

# The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God and the Book of Deer

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*THE ICONOGRAPHY, text, origin and date of the Book of Deer will be considered. A new interpretation of the imagery will be proposed, the imagery being placed in the context of other Insular manuscripts and in relation to the Gospel texts of Deer. Furthermore, it will be argued that the book functioned, to a certain extent, as a protective talisman.*

The Book of Deer (Cambridge University Library, MS Ii.6.32) is a late 9th- or early 10th-century, small-format gospel book containing, in addition to Gospel texts, *notitiae* in a Gaelic hand of the 11th or 12th century. The monastery of Deer is mentioned in the *notitiae*, hence its association with Deer, in north-eastern Scotland. Today the book is in the care of Cambridge University Library.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is significant not only because it is a rare surviving illustrated manuscript of this early period, but because it also contains early Gaelic texts. The present essay deals exclusively with the manuscript in its original form and not with the later *notitiae* that have been published elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Gaelic texts, the original manuscript has received little consideration; only recently have alternative interpretations of the iconography been put forward and to date a satisfactory explanation of the abbreviated texts of Matthew, Mark and Luke has not been suggested.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the historical and cultural context of the manuscript's production has not been considered, primarily because it has always been assumed that the place of origin was Deer. The following pages will therefore address the iconography, text, origin and date of the Book of Deer.

<sup>1</sup> P. N. R. Zutshi, 'The Book of Deer, 1200–2000' in Katherine Forsyth (ed.), *'This Splendid Little Book': Studies on the Book of Deer* (Dublin, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> K. Jackson, *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer* (Cambridge, 1972); J. Stuart, *Book of Deer* (Spalding Club, 1869); W. D. Simpson, *The Book of Deer* (Peterhead, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> See J. Geddes, 'The Art of the Book of Deer', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 128 (1998), 537–49; D. E. Meek, 'The Book of Deer' in N. Cameron et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993); I. Henderson, 'Abstracts: the Book of Deer' in E. Evans, D. Griffith, J. G. and E. M. Jope (eds.), *Proc. Seventh International Congress Celtic Stud.* (Oxford, 1986), 278; K. Hughes, 'The Book of Deer (Cambridge University Library MS. Ii.6.32)', 22–37 in D. Dumville (ed.), *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1980); J. J. G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts: 6th to the 9th Centuries (A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles I)* (London, 1978), no. 59; I. Henderson in K. Forsyth (ed.), *op. cit.* in note 1.

It has been remarked that the Book of Deer is of the type known as a 'pocket gospel book', a type peculiar to Ireland during the early Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> These books were often left unbound, placed in leather satchels and worn around the neck as talismans. The most famous is the Cathach of St Columba, now preserved in the Royal Irish Academy (MS S.n.) and supposedly written by Columba himself. It was subsequently carried into battles, bringing victory to the owners. Prologues, chapter headings and other *apparatus* were not included in these books as they were concerned especially with the power of the Word of God to heal and to protect, and had less to do with liturgical readings or use in a liturgical setting. Another characteristic of these manuscripts was the inconsistent and sometimes large numbers of leaves per gathering. In addition, the manuscripts often began on the verso of the first folio, thereby leaving the recto blank. Deer follows the practice of leaving the first verso and last recto blank, but differs from the pattern by adopting a consistent twelve-leaf gathering (with the exception of the first gathering of four leaves and the last of ten leaves). Because of the small format, the lack of textual *apparatus*, and the arrangement of text and image within gatherings, it can be said that Deer shares in the 'pocket gospel book' tradition.

The one Gospel written in its entirety (over four gatherings) in the manuscript is John. Traditionally, the Gospel of John was considered as having magical properties.<sup>5</sup> This was especially true of the incantation of the first few words: *In principio erat verbum*, where the relationship between Christ and the *Logos* or Word was firmly established and mystically articulated.

These books were sometimes given as gifts and were therefore considered objects of pride and prestige for individuals rather than institutions. The Macdurnan Gospels (Lambeth Palace, MS. 1370) is a good example of a manuscript associated with a specific, named individual and presumably therefore considered a personal high-status item.

Although Deer shares in certain characteristics of these pocket Gospel books, it also has affinities with much grander books: in its ambitious and complex iconographic programme it has similarities to the Book of Kells and other magnificent Insular manuscripts. However, there are some anomalies or idiosyncrasies. First of all, although all four Gospels are present, only John is complete. Since John has special significance this fact should not present a problem. Matthew, Mark and Luke, however, terminate at various points in their text: Matthew 7:23, Mark 5:35, and Luke 4:1. Matthew is comprised of two gatherings: the first contains four leaves upon which is written the genealogy of Christ. An *explicit* indicates that the genealogy was considered the prologue to Matthew's text proper. The second

<sup>4</sup> P. McGurk, 'Irish Pocket Gospel Books', *Sacris Erudiri*, 8 (1956), 249–70. For a discussion of pocket Gospel books as 'token books' see T. J. Brown et al., *The Stonyhurst Gospel of St John* (Oxford, 1969). For a discussion of the category of 'secondary' Gospel books see R. Gameson, 'The Royal 1.B.vii Gospels and English book production in the seventh and eighth centuries', 24–52 in *idem* (ed.), *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the importance of the Gospel of John see M. P. Brown, '“In the beginning was the Word”: books and faith in the age of Bede' (The Jarrow Lecture 2000, Jarrow, 2001); D. Marner, *St Cuthbert: His Life and Cult in Medieval Durham* (London, 2000), 22; and M. Werner, 'The Book of Durrow and the question of programme', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 26 (1997), 23–40, esp. 30–1. On the apotropaic power of Gospel books see L. Nees, *The Gundohinus Gospels* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987).

gathering is of twelve leaves and finishes on the recto of the last leaf (fol. 15) with the word *iniquitatem*. The verso is left blank. Mark begins with a picture and the text on the next gathering and ends at fol. 27v. At fol. 28 there is a later insertion upon which is written a Prayer for the Communion of the Sick, thereby indicating a further connection to the 'healing' function of the book and attesting to the power of the Word.<sup>6</sup> Luke begins at fol. 29 with a picture on the verso leaving the recto blank, and the text ends at fol. 40, line 9, with the word *diabolo*. Finally John begins with a blank recto, a picture on the verso and the text on the following recto.

Kathryn Hughes remarked that the abrupt ending of Matthew, Mark and Luke may indicate that the manuscript was never finished.<sup>7</sup> However, if it was simply left unfinished the scribe would have had to have made the following decisions: to write the text of Matthew over two gatherings, stopping at 7:23; to decide not to continue with Matthew for some reason, but to move on, instead, to the text of Mark, stopping, inexplicably, at 5:35; to decide not to continue Mark, but instead to go on to Luke coming to rest one-third of the way down the verso of the last folio at Luke 4:1, leaving the remainder of the quire, that is, almost two folios, blank. Finally, he would have had to decide to start John, and to continue to write the text over four quires until John was finished.

This series of stops and starts seems highly unlikely even if the exemplar itself was impartial and imperfect. Even though there are some obvious textual errors, the script itself is highly accomplished and one can hardly imagine it would have escaped the attention of the scribe that he had not actually finished Matthew, Mark and Luke, especially since he was clearly able to complete John. Furthermore, if something caused the scribe to stop at certain places one would imagine that once the work was resumed he would have picked up where he had left off, rather than starting a new Gospel. This state of affairs would indicate that the interruptions were deliberate.<sup>8</sup> However, in order to explore the possible reasons for such abbreviated texts one must consider the relationship between text and image and, indeed, consider the broader context of the book's potential as an object having apotropaic power.

The illustrations to Deer have been considered stylistically unsophisticated.<sup>9</sup> This lack of appreciation of the hand of the artist/scribe by historians has, in part, been responsible for the limited and cursory studies of the illustrations. The pictures can be summarised (in order of appearance) as follows: four figures around a cross (fol. 1v); an initial page (fol. 2); a large seated figure with a sword (fol. 4v); the Chi-Rho initial page (fol. 5); a figure with a halo and a satchel (fol. 16v); an initial page (fol. 17); a figure with a satchel and out-stretched arms (fol. 29v); an initial page (fol. 30); a figure with a satchel surrounded by six figures and a cross at his feet (fol. 41v); an initial page (fol. 42); two half-page figures with satchels (fol.

<sup>6</sup> F. E. Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church* (Oxford, 1881), 163–6.

<sup>7</sup> K. Hughes, op. cit. in note 3, 24.

<sup>8</sup> For an example of a contemporary manuscript that contains extracts of the gospels see M. P. Brown, *The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-Century England* (London, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> O. K. Werckmeister, 'Three problems of tradition in pre-Carolingian figure-style: from Visigothic to Insular illumination', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 63C (1962–4), 167–89.



FIG. 1

Cambridge University Library  
MS. li.6.32, fol. 14v. Four figures  
arranged around a cross.

*Photograph: Cambridge University  
Library (© the Syndics of Cambridge  
University Library).*

84v); four figures around a cross, three with outstretched arms (fol. 85v); four figures around a cross (fol. 86).

The number and type of illustrations are remarkably consistent. For instance, the book begins and ends with four figures around a cross (the salterian type of cross is depicted on fol. 86) (Figs. 1 and 2). These figures can be distinguished as belonging to two types.<sup>10</sup> Firstly, the lower two figures in both illustrations have elaborate drapery and a satchel around the neck. The upper two figures have rectangular 'bodies' with diagonal lines from the corners creating an 'X'-shape over the bodies. The four figures with satchels can be understood as Evangelists while the upper figures can be read as angels. An identical arrangement can be observed in the Garland of Howth where two Evangelists with books stand below

<sup>10</sup> M. P. Brown, *op. cit.* in note 8, 99.

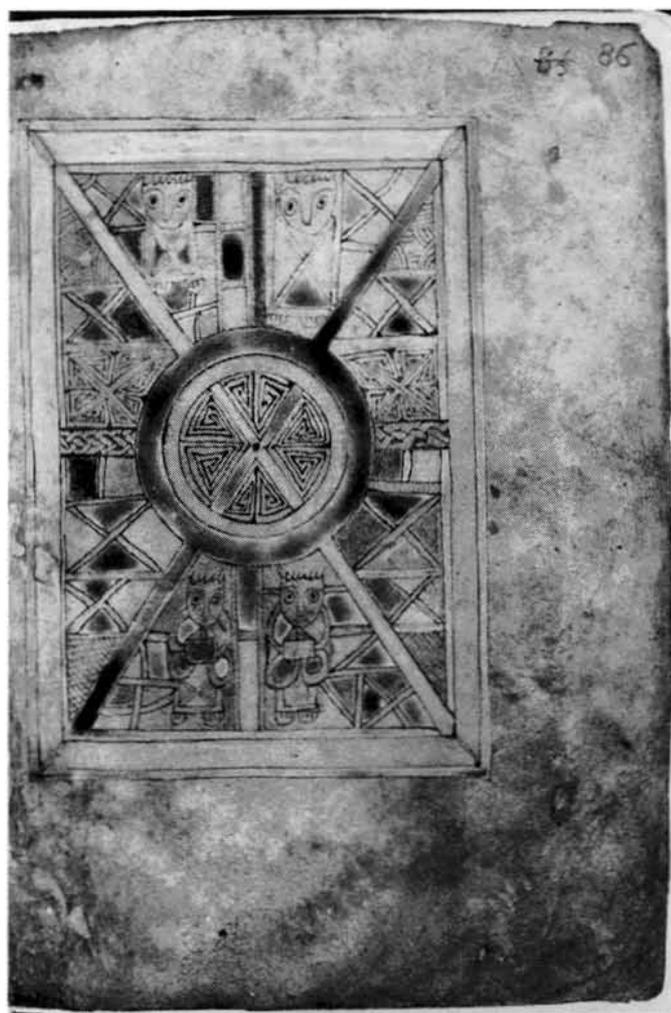


FIG. 2

Cambridge University Library MS. Ii.6.32, fol. 86. Four figures.  
 Photograph: Cambridge University Library (© the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

two angels at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>11</sup> It is uncertain whether a complementary pair of Evangelists and angels was located at the end of the Garland of Howth as the manuscript has been subsequently damaged, but it would be reasonable to assume such an arrangement did exist.

A similar combination of figures can be observed in a relief slab at Kirriemuir where two figures holding books are accompanied above by bird-headed figures whose bodies are rectangular in form with only diagonal lines crossing the body to indicate wings.<sup>12</sup> Clearly this is what the artist of Deer had in mind. Although the

<sup>11</sup> J. J. G. Alexander, *op. cit.* in note 3, no. 59, ill. 20.

<sup>12</sup> C. L. Curle, 'The chronology of the Early Christian monuments of Scotland', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 74 (1939-40), 60-115; M. Werner, 'The four evangelist symbols page in the Book of Durrow', *Gesta*, 8 (1969), 3-17.

imagery in Deer is cursory, it is consistent. Evangelists have drapery and satchels; angels have rectangular bodies, no drapery and no satchels.

The methodical approach is taken further in the images that preface each Gospel text, where each receives a picture of a large figure surrounded by decorated frame and an initial page comprised of a decorated initial with frame. In addition, there may have been another illustration prefacing the Gospel of Matthew as the second folio is wanting in the first quire. Since the text of Matthew begins on what would have been the third leaf, this second leaf probably contained an image on the recto and possibly the verso as well. The only other illustrations include the two figures with satchels ending John and a full-page cross with figures on the penultimate page.

In what follows I shall discuss the images prefacing the Gospels in order and in relation to their abbreviated texts. Prefacing Matthew is a large seated and draped figure holding a sword. This figure is stylistically different from the remainder of the images in that its drapery is more carefully delineated and the body is more monumental. He has a four-pointed beard, unlike the other, clean-shaven figures. Since there does seem to be an attempt to present figures with subtle distinguishing marks or characteristics it is vital to clarify the special attributes of each. The figure prefacing Mark has a halo. In this respect it is different from the rest. The figure prefacing Luke has its arms outstretched in a cruciform pose. The figure prefacing John has six smaller figures surrounding it and an inscribed cross at his feet. These are the visual 'clues' that point towards their identification. It is not enough to simply suggest that these are Evangelists since the artist has chosen to distinguish them one from the other in various ways.

#### THE FIGURE WITH A SWORD (Fig. 3)

This figure has been identified as either Matthew or Abraham, although neither identification is convincing.<sup>13</sup> The attribution of Matthew rests upon the idea that Matthew-as-Apostle is represented: hence the sword alludes to his martyrdom. However, it is only in much later representations of Matthew that the sword iconography was introduced. By far the most popular representation of Matthew during the Middle Ages was as an Evangelist, either seated or standing and holding a pen and book.

The identification of the figure as Abraham rests upon a comparison with the Book of Howth and is dependent upon a particular reading of the Howth miniature.<sup>14</sup> Rather than the representation of two evangelists and two angels, Isabel Henderson has suggested that the two lower figures represent David and Abraham while the upper figures represent Isaiah and the angel, thereby visually responding to the opening preface of Matthew concerning the genealogy of Christ. Henderson concludes that the Deer image is of Abraham and the attendant figures represent Isaiah and the restraining angel, like in Howth. However, this rather idiosyncratic reading depends upon several unlikely factors: that the artist was aware of the Howth iconography; and that a partial, not complete, restatement of

<sup>13</sup> J. Geddes, *op. cit.* in note 3; I. Henderson (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3.

<sup>14</sup> I. Henderson (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 278.



FIG. 3  
Cambridge University Library  
MS. Ii.6.32, fol. 4v. Bearded  
figure holding a sword. Photograph:  
Cambridge University Library (© the  
Syndics of Cambridge University  
Library).

such iconography was attempted by the artist; or that he independently invented or created an identical one.

Another approach might be to try to understand the significant elements of the image in relation to the Biblical text it accompanies rather than to try to reinterpret comparative material in order to fit a preconceived interpretation of Deer. The significant elements of the Deer image are as follows: the two attendant figures; the sword; the beard; and the decorative embellishments of the frame. Since the two attendant figures are delineated in the same manner as the angels on fols. 1 and 86, they are most likely angels as well, this time attending the central figure. Attendant angels were very common in Insular iconography and are present, in particular, with the figure of Christ. Angels help Christ dispense judgement in Psalm 7:12; Isaiah 34:6; Jeremiah 12:12 and Revelation 1:16. Angels accompany Jesus on his final return in Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26;

2 Thessalonians 1:7 and Matthew 24:31. And angels assist in separating the wicked from the righteous and help Christ in executing divine judgement in Matthew 13:37–43.

Angels are represented throughout the Book of Kells, often in association with Christ. This overwhelming interest in representing angels in Kells has been linked convincingly with the Life of St Columba, of which Book Three is entirely dedicated to Columba's interaction with angels and their role in assisting him to fight evil forces, a role consistent with that in the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Angels, therefore, assist Christ in times of judgement and, according to the Life of Columba, they help in the battle against evil and temptation.

Swords have particular iconographic associations with certain individuals, such as Matthew and Abraham, as has been mentioned. However, they also have other associations with war, protection, judgement and the Word of God. In Revelations a sword issues forth from the mouth of Christ at the end of time (Rev 19:11–17). The theme of 'sword as divine judgement' can be found in Psalm 7:12, Isaiah 34:6 and Jeremiah 12:12. In addition, the sword can be either simply 'words', such as in Psalm 57:4, Proverbs 5:4 or Proverbs 12:18, or more significantly the 'Word of God' such as in Isaiah 49:2; Ephesians 6:17, Matthew 4:1–11 and Hebrews 4:2.

Associated with this idea is Christ as the Divine Warrior, something made clear in Ephesians 6:10–17:

Finally, my brethren, be strengthened in the Lord and in the might of his power/Put you on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil./For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places./Therefore, take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect./Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of justice:/And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace./In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one./And take unto you the helmet of salvation and *the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God)*. [Author's emphasis]

This theme is also indicated in Matthew 3:11–12 and 10:34; Exodus 15:3; Colossians 2:13–15; Ephesians 4:8 (refers to Psalm 68); and Revelation 19:11–17. Origen, concerned especially with the exegesis of the literal and spiritual sword, quotes Ephesians 6:11ff. extensively and frequently in his homilies on Exodus, Numbers, Joshua and Judges, considered to be the main 'war books' of the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> Sedulius Scotus (a contemporary Irishman) in his poem recounting the victory of Hartgar, bishop of Liège, over the Norsemen in the 850s also reiterates this theme:

You ward off your enemies with the shield  
Of faith, a sacred *lorica*, and Christ's helmet;  
And flashing with salvation's golden sword,  
You destroy them.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba*, trans. R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth, 1995), especially Book III.8: 'Of a fierce fight with demons in which St Columba received timely help from angels'.

<sup>16</sup> G. E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley, 1979), 18–39.

<sup>17</sup> E. G. Doyle (trans.), *On Christian Rulers and The Poems* (Binghamton, 1983), 26–48.

The relationship is, of course, between the sword as protective armour, the sword as Word of God, and the power of the Word of God to defeat evil forces. Christ as *Logos*, as Word, is therefore both a Warrior and Judge.<sup>18</sup> He, and his Word, defend the faithful. A representation of an enthroned and bearded Christ holding a sword, that is at once a metaphorical representation of the Word of God, and an allusion to Christ as Warrior, attended by angels, would not be exegetically unusual.

Further testament to the identity of the figure as Christ can be found in the decoration around the frame. This picture has the most elaborately decorated frame in the manuscript. The decoration consists of either cross variations or lozenges, both of which refer directly to Christ and both of which have parallels in Kells and other Insular books.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the decoration in the Book of Deer is deliberately hierarchical. The opening and closing pictures representing Evangelists and angels have no decoration in the frames, while the central figures prefacing the Gospels and the initial pages all have elaborately decorated frames around them. Here again the artist is demonstrating a remarkable degree of consistency and deliberation that requires explanation. In this image the decorative crosses and lozenges provide another clue to the identity of the figure as Christ.

Kells can provide yet another parallel in the picture of Christ enthroned on fol. 32v (Fig. 4). The images prefacing Matthew in Kells are as follows: a symbol of Matthew (fol. 28v); an initial page (fol. 29); Christ enthroned (fol. 32v); a cross-carpet page (fol. 33); and the Chi-Rho page (fol. 34). Christ enthroned immediately precedes the page opening of the cross-carpet page and the Chi-Rho. The equation made between fols. 33 and 34 is, of course, the Cross, with its manifestation in the cross-carpet page and the Chi-Rho. Likewise in Deer, if this image is understood as Christ and if we remember that fol. 2 has been excised and may have had a form of cross-carpet page on it, a similar set of introductory material to Matthew can be found. Christ in Deer is placed opposite the Chi-Rho, a visual manifestation of the name of Christ (Fig. 5). Further comparisons can be made between the Chi-Rho in Kells and Deer where two small heads appear in both and in both angelic attendants surround Christ.

Another peculiar aspect of this image is that it has been defaced.<sup>20</sup> Although it is impossible to tell when this happened or whether it was through an intentional or accidental act, one can find defaced images in another Christian context, albeit much later. In devotional manuscripts of the 15th century the face of Christ can be virtually obliterated through the repeated kisses of a reader.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in a Book of Hours (Rotterdam, Gemeente Bibliotheek, MS. 96 G 12, fol. 314v) a Last Judgement scene depicts, amongst other things, Christ with a sword issuing forth from his mouth. His face has been rubbed out, presumably by such a devotional

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the Carolingian interest in Christ as victorious war-leader see G. Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), 157–69.

<sup>19</sup> M. Werner, 'Crucifixi, sepulti, suscitati: remarks on the decoration of the Book of Kells', 450–88 in F. O'Mahony (ed.), *The Book of Kells: Proceedings of a Conference at Trinity College Dublin 6–9 September 1992* (Dublin, 1994); S. Lewis, 'Sacred calligraphy: the Chi Rho page in the Book of Kells', *Traditio*, 36 (1980), 139–59.

<sup>20</sup> John Higgitt has proposed (through personal correspondence) that a matching stain on the opposite page may indicate that some substance was dropped on the page, such as wax, thereby indicating an accidental occurrence.

<sup>21</sup> I would like to thank William Noel for bringing my attention to this fact.



FIG. 4  
 Book of Kells, Trinity  
 College Library, Dublin  
 MS. 58, fol. 32v. Christ  
 Enthroned. Photograph:  
 Trinity College Library, Dublin  
 (© The Board of Trinity  
 College, Dublin).

practice of the owner. This practice of kissing figures only happens with an image of Christ. It does not happen with the Evangelists or saints. Therefore, if the face in Deer has been rubbed out by a similar devotional practice, it provides further evidence that those kissing the figure thought that they were, in fact, kissing Christ. In other words they understood this image to be Christ and not an Evangelist.

Finally, one must consider the abbreviated text of Matthew and possible implications concerning the relationship between text and image. The first quire is comprised of the genealogy of Christ and, in particular, the notion that Christ is a descendant of David and of Davidic Kingship. The image of Christ as Warrior and Judge prefaces Matthew 1:18–7:23 and is placed opposite the name of Christ (Chi-Rho). Christ as Warrior is the theme of Matthew 3:10–12 where John the Baptist foretells Christ's coming:

For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire./I indeed baptize you in water unto penance: but he that shall come after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire./Whose fan is in his hand [*ventilabrum in manu sua*]: and

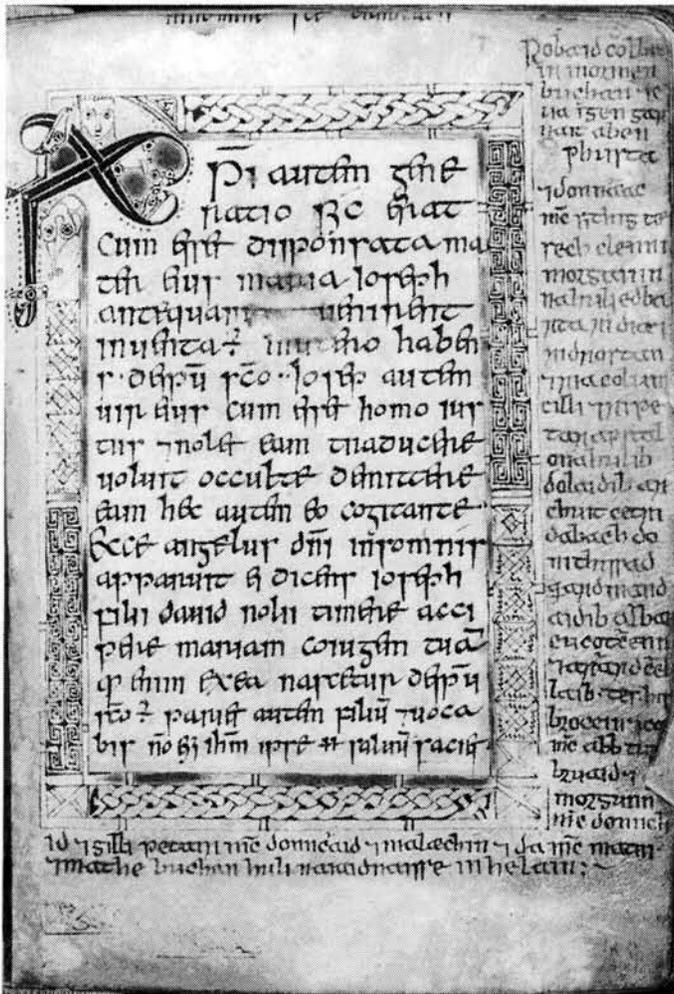


FIG. 5

Cambridge University Library  
MS. li.6.32, fol. 5. Chi-Rho  
initial. Photograph: Cambridge  
University Library (© the Syndics of  
Cambridge University Library).

he will thoroughly cleanse his floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

John the Baptist was clearly expecting a Divine Warrior figure and the remainder of Matthew seeks to elaborate upon this theme, presenting Christ's role, however, as a spiritual warrior as opposed to a physical warrior. This theme culminates in Christ's statement: 'I came not to send peace, but a sword' (10:34). The metaphorical sword of the spirit of Ephesians is transformed into the physical sword of a warrior, represented at the beginning of Matthew by Christ holding the sword. Although Matthew's gospel is specifically concerned with Christ as a 'spiritual' as opposed to a 'physical' warrior, the general theme of warfare (real or biblical) would not have been unfamiliar to the reader and may even have played a part in the desire to make such a talismanic object as the Book of Deer.

Matthew 7:21–23 is a section of the Sermon on the Mount that elaborates upon Jesus in the role of eschatological judge:

Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in Heaven, he shall enter the kingdom of heaven./Many will say unto me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in thy name and cast out devils in thy name and done many miracles in thy name?/And then I will profess unto them: I never knew you. Depart from me, you that work iniquity.

This passage clearly refers to the ‘end-times’ with the phrase ‘in that day’, that is, at the Second Coming. Furthermore, the passage ends with the threat of Christ’s judgement upon those who work ‘iniquity’ or wickedness. Thus the tone and even the precise ending of the text of Matthew can be justified as deliberate references to the role of Christ as Divine Warrior and as Judge. If the picture of the man with a sword is not the Evangelist Matthew, and instead represents Christ as Judge and Warrior, then one must ask whether the other figures preceding subsequent Gospels are, indeed, representations of Evangelists or possibly alternate versions of Christ.

Before doing so, a brief word of explanation is necessary about the notion of an abbreviated text and the possible reasons for the form it takes in *Deer*. The *Book of Cerne* (Cambridge University Library, MS. Ll.1.10; c. 820) is one of several early books that contain extracts often around a central theme. In *Cerne* sections from the Passion narrative of each Gospel preface a series of devotional prayers.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, in the *Book of Cerne*, a conscious effort was made on the part of the scribe to cite the same narrative text from each of the four Gospels. In *Deer* one might legitimately ask why the scribe did not simply extract the relevant text(s) from the Gospels in a similar fashion to the *Book of Cerne* in order to make the intended points. For instance, why not simply write the section in Matthew dealing with St John’s prophecy and the Sermon on the Mount, or any other section dealing with the themes of Christ as Warrior and Judge, instead of beginning each Gospel and then curtailing it?

The answer may lie in a combination of reasons. Pocket gospel books often had uneven and rather large numbers of leaves per quire. This may have been due to attempts by the scribes to contain the text of each Gospel within one gathering, possibly emulating a much earlier tradition of book making, and resulting in the sometimes large number of leaves.<sup>23</sup> In *Deer*, however, the gatherings are modestly comprised of twelve leaves. The scribe may have been working on the idea that Matthew, Mark and Luke would only receive one gathering (like the pocket gospel tradition), but was clearly unable to fit the entire text into one gathering. The use of consistent gatherings of twelve leaves suggests that the scribe was familiar with established scriptorium practices and that he wanted to conform to them. Therefore, given this constraint, the scribe had to decide at what point to end the text, whilst at the same time utilising the maximum amount of space available in a gathering. Presumably the decision to stop at a certain point in the text was

<sup>22</sup> M. P. Brown, *op. cit.* in note 8, esp. 151–61, on the relationship of the *Book of Cerne* to other private devotional books.

<sup>23</sup> P. McGurk, *op. cit.* in note 4, 254.

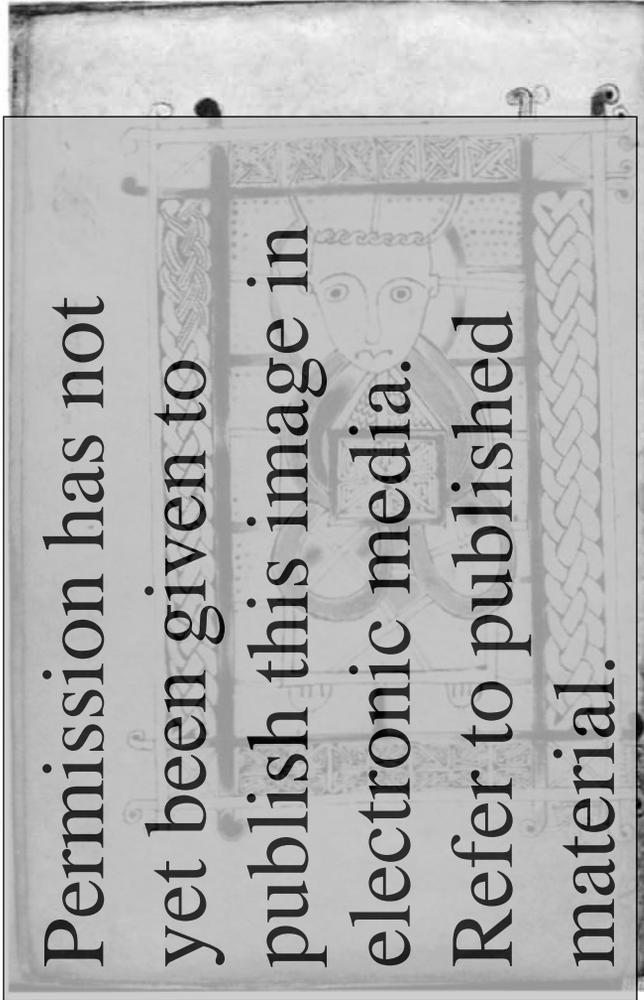


FIG. 6

Cambridge University Library MS. li.6.32, fol. 16v. Figure with a halo and a book/reliquary. Photograph: Cambridge University Library (© the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)

informed both by the limited space in a gathering and the desire to end at a significant point in the text.

#### THE FIGURE WITH THE HALO (Fig. 6)

The figure beginning the extract to Mark is perhaps the most enigmatic precisely because it is so limited in detail. There are two elements that need to be clarified. Firstly, the satchel and secondly the halo. Like the representation of the Evangelists on fols. 1 and 86, this figure is draped and wears a satchel around the neck. In fact, with the exception of angels and the previous figure holding a sword, all the figures wear satchels. The rectangular object placed in front of the figures has been understood as a shrine, a book or a book satchel. There is very little intrinsic detail from which to decipher its identity. Furthermore, the drapery obscures any indication of the position of the hands.

However, if we assume that the illustrator took a consistent approach to the imagery, which can be demonstrated elsewhere, it follows that the illustrator wanted to represent the same type of object in front of each individual and that these objects were being 'held' in the same manner throughout. Whatever the object is, it is either held by the figures or hung around the neck.

There is, however, a crucial and revealing visual clue as to the object's identity in the image prefacing Luke. Here the object cannot be held by the figure as his hands clearly extend outward breaking the frame of the picture. If the object was a book or book shrine it would have to be 'floating' in front of the figure. Given the consistent approach taken by the illustrator it would be odd, indeed, to 'float' the object in this way. Presumably, in her analysis of this image, Jane Geddes assumed that the object was either a book or book shrine and that, therefore, the figure must be holding it. This led Geddes to the implausible conclusion that the figure must have four arms, two holding the book and two outstretched.<sup>24</sup>

However, if one considers the third option, that the object is a book in a satchel hanging around the neck, the figures and their objects make perfect sense. Each figure has a satchel around the neck, the arrangement permitting the hands to be either concealed in the drapery or extended outwards. This is the only conclusion that can account for the manner in which the object is held by all of the figures.

Almost exclusively, when books are depicted in the Middle Ages they are represented as a book (either open or closed) often held by a figure or placed in front of the figure on a lectern or table. A satchel worn around the neck is quite different.<sup>25</sup> It alludes to a book rather than representing a physical book *per se*. The notion of a satchel worn around the neck refers to that aspect of the book, that is, the Word, which has talismanic power. It depicts the act of using the book, or wearing the book, in a way that contemporaries might have used it. Representations of wearing books are very unusual in the Middle Ages. By representing the satchel, and not the actual book, allusions to the *use* of the book as talisman, rather than simply the idea of the Gospels or the Bible, is established. In a sense, the satchel becomes part of the metaphorical armour referred to in Ephesians and as such is analogous to the sword held by Christ in the previous image. The sword is the Word of God, the Word is powerful and its written manifestation is worn around the neck like so many shields represented on contemporary slabs.

The halo is more 'generic'. Haloes were used in representations throughout the Middle Ages to define sanctity. This halo is not cruciform, although it does

<sup>24</sup> J. Geddes, *op. cit.* in note 3.

<sup>25</sup> The satchel of the Corpus Missal (Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS. 282) still survives. See F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period (1020-1170 A.D.)* (London, 1970), pl. 1. For representations of satchels being worn occur on cross-slabs from Shetland, see J. R. Allen and J. Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1903), 3-15, figs. 4, 4A, 6 and 7.

have a peculiar break on either side at the top.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore perhaps simply a reference to the sanctity of the individual depicted and nothing more.

The text ends at Mark 5:35. This is a curious place to end as the preceding passage deals with a double miracle, or a miracle story within a miracle story. It begins with a story about a girl who had recently died. Then it introduces a sick girl who touches Christ's robe and is thereby cured (5:35). And finally it ends with the resurrection of the dead girl by Christ. Rather than stop at the curing of the sick girl, one might legitimately wonder why the scribe did not continue a few lines further and included the more powerful miracle of the raising of the dead.

In order to make sense of this, one has to consider it in the context of the book as a whole. Immediately after this text is a Prayer for the Communion of the Sick. This was written either by the same hand as the Gospel text or a slightly later hand.<sup>27</sup> Whether it was introduced immediately or as a later addition to the manuscript, it is apparent that the compiler/scribe thought that placing it after Mark (and not after John) was appropriate. By stopping the text at Mark 5:35 the scribe brought the attention of the reader to a healing miracle and by doing so provided evidence of Christ's power to heal. Placing a Prayer for the Sick immediately after it thus embellished the healing miracle. If the scribe had continued with a resurrection (rather than stopping at a healing miracle) the point of Christ's healing ministry would be less forceful and the connection with the Prayer for the Sick less apparent. The image with its satchel and halo can be read as another Christ, this time referring to Christ's healing ministry. Like the Book of Deer itself, which would have been worn around the neck, the satchel refers to the potency of the Word to protect and to heal.

Although perhaps not directly related, the general sentiment of Christ as healer of illness has a parallel in the so-called Tiberius-group prayerbooks, specifically British Library Royal 2.A.XX and the Book of Cerne. Both Morrish and Brown have noted that Gospel extracts included in the manuscripts frequently relate to the miracles of healing and the notion of Christ as physician of mankind.<sup>28</sup> This fascination with prayer, invocation, healing and the underlying use of Gospel 'extracts' reflects similarities in approach and spirit to the texts and images of Deer.

#### THE FIGURE WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS (Fig. 7)

It has been suggested that the figure prefacing Luke is the Evangelist in *orans* pose. However, like the 'Matthew' image there is no evidence for this pose in the

<sup>26</sup> It is rather curious that the representation of the tonsure of Mark in the Book of Dimma looks remarkably similar to this concave break at the top of Mark's halo in Deer. Likewise, in Dimma the gospel-book held by Mark is joined by two angled lines coming from the neck. Although these lines probably represent an aspect of his drapery, they nevertheless might be misread as a satchel with a horizontal orientation as in Deer. A horizontal orientation also occurs with the early surviving satchel of the Corpus Missal and the Shetland cross-slabs. Mark Clarke has kindly discussed with me examples of recent Ethiopian satchels, one of which was oriented horizontally and had double-line crosses tooled into the leather looking remarkably similar to the depiction of the satchels in Deer. This may suggest that a horizontal orientation for the satchel was not so uncommon as one might expect.

<sup>27</sup> David Howlett, *Caledonian Craftsmanship: The Scottish Latin Tradition* (Dublin, 2000), 1–5, dates the 'Prayer in the Book of Deer' to the 12th century. David Dumville says this is 'erroneous' and prefers '850x1000': idem, Review of David Howlett, op. cit., *English Hist. Rev.*, cxvi (2001), 455–6.

<sup>28</sup> M. P. Brown, op. cit. in note 8, esp. 148–61, and J. Moorish, An examination of the literature and learning in the 9th century (unpubl. D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1982).

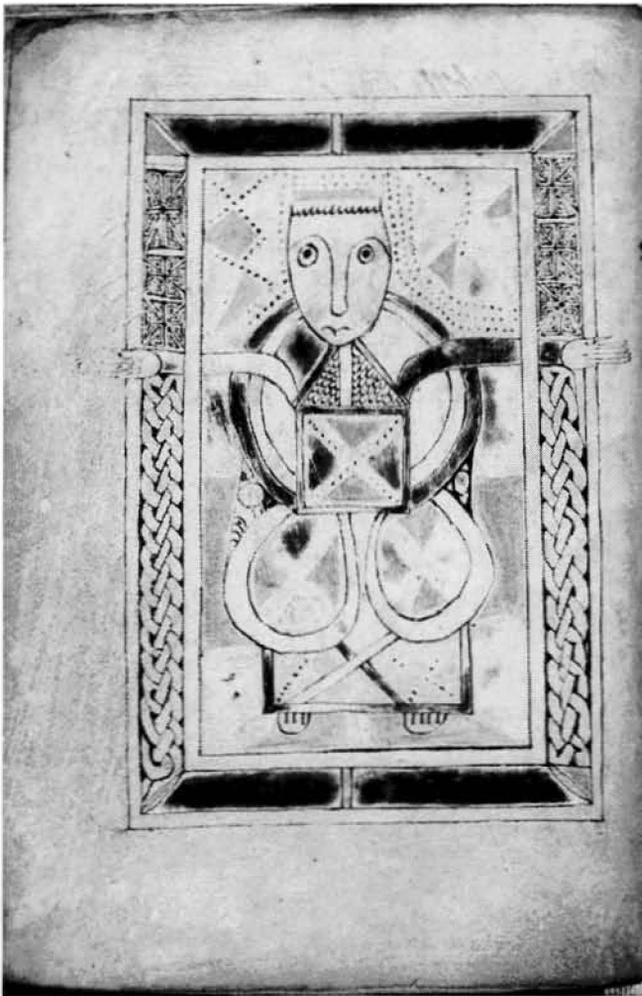


FIG. 7

Cambridge University Library MS.  
li.6.32, fol. 29v. Figure with hands  
reaching out through the frame.

Photograph: Cambridge University Library  
(© the Syndics of Cambridge University  
Library).

repertoire of Luke's iconography. Evangelists usually carry books, have scrolls, hold pens, or write on parchment upon desks. They do not put their arms in the air in prayer. Henderson has proposed that this is Zachariah before the altar, presumably at prayer, while Geddes (having seen four arms on the figure) has resolved that it represents a conflation between Zachariah and the Evangelist.<sup>29</sup>

A less complicated reading of this picture is, quite simply, as a crucifixion image whereby the essential elements of outstretched arms imply a Christ crucified. A distinctive visual clue provided by the artist/scribe, and unique to this image, is a blank rectangular space above the head of Christ that may indicate, in a typically terse fashion, the titulus. Crucifixion imagery is quite common in early manuscripts and can be found in St Gall, Stiftsbibl., Cod. 51, p. 266; Durham Cathedral

<sup>29</sup> I. Henderson (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 278; J. Geddes, *op. cit.* in note 3.

Library A.II.17, fol. 38<sub>v</sub>; a crucifixion was planned for Kells;<sup>30</sup> Southamptton Psalter, Cambridge St John's College, C.9, fol. 38<sub>v</sub>; and Würzburg, Universitätsbibl. Cod. M.p.th., fol. 69. In addition, Kells contains an indication of a figure behind the panel frame of John whose outstretched hands extend beyond the frame as does his head and feet. Martin Werner has suggested that it represents an indirect representation of Christ crucified.<sup>31</sup>

The placement of a crucifixion scene at the beginning of Luke is not unprecedented, albeit from a later context. The relationship between the crucifixion, sacrifice and Luke's evangelist symbol, the ox, is neatly articulated in the 12th-century Floreffe Bible (London, British Library Add. MS. 17738) and exemplifies a larger tradition of using Luke's symbol of an ox as an inspiration for visual exegesis.<sup>32</sup>

The crucifix represents, of course, Christ's triumph over death. In Origen's homily on Joshua 1.3, he reminds the reader that Jesus 'has triumphed over the principalities and powers and has nailed them to the Cross in His Person'.<sup>33</sup> He also explained that the fall of Jerico was more than a simple act of war. As Caspary has said, its significance:

... is that it represents the triumph of Jesus, the divine Commander, over 'principalities, and powers, over the rulers of darkness of this world'. This triumph, though in principle achieved at the time of the resurrection (for it is Christ who has nailed to the Cross the powers and rulers of this world) remains, however, incomplete. Until it shall be made fully visible at the time of the Last Judgement, it has to be perfected within the soul of every individual Christian.<sup>34</sup>

The Cross pose can be paralleled by the so-called 'Arrest or Passion of Christ' image in Kells (fol. 114), an image that has received considerably more scholarly interpretation. In connection to the image the cross pose has been linked to the *orans* pose of prayer, to martyrdom and to notions of triumph, all of which are equally applicable to the image in Deer.<sup>35</sup> The pose was related to the Passion and Salvation by 5th- and 6th-century exegetes and to its power as a weapon against evil by Maximus of Turin and Gregory the Great.<sup>36</sup> Although applied to the Kell's image, Carol Farr's words have equal force for Deer:

In the illustration, Christ stands in the posture of the christian hero, the martyr, of which he is the first of all, the one imitated by the holy warriors carrying on the martyrdom in the sense of daily battle against the devil, who torments the church of the present from the time of the Passion up to the defeat of the antichrist and Last Judgement.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> F. Henry, *The Book of Kells: Reproductions from the Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin, with a Study of the Manuscript by Françoise Heury* (London, 1974), 173. Henry suggests that fol. 123<sub>v</sub> was reserved for a Crucifixion.

<sup>31</sup> M. Werner, op. cit. in note 19, and idem, 'The cross-carpet page in the Book of Durrow: the cult of the True Cross, Adomnán and Iona', *Art Bull.*, 72 (1990), 174-223.

<sup>32</sup> J. O'Reilly, 'Exegesis and the Book of Kells: the Lucan genealogy', 344-97 in F. O'Mahony (ed.), op. cit. in note 19, at pp. 356-7 and pl. 127.

<sup>33</sup> W. A. Baehrens, 'In Libro Jesu Nave Homiliae', *Die Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufus Übersetzung* (Leipzig, 1921), Hom. Jos. 1.3, 290.

<sup>34</sup> G. E. Caspary, op. cit. in note 16, 22.

<sup>35</sup> P. Harbison, 'Three miniatures in the Book of Kells', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 85C (1985), 181-94; L. Gougaud, *Devotional and ascetic practices in the Middle Ages*, trans. G. C. Bateman (London, 1927), 6-10.

<sup>36</sup> Maximus of Turin, *De cruce et resurrectione domini*, Sermo 38.3, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1953-), vol. 23, 149-50, lines 32-41; Gregory the Great, *In primum regnum expositiones* 6.3-4, in *Patrologia Latina*, J. P. Migne (ed.), vol. 79, 409B-410A.

<sup>37</sup> C. Farr, 'Textual structure, decoration, and interpretive images in the Book of Kells', 437-49 in F. O'Mahony (ed.), op. cit. in note 19, at pp. 444-5.

This theme ties in nicely with the text of Luke in Deer which ends at 4:1 on the word *diabolo*, the beginning of the temptation in the desert narrative: 'And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the spirit into the wilderness,/Being forty days tempted of the devil'. This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it is precisely at this point that a large miniature of the Temptation can be found in Kells.<sup>38</sup> This is the strongest evidence for direct knowledge of Kells by the Deer scribe or, at the very least, knowledge of a shared tradition.

Secondly, the crucifixion represents the ultimate triumph over the 'darkness of this world': it is the ultimate expression of Christ's triumph over the devil (as articulated in Luke 4:1). And finally, the way in which Christ defeats the devil in the desert is by using the written word as protection, by using the Word of God as protective armour. Each time Christ is tempted he answers by saying, 'It is written', thereby making an pointed reference to the power of the written Word of God. The devil, referred to by the last word of the text of Luke, *diabolo*, is defeated by Christ in the desert, by the 'Word of God', and, ultimately and emphatically, by the Crucified and triumphant Christ as depicted a few pages earlier.

In discussing the narrative Christological scenes in the Tiberius Psalter (London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius C.VI), Openshaw usefully makes the exegetical link between the Temptation and Crucifixion. Referring to Haymo of Auxerre, Eusebius of Caesarea, Hrabanus Maurus and Paschasius Radbertus she declares that 'Christ's conquest of the Devil in the desert was seen as a pivotal event in his ongoing battle against the forces of evil, a battle which would culminate in the Crucifixion'.<sup>39</sup> Having a Crucifixion scene in Deer, and not a Temptation scene as one finds in Kells, displays a certain level of exegetical sophistication on the part of the makers of Deer and alludes to a more ambitious decorative programme than has been previously recognised.

#### THE FIGURE WITH A CROSS AND ANGELS (Fig. 8)

If the triumphant, crucified Christ is alluded to in Luke, it is the resurrected Christ that is being referred to in the illustration prefacing John. Visual clues to the scene's identification are the cross at the foot of the large central figure and the six attending figures. The attending figures can be explained as angels, rectangular in shape and with only a rudimentary indication of the folded-over wings. The central figure is identified by the cross at his feet and therefore can only be Christ. Again, as in the pictures prefacing Matthew, Mark and Luke, there is nothing to suggest an Evangelist portrait. The scene represents Christ surrounded by a multitude of angels, probably a reference to the end-times when Christ, while dispensing judgement, will be assisted by angels.

Like the crucifixion scene, the 'Last Judgement' has Insular iconographic parallels, such as the above-mentioned Last Judgement in the St Gall Gospels (Stiftsbibl., Cod. 51, p. 267) and the Second Coming from Turin (Bibl. Nazionale,

<sup>38</sup> C. Farr, *The Book of Kells: Its Function and Audience* (London, 1997), 51–103.

<sup>39</sup> K. Openshaw, 'The Battle between Christ and Satan in the Tiberius Psalter', *J. Warburg Courtauld Inst.*, 52 (1989), 14–33, esp. p. 18 and note 23.

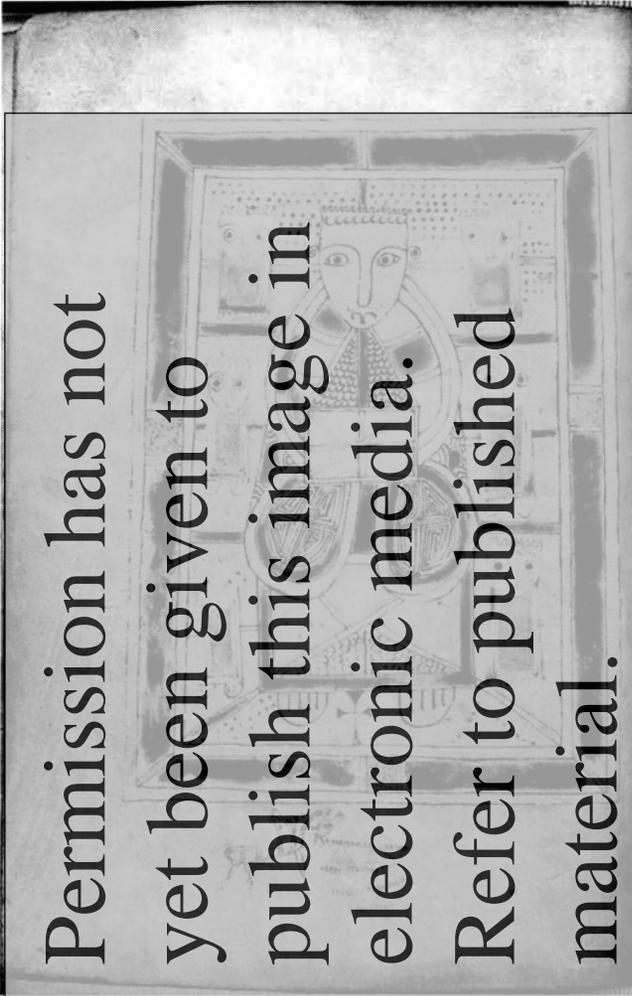


FIG. 8

Cambridge University Library MS. Ii.6.32, fol. 41v. Figure flanked by six small figures. *Photograph: Cambridge University Library (© the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).*

Cod. O. IV.20, fol. 2<sup>a</sup>).<sup>40</sup> Both depict Christ holding a cross and surrounded by smaller figures of apostles, angels and the resurrected faithful. The essential identifying elements of Christ, the Cross and the attendant angels, are present.

An alternative identification has been proposed that this is an Enthroned Christ, the comparison having been made to Kells.<sup>41</sup> However, one must remember that the Enthroned Christ in Kells, with its notional association of kingship and the genealogy of Christ, prefaces Matthew's text and not John's. Such notional associations make more sense at the beginning of Matthew's text while the 'Ascension' or 'Last Judgement' iconography is more suited to the Gospel of John.

<sup>40</sup> J. J. G. Alexander, *op. cit.* in note 3, ills. 206 and 280.

<sup>41</sup> I. Henderson (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 278.

Illustrations of the vision of St John such as that in the early 10th-century Æthelstan Psalter (London, British Library Cotton Gba A.XVIII, fol. 21) provide a useful comparison. Christ is depicted amongst the heavenly choirs of Martyrs, Confessors and Virgins, holding a cross, with pierced side and identified by an inscribed Alpha and Omega.<sup>42</sup> John was considered the Evangelist with a special relationship to Christ, having stood at the cross and become son and guardian to Mary, thereby enabling him to access divinely inspired revelation as recorded in the Apocalypse. For these reasons such visionary scenes of the Ascension and Judgement, or in the case of the Æthelstan Psalter the choirs of angels, were appropriate scenes to include.

The Gospel text of John is complete and, therefore, understandably the most significant text in the Book of Deer.<sup>43</sup> However, as I have tried to demonstrate, the abbreviated texts of Matthew, Mark and Luke and the additional Prayer for the Sick all played a part in enriching the notion that the power of the Word of God was essential in overcoming sickness, death, temptation and evil. This idea is visualised by representing various roles of Christ: Christ as a Warrior and Judge; Christ as a Healer; Christ Triumphant on the Cross; and the Last Judgement. The Word is represented first metaphorically as a sword and then repeatedly worn around the neck in a satchel, a visual reference to its apotropaic power. Text and image consistently reinforce this theme.

It has been noted that the scribe in the text of John added marginal 'arabesques'. They presumably functioned as *notae bene*; however, their references have not been explained fully. This is not the place to do so, but it is significant that two of them seem to have associations that resonate with the visual and textual themes of the rest of Deer. The first refers to the passage in which Christ names Simon, the son of Jonah, *Petrus* (Peter) or a rock (1:41). It was upon this rock that

<sup>42</sup> J. O'Reilly, 'St John as a figure of the contemplative life: text and image in the art of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform', 165–85 in Nigel Ramsay et al. (eds.), *St Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult* (Woodbridge, 1992). J. J. G. Alexander, op. cit. in note 3, ill. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Although the text is generally complete there are some phrases either left out or placed out of sequence. For instance, at John 2:16 (45v) the text reads:

Line 1. . . . domum negotiationis [ommission mark] tum est zelus domus

Line 2. Recordati vero sunt discipuli eius . . . quia scrip

Line 3. Tuae comedit me. . .

Line 2 belongs after *negotiationis* in line 1. It is particularly odd that the scribe wrote the ending *tum* on line 1, while ending line 2 with the first part of the word *scrip*. Line 3 should continue the text after *domus* of line 1. This situation indicates several things. Firstly, by introducing an omission mark and including the missing text (line 2), the scribe was clearly aware that a passage was missing. He therefore may not be as ignorant as he has been portrayed in previous studies. Secondly, the partial *tum* of *scriptum* on line 1 implies that the exemplar was either incomplete (either missing the passage or damaged) or difficult to decipher. Of these options the first is the least likely as one would imagine that if the passage were missing half of the word would not have remained. This means the passage was either damaged or difficult to decipher. If it was damaged the scribe may have indicated the omission with a sign, written what remained, that is *tum*, and then, after checking what should be included, written the passage on the next line. A damaged exemplar may also explain why an omission mark was used instead of leaving space (a line, for instance) for the inclusion of the passage. The scribe may not have been aware of how much space was necessary if the exemplar was damaged in some way. If the passage was difficult to decipher a similar series of events may have taken place. However, he would have presumably had a rough idea of the necessary space to leave. Therefore the most likely scenario was that the scribe was copying a damaged exemplar and introducing missing passages where he could, thereby creating a text with passages out of sequence. In all of these cases the evidence tends to support the idea that the exemplar was in some way deficient and that the scribe recognised this fact and acted in the best way he knew how. This hypothesis tends to support the view that the scribe was aware of what he was doing and was not ignorant or careless.

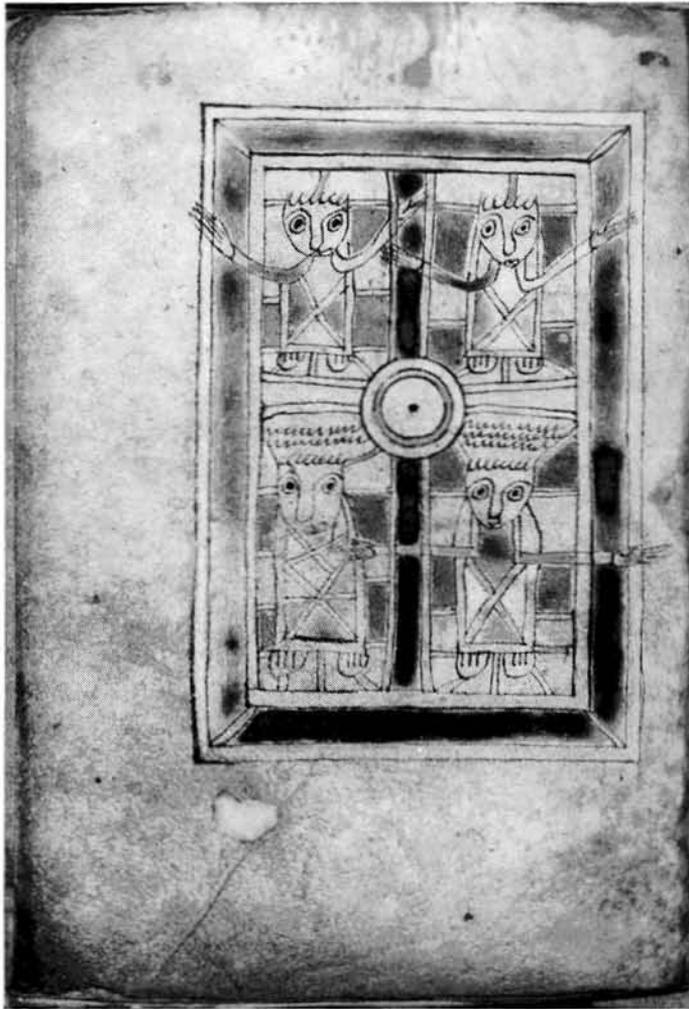


FIG. 9  
Cambridge University Library  
MS. li.6.32, fol. 85v. Angels with  
hands outstretched arranged  
around a cross. Photograph:  
Cambridge University Library (© the  
Syndics of Cambridge University  
Library).

Christ built his church. The second related reference highlighted by a marginal arabesque is at 2:19 and ends *cum ergo resurrexisset a mortuis*, the passage being: 'Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'. Here is a reference not only to Christ as the Divine Warrior, but to the Resurrection and to the establishment of a new church. The two figures represented in the half-page illustration at the end of John's text, identified only by satchels and drapery, are not angels. They could, however, indicate Peter and Christ given that the *notae bene* earlier in the Gospel refer to the establishment of the new Church under Peter, and given that this same charge to Peter is repeated by Christ at the end of the Gospel, just prior to the illustration themselves.

The final illustration we must consider is located on the verso of the second-last folio; it has no corresponding image at the front of the manuscript (Fig. 9). As we have seen, there is an internal consistency about the placement of images, with

the first and last images mirrored and each gospel receiving a 'Christ' image and a decorated initial. However, we must remember that the second folio is missing and that either one, or more likely two, images were placed on this folio. Hence a companion for this image could have been drawn at the beginning of the book. Given the convention of rectangular bodies these figures are angels surrounding a cross. Three of the four do seem to be in the *orans* pose. Angels in this pose have parallels elsewhere: for instance, on fol. 48 in Kells a small angel has arms outstretched thus. Since the 'angels' have no identifying attributes it is impossible to say with any certainty who they might be, but it is curious that three of the four are in *orans* pose, perhaps making a more specific reference to the notion of angelic intercession. The obvious candidates for such intercessory figures are the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, all three having early associations with one another and with the early church in Britain and Ireland. Furthermore, Michael is considered the protector of Israel in Daniel (10:13 and 12:1), as well as the principal fighter against the devil in Revelations (12:7-9) while Raphael was associated with healing. All three were represented together in art in England and elsewhere and would not be out of place in the context of Deer.

The repetition of the cross as a monumental symbol occurs three times in Deer, with a possible fourth now not remaining. A small cross occurs at the foot of one of the figures and it occurs throughout the decoration of the frames, just as in Kells numerous cross-forms are embedded within the decoration.<sup>44</sup> The Cross, of course, symbolises Christ, and its presence throughout the book reaffirms the Christological approach to text and image. Clearly the book was concerned with the power of the Word of God. Its texts and images expand upon the theme of Christ as *Logos* and the power of that Word to both heal and conquer evil. The book itself was probably worn in a satchel around the neck of an individual for precisely these reasons, a suggestion that is confirmed by repeatedly depicting satchels around the necks of the figures rather than having them hold books as was the norm. The implication of my proposed interpretation of the Book of Deer is that its makers would have been quite sophisticated in their approach to the relationship between text and image. Furthermore they would have been aware of the type of imagery available in books like the Book of Kells. While they may not have had an illuminated gospel book at hand as an exemplar, they were able to adapt their models with an informed understanding of the bible and biblical exegesis to create a fascinating and unique manuscript.

#### PLACE OF ORIGIN AND DATE

The final part of this paper will consider the place and date of production. The only written evidence for a possible place of production in the Book of Deer can be found in the reference to Deer in the Gaelic *notitiae*. However, since this note was written after the manuscript itself was written it can only indicate with

<sup>44</sup> B. Meehan, *The Book of Kells: An Illustrated Introduction to the Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin* (London, 1994), 33.



FIG. 10

Macdurnan Gospels, Lambeth Palace Library MS. 1370, fol. 115v. St Luke. Photograph: Lambeth Palace Library (© Lambeth Palace Library).

certainty that the Book of Deer was in Deer in the 11th or 12th century. It cannot be taken as proof that the manuscript was actually written in Deer.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore one must explore other ways in which to establish a place of origin. One avenue of investigation is to compare the decorative aspects of the manuscript with decoration on objects with known points of origin. The decorative elements in Deer are primarily found elaborating the frames and the backgrounds of the figure pages and initial pages. They consist of variations on interlace, cross motives and key patterns and, although somewhat inconsistently rendered, they are distinctive.

The desire to compartmentalise the background of the figures through a series of horizontal and angled lines, washes of colour and dots has its closest parallel in the previously mentioned Macdurnan Gospels, a manuscript produced for Mac Durnan, Abbot of Armagh, between 888 and 927 (Fig. 10). In 891 he was made head of the Columban monasteries, and it is thought that the Macdurnan Gospels

<sup>45</sup> An attempt was made by Jane Geddes to identify the particular type of sword held by the figure on fol. 4<sup>v</sup>. She concluded that the sword is not of an Irish type, but was a type found in England, Norway and Scotland. See Geddes, *op. cit.* in note 3, 545-9.

were probably written during his tenure as abbot, in other words, at some point in the late 9th or early 10th century. In addition to the compartmentalising of the background, a variation on the cross motif surrounding Matthew and Mark occurs in the decoration of the frames of the Macdurnan Gospels. These decorative links, although not exact parallels, suggest a connection between the two manuscripts and possibly between the cultural context of Armagh and the Book of Deer. They also suggest a date in the late 9th or early 10th century for the Deer manuscript, although ascribing dates based upon comparative decorative material is highly problematic.

Other connections can be made between the decoration in Deer and the decorative motifs found on Cross slabs and crosses in the region just south-west of Perth (Fig. 11). The Dupplin Cross is a particularly useful comparison as several motifs on that monument conform precisely to those in Deer.<sup>46</sup> Further variations occur in Monifieth and the rather more elaborate hairstyle of the Mark figure can be paralleled with that of the reclining figure on the inscribed arch from Forteviot (Fig. 12).<sup>47</sup> In addition, as has already been mentioned, the pairs of standing and winged figures at Kirriemuir may provide a model for the angels in Deer. Such comparisons cannot prove the place of origin of Deer, but the shared decorative vocabulary does tend to point to the region of Perthshire as a possible place of origin. Furthermore, these motifs do not occur on known monuments in or around Deer. The monuments in Perthshire all date from the 9th and 10th centuries while the one with most similarities, the Dupplin Cross, has been dated recently to the 820s and connected to Constantine, son of Fergus.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to its decorative elements the Cross at Dupplin, like other crosses and slabs in the region, depicts warriors. They hold spears, march into battle and, in two cases on the Dupplin Cross, wear shields that hang around their necks with straps. On another panel David and the Lamb are represented invoking notions of Davidic Kingship and salvation.

The Dupplin Cross stands between the centres of ecclesiastical and secular power of this region and, indeed, possibly of what was once a much larger geographical area. Although very little historical information remains about the emergence of the *Regnum Scottorum*, a few facts can be ascertained with reasonable certainty.<sup>49</sup> Scholars have tended to be divided between those who maintain a slow

<sup>46</sup> See the motifs in Allen and Anderson, *op. cit.* in note 25, numbered 1002, 1004 and 1006 from Dupplin and Monifieth; 1014 from Clonmacnois; 909 from Dupplin. Henderson has reached independently the same conclusion. See Henderson (forthcoming), *op. cit.* in note 3.

<sup>47</sup> L. Alcock, 'Forteviot: a Pictish and Scottish royal church and palace', 211–39 in S. M. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1982); L. Alcock and E. A. Alcock, 'Reconnaissance excavations on Early Historic fortifications and other royal sites in Scotland, 1974–84', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 122 (1992), 215–88; S. Airlie, 'The view from Maastricht', 33–46 in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark Age Europe* (St Andrews, 1994); P. Wormald, 'The emergence of the *Regnum Scottorum*: a Carolingian hegemony?', 131–60 in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark Age Britain* (St Andrews, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> K. Forsyth, 'The inscription on the Dupplin Cross', 237–44 in C. Burke (ed.), *From the Isles of the North: Medieval Art in Ireland and Britain* (Belfast, 1995); L. Alcock and E. A. Alcock, 'The context of the Dupplin cross: a reconsideration', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 126 (1996), 455–7; I. Henderson, 'The Dupplin Cross: a preliminary consideration of its art-historical context', 161–77 in J. Hawkes and S. Mills (eds.), *Northumbria's Golden Age* (Stroud, 1999); L. Laing, 'The chronology and context of Pictish Relief Sculpture', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 44 (2000), 81–114.

<sup>49</sup> A. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500–1286*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1922); W. Skene, *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots, and other Early Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1867); and *idem*, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1876).



FIG. 11  
The Dupplin Cross. Photograph: © Crown  
Copyright, reproduced courtesy of Historic  
Scotland

FIG. 12  
Forteviot carved arch. Photograph: ©  
Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland.



and gradual transformation from a Pictish to Scottish (Christian) kingdom and those who argue for a more dramatic change precipitated by destructive and decisive warfare.<sup>50</sup> At the centre of the debate are Dunkeld and Forteviot, both within a few miles of the Dupplin Cross.

Those in the first camp tend to see Kenneth Mac Alpin's ascendancy as the result of a long and slow process of 'Scotticization' which lasted for perhaps 250 years. It was based upon the protracted incursions of a Columban reform church and the gradual replacement of Pictish matrilinear regnal inheritance by Gaelic norms.<sup>51</sup> Against this view, Wormald has argued for a more decisive hegemonic shift having taken place. His thesis is based upon several issues: the sudden apparent loss of the Pictish language; comparisons with English and Carolingian models of dynastic change and growth; and a critical reassessment of the historical sources.

In addition, recent archaeological excavations carried out at Forteviot indicate that it was the location of a palace complex of some importance. It has been suggested that it was the home of the Pictish and Scottish Kings, a palace where legal matters were settled and assemblies took place.<sup>52</sup> An elaborate stone arch remains which presumably once formed part of the doorway to a royal chapel and upon the arch are depicted several figures holding swords again echoing themes of Davidic Kingship. The palace at Forteviot has been compared to that at Ingeheim of the same date, the centre of the court of Louis the Pious (814–40) and one of the great centres of Carolingian art production.<sup>53</sup>

If Forteviot can be understood as the centre of secular power, Dunkeld can be viewed as the centre of ecclesiastical power. Kenneth Mac Alpin translated the relics of St Columba to Dunkeld in 849.<sup>54</sup> Columba, despite his name literally meaning 'Dove of the Church', was hardly a peaceful saint, according to his biographer Adomnán. He inspired fear and awe in those he met and was likened to a warrior. Columba had a great interest in battles and was considered a 'giver of victory'. Adomnán in his introduction to his *Life* recounts:

Some kings were conquered in the terrifying crash of battle and others emerged victorious according to what Columba asked of God by the power of prayer. God who honours all saints gave this special privilege to him as to a mighty and triumphant champion . . .<sup>55</sup>

The battler, or 'Cathach', of St Columba, is further testimony of the power that Columba had to overcome his enemies. Likewise, the early 10th-century *Annals of Ireland* describe how, during a battle between the Scots and the Norsemen (918), the staff, or crozier, of St Columba was carried in front of the army as a battle standard, and through the power of the relic came victory at war. The crozier was then named *Cathbuid*, or 'victory in battle', and was often subsequently carried into armed conflict.<sup>56</sup> Coincidentally, the battle referred to in the *Annals* took place

<sup>50</sup> P. Wormald, *op. cit.* in note 47.

<sup>51</sup> P. Wormald, *op. cit.* in note 47.

<sup>52</sup> S. Airlie, *op. cit.* in note 47.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> A. Anderson, *op. cit.* in note 49, 288.

<sup>55</sup> A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80–1000* (London, 1984), 95–7; Adomnán, *op. cit.* in note 15, 110.

<sup>56</sup> G. Henderson, *From Durrrow to Kells: The Insular Gospel-Books 650–800* (London, 1987), 190–1.

in Dunkeld and presumably the crozier referred to in the account was part of the Columban relics taken to Dunkeld in 849.

There are several connections, therefore, which associate the Book of Deer with Dunkeld and its immediate vicinity. Firstly, the decoration of the manuscript can be most closely associated with objects from the region just south-west of Perth. The book itself is entirely concerned with the power of the Word of God to conquer evil and cure the sick. This is elaborated upon through the Christological iconography and the abbreviations of the text of Matthew, Mark and Luke and the complete text of John. Angels, who were so helpful to Columba and Christ in fighting evil, are multiplied throughout the Book of Deer. Satchels too are represented: worn like armour around the neck, they are an allusion to the power of the Word in a hostile world. Although the book is concerned with the Word and its power, the iconographic sources and allusions and the exegetical knowledge required to produce such a book draws upon the cultural and spiritual sphere of Iona or, at least, a well-versed Columban outpost. Since Columba's relics were transferred to Dunkeld in 849 and a new Columban foundation was established there, and since the decorative and certain iconographic features of the Book of Deer can be found in the vicinity of Dunkeld, it is reasonable to propose that Dunkeld is the place of origin of the Book of Deer. Indeed, as early as 1967, Isabel Henderson pointed out the importance of Dunkeld at this time: 'Dunkeld, with its relics of Columba, its chief abbot-bishop, and its control over both Scots and Picts, was as near to a re-creation of the heyday of Iona and the Columban church in the sixth century as the age [the 9th century] could allow'.<sup>57</sup> A large, elaborately decorated book may not have been the exemplar, but the scribe had the talent to create a unique and sophisticated book from what was at hand.

The final question one must address is the date.<sup>58</sup> Like the place of origin there is nothing in the manuscript which would directly suggest a date, nor is there a reference to a possible patron. In addition, the hand of the scribe has not been localised or dated precisely, partly because there are very few 9th- or 10th-century manuscripts from which to get any sort of clear notion of the date of the hand. Moreover, the fact that the scribe/artist may have drawn upon motifs from monuments such as the Dupplin Cross does not necessarily mean that the Book of Deer should be dated to the 820s. The artist could have been inspired by motifs on objects that had been around for some time. It is, therefore, impossible to narrow down the general dating of the late 9th or early 10th century to any great extent.

A book like Deer would have been a valuable commodity at any point in the Early Middle Ages. One with themes such as the Warrior Christ in which explicit references to the power of the Word to protect and heal were articulated would not have been out of place during either the 820s, with the establishment of the Church in a potentially hostile environment by Constantine, son of Fergus, or with the introduction of Columba's relics in 849, or even with the onslaught of the

<sup>57</sup> I. Henderson, *The Picts* (London, 1967), 89.

<sup>58</sup> I. Henderson refers to Deer as '9th-century', op. cit. in note 3, 278. Patrick McGurk dates the Book of Deer to the 10th century. See P. McGurk, 'The Gospel Book in Celtic lands before AD 850: contents and arrangement', 165-89 in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds.), *Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions* (Stuttgart, 1987), at p. 174.

Norsemen and subsequent battle of 918. One can imagine that such a book, carried in a satchel into either a real or a 'spiritual' battle, would have been an appropriate talisman. If this was a high-status book, one can imagine that its patron might have been the founding abbot of Dunkeld or even the secular ruler Constantine or one of his successors.

Conversely, it can be argued that the themes contained in the book might seem to fit less comfortably in a more settled and peaceful context. This has implications for the debate centred upon whether the transition between the Pictish and 'Scottish' kingdoms was one of peaceful transition or bloody defeat. The imagery and text of the Book of Deer would imply that the environment in which it was produced and used was one of upheaval and political instability, rather than peaceful coexistence.

The Book of Deer may have been made in Dunkeld, but it certainly ended up in Deer in the 11th century. How it migrated from Dunkeld to Deer is yet another mystery but there is one known historical figure who links the two regions.<sup>59</sup> Dunkeld was burned to the ground in 1027 whilst Crinan was Abbot of Dunkeld. He was married to the daughter of Malcolm II and they had a son, Duncan. Since Crinan and his family survived the fire, they presumably fled Dunkeld at that time and one would imagine that they might have taken with them some of Columba's relics and other valuables such as a venerable old book. Duncan, who must have been a teenager at this time, later became king and was killed in 1040 by Mac Beth at Elgin, close to Deer. Although there is absolutely no proof that Crinan had possession of the Book of Deer, the link between Dunkeld and Elgin (near Deer) in the figure of his son Duncan, although tenuous, places this little book at the romantic heart of the 'Scottish' kingdom.

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<sup>59</sup> In the marginal Gaelic notes there are two witnesses mentioned from Dunkeld. This may provide yet a further link between the centres.