William Smith was a herald to Queen Elizabeth I. For a man who became Rouge Dragon Pursuivant he had followed a curious career path, which had even included a period as a spectacularly unsuccessful innkeeper in Nuremberg where his 'lack of amiability and sharp tongue' no doubt proved to be fatal handicaps in developing his trade. He was, however, a man intrigued by the monuments of his native county of Cheshire and in 1565 wrote the earliest surviving account of the stone crosses which then stood complete in the market square at Sandbach (pl. 1). Joshua's question, from which I take my title, might appropriately have sprung to his lips when confronted by these carvings, particularly since he does not seem to have been offered any useful enlightenment by local residents – despite the telling evidence of

---

1 The text represents a version of the T. Northcote Toller Memorial Lecture delivered in Manchester on 13 March 1995. I am deeply grateful to the Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies at Manchester for the invitation to speak in this distinguished series and to the following for helpful discussion: Eric Cambridge; Jim Lang; Jane Hawkes; Caroline Richardson; Ross Trench-Jellicoe; and Niamh Whitfield. Since it is impossible to reproduce the large number of illustrations which accompanied the lecture I have tried to give references to the most accessible photographs or drawings. The following abbreviations are used:

panels showing the Crucifixion and the Nativity, they assured him that the sculptures were pre-Christian in date and, moreover, that their inscriptions and figures could only be understood when the observer was suspended upside down in front of the crosses.  

Smith's twentieth-century academic successors are rarely faced with such athletic challenges in the course of their studies, although even they would be well advised, when manoeuvering these pieces for photography or closer scrutiny, to pay heed to another cautionary tale in the antiquarian record. This comes from the diary of William Blundell, a cavalier in the Royalist army, who tells of an attempted removal of a cross which obstructed the line of play on a bowling green at Whalley in 1642; the man who attempted to re-site the obstacle was crushed to death beneath the falling monument.

The problem in studying pre-Norman sculpture actually now lies less in the physical difficulties of handling the material than in the fact that most of it has survived in scattered, fragmented and battered form. The crosses at Sandbach, for example, were cut down by iconoclasts half a century after Smith had seen them and parts were eventually recycled into a grotto at Oulton Park where they served as conversation pieces, their role signalled by an inscription carved on one of them:

With awful steps approach this shrine  
Sacred to Druids erst divine.  
Here ancient Virtue still preserve  
Nor ever from its precepts swerve.

It was only in 1816 that most of the exiled fragments were re-assembled back at Sandbach but by then some had been lost for ever. Elsewhere many carvings disappeared into the foundations of Norman and later buildings, only to re-emerge, broken and covered in mortar, during Victorian restoration work. Even when they have remained above ground the combined effects of weathering and vandalism on the stones have often been disastrous. At Heysham and Gressingham in northern Lancashire, for example, cross-shafts were incorporated as quoinstones into post-medieval churches and in these exposed positions their ornament has been largely obliterated by the joint assaults of weather, atmospheric pollution

---


and lichen.\(^5\) The three beheaded tenth-century crosses, gathered into West Park, Macclesfield as objects of civic pride in the nineteenth century, have suffered even worse indignity. They now stand incongruously, decorated with spray paint, in the middle of a children's playground.\(^6\)

Nevertheless, however fragmentarily (and vulnerably) it survives, pre-Norman stone sculpture has two great attractions for the archaeologist.\(^7\) There is, first of all, a great deal of it: in Lancashire and Cheshire alone there are at least 180 such carvings in the area's museums and churches. And secondly, though there has been a certain amount of post-Norman migration, most carvings still remain at the sites where they were first produced, and thus offer us access to local Anglo-Saxon tastes in a manner which cannot be calibrated from other, more mobile, forms of contemporary art such as manuscripts and metalwork.

As in the rest of Northumbria and northern Mercia, the vast majority of stone carvings in this area belong to the tenth and eleventh centuries. Earlier, pre-Viking carvings are relatively rare; indeed, only seven sites in the whole of Lancashire and Cheshire have produced material which can be dated to the eighth or ninth centuries.\(^8\) I argued long ago that, in that earlier period, stone sculpture was limited in its distribution because it was essentially a monastic art and, despite subsequent disputes about the nature of Anglo-Saxon monasteria and forms of pastoral provision, that assertion still remains valid.\(^9\) We can now, indeed, push this argument further, for what has become apparent, thanks to the work of Eric Cambridge in County Durham, is that it may have been only certain kinds of pre-Viking monastery which produced sculpture. It is that additional restriction upon potential production centres which must explain, not only the relative paucity of pre-Viking carvings but also the curious fact that, apart from Sandbach

---


\(^8\) Heysham, Lancaster, Halton, Hornby, Gressingham, Sandbach, Overchurch.

and Overchurch, all eighth- and ninth-century sculptures from the two counties are concentrated in a small area of the Lune valley encompassing Heysham, Lancaster, Halton, Hornby and Gressingham.\textsuperscript{10} South of this line pastoral provision and monastic foundations were probably of a very different type.

Whatever their period, the majority of carvings from the area are either crosses or slabs. But there are some surprising exceptions. From the excavations at Heysham, for example, came a substantial fragment, now in Lancaster Museum, whose curved terminal carries the head of a bird of prey (fig. 1).\textsuperscript{11} This can be compared with a beast-headed piece from Lastingham in Yorkshire, now convincingly reconstructed in the Yorkshire Philosophical Society's Museum in York as a vertical strut from a high-backed throne of the type represented in a David portrait in the eighth-century Durham


\textsuperscript{11} Since this lecture was given the stone has been published in Potter and Andrews, 'Heysham', 106–11.
Cassiodorus manuscript.\textsuperscript{12} What may be the remains of another such animal terminal has been recorded from the Old Swan area of Liverpool though in this case the identification is less certain and the stone remains in private possession.\textsuperscript{13}

A second carving also merits consideration in this context of eccentric forms. This is the rune-inscribed stone from Overchurch which found its way into the fabric of Upton church and has now finally found a resting place in Birkenhead Museum.\textsuperscript{14} The inscription records, in slightly erroneous Old English, that ‘the people/army (\textit{folc}) erected a monument, pray for Aethelmund’. The accompanying animal ornament fits neatly alongside Mercian forms of \textit{c}. 800, but the more intriguing decorative feature is the incised arch which is carved into the narrow end of the stone, because this almost certainly suggests that the monument was originally designed as a form of shrine. When Bede described the setting into which St Chad’s bones were translated at Lichfield he spoke about the \textit{tumba lignea} having ‘a hole in one side through which those who go thither out of devotion may insert their hands and take some of the dust’.\textsuperscript{15} Such apertures, sometimes described as \textit{ostiola} (small apertures/doorways), are typical of a whole variety of shrines.\textsuperscript{16}

What we have at Overchurch, I believe, is a tactful allusion to this diagnostic shrine feature, functioning in exactly the same manner as the blind arches set into the sides of tenth-century Anglo-Viking hogbacks.\textsuperscript{17} Aethelmund, the monument hints, had claims to sanctity in the eyes of the \textit{folc}.

The churches of Cheshire and Lancashire thus provide some surprising monumental forms. They also contain some fascinating iconographical riddles. I take two examples, one from the pre-Viking period and another from the tenth century.

The spirit in which the figural art of the early, monastic, phase of Anglo-Saxon sculpture must be approached has been well explored by a series of scholars from Saxl and Schapiro through to Meyvaert, Henderson and Ó Carragáin in their various

\textsuperscript{12} Lang, \textit{Corpus}, 172–3. For the manuscript see J.J.G. Alexander, \textit{Insular manuscripts, 6th to 9th century} (London: Miller, 1978), pl. 74.

\textsuperscript{13} Unpublished. I am grateful to Dr Longworth of Liverpool Museum for information on this discovery.

\textsuperscript{14} R.W.V. Elliott, ‘Two neglected English runic inscriptions’, \textit{Mélanges de linguistique et de philologie; Fernand Mosse in memoriam} (Paris: Didier, 1959), 144–7; Bu’lock, \textit{Pre-conquest Cheshire}, 383–1066, fig. 10, pl. 9.


studies of the complex significance of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses. They have taught us to see how the lay-out and ornament of these carvings constantly resist an easy, superficial, reading and that the sculptures must be approached with an informed awareness of the liturgy and of patristic commentary. A full understanding demands a willingness to reflect on, and to probe, both the potential meaning of individual scenes, and the further meanings which emerge when those scenes are combined and juxtaposed. In effect the monuments provoke, and respond to, the act of ruminatio, that monastic skill in reading, contemplating and digesting texts on which Dom Jean Leclercq has written so eloquently. The whole process of study and thought about these sculptured texts thus becomes, to use Leclercq’s words, ‘a prayerful reading’, in which we weigh all, ‘in order to sound the depths of their full meaning’. Through such rumination, the sculpture can be transformed into a vehicle of mediation between the terrestrial and heavenly worlds.

The large crosses at Bewcastle and Ruthwell have fruitfully responded to this form of approach. But other sculptures were clearly carved in the same learned tradition and demand a similar type of understanding. Lancashire provides several examples but none more apposite than the delicate and dramatic ‘Loaves and Fishes’ panel on the ninth-century shaft from Hornby (pl. 2). This is a curious rendering of a well-known scene. Admittedly it contains the essential element of the loaves and fishes; but it also involves two figures who are separated by a fruiting vine-tree. The visual riddle posed by a tree which, biblically, did not exist is quite deliberate. For the unexpected combination of elements forces us to ask questions in order fully to understand the implications of the scene; the tree prevents us from responding to the panel as simply a representation of a miraculous event. In seeking an explanation we are inevitably lured into that further exploration described by Aelfric: ‘. . . with regard to the miracle which God wrought with the five loaves it is not enough that we wonder at the miracle, or praise God because of it, without also understanding its spiritual sense (gastlice andgity).’

What, then, is the ‘spiritual sense’ to which we should be alerted by the unexpected nature of this iconography? The easiest routes to an answer (or actually a series of answers) are provided by

---

18 Relevant bibliographical details will be found in The Ruthwell cross, ed. B. Cassidy (Princeton, N.J.: Dept. of Art and Archaeology, 1992).
St Hilary and St Augustine. Both saw this miracle as an image of God's fecund power to sustain His people but Hilary, in developing this concept, pursues the argument in a direction which is particularly illuminating for Hornby. His discussion moves out from food, as represented by loaves and fishes, to wine: 'wonder not that the fountains run, that there are grapes in the vines and that wine comes forth from the grapes and that all the resources of the world come to us in a certain yearly and unwearied motion; for this so great yield of loaves proclaims the Maker of all this'.

The miracle for Hilary and other patristic writers was not, then, just an event which took place in the past; it was a statement about God’s bounty to mankind in the present. And that bounty includes wine. The iconography of Hornby deliberately prevents us from seeing this scene as a mere depiction of a well-known biblical episode. By the incorporation of a fruiting vine we are forced to seek a further depth of significance; informed *ruminatio*, that great monastic process, begins to solve the visual riddle in terms of arguments such as those invoked in Hilary’s commentary. For *part* of the ‘*gastlicie andgiti’* of the Hornby scene points to God’s abundant provision for His creation, which is visible in the grape of the vine as much as in the more solid nourishment of bread and fish.

But we are not yet finished. For this miracle (the only one narrated in all four Gospels), like the feeding of Israel with manna — an episode with which it is frequently associated — was also seen as a foreshadowing, a ‘type’, of the Last Supper and its Eucharistic re-enactment. This equation is already present in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel (and in 1 Corinthians 10) where the familiar phrases used to justify the Mass are all linked to the miracle of the Five Loaves and Fishes: ‘Then Jesus said unto them: verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from Heaven, but my Father giveth you that true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world... and Jesus said unto them I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst... I am the living bread which came down from heaven... Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you’.

Taking his cue from this biblical text, Augustine’s sermon on John 6:9 is typical of many commentators in moving from a description of the miracle into an explanation of its Eucharistic significance: ‘Who is the Bread of heaven but Christ? But in order

that man might eat Angels' bread, the Lord of Angels was made Man. For if He had not been made Man, we should not have His Flesh: if we had not His Flesh we should not eat the Bread of the altar. This kind of patristic insight has its reflex in art. As early as the third-century, in the crypt of Lucina in Rome, the two fish of the miracle face one another, each carrying a basket of loaves in which nestles a cup of wine: similarly on the market cross at Kells in the ninth century the two fish are set saltire-wise to form the Chi opening letter of Christ's name, thus underlining their Eucharistic symbolism.

Alerted to this sphere of reference we can now perhaps begin to understand another level of meaning in the Hornby panel. For the iconographically novel element of the fruiting tree not only picks up the miracle's implications of fecundity, which were identified by Hilary, but also alludes to the Eucharistic references which Augustine teased out from the biblical text. Like the cups of Lucina's crypt, the fruiting vine pulls us back to the John text, 'except ye eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you'. And the shape of the tree draws on a whole complex of associated ideas to reinforce the point. For it is essentially cruciform. This is the Tree as Cross and Christ as its Fruit, a complex and powerful concept which was memorably celebrated by the fifth-century poet Fortunatus in a series of influential hymns: 'You are powerful in your fruitfulness, O sweet and noble tree, seeing that you bear such fruit in your branches ... hanging between your arms is a vine, from which sweet wines flow red as blood'. Read with these texts in mind, the Hornby scene is clearly replete with both Eucharistic symbolism and notions of God's generous provision for mankind. But such readings obviously spring from a learned and informed discipline; pre-Viking sculpture like that from Hornby was never, in any sense, a popular art.

My second iconographical surprise dates to the Viking period, when sculpture's patronage had widened beyond its original narrow monastic base. Secular themes we now depicted alongside more overtly Christian scenes and symbols. Thus at Neston an angel stands in a panel above two jousting horsemen whilst, at Halton,
Pre-Norman Sculpture

Sigurd and his decapitated brother fill the shaft of a cross whose arms carry evangelist symbols. But much more interesting than these iconographic mélanges are the figures on the enormous tenth-century cross-head from Winwick. On one end-panel is a priest dressed in alb and chasuble, surrounded by the tools of his trade: bell and holy-water bucket, cross and (probably) portable shrine. At the other end of the cross, two men stand on either side of a third who is suspended upside down by a rope. They appear to be sawing him in half with a bow-saw (fig. 2a). This extraordinary scene does not depict some pagan or secular tragedy but almost certainly shows Isaiah being sawn in two – an identification which becomes more convincing when the Winwick scheme is set against a labelled depiction of the prophet’s martyrdom from a fifteenth-century Dutch manuscript (fig. 2b). The iconography is otherwise unattested in Britain before the Norman period but it was a story well known to Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome and Bede as being the allusive point of Paul’s reference in Hebrews 10:37 to the faithful who, in the past, had been ‘stoned, sawn asunder, tempted and slain’. It is an iconographical curiosity and obviously raises some intriguing questions about the range and transmission of motifs in the tenth-century Anglo-Viking north.

27 Bailey, Viking sculpture, 159–61.
28 For a full treatment of the later iconography of this theme see R. Bernheimer, ‘The martyrdom of Isaiah’, Art Bull., xxxiv (1952), 19–34.

Figure 2
(a) Winwick; (b) New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 385
(Drawings: Author)
There is then an iconographic interest in the sculptures from Lancashire and Cheshire. But most of the surviving carvings lack any figural art. What can be gleaned from these works? Until the material has been fully studied afresh some deductions are inevitably tentative but already certain patterns of distribution call for explanation. In the pre-Viking period we have already noticed the curious concentration of sculpture in the Lune valley which contrasts with its virtual absence elsewhere in the two counties, and suggested, by analogy with the better-documented situation in County Durham, that this reflects the existence in that area of a particular form of monastic *parochia*. Within that north Lancashire group it is also possible to see certain links: the Gressingham cross-head, for example, was clearly produced by the same man who carved the small head fragment still surviving a few miles away at Hornby; he uses an identical ribbed motif on the side of the head and sets it out on an identical measurement unit.

But it is for the Viking period of the tenth and eleventh centuries that this sculpture acts as a major source of information. For within this north-western area documentary evidence now largely fails us; metalwork finds are inevitably randomly distributed and only the place-names can match the carvings for their geographical spread. I draw attention to two features to provide some measure of the potential value of this material, and also of some of the problems in its interpretation.

First, the urban prosperity, commercial organization and trading impact of tenth-century Chester clearly emerges from the way in which a mason’s yard (apparently attached to St John’s, to judge from the unfinished piece at the site) provided near-identical crosses not only for various graveyards in the city but also for outlying sites like Bromborough, West Kirby and, at a greater distance, Whitfield in Flintshire. This mass production of stereotyped monuments can only be paralleled elsewhere in the Anglo-Scandinavian north at York and Lincoln and is a useful confirmation (supported, of course, by the numismatic evidence) of the relative status of the city in the tenth century. But Chester also provides us with a warning about the dangers of simplistic interpretation of sculptural evidence. Chester, unlike Lancaster, has no sculpture which can be convincingly

29 See note 10 above.
30 Edwards, ‘Annotated checklist . . .’, 59–60; Collingwood, ‘Some crosses at Hornby . . .’.
assigned to a date before the tenth century. It might therefore plausibly be argued that the city’s real growth, in as far as it can be measured in sculptural terms, dates to the period after Aethelflaed’s re-fortification in 907 and the subsequent translation of St Werburgh’s relics, encouraged, no doubt, also by the local tenth-century development of an Oswald cult. One might even be tempted to think that Roger of Wendover had captured a genuine piece of information when he wrote of Chester as being ‘waste’ in 893. But this would be to misunderstand the evidence. We can certainly accept the tenth-century proliferation of monuments as a signal of Chester’s commercial vitality at that period, but the contrast with Lancaster in the centuries before the Vikings is (as we have seen) more likely to reflect a difference in earlier forms of pastoral provision, or of monastic types, than to be a reflex of the contrasting economic prosperity of the two centres.

My second observation involves larger distribution patterns. In the tenth and eleventh centuries the lands around the northern rim of the Irish Sea were all infiltrated, albeit in differing densities, by Scandinavian groups in a settlement which is barely chronicled by Anglo-Saxon sources. The political and economic relationships between these areas can in part be tracked through the coin-hoards and associated metalwork, whilst Gillian Fellows-Jensen has unravelled much of the complex onomastic outcome. My interest, however, lies in revealing some less closely-dated patterns of connections and (significantly) disconnections which are reflected in the sculpture and which are summarized on the accompanying map (fig. 3). The details which underlie these boundaries and connections were published in 1994 and there is no need to repeat them here. But what does emerge strongly from this map are the numerous traces of Cumbria-Cheshire links which can be assembled. Intriguingly, however, these are links which appear to exclude large tracts of Lancashire south of the Lune. These inclusive and exclusive patterns have still to be satisfactorily
explained, but they clearly provide a vital form of evidence for our understanding of tenth-century politics, trade and culture around the Irish Sea.

Like *Beowulf*, I fear, this paper has taken on a digressive structure but, having grappled with minor monsters, I now reach my main preoccupation: the physical appearance of the original monuments and its implications. Here I need to weave together three strands of evidence.

First there is the undoubted fact that many of these stone carvings were designed to be covered in gesso and then painted.\(^3\)

---

Plate 1
Sandbach Crosses
(Photograph: R. Trench-Jellicoe)
Plate 2
Hornby Shaft
(Photograph: R. Trench-Jellicoe)
Plate 3
Penrith Plaque
(Photograph: by kind permission of Abbot Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Kendal)
Plate 4
Whalley Cross
(Photograph: Author)
Their original appearance relied little on the tasteful reticence of natural stone; these were once hideously polychrome monuments. The evidence for the former existence of gesso coating is widespread and the associated paint survives in some quantity, though its traces are usually now to be found nesting in crevices. Locally there is a liberal use of red on an inscribed shaft from Lancaster and there are traces of both red and black pigment at Halton. Further north the large shaft from Urswick in Furness carries both red and blue whilst the Crucifixion plaque from Penrith, now in Kendal Museum, is not only liberally coated with gesso but also has a variety of green and orange colouring (pl. 3). To such northern evidence we can add the results of recent work on the late Saxon rood from Breamore in Hampshire which showed that even gold leaf could be added in certain contexts. Such painting, of course, could have completely transformed the appearance of monuments, as can be appreciated from the reconstructions of the early eleventh-century slab from St Paul's in London. Miscuttings could have been concealed and details could have been added. On some occasions, indeed, the sculptor only seems to have supplied the most basic outline of a representation which, as at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire, would then require major supplementation by the painter. Incised inscriptions could have been highlighted, like the surviving runic example from St Maurice’s at Winchester, and this would have been particularly helpful in those cases where the text was set high up on a tall monument. Similarly, borders and now-blank panels could have carried painted inscriptions; it is, for example, difficult to believe that the great open page of the Book of Life at Halton did not carry some *incipit*, just as similar books do in analogous manuscript


representations. Equally, differential colouring could have clarified the content and meaning of many scenes, focusing attention on some essential detail which is now lost in the uniform appearance of a panel. Thus the infant Christ who nestles in Mary’s arms among the mass of small-scale figural cells on the west face of the smaller shaft at Sandbach could have been colourfully highlighted; had such paint survived, non-observant modern scholars would have been saved the embarrassment of deluding themselves into believing that this figural honeycomb was in some way intended as a Pentecost scene!

My first strand, then, is one of painted monuments. My second is that many of these carvings had metalwork, glass, paste and jewelled attachments. Some of these may, admittedly, be secondary accretions to the original carving. Dodwell, for example, has drawn attention to the story of Tovi, one of Canute’s followers, who showered precious gifts on the large Crucifixion figure at Waltham in Essex. He and his wife topped it off with a golden crown, gave it gems and gold and even attached a sword to its side with plates of silver. These tributes were tokens given in recognition of the miraculous properties of a carving which had achieved the status of a relic in its own right. Among surviving pieces there is similar evidence of what are likely to be later attachments. Thus the stone shrine known as Hedda’s Tomb, at Peterborough, has a row of three (presumptively secondary) holes along one side of its eaves which suggest that it may once have carried a rail with curtains which could have been drawn aside, dramatically to reveal the figures beneath. And Isabel Henderson has recently suggested that a fourth hole beneath Peter’s hand on that monument may well have contained a relic; this again may have been an addition to the original scheme. To this group we might add the cross at Rothbury in Northumberland. The upper sides of the arms of this ambitious carving have been drilled; but were those holes original and did they contain candles in a manner reflecting the practice attested by the well-known sixth-century Sinai cross and illustrated in the sixth/seventh century catacomb painting of Pontianus.

---

44 Cramp, ‘Otley crosses’, pl. 48(2).
45 For the Sandbach scene see Bu’lock, Pre-conquest Cheshire, plate 7B. My Newcastle colleague, Dr Jane Hawkes, has a study of this monument in the press.
47 Bailey, Viking sculpture, pl. 48.
48 I. Henderson, ‘The insular and continental context of the St Andrews sarcophagus’, Scotland in dark age Europe, ed. B. Crawford (St Andrews: University, 1994), 91. The hole beneath Peter’s hand is best seen in Webster, Making, fig. 24.
49 For Rothbury see Cramp, Corpus, plate 212. For Sinai and catacomb crosses see K. Weitzmann and I. Sevcenko, ‘The Moses cross at Sinai’, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, xvii (1963), pls 1, 10.
All this is arguably indicative of secondary attachments. There is, however, convincing evidence that metallic and other features were designed into some carvings from the first. Thus the ninth-century cross from Reculver in Kent still preserves, in the vertical borders which flank its figural panels, the peg-holes which held a decorative metal strip (and the mouldings which were channelled to help hold it in place) whilst its ascending Christ clearly had a Resurrection cross attached to His hand by means of the peg-hole drilled through the palm. The great rood at Breamore in Hampshire has peg-holes (one still containing a wooden peg with the copper alloy stain left by a nail) on either side of Christ's neck which presumably fixed a halo or crown, and Warwick Rodwell has rightly drawn attention to other dowel holes which suggest that the wrists were also bound by a metallic band. Not far away, the figure of Christ on the neo-Romanesque rood at Romsey has a curious flat head which is best explained as adapted for a metallic crown, whilst one of the angels on the smaller rood inside the Abbey had drilled eyes which still contain the oxidized remnants of a metallic or jewelled setting. In Northumbria the small cross-head from Lastingham clearly had some form of precious jewel/glass (?) even relic) inset placed at the centre of its decorative boss because the damage caused when it was prised out can still be seen. In the light of these examples it becomes highly probable that the deeply-drilled holes on the flat bosses of the Lancaster 'Cynibalh' cross, now in the British Museum (fig. 4b), and the similar features on the later crosses from Chester were equally enhanced by metallic attachments. This type of additional decoration would be fully in keeping with contemporary sculpture elsewhere in Britain and on the continent. In Scotland Isabel Henderson and Ian Fisher have drawn attention to the vestigial remains of such fittings whilst in


51 Rodwell and Rous, 'The ... rood ... of ... Breamore', 309–10.


53 Lang, Corpus, ills. 582, 583.

54 For Lancaster see Garstang, 'Anglo-Saxon remains', Victoria history ... of Lancaster, pl. facing 266; Collingwood, Crosses, fig. 126. For Chester see Allen, 'Monuments', fig. facing 156; Thacker, 'Cheshire', fig. 39.

the seventh-century 'Hypogée des Dunes' at Poitiers there are glass insets still remaining in situ on the inscribed slab at the entrance to the inner chamber; moreover the painted cube at the east end of the mausoleum has bead-decoration on its painted surface and the pillars flanking the entrance to the tomb have holes for jewels scattered across their carved ornament. 56

Two strands of my argument are now in place: painting and metalwork attachments. The third involves the notion of a skeuomorph. Conventionally this is defined as involving the adoption from a model of features or forms which are appropriate to the medium of that model, but which are functionally irrelevant to the medium in which the model is being copied. Conventionally also, the concept of a skeuomorph is often associated with ideas about 'blind' or 'careless' reproduction. I want to suggest a different interpretation and three examples will clarify the issues involved.

First, there is the tenth-century Penrith Crucifixion slab already mentioned in connection with its gesso and painted covering (pl. 3). 57 This emerged from a London saleroom in the 1980s and can be traced back, along a somewhat murky track, to the great nineteenth-century art collection in Lowther Castle. In its iconography it is very close to a small Irish metalwork plaque from Clonmacnoise. But the comparison with Clonmacnoise illuminates more than issues of shared compositional origins. The Irish piece is cut in openwork and, necessarily, all of its figures therefore overlap or are linked to each other or touch the surrounding frame; only thus can all the elements physically be held together. Now the decoration on the stone slab is organized in precisely the same manner: Christ's head and hands penetrate the border; the angels stand on His arms and their Grecian hair touches the frame; all other figures are linked to each other. This is not a treatment structurally demanded by the sculptural medium; in some way therefore the Penrith slab's organization reflects openwork metallic ornament of the type seen, on a much smaller scale, on the Clonmacnoise plaque.

Next is a decorated slab, one of several set externally and incorporated into the strip work of the early tenth-century church at Barnack in Northamptonshire (fig. 4a). 58 The important feature in this context is the manner in which the scrollwork ornament is 'clipped' to the frame because, on a massive scale, this picks up a detail which is

56 See J. Hubert et al., Europe of the invasions (New York: Braziller, 1967), pls 68, 73, 74.
57 Bailey, Corpus, 140–2; R.N. Bailey, 'A crucifixion plaque from Cumbria', Early medieval sculpture in Britain and Ireland, ed. J. Higgitt, B.A.R. British Series 152 (Oxford: BAR, 1986), 5–21. In view of the arguments set out below note the suggestive comment that the cross-hatching on this stone may have supported enamel: J.T. Lang, 'The painting of pre-Conquest sculpture in Northumbria', Early medieval wall painting, ed. Cathar, 141.
functional in metalwork: compare, for example, the Kirkoswald trefoil mount. The obvious deduction (although we will see that it is, in part, mistaken) is that this represents a somewhat thoughtless adoption into stone of a practical fixing device from a metalwork model.

My last, and more illuminating, example is provided by a ninth-century slab from the North Yorkshire site of Kirkdale (fig. 4c). It was probably originally the lid of a sarcophagus or stone shrine, and is decorated on the top with a rather complex form of knotwork. The intriguing parts of the carving for us, however, are the narrow edges

---

60 Lang, *Corpus*, ills. 564–7.
because they carry a series of pendant triangles. In effect they form petrified tassels, and the impression they helped convey is that the slab was draped in some form of highly decorated textile cover—an impression which would be further strengthened by the use of suitable colouring. Now a textile covering would be highly appropriate for a tomb or shrine. Fine linen covered the tomb in the visionary church described in the ninth-century poem *De abbatibus* whilst, in the real world, we have extensive documentary evidence for tomb-coverings of rich fabric at Ely and Glastonbury, some woven with decorative motifs and others set with gold and gems; the *Vita* of the seventh-century bishop Eligius records similar drapery enveloping Merovingian shrines. At the major pre-Viking monastic site of Kirkdale, I would argue that this traditional textile tribute to the enclosed relics was permanently provided in the carved decoration of the stone lid of the sarcophagus.

Interpreting Kirkdale’s sculpture in this manner suggests, of course, a rather more subtle manner of understanding the notion of ‘skeuomorph’, and of the thinking which lies behind it, than has been adopted in the past. The relationship between textiles and the Yorkshire carving is less one of the sculptor unthinkingly *copying* irrelevant functional elements from a textile model than of his actually *trying to achieve a textile effect*. This is, I believe, a more fruitful way of approaching this whole issue because what I want to suggest is that, in seeking to explain ‘metalwork’ details of the Penrith and Barnack slabs (and the material I now review), we should not necessarily see these as the results of careless reproduction of forms appropriate to another medium, but rather of the sculptors actually trying to make their carvings look like metalwork. What is more, in their attempt to reproduce another medium in stone, they were able to exploit the other two sculptural features we have just isolated: painted surfaces and metallic attachments.

A fragmentary cross-head from Heysham provides a good local starting point for this argument (fig. 5a). On one face there is an enclosed cluster of bosses with a vertical moulding leading into the lower arm; this moulding is surrounded by a zig-zag decoration in relief. The same type of zig-zag border recurs at Jarrow, Hexham, Ripon. Northallerton and Hornby (figs 5, 6). It is also found, in a

---


62 Collingwood, *Crosses*, fig. 128.

Figure 5
(a) Heysham; (b) Northallerton; (c) Ripon; (d) Hexham
(Drawings after Collingwood, *Crosses*. At differing scales)
Figure 6
(a) Hexham; (b) Jarrow; (c) Ripon Disc; (d) Ripon; (e) Lancaster Vicarage Field
(Drawings: Author. At differing scales)
more meandering version, on a cross-arm which emerged from the 1971 Vicarage Field excavations at Lancaster; here the central moulding terminates in a boss with a drilled hole in its crown (fig. 6e).\(^{64}\) On the reverse of the Lancaster piece the moulding is surrounded by a series of bosses or pellets; Northallerton's cross-head has exactly the same combination of zig-zag and pelleted frames whilst other crosses from Ripon and Hexham also employ the motif of bossed surround (figs 5b/d, 6d).\(^{65}\) The metalwork associations of these types of border will be immediately apparent: the Cuthbert cross of the seventh century and both the Ormside bowl and Rupertus cross of the eighth provide good examples of pelleted borders whilst the triangular garnet cells of the seventh-century Ripon disc (fig. 6c) exactly match, on a miniature scale, the effect of the sculptural zig-zag framing.\(^{66}\) If the cells formed by the zig-zag mouldings on the carvings were painted red then the cloisonné garnet analogy would, of course, be even more striking. Nor, once the eye is alerted to the possibility, is it difficult to see how the central elements in the cross-arms of Hexham, Jarrow and Ripon could, with the aid of appropriate pigments, also resemble enormous walled garnet cells (figs 5c, 6a/b) - and we would do well to remember that W.G. Collingwood long ago noticed that the ornament on the centre of the Northallerton cross-head bore a marked resemblance to the base of the Ormside bowl.\(^{67}\) The addition of a paste or jewelled inset in the drilled boss at Lancaster would only further strengthen the metallic impression of this type of carving.

The same theme can be pursued elsewhere. The British Museum 'Cynibalh' cross from Lancaster, for example, not only has drilled holes in its flat bosses which could have carried jewelled insets, but it is also decorated with a discontinuous form of interlace and, at the junction of head and shaft, with a horizontal moulding surrounded by a double rectangular frame (fig. 4b).\(^{68}\) The discontinuous interlace strands come close in their effect to the repoussé knotwork on the base of the Ormside bowl or the mounts on the Northumbrian Hexham bucket and Fulda bookbinding, whilst the rectangular feature can reasonably be compared with the jewels set in squared frames which decorate the Copenhagen, Monymusk or Bologna shrines.\(^{69}\) The

---


\(^{65}\) For Hexham see Cramp, *Corpus*, ill. 902. For Northallerton see above note 63. The Ripon fragment is unpublished.

\(^{66}\) Webster, *Making*, nos 98, 133, 134. The Ripon jewel is unpublished.

\(^{67}\) Collingwood, *Crosses*, 23-4, figs 29-30.

\(^{68}\) For the 'Cynibalh' cross see note 54 above.

central cluster of bosses on one of the crosses from St John's Chester mimics the filigree effects of the Kirkoswald brooch;\(^{70}\) the row of pellets on the 'sheep' fragment at Halton look like the nails holding down a decorative strip whilst the broad rope-mouldings of the arris borders of the cross at Disley echo a well-known method of concealing the angled junction of two adjacent metal plates.\(^{71}\) The large cross in Whalley churchyard carries a heavy moulding running down the centre of one face which almost appears to be held in place by a large bossed rivet at the point where it splits below (pl. 4).\(^{72}\) The narrow edges of the same cross carry ornament which, interpreted metallically, looks like an attached plate with serrated edges whilst the large boss on the west face carries a star-shaped capping which exactly reproduces the manner in which a metallic sheet would be fixed to a convex surface, as a glance at the boss from Sutton Hoo would confirm (fig. 7).\(^{73}\) Sculpture after sculpture betrays metallic symptoms.\(^{74}\)

For some overall impression of the metallic effect of these monuments it is worth returning to the two crosses in the market square at Sandbach which so intrigued Sir William Smith (pl. 1).\(^{75}\) These two crosses are obviously closely related in both motifs and in minor details and, on the basis of the heraldic beasts on the north side of the larger cross, can be assigned to a date around 800 A.D. No traces of paint are now visible, though we have already seen that some form of colour differentiation would have been desirable to highlight the distinctive elements in the nested cells of the smaller cross. The larger shaft, however, had at least one metalwork attachment for, as Caroline Richardson noted in her recent detailed survey, there are four holes drilled around the boss on the east side of the head which either supported the flange of a hemispherical covering or held a framing circlet (fig. 8). On both crosses the heavy ropework arris is of metalwork type and the triangular forms gripping the lower corners repeat a characteristic metalwork method of attaching sheets to a wooden core.\(^{76}\) On all of the panels there is a scatter of meaningless bosses which can reasonably be compared with those pellets which

\(^{70}\) See: Bu'lock, *Pre-conquest Cheshire*, fig. 15; Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon metalwork*, pl. 28.

\(^{71}\) For Halton see Collingwood, *Crosses*, fig. 92 (e). For Disley see Allen, 'Monuments', figs facing 149; Thacker, 'Cheshire', fig. 40(2).

\(^{72}\) Bailey, *Viking sculpture*, pl. 5; Collingwood, *Crosses*, fig. 132.

\(^{73}\) R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo ship burial*, vol. iii (London: British Museum, 1978), figs 34, 71. Note the close parallel on a cross-head from St Mary Castlegate, York, which has other distinctive metalwork features: Wenham, *Bishophill Junior and St Mary Castlegate*, 156–8, fig. 48s.

\(^{74}\) Note for example the north side of the Bewcastle cross with its millifiore chequers and 'bound' scrolls or the metallic hasps of the Falstone shrine: Bailey, *Corpus*, ills 105, 107; Cramp, *Corpus*, ills 889–90.

\(^{75}\) The best published photographs are those in Bu'lock, *Pre-conquest Cheshire*, pls 4–6.

occur on the nasal of the York helmet or on the Altheus reliquary where they cover the nails which hold the metal sheet to its core. On the narrow faces of the two crosses there is a ladder-like arrangement of frames, each containing a single figure. Many of these figures carry attributes, and in each case it is noticeable how feet, hands, heads and attributes all touch the frame in the manner of the Penrith Crucifixion slab; this we saw as a characteristic feature of openwork like the Clonmacnoise plaque or (in an English tradition) the Whitby discs. On the east face of the large cross, as on its vine-scroll face, it is noticeable how the limbs of humans, birds and animals extend to overlap other features and that linking discs are inserted to bind one element to another in the strengthening manner essential to openwork metal decoration. Finally, on the smaller cross, the framing system of trellis-like mouldings which run between bosses echoes the subdivisions so popular in Trewhiddle art like the Tassilo chalice, Fuller brooch or Pentney brooches.

The Sandbach crosses, along with much other sculpture, should then be seen for what they were – highly coloured, decorated in metallic and jewelled hues and devices, and strewn with glass, paste and metal fittings. All was designed to give the effect of a massive metal cross, a giant version, as it were, of the well-known

77 For York helmet see D. Tweddle, *The Anglian helmet from Coppergate* (York: Archaeological Trust, 1992), figs 429–31. For Altheus reliquary see Hubert et al., *Europe of the invasions*, fig. 315.
Rupertus cross.\textsuperscript{80} We should not imagine that this cross was, in any way, a unique object, for the National Museum in Edinburgh houses the fragments of just such another set of metal sheets found in Dumfriesshire; these are decorated in repoussé with scroll and (significantly in this context) human ornament, surrounded by a pelleted frame.\textsuperscript{81} What is more, the ninth-century poem \textit{De abbatibus} describes altar crosses covered in gold plate and emeralds and there are other literary descriptions of eighth-century crosses at York and Hereford encrusted with gold, silver and jewels.\textsuperscript{82} It is reasonable to claim that such metalwork crosses were at the centre of the elaborate ritual of the Anglo-Saxon church. The sculptors, I would argue, were producing enormous versions of the same objects in stone.

Why should Anglo-Saxon sculptors strive to achieve such effects? And why did other insular sculptural traditions follow suit? For the same metalwork infection is blatantly present in Ireland among the Ahenny group and, less noticeably, can be traced on other crosses as well.\textsuperscript{83} Equally it recurs in Scotland on such well-


\textsuperscript{82} For \textit{De Abbatibus} see Aethelwulf . . . . , ed. Campbell lines 723–5, 737–9. For other references see Gem, 'Architecture . . . . ', 56–61.

known pieces as the cross-slabs at Nigg, Meigle and Aberlemno (roadside) as well as among the Iona material. And it is present in at least one group of monuments from Merovingian France. There are, I believe, two answers. One relates to an international Christian perception; the second is more deeply rooted in an Anglo-Saxon psyche.

The medieval world knew through pilgrims' tales of a series of replica commemorative Crucifixion crosses which had been erected on Golgotha hill. The first of these, probably set up by Constantine, was apparently in metal but was relatively austere; it was replaced (or encased?) with a gem-studded cross by Theodosius between 417 and 440. In 620 this, in its turn, was succeeded by a cross of silver. It was the gem-studded cross, the *crux gemmata*, which was to become a highly potent image, carried westwards in pilgrims' descriptions and in artistic representations. It figures on the pilgrim ampulae of the treasury in Monza; it can be seen towering behind Christ the Judge in the c. 400 apse mosaic of S Pudenziana in Rome and, a century and a half later, is set among the starry heavens in the apse of S Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna; it also lies behind work like the late sixth-century 'Justin cross' now in the Vatican Museum. This great jewelled cross is also, of course, a central image in *The dream of the Rood* where its appearance is a signal to the dreamer of impending doomsday. He sees it as

```
begoten mid golde; gimmast stodon
fægere æt foldan sceatum, swylce þær fife wæron
uppe on þam eaxlegespanne . . .
```

Similarly in *Elene* Constantine gazes up into the sky and sees the same tree of glory

```
golde geglenged, (gimmast lixtan)
```

In a sense, then, Anglo-Saxon and Irish sculptors, as well as the Picts, were following the most justified of religious precedents in

---


metallizing their stone crosses. They were reproducing Golgotha in Britain.\textsuperscript{90}

The second explanation relates to the prestigious nature of the metalworker and the jeweller's art. As Sutton Hoo vividly reminds us, late pagan society in England expressed its achievements through jewelled display. Christian society equally set the metalworker high in its rankings, to the point where it was appropriate that a saint like Dunstan could, later, be claimsed on the basis of his skills as the patron saint of goldsmiths and jewellers.\textsuperscript{91}

Liturgical metalwork – the chalices and shrines, the bookcovers produced by men like the \textit{Lindisfarne Gospels'} Billfrith – all testify to the continued high status of metalwork and jewellery as an appropriate manner of celebrating God's worship, of honouring His word and glorifying His saints.\textsuperscript{92} Were it necessary, of course, Christian Anglo-Saxons would have had little difficulty in assembling further biblical justification for the prestige they accorded jewellery; the language of the \textit{Apocalypse}, for example, describes the new Jerusalem in jewel-like terms, a convention that the \textit{Pearl} writer was later to exploit.

We have been taught by Rupert Bruce-Mitford and George Henderson to recognize the metalwork-derived elements in the decoration of early manuscripts like \textit{Durrow} and \textit{Lindisfarne}.\textsuperscript{93} I would argue that the sculptors, for very good theological and social reasons, similarly sought to express the importance and the meaning of their work by invoking the prestige of another medium, and some of the key evidence for that assertion lies in the Sandbach crosses of Cheshire before which William Smith was urged to dangle some 400 years ago.

\textsuperscript{90} Since this lecture was prepared Dr J. O'Reilly has reminded me that H. Richardson, \textit{The concept of the High Cross}, \textit{Irland und Europa: die kirche im frühmittelalter}, eds P. Ni Chathain and M. Richter (Stuttgart: Klett, 1984), 129-30 specifically linked the metalwork appearance of the Ahenny crosses with the Golgotha cross, though without broadening the argument or invoking the evidence of metalwork attachments and painting.

\textsuperscript{91} For Dunstan see \textit{Memorials of St Dunstan}, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series 63 (London: Longman, 1874), 79. For metalworking skills among late Saxon abbots see Dodwell, \textit{Anglo-Saxon art}, 55, 58, 260, 262.

\textsuperscript{92} Literary references to liturgical metalwork have been usefully assembled in Gem, \textit{'Architecture'}, 56-61.