

CHAPTER VI

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORNAMENTAL REPERTOIRE

INTERLACE AND GEOMETRIC ORNAMENT

In the course of his pioneering work on the early Christian monuments of this region, most specifically of Wiltshire (Allen 1894, and see Chapter IV), Romilly Allen tried to apply the terminology and types he had constructed elsewhere in order to analyse the inventive, playful variations on a theme displayed in the geometric interlace of Northumbria and Pictland. In the event he could only identify a few types of 'geometric interlace' based on a grid, and the same problem is found in applying Gwenda Adcock's classifications as set out in the *General Introduction* to the Corpus series (Cramp 1984, xxviii–xlvi; id. 1991). There is a very limited repertoire of geometric types of interlace in the south-west, in which rows of pattern F (figure-of-eight) or pattern C, both simple and encircled, together with plain plait, are the most common. There is also however a type of free-running non-geometric interlace, such as occurs on the shafts from East Stour and Teffont Magna (Ils. 57–60, 517), which is composed of loops and twists linked by long diagonals, and which resembles the loops and twists which fill the spaces between the ribbon animals on shafts such as Ramsbury 3 or Dolton (Ils. 495–7, 20–3). It is not as if this most ubiquitous of Anglo-Saxon pattern elements could not be mastered by the Wessex carvers — much of the carving is very competent and assured — but it appears that its geometric interplay did not interest them. The strands of most of the interlace (with the exception of some pieces from Keynsham, Ils. 275, 295) are median-incised, and particularly in the eighth to ninth centuries, are delicately modelled.

In one case, on the panels in the centre of the jambs at Britford (Ill. 416), the patterns are unique in Wessex sculpture. Their triangular knot-work (Allen 1903, 298, no. 738; Cramp 1991, fig. 25) can be closely compared, however, with the decoration on the panels of the arch supports in the *Vespasian Psalter*, fol. 30v (Ill. 527). A variation of this triangular knot-work is also found on

the slab from Holy Trinity, Bradford-on-Avon where it is combined, not with vine-scrolls as at Britford, but with interlinked trumpet spirals and key patterns (Ils. 407–9), and this could equally have reflected the fashions of Insular manuscripts or metalwork.

From the fragments which remain, the Bath, Bradford and Keynsham cross-heads (Ils. 173–4, 400, 289), with their elegant pattern E terminals, are of comparable type and date, and at Bradford are combined with animal-headed interlace. Other cross-heads such as Cattistock or Shaftesbury Holy Trinity (Ils. 46, 101) have too little surviving for the pattern to be identified.

A few cross-shafts which have plant-scrolls as well as interlace, including East Stour and Gillingham, Dorset (Ils. 57–60, 66–7), and Kelston, Somerset (Ils. 268–9), have panels of free-flowing non-geometric interlace and form an early grouping. Broad Chalke, Wiltshire (Ils. 429–32), however combines a type of interlaced plant-scroll with panels of plain plait.

At Glastonbury pattern C ring knots occur on two pieces (Ils. 224, 232), as also on Ramsbury 3, where they are combined with animal ornament (Ils. 498–502), a combination which is also found at Dolton (Ill. 22). Pattern C knots also occur as the only interlace type on Keynsham 1, the Henstridge piece and the Knook shaft (Ils. 275, 258–64, 459), and can perhaps be seen as a popular Wessex type since it is also found amongst the few interlace fragments in the south-east, as for example Wantage, Berkshire and Wherwell, Hampshire (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, ils. 474–7 and 479–80).

Rows of figure-of-eight knots are however ubiquitous in Anglo-Saxon sculptures. In this area the slab from Banwell (Ill. 170) is of a type found in the tenth/eleventh century in the Midlands and East Anglia (see above, Chapter V, p. 32), but the pattern is used on earlier monuments here, with the freer ornament, at Teffont Magna, Ramsbury or Dolton (Ils. 518, 489, 20, 22), whilst on a panel from Shaftesbury Abbey a ribbon animal is bordered by a run of interlinked pattern F knots (Ill. 89).

If it were not for Colyton, Devon (Ills. 3–9), it could be said that free interlace is only found combined with vine-scroll derivatives; that the limited geometric types are to be found either on their own or with animal ornament; and that interlace is never found on monuments with acanthus-type ornament. Colyton is however an individual monument which seems to bridge different ornamental traditions, and will be further considered in Chapter IX (p. 72). The combination of panels of figure-of-eight and plain plait on the narrow sides of that shaft (Ills. 5–6), combined with interlaced ribbon animals (Ill. 7) and acanthus scrolls and sprays on the broad faces (Ills. 3–4, 8) sets it apart from any others.

Later in the series of monuments from this region are two granite crosses from Devon: Coplestone and Exeter. The former is decorated with panels of geometric interlace including plain plait, paired ring-knots, an unusual pattern of twists and loops (Allen 1903, 215, no. 552), as well as key patterns (Ills. 10–13). This has been dated to around the late tenth century, by the ring knots and the horseman, which are Viking-age types, and seems to represent a new influence in the area. The interlace panels are however finely carved and much more complex than the little panels of interlinked loops on the Exeter cross, with which it has been compared (Ills. 26–9). Like the key patterns, the Exeter carving is much cruder and clumsier (Ills. 32–3), and has affinities with British monuments from Cornwall and Wales. Other late examples of pseudo-interlace are to be found on two monuments from Cricklade (1 and 2, Ills. 445–6), and these seem to be copying monuments outside the area.

Other geometric ornament such as the spiraliform ornament on the Bradford-on-Avon slab or key patterns have been mentioned above in passing. It is important however to note that the fine key patterns on the Bradford and Glastonbury slabs (Ills. 407, 251) as well as the top of the Codford St Peter shaft (Ills. 425–8) can be paralleled in early manuscripts, and are part of a common Anglo-Saxon eighth-century tradition, whilst the simple key patterns on the later Coplestone and Exeter shafts seem to demonstrate new influences from stone carvings outside the area.

THE RIBBON ANIMAL PHENOMENON¹

A significant number of sculptures from Wessex are decorated with intertwined lacertine beasts with

¹ An earlier version of this section will be published in a volume of essays dedicated to the late Ann Hamlin and entitled, 'Colerne and the Irish connection'.

extended elements of their variously patterned bodies, or serpentine creatures entwined with interlace, and these have been the subject of more discussion than any other group of monuments in Wessex. They comprise, within the area of this volume, sculptures at Colyton and Dolton (Devon), Shaftesbury (Dorset), Chew Stoke, Frome, Glastonbury, Keynsham, Rowberrow, Wells, and West Camel (Somerset), Bradford-on-Avon, Colerne, and Ramsbury (Wiltshire); and outside the area, Little Somborne, Steventon, and Winchester Upper Brook Street (Hampshire), Abson, Deerhurst, and Gloucester (Gloucestershire), and Tenbury Wells (Worcestershire) (see Fig. 19).

As early as the nineteenth century a number of these West Saxon sculptures were identified as a distinctive regional group and their affiliation to Hiberno-Saxon art noted (Allen 1894; Browne 1908). Their dating, even from this point, divided between Browne's early eighth-century date (thus identifying them as some of the earliest crosses from the Wessex region), and Allen's view that they were much later. Brøndsted (1924, 218), however, more precisely linked the cross-hatching and contour bands on the animal bodies to Scandinavian influence, and this was later supported by other scholars such as Baldwin Brown (1937, 284–5), Talbot Rice (1952, 128–9) and initially Wilson (in Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966), although more recently he has seen them as related to Midland carvings of an earlier period (Wilson 1984, 108). All current views, however, are founded on an important study by Frank Cottrill (Cottrill 1931 and 1935) who saw these beasts as a variant of the Hiberno-Saxon ribbon animal and provided parallels from eighth-century manuscripts such as the Barberini (Rome) Gospels (Alexander 1978, cat. 36).

Nearly thirty years ago I considered these pieces (Cramp 1975, 186–7; id. 1977, 230), and briefly discussed the group, attributing it to an interest in the animal art of south-western Mercia. I attributed the style to the ninth/tenth centuries since many of the compositions were to be found on sculptures which did include Scandinavian-influenced compositions, such as St Alkmund's, Derby (see Cramp 1978, fig. 1.1). The debate has been developed by Tweddle, who in 1983 was inclined to spread the dating from the eighth century through the ninth century (1983, 18–20), but in 1995 would date them late eighth to early ninth (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, 34–40), saying that the spiral joint on animals 'virtually dropped out of use in Anglo-Saxon art by the early ninth century' (*ibid.*, 38). Tweddle's work on the Coppergate helmet (1992, 1132–1165) provides the best recent analysis of metalwork and sculptural parallels for the ribbon animals. In addition, Steven Plunkett in an unpublished thesis (1984, I, 180–201)

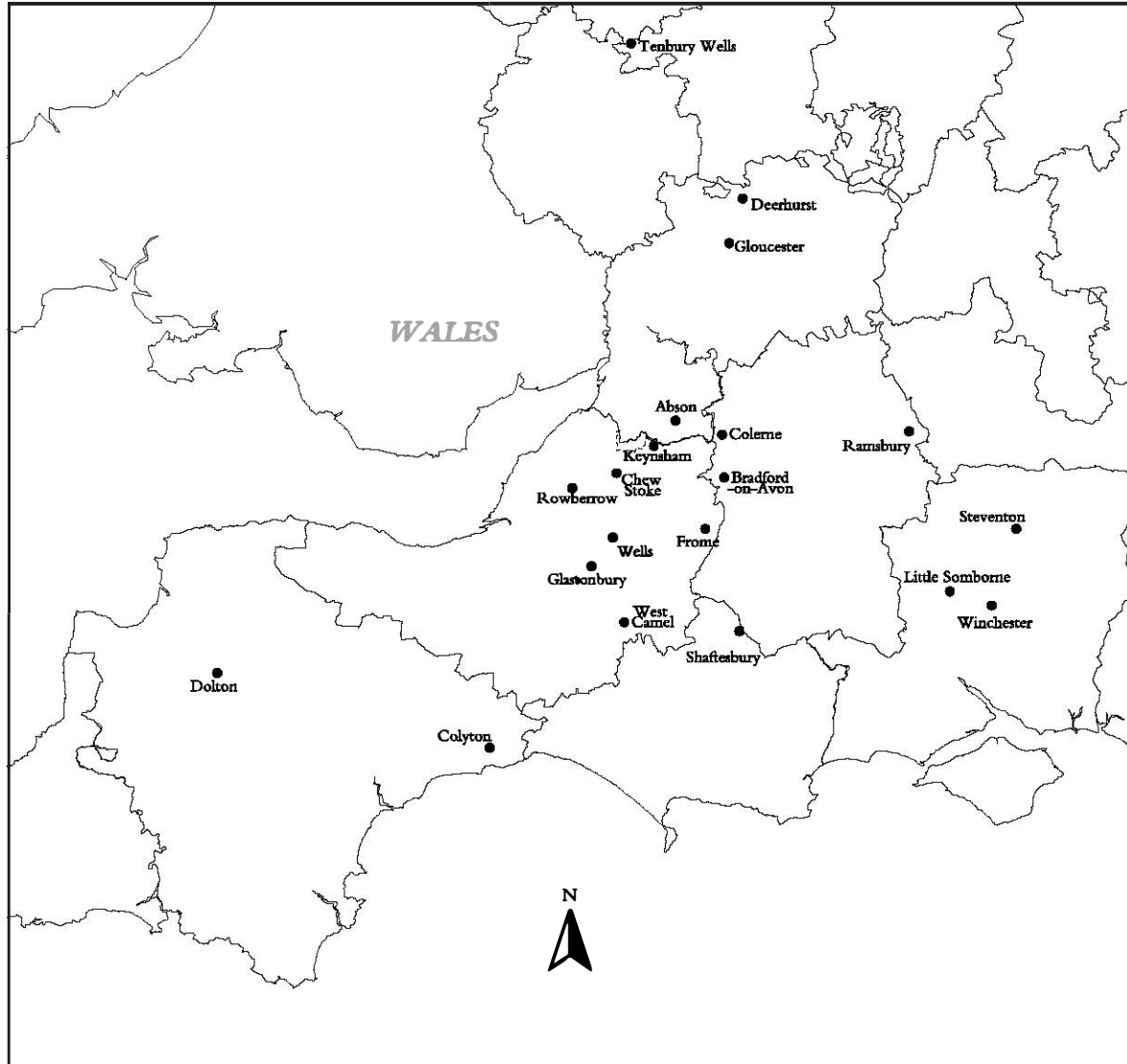


FIGURE 19

Distribution of sculpture with intertwined lacertine animals in south-west England

has examined the group in detail and in particular added two extra sites to the group, Abson and Deerhurst in Gloucestershire (ibid., 182–3). The examples from the Somerset area were also discussed by Foster (1987, 53–60), and the group in general terms by Bailey (1996, 20–2), who concludes that the late eighth century 'must be the likely date for most of the Colerne sculptures' (ibid., 22).

Amongst this group Cottrill saw Colerne 1a–b (Ills. 433–5) as primary — a position which most commentators accept, as they also accept that this is a coherent group of sculptures. Cottrill mentioned in passing that the zoomorphic decoration of the Tara brooch 'reminds one of Colerne not a little' (Cottrill 1935, 146; cf. Youngs 1989, 77) but Kendrick was most prominent in seeing the 'Celtic' aspect of West Saxon art in 'animal-patterns in the Hiberno-Saxon tradition', and further says, 'These animal-patterns represent a persistent under-current in West Saxon design of the period that must have some connexion with the ornamental repertory of the earlier barbaric manuscripts' (Kendrick 1938, 189). He further says that 'this new fondness for the Ribbon Style formula in animal-design was probably a result of continued contact with the Celtic west' (ibid., 190). In a footnote to these statements he adds that the resemblance to older manuscript-types of animals, e.g. the late eighth-century Cutbercht Gospels, fol. 71b, bottom panels (Alexander 1978, ill. 184), is 'probably accidental'. Kendrick also compared Tenbury Wells with the Barberini Gospels, fol. 11b, right-hand border (Alexander 1978, ill. 178), and finally provided a linear chronology in which 'these once fiery alert creatures' (such as Colerne) developed into 'smooth-flowing ribbon-scrawls' (Kendrick 1938, 190).

The modern work of Tweddle and Plunkett would now see the beginning of this 'school' as contemporary with the manuscripts with which Kendrick compared them, and less of a revival than a survival of Celto-Saxon traditions. Nevertheless there is still some debate as to the date-span of these sculptures and indeed their inter-relationships. There is also the related problem as to why these motifs were so ubiquitous and popular in Wessex, although Gwenda Adcock's recent work (2002) has demonstrated that what she calls 'the Lindisfarne tradition' of ribbon animals in Northumbria was more widespread and longer lasting than had hitherto been supposed.

If, in considering the origin and affinities of the Wessex group, one accepts that the two panels from Colerne are early in the series and that they are both from the same monument (see catalogue, p. 211), then one must note that variations emerge even on the same monument. There are compositional differences. On Colerne 1a

the two distinct animals' bodies cross and the extended pairs of front legs interlink, whilst their tails develop into interlace which fills the area between them; nevertheless these remain coherent animals (Ills. 433–4). On Colerne 1b a composition of two or three creatures is more obscure: only one is nearly complete, it is coiled back on itself and it has legs which penetrate the serpentine bodies which cross each other and surround it (Ill. 435). The heads of the animals on each panel differ, those on 1a being clearly canine or leonine and, despite the joint spirals, naturalistic, whilst the body patterning of the creature on 1b is varied and elaborate, with beaded chevrons on one side of its body and hatching on another, and even its ear is filled with pellets.

This hatching of the bodies on Colerne 1a is common to seventh- to eighth-century metalwork in both Ireland and Britain, as has been discussed by Niamh Whitfield (1995, 89–104), but there is a longer tradition in Ireland since it still persists in fine ecclesiastical pieces such as the twelfth-century Cross of Cong (Cone 1977, 214–15, pl. 63). Likewise in a few manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells, one can also find bodies double-outlined and decorated with slashed or 'hatched' ornament; and in fol. 202r (Henry 1974, pl. 109) not only are bird bodies 'hatched' but also the plant-scrolls, so this seems to be conceived as a ubiquitous surface texturing. It is however of interest that the creatures in the Lindisfarne Gospels and related Insular manuscripts are never decorated in this way, nor are Northumbrian sculptures until the Viking Age. Moreover the interlace, and indeed the animals, are always laid out with the discipline of a grid, and the animals in Adcock's 'Lindisfarne tradition' (2002) retain this characteristic as well as the plain bodies into the tenth century.

The simple hatching, herringbone, or repetitive dot patterning found in the Wessex sculptures is also different from the surface treatment of Mercian profile beasts, in which the patterning emphasises the major elements of an animal body and differentiates it from the texturing of birds or reptiles. The Gloucester animals have significant differences in body patterns to indicate canines, birds or reptiles (Ills. 543–4), although these are much more stylised than the differences in the wing and body patterns on the Gandersheim Casket creatures of the later eighth century (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 177, ill. 138). In Northumbrian sculpture body patterning is not often used, but where it is, as on the base of the Rothbury cross (Cramp 1984, pl. 215, 1224), it is only on reptiles that whole body is patterned, with lightly incised herringbone texture, and the bodies are rounded and realistic. This differs very much from the hard outlining of the West Saxon creatures. This outlining

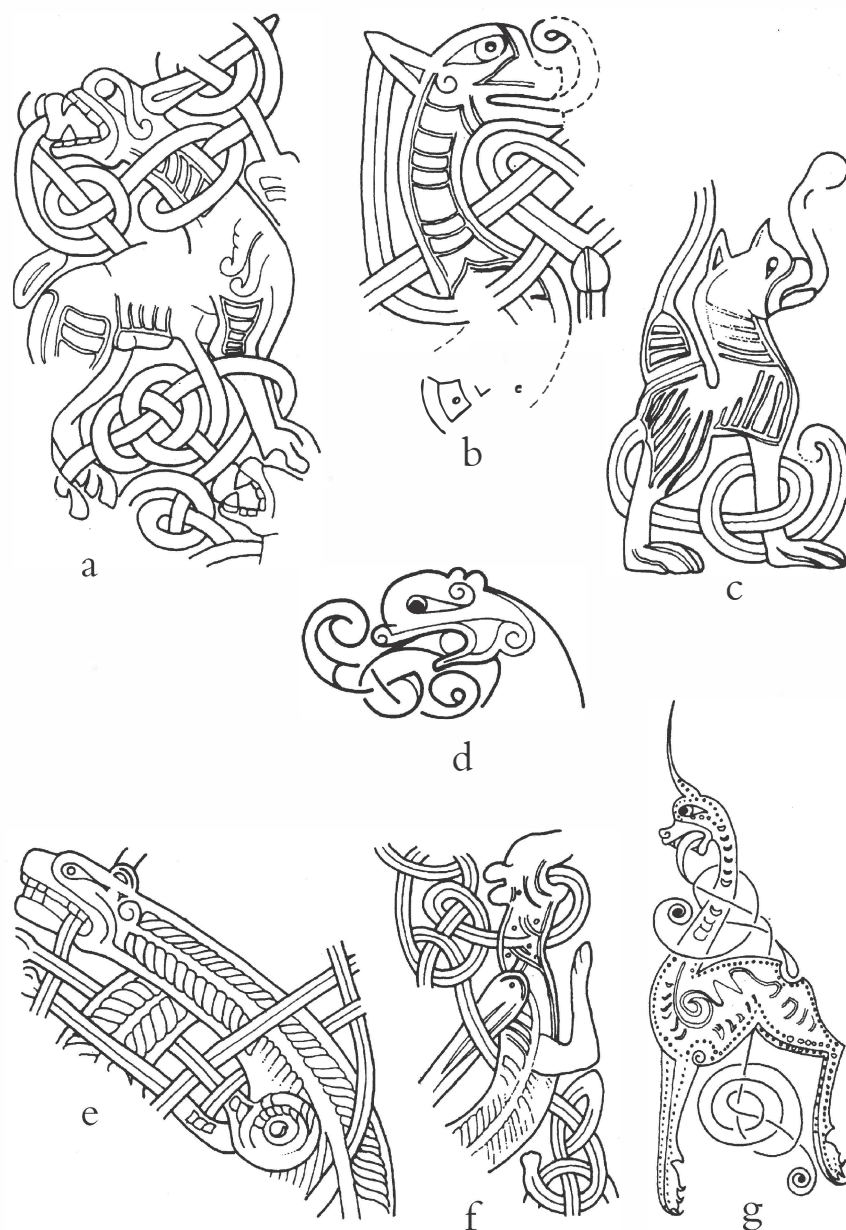


FIGURE 20

Animals enmeshed in interlace, on stone and in manuscripts (nts)

- (a) Gloucester (St Oswald) cross-shaft, Gloucestershire; (b) Glastonbury 2A, Somerset; (c) Crophorne cross-head, Worcestershire; (d) London, British Library, MS Royal I. E. VI, fol. 4r (arcade terminal); (e) Colerne 1aA, Wiltshire; (f) Dolton 1aD, Devon; (g) St Petersburg, Public Library, MS Cod. F. v. I. 8, fol. 18r (initial L)

and repetitive patterning is however very frequent in metalwork, and a noteworthy example is the Coppergate helmet from York (Tweddle 1992, 965–75, figs. 429–437). Here the animals on the nasal have cross-hatched and outlined bodies, with spiral hips from which spring spindly legs, but the heads have long extended jaws — a type found in so many Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, although the canine heads with gnashing teeth which terminate the eyebrows have many similarities with Colerne. The emphasis on the heads is indeed, as has often been remarked, reminiscent of terminals in English metalwork and manuscripts of the eighth to ninth centuries (*ibid.*, figs. 571–4). The heads of the leonine creatures on the shaft from St Oswald's Priory, Gloucester (Ill. 543), are similar to Colerne 1a, but the composition is different. The Gloucester animals remain part of an inhabited plant-scroll, and their stance is explained as they reach to snap at bunch of fruit, while the Colerne creatures stretch or writhe for no apparent reason.

In a recent article discussing the sculptures from Glastonbury (Cramp 2001, 155–9), I grouped together Colerne 1a, Glastonbury 2 and Dolton 1 with Mercian profile beasts from Gloucester and Cropthorne, Worcestershire (*ibid.*, fig. 4a–f; see Fig. 20). In this case Colerne could be seen as at the end of a western Mercian tradition, but at the beginning of a style in which the body patterns are transferred to ribbon animals. These coherent profile beasts with forelegs have more in common with each other than with the serpentine animals from other sites, whose legless bodies are variously patterned but most often by simple hatching. One might however note the more canine-type heads of the ribbon animals at Steventon (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, ill. 472) and West Camel, face A (Ill. 346), which set them apart from the purely serpentine creatures which are found in this area at Bradford-on-Avon 1 (Ills. 398–9), Colyton 1 (Ill. 7), Frome 1 (Ills. 221–2), Keynsham 3 and 5 (Ills. 274, 283, 287), Ramsbury 2 and 3 (Ills. 485–7, 492, 495–7), Rowberrow 1 (Ill. 322), Shaftesbury Abbey 1 (Ills. 89–91) and Wells 2 (Ill. 325). On the other hand there are significant differences even in the profile group: as discussed in the catalogue, the Glastonbury 2 animal (Ill. 228) with its body decorated with blocks of hatching is closer to the Mercian type; the paired Dolton beasts (Ills. 20–1, 23) to southern English manuscripts of the late eighth century; and Colerne is clearly linked to the Hiberno-Saxon metalwork and manuscript tradition. Moreover serpentine creatures occur together with profile creatures on the same monuments, as for example Colerne 1b (Ill. 435), West Camel (Ills. 347–8) and possibly Frome (Ill. 222). Many sculptures are too fragmentary for composition or details of head-types to

be determined, but those which are more complete show considerable variety, and appear to be variations on a theme rather than interlinked copies. At West Camel, face A (Ill. 346), below a vestigial plant-scroll, is part of a panel containing a pair of confronted animals with limbless pelleted bodies which taper as they cross. The heads are of canine appearance, with tightly closed squared-off jaws showing a line of teeth, and bumpy forehead with a back-pointed eye. Their pointed ears develop into interlace which passes over or through their bodies and fills the space between them with tight, irregular, sharply pointed loops. The bodies are limbless, tapering slightly as they cross, and are filled with rows of irregular pellets. On face B (Ill. 348) two lacertine creatures with pelleted bodies cross and re-cross, and the spaces between their bodies are filled with non-geometric interlace which fetters the bodies. At Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire, the bodies of similar lacertine animals are decorated with pellets, or incised with triangles and dots (Cottrill 1935, pl. XVI; see Ill. 547). At Frome part of a panel which is difficult to decipher shows a part of a serpentine beast with body outlined and filled with chevrons and dots, and below, what could be an animal with front feet and reptilian head seen from above (Ill. 222).

This type of incised ornament is also shown on face A of a shaft at Ramsbury (2 and 3, Ills. 485–7), which has usually been seen as late in the group, because there are only the serpentine creatures and these are 'without the elasticity and tautness of early Ribbon Style design' (Kendrick 1938, 212). On face A a serpentine creature with a long straight neck bites at an undulating body which may be its own or another's (Ills. 492, 495–6). The bodies are patterned with simple incised chevrons and are crossed and fettered with irregular interlace. On face B a single serpentine creature coils round and bites its own body; its reptilian head with teeth is shown in profile (Ill. 497). The overall impression is loose and restless, and very different from the controlled geometricism of animal ornament in Northumbrian sculpture. Nevertheless it is unwise to base any chronology on whether one sees lack of elasticity or a measure of restlessness; this monument could have been very striking when painted, and if there is a type which overlaps with the fashion for acanthus ornament (see p. 51 below) it is the simple ribbed and rounded 'serpents' which occur on Ramsbury 7 (Ills. 511–12) as well as Wells 2 (Ill. 325) and (combined with acanthine ornament) at Chew Stoke 1–2 (Ill. 200) and Colyton (Ill. 7).

Although one can see this fashion for animal ornament in Wessex as a parallel but related fashion to some

sculptures in the Midlands, there is sufficient that is distinctive to suggest internal inspiration. This is not only in the variety of body patterning, but in the formulae of layout, in particular in what Plunkett has characterised as the 'Horseshoe-Looped Beasts', such as Rowberrow, Tenbury Wells, Steventon and Dolton, or the 'Asymmetrical Convoluted Beasts in Multiple Compositions' and 'S-Shaped Beasts' such as Ramsbury 3 or Tenbury Wells (Plunkett 1984, I, 194–6).

It is possible that the region's traditional links with the Celtic kingdoms in the west, manifested in the earliest stone monuments (see pp.63–4), the commemoration of Celtic saints at sites such as Congresbury, and the repertoire of other forms of Insular ornament such as fret patterns at Glastonbury and Bradford-on-Avon (Ills. 251, 407), fostered the interest in this type of animal ornament. Indeed the fragmentary sculptures Glastonbury 5 and 10 (Ills. 239, 247), as well as the more complete portrait beast on Glastonbury 2 (Ill. 228), could well be the prelude to this tradition. Both manuscripts and metalwork could have been a source of inspiration. The canine/leonine heads which snap and snarl on the terminals of letters and borders of Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, fols. 114v and 124 (Henderson 1987, figs.212,213), are similar in type and vigour to Colerne, but so are the terminals in the Barberini (Rome) Gospels with which Cottrill compared them (1935, 146, fig. 1). In metalwork the terminal of the Thames fitting (Webster and Backhouse 1991, ill. 179) and indeed the rather less savage terminal of the Alfred Jewel (ibid., ill. 260) are comparable, and these examples span a period from the eighth to the ninth century. Despite the variety of head types found in the Wessex carvings, none have the long extended jaws with reptilian heads which are found in Anglo-Saxon and Irish metalwork, in a tradition which ultimately derives from the Style II phase of Germanic ornament, but which persist in England as late as c. 800 in the interlaced bipeds on the nasal of the Coppergate helmet (dated 750–800 by Tweddle 1992, 1165, figs.429, 578–92), and in Ireland throughout the ninth century. The suggestion that spiralform ornament had fallen out of fashion by the early ninth century in metalwork and manuscripts (Budny and Graham-Campbell 1981, 11) need not necessarily apply to the dating of these sculptures, especially if the inspiration was from Ireland or earlier Insular work. On the other hand, the foundation in AD 909 of the see of Ramsbury to serve Wiltshire and Berkshire, and that of Wells to serve Somerset, need not provide a *terminus post-quem* for the sculptures there, since both places had been minsters before that and so could well have had cemeteries with stone monuments. A period 'late eighth

to early ninth century' still seems to me a feasible date for Colerne and the beginning of this tradition, and it is possible that such animals remained popular until ousted by the new fashions for acanthus ornament in the tenth century. In fact the importance of Chew Stoke (Ills.200–3) and Colyton (Ills. 3–9), where, as mentioned above, serpentine animals are juxtaposed with newly fashionable plant-scrolls, is that they demonstrate an overlap in the fashions for these different types of ornament. This is also consonant with Plunkett's view that in this 'tradition in the Celto-Saxon style ... the range from Colerne to Colyton types shows a growth away from the metallic forms towards a simpler manner. This is best understood as part of a diverse development in various media' (Plunkett 1984, I, 194).

How was this fashion generated and disseminated in the west? It appears to succeed the notable monuments with plant-scrolls and geometric interlace in western Wessex, for example at Kelston, East Stour or Gillingham (see pp. 48–50 below). Plunkett considered that the distribution of the ribbon-animal type could have been through the monastic network (1984, I, 198–9). Some sites are indeed episcopal or monastic, but the status of others: Colerne, Dolton, Rowberrow, West Camel, Steventon, Little Somborne, is unknown. The strong metalwork tradition could indicate secular taste; on the other hand, animal ornament was also considered appropriate for liturgical metalwork in Ireland, Scotland, and the Continent. The carvers could have been trained in monastic workshops, and although there seems no obvious centre which links them, Glastonbury had continuing contact with the Celtic west, was from time to time under Mercian control and thus possible influence, and some of its sculptures, as noted above, are closely related to the Colerne type. It is indeed possible that there was an earlier influential monument, now lost, which could have continued to inspire this tradition, and the ninth-century contacts with the art of Scandinavian invaders could perhaps have encouraged the use of traditional Anglo-Saxon animal ornament in a competitive manner.

Finally the question can be asked in relation to animal ornament: is it, like frets or spirals, merely ornament, or has it some additional significance? Yet animal ornament is so widespread in all media in pre-Conquest England that it is difficult to feel that every instance carried a deep significance. As well as the paired and interlaced ribbon-animals there are beasts which exist as discrete elements, such as the sprawling animal at Melbury Osmond (Ill. 83) or the strange quadruped at Cranborne (Ill. 56), to both of which one is hard pressed to assign a symbolic meaning.

In contrast the procession of animals on the columnar shaft at Melbury Bubb in Dorset (Ills. 72–81) can reasonably be considered as having the same significances as in late Anglo-Saxon Bestiaries (see catalogue entry, p. 104). Even the animals in the plant-scrolls in Anglo-Saxon art — versions of canines, bipeds and birds — could be seen as representatives of the range of non-human Creation, in land, sea, and air, which is protected in and nourished on the True Vine. One could say that the Colerne animals were like lions and the Ramsbury beasts were certainly serpents, and that both were struggling in their fettering interlace. The serpent, from the Book of Genesis onwards, has been identified by Christians as a manifestation of the force of evil, and specifically the devil, and this is constantly echoed in Anglo-Saxon literature. There may be also wider references in the early medieval world. In a recent discussion of the carved steps leading into the hypogeum of Mellebaude at Poitiers, the serpents depicted there are seen as part of the Germanic repertoire symbolising the animal from the depths of the earth, of the tomb and of death, but in Christian funerary monuments it can be assimilated to another ancient significance as a symbol of immortality (Flammin 2004, 47). This may have been one significance in England also. The lion can be interpreted in early Christian exegesis as a type of Christ, and the combat of the lion and the serpent, as it appears on monuments particularly of the Viking Age, has been interpreted as a struggle of good against evil. Nevertheless the roaring lion can be also a manifestation of the devil, and appears in this guise, or as a hissing serpent, in the *Life of St Guthlac*, as Louis Jordan has noted (1986, 290; Colgrave 1956, 95, 115). If demonic iconography was often associated with beasts and monsters in the period here under consideration, then these sculptures could depict demonic forces controlled by the power of the Cross. This would be particularly applicable in the period when southern England was struggling to contain the power of the pagan Scandinavian settlers. But it is equally possible that figures of interlaced animals had, during their long history, become familiar and anonymous, only taking on specific levels of meaning when they were depicted individually or in a narrative composition.

PLANT ORNAMENT

This type of ornament has a distinction and variety in this region which sets it apart from other areas, but it is difficult to assess and to date until the appearance of the various forms of acanthus-type ornament, which can be compared with similar fashions in tenth-century manuscripts and metalwork.

As Brøndsted said perceptively in 1924, ‘The image of South English art as a whole is more wavering and unstable than that of the North English, there are more possible explanations in the separate cases as a result of this greater obscurity’ (1924, 94). This is indeed true in relation to plant-scrolls: each monument — with the exception of East Stour and Gillingham (Ills. 57–64, 65) — has to be considered as an individual piece. This means that, unless they are the representatives of a large body of missing sculptures, each could be an individually commissioned monument and not necessarily the products of the same or even interrelated workshops. There is also no hint that plant-scrolls were introduced early and through the medium of sculpture, as in the north; but where parallels can be recognised they are most readily found in relation to manuscripts and to a lesser extent metalwork.

Amongst the earliest group is the berried scroll, the ultimate inspiration of which is vine-scroll, which in early Christian art and exegesis derived a symbolic power from the text of St John’s Gospel, 15. 1–5. None of the West Saxon scrolls are closely similar to the vine plant, but at Britford, Wiltshire (Ills. 411–20), although the scrolls are very formalised, they nevertheless emphasise the fruit of the vine and are not more stylised than the Italian examples with which they have often been compared (see catalogue entry, p. 206). These are organic scrolls with alternating volutes, and the outlined berry bunches are clearly distinguished from the leaves. Nevertheless, on the north pilaster of the east face, the interiors of some of the leaves are patterned with a criss-cross ornament (Ills. 417, 419), a southern English idiom shared with animal ornament and scrolls, and this is found outside the area as at Acton Beauchamp, Herefordshire (Cramp 1977, fig. 61d) but manifests itself even more firmly in the criss-cross decorated leaves and buds of the Minety fragments (Ills. 468–71). The rounded palmette leaves clinging to the interior of the volutes at Britford are found with plant forms as early as the eighth century in southern English manuscripts such as the *Vespasian Psalter* (Ill. 527), as well as in metalwork, for example on the fittings on the Abingdon sword (Hinton 1974, 1–7, no. 1), as late as the ninth century, whilst in Italy these palmette-like leaves occur on monuments dated eighth to ninth century (see Cramp 1999). Similar leaves occur on the top of face A and on face D of the Codford shaft, Wiltshire (Ills. 425, 427), but on face B there is a tantalising fragment of a loosely flowing scroll with leaf flowers, long curling leaves and small heart-shaped leaves (Ill. 426). In the bush-scroll at Kelston, Somerset (Ill. 268) — with similar heart-shaped leaves — the leaf forms can be compared with the Fetter Lane sword pommel, dated to

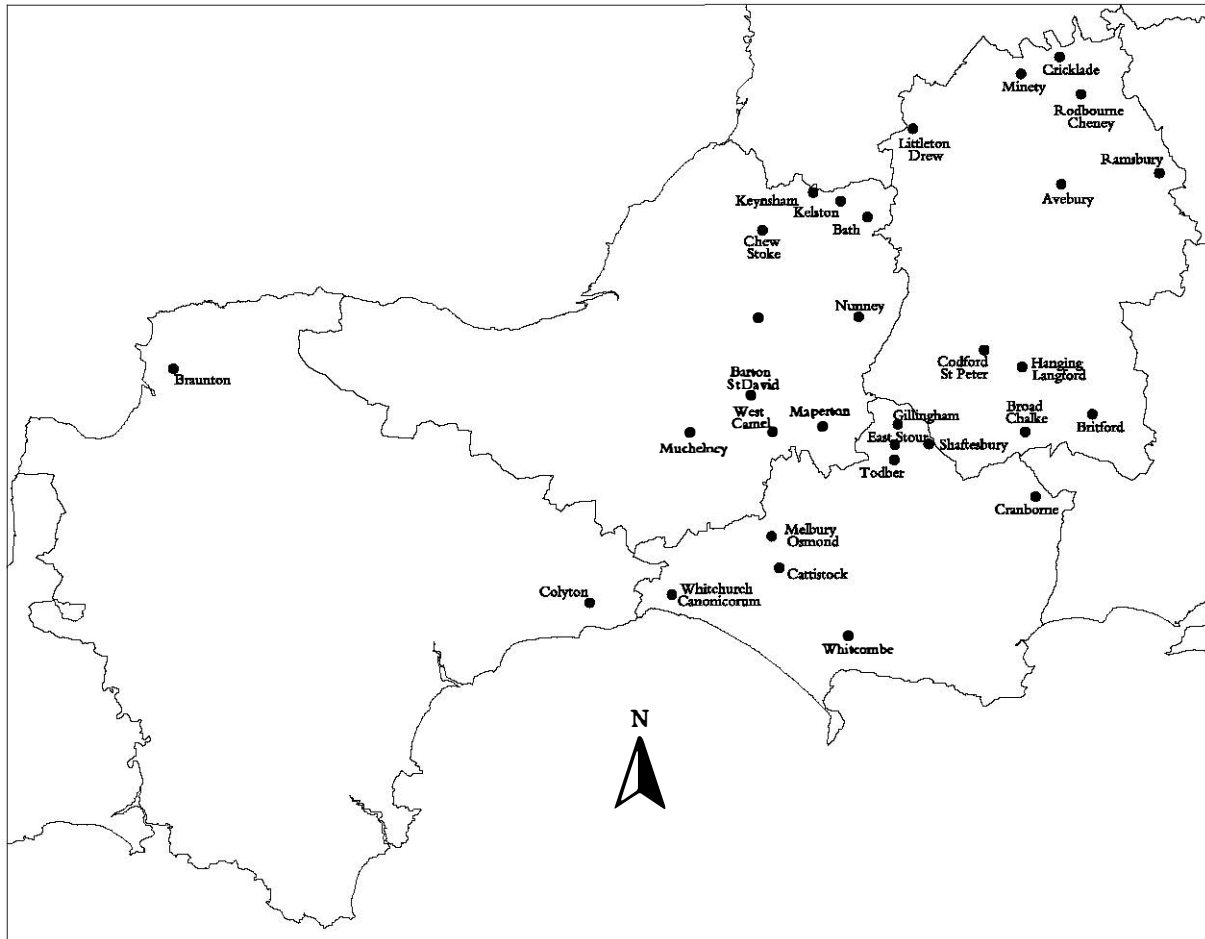


FIGURE 21

Distribution of sculpture with plant ornament in south-west England

TABLE 2
Types of plant ornament in south-west England

<i>Scrolls</i>	<i>Scrolls and acanthine</i>	<i>Acanthine</i>	<i>Plantelement</i>
Britford	Chew Stoke	Avebury	Avebury
Broad Chalke	Colyton	Barton St David	Codford St Peter
Catstock	Littleton Drew	Bath	Cricklade
Codford St Peter	Maperton	Braunton	Melbury Osmond
East Stour	Minety	Littleton Drew	Muchelney
Gillingham	Todber	Todber	Nunnery
Hanging Langford		Wells	Ramsbury
Kelston			Rodbourn Cheney
Ramsbury			Whitcombe
West Camel			

the end of the eighth century (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 221, no. 173). In contrast to the sculptured crosses of Northumbria and parts of Mercia there is no evidence for 'vine-scrolls' (whether plain or inhabited) running up the sides of cross-shafts, but the plant forms, other than at Britford, are discrete elements in tree or bush form, such as are found on metalwork or in manuscripts.

Nevertheless there was a wealth of plant forms available to the West Saxon artist in the period from the late eighth through the ninth century, as is well illustrated by the cross from East Stour, Dorset (Ills. 57–64). The cascading berried scrolls, which are nearly obliterated on Gillingham 1A (Ill. 65), are, on East Stour face A, much clearer (Ills. 57, 62), with clinging palmette leaves and large unenclosed berry-bunches sprouting others on a smaller scale. Long curling leaves with scooped centres are to be found on all faces of the shaft, and on face B these are combined with pendant leaf-flowers and pointed plant elements which can be closely compared with manuscripts (Ills. 58, 64). The bush-scroll on face B of East Stour, with its segmented stem and pendant leaf-flowers with flat pointed petals, can be compared with manuscripts such as BL Royal 1.E.VI, fol. 4r (Wilson 1984, ill. 103), and in metalwork with the Poslington finger-ring (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 237, ill. 202), as well as Keynsham 9 (Ill. 295). Outside the area, such artless and exotic plant forms are also found on the edges of the Lechmere headstone, Worcestershire, and the Gloucester grave-cover (Cramp 1975, pl. XIX; Backhouse *et al.* 1984, 43, no. 24). All of these examples point to dates in the early ninth century. The western Mercian connection is interesting since it exists also in the animal ornament of crosses (see above), although the prevailing orientalizing taste (most obviously reflected on face C of East Stour, Ill. 63), has informed all of the plant-scrolls so far discussed, and seems widely dispersed in Southumbria. The palm tree/Tree of Life and its associated rosette on the cross-head from Cattistock in Dorset (Ills. 45–6) is for example a particularly striking example (see p. 98).

A less successful attempt to depict an interlaced scroll with long triangular leaf-forms is to be found at Broad Chalke, Wiltshire (Ills. 429, 432), although this shaft is so worn that it is difficult to evaluate, and the associated panel of interlace is very different from Gillingham and East Stour (see above). The ultimate stylisation of the bush scroll is however to be found on West Camel, Somerset, face A (Ill. 346), where the plant has been reduced to a skeleton framework of hollow twigs and leaves. Here other faces of the shaft are decorated with ribbon animals, and this is a crucial piece in determining

how the 'ribbon animal' and the early plant fashions interrelate (see above, p. 46).

At the important ecclesiastical site of Ramsbury in Wiltshire, however, sculptures survive which use plant forms drawing on different traditions. One round-ended recumbent grave-slab (no. 5, Ills. 506–7) is covered with interlinked leaf trails in which the long triangular leaves with extended tips are reminiscent not only of East Stour but also of ninth-century metalwork such as the Pentney brooches (Webster and Backhouse 1991, fig. 187). But there are no inhabited scrolls formed from this type of foliage, and, although on Ramsbury 1 the beasts in roundels flanked by rosettes give an initial impression of a scroll (Ill. 488), they seem to belong to a tradition whereby animals are depicted as single portraits. The Oriental/Merovingian influence which Brøndsted saw in West Saxon sculpture is nowhere more evident than on Ramsbury 1, and as he pointed out in relation to faces A and C (Ills. 488, 491), there is a close similarity between the animals in roundels with squarish heads lolling on long stalk-like necks and the animals in some Merovingian manuscripts such as the Gelasian Sacramentary, fol. 3b or 132a (Brøndsted 1924, 124–5, figs. 83, 91). Rosettes are also a common occurrence in Merovingian art, as well as in southern English manuscripts such as the Vespasian Psalter, fol. 30v (Ill. 527). On one side of the grave-cover (no. 4) — which most probably forms a suite with this cross (see catalogue, pp. 228, 230) — are two similar animals in roundels and with rosettes (Ills. 503–5). One has a canine head, the other pointed jaws like the animals on Todber 1cA (Ill. 110). Such creatures in roundels may have had their ultimate inspiration in oriental textiles, but by the late eighth century had been acclimatised into western European art. One may compare also the Maaseik embroideries where animals and birds are enclosed in roundels (Budny and Tweddle 1984, 75, pl. IIa). These animals lack the liveliness and spring of the confronted canines on the paired brooches from Pentney, but one is conscious in Wessex of lacking a significant body of metalwork with which some of the sculpture could be compared. Many years ago however I compared the ornament on the back of the Alfred Jewel with the East Stour bush-scroll (Cramp 1975, fig. 19; see Fig. 22d), but also noted the hybridisation whereby earlier fashions of plant-scroll affect the acanthine ornament on West Saxon sculptures such as Maperton and Chew Stoke, Somerset (Ills. 202, 304), or Colyton, Devon (Ills. 3–4). One could add to this list the later scrolls at Todber, Dorset, which include single grape bunches and small rosettes (Ills. 106, 109–10; see p. 114).

ACANTHINE ORNAMENT

The varied plant forms discussed above, which seem to span a period from the late eighth through the ninth century, are succeeded by plant ornament which is perceptibly more influenced by the taste for acanthine ornament promoted in court circles as early as the first quarter of the tenth century, in examples such as the Cuthbert vestments (Ills. 535–8) or the borders of the presentation scene in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183, fol. 1v (Ills. 529–34). Even here, however, as Freyhan pointed out (1956, 412–13), there is a notable difference between the English examples and the acanthus on Carolingian ivories and manuscripts. Acanthus-derived ornament has been in recent years most fully analysed by Jeffrey West who, in an article published in 1993, summarizes the problems of evaluating this in the following telling points: ‘The range of motifs and compositions described by the term “acanthus” betrays considerable variation in both form and detail’; ‘Few of the motifs in late Anglo-Saxon and English Romanesque art which have been described by the term acanthus bear close comparison with the acanthus ornament of classical antiquity’; ‘Unlike the classical repertory there is neither an established taxonomy, nor a nomenclature for the foliate motifs and compositions of late Anglo-Saxon and English Romanesque art’ (West 1993, 247). This is not however surprising since in all of the English ornament the emphasis is not on skilful repetition but on theme and variation. In this discussion I have adopted West’s useful term ‘acanthine’ with reference to the foliage.

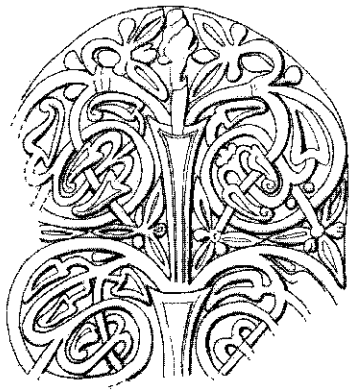
In only one instance in this area do we find close-packed classical acanthus ornament in sculpture, and that is on the impost from Avebury, Wiltshire (no. 2, Ill. 396), which may be compared with an impost fragment from Peterborough (West 1993, fig. 6), fragments from St Oswald’s, Gloucester, nos. 42, 43 and 45 (Heighway and Bryant 1999, 170–1, figs. 4.19, 4.22), and Winchester Old Minster 67, Hampshire (Tweddle *et al.* 1995, ill. 606), as well as in metalwork, the Wareham mount (Webster and Backhouse 1991, no. 256; and see catalogue, p. 201). Normally however the influence of acanthine ornament results in a hybridisation of plant forms in which fleshy leaves that curl in hard angles are combined with triple buds or leaves and leaf-flowers (Cramp 1991, fig. 12a) — motifs which are to be found not just in West Saxon, but also in some southern Mercian sculpture such as the external panels at Barnack church (Cramp 1975, 157–9, fig. 20).

As in other plant forms there are two compositions — a running or tangled scroll and, more frequently, a tree-

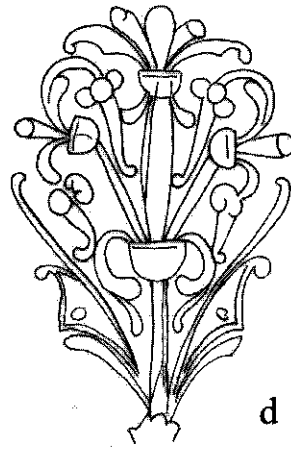
like form. The cross at Colyton, Devon (p. 80, Ills. 3–9), which is closely linked stylistically with the fragments at Chew Stoke, Somerset (Ills. 200–3), has been taken by Steven Plunkett as the starting point for what he calls ‘the Colyton School’, in which he analyses in detail the elements of the plant-scrolls on this cross together with Chew Stoke (Ill. 202), Littleton Drew, Wiltshire (Ills. 455–8), Todber, Dorset (Ills. 104–13), Nunney, Somerset (Ills. 316, 318), and Iron Acton, Gloucestershire (Plunkett 1984, I, 202–12). Colyton’s claim to be early in the series is supported by the fact that there are also panels of interlace (Ill. 5) which are identical with those on sculptures that are identified as part of the ‘ribbon animal group’ such as Ramsbury 3 and Dolton (Ills. 498–502, 22), and on the uppermost panel of face D at Colyton (Ill. 7) there is a part of a composition of ribbon animals of the same type as at Chew Stoke (Ill. 200).

Nevertheless face A at Colyton (Ills. 3–4) has most of the elements which distinguish other monuments which have only foliate decoration. There are long triangular leaves with curling tips and outlined centres as at East Stour (Ill. 63), but they are wider and more dominant and in places almost flower-like, and these are combined with trefoil buds and leaf-flowers in which two petals open to enclose a single central bud or stamen. Such leaf-flowers are a feature of several manuscripts which have been dated to the first half of the tenth century, such as Bodleian Library MS Junius 27 (Temple 1976, no. 7, ill. 1, 20–4) or the often quoted presentation portrait Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183, fol. 1v (*ibid.*, ill. 18 and 29; see Ill. 529), as well as on the Cuthbert stole and maniple (Ills. 535–8) which have a similar date. At Colyton the scroll is inhabited by a quadruped and a bird, and this is the only sculptured scroll in the south-west where the inhabitants are engaged with the plant in the way they are for example in the base of the frame of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183, fol. 1v (Ills. 532–3).

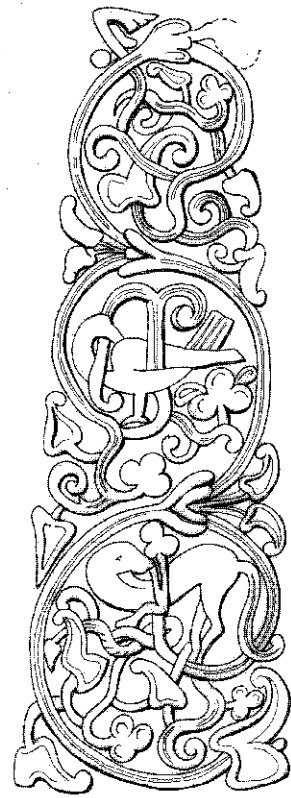
On the base and the head of the cross there are foliage sprays in which the leaves are more obviously acanthine (Ills. 3, 8), and such self-contained foliage sprays are also to be found on the Sittingbourne dagger (Wilson 1984, ill. 197), as well as at the head and feet of the portraits of the deacons Peter and Lawrence on the Cuthbert stole (Battiscombe 1956, pl. XXXIV; see Ill. 537). The double-clipped base from which the fronds spring is, like the domed side clips, a feature of this West Saxon foliage formation which appears again and again, and is possibly derived from metalwork, although the clips can be a different shape, as for example on the Kirkoswald brooch (Kendrick 1938, pl. LXXVIII.3). Foster in her discussion of the foliage motifs from Somerset notes in addition



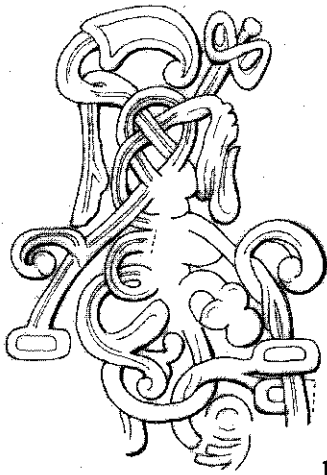
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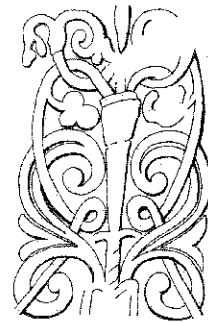
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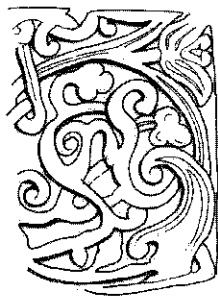
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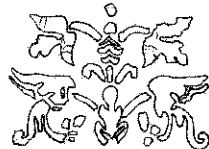
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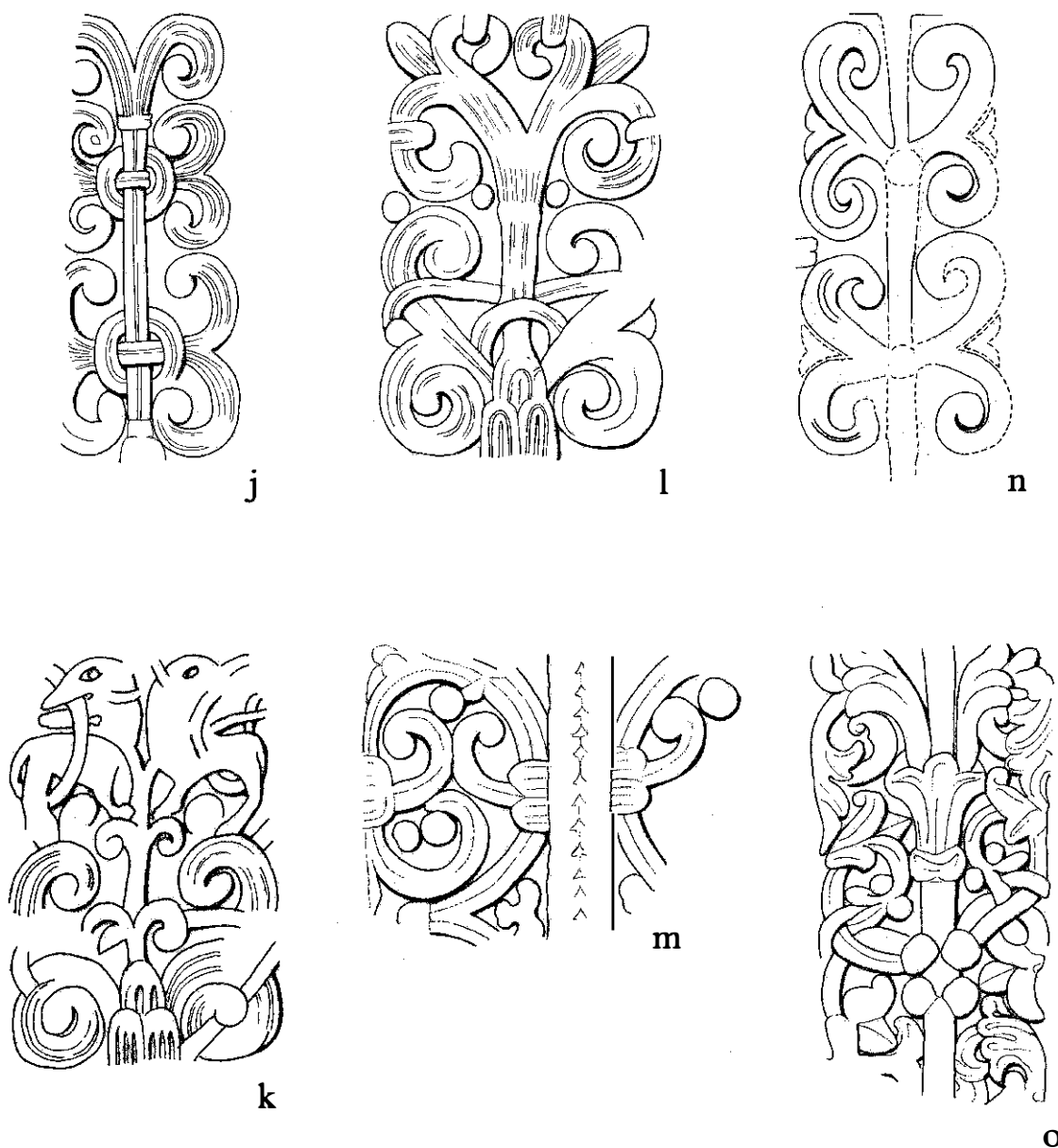


FIGURE 22

Examples of plant ornament in various media (nts)

- (a) East Stour 1B (lower), Dorset; (b) Maperton 1A, Somerset; (c) Chew Stoke 2A, Somerset; (d) Back of the Alfred Jewel; (e) Border of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183, fol. 1v; (f) Detail of embroidered stole from the coffin of St Cuthbert; (g) Colyton 1bA (shaft), Devon; (h) Littleton Drew 1aA, Wiltshire; (i) Colyton 1cA (base); (j) Todber 1cD, Dorset; (k) Todber 1cA; (l) Todber 1cC; (m) Bath 7A, Somerset; (n) Littleton Drew 1bC, Wiltshire; (o) Gloucester (St Oswald) grave-cover, Gloucestershire

that the 'clipping feature' is also to be found on the border of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183, fol. 1v (Foster 1987, 58; see Ills. 530, 534).

The large flat curling leaves of the inhabited scroll, as well as the trefoil leaves or buds, also occur in the tangled scrolls at Maperton (Ill. 304) and Chew Stoke (Ill. 202), whilst the running scroll at Nunney is a less fluent form with sharply angled side tendrils, but here also are the domed clips and incised buds (Ill. 316), and on face D crumpled leaves which are more acanthine (Ill. 318). The crouching, craning birds on face B at Nunney (Ills. 317, 319) have been compared by Plunkett with tenth-century metalwork such as the Canterbury and Thames censers (1984, I, 210; cf. Wilson 1964, pls. XII–XIV, XXIV), and it is noteworthy that several of the tree-scrolls such as Wells 1 (Ill. 324, 327) have also a harshly cut metallic quality (see catalogue p. 176).

The tree-like form has various guises: in all the examples there is a straight central stem which can be segmented or divided by cups or floral elements which provide the junctions from which the side tendrils spring. At Braunton, Devon (p. 79), although the details are very worn (Ill. 1), there is a certain amount of space between the stem and side shoots in the manner of the back of the Alfred Jewel or the Cuthbert embroideries (see Figs. 22d, 22f), but it is more tangled so that the elements do not stand out as they do on the jewel or the embroideries. Some comparison can however be made with the tangled fronds sprouting from the uppermost cup on Littleton Drew 1aA, Wiltshire (p. 221). This very accomplished carving has on two faces, 1aA and 1bC, pairs of large acanthine leaves with single veins and curling lobed tips which spring from the cups of the central stem (Ills. 455, 457), but on faces 1aD and 1bD delicate cascades of interlinked knotted strands with no floral elements, which spring in pairs from the flat central stems formed by interlocking cones (Ills. 456, 458). On the less worn side it is also possible to appreciate the skill with which the side knots are joined across the centre with fine arching and crossing strands. There is nothing quite like this composition, but the large paired leaves with central buds are also found on the cross-shaft at Todber, Dorset (p. 114). This piece has most of the elements already mentioned and indeed some motifs such as the single berry bunch on faces 1a–bA and D of the uppermost panel (Ills. 107, 109) and the circle of radial leaves on 1a–bA which are unique. Since several of the panels are relatively unworn it is possible to appreciate the competence of the deep, rather hard, carving which is given additional emphasis by the double veining of the leaves. On face 1a–bD the plant is organised as a running scroll, each volute filled with three curling leaves and

bound into the 'frame' with double domed clips on each side (Ill. 109). In the interstices of the volutes there are tiny rosettes. The ornament on the other surviving panels is all composed in variations of the tree-scroll. On face A of the lower shaft there are two affronted animals with rosettes and large curling acanthus leaves below (Ill. 110). On the narrow side 1cD the pairs of acanthus leaves are locked to the straight central stem by rings, and spaces are filled by small triple pellets (Ill. 113). The pairs of large acanthine leaves facing outwards and with central buds are very like Littleton Drew, but the style of carving is markedly different.

As well as on the shafts of crosses, bold floral ornament of a related type is also found on two grave-covers within this region, at Bath and Wells (pp. 142, 176), and one outside the region at Gloucester (West 1984b, 43, no. 24; Heighway and Bryant 1999, 168, no. 37). The plant ornament on the Wells 1 cover relates more to the scrolls at Colyton or Nunney, but with a heavy metallic treatment (as noted above) in which the stems of the tree-scroll are faceted and nicked with cross-bands, and the trefoil leaves at the top and at the junction of a pair of side shoots are deeply scooped (Ills. 324, 327). The lack of acanthine features in this scroll has led West to consider that this could be an earlier piece than Gloucester (West 2001, 488–9) and this is a reasonable supposition (but see catalogue p. 176). The partial grave-cover from Bath (no. 7, Ills. 183–5) has not been previously considered in relation to the Wells piece or St Oswald's, Gloucester, with which it has more in common. The crisp, close packed curling leaves are similar, but whereas the Gloucester scroll includes leaf-flowers on the main face (West 1983, pl. XIII) and is a tree-scroll, the Bath piece could have had two running scrolls clipped, like Todber, by double clips to the frame, and indeed the scroll filled with three curling leaves and loose pellets is very like Todber 1a–bD (Ill. 109). These foliate scrolls could well be all of tenth-century date, and it is possible to suggest that interest in this motif was fostered by the circulation of manuscripts amongst the episcopal centres once the Sherborne diocese had been sub-divided in 909 (see Chapter I, p. 9). Plunkett's view that the fashion was spread through the network of the reformed monasteries is also a possible supposition, and indeed the influences could supplement each other.

If these sculptures have been inspired by manuscripts, their compositions can nevertheless be very different, for example most acanthus leaves in the margins of manuscripts curl into the frames, whilst on the sculptures the leaves tend to open outwards. But in both sculptures and manuscripts, responses to the fashion of the age for acanthine ornament are equally varied, and whereas other

media can help to produce a chronological framework for the sculpture, perhaps the relationship should be seen as reflecting a common inspiration rather than one providing a model for the other. It has however proved impossible to distinguish tenth- from eleventh-century foliate ornament in sculpture, and indeed this type of ornament continues to inspire sculptors into the later eleventh century, as at Knook (Ills. 556–62; see Chapter IX, pp. 73–4). There is a problem of having taken a timescale for the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture series as against the criterion of a style as for the Romanesque corpus. It is self-evident that artists and craftsmen did not cease to produce new work nor indeed change their styles immediately at 1066, and also 'Romanesque' styles must have been known to some influential Anglo-Saxon patrons, whether lay or ecclesiastical, by the beginning of the eleventh century. If motifs such as acanthus compositions appear on Romanesque forms such as tympana, there seems no need to suggest that they have been influenced by Anglo-Saxon manuscripts rather than by a strong continuing tradition of stone sculpture.

Finally one may ask, were these sculptured plants in any way symbolic and meant to convey Christian messages to those who saw them? Jane Hawkes has recently published an in-depth review of the possible symbolism in depictions of plants in Anglo-Saxon art (2002, 263–86), and although her sculptural examples are from the north and the Midlands the same considerations could apply to the West Saxon material.

She considers that the acanthus was adopted as a decorative motif, and 'as such it represents a plant-form whose existence in Anglo-Saxon art was determined by the art-historical sources lying behind its production: in this case a renewal of Classical influences through the aegis of Carolingian and Ottonian artistic traditions' (ibid., 274–5). On the other hand she sees the vine-scroll, although also an import, this time from the art of the Roman world, as having 'the potential to function as a complex symbol referring to life and death, to the sacrament of the Christian Church, and to the salvation achieved through faith' (ibid., 275). At an earlier date Foster (1987, 60) suggested that the stepped bases from which the tree-scrolls at West Camel and Kelston arise were meant to suggest Calvary, and this would support the link between redemption and Christian renewal through the eucharist. Jeffrey West (pers. comm.) would further suggest that the tree-like forms on the Braunton, Gloucester and Wells grave-covers could similarly allude either to the True Cross or the Tree of Life. Clearly the potential for such an understanding was there, but it is difficult to determine today, from the discrete examples in West Saxon sculpture, how far that potential was realised. Hawkes herself sums up the position which it seems most reasonable to adopt, 'Clearly, the extent to which any given instance of the vine-scroll on a piece of Anglo-Saxon sculpture was understood to convey a fully complex set of iconographic references to Christ, his Church and salvation, is a question that cannot be fully answered' (2002, 279).

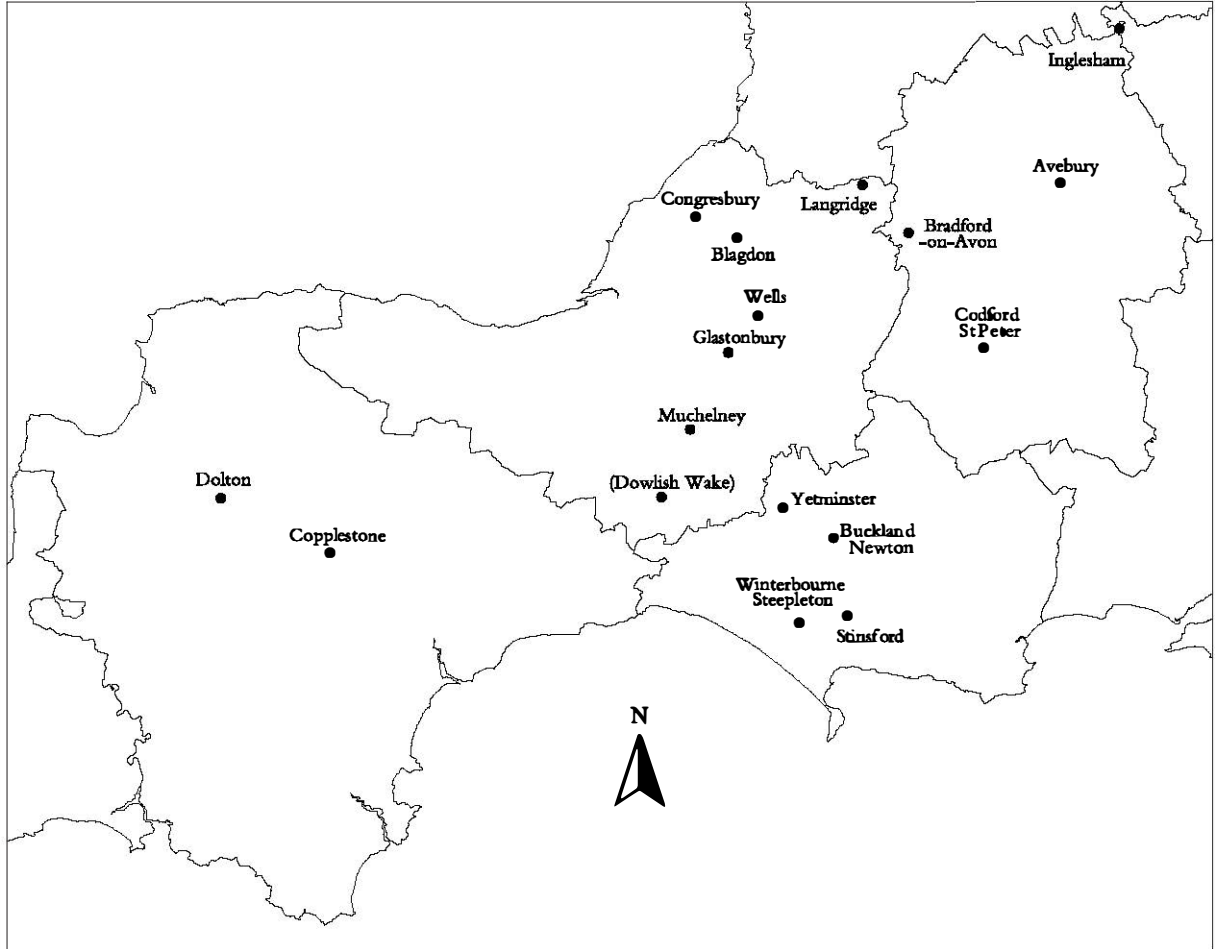


FIGURE 23
Sites with figural sculpture in south-west England

TABLE 3
Types of figural sculpture in south-west England

<i>Figures</i>	<i>Christ</i>	<i>Virgin and Child</i>
Avebury	Bristol	Inglesham
Buckland Newton	Congresbury	Langridge
Codford St Peter	Muchelney	
Copplestone		<i>Angels</i>
Dolton	<i>Saint</i>	Bradford-on-Avon
Glastonbury (pyramids)?	Congresbury	Glastonbury?
Yetminster	'Dowlish Wake'	Stinsford
Blagdon	Wells?	Winterbourne Steepleton