

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

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The Anglo-Saxon carved stone monuments that survive today from Derbyshire and Staffordshire have formed part of the corpus of this material nationally and have attracted the attention of antiquarians and scholars for well over three centuries; with Robert Plot's late seventeenth-century account of some of the stones in Staffordshire providing the earliest attested engagement with the sculptures in the region. Indeed, his interest in the monuments was such that it resulted in the publication of what is the earliest illustration of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture (see Chapter I). From this starting point visual records of the material have continued to accompany the textual accounts of the eighteenth through to the twenty-first century, being preserved in notebooks as well as local and national publications, journals and monographs, and taking the form of sketches, rubbings, photographs and most recently, digital reconstructions. Thus George Forrest Browne's rubbings, refined with outlines in ink and reproduced on printer's blocks by the costly process of photolithography, were presented to the reader as 'accurate' visual records accompanying the textual account of the survey of the Derbyshire sculptures that they accompanied (Browne 1886)—in reaction to the sketches published by earlier antiquaries (e.g. Rooke 1796). In the first quarter of the twentieth century sketches by a professional artist were produced by Collingwood on his site-visits, then checked against photographs (see Hawkes forthcoming) and the results published; other accounts were illustrated simply by photographs (e.g. Routh 1937a–b), sometimes supplemented by line-drawn diagrams of particular details, such as an interlace form. With the recovery of the fragmentary shrine panel at Lichfield in the early twenty-first century digital imaging providing rotational 3D viewing came into play.

The stone sculptures from this region have thus been presented over the centuries of their scholarship with systematic attempts to juxtapose the textual

with the visual in ways that reflect the technological advances of a given period and the concerns of their authors. This continuum of visual representation is perhaps due, in part, to the notable emphasis on figural carving that characterises the sculpture of this region, with over half (17) of the 30 stone monuments dated to the Anglian period featuring such decoration, and nearly the same number (16) surviving from the ninth through tenth centuries.¹ This represents a notably high proportion of carved figural schemes compared with that surviving in other areas of Anglo-Saxon England and may well have contributed to the nature of the scholarly interest in the monuments (see Chapter VI).

Also reflective of the history of the scholarship—of Anglo-Saxon sculpture generally, and so of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire material as well—are the varying strategies that have been brought to bear to date the carvings as awareness has grown, particularly in the course of the twentieth century, of the datings assigned comparatively emotively by earlier scholars as the early medieval nature of the sculptures came to be recognised (see Chapter I). In this respect, as Rosemary Cramp has succinctly put it: 'so far no analytical method has been devised to date carved stone in absolute terms' (Cramp 1991, xlvii). In other words, no dates can be said to be 'absolute' since there are no reliable reference points on which to set a chronological 'benchmark', let alone develop an indisputable chronology based on style, an approach that has been developed to mitigate the absence of points of origin (see e.g. Orton 1999).

The dating of architectural sculptures has, of course, followed a slightly different scholarly trajectory, with extant historical accounts of the structures and their

1. These numbers do not include the three pieces at Bakewell (12, 15 and 16) which, although featuring figural decoration probably originated outside the area under consideration here, from Sandbach in Cheshire.

sites available (albeit in a limited way) to contextualise the contemporary decorated architectural features, as is the case at Repton in Derbyshire (see Chapter V). In most cases, however, dates have generally come to be derived from stylistic comparison with other media or with stone sculptures elsewhere, where dates have sometimes, in the past, been assigned with a degree of over-confidence (e.g. Kendrick 1949). Comparison with other media, for example, may not form an accurate base from which to develop a chronology, simply because we do not know whether a style or motif carved in relief on stone was contemporary with a given (perhaps portable) artefact, or whether the carving was intended to recall or reproduce something that already had a degree of antiquity. The limitations of this dating method have long been recognised (e.g. Wilson 1984, 15–16), but in the absence of clear alternatives (as recognised by Cramp), the dates assigned here for the sculptures extant in Derbyshire and Staffordshire tend to follow the general consensus which has come to be accepted in the light of considerable scrutiny for well over a century of scholarship.

The range of dates assigned to the free-standing sculptures in this volume is thus understood to lie between the eighth and eleventh centuries, with the majority, largely the carved stone crosses, clustering in the ninth and tenth centuries. The dating of monuments assigned to the latter end of this range depends to a great extent on whether Anglo-Scandinavian elements are considered to appear in the sculptural ornament (see e.g. Bailey 1980). This too, can be problematic because we know that Scandinavian presence was not uniform across the northern and eastern counties which eventually became subject to the Danelaw, of which areas of Derbyshire and Staffordshire were variously a part. There are, for example, almost no Scandinavian place-names in the Peak District. Furthermore, many, if not most, sculptures are fragmentary; with so much of their original carved decoration missing it is rarely possible to make a clear assessment of their date. It has also been argued that regional variety could be mistaken for chronological sequencing (Cramp 1978, 5), and the possibility suggested that, because of this, most free-standing sculpture could be assigned to short bursts of activity in the earlier part of the tenth century, irrespective of the presence or otherwise of Scandinavian elements, the latter not always easy to identify (Sidebottom 1999; 2000; see further Chapter VII). The dating of the Anglo-Saxon stone sculptures that have been presented here, therefore, should be

considered to reflect no more than informed opinion in keeping with the current state of the scholarship generally.

As with the architectural sculptures, such decisions are, of course, not made in isolation. Awareness of theological and ecclesiastical concerns current at different times in the early Middle Ages and the ways in which these were given visual expression also comes into play, as does the historical evidence for activities in the regions where the sculptures survive (see Chapter IV). Here, the activities relating to Derbyshire and Staffordshire are especially complex as the region seems to mark one of the divisions between the Danelaw and southern (Anglo-Saxon) England. Much of the area represented by the two counties was located in the Mercian heartlands, but we are also aware of a number of relatively small political or administrative units which are known from documentary sources such as the so-called Tribal Hidage, the earliest manuscript of which dates to the eleventh century. The region was also an area where both Northumbria and Mercia vied for power in terms of territorial acquisition, with Northumbrian jurisdiction extending into the northern part of the two counties in the seventh century, until Mercian fortunes were restored. Written sources and archaeological evidence indicate that the territories of Derbyshire and Staffordshire were of central importance for Mercian rulers, and included places such as Tamworth, where royal council meetings were held, and religious foundations like Repton and Hanbury that were foci of royal patronage, burial and saints' cults. Nevertheless, during the ninth century it is apparent that the Viking invasions and subsequent settlement eventually created a major division within the two counties, one that was later formulated into the Danelaw division. The exact boundary between Scandinavian-controlled Mercia and Anglo-Saxon Mercia in the ninth century is unknown, but it appears to have been somewhere in what became the county of Staffordshire.

With this in mind it is possible to suggest that some of the political diversity within the two counties is reflected in the regional groupings of the free-standing monuments in the region (see Sidebottom 1996; 1997b). Four groups have been identified through their repeated use of selected motifs (see Chapters III and VII, and Figs. 9–12), two of which, the Trent Valley Group and the Peak Group, appear to coincide with our understanding of the territorial arrangements of the Mercian heartlands—or at least, 'original' Mercia (see Chapter IV and Fig. 15)—and the land

unit of the *Pecsaetan*, respectively. Another grouping, the Pennine Fringes Group, appears to identify areas of Hiberno-Norse settlement, with its own repertoire of design elements displaying similarities to carvings to the west where such settlement is known to have occurred; this group is located on the marginal land, especially on the Gritstone fringes of the Peak District of Derbyshire and Staffordshire. The fourth grouping, the Dove Valley sub-group of sculpture, is difficult to see as entirely separate. It has similarities with the larger Trent Valley Group but also has its own particular variations. It is geographically discreet, being restricted to a relatively small area around the River Dove and its tributaries, and it may be that it represents the preferences of the sculptors and/or their patrons, thereby forming a localised variant of the larger group (see Chapter III and Fig. 11).

The evidence for such groupings is, as implied by the sculptures clustered on the Gritstone fringes of the Peak District, further supported by geological evidence (see Chapter II). It seems that two main sandstones provided the sculptors with most of their material: the Carboniferous Millstone Grit and the younger Triassic Sherwood Sandstone, both of which form the bedrock to much of the area covered by the counties. Millstone Grit is found around the periphery of the limestone core of the Peak District of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, in the northern part of the two counties at the southern end of the Pennines. Sherwood Sandstone, on the other hand, is found outcropping to the south of the Pennine ridge in southern Derbyshire and across most of Staffordshire.

Carboniferous Limestone, found at the core of the Peak District, was not used for monument production with just two possible exceptions: both at Bakewell (19 and 20) in Derbyshire. This is no doubt due to the fact that Carboniferous Limestone is extremely difficult to carve successfully and, furthermore, outcrops of the more amenable Millstone Grit (and to some extent Sherwood Sandstone) were never far from the sites of display. The corollary is that Gritstone was used for more than half of the monuments extant in the region. Although there are outcrops of Coal Measures sandstones in the region, both in eastern Derbyshire and in northern Staffordshire, no monuments were carved in this medium (Table 1, p. 12). Stone of the Cadeby Formation (formerly Magnesian Limestone), although found in eastern Derbyshire, again was not used in production, but no Derbyshire monuments, with the exception of Blackwell (East Derbyshire) 1, are located close to this stone source. A small number of non-local stone types were used by the sculptors in

the two counties. The 'angel' of Lichfield 1 was carved in a Jurassic Oolitic limestone, as were Derby 3 and 10 and the shaft at Spondon (1). With the probable exception of the Lichfield sculpture, the Oolitic limestone was most likely transported along the River Trent from Lincolnshire (possibly Roman Lincoln) and it is notable that Spondon lies on the north bank of the Trent, with Derby having a Roman road linking it directly to the same river at Sawley (Fig. 14). It is feasible, perhaps even likely, that Roman milestones and/or columns were reused in the production of the Anglo-Saxon monuments: particularly the round-shafted crosses in the north-west of the region, with many of these being located close to Roman roads (see Chapter III).

The conclusion to be drawn from analysis of the stone-types used for the sculptures is that, with very few exceptions, the stone used in the production of the monuments across Derbyshire and Staffordshire was from sandstones local to the site of display. Notably, at Alstonefield and Ilam in Staffordshire, locations both on the Carboniferous Limestone, both Sherwood Sandstone and Millstone Grit have been used in monument production. Sources for both of these lie relatively close to the sites: Sherwood Sandstone to the south and Gritstone to the north. At Alstonefield, there are two monuments (6 and 11) which were produced from Millstone Grit and both show rare evidence that they were fashioned on site. The nature of the site at Alstonefield is uncertain, and it may not have been a significant pre-Conquest ecclesiastical centre, despite the number of monuments extant there; the church is not mentioned in Domesday (Morris 1976, 8, 28).

Thus, overall, the use of locally-sourced stone types suggests that most sculpture in region was produced on site rather than transported from a centralised centre of production. This, of course, does not mean that sculptors associated with a particular centre did not travel to a number of sites to carve the stones quarried locally (see Chapter VI). Generally speaking, the choice of stone-type appears to represent a pragmatic response to the geographical and, thereby, geological distribution. For example Millstone Grit predominates through the Peak Group, whereas Sherwood Sandstone was used extensively in the Trent Valley Group. However, at Alstonefield, Sherwood Sandstone has been used for a monument of the Trent Valley Group (e.g. Alstonefield 4) and Millstone Grit for the monuments of the Pennine Fringes Group. At Leek, similar observations can be made where, for example, Leek 1 of the Trent Valley Group is produced from Sherwood Sandstone,

whereas Leek 2 of the Pennine Fringe Group is of Millstone Grit. Both are found in close proximity to these sites, suggesting that different stone-types were available to the sculptors producing the monuments of the two groups, implying in turn, either that both may have operated over different topographical zones or that the availability of even easily accessible stone-types was part of a complex set of socio-economic relations operating in each locality.

In the Peak District, the large crosses and associated monuments at Wirksworth (2 and 5), Bakewell (1), Eyam (1) and Bradbourne (1) appear to share common features in terms of their figural types, iconographic schemes, interlace patterns and plant-scrolls, suggesting that there may have been a single sculptor at work or, at least, a small number working together following set patterns and with access to a common set of iconographic models. It is a relatively small group where this would have been feasible. Likewise, the Dove Valley sub-group (Chapter III) is a geographically discreet group of monuments with a distinctive figure-type, where it would have been feasible for a single sculptor or a small group to have executed the carvings, but this must, of course, remain uncertain. In other regional groups, it is not possible to detect the hand of a single or even a small group of peripatetic sculptors, in many cases because of the fragmentary nature of the sculptures or the lack of a distinctive 'hallmark'.

Determining the function of free-standing monuments produced by these sculptors, whatever their working relationships, has not been without its problems. During the first half of the twentieth century they were variously explained as serving a number of different functions: funerary (cf. Collingwood 1927, 4), wayside markers (cf. Brown 1937, 93), preaching crosses (cf. Kendrick 1938, 126), and boundary markers (cf. Pape 1945-6, 39). More recently they have also been explained as votive offerings, places of prayer, and as markers of places associated with saints and their funeral routes, all having 'potential apotropaic power' (Moreland 2010, 257). Many of these explanations have been inspired by the diversity of location, with some of the monuments standing in churchyards but with others located where it is more difficult to see an explicit ecclesiastical connection. With this in mind, Lang (1988, 8), among others, suggested that they might have functioned as 'cenotaphs', and the notion that they were, in some way memorial is not unreasonable. At an obvious level, the few inscriptions preserved on the Anglo-Saxon free-standing monuments suggest

that they were erected in commemoration. Only two such inscriptions, however (both runic), survive from the region under consideration here: at Bakewell and Leek. While Leek 1 (apparently articulated in Anglo-Saxon rather than Scandinavian runes, Ill. 565) is too damaged to interpret, Bakewell 35 (Ill. 96) can be reasonably suggested to have served a commemorative (Scandinavian) function. Here, the choice of runes rather than the roman alphabet might suggest that across the Anglo-Saxon period secular influences may well have played a significant role in the production of the monuments—although the mix of runic and roman, Old English and Latin, is a recognised epigraphic feature of the early Anglo-Saxon Church (Page 1989; Fell 1994). More broadly speaking, however, notions of 'cenotaph' and 'memorial' hold true for all monuments set up in the form of a cross, the definitive symbol of Christianity, whether erected under ecclesiastical or secular patronage. Free-standing monuments of this form would invite the viewer to 'call to mind' ideas associated with that belief system and commemorate its presence in the landscape.

Within the two counties a number of principal religious houses have been identified as flourishing during the Anglo-Saxon period (Fig. 18), including the important monastic sites at Repton and Hanbury and the diocesan centre at Lichfield. A monastery was also founded in the later Anglo-Saxon period at Burton Abbey (Burton-on-Trent) and just outside this region, in Leicestershire, not far from the Derbyshire border, stood the early monastery at Breedon-on-the-Hill. Elsewhere in the region, there were lesser houses that were no doubt also significant, perhaps on a more local scale. This said, the relationship between stone sculpture and ecclesiastical provision is not always obvious. On the one hand, there are sites such as Bakewell, itself most likely the principal church in the Peak District, where the array of sculptural fragments supports such a status for the church. Similar observations apply to St Alkmund's in Derby and, of course, Repton, with its chapel at Ingleby where elaborate sculptures were also displayed. On the other hand, some important ecclesiastical sites, especially in Staffordshire, show no sculptural interest: stone monuments are notably absent from Hanbury, Tattenhall, Penkridge and St Bertelin's/St Mary's in Stafford, for instance. The relationship between pre-Conquest churches (at least, those recorded in Domesday) and the distribution of Anglo-Saxon sculpture is interesting; some have sculptural provision (for example at Bradbourne in Derbyshire) but many do not. In Derbyshire alone, only eleven out of the thirty-seven churches recorded

in Domesday (Morris 1976) have sculpture. The position is similar in Staffordshire, although here the churches in Domesday may be under-represented. The reason for this disparity is unclear. It may be a case of differential survival, where sculptural fragments have been destroyed or yet remain to be recovered from pre-Conquest foundations. Alternatively, it might reflect the existence of a relatively small number of churches when the sculpture was erected as opposed to the much larger number that was recorded in the later eleventh century.

There are certainly a number of church sites with sculpture where there is no record—neither historically nor archaeologically—of a pre-Conquest church. A good example is Eyam in Derbyshire with its impressive monument of the Peak Group (Eyam 1), or at Leek in Staffordshire with its array of sculptures. There are also sculpture sites which are extremely difficult to relate to any form of ecclesiastical provision and many of these can be identified with the Pennine Fringes Group. A good example is Eccles Pike (1), from where the cross-shaft that now stands in Chapel-en-le-Frith churchyard was brought from a wayside location. This movement of monument to churchyard may well have occurred elsewhere and crosses now found in an ecclesiastical context may represent an exaggerated number. The association of church and sculpture—especially free-standing monuments—may not have been direct. In some cases, of course, the relationship between the church (as an institution at the very least) and the sculptural monuments that were erected in a given locality was clearly expressed, and intended to be recognised. For instance, the schemes filling the crosses of the Peak District group (including that at Eyam where the sculpture provides the only early evidence of ecclesiastical activity at the site), display a complex set of references to the pastoral role of the Church and its clergy, and the salvific nature of the belief system promulgated by that institution and its adherents. If, however, it is accepted that a funerary function for the crosses is doubtful and that a broadly commemorative context is the more likely, then it is possible that some were erected at estate centres, not necessarily in churchyards, or were, in some cases, erected in prominent locations within individual landholdings—like the cross recorded as being erected on a secular estate by a landowner in Hampshire during the seventh century to provide a focus of prayer among those living on his lands (Talbot 1954, 154–5). Over time, churches were built at some of these centres and the current relationship between churchyard and monument came into being, although

there were some where the provision of a church was much later and, occasionally, never occurred at all (at Rowsley in Derbyshire, for example).

The various functions and social/ecclesiastical associations that can be discerned in the region are also reflected in the distribution of sculpture across the two counties which is far from uniform (see Chapter III and Fig. 8). Most of the sculpted stones considered here comprise free-standing monuments set up in the northern part of the region; there is a distinct lack of this form of sculpture in southern Staffordshire. Indeed, in the southern half of Staffordshire, there is a complete absence of sculpture identifiable with Anglo-Saxon activities, with the exception of the Wolverhampton column (Wolverhampton 1) and the Lichfield ‘angel’ (Lichfield 1). This area arguably lay outside the region subsumed by the Vikings in their conquest and settlement of the north Midlands, and the interesting question is why there is no earlier material in this area, once at the heart of Mercia, which included the politically important centres of Tamworth and Stafford. Elsewhere in the two counties sculpture is widely distributed with just a few areas where sculpture is rare; north-east Derbyshire is one of these, an area of relatively poor agricultural land and perhaps extensive woodland where there were few estate centres, secular or ecclesiastical.

Variety is also evident in the settings of the sculptures which are found at elevations ranging from below 50 m (e.g., at Wilne) to above 300 m (e.g., at Pym Chair or Eccles Pike). Perhaps the most interesting monuments are those which are located at 250 m or above (Table 2). All of these, where they can be identified with a regional group, belong to the Pennine Fringes Group and are fashioned from Millstone Grit, a stone type found at the highest altitudes. The elevation of some of these sculptures can be considerable; that at Eccles Pike, for example, was found at around 360 m and that at Pym Chair, at 466 m. It seems that the prime purpose of these sculptures may well have been intended to command a vista in the landscape, in contrast to those at relatively low altitudes.

Whatever their settings, the sculptural forms that were produced were also extremely varied (see Chapters VI and VII). Rectangular shafts are ubiquitous (with the exception of southern Staffordshire), with a small number of larger examples in the Peak District. There are also round-shafted crosses, most of which cluster in the north west of the region as part of a larger array that extended into Cheshire (see Bailey 2010, 33–7). Many of these ‘fan out’ from an area to the north and west of Buxton in Derbyshire and are

chiefly on, or close to, the Gritstone margins of the limestone 'White Peak'. The cross-heads that once surmounted these free-standing crosses are relatively rare and most are fragmentary, testifying to the ravages inflicted on the monuments over time. There are also the remains of a significant number of recumbent slabs surviving in the two counties, at Bakewell (33 and 34), Derby (8–10), Wirksworth (5), and Repton (15–

18, and possibly 10). These take a variety of forms and provide evidence of the impressive degree of innovation in sculptural design (and commemoration) that took place in this region across the Anglo-Saxon period, something that is brought into high relief in the process of bringing the monuments together in a volume such as this.