

CROSS-CARPET PAGES AND MONUMENTAL STONE CROSSES  
THE SYMBOL OF THE CROSS IN INSULAR ART

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Art History  
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

June 1992

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An Abstract of the Thesis of  
Marian Bleeke for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of Art History to be taken June 1992

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The function performed by the Insular cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses, and the meaning these works of art carried within their original context, are the focus of this study. My examination indicates that the cross-carpet pages acted as interior book covers and carried the cross in order to protect the texts they enclosed. My analysis also demonstrates that the monumental stone crosses acted as the standard of the Christian faith and were put to a variety of uses within the Insular landscape. This thesis then proposes that it is the dual nature of the cross, as both the sign of Christ's victory and the instrument of his Passion, that informed the function and meaning of these two potent manifestations of the symbol of Christ. Finally, the duality of the cross is related to the western Church's understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human natures of Christ.

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## INTRODUCTION

The mid-sixth through mid-ninth centuries is an elusive yet fascinating period in the history of the British Isles. Most of England had been conquered by the Anglo-Saxons, who had divided the island into a number of small kingdoms. Christianity was new to them and was radically reshaping their culture. In addition, Irish Christians, who had long been isolated from the rest of Christendom, were reestablishing contact with Rome. The mix of pagan Anglo-Saxon culture with both Roman and Irish Christian influences gave birth to a wealthy and successful society, which then perished in the ninth century Viking raids. From among the remains of this rich culture, the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses have repeatedly drawn the attention of art historians. However, since the scholarship on these works of art has tended to focus on a single issue, many questions still remain concerning the cross-carpet pages and monumental crosses, and the culture responsible for their creation.

Initially, this study was to be concerned solely with the cross-carpet pages. However, it was subsequently molded by certain frustrations with the scholarship on these images. This scholarship has focused upon determining the precise date and provenance for each of the manuscripts which contain cross-carpet pages and on

using this information to debate whether they rightly belong to the artistic heritage of England or Ireland. Representing the Irish, or Celtic, partisans, Francoise Henry has written that considering the cross-carpet pages to be anything other than Irish "betrays a warped approach to the history of Northern England."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, T.D. Kendrick has written that the creation of the Lindisfarne Gospels, one of the manuscripts that contain these images, "took place...at a time when the Celtic Church had long since ceased to be influential in Northumbria, and no Celtic person...had anything to do with the making of the book."<sup>2</sup> This debate continues, although less heatedly, in the scholarship on monumental stone crosses. The research on these monuments is split between scholars who see the crosses in England as the products of Irish influence and those who are of the opinion that the English crosses are completely independent from the Irish monuments.<sup>3</sup> These debates are fueled by the scarcity of hard evidence about both cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses, which leaves room for varying interpretations of what evidence does exist. Furthermore, it is precisely this lack of evidence that will prevent these debates from ever being resolved and so makes them infertile ground in the search for a real understanding of these works of art.

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<sup>1</sup> Francoise Henry, Irish Art of the Early Christian Period (to 800 A.D.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 160.

<sup>2</sup> T.D. Kendrick, Anglo-Saxon Art to A.D. 900 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Bieler, "Ireland's Contribution to the Culture of Northumbria" in Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede, ed. Gerald Bommer (London: SPCK., 1976) 220-1. Henry, Irish Art, 131.

In the scholarship on cross-carpet pages, this debate has been so pervasive that choosing an identifying label for these images almost necessitates choosing one position or the other. Scholars who agree with Francoise Henry would label them as "Irish" or "Celtic," while T.D. Kendrick and others use "Anglo-Saxon." "Hiberno-Saxon" is one compromise term, however it still refers back to the main issues in the debate. In this study, "Insular" is used as the identifying term for both the cross-carpet pages and the monumental stone crosses. Simply meaning "of an island," this term circumvents entirely the issues that usually dominate research about these works of art.

Leaving aside the issues that have traditionally dominated the scholarship on Insular cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses necessitates striking a new path through the evidence regarding these works of art. It is towards this end that this project was expanded to include the stone monuments. The cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses share, aside from similar dates and provenances, the same dominant motif, the cross. Likewise, the written sources that survive from this period are replete with crosses. This study will use this written evidence to illuminate its discussion of the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses, with the goal of uncovering the meaning or meanings carried by these crosses.

To achieve its goal, this study will focus first upon the functions performed by the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses. To examine their functions, these works of art will

be considered within their original environments; the cross-carpet pages will be shown as integral parts of the manuscripts that contain them and the stone crosses as monuments deliberately inserted into the Insular landscape in order to be put to certain uses. It is assumed that the repeated, prominent use of the cross on both cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses was both deliberate and significant. Therefore, the reasons why the functions of these works of art would have been associated with the cross in particular will be examined. These reasons will then be shown to be manifestations of the specific meanings the cross carried in Insular culture. The emphasis placed, in this study, on the original functions and meanings of the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses, unlike the traditional scholarship's focus on date and provenance, will open new perspectives upon Insular culture.

## CHAPTER I

A survey of Insular art and literature cannot help but reveal the important position held by the cross in this vital, young culture. Crosses dominate the intricacies of the cross-carpet pages, the masterpieces of Insular manuscript illumination (Pl.1-6). The remains of monumental stone crosses recall mighty crosses that once dominated the landscape, silhouetted against the sky (Pl. 6-8, Fig.4-6). Lastly, surviving texts, from Saints' lives to vernacular poetry, record cross monuments that have not survived, as well as miracles performed by the power of the cross and legends surrounding the True Cross. It is the purpose of this paper to forge links between these various appearances of the cross in order to better understand the meaning of this symbol in the art of this culture. First, the functions of the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses will be examined. For these works of art were not created solely for their aesthetic appeal; each had a function to fulfill. Secondly, the reasons these functions were associated with the cross motif will be elucidated, in order to discover the meaning or meanings carried by the Insular crosses.

The cross-carpet pages, full page illustrations that carry the cross as their dominant motif, are found within elaborately embellished Gospel books, such as the Books of Durrow, Lindisfarne,

and Kells. These three luxury manuscripts, containing the texts of the four Gospels, were produced by monastic scribes in the late seventh through early ninth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The monks who produced these manuscripts lavished their time, energy and resources on embellishing the Gospel texts with elaborate illuminations, not only cross-carpet pages (Pl.1), but also other full page illustrations as well as decorated initials and display script (Fig.1-3). All of these illuminations share a distinctive style that emphasizes color, line, and intricate pattern; it is, in fact, the style of traditional metalwork transferred onto the manuscript page. These metalwork-style illuminations embellished the Gospel texts "as though with precious jewels,"<sup>2</sup> in order to express the sanctity of these texts. The Gospels were considered the most sacred of all Christian texts for "the subject of the Gospel narratives is Christ the Word made flesh," and so "the Gospels in a very particular sense imitated the presence of God among his people."<sup>3</sup> The cross-carpet pages and other illuminations insured that the appearance of these manuscripts "should be in keeping with the status of a book

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<sup>1</sup> The Lindisfarne Gospels is the most securely dated of the three manuscripts, for its production was associated with the elevation of St. Cuthbert in 698. The Book of Durrow is an earlier work, dated to c. 680, and the Book of Kells is the last of the three, dated to c. 800. See Janet Backhouse, The Lindisfarne Gospels (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981), 8, 10, 14. Francoise Henry, Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to 800 A.D.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 191. Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting: Book Illumination In The British Isles 600-800 (New York: Braziller, 1977), 35, 60, 108.

<sup>2</sup> Calkins, Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, From Durrow to Kells: The Insular Gospel-books 650-800. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 15.

enshrining the word of God."<sup>4</sup> However, the placement of the cross-carpet pages in relation to the Gospel texts and aspects of their formal design imply that the cross-carpet pages may have had a more specific function to fulfill, a function which may begin to reveal the meaning of the Insular crosses.

Other types of cross monuments, crosses forged from precious metals and monumental crosses inserted into the landscape, punctuated the history of Christianity in the Insular world. The first Anglo-Saxons to encounter Christian missionaries were immediately confronted with the cross, for the missionaries led by St. Augustine of Canterbury carried a silver cross when they first disembarked in the kingdom of Kent in 597. Sent from Rome to convert the pagan Angles and Saxons, these missionaries quickly established a church in Kent and soon began to send missionaries into the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. In 625 a mission led by Bishop Paulinus established a church in Northumbria, the northernmost Anglo-Saxon kingdom. However, this church had to be disbanded eight years later, when Northumbria was invaded, King Edwin of Northumbria was killed, and Bishop Paulinus had to flee to Kent with Queen Ethelberga, her children, and Edwin's gold cross.

A year later, Oswald, a son of Edwin's rival for the throne, repelled the invaders and became King of Northumbria. Before his decisive victory at the battle of Heavenfield, Oswald erected a large wooden cross on the battlefield. This was the first monumental cross raised on English soil. Oswald may have been continuing a

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<sup>4</sup>Backhouse, Lindisfarne, 22.

tradition of monumental crosses that he had learned from the men who had converted him to Christianity, the monks of the island monastery of Iona. The monks of Iona are known to have erected crosses to commemorate the founder of their community, St. Columba, and crosses still stand on Iona today (Fig.4).<sup>5</sup> As King of Northumbria, Oswald later sent to Iona for a mission to convert his kingdom and, in 635, Bishop Aidan arrived and established the island monastery of Lindisfarne as his episcopal see. Unfortunately, the monastery of Lindisfarne was destroyed by Vikings and no evidence survived to document whether the Lindisfarne monks also erected crosses. However, the fragments of crosses found at Hexham and York (Fig.5), as well as the cross shafts that survive at Ruthwell and Bewcastle (Pl. 7-9), show that the tradition of monumental crosses took root in Northumbria.

The monks Oswald invited into Northumbria and those who had converted him, were not affiliated with the Roman mission in Kent. Instead, the monks of Iona were representatives of what has become known as the Celtic Church. The result of missionary activity undertaken while Britain was still a Roman province, the Celtic Church had survived past the Anglo-Saxon invasions in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The practice of erecting monumental crosses may have been one of the unique traditions which developed within the Celtic Church while it was isolated from the rest of Christendom by the invasions. While isolated, the Celtic Church had

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<sup>5</sup>Adamnan, Life of St. Columba: Founder of Hy, trans. William Reeves (Llanerch: Llanerch Enterprises, 1874), 66, 129.

developed a unique structure based on powerful monasteries and had retained an old system for calculating the date of Easter which had been abandoned by the rest of the Church. The Northumbrian church continued the Celtic traditions of its founders for the first thirty years of its existence. Then, at the Synod of Whitby in 664, the Northumbrians abandoned the Celtic date for Easter.<sup>6</sup> Because Bishop Aidan's successor, Colman, and a group of Lindisfarne monks left Northumbria after the Synod, Whitby has been seen as marking a schism between the Celtic and Roman churches.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, if the practice of erecting monumental crosses was one the unique traditions of the Celtic Church, then it was one Celtic influence that survived in Northumbria even after Whitby. For the Ruthwell cross, the most famous of the Northumbrian monumental crosses, was not erected until one hundred to two hundred years after the Synod.

Certain scholars, such as Ludwig Bieler, are of the opinion that all of the Insular monumental crosses trace their roots to the influence of the Celtic Church.<sup>8</sup> However, other scholars, including Francoise Henry, hold that the monumental crosses in England are the result of an independant development.<sup>9</sup> Henry used the striking formal differences between the crosses found in England and those

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<sup>6</sup>Bede, History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin, 1968) 192.

<sup>7</sup>Fritz Saxl, "The Ruthwell Cross," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute 7 (1943), 6-7. Meyer Schapiro, "The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross," Art Bulletin 26 (1944), 240-3.

<sup>8</sup>Ludwig Bieler, "Ireland's Contribution to the Culture of Northumbria" in Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede, ed. Gerald Bommer (London: SPCK, 1976) 220-1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

in Ireland as evidence for the autonomy of the English crosses from Celtic influence. For example, English sculptors adopted an inhabited vine-scroll motif from Mediterranean models for their crosses (Fig.5), whereas the Irish preferred bosses and interlace motifs (Fig.6).<sup>10</sup> However, Henry's work on the relationship between the English and Irish crosses is concerned with tracing the formal development of this type of monument, which is not at issue in this paper. The two groups of crosses, despite their formal differences, can be shown to have served the same functions within their landscape settings. It is by investigating these functions that the meanings carried by the cross within the Insular milieu will be articulated.

Information concerning the functions performed by monumental crosses and records of cross monuments that have been destroyed over the centuries, such as the cross Oswald erected at Heavenfield, can be found in contemporary texts. One such text is Bede's History of the English Church and People, written in the first half of the eighth century. This historical work is most useful for information regarding those areas of the Insular world with which Bede was most familiar, the Kingdom of Northumbria and Insular monastic culture. Two Saint's lives also written by Bede, his Life of St. Cuthbert and Lives of the Abbots of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, provide additional information about the use of the cross within Insular monasteries. The Lives of the Abbots of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, actually a group life of the founders and leaders of the

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<sup>10</sup>Henry, Irish Art, 134, 146.

twin monasteries, can be used to demonstrate the use of the cross within communities that were never part of the Celtic Church, as can another Saint's life, Eddius Stephanus' Life of Wilfrid.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Bede's Life of St. Cuthbert includes records of the use of the cross within the Lindisfarne community, which was forced to form a synthesis between its Celtic heritage and the increasing influence of the Roman church.<sup>12</sup> In addition, because Cuthbert was deeply involved in the Church's pastoral mission among the laity, the Life of St. Cuthbert is also a unique source for information regarding the use of monumental crosses outside of the monasteries.

Additional information regarding the use of the cross within the Celtic community that founded Lindisfarne can be found in Adamnan's Life of St. Columba. St. Columba, who died in 597, was the founder and first Abbot of Iona. The ninth Abbot of that community, Adamnan, wrote this Life of his saintly predecessor some one hundred years after Columba's death.<sup>13</sup> Because Columba lived during the very formation of Insular Christian culture, this text can be used as a source of information about the use of the cross in this culture's infancy. However, since the accuracy of Adamnan's account may be called into question, this Life can also be seen as providing information about the use of the cross in Adamnan's own day.

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<sup>11</sup>J.F. Webb, "Introduction," In Lives of the Saints (New York: Penguin, 1965), 28.

<sup>12</sup>D.H. Farmer, "Introduction," in The Age of Bede. (New York: Penguin, 1965), 16.

<sup>13</sup>William Reeves, "Preface," in the Life of St. Columba: Founder of Hy, (Llanerch: Llanerch Enterprises, 1874), 17.

Although the Synod of Whitby did not mark an outright schism between Adamnan and Columba's Celtic Church and the Church in Northumbria, it did mark the beginning of a shift of power within the Northumbrian church away from monasteries like Lindisfarne and towards the cosmopolitan center of York. As a result of this power shift, York became a center of interest in the history of Insular cross monuments and the texts that record them. Indeed, when York became the seat of the second English archbishopric in 735, York Minster was embellished to suit its new status with a cross covered with precious metals for the new altar of St. Paul and a second new altar dedicated to the Cross. These embellishments were described, along with a full record of the apex of York's power, in Alcuin of York's historical poem, "The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York." Alcuin's account ends, however, just before the beginning of the end of the Insular era. The Vikings attacked Lindisfarne for the first time in 793 and this attack signaled the beginning of the Danish onslaught that was to change the course of history.<sup>14</sup>

Two other groups of texts provide still more information about the Insular conception of the cross. The first of these two groups is a pair of treatises on Holy Virgins, one in prose and the other in verse, written by Aldhelm, Bishop of Wessex. In these two treatises, Aldhelm chronicled the lives and virtues of male and female Virgins, both local saints and biblical personages. Among the anecdotes he included in these works are several legends about the use of the cross. Lastly, there are several poems in the Anglo-

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<sup>14</sup>D.J.V. Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age. (London: Longman, 1973), 145-9.

Saxon vernacular which recount biblical stories and other legends about the cross. The *Dream of the Rood* retells the crucifixion, *Elene* relates the legend of the discovery of the relic of the True Cross by St. Helena, and a section of *Christ* explicates the vision of the cross that was expected to appear on Judgment Day. The characterization of the cross within these poems provides some of the best direct evidence for the meaning of the cross within Insular culture.

From imposing stone monuments to an apocalyptic vision in a powerful poem, the image of the cross dominates the artistic and literary remains of Insular Christian culture. While the cross-carpet pages dazzle the eyes, the historical sources record crosses that have disappeared over the centuries and the functions cross monuments once fulfilled. These texts also record the many miracles said to have been performed by the power of the cross, which provide important evidence for the function of the cross-carpet pages. The use of the cross as an important symbol lasted long past the end of the Insular era and continues even today. Because the sign of the cross is still used in our times, it is easy to assume that the meaning of this symbol is generally understood. Indeed, it may seem unnecessary to inquire after the meaning of the cross. Nevertheless, this study will reveal an unexpected richness behind the images of the cross in Insular art and in doing so will deepen our understanding of Insular Christian culture.

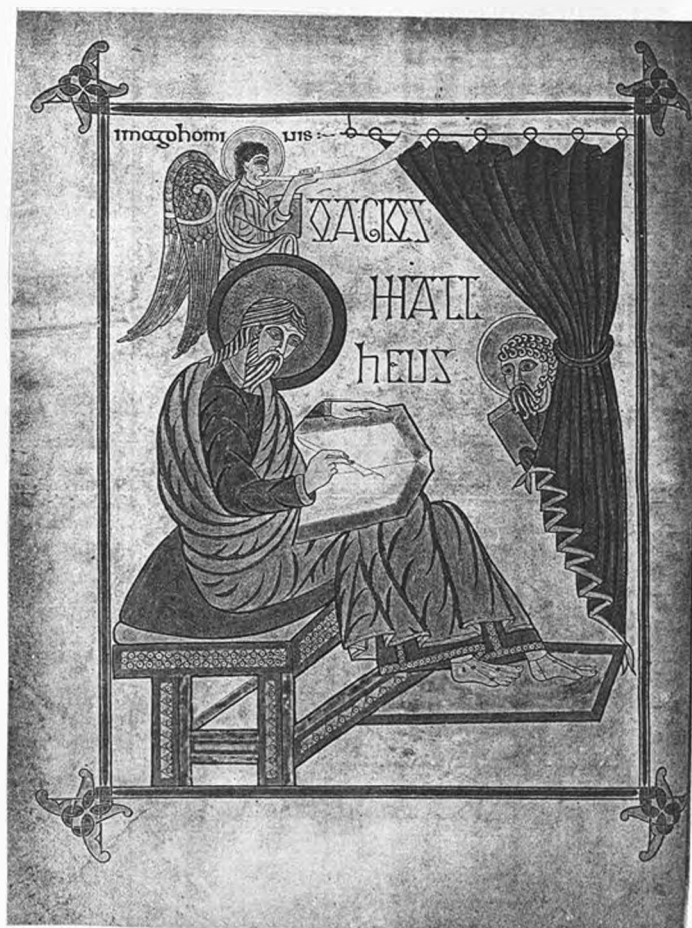


Figure 1. Portrait of St. Matthew, The Lindisfarne Gospels, Folio 25 verso.



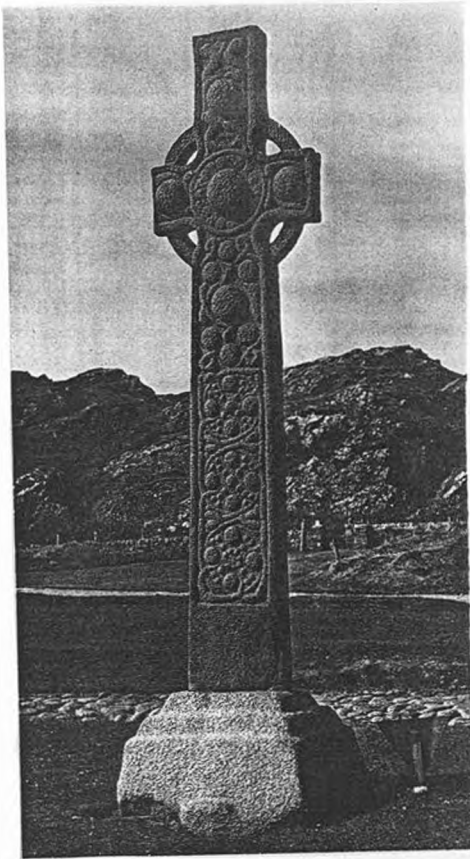


Figure 4. St. Martin's Cross, Iona.



Figure 5. Acca's Cross, Hexham.



Figure 6. Cross-Slab, Aberlemno.

## CHAPTER 2

Monastic scribes lavished their time, energy, and resources upon elaborately embellished Gospel books, such as the Books of Durrow, Lindisfarne, and Kells, in order to give glory to the word of God. However, to gain a more precise understanding of their art, it is necessary to ask whether the monks had a more specific motivation for their prominent use of the cross motif within their masterpieces, the cross-carpet pages. Like all manuscript decoration, the cross-carpet pages were deliberately placed in a specific relationship to texts they accompany. In these three books, the placement of the cross-carpet pages in relation to the Gospel texts suggests that these pages may have functioned as protective coverings; they are, in fact, book covers within the books. Unfortunately, the covers for these books no longer exist; any formal similarities which existed between the cross-carpet pages and these covers would have strengthened the hypothesis that these cross-carpet pages may be seen as interior book covers. Nevertheless, there are similarities between these cross-carpet pages and other extant book covers which support the cross-carpet page as book cover hypothesis. Because the cross is the primary motif for both book cover and carpet page, the relationship between these exterior and interior coverings needs to be clarified.

Within the Books of Durrow and Lindisfarne, there is a pattern to the placement of the cross-carpet pages in relation to the Gospel texts. The Book of Durrow begins with a cross-carpet page which faces a page displaying the four Evangelist symbols arranged around a cross (Fig.7).<sup>1</sup> Each of the individual Gospels within the Book of Durrow is also introduced by a carpet-page, which faces the first page of each text.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, a cross-carpet page faces the opening of each of the Gospel texts in the Lindisfarne Gospels and a fifth cross-carpet page introduces St. Jerome's introductory letter, "Novum opus."<sup>3</sup> This pattern of placing the cross-carpet pages at the beginning of each section of the text makes evident the purpose of these cross-carpet pages as interior book covers. Indeed, the individual Gospels were sometimes bound as separate books with their own covers as, for example, the seventh-century Stonyhurst

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<sup>1</sup>Robert G. Calkins, Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 36, 289. The Book of Durrow has been re-arranged. The first carpet page and the four Evangelist symbols page, folios 1 verso and 2 recto, are in their original positions. However, the next carpet page, folio 3 verso, has been cut out of its original place in the binding and moved to its present position, introducing St. Jerome's "Novum opus" letter.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Actually the Gospel of Matthew does not presently have a carpet page, but it is likely that the carpet page which now introduces Jerome's "Novum Opus" letter once belonged to Matthew's Gospel. An example of the normal order within the Book of Durrow is the Gospel of Mark which begins with Mark's symbol, the Eagle, on folio 84 verso. A carpet page follows, on folio 85 verso, facing the Incipit to Mark on folio 86 recto. It should also be noted that not all of the carpet pages in the Book of Durrow are cross-carpet pages.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 290. An example of the interior organization of the Lindisfarne Gospels is the Gospel of Matthew. After the prefaces and a list of festival readings from Matthew, comes an Evangelist portrait on folio 25 verso, then a cross-carpet page on folio 26 verso, facing the Incipit "Liber generationis" on folio 27 recto.

Gospel of St. John, a practice which is reflected in the cross carpet pages.<sup>4</sup>

The single cross-carpet page in the Book of Kells has a different position in the manuscript than those in the Books of Durrow and Lindisfarne, but it too may be seen as an interior book cover.<sup>5</sup> This cross-carpet page introduces the "Christi autem" page in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Although this is not the actual beginning of Matthew's Gospel, the motivation for this placement becomes evident. The phrase "Christi autem generatio" serves as a transition from the Old Testament genealogy of Christ to the story of the Incarnation itself (Matthew 1:18). The first three letters of Christ's name are formed into the monogram XPI. In the Book of Kells, this monogram has expanded to a full page dimension, highlighting the sanctity of the text. The cross-carpet page introducing this monogram further emphasizes its special significance.<sup>6</sup>

Formal similarities between extant book covers and the cross-carpet pages reinforce the hypothesis that these pages should be seen as interior book covers. The most compelling similarity between a page from one of these Gospel books and a book cover,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 60-62.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. 79. An unknown number of folios are missing from the beginning of the Book of Kells. Exactly what was contained in these folios will never be known, but they may have contained Jerome's "Novum opus," perhaps introduced by a carpet page, as in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the re-arranged Book of Durrow.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 90-91, 291. The XPI monogram is on folio 34 recto and the cross-carpet page on folio 33 recto. The Books of Durrow and Lindisfarne have similar, but smaller, monograms. See the Book of Durrow folio 23 recto and the Lindisfarne Gospels folio 29 recto.

however, involves neither a cross-carpet page nor a book cover that is actually extant. Instead, Lawrence Nees has convincingly compared the Four Evangelist Symbols page from the Book of Durrow to a book cover depicted in a fifth century Neapolitan mosaic (Fig 7,8). Nees does not suggest that the mosaic image itself should be linked to the Evangelist Symbols page, but rather that the manuscript page should be connected with actual book covers similar to one represented in the mosaic. Both the Durrow Evangelist Symbols page and this book cover are organized around a large cross which creates four corner areas, each of which contains one of the four Evangelist symbols.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the cross in this comparison suggests as well a connection between the book cover and cross-carpet pages. Indeed, book covers similar to the Naples mosaic image may have been imported into Northumbria along with the large numbers of books that were imported for the use of the Church.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, book covers from outside the Insular milieu should be considered convincing evidence for the link between book covers and cross-carpet pages.

Extant book covers from outside the Insular milieu, therefore, can be used to give an idea of the types of covers which were

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<sup>7</sup>Lawrence Nees, "A Fifth-Century Book Cover and the Origin of the Four Evangelist Symbols Page in the Book of Durrow," *Gesta* XVII/1 (1978): 3-8.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, (London: B.T. Batsford., 1972), 40, 153, 191. Bede, "Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow," in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J.F. Webb and H. Farmer (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 188. Bede writes of Benedict Biscop's third trip to Rome "He brought back a large number of books on all branches of sacred knowledge, some bought at a favorable price, others the gifts of well-wishers."

imported into Northumbria that may have influenced both Insular book covers and the cross-carpet pages. In the Mediterranean, ivory carving was a popular medium for book covers. One ivory book cover from sixth-century Syria (Fig. 9), although unlike the cross-carpet pages in its representation of two saints, shares the dominant cross motif of the cross-carpet pages. A gold book cover, encrusted with jewels (Fig.10), made on the continent for the Gospels of Queen Theodelina (c. 600), is even more similar to the cross-carpet pages. Like the cross-carpet page that introduces the Gospel of John in the Lindisfarne Gospels (folio 210 verso, Pl. 2), this cover has an equal armed cross which creates four corner areas. Each one of these areas is filled with decorative motifs, including a decorative panel bent into a right angle. This book cover is also reminiscent of the kind of cover which once encased the Lindisfarne Gospels, according to a tenth century colophon in that manuscript. This colophon states that the original covers for the Lindisfarne manuscript were the work of Bilfrith the Anchorite who "forged the ornaments which are on it on the outside and adorned it with gold and gems and also with gilded-over silver -pure metal."<sup>9</sup> Finally, the back cover of the Lindau Gospels (c. 810) also displays the dominant cross motif that distinguishes the cross-carpet pages (Fig. 11).<sup>10</sup> The animal interlace motifs that fill the corners of this book cover are reminiscent of those on the cross-carpet page which introduces

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<sup>9</sup>Janet Backhouse, The Lindisfarne Gospels (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1981), 7.

<sup>10</sup>Actually both covers from the Lindau Gospels are dominated by a cross, but the front cover presents a crucifixion scene.

Matthew's Gospel (folio 26 verso, Pl. 3) in the Lindisfarne Gospels. As has been well-established, the decorative motifs used on the cross-carpet pages emerged from an indigenous metalwork tradition.<sup>11</sup> This relationship strengthens the idea that the cross-carpet pages are metalwork book covers, transformed into manuscript pages, but retaining their old form and protective function.

The previous examples connect the cross-carpet pages to some of the types of book covers which may have been imported into England. Because of the close ties between Northumbria and Ireland, fragments from book covers made in Ireland may be used to represent work made within the wider Insular milieu. One such fragment (Fig. 12), found in a Viking grave, probably represents booty captured in the ninth century Viking raids. Another fragment (Fig. 13) dates from the late tenth century. Both of these fragments resemble the cross-carpet pages in their use of the cross as the dominant motif, providing strong evidence that the cross-carpet pages stem from book covers.

Other Irish comparisons to the cross-carpet pages are not book covers but book shrines. These Irish objects entirely encased precious books. Adolf Mahr wrote of one of these shrines that "it is not so much a protective cover... but it is a shrine, intended to enhance the relic-character of the book."<sup>12</sup> While emphasizing the

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<sup>11</sup>Backhouse, Lindisfarne, 67-75. Calkins, Illuminated Books, 57.

<sup>12</sup>Adolf Mahr and Joseph Raftery, Christian Art in Ancient Ireland, vol. 2 (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976), 55.

function of a book shrine as an indicator of a book's relic-like status, Mahr placed this function in opposition to the protective function exercised by book covers. However, the rationale for placing these two functions in opposition is unclear. A book that has achieved a relic-like status is even more in need of protection than a less precious book, hence the complete encasement of relic-like books in shrines instead of simple covers. The protective shrine would have been embellished to express the status of the object within it.<sup>13</sup> The front face of one of these book shrines, the Soiscel Molaise, is dominated by a wheel cross (fig.14), resembling the cross on the carpet page which introduces the Gospel of Mark in the Lindisfarne Gospels (folio 94 verso, Pl.4). They share the central circle and are both equal armed, as is the cross on the Lindisfarne carpet-page that introduces Luke's Gospel (folio 138 verso, Pl. 5).<sup>14</sup> A large cross dominates the back face of another one of these book shrines, known as the Donnach Airgid (Fig.15).<sup>15</sup> In its sheer dominance over the field on which it is placed, this cross resembles the one on Matthew's carpet page in the Lindisfarne Gospels (folio 26

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<sup>13</sup>Adamnan, Life of St. Columba, ed. and trans. William Reeves (Llanerch: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 76-77, 107-8. That books were accorded the status of relics can be clearly seen in the references to books written by St. Columba's in Adamnan's Life of that Saint. Columba's books could not be harmed by water and were used both to end a drought and to secure a favorable wind for a journey.

<sup>14</sup>Mahr, Ancient Ireland, 55-6, 119-20. Although the date of this shrine is uncertain, Mahr believes it was originally created as a house-shaped shrine in the eighth century. Mahr also writes that the Book of Durrow was encased in a shrine in the late ninth century. Unfortunately this shrine has not survived.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 115-19. It is interesting to note that the front face of the Domnach Airgid displays a crucifix into which is incorporated a rock crystal compartment which is said to contain a fragment of the True Cross. Although this shrine has been modified many times, Mahr dates its earliest stage to c. 850.

verso, Pl.3). However, in its slim and simple shape, it is more reminiscent of the Book of Durrow cross-carpet page (folio 1 verso, Pl. 6), without the second cross-bar. The use of these dominant cross motifs on these book shrines supports the idea that the cross-carpet pages stem from the outer, protective, coverings of books.

A cover or shrine was made for a precious book in order to protect its delicate interior. The cross-carpet pages emulate book covers in their placement within the manuscripts and in their formal design. However, as manuscript pages themselves the cross-carpet pages could not have added any physical protection for the texts they enclose. Nevertheless, because the the cross was used as the dominant motif on the outer, protective coverings of books, the possibility of a connection between the cross and the idea of protection, which would extend onto the cross-carpet pages, needs to be examined. Lawrence Nees proposed a link between protection and the combination of the cross with the four Evangelists. He stated that the cross and the four Evangelists were intentionally combined on the Book of Durrow Evangelist Symbols page, and on the type of book cover that it seems to emulate, in order to "protect the sacred book against demonic penetration."<sup>16</sup> His evidence for the power of this combination of the cross with the Evangelists is an Anglo-Saxon charm for reviving infertile land. This charm involved burying crosses, with the names of the Evangelists carved into the cross arms, in the corners of the infertile field, while chanting

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<sup>16</sup>Nees, "Book Cover," 5.

"Crux Mattheus, Crux Marcus, Crux Lucas, Crux Sanctus Johannes."<sup>17</sup> If the primary written sources for this period also include evidence that the cross alone was thought to exercise a protective function, then the cross-carpet pages, as well as the book covers they resemble, may carry the cross in order to mystically protect the sacred texts they enclose.

Evidence that the cross alone was thought to exercise a protective power is found in Adamnan's Life of St. Columba. One piece of evidence for the protective power of the cross is an anecdote from the section of this Life which concentrates on Columba's miraculous powers. One day a boy at one of St. Columba's monasteries was carrying a bucket of milk. As he passed the Saint, the boy asked him to bless the milk. When Columba made the sign of the cross over the bucket, the milk suddenly spilled. The boy had apparently neglected to make the sign of the cross over the bucket before filling it and there was a demon hiding at the bottom. When St. Columba made the sign of the cross the demon had to flee, spilling the milk.<sup>18</sup> Columba also used the protective power of the cross when he came upon a group of people who were being threatened by the Loch Ness monster. One man had already been killed. Columba used the power of the sign of the cross to command the monster to depart and never again harm men.<sup>19</sup> St. Columba was

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. For this charm in full see R.K. Gordon, ed. and trans., Anglo-Saxon Poetry, Everyman's Library (New York: Dutton, 1954), 89.

<sup>18</sup> Adamnan, Life, 81.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 89.

not the only holy man to use the sign of the cross as protection against demons and monsters, St. John of Beverly did likewise. One year during Lent, St. John cured a dumb boy by making the sign of the cross over the his tongue.<sup>20</sup> Demons are not mentioned in this anecdote, but a common explanation for illness at this time was demonic possession. Using the power of the sign of the cross, St. John drove a demon out of that boy's tongue. These anecdotes suggest that the sign of the cross did exercise a protective power against demons and monsters. Furthermore, if it was believed that the cross had this power, then the cross may have been used to cover the sacred texts of the Gospels in order to protect these sacred words from evil forces.

Aldhelm, in his pair of treatises on Holy Virgins, provides more evidence for the protective power of the cross. Two of the male virgins he included in these works, Hilarion and St. John the Evangelist, used the cross for protection. Hilarion stopped a flood by making the sign of the cross three times in the sand.<sup>21</sup> St. John the Evangelist was protected against snakes by "the ensign of Christ going on before and armed with Christ's standard."<sup>22</sup> The "ensign" or "standard" of Christ is the cross. The word for standard in Anglo-

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<sup>20</sup>Bede, History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin, 1968), 272. Repeated in Alcuin, The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York, ed. and trans Peter Goodman, Oxford Medieval Texts, ed. C.N.L. Brooke, D.E. Greenway, M. Winterbottom (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1982), 89.

<sup>21</sup>Aldhelm, "Carmen de Virginitate," in Aldhelm: The Poetic Works, trans. Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer Ltd., 1985), 121. Also in Aldhelm "De Virginitate," in Aldhelm: The Prose Works, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer Ltd., 1979), 89.

<sup>22</sup>Aldhelm "De Virginitate" Prose, 80.

Saxon is *beacen*, or *heofonbeacon* , and in two Anglo-Saxon poems, the *Dream of the Rood* and *Exodus*, this word is used to refer to the cross.<sup>23</sup> Both of these virgins Saints, therefore, made use of the protective power of the cross.

All of these Saints supplemented the power of the cross with that of their own sanctity. Nevertheless, the cross did have an independant protective power, as can be seen in a miracle that happened at the monastery of Oudle. A band of armed men had set this monastery on fire. However, when the flames reached the cross standing in the monastery yard, they immediately died out. Then an angel, holding a cross, drove the men away. They were all blinded, except for those who crossed themselves while fleeing. This anecdote shows that the cross not only had its own protective power, but could even protect a sinner against the just wrath of God.<sup>24</sup>

The cross was also used to consecrate both churches and altars. When a church was consecrated, either metal crosses were hung upon the walls or crosses were actually carved into them. To consecrate an altar, crosses were marked on its four corners and in

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<sup>23</sup>Michael Swanton, ed., *The Dream of the Rood*. Old and Middle English Texts, ed. G.L. Brook (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 63. Peter J. Lucas, "Old English Christian Poetry: The Cross in Exodus," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), 199. Bede, *History*, 69. The cross is also the standard of the Church. As Bede writes, St. Augustine of Canterbury and his fellow missionaries, when they first landed in England, carried a silver cross "as their standard."

<sup>24</sup> Eddius Stephanus, "Life of Wilfrid," in *Lives of The Saints*, ed. and trans J.F. Webb (New York:Penguin Books,1965), 204-5.

its center, as for example, the crosses on St. Cuthbert's wooden altar (Fig.15).<sup>25</sup> These crosses may also have been intended to drive the demons out of the holy places and objects, just as St. John of Beverly used the cross to get the demon out of that boy's tongue. Furthermore, each member of the church was marked with the cross perpetually, starting from baptism. This cross protected the faithful from evil; as Bede writes, "each member of it (the Church) bears the sign of the Holy Cross on his forehead, so that this emblem may afford constant protection against the assaults of wicked spirits."<sup>26</sup> The cross protected holy places and the faithful against evil and could even drive away the demons and monsters if they managed to attack the faithful, or just hide in their milk. These anecdotes further underscore the significance of the cross, indicating that the cross placed on a book cover could protect the contents of the book from demons. Similarly, the cross-carpet pages, functioning as interior book covers, would have added extra protection for each section of the sacred word of God.

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<sup>25</sup>William Stevens, The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, Yale Studies in English, ed. Albert S. Cook (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1904), 16. Steven's book is a survey of the primary sources for this period for references to the cross. For those primary sources which I have not been able to access, I rely on Steven's research. Martin Werner, incidentally, has remarked that the four corner crosses and center cross of a consecrated altar resembles the arrangement of crosses on one of the Book of Durrow cross-carpet pages, see Martin Werner "The Cross-Carpet Page in the Book of Durrow: The Cult of the True Cross, Adomnan, and Iona," Art Bulletin 72 (1990): 174-223, 208.

<sup>26</sup>Bede, History, 325. This quote is actually from a letter sent to King Nathan of the Picts from Coelfris the Abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow. However, Bede probably wrote the letter and then also included it in his history.

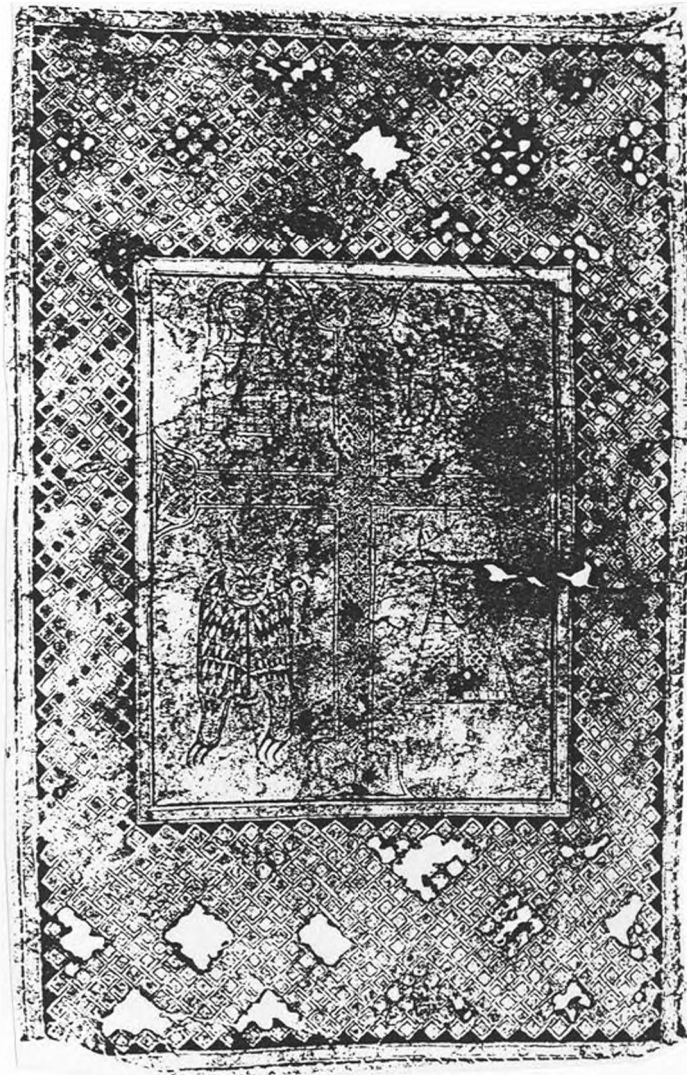


Figure 7. Four Evangelist Symbols Page, The Book of Durrow, Folio 2 recto.

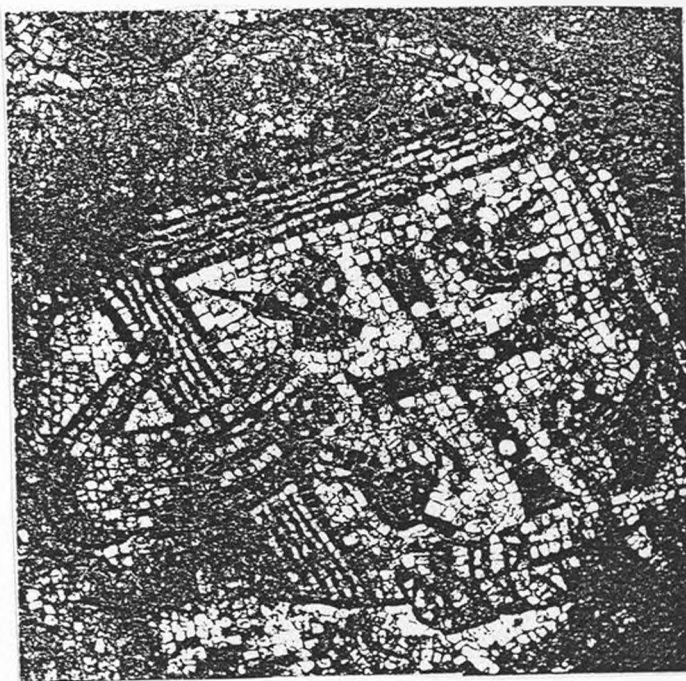


Figure 8. Book Cover, Mosaic of a Bishop, Catacomb of S. Gennaro, Naples.



Figure 9. Ivory Book Cover, Syria



Figure 10. Book Cover, Gospels of Queen Theodelina.



Figure 11. Book Cover, The Lindau Gospels



Figure 12.  
Fragment of a Book Cover,  
Björke Churchyard, Hjørundfjord



Figure 13.  
Fragment of a Book Cover,  
Hollycross, Tipperary

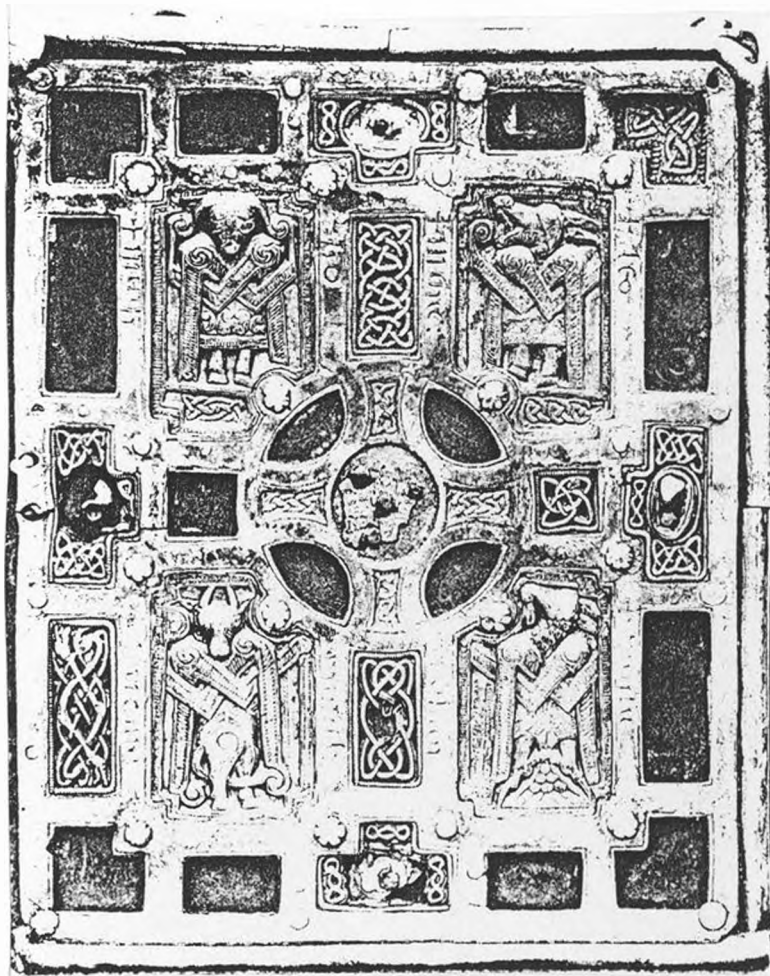


Figure 14. Front Face, Soiscel Molaise

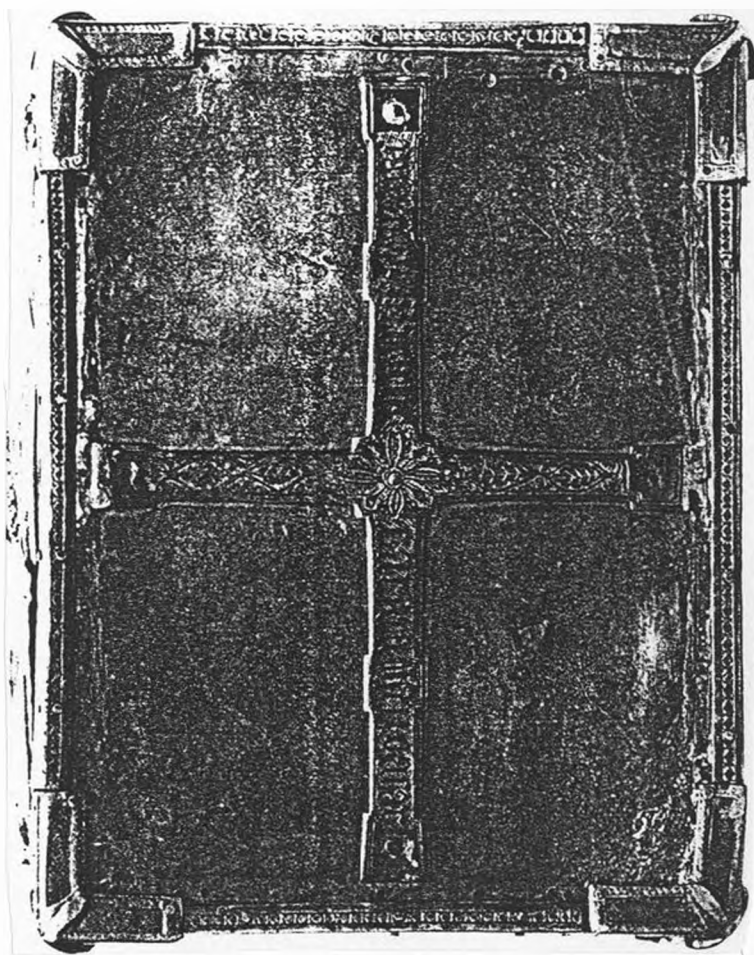


Figure 15. Back Face, Domnach Airgid.

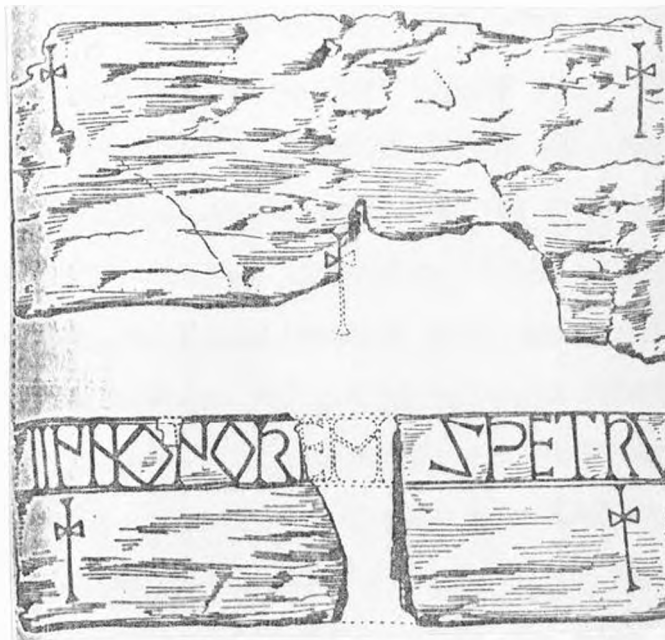


Figure 16. Wooden Altar of St. Cuthbert, Durham Cathedral Library.

## CHAPTER 3

St. Augustine of Canterbury and his mission of monks carried a silver processional cross when they first disembarked on English soil. One hundred and twenty years later, the monks of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow carried a gold cross in the procession which escorted their abbot, Coelfrid, to his ship as he set sail for Rome.<sup>1</sup> In each case, Bede wrote that the monks carried the cross as their "standard," as the distinctive public symbol of their faith.<sup>2</sup> Because monumental stone crosses were also prominent public symbols of the Christian faith, they likewise functioned as standards of that faith. Permanently inserted into the landscape, the stone crosses made this standard constantly visible and readily available for a variety of uses. Continuing a Celtic tradition, monumental crosses were used to mark the sites of monasteries; for example, St. Cuthbert erected a cross to mark his hermitage on the island of Outer Farne.<sup>3</sup> Crosses were also used as memorial

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<sup>1</sup>Bede, History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 69. Bede, "Lives of the Abbots," in The Age of Bede, trans. J.F. Webb and H. Farmer (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 203. St. Augustine of Canterbury arrived in 597, Coelfrid left in 716.

<sup>2</sup>Bede, History, 69. Bede, Lives of the Abbots, 203. As noted above in Chapter 2, in discussing Aldhelm's use of the phrase "Christ's standard," the cross was referred to in Anglo-Saxon poetry as a *beacen*, meaning sign or standard. See Chapter 2, notes 21,22.

<sup>3</sup>Bede, "Life of Cuthbert," in Lives of the Saints ed. and trans. J.F. Webb (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 117. William Stevens, The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, Yale Studies in English, ed. Albert S. Cook (New York: Henry Holt and

monuments for important people and as memorials at the sites of important events. Lastly, they functioned as sites for private prayer and public religious services, both among the laity and within the monastic communities.

Some stone crosses marked graves and served as memorials to important people. For example, one of the crosses at Hexham is generally assigned the honor of marking the grave of Bishop Acca.<sup>4</sup> Other crosses associated with important people marked the sites of significant events in their lives. Several anecdotes recording examples of this type of memorial cross come from Adamnan's Life of St. Columba. Adamnan wrote that when St. Columba's uncle Ernan was dying, the two men tried to meet one last time. Unfortunately, Ernan died while still twenty-four paces away from Columba. According to Adamnan, one cross was erected on the spot where Ernan died and another on the spot where Columba was standing at the time.<sup>5</sup> This pair of crosses marked the site of a significant

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Co., 1904, 57. Caroline Neuman de Vegvar, The Northumbrian Renaissance: A Study in the Transmission of Style (Toronto: Associated University Press, 1987), 203-4.

<sup>4</sup> W.G. Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age, (Felinfach, Llanerch, Dyfed: Llanerch Enterprises, 1989) 32. David M. Wilson, Anglo-Saxon Art: From the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest, (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1984) 70, 77. Wilson doubts that the cross generally assigned to be Acca's actually marks the Bishop's grave. Collingwood, on the other hand, is more interested in a twelfth-century report that would place one cross at the head and another one at the foot of Acca's grave. Collingwood says that the foot cross was probably a cross at the head of the next grave, which would imply that the cross was a commonly used grave marker. However, the cross-shaped monument does not seem to have been the primary type of grave marker. A substantial number of dressed stone slabs with incised crosses have been found at York Minster, indicating that the cross-incised slab that was the common grave-marker in Northumbria. James Laing, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 28, 60-70.

<sup>5</sup> Adamnan, Life of St. Columba, ed. and trans. William Reeves (Llanerch: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 66.

event in St. Columba's life. Columba had previously predicted that he would never see his uncle alive again and when Ernan died twenty-four paces away, Columba's prophecy came true. Therefore, these two crosses functioned as a memorial to an event which demonstrated Columba's power of prophecy. This event and the power it demonstrated were sufficiently significant to be commemorated by a monument, and to be included in Adamnan's Life, because Columba's power of prophecy was one of the proofs of his sanctity.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere in his Life of St. Columba, Adamnan described the last few days of the Saint's life. A cross mentioned in one of these anecdotes, like the pair of crosses set up for the Saint and his uncle, functioned as a memorial monument for an event which demonstrated Columba's sanctity. In this anecdote, Columba stopped to rest while walking to the monastery and an old pack-horse came over to him and cried upon his chest. According to Adamnan, a cross was later erected upon this site to commemorate the communion between the saint and the animal.<sup>7</sup> Anecdotes about saints and animals are not rare in Insular saints' lives. Columba also predicted the arrival of an exhausted crane and had it treated as a guest by one of his monks until it was well enough to fly.<sup>8</sup> Bede's

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<sup>6</sup>Adamnan, Columba, 34, 37. Adamnan's Life is not a biography of the Saint. It is a collection of anecdotes gathered into three books, the first about Columba's power of prophecy, the second about his miraculous powers, and the third about the visions of angels that appeared to him. The three books argue for Columba's sanctity by showing that he was closer to God, from whom these powers and visions came, than ordinary men.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 67.

Life of St. Cuthbert records several similar anecdotes concerning this Insular saint. Otters dried St. Cuthbert's feet after he spent the night praying in the sea, an eagle provided him with food, upon his request, the birds stopped eating his crops, and some ravens begged his forgiveness for stealing straw off his roof and then brought him a lump of lard as a gift.<sup>9</sup> In these anecdotes, St. Columba and St. Cuthbert continued a tradition stemming from the Lives of the Desert Fathers and ultimately from Elijah, who was also fed by a raven in the wilderness. These anecdotes constructed parallels between the Insular saints and the men whom they saw as the founders and prototypes of monasticism.<sup>10</sup> Through such anecdotes, the saints were shown to have attained the peaceful kingdom of God and to have returned to the harmony with nature that Adam enjoyed before the fall. Two of the figural panels on the Ruthwell cross (Pl.7) express the same idea of harmony between the men of God and God's creatures. On one panel, Christ himself is adored by creatures in the desert. On the panel below, St. Paul and St. Anthony divide a loaf of bread which was brought to them by a raven.<sup>11</sup> The cross that was erected where the horse mourned Columba's imminent death commemorated Columba's participation in this tradition and in doing so highlighted his sanctity.

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<sup>9</sup>Bede, "Cuthbert," 85,87,96-98.

<sup>10</sup>Meyer Schapiro, "The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross," Art Bulletin 26 (1944) 236-7. Fritz Saxl, "The Ruthwell Cross," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute 7 (1943) 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Schapiro, "Religious Meaning," 232-45. Saxl, "Ruthwell Cross," 1-19. Kristine Edmondson Haney, "The Christ and the Beasts Panel on the Ruthwell Cross," Anglo-Saxon England 14() 215-231.

In an anecdote from Bede's History of the English Church and People, he mentioned the cross erected by King Oswald of Northumbria on the battlefield of Heavenfield, where Oswald won his crown.<sup>12</sup> After the battle, this cross functioned as a memorial to what Oswald had achieved in this place. Oswald not only won Northumbria for himself, he won the kingdom for the Christian faith, for he would call for the mission from Iona which established the Northumbrian Church. The cross at Heavenfield was the first standard of the Christian faith erected in Oswald's kingdom, as Bede wrote, "there was no emblem of the Christian Faith, no church, and no altar in the whole of Bernicia until the new Christian leader Oswald, moved by his devotion to the Faith, set up this standard of the holy cross before giving battle to his relentless enemies."<sup>13</sup> After Oswald died, the monks of Hexham began to make a yearly pilgrimage to this cross on the eve of the anniversary of his death, in order to hold a vigil for him. The cross at Heavenfield had come to function as a memorial to the great King, as well as to his victory and the conversion of Northumbria which he had initiated.

Oswald set this cross up before the battle in which he won his crown. Yet, he did not erect it to commemorate his victory, which

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<sup>12</sup> Bede, History, 142. Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses, 8. According to Bede, this cross was made of wood. W.G. Collingwood wrote that the crosses mentioned by Adamnan in his Life of St. Columba were also wooden monuments. These wooden crosses can be grouped with the stone crosses as permanent, public standards of the faith, for they remained standing for years. The crosses mentioned by Adamnan were erected around the year of St. Columba's death, 597, and were still standing when Adamnan wrote his Life some one hundred years later.

<sup>13</sup> Bede, History, 143. Bernicia was one of the two earlier kingdoms which were united to form Northumbria.

he had not yet won, nor to commemorate the conversion of Northumbria, which had not yet happened, nor yet as a monument to himself. Instead, he raised this cross in order to use it as a focus for his prayers and those of his soldiers as they begged God for assistance in the upcoming battle. Bede wrote that Oswald "set up the sign of the holy cross and, kneeling down, asked God that He would grant his heavenly aid to those who trusted in Him in their dire need" According to Bede, Oswald then called out to his soldiers "Let us all kneel together, and ask the true and living God almighty to protect us." In Alcuin's version of the same events, he recounted Oswald as saying to his men

"with pious heart implore God's aid, that is  
more mighty than any weapon. Prostrate yourselves in  
prayer  
before the cross I have set up on that mountain-top  
where it shines brightly as a sign of Christ's triumph,  
and even now will ensure our victory over our foe."

Then,  
stars,  
The din of the host's prayers was carried beyond the  
and so, before the cross, the entire army  
worshipped its Lord God on bended knee.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, according to both Bede and Alcuin, Oswald's cross was erected to function as the focus for his private prayers and the corporate worship of his followers.

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<sup>14</sup>Bede, *History*, 142. Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. Peter Goodman, Oxford Medieval Texts, ed. C.N.L. Brooke, D.E. Greenway, M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 25. It also seems likely that Oswald's use of the cross at Heavenfield was meant to reenact Constantine's use of the symbol at the battle of Milvian bridge. See Chapter 4, p..

As the standards of the Christian faith, monumental stone crosses were appropriate sites for public religious services. W.G. Collingwood wrote that "To set up a cross where no church was and so hallow the spot is a common incident in the lives of Saints."<sup>15</sup> Collingwood labeled such crosses as "missionary" crosses and wrote that they would have been made quickly, most likely out of wood. According to Collingwood, a missionary would not have waited for a stone monument to have been carved before he began to preach. Nevertheless, the Ruthwell cross, an elaborately carved stone monument, has also been called a "missionary" cross.<sup>16</sup> Monuments like the Ruthwell cross did indeed become appropriate markers for the sites of missionary activity once it was clear that such activity would have to be a permanent part of the life of the Church. Outside of the monasteries and royal strongholds, the Northumbrian church had to maintain a missionary attitude towards the pastoral care of the laity because of practical constraints. The majority of the population of Northumbria was scattered in small communities and there were not enough priests for one to be permanently assigned to each tiny village. To place permanent priests in some villages would have left others without any pastoral care.<sup>17</sup> The church had to

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<sup>15</sup>Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses, 5.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Swanton, ed., The Dream of the Rood, Old and Middle English Texts, ed. G.L. Brook (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 25.

<sup>17</sup>Bede, History, 215. D.J.V. Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age, (London: Longman, 1973), 89-91.

fulfill its pastoral duties through itinerant priests who traveled from village to village, preaching and performing the sacraments.<sup>18</sup>

According to Bede, St. Cuthbert went out to preach with special enthusiasm. He wrote that

Cuthbert, however, gladly undertook this pious task, and taught with such patience and skill that when he left the monastery it would sometimes be a week ... occasionally an entire month, before he returned home.<sup>19</sup>

The arrival of a priest in a village was always a momentous occasion,

whenever a clerk or priest visited a town, English folk always used to gather at his call to hear the Word, eager to hear his message and even more eager to carry out whatever they had heard and understood.<sup>20</sup>

The more remote villages were avoided by many priests, but Cuthbert made especially heroic efforts to reach these isolated communities,

He used to visit and preach in villages that lay far distant among high and inaccessible mountains, which others feared to visit and whose barbarity and squalor daunted other teachers.<sup>21</sup>

After a plague, Cuthbert was especially inspired to undertake a preaching tour because,

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<sup>18</sup>D.J.V. Fisher, The Anglo-Saxon Age, 93-4, 101. Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1972), 247. Fisher and others have said that Archbishop Theodore of Tarsus ended the practice of itinerant priests at the Synod of Hertford, but he only insisted that priests and monks receive permission from their superiors before embarking on their preaching tours.

<sup>19</sup>Bede, History, 260.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

some had even abandoned the Christian sacraments and had recourse to the delusive remedies of idolatry, as though they could expect to halt a plague ordained of God by spells, amulets, and other devilish secret arts.<sup>22</sup>

Without constant pastoral care, the old pagan ways remained an attractive option during difficult times. Christianity had not yet been firmly implanted in the majority of the English people; wandering preachers like Cuthbert were engaged in a perpetual mission to these nominal Christians.

Monumental stone crosses functioned as sites for the missionary activities undertaken by wandering preachers like Cuthbert. These preachers used crosses that had been erected to commemorate people or events, or crosses which were set up specifically as preaching crosses on noble estates, in villages, or alongside roads.<sup>23</sup> The Ruthwell cross has been identified as one of these preaching crosses. According to Caroline Neuman de Vegvar, it originally stood at a preaching station called Priestwoodside.<sup>24</sup> Other scholars, however, have associated the Ruthwell cross with Insular monastic culture instead of with the pastoral care of the laity. Indeed, Meyer Schapiro imagined a hypothetical monastic community at Ruthwell as the original context for the erection of this cross.<sup>25</sup> Schapiro identified the Ruthwell cross as a monastic monument because the primary element he isolated within its figural program was a "broad ascetic conception" which he

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity, 247-248. Stevens, The Cross, 59. Neuman de Vegvar, Northumbrian, 204.

<sup>24</sup>Neuman de Vegvar, Northumbrian, 204.

<sup>25</sup>Schapiro, "Religious Meaning," 243.

associated with the ideals of early monasticism.<sup>26</sup> This conception of the program grows out of the desert motif Schapiro found on the north face of the cross (Pl. 7). This desert motif consists of Christ with the animals, St. John the Baptist holding the Agnus Dei, and St. Paul and St. Anthony breaking bread. Christ was adored by the animals while in the desert during his Temptation. St. John the Baptist lived in the desert, and was seen by the Insular monks as a prototype of the monastic life. Likewise, St. Paul and St. Anthony, who broke their bread in the desert, were seen as the founders of monasticism.<sup>27</sup> On the opposite face of the cross (Pl. 8), the primary panel presents Mary Magdalen wiping Christ's feet with her hair. Because the Magdalen was associated with Mary the sister of Martha, the figure for the contemplative life, this panel continues the monastic idea.<sup>28</sup>

Although there is no direct evidence that the Ruthwell cross was ever associated with a monastery, Schapiro's identification of this cross as a monastic monument is not entirely unreasonable. Monumental crosses were indeed important to Insular monastic culture. As mentioned previously, they were used to mark the sites of monasteries. They also functioned as sites for the monks' private prayers. St. Lambert of Maastricht, for example, used a cross inside the monastery of Stavelot as the focus for his penitential prayers. Monumental crosses also functioned as sites for the monks'

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<sup>26</sup>Schapiro, "Religious Meaning," 230, 238-9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 236-7. Fritz Saxl, "The Ruthwell Cross," 3-4.

<sup>28</sup>Schapiro, "Religious Meaning," 233-7

corporate religious services. Indeed crosses are known to have been used for the performance of the mass within the earliest Irish monasteries.<sup>29</sup> Because of the liturgical motifs he found within its figural program, Eamonn O'Carrigáin is convinced that the Ruthwell cross was also used for the performance of the mass within a monastic community.<sup>30</sup>

In 1642 the Ruthwell cross was overturned by religious reformers and broken into several pieces. It was restored in the 1880's, but the restoration is problematic.<sup>31</sup> Eamonn O'Carrigáin would reorient the cross, so that the side which has been turned to face north would face west (Pl. 7). Because mass was celebrated with the congregation facing east, the motifs on this side of the cross would have faced a congregation receiving communion at the cross. Several of the figural panels on this side of the cross can be interpreted as eucharistic motifs. The panel of St. Paul and St. Anthony breaking bread, a major element in Schapiro's desert theme, can be seen as a reference to the Celtic rite of *cofractio*. Likewise, the panel of St. John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei may be seen as a reference to the chant "Agnus Dei," which had recently been introduced for use during the celebration of the eucharist. According to Eamonn O Carrigáin, these eucharistic references

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<sup>29</sup> Eamonn O Carrigáin, "The Ruthwell Cross and Irish High Crosses: Some Points of Comparison and Contrast," in Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500-1200, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1987), 122. Henry, Irish Art, 53-4, 118.

<sup>30</sup> O Carragáin, "The Ruthwell Cross and Irish High Crosses," 118-123. Eamonn O Carrigáin, "Liturgical Innovation Associated with Pope Sergius and the Iconography of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Cross," in Bede and Anglo-Saxon England ed. Robert T. Farrell (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), 131-147.

<sup>31</sup> Neuman de Vegvar, Northumbrian, 204-206.

combined with the inscription on the panel of Christ and the animals, which says that the animals recognized him as the Saviour of the World, created a unified message; that Christ the Saviour was to be recognized in the bread received in communion.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the motifs from the side of the Ruthwell cross are repeated on the western face of another monumental stone cross, the Bewcastle cross (Pl. 9). The repeated elements are the panels of St. John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei and Christ with the beasts. The Bewcastle program adds to these two elements a third panel representing St. John the Evangelist with his eagle. The two repeated panels may be interpreted in the same manner as the corresponding elements in the Ruthwell program, as an admonishment to recognize Christ in the Eucharist during the chant of the Agnus Dei. St. John the Evangelist was added, according to O'Carrigáin, to represent the scriptural source for this chant.<sup>33</sup>

The panels on the opposite side of the Ruthwell cross (Pl. 8), may be associated with the liturgy for the last three weeks of Lent, which was concerned with the preparation of catechumens for Baptism. Especially telling are the panels of the Crucifixion and Annunciation at the bottom of this face of the cross. Eamonn O Carrigáin would have them read in reverse chronological order, starting from the bottom of the cross, so that they may be interpreted as referring to the death and rebirth experienced by the catechumen in Baptism. The remainder of the panels on this side of

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 118-9, 120

<sup>33</sup>O Carrigáin, "Liturgical Innovations," 135-6.

the cross may be interpreted as follows; the healing of the blind man panel as representing conversion, the Mary Magdalen at the feet of Christ signifying repentance, and the Mary and Martha panel as a reference to the Christian life. These panels may have represented the theme of the union of the believer with Christ, a theme which would have been an appropriate message for those preparing to receive baptism.<sup>34</sup>

O Carragáin associated these liturgical motifs, and therefore the entire Ruthwell cross, specifically with the performance of the liturgy within a monastic setting because these motifs would have been intelligible only to an educated audience that was intimately familiar with the liturgy.<sup>35</sup> However, if the Ruthwell monument functioned as a site for the pastoral care of the laity, these motifs could have been explained to the congregation by the priest performing the ceremony. Indeed, wandering priests could have used the panels on a cross like the Ruthwell monument as inspiration for their sermons and as illustrations for teaching the laity the fundamentals of the faith. Schapiro's monastic motifs, if they were intelligible to the laity or were explained to them, would have strengthened their faith in the church that was brought to them mainly by monks. This is not the place to argue whether the Ruthwell cross was a monastic monument or one intended to function as a site for missionary work among the laity. What is

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<sup>34</sup> O Carragáin, "The Ruthwell Cross and Irish High Crosses," 118, 121.

<sup>35</sup> O Carragáin, "Liturgical Innovations," 132, 138. Eamonn O Carragáin, "The Ruthwell Cross and Irish High Crosses," 123.

important is that monumental stone crosses like this one were used for religious services both within the monasteries and among the laity. Both monks and laymen also used the crosses as the sites for private prayer. Finally, the crosses were appropriate memorial monuments for saints and kings and for their deeds. Monumental crosses were appropriate for any and all of these functions because they were the standards, the distinctive public symbols, of the Christian faith. It remains to be seen, however, why the cross was the symbol chosen to act as the standard of the faith.

## CHAPTER 4

The Insular cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses were brought together to become the topic of this study because of their obvious similarities; they are the products of the same culture and share the same dominant motif. However, these two types of crosses have been shown to have functioned quite differently. The cross-carpet pages, acting as interior book covers, carried the cross in order to mystically protect the sacred texts they enclosed, whereas the monumental crosses, acting as the standards of the Christian faith, were put to a variety of uses in the Insular landscape. The two types of crosses were also intended for different audiences. The cross-carpet pages were precious possessions of wealthy monasteries, intended only for the eyes of privileged members of those communities. The monumental stone crosses, on the other hand, were the most public of monuments. Even when located within monasteries, these crosses, which reached heights of some seventeen feet, were meant to be seen by everyone within a radius of several miles.<sup>1</sup> They spread over the landscape, marking the advance of the new religion, marking the land that had been conquered for Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ruthwell cross was just over seventeen feet, see C.R. Dodwell, Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 115.

Monumental stone crosses functioned as standards of the Christian faith because they were the primary public symbols of that faith. However, the use of the cross as the standard of the faith was also informed by another connotation of the word "standard." It can also refer to a battle standard, a symbol used as a rallying point by an army at war. In Anglo-Saxon poetry, Christ is often pictured as a warrior and the history of Christian salvation as a series of battles. In *The Dream of the Rood*, for example, Christ is characterized as a young warrior who strips before his battle upon the cross and rests afterward.<sup>2</sup> This vision of the history of salvation is well exemplified by this account of the Harrowing of Hell from the poem *Christ*,

Now the devils' warriors are vanquished and humbled and bound  
in hell-torment, bereft of blessings in hell's abyss. His  
adversaries could not succeed in battle by casting of weapons,  
after the King of Glory, the Protector of the Kingdom of Heaven  
made war by the might of One against His ancient foes.<sup>3</sup>

Christ was victorious in his wars against evil; he overcame death in the Crucifixion and devils in the Harrowing of Hell. The cross is frequently characterized in Anglo-Saxon poems as the sign of Christ's victory. In *Elene*, for example, it is called the "cross of heaven's King, the true sign of victory," "the victorious cross," and "the best token of triumph," as well as "the most excellent

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<sup>2</sup>"The Dream of the Rood," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. R.K. Gordon, Everyman's Library (New York: Dutton, 1954), 236.

<sup>3</sup>"Christ," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. R.K. Gordon, Everyman's Library (New York: Dutton, 1954), 143.

triumphant cross."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Alcuin of York, when recounting the erection of King Oswald's cross at Heavenfield, had Oswald say that his cross "shines brightly as a sign of Christ's triumph and even now will ensure our victory over our foe."<sup>5</sup>

Christian kings often adopted this sign of Christ's victory as their own battle standard, in hopes that it would bring them victory as well. For example, the cross that King Oswald erected before the battle of Heavenfield acted as his army's battle standard. When he set up this cross, Oswald was most likely imitating Constantine, who adopted the cross as his standard before the battle of the Milvian bridge.<sup>6</sup> As told in the poem *Elene*,

Constantine, the glorious king, bade a sign be wrought in great haste like unto the cross of Christ...Then at dawn with the break of day he bade the warriors awake and raise the standard for battle and bear the holy tree before them, carry the sign of God among the foe.<sup>7</sup>

Constantine won his battle because of the divine intervention he secured through his use of the cross,

Then it was plain that the King almighty in that day's work had granted to Constantine victory, glorious honour, triumph under the heavens, by his rood-tree.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"Elene," in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, ed. R.K. Gordon, Everyman's Library (New York: Dutton, 1954), 228-9

<sup>5</sup>Alcuin, The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York, ed. Peter Goodman, Oxford Medieval Texts, ed. C.N.L. Brooke, D.E. Greenway, M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 25.

<sup>6</sup>William Stevens, The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, Yale Studies in English, ed. Albert S. Cook (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1904), 82. Michael Swanton ed., The Dream of the Rood, Old and Middle English Texts, ed. G.L. Brook (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 45.

<sup>7</sup>"Elene," 213

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 213-14.

Likewise, Bede wrote that Oswald's victory was due to his great faith, symbolized by his use of the cross.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, just as Oswald's cross was the first Christian symbol erected in his kingdom and marked the beginning of its conversion, so Constantine was thought to have converted to Christianity immediately after the battle of the Milvian bridge.<sup>10</sup> The victorious standard of the cross, as it won battles on earth, conquered kings and countries for Christ.

In the Insular world, the cross was also the battle standard of a more unusual army, an army of monks out to conquer the souls of all of mankind for Christ. The monasticism practiced in the British Isles by men like St. Cuthbert, whose preaching tours have already been discussed, was a unique phenomenon. These men were monks, but they were not cloistered. They left their monasteries and worked among the laity, converting the pagans and caring for the souls of their fellow men. As Henry Mayr-Harting wrote, "the role of monks in the English conversion was a dominant one from the start" and these monks felt "a vivid social consciousness and desire to conquer or reconquer the whole of human society for Christ."<sup>11</sup> Aldhelm, in fact, described the Insular monks as "combatants in the monastic army, boldly offering our foreheads armed with the banner of the cross."<sup>12</sup> The majority of the monumental stone crosses, which were erected by monks not by kings, were the battle

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<sup>9</sup>Bede, History, 142.

<sup>10</sup>Elene," 213-14.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England (London: B.T. Batsford, 1972), 7.

<sup>12</sup>Aldhelm, "De Virginitate" in Aldhelm: The Prose Works, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer Ltd., 1979), 68.

standards of this monastic army. The crosses that were used as memorials to the saints commemorated the most outstanding of this army's warriors. Within their communities, the monastic warriors used the crosses as sites for private prayer and corporate religious services, wherein they fought off the devils that attacked them personally, various vices and sins. Lastly, outside of the monastic communities, the monumental crosses served as sites where the monks might wrest others away from the devil, by preaching, making new converts, and performing the sacraments that bound the faithful into the body of the Church.

The first of the sacraments that bound a person into the body of the church was Baptism. As part of the ceremony of Baptism, the catechumen was marked with the sign of the cross. This cross, known as the Sphragis, protected the Christian from the forces of evil.<sup>13</sup> As Pope Boniface wrote to King Edwin of Northumbria, urging him to receive Baptism,

Accept therefore the sign of the Holy Cross, by which the entire human race has been redeemed, and exorcise from your heart the damnable crafts and devices of the Devil.<sup>14</sup>

This sign of the cross exorcised demons because it was the symbol of Christ's victory in his war against them. The Sphragis marked the Christian as a soldier in Christ's army, who shared in his victory, and it frightened demons away by reminding them of their defeat.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Jean Danielou, The Bible and the Liturgy (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 54.

<sup>14</sup>Bede, History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 119.

<sup>15</sup>Danielou, The Bible, 56-7, 61.

Bede wrote of this sign of the cross,

each member of it (the Church) bears the sign of the Holy Cross on his forehead, so that this emblem may afford constant protection against the assaults of wicked spirits.<sup>16</sup>

This passage was quoted previously as evidence in support of the protective power of the cross on the cross-carpet pages. These pages can be seen as possessing this protective power because they too frightened away demons with the sign of Christ's victory. If the protective power exercised by the cross-carpet pages is explained in this manner, then the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses can be seen as performing their different functions, as protective covers and as standards of the faith, for the same reason, because both presented the sign of Christ's victory. Even the division between the functions of the two types of crosses becomes less distinct when it is recognized that certain of the monumental crosses possessed powers similar to the protective force exerted by the cross-carpet pages. Oswald's cross at Heavenfield, for example, was said to possess healing powers.<sup>17</sup> Like the protective power of the cross-carpet pages, the power of this monumental cross can be explained as the ability of the sign of Christ's victory to frighten away demons, who caused illnesses, by reminding them of their previous defeats in their war against Christ.

As the sign of Christ's victory, the cross was expected to appear in the sky at the Second Coming to herald his final triumph

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<sup>16</sup>Bede, History, 325.

<sup>17</sup>Bede, History, 143-44.

over evil. In the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, a vision of the cross, which N.A. Lee identified as a vision of the Last Day, is described as

the glorious tree joyfully gleaming, adorned with garments,  
decked with gold, jewels had fitly covered the tree of the  
Lord.<sup>18</sup>

Hence the sign of Christ's victory was envisioned as a gleaming, golden, jeweled encrusted cross. This description of the triumphant cross is reminiscent of the metalwork style of the cross-carpet pages. The cross-carpet pages may have been intended to present this victory sign so that the demons' fear of it might protect the sacred books. However, both this description of the vision of the cross and the cross-carpet pages themselves are also reminiscent of another description of a different jeweled cross. The relic of the True Cross, the actual wooden instrument of the Passion recovered by St. Helena, was covered with jems and encased in a precious reliquary. As described in the poem *Elene*, Helena herself

ordered the cross to be overlaid with gold and gems and with  
the most costly precious stones; and they decked it with  
cunning arts and enclosed it with clasps in a silver case.<sup>19</sup>

The resemblance between this description of the relic of the True Cross and the cross-carpet pages presents another explanation for the power of protection exercised by these pages.

In general, the cross-carpet pages resembled the relic of the True Cross because both were jewel encrusted crosses. More

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<sup>18</sup>N.A. Lee, "Unity of Dream of the Rood," *Neophilologus* lxi (1972):474-6. "Dream," 235.

<sup>19</sup>"Elene," 229.

specifically, Martin Werner has suggested that the cross-carpet pages in the Books of Durrow and Kells in particular were meant to recall the relic, because of the two horizontal members on the crosses carried by these pages (Pl.6). This double-armed shape may have been intended to imitate more precisely the form of the relic of the True Cross, which was likewise shaped as a cross with two horizontal bars.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, the physical similarities between the cross-carpet pages and the relic of the True Cross created an association between the two that was sufficiently intimate, in the eyes of Insular Christians, for the pages to take on the properties of the relic. These properties would have enabled the cross-carpet pages to protect the texts they enclosed. In fact, according to *Elene*, the True Cross not only had healing powers, exorcising the demons that caused illnesses, but was also inviolable, protecting itself from evil.<sup>21</sup> If the cross-carpet pages were intimately associated with the relic of the True Cross, then the protective power exercised by these images may have been a manifestation of the power of that relic.

It is the sacred status of texts that the cross-carpet pages enclosed which makes this intimate association between these images and the relic of the True Cross plausible. If these pages possessed the properties of the relic, they most likely did so by embodying its spiritual presence, just as the Gospel texts in these

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Werner, "The Cross-Carpet Page in the Book of Durrow: The Cult of the True Cross, Adomnan, and Iona," *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990):178-180.

<sup>21</sup>"*Elene*,"229.

most holy of books were the embodiments of the spiritual presence of Christ himself. An image that acted in this manner, that possessed the properties of the original object it represented and embodied the spiritual presence of that original, is generally called an icon.<sup>22</sup> If the power of the cross-carpet pages is explained as a manifestation of the power of the relic of the True Cross, then these pages can rightly be termed icons of the relic of the True Cross.

The power the cross-carpet pages possessed for the protection of the texts they enclosed has been explained in two ways; first, as the power of the sign of Christ's victory to frighten away demons with the memory of their own defeat, and secondly as the power of the relic of the True Cross present in images acting as icons. The first of these two explanations shows the cross-carpet pages as performing their particular function for the same reason that the monumental stone crosses performed theirs, because both were the sign of Christ's victory. On the other hand, the second of these two explanations, which is not shared by the monumental stone crosses, shows the two groups of crosses not only as functioning differently, but also as performing these functions for different reasons. There is no need, however, to choose between the two explanations of the power of the cross-carpet pages and so decide whether they were similar to or differently from the stone monuments. Both explanations can exist side by side within the cross-carpet pages,

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<sup>22</sup>For a discussion of icons in the Insular world see James Earl, "Typology and Iconographic Style in Early Medieval Hagiography," Studies in the Literary Imagination VIII no.1 (Spring 1975)24-28, 39-43..

making them simultaneously like and unlike the monumental stone crosses.

Accepting both explanations of the power of the cross on the cross-carpet pages forces recognition of the dual nature possessed by the Insular crosses in general, and by the cross-carpet pages in particular. This duality of the cross is well demonstrated in the poem *The Dream of the Rood*. The Dreamer figure's vision of the cross has already been partially described, he sees it as the gleaming, golden, jewel encrusted sign of Christian victory. Yet,

through all that gold I could perceive the former strife of  
wretched men, that it had once bled on the right side...at times  
it was bedewed with moisture, stained with the flowing of  
blood, at times adorned with treasure.<sup>23</sup>

The cross the Dreamer sees alternates between being adorned with treasure and smeared with blood. It is alternately the glorious sign of Christ's victory and the gory instrument of his Passion, which would become the relic of the True Cross. The cross alternates between these two aspects because it is both of them. The victorious cross and the cross as an instrument of torture are the two aspects, the two natures, of a single thing.

The cross was not alone in possessing a dual nature, Christ was also possessed of two natures, as both God and man. That, at least, was the doctrinal position upheld by the western Church after being validated by the Papacy at the Council of Chalcedon in 449.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>"Dream," 235.

<sup>24</sup>Woolf, "Doctrinal Influences," 138-142. Michael Swanton, *The Dream of The Rood*, Old and Middle English Texts, ed. G.L. Brook (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 68.

The papal position essentially stated that Christ possessed both a fully human and a fully divine nature and that the two were distinct from one another, but were nevertheless indivisible. This position was meant to be a compromise between two other conflicting interpretations of the relationship between the divine and the human in Christ and to end the debate on this issue. Yet the controversy concerning this relationship continued even into the late seventh century, when the Insular crosses were being created.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the English church was involved in the continuing debate on this issue, for the English Bishops met in a council at Hatfield in 680 to sign a statement supporting the papal position, which the Pope was preparing to defend once again at an Ecumenical Council in 682.<sup>26</sup>

Christ's two natures can be seen as analogous to those of the cross. His divinity, which triumphed over death and the devil, can be likened to the triumphant cross, the sign of that same victory. His humanity, which suffered and died and then was resurrected can be likened to the wood of the True Cross, which bore him in his sufferings, was cut down and buried, and then was recovered and enshrined in glory. This second analogy is explicitly made in the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, wherein the cross is made to speak. It recounts to the Dreamer its experiences on Calvary,

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<sup>25</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 247-264. Woolf, "Doctrinal Influences," 138-9. Swanton, *Dream*, 56-58.

<sup>26</sup> Bede, *History*, 234-6.

I saw the Lord of mankind hasten with great zeal that he might be raised upon me...they pierced me with dark nails; the wounds are still plain to view in me, gaping gashes of malice...They bemocked us both together. I was all bedewed with blood.<sup>27</sup>

In this passage, the cross is shown as suffering through the Passion. The most common interpretation of this passage is that the cross was used to represent Christ's suffering humanity so that his divinity could be shown as an impassible warrior, battling stoically upon the cross.<sup>28</sup>

This interpretation of *The Dream of the Rood* allows the poem to be seen as having been designed to reflect the western Church's understanding of Christ's two natures, for it presents both his divinity and his humanity. The analogies between Christ's two natures and those of the cross allow the cross-carpet pages, and the Insular crosses as a whole, to also be seen in relation to this point of doctrine. Perhaps, the original audiences for these works of art, accustomed to the idea of Christ as possessed of two natures, were both willing and able to see a similar duality within the cross.

Martin Werner first linked the debate over the relationship between the divine and the human in Christ to a cross-carpet page, the one in the Book of Durrow (Pl.6). He did so by first associating this cross-carpet page with the relic of the True Cross, because of its double-armed shape. According to Werner, devotion to the relic of the True Cross was an expression of support for the western

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 236.

<sup>28</sup>Robert B. Burlin, "The Ruthwell Cross, the Dream of the Rood and the Vita Contemplativa," *Studies in Philology* 65 no.1(1968):28-29. Rosemary Woolf, "Doctrinal Influences on The Dream of the Rood," *Medium Aevum* xxviii (1958):149-50.

Church's understanding of the relationship between Christ's two natures, because it entailed acknowledging the reality of the Incarnation and therefore of Christ's humanity, which was one half of this point of doctrine.<sup>29</sup> Werner's reading of this cross-carpet page did not relate it to Christ's divine nature. Instead, he interpreted the Four Evangelist Symbols page which faces this cross-carpet page, as referring to the cross as cosmic symbol and therefore as representing Christ's divinity.<sup>30</sup>

By dividing the two natures of the cross between two different images, this formulation of the duality of the cross in Insular images differs from the one developed in this study. This division also makes Werner's argument specific to the Book of Durrow, for no other extant Insular Gospel book contains a cross-carpet page facing a Four Evangelist Symbols page. Furthermore, Werner's interpretation of this cross-carpet page, although it related the page to the relic of the True Cross, did not show the Insular image as an icon of the relic. Therefore, this interpretation did not begin to explain the protective function of the cross-carpet pages. In fact, Werner did not recognize the cross-carpet page as a protective covering, he instead interpreted this page, with the facing Four Evangelist Symbols page, as a scholarly figuration of the two of the holy sites in Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup> Lastly, Werner used this second interpretation of these two pages to advance an argument concerning

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<sup>29</sup>Werner, "Durrow," 187.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 213. See Chapter 2, Figure 7, p 30.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 208-212.

the specific date and provenance of the Book of Durrow; such issues of date and provenance were firmly renounced at the beginning of this study in favor of the questions of function and meaning.<sup>32</sup>

By connecting the Book of Durrow cross-carpet page to both the relic of the True Cross and the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ, Martin Werner's work initiated the development of the argument presented in this study. In its final form, however, the argument presented here differs from Werner's in both its details and its central thesis, that the cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses, in their original function as interior book covers and standards of the Christian faith, were manifestations of the duality of the cross, as both the instrument of the Passion and the sign of Christ's victory.

As the signs of Christ's victory over evil and as icons of the relic of the True Cross, the monumental stone crosses and cross-carpet pages were powerful objects within the culture that produced them. In fact, the duality of the cross both reflected and enhanced its strong association with Christ himself, further increasing the power of this symbol. The use of the cross as a powerful symbol was not unique to Insular culture and even today, the cross continues to be a prominent public symbol of the Christian faith. In fact, investigating the use of the cross outside of the Insular context may reveal that the power of this symbol continues to be informed by its dual nature. However, the fascination with the examination of the cross in an Insular context lies not in the symbol itself, but in types

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 216-223.

of works of art that embodied this symbol in this culture. The cross-carpet pages and monumental stone crosses were all but unique to the Insular world. They stood as powerful and unusual manifestations of this ubiquitous Christian symbol.

## PLATES



Plate 1. Cross-Carpet Page, The Lindisfarne Gospels, Folio 2 verso

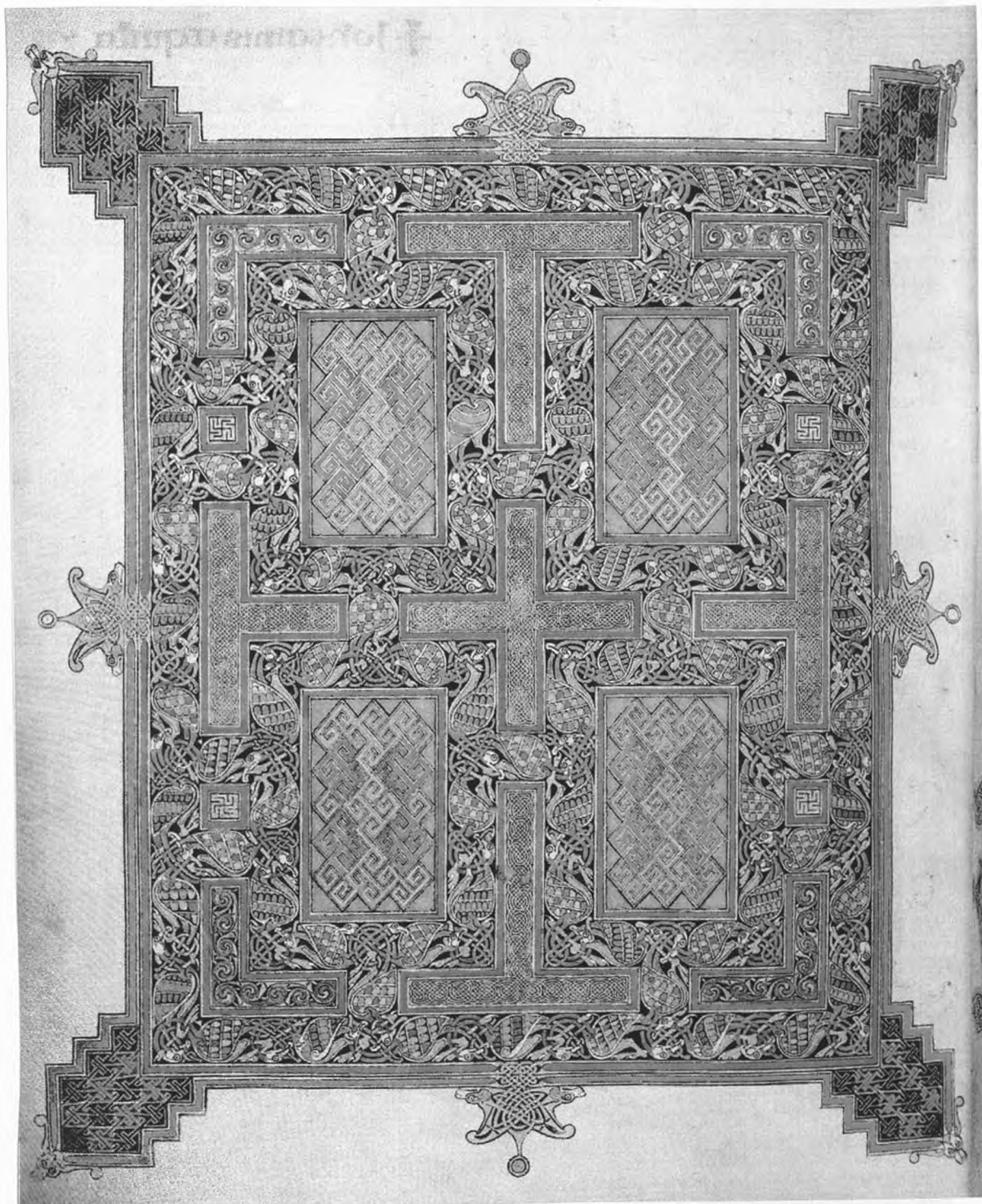


Plate 2. Cross-Carpet Page, The Lindisfarne Gospels, Folio 210  
verso

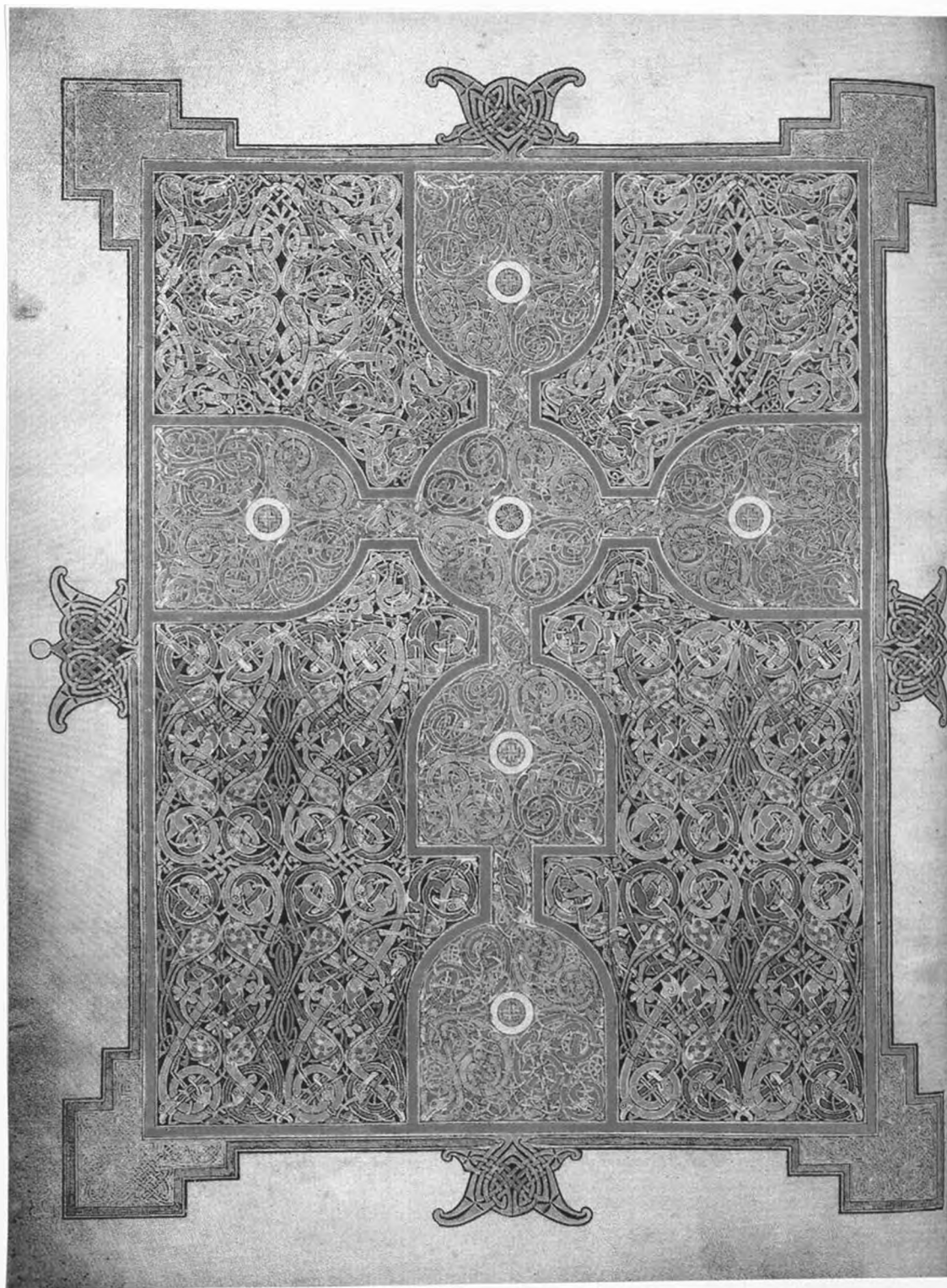


Plate 3. Cross-Carpet Page, The Lindisfarne Gospels, Folio 26 verso



Plate 4. Cross-Carpet Page, The Lindisfarne Gospels, Folio 94 verso



Plate 5. Cross-Carpet Page, The Lindisfarne Gospels, Folio 138  
verso

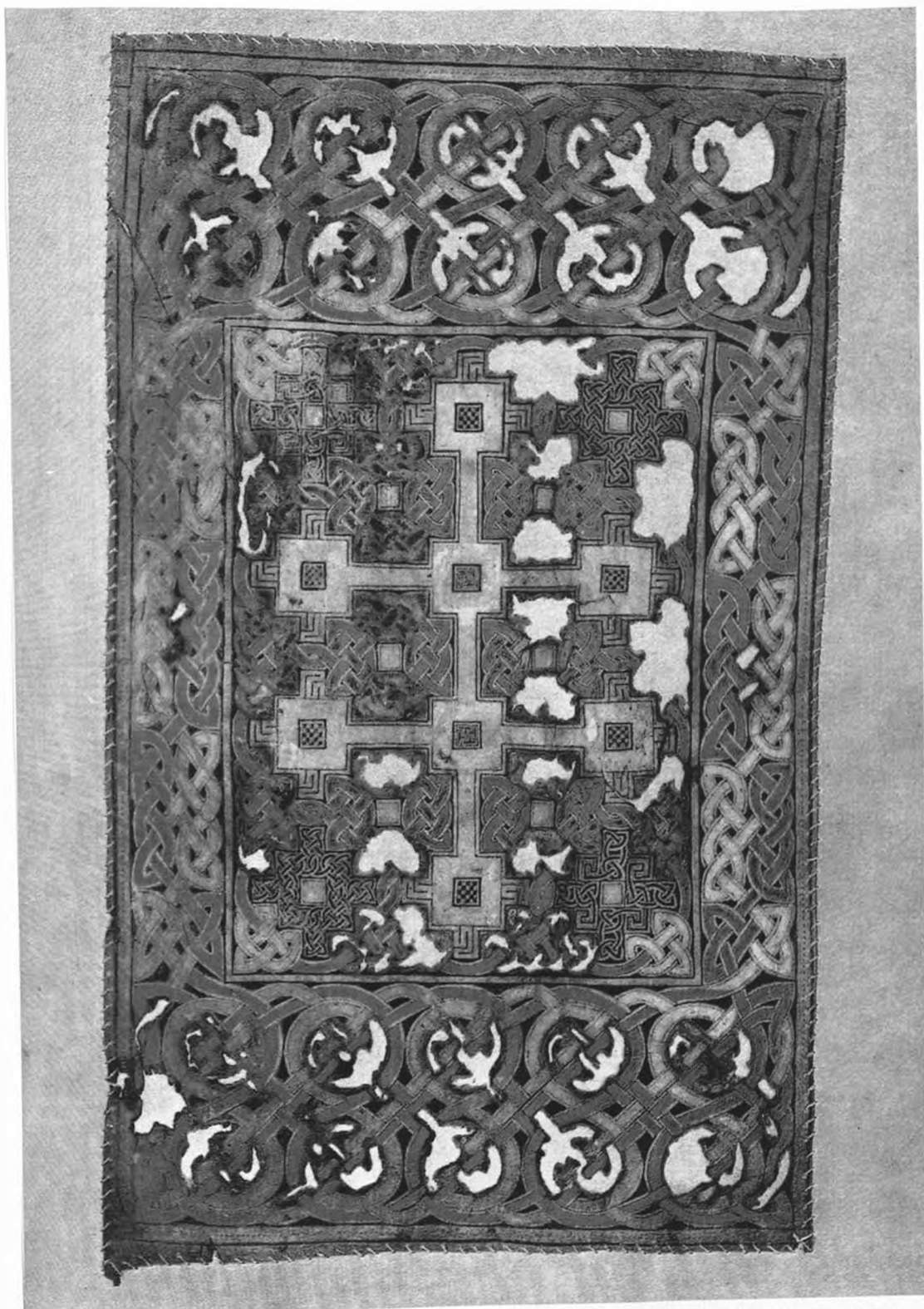


Plate 6. Cross-Carpet Page, The Book of Durrow, Folio 1 verso



Plate 7. North Face of the Ruthwell Cross, Dumfries





Plate 9. West Face of the Bewcastle Cross, Cumberland

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