
Queries & Responses

Notes on the last issue...

Malcolm Jones

The editor has kindly allowed me to make a few points in response to the interesting Spanish and other misericords discussed in the previous issue.

I was sorry I was unable to attend the Barcelona conference as the Spanish ensembles are evidently so interesting iconographically!

In my doctoral thesis *The Misericords of Beverley Minster: a Corpus of Folkloric Imagery and its Cultural Milieu, with special reference to the influence of Northern European Iconography on Late Medieval and Early Modern English Woodwork* (Polytechnic South West; 1991), I discuss at some length the evidence for the use of 'Germanic' prints and the *criblé* border cuts from late 15th/early 16th century Parisian *Horae* (the cat washing itself on top of a pair of bellows in the Musée Cluny reproduced in our last issue but one, is another such) as design sources for English and Continental misericords. As Christa Grossinger's excellent new book confirms (see my review in the last issue) we may now take for granted that an appreciable number of misericords of the latter part of the 15th and 16th centuries derive from such print-sources.

Humane Rider?

It seems to me that the carving labeled "Monk carries wineskin" at San Salvador de Celanova (p. 212 fig. 2) is, in fact, another example of a motif I have called (e.g. at Bristol in 1520) the 'humane rider', and in this context probably derives from the Parisian *Horae* cut of this subject.

One principle of iconography, it seems to me, is that we should know the significance of a motif by the company it keeps — put

proverbially, *birds of a feather flock together* — and the little scenes on the Flemish monumental brass of Adam de Walsokne (d. 1349) in the church at King's Lynn, Norfolk, are no exception. As long ago as 1864 Waller correctly identified the mounted sack-rider as a proverbial folly and importantly referred the motif to an early 13th century poem by an anonymous monk of Peterborough Abbey entitled *Descripto Norfolciensium* (Description of the people of Norfolk). This poem is the earliest evidence for defamatory regional *blason populaire* in England, detailing anecdotes of the type slightly later applied to the ironically named 'Wise Men of Gotham' (in Nottinghamshire). Typical of the stupidity of the Norfolk men, according to the poem, is the fact that they ride to market carrying their sacks on their backs thinking thereby to save their horses! It may be no more than coincidence, but the same motif appears on one of the early 15th century roof bosses in the cloister of Norwich cathedral carved by one John Watlington and *Brice the Dutchman*.¹ This suggests another possible route, apart from the import of manuscripts, by which such motifs could reach later medieval artists. Apart from at least three depictions of this particular folly in 14th century Franco-Flemish manuscripts,² continental examples include a 13th stone carving on the Portail des Librairies of Rouen Cathedral, lead badges from the second half of the 15th century, found recently in Holland, and (probably), a misericord in the church of Saint-Spire, Corbeil, now destroyed. I believe we can now add the San Salvador de Celanova carving to this growing corpus.

In the English misericord corpus the humane but foolish sack carrying rider is found on one of the important series of stalls in Bristol Cathedral carved in 1520. The carving described, accurately but misleadingly by Remnant, as 'Mounted woman bringing a sack of corn to a post-mill', like several others in the cathedral, derives from a series of ornamental metal-cuts which appears in the margins

¹ A.B. Whittingham *Norwich Cathedral Bosses and Misericords* (Norwich, 1981) p. 15.

² The MSS are: Paris; Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal MS 5218 f.20 (in fact, woman on ass), (Tournai, 1351); The Hague, Meermanno-Westreenianum Museum MS 78.D.40 (Amiens, 1323); BL Stowe MS 12f.89v., reproduced as fig. 696 in Randall.

of early 16th century Parisian Books of Hours printed by Pigouchet for Vostre — these motifs are of great but still unrecognized importance in the history of the transmission of Continental designs to English art.³ There is another example in wood carved on a Somerset bench end which perhaps strengthens the case for regarding the Bristol misericord's mill as an addition to the original design.

I have given my reasons elsewhere for suspecting that this folly may also have been enacted on stage, in the First Shepherd's Play of the Wakefield Pageants which also includes the earliest known reference to the *foles of Gotam* (M. Jones, "*Slawpase fro the ?yr-Whele: Seeing between the lines*" in *Festive Drama*, ed. M. Twycross (Cambridge; 1996) 242-58.

In an alternative presentation of this motif, the humane rider carries the sack in his arms, as in an early printer book woodcut; significantly the title-page illustration to a German parodic sermon⁴ — note, too, how the rider's folly is pointed out by the fool peeping around the column at the bottom right, and further signaled by the fly swarm.⁵ A very similar motif can be found in French literature: in Noel du Fail's *Propos Rustiques* of 1547 occurs the following passage:

(j') estois contrainst boire deux ou trois voltes (gratieux compulsoire) pour me rendre la ceruelle plus frisque & deliberee, & mestoit vne telle peine que au charretier qui; pour ayder a ses cheuaux attellez a la charrette trop chargee, met son chappeau entre son espaulle & la roue, pour aucunement les

³ See my thesis.

⁴ The sermon in question is entitled *Ein Predig vom Wolff zu den Gensen* (1524) and is reprinted in S.L. Gilman *The Parodic Sermon in European Perspective* (Wiesbaden, 1974).

⁵ See P. Vandenbroek, "Zur Herkunft und Verwurzelung der *Grillen*" in *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 3 (1987) 52-84.

soulager; aucunesfois beuuant a son barril, attache au collier du cheual de deuant.⁶

*Humane rider on misericords.*⁷

France

Ile-et-Vilaine: La Guerche-de-Bretagne S-09.

Paris: Musee national du Moyen Age R-04.

Seine-et-Marne: Champeaux SL-07.

Great Britain

Avon: Bristol S-01.

Spain

Belmonte WU-09.

Celanova SL-05.



Rider with Sack on Head

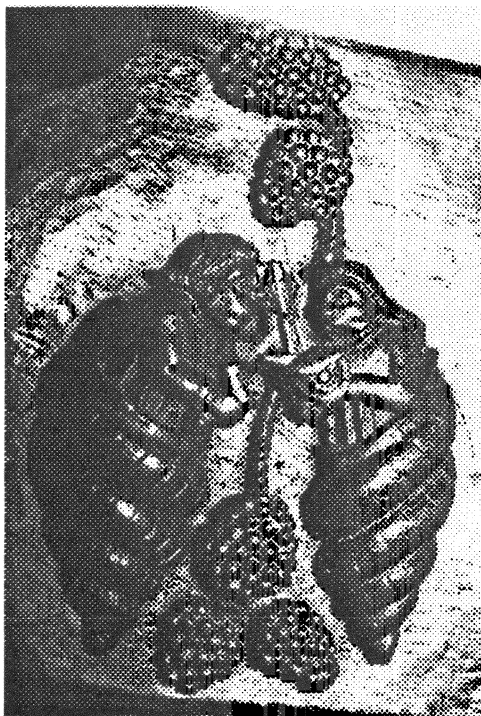
Champeaux, Seine-et-Marne

⁶ Ed: L.-R. Lefèvre (Paris, 1928) p. 15.

⁷ This list is from the files of Misericordia International.

The Dragon and the Knight of the Shell

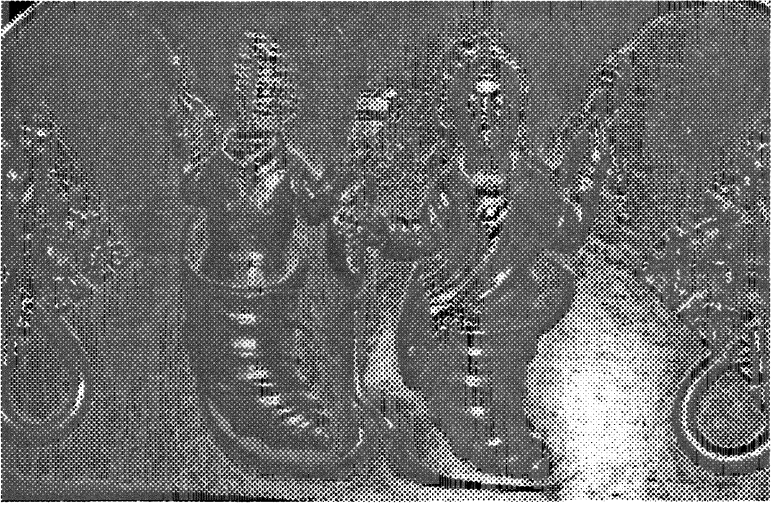
Unknown to Remnant — and, I suspect, all students of the English misericord corpus — the British Museum possesses an example of the mysterious subject described by M.D. Anderson⁸ as ‘Child rising from shell to fight dragon’, and we must be grateful to John Cherry of the British Museum for publishing that museum’s example in our last issue as “Good and Evil in the British Museum” pp: 316-7 and fig. on p. 316. Coincidentally, in my review some 20 pages further on in the same issue in my review of Christa Grossinger’s new book I summarize my own conclusions regarding this enigmatic subject (p. 339).



Couple in Whelk Shells

Windsor

⁸ In Remnant p. 210.



Couple in Whelk Shells

Stratford

As the motif also occurs at Beverley (1520) I was obliged to look into it in my thesis and like to think I may have happened across a specific source for the design which, in short; I believe to be based ultimately on a Monstrous Race prototype.

Anderson records seven such examples of this motif (though her Leintwardine example does not include the dragon; and she does not include the Beverley carving in this list), the earliest of which is at Lincoln of c1370. The 'shell' in these depictions is of the spiral whelk-type from which the 'child' emerges vertically. In the Vatican Library there is an illustrated South German manuscript of Hrabanus Maurus's encyclopedia *De rerum naturis* dating to 1425, which includes on f:75v. a depiction of the various Monstrous Races. On the lowest register, next to and facing a sciapod, sheltering under its outsize foot, the torso of another smaller human figure appears to emerge, hands upraised, from a conical coil which was probably intended for a hole in the ground. There must be some misunderstanding of the Latin text here, because in the original; Festus explained that pygmies were so small that seven of them could rest beneath a single stem — *sub uno caule*. Wittkower does

not explain how he comes to render this phrase 'in a hole',⁹ but at some point classical Latin *caule*, probably the ablative case of *caulis*: 'stem, stalk', was misunderstood as an oblique case of the plural noun, *caulae*: 'opening, hole, passage'.

That the conical coil was intended as a hole or burrow can be confirmed from examples of earlier medieval illustration practice, e.g. the dog emerging from the burrow on f.159r. of the rabbit depicted on the opposite f.158r. in Walters Art Gallery, MS 37 (Flemish, late 13th century).¹⁰ Also significant and hardly coincidental is the related carving on a 'poppy head' in the church of St. Margaret, King's Lynn, depicting a man emerging from a whelk shell below a rabbit emerging from a burrow.

The monster on the right of the emerging pygmy in Bibl:Vat: Pal lat 291 is not a humanoid, but a nine-headed *hydra* with the body and tail of a dragon. The pygmy's left hand appears to stab at the lowest of the hydra's heads, and this, I suggest, is the image-type which ultimately underlies the Beverley carving, described by Remnant as 'Man between two dragons whose tails surround him'.

There is perhaps some reminiscence of the correct 'stalk, stem' meaning in the illustration of the Monstrous Races on f. lv. of Westminster Abbey Library MS 22, a late 13th century Bestiary which opens with two pages of Monstrous Races illustrations (the text of 'Third Family' bestiaries such as this was amplified by Isidore's account of the Monstrous Races, *De Portentis*, part of Book II of his *Etymologiae*). A pygmy with halberd stands on top

⁹ R. Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (1942) 159ff., especially 174 n.3.

¹⁰ Reproduced in Randall, fig 81. A further example is the rabbit burrow depicted on f. ér of BL Add. MS 366 (Franco-Flemish), p. 1318.

of a flowering stem and is thus able to look the tricephalic giant in the face or, rather, faces.¹¹

The Beverley carving might well be seen as an 'improvement' of the earlier single dragon model as seen at Manchester and Durham Castle,¹² with a second dragon added to the left of the shell-figure for the sake of symmetry, and indeed, there is an earlier precedent for this arrangement in the example of the motif at Chester, the only other to include a second flanking dragon; and yet the upraised arms of the Beverley figure are so like the pose adopted by the pygmy in the Vatican manuscript, that it seems likelier that such a model, perhaps via the intermediary of a 'pattern book' lies behind the Beverley carving. It is noteworthy that the Vatican manuscript reports in the order and selection of its Monstrous Races from that of the older illustrative tradition represented by the Monte Cassino manuscript of the 11th century (which quite correctly, does not present the hydra at this point; it not being a monstrous human, but a monster *tout court*).

I further argue in my thesis that both supporters of the Beverley misericord symbolize cowardice, so that it is likely that -- as far as the 16th century carver was concerned -- this original Monstrous Races motif embodied the virtue of courage or fortitude.¹³ Bond says quite simply that the carving denotes 'the conflict of purity and vice'.¹⁴

¹¹ The four half-length figures in a shelter under the stem are apparently intended as 'Brachmani', some of whom are said to be cave dwellers, though their location under the boughs of a tree is perhaps reminiscent of a model such as that in the Monte Cassino manuscript.

¹² Which might itself derive from the example now in Durham Castle; but originally in the Castle at Bishop Auckland (41:7), which Tracy dates to c.1490, and states is close to Hand C at Ripon.

¹³ See previous section for a detailed discussion of the supporter motifs.

¹⁴ Bond p. 157.

Homosexual Games

I was surprised to see fig. 5 on p. 161 of the last issue, a photograph of a misericord in Leon Cathedral labeled by Isabel Mateo Gomez as “Two Homosexuals”, where she apparently sees “two friars either measuring or touching each other’s penises”. I see two boys playing a sort of jousting game with crossed sticks, of which there are two further examples in the English misericord corpus!

The early Tudor interlude *Fulgens & Lucre* (1497) includes a parody of chivalric entertainment with a species of joust alarmingly named *farte pryke in cule* — a few years ago Peter Meredith plausibly interpreted this as the schoolboy game of ‘cock-fighting’, which, unknown to him, however, is illustrated on two sets of royal choir stalls contemporary with the play, carved on misericords in Henry VII’s Chapel in Westminster Abbey (c.1512) and in St. George’s chapel, Windsor (c. 1480).

Thanks to the excellent photographs — and one of the most useful features of our journal is the abundance and the increasingly good quality of the photographic illustrations which allow such scrutiny — there is a tell-tale detail discernible which it seems to me confirms the interpretation being advanced here (not counting the fact that the ‘friars’ in question would seem otherwise to be sporting extraordinarily *flattened* penises!). In the crook of each boy’s elbow, emerging from under the crook behind his knee, we see the rounded end of the transverse stick. While I feel sure that the carver has indeed portrayed a contemporary boy’s jousting game here at Leon, as at Westminster and Windsor, the fact that in 19th century English public schools it was termed ‘cock fighting’ and in the late 15th century, (fart) prick-in-cule (if Meredith’s identification is accepted) may not be wholly innocent of homosexual reference after all! (For the sexual symbolism for the ‘cock’ in this period see my “Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art III: Erotic Animal Imagery” in *Folklore* 102 (1991), 192-219).

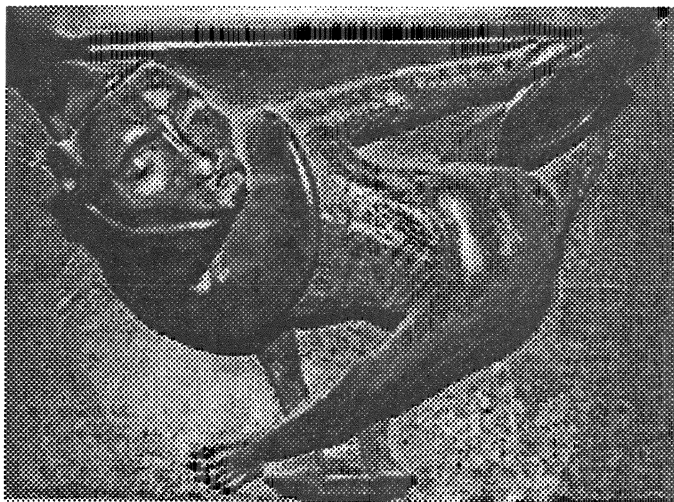
On another Windsor misericord a bizarre scene is depicted in which we see two men kneeling one behind the other; a scarf attached to the forward man passes round the neck of the following man and has the effect of pulling his nose into the anal cleft of man in front,

whose hose; at half-mast, have exposed his buttocks — it may also not be without significance that both men have a scalloped edge to their tunics, i.e., this may imply derivation from an original which also featured fools in similarly fringed tunics, for there is an undoubted relationship with the identical and plainly scatological antics of the ass-eared fools who inhabit the margins of the 1498 Basel edition of Brant's *Narrenschiff*. As the Windsor stalls were carved at least 15 years before this, however; the implication must be that the motif was available either in earlier printed book margins or perhaps in the form of a print no longer extant.

One last question: Where is the marvelous bespectacled bottom placed by the editor as a 'tailpiece' to the journal on p. 356 to be seen 'in the flesh'?

Editor's note:

The marvelous bespectacled bottom on page 356 of the fall, 97 issue of *Profane Arts*, viewed by some of the participants to the Barcelona conference, is a bas relief on a partition between two choir stalls at the cathedral of Leon. It shares the space with many other marvels.



Ape Admires Backside in Mirror

Leon, Spain