

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CROCODILE IN THE MIDDLE AGES.¹

By GEORGE C. DRUCE.

Among the numerous animals found in ecclesiastical figure sculpture it is remarkable that so picturesque a character as the crocodile is rarely to be met with in any easily recognizable form. That it was frequently represented in some form or other seems more than likely from the fact that it can be shown by reference to mediaeval manuscripts to have been the subject of an extensive symbolism. The object of the present paper is to endeavour to show what that symbolism was, and in what circumstances and form we should expect to find the crocodile in church architecture.

In the earlier period of figure sculpture, say the twelfth century, we should not expect to find the crocodile in natural form, owing to the lack of knowledge of its anatomy on the part of artists and masons, and to the fact that exact definition was not regarded as of great importance, only such details being included as might sufficiently indicate the subject. Considerations of space also led to the same result. A curious instance of this may be seen at Alne church, Yorks (plate 1, no. 1), where there is a sculptured representation of a ship with two men in it, with some letters of the incised title *Aspido* above: this is the abbreviated Greek name of the *Aspido Chelone*, a shield-shaped tortoise or turtle, and in a secondary sense a great sea-monster, of which there is no sign at all in the picture; the ship is really resting on its back, the greater part of it being submerged in the sea. I shall have occasion to refer to this subject again at a later stage.

In his work, *L'Art Religieux du XIII^e Siècle en France*, p. 422, M. Émile Mâle points out that representations of hell-mouth, such as may be seen on the tympanum at Bourges cathedral in the scene of the Last Judgment, and elsewhere, were based on the crocodile's head, and

¹ Read before the Institute, 1st December, 1909.

that this symbolic employment was due to the description of it in Job xli. At Bourges the cauldron into which lost souls are being thrust is set in the mouth of a monster, and the flames are being blown up by two demons with bellows (plate II, no. 1). M. Mâle bases his view on the fact that the early commentators of the book of Job recognised in Leviathan a figure of Satan and his works. He says :

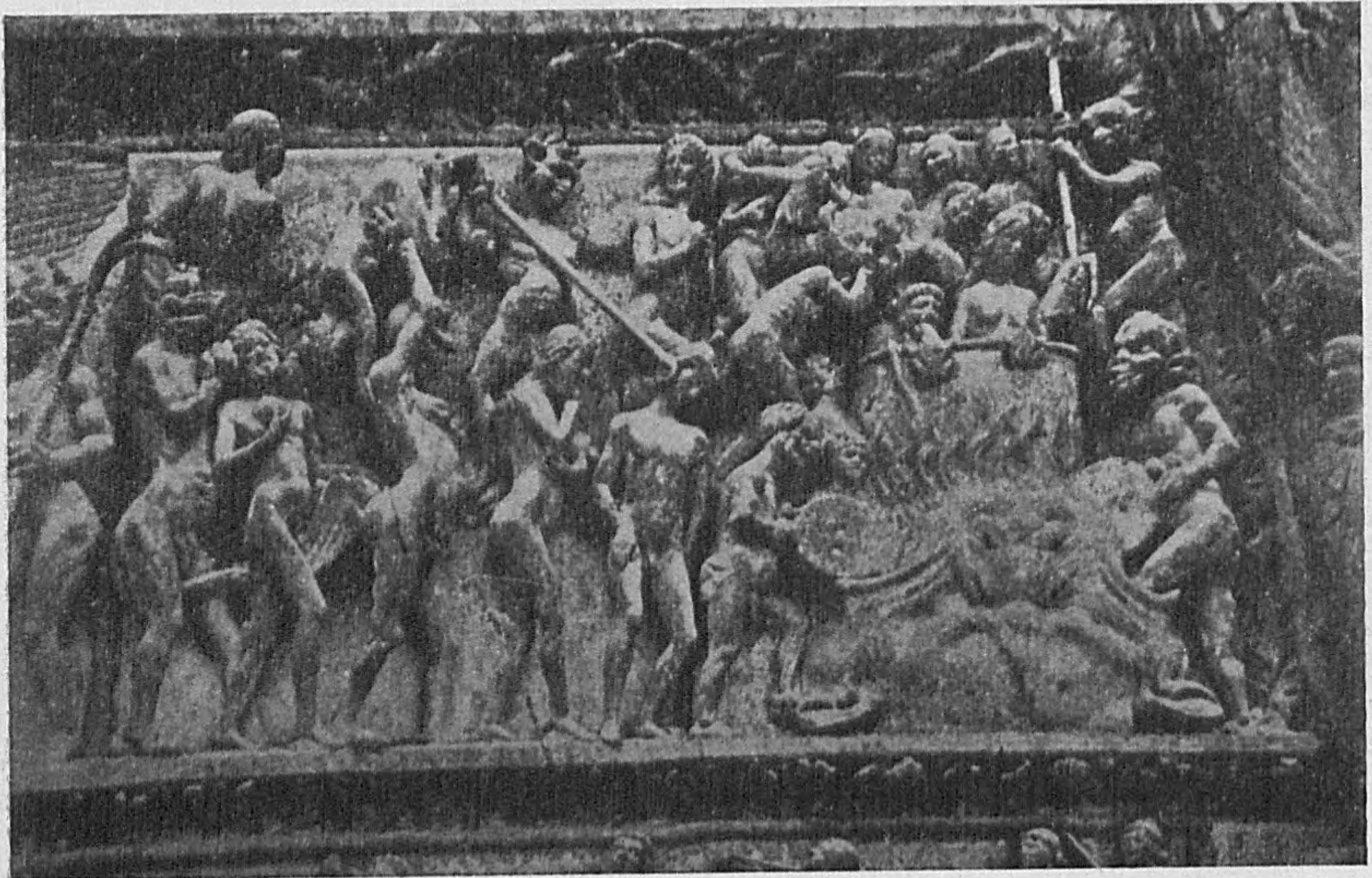
Certains passages interprétés avec une subtilité surprenante, eurent au moyen âge la plus singulière fortune. Saint Grégoire le Grand, par exemple, admet que le verset, où il est parlé de l'hameçon qui prendra le monstre, se rapporte à la victoire de Jésus-Christ sur Satan. Les plus fameux interprètes du livre de Job, Odon de Cluny et Brunon d'Asti, transmirent cette doctrine à Honorius d'Autun, qui, renchérissant sur eux tous, écrivit : ' Léviathan, le monstre qui nage dans la mer du monde, c'est Satan. Dieu a lancé la ligne dans cette mer. La corde de la ligne, c'est la génération humaine du Christ ; le fer de l'hameçon, c'est la divinité de Jésus-Christ ; l'appât, c'est son humanité. Attiré par l'odeur de la chair, Léviathan veut le saisir, mais l'hameçon lui déchire la mâchoire ' (Honorius d'Autun, *Spec. Eccl. Patrol.* clxxii, col. 937).

L'Hortus deliciarum, le fameux manuscrit d'Herrade de Landsberg, contenait une miniature où la pensée des commentateurs du livre de Job avait pris figure : les rois de Judas formaient la corde de la ligne, et Jésus, avec l'hameçon, déchirait la gueule du monstre.

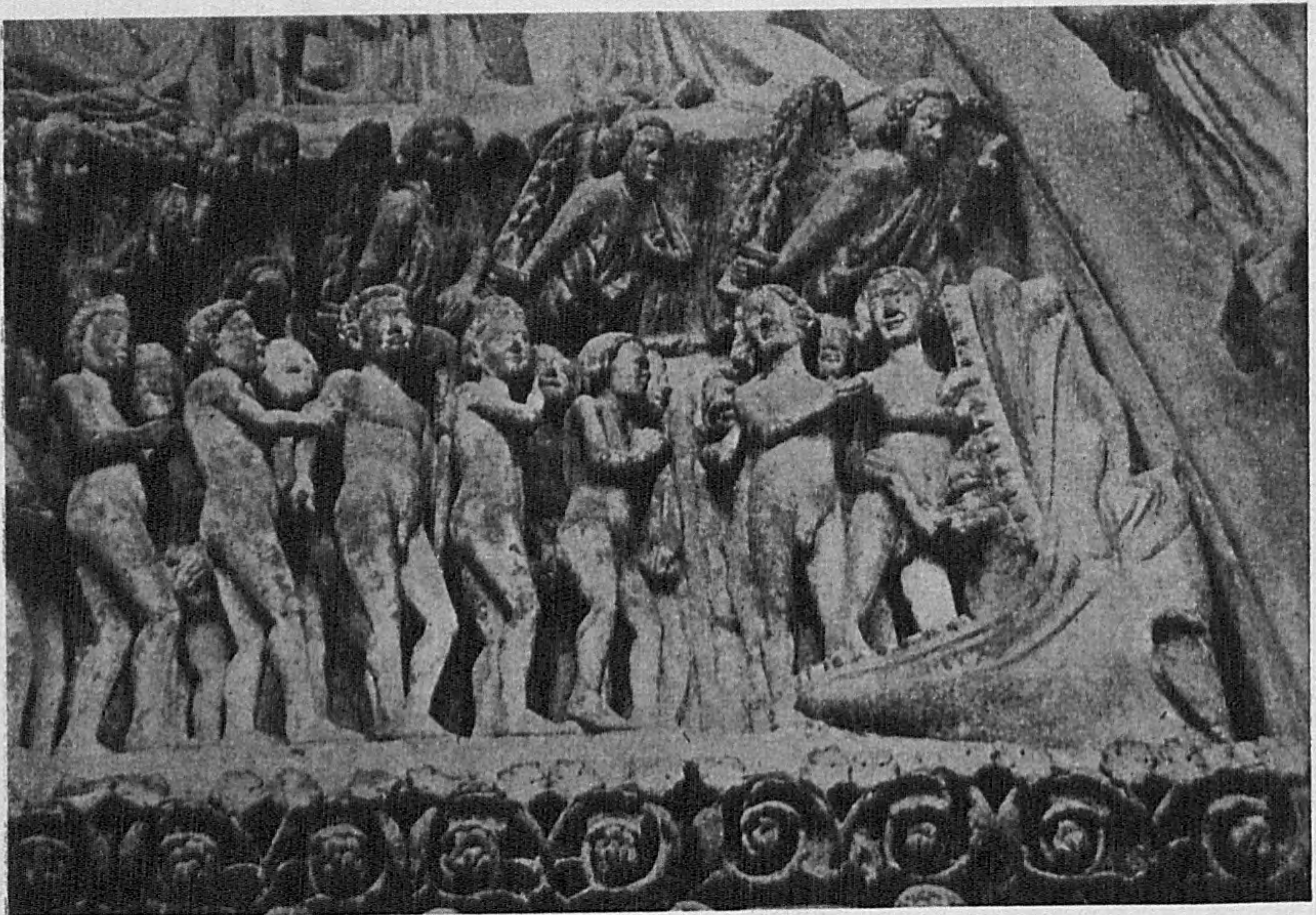
Il fut admis encore que le passage où il est parlé de ' celui qui ouvrira les portes de la gueule de Léviathan ' désignait la descente de Jésus-Christ aux enfers et sa victoire sur Satan. ' En brisant les portes de l'enfer, ' dit Brunon d'Asti, ' Jésus-Christ brisa les portes derrière lesquelles Léviathan cachait son visage. ' De là est née la tradition artistique bien connue qui consiste à représenter, dans la scène de la descente aux enfers, près des portes brisées que Jésus foule aux pieds, la gueule ouverte de Léviathan.

The seething-pot too, M. Mâle adds, passed for a description of hell. The artists of the thirteenth century were not above adopting these descriptions *in toto*, and went so far as to put the cauldron inside the open mouth of the monster. The allusion to the seething-pot in juxtaposition with the crocodile certainly sounds attractive ; I may, however, point out in passing that we do not always find hell-cauldron in the mouth of a monster. On the great painting at Chaldon, Surrey, which is about 1200 in date, it stands securely on its own legs (plate IX). In a twelfth century manuscript at the British Museum¹ there is an almost identical scene, a pot on three legs,

¹ *Nero*, C iv, fo. 38.



NO. I. BOURGES CATHEDRAL CHURCH. HELL-MOUTH.



NO. 2. AMIENS CATHEDRAL CHURCH. HELL-MOUTH.

full of souls, with a fire underneath and two attendant demons with pitchfork and rake. A model for the cauldron would be found in the common domestic utensil.

The evidence produced by M. Mâle would seem to be conclusive as to the symbolic use of the crocodile as hell-mouth, but it will be apparent that it clashes altogether with the view that has, I believe, been held by most archaeologists that Jonah's fish was the motive from which such sculptured representations sprang. Although we now know that Job's Leviathan was the crocodile, it seems very uncertain whether the people of the middle ages in Europe knew enough about that animal to apply his description to it. It is more probable that they regarded Leviathan as some dragon or sea-monster. It is true that, as such, it would equally supply a "motive" for hell-mouth, but whatever passage suggested the first idea, it had to be put into pictorial form. Although a fertile imagination will do a great deal, I think the artists of

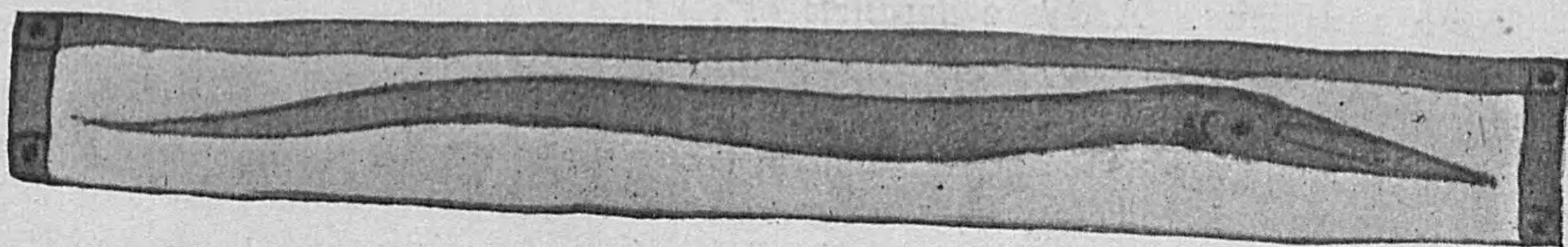


FIG I. MS. HARL. 3244 (B.M.) COCODRILLUS.

the middle ages worked for the most part from existing pictorial models, and in dealing with the symbolism of the crocodile, I shall suggest a source whence they may have obtained a model or models for hell-mouth.

For the purpose of ascertaining the symbolism of the crocodile I shall turn to the mediaeval bestiaries, and see what they tell us. These were by way of being religious natural history books, founded upon the appearance and habits of animals, birds and reptiles, the whole being employed to teach religious or moral lessons. Some of them have as many as 120 or 130 illustrations, which are exceedingly quaint, and show great versatility on the part of the artists: the same subject is often illustrated in totally different ways.

In the bestiaries of the thirteenth century at the British Museum the crocodile usually occurs twice over, being classed both with the larger sea-fish and with the land animals. In MS. Harl. 3244, fo. 66 it appears among

the fishes as a long, thin yellow eel (fig. 1), on which the long mouth is the only approach to nature, and on fo. 43, among the animals, as a clumsy beast.

In MS. Slo. 3544, a little later in date, *Cocodrillus* appears among the fishes as an awkward, lumbering beast, but with a head possibly more natural than in some other manuscripts (plate III, no. 1). It has a spined back, three legs on one side, and a twisted tail. It has ears, an important detail, folds of skin behind the nostril, and its legs are hairy like beasts' legs. It is submerged in water.

The description given of the crocodile in the bestiaries, whether as an aquatic or land animal, is much the same, though the symbolism is usually to be found under its heading as a land animal. A translation of the Latin text of MS. Harl. 3244, fo. 43 runs thus :

The crocodile, so called because it is of the colour of the crocus,¹ is found in the river Nile. It is a four-footed animal, powerful both on land and in the water, generally twenty cubits long, and armed with cruel teeth and claws. And the hardness of its skin is such that a shower of stones, however strongly hurled, rebounds from it and does not hurt it. By night it lies quiet in the water, by day on dry ground. It hatches its eggs on land, the male and the female taking their turns. Certain fishes, which have crests like a saw, cut through the tender parts of its belly and kill it. And alone of all animals it moves its upper jaw, and keeps the lower one immovable. Its dung is made into an ointment, with which wrinkled old women of pleasure anoint their faces and become beautiful again, till the sweat flowing down washes it off.

And under this figure hypocrites are symbolized, and men of luxury and avarice, who are inflated with pride, which sticks to them like bird-lime, who are splashed with the plague spots of luxury and held fast bound by the disease of avarice. Nevertheless, in the light of men they show themselves as those who walk uprightly and, as it were, most righteously in justification of the law.

Whereas by night it rests in the water, by day on land, so hypocrites, although they live in luxury, yet are delighted if they are reported to live just and holy lives. Conscious of their own wickedness they beat their breasts, though habit from long practice leads them on to the perpetration of fresh evil.

Whereas it moves only its upper jaw, so they show forth, in word only, examples of the holy fathers, and a goodly supply of their good words; while in deed they show forth very few of the things which they say.

Whereas of its dung an ointment is made, so evil men are generally praised by the unlearned for their evil deeds; and are glorified by the praises of this world, as it were with an ointment. But when the judge,

¹ The derivations of many of the names in the bestiary seem to have come from Isidore's *Etymology*.

scorpius dicitur quia scilicet omni manu tollitur. Tradunt
 autem eius cuiusdam manipulo. Nigros omnes qui ibi sunt.
 scorpiones et eundem locum congregat.



SCORPIUS
 COCODRILLUS

ALCOLO COLORE
 DICTUS GIGNITUR
 IN NILO FLUMINE
 ANIMAL QUADRU
 PER UTI TA TIAQ
 UALENS LONGITU
 DINEM PLENUM
 AN. XX. CUBITORU
 ANTIQUM TINGU
 UM IN MANUTE AMARUM. GUSTA Q: CUIUS SUMMA UT QASSUS FER
 TUM ICHU LAPIDUM TEO REPIDAT: NON NOTET. HODIS I AQUI DIE

NO. 1. MS. SLO. 3544 (B.M.). COCODRILLUS.

les se traveue se se ducere et engout tout
 entier et lors que il se traveue en son ventre.



se u depiece toute sa vele. et puis sen ut a
 que iore de sa uivre. pour cho diou tapes

NO. 3. MS. 7534 (BIB. NAT. PARIS). CROCODILES.

leuam luas. ut pures obfusus remane. Adhuc dicitur apu. ugrine
 fauce apparet. Hec dicitur alius q: mella exoritur. Cum gubdatur munda
 gox nulla. moxur. si aut obuia ne nulli in puac gualleat. et fo.
 mure et copate ad uuyfudguy fauude. Si quilo rarus adpuit fauit
 qy pofitius pro: immoqur. et alius q: aqua. qui natus patur. Semia ut
 poudere dicitur. Hanc ut alio dolo. fit in loco renuque.



SCORPIUS
 COCODRILLUS

COCODRILLUS A COCOLO COLORE DICTUS GIGNITUR IN NILO FLUMINE. AIAL FERUPE I
 TA ET AQ UALENS LONGITUDINE PLENUM. XX. CUBITORU. DENARIU ET UNGUI
 SI IMMATURE DITUR. Sicut q: utat dicitur. ut qmuis ferat u
 rus lapidat uero repudat. si uocet. no se in dqs. duc in huius gclat. Qua
 in tra foue. uiffis et ferunt uces feruatur. hunc riles adam feruam la

NO. 2. MS. HARL. 3244 (B.M.). COCODRILLUS.



Animal in nilo flumine qd dicitur ydru in aqua ydrus.

NO. 4. MS. HARL. 4751 (B.M.). HYDRUS AND CROCODILE.

separating the evil from the good, moves forward in his wrath to strike the evil down, then all that glory and praise vanishes like smoke.

Other manuscripts give much the same account with minor differences in the text, but in MS. 12 F XIII, fo. 23 (B.M.) there is additional information. After the paragraph about certain fishes which kill the crocodile, it says :

There is in the Nile a race of dolphins with spined backs which do the same thing. Some people hold crocodiles to be fishes, because they know how to stay in the water. Others call them in other respects beasts, because they know how to remain on land.

And after the paragraph about the face-ointment being washed off, it says :

The crocodile, which is an animal with a hard skin and crafty, and which feeds on mud (*lutum*),¹ signifies luxury long persisted in. Whence they are numbered in Leviticus among the unclean animals which ought not to be eaten.

And again at fo. 105 it says that it is "hominibus infestum," and farther on that it is attacked by serpents, which enter its body by the right side and get out by the left.

The illustration (plate III, no. 2) accompanying the text in MS. Harl. 3244 that I have given in full, shows the crocodile as a clumsy beast with a spined back, three-clawed feet and a long branching tail. It has a beast-like head with ears, curled nostril, and skin-folds of the same character as in MS. Slo. 3544. It has been attacked by a hunter with a spear, but he has been caught by the crocodile and is in difficulties. In addition, a small snake can be seen emerging from the crocodile's body, and there is a small inset inscription above intimating that the crocodile is dead. This episode I shall deal with later on.

It will be noticed that there is no apparent connection between the illustration in MS. Harl. 3244 and the text attached to it, and also that there is no sign of a quotation from Job. On the contrary, it is clear that the details came from another source, namely, Pliny's *Natural History*, where he says :

The Nile produces the crocodile also, a destructive quadruped, equally dangerous on land and in water. This is the only land animal that does

¹ The word *lutum* here is capable of two interpretations according to the quantity. I have rendered it "mud,"

but "yellow weeds" would perhaps be legitimate in view of the crocodile being described as crocus-coloured.

not enjoy the use of its tongue, and the only one that has the upper jaw moveable and is capable of biting with it, and terrible is its bite, for the rows of its teeth fit into each other like those of a comb. Its length mostly exceeds eighteen cubits. It is armed also with claws, and has a skin that is proof against all blows. It passes the day on land and the night in the water, in both instances on account of the warmth.¹

In these particulars he follows Aristotle and Herodotus. The accounts given in Pliny seem to have inspired many of the bestiary illustrations occurring under the heading of *Cocodrillus*. They show a crocodile either devouring a man or holding him in its claws, and it is probable that some of our church carvings of beasts swallowing human beings represent this phase. In MS. Add. 11283 (B.M.) the crocodile grasps a man in its claws. In MS. Ashmole 1511 (Bod.) it grasps a naked man lying on the ground. On the other hand, in MS. 12 F xiii (B.M.) the crocodile stands on the bank of a river alone. In MS. Slo. 3544 (B.M.) we have seen it alone in the water with three legs on one side (plate III, no. 1). In MS. 12 C xix (B.M.) it swallows the hydrus, a subject of which I shall give an account below. In all these cases the crocodile is a clumsy beast-like animal.

In Philip de Thaun's Bestiary, written soon after 1121, in metrical Norman-French, and therefore earlier than those I have quoted from, we find much the same information as to its appearance and habits, but with the addition that

S'il pot hom devure, quant manget ad si plure (if it can devour a man, when it has eaten him, it weeps).²

This is an old characteristic frequently referred to in mediaeval literature, on which we need not now dwell. It is introduced into the bestiary no doubt to heighten the idea of the crocodile's crafty nature, and probably originally arose through its having large lachrymal glands.

The fishes with the crests like saws are "dolphins," whatever that may mean. We learn this from MS. 12 F

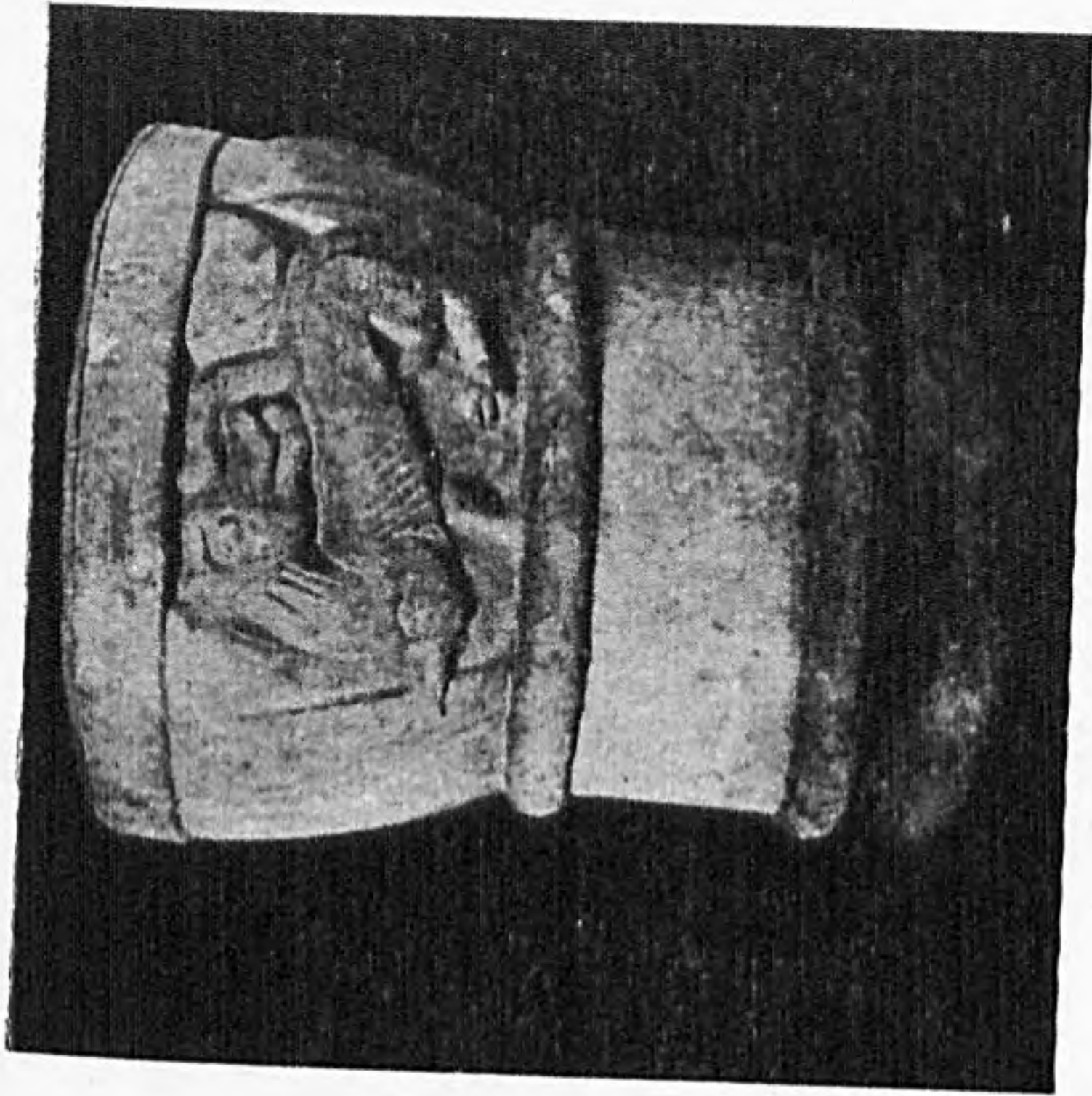
¹ In bk. viii, ch. 37-38, Bohn's translation.

² Wright's ed. 1841. And in a somewhat later *bestiare rimé* in the Bibl. Nat. in Paris it runs:

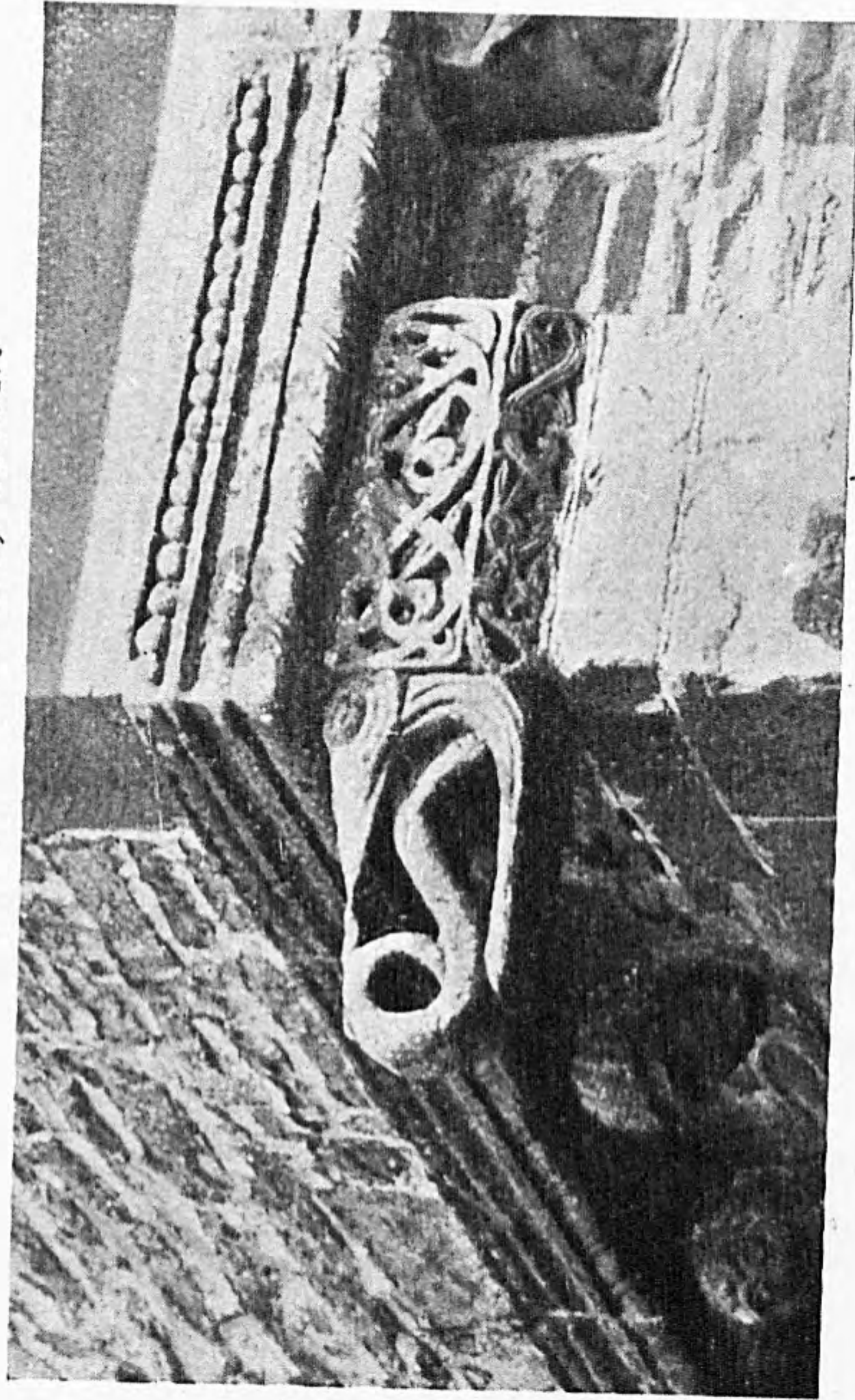
"S'il encontre home, et il le vient
Manjue le, ren n'i remeint;

Mès toz jorz après pois le plore
Tant dis cum en vie demore."

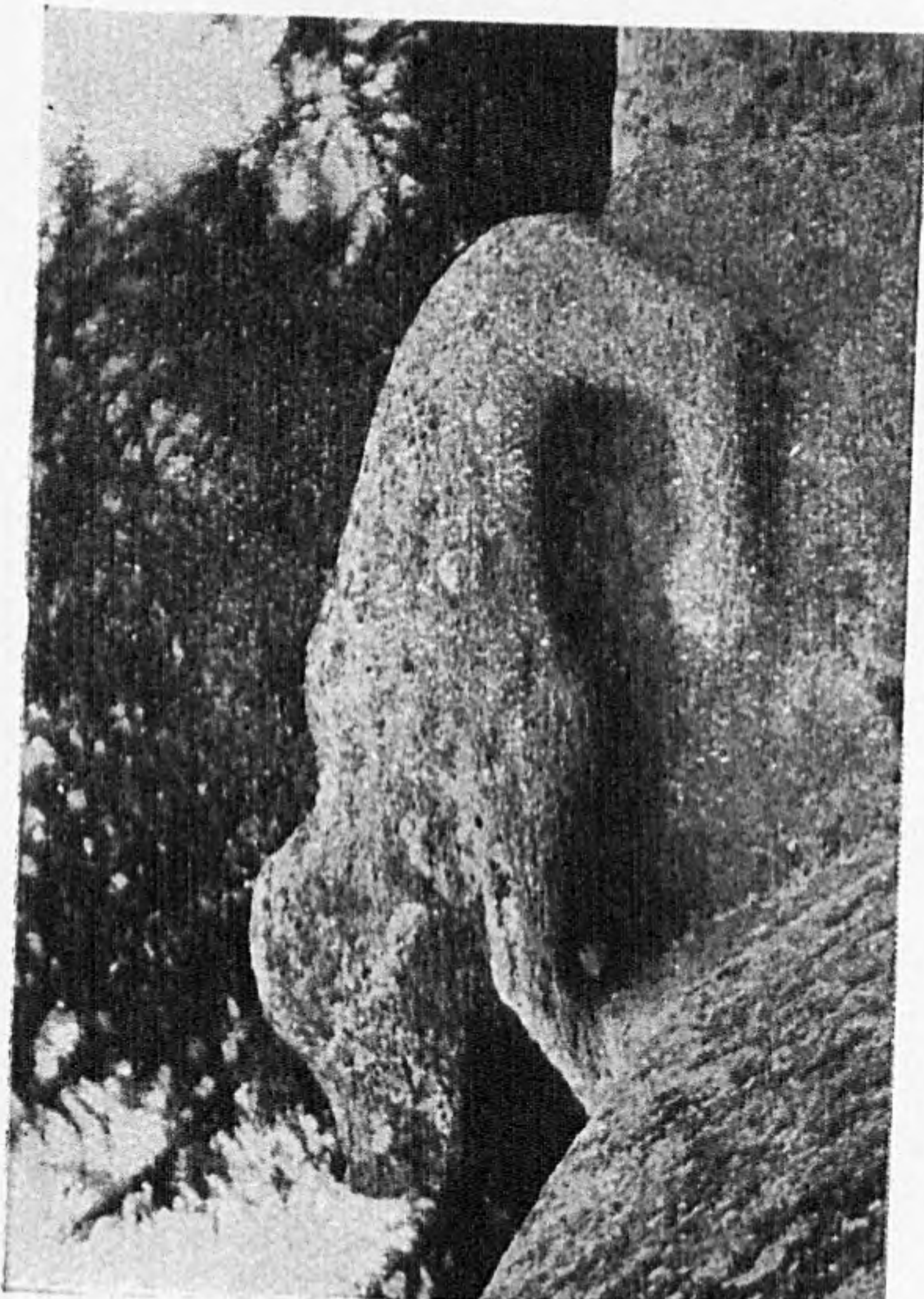
If it meets a man and succeeds in eating him, nothing of him is left; but for ever afterwards it weeps for him, so long as it dwells in this life.



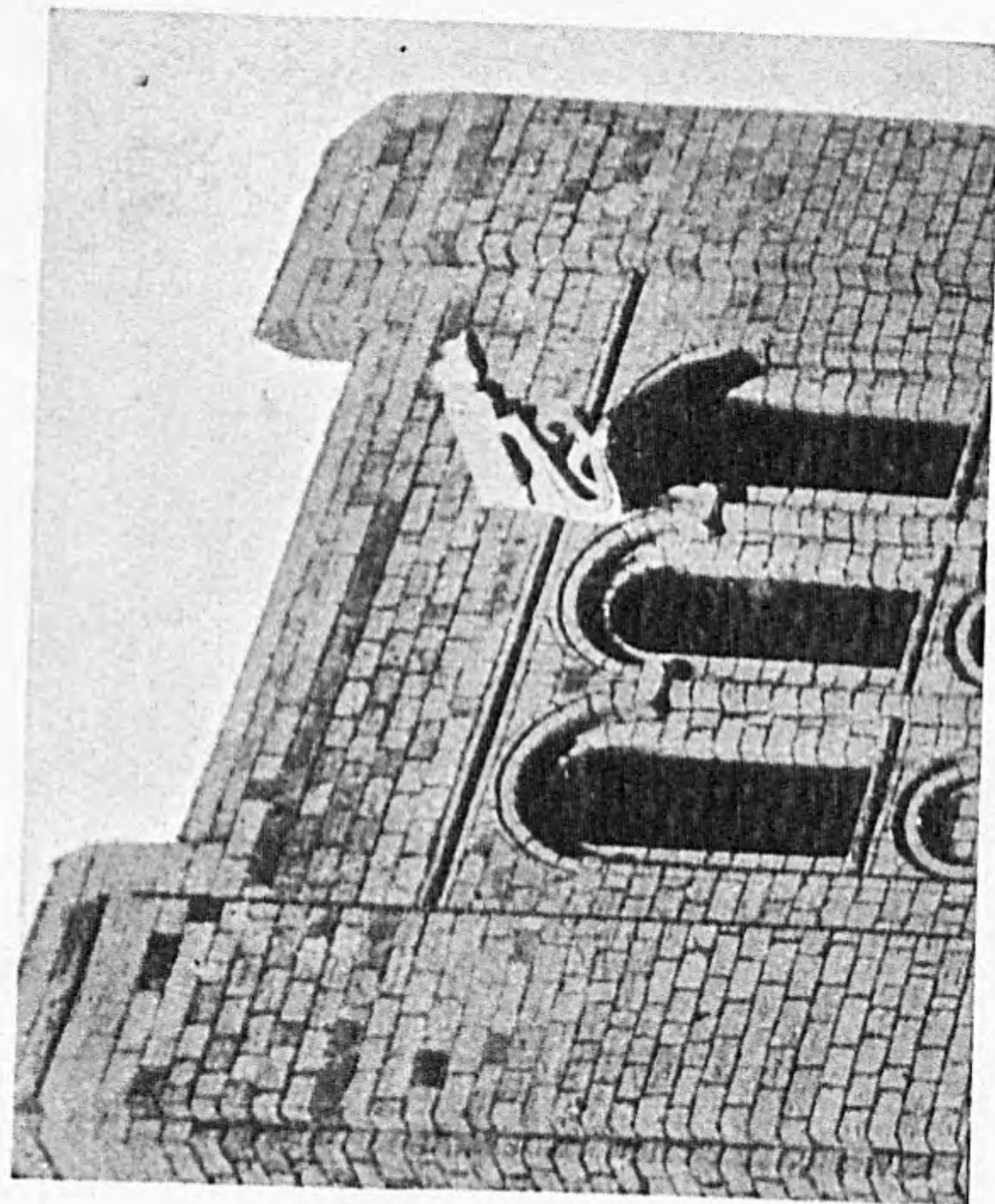
[Miss E. K. Prideaux, phot.
NO. 2. TOPSHAM, DEVON.



[H. Creighton Beckett, phot.
NO. 4. KILPECK, HEREFORD. HYDRUS AND CROCODILE.



[G. C. Druce, phot.
NO. 1. YAXLEY, HUNTS.



NO. 3. BURY ST. EDMUNDS. HYDRUS AND CROCODILE.

xiii, as already mentioned, and we find the same stated elsewhere in the bestiaries under the heading of *Delphines*. The description of the attack on the crocodile by the dolphins also came from Pliny,¹ who gives a full account of it. There are pictures of them in the bestiaries, but there does not appear to be any symbolism attached to them in connection with the crocodile, nor do I know of any architectural examples.

The strange account of the dung of the crocodile which is converted into an ointment, must have been directly inspired by some such passage as the *Epodes* of Horace, xii, II, but as before, we fall back on Pliny for general information. He says² :

The other kind of crocodile resembles it (the amphibious crocodile), but is much inferior in size. It lives upon land only and amongst the most odoriferous flowers; hence it is that its intestines are so greatly in request, being filled as they are with a mass of agreeable perfumes. This substance is called *crocodilea*, and it is looked upon as extremely beneficial for diseases of the eyes, and for the treatment of films and cataract, being applied with leek-juice in the form of an ointment. Applied with oil of cypress, it removes blemishes growing upon the face; and employed with water, it is a cure for all those diseases, the nature of which it is to spread upon the face, while at the same time it restores the natural tints of the skin; an application of it makes freckles disappear as well as all kinds of spots and pimples.³

This phase of the subject appears to have tickled the fancy of the artist of one of the manuscripts in the British Museum⁴ so much, that he has actually depicted an elegant lady seated on a stuffed stool, dressed in a green garment and with her hair done up with bands, busily engaged in collecting the droppings.

The symbolism expressed in the text of the bestiary largely speaks for itself, and is a fair example of the moralising that we find throughout. The ingenuity with which the various points of the crocodile's appearance and habits are turned for either religious or moral teaching is marvellous. It is a symbol of hypocrisy and deceit.

¹ *Loc. cit.* viii, 38.

² *Loc. cit.* xxviii, 28.

³ As a side light on the above we find in Marco Polo, bk. ii, ch. xl, the people of Karazan (China) "taking care to secure the gall of the crocodile, which is most highly

esteemed in medicine. . . . A small quantity of it being applied to carbuncles, pustules, or other eruptions on the body, they are presently dispersed."

⁴ Slo. 3544, fo. II.

The fact that it lives both on land and in the water, and its moveable and immoveable jaws are all brought into play, but the ointment episode is evidently the *pièce de résistance*. Luxury, i.e. vice, and avarice were regarded as the two worst sins in monkish eyes, and they are the butt of the moralist in the bestiary over and over again. Here we have ill-doers described as hypocrites, as inflated with pride, and so on, and it is pointed out how their superficiality and love of praise shall prove fatal to them in the last day.

In some French bestiaries at Paris there are curious illustrations of crocodiles, one of which, from MS. 7534 (Bibl. Nat.), is shown on plate III, no. 3. They are the most uncouth animals imaginable, and they have the peculiar feature that their heads are upside down. We know from the text that they are meant for crocodiles. Le Père Cahier comments upon them thus¹:

Comme Pline n'a jamais été plus fidèle à copier Aristote que quand ce grand observateur avait été trompé, il a contribué par son influence à faire croire bien longtemps que la mâchoire supérieure du crocodile se mouvait sans que l'inférieure fit autre chose que de lui opposer une surface fixe. D'où il est arrivée qu'à fin de donner au crocodile une mastication normale, les artistes du moyen âge lui ont ajusté la tête à peu près à l'envers, comme pour tourner la difficulté.

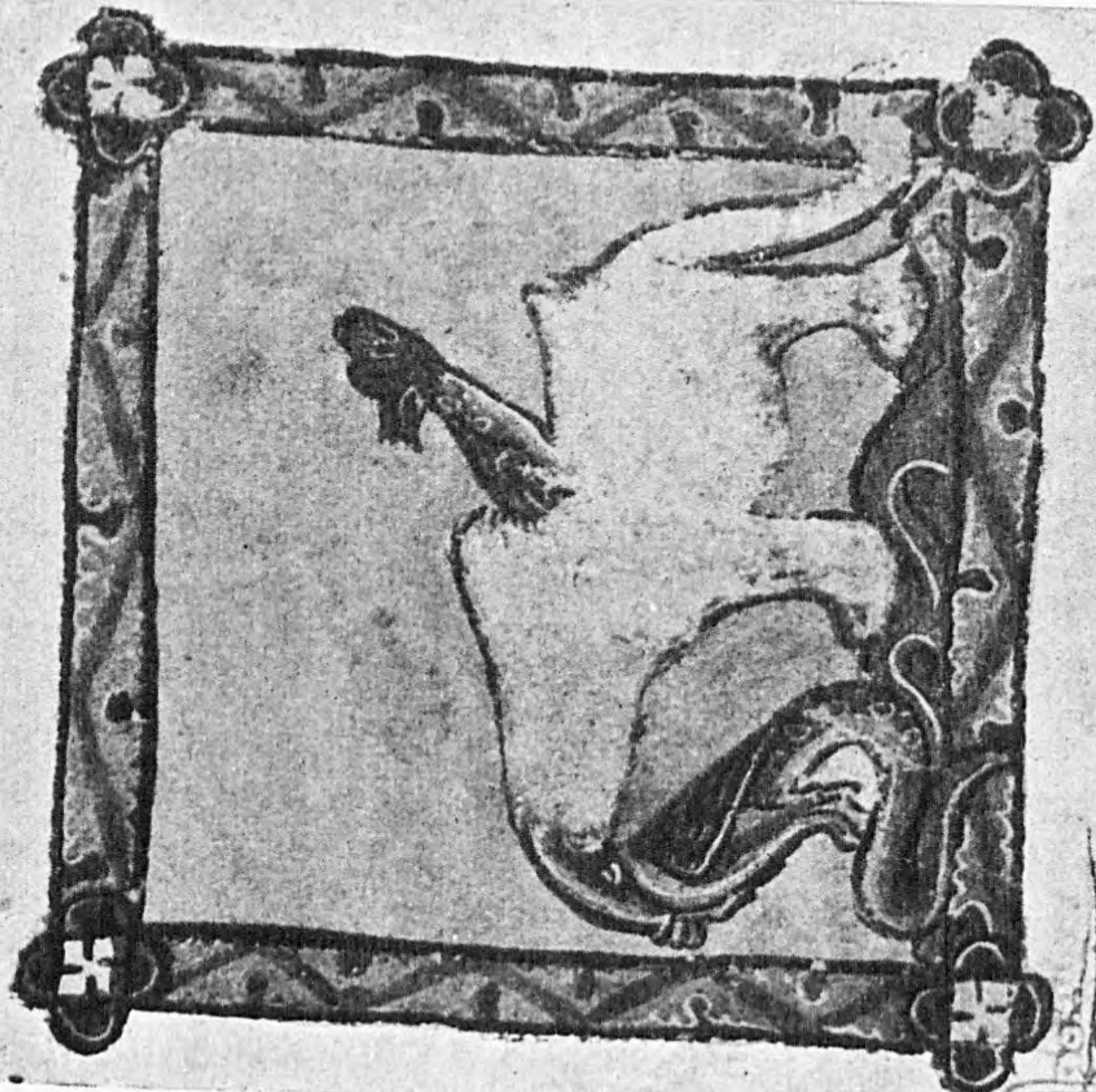
This feature does not, as far as I know at present, occur in any English bestiary,² though in MS. Add. 11283 and Ashmole 1511 the whole crocodile is lying on its back when attacked by the hydrus, but this, I feel sure, is only intended to show that it has been killed. I am bound to say that I regard le Père Cahier's explanation as insufficient. Although the illustrators of these books, as a rule, followed the text, I think it probable that the artist here may have followed Pliny in an expression he uses in bk. viii, ch. 38, when describing the method of hunting the crocodile by the race of men called Tentyritae. The words run "hiantibus resupino capite ad morsum" (*faucibus* being understood) which, correctly rendered,

¹ *Mélanges d'Archéologie*, iii, 216.

² In MS. Harl. 4751 (B.M.) it may perhaps be doubted whether the back or the belly of the crocodile is represented,

and it would consequently appear uncertain how the head is attached (see plate III, no. 4).


Polet adieu doibt les couture dit del
 seul pain ne vit que le ho q'ant de
 la parole de deu: la wordz ille.



Ceste beste est q' on apele co codzille
 z vge altre beste q' on apele
 ydrel z cele gverle ey laighe de hyl:

NO. 2. MS. 3516 (BIB. ARS. PARIS).
HYDRUS AND CROCODILE.

Hydros: in aqua uiuent. De serpente q' ydrus ab ydro qd est aqua: dicitur.
 Grci enim ydros aquas uiuant. hucle dicit aquatilis serpens. a quo.
 uia obtingunt. e' morbus q' dicitur. eo qd fumo touis remediatur.



His fuit in terra insula. ul' palude minus amara. In
 latine grece q' est. qd uno celo ta aqua. gressu. h' h' fabulosa e. Item gressu

NO. 1. MS. HARL. 3244 (B.M.). HYDRUS.

would be "with its head turned back and jaws agape for biting." The word *resupino* is also used in the sense of "reversed," and it is possible that the illustrator, perhaps taking his cue from the motion of a shark, interpreted the word in an exaggerated form, and made the head entirely upside down.

It will be noticed that one of the crocodiles in MS. 7534 has a human head in its jaws. Although it would be generally known by repute to be a dangerous animal and addicted to eating people, I am inclined to think that the motive for these illustrations is to be found in the account given by Pliny¹ of the hunting of the crocodile before alluded to. This account is interesting and describes the crocodile as a terrible animal and very dangerous, and says that the Tentyritae were the only race of men able successfully to capture it.²

I do not know of any example in architecture with the reversed head, but we have several beasts which I think are intended for crocodiles, judging by their resemblance to the manuscript illustrations. At Tissington, Derbyshire, on the Norman font are two beasts of the clumsiest description, one of which has a human head in its jaws. Associated with them are the Agnus Dei, two men, and a bird (plate 1, no. 2). In this case the man is in feet first.³

At Ilam, Staffs, close by, there are two beasts on the Norman font (plate 1, no. 3). One has a human head in its jaws, and the other the same, but with a second head lying below. Both these beasts have long tails and feet with long claws; the man is in this case in head first. It is difficult to understand the duplication of these beasts on one font, unless it is due to the crocodile occurring twice in the bestiaries, but they may perhaps be two

¹ Bk. viii, 38.

² The account given in Marco Polo of the crocodiles at Karazan (China) may be again referred to here as illustrating popular ideas: "Here are seen huge serpents, ten paces in length and ten spans in the girth of the body. At the forepart near the head, they have two short legs, having three claws like those of a tiger, with eyes larger than a fourpenny

loaf and very glaring. The jaws are wide enough to swallow a man, the teeth are large and sharp, and their whole appearance is so formidable, that neither man, nor any kind of animal, can approach them without terror" (bk. ii, ch. xl.)

³ Mr. Romilly Allen describes this font with illustrations in the *Reliquary*, i, 24, 1887. See also his *Early Christian Symbolism*, 372.

different animals.¹ As to the duplication of the heads, Pliny tells us that the crocodile was sometimes forced to disgorge the bodies it had lately swallowed, but I have not found this feature in any of the manuscripts.

At Bradbourne, in the same neighbourhood, there is another good instance on the tower doorway (plate 1, no 4); the beast in this case has the man feet first; it is a little difficult to decide whether it is the man's ribs or the beast's teeth that we see. Another example occurs on a slab at Holton, in Suffolk, and Mr. Romilly Allen records others on the Scotch crosses.

Where there is no accessory to help us, the difficulty of identification is greatly increased, and it is hopeless to speak positively. Considering that we find the crocodile standing alone in the bestiaries, as in MSS. 12 F XIII and Slo. 3544, there is every reason to expect the same in architecture, and the beast astride on the parapet, on the south side of Yaxley church, Hunts, shown on plate IV, no. 1, may perhaps be a crocodile. It has a long mouth and clawed feet. The tail is also long, but is on the other side. Other animals occur on the exterior of this church, and they appear to be of fourteenth century date.

On the Norman font at Topsham, Devon, is another uncouth beast, with a long tail and clawed feet. There is nothing about it which enables us to identify it, and I show it only as a possible instance (plate IV, no. 2).

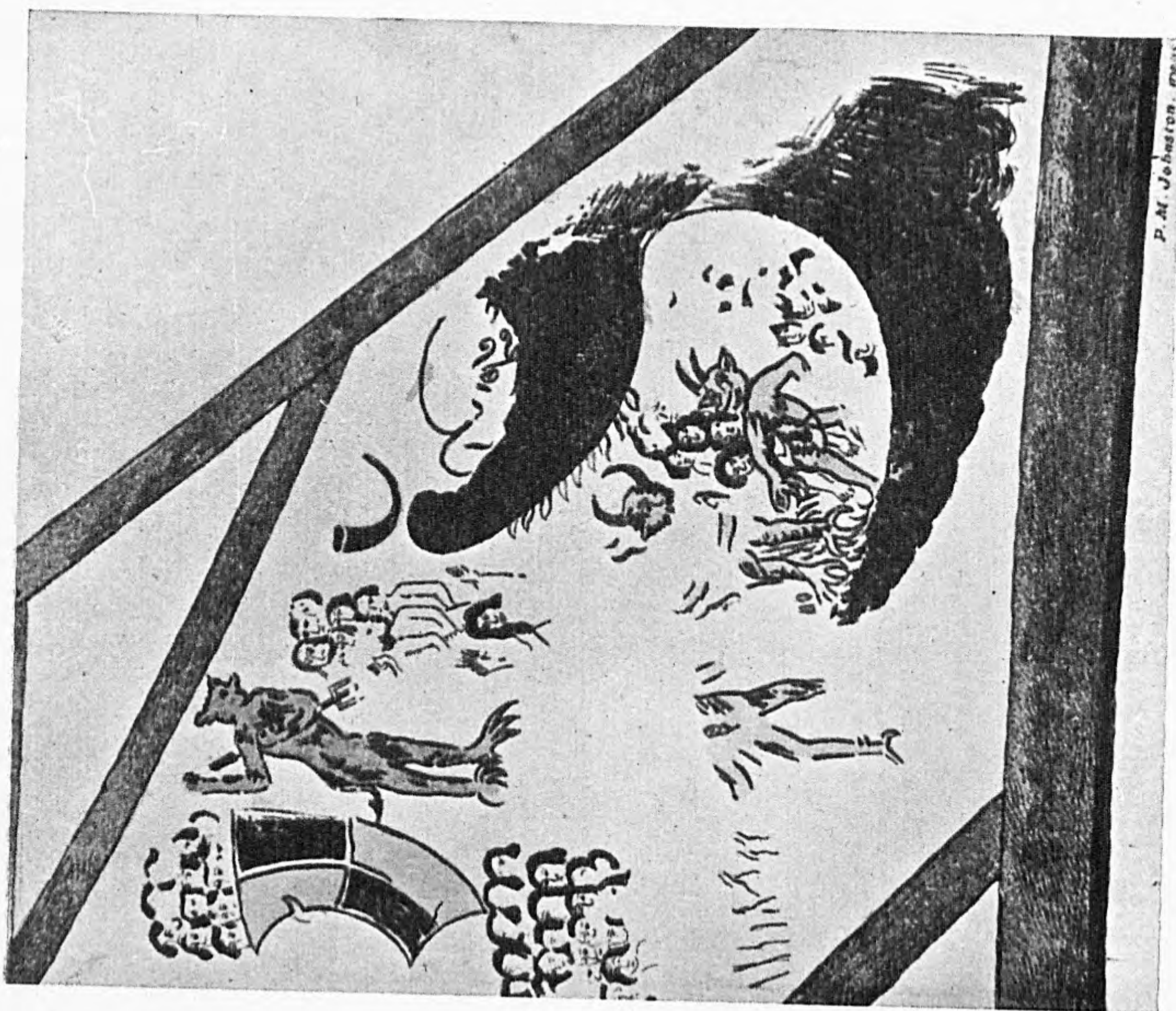
I shall now embark on a much more important episode in which the crocodile is concerned, and that is where it swallows the *hydrus* or water snake. Whatever influence the bestiary had upon architectural detail in the direction I have already mentioned, I hope to show that in this phase it had a much greater, and that it has also an important bearing on the questions discussed by M. E. Mâle.

As the description of the *hydrus* and its relations with the crocodile is fairly common to all our English-Latin bestiaries, it does not matter much from which I quote; I take both my illustration and text from MS. Harl. 4751 (B.M.) The information is given under the heading of *Hydrus*:

¹ An animal called the *Yelve*, with a human head in its mouth, is also illustrated in *Melanges d'Archéologie*. I cannot identify it.



NO. I. CAEDMON'S PARAPHRASE. HELL-MOUTH.



NO. 2. FORD, SUSSEX. HELL-MOUTH.



[Arthur Gardner, phot.]

NO. 1. LINCOLN MINSTER, WEST FRONT. HARROWING OF HELL.



[G. C. Druce, phot.]

NO. 2. KENCOT, OXON. HARROWING OF HELL.

There is an animal in the river Nile which is called hydrus, living in the water. For the Greeks call water *hydros*. Whence it is called a water-serpent. And men bitten by it swell up, and the sickness from it certain people call *boa*, because it is cured by (the application of) ox-dung. The hydra was a dragon with many heads, such as was in the Lernean island or marsh of the province of Arcadia. It is called in Latin *exbydra*, because one being cut off, three heads used to spring out, but this is fabulous, for it is understood that the hydra was a place belching forth waters, devastating the neighbouring state, in which place, when one outlet was shut many (others) burst forth; and Hercules, seeing this, drained the places, and thus shut up the outlets of the water. For the word hydra was derived from water. This hydrus is quite hostile to the crocodile, and has this nature and habit that, when it has seen a crocodile asleep on the shore, it goes, if its mouth be open, and rolls itself in the mud, in order that it may be able more easily to glide into its jaws. The crocodile then suddenly swallows it alive, and then the hydrus, after tearing all the crocodile's bowels to pieces, emerges not only alive, but even unhurt. So, then, death and hell have the likeness of the crocodile, for the Lord Jesus Christ is hostile to them. For taking on Himself our human flesh, He descended into hell and, bursting all its bowels, led out those who were unjustly held bound by it. For He destroyed death itself, rising from the dead, and reviled it, saying prophetically, "O death, I will be thy death, (O) hell, I will be thy sting."

The illustration (plate III, no. 4) shows the hydrus being swallowed by the crocodile. It is in the usual form of a winged dragon. Its wings and tail have not yet got in, but the head can be seen emerging from the crocodile's side, the two events being thus combined. The crocodile is a large greenish monster with spined back, clawed feet and a much twisted tail. Its head is, as before, that of a beast, with long ears, teeth, and curled nostril.

Before proceeding to follow up the symbolism, I shall, as before, give a few details of the hydrus and of the sources of the information given by the bestiary. Pliny¹ makes the ichneumon and not the hydrus the hero of the attack. He first gives an account of the trochilus, a bird which obtains its food by picking off the leeches which infest crocodiles' mouths. He says it cleans first the outside of its mouth, then the teeth, and then the inside, while the animal opens its jaws as wide as possible in consequence of the pleasant sensation. It is at this moment that the ichneumon, seeing it fast asleep through the tickling,

¹ *Loc. cit.* vii, 37.

darts down its throat like an arrow and eats away its intestines.

In the earlier part of the same chapter Pliny tells us how the ichneumon prepares for its combat with the asp by plunging itself repeatedly in the mud and then drying itself in the sun, and though he does not expressly mention this in the case of the attack on the crocodile, he evidently means the same preparation to apply. An account of the trochilus also appears in Herodotus,¹ and of both trochilus and ichneumon in Aristotle.² In Professor Land's list of bestiary subjects in his article on the "Physiologus" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, he mentions the ichneumon covering itself with mud for the purpose of killing the dragon (in Pliny the asp) as a variation of the story, but I have not found it mentioned so far in the English bestiaries.

There is a difficulty in identifying the hydrus. The Greek word *enhydris* is variously translated in Liddell and Scott as "otter" where it occurs in Herodotus, and as "water-snake" in Pliny. Aristotle distinguishes between the *enhydris* and the *hydrus*,³ saying the former has feet, the latter none, and these are rendered "otter" and "water-snake" respectively in Bohn's translation. Pliny mentions the *enhydris* several times. In one place⁴ he calls it a male white serpent, and says that persons who go in pursuit of the crocodile anoint themselves with the fat of this animal; and in another⁵ he says "there is also a snake (*coluber*) which lives in the water, the fat and gall of which, carried about them by persons when in pursuit of the crocodile, are said to be marvellously efficacious, the beast not venturing in such cases to make an attack upon them." Again, he says *enhydris* is the name given by the Greeks to a snake (*coluber*) that lives in the water. With the four upper teeth of this reptile, it is the practice, for the cure of aching in the upper teeth, to lance the upper gums, and with the four lower teeth similarly for aching in the lower.⁶ He also refers to the livers of the water-snake (*aquatici colubri*) and hydrus (*hydri*) as a cure,

¹ ii, 68.

² *Hist. Anim.* ix, 7.

³ *Ibid.* i, i and viii, 7.

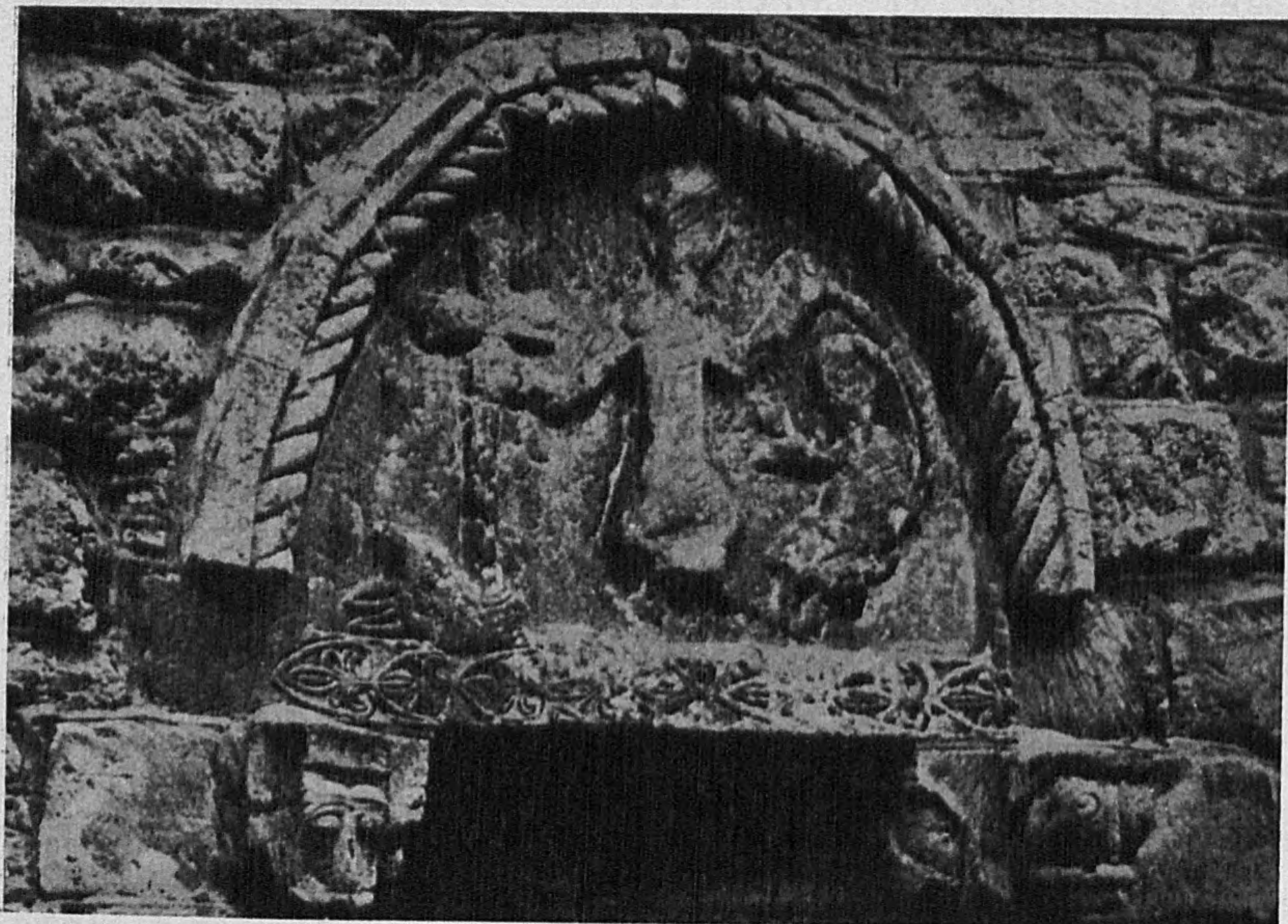
⁴ *Loc. cit.* xxx, 8.

⁵ *Loc. cit.* xxxii, 19.

⁶ *Loc. cit.* xxxii, 26.



[G. C. Druce, phot.]
NO. 1. QUENINGTON, GLOS. HARROWING OF HELL.



[G. G. Buckley, phot.]
NO. 2. BECKFORD, GLOS. HARROWING OF HELL.

apparently here referring to different snakes.¹ It is not perhaps a matter of much importance for our purpose to identify these "serpents" any more than the "dolphin," but it is of some interest because of the effect which these descriptions in Pliny apparently had on the bestiary illustrations, and especially on one in MS. Harl. 3244, under the heading of *hydrus*, where it shows a man in a boat dressed in a cloak and armed with spear and shield, and near him the hydrus, like a long yellow sea serpent (plate v, no. 1). It might appear at first sight that he was hunting this serpent, but I am sure that that is not the case. He is only following it, both going to find their common enemy, the crocodile.²

The allusion in the bestiary to men when bitten by the hydrus swelling up and catching the sickness called *boa* also came from Pliny, who tells us³ that *boa* is the name given to a malady which appears in the form of red pimples upon the body; for its cure the patient is scourged with a branch of elder. In another passage⁴ he gives another somewhat less drastic remedy.

The paragraph relating to the hydra and Hercules, which follows next we must regard by way of parenthesis; it does not concern us beyond that it has caused an additional illustration to be inserted in some manuscripts, as, for instance, in MS. 12 C XIX (Flemish), where we find the hydra as a green dragon with six various coloured heads. Romilly Allen and other writers have apparently confused the hydrus with the hydra. It is the former that attacks the crocodile, as clearly stated in the bestiary, but in a little *bestiaire d'amours* (Harl. 273) in the British Museum, we find illustrations of a crocodile devouring a man, a hydra as a dragon with two legs and four small heads, and a crocodile with four small hydra heads emerging from its side.

¹ *Loc. cit.* xxxii, 33.

² There are some curious allusions to the precautions taken against crocodiles by pepper gatherers in India in Sir John Mandeville's travels, where he says the natives anoint their hands and feet with a juice made of snails and other things, the smell of which drives away crocodiles; and again he tells us that the men of the

island of Silha smear themselves with ointment of "lemons" to keep the crocodiles off when collecting precious stones. An allusion is also made to crocodiles shedding tears when devouring men (Macmillan's ed. 1900, 113-131).

³ *Loc. cit.* xxiv, 35.

⁴ *Loc. cit.* xxvi, 73.

The illustration (plate v, no. 2) of the hydrus killing the crocodile in the Picardy prose bestiary in the Arsenal Library, Paris, of late twelfth or early thirteenth century date, is perhaps the most striking from the point of view of the unnatural shape of the crocodile. It is an extraordinarily uncouth beast, in no way resembling a crocodile. The hydrus is in dragon form, and is getting into the crocodile's mouth, and emerging as before. This occurs under the heading of *Cocodrille*.¹ In an illustration in another French bestiary the crocodile is almost exactly like a Newfoundland dog.

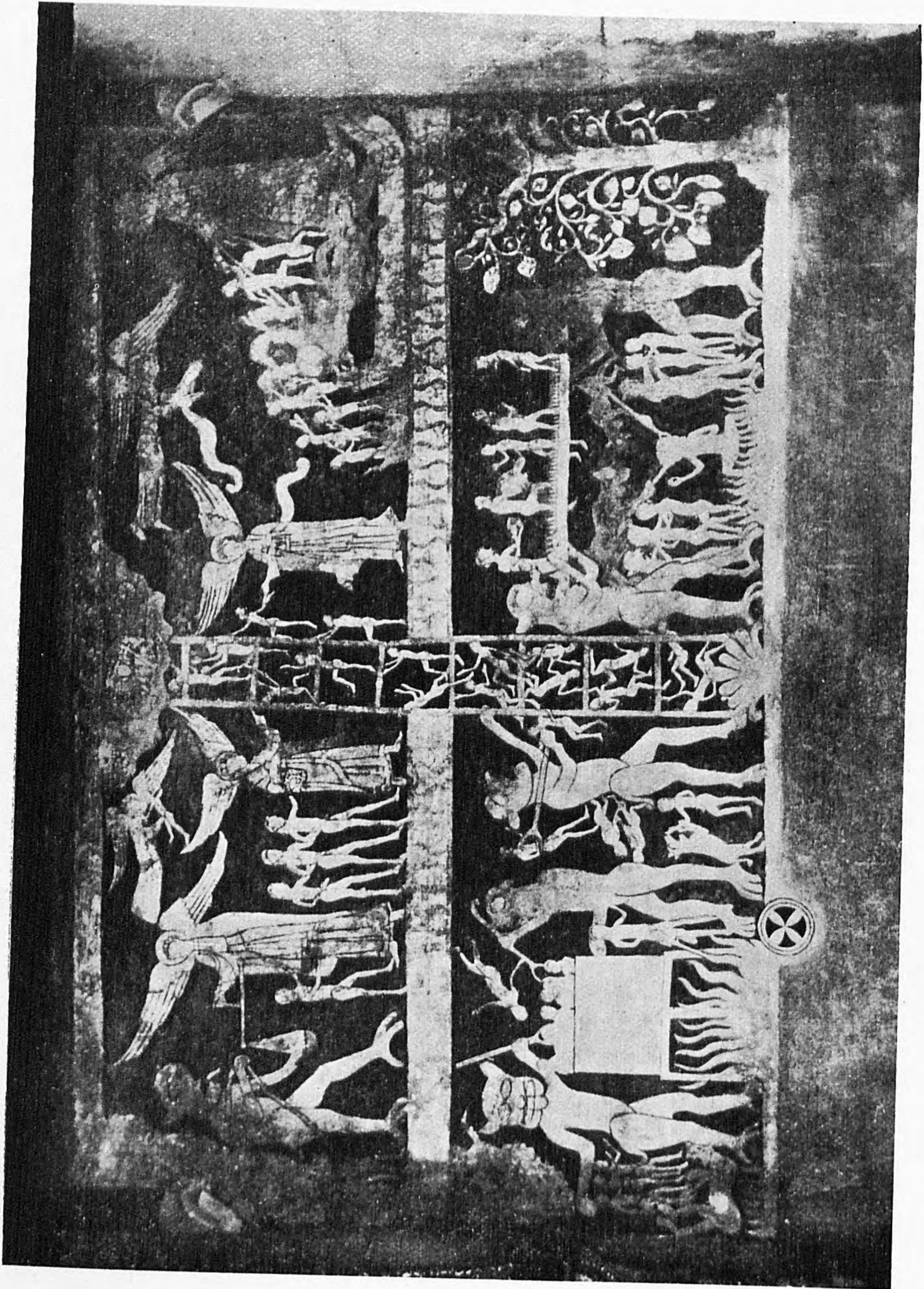
For the purpose of dealing with the symbolism, I return for the moment to the illustration in MS. Harl. 3244, fo. 43 (plate III, no. 2), where we see the hydrus as a snake emerging from the crocodile's side, with a little inset inscription above. This contains the words "Serpens intrans et eo mortuo exiens" (The serpent entering and getting out from it dead), which indicates clearly that the crocodile has been killed. The exposition of the symbolism in the bestiary is very plain. We have the doctrines of the Incarnation and the descent into hell both taught. As the hydrus covers itself with mud, so Christ assumed human flesh; and as the hydrus is swallowed and kills the crocodile, and emerges again unhurt, so Christ descended into hell, overcame death and hell and rose again, taking with Him those who were unjustly held bound there. All the details of these events are described fully in the apochryphal gospel of Nicodemus.

There is but little variation in the symbolism, as we should expect, but in certain Latin bestiaries at Brussels and Berne it is fortified by an additional quotation from Matt. xxviii, 52, "And the graves are open, and many bodies of the saints arose." In the *bestiaires rimés* the language is very quaint.

The importance of this information is manifest, for here we have proof of the crocodile being directly employed to symbolise death and hell in the scene of the Harrowing

¹ In *Melanges d'Archéologie* the plate of this subject shows the crocodile's head reversed, but the manuscript appears to have undergone some deterioration, which

has obliterated the features to such an extent that they are almost unrecognizable in my reproduction.



CHALDON, SURREY. WALL-PAINTING.

[G. C. Druce, phot.]

of Hell, coupled with illustrations which show it more or less as a beast, or at least with a beast-like head.

We should have expected that such a striking symbolic form of the Harrowing of Hell would have been well represented in ecclesiastical architecture, but at present I know only of three examples, one at Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, and two at Kilpeck, Herefordshire, and it is a curious circumstance that these are the only sculptures I know of in which the crocodile can be at all identified. There is a remarkable correspondence between them. They are of about the same period, of similar design and purpose, and might well have been the work of the same hand. The view of Bury St. Edmunds (plate iv, no. 3) shows the upper part of the Norman tower at Bury St. Edmunds, where the sculpture appears as the lower part of a gargoyle, on the south side. It consists of the crocodile's head only, with the hydrus as a curled snake in its jaws.

At Kilpeck (plate iv, no. 4) one sculpture is at the south-west angle of the church and is more accessible. There is only a head, but it is a good one, and the artist has blessed it with a little typical ornament. The hydrus appears as a snake wriggling down its throat. Why this subject is so scarce, it is difficult to say. I can only suppose that it is due to the mediaeval artists preferring to represent Christ in human form in the Harrowing of Hell.¹

The three scenes in which hell-mouth principally occurs are the fall of the rebellious angels, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Last Judgment. For an example of the first I turn to Caedmon's Paraphrase of the Scriptures, a manuscript written probably about the year 1000, and now in the Bodleian Library. On plate iv of Ellis's account of this manuscript, published in 1833, we see Satan bound in chains and lying in the mouth of hell, which appears as a beast's head, rather short and squat, with large ears, oval eyes, and fangs, to which Satan is chained (plate vi, no. 1). The curled nostril and folds of skin behind will be noticed, also the hair on the head.

¹ After careful examination of the sculptures on the early font at Melbury Bubb, Dorset, I am of opinion that the

hydrus and crocodile are not among them. There the supposed object is, I think a dog worrying a lion.

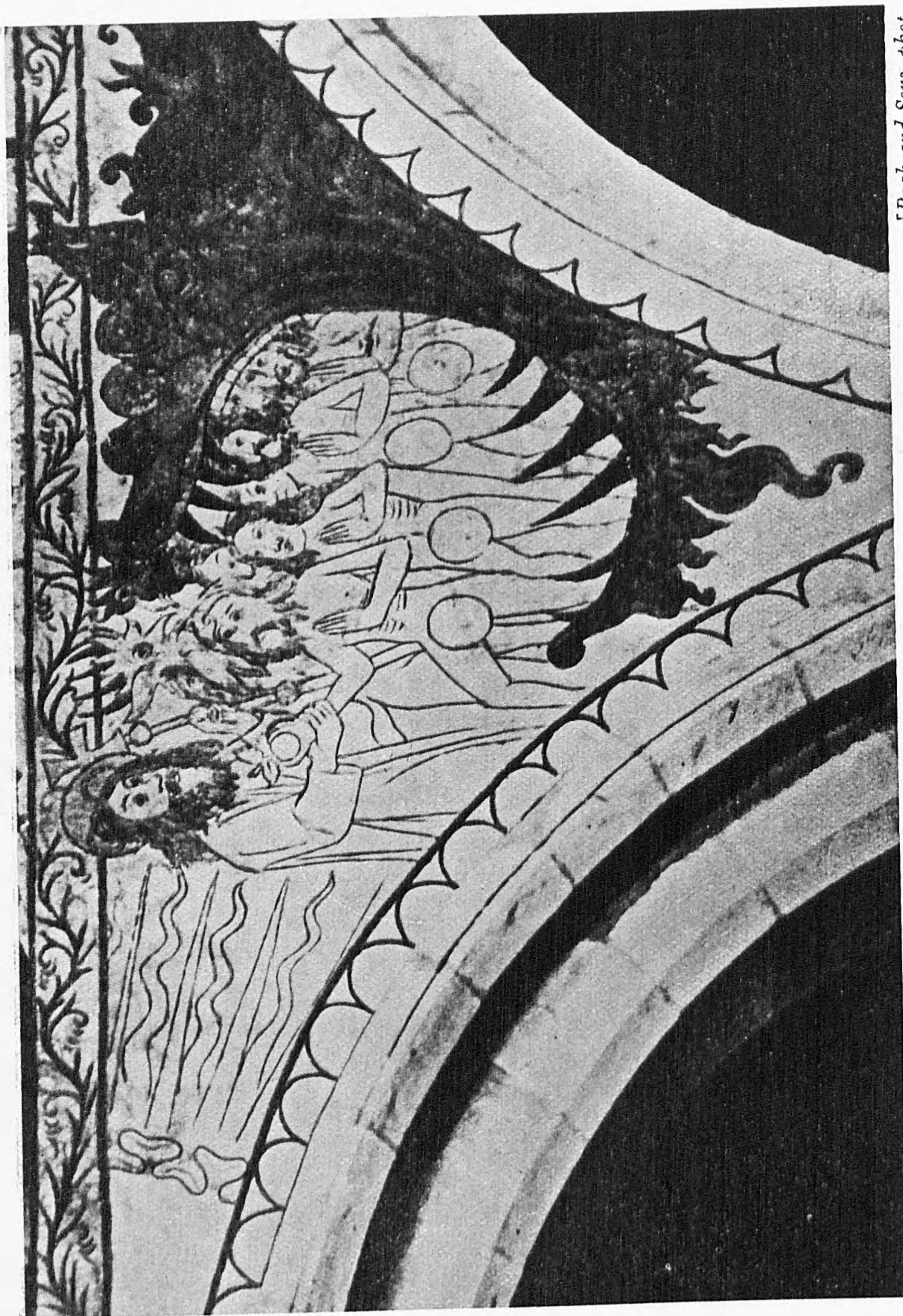
On plate xi of the same work hell-mouth appears as a beast's head with similar features, but Satan, who has a tail, lies bound below. Another good example of eleventh century date occurs in an Anglo-Saxon book of orations in the British Museum, where Satan appears as a doubled-up and chained figure under Christ's feet, either in or falling into hell-mouth. It shows the same beast-like features. In this miniature Arius and Judas appear in chains on either side of hell-mouth.

Scenes of the Harrowing of Hell are much more common. For general details the twelfth century example at Lincoln cathedral on the west front is good (plate vii, no. 1). Hell-mouth appears as a beast's head with ears, oval eyes, nostril and skin-folds plainly shown. It is filled with souls, who hold out their hands towards Christ. The figures are much mutilated, but Christ appears grasping Adam by the hand, while he tramples upon Satan, who lies prostrate, his hands being bound by a ring. His feet are clawed and his head is also beast-like. It is probable that Christ originally bore a cross in this scene, the cross of the Resurrection, the end of which would be in Satan's mouth. Another figure appears behind Christ with his hands clasped. A similar figure occurs in the early fresco in the crypt at St. Clement, Rome, where Christ treads upon a black demon. In a twelfth century psalter¹ an angel stands behind Christ, stabbing a small black demon with a lance.

There are two other examples of hell-mouth at Lincoln. On the south doorway of the angel choir, it appears as the usual beast's head with fringed hair; and on the west front in a scene which is sometimes described as Dives and Lazarus, there are three souls falling into hell-mouth, which is also strongly beast-like.

On the Norman doorway at Quenington, Glos, there is one of the best known sculptured examples of the Harrowing of Hell (plate viii, no. 1). Satan lies with his hands bound with a ring, as at Lincoln, and Christ is thrusting his cross down his throat. The sun, with human face, symbolic of Christ's glory, appears above. Hell-mouth is represented by a head, but it cannot be defined

¹ MS. Nero, C iv (B.M.).



[Boak and Sons, phot.]

PICKERING, YORKS. WALL-PAINTING, HARROWING OF HELL.

very easily. Romilly Allen, in his *Early Christian Symbolism* (p. 280), calls it "the open jaws of a monster"; but we are at a disadvantage, because the head is not seen in profile. At Higham Ferrers, Northants, in a medallion over the west door, there is a good thirteenth century example, showing the usual details.

At Beckford, Glos, on the tympanum of the north doorway (plate VIII, no. 2) we find the details much curtailed. Here hell-mouth is a simple beast's head, down which Christ thrusts his cross: while on the other side is a single figure (Adam), who stretches out his arm towards him. The beast head has prominent ears and nostril. This is a twelfth century example.

A further stage is reached at Kencot, Oxon (plate VII, no. 2), where on the tympanum of the south doorway, both parties in the scene are rendered in symbolical form, as in the case of the hydrus and crocodile at Bury St. Edmunds and Kilpeck. Here is Sagittarius, whose title appears above, shooting an arrow down a beast's throat. This beast has a well-defined ear, oval eye, nostril and fangs. The centaur usually has a bad significance. In the bestiary it is a type of evil passions and fights with the savage man, who symbolizes the christian soul. It is an instance of the curious directions that such symbolism takes; the same animal may signify alike what is most good and most bad, just as the lion in the Bible symbolizes Christ and also the devil. Sagittarius, as the sign of the zodiac, was used to symbolize Christ, as we learn from Philip de Thau's work, the *Livre des Creatures*, in which he has a great deal to say about the calendar, and in which the zodiacs are treated of and their religious significance explained. He tells us first that Sagittarius drawing back his bow signifies the punishment the Jews are to receive for their ill-treatment of Christ, and then continues:

L'arc qu'il tent en sa main, iceo, n'est pas en vain;
 Il signifie tant, seiez i entendant,
 Quant fud en croiz pendud, parmi le cors ferud,
 Seinz espiriz s'en alad pur icels qu'il amad,
 Ki en enfern esteient, sun sucurs atendaient;
 Cume l'arc gerant met la seete avant;
 E ceste entenciun nus fait l'arc par raisun
 Ke la seete vait par mi que la cruiz fait.¹

¹ Wright's *Popular Treatises on Science* p. 44, 1841.

The bow which he holds in his hand, this is not in vain ; it signifies this much (now attend to it), when he was hanged on the cross and wounded in the midst of his body, the Holy Spirit departed from him for those whom he loved, *who were in hell and awaited his help* ; as the bow-bearer puts his arrow forward (and the bow presents us rightly this meaning) that the arrow goes through the way which the cross makes.

These lines are clearly an allusion to the Harrowing of Hell.

The subject occurs also in paintings ; the example at Chaldon (plate ix) is good, but the one detail we want is inadequately shown. Satan lies bound in hell. Christ thrusts the cross down his throat, while He takes Adam by the hand as before, the other saints following.

At Pickering, upon a fifteenth century painting (plate x) we have a fine example with some good details which correspond well with the manuscripts. Here hell-mouth is very plainly a beast's head. Christ appears as a bearded man with a cross, in rays of light. He grasps Adam by the hand, who may be distinguished by the apple he holds, and brings him forth, followed by the other saints. Just above, a couple of little demons may be seen. The anatomical details are well displayed here, the ears, the teeth, the skin-folds behind the nose, and the little hairy beard. The skin-folds correspond very closely with those of the crocodile in MS. Slo. 3544 (plate III, no. 1), although the painting is probably 150 years later. For the purpose of further comparison I have examined over twenty illustrations of hell-mouth in manuscripts dating from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, and it is wonderful how little variation there is : the larger proportion are scenes of the Harrowing of Hell, and they all show beast-like heads ; one in MS. 28784 B really somewhat resembles a crocodile's head and is of a grey colour.

One of the earlier references made was to hell-mouth at Bourges, with the cauldron. This is in the scene of the Last Judgment, and I shall now consider one or two more examples. In 1904 there was dug up in the deanery garden at York a sculptured stone.¹ It shows three beast-like heads and a very large cauldron behind

¹ This was the subject of a paper by Mr. John Bilson, F.S.A, in the *Yorkshire Architectural Society's Journal*, xix, 435.



YORK. HELL CAULDRON.

[Green, phot.]

them (plate xi). The cauldron contains a confused mass of souls with various emblems of their sins, mixed up with loathesome beasts and reptiles. Below, other souls are being tormented in flames by repulsive demons, who hold them down with pitchforks. Of the three mouths two are seen in profile, and these are filled with noisome reptiles, such as frogs, lizards or snakes, which bite the souls; the centre head particularly has two frogs crawling into its nostrils. I would call attention to this item of frogs, because Mr. Bilson, and most other writers, I believe, call them toads. It may appear to be a distinction without a difference, but I have a reason for preferring frogs in this instance, because of the three heads.

In Rev. xvi, 13 the Vulgate reads: "Et vidi de ore draconis, et de ore bestiae, et de ore pseudoprophetae spiritus tres immundos in modum ranarum." Here we have three mouths mentioned and a direct reference to frogs as unclean spirits in them, but if this was not enough to inspire their use in architecture, we have the additional evidence of the bestiary, where the same symbolism is recorded under the heading of *Frogs*.

A translation of the Latin text of MS. Harl. 4751, runs thus:

Frogs are so called from their croaking, because they croak round the marshes in which they were bred, uttering their peculiar cry with never-ending din. Frogs are the devils of the Apocalypse. "I saw (coming) from the mouth of the dragon unclean spirits in the form of frogs. Now these are the spirits of devils." Frogs are heretics who, wallowing in the filth of the vilest sensuality, do not cease to snarl with vain croakings, as in Exodus.

The illustration in this manuscript shows four frogs swimming in water, one of which is seized by a fish. It is difficult to distinguish some of these little animals pestering lost souls, but where a frog or toad-like animal bites one, I should suppose it to indicate a heretic, as described in the bestiary. At Bourges (plate II, no. 1) we see one actually with its head inside the mouth of a soul in the cauldron, and we may well imagine that it represents a heretic "who has not ceased to snarl" with his vain frog-like croaking.

On the west porch of the cathedral of Notre Dame at Paris, in a moulding (plate XII, no. 1) appears a beast's

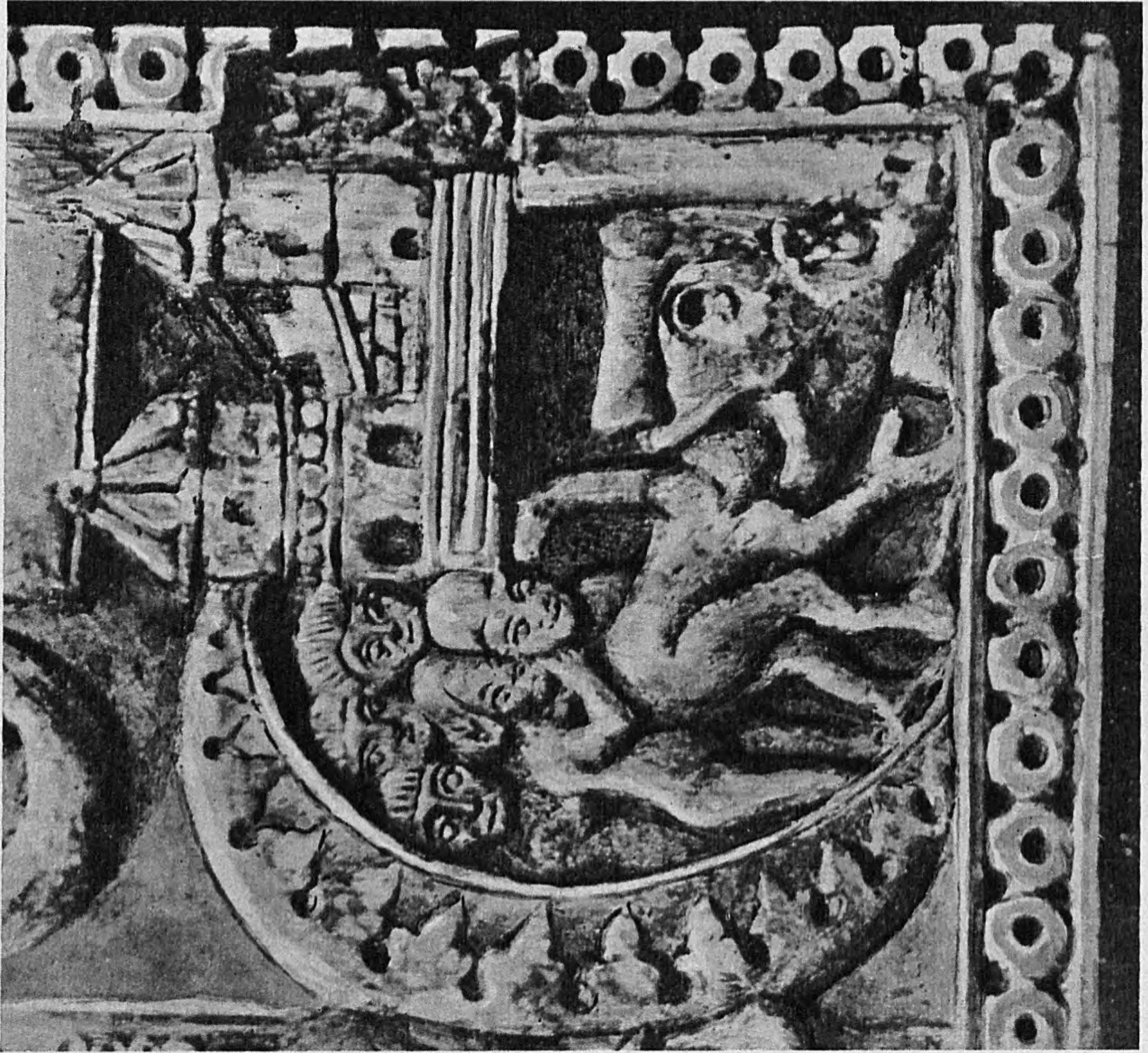
head with the same typical nose, eye, ear and skin-folds as before, swallowing a clothed woman, who emerges behind the head. At first sight it might appear to be the legend of St. Margaret, but immediately below is a cauldron in flames with two demons thrusting souls down into it. A clothed female figure appears to be standing in the cauldron, whose head is not visible; a large snake clings to her back, and two frogs are on the edge of the cauldron, one of whom is biting her leg. I should suppose this sculpture to represent two separate stages in the fortunes of a lost soul.

At Amiens (plate II, no. 2) we have hell-mouth, but without a cauldron, in the scene of the Last Judgment, and of a date corresponding with Bourges and our manuscript. It is again a beast's head with well defined ears, eye, and fringe of teeth. Lost souls are being driven into it by demons, while above are angels with flaming swords. At Rouen another example occurs on the tympanum of the Portail aux Libraires. Hell-mouth appears as a beast's head, with a cauldron in flames filled with souls.

At Southwold, on a stall arm of the fifteenth century (plate XIII, no. 1), we have a simple representation of hell-mouth. It is again clearly a beast-head; it has the same large ears, oval eyes and skin-folds on the upper jaw, also regular teeth, as at Amiens, and fringed hair. There are two human beings very uncomfortably tucked in its mouth. At Worcester cathedral, on a spandrel of the wall arcade in the south-east transept, hell-mouth appears as a beast's head with skin-folds, large ear, prominent nostril, fangs and hairy beard or neck. Other examples may be seen on an alabaster table at the British Museum, and on an ivory diptych at South Kensington. As to manuscripts, in a fourteenth-century bestiary at the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, which has double illustrations, there are at least eight, all showing the same beast form, and in a fourteenth century *breviaire d'amour* at the British Museum there are eleven, all of the same type.

At Ford church, Sussex, in the painting of the Last Judgment, which Mr. P. M. Johnston, F.S.A.¹ places

¹ See his paper on Ford church in the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, xliii, 150.



NO. 2. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM. IVORY BOOK COVER, HELL-MOUTH.



NO. 1. PARIS, NOTRE DAME, WEST PORCH. HELL-MOUTH, ETC. [Arthur Gardner, phot.]

in the early part of the fifteenth century, we have the same beast-like mouth (plate vi, no. 2). Mr. Johnston writes thus about it: "On the extreme right are 'the jaws of hell,' represented in the usual form of a yawning whale or sea-monster's head, fringed with teeth, an image taken from Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving, 'Out of the belly of hell' when he had been thrown up by the fish."

This reference of Mr. Johnston's brings us directly into conflict with the views put forward by M. Emile Mâle, and owing to the general acceptance of Jonah's fish as the "motive" inspiring representations of hell-mouth, it will be only fair to inquire what evidence there is in manuscripts and sculpture to support it.

The earliest illustrations of Jonah that we have are in the Roman catacombs, and I am able to show paintings in the catacomb of Calixtus of the two scenes in which the so-called "fish" appears, i.e. when he is thrown overboard and when he is disgorged. In the first scene (plate xiv, no. 1) the ship appears with sailors, one of whom has his hands raised in the ancient attitude of prayer for deliverance from the storm. In the centre is Jonah going overboard head first, and on the right is the fish coming towards him. Owing to the poor lighting its shape is rather difficult to gauge.

In the second scene (plate xiv, no. 2), where he is being disgorged, its form can be better seen, but I have had to touch up the outlines in my illustration. It is clearly one of those *hippocampi*, or sea-monsters, that we find in classical art, having front flappers or paws, big ears and a much curled body and tail.

On a sarcophagus of the fourth century in the Lateran Museum at Rome we have the two scenes combined immediately below the medallion with the portraits of the deceased. On the left Jonah is thrown overboard, and on the right he is disgorged and lying under the gourd or ivy-bush, according to which version is followed. Here the head is that of an animal with ears and teeth (plate xiv, no. 3).

At Milan cathedral there is an ivory pyx with a carving of Jonah cast overboard, of which there is a reproduction at South Kensington (plate xiv, no. 4). It is marked as of the fourth to sixth century. The "fish" here is of

the same type. Upon the ambo in the cathedral at Ravello, of about seventh century date, the same two scenes appear. In each it is a sea-monster of the dragon type, with wings and curled tail. A good illustration can be seen in Messrs. Bligh Bond and Camm's recent book on Screens.

The reason for the appearance of these forms in early christian art was because it had not then developed on any independent lines, but was largely a form of pagan art. We find plenty of marine monsters on vases, coins, and pavements, such as upon the pavement in Hadrian's Villa at Rome, about 120 A.D. in date. Their heads take the form of horses, rams, or centaurs, and they are often ridden by graceful nereids. It is possible that some particular figure in classical mythology was used as the model for Jonah's fish, as in the case of the Good Shepherd or the Fall. The sea-monster of Andromeda is generally spoken of in this connexion.¹ There was also the influence of the Greek translations of the Old Testament which the early christians used. There the word *κῆτος* is employed, meaning a great beast of any kind. The fish idea arose from the Vulgate translation of *κῆτος* into *piscis*, and thence into *whale*, because it was the largest fish known. These classical sea-monsters may also be seen on Carolingian ivories of the ninth century at South Kensington, where they are used in an allegorical sense.

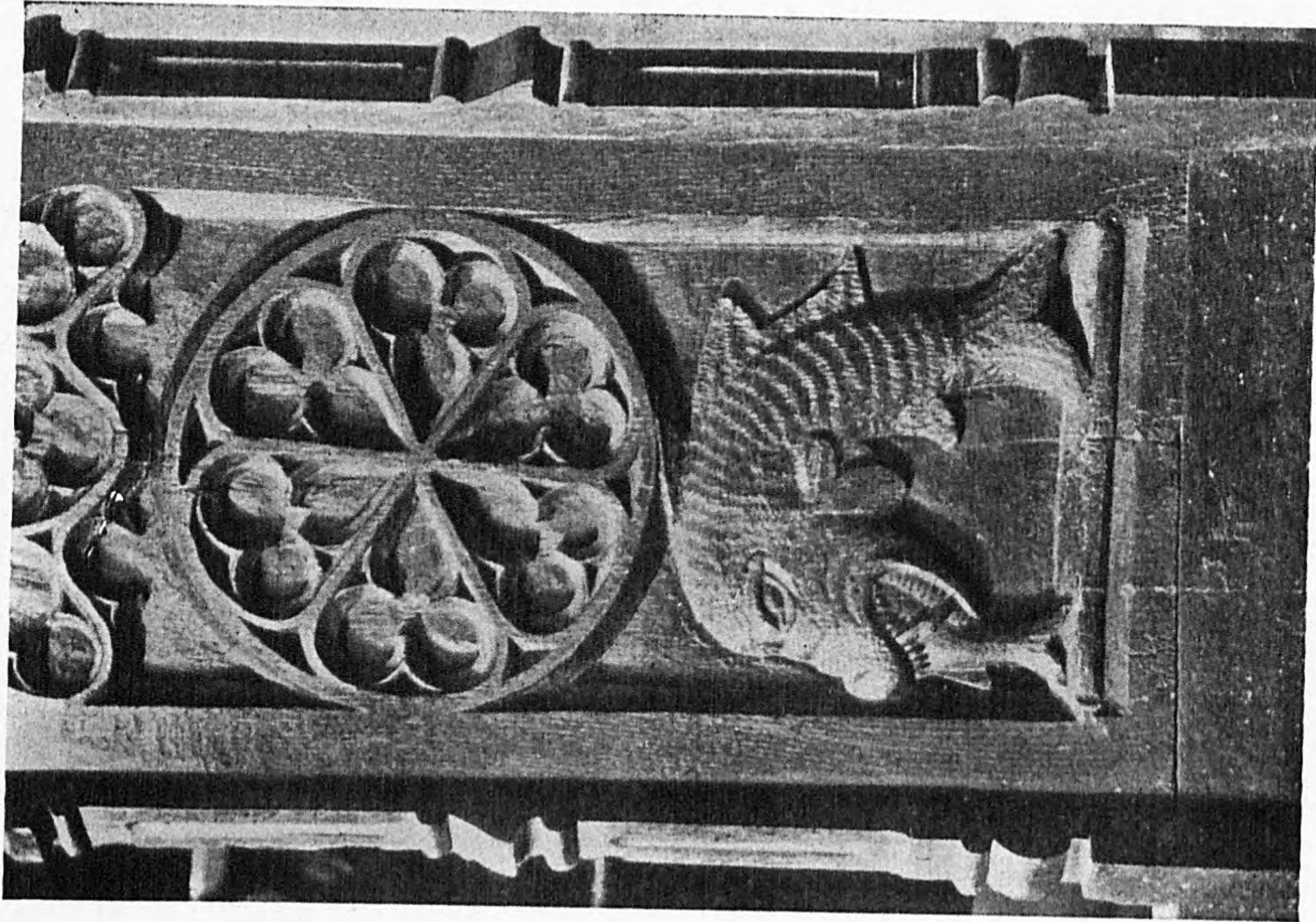
Whether they can be traced back through the various stages of Greek art to any natural animal such as the Egyptian crocodile is not my present purpose to inquire, but they are distinct enough, if compared with the classical art. The coin which I illustrate, which bears the heads of Agrippa and Augustus on the obverse, and is about 18 B.C. in date, shows on the reverse a natural crocodile, though its head is not well



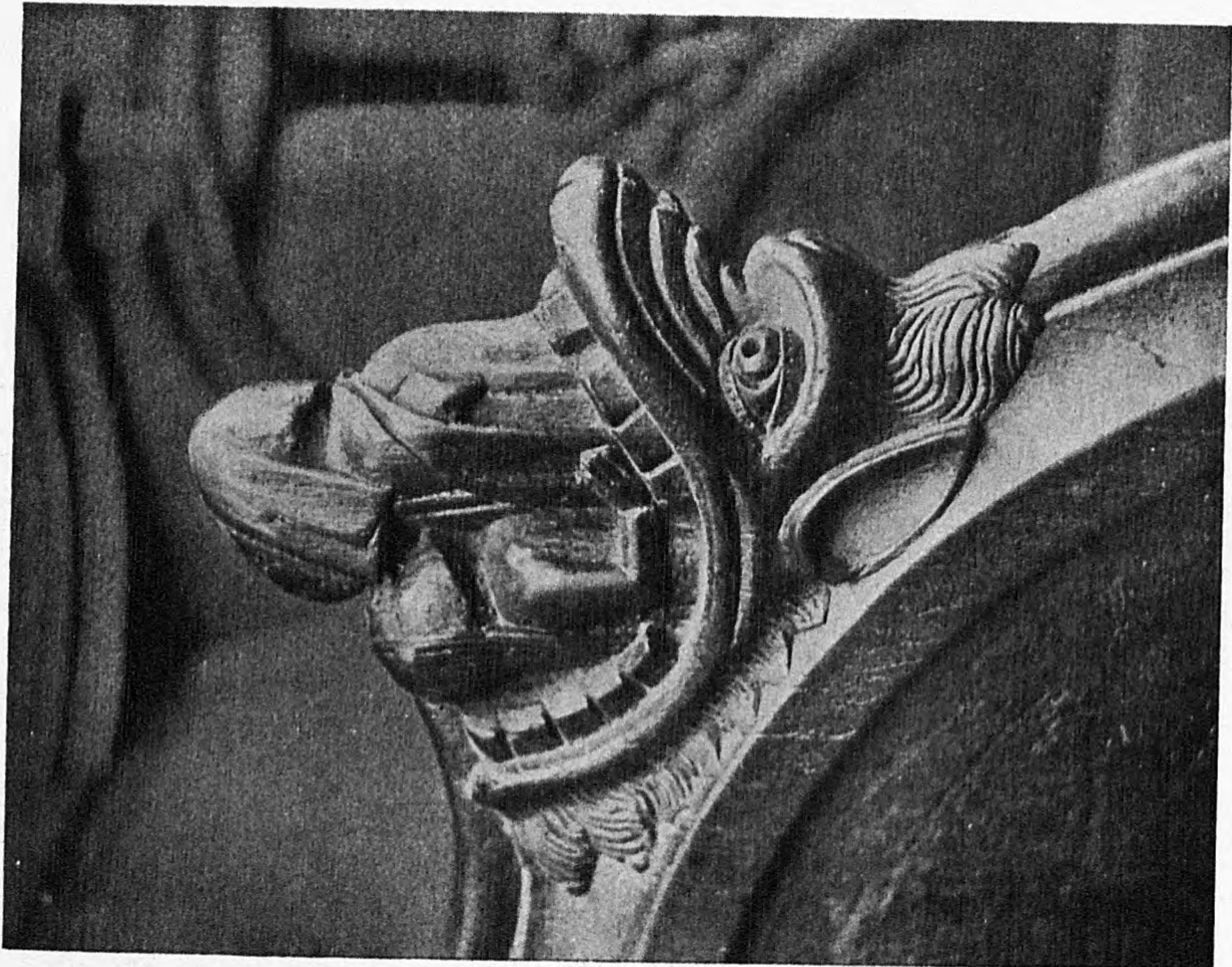
FIG. 2. ROMAN COIN WITH CROCODILE.

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¹ *La Peinture italienne*, G. Lafenestre, and *Christian Art and Archeology*, Lowrie, 207.



[G. C. Druce, phot.]
NO. 2. KIDLINGTON, OXON. ASPIDO.



[G. C. Druce, phot.]
NO. 1. SOUTHWOLD, SUFFOLK. HELL-MOUTH.

drawn. It is short and rather resembles a beast's head (fig. 2). Others which approach more nearly to nature may be seen on lamps in the fourth vase room at the British Museum (nos. 243, 298).

An inspection of the ivory book-covers at South Kensington also shows the earliest hell-mouth that I know of. It is on a Carlovingian ivory of the Last Judgment, marked as prior to the tenth century, and is in the same show-case as those with the allegorical classical sea-monsters of the same date. There is no resemblance between them. The portion of the ivory with hell-mouth is illustrated on plate XII, no 2. It appears as a rude kind of natural beast's head, but of what beast it is impossible to say. The mouth is small, and there seems hardly any room for the lost soul to get in.

I shall now turn to mediaeval representations of Jonah's fish, and for the purpose of seeing what form they take I shall adopt the same course as before and consult the mediaeval bestiaries. Under the heading of *Aspido vel Cete* we find illustrations and accounts of a sea-monster, and an allusion to Jonah's fish. My illustration (plate xv) is taken from MS. Harl. 4751, but the account on fo. 60 of MS. Harl. 3244 is fuller, and so I give a translation of it in preference. The miniature is on the same lines but in much simpler form. The title runs thus :

About the aspido chelone that is a great beast. This fish, when it comes up to the surface to sun itself, has the likeness of an island, so that often those navigating (ships) anchor on it; about which fish also there is mention in the life of St. Brendan.

There is a beast in the sea which is called *aspido chelone*, but in Latin *aspido testudo*. Now the beast is great, having over its skin a surface of sand, as it were, just like the sea shore. This (beast) in the middle of the ocean raises its back above the waves of the sea so that by those navigating vessels it is sometimes believed to be an island, especially when they have seen its whole breadth covered with sand as in all the sea shores; thinking it, then, to be an island, and drawing their ship near to it and disembarking, they fix in stakes and fasten the ships. Thereupon that they may cook for themselves food after their labour, they make their fires on the sand as on the land. But that (beast), when it has felt the heat of the fire, suddenly dives down into the water and draws the vessel with it into the depths of the sea.

Thus suffer all those who are of unbelieving heart and such as are ignorant of the wiles of the devil, putting their trust in him and binding themselves

to his works. They sink together with him into the Gehenna of burning fire. Such is his cleverness.

The second nature of this beast is this: when it is hungry it opens its mouth and exhales, as it were, a certain sweet smell from its mouth, which smell, so soon as the smaller fishes notice, they collect between its lips. But when its mouth has become filled with different kinds of little fishes, suddenly it shuts its mouth and swallows them.

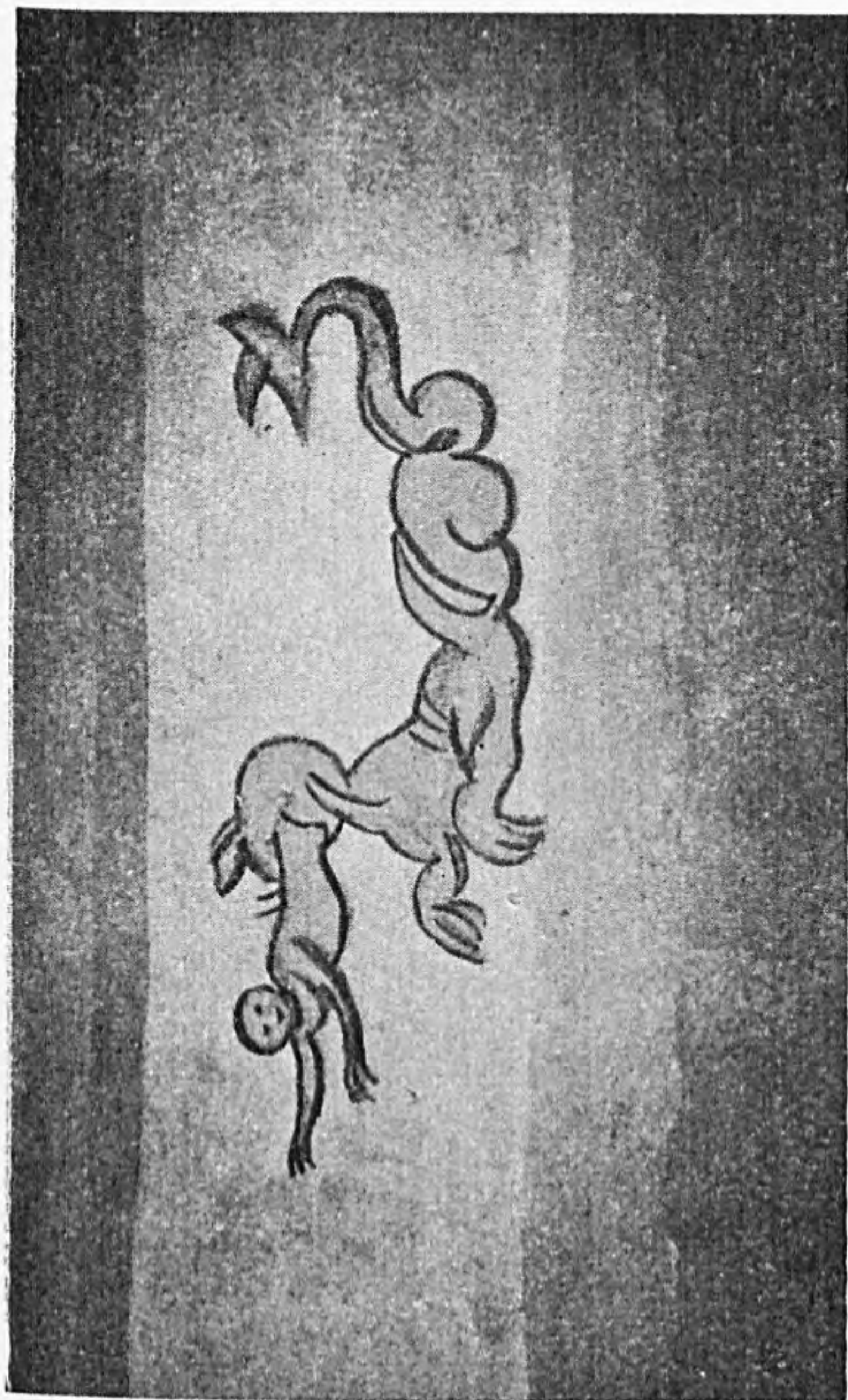
Thus suffer all who are of weak faith and (who) are attracted by pleasures and indulgences, as it were, by some devilish odours; they are suddenly carried off by him as the tiny little fishes. For the bigger (fish) beware of him and never come near him. Such, then, are those who always have Christ in their minds, they are great in his sight, and if they have made progress, perceive the manifold wiles of the devil and guard themselves from him and resist him the more. And he flies from them. But the men who are vacillating and of weak faith, when they betake themselves to the pleasures and luxuries of the devil are deceived, as the Scripture says, "with ointments and various perfumes do they make themselves glad,"¹ and thus is their soul built up on unstable ground. It is called *cete* on account of the immensity of its body. For there are vast bodies and kinds of beasts equal in size to mountains in so much that even ships are moored there as if to an island, like that (beast) which swallowed up Jonah, the belly of which was of so great size that it was reckoned to be hell, Jonah the prophet himself saying, "He hath heard me from the belly of hell."

The illustration shows the ship resting on the back of the sea-monster, from which trees are growing to make it appear more like an island. There are nine sailors, most of whom are very busy getting down the sail and unshipping the mast. One has landed and has lit a fire on which a cooking-pot rests, which he is blowing up with quite modern-looking bellows.

I referred to this subject at the beginning of my paper, as being sculptured at Alne, but there the sea-monster is not visible, and so it is useless for our purpose. Its second nature is shown clearly by the shoal of little fish swimming into its mouth. I have been fortunate enough to find an example of this carved on a fifteenth century bench-end at Kidlington, Oxon, where it occurs in a very simple form, merely a large fish swallowing a small one (plate XIII, no. 2). It is the only carving of the subject that I know of at present.

As regards the symbolism it is not necessary to say much. The sea-monster, or fish, is a type of the devil

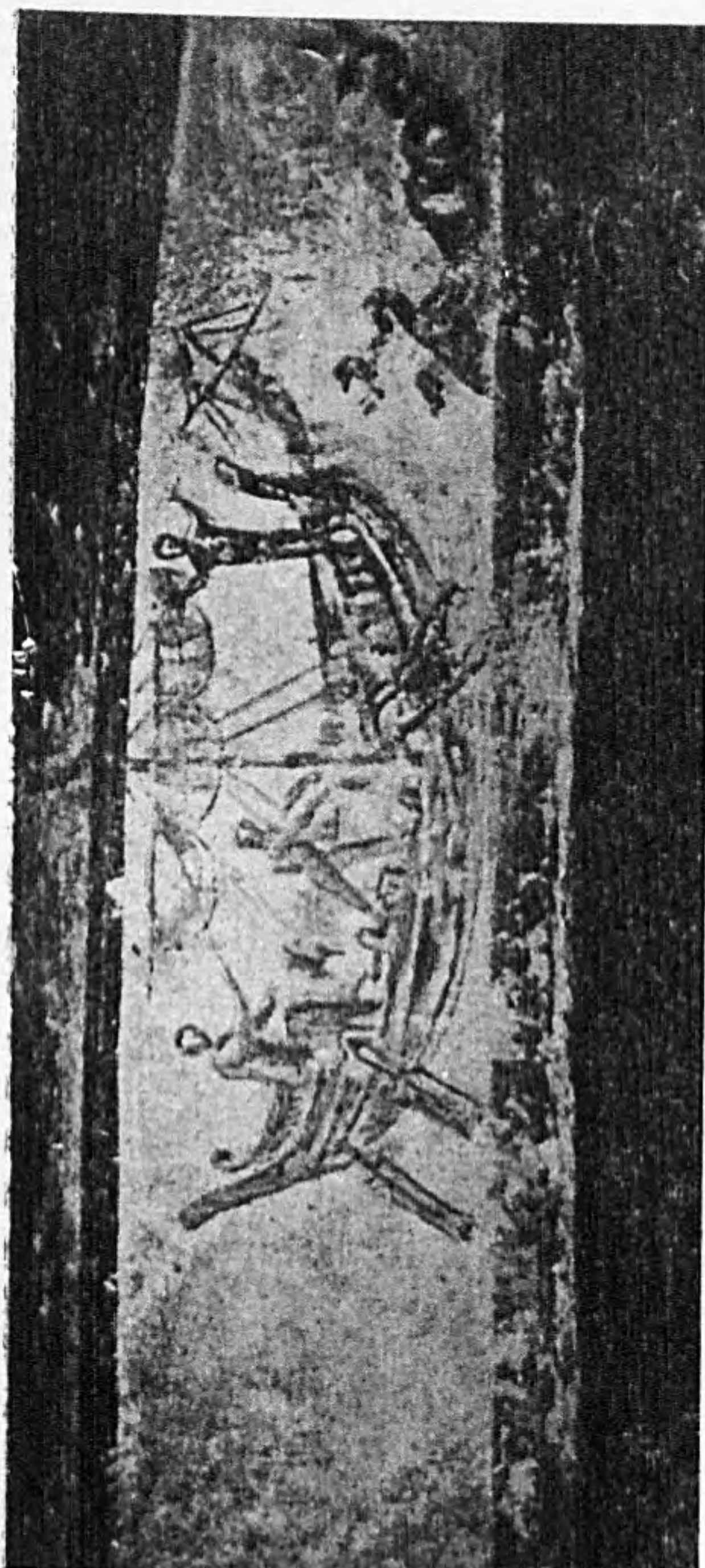
¹ Prov. xxvii, 9.



NO. 2.
[Parker, phot.]
CATACOMB OF CALIXTUS, ROME. JONAH DISGORGED (RESTORED).



NO. 4. IVORY PYX, MILAN CATHEDRAL. CAST IN THE
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.



NO. 1. CATACOMB OF CALIXTUS, ROME. JONAH CAST OVERBOARD.
[Parker, phot.]



NO. 3. SARCOFAGUS, LAT. MUS. ROME.
[Parker, phot.]

entrapping unwary and weak men; but the turning of the smaller and bigger fish into those people of weak and strong faith respectively is highly ingenious.

The ancients were fond of stories of immense fish or sea-monsters, and Pliny, as usual, has a good deal to say about them. In bk. ix, ch. 12, he says:

The Indian sea produces tortoises (*testudines*) of such vast size that with the shell of a single animal they are able to roof a habitable cottage: and among the islands of the Red Sea, the navigation is mostly carried on in boats, formed of these shells. They are to be caught in many ways; but they are generally taken when they have come to the surface of the water just before midday, a season at which they experience great delight in floating on the calm surface, with the back entirely out of the water

Turtles are really referred to here, but the term *aspido* had no doubt become generic for any large sea fish long before the twelfth century. In this connection it is worth pointing out that *balena*, the whale, is separately treated of in some of the bestiaries, with illustrations showing it spouting, but there is no reference to Jonah.¹

There is a second account on fo. 64 of MS. Harl. 3244, which corresponds with that in MS. Harl. 4751, both being rather shorter than the account I have given. The information relating to Jonah is practically the same, but it possesses an important feature in that the illustration shows Jonah himself being disgorged by a fish (plate xvi, no. 1). He is naked and catching hold of a conventional tree. The title given to the subject runs thus: "De genere ceti aspido dicitur, cujus venter maximus est ut infernus dicatur." This title and the illustration together make it clear that it represents Jonah's fish, and as such it is perhaps of more value than the other miniature. Both are of thirteenth century date. With a view to further evidence I inspected practically all the catalogued manuscript illustrations of Jonah and the fish at the

¹ It should be noted, however, that the account of this *cetus* in the Latin *Physiologus* of Thetbaldus (MS. Harl. 3093, fo. 37) has the title *De Balena*. The allusion to Jonah is contained in one line, immediately following the account of the swallowing of the little fish: "Non sic non sic iam

sorbuit ille ionam." In the English rendering of this manuscript, made in the thirteenth century (Arundel MS. 292, fo. 8), the allusion is ignored. See *An Old English Miscellany*, published by the Early English Text Society, 1872.

British Museum, and they all show the same thing, that the artists intended to draw a natural fish; and they were, on the whole, fairly successful. More particularly I may mention Harl. 4382, fo. 122b, a French bible history of the fourteenth century, where the picture is most artistic and the fish well drawn. MS. 16975, fo. 73, a Latin psalter of the thirteenth century, is also instructive; there the two scenes are contained in the bends of the letter S, formed by a winged dragon with a head at each end; although the fish's head is not so well drawn it has the shape, and unmistakable scales. These illustrations show the fish with round eyes, and there is no symptom of an ear.¹

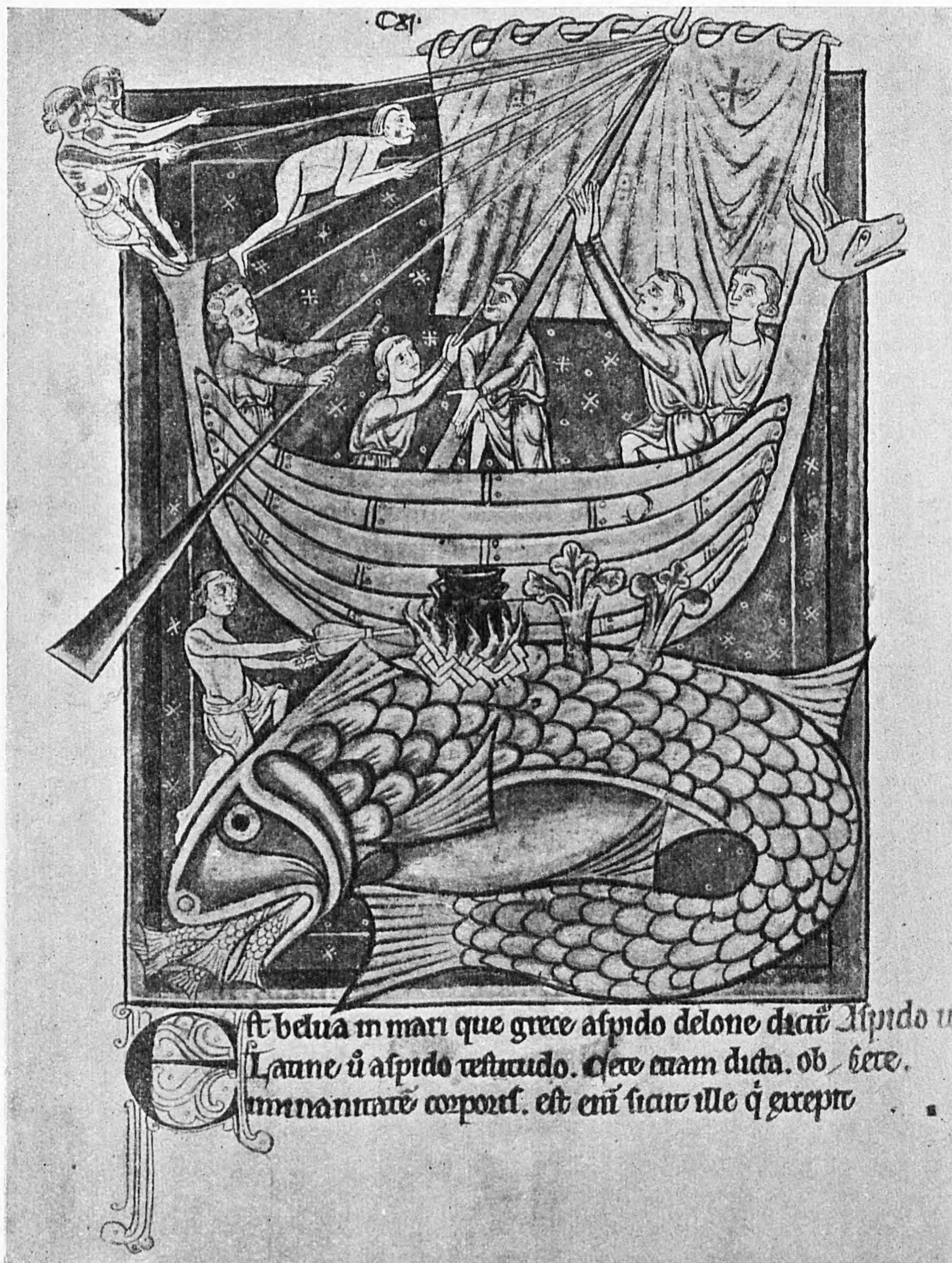
Turning to carvings, we have two good representations of Jonah on misericordes at Ripon cathedral, which would be of fourteenth or fifteenth century date. The first shows the ship with three men busily engaged in throwing Jonah overboard. The fish can be seen in the water below, and is fairly natural (plate xvi, no. 2).

In the second (plate xvi, no. 3), Jonah is seen rising up out of the fish's mouth, the dry land with trees being clearly indicated. The form of the fish's head can be better seen here. Its mouth is broad, rather like a shark's, and it has a curly beard, resembling what we see on a cod-fish.

We see, then, that from the evidence of the English-Latin bestiaries the people of the middle ages were familiar with both the crocodile and Jonah's fish as symbols of hell, but the reference to the latter seems to be rather confined to a comparison for the purpose of giving emphasis to the size of *aspido*, the symbolism of which goes altogether in another direction. I have not found any allusion to Jonah so far in any foreign manuscript. The illustrations of the *crocodile* show it to be practically always a beast-like animal, and those of Jonah's fish a more or less natural fish. The bestiaries professed to

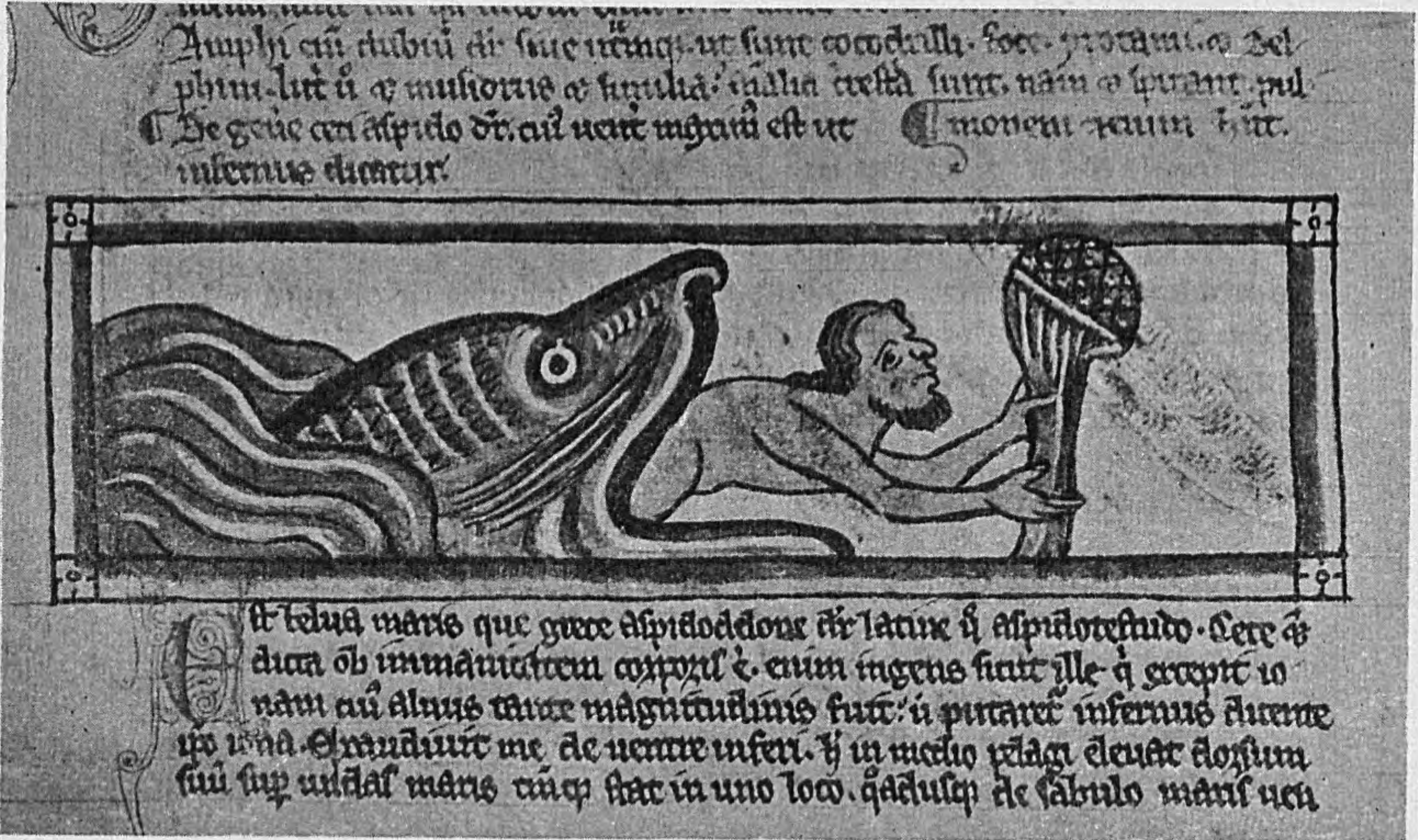
¹ Manuscript illustrations of Jonah in the fish's mouth are usually to be found in the Latin psalters, in the initial letter S of the sixty-ninth psalm, which begins: *Salvum me fac, Deus*. Revised version,

“ Save me, O God;
For the waters are come in unto my soul.
I sink in deep mire, where there is no
standing:
I am come into deep waters, where the
floods overflow me.”

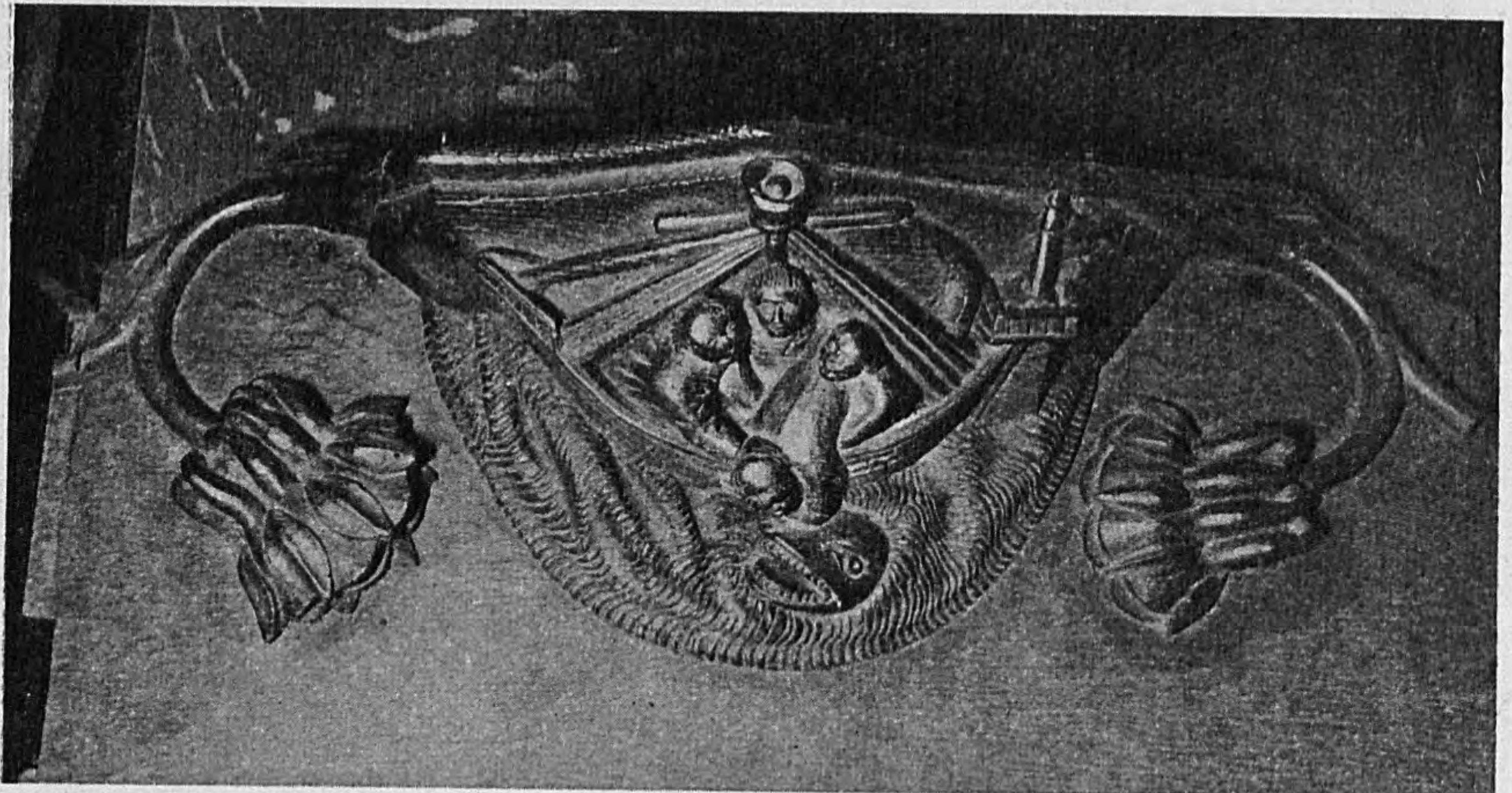


Est belua in mari que grece aspido delone dicitur Aspido u
Latine u aspido testucudo. Certe etiam dicta. ob herte.
similitudine corporis. est enim sicut ille q exrept

MS. HARL. 475I (B.M.). ASPIDO CHELONE.

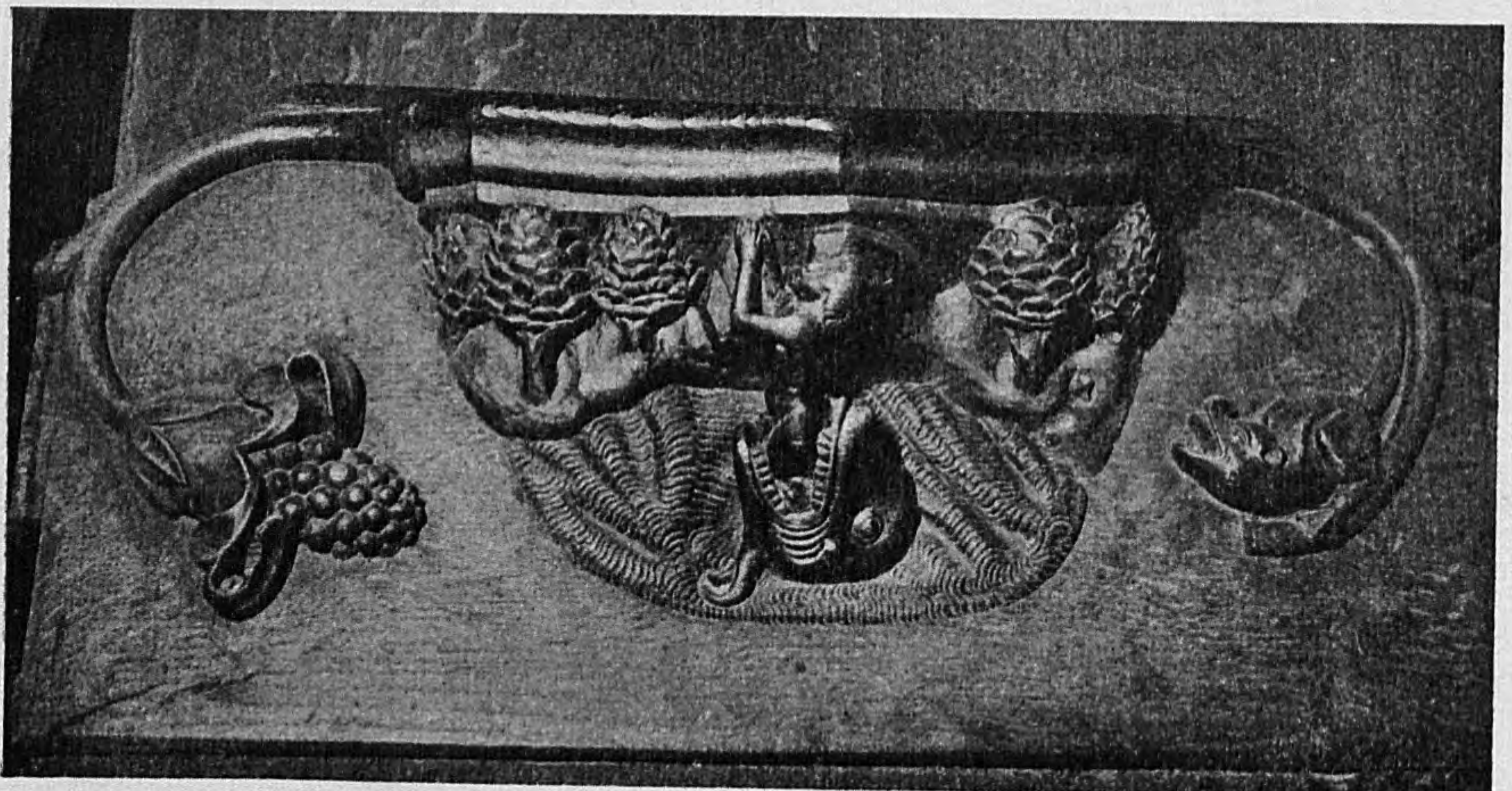


NO. I. MS. HARL. 3244 (B.M.). JONAH DISGORGED.



[Geo. Parker, Ripon, phot.]

NO. 2. MISERICORD, RIPON CATHEDRAL CHURCH. JONAH CAST OVERBOARD.



[Geo. Parker, Ripon, phot.]

NO. 3. MISERICORD, RIPON CATHEDRAL CHURCH. JONAH DISGORGED.

deal with natural forms, except when they treated of fabulous animals, such as the syren or centaur, where they adopted classical models. In the case of the *crocodile* they attempted to follow nature according to their limited knowledge, although we have probably to allow for a considerable amount of copying; in the case of *aspido* with the ship on its back they may have followed a ready-made model, as it is mentioned in the *Arabian Nights*; but if they drew a natural *fish*, it would be due to the rendering of *piscis* in the vulgate.

The paintings and carvings of hell-mouth in churches certainly show a beast's head, not a fish's. It seems probable, therefore, that some animal was taken for a model, and I suggest that it was the crocodile. The evidence of the bestiaries as to its symbolism in the scene of the Harrowing of Hell is very definite, and as the artists and carvers of the middle ages were well acquainted with these books, I think they took their cue from them, being additionally attracted by the stimulating information derived from Pliny. This does not mean that the primary need for the representation did not come from the Bible, but in view of the number of symbolic references to hell I think it is difficult to nail down any one particular passage or account, such as in the book of Job, or in the story of Jonah, as suggesting the first idea.

We are unfortunately in doubt as to the date of the earliest *illustrated* bestiaries. Some of the continental manuscripts are said to be as early as the tenth century. In Philip de Thaur's version, which was written soon after 1121, there are instructions for the illustrations. These were done afterwards.¹ The earliest allusions we have to the bestiary (or *physiologus*, as it was then called) are in the fifth and sixth centuries, and if it was the product of some christian monk at Alexandria, as is supposed, the crocodile would have had a good chance of being one of the first animals to be made use of and illustrated.

From the details I have given I think we may fairly expect to find the crocodile in ecclesiastical architecture, and in more ways than one. It may either

¹ In MS. 12 F xiii (B.M.), the illustrations are only partly completed.

be alone, or devouring human beings, or representing hell-mouth. The great difficulty is that of identification, but considering that we have a certainty at Bury St. Edmunds and at Kilpeck, I hope other examples may be forthcoming.

It is possible that, while admitting the *beast* form, we are wrong in claiming the crocodile as supplying the model for hell-mouth. There is our old friend the dragon, but I think it usually symbolized Satan himself rather than hell. There is the lion, which we might well suspect, but in the bestiaries it is quite the reverse ; it symbolized Christ. Up to the present I have found no other animal or reptile mentioned in mediaeval ecclesiastical literature as fulfilling the rôle that the crocodile does, and as my object was to explain the symbolism of the crocodile only, I do not propose to consider any other claims in the present paper.

In conclusion, I have to express my acknowledgements to kind friends who have helped me with illustrations, and otherwise : to Mr. Philip M. Johnston, F.S.A. for allowing me to reproduce his drawing of the Ford painting ; to Mr. Arthur Gardner for the photographs of Lincoln and Notre Dame ; to Miss E. Prideaux for the Topsham font ; to Mr. H. C. Beckett for the photograph of Kilpeck, and to Dr. G. Granville Buckley for that of Beckford ; to Mr. James Parker, of Oxford, for permission to reproduce the Catacomb paintings, etc ; and to Mr. George Parker, of Ripon, for the two misericords at Ripon. And lastly, I have to render my sincere thanks to my friend, Mr. Chas. D. Olive, of Wimbleton, for so much care in checking and rounding off my translations of the Latin manuscripts.