

## THE GREAT CROSSES OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY IN NORTHERN ENGLAND.

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Among the early monuments of our country few can rival in beauty, in artistic interest, and in historical importance, the stone crosses erected in northern England in early days. They have recently aroused a good deal of attention, and have given rise to some theories which in my view are contrary to sound induction and archaeological good sense, and I deem it necessary to devote some pages to their discussion. This objection extends to their assumed date, their ornamentation, and the meaning and interpretation of their inscriptions, where such exist. It is not perhaps singular that the writers who have published the most impossible theories about them have not been Englishmen, who have made a long study of our archaeology, and have in consequence learnt how to treat our archaeological facts in rational perspective, but foreigners, who have had a very casual knowledge either of our history or of our antiquities. America, Germany, and Italy have all furnished critics of our subject, whose conclusions are largely based on subjective methods which seem to ignore the most elementary facts underlying the subject. Let us see what these facts are.

In the first place, these crosses are all clearly Christian. It is true that the cross is occasionally found as an ornament in early pagan structures, but that fact has no connexion with our subject. Stone crosses, used as memorials or set up as symbolic emblems in early times in various places in Britain, are unmistakable signs of Christian culture and are so accepted by everybody.

Secondly, such early Christian crosses in Britain are limited to certain geographical areas. In regard to England they are only found in the north and in the west, and are virtually absent, or very scarce, in Wessex, Mercia south of the Mersey and the Trent, East Anglia and Cornwall.

The district, however, where they abound is almost entirely that situated within the boundaries of the kingdom of Northumbria.

Northumbria was divided into two sections by the river Tees, each of which was for a while an independent kingdom, and later a sharply contrasted province. The northern one was called Bernicia, and the southern one Deira; the former answering to the modern counties of Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire north of the Lune, and the latter to the county of York.

In describing the great wooden cross set up by king Oswald at Heavenfield, near Hexham, where he defeated and killed the British king Caedwalla in the year 635, Bede says: "As we have understood, there was no sign of the Christian faith, no church, no altar erected throughout all the nation of the Bernicians before that new commander of the army, prompted by the devotion of his faith, set up the standard of the cross as he was going to give battle to his barbarous enemy."<sup>1</sup>

The year 635, therefore, is a notable date as a *terminus a quo* in fixing the chronology of the crosses of Bernicia. In regard to Deira, or Yorkshire, the possibilities are somewhat different, since that area was the scene of the labours of a Christian mission in the earlier reign of king Aedwin, under Paulinus and his protégé James the deacon. In a work on St. Augustine of Canterbury, which I recently published, I followed the current view that one or two of the Yorkshire crosses and those at Whalley in Lancashire may have been contemporary memorials of the mission of Paulinus. I now think this is unlikely, and that they were probably set up some years afterwards as memorials of the proto-evangelist of Northumbria. No such memorials mark anywhere the mission of Augustine in the south, and as Paulinus was a Roman by origin and belonged to that mission, it is unlikely that he would have adopted the practice in the north, nor do any of these stone crosses recall the ornament and style derived from Rome or known in Italy or Gaul at that time. I now believe that all these stone crosses are of a later date.

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Ecl. Hist.* iii, ch. 2.

The first crosses existing in the north, about whose date there can be no doubt, are those found at Hartlepool and elsewhere, and they are ear-marked as to date and provenance by their inscriptions as well as by their style. In a work shortly to appear on "The Golden Age of the Early Christian Church" I have described these crosses and discussed their inscriptions, which show that they belong to the second half of the seventh century. They are unmistakably of Irish origin<sup>1</sup> and due to the mission of St. Aidan. A cross of similar style is preserved on a slab at Jarrow, and was doubtless the foundation-stone of the church. A fragment of a cross, also of the same type, was found by Canon Greenwell at Billingham, near Stockton-on-Tees, and is now in the British Museum. It is inscribed "Orate pro F." My friend, Professor Lethaby, says of this inscription: "It is written in beautiful minuscules that must have been written by a learned scribe. . . . A fragment of a cross from Dewsbury in the same museum is also inscribed in good minuscules, and it cannot be far removed in age from the other; its date must be about 700."<sup>2</sup>

It is not these small crosses, however, that are occupying us now, and we will therefore turn to the real purpose of this essay, namely, the discussion of some specimens of the magnificent series of crosses and cross fragments found in Northumbria, of which the most notable are those at Bewcastle and Ruthwell, splendid examples which mark a great epoch in the history of the ornamental art of this realm. Such crosses seem to have been put up partly to mark sacred spots where baptisms and other services were afterwards held by the itinerant missionaries, or as memorials, etc. In the life of St. Willibald, who was born about the year 700, we read that when he was about three years old his parents made a dedication of him before the great cross of our Lord and Saviour, "for it is the custom of the Saxon race that on many of the estates of nobles and of good men, they are wont to have, not a church, but the standard of the holy Cross, dedicated to our Lord and revered with great honour, lifted up on high."

Let us now turn to the date of these crosses, but

<sup>1</sup> Their ultimate origin is another question, but, immediately, they were clearly derived from a pattern then existing in Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeol. Journ.* lxx, 152.

before dealing with the questions directly, I should like to say a few words about the theories which have been enunciated by some foreign archaeologists, notably by an American writer, Professor Cook, and by others. They seem to me to have overlooked the studies of English antiquaries, who have worked for several decades on strictly inductive lines to illuminate and trace the origin and progress of English art.

It is forgotten by some archaeologists that that science is only a branch of history, and that a preliminary study of the history of a country is absolutely necessary if we are to explain, and especially to date, its monuments. First, then, I would explain the very elementary fact that English history is divided sharply into two great provinces by the Norman Conquest. That conquest displaced the nobles and gentry of this realm (that is, the educated classes) almost *en bloc*. Its effect on the personnel of the Church was almost as great as it was in regard to the civil grandees. French-speaking and thinking priests filled most of the dioceses and rapidly monopolised the canonries and other dignified posts. Some of the monasteries retained for a while their English complexion, and the speech of the country did not begin to change for some time, but otherwise the life of the educated people and the priesthood changed almost entirely. Architecture, and the other arts received a new impetus and developed greatly.

By the middle of the twelfth century the change had become very marked in all these matters, and, as is well known, the old language had then become so obsolete that Latin translations of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* became necessary, works composed in Anglo-Saxon ceased to be written, while the vernacular speech became almost entirely disused in the *scriptoria* of the monks. At this time England became covered with fair minsters and parish churches, of which large numbers remain: they have been minutely studied and their architectural and sculptural details classified and described.

Now it is to the twelfth century that the Commendatore Rivoira<sup>1</sup> and Professor Cook<sup>2</sup> attribute such splendid

<sup>1</sup> *Lombardic Architecture* (1910), vol. ii, p. 143; and *Burlington Magazine*, April, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> "The date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses," *Trans. Conn. Acad. of Arts and Sciences*, Dec. 1912.

and pre-eminent monuments of art as the great northern memorial crosses. I have no hesitation in saying, and I am sure I shall be supported by every English writer having any claim to authority on the question of the history of English art, especially ecclesiastical art, that there is no single feature about these crosses or their ornamentation which in the least resembles English artistic work of the twelfth century, or can be found in any work attested by documentary evidence to belong to the twelfth century in any part of these realms. Nor, may I say very emphatically, can anything like it be found in remains of that date in any part of continental Europe. I had written this when I met with the following sentence, in which my friend, Sir W. Martin Conway, with his usual facile pen, has expressed the general conclusion which most, if not all, archaeologists in this country have reached on the issue before us. He says: "Take a photograph of either the Ruthwell or the Bewcastle cross, which Professor Cook would assign to the twelfth century, and place beside it a photograph of any undoubted work of twelfth-century decorative sculpture: they will at once be seen to be expressive of different worlds. The ideal behind the one is not the ideal behind the other."

Let us now turn from the character of the art on these monuments to another, perhaps an even more effective, argument. The principal crosses we are dealing with are inscribed; they not only have the names of well-known kings and saints upon them, but also have whole sentences, and in one case a large section of a fine poem. First, in regard to the names. It must be remembered that to the early Norman conquerors the history of their predecessors and their literature was not only inaccessible but hateful. The Anglo-Saxon kings and saints were no heroes to them. They did not know their names except in two or three conspicuous cases, and they cared nothing about their deeds. So far did this extend that in the case of a majority of the churches the dedications were changed from those of Saxon saints to other saints especially favoured by the Normans, and so far as we can see, the change effected by the conquest of 1066 was as far-reaching and complete in England as that of the French revolution was when it replaced the 'ancien régime.'

How is it, then, that on these crosses not a single Norman name occurs, either of prince or priest or saint? They are all Anglian names. Not only so, but the bulk of them are names of obscure persons who must have passed entirely out of living memory and whose very existence has only been rediscovered in modern times. How could it enter the imagination of any man, however fantastic, to suppose that in the twelfth century wealthy Norman chiefs or churchmen (only men of wealth could have paid for such monuments) were urged by an afflatus for commemorating in this magnificent fashion a whole bevy of people who had passed away several centuries before, and were no longer remembered by any one?

Again, these names and inscriptions are written in two forms of script, some of them in runic characters and some in Roman minuscules. Who that has any knowledge of our history could suppose that inscriptions could have been written at all in English *runes* in England in the twelfth century<sup>1</sup>: *a fortiori*, that they could have been written so accurately? The whole notion can only have occurred to one unfamiliar with the history of our monuments. The forms of the Roman letters used in other inscriptions are just as inconsistent with their belonging to the twelfth century as the runes, for they are written in Irish minuscules quite unknown by Norman scribes.

Thirdly, in regard to the inscriptions other than names, and especially to the poetry. Who was there in the twelfth century who could have written the Northumbrian tongue in this fashion so accurately and, as we shall see, in so early a form? Who, again, was to read it when written? It was quite obsolete at that date, and long before that date. What purpose, what motive could have induced these Normans to set up in out-of-the-way villages and in mountain graveyards these most costly monuments in memory of forgotten people, and in a speech which no one could read?

The fact is that, instead of setting up crosses in this

<sup>1</sup> The only instance of runes occurring on a monument anything like so late is on the famous font at Bridekirk. These occur in a very Scandinavian corner of England, and

the runes are not English but Scandinavian, and have nothing to do with the runes on the crosses.

fashion and taste, the early Normans ruthlessly destroyed them in their widespread efforts, especially potent in the twelfth century, to replace the more or less humble Anglian churches by the great Norman minsters and parish churches of their own time, which abound in our land.

On this matter my acute friend, who did so much for the illustration of early art in these realms, Romilly Allen, wrote: "The Normans showed but little respect for the sepulchral monuments of their Celtic and Saxon predecessors, and when about to erect a church or cathedral the first thing they did was to break up all the crosses which were on or near the site and use them as wall-stones."<sup>1</sup>

These historical considerations seem to me to be entirely conclusive, and to be much more weighty than any but the clearest archaeological testimony. Now it happens that Professor Cook's dating of the ornamentation on these crosses is equally impossible. Professor G. Baldwin Brown, in his answer to his contention that they belong to the twelfth century, says: "It might more easily present itself to one who regards the two crosses as isolated objects, than to those who know them as they really are, only the two most elaborate and beautiful of a series of monuments similar in kind, the number of which must run into the thousands, for there are no fewer than five hundred in Yorkshire alone . . . Professor Cook takes no note of the fact that a good many of the stones have come to light in a fragmentary condition, used as building material in mediaeval walls, some of which are of pre-Conquest date."<sup>2</sup> As one example out of many, Professor Brown cites the case of the west wall of the church of Kirkdale, in Yorkshire, which is dated by its famous inscribed sun-dial over the south doorway to within a year or two of A.D. 1060. This has built into it, low down, a beautiful tomb-slab with characteristic foliage scroll-work of the Anglian type. On some of Professor Cook's judgments on archaeology which led him to put the crosses into the twelfth century, Professor Brown has some useful comments. Thus, in regard to the representation of St. John Baptist and the *Agnus Dei*, of

<sup>1</sup>*Vict. Hist. of Northamptonshire*, ii, 191, note.

<sup>2</sup>*Burlington Magazine*, xxiii, 44.



which Professor Cook writes that it cannot, according to indication, be earlier than the twelfth century, the writer reminds him that in another passage he had himself mentioned an early monument, probably of the sixth century, the ivory chair of Maximian at Ravenna, on which the principal figure is a St. John Baptist with a lamb of the very type found on the crosses. In regard to the representation of the Annunciation and the Visitation, Dr. Stuhlfauth has specially emphasised the fact (as confirmatory of the early date of the Ruthwell cross) that the primitive Syro-Palestinian type of the Annunciation with the standing Mary makes its appearance on that monument; while the Visitation occurs on the golden medallions from Adana at Constantinople, published by Dr. Strzygowski, which are of the sixth and seventh centuries, and is also represented on the chair of Maximian. The flight into Egypt, says Professor Brown, which, according to Professor Cook, does not appear in Christian art till the tenth or eleventh century, occurs in these medallions in a form that reminds us curiously of the relief on the Ruthwell cross with the tree that comes above the head of the ass.<sup>1</sup> It is also found at Sta Maria Maggiore.<sup>2</sup> The Christ on the Ruthwell cross in the scene of the washing of the feet of Christ by the Magdalene is very like the glorified Christ on both the great western crosses, and is an early type. This Christ in the attitude of benediction also occurs on the wooden coffin of St. Cuthbert at Durham. In reply to the American professor's remark about the representation of the Crucifixion on the Ruthwell cross, which he says is first found in a seventh-century Roman painting, Professor Brown reminds him that he has overlooked its occurrence on the wooden doors of Sta Sabina at Rome, and on a British Museum ivory, both of the fifth century; and in both cases the Saviour is shown lightly clad, as on the Ruthwell cross. Again, in regard to the royal falconer, who is represented on the Ruthwell cross wearing long hair, "Everybody," says Professor Brown, "knows that the Normans cut their

<sup>1</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, xxiii, 44.

<sup>2</sup> About 435; Lethaby, *Burlington Magazine*, xxiii, 49.



hair short like priests, and their heads were shaven at the back, as is shown on the Bayeux tapestry, while the Saxons were characterised by an ample *chevelure*.”<sup>1</sup> As Professor Lethaby has suggested to me, the “royal falconer” must represent the person commemorated on the monument, and he aptly quotes the figure of the king carrying a falcon on a coin of the Northumbrian king Aldfrith. This is a complete answer to Professor Cook’s contention that falconry was only introduced into England at a later date.

Summing up the results of his analysis, Professor Brown says that “An examination of Professor Cook’s critique on the carving of the crosses leads to exactly the opposite result to that he aimed at, as it tends to confirm the view of their early date, and at any rate to place them convincingly in the Saxon period. . . . The single fact that in all the foliage of the two crosses there is nowhere a trace of the classical acanthus seems almost to force one to place them earlier than the Carolingian renaissance.”<sup>2</sup>

I do not propose to say another word about this twelfth-century delusion. Let us now turn to pre-Conquest days. Here, again, we can divide English history into two notable sections, separated by great race changes and otherwise.

During the ninth century England was persistently invaded and harassed by the most cruel scourge which ever tormented it, namely, the invasions of the Danes and Norsemen. They destroyed nearly all the monasteries in the country and a large part of the churches, and for one hundred years the poverty-stricken country could build no fresh ones, so that there is a great hiatus in English art during the ninth century. Especially was this destruction felt in its richest and most flourishing part, namely, Northumbria, where the pagan piratical invaders displaced the older landowners and divided the land among them. Christianity was really restored there only after the baptism of Canute. Between the accession of Canute and the Norman conquest there was a certain renaissance of English art. Churches were again built, some on a larger and more ornamental scale than before, and crosses were also erected. These crosses, however, were decorated with a kind of ornament different

<sup>1</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, xxiii, 43-45.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* 45.

from that existing on the crosses we are discussing in this paper.

Apart from this, the inscriptions on the latter are quite inconsistent with their having belonged to the post-Danish conquest. As we should expect from their Danish origin, the runes that are found on the later monuments belong to another type, namely, that which prevailed in Scandinavia, and are not of the English type such as we find on the Bewcastle and other similar crosses. The language on the latter series of crosses is also quite inconsistent with their being post-Danish. It is pure Northumbrian of an early type, and contains neither Danish words nor traces of Danish syntax such as occur on the later crosses, when the speech of Yorkshire had become Anglo-Danish. The *names* recorded on the older crosses, again, are purely English names written in their Northumbrian form; not one of them is a Danish name, and, as I have said, many of them are names of obscure persons and are not the least likely to have been commemorated on monuments by the Danish landowners of Yorkshire in the tenth and eleventh centuries, who were separated completely in tradition from the older men, not only by their belonging to another race but by the hundred years of restored paganism.

All this was apparently unknown to Dr. Sophus Müller, a deservedly high authority on Danish antiquities, but with no special or direct knowledge of our archaeology and, what is much more important, ignorant also of our history. In a work entitled *Dyre ornamentiken i Norden*, published at Copenhagen in 1880, he dates our crosses not earlier than the year 1000, on the astonishing ground that their decoration belongs to the late Carolingian period, with which it has in fact no connexion whatever, in style or otherwise. Nothing can be plainer than that none of the crosses of the type we are discussing have anything to do with the ninth, tenth, or eleventh centuries. Thus by a process of exhaustion we are obliged to treat the close of the eighth century as the *terminus ad quem* of our journey.

Let us, therefore, turn to the earliest period of Northumbrian Christian history, and especially to that which intervened between the advent of the Celtic monks under

Aidan in the seventh century and the year 800. Here we have a different story to tell. All the reasons which I have quoted as conclusively proving the impossibility of these crosses having been erected later than the year 800 converge upon the probability, or rather certainty, that they were erected before the year 800. The runic letters on them belong to that period, the language on them is exactly of that period, the known names on them are all of persons who lived at that period, and the poetry which occurs on the finest of them was composed by a Northumbrian poet who lived in that period; nor do I know of a single fact or argument that is opposed to that conclusion, except such as are drawn from *a priori* and subjective considerations, all full of stupendous difficulties. I shall take it as proved, therefore, that the crosses we are discussing were erected in the seventh or eighth century. If we concede this we must reasonably insist further that they were erected during the lifetime, or very soon after the death, of those commemorated upon them or bearing their names. It is mere arbitrary wilfulness to discard this evidence without some kind of reason. So far as I know, there is no assignable reason which can be supported by argument in favour of dating these crosses at any period other than that attested by the names occurring on them and confirmed by all the other facts we know about them. Let me quote two instances drawn from some of the biggest and most important of these crosses.

First, that at Bewcastle, with which the Ruthwell cross is closely associated. It bears the names of king Alcfrith and of his wife, and I have no doubt whatever that it was erected in their lifetime.

The second of these monuments which I would mention is Trumwine's cross at Abercorn. Trumwine was appointed bishop of the Picts at Abercorn in the year 681. The Pictish Mission Church came to an end in 684, when Trumwine was driven away, having been the first and last Anglo-Pictish bishop. This cross must, therefore, have been set up between 681 and 684. It is quite incredible that it could have been set up after the latter date, when the Picts killed king Ecgrith and put an end to the domination of the Northumbrians over their people.

The last thing the Picts would have done would have been to set up a cross in honour of a Northumbrian bishop whom they had expelled.

Thirdly and lastly, I would quote Acca's cross, formerly at Hexham and now at Durham. Acca's career as bishop ranges from 709 to 740; the cross was assigned to him in early times, and probably bore his name.

These three crosses, being the most important both in size and in ornamentation of all those in Northumbria, clearly belong to the latter part of the seventh and the very beginning of the eighth century. This is also the view of the former Slade Professor, my friend Sir W. Martin Conway, who says of the two great western crosses: "For me they belong to the late seventh or early eighth century and nowhere else, late Celtic for choice."<sup>1</sup> So far as we know, they are among the very earliest of these crosses, and it is no doubt a notable fact and one to be carefully remembered, that being very early examples they yet offer us specimens of the very highest and most tasteful decoration which occurs on this type of cross. There is no sign whatever of immaturity or of a prentice hand among them, and whoever made them, and whence-soever they came, the artificers were very skilled workmen as well as artists, and must somewhere have found excellent models.

The next question that arises is, who were these artists and whence did they come? It is a very difficult one to answer. By a process of exclusion, however, we may limit the problem considerably.

It is perfectly plain that these crosses and the ornaments they bear were not developed out of anything previously existing in these islands. Nothing like them is to be found at an earlier date either in England, Ireland or Scotland, and yet they appear here not in an immature and elementary form, but in full-blown beauty, the earliest ones being the most perfect, most beautiful, and most important from their size and distinction. It is equally plain that we can find nothing like them in the west of Europe. They are non-existent in Germany, France, or south of the Pyrenees, notably in France, whence so much

<sup>1</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, xxiv, 85, 86.

of our early artistic work, our buildings, church furniture, plate, and the like, were derived.

Italy at this time was a land of desolation and decrepitude. Goths, Vandals, and the early Lombards had trampled upon it in all directions, and such times were not consistent with the rise or development of a kind of ornament both strong and artistic. On the other hand, the Lombards were still in their barbarous condition, only recently converted to orthodoxy, and had not yet developed their architectural skill of a later time.

It is plain, in fact, that the only parts of Italy where the arts maintained a certain lethargic and crystallised form were those immediately influenced by Byzantium through its colony at Ravenna, or in places where they had spread at second hand thence. Some people have suggested as possible that Ravenna may have been the source of the art of the great Northumbrian crosses. I cannot for a moment accept this. The art which flourished at Ravenna was attractive and original in its aims and products, but it had, so far as I can see, no *direct* connexion with that displayed on these northern crosses. On the latter the figures and the interlaced tracery of vines with small animals among the branches are treated in a manner different from anything known to me at Ravenna, nor can we well see what could induce any artists or patrons of art to come hither from Ravenna, whose archbishop and whose people, although orthodox, were on bad terms with the ecclesiastical authorities at Rome, and were very seclusive. At this time, again, Ravenna was shut off from intercourse with the west by the unruly Lombards and many other obstacles, and we have no evidence of any communication with the west.

We are driven, therefore, to seek for our explanation farther afield, however difficult the process may at first sight appear. There can be no doubt that when the Muhammedans made their terrible onslaught on the empire, in the time of Heraclius and his family, the areas where the arts were most flourishing and perhaps most fresh and living were Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt. In regard to the former districts, knowledge has been greatly increased of late years: we have been shown how, in the times succeeding the great Constantine, a renaissance took place there which had produced a very decided

advance in the methods of building, in which architectural and mechanical processes and developments had occurred resembling in a measure the similar movement we call the Italian renaissance.

This was accompanied by a similar growth in the style of ornament which we find so largely developed in the minor elements of church furniture, such as the sarcophagi and so on. Like other similar movements, this was doubtless not a spontaneous growth, but the result of a graft and of fresh ideas, in this case from the very flourishing and artistically remarkable Sassanian empire. The combination of this with the traditions of old Rome produced, especially in Asia Minor and Syria, a new kind of artistic growth which has been much illustrated by the researches of Strzygowski and Miss Bell.

A contemporary and similar development was meanwhile taking place among the Christian Copts of Egypt, which has been a revelation to us all, and has been especially illustrated by my friend, Mr. Somers Clarke, and others. It is in these areas, and these only, so far as my knowledge goes, that the kind of decorative art which occurs in the early northern crosses is to be found : especially is this so in the Coptic remains, which have been attracting more and more attention of late years. The first temptation among many people will be to treat this provenance for our seventh-century Northern art as in a measure a fantastic notion, but some consideration may perhaps modify this view, especially as the process of exhaustion seems to make the solution of the paradox impossible in any other way.

In the first place, then, we must remember that the seventh century was the great era of the primitive monks and anchorites, who were then seized with an indescribable fervour for the monastic life. The result was to break down all kinds of geographical boundaries and frontiers, and to create an amazing cosmopolitanism among the recluses. A feeling of brotherhood and kinship pervaded them all, whatever their complexion, their speech, or their blood. Especially cosmopolitan were the Irish Columban clergy, some of whom in search of solitude, others in search of learning, seem to have found their way into every corner of central Europe, as far as Iceland and perhaps Norway in the north, and as far as the recesses of

the Apennines in Italy and of the Alpine country, while France was dotted with their settlements.

It must be remembered that to these primitive monks and hermits the Mecca and focus of their craft and profession was Egypt, in the sandy wastes of which there were vast numbers of them in large communities, who there developed not only their special forms of asceticism, but also their forms of learning, and bestrewed the land with great monasteries and many churches of a type most interesting both in design and ornament.

Again, it must be remembered that in the seventh century the Muhammedan Arabs overwhelmed the countries to which we are referring and largely destroyed their religious life, scattering their monks and clergy in various directions. The result was the flooding of the Italian peninsula and Sicily with Greek monks and priests. Greek monasteries sprang up there, even in Rome itself, and Greek ecclesiastics made their way to the higher offices in the Church, doubtless patronised and supported by the great emperor and his officials. It is a most noteworthy fact that at this time quite a number of Greeks in succession became popes, and so far as we can discover introduced many changes into the cults and ritual of the Latin Church.

This Greek influence took place, not only in Italy, but in far-off Britain, where Rome had its own specially cherished mission. We had a Greek in the metropolitan see at Canterbury, and another Greek at the head of the senior English monastery, that of St. Augustine at Canterbury; we know further that here and in Ireland there was a special fervour for studying Greek at this time unmatched elsewhere in Europe, and virtually unknown in Gaul. There was also a constant moving to and fro of students and scholars in search of fresh methods of learning and teaching. Nuns rivalled monks in their pursuit of knowledge and their aptitude at composing classical verse. Meanwhile the fashion for travel was stimulated by the desire of visiting Rome, the western capital of Christendom, and Jerusalem, the birthplace of the Faith. All this was very especially the case in these realms, and notably in Ireland. We cannot doubt that among these pilgrims and travellers there must have been some who brought



back visions of the fine churches and fine services they had noticed, and brought back, too, patterns and samples of the artistic work they had seen.

It is not so wonderful, therefore, that the renascent style of ornament which had grown up in the rich and prosperous lands of the Seleucidae and the Ptolemies, and had been especially cultivated by the provincial inhabitants of those Roman provinces, should have found their way at this very time to Britain. It is noteworthy that it came not to the south of England, where such remains are virtually not found, but to the north, where the ecclesiastical movement was so full of life, and where it was especially cherished by the clergy of the Irish mission, who founded the famous school of neo-Celtic art at Lindisfarne.

It is noteworthy, too, that some of the very finest and earliest of the crosses we are discussing have been found, not in the eastern parts of the Northumbrian land, but in the lands bordering the Solway Firth, where we have evidence that there was a port at which there was much commerce, not only with Ireland but with the continent, namely, Ravenglass. All this converges on the probability that these crosses had their inspiration in the Coptic art of Egypt or the neo-Roman art of Syria and the prosperous lands of Asia Minor.

The view here expressed, that the art of the earliest Anglian crosses came from Egypt and Syria, was reached by myself independently, and it was only after the previous remarks were written that I was greatly pleased to find that I had the support of greater authorities than myself, and notably my distinguished friends, Mr. O. M. Dalton and Professor Lethaby. Mr. Dalton unhesitatingly attributes the crosses to the seventh century. In regard to the sculptures on them, he says on page 103 of his *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*: "Reasons are advanced elsewhere (p. 236) for the belief that this really remarkable sculpture, which decayed almost as suddenly as it arose, must have been inspired from foreign (east Christian) sources."

Turning to the reference here made on page 236, Mr. Dalton, speaking of the sculpture on the Bewcastle and Ruthwell crosses, says: "It appears very suddenly

and decays with great rapidity ; its rise and fall are those of an exotic art which flourishes during the persistence of exceptional conditions, but is unable to maintain itself when they are withdrawn. The half-figure of Christ at Rothbury, not a hundred years later than the Bewcastle cross, shows all the symptoms of decadence ; the staring eyes, the elongated lips, the drapery channelled rather than modelled, are all evidence of a growing incapacity. . . With the crosses of Aycliffe and Ilkley, and the fragment from Gainford, the decay is complete : the human figures have almost shrunk to conventional hieroglyphs without pretence to natural truth. It can hardly be doubted, therefore, that this meteoric appearance of a monumental sculpture in Northumbria must be ascribed to external influence. To the question from what quarter this influence proceeded there is only one probable answer : it must in the first instance have come from the east of the Mediterranean. Neither in Ireland, nor in the Frankish dominions, nor in Italy do we know any sculpture at all comparable with this, or any art in which the human figure is treated with greater ability.”<sup>1</sup>

Let me now turn to Professor Lethaby, who has written so ably on these crosses. He points out that a sculpture which has a striking resemblance to the figures on our crosses is illustrated by Mr. Dalton in his figure 85. This is Coptic. Speaking of the braided patterns on the Bewcastle cross, he derives them from Coptic sources, and he quotes Dalton as attributing “the diagonal key pattern,” or “skew fret,” on these same crosses to eastern sources, while he himself derives it from Coptic textiles or manuscripts such as the Book of Durrow, and the Lindisfarne Gospels, “Unless,” he adds, “as I believe is probable, eastern artists themselves brought their traditions.” He similarly attributes to Coptic prototypes the foliage pattern on the Bewcastle cross where the scrolls interlace,<sup>2</sup> and he concludes : “I am entirely satisfied that the Ruthwell cross is a seventh-century monument, and I believe that its art types were derived from Coptic sources.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, 236.

<sup>2</sup> See Dalton, fig. 27 and figs. 22, 23, 24, and 25 for single scrolls.

<sup>3</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, xxi, 146.

Another piece of notable evidence in this behalf is to be found in the very singular fact that among the unusual incidents figured on the Ruthwell cross one represents the meeting of the two anchorites, Paul and Anthony, in the Egyptian desert.<sup>1</sup>

Another proof of the early date of these crosses is deducible from the forms of the letters in those cases where the inscriptions not written in runes are set out. On this Mr. Lethaby has some very useful remarks. He says that the pure alphabet in which the Latin inscriptions are written is in an Irish form of script. They resemble those on the early grave-slabs found at Hartlepool, and are of a character entirely different from the inscribed dedication-stone of the church at Jarrow, a work of the Roman school. The Ruthwell inscription is certainly in the Celtic tradition.<sup>2</sup> On the same subject, Mr. Lethaby writes elsewhere: "At my suggestion, Miss D. Moxon, of the Royal College of Art, made some time ago a close study of the alphabet of the Latin inscription, and this she allows me to reproduce. . . There can be no doubt that the result gives us a semi-Irish hand such as was in use in Northumbria about the year 700. The X, for instance, is like the famous great X of the Book of Kells. . . I would point out one rather remarkable coincidence regarding the contractions IHS. XPS. On the Ruthwell cross the Greek H is improperly represented by the letter h. Now on the Gospels from Bobbio in the National Library at Turin the letters are rendered in exactly the same way, I h S."<sup>3</sup> Again he says: "A curious form of & occurs on the Ruthwell cross, and a somewhat similar symbol for it is common in Saxon and Irish manuscripts, including the Book of Kells."<sup>4</sup> In a later paper Mr. Lethaby adds: "I should now like to make the correction that the sign for & is much more like that found in Irish manuscripts than was shown. . . . A similar symbol is found on the Welsh cross at Caldey island, and on a Cornish cross at Lanherne."<sup>5</sup>

Turning from the inscriptions in Romano-Irish letters to those written in runes, about which there has also been

<sup>1</sup> See Lethaby, *Archaeol. Journ.* lxx, 145 and 146.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* 147.

<sup>3</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, xxi, 145.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* xxiii, 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Archaeol. Journ.* lxx, 147, note.

some mystification, the evidence seems to me to entirely confirm the other facts here adduced. In the first place, it is a strong argument in favour of the early date for the Ruthwell cross that so long an inscription should have been written at all in runes and not in Roman letters, which superseded them at an early date even on the crosses. The runes used in this country were of two series, an early series known as English runes and a later one which was especially developed in Scandinavia, and was used in England by the Danes and Norwegians of a later date. They differ from each other in details rather than substantially. It has been argued that in the case of these crosses some of the runes point to a later date for the inscriptions than the seventh century.






That the runes on the crosses I am discussing are English runes and do not belong to the Scandinavian series is beyond doubt. Long ago Dr. Duncan, in his memoir on the Ruthwell cross in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, written in 1845, said: "The runes are not Danish, but Anglo-Saxon, a discovery which seems to have been made by Grim, which establishes that the date must be sought for during the Heptarchy. . . . Repp has discovered that the runic alphabet is widely different from that employed by the Danes."

The only reasonable objections which have been made to the conclusions here urged were raised by Professor Baldwin Brown, who otherwise agrees with the view that the crosses are of the earliest type. Speaking of the cross-head at Ruthwell, he says that he has not been able to find any cross-heads so like the Ruthwell example of earlier date than examples from Rothbury, Northumberland, and others built into the Norman walling of the chapter-house at Durham, and dated by their position between the years 1000 and 1083. In regard to this, Mr. Lethaby says conclusively: "The cross-head has been falsified in restoration; the second curve in the lower arm had no existence before the cross was broken."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Brown also urges that two of the runes in the inscription are of a later date. In regard to this we must remember that the Ruthwell cross inscription is by far

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeol. Journ.* lxx, 155.

the longest one we know written in English runes. If we exclude it we have very few inscriptions extant, and these short and unimportant, belonging to the earlier time. Under these circumstances it would be very rash to base a wide induction which would be at issue with all the other evidence we possess on negative testimony. As Mr. Lethaby says: "The inscriptions are so few that a complete alphabet cannot be made up from them. Now it happens that the need for the particular runic letters which are objected to does not, I believe, occur at all in the short series, so that it is impossible to say they would not have been used."<sup>1</sup>

To this I would add that the two characters in question, answering to G and K, are  and , and neither of them occurs among the Scandinavian runes. Stephens, in his vast corpus of runic inscriptions, has analysed the usage of the runic characters very minutely, and tells us that among the old Northern runes, by which he means those older than the Viking times, there are only two forms of the rune for K, one  on the Ruthwell cross, and  on the Bewcastle cross, showing that the former is a mere variant. This is still more clear from the fact that on the Ruthwell cross itself  also occurs as a variant of the same letter.

In regard to the other rune which stands for G, I can only find it twice among the hundred inscriptions described by Stephens. In the table in vol i, p. 125, of his great work may be seen, however, quite a number of variants of this letter closely allied to this form, showing that it is a mere accidental variety. It is clear, therefore, that any argument based on these two accidental runes must be a very fragile one, and hardly weighs in the balance at all compared with the mass of evidence on the other side.

This concludes my analysis of the dates of the great crosses at Bewcastle, Ruthwell and Abercorn; and I claim to have shown that the criticisms of foreigners on the dates and artistic ties of these domestic monuments of ours do not in any way affect or qualify the otherwise conclusive date continuously assigned to them by a whole catena of expert English antiquaries.

<sup>1</sup>*Archaeol. Journ.* 156.