

## CHAPTER VII

### FIGURAL IMAGERY

Figural carving is as rare on sculptures in western Wessex as elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon England, and indeed is more limited in its range than in Mercia and Northumbria in the pre-Viking Age. Despite the often quoted account of the 'pyramids' at Glastonbury (see Chapter V, p. 33), on which William of Malmesbury describes individual figures with inscriptions in terms which are reminiscent of the figure panels on the Bewcastle and Ruthwell crosses (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ills. 90, 94–6; Cassidy 1992, pls. 11–26), there is little which can with confidence be dated to the pre-tenth century. Nevertheless in the later period of the tenth and eleventh centuries there are large-scale figures with high quality carving, which are some of the most impressive monuments from Anglo-Saxon England.

The smaller-scale carvings depicting the life and miracles of Christ which are to be found on cross-shafts in Northumbria and Mercia (see Hawkes 2003, 365–8 for a listing) are not found here, with the possible exception of the enigmatic fragment of a scene on Avebury 1, Wiltshire (p. 200, ills. 393–4). The only other figure which has been dated in this volume to the late eighth/early ninth century is the single portrait figure on the shaft from Codford St Peter, again in Wiltshire (p. 209, ills. 425–6). This has been interpreted as a secular figure probably picking grapes, an interpretation which is supported by the informal dress and the likeness to a figure on a strap-end from Cranborne Chase in Dorset (see Ill. 539). The interpretation of the figure favoured here however is of King David, and although there are few figures from the Old Testament depicted on Anglo-Saxon sculptures, illustrations from the life of David do occur, as indeed they do also on Pictish and Irish crosses (Henderson 1986; id. 1998, 120–34). David as the psalmist and the progenitor of Christ's earthly lineage is commonly depicted in psalters and, most relevantly for Southumbrian art, in the series of paintings which survive from the eighth-century Vespasian Psalter (Wright 1967, 68–79, *frontispicæ*, pl. IIa–b; and see Ill. 527), with which the Codford shaft has some artistic parallels.

With the exception of the anonymous figures on the Yetminster shaft, Dorset (p. 127, ills. 153–8), and the horseman on the cross at Copplestone in Devon (p. 82,

Ill. 12), all of the rest of the sculptures seem to have decorated the interior of churches: some are individual panels such as the Bristol Christ (p. 145, Ill. 198), others were perhaps part of larger 'friezes' like the Inglesham Virgin and Child (p. 217, Ill. 453), or the figure of St Peter on the 'Dowlsh Wake' panel (Unknown Provenance 1, p. 189, Ill. 380). It is interesting that in both of these cases the figures are named and this could be because they were once associated with other figures, but alternatively the *titulus* could have been part of the iconography of the sculptor's model. Richard Gameson has explored at length the use of inscriptions with images in later Saxon art in various media (1995, 70–104) and concludes that these simple *tituli* had a long lineage in Christian art, and that 'such inscriptions had taken on a role akin to that of a pictorial attribute of the subject' (ibid., 91).

Like icons, these sculptures focused the devotion of the beholder. They may have played a part as stations in the reformed liturgy of the church, but their prayerful contemplation by individuals could have encouraged a deeper understanding of the basic tenets of the faith.

#### CHRIST

##### VIRGIN AND CHILD

The major events in the life of Christ are only partially represented. Indeed the narrative scenes of the Annunciation, Visitation, Presentation at the Temple and the Adoration of the Magi which occur in eighth/ninth century Northumbrian and Midlands art, as mentioned above, are missing from Wessex art of that period. But as a child held in the arms of the Virgin he is represented twice in this region: on the panels at Inglesham, Wiltshire (p. 217, Ill. 453) and Langridge, Somerset (p. 169, Ill. 305), and arguably the devotional focus here is to the Virgin as mother of God. This was the primary Christological image and the commonest in Anglo-Saxon art, from the seventh-century Cuthbert Coffin onwards (Kitzinger 1956, pl. IV, fig. 4a). In the period of the Benedictine reforms there was however a great revival

of interest in and devotion to Mary which is demonstrated not only in art but in increased emphasis on her role in the liturgy, private prayers and church dedications (Clayton 1990). As Clayton says, 'In the Benedictine reform period the ardent Marian piety which is evident in so many of the artistic monuments is of a piece with all the other witnesses which testify to the Marian enthusiasm of the south of England' (ibid., 178). The two images which survive in this region have some similarity in that the Child is seated across the Virgin's left knee, his right hand held up in blessing, his left holding a book, and the faces of both are turned to the spectator. At Inglesham the Virgin is clasping him with both hands and her body is turned towards him, while she looks at the spectator (Ill. 453). This pose has been seen by Raw (1966, 46) as related to the type of images in the Book of Kells (Alexander 1978, ill. 233) and the Cuthbert Coffin (Wilson 1984, ill. 43), and certainly there are similarities, and the pose is dissimilar to the other depictions of this scene in Northumbria and Mercia. Although Hawkes, in an extensive discussion of this iconography, compares Inglesham most closely with a worn carving from St Alkmund's, Derby (Hawkes 1997, 108, 116), it is difficult to equate the details of the two sculptures (see Routh 1937, pl. XIIIa; Radford 1976, pl. 9a). The Inglesham Virgin is unusually without a halo and is tenderly subordinated to the Child who leans slightly towards her (compare the copper-alloy casting from York: Zarnecki *et al.* 1984, 238, no. 227). At Langridge however the Virgin and Child both look outwards, more divorced from each other (Ill. 305), and the importance of the Virgin in her own right as mediator and queen of heaven is emphasised by her upraised hand, in the manner of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, ivory where the Virgin and Child are supported in a mandorla by angels (Clayton 1990, pl. XV).

#### CRUCIFIXION AND REDEMPTION

The central act of Christ's life, the Crucifixion, is in eastern Wessex recorded on large-scale roods of the type found in the Winchester diocese, for example at Breamore, Headbourne Worthy, or Romsey (see Tweddle *et al.* 1995, 73–9). These have not survived in this region although they must have existed on a similarly large scale, as the fragmentary *suppedaneum* with the feet at Muchelney, Somerset (p. 171, Ills. 306–8), or the attendant angels at Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire (p. 203, Ills. 404–6) demonstrate. The active involvement of angels in scenes from the life of Christ is typical of this later period of art and is discussed below (p. 59).

From an early period the Crucifixion, Redemption and

Judgement were linked in exegesis and art, as is apparent in the symbolism of the Lamb as an icon of Christ. The practice of representing Christ in the symbolic form of a lamb can derive from the words of John the Baptist, 'Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world' (John 1.29), thus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 53.7. The words of the Mass at the consecration continue to remind the faithful of the body of Christ sacrificed on the cross and the enduring eucharistic significance. But this overlaps also with the apocalyptic imagery of the Lamb who stands on the throne amongst the four beasts (Revelation 5.6, 7, 12). The interest in imagery of the Lamb, particularly in its apocalyptic role, is evident in late Saxon art in other media, such as an ivory reliquary cross (Raw 1967, pl. 45b) or an Anglo-Saxon portable altar now in the Musée de Cluny (Okasha and O'Reilly 1984, 39–44, pl. 15b). The same fusion of crucifixion and apocalyptic imagery is also perhaps implicit on the grave-cover from Ramsbury, Wiltshire, where the much mutilated, haloed Lamb is set in the centre of the cross (no. 6, Ills. 509–10). Nevertheless if the winged creatures surrounding the cross are to be interpreted as the symbols of the evangelists (see catalogue entry, p. 232), then this can be the Lamb who appears on the Day of Judgement. Similarly there is a possibility that the fragment of a tenth-century cross-head from Bath (no. 9), where there is probably an eagle figure (p. 143, Ills. 190–2), could also have depicted an apocalyptic scene.

Late Saxon manuscript art demonstrated a pre-occupation with the Day of Judgement and the events which preceded it, in the fall of the angels, the entry of sin into the world and the redemption through the Cross, the harrowing of Hell. 'The cross-staff held by Christ is a standard attribute of the risen Christ and reminds the viewer of his death and the salvation which flowed from it' (Raw 1997, 133), and he appears holding a cross-staff in manuscript depictions of the Last Judgment and the Second Coming, as early as the eighth century in Insular manuscripts like the St Gall Codex 51, p. 267 or the Turin Gospels, Cod. O.IV.20, fol. 2a (Alexander 1978, Ills. 206 and 280). The most notable figure from this area in sculpture is on the Bristol slab (p. 145, Ill. 198), where the risen Christ grips the cross-staff in his right hand, raising the souls from the mouth of Hell with his left, whilst Satan is crushed beneath his feet. Christ also holds the cross-staff on the Congresbury carvings, Somerset (p. 149, Ills. 208, 220), and here also is a larger figure (Ill. 218) which could represent other persons of the Trinity such as are depicted in the Sherborne Pontifical (Temple 1976, no. 35). If this were a depiction of the Holy Spirit or the Father this would be in keeping with the devotion

of the time. As Barbara Raw has stated, '... the tenth and eleventh centuries saw a striking development in devotion to the Trinity in both public and private prayer, in church dedications, and, at least in England, in art and preaching' (Raw 1997, 10). This is manifest not only in the writings of Ælfric or in manuscripts such as BL MS Harley 603, fol. 1r (ibid., 139–42, pl. XVa; Temple 1976, ill. 210) but also in more lay contexts such as Godwine's seal (Wilson 1984, ills. 267–8). In sculpture, the figure on fragment (b) at Congresbury has been tentatively identified in the catalogue entry as God the Holy Spirit or God the Father (p. 151, Ill. 218).

These iconic depictions of Christ are obviously only a remnant of what once existed, and the surviving angels point to spaces which could be filled by depictions of Christ. It is generally assumed that the Bradford angels (Ils. 404–6) attended a Crucifixion, whilst the Winterbourne Steepleton angel (Ils. 149–52) more plausibly attended an enthroned Christ, either in a Judgement or possibly in an Ascension scene (see catalogue, pp. 125, 203, and below - Angels).

## SAINTS

### ST PETER

St Peter, as the prince of the apostles, gate-keeper of heaven, close companion of Christ, as well as the founder of the church in Rome, is commonly depicted in Anglo-Saxon art from the seventh-century coffin of St Cuthbert onwards. Indeed John Higgitt in a detailed analysis of the iconography of St Peter has suggested that the beardless, tonsured figure on the coffin is a specifically Anglo-Saxon type, invented perhaps by the 'Roman party' in the Anglo-Saxon church and persisting as the preferred image throughout the pre-Conquest period (Higgitt 1989). As Higgitt says, 'The "Anglo-Saxon" type re-emerges vigorously in southern English manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the earliest instance being in the Athelstan Psalter ... The iconography was taken up enthusiastically by artists of the period of the Monastic Reform' (ibid., 282). Most of the examples he quotes are from manuscript depictions, and he comments that, 'Given the importance of St Peter for the English church it is surprising that he does not seem to have appeared very often in Anglo-Saxon sculpture' (ibid., 281). The few examples which Higgitt could then identify are from Northumbria or Mercia, but the recent discovery of the Congresbury and 'Dowlish Wake' (Unknown Provenance 1) carvings have now provided striking images of the same type from Wessex sculpture.

It is true that the tonsured figure on the Congresbury column may be seen as having a shadowy beard (Ill. 219), but this is not the bushy beard of so many Continental depictions and seems to be a stylistic device. The figure on the 'Dowlish Wake' panel is inscribed 'Peter' (p. 189, IIs. 379–80), and although there is a remote possibility that this is Peter the Deacon, it fits the Anglo-Saxon type of St Peter, the apostle.

### OTHER FIGURES

There are no other identifiable depictions of saints in this area, although the tonsured figure on the Congresbury column has been identified elsewhere as possibly St Cyngar (Oakes and Costen 2003, 303–4), and the shadows of figures on the Wells 4 font may have represented apostles or saints (p. 177, IIs. 329–34, 337–8). The strange little figures under arches, in a very different style, on the Yetminster shaft (p. 127, IIs. 153–8) might have been intended as ecclesiastics, and there is a tentative, although not very convincing, interpretation of the crude figure at Buckland Newton, also in Dorset, as St Paul (see p. 97, Ill. 52). In both of these sculptures it is noteworthy that the heads of the figures are most specifically depicted, and this emphasis on the head is to be seen in its most extreme form in the grotesque head without a body at Dolton in Devonshire (p. 83, Ill. 20).

## ANGELS

Angels are widely depicted in Anglo-Saxon sculpture (for a listing of occurrences in pre-Viking Age monuments in kingdoms other than Wessex, see Hawkes 2003, 366). In West Saxon manuscripts and sculptures, angels are particularly popular in the later period, and there are in this area some outstanding large-scale carvings of angels, of a type which has not occurred in the publications of the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture previously. This prompts some consideration of their history and significance.

Genesis is silent about the creation of angels, and in early days Neoplatonists and Gnostics could understand spirits — angels — as uncreated, even participating in creation (Keck 1998, 13); but at the Council of Nicea in AD 325 the bishops declared God as 'creator of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible' (ibid., 17–18). Angels were however envisaged as created before men, and the first biblical reference to angels is to the cherubim who with flaming sword guarded the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3.24). From Jewish Apocalyptic literature Christianity received the assertion that angels

were organised into hierarchies (e.g. I Enoch 61.10). Pseudo-Dionysius (*floruit* c. 500), on the basis of scripture, divided the hierarchy into three groups: (1) seraphim, cherubim, thrones; (2) dominions, virtues, powers; (3) principalities, archangels, and angels (Neck 1998, 57); and this seems to have been widely accepted. A small group of the order of archangels were specially privileged to stand before God (Tobit 12.15) and to be responsible for the lesser hosts, and the archangels are the only order which includes named biblical figures: Michael — he who is as God; Gabriel — fortitude or power of God; Raphael — medicine of God. These three with the addition of Sariel/Uriel appear most often in Jewish and Christian literature, but there is an expanded list of seven archangels in I Enoch 10: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel.

Despite the early condemnation of the naming of angels, other than those identified by name in the Bible, knowledge and the use of the longer list continued in Insular art, for example in the litany of archangels on the Cuthbert Coffin (Kitzinger 1956, 273–7, pls. IX and X), and as Richard Bailey has recently discussed in relation to the angel panel from Deerhurst in Gloucestershire, the extended list of names can be found in western Mercian manuscripts which have been dated to the ninth century (2005, 13–14). Nevertheless, although the names of seven or sometimes six archangels continued to be invoked in popular prayers, the biblical trio of Gabriel, Raphael and Michael are the norm and most commonly represented after the ninth century.

Although in Old English texts, as in scripture, angels could appear as men (see for example the *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert*, ch. IV; Colgrave 1940, 66–9), in all the sculptural depictions the angels are winged, and this, as in art elsewhere, served to distinguish them from Christ or the saints.

Angels have a special place in the liturgy and prayers of the church, in which man and angels participated in the worship of God. As Mayr-Harting pointed out, ‘Every prayer in the Common of the Mass, not excluding the cry for mercy, is an angelic prayer, and the latest of these mass prayers is eighth century (Mayr-Harting 1998, 14).

A consciousness of the presence of angels in the church was obviously widespread throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Alcuin wrote to the monks of Wearmouth/Jarrow: ‘It is reported that our master and your patron, blessed Bede said, “Know the angels visit the canonical hours and the fraternal congregations; what if they do not find me there among the brothers? Will they not have to say “Where is Bede, why has he not come to the appointed prayers with his brothers?”’ (Letter 284: Dümmler 1895, 443). In a more secular context, as Raw

points out (1990, 122), ‘the presence of angels in the church was noted in the Anglo-Saxon law-codes’ (e.g. Thorpe 1840, II, 408; Liebermann 1903–16, I, 284).

Barbara Raw, in discussing the presence of angels and the eucharistic iconography of the Crucifixion illustrations in the Sherborne Pontifical and the Arenberg Gospels (1990, 119–23, pls. I and II), has concluded: ‘The angels, like the chalice, connect the historical event of Christ’s death to its commemoration in the mass’ (ibid., 120). This connection could well account for the presence and positioning of the angels alongside the chancel arch at Bradford-on-Avon. In Insular art of the eighth century, angels flank the crucified Christ (for example in Durham Cathedral MS A.II.10, fol. 38v, or the St Gall Codex 51: Henderson 1987, figs. 114–18), facing outwards above the cross-arms, and their solemn static presence is worthy of comment because in the early Church angels were seen as aghast and puzzled at the event: in the Pseudo-Chrysostom, ‘the ranks of bodiless angels shuddered’ (Raw 1990, 120–1, n. 62). A passage in the Syrian liturgy names the angels grieving at Christ’s death as Michael and Gabriel, and sometimes also in Byzantine art the angels on either side of the cross are labelled with their names (ibid., 121). But on the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon portable altar in the Musée de Cluny, Paris, the attendant angels who stand below Mary and John at the Crucifixion are labelled Gabriel and Raphael (Backhouse *et al.* 1984, 92–3, cat. 76). Raphael, whose name can signify healing as well as the bitterness of death, is probably more apposite here than the militant Michael. But none of the carved angels in the area covered by this volume is labelled, and unfortunately the Winterbourne Steepleton inscription (no. 2, p. 126, Ills. 147–8) is too fragmentary to determine whether this related to the angel carving or not.

Angels participated in judgement of the individual soul, and on an eighth/ninth century cross from Halton in Lancashire an anonymous angel is holding an open book whilst a small penitent kneels at his feet (Cramp 1970, Taf. 48, 2); and on cross-heads in Derbyshire, such as Eyam (Routh 1937, pl. XIV; see Ill. 542), angels accompany the figure of Christ at his Second Coming, sometimes blowing trumpets. These small narrative scenes, like the depictions of Gabriel at the Annunciation, are not found in this region where the large-scale carvings of individual angels are the norm.

One of the most interesting carvings is the mutilated panel at Stinsford, Dorset (p. 113, Ill. 100), showing St Michael spearing the dragon, since this is one of the earliest depictions of this scene in English sculpture, although an armed figure of Michael is found on the Newent slab in Gloucestershire where the crucifixion,

redemption and judgement are all juxtaposed (Zarnecki 1953c, 53, pl. IV).

Michael was a significant figure in the early church (Hannah 1999), and the warning of St Paul in Colossians 2.18 about worship of angels is pertinent here, since devotion to Michael even threatened the supremacy of Christ, whilst by some Christ himself was thought of as an angel. Later, as noted above, Michael has a similar position to the other archangels in the early Middle Ages, but between *c.* 950 and 1050 his role became more prominent, plausibly because there was a widespread interest in the Apocalypse around the millennium. In the Apocalypse, Michael and his angels overcome the dragon, 'that old serpent who is called the devil and Satan' (Revelation 12.7–9). But this is not the conclusive defeat of Satan; this comes with the victory of the Lamb on the cross and the harrowing of Hell. On the Stinsford slab Michael is shown in the act of slaying the dragon (Ill. 100), but on the Bristol slab it is Christ who grinds Satan beneath his feet in the final surrender (Ill. 198). Nevertheless Michael by the eleventh century had taken

on something of the character of an individual saint or hero, and is depicted as a single figure not just at Stinsford, but also in manuscripts such as BL Cotton Tiberius C.VI, fol. 16 (Temple 1976, ill. 310). It may not be too fanciful to suppose that Michael the dragon slayer would have been a particularly attractive figure to those at Cnut's court who had been brought up on Germanic hero myths.

It is also possible that the revival of monastic life in England in the tenth and eleventh century fostered a more general interest in angels. There is an ancient tradition in which the religious life is seen in terms of the life of angels: 'In the angels above, the monks below discovered models of obedience, chastity, and love' (Brown 1982, 319; also Keck 1998, 117–20), and the reformed monasteries followed the Rule of St Benedict, who specifically linked angels with the religious life (chs. 7 and 19; Farmer 1968). The depiction of these heavenly beings in sculptures, and also in wall paintings such as Nether Wallop (Gem and Tudor-Craig 1981), could then have played a particularly significant part in the devotions of religious communities in late Saxon England.

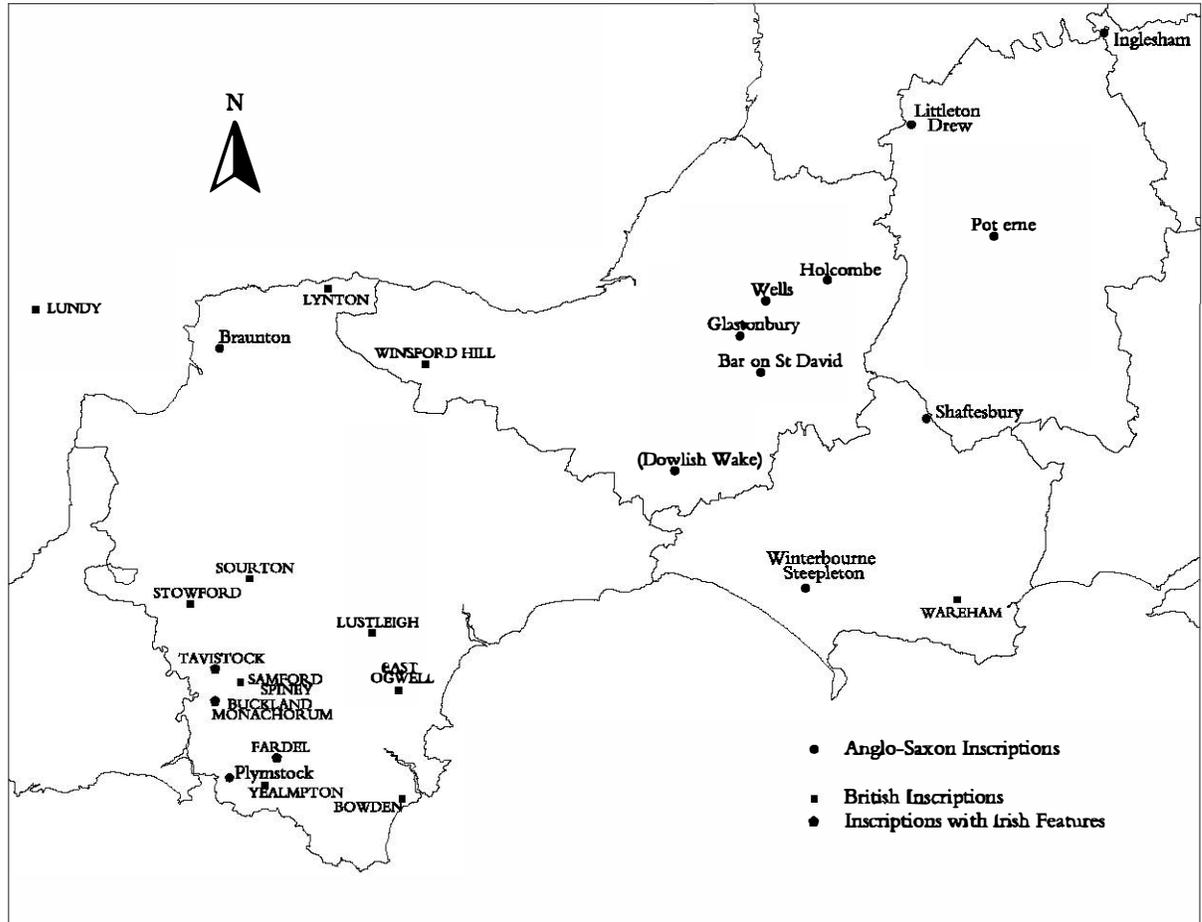


FIGURE 24  
Distribution of Anglo-Saxon and British inscriptions on stone in south-west England