Finch & Co



ENGLISH 'MEMENTO MORI' SLATE TOMBSTONE

AN ENGLISH 'MEMENTO MORI' SLATE TOMBSTONE INCISED AND RELIEF DECORATED WITH A LARGE WINGED ANGEL WEARING A ROSARY BEARING THE INSCRIPTION 'REMEMBER DEATH' A HAND TO EACH SIDE CARRYING A PALM LEAF
EARLY 18TH CENTURY
SIZE: 39.5CM HIGH, 86.5CM WIDE, 2.5CM DEEP - 15½ INS HIGH, 34 INS WIDE, 1 INS DEEP

LITERATURE

SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY WERE PART OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF FUNERARY MONUMENTS FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES. ENGLISH CRAFTSMANSHIP AND SCULPTURE CAN EASILY BE STUDIED IN CHURCHES AND CHURCHYARDS, AND ONE CAN TRACE A CONTINUOUS ARTISTIC IMPULSE TO REPRESENT COMPLEX BELIEFS AND ABSTRACT CONCEPTS IN CONCRETE VISUAL TERMS. FASHIONS IN THE USE OF SYMBOLS AND ALLEGORY NATURALLY ALTERED FROM PERIOD TO PERIOD IN ACCORDANCE NOT ONLY WITH THE RISE AND DECLINE OF PARTICULAR ARTISTIC STYLES, BUT ALSO WITH CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS AND INTELLECTUAL ATTITUDES.
SLATE WAS A SOFT ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR CUTTING WITHOUT UNDUE LABOUR AND FINE ENOUGH TO ALLOW DELICATE FLOURISHES. IT GAVE THE SLATE CUTTER THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AND FORM A CRAFT IN THE ENGLISH VERNACULAR TRADITION. TOMB AND HEADSTONES ARE VISIBLE LINKS BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. IN THIS FORM OF ART THERE IS A REMINDER TO THOSE WHO COME AFTER US OF THEIR OWN MORTALITY AND OF THE FRAILTY OF ALL HUMAN LIFE.
ANGELS ARE PORTRAYED AS WINGED HUMAN BEINGS ON THESE TOMBS. THEY ARE MYSTICAL BEINGS WHOSE ROLE IS TO INTERCEDE DIRECTLY AND INDIVIDUALLY BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY. THEIR NAME COMES FROM THE GREEK WORD FOR 'MESSENGER' AND AS SUCH THEY ACT AS INSTRUMENTS OF GOD AS ANNOUNCERS OF WRONG-DOERS. THE PALM LEAF IS ASSOCIATED WITH VICTORY AND IS A SYMBOL OF JESUS' VICTORY OVER DEATH, AND OF THE CHRISTIAN'S VICTORY OVER SIN, THE WORLD AND THE DEVIL.