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A Cross-head from St Mary Castlegate, York, and its Affiliations

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A fragmentary cross-head from St Mary Castlegate, York, raises some interesting questions about the ecclesiastical culture of tenth-century Northumbria. While this stone, and the others from the site, have received a degree of scholarly attention, the cultural implications they raise have not hitherto been explored in any great detail.

St Mary Castlegate: Background

St Mary Castlegate is one of a cluster of churches in York founded before the Norman Conquest with associated tenth- or eleventh- century sculpture. The church stands in the immediate vicinity of the excavated tenth- to eleventh-century site at 16-22 Coppergate: it was clearly in a densely-inhabited area of the city. There is some extant eleventh-century masonry in the nave (St Mary's Church, Castlegate, York 2006). The recorded sculptural assemblage at St Mary's consists of nine stones, two of which have been lost. One of the extant stones (7 in the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* numbering, Lang 1991) carries an inscription in Latin and Old English recording the building of the church and its dedication to Christ, St Mary and All Saints by patrons with Scandinavian names (Higgitt in Lang 1991). There are two recumbent grave-covers (5 and 6), one of which (5) is coped and elaborate, and the remains of four crosses. The coped grave-cover and one of the cross-heads (2) have strikingly close affiliations with two pieces of sculpture from Sinnington, N. Yorks, fifty kilometres away. Except for another of the cross-heads (see below), all the extant sculpture is carved in sandstone.

St Mary Castlegate: Cross-Head 3

The exception is cross-head 3, carved from a soft, fine, pale limestone. Like the other sculpture, it very probably represents the re-use of worked stone from Roman Eburacum (Lang 1991). It survives in three pieces, one of which was found during nineteenth-century restoration work and the other two (which carry traces of plaster and paint) during twentieth-century excavation (Tweddle in Wenham *et al.* 1987). There have been several attempts at reconstruction (Collingwood 1927, Hall 1975, Tweddle in Wenham *et al.* 1987), which differ in minor details. All, however, agree that this was once a ring-headed cross, with on one face an elaborate series of bosses and, on the other, four crouching animals, one on each arm.

The ends of the arms of the cross protrude beyond the ring and are decorated with a plate and boss. Lang uses the word 'unique' twice in his discussion of this cross, once to describe the plate-and-boss ends, and once to describe the crouching animals, which he refers to as 'canine animals' and 'dogs' (Lang 1991). Tweddle refers more cautiously to a 'crouched quadruped' and 'crouched animals'; like Lang's, his discussion is concerned with date and ethnic affiliation, and stylistic and formal connexions (Tweddle in Wenham *et al.* 1987). Both come to the same broad conclusions: that the cross is tenth-century, Anglo-Scandinavian, and very unusual. Collingwood, who had only one fragment to study, raised the tentative possibility that images on the four arms of the cross might have represented the four Evangelists, and that the 'little beast, modelled in the round' might be 'the Lion of St Mark'. (Collingwood 1909, 1927): this would imply the calf, lion and man of the other evangelists on the other arms. However he was clearly dissatisfied with this hypothesis, and in his reconstruction drawing he chose to show an animal on each arm, as later proved to be the case (Collingwood 1927). Collingwood's rejected hypothesis remains the only previous suggestion as to the meaning of this stone's iconography.

St Mary Castlegate 3: the Animals

Three animals survive on the extant arms of the cross, one complete but for its head and one fore-paw. The others are hacked back to little more than scars on the stone, but from what can be seen they look as though they are intended to be identical and it is plausible, with Collingwood, to guess that the missing fourth arm was also carved with an animal. A composite analysis of the three surviving carvings suggests a creature with rounded haunches, a tail that curves straight up to lie flat along the spine, stylised hind legs and naturalistic, well-defined, splayed front paws. Collingwood's reconstruction suggests a raised head, presumably because there is no obvious scar on the stone where a head has been chipped away. The heads and the front paws of the beasts would have intruded into the central space of the cross, very close to any boss marking the crossing.

Previous scholarship thus offers two lines of enquiry: that these are dogs (Lang) or lions (Collingwood), and claims that they are unique. These creatures are indeed unparalleled in Anglo-Saxon sculpture: however, there is



Fig. 1. St Mary Castlegate 3: the face with the three dogs/lions. Image courtesy of the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, University of Durham. Photographer: Tom Middlemass.

a series of striking parallels from Ireland and the west of Scotland. In a study unrelated to St Mary Castlegate, Hawkes has explored the significance of some of these in her assessment of a cross-head from Mayo Abbey, co. Mayo, Ireland (Hawkes, 2001). This is a free-armed cross-head of Anglian type which Hawkes dates to the late eighth- to early ninth-century; she identifies the figure on one face as the risen Christ and draws attention to an animal crouching on the top of the upper cross-arm, which she identifies firmly as a lion, although it is extremely badly weathered. She adduces mid-eighth-century parallels from Iona (two confronted creatures on the top of the upper cross-arm on the Cross of St John, also very weathered, and broken) and Kildalton (four creatures set around the central boss). At Kildalton, the crouched creatures above and below the boss are shown from above, and here the resemblance to St Mary Castlegate is striking. Hawkes, drawing on patristic writings, reads the lion, at Mayo and elsewhere, as a symbol of the resurrected Christ, and she draws attention to connexions between Mayo, Iona, and Northumbria, especially York. Evidence for the connexions between Mayo and York fades out before the tenth century, although in c.800 it was under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York (Hughes in Clemons and Hughes, 1971).

However, Hawkes does not suggest a reason why there should be multiple images of lions at Iona and Kildalton; nor does she discuss a group of Irish monuments which also have crouched animals carved as though seen from above but disposed very differently about their crosses.

Three sites in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Drumcliff, co. Sligo; Donaghmore, co. Tyrone, Galloon, co. Fermanagh) produce four crosses with crouched beasts; Harbison categorises these as belonging to the Ulster group, and suggests a ninth-century date (Harbison, 1992). At Drumcliff, there are three beasts: one on the north end of the lateral cross arm and two on the underside of the ring, flanking the lower arm of the cross. Harbison distinguishes here between 'a lion in high relief' at the top of the shaft and the 'animal in high relief, facing downwards', immediately above it (Harbison, 1992), which suggests that he does not think the latter is obviously a lion. At Donaghmore there is a creature on each end of the lateral arm of the cross. At Galloon, where only the cross-shafts survive *in situ*, the animals creep down the south face of the East Cross and the north face of the West Cross. The Irish examples of these animals occur in a variety of iconographical contexts, but always on either or both the north or south face of the crosses, never the east or west, i.e. the main

faces. They are always depicted from above, crouched. With the possible exception of the West Cross at Galloon, they do not appear in close proximity to human figures (and even here the animal does not form part of the scene with the possible figures). While Harbison only refers to them as animals a little more precision can be attained. There is no apparent stylisation or abstraction in the design. The animals have paws rather than hooves, there are no horns, they have short muzzles and small ears. No tail is visible. At Drumcliff (by far the best-preserved) they have well-modelled haunches. In other words, they are very like the creatures at St Mary Castlegate, more so than the animals at Iona, Kildalton or Mayo. At Drumcliff, Donaghmore and Galloon the animals are not given the prominence that they are at Iona, Kildalton and Mayo. They creep down the cross, always head-down, in comparatively obscure positions. At all three of these sites there is a creature to both north and south, although at Galloon they are on separate crosses. It is harder to read these animals as symbols of the triumphantly risen Lord. What then might they be? If not lions, is there any justification, given Lang's suggestion for the St Mary Castlegate cross, for the idea that they are dogs?

The many references to dogs in Scripture are overwhelmingly negative. Menache explores the general hostility of monotheistic religions to dogs: she suggests that dogs are inherently liminal creatures, often living on intimate terms with humankind and straddling the boundary between human and non-human, sacred and profane, and she points out that dogs are the only animal which St John associates with the whoremongers, sorcerers, murderers, idolaters and liars excluded from the kingdom of heaven, in Revelation 15:22 (Menache, 1997). In the context we are examining here, namely crosses, the most relevant biblical reference to dogs is 'For dogs have surrounded me; a gang of evildoers has closed in on me; they pierced my hands and my feet' from Psalm 21:17 (in the Vulgate numbering). This psalm is among the most prominent of the Old Testament texts interpreted as prophecies of the crucifixion, one that would have been known by heart by all members of a monastic or collegiate community through constant repetition. Its opening line, "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me," was quoted by Christ on the cross, and St Augustine interprets the whole psalm as though spoken by Christ: an intensely personal dramatic monologue commenting on the experience of the Crucifixion (Hebgin and Corrigan, 1960). The psalm's encompassing dogs/evil-doers would make sense in terms of the disposition of the animals around the cross-head both at Donaghmore and Drumcliff, and at St Mary Castlegate; less so at Galloon unless we read both crosses together as part of a single monumental landscape: plausible, given that the two Galloon cross-shafts are so similar.

Whether dogs or lions, these creatures imply a complex interpretation of Christian belief that eschews the literal and the obvious: how is this developed by setting it in the context of the cross as a whole?

St Mary Castlegate 3: the Bosses

The other face of the St Mary Castlegate cross-head is as elaborate, and almost as unusual, as the face with the animals. The centre and the arms of the cross are each marked by a domed and decorated boss, against a background of cable and beading. The central boss is quite deeply carved, but some of the ornament on the others is quite lightly incised and may have been further picked out with paint. Lang draws attention to the Borre style origins of the motif on the central boss, and Tweddle suggests parallels that would place the cross in 'the late 9th century, or the first half of the 10th century' (Lang, 1991; Tweddle, 1987).

A cross-head with five highly-ornamented bosses is surely intended to invoke the five wounds of Christ. The obvious comparandum is 'The Dream of the Rood,' ll. 7b-9a, with its description of a cross with five jewels at the intersection. The cross the poem depicts is the *crux gemmata*, the jewelled cross with five gems representing the five wounds that will appear in the sky at the Second Coming, a staple of devotional art from at least the fifth century and well-known in Anglo-Saxon sculpture (Bailey, 1996). The subject of the Cross in the art and literature of Anglo-Saxon England and her neighbours has been studied exhaustively and there is no room here to cover again such well-trodden ground in any detail. Where stone crosses are concerned, there are parallels at Iona, among other places, for five bosses adorning the cross-head; and Bailey draws attention to the cluster of five bosses on the pre-Viking Age crosses at Irton (Cumbria) and Northallerton (N. Yorks) as representations of the five wounds (Bailey 1980 and 1996). The ornamented bosses at St Mary Castlegate thus assimilate images of the Crucifixion and the Second Coming in a way very familiar from much early medieval art and literature: to take but one literary example of many, Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, describes in one homily how at the Last Judgement Christ will display His wounds and ask what humankind has done for Him (Raw, 1990). It is only at the Second Coming that the true meaning of the Crucifixion will be realised by most of humanity: crosses such as St Mary Castlegate represent an attempt to bring that meaning home before the end of time.

If the cross-face with the bosses at St Mary Castlegate is primarily an evocation of the Second Coming as the fulfilment of the Crucifixion, how might this help with a reading of the face with the animals? Bailey points out that that many Irish crosses have 'their Crucifixion on one side of the cross-head and a scene showing Christ in Judgement on the other', and he compares the Irish carvings with three English stones, from Billingham (Cleveland), Thornton Steward (N. Yorks) and one of the other cross-heads from St Mary Castlegate (Bailey 1980), which is discussed below. A Last Judgement/Second Coming image on one face thus may well be balanced by a Crucifixion image on the other. In this case, images of encompassing dogs, alluding to Psalm 21 and the words

spoken by Christ on the Cross, would be highly appropriate. If they are lions, and, as Hawkes argues, lions represent the Risen Christ, the cross would then carry imagery associated with the Resurrection on one face and the Second Coming on the other, the whole contained within the Cross as an evocation of the Crucifixion. Either analysis is doctrinally sound and would make for a powerful visual statement of faith. In either case, whether lions or dogs, this cross-head demonstrates complex and learned iconography and a wide range of reference, both biblical and patristic, hinting at a community of sophisticated patrons and craftsmen.

St Mary Castlegate 3: the Context

The possible inherent meanings of the St Mary Castlegate cross-head are intriguing, but not more so than the possible origins of its motifs. If an Irish or western Scottish origin is postulated for the animal motif, how might it have travelled to St Mary Castlegate?

The Hiberno-Norse settlers in Cumbria and Yorkshire from the early tenth century onwards are usually seen as the vector for the motif of the ring-headed cross: Bailey cites as possible *exempla* for the type St Martin's cross at Iona, the south cross at Clonmacnoise (co. Offaly), and a cluster at Ahenny (co. Tipperary), Killamery and Kilkieran (County Kilkenny), all in the hinterland of Waterford (Bailey 1980). However Mayo, Drumcliff, Donaghmore and Galloon are all in the northern and western parts of Ireland, a long way from the Viking or Hiberno-Norse settlements which, with the exception of Limerick, cluster in the south and east. The usual date given for the beginning of Hiberno-Norse incursions into Cumbria is 902, based on an entry from the *Annals of Ulster*, referring to the expulsion of the heathen from Dublin.

Iona and Islay were undoubtedly part of the region that experienced Viking raids and settlement (Woolf, 2007). Settlement on Islay in particular is suggested by a few furnished burials with Scandinavian-type grave-goods (Graham-Campbell and Batey, 2001). However the available archaeological evidence does no more than indicate that people and ideas were circulating in a Hiberno-Norse milieu that included sites with impressive Christian sculpture.

It is impossible to say whether any of these people were interested in crosses, or whether they had any connexion with York: the evidence is not there. Bailey surveys the arguments about the Manx, Irish or Scottish inspiration for the Northumbrian ring-headed crosses, but goes on to argue that '[t]his dispute about origins is...a side-issue: the important point is that the presence in England of a ring connecting the arms of a cross indicates that we are dealing with a monument of the Viking period' (Bailey 1980). But it surely indicates more than that: it shows that, at St Mary Castlegate and elsewhere, we are dealing

with people who had looked *closely* at ring-headed crosses, some of which were a considerable distance from the usual Viking areas; and who had thought those crosses important enough both to remember and to reproduce with considerable skill, not only in their essentials but in some of their minor details. The usual definition of the Hiberno-Norse does not include ecclesiastics, but perhaps we should reconsider or, rather, consider that other people as well as the Hiberno-Norse as usually defined may have been travelling between Ireland and Northumbria in the tenth century. The leaders of the Hiberno-Norse were progressively assimilated into Christian practices over the course of the tenth century: Woolf concludes his assessment of the career of Amlaib (Olaf) Cuaran thus: 'He began his career as a pagan plunderer and ended it as a penitent on Iona' (Woolf, 2007). Amlaib ruled twice in York between 941 and 952 and was a major power-player in Dublin, ruling there several times before his abdication and death in 981: what was the long back-story of his relationship with Irish and Ionan monastics?

St Mary Castlegate: the Other Carved Stones

There are two other fragmentary cross-heads from St Mary Castlegate. One of these (4) is also ring-headed, and Lang suggests an early tenth century date, on grounds both of form and of motif. The other (2) is a free-armed cross of a type familiar from the pre-Viking Age. On one face is the crucified Christ with creatures - in one case a serpent - carved beneath His outstretched arms. The other face carries a battered human figure. Lang cites several Northumbrian parallels for the position of Christ (Ellerburn 8, Sinnington 11, Kirkdale 1 and Great Ayton) and suggests that, 'Its origins may well be Irish; in the light of the York-Dublin axis in the tenth century this would not be surprising'.

Coatsworth, too, draws attention to the Irish affiliations of this free-armed cross-head, but she also points out the conservative, Anglian nature of the form (Coatsworth in Wenham *et al.* 1987). She concludes by describing York's sculptors as having 'eclectic and innovative tendencies'. Eclecticism and innovation are surely signs of a mature, well-informed and confident approach to the making of sculpture.

Finally, at St Mary Castlegate, there are the two recumbent grave slabs. Of these, one is a small fragment whose decoration (still carrying some gesso) suggests the tenth century. The other, which is coped, has an elaborate free-armed cross against a background or ring-knots, which Lang suggests could be late ninth- or tenth-century. He draws a close parallel with Sinnington 15, to the extent of ascribing them to the same hand (Lang, 1991). There are thus two close parallels with Sinnington at St Mary Castlegate, though of very different kinds. The two cross-heads (SMC 2 and Sinnington 11), though similar in concept are very different in execution; the

coped slabs on the other hand are virtually identical. All Saints, Sinnington, has an exceptional collection of surviving sculpture, with eighteen pieces which date from the late ninth to tenth centuries and include virtually every form common in the period. There are parts of up to eleven cross-shafts, free-arm and ringed cross-heads, a hogback, and the coped grave-cover already noted. Of this Lang notes that it is 'Late Anglian' in style, whereas other pieces are 'Anglo-Scandinavian'. In addition to the Irish parallels suggested for the figure of the crucified Christ (Sinnington 11 cf. e.g. Castledermot, co. Kildare), Lang also suggests that the figures on the cross-shaft Sinnington 1, shown flanking a staff, are similar to those on the Cross of the Scriptures, Clonmacnoise, co. Offaly, 'which is usually interpreted as the founding of a monastery' (Lang, 1991). Sinnington, on the north side of the Vale of Pickering, is one of a dense cluster of churches with remarkable Anglian and Viking Age sculpture, and lies very close to major ecclesiastical sites such as Stonegrave and Lastingham.

Thus at these two linked sites, Sinnington and St Mary Castlegate, we have a similar culture of multiple monuments drawing widely on Insular and Norse decorative traditions. This culture appears to be established before the end of the ninth century, or at least confidently to refer to its inheritance from the Anglian church, and to make very specific references to the sculptural traditions of Ireland and Iona.

Conclusions

Taken as a group, the stones from St Mary Castlegate refer to an astonishingly wide range of traditions. The hypothesized Irish affiliation of the dog/lion creatures on St Mary Castlegate 3 is extremely thought-provoking, especially given the close links with the assemblage at Sinnington, in connexion with which Lang suggests further Irish parallels. But, on reflection, perhaps this should not astonish. Before the Viking Age, the art of the Northumbrian Church was also eclectic, drawing on Mediterranean and Insular traditions, both Germanic and Celtic. The sculpture from St Mary Castlegate looks much less surprising if placed in the context of a Northumbrian Church that, while rocked to its foundations by the Viking onslaughts of the ninth century, still retained a strong sense of its identity and traditions. It also looks less surprising if we allow for the possibility that the ancient links between York and the Irish churches may have continued into the tenth century, albeit transmuted under a new political dispensation. Admittedly, there is no documentary evidence for this hypothesis, but there is very little documentary evidence for any of the activities of the Northumbrian Church at this period. The stones should be allowed to speak for themselves.

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