concealed inside a wall of the church [fig.1.8].¹¹⁴ Like the Breadsall *Pieta* this sculpture was broken but in several more pieces. It is now a collection of fragments glued back together to appear whole. The context of the discoveries at Layston and Breadsall can be replicated for any number of the over four hundred English alabasters in churches and museums across England discovered in a similar context. Building works taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries uncovered hundreds of alabasters, some of which were smashed into minute pieces. Others survived relatively whole but showed signs of intentional damage. Yet, it was not only alabasters which were treated in this way, nor was it only objects from the later medieval period. Romanesque sculptures from St Mary's York were discovered in 1829, and the South Cerney head and foot now on display at the British Museum was found in 1915 somewhere near the chancel

¹¹² Sarah Tarlow, "Reformation and Transformation: What Happened to Catholic Things in a Protestant World" in *The archaeology of reformation 1480-1580*, eds. David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (Leeds: Maney, 2003), 116.

¹¹³ *Post Office Directory of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutlandshire* (London: W. Kelly & Co, 1891), 60.

¹¹⁴ G.E. Moodey, and W.L. Hildburgh, "A medieval alabaster from Layston", *Transactions of the East Hertfordshire Archaeological Society*, 13/2 (1952-4), 152-5.

divide in the church.¹¹⁵ The sculptures from St Mary's Abbey, York, were discovered relatively whole but the Christ figure from South Cerney found in a fragmentary state. There are two different historical contexts to consider here, one being monastic and the other parochial. As outlined above, images from monasteries and parishes were partly affected by similar historical turns which shaped their status and significance during and after the Reformation.¹¹⁶ Although the sculptures from St Mary's York and South Cerney were made at a similar time their intended audiences were very different, as was the context for their removal and deposition too. A nuanced and diachronic approach is needed.

The wealth of evidence for all sculptural discoveries from parish churches is staggering and relatively little-studied. In 1848 around 450 stone fragments, not in alabaster, comprising figural and architectural sculpture from two different fifteenth-century ensembles were discovered in the east wall of the transepts at St Cuthbert's church, Wells.¹¹⁷ Some groups of sculpture from parish churches are well known and have been published, often with the intention of reconstructing the original arrangement of the fragments.¹¹⁸ Strangely, this has hardly ever been the case with large caches of

¹¹⁵ Richard Marks, "From Langford to South Cerney: The Rood in Anglo-Norman England", *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 165:1 (2012), 172-210; Christopher Norton, "The Buildings of St Mary's Abbey, York and Their Destruction", *The Antiquaries Journal*, 74 (1994), 256-288.

¹¹⁶ David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); see also: G. W. Bernard, "The Dissolution of the Monasteries," *History* 96, no. 324 (October 2011): 390-409.

¹¹⁷ A project was launched in 2016 to photograph and catalogue every fragment discovered at St Cuthbert's. All of the images and information is now available for free, online: www.Reredosproject.wordpress.com [accessed 24/08/2018]. At the time of writing, Eleanor Townsend is preparing a PhD on the fragments, supervised by Prof Gervase Rosser at the University of Oxford.

¹¹⁸ Phillip Lindley, A. Brodrick, and J. Darrah. "The Great Screen of Winchester Cathedral I." *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1038 (1989), 604-17; Phillip Lindley, "The 'Great Screen' of Winchester Cathedral Part II: Style and Date." *The Burlington Magazine* 135, no. 1089 (1993), 797-807; Philip Lindley, "Sculptural Discoveries at

alabaster sculpture.¹¹⁹ The broken stone heads and torsos from Cobham, Kent, have been comprehensively studied and included in museum exhibitions.¹²⁰ In other cases, such as the Layston alabaster Crucifixion, they have yet to receive very much attention at all past antiquarian-style description.¹²¹ In rare cases, alabasters were discovered deposited alongside other objects. At St Nicholas church in Buckenham, Norfolk, a Limoges crucifix was discovered with an alabaster of St Erasmus under the chancel floor before 1847 [figs 1.9 and 1.10].¹²² Yet, is it possible to say anything conclusive about the burial, deposition, reuse or, as Alexandra Walsham has put it, the “recycling” of medieval objects during and after the Reformation?¹²³ Were alabasters, broken or otherwise, simply rubble to be reused in building work or is there more to it? Attempts to reintegrate fragmentary medieval material into the broader discourse is ongoing and there is much still to be done.¹²⁴ Sarah Tarlow has argued that we should read the reuse of sculptures and other objects as “iconic”, i.e. that the act of burial, concealment or reuse is in itself important.¹²⁵ Her work has built on the research of David Stocker into what he considers to be the ritualistic burial of medieval fonts after the Reformation.¹²⁶

Winchester Cathedral”, *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club Archaeological Society*, 46, 1990, 101-111.

¹¹⁹ By this I mean publications that go beyond simple description of the discovery.

¹²⁰ Richard Marks, “Altarpiece, Image and Devotion: Fourteenth-century Sculpture at Cobham, Kent” in *New Offerings, Ancient Treasures: Studies in Medieval Art for George Henderson*, eds. Paul Binski and William Noel (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), 417-444.

¹²¹ Moodey and Hildburgh, “Alabaster from Layston”, 152-5.

¹²² For descriptions and engravings of the alabaster and the Limoges cross, see: *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol.I (1847), 243-251, 300-304. These were supplied by the antiquary Dawson Turner who also donated both objects to Norwich Castle Museum. The crucifix is Norwich Castle accession number: NWHCM: 1846.97. The alabaster of St Erasmus is: NWHCM: 1847.19.

¹²³ Alexandra Walsham, “Recycling the Sacred: Material Culture and Cultural Memory after the English Reformation”, *Church History* 86, no. 4 (2017), 1121-1154.

¹²⁴ Aston, “Public Worship and Iconoclasm”, 20.

¹²⁵ Tarlow, “Reformation and Transformation”, 116.

¹²⁶ David Stocker, “Fons et origo: the symbolic death, burial and resurrection of English font stones”, *Church Archaeology*, vol.I (1997), 17-25; David Stocker with P. Everson, “Rubbish recycled: a study of the re-use of stone in Lincolnshire” in *Stone: Quarrying*

However, before these kinds of questions can be asked, or adequately answered, a proper assessment of the corpus and its contexts is needed. As a first step in this direction, I will analyse the evidence for the concealment of alabasters in several churches, the types of objects buried, the condition of the objects and the location of their burial. By tracing similar patterns of behaviour in the treatment of fragmentary or whole alabasters a more general assessment can be produced.

Yorkshire: Clerical Concealment

In 1756 a group of alabaster and wooden sculptures were discovered in Wakefield, Yorkshire, the details of which were published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. An engraving of single image of a standing bishop was included in the publication [fig.1.11]:

This figure, which is very elegant and capital, is, it seems, but one of a large number, all which, some in alabaster, and some in wood, richly ornamented with painting and gilding and very antique, were found the last May, in the roof of a small chapel at Wakefield in Yorkshire...for they have lain as long concealed as since the reign of K. Henry VIII and are, no doubt in themselves much older...I shall only add, that according to my information, the other figures of this collection are equally beautiful with this, especially the alabaster ones, one of which is very large, and represents St Ann, the mother of the Virgin Mary, teaching the young virgin to read, and the other two saints under the act of martyrdom. This is a group of fifteen

and Building in England A.D. 43-1625 ed. David Parsons (Chichester: Phillimore, 1990), 83-101.

¹²⁶ *Post Office Directory of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutlandshire* (London: W. Kelly & Co, 1891), 60.

figures in *alte relieve*. There are in all, I find, no less than 25
different pieces.¹²⁷

Along with St Michael from Moll's *England and Wales* and the Adoration of the Magi from Long Melford, the Wakefield alabasters are amongst the earliest published account documenting the discovery of medieval alabaster sculpture in England. The description in *The Gentleman's Magazine* was signed by P. Gemsege, the pseudonym of Samuel Pegge, an antiquarian originally from Osmaton, Derbyshire.¹²⁸ Although his description provides valuable information such as location, types of object, material differences and quantity, it is not exactly clear if Pegge actually saw any of the objects first hand, nor is it clear what condition the group survived in, how they were concealed, or where this chapel was situated. Further, none of the sculptures can be located today. The whole group was shown in London the year after discovery, and a further image, not in alabaster but wood, was illustrated in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1759 [fig.1.12].¹²⁹ What exactly constituted the "chapel" is also unclear. Was it a chapel inside of a parish church or perhaps something larger? Perhaps it was a chapel within a private home? A large number of private chapels and hiding holes were built inside homes in Yorkshire, soon after the Reformation, in order to conceal Catholic priests and recusants, though none has been documented in Wakefield.¹³⁰ Further, evidence for large numbers of medieval objects - especially alabaster sculptures - being discovered

¹²⁷ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1756, 559-560.

¹²⁸ Margaret O'Sullivan, "Pegge, Samuel (1704-1796)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21779, accessed 8 July 2015]. Osmaton is fourteen miles from Ashbourne, Derbyshire, where a late 15th century alabaster tomb of Sir John Bradbourne survives.

¹²⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1759, 267-269.

¹³⁰ Granville Squires, *Secret Hiding Places: The Origins, Histories and Descriptions of English Secret Hiding-Places used by Priests, Cavaliers, Jacobites & Smugglers* (Tower Books: Detroit, 1971), 115-131.

within these chapels and hiding holes is slight.¹³¹ It is far more likely that the sculptures described by Pegge were removed from the interior of a church and hidden in the roof of a chapel at some point after 1547. But who was responsible for moving the objects and hiding them in the roof? Was it a rogue individual or was there corporate cooperation?

In the case of the Wakefield sculptures it will remain difficult to be certain. Both scenarios are plausible in relation to the removal of objects generally, but in Yorkshire, and elsewhere, there is documentary evidence for clerical concealment of images and written accounts of the governmental reaction to these actions, which at the time constituted a direct violation of the law:

On 29th October 1567 Thomas Blackburne, Richard Tirrie, Ninian Atkinson, Christopher Bawdersbie, John Carver alias Brownflet, vicars of the church of Ripon. On a night toke the keis of the churche from one John Daie the sacristane there, and that night all the imageis and other trumperie were conveighed furthe of the said churche and bestowed by the said vicars where it is not knowen...¹³²

Dated 1567, this account of clerical action shows that images of some kind were still located at Ripon at that time, eight years after the Elizabethan injunctions were issued. It shows that several members of the clergy were willing to engage in wholesale violation of the law to protect certain images held within the church. In the same year at Ripon, and possibly related to the actions of the same individuals described above, there was a

¹³¹ In Chapter Four of this thesis I explore alabasters which were kept in recusant houses after the Reformation, see: 178-222.

¹³² Joseph Thomas Fowler, *Memorials of the Church of SS. Peter and Wilfrid, Ripon*, Vol III, LXXX (London: Surtees Society, 1886), 344; Pauline Sheppard, “‘Full of Imageis’: The Ripon Alabasters”, in *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 57, 1985, 93-100.

discovery of several hidden alabaster sculptures within the Minster: “there is a house within a vault of the said church, yet remaining reserved 6 great tables of alabaster full of images.”¹³³ After this a commission was set up to search houses for “images and other ornaments and monuments of idolitrie supposed to be reserved and kept in store within the towne and paryshe of Rippon.”¹³⁴ The actions of the clergy did not come without repercussions. In 1568 one of those involved, Thomas Blackburne, was imprisoned for removing images from the church.¹³⁵ Perhaps the Wakefield sculptures described in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* were removed in the same manner as at Ripon, which was a process of clerical concealment of objects in defiance of the injunctions issued by Elizabeth I. It could equally have been a group of parishioners. Yet, clerical reaction in some areas of the country to the abolition of images was deeply felt. John Jewel, who visited the county of Devon on behalf of the Crown in 1559 recorded compliance amongst parishioners, but he singled out the clergy by stating “the exception, predictably, was the response of the clergy, for if inveterate obstinacy was found anywhere, it was altogether among the priests, those especially who had once been on our side.”¹³⁶ ‘Obstinacy’ is further registered in a letter written by a priest, presumably put in place to effect compliance, to Bishop Dowham of Chester, describing a church which was still functioning in what he saw as a pre-Reformation context:

Many grefes are in my mynd, my good lorde, but I am lothe to troble yr ho. The table which we minister on ys an old altar whereof masses have been sayde to songe, a pulpit, many saynes troofe bettr, altar stones and Idolls seates standing and I have moved to abolish such

¹³³ Fowler, *Memorials*, 344.

¹³⁴ Sheppard, Ripon alabasters, 93.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁶ Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 171.

abuses but I cannot be heard. I dygged of late in myne owne grownes
and found a great nober of Alabaster Images who. I destroyed as thys
berer can declare.¹³⁷

It was not enough to have destroyed the alabasters and written to
communicate the fact to the bishop, in this case the bearer of the letter
could also confirm that the destruction had taken place.

Judicial reaction against the subversive behaviour of rebellious clergy is
documented in a search for recusant priests at York Castle in the late sixteenth century:
“They broke open several places, including the ceiling in the-outgate and in the new
chamber above. They searched for three days. They broke down and beat down walls,
ceilings, floors, hearths, boards...They found a great store of books and church stuff.”¹³⁸
Documented searches for ‘papist’ priests, recusants, and the objects they concealed was
explicitly connected to the enforcement of law under Elizabeth, as set out in 1559.¹³⁹
However as the sixteenth century progressed and war with Spain - a Catholic enemy -
became a distinct possibility, those priests and recusants who still championed the
Roman Church were now becoming more than an irritation, they had become enemies
of the State.¹⁴⁰ This event further impacted images, especially in the case of Catholic
recusant parishioners who harboured images. The excommunication of Elizabeth by
Pius V in 1570 effectively made all Catholics in England and those English Catholics
abroad traitors to the Crown. A statute of 1571 forbade the possession of pictures along

¹³⁷ Rev F.R. Raines, *A History Of The Chantries Within The County Palatine Of Lancashire*, Vol. I (Chetham Society, 1862), 206.

¹³⁸ Squires, *Hiding Places*, 124.

¹³⁹ Hugh Aveling, *Northern Catholics: The Catholic Recusants of the North Riding of Yorkshire 1558-1790* (London: Geoffry Chapman, 1966), 13-14.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas M. McCoog, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1589-1597: Building the Faith of Saint Peter upon the King of Spain's Monarchy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 143-204; Williams, “Religious Pictures”, 55.

with crosses and beads.¹⁴¹ Catholic objects and subversive behaviour would become synonymous for the entire course of Elizabeth's reign. During the 1580s searches continuously took place in homes for offending pieces.¹⁴²

In this section I have outlined the evidence for the removal and concealment of alabaster sculptures in churches. This activity was taking place from the very earliest days of the legislation against images. The situation at Long Melford shows that at the same time the majority of people acted in compliance with the injunctions as they were set out. Yet, beginning in the late 1540s and continuing well into Elizabeth's reign, priests alongside members of the parish community often disobeyed the law by removing alabasters from churches or hiding or burying them within the church. Such subversion continued into the seventeenth century and the visitation articles were maintained and reissued: "Whether there be any in your parish who are noted, known or suspected to conceal or keep hidden in their houses any mass-books...or any other ornaments of superstition uncanceled or defaced, which it is to be conjectured they do keep for a day, as they call it."¹⁴³ The second part of this chapter will discuss the concealment of English alabasters in homes, but for now let us return to the discovery of alabasters in parish churches. By looking closer at exactly how alabaster sculptures were damaged and then deposited, similarities and differences in iconoclastic treatment can be detailed.

Nottinghamshire: The Flawford Alabasters

¹⁴¹ Alexandra Walsham, "The Pope's Merchandise and the Jesuits' Trumpery: Catholic Relics and Protestant Polemic in Post-Reformation England," in *Religion, the Supernatural and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe: An Album Amicorum for Charles Zika*, eds. Jennifer Spinks and Dagmar Eichberger (Brill: Leiden, 2015), 370-409.

¹⁴² Williams, "Religious Pictures", 55.

¹⁴³ Walter Howard Frere, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, Vol. III (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1910), 346.

In 1779 three alabaster sculptures were discovered inside the church of St Peter's in Flawford, Nottinghamshire [figs 1.13, 1.14 and 1.15].¹⁴⁴ They were found during preparatory work for the demolition of the church building which now no longer exists.¹⁴⁵ Their discovery was described twice in *The Nottingham Journal* during 1779. First on February 27th and then again on March 13th:

Last week as workmen were digging up the foundation of *Flawford* church, in this neighbourhood, which was lately taken down, they found three images of alabaster, under the chancel, about two feet in length; one is supposed to represent the Virgin Mary suckling a child: there are no rays encircled, but a coronet over it; the second a Bishop, with a mitre on his head, and a crosier in his hand; the other is supposed to be the effigy of a Saxon prince.¹⁴⁶

Helpfully, a find-spot was provided, but in the following article the description was expanded with additional details for the condition of each sculpture and its iconography:

The account given in this paper of the 17th of the images found under the altar piece at *Flawford* church in this neighbourhood, being some what deficient, we presume the following further particulars will not prove unacceptable to the lovers of antiquity: The figures are

¹⁴⁴ These three sculptures were given to the city of Nottingham by Misses Percy in 1908. Percy inherited them by exchange and descent from the original owner Mr Francis Breedon of Ruddington. See: Cheetham, *Unearthed*, 20-27. Nottingham Castle Museum has a relatively large collection of English alabasters, however, all of these, except for the examples from Flawford, were acquired from the art market in the 20th century when the Castle Museum sought to establish a collection demonstrating the artistry of the Midlands alabasterman.

¹⁴⁵ There is an engraving of the church after demolition, drawn from memory by Mr. Carver, see: Robert Thoroton, "Parishes: Rodintone", in *Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire: Volume 1, Republished With Large Additions By John Throsby*, ed. John Throsby (Nottingham, 1790), 123-132: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/thoroton-notts/vol1/pp123-132> [accessed 15 June 2015].

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 123-132.

made of alabaster, and the first found was a little defaced by the workmen...¹⁴⁷

Going into some detail, the author described the surviving polychromy on the sculptures and gave key details of the condition of the sculptures at the time of discovery. The Virgin and Child were: “clothed in robes of various colours, sculptured with great art...and the hair of her head, (as also that of the child) is richly ornamented with gold...The next image is a representation of St. Peter, habited in robes of variegated colours...”¹⁴⁸ John Throsby enlarged and updated Robert Thornton’s seventeenth-century antiquarian work on the *History of Nottinghamshire*. In it he included his own views on the sculptures, briefly describing them, which by this point were in his possession, on loan from Mr Breedon. He also include an engraving of the sculptures in the publication [fig.1.16]:

The chancel of this church belonged to the Devonshire family, and was not destroyed with the church. In the year 1779, as the workmen were taking up the chancel floor, they discovered the figures and took them from their hiding place with care. They were doubtless hidden at or about the time of the reformation, by some pious catholic to prevent their destruction by the fanatics of the day, in hopes that some favorable occurrence might bring about the ancient forms of worship.¹⁴⁹

At the time of Throsby’s additions to Thornton’s text only a handful of alabaster sculptures had been discovered in England in a similar way. It would be another seventy years until another sculpture would surface in Nottinghamshire. Throsby’s insistence

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 123-132.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 123-132.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 123-132.

that the alabasters were buried purposefully for retrieval and reuse implies a monolithic view of the Reformation, and does not account for the various changes in law over the period which might have affected treatment of sculptures and parish reactions. Further, the prevailing view that the Flawford alabasters were buried without damage has not been challenged. Margaret Aston considered these images to have been buried undefaced in the hope that one day they could be returned to use.¹⁵⁰ In effect this has repackaged the approach to the objects taken by Throsby and his contemporaries in the eighteenth century. A closer survey of the actual damage on each of the Flawford alabasters suggests that the picture is more complicated than first appearances would suggest.

There is a recurring pattern of damage on each of the three alabaster figures from Flawford. Apart from minor marks and scratches, each has more specific areas of surface loss and breakages of parts including noses, fingers and prayer scrolls. The *Nottingham Journal* records that there was some damage inflicted to the face of the first image by the workmen, yet the damage to each sculpture is complex. There is a patch of loss on the Virgin's right cheek which covers the area from her nose up to her eye and down to her chin, a small break to her nose, and a portion of her crown has broken [fig.1.17]. Similarly the Christ child has lost most of his nose and there is an area of loss of the surface layer of alabaster between his eyes down to his mouth [fig.1.18]. A series of pitted marks along Christ's right arm, which continue onto the Virgin's exposed breast, contrast repeated damage, perhaps from a tool, with the smooth undamaged alabaster of his left arm. Substantial loss of surface can be seen on the alabaster bishop, especially around the area directly above his eyes, which broadens out over the mitre. Portions of his nose and chin are missing and across his left

¹⁵⁰ Aston, "Worship and Iconoclasm", 21.

shoulder there is a major breakage, beginning below the shoulder and continuing up towards the neck of the sculpture [fig.1.19]. The figure of St Peter shows signs of damage to the surface area across the middle of his entire face, breakages on his right hand, partial damage to the keys hanging from his right hand, and the removal of the head of the small donor figure situated at his right knee [fig.1.20]. Apart from these similar losses of surface and breakages to other parts of the body there is one other major common feature between them. Each of the main figures has had its head removed and then reattached at some point in its history. In his catalogue of the Nottingham Castle's alabasters, *Unearthed: Nottingham's Medieval Alabasters*, Francis Cheetham addresses this fact, stating: "the head of each one of the figures has been broken off, presumably after their discovery, for there is no record in contemporary descriptions of such damage when they were found."¹⁵¹ This is hard to believe. Why would the heads of all of the sculptures have been broken in the late eighteenth century? Cheetham goes on to remark that: "They have been repaired, the breaks being made good with plaster. It is however possible, although unlikely, that contemporary records omitted to mention this damage."¹⁵²

In the eighteenth century there remained unresolved issues towards religious images but interest in preservation was beginning to override destruction. It would have been an extreme act in the eighteenth-century to saw off, or break off by some other means, each head from the Flawford alabaster group. An assessment of the damage to each sculpture suggests that it is far more likely that all of the sculptures were subject to a series of blows to the face - registered on each as a partial loss of alabaster - in order to break the heads from their bodies. The contemporary engraving from Thoronton's history records the appearance of the sculptures and in it the artist corrected the image

¹⁵¹ Cheetham, *Unearthed*, 21.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

of the donor figure by replacing his head. This was commonly done as shown in the discussion of the Freckenham alabaster below. If the churchwarden's accounts for St Peter's, Flawford, survived, perhaps they might have contained recorded payment for the repairing of the sculptures during the reinstatement of Catholicism under Mary. However, they could easily have been broken in the reign of Elizabeth I. It will remain difficult to be certain when the Flawford sculptures were actually damaged, but the physical evidence suggests that in opposition to the prevailing view, they were buried in the chancel after having their heads broken off. This evidence must surely change our approach to understanding their deposit and its location, which was under the altar in the chancel.

In the late Middle Ages the chancel was the most sacred part of the parish church and its space the exclusive preserve of the clergy. When used for the burial of people it was reserved for the most important individuals. All three of the Flawford alabasters were discovered under the altar within this space. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a full assessment of the location for all alabaster finds in England, but the multiple and possible significance of their deposition can be assessed in two separate ways. First that there was a ritualistic reason for placing these sculptures in the chancel after being broken, or second, that it happened due to a need to make sure the alabasters were not visible anymore. They need not be mutually exclusive. Alongside the injunctions against images in 1550, all altars situated at the east end of the church were ordered to be destroyed and replaced with Communion tables.¹⁵³ If the altar at Flawford was dug up, then the ground which had been opened up might have been the most accessible place in which to place three large figural sculptures, the tallest measuring a metre high. Still, the chancel and its sacral importance would have been

¹⁵³ Duffy, *Altars*, 563.

apparent to those who deposited the sculptures within it. In this instance it might also have been the most logical place to bury the alabasters due to building work in the chancel and the change in function for this space.

Suffolk: The Freckenham Eligius Panel

In 1776 at the church of St Andrew in Freckenham, Suffolk, an alabaster panel showing St Eligius was discovered [fig.1.21].¹⁵⁴ It was described in *The Gentleman's Magazine* the following year:

A workman employed in repairing and white-washing the church of Frecknam, in the county of Suffolk, in the spring of the last year (1776), struck down with his hammer a piece of alabaster – it was fixed in the inside of the church, in the wall, near the north door of the nave.¹⁵⁵

St Eligius is depicted centrally in the panel. He is shown inside his workshop preparing to re-shoe a horse and is assisted by another figure. *The Gentleman's Magazine* included an engraving of the panel, which was cited by Philip Nelson in his discussion of the sculpture for *The Archaeological Journal* in 1917 [fig.1.22].¹⁵⁶ Nelson commented on the condition of the object: “if the illustration in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1777, is a faithful representation, [*the panel*] must have suffered considerable mutilation since that date.”¹⁵⁷ The integral bevelled frame of the panel has

¹⁵⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1777, 416. There have been eight documented discoveries of alabasters in churches in Suffolk, see: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 192-201.

¹⁵⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1777, 416.

¹⁵⁶ Philip Nelson, “Some Further Examples of English Medieval Alabaster Tables”, *Archaeological Journal* vol.74 (1917), 105-121, 108.

¹⁵⁷ Nelson, “Alabaster Tables”, 108. The “correcting” of broken alabasters for publication is not necessarily an act of deception. This act of replacing missing body parts on sculpture was common and it was not until the later nineteenth century that the

suffered minor damage with the top left hand corner showing a break, yet the faces and hands of both the figures in the sculpture, including the horse's head and hooves, have suffered areas of loss. Nelson's suggestion that this damage was possibly the result of mutilation after discovery is unsubstantiated.

At Freckenham the areas of loss were, like Flawford, intentional, and show signs of removal with a tool of some kind. This device was used on the faces of both the figures, including the hands of Eligius which have been chipped off. Looking at a wider range of sculptures and object types reveals similar treatment of medieval images. Should the damage therefore be seen as part of the process of parish compliance with the regulations surrounding mid-sixteenth-century image use? Alabasters showing of the martyrdom of St Erasmus from St Nicholas church, Buckenham, Norfolk, and the Coronation of the Virgin¹⁵⁸ at St Mary's, East Rudham, Norfolk (figs. 1.9 and 1.23), have both had the faces and hands removed from the most important figures.¹⁵⁹ A stark contrast is apparent in the Buckenham sculpture, between the still intact faces of the torturers and the chiselled, damaged face of Erasmus. It is a well-documented fact that iconoclastic destruction is frequently directed towards faces and hands in images.¹⁶⁰ Large numbers of surviving screen paintings across Norfolk and Devon attest to this, with scratches and gouging out of faces, eyes and hands being a common feature. For instance this type of iconoclasm is seen at Ringland. Inside the church at the division between the nave and chancel stands the remains of a fifteenth-century wooden screen with saints painted on the dado level. The figures in this group have had their faces and

idea of conserving the damaged object in its discovered state would replace it. See: Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon, 2004), 277-307.

¹⁵⁸ This sculpture will be discussed in greater detail in the next case study.

¹⁵⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Suffolk* (New Haven, Yale, 1974), 222.

¹⁶⁰ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 378-428.

hands removed by scraping the paint away from the wooden surface; a destructive process also applied to the alabaster panel at Freckenham. This method does not break the integral structure of the wooden or alabaster panel, and the damage is isolated. Breaking an alabaster sculpture by smashing it on a hard surface or throwing to the floor is diagnostically different from the concentrated removal of a single part of the sculpture.

Variations in this method of iconoclasm exist within East Anglia, and in varying degrees of complexity. For instance, a painted image of St Jerome on a pulpit in Burnham Norton, Norfolk, has various gouged marks on his face and hands. Another painted image, this time of St Peter, on the dado of the screen at Trunch, Norfolk, retains deep grooves across the face and hands of the saint. Connected by the motive to remove faces and hands from the figures depicted, all of these examples show a recurring and frequent pattern of damage. A number of fifteenth-century carved wooden pew ends at St Andrews, Freckenham, show similar treatment. They depict lay parishioners engaged in devotional acts such as reading or praying. The heads of these figures have been removed by a saw and were later restored by G.E. Street in the late nineteenth century. This destruction might have been undertaken at the same time as the removal of St Eligius' face in the alabaster, but it is difficult to determine exactly when this was.

Returning then to the St Eligius alabaster at Freckenham, how does it fit into the wider context of iconoclastic destruction and how are we to understand its burial? In some of the cases described above, particularly where church furniture is concerned, once the faces and hands of the images had been mutilated they had become sufficiently desacralized and were now suitable for reuse within a Protestant church. The screens were now fit to be whitewashed and painted with the ten commandments,

the pulpit suitable for preaching, and the pews to be sat in.¹⁶¹ This process was not confined to East Anglia, as Eamon Duffy and Alexandra Walsham have noted. A variety of pre-Reformation objects and architecture were reused in a number of different contexts across England. Pyxes became coin weights and holy-water stoups were now suitable for parish washing.¹⁶² Much of this material needed to be reused in the period after the Reformation. During the period between 1540 and 1570 churches in England became financially insecure. The previous system of bequests which had fuelled the pre-Reformation church had changed, thus limiting the total financial input into the parish. After mutilation the alabaster at Freckenham could not be easily reused as a devotional image, nor might it have seemed possible that it could ever be used again, whereas objects with architectural functions such as screens, windows and pews still retained a function. It is tempting to try and attribute ritualistic meaning to the deposition, burial or concealment of alabasters in churches, in the years following the Reformation. Nomenclature can be tricky here as each word implies a different motivation: deposition, burial or concealment. Perhaps in some cases, like Flawford, the burial of “decapitated” images of the Virgin Mary, St Peter and a bishop, resonated and had profound meaning for those who undertook the deposition. Perhaps burial in the most sacred part of the parish church was the only way of dealing with sculptures which might have been central to the devotional life of the church for many years.¹⁶³ By burying the sculptures in the same manner as a human person of the highest status they

¹⁶¹ In 1561 Elizabeth I ordered the removal of rood screens; partition screens were allowed to remain, see: Aston, *Kings Bedpost*, 101. See also: Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 362. Stained glass is another major feature of parish churches which was either removed at great cost, or sufficiently mutilated to be considered acceptable. For a detailed study of this see Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1993), 229-246.

¹⁶² Duffy, *Altars*, 586.

¹⁶³ In 1974 a statue of the Virgin was discovered at Waltham Abbey in the monastic precinct. Margaret Aston recorded that it was “lying in a position that suggested to the excavators something more akin to a careful internment than disdainful disposal by iconoclasts.” Aston, *Worship and Iconoclasm*. fig.11.

were, perhaps, respectfully attending to the object. In other cases, such as Freckenham, the find spot does not carry the same sacral potency as the chancel. Perhaps those responsible for placing it in the wall were attempting to cover up an image which was no longer allowed but which they were as yet unwilling to completely destroy or throw away.

Part Three: Alabasters in Houses:

Roger Martyn's wish to see his sculpture returned to Holy Trinity, Long Melford, was never fulfilled. Already decayed at the time of his writing, its whereabouts are now unknown and it is has probably long since been destroyed. Whether he kept it hidden or not is impossible to say but there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that Martyn was not alone in his actions or apparent motivations. Article twenty-eight of the Elizabethan visitation explicitly instructed "that no persons keep in their houses any abused images, tables, pictures, paintings, and other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry or superstition."¹⁶⁴ At Coddenham church, Suffolk, an unbroken alabaster panel of the Crucifixion was discovered in a house near the church and now sits above the altar.¹⁶⁵ Heavily repainted after discovery it shows no signs of damage or repair. It was probably removed from the church during the reign of either Edward VI or Elizabeth I, escaping the iconoclastic fate of the majority of alabasters in Suffolk. A major difference between the alabasters at Freckenham and Coddenham is that one was broken and then buried in a church, the other was concealed undamaged inside a private dwelling. This is true of the majority of alabasters which have been found in houses. In 1581 at Scaldwell, Northamptonshire - a village which had remained Catholic under Mary -

¹⁶⁴ Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 301.

¹⁶⁵ "Over the Altar is a carving in alabaster of the Crucifixion, apparently of a very early date; which was discovered some years ago in a house near the church, which probably formed part of the monastic buildings." See: *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute for Archaeology*, vol. XVII (1920), 130.

alabasters were discovered soon after having been hidden.¹⁶⁶ Their condition was clearly of interest. They were described in a letter to the Bishop of Peterborough. It was noted that they were discovered ‘undefaced’ and in a ‘towne howse.’¹⁶⁷ In 1573 the home of Sir Peter Kilburne was searched for the second time, having previously been raided in 1569 after refusing to swear the Oath of Supremacy. The images discovered in his possession were:

one image of Christe with the crosse upon his backe, thre other tables, two of wood and one of alabaster, with gilted ymageis of the Trinitie, Christe crucified and of our Ladye.¹⁶⁸

Visitation books from Elizabeth’s reign describe the condition of images and altar stones in order to report whether they had been defaced or not.¹⁶⁹ Several images on display in churches were documented as ‘undefaced’, although it would not be long until they too were broken, damaged or concealed. Almost all of the sculptures surveyed in parts one and two of this chapter showed some signs of damage which most likely took place before they were buried. Heads were broken, faces and hands were removed with tools and entire panels were smashed to pieces. When alabasters are discovered in a church context it is rare for them not to show some sign of having been damaged. The opposite is the case for documented discoveries or instances of

¹⁶⁶ Duffy, *Altars*, 587.

¹⁶⁷ “Thatys to say the picture of Chryst called the roode, the picture of Saynt Peter, both of wood, undefaced, the picture of the Trinitie, and the picture of Saynt Mudwyn wt hyr cove standing by her both of alabaster undefaced, and a tabernacle of wood which in the tyme of popery dyd stand upon the auter wt a great number of images appertaining to the same.” See: Duffy, *Altars*, 587

¹⁶⁸ Houllbrooke, *Letter Book*, 177; Williams, “Religious Pictures” 103.

¹⁶⁹ “Churchwardens of Bishophill elder...no decent communion table; their altar stone is not defaced and that they suffered a table of images in their church undefaced; no pulpit; no sufficient books for Divine service”, see: Hugh Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York 1558-1791* (St Albans: Catholic Record Society, 1970), 170, appendix I, 189: “St. Maries – John Hewbank is said to have monuments of superstition.”

alabasters surviving in houses. This fact underscores the way in which the purported concealment of alabasters should be viewed in both contexts: church or house. Overall, there are differences in the surviving condition of alabasters found in churches and houses. On one hand the church was a sacred space where liturgy and salvific rituals were performed, on the other, the home was a domestic space with a variety of more mundane functions. Another point worth considering is that alabaster deposits from churches sometimes contain several assemblages of sculpture from a number of altarpieces. It is rare that more than one alabaster is found in a dwelling.

Evidence for the Discovery of Medieval Objects in Houses:

Aside from alabaster sculptures a range of medieval objects have been discovered in houses.¹⁷⁰ In the late nineteenth-century a framed sixteenth-century illumination was located under the floorboards of a cottage near Sandon, Essex.¹⁷¹ In 1901 a processional cross was found along with vestments in an oak chest in a farmhouse near Abbey Dore, Herefordshire.¹⁷² In 1839 Dawson Turner recorded a discovery of a medieval wooden box in his grangerised copy of Francis Blomefield's *Topographical History of Norfolk*. The box was "embedded in the wall of an old clay cottage near Loddon."¹⁷³ Hidden or not, these objects and many others form an archaeology related to the early years of the Reformation and the decades following it. The cross and vestments were arguably connected to recusant activity and would have thus served a functional role after the

¹⁷⁰ Tara Hamling, "To see or not to see? The presence of religious imagery in the protestant household" *Art History*, 30:1, 2007, 170-197.

¹⁷¹ Richard Marks and Paul Williamson eds., *Gothic Art for England: 1400-1547* (London: V&A Publishing 2003), 415.

¹⁷² Marks and Williamson, *Gothic Art*, 416

¹⁷³ British Library Add MS 23053, f.85. This box is now at the British Museum, accession number: 1977,1001.1.

Reformation, being used in the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁷⁴ Other medieval objects can be brought into this category too, such as the gold Langdale Rosary at the V&A or the recently rediscovered silver Little Crosby Rosary, now on loan to the British Museum.¹⁷⁵ Both can be easily connected to recusant families. For English Catholics operating in secret after the Reformation these objects must have carried something like the status of relics. Dawson Turner's little box might have been hidden to prevent destruction but the process of concealment also removed the opportunity to use the object. Over time their existence would have been forgotten. The discovery of a fourteenth-century ivory group in Devonshire attests to this. On September 29th 1818, the antiquarian Reverend J. Skinner recorded in his diary the discovery of an ivory Annunciation in a house by an old gentleman "in the wainscot, he was pulling down over the fireplace."¹⁷⁶ Skinner recorded the ivories by drawing the diptych group and the grand house in which they were found. Fortunately the ivories still survive and are now located in a private collection in London.

English alabasters can be placed in both categories described above. They were discovered embedded into walls or found in roofs and under floors. Antiquarian magazines, newspapers and journals contain a wealth of articles relating to these discoveries. For instance, an alabaster Man of Sorrows was discovered with another

¹⁷⁴ Marks and Williamson, *Gothic Art*, 416. Over forty crosses have survived, many discovered in houses, see: Charles Oman, "English Base Metal Church Plate", *Archaeological Journal*, 119 (1962), 198–200; Colum Hourihane, *The Processional Cross in Late Medieval England: The 'Dallye Cross'* (London: The Society of Antiquaries, 2005).

¹⁷⁵ Eric Maclagan, and Charles Oman, "An English gold rosary of about 1500", *Archaeologia*, series 2, vol. LXXXV, 1935. pp. 1- 22; Peter Davidson, Mark Blundell, Dora Thornton, and Jane Stevenson, "The Harkirk Graveyard and William Blundell 'the Recusant' (1560-1638): a Reconsideration." *British Catholic History* 34, no. 1 (2018), 29–76.

¹⁷⁶ British Library Additional MS 33646.

alabaster of St Armel in 1834 at Plas-pentre farm, Denbighshire, under the floor.¹⁷⁷ An alabaster showing the Burial of St Catherine is now at the Gold Hill Museum, Dorset. It was discovered in a recess above the fireplace in a house on the high street of Shaftesbury in 1922 [fig.1.24].¹⁷⁸ All of these sculptures were found in excellent condition; the Gold Hill St Catherine still retaining much of its original polychromy and gilding. Household discoveries were still taking place into the twentieth century with alabasters found in or near houses in Exeter in the 1930s, Orford, Suffolk in the 1960s and Berg Apton, Norfolk in 1970.¹⁷⁹ An altarpiece of the life of St William, now at York Museum, was discovered near Peasholme in 1965.¹⁸⁰ These panels were arguably deposited in a house with a monastic connection.¹⁸¹

The provenance of certain alabasters suggest that they were never hidden at all and like the processional cross possibly served post-Reformation Catholics. The alabaster Virgin and Child in its original housing, now at Worcester Cathedral, was given by Lady Hornby of Pleasington Hall and has an oral provenance linking it to the priory of Whiteladies at Worcester.¹⁸² As recusants, the Hornbys might have looked after and perhaps used the sculpture long after the Reformation. In Chapter Four of this thesis I discuss several alabasters which can be linked to recusant families in

¹⁷⁷ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, vol.XXVI (1913/1914), 31-32.

¹⁷⁸ E.T Long, “English Alabaster Tables in Dorset”, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*, XLIX 1928, 112. Long states in the same article that there are nineteen fragments in Wimborne Minster located in the library. Nothing more has been published about them and Francis Cheetham did not reference them. I mention them here to note their existence.

¹⁷⁹ The Exeter sculpture is now in St George’s church, Sudbury. It was found “broken, in the garden of a house near Exeter and restored”, see: *The Universe*, September 8, 1933, 2. For the Orford alabasters see: *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute for Archaeology*, vol.xxxi (1970), 202. For the alabaster figure at Berg Apton see: *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol.35, 1970, 143-144.

¹⁸⁰ See Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 53; Oliver Fearon, “*Pieces from Peaseholme: Six medieval alabasters and their contexts in fifteenth-century York*” (MA dissertation, The University of York, 2013).

¹⁸¹ Fearon, “*Pieces from Peaseholme*”, 4-5.

¹⁸² *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, vol.XXV (1913/1914), 79-82.

Lancashire and Warwickshire.¹⁸³ The protection and possible use of alabasters in recusant houses is an undeveloped and little researched aspect of their history. For many, the history of English alabaster is held to have stopped with the Reformation which ceased production of religious images. This issue needs redress.

Alabaster Heads of St John the Baptist:

Alabaster heads of St John the Baptist survive in a large enough number to merit investigation in their own right.¹⁸⁴ Francis Cheetham catalogued ninety-seven examples of which sixty-four are in the United Kingdom.¹⁸⁵ Several from this group were collected from Continental Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and brought back to Britain, but a surprising number have established provenances linking them to discoveries in churches, houses or to old antiquarian collections. Most, however, survive in domestic contexts. Further, there is a curious aspect of their condition which marks their survival out as peculiar if the group is considered as a whole. In almost all of the cases, even when damage is present, the head of John the Baptist remains untouched. For instance, the entire scene which once surrounded the head of John the Baptist now at Stonyhurst College has been broken away but the platter with head remains [fig.1.25]. The Burrell Collection in Glasgow contains examples in their original frames. One example was discovered in the late eighteenth century and was recorded in *The Ipswich Journal* dated 1789: “Last week, some workmen employed in taking down an old house adjoining the New Bank Buildings in this town, found, secreted under one of the floors, a precious relick of the Romish Church. Four figures

¹⁸³ See Chapter Four of this thesis, 178-221.

¹⁸⁴ For a general discussion of the medieval phenomenon focused on the head of St John the Baptist, see: Barbara Baert, *Caput Johannes in Disco: Essay on a Man's Head* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For the best discussion of the alabaster heads, see: W.H. St. John Hope, “XXI.—On the Sculptured Alabaster Tablets Called Saint John's Heads.” *Archaeologia* 52, no. 2 (1890), 669–708.

¹⁸⁵ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 156-160.

curiously cut in Alabaster – in the centre is represented the head of the Deity; immediately under, a half length of the Saviour; on the right side, a full length of the Pope; and on the left, that of St. Peter. The whole is fastened in a plain wainscot box, of about a foot square and is in fine preservation.”¹⁸⁶

Documentary evidence for medieval household ownership or donation of St John’s heads to churches is vast.¹⁸⁷ Individuals such as Isabella Hamerton of York bequeathed to her chaplin in 1432: “unum lapidum alabastri secundum formam capitis Sancti Johannes Baptistae.”¹⁸⁸ Robert Collyns, a citizen and haberdasher of London, left in his will of 1523: “a jak and S. John's clothy of green satin, S. John's head of alabaster”.¹⁸⁹ Documentary examples like this are typical. Susan Foister has shown that St John’s heads in alabaster appear frequently in late medieval household inventories but notes that other types of alabaster are often mentioned too: Robert Waryn had as many as three alabasters in a single room in 1494.¹⁹⁰ Alongside the removal of alabaster from churches there would have already been a large number of sculptures in private ownership at the time of the Reformation, and the St John’s heads in alabaster were possibly the most numerous. Their popularity and seeming ubiquity meant that they were singled out by reformers. They were referenced specifically in the diocesan visitations of the bishop of Norwich in 1561 which asks:

¹⁸⁶ *The Ipswich Journal*, 1789.

¹⁸⁷ Hope, “Saint John's Heads”, 669–708.

¹⁸⁸ Tomas Bodkin, “Medieval English Alabaster-work in Portugal”, *Boletim do museu de Arte Antiqua*, 73.

¹⁸⁹ “Henry VIII: July 1523, 1-15,” in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 3, 1519-1523, ed. J.S. Brewer (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), 1317-1327. British History Online, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol3/pp1317-1327>.

¹⁹⁰ Susan Foister, “Paintings and Other Works of Art in Sixteenth-Century English Inventories”, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 123, No. 938 (May, 1981), 275-276.

Whether any keep in his house any abused images, namely such as be removed from the church, or Saint John's head, S. Katherine, Nicholas, or their heads, or such like, or no?¹⁹¹

Unlike images of St Catherine or St Nicholas, heads of John the Baptist can be classed alongside The Man of Sorrows or the Mass of St Gregory as particularly objectionable according to reformers. Nathaniel Bacon's papers record an instance of continued post-Reformation devotion to the image type: "at a gentylemans howse in that townee the ys Sr Johns head in a platter & ther ys great prayeing & knelyng to yt every daye."¹⁹² This practice was a continuation of a late medieval form of devotion. Roger Martyn from Long Melford describes how his father set up candles in front of the image of St John the Baptist.¹⁹³ Still, these images were sought out and removed when discovered. In 1583 a 'pickture called the St Jones head' was removed from a chamber in the house of Mistress Hampden in Buckinghamshire.¹⁹⁴

A number of alabaster heads were probably never concealed. An engraving of the alabaster St John's head owned by David Wells was included in Jacob Schnebellie's *Antiquaries Museum* in 1789, the alabaster originally "having been preserved for many years as a curiosity in the mansion-house of a respectable family in Staffordshire [fig.1.26]."¹⁹⁵ Christ's head and the figure above St Thomas have been badly damaged but the face of John the Baptist remains intact. An earlier published image and description of a St John's head appears in William Stukeley's *Paleographica Britannica* in 1746: "I have some elegant pieces of old sculpture in alabaster, in mezzo relieve,

¹⁹¹ Williams, "Religious Pictures", 43; Frere, *Visitation Articles*, 106, 92.

¹⁹² H.W. Saunders, ed., *The official papers of Sir Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, Norfolk as Justice of the Peace* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1915), 158.

¹⁹³ Dymond and Paine, *Melford Church*, 43-44.

¹⁹⁴ Williams, "Religious Pictures", 56. For the reference, see: PRO State Papers 12/167, f.47

¹⁹⁵ Jacob Schnebellie, *The Antiquaries Museum* (London: J. Nichols, 1797), cat.no.1.

which I take to have been portable or private altars high raised, one of them, has belonged to some chapel dedicated to St John Baptist. It was given me by my worthy and learned friend Samuel Gale.”¹⁹⁶ [fig.1.27] Gale was one of the founding members of the Society of Antiquaries and it appears that the pedigree of such a connection was important to emphasise. A number of important early antiquarian collections contained examples of a St John’s head. An example now in the Maltwood art museum and gallery, British Columbia, was originally in the Leverian Museum, London, before 1788.¹⁹⁷ Several heads of John the Baptist in the Ashmolean Museum speak to the popularity of the type amongst antiquarians. One, still in its original housing, was probably part of the Tradescant collection given by Elias Ashmole in 1683.¹⁹⁸ Another has an eighteenth-century provenance.¹⁹⁹ Several St John’s heads have dates, names and heraldry carved into the reverse of the panels. At Norwich Castle Museum the date 1621 and a name can be seen.²⁰⁰ An alabaster at the V&A has the date 1658 and the shield of a company carved on the reverse.²⁰¹ These additions indicate a desire to label the sculptures and mark their passage through time.

For some, by this point in the seventeenth century, the St John’s heads had lost their idolatrous connection and had become objects of curiosity. This might account for why they were part of a large number of antiquarian collections. Collectors continued to be fascinated by them. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries museums were rapidly acquiring and expanding, adding to their collections voraciously. A St John’s

¹⁹⁶ First quoted by W. L. St John Hope in: Hope, “Saint John’s Heads”, 669.

¹⁹⁷ Janice Curry, “True to God and King: Alabaster Heads of St. John in Late Medieval England” (MA dissertation, University of Victoria, 1994), 4.

¹⁹⁸ Warren, *Medieval and Renaissance*, vol.II, 616-632, 624.

¹⁹⁹ Warren, *Medieval and Renaissance*, vol.II, 628-629.

²⁰⁰ Norwich Castle Museum accession number: NWHCM : 1893.19

²⁰¹ V&A accession number: A.204-1946. Clive Cheeseman, *Richmond Herald*, identified this shield as belonging to the Dyers Company. Personal communication, September 2016.

Head bought for the British Museum in 1875 was previously in the collection of John Bowyer Nichols, sold on by his son John Gough Nichols.²⁰² The Nichols family were influential publishers and editors of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Before they took ownership, the alabaster was previously in the collection of antiquarian and architect John Carter, who came across a number of alabaster sculptures during his graphic surveys of medieval art and architecture.²⁰³ A number of these were never published, for instance in 1793 he drew and described a St John's head in alabaster "in the Arundelian marbles, from the collection of the late Dr. Rowlandson."²⁰⁴ [fig.1.28] Another St John's Head owned by John Gough Nichols was bought by the BM in the same year. It was previously in the collection of Dr Samuel Meyrick.²⁰⁵ Although these sculptures were acquired by the BM in the second half of the nineteenth century, their much older provenances demonstrate that collectors valued the ownership history. All of the alabasters which came into the BM's collection in the nineteenth century were acquired for the museum by Augustus Wollaston Franks, assistant keeper in the department of British Antiquities. He was part of the same networks as many of the collectors described above, all connected through the Society of Antiquaries.²⁰⁶

In a few cases the sculptures have been lost but their original locations can be determined through documentation. A St John's head is referred to in the "Black Book", a medieval book of records for the city of Winchester.²⁰⁷ "A hede of syn' John the Baptie of alabaster" is mentioned amongst other goods as part of an inventory of the

²⁰² *The Gentleman's Magazine* 1824, vol.XCIV, part II, p.209.

²⁰³ Ord, "Long Melford", 92-95. John Carter, *Specimens of the ancient sculpture and painting, now remaining in this kingdom, from the earliest period to the reign of Henry ye VIII, etc.* (London, 1780).

²⁰⁴ British Library, Additional MS 29931, f.240, recto.

²⁰⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1824, 209.

²⁰⁶ John Cherry, "A.W. Franks and medieval Antiquities" in *A.W.Franks: Nineteenth-century Collecting and the British Museum*, eds. John Cherry and Marjorie Caygill (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 184-199.

²⁰⁷ For the original "Black Book", see: British Library Additional MS 6036.

hospital of St John in the city.²⁰⁸ In 1798 the same head was possibly on display and documented “in the dust-hole...near the apartments of the windows, amongst curious antiquities, is seen the figure of St John the Baptist’s head in the dish.”²⁰⁹ The chapel where the sculpture was probably discovered had gone through a number of renovations in order to become a public school.²¹⁰ Similarly, another church which was converted into a school also contained an alabaster head of St John. A label on the reverse of an example at the BM states that “this relic illustration of The Doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist formerly belonged to the ancient chapel of St John the Baptist at Buckingham - now converted into a Grammer School. I purchased it off the widow of the late Master the Rev Tho Cockram in the year 1897. Charles Kerry, Rector of Upper Stonson, Beds.” [figs 1.29 and 1.30].²¹¹ The alabaster was acquired by the British Museum in 1904, probably because of the important provenance and the ‘archaeological’ context. Unlike the St John’s heads discovered in houses, this sculpture shows signs of serious damage and has been glued onto a large marble block to hold the pieces together. There is a major break across the middle of the sculpture and a loss to the lower half under St Thomas Becket. St Peter’s right hand and most of his key are missing and Christ’s face looks as if it has been worn away by stroking, kissing or licking rather than mutilation.

Alabasters on Display after the Reformation:

St John’s heads are amongst the earliest documented alabasters in antiquarian collections. Yet, evidence suggests that alabasters were displayed in several prominent houses in the century following the Reformation. In 1603 Henry, Lord Cobham had

²⁰⁸ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1830, vol.c ii, 402.

²⁰⁹ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1830, vol.c ii, 402; John Milner, *The History and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester*, Vol. II (Winchester: Nutt and Wells, 1798), 225-226.

²¹⁰ Milner, *Antiquities of Winchester*, 226.

²¹¹ British Museum accession number: 1904,0409.1.

two alabasters on display, located in a gallery alongside maps and paintings.²¹² Further, Lord Lumley also had a group of alabasters on display in his long gallery. They are documented as five scenes of the Passion of Christ in alabaster.²¹³ Baron Waldstein's diary of 1600 records that "as for statues there was a very noticeable alabaster figure of Christ in the garden at Theobals."²¹⁴ Recent studies have shown that modern constructs of Protestant iconophobia have been overblown.²¹⁵ Religious images, alabaster included, could be kept out on display in rare cases, depending on the context and the individual. Elizabeth I kept images in her chapel, John Parker, son of Archbishop Matthew Parker also kept images he inherited from his father on display in Lambeth Palace in 1581, and Bess of Hardwick is documented as having a number of images in Hardwick Hall in 1601, including:

a table of Iverie carved and guilt with little pictures in it of the natyvitie the picture of hell.

In the lowe Chapple: a Pulpitt, a Cubberd, fowre formes, a Crucifixe of imbrodered worke, too pictures of our Lade the Virgin Marie and the three Kinges, the salutation of the Virgin Marie by the Angel.²¹⁶

²¹² Foister, "English Inventories", 275-276. See also Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 63, ft.290 for the citation to the documents at the National Archives: PRO 178/3521.

²¹³ Williams, "Collecting and Religion", 175.

²¹⁴ Baron Waldstein, *The Diary of Baron Waldstein: A Traveller in Elizabethan England*, trans. G.W. Groos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 83.

²¹⁵ For a recent discussion of iconophobia in the late sixteenth century, see: Tara Hamling and Richard Williams, "Introduction" in *Art Re-formed: Re-assessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts*, eds. Tara Hamling, & Richard Williams, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 4.

²¹⁶ For Parker, see: Williams, "Religious Pictures", 30. For Elizabeth I, see: John Phillips, *Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (London: University of California Press, 1973), 127. For Hardwick Hall, see: L. Boynton & P. Thornton, "The Hardwick Hall Inventory of 1601" *Furniture History*, vol. VII (1971), 1-40.

An alabaster showing the *Pieta* is documented in the house of one of the most prominent Protestants in England and a right hand to Elizabeth I. It is first described in 1688, when Culpepper Tanner, steward to the 5th Earl of Burghley, drew up an inventory of items in Burghley House.²¹⁷ His description of “My Ladys Appartment”, specifically “My Ladys Anteroome” contains an alabaster image located over the chimney, which is collected under the group labelled “China”: “A Virgin Mary with Our Saviour in Arms in Allabaster” [fig.1.31].²¹⁸ Until recently the alabaster was catalogued as German or Flemish but I have suggested that it is far more likely to be English.²¹⁹ A number of features confirm this. The sculpture is not carved in the round but is hollowed out around the base of the reverse with drilled holes and lead wires fixed into place [fig.1.32]. This is typical of English alabaster work. Further, the overall style and pose of the Virgin correspond with an alabaster Virgin and Child at the British Museum which has always been considered an English sculpture.²²⁰ Christ’s recumbent pose in the Burghley *Pieta* is distinctly similar to a late fifteenth-century alabaster panel showing the Lamentation of Christ at the Burrell Collection [fig.1.33]. Yet, unlike the alabaster of St Michael, with which I opened this chapter, the *Pieta* at Burghley has never spent a moment underground. It is in immaculate condition with extensive traces of original paint and gilding, and no signs of damage.

Robert Cecil, 1st Lord Burghley, who owned Burghley House, was constantly engaged in the rooting out of religious imagery from houses. Lord Hunsdon reported

²¹⁷ Exeter MSS 51/18

²¹⁸ Exeter MSS 51/18, f.27.

²¹⁹ This suggestion has been accepted by the curator at Burghley house, personal communication with Jon Culverhouse, and is reflected in the change to their online record for the object: <https://collections.burghley.co.uk/collection/an-alabaster-relief-of-the-pieta-german-15th-century/> [accessed 22/08/2018]. The sculpture was previously catalogued as English but with a question mark, in: Oliver R. Impey, *The Cecil family collects four centuries of decorative arts from Burghley House* (Alexandria: Art Services International, 1998), 137.

²²⁰ British Museum accession number: 1956,0701.1.

to Burghley in July 1573, that he captured a man entering England “wt a number of hypocrytcall and abhomynable Idolatrus pyctures.”²²¹ These images and the rosary beads he brought in were thought by Hunsdon to “increase Idolatry and popery to styre up a new.”²²² In the case of Sir Thomas Stanley, who was connected to a plan to free Mary, Queen of Scots, Burghley instructed the interrogator to enquire “What images were set up of late in the chapel of Lathom, by whose commandment.”²²³ The Burghley *Pieta* typifies Richard L. Williams’ argument that religious images could exist in houses so long as there was no doubt about the political or religious affiliation of the owner. Perhaps hypocritically, Burghley might have had no issue keeping an image of the *Pieta* in his own house, while he rooted out similar images in others. For instance, an image of the Virgin was discovered in the hayrick of Edward Rookwood in 1578. The account was related by Richard Topcliffe to the Earl of Shrewsbury in a letter where he called Rookwood a ‘papyste’: “a piece of plate being missed in the court and searched for in his hay house, in the hay rick such an image of our Lady was there found.”²²⁴ Elizabeth I was present in the house at the time of the discovery and ordered the sculpture to be burnt. In this situation, the ‘discovery’ of the image and its destruction must surely have been connected to a show of power on the part of Elizabeth. The image, representative of Rookwood’s ‘papist’ nature, was suppressed to indicate what would and would not be tolerated.

Part Four: Alabaster taken or sold abroad after the Reformation

²²¹ Williams, “Religious Pictures”, 60, citing: PRO State Papers 15/21, f.68, “Letter from Hunsdon to Burghley”.

²²² *Ibid.*, 60.

²²³ Williams, “Religious Pictures”, 56, citing: Hatfield Papers, MS 157, f.136. The chapel was consecrated in 1500 and still exists.

²²⁴ Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts*, 318.

Three of four ships have lately arrived from England laden with images, which have been sold at Paris, Rouen and other places, and being eagerly purchased, give to the ignorant people occasion to talk according to their notions; which needed not had their Lordship' command for defacing them been observed.²²⁵

Often used as evidence for a great flood of images moving from England across the Channel in the latter half of the sixteenth century, this quote describes a point at which the Reformation was heating up.²²⁶ Yet it warrants scrutiny. William Anderson cited it in combination with another, rightly famous image from *Foxe's Acts and Monuments* which shows a ship being prepared with objects [fig.1.34]. It carries the tagline: "ship over your trinkets and be packing papists." There are some issues in this combination of image and evidence. First, Anderson states that the majority of alabasters taken to France were transported during the Reformation and the activity was led by those who "foresaw the destruction of traditional iconography in England."²²⁷ Yet, the image from Foxes *Acts* does not show the transporting of images at all. The "trinkets" which are being packed up and shipped away comprise censers, croziers, candlesticks and chalices. In the background, images are clearly being pulled down and burnt; a label above the procession of "papists" clearly identifies this act. By sending away the Catholics with their trinkets and burning all of the images in the church, this allegorical image visualises a core objective of the Edwardine Reformation, which is also labelled clearly: "the purging of the temple". Therefore, the papist ship sails away from the cleansed temple of Protestantism. This image does not show the transporting of sculptures abroad to France. It denies the fact, because all of the sculptures in English churches were well and truly destroyed according to the official line. Yet, alabasters left

²²⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, 1547-1553*, ed. W.B. Turnbull (London, 1861), 55.

²²⁶ Anderson, "Re-Discovery", 47-58; Oakes, "Dr Hildburgh", 71-84.

²²⁷ Anderson, "Re-Discovery", 48.

England during the Reformation but exactly when, and by what means is not completely clear. There was no single method and they were taken further afield than France. In this final part of Chapter One, I will outline the evidence for the post-Reformation movement of alabasters.

English Alabasters Abroad:

Where documents survive it is possible to determine exactly when and by what means an alabaster sculpture left England during the Reformation. An entry for 1548 in the churchwarden's accounts of St Andrew's and St Michael's, Lewes, states:

Item recd of Thomas Sentter who was put in trust by certen of the parish to make sale of thre aulters of alybaster to the frenche men in pty of payment of xxxs whereupon they dyd.²²⁸

Without the recorded thoughts of Roger Martyn it can be difficult to read emotions into records, but from the documentary evidence it would appear that the Reformation impacted parishioners in Lewes in much the same way as it did at Long Melford.

During the years leading up to Edward's reign they repaired their pyx, mended their doors and spent large sums in order to beautify the interior of their church.²²⁹ In the year following the sale of the alabasters there is a payment of two shillings and six pence for defacing two windows.²³⁰ The parishioners of Lewes were compliant with the legislation against images and perhaps saw an opportunity to sell on what they could, including the alabasters, before they were destroyed.

Numerous similar references survive in parish records documenting the sale of alabaster and other goods around the time of the Reformation and this activity appears

²²⁸ H. Michell, "The Churchwardens' Accounts of St Andrew's and St Michael's, Lewes from 1522 to 1601" *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol.XLV 1902, 40-61.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

to have gone on for some time.²³¹ A document of 1566 in the Archives départementales de Seine-Maritime details the purchase of an alabaster altarpiece from an English church for the village of Angleville-de-bras-Long, Normandy.²³² Ships carrying alabasters to France are recorded as late as 1570.²³³ Still, there are instances where alabasters were transported far beyond the shores of France. In 1551 Count Pietro Giulio Cristiani transported an English alabaster Virgin and Child along with an image of the Trinity to Varese Ligure where they can still be seen in the parish church. A document in the family archives of the Crisiani family records the date and motive behind the transportation of the images: “during the revolution of Henry VIII, he came home with many famous carvings saved from the fury of the heretics.”²³⁴

The exact scope of post-Reformation trade in English alabasters is still an underdeveloped area of study. Clarification would help to provide granular detail to what is an unwieldy mass of sculptures in a large geographical range. It would need a dedicated study in order to start building a clearer picture. Work by Laurence Flavigny has contributed to our understanding of the situation in Normandy but other areas with long-standing English connections have yet to receive any attention at all. A current project by Zuleika Murat, to study English alabasters in Italy, is helping to unearth documents and provenance records for sculptures across the western side of the Adriatic.²³⁵ In order to complement her work and broaden the picture, I present a case

²³¹ Eamon Duffy, “The End of it All: The Material Culture of the Late Medieval Parish and the 1552 Inventories of Church Goods,” in *Saints, Sacrilege and Sedition: Religion and Conflict in the Tudor Reformations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 109–129.

²³² Flavigny, *D’Angleterre en Normandie*, 115.

²³³ Prior and Gardener, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 469.

²³⁴ Marzia Ratti, *Arte e devozione in Val di Vara: catalogo della mostra: Varese Ligure, Palazzo Cristiani-Picetti, 15 luglio-31 ottobre 1989* (Genova: SAGEP, 1989), 50-54, 34-3.

²³⁵ Zuleika Murat, “Medieval English Alabaster Sculptures: Trade and Diffusion in the Italian Peninsula”, *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 22 (2016), 399-413.

study below of English alabasters on the eastern side of the Adriatic, along the Dalmatian coast.

A Case Study in Post-Reformation Trade: Croatian Merchants and English Alabaster

Between the islands of Hvar to the north and Mijet to south, lies the Croatian island of Korčula, located twenty miles off the Dalmatian coast. At the heart of the island is the small village of Čara which contains two churches. One church has a parochial function and is located at the centre of the village. The other is a small chapel dedicated to the Virgin and is situated in a field nearby the village. In this church, called Gospe čarskog polja (Our Lady of the Field), are five English alabaster panels and two bookend figures from a disassembled mid-fifteenth-century Marian altarpiece [figs 1.35 and 1.36].²³⁶ All of the sculptures apart from one have been permanently reset into a marble frame, probably made in the seventeenth century, and show: [1] a standing figure of John the Baptist; [2] Annunciation; [3] Nativity; [4] Adoration of the Magi; [5] Coronation of the Virgin; [6] a standing figure of St John the Evangelist. The alabaster of the Assumption of the Virgin is located at the centre of the ensemble [figs 1.37 to 1.43]. In this new order, the Assumption has been repositioned as the central panel, which in the original order would have been a different panel, usually the largest. Here, that sculpture is The Adoration of the Magi, now located at the bottom left of the ensemble but originally the central image. Why then has the Assumption taken centre stage?

There are no documents to date the arrival of English alabasters in Čara, yet a legend connected to them details their discovery on a nearby beach after a shipwreck.²³⁷

²³⁶ C. Fisković, "English Monuments in Dalmatia" in *Dubrovnik's Relations with England*, a symposium of April 1976, eds. R. Filipović and M. Partridge, (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 1977), 157-85.

²³⁷ Igor Fisković, "Engleski alabasterni reljefi u Čari na Korčuli", *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, 27(2003), 43-52.

After this the sculptures were brought to the parish church where they were stored for a time. However, the image of the Assumption would not stay put and miraculously flew from the church into a field nearby. This happened repeatedly and therefore it was decided that a chapel should be built to honour the Assumption image, which became “Our Lady in the Field”. Shipwrecks are sometimes associated with works of art which have their origin in far-off locations. Take for example an alabaster altarpiece of St George in Borbjerg, Denmark, which, as legend has it, was shipwrecked on its way to St Petersburg.²³⁸

The islands that line the Dalmatian coast contain a number of English alabasters. They can be found on Hvar, Korčula and Lopud. Without documentation it is difficult to be certain but the evidence suggests they were most likely taken to Croatia at the time of or after the English Reformation by Ragusan (Dubrovnik) merchants working in London, Margate or Southampton and gifted to religious institutions on the islands.²³⁹ The presence of a Ragusan merchant class in London, specifically on Fenchurch street, was at its strongest between 1530 and 1580.²⁴⁰ These merchants were members of the Ragusan nobility and some had large houses on these islands which functioned almost like Veneto country villas, for individuals who lived in Dubrovnik.²⁴¹ Two alabasters were once on display on the island of Lopud. One of these showed St Thomas Becket and the other, a head of St John the Baptist [figs 1.44 and 1.45]. Fragments of the Becket alabaster were discovered in a small room located in the basement of the parish church in 2003. Further, the head of St John the Baptist was

²³⁸ See Chapter Five of this thesis, 222-272.

²³⁹ Veselin Kostić, “Sketches from the life of Ragusa Merchants in London in the time of Henry VIII”, *Dubrovnik Annals* 12 (2008), 45-56.

²⁴⁰ For an overview see: Veselin Kostić, *Dubrovnik i Engleska 1300-1650* (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1975), 565-600. For a wider history, see: Branka Magaš, *Croatia through History: The Making of a European State* (London: Saqi, 2007).

²⁴¹ Kostić, *Dubrovnik i Engleska*, 581.

originally in the Dominican Convent on Lopud but has now been transferred to a museum in Dubrovnik. A local legend on Lopud records the bringing of an altarpiece from the chapel of Henry VIII to the parish church at the time of the Reformation.²⁴² Although the legend cannot be relied on as factual, the mythology which surrounds the alabaster is similar to the way in which Count Pietro Giulio Cristiani brought two alabasters to Varese Ligure in Italy. Individuals like Cristiani can be traced on Lopud. Miho Pracat (d.1607) was a wealthy merchant who kept a house there. He helped to fund churches such as the chapel of the Holy Cross, Lopud, and donated works of art to the island parish church of Our Lady.²⁴³ Perhaps Pracat, like Cristiani, bought a number of alabasters and donated them to the churches of Lopud. Both individuals must have valued the carvings and their actions are evidence of a continued appreciation for English alabaster sculpture.

Further work on English alabasters abroad would help to enhance our understanding of the different motives behind post-Reformation trade in English works of art. Still, these instances demonstrate an appreciation for the sculptures at the time of the Reformation and speak to their continued value outside of England. In some cases individuals like Cristiani would have surely have spotted a bargain, buying sculptures on the cheap to bring back from England. Yet, in other cases, they must have been appalled by the destruction wrought by the Reformation and the alabasters might have carried something like the status of relics.

Conclusion:

I have outlined the broad and complex history of English alabaster sculpture after the Reformation and although I have aimed to be comprehensive there is inevitably far

²⁴² Personal communication with residents of the island, September 2014.

²⁴³ Information taken from a didactic panel located inside of the chapel of the Holy Cross, Lopud, September 2014.

more to be said. Part One of this chapter looked at parish compliance, Part Two analysed clerical reactions to the injunctions and the burial of objects in churches, Part Three examined how alabasters were concealed in houses, and Part Four described the different means by which alabasters left England during the Reformation. By exploring the post-Reformation history of English alabaster sculpture I have shown that the effect of the injunctions against certain images had a long and profound effect on the status and significance of the corpus both in England and abroad. Still, particular alabaster images need specific attention, particularly those of St Thomas Becket and the Man of Sorrows, which have their own stories of destruction, survival and concealment to tell. I have shown that sculptures were moved from churches into homes and back into churches again; that many were destroyed and some were buried or concealed.

Analysing the treatment of English alabaster in parishes across England helps to plot and trace local responses to the Reformation and give voice to individuals who leave no trace. Moving on to Chapter Two, we will zoom in and look more closely at a group of fragmentary alabasters and discover that far from being simply a gathering of broken sculptures, there is much that we can learn from attending to their format, context and iconography.

Chapter Two:

The Kettlebaston Altarpiece at the British Museum: Reconstruction, Iconography and Context

Introduction:

In this chapter I explore the development of English alabaster altarpieces during the fourteenth century. Its focus is the format and iconography of the earliest alabaster panels and as a starting point it asks how were they different from contemporary English and European altarpieces made in other materials. This is a difficult question to answer satisfactorily as so few English altarpieces survive and thus the statistical pool is limited. Yet, there are a number of instances within the corpus of early alabaster panels where their format and iconography departs radically from other surviving sculpted or painted altarpieces and reredoses from England. These iconographic idiosyncrasies of early English alabaster sculptures have yet to be explored, or recognised, by other scholars. However, further questions remain about the chosen format and structure of early alabaster ensembles. Why, for instance, are the earliest alabaster altarpieces made up of three independent panels rather than in one single block of stone like other contemporary painted and sculpted examples? Their panel structure and its relationship to comparable works of art has never been questioned. They have often been treated as part of an accumulation of iconographical data rather than as signature objects.

The first part of this chapter begins with the discovery of one of the earliest surviving English alabaster altarpieces from Kettlebaston, Suffolk. From this altarpiece we move to larger questions. I will argue that the closest parallels for the iconography, structure and format of the earliest altarpiece panels can be found in Continental panel

paintings and other works of art from the fourteenth century. Continental connections will be explored through the embedded networks that existed between the earliest patrons linked to English alabaster and the ownership of Italian panel paintings in England. It is here that we find resonances for the iconography of English alabaster sculptures. The same individuals who patronised alabaster sculptors, many of whom were members of the English court of Edward III, also had deep links and networks throughout Continental Europe. The point of making the claim here - that alabasters fit into a wider history of patronage in the fourteenth century - serves to help reframe the corpus and bring English alabasters into a wider art-historical discourse. Exploring their imagery as part of a European network of image-making brings them and the material of alabaster into dialogue with a range of other object types. Further, it shows that early alabaster panels like early alabaster tombs find their connections within a European nexus of image interaction rather than occupying the status of a provincial phenomenon. In part two of this chapter I move beyond the Kettlebaston altarpiece and situate it within the wider development of alabaster altarpieces, and altarpieces more generally, dating from the second half of the fourteenth century. I close the chapter by examining an alabaster altarpiece made around c.1400 with scenes from the life of Christ. The point here is to establish similarities and differences in the corpus and to add balance to the Marian focus of the first part of this chapter.

Part One: The Discovery at St Mary's, Kettlebaston:

In 1864 a group of fragmentary English alabasters was discovered inside the chancel of St Mary's, Kettlebaston, Suffolk. The discovery included three Marian images which are amongst the earliest surviving English alabaster panels [figs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3].²⁴⁴ St

²⁴⁴ M.R. Taylor, "The Kettlebaston Alabasters" in *The Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, vol.XXX, part 3 (1967), 252-259.

Mary's was rebuilt in the fourteenth century, at which time the chancel was enlarged and fitted with a new altar and sedilia. The rebuilding was recorded by Robert Pikele, who stated that the church at Kettlebaston was "built anew" in 1342/3 but there is little other documentation to substantiate this.²⁴⁵ As part of these "new" building works a funeral monument on the north wall of the chancel was created, and an image niche of around the same date can be found, situated on an external buttress of the chancel. It seems likely that all of this work to refashion the chancel was connected and that, potentially, the alabaster altarpiece was part of it. A new and large window located on the South wall of the chancel is perfectly placed to provide sufficient light for an altarpiece. Perhaps the tomb on the North wall represents the patron of the building activity but as of yet no information is forthcoming for who this might have been, if indeed it was a single individual at all.

Nineteen years after their discovery, the alabasters were donated to the British Museum (BM) by Reverend James Beck, rector of nearby Bildeston church, Suffolk. He had taken possession of the fragmentary panels soon after they were found. Beck was a notable local antiquarian and a number of other objects came into the BM through his benefaction. His name is still scrawled in pencil on the reverse of one of the panels as a reminder of his part in its history.²⁴⁶ The discovery was recorded in the BM departmental acquisitions register as having been "found about twenty years since imbedded in the walls of the chancel of the church at Kettlebaston, Suffolk."²⁴⁷ Augustus Wollaston Franks, curator at the British Museum and a regular correspondent of

²⁴⁵ A.E. Stamp, *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, vol. XI, Edward III* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1935), 423. My thanks to James Bettley for bringing this reference to my attention.

²⁴⁶ Reverend James Beck donated a large number of objects to the British Museum over the course of the mid-nineteenth-century.

²⁴⁷ British Museum archival register for the Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory (British Antiquities), August, 1883.

Beck's, recorded the acquisition himself. Franks was responsible for the first acquisition of an English alabaster into the national collection in 1853 and was committed to the purchase of archaeological discoveries when he could.²⁴⁸ He recognised that context mattered but he failed to record the exact location inside the chancel where the sculptures were found.

The Kettlebaston alabasters are an important group of medieval sculpture. Yet, their condition has meant that they have been overlooked. Even in their current state they serve as a vital piece of the puzzle for reconstructing the format of the earliest alabaster altarpieces, and English altarpieces more widely.²⁴⁹ A relatively large number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century alabaster panels are still set into their original wooden frames, which is not the case for any of the sculptures related to the Kettlebaston group or almost any of the earliest alabaster panels.²⁵⁰ The iconography and format of the Kettlebaston alabasters is unique in the context of early English altarpieces and, as I will show, engages with imagery and formats related to a wide Continental image nexus, rather than other sculptures found closer to their place of production in England. Some of these issues will of course be related to the survival rates of English fourteenth-century sculpture. However, having been discovered in the chancel of an English parish church, the Kettlebaston panels allow for an insight into how English alabaster sculptors brought an international vocabulary to the altars of parish churches, transforming the way we might view images associated with parish church altars.

²⁴⁸ Cherry, "A.W. Franks", 184-199.

²⁴⁹ Many of these sculptures are included in a useful analysis of fourteenth-century alabasters by W.L Hildburgh, "English Alabaster Tables of about the Third Quarter of the Fourteenth Century" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1950), 1-23.

²⁵⁰ A statement of this kind is complicated by there not being a complete survey of all extant sculptures. Philip Nelson, "The Woodwork of English Alabaster Retables" *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Vol. LXXII (1920), 50-60.

Only a handful of medieval records survive for St Mary's, Kettlebaston, and none helps to accurately date the panels. In 1532, John Folkes left a bequest to the church "to make a table of our Blessed Lord to stand over the Altar of the South side of the church the pattern thereof to be taken of the table in Brettenham church."²⁵¹ At this time the Marian alabaster altarpiece might still have occupied the high altar in the chancel. The "table" paid for by John Folkes does not survive, making it impossible to know whether it was ever made. Further documents locate other images inside the church, such as a crucifix, a Trinity, and St John the Baptist, but these could have been freestanding sculptures, stained-glass or wall-paintings.²⁵² Difficulty in dating alabasters stems from the fact that not a single alabaster panel or freestanding sculpture can be tied to a contract for production. This is the case for the well-known and often quoted reredos made for Edward III by Peter the Maceon of Nottingham.²⁵³ A number of scholars have offered dates for the Kettlebaston panels and these have ranged between 1350 and 1380, but have never been conclusive.²⁵⁴ It is probably impossible to decide the matter. Although accurate dating has proved difficult, the group's perceived importance amongst scholars has almost always focused on the skilful handling of the carving. Nigel Ramsay considered them "the finest of the early alabaster panels", although in exercising this opinion he was repeating the view of Philip Nelson and other earlier authors.²⁵⁵ St John Hope tried to circumvent the lack of documentary evidence

²⁵¹ Taylor, "Kettlebaston", 253.

²⁵² V.B. Redstone, "Chapels Chantries and Gilds in Suffolk", *The Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, Volume XII Part 1 (1904), 81.

²⁵³ Hope, "Early Working", 221-240.

²⁵⁴ See, for instance: Hope, "Early Working", 221-240; Prior, "Alabaster Tables", 16-50; Stone, *Sculpture in Britain*, 190; Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 513.

²⁵⁵ Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 513; Philip Nelson, "Earliest type of English Alabaster Panel Carvings" *The Archaeological Journal*, vol.LXXVI (1919), 85.

by comparing the style of the Kettlebaston sculptures to the weepers on the tomb of John of Eltham (d.1336), in the hope of securing an early date for the alabasters.²⁵⁶

Description of the Panels:

The Kettlebaston panels are all fragmentary but enough survives for their iconography to be easily identified. They show: the Annunciation [fig.2.1], the Coronation of the Virgin [fig.2.2], and the Ascension of Christ [fig.2.3]. Surprisingly, their format and wider context has hardly been considered.²⁵⁷ The later Pan-European popularity of English alabaster altarpieces in the fifteenth century has sometimes obscured a view of the entire corpus, serving to create a problematic picture for the status and significance of the earliest sculptures. At the time of their making the Kettlebaston alabasters would have been quite different in form and probably in iconography and material, from what almost anyone living in the parish had ever seen.²⁵⁸ English parish church inventories from the fourteenth century detail large numbers of textiles, some used as altar frontals, but relatively few altarpieces or reredoses have been documented before the middle of the century.²⁵⁹ For instance the church at Swinton, Norfolk, had an alabaster table with the Crucifixion by 1368: “Item j tabula de alabastr’ de ymagine cum cruce de

²⁵⁶ Hope, “Early Working”, 221-240.

²⁵⁷ Prior and Gardener, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 472. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain*, 264, Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 513.

²⁵⁸ Justin Kroesen and Regnerus Steensma, *The Interior of the Medieval Village Church* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); Paul Binski, “Statues, Retables, and Ciboria: The English Gothic Altarpiece in Context, before 1350” in *The Altar and its Environment 1150-1400*, eds. Justin E.A. Kroesen and Victor M. Schmidt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 31-46.

²⁵⁹ Dirk Ollman, “The Origin and Development of the English Reredos 1000-1540” (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001), 79-97. Some caution must be taken here as the survival rates for this period are low. Ollman provides a number of documentary examples where retables are cited from the thirteenth century, including Arborfield (1220), Heybridge (1249-52), Oxney (1214-22).

eodem”.²⁶⁰ This is one of the earliest references to an alabaster in an English parish church. When present, figurative or heraldic stained glass in the east window would have provided a backdrop to the altar, and perhaps in some cases acted like a reredos. Still, it seems unlikely that the majority of English parish churches had an altarpiece in the early to mid-fourteenth century.²⁶¹ Some caution must be taken here as the survival rates for this period are low. Nevertheless, the Kettlebaston panels must be situated within a developing and burgeoning context for altar imagery in parish churches; its very development was possibly one reason for the wider quarrying and use of alabaster outside of funeral monuments and other early free-standing sculptures.²⁶²

The Annunciation:

Measuring 25 cm x 25 cm, the Annunciation shows the Virgin seated on an elongated bench, part of which is still visible to her right before the break. On her left hand side is a tall, narrow and bevelled stand on top of which is placed an opened book. Mary’s body is turned away from the bookstand towards the interior of the scene which before it was broken would have shown the archangel Gabriel. The Virgin’s left hand is curved towards the inside of her lap and from the fragmentary remains of her right arm it is possible to reconstruct her position, demonstrating that she would have originally held it raised up toward Gabriel. Mary’s positioning suggests that her head was turned towards the interior of the panel with her body twisted to emphasise her surprise, a feature the sculptor endeavoured to depict emphatically. The Virgin’s right leg is placed above and in front of her left leg with the right foot poking out from beneath an

²⁶⁰ Dom Aelred Watkin, *Archdeaconry of Norwich, Inventory of Church Goods, temp Ed III* (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1947/1948), 61. My thanks to Tom Nickson for bringing this reference to my attention.

²⁶¹ Ollman, “English Reredos”, 79-97.

²⁶² The most complete survey of English alabaster tombs is still: Arthur Gardener, *Alabaster tombs of the pre-reformation period in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

elaborate gathering of highly detailed switchback drapery folds. These begin as soft waves of fabric at the right and grow into a zigzag pattern across the long horizontal ledge of ground. A small portion of drapery dangles off the edge of the ground, playing with and contrasting the very low relief of the figural sculpture against the more dramatic depth of the lower part of the panel. This division serves to separate the zone on which Mary's seat is placed and the integral bevelled frame underneath. The reverse of the panel is flat and mostly plain except for a small rectangular drilled hole which has been filled with lead and retains elements of a broken wire [fig.2.4]. Grooved lines on the reverse indicate marks left as the block of alabaster was separated out from a larger piece by means of a saw. A number of diagonal lines, grooves and scratches are present across the reverse of the panel; some indicate marks made by the tools used to carve the figural side.

The Coronation of the Virgin:

Measuring 25 cm x 29 cm, the Coronation panel is broken into a number of pieces with the main break running directly under the now missing heads of the Virgin and Christ. Here, again, the sculptor has created two distinct registers, with the lower section still showing faint traces of gilding and patterning which would have originally covered the background of the alabaster panel. A horizontal strip of ground is located within this lower space where the Virgin kneels in supplication before Christ. Her cloak is caught at the knee and the drapery fans out, gathering under the noticeable indent of her shoe. Mary's hair is uncovered and is shown as a series of repeating S shapes trailing down her right shoulder. Both her arms are outstretched, reaching towards the upper register containing Christ who is shown seated on a throne with his feet placed on the ground below. His throne spans the entire width of the panel, demonstrating that once crowned and blessed, Mary will be pulled up from the lower register to sit beside him. Further

breaks in the alabaster can be seen on the reverse of the panel which cannot be easily detected from the front [fig.2.5]. After discovery the fragments must have been glued back together, after which an additional layer of plaster was added to strengthen the repair. A further rectangular drilled hole can be seen where the plaster has worn away, which also functioned as a means of securing the alabaster panel into a wooden frame.

The Ascension:

Measuring 18cm x 29 cm, the panel of the Ascension is unlike the others in one key respect. There is no separation present between the base of the integral frame and the figures depicted. In this panel the Apostles are situated along its base and are shown kneeling on a mound of earth which protrudes slightly between the two central figures. It is not possible to identify any of the figures with certainty but it is tempting to identify the figure placed centre left as Mary; a small portion of hair draped along the right hand shoulder of the figure is similar to her depiction in the other panels.²⁶³ This figure is, however, shown barefoot and it would be extremely unusual to depict the Virgin in this way.²⁶⁴ From the reverse of the panel we can see that the fragment was previously in two pieces rather than one, suggesting that it was glued back together before it entered the British Museum [fig.2.6].

The measurements, coherence of style, format and narrative of the Kettlebaston panels all serve to demonstrate that they once formed a single altarpiece. This has never been in doubt but the “archaeological” context for the group, and the fact that only three narrative scenes for the life of Mary were found, suggests that the arrangement originally comprised only these three scenes. In other words, we are not missing another panel from the ensemble which would have extended the narrative sequence.

²⁶³ See, for instance, V&A accession number: A.27-1950

²⁶⁴ Joanna Cannon, "Kissing the Virgin's Foot: Adoratio before the Madonna and Child enacted, Depicted, Imagined." *Studies in Iconography*, 31 (2010), 1-50.

This is a crucial point and one which has not previously been explored. Due to a lack of surviving comparative material it is not possible to be absolutely certain about the order of the panels but I will return to this in due course. Like most alabasters the Kettlebston panels have remained decontextualized and when studied at all they have been considered only alongside other English alabaster sculptures. This has proved to be problematic but is akin to other historical treatment of single material studies. Casting the net wider, and more importantly abroad, brings fresh material into dialogue with the Kettlebaston fragments, helping to provide a firmer date and context for their production.

The Iconography of the Kettlebaston Fragments:

First, before moving on to discuss their wider connections we need to investigate how they relate to the surviving corpus of English alabaster sculpture. The Kettlebaston alabasters are distinct from the majority of surviving English alabasters panels. Take for example the Annunciation scene. Almost all of the over one hundred examples recorded by Francis Cheetham follow a format where Gabriel kneels before Mary, who is shown either standing or kneeling, although there are numerous micro-variations on this theme.²⁶⁵ A relatively small number within this corpus are directly related to the example from Kettlebaston.²⁶⁶ Two other alabasters which most closely match its arrangement of figures are in the V&A and Nottingham Castle Museum [figs 2.7 and 2.8]. Both measure 43cm x 30cm, and show the Virgin in a similar but not identical pose. The base of each panel is raised and canted which produces a dramatically different effect for the presentation of the scene. In these two panels the figures are

²⁶⁵ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 74-79.

²⁶⁶ Francis Cheetham listed five others but the example from Burton Agnes should be discounted as it is dated to c.1481 and located on the tomb of Sir Walter Griffith, see: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 74-75.

projected out from the relief rather than contained within the sunken integral frame. All of these panels derive their iconography from an earlier fourteenth-century “type” already circulating – albeit with great rarity – in England around the middle of the fourteenth century. For example the Annunciation page from the Neville of Hornby Hours and the same scene from the Zouche Hours show a seated Virgin of this type [figs 2.9 and 2.10]. Still, in both manuscripts the Virgin is presented centrally and her body is much larger within the frame of the image.²⁶⁷ Both the Hornby and Zouche manuscripts were deluxe products made for high ranking individuals which suggests that a reassessment of the status of the Kettlebaston fragments is in order. Was there perhaps a similar patron behind their production?

The sculptor of the panels from the V&A and Nottingham Castle – who might have been the one and the same – was less skilled in the handling of relief when compared to the Kettlebaston sculptures. Both display a blocky, rough quality to the relief style and undercutting is practically non-existent. Gabriel’s scroll for instance is completely solid. Whoever carved the Kettlebaston Annunciation was committed to undercutting and took risks with vulnerable areas of drapery in order to achieve a dramatic depth of relief. Simply put, none of the “qualities” evident in the Kettlebaston Annunciation can be seen in either comparable example, including the dynamic interplay between space and relief, or the attention to detail which characterises each of

²⁶⁷ For the Hornby Hours see: Kathryn A. Smith, “The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion”, *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999), 72-92. Nigel Morgan, “Patrons and Devotional Images in English Art of the International Gothic c. 1350-1450”, in *Reading Texts and Images: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Art and Patronage in honour of Margaret M. Manion*, ed. by Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), pp. 93-122 (pp. 96-97). Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (London: British Library, 2003), 30, 57, 61, 63, 67, 73, 87, 89, 91, 95-106, 109-12, 116-19, 121-23, 128-29, 134-39. There are other “matching” images in both the Neville of Hornby Hours and the Zouche Hours, for instance f. 157v and f. 7r respectively, where Mary and John are shown seated on the ground at the Crucifixion. For the Zouche Hours, see: Bodleian MS. Lat. Liturgy. e. 41, fol. 7r.

the alabasters discovered in Suffolk. Therefore, the sculptor responsible for the panels at the V&A and Nottingham Castle was either less talented or was more concerned with producing a greater quantity of sculptures quickly. Both might have been made at a similar date but they were clearly not made by the same sculptor responsible for the Kettlebaston Annunciation. That said, all must surely share a common “source”, and perhaps the Kettlebaston panel or another now lost version provided the template. The evidence outlined above suggests that two, or possibly three sculptors were producing alabaster altarpieces of a similar size, with comparable iconography around the same time.

Discrepancies of quality aside, the panels from the V&A and Nottingham Castle survive in much better condition and thus help to visually replace what has been lost in the Kettlebaston scene. A visual reconstruction of the Kettlebaston fragment, drawing on elements from these other panels, helps to indicate lost portions of iconography [fig.2.11].²⁶⁸ In order to reconstruct this panel to scale, it became apparent that a lily vase was probably not present when the panel was whole. This is probably down to space. It was not possible to fit Gabriel and a vase into the left hand side of the scene.

In terms of sophistication of technique, size and format, the Kettlebaston Annunciation is much closer in style to two other alabaster Annunciations in the V&A [figs 2.12 and 2.13]. The first was probably made by the same sculptor responsible for the Kettlebaston group, or one who had intimate working knowledge of the Kettlebaston sculptor’s style and technique. The other is almost certainly by another sculptor but is particularly close to Kettlebaston in format but not in style or technique. Placing the two panels from the V&A side by side reveals their specific differences. In

²⁶⁸ This reconstruction also makes use of another alabaster from the V&A, accession number: A.28-1950. It is discussed in greater detail below.

the second V&A panel the Virgin's upper body is larger and her throne less delineated. Gabriel by contrast is smaller, squeezed into the space above the lily with the vase placed towards the margins of the frame. Further, Mary's halo is sculpted rather than painted and less attention has been paid to undercutting. Gabriel's scroll in the first V&A panel is almost completely undercut.

The second V&A Annunciation can be placed in a stylistic grouping with two other fourteenth-century alabasters depicting the Crucifixion. These are a complete panel at the V&A and another fragment of the same scene at the BM [figs 2.14 and 2.15]. Whether or not these three alabasters shared the same maker is impossible to prove, however, their similarities demonstrate that Marian and Christological altarpieces were being produced at the same time in alabaster and are in my opinion by the same sculptor or workshop. Both Annunciation panels from the V&A are the same size, measuring 40cm x 30cm, which is approximately what the Kettlebaston panel must have measured when it was complete. Each of these Annunciation scenes shares the same bevelled and integral frame, yet there are numerous shared similarities between Kettlebaston and the first V&A panel which need to be addressed.

A number of technical and stylistic similarities exist between the Annunciation from Kettlebaston and the first V&A example, however, their iconography is slightly different. Mary in the panel from the V&A is seated upright with her body turned at an angle towards the left hand side of the scene. No bookstand is present and thus the Virgin holds an open book within her lap towards the viewer. If the alabasters from Kettlebaston and the V&A were made by the same sculptor or workshop these differences indicate knowledge of a variety of methods for depicting the Annunciation. Beyond their stylistic similarities, the inventiveness displayed by the sculptor is equally important to note. Gabriel, for example, is shown descending into the scene riding a

cloud and carrying a scroll. It is an unprecedented way to represent the Annunciation in English art and although it could be the *sui generis* creation of the sculptor there are iconographic parallels outside England which will be explored below.

The arrangement of space in both panels is different too. Mary in the V&A Annunciation is shown seated at the base of the panel, whereas in the Kettlebaston panel she is raised into the middle of the scene. Seated Annunciations of this sort are extremely rare in English works of from the fourteenth-century.²⁶⁹ Typically, Gabriel and Mary were shown standing opposite each other.²⁷⁰ When a seated Annunciation has been found in a fourteenth-century English manuscript, it has usually been the focus of much scholarly attention. This has almost always been discussed in relation to an internationalism for the iconographic “sources” of the scene.²⁷¹ In the case of the Teymouth Hours the scene has been compared to the work of Jean Pucelle and included within an elite group of manuscripts with established Italian or wider Continental connections.²⁷² Another example where an artist has incorporated a side-on presentation of the Virgin for the Annunciation is in the Llanbelig Hours, but this manuscript has been dated to the late fourteenth century and thus likely postdates its first appearance in alabaster.²⁷³ Up until now the Kettlebaston alabasters have only been considered within the framework of the surviving corpus of English alabaster sculpture. Seeing them, and their wider artistic environment as active participants in Continental

²⁶⁹ Several earlier seated Annunciation scenes can be found in Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque manuscripts, for instance, in the Benedictional of St Æthelwold, British Library Additional MS 49598, f.5v.

²⁷⁰ Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Peterborough Psalter in Brussels and other Fenland manuscripts* (London: Harvey Millar, 1974).

²⁷¹ Lucy Freeman Sandler, “A Follower of Jean Pucelle in England”, *The Art Bulletin*, 52:4 (1970), 363-372.

²⁷² Sandler, “Jean Pucelle”, 371.

²⁷³ Paul Binski, *Becket's Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England, 1170-1300* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 219.

exchange alongside manuscripts like the Taymouth Hours is helpful even when documentary evidence is lacking.

No single object can serve as a prototype for the iconography of the Kettlebaston alabasters, but by tracing similar examples across Europe we can identify a network of exchange. For instance, a painted Annunciation scene of c.1370 in the cloister of the Emmaus Monastery in Prague shows Gabriel kneeling on a cloud [fig.2.16].²⁷⁴ Another variation of this scene made some years previous, c.1340-50, can be found in the chapel of Saint Michael at Pedralbes monastery in Spain. There, Gabriel is also depicted flying towards rather than kneeling or standing in front of the Virgin [fig.2.17]. Both of these scenes share a deep interaction with Italian art, Giotto in the case of the Pedralbes monastery.²⁷⁵ Prague, on the other hand, was home for a time to itinerant Italian painters such as Tomasso da Modena and the Italianate characteristics of art produced there in the second half of the fourteenth century have been well explored.²⁷⁶ Still, there are further similarities between the Annunciation in the Emmaus cloister and the alabaster panel at the V&A which are worth exploring, particularly the unfurling of the scroll towards Mary and Gabriel's overall position. His

²⁷⁴ See Zorana Opačić, "Charles IV and the Emmaus Monastery: Slavonic tradition and imperial ideology in fourteenth-century Prague" (PhD Thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2003).

²⁷⁵ Millard Meiss. "Italian Style in Catalonia and a Fourteenth Century Catalan Workshop", *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, vol. 4 (1941), 45-87. Rosa Alcoy, "Barcelona sota el signe de Giotto? Mirades i arguments", in Rosa Alcoy (ed.), *El Trecento en obres*. (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2009), 49-90. Rosa Alcoy. "Clarisse, monarchia e mondo francescano, nella capella di sant Michele, nel monastero di Pedralbes, e oltre" in *Ikon*, vol. 3 (2010), 81-94. For a painting by Giotto showing Gabriel flying at the Annunciation, see the Santa Reparata Altarpiece, c.1310-12: Julian Gardner, "Giotto in America (and Elsewhere)" in ed. Victor M. Schmidt, *Italian Panel Paintings of the Duecento and Trecento* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art. 2002), 161-182, 165.

²⁷⁶ Opačić, "Emmaus Monastery"; James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575*, (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2004), 3-15. Jan Royt, *The Master of the Trebon Altarpiece* (Prague: Karolinum Press, University of Chicago Press 2015), 63. See also Barbara Drake Boehm, ed., *Prague: the Crown of Bohemia, 1347-1437* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 76-77.

wings are similarly pointed and are shown as rigid, upright and spread out with long lines indicating the individual definition of the feathers. It could be that Gabriel's depiction in the alabasters was conditional on space. If the sculptors wanted to include both the lily vase and Gabriel, but at the same time needed to retain the tall rectangular format of the frame, then a compromise was needed. Perhaps there was simply not enough space to show Gabriel as keeling over next to the Virgin unless an overall reduction in figure size was considered. Whatever the reason, the choice to present Gabriel riding the cloud and the Virgin Mary as seated both demonstrates a familiarity with other Continental depictions of the Annunciation, all of which have established links with iconographic developments in Italian painting.

In a number of ways, Simone Martini's Annunciation from the Orsini altarpiece provides an archetype for thinking through the Virgin's presentation in these early English alabasters [fig.2.18].²⁷⁷ Martini depicted the Virgin turned towards the inside of the frame. He added an open book and a lily vase to her immediate right hand side. Martini's format proved extremely popular and was widely copied in Italy and elsewhere. The point here is not to suggest that the makers of these early English alabasters were coping directly from a painting by Simone Martini but rather that iconographic elements in the alabasters, such as the angle of the Virgin's throne and body, might be considered similar and worth exploring. At the very least it suggests a working knowledge of a type of Continentally inspired representation on the part of the sculptor of the Kettlebaston alabasters. Apart from Simone Martini a range of painters chose to depict the Annunciation in this way. The examples range in date from the mid fourteenth century onwards and include the Annunciation from the Vyšší Brod

²⁷⁷ Neil Stratford first made this connection in his discussion of the Annunciation from the Grandisson ivory diptych, see: Neil Stratford, "Bishop Grandisson and the Visual Arts", in *Exeter Cathedral: A Celebration*, ed. Michael Swanton, (Exeter, 1991), 145-55.

altarpiece, c.1350, and the Annunciation panel in the Cleveland Museum of Art dated c.1380 [figs 2.19 and 2.20]. Significantly, the size and format of the Cleveland Annunciation is similar to the alabasters, measuring 40cm x 30cm. The same could also be said of its raised integral frame and rectangular spatial arrangement, but I will return to this in due course.

Similarities between English works of art and Italian paintings have been well explored. Usually these discussions have focused on deluxe manuscripts made for high-ranking individuals, or on the wall-paintings at St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster Palace, and those for Prior Crauden's chapel at Ely cathedral.²⁷⁸ Other contemporary English images which arguably reference Italian prototypes are the ivories associated with John Grandisson, bishop of Exeter (d.1369).²⁷⁹ Grandisson was papal legate to England and one-time chaplain to Pope John XXII in Avignon, who as Paul Binski has recently argued, had an alabaster tomb possibly carved by an English sculptor active

²⁷⁸ For English manuscripts see: Otto Pächt, "A Giottesque Episode in English Mediaeval Art." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 51-70. Francis Wormwald. "The Fitzwarin Psalter and Its Allies." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 71-79; Lynda Dennison, "'The Fitzwarin Psalter and its Allies': a Reappraisal" in ed. W.M. Ormrod, *England in the Fourteenth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1986), 42-66; Paul Binski, *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style, 1290-1350* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 325-337. For the wall-paintings from St Stephen's chapel, Westminster and Prior Crauden's chapel, Ely see: Paul Binski and David Park, "A Ducciesque Episode at Ely: The Mural Decorations of Prior Crauden's Chapel" in *England in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. W.M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1986), 28-41; Andrew Martindale, "St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, and the Italian Experience" in *Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture presented to Peter Lasko*, eds. David Buckton and T.A. Heslop (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1994), 102-112; Jane Reita Spooner, "Royal Wall Paintings in England in the Second Half of the Fourteenth Century", (PhD Thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2017), 96-183. My thanks to Jane for sharing her PhD research with me before publication.

²⁷⁹ Stratford, "Bishop Grandisson", 145-55. For further discussion of Exeter cathedral and its Italian connections, see: Xenia Muratova, "Exeter and Italy: Assimilation and Adaptation of a Style: The Question of Italian Trecento Sources in the Sculptured Front of Exeter Cathedral (fourteenth century)" in *World Art: Themes of Unity in Diversity*, vol. I, ed. Irving Lavin (London: Penn State Press, 1989), 117-132; Paul Williamson, "Sculptures of the West Front" in *Exeter Cathedral: A Celebration*, ed. Michael Swanton. (Exeter, 1991), 78; Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 334-336.

abroad.²⁸⁰ An Annunciation scene from one of Grandisson's ivories is distinctly similar to a painting by Taddeo Gaddi.²⁸¹ An image of the Virgin and Child from an ivory triptych also owned by Grandisson has been compared with Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Maesta, but is also close to an unattributed Italian Madonna and Child of the same date [figs 2.21 and 2.22].²⁸² Grandisson was consecrated bishop of Exeter in Avignon in 1328 and it has been suggested by others that his time at the Papal Court was the catalyst for the Italianate iconography of his ivories and other objects associated with his patronage.²⁸³ He left Avignon in the early 1330s but his continued links with the Continent might have created a network for the movement of Italian and other artworks to England in the mid-fourteenth century.²⁸⁴ However, this was not one way as the tomb of John XXII shows.²⁸⁵ English alabasters should be included in this cross Channel movement of objects and people, especially given that several fourteenth-century English alabasters showing the Adoration of the Magi can be found in a number of locations across Europe.²⁸⁶ The status of Opus Anglicanum abroad demonstrates high esteem for works of art made in England.²⁸⁷ By closely exploring the alabaster Annunciation from Kettlebaston, we have opened a door for thinking about its iconographical context. Let us now survey the other panels in the Kettlebaston group in order to broaden the discussion.

²⁸⁰ Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 257-260.

²⁸¹ Binski and Park, "Ducciesque Episode", 39. Neil Stratford suggests a Sienese comparison for the Annunciation, see: Stratford, "Bishop Grandisson", 150.

²⁸² Stratford, "Bishop Grandisson", 150; Carlo Volpe, *Pietro Lorenzetti* (Milan, Electa, 1995), 202.

²⁸³ Binski and Park, "Ducciesque Episode", 39-40.

²⁸⁴ Grandisson was back on the Continent again in 1343 on a trip to Rome, see: Neil Stratford, "Bishop Grandisson", 145.

²⁸⁵ For a lengthy discussion of the English abroad, see: Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 231-280.

²⁸⁶ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 82-83.

²⁸⁷ Clare Browne, Glyn Davies and M.A. Michael, *English Medieval Embroidery: Opus Anglicanum* (London, 2016); Julian Gardner, "Papal Exactions, Royal Gifts and fashionable Cardinals: the Curial Clientele for Opus Anglicanum c.1300-70" in *The Age of Opus Anglicanum* ed. M.A. Michael (London: Harvey Miller, 2016), 22-35.

The Coronation of the Virgin:

In 1928 W.L. Hildburgh bought an English alabaster panel of the Coronation of the Virgin. The sculpture which is now at the V&A was bought at the same time and from the same dealer as its partner Annunciation, discussed above [fig.2.23].²⁸⁸ The Coronation panel is undamaged and is similar enough in style, size and condition to suggest that it originally formed part of the same altarpiece as the Annunciation scene. They also share a common provenance. Both alabasters were previously in Samuel Meyrick's collection housed at Goodrich Court.²⁸⁹ An alabaster Ascension which would complete the altarpiece is now missing and no further provenance details exist to help track the history of the two alabasters prior to them being at Goodrich Court.

The alabaster Coronation provides missing sections of the scene which has been lost from the upper half of the Kettlebaston panel [fig. 2.24]. As before, neither of the panels are the same and slight differences can be seen. For instance, in the V&A Coronation the upper half of the Virgin's body is turned towards the seated Christ, whereas in the Kettlebaston scene Mary's body is turned away. Still, both panels are similar enough to indicate the general outline of what is missing. The reconstruction of the Coronation panel from Kettlebaston shows the Virgin kneeling before Christ to receive the crown, which is a rare and early example of this iconography in England. A sculpture showing the kneeling Virgin at the Coronation was originally part of a reredos in the Lady Chapel at Christchurch Priory, Hampshire, however, this image is dated to around c.1400 when the format was achieving greater popularity. It therefore postdates

²⁸⁸ V&A museum number A.29-1950.

²⁸⁹ Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 208. For Sir Samuel Meyrick and his collection see: Rosalind Rowe, *Sir Samuel Meyrick and Goodrich Court* (Almeley: Logaston, 2003).

the alabaster.²⁹⁰ A typical contemporary treatment of the Coronation can be seen on the Harrington tomb from Cartmel Priory in Lancashire, dated to c.1330-50 [fig.2.25].²⁹¹ There, Christ and the Virgin sit side by side, his hand raised in blessing as an angel places the crown on Mary's head. Other "traditional" sculptural examples include the Coronation of the Virgin in the Lady Chapel in Hereford cathedral, or the Coronation in one of the Grandisson ivory triptychs at the British Museum.²⁹² We could go so far as to consider this mode as relatively fixed. It was the *de facto* way in which the Coronation was depicted since its invention in England around 1100.²⁹³ Where then did the alabaster sculptor come across the image of the kneeling Virgin? By searching further afield and outside the context of English art of the period we can find images of a kneeling Virgin at the Coronation in a number of Italian panel paintings dated to the second half of the fourteenth century. These include an example by Vitale de Bologna of c.1340-45, at the Louvre, Paris, and a further panel by Barnaba da Modena of c.1374, housed in the National Gallery, London [figs 2.26 and 2.27].²⁹⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that both Vitale and Barnaba hailed from Northern Italian cities where banking links can be traced between England and Italy.²⁹⁵

The Ascension:

²⁹⁰ Prior and Gardner were the first to compare the iconography of these two sculptures but misdated the Lady Chapel fragment to c.1340. See: Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 472-473. Other examples include British Library Additional MS 37049, f.27v, where the Virgin is kneeling before Christ who holds up one hand in blessing. This manuscript is, however, dated to the second half the 15th century.

²⁹¹ James Alexander Cameron, "The Harrington tomb in Cartmel Priory: making, agency and audience" (MA dissertation, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2011).

²⁹² Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 354-357.

²⁹³ George Zarnecki, "The Coronation of the Virgin on a Capital from Reading Abbey." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13, no. 1/2 (1950): 1-12. T.A. Heslop, "The English Origins of the Coronation of the Virgin." *The Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1233 (2005): 790-97.

²⁹⁴ For a further example see: Meiss. "Italian Style in Catalonia", fig.22.

²⁹⁵ Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 252-265.

By the fourteenth century if an English artist wanted to depict the Ascension, two choices were broadly available. The first was a format almost unchanged since the Anglo-Saxon period. In it the Virgin and Apostles stand in various different arrangements and all look up towards the sky, where Christ's body is shown leaving earth. By c.1000 the entire body of Christ would be replaced by a half present body, the so-called "disappearing Christ".²⁹⁶ This format continued to be popular for many centuries. An example can be seen on a roof boss in the Great Hospital, Norwich, c.1385 [fig.2.28]. The second format, as seen in the Annunciation from the St Omer Psalter, c.1330, shows the Virgin seated on the ground in the middle of the apostles, all looking upwards towards Christ's Ascension.²⁹⁷ This iconography was selected for the final scene of an altarpiece originally from St Mary's, Sutton Valence, which is roughly contemporary to the alabaster panels from Kettlebaston [fig.2.29]. The Ascension from Kettlebaston is unlike either of these other scenes and thus departs again from established and more traditional iconographical formats. Its maker opted to group the kneeling figures around the Mount of Olives which Christ departed from. This type of iconography is almost without parallel in England but there is a wealth of evidence for its popularity on the Continent.

Italian examples derive from Giotto's treatment of the scene in the Scrovegni Chapel, which became archetypal. Artists such as Guariento d'Arpo (d.1370) adapted the scene for panel paintings [figs 2.30 and 2.31].²⁹⁸ By the 1340s this format had travelled widely and made its way into other works across Europe, for instance in

²⁹⁶ Meyer Schapiro "The Image of the Disappearing Christ: the Ascension in English Art around the Year 1000" in *Selected Papers: III. Late Antique, Early Christian, and Mediaeval Art* (New York, 1979). Robert Deshman, "Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images." *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 3 (1997): 518-46.

²⁹⁷ The Saint Omer Psalter, British Library MS Yates Thompson MS 14, f.120r.

²⁹⁸ This painting is held in the Collezione Vittorio Cini, Venice.

manuscripts by Pacino di Bonaguida, in panel paintings by Barnaba da Modena, or in painted altarpieces such as the Vyšší Brod Ascension [fig.2.32].²⁹⁹ The Ascension scene in the Norwich Passion retable is one of the earliest examples of a kneeling Ascension in an English panel painting, but as it is dated to c.1380 it likely postdates the Kettlebaston sculpture [fig.2.33]. Paintings from Northern Germany and Bohemia are clear stylistic cousins for the Norwich retable, and it is to the Continent that we should look for the iconography of the Kettlebaston scene.³⁰⁰

The popularity of depicting kneeling figures at the Ascension also spread in manuscript form. One of the most widespread examples of this arrangement can be found in the earliest surviving versions of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, dated to the early fourteenth century and linked to that most international of places, Avignon.³⁰¹ This manuscript was copied extensively, and the *Speculum's* popularity was enormous. An English *Speculum*, c.1380, in Yale's Beinecke Library shows apostles with their symbols all kneeling around the Mount of Olives [fig.2.34]. It became the *de facto* way of representing the Annunciation in alabaster. Two late fourteenth-century Ascension panels at the Burrell and the V&A both show the Apostles kneeling with their attributes [fig. 2.35 and 2.36]. These other examples also help us to replace what has been lost from the Kettlebaston scene [fig.2.37]. All of the visual evidence suggests that the sculptor of the Kettlebaston panels had access to a wide range of contemporary Continental iconographical sources.

²⁹⁹ For a manuscript leaf of the Annunciation by Pacino di Bonaguida, see: Getty Museum, Ms. 80a. An Annunciation panel by Barnaba da Modena is in the Capitoline Museum, Rome, accession number: PC 347.

³⁰⁰ T.A. Heslop, "The Norwich Cathedral Passion Altarpiece ('The Despenser Retable')" in *Norwich: medieval and early modern art, architecture and archaeology*, eds. T.A. Heslop and Helen Lunnon (Leeds: Maney, 2015), 201-215.

³⁰¹ Evelyn Silber, "*The early iconography of the 'Speculum Humanae Salvationis': the Italian connection in the fourteenth century.*" (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1983).

Analysis of Paint and Gilding Across the Panels:

A large quantity of remaining paint and gilding can be found on all of the Kettlebaston fragments, showing that the sculptures were originally extensively polychromed.³⁰² A range of colours can be identified. Traces of black, gold and red can be seen on and inside the hemline of the Virgin's cloak in the Annunciation panel. Green, white and red pigment can be seen on the ground to indicate grass and flowers. A predominant and bold red covers the bookstand with pink used on the bench. The area between the Virgin and the break is completely gilded as is the background but not the outer edges of the frame itself. Circular areas of loss in this section denotes the use of raised decoration which were previously glued to the alabaster surface before gilding but have since fallen off. This technique was widespread and can be paralleled on a large number of other alabaster sculptures although the patterns vary.

Polychromatic reconstruction provides a visual insight into the different ways the Virgin was represented across the sculptures [fig.2.41]. Along the hemline of the Virgin's cloak in the Annunciation there is a faint and continuous line which indicates that it was originally gilded. Further, the small repeating portions of black paint show a pattern of fleur-de-lis which would have covered her cloak. These can be detected each time Mary is shown, however in the Coronation panel the fleur-de-lis were painted over gilding whereas in the Annunciation they were not. It appears that Mary was partially polychromed in the first panel and then wore a full, golden cloak in the following scene. The point of this might have been to single out the Coronation scene as particularly important, suggesting that it might have formed the central scene in the arrangement.

The Kettlebaston Alabasters in the Wider Context of Surviving English Altarpieces:

³⁰² Analysis of the polychromy and gilding was undertaken by British Museum scientists Lucia Pereira-Pardo and Joanne Dyer.

Iconographically distinct from almost all existing English altarpieces that predate them, the Kettlebaston alabasters are structurally different too. Carved as individual panels, the sculptures were then set into a larger wooden framework to be placed on an altar. The panel structure of early English alabasters has never been questioned but doing so leads to a reconsideration of its origins and significance. Why this was the case will be explained in due course, yet it is worth situating the panels within the development of what is known about altarpieces and reredoses in England to make clear how different early alabaster panels were to what existed elsewhere.

English altarpieces and reredoses have yet to receive the scholarly attention paid to some of their Continental counterparts.³⁰³ Apart from the vast literature on single altarpieces or fragments in antiquarian journals, Francis Bond treated several aspects of their history in his 1916 publication *The Chancel of English Churches*.³⁰⁴ Since Bond there have been a number of focused studies of single important altarpieces but all of these have been painted rather than sculpted and are extraordinary examples of their “genre”.³⁰⁵ Contemporary scholarly interest in panel paintings has extended to chancel

³⁰³ See this thesis, footnote 4.

³⁰⁴ Francis Bond, *The Chancels of English Churches: the altar, reredos, lenten veil, communion table, altar rails, houseling cloth, piscina, credence, sedilia, aumbry, sacrament house, Easter sepulchre, squint, etc* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), 51-100. See also: Binski, “Statues, Retables and Ciboria”, 31-46.

³⁰⁵ This list is not intended to be exhaustive: Paul Binski, David Park and Christopher Norton, *Dominican Painting in East Anglia: the Thornham Parva Retable and the Musée de Cluny Frontal* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1987); Ann Massing, ed., *The Thornham Parva Retable: Technique, Conservation and Content of an English Medieval Painting* (Cambridge: Hamilton Kerr Institute, 2003); Paul Binski, “What was the Westminster Retable?”, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, (1987), 140, 152-174. Paul Binski and Ann Massing, eds., *The Westminster Retable: History, Technique, Conservation* (Cambridge: Hamilton Kerr Institute, 2009). M.A. Michael, “The Bible moralisée, the golden legend and the Salvator Mundi: Observations on the iconography of the Westminster Retable.” *The Antiquaries Journal* 94 (2014): 93-125. Heslop, “Passion Altarpiece,” 201-215. T.A. Heslop, “Attending at Calvary: An early fifteenth-century English Panel Painting.” in *Tributes to Nigel Morgan. Contexts of Medieval Art: Images, Objects and Ideas*, eds. Julian M. Luxford and Michael A. Michael (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2010), 278-292.

screens and other parclose screens with recent publications updating important work done by Audrey Baker in the early twentieth century.³⁰⁶ Dirk Ollman's unpublished PhD thesis sought to situate the English altarpiece within a developmental trajectory, yet strangely, he omitted alabaster sculptures from his study.³⁰⁷ Justin Kroesen and Regnerus Steensma's study of parish church interiors also excluded English alabaster.³⁰⁸ Ollman's thesis is useful in that it gathers together an enormous quantity of data for analysis, however it is by no means exhaustive. From it one can begin to think about similarities, difference and the emergence of a variety of formats for the altarpiece.

From the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century there were both freestanding altarpieces which were presumably placed on top of the altar, such as the Westminster retable or Thornham Parva retable, and wall-painted images which probably served a similar function to an altarpiece, such as those at SS Peter and Paul, Dorchester, St Mary's, Brent Eleigh, and the chapel of St Faith, Westminster Abbey. Apart from the Westminster retable, each of the other examples are similar in that they all have a Crucifixion placed at the centre. The central Crucifixion in the Thornham Parva retable is flanked either side by a series of niches containing saints [fig.2.38]. This format was also available in sculpted form with numerous still surviving or restored reredoses in churches across the country, for example at Geddington, Northamptonshire. The reredos at Bampton church, Oxfordshire, is a rare example where a version of this format survives with its sculptures still intact [fig.2.39]. It shows

³⁰⁶ Audrey Baker, *English Panel Paintings 1400-1558* (London: Archetype, 2011). Lucy Wrapson, "*Patterns of production: A technical art historical study of East Anglia's late medieval screens*" (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2013); Spike Bucklow, Richard Marks and Lucy Wrapson, *The Art and Science of the Church Screen in Medieval Europe: Making, Meaning, Preserving* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017).

³⁰⁷ Ollman, "English Reredos", 8; 133-134.

³⁰⁸ Justin E.A. Kroesen and Regnerus Steensma, *The interior of the medieval village church* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 59-104.

Christ in Judgement at the centre flanked by the apostles. A similar rectangular altarpiece can be found nearby in Somerton, Oxfordshire [fig.2.40]. What unites almost all of these altarpieces or reredoses is their single monumental form. At Bampton and Somerton they are made from a single block of stone. The major and important difference between them and the Kettlebaston altarpiece is that it was constructed from individual panels which were held together by a wooden frame. The reverse of the panels indicate how this worked. Holes were drilled into the alabaster and fitted with wires which held the alabaster and the wooden frame together.

This was the world into which the Kettlebaston fragments entered. By the end of the fourteenth century there was a wide range of multi-scene narrative altarpieces. The Norwich Passion Retable, c.1380, exemplifies what painted altarpieces might have looked like around the same time, and the five-panelled Marian reredos at New College, Oxford c.1386 is an indication of a sculpted altarpiece not made from alabaster.³⁰⁹ Fragments surviving from the Lady Chapel at Christ Church Priory, Dorset, show that this form was widespread by c.1400.³¹⁰ Other extant sculptures which are difficult to place and which range in terms of iconography, skill and style, should be considered alongside the Kettlebaston alabasters. All are *ex situ* and although each possibly worked as an altar image, it is not possible to be conclusive. They are the Nativity at Bolsover, Derbyshire, the St Helena and St Martin fragments at Mattersey,

³⁰⁹ This statement should be tempered by the fact that both altarpieces were made for elite religious institutions. For New College, Oxford, see: Anna Eavis, "The Commemorative Foundations of William of Wykeham", in *The Medieval Chantry in England*, ed. Julian M. Luxford and John McNeill (Leeds: Maney, 2011), 169-95.

³¹⁰ Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 472-473.

Nottinghamshire, the large St Catherine fragment from Lincoln, and the Crucifixion fragments from Loders, Dorset.³¹¹

Early English Alabasters and the Italian Connection:

Establishing an exact link between the Kettlebaston alabasters and a Continental prototype is an impossible and unwise task. If there were a better preserved corpus of Northern European panel paintings the picture would be much clearer. Nevertheless, it is possible to detail a series of links between the early patronage of English alabaster sculptors and the ownership of Italian panel paintings in England. References to Italian paintings, or “Lombard” panels, have been discussed previously a number of times.³¹²

My aim in revisiting them here is to make explicit the connection between the individuals who owned them and those who patronised the earliest artists working in alabaster.³¹³ A group of “*tres tabule de opera Lumbadorum*” are recorded in the goods of Queen Isabella, taken after her death in 1358. In 1361 Master Hugh of St Albans - who also worked as a painter for king Edward III at St Stephen’s chapel, London - left his wife a “*tabula de vj peciis de Lumbardy*”. At some point between 1349 and 1396 Abbot Thomas de la Mare donated a painting “*in Lumbardia pictoratum*” for the high altar of St Albans.³¹⁴ Another “*table de Lumbardia*” is described in 1386 in the Winwick Chantry at St Michael’s, Huyton.

All of these references date within the reign of Edward III and the early years of the reign of Richard II, which is precisely the period when alabaster first gained

³¹¹ For Bolsover, see: Ollman, “English Reredos”, 162-163. For the Mattersea fragments, see: Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 420-421. My thanks to Julian Luxford for bringing the Loders fragments to my attention. The Crucifixion fragment from Orwell, St Andrew, should also be added to this group, see: Ollman, “English Reredos”, 204.

³¹² I have extracted these examples from: Binski and Park, “A Ducciesque Episode”, 40.

³¹³ Jane Spooner also revisits the ownership of Italian paintings at the court of Edward III in her PhD thesis, see: Spooner, “Royal Wall Paintings”, 153-156.

³¹⁴ Binski & Park, “A Ducciesque Episode”, 40.

widespread popularity as a sculptural material in England. Kim Woods has shown that networks for the early commissioning of alabaster tombs centred on members of the court of Edward III, particularly amongst the Knights of the Garter.³¹⁵ Yet others within this court who were not Garter knights patronised alabaster sculptors too. For instance, Isabella of France owned three Italian panel paintings and was also amongst the earliest known patrons of sculptors working in alabaster. Her alabaster sculptural projects might have included that of her late husband Edward II's tomb at Gloucester, a possible connection to John XXII's tomb at Avignon, her son John of Eltham's tomb at Westminster Abbey and her own, now lost, tomb at the London Greyfriars.³¹⁶ Edward III was also a notable patron of alabaster. In 1369 he employed Peter the Maceon of Nottingham to make an alabaster reredos for the high altar of St George's Windsor. Many of the original group of Garter knights ordered tombs made in alabaster, and can be connected to other works of art in alabaster such as the figures for the Neville Screen at Durham, made c.1379.³¹⁷ Further, Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III, commissioned a tomb from Jean de Liège, probably made from English alabaster. Therefore the same court through which we can document ownership and circulation of Italian paintings, comprised many of the same individuals who were popularising alabaster as a luxury material for sculpture. It is entirely plausible that the same sculptors responsible for early alabaster tombs made altarpieces and free-standing

³¹⁵ Kim Woods, "Plantagenets in alabaster" in *The Plantagenet Empire, 1259-1453*, eds. Peter Crooks, David Green and Mark W. Ormrod, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2016), 89-108.

³¹⁶ F.D. Blackley, "The Tomb of Isabella of France, Wife of Edward II of England", *Bulletin of the International Society for the Study of Church Monuments*, 8 (1983), 161-164. Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets: Kingship and the Representation of Power, 1200-1400* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 178-182; Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 257-260.

³¹⁷ Christopher Wilson, "The Neville Screen" in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, ed. N. Coldstream and P. Draper, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 3 (London: Routledge, 1980), 90-104.

figures too, and perhaps this is where the link can be found between the iconography in the Kettlebaston sculptures and its Italian roots.

Certain members of Edward III's court travelled extensively and had truly international tastes when it came to luxury goods and works of art, including Edward himself, his mother Isabella of France, Prior Crauden at Ely, Bishop Richard of Bury at Durham and Bishop John Grandisson at Exeter.³¹⁸ Several scholars, particularly Paul Binski, have argued for an international approach to English objects created in the first half of the fourteenth century. Binski has explored connections between Italian bankers and high-ranking clergy or members of the royal court. Further, he has traced connections between English art of the period, including manuscripts, painting, sculpture and architecture to Avignon under the papacy of Pope John XXII.³¹⁹ When patrons or institutions with international connections do not exist, as in the case of a manuscript such as the Egerton Genesis, a new approach, stylistic or contextual, needs to be taken.³²⁰ This has been the approach I have taken here. By reassessing the iconography and format of the Kettlebaston altarpiece, it can be placed within a European context and thus situated within a wider style nexus. Doing so helps to move them away from scholarly isolation. Still, the fact remains that the Kettlebaston alabasters were made for the altar of a parish church in Suffolk with as yet no discovered connection to the courtly circles described above. This need not distract from the argument as there is no reason to see the parish church altar as operating at a lower grade for a potential patron or group of patrons.

³¹⁸ For Richard of Bury see: T. A. Heslop, "The Episcopal Seals of Richard of Bury" in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, ed. N. Coldstream and P. Draper, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 3 (London: Routledge, 1980), 154-160.

³¹⁹ Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 252-265.

³²⁰ Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 318-325.

On Framing: Early Alabaster Frames as Skeuomorphs

A final note on the Kettlebaston panels. Why were they carved as individual panels with integral frames? There seems little logical explanation for this as alabaster can easily be quarried in pieces large enough to be carved from a single block of stone such as other contemporary English stone altarpieces.³²¹ With this in mind, the integral sculpted frames of these early panels are fascinating. They lack micro-architectural canopies which by the mid-fourteenth century had become fairly commonplace. The Sutton Valence altarpiece is typical of what would be expected, and the reredos screens from Durham Cathedral or Our Lady of the Undercroft, Canterbury, show the popularity of architectural canopy work at the same moment. The possibility remains that a micro-architectural canopy was part of the now lost wooden frame, yet, the inclusion of an integral sculpted frame as part of the panel, combined with the rectangular format points toward the world of the painted panel more than it does to what survives in comparable altar sculpture. Italian panel paintings from the fourteenth century often come with integral frames built up in gesso around the central image.³²² This is common for Italian diptychs or single devotional panels but it was not confined to Italy. Victor Schmidt has explored the relationship between the format of Italian portable polyptychs and other works of art, including gothic ivories and miniature metalwork altarpieces.³²³ He has shown the way in which French goldsmiths and ivory sculptors incorporated the format of Italian panel paintings into their work. I have shown that the sculptor of the Kettlebaston alabasters was aware of a range of Continental iconographies. However, is it possible that the format of the panels themselves were skeuomorphic of panel

³²¹ Le Pogam, *Les Premier Retables*, 122-123.

³²² See especially: Victor M Schmidt, "Portable Polyptychs with Narrative Scenes: Fourteenth-Century De Luxe Objects between Italian Panel Painting and French Arts somptuaires" in *Italian Panel Paintings of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 399.

³²³ Schmidt, "Portable Polyptychs," 399.

paintings? A Netherlandish or French Annunciation dated c.1380, at the Cleveland Museum of Art, is similarly contained within an integral frame, as is an Adoration of the Magi from Prague, made c.1375-78 [fig.2.20].³²⁴ Perhaps a painting like this served as the prototype for the iconography and format of the Kettlebaston panels. This is a difficult argument to prove but the proposed connection between early patrons of alabaster and ownership of panel paintings in England might account for a transfer of form between two materials with similar functions. Whether these panel paintings were Italian, French or otherwise is impossible to say but the high status of the imported paintings is undeniable and their format might therefore have been reproduced in the sculptural process.

By examining the way in which the alabaster panels were painted this point can be further treated. In Chapter Three of this thesis I discuss the polychromy of a mid-fourteenth-century English alabaster Virgin and Child and its relationship to contemporary marble sculpture from the Continent [fig.3.21].³²⁵ In the case of the Virgin and Child a limited palette is employed as the desired effect was probably in imitation of marble. The Kettlebaston panels, however, are almost completely covered with paint and gilding. If the Virgin and Child of chapter three and the Kettlebaston altarpiece were made around a similar time, they raise an interesting question about the role of partial and full polychromy of the same material. Covering most of the available alabaster make sense if the sculptors were looking to imitate panel paintings. Further, small raised bumps in the halo of the Virgin at the V&A and the pastiglia-like decoration of the background of the panels seems to suggest that applique effects were being recreated in sculpture.

³²⁴ Boehm, *Crown of Bohemia*, 245, cat.no.248.

³²⁵ See Chapter Three of this thesis, 141-177.

The parish church context for the Kettlebaston sculptures should not deter a reappraisal of their status and significance. Through a focused study I have situated them within a wider European context. By reconstructing their original iconography, size and format they can be brought into dialogue with other important fourteenth-century Marian alabasters and altarpieces more generally. From an iconographical point of view they are highly inventive and depart from the iconography of comparable works of art made in England at the same time. Following on from Kettlebaston the second part of this chapter looks at the bigger picture of the development of English alabaster altarpieces in the second half of the fourteenth century, and ends with a discussion of a Christological altarpiece to balance the Marian focus of part one.

Part Two: Beyond Kettlebaston: English Alabaster Altarpieces 1350-1400

Francis Cheetham took the view that the iconographic range of English alabasters was standardised from the very beginning of what he considered to be the “industry”.³²⁶ His method to prove this theory needs addressing. For his description of the process of standardisation, Cheetham stated that “we may assume that the designs were drawn up on thin parchment, or perhaps paper by the second half of the fifteenth century, and used as standard patterns or templates.”³²⁷ He then goes on to imagine the preparation of an alabaster panel, rubbed with sand and polished with goatskin. Cheetham argued that once finished the standard design would be transferred onto the ready slab. His single piece of evidence for this process was not sculptural but came from a preparatory sketch for a painting, the pricked drawing of Sir Thomas More and family by Hans Holbein.³²⁸ There are serious issues here. Cheetham utilised a sixteenth-century preparatory drawing from a German born painter’s workshop to explain how an

³²⁶ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 8.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

English sculptor from the fourteenth century might have produced alabaster panels. The sole surviving unfinished alabaster from the fourteenth century suggests the process was completely different [fig.2.42]. Discovered in the nineteenth century inside St Peter's church on the Isle of Thanet, the alabaster was found in two fragments. Enough survives, however, to determine the iconography and demonstrate how it was made.³²⁹ It is a Crucifixion scene and the sculpture is broken in two pieces between Christ and John the Evangelist. The area above the figure of St John has been squared off and it seems likely that the piece was reused as building rubble. Perhaps the sculpture broke halfway through its making like the statue of the Virgin and Child from the Abbey of St Germain-des-Pres, Paris, which was buried at the entrance to the Lady Chapel.

This discovery is singular in its rarity and allows for an insight into sculptural processes. Working from right to left the sculptor moved on after partly finishing each figure, but worked towards a general outline mapped out on the face of the panel. A vague line to the left of Christ marks out the space which the Virgin was intended to fill. Rather than some complicated process of transferring a design and completing it like painting by numbers, the sculptor of this panel worked from his or her imagination. Cheetham's view of how alabasters were made effectively removed the process of thinking or artistic creativity from the act of making. By handing creativity back to at least some of the sculptors working in alabaster, it is possible to refute Cheetham's "process of standardisation" and engage with the objects on a one to one basis. The unfinished Crucifixion alabaster from Thanet is not a template for all alabasters produced in the fourteenth century but it does allow for a general understanding of process.

³²⁹ Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 407-408.

In the following part of this section I address shape, size, iconographic range and the variety of English alabaster altarpieces. I move beyond the Kettlebaston altarpiece and outline a rough chronological development up to c.1400. Doing this will help integrate English alabasters into wider discussions from which they have generally been missing.

Variety and difference:

Far from standard, alabaster panels of the fourteenth century are marked by a wide diversity of shapes, sizes, iconography and format.³³⁰ Marian images are numerous and demonstrate the expanding and immense devotion to the Virgin across Europe during the period.³³¹ The Kettlebaston group are amongst the earliest of the three part Marian cycles in alabaster but other panels which show Mary can be found. Twelve rectangular English alabaster panels show the Adoration of the Magi with the Virgin reclining in bed [fig.2.43].³³² These sculptures build on a well-established iconographic type which already existed in England, for instance at Bolsover, Derbyshire.³³³ A contemporary example which includes the Adoration of the Magi is in the choir screen at Christchurch Priory, Hampshire, dated to c.1350 [fig.2.44]. The Adoration of the Magi located in the south porch of the west front at Exeter should also be considered as part of this group.³³⁴ Still, the connections for these images, like Kettlebaston, all point abroad. Examples of a recumbent Virgin with the Magi can be seen in early fourteenth-

³³⁰ Nelson, "Earliest type," 85.

³³¹ Nigel Morgan, "Texts and Images of Marian Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England", in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1991 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford: Watkins, 1993), 30-53.

³³² For a brief discussion of these panels, see: Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 143-147. For a list of the surviving examples, see: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 180.

³³³ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 145.

³³⁴ Muratova, "Exeter and Italy", 117-132; Williamson, "West Front", 77.

century Italian paintings by Giotto or Giovanni Baronzio [figs 2.45 and 2.46].³³⁵ Julius Baum made the link between the combined Adoration of the Magi/Reclining Virgin and Italian prototypes, suggesting that comparisons can be found in Italy between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and gives Guglielmo Agnelli's pulpit at Pistoia as an example.³³⁶

None of the Adoration of the Magi alabasters survives in situ which makes reconstructing their original contexts difficult. Surprisingly they have so far not been studied as a group. Yet, documentary evidence suggests that they might have been placed on altars.³³⁷ They relate to a burgeoning and widespread devotion to the Three Magi, which grew in popularity during in the second half of the fourteenth century. Edward III was particularly devoted to the Magi. He visited their shrine in Cologne and selected the Adoration as the focal image for the east end of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster.³³⁸

Apart from these panels, other single Marian alabasters were made around the same time. Three relatively large sculptures show the Coronation of the Virgin and all are arguably fourteenth century in date or date to around c.1400. None survives in situ and so like the Magi images, their context is difficult to reconstruct. They have yet to receive any serious attention and little provenance information is forthcoming. Unlike the Magi alabasters, where a similar format suggests at least some common ground, the Coronation alabasters are all of different shapes and sizes. The first, from East

³³⁵ Anna Koopstra, *Giovanni da Rimini: Scenes from the Lives of the Virgin and other Saints* (London: National Gallery, 2017), 29. The Adoration of the Magi from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: 11.126.1.

³³⁶ Julius Baum, "Fourteenth Century Alabaster Reliefs of the Epiphany", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Dec., 1933), 387.

³³⁷ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 143-147.

³³⁸ For Edward III's devotion to the Three Magi, see: Mark Ormrod, "The Personal Religion of Edward III", *Speculum* 64, no. 4 (1989): 849-77.

Rudham, Norfolk was discovered as part of a large cache of mixed English alabaster sculpture.³³⁹ The second is in the Barber Institute, Birmingham, and was purchased in 1939 [fig.2.47].³⁴⁰ At over 100cm in height, this is amongst the largest surviving alabaster panels. It could possibly have formed the central part of a narrative ensemble and is similar in size and iconography to large Coronation altarpieces from Germany, for instance the wooden altarpiece at the Bode Museum originally from Minden cathedral.³⁴¹ It could also have functioned as a single image. The final Coronation alabaster is from Portugal. It is located in the sacristy of the seventeenth-century parish church in the town of Cernache [fig.2.48].³⁴² No information about how the alabaster arrived in Portugal or who might have brought it there has come to light, but it is an extraordinary example of an English alabaster sculpture. Its format is long and rectangular, measuring 100cm in width.

No multi-panelled altarpieces depicting saints' lives survive from the fourteenth century and it is possible that none was ever made. Exactly what iconography constituted the alabaster reredos Edward III ordered from Peter the Maceon is undocumented. Perhaps it contained scenes from the life of St George but it could easily have been Christ or Mary, or even just standing figures. The latter seems more likely given what other contemporary reredoses looked like, for instance the Neville Screen at Durham. The martyrdom of Thomas Becket was chosen for the Foljambe alabaster, but this sculpture is an anomaly amongst the evidence for Marian and Christological sculptures. The earliest complete alabaster altarpiece with a non-Marian or Christological narrative is located in the Marienkirche in Gdansk and possibly dates

³³⁹ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 101.

³⁴⁰ The Barber Institute of Art Coronation of the Virgin, accession number: BIRBI-39.25.

³⁴¹ Bode Museum accession number: 7A3-M-BOM-AMC-A02.

³⁴² Raul Esteves dos Santos, *A Escultura em Portugal* (Lisboa: Academia Nacional de Belas Artes, 1948), 38.

around c.1420 [fig.2.49].³⁴³ Although standing images of saints can be documented in alabaster from the mid-fourteenth century, it appears likely that their appearance in a narrative format was an early fifteenth-century development. This resonates with the explosion of this type of imagery in the fifteenth century, for instance the shift from an Apocalypse cycle in the cloister bosses of Norwich cathedral to stories drawn from saints' lives.³⁴⁴

Christological images can be divided into two categories. First: a number of single panels representing the Crucifixion are documented in a variety of different sizes and styles. The broken alabaster from Thanet was one example. Several are relatively simple [fig.2.50]. Others, such as the example from Layston, are evidence of a skilled and confident sculptor.³⁴⁵ None of these Crucifixion panels appear to have been supplemented by additional narrative scenes. The documented alabaster from Swinton, Norfolk, is perhaps an example of this type.³⁴⁶ The majority of surviving alabaster Crucifixions contain Christ, the Virgin and St John but a further two panels from the V&A and the British Museum show groups of figures at the base of the Cross.³⁴⁷ This is in line with the wider development of Crucifixion iconography across Europe. However, additional narrative scenes which are related survive and two of the earliest are a Resurrection at the British Museum, and a Betrayal panel, previously in the

³⁴³ A. M. Olszewski, "Gotyckie Rzeźby Alabastrowe Pochodzenia Angielskiego W Polsce," *Nadbitka Z Biuletynu Historii Sztuki*, R XXII/1 (1960); and: Kathryn A. Smith, "'A Lanterne of Lyght to the People': English Narrative Alabaster Images of John the Baptist in their Visual, Religious, and Social Contexts" (Forthcoming). My thanks to Kathryn for sharing this article with me before publication.

³⁴⁴ Martial Rose, *The Norwich Apocalypse: The Cycle of Vault Carvings in the Cloisters of Norwich Cathedral* (Norwich: Centre of East Anglia Studies, 1999). Veronica Sekules, "Religious Politics and the Cloister Bosses of Norwich Cathedral," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* (2006), 159:1, 284-306.

³⁴⁵ See Chapter One of this thesis, 54.

³⁴⁶ Watkin, *Archdeaconry of Norwich*, 61.

³⁴⁷ The British Museum alabaster is fragmentary but was probably made by the same sculptor as the V&A example. V&A accession number: A.106-1946. British Museum accession number: 1969,0605.1.

church of St Peter and St Paul, Hawley, Hampshire [figs 2.51 and 2.52].³⁴⁸ Philip Nelson recognised the similarity of these panels which he thought were possibly produced by the same sculptor or workshop. Nelson suggested that alongside one of the V&A Crucifixion, the Hawley Betrayal and the BM Resurrection would have made up a three part Christological cycle [fig.2.53]. This suggestion is enticing but, without a provenance linking them, some questions remain whether or not they were once a single altarpiece. Still, the Kettlebaston group was made of three panels, and it is therefore entirely believable that the same or a similar sculptor was also making three-part Passion cycles at the same date.

By c.1400 five-panelled Marian and Christological altarpieces were being produced in a relatively large number. These groups have come to be seen as the basic format of the English alabaster altarpiece. Two complete examples can be found in the National Museum of Copenhagen and at the V&A [figs 2.54 and 2.55]. Yet, this is not to say that at this point the iconography had become standard in any way. An image of Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Christ, c.1380-1400, shows continued iconographic experimentation [fig.2.56]. From the turn of the fifteenth century, the popularity of alabaster altarpieces grew and it is clear that they were produced for a variety of different institutions and patrons, all with different budgets and expectations. It is also clear that as the fourteenth century progressed, some sculptors working in alabaster continued to experiment with iconography, shape, size and format. I close this chapter with an analysis of another important but overlooked altarpiece in the collection of the V&A. It is a five-part narrative cycle of the Passion of Christ. Although we can document more popular combinations of scenes in alabaster, it is equally

³⁴⁸ The Betrayal panel from St Peter and St Paul, Hawley, was stolen and as yet has not been recovered. See, also: Le Pogam, *Les Premier Retables*, 233, for a comparison with an alabaster now at the Musée de Cluny.

possible to see different levels of production operating at the same time. Some sculptors who chose to work in alabaster created new iconographic types and engaged with complex ideas in the construction of images. The sculptor of the group below was just such an artist.

Case Study: The V&A St John Altarpiece and Iconographic Complexity:

In 1923, Walter Leo Hildburgh bought a group of five alabasters in Paris through an agent connected to a dealer based in Bordeaux.³⁴⁹ No further provenance exists for the panels but as was his usual way, he placed them on loan with the V&A immediately and later donated them in 1946. The narrative sequence comprises: [1] the Last Supper, [2] the Crucifixion, [3] the Descent from the Cross, [4] the Maries at the Sepulchre, [5] Doubting Thomas [figs 2.57, 2.58, 2.59, 2.60, 2.61]. Varying degrees of damage can be traced across the panels. Four are severely broken with only one remaining in a complete state. This panel, the Descent from the Cross, allows for a reconstruction of the original size of the others. They are larger than most surviving alabasters. Each panel would have measured approximately 55cm x 38cm, making them fifteen centimetres taller than the Kettlebaston group. An estimated width of the original altarpiece is around two meters. All of the breakages have occurred across the upper halves of the panels and in some cases the heads of key figures such as Christ in the Crucifixion scene have been lost. At some point the broken edges of the Last Supper have been reworked and smoothed over, presumably to make the panel more presentable. None of the other alabasters shows reworking like this which suggests a

³⁴⁹ See Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 67. W.L. Hildburgh, "A Group of Panels of English Alabaster", *Burlington Magazine*, (1930), XLVI, 307-15. Hildburgh, 'English Alabaster Tables of about the Third Quarter of the Fourteenth Century', *The Art Bulletin*, (1950), XXXII, 1-23. figs 23-6; Clement Pitman, "Speculations on Fourteenth-Century English Alabaster Work", *Connoisseur*, CLV, February 1964, 82-9. See also: Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 514.

complicated history for the group and one which is not easy to resolve due to the provenance issue. The Descent is the only sculpture which retains substantial original polychromy and gilding. It shows a fine reticulated pattern of dots which makes up the background of the scene. Yet, even with these differences of condition it is undeniable that these alabasters once comprised a single altarpiece. All of the sculptures are marked by the same skilful carving and depth of relief but they are also feature scenes which are iconographically rare in the corpus of English alabasters. Three of the scenes: the Last Supper, the Three Maries and Doubting Thomas are amongst the rarest found in alabaster.³⁵⁰ Further, at the presumed stylistically determined date of their making being the late fourteenth century, all three are the earliest example of their iconography in alabaster. As a group, the altarpiece is a good example of how preconceived notions about standard formats in alabaster have affected scholarly ability to judge particular sculptures and groups on their own merit and in context. Cheetham suggested that the group might have made up a single altarpiece but that it was missing two terminal panels of saints.³⁵¹ Nigel Ramsay writing in *Age of Chivalry* repeated this in his catalogue entry for the altarpiece but added that it would have had other main panels, now missing, which would allow the Crucifixion to be placed centrally in the arrangement.³⁵² Both Cheetham and Ramsay's remarks speak to a culture of trying to make surviving alabaster sculptures conform to the typical and expected rather than the extraordinary.

The Passion Narrative and the Gospel of John:

Other complete Passion altarpieces derive their iconography more generally from combined accounts of Christ's life as related in the Gospels, particularly in those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The most popular combination of scenes for a Passion cycle

³⁵⁰ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 108, 141.

³⁵¹ Cheetham *Medieval Alabaster*, 67.

³⁵² Alexander and Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 514.

include the Betrayal, Flagellation, Crucifixion, Entombment, and Resurrection [fig.2.55]. The V&A altarpiece, which is our focus here, lacks four of the five most commonly produced alabaster images which explains why Cheetham and others found it difficult to situate and assumed there were pieces missing. Its iconography is specific to John's Gospel account of the Passion. John is not one of the synoptic gospels, meaning it is completely different to the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. John 13:23-27 recounts how Christ's favourite disciple rested on his breast at the same moment he identified the traitor Judas. After dipping a piece of bread Christ handed it to Judas, signalling him as the traitor. The tension is explicitly played out in the alabaster which combines the identification of Judas with Christ's announcement that his body is the new covenant. It is profoundly Eucharistic in tone, especially for an object which once acted as a backdrop to the performance of the Mass. In the alabaster of the Last Supper, Christ holds up an object which must surely be a loaf of bread but here it is pyx-like, perhaps invoking the idea that the very thing which could have saved Judas signalled him as a traitor to the other disciples. At first it appears as if there is no cup or chalice present in the scene but a small dowel hole located in front of Christ and John might once have held a now lost object in place [fig.2.62]. Another similar dowel containing a small piece of broken wood can be seen inside of Christ's wound in the Crucifixion, demonstrating that the visual effect of blood pouring out was important to the maker or patron of the altarpiece [fig.2.63].

Moving on to the next alabaster panel. Mary is described in John 19:25 at the foot of the cross with her sister Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. John the Evangelist stands behind them as the only haloed figure in the scene, holding his palm behind his head and looking up towards Christ's body. At the same time Mary slumps into the arms of her companions in sorrow at the death of her son. Why single

John out as a particularly holy figure? Does this have something to do with the combination of narrative source and representation? The next alabaster panel provides further clues. In verse thirty-eight of the same chapter, Joseph of Arimathea arrives to take the body of Christ away, removing him from the cross. Once again, John is the only figure in the alabaster with a halo and he stands away from the main part of scene with his palm in the air, his other hand resting on the ladder watching as the action unfolds. In John 20 we are provided with an account of the visitation to the empty tomb. The same scene is shown in the alabaster altarpiece. There is no description in any of the Gospels of John being present when the Maries arrived, yet he is shown in the alabaster, pointing with his right hand to a palm. Here, John is more involved in the scene and like the Maries, he is as a witness to the empty tomb. Lastly, the Doubting of Thomas is described in John 20:25-29 and is the only Gospel account to do so. In the alabaster panel John's head can be seen next his palm, peering out over the heads of others on the far right in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the interaction between Thomas and Christ.

There might be other missing panels which are currently not accounted for, or which have been long since destroyed. But as other popular scenes from Christ's passion, such as the Betrayal, Flagellation, Entombment and Resurrection are not described in John's Gospel, it seems unlikely. An alabaster panel showing the Flagellation was probably made by the same sculptor as the V&A group, and can be found in the church of Bailly-en-Riviere, Normandy [fig.2.64].³⁵³ The same idiosyncratic reticulated pattern appears on the reverse and it is a similar size to the V&A examples. However, the main part of the scene is raised and set in the middle of the panel which is different from all of the V&A alabasters. Crucially, John is not present in the Bailly-

³⁵³ Flavigny, *D'Angleterre en Normandie*. The panel was donated to the church in 1852 by M. Marc Antonie Helbourg and Marguerite Barre.

en-Rivere panel which adds to the evidence against it being part of the V&A group. It must have been from another altarpiece which might have been made by the same sculptor, possibly for another Continental patron.

Clearly the sculptor of the V&A altarpiece drew heavily on John's Gospel for its narrative structure. Further, John is represented and shown prominently in each scene. Why might this be? In the panel showing the Maries at the Sepulchre, John is inserted into a scene in which he was not actually present and is depicted carrying a palm. Moreover, he is shown holding a palm in all of the other alabasters, except for the first panel where he rests, asleep on Christ's breast. In the Descent, his palm is depicted high and aloft to make it prominent and visible. It could be a martyr's palm but John is associated apocryphally with another palm, given him by the Virgin Mary on her deathbed. In either case the appearance of the palm demonstrates a playful temporality for the scenes depicted. If John holds the palm given him by the Virgin, then he carries an object which he received after the events depicted in the alabasters took place. The same is the case with the palm signifying martyrdom. What is the reason for this play with temporality? Jeffery Hamburger has pointed out John's role as the "speculator spiritualis", the spiritual spectator, and identified the ways in which John was used to help visualise the truth of Christ's life and death.³⁵⁴ Some of these instances were similarly temporally anachronistic. A French illuminated manuscript documenting the life of St John, made roughly around the same time as the alabasters, contains images of

³⁵⁴ Jeffery Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: the Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (London: University of California Press, 2002), 140. See also: Jeffrey Hamburger, "The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions," in *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone, 1998), 111-148; Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500* (London: Merrel Holberton, 1994); Herbert Kessler, "Turning a Blind Eye: Medieval Art and the Dynamics of Contemplation," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 413-39.

Christ giving John the “Word” in the form of a sealed book or document. It includes an image of him holding his palm and looking towards the Crucifixion.³⁵⁵ In light of this, what are we to make of the alabaster altarpiece and of John’s various representations? How did these images function? Do we see an image of the Crucifixion or, like Hamburger’s images, are we witness to John’s vision of the scene? To *read* the alabaster images clearly requires knowledge beyond a simple understanding of Biblical narrative, but there are further clues in the altarpiece.

Christ is haloed twice, but only in the first panel and the last panel. Both are profoundly Eucharistic. In the first he identifies Judas who betrayed him and announces that he will become the New Covenant. In the last, Thomas, who is the final apostle to witness Christ after his Resurrection, sticks his fingers into the wound of Christ as a way of learning the truth. They speak to an engagement with Christ’s body as a means to salvation. There is a visual symmetry to these two scenes which bookend the altarpiece. Judas kneels before Christ on the far left and Thomas before Christ on the far right. Both disciples are transformed in different ways through their interaction with Christ. This continues in panels two and four. In the second panel the centurion points to the body of Christ, turning to his group of soldiers to confirm that Christ was indeed the son of God. He is mirrored in his action by the angel of panel four, who turns towards the Maries and points into the empty tomb demonstrating that Christ is not there but has risen. John, unlike any of the other disciples is witness to all of these events and is visually singled out in the sculptures. It is from John and through John that we the viewers learn the truth of Christ’s salvation.

The alabaster images are theologically complex and the implication here is that the patron or original viewers of the altarpiece would have been able to engage with

³⁵⁵ Hamburger, *St. John the Divine*, 140.

their complexity. This suggestion allows the altarpiece to be rescued from isolation. Another alabaster at the V&A, which was possibly made around the same time as the Passion altarpiece, displays similar iconographic complexity [fig.2.65]. It is a tall panel composed of two registers showing the Annunciation and the Trinity but here connected by Christ who is crucified on a lily which grows into a cross held in the lap of God the Father. The lily originates in a vase from the scene below; Gabriel's scroll twists around the stem of the flower rising upwards into the body of Christ. Here we find the word literally becoming flesh. Elements of this iconography can be found elsewhere but it is the unique combination of the Trinity, Annunciation and Lily Crucifixion which suggests a creative force, patron and artist, behind its making. In this instance the iconographical experiment can only be found once but the popularity of John appearing with his palm proliferated in English alabaster during the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century. He can be found in a relatively large number of Crucifixion panels, shown seated on a rock opposite Mary, holding his palm and looking mournfully into the ground [fig.2.66].³⁵⁶ In rare cases, French altarpieces with a similar arrangement show John in this way but without a palm.³⁵⁷ In another alabaster of the Descent from the Cross at the V&A, John is shown holding a palm and watching as Christ is brought down from the Cross [fig.2.67]. However, it is only in the complete Passion altarpiece at the V&A that we find John so compellingly represented in all of the panels, suggesting that it was perhaps in that workshop where the idea was first developed and was later copied into other altarpieces for many decades to follow.

³⁵⁶ The iconography of St John seated on a rock is extremely rare in Northern European art. It appears in the Crucifixion scene in the *Paravent de Narbonne* at the Louvre, see: Susie Nash, "The Paravent de Narbonne, Context and Technique" in *The Fabric of Images, European Paintings on Fabric Supports, 1300-1500*, ed. Caroline Villers (London : Archetype Press, 2000), 77-87.

³⁵⁷ For example, see the French passion altarpiece from Ailly-sur-Noye in: Le Pogam, *Les Premier Retables*, 197.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have shown that English alabasters were inventive and complex works of art. This has been achieved through focused studies which broaden out to consider alabaster altarpieces, and altarpieces more widely as a genre. The vast majority of English alabaster panels produced during the second half of the fourteenth century were Marian or Christological. Altarpieces developed from a three-panel structure which later grew to become larger, incorporating five panels or more by c.1400. There is clear evidence that certain scenes were popular: Annunciation, Coronation and Ascension for Mary, and Betrayal, Crucifixion and Resurrection for Christ, but these were by no means standardised. Other scenes were available and saints were depicted too, albeit rarely. By focusing on the Kettlebaston altarpiece I have shown that early alabasters depart from established conventions of comparable English altarpieces, demonstrating a range of iconographic sources and complex imagery. A reconsideration of their size and format has led to questions about the way in which early alabaster sculptors were imitating other works of art. Yet the situation is not easily rectified. Patrons for the early panels cannot be identified and many are fragmentary or have little provenance information. Still, moving them into a discussion with truly European horizons means that there is much more that can be said in the future. The iconography of the St John altarpiece at the V&A is extraordinary in its complexity. It too opens up new questions about the environments in which alabaster sculptors were operating. By returning to the objects and studying them in context it is possible to remove English alabasters from their place as an obscure provincial phenomenon and reposition them as sculptures worth our attention. In the following chapter I move from fourteenth-century altarpieces to free-standing sculpture and explore similar issues which have affected English alabaster sculpture abroad.

Chapter Three

English Alabaster Abroad I.

Imitation or Invention? The British Museum Virgin and Child and St George from Quejana

Introduction:

This chapter focuses on the internationality of English alabasters in the fourteenth century but moves from altarpieces to freestanding sculpture. It centres on two exceptional carvings with Continental destinations. The first is a Virgin and Child with links to Belgium, the other an alabaster of St George and the Dragon with links to Spain. My primary aim is to unpick and re-evaluate their history in light of their inventive iconography and the importance of their contexts. The alabaster of St George can be situated within a socio-political network encompassing several ruling members of England and Castile. It was last documented in Spain inside the funerary chapel of Pedro López de Ayala, Chancellor of Castile (d.1407). The placement of this alabaster in a high status funerary chapel encourages us to reconsider its status, and the status of alabaster sculpture more generally, including that of its makers, patrons and networks. When documentary evidence is lacking, in the case of the Virgin and Child, I aim to situate it stylistically within a wider Continental image nexus. Neither sculpture has been the focus of an independent study before. What will become clear is that the sculptors who produced these images had an international outlook and engaged thoughtfully with a variety of sources.

Part One: The British Museum Virgin and Child

In December of 2015 an alabaster Virgin and Child was auctioned at Sotheby's, London [figs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3]. Catalogued as fifteenth century and covered by a layer of

shellac varnish, its underlying characteristics lay obscured and unnoticed. The last time the sculpture had appeared on the market was in 1930 in Berlin as part of the posthumous sale of the collection of Dr Albert Figdor.³⁵⁸ The ‘great Figdor Collection’ sale was covered by Frank Davis in his ‘A Page for Collectors’ on 20th September, 1930 for *The Illustrated London News*. Along with images from the sale, Davis discussed potential ways in which ‘great’ collections like Figdor’s could enter British public collections: “When something really important comes on the market in England, and the British Museum – shall we say? – announces that it must at all costs be kept in the country, we may have to adopt peculiar methods of procedure.”³⁵⁹ Eighty-five years later, the British Museum was fortunate enough – with the support of generous organisations and patrons – to acquire Figdor’s alabaster. As will be shown below, there are several remarkable features of this sculpture, including its provenance, early date of production, condition and the obvious skill of its maker. It is my aim in this chapter to reconsider and reposition the Virgin and Child in its proper context as a work of European art. I will do this by comparing it with other Continental sculptures made in alabaster and marble, taking into account the wider context for commissioning, donation and function.

Provenance:

It was in 1864 in Mechelen, Belgium, that the sculpture made its first public appearance, displayed in W.H.J. Weale’s exhibition *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica*.³⁶⁰ The

³⁵⁸ Otto Von Falke: *Die Sammlung Dr. Albert Figdor* (Vienna and Berlin, 1930), IV, cat.142, p.LXXVII.

³⁵⁹ *The Illustrated London News*, Sept. 20th 1930, 494.

³⁶⁰ W.H.J. Weale, *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica: Choix d'objets d'art religieux du moyen-âge et de la renaissance exposés à Malines en Septembre 1864* (Brussels, 1866), cat.10. For Weale see H.P. Mitchell, ‘The Late Mr W.H. Weale’ *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 171 (1917), 241-243. There are two letters of correspondence between Weale and BM curators, one to A.W. Franks and the other to C.H. Read. These are not

earliest photograph of the alabaster—essentially, the first known visual documentation we have of it—was included in the publication that followed the exhibition in 1866, and shows it alongside another Virgin statue now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art [fig.3.4].³⁶¹ Weale dated the British Museum sculpture to the beginning of the fourteenth century and located it in Sint-Truiden, Belgium, belonging to the Redemptorist Fathers, a religious congregation founded in the eighteenth-century but established there in 1833.³⁶² He offered no hint as to where he thought it might have originated. Presumably it came into the Redemptorists' possession between 1833, when they were settled in Sint-Truiden, and 1864, when the sculpture was exhibited in Mechelen. How they acquired it is undocumented and is thus unknown, although some possibilities can be suggested.

The Redemptorists were the first 'new' Christian order established in Sint-Truiden after the French Revolution and their archives document the local donation of several objects, which were primarily relics. These sources describe an institution concerned with the appropriation of relics - rather than sculptures - which had been dispersed at the Revolution:

A la Révolution Francaise de l'an 1794 (les moines furent expulsés en 1797) -
beaucoup de ces précieuses reliques furent confiées aux meilleures familles de

associated with the alabaster sculpture but are worth mentioning here to note their existence. They are in the archives of the British Museum in the department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory.

³⁶¹ Philadelphia Museum of Art accession number: Cat.1131.

³⁶² See Antoine Courtejoie, *Histoire de la Ville de Saint-Trond* (Sint-Truiden, 1846), 364-367. Alfred Deboutte, "Fifty Years of Redemptorist Missions in Flanders 1935-1985." *Spicilegium historicum Congregationis SSmi Redemptoris* (1985), 467-484. The site at Saint-Trond was dissolved in 1965 and the building no longer survives. For further information about the Redemptorists in Sint-Truiden, see: Pieter Joannes Clerinx, *De paters Redemptoristen van Sint-Truiden honderd jaar op Steenaert* (Sint-Truiden Moreau, 1933) and Maurice De Meulemeester, *Het klooster van Steenaert te Sint-Truiden* (Leuven: Sint-Alfonsusdrukkerij, 1933).

St-Trond... Plusieurs de ces reliques furent données à nos Peres (qui arrivèrent à St-Trond en 1833).³⁶³

Thus relics had been protected by the patrician families of Sint-Truiden during the Revolution. Now that an institution existed in which they could be safely housed they were returned for use.

Such protection and donation of relics is paralleled in another case related to the Redemptorists, and suggests a possible conduit for the donation of the alabaster. Regine de Museil was the last surviving Benedictine nun from the abbey of Nonnemielen. She donated the surviving contents from the suppressed abbey to the Redemptorists in 1836.³⁶⁴ She and the objects had resided at a castle in the village of Nieuwerkerken, presumably from the time of the Revolution. Unfortunately, apart from the relics, the archives of the Redemptorists do not detail the exact contents of this gift. The evidence is slight. However, as there is only a twenty-one year period during which the sculpture could have entered the Redemptorists - between the foundation of the community in Sint-Truiden and the exhibition of the alabaster in Brussels - Regine's donation appears the most likely route.

Other donations can be traced in the archives but the alabaster remains undocumented. For instance, in 1840 an ivory crucifix figure which had previously been in Maastricht in the Convent of the Beghards, a male religious branch of the Beguines, was given to the Redemptorists.³⁶⁵ There is little evidence to suggest that the Order was

³⁶³ Leuven, KADOC, 709/1, P. Mingolet, "Notes concernant les ss.reliques conservees a Stenaert". I would like to express my thanks to Jo Luyten of the KADOC archives for welcoming me and freely sharing his own research into the Redemptorists.

³⁶⁴ Leuven, KADOC, 709/1, *Chronicon Domus Trudenensis*, 6. J. Bongaerts, *Abdij Nonnemielen Sint-Truiden*. Sint-Truiden, z.d., blz. 41-42.

³⁶⁵ Leuven, KADOC, 709/1, note: "*Donation d'un Christ in ivoire*", C. Theuerkauff, "Addenda to the Small-Scale Sculpture of Matthieu van Beveran of Antwerp", *The Metropolitan Museum Journal*, v.23, (1998), 125-147.

deliberately acquiring medieval works of art and the earliest images of the interior of the church suggest that the preferred aesthetic was not one articulated through the display of reclaimed medieval or renaissance artworks.³⁶⁶ If the alabaster Virgin were ever on display inside the church there is seemingly no way to locate it there. How and why the sculpture left the Redemptorists is unclear, but it was not uncommon for medieval and renaissance objects to be acquired by dealers or collectors from religious institutions after appearing in exhibitions such as *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica*.

In 1890 the alabaster appeared in print for a second time. By this date it had left Belgium and was now in the private collection of Dr Albert Figdor of Vienna.³⁶⁷ Once again the sculpture was catalogued as fourteenth century, only in this instance the stone was mistakenly noted as being marble rather than alabaster. Figdor was an Austrian banker who amassed an enormous collection similar to those formed by members of the Rothschild family. Albert's brother, Karl, was a collector as was his nephew, Karl Wittgenstein, son of Albert's elder sister, Fanny.³⁶⁸ The Figdor collection (comprising the collections of both brothers) was on display and could be seen by special appointment in the Palais Figdor. Eugen Guglia's 1908 guidebook to Vienna lists the contents of the *Sammlung der Bruder Dr. Albert and Karl Figdor*. The Virgin and Child is described as "Marmorstatuette der Madonna mit dem Kinde aus St. Trond in

³⁶⁶ The single instance where a much older object is sought out by the Redemptorists is the purchase of a medieval font from Wellen associated with Christina the Astonishing, see J.C. Ghislain, "A Twelfth-Century Font from Wellen", *The Metropolitan Museum Journal*, v.44 (2009), 37-46.

³⁶⁷ Jules Helbrig, *La sculpture et les arts plastiques au pays du Liège et sur les bords de la Meuse*, (Bruges, 1890), 119, pl. XVII. The sculpture appears again in: Joseph Destrée, *Annales de la Société d'archéologie de Bruxelles*, vol. 23 (1909), 456, fig. 7. Paul Clemen and Julius Baum, *Belgische Kunstdenkmäler* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1923), vol. I, fig. 153. W. L. Hildburgh, "Further notes on English alabaster carvings" in *Antiquaries Journal*, X (1930), 43.

³⁶⁸ Allan S. Janik and Hans Veigl, *Wittgenstein in Vienna: A Biographical Excursion Through the City*, (Vienna: Springer, 1998), 175-177. Elana Shapira, *Style and Seduction: Jewish Patrons, Architecture, and Design in Fin de Siècle* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press 2016), 91.

Belgien. Niederlandish (?) 1500.”³⁶⁹ A surviving photograph of the arrangement of the collection shows the imaginative way in which the objects were displayed [Fig.3.5]. The alabaster was not placed alongside other works typologically, but was positioned on a foliate pedestal at the side of a doorway and next to Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Wayfarer*, now in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Figdor had offered his collection to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 1891, although this acquisition did not take place. Instead, at his death in 1927, it was left to his niece Ms Becker-Walz.³⁷⁰ Two sales of parts of the collection took place in Austria and Germany; the alabaster was sold by the Paul Cassirer gallery in Berlin, at which time it was purchased by a collector in whose family it remained until the 2015 Sotheby’s sale. By the time of the sale of Figdor’s collection, the possibility that the Virgin and Child might be English in origin had been raised. Yet its place of production was still in question. In the Figdor catalogue it was dated to the fourteenth century and the possible place of manufacture given as the Netherlands or England.³⁷¹ A couple of years after the Figdor sale, Marguerite Devigne included the Virgin and Child as the only English work of art in her study *La Sculpture Mosane*.³⁷² She categorised the sculpture as an important foreign import into Belgium but emphasised its differences from contemporary French examples in order to distinguish its place of origin. It was, she argued, “indubitablement un travail anglais”.

A lack of historical consensus regarding date of production and place of creation is not unique to this sculpture but rather indicative of the entire historiography

³⁶⁹ Eugen Guglia, *Wien: Ein Führer Durch Stadt Und Umgebung* (Vienna, 1908), 151.

³⁷⁰ Janik and Veigl, *Wittgenstein in Vienna*, 176.

³⁷¹ Von Falke, *Albert Figdor*, cat.142.

³⁷² Marguerite Devigne, *La Sculpture Mosane du XIIIe au XVIe Siecle*, (Paris and Brussels: Anvers, 1932), 58 and pl.XVIII, no.85. Devigne described the sculpture as “D’apres moulage” which means that a cast must have existed at some point, the location of which is now unknown.

for English alabasters on the Continent. This is particularly the case when the sculpture is of a high quality. It was only after W. St John Hope's research into the documentary sources for the production of alabaster in England that the situation was ultimately rectified.³⁷³ Hope was aided in this work by the large number of alabasters discovered in English parish churches during renovations to their fabric.

Iconography

Carved, polished and partially polychromed, the Virgin is crowned as Queen of Heaven [fig.3.1]. She holds in her left hand a twisted root or branch which blossoms into five separate, five-petalled flowers, perhaps roses. Christ is seated on his mother's right arm, turned towards her but with his head facing outwards. The Virgin's right hand holds the infant securely, his right foot is presented to the viewer. Christ stretches out his left arm towards his mother's breast and lays his hand at the centre of her chest. These subtle connections unite the figures. It is within their combined roles as mother and queen, child and saviour that we realise their supreme authority: Christ's gilded apple doubles as an orb communicating his role as the new Adam and the Salvator Mundi. He is shown as the new man who can undo the errors of the first man, returning as God to judge those who will be saved at the end of time. Such collapsing of historical chronology was commonplace in Christian thinking. For instance, in a single image of the Worcester Chapter House paintings, the Virgin is crowned by God at the beginning of time and at the end: when she is "married" to the "Lamb", that is Christ.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Hope, "Early Working" 221-240; Anderson, "Re-discovery" 47-58; Oakes, "Dr Hildburgh," 71-83. For a general overview including European alabaster sculpture, see: Kim Woods, "The fortunes of art in alabaster: a historiographical analysis," in *From Major to Minor: the minor arts and their current status in art history*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 82-102.

³⁷⁴ T.A. Heslop, "Coronation of the Virgin" 790-797. T.A. Heslop, "Worcester Cathedral Chapterhouse and the Harmony of the Testaments," in *New Offerings*,

Similarly in the alabaster sculpture she is rendered as Queen carrying Christ as an infant to whom as the Bridegroom she will ultimately be united. These things are heavenly and thus fall outside the logic of chronology.

There is a visual relationship established in the sculpture between Mary's role as the *Virgo* (Virgin) and the *Virga* (Rod) which she holds. The sceptre-like branch emphasises her regal status but also situates her as the New Testament inheritor of Aaron's rod, the staff which flowered when placed overnight next to the Ark of the Covenant. It was the owner of this staff who was selected by God to constitute the hereditary priesthood (Numbers 17.8-18.7). In this context the Christ child, who will become the New Covenant (Luke 22:1), is presented to us visually as the New Law replacing the Old Law. The accentuated root held by Mary in this image is not accidental or superficial.³⁷⁵ Major English sculptural commissions of the fourteenth century, such as the reredos at Christchurch Priory, Dorset, or the chancel window at Dorchester Abbey, Oxfordshire, contain monumental Tree of Jesse iconography and serve to represent the birth of Christ as growing from out of the root of his Old Testament ancestry.³⁷⁶ Visualising and alluding to the Jesse tree was a powerful trope in medieval art and literature. A contemporary reference can be found in the poetry of John Gower, who, writing in 1367 after the battle of Najera states: "The English king

Ancient Treasures. Studies in Medieval Art presented to George Henderson, eds. Paul Binski & William Noel, (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), 280-311.

³⁷⁵ Vincent Gillespie, "Medieval Hypertext: Images and Text from York Minster", in *On the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and readers. Essays Presented to M. B. Parkes*, eds. P.R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1997), 206-29.

³⁷⁶ Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 311-312.

manifests like the root of Jesse, whose strength is tireless.”³⁷⁷ The root held by the Virgin in the alabaster makes this point explicit.

Material:

Alabaster was used in England as a luxury material for sculpture from the 1330s, yet this was not a situation unique to the British Isles. Numerous sculptors in the Netherlands, France, Spain and Italy all realised the potential of alabaster as a sculptural medium during the course of the fourteenth century.³⁷⁸ The range of objects produced in these countries was as diverse as in England and included small devotional sculptures such as the Virgin and Child at the Bode Museum; altarpiece arrangements like the Passion cycle at the Mayer van den Bergh Museum; or single figure sculptures carved in the round in the case of the Annunciation group now divided between the *Musée du Louvre* and the Cleveland Museum of Art [figs 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8].³⁷⁹ Yet, alabaster did achieve a degree of use in England that was unparalleled anywhere on the Continent and, as noted in chapter one, much of the documentary evidence points to the development of the workshops either near the quarries or in towns and cities around

³⁷⁷ David R. Carlson, ‘The English Literature of Najera (1367) from Battlefield Dispatch to the Poets’, in *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, eds. Ana Sáez-Hidalgo & R.F. Yeager, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 89-101.

³⁷⁸ Kim Woods, ‘The Supply of Alabaster in Northern and Mediterranean Europe in the Later Middle Ages,’ in *Trade in Artists Materials: Markets and Commerce in Europe to 1700*, eds. Jo Kirby, Susie Nash and Joanna Cannon (London: Archetype, 2010), 86-93.

³⁷⁹ Françoise Baron, *Les Fastes du Gothique: le siècle de Charles V* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1981), 99, cat. 45 a-c and 112-113, cat. 60 a-b. The sculptor of the group in the Mayer van den Bergh museum used both alabaster and marble for the same altarpiece. The alabaster Virgin and Child at the Bode Museum is inv. 34. Several fourteenth century Spanish alabasters are included in: Rafael Cornudella, Cèsar Favà and Guadaira Macias, eds., *Gothic Art in the MNAC Collections* (Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 2011), 166-207.

the Midlands and North of England.³⁸⁰ The later fifteenth-century production of some of the alabaster workshops - primarily in the form of figures or altarpieces but tombs too - was prodigious in its output.³⁸¹ That said, the picture of industrial scale in the manufacture of English alabaster in the fifteenth century is misleading in terms of levels and quality of production. As explored in the previous chapter: during the first half of the fourteenth century, use of alabaster in England was in its infancy, and the picture is obscured by the poor survival rates aside from royal or high status tombs.³⁸² The alabaster for the Virgin and Child was possibly quarried at Tutbury, Staffordshire, as some of the earliest documents cite this location specifically; though it is impossible to be certain until isotopic analysis has been undertaken.³⁸³

Context:

The special importance of the BM Virgin and Child lies in the probable early date of its production and in its outstanding condition. Most surviving examples are badly damaged. This one survives without any major breaks. What is more, large portions of its original polychromy and gilding are still intact. A limited palette of three colours - red (vermillion), green (verdigris) and gold (gold leaf) - was employed to contrast the polished whiteness of the alabaster and to highlight specific and important areas of the figures depicted.³⁸⁴ Such a rare combination - of early date and excellent condition complete with polychromy - offers an insight into what is otherwise a lacuna in the 'genre'. A small total of fifteen other English alabaster Virgin and Child statues from the

³⁸⁰ Hope, "Early Working", 221-240. Nigel Ramsay, "Alabaster" in *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, eds. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay, (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 29-40.

³⁸¹ For an overview of the alabaster tombs, see: Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*.

³⁸² K. Woods, "Plantagenets in Alabaster", 89-108.

³⁸³ Ramsay, "Alabaster", 31.

³⁸⁴ Analysis undertaken by British Museum scientists Lucia Pereira-Pardo and Joanne Dyer.

fourteenth century are currently known.³⁸⁵ Of the standing figures, all are either severely damaged or have suffered from an almost total loss or dramatic overpainting of their original polychromy. Six are currently located in churches in France and it is entirely possible that at least some of these extant works were specially commissioned (most likely from England) and exported at the time of their production.³⁸⁶ The Continental provenance of the alabaster BM's Virgin and Child and, as will be argued, its stylistic similarities to French courtly sculpture, indicate that the networks for image interaction worked both ways. Certainly, other important early English alabasters with a Continental provenance suggest they were specially commissioned. The freestanding sculpture of St George and the Dragon discussed in Part Two of this chapter is uniquely carved in the round and was previously in the Ayala family chapel in Quejana, Spain.³⁸⁷ In rare cases documents and sculptures can be explicitly connected, as with the exportation from London to Rome of three alabaster figures by Cosmato Gentilis (later pope Innocent VII) in 1383. Two of these sculptures still survive in what was Cosmato's Cardinal Basilica, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome [figs 3.9 and 3.10].³⁸⁸

In this instance the documents provide evidence only for the movement of sculptures

³⁸⁵ More would surely be found if a fuller survey of English alabasters was undertaken. The subject is usefully treated in Land, *Englischen Alabastermadonnen*, 135-142, no.1, 143-154, no.2, 155-158, no.3, 174-178, no.7, 183-184, no.9, 211-213, no.17, 230-232, no.22, 254-258, no.27, 268-271, no.31, 274-282, no.33, 283-285, no.34, 286-287, no.35, 292-295, no.37, 328-329, no.48, 369-371, no.59, 402-404, no.71. Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 89-92.

³⁸⁶ It is possible that some of these sculptures were exported to Continental Europe after the English Reformation, however, there is sufficient evidence of a healthy trade in carved alabaster from the fourteenth century onwards, see: Ramsay, "Alabaster", 38-39.

³⁸⁷ Ángela Mata, *El retablo Gótico de Cartagena y los alabastros ingleses en España* (Murcia: Caja de Ahorros, 1999), 124. This sculpture is analysed in greater detail below and forms a compelling case study in connection to many of the issues raised here.

³⁸⁸ St John Hope, "Early Working", 227. Ulrich Middeldorf, "Two Alabaster Statuettes in Rome", in *Art in America*, col.16 (1927-28), 199-203. Walter Ullmann, *The Origins of the Great Schism: A study of Fourteenth-century Ecclesiastical History* (London: Archon Books 1948), 138-141. W.L. Hildburgh, "Some English medieval alabaster carvings in Italy", *Antiquaries Journal*, 35 (1955) 182-6. Murat, "Medieval English Alabaster", 399-413.

and not of their production or method of acquisition. However, certain details about Cosmato's time in England seem to have gone unnoticed which might explain how he came to acquire the sculptures. When Cosmato was working in England extracting papal revenues, a deputy under royal protection was appointed to him on the 14th July 1379; namely Master John de Thelewall, who was connected to the Duchy of Lancaster in which the alabaster quarries were situated.³⁸⁹ Perhaps the alabasters were a gift from Thelewall, or perhaps he was the connection through which Cosmato made contact with the sculptor of the statues. Others involved with the duchy in administrative roles, such as Godfrey Foljambe or Sir Sampson Strelly patronised sculptors working in alabaster.³⁹⁰ It is from his clerk in Tutbury that John of Gaunt ordered the alabaster for his and Blanche's tomb in St Paul's cathedral, London.³⁹¹

Similar inferences could be made about the several undocumented fourteenth-century English alabaster Adoration of the Magi sculptures that survive in Germany and Poland.³⁹² A possible explanation for the presence of outstanding alabaster sculptures in Castile, Rome and the Baltic Coast is that these were important political zones for England in the second half of the fourteenth century. The alabaster Virgin and Child should be seen within this fourteenth-century context as an important and special commission, made by a sculptor who worked his material with confidence and was engaged in the latest Pan-European artistic developments.

Date:

³⁸⁹ See Ullmann, *Great Schism*, 138

³⁹⁰ Both Godfrey and Sampson have alabaster effigies. My thanks to Kim Woods for alerting me to the connection between Sampson Strelly and Peter the Maceon. For further information see: Simon Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity, 1361-1399* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

³⁹¹ Woods, "Plantagenets in Alabaster", 103-104.

³⁹² Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 2-3, 82-83. Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 143-147.

No documentation survives to help date the BM alabaster precisely, but one can be proposed through comparison with other works of art in England. The Flawford Virgin and Child is its closest relation; its place of manufacture has long been accepted as English and it has been widely discussed [Fig.3.11]. Discovered alongside two other alabasters in 1779, the Flawford Virgin was found under the chancel altar of the now demolished St Peter's church in Flawford, Nottinghamshire.³⁹³ W. St John Hope dated the Flawford Virgin to the 1380s by comparing it stylistically with the alabasters exported to Rome by Cosmato Gentilis.³⁹⁴ Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner cited the Flawford figure but made no effort to refine the dating. They included it in a general discussion of fourteenth-century carvings, stating that the figure is "among our most perfect medieval images."³⁹⁵ Lawrence Stone agreed, describing the Flawford figures as the best examples of 'free-standing statuettes of the highest quality', relating the pose and the drapery to the French court style of 1340-60.³⁹⁶ Stone gave the Flawford Virgin a date range of between 1350 and 70.

Its proximity to Nottingham and its likely fourteenth-century date of production strengthens the Flawford Virgin and Child's attribution to an English sculptor, the city being the home and working place of the often cited Peter the Maceon of Nottingham.³⁹⁷ It has been suggested that Peter was the sculptor of the Flawford figures but there is no credible evidence to support this and it is wishful thinking.³⁹⁸ The Flawford Virgin is a *Virgo Lactans* image and in it Christ touches the uncovered breast

³⁹³ Cheetham, *Unearthed*, 20-27.

³⁹⁴ St John Hope, "Early Working", 227.

³⁹⁵ Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure-Sculpture*, 358-9.

³⁹⁶ Stone, *Sculpture in Britain*, 190.

³⁹⁷ Hope, "Early Working", 224-225.

³⁹⁸ Clement Pitman, "Speculations on Fourteenth-Century English Alabaster Work", *Connoisseur*, CLV (Feb. 1964), 82-89.

of the Virgin in an act of presentation to the viewer.³⁹⁹ A similar fourteenth-century English *Virgo Lactans* in alabaster is in the Victoria and Albert museum [fig.3.12].⁴⁰⁰ It is close in both style and format to both the BM and the Flawford Virgin, and may represent the work of another sculptor at a similar date.

The similarities between the British Museum and Flawford alabasters are sufficient to suggest a comparable date, yet their differences are also telling. The hair, pose and format of both sculptures are generally similar. For instance, the Christ Child sits within the crook of the right arm of each figure. Further, the hair of each Virgin is worked in tight waves which fall onto the neck of the figure, tucked behind the shoulders and held in place by a mantle made up of a series of strongly repeated v-shaped and switchback drapery folds. These serve to communicate the virtuosic skill of the sculptor and his confidence in working the stone. Both figures display a slight contrapposto sway with the larger part of the weight resting on the left leg, positioned a few centimetres in front of the right. The similar size and format of these images - 71cm and 75cm - is surely related to their function and original context. In the case of the British Museum Virgin the reverse is striated by a series of vertical marks left by the saw cutting through the block of stone, implying that it was never meant to be seen [fig.3.13]. With the exception of the alabaster St George discussed below, this was another common trait of English sculptures. Yet, despite these similarities, there are noticeable differences between the BM and Flawford sculptures. The soft flowing curves of the Virgin's drapery in the BM figure is contrasted by the sharp, crisp edges and v-shapes which characterise the Flawford alabaster. A larger alabaster block has been used to make the BM sculpture. Its depth of relief is 10.5cm compared to

³⁹⁹ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 154.

⁴⁰⁰ V&A accession number: A.140-1946. Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 191, cat. 118; and W.L. Hildburgh, "Medieval English Alabaster Figures of The Virgin and Child - I. Our Lady Standing", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 88, No. 515 (Feb., 1946), 30-33.

Flawford's 5cm. This provides a fullness to the rounded shape of the BM figure, whereas Flawford is flatter, due to the sparing use of alabaster. These differences place the two sculptures in slightly different stylistic traditions. The BM alabaster can be more easily related to French sculpture of around 1350-75 than it can be to the Flawford figure, which is probably somewhat later in date.

This can be explored by looking more closely at several aspects of the BM figure. Apart from the area around the shoulders and neck, the reverse has been left as it was after the alabaster block was sawn. From the reverse a prominent and peculiarly large strut can be easily seen. It connects the portion of drapery hanging over the Virgin's left arm to the area just above her knee.⁴⁰¹ Such dramatic presentation of drapery emanates from Northern France, Ecois for instance, where artists working in metal, freestone and marble were all exploring its potential.⁴⁰² The limited degree to which polychromy and gilding were applied around the hair and crown of the Virgin confirms that the sculpture was set into some form of recessed tabernacle or niche enclosed at the reverse [fig.3.14]. Alabaster images of the Trinity and the Virgin donated to Durham Cathedral by Prior John Fossor, c.1341-74 were described as 'cum tabernaculis cum aliis ornamentis', and the 1392 donation of a Virgin alabaster to St Sampson's church, York is described as: "unum tabernaculum ymaginis beate Mariae de alabaustre."⁴⁰³ What exactly these tabernacles looked like is still guesswork but it is clear that they often came along with the sculptures themselves. For instance, Adam de

⁴⁰¹ It is likely that the strut on the Virgin was originally not meant to be so large. A small fissure in the stone can be traced across the main body of the alabaster and into the portion of drapery at exactly the point where the top of the strut is located. The relative softness of alabaster and its liability to fracture - compared to marble - probably accounts for the size of the strut which on sculpture in other material is usually presented disguised or hidden from sight.

⁴⁰² Catherine Arminjon and Sandrine Berthelot, *Chefs-d'oeuvre du Gothique en Normandie: Sculpture et orfèvrerie du XIIIe au XVe siècle* (Caen: Musée de Normandie, 2008), 101-110, particularly the sculpture of St Veronica, fig.2, 103.

⁴⁰³ St John Hope, "Early Working", 225, 228.

Sodbury, abbot of Glastonbury from 1323, gave an image of the Virgin Mary to the abbey with a tabernacle.⁴⁰⁴ It is worth noting here that inventories relating to ivory figures of the Virgin and Child are often described in documents as ‘tabernaculum.’⁴⁰⁵ Their format, comprising a central standing figure of the Virgin and Child inside of a canopied niche with wings, might help provide a point of comparison for thinking about the way in which alabaster Virgin and Child sculptures were framed. Further, a surviving Spanish alabaster Virgin and Child dated to the fourteenth century, speaks to the cross-material appropriation of this particular format [fig.3.15]. Located at the Monasterio de San Juan de las Abadesas and dated to 1343, the alabaster Virgin and Child is placed inside of a tabernacle in the middle of a series of narrative scenes documenting the life of the Christ.⁴⁰⁶ Transferring such a frame to the BM alabaster is a hypothetical exercise as there is no way of knowing exactly how it was originally housed. It could simply have been placed inside of an open framework on an altar as seen in a contemporary manuscript illumination [fig.3.16].

A number of previous authors have commented on the stylistically “French” appearance of the BM figure, but few have looked to France for comparisons or indeed asked the question why it might have been made to look so. In the previous chapter I pointed out that it is within the highest levels of the English court of Edward III that we first find references to the patronage of alabaster tombs. Some of the same individuals owned alabaster statues too. Isabella of France owned an alabaster figure of the Virgin

⁴⁰⁴ “Houses of Benedictine monks: The abbey of Glastonbury”, in *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London, 1911), 82-99. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/som/vol2/pp82-99> [accessed 20 July 2017].

⁴⁰⁵ Sarah M. Guérin, “Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine”, *The Art Bulletin*, 95:1 (2013), 53-77, especially 58-62.

⁴⁰⁶ Marks, *Images of Devotion*, 154-156.

and a broken sculpture of St Stephen.⁴⁰⁷ One of Isabella's closest confidants, Marie de St Pol, countess of Pembroke, owned an alabaster Virgin which she gave to Westminster Abbey at an unknown date, afterwards becoming the cult image, St Mary le Pew.⁴⁰⁸ Marie's cross-channel hopping and position as a major conduit for Anglo-French cultural interaction has been well explored.⁴⁰⁹ Like Grandisson, the European connections of women like Isabella and Marie were surely routes through which objects travelled, in both directions.

Alabaster carving was not a uniquely English phenomenon. Its early use as a luxury material for sculpture can be documented in a variety of locations across Europe. Apart from tomb sculptures, many of the earliest alabaster images from France, Spain or Italy depict the Virgin Annunciate or the Virgin and Child. A "Notre-Dame d'albâtre" was in the choir screen of Cambrai by 1370.⁴¹⁰ Comparable in size and style to their English counterparts made in alabaster, all of these images and especially their material should therefore be seen as interacting with each other in a Pan-European nexus. For example, Mary of St Pol possibly went to Paris on behalf of Philippa of Hainault in connection to payment for her tomb. How far English sculptors were embedded within this cross-Channel activity is clear, for instance an English alabaster of St Catherine now in Paderborn is remarkably similar to an alabaster

⁴⁰⁷ Cheetham *Unearthed*, 41.

⁴⁰⁸ Ramsay, "Alabaster", 36.

⁴⁰⁹ Mark Ormrod, "Queenship, Death and Agency: the Commemoration of Isabella of France and Philippa of Hainault", in *Memory and commemoration in medieval England*, eds. Caroline M. Barron and Clive Burgess (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), 100-102.

⁴¹⁰ John W. Steyaert, *Late Gothic Sculpture: The Burgundian Netherlands* (Ghent: Ludion, 1994), 324-325, cat.98. For the Cambrai Virgin, see: Jules Houdoy, *Histoire artistique de la cathédrale de Cambrai, ancienne église métropolitaine Notre Dame* (Paris: Lille, 1880), 39.

sculpture by Andre Beauneveu [figs 3.17 and 3.18].⁴¹¹ Let us take this further. Two courtly French Virgin and Child sculptures in marble, one now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Arras, the other in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, serve to make this point [figs 3.19 and 3.20].⁴¹² Alabaster can look very much like white marble and some sculptures described in documents as alabaster have now been identified as marble and vice versa.⁴¹³ These documents must be seen as ambiguous and the terms alabaster and marble as interchangeable rather than fixed. The first of the sculptures was made in 1329 by Jean Pepin de Huy for Mahaut, Countess of Artois who is documented as the donor of the Arras Virgin, to the Charterhouse of Mont-Sainte-Marie de Gosnay. Jean Pepin le Huy, the sculptor of the Arras Virgin, is also documented as working in alabaster and thus the whole concept of material imitation might have had more to do with availability, or desirability, than expense.⁴¹⁴ The second is dated to c.1340 and measures 81cm - 6cm taller than the BM alabaster Virgin. Apart from their material differences and place of manufacture the overall effect is almost exactly the same. To what extent we are able to situate the undocumented BM alabaster Virgin and Child within the same courtly networks as the two French examples is

⁴¹¹ Froissart claims that Beauneveu came to England but this has yet to be resolved, see: Ormrod, "Death and Agency", 98-99.

⁴¹² W.D. Wixom, "Medieval Sculpture at the Metropolitan: 800 to 1400", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s., 62, no. 4 (2005). 32. A number of other marble and alabaster Virgin and Child sculptures could also be compared to the British Museum alabaster Virgin and Child, see: Baron, *Les Fastes du Gothique*, 67. 82-83, cat.27. 87-92, cat.31-36.

⁴¹³ Woods, "Plantagenets in Alabaster", 92. Woods, "Supply of Alabaster", 86-88. Aleksandra Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures: Southern Netherlandish alabasters from the 16th to 17th centuries in central and northern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 24-25. Lipinska cites the famous example of Dürer, who stated that Michaelangelo's *Pieta* in Rome was made out of alabaster rather than marble. This does not mean that Dürer was wrong but rather indicates the interchangeability of the two words to sometimes describe white stones.

⁴¹⁴ Françoise Baron, "Un Artiste du XIV^e siècle: Jean Pépin de Huy. Problèmes d'attribution", *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art* (1960), 89-94. G. Schmidt: 'Drei Pariser Marmorbildhauer des 14. Jahrhunderts. I. Jean Pépin de Huy. Stand der Forschung und offene Fragen', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, xxiv (1971), 160-68. See also: Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 24.

problematic. Some might feel that this is an attempt to raise the status of an English alabaster sculpture to an unrealistic position, yet the commonalities are undeniable. Further, recent scientific analysis and polychromatic reconstruction of the British Museum sculpture demonstrates how similar the painterly treatment of the alabaster Virgin and Child sculpture was when considered alongside its marble counterparts [fig.3.21]. Partial polychromy and the potency of whiteness were clearly desirable.⁴¹⁵

The smaller works discussed above can be viewed as diminutive versions of the many almost life-size fourteenth-century marble or stone Virgin and Child sculptures, examples of which can be found in the cathedrals of Sées and Coutances or the churches of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Paris) and Ecouis.⁴¹⁶ This all suggests a sculptor who was not working in an anachronistic mode, but was aware of contemporary stylistic developments. If the British Museum alabaster was made for a European client it further shows his or her ability to cater to a Continental taste. Perhaps the sculptor of the BM Virgin and Child was imitating and building on developments in the taste for marble and alabaster Virgin and Child sculptures in France and elsewhere. It is clear that there are distinct similarities. By looking more closely at why this imitation might have taken place we need to attend to the culture of representing whiteness and why it was desired on both sides of the Channel.

Polychromy, Whiteness and the Alabaster Virgin and Child:

The connection between sculptural materiality and contemporary devotion is referenced by William Fitzadam of Liverpool in his will of 1380, which stipulates burial “before the face of the white image of the Virgin.”⁴¹⁷ Why did Fitzadam require burial

⁴¹⁵ For a short discussion of white images of the Virgin Mary, see: Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 154-156.

⁴¹⁶ Arminjon and Berthelot, *Chefs-d'oeuvre du Gothique*, 71-86.

⁴¹⁷ James Allanson Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, vol. I (London, 1873), 35.

before this particular white Virgin? Did he find the image particularly beautiful? Perhaps he held a distinct and personal affection for it. The white Virgin in the Monastery of San Juan de las Abadesas was a popular image of devotion and the donation of a number of alabaster or marble Virgin and Child sculptures, noted above, by royalty, nobility and clergy, show a devotional connection between the donors and the images. Burial before images of the Virgin was of course nothing new. Just four years before Fitzadam's death, Edward the Black Prince had requested burial before the image of the Virgin in Our Lady of the Undercroft at Canterbury cathedral.⁴¹⁸

The appropriateness of a white material - or white paint used on wood or stone - for images of the Virgin is relatively easy to trace in biblical, exegetical and poetic sources.⁴¹⁹ Mary was commonly compared with the female lover in the Song of Songs, in which the colours of red and white are contrasted through the imagery of flowers: "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women."⁴²⁰ Whiteness was also used as a literary trope for describing beautiful people and precious things; it is from ivory that Pygmalion carved his perfect woman.⁴²¹

Materials like ivory or whale bone were co-opted to make aesthetic judgements connected to the whiteness of skin. In his discussion of Estrildis, Geoffrey of Monmouth remarks on her complexion: "No precious ivory, no recently fallen snow, no lillies even could surpass the whiteness of her skin."⁴²² Further, poems like *Pearl* are meditations on the material connection between whiteness, preciousness and beauty.

Medieval artists were not distinct from this culture but embedded in it - take for

⁴¹⁸ The colour of the sculpture located in Our Lady of the Undercroft is unrecorded.

⁴¹⁹ See Gillespie, "Medieval Hypertext", 206-29; and Beate Fricke, "Matter and Meaning of Mother-of-Pearl: The Origins of Allegory in the Spheres of Things", *Gesta*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 2012), 35-53.

⁴²⁰ Song of Songs 2:1-3.

⁴²¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (London: Penguin, 2004), 394-396.

⁴²² Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (London: Penguin, 1966) 76. See also the poem: "The White Beauty", 80-82.

example Jean de Liège or Andre Beauneveu - and found a wide variety of uses for ivory, marble, alabaster, mother of pearl and enamel.⁴²³ White ronde-bosse enamel work flourished at the same courts that popularised the use of ivory, alabaster and marble. Whiteness had potentially the same profound allegorical significance for artists who carved, polished and painted different materials as a kind of visual ekphrasis. Ultimately this came down to representing the beauty or virtue of the person depicted or memorialised. During the late fourteenth century a number of knights, many of whom were connected to the Order of the Garter, chose to have alabaster effigies carved for their tombs.⁴²⁴ As Julian Luxford has pointed out, Sir Walter Manny's (d.1372) choice of an alabaster tomb in London's Charterhouse might have been related to his virtuous character. Virtue, in Manny's case, as his chronicler relates "shone out of Manny during life."⁴²⁵ Shininess, like whiteness, was commonly used in descriptions of beauty, preciousness or virtue. In the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer states "just as the summer sun shine bright/and fairer, clearer, with more light/than any other star in heaven/the moon herself, or planets seven/so she for all the world outshone."⁴²⁶

Patrons like Isabella of France, Mary of St Pol or Mahout, Countess of Artois, employed sculptors to make them alabaster or marble images. These same patrons would also have easily understood the poetic significance of whiteness and shininess. Perhaps poets might have even tried to win favour with them by making such comparisons about their own complexions. When presented with the challenge of representing Mary, the Mother of God, it is no wonder that artists embedded in the

⁴²³ Fricke, "Matter and Meaning", 35-53.

⁴²⁴ Woods, "Plantagenets in Alabaster", 89-108.

⁴²⁵ Julian Luxford, "The Space of the Tomb in Carthusian Consciousness" in *Ritual and Space: Proceedings of the 2009 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Frances Andrews (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2011), 271-272.

⁴²⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, trans by E.B. Richmond (London: Hesperus, 2007), 55-56.

same courtly networks utilised the bare whiteness of stones like alabaster and marble, or other materials such as ivory and bone. Just how far we can *read* into the interaction between the allegorical potential of whiteness and the partial polychromy of the BM Virgin and Child is to be determined. Yet, if we place the alabaster Virgin and Child, hypothetically, within the same context as similar marble or alabaster sculptures from the Continent, then it is plausible that it was made made for a patron within a courtly network. However, this does not preclude it from being available to other patrons too.

Exactly when the BM Virgin and Child was made is hard to say, but if a date range of between 1350 and 1375 is accepted, then it was produced at a crucial point for the development and use of alabaster in England. Situating it within a European context helps to promote it, and the study of English alabaster more generally, from isolation. This study suggests that rather than operating in a vacuum, English sculptors, like their Continental counterparts, were working for patrons on both sides of the Channel and were responding thoughtfully to new developments. It is unlikely that a patron for the BM Virgin and Child will ever be forthcoming. However, in the following section of this chapter a patron can be identified, along with a detailed provenance. This information transforms the way in which we are able to think about the sculpture in question.

Part Two: St George and the Dragon. A Case of Individual Patronage?

English alabasters were internationally mobile from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards. In the case of three sculptures exported by Cosmato Gentilis it is possible to determine what the alabasters represented, the individual who exported them, where they were destined to go (Rome) and where two of them are now (Santa

Croce in Gerusalemme).⁴²⁷ In other cases where evidence is lacking, as with the alabaster Virgin and Child discussed above, we need to hypothesise about the likelihood of sale or commission at the time of manufacture. Perhaps like a number of the French marble or alabaster Virgin and Child sculptures, the BM alabaster was donated to a Netherlandish or French religious institution by a wealthy patron. This was the case with the alabaster Virgin and Child donated to the Westminster Abbey by Mary of St Pol or the Virgin and Trinity donated to Durham Cathedral by John Fossor. Sometimes, where documentary evidence exists, such as the *ymagez d'alabastre* recorded leaving Dartmouth in 1390 and headed to Spain, it is not possible to link the evidence to extant sculptures.⁴²⁸

Part two of this chapter focuses on an English alabaster which can be placed in a funeral chapel in Spain, and within a wider patronage programme for the chapel. It is a late fourteenth-century sculpture of St George and the Dragon [fig.3.22] and its provenance can be traced back to the chapel of the Virgin in the Quejana convent in Ayala, Spain, founded in 1373 by Hernan Perez de Ayala (d.1385). Curiously, given its impressive size, condition, and provenance, the sculpture has received little attention. When it has featured in English language publications, it has been treated with only the most cursory of catalogue descriptions, or remarks on its special character.⁴²⁹ In other English language publications it has been used to illustrate devotion to St George, or

⁴²⁷ Murat, "Italian Peninsula", 401.

⁴²⁸ Ramsay, "Alabaster", 38. Extracted from *Select Cases in Chancery, 1364-1471*, ed. W.P. Balidon (Selden Soc. X, 1896), 45-46. For extant alabasters in Spain, see: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 205-206. See also: W.L. Hildburgh, "Some English Alabasters in Spain", *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, XXIX (1917), 74-94; Jesus Hernandez Perera, "Alabastros ingleses en España", *Goya*, no.22 (1958), 222. S. Alcolea, "Relieves ingleses de alabastro en España: ensayo de catalogación", *Archivo Español de Arte*, XLIV (1971), 137-154.

⁴²⁹ Stone, *Sculpture in Britain*, 191.

has served as a document for dating English armour of the period.⁴³⁰ It has never been the product of a focused study, especially one which can place it in its historical, stylistic and material context. It is my intention to rectify that here. When the sculpture has featured in Spanish language publications, it has been situated as a passive purchase with scholars linking it to Hernan de Ayala's business interests, which intersected with English merchants.⁴³¹ One indicator of this interaction is the description of English textiles Hernan left to the Quejana convent in his will.⁴³²

The alabaster St George is unique, and it is unlikely that it was made with the intention to sell on the open market, without a buyer in mind. All of the evidence points towards a special commission, either to be given as a gift, or made to order for someone within the Ayala family. St George is the crucial link here. He was patron saint of Catalonia and thus a relevant choice whomever the original patron was. Further, the alabaster engages strongly with Continental trends in sculpture. It serves to strengthen my argument for the ability of English alabaster sculptors to cater for and engage with an international patronal base.

Provenance:

⁴³⁰ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 113-120; Marks and Williamson, *Gothic: Art for England*, cat.no.84; Tobias Capwell, *Armour of the English Knight, 1400-1450* (London: Thomas del Mar, 2015) 66.

⁴³¹ Mata, *El retablo Gotico*, 77, 124.

⁴³² Fernán donated a large number of liturgical objects to the monastery after his death, including a range of orphreys and chausables from London. See: Juan de Contreras and López de Ayala, Marqués de Lozoya, *Introducción a la biografía del Canciller Ayala con apéndices documentales acopiados por el Marqués de Lozoya* (Ayala: Junta de Cultura de Vizcaya, 1950), 100-101. I am immensely grateful to Maeve O'Donnell-Morales for bringing this reference to my attention and for sharing her own research on the Quejana monastery with me.

We find the sculpture now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, where it has been since its donation by Samuel Kress in 1953.⁴³³ It was bought by Kress in 1944 after having been through a number of collections in Europe and the United States.⁴³⁴ It was even offered to the V&A in 1938, but was turned down by Sir Eric Maclagan.⁴³⁵ Its prior history in Spain was hinted at in 1911 when it was catalogued in the collection of Benoit Oppenheim but located previously in the Quejana convent.⁴³⁶ If it were not for an earlier description of 1880, this reference would sit precariously, but the earlier description firmly situates the alabaster St George, still in situ, in the chapel of the Virgin in the Quejana convent:⁴³⁷

En las paredes inmediatas se ven los sepulcros murales, con estatuas yacentes, de Hernán Pérez, hijo de Pedro López, y de su mujer D.a Eloisa de Cevallos, cuyas pobres esculturas no alcanzan, ni con mucho, a la importancia de las sus

⁴³³ National Gallery of Art accession number: 1953.2.2. My thanks to Emily Pegues, Dr Alison Luchs and Anne Halpern for facilitating such open access to the excellent curatorial files at the National Gallery. Charles Seymour, *Masterpieces of Sculpture from the National Gallery of Art* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1949), 34-36.

⁴³⁴ The chronology of the sculpture's provenance is as follows: Benoit Oppenheim [1842-1931], Berlin, before 1911-1920 or after;[2] Lionel Harris [d. 1943], Spanish Art Gallery, London, in or before 1925.[3] (Goldschmidt Galleries, New York);[4] sold 1925 to Otto H. Kahn [1867-1934], New York;[5] Mrs. Otto H. Kahn [d. 1949], New York;[6] Mogmar Art Foundation, New York, by 1940;[7] Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris, by 1942;[8] purchased 1944 by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[9] gift 1953 to National Gallery of Art. Information supplied by the NG, Washington DC.

⁴³⁵ See letter between Sir Eric Maclagan and Mrs Khan dated May 18th 1938, National Gallery object file for 1953.2.2.

⁴³⁶ Benoit Oppenheim, *Originalwerke in Holz, Stein, Elfenbein usw. aus der Sammlung Benoit Oppenheim, Berlin*, Supplementary volume, (Leipzig, 1911), no. 136, pl. 79.

⁴³⁷ O.P.Martínez Vázquez, "Reseña histórica y catálogo monumental del Monasterio de Quejana—1374—1974, VI Centenario," *Boletín de la Institución "Sancho el Sabio"*, 19 (1975), 35, 64 n. 13, 67 n. 34. Micaela J. Portilla, *Quejana, solar de los Ayala* (Vitoria, 1983), 33, 47, 49-51.

padres...En el lucillo de D.a Eloisa han arrinconado una bella imagen de alabastro de San Jorge, de curioso mérito, por su antigüedad y detalles.⁴³⁸

How the alabaster came into Benoit Oppenheim's collection is unrecorded but it must have left Quejana between 1880 and 1911.⁴³⁹

Iconography:

Carved in the round the alabaster shows St George atop his horse trampling a dragon [figs 3.23 and 3.24]. It measures 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm, making it one of the largest surviving English alabasters. Kneeling down next to the battle is a female figure: a princess - or 'maid' or 'Margaret' - now headless. She holds her left arm raised up towards her chest and with the other clutches a band restraining the dragon around its neck [fig.3.25]. This depicts a specific moment from George's hagiography. After subduing the dragon he asked the maiden to place her girdle around its neck, after which it rose and followed her around in a tame state.⁴⁴⁰ It is worth emphasising the inclusion of the princess as it is extremely rare - if not unprecedented - for a major sculpture of St George to interpret the iconography in this way before 1400. The sculptor must surely have been responding imaginatively to the story or, more probably, working with a now lost model.

⁴³⁸ Ricardo Becerro de Bengoa, "Descripciones de Álava: Libro inédito escrito en 1880," *Ateneo* (1918), 271-272.

⁴³⁹ A painting from the same chapel, discussed below, is now in the Art Institute of Chicago. It is recorded as having been sold after receiving documented approval from the bishop and nuncio. Personal investigation with the assistance of Maeve O'Donnell-Morales into the possibility of a similar documented approval for the sale of the St George alabaster has been fruitless. For the painted altarpiece from Quejana, see: Martha Wolff, *Northern European and Spanish Paintings before 1600 in the Art Institute of Chicago*, (Chicago: Chicago Institute of Art, 2008), 100-107.

⁴⁴⁰ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans by William Granger Ryan, vol. I, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 239.

George is monumental. His size is exaggerated when compared with that of his horse. The scene is a dramatic, theatrical and compelling rendering of the saintly chivalric hero. It is an achievement in the balancing of size and form: a side-on view shows the concave format of the entire ensemble [fig.3.24]. It appears as if the sculpture could topple over at any moment, the fact that it does not reaffirms the sculptor's control and knowledge of the material. Perhaps the large and unwieldy size of the alabaster indicates that the sculptor was trying to represent George as he is described in the *Golden Legend*: "like sand, heavy with the weight of his virtues."⁴¹¹ George's upper body rises out from the main rectangular block of the alabaster containing the horse, the dragon and the princess. His body is slightly twisted and his left hand grasps the handle of a sword still connected to his golden belt. With George's right arm outstretched - now broken at an extremely fragile point of undercutting - the sculptor has emphasised his colossal size. Enough of this arm survives to show that it was bent at a right angle from the elbow; a broken strut located on his bascinet shows where it would have been connected to improve stability, which it ultimately did not [fig.3.26]. Still, the risks involved with carving the upper portion of George's body must have been immense. A crack or a fracture in the sculpture would have ruined the entire piece. The break noted on the strut of the alabaster *Virgin and Child* discussed above shows how precarious deep relief carving of alabaster could be. Whoever the sculptor of the *St George* was, he or she clearly had an impressive control over their material, which suggests someone well versed in the carving of alabaster.

George's armour is carefully observed. He is depicted wearing full armour, a mix of plate and mail. His tall centrally ridged bascinet is connected with a heavy looking aventail, attached by means of a sculpted and visible border of staples which are

⁴¹¹ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 238.

fitted by a threaded string. He wears leg defences of plate, fitted at the knee with a defence guard. The gauntlet on his left hand is also plate - probably only on the upper part - with the underside likely made of leather akin to the Black Prince's surviving gauntlets at Canterbury cathedral, dated c.1370. The shape of his, like George's, are flared at the cuffs. His shield is attached to his left shoulder by means of a black strap which rests across the front breastplate and his sword belt is slung low, connected to his armour by means of a secondary broader belt made up of protruding square fittings. His breastplate and shield are emblazoned with a red cross with which George is commonly identified. He wears a cuirass of plate which indicates a date at the earliest in the final decades of the fourteenth century, for instance, post-dating the knightly effigies of Sir Thomas Beauchamp at St Mary's Warwick (d.1369), or the Black Prince at Canterbury cathedral (d.1376) [figs 3.27 and 3.28]. Yet the style of the sculpture and the armour respond to a relatively wide date range which has proved difficult to pin down. Tobias Capwell has recently dated the piece as c.1390-1400.⁴⁴² This is understandable given the lack of documentation for accurately dating any single alabaster, combined with the unique nature of the sculpture. There is simply very little to compare it with.

From the earliest point in its historiography, scholars have dated it to a wide range, from c.1350 up to Capwell's recent suggestion of c.1390-1400.⁴⁴³ For the time being, and without documentary evidence for its production, a date somewhere between 1380 and 1400 is suggested for the sculpture, based on the type of armour depicted. A *terminus ante quem* of around 1400 is likely as the aventail is mail rather than plate, which started to take over in popularity in the first decade of the fifteenth

⁴⁴² Tobias Capwell, *The Armour of the English Knight*, (London: Thomas del Mar, 2015), 66.

⁴⁴³ For a short discussion of the different dates suggested for the sculpture see: Ulrich Middeldorf, *Sculptures from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools XIV-XIX century*, (London: Phaidon, 1976), 118-119.

century.⁴⁴⁴ As will be explored below, this date range coincides with the major period of patronage at Quejana convent and thus the making of the sculpture fits in with the contemporary patrons of the church in which it was found. Hernan who founded the church in 1373 died in 1383 and his son Pedro López by 1407. If the sculpture is from the final two decades of the fourteenth century, it suggests that Pedro is the more likely patron, or recipient, of the alabaster.

Polychromy and Gilding:

When it came to painting the sculpture, the artist employed a mixture of full and partial polychromy and gilding. George, his horse, and the princess are partially polychromed but the dragon is almost fully painted with various colours: red for its body and green for its wings. Black paint has been used to accentuate certain features, especially eyes, ears and the tail of the dragon. Red but particularly gold has been used sparingly to highlight particular and important areas of the sculpture, for instance: George's mail, his sword – which was probably completely gilded – his belt and spurs. Several late medieval images of George show that he was armed by angels, or the Virgin Mary, and thus the gold colour of his armour serves to communicate the heavenly nature of his attire.⁴⁴⁵ Other representations of the saint, including his kneeling image in the St Stephen's chapel paintings from Westminster Palace, show him in golden armour.

A relationship between full and partial polychromy sets up a dichotomy between the unpainted 'good' figures in the scene comprising St George and the Maiden, and the lively 'bad' dragon. Several other English alabasters made around the

⁴⁴⁴ Capwell, *English Knight*, 85-89.

⁴⁴⁵ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 238. This iconography achieved popularity in sculpture for example on the alabaster altarpieces of St George at Evreux Museum (originally at La Selle church), and Borbjerg, Denmark. See: Samantha Riches, "The La Selle Retable: an English alabaster altarpiece in Normandy" (PhD thesis, University of Leicester 1999). The iconography is also seen on the spandrels of the south porch of St George's Colegate, Norwich, dated c.1450.

same time were painted in a similar way. One particular idiosyncrasy of the way in which English alabasters were painted can be seen on representations of mail armour. On the St George alabaster, tiny brushstrokes indicate the links in the mail which are painted over the gilding on George's aventail. A similar technique exists on several contemporary examples. It can be seen on the fourteenth-century Resurrection panel at the British Museum and the Hawkley Betrayal panel [figs 2.51 and 2.52]. Still, for the St George alabaster, the artist went further in trying to create new effects in gilding. Using different techniques of water and oil gilding, the painter was able to depict matt and shiny effects on George's armour, thus contrasting different metal effects and showcasing his or her obvious talent [fig.3.29].⁴⁴⁶ Similarly, the princess's cloak has been gilded along the hemline and on a strip across her neckline. Above these gilded lines the artist has painted a recurring pattern of red dots, also seen on other alabasters, for example Christ in a Betrayal panel from the Burrell Collection [fig.3.30]. Surface texture, polish and colour variation was clearly on the mind of the artist who made the sculpture.

Patronage at Quejana:

The Ayala family were internationally positioned with an established position inside of the Ivrea court of Pedro I of Castile. After he was overthrown they switched allegiance to the new Trastamara court of Henry II.⁴⁴⁷ Hernan's son, Pedro López de Ayala, served as a member of successive Castilian governments, including those of Pedro I,

⁴⁴⁶ This has been identified by Lucia Perria-Pardo, research scientist at the British Museum. My thanks to Lucia for discussing this with me and sharing her research.

⁴⁴⁷ Lozoya, *La biografía del Canciller Ayala*; P.E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III & Richard II*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 19. Constance L. Wilkins, *Pedro López de Ayala* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 1-7.

Henry II, Juan I and Henry III.⁴⁴⁸ In his final years he was made royal chancellor to Henry III of Castile and is best known as a chronicler and poet.⁴⁴⁹ Although relations between England and Spain were often turbulent, they maintained diplomatic contact during this period and the Ayala family were involved. The first major interaction was at the battle of Najera in 1367, when Pedro López was imprisoned by the Black Prince's forces.⁴⁵⁰ After his release, he served as ambassador to the papal court at Avignon in 1384. He was the representative of Juan I, of Castile, at the signing of the Bayonne treaty, where John of Gaunt relinquished his title as King of Castile. He was also present at a meeting which took place in 1396 between Charles VI of France and Richard II of England, at which peace was discussed.⁴⁵¹ These instances were, however, major political links. A number of more intimate links existed too. Pedro's cousin, Dona Sancha, married Sir Walter Blount, a key ally of John of Gaunt, thus establishing a permanent English connection between the Ayala family and English courtly circles.⁴⁵² John of Gaunt was extremely active in Castile, claiming sovereignty through his marriage to Constance, daughter of Pedro I of Castile.⁴⁵³ Blount worked on behalf of John of Gaunt and returned to Castile in 1386 and 1393, the final time in order to seek out peace negotiations with Henry III.⁴⁵⁴ Back in England, Blount's wife, Dona Sancha, was part of the entourage of Constance of Castile, the new Duchess of Lancaster.

⁴⁴⁸ Lozoya, *la biografía del Canciller Ayala*; Wilkins, *Pedro López*, 4-6. Wolff, *Spanish Paintings*, 104.

⁴⁴⁹ Williams, *Pedro López*, 6-7. Russell, *English Intervention*, 398.

⁴⁵⁰ Fernando Galván, "At the Nájera Crossroads [1367]: Anglo-Iberian Encounters in the Late Fourteenth Century", in *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, eds. Ana Sáez-Hidalgo & R.F. Yeager (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 113-114.

⁴⁵¹ Wilkins, *Pedro López*, 6.

⁴⁵² Carole Rawcliffe, "Blount, Sir Walter (d.1403)", *Oxford National Biography*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2699> (accessed 19/11/2018). See also, Andrea Ruddick, *English Identity and Political Culture in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 254.

⁴⁵³ Anthony Goodman, "John of Gaunt", in *England in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1986), 76-77.

⁴⁵⁴ Russell, *English Intervention*, 538-539.

Frictions and complicated histories aside, there were plenty of opportunities for someone to commission - or be presented with - an alabaster St George and the Dragon, especially given the ties between the Duchy of Lancaster, where the alabaster quarries were situated, and the wider Ayala family.

Financing of the Quejana convent began with Hernan but was completed by Pedro López and his wife Dona Guzman.⁴⁵⁵ They were responsible for the tower containing the chapel of the Virgin, in which both of their effigies were placed, and where the alabaster St George was first recorded [fig.3.31].⁴⁵⁶ Although Hernan's effigy is located in the chapel of the Virgin today, it was originally in the main building of the church and was moved at a later, post-medieval date to its present place.⁴⁵⁷ Limited scholarly attention has been paid to the architecture of the church and chapel, but several extraordinary objects are associated with its interior. The chapel of the Virgin was a chantry chapel, reserved for the bodies of Pedro López and Dona Guzman. As patrons they are linked to a number of other works of art originally located inside of the chapel, including: their Spanish carved alabaster effigies, a Rhenish triptych now in Madrid, and a large painted altarpiece now in the Chicago Art Institute [fig.3.32].⁴⁵⁸ Inscriptions on the painted altarpiece identify the donor portraits as Pedro López and Dona Guzman, establishing their role as patrons.⁴⁵⁹ No such inscription survives for the alabaster but in this case it proves that they clearly had a taste for luxury works of art, and if the St George was commissioned by them, it demonstrates the range of their activity. Material evidence is supported by the international profile of Pedro López,

⁴⁵⁵ Ricardo Becerro de Bengoa, "Panteón del Canciller Don Pedro López de Ayala," *Boletín de la Sociedad española de excursions*, 24 (1916), 161-64. Portilla, *Quejana*, 29-45.

⁴⁵⁶ Portilla, *Quejana*, 29-45.

⁴⁵⁷ Portilla, *Quejana*, 29-45.

⁴⁵⁸ Wolff, *Spanish Paintings*, 106. O'Donnell, "The Castilian Altar".

⁴⁵⁹ Chicago Art Institute, Museum No. 1928.817. Wolff, *Spanish Paintings*, 106

which continued into his later years when he served as chancellor to Henry III, during which time he travelled to Paris and Avignon on Castilian business.⁴⁶⁰

Discussion: St George in England and in Spain:

St George was immensely popular in England during the Middle Ages.⁴⁶¹ Over the course of the fourteenth century he became intimately connected with the royal chapel at Windsor, developing into the archetypal chivalric hero to be imitated by the royal and noble members of the Order of the Garter, established there by Edward III in 1348.⁴⁶² Prior to this date he featured on Romanesque tympana, at St George's, Brinsop, Herefordshire, for instance, but elsewhere too, and began appearing with greater prominence in English court art in the second half of the fourteenth century.⁴⁶³ Notable royal images include St George handing Edward III an armorial shield from the Milemete treatise, on the college seal of St George's Windsor, and below the Adoration of the Magi wall-painting originally situated at the east end of St Stephen's chapel, Westminster Palace.⁴⁶⁴ Edward III ordered an alabaster reredos for St George's Windsor in 1367 and although the iconography is undocumented, it is likely that, given his popularity elsewhere George might have featured there too. His image appears in small and large scale stone sculpture, for example a stone St George was discovered at St Albans, and a fragmentary St George from Winchester is now at the British Museum

⁴⁶⁰ Wolff, *Spanish Paintings*, 104.

⁴⁶¹ For a wide ranging and accessible overview of St George see: Sam Riches, *St George: Hero, Martyr and Myth*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2000). For George in an English devotional context see: Marks, *Image and Devotion*, pp.114-120. For an expanded but slightly lacklustre history of the cult of George in England, see: Jonathan Good, *The Cult of Saint George in Medieval England*, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009).

⁴⁶² Mark Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 299-321.

⁴⁶³ For Romanesque tympana of St George see: Riches, *Hero, Martyr and Myth*, pp.23-26; and George Zarnecki, *Later English Romanesque Sculpture, 1140-1210* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1953), 12-13.

⁴⁶⁴ Michael Michael, "The Iconography of Kingship in the Walter of Milemete Treatise", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994): 35-47.

[figs 3.33 and 3.34].⁴⁶⁵ Both probably date to the last quarter of the fourteenth century and are thus contemporary with the alabaster St George from Ayala. Nevertheless, given this rise in popularity it is curious that St George hardly appears in alabasters dated to the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Two extant altarpieces survive along with a number of single panels.⁴⁶⁶ All date from the second half of the fifteenth century, making the Ayala sculpture the earliest image of George in alabaster by at least fifty years. Further, as this is the only alabaster sculpture carved in the round, it raises the question: where - other than the text of the Golden Legend - did the sculptor look for inspiration?

Equestrian images were extremely popular during the Middle Ages, exemplified by the widespread tradition of mounted riders on personal seals.⁴⁶⁷ Identifying publically with the strength of a powerful knight is easy to understand. During the fourteenth century the monumental image of the rider on horseback was often connected to funerary sculpture. Italian examples include those made for Cangrande della Scala in Verona (d.1329), or Bernarbo Visconti (d.1385) in Milan. Both sculptures engage with a longer trend which has its roots in Roman equestrian images like that of Marcus Aurelius in Rome, but reinterpreted by sculptors for statues like the famous rider figure at Bamberg cathedral. The images of St George which adorn the exteriors of St Pierre at Angoulême cathedral, dated to the twelfth century, and Basel Münster, dated to the fourteenth century, are part of this culture of representation. Yet, neither depicts St George completely in the round as he is in the English alabaster from Ayala. The

⁴⁶⁵ British Museum St George accession number: 1853,0404.1. This sculpture remains unpublished. For the St Albans George see: Charles Henry Ashdown, *St Albans Historical and Picturesque* (London: Elliot Stock, 1893), 90. Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 115, fig.78. Ruddick, *English Identity*, 289-94.

⁴⁶⁶ For the total number of St George panels see: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 179.

⁴⁶⁷ Jean-François Nieuws, "Early Aristocratic Seals: an Anglo-Norman success story" in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2015*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), 97-124.

earliest extant monumental sculpture of St George in the round is a bronze St George and the Dragon from Prague made c.1373 [fig.3.35].⁴⁶⁸ A St George from St Stephen's cathedral in Vienna, shown standing, spearing the dragon, is more typical iconography of the saint [fig.3.36].⁴⁶⁹

Smaller sculptures of St George on horseback began to be produced during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, of which the Ayala George is a relatively early and important example. The function of these images might be related to the altar. A miniature showing the chapter of the Garter praying before a sculpted image of the saint is dated 1444-45 [fig.3.37].⁴⁷⁰ Yet, this image, which dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, showcases a period when the popularity of this format was already established. Inevitably, the alabaster might have had any number of other functions which are unrecorded. Another, smaller representation is a Netherlandish example at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, dated c.1390-1400 [figs 3.38 and 3.39].⁴⁷¹ It was made at around the same time as its alabaster counterpart and it is clear that there are stylistic links, especially given both were carved fully in the round. Still, it is possibly the Bohemian connection which remains the strongest. The Prague bronze and the English alabaster St George are presented in similar positions. Each one holds

⁴⁶⁸ Boehm, *Crown of Bohemia*, 161-161. Klára Benešová, "St George the Dragon-slayer at Prague Castle - the Eternal Pilgrim without a Home?" *Umění* 1 (2007), 28-39. The NG alabaster and the Prague St George are compared, albeit briefly, in Jan Bažant, "St. George at Prague Castle and Perseus: an Impossible Encounter?" *Studia Hercynia* XIX/1-2 (2015), 189-201.

⁴⁶⁹ Metropolitan Museum of Art accession number: 29.158.770.

⁴⁷⁰ British Library, MS Royal 15 E VI, f. 439.

⁴⁷¹ Nuremberg Germanisches Museum accession number: Pl.O.32. Frank Matthias Kammel, "Bildschnitzerkunst aus den Niederlanden und aus Holstein" in: *Mäzene, Schenker, Stifter. Das Germanische Nationalmuseum und seine Sammlungen*, ed. Annette Scherer (Nürnberg: Germanische Nationalmuseum, 2002), 141-143. Christine Kupper, "Heilige zwischen Verehrung und Vereinnahmung" in: *Mittelalter. Kunst und Kultur von der Spätantike bis zum 15. Jahrhundert* eds. Jutta Zander-Seidel and Frank Matthias Kammel (Nürnberg: Germanische Nationalmuseum, 2007), 370-385, 372-373.

onto the spear with his right hand, and a sword with his left, their horses turning their heads down toward the dragons as they begin to trample on them with their hooves. The impact of Bohemian art on Europe during the late fourteenth century was significant and has been well explored elsewhere.⁴⁷² Perhaps like other works of art produced in England in the late fourteenth century, such as the Norwich Passion Retable or the Sherbourne Missal, the sculptor responsible for making the alabaster had seen similar images to the Prague George in England or had plausibly travelled abroad himself.⁴⁷³

If St George was popular in England then he was equally popular in Spain. He was the patron saint of Catalonia and acted as a archetypal chivalric hero to be imitated. Mounted on horseback, the image of George surely resonated with another popular Spanish depiction of St James of Compostella, also on horseback. Exactly how the sculptor responsible for the alabaster St George came into contact with developing trends in Continental representations of the saint is unknown. We are in a similar situation in understanding how the sculpture came to be in the funerary chapel of Pedro López and Dona Guzman. Was the sculpture a gift, or was it a commission made by the pair? Without documentation it will remain impossible to be certain. Yet, the same courtly networks were at play here as they were for the Virgin and Child alabaster discussed previously. Members of the English court, who were early patrons of alabaster, displayed a European outlook when it came to the ownership of works of art. Pedro López and Dona Guzman were the same. Their funerary chapel contained an effigy of Pedro, showing him in full armour clutching a sword to his chest. If the sculpture had been a gift it surely resonated with his status. If it was a commission then

⁴⁷² Simpson, *Bohemian Painting*.

⁴⁷³ T.A. Heslop makes this suggestion for the painter of the Norwich Passion retable, see: Heslop, "Passion Altarpiece", 201-215.

it would not be out of line with other major works of art from the chapel of the Virgin or what can be documented about his life and personality.

Conclusion:

Chapters two and three should be considered a pair which together deal with altarpieces and freestanding alabasters made during the second half of the fourteenth century. In each chapter I have emphasised and explored connections between the early history of English alabaster and works of art from across Continental Europe. English sculptors working in alabaster engaged with images and ideas circulating across Italy, Bohemia, Germany and France. This should come as no surprise, as English alabaster sculptures made at this date can be documented in all of these countries. They were not, however, a homogenous group and should be explored on an individual level. The status of English alabasters abroad has always been uncertain due to a lack of documentation: were they sent abroad before the Reformation or after? In chapter five of this thesis I expand on this issue, but for now, the methods employed in this chapter show that when studied as independent works of art, they have much to tell us about the historical reception and status of English art on the Continent.

Chapter Four

The St Catherine Altarpiece from Lydiate Reunited: Patronage, Attribution and Environment

Introduction

Surprisingly few attempts have been made to try and reconnect alabaster panels which have, over time, become separated from each other. This chapter reunites a group of English alabasters in Lancashire and London and argues that together they originally constituted an altarpiece representing the life of St Catherine, probably made for the high altar of a private chapel dedicated to St Catherine, built in the late fifteenth century on the grounds of Lydiate Hall. No documentation survives for the building of the chapel, but there is sufficient physical evidence to suggest that its construction was first undertaken by Laurence and Catherine Ireland in the final decades of the fifteenth century, at the same time as the rebuilding of the Hall. Taking its size, iconography and provenance into account, the altarpiece appears to be a commission made for the Irelands specifically for the chapel. If this is so, the suggested building dates and patronage of the chapel allows for a rare instance where an alabaster altarpiece can be satisfactorily dated and the patrons identified. Still, the point of this chapter is not simply to gather together separate sculptures for the purpose of dating them. More can be said. In this chapter I bring together, for the first time, a group of alabasters under one master sculptor or workshop and attribute them to the maker of the Lydiate altarpiece. By identifying this group it is possible to detail sculptural processes previously unacknowledged or misrepresented in the literature, primarily the early use of Continental prints by sculptors working in England.

In the final section of this chapter I investigate the post-Reformation history of the Lydiate altarpiece. It is a rare case of survival. In England, most of the alabasters were completely destroyed, buried or concealed. Ones that survived in houses became ‘curiosities’, perhaps in some contexts they became almost relics. The context for the survival of the Lydiate alabasters is rooted in post-Reformation recusancy in Lancashire. Why they survived and how they were reused inside of the nineteenth-century Roman Catholic church in Lydiate will form the conclusion of the chapter.

The Panels:

Seven sculptures, which together constitute a complete altarpiece for the life of St Catherine, are currently split into two groups: four panels, two canopies, and a fragment from a free standing figure are held at the Roman Catholic church of Our Lady of Lydiate (the panels and canopies are presently cemented into the baptistery wall).⁴⁷⁴

Two further panels from this arrangement form part of the collection of the Society of Antiquaries, London [SoA].⁴⁷⁵ In order of the narrative sequence the panels show: [1] St Catherine before Maxentius and the burning of the Philosophers, Lydiate; [2] St Catherine in Prison, London, SoA; [3] The Breaking of the Wheel, Lydiate; [4] St Catherine in Prayer, Lydiate, [5] the Beheading of St Catherine, London, SoA; [6] the Burial of St Catherine at Sinai by Angels, Lydiate, [7] and a head fragment from a standing figure of St Catherine [figs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7]. Both panels at the SoA measure 45cm x 27cm x 6.3cm with a depth of relief of 5cm. Most of the Lydiate panels are fragmentary, still, the widths of each alabaster matches the measurements of the London panels, with the most complete sculpture exactly matching the height, depth, and depth of relief of the SoA panels. When it was

⁴⁷⁴ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 31-36.

⁴⁷⁵ Society of Antiquaries accession number: LDSAL 150.2 and LDSAL 150.1.

complete, the free standing figure of St Catherine measured 74cm x 25cm but is now known in its original form only from antiquarian description and a photograph included in an article of 1915 by Philip Nelson [fig.4.8].⁴⁷⁶ Until recently it was thought to have been lost, but during the course of my research St Catherine's head was discovered in a hole in the brickwork of the boiler room of the church.⁴⁷⁷ That it can be accounted for as a whole piece up until the early twentieth century suggests the reasons for its current state are probably accidental but as yet are unexplainable.

Reunited:

In all four of the earliest publications which discuss the Lydiate/SoA sculptures it was suggested but never fully developed upon that the panels were connected beyond stylistic and iconographic similarities. Reverend Edward Powell mentioned the existence of the beheading panel at the SoA in the final footnote of his 1894 article, believing it to be “similar in workmanship and decoration to the Lydiate panels.”⁴⁷⁸ In 1912 Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner discussed the group in *An Account of Medieval Figure Sculpture in England*. They connected the SoA panels to their counterparts at Lydiate, stating: “at Lydiate Hall, in Lancashire, are other scenes of St Catherine, which, with those of the Antiquaries, would make up a complete set dedicated to this saint.”⁴⁷⁹ Prior and Gardner were usually critical of the work of the English alabaster sculptors. In this instance however they displayed a rare moment of

⁴⁷⁶ Fortunately Philip Nelson also included measurements for the sculpture, see: Philip Nelson, “Ancient Alabasters at Lydiate” in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol.LXVII (1915), 20-26.

⁴⁷⁷ The discovery took place in June 2016, personal communication with Father Thomas Wood of Our Lady of Lydiate. My thanks to Fr Wood for welcoming me to the church on a visit in 2015 and for sending images of the alabaster head after its discovery.

⁴⁷⁸ Rev. Edward Powell, “Alabaster Carved Panels at Lydiate: The Legend of St Catherine” in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. XLVI (1894), 174.

⁴⁷⁹ Prior and Gardner, *Medieval Figure Sculpture*, 496-497.

admiration in describing the group: “The rich filling of the ground, the deep undercutting, and the rugged forcible technique, with its strong presentation of action and expression, distinguish these “Martyrdom” tables as some of the most genuine achievements of fifteenth-century style.”⁴⁸⁰ Prior and Gardner’s work was succeeded by Philip Nelson in two articles of 1913 and 1915.⁴⁸¹ Nelson went so far as to bring the group together, stating that one of the SoA examples “may, from its marked similarity of treatment, have originally formed part of the Lydiate retable.”⁴⁸²

All of the panels share the same skilful deep undercutting and still preserve in parts substantial original polychromy and gilding. The losses of both are relatively uniform across the panels, suggesting a common history. The distribution of the surviving paint and gilding is partial in application rather than complete, with gilding being used on the background of the panels but also on the hair of Catherine, Christ and God the Father. The faces, clothes and hair of the tormentor figures in the panels are not gilded but sufficient paint survives, proving that they once were fully polychromed. This was done in order to create a relationship between painted and unpainted surfaces in the narrative scenes, and by extension draw attention to the characters on which gilding has been used. Apart from St Catherine, the angels and other subsidiary ‘good’ characters, the faces of the figures have been worked in an idiosyncratic crisp geometric style with accentuated angular cheekbones. This angular technique is best seen on the drapery of St Catherine where in certain scenes, particularly her imprisonment, it is shown as a gathering together of square-shaped folds. The tormentors of the Saint, when beardless, have small punched holes for

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 496-497.

⁴⁸¹ Philip Nelson, “Some Examples of Nottingham Alabaster-Work of the Fifteenth Century”, *Archaeological Journal*, 70:1 (1913), 133-136. Nelson, “Ancient Alabasters”, 20-26.

⁴⁸² Nelson, “Ancient Alabasters”, 23.

stubble and sharp grooves cut into their foreheads to furrow their brows, creating a disparity between them and the soft calmness of Catherine in the face of adversity [fig.4.9]. The sculptor's attention to detail should not be overlooked, for instance, in the panel of St Catherine in Prayer the ground has been tooled with a repeating zig-zag pattern [fig.4.10]. This is the only scene from the set with this motif, the others being fully painted in green and dotted with a flower pattern. The tough tooling of the ground beneath Catherine might relate to the iconography of the scene which shows her in prayer. This scene is the first panel from the right hand side of the altarpiece ensemble and registers a change in the action. In it Catherine no longer calls on God to aid her in her dispute with her tormentors. She is instead shown invoking God's help through prayer to assist those – perhaps the medieval viewers of the altarpiece – who in times of trouble might think of her and her imminent martyrdom. The change in the texture of the ground should therefore be considered an artistic choice, differentiating the 'feel' of the ground across the altarpiece as a whole. The application of this method of tooling is uncommon on English alabasters but can be found on Continental sculpture. It might have been a personal invention of the sculptor, but it is far more likely that it was witnessed on another piece, and then co-opted for a particular use in this special instance.

Unlike their counterparts in Lydiate, the panels at the SoA can be moved freely and thus allow for a study of the reverse of the sculptures [fig.4.11]. Grooved lines show how the alabaster panels were sawn apart from a larger block of stone. Stickers indicate the inclusion of the fragments in the exhibition of English alabaster work at the Society of Antiquaries in 1910.⁴⁸³ Small drilled holes are filled with lead and contain wires which show that these panels and their Lydiate counterparts were once contained within a

⁴⁸³ Hope, *Illustrated Catalogue*, 61-62.

wooden frame; one which has long since disappeared. The carvings are larger in height, depth and depth of relief than the average surviving alabaster panel. The use of a larger block of alabaster allowed the sculptor to create a deeper expression of three-dimensional plasticity, particularly apparent in the figure of St Catherine in Prison who appears as if she has been carved in the round.

The Lydiate Altarpiece in the Wider Corpus of English Alabaster Sculpture:

Apart from the Lydiate/SoA examples, Francis Cheetham catalogued eighty-eight other alabaster sculptures of St Catherine.⁴⁸⁴ Of these, thirty-four solely represent the standing saint. Determined by their size and format this number comprise primarily bookend figures to altarpieces. Other similarly large examples of St Catherine can be found, for instance, at Mont St Michel, France, and another in The Philadelphia Museum of Art, United States. Neither sculpture was included in Cheetham's catalogue.⁴⁸⁵ It is unclear whether these alabasters were originally part of altarpiece ensembles like the one at Lydiate or were placed inside of an independent tabernacle or image niche. Of the remaining fifty-four narrative panels, five have a documented English provenance, having been discovered in churches or private houses and recorded as such.⁴⁸⁶

Fragments from Preston in Holderness include images of St Catherine in Prison and St Catherine Saved from the Wheel, replicating iconography already present at Lydiate/SoA. Similarly, the fragments representing St Catherine's beheading found at Wood Ditton, and the panel of St Catherine's Burial found in Shaftesbury and now at Goldhill Museum, Dorset, also reproduce iconography at Lydiate/SoA. Therefore, four

⁴⁸⁴ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 31-36.

⁴⁸⁵ I visited Mont St Michel in 2015, at which time the alabaster was on display in the parish church of St Peter. My thanks to François Saint-James the curator in charge of Mont St Michel for arranging access and for sharing his own thoughts and research into the alabasters. The St Catherine in the Philadelphia Museum of Art is accession number: 1986-26-407.

⁴⁸⁶ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 31-36.

different alabaster altarpiece ensembles survive in England out what would have originally been a large corpus representing one of the most popular late medieval saints.⁴⁸⁷ The rest were either completely destroyed, taken to the Continent in the sixteenth century or are still waiting to be discovered. A small possibility remains that the Lydiate and SoA sculptures represent elements from two different altarpieces, however, a closer study of the iconography of the panels and the format of the altarpiece will help to prove categorically whether or not they belong together.

Cheetham documented two complete and four incomplete altarpieces for the life of St Catherine.⁴⁸⁸ He included the five Lydiate alabasters as an incomplete example, without reference to the surviving panels at the SoA as part of the arrangement. Complete altarpieces are located at the Ca d'Oro, Venice, and at the parish church of Verjum, Denmark [figs 4.12 and 4.13].⁴⁸⁹ The format and narrative order of the Venice and Vejrums altarpieces is exactly the same, apart from having different saints as bookend figures. Both altarpieces show, from left to right: [1] St Catherine before Maxentius and the burning of the philosophers; [2] St Catherine in Prison; [3] a tall central panel of the Breaking of the Wheel; [4] the Beheading of St Catherine; [5] Burial of St Catherine. The central panel of each is formed of a taller narrative scene of St Catherine and the Breaking of the Wheel. This scene is central to the narrative. It shows the power of God's intervention, highlighting the function of the wheel as the

⁴⁸⁷ Katherine J. Lewis, "Pilgrimage and the Cult of St Katherine in Late Medieval England" in *St. Katherine of Alexandria: texts and contexts in Western medieval Europe*, eds., Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003.), 37-52. See also: Eamon Duffy, "Holy Maidens, Holy Wyfes: the Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England." *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990), 175-96.

⁴⁸⁸ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 161-162. For another, now lost altarpiece of St Catherine, see: William Sparrow Simpson, *Visitations of Churches belonging to St. Paul's Cathedral, in 1297 and in 1458* (London, 1895), lxiii.

⁴⁸⁹ For the altarpiece at the Ca'd'Oro, see: Murat, "Medieval English Alabaster", 403-405. For the altarpiece at Vejrums, see Chapter Five of this thesis, 222-272.

symbolic attribute of the Saint; a representation of her triumph over evil. In the Lydiate group, the same panel - the Breaking of the Wheel - is of a similar height to its companion panels in the altarpiece. In this instance, it is unlikely that the scene of the Breaking of the Wheel was used as the central scene. It suggests that the arrangement of imagery in the Lydiate/SoA altarpiece was similar, but not the same as other complete versions, and that another, different, sculpture was originally placed at the centre. An alternative arrangement is confirmed when the number of panels is taken into account. Both altarpieces at Venice and Vejrum are made up of five narrative panels. The two narrative scenes missing from the four panels that survive at Lydiate are St Catherine in Prison and the Beheading of St Catherine. These missing scenes are exactly those represented in the SoA panels, further confirming that all the panels were originally part of the same altarpiece.

One of the major differences between the Lydiate altarpiece and those at the Ca'd'Oro/Vejrum is that it contains six panels rather than five. At Lydiate, the panels showing St Catherine in Prayer and her Beheading are an important instance where this group differs, iconographically speaking, from the remaining corpus of English alabasters. In other panels, the moment of St Catherine's prayer is almost always combined with her execution. In the Lydiate group these two events are separated in order to create two panels, one for Catherine's prayer and another for her martyrdom. It extends the narrative of the Saint's life over a larger number of panels and creates a tension between two pivotal moments: her prayer - when she asks God to help those in time of need - and her martyrdom, when she is murdered for not relinquishing her beliefs. No English alabaster altarpieces survive with an even number of scenes. Several late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century alabaster altarpieces contain panels all of the same size, but nevertheless still follow an arrangement where the same number of

sculptures are situated either side of a central narrative panel [fig.2.54].⁴⁹⁰ It is tempting to arrange the panels from the Lydiate altarpiece in a similar configuration with the image of the standing saint positioned elsewhere. However, this would be anomalous and there must surely have been a central scene - narrative or otherwise - situated at the middle of this altarpiece.

In a proposed reconstruction of the original format of the altarpiece I have placed the free standing sculpture of St Catherine at the centre, and arranged the six panels either side in two groups [fig.4.14]. An arrangement like this is unique but a reference in the Suppression documents describes another - now lost - ensemble having existed at the church of the Blackfriars in Salisbury.⁴⁹¹ The indenture is a catalogue of objects found inside of the church and notes St Barbara's placement in the middle of an alabaster altarpiece: "11 altars, 2 of them tables, 3 imagery, 1 double table of alabaster, 1 large altar with St. Barbara in the midst, alabaster."⁴⁹² Although rarely found in England, this type of arrangement with a tall free standing sculpture in the centre can be paralleled on Continental altarpieces made in Germany and the Low Countries in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries [fig.4.15]. For instance, a German altarpiece of St Catherine, with a centrally placed standing saint in the middle of a narrative arrangement, can be found in Sønder Bjerge Kirke in Denmark.⁴⁹³ Perhaps the sculptor of the Lydiate altarpiece looked abroad for this format as a way to appeal to an international market? This will be explored in greater detail in due course. It is

⁴⁹⁰ V&A accession number: A.172-1946. Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 68.

⁴⁹¹ "Henry VIII: October 1538 1-5", in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 13 Part 2, August-December 1538*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1893), 194-211. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no2/pp194-211> [accessed 27 January 2015].

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ Sissel F. Plathe and Jens Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altertavler: og Anden Billedbærende Kirkeudsmykning af Betydning for Liturgien og den Private Andagt*, vol.II (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010), 974-975.

possible that the Master of the Lydiate Altarpiece witnessed this type of altarpiece arrangement in person, either on the Continent or by way of an imported Continental altarpiece in England. If the altarpiece was constructed in this way it supports a late fifteenth-century date of manufacture and places it in an artistic dialogue with similar works of art created in Continental Europe. Further, it suggests that the Lydiate altarpiece originally looked distinctly different from other, more familiar alabaster altarpieces.

A reconstruction of the format and original size of the altarpiece helps to visualise and pinpoint its differences. By combining the widths of all of the sculptures a total of 1.87m can be reached for its combined width, and 74cm for the height at the centre. The wooden frame of the Passion altarpiece at the Capodimonte Museum, Naples, is a good substitute for the missing frame at Lydiate as both altarpieces share a similar format with three narrative panels located either side of a much taller central scene. Reuse of the measurements from the Naples altarpiece allows for a reconstruction of the lost form of the Lydiate altarpiece. Its frame measures ten centimetres between each panel, fifteen centimetres below the sculptures for descriptive text, and ten centimetres above the canopies for decorative framework. With these measurements we can estimate a maximum width of 2.47m for the reconstructed Lydiate altarpiece, with a height of 1.22m, taking into account a slightly larger canopy over the central figure. It would have been closed for Lent and perhaps at other times; the existence of iron hinges on several surviving altarpieces accounts for this. Yet the frame would need to close around the larger central figure too. Once again the Capodimonte altarpiece provides clues. On either side of the upper part of the frame are two small iron hinges suggesting that it originally contained painted shutters to enclose the taller central section. This construction element can be seen on a number

of Netherlandish altarpieces made in the late fifteenth century. Painted shutters of this sort can be found on altarpieces made in Antwerp, Brussels and Bruges, many of which were exported to England from the middle of the fifteenth century onwards.⁴⁹⁴

Condition:

Typically, those alabasters which have been discovered in churches across England have survived as broken fragments. The impetus for their destruction was a legal and political one, issued as a series of Articles and Injunctions beginning in the reign of Henry VIII and continued by his successors Edward VI and Elizabeth I.⁴⁹⁵ Sculptures discovered in churches commonly have signs of deliberate damage. When alabasters have been discovered without signs of iconoclasm, it is likely that they were hidden away to prevent deliberate damage or possibly for some ritualistic reason. Documentary evidence for private individuals and the clergy removing and hiding sculpture in such a way supports this theory. In chapter one I outlined the different contexts for this type of behaviour. The methods employed to *deface* a sculpture were manifold and included the use of tools to chisel or chip away at faces, hands and symbols of the saintly individuals. In other cases the use of force was applied to break the head from the body of the sculpture, or it was smashed against something hard to break it into numerous fragments. It is worthwhile surveying the condition of the Lydiate/SoA sculptures to see if any of these patterns exist.

Survey of the alabasters at Lydiate:

⁴⁹⁴ This feature was pointed out to me by Kim Woods. My thanks to Kim for a memorable visit to Naples in 2015 and for sharing her thoughts and research into English alabaster altarpieces. Her work is forthcoming: Kim Woods, *Cut in Alabaster: a Material of Sculpture and its European Traditions 1330-1530*, (Brepols, 2018). I have not had a chance to consult this publication prior to the submission of this thesis as it was published the same month as submission.

⁴⁹⁵ See Chapter One of this thesis, 38-93.

Superficially, the Lydiate alabasters appear to be in relatively complete condition, with only the panels of St Catherine and the Breaking of the Wheel and St Catherine in Prayer showing noticeable, large-scale losses. However, close physical assessment of each panel reveals considerable signs and patterns of damage. The panel of St Catherine before Maxentius is broken into two pieces with the break running diagonally across the panel, above Catherine's head, through Maxentius' legs. Above Catherine, the head of a figure is broken and the hands of the saint have been broken too, chipped off at the wrists. Maxentius' sword has suffered damage to the main part of the blade, otherwise there is no damage to the hands or faces of any other figures in the scene. The panel showing St Catherine and the Wheel is broken into two pieces with the major break running under the neck of Catherine. Major losses of alabaster can be seen on the upper right and left hand side of the panel either side of Catherine's head. The hands of both God the Father and Catherine are broken and there is a small portion of the Saint's nose missing with a series of scratch marks across her face. St Catherine in Prayer shows the most considerable losses. A large portion of alabaster from the upper right of the panel is missing, there is a break running through the necklines of two figures located in the upper left hand corner, and Catherine's hands have been broken or chipped off. The Burial of St Catherine is the most complete of all the Lydiate panels with losses confined to the angel's heads located in the upper right hand corner of the alabaster.

A proper physical assessment of the standing figure of St Catherine has not been possible due to its recent circumstances, but working from the early 20th century photographs some details of its condition can be described. Apart from a small diagonal break and loss of alabaster to the bottom right portion of the figure, the alabaster appears to have survived without any major structural fractures. Yet, there is an area of

loss where her wheel was located and other areas of damage suggest attributes of the Saint were broken purposefully. Losses can be seen on the tip, hilt and handle of St Catherine's sword, and her martyr's palm is lost, broken at the area above her hands. The base of the strut which would have supported the palm can be seen, jutting out near the underarm of the saint. In the nineteenth century Reverend Powell considered the standing figure of St Catherine to be "mutilated" and believed that the "upper part of the head had been cut away".⁴⁹⁶ This is an understandable assumption given that Powell might well have been accustomed to the visual effects of iconoclasm on English sculpture, but, it is nevertheless untrue. No saw marks or tooling can be seen on the head fragment, which might suggest forced removal of the crown. A closer look at the alabaster reveals something different. Across the brow of the sculpture there is a small lip and rim at the peak of the forehead which runs across its circumference [fig.4.16]. This lip indicates that the sculpture was originally fitted with a metal crown which was possibly removed and later melted down. Some medieval ivories had additional crowns, as did the fifteenth-century Guildhall figures, now at the Museum of London.⁴⁹⁷ Its appearance at Lydiate is a rare instance - possibly unique - in the corpus of surviving English altar sculpture, where an English alabaster sculpture has an additional rather than an integral crown. It discounts the presumed mutilation of the head of the saint, but as the crown is missing it must also be considered as a loss to the sculpture alongside the more visible scars of iconoclasm.

Notable patterns of iconoclasm emerge from close study of all of the panels at Lydiate. Except for the image of the Burial of St Catherine, there is what appears to be targeted damage to specific areas of the 'good' figures, including St Catherine and God

⁴⁹⁶ Powell, "Panels at Lydiate", 174.

⁴⁹⁷ Museum of London accession numbers: 2002.117/1a, 2002.117/2a, 2002.117/3a, 2002.117/4a.

the Father. Yet other characters have escaped similar treatment. The panels showing St Catherine before Maxentius or St Catherine and the Wheel are two cases in point. In both, Catherine has had her hands chipped away. Neither Maxentius nor the Philosopher figures show any serious signs of damage to their faces or hands. In the image of St Catherine in Prayer, the saint's hands have again been chipped away and broken. Further, some of the alabasters have been broken into a number of pieces and are no longer structurally whole. This process of destruction might have begun with the chipping off of the hands of the holy figures, with the breaking of the panels into pieces following after. Perhaps this damage works as a physical manifestation or interpretation of the legal order to 'deface and destroy'? Yet one of the sculptures is relatively undamaged. The image of Catherine's burial might have escaped a more severe treatment because of its iconography. In the panel Catherine is shown covered up by a funeral shroud, enclosing her hands. Angels were not major targets of iconoclasm, and thus the image was possibly less likely to be 'abused' than those of Catherine and the Wheel or Catherine in Prayer which show the greatest signs of destruction. The standing image of St Catherine might fall into the same category. Signs of damage can be found located at Catherine's saintly attributes. This evidence indicates that particular holy characters in the narrative sequence were destroyed. In each case the figures of Catherine, or of God, have been broken in some way in order to render them suitably defaced.

Survey of the alabasters at the Society of Antiquaries:

The panels at the SoA survive in considerably better condition, yet there are signs of damage which need to be addressed. Similar areas of damage can be seen, which suggests that the SoA panels might have been broken at the same time in the group's history as the others at Lydiate. In the panel of Saint Catherine in Prison, the angels

either side of the saint have had their heads and hands broken off, with further breaks located on the small crenelated capitals of the canopy above Catherine's head.

Originally these angels held censers which served the purpose of elevating the holiness of the central figure of Catherine. In the panel of Catherine's Beheading, her crown, face and right hand all show signs of breakage, but to a lesser extent than the panels at Lydiat. Neither of the SoA panels has any major breaks to their integral structure and have survived in one piece.

Provenance:

Society of Antiquaries:

Exactly when the two alabaster panels arrived at the SoA is undocumented. They are first discussed in 1847 by Albert Way for his catalogue of the collection, wherein he describes them in a double entry as: "Two alabaster tablets, sculpted in relief, of the same period and similar execution as the preceding. Their date may be assigned to the middle of the fifteenth century."⁴⁹⁸ Way was usually diligent in his search for provenance details, but here provides no hint of the means by which these two sculptures came into the SoA. This is not a completely unusual situation as there are numerous objects in the collection without provenance. Still, it suggests an early date of donation when the recording of objects deposited at the SoA was not an absolute requirement. The SoA rarely purchased objects for its museum, instead accepting donations of objects which spoke to their core values.⁴⁹⁹ These donations, their presentation, discussion and

⁴⁹⁸ Albert Way, *Catalogue of Antiquities, Coins, Pictures and Miscellaneous Curiosities in the Possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London* (London: John Bowyer Nichols & Son, 1847), 29.

⁴⁹⁹ For the early collecting history of the Society of Antiquaries see David Gaimster & Bernard Nurse, eds. *Making History: Antiquaries in Britain 1707-2007* (London: Royal Academy, 2007), 93-161. For further information on the alabasters held at the Antiquaries, see: Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 205, 258, 344, 350, 410 & 423.

publication were especially important before the 1850s when there was no national collection of British antiquities.⁵⁰⁰ The Society's commitment to publish English alabasters was established early on in their history, for example, the 1794 edition of *Archaeologia* contains an article by Craven Ord which is an account of the Adoration of the Magi alabaster discovered at Long Melford. Ord's note is part of a wider antiquarian context for the publication of alabasters. *The Gentleman's Magazine* had published several such cases in 1745 and 1777, but most of these discoveries reverted to private ownership.⁵⁰¹ William Stukely published a description of his alabaster head of St John the Baptist, noting further ownership of other examples. At the Society of Antiquaries there was the possibility that they could form part of a museum which was available for consultation by curious individuals. Over time it became a regular procedure that donations were recorded in the minute books for the Society, the earliest of which is dated to 1707. However, research has revealed no details of the St Catherine alabasters being presented at a meeting to the Society, nor a record of their donation prior to 1847 when Way's catalogue was published. As this lack of provenance affects both sculptures it is highly likely that they were given together and at the same time, perhaps early on in the Society's history when it was not due process to record the donation. During the early formation of the Society, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, they did not have a fixed address and were not granted a Royal Charter until the 14th November 1751. It was from this date that they were able to own property as a formally recognised institution.⁵⁰² Still, it is strange that these sculptures were never discussed at a meeting of the society, or if they were that it was not recorded.

⁵⁰⁰ Thomas Kendrick, "The British Museum and British Antiquities", *The Museums Journal*, Vol. II, no. 6 (Sept.1951), 139-49.

⁵⁰¹ See Chapter One of this thesis, 38-93.

⁵⁰² Arthur MacGregor, "Forming an Identity: The Early Society and its Context, 1707-51" in *Visions of Antiquity: The Society of Antiquaries of London 1707-2007*, ed., Susan Pearce (London: Society of Antiquaries, 2007), 44-73, 66.

The story of their survival and subject matter resonated with the ethos and intrigue that dominated the early proceedings of the Society's meetings and the fact that they so clearly formed a pair would have been of added interest to the fellows. Prior to the publication of Way's catalogue there were numerous presentations and published accounts for the discovery of medieval alabasters.⁵⁰³

Why these two sculptures were removed from Lydiate and brought down to London is still unclear. It is possible that due to their outstanding condition they were separated from the more fragmentary examples in Lydiate and preserved at the SoA as exemplary *ancient* sculpture. What is clear is they were most likely given to the SoA early on in the institution's history and are therefore the first alabasters to enter their collection. Gaps in the record for eighteenth-century donations are not completely surprising. There was still not anything like a comprehensive commitment to preserve buildings or object groups in their entirety. It was a similar situation for the fragments taken from St Stephen's Chapel in 1814 and now preserved at the British Museum.⁵⁰⁴ Rather than attempt to salvage entire portions of the wall-paintings or preserve them in situ, a selection of fragments was removed and taken to the SoA. If the alabasters had been donated in the middle of the nineteenth century it is far more likely that the whole group would have been given together.

The History of the Alabasters at Lydiate Hall:

In 1876, Reverend Thomas Ellison Gibson – who was the first priest of Our Lady of Lydiate not trained as a Jesuit – recorded the alabasters at Lydiate as having previously been inside Lydiate Hall [fig.4.17].⁵⁰⁵ The first *Victoria Country History* to include

⁵⁰³ See Chapter One of this thesis, 38-93.

⁵⁰⁴ Rosemary Hill, "Proceeding like Guy Faux': the Antiquarian Investigation of St Stephen's Chapel Westminster, 1790–1837", *Architectural History* 59 (2016), 253–79.

⁵⁰⁵ Thomas Ellison Gibson, *Lydiate Hall and its Associations* (1876), 179.

Lydiate was published in 1907 and paraphrases much of Gibson's research in relation to the extant buildings and the alabasters.⁵⁰⁶ No entry exists for Lydiate in the first or revised edition of *The Buildings of England* and there has, as yet, been no modern scholarly survey of what remains of the Hall, the late medieval chapel dedicated to St Catherine, or Our Lady of Lydiate which was built in the early nineteenth century across from the road from the site of the Hall.⁵⁰⁷ Gibson's *Lydiate Hall and its Associations* is still the oldest and most comprehensive dedicated study of the area's history, art and architecture.⁵⁰⁸ It was Gibson who suggested, for the first time, that the panels and the figure of St Catherine might have originally come from the private chapel built by the Irelands and dedicated to St Catherine [figs 4.18 and 4.19]. He states that there was "preserved at the Hall from time immemorial four alabaster groups, which doubtless formed the reredos of the altar of the saint, whose sufferings and death they illustrate."⁵⁰⁹ He further noted that "besides these groups, there is still at the Hall an alabaster figure of St Katherine, holding in one hand a sword, but the wheel on the other side has disappeared."⁵¹⁰ At the time of publication Gibson saw the statue of St Catherine with another un-associated alabaster of the Visitation on a wooden bracket on the staircase of the Hall.⁵¹¹ His description accounts for four panels and the then well preserved figure of Catherine but gives no indication - within living memory -

⁵⁰⁶ William Farrer and John Brownbill, eds., "Townships: Lydiate" in *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 3* (London, 1907), 200-208.

⁵⁰⁷ Richard Pollard and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Lancashire, Liverpool and the South-West* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2006).

⁵⁰⁸ W.J. Roberts, "On the ruined chapel, at Lydiate, in Lancashire", *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Vol. I (1848/49), 146-153.

⁵⁰⁹ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 175.

⁵¹⁰ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 179.

⁵¹¹ "A curious figure of St Katherine, Virgin and Martyr, stands on a wooden bracket, and was probably brought from the ruined chapel dedicated to her...This statue, three feet in height, of alabaster, has been richly coloured and gilt...There is also a very quaint representation of the Visitation of Our Blessed Lady, evidently of great antiquity. This, with the wooden model of a tench (*sic*), said to have been caught by Sir Francis Anderton in a neighbouring pit, completes the list of curiosities to be met on the staircase." See: Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 175.

of any other panels having existed there or for any being removed and taken to London.

The location of the alabasters in St Catherine's Chapel

Gibson begins his chapter on St Catherine's chapel by quoting the antiquarian Thomas Pennant, who in 1773 had described the structure in his *Tour from Downing to Alston Moor*. It was a "small but most beautiful building, with a tower steeple...venerably overgrown with ivy. It had been a chapel-of-ease to the Parish Church of Hallsall, dedicated to St Catherine and supposed to have been founded by one of the Irelands of Lydiate. Over the door the letters L.I., for Laurence Ireland, probably the founder".⁵¹² In 1848 W.J. Roberts further confirms evidence for the likely patronage of the chapel, describing the initials L.I. and C.I. as engraved on the corbels of the porch and the heraldry of the Ireland family on a shield inside of the main door: "a spear in bend pointing to the sinister base point; on the other end a pennon pendant between six fleur-de-lis."⁵¹³ References to these particular Irelands - Laurence and Catherine - and their patronage is confirmed in several other publications all of which note the surviving corbels bearing the Ireland initials.⁵¹⁴ The earliest is in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1821.⁵¹⁵ The documented patronage is reinforced by its dedication to Saint Catherine, related by Gibson to the marriage of Catherine Ireland, née Blundell of Little Crosby, to Laurence Ireland in 1451 at which time he already held the estate.⁵¹⁶ If the alabasters were located in the chapel they could not date from before 1451 at which date the

⁵¹² Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 51.

⁵¹³ Roberts, "On the ruined chapel", 147.

⁵¹⁴ Henry Taylor, 'Lydiate Hall, Near Ormskirk, Lancashire', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, Vol. XLVI (1896), 107-122, 109. Powell, "Alabaster Carved Panels", 168. Farrer and Brownbill, 'Townships: Lydiate', 200-208.

⁵¹⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1821, vol.ii, 597, contains an engraving of the chapel on opposite folio which is possibly the earliest surviving image of the building.

⁵¹⁶ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 2.

chapel did not exist. Gibson gives an approximate death date for Laurence Ireland as 1485 when his name is superseded by that of his son, John Ireland, on manorial documentation.⁵¹⁷ A date for Catherine's death is not recorded. Laurence Ireland's initials were also present in the Hall, appearing on a doorway leading into the main building.⁵¹⁸ The initials of John Ireland (d.1514), son of Laurence Ireland, are not noted anywhere on the chapel but were present on canopy work in the Hall.⁵¹⁹ From this superficial evidence we can conclude that both the chapel and the Hall were started between 1451 and 1486, during Laurence's life, and the presence of his and his wife Catherine's initials marks their patronage of the chapel at a relatively complete stage of the build. This tentatively allows for a preliminary dating of the sculptures to between 1451 and 1486. If the sculptures were made for the altar of the church it is plausible that they were made during their lives, however, bequests for alabaster tables show that manufacture could take place after the donor's lifetime. At Dunwich, Suffolk a posthumous bequest of 1458 is for "ad novam tabulam de alabastro de historia Sanctae Margaritae."⁵²⁰ It is equally plausible that the alabaster altarpiece at Lydiate could have been made after 1486, either by bequest, or by the Ireland's son John, but as will be shown, the style of the sculptures indicates that the most likely date of production should be the period between 1475 and 1490.

As it stands today the chapel is in an even more ruinous state [figs 4.19 and 4.20]. It has lost major portions of the stonework over the past 150 years. Comparison between recent photographs and the frontispiece for Gibson's chapter on the chapel show that the majority of the mullions from the south window range have gone, as has masonry from the south porch, the area above the east window, and the turrets fixed at

⁵¹⁷ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 28.

⁵¹⁸ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 2.

⁵¹⁹ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 3.

⁵²⁰ Bond, *Chancels of English Churches*, 64.

the pinnacle of the west tower have also disappeared. Essential architectural details which previously served as evidence for patronage has now been lost and we must rely on the literary descriptions provided above. No documentation survives for building the chapel, but a physical assessment of its style corresponds with a late fifteenth-century date for its construction. The chapel was probably built in a single campaign with no stonework or masonry present from a previous building sequence.

It is un-aisled with a single storey elevation, a western tower and a two-storied southern porch. The inside of the building measures approximately 9m x 3m and is fenestrated only at the east end and on the southern range. A width of 2.47m for the reconstructed altarpiece suggests that it would have sat comfortably over an altar situated at the east end of the chapel. When closed the altarpiece would probably have sat neatly on top of the altar and square with the width of the window behind it [fig.4.21]. The relationship between the size of the total ensemble and the width of the chapel raises a question about how the altarpiece was commissioned. Was it bought 'off the peg'? Or was it specially ordered? Its size suggests that it was made specifically for the chapel to fit the architecture. This indicates a working knowledge of the size and format of the building on the part of the sculptor who made the altarpiece. If the Lydiate altarpiece was a special commission then it is worth thinking through the relationship between artist and patron, work of art and environment. In the case of the Lydiate sculptor, much more can be said.

The Master of the Lydiate Altarpiece and his Environment:

Over the course of my research I have identified a group of sculptures which I believe can be attributed to the Lydiate Master and his workshop. They include a free-standing sculpture of St Peter, Private Collection, London; an Annunciation, Musée Picardie, Amiens; a panel showing the Harrowing of Hell, Louvre, Paris; two panels from a

Passion altarpiece, Stonyhurst College, Lancashire; a large Trinity, Bristol Art Museum; a large St Christopher figure, V&A, London; and an altarpiece of the Life of the Virgin, Abbey of Saint-Riquier, Abbeville [figs 4.22, 4.23, 4.24, 4.25, 4.26, 4.27, 4.28, 4.29].⁵²¹

Some of these sculptures were made by a single individual and others, such as the altarpiece at St Riquier, were collaborative workshop products. Yet, all share the same deep undercutting and stylistic traits identified in the Lydiate alabaster panels. An idiosyncrasy of the Lydiate Master is his dedication to angularity for facial features. Details from the faces of Christ or Porphyrius in the Lydiate panels show how he carved their cheekbones to appear raised, underscored with a sharp line between cheek and beard. This detail can be paralleled on the faces of Christ and the Jewish priest in the Stonyhurst panels. Further, the hair of the angel in the scene of St Catherine in Prison from Lydiate is construed as a series of long wavy lines terminating in tight corkscrews at the forehead; again paralleled on the hair of St John the Evangelist's hair in the Stonyhurst Crucifixion. Across the wider group these traits can be seen on the faces of Christ and John the Baptist in the Louvre panel, St Peter in the private collection, God the Father in the Amiens panel, and the Three Kings in the St Riquier altarpiece. Other stylistic peculiarities that unite this group include the reuse of a

⁵²¹ For the alabaster of St Peter, London, see: J.L Schrader, *The waning middle ages. An exhibition of French and Netherlandish art from 1350 to 1500 Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Publication of "The Waning of the Middle Ages" by Johan Huizinga.* (Kansas: Kansas University, 1969), 55-65. Stanley Ferber, *Developments in the Early Renaissance* (New York: State University of New York, 1968), 32. The Annunciation from Picardie is unpublished, except for its note in: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 79. For the Harrowing of Hell, Louvre, see: Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, ed., *Les Sculptures Européennes du Musée du Louvre: Byzance, Espagne, îles Britanniques, Italie, Anciens Pays-Bas et Belgique, Pays Germaniques et de l'Europe de l'est, Pays Scandinaves, Antiques Restaurées et Copies d'Antiques* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2006), 62. For the Stonyhurst alabasters see: Hope, *Illustrated Catalogue*, 68. Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 200. For the Bristol Trinity, see: *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Jan. 1788, vol. I, 9, pl. I. For St Christopher at the V&A, see: Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 95. Marks and Williamson, *Gothic: Art for England*, 396-397. For the altarpiece at St Riquier, see: Georges Durand, *La Picardie historique et monumentale. Tome IV, Arrondissement d'Abbeville. Seconde partie. Société des antiquaires de Picardie* (Paris: Librairie a Picard et Fils, 1907-1911), 339-341.

particular type of cloak fastener for several figures, and a knotty, wooden Crown of Thorns for Christ. The fastener can be seen on St Catherine in Prison (Lydiate), St Peter (Private Collection) and the Risen Christ (Louvre). It is carved as a double band of twisted ropework and serves to hold the cloak on the shoulders, fastened by two foliate buttons. Christ's crown in both the Bristol Trinity and the panel showing St Catherine in Prison is pronounced and formed of thick interlocking thorns. It has been beyond the scope of this chapter to undertake further research into the provenance of each sculpture in this group, but doing so might provide a clearer picture of their separate histories. Still, from the current and previous known locations of each, it is possible to detail a European network for the Lydiate Master. His patronage went beyond the minor nobility of Lancashire which indicates he was a desired and sought out sculptor. A closer study of two alabaster panels at Stonyhurst provides further details about the working practice of the Lydiate Master and his workshop.

Case Study: The Circumcision and Crucifixion at Stonyhurst:

First documented in 1713, the Stonyhurst panels were described in the "Shireburne Inventory Book of Household Goods" as "Two alabaster figures. Crucifixion and Circumcision" [figs 4.25 and 4.26].⁵²² At that time they were located in the sacristy of the chapel. Today, Stonyhurst has a collection of nine alabasters but as no other alabasters are mentioned in the inventory, it is possible that these two were the only sculptures in the house prior to the donation of Stonyhurst estate to the Jesuits in 1794 by Thomas Weld.⁵²³ The Shireburne inventory book is a catalogue of goods belonging to Nicholas

⁵²² Stonyhurst College archives: "My Lady Shireburn's Inventory Book of Household Goods at Stonyhurst Anno Domini 1713", f.7.

⁵²³ Andrew Henderson, *The Stone Phoenix : Stonyhurst College 1794-1894* (Worthing : Churchman, 1986), 22-23; and A. Hewitson, *Stonyhurst College, its Past and Present: An Account of its History, Architecture, Treasures, Curiosities, etc* (Preston, 1870); T.E. Muir, *Stonyhurst College, 1593-1993* (London: James & James, 1992).

Shireburn, whose descendants built Stonyhurst in the sixteenth century. There is no way of knowing for certain if the alabasters had been in the house since the Reformation, but the eighteenth-century provenance for the panels predates widespread antiquarian interest in alabasters and it is probable that their history was similar to that of the Lydiate altarpiece. Recusant ownership of the estate explains why these panels were never buried and why they have survived. Unlike the Lydiate altarpiece, which was originally made for St Catherine's chapel, adjacent to Lydiate Hall, there is no such chapel or specific evidence outlining the patrons at Stonyhurst. Further, it is not possible to prove whether or not panels were brought to Stonyhurst from a church or another house nearby. Still, the existence of alabasters made by the Lydiate Master help to inform an approach to the Stonyhurst altarpiece. Stonyhurst is located approximately forty miles from Lydiate and the local gentry were well connected in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. If the Lydiate Master was working on a commission in the area, at Lydiate or elsewhere, he might have found other work for a similar client at or near Stonyhurst. His work for the Irelands at Lydiate shows that he had patronal connections within a network of wealthy Lancastrians. Simply put, his work was desirable and people were after his services.

Both Stonyhurst sculptures measure 44cm x 23cm x 4.5cm with a depth of relief of 4cm. Their dimensions confirm that they were originally part of the same altarpiece ensemble but as the other panels are now lost it is difficult to reconstruct what the original ensemble looked like. Further, the Crucifixion is the same size as the Circumcision which is strange as typically the Crucifixion forms the central and thus taller panel of the altarpiece. This approach should be cautioned. I have already shown that the Lydiate sculptor was breaking with what might previously have been perceived as typical formats for English alabaster altarpieces. The Stonyhurst panels are unified by

a single provenance and a similar condition which speaks to a shared history. Apart from a small triangle of painted ground between Christ and Mary in the Crucifixion panel, there is little remaining polychromy or gilding present, and the gold ground of the background is lost with only the underlying bole remaining. The surface texture of each panel is characterised by a pitting of the alabaster, resulting in a somewhat desiccated appearance. Pitting like this takes place when the alabaster has had prolonged exposure to a damp environment. The Crucifixion panel is made up of five fragments with breaks running directly through the body of Mary, across the torso of Christ, around the figure of the Evangelist, and vertically through Christ's right arm. Mary's hands, Christ's feet and the face of the angel at the foot of the cross are missing, as is the chalice which was presumably once held by the angel above the Virgin. The Circumcision panel is in better condition but also shows signs of loss, notably behind the uppermost figures and to the area below the feet of the Virgin. Christ's face has been worn away possibly through tooling or by exposure to damp conditions. There are no major integral breaks and the panel survives as a single piece.

Dimensions, condition and an eighteenth-century description of the panels indicate that they were originally part of the same altarpiece. Still, a fuller discussion of their size and iconography will help clarify any doubts. All of the measurements for the panels at Stonyhurst correspond almost exactly with the St Catherine sculptures from Lydiate. Particular and idiosyncratic aspects of the panels' dimensions help to identify similarities and similar sculptural techniques employed in making the panels. Both Stonyhurst sculptures have a height of 44cm, which is large. An equally unusual large depth of relief at almost 4cm indicates a greater use of the material. A reason for this additional use is the effect created by depth of relief, a characteristic of the Lydiate master's working method. All of the panels from Lydiate and Stonyhurst are sculpted in

high relief, providing a greater degree of plasticity around key figures and events, and showcasing the virtuoso skill of the sculptor. The Circumcision is a case in point. Take the altar on which Christ is circumcised. It is placed at an angle to the viewer in order to create a sharp vertical line which runs from the base of the sculpture, ending around halfway up the panel. This line is interrupted twice by layers of cloth, implying that the table-top on which Christ is placed is cushioned. The strong vertical line helps to draw the eye of the viewer towards the central part of the panel and the act of circumcision. By presenting the scene in this way the sculptor has effectively split the panel into two halves, both horizontally and vertically, focused around the Christ, located at the centre. The arms, knife, legs and cloth are all extremely fragile due to their undercutting and thus would have been technically difficult to achieve. Depth of relief is at its greatest around the circumcision. It indicates an area of heightened importance and visual focus.

English alabasters of the Circumcision are rare with the scene appearing in just two other panels.⁵²⁴ Cheetham catalogued four other examples but he misidentified two, which are in fact images of Christ's Presentation in the Temple. The remaining two Circumcision panels have been dated to the late fifteenth century which suggests that the scene was a relatively late addition to the repertoire of English alabaster sculptors. Although the scene appears frequently in English manuscripts, it is possible the scene was not particularly popular in its sculpted form, appearing infrequently, for instance on a wooden roof boss in Salle, Norfolk. Apart from Stonyhurst, two other alabaster representations of the Circumcision can be found in the Archaeological Museum,

⁵²⁴ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 88. Cheetham cites four images of the Circumcision but misidentified two panels which are in fact representations of the Presentation of Christ at the Temple. The first sculpture he misidentified is from the altarpiece in the church of San Benedetto a Settimo, Pisa, and the second is at the V&A, accession number: A63-1946.

Madrid, and at the V&A, the latter bought by W.L. Hildburgh in Brussels.⁵²⁵ Data for surviving alabasters in England is somewhat skewed by Reformation destruction, but the fact that no other fragments of the Circumcision survive amongst the many hundreds found in churches is indicative of its probable unpopularity. It appears with greater frequency in Continental works of art, specifically in German and Netherlandish paintings and Netherlandish carved altarpieces of the late fifteenth century, such as the example at the Musée des Antiquités, Rouen [Fig.4.30].⁵²⁶ The narrative of the Rouen altarpiece is arranged in three parts, beginning with the Nativity, continuing to the Adoration and ending with the Circumcision. As the Stonyhurst Circumcision is paired with a Crucifixion it is unlikely to have followed this Continental format. Nevertheless, the question remains: if the Circumcision was a rare image in England, where did the Lydiate Master look for a prototype? The answer can be found in the importation of printed images into England.

Printed Images and the Stonyhurst Circumcision:

Two Continental prints share a similar iconography with the Stonyhurst alabaster Circumcision. Both are by the Master of the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand and are after Israhel van Meckenem [figs. 4.31 and 4.32]. Both images have been dated to between 1470 and 1490, and therefore correspond to the suggested dates of the Lydiate alabasters.⁵²⁷ In the discussion below I take into account the iconography of the three Circumcision images and the different artistic choices in each. Other considerations include the size and function of different images, for instance, the different role of a book or single print compared to a sculpture.

⁵²⁵ Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 198.

⁵²⁶ d'Hainaut-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacre*, 189.

⁵²⁷ British Museum accession numbers: 1850,0223.10 and 1846,0709.38.

For his engraving, the Martyrdom Master depicted five figures in two groups arranged either side of the altar. All of those depicted are focused on Christ's circumcision, their gaze directing the viewer's attention towards the scene. They are positioned inside of a vaulted room with a window placed in the centre above the infant Christ. The altar is prominent placed and is covered with a cloth. Two trefoils are displayed on its front face. Christ is placed on top of the altar. His left leg is raised up and held in place by a hand. He leans back and his torso twisted around towards his mother so that he can be viewed frontally with his head turned to the left. Mary steadies the infant with a hand near his lower back and with her other hand she holds his left arm. Simon the priest holds a circumcision knife in his left hand and with his right hand holds the fabric under the Christ child. It is a relatively symmetrical arrangement with the priest and Mary leaning towards each other in order to create an arch which mirrors the vaulting of the building above.

Another, similar print of the same scene, by the same printmaker, differs from the first in several key respects. It is coloured by hand which other versions might have been but none survives. In this second print certain elements are differentiated from the first example, for instance: a purse hangs from the priest's belt, an additional female figure is present behind Mary, the ornamental front of the altar has changed, and there is a line of text underneath the scene which reads: "circumcisio ihesu". Yet, the most notable difference is architectural, especially framing of the scene. The vaulted ceiling from the first image is gone and the wall at the back of the room is now a series of coloured bricks into which three windows are set. These differences aside, Christ's circumcision is similarly depicted in both prints and the different ways in which architecture, clothing or colour were altered do little to affect the inventive portrayal of Christ's twisted body at the centre of the scene. This inventive mode of portraying

Christ's body at the Circumcision was ultimately adopted for the alabaster sculpture. Apart from the altar, clothing, lack of architecture and number of persons present, the central depiction of the Circumcision is the same, except in this case the priest holds a flask in his right hand which was used to disinfect the area around the foreskin. Further, Mary's arm stretches over the infant Christ to hold his leg in place which in the prints is curiously only half shown. The Circumcision panel at Stonyhurst shows the Lydiate Master reinterpreting a printed source for an image which appears infrequently in England. It was not, however, a simple case of transferring the "design" from the print to the alabaster. A number of choices were made to alter the design in order to improve it and to make it more appropriate as a sculpted image. Prints are often seen as simple "sources" for sculptures, ceramics and stained-glass, in fact it was far more complex.

Alabaster and Prints:

Printed images were made and circulated by methods which sculptures were not. They were produced from a matrix and often, but not always, number more than one. No two sculptures can ever be exactly the same. What original functions many of the earliest prints had is still unclear, yet a large quantity has survived having been sewn or pasted into medieval prayer books.⁵²⁸ This devotional aspect was one of their functions, and the widespread trade to England in printed books, amongst other works of art from the Continent, explains their presence.⁵²⁹ It is entirely possible that the Master of Lydiate

⁵²⁸ For two of the most recent surveys of this material see: Ursula Weekes, *Early Engravers and their Public. The Master of the Berlin Passion and Manuscripts from Convents in the Rhine-Maas Region* (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2004). Kathryn M. Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). See also: Peter Parshall and Rainer Schoch, eds., *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and their Public* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁵²⁹ In 1480 over 900 books were imported into London from the Low Countries, see: Caroline Barron, "Introduction: England and the Low Countries" in *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), 1-28, 16-17.

acquired a print of the Circumcision through this trade network. The facture and dissemination of printed images encourages the view that, because a print survives in greater numbers than a sculpture, it must be the source or authority for the “copy”, which in this case is the alabaster panel. On one level this assumption is accurate, however, it is not so simple. A linear and somewhat naïve view of image transmission has problematized the way in which the alabaster/print relationship has been viewed in the past. The Lydiate Master was a creative and inventive sculptor who turned to and reinterpreted a printed source when needed. It was a rare instance in a corpus of work where printed “sources” do not feature. Use of a print in this instance should not diminish his creative input any more than it should for other artists who used prints, such as Tilman Riemenschneider. Prints simply became part of the culture of artistic transmission and production from the final decades of the fifteenth century onwards. Surprisingly, they have hardly featured in discussions of English alabaster sculpture.

Francis Cheetham was the only scholar who explored the relationship between printed images and English alabasters.⁵³⁰ Cheetham compared a fragment of an alabaster showing Christ before Herod at the V&A with a woodblock print from the so-called Delbecq-Schriber Passion, showing Christ before Pilate [figs 4.33 and 4.44].⁵³¹ For Cheetham, the print was without a doubt the “source” image for the sculpture and that was where the story ended. It especially helped him to argue that “the designs used by the alabastermen were not their own creation.”⁵³² The complex nuances of early print culture, its production, circulation, and multiple functions were not investigated further and he failed to make the link between the woodblock print and an engraving by Martin

⁵³⁰ Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 18-20.

⁵³¹ Kathryn M. Rudy, “Reconstructing the Delbecq-Schreiber Passion (as part of the St Godeleva manuscript)” in *Unter Druck: Mitteleuropäische Buchmalerei im 15. Jahrhundert*, eds. J. F. Hamburger and M. Theisen (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2018), 156-167.

⁵³² Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 18.

Schongauer [fig.4.35].⁵³³ This problematises the link between the Delbecq Schriber print as “source” image and the alabaster as the “copy”. There are further problems.

Although there is a clear link between the alabaster and both prints - especially the positioning of Pilate’s legs and the figure to his right with his back turned - the iconography, the arrangement of figures, and the actual narrative depicted is substantially different. It is Herod who is represented in the alabaster and Pilate who is depicted in the prints. If it were a direct “copy”, why are the images not exactly the same? Perhaps the sculptor was drawn to two unusual elements in both prints, for instance, the positioning of Pilate’s legs and the figure with his back turned to the viewer. A typical way of presenting Caiphas, Herod or Pilate, who were seemingly interchangeable apart from clothing and attributes, was to have them set at an angle towards Christ. By positioning Herod frontally the prints display a novel and inventive approach to representing the figure. This might have been a draw for a sculptor who was looking for a new way to construct the scene. It proved to be a popular format. Frontal positioning was taken up by other sculptors working in alabaster. Another panel of Christ before Pilate makes use of it and both take elements from the poses of the figures, including certain parts of the wardrobe [fig.4.36]. Here the presentation is equally similar to the same scene from a printed edition of the *Biblia Pauperum*, another text circulating widely from the 1470s onwards [fig.4.37].

The inclusion of new inventive iconographic elements from the world of printed images demonstrates a creative mind behind the process of English alabasters. Christ before Herod is an extremely rare image in alabaster. Cheetham catalogued just one other apart from the V&A example, and representations of Christ appearing before

⁵³³ British Museum accession number: 1845,0809.394.

Pilate, Herod and Caiphas are almost as rare as each other.⁵³⁴ When they do appear it is only in large ambitious altarpieces such as the seven-panelled Capodimonte Passion altarpiece or the nine-panelled Passion altarpiece at the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse.⁵³⁵ For the V&A panel of Christ before Herod the sculptor might have found himself without a familiar image in mind and thus looked elsewhere for inspiration. Cheetham promoted a subordinate view of the relationship between print “source” and alabaster “copy”. He did this in order to reinforce his problematic theory about image derivation in English alabaster sculpture.⁵³⁶ His long-standing project was to collect alabasters together under the rubric of “standardisation”:

The recognition of the use of standard designs, standard themes and standard arrangements, in alabaster and other media, is a useful counterbalance to the common concept of the medieval artist producing each piece as an individually inspired work of art. Indeed, from the craftsman’s point of view, if you have a good design at hand, it is common sense to use it more than once, although with alterations which could be slight.⁵³⁷

For Cheetham, the fact that alabaster sculptors now had a ready source of available “authorities” for their sculptures, gave credence to what he had always viewed as repetition in the oeuvre of the alabastermen. By not being self-reflexive about his methods, and not investigating the relationship between prints and alabasters fully, Cheetham failed to note the complexity in the many instances whereby prints were used by sculptors working in alabaster.

⁵³⁴ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 114-115.

⁵³⁵ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 171, 175.

⁵³⁶ Cheetham *Alabaster Images*, 8-13. For an approach to standardisation in another context see: Lynn F. Jacobs, “The Marketing and Standardization of South Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Limits on the Role of the Patron”, *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 2 (1989), 208-29.

⁵³⁷ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 13.

Prints and Alabaster in the Wider Corpus

Several other sculptures not made by the Lydiate master share their iconography with Continental prints. Until now these have been unrecognised, but they show a developed and wider use of prints by alabaster sculptors outside of the Lydiate workshop.

Sometimes only a few elements are selectively borrowed from a print for a sculpture.

For instance, an alabaster at the V&A showing the Three Maries at the Sepulchre is similar to a group of prints made by a number of engravers [figs 4.38, 4.39, 4.40, 4.41].

Instances of the Three Maries appearing in alabaster are rare, with just three other examples.⁵³⁸ A pattern is developing whereby an alabaster sculptor turns towards a print in instances where there is iconographical rarity.⁵³⁹ For the alabaster of the Three

Maries, the sculptor borrowed elements from a print, such as the positioning of the Maries next to the standing angel, or the placement of the empty tomb at an angle with its cover lying across it. An element from the print was borrowed by the sculptor for the alabaster: one of the Maries from the group holds the shroud of Christ in her right hand with the other side held up by the left hand of the angel. Still, the sculptor altered a number of things, particularly the dress of certain figures, adding in a small angel to the bottom of the scene. An Entombment scene from Dieppe shows a similar working practice, but only the cloak of Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea has been borrowed from the print [figs 4.42 and 4.43]. The positioning of his legs and the way in which the sleeve from the left arm has been tucked into a belt is directly borrowed from the printed images. None of the other figures was included nor was the overall arrangement of the scene used. In rare cases sculptors working in alabaster engaged in near enough wholesale copying of printed images. An alabaster Deposition from the Cross, now at

⁵³⁸ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 141.

⁵³⁹ Julian Luxford, "The Iconography of St William of Norwich and the Nuremberg Chronicle", *Norfolk Archaeology*, 47 (2015), 240-246.

the V&A, is almost exactly the same as a print from the Delbecq-Schriber series [figs 4.44 and 4.45].⁵⁴⁰ However, it is an inventive and rare format for the presentation of the scene. In it Mary and John the Evangelist kneel down in front of the Deposition which is a novel treatment unparalleled in English alabaster. In most cases, however, sculptors borrowed elements from prints, for instance, Christ gathering his cloak in his right hand from an alabaster *Noli me tangere* from the V&A [figs 4.46 and 4.47], or Caiaphas opening his robe before Christ in an example from a private collection in London [figs 4.48 and 4.49].

Almost all of the prints which I have compared with English alabasters are attributed to anonymous printmakers such as the Master of the Martyrdom of the 10,000 or the Master of the Delbecq Schriber Passion, who were working after engravings by artists such Israhel van Meckenhem or Martin Schongauer. There are still many unanswered questions about the production and dissemination of prints made by these artists but a great number have been found pasted into prayer books.⁵⁴¹ Little is known about how they circulated in England but the fact that they can be documented in a range of sculptors' workshops probably operating from c.1475 onwards indicates how many must have been exported. This is an important element of my research. It shows that by re-evaluating English alabaster sculpture there is much to learn about the trade and dissemination of printed images in England.

In light of this a new approach is sought. How can a flow of images be traced and is it possible to analyse a network of exchange? Is there another way of viewing the interaction of these images outside of a system of linear transmission between "source"

⁵⁴⁰ This arrangement is similar to two Northern French sculptures showing the Deposition made c.1500, see: John Steyaert ed., *Late Gothic Sculpture: the Burgundian Netherlands* (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1994), 232-233.

⁵⁴¹ See footnote 519.

image and “copy”? English alabasters, among other goods, were traded through Brussels, Bruges and Ghent at exactly the same time that Continental sculptures, textiles, manuscripts, prints and printed books were being sold into England.⁵⁴² It confirms that English alabasters did not exist within a provincial vacuum but were made, traded and valued as part of a rich European network of artists’ products and materials. Integrating the panels attributed to the Master of the Lydiate altarpiece into a larger story of artistic production in Europe is an important move away from the iconographical taxonomy alabasters have occupied, and toward placing them within a larger history of art. This story can be extended to include Continental sculptures too.

Between England and the Low Countries:

Cheetham’s underexplored view that print sources could be easily applied as designs for alabaster was flawed in its simplicity. It was not only towards the world of prints that alabaster sculptors looked. Any form of relationship between English alabaster and Continental sculpture has yet to be fully explored, and although a full study is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will indicate several instances where they interact to indicate directions for further research. Importantly, the evidence I outline below is produced in order to oppose any view that English alabasters slid into some kind of remote provincial decline in the years before the Reformation. From their interaction with Continental prints and sculpture we can see that English sculptors were clearly interested in contemporary developments abroad. One example of this is the scene of the crowded *Pieta* or Lamentation. An English alabaster from the Burrell Collection shows Christ lying in the Lap of Mary, surrounded by figures including Mary Magdalen,

⁵⁴² Woods, “Long Melford Church”, 93-104. Woods, *Imported Images*, 106-142; Barron, “Introduction”, 1-21.

John the Evangelist and others [fig.4.50].⁵⁴³ Mary holds Christ's head which droops softly towards the viewer. Prominence is given to the Crown of Thorns which has been removed from Christ's head and placed at the bottom of the panel next to a skull, presumably Adam's, on top of which Mary's right foot is placed. Christ's arm dangles down between the two signs, crown and skull, touching both and connecting whatever message is being relayed. It is a markedly different approach to the scene from earlier versions, where Christ and Mary are alone, or they are shown between just Mary Magdalene and John the Evangelist. Continental wooden altarpieces which are similar to the Burrell alabaster were carved in the Low Countries between 1500 and 1525. Take for example, the *Pieta* from the Pocklington Altarpiece, which shows Mary with her foot on Adam's skull, or the Lamentation of Christ from the retable of Saint Denis in Liège.⁵⁴⁴ Similar arrangements can be seen in the Strangnas altarpiece or the Veckholm altarpiece, yet the closest arrangement of this scene with the English alabaster is from the Villberga altarpiece in Sweden [fig. 4.51].⁵⁴⁵ Continentally carved altarpieces were once traded to England in a relatively large number but only a few pieces survive.⁵⁴⁶ At least some English sculptors working in alabaster would have seen these up close and therefore had the chance to engage with them as physical objects.

⁵⁴³ Burrell Collection accession number: 43.

⁵⁴⁴ For the Pocklington altarpiece see: Woods, *Imported Images*, 474-479; d'Hainaut-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacre*, 144, 208. For the Retable de Saint Denis in Liège, see: Comte J. de Borchgrave d'Altena, *Les Retables Brabançons 1450-1550* (Bruxelles: Editions du Cercle d'Art, 1942), cat.XXII. I have been unable to consult this thesis but it would surely contain much relevant information: K. Mensel di Martino, "The late gothic carved altarpiece from Brussels: a catalogue, with an historical and interpretive introduction" (PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1992).

⁵⁴⁵ Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, ed., *Retables brabançons des XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2002), 333-338. See: d'Hainaut-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacre*, 105, 215. Kim Woods, "Five Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces in England", *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 138, No. 1125 (Dec., 1996), pp. 788-800; and Woods, *Imported Images*, 356-358.

⁵⁴⁶ Woods, *Imported Images*, 106-142.

However, English alabaster altarpieces also travelling in the opposite direction which suggests that transmission was not linear but worked both ways.

The Lydiate Master clearly had access to prints but other evidence points towards his engagement with Continental sculpture and other works of art. At the base of the Crucifixion from the Saint-Riquier alabaster altarpiece Mary Magdalene hugs the cross [fig.4.52]. Although an extremely rare iconography in English alabaster, parallels can be found on the Continent, for instance in the Crucifixion c.1477-78 by Derick Baegert now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid. Yet, this was also a motif that can be seen in a number of altarpieces from the Low Countries including the Ambierle Passion retable, the Strangnas altarpiece and another from the *Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire*, Brussels [fig.4.53].⁵⁴⁷ Perhaps the Lydiate master had seen Mary Magdalene depicted in this way on an imported Continental altarpiece and included it in the Saint-Riquier altarpiece, which was ultimately destined to end up in Northern France. Further, it is worth considering the layering of space in both English alabaster and Continentally carved wooden retables. Continental sculptors working in wood utilised a number of individually carved blocks to make up a scene. This allowed them to create a greater depth for each frame. English alabaster sculptors only ever worked from a single block of stone but there is evidence that they were aware of these spatial developments. The Crucifixion scene from an alabaster altarpiece at the Capodimonte museum, Naples, demonstrates the skill of the English sculptor, who worked to create a similarly deep space for the numerous, layered figures at the base of the Cross and around the figure of Christ. The swooning Virgin is distinctly similar to representations of the same scene in Brussels altarpieces such as the example from the Ambierle Passion in France [figs 4.54 and 4.55].

⁵⁴⁷ d'Hainaut-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacre*, 105, 215.

An impressive and large alabaster Trinity made by the Lydiate Master is amongst the clearest examples of this interaction [fig.4.27]. It remains unpublished except for a short account of its provenance and an engraving, included in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in January 1788 [fig.4.56]. At that time it was in the ownership of the antiquarian Richard Greene, who was given it by Mr Weston of Solihull, Warwick. Greene recounts that Weston provided a provenance when he transferred ownership of the sculpture: "it had been in the possession of a Roman Catholic family in his neighbourhood for many years, and it is supposed to have belonged to a private chapel or oratory."⁵⁴⁸ It has not fared well over time and the alabaster is currently in a poor state. There are several places where it is seriously broken and evidence of plaster replacements can be seen, including the Holy Spirit as a dove. It is covered in a yellowish paint which hints at the colour of the underlying alabaster but ultimately obscures it. Removal of the paint, and conservation of the alabaster would allow for a better understanding of the condition of the sculpture. Still, it is a remarkable survival. If it were to be conserved I am sure that the quality and sophistication of its underlying sculpture would be apparent, especially when viewed next to another sculpture by the Lydiate Master, such as the similarly large image of St Christopher at the V&A.

Wearing a triple-tiered tiara, God the Father is shown seated, his head and eyes fixed firmly forward. From his mouth the Holy Spirit emanates in the form of a dove. With his hands he holds the body of Christ up around his ribs, his fingers framing and pointing towards the wound in Christ's side. Christ's arms droop down either side of his body and his head twists forwards to the right hand side. His feet are balanced at an awkward angle on top of an orb, with his right foot pointed forward and his left leg turned inwards. Like a number of other sculptures produced by the Lydiate Master,

⁵⁴⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Jan 1788, vol. I, 9.

this type of Trinity is unprecedented in English alabaster, but it can be found in other materials in England, for instance, on the tomb of Richard Sackville (d.1535) at St Peter's church, West Hampnett, Sussex, or the stained glass at the east end of Holy Trinity, Goodramsgate, York. Yet, the example from West Hampnett is perhaps a little late as a comparison for the Bristol Trinity which was probably made in the late fifteenth century. Famously, Hugo van der Goes was commissioned in 1478 to paint an altarpiece depicting Edward Bonkil kneeling before a similar type of Trinity. It stood for many years in the Collegiate Chapel of the Holy Trinity in Edinburgh. The format van der Goes selected for his Edinburgh Trinity was one which had its roots in Netherlandish painting of the 1420s, coming out of the workshops of the Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden. Sculptures relating to these early painted examples have been studied previously by Bart Fransen.⁵⁴⁹ He cites a number of examples which were made in Brussels around 1450. Several are broadly similar to the Bristol alabaster Trinity but it is the example from St Peter's Leuven which most closely relates [fig.4.57].⁵⁵⁰ Yet another Brabantine example not cited by Fransen is extremely similar to the Bristol Trinity. It was made in Tournai c.1430-50 and is now at the Musée diocésain d'art Sacré, Lille [fig.4.58].⁵⁵¹ In the Lille Trinity, Christ's arms are held down towards his sides and his feet are pointed in opposite directions. Sculptures like these must have also formed part of the extensive trade in works of art between England and the Low Countries in the final decades of the fifteenth century. None, however, has survived. In the final section of this chapter I return to the Lydiate altarpiece and explore the context for its survival in the years following the English Reformation.

⁵⁴⁹ Bart Fransen, *Rogier van der Weyden and Stone Sculpture in Brussels* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2013), 115-127.

⁵⁵⁰ Fransen, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 120.

⁵⁵¹ For a wider discussion of sculpture in Brussels see: Steyaert, *Late Gothic Sculpture*, 67-89, 102-103. For the Trinity sculpture, see: 102-103.

Lancashire, Recusancy and the survival of the alabaster panels:

1590: A summarie information of the state of Lanc, returned by the L. Busshop Secretary. 1. The number of recusants is great and dailie increase. 2. These maie be seen usuallie every Sunday and holiday, as hath also very lately bene confessed as many people to repaire to places suspected in religion as to the parryshe Churche.⁵⁵²

On Lord Burghley's map of Lancashire a small cross is situated above the name "Laurence Ireland de Lidiate", next to a drawing of a house and a church labelled "Lydyat Chap" [fig.4.59]. Two similar crosses can be seen nearby and they identify houses occupied by "Blundale de Crosbie" and "Blundall de Ince". This map details the presence of recusants in Lancashire but is explicitly a survey of chapels and their location. All of the alabasters from Lydiate, Stonyhurst and Bristol have provenances tying them to Catholic houses. Without detailed documentary evidence for when the alabaster altarpiece in St Catherine's chapel, Lydiate, was removed, the chronology of its movements remains hypothetical. From documentary evidence we can be sure that by the nineteenth century, four of panels, the standing figure of St Catherine and two canopies were inside Lydiate Hall. Yet the ruinous state of the chapel, described by Thomas Pennant's in 1773, can be pushed further back to 1701, when burials were taking place within the chapel for Jesuit priests working in the area.⁵⁵³ In chapter one I showed that numerous sculptures and other works of art were removed from churches and kept in homes from the reign of Henry VIII onwards. However, none of those sculptures can, or have been linked to a community which continued to practice Catholicism after the Reformation. During the first waves of the Reformation in Lydiate

⁵⁵² Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 242.

⁵⁵³ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 181. See also: *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1821 vol.II, 597.

the first impulse could have been to hide the altarpiece, but an almost 3m-wide ensemble might have been somewhat conspicuous and problematic to seclude effectively inside of the manor house. It must have been broken up early on. The condition of the Lydiate/SoA alabasters suggest that they were never buried but were kept somewhere in the manor house throughout a period of great difficulty for Catholics in England.⁵⁵⁴ Close study of the alabasters in Lydiate and at the SoA further suggests that they were damaged in a similar manner to many of the alabasters discussed in chapter one. At some point during the Reformation the altarpiece was probably removed from the chapel and a number of panels were damaged in a specific way. After this the entire group was then kept somewhere relatively safe until it was acceptable to put them on display in the Hall. Alabasters remained in houses after the Reformation, some, as in the case of the Burghley *Pieta*, might even have been on display in the sixteenth century.⁵⁵⁵ Yet, at the time, Burghley had nothing to fear and was under nothing like the same kind of scrutiny as members of the Catholic gentry in Lancashire. It was simply a completely different case for the Irelands at Lydiate or the Shireburns at Stonyhurst.⁵⁵⁶ As recusants they were suspected as traitors to the monarch and by housing priests, liturgical objects and sculptures with banned religious iconography they were breaking the law. Their “protection” of these sculptures was therefore a dangerous activity.

⁵⁵⁴ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Alexandra Walsham, “The Pope’s Merchandise and the Jesuits’ Trumpery: Catholic Relics and Protestant Polemic in Post-Reformation England,” in *Religion, the Supernatural and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe: An Album Amicorum for Charles Zika*, ed. Jennifer Spinks and Dagmar Eichberger (Brill: Leiden, 2015), 370-409. E. Murphy, “Music and Catholic culture in post-Reformation Lancashire: Piety, protest, and conversion”, *British Catholic History*, 32(4) (2015), 492-525.

⁵⁵⁵ See Chapter One of this thesis, 38-93.

⁵⁵⁶ Questier, “What happened to English Catholicism after the English Reformation?”, *History* 85:277, 28-47.

All of the alabasters from Lydiate Hall were transferred to Our Lady of Lydiate by Thomas Weld Blundell when it was first built in 1854. Weld Blundell was Lord of the manor of Lydiate and a major donor to the building of the new Roman Catholic church. He was also the dedicatee of Gibson's *Lydiate Hall*.⁵⁵⁷ It is worth noting that Weld Blundell inherited Lydiate Hall through a line of British Roman Catholic familial descent. It is the Catholic element of this story that sets the survival of these alabasters apart. Fortunately, Gibson supplies further details about how the alabasters were repurposed for use in the new church. They were rearranged as "three panels in front of the high altar, and one on the left side of the pulpit."⁵⁵⁸ This configuration of the alabasters no longer survives as the chancel and area around it were renewed again in 1875, through a donation from the Lighbound family for a new impressive reredos.⁵⁵⁹ The pulpit is still extant although it now contains a large alabaster figure of St Cuthbert which was not mentioned by Gibson [fig.4.60]. It could have formed part of the original arrangement for the pulpit and perhaps come from another donor. It has been suggested that it may have originally come from Halsall church which was dedicated to St Cuthbert, but there is no credible evidence for this.⁵⁶⁰ The three panels which formed the altar frontal are described by Gibson in narrative order: St Catherine before Maxentius, St Catherine and the Breaking of the Wheel and St Catherine in Prayer. The panel of the left hand side of the pulpit is described as "the deposition of the Saint after its translation to Mount Sinai."⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 149.

⁵⁵⁸ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 177.

⁵⁵⁹ Information about the donors of the "new" reredos is provided by the dedication script running along the base of the ensemble. It contains sculptures of St Catherine and St Cuthbert which in their own way, respond to the alabasters.

⁵⁶⁰ Farrer and Brownbill, "*Townships: Lydiate*", 200-208.

⁵⁶¹ Gibson, *Lydiate Hall*, 178.

After Catholic emancipation in England, religious objects which had long been hidden or unused were returned to church use. Many of these objects came from local patrician families who continued to celebrate their Catholic faith in private following the Reformation. These same families had protected and hidden priests, with the objective of facilitating Catholic ceremonies. Our Lady of Lydiate preserves several medieval and early modern liturgical items including a chalice and paten, two pyxes, and a cross [fig.4.61]. These items range in date from the late fifteen century to the seventeenth century and several are of the type which were used by recusant priests moving around the area in their delivery of the Eucharist. Returning objects to churches and making use of them was clearly important. Inscribed under the foot of the Hornby chalice, now at St Mary's RC church, Hornby, are the words "Restore mee to Caton".⁵⁶² Yet it was not only objects associated with the liturgy which were returned for use but sculptures and other works of art too. At St Maries cathedral, Sheffield, a medieval English alabaster altarpiece was similarly reused as an altar frontal [fig.4.62]. By the nineteenth century the Lydiate alabasters must have acquired something like the status of relics. Rather than being kept in the Hall they were returned for use and placed in a prominent place as part of a frontal for the altar. Although they have moved again, now to the wall of the baptistery, they remain, inside of a church near to the site for which they were originally made.

Conclusion:

This chapter has explored a number of issues. It is the first time that separate panels from an alabaster altarpiece have been brought back together and its original form reconstructed. Further and perhaps more importantly its patrons and original location

⁵⁶² Dom Odo Blundell, *Old Catholic Lancashire: vol.3* (London: Burns Oates, 1925), 22.

has been identified. The results of this empirical work have been especially rich. It has led to the identification of an as yet unidentified master and workshop operating in the final decades of the fifteenth century, of which, I am sure, over time more will be discovered. Yet, this chapter has done more. It has looked at processes of production which have largely been ignored. The use of Continental prints by alabaster sculptors opens up methods of production which were starting to be used by painters and sculptors across Continental Europe. Situating English alabaster workshops within this developing tradition is one further way in which they can be considered as part of a wider history of art and integrated into it. Yet, the historical context has mattered here too. The alabaster altarpiece from Lydiate would not have survived if it had not been for recusant families who sought to protect it. Histories can, however, be hard to trace, especially between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, but when the alabasters re-emerged in the nineteenth century, it was as an altar frontal and pulpit. It is the reuse of these alabasters which leads into the final chapter of this thesis, in which I examine the reframing of English alabaster sculpture in Denmark and Holland in the late sixteenth-century. It continues the thread of situating English medieval alabasters within a European framework.

Chapter Five:

Alabaster Abroad II: Reframing English Alabaster in Denmark and Holland

Introduction:

This chapter focuses on the reframing and reuse of English alabaster sculptures in the long sixteenth century. The primary geographical focus is Denmark.⁵⁶³ Alabaster was and remained an exotic material in Denmark during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In both its cut and uncut forms it had to be procured from far away and so was very different from the far more common wooden sculptures available.

This is a chapter in three parts. In the first part I will investigate two complete fifteenth-century alabaster altarpieces which were kept whole but reframed several times. They are located at Borbjerg and Vejrum, both in the western part of Jutland. I take up the argument that, rather than a question of arbitrary availability, the reuse of alabaster was a self-conscious choice relating to its rarity and material properties. At Borbjerg church, an English medieval altarpiece of St George received new additions

⁵⁶³ Many of the alabasters in Scandinavia have long been known to scholars and were first published in English in 1920 by Philip Nelson as part of a brief survey. References to them can be found in the by now familiar work of Francis Cheetham, W. St John Hope, Edward Prior and Arthur Gardener, Sir Eric MacLagan, Lawrence Stone and Nigel Ramsay. None of these authors sought to contextualise the alabasters within a wider context of trade in other altarpieces, specifically from the Low Countries and Northern Germany, nor did they discuss the reframing or reuse of the panels. For an overview of these panels and others in Iceland, see: Philip Nelson, “English Medieval Alabaster Carvings in Iceland and Denmark”, *Archaeological Journal* LXXVII, 1920, 192-206; Beckett, “Engelske Alabastavler”, 19-24, 45-8; Eric MacLagan, “An English Alabaster Altarpiece in the Victoria and Albert Museum”, *Burlington Magazine* XXXVI, 1920, 53-65; Nordal, “Alabastursmyndir frá Miðöldum”, 85-130; Martin Jürgensen briefly discusses the Vejrum and Borbjerg altarpieces together but only in passing, see: Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art across the Danish Reformation: Changing interiors of Village Churches* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 105-107. Apart from the alabasters discussed in this chapter, a unique panel showing the *Pieta* can be found in Thorning church, Denmark, and several more are in the National Museum in Copenhagen, the majority of which were acquired in the nineteenth century. For a full list of alabasters in Denmark, see: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 184.

around c.1500 and was completely reframed in the seventeenth century.⁵⁶⁴ At Vejrum church, an alabaster altarpiece of St Catherine was reframed in the early sixteenth century with a new Netherlandish-style canopy, after which the central arrangement was enlarged no less than four times. To understand how these English alabaster sculptures arrived in Denmark and why they were desired it is necessary to look briefly at the bigger picture of the marketplace for foreign works of art in Scandinavia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Alongside English alabaster, medieval sculptures from the Low Countries and Germany can be found throughout Denmark. A discussion of these altarpieces and their contexts will set the scene for a longer and central case study within the present chapter, of a composite altarpiece located at Hornslet church, also in Jutland but in the eastern part, nearer to Aarhus. This example can properly be called composite because, unlike Vejrum and Borbjerg, the alabasters were not reframed in their original format but were joined up with other works of art to create a new arrangement. Broken panels were repaired and new sculptures were produced to replace lost pieces. I will argue that far from being a simple act of joining up *disiecta membra*, this rearrangement was part of a complex programme of architectural and artistic patronage within Hornslet church. The altarpiece was assembled in the 1570s by Jørgen Rosenkrantz, who, apart from being head of one of the most powerful families in Denmark, also effectively took control of his local parish church to refashion it as a family mausoleum. Contextually what unites this and the later sixteenth-century reframing of all of the Danish examples discussed here is the introduction and establishment of Lutheranism in Denmark.⁵⁶⁵ This change of religious context provides

⁵⁶⁴ Samantha Riches, “An Alabaster Altarpiece of St George” in *The History of British Art 600-1600*, ed. T. Ayers, (London: Tate, 2008), 76-77.

⁵⁶⁵ For a brief introduction to the Reformation in Denmark see: Jørgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 22-25. For a succinct overview of the place of material culture in Reformation Europe see: Bridget Heal, “Visual and Material Culture” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

the foundation for understanding why the altarpieces look the way they do now, but it also explains the very fact of their survival.⁵⁶⁶

The geographical scope of this chapter is understandably limited, focusing almost entirely on Denmark. A similar chapter could have been written about Portugal, Spain, France, Germany or Poland, where there are large numbers of alabasters, all with important stories to tell. Yet Denmark is a particularly rich environment in which to think about English alabasters because of the wealth of surviving material – both English and Continental – alongside documentation. The developing political and religious context provides a lens through which to view the later treatment of English alabaster, its preservation and restoration. Mindful of the single geographical focus, and in order to provide a counterpoint to the heavy weight placed on Lutheran Denmark, this chapter will end with an analysis of a similar sixteenth-century Catholic reframing of English alabaster in Afferden, Holland. The point of this will be to identify and investigate similarities and differences in the treatment of English alabaster during the long sixteenth century.

Part One: The Alabasters at Borbjerg and Vejrum and their place in the trade of Medieval Works of Art to Denmark

Borbjerg: The St George Altarpiece

The alabaster altarpiece at Borbjerg is made up of five narrative panels describing events from the life of St George with a standing figure either side [fig.5.1]. From left to

2016), 601-620. For an overview of the lead up to the Reformation and the state of politics in Denmark, see: Paul Douglas Lockhart, *Denmark, 1513-1660: the Rise and Decline of a Renaissance Monarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-27. For a wider overview of the European context see: Ulinka Rublack, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵⁶⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, “Are Things ‘Indifferent’? How Objects Change Our Understanding of Religious History”, *German History* 34 (1), March 2016, 88-112.

right the show: [1] a standing figure of St George; [2] the Flaying of St George, [3] St George and the poisoned cup; [4] St George before the Temple of Apollo/Falling of the Idol; [5] the Resurrection and Arming of St George by the Virgin Mary; [6] St George fighting again the Gauls (?); [7] a standing figure of St Michael [figs 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8]. The whole arrangement has been enlarged a number of times.⁵⁶⁷ Three new wooden sculptures were added around c.1500 which show a bishop or abbot, the Virgin Mary and St George [fig.5.9].⁵⁶⁸ Where the altarpiece was located when these additions were made is unknown; it might have been in Borbjerg church but it is more likely that it was nearby in a larger site which was made redundant during the Danish Reformation.⁵⁶⁹ It was a common practice for parish churches to reclaim valuable works of art from important sites and it would not be at all surprising in this case. Like many regions of Europe, George was popular in the Danish realms. For example, a large sculpture in the round of George slaying the Dragon survives in Broager church in the former Duchy of Schleswig.⁵⁷⁰ In 1639 the Borbjerg altarpiece was reframed again, at which time it was set into the ornate frame in which it remains today. The frame was made by Christen Carver from Holstebro and Jacob Maler.⁵⁷¹ This wooden frame is playful, combining classical motifs such as egg and dart abacuses with sprouting eagle heads, winged putti, and hanging garlands of fruit. At this date of reframing the altarpiece can be documented inside of Borbjerg church, but now moved to the high altar.

⁵⁶⁷ Andres C. Christensen and Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen, *Danmarks Kirker: Ringkøbing AMT: Borbjerg Kirke* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 2013), 1839-1921, especially 1864, which sets out the documentation for the different states of the reframing. Web access at: <http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/ringkoebing/borbjerg-kirke/> See also: Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altertavler*, vol.I, 131-134.

⁵⁶⁸ Christensen and Johannsen, *Borbjerg Kirke*, 1864.

⁵⁶⁹ My thanks to Margit Thøfner for sharing her unpublished work on the Borbjerg altarpiece with me.

⁵⁷⁰ Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 97-99.

⁵⁷¹ Christensen and Johannsen, *Borbjerg Kirke*, 1864.

The iconographical range of the Borbjerg retable is unique in the wider corpus of English alabaster sculpture. Yet parallels for this narrative cycle can be found elsewhere, for instance in the stained glass cycle at St Neots church in Cornwall.⁵⁷² However, the story does not correspond to the standard life of the saint as told in the *Golden Legend* and as seen in other images of George such as the English alabaster altarpiece originally in La Selle church (now in Evreux museum) [fig.5.10]. Particularly strange is the fact that there is no image of George fighting the Dragon in the main cycle; but there is an image of George spearing the Dragon as a standing figure. Riches argues that other panels from the Borbjerg ensemble have been lost but there is no credible reason to think this.⁵⁷³ Her PhD focused on the Le Selle altarpiece which is remarkable in containing a six-panelled narrative cycle of St George.⁵⁷⁴ This is perhaps why Riches thought there were panels missing from the Borbjerg ensemble. Five-panelled altarpieces like the one at Borbjerg were far more common and the condition of the surviving panels located there suggests that the alabasters were treated with respect and care from the time they were sculpted. In other words, it would be strange if one panel had been damaged when all of the rest are in excellent condition. Moreover, the central, larger panel in the Borbjerg altarpiece is still in place which means that there would have to be at least two lost panels to make the arrangement make sense, i.e. three panels either side. This would make the Borbjerg group one of the largest extant alabaster altarpieces representing the life of a saint. It is far more plausible that what remains is what originally constituted the medieval altarpiece.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷² Riches, *Hero, Martyr and Myth*, 84-86.

⁵⁷³ Riches, *Hero, Martyr and Myth*, 78.

⁵⁷⁴ Riches, "The La Selle Retable"; and Riches, "Altarpiece of St George", 76.

⁵⁷⁵ For evidence of an altarpiece which was reconfigured see my discussion of the Stadthagen example below, 267.

Without further documentation it will remain impossible to determine where the altarpiece was originally located or who might have been responsible for its commission or transport. Yet there is much to be learnt from the iconography. In the corpus of surviving English alabasters the Borbjerg ensemble is singular in its arrangement and thus it seems unlikely that its maker created the panels without a patron in mind, or some discussion about what iconography was required. It therefore joins a small, select group of alabaster altarpieces, which must surely have been made under instruction rather than produced “off the peg”. These altarpieces include the St Catherine group at Lydiate (discussed in chapter four), the Passion altarpiece with St John (discussed in chapter two), the St Edmund panels at the V&A and the Te Deum altarpiece, which was possibly originally in St Peter Mancroft, Norwich.⁵⁷⁶ The best known example is an altarpiece showing the life of St James in Compostela now in the museum at Santiago de Compostela [fig.5.11]. Much has been made of the St James altarpiece because, apart from being unique, it can be satisfactorily dated thanks to the link between it and a patron, John Gudyar, who travelled to Compostela on pilgrimage in 1456.⁵⁷⁷ In that case an English cleric commissioned and arranged for the transport of the alabasters to Spain. A similar train of events could easily be the case for Borbjerg, but there is no way to be sure.

The St Catherine altarpiece at Vejrum:

⁵⁷⁶ For the Norwich Te Deum panels see: Ian Collins, ed., *Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 2013), 92-93. For the St Edmund panels see, V&A accession number: A.120-1946.

⁵⁷⁷ W.L. Hildburgh, “A Datable English Alabaster Altarpiece at Santiago de Compostela”, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 6(03), July 1926, 304-307. Fernando Pérez Suescun, “Los alabastros medievales ingleses y la iconografía jacobea: algunas piezas singulares”, *Anales de Historia del Arte*, Vol. 24, N^o Esp. Noviembre 2014, 421-438.

The alabaster altarpiece at Vejrum is one of only three surviving complete English altarpieces detailing the life of St Catherine [fig.5.12].⁵⁷⁸ The others are a five-panelled example at the Ca'd'Oro in Venice and a six-panelled version split between Our Lady of Lydiate in Lancashire and the Society of Antiquaries in London.⁵⁷⁹ At Vejrum, the altarpiece is made up of five panels which read from left to right: [1] Standing image of St Barbara, [2] St Catherine before Maxentius, [3] St Catherine in Prison, [4] St Catherine and the Breaking of the Wheel, [5] the beheading of St Catherine, [6] the burial of St Catherine by Angels, [7] standing image of Mary Magdalene [figs 5.13, 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.17]. No other English alabaster sculptures representing St Catherine survive in Denmark but wooden ones were made elsewhere, such as the North German example of c.1500 at Sønder Bjerge, which show the popularity of the format.⁵⁸⁰ Still, it is extremely rare to find a full cycle of a saint's life in a Danish church and so the unusual nature of the St Catherine altarpiece, like the St George example at Borbjerg, must have been instantly recognisable. However, although the Borbjerg altarpiece is unique and probably a special commission, the St Catherine altarpiece could have been produced for the open market without a client in mind.

⁵⁷⁸ Andres C. Christensen and Birgitte Bøggild Johansen, *Danmarks Kirker: Ringkøbing AMT: Vejrum Kirke* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 2013), 2177-2266. Web access: <http://danmarkskirker.natmus.dk/ringkoebing/vejrum-kirke/>; see also: Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altertavler*, vol.II, 1127-1128.

⁵⁷⁹ The St Catherine altarpiece from Lydiate is the central object of Chapter Four of this thesis, see: 178-221.

⁵⁸⁰ It is possible that other altarpieces with scenes of St Catherine's life existed in Denmark previously, see: V&A accession number: A.119C-1946. This alabaster shows St Catherine and the Burning of the Philosophers. It was bought by Hildburgh in Copenhagen before 1926 and donated to the V&A in 1946. It is probably from the same altarpiece as V&A: A.5-1921, which shows the Beheading of St Catherine. That panel was in the museum of the Architectural Association, London, and was purchased from them in 1921. See: Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 86, 90. See also: Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altertavler*, vol.II, 974-975.

Cheetham catalogued fourteen examples of St Catherine in Prison which indicates the large number of altarpieces which must have once existed.⁵⁸¹ For comparison there are only two surviving configurations for altarpieces of St George and seven for John the Baptist. This makes Catherine at least twice as popular as John. Images of St Catherine number behind Christ and the Virgin only as the most commonly represented in the corpus of English alabaster sculpture.⁵⁸² The other known narrative cycles for saints are: St Edmund, St George, St John the Baptist, St Martin, St Peter, St Thomas Becket and St William of York.⁵⁸³ What this means is that there was enough of a desire in England, and across Europe, for alabaster altarpieces of St Catherine that they could be produced in large numbers. This plays out in the iconography. At Borbjerg a number of scenes are present which do not feature in George's hagiography from the *Golden Legend*, whereas the scenes from the Vejrum altarpiece are all taken from the most popular form of Catherine's hagiography as described in the same compendium.

Elements in the production of the two altarpieces indicate differences in quality. Different techniques are clearly visible. Greater depth of relief across the panels gives a visual sense of roundness to the figures depicted; 5 cm in the case of Borbjerg but only 3 cm in the case of Vejrum. This is best seen in the image of the Virgin arming St George; the bascinet with aventail looks as if it is carved almost in the round [figs 5.18 and 5.19]. How does this compare with the St Catherine panels? They, on the other hand, are relatively flat with simple ovoid faces and a hesitancy to undertake risky deep cutting of the alabaster [fig.5.20]. Simply put, the maker of the Borbjerg panels was a better or at least better paid sculptor. Deep cutting requires care and patience. This

⁵⁸¹ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 34-35.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

short comparison supports the argument that the Borbjerg panels were a more important commission and that they possibly reached Danish shores through a different route from the Vejrum panels. It suggests that Denmark was an open market for both mass-produced English altarpieces and special commissions.

The Vejrum altarpiece did not remain static for long and, like Borbjerg, it has a complicated history of reframing.⁵⁸⁴ Around c.1500 the Vejrum alabasters were set into a new wooden frame made up of tall, thin, blind window tracery with circular curvilinear oculi. Above each of the single niches is a recurring ogee-arched canopy design. This new frame almost doubled the original size of the altarpiece in height but curiously it did not replace the earlier canopies which were included in the resetting. Thus the new frame is one placed around an altarpiece which is already framed. More resetting took place after this. Firstly, a wooden Trinity made c.1500 was placed above the altarpiece in 1520 and, secondly, a new base with notably Lutheran inscriptions was connected underneath in 1593.⁵⁸⁵ Around 1632, and at a similar date to the Borbjerg altarpiece, the entire ensemble was reframed again, this time in an even larger frame with additional paintings and text [fig.5.21].⁵⁸⁶ At its base is a line of text which identifies how viewers were supposed to look at the sculptures:

These images are placed to adorn and decorate and hold no other power or virtue⁵⁸⁷

Warnings like these were supposed to remind post-Reformation parishioners that these were not images to venerate and that their function was otherwise; now they had

⁵⁸⁴ Christensen and Johannsen, *Vejrum Kirke*, 2177-2267, particularly 2200-2222 for the history of reframing.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2206-2207.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2200-2222.

⁵⁸⁷ “Dis bilder er sat for zyr oc prydt di haffic ick anden krafft och dyd”. For a different translation see: Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 107. He translates it into a form of modern Danish: “Disse billeder er sat for zier og prydt dog haver ingen kraft og dyd.”

become decoration.⁵⁸⁸ Yet the words also identify an unease about these specific images and their potential power. It suggests that the alabasters were problematic precisely because they might exercise some kind of hold on the viewers, in part, surely, because they were lively and visually attractive.

The date of the seventeenth-century reframing ties both Borbjerg and Vejrum into a wider European wave of beautifying the interior of Protestant churches; archbishop William Laud leading a wave of the revival in England.⁵⁸⁹ But the contexts here are different. Denmark was built up on a Lutheran foundation and England a Calvinist theological framework. The Vejrum altarpiece, treated in this way, is evidence of the leading Danish theologian Peder Palladius's suggestion that older images, once removed from an altar, could be used to decorate the walls.⁵⁹⁰ Yet the place of these images as 'decoration', and their contemporary description as such, was surely tied to their material, form and narrative. In other words, for them to 'adorn and decorate,' the alabasters must have continued to be attractive and beautiful to the individuals responsible for reframing and maintaining them. Otherwise they would not have been retained. Further, the cycle of images was unique in Denmark. The style of the sculpture is distinct, and they were sculpted in a highly desirable material.⁵⁹¹ All of this supports the argument of this chapter, namely, that English alabaster was and remained a self-conscious choice, selected for its rarity and specific materiality, so very different

⁵⁸⁸ Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 352. Jürgensen records that Christian IV ordered the taking down of an image of St Dionysius as members of the parish were still venerating the image and dressing it up. He includes further references to continued instances of idolatry. See also: Johannsen and Johannsen, "Re-forming the Confessional Space", 267.

⁵⁸⁹ For England, see: Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: the Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Graham Parray, *The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation: Glory, Laud and Honour* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008).

⁵⁹⁰ Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 353.

⁵⁹¹ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 178-191.

from the standard wood altarpieces which survived in abundance. We will return to Borbjerg and Vejrum in due course, but for now it is helpful to try to outline how they fit into the bigger picture of trade in works of art to Denmark in the fifteenth century.

The Internationality of English Alabaster and the Context of Trade in other Altarpieces⁵⁹²

There was no single way by which English sculptures reached Continental Europe, yet the trade in English alabaster has often been seen as homogenous. Take for example this statement: “The workshops that operated on the largest scale and had the broadest reach were those in central England (Nottingham, Derbyshire, Norwich, York, Lincoln) and London, active c.1340-1500.”⁵⁹³ There is nothing necessarily wrong here, but Aleksandra Lipinska provides no evidence why 1340 is a starting point and, surprisingly, she assumes that all alabaster production stopped in c.1500, which it did not.⁵⁹⁴ Further, there is little evidence for any workshops active in the Midlands in the middle of the fourteenth century, unless the single commission by Edward III of Peter the Maceon originates from a workshop. According to this line of thinking, the exceptional Virgin and Child and St George sculptures discussed in Chapter Three are connected to all alabasters abroad by the same process of manufacture and trade as a mid-fifteenth-century altarpiece made to be sold on the open market. This cannot be the case as the networks for these objects were completely different and it is clear that the bigger picture needs nuancing. The international trade in English alabaster which

⁵⁹² For Brussels altarpieces and trade see: Claire Dumortier, “Commercialisation et Distribution” in d’Hainaut-Zveny, ed., *Miroirs du Sacre*, 62-93.

⁵⁹³ Lipinska, *Moving Images*, 44-45. Earlier studies set this out more fully, especially Ramsay, “Alabaster”, 38.

⁵⁹⁴ It is impossible to determine a precise exact end date for the production of alabaster in England, see: Ramsay, “Alabaster”, 39. Duffy, “the Alabastermen”, 54-65. Although production of panels for altarpieces and other religious images ended around the time of the Reformation, tomb production and trade in raw alabaster continued. See: Jon Bayliss, “Richard Parker: the Alabasterman” *Church Monuments*, vol. 5, 1990, 39-56.

can be documented by the middle of the fifteenth century was practically non-existent at the time of the making of the Virgin and Child. As previously argued, it must have travelled abroad by some other means and was probably taken by an individual.

Sometimes, when special and rare fourteenth-century sculptures exist abroad, as in the case of the combined Nativity/Adoration panels, they are used as evidence for the early popularity of English alabaster sculptors; as precursors and indicators of the future trade of the fifteenth century before it had taken place [fig.2.42].⁵⁹⁵ Almost all of the known Nativity/Adoration sculptures can be located along the northern Baltic coast and in Germany. Trade links between England and these locations was strong between 1350 and 1400, and English works of art show evidence for this interaction in technical, stylistic and iconographic terms across a range of different object types, for instance: the Wilton Diptych, the Sherbourne Missal or the Norwich Passion altarpiece.⁵⁹⁶ However, it is hardly conceivable that the English sculptors producing alabaster panels were nearly always making them on an ad hoc basis in the hope of selling them abroad. Far more plausible is the possibility that English merchants located abroad commissioned and donated these sculptures to foreign churches, or that foreign merchants or diplomats based in England did the same. The case of Cosmato Gentilis is surely not unique. The kind of complex trade networks at play in Denmark are epitomised by the sixteenth-century wooden St Ninian altarpiece now in the National Museum of Denmark.⁵⁹⁷ It was commissioned by Scottish merchants who were resident in Elsinore but was made by a German workshop in Lübeck. Another example where English merchants commissioned works of art abroad can be found in Hamburg. A painted altarpiece

⁵⁹⁵ Marks, *Image and Devotion*, 143-147.

⁵⁹⁶ Steffani Becker-Hounslow and Paul Crossley, "England and the Baltic: New Thoughts on Old Problems" in *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: studies in memory of Andrew Martindale*, ed. John Mitchell (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000), 113-128.

⁵⁹⁷ George Hay, "A Scottish Altarpiece in Copenhagen", *The Innes Review*, Aug 2010, vo. 7, No. 1, 5-10.

representing the life of St Thomas Becket was produced by Master Francke for English merchants around 1436 and donated to the church of St John, Hamburg.⁵⁹⁸ Although beyond the scope of this thesis more work needs to be done, particularly in state, regional and ecclesiastical archives across Europe. Only then will it be possible to identify exactly what kinds of documentation survives to identify which alabaster sculptures in Europe might have been traded before and after the Reformation.⁵⁹⁹ For instance, Bera Nordal's research into English alabasters in Iceland has shown that all of the extant sculptures can be accounted for through documents relating to Icelandic medieval inventories of churches.⁶⁰⁰ It suggests that all of the trade in English altarpieces to Iceland took place before the Reformation.

There was little international competition in the European altarpiece market during what for ease might be termed the first phase of English alabaster production c.1350-1400. But between 1400 and 1500 this would change dramatically and a number of Northern European workshops producing carved retables would end up in direct competition with each other.⁶⁰¹ The main workshops were located in Antwerp, Brussels

⁵⁹⁸ Snyder, *Northern Renaissance art*, 67-70.

⁵⁹⁹ For the surviving documentation in northern France see: Flavigny, *D'Angleterre en Normandie*. 115.

⁶⁰⁰ Nordal, "Alabastursmyndir frá Miðöldum".

⁶⁰¹ This list is by no means exhaustive. For a wide ranging discussion about trade in works of art see: Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: The Merchant in medieval Europe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 228-285. For markets and marketplaces see: Wim Blockmans, "The Cultural Market in the Burgundian Netherlands" in *Late Gothic Sculpture: The Burgundian Netherlands*, ed. John W. Steyaert (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1994), 37-49. For the Bruges market, see: J. Van Houtte, "The Rise and Decline of the Market of Bruges." *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 19, no. 1 (1966), 29-47. For a wide ranging analysis of carved retables, see: Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90-92. For altarpieces made in the Low Countries see: Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, *Les retables d'autel gothiques sculptés dans les anciens Pays-Bas: Raisons, forms et usages* (Louvain-la-Neuve, académie royale de Belgique, 2008). For Brussels altarpieces and trade see: Claire Dumortier, "Commercialisation et Distribution" in *Miroirs du sacré: les retables sculptés à Bruxelles, XVe-XVIe siècles: production, formes et usages*, ed., Brigitte d'Hainaut-Zveny (Bruxelles: CFC-Éditions, 2005), 62-93. For a wider discussion of

and Mechelen but smaller ones can be documented in Bruges, Ghent, Cambrai, Tournai, Diest, Leuven, Courtrai, Mons, Cologne, Lübeck and Nuremberg as manufacturers of retables.⁶⁰² English alabaster altarpieces have mostly been considered apart from this Continental marketplace even though they were embedded within it and in some respects must have driven change.⁶⁰³ Susie Nash states that over three-quarters of the altarpieces made in Antwerp might have been produced for sale outside of the Netherlands.⁶⁰⁴ She cites “Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Scotland, England, France and Italy” as the international geographic range for the Netherlandish sculptors.⁶⁰⁵ This range was shared by the alabaster workshops in England itself and examples of their craft can be found in every one of the countries Nash cites, yet they remain on the margins of scholarship. Nash points out that the clientele for wooden Netherlandish carved altarpieces was “mostly clergy, guilds, confraternities, merchants and noblemen, although occasionally members of the very top rank bought them, like Philip the Bold.”⁶⁰⁶ This situation is particularly close to that of English alabaster in

sculpture in Brussels see: Steyaert, *Late Gothic Sculpture*, 67-89. For Netherlandish altarpieces carved in alabaster see: Kim Woods, “Towards a Morphology of Netherlandish Altarpieces in Alabaster” in *Niederländische Kunstexporte nach Nord- und Ostmitteleuropa vom 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert: Forschungen zu ihren Anfängen, zur Rolle höfischer Auftraggeber, der Künstler und ihrer Werkstattbetriebe*, eds. Jiri Fajt and Markus Hörsch (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014), 41-60. For a general introduction to German altarpieces see: Rainer Kahsnitz, *Carved Altarpieces: Masterpieces of the Late Gothic* (London : Thames & Hudson, 2006). R. Didier, “Sculptures et retables des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux des années 1430-1460. Traditions et innovations pour le Haut-Rhin et l’Allemagne du Sud”, in *Le retable d’Issenheim et la sculpture au nord des Alpes à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. Christian Heck (Colmar: Musée d’Unterlinden, 1989).

⁶⁰² Nash, *Northern Renaissance*, 90.

⁶⁰³ Ramsay, “Alabaster”, 38. Ramsay argues for a strange paradox wherein the carvings are poorly marketed yet somehow are incredibly popular. He states: “The carvings cannot have been particularly well marketed, and indeed they tend to be found even today, in the areas close to sea ports or beside the major rivers, and yet they appealed to the market sufficiently to exceed by far the sales of the German limewood carvings or, in the 16th century, the smaller alabaster panels of Malines (Mechelen).”

⁶⁰⁴ Nash, *Northern Renaissance*, 91.

⁶⁰⁵ Nash, *Northern Renaissance*, 91.

⁶⁰⁶ Nash, *Northern Renaissance*, 91.

England and abroad, and, as has been shown, they can be linked to high status patrons such as Cosmato Gentilis (later Pope Innocent VII) or Pedro de Ayala, fraternities such as that named for St Dorothea in St Mary's, Gdansk, or clergy such as John Gudyear mentioned above.⁶⁰⁷ Numerous references to the donation of English alabasters to churches could be easily produced and have been studied in some detail by Richard Marks.⁶⁰⁸ Nash, like most other authors working on the "Northern Renaissance", omits English alabasters from her discussion and treats them as an obscure provincial phenomenon. For Lynn Jacobs English alabaster serves only as a counter-example for her study of Netherlandish altarpieces of other "standardised" mass-produced images in the Middle Ages, alongside Limoges enamels, Tournai fonts and Parisian ivories.⁶⁰⁹ This ambivalence about English alabaster is not unique to these studies but is shared by many scholars of medieval sculpture.⁶¹⁰

In truth, English alabaster altarpieces produced in the Midlands and North of England rivalled Continental centres of production, including Antwerp and Brussels in the Low Countries and Lübeck in Germany.⁶¹¹ Altarpieces from these Continental workshops were also popular in Denmark and a relatively large number can still be seen in churches including fine examples from the Netherlands, or from Northern

⁶⁰⁷ The English alabaster altarpiece in St Mary's Gdansk was donated by the St Dorothea Fraternity, see: Weronika Grochowska, "Artistic donations for St Mary's Church in Gdansk during the reign of the Teutonic Order" in *New Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Gdańsk, Poland and Prussia*, ed. Beata Możejko (London: Routledge, 2017), 162-177. See also: Philip Nelson, "The Virgin Triptych at Danzig", *Archaeological Journal*, 76:1 (1919), 139-142.

⁶⁰⁸ Marks, *Image and Devotion*.

⁶⁰⁹ See Jacobs, *Netherlandish carved altarpieces*, 235.

⁶¹⁰ Luxford, "Object of Devotion: Review", 137-138.

⁶¹¹ For a recent exhibition focused on Lübeck, see: Jan Friedrich Richter, *Lübeck 1500: Kunstmetropole im Osteeraum* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2015). Jan von Bonsdorff, "Is Art a Barometer of Wealth? Medieval Art Exports to the Far North of Europe" in *Art Markets in Europe 1400-1800*, eds. M. North and D. Ormrod, (London: Ashgate, 1998).

Germany.⁶¹² In England the trade moved in both directions with evidence for wooden Continental carved and painted altarpieces being brought there and even artists collaborating in workshops.⁶¹³ A Netherlandish altarpiece was recorded at Long Melford church, Suffolk, in the sixteenth century and parts of it still survive today.⁶¹⁴ This culture of interaction is unsurprising given the itinerancy of art and artists, and the mercantile interaction flowing between England and the Low Countries in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

Denmark as a Marketplace for Altarpieces

Denmark is a special case because of the extraordinary number of surviving medieval works of art found there.⁶¹⁵ Further, it had very little in the way of an indigenous production of carved altarpieces and so from 1400 onwards looked towards the rest of Europe for this type of object.⁶¹⁶ Its churches are therefore a relatively unmined treasure

⁶¹² Sissel Flavigny, "Brabantine carved altarpieces in Denmark", in *Antwerpse retabels 15de-16de eeuw*, vol. II ed. H. Nieuwdorp (Antwerp: Museum voor religieuze kunst Antwerpen, 1993), 101-109.

⁶¹³ For collaboration in a London sculptural workshop see: Caroline Barron and Mary Erler, "The Making of Syon Abbey's Altar Table" in *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: Studies in Memory of Andrew Martindale*, ed. John Mitchell (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000), 318-335. For artistic collaboration at Winchester and Eton in the fifteenth century see: Phillip Lindley, A. Brodrick, and J. Darrah, "The Great Screen of Winchester Cathedral I." *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1038 (1989), 604-17. Phillip Lindley, "The 'Great Screen' of Winchester Cathedral Part II: Style and Date." *The Burlington Magazine* 135, no. 1089 (1993): 797-807. Emily Howe, ed., *Wall Paintings of Eton* (London: Scala, 2012).

⁶¹⁴ Woods, "Long Melford", 93-104.

⁶¹⁵ The same is the case for Germany, see: Walker Bynum, "Are Things 'indifferent?'" , 88-112.

⁶¹⁶ Anna Nielsen provides a short and unsatisfactory review of the visual arts in Scandinavia in the later Middle Ages. Lübeck, Brussels and Antwerp are mentioned but trade between England and the region is unexplored. See: Anna Nielsen, "Art and Architecture" in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol.1, ed. Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 544-549.

trove for art historians. The situation is helped further by the extraordinary current effort to catalogue all medieval altarpieces and fragments in Danish churches.⁶¹⁷

Altarpieces from the Netherlands and Germany were brought to Denmark from the fourteenth century onwards.⁶¹⁸ The list below is not meant to be exhaustive but indicative of the range of sites and diversity of object formats. One of the earliest pieces is an early fourteenth-century North German altarpiece in Boeslunde Church, formerly in the Carmelite Abbey church of Skælskør. In 1398 a German altarpiece was donated to Lund cathedral by Ida Pedersdatter Falk, a high ranking member of the nobility.⁶¹⁹ Other German altarpieces can be found at Engestofte Kirke and at Helligåndskirken in Faaborg, with a small number of works attributable to master sculptors such as Bernt Notke and Claus Berg.⁶²⁰ Altarpieces made in Antwerp can be found in the churches of Ulkebøl, Søndre Sogn, Holstebro, and Viborg cathedral. They primarily date from the third quarter of the fifteenth century and indicate the dominance of the Low Countries in the production of carved altarpieces towards the end of the century. Apart from the few English examples discussed in this chapter, there was a wider interest in alabaster sculpture: a Southern Netherlandish altarpiece can be found in Haderslev cathedral and an alabaster *Pieta* made in Lübeck c.1425 was once in Sønder Alslev but is now in the National Museum.⁶²¹ Margarete I (d.1412) had her tomb effigy carved in alabaster,

⁶¹⁷ The authors are exhaustive in their search for documentation and photographic material in connection to the history of medieval altarpieces in Danish churches. These books are an indispensable resource. Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altartavler*, vol.I and II.

⁶¹⁸ Nilsen, "Art and Architecture", 546.

⁶¹⁹ Peter Tangeberg 'Church art as Craft' in *Margarete I: Regent of the North, The Kalmar Union, 600 Years*, ed. Poul Grønder-Hansen (Copenhagen: Danmarks Nationalmuseum, 1997), 216-222.

⁶²⁰ Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altartavler*.

⁶²¹ Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altartavler*.

which serves as a reminder of the early adoption of the material for high status burials.⁶²² The group of surviving English alabasters in Denmark, and those across Europe, need to be understood within this wider context, not apart from it, as has traditionally been the case. This is true also of the position of Denmark in Scandinavia and the rest of the Baltic Sea area. English alabasters can be found throughout the areas where merchant activity took place and they are at their most numerous in the towns and cities where trade was at its most dense.⁶²³

A brief outline of the European Trade of Alabasters from England:

There is a long history of trade in English alabaster which continued into the early modern period.⁶²⁴ In some cases, such as the well-known purchase of English alabaster by Alexandre de Berneval in 1414, Continental sculptors came to England for the raw material.⁶²⁵ This continued well into the sixteenth century when Southern Netherlandish sculptors were still sourcing alabaster from England, although often with difficulty.⁶²⁶ Yet it is clear from the documents that foreign merchants purchased alabaster to sell abroad: Johannes Coynt on the ship of Johannes la Vide, described as an alien, left Boston on the 15th of May, 1383, with a rabbit and otter fells and two alabaster images; the images valued at 14s. 4d.⁶²⁷ Stephanus van Wynkill, also described as alien, left on the Johannes Leawe from Boston on the last day of June 1397 with alabaster images

⁶²² Poul Grinder-Hansen, "At Margrete's Tomb", in *Margarete I: Regent of the North, The Kalmar Union, 600 Years*, ed. Poul Grinder-Hansen (Copenhagen: Danmarks Nationalmuseum, 1997), 273-278. For an in depth study of the period see: Vivian Etting, *Queen Margarete I (1353-1412) and the Founding of the Nordic Union* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

⁶²³ Major centres of trade such as Bordeaux, Lisbon, Gdansk are all home to large numbers of English alabaster. See the geographical index in Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*.

⁶²⁴ Kim Woods has covered the whole of Europe in a short but exemplary article, see: Woods, "Supply of Alabaster", 86-93.

⁶²⁵ John Bilson, "A French Purchase of English Alabaster in 1414", *Archaeological Journal*, 64:1(1907), 32-37.

⁶²⁶ Lipinska, *Moving Images*, 22.

⁶²⁷ S.H. Rigby, ed., *The overseas trade of Boston in the reign of Richard II* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 132.

and other goods valued at £20.⁶²⁸ English merchants did the same and must have accounted for the bulk of the trade, including men such as Johannes Bewpeny, who set sail with two alabaster images worth 5s, on the 2nd of August, 1390.⁶²⁹

Trade between England and Scandinavia increased during the course of the fifteenth century.⁶³⁰ In Iceland alone seven whole altarpieces survive and a number of single images.⁶³¹ Nordal cites King's Lynn as the major trading partner with Iceland but rightly states that there is little evidence to suggest that alabaster was traded from there.⁶³² Ports such as Bristol had a long connection to Scandinavia and were major centres for the international distribution of alabaster.⁶³³ Much of the Bristol trade to Scandinavia is focused on Iceland, or Bergen in Norway, and there are a number of sculptures in both countries, as there are in Denmark and Sweden.⁶³⁴ Alabaster was frequently traded out of Bristol, Hull and Poole and merchants based there, such as the Bristolian William Canynges, were granted permission to trade with Iceland on a number of occasions.⁶³⁵ Canynges must have considered alabaster a suitably important material as he had two alabaster tombs made to commemorate himself; both now lie next to each other in the church of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol.⁶³⁶ Other than these memorials there is no direct evidence to suggest that Canynges was taking alabaster altarpieces to Iceland but others

⁶²⁸ Rigby, *Boston*, 221.

⁶²⁹ Rigby, *Boston*, 135.

⁶³⁰ For an overview of the strength of medieval trade between England and Scandinavia see. E.M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London: Methuen & Co, 1967), 98-142.

⁶³¹ Nordal, "Alabastursmyndir frá Miðöldum".

⁶³² Nordal, "Alabastursmyndir frá Miðöldum", 127: "Only two custom reports from 1492 and another from 1514 mention 'imagines' which could be alabaster".

⁶³³ For permission to trade goods with Iceland and Denmark see, E.M Carus-Wilson, ed. *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1937), 65, 68, 69, 71, 94-95, 127, 130, 135-136, 144, 155.

⁶³⁴ See geographical index in Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*. See also: Susan Flavin and Evan Jones, eds., *Bristol's trade with Ireland and the Continent, 1503-1601: the evidence of the Exchequer customs accounts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009).

⁶³⁵ C. H. Vellacott, *The Victoria County History of Dorset*, vol. II (London: Constable and Co., 1908), Poole Custom Accounts, 336.

⁶³⁶ Carus-Wilson, *Merchant Venturers*, 120.

like him certainly did trade in the material elsewhere, such as John Bailly who took alabasters to Bordeaux in 1478 or Elizabeth Jakes, the wife of Robert Jakes, who took an alabaster altarpiece to Lisbon in 1478.⁶³⁷ Further references to the international trade in alabaster from Bristol include Robert Fortey who took two tables to Northern Spain in 1486, or Richard Hunt who in the same year exported a single altarpiece to the Algarve.⁶³⁸ Hull was a centre of distribution, too, and was where de Berneval sent the alabaster he purchased from Chelleston to Fecamp.⁶³⁹ Further documents trace the movement of alabaster through Hull: in 1465 Jacobus Jonson and Adrianus Barbour left the port with “2 tabules de alabaster”.⁶⁴⁰ These references do not complete the picture but indicate gaps in what we know. Details about the relationship between merchants and workshops in England, or merchants and patrons on the Continent are unknown. In some cases the altarpiece must have been sold on directly to an individual or a group, and in others it might have been taken to a market where it attracted the attention of a prospective buyer.

Borbjerg and Vejrum in context:

Returning briefly, then, to the altarpieces at Borbjerg and Vejrum. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, it is probable that both were taken to Denmark at the height of the popularity for English alabaster in Scandinavia during in the fifteenth century. In

⁶³⁷ Carus-Wilson, *Overseas Trade of Bristol*, 130, 143.

⁶³⁸ My thanks to Evan Jones for bringing the following unpublished references to my attention: 1485/6 Bristol “particular” customs accounts (TNA:PRO, E122/20/5): 16 May 1486, the ship the '*Seint John*' of Fuenterrabia (Spanish Basque country) exits to northern Spain with 2 “tables of alabaster” owned by Robert Fortey (a Bristol merchant), each valued for customs purposes at £1. 26 August 1486, the *Mary Founce* (probably a Bristol ship) exits to Algarve with 1 “table of alabaster” owned by Richard Hunt (a native merchant), valued for customs purposes at 13s. 4d. For further information see: Richard Stone “Bristol’s Overseas Trade in the Later Fifteenth Century: The Evidence of the “Particular” Customs Accounts”, in *The World of the Newport Medieval Ship: Trade, Politics and shipping in the fifteenth century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), 181-203.

⁶³⁹ Bilson, “French purchase”, 32-37. See also: Woods, “Supply of Alabaster”, 86-93.

⁶⁴⁰ Wendy R. Childs ed., *The Customs accounts of Hull 1453-1490* (Leeds: Yorkshire Archæological Society, 1986), 91.

this context, it is particularly striking that none of the remaining English alabasters in Denmark has been dated after c.1470 and the situation is much the same in Iceland.⁶⁴¹ If a proper survey were undertaken for Sweden and Norway a similar picture would most likely emerge as this is true, too, of almost all of the English alabasters found across the Baltic region. But it would be wrong to assume that this change was down to a decline in quality. In the previous chapter I showed how English sculptors were producing high quality work well into the sixteenth century. Instead, one possible reason for the decline of the movement of these objects to Denmark may be the dominance, or rise, of merchant activity from elsewhere in Europe, particularly the Netherlands and northern Germany.⁶⁴² This plays out in the evidence for trade between England and the wider Scandinavian region. Customs accounts from Bristol suggest that the most concentrated activity for trade to the Kingdom of Denmark took place before 1470. Further, there are a greater number of surviving Netherlandish or German altarpieces dating to the second half of the fifteenth century or the early years of the sixteenth. It is telling that when a sculptor was invited to settle in Denmark by the king and queen it was Claus Berg from Lübeck, showing the close ties that had developed across the Baltic and emphasising that, by now, England, at least artistically, had come to seem distant.

As it happens, this shift can be detected in the physical changes to the altarpiece at Vejrum. Before its first reframing in 1500 it would have presumably looked much as it did when it was first brought to Denmark. However, its new frame, with golden tracery and ogee-style canopies, resembles the frame of a Netherlandish

⁶⁴¹ See Nordal, “Alabastursmyndir frá Miðöldum”, the latest date for a sculpture is probably around 1470.

⁶⁴² See: Jan Harasimowicz, Piotr Oszczanowski and Marcin Wiśłocki, eds., *On the opposite sides of the Baltic Sea: relations between Scandinavian and Central European countries* (Wrocław: Via Nova, 2006). The essays by Sven Lilka and Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann are especially important.

altarpiece. Whether this was a case of simply updating an older work of art with a contemporary frame or something more complex is difficult to determine. The new frame certainly makes the older altarpiece look more like the kind of Netherlandish object which had become popular by this time and which carried a high status, such as the altarpiece at Holstebro [fig.5.22]. Yet, as much as the frame provides a new dimension to the group, the alabasters remain squarely at the centre. It must have been the unique character of the alabasters which continued to make them desirable to their early modern viewers. Far from being replaced, their additions speak to the delight of those who sought to preserve and enhance them. This brings us to the second part of this chapter which focuses on a group of alabasters which do not survive whole but are fragmented from their original framing. The purpose of exploring them in relation to the examples at Vejrum and Borbjerg is to further prove that the reframing of English alabaster in Denmark was an active choice with attention paid to material, rarity and other special characteristics of the sculptures.

Part Two: Hornslet Church and the Past: Recycling Medieval Alabasters in Sixteenth Century Denmark

Hornslet's altarpiece is composite. It comprises a number of different works of art, painted and sculpted, all made at various times between c.1450-1670 [fig.5.23].⁶⁴³ This is unusual and stands in striking contrast to most reframed or reset altarpieces in Denmark. The majority of large reframed medieval altarpieces follow what I think of as the diachronic morphology of Borbjerg or Vejrum, where several changes or additions were made over time around the central original structure. In these and the majority of other cases, the original altarpiece was left without being enlarged or dramatically reframed and apart from repairs or repainting is as it was when first produced. Such is

⁶⁴³ Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altartavler*, vol.I, 405-407.

not the case at Hornslet, however, where the majority of the different elements were brought together at a single moment in time during the 1570s. Further, a number of the gathered earlier sculptures are fragmented and several panels from the various original ensembles are missing. Thus the present arrangement is a combination of fragments which together appear whole, albeit in a new configuration. Added to this, the altarpiece at Hornslet is not the only focus and cannot be seen in isolation. Memorials, furniture, paintings, preaching, singing and the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist all interact within the same space. Evidence for a grand and overarching patronage project at Hornslet also prompts an enquiry into the interaction of objects, people and place. The composite arrangement at Hornslet is a particularly vivid reminder that altarpieces were one part of a programme that invited those in the church to visualise God, either as an image, or as bread and wine transformed in the mass into flesh and blood, consubstantiation being a central tenant of the Lutheran rites.

Production of this new altarpiece from medieval fragments coincided with a wider range of architectural and artistic patronage led by the Rosenkrantz family. Through their patronage from the 1560s onwards, Hornslet church became a site for the creation of dynastic memory. It became a projection of contemporary and future familial identity and grandeur. This had as much to do with resolving religious and dynastic ruptures of the past as it did with creating a space for the future. Objects linked to a papist past were not hidden from sight but were made ever present, from the medieval baptismal font to the fragments used in the altarpiece. For the celebration of the Eucharist or Baptism, older objects also interwove materially with a Lutheran present, one where these sacraments were understood as salvific rituals. The act of making or remaking at Hornslet is as much about late sixteenth-century attitudes

towards preservation and restoration as it is about the combination of old and new things.⁶⁴⁴

Description:

Hornslet church is a long narrow un-aisled structure with a western tower, large porch, and triangular shaped apse. Adjacent to the area around the high altar is square-formed chapel which was designated a burial space for Jørgen Rosenkrantz (d.1596) and his wife Dorothea Lange (d.1613). The composite altarpiece is located at the high altar of the church. It is made up of twelve scenes from Christ's life and passion. Five of these are sculpted in alabaster or wood. The sculptures which occupy the central part of the arrangement and are the oldest pieces of the assemblage dating from c.1450 to c.1570. Between the base of the Crucifixion and the predella is a painted block of text which reads: "O vere digna Hostia Per Quam Fracta Sunt Tartara Redempta plebs captivate redit ad vita premia" (O truly worthy sacrifice through which Hell was broken, the redeemed people are led from captivity to eternal life).⁶⁴⁵ This text is extracted from an early Christian Ambrosian hymn, *Ad cenam Agni providii*, and is highly Eucharistic in tone.⁶⁴⁶ It is itself a reused fragment from the past, repurposed for the new ensemble. Additional scenes from Christ's life, painted on panel rather than sculpted, are situated on the wings and predella. These were added in c.1672 by Erik Rosenkrantz and as later additions they fall outside of the parameters of this study which will focus instead

⁶⁴⁴ See Bynum, "Are things Indifferent?", 88-112; and Peter Burke, "Images as Evidence in Seventeenth-Century Europe", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 2 (2003), 273-96, esp. 283-284.

⁶⁴⁵ My thanks to Sandy Heslop for helping me with the translation of this text.

⁶⁴⁶ My thanks to Margit Thøfner for sharing her own research into the reuse of Catholic hymns in post-Reformation Denmark.

on the patronage of Jørgen Rosenkrantz, the first of his family to settle in Hornslet.⁶⁴⁷

The Rosenkrantz's connection to the altarpiece is made explicit by the heraldic shields at the base, which allow the remade altarpiece to be satisfactorily dated.⁶⁴⁸

In 1559 Jørgen Rosenkrantz and Dorothea Lange moved into the area and built Rosenholm manor.⁶⁴⁹ They became major investors in the church, branding it with Rosenkrantz/Lange heraldry. Together they enlarged the fabric of the building and furnished the interior. As well as the composite altarpiece, a number of other objects in the church still attest to this, including numerous wall memorials, a large painting of the Resurrection of Christ with Rosenkrantz/Lange portraits, and the chair of the cantor made by Mikkel van Groningen. Rosenkrantz was no ordinary member of the Danish nobility. He was one of the most powerful men in the country, serving on the King's Council and was a key member of the regency government after Frederik II died.⁶⁵⁰ This study is the first to examine the Rosenkrantz's patronage of Hornslet church, especially in connection to the reuse of English alabasters, and in so doing provides insight not only into contemporary Lutheran devotional practices but also illuminates attitudes towards antiquarianism, restoration and preservation in late sixteenth-century Denmark.⁶⁵¹

The Altarpiece:

⁶⁴⁷ For a short discussion of the seventeenth-century painted wings of the Hornslet altarpiece see: Thorsteinn Helgason, *The Corsairs' Longest Voyage: The Turkish Raid in Iceland 1627* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 329-330.

⁶⁴⁸ Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altartavler*, vol.I, 406.

⁶⁴⁹ *Rosenholm: A Short Description of a visit to the Rosenkrantz Estate*, 1966

⁶⁵⁰ Minna Skafte Jensen, *Friendship and Poetry: Studies in Danish Neo-Latin Literature* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2004), 94. See also P.D. Lockhart, *Frederik II and the Protestant Cause. Denmark's Role in the Wars of Religion, 1559-1596* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 299. Lockhart, *Denmark 1513-1660*, 42.

⁶⁵¹ For a general overview of the historical context see: Thorkild Lyby and Ole Peter Grell, "The Consolidation of Lutheranism in Denmark and Norway", in *The Scandinavian Reformation: from Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform*, ed. Ole Peter Grell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114-143.

At the centre of the altarpiece is a wooden Crucifixion scene attributed to the workshop of the Lübeck-born sculptor Claus Berg [fig.5.24]. At the base of this sculpture, Mary collapses into the arms of John and her attendants. Next to her a man pulls a face. Those gathered to the right debate and discuss the unfolding activity around them. Mary Magdalene hugs the base of the cross and Longinus pierces the side of Christ with his spear. He looks towards the viewer and points at his eye, an indicator of the blood which spilled onto him, healed his physical and spiritual blindness and converted him to Christianity. It is a dramatic rendering of one of the central moments of Christianity when Christ sacrifices himself for the sins of the world. Visualising this was important for Lutherans as it allowed them to see the act of salvation.⁶⁵² As the backdrop to the Eucharist this image would have been one focus of attention during the ritual.

The attribution of this Crucifixion to Berg's workshop is secure and derives from the sculpture's stylistic similarity to a number of other Berg workshop sculptures in Denmark, for instance at Sanderum or the church of our Lady, Aarhus.⁶⁵³ Berg had set up a workshop in Odense at the very beginning of the 16th century and was patronised by the king and queen of Denmark. Having an altarpiece made by him or his workshop was a marker of status.⁶⁵⁴ How the fragment at Hornslet came to be dislocated from its original group is unknown. It seems unlikely, given the expense involved in commissioning one, that a small parish church could have afforded it. Nevertheless, during the second half of the sixteenth century a large number of altarpieces were moved from larger, wealthier and now defunct religious institutions to smaller churches, and given the relatively high number of surviving Berg workshop altarpieces, it was

⁶⁵² Bridget Heal, *A Magnificent Faith: Art and Identity in Lutheran Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 149-157.

⁶⁵³ Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altartavler*.

⁶⁵⁴ For the most up to date account of the life and work of Claus Berg, see: Jan Friedrich Richter, *Claus Berg: Retabelproduktion des Spätmittelalters im Ostseeraum* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2007).

probably not particularly difficult to procure one, especially someone in Rosenkrantz's position.⁶⁵⁵

The Crucifixion was probably made between 1506 and 1532 when the Berg workshop was active in Odense. However, in its new setting in the Hornslet altarpiece, it does not appear as originally carved. Alterations were made even within this single scene. The original wooden image of Christ on the cross is missing and has been replaced by an alabaster version, stockier and muscular and clearly of a later date [fig.5.25]. It was most likely made in the 1570s not by an English but by a Netherlandish sculptor perhaps based for a time in Aarhus, located fifteen miles south of Hornslet.⁶⁵⁶ A remarkably similar alabaster sculpture of Christ is situated between the effigies of Erik Podebusk and Sidsel Oxe in Aarhus cathedral [fig.5.26]. Erik died in 1574 and the date on that monument is 1576 which suggests a similar date for the Christ at Hornslet.⁶⁵⁷

This new Christ can be understood in the context of a renewed interest in alabaster, which once again became a popular sculptural material in Denmark from the 1560s onwards.⁶⁵⁸ Aleksandra Lipinska has explored how altarpieces, tombs and epitaphs made by sixteenth-century Southern Netherlandish sculptors and found across

⁶⁵⁵ Johannsen and Johannsen, "Re-forming the Confessional Space", 241-276.

⁶⁵⁶ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 178-191. Plathe and Bruun date the Christ figure to 1574, see: Plathe and Bruun, *Danmarks Middelalderlige Altertavler*, 405. A number of itinerant Netherlandish sculptors were working in the Baltic Sea area, see: Hugo Johannsen, "Willem van den Blocke and his Monument (1585-1586) for Christoph von Dohna in the Cathedral of Odense. An Example of the Spread of the Style of Cornelis Floris in the Baltic" in *Netherlandish Artists in Gdansk in the Time of Hans Vredeman de Vries* ed. M. Ruzkowska-Macur (Gdańsk: Museum of the History of the City of Gdańsk, 2006), 111-118. See also: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "Ways of Transfer of Netherlandish Art," in *Netherlandish Artists in Gdańsk in the Time of Hans Vredeman de Vries* ed. M. Ruzkowska-Macur (Gdańsk: Museum of the History of the City of Gdańsk, 2006), 13-22.

⁶⁵⁷ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 178-191.

⁶⁵⁸ There is, of course, a much longer history for the use of alabaster in Denmark for instance the tomb of Margarete I in Roskilde and the medieval trade in English alabaster sculpture. However, the rise in popularity of Southern Netherlandish alabaster sculpture can be seen as a different phase in the history of the material.

the country were appropriated for new altarpiece ensembles in Denmark by wealthy patrician families in this period.⁶⁵⁹ The popularity of alabaster in the later sixteenth century, as she shows, stems from the fashionable example set by ambitious commissions such as the tomb of Admiral Herluf Trolle and his wife, Brigitte Gøye made by the master sculptor Cornelis Floris c.1566-1568.⁶⁶⁰

Other members of the Rosenkrantz family likewise commissioned Netherlandish altarpieces, such as a small Mechelen altarpiece for Mette Rosenkrantz (d.1588), and a larger ensemble for Tvis church linked to Holger Rosenkrantz (1574-1642), Jørgen's son.⁶⁶¹ If the sculptural part of the altarpiece arrangement at Hornslet was brought together in the 1570s, then it was made during the height of popularity of alabaster amongst the leading nobility of Denmark.⁶⁶² Jørgen Rosenkrantz was part of the same interwoven group of Danish nobility as Trolle or Podebusk and so his desire to patronise a similar network of sculptors is not surprising.⁶⁶³ The reframing of

⁶⁵⁹ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 178-191. For other examples see: Karen Petersen and Jørgen Boye Petersen, *Kirkelig skulptur i Danmark*, vol II (København: Gyldendal, 1999), 145-156. For discussions of the interaction between the Netherlands and Denmark see: Thomas deCosta Kaufmann, "The European Perspective" in *Reframing the Danish Renaissance: problems and prospects in a European perspective*, eds. Michael Andersen, Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen and Hugo Johannsen (Copenhagen: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2011), 33-50; and Michael North, "Cultural Relations between the Netherlands and the Baltic Region" in *On the opposite sides of the Baltic Sea: relations between Scandinavian and Central European countries*, eds., Jan Harasimowicz, Piotr Oszczanowski and Marcin Wisłocki (Wrocław: Via Nova, 2006), vol. II, 341-346.

⁶⁶⁰ Lipinska, *Moving sculpture*, pp.78-79. Kaufmann, "Ways of Transfer", 13-22.

⁶⁶¹ See Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 185-186; and Aleksandra Lipinska, "Adaptations of Imported Southern Netherlandish Alabaster Sculpture in the Baltic Area in the 2nd Half of the 16th Century" *On the opposite sides of the Baltic Sea: relations between Scandinavian and Central European countries*, eds., Jan Harasimowicz, Piotr Oszczanowski and Marcin Wisłocki (Wrocław: Via Nova, 2006), vol. II, 350-351.

⁶⁶² The same sculptors were achieving popularity in Germany too, see: Anna Jolly, "Netherlandish Sculptors in Sixteenth-Century Northern Germany and Their Patrons", *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1999), 119-143.

⁶⁶³ One of Jørgen's relatives, Holger Ottesen Rosenkrantz served on the king's Council with Admiral Herluf Trolle, see: Lockhart, *Denmark 1513-1660*, 38. For a discussion of these networks see: Lyby and Grell, "Consolidation of Lutheranism", 115.

alabaster as such by members of the Rosenkrantz family was not something unique to Hornslet but can be seen as a wider desire to commission or reuse the material. What marks Hornslet out as a special case is the *combination* of much older English alabasters with newly commissioned Netherlandish alabaster. The decision to commission a new Christ in alabaster, rather than wood, for the central figure is worth thinking through. Can Rosenkrantz's attraction to alabaster be reduced to the contemporary fashion for it as a luxury material, or does his inclusion of it at Hornslet stand in need of further explanation?

The material juxtapositions effected in the modified Crucifixion create a visual relationship between fully polychromed wood and partially polychromed alabaster. Christ's body is left mostly unpainted but polished so that its translucent and shiny surface might interact with the candlelight inside of the church during the celebration of the Eucharist. Previously, there has been some discussion of the translucence of alabaster and its flesh-like quality.⁶⁶⁴ In this instance, where a clear choice has been made to include a partially polychromed alabaster Christ at the centre of the ensemble, such a connection between stone and flesh would appear justified. Alabaster, its materiality dramatised by the interaction with wood, was surely seen as a more appropriate medium for representing the body of Christ.

The theological point being made in this panel is one based on sight and interaction with the crucified Christ. In beholding the saviour on the Cross, Longinus is cured of spiritual blindness. Positioned at the high altar with its entwined Eucharistic connection and significance, the alabaster image of Christ would have been a visual focal point for the worshippers of Hornslet church, especially at the moment of receiving the eucharistic wafer. During the Lutheran service, the participant would first

⁶⁶⁴ Lipinkska, *Moving Sculptures*, 33-34.

receive the wafer on the left hand side of the altar, moving afterwards to the right to receive the wine.⁶⁶⁵ Margit Thøfner, in her discussion of the Mühlberg altarpiece, rightly encourages a move towards thinking about altarpiece imagery in connection with liturgy and the liturgical vestments or equipment.⁶⁶⁶ In this case, therefore, the material of alabaster could be seen as working to reinforce and make memorable the bright, glowing body of Christ in the mind of the viewer before, during and after the celebration of the Eucharist, as he or she moved across in front of it.⁶⁶⁷

The inscription below the image is part of the same framework for thinking through salvation and is a claim to patristic authority. Like the sculptural fragments pieced back together, this line of text is fragmentary too. It is a piece from the Catholic, Roman past and its reconfiguration here helps to negotiate a similar reconciliation between past and present. It too is deeply Eucharistic, stressing that captive people can be set free through Christ's sacrifice, enacted at the altar. Consubstantiation was a central tenant of Lutheranism. Christ's sacrifice was not merely imagined at the altar, but was physically and materially present each time the Mass was celebrated.⁶⁶⁸ This line of thinking can be extended to the supplementary narrative panels which frame the central scene.

Positioned either side of the wooden Crucifixion scene are a number of mixed English and Netherlandish alabasters. This arrangement replicates a familiar type found

⁶⁶⁵ Martin Schqarz Lausten, *A Church History of Denmark* (London: Routledge, 2017), 116.

⁶⁶⁶ Margit Thøfner, "Framing the Sacred: Lutheran Church Furnishings in the Holy Roman Empire", in *Lutheran Churches in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew Spicer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 128.

⁶⁶⁷ Discourse on the Eucharist was important. Niels Hemmingsen (d.1600) was called before Frederik II because of his perceived Calvinistic views on the Eucharist, see Lyby and Grell, "Consolidation of Lutheranism", 120.

⁶⁶⁸ Many thanks again to Margit Thøfner for sharing her unpublished work. See also: Thøfner, "Framing the Sacred", 123.

in other Danish churches where narrative panels are similarly situated around a large central Crucifixion, as at Sanderum Church [fig.5.27]. It is unlike the format of contemporary Netherlandish alabaster altarpieces, which were usually constructed as tall arrangements comprising a series of narrative layers.⁶⁶⁹ At Hornslet, five English alabasters from the same altarpiece have been reused: three relief panels and two standing figures. The Annunciation is situated at the bottom right with the Nativity above it; Christ's Resurrection is placed at the bottom left, and two standing saints are grouped together: St John the Baptist and St Matthew the Evangelist at the top left [figs 5.28, 5.29, 5.30 and 5.31]. These stylistically cohesive and narratively coherent sculptures were clearly originally part of the same altarpiece ensemble, with two further pieces now missing, probably the Ascension and the Assumption although there were multiple variations on which scenes could be included in Marian alabaster altarpieces. The Resurrection is taller than the other English panels, suggesting that it was originally placed at the centre of the ensemble.⁶⁷⁰ This implies that there was no Crucifixion present in the original configuration of the English alabaster altarpiece, and thus suggests one reason why another one might have been sought out at the time of the reconfiguration in the 1570s. To give an idea of what this earlier altarpiece would have looked like before it was repurposed by Rosenkrantz, we can turn to an almost identical altarpiece of exactly the same date depicting the Joys of Mary from Möðruvalla church in Iceland [fig.5.32].⁶⁷¹

It is possible that the same workshop produced both the panels from Hornslet and the altarpiece in Möðruvalla church and that they were traded abroad at a similar

⁶⁶⁹ See the discussion of the Afferden altarpiece below.

⁶⁷⁰ Resurrection panels survive in the largest number of any English alabaster panel. This is down to the fact that they could be used in two ways, either in a passion narrative sequence or as the central panel in a Marian altarpiece. See: Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 134-141.

⁶⁷¹ Nordal, "Alabastursmyndir frá Miðöldum", 114.

time. In the new arrangement of scenes at Hornslet the altarpiece can be read from the bottom right and then upwards from the Annunciation, then the Nativity, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and ending with the Ascension. However, this final image, like the central Christ, was not carved in England but in the Southern Netherlands or nearby in Aarhus by a Netherlandish sculptor [fig.5.33].

In fact, the Ascension scene provides crucial evidence that, rather than a haphazard or opportunistic bringing together of disparate pieces, the entire assemblage at Hornslet was united at a single moment with the intention of making a new altarpiece. Although Ascensions were among the most popular images carved in English alabaster, the same was not true of Netherlandish sculptors working in alabaster, even for large Passion narratives.⁶⁷² Furthermore, the Netherlandish Ascension has almost exactly the same measurements as its English counterparts and must therefore have been created with the goal of extending the narrative sequence and replacing what was lost. The rather clumsy carving of the new Ascension suggests the sculptor was unfamiliar with this image type. Conversely, the alabaster of the crucified Christ is skilfully carved, yet there is no reason to doubt that both are by the same artist. It seems highly likely that the Netherlandish Ascension was commissioned by Rosenkrantz to replace a lost scene that would have originally have been one of the five panels of the English altarpiece. The apostles are depicted as kneeling with several seated, all gathered around the rock from which Christ ascended. This is relatively typical of English Ascensions of c.1450 but not of Netherlandish alabasters c.1570 which usually show the figures standing.⁶⁷³ Perhaps the Netherlandish sculptor who

⁶⁷² A rare version can be found on the pulpit of Lübeck cathedral, which was carved c.1568-1572, see: Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 85.

⁶⁷³ Jacek Kriegseisen and Aleksandra Lipinska, *Matter of Light and Flesh: Alabaster in the Netherlandish Sculpture of the 16th and 17th centuries* (Gdańsk: Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku, 2011).

made this panel took inspiration and copied some elements from a panel from the original English altarpiece. Or perhaps the original alabaster was damaged beyond repair and could not be included and therefore an additional one was commissioned.

Evidence of connective or restorative imitation may be detected elsewhere.

There are two more English alabaster canopies than there are surviving English panels. These canopies were used to frame the newly made Netherlandish Ascension and two additional sculptures, namely the figures created by the same sculptor to complement the English sculptures of John and Matthew [fig.5.34]. Whoever made the central Christ, the Ascension and the two additional figures must have had the English alabasters in front of them or had studied them up close. Proof of this is in repair work undertaken to the Resurrection alabaster [fig.5.35]. A new angel was carved and added to the upper right hand corner in order to replace what was presumably a broken and lost fragment of the panel. This interaction between the Netherlandish sculptor and the medieval alabasters indicates a developing culture of attentive restoration and preservation in sixteenth-century Denmark. It was important that the medieval pieces where possible could be saved and intelligently reused.

On reframing:

When the English alabaster altarpieces at Borbjerg and Vejrum were reframed they were kept whole. The process of reuse had as much to do with enshrining the original form of the alabaster altarpiece as it did with repackaging and representing past works of art in a new context. At Vejrum, for instance, the c.1500 canopy work did not replace the earlier English canopies but rather doubled what was present. If the goal was to bring the older work of art – the alabaster altarpiece - up to date then why retain similar structural elements of the original frame? Relatively few changes were made to the panels themselves and so the method of maintaining the *look* of the original was akin to

the contemporary reframing of ancient icons in Rome, explored recently by a number of scholars.⁶⁷⁴ The English alabasters at Borbjerg and Vejrum can thus be tied into and discussed in a wider context in which whole medieval altarpieces were reframed or repurposed. This type of behaviour can be traced across Lutheran Europe, for instance in the Stadthagen altarpiece discussed in the following case study where a larger Netherlandish group was made smaller.⁶⁷⁵ Brigit Heal has explored this issue in *Magnificent Faith* as have a number of other scholars.⁶⁷⁶ The point is not to suggest that there was some systematic or central direction for this behaviour; it is almost always highly localised.⁶⁷⁷

What took place at Hornslet was less about size reduction or expansion and more about hybridity of form; a repackaging of the past from bits of things.⁶⁷⁸ Jørgen Rosenkrantz was a wealthy landowner. He lavished enormous sums of money on building two manor houses: Rosenholm and Skaføgård.⁶⁷⁹ At Rosenholm he built a chapel and furnished it with a new altarpiece. Further, the renovations at Hornslet involved building works and the commissioning of new works of art which were surely not inexpensive. This contextual knowledge helps to frame the decision to reuse

⁶⁷⁴ See for instance: Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 71-83.

⁶⁷⁵ Heal, *Magnificent Faith*, 158-188. See also: Lipinkska, *Moving Sculptures*, 194.

⁶⁷⁶ For the example of a reframed fifteenth-century Virgin and Child in Drahnisdorf, see: Heal, *Magnificent Faith*, 95-97.

⁶⁷⁷ Heal, *Magnificent Faith*, 50.

⁶⁷⁸ Alexandra Walsham addresses things and their reuse, yet her general interest is focused on the home and not the church space, see: Walsham, "Recycling the Sacred", 128.

⁶⁷⁹ Krista de Jonge, "A Netherlandish Model? Reframing the Danish Royal Residences in a European Perspective", in *Reframing the Danish Renaissance: problems and prospects in a European perspective*, eds. Michael Andersen, Birgitte Bøggild Johanssen and Hugo Johanssen (Copenhagen: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2011), 219-233.

medieval objects for the altarpiece in Hornslet church. It would have easily been within Jørgen's reach to commission a new altarpiece.⁶⁸⁰ That he does not is telling.

Jørgen Rosenkrantz, Hornslet Church and the Contexts of Reuse:

When visiting the church of Hornslet today, visitors are encouraged by its guide to seek out the differences in its architectural fabric; to marvel at its medieval wall paintings, and to connect the monuments with paintings, sculptures and texts commemorating many generations of the Rosenkrantz family. Yet Hornslet is not an accidental mausoleum. It was repurposed and planned as an ensemble from the very beginning. When Jørgen and his wife Dorothea moved to Hornslet in the 1560s they did more than simply add to the building and commission works of art or furniture. Jørgen also arranged for the transfer of the buried bodies of fourteen generations of his widely dispersed family to Hornslet church.⁶⁸¹ Like the fragments of the reused alabaster altarpiece, their physical bodies were reunited with their kin in Hornslet church. They were being divested of their connection to a Catholic past and given a new chance for salvation in Hornslet.

Why was the macabre and extreme effort of relocating bodies undertaken and how does it relate to the reused alabaster altarpiece?⁶⁸² Great churches - abbeys, cathedrals or otherwise - were from early on in Christianity the preferred location for high status burials. In post-Reformation Denmark most of these spaces, but especially the corporate structures behind them, became redundant and thus memorialisation of present and past shifted in some cases to a parish space. At Hornslet, a painted board

⁶⁸⁰ Rosenkrantz commissioned a new altarpiece in 1567 for the chapel at Rosenholm palace.

⁶⁸¹ Jensen, *Friendship and Poetry*, 95.

⁶⁸² Relocation of dispersed family members was not completely unheard of and can be paralleled in other contemporary cases amongst the Danish nobility, see: K. de Fine Licht, "Gennerup Kirke Et Gravanlæg fra Frederik II's tid", *Architectura: arkitekturhistorisk årsskrift*, 17, 1995, 139-150. Johannsen and Johannsen, "Re-forming the Confessional Space", 257. For the German context see: Heal, *Magnificent Faith*, 170-171.

in the funeral chapel of Jørgen and Dorothea provides the crucial evidence. It contains a poem, painted in both Latin and Danish, strategically located opposite a painted image of Christ's Resurrection with kneeling, pious portraits of Jørgen Rosenkrantz and his wife, Dorothea Lange with their children [fig.5.36]. The poem describes Rosenkrantz's personal objective in enlarging the building and adorning it with works of art:

This place I have chosen with the purpose here to have my final resort,
and built this chapel with the end and design here to sleep peacefully and
quietly...my body will rise again new and bright, yea, be covered visibly in
my skin, and in my own flesh I shall behold my God.⁶⁸³

Tied to future bodily resurrection this poem is a grand and eloquent statement of piety and patronage.⁶⁸⁴ Christ, according to the text of the poem, had for Rosenkrantz “washed away my sins in grace, by faith, in Christ's blood.” The physicality of the resurrection – that it is embodied, not merely spiritual – is one way of justifying works of art: they teach us about the glorious time to come, when we are embodied but no longer enslaved by mortal flesh. After death, Jørgen will sleep peacefully but at Judgement Day his physical fleshy body will rise and he will encounter not simply a vision of God but God himself.

Jørgen's desire was to reunite all of the generations of his family—pre- and post-Reformation—so that one day they could rise and be judged as one. Consolidation of previous members of the Rosenkrantz family in one place meant that they would all be together when Judgement came. But this was not solely about the reconciliation of no-

⁶⁸³ Jensen, *Friendship and Poetry*, 100.

⁶⁸⁴ Jensen states that: “the deceased's eagerness to see Christ with his own eyes is truly humanist: with the distribution of reliable Bibles in print, it had become possible to learn God's words by personal experience”. See: Jensen, *Friendship and Poetry*, 102.

longer living Catholics and Lutherans. Such reconciliation could be performed by the living, through their contact with certain objects within the church including the alabaster altarpiece but also the baptismal font. As with many other Danish churches the medieval font at Hornslet was preserved and apart from the architecture is the oldest remaining object.⁶⁸⁵ Rather than a new font be made, it served as a constant reminder that old Catholic things could become good Lutheran things, not by discarding them, but through their continued use.⁶⁸⁶ Ceremonies taking place within the church included the induction of future generations of Rosenkrantz into a good Lutheran life, beginning at the medieval font and ending in burial inside the church. The font, like the medieval altarpiece, provided continuity through its antiquity.⁶⁸⁷ It is surely no accident that the objects associated with these sacraments are medieval, since baptism and the Eucharist were the only two rites continued from the Catholic into the Lutheran church.⁶⁸⁸ However, simply reusing or reburying things was not enough; some realignment of the overall message was needed, and a number of memorials in the church attest to this. Not only, for example, did Rosenkrantz have the bodies of his father and grandfather moved to Hornslet and reburied there. He also commissioned new monuments to commemorate them, reinforcing and broadcasting their bodies'

⁶⁸⁵ Thøfner, "Framing the Sacred", 110-118.

⁶⁸⁶ Thøfner, "Framing the Sacred", 110-118. Richard Brilliant "Authenticity and Alienation" in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*, eds., Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney (London: Routledge, 2016), 167-177. See also: Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 122-140.

⁶⁸⁷ Richard Brilliant "Authenticity and Alienation" in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*, eds., Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney (London: Routledge, 2016), 167-177. See also: Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 122-140.

⁶⁸⁸ Margit Thøfner, "Imported Patterns and Homegrown Virtues: Hendrick Goltzius's Exemplar Virtutum Prints and the Altarpieces of St Nicholas in Kolding and St Mary in Flensburg", in *Reframing the Danish Renaissance: problems and prospects in a European perspective*, eds. Michael Andersen, Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen and Hugo Johannsen (Copenhagen: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2011), 119.

presence in the church. This monument to Erik and Otto Holger Rosenkrantz was installed immediately adjacent to the composite alabaster altarpiece [fig.5.37].

Hornslet church is an index of Jørgen Rosenkrantz's desire to address his family's past, and to overcome the generational cleavage created by the Reformation. By exploring his reuse of a group of English alabaster sculptures in the context of his overall patronage of Hornslet church, we can discover a complex and overarching project where objects and people from the past are reconciled in the present through being reused or reburied. This is unsurprising given that Rosenkrantz was a humanist and scholar. In his selection of a group of much older alabaster sculptures for the altarpiece we can see Rosenkrantz thinking about the past in a material way. It shows that English alabasters, far from being seen as isolated or unimportant, were central to and played a key role in the structure of devotional life and memorialisation in Hornslet church.

Reflection

A famous and much reproduced image from Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* shows the Catholic Church personified, carrying away devices - "trinkets" - for the Mass, all the while in the background holy images are being piled up and burned [fig.1.34]. This image, or any number like it, depict a Calvinist, Protestant culture where destruction was part of a reforming identity; a modern church literally breaking with the past. That the Church could be cleansed by acts of destruction was frequently depicted in prints and sometimes in the case of portrait prints could be directly linked to the individual.⁶⁸⁹ The altarpiece at Hornslet is antithetical to this premise, it addresses the past in its facture. Lutheranism defined itself by not being iconoclastic. Reuse gave the English alabasters and the wooden Crucifixion scene a second chance, as did the reburial of

⁶⁸⁹ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion, 2003), 90.

Erik, Otto and the many other generations of Rosenkrantzes brought to the church. Hornslet was, for Jørgen Rosenkrantz, a place where history needed to be resolved through a careful interweaving of past and present. He could have easily commissioned a new Netherlandish altarpiece for the high altar of Hornslet. That he did not and instead went to some lengths to combine and restore older, medieval works of art speaks to the complexity of his project. For a pious Lutheran and humanist like Rosenkrantz this would have been both a serious spiritual undertaking and a playful intellectual exercise.⁶⁹⁰ The ruptures of the past could be reconciled through the combination of old with new, unified in the altarpiece by the inclusion of contemporary sculptures. It was not the *Englishness* of the medieval alabasters which was desired, for perhaps their place of origin had been lost from memory. It was their material otherness, their difference from what else was available, and their greater antiquity, that made them suitable for Rosenkrantz's purposes. In the final section of this chapter I explore a similar reframing of English alabasters in Afferden, Holland, except in this case, the context is Roman Catholic.

Part Three: The Afferden Altarpiece: Reframing Alabaster in a Catholic Context

How the group of English alabasters now located in the Roman Catholic church of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Afferden originally came to Holland is unknown [fig. 5.38].⁶⁹¹ Like almost all other English alabaster altarpieces on the Continent there are no

⁶⁹⁰ On the early establishment of Humanism in Copenhagen see: Ole Peter Grell, *The Scandinavian Reformation: from Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 16-18. Ole Peter Grell, "Caspar Bartholin and the education of the pious physician", in *Medicine and the Reformation* eds. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (London: Routledge, 1993), 78-100. Ole Klindt-Jensen, "Archaeology and Ethnography in Denmark: Early Studies", in *Towards a History of Archaeology*, ed., Glynn Daniel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

⁶⁹¹ E. Van Nispen tot Sevenaer, "Het Relief in Albast uit de Kerk te Roozendaal en het Retabel in Albast te Afferden", *Het Gildeboek XVIII*, no.4, December 1935, 122-3.

documents to chart its provenance. However, as I will argue, the Afferden altarpiece was reframed at least twice and these instances of reuse help trace an object biography for the group. Still, their history from the mid-sixteenth-century onwards is extremely chequered and it is by some luck that they are still extant at all. Afferden was located at what we might consider to be a Catholic frontier, lodged at the border of Catholic Limburg and Protestant Holland. As such it was at the epicentre, rather than the fringes, of the Eighty Years War which was marked by extreme iconoclasm. Centuries later, in 1944, the medieval incarnation of SS Cosmas and Damian was partly destroyed but the altarpiece survived and is now housed in a church rebuilt after 1957 on the same site as the original building. Fortunately a number of photographs of the interior of the church were taken before it was damaged and show the altarpiece in situ [fig.5.39]. Currently the alabasters are at the high altar of the church.

Description:

In its present arrangement the altarpiece contains seven late fifteenth-century English panels. All were originally part of the same altarpiece ensemble but are now reordered and arranged in three layers. The bottom layer contains: [1] the Betrayal, [2] Flagellation, [3] and Christ nailed to the Cross. The second: [4] the Deposition, [5] Entombment, [6] and Resurrection. The third contains only [7] the Crucifixion. All of the original English alabaster canopies survive as do thirteen subsidiary smaller English alabaster figures also with their canopies; they are a panoply of male and female saints [figs 5.40, 5.41, 5.42, 5.43, 5.44, 5.45, 5.46, 5.47]. Three additional figures - not English nor medieval - were probably carved in Mechelen in the mid-sixteenth century to supplement those missing or to fill empty spaces as part of the reorganisation of the alabasters in a new frame. A pair of alabaster herms either side of the Crucifixion - also not made in England - were likely carved at the same time and by the same workshop

as the additional smaller figures. At the very top of the entire ensemble is an alabaster panel of Christ between two angels. The angel to his right holds him by the arm and crowns him, the other angel presents him with a cross [figs 5.48, 5.49, 5.50]. This was presumably carved by the same sculptor who made the additional smaller figures and the architectural ornament.

Due to their location, it has not yet been possible to measure the alabaster panels, yet they appear larger than most alabasters. It is not just their size that is worth remarking on but the total number of panels too. The altarpiece contains seven alabasters. Most surviving examples contain five and thus the Afferden group can be placed alongside the Capodimonte altarpiece, the Nantes altarpiece, the Compiègne altarpiece, the La Selle altarpiece and the Musée des Augustins altarpiece as amongst the largest surviving ensembles.⁶⁹² Surprisingly, it has never been the focus of a scholarly study despite its extremely interesting combination of medieval and early modern sculpture, and its fascinating story of survival. My intention is to rectify that.

Iconography:

When did the alabasters leave England for Afferden? Perhaps it will be impossible to be sure but certain elements of the iconography reveal a number of clues. The altarpiece contains an image of Christ being Nailed to the Cross which is amongst the rarest images in English alabaster, appearing just twice elsewhere: once in a displaced panel at the V&A and another in an altarpiece at the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse.⁶⁹³ The Augustins altarpiece is large, comprising nine panels, and so, like Afferden, the scene must only have been included when there were an above average number of alabasters. Although rarely present in English alabaster sculpture, the image of Christ

⁶⁹² See Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 161-177.

⁶⁹³ Cheetham, *Medieval Alabasters*, 243; and Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 171.

being nailed to the Cross was relatively popular on the Continent, particularly in German and Netherlandish panel painting. Still, it was not reproduced with the popularity of other Passion scenes such as Christ Carrying the Cross, the Betrayal or the Flagellation. It was rarely included in wooden altarpieces carved in the Netherlands or Germany which were popular throughout the Low Countries. Perhaps it was the iconographic rarity of the scene which might have attracted whomever purchased it? Or perhaps it was originally produced as an altarpiece made for export during the Middle Ages, including a scene which was more popular on the Continent than it was in England. Further, the image of Christ being nailed to the Cross might have resonated with later viewers at a time when persecution of Catholics was taking place in England, the source of the alabaster's manufacture, and elsewhere in Europe. Christ, defiantly accepting his fate might well have served as a model for Roman Catholics in what they perceived to a troubled time across Europe. It is entirely possible that a church in Limburg, such as SS Cosmas and Damian, ordered the altarpiece during the fifteenth century, and specified that it should contain an image of Christ being nailed to the Cross.

None of the iconographical evidence proves conclusively whether or not the altarpiece was originally made for an English or Netherlandish church, and it could simply have already been in the Netherlands, or somewhere else, having been sold to a client on the Continent before the Reformation. The iconographical inclusion of a beadsman in the Entombment scene, although peculiarly English, would surely have resonated with a Continental audience familiar with the rosary [fig.5.44]. Beadsmen were idiosyncratic to England and frequently appear in English alabaster tomb sculpture, and as far as I know only once more in a displaced Entombment panel at the

church of the Holy Trinity, Cherbourg, France.⁶⁹⁴ The contemporary role of beadsmen lay in the act of praying for the soul of the deceased which explains why they were imaged on and around tombs. When present, beadsmen can usually be found at the feet or around the tomb chests of English alabaster funeral monuments, such as those of John de Strelley (d.1501) or Sir Richard Vernon (d.1517).⁶⁹⁵ The inclusion of beadsmen on tombs appears to be a later fifteenth-century tradition and the presence of one in the Afferden Entombment panel implies that the altarpiece was probably made later on in the second half of the century. The style of the figures depicted certainly corroborates this; the fluted bascinets with plate aventails are of a post-1460 date.⁶⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the presence of the beadsman in the Entombment panel is inventive, rare and different to what might have been on offer from a Continental sculptor. Thus, and in a similar way to the rare image of Christ Nailed to the Cross, it might well have caught the eye of the purchaser of the alabaster altarpiece for these very reasons.

These peculiar or rare features in Afferden's English alabasters extend to the later Continental additions, particularly the image of Christ between two angels situated at the apex of the ensemble. Stylistically, the panel appears to be closest to alabasters made in Mechelen around the middle of the sixteenth century but it is without parallel in the wider corpus. The background is made up of small ball-like circular swirls of cloud, characteristic of a number of mid to late sixteenth-century Netherlandish alabasters.⁶⁹⁷ Further, Christ is stocky and muscular with a loincloth caught by the wind which is altogether similar to an alabaster of the Resurrection in the National Museum

⁶⁹⁴ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 186.

⁶⁹⁵ Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation: Commemorating the Dead in the Late-Medieval English Parish* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015), 191-193.

⁶⁹⁶ For instance this is a similar date to the armour of George as depicted in the Borbjerg altarpiece.

⁶⁹⁷ Kriegseisen and Lipinska, *Matter of Light and Flesh*.

of Gdansk, dated to the second half of the sixteenth century.⁶⁹⁸ This is matched by the angels whose billowing draperies flow around their moving bodies. The skill of the carver does not equal that of the best Netherlandish sculptors who worked in alabasters such as Jean Mone, Willem van den Broecke or Cornelis Floris, but showcases enough competence to suggest that this was someone confident in working the stone, who was professionally engaged in producing this type of object with ease. In other words, these were not randomly or poorly selected additions to the English alabasters, but serious works of art commissioned to compliment and add to the already existing panels. Mechelen sculptors produced a wide range of images in alabasters, including Old Testament and New Testament scenes for large altarpieces, single image frames, tombs, epitaphs and portraits.⁶⁹⁹ Like English alabaster altarpieces there was no one single basic format, but many, if not most of the larger multi-panelled Mechelen alabaster altarpieces were topped by an image of Christ's Resurrection.⁷⁰⁰ This scene was already present in the English alabasters, located in the first tier of the ensemble, and rather than resituate it at the top of the altarpiece, a different panel was inserted.

Reframing:

The current wooden frame for the Afferden alabasters was probably made in the first half of the seventeenth century, the date provided by the heraldic shields of the nobleman Dirk Schenk van Nijdeggen (d. 1661) and his wife Anna Margaretha van Nassau-Cortenbach-Grimhuizen (d. 1668).⁷⁰¹ Members of the Schenk family had fought for the Spanish side during the Eighty Years War. Dirk and Anna Margaretha's shields were originally situated on the predella, but after 1944 were moved to the dado level of

⁶⁹⁸ Kriegseisen and Lipinska, *Matter of Light and Flesh*, cat.24, 184-186.

⁶⁹⁹ Kriegseisen and Lipinska, *Matter of Light and Flesh*.

⁷⁰⁰ For an example see: Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 159.

⁷⁰¹ Van Nispen tot Sevenaer, "Het Relief in Albast", 122-23.

the structure. Other elements, however, and the overall arrangement of the sculptures suggest an earlier mid-sixteenth-century reframing which preceded and informed the later reframing.

A first reframing of the panels probably took place around the middle of the sixteenth century when the additional Mechelen alabasters were made to complement the English examples. For instance, the herms either side of the Crucifixion are exactly the same height as the English alabasters, suggesting they were made specifically to suit the panel. Similarly, the three subsidiary figures are exactly the same size as their English counterparts, confirming that at the very least some arrangement of English with Mechelen alabasters took place after the middle of the sixteenth century. Further, as described above, the Mechelen alabaster of Christ between two angels is iconographically rare on the Continent and was thus potentially made to go with the English group which already contained an image of the Resurrection. It is of course possible that a group of sixteenth-century Mechelen alabasters were combined with the English examples at a later date for the altarpiece but the structure suggests otherwise. The arrangement of the panels in a three-tier structure can be paralleled in a recently auctioned Mechelen altarpiece attributed to the circle of Jean Mone and dated c.1530-1540 [fig.5.51].⁷⁰² Further evidence of this form of arrangement for Southern Netherlandish alabaster altarpieces can be seen in situ and include Jean Mone's c.1533 altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments in Halle or his c.1536-1541 passion altarpiece in Brussels.⁷⁰³

The addition of a Mechelen alabaster to a much older group of sculptures was not unique to Afferden, and was not unique to the reuse of English alabasters. In 1580,

⁷⁰² Freemans Auctions, Philadelphia, British and European Furniture and Decorative Arts, Lot 33, 25th May 2017. Aleksandra Lipinska provided the catalogue note.

⁷⁰³ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 60, 63.

due to the building of new ducal monuments in St Martin's church, Stadthagen, the mid-fifteenth-century wooden Netherlandish altarpiece needed to be moved [fig.5.52]. As part of this some structural changes and additions were made to the ensemble. The name of Chancellor Anton von Wietersheim is recorded on the object, he having arranged this work, renovating the object due to its deterioration.⁷⁰⁴ As Lipinska notes, the width of the altarpiece was reduced and two panels were reused on the upper section of the structure, either side of a c.1560-85 Mechelen alabaster altarpiece of the Crucifixion topped by the Ascension.⁷⁰⁵ Strictly speaking this was an act of combination wherein two already existing altarpieces of different dates were incorporated into a single ensemble, yet the point being made is almost exactly the same as that at Afferden. In this case as with the others explored above, remaking was connected to memory, the reordering of liturgical space and the patronage of noble or high ranking civil individuals. In the decades following the Reformation, making images much like breaking images was a means by which individuals and communities could construct new identities or refashion old ones.

Before the documented seventeenth-century reframing of the alabasters at Afferden it is difficult to trace any provenance for the group. The evidence is weak and somewhat conflicted. In the guidebook to the church, Henk van Os suggests that the altarpiece could have originally been brought by English monks who left at the Reformation and came to live in Saint Agatha's monastery outside Cuijk.⁷⁰⁶ There is little specific evidence for this – I have been unable to trace a group of monks who

⁷⁰⁴ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 193-194. Lipinska goes into greater detail regarding this object. The importance of the Stadthagen altarpiece is noted by Ethan Matt Kavalier in his online CAA review of Aleksandra Lipinska's publication: <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2704> (Accessed 27/06/18).

⁷⁰⁵ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 193-194.

⁷⁰⁶ A.G.W., Wijers, *De kerk van Afferden (L.)*, <http://members.home.nl/tonwijers/landgoedbleijenbeek/index22e.html> (accessed 27/06/22018)

settled outside Cuijck - and the movement of large sculptural groups by fleeing religious groups is undocumented. It would have been an immense effort to transport an alabaster altarpiece at a time of exile, yet the altar frontal of the Thornham Parva retable made its way to the Continent. It was made for a Dominican convent, Thetford Priory in Norfolk, and it is not impossible that it was taken by a group of Dominicans who were leaving England. Nevertheless, the suggestion that the sculptures were brought to Holland by fleeing monks is unlikely and it is far more plausible that much like many of the other alabasters which made their way to sites across Continental Europe, they were either brought directly by an individual or sold on through a system of agents.⁷⁰⁷ In Afferden's case there is some evidence to suggest the latter was possible. J.H.A. Mialaret cites a local story which relates that the panels were given to the church by Dirk van der Lippe, known as Hoen van Blijenbeek in 1542.⁷⁰⁸ This date coincides with the mid-sixteenth-century date of the Mechelen alabasters made to accompany the English sculptures and the arrangement as suggested by the comparisons provided. Great care must have been employed in the bringing of the sculptures over from England to Holland as they survive in remarkable condition, suggesting that they were possibly professionally exported rather than a rushed event taking place during the Reformation. This, combined with the making of the smaller figures and the architectural elements, suggest that the current arrangement was created with attention to detail at some point in the mid-sixteenth century, long before the refreshing of the reframing again in the seventeenth.

Discussion:

⁷⁰⁷ Flavigny, *D'Angleterre en Normandie*. 115.

⁷⁰⁸ J. H. A. Mialaret, *De Provincie Limburg: Noord-Limburg Nederlandse monumenten van geschiedenis en kunst* (Arnhem: Gijsbers & Van Loon, 1971), 21. For Hoen van Blijenbeek, see: *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, Book Seven (Amsterdam, 1974), 772-774.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that Hoen van Blijenbeek acquired, reframed and donated the English alabaster panels to Afferden church in 1542. Why would he do so? The Southern Netherlands was home to various centres of alabaster production, Antwerp and Mechelen amongst the most productive. Why then was an older group of foreign alabasters selected when it must have been equally easy, if not easier to commission new panels from one of the workshops or sculptors operating at a closer proximity. Whoever was responsible was able to procure a new panel image and several other additions to the ensemble. Were the English sculptures cheaper to acquire as they were being sold off from England during the Reformation? Perhaps what was wanted at Afferden was size but also something different. Were English alabasters chosen because it was Catholic and Southern Netherlandish sculptors who were mostly working for Protestant clients?⁷⁰⁹ Netherlandish sculptors working in alabaster were sourcing the raw material from England, although as Lipinska has pointed out, obtaining it was sometimes difficult.⁷¹⁰ Considering the extraordinarily high number of surviving English alabaster sculptures still extant in churches in Northern France, very few can be located in the Netherlands.⁷¹¹ The altarpiece at Afferden is noteworthy, first as it is the only group with a provenance to a church and second due to its size.

Various questions can be asked about these sculptures and their reframing but there are too few answers. Perhaps the objects were like relics and due to the persecution of Catholics in England they served as a reminder of that struggle. Other objects, such as the Anglo-Saxon reliquary of the True Cross in Brussels, indicate that objects were being rescued from iconoclasm abroad. Perhaps, and in my opinion the more likely situation, the alabasters were already in the church or nearby and they were

⁷⁰⁹ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 6.

⁷¹⁰ Lipinska, *Moving Sculptures*, 22.

⁷¹¹ Cheetham, *Alabaster Images*, 203.

reframed at a later date in a similar situation to the alabasters at Borbjerg, Vejrum or Hornslet. Still, the connection between the name of Hoen van Blijenbeek, or indeed the later reframing by van Nijdeggen, the acquisition and redisplay of medieval English alabaster in Afferden, all speaks to a desire to connect high status patrons to the refashioning of liturgical space and the reuse of medieval objects. This became all the more pertinent in the early seventeenth century when locations such as Afferden were situated at a frontier between Catholicism and Protestantism. A reminder of the status of alabaster and its visual power comes to us from nearby 's-Hertogenbosch. In 1625, after the Twelve Years Truce, an enormous choir screen was commissioned and installed in the Catholic cathedral of St John.⁷¹² It is a visual exercise in reinforcing orthodoxy and carried with it the message that religious sculpture, prominently placed, played a central role in shaping and communicating post-Reformation Catholic identity. Perhaps when the Afferden altarpiece was reframed in the seventeenth century by Dirk Schenk van Nijdeggen and Anna Margaretha van Nassau-Cortenbach-Grimhuizen, it was with a similar goal in mind that the sculptures were represented to the faithful.

Conclusion:

These images are placed to adorn and decorate and hold no other power or virtue⁷¹³

By returning to this line of text from the Vejrum altarpiece we journey back to a number of issues brought up in Chapter One of this thesis, especially regarding the changing status and significance of English alabaster after the Reformation. In England, whatever power the alabasters had was dealt with through a legally sanctioned process of destruction. In Lutheran Denmark the situation could not have been more different. This chapter has shown that English alabasters were selected and reused in specific

⁷¹² The screen was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in 1866. Accession number: 1046:1-1871

⁷¹³ See footnote 586.

contexts, always motivated by a desire to engage with the visual and material properties of the object. As the Vejrum inscription states, this was not without problems.

Beautifully carved and particularly lively sculptures like those at Vejrum needed to come with warnings and guidelines for viewing.

My point here has not been to suggest that there is a sustained argument for collective reframing of alabasters. There are, however, similarities in all of the cases I have explored. The method here has been to focus on the specific localised context of reuse. For Hornslet there was no need to supply a warning line with the alabaster altarpiece. Its function there was intertwined with wider visually didactic objects and performative rituals. There could be no doubt about its function. All of these examples run counter to prevailing ideas about Protestant fear of imagery and especially an uneasiness surrounding sculpture which still persists. For instance, Jürgensen states in his 2018 publication: “It took a long time for the Protestants to bring back sculpture as an acceptable format.”⁷¹⁴ This kind of thinking refuses to engage with the many hundreds of reused medieval altarpieces in Danish churches, or the commissioning of new sculptures from artists like Cornelis Floris. Reused medieval alabasters at Borbjerg, Vejrum and Hornslet show that Danish patrons were deeply engaged with sculpture both past and present, and were driven in their desire to employ it, where possible, in the construction of good Lutheran devotional practices.

⁷¹⁴ Jürgensen, *Ritual and Art*, 354.

Conclusion

From the very beginnings of its use in the fourteenth century, English sculptors working in alabaster were aware of and connected to current artistic developments across Continental Europe. Far from being isolated, these sculptors were part of and receptive to the movement of objects Europe-wide. This is unsurprising as the corpus is characterised by its geographic distribution which is Pan-European. This thesis has approached a large, and at times daunting, corpus of sculpture through focused case studies which have led to larger and more pertinent questions. I have explored English alabasters and their connections in relationship to a range of material types and media across Europe, including Continental panel paintings, Continental sculptures in marble and alabaster, wooden altarpieces from the Low Countries, and Netherlandish or German prints. If explored further more connections like this would surely be found, and I hope to as I develop my research in the coming years. Yet, the argument has not been one of passive English reception to Continental developments. English sculptors were active agents in the flow of ideas and works of art across the Channel, down the Iberian Peninsula and throughout the Baltic Sea coasts. By reassessing English alabasters in context, this thesis has shown that they were not produced in provincial isolation, but were connected to and part of a dynamic European nexus of art production and trade.

In the introduction I outlined four research areas interwoven throughout the thesis. These were: [1] destruction, survival and reuse, [2] re-evaluating the importance of patrons and sculptors, [3] reconstructing altarpieces, [4] the place of alabaster within the wider European trade of images. By reviewing the evidence for iconoclasm, concealment and rediscovery in chapter one, a more developed and nuanced understanding of the changing status of English alabaster carving has been put forward.

Just as there is no monolithic history of the Reformation, there is no one single history for the treatment of alabasters. Regional and local histories are especially important and more work on the recusant protection of English alabasters would, I am sure, prove fruitful. A number of sculptures explored in this thesis were directly affected by the Reformation including altarpieces in England at Kettlebaston and Lydiate, and those from further afield at Borbjerg, Vejrum and Afferden. Broken alabasters discovered in English churches have often been treated as groups of mixed fragments rather than studied for their constituent parts and likely original contexts. Reconstructing the altarpieces from Kettlebaston and Lydiate has yielded important results. I paid close attention to their iconography, shapes, sizes and polychromy. My suggestion that the Kettlebaston altarpiece is amongst the earliest surviving multi-panelled English altarpiece with scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary has implications. It is an important document for historians, literature specialists and art historians interested in the visual manifestations of Marian devotion in fourteenth-century England, but it also permits an insight into the development of the narrative altarpiece more widely. The connections stemming from the Kettlebaston altarpiece have been shown to be European in scope, and part of a particularly dynamic period for English artistic patronage.

The same is true of the Lydiate altarpiece which is singular in its format, constructed as a series of narrative panels surrounding a tall standing figure. Its sculptor was responsible for a group of important alabasters - their connections as yet unrecognised - which would benefit from further investigation. In chapter four I revealed how this sculptor had access to early Continental prints, which in turn opened up a whole new avenue for thinking through the production of English alabasters, an aspect of their history which until now has been little explored. Revisiting the survival of

the alabaster panel in Lydiate and the Society of Antiquaries led to a reconstruction of its original format and ultimately a reconsideration of its patronage. Although questions remain over the original patron of the Kettlebaston altarpiece, for Lydiate it is likely to have been Laurence and Catherine Ireland who were wealthy landowners in Lancashire. Revealing these unrecognised histories of patronage allows us to see the different kinds of networks at play between alabaster sculptors and who they were working for in England and abroad.

Patronage is an important and understudied aspect of English medieval alabaster carving. This thesis has explored and uncovered the role of patrons in three separate case studies: Pedro de Ayala and the alabaster St George at Quejana, Laurence and Catherine Ireland and the St Catherine altarpiece at Lydiate, and Jørgen Rosenkrantz in the recycled Passion altarpiece at Hornslet church. Previous scholars have lingered over a single documented patronal link between John Gудyear and an alabaster altarpiece he donated to Santiago de Compostela in 1456. I have shown that beyond this instance there are a number of further avenues for exploration. For the St George alabaster from Quejana a whole network can be described, situating Pedro López de Ayala in direct contact with numerous members of the entourage of John of Gaunt. Perhaps Pedro received the alabaster as a gift or perhaps he commissioned it himself. Without documentation we can never be sure. Yet, its unique and special character has been worth emphasising and by examining the sculpture in context the results have illuminating. Further, by exploring the patronage of the Irelands at Lydiate, or Jørgen Rosenkrantz's at Hornslet, we can see the personal connections at play between artists, objects and patrons. Rosenkrantz's selection of English alabasters for the Hornslet altarpiece shows how, long after their production stopped in England, they continued to be valued and have special importance for those connected to them.

Potential areas for future investigation:

The competitive relationship between makers of English alabaster altarpieces and altarpieces produced in the Low Countries needs expanding upon. I have touched on this issue several times in this thesis, particularly in Chapters Four and Five, but it merits closer attention and deeper analysis. It could form an independent study in its own right. England and the Low Countries were two of the largest producers of altarpieces in the later Middle Ages, yet their histories have remained separate from one another. There is a great deal of crossover in terms of format, structure, iconography and locations of trade between workshops based in both regions. It is surprising that this kind of study has not yet been attempted. To do so would properly bring English alabaster sculpture into dialogue with European works of art. Part of the problem pertains to the state of knowledge and it is my hope that this thesis and future publications arising from it will encourage a more connected approach to the study of altarpiece production and trade on both sides of the Channel.

There is a serious lack of available images and information for surviving English alabasters, which has meant that even the most extraordinary sculptures remain little known. One way to rectify this situation would be to stage an exhibition bringing together many of the most important pieces from across Europe and the United States. Similar material, such as *Opus Anglicanum*, has been well treated in exhibitions; English alabaster on the other hand has yet to be the focus of a single major exhibition in the United Kingdom. An online catalogue of all extant alabaster sculptures like the *Gothic Ivories Project* would enhance the study of English medieval alabasters. It would allow accurate distribution maps to be drawn, and would provide the basis for panels which have become separated to be re-joined. Studying the distribution of English alabasters is important as it is by no means accidental. In chapter five I emphasised the

close relationship between Anglo-Scandinavian trade and the dating of English alabasters in the region. Further research could be conducted into almost any area where English alabasters are extant. For France, the distribution of English alabasters along the Western coast almost exactly matches the areas which were held by England until the second half of the fifteenth century. To what extent this created a network for trade in English alabaster has yet to be fully explored. Similar avenues could be investigated. For instance, political ties between England and the Duchy of Aquitaine or England and Portugal surely stimulated trade which in turn resulted in the movement of works of art between the regions. English alabaster sculpture should be seen within this geo-political framework and not apart from it, as has mostly been the case hitherto.

One major area for future research is the relationship between extant alabaster tombs, panels and free-standing sculptures. It has been beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate links between tombs and other sculptures in alabaster. Traditionally these areas have been studied separately as they historically pertained to different scholarly interest groups. Yet there is plenty of visual evidence to confirm that the same sculptors who produced tombs also made altarpieces or free-standing sculptures. For instance, Sir Richard Dalton's (d.1442) alabaster effigy at Apethorpe, Northamptonshire, contains an Annunciation above his head [fig.6.1]. Similarly, an alabaster of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin is situated behind the alabaster effigy of Richard Herbert of Ewyas (d.1510) at Abergavenny Priory [figs 6.2 and 6.3]. On one hand, tombs like these can be easier to date and thus provide an established chronological framework from which to work in dating alabaster panels for altarpieces. However, the value of including them goes beyond empirical issues such as dating and attribution. Further investigation could help to expand the parameters of the networks involving sculptors and their patrons. For instance, the same workshop responsible for the alabaster Assumption at

Abergavenny might have been connected to another alabaster of the same iconography which is now in the church of La Trait, Normandy [fig.6.4].

Other areas to develop include further collaborative research with scientists, especially focused on polychromy and gilding techniques used on English alabaster. It is here that tombs and other sculptures might be united, especially in thinking through the different ways in which alabaster was carved and painted. Privileged access to the certain sculptures at the British Museum meant that this could be done for the Kettlebaston altarpiece and the Virgin and Child. The results of the analysis allowed for full polychromatic reconstruction of the original treatment which in turn helped to provide context for understanding how these pieces might have looked when they were first produced. Another area where scientific analysis might play a part is in the analysis of isotopes. As yet there has been no way of knowing the exact source of the alabaster quarries for surviving pieces. Beyond these more work could be done on the reuse of English alabasters in England and abroad, including their longer life cycles and collecting history.

It has been the central aim of this thesis to reassess English alabaster sculpture by exploring it in its proper European context. A further goal has been to challenge historical ambivalence about English alabasters, especially the prevailing view that they were standardised products made by unthinking sculptors and purchased by thoughtless patrons. In the course of my research there is much I have had to leave out and there are of course a number of possible future directions for study. However, I hope that this research has shown that at least in some cases English alabasters were dynamic objects crafted by creative and imaginative artists reacting to and developing a wider trans-European network of art making. To ignore these aspects of their production is to relegate the alabasters and the sculptors who made them to the footnotes of the history

of art. The evidence presented here suggests that does them, and our understanding of them, a major disservice.

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- 2.48. *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c.1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Church of Cernache, Portugal. Image credit: image in the public domain.
- 2.49. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St John the Baptist, c.1400-1420. Alabaster panels in a wooden frame, 60cm x 180cm. Marienkirche, Gdańsk, Poland. Image credit: Marienkirche, Gdańsk.
- 2.50. *The Crucifixion*, late fourteenth century. Alabaster, 43cm x 23. Accession number: A.87-1946. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 2.51. *The Resurrection of Christ*, c.1370. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, some nineteenth-century paint, 42cm x 29cm. Accession number: 1905,0522.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 2.52. *The Betrayal of Christ*, c.1370. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, measurements unknown as panel was stolen. Church of St Peter and St Paul, Hawkley, Hampshire. Image from Cheetham, 2003.
- 2.53. Reconstruction of an imagined altarpiece containing alabaster panels from the V&A, BM and Hawkley church.

- 2.54. Altarpiece with scenes of the Joys of the Virgin, c.1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, wooden frame, 70.5cm x 177.5cm. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.
- 2.55. Altarpiece with scenes from the Passion of Christ, c.1400. 43cm x 140cm, without frame. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 2.56. Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee, c.1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 57cm x 48. Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France.
- 2.57. The Last Supper, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 39.8 cm, x 37.2 cm. Accession number: A.48-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 2.58. The Crucifixion, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45.3 cm, x 37.3 cm. Accession number: A.50-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 2.59. The Descent from the Cross, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 54.6 cm x 37.9 cm. Accession number: A.49-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 2.60. The Three Maries at the Sepulchre, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 37.7 cm x 37.5 cm. Accession number: A.51-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 2.61. The Doubting of Thomas, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 41 cm x 36.8 cm. Accession number: A.52-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

2.62. Detail from panel of the Last Supper, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 39.8 cm, x 37.2 cm. Accession number: A.48-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

2.63. Detail of Christ's side wound from the Crucifixion panel, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45.3 cm, x 37.3 cm. Accession number: A.50-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

2.64. The Flagellation of Christ, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 59.5cm x 38cm. Church of Saint Martin, Bailly-en-Riviere, Normandy, France.

2.65. The Annunciation with a Lily Crucifixion in the Lap of the Trinity, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding; painted wooden frame, 54 cm x 31.5 cm. Accession number: A.193-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.

2.66. The Crucifixion, c.1400. Alabaster, 42cm x 26cm. Musée départemental des antiquités, Rouen.

2.67. Descent from Cross, c.1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 44.2 cm x 27.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.

Chapter Three: English Alabaster Abroad I. Imitation or Invention? the British Museum Virgin and Child and St George from Quejana

3.1. Virgin and Child, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 75cm x 25cm. Accession number: 2016,8041.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.

- 3.2. Alternative View of Virgin and Child, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 75cm x 25cm. Accession number: 2016,8041.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 3.3. Alternative view of Virgin and Child, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 75cm x 25cm. Accession number: 2016,8041.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 3.4. BM Virgin and Child on display with another alabaster Virgin and Child, from: W.H.J. Weale, *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica: Choix d'objets d'art religieux du moyen-âge et de la renaissance exposés à Malines en Septembre 1864* (Brussels, 1866), cat.10.
- 3.5. Interior of the Palais Figdor with Virgin and Child on display, from: Otto Von Falke: *Die Sammlung Dr. Albert Figdor* (Vienna and Berlin, 1930), IV, cat.142, p.LXXVII.
- 3.6. Workshop of Nino Pisano, Virgin and Child, c.1345-47. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 25cm x 8cm. Accession number: inv.34. Skulpturensammlung, Bode Museum, Berlin.
- 3.7. Angel Gabriel from an Annunciation group, c.1350. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 26cm. Accession number: Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1954.387. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland. Image credit: Cleveland Museum of Art.
- 3.8. Virgin Mary from an Annunciation group, c.1350. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 69cm x 20cm. Accession number RF1661. The Louvre, Paris. Image credit: The Louvre.
- 3.9. St Paul, c.1380. Alabaster, 115cm x 25cm. Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

- 3.10. St Peter, c.1380. Alabaster, 113cm x 25cm. Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 3.11. Virgin and Child, c.1370-80. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 81cm x 22cm, discovered in St Peter's church Flawford. Nottingham Castle Museum. Image credit: Nottingham Castle Museum.
- 3.12. Virgin and Child, c.1370-80. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 97 cm x 34.5 cm. Accession number: A.140-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A Museum.
- 3.13. Reverse of BM Virgin and Child, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 75cm x 25cm. Accession number: 2016,8041.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 3.14. Detail of the BM Virgin and Child, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 75cm x 25cm. Accession number: 2016,8041.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 3.15. Retable of Santa Maria la Blanca, c.1343. Alabaster. *Monasterio de San Juan de las Abadesas, Catalonia, Spain. Image credit: image in the public domain.*
- 3.16. *Faustus legend from Book of Hours, England: c.1370. MS Thott 547, f.6v. National Library of Denmark and Copenhagen University Library, Copenhagen, Denmark. Image credit: National Library of Denmark and Copenhagen.*
- 3.17. *St Catherine, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 96cm x 25cm. Paderborn Cathedral, Germany.*
- 3.18. *André Beauneveu, St Catherine, c.1380. Alabaster, 186cm x 56cm. Church of Our Lady, Kortrijk. Image credit: RMN-Grand Palais, Daniel Arnaudet and Christian Jean.*

3.19. Jean Pepin de Huy, *Virgin and Child*, c.1329. Marble, 65cm x 21cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Arras, France. Image credit: image in the public domain.

3.20. *Virgin and Child*, c.1340. Marble with polychromy and gilding, 77.2 x 23.8 x 13.5 cm. Accession number: 17.190.721. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image credit: Metropolitan Museum.

3.21. *Reconstruction of polychromy and gilding for BM Virgin and Child*, c.1350-75. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 75cm x 25cm. Accession number: 2016,8041.1. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.

3.22. *St George and the Dragon*, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm. Accession number: 1953.2.2. National Gallery of Art, DC. Image credit: National Gallery of Art.

3.23. *Alternative angle of St George and the Dragon*, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm. Accession number: 1953.2.2. National Gallery of Art, DC.

3.24. *Alternative angle of St George and the Dragon*, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm. Accession number: 1953.2.2. National Gallery of Art, DC.

3.25. *Detail of 'the maid' restraining the dragon. St George and the Dragon*, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm. Accession number: 1953.2.2. National Gallery of Art, DC.

3.26. *Detail of the broken strut. St George and the Dragon*, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm. Accession number: 1953.2.2. National Gallery of Art, DC.

- 3.27. *Sir* Thomas de Beauchamp, 11th Earl of Warwick, c.1360-70. Alabaster effigies at St Mary's church, Warwick.
- 3.28. Bronze effigy of the Black Prince, c.1378. Canterbury Cathedral.
- 3.29. Detail of gilding techniques. *St George and the Dragon*, c.1380-1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 81.5 x 60.5 x 20.5 cm. Accession number: 1953.2.2. National Gallery of Art, DC.
- 3.30. Detail of polychromy and gilding. Betrayal of Christ, c.1400. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 41.3 x 26.1 cm. Accession number: inv.14. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow.
- 3.31. Interior view of the chapel of the Virgin Mary, Quejana monastery, Ayala, Spain.
- 3.32. Retable of the Life of Christ and the Virgin Made for Pedro López de Ayala, 1396. Tempera and gold on panel, 232.1 × 649 cm. Accession number: 1928.817. Chicago Institute of Art, Chicago. Image credit: Chicago Institute of Art.
- 3.33. St George, c.1400. Limestone, 100cm x. 25cm. St Albans cathedral, Hertfordshire.
- 3.34. St George, c.1400. Limestone, 31cm x 17cm. Accession number: 1853,0404.1. British Museum, London.
- 3.35. St George and the Dragon, c.1373. Bronze, 196cm x 177cm. Prague Castle Collections. Image credit: Jan Gloc.
- 3.36. Saint George and the Dragon, c.1370. Wood, gesso, polychromy, gildings, 58.4 x 26 x 16.1 cm. Accession number: 29.158.770. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

3.37. *The Talbot Shrewsbury book, c. 1444-1445. Royal 15 E VI, f. 439. British Library, London.*

3.38. *St George and the Dragon, c.1400. Wood, polychromy and gilding, 40 cm x 25cm. Accession number: Pl.O.3199. Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg.*

3.39. *Reverse image: St George and the Dragon, c.1400. Wood, polychromy and gilding, 40 cm x 25cm. Accession number: Pl.O.3199. Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg.*

Chapter Four. The St Catherine Altarpiece from Lydiate Reunited: Patronage, Attribution and Environment.

4.1. St Catherine and the Burning of the Philosophers, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire.

4.2. St Catherine and the Breaking of the Wheel, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire.

4.3. St Catherine in Prison, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Society of Antiquaries, London.

4.4. St Catherine in Prayer, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire.

4.5. The Beheading of St Catherine, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Society of Antiquaries, London.

4.6. The Burial of St Catherine by Angels at Sinai, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire.

- 4.7. Fragment of the head of St Catherine from a standing figure, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 15cm x 10cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire. Image credit: Thomas Wood.
- 4.8. Full image of standing St Catherine, originally 74cm x 25cm, from Philip Nelson, "Ancient Alabasters at Lydiate" in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol.LXVII (1915), 20-26.
- 4.9. Detail of a tormentor of St Catherine, from: Beheading of St Catherine, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Society of Antiquaries, London.
- 4.10. Detail of the tooled ground beneath Catherine's feet: St Catherine in Prayer, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire.
- 4.11. Reverse of the Beheading panel, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 27cm. Society of Antiquaries, London.
- 4.12. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St Catherine, c.1450-60. Alabaster set into a wooden frame with polychromy and gilding. Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice. Image credit: Zuleika Murat.
- 4.13. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St Catherine, c.1450-60. Alabaster set into a wooden frame with polychromy and gilding. Vejrum church, Jutland, Denmark.
- 4.14. Proposed reconstruction of the Lydiate altarpiece, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire, and Society of Antiquaries, London. Image credit: British Museum.

- 4.15. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St Margaret, c.1520. Oak, polychromy and gilding, 242 cm x 213cm. Accession number: 5894-1859. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A Museum.
- 4.16. Alternative view of the head of St Catherine. c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 15cm x 10cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire. Image credit: Thomas Wood.
- 4.17. Lydiate Hall, early twentieth-century photo from Edward E Newton, *Lydiate: Past and Present*. Lydiate: Lydiate Parish Council, 1977.
- 4.18. Lydiate Chapel, early twentieth-century postcard from Edward E Newton, *Lydiate: Past and Present*. Lydiate: Lydiate Parish Council, 1977.
- 4.19. St Catherine's Chapel, c.1470. Lydiate, Lancashire.
- 4.20. St Catherine's Chapel, c.1470. Lydiate, Lancashire.
- 4.21. Interior of St Catherine's Chapel, c.1470. Lydiate, Lancashire.
- 4.22. St Peter, c.1480. Alabaster, 53.5cm x 18cm. Private Collection, London.
- 4.23. The Annunciation, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 41cm x 27.2cm. Musée de Picardie, Amiens, France.
- 4.24. The Harrowing of Hell, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 42cm x 28cm. The Louvre, Paris. Image credit: The Louvre.
- 4.25. The Circumcision of Christ, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 44 x 23. Stonyhurst College, Lancashire.
- 4.26. The Crucifixion, c.1480. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 44 x 23. Stonyhurst College, Lancashire.

- 4.27. The Trinity, c.1480. Alabaster, 88cm x 33.5cm x 17cm. Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Bristol.
- 4.28. St Christopher, c.1480. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 94 x 30. Accession number: A.18-1921. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 4.29. Altarpiece with scenes from the Life of the Virgin, c.1480. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Abbey church of St Riquier, Abbeville, France.
- 4.30. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Christ, c.1470-80. Wood with polychromy and gilding. *Musée des Antiquités*, Rouen. Image from Image from D'Hainault-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacré*, 74.
- 4.31. Master of the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand after Israhel van Meckenem, the Circumcision of Christ, c.1460-1500. Engraving, 6.8cm x 4.8cm. Accession number: 1850,0223.10. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 4.32. Master of the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand, the Circumcision of Christ, c.1460-1500. Engraving, 6.8cm x 4.8cm. Accession number: 1846,0709.38. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 4.33. Christ before Herod, c.1500-20. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 40cm x 34.2cm. Accession number: A.101-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 4.34. Christ before Pilate, Delbecq-Shriber passion, c.1460-90. Woodblock print, 9cm x 7cm. Old Master Print, Izegem, Belgium.
- 4.35. Martin Schongauer, c.1480-1500. Engraving, 16cm x 11cm. Accession number: 1845,0809.394. British Museum, London.

- 4.36. Christ Before Pilate, c.1500-20. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 48cm x 28cm. Musée départemental des antiquités, Rouen.
- 4.37. Christ before Pilate from the Biblia Pauperum, c.1460-70. Woodblock print, 16cm x 19cm. Accession number: 1845,0809.24. British Museum, London
- 4.38. Master of the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand after Israhel van Meckenem, Three Maries at the Sepulchre, c.1460-1500. Engraving, 6.9cm x 4.9cm. Accession number: 1850,0223.41. British Museum, London.
- 4.39. Three Maries at the Sepulchre, c.1480-1510. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding, 52.8cm x 30.4cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 4.40. Three Maries at the Sepulchre from the Delbecq-Shriber passion, c.1460-90. Woodblock print, 9cm x 7cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image credit: Rijksmuseum.
- 4.41 Three Maries from the Biblia Pauperum, c.1460-70. Woodblock print, 16cm x 19cm. Accession number: 1845,0809.31. British Museum, London.
- 4.42. The Entombment of Christ, c.1480-1510. alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 45cm x 25cm. The Château de Dieppe, Normandy.
- 4.43. The Entombment of Christ from the Delbecq-Shriber passion, c.1460-90. Woodblock print, 9cm x 7cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image credit: Rijksmuseum.
- 4.44. The Deposition of Christ, c.1480-1510. Alabaster, 53cm x 29.4cm. Accession number: A.68-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 4.45. The Descent from the Cross from the Delbecq-Shriber passion, c.1460-90. Woodblock print, 9cm x 7cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image credit: Rijksmuseum.

- 4.46. Noli me Tangere, c.1480-1510. Alabaster, 54cm x 29cm. Accession number: A.67:1-1946. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Image credit: V&A museum.
- 4.47. Noli me Tangere from the Delbecq-Shriber passion, c.1460-90. Woodblock print, 9cm x 7cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image credit: Rijksmuseum.
- 4.48. Christ before Caiaphas, c.1480-1510. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 40cm x 30cm. Private Collection, London.
- 4.49. Master of the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand, Christ before Caiaphas, c.1460-1500. Engraving, 6.8cm x 4.8cm. Accession number: 1850,0223.24. British Museum, London. Image credit: British Museum.
- 4.50. The Lamentation over the Dead Christ, c.1500-1520. Alabaster, 33cm x 19cm, inv.43. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow.
- 4.51. Lamentation over the Dead Christ from an altarpiece with scenes of the Passion of Christ, c.1515-1520. Wood with polychromy and gilding. Villberga, Sweden. Image from D'Hainault-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacré*, 105.
- 4.52. Detail of the Crucifixion panel from: Altarpiece with scenes from the Life of the Virgin, c.1480. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Abbey church of St Riquier, Abbeville, France San Riquier.
- 4.53. The Crucifixion from an altarpiece with scenes of the Passion of Christ, c.1470-80. Wood with polychromy and gilding. Brussels, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire. Image from D'Hainault-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacré*, 98.
- 4.54. The Crucifixion from an altarpiece with scenes from the passion of Christ, c.1450-70. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Capodimonte Museum, Naples.

4.55. The Crucifixion from an altarpiece with scenes from the Passion of Christ, c.1466. Wood with polychromy and gilding. Church of Saint-Martin, Ambierle, France. Image from D'Hainault-Zveny, *Miroirs du Sacré*, 39.

4.56. Engraving of the Trinity alabaster from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Jan 1788, vol. I, 9.

4.57. The Trinity, c.1450. Stone, 68cm x 41cm. Leuven, St Peter's Church. Image from: Bart Fransen, *Rogier van der Weyden and Stone Sculpture in Brussels* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2013), 120.

4.58. The Trinity, c.1430-50. Oak with polychromy, 62.4cm x 31cm. Accession number: inv.AC220. Lille, Musée diocésain d'art Sacré. Image from: John W. Steyaert ed., *Late Gothic Sculpture: The Burgundian Netherlands* (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1994), 102-103.

4.59. Detail of Lydiate chapel on Lord Burghley's Map of Lancashire, c.1590. British Library, London.

4.60. St Cuthbert, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 76.2cm x 33cm. Church of Our Lady of Lydiate, Lancashire.

4.61. Recusant liturgical items given to Our Lady of Lydiate after Roman Catholic emancipation.

4.62. Early twentieth century image of the alabaster altarpiece used as a frontal in St Maries Roman Catholic cathedral. Sheffield, Yorkshire.

Chapter Five: Alabaster Abroad II: Reframing English Alabaster in Denmark and Holland

- 5.1. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St George, c.1460, reframed in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, wooden frame, painted. Borbjerg church, Denmark.
- 5.2. Standing figure of St George, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 14cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.3. The Flaying of St George, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 27cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.4. St George and the Poisoned Cup, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 27cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.5. St George before the Temple of Apollo/Falling of the Idol, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 60cm x 27cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.6. The Resurrection and Arming of St George by the Virgin Mary, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 27cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.7. St George fighting against the Gauls, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 27cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.8. A standing figure of St Michael, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 56.5cm x 14cm. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.9. Three figures: A Bishop, the Virgin Mary and St George, c.1500. Wood with polychromy and gilding, Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.10. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St George, c.1500. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, wooden frame. Originally from La Selle church, now at Musée d'Art-Histoire-Archéologie, Evreux, Normandy, France.

- 5.11. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St James the Greater, c.1456. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, wooden frame. Museo Catedral, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.
- 5.12. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of St Catherine, c.1430-60, reframed in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, wooden frame, painted. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.13. Standing Image of St Barbara and panel of St Catherine before Maxentius, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 42cm x 15cm. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.14. St Catherine in Prison, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 42cm x 29cm. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.15. St Catherine and the Breaking of the Wheel, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 42cm x 29cm. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.16. The beheading of St Catherine, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 42cm x 29cm. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.17. The burial of St Catherine by Angels and a standing image of Mary Magdalene, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 42cm x 29cm, 42cm x 15cm. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.18. Detail of the arming of St George, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Borberg church, Denmark.
- 5.19. Detail of the arming of St George, c.1460. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Borberg church, Denmark.

- 5.20. Detail of St Catherine in Prison, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.21. Closed wings of Vejrum altarpiece, c.1430-60, reframed in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, wooden frame, painted. Vejrum church, Denmark.
- 5.22. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Mary, c.1520. Wood with polychromy and gilding. Hostelbro church, Denmark. Image credit: Jürgen Howaldt.
- 5.23. Composite altarpiece with scenes from the life of Christ, fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Alabaster and wood, polychromed and gilded with painted scenes on the wings and predella. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.24. Detail of the central panel from Hornslet. Workshop of Claus Berg, the Crucifixion, c.1525. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.25. Detail of the crucified Christ, c.1570-80. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.26. Funeral slab for Erik Podebusk and Sidsel Oxe, c.1576. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Aarhus cathedral, Aarhus, Denmark.
- 5.27. Workshop of Claus Berg, altarpiece with scenes of the Passion of Christ, c.1525. Wood with polychromy and gilding. Sanderum church, Denmark.
- 5.28. The Annunciation, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 40cm x 30cm. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.29. The Nativity, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 40cm x 30cm. Hornslet church, Denmark.

- 5.30. The Resurrection of Christ, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 44cm x 30cm. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.31. Two standing figures of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 40cm x 15cm. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.32. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Mary, c.1430-60. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding in a wooden frame. Museum of Akureyri, Möðruvalla church, Iceland.
- 5.33. The Ascension, c.1570-80. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 38cm x 30cm. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.34. Two standing figures of St Peter and St Paul, c.1570-80. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding, 40cm x 15cm. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.35. Detail from the panel showing the Resurrection of Christ, c.1430-60 and c.1570-80. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.36. Unknown artist, the Resurrection of Christ with kneeling figures from the Rosenkrantz family, c.1570-80, Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.37. Memorial to Otto and Holger Rosenkrantz, c.1570-80. Stone, painted. Hornslet church, Denmark.
- 5.38. Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Christ, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland.
- 5.39 Interior of the church in 1928 with the altarpiece in situ. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.40. The Betrayal, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.41. The Flagellation, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.42. Christ Nailed to the Cross, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.43. The Deposition, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.44. The Entombment, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.45. The Resurrection, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.46. The Crucifixion, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.47. Standing figures of Saints, c.1460-1500, reframed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.48. Standing figure of St John the Evangelist, c.1550. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.49. Herm, c.1550. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.50. Christ crowned by Angels, c.1550. Alabaster with traces of polychromy and gilding. Saints Cosmas and Damian church, Afferden, Holland. Image credit: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

5.51. Circle of Jean Mone, altarpiece with scenes from the life of Christ, c.1530-40. Alabaster and wood, polychromed and gilt, 134cm x 91cm. Freeman's Auctioneers, Philadelphia.

5.52. Altarpiece with scenes from the Passion of Christ, c.1450-1585, St Martin's Church, Stadhagen. Image credit: image in the public domain.

Conclusion:

6.1. Alabaster effigy of Sir Richard Dalton, c.1442. Apethorpe, Northamptonshire. Image credit: image in the public domain.

6.2. Alabaster effigy of Richard Herbert of Ewyas, c.1510. Abergavenny Priory. Image credit: Meg Bernstein.

6.3. The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary, c.1500-1520. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Abergavenny Priory. Image credit: Meg Bernstein.

6.4. The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary, c.1500-1520. Alabaster with polychromy and gilding. Church of La Trait, Normandy.