

## I.—TWO CARVED STONES AT MONKWEARMOUTH.

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The collection of carved and worked stones, formerly built into the wall of the vestry at Monkwearmouth, have recently been taken out and dried and are now exhibited in cases in the north aisle. It has thus been possible to examine properly the individual stones and the intention of the present paper is to consider the origin, date and purpose of the two stones carved with lions which form part of the collection.

It will be well to start by giving an account of the objects as they stand.

(a) A block of stone (Plate I, *a*)  $23\frac{1}{2}$  in. long by  $16\frac{1}{4}$  in. high and  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in. thick, has a finished surface on the sculptured or left-hand side and on the front, and rough tooling only on the right side, top and back. The carving extends round the left side and the front and represents a standing lion with a heavily modelled tail over its back and the head turned to the right behind the shaft of a short colonette, with a rough capital and base, on the left front angle of the stone. The carving at the side is in flat relief, but the averted head is partly in the round, the face of the front of the stone being cut back in a segmental form, rendering this semi-detachment possible.

(b) A block of stone (Plate I, *b*)  $22\frac{1}{2}$  in. long by 15 in. high and  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in. thick, has, like (*a*), a finished surface only on the carved left-hand side and the front end. The carving represents a standing lion with the mane rendered by a series of parallel bands of scorings; the tail, as on the other stone, is heavily modelled, but has been largely broken away; the head of the lion is turned horizontally to the left and has the

jaws open. The front feet are set side by side and have somewhat grossly rendered paws. There is no angle-colonette on this stone and the front is framed in a plain margin at the top, bottom and right-hand side.

There can, I think, be little doubt that these two carved stones formed the enclosures beneath the slab of a stone bench or seat as the rough dressing of the right face and top in each case indicate that they butted against masonry and that a slab or a second stone stood on the top of them. It is notable that both stones are left-hand ends and consequently that they do not belong to the same seat or bench and that the two right-hand ends have thus been destroyed. It will be well to consider the matter from three aspects:

- (a) the probable date of the stones, as this necessarily controls the purpose to which they were put;
- (b) the cognate objects in England which have survived; and
- (c) the Continental background.

In regard to the first point it will be well to recall that the early monastery at Monkwearmouth<sup>1</sup> was founded about 674 and destroyed by the Danes in or about 890. Except for the short interval in which it was revived<sup>2</sup> (1076-83) it remained only a parish church, as it was presumably patched up and so used between 785 and 1075. It should also be remembered that Wearmouth was the more important of the twin monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow in the early period. The necessary corollary of this historical background is that the making of these carved bench-ends is extremely unlikely to have taken place, after the devastation of the monastery, at any period except during the short revival (seven years) towards the end of the eleventh century. We may, I think with reason, rule out, also, this short period, of

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Historia Abbatum* (Plummer's edition of Bede), I, p. 364 *et seq.* *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica Majora* (Rolls series), I, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> Symeon of Durham (Rolls series), I, pp. 112-13, and D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 1949, p. 168.

which we know the circumstances and in which a struggling and very small community had little opportunity for ornamental work of this nature. The character of the work, furthermore, fits ill with the known work of that period, such as can be studied in the stark contemporary buildings at Jarrow. We are thus compelled, almost without alternative, to assign these carvings to the period of the two centuries of the early monastery.

Their purpose in such a monastery can hardly be open to serious doubt. We do not know the form of the east end of the church of Wearmouth at this period and it is idle to speculate as to whether it was apsidal or square-ended. It is, however, reasonably certain that it had, set behind the main altar, the then usual arrangement of presbyters' benches and a throne for the abbot in the middle. This last would certainly be raised above the benches for the rest of the community, in a manner still to be seen in many Italian churches. It would thus seem probable that, of the two surviving bench-ends, one (probably (a)) formed the end of the presbyters' bench on the north side and that the other (probably (b)) formed part of the bench-end of the abbot's seat. We may suppose that both were capped by the slab of the bench or the seat itself and that both had arm-rests, curved or flat-topped above the bench and that the abbot's seat had perhaps a back-piece. The hollowed front of stone (a) continues to the right edge of the slab and it is likely that this hollow face was continued along the rest of the bench. It would thus seem that the corresponding bench- or seat-ends on the south side are both missing, together with all the elbow-rests and the functioning part of the abbot's seat.

Turning now to the surviving English objects serving a like purpose: there are only two that may claim to be pre-Conquest in date and these are the stools at Hexham and Beverley. The one at Hexham<sup>3</sup> is clearly of the period of

<sup>3</sup> Illustrated in *The Builder*, April 1st, 1899, and hence in G. Baldwin Brown, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 2nd edition, 1925, p. 178, also Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture*, 1, plate 30.

St. Wilfred or soon after and was no doubt the bishop's stool. It is cut out of one stone and has linear ornament on the front and left side, the right side having been cut back. The seat has a rounded back and on the top surface are panels with interlacement. The seat at Beverley is of similar form but is in one stone with its support and is without ornament of any sort. Poulson describes it in 1829<sup>4</sup> as "hewn out of a solid stone with a hollow back; it has been broken, but repaired with iron cramps". The seat at Hexham is ancient only as regards the monolithic seat itself and there is now no evidence as to what was the form of the supports below the arms, which would have corresponded with the stones at Wearmouth. The arrangement of the bishop's seat in the middle of the apse is perpetuated at Norwich Cathedral and there is no reason to suppose that the existing seat there does not represent the throne set up for Bishop Herbert Losinga at the end of the eleventh century.

The crucial evidence as to the origin and purpose of the stones at Wearmouth is to be found, not unexpectedly, on the Continent. The stone seats or thrones still existing in Italy are sufficiently numerous to show the forms and ornament adopted from the late antique to the Middle Age.<sup>5</sup> Thus at S. Gregorio, Rome, is a late antique stone chair with winged beasts at the sides and a sculptured back. At S. Ambrogio, Milan, is a chair, with lions on the arm-rests and panels of interlacement, which would seem to date from the tenth century. Later Italian chairs appear to have more and more adopted the practice of placing the actual seat on the backs of a pair of beasts, generally lions. Such still exist at S. Zeno, Verona (twelfth century), Monte S. Angelo (twelfth century), Anagni and SS. Nereo e Achilleo, Rome (thirteenth century) and elsewhere. To find the closest

<sup>4</sup> G. Poulson, *History of Beverley*, II, p. 687. It is illustrated in H. D. Traill, *Social England*, I, p. 427.

<sup>5</sup> Rohaut de Fleury, *La Messe*, II, plates 146 to 168. For Monte S. Angelo see E. Bertaux, *L'art dans L'Italie Meridionale*, p. 449.

parallel to the Wearmouth stones, however, it is necessary to go to southern Germany. Here there survive two stone thrones, one at S. Emmeran at Regensburg (fig. 1) and the other at the Cathedral of Augsburg. The first is dated by Joseph Braun<sup>6</sup> to a period before 972; the other is evidently later. In both cases the seat is supported by a pair of lions and at S. Emmeran they resemble very closely the form and treatment of the lion on stone (b) at Wearmouth. At Wearmouth the lion is

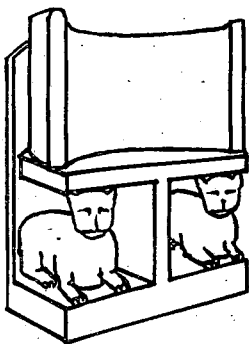


FIG. 1.

framed in a flat surrounding fillet on three sides and at Regensburg precisely the same treatment is adopted except that the compartments containing the lions are considerably wider than those at Wearmouth so that only a single vertical fillet is necessary to divide them. The division serves also

as a central support to the seat, whereas at Wearmouth there must have been a third compartment or panel in the middle. It would thus seem that if the lions of stone (b) were duplicated and something in the nature of the Frithstool at Hexham were set upon their backs (fig. 2), the abbot's seat would, in all its essentials, bear

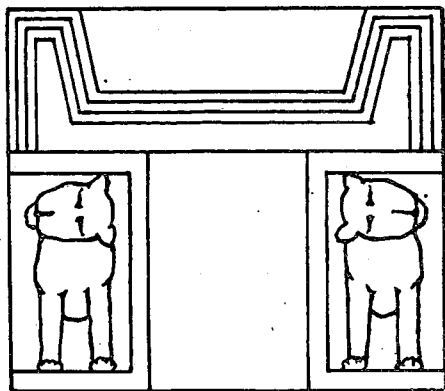


FIG. 2.

so very close a resemblance to the "stool" at Regensburg as

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Braun, S.J., on "Bischofstuhl" in O. Schmitt, *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, II, 1948, pp. 810-11. The Augsburg throne is illustrated in *Reliquary and Ill. Arch.*, N.S., XII, p. 208.

to leave no doubt as to its completed form and the purpose to which it was put.

As to stone (a) at Wearmouth it is less easy to adduce a still existing enriched bench-end to the presbyters' bench. One, however, does survive at S. Appolinare in Classe Ravenua<sup>7</sup> (c. 688-706), but here the ornament is purely conventional with the name of the then bishop, but no carving.

We can thus assume, with entire confidence, that the stones carved with lions at Wearmouth formed the sub-structures or supports of the abbot's stall and the bench-end of presbyters' bench in or round the east end of the monastic church there, before the destruction of the monastery by the Danes about 890.

<sup>7</sup> Rohaut de Fleury, *op. cit.*, II, plate 157.



STONE B.



STONE A.

CARVED STONES AT MONKWEARMOUTH.

