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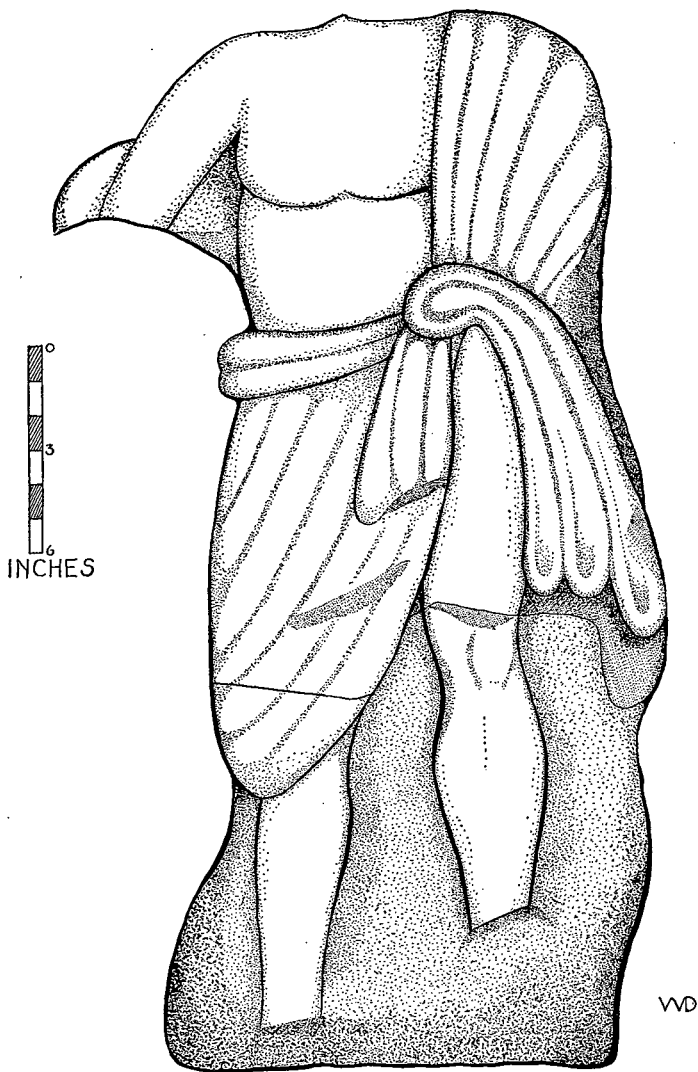
FRAGMENT OF ROMAN SCULPTURE IN HEXHAM ABBEY

Whilst I was checking fragments of Anglian sculpture in Hexham Abbey church, my attention was drawn to two conjoined fragments of sculpture wedged into an aumbry in the north wall of the Prior Leschman Chantry. They represent a human male figure clad only in a folded drape and now lacking the head, feet and right forearm.

The figure is facing front, with the feet slightly apart, the right arm away from the body and backed by a fold of the drape but, lacking the forearm, it is impossible to indicate the direction of the pose. The left shoulder and arm are rather peculiarly hidden by a fold of the drape which is twisted around the waist and covers the right leg in a fold to below the knee. Another fold begins left front and descends by the side of the left thigh to the left knee, leaving bare the leg from the waist downwards. The right upper arm and torso are also bare to the waist.

The only medieval sculpture that displays any expanse of nudity or partial nudity is a crucifixion, which the present specimen is obviously not. The only other possibility in its present surroundings, taking into consideration the material and treatment of the figure, is that it is Roman and possibly from Corbridge.

The sculptural fragments from the various sites on the Wall are practically all of sand or gritstone of varying degrees of coarseness or fineness. This agrees perfectly with the present specimen, which is coarse sand-stone. The garment is a Greek chiton or Roman toga, well girded up, and is arranged in stylised folds that one could almost call broad pleats which fall rather stiffly (in deep contrast to the natural



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folds of a medieval figure in the same aumbry) and tend to follow the contours of the figure in a manner unlike fabric, but which can be very well paralleled by similar treatment of textile on figures at Chesters and Carlisle.

It would seem that the sculpture is of Romano-British origin—though of good provincial workmanship. The sculptor, proficient up to a point in working towards the round, has not yet divorced his figure from the parent block and it still retains the flattened stratified contours.

Both Bruce and Collingwood in their writings mention numerous fragments of Roman sculpture, both in Hexham and elsewhere, but the above specimen seems to have escaped notice—perhaps owing to its shadowed position.

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