

INTRODUCTION



Insular art, the art of the British Isles and Ireland during the early medieval period, is enjoying something of a renaissance. After a long period of relative neglect, the past few years have seen a remarkable growth in interest in the field, and a consequent growth in new information, discoveries, and approaches to the material. This is reflected in the present volume by the number of contributions from younger scholars, as well as by the number of new finds, new interpretations, and new ways of looking at Insular art that characterize all the essays.

The Insular Tradition, began as a symposium of the same name held as part of the Kalamazoo Medieval Congress in May 1991. The purpose of the symposium, and this volume, was and is to look at the various ways in which "tradition" becomes a part of Insular art and art history. The definition of tradition was deliberately left open to allow speakers to come up with their own traditions, as well as to allow them to deal selectively with the various traditions that form a part of Insular art and the study of Insular art. Chapters, therefore, deal with the Late Antique tradition and how it was preserved and modified by Insular artists (Ryan, Hawkes, Stalley); the "Celtic" tradition (Ryan, Ó Floinn, Henderson, Cramp), the "Anglo-Saxon" tradition (Cramp, Mac Lean, Lang, Farr, Karkov); the biblical tradition (Alexander, de Vegvar, Farr); methodological traditions (Stalley, Karkov,

Lang, Farr); technical traditions (Youngs, Whitfield); the overturning of traditions (Farr, Hawkes, Stalley). It is obvious from this list that a number of the papers deal with the assimilation of, rejection of, or conflict between traditions. The papers represent a wide range of material and methodological approaches to that material, and cover all the major areas of Insular art.

A primary concern of the contributors to this volume is the value of interdisciplinary studies and the need for dialogue between scholars working not only in different disciplines, but also in the different subfields of archaeology and art history. We tend more and more to specialize in manuscripts, metalwork, sculpture, burial archaeology, settlement archaeology, and so forth, with the result that we can sometimes lose sight of the larger picture, and sometimes neglect evidence provided by other disciplines, media, and methodologies. *The Insular Tradition* conference and its proceedings are both attempts to keep the dialogue open.

The essays that follow are grouped primarily according to media. The first three chapters deal specifically with Anglo-Saxon sculpture, Catherine E. Karkov's "The Bewcastle Cross: Some Iconographic Problems," Carol A. Farr's "Worthy Women on the Ruthwell Cross: Woman As Sign in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," and Jane Hawkes' "Symbols of the Passion or Power? The Iconography of the Rothbury Cross-head."

All the crosses are of great importance in the context of Insular stone sculpture, but it is probably accurate to say that the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses have received more attention than any others in the corpus. Catherine E. Karkov addresses the problematic bottom panel on the principal (west) face at Bewcastle. The panel shows a man and a bird with a large T-shaped object, probably a perch. There have long been two schools of thought on this panel; one takes the human figure as secular, a layman engaged in hunting, while the second identifies the panel as a portrait of John the Evangelist with his symbol the eagle. Karkov proposes an interpretation in which a royal figure appears on the bottom of the cross, separated from the sacred figures at the top by a commemorative inscription. However, this is but one interpretation, she proposes for a monument which is clearly multivalent, in the best tradition of Insular art.

Carol A. Farr starts her study of the Ruthwell cross by enumerating the four panels on which women are depicted, and makes the observation that scholarly discussion of the rich iconographic program on Ruthwell "almost never considers, even in passing, the significance of these exceptional images of women" (p. 47). The panel showing two confronted women grasping one another in the cross-head sequence, above the fragmentary inscription *dominae* is identified as Martha and Mary, but specifically "modeled upon Visitation images creating a resonance with the story in which the Virgin

recites the canticle the *Magnificat*" (p. 49). Mary and Martha parallel the figures of Paul and Anthony on the lower part of the Ruthwell shaft, with both panels representing a monastic ideal. No one can doubt the importance of the large panel, which occupies a central position on the lower shaft of the cross, Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet with her hair. Farr speculates "the image may have encouraged the personal devotions of an audience which at least included females, whose devotions were further directed or amplified by the other sculpted figures and the inscriptions" (p. 53).

The Rothbury cross, in its original realization, must have been close to the level of Ruthwell in complexity and richness of design. Jane Hawkes addresses the vexed question of the cross-head iconography. The obverse of the cross-head is so damaged at its center that the subject cannot be identified, though it has long been assumed to have held a bust of Christ. This supposition is bolstered by the long-held interpretation of the three remaining cross-arms as carrying the instruments of Christ's Passion. While instruments of the passion certainly show up in later Anglo-Saxon contexts, no early parallels are known. Hawkes rightly points out that the figures on the cross-arms seem to be venerating Christ and presenting him with the objects they hold.

Hawkes questions the nature of the objects as well. The upper figure in fact holds rods or scepters of power, similar to those on the Alfred jewel or the Fuller brooch, though these ninth-century versions in metal work and enamel are more decorative. Similar iconographies are found in manuscripts such as the Lichfield Gospels and Kells, though the ultimate source seems to be the insignia in late imperial diptychs. The figure on the right lateral arm at Rothbury supposedly holds *two* crowns of thorns. Hawkes rightly points out how this is in itself contradictory, because the crown was *unique*. Once again, later imperial tradition provides an answer, in that circular objects are crowns of victory, which were common on coins in both late imperial and Early Christian contexts. The figure on the lower arm, who—in the *earlier* interpretation—held nails for the Crucifixion, Hawkes sees as carrying tubular objects or folds of cloth very much like the *mappa circensis*, the napkin lowered to mark the beginning of the games. She cites numerous examples of consular diptychs being used in early Insular liturgy. While there is still at least a chance for the traditional interpretation of this enigmatic panel, it must be said that there is a great deal of suasion in the evidence presented here.

A group of five chapters broadens the picture to include Irish and Pictish art, largely sculpture: James Lang's "Survival and Revival in Insular Art: Some Principles," Douglas Mac Lean's "King Oswald's Wooden Cross At Heavenfield in Context," Shirley Alexander's "Daniel Themes on the Irish

High Crosses," Roger Stalley's "The Tower Cross At Kells," and Isabel Henderson's "Variations on an Old Theme: Panelled Zoomorphic Ornament on Pictish Sculpture At Nigg, Easter Ross, and St. Andrew's Fife, and in the Book of Kells."

James Lang broadens our picture of Insular art by examining the use of style in Anglo-Saxon and Irish sculpture. This chapter is concerned with native Anglo-Saxon and Irish styles, rather than the Late Antique. Lang explores the "problem" of why some stylistic traits remain popular throughout the Insular period, as well as why certain styles are deliberately revived by individual artists, schools, and patrons, or on individual works. This essay nicely demonstrates the way style itself rapidly becomes politicized in both Anglo-Saxon and early Irish sculpture.

Douglas Mac Lean addresses the intriguing question of how a Christian cross would have functioned for a newly converted Anglo-Saxon army. Bede tells us that King Oswald had his army kneel before the monument at Heavenfield and pray for victory. Mac Lean poses two questions unanswered in Bede's account: where did Oswald get the idea of a cross, and why did the army kneel? As to the first question, Mac Lean makes a convincing case to show that Oswald both learned the faith, and acquired a knowledge of wooden crosses, at Iona. He turns to two excavated royal sites, Yeaveering and Cheddar, for a pre-Christian context for wooden crosses, *suggesting* a continuity between pagan and Christian practice. In Mac Lean's view, the importance of the wooden cross at Heavenfield cannot be overstated. "In choosing to kneel before Oswald's wooden cross, the Anglian army of Bernicia inadvertently paved the way for Oswald's foundation of Lindisfarne, the evangelization of much of England, the architectural patronage of St. Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop, and the development of the Insular freestanding sculptured stone cross" (p. 92).

Shirley Alexander surveys the meaning and function of Daniel scenes on the Irish high crosses. Daniel iconographies are of prime importance in Early Christian contexts, and Ireland follows this trend. Alexander notes that on Irish crosses Daniel panels are most frequently associated with the Fall. The sources for these Daniel iconographies, we are told, most often are third- and fourth-century Roman catacomb paintings. Alexander's principal interest is "the meaning of the Daniel theme on the Irish crosses, and the clues the sculptors have provided for the interpretations of the subject" (p. 100). She tells us that in the visual arts the meaning of the image, and the message of the monument are constructed by the viewer (p. 107). Several Irish crosses are then reviewed, and both the Daniel panels and the scenes against which they are juxtaposed are analyzed.

Roger Stalley studies the best preserved of the monuments at Kells, the Tower cross. Stalley respectfully but resolutely challenges the long-held

orthodox analysis of the orderly and typological development of Irish stone crosses which suggests “a Darwinian-like faith in the process of evolution” (p. 118).

The Tower cross is of great importance, but as the interpretation of the cross also involves *date*, great problems arise. If the cross is indeed related to the Book of Kells, the date (a *terminus post quem*) would be either 804/07, for those who believe the manuscript was made at Kells or brought there after the attack on Iona, or after 878 for those who believe it was brought over in that year with the other relics of Columba. After an analysis of five major dates of importance for Kells, Stalley turns to style and iconography, which he feels accord most closely between the Tower cross and the Scripture cross of ca. 900. He concludes by locating the cross firmly within the monastic politics of the late-ninth century.

Isabel Henderson examines Pictish art and its place within the Insular tradition. Her primary focus is on the zoomorphic ornament on the cross-head at Nigg, though her piece is much enriched by close study of similar ornament in the Book of Kells. In the course of a detailed study of the elements of the Nigg cross-head, Henderson finds a primary characteristic of “balanced asymmetry—a deceptive symmetry created by using the same motif within symmetrical constructions that support markedly varied internal arrangements” (p. 147). The notion that the Nigg slab is either isolated or atypical is challenged, with the St. Andrew’s Sarcophagus as most in accord with Nigg. While the two panels of the sarcophagus do not match each other, Henderson believes that they have “exactly the same degree of similarity and difference as the pairs of decorative panels that flank the cross-shaft on the Nigg slab” (p. 149). While there is no evidence that the Nigg and St. Andrews sculptors borrowed directly from the Book of Kells, Henderson holds that the animal ornament in all of these contexts is in a similar stage of development. David Wilson long ago concluded that ornament in the St. Ninian’s Isle treasure had parallels at Nigg, and Henderson reinforces that relationship in the last part of her study.

Carol Neuman de Vegvar’s “The Echternach Lion: A Leap of Faith,” continues the discussion of animal art, focusing specifically on one central image in the Insular manuscript tradition. Few would disagree with de Vegvar’s claim that this beast is “one of the most compelling works in Insular art” (p. 167). Her study addresses the meaning of the image, and the “dynamic opposition of energies of figure and frame” (p. 167). De Vegvar provides ample evidence to show that the lion has a christological frame of reference in liturgy and commentary, which she caps by claiming a close association with the Athanasian Creed. She further cites the Homilies on Ezekiel of Gregory the Great and Latin hymns from the *Antiphonary of*

Bangor, "Turba Fratrem," and "Praecamus Patrem," which associate the lion with flame and/or light.

Four chapters are devoted to metalwork: Susan Youngs, "Recent Finds of Insular Enameled Buckles," Niamh Whitfield, "Filigree Animal Ornament From Ireland and Scotland of the Late-Seventh to Ninth Centuries: Its Origins and Development," Michael Ryan, "The Menagerie of the Derrynaflan Paten," and Ragnall Ó Floinn, "Innovation and Conservatism in Irish Metalwork of the Romanesque Period."

Susan Youngs studies fourteen objects, only four of which have been published, and three of which are new finds from Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. The recent finds came from the activity of metal detectorists. A number of these buckles are Irish, though their origin may perhaps be derived from the same model that underlies the seventh-century "dummy" buckle from Sutton Hoo, mound one. Youngs also explores the function of the buckles:

The introduction of buckles as a new type of fastener in Ireland raises some interesting questions about function, whether decorated belt-buckles are evidence for a change in dress-style in the aristocratic, and therefore possibly more cosmopolitan section of Irish secular society. However the continued development of distinctive Celtic brooch forms, which included absorption of design elements from very different Germanic models, shows a strong and vigorous native dress tradition, an impression borne out by scraps of pictorial evidence from illuminated manuscripts and sculpture. (pp. 198)

Niamh Whitfield provides a closely detailed study of important *minutiae* in filigree animal ornament. Whitfield begins her essay by calling into question Michael Ryan's strong case for an Early Christian base for the Insular tradition. While it is right to see the Early Christian tradition as one aspect of the base, gold filigree ornament is very much influenced by Germanic traditions. The Hunterston brooch *clearly* parallels the filigree ornament on the Ålleberg, Möne, and Färjestaden collars, Swedish pieces dating to A.D. 450–500. While similarities exist, it is highly unlikely that the influence was direct, and Whitfield sees Anglo-Saxon England as the path of communication. It is now certain that there was continuous communication between Scandinavia and the North of England as John Hines' case in *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period* (B.A.R. Brit. ser. 124 [1984]) is not to be ignored. Whitfield concludes that the Insular debt to Germanic goldsmiths is heavy indeed. On the

inspiration of the Early Christian tradition for the Irish, Whitfield sees a "cousinly relationship . . . between motifs executed in different styles in different areas, making craftsmen who were familiar with one idiom receptive to designs executed in the other" (p. 225). Yet, in her conclusion, she stresses that none of these models was followed slavishly, rather all were transformed by the originality and technical virtuosity of Insular craftsmen.

No one can doubt the importance of the remarkable Derrynaflan hoard, unearthed in 1980, for the study of Insular art and archaeology. The wine strainer is of interest, the chalice a brilliant balance to Ardagh, but the paten—in design, methodology and execution—is unique. It was made in such a way that it could be disassembled and reconstructed without insuperable difficulty, and it is virtually certain that the piece had been taken down twice in antiquity. Michael Ryan tells us that the object is in the "mainstream of Irish style metalwork of the eighth century, and is to date the most elaborate and accomplished piece to come to light from that tradition" (p. 247). Of the twenty-four filigree ornaments that surround the rim, three are abstract, four show two kneeling men, and seventeen include animals. Paired arrangements are most common on the paten, either of men or beasts. Ryan has elsewhere made the case for the source of the human figures in Late Antique silver plates from which perhaps the paten itself was derived. Derrynaflan is the only large scale paten to have survived from early medieval western Europe. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the *possible* resonances and meanings of the paten and its ornament through a survey of parallel objects, exegetical texts, and especially liturgy. The reader is warned against any attempt to seek an all encompassing controlling order or sum of meanings in the piece, because "far too many certainties have been claimed in the field of early Irish art history" (p. 254).

Ragnall Ó Floinn's contribution opens with the observation that while the renaissance of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in architecture can be dated, the case for the dates of metalwork is not easily made. The later metalwork is distinctive in several ways: it is all ecclesiastical in nature; the objects survived mainly because they were in the keeping of certain families down to modern times; the late metalwork has parallels in earlier Irish forms, but these forms are largely unparalleled in Anglo-Saxon or continental metalwork. In a careful analysis, Ó Floinn draws out details which show these late pieces to be derived from work on the continent, most often Germany. These new forms include arm shrines, cross- or candlestick-bases, crucifixes and crucifix figures, as well as a hint of new techniques in metal working and decoration.

Rosemary Cramp concludes the volume with "The Insular Tradition: An Overview," itself a summary of the tradition based primarily on archae-

ological evidence. She boldly proposes that Insular material is absolutely distinctive, that with a few border exceptions no one could mistake a piece of sculpture from the continent as Insular, or vice versa.

Cramp's essay focuses on new research and new discoveries which have increased our understanding of "the social and technological processes which formed and developed the Insular traditions" (p. 283). She discusses the ways in which political and social contacts in the early Anglo-Saxon period encouraged artistic and cultural assimilation, but points out that distinctive styles and traditions remained. Cramp emphasizes that what we now call the "Insular tradition" is not "monolithic," but instead is characterized by a number of regional and cultural variations, "particularly between those who did and those who did not accept without adaptation Mediterranean traditions" (p. 295). She then discusses the forces that produced Insular culture, its many manifestations, and the problems it still poses for modern scholars. Cramp's essay not only serves as a response to the conference theme and the individual papers, but also emphasizes that the end is the beginning, and that new discoveries and interpretations will continue to alter and enrich our understanding of the Insular tradition.

Catherine E. Karkov

THE BEWCASTLE CROSS

*Some Iconographic Problems*

No two monuments of Anglo-Saxon sculpture have received more attention than the early eighth-century Bewcastle (Cumberland) and Ruthwell (Dumfriesshire) crosses, yet there are probably no two monuments about which so many questions remain unanswered. The two are frequently studied as a pair,¹ with the emphasis being on their stylistic and iconographic similarities. It is important to remember, however, that they are also very different, both in function and in iconography. The purpose of this paper is not to examine all the differences between the two, but to look in detail at the iconography of the Bewcastle cross, focusing on its one unique and pivotal panel, the panel displaying the standing figure of a man with a bird (pls. 1.1, 1.2).

The image of the man and bird is located at the base of the west face of the shaft. The man has long curling hair and stands turning slightly to the left. He holds a rod or stick (or possibly a cross) in his right hand, while a bird of prey balances on his extended left arm. There is a long T-shaped object, possibly a stand or perch below the bird. To put the panel in context, it appears just below a lengthy runic commemorative inscription; above the inscription are two panels with religious subjects, the first showing Christ over the beasts, and the second John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei.² The cross-head is now missing. The north face of the shaft is



Pl. 1.1. The Bewcastle Cross. Photograph by author.

carved with panels of plant-scroll, interlace and geometric ornament. The east face displays a continuous inhabited vine-scroll, while the south face is decorated with plant-scroll, interlace ornament and a sundial.



Pl. 1.2. Bewcastle Cross, detail of west face. Photograph by author.

The exact identification of the figure holding the bird on the west face of the cross is still very much a matter of debate. There are basically two schools of thought. The first sees the figure as the "portrait" of a layman—a

suggestion first put forward in 1865 by William Nicolson in a letter to Obadiah Walker.³ The second interprets the figure as a portrait of John the Evangelist with his symbol the eagle. It has been pointed out on a number of occasions, most recently by the editors of the second volume of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, that if the figure is an evangelist portrait it is a highly unusual one.⁴ The most obvious problem with interpreting the panel as a portrait of John is that the appearance of the figure with his long curling hair, short garments, and large collar or ruff is more appropriate for a layman than for an evangelist. The figure is also shown without a halo, standing rather than seated, and with the bird perched on his outstretched hand rather than hovering above or alongside him (the latter arrangement is found in the panel with John and his eagle at Ruthwell). Moreover, nowhere else in Anglo-Saxon sculpture does a single evangelist appear in this position on a cross.

It has also been suggested, however, that it is the context of the panel which brings out its religious meaning. Éamonn Ó Carragáin, for example, believes that this face of the cross deals with the theme of recognition. He points out that the runic inscription between the upper two panels "+gessus kristtus" implies that Christ is to be recognized "*in propria figura*," as the beasts recognized him, and also as the Agnus Dei.⁵ He then suggests that the "evangelist portrait" at the foot of the cross represents the scriptural authority for the Agnus Dei chant which had recently been introduced into the Roman liturgy of the mass, the chant being based on John 1:29.⁶ He goes on to state that John's symbol, the eagle, was "more significant" than the other evangelist symbols. It was not only John's symbol, but also a symbol of the resurrected Christ, and the renewal of life through baptism.⁷ It would, therefore, not be out of place appearing alone on such a monument.

This symbolism, however, centering on the idea of resurrection, is surely more appropriate for the head of a cross than for the base of its shaft. Evangelist symbols, when they do appear on Anglo-Saxon stone crosses, usually appear on the head or upper shaft, and it is certainly possible that the missing head of the Bewcastle cross contained portraits of the four evangelists and/or their symbols. On the Ruthwell cross, the evangelists and their symbols appeared at the top of the shaft and in the remaining three arms of the cross-head, with John and his eagle in the uppermost arm of the cross.⁸ In the case of metalwork crosses, on which the four evangelist symbols are arranged in the terminals of the two arms and at the head and foot of the cross, the eagle, with or without John, appears most often, if not exclusively, at the top of the cross. This is the case on the Brussels reliquary cross, the Crucifixion reliquary in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and on an Anglo-Saxon processional cross now in Copenhagen, though all three of these examples are eleventh-century in date.⁹

A further problem with the interpretation of the figure at the base of the Bewcastle cross as John the Evangelist is that it is separated from the other two figural scenes on this face by a lengthy commemorative inscription. The inscription has sustained far too much damage to be reconstructed with any certainty, but it does begin with the sign of the cross and the words "*his sigbecn*" (this victory beacon) and end with a form of the phrase "*gebidaþ hæc sawle*" (pray for the soul). The prayer is intended for the soul of the individual (or individuals) whose names are recorded on the cross. Variations on this formula are common on Anglo-Saxon commemorative monuments.¹⁰ It is possible that the name Alcfrith appears in the third line of the inscription—the letters *lcfri* survive. If the name is actually Alcfrith, it may refer to Alcfrith, sub-king of Deira and son of Oswiu, king of Northumbria and overlord of Mercia in the third quarter of the seventh century. This particular interpretation is supported by the fact that the name Kyniburg (also in runes) appears just above the lowest panel of the north face of the cross, and Alcfrith is known to have married a Mercian princess (Cyniburgh) of that name.¹¹ The most interesting parallel for the Bewcastle inscription is provided by a fragmentary cross-shaft at Urswick (Lancashire). The inscription is in runes and occupies the central panel of the main face of the shaft. It reads:

+tunwinisetæ
 æftertoroꝝ
 tredæbeku
 næfterhisb
 æurnægebidaes þe
 rs || au
 || læ

(Tunwine raised this cross in memory of his lord [or son]
 Torhtred. Pray for his soul.)

Beneath the inscription is a panel with two figures in secular dress with the artist's signature (Lyl [made] this) running across their torsos. Thus, the general composition of this face of the cross with apparently secular figures depicted beneath a commemorative inscription is very close to that of Bewcastle.¹² The date of the Urswick cross-shaft remains uncertain, though it has most recently been placed in the ninth century.¹³

In her discussion of the Bewcastle cross, Rosemary Cramp states that: "The figure carving at the base of the Bewcastle cross may have been a precocious essay in depicting a secular type, or a secular person." She goes on to add, however, that "it seems to have no development in surviving Anglo-Saxon art until the tenth century 'portraits' of such kings as Aethelstan

and Edgar."¹⁴ She therefore believes it "more prudent" to interpret the figure as John the Evangelist.¹⁵

Hunting and falconry, however, were noble pastimes, and hawks are found as attributes of nobility throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. Bird heads decorated high-status objects such as brooches. Birds of prey appear on a number of objects from the Sutton Hoo burial, most notably on the lyre, purse cover, gold buckle, drinking horns, and shield. A rider with a hawk does appear on a tenth-century cross-shaft at Sockburn (Durham),¹⁶ his identity is, however, uncertain, and he may be meant to represent the god Odinn rather than a secular figure. At a much later date, hawks are used to identify the figures of Harold and Guy, Count of Ponthieu, in the opening sequence of the Bayeux Tapestry.¹⁷ The figure of the aristocrat with hawk also appears in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The hawk is one of the hall-joys whose loss is mourned in the "lament of the last survivor" in *Beowulf*:

Næs hearpan wyn,
 gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc
 geond sæl swinged, ne se swifta mearh
 burhstede beated.¹⁸

The noble prince with a hawk on his glove signals the beginning of the battle in lines 5–10 of *The Battle of Maldon*:

þa ðæt Offan mæg ærest onfunde,
 ðæt se eorl nolde yrhdo gepolian,
 he let him þa of handon leofne fleogan
 hafoc wid þæs holtes, and to þære hilde stop;
 be þam man mihte oncnawan þæt se cniht nolde
 wacnian æt þam wige, þa he to wæpnum feng.¹⁹

The image is repeated in lines 16–18 of *Maxims II*, a poem which deals with the proper order of the world of nature and of man:

Ellen sceal on eorle. Ecg sceal wid hellme
 hilde gebidan. Hafuc sceal on glofe
 wilde gewunian.²⁰

This is not simply a literary *topos*, however. In the mid-eighth century, Æthelbert of Kent wrote to Boniface requesting him to send two falcons, for there were very few good birds to be found in Kent.²¹ During this same period, Boniface sent Æthelbald of Mercia "as a sign of true love and devoted friendship," a hawk, two falcons, two shields, and two lances.²²



Pl. 1.3. Elgin Cathedral slab. Photograph by T. E. Gray.

Secular figures with hawks can also be found in art contemporary with Bewcastle. They appear, for example, in eighth-century Pictish hunting scenes. Images of riders with birds of prey on their arms appear on the back of the Elgin cross-slab (pl. 1.3), as well as on the St. Andrews sarcophagus. Isabel Henderson has argued that the rider on the St. Andrews sarcophagus might refer to a line from Ps. 45.²³ She tentatively identifies the figure as David and, because he is also shown with a sword, suggests that the image

refers to the line: "Accingere gladio tuo super femur tuum potentissime, specie tua et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere procede, et regna."²⁴ There is no mention of a bird in Ps. 45, however, the general theme of the psalm is kingship, and the bird of prey, as an attribute of kingship, would certainly be appropriate to the overall imagery of the text. While the rider with the bird could not, therefore, be interpreted as a portrait of a contemporary figure, it may be interpreted as an image of kingship readily identifiable to an eighth-century Insular audience.

In their discussion of the Bewcastle cross, Cramp and Bailey also note that on a religious monument secular figures would not be shown on the same scale as holy figures.²⁵ There is, however, no differentiation in scale between the figures in Pictish sculpture, or those depicted in the lower panel of the ninth-century Urswick cross-shaft. The identity of these latter figures is uncertain. Both are male and wear what is apparently secular dress, the "ruffs" at their necks being particularly close to the one worn by the Bewcastle figure. The figure on the left at Urswick carries a cross and reaches out to touch the shoulder of the figure on the right. It has been suggested that the scene may represent Christ welcoming the dead Torhtred into heaven, an episode from a saint's life, or a conversion scene.²⁶ The cross clearly identifies the man on the left as a biblical or ecclesiastical figure of some sort, yet his dress and height are identical to those of the secular figure towards whom he reaches. Secular and holy figures also appear on the same scale on the tenth-century cross of the scriptures at Clonmacnois in Ireland.²⁷ Admittedly these crosses are later than Bewcastle, and the Clonmacnois cross is Irish rather than Anglo-Saxon, however, they do suggest that there may be significant exceptions to the general principle of hierarchy of scale in early medieval art.

Much closer to the figure on the Bewcastle cross than the sculptural scenes are the images which appear on a series of *sceattas* generally dated to the first half of the eighth century (figs. 1.1 and 1.2). These, like the Pictish sculptures, are noted in the *Corpus* discussion of the Bewcastle cross, but there they are dismissed as having no direct relevance to the Bewcastle image.

The sheer number of the *sceattas*, and the variety of combinations of figure and bird that occur on them, make them worthy of closer examination. There are five series of coins, all iconographically interrelated, that are relevant to the Bewcastle image. Series B, the "bird-on-cross" type, is generally dated ca. 685–700/10, and displays a bust on the obverse, and a cross capped with a bird on the reverse. Series U, the "bird and branch" series, dated ca. 710–720, shows a figure with a cross or crosses on the obverse and a bird and branch on the reverse. One unique example from this series has an archer on the obverse and a bird and branch on the

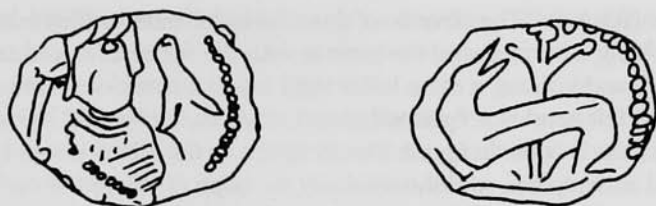


Fig. 1.1. Sceat found at Walbury Camp, Berkshire (drawing not to scale). Courtesy of author.



Fig. 1.2. Whitby 12 (drawing not to scale). Courtesy of author.

reverse, a combination of images also found on the Ruthwell cross.²⁸ Series K, which succeeded Series U, is dated ca. 720–730, and includes a number of different types. The most relevant types show a bust or seated man on the obverse and bird and branch on the reverse. Type 20 has a bust with cup on the obverse, and a figure with cross and bird on the reverse. A Series K *sceat* found near Walbury Camp in 1974 shows on the obverse a draped and wreathed bust facing a falcon on a perch (fig. 1.1).²⁹ Series Q, ca. 725–735/45, is problematic, having variously a beast, bust, or bust with cross on the obverse and a bird or beast on the reverse.³⁰ The Series L *sceattas*, most recently dated ca. 730–40,³¹ are iconographically closest to the Bewcastle cross. Moreover, while there may be little to connect the Bewcastle cross directly with Pictish sculpture, there are possible links between Bewcastle and the Series L *sceattas*. While the series has a relatively wide distribution over the south of England, it is generally associated with Æthelbald of Mercia (716–57), who dominated southern England during the second quarter of the eighth century. This is, of course, the same Æthelbald who received the gift of hawks and falcons from St. Boniface. The Mercian associations of the Bewcastle cross, with its possible references to Alcfrith and Cyniburgh, make the comparison of cross and coins particularly appealing. On these coins, as at Bewcastle, the man is generally shown facing left towards a hawk, or holding a cross in one hand, a hawk in the other. Whitby 12 is a particularly interesting example from

this series (fig. 1.2).³² The obverse of this coin is decorated with the bust of a figure holding a scepter, and the reverse with the figure of a man standing in a "boat" and holding a cross in his right hand, a hawk in his left. Below the figure's left hand is a T-shaped object very like the "perch" beneath the left arm of the Bewcastle figure. The inclusion of this detail is rare both on coins and in sculpture, and the similarity in shape of the perch on Whitby 12 and that of the Bewcastle cross is, therefore, particularly intriguing. The Bewcastle figure is usually described as holding a long rod or stick in his right hand, but the panel is very worn, and it is possible that he originally held a long cross, as do the figures on the *sceattas*.

The evidence for associating the Series L coins with Æthelbald of Mercia is as tenuous as that which connects the Bewcastle cross with Alcfrith. Nevertheless the coins do indicate that the iconography of the Bewcastle panel was current in eighth-century England in a secular context. It would also be impossible to call the images on the coins portraits of kings, however, as with the Pictish riders, they are easily recognizable as representations of kingship, with the hawk and the cross uniting symbols of the secular and religious worlds, or perhaps suggesting the idea of triumph or victory at both a secular and ecclesiastical level. This latter interpretation is, of course, particularly relevant to the function of the Bewcastle cross as a sign or "beacon" of victory.

In his discussion of the Bewcastle panel, É. Ó Carragáin stressed the significance of the stance of the figure, who is shown turning either toward or away from the hawk on his left. He states:

The man's turning stance can reasonably be construed as inviting the onlooker to gaze at the bird he holds. . . . The way in which the stance of the human figure directs the onlooker's gaze to the bird seems theologically significant. Of the four evangelists, John was the great contemplative, who wrote of that "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have diligently looked upon and our hands have handled."³³

He goes on to contrast the turning stance of the figure with the frontal presentation of Christ and John the Baptist in the upper two panels. However, on the majority of the *sceattas* the figures are also shown turning to the left. The busts on the obverse of the series U and K coins are shown with frontal torsos, their heads turning to face the cup or hawk to their left. The figures on the reverse of the series K and L coins are presented in a variety of poses. The most common image is that of the figure whose body is depicted frontally, while his head and feet turn to the left. The popularity

of the turning figure on the coins suggests that there is unlikely to be any theological significance to the pose of the Bewcastle figure.

Another problem with the Bewcastle cross is its location. The cross stands within a Roman fort located along the important east-west highway formed by the Tyne-Solway gap. Bewcastle was clearly an important center, but it may have been an important secular rather than religious center, as there is no evidence of an early monastery on the site. Yet it is also clear that the cross was made by and for a literate, educated community—the presence of the inscriptions and the sundial indicate as much. One possibility is that the site was an *eigenkirche*, or “private church,” an endowed site closely associated with a noble family.³⁴ As Ó Carragáin emphasizes, the commemorative inscription is in runes, and with the exception of the *+gessus kristtus* which appears below the panel of John and the Agnus Dei, there are no Latin inscriptions on the cross. This is in marked contrast to Ruthwell, and Ó Carragáin suggests that this may indicate that we are indeed dealing with an aristocratic establishment.³⁵ If this is the case, would the complex liturgical meaning and function he ascribes to the cross have been readily recognizable to such an audience? Possibly, the texts Ó Carragáin sites do all relate to the major feasts of the liturgical year. However, a combination of secular and sacred symbolism would be particularly appropriate to an aristocratic foundation, and there is a much more straightforward level at which the cross could be read.

The argument for interpreting the figure on the Bewcastle cross as that of John the Evangelist relies heavily on understanding the figure in the context of a coherent iconographic program. If the figure is to be interpreted as an image of a king or a symbol of kingship, it must also fit into the overall iconographic program of the cross, and it does. Beginning with the lowest panel on the west face, we have the figure of the king, with the hawk, a symbol of secular kingship. Above this is the inscription which identifies the cross as a commemorative monument; and such a monument could only have been commissioned by and for a member of the aristocracy. The inscription also effectively separates the figure with the bird from the two panels of sacred imagery at the top of the shaft. Above the inscription is the panel with Christ over the beasts, or Christ in his role as king of the world. This is emphasized by his position over the two beasts, and the presence above the panel of the inscription *+ gessus kristtus*, Christ the Anointed One.³⁶ At the top of the shaft is the image of John the Baptist holding the Agnus Dei, symbolic of Christ as ruler of heaven and earth. The lamb is an image of the final triumph of Christ, as expressed in the Book of Revelation, in which Christ appears as “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14). At a very basic level this face of the cross becomes a study in the hierarchy of kingship. The relevance of the program to an eighth-

century aristocratic audience is obvious enough. Moreover, as Ó Carragáin notes, Christ recognized by the beasts refers to a line from the canticle of Habbakuk, "In medio duorum animalium innotesceris" ("In the midst of two animals you will be recognized"), the canticle sung at the moment commemorating Christ's death on Good Friday evening (as well as every Friday morning at Lauds).³⁷ The death of Christ and the death of the individual commemorated by the cross are thus associated with each other on the monument; while the uppermost panel with John and the Agnus Dei holds out the promise of eternal life with Christ in heaven.

I do not wish to imply that this is the only way in which the cross may be read. Multivalency has long been recognized as a characteristic of Insular art, and the Bewcastle cross, like so many of the Insular monuments contains different levels of interrelated meanings. The iconographic progression on the west face from secular, earthly kingship to sacred and eternal kingship also provides an exegetical sequence which moves from literal kingship in the lowest panel to moral (or tropological kingship) in the middle panel to anagogical kingship in the uppermost level, a three-fold sequence employed by Bede (among others) in his exegetical writings.³⁸ The manner in which the three figures have been represented is particularly appropriate to this type of sequential, or typological reading. The Bewcastle figures are monumental, completely filling the panels in which they are confined. They are also iconic; all three presented alone with their respective symbolic animals, the hawk, the beasts, and the lamb. Each one also gazes straight out at the viewer. This is very different from the Ruthwell program in which a variety of figures of differing sizes are combined to form abbreviated narrative groups. The panels on the two broad faces of the Ruthwell cross, when read together, form a complex liturgical narrative whose meaning is made explicit by the accompanying Latin inscriptions. There are no such inscriptions on the Bewcastle cross, nor is there any sense of narrative. We focus instead on the hierarchy of forms and on the three separate but interrelated levels of meaning. Thus, while the cross can be read as a study in kingship at a very literal level, the juxtaposition of the three figures offers additional and more complex readings to an audience familiar with the exegetical tradition. Moreover, if the head of the Bewcastle cross originally contained the four evangelists and/or their symbols, and its similarities with Ruthwell suggest that this may have been the case, the liturgical meaning of the cross elucidated by Ó Carragáin would still be evident.

Finally, John the Baptist and the Agnus Dei, and Christ recognized by the beasts are also images which refer to the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The inhabited vine-scroll which decorates the east face of the cross is also a symbolic reference to the Eucharist,³⁹ and this meaning is

further emphasized by the way in which the birds and beasts bite at the fruit which grows from the vine. The east face of the cross then becomes an image of the tree of life, and the cross as a whole a sign of both death, in its reference to the Crucifixion, and life, in its reference to the tree of life. The plant-scroll imagery is continued on the north and south faces of the cross, where stylized plants alternate with geometric and interlace ornament. The names of members of the Mercian and Northumbrian royal families, also appear in the borders between the panels. The individuals whose names are thus recorded may be described as inhabiting these last two faces of the cross, just as the birds and beasts inhabit the vine-scroll of the east side.⁴⁰ Moreover, both Cramp and Ó Carragáin point out that the sundial on the south face of the cross has been incorporated into the plant-scroll so that it forms a large leaf with a berry bunch growing from its top, turning the cross into a sort of "time-tree."⁴¹ Whatever the liturgical meaning of the image,⁴² the fact that the names of contemporary individuals are included on this face suggests that the sundial might also have had a more literal significance, providing an image of the passing of time within a dynastic or genealogical context. The cross then becomes itself a monumental tree of life and death, a Book of the Dead, on which a royal lineage has been recorded, and for which the figure of the man with the hawk, an image of temporal kingship, serves as an appropriate base.

NOTES

1. A full bibliography of scholarship on the subject can be found in R. Cramp and R. Bailey, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, vol. II, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

2. Close examination of this panel of the cross by the author and Dr. Jane Hawkes in July 1996 confirmed that the figure is indeed John the Baptist and not God the Father as some scholars have suggested. (See, for example, Paul Meyvaert, "Ecclesia and Vita Monastica," in Brendan Cassidy, ed., *The Ruthwell Cross*, Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers I [Princeton: Index of Christian Art, Dept. of Art & Archaeology 1992], 95–166, at p. 112.) The figure points with his right hand to the lamb, an iconography used exclusively for John the Baptist.

3. Quoted in A. S. Cook, *The Anglo-Saxon Cross* (Hamdon, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), 134.

4. Cramp and Bailey, *Corpus*, vol. II, 70. Even though the editors find difficulties with this interpretation, they conclude that, "On the whole it seems more prudent to suppose that the figure is one of St. John the Evangelist with his eagle."