


# RAPTORS: ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF AN ENIGMATIC CAPITAL IN THE NAVE OF BEVERLEY MINSTER

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*This article deals with the iconography of a unique fourteenth-century capital, situated near the one-time tomb of St John of Beverley in the nave of Beverley Minster, Yorkshire. The capital features two hybrid creatures, part animal, part human. Both creatures hold a severed bird's claw. This article argues that these severed bird's claws, resembling drinking vessels, are likely to be griffin claws. This interpretation allows for a reappraisal of the meaning of these figures and their use in the church.*

**Keywords:** Beverley Minster; hybrids; pardoners; shrine of St John of Beverley; griffin claws

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of their fine workmanship and interesting iconography, featuring as they do foliage, green men, animals, monsters, hybrid creatures, men and angels, the capitals of the nave supports of Beverley Minster have aroused little scholarly interest. Apart from Gwen and Jeremy Montagu, who mention one of the capitals in their 1978 study of the numerous depictions of musicians in Beverley Minster, the only other scholar to refer to this extensive series of carvings – albeit only briefly – was Nicholas Dawton.<sup>1</sup> He took their iconography to represent issues of morality, and suggested that they were intended to extend the corbel imagery of the wall arcades of the nave aisles, which he described in far greater detail, characterising them as ‘a sermon in stone’ and adding that they represented a sequence of ‘disparate and unrelated subjects, not all of which can be precisely identified’.<sup>2</sup>

Julia Perratore’s 2018 article on the fourteenth-century sculpture in Beverley Minster nave likewise focused on the label stops in the nave aisles, rather than on the capitals of the main arcades. Like Dawton, Perratore could detect no unifying sequence or narrative binding the totality of the largely profane figures in the aisles together, thus ruling out ‘the possibility of an orchestrated program communicating a single concept’.<sup>3</sup> She therefore argued that the sculptures were intended as ‘mnemonic and sensory stimuli for the devotee to reflect upon during worship’.<sup>4</sup> Presumably, the imagery of the nave capitals functioned in much the same way.

1. Montagu and Montagu 1978; Dawton 2000.

2. Dawton 2000, 111–15.

3. Perratore 2018, 136–7.

4. Ibid, 128.

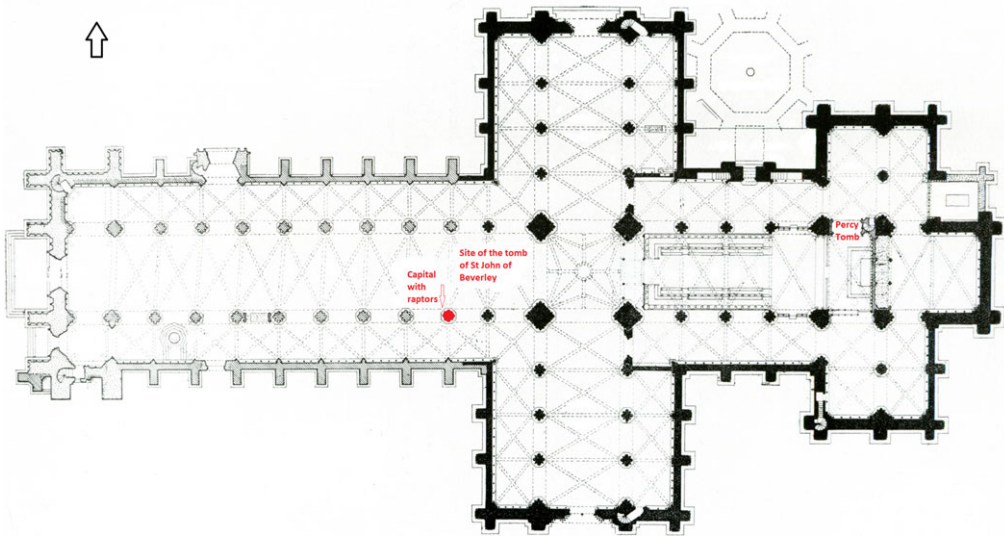


Fig 1. Location of the capital in the Beverley Minster nave. Plan adapted from Nilson 1998.

Although it is clear that the nave capitals as a group deserve more than the scanty treatment they have been given so far, before any attempt can be made to assess the ensemble as a whole (which is not the purpose of this article), it is necessary to solve the problems concerning the images that defy easy identification.

One highly idiosyncratic, and to my knowledge unique, image features on a capital located at the east end of the southern nave arcade. The capital is situated on the west side of the second column and faces into the nave. It is thus located just in front of the original burial site of St John of Beverley, the most important saint in the north of England after St Cuthbert.

St John, who had been bishop of York from 706, retired to Beverley in *c* 714, where he founded the first church on the site. On his demise in 721, he was buried inside the church, where his tomb remained undisturbed until 1037. In this year, his relics were translated to the choir and placed in a shrine that was located east of the main altar. In spite of this, the original burial site – the tomb – remained an important focus of the saint’s cult, around which all later building on the site was configured.<sup>5</sup> The capital was thus in full view of anyone visiting the church, near one of the church’s most prominent pilgrim attractions, which is not unimportant, as will become clear below (fig 1).

The capital features two large hybrid creatures that completely fill the available space. They are for the greater part animals, but for a small part also human. Holding their heads cheek to cheek, they fix the beholder with penetrating beady eyes (fig 2). The left creature somewhat resembles a griffin, combining the smooth hind body of a lion with a feathery upper body and a raptor’s head. However, it has bat wings and instead of a paw, has a human arm and hand holding a goblet shaped like a severed bird’s foot at which it is pecking. The creature on the right combines the hind parts and tail of a lion with the feathered body, wings and head of an owl. It has a clawed foot, like that of a bird, and a human

5. Woodworth 2011, 36, 39, 41–5.



Fig 2. Capital in the southern nave arcade of Beverley Minster, featuring two raptors holding drinking horns with a support in the form of a bird's leg. *Photograph*: author.

hand which also holds a severed bird's claw, at which it too is nipping with its beak. It is this capital that is the focus of this article.

In order to date and contextualise the sculpture, I will first briefly discuss the relevant building phases of the fourteenth-century nave before scrutinising the capital's imagery, starting with the severed birds' feet and then moving on to the two hybrids. Attention will then be given to the problems faced in funding the construction of the nave and dealings between the Beverley chapter and fraudulent pardoners. I will argue that the capital served to warn onlookers to be cautious of such persons, who extracted money from the faithful on the pretence of collecting for the Minster, thereby duping both the donors and the intended beneficiary institution.

### THE BEVERLEY MINSTER NAVE

Beverley Minster, now a parish church, was the most important religious house in the East Riding of Yorkshire. It was also one of the richest houses in the north, behind only York Minster, Durham Cathedral Priory, St Mary's York and the Cistercian houses of Fountains and Furness.<sup>6</sup>

Until the Reformation, the minster was a collegiate foundation, served by a community of secular priests. In early medieval times, it is likely to have been a sub-cathedral of the archdiocese of York, together with Ripon and Southwell, and it was therefore endowed with large estates and great privileges. There were originally seven canons, a number that had been increased to nine by the end of the thirteenth century. Of these nine, only the original seven prebendaries were entitled to a place in chapter by right. Each canon was

6. Wilson 1991, 182.

known by the minster altar to which his prebend was attached. The seven oldest prebends were associated with the altars of Sts Andrew, James, Martin, Mary, Michael, Peter and Stephen; the eighth canon was given the altar of St Katherine and the ninth prebend, assigned to the archbishop of York, was associated with the altar of St Leonard. Eight of the nine canons had pastoral duties: five in the town, the other three in the outlying townships. This pastoral work was to be carried out at the incumbent's altar in the minster. As the men appointed to these benefices were often of national standing and also held benefices elsewhere, they tended to be non-resident so their pastoral tasks were seen to be by vicars and their liturgical duties by so-called *berefellarii* or parsons.<sup>7</sup> The lands owned by the minster and the general revenues of the chapter were administered by a provost, a function that had been created by Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux (1070–1100). The provost was an external officer with authority in the government of the church, but with no stall in the choir and no vote in chapter. The office was a lucrative one and the king often gifted it to important royal servants as a reward for their services.<sup>8</sup>

It is assumed that the building of the nave was taken in hand following the completion, in 1308, of the new high altar and the shrine for the relics of St John of Beverley that was situated behind it in the choir.<sup>9</sup> Although the undertaking was in part financed by sending out professional itinerant questors all over of the north of England and East Anglia to collect funds, the building of the nave was slow, spanning many decades.<sup>10</sup> In its present form, the three-aisled nave of Beverley Minster consists of eleven bays. In addition to the western porch, there are entrances on the north and south sides, both situated in the fourth bay from the west. The easternmost one-and-a-half bay of the nave still belong to the thirteenth-century Early English phase that came to a halt in *c* 1260.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the rest of the nave, which was built in the Decorated style, a huge amount of black Purbeck stone was used here, and decorative sculpture is lacking. According to Woodworth, the thirteenth-century work came to a halt precisely at the site of the tomb of St John, which served to emphasise that the building was incomplete and thus unworthy of the saint – a ‘culture of incompletion’ that could be used for the express purpose of raising more money for the building.<sup>12</sup>

In his 2000 article on the Gothic sculpture of the church, Nicholas Dawton distinguished several distinct stages in the fourteenth-century work.<sup>13</sup> During the first campaign, the wall of the southern aisle was completed, together with its wall arcades and sculpture. The old nave was left standing for as long as was possible, so as not to hinder the pilgrims reaching the tomb of St John of Beverley, the second and more public focus of the saint's cult.<sup>14</sup> During a second campaign in the 1330s, the south aisle was completed, the north aisle begun and a start was made to building the nave arcades. The difference between the two campaigns is clearly detectable. While the arcades under the windows

7. Hiatt 1898, 24.

8. McDermid 1980; Palliser 2000, 23–35.

9. Wilson 2006, 112–13. For the Romanesque nave, see Johnson 2013.

10. Stone 1972, 171–2. For an overview on the literature about Beverley Minster, see Woodworth 2011, 10–13.

11. Woodworth 2011, 68.

12. *Ibid.*, 79.

13. Dawton 2000, 106–29. Woodworth 2011, 74, distinguished as many as six campaigns between *c* 1308 and 1388.

14. The tomb's position in the second bay west of the crossing was attested in 1664: Dawton 2000, 107.

on the south side are more or less in Early English style,<sup>15</sup> those on the north side have the ogee arches characteristic of the Decorated style. As far as the main nave arcades are concerned, each support has a quatrefoil plan with a smaller column in each angle, thus continuing the pattern set by thirteenth-century work in the easternmost bay. In contrast to the Early English columns, the Decorated nave supports have keeled angle columns with figurative (rather than plain) capitals.<sup>16</sup>

According to Dawton, this second campaign marked the arrival of a new architect and a new team of sculptors, the leading personality of whom has been named the Clifford master, after a carved knight bearing the Clifford arms on the so-called Percy tomb that is located between the chancel and the north choir aisle. On account of its heraldry, this tomb cannot be dated before 1340.<sup>17</sup> The Clifford master's work has been celebrated as one of the glories of the Decorated style. It is to his workshop that the carvings of the wall arcades in the northern nave aisle, the capitals and label stops in the nave arcade and the reredos screen in the choir have been attributed.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that the capital with the hybrids holding severed birds' feet should be dated to the early 1330s, as it was obviously one of the first capitals to be made for the arcade of the Decorated nave.

#### ON GRIFFIN CLAWS AND DRINKING HORNS

As has been mentioned, the two hybrid creatures on the capital each hold a bird's claw. This feature being highly unusual, I will first explore the possible meaning of this attribute, before turning to the creatures themselves, as these severed birds' feet are likely to be the key to understanding the meaning of the image.

In medieval literature, starting with the French *Chanson d'Aspremont*, composed between 1187 and 1191, the severed bird foot is linked to griffins. In the *Chanson* a giant griffin is defeated by a knight called Naimes, who cut off both its feet. The feet are described as being larger than one can say and able to contain a gallon of wine. Naimes took one of these feet to Charlemagne, who put it on show in Compiègne, where, according to the *Chanson*, it was still to be seen.<sup>19</sup> A similar griffin story occurs in the fifteenth-century *Huon* cycle and in the English version *Huon of Bordeaux*, translated from the French by Sir John Bouchier in 1534. In this case, a knight named Huon presents a foot of a slain griffin to the King of France, and it is hung for prosperity in the holy chapel.<sup>20</sup> A reference to a griffin's talon as a cup for drinking from, as opposed to the entire foot, occurs in the thirteenth-century *De animalibus* of Albertus Magnus (c 1200–80).<sup>21</sup> Chapter 29 of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, written in 1371, reveals that a griffin had 'talons so long and so large and great upon his feet, as though they were horns of great oxen or of bugles or of kine [an archaic plural for cows], so that men make

15. Allsopp 1959, 8–18. For the dating, see Phillips 2008, 48–51, who has argued that the first six bays of the south aisle were built during the 13th-century campaign and remodelled in the 14th century.

16. For a discussion of how the canons viewed their church, see Woodworth 2009.

17. Dawton 2000, 107–10. For the Clifford master, see Dawton 1983 and 1989.

18. Dawton 2000, 110–19.

19. Williamson 1998; Suard 2008, 154–6 verses 1,511–21, and 160–1 verses 1,594–608.

20. Murrin 2014, 88.

21. Albertus Magnus: Stadler 1920, 1,494; Morgan 2007, 63.

cups of them to drink off.<sup>22</sup> These examples suggest that the birds' feet of the two Beverley hybrids, in spite of their relatively small size, were intended to represent cut-off griffin claws that could be used as drinking vessels.

From the fourteenth century, drinking horns were often named griffin claws and as such made their way into the medieval treasuries of north-western Europe, as is evidenced by inventories and wills of the period. In order to emphasise the drinking horn's derivation from the griffin, they were even given stands formed like clawed griffins' legs or as griffins; for example, a thirteenth-century horn from the abbey of Saint-Denis that is now in the Cabinet des Medailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>23</sup> Such horns with griffin feet are not unlike the Beverley severed birds' feet, even if they are supported by two rather than by one foot. In Denmark, the earliest appearance of the griffin claw dates to 1338, when the canon Tyge Degn gifted such a rarity – a *klo* – to the local dean in Lund (now in Sweden). In 1350, bishop Jacob of Roskilde bequeathed nine drinking horns and three claws to various members of the clergy and the nobility.<sup>24</sup> An inventory of the shrine of St Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral, compiled in 1383, lists two griffins' claws as well as griffins' eggs. These objects were likely donated to St Cuthbert's shrine in Durham by wealthy followers who obtained them during the Crusades.<sup>25</sup> The British Museum still houses a large horn associated with St Cuthbert that used to be a part of Sir Robert Cotton's cabinet of curiosities, probably since the Reformation. It was mounted and inscribed: *c* 1600: *gryphi unguis divo cuthberto dunelmensi sacer* ('The claw of a griffin sacred to the blessed Cuthbert of Durham').<sup>26</sup> A sixteenth-century specimen in the British Museum (WB. 102) made in Mainz has an inscription saying: *Ein Greiffen Clo bin ich genant in Asia Arabia wol bekant* ('A griffin's claw I am called, in Asia Arabia I am well known').<sup>27</sup> These last two examples also show that griffin claws could differ quite considerably in size. The Cotton griffin claw is 711mm long, while the Mainz griffin claw, including the stand, is 280mm wide, 388mm high and 120mm deep.<sup>28</sup>

The examples mentioned above only form the tip of the iceberg, as medieval church inventories from all over north-western Europe list a considerable number of griffin claws. Unfortunately, no inventory of the treasury of Beverley Minster seems to have survived, but considering its proximity to Durham, where the treasury housed both griffin claws and eggs, the Beverley clergy is likely to have been familiar with drinking horns and their association with griffin claws. It therefore seems reasonable to surmise that a medieval viewer of the Beverley capitals would have associated the severed birds' feet held by the raptors on the capital with the griffin claws kept in church treasuries. Interestingly, in England, up to the Norman Conquest, drinking horns (not necessarily griffin claws) were used as symbols of the transfer of property and as such functioned as symbols of tenure.<sup>29</sup>

22. Pollard 1900, 177.

23. Gaborit-Chopin 1991, no. 41.

24. Etting 2013, who also provides other examples.

25. Raine 1828, 122, 127–8.

26. Speakman 2011, 229–30, no. 132.

27. Tait 1991, no. 1, pl 1, figs 5–17.

28. Ibid, no. 1; Speakman 2011.

29. Neuman de Vegvar 2011, 114. In the 10th century, King Edgar of Wessex confirmed a gift of land by the deposition of an oliphant upon an altar of Glastonbury Abbey (Neuman de Vegvar 2003, 248). The 11th-century Ulph's horn, made of an elephant's tusk, was likewise deposited in the treasury of York Minster by a chieftain named Ulph Thoroldsson as a token of a gift of land in Yorkshire (Kendrick 1937). The Pusey horn, which was presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1938 by the Pusey family (V&A museum no. 220-1938), was allegedly given to their

If the birds' feet on the Beverley capital were indeed associated with the griffin claws seen in church treasuries, they too may have denoted ecclesiastical property.

The next question to ask is what the griffins' feet, associated as they seem to be with (church) treasure and gifted property, are doing in the hands of two evil-looking hybrids.

### THE RAPTORS

That a medieval audience would have assessed these two creatures as evil is apparent from various sources in which hybrid creatures are given a bad press.<sup>30</sup> Robert Holcot, a fourteenth-century Dominican, for example, interpreted hybrids as follows:

The church has one head, which is Christ. But regrettably outside of the church there are some monstrous men having two heads and contrary motions. For they have a body of sin joined to the natural body, and the head of this body, which is joined to it by pride, is the Devil. The fiery eyes of this body sparkle with wrath, and its face is lean and sad through envy. The hands are rapacious like the foot of a lion, or like that of an eagle through cupidity and avarice. The belly is porcine through gluttony. The reins are goat-like through lechery, the feet are bear-like through sloth.<sup>31</sup>

From this quote it appears that the specific animals that constituted a hybrid creature were linked to specific vices. In order to understand what sins the two creatures on the Beverley capital were associated with, it will be necessary to investigate how the different animals making up the Beverley hybrids were interpreted in medieval times.

#### The griffin-like raptor

The body of the left creature is part lion and part bird, and its face has the crooked beak of a raptor, and so resembles a griffin, even though it lacks the long ears attributed to griffins by Pliny the Elder and with which they are usually (but by no means always) depicted.<sup>32</sup> The Beverley hybrid also has a bat's, rather than the usual feathered, wing and a human

ancestors by King Canute (†1035) to mark the transfer of land. The legend on the horn reads: 'I kynge knowde [Canute] gave Wyllyam Pecote [Pusey] thys horne to holde by thy land' (Cherry 1989, 114 and pl xx). William reputedly received the manor of Pusey as a reward for warning of an impending Danish attack. The use of large horns as symbols of tenure was obviously common in medieval England, with the horns standing in for written deeds (Pegge 1775). A *cornu eburneum* confirmed a gift of land in Inglewood Forest to Carlisle Cathedral by Henry I (Hahn 2015, 115). Likewise, King Edward the Confessor granted the huntsman Nigel a hide of land named Dere Hide and a wood called Hulewood with the custody of the forest of Bernwood to hold of the king to him and his heirs by one horn, *quod est charta predicate Forestae* ('which is the charter of the said wood') (Nicolson and Burn 1777, 26). Other horns of tenure are those of Borstal, Savernake, Wirral and Delamere (Moule 1842, 134).

30. Salisbury 2011, 124–6.

31. *Super librum ecclesiastici*, Venice 1509, fol 18; quoted by Robertson 1962, 155.

32. Pliny VII-2: Rackham (ed) 1942; Pliny X-70: Rackham (ed) 1950; Pliny XXXIII-21: Rackham (ed) 1952.

arm. It is therefore not a real griffin, but rather a griffin with human traits, or a man turned griffin, an ambiguity that is further underlined by the bat's wing – the bat being categorised as neither bird nor beast. It was precisely because of this ambiguity that the nocturnal creature was considered to be of a treasonous, devilish nature.<sup>33</sup> Presumably, therefore, the Beverley hybrid represents just that, a particularly wicked type of person or creature, in whom there is little humanity or goodness left, his evilness being made manifest by his bestial, predominantly griffin-like appearance. As St Basil mentioned in his *Hexaemeron* of c 370: 'What is the form of quadrupeds? Their head is bent towards the earth and looks towards their belly, and only pursues their belly's good. Your head, O man, is turned towards heaven; your eyes look up. When, therefore, you degrade yourself by the passions of the flesh [...] you approach animals without reason and become like one of them.'<sup>34</sup> In order to grasp the nature of the Beverley griffin-like raptor it is therefore important to understand what characteristics, for good or for evil, medieval scholars attributed to the griffin.

Already from Antiquity griffins were associated with treasure. According to Pausanias, the griffin was first mentioned as a guardian of gold in a now-lost poem of the seventh century BC, written by Aristeas of Proconnesus, who described them as fighting for gold with the one-eyed Arimaspi.<sup>35</sup> This account was perpetuated by Aeschylus, Herodotus, Solinus and others. Vergil, his commentator Servius and others remarked on the griffin's enmity to horses.<sup>36</sup> In the medieval West, the seminal text on griffins is Isidore of Seville's seventh-century *Etymologiae*, in which the griffin is described as a: 'four-footed (*quadrupes*) winged (*pinnatus*) animal. This wild animal is born in the Hyperborean mountains. They are lions in their body; similar to eagles in their wings and faces; very dangerous to horses. They tear apart any human they see.'<sup>37</sup> This passage found its way into various texts, such as the Oxford Bodleian and the Cambridge University bestiaries.<sup>38</sup> However, there are two additional passages in Isidore's *Etymologiae* that did not make it into the bestiaries, in which the griffin's habitat is described as being respectively in India or Scythia, where griffins are said to have guarded gold and gems such as emeralds.<sup>39</sup> In later medieval accounts commentators lingered on the emeralds, and the gold of Antiquity was forgotten.

There was of course a symbolic meaning to all this, and, like all medieval animals, griffins could be considered either good or bad. The positive interpretation of the griffin took its cue from the idea that the two constituent animals were the eagle and the lion, the king of birds and the king of animals respectively, making it a royal and powerful beast. From its association with treasure it became a guardian creature, often appearing in church architecture as a protector of thoroughways as well as on baptismal fonts and tombs.<sup>40</sup> However, in the writings of medieval churchmen the creature tends to have negative characteristics prevailing. In his *De Universo*, Hrabanus Maurus (c 780–856) holds that 'griffins can signify the anger of those persecuting Christians or the presumptuousness of the proud, who attack those seeking Christian simplicity and leading a sensible life'.<sup>41</sup> Marbod of

33. Salisbury 2011, 139.

34. *Hexaemeron* IX.2: Migne (ed) 1857; Rowland 1984, 490.

35. Pausanias I-24: Levi (ed) 1979, 69.

36. Armour 1995, 18–9.

37. Isidore XII: 2–17: Throop (ed) 2005.

38. Barber 1993, 39.

39. Isidore XIV: 3, 7 and 32: Throop (ed) 2005.

40. von Blankenburg 1975, 74–5, 138, 142, 241–2; Armour 1995, 80–3.

41. Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo*: Migne (ed) 1864, vol III col 222; Michel 1979, 66–7.



Rennes (1035–1123) and the text of *De Bestiis* somewhat echo this evaluation of the creature. The *De Bestiis* text holds that the gems [the emeralds] symbolise the faithful, while the griffins ‘symbolise devils, who begrudge men who want to have the precious pearl of faith and want to take it away from them, not in order that it should benefit themselves, but to prevent others from enjoying the benefit of it’.<sup>42</sup> In the French *Prose Arsenal Bestiary* (MS 3516) of around 1300 the griffin and its offspring are allegorised as devils in hell, and the ox, that they carry off, as the man who lives in mortal sin: when it is time for the ox/man to die, the griffin comes seeking food, carries him off and throws him to its young ones in the darkness of hell, where he remains in the power of his enemies for ever.<sup>43</sup> Various bestiaries, in their lapidary sections, also describe the griffin as symbolising the devil.<sup>44</sup>

Some medieval writers, however, had more specific sinners in mind when thinking of the griffin. In his *Dictionarium vulgo repertorium morale*, Pierre Bersuire (c 1290–1362) regards griffins as symbols of the greedy elite of his day, that is, those who hold worldly and ecclesiastical offices. He also discusses the two constituent parts of the griffin. From the eagle, the griffin took its vanity and pompousness, from the lion its barbarity and cruelty, curved claws and acuity, avarice and cupidity.<sup>45</sup> Alexander Neckam (1157–1217) argued against this similitude as, in his view, the grabbing mighty were far worse than the griffins because, being animals, the latter could not commit sin: ‘if you think they are like nobles, you are wrong: the nobles are spurred on by their greedy hunger for gold, whilst the griffins have no nagging desire for lucre but naturally rejoice in the quiet pursuit of looking.’<sup>46</sup> A late example of the griffin symbolising the predatory clergy is the *Plowman’s Tale*, in which the griffin figures as a symbol of clerical corruption.<sup>47</sup>

The Bible, too, has little good to say about the griffin. Here, it features in the list of unclean birds of the books Deuteronomy and Leviticus. As most of the birds enumerated there were inedible in the first place, medieval authors held that they had a spiritual rather than a literal meaning, and were to be regarded as unclean birds because of their vices.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in his writings on Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Hrabanus Maurus allegorised these birds, arguing that they represented:

the rapacious and those who evilly pursue the food of others, rejoicing in unjust riches. For in the churches, among those who are thought to be devoted to contemplation, can be found those who do not apply themselves to it as they should but are puffed up in vain [ . . . ] These are symbolised here, animals which obtain their food by plunder’.<sup>49</sup>

In his *Aurora*, a Bible in verse, Peter of Riga (c 1140–1209), a canon of Reims Cathedral, suggested that:

42. Blamires 1979, 103–6; Armour 1989, 21–2.

43. Druce 1913–14. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paris, MS fr. 3516 (*Bestiaire of Pierre de Beauvais*).

44. MSS BnF lat. 11207 and Mazarine 742, as well as British Library Harley MS 3244: see Clark 2006, 127, n. 42.

45. Armour 1989, 36–7.

46. Neckam: Wright (ed) 1863, 488; Armour 1989, 36–7, and 1995, 90.

47. Dean 1991, 51–115.

48. d’Ayzac 1860, 242–3.

49. Hrabanus Maurus, *Expositionum in Leviticum*: Migne (ed) 1864, vol 108, cols 355–8; *Enarratio super Deuteronomium*: ibid, cols 885–8; Armour 1989, 41–3.

these birds [the impure birds mentioned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy] indicate the earthly power of men who are full of wickedness and have little faith. The law, by listing many birds, denotes therefore the powerful in whom there is an abundance of sin [...]. The griffin, a winged animal which stands on four feet, seizes men and loathes horses. By it is denoted the cruel criminality of the powerful who ferociously drink up human deaths'.<sup>50</sup>

To sum up, although the treasure-hoarding griffin was sometimes imbued with positive qualities, in medieval times it was predominantly regarded as a symbol of avarice, inimical to men and other beings, known for its rapaciousness, insatiable appetite and propensity to plunder. Although from its appearance the anthropomorphic creature on the Beverley capital is not a true griffin, in depicting it as half lion, half raptor the creature was given the main characteristics of the griffin for the purpose of implying that it was imbued with the griffin's greedy, rapacious and treasure-hoarding qualities. The hybrid's beak, bat-like devilish wings, lion parts, pecking behaviour and, above all, its human hand holding a griffin claw – an object associated with church treasure – all suggest that it portrays an evil, ruthless and destructive hoarder of treasure, inimical to the faithful.

### The raptor with the head of an owl

Companion to the griffin-like creature is a raptor with the head and middle part of a bird. The hooked beak and round face, accentuated by a sort of ruffled fringe with the suggestion of ears on top, identify the head as that of an owl. In medieval art, owls with round fringed faces are quite common.<sup>51</sup> Although its hind parts resemble those of a lion and it has one human arm, the owl-like qualities dominate, the head being the most conspicuous part of the body with the greatest agency. It may therefore be assumed that the owl was specifically chosen to be the main constituent part of the creature because of the moral associations that it conveyed.

Even though there were some who commented positively on the owl, the bird was generally regarded as a thoroughly negative creature.<sup>52</sup> The biblical books Deuteronomy and Leviticus numbered four types of owl among the unclean birds and it was precisely this quartet that entered Isidore's *Etymologiae*. First comes the screech owl, *ulula*, who takes its name from 'lamentation and mourning'. Next comes the eagle owl, *bubo*, 'a bird associated with the dead'. Isidore also quotes Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: 'He has become a foul bird, messenger of sorrow, slothful eagle owl. Dire omen for mortals.' And he concludes: 'Finally, among the augurs, it is said to portend evil. When seen in a town, they say it signifies bereavement.' Then there is the night owl, *noctua*, that flies by night and cannot be seen in the daytime, and the fourth type of owl mentioned is the horned owl.<sup>53</sup>

50. Beichner 1965, xi.

51. Examples occur in: British Library, Add MS 42130, fol 52r, Add MS 18852, fol 226v, Royal MS 20 A. iv, fol 3v, and Royal 2 B VII, fol 128v; Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764, fol 73v.

52. For positive interpretations of the night owl, see University of Aberdeen MS 24, fol 35v; Eadmer: Southern (ed) 1972, 69–71; Stone 1988, 181–247.

53. Isidore XII: 7, 38–42; Throop (ed) 2005.

The information on owls provided by Isidore was greatly expanded on in the *Oxford Bestiary* (MS Bodley 764), as here the night owl is said to signify the Jews ‘who, when our lord came to save them, rejected Him’. The screech owl entry also corresponds to Isidore’s text, but adds that the bird is an image of all those who yield to the darkness of sin and flee the light of justice. Hence it is counted among the unclean creatures in Leviticus. The screech owl is the symbol of all sinners. Following this, there is an extensive passage summing up all its bad habits. It is also said to be ‘a loathsome bird because its roost is filthy from its dropping, just as the sinner brings all who dwell with him into disrepute through the example of his dishonourable behaviour’. Furthermore, ‘it is burdened with feathers to signify an excess of flesh and levity of spirit, always bound by heavy laziness, the same laziness which binds sinners who are inert and idle when it comes to doing good’. In addition, it is said to live in the graveyard day and night, which makes him comparable to the sinner ‘who delights in his sin, which is the stench of human flesh’. The passage also tells the reader how such birds should be treated. The owl was to be an object of mockery for the righteous, who should severely reprimand him, ‘tear out his feathers and wound him with their beaks, because the righteous hate the carnal deeds of the sinner and curse his excesses’.<sup>54</sup> This was often depicted in medieval art by showing small birds attacking an owl, as for example on one of the misericords of the choir stalls in Beverley Minster. A second entry on the screech owl again expands on Isidore’s text, holding that ‘this bird signifies the wailing of sinners in hell, and, as the prophet says when he speaks of the destruction of Babylon: “Their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there” [Isaiah 13:21].’<sup>55</sup>

Yet another story concerning the owl comes from the reformer John Wyclif (c 1320–c 1384). In it, an owl, shivering from the cold, is charitably given feathers by the other birds; so many, that she became quite overburdened. Yet, when a hawk swooped down on them and the birds wanted their feathers back to fly away, the owl refused to return them, leaving the birds no choice but to take them back by force. This story was explained as follows: ‘Even so, when war breaks out, we must take from the endowed clergy a portion of their temporal possessions, as property which belongs to us and to the kingdom in common, and so wisely defend the country with property which exists among us in superfluity.’<sup>56</sup>

So, although some medieval authors had positive things to say about the owl, on the whole the creature was thought of as a symbol of the sinner and sometimes, on account of its hooked beak resembling the archetypal Jewish hooked nose, with the Jew.<sup>57</sup> It was a bird to be disliked and derided by other animals. By implication it is likely that the hybrid creature on the capital, the greater part of which is that of an owl, was imbued with similar negative associations. It had but little humanity (one arm), and although its back parts were those of a lion, a beast that in medieval lore had both good and bad qualities, considering the creature’s sinful hybridity it is likely that the negative qualities of the lion prevail here.<sup>58</sup> As has been mentioned, the thirteenth-century scholar Pierre Bersuire associated the lion with barbarity and cruelty, acuity, avarice and cupidity, while the fourteenth-century Dominican Robert Holcot, in speaking of hybridity, linked the lion to rapaciousness.

54. Barber 1993, 147–9.

55. *Ibid.*, 170–1.

56. Workman 1926, 210–11; Pantin 1955, 128.

57. Miyazaki 1999, 23–51.

58. Michel 1979, 46–7.

Now it has been established that the birds' feet held by the raptors are probably griffin claws, which by the fourteenth century had become objects to be found mainly in treasuries, and that the two hybrids nipping at these bird feet represent a thoroughly evil, rapacious treasure hoarder and his equally despicable companion, it would seem we are dealing with creatures that are despoiling (church) treasure or property. They grab the objects with their hands, their only human traits, and peck at them with their raptor's beaks. In order to find out what relevance such an image could have had for Beverley Minster in the 1330s, it is necessary to turn to the building of the minster's nave and address the question of how this project was financed. That there were difficulties is evident from the fact that work carried on – with long intermissions – until *c* 1420.

#### FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF BUILDING BEVERLEY'S NAVE

The building of Beverley Minster needed a huge financial input. Although most of the costs were covered by the chapter itself as well as by the townsfolk and guilds, major additional funding was required.<sup>59</sup> Of course, there was the income deriving from both the tomb and shrine of St John of Beverley that could be boosted by the occasional miracle, as happened in 1318, 1322 and 1323, but, even though shrines generated a lot of income (usually some 10 per cent of all income of a given church), most of this went into subsidies for the resident clergy, and only on occasion were such sources directed to building works.<sup>60</sup> A significant part of the funds needed for building was therefore probably collected from outside Beverley. The importance of such external sources of funding is evident from the *Beverley Chapter Act Book*. In it there is, for instance, a passage where the collector is exhorted to hand in his revenues as soon as possible, as the master of the works was in sore need of money.<sup>61</sup>

In medieval times, such money collection was done by professionals called questors or, unofficially, pardoners, some of whom belonged to the clergy but more often were laymen. The collecting business was a lucrative one, so much so that it led to fraud and attracted false collectors equipped with forged documents and the occasional false relic. The *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, written in 1344 by William Doune, contains a lengthy diatribe against fraudulent and false pardoners and their practices.<sup>62</sup> In 1377, similar complaints occur in the *Register of Thomas de Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter*.<sup>63</sup> In 1414, academics from University of Oxford complained to the Council of Constance that false questors seduced the people 'and then drag them to hell with them'.<sup>64</sup>

In early fourteenth-century Beverley, there was a sense of urgency to the issue of false and fraudulent collectors, as their practices were causing serious financial damage and bringing the cult of St John of Beverley into disrepute.<sup>65</sup> Already in 1307, there were complaints about fraudulent questors purportedly collecting money for the shrine of St John at Beverley, as well as for the building of the minster, but instead using the received

59. For the contributions made by the various parties, see Woodworth 2011, 122–40.

60. For the accounting of shrine offerings, see Nilson 1998, 139, 182.

61. Leach 1898, 281.

62. Correale and Hamel 2005, 76–7.

63. Williams 1965, 204.

64. Swanson 2008, 193; Horrox 2014, 452.

65. Bartlett 2013, 326.

funds for their own illegal and dishonest purposes.<sup>66</sup> In 1308, Elias de Lumby was appointed head collector for Beverley's new works and ordered to recall all previous collectors, their commissions being superseded. He was also given the power to arrest all those pretending to be Beverley collectors with their false relics and forged documents, and to prosecute them either in the civil or in the ecclesiastical courts. His working territory was the dioceses of York, Durham, Carlisle and Lincoln, where he had subordinates working for him. For these privileges, he paid the chapter twenty pounds a year in four instalments and he promised to account for any balance after subtracting his own expenses, which consisted of the cost of a robe and tabard and keeping a horse, at the end of the year.<sup>67</sup> In spite of this, in 1310, Bishop Dalderby of Lincoln castigated false collectors who duped the faithful and used their receipts for their own purposes, and he had it proclaimed throughout his diocese that false collectors had been taking alms for the shrine of St John at Beverley and that the only accredited collector in Lincoln was William Hambleton.<sup>68</sup>

But the official pardoners were not of blameless behaviour either. In 1314, the collector Robert de Pagula, who had been working for Beverley Minster in the diocese of Lincoln, was criticised for not conducting himself properly and for not accounting to the keepers of the fabric at the agreed date.<sup>69</sup> In 1318, when another grant to collect money in the diocese of Lincoln was granted, the questors were, among other things, warned not to use 'painted rolls or false relics'.<sup>70</sup> Surprisingly, Alexander de Derby, who, according to the Beverley records, confessed in court that he had passed himself off as a collector for the minster in the Lincoln diocese, had gathered money there and had spent it for himself, and been excommunicated as a consequence, was pardoned in 1324 and made the minster's official questor in the diocese of Norwich.<sup>71</sup>

In this context the preying raptors on the Beverley capital pecking their griffin claws seem to be symbolic of evil doers feasting on church property. They fit to perfection the image of the medieval fraudulent pardoner, who, with the help of (false) indulgences, (false) relics and/or (false) credentials, despoiled the church by extracting as much money as he could from gullible victims, not with the aim of benefitting the institution for which he claimed to be collecting, nor in order to save the souls of the faithful donors, but in order to greedily fill his own pockets. Chaucer's detestable Pardoner of half a century later is a perfect example of such a person.<sup>72</sup>

#### THE FUNCTION OF THE BEVERLEY CAPITAL

This brings me to the capital's location just in front of one of the most important pilgrim sites in Beverley Minster, the former tomb of St John of Beverley.<sup>73</sup> By setting before the

66. Leach 1898, 204.

67. Ibid, 229–30 and 252; Kellogg and Haselmayer 1951, 260–1.

68. Horrox 2000, 37.

69. Leach 1898, 320.

70. Swanson 2008, 188–9.

71. Leach 1898, 316–7; Swanson 2008, 183–4.

72. Benson 2008, 195 (verses 427–31) and 196 (verses 452–3); Minnis 2013; Horrox 2014, 455.

73. Crook 2016, 256, states that from the early 14th century St John of Beverley was primarily revered at his tomb in the nave, as the *feretrum* was probably not readily accessible for pilgrims. Horrox 2000, 39–40, holds that the tomb only took precedence over the shrine after a fire wreaked havoc in 1188, causing the temporary abandonment of the east end of the church.

faithful an image of two raptors as symbolic of fraudulent pardoners, it exhorted the faithful to be vigilant when giving alms for the erection of the new church or other purposes, and to make sure that, in donating to the church, one did so in the proper place – in the offering box near the tomb. In the cathedrals of Canterbury and Durham securely locked offering boxes stood by the sides of the main shrines.<sup>74</sup> In St George's Chapel at Windsor such a box with letter 'H' on it still survives. It was to receive the oblations at Henry VI's tomb, who was venerated there as a saint.<sup>75</sup>

In many places prompts to encourage pilgrims' benevolence lined the pilgrims' route leading through the church to the shrine. In Beverley, the label stops of the north-west aisle repeat the image of a lady with a lapdog three times. This image has been read as an exhortation to cease indulging one's pets and spend the money on alms instead.<sup>76</sup> In Ely, pilgrims on their way to the tomb of St Etheldreda were directed north of the presbytery, where they walked past tombs and wall paintings of benefactors that were to inspire them to offer generously.<sup>77</sup> The stained glass windows of Canterbury Cathedral's Trinity Chapel feature not only the miracles performed by St Thomas Becket, but they also manifest by what (material) means the cured pilgrims expressed their gratitude to the saint, in the hope to draw further donations from the faithful.<sup>78</sup> To bring the message home even better, the Becket miracle windows were provided with explanatory verses, *tituli*, and in the period before the saint's translation an account of the miracles was read out to the pilgrims in the chapter house.<sup>79</sup> That offerings were expected is clear from the pseudo-Chaucerian *Tale of Beryn*, in which a pardoner and a miller discuss the iconography of the stained glass windows in the cathedral of Canterbury, but are ushered on by the host of Southwark, who is accompanying the group and tells them not to go and pray at the shrine, but to go and do their offering: "Pese!" quod the hoost of Southwark, "let stond the window glased! Goth up, and doth your offering".<sup>80</sup> A pilgrim's badge from the cathedral (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) shows a figure, a monk or canon, pointing with a stick at a huge jewel decorating the shrine cover, the so-called *Regale de France* donated to the shrine of St Thomas Becket by Louis VII of France in 1179.<sup>81</sup> Drawing attention to this specific item served a dual purpose. The size of the jewel would have awed the visiting pilgrims; the king's handsome gift may have induced the pilgrims to give liberally.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the message the capital was intended to transmit is thus an apt one. Dating to the 1330s, the capital was one of the first to be made for the nave arcade, where it was placed in a very prominent place near the tomb of St John of Beverley. The devotee being guided to, or reflecting upon, the image of the two raptors nipping at their severed griffin

In 1474 the income derived from offerings at the tomb amounted to 11s 8d, while the shrine made £11 4s 2d.

74. Dobson 2001, 24–43.

75. Ibid, 153; Roswell 2017, 58.

76. Dawton 2000, 116; Perratore 2018, 138.

77. Keynes 2008, 57; Owen 2008, 69; Roswell 2017, 58.

78. Michael 2004, 19, 154–61.

79. Caviness 1977, 143.

80. Furnivall and Boswell-Stone (eds) 1887, verses 157–8.

81. Nilson 1998, 188.

claws was given a visual prompt to be wary of false pardoners who, by making use of false credentials and false relics, despoiled the church to satisfy their own selfish needs. By giving money or goods to such imposters, all good intentions would be rendered void by means of fraud, as the alms given would favour these associates of the devil rather than the intended beneficiary institution.

The owl-like creature probably brought home the message that these were creatures that ‘flee the light of justice’. Such miscreants were to be shunned. If possible, they were to be driven away by the righteous, to avoid donors spending their money where it would do no good at all, neither benefitting their souls nor the minster. There is an economic side to the capital, as it would also have exhorted the faithful to place his or her offerings in the right place, ie there and then in the money box near St John’s tomb. Considering the slow progress of the building of the nave, every penny was needed if it was ever to be completed.

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