The Stones of Cumbria

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

Gosforth, in the English province of Cumbria, is home to a group of tenth-century sculptures that are among the most intricate and best-preserved examples of Anglo-Scandinavian monumental stone carving. These sculptures are essential for appreciating the complex and rich culture that developed in the late first millennium in northern England. This thesis offers a detailed analysis of the Gosforth sculptural group through multiple facets of its construction, design, and location to gain a broader understanding of the role of public sculpture in the unsettled but dynamic regions of Viking England.

The complexity of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture is examined first through an archaeological and material reassessment that reveals the method of the monuments’ construction and further supports the attribution for most of the sculptures to a single artist, whose craftsmanship, composition, and style match works across northern England, several of which were previously unattributed to him. This corpus expands our understanding of at least one professional early medieval artist and enables us to refine the general timeline of sculptural production in England. This artist sculpted in support of a new Anglo-Scandinavian elite, who adopted the local practice of ornamenting carved crosses but consciously adapted the
iconography to reflect and reaffirm their otherness. By referencing one another, the sculptures forged and reflected the complex process of mutual acculturation and competition among communities and served as fixed spatial and mental foci in the Viking Age settlement of northern England.

This thesis illuminates the Gosforth sculptures as markers of the distinct tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian culture through a holistic examination of the sculptural group, their historical community, and their broad cultural context, redefining Cumbria as a bastion of the Danelaw where some of the greatest public works of pre-Norman England still stand, thus allowing us more accurately to understand the forces that shaped the English nation.
Acknowledgments

I would first like to state the importance of such projects as the *Corpus of Anglo-Stone Sculpture in England*. Its volumes allowed me to work on a thesis such as this from North American and were absolutely vital in establishing the connection between Gosforth and the Tees Valley. I hope this and other such long-term cataloging initiatives continue and evolve as new evidence comes to light.

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This work is dedicated to Charles Arundel Parker, who loved Gosforth, and Douglas Luther Miller, who loved me.
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1 “This Wonderful Pillar”

“This wonderful things in the world are the most useless; peacocks and lilies for instance.” ~John Ruskin

The small English village of Gosforth lies tucked against the foothills of the steep Cumbrian fells. The fells loom to the east, harboring treacherous screes that hem in deep, narrow lakes with the river-carved land sloping away rapidly to the unseen Irish Sea in the west. The main road of the village connects the fells with the sea on its route past the Church of St. Mary’s, which was founded in the twelfth century. In its churchyard, at a bend in the road, stands a “slim and elegantly designed pillar,” the Gosforth cross. There it has stood for a thousand years with remarkably little loss to time. So complete is its preservation that the figures of forgotten gods look out from their high vantage, a cast of characters from a people more legendary than known, the history of whom is only recently being rediscovered.

The Gosforth cross alone merits study for it is among the tallest, certainly the thinnest, and one of the most decorated free-standing crosses known from the Insular world, but it is not alone at Gosforth. Housed in the church are six additional fragments, the remains of long-destroyed sculptures, which attest to the grand sculptural group that once stood alongside the remaining cross. The cross and the two broken cross heads within the church are from a different age, when elder roods such as those at Ruthwell and Bewcastle already inhabited the land. The tenth century was one of profound change in northern England: when a foreign people with a new language, a new economy, and a new religion entered the land. Two of the Gosforth sculptures, the mysterious hogbacks, visually attest to the impact these new people wrought. In many ways, Gosforth, Cumbria, is typical of tenth-century sculptural groups across northern England, but its unique qualities, both in individual sculptures and in the group as a whole, set it apart.

The superlative qualities of the tenth-century sculptural group at Gosforth have been recognized for over a century. The Gosforth cross was first recorded at the end of the eighteenth century.² Victorian antiquarians later took interest in the site after the discovery of additional pre-Conquest monuments excavated during renovations to the Norman church.³ A local medical doctor, Charles A. Parker, wrote most of the publication focused on the site at this time. The Gosforth cross received its first detailed academic treatment in Knut Berg’s Courtauld Institute article of 1958.⁴ More recently, Richard Bailey has written the most extensively on Gosforth in both his own work and within the context of the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture project.⁵ In 2000, Bailey lamented that the site had not attracted the kind of scholarly attention it was due.⁶ Since then, the Gosforth cross has been used as evidence within broad discourses about religious conversion, cultural exchange, and the continuity of forms from the Anglian to the Viking periods, but the view that claims Gosforth for the Christians, established a century earlier, is hardly challenged. Most recently, Catherine Karkov reiterated, “Gosforth remains emblematic, at least in the scholarship, of a harmonious and creative Anglo-Scandinavian hybrid culture,” and rightly recognized that the group of sculptures “may have more nuanced and shifting meanings reflective of its status as a material

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statement….” She did not attempt to answer any of the interesting questions she posed about Gosforth. Indeed, one might ask what the Gosforth group has to do with Anglo-Saxon England at all.

The first printed mention of the cross was in Gentleman’s Magazine by “Carbo” in 1799. The description is brief although Carbo recorded the sculpture’s provenance and measurements, no details of the elaborate iconography beyond “two figures of horses and men” was provided. Although the record of the Gosforth cross was brief, this early publication also preserves one of the most complete reports of a second “column,” presumably a cross similar to the one extant. In 1866, George Stephens published his four-volume set on the carved monuments of Scandinavia and England. Though relatively thorough in scope, his appraisal of the sculptures is not an art-historical one but rather reflects the nineteenth-century academic approach of cataloguing and recording.

The Rev. W. S. Calverley published the earliest scholarly treatment of the Gosforth Cross in the Archaeological Journal in 1883. Calverley’s examination focused primarily on the iconography of the four shaft faces, and matched the images to stories of the Vala’s Prophecy in the Völuspá, the Edda of the Ragnarok, the final battle between the Gods and the Giants. Calverley concluded, however, that the monument was decidedly Christian and that the depictions of Norse myths were analogous and had “clear” Christian interpretations. While the article has a sense of British antiquarianism

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8 Carbo, "Untitled [The Gosforth Cross]," 833.
9 George Stephens, The Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England, Now First Collected and Deciphered (London: Smith, 1866).
10 Calverley, "The Sculptured Cross." This publication was preceded by preliminary papers delivered to the Archaeological Institute at their meeting at Carlisle, August 3, 1882, and the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society at their meeting of December 2, 1882.
about it, the engraved illustrations continue to provide a useful record of elements of the cross that have weathered since its publication.\textsuperscript{11}

Dr. Charles A. Parker published more on the Gosforth group than any other single author and penned the only monograph on the group in 1896.\textsuperscript{12} The volume discussed both the extant cross and the, then, newly discovered sculptures: two additional wheeled cross-heads (presumably from two crosses similar to the surviving one), a carved panel called the “Fishing Stone” for its depiction of Thor’s fishing expedition for the World Serpent, and two hogback grave monuments, also from the same period. The volume also included an anecdotal history of the cross group, which recorded interviews with older Gosforth residents, who remembered legendary information about the sculptures that could not be verified the time of the interviews. While this sort of anecdotal history is hardly strong evidence, it does provide some information of potential interest for archaeological work.

W. G. Collingwood included the Gosforth Cross in his classic 1927 survey volume, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age}.\textsuperscript{13} The purpose of the study was “an attempt to consider ancient styles as phases of a process, and to place the examples in a series.”\textsuperscript{14} Collingwood speculated that the shape of the Gosforth Cross was similar to such possible early (presumably wooden) crosses as at Iona and Heavenfield.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} It is unclear to me at this time if the images in the Calverley article are extrapolations from the cross in a similar state as it has survived to the present, or if there has been significant weathering since. The truth is likely in between these two extremes.


\textsuperscript{13} W. G. Collingwood, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age} (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927).

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., preface.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 5.
Collingwood classified the twelve extant crosses with round bases and squared, decorated shafts as “staff roods.”\textsuperscript{16} Collingwood also provided a brief description of the iconography on the Gosforth cross. “As to type, the cross is not Manx, nor Scottish, Irish or Welsh; it is a development of general Northumbrian art under strong Norse influences, and its period must be about the turn of the tenth into the eleventh century.”\textsuperscript{17} Collingwood's note of the failure of the Gosforth Cross to fit within his taxonomy is noteworthy, for it is an early recognition of a possible secondary influence within early medieval Insular sculpture. This observation also led to a reasonably strong date for the cross based on style alone, which only recently has been supported by radiocarbon dating.\textsuperscript{18}

Collingwood continued to publish his work on the sculptural stones of northern England through the 1920s, often mentioning the Gosforth cross for comparative purposes.\textsuperscript{19} The Gosforth cross was also used as an exemplum for Richard Reitzenstein’s study of the common themes of European religions.\textsuperscript{20} After a lull in scholarship during and shortly after World War II, interest in the cross revived in the late 1950s. Knut Berg published on the cross in 1958, although he offered few dramatic conclusions and reiterated Parker and Collingwood’s views that the cross was essentially Christian.\textsuperscript{21} Richard N. Bailey wrote his unpublished Ph.D. thesis at the University of Durham in

\textsuperscript{16} The twelve crosses are: Giant’s Grave, Penrith; Gosforth; St Bridget’s, Beckermet; “Apostle’s” cross, Collingham; the base at Masham; fragments at Dewsbury of a “Paulinus” cross; fragmented cross at Gilling West; Stanwick; Ilam; Leek; fragments at Disley; and Brailsford. For a further consideration of these monuments, see chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{17} Collingwood, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses}, 157.

\textsuperscript{18} Organic material from excavations by Dr. Clifford Jones were radiocarbon dated at Cambridge University to 970 +/- 20 (uncalibrated; personal communication).


1974, which served as the basis for many of his later publications on northern pre-Conquest sculpture. Despite further mentions in numerous works over the next decade, the Gosforth sculptures were not the subjects of focused study.

In 1980, Bailey published an important work, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England*, in which he attempted to assemble the corpus of carved Viking iconography in northern England. This study spurred some immediate interest in the sculptures with two papers presented at the sixth International Saga Conference in 1985. John Lindow investigated the dynamics of the development of the *Völuspá* saga, putting its formation in the context of the Danelaw and the Christian influences there. He cited the Gosforth cross as an example of the iconography of this story and noted the absence of a depiction of Odin. However, he did little more than agree with Bailey’s (1980) assessment of the iconography. John McKinnell, in his response, essentially agreed with Lindow, but gave more attention to the sculptural evidence. He provided an excellent, albeit brief, catalogue of instances of specific iconography of Viking myth in Northumbria, a small subset of the overall production of the era. He reviewed the iconography of the Gosforth cross, comparing it to other potential occurrences of the same story, although he

25 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*.
27 Lindow and McKinnell agree that the *Völuspá* saga shows genuine syncretism, or Christian elements and/or images as part of an overall view that is not within standard Christainity. McKinnell, "Norse Mythology," 329.
28 Lindow, "Norse Mythology," 312.
reaffirmed the Gosforth cross as a Christian monument.\textsuperscript{29} Due to his conviction about the Christian nature of the cross, McKinnell was uneasy about comparisons between the cross and such monuments as hogbacks. He also reiterated the Christian message of the Fishing Stone in comparing Thor’s struggles with a serpent to those of Christ.\textsuperscript{30}

Not until the publication of the second volume of the \textit{Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England (CASSS)} in 1988 was the Gosforth cross reconsidered at length.\textsuperscript{31} Here Bailey, based on his earlier work, described the iconography and agreed with Calverley about the non-Christian depictions of Ragnarok. He also noted that the “Crucifixion” scene at the bottom of the east face closely resembled a plaque from Penrith (\textit{CASSS Penrith 11}) discovered in 1981; he surmised a common source, probably a metal book cover. He concluded, “The patterning of the cross, if correctly interpreted here, thus shows an original mind at work, exploiting links and contrasts in a manner which reflects a radical theological approach which would otherwise never have been suspected in Viking-age Cumbria.”\textsuperscript{32}

These proved to be some of the final words until Bailey broached the topic again at the eleventh International Saga Conference in 2000 where he said, “Since [1987], these sculptures have not attracted any further detailed attention.”\textsuperscript{33} Unfortunately, Bailey’s nod to Viking-age sculpture in 2000 failed to spur a new round of interest in the topic. Most recent publications on the subject of Vikings have concentrated on literary and linguistic issues and the general cultural impact of the migrations. A handful of scholarly works addressed the sculptural or iconographic traditions, though none of them focus

\textsuperscript{29} McKinnell, "Norse Mythology," 332.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2, 100-04. The \textit{CASSS} entry provides a full bibliography of the monument from 1799 to 1988, although most of these references did not contribute any unique arguments to the understanding of the Gosforth sculptures but rather reiterated the works detailed here.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{33} Bailey, "Scandinavian myth," 15.
monographically on the Gosforth cross or its related monuments.\textsuperscript{34} Instead, the Gosforth cross functioned in recent scholarship as an exemplar of other aspects of medieval sculpture and Bailey’s interpretation of the 1980s had not been overtly challenged.\textsuperscript{35}

Although the Gosforth cross is now mentioned regularly in academic publications about Insular medieval art, its function within the scholarship is one of a supporting role or illustration in the narrative of the conversion of the North. While the cross’s complex and unusual iconographic program is fascinating and worthy of study, this aspect has formed the main body of modern research. Indeed, the cross is often studied in relative isolation from the complete site, which includes six other monuments all with varying degrees of damage. With the exception of the Fishing Stone, none of the other five monuments at Gosforth support any decipherable iconography and therefore are often not included in conversion narratives, save occasionally the problematic “Saint’s Tomb.” This practice of decontextualizing the Gosforth cross has allowed it to gain a role in contemporary views of tenth-century England that it may not have had historically. While the site eventually was Christianized, that process, both culturally and temporally, may not have been as simple as the researchers deploying the Gosforth cross suggest.

Almost forty years after Bailey’s instrumental work on Cumbrian pre-Conquest sculpture, the Gosforth cross and its sculptural group demand reassessment. The near-completion of the \textit{Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture} allows for a far broader knowledge of tenth-century sculpture across England than was available during prior studies. More sympathetic and nuanced research in the Viking period, both archaeological and academic, has honed our understanding of the culture that gave rise to the Gosforth group.

\textsuperscript{34} Birgit Sawyer, \textit{The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Signe Horn Fuglesang, "Iconographic traditions and models in Scandinavian imagery," in \textit{The Thirteenth International Saga Conference} (Durham, UK 2006).

This study seeks to reassess the site of Gosforth, Cumbria by taking into consideration its entire sculptural assets to clarify the position of this remarkable community not only in terms of religious conversion, an important academic issue, but also in terms of urbanization, economics, and the function of public art in the tenth century. Gosforth is remarkable for its superlative monument group, but this community appears neither monastic nor ecclesiastic nor royal. Gosforth’s socio-economic role in the region is unclear but it was a lay community in a region outside the main political centers of the time. These qualities may have marginalized it within art historical study, but these very reasons are why Gosforth is so crucial to enriching our understanding of the early Middle Ages.

By focusing on what Gosforth can reveal about patronage outside these well-studied groups, we can enumerate additional forces driving the production of art. Without recognizing these forces, a skewed picture of the artistic production of the late first millennium unjustly prospers, one that privileges the authorities of the Church and Crown in a region and culture where neither was a primary social force, but where complex artistic production was taking place. While such factors are inarguably enormous forces in early medieval art and deserve consideration, the presence of grand sculpture at a site that seemingly sustains little to no connection with such forces demands an explanation. Additionally, the fortunate preservation of a large collection of sculpture by a single individual provides a rare opportunity to explore the life of a prolific early medieval artist who worked outside of direct monastic, ecclesiastical, and/or royal patronage.

Research into the settlement patterns and economic conditions of the tenth century in northern England and the Irish Sea has been of interest to archaeologists for many years.36 Archaeology has provided important data for solving questions about

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36 The Viking Congress, a quadrennial meeting of Viking scholars from across the European world settled by Scandinavians during the seventh through eleventh centuries, focuses its scholarship on the area in which the meeting is held. Relevant meetings and their subsequent volumes for the study of northern England and the Irish Sea are: 1961 – York, England; 1973 – Dublin, Ireland; 1981 – Isle of Man; 1997 – Nottingham and York, England; 2005 – Cork, Ireland. This group is mainly focused on languages, literature and archaeology and art historians are poorly represented in their ranks.
dating and settlement patterns.\textsuperscript{37} Linguistic analysis has also contributed to this understanding, although relying solely on place-name evidence is problematic.\textsuperscript{38} These important studies use the sculptural evidence to support the archaeological and linguistic claims but there has yet to be a comprehensive study from the art historical perspective.

The results of this dissertation are revealing. By separating aspects of the site and subjecting them to analysis, a different narrative develops about tenth-century Cumbria and the Irish Sea region. The materiality, the artist, and the iconography are all reassessed based on monuments themselves, rather than from generalizations about the site, the region, the greater society, or even external forces, as other approaches have done. With this new narrative, the function of the sculptures as complex artistic, cultural objects can be better appreciated. They played a key role as shapers of space and as pillars of cultural identity during the period prior to the Norman kings’ consolidation of power in which various groups each with different languages, mythologies, and social hierarchies inhabited the British Isles.\textsuperscript{39} This study reclaims the Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture of the tenth century from its current marginal position within the standard historical narratives on early England that often focus on Anglo-Saxon art and literature. Anglo-Scandinavian art is not a subset or variant of Anglo-Saxon art but rather demonstrates the distinct culture of the North in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The first chapter offers detailed descriptions of the seven Gosforth sculptures and sculptural fragments and discusses the broad issues of sculptural production in northern England. I find that Bailey’s theory for the use of templates by sculptors to replicate specific forms is supported by further evidence from Gosforth. This suggests that the Gosforth artist had ties to the high level sculptural production of the Tees valley.


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The second chapter provides both a historical and historiographic background to the monuments. Little is written about the history of Cumbria in the tenth century, mostly because few specifics are known. The region’s chronology must be interpolated from neighboring counties and external political and social bodies. Even within these, only a single textual document specifically refers to Cumbrian lands during the tenth century. For this reason, the sculptures should not be seen as illustrative of historical events but as markers of political and social spheres not otherwise recorded by those who made them. The general historiography of the Gosforth monuments will review the main scholarship concerned with the site and summarize the current state of research. This will serve as a springboard for more focused analysis of specific aspects of the group.

The materiality of the Gosforth sculptures and their archaeological context is the subject of the third chapter. Our picture of the physical makeup of the site has changed little since the antiquarians’ writings but this aspect is fundamental to any further study of the site. Several interesting discoveries arise here that reshape our picture of Gosforth in fundamental ways. A new argument is presented concerning the Gosforth cross’s construction. The grain of the sandstone is diagonal throughout the height of the shaft. This was purposeful engineering on the part of the Gosforth artist to strengthen the slender shaft against erosion from the elements.40 Two of the most substantial claims in this chapter concern the least of the fragments: Gosforth 2, a cross head, and Gosforth 7, a small fragment of stone with preserved iconography. I argue that Gosforth 2 may belong to a fragment from a nearby site, Muncaster 1, a cross shaft. By reconstructing these fragments as one monument, Gosforth’s sculptural group becomes more similar to such other major sculptural sites in Cumbria as Penrith and helps to establish a pattern of settlement type. This argument also explains why the broader Scandinavian archaeological context for Muncaster’s fragment is missing. Gosforth 7 has been assumed and later argued to be a cross shaft fragment of a second cross similar, if not reasonably

40 An expanded version of this argument is in Amy R. Miller, "Against the Grain: Sculptural Innovation at Tenth-Century Gosforth," in *TBA*, ed. Heather Pulliam (forthcoming).
identical, to the Gosforth cross. Previous authors have recognized several problems with this interpretation and the resulting arguments have been unsatisfying because none has offered any other suggestion. Here, I argue that this fragment does not belong to a cross but to a hogback reasonably identical to the Saint’s Tomb and carved by the same artist. While the precise iconography of the monument cannot be reconstructed, the fragment does offer supporting evidence to the claim, also in this chapter, that the narrow ends of the Saint’s Tomb were recarved by a later hand, undermining the conversion narrative that uses the monument as an example of the early site’s Christian community. Considering only the material aspects of the Gosforth sculptures, the group now comprises two tall crosses, one “plank type” cross, three hogbacks, and the Fishing Stone. These seem like minor changes, but they have an enormous impact on the interpretation of Gosforth as an Anglo-Scandinavian site, especially within the general narrative of settlements in northern England.

The fourth chapter focuses on the artist responsible for most of the sculptures at Gosforth, named by Bailey as the “Gosforth master.” This chapter relies on the art historical practices of stylistic analysis and basic connoisseurship as the foundations for its claims. Here, we trace the active life of the Gosforth artist from his nascence in northern Yorkshire to his late work at Gosforth. His style remains relatively constant, but the complexity of his work increases and changes in accordance with various influences on his travels from Yorkshire to Gosforth. What we find is an artist who received training from the remnants of the Anglian sculptural tradition in York and traveled by way of established trading routes lined with Anglo-Scandinavian communities, some of which employed him to carve monuments now in fragments. He eventually executed some of

42 Cramp, *CASSS 2*.
43 An expanded version of this argument was previously published in Amy R. Miller, "A Second "Saint's Tomb" at Gosforth, Cumbria," *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* 12 (2012).
44 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*. 
his finest work at Gosforth, a community presently well away from political and cultural centers. The presence of such sculpture indicates the tenth-century settlement had greater importance and wealth, which enabled it to patronize such superlative sculptures from a mature artist. This chapter also proposes a more precise date for the sculptures to between 960 and 970 based on political events in Yorkshire and radiocarbon dating from spot excavation in Gosforth.

Building on the reassessment of the types and quantity of Gosforth’s sculptures and the background and influences of the Gosforth artist, the fifth chapter explores the iconography of the Gosforth sculptures both in terms of narrative content and monumental function. The site’s iconography has received the most scholarly attention, much of which, due to the overall cross form, assesses it as a Christian monument with a polytheistic flavor. While the monument shows close contact with and inspiration from Christian sculpture, the works at Gosforth do not necessarily show a simple, albeit clumsy conversion. Instead, these monuments reflect the community celebrating its northern religious and cultural heritage in the symbolic language of the Insular lands.

This symbolic language was adapted by the Anglo-Scandinavians, but its integration into the community’s mythological narratives may have provided the means for later conversion, shown by changes to and destruction of some of the monuments. However, by recognizing the monuments’ and their makers’ original message, the process of the


46 This adaptation and reinterpretation of local symbolism is well known in Diaspora studies of Jewish and African culture and is now beginning to be discussed in terms of the Irish Sea Vikings, most recently although briefly at the International Viking Conference - Viking Woodstown and Hiberno-Norse Waterford of 26-28 March 2010, Waterford, Ireland. See, in general, Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Theorizing Diapora: a Reader*, ed. Jana Evans and Anita Mannur Braziel (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 233-46.
conversion of the North can be more accurately understood, with the result that the altered narrative diverges in part from that of present scholarship.\textsuperscript{47}

The sixth and final chapter evaluates the impact of the Gosforth community on the network of exchange present in the tenth-century Irish Sea. While Gosforth’s original establishment can be dated only through archaeological means, the ways in which that community was established can be inferred from the way in which the monuments affect the environment to create place out of space.\textsuperscript{48} This creation of place then has an effect on the wider network in which it becomes a node, which might seem inconsequential until we realize that network exchanges are the conduits through which cultural norms and changes are enacted.\textsuperscript{49} The injection of the Gosforth monuments within this network reifies the cultural connection between the polytheist and Christian elements and alters the political geography of the region in a way that redirects and creates trade and resources. Mapping these network changes provides a means through which to trace artistic transmission across the Irish Sea, allowing us to better understand how these communities were affected by social, economic, and political changes. Such analysis enriches our understanding of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, a period otherwise of interest to scholars of medieval history in terms of conversion, apocalypse, and the making of the modern state.


The conclusion offers a short narrative of the changes to Gosforth through periods of conversion, iconoclasm, and preservation. Generations of inhabitants have left their own mark on Gosforth and the monuments that helped to create it. Through this study, the community and its sculptures are being reinterpreted yet again and suggestions are made for enhancing this process; included is a discussion of opportunities for further investigation through the methodologies of archaeology, art history, geology, and geography, to name a few, that will promote a richer understanding of this important site.
2 The Monuments

To serve as a basis for the subsequent study, this chapter offers detailed descriptions of the seven pre-Conquest sculptures and sculptural fragments at Gosforth. Each monument’s description is prefaced with a brief overview of its provenance. Much of the technical information about the monuments, including exact measurements, coordinates, and geologic data, are found in the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England (CASSS)* and are included here for convenience.\(^{50}\) Subsequent visual analysis will explore the compositional relationships within individual monuments and across the site’s corpus. The textual descriptions offered here provide an interpretation for the visually complex and difficult to reproduce sculptures as well as evidence in support of Bailey’s theory concerning the use of templates by tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian sculptors.\(^{51}\)

These observations demonstrate the validity of Richard Bailey’s conjecture that figural motifs on tenth-century sculpture out of the Brompton School, a group of stylistically similar sculptures created by a group of artists in and around Brompton, North Yorkshire, between circa 920 and 940, were created with the use of templates.\(^{52}\) While Bailey did not use any material from Gosforth as evidence in his argument, the repetitive use of certain motifs suggests templates (or a design conceived through templates) were used. This demonstrates both the wider influence of the Brompton School beyond the Tees Valley and an awareness of regional artistic trends across northern England.

\(^{50}\) Cramp, *CASSS* 2.

\(^{51}\) Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 238-56.

\(^{52}\) For the Brompton School, see James Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, vol. 6, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2001). For Bailey’s argument on the use of templates, see the final chapter of Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*. 
2.1  The Gosforth Cross

The Gosforth cross (CASSS 1) [PLATE 1] stands in the south churchyard of St. Mary’s in Gosforth, Cumbria, England [54°25′08″N 3°26′03″W; Ordnance Survey grid reference NY0603], approximately ten meters from the church’s south wall, the foundations of which date to the twelfth century. The entire monument comprises the monolithic cross and a separate base into which the cross has been set. Together, the cross and the base are 442 centimeters (cm) tall. The cross is of the “round shaft derivative” type: the lower round section is plain with a band of repeating triangles that extends 18 cm just below the transitional swag between it and the upper shaft. Figural scenes and interlace patterns arranged vertically in a single panel decorate the upper section. The cross head is ringed and decorated overall with interlace.

2.1.1  Base

The total depth of the base is unknown; its subterranean depth is at least 40 cm with an additional 28 cm above ground for a total height of at least 68 cm. [PLATE 2] Above ground, it measures 100 cm wide by 99 cm deep, carved from red sandstone (Triassic St. Bees type). The base required quarrying a block with a total volume at least 0.673 cubic meters weighing approximately 1,560 kilograms (1.6 metric tons).

The visible portion of the block has been carved into two tiers; the tiers on the east face are inset 3 cm and those on the west face are inset 5 cm. The north and south faces are both inset 4 cm on average. The tiers are plain without interlace or decorative molding. The tiers are slightly convex — an effect perhaps caused by erosion. The base is not square but rather slopes in a non-symmetrical trapezoid, the east being the widest

53 The lower meter of this wall is Norman where the remaining elevation dates to the mid nineteenth century.
55 For information about the geology of Cumbria as it pertains to the Gosforth sculptures, see D. L. Schofield, “Regional Geography” in Cramp, CASSS 2, 7-9.
56 The average density of sandstone is 2323 kg/m3.
side. The corners are slightly rounded, especially the southwest and northwest. The subterranean corners are more sharply squared due, in part, to protection from the elements by the surrounding earth. The west side is the most irregular, sloping inward from the northwest to the southwest corner. The subterranean portion of this side also slopes to such an extent that the lowest tier is missing.

The base has a slightly off-center hole into which the Gosforth cross is set. Whether the hole passes through the block or whether it is a mortise is unknown (both types exist in Cumbria). A centimeter-wide crack runs through the base from east to west at a slight diagonal, passing through the hole; this was caused by ice forming in the hole and breaking the stone as it expanded during the freezing process, which suggests that the hole is a mortise. The crack was repaired at an unknown date with cement apparently made from red sandstone because its color matches the stone well. What extra space existed in the hole is now filled lead, added before 1881 in order to secure the monument.\(^{57}\) The crack was repaired before the lead was poured around the base because the lead does not flow into the break.

### 2.1.2 Lower Shaft

The lower shaft of the Gosforth cross has a circular section and exhibits slight entasis. [PLATE 3] The widest diameter is 32.5 cm at the narrowest is 30 cm. The upper third of the lower section is decorated with a pattern of concave triangles arranged in vertical rows that spiral slightly clockwise around the shaft, which terminates abruptly without a transitional element. The lower two-thirds of the lower shaft is undecorated. The western side is marred by a narrow, crescent-shaped crevice carved by water running down the surface of the stone and eroding away a softer sedimentary layer.\(^{58}\) A few scattered, superficial holes mar the lower shaft. These also exhibit erosion, indicating that this damage is not recent.

\(^{57}\) Charles Parker reported that this was done by some “pious individual” before he helped clean the cross on July 8, 1881. Parker, *The Ancient Crosses*, 7.

\(^{58}\) The water eroded the less dense layer of the sandstone exposing clearly the alignment of the sedimentary grain of the stone within the sculpture. Miller, "Against the Grain."
2.1.3 Swag Transition

Four single swags mark the transition between the lower round shaft and the upper angular shaft. [PLATE 4] The rectangular upper panels become circular via these swags by curving and flaring the bottom of the panels. The swags merge together at the corners to form triangular areas similar to inverted pendentives. The swags are shallow and sharply curved at the sides, making for a narrow transitional area, and are defined from the face of the cross by a plain raised ridge with a slight undercut, here called a roll molding. This molding appears to overlap the pattern of triangles encircling the upper part of the lower shaft and projects out from the surrounding stone. It has been adversely affected by erosion, with portions of it having broken away; the remaining molding is less acute and robust than it would have appeared originally.

2.1.4 Upper Shaft

The upper shaft of the Gosforth cross has a rectangular section tapering from 25 by 21 cm above the swag to 16 by 14 cm below the cross head. Each of the four faces is a single panel demarcated by a plain roll molding along the edges extending up from the points at which the swags merge. The molding is missing along portions of the shaft making the monument slightly narrower than its original width.

Each panel is filled with a series of figural vignettes; these are carved in bas-relief from flat panels. The backgrounds of the panels are cut to an even depth, framed by the roll molding. The panels are oriented, as is the base and cross head, with the wider sides of the cross aligned east and west, although it is unknown if this is the original orientation, or if the cross has been rotated in its base. Due to this orientation, the sides are commonly referred to by the cardinal direction they face.

2.1.5 North Face

Beginning at the swag, the north face has a closed double-strand, median-incised simple interlace that fills the width of the field, turns six times, and extends 50 cm up the shaft. [PLATE 5] The next vignette occupies the next 50 cm. Two horsemen are opposed to each other, one above the other. The upper horseman rides to the right and the lower
rides to the left. The lower horseman is upside-down with respect to the orientation of the cross. Except for their orientation, the horsemen are identical: a man sits astride a horse, the reins held in his left hand and a spear held in his right. The spear terminates above the flank of the horse (but this could be the effect of erosion) and the right arm has been foreshortened causing the man’s right forearm to disappear, indicating that the arm is held at a right angle. He has an inverted teardrop-shaped head with no indication of hair or helmet, and his face is represented frontally with two drilled eyes and the indication of a mouth or nose. His torso is twisted to the right, causing the shoulders to be opened to the viewer. He wears a belted tunic and his feet extend along the front legs of the horse; their differentiation against the body of the horse has been lost to erosion. His body is softly modeled and realistically proportioned save for the absence of full legs.

Both horses face right, respective to their riders, and the upper horse has the suggestion of a drilled eye. They have tapering, pointed snouts and small pointed ears, all heavily eroded. The horses’ legs extend in an unnaturally straight “M” formation below their softly outlined bodies; if the legs terminated in differentiated hooves, these have been eroded away. On the upper horse, a long, thin tail extends downward between the horse’s hind legs and the roll molding on the left side of the panel. Presumably, the lower horse also had a tail, but no trace remains. The horses are scaled improperly with respect to their riders—they are only the size of small ponies.

The only damage to this scene aside from general erosion is a 3 by 1 centimeter oblong hole under the forward hoof of the upper horse 2 cm in from the right edge. The hole extends diagonally between the hind legs of the lower horse. It formed along the grain of the sedimentary layers of the sandstone where a softer deposit had been eaten away.

Above the two riders is a fantastic creature, which fills the remaining 100 cm. The creature faces downward. Its fanged head is above the upper rider and its body terminates just below the cross head. The round head has a thin, upturned snout projecting down toward the riders and is shown in profile with the lower jaw to the left and the upper jaw and snout to the right. The mouth is a wedge cut from the head and outlined with a single
incised line giving the impression of simple lips or gums. Fangs fill the open space in the mouth; one long, pointed tooth extends down from the upturned snout and ends just before the lower jaw, and, behind it, a second tooth extends up from the end of the lower jaw ends before the upper jaw. These teeth are carved at a lower relief than the head, giving the impression of being set into the mouth. Because the head is shown in profile, only a single eye has been carved. It comprises two concentric rings that nearly fill the available space in the head over the upper jaw. One long, straight ear or horn extends behind the eye beginning at the crest of the head. It tapers to a point and a small divot appears to have been carved out of the center of it.\(^5^9\)

The head is joined to a thin neck that seamlessly becomes a long, thin, tapering body that extends the rest of the length of the panel. The body of the creature passes over and under eight rings alternately. Horizontal bars are counterlaced through the rings, alternately passing over then under the body and over then under the rings. Each bar terminates in a side-based right triangle—here the right angle corner is rounded off. The short sides face down, the long sides are aligned to the roll molding, and the hypotenuses join back to the bars. These triangular appendages are described as wings. The surface of some of these wings may be inscribed with an inset outline, but on others this has eroded away. The creature’s body terminates by splitting into two strands, which then curve around and rejoin in the form of a triquetra.

2.1.6 East Face

The lowest element on the east face is field of interlace terminating in affronted lupine heads. [PLATE 6] Due to loss of detail to erosion and vagueness or mistakes in the interlace, differentiating the separate strands of the design is difficult. The scene may represent one beast with two heads or two interlaced beasts in combat. The left head’s jaws open upward. A drilled eye sits behind the joint and a pointed ear extends from the back of the head. The lower jaw transforms into a strand of interlace, which curves back

\(^{5^9}\) Because the divot is aligned with the stone’s grain, it may be damage that, due to its position, appears purposeful.
toward the head and joins with it forming a loop. The right head has a similar appearance to the left head with a drilled eye and a small ear at the back. Its mouth is also open as if it is in the process of devouring the left head. Like the creature on the north face, an incised line outlines the right head’s jaws. The right beast’s jaw becomes a plait of interlace, looping down and back to join with the head. A third loop of interlace entwines between these two beasts, but it is incorrectly joined at the right side with one strand seeming to loop back and connect to the right beast’s head and the other strand to lift into the upper right corner. Here it either terminates beneath the plait extending from the base of the right beast’s skull or loops back as an extension of the right beast’s ear.

Directly above these tangled beasts, two human figures face one another. The figure on the left is a man shown in profile. His legs are together with both feet facing right and his arm is extended in front of him to the right, holding a spear. He wears a belted tunic that tapers to two points at his thighs. No detail of nose or eye remains on the man’s face. The right figure is a woman who faces left. She wears a long dress that tapers to a point behind her feet as if trailing on the ground. Only one foot is visible under the skirt, pointed to the left. Her arm extends out in front of her. She holds a curved object in her hand. Her face also lacks detail with no eye or nose. She has a braided pigtail trailing down her back, the end missing due to damage.

Above the profile figures, a man is contained within a raised molding, decorated to resemble cable or rope, which forms a rectangle around him. He faces forward in a cruciform position with his feet standing on the lower horizontal molding and his arms extended out, one to each side, touching the vertical moldings. His inverted-teardrop shaped head just touches the upper horizontal molding. His face is composed of two drilled eyes and a small horizontal incision for a mouth. He is dressed in a tunic like that of the spear bearer beneath him; it is belted and tapers to two points at his thighs. His legs are together, differentiated by a single vertical incision between them, but his feet are splayed, pointed outward toward the edges of the shaft. In raking light, a raised line

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60 At certain angles of light, there is the appearance of a nose, but this is probably a trick of the light playing over shallow channels carved out by erosion under the eyes.
extends from the man’s right side down toward the spearhead of the spear held by the man to the lower left. This spear crosses under the lower horizontal molding separating the cruciform man from the two figures below.

Above the upper vertical molding of the rectangle containing the man is approximately 50 cm of interlace. The pattern is called “ring chain” or “vertebral” interlace due to its resemblance to either a series of interwoven rings and straps or to a spine. The ring chain appears to be a vertical strip of convex triangles surrounded by interleaved circles. Specifically, the lower corners of each triangle continue beneath the overlaying strand to form the circle that surrounds the triangle below it. The strands then merge into a single strip under the second triangle before emerging to form the top of the third triangle. In this manner, every third triangle is part of the same strand with the finished ring chain constructed from three identical interlaced triangle-circle-strip forms. Here, this ring chain has five complete segments and terminates with a sixth triangle turned back under the final ring to join the triangle above it. The top of the motif ends with the point of a triangle. This ring chain is median-incised with the centers of the triangles carved out, giving the appearance of being formed from two parallel strands.

Immediately above the ring chain is a final vignette that occupies the remaining space. Its lowest element is a male figure positioned horizontally across the width of the panel. He stands on the right molding facing up. He wears a short tunic with the suggestion of a belt. His face is undifferentiated but there is the suggestion of two drilled eyes. His right arm holds behind him a staff or spear that spans the width of the panel. His left arm extends upward, clutching at the upper snout of a beast, which confronts him. One of the man’s feet is planted on the ground and his other extends forward, stepping toward the lower jaw of the beast’s open mouth. This figure is the only human represented in the top two thirds of any face of the upper portion of the cross.

The beast resembles that of the north face. Its head is directly above the horizontal figure, compositionally in front of him, and its jaws are agape. The head is round with the upper and lower jaws of a pointed snout extending down in a “V.” The beast’s mouth is outlined by an incised line and its forked tongue juts out toward the man, with the lower
fork draped over his extended leg and the upper fork under it. A round eye is set high into the skull, formed with a single, incised circle. A small, round ear is tucked against the back of the head, slightly hollowed out. The beast’s body is formed with two fleshy plaits, which interlace in a simple two cord braid with those of a second beast whose head faces the opposite direction, up toward the cross head. Both of the beasts’ lower jaws are to the right. Although their snake-like bodies are interwoven, they are separate from each other.

The upper, or compositionally right, beast is a reflection of the lower, though damage obscures some of the detail. The head is round with a circular eye set high into the skull. The mouth is open in a “V” and is accentuated with an outline. The upper beast has a fang hanging from its upper jaw. No trace of a lower fang exists, although there may have been one originally.

2.1.7 West Face

At the bottom of the west face is a vignette of two figures: one placed horizontally across the bottom of the swag, and another kneeling above it. [PLATE 7] The lower figure’s arms and legs extend up and away from its body, each one carved individually. Each set of arms and legs is bound with a ring. The head has no eyes or nose, but because other frontal figures have drilled eyes their absence here could indicate that the figure is shown in profile. A long, corded plait trails along the figure’s back between the body and the swag’s molding. This could be the figure’s pigtail that attaches to the base of its head. A noose or cord is looped around the figure’s neck. This rope extends up and through a ring at the top of the scene. To the left of the figure’s head is a triangular serpent head whose body extends up the left side of the panel and interlaces through the same ring binding the noose. Due to erosion damage on the left, the details of the serpent have been obliterated. The second figure kneels above the lower one. The long dress and braided pigtail suggest that this figure is female. Her face is shown in profile. She kneels on the molding at the right side of the panel and extends her arms before her toward the head of the bound figure. In them she holds a crescent—a bowl or vessel. Over the kneeling figure is an arched, horizontal cord that loops through the same ring knotting the serpent’s body and the noose.
Above the arching cord is an inverted horseman similar to those on the north face. He sits astride the horse with his right arm stretched behind him bearing a staff or spear, ending just above the horse’s flank. His left arm extends forward holding the horse’s reins. He wears a belt tunic and his face is frontal with two drilled eyes and the suggestion of a mouth. He wears no helmet. His leg is stretched forward toward the front of the horse in shallow relief from its body. The horse is facing left, cantering with its right fore and hind leg striding forward and its left legs back. The horse has a thin tail between its body and the right molding. Because the figure is inverted, the man’s head points down and the horse’s hooves point up.

Above the horse’s hooves, a man stands on the left molding horizontally spanning the width of the cross shaft. His feet are splayed to each side and his head is to the right. He wears a belt tunic that tapers to short points at his thighs. He stands in a cruciform position similar to that of the cruciform man on the east face at the same height on the shaft. In his left hand, the man holds a curved object. The portion of this object above his hand flares to a blunt end and the portion below his hand tapers to a point. In his right hand, the man holds a staff or spear out vertically, in relation to his body, which is horizontal across the panel. This staff separates the man from two beast heads that descend upon him from above. The beast heads are like those on the other faces—round with circular, incised eyes, fanged mouths opened in a wedge and outlined gums or lips. The beasts are affronted with their lower jaws next to each other in the center of the panel, and the tops of their heads and pointed, upper snouts along the outer edges. The bodies of both beasts are, like others on the cross, a mass of interlaced plaits. Each beast’s body is a single cord knotted back on itself in a simple braid. The bodies terminate in pointed tails that come together in the center of the panel.

Above this, the remaining length of the panel is filled with a ring chain pattern identical to that on the east side. This motif comprises ten complete links with an additional half-link forming the lower termination of the pattern. The pointed tails of the affronted beasts appear to join into the ring chain, springing from the pattern in the position of the next ring. At the top of the ring chain is a beast head like the others on the cross. The head is round with an open, fanged mouth and, in this case, a drilled hole for
an eye rather than an incised circle. It has a small, hollow ear at the back of its skull. The lower jaw is to the left and the upper to the right.

2.1.8 South Face

The swag of the south face contains a beast, bent around and interlaced with itself. [PLATE 8] The head and upper body is at the right edge of the panel. The head is shown in profile, looking left, with an incised circle for an eye at the top of the skull. A small, pointed horn or ear projects up and slightly forward from the crest of the head. Its jaws are pointed and open in a wedge shape. The thin, long body curves down and to the left. The back haunches rise up and back toward the creature’s head. Here, the body divides into two legs, the left, on top, passes down under the creature’s left foreleg, then over the right foreleg, then under the body. The right, lower hind leg passes over the left foreleg, under the right foreleg, then over the body. The left foreleg then continues over the body just before the haunch and the right foreleg passes behind the body.

Above the entangled creature is a single strand braid situated horizontally across the width of the shaft. The left end of the strand terminates in a blunt, triangular head, and the right end terminates in a tapering, pointed tail, making the strand a serpent braided back on itself.

A fourth horseman is above the serpent. This horseman is oriented correctly with respect to the ground. He is the most well preserved and detailed of the cross’s horsemen. Like the others, the man sits astride a horse, which walks to the right. His large, inverted-teardrop-shaped face is turned toward the viewer and is represented by two drilled eyes and the suggestion of a mouth. He wears no helmet and has no hair. His right arm extends behind him bearing a downward-pointed sword or spear, the tip of which terminates just above the horse’s flank. His left arm is held out before him, bent at the elbow with the forearm foreshortened toward the viewer. This hand holds finely carved drooping reins that drape across the horse’s neck to its mouth. The man wears a belted tunic and his legs extend down the horse’s side with a slight bend, his foot stopping at the top of the forelegs. This horse, unlike the other three, is more accurately proportioned with respect to its rider, although its head is too small. It has two small ears, but no eye. It canters with
its right legs forward and its left legs back. A full tail hangs from its flank falling almost to its hooves.

The next element consists of a quadruped along the left molding, which is leaping up the cross shaft. Its pointed snout points up with its ear laid back from the back of its skull. Its fore and hind legs are stretched out in a large stride and its long tail is held down and close to its back legs. It leaps over a tangle of narrow, seemingly jumbled, interlace. The strands originate in the upper right of the vignette at the right side of the shaft; and they narrow as they twine down under the animal. The strands taper to points and additional tapering strands loop around the ends. The branch nearest to the animal appears to fork twice, but this section is damaged by erosion. One branch loops back and passes under the animal’s outstretched front leg, terminating beneath its head as if it is being chewed.

Above this is a stag, which canters horizontally across the cross shaft to the right with its right legs forward and left legs back. It has the same body type as the horses and is shown in the same position. Its head is a short triangle set on a long, slender neck. No indication of an eye remains. Two forked antlers spring from the top of its head, splayed apart at a right angle, and a small ear is tucked under the right antler. Each antler has three small tines positioned on the outside, resembling the teeth of a saw. Instead of a long tail, it has a short nub on its flank.

Above the stag is another ring chain of seven full links and an additional half link as the lowest terminating element. This ring chain differs from the other instances because/insofar as it is not median-incised. Like the ring chain on the east face, this one also serves as the body of a beast, terminating in a lupine head. The head is round and has open jaws. The upper snout curls up and touches the right molding and the lower jaw is to the left. The eye, an incised circle, is set high and back in the skull and just behind it protrudes a leaf-shaped ear. Surrounding the entire skull is a circular band. It passes over the neck, made from the last central triangular element of the ring chain below, under the lower jaw, over the upper jaw, and under the ear.
The final element on the south face is another interlaced beast. This one is constructed from a single, fleshy plait that is braided against itself. It has a head similar to the other wolf-like beasts on the cross with the same circular eye, pointed head, and open jaws. This beast, unlike the ringed one below, has fangs in the upper and lower jaw. Its head is oriented differently with the upper head to the left and the lower jaw to the right. Of all the similar creatures on the cross, this is the only one that terminates with a spiraled tail. It originates at the left and stretches across the width of the panel, curling back to the left in a tight spiral.

2.1.9 Cross Head

The cross head has equilateral arms and a free ring through the midpoint of the cross arms and measures 47.5 cm high, 50.8 cm wide, and 12.5 cm thick at the arms and 16.5 cm thick at the central boss, raised 12 cm in diameter in a hemisphere from the surface of the face. [PLATE 9] Equilateral arms radiate out at right angles from this central point in narrow triangular wedges that are the width of the boss at the inside and widen to 17 cm at the outside. The arms are squared off straight and are not curved at the outer edges and join around the central boss in smooth, slightly acute curves. The lower arm is wider on the north-south axis than the top of the cross shaft creating a stepped transition from the shaft to the head with the east-west axis being flush with the cross shaft.

Erosion has heavily damaged the details of the cross head. The plain molding that defines the swag and the edges of the paneled upper shaft continues on the cross head. It outlines each arm but on the east and west faces does not divide the shaft from the cross head. An additional molding crosses from the near side of one arm to the far side of the adjacent arm forming a crisscrossing pattern around the central boss. These moldings divide from and merge back into the outline molding, creating a triangular field in each arm. Each of these triangular spaces is filled with a triquetra knot with two points in the corners of the arm and the third pointed back toward the central boss. The triquetras on the west face show evidence of being median-incised while those on the east face do not. The squared ends of the horizontal arms are also decorated with interlace; the south side has a single strand grid interlace and the north side is a double-strand grid interlace.
top and east face of the upper arm has broken away along the stone’s grain. Any
decoration on the top, which is not visible from the ground, is now destroyed.

The ring that connects the cross arms circles through the midpoints of the arms’
length. It is eight cm wide on the east/west axis and four cm thick on the north/south axis,
narrower than the thickness of the cross arms. It is set in equally from each face. The ring
is decorated on the east/west faces with a simple braid. The narrow, external edge of the
ring is decorated with a cabled, raised molding like that surrounding the cruciform man
on the east face. The molding runs around the circumference of the ring.

2.1.10 Summary

Overall, the Gosforth cross is the tallest, most slender, most ornate, and among
the most complete Anglo-Scandinavian monuments in England. At 4.4 meters, the cross
stands among the tallest free standing crosses carved in the Insular world, surpassed only
by four known crosses: two at Monasterboice (Muirdach’s Cross – 4.5 m, Tall cross – 7
m), the north cross at Sandbach (4.8 m), and a 8.5 m high cross reported by William of
Malmsbury in his account of Glastonbury Abbey.61 [FIGURE 1] When the context of
comparison is narrowed to tenth-century production, the Gosforth cross even surpasses
Hexham 1 at 3.5 m and within Cumbria it is the tallest.

Geological and Polytechnic Society of the West Riding of Yorkshire 3 (1849-59): 502-33. The current
height of the Ruthwell cross is 18 feet although the reconstruction is questioned. See Fred Orton, Ian
Wood, and Claire A. Lees, Fragments of History: Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
Figure 1. Scale comparison of tallest extant Insular crosses. From left, the Cross of the Scriptures, Clonmacnois; the Tall Cross, Monasterboice; the Gosforth cross; the Bewcastle cross; the crosses of the Giant's Grave, Penrith

In addition to its impressive height, the Gosforth cross is unusual in its delicate proportions, narrowing to a mere five inches at its narrowest just below the cross head. By comparison, the Ruthwell cross’s shaft below the cross head is ten inches. Comparing the volume of the two monuments, the Gosforth cross’s shaft at its narrowest has only one quarter the stone of Ruthwell.

The Gosforth cross is also among the most complex of any pre-Conquest cross in terms of its figural count: 29 humans, animals, and monsters dispersed across at least nine separate vignettes arranged across all four of its faces. In terms of pictorial complexity, the Gosforth cross is equal to such grand and intensely studied monuments as the Ruthwell cross with 17 human figures and a dozen animals. In terms of numbers, the two monuments are of equal complexity, but the Ruthwell cross depicts Christian narratives,
which have attracted more criticism and controversy, especially in terms of conversion narratives and the “Northumbrian renaissance.”

Reconstruction problems that plague comparable monuments are absent from the Gosforth cross; this simple act of survival places it apart. Both the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses are fragmentary, the former purposefully destroyed in an act of iconoclasm (its present form is a nineteenth-century reconstruction) and the latter with a missing cross-head, if it once possessed one at all. The Gosforth cross’s survival may be the result of various factors: the quality of its stone, its isolated location, and fortunate protection during periods of iconoclasm. Although the pre-Conquest sculptural record is literally fragmentary, many of the grandest monuments appear to have survived in some form, providing a reasonable idea of their types and distribution. This fragmentary record may cause the Gosforth cross to seem more unusual than it may have been, but even in terms of fragments, only a handful compare favorably to the Gosforth cross’s morphology and these may have been carved by the same artist. Indeed, the superlative qualities of the cross may also have aided its survival by encouraging its preservation by later inhabitants.

2.2 Gosforth 2

Gosforth 2 is an incomplete red sandstone fragment in two pieces of the ringed head from a free standing cross. [PLATE 10] It measures 35 cm high, 54 cm wide and 12 cm thick and is currently set into the east wall of the north aisle of the nave of St. Mary’s. Because of this installation, the fragment’s reverse side is known only from a drawing by Charles A. Parker from the mid-1890s and through a photograph by the Rev. William S. Calverley from 1899. The ornament on the broad sides of the fragment have been recorded; whether any exists on the narrow edge is unknown.

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The cross head is a bossed, ringed type. The center is intact, although the raised portion of the central boss has been sheared off. A cabled molding surrounds the boss. Three arms extend from the boss; the upper arm is missing. The angle of the cross’s armpits is sharp and slightly acute. The lower vertical arm’s outer measurement is 18 cm and it tapers to 13 cm where it joins the horizontal arms around the central boss. The horizontal arms are narrower and less tapered than the remaining vertical arm. Their outer measurements are 14 cm and they taper to 12 cm. An 8 centimeter wide free ring joins the horizontal arms to the lower arm and would have continued around the circumference of the cross head. The extant arms are all damaged at their extremities. The entire upper arm is missing from just above the central boss where it would join with the horizontal arms. The right arm is missing the length of arm that meets with or projects past the outer free ring. The left arm tapers to a point with the upper outer end sheared away and the lower outer end that joins to the remaining portion of the ring also missing. The lower arm is also broken off at the outer edge of the ring. A plain molding outlines each arm as well as the raised cable molding of the central boss. The field of each arm is decorated with a fill of three-plait braid; the braid of the lower vertical arm is median-incised.

A now-partial ring of equal thickness to the arms joins the two horizontal and one lower vertical arm. The lower right quadrant is well preserved but the lower left quadrant ring is heavily damaged and much of its face is missing. The broad face of the ring is bordered with a cabled or rope molding. Between the moldings is a ring chain motif of the same type carved on the east face the Gosforth cross. The ring chain is oriented so that the triangular motifs in the center of the design point down. The damage on the lower left quadrant is so extensive that the orientation of the ring chain is uncertain, but based on two incised lines still visible as well as the rotation of the cable molding on the left, the ring chain appears to continue around the ring in the same manner as on the right, rather than originating at the lower arm and mirroring that on the right.
The reverse of Gosforth 2 is known from Parker’s drawing and Rev. Calverley’s photograph, although there are differences between them.64 [PLATE 11] Parker more clearly indicates a cabled molding around the central boss; in Calverley’s image it appears to be plain. Both show each horizontal arm filled with a thick, fleshy plait twisted back and braided against itself. The arms have mirrored symmetry with respect to each other. Calverley’s record of this interlace is shadowed and unclear, but Parker’s line drawing shows the plaits terminating in pointed tails above the central boss indicating the plaits are snakes with the missing heads at the outer arms, having been broken off. Both drawings show the lower arm filled with the same median-incised three-plait braid as the visible face.

The ring, decorated with ring chain on the visible face, here is ornamented with plaited interlace. The plain cords are configured in simple braids. Parker’s drawing shows the lower right quadrant to have a narrow four-cord braid and the lower left quadrant to have an open, narrow-plait three-cord braid; Calverley’s photograph shows a three strand braid for both. Both records show plain rather than cabled molding outlining the ring, but the photograph indicates that the molding may have been cabled. This could also be the effect of casual shading. Because Parker deliberately indicated cabled molding on the visible face and around the central boss, if the outlining molding on the obscured side was even slightly cabled, Parker almost certainly would have indicated this.

The fragment’s installation in a wall obscures any decoration that might exist on the narrow edge of the outer circumference. Neither Parker nor Calverley recorded the outer edge, probably because so little of the actual edge survived, but Parker does show a possible secondary cable molding outside the outer cable molding on the ring of the lower right quadrant of the visible side. This secondary molding is no longer visible, but that the circumference of the ring was decorated with a raised cable molding is possible. The missing ends of the arms were almost certainly decorated with interlace.

64 Parker’s drawing appears in the foldout leaf in Parker, The Ancient Crosses. Calverley’s photograph is reproduced in Cramp, CASSS 2, ill. 310.
2.3 Gosforth 3

Gosforth 3 is an incomplete ringed cross head fragment of Triassic red St Bees sandstone. [PLATE 12] It measures 61 cm tall and 48 cm across. Because it is installed into the east wall of the north aisle in the nave of St. Mary’s, the depth of the fragment is unknown. Based on its similarity in visible proportion to the cross head of the Gosforth cross, it is probably of similar thickness, around 13 cm. The fragment is in two pieces with the right arm broken just to the right of the central boss of the cross. It has been installed in its proper position but does not seem to have been attached permanently to the larger fragment. The upper right and lower right quadrants of the free ring are missing and have been roughly substituted in the installation with molded putty or concrete.

Unlike Gosforth 2, the obscured sides of Gosforth 3 have not been recorded. Parker’s 1896 drawing shows the visible face of the larger fragment of Gosforth 3 before the right arm was found in the churchyard. He does not provide a drawing of the reverse; this may be due to the loss of decoration by damage or because it was installed in the wall before its reverse could be recorded.

The cross head is equilaterally-armed with a free ring passing through the midpoint of each arm. The triangular arms flare out from a central boss, the raised portion having been sheared away, to approximately one-eighth the circumference of the circle. The extremity of the lower vertical arm is slightly squared where the ring chain passes through it. The armpits are acute and slightly curved. A crudely carved tongue extends approximately 10 cm down from the lower arm, recessed unevenly from the surface. The ring is also inset from the surface of the arms, as on the Gosforth cross.

The entire visible surface, save for the tongue, is decorated. Each arm is outlined with a plain roll molding creating a triangular field, which is filled with knotwork. The vertical arms each have a triquetra with an additional central loop. The horizontal arms are filled with a field of multiple ring chain identical to that on the upper portion of the round lower section of the Gosforth cross, oriented with the points of the triangular pattern pointing up. This pattern is well preserved on the right arm, which appears to have been better protected from erosion. The concealed ends of the arms may be
decorated with three strand interlace as indicated by John Stuart in 1867. The free ring is 8 cm wide and, if recessed similarly on the obscured side, is probably 5 or 6 cm thick. Its face is ornamented with a simple two-strand braid motif. Based on the remaining original left quadrants, the pattern ‘travels’ around the cross head rather than converging on one arm. Whether the pattern continued in this manner on the right or was a mirror image with both converging toward the vertical arms is unknown.

2.4 The Warrior’s Tomb

The Warrior’s Tomb is a “hogback” monument of Triassic red St Bees sandstone found in June, 1896, along with the Saint’s Tomb, in the foundation wall of the north aisle of St Mary’s. It shares a custom plinth with the Saint’s Tomb, both installed there in the late nineteenth century at the west end of the north aisle. The original position of the Warrior’s Tomb is unknown, although it was exposed to the elements for some time as demonstrated by marked erosion.

The monument is made from a rectangular monolithic slab set on one long, narrow edge. The long sides of its footprint are slightly bombé. It measures roughly 168 cm long and 25 cm high, and its thickness is 59 cm at its narrow ends and 65 cm in the middle. The top half of the stone tapers to a pointed ridgeline that is slightly arched. The stone’s ends are flat, the top half tilted slightly inward. All faces are decorated with shallow relief carving: the broad sides are divided into two halves, the upper being regularly tessellated like a house roof and the lower being a picture plain for a narrative scene (south side) or interlace motifs (north side); the narrow ends have figural decoration, but the extreme degree of damage to them makes the images difficult to decipher.

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65 J. Stuart, *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (1867). This illustration is reproduced in Cramp, CASSS 2, ill. 312.

The roof tessellation is regular across the top half of the broad sides. There are five rows on each side: each row is a band of trapezoidal meander with every tooth raised in relief and every notch carved down. The rows are offset with respect to each other, with the broad base of each raised tooth aligned to the wide gaps formed by the carved down notches. This created an overall pattern of elongated, tiered hexagons across the surface of the stone. The tessellated “roof” slightly overhangs the vertical “wall” beneath it. The roofline is plain without a pronounced ridge.

The south face is one of the few examples of a complex narrative scene occupying the entire face of a hogback monument. At least thirty figures divided into two groups, fifteen to the left facing right and fifteen to the right facing left, converge toward the center of the monument. The figures in each group overlap one another in a long row, and each figure is rendered almost identically to every other figure. They stand upright though little to no trace of their legs remains. They hold round shields at their hips with their upper torsos, shoulders, and heads above the shields. Relief lines, which may be weapons, extend back from the tops of their shoulders, one per figure. The two figures at the head of each group facing each other at the middle of the stone are rendered slightly differently. The left leader appears to reach forward with one hand, but if he holds anything it is obscured. The right leader holds a rudder-shaped object before him, which resembles a staff topped with a flag. Collingwood illustrated a man kneeling between them facing to the left, but there is little evidence for this on the monument. His interpretation may have stemmed from a trick of the light.67

The north face has no figural iconography. The single field divides roughly into three zones of decoration. Beginning at the left is an area of four interlaced rings which span the width of the field. The circles join in a simple two-strand crossing where they overlap. Extensive damage to the monument has destroyed the left portion of the design. It does not have a closed termination but rather appears truncated, as if the artist simply left off with one motif to begin another. The second zone, just to the right of center, is a

67 Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses.
disordered, vine-like motif. The monument was broken in two through this section and the repairs disrupt interpretation of the carving, which does not appear to have any sense or pattern. The third zone is occupied by a large, circular motif at the far right. A circle is bound with a triple-lobed single-strand knot that loops back and under itself. To the lower left of this is a similar motif but the triple-lobed strand is here reduced to two. Above this is a continuation of the vine-like plaits from the center motif.

The gabled ends of the Warrior’s Tomb are extensively damaged. Because of this, the iconography on them may not be original to the design. The west end retains traces of what may be animal interlace; a sweeping, curved line extends from the edge of the roofline, down in a wide circle, and then back up again. Traces of lines on the interior of the partial circle suggest a dragon-like form, and additional carving may have crowned this motif. The east end is entirely filled with a large figure, whose torso, left arm, and half of his head survive. He is similar to the warriors on the hogback’s figural face with wide shoulders and an egg-shaped head. He wears a tunic with a narrow, low-slung belt. His left arm bends up at his chest and he may hold a hammer, axe, or sword in front of him. Incisions on his face suggest a moustache.

2.5 The Saint's Tomb

The Saint’s Tomb is also a hogback monument, albeit of a different design than the Warrior’s Tomb. [PLATES 16-18] Its proportions measure 5.1 feet long (157 cm), 2.6 feet tall (80 cm), and 0.85 feet wide (26 cm). Discovered in the Norman foundations of St. Mary’s, it now shares a pedestal with the Warrior’s Tomb, installed with its broad faces oriented north and south. Its overall form is that of a peaked-roofed house. Its slightly bombé walls rise vertically to the midpoint of the height, then tilt toward the center, tapering to a pointed ridge. The narrow ends are nearly vertical and pitch inward slightly. The monument is extensively damaged: one upper corner is missing and the monument has been broken into at least four pieces. It was reconstituted with mortar for its installation in St. Mary’s.

The broad sides of the roof are uniquely ornamented. The roof is outlined with panels on the three outer edges. The lower edge is dressed with a plain, narrow roll
molding. The narrow side panels are outlined by a plain roll molding and filled with relief carving. Each contains an interlaced serpent for a total of four serpents with their heads at the top of the panel and their tails at the bottom. Its body twines around itself in a simple three-plait braid. The tapering tail curls back on itself in a spiral that turns counterclockwise on three of the serpents and clockwise on the fourth serpent of the left, north panel.

The top of each panel converges to the roofline but damage to the monument has destroyed all original terminating elements. The inner corners of the panels transform into the jaws of ursine heads, which look inward toward one another along the ridge of the roof. Each beast has a long, blunt snout, the top of which forms part of the ridge along with the top of its head. The beast’s mouth is open and two thick fangs protrude from the upper and lower jaw. A thin, upwardly curled tongue protrudes from the mouth. Cabled moldings, one along the ridge itself and the other extending between the lower jaws of the endbeasts, demarcate the panel along the roof’s ridge. The field between these moldings, terminated on each end by the open mouths of the endbeasts, is filled with a double-headed braided monster. This type of creature also appears on the east face of the Gosforth cross, but on this hogback, the terminating heads are slightly different. Like those on the Gosforth cross, each head is rounded with a hollow, pointed ear set low on the back of the skull. The mouth is open at an acute angle and a large, incised eye stares out. These beasts are different because their upper snout extends into a long point, which nearly touches the upper fang of the confronted endbeast. These ridge beasts are also devoid of fangs.

The field between the three outer panels and the lower roll molding of the broad sides of the roof is filled with an incised diamond pattern. In contrast to the careful and deep carving on the rest of the monument, these incised diamonds are skewed off horizontal and are irregular sizes. They show no evidence of planning and the execution of individual lines is poor and uncertain. The lines are also irregular depths, another indication of their poor workmanship. While the same hand as the rest of the monument
may have carved these lines, their irregular pattern and poor execution suggest instead that another artist carved them, either at the time or later.\(^\text{68}\)

The lower horizontal portion of the broad sides each has a single relief panel covering the length of the monument with 4 cm wide borders at each end. Below these is a wide lower border without decoration that averages 12 cm wide, although some or all of this may have been subterranean. On both sides, similar carvings inhabit inset panels, which are approximately the same width, around 16 cm, although the north panel is slightly wider.

The north side’s panel is essentially symmetrical around a central, vertical axis and is filled with four monstrous creatures with elongated bodies entwined both around one another and two human figures. The creatures are paired; the outer ones curl toward the center in a tight spiral with their snake-like bodies looping around their heads, which resemble other creatures carved by the Gosforth artist: rounded with open, toothless mouths, circular, incised eyes, and small ears at the back of the skull. The outer creatures’ bodies snake long the bottom of the panel before narrowing and rising to the top of the panel at the center, entwining with the bodies of the other monsters; their bodies then join at the center top of the panel creating one sinuous beast.

Two inner creatures face one another to either side of the center. They are reflections of each other and have the same rounded heads as the outer beasts. Their mouths are agape with both the upper and lower jaw elongated. These jaw lines join to the beast opposite. The lower jaws join together at the bottom center of the panel, while the upper one extends straight along the top of the panel, then dip down and cross the midpoint of the panel diagonally, widening and curving upward to become the body of

\(^{68}\) The shallow carving technique of the “illustrated” hogbacks, such as the Warrior’s Tomb and Lowther 4, may have been done in such a manner only to facilitate painted decoration, with the carving serving as outlines. If this is the case, the flat roof panels of the Saint’s Tomb may have been intentionally left blank to serve as an open field for painted decoration. After the paint wore away, the monument could then have been decorated with its current, permanent sculpted decoration.
the beast opposite, where it joins to the back of the skull. The various lines entwine through themselves and the conjoined bodies of the outer beasts.

Between the fleshy, sinewy bodies of the inner and outer beasts are two human figures, one on each side. They take slightly different positions, but they both stand with their arms splayed out in a cruciform position. Each figure’s legs weave around the thick body of the outer beast at the bottom of the panel. The feet penetrate the panel’s frame. The outer arm enters the mouth of the outer creature while the inner arm curls around the body of the inner creature, widens into a ribbon-like form, then passes beneath the figure’s own body. The panel’s outer, lower corners each contain a human mask presented frontally. They are shaped like an inverted teardrop, similar to the various frontal heads on the Gosforth cross.

The south face has a panel similar to the north. The right end of the panel’s design also has a curled, round-headed beast with an open mouth and round ear. To its immediate left, straddling its sinuous body is a human figure in the same position as those on the north side. Its arms are extended to each side, the right touching the creature’s mouth and the left looping around the neck of another beast, then turning back and passing through the figure’s legs. The legs are entwined with the curled beast’s body and, like those on the north face, its feet permeate the panel’s frame. Another similar monstrous creature with a round head, circular eye and small, rounded hollow ear is to the left of the figure. Its snake-like body extends down and then up, interlacing with its long jaws extending out from its open mouth. Unlike on the north face where this creature is conjoined with a mirror of itself, here the design becomes irregular as it transitions into a regular three-plait braid, which extends the remaining length of the panel. The element in the center of the panel in the transition between the monsters and the interlace has a circular incision similar to the eyes of the creatures. The right side of the plait with the eye opens in a mouth-like form, but it is unclear what sort of creature this is meant to be.

The monument’s gabled ends are in poor condition and the carving on them is shallow. Both ends are slightly convex, indicating that they may have been reworked.
The shallow quality of the carving and sloppy, crude execution also suggest that these were not part of the monument’s original design. The west gable currently has a cruciform figure standing frontally in the center of the triangular field. He wears a short tunic with a straight, horizontal hem. His legs are separate, but his feet are missing. His arms extend horizontally across the monument and there is no indication of a hand on either arm where it touches the remnants of a plain roll molding. Beneath the figure’s right arm is a square, indicated by a horizontal line extending out from his waist. His head is long and oval with a pointed chin set down against his chest and a slightly pointed head. A plain, wide arch is over his head, suggested by outlines. Above the arch where the gable begins to narrow are traces of lines, but the stone is too damaged to reconstitute them. The tip of the gable is missing from the west end. The east gable is similar to the west but is in better condition. A cruciform figure fills the width of the space. He has a low, egg-shaped head with deeply drilled eyes and a nose or mouth below them. He wears a tunic with a square hem and his legs are thin and spindly. An incised arch covers his head. The triangular space to the gable is missing and what survives is severely eroded. Traces of interlace are visible in raking light, but not enough to reconstitute the motif.

2.6 The Fishing Stone

The Fishing Stone is a flat red sandstone slab carved in relief on one broad side. [PLATE 19] It is 70 cm high, 33 cm wide and 14 cm thick, sculpted in bas-relief on one broad side. The stone, found by Charles A. Parker with the carved side down in the churchyard, was being used as a step for the sundial to the south of the Gosforth cross. It is now installed into the south return of the east end of the north aisle of St. Mary’s. The carved face of the stone is divided into two fields by a straight, horizontal line 2.5 cm wide. The lower region occupies three-fifths of the face and the upper occupies two-fifths. The two fields each contain a separate vignette, both of which have been reduced at the edges. Both scenes have been damaged by erosion, more severely along the right side as though the right quarter of the stone along the entire height had been abraded.

The lower scene shows two figures in a boat with fish below and an interlaced serpent above. Three oblong fish surround an object extending down from the boat
above. Their bodies are elongated ovals with their heads pointed toward the center of the stone and their truncated tails extending past the edge. The object they gather around is shown with a straight line in relief, which terminates in a prolate ovoid with pointed ends. The left end is carved into two curved horns by removing a triangular area between them. In the lower right corner is a loop, which may join with a pointed, fish-like head next to the horned object. Due to the severe abrasion and the edge truncating the lines, it is difficult to interpret the form. Between the fish in the lower left corner is a bulbous appendage extending into the pictorial field. The extreme left corner is broken away, so to what the appendage belongs is uncertain.

A boat with two men and a central mast is above the aquatic creatures. The boat is nearly the width of the stone and is viewed from the broad side in profile, as if seen from the water line. Its stern and prow rise to taper points in the manner of other depictions of boats in tenth-century northern Europe. If the boat had a figurehead on the right, this has been abraded away. The boat’s side no longer bears any superficial decoration other than some angular gouges along the midsection. These gouges suggest runic letters, but they are too heavily damaged or completely abraded away, to decipher.

The boat contains two frontal figures, one at each end, their arms extended out to the sides with egg-shaped heads set deeply between their shoulders. The left figure has two drilled eyes and the right was certainly similar, but his eyes have been lost to the deep abrasion. Both of them hold objects in their right hands: the right figure holds a hand axe and the left figure hold a hammer that is missing its entire right side to the edge of the stone. The right figure appears to grasp the high prow of the boat in his left arm, but this may only be an effect of the abrasion and the left holds in his left hand the end of a narrow, raised line that disappears behind the boat and is the terminus of the upward slanting line extending from the ovoid, horned object amid the fish. A vertical relief bar extends up from the center of the boat between the two figures indicating a mast; it is the same height as the figures and ends in a small square.

Above the boat is a braided plait. It is a single strand that loops at each end and braids around itself. The plait takes the form of a serpent; the right end tapers to a pointed
tail as it curves down along the right side of the stone and the left end projects horizontally from the plait’s return loop and flares slightly before tapering quickly to a blunt, pointed head. The horizontal divisor is just above the braided serpent.

The major figure in the top vignette is a backward-looking beast. The animal’s body is positioned horizontally across the slab with the full chest to the left tapering to narrow hindquarters at the right. Two hind legs extend down in a “V” from the haunch and end squarely above the horizontal divider. The forelegs begin under the swell of the chest. The left leg extends straight down and rests on the horizontal divider. The left front leg reaches back, unbent, and touches the forward hind leg at the foot. The beast has a long, thin tail that trails midway down the back hind leg. The animal’s head looks back over its back, supported on a thick arching neck. The top of the head, including the eyes and ears, is missing indicating the stone was once larger and perhaps the upper and lower fields were the same size. The beast’s mouth is open slightly and both the upper and lower jaws disappear behind its back. Above the animal’s head and back, a triangular region in relief enters the scene from the top edge. Another line cuts diagonally across the upper right corner. Whether these lines are related or what they represent is unknown.

Below the beast, two knotted snakes twine through its legs. The left snake is positioned under the neck and chest and the right snake below the hindquarters. The left snake begins to the left of the beast’s thick neck and runs down along the left edge of the stone. In the space between the animal’s forward leg and chest, the serpent loops around itself in a simple left-hand knot. It then continues over the forward foreleg, behind the back foreleg, over the tail of the second serpent, and terminates in a triangular head beneath the belly of the beast. The second serpent begins behind the back foreleg and its pointed tail touches the beast’s underside. It passes under the neck of the first snake, over the beast’s forward hind leg, and twists itself in a simple knot. Due to the heavy abrasion damage, the snake appears to merge with the beast’s back hind leg, but there appears to be a triangular flare where the snake’s body passes out of the knot, which may be a head.
2.7 Gosforth 7

Gosforth 7 is a small red sandstone hogback fragment installed in St. Mary’s in the corner of the north aisle and the vestry, partially concealed by paneling. 69 [PLATE 20] The stone is 23 cm high, 20 cm wide and 11 cm deep. The two exposed faces are decorated. They meet at a right angle edged with a plain roll molding. The narrow face to the left of the molding has the lower portion of a three strand braid terminating in a counter-clockwise spiral, like that of the spiraled tails of the Gosforth cross and the Saint’s Tomb. Beneath this is a horizontal molding joining to the molding on the left. The fragment is broken just below.

The ornament on the wider face to the right of the roll molding is difficult to distinguish due to its fragmentary nature. A wide loop drapes across the upper half of the remaining face and the right end is sharply forked and an almost circular incision could be an eye. From the lower midpoint of this loop a wide band extends down to the lower broken edge. On the left side of this wide strip is extends a flange, which may be slightly incised. Because of the excessive damage on this fragment, the intentionality of superficial marks is difficult to determine. The concealed faces are roughly broken and undecorated, recorded as such by Parker before its installation into the wall. 70

2.8 Conclusions

The Gosforth monuments are among the most visually elaborate of tenth-century England. The figural decoration forms its own system of internal references and meanings irrespective of the overall scheme or the identification of specific elements. What is most noticeable is the repetitive nature of the compositional elements—both figural motifs and interlace motifs are used again and again. The four horsemen are rendered nearly identically, although in different sizes. The lupine heads all conform to a single type, with variations in detail for narrative function. The single ring chain appears

69 Miller, "A Second "Saint's Tomb" at Gosforth, Cumbria."

70 Parker, The Ancient Crosses.
three times on the Gosforth cross and once on the larger fragmentary cross head (CASSS 3); the field ring chain appears on the Gosforth cross and the smaller fragmentary cross head (CASSS 2).

The individual human figures are also rendered closely to a type, with men wearing tunics and women wearing long, trailing dresses with long braids down their backs. Both female figures are depicted in profile and both hold vessels out toward a male figure, visually reinforcing the cultural role of women to be in attendance to men. Of the nine male figures, two are shown in profile and the remaining six face frontally with their arms outspread. The three male figures on the Saint’s Tomb also hold their arms out as do the two figures on the Fishing Stone. This indicates that the cruciform pose is used for general figural representation and is not necessarily symbolic of Christianity. It may be used to visually communicate clearly the humanity of the figures, as opposed to the monstrous elements in the composition. All the men hold spears, except for the bound figure on the lower west face and the sole frontal figure on the east face of the cross, and all wear belted tunics. This shows expectations of maleness: belts and weapons. Both the figures without weapons are bound. The west figure is supine at the lowest place on the west face and bound at the hands and legs, communicating powerlessness; the east figure is the largest individual figure on the cross and is the only frontal figure on that face, suggesting his importance, and the cabled molding around him, which passes either over or under his hands, could be read as binding or encircling him with rope. His unarmed state also suggests a difference from the expectations of the male, visually establishing him as powerless despite his size and his confrontation with the viewer.

The various orientations and sizes of the Gosforth cross’s figures indicate that the artist was not concerned with optically realistic pictorial space. The artist’s inclusion of separate narrative events within a single frame condensed narrative time to create direct visual connections between them. The frontal figure on the east face is the largest, but this is more a result of the general composition of the cross, for although the figures are different sizes, they are all rendered as large as possible within their appointed space. If the artist meant to be explicit in his use of hierarchy of size, he could have made the
smaller figures more dramatically diminutive. Due to the low viewing angle where the attendant figures appear larger with respect to the cruciform figure, the size of the figures on the lower east face appear more balanced when standing before the cross than through the artificial, flat viewing angle achieved through photography or engraving.

Actually, the overall design of the cross impedes the viewer’s perspective. The figural panels begin almost two meters up the shaft—above eye-level for most people. Unlike such other crosses as the Anglian shafts at Beckermet and Irton, whose inscriptions are specifically placed at or below eye level, the Gosforth iconography is elevated and beyond close inspection, lending it an otherworldly aspect. The figures and their environment are above or beyond the human world, indicating that they represent mythological figures rather than “current” historical ones. Scholars believe these sculptures were originally painted, which certainly would have rendered the Gosforth iconography more clearly, but on the Gosforth cross, the figural compositions are still physically separated from the human sphere.\(^{71}\)

The seven monuments and fragments at Gosforth comprise one of the largest collections of high-quality, iconographic pre-Conquest sculpture in England. They are superlative in many regards, yet also share stylistic affinity with the general corpus of tenth-century sculptural material. The absence of vine scroll motifs, spine-and-boss cross heads and pelleted borders discount an earlier date, while twinned interlacing within the panels, stout figural styles and interlaced animals support a tenth-century date.\(^{72}\) The following chapters will discuss specific aspects of the sculptures, but here it is important

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\(^{71}\) Due to the extreme weathering suffered by the cross, no trace of paint or gilding remains. It also has no drilled holes for metal appliqués or revetments, although some of the erosion damage on the north face could have been the result of a hole. Evidence for paint on stone sculpture exists on a Crucifixion plaque from Penrith, Cumbria (CASSS I/1), on which traces of paint remain. Jane Hawkes argues for the Sandbach crosses to have been painted originally. Jane Hawkes, The Sandbach Crosses: Sign and Significance in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002).

\(^{72}\) Rosemary Cramp and British Academy, Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament: A General Introduction to the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture (Oxford; Toronto: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1991).
to note that the intricacy of both the group’s iconography and structural design elements are unsurpassed.

The extreme design and quality of the Gosforth monuments suggest that the Gosforth artist was in a sort of competition, although the nature of that competition cannot be entirely recovered. The desires of the patron, whether a single individual, a small group, or leadership within the broader community, may be responsible as they could have sought to have for themselves sculptures that surpassed in size and narrative complexity those in other settlements. Conversely, the artist may have desired to make the tallest, thinnest, most elaborate sculpture possible and found at Gosforth the means to do so. Perhaps the desires of the artist and patron(s) were unified toward designing, financing, and executing such an ambitious project. Separating the specific impetus for the Gosforth sculptures’ dramatic designs is impossible but the cost/patronage and execution/craftsmanship were certainly available. That the sculptures visually reference works across northern England and surpass so many of them indicates that, whatever the source of the competitive drive at Gosforth, the required components to compete successfully were in place.

This outward-looking competition was not restricted to Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture. Thomas Noble, who wrote with regard to ninth-century architecture, said, “Whole complexes could compete with each other: there was a kind of battle of capitals among Aachen, Rome, Constantinople and Baghdad. Buildings talk, and they speak known languages.”\(^73\) In the case of architecture, it was not necessary to copy a famous building but rather to invoke it.\(^74\) If successful, the new structure and its patrons inherited some the cultural capital of the old. The relationship between Anglo-Scandinavian crosses is not precisely that of the great early medieval buildings, but the direct allusion


to previous works is common to both. The relationship between works referenced can be local and regional, as is the case in northern England, or it can span cultures and continents. Although I use the word “competition,” the motive behind the Gosforth sculptures’ designs was not necessarily antagonistic, but rather may have been the result of a desire to test the extremes of human endeavor.

The Gosforth group can be described with superlative adjectives for many of its features: tallest, thinnest, most (figures, animals, complete). This alone indicates that the artist was striving to make monuments that surpassed all others to stand apart from standard sculpture. He (we presume a man) did not, however, disengage from the visual language for sculpture established on related but somewhat parallel works. Motifs like the ring chain appear in Yorkshire and Cumbria on both sculpture and metalwork. Male figures are often depicted with spears in belted tunics; women are shown in trailing dresses with long braids. The Gosforth artist was just as aware of his artistic milieu and how his work was positioned within it as is argued for other artists of other superlative works like Eadfrith (the Lindisfarne Gospels).

75 The effect and function of these relationships is discussed further in Chapter 7.

76 Compare Bailey’s Circle Head Group of the western coast with Lang’s Brompton School of the Tees Valley. Cramp, CASSS 2; Lang, CASSS 6.


78 An excellent comparison for the woman on the east face of the Gosforth cross is on a hogback fragment at Sockburn, Co. Durham (CASSS 15), where the figure is rendered almost identically. Rosemary Cramp, County Durham and Northumberland, vol. 1, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England (Oxford [Oxfordshire] ; New York: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1984).

The Gosforth artist’s awareness of decorative and artistic trends demonstrates that the Insular world in the tenth century was not particularly small despite the fact that many of the stylistic groups of sculptures are in part defined by their provincialism. While it is unusual among the corpus of tenth-century sculpture to see trends from relatively distant geographical regions, the Gosforth artist displayed a broad decorative repertoire. Given the unsettled politics of the tenth century, the elite, at least, likely kept apprised of regional events. The alliance between Dublin, Alba, and Northumbria at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 brought together people from across the British Isles. They battled a coalition of the Anglo-Saxon counties in Mercia and Wessex under the leadership of Æthelstan, and thus the Insular world was brought together in a dramatic turning point for the nascent Anglo-Saxon nation. That the Wessex king looked to the entire island, that the traders out of Dublin established and maintained links across the Irish Sea, that culturally and geographically disparate groups felt the need to unify against a common enemy, and that the various annals kept in the tenth century tend to record the same major, regional events shows that regionalism and familial relations were very much a part of tenth-century identity.

The descriptions in this chapter also offer evidence in support of Richard Bailey’s claim for the use of templates by Anglo-Scandinavian sculptors. He cites remarkable similarities between instances of similar figural reliefs such as the two birds on a cross shaft fragment at Brompton, which are nearly identical save for the positioning of their feet. He also compares two warriors, one from a Sockburn cross shaft fragment that has stylistic affinity to the hand of the Gosforth artist (CASSS Sockburn 6), and the remains of the head and spear from one of the finest carvings of Anglo-Scandinavian production,

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82 Bailey makes an extensive argument for this in the final chapter, “The Sculptor at Work,” in Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 238-56. The form or material of these possible templates is speculative.
a cross shaft fragment at Brompton (CASSS Brompton 3). Two other warriors at Middleton are also so nearly identical as to suggest the use of a template.

The Gosforth cross’s horsemen, although not cited as evidence of the use of templates by Bailey, are also remarkably similar to one another. While this could simply be the result of the fact that the same artist carved all of them, on the other hand they all “walk” in the same direction, they have the same stance, and the warriors on them have the same weapons. That the horsemen are slightly different sizes on each face is likely what prevented Bailey from using them in his argument. However, their omission is notable. Despite the different sizes and level of detail between the horsemen, they do support Bailey’s argument that the templates were not slavishly copied but rather used for compositional design and to establish a minimum standard. “The template may, as it were, guarantee a minimum level of competent performance, but the real artist can rise above this—in just the same way as Eadfrith, the illuminator of the Lindisfarne Gospels, imposed his personal style on the geometric layout of his ornamental pages.”

The repetitive nature of much of the Gosforth iconographic features may be the result of the use of templates—for horsemen, wolves heads, standing figures—but with artistic adaptations. The overall iconographic scheme could have been planned out with these templates on a prepared shaft prior to carving. Whether these templates were produced specifically for the cross or whether the Gosforth artist may have had them from previous work is unclear due to the highly fragmentary nature of most of the tenth-century sculptural corpus. If the Gosforth artist’s origins were in the Tees valley where Bailey argues most strongly for the use of templates, he would have continued to work in the manner of his training. The following chapters offer further support for the Gosforth artist’s eastern origins.

83 Ibid., 247.
3 Cumbria to the Tenth Century: the Place of Gosforth and its Sculptures

Cumbria’s early history is less known and less studied than other regions of the British Isles due in part to the dearth of local historical information. Many aspects of Cumbria’s past are vague or unclear, but the differences in its material culture indicate the people who lived there were not identical to their better-studied neighbors in Ireland, Scotland and Yorkshire. By amassing the scant evidence from a variety of sources, the sculptural group at Gosforth and the people who made it can be understood better in the context of a long and complex timeline.

Within the last few years, scholars have produced new research focused on the Cumbrian past. Two recent conferences, People and the Land: Settlement in the Eden Valley and Hagiography at the Frontiers: Jocelin of Furness and Insular Politics, have brought more scholarly attention to early medieval Cumbria and provide a strong basis for further work. In 2011, metal detector enthusiasts discovered two large Viking-Age silver hoards in southern Cumbria, which are now being studied at the British Museum. These new material and scholarly contributions will expand our knowledge of Cumbria’s Viking Age as published research develops from them.

This chapter draws together what can be said about the historical inhabitants of Cumbria from a variety of sources going back to the initial settlement of the region in the Neolithic period. The land and its inhabitants have shaped one another since that time and

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84 People and the Land was held 6 October 2007 in Appleby-in-Westmorland in the Eden Valley. Its mission was to bring together scholars who had focused their research on the people who dwelled within the Eden Valley from the prehistoric to the present. In conjunction with the AHRC project, “Hagiography at the Frontiers: Jocelin of Furness and Cross-Border Politics,” the conference, Hagiography at the Frontiers: Jocelin of Furness and his Near Contemporaries, was held 8 July 2012 at Furness Abbey and discussed the late twelfth-early thirteenth-century hagiographer, Jocelin, whose most important of many works was St. Patrick’s vita.

certain effects of earlier populations persist even to the present day. Despite the thin evidence, much can be said about the history of Cumbria if restricted to general trends. What is not clear via the historical record is the specific identity of the tenth-century community responsible for the large sculptural group at Gosforth. Reliance on broadly argued trends may distort or disguise local realities. This chapter offers a solution to this problem by arguing for the possibility of localizing aspects of identity by means of material, stylistic, and iconographic choices on the part of the patron and/or sculptor.

3.1 Neolithic and Bronze Age Cumbria

The modern county of Cumbria was first inhabited approximately 9,000 years before present in the drastic warming of the Holocene Optimum period, during which the mile-thick ice sheets of the last Ice Age, which carved deep ravines out of the volcanic landscape of the Cumbrian Mountains, retreated. Rich soil deposits became home to thick forests, first of birch and ash, then of oak. Humans followed the forest game of boar, bear and deer north along the rising coastline of an England still connected to the European continent.

Through the Neolithic period, the Cumbrian population engaged in the production and export of practical and ritual objects in the hundreds from the Langdale “Axe Factory.” The quarry exported stone blanks of greenstone as well as finished axes for what are believed to be ceremonial purposes; more practical non-greenstone axes were used across England to fell trees and shape wood.

The late millennia of the Neolithic period and the early centuries of the Bronze Age was a period of gradual but significant deforestation. As people began to practice agriculture and animal husbandry, they established permanent settlements and cleared the thick forests from the fells for pasturing and agriculture. This caused soil erosion from the hillsides as the shallow-rooting grasses and shrubs that replaced the forests were unable to hold back the soil from the wetter environment that was brought on by the

increasing oceanic climate as England became an island due to the rising sea level. This fell deforestation was permanent, with the large tree species that once covered the slopes unable to find purchase on the exposed rocks and screes.

Changes in sea level put pressure on the Cumbrian Bronze Age population as quicksand and peat bogs formed along the coast and reduced the arable land. Despite these environmental changes, the region was not abandoned. Inhabitants during the third and second millennia BCE constructed the most well-known evidence of their culture: the megalithic henges and circles. Cumbria is home to many of the earliest and best-preserved circles in England, such as Castlerigg, Long Meg and her Daughters in the Eden Valley, Swinside on the southern slopes north of Furness, and Grey Croft to the south of Sellafield nuclear facility north of Seascale. Several other circles have been destroyed due to agricultural and industrial activity.

3.2 The Iron Age Carvetii

Around 500 BCE, Celtic culture developed in or was transplanted into Cumbria. The Romans called this culture the civitas Carvetiorum although the only direct evidence of this nomenclature is two fragments of Roman sculpture attesting to them. The

88 Ibid.
89 For example, Grey Croft had been buried in the early nineteenth century because it interfered with agriculture. It was later restored.
90 For a detailed overview of Iron Age Cumbria, see Dennis William Harding, The Iron Age in Northern Britain: Celts and Romans, Natives and Invaders (New York: Routledge, 2004); N. J. Higham and Barri Jones, The Carvetii, The Peoples of Roman Britain (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1985). Higham and Jones’ bibliography is a nice resource for archaeology of Iron Age Cumbria to 500 CE.
91 The origin of the “Celts” and their cultural signifiers is debated. Here, I use the term loosely and inclusively for the pre-Roman Iron Age culture in the British Isles. For a genetic approach to the origins of the British people, see Stephen Oppenheimer, The Origins of the British: A Genetic Detective Story: The Surprising Roots of the English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh (New York: Carroll & Graff, 2006).
Carvetti are not included in Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, although other groups such as the Brigantes and Damnonii are. The capital of this region was possibly at Carlisle [Luguvalium], the only walled town known from this period, or, as convincingly argued by Nick Higham and Barri Jones, Clifton Dykes near Brougham.94

Pre-Roman Cumbria has received little modern archaeological attention and knowledge of the region in the Iron Age is dependent upon pollen analysis, landscape study, and scattered artifact finds, mostly in the foothills of the Eden Valley.95 Higham and Jones state the matter succinctly, “In practice, there is only negligible evidence for an Iron Age culture in the territory prior to the Roman conquest.”96 Studies of Iron Age West Cumbria and the Allerdale parish in which Gosforth is situated are found only as part of broader works. No evidence for pre-Roman inhabitation has been found at Gosforth, although this is certainly because little archaeology focused on the Iron Age has been executed in West Cumbria. The area was likely sparsely inhabited, although alluvial patterns may have rendered the site of Gosforth uninhabitable at the time.

### 3.3 Roman Cumbria

The Roman period in Cumbria is better studied due to a plethora of exposed ruins and reasonably undisturbed archaeological evidence that can be corroborated with

near Brougham found in 1964 bears the inscription *R.P.C. Car* interpreted as *respublica civitatis Car(vetiorum)*. Collingwood and Wright, *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, 288. No distinct Carvetti material culture of a political nature (such as coins or independent annals) survives.

93 Book 2, chapter 2, part 1.
historical records from Roman writers. Hadrian’s Wall runs through the northern part of the county and much of the scholarship on Roman Cumbria is contextualized by it. Roman West Cumbria is less studied and a summary of the scholarship follows.

The Romans wrote the first historical records of Cumbria and these, corroborated with archaeological discoveries, provide an account of life at the periphery of the Roman world. The Roman Empire first invaded the island in 43 CE and subjected the native population to occupation and taxation. The inhabitants were not wholly against these changes; local elite took on Roman titles and constructed Roman architectural forms like villas and bathhouses. The Romans did not establish firm control in northern England in the middle first century and Tacitus records the first war between Venutius, apparently of the Carvetti who were resistant to Roman rule, and his former wife Cartimandua, queen of the neighboring Brigantes and ally to the Romans. Venutius eventually defeated Cartimandua by c. 69 CE, liberating the north of England from Roman occupation for a decade before Gnaeus Julius Agricola defeated the North, razed Carlisle in 79 CE, and founded Stanegate Fort around 80 CE.

Emperor Hadrian initiated the single greatest period of infrastructure development in Cumbria until the Industrial Revolution. In addition to his famous wall regulating the Roman border with the Celts, he also built roads throughout the North. High Street from Brocavum (Brougham) to Galava (Ambleside) and the Stainmore road over the Pennines through Rey Cross were still in use through the period of Anglo-Scandinavian

97 There are several detailed studies about aspects of Roman Cumbria: Timothy W. Potter and Dorothy Charlesworth, Romans in North-West England: Excavations at the Roman forts of Ravenglass, Watercrock and Bowness on Solway (Carlisle: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 1979); Tom Garlick, Romans in the Lake Counties (Clapham: Dalesman, 1970); David John Breeze, "The Roman army in Cumbria: the second Dorothy Charlesworth lecture," Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society 88 (1988): 9-22. More resources exist specifically for Hadrian’s Wall:

settlement. A major road also ran the course of the wall from Luguvalium to Coria to Arbeia, connecting the mileforts down to Glannoventa (Ravenglass), Solway, and through Lancastershire. The mountainside fort of Mediobogdum (Hardknott) lies 20 kilometers west of Gosforth on the treacherous road through Hardknott pass between Galava and Glannoventa, only 10 kilometers south of Gosforth, indicating that the Romans were active in West Cumbria, although no evidence for Roman settlement specifically at Gosforth has been discovered.

With Roman roads came Roman armies and their cultures. In addition to changes in the landscape and material culture brought by Roman armies, they introduced Christianity to Cumbria as one of many religions practiced in the Late Antique period, but how widespread Roman Christianity became in the region outside of Roman military settlements is unclear. The induction of Christianity in Cumbria is important because it has an obvious bearing on the nature of the Gosforth monuments eight centuries later and is an aspect of Roman influence in the lives of Cumbrians that persisted longer than did architecture or infrastructure. Roman evidence for Christianity in Cumbria includes two carved grave monuments, one with an inscription and one with a chi-rho motif. The two inscriptions are interpreted as Christian based on comparisons to more certain

99 For the latter, see fig. 21 in Higham and Jones, The Carvetti, 45. Indeed, remains of these Roman roads are found hugging the modern highway system.


101 Dorothy J. Watts, Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain (London: Routledge, 1991). Watts concluded, “Although Christianity in Britain seems not to have been taken up initially with vast enthusiasm and by large numbers, the abandonment of pagan temples attests the overall decline in paganism in the fourth century.” (227) She blames Christian zealots for the destruction of pagan temples, but the reality may be more complicated, perhaps politically rather than religiously based.

Christian inscriptions in Spain and elsewhere, but the evidence is not irrefutable. The *chi-rho* stone from the Roman fort and *vicus* of Maryport (RIB 856) is known only from an engraving because the stone has been lost, but its apparent workmanship and form indicate it to be a well-made grave marker. A lead tank at Ireby, decorated with wreath-like circles, has been argued by Dorothy Watts to indicate a vessel with a Christian liturgical function. A ring from Carlisle also bears a *chi-rho*. Excavations at Maryport in July 2011 may uncover additional evidence for Cumbrian Roman Christianity. Maryport’s fort and *vicus* have produced the largest collection of Roman dedicatory altars yet found in England. This collection demonstrates the variety of religious beliefs and practices of military commanders in the provinces, which show the types of religions introduced into northern England.

3.4 Sub-Roman Cumbria

The exit of the Romans from Cumbria was a gradual process, but Roman political administration was certainly gone by the early fifth century. Scholars disagree on the extent to which Roman life continued after imperial withdrawal. On the one hand, Deirdre O’Sullivan stated that strong evidence for the persistence of native occupation at Roman sites in the fifth century is missing. On the other, Alan Whitworth provided a short account of several Hadrianic forts that appear to have had persistent occupation

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103 The stone memorializes a Greek man, Flavius Antigonas Papias, in the exurb of Carlisle.
104 Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain*, 165-69.
107 Roman military presence and administrative oversight in Britain had already been in decline in the decades preceding the customary date of Roman exit from England in 410.
108 Deirdre O’Sullivan, "Cumbria for the Vikings: A review of some 'Dark Age' Problems in North-West England," in *The Scandinavians in Cumbria*, ed. John Baldwin and Ian D. White (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1985), 17-36. She makes a convincing argument for caution concerning the "Brigantian clearance," an increase in cultured grain pollens associated with forest clearance to provide food for stationed troops during the Roman period. Carbon 14 dates indicate this period is within the fifth and sixth centuries rather than the mid-second. See fig. 2.1 in O’Sullivan.
through the seventh century, and Rachel Newman recently demonstrated through historical and archaeological evidence that aspects of Roman life in circumural Cumbria persisted into the seventh century.\(^{109}\) Ann Williams argued that the South was more Romanized than the north where the Roman political structured fractured into petty kingdoms.\(^{110}\) This scholarly disagreement shows that sub-Roman Cumbria is not well understood and that the scant evidence attesting to it can be interpreted in a number of ways.

Certainly, the stoppage of Roman payments to England caused a dramatic economic effect. Such northern border cities as Newcastle and Carlisle may have remained regional political centers even if archaeological evidence for this is scant. Little is known about sub-Roman Cumbria because much of the cultural evidence for this period is missing, whether in the form of datable coins from an archaeological context or historical writings.\(^{111}\) With the end of Roman material and economic imports, locals would have reused objects and metal. This combined with the likelihood that the Cumbrian population followed the same trend toward population decentralization makes sub-Roman evidence difficult to find.

While news of the Sack of Rome in 410 reverberated through Europe and the Near East, life in Cumbria would have been little affected. Cumbrians persisted in their agriculturally based lives, although increasing economic depression set in when the importation of Roman currency into the region dried up. The indigenous “Celtic” population had become Romanized in part and governance changed hands from Roman officials to tribal leaders, although these were by this time probably the same families.

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\(^{111}\) Two British sources exist from this period: the *Confessio* of St. Patrick and Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain). Both have information about the western coast of England, but nothing specific that can be directly related to modern Cumbria. See also R. G. Collingwood, "Prehistoric settlement near Crosby Ravensworth," *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* 33 (1933): 202, 201.
Peter H. Sawyer argued for the late-Roman introduction of Germanic mercenaries into England, a practice that was continued after the Roman departure by local aristocrats, some of whom were these same Germanic warriors-made-good. Evidence at Birkoswald suggests that timber houses were built within the old stone walls of the fort, but local craftsmen seemed either unable or unwilling to maintain the extensive Roman defenses. That some of this construction remained is evidenced by Bede, who provides eyewitness accounts of Roman architecture, although the temporal sequence he affords to Hadrian’s and Antonine’s Walls is in error. However, Bede also says of the Roman construction, “The built cities, beacon towers, bridges, and roads are visible even to this day in the same places,” indicating that more of these structures could be seen in Bede’s time than in the present and that into the eighth century they were recognized as Roman. While the Roman topology of Bede’s eighth century cannot be presumed to have persisted into the tenth, the Cumbrian Roman landscape was certainly more evident in the tenth than in the present. Additionally, with the low population in West Cumbria, such structures as Hardknott Fort may have been comparatively intact, although archaeology has not confirmed tenth-century occupation or use of the site. Regardless of the Roman architectural persistence in Cumbria, the general “Romanness” of the region waned. Gradually, the use of regulated currency ceased, for there existed no central authority to issue it, no importation of new money in the form of military salary,


113 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, I. v-xii. He describes, incorrectly, how Severus had built a *uellum*, or turf rampart, across England (I. v. 1-2) misinterpreting the *uellum* built to the south of Hadrian’s Wall, followed by the Antoinine Wall (I. xii. 2), followed by the stone sections of Hadrian’s Wall (I. xii. 2). Bede derived his information from the *Historiae adversum paganos* of Orosius (c. 416), itself based on the *Breviarium* of Eutropius (369). For a detailed explanation, see Michael Lapidge, John Blair, and Simon Keynes, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 107-18.


115 The small eighth(?)-century church at Escomb, Yorkshire was built in part from reused Roman ashlar blocks.
and the towns that were built for or relied upon Roman trade were reduced in size, perhaps even depopulating entirely.\textsuperscript{116}

Environmental as well as political change pressured inhabitants of northern England. In Cumbria, this was a period of gradual climatic warming and with the higher temperatures came higher sea levels. These rising seas would have reduced the amount of arable land, especially in western coastal Cumbria, further encouraging population emigration. This warm period was also drier, which may have contributed to the greatest level of deforestation in the Lake District as farmers cleared more acreage for cereal cultivation.\textsuperscript{117}

One traceable and lasting cultural effect of Roman occupation was the introduction of Christianity. While physical evidence for the Late Antique Church in Cumbria is scant, Cumbrian archaeology has revealed several Roman and sub-Roman Christian finds that show the religion’s persistence in the region. Some textual evidence survives that may indicate at least a small Christian community there. St. Patrick, the famous missionary to the Irish, may have been Cumbrian. He was born in late Roman Britain around 387 near Banna Venta Berniae, the son of Calpornius, a deacon, and the grandson of Potitus, a priest.\textsuperscript{118} His early life is known autobiographically through his \textit{Declaration}, where he defends charges laid against him by fellow Christians in Ireland.\textsuperscript{119} Three generations of Christians may have lived in late and sub-Roman


\textsuperscript{117} Vincent, "Pre-Viking Change in the Cumbrian Landscape," 14-15.

\textsuperscript{118} The location of Banna Venta Berniae is unknown, but it is thought to be near Carlisle, somewhere along Hadrian’s Wall.

Cumbria although Patrick does not elaborate on how extensive this faith might have been in his homeland.

Aside from the possible reference by Patrick, the historical account of Christianity in Cumbria is even cloudier. By the sixth century, the Welsh poet, Taliesin, records a line of rulers for a northern kingdom of Rheged, thought to correspond to the historical counties of Westmorland and eastern Cumberland centered in the Eden Valley, as the pre-Roman Carvetti culture appeared to do.\(^{120}\) Kenneth Jackson argues for persistence of Roman culture in the highlands, especially among the elite.\(^{121}\) No real evidence for this kingdom survives save perhaps in Brithonic-Celtic (Cumbric) place-names, and any links early Rheged had to the established Irish church, the British church, or the growing ecclesiastical power in Northumbria is unknown. Little evidence exists for the religious practices of Rheged, whether these were politically patronized or not, but whatever those were did not produce long-standing architectural or identified material evidence.

Some additional evidence for Cumbrian cultural practices can be gleaned from the early saints’ lives, such as the twelfth-century *Life of St Kentigern*, a saint to whom many churches in and near the historical kingdom of Strathclyde are dedicated, including within northern Cumbria. Kentigern (Mungo) lived in the early- to mid-sixth century and was the son of a northern king (*regis Cumbrie*), although these early saints were expected to be of a royal lineage and attaching his name to a convenient petty ruler would have been standard practice.\(^{122}\) Later events in Kentigern’s life take place on the river Clud (Clyde) where he is abused by a Cumbrian king named Morken (Morcent).\(^{123}\) While this


\(^{123}\) Jocelin, *Life of St Kentigern*, c. 21-22.
place is further north than modern Cumbria, it indicates that Cumbria was probably ruled from the Forth of Clyde at this time, perhaps in a similar manner to early Northumbria where the north and south regions of the kingdom were at times united and at others divided, here in the west into Strathclyde (north) and Rheged (south). When Kentigern flees the revenge of Morken’s relations, his journey takes him to sites around Karleolum/Cairliuel (Carlisle), where he performs missionary work and erects a cross at a place Jocelin called *Anglice Crosfeld.*

Jackson speculated that this part of the story was added by Jocelin, a monk at Furness Abbey in extreme southern Cumbria, to explain the prevalence of church dedications to St Kentigern (Mungo) in northern Cumberland. Of course, all of this speaks more to Jocelin’s twelfth-century concerns than to the historical reality of sixth-century Cumbria. Jackson summarized this by accepting a Kentigern as the founder of a Glasgow church and a possible missionary in Cumbria; the *Annales Cambriae* record Kentigern’s death in 612. Effectively throwing out the rest, Jackson did admit the interest to the narrative detail that Strathclyde was “subject” to the bishops, suggesting a possible sanctioned connection between the early Brythonic-Celtic church and the supposed pagan(?) state. Clear answers to question of religious adherence in Cumbria in the fourth through seventh centuries are difficult to assert. There are no extant Christian inscriptions and only one cross-slab. Mostly likely, Cumbria’s religious identity tended toward introversion rather than maintaining strong ties to Rome, perhaps more strongly Christian in larger population centers. This local flavor of Christianity became more influenced by the Celtic church as immigrants into eastern and southern England subverted the sub-Roman Christianity there. Bede reports that during Augustine’s

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124 The nature of the cross (whether stone or wooden, decorated or plain) and the location of the “cross field” are unknown. Jocelin, *Life of St Kentigern,* c. 23-31.

125 Jackson, "The Sources for the Life of St Kentigern," 313-14. Jocelin also wrote St. Patrick’s *vita* showing his interest in local early Christianity. Jocelin’s *vita* of St. Patrick has not been edited, but the Jocelin project headed by Dr. Clare Downham promises a forthcoming volume.

126 Ibid. 341-42.

127 O'Sullivan, "Cumbria for the Vikings." 22.
mission to the Angles in the early seventh century, he was met with resistance not by pagan traditions but by the conflicting Christian traditions of the British church, such as the Pelagian heresy and differing calculation of Easter. In the North, such poems as the *Gododdin* suggest that the inhabitants viewed themselves as Christian as indicated by the Strathclyder Aneirin’s prayer for Ceredig.  

What can be said with some certainty about sub-Roman Cumbria is that it fell victim to the same depopulation that affected much of Western Europe. Two forces are generally believed to be responsible for this: the so-called Plague of Justinian (541-542 CE) and the Global Climate Event of 535-536. The Plague of Justinian, perhaps a strain of bubonic plague, which entered the Byzantine Empire from the east, had a profound effect on the population of Europe with possible losses of one-third to one-half of adults, and there is evidence that this plague was eventually transmitted as far as Ireland, possibly affecting Cumbria. However, the effect of a plague in an area of low population density would not be as great as in urban centers, so this alone is not entirely responsible for the population drop in Cumbria evidenced by pollen changes.

The impact of the AD 536 Climate Event is more difficult to measure, but annals from Ireland to China report a weak sun and crop failures due to cold and it shows up in dendrochronology from around the world. Whether this event was caused by a natural fluctuation in the climate, sunspots or solar intensity, a meteor, a volcanic event, or some combination of forces, its effect was to shorten growing seasons, reduce the amount of energy reaching Earth from the Sun, and altered the length of day due to the reflection of light off the aerosol particles suspended in the atmosphere.

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The AD 536 Climate Event was the harbinger of three centuries of cooler, wetter conditions in Western Europe, ending in the middle ninth century after the freezing of the Nile River in 829. While weather alone does not necessarily explain changes in population, if northern England became dramatically colder and drier in the post-Roman years, this might have driven less sturdy members of the population further south and away from the harsher coastal regions of Cumbria.

3.5 Anglo-Saxon Cumbria

To say that Cumbria enjoyed the same flowering of Anglo-Saxon culture as seen in the South would be slightly misleading. The petty kingdom of Rheged coalesced from the power vacuum left by the Romans, eventually to fall, at least in part, to Northumbrian annexation by the mid-seventh century. Northumbrians certainly controlled northeastern Cumbria by 685, attested to by Bede. Based on place-name evidence, the Brithonic language of Rheged gave way to Old English. During this period, Cumbria appeared to have benefitted from Northumbrian rule with a centralization of ecclesiastical and political power, although the materially and intellectually rich monasteries of the east did not develop west of the Pennines.

The exact nature of Northumbrian governance in Cumbria is unknown. The soils of northern Cumbria and the Eden Valley are some of the best in northern England, so the region was probably exploited for cereal production. Carlisle in the north was a population center and likely political hub for the governance that oversaw the area. Anglian presence in the fertile land of the Eden Valley, north Cumbria and the western coastal plain is certain due to Anglian place-names as well as an even distribution of

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132 The floods of Winter 2009 prove how inhospitable the Cumbrian weather can become even in a period of warm, comparatively stable climate.
Anglian artifacts correlated to the same regions. The place-name evidence shows a mix of influences in the pre-Scandinavian period. Old English names (-ham, -ingham, -ceaster) mix with Old Welsh (Briton) names (-ock, Ince, Penketh).\(^{135}\) These are the same regions that had been populated by the Carvetti, Romans, and Rheged with places like Carlisle likely enjoying continual occupation.\(^{136}\) Through the two and a half centuries of Northumbrian control of Cumbria, the population and its wealth increased, as demonstrated by the large-scale stone sculptures erected beginning in the ninth century.

Aside from the somewhat numerous Anglian period sculptures, material evidence for the early Anglo-Saxon period in Cumbria is thin. Numerous curvilinear churchyards suggest the pattern of Anglian habitation.\(^{137}\) The thirteen examples are fairly evenly distributed around the Cumbrian massif, one of which is Dacre, whose construction was described by Bede.\(^{138}\) The nearest to Gosforth is Beckermet St Bridget, a site to which Gosforth is often compared due to the Anglian round shaft cross there.

Ecclesiastic foundations return us to the nature of religious practice in Cumbria in the seventh and eighth centuries. While the second-century Romans introduced Christianity into Cumbria, the earliest evidence for large-scale organization and expression of the medieval Roman Christian faith does not date before the eighth century.\(^{139}\) While ecclesiastical records from the eighth and ninth centuries are reasonably rich from Northumbria and Yorkshire, as O’Sullivan succinctly stated, “We


\(^{139}\) “No direct, contemporary reference to any late Roman church in Britain is known; either from history or from surviving inscriptions.” Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500*, 143.
are not exactly embarrassed by a wealth of data for Early Christian Cumbria.\textsuperscript{140} O’Sullivan also exposed the biases of the Cumbrian archaeological record toward Roman dating, citing W. G. Collingwood’s observation that pre- and sub-Roman artifacts would be unlikely to survive. The permanent nature of Roman artifacts distorts the archaeological record, which results in a simplistic material record at a culturally complex site.\textsuperscript{141} The lack of Early Christian archaeology in Cumbria is also a result of academic interests and limited resources. However, new archaeological evidence, both geophysical and material, from Roman and post-Roman contexts suggests some degree of social and religious continuity along the northern frontier.\textsuperscript{142}

There is also a dearth of post-Roman archaeology for Cumbria due to a number of factors including the destruction of early medieval sites by farming activities, the constant habitation of sites, the paucity of known sites to excavate, the likelihood that the inhabitants were poor and left little for an archaeologist to find, and a local bias toward Roman material. R. G. Collingwood summed up these problems in 1933 and, unfortunately, little has changed:

\begin{quote}
We do not know what furniture the pre-Roman and post-Roman Britons of our District possessed; but there is reason to believe that they had very little of such nature as to leave clues to the archaeologist. If a village like [Ewe Close] had a long life before, during and after the Roman period, it is probable that excavation would yield, as at Ewe Close it did, finds of Roman date and no others.\textsuperscript{143}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{140} O’Sullivan, "Cumbria for the Vikings."
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid. 21-22. See also Collingwood, "Prehistoric settlement near Crosby Ravensworth," 202.
\textsuperscript{143} Collingwood, "Prehistoric settlement near Crosby Ravensworth."
Broader evidence for Christian practices in England in the seventh and eighth centuries comes from a variety of primary sources. These sources indicate that the sub-Roman kingdoms were pressured eventually annexed by Anglo-Saxon immigrants into eastern and southern England. Bede reports English expansion northward and dedications to St. Cuthbert in Carlisle suggest that area was within the diocese of Lindisfarne. The only piece of documentary evidence referring to the inhabitants of Cumbria is the tenth-century * Historia de Sancto Cuthberto *, where Ecgfrith gives the see of St. Cuthbert a fifteen mile radius of land around Carlisle (Luel) and land at Cartmel near Furness “with all its Britons.”

Given the thin historical evidence for Anglo-Saxon Cumbria, scholars have attempted to understand the people of the region through evidence left in the landscape, primarily through the studies of curvilinear churchyards and place-name evidence. While these approaches require several problematic assumptions, they do offer intriguing arguments for population distribution. Anglian Cumbria’s population was somewhat sparse, ethnically complex, and somewhat Christian, although the extent and nature of the Christianity practiced there is unknown outside of Simeon’s record of links to

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144 Papal letters, Saint’s Lives and histories (both internal such as Bede and external such as Isidore) combine to define our picture of early Anglo-Saxon England. See Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972).


146 Ibid., 144. Et quia videbatur parva terra, adjunct civitatem quae vocatur Luel, quae habet in circuitu quindecim milliaria, et in eadem civitate posuit congregationem sanctimonialium, et abbatissam ordinavit, et scolas constituit. Postquam vero Sanctus Cuthbertus suscitavit puerum a mortuis in villa quae vocatur Exanforda, dedit ei rex Ecgfridus terram quae vocatur Cartmel et omnes Britannos cum eo, et villam illam quae vocatur Suthgedluit, et quicquid ad eam pertinet.

147 For curvilinear churchyards, see O'Sullivan, "Curvilinear Churchyards in Cumbria." For extensive place-name analysis, see Fellows-Jensen, "Scandinavian Settlement in Cumbria." As noted in Winchester, *England’s Landscape: The North West*, 39. Norse elements were used for newly-established communities and locations through the thirteenth century, so the existence of a Norse language element does not necessarily indicate the settlement patterns of the tenth century and, in fact, Gosforth itself does not bear a Norse element in its name (the –th ending of ford may be due to Norse pronunciation influence) though there was clearly a Anglo-Norse community there. However, the name Gosforth is not recorded until the thirteenth century. The name of the tenth-century community is unknown.
Lindisfarne. These Christians were poorly organized during the late Roman and Rheged periods but enjoyed greater sponsorship and wealth under Northumbria when the earliest stone crosses were erected throughout the region at places like Lowther, Beckermet, and Irton.

Anglian Northumbrian control waned after the fall of York in 866 when Danish armies and settlers occupied the North. The next period of sculptural carving in Cumbria began to reflect a greater influence from these York-based Scandinavians, indicating cultural transmission over the Pennines. Pressure on Anglian inhabitants also increased from the west. Higham noted, “at least two members of the Anglian aristocracy were in flight to the east by 915 to avoid piratical invasions.”148 These early-tenth century invasions were most certainly the result of political upheaval in Dublin when the Norse were driven from the trading center in 902 and crossed the Irish Sea to settle along the coast from Chester through the Scottish Isles. These incursions did not end Anglian occupation of Cumbria, but the nature of the culture there changed when compared to the southern counties ruled by Anglo-Saxon kings who, like Alfred, were mindful of the effect the Scandinavian presence would have upon their politics and language and who had the resources to defend themselves against the Vikings.149

3.6 Viking Age Cumbria

Understanding the effect of the Viking raiding and settlement of Cumbria is complicated by an incomplete picture of the region’s historical events. Only scant mention is made of northeastern Cumbria relative to Northumbria or Strathclyde, and no definitive information survives for the western coast. This absence of information allows us to conclude that no major political or religious center existed in western Cumbria that would have garnered mention in the annals. Neither was the region a particularly contested one from the perspective of contemporaneous historians responsible for the

149 Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, Alfred the Great, Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).
regional annals, who did discuss the political changeovers in such places as Dublin and York.

For Cumbria, archaeological and contemporary documentary evidence of the Viking Age is limited.\textsuperscript{150} There is no documentary source yet discovered from Cumbria itself, neither writs nor land charters useful for tracking settlement patterns. Pollen analysis from northern samples suggests woodland regeneration, which suggests a declining population.\textsuperscript{151}

The Viking presence in the British Isles has become better studied since the 1960s. Scholarship ranges from general overviews to the study of place-names in specific counties. The effect of the “Northmen” was quite different in the distinct regions of the British Isles but for the purposes of setting the stage for a study of the Gosforth sculptures, this investigation will focus on the impact of Norse exploration, aggression and settlement in the modern-day county of Cumbria, speaking to the western coast as much as is possible. However, a general overview of Scandinavian activity throughout the “Western Isles” will provide some useful perspective.

The earliest raiders most likely came from westernmost Scandinavia, present-day Norway. Never needing to brave the open seas, these small boats of raider-explorers island-hopped from the southwestern fjords through the Orkney and Shetland Islands and down the east and west coasts of Scotland. The \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC)} records the first contact with these explorers during the reign of Beorhtric (786-802), “There came for the first time three ships of Northmen from Hordaland [Norway] and then the reeve

\textsuperscript{150} O'Sullivan, "Cumbria for the Vikings," 17.

rode to them and wished to force them to the king’s residence, for he did not know what they were, and they slew him [the reeve].”

The first raids were sporadic, likely achieved by relatively small and swift-moving bands of men who were opportunistic at best. They might pose as honest traders who then turned on the locals, especially if the perceived physical and political defenses were weak. Some of these first “raiders” could certainly have been traders, so a share of legitimate trade was likely occurring in the second half of the eighth century in addition to violent raiding and slave-taking. The main Old-English historical sources for this period are the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Asser’s biography of King Alfred, and such Old English poetry as the Battle of Maldon. All of these sources are politically affiliated with the West Saxon crown and are understandably anti-Scandinavian in perspective. First among other local sources of historical information is the Vitae Sanctus Cuthbertus, which details the tribulations of the Lindisfarne community in the era of Viking raids. This and other Church sources are also, again understandably, anti-Scandinavian. Irish sources include the Annals of Ulster, the Annals of Inisfallen, and the Annals of the Four Masters, all of which detail not only the raids themselves but also the raiders.

The raid on the Northumbrian monastery of Lindisfarne was a sharp turning-point in the relations between the “Northmen” and the locals. The famous 793 entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states:

In this year dire portents appeared over Northumbria and sorely frightened the people. They consisted of immense whirlwinds and flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine immediately followed these signs and a little after in the same year, on 8 June, the

\footnote{ASC}{The first raids were sporadic, likely achieved by relatively small and swift-moving bands of men who were opportunistic at best. They might pose as honest traders who then turned on the locals, especially if the perceived physical and political defenses were weak. Some of these first “raiders” could certainly have been traders, so a share of legitimate trade was likely occurring in the second half of the eighth century in addition to violent raiding and slave-taking.}

\footnote{Bede, "Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda."}{First among other local sources of historical information is the Vitae Sanctus Cuthbertus, which details the tribulations of the Lindisfarne community in the era of Viking raids. This and other Church sources are also, again understandably, anti-Scandinavian.}

\footnote{Translations for all the Irish chronicles are available through the Corpus of Electronic Texts (CELT) project at the University College Cork at http://www.ucc.ie/celt/publishd.html.}{Irish sources include the Annals of Ulster, the Annals of Inisfallen, and the Annals of the Four Masters, all of which detail not only the raids themselves but also the raiders.}
ravages of heathen men miserably destroyed God’s church on Lindisfarne, with plunder and slaughter.\textsuperscript{155}

Other raids followed. Raiders attacked Monkwearmouth in 794 and Iona fell in 795. These opportunistic early raids on coastal and river monasteries should be seen in the context of the early waves of Scandinavian colonization in Scotland, Orkney, and the Hebrides.\textsuperscript{156} Scandinavian attacks on East Anglia, Kent, and Wessex were sporadic until the mid-ninth century, when Danish invaders concentrated their might against the English kingdoms. With bases in northern Scotland and Ireland, these “foreigners” had a purchase for their fleets and armies only a day’s sailing from the English coast. During this period, the Cumbrian coast may have seen its first Viking settlers. Archaeological evidence from Gosforth suggests these colonies were temporary at first, perhaps only to take advantage of a brief growing season.\textsuperscript{157} Danes took York in 866, sparking a civil war in Northumbria. To whatever extent costal Cumbria was managed by Northumbrian kings, the conflict with York certainly destabilized this control.

Over the next century, the north of England was caught between Dublin and York, the two seats of power for Scandinavian political and economic interests. The complex history of these kingdoms is too lengthy to relate here, but instability caused by the almost constant struggle certainly pushed settlers and refugees into more liminal areas, such as the west Cumbrian coast.\textsuperscript{158} Indication that the rank and file of northern settlers may have preferred a peaceful farming life is seen in Hálfdan I’s (d. 877) failure to inspire his former successful army to take up arms against Dublin in his 876 campaign

\\textsuperscript{155} ASC. Recent effects of volcanic eruptions in Iceland lend greater support to the “omens” of “fiery dragons” that may have preceded the Lindisfarne raids. If there was intense volcanic activity in Iceland for an extended period of time, the resulting ash may have caused a famine from decreased sunlight, which would have spoiled crops.


\textsuperscript{157} Clifford Jones, "Title," 2005 (Unpublished)

against the city. Indeed, the Danish historian Saxo indicated that Hálfdan’s followers despised him for not leaving them to their fields and eventually forced him into exile.\textsuperscript{159}

In the century between the 860’s and the 960’s, York became a battleground, both figuratively and literally, between three political bodies: the West Saxon/Mercian throne, the “Danish” Northumbrians, who were backed by the archbishopric of York, and the “Norse” Dublin kings descended from Ragnall/Ragnarr Lodbrók (d. 852-6).\textsuperscript{160} While these were the usual players in the struggle for York, occasional foreign kings such as Eiríkr blóðöx Haraldson, son of Haraldr hárfagri, favorite son of the first king of a united Norway, made attempts to hold York. While unrest in the Vale of York, two mountain chains and hundreds of kilometers removed from Gosforth and the Cumbrian coast may seem to have little to do with events in Cumbria, its impact may have driven the losers or the politically disinterested into these marginal areas.

Returning to the broader picture of Norwegian immigration through the Western Isles, most of the focus of both the early raids and the later settlements focused on the shoreline of the Irish Sea. One of the geologic mechanisms that kept Cumbria in relative isolation even into the nineteenth century was the physical barrier of the Pennines. Overland crossing was not impossible, but it was tedious, treacherous, and in the case of the long winter months, unadvisable. Similar to the situation in the Bronze Age Mediterranean, the sea proved to be a friendlier conduit for travel. For seamen as experienced as Norse longship crews, even the choppy waters of the Irish Sea would be less inconvenient than overland travel.

This being said, it is no surprise that the majority of Norse settlements are to be found on the coastal Irish Sea. The exact chronology of settlement patterns is not clear due to a lack of documentary evidence, and scholars remain in debate concerning specific sites. Certainly, the turn of the ninth century is an accepted \textit{terminus a pro} for permanent

settlement even if some locales served as wintering locations earlier. In the northwest counties themselves, including Cumbria, there is no evidence to support colonization earlier than 902, the year in which the Scandinavians were expelled from Dublin. The Cuirdale Hoard is dated to 903 on the basis of numismatic evidence and was probably buried on the banks of the River Ribble in Lancashire by displaced Dubliners.

The tenth century was a dynamic time for the British Isles. While Cumbria was hardly in the thick of things, the region did see an influx of settlers not only from the Isle of Man, but also Anglo-Danish from the Danelaw (mostly concentrated in the Eden Valley) and Norse-Scots.

3.7 Gosforth and Identity

The question “Who lived at Gosforth?” is deceptively simplistic. Addressing this question provides insight into the patronage of the Gosforth sculptures, an important component in considering the multiple interpretations of their iconography. Chapter five shows how an exceptional Insular artist trained in Yorkshire drew stylistic inspiration from a broad geographical range to create a superlative sculptural group in a seemingly isolated location. However, this does not address why such an artist was drawn to Gosforth and executed work there. The specific nature of the tenth-century Gosforth community is actually unknown, although much has been assumed about it. The


165 These last settlers are attested to through place-name evidence such as Aspatria, which uses a Gaelic word order, but with Norse words, called inversion-compounds. Winchester, *England's Landscape: The North West*, pg. 39.
community has been labeled “Viking,” “Anglo-Scandinavian,” or “Norse-Gaelic” but none of these groups (to the various degrees that they are modern constructs) can necessarily lay absolute claim to Gosforth or its sculptures.166

Given the dearth of material or historical evidence with which to contextualize tenth-century Gosforth, direct statements about the community there cannot be made. Instead, a more sensitive discussion of theories of identity can be used to argue for a mercantile group that maintained cultural ties with the Solway and Eden Valley and more direct ties with the Isle of Man. It commanded wealth but its absence from historical records suggests it was not at the center of a broad power network but rather had a place within it due to the evidence of its elite sculpture. The presence of “Viking colonial” sculptural forms,167 such as hogbacks and round-shaft crosses, will be used to argue that the Gosforth elite expressed themselves in the memorial tradition of Yorkshire, at this time a multicultural region with the potential of an individual’s or community’s “ethnic identity” as varying and as constantly shifting as the region’s political alliances.

In defining medieval identity, scholars have used the (now) problematic term “ethnicity.”168 The use of the term is broad and has ramifications for all anthropological

166 The CASSS has, throughout, established the labels “Anglian” for earlier and/or Christian English sculpture and “Viking Age” or “Anglo-Scandinavian” for later sculpture, especially in northern counties. This simplifies the discussion, something desperately needed when dealing broadly with a wide variety of art, but the strokes are rather broad to remain useful in a more nuanced study. Unfortunately, the term “Anglo-Scandinavian,” while useful for loosely grouping the “Hiberno-Norse,” “Yorkshire Danes” and “Strathclyde/Scottish Norse,” suggests a strict racial and/or ethnic basis the author does not promote.

167 James T. Lang, "The distinctiveness of Viking colonial art," in Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1986), 243-60: 243-60. Lang used the term “Viking colonial” to define sculptural forms indigenous to areas of England settled by Scandinavians in the ninth and tenth century, settlement that seems to have altered the sculptural practices native to the regions. I adopt this terminology due to the lack of better alternatives.

disciplines, but questions concerning medieval identity are fraught with problems separate from the postmodern post-Colonial debate.\textsuperscript{169} Clare Downham has recently shown that such hybrid ethnicities as “Anglo-Scandinavian,” which allow us the veneer of cultural sensitivity, may be misleading in terms of the reality of ninth- and tenth-century England and that these terms speak more to the political and academic narrative requirements of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe than to the political or cultural reality of the population of the northern counties.\textsuperscript{170} Her study demonstrated that the Dublin elite probably exercised their political influence across the northern counties and maintained a strong connection between Dublin and York, at times being disrupted from one or the other center by local challengers. Even making a division between “Hiberno-” and “Anglo-” may be unwarranted because these labels are a result of modern nations and not grounded in medieval identity. Stephen Harris asserted a similar conclusion from the period’s literary evidence and stated, “There seems not to have been a single ethnic identity expressed, but strata of competing identities, sometimes contradictory, sometimes consonant…."\textsuperscript{171} Given Gosforth’s geographic position literally between Dublin and York, it is a good candidate for refining our notions of identity within the bounds of this debated political entity.


\textsuperscript{170} Clare Downham, "'Hiberno-Norwegians' and 'Anglo-Danes': anachronistic ethnicities and Viking-Age England," \textit{Medieval Scandinavia} 19 (2009): 139-69. "They take their origin in national boundaries which were not embedded in the ninth and earlier tenth centuries, and they reflect attitudes to core and periphery as defined by later mediaeval and modern politics. In discarding these stereotypes, we may find that new possibilities emerge for interpreting aspects of the Viking-Age in England and beyond.” p. 169.

The “Kingdom of Dublin,” something Peter Rex suggested might have been possible but unstable, never materialized politically in terms of the recorded annals, but history is written by the winners; those who were politically aligned to or dependent upon Dublin and the dynasty of the Ívarr may have identified themselves primarily with its aristocracy, an aristocracy settled in Ireland for a century. Patrick Geary showed how aristocratic groups and the alliances between them were often the motivating factors behind ethnic identification in the early Middle Ages and that these identities were situational constructs in service of the politics of a particular time, place, and viewpoint. At any rate, we must be mindful that we in the present are guilty of manufacturing potentially false “ethnic” groups in the northern counties as much as would a chronicler in the West Saxon court.

This having been said, reducing categorization to the level of the individual and bemoaning the impossibility of saying anything at all is no more useful than demonstrating the uniqueness of each tenth-century sculpture and denying the similarities between them. Gosforth did not exist or function in political, religious, legal, or linguistic isolation and while we have less information about the community than we would like, it is possible to clarify Gosforth vis-à-vis the various centers of power in the British Isles, which will provide a grounded perspective from which to discuss issues of patronage.

Several types of information are used to construct medieval groups, whether those groups are based on common political or military goals (such as an army) or a sense of shared identity (such as a monastic order): geographical, historical (both secular and ecclesiastic), linguistic, and material. No tenth-century historical account attests to

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172 Peter Rex, *Edgar, King of the English 959-75* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 28. Downham, “Hiberno-Norwegians,” p. 169 said, “These rulers would have been attuned to the needs and concerns of their constituencies on both sides of the Irish Sea and familiar with the cultures of both. It is possible to envisage a ruling elite who felt equally at home with the various viking-cultures of Ireland and Britain, rather than conforming with the labels of ‘Hiberno-Norwegian’ or ‘Anglo-Dane’.”


174 Geary has shown that, at least within recorded medieval ethnic terminology, the identification of groups was primarily politically based and was specific to a certain situation or purpose.
Gosforth, no local verbal expression survives, no extensive excavation has been done in the village, and no burial has been found. All of this seems extraordinarily negative, but some positive assertions can be made from the absence of evidence. First, like most of the western Cumbrian coast, the community fell outside the direct dominion of the Church or the recognized State. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 945 (A-C and *E-F) states, “In this year King Edmund ravaged all Cumberland, and granted it all to Malcolm, king of the Scots, on condition that he should be his ally both on sea and on land.”\footnote{Dorothy Whitelock, ed. \textit{English Historical Documents}, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1955, 1979), 222-23.}


Equally, while the region may have fallen under the dominion of the Kings of Dublin, the various annals of Ireland make no mention of western Cumbria. This absence from the historical record is telling. Such highly contested settlements as Dublin and York appear regularly in the various chronicles, tracking who controlled these strategic cities. Even such smaller cities as Carlisle find mention. However large or small tenth-century Gosforth was, it was not considered strategic in the broader shifting political alliances between Anglo-Saxon England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Church records are equally silent. While sculptural and name-place evidence shows Christian influence introduced by Romans continuing in the post-Roman period, Gosforth’s religious alliance, if indeed the community had one, is unverified by records. St. Mary’s oldest architectural fabric dates to the twelfth-century Norman settlement.
While this building may have replaced an earlier structure for which there is no discovered archaeological evidence—a plausible scenario if the earliest church were wooden—the existence of such a building is not guaranteed by the presence of the cross. Even if the Norman church replaced another structure, specific evidence would need to be found to determine if that structure had been a Christian foundation or that it was used in the process of any sort of religious performance.

Evidence for the tenth-century language spoken at Gosforth is also lacking. The interplay of languages in the pre-Conquest British Isles has garnered significant scholarly attention, drawing from a broad variety of sources including literature, property documentation, coinage and metalwork, place-name evidence, and sculptural inscriptions, but conclusions on the mutual intelligibility of the languages is still debated. Precisely what was being spoken at any given time and place is unclear and could have varied greatly even over short distances, especially if localized creoles developed. Both an Anglo-Saxon runic inscription in Cumbria at Great Urswick in the Furness peninsula and the illegible Insular-Latin(?) inscription at Beckermet were carved over a century earlier than even the most liberal date for the Gosforth sculptures. Scandinavian runic inscriptions are just as rare with only one dating to the tenth century: a runic alphabet on a penannular brooch found at Penrith.


178 Raymond I. Page, An Introduction to English Runes (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1973, 1999). For Urswick (1) and Beckermet (1), see Cramp, CASSS 2. On Urswick, Raymond Page translates the main block of Anglo-Saxon text as, “Tunwine put up (sc. ‘this’) cross in memory of his lord (son?) Torhtred. Pray for the (i.e. ‘his’) soul.” The lower fragmentary inscription says, “Lyl made this…” one of three known signed pre-Conquest works on the English mainland (p. 148-151). No translation of the illegible Latinate letters on Beckermet St. Briget 1 is offered in the Corpus (p. 54-56).

179 Six other Scandinavian runic inscriptions have been recorded in Cumbria, but all of them are twelfth or thirteenth century. See Katherine Holman, Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions in the British Isles: their Historical Context (Trondheim: Centre for Medieval Studies, 1996).
Place-name evidence is equally useless because the name “Gosforth” is argued to be a generic Old English place name –*ford* in use through the late Conquest period.\(^{180}\) Such a long time frame does not help in establishing a settlement date. Even if a given linguistic usage can be more or less dated, this is not necessarily an indication of broad local usage nor is it absolute in terms of a chronology of the site. Éamonn de h-Óir argued that in some Irish examples dual place-names, one in Scandinavian, one in Gaelic, persisted due to the Scandinavian being in use commercially by English traders and the Gaelic in use locally, surviving in Irish language contexts.\(^{181}\) Whether the apparently Anglo-Saxon “Gosforth” pre- or post-dates the tenth century, there is no certainty that this name was used by the community responsible for the Gosforth monuments. Because coastal Cumbria did not fall under Norman control at the time of the Domesday census, the early name for the community is unknown. Regardless, place-name evidence is problematic at best, based on ethnocentric cultural assumptions that may not be valid for the period in question.\(^{182}\)

Fortunately, what Gosforth lacks in other evidence it makes up for in the abundance of material culture. Home to its superlative collection of stone monuments, these sculptures make demands on the modern viewer precisely because they do not conform precisely to expectations of Insular art. James Lang stated the problem well:

> Take, for example, the Gosforth Cross in Cumberland, the figure carving of which has long been recognized as


\(^{182}\) Eric Christiansen made the criticism that, “Over the last 35 years the PN [place-name] virtuosi have invented (1) large unrecorded immigrations from Scandinavia, (2) new meanings for ON [Old Norse] name-elements, every decade or so, (3) and ON-Old English inter-language as a medium of diffusion, as ways of solving problems they alone have detected.” Christiansen, *The Norsemen in the Viking Age*, 230, fn. 24. For a detailed criticism of Manx place-name evidence, see Basil Megaw, "Norseman and Native in the Kingdom of the Isles," *Scottish Studies* 20, no. 1 (1976): 1-44, 1-44, p. 6-15. Clare Downham (2009, p. 157-163) also made the point that place-names connected to topographical features are not necessarily indicative of a given people having bestowed them but rather reflect the features themselves, especially in the case of –*thorpe* and derivatives.
representing Ragnarok, that distinctively Scandinavian event where the Norse gods perish. Nothing could be more “Viking” than the figurative panels, but the form of the monument is thoroughly Insular. The wheel-head cross is a Celtic type from the West, and the shaft form, cylindrical below and squared above a swag, derives from local late Anglian monuments. The eclecticism of the Gosforth Cross is therefore threefold: Scandinavian, Anglian, and Celtic.  

While Lang defines the Gosforth cross in modern ethnic terms, he is entirely accurate in the essence of his statement. The churchyard cross has aspects of art from various geographic regions, Ireland (Celtic), Yorkshire and the Peak District (Anglian), and multiple mythologies, Christian (Celtic/Anglian) and Odinism (Scandinavian). Whether some of these features would have been considered “Other” or were simply an expected fusion of separate cultural influences cannot be entirely known, but given the lack of comparable monuments for those at Gosforth elsewhere, we can be certain the artist employed a certain level of inventiveness.

The hogback sculptures show similar influences. Lang argues for Irish shrines as the basis for the hogback form, especially the “shrine type” seen at Gosforth with its gable panels and overall proportions. Lythe, Yorkshire on the eastern coast near the mouth of the Tees, and Govan, Scotland are the other major sites for “shrine type” hogbacks, with Lythe’s hogbacks being quite small and Govan’s being the largest hogbacks known. The Gosforth hogbacks, with their narrow proportions but great length and height, are every bit as innovative as the cross.

183 Lang, "The distinctiveness of Viking colonial art," 243-60, p. 46.
184 I prefer the term “Odinism” in the context of Cumbrian “Scandinavian” art because it better reflects the underlying spiritual beliefs and/or religious practices of people who value the pre-Christian Northern European myths rather than conflating them with a modern geographical region. Additionally, the history of the myth depicted at Gosforth, the Ragnarok, has so many parallels to the Christian Apocalypse that it may be, at least in part, an Insular product, and so labeling it “Scandinavian” may be inaccurate and misleading.
185 Lang, "The distinctiveness of Viking colonial art."
At Gosforth was a group of people with the means to support the production of a large number of sculptures. Some of them may have been Christian, to a greater or lesser extent, who still found cultural value in the “old stories,” or they may have been believers in the Forn Siòr, who wished to express their own beliefs in the mode similar to other communities: on a freestanding stone cross. The presence of hogbacks indicates that someone at Gosforth wanted to be associated visually with other hogback patrons, most of whom lived in the highly contested lands in northern England concentrated along the Tees river valley in Yorkshire and historical Northumbria and the Eden valley in Cumbria. They may not have all shared the same political affiliation, religion, or language, but they all had the resources to patronize large-scale stone sculpture. In fact, these elites quadrupled the sculptural production in northern England from what it had been in the eighth century in as few as two generations.¹⁸⁷

Instead of viewing Gosforth in broad categories as either an ethnically “Anglo-Scandinavian” settlement that enjoyed the production of an unusually talented artist or as a Christian village patronizing a didactic monument promoting the superiority of Christianity over paganism, the community at Gosforth should be seen instead as attempting to identify itself within the highly contested and constantly shifting power network between Dublin and York. The community may have consisted of indigenous Christian Romano/Welsh Britons, Odinist settlers from Yorkshire escaping political upheaval, merchant elites from various kingdoms (“converted” or not), or a combination of all of these peoples and modifiers. Without more specific local evidence, some questions must be left unanswered, but a more thoughtful consideration of local dynamics with a mind to what is known about the site and how this is known will shed a better light on the complex iconographic problems at Gosforth.

The construction of identity underpins the more relevant discussion of artistic intent in terms of the Gosforth monuments. The original intent of an artist and/or patron

has been cast as increasingly irrelevant in postmodern art historical discourse. Instead, the multiple ways in which an audience receives and interprets the art as a material object has gained more validity in terms of its functional life; the desires of the maker may not be at all realized through the audience. While arguing for a singular specific and static meaning is impossible and unnecessary, in the case of the Gosforth sculptures certain decisions made by the artist and/or patron reveal the acculturation of the Gosforth community and this, in turn, exposes aspects of their identity that they wish to make concrete both internally within the community and externally to other groups, groups that may or may not share in that identity. Gosforth and its sculptures are part of a broad network of Viking colonization that lasted several centuries and spanned thousands of miles but the community at Gosforth is not necessarily reflective of a false homogeneity across the Viking world.

How a given individual in tenth-century Gosforth would have described himself is, without the discovery of autobiographical evidence, lost to time. Even so, that formed identity would not be essential but relative to the recipient of that expression. Yet despite the negative thesis that identity is impossible to know, the sculptural evidence remaining at Gosforth and throughout northern England is itself a powerful statement of identity. Stuart Hall, in writing about Caribbean identity and “Third Cinema,” stated, “Identity is… a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” No single identity, whether for an individual, a group, or a political entity, is fixed. Identity is a relational, fluctuating process, constantly in negotiation with the social and physical environment. In the case of Gosforth, the

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189 This can happen for geographic or political regions, religious adherents, language users, etc. See David Mattingly, "Cultural Crossovers: Global and Local Identities in the Classical World," in *Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World*, ed. Shelley Hales and Tamar Hodos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 283-96: 283-95, p.85.

190 Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 236.
sculptures there fossilized a particular moment in the process of negotiating its identity, a process that can be understood by measuring the various influences present.

This process, however unstable, is not arbitrary. Measurable patterns appear during the process of transculturation that can be evaluated in the resulting state expressed through material evidence. At the level of the individual, three strategies of acculturation stand out: adjustment (adaptation), reaction (extroversion vs. environment), and withdrawal (introversion vs. environment). While these strategies are typically defined in terms of behavior (as well as material production), applying them strictly to material production is useful. In terms of a resulting material expression of transculturation, all three of these must occur to a greater or lesser degree.

Archaeologically, if only one strategy had been in effect in the production of a material object, the object would not be a result of transculturation per se but merely the result of one of these isolated processes. Complete adjustment would render an object identical to those of the local dominant modes and would be indistinguishable from the “white noise” of those other objects; complete reaction would render an object identical to the objects of the transplanted culture and while this object would appear out of its “correct” time and/or place, this sort of object is likely to be considered wrongly an import and not native production; complete withdrawal would be the absence of cultural production and thus be unrecoverable. This last, withdrawal, is especially insidious in terms of assumptions we make of a culture. For example, no evidence of manuscript illumination produced by the Dublin Scandinavians in the ninth century exists, but its absence does not prove they did not produce illuminated manuscripts. Whether this absence is the result of withdrawal on the part of the Dublin Scandinavians or their efficient destruction

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191 Nadia Altschul, after Fernando Ortiz, promotes the term “transculturation” in place of “acculturation” because it reflects better the mutual exchange of cultural interaction. “By focusing on mutual influences, transculturation can move away from such hierarchies, an inheritance of Romantic ideas of civilizational superiority and distinct and unique cultural essences.” Nadia R. Altschul, "The future of postcolonial approaches to medieval Iberian studies," Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies 1, no. 1 (2009): 5-17, 10.

can never be known. Evidence for either scenario would establish the presence or absence of the manuscripts themselves.

This realization makes the concept of “hybridity” in culture popular in modern humanities discourse less interesting in terms of a conclusion and more useful in terms of a methodological tool. All cultural acts express aspects of hybridity-as-identity as negotiated through the externalization of the self, whether as an individual or as a member of a group. Making and using material objects is one of the most extroverted and permanent of acts and the cultural hallmarks within them are better viewed as a “process rather than a description.”\textsuperscript{193} The hybridity of the Gosforth sculptures is often discussed in terms of its impurity vis-à-vis the norm of the Norse or Christian religion and/or Scandinavian versus Anglo-Saxon “race.”\textsuperscript{194} The apparent hybridity is a result of modern cultural benchmarks and not necessarily the product of a mindful act of cultural combination on the part of the Gosforth artist or patron. Additionally, labeling something as “hybrid” privileges dominant cultures, religions and political entities; it reinforces a sense of purity that is corrupted by anterior forces of cultural imperialism.\textsuperscript{195} Rather than placing a label of “hybrid” on the material production of an individual or group, however large, in terms of otherness to that individual or group, instead we can reverse engineer the expressive selections reified within the object to uncover the perceived (and conceived) communicative function of that object.

The Gosforth cross can be interpreted from two perspectives: as a hybrid object that mediates differences between its makers’ identity and that of distinct other groups,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{194} The term and concept of hybridity, here defined as the combination of disparate source material within one object, is problematic but part of the discourse isolating Anglo-Scandinavian material from Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Scottish, et cetera, all these cultural labels preferably in quotes. This raises the problem of using race and/or ethnicity as a genesis or meaning in specific forms in art, addressed in Lawrence Nees, “Ethnic and primitive paradigms in the study of early medieval art,” in \textit{Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies}, ed. Celia Chazelle and Felice Lifshitz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 41-60.
\end{itemize}
groups that present real or imagined threats to the makers’ identity; or as a statement of local identity within a complex network of individuals and communities, each with their own relationship to and function within wider power structures. This latter perspective is the more honest one if an argument concerning the decisions of the makers can be made. Arguing for specific personal decisions on the part of the artist requires the construction of an individual identity for a person about whom nothing is known. Rather, comparisons between the sculptural remains provide evidence for the extent of the social and trade network in which they functioned, removing individual decision making from the analysis of choice.

Northern England possessed a different political and religious environment from southern England. This is clearly seen in the sculptural record. The sculpture of the North is taller, more numerous, the cross heads are ringed, and hogbacks are common. The sculpture of the late ninth and tenth centuries in the North is less likely to be architectural and more likely to be free-standing. The three crosses, three hogbacks, and one plaque (architectural?) comprise one of the largest collections of Viking Age sculpture; that six of these seven sculptures can be attributed to one artist makes for the largest collection of art by one hand known in the early medieval West. Looking at only those six sculptures attributable to the Gosforth artist, they show influences from Ireland, Strathclyde, the Eden Valley, and the length of the Tees Valley overlapping modern day County Durham and Yorkshire. While this might be expected when one realizes that this entire region fell under the political influence of Dublin and York, this single artist appears to have been personally familiar with details of sculpture across a wide geographic region. The travels of this one artist show that the north of England was well connected and not as provincial as the lack of historical sources suggests. Additionally, the widespread distribution of

sculpture through central and southern Cumbria, even if most is not as superlative as that at Gosforth, shows a certain degree of wealth and political (at least locally) stability.  

Cumbria’s effective absence from the historical records until the twelfth century makes understanding the contemporary milieu of tenth-century sculptural production difficult. Despite this, early Cumbria was not necessarily a hinterland to its better understood neighbors; it is a region in which Roman Christianity survived and, if there is any truth in the legends, played a role in seeding and/or reinforcing that religion in Ireland. Cumbria’s early crosses, among which those of Ruthwell may be counted, are some of the finest examples of Anglian Christian art; it should be no surprise that some of the finest Anglo-Scandinavian art also survives there. Rather than being on the borders, Cumbria was a center of high artistic production despite, or perhaps because, it did not seem to have been a traditional political center. This is somewhat unexpected given the modern focus on early medieval centers of power and population, but the results of a sensitive investigation into its art and culture expand greatly our understanding of the height of Scandinavian influence in England.

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198 Christina Maranci demonstrated how traditional ethnic, religious or political borders may obscure or distort the reality of the early medieval period. Christina Maranci, "Building Churches in Armenia: Art at the Borders of Empire and the Edge of the Canon," Art Bulletin 88, no. 4 (2006): 656-75.
4 The Making of Gosforth: Stone and Substance

The materiality of sculpture is often overlooked by art historians, who are more interested in the iconographic and stylistic aspects of sculpture as art. These aspects, while integral to an object’s artistic function, are superficial to its materiality. The stone of the Gosforth monuments is vital to the very existence of the works, yet often it earns only passing or cursory attention. This oversight has restricted what can be said concerning their design, construction and longevity. At Gosforth, the artist pushed the structural boundaries of sandstone to an extent that it demands an investigation into how he manipulated this material; this analysis provides clues with which we can trace his origins, training, and craftsmanship. The material matrix also contains information about the scope and types of sculpture at Gosforth and allows for a more accurate description of the community.

The results of this investigation significantly update the interpretation of tenth-century Gosforth. This chapter proves that, by the end of the tenth century, Gosforth had at least three crosses, at least three hogbacks, and architecture decorated with vertical stone panels in relief. This chapter first will reassess the cross monuments at Gosforth: the intact churchyard cross (CASSS Gosforth 1), [PLATES 1-9] and two cross head fragments (CASSS Gosforth 2 and 3). [PLATES 10 and 12] The extreme proportions of the surviving cross preserve valuable information about tenth-century quarrying, which is presently only cautiously understood based on scant evidence. The cross-

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199 The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England project has been attentive toward the materiality of the stones and each volume includes a section on the geology of the region. The types of stone used for each sculpture are included as part of the heading material. Individual authors record more material information than others.

200 Parker, The Ancient Crosses. Parker discusses a fourth cross, but this dates to the early twelfth century and is currently in the Whitehaven Museum (WHHMG 1974: 171). An unpublished fifth cross is located in St. Mary’s in the northwestern-most windowsill, labeled as a boundary marker, similar to Lowther 9 and likely of post-Norman date Cramp, CASSS 2, 167. These sculptures fall outside the scope of this dissertation.

grain of the cross’s stone shows how it was carved from the internal diagonal of a block in order to maximize its height and increase its internal strength. Angling the grain was an expensive way to carve a statue due to the large amount of material waste, but this technique also provided structural stability for the monument—especially for its delicate proportions—and contributed to the cross’s survival against the Cumbrian environment for over a millennium. This technique is extremely rare in the corpus of pre-Conquest sculpture and its use appears restricted to sites where the Gosforth artist may have lived.

The fragmentary crosses provide evidence for the greater sculptural complex at Gosforth. The first fragmentary cross head, Gosforth 2, is larger and of a different design than the other two crosses. No additional fragments have been found at Gosforth that fit with this cross head. This section also argues that the headless cross shaft at nearby Muncaster is a good match. The second cross head fragment, Gosforth 3, is nearly identical in size and shape to the Gosforth cross’s; local and antiquarian legends tell of a second cross where a sundial now stands in the churchyard several feet south of the extant cross. The final part of this section explores the legitimacy of the legendary second cross and concludes that this fragment did belong to a monument similar to the extant one in the churchyard.

Next, this chapter discusses the material aspects of the Gosforth hogbacks, a sculptural type endemic to mainland, pre-Conquest England: the Warrior’s Tomb (CASSS Gosforth 4), [PLATES 13-15] the Saint’s Tomb (CASSS Gosforth 5), [PLATES 16-19] and the small carved fragment, CASSS Gosforth 7.202 [PLATE 20] For the last century, scholars identified only two hogbacks at Gosforth, interpreting the Gosforth 7 fragment

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202 Hogbacks are a sculptural type restricted to England and Scotland. A lone, degenerative hogback at Castledermot, Ireland, is the only known exception. Small numbers of related recumbent monuments occur in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Cornwall. Lang is hesitant to include them in his survey saying, “Outlying hogbacks tend to have only faint echoes of the original types.” Hogbacks are not found in Scandinavia, Iceland or Greenland, or in eastern settlements areas like Russia. Lang, "The Hogback."
as part of a cross shaft. Its similarity to the unusual design of the Saint’s Tomb indicates that rather than a cross fragment, Gosforth 7 is a hogback. While not enough remains to study details of its iconography, its identification as a hogback alters our current understanding of the sculptural composition at Gosforth.

The final sculpture at Gosforth, the Fishing Stone, (CASSS Gosforth 6), is a greater enigma in terms of its type and function. [PLATE 19] Previous researchers argued that it is either a piece of a cross shaft or part of a horizontal frieze attested to in Icelandic skaldic poetry. 203 This chapter offers a new interpretation that it is a stone version of the type of external vertical architectural friezes and portal decoration found, for example, on the stave church in Urnes, Norway. No Viking Age structure has been discovered in England, which makes the Fishing Stone a key monument for understanding Anglo-Scandinavian architecture.

Taken together, the Gosforth monuments help reconstruct the narrative of changes that took place there since their creation. The nature of these changes reveals the reception of these sculptures in later periods, which in turn suggest aspects about their original function and meaning. The numbers and quality of the sculptures indicate the prosperity of the community and its engagement with and participation in regional artistic trends. By revisiting the archaeological record and the early scholarship on Gosforth and by reconciling them against the sculptures, the accuracy of our current understanding of the group can be measured against a better understood provenance.

4.1 The Gosforth Crosses

4.1.1 Gosforth 1: Morphology and craft

Of the seventy known crosses in Cumbria, the cross at Gosforth is unusual in its overall form and unique in many of its morphological details. 204 It is one of only eight

203 Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses*; Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*.

204 The CASSS lists 127 cross heads, shafts, fragments (likely from a cross) and bases (See Cramp, *CASSS* 2, 175-85.). Because some of these fragments may be from the same monument, I have rectified the
complete cross monuments in the county. While that number is a small comparison set, no other complete cross is as elaborate or refined. Its completeness provides evidence of the extreme feats of material engineering attempted at Gosforth—feats impossible without an innovative approach by the artist. This section discusses the stone from which the Gosforth cross was carved and the consequences of its unusual biased grain.

The Gosforth cross stands in the churchyard south of St. Mary’s church, just to the north of the main east-west road running from Seascale on the western coast, through Gosforth, to Wastwater Lake in the near fells to the east. The modern regional highway A595 follows the coast a mile west of the cross, approximately following the coastal route of a possible Hadrianic Roman road linking Ravenglass [Glannaventa] to Maryport [Alauna]. [PLATES 21 and 22] The cross certainly remains in its original location and base on account of its obvious fragility; possibly, it could have been rotated at some point prior to the addition of lead into the base to change its orientation.

The cross measures 436 cm (height) (excluding base) by 102.5 cm (maximum circumference). The squared upper portion of the shaft is 207 cm (height) by 25 cm (east/west faces) and 21.2 cm (north/south faces) tapering to 16 cm (east/west) by 14.1 cm (north/south). The cross head measures 50.6 cm wide. Its thickness is 23 cm at the boss and 12.5 cm at the arms. These proportions are remarkably delicate considering that the cross was carved from one piece of stone. The monolithic quality of the Gosforth cross is expected but its extreme proportions are unusual. A cross of such height required a large, intact stone, the source of which is not immediately apparent.

number of monuments to known, unique free-standing crosses. This does not include free bases, which might have held wooden sculptures or functioned altogether differently. Most of these are fragments and are identified as cross shafts.

205 Addingham 1 [PLATE 23], Dearham 1 [PLATE 24], the Gosforth cross [PLATE 1], Iront 1 [PLATE 25], Penrith 2, 4 and 5 [PLATES 26-28], and Rockcliffe 1 [PLATE 29]. The Penrith group is severely damaged and eroded, but the sculptures are complete enough to be included in this list.
Identifying the quarry from which the stone for the Gosforth sculpture was taken is difficult, for little is known about early medieval quarries. Documentary evidence for quarries exists from later periods in records describing the construction of ecclesiastical foundations. Knoop and Jones noted that the cost of transport for the stone to build the thirteenth-century Vale Royal Abbey was three times the cost of extraction. While such figures are not necessarily directly applicable to the pre-Conquest period, they do indicate how troublesome transportation of heavy material was. That such transportation costs were applicable in tenth-century Cumbria is possible. More than the strict cost of material, which is a relative measure at best, the difficulty in transporting such a large stone intact to Gosforth is a greater problem.

Samuel Jefferson’s *History and Antiquities of Allerdale* reported that the Gosforth parish “abounds with freestone.” It is true that the western coastal plain is formed on the rolling sandstone beds that form red cliffs at points along the coast. Without precise analysis of the Gosforth cross’s sedimentary profile, the precise source of the stone can only be a conjecture given the abundance of material. The extreme proportions of the cross restrict possible sources.

In the early Middle Ages, local sources of stone were preferred for sculpture and architecture due to the expense and danger of long-distance transportation. Because of this, a twenty-kilometer rule is used when searching for material sources. In the case of Gosforth, much of the distance could have been traversed over water. A *knarr* type of cargo vessel excavated at Skuldelev had a capacity of 24 tons, more than adequate to

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206 Knoop, "The English Medieval Quarry," 18. One wonders if this “shipping cost” was included in the building estimates.

207 Samuel Jefferson, *The History and Antiquities of Allerdale Ward, above Derwent, in the County of Cumberland with Topographical notices and Memoirs* (Carlisle: S. Jefferson, 1842), 296. An exception to the local rule is from the Spiral Scroll group. There is evidence to suggest that a central quarry, regardless of size, may have been used by the artists responsible for the Spiral-Scroll group in northwest-central Cumbria, due to their use of uncommon white sandstone. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 238.

208 Stanier, *Stone Quarry Landscapes*. The ten-mile rule appears to hold for almost all of the pre-Conquest sculpture in CASSS. It is likely to be the case throughout western Europe, although a new, comprehensive study founded in modern Geological analysis is sorely needed.
transport the Gosforth block. Without graded roads and shock absorbers, over-ground transport would have been more perilous for the huge monolith than over water, even though the direct overland distance from St. Bees Head to Gosforth is less than twenty kilometers. Viking ship types had a shallow draft, making possible the block’s transportation to Gosforth up the River Irt and the River Bleng, which at the time spread into a lake. The northwestern shore of this former lake was within paces of the cross’s location. A less likely possibility is that the stone was quarried in the immediate vicinity of Gosforth from a minor outcrop of sandstone such as the lost, small quarry, Gilgrass (Gillgrass), on the road from Wellington to Wind Hall, both just to the north of Gosforth.

Another possibility for the stone’s source is that it was reused from a Roman site. Gosforth lies approximately equidistant between Hardknott fort in the south and St. Bees Head in the north. Earlier Anglian sites show some evidence of the reuse of Roman material, but the evidence at Gosforth is not in favor of this. Although the built structure of Hadrian’s Wall stopped just past Carlisle on the Solway coast, Romans extended the security of their empire south from the wall along coastal Cumbria, from large garrisons with vici as at Maryport to small mileforts. The Romans tended to quarry locally for normal building material, only going farther afield for specialized decorative stone.

Both the local quarry and reuse of Roman material options might appear more favorable than the St. Bees source for the stone, but these are less likely when the quality of the stone is considered. The dimensions of the stone required for the Gosforth cross alone exclude the possibility that it was made from reused material. Finding a pre-cut,

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intact, five-meter-long stone would have been extremely improbable. Additionally, if the stone were quarried fresh, then some measure of quality control would be available. The design of the cross does not allow for serious faults in the stone, and a trained eye could avoid major faults in the stone at the quarry.\textsuperscript{212}

The red sandstone of the Gosforth cross is of the Triassic St. Bees type, a finely laminated water-lain deposit containing muscovite mica that is found along the length of the Cumbrian coast.\textsuperscript{213} The superficial strata often fracture along bed lines once they are exposed to the Cumbrian climate, although sandstone is generally known for its resistance to erosion and because of this is often used architecturally.\textsuperscript{214} A test of stone from Birkham’s quarry in St. Bees by the Building Research Establishment, Ltd. listed the maximum size of block the quarry would extract as 1.5 m x 3 m x 3 m.\textsuperscript{215} The longest proportion of the block from which the Gosforth cross was cut was at least 5 meters—almost twice as long as modern practices easily produce. No evidence exists for any deep early medieval quarry near Gosforth and Roman material of an adequate size for the cross was not commonly produced in England.\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{212}This implies that the Gosforth artist was involved in obtaining the stone blank for the cross. No evidence exists for this, but due to the extreme material needs for his design, I think he was aware of the problems of quarrying and was personally involved in selecting appropriate stone.

\textsuperscript{213}Cramp, CASSS 2, 9.


\textsuperscript{216}Calverley stated, “The sculpture are often of a colour similar to the walling stones of the church, which have been quarried by the early folk from the ruins of Roman buildings, camps, stations, etc., of the neighbourhood. These quarries may now sometimes be found; vegetation, denudation, cultivation of land, not having quite obliterated all traces. I have found some of them where none thought a stone-quarry existed.” (Notes, 26) It is unclear if he means that he knows of deposits of Roman architectural blocks that show evidence of removal or that he knows of Roman and early medieval quarries. Regardless, he offers no further authority or evidence.
Calverley’s experience with the limitations of stone quarrying at the turn of the last century elucidates the origins of a large monolith in the Gosforth area. In his efforts to copy the Gosforth cross at Aspatria, Calverley discovered the difficulties of extracting a large enough block although he did not, out of difficulty or ignorance, attempt to copy the angled grain.\footnote{217}

We have a freestone quarry which supplies by many steamers huge blocks of red sandstone for the ornamentation of the fronts of New York buildings... [...] [Mr. Henry Graves, the quarry-master] took me down to the quarry and showed me what he considered to be a good post of rock for the purpose. This was very deep -- the bottom post worked. The men took every care to win the stone perfectly. They wedged it away from its bed, two feet wide, two feet thick, sixteen feet long...\footnote{218}

The replica required stone from deep bedrock to secure an intact monolith of sufficient size.\footnote{219} Calverley also wrote further that the sculptor, Mr. Christopher Dickinson, “a local mason who had worked for Mr. Graves a long time, who was now getting old,” found the block just large enough to fit the cross. That Calverley met with difficulty finding a suitable block in a deeply excavated modern quarry presents a question as to the origins of the Gosforth block. The unusual size of the Gosforth block and the necessity for a long run with even grain restricts possible sources for the stone. The grain within the block was aligned horizontally running the length of the longest dimension, naturally parallel to the ground; this indicates that a narrow, tall block was removed from an exposed face of deep bedrock. St. Bees Head, ten miles north of the modern town of Seascale and within sight of the Seascale coast, is the most likely source of the stone.

\footnote{217} Parker is the only author I have found who takes notice of the cross’s grain, writing only, “The socket of the cross has the same twisted grain as the shaft, both being made of stone which has been brought from some distance, and not from the great quarry at Gillgrass.” Parker, \textit{The Ancient Crosses}, 12.

\footnote{218} Calverley and Collingwood, \textit{Early Sculptured Crosses (1898)}, 23-4.

\footnote{219} The Aspatria block was considerably smaller than the Gosforth block, for the Aspatria replica was not carved on the bias.
St. Bees Head, a massive prominence of red sandstone, lies approximately fifteen km north up the coast from the modern village of Seascale, the nearest coastal town to Gosforth, which lies five kilometers inland. Points along St. Bees Head, such as Fleswick Bay, provide access by sea to deeply bedded sandstone capable of producing enormous monoliths. [PLATE 30] At these cliff faces, the poor quality of the more superficial beds is evident; even five-meter deep strata crack every two or three horizontal meters. Quarrying down over five meters to obtain a monolith of sufficient size for the Gosforth cross would have been extremely difficult and expensive. Rather, at these coastal promontories, the required width of stone could be removed from the deepest beds of the exposed face and transported back to Gosforth by sea. Even though a greater amount of material would need to be quarried to carve the cross from the diagonal, a larger stone was more likely to survive quarrying and transportation.

The exposed cliff faces along the Cumbrian coast falsely suggest easy access to stone. While deep beds that can produce large monoliths are exposed, the poor footing and shifting tides create treacherous conditions that would have complicated attempts to extract large blocks. However, the absence of a deep early medieval quarry in the region suggests that these coastal outcrops were the main sources for large stones and those who gathered them did so at some considerable risk.

Regardless of whether the stone was gathered locally, or as far away as St. Bees Head, extracting it from the ground and transporting it to the site required immense and careful effort. Breaking the stone at any point during the cross’s manufacturing process would have been a costly disaster. For this reason, the block from which the cross was cut may have been quarried as a large “double” block, which was then split and carved in Gosforth after transport. Having a thicker/wider block would have helped protect the great length from breaking.

The cross yields further information about its construction process, which provides more evidence for the source of its stone. Its most unusual feature is the orientation of the sandstone grain within the monument. The grain is clearly visible on the round, lower section of the shaft’s west face and on the upper squared portion of the
north and south faces, angled approximately 15° from vertical from east to west. [PLATE 31] This angle is uniform throughout the monument. The only loss to the sculpture is at the top of the cross head where the upper east face of the cross head has sheared off at the same angle. This extreme grain alignment is highly unusual in pre-Conquest monuments and suggests two things: that the monument was carved from the quarried stone diagonally and that this was done not only to maximize height but to ensure the finished monument would be resistant to the types of damage that crosses often suffer in the elements. 220

The process of quarrying stone involves drilling holes into which wedges can be inserted to split blocks away from the bedrock. In the case of sandstones, the blocks break between sedimentation layers where the material bond is weaker. Quarrying stone with a spontaneous bias grain effectively would be impossible using wedges, especially given the size of block needed at Gosforth. The orientation of the cross within the block required minimum proportions only slightly thicker than the maximum width of the cross head – 51 cm. Adding the height of the cross with an additional minimum of 25 cm to account for subsurface material provides the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle of 90°/75°/15°. Using these measurements, the minimum proportions of the quarried block were 450 cm long, 120 cm wide, and 51 cm thick—a block of at least six tons. Even though a greater amount of material is required to be quarried to carve the cross from the diagonal, the likelihood of extracting a large block of adequate length is greater than extracting one near in proportion to the finished cross. [PLATE 32]

In terms of the monument’s volumetric integrity, problems arise from both horizontally and vertically oriented grain. When the grain is aligned horizontally, the surface area between the individual layers 221 is minimized, making the likelihood of horizontal shearing high. No surviving cross monuments have horizontally aligned grain,

220 Often, the high degree of surface treatment or the fine grain of the stone obscures the orientation of the sedimentary layers.
221 I subsequently refer to this as the “lamination surface area.”
although for these monuments, standard quarrying practices also would have discouraged horizontal alignment.\textsuperscript{222}

Vertical orientation of the sedimentary layers obviously maximizes the possible lamination surface area, but this orientation introduces the risk of superficial vertical delamination. This risk is exacerbated where surface relief is carved into the broad side of the grain, a common occurrence on Cumbrian tombstones. Delamination can also occur along the entire length of the monument if one stratum is more porous than others. This layer absorbs more water and, over time, either erodes away or breaks the bond between the layers. This results in missing cross arms, missing faces, and, in some cases, structural failure of the entire sculpture. The narrow proportions of the Gosforth cross would have increased this risk of vertical splitting if the grain were aligned vertically. We see evidence of this type of damage on the cross’s lower section. This type of erosion probably caused the loss at the cross head. Stone selection also has a bearing on this type of failure. The regular grain of the cross indicates that the sculptor was fortunate that the quarried stone had uniform layers.\textsuperscript{223}

The difference between horizontal and vertical grain alignments can be compared numerically by calculating what the resulting lamination surface areas of each option would be within the Gosforth cross. The lamination surface area resulting from aligning the grain horizontally is calculated by finding the area of a horizontal cross section through the monument. For the narrowest point, the shaft just below the cross head, the surface area of a cross section is 14 x 16 cm, or 224 cm\textsuperscript{2}. The maximum lamination surface area possible in the Gosforth cross is achieved with vertically aligned grain, the most frequent orientation found in tenth-century crosses. It is sufficient to estimate the

\textsuperscript{222} With a drill and wedge quarrying technique, a preference for extracting shallow, wide blocks off the horizontal bedding results in vertical grain orientation if erected on-end. Tall monuments with horizontal grain would need to be carved from blocks quarried with masonry saws that could cut tall, narrow blocks off the surface of a rock face. The author has noted instances of horizontal shearing in modern sandstone newel posts in Cumbria where the post was carved without regard to the stone’s grain orientation.

\textsuperscript{223} This might support the contention that the sculptor himself selected the stone to be quarried from the rock face.
surface area of so irregular a form by restricting its contours to regular shapes. The cross head is approximately 50 x 50 cm, which results in a surface area of 2,500 cm$^2$, but almost half the material between the cross arms has been removed, resulting in an estimate of 1,800 cm$^2$. The cross shaft tapers, resulting in a roughly trapezoidal cross section with a surface area of approximately 12,500 cm$^2$. This figure, added to the cross head, totals 15,000 cm$^2$ of lamination surface area with vertical grain alignment. [PLATE 33]

Introducing an angle in the grain’s alignment mitigates the weaknesses of both horizontal and vertical grain origination. Cutting the monument at a sharp angle to the sedimentary grain of the sandstone allowed the Gosforth artist to protect his sculpture against both horizontal and vertical splitting. When the grain is carved at a fifteen degree angle from vertical, the surface area of the sculpture’s weakest point nearly quadruples from the 225 cm$^2$ produced with horizontal orientation to over 860 cm$^2$; while this is nowhere as large as the potential 15,000 cm$^2$ gained from vertical grain orientation, the quadrupling of the lamination surface area incurs all the benefits of verticality without any of the weaknesses. The sculptor retained structural strength and stability by increasing surface adhesion between individual sedimentary layers and at the same time mitigated the risk of superficial delamination and complete structural failure through the narrow parts of the sculpture.

The fifteen-degree angle also provides greater stability for the surface carving, which would have been especially important to support the Gosforth cross’s deep relief. In grained material, especially wood, the end grain is valued for its ability to hold fine detail without splitting or shearing. Finely grained, water-lain sandstone is built up from planar layers, not individual fibers, so in sandstone no true wood-like end grain exists. However, a sculptor of stone would still wish to avoid carving relief straight into the broad side of the grain. Rather, in a block where the grain is aligned to the geometric surfaces, four sides will have grain and two opposite sides will be parallel to the grain. These surfaces with parallel grain are at the most risk of losing relief carving. [PLATE 34]
On these parallel faces, when the carver cuts into the stone, he reduces the surface area between the layers that keep the relief affixed to the stone. Relief carved in this fashion can be more prone to environmental damage. Due to the viscosity of water, relief carvings increase the absorption of water into the stone as water suspends under the carved projections. The water then puts the integrity of the relief at risk, especially with a freeze/thaw cycle as is common in the northern counties. The environmental damage on monuments with a vertical grain alignment is readily seen in other Cumbrian monuments, such as the tenth-century round shaft cross at Beckermet St. Bridget (CASSS Beckermet St. Bridget 2). Here, a proportionally more robust monument than the Gosforth cross is visibly delaminating. [PLATE 35] The lower portion of the entire east face has sloughed off, demonstrating the weakness of vertically aligned grain. Also illustrative is the damage to the two tall crosses of the “Giant’s Grave” sculptural group in Penrith, Cumbria; these two round shaft crosses are similar to the Gosforth cross, although the cross heads were not ringed. [PLATE 27 and 28] Both Penrith crosses have vertically aligned grain and both have lost their horizontal cross arms, reducing the heads to pointed stumps. Additionally, the north cross has lost part of one carved face to delamination. [PLATE 36] This pattern of loss at Penrith is certainly due to

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224 Sandstone naturally resists erosion well and for this reason is often used architecturally, but lesser quality or irregular sandstones are prone to shearing. Prothero and Schwab, *Sedimentary Geology*, 19-25, 79.

225 Recent studies have produced more nuanced timelines for the historical climate of the North Atlantic, showing temperate summers but more severe winters in the mid-tenth century than those in prior decades. Concerning northwestern Iceland, “By ~A.D. 960, however, maximum temperatures remained at ~7.5 to 9.5° C, but minimum temperatures from ~1.0 to 3.6° C were on average almost 6.0° C lower than during the initial wave of settlement.” William P. Patterson et al., “Two millennia of North Atlantic seasonality and implications for Norse colonies,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 107, no. 12 (2010): 5306-10, 5306-10.

226 Cramp, *CASSS* 2, 56-57, ill. 41, 47-51.

227 Ibid., 136-38, ill. 489-506. The crossheads are the “boss and lozenge” style.
environmental damage and not to purposeful destruction. Such damage unfortunately encourages further decay by exposing more crevices in which water can collect.  

On the Gosforth cross, all faces have angled grain, thus eliminating the problems resulting from parallel grain. The benefit of the angle extends into the relief carving, providing greater tenacity to the projecting material. If water absorbs into the surface, it can only penetrate the sculpture from one direction. All open grain runs into the central mass of the sculpture, limiting the depth to which the water can penetrate. The cross, unfortunately, has eroded and suffered small areas of loss, especially to the roll molding that defined the upper panels, but the entire iconographic program remains, even such delicate details as spears and horse reins. A high degree of surface finish, including the paint that was likely originally applied to it, also helped to preserve the stone by shedding water more effectively and restricting the absorption of water.

Pre-Conquest crosses typically have vertically aligned grain. Wedge splitting quarrying techniques are responsible for this preference in grain alignment because it maximizes the size of the monument cut from the block. The few that deviate from the vertical do so only so slightly and reap no benefit from the resulting angle. In some cases, twists in the grain have caused part of the shaft to divert from the vertical.

228 The pre-Conquest stone sculpture in England benefits from varying conservation practices. In such sculptural centers as Lythe, Brompton and Sockburn, carved fragments are preserved in a controlled, indoor climate. Conversely, many of the grand Cumbrian sculptures at Bewcastle, Gosforth, and Penrith are still exposed to the environment and their conditions are subject to continuing deterioration.

229 Hogbacks are omitted from this discussion because the physical stresses within them are far less than in cross monuments, where the strength of protruding arms is a concern to the sculptor.

230 An angle less than 5° is too small to confer a noticeable benefit to a monument. A detailed study of grain alignment in hogbacks may be informative.

231 In many cases the orientation of a monument’s grain is evident in photographs, or a researcher has recorded it. In cases where the fragment is installed in a wall, the grain alignment of the stone is entirely obscured, since the grain is most readily seen on the narrowest dimension of the fragment, the grain being parallel to the broadest face. The CASSS volumes are the best resource for high-quality, high contrast photographs. For monuments outside of England, see M. Redknap and John Masters Lewis, *A corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales*, vol. 1: Breconshire, Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Radnorshire, and geographically contiguous areas of Herefordshire and Shropshire (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007); Nancy Edwards, *A Corpus of early Medieval Inscribed Stones*.
achieve his extreme design for the Gosforth cross, the Gosforth artist devised an innovative solution to the structural problems of his chosen medium. If other sculptures exhibit angled grain, it is worth considering whether they bear some connection to Gosforth.

Three sculptural fragments along the River Tees have the same, unusual 15-degree angle to their grain as found in the Gosforth cross: a cross head at Brompton, North Yorkshire (CASSS Brompton 10) and shaft fragments at Sockburn (CASSS Sockburn 5) and Coniscliffe, Co. Durham (CASSS Coniscliffe 6). [PLATES 37-39] While North Yorkshire seems far removed from western Cumbria, the geographic distance is not great. Numerous stylistic details are shared between Anglian and Viking period sculpture of the Eden and Tees valleys, indicating that the regions were not isolated from one another even if they each developed recognizable stylistic preferences.

Brompton is an important center of tenth-century sculpture with fifteen fragmentary crosses and eleven mostly intact hogbacks. The sculpture there comprises the largest group within the distinctive Allertonshire workshop; Lang defined the “Brompton School” based on the repeated use of particular motifs. While not as refined in workmanship, details of the Brompton cross head’s design are similar to the head of the Gosforth cross. [PLATE 37] Of all the cross heads at Brompton that display the distinctive “Brompton loop” motif, this one alone possesses secondary strands around

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232 The challenging “Coast to Coast” walking trail between St. Bees and Robin Hood’s Bay can be traveled in two weeks on foot.


234 Peculiarities of the workshop include rounded, transverse shaft moldings, plastic figure carving, deeply drilled interlace, panels with isolated figures, and a unified stone type. Ibid., 44-49.
the central boss, a feature seen at Gosforth, although the Gosforth cross’s cross arms are ornamented with freely formed triquetras rather than a true “Brompton loop.”\textsuperscript{235} Other similarities between the two carvings are the inset nimbus, flaring cross arms, and the confident, precise craftsmanship.\textsuperscript{236} The range in quality and designs at Brompton “demonstrates [that] more than one sculptor produced pieces for the site,” and therefore the possibility that the Gosforth artist practiced stone carving among these more- and less-accomplished sculptors is a strong possibility.\textsuperscript{237}

Another fragment with angled grain is found at Sockburn, Co. Durham (CASSS Sockburn 5).\textsuperscript{238} The grain is most evident on the face with the surviving spearman, who wears a helmet and carries a round shield on his shoulder. His tunic is slightly pointed in a manner similar to the more extreme pointed tunics found at Gosforth. This fragment is heavily damaged, but the overall style and the way in which the tip of the spear overlaps the plain molding above the spearman’s head is highly comparable to similar stylistic quirks seen at Gosforth, where figures overlap frames and moldings.\textsuperscript{239} Looking more broadly at the Sockburn monuments, the teardrop-shaped heads with drilled eyes, biting wolves with large teeth in wedge-shaped mouths and incised circular eyes, figural types of the women with long, trailing dresses and spearmen on horses, and a prototype of the distinctive Gosforth ring chain all suggest that the Gosforth artist was present if not active

\textsuperscript{235} Among the Brompton fragments, Brompton 10 shows some of the finest workmanship. None of the cross heads at Gosforth have a “Brompton loop”; the central bosses at Gosforth fill the center of the cross head to the armpits leaving no room for plaits to join together the triquetras. This lends them a more delicate appearance than those at Brompton.

\textsuperscript{236} The high quality of carving and the use of serpent motifs suggest that the Corpus Brompton 16 hogback may also have been carved by the Gosforth artist. The distinctive three plait interlace occurs on most of the Gosforth sculptures. The Brompton hogback is not as skillfully rendered, with a mistake in the interlacing on each side (the mistake is the same, but flipped).

\textsuperscript{237} Lang, \textit{CASSS} 6, 47.

\textsuperscript{238} In addition to Lang’s information in the \textit{Corpus}, see also Rosemary Cramp, "Sockburn before the Normans," in \textit{Tapestry of Time: Twelve Centuries at Sockburn} (Middlesbrough: Quoin Publishing, 2010), 2-40: 3-36.

\textsuperscript{239} This occurs in the Gosforth cross “Crucifixion” scene and on the Saint’s Tomb hogback.
None of the Sockburn monuments are necessarily attributable to the hand of the Gosforth artist, but similar monuments by different hands there indicate that motifs and designs were shared among artists.

The final fragment that exhibits the 15° angled grain technique is the round shaft cross fragment at Coniscliffe, County Durham (CASSS High Coniscliffe 6). The fragment was used as part of the external south nave wall of St. Edwin’s and good fortune left exposed one of the two visibly grained faces. The sharp angle to the grain is obvious. In addition to the angled grain, the overall proportions of this fragment are comparable to the Gosforth cross and the figure, with his thin legs and scalloped tunic, is stylistically similar to figures by the hand of the Gosforth artist. The unusual use of angled grain in a formally and stylistically comparable monument suggests that the Gosforth sculptor also carved the fragment at Coniscliffe. If the Gosforth artist practiced in Brompton and Sockburn, the Coniscliffe fragment probably post-dates the Brompton sculptures but pre-dates the Gosforth sculptures if his travels took him from east to west. Also, the Coniscliffe fragment more closely resembles the Gosforth cross in its swag transition from a round lower shaft to a squared upper shaft indicating that Coniscliffe was an intermediate sculpture.

Nothing definite is known about the life of the Gosforth artist, but these monuments, along with another fragment at Gilling West, North Yorkshire (CASSS Gilling West 2), which according to James Lang has motifs comparable to those at Gosforth, suggest that the Gosforth sculptor had origins in Yorkshire. [PLATE 40] These connections support Rosemary Cramp’s statement that, “There does seem to be evidence in several monuments at Sockburn, and a single cross shaft at Hart and Gainford, which

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240 Sockburn cross fragments 5 and 6 and hogback fragment 21 show the greatest affinity to the Gosforth master’s style, although these sculptures are not as refined in their workmanship, with the hogback being the least convincing attribution. This may be because the Gosforth master would have worked at Sockburn before he worked at Gosforth.

241 Cramp, CASSS I, 60-61.
share Scandinavian motifs, that there were itinerant carvers in the early tenth century.  

Given the strength of the material evidence from Brompton and Coniscliffe, and given the stylistic and thematic affinity to Sockburn, the Gosforth artist appears to be one of these itinerant carvers; he travelled late(r) in his career west over the Pennines looking for work and/or to escape unfavorable political changes.  

This would also explain why his style is not otherwise seen in Cumbria.

The Gosforth artist’s Yorkshire origins and his manipulation of the stone’s grain show that he had experience with the various problems that afflict sculptures with such severe proportions as that at Gosforth. The overall morphology of the cross is an extreme example of the “columnar” or “round-shaft” type. In Cumbria, in addition to the Gosforth cross, this type is represented by the two crosses at St. Bridget’s, Beckermet, and the two crosses that are part of the “Giant’s Grave” sculptural group at St. Andrew’s in Penrith. Most crosses of this type are in Staffordshire in the Peak District. Isolated examples also are at Yetminster, Dorset, West Gilling, Richmond, and in Denbighshire. There were two separate periods of round shaft cross carving: an earlier late eighth- or early ninth-century Anglian period and a later middle to late tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian period. Although the general form of these crosses is similar, the proportions of Gosforth are dramatically different.

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242 idem, "Sockburn before the Normans," 28.

243 Given that those monuments attributable to the Gosforth master have a strong Norse mythological iconography, he may have preferred a career working for communities who were not strongly aligned with Christianity.

244 Bailey proposed that this was because he worked only for a patron at Gosforth. While this may be the case for his limited Cumbrian monuments, it does not explain how the sculptor developed his elevated and distinctive style.

245 Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses.


246 Bailey argues that Dacre 1 as an example of a pre-Viking round-shaft cross, but the fragment is inconclusive. Cramp, CASSS 2, 30.
Figure 2: Comparison of various round-shaft crosses

The Gosforth cross has conceptual similarities to other round-shaft crosses but in terms of its execution bears little resemblance to its sculptural family. Kendrick said,

In the Cumberland group, therefore, we must keep the Gosforth type as something by itself, and accept the twin crosses at Beckermet St. Bridget and the twin crosses at the Giant’s Grave, Penrith, as the ‘Cumberland type’ proper. When we look at the numerous round-shaft crosses in the Peak district, the head-quarters of the whole series, we see that all of them belong to the Beckermet rather than the Gosforth type....

Because of their visual similarity to tree trunks, round-shaft crosses have been compared to wooden sculpture, and all except for the Gosforth cross have one or more

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247 Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art*, 70.
carved bands encircling the column shaft below the decorated facets.\textsuperscript{248} An undecorated column with faceted sides could certainly be easily produced from a hewn log, and Lang argued that this cuff represents a rope or metal band that would have encircled wooden crosses to prevent them from splitting, to stabilize them to the ground, or to serve as decoration.\textsuperscript{249} The absence of a carved band on the Gosforth cross, however, suggests that the sculptor was not attempting to duplicate, at least not directly, a wooden prototype, although the presence of such cuffs on these missing wooden exempla is as speculative as the exempla themselves. Whether or not the sculptor was duplicating a wooden cross, he certainly was designing and had been sculpting within the milieu of other columnar crosses. A cuff is structurally unnecessary for a stone sculpture; the Gosforth artist omitted this feature in at Gosforth because a cuff disrupts the verticality of the sculpture. Evidence indicates a northern Yorkshire origin for the artist; he had already carved similar sculptures at Coniscliffe and Gilling West, where a triple vestigial cuff sits below a curved swag similar to the design at Gosforth.\textsuperscript{250} The round-shaft derivative at Sockburn is one step in the morphological changes between a cross such as at Brompton and one like that at Gosforth.

Finally, the construction process of the Gosforth cross is unknown. There are two possibilities: it was carved and then erected, or it was erected and then carved in place. There are reasonable arguments for both. The former scenario is more intuitive. The replica of the Gosforth cross, carved by Christopher Dickinson of Aspatria and erected in

\textsuperscript{248} Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2, 101. Bailey notes, “Workington 2, if it is indeed a round-shaft derivative, is equally linked to local west-coast groups and, in its use of a scalloped frame without a collar, may well have been influenced by Gosforth 1, which is the only other carving in England to have this particular form.” idem, \textit{CASSS} 2, 31.

\textsuperscript{249} J. T. Lang, "Viking Age Sculpture," in \textit{A Century of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture} (Newcastle upon Tyne: F. Graham, 1977), [40] p.: 25. A wooden prototype for the Gosforth cross is unlikely for the size of tree that would have been required would have been more valuable as architectural building material. Even so, carving a wooden cross would in no way inform the artist as to how to craft in stone.

\textsuperscript{250} Miller, "Against the Grain."
1888 by the Rev. William S. Calverley, vicar of St. Kentigern, Aspatria, was done in this manner.251

The vicar of Aspatria, Mr. Calverley, has just reared in the churchyard a replica of the famous GOSFORTH CROSS. A stone 16 feet long was obtained from the quarries at Aspatria, and taken to the vicarage yard, where a mason, under Mr. Calverley’s directions, carefully and successfully reproduced the carvings from the Gosforth Cross. The cross was recently successfully raised — not an easy job, considering its length and slimness, which rendered it necessary to jacket it in planks and sods, for fear it would snap by its own weight.252

Nonetheless, the problem of the Gosforth cross’s fragility lends weight to the possibility that the cross was carved in place. With the cross a mere 14 cm thick at its most slender point, the possibility that it could break during installation was likely. Perhaps the community at Gosforth could have raised a completed cross as successfully in the tenth century as one had been raised in nineteenth-century Aspatria, but the operation would have been equally as risky. The publication did not describe in detail how the cross was lifted, but the act probably involved machinery unavailable in the tenth century. Furthermore, detailing the cross in a horizontal position would have been difficult. The thin neck below the cross head would have required support when the sculpture was turned over to complete the carving in the round. Evidence from a quarry in Ireland shows that the weakest point of a cross is just below the cross head. There, a discarded cross blank broke in two even before it was removed from the quarry.253

The most likely method of production is that the cross was roughed out first, erected, and then finished. This explanation seems counter-intuitive when imagining a sculptor swinging a hammer and sharply striking a chisel at a delicate, free-standing

251 Calverley, Early Sculptured Crosses (1888), 166.
253 Roger Stalley, “Irish Cross Carving: Some Questions of Authorship and Design,” presented at “Scotland and Beyond: Early Medieval Carved Stones,” conference at the University of Edinburgh, 30 March – 1 April, 2011. The location of the quarry is guarded to prevent looters from disturbing the site.
cross. The Norse settlers in Cumbria used various types of carving techniques: percussive carving (a hammer or punch and chisel), drilled carving, and abrasive carving; this last “involved rubbing down the cut surface with other stones.” In addition to these, the Norse sculptors used a “picking” technique, which gained popularity during this period. Rather than using a tool percussively, the same tool could be used abrasively to produce a great deal of detail on relatively finely grained stone. If such a picking technique were used for the detail work on the Gosforth cross, it could have been finished in place.

4.1.2 Gosforth 2: Continuity and Contrast

The free standing cross is not the only cross monument at Gosforth, though it is the only one remaining in place. At least two other crosses once stood at the site. Two fragmentary wheeled cross heads, now mounted in the eastern wall of the north chancel, were found near or on the church grounds. Both of these fragments are stylistically similar to the extant cross and are attributed to the Gosforth artist.

Gosforth 2, [PLATE 10] found in the in-fill of a rediscovered north doorway in St. Mary’s in 1843, is severely damaged but less eroded than the Gosforth cross. It is a similar design to the other Gosforth cross heads, though nearly twice as large. The carving is in good condition, indicating that it has been protected from the elements for some portion of its life. Lang and Bailey attributed it to the same artist as that of the Gosforth cross based on the interlace style, figural details, and general level of

254 Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 254.
255 Lang, "Viking Age Sculpture," 3.
256 The author’s experiments confirm that picking the same type of soft sandstone as the Gosforth monument is both reasonably fast and remarkably easy. The Gosforth cross is so severely eroded that no clear tool marks remain such as can be observed on pieces protected from the elements over the last millennium.
257 Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures."
258 Parker, The Ancient Crosses, 73.
execution. Bailey says that it “must have belonged to a very impressive carving.” If Gosforth 2 is assumed to have been similar in design to the Gosforth cross, extrapolating the ratio from a reconstruction of the cross head results in a monument nearly nine meters tall. Given the difficulty in erecting the Gosforth cross, this possibility is unlikely.

Gosforth 2 was discovered in the rubble filling in the north door but no records indicate when the door was blocked; to the extent that such acts are recorded, the blocking of other north doors around England mostly occurred between 1650 and 1750, though many apparently were blocked much earlier. Parker noted that additional “fragments” were also found when the north door’s rubble was removed, but they have unfortunately since been lost and he provides neither textual nor photographic descriptions of them. Some of these fragments may have been from Gosforth 3, but more likely Parker was working from oral history when he reported these additional fragments because he certainly would have recorded them in some fashion if they had interesting carving.

Rather than being from an elaborate and unique monument, Gosforth 2 is a plank-type cross, the most common type of sculpture among the Cumbrian crosses of the Viking age. This type of cross is found at Addingham (complete), [PLATE 23] Dearham (complete), [PLATE 24] Cross Canonby, Urswick, Penrith, [PLATE 26] St. Bees, Irton, [PLATE 25] Waberthwaite, and Beckermet. Yet despite the variety of possible plank cross types, the design of Gosforth 2 need not remain purely speculative. Five miles to the south of Gosforth in the churchyard of St. Michael’s, adjacent to the

259 Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures."
260 Cramp, CASSS 2, 104. Bailey does not offer a speculative description of the monument.
261 Parker, The Ancient Crosses, 73.
262 Cramp, CASSS 2, xiv and fig. 1, xv.
263 The “Giant’s Thumb” at Penrith is held to be a round-shaft derivative on account of drawings by Collingwood in Northumbrian Crosses. While Collingwood was an excellent artist, his illustrations of the English crosses are not always accurate, as demonstrated by his illustration of the Gosforth cross in the same book, which has a number of inaccuracies.
grounds of Muncaster Castle outside of Ravenglass, stands a tenth-century plank-type cross shaft. [PLATE 41] This shaft is often invoked with the Gosforth group because it is one of the few cross monuments in England to feature the rare type of ring interlace found on the Gosforth cross, Gosforth 2, and Dearham 1.264 Installed in front of the base of Muncaster shaft is a ringed cross head from Irton (Irton 2) of a much later date than the Anglian Irton cross. Lord Pennington of Muncaster and Parker found the Irton cross head in a stone wall before 1878 and removed it to Muncaster.265 Parker reported:

The cross-head fixed in the socket was rescued from the garden wall of a cottage called Eilbeck Ground in Irton, only a short distance over the boundary between that parish and Muncaster, by Lord Muncaster and the writer. It was brought here in the hope that it might prove to belong to this [Muncaster] shaft, but whether it does so is doubtful. At the same time the cross was fixed in a new socket, the old one, which lies by it, being insecure.266

The socket Parker described remains in the churchyard next to the monument, but there is no reasonable way that the Muncaster shaft fit within it; the aperture is far too small for it.267 Parker also did not say that the Muncaster shaft was ever within it, only that it was “insecure.” Unless Muncaster 1 has a tenon or tapers severely, neither of which have been recorded, this cannot be the base that once held it.268 The Irton cross head, once

264 In England: Cross Canonby 5, Dearham 1, Gosforth 1, Gosforth 2, Muncaster 1, all Cumbria. In Wales: Penmon, 1 Anglesey. J. R. Allen, The Celtic Crosses of Wales, Reprint of 1899 Archaeologia Cambrensis ed. (Llanerch: J. M. F. Bookbinding, 1989), 44. The ring chain motif is common on Viking Age sculpture on the Isle of Man: Michael 74 and 75, Ballaugh 77, Jurby 78, St. Johns 81, Maughold 82, Andreas 83, Braddan 86, Maughold 91, Bride 92, Jurby 98, Michael 100, and Andreas 102 and 103. P. M. C. Kermode and David M. Wilson, Manx Crosses, Facsimile reprint of the 1907 edition / ed. (Balgavies, Angus: Pinkfoot Press, 1994). Styles of interlace and their meaning will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

265 E. H. Knowles, "Notes on the fragments at St. John's, Bedermet; Whitbeck; Corney," Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society 4 (1880): 139-48, 142.

266 Parker, The Gosforth District, 171.

267 The bottom of the shaft measures 41 cm by 17 cm. The opening of the empty base at Muncaster measures only 39 cm by 16 cm.

268 Cramp, CASSS 2, 134.
removed to Muncaster, was found to not fit on the shaft and was placed on the base in front of it.

Presently at Muncaster are pieces of three separate monuments, none of which appear to be native to the site: an “ancient” base, a shaft, and a ringed cross head. The base is not datable, but it is crudely executed, unlike the other fragments, and is probably pre-Conquest. In 1899, Calverley reported that the base was “recently” placed there. Its origin is unknown. The wheel head is of a Cumbrian Norse type and certainly dates to the tenth century; as there is no contextual evidence for it, dating must come from style alone. That it was found near Irton, a site that in the tenth century did have the still.remaining cross, is notable. A tenth-century community at Irton is likely, though no such evidence exists for Muncaster. The earliest speculated date for the foundation of St. Michael’s Church is the middle eleventh century, and a church is listed in documents dating to the reign of Henry II (1154-1189).

Because the cross head was brought in from Irton and the possibly pre-Conquest base was “recently” placed there in the late nineteenth century, the cross shaft remains the only evidence of the pre-Conquest antiquity of the Muncaster site. Isolated monuments are rare in Cumbria; almost every site has multiple sculptures from the tenth century, which makes a Muncaster origin for the shaft suspect. Again, the shaft has the same ring plait as found on the Gosforth shaft. This indicates a possible connection to nearby Gosforth but the nature of this connection is unclear. One possibility is that a separate artist purposefully copied the designs at Gosforth for the Muncaster monument. The other possibility is that a Gosforth artist carved the shaft and that the fragments of Gosforth 2 are the remains of the cross head for the Muncaster shaft.

269 Ibid., 168.

270 Calverley, Early Sculptured Crosses (1888).

271 This cross head is of the “wheel head” type defined by Bailey, endemic to coastal northwestern England. Cramp, CASSS 2.

272 Corpus, p. 126.
The size of Gosforth 2 and the discovery of the Fishing Stone by Parker on March 16, 1882 led him to speculate that it was part of the shaft for Gosforth 2.\(^{273}\) This is unlikely. If true, then the resulting monument would either have been an unprecedented composite sculpture or it would have been an unusual tenth-century design looking back to such early paneled Anglo-Saxon examples as Bewcastle and Ruthwell. If the former is the case, then there is nothing with which to compare such a monument and no means by which to speculate about Parker’s concept for the complete work.\(^{274}\) Parker did not state whether he thought the stone was later worked down into a thin panel or if it was fitted as a revetment of some sort onto a central core along with other panels, thus forming a cross shaft, and he offered no reconstruction drawing. The stone, as Parker found it, is not especially thick. If the fragments found in the doorway with Gosforth 2 were part of this conglomerate monument, without records of their shape or carvings, reconfiguring the sculpture is impossible. If the monument were dismantled around the time the north door was sealed, then the Fishing Stone was left in the churchyard purposefully and may have been reworked to adapt it as a step for the sundial. Parker noted that the lower arm of Gosforth 2 was wider than the others, and, because the head was broken off amid the interlace decorating the face of the lower arm, he thought this interlace must have extended down the shaft. How this reconciles with the fact that there is no interlace on the Fishing Stone is unclear.

Parker, therefore, was in error when he connected the Gosforth 2 cross head with the Fishing Stone. Rather than extend down the shaft, the interlace probably terminates and the cross head is set off from the shaft by a continuation of the roll molding on its perimeter, just as it does in most other crosses of this type. For example, the Gosforth cross shows a clear termination of the ornament between the lower cross arm and the decorative program on the shaft even though this is not demarcated by a roll molding. In contrast, the Gosforth 3 fragment does have a roll molding separating the lower arm from

\(^{273}\) Parker, *The Ancient Crosses*, 74-76.

\(^{274}\) Parker did not provide any description or illustration to explain how these fragments would fit together.
the shaft. That neither of the other cross heads at Gosforth show a continual interlace from the boss down the shaft indicates that this was not the case with Gosforth 2 either.

If the decoration on the lower arm of Gosforth 2 terminates within the arm itself, then finding a shaft with matching decoration is unnecessary. This leaves open the possibility that the Muncaster shaft belongs to Gosforth 2. If the two fragments were once a single monument, they should have comparable measurements. The width of the broken top of the Muncaster shaft is 25.3 cm. This is close to the Gosforth fragment’s lower arm width of 24.9 cm at the point of the break. Additionally, they are the same thickness, 9 cm. Accounting for some missing material from where the two fragments meet, they fit well. When the entire monument is reconstituted, the result is a sculpture of good proportion that resembles other plank-type crosses in Cumbria from the tenth century. [FIG 3 and PLATE 42] In addition to the good fit, the decorative elements of the two fragments relate well. Both have the same unusual ring-plait found at Gosforth and on several cross slabs on the Isle of Man.\(^{275}\) While the ring-plait motif occurs at Cross Canonby and Dearham, it is the field type rather than a single chain. Gosforth is the only place outside the Isle of Man where the specific single chain type appears on stone sculpture.\(^{276}\)

\(^{275}\) Kermode and Wilson, *Manx Crosses*. Specifically, Michael 74* and 75, Ballaugh 77, Jurby 78, St. Johns 81*, Maughold 82, Andreas 83, Bradden 86, Maughold 91, Bride 92, Jurby 98, Michael 100, and Andreas 102 and 103. Those monuments with an asterisk are signed by the artist.

\(^{276}\) A median-incised ring chain decorates the silver-gilt hilt of a Viking Age sword was discovered in a grave in the Eden Valley Hesket-in-Forest, near Carlisle, Cumberland (The Tullie House Museum, Carlisle RF 389—420) as part of the Hesket Burial. Haakon Shetelig, *Viking antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland* (Oslo: H. Aschehong, 1940), 17. Other types of ring chain occur in the Tees valley and in northern Lancashire, but they are not an exact match to Gosforth. See Caroline Ann Richardson, *The Borre style in the British Isles and Ireland: a reassessment* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1993).
Gosforth 2 is heavily damaged and only one quarter of the nimbus from the cross head survives. Its fine detail and craftsmanship do not correspond to the relatively simple and bold style of the Muncaster shaft. Considering their decorative elements alone, the two fragments do not compare well. However, if the monument were painted, as was likely, then the relative plainness of the shaft as it appears now would have been different; the simple carving would have left room for more detailed painted decoration. Also, on such crosses as those at Dearham, the head is more finely detailed than the shaft. In terms of craftsmanship, the finer work on the cross head would have been easier to execute because laying out a large, regular design is more difficult (without modern drafting tools) than filling a smaller area with the same design. Another possibility is that a different artist carved the cross shaft. The stylistic differences between the two intact Gosforth hogbacks show that at least two sculptors worked there. The shallow, linear style of the "Warrior's Tomb" and the Muncaster shaft do compare favorably.

Within the scenario argued above, in which Gosforth 2 belongs to the Muncaster shaft, are two additional possibilities: that Gosforth 2 was originally at Muncaster and was at some point taken to Gosforth, or that the Muncaster shaft was originally at Gosforth and at some point taken to Muncaster. Muncaster Castle is an old foundation,
with the land having been granted to Alan de Penitone in 1208. The oldest sections of the building itself date to the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{277} The Church of St. Michael and All Angels on the grounds of Muncaster, to the northwest of the castle, is thought have an early foundation; the engraved brass monuments within the church’s nave that attest to the site’s antiquity (fourteenth century) were placed there by the first Lord Muncaster (d. 1813) in the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{278} No record of the shaft exists before Daniel and Samuel Lyson’s description and illustration in their \textit{Magna Britannia} of 1806.\textsuperscript{279} While this date is before the major renovation designed by Anthony Silvan in 1874,\textsuperscript{280} the manor and grounds had already been repaired, expanded and developed by Sir Joseph Pennington in the 1760s.\textsuperscript{281}

The lands and the people of the Parish of Gosforth fell under the Baronet of Muncaster. If the monument were originally on the lands of Muncaster, that any portion would have been taken away to Gosforth is highly unlikely. More likely, Lord Muncaster had the monument removed from Gosforth in the late eighteenth century when so much other work was being done to the Muncaster estate. By that time, the shaft’s cross head was already used for rubble for the north doorway fill. The addition of an ancient sculpture to Muncaster’s church would have given the foundation an air of antiquity and legitimized the political seat of Muncaster. The current absence of a suitable base at Gosforth for the cross is understandable because the similar cross at Dearham was not erected in a base but directly in the ground. Plank-type crosses are far more stable than

\textsuperscript{277} Roman remains of a small garrison are near Muncaster’s gate house.


\textsuperscript{279} Daniel Lysons and Samuel Lysons, \textit{Magna Britannia: being a concise topographical account of the several counties of Great Britain}, 6 vols. (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies ... 1806), 202. “...and that at Muncaster, four feet nine inches high, ornamented with guilloches…”


\textsuperscript{281} Parker provides a concise history of Muncaster from the Roman period through the late nineteenth century in \textit{The Gosforth District}, 156-172.
the tall, thin round-shaft type of the Gosforth (CASSS 1) cross or even Beckermet St. Bridget’s 1 and 2, nor do they require bases any more than do upright tombstones. Parker reported finding a now-lost base in the eastern stone wall of the Gosforth churchyard when it was rebuilt, but he never described or photographed it.\textsuperscript{282}

### 4.1.3 Gosforth 3: Repetition

The second fragmentary cross, Gosforth 3, nearly replicates the cross head of the Gosforth cross in both size and style and so should be seen as a contemporary of the still extant monument. [PLATE 12] Parker speculated that it was once part of a second, destroyed cross that also stood in the churchyard.\textsuperscript{283} He believed this because of the report by “Carbo” in Gentleman’s Magazine of 1799, the first publication describing the cross, that a second cross was approximately seven feet away from the Gosforth cross and was “cruelly cut down” to make a sundial.\textsuperscript{284}

Gosforth 3 was found in the parson’s garden to the east of the churchyard; the decoration on it is severely worn, indicating that it had been exposed to the elements for some time. It has an intact tenon with which the cross head was mounted in a separate shaft. Parker thought the cross may have been placed on the roof in a certain stone mortise, but at the same time he refutes this theory because the mortise is not deep enough for the tenon.\textsuperscript{285}

The Gosforth 3 fragment strongly suggests the existence of a second cross of similar form to the Gosforth cross, but the monument to which this fragment belonged was probably destroyed before the one reportedly dismantled in the eighteenth century to

\textsuperscript{282} Parker speculated that the “Resting Cross” head fragment, now housed at Whitehaven, originally fit the discovered socket. Cramp said of it, “Crosses of [its] type, with no edge mouldings and with short arms … are possibly post-Conquest, but may belong to a tradition which overlaps the Conquest. Parker, The Ancient Crosses at Gosforth, Cumberland, 69; Cramp, Corpus 2, 170.

\textsuperscript{283} Parker, The Ancient Crosses, 72.

\textsuperscript{284} Carbo, "Untitled [The Gosforth Cross]."

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
make a sundial. The original cross was destroyed on purpose or by accident, and the wheel head was appropriated for a new monument at a later date as suggested by the conversion of the upper portion of the shaft into a tenon. The Gosforth cross is monolithic and Gosforth 3 likely was as well. Based on the demonstrated ability of the Gosforth artist to carve the extant cross, there is no reason to assume he would have taken a different approach with a second cross.\textsuperscript{286} No intact tenth-century crosses are composite, but composite reconstructions of crosses – often from fragments from multiple monuments – are common after the seventeenth century when villages sought to display their antiquity.

The use of Gosforth 3 in a composite monument is almost certainly of the Norman Age or later. Composite crosses are not proven in tenth-century Cumbria, though earlier monuments, like the Ruthwell cross, may have been composite.\textsuperscript{287} While it is possible that any or all of the fragments scattered across the county are, in fact, composite pieces, there is no evidence for this on any of them except for Gosforth 3. While Gosforth is an exceptional site in many ways, in many others it conforms closely to other sites in Cumbria, and so there is little reason to suppose that the tenon construction of Gosforth 3 is original to the tenth century.

The report from “Carbo” about a second cross being cut down may be true, though his report was secondhand and he offers no description of the sculpture. The sundial pillar supposedly created from the second cross from which Gosforth 3 came still stands south of the cross, as was reported in 1799.\textsuperscript{288} The early literature assumes that the fabric of the sundial pillar was original to the tenth century. The current style is an octagonal shaft that measures 20 cm in diameter. [PLATE 43] While this cannot be the configuration of the tenth-century cross, it may have been the pillar on which the

\textsuperscript{286} No evidence exists that would clarify the manufacturing order of the two tall crosses.

\textsuperscript{287} Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2, 61.

\textsuperscript{288} Carbo says that a stone with a sword carved upon it laid between the two crosses. This stone was mostly likely a Norman tombstone, several of which remain in fragmentary condition in St. Mary’s. Carbo, "Untitled [The Gosforth Cross]."

Gosforth 3 fragment was mounted. Due to the addition of lead in the socket of the base of the sundial, it is impossible to see if the hole, which is rather too large for the current style, is still filled with the original “stump” or if the entirety of the previous monument and the new octagonal base has been refitted. Whatever the case, the style is set along the eastern side of the rounded rectangular mortise, not in the middle.²⁸⁹

If the base of the sundial is the original base for Gosforth 2, then the shape of the mortise indicates that the shaft was rectangular rather than cylindrical. The socket of the base of Gosforth 1 is clearly cylindrical and the shaft of the cross fits closely within it. The two crosses need not have matched perfectly in form, as evidenced by other “matched” crosses like Penrith and Beckermet in Cumbria and Sockburn and Brompton east of the Pennines do not match perfectly but only resemble one another. This second Gosforth cross may have had a more rectangular lower portion and may have been slightly larger, perhaps more akin to Sockburn 3 or Stanwick 2 [PLATES 102 and 112] than to its Gosforth counterpart, although the proportions of the two cross heads are very similar. However, if the sundial’s base dates to the same period as the Gosforth cross and was made by the same artist, he would have made that base fit as closely to the second monument as the base for the extant cross fits to it. Instead, the sundial base was probably made for the later composite sculpture with the reused Gosforth 3 cross head atop it.²⁹⁰ Another possibility is that the extant second base was not that which held Carbo’s second cross. The sundial base is far more rectilinear than the visible portion of the stepped base of the Gosforth cross, far taller, and more massive. It is also much less weathered. This base is unlikely to date to the time of the Gosforth sculptures and so any evidence derived from it toward understanding the tenth-century should be considered cautiously.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Parker noted this. Parker, "Ancient cross at Gosforth, Cumberland," 74.
²⁹⁰ The authors of the CASSS did not believe the sundial base to be ancient because they omitted it from the survey—even from the “Stones of questionable date” section.
²⁹¹ The base is not listed in the Corpus in the catalog of pre-Conquest sculpture. Interestingly, it is also not listed in any appendix of post-Conquest stones or stones of questionable date. The editors of the Corpus must have considered it modern and this looks very much to be the case.
Jefferson reported in 1842 that, “the present rector … has in his possession fragments of one or two other crosses, supposed to have been found in different parts of the church-yard. They appear by their workmanship to have been erected at least at as early a period as before the Conquest; and are probably portions of the cross which was destroyed.” Because the Fishing Stone was not found until 1886, these additional fragments are probably from Gosforth 3, though Jefferson unfortunately provides no description or illustration for these them.

Today, the Gosforth cross stands alone in its churchyard, but in the tenth-century, it would have been one of two tall crosses, accompanied by a bold, intricately carved third cross. These three crosses shared design and decorative elements creating a visual continuity across the group. Interest in the Gosforth cross has generated the most scholarship among the sculptural fragments at Gosforth, but this has been to the detriment of understanding the site as a whole. This re-evaluation of the crosses, considering them as much as possible as complete monuments, alters the picture of art production and patronage during the tenth century in western Cumbria. While these discoveries are seemingly minor, so little is known of the period that the greater accuracy mustered from the least evidence has substantial weight. The three large crosses at Gosforth attest to a wealthy community that imitated regional communities in their types and numbers of sculptures. This indicates regional awareness and interaction as well as the extroverted expression of identity. This becomes more acute with the added consideration of the hogbacks.

4.2 The Hogbacks and “Fishing Stone”

4.2.1 The Hogbacks

The Warrior’s Tomb and the Saint’s Tomb are examples of hogbacks, a type of sculpture endemic to pre-Conquest England. These sculptures derive their name from a

humped profile that resembles a hog. Hogbacks have a broad morphology. In general, they are long, narrow sculptures that taper to a ridge. The upper portion of the broad sides is often tessellated like roof shingles with different patterning types. Many hogbacks in northeastern England have endbeasts: large, plastic bears that grasp with two or four paws the hogback at the narrow ends. Not all hogbacks have endbeasts and some only possess a vestigial head. The profiles of the monuments also vary, but they all fall within human scale, ranging between four and six feet long. For this reason, scholars have argued they served as grave markers, meant to be placed over the body, possibly in conjunction with a cross at one or both ends. Due to their house-like appearance, Lang has linked them to the practice of erecting houses for the dead from non-perishable materials. Aside from the shingle-like patterning on the tops of the hogbacks, they do not otherwise resemble houses. There is no carved indication of doors or windows, and many of them are furnished with the gripping end beasts.

The function of hogbacks is not known because none of them remain in situ. While they are presumed to be associated with graves, none has been found beneath a hogback. Typically, as in the case of the Gosforth hogbacks, they are discovered during architectural reconstruction as part of a fill for a wall or foundation. At other times, the hogback was reused as a convenient lintel for a doorway. Whatever their original function, it was quickly lost or destroyed in post-Conquest England when they were reused simply for their material value.

Both of the Gosforth hogbacks were discovered when the north wall of St. Mary’s was demolished during the expansion of the nave in the late nineteenth century. Parker recorded and published their discoveries shortly after. The hogbacks were then installed in their current location in the west end of the north extension to the nave in a base carved with a description of their discovery. The Saint’s Tomb is north of the

293 Cramp, CASSS 2, xxi.
294 Lang, "The Hogback," 91.
295 Parker, The Ancient Crosses.
Warrior's Tomb and they are separated by a mere 15 cm, making photographing them difficult.

### 4.2.1.1 The Warrior's Tomb hogback

Parker discovered the Warrior’s Tomb in the north foundations of the church during the renovation and expansion of St. Mary’s in 1896. [PLATES 13-15] When workmen demolished the north wall of the church, they used explosives and percussive demolition to reduce the wall. According to Parker, the wall was difficult to dismantle due to its thickness and a large amount of mortar between the stones.\(^\text{296}\) The Warrior’s Tomb was found in two fragments. Parker believed it was broken during the construction work, having been previously placed in the wall complete.\(^\text{297}\) The monument has since been repaired with minor restoration along the break.

The morphology of the Warrior’s Tomb is within the normal parameters for Cumbrian hogbacks.\(^\text{298}\) It is 168 cm long, 27 cm wide (average), and 65 cm high (average). The upper half is arched and completely tessellated with regular trapezoidal shingles, their lower points varying between 1 cm and 3.5 cm. The lower halves of the broad sides are carved with distinct scenes, the iconography of which will be discussed in chapter four. The Warrior’s Tomb possesses no obvious end-beasts, but evidence of small vestigial beasts may have been lost to damage. This hogback’s name derives from the image of a warrior on the west gable end as well as from a narrative scene of two facing armed groups on the south broad face.

Compared to all known hogbacks, the Warrior’s Tomb is long and narrow, but its proportions are not so irregular as to pose any problem in terms of quarrying the material. The pronounced grain of the stone allows for it to even be a product of natural effacing

\(^{296}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{297}\) Ibid.

\(^{298}\) Bailey notes that Cumbrian hogbacks tend to be taller and thinner than other hogbacks. Cramp, CASSS 2, 107.
off a sandstone bed. The orientation of the grain indicates that it was not carved from the same block material remaining from the production of the Gosforth cross. The grain of the rock runs parallel to the south rooftop, evidence for an unintuitive production technique. One might presume that to make a hogback, one would quarry a stone of near proportion to the desired size, set it upright on a long side, and then proceed to carve both sides down equally. Unless the stone block were cut irregularly obliquely from its bed, the southerly list of the grain indicates that the hogback was carved with the (current) south face flat down while the (current) north side was carved into shape. The south side is somewhat flatter, suggesting that this side was less carved down from the quarried block, while the south side has a greater convexity. If this is the case, then the proportions of the original block are no less than 170 cm by 70 cm by 45 cm. The loss of mass due to this means of production could explain the thinner proportions of this hogback.

The broad faces of the Warrior’s Tomb are in good condition despite some obvious weathering; the original placement of the hogback certainly exposed it to the elements. The south side shows the most damage, especially to the right rooftop and gable end and to the lower left corner. The broken section of the upper right corner shows less erosion, indicating that it was placed into the foundations of the church shortly after incurring the damage, which is not so fresh as to be a result of its excavation in the nineteenth century. The shearing is along the sedimentation grain and this process is especially evident on the west end and probably occurred as a result of wicking moisture up from the ground, which weakened the stone. A few cycles of freezing and thawing would have forced the stone apart at these sedimentation gaps. Failure occurred most readily at the gable because there was not enough material remaining at this thin section of the monument to resist the pressures of water and ice. This damage was probably not intentional, though it could have been exacerbated by the stone’s later removal and installation into the church foundations. Parker almost certainly would have recovered any additional pieces found with the monument when it was discovered. Given the environmental damage and the likelihood that the hogback was covered with moss and lichens, it is no wonder that its fate was to be used as building material. Its status as a monument may not have been apparent to later inhabitants at Gosforth.
4.2.1.2 The Saint’s Tomb

The hogback called the Saint’s Tomb was discovered by Parker in the north foundations in the same manner as the Warrior’s Tomb. The name derives from the crudely executed crucifixes on the gable ends. [PLATE 16-18] The morphology of the Saint’s Tomb is quite unusual within the body of known hogbacks. It is taller and narrower than any other Cumbrian hogback, measuring 157 cm by 25 cm (average thickness) by 75 cm (average height). Though it is a hogback, the profile of the Saint’s Tomb is much more house-like and less hog-like than its companion, Gosforth 4. It is classified as a “shrine-type hogback” or “k type” in the Corpus.299 Local lore relates that abrasion marks on the ridge of the Saint’s Tomb are places where the warriors of the past once sharpened their swords.300

Comparable shrine type hogbacks are rare. The Saint’s Tomb is the only shrine-type hogback among the Cumbrian monuments. Most of the shrine-type hogbacks occur at Lythe in North Yorkshire.301 A comparison of the Saint’s Tomb to the Yorkshire hogbacks shows that even though they are typed together they bear little resemblance to each other, being quite different in their proportions. The Saint’s Tomb is particularly unusual because it possesses a unique combination of features that are all present in Cumbria, save for the extended tongues on the end-beasts, but nowhere else do they all exist in one monument.302

The Saint’s Tomb does not show the grain abnormalities of the Warrior’s Tomb. Grain on the east gable end runs vertically and only due to a turn in the stone does it list on the west gable end. The verticality of the east gable grain indicates that the hogback

299 Ibid., xiv-xxi.
300 This is a popular piece of local lore. The author was told this on a number of occasions and it is reported on many webpages as well.
301 Lang, CASSS 6, 153-67.
302 Cramp, CASSS 2, 107.
was probably carved upright from a blank obtained from the quarry, stone of a lesser quality than that used for the Gosforth cross.

The broad sides and roof of the Saint’s Tomb are quite straight, and the entire monument is well executed, save for the gable ends. These are the most damaged. Instead of the slightly convex profile of the rest of the monument, the gable ends are concave, the east end more greatly than the west end. Both ends have a pronounced concavity indicating that they were purposefully re-carved prior to its deposition in the foundations of St. Mary’s. Both have “crossless crucifixes” with the arms of Christ spanning the width of the stone in line with the eaves of the roof on either side. On the east end, the crucifix is surmounted by knotwork penetrating into the gable. The knotwork forms a complex triquetra, though the lower portion of the knot is too damaged to discern if the interlaced cables continue into another form. The surface of the triquetra is on the same level as the roll molding of the gable, indicating that it was executed at the same time as the broad sides. Below this the surface of the stone is much rougher, quite unlike the finished surfaces on the broad sides. A crucifix has been chipped into the stone but it lacks the depth and finish one would expect of the work of the Gosforth artist. The rough quality of the stone and poor execution of the iconography suggest that the gabled ends of the Saint’s Tomb were reworked from the original design.

4.2.1.3 Gosforth 7

The Gosforth 7 fragment is a corner from a rectilinear sculpture now installed in the corner of a locked storage room on the same return wall as the Fishing Stone, behind a wooden partition that encloses the arch at the end of the north aisle. It is made of the same red, St. Bees-type sandstone typical of the other tenth-century Gosforth sculptures. In what remains of it, the condition of the carving is good, but it is unfortunately extremely fragmentary. The carving is deep, fleshy and confident and compares favorably to the hand of the same artist who carved the Gosforth cross in the churchyard.

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303 Miller, "A Second "Saint's Tomb" at Gosforth, Cumbria."
the Saint’s Tomb hogback, the Fishing Stone plaque and the fragmentary cross heads. Ornamenting the 90° edge is a simple roll molding similar to that on the churchyard cross and to the Saint’s Tomb, the larger of the two Gosforth hogbacks. The two visible sides each preserve fragmentary iconography. The left face shows the counterclockwise-curved tail and braided lower body of a serpentine beast, a motif identical to the curly-tailed creatures on the churchyard cross and the Saint’s Tomb. The right face is carved with a convoluted, broad interlace that appears to be an animal form with indications of a circular incised eye and a long, pointed ear, but the composition is too fragmentary to say definitively. The rest of the fragment is broken away and these rough edges are hidden in the wall into which it was installed and have not been recorded.

Parker first recorded this fragment as “the latest fragment,” which had been recently unearthed “close to the churchyard,” speculated about its original form, and provided his own line drawing, although he did not align the faces properly with respect to each other. He supposed that it was “evidently a portion of a slender cross like the existing one.” Richard Bailey also proposed that the fragment “may be part of the destroyed shaft which still existed in the churchyard in the late eighteenth century,” apocryphally once in the cross base a few feet south of the cross and now housing the remains of a sundial column. The fragment’s scale initially appears close to that of the Gosforth cross, but this is not the case. Only one squared edge remains, so the original minimum proportions of the fragment must be extrapolated to include roll moldings at both sides; with this consideration it was not smaller than 16 cm by 26 cm. The upper portion of the Gosforth cross is 207 cm and tapers from 25 cm by 21 cm at the bottom to 16 cm by 14 cm just under the cross head.

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304 Cramp, CASSS 2.
305 Parker, The Ancient Crosses, 80.
306 Ibid., 81.
307 Cramp, CASSS 2, 109.
While the fragment compares poorly to the churchyard cross, another possibility is that it might be a portion of the now missing shaft of the larger of the two fragmentary cross heads, Gosforth 2. The horizontal molding below the curled tail on the left face undermines this argument however. This molding is rather wide (approximately five cm) and disrupts the verticality of the presumed shaft. The fragment’s right face has no indication of paneling and whatever the interlaced composition was, it continued past the terminus of the panel on the left face. If the fragment did belong to a plank cross, the curly-tailed creature would have been on a narrow side contained within a panel. None of the known non-barred plank crosses in Cumbria show any evidence of panels on their narrow sides. If Gosforth 7 belonged to Gosforth 2, the resulting monument would be unique, which is possible considering the inventiveness of the Gosforth artist, but this conclusion renders any further speculation impossible.

A paneled tenth-century cross shaft of similar proportions to Gosforth 7 survives at Kirklevington, North Yorkshire, although the molding differentiating the panels is narrow. Bailey observed a partial arch below the curled tail and compared this seemingly arched molding to the semi-swags at Sandbach. My own inspection of the fragment revealed that the apparent arch is actually the result of damage and that the original design continued in a straight, flat molding. The lack of satisfying comparable material from extant English crosses makes Gosforth 7 unlikely to have belonged to a cross monument.

Although Gosforth 7 measures only 23 cm by 20 cm by 11 cm, fortune has preserved in it enough diagnostic information to recognize a hitherto unknown monument of Insular sculpture. Long argued to be a portion of a cross shaft, the small fragment is, rather, the remains of a second large hogback similar in overall design to the extant

308 Ibid., 104.
309 Barred crosses survive at Bromfield and Rockcliffe, Cumbria.
310 Lang, CASSS 6, 142-43.
311 Cramp, CASSS 2, 109.
Saint’s Tomb, and with this realization, our impression of tenth-century Gosforth changes significantly. If we extrapolate another border to the left of the curly-tailed creature on the left side of Gosforth 7 to center the motif within the panel, then the resulting width is 16 cm. This is the width of the right roof panels of the Saint’s Tomb, suggesting that Gosforth 7 is a fragment from this portion of a similar monument. [PLATE 44] The curled tails are exactly the same size and in the same position. The wide border below the curled tail is the lower part of the hogback ‘roof’ overhanging the vertical illustrative panel below. The right face is a portion of the gabled end of the hogback, possibly showing a serpentine creature in a larger composition.

While the overall iconographic scheme of the Gosforth 7 hogback cannot be recreated, the fragment sheds light on the original iconography of the Saint’s Tomb, which was altered when a later artist added a crucifixion to each end of the hogback. These crucifixions are poorly executed when compared to the depth and detail of carving on the hogback’s broad sides. Previous scholars have assumed that these scenes are original to the monument and thus prove, along with a similar scene on the churchyard cross, that the community at Gosforth was Christian. 312 On the east end, a deeply carved triquetra knot fills the triangular field of the gable and surmounts the crucifixion. The lower portion of the knot is too damaged to discern whether the interlaced cables continued into another interlace form or whether the motif was separate from whatever was originally below. The surface of the triquetra is on the same level as the remaining roll molding of the gable, indicating that it was executed at the same time and by the same hand as that which carved the broad sides, i.e., the same hand that carved most of the Gosforth monuments. Below the triquetra, the surface of the stone is much rougher, quite unlike the skillfully finished surfaces on the broad sides. 313 A crucifixion has been chipped into the stone but it lacks the depth and finish one would expect of the work of the Gosforth artist. Unfortunately, the upper gable is missing from the west side, which

313 This highly finished workmanship is also demonstrated by the same artist on the Gosforth cross.
makes comparison to the east end’s remaining triquetra and extant roll molding impossible.

The fragmentary iconography on Gosforth 7 and the expected deep carving and squared angles of the surviving upper portion of the upper east gable of the Saint’s Tomb indicate that the gabled ends of the Saint’s Tomb were altered from the monument’s original design. The fragmentary animal interlace framed by a roll molding on the right face of Gosforth 7 is flat and well executed with no convexity. The sides of the fragment are 90° with respect to each other, something the Gosforth artist was more than capable of carving considering the precise, regular angles of the churchyard cross. The gabled ends of the Saint’s Tomb lack this level of execution. The edges of both gabled ends are raw and unfinished and the angle at which the broad sides and gable ends meet is irregular and uneven. This poor craftsmanship is not in keeping with the demonstrated abilities and design sensibilities of the Gosforth artist. The two crucifixions were considered to be original due to their resemblance to the same iconography on the lower east face of the Gosforth cross, but this similarity could be explained by a later carver simply copying locally available iconography when the hogback was altered.

4.2.2 The “Fishing Stone”

Gosforth 6 is an unusual sculpture known as the “Fishing Stone” due to its iconography. It is a small, flat panel measuring 70 cm by 33 cm by approximately 14 cm.\footnote{Parker, The Ancient Crosses, 75. Parker gives this depth measurement as 5.5 inches. The current position of the stone makes it impossible to confirm this measurement.} [PLATE 19] The stone is decorated on one broad face. Parker discovered the stone on March 16, 1882 face down to the northeast of the sundial socket. Parker also discovered a makeshift foundation for the stone constructed from slates and mortar. He thought the stone was probably installed as a step for the sundial in 1789.\footnote{Ibid.}

The stone is currently installed in the north return of the reinforcing pier at the east end of the north isle of the church. A band of a floral frieze fragment is positioned
above the stone, but the two are not contemporary. The original function of the Fishing Stone is unknown, but scholars have offered two theories. The first is that the Fishing Stone is the remaining fragment from a smaller, plank-type cross, perhaps the shaft for Gosforth 2. This is unlikely because it is too thin; and, if it were simply a shaft fragment that was reused as a step, the ornament could have worn off the exposed side but the material would not have been reduced so greatly. If the fragment once belonged to a cross shaft, someone re-carved it into a thin panel, purposefully preserving the narrative scene.

Another proposal is that the stone was once part of a horizontal frieze. The possible placement or function of this proposed frieze is unknown because no contemporary architecture from tenth-century Gosforth survives. Such a frieze may have run along the roofline on the interior of the longhouse; such friezes have been described in Old Norse skaldic poetry. While this proposal accounts for the shape of the Fishing Stone, such friezes were almost certainly either on wood or fabric. Installing stone overhead would have been difficult and dangerous, especially because these panels would have been suspended over sleeping berths. The Fishing Stone also shows evidence of weathering, indicating that it was installed outdoors, and heavier erosion on its right side than its left, though this may have been caused by whatever secondary functions the stone served.

One possible explanation accepts the dimensions of the Fishing Stone as original and accounts for its vertical orientation. The Fishing Stone may have functioned as part of a series of external, vertical architectural panels like those around the north portal of the Urnes stave church. [PLATE 45] The current church dates to 1050, but the carved panels were reused from a previous building. It is possible that the proposed vertical panels at Gosforth were carved from stone instead of wood due to the abundance of local

316 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture.*


stone. This might also explain the uneven wear across the face of the stone, if it were installed next to a doorway where it would have been grasped by hands going through the door. Whatever the structure may have been at Gosforth, it was removed and possibly rebuilt in the twelfth century, the date of the oldest foundations of St. Mary’s church. The stone perhaps survived because it had fallen from the façade face down and was obscured or ignored during subsequent centuries until it was installed as a step for the sundial in the late eighteenth century. Of these narrative panels, only the story of Thor fishing for the Midgard Serpent survived, but the others would have shown other scenes from important moments in Norse mythology.

4.3 Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates how understanding the materiality of the monuments and fragments is a vital basis for further arguments in this dissertation. Its contribution to the study of Gosforth is its detailed examination of the Gosforth cross’s unusual grain orientation, which connects the Gosforth artist to Yorkshire, its connection of a Gosforth cross head to the cross shaft at nearby Muncaster, and the identification of a small, little-studied fragment as a hogback. Together, these findings show that a talented and inventive sculptor worked at Gosforth after a period of work and training in communities along the River Tees, the northern border of modern Yorkshire. The community had access to high quality stone and it had the means to commission at least six free standing monuments and at least one architectural revetment.

This revised group of surviving monuments now consists of two tall, thin crosses, one shorter plank style cross, two large shrine-type hogbacks, a third, dissimilar hogback, and vertical stone panels carved with cultural iconography decorating the exterior of a nearby longhouse and/or “temple.” Add to this the probable bright paint that would have covered the sculptures and the Gosforth landscape becomes a brilliant one.

The number of monuments and their proportions tell of a prosperous, inventive, and resourceful community. The quantity and quality of these sculptures show that they spared no expense on either the acquisition of material or on the talent needed to shape it into the extreme forms seen at Gosforth. This study of the monument’s materiality has
corrected previous assessments of the site in terms of the numbers and types of monuments there and provides a more accurate basis for further study. It also indicates that the primary artistic hand at Gosforth was a prolific artist whose work spanned the north of England. The isolation of a single early medieval artist with so a large body of work provides a rare opportunity to better interpret the period’s thinly understood artistic practice, patronage and production.
The six Gosforth sculptures form the largest known collection of output from a single sculptor in tenth-century England. The size and quality of the group rivals the surviving oeuvre of any other known early medieval artist. Despite the identification of the Gosforth “master” by James Lang and Richard Bailey decades ago, no further research has been published on one of the most prolific artists of his time.\footnote{Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures."} This chapter fills this gap in the research, tracing the origins of the Gosforth artist to Yorkshire, an origin already suggested by the possible use of templates and an unusual construction method. The Gosforth artist’s scattered production in Yorkshire suggests a period of itinerant commissions while his large corpus at Gosforth suggests residency. This chapter first reviews the scholarship on the Gosforth artist and defines his style, beginning with the churchyard cross, his most accomplished and important work.\footnote{Bailey, \textit{Viking Age Sculpture}.} Bailey’s use of the term “master” is somewhat problematic because it implies that there existed a governing body for the arts in tenth-century England. Granted, the term “master” can be more broadly used to describe a great artist, but this also suggests aesthetic hierarchy. Rather, Bailey’s “Gosforth master” will be called here the “Gosforth artist,” and the secondary Gosforth sculptor of the Warrior’s Tomb hogback will be referred to as the “Warrior Tomb artist.” The subsequent section will compare his sculptures to regional monuments to demonstrate that the Gosforth artist worked elsewhere prior to his time at Gosforth. Certain fragments in northern Yorkshire have a stylistic affinity to the works of the Gosforth artist and can be attributed to an early phase of his career. These monuments help create a history for the artist, addressing questions about his mysterious origins. After having traced these stylistic connections, the final section will refine the date of the Gosforth sculptures based on historical events in Yorkshire and correlated to the average life expectancy in tenth-century northern England as well as archaeological evidence.
collected at Gosforth. This new date can help us to refine the dates of other regional monuments and to construct a more accurate timeline of tenth-century sculpture in northern England.

5.1 The Making of the Gosforth Artist and his Figural Style

Basic connoisseurship, the practice of defining individual hands in a collection of artifacts, is considered by some to be at best old-fashioned and at worst nationalistic, ethnocentric, and irrelevant. Nonetheless, Schapiro was correct when he said, “To the historian of art, style is an essential object of investigation. […] It is, besides, a common ground against which innovations and the individuality of particular works may be measured.” In this sense, style is not connoisseurship, the latter being associated with the intangible air of taste or comparative quality. Style, in Schapiro’s estimation is, “like the nonaesthetic features of an artifact,” self-evident and able to be formally defined. Style is the visual means by which art can be grouped and compared; this is most useful for grouping or defining large numbers of artifacts.


323 Ibid.

This practice is not simply a pedantic one. Modern researchers use style in the pursuit of broader questions rather than limiting the methodology to discern individual hands within an assortment of artifacts. At Gosforth, the recognition of a single artist for most of the sculptures allows us to discuss the process of their manufacture. Additionally, the artist’s background informs the sculptures’ function and reception. The basic dearth of evidence for patronage or reception limits what can firmly be said about the art. One reason Gosforth, despite its expert engineering and elaborate iconography, is marginalized within the broad discourse of medieval art history is that it offers no evidence for the presence of the usual sources of medieval patronage or reception: the Court and the Church. Bailey conjectured that the complex and unusual iconographic program indicated that the patron was a “man of unusual theological thought.” This was an attempt to explain the unique iconographic elements of Norse gods combined with what appears to be Christian symbolism in the form of the Crucifixion, but without any purchase into the sort of patron Gosforth had, that individual or group merges into the work itself. At any rate, with so much of the art’s context absent, what traces remain of the artist are all the more important in rebuilding what can be said concerning more complex questions.

Despite recent disinterest in consideration of style, a number of benefits result from such a study at Gosforth. Free standing sculpture may have been all the rage in tenth-century northern England, but it was relatively a short-lived practice, perhaps as little as thirty years. If this is true, then the number of artists operating in the North may have been quite limited; their activity at different sites may inform patterns of patronage or the function of the sculptures.


325 Cramp, CASSS 2, 33.
326 Lang, CASSS 6, 47.
On the basis of style, Richard Bailey and James Lang first suggested that six of the seven sculptures and sculptural fragments at Gosforth were stylistically similar enough to suggest that one artist crafted them.\[327\] [PLATES 1-12 and 13-20] The dissimilar style of the Warrior’s Tomb, they argued, indicated that it was carved by another hand.\[328\] [PLATES 13-15] Bailey’s chapter in the CASSS, “Schools of Viking-period Sculpture,” begins with three paragraphs about the “Gosforth Master,” and given that six of Cumbria’s forty major tenth-century sculptures, fifteen percent of the total, are attributed to one artist, the Gosforth artist’s primacy is deserved.\[329\] He observed that the Gosforth artist’s pieces “stand apart from the rest of the work on the peninsula in the high quality of their carving and in the originality of their iconographic programmes.”\[330\] Bailey was unable to find the distinctive Gosforth hand elsewhere and stated that, “Work in this distinct style and of such quality does not appear elsewhere in the north-west, and so we must presumably see this sculptor as working solely to the commission of the patron at Gosforth.”\[331\] He restricted this statement to Cumbria and did not speculate further on a genesis for the Gosforth artist.

The quality of the Gosforth sculptures demands attributing them to a trained artist. The careful engineering of the churchyard cross, demonstrated in the previous chapter, was not the product of a dilettante. The Gosforth artist had both material experience with stone and a broad visual repertoire that allowed him to design a sculpture that was unique but still engaged with contemporary sculptural trends. Despite the many questions that cannot be answered about tenth-century Gosforth, the large sculptural collection does provide some rare evidence for artistic production in the region. Asking who carved the Gosforth sculpture verifies Rosemary Cramp’s claim that there were both itinerant and

\[327\] Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures," 290-93.

\[328\] This hand may have been responsible for the Muncaster cross shaft.

\[329\] Cramp, CASSS 2, 33.

\[330\] Ibid.

\[331\] Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 255.
resident carvers in the early tenth century.\footnote{Cramp, "Sockburn before the Normans," 28.} Because so little is known about early medieval artistic production, the answer also provides an important contribution to understanding how so many sculptures were made in northern tenth-century England in so short a time and why they were made.

The early medieval artist is elusive. Compounding the dearth of textual accounts attesting to artistic production is the anonymity of the pieces themselves. Few surviving works were signed; most that were are manuscripts and late memorial sculptures. No artists’ biographies exist to illuminate the realm of the craftsman, for that is how the medieval artist is often considered—a craftsman.\footnote{See Anthony Cutler, "The Right Hand's Cunning: Craftsmanship and the Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," \textit{Speculum} 72, no. 4 (1997): 971-94. Cutler does not include Insular production of any sort, but his discussion of a sculptor’s studio at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor is an interesting glimpse into the late antique art market. For more on Aphrodisias, see Peter Rockwell, "Unfinished Sanctuary Associated with a Sculptor's Studio," in \textit{Aphrodisias Papers}, ed. R. R. R. Smith and Kenan T. Erim (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 127-43: 127-43.} When considering the entirety of the Middle Ages, more is known about artistic production, although the extent of specific knowledge varies depending on the medium.\footnote{For instance, far more is known about monastic manuscript production, both broadly and specifically, than early Scandinavian shipbuilding, both in the practice and the artisans. This is, in part, that more examples remain, but also that manuscript production was done by those who, literally, wrote history and therefore left more information about themselves. Precious little is known about individual early medieval sculptors. For a discussion of an early illuminator who may have practiced as a sculptor, see Elizabeth C. Parker, "Master Hugo as Sculptor: A source for the Style of the Bury Bible," \textit{Gesta} 20, no. 1 (1981): 99-109, 99-109. For general surveys of the medieval artist, see Andrew Martindale, \textit{The Rise of the Artist in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972). Martindale included next to nothing on artistic production before the twelfth century. See also Janetta Rebold Benton, \textit{Materials, Methods, and Masterpieces of Medieval Art} (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009). Benton discussed a broader temporal range of artist production, but gave short shrift to stone carving. Indeed, she said on p. 141, “With few exceptions, free-standing stone figures in the round were not carved and stone relief was usually restricted to carvings on sarcophagi.” Her subsequent examples of stone sculpture focused mostly on Gothic production. How unfortunate that early Insular sculpture did not make the cut for her otherwise inclusive survey text.} The few names that survive, such as those listed in the colophon of the Lindisfarne Gospels, tantalize the modern mind by offering a glimpse of the personal narratives behind the production of works of such high craftsmanship that later people considered them to be divinely wrought.\footnote{Brown, \textit{The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe}.}
When limited to pre-Conquest Insular sculpture, the evidence for the early medieval artist is thin. Only three of the thousands of pre-Norman sculptures and fragments in England have any record of the carver’s name. In the Isle of Man, the Viking-period carving is more often inscribed with dedications and the names of patrons, but even among this rich textual record, the inclusion of the carver’s name is rare. The name of one Manx carver survives: Gaut Bjarnarson signed his name to what is believed to be some of the earliest of the island’s Viking-period sculptures: Andreas 99 (73) [PLATE 46], where he carved “Gaut made (this), son of Björn from Kolli,” and Michael 102 (74) [PLATE 47], also known as “Gaut’s Cross,” where he carved his name and added, “and all in Man,” suggesting he was responsible for all the carved cross-slabs on the island to that point. While this assertion may be hyperbole on the part of Gaut, if he were the originator of the upright, carved cross-slab form on the Isle of Man, then he may have been responsible for the earliest of Manx Viking-period sculptures and, at the time, have been responsible for all of them. His distinctive style has enabled scholars to attribute such additional unsigned stones as Jurby 103 (78) to Gaut’s hand, all dated roughly to the mid- to late-tenth century, underscoring his productivity. [PLATE 48]

Gaut’s body of work makes the argument for a single Gosforth artist more plausible. The recognition of one hand across a large number of monuments at one location is extraordinary, but less so in light of the local patterns of Viking-age sculptural production on Man, an island visible from and with strong stylistic connections to Gosforth. The changes in style between towns and regions provide answers to questions of training, production, exchange and the movement of artists between locations.

336 Kirkheaton 1, YW is signed Eoh worohte (CASSS 7, 189-190), Urswick-on-Furness, Cumbria 1 is signed Lyl pis w(rohtæ) (CASSS 2, 148-150), Alnmouth, Northumbria is signed Myredah made me (CASSS 1, 161-162). For a brief discussion of these inscriptions, see D.N. Parsons, “The Inscriptions,” in CASSS 7, 79-84, and Bailey, England’s Earliest Sculptors.

337 “Tentatively identified as the island of Coll in the Hebrides.” A. M. Cubbon, The Art of the Manx Crosses (Douglas: Manx Museum and National Trust, 1983; reprint, 1996). For an early discussion of Gaut, see Kermode and Wilson, Manx Crosses. Gaut may not have carved the runes, but the two monuments bearing his name have many stylistic similarities. For a discussion of this see, David M. Wilson, The Vikings in the Isle of Man (Langelandsgade: Aarhus University Press, 2008).
The Gosforth sculptures attributed to the Gosforth artist exhibit certain unique hallmarks that combine to describe his hand. His figural style is for stocky bodies with thin arms and legs. Men wear tunics with pointed hems, and women wear long, trailing dresses. Frontal heads are shaped like inverted teardrops; heads shown in profile are rounded with females having a long, braided pigtails.\(^{338}\) Heavy erosion precludes any statement about facial details for either frontal or profile views, although larger, frontal figures still retain deeply drilled eyes. The figures interact with and overlap the framing devices around them, including structural elements of the monument itself like the roll molding decorating the outer edges of the cross’s upper shaft.

The Gosforth artist’s treatment of animals and monsters shows similar patterns. On the churchyard cross, he depicted three types of animals: hoofed quadrupeds (four horses and one deer), wolves (heads only), and one rodent (the squirrel of the north face).\(^{339}\) [PLATE 49] The hoofed animals are all made in the same manner: they face right with their legs positioned like an “M” with small, triangular heads. The artist differentiates between horses and the deer by giving the deer a short tail and a rack of antlers. The regular treatment and size of the five hoofed animals suggests a template may have been used for their general design.\(^{340}\) The lupine heads that transform fields of interlace into fantastic animals are also carved similarly to one another. They are all shown in profile with open, fanged jaws and circular, incised eyes. Their small, drilled ears sit at the back of the skull. The artist deviates from this standard slightly in cases where the wolves interact with figures, with the basic form remaining consistent.

The cross’s decorative elements are also treated similarly. The Gosforth artist preferred the iconic, Borre-style ring chain or a four-plait braid for interlace fields, many of which function as bodies for wolfish monsters. [PLATE 50] He used median incision

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\(^{338}\) The two clearly female figures are both shown in profile, so a comparison for frontal treatment is not available.  
\(^{339}\) For a detailed argument about the identification of these animals, see chapter four.  
\(^{340}\) Evidence for this from Yorkshire sculptures in Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture.*
to elaborate interlaced plaits and a generally “fleshy” style of wide, close, softly modeled plaits with which he builds his interlace. He also carved superficial decoration in relatively high relief though he does not severely undercut the knotwork or figures. His dense compositional style with several distinct elements stands out from the general style of contemporary work of large, isolated figures and less complex interlace. He was an artist with an eye for detail including small spearheads, braids, belts and fangs. More detail has certainly been lost to erosion.

Lang and Bailey first proposed a single artist for all the Gosforth sculptures except the Warrior’s Tomb and coined the title, the “Gosforth master.” They challenged, albeit somewhat indirectly, the artificial chronological simplicity of labeling a work “Jellinge” or “Urnes” style, especially for Insular works. Bailey later expounded on the Gosforth artist in a discussion of patron and sculptor, “In the Cumbrian village there are so many links in style and technique, in ornament and figural themes, between the large cross, the ‘Fishing Stone,’ the ‘Saint’s Tomb’ and one of the cross-heads that they must all be attributed to the hand of the same sculptor.” A few years later, he reaffirmed the “Gosforth master” in the second volume of the CASSS in a review of the prominent styles of Cumbrian sculpture. Here, he characterized the Gosforth artist by “fleshy” interlace, figures with teardrop-shaped heads set low between the shoulders.

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341 See a more typical example of tenth-century interlace see Aspatria 1 [PLATE 52]
342 Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures."
343 Scandinavian art is traditionally divided into three styles: Jellinge, Mannon, and Urnes, with some sub-groups such as Borre. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art*; David M. Wilson, "The Dating of Viking Art in England," *British Archaeological Reports* 49 (1978): 135-44; David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, Revised ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999). Jellinge style is characterized by incised details and interlaced animal forms with elongated horns, legs, and snouts. Urnes style is defined by the style of wood carving preserved from an earlier structure now incorporated into the twelfth-century stave church at Urnes, Norway, which has the elongated, interlaced animal forms similar to the Jellinge style, but the quality of the line vacillates between thick and extremely thin or spindly. In scholarship, Jellinge artifacts pre-date Urnes artifacts, but the Gosforth monuments, as Lang and Bailey demonstrated, challenge this simple chronology. I tend to avoid the traditional Viking style terminology here. While it may apply better to Scandinavian works, it is less accurate for Insular art.
344 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*. 
and the tall, narrow proportions for the overall monument forms.\textsuperscript{345} Bailey, consistent with his earlier publications, attributed all of the Gosforth sculptures to the hand of the Gosforth artist except for the Warrior’s Tomb, which was stated to be the work of another artist who “expresses a similar interest in Scandinavian mythology, but [the Warrior Tomb’s] incised style of carving and its presentation of the human figure sharply differentiate it from the other material at this site.”\textsuperscript{346}

Lang and Bailey made a significant contribution when they identified a single hand responsible for the majority of the Gosforth sculptures, but the fragmentary state of tenth-century sculpture did not allow them to connect the artist’s sculptures at Gosforth with potential earlier work and they made no attempt to do so. Bailey later stated that, “Work in [the Gosforth artist’s] distinct style does not appear elsewhere in the north-west, and so we must presumably see this sculptor as working solely to the commission of the patron at Gosforth.”\textsuperscript{347} So skilled an artist could not have appeared from nowhere, although Bailey was correct that the Gosforth style does not appear elsewhere in the north-west. He later asserted that, “there is no doubt that the so-called Gosforth Master spent the whole of this active sculptural career at the same site.”\textsuperscript{348} Of course, given that Bailey said, “Its [Viking-period sculpture in Cumbria] contacts, inspiration and influence are largely to be found in the lands around the Irish Sea and not across the Pennines to the east,” he had to suppose that the Gosforth artist worked nowhere else. In this, Bailey is incorrect. The origins of the Gosforth artist cannot be found locally or to the west, but rather to the east, across the Pennines in modern-day Yorkshire and County Durham along the River Tees.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{345} Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2.  \\
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{347} Bailey, \textit{Viking Age Sculpture}, 225.  \\
\end{flushleft}
5.2 The Genesis of the Gosforth Artist and his Volumetric Style

The foremost sculpture at Gosforth is the round shaft cross standing in the courtyard and it serves as the stylistic basis for the hand of the Gosforth artist. [PLATES 1-9] Its style can be considered through two parallel aspects: figural and volumetric. Figural style is that of the relief carving, here elaborating the upper flat sides of the cross. Volumetric style concerns the elements of three-dimensional design. Details of the figural style serve well to unify the Gosforth sculptures, excepting the Warrior’s Tomb, to a single hand, but because this particular style is unmatched save, perhaps, for the Sockburn fragment, it reveals nothing about the Gosforth artist’s origins. The previous chapter showed how the usual angled grain technique used at Gosforth had antecedents along the River Tees.\(^{349}\) Considering the Gosforth artist’s volumetric style adds to the argument for his background and makes clear the design influences that came together and resulted in his most striking work, the churchyard cross. The Gosforth artist’s designs are a complex fusion of two distinct influences, one stemming from the Brompton school in northern Yorkshire and one from the Circle-head group in northern Cumbria.

Lang defined the Brompton school in the Northern Yorkshire volume of \textit{CASSS}.\(^{350}\) The large sculptural group, comprising twenty-six sculptures and sculptural fragments including two almost complete crosses and ten hogbacks in Brompton-in-Allertonshire defines this school, the core production of which is found through the central Tees Valley from Northallerton in the south to Darlington in the north. [PLATE 54] Its influence stretched from the eastern coastal settlement at Lythe along River Tees to the Stainmore pass. General stylistic hallmarks of the Brompton school are deep, plastic carving with large, isolated figures and/or “fleshy” knotwork fields within panels

\(^{349}\) See also Miller, "Against the Grain."

\(^{350}\) Lang, \textit{CASSS 6}, 47-49.
demarcated by roll moldings. More specifically, the Brompton school’s free standing crosses feature a continuous interlace knot that loops around a central boss or decorative element and through the cross arms, which are joined with a plain disc or decorated ring. Lang called this cross head knotwork the “Brompton loop” and it is a common feature of Tees valley tenth-century crosses. [PLATE 55]

The primary feature of the Brompton school is also a strong hallmark of the Gosforth artist’s style: namely, the “fleshy” quality of the knotwork. Interlace is considered “fleshy” when it comprises thick cords or plaits that appear three-dimensional due to deep drilling and undercutting, appearing as if cords of clay have been woven together and applied to the stone’s surface. The Brompton school monuments have varying degrees of fleshy interlace, but all of them have wide plaits with interlace that fill the entire field leaving very little visible ground. The fleshiest interlace is found on the Brompton hogbacks. Some, such as Brompton 16, have the same heavy, plastic plaiting seen on the Gosforth cross. [PLATE 56]

Another characteristic of the Brompton school is the “Brompton loop,” an interlace design featured on a number of cross heads in the Brompton region. This is a single plait knot that joins triquetras in each cross arm through the center of the cross, sometimes around a central boss or incised design. An elaborate version of the Brompton loop decorates the head of the Gosforth cross, a feature otherwise absent from northern and western Cumbria except for a modest, isolated example at Brigham. [PLATE 57] The Gosforth cross’s head has equilateral, wedge-shaped arms and a free ring through the midpoint of the cross arms. The lower arm is wider on the north-south axis than the top of

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351 The figural style preferred in the Brompton school is reminiscent of the Gosforth artist, but the range of craftsmanship at Brompton is so broad that assigning a single meaningful style to the work is impossible. Some figures do have oval heads and short tunics and the general approach to forming the displaying the figure is remarkably similar between the two sites.

352 Regional crosses and cross fragments with the “Brompton loop” are Brompton 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; Kirklevington 19, Northallerton 6, 7, 8, 9; Kirby Sigston 5; Sockburn 11, and an outlier at Brigham 7 in Cumbria. See Lang, CASSS 6, 47.

353 Some appear in the southern Eden valley, which has access to the Tees valley over the Roman pass at Rey Cross, but this is expected due to its geographic proximity.
the cross shaft, creating a stepped transition from the shaft to the head, a feature also common in Yorkshire on both free standing crosses and incised cross slabs. The east-west axis is flush with the cross shaft. The arms are outlined with a roll molding that crosses from the near side of one arm to the far side of the adjacent arm, forming a criss-crossing pattern around the projecting boss. Each arm is filled with a triquetra knot with two points in the corners of the arm and the third pointed back toward the center. While this is not a true Brompton knot, the visual aspects of the overall cross design—cross arms with triquetras and criss-crossed plaits around a central boss—speak more to the Brompton school than any local tradition in western Cumbria.

Another similarity in design between Gosforth and the Brompton school is the free ring that connects the cross arms through the midpoints of the arms’ length. Not all cross heads in the Brompton school use this technique, but one, Brompton 10, a confidently carved fragment, is a good match to the Gosforth cross head. [PLATES 9 and 37] In both, the ring is set in equally from each face, flush with neither and decorated on exposed faces. Brompton 10 and the Gosforth cross also share the same angled grain, and the Brompton fragment exhibits strong, confident carving that makes the Brompton cross head a strong candidate to be early work of the Gosforth artist.354

In addition to the fleshy interlace and the “Brompton loop,” further elements of the Gosforth artist’s style suggest that he learned his craft east of the Pennines: the swag transition on the Gosforth cross and the “shrine type” design of the Saint’s Tomb hogback. An exploration of the transitional element of round shaft crosses provides insight into the ways in which Insular sculptural styles were transmitted. The Gosforth cross’s two sections—a squared upper and round lower—are joined by means of a swag, one of many ways to make such a transition on what are called “round derivative shaft”

354. The similar cross head now installed in the church, Gosforth 3, does not have a Brompton loop on the exposed face because the horizontal arms are filled with the same field of ring chain found on the lower portion of the Gosforth cross making the formation of a Brompton loop impossible. Unfortunately, no record of the hidden face exists.
crosses.\textsuperscript{355} [PLATE 4] Within the influence of the Brompton school are several candidates that could have provided inspiration for the use of a swag.

A design element used commonly in the Tees valley is a vandyke, a shield-shaped panel at the base of a decorative field. [PLATE 58] The two more complete crosses at Brompton both have vandykes, which also appear at Hawkser, Sockburn, Stanwick, and West Gilling. They are used as a lower termination for a decorative field on the upper part of a cross shaft below which the shafts are plain.\textsuperscript{356} This has prompted them to be included in the “round shaft derivatives” group.\textsuperscript{357} While vandykes do resemble swags and decorated upper shafts contrast plain lower shafts, including them with the “round shaft derivative” cross type suggests that the sculptors attempted and failed to duplicate a specific type of monument.\textsuperscript{358} Rather, the Tees valley vandyke crosses should be considered as products of a particular group of artists, whose designs are more stylistically complex than mere copies would be. Vandykes are distinct decorative elements and where they appear, they function within the context of a single face of a cross and not within the volumetric composition.\textsuperscript{359} An unusual round shaft example

\textsuperscript{355} Round shaft crosses are defined as those “whose lower parts are cylindrical in section whilst the upper area is squared. The junction between cylindrical and squared sections is marked or masked by two features which can occur individually or in combination: a curved ‘swag’ to the lower panel on the squared section; and one or more horizontal mouldings or fillets encircling the upper part of the cylinder.” Richard N. Bailey, \textit{Cheshire and Lancashire}, vol. 9, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2010), 33-37.

\textsuperscript{356} Lang considers these to be skeuomorphs of metal appliqués, while others consider them to be an attempt to reproduce the swag transition of Anglian round-shaft crosses. Lang, \textit{CASSS} 6, 66.

\textsuperscript{357} “Shafts with two sections, of which the upper part is angular while the lower part can be round or sub-rectangular. The division between the sections can be marked by a swag, and/or a collar.” Cramp and Academy, \textit{CASSS General Introduction}, 14.

\textsuperscript{358} Yorkshire, County Durham, and Northumbrian Anglians produced columnar monuments at Masham and Reculver, perhaps surmounted by crosses, in the fashion of Roman Jupiter columns or the ciborium shafts at the Shrine of St. Mark in Venice, but there is no evidence these had any influence on the development of the round shaft cross form in the tenth century. Bailey, \textit{CASSS} 9, 34.

\textsuperscript{359} Brompton 1 is a good example where vandykes are used only on the broader faces. [PLATE 60] The decorative panels of the narrow sides do not terminate in a vandyke, but they extend past the lower bound of the broad face’s decorative panels. This shows that vandykes were not used to simulate swags but rather they were considered as separate things.
from Yorkshire, Sherburn 4, has two vandykes on one face but also has cuffs and a swag transition, supporting the argument that they act as independent decorative elements and are not devolved round shaft transitions. [PLATE 59]

The Gosforth cross is a true round shaft derivative cross. Its four single swags make the transition between the lower round shaft and the upper angular shaft. The rectangular upper section becomes circular by means of these swags, which merge together at the corners to form triangular areas similar to inverted pendentives. The swags are shallow and sharply curved at the sides, making for a small transitional zone. They are further defined from the face of the cross by a plain raised ridge with an undercut roll molding, carved to appear to overlap the pattern of triangles encircling the upper part of the lower shaft. The swag molding projects out from the surrounding stone, demonstrating that the Gosforth artist planned this projection as part of the original volumetric design. Swags with projecting roll moldings are a more complicated transitional element to design and execute in order to transition from a round lower to a squared upper shaft than is a simple band, which is a more common transitional solution in tenth-century sculpture.360

The Gosforth cross is not the only round shaft cross in Cumbria. Others stand at nearby Beckermet St. Bridget (both an Anglian and a tenth-century example), and at Penrith in the Eden Valley. [PLATES 35 and 61] Penrith’s crosses do not have swags and so while many other aspects of Penrith’s monuments may have provided inspiration for the Gosforth artist, he saw no swags there. Beckermet’s crosses both have swags, but the chronological relation of the tenth-century shaft to Gosforth is unclear, undermining attempts to trace specific influences. This may be irrelevant because the swag transition of the earlier, probably ninth-century shaft has a heavy roll molding that projects out and overlaps the lower shaft and it could have served as the inspiration for all the Cumbrian

360 Pape, “The round-shafted pre-Norman crosses,” 25-49; T. D. Kendrick, "Late Saxon Sculpture in Northern England," Journal of the British Archaeological Association 6 (1941): 1-19, 1-19; Cramp, CASSS 2, 30-31; Bailey, CASSS 9, 33-37. In the crosses of the Peak District with swags, the swags do not project from the cross farther than any other decorative element, indicating that they function more as superficial ornament than as part of the monument’s volumetric design.
round shaft crosses. However, if other evidence points to a Yorkshire origin for the Gosforth artist, the design for the elegant swag on the Gosforth cross is more likely to be found there.

While the Brompton school did not produce any swagged round shaft derivative crosses, one stands within a day’s travel at Follifoot in the West Riding.\(^{361}\) [PLATE 62] The fragment was found, according to local legend, in the lake at Rudding Park and was eventually restored and placed on a traffic island on the high road of Follifoot. The original, lower portion of the cross has a plain double molding at the foot, an extremely squat round lower shaft, and double-molded swag that makes the transition to a squared upper shaft.\(^{362}\) The carving of all the volumetric elements of the monument is well-executed, symmetrical, and confident. The deep triple molding with regular pellets is among the best carving anywhere in Yorkshire. This is in contrast to the superficial, irregular (bordering on incompetent) decoration on the monument’s upper faces. The panels could have been intentionally left blank by the original sculptor, as seen in a small group of plain eighth- and/or ninth-century Anglian crosses with pelleted borders.\(^{363}\) [PLATE 28] Coatsworth suggested that these shafts may have been inspired by the plain crosses of Whitby, a major contemporary monastic site; Lang argued that the crosses there were left plain so that they could be painted.\(^{364}\) The Follifoot monument is unique in its odd proportions and design, but in terms of its original decoration and quality of

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\(^{361}\) Follifoot 1. Elizabeth Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, vol. 8, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England (Oxford ; New York: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 2008), 151.  

\(^{362}\) The upper portion of the monument as it appears now is an imaginative reconstruction.  

\(^{363}\) Little Ouseburn 1 and 2 and Ripon 6 in Western Yorkshire, Northallerton 5, Whitby 50 in Northern Yorkshire; Hexham 1 and Nunnykirk 1 in Northumbria This is James Lang’s “Plait and Pellet” group in York (Lang, *CASSS* 6, 40.) In North Yorkshire: Masham 2; in Western Yorkshire: Little Ouseburn 1, 2(?), Ripon 2 and 6; in York and Eastern Yorkshire: St Mary Bishophall Junior 4. (Coatsworth, *CASSS* 7, 208.) Kirklevington 20 in Northern Yorkshire may also belong to this group: idem, *CASSS* 6, 150-51. Lang dates the Kirklevington fragment to the “tenth or eleventh century” based on Collingwood’s dating of Osmotherly 3, YN although he says, “However the assured carving suggests an earlier period when expertise flourished.” Therefore, this fragment may be earlier.  

\(^{364}\) Lang, *CASSS* 6, 39-40; 231-66.
craftsmanship, it fits in well with the plain or billeted cross shafts of Anglian Yorkshire. As for the knotwork now ornamenting the upper shaft, the legible interlace types are certainly tenth-century, especially the common Viking-period approach of placing interlace in parallel rows. The simple meander motif also dates to the tenth-century.  

If the Follifoot fragment was intended to be plain, then that feature, along with the unusual form of the round shaft, places it in the Anglian ninth century rather than in the Scandinavian tenth century as suggested by Coatsworth. Its thick lower shaft and heavily molded swags are like the Anglian round shaft cross at Beckermet, St. Bridget. [PLATE 61] The fragment’s high level of craftsmanship also places it in the ninth century, perhaps from the same school responsible for the Dewsbury series, an impressive group of tiered pillars in Yorkshire like that at Masham. Though these Anglian sites are not geographically close, they are all associated with monastic activity and have freestanding crosses bearing similar ornament. Although talented, the Brompton artists could not have carved the Follifoot cross; nothing at Brompton suggests that any of them were capable of that level of execution. Additionally, the well-carved lattice decorating the bottom portion of the monument compares favorably to a fragment of great skill at York Minster (1), a roughly dressed block with an inhabited scroll of fine workmanship on a broad face and a basket weave with irregular turns on a narrow face.  

[PLATE 64] Therefore, Follifoot must be a round shaft cross of an unique type carved in the Anglian period, decorated to local tastes with a basket weave paralleled in York and a plain, pelleted shaft like those at Little Ouseburn, Ripon, and Whitby.

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365 This type of meander is classified in the Corpus as type 2 meander. This type of meander occurs in Cumbria: Glassonby 1? Lowther 7; in North Yorkshire: Lythe 2 (debased), Rudby 1(? – possibly eleventh century), Upleatham 1; in Western Yorkshire: Aberford 1, Burnsall 2, Collingham 3, Kildwick 2, Kirkby Wharfe 1 and 2, Thornhill 6(?); in Co. Durham: none, and in Northumbria, Bothal 2. The rest of the decoration on Follifoot 1 is severely worn save for the basketweave motif on the round lower shaft, which has parallels to a late Anglian panel in York and its masterful execution suggests that it is probably part of the original design.

366 Coatsworth, CASSS 8. The interlace by which Coatsworth dates the shaft to the tenth century may have been added then, perhaps to bring it “up to date” with the other sculptures produced in Viking Yorkshire.

367 Lang, CASSS 3, 53-54. Lang dates this fragment to the eighth or early ninth century and calls it “by far the most accomplished pre-Conquest carving from the Minster.”
The Follifoot monument has no parallel in the sculptural record and if this were also true at the time, it may have attracted the attention of later craftsmen. The tenth-century interlace added to it shows that it was still visible and functional in order to have merited an update to the new fashions. Such a monument certainly could have provided inspiration for at least one artist in nearby Brompton. Two fragmentary monuments in the Tees valley support the theory that not just the Brompton school generally, but the Gosforth artist specifically may have been influenced by the Follifoot cross: fragments at Gilling West (2) [PLATE 65] in northwestern Yorkshire and at Coniscliffe (6) [PLATE 39] in County Durham. Both fragments feature a square upper shaft, a circular lower shaft, and a raised roll molding demarcating a swag transition between the two. Additionally, all three have a similar figural style and the high level of execution consistent with the Gosforth artist.

Gilling West is a small village situated in northwestern Yorkshire in the foothills of the Pennines. Several tenth-century fragments have been found there, indicating that the site was of some importance and/or wealth at the time. The fragment at Gilling West is remarkably similar to the Gosforth cross. Most of the monument is gone, but fortune preserved the diagnostic swag between the round lower shaft and the squared upper shaft remains. Most of the sculptures in the round shaft family do not have truly round lower shafts; instead, their shafts are rectangular with only the corners rounded off to give the appearance of a round shaft. Gilling West’s lower shaft is perfectly round and the upper portion is sharply rectangular like the Gosforth cross.

Little remains of the iconography of the Gilling West fragment though what survives is well preserved. Two faces (CASSS B and D) show a single stranded interlace terminating in a serpent head and, on the other, a serpent tail. While this exact motif does not occur at Gosforth, the deep, fleshy carving and precise workmanship are hallmarks of the Gosforth artist. Serpents appear on most of the monuments attributed to the Gosforth artist, indicating a general interest in the motif. The Gilling West fragment

368 The snake’s head is identical to that of the hogback Brompton 16, and the Crathorne 1(a) fragment.
suggests a monument altogether simpler than the complex cross at Gosforth, but the overall proportions and carving technique are so similar that Gilling West should be attributed to the same hand, as suggested by Cramp, Bailey, and Lang.\(^{369}\)

Similarly, the fragment at Coniscliffe, County Durham,\(^{370}\) on the north bank of the Tees River, should also be attributed to the hand of the Gosforth artist.\(^{371}\) The fragment is a round shaft derivative type, though due to its extremely fragmentary state and present location, set into the north wall of St. Edwin’s church, it is difficult to make definitive statements. Fortunately, the transition zone is preserved: the upper portion of the lower round shaft, the lower portion of the upper squared shaft, and the swag transitioning between the two. In this case, the roll molding has been doubled. The single visible face of the Coniscliffe fragment also preserves the body of a male figure—his head and right upper arm are missing. The figure is centered on the shaft within and above the swag. He wears a beltless short tunic with pointed hems rendered identically to those on the Gosforth cross. The figure is lifting his left arm above his head and his small feet point slightly down, suggesting that the figure is hanging or lying on the ground. Because the full pose of the figure is damaged and any potential attributes are missing, identifying either the figure or the narrative scene, if any, is impossible. The execution of Coniscliffe is not as fine as that at Gilling West or the Gosforth cross, but the extensive damage to the fragment, evident by the erosion suffered by the swag, no doubt obscures its original quality. Due to the shape of the monument, the use of angled grain, and the strong similarity in figural treatment, the Gosforth artist carved the Coniscliffe cross. Its

\(^{369}\) Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures." Cramp, CASSS 2; Lang, CASSS 6. p 114.

\(^{370}\) Cramp, CASSS 1, 59-60. A second round shaft derivative fragment survives at Gilling West, which has a cuff and vandyke as the transition between the shaft’s zones. The level of execution of this fragment suggests that it was not carved by the Gosforth artist. The knotwork is irregular, the depth of carving is shallow, and the monument is visually busy. Most of the Yorkshire sites exhibit the hands of multiple craftsmen, so Gilling West is keeping with this expected trend.

\(^{371}\) This fragment has been attributed to the Gosforth artist on technical grounds as well. See above chapter 4 and Miller, "Against the Grain."
temporal relationship to Gilling West is uncertain, but given their close geographic relationship, they were probably carved temporally close to one another.\footnote{This has not been suggested in previous scholarship. Cramp compares the fragment to Dinsdale 2, County Durham and Finghall 4, North Yorkshire in terms of the “Anglo-Scandinavian tradition” of the figure carving. Cramp, \textit{CASSS I.} p. 60-61.}

The fragments at Gilling West and Coniscliffe, both stylistically similar to the Gosforth cross, expand the Gosforth artist’s corpus of work and demonstrate that he was familiar with the cross at Follifoot, or a now-missing sculpture quite like it, while working in Yorkshire. All of these monuments have multiple heavy, rounded swags separating markedly round and square shafts. No other monument in the region provides such a strong comparison in both overall form and in level of execution, matching or exceeding any product of the Brompton school. These two fragments, together with the Brompton cross head, share so many of the unique stylistic characteristics of the Gosforth artist that his genesis east of the Pennines is more certain.

Sockburn, situated on the north banks of the River Tees in County Durham, also has a number of fragments that compare favorably to the hand of the Gosforth artist. The strongest comparison is an extremely damaged piece, Sockburn 5, that has the same angled grain as the Gosforth cross and matching figural style. [PLATE 38] The Sockburn fragment preserves a single figure: a standing warrior, facing left and holding a tall spear before him with both hands. A shield hangs on his shoulder in front of his body and he wears a crested helmet on his head. He has the same stocky proportions and pointed tunic as a similar figure on the Gosforth cross, the spearbearer below the cruciform figure on the east face. [PLATE 53] While all of these make a good case for the Gosforth artist attribution, the strongest evidence is that the point of the Sockburn figure’s spear overlaps the roll molding of the frame above him. Every instance of a cross or hogback where a figure overlaps a frame has strong stylistic connections to the Gosforth artist making this feature an additional, although rarely seen, aspect of his hand.\footnote{One Brompton school cross shaft fragment, Kirklevington 2, shows a frontal figure standing on a small hill or slope. The way the panel around him is cut down indicates that the figure is not overlapping the frame itself, but simply standing on a compositional element of the scene that itself blends with the frame.}
The design of the Saint’s Tomb hogback also supports a Yorkshire origin for the Gosforth artist. In terms of its overall design, the Saint’s Tomb is a unique hogback whose form suggests a tall and narrow, peaked-roofed house. Its relief carving with its fleshy interlace, deep carving, and figures overlapping the frame attribute the monument to the Gosforth artist. While the Gosforth cross’s general form is found elsewhere in England, the Saint’s Tomb has no such direct parallels. Lang classified it as an “enriched shrine type”: house-shaped with decorated terminal panels at the end of the long sides and a pitched roof. This type of hogback appears almost exclusively at Gosforth and at Lythe, North Yorkshire, a small, coastal village with a large collection of Viking-period sculpture. Although Lang classified the Saint’s Tomb and Lythe hogbacks as the same type, they only resemble each other in the most general sense.

While the figure is executed in the general, fleshy relief style of the Brompton school, it is not a good match to the Gosforth artist’s hand. Lang, CASSS 6, 142-43. The only extant figure that clearly overlaps his frame not attributable to the Gosforth artist is the Penrith plaque, argued to be a copy of similarly designed Irish bronze crucifixion plaques. The date of this piece is likely pre-Conquest, but otherwise uncertain. Cramp, CASSS 2, 140-42.

Gosforth 7 was likely a second “Saint’s Tomb,” but the unusual design does not appear outside of Gosforth. See chapter 4 above and Miller, “A Second "Saint's Tomb" at Gosforth, Cumbria.”

Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures."


A visual inspection of all untyped hogbacks confirmed that none of them even in a fragmentary or worn state are of type k. Another type k is at Easington, YN near Lythe and can be considered with the Lythe group. Easington 8 and Lythe 21 are nearly identical in style and design.

Based on the CASSS’s terminology and illustrations, the Lythe hogbacks should be classified as type ‘i’, the “house type.” The line drawing illustrating the ‘i’ type hogback appears to be a reconstruction of Lythe 19, including the bird and backward-looking beast. The ‘k’ type hogback is not illustrated. The general introduction printed as the preface to CASSS volumes 1 and 2 is not included in volume 6, the North Yorkshire volume compiled by Lang, though he cites Cramp’s Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament, a separate printing of the preface material to the early CASSS volumes. Moreover, Lythe 21 and Easington 8 resemble the type ‘h’ or ‘scroll type’ hogback, but this could be due to their extreme fragmentary nature. The diagnostic ends are missing and Lang presumably cataloged them based on their angular profile to the ‘k’ type, with their sharply pitched roofs and vertical sides. Lang types Ingleby Arncliffe 3 as type ‘i’, but according to the type diagram, this more closely resembles type ‘j’ or ‘wheel-rim’ type. I suspect the
“Shrine type” hogbacks like those at Gosforth and Lythe are interesting due to their strong resemblance to an ornamented house. While some hogbacks suggest architecture due to their tessellated “roofs,” shrine type hogbacks are angular, often without endbeasts. Unfortunately, none of the Lythe hogbacks have survived intact and the site’s numerous fragments do not reassemble into complete monuments. All of them have low-pitched roofs with three tiers of tegulation and most have decorative panels, but unlike the Saint’s Tomb, they are short and squat. While their original length is unknown, the visual effect of a Lythe hogback is entirely unlike that of the Saint’s Tomb. The Lythe hogbacks sit low to the ground, similar to recumbent slabs, whereas the Saint’s Tomb comparatively towers above waist height. Regardless of artificial classification types, the number of unusual features that occur at both Lythe and Gosforth suggest some connection between the sites. Lang said the type, “is almost certainly a skeuomorph of a reliquary shrine rather than a house.” The specific arrangement of decorative panels is nearly identical between Gosforth and Lythe, which is unlikely to be mere coincidence. Because the type resembles a portable object, the forms in Lythe and Gosforth could have developed independently based on a common inspiration. This would explain the differences between the monuments, but if the Gosforth artist had only seen or made hogback types as seen at Brompton, he should have been more inclined to keep making Brompton-like hogbacks with large, plastic endbeasts and simple decorations on the broad sides. Even if he wanted a larger monument than the small types at Brompton, he could have constructed monuments like the giant hogbacks at Govan.

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379 Lythe 17 and 18 may be from the same monument, but Lang does not suggest this.
380 See Chapter 2.
381 Lang, CASSS 6.
Scotland, rather than making something akin to a house or reliquary.\textsuperscript{382} Perhaps the Gosforth artist did visit Lythe and simply thought the types of hogbacks there to be more visually pleasing than those at Brompton.

Based on its large number of sculptures, Lythe must have been an important site in the tenth century. It has around thirty-five Anglo-Scandinavian monuments, mostly hogbacks.\textsuperscript{383} Lang asserts that Lythe had no influence on other sculptures, but the appearance of shrine type hogbacks in Gosforth and perhaps Burnsall indicates this is not entirely accurate.\textsuperscript{384} If Lythe were the important population and power center that is suggested by the sculptural remains, it would have attracted people from throughout the region, including the Gosforth artist, who would have had an opportunity to see the monuments. The Saint’s Tomb may have been designed specifically to forge a visual link between the two communities, but nothing is known about the distribution or nature of political power between eastern and western northern England and so the specifics of the connection can remain only speculative.

The Gosforth artist’s most remarkable work stands in Cumbria, but his origins lie in Yorkshire. Crosses at Brompton, Sockburn, Gilling West, and Coniscliffe all share similar stylistic traits to the design of the Gosforth cross and all have a high level of workmanship. This evidence adds to the angled grain evidence at Brompton, Sockburn, and Coniscliffe that suggested the Gosforth artist honed his skills east of the Pennines before executing the Gosforth sculpture. Furthermore, the unusual swag transition on the Gosforth cross may have been inspired by a similar design at Follifoot and the unique design of the Saint’s Tomb has parallels to smaller hogbacks at Lythe. Taken together,


\textsuperscript{383} Lang, \textit{CASSS 6}. The exact number of monuments is unknown because none of the Lythe sculpture is complete and multiple fragments may be from a single monument.

\textsuperscript{384} Ibid. Lang says, “Apart from a type k hogback at Easington nearby (no. 8, Ills. 234-5), the workshop did little to influence sculpture outside Lythe.” The same sculptor(s) who worked in Lythe could very easily have carved the Easington hogback.
these comparisons form strong evidence for the Gosforth artist having trained and/or
worked in Yorkshire and dramatically expands his work beyond Gosforth.

5.3 The Gosforth Artist in Cumbria

Cumbrian sculptors, rather than incorporating sculptural details from the tenth-
century Brompton school, developed their own regional styles as represented by what
scholars call the Spiral Scroll group and the Circle-head group.\(^{385}\) [PLATE 70] Bailey
specifically described the Spiral Scroll group as an “extreme example of […] parochial
tendency in the tenth and eleventh century.”\(^{386}\) This local tendency is useful because, as
he further explained, “This is an important group, not only because of its size [numbers],
but because its links outside Cumbria are a vital factor in disentangling the cultural and
political complexities of north-west England and south-west Scotland in the tenth and
eleventh centuries.”\(^{387}\) The Spiral Scroll group comprises at least twenty-six sculptures at
fourteen sites.\(^{388}\) Three common motifs define it: a “lorgnette” cross head, “stopped plait”
knotwork, and vegetal forms patterned into spiraled scrolls of more or less intricacy.\(^{389}\)
[PLATE 67] All three motifs have their genesis in the Anglian period, a rare example of
direct continuity in Insular art between the ninth and tenth centuries. Kendrick described
them as “shafts in the form of a thinnish rectangular slab bearing a chaotic ornament


\(^{386}\) Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 196.

\(^{387}\) Ibid.

\(^{388}\) Addingham 1; Aspatria 2, 3, 4; Beckermet St Bridget 2; Beckermet St John 1, 2; Bridekirk 1;
Bromfield 1*; Carlisle 4*; Cross Canonby 2; Dearham 2, 3; Distington 1 2*, 3, 4; Haile 1; Harrington 1;
Isel 1, 2; Kirkby Stephen 6*; Penrith 2*; Plumbland 1; St Bees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Workington 2; and Unknown
Provenance 1, though likely of the Egremont region. Starred (*) sites are not listed by Bailey (1980) in his
overview as Spiral Scroll School sites but are strongly linked to the group in the discussion following the
individual monuments in *CASSS* 2 and mentioned in the Spiral Scroll School overview of pages 33-38.
The Spiral Scroll School itself is connected to the Lorngette or Spine-and-Boss group described in
Collingwood, "On a group of Northumbrian crosses." Its Anglian origins appear to be in Ripon and inspired
by metalwork. See Lang, *CASSS* 6, 43-44.

\(^{389}\) The “lorgnette” motif is “a cross-head pattern which is made up of basses, circles and connecting
spines.” “Stopped plait” knotwork, so-called by Collingwood, is that which, “instead of having the
appearance of passing over and under each other, are ’stopped’ short of their crossing.” Bailey, *Viking Age
Sculpture*, 205-06; Cramp, *CASSS* 2, 33-38.
consisting of a degenerate scroll or a tangled interlace, or both together, woven round small free-style figures, both men and animals,” and considered it a style restricted to the northwestern (Cumbrian) coast. Bailey surmised that the Anglian cross at Beckermet St Bridget, [PLATE 61 (left)] which has a spiral scroll on one face and by this is dated to the eighth century, was the primary source of the tenth-century Spiral Scroll group’s motifs. The Spiral Scroll group is not influential at Gosforth. Although a beautifully carved spiral vine survives on a Brompton cross shaft (Brompton 3), the Gosforth artist never used the motif at Gosforth. [PLATE 68] If the Gosforth artist were a local “late Anglian” or had roots in the west, the common Cumbrian spiral scroll would be an expected motif.

Although the Spiral Scroll group shows little influence at Gosforth, the products of it are co-located in Cumbria with another group that did influence Gosforth sculptures: the Circle Head group, [PLATE 69] which is predominately in western and northern Cumbrian, with outliers in Lancaster and western Yorkshire, indicating some regional influence. [PLATE 70] Circle Head crosses are wide, narrow, plank-style monuments with broad cross heads that seamlessly sprout from their bases. [PLATE 24] The head is ringed with a decorated circle inscribed over the cross arms. These crosses often have circular knot motifs on the broad faces of the shaft.

Bailey did not make a direct link between the Spiral Scroll group and the Circle Head group, but the two intersect in several locations, indicating that some relationship existed between them. Aspatria, Bromfield, Dearham, and Workington, and possibly Beckermet St John’s all have examples of monuments from both groups. Although the Gosforth artist’s carving style is predominately that of the Brompton school in Yorkshire, the Cumbrian Circle Head group has some influence in Gosforth in the large Gosforth

390 Kendrick, Late Saxon and Viking Art, 64.
391 Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 206.
392 The Brompton carving is of such high quality that early scholars misattributed it to the Anglian period. Lang, CASSS 6, 66-68.
393 Cramp, CASSS 2. See Regional schools.
cross head fragment, the style of which is more akin to the Circle Head group than to anything in Yorkshire.

The effect of Cumbrian styles on the Gosforth artist’s work is more clearly seen in the proportions of the Gosforth sculptures. The tendency for tall, narrow sculptures is the most Cumbrian quality of the Gosforth monuments and is the same quality that is so dissimilar to the Brompton school. Yorkshire hogbacks are low and small; the proportions of intact examples average 45 cm tall and 130 cm long. In contrast, the Saint’s Tomb towers 86 cm and is over 156 cm long. Brompton crosses tend toward being thick and heavy, although their fragmentary state precludes a definitive comparison to the lofty and slender Gosforth cross. The best Yorkshire comparison to the slender form of the Gosforth cross is the Jelling style Sockburn shaft (CASSS Sockburn 8), but its tapering bulk fails to achieve quite the same effect as at Gosforth. [PLATE 71]

In terms of overall proportions, the Gosforth monuments have a greater affinity to Cumbrian examples than Brompton school sculptures. Both the crosses and all the hogbacks at Penrith are tall and narrow. The broad, thin, plank-style crosses of the Circle Head group are similar to the large Gosforth cross head fragment and quite unlike the square, bulky Brompton crosses. If the Gosforth artist produced tall, thin Cumbrian versions of crosses and hogbacks but with the interlace and figural style of the Brompton school, then his work demonstrates that he was influenced by two distinct sources that did not appear to have overlapped greatly. These dual influences cause the Gosforth group to stand out from the corpus of tenth-century sculpture; they resist classification. These dual influences also prove Cramp’s itinerant artist thesis where a few trained artists who traveled between communities working on commission did the best sculptural work of the tenth-century.394 This strongly suggests that the explosion of tenth-century sculpture may be the product of a relatively small group of artists, some operating locally and others, such as the Gosforth artist, working regionally.

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394 This is not to imply that trained artists carved all this sculpture. Locals who had no access to trained sculptors or who could not afford them probably executed many of the debased examples, which tend to be uninspired copies of nearby works.
5.4 The Gosforth Artist at Gosforth

The Gosforth sculptures show a combination of stylistic influences from the artist’s time working in the Tees valley and his travels through and life in Cumbria. The picture at Gosforth is more complex than simply picking apart which aspects came from one or the other source. His work at Gosforth is that of a mature artist and his individual impulses for motif and composition are a combination of elements from Yorkshire and Cumbria. The elaborate ring chain is a particular element rarely used outside of Cumbria. Types of ring chain ornament Yorkshire crosses, but they take simpler forms. Tracing the use of the Gosforth ring chain illustrates how the Gosforth artist incorporated local elements in his Cumbrian work, demonstrating how his style evolved from his earlier sculptures. These stylistic changes are extreme enough that they prevented scholars from connecting his earlier work in Yorkshire to his later work in Gosforth, the latter which represents a distinct phase of his career in which he expanded his ornamental vocabulary and compositional style.

The ring chain at Gosforth has become a hallmark of the Viking period sculpture on the Isle of Man, but it is not common on Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture in northern England, appearing only in the Isle of Man, Cumbria, and Northumbria.395 For the Manx material, Philip M. C. Kermode defined a small corpus of ring chain monuments and created an “evolution” of the motif from the interlace fill pattern of the Cross Canonby

395 In England, Gainford 16, Co. Durham; Sockburn 6, YN; Kirklevington 5, YN*; Kirkbymoorside, YN, Upleatham 5, YN; Burnasall 1, YW; Penmon-on-Anglesey, Wales; Gosforth 1, Cu; Dearham 1, Cu; Cross Canonby 1, Cu; Beckermeyt, St. Johns 1, Cu (debased?), Bromfield 2, Cu; Rockcliffe 1, Cu; Aspatria 1, Cu; Hattersh, Lincolnshire (strap mount) (see Gabor Thomas, "Anglo-Scandinavian Metalwork from the Danelaw: Exploring Social and Cultural Interaction," in Cultures in Contact, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 237-55: Fig. 18. In Mann, Ballaugh 100 (76); Michael 101 (74); Michael 102 (75); Jurby 103 (78); Ballaugh 106 (77); St. John’s, German 107 (81); Maughold 108 (82) and 84 (58); Andreas 109 (83); Braddan 112 (86); Maughold 114 (91); Bride 118 (92); Jurby 119 (93); Bride 124 (97); Jurby 125 (98); Michael 126 (100); Andreas 128 (102); Michael 129 (101); Andreas 131 (103); Michael 132 (105); Jurby 134 (107); and possibly Jurby 104 (79); Peel, German 115 (88); and Michael 117 (89) though the ring chain pattern on these last three is fragmentary to the extent that an absolute description cannot be made. A starred (*) entry indicates a site where the motif is so fragmentary its identification is uncertain.
hogback [PLATE 72] and the round shaft interlace on the Gosforth cross. Bailey discussed ring chain only briefly, where he observed that the main difference between English and Manx ring interlace was the direction of the “tongue,” and based solely on this difference the origin of the motif could not be determined. Rather, he argued, the motif served only to show a strong connection between the Isle of Man and Cumbria (with points beyond).

The most detailed investigation about the Insular ring chain motif is Caroline Ann Richardson’s M. Litt. dissertation on the Borre style in the British Isles. She argued that the specific ring chain motif seen in Gosforth is native to the British Isles, but that it is connected, stylistically, to the Borre tradition and thereby allows the dating of ring chain-bearing monuments no earlier than the early tenth century.

Derek Hull traced the development of the ring chain motif, although the book is without citations. He did not speculate on whether the Manx motif preceded the Cumbrian version but observed that the Gosforth cross had the most variety of this motif on a single monument. He illustrated the geometric relationship between a single ring chain and a “two-dimensional array” created by repeating the ring chain across a field.

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396 From this field type, the pattern was reduced “to fill in a long panel by reducing it to a single row.” Kermode and Wilson, *Manx Crosses*. He believed the motif to have been transmitted to the Isle of Man from Cumbria, due to his belief that the Manx sculptures dated to the eleventh century. He did not compare the Manx/Cumbrian ring chain to the Borre-style chain interlace, but he could have known of it because the ship burial was discovered in the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, he set the “chain-cable” motif separate from other forms of ring interlace, which he called “linked bands,” named such by J. G. Cumming, *The Runic and other Monumental Remains of the Isle of Man* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1857). He makes comparisons to Cumbrian and Welsh designs as well as to a Roman pavement pattern, though which pattern he means to make a comparison to is unclear. He says J. O. Westwood, a geologist, showed these patterns to him.

397 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*.

398 Richardson, *The Borre style in the British Isles and Ireland: a reassessment*.


400 The Gosforth and Manx single ring chain motif is constructed by interweaving three identical open spade- or circle-and-bar chain elements. The Insular ring chain motif is a more complex design than the design on the Borre strap end, which has served as a basis for the Borre style of interlace; in the Insular version, three strands are mutually interwoven whereas in the Borre strap design, one strand is interwoven
His illustrations usefully demonstrated how the ring chain is composed of three separate, interlaced strands that are combined to create a chain rather than a knot.

While the difference between and chain and a knot seems pedantic, the construction techniques for each are quite different. Knots are constructed by the manipulation of a grid; chains are constructed by the repetition of a motif. Although Bailey does not cite the ring chain motif as an example, he suggests that sculptors in northern England used templates or stencils to design the ornament on their sculptures. His examples are all from Yorkshire and Durham where he shows specific decorative elements such as birds and warriors that possess a great degree of similarity across monuments. In terms of creating a ring chain motif, whether it is a single chain or an array, a similar technique could be used quite successfully and strengthens Bailey’s argument. In the case of the Gosforth cross, the single ring chain tapers slightly as the shaft of the cross narrows. This does not preclude the use of a template for the central triangular element of the design because they are all nearly identical in terms of size. Given the uneven execution of the Muncaster shaft, the use of a template there is not probable, but carving on a large scale is more difficult in terms of maintaining regularity of form than carving on a small scale, so the seeming clumsiness of the execution could simply be a result of the problem of scale.401

Borre style interlace also occurs on regional metal- and woodwork. A converging ring chain appears on the silver-gilt sword hilt found in the High Hesket burial in the previous civil parish of Hesket-in-Forest, Cumbria in the Eden Valley, ten miles north of

401 The odd types of ring chain used in the Brompton school also point to the use of templates to repeat the elements. The Brompton school examples are far less complex than the ring chain at Gosforth, mostly constructed by repeating an overlapping, closed loop motif and then linking them by alternating the way plaits pass over or under during the carving process. The Gosforth ring chain is actually created with three separate strands of circles or teardrop shapes attached by single plaits. These three strands interweave. The ring chain can be constructed from leather to form an elastic belt, but it would be non-trivial to carve such a design from templates.
Penrith.\textsuperscript{402} [PLATE 73] It dates to the early to middle tenth century and is a type foreign to Norway, indicating this sword was Insular.\textsuperscript{403} If this specific type of ring chain was popular in the Eden valley and northern Cumbria, the Gosforth artist would have seen it through non-sculptural examples alongside the Cumbrian sculpture. Outside of Cumbria and Man, the ring chain decorates two corners of the Ballinderry gaming board, which was probably made in Dublin.\textsuperscript{404} [PLATE 74] The only incidence of this ring chain known in Scandinavia is on a spoon handle but this object has not been published.\textsuperscript{405} This ring chain also appears in several variants along the Tees valley in North Yorkshire, such as Gainford 16, Co. Durham.\textsuperscript{406} [PLATE 75] The comparative simplicity of these ring chain examples and their appearance on sculptures that are dated to the same period as similar sculptures attributed to the Gosforth artist suggest they preceded Gosforth and served as inspiration for the Gosforth artist’s interest in ring chain.

In addition to his use of elaborate ring chain types, the Gosforth artist broke from the Brompton school in his figural composition, preferring complex, multi-figure scenes to isolated figures. Brompton school monuments feature isolated figures in separate panels bounded by plain roll molding. By contrast, all of the surviving iconography by the Gosforth artist’s hand at Gosforth involves multiple figural and compositional elements. A hogback at Sockburn (\textit{CASSS} Sockburn 16) may have featured an iconographically complex composition, but only a portion of one figure survives. [PLATE 76]

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{402} Shetelig, \textit{Viking antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland}; Cowen, "A catalogue of objects of the Viking Period in the Tuillie House Museum, Carlisle."
\item \textsuperscript{403} Jan Petersen, \textit{De Norske Vikinsverd} (Oslo: Kristiana, 1919).
\item \textsuperscript{404} Graham-Campbell, \textit{The Viking World}. It was found in archaeological context in Dublin and so its manufacture there is assumed, but it may have been imported.
\item \textsuperscript{405} Wilson mentions this spoon in passing and provides a vague description, but he cites no source. Wilson, \textit{The Vikings in the Isle of Man}. Spoons are quite transportable and so the object could have been imported, but without information about the object, anything said is conjecture.
\item \textsuperscript{406} Collingwood, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses}, 97, 148; Cramp, \textit{CASSS I}, 85-86.
\end{itemize}
Ring chain is an ornament used broadly by Insular Anglo-Scandinavian artists, but the distinctive type used by the Gosforth artist on the Gosforth cross and the large cross head is restricted to western Cumbria and the Isle of Man. The Gosforth artist added this local decorative element to his repertoire and combined it with the Brompton school style for his Gosforth sculptures. Unusual geometric ornament is a stronger tool for tracing the flow of artistic influence as it is less subject than figural types to stylistic aberrations. Tracing the types Insular of ring chain assists in refining the specific chronology of the Gosforth artist’s career and the general chronology of Insular sculpture, something that is still only vaguely understood.

5.5 Yorkshire, Gosforth, and the Isle of Man: A revised chronology

With evidence that the Gosforth artist worked in Yorkshire and with evidence for two distinct sources of influence, the date of the Gosforth sculptures can be narrowed down. Despite a century of research, the date of many pre-Conquest sculpture is still uncertain, often no more precise than within a century. Parker, citing the inability of the Vikings for productive, artistic activity, placed the Gosforth cross prior to the ninth century.407 Even at the time, there was disagreement on this. Parker reported that, in 1883, Canon E. H. Knowles wrote to him, “I obstinately stick to my notion that […] the Gosforth cross a monument of the latter Danish invaders […] in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.”408 Collingwood agreed with Knowles once he defined the “Anglo-Dane” and “Anglo-Norse” carvings from the earlier Anglian period and dated the Anglo-Norse Gosforth cross to “around 1000.”409 Johannes Brøndsted linked the thick and thin interlace on the sides of the Saint’s Tomb to the Urnes style, suggesting for it a mid-eleventh century date.410 Kendrick supported this dating with a similar opinion of the

408 Ibid., 66.
409 Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses, 6.
410 Johannes Brøndsted, Early English Ornament (London; Copenhagen: Hachette, 1924), 227.
Fishing stone. Bailey and Lang disagreed, instead sharing the opinion of Berg and others that the cross dated to the tenth century, although they added, “Within a tenth-century framework, however, it would be difficult to justify a narrower dating.”

A similar story can be told for most pre-Conquest sculpture. While the large subdivisions of “earlier Anglian” and “later Anglo-Scandinavian” are not contested in most cases, many monuments continue to defy firm dating. Even the chronology of such large groups as the Manx crosses cannot be fixed relative to Irish or English works. However, the result of this study is that the relationship of Yorkshire to Cumbria to the Isle of Man can now be established through the works of the Gosforth artist.

Most coastal Cumbrian sculpture shows little influence from either Yorkshire or Ireland, suggesting that the tenth-century artists there restricted themselves to local sources for forms and motifs. The shallow carving technique, circular knot forms, plain hogback types with small or non-existent end beasts, and simple figural style of the Spiral Scroll and Circle Head groups are quite unlike Gosforth’s fleshy interlace and plastic, compositionally complex figural carving. These influences at Gosforth monuments are a product of Yorkshire, not Cumbria.

Bailey was correct that the Gosforth artist’s work is not seen elsewhere in Cumbria, but most curious is that no attempt to copy his work is evident. Despite the grandeur at Gosforth, the sculptural group failed, apparently, to resonate with other artists. Two reasons might be the case: either the sculptures were considered strange and no one wished to copy them, or the sculptures were made after the peak of Cumbrian sculptural commissions. Given that the various Cumbrian stylistic groups defined by Bailey were highly parochial, perhaps taking inspiration from what must have been one of the local grandest sculptures, the Anglian Beckermet cross, it is hard to imagine that they would ignore the masterful Gosforth group. If they postdated the work at Gosforth,

411 Kendrick, Late Saxon and Viking Art, 149.

412 Bailey and Lang, "The Date of the Gosforth Sculptures," 292-93; Berg, "The Gosforth Cross."
the Gosforth sculptures should have had a greater influence in these Cumbrian sculptural styles causing them to be less parochial and more “international” with Yorkshire stylings. Instead, the Spiral Scroll group emulated Beckermet, but the proximity of Gosforth to Beckermet is close enough that if the carvers knew of the Beckermet sculptures, then they surely would have known of the Gosforth sculptures. On the other hand, the Gosforth artist was clearly influenced by Cumbrian sculptures, especially in his adoption of the ring chain and his choice of extreme proportions. He did not take to all local tendencies; the stopped plait technique and spiral scroll motif of the Anglians and Spiral Scroll school are abandoned. Thus, the Spiral Scroll group and the related Circle Head group of northern and western Cumbria must predate the Gosforth artist’s activity because the Gosforth artist copied aspects of them but they in turn did not copy Gosforth.

The hogbacks also provide chronological evidence. While a connection exists between Gosforth and Lythe based on some specific similarities, the Saint’s Tomb defies classification. It shows influences from a large array of other monuments and compares favorably to none of them. No other artist save that of Govan attempts anything on the scale of the Saint’s Tomb, which suggests that Gosforth was financially elite, but the Govan hogbacks stylistically resemble Brompton more than Gosforth. Neither are any smaller or less-ambitious copies of the Saint’s Tomb known, indicating that the unusual hogback was not stylistically influential. For such a large and well-formed monument to have such little impact on a region indicates that it was either extremely isolated, that no other carver had the necessary skills or patronage, or that it was one of the last hogbacks to be carved in Cumbria. While Gosforth is isolated even today, the number and scale of the monuments there suggests that, at its peak, the community was quite wealthy and was of a size to support such a complex sculptural

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413 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 206. Bailey argues that the Spiral Scroll group “seems to have had its original inspiration in a local cross carved in the pre-Viking period. The cross concerned is the one in the graveyard of St Bridget’s Beckermet.” In terms of Yorkshire influence, this is greater in the southern Eden valley, which has closer links to Yorkshire.

414 Govan 5 in Scotland is the largest hogback known. Other than its great size, it has more in common with the Brompton hogbacks, niches and large endbeasts, than it does with Cumbrian trends. Anna Ritchie, ed. *Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994).
project. The community must have been visited. That no other artist could execute such a monument is possible, but human nature suggests that someone would have tried. These potential copies may have been destroyed, but to find no evidence for them is unlikely. This leaves the probability that the Gosforth monuments are of late manufacture, something likely given their level of execution and complex stylistic influences.

The second Gosforth hogback, the Warrior’s Tomb, is a large, narrow hogback with carved tessellation on the “roof” and side panels decorated with a shallowly incised illustrative scene on the south side and knotwork motifs on the north. The general form of the monument resembles a long house with a steeply pitched roof. The south face is one of the few examples of a complex narrative scene occupying the entire face of a hogback monument. At least thirty figures divided into two groups, fifteen to the left facing right and fifteen to the right facing left, converge toward the center of the monument. [PLATE 78]

A similar hogback at Lowther (CASSS CWL 4) compares somewhat favorably to the Warrior’s Tomb. 415 [PLATE 79] The Lowther hogback also has a shallowly incised illustrative scene of a row of men with shields to the right, a large, central figure, and a Viking longboat full of a shield-bearing company to the left. Despite the apparent narrative complexity of the scene, the carving is crudely executed and the nuances of the scene are indistinguishable due to damage and poor rendering. Also, no evidence exists to date the two hogbacks with respect to one another. While they reflect the general illustrative propensity in Cumbria, the same hand did not carve them and there is no evidence that the sculptor of one was aware of the other.

The style of these figures does not compare favorably to the style of the Gosforth cross. Generally speaking, the scene is incised or in shallow relief, with the heads of the figures rendered in greater relief than the shields. Additionally, the figures have tall, thin proportions, unlike the short, stocky figures of the cross. The interlace designs on the

415 Cramp, CASSS 2. Lowther, the site of an Anglian monastery, has fragments from some of the finest vine scroll crosses in England. It is one of the few sites of continual sculptural production through the ninth and tenth centuries.
reverse are sharp and shallowly carved, unlike the thickly plaited, fleshy knotwork of the Gosforth artist. These differences indicate that another hand carved the lower half and gabled ends of the Warrior’s Tomb. This hand may also be responsible for the incised decoration on the broad sides of the Saint’s Tomb “roof,” decoration which may have been added at a later date.

Curiously, the tegulation of the Warrior’s Tomb roof has the confident, deep carving indicative of the Gosforth artist. This suggests, along with the differences in style on the Muncaster/Gosforth 2 cross, that the two Gosforth carvers may have worked on monuments together. In the case of the Muncaster/Gosforth 2 cross, the carving on the Muncaster shaft is shallower than would be expected from the Gosforth artist, and the execution is slightly clumsy. This monument may be an example of the Gosforth artist rendering the more complex carving and decoration of the cross head and a lesser hand completing the cross shaft.

This cooperation suggests something about the chronological relationship between the two Gosforth carvers. If the Warrior’s Tomb carver was in the position to complete unfinished work of the Gosforth artist, whether by choice or necessity, it suggests they worked in Gosforth simultaneously, perhaps with the Warrior’s Tomb artist outliving the Gosforth artist. The same hand may have carved both the Muncaster shaft and the Warrior’s Tomb, a hand that has a good regional comparison. Gaut Björnson of Cooley signed two Manx cross slabs, one of which, Michael 102 (75), has the same decorative scheme as the Muncaster/Gosforth 2 cross. [PLATE 47] He certainly could have seen the monument, but he also could be responsible for the incised style at Gosforth. Could Gaut have worked with or under the Gosforth artist? This would explain why the use peculiar designs favored by Gaut and copied faithfully by later sculptors on Man is so strongly paralleled at Gosforth. 416

The Gosforth sculptures appear not to have been influential in Cumbria, but the sculptors of the Isle of Man copied and reused many of the motifs at Gosforth, most

416 A ridiculously speculative but nice idea is that Björn, father of Gaut, might be the Gosforth artist.
obviously the iconic ring chain that decorates so many of the early Viking-period cross slabs on the island. Manx crosses are carved from slate, a highly friable sedimentary stone. This material limits how aggressively stone can be undercut before it breaks away. For this reason, Manx crosses are not free standing but carved superficially onto slabs, because the material does not allow for a free standing cross. Manx cross slabs are carved on both sides as if they were free standing, and the stone remaining under the cross arms then has additional designs or figural scenes added, figures appearing more frequently on later slabs. Many Manx cross slabs follow a predictable decorative pattern. On Michael 102 (75), the selection of ornament matches almost exactly that of Muncaster/Gosforth 2. On one side, Gaut uses the same ring chain, springing from the ground like vegetation, to fill the cross shaft, and on the other he uses a simple four plait braid. The cross head has a modified version of the “Brompton knot” used on the Gosforth cross, with Gaut’s version incorporating elements of the ring chain motif. Because a projecting central boss on the cross head would break away, Gaut used a circular knot favored by the Circle Head group. Gaut’s thick plaiting style also compares favorably to the Gosforth sculptures. Because Gaut clearly derived inspiration from the Gosforth crosses, the Manx sculptures certainly post-date them.

Knowing that the Gosforth sculptures post-date most Cumbrian works, there is still the question of the chronology of the Gosforth artist’s oeuvre. If the Gosforth artist began his career at Gosforth and traveled east seeking commissions, then he would have decided to simplify his designs a great deal. He could have rid himself of the Cumbrian tendency toward tall and narrow sculptures and taken up the more solid and compact styles preferred in Yorkshire. He could have reduced his illustrative compositions to a single figure, simplified the ring chain motif, and relegated himself to being one artist amongst many. This is all, however, unlikely given the opposite possibility. The Gosforth sculptures are simply better executed than the sculptures attributable to the Gosforth artist in Brompton and Sockburn. The shaft fragments at both Coniscliffe and Gilling West are highly comparable to the Gosforth cross in terms of their design, but their iconography
does not seem to be as complex.\textsuperscript{417} Lang argued that the high level of craftsmanship in the Brompton school and its proximity to York, where he assumed the vestiges of sculptural practice from the eighth century survived, meant that a group of sculptors trained and practiced there. The Gosforth artist could easily have been one of these carvers. Finally, the extreme proportions and unusual construction technique of the Gosforth cross demanded a highly trained craftsman who could execute his elaborate vision. Therefore, the Gosforth artist worked in Yorkshire, probably with members of the Brompton school, at Brompton and Sockburn before traveling west through Gilling West and Coniscliffe (in some order) and then crossed the mountains into Cumbria where he saw and was inspired by the sculptures of the Eden valley and northwest Cumbrian plains, finally ending his career at Gosforth. [PLATE 40]

If this is the case, then the timeline not only of the Gosforth sculptures, but also of the Eden and Tees valley monuments and the Spiral and Circle Head groups, can be refined. The height of the best production within the Brompton school has been restricted to between 920 and 960.\textsuperscript{418} If the Gosforth artist trained in this group and produced his earliest sculptures there, then he was born, likely in Yorkshire, no later than 930.\textsuperscript{419} He was necessarily born no earlier than 910, though if this early date were the case, one would expect to find more of his hand in Brompton itself because he would have acted as one of the founding members of the school, the founders of which may have originated in York. While this is possible, if his journey west was in the second quarter of the tenth century, continuous sculptural production in Yorkshire would have had a greater influence on him. Rather, he was probably born around the end of this window, around 930, trained in the now-established Brompton school perhaps on account of family connections, and sought commissions in the newer settlements as settlers.

\textsuperscript{417} The extensive damage to them does not allow for a comparison of overall height. They were not necessarily any taller than other Tees valley crosses.

\textsuperscript{418} Lang, \textit{CASSS} 6. The author prefers the earlier dates within this range to the later on the basis of political stability in the region.

\textsuperscript{419} He might have traveled to Brompton from elsewhere, perhaps even to seek training there, but this would presume that the Brompton school had a wide reputation and there is no evidence for this.
traveled up the Tees and established new communities needing sculpture. If he lived a robust lifespan of at least forty years and carved the Gosforth sculptures in the last decade of his life, this would put the execution of the Gosforth sculptures from circa 960 to 970. This date is corroborated by the radiocarbon date of the excavated turf roof of an early structure to 970 +/- 20 (uncalibrated), which provides not a date of settlement but of the structure’s destruction. If the Spiral Scroll school and the Circle Head group influenced the Gosforth sculptors then, by 960, some sculptures would have been finished, which places their production loosely around 950. In this chronology, Manx Gaut worked circa 970-975 after the major monuments at Gosforth were completed. Tynewald, the Manx parliament, was officially established in 979, fitting well in this proposed chronology.

Tracing the Gosforth artist’s influences defines the chronology of his works. The Gosforth artist began his career in Yorkshire, probably in his early teenage years in the 930s. He worked in Brompton and Sockburn, then traveled west along the River Tees, finding commissions at Gilling West and Coniscliffe. Elements of the Gosforth sculptures echo some Eden valley monuments, especially at Lowther and Penrith, and so the Gosforth artist likely entered Cumbria through the Stainmore pass and journeyed north through the Eden valley before continuing west. He could have seen the works at Aspatria and Dearham, these necessarily dating to roughly before the 950s, as well as the Anglian shaft at Beckermet before settling in Gosforth. Here, he must have ended his career, probably after 960; the production of at least six major sculptures would have taken time. The second hand at Gosforth, the Warrior’s Tomb artist, appears on pieces that also bear the Gosforth artist’s hand, suggesting the two worked together in some fashion. This indicates that the Warrior’s Tomb and Gosforth 2/Muncaster may have been carved after the other Gosforth sculptures. The strong similarities between Gosforth

420 The carbon dating was performed at the University of Cambridge, available via personal communication with Clifford Jones, Barefoot & Trowel, Seascale, Cumbria.

421 Viking raiders and settlers occupied Man as early as the eighth century, but there is no evidence that the sculptural program began there so early. Indeed, the sculptures on Man may have become popular after periods of political upheaval settled and communities were able to invest commissioning costly artworks.
2/Muncaster and Manx cross slabs, especially Michael 102 (75) by Gaut Björnson, indicate the Manx sculptures post-date those at Gosforth, that is, after 970.

5.6 Conclusions

This chapter argued that a single individual, the Gosforth artist, produced entirely or in part six of the seven sculptures at Gosforth. A second artist worked alongside or after him and this second artist may have been Gaut Björnson, an early cross slab carver on the Isle of Man. This argument was developed through stylistic analysis of both the superficial figural style and the volumetric style of the monument forms.

For tenth-century sculpture in northern England, no evidence exists for fixed workshops. The six sculptures at Gosforth attributable to one hand constitutes the largest single group attached to one individual, but other political centers demonstrate a high degree of stylistic affinity among the local sculpture, indicating that there, too, worked one or two carvers, who were responsible for the sculptural needs of the community. More detailed work on these centers is needed. In some of these cases, the craftsmanship both in terms of overall design and competency in carving indicates that these artists may not have been “professionals” but rather artists who carved out of necessity or opportunity to meet the demands of local patrons rather than an exclusive career choice.

The Gosforth artist, by contrast, is certainly a “professional” in the sense that he has a highly developed material knowledge of stone, knowledge of various sculptural styles, and the ability to successfully carve his extreme designs. The proportions of the Gosforth cross were not born out of the ether but rather represent an attempt to make a sculpture in the mode of previous monuments, but of superlative dimensions. The works are so much better executed than others in the region that previous scholars have speculated that the Gosforth artist must have been an Anglo-Saxon employed by local Anglo-Scandinavians. This hypothesis does not account for the strong Anglo-

\[422\] Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses, 155.
Scandinavian style of the carving and complicates the question of the iconography, as discussed in the next chapter.

Based on the survival of several features appearing on the Gosforth cross, the transmission of these features can be reconstructed. Two possibilities exist: either the Gosforth cross is an early example that served as inspiration for later sculptors or it is a late product showing an accumulation and adaptation of various forms used earlier. I argue the latter is far more reasonable for several reasons: the execution of the Gosforth monuments (except the Warrior’s Tomb) is among the best of the tenth-century sculpture in northern England; the extreme shape indicates a late design developed from earlier sculptures indicated by similar fragments in North Yorkshire; the combination of disparate elements into one; the lack of obvious copies; and the assumption that a sculpture of high workmanship is the product of a well-trained and practiced sculptor and that the production of such a sculptor would advance over time.

Taking these into account, the most reasonable argument explaining the extant monuments of Cumbria and their relationship with those of North Yorkshire is that the Gosforth artist was trained and did his early work in Allertonshire in the Brompton school. The inclusion of a serpent, pellets, and the overall fleshy style of the carving of a hogback (CASSS Brompton 16) makes this sculpture a good candidate for the early work of the Gosforth artist. He would have seen earlier monuments such as the unusual round shaft cross at Follifoot, adapting this design in his later works. The artist then moved west and north along the River Tees, probably working for a succession of patrons. The round shaft crosses at Gilling West and Coniscliffe, both of which look to Follifoot, are so similar to the Gosforth cross in both their shape and their style that they are most certainly the product of the Gosforth artist. Political unrest destabilized North Yorkshire and compelled some of those there to relocate west of the Pennines and Cumbrian mountains, out of reach of similar southern Anglo-Saxon kings with designs on York and out of reach of continuing incursions from the Continent.

The artist then traveled up the Eden valley and saw the sculptures of Penrith—two round shaft crosses and a collection of hogbacks created by an endemic Cumbrian
sculptor not trained in the Brompton school, but instead of the Spiral Scroll school operating in north central Cumbria. The Gosforth artist then passed through the north Cumbrian plain and came into contact with the Dearborn cross and other circle head crosses before arriving in western Cumbria. Here, he further developed the round shaft type already produced in Yorkshire, making a pair as at Penrith (presumably at the request of a possible patron) making them more extreme in proportion and better executed. His previous experience and training in Brompton allowed him to judge the best stone to use to achieve this ambitious design and his advanced knowledge of sedimentary stone allowed him to engineer monuments that would survive the extreme conditions in western Cumbria.

The Gosforth artist carved the two crosses Gosforth (CASSS 1 and 2) and the tall hogbacks (CASSS 5 and 7), although the order of execution of these cannot be determined. The Fishing Stone is also attributed to the Gosforth artist, but how this project relates temporally to the free standing sculptures is unclear. The plank cross of Gosforth 2/Muncaster was probably executed late, providing an explanation for the second hand that is more similar to the hand of the Warrior’s Tomb. The fine work of the cross head was executed before the main shaft or he worked in conjunction with the second artist. This cross was carved after the fashion of the Circle Head crosses popular along the western coast.

While the Gosforth monuments may not have inspired the Yorkshire and Cumbrian artists, they almost certainly provided inspiration for Gaut Björnson of the Isle of Man. Gosforth is well positioned to control trade through the eastern Irish Sea and those who controlled Gosforth probably sought to control the Isle of Man, visible from the hills just north of the cross itself, to further this control of the coastal trade. A native tradition of carved cross slabs was already being practiced when a new style of sculpture from Cumbria was introduced. These slabs had a ring chain on the shaft of the cross on one side and a simple, braided interlace on the other in emulation of the Gosforth 2/Muncaster plank cross. The use of elaborate ornament on the side panels of the cross slabs looks to similar compositions on the upper shaft of the Gosforth cross (and probably
the Gosforth 3 cross head). The sculptors working on the Isle of Man could not duplicate the Gosforth sculptures due to the limitations of the local materials.

This chapter significantly adds to the understanding of the sculptural practices of Anglo-Scandinavians in England during the tenth century. In the east, the best artists trained in the Brompton school and practiced as itinerant carvers, taking advantage of local patronage opportunities. In the west, stone carving was less formalized and individuals likely transmitted techniques more casually and tended to copy a restricted set of designs and motifs. The Gosforth artist trained in the Brompton school, evident by his the figural types and interlace elements at Gosforth, and incorporated local elements, evident by the inclusion at Gosforth of the parochial forms and tendencies of the Circle Head and Spiral Scroll sculptural groups of tenth-century Cumbria. This study has also refined the chronology for all of these sculptures, supporting Lang’s theory that they were executed within one or two generations.\footnote{Lang, \textit{CASSS} 6.} This study of the Gosforth artist’s career expands our understanding of the elusive early medieval artist. While Anglo-Scandinavian England is in many ways a unique culture, evidence for the apparent professionalization of artistic production there should challenge us to seek similar patterns elsewhere.
6 Reading Gosforth: Myth and Meaning

The aspect of the Gosforth sculptural group that has attracted the most scholarly attention is the unusual iconography of the churchyard cross and Fishing Stone. Different readings of their iconography have lead to vastly different conclusions about its narrative and function. This chapter briefly reviews the historiography of this research and presents a contrasting interpretation that demonstrates how the iconography of these monuments did not function in terms of absolute fixed meaning, but rather was purposefully adaptive to the perspective of a variety of audiences. While this revision is intended to be reflective of the original intent of the artist, as much as such a thing can be argued, presuming to end the debate concerning the interpretation of the iconography at Gosforth is to obscure its very meaning and function. To deny the influence of two centuries of co-existence with Insular Christianity is obviously foolish, yet to presume that the elaborate and, in some cases, unique iconography describing the Forn Siðr was carved only in an elaborate deference to another system of beliefs is at best simplistic and at worst ethnocentric.424

A broad scope of opinions concerning the Gosforth cross’s iconography has been expressed over the last century, and early scholars already delineated the basic interpretive scheme. Richard Reitzenstein, a scholar of comparative religion, attributed a Christian meaning to the cross’s entire iconographic program.425 Charles A. Parker and Arthur B. Cook presented both Christian and “heathen” interpretations of the cross, while William S. Calverley and William G. Collingwood believed that the cross illustrated the Völuspá narrative of the Ragnarok in which Odin and the other gods would die in a great

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424 In order to avoid privileging Christianity as a recognized religion over “Scandinavian mythology” as a quirky series of mythological stories, I use the term “Forn Siðr” (Old Beliefs) in reference to stories of the Northern gods. This is a term used by neo-Pagans as a general descriptor. Such terms as “Odinism” have, unfortunately, aspects of white or Aryan supremacy associated with them and will be avoided here. The spelling of names within the Forn Siðr is regularized after Andy Orchard, ed. The Elder Edda: a Book of Viking Lore (London: Penguin, 2011).

At the other end of the spectrum, Thomas Kendrick argued that the scenes may have once carried specific meanings within broad northern Iron Age beliefs, but by the time of the Gosforth cross’s carving these images may have been no more than mere “decoration.”

Here, I argue for a Forn Siòr meaning for the iconography at Gosforth. No evidence exists to suggest that the Gosforth sculptor/patron or community were overtly and wholly Christian despite numerous examples of Christian sculpture available in the region for the artist to emulate. Certainly, aspects of the sculptural group are indebted to Christian tradition, but those same traditions are undermined by changes that infuse Forn Siòr meaning. However “pagan” the cross’s iconography was, the monument’s Christian form and iconographic inspiration was purposeful. The artist was entirely aware of the sculptural traditions of northern England, themselves developed from a combination of pre-existing Anglian and imported Irish traditions, and these were used to create a monument with a complex function to match an equally complex cultural and religious environment.

### 6.1 The Gosforth cross

All of the Gosforth cross’s iconography occurs within the four long, flat panels comprising the upper portion of the monument. [PLATE 44] No figural decoration is

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427 Kendrick, "Late Saxon Sculpture in Northern England."

428 In chapter 2, I argue for a reconsideration of the “Saint’s Tomb” hogback where I think the gabled ends of the monument that now bear Crucifixions were recarved by a later hand.

429 The sculpture itself is difficult to photograph in a manner that successfully records details of the iconography. This plate, drawn by Charles Parker, serves as a reasonably accurate record of the Gosforth
carved onto either the lower round section or the cross head, although the uppermost creatures on the shaft interact with the cross head to make it part of the iconographic composition with twelve human and sixteen animal figures. The Gosforth cross has the most elaborate figural decoration of any extant Anglo-Scandinavian monument.⁴³⁰

Serious scholarly interest in the iconography of the Gosforth cross began in the late nineteenth century with Parker. He relates how he and Calverley undertook in the 1880s to clean the cross from the lichens that obscured the details of the carving, “Calverley and I determined to clean the stone, which was thickly encrusted with lichens, so that ‘the story of the cross’ might be made clear if possible.”⁴³¹ Before this cleaning, the extent and details of the cross’s iconography were obscured. At this time, Dr. George Stephens from the University of Copenhagen contacted Parker and Calverley for information about the cross. Dr. Stephens was so taken with the photographs and descriptions sent to him that he traveled to Gosforth to see the monuments for himself.⁴³² This cooperation with Dr. Stephens produced the first detailed interpretation of the sculpture’s iconographic program. They argued that it illustrated the events of Ragnarok, the dark Apocalypse of the Forn Siðr, but they also recognized the possibility for both Christian and “heathen” interpretations.⁴³³ However, Calverley’s view that the cross was

cross’s relief carvings. Collingwood’s version published in 1927 is highly inaccurate. Compare to PLATE 80.

⁴³⁰ Some of these are combined such as in the four men on horseback.


⁴³² The results of this cooperative research were presented at the Royal Archaeological Institute at Carlisle in 1882 and later published as Charles Arundel Parker, *The Runic Crosses at Gosforth, Cumberland* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882).

⁴³³ Calverley, "The Sculptured Cross," 143-58. This publication includes the most accurate full-length drawings of Gosforth I made by Dr. Parker, as well as numerous etchings executed by Prof. Magnus Petersen from photographs, some of lesser accuracy.
primarily a didactic Christian monument is clear when he wrote, “How successfully pure heathendom is used on this monument as a means of teaching the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{434}

Parker published a similar reading in his 1896 monograph where he separated the Christian interpretation from the Scandinavian, ordering the Christian first, but he also stated, “The two meanings are inextricably mixed together, and react upon each other.”\textsuperscript{435} Later, after his discussion of the “heathen” meaning, he recognized that the stories shown on the cross had parallels to Christianity and that these parallels may be attributable to a common source instead of one being taken from the other.\textsuperscript{436}

Thirty-five years later, Parker published with W. G. Collingwood a reappraisal of the Gosforth cross, noting physical details either incorrectly recorded or overlooked and reassessing the date and interpretation.\textsuperscript{437} Parker appears to have changed his mind regarding the religion of the monument when he said, “It is impossible to regard this as a purely heathen monument; it is Christian with certain heathen allusions.”\textsuperscript{438}

A decade later, Collingwood later published his great work, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age}.\textsuperscript{439} The goal of the publication was to provide an overview of the pre-Conquest monuments in northern England and no one sculpture is afforded lengthy investigation. The Gosforth cross appears as an example of the later Anglo-Norse style, although Collingwood argues for an Anglian sculptor on the basis that “no other in those parts could adopt and carry out this peculiar and difficult form of

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{434} Ibid.: 156.
  \item \textsuperscript{435} Parker, \textit{The Ancient Crosses}, 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 58-59.
  \item \textsuperscript{437} Parker and Collingwood, "A reconsideration of the Gosforth cross," 98-113. Parker drew new engravings for this publication, illustrating some of the figural details taken from rubbings, especially in the “Crucifixion” group on the lower east side.
  \item \textsuperscript{438} Ibid.: 110.
  \item \textsuperscript{439} Collingwood, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses}.
\end{itemize}
Collingwood acknowledged, somewhat begrudgingly, that the Gosforth iconography recorded the events of the Ragnarok, but he added, “This explanation at any rate might tally with the folk-theology of about 1000, when the *Völuspá* was current, especially at such a centre of Norse life as Gosforth must then have been; and if it is illusory, we still have before us in this monument something that needs explanation in the light of all we know about the time and place.”

Around this time, the Gnostic scholar Richard Reitzenstein published a wholly Christian interpretation of the cross. He used it to illustrate his comparison of the Ragnarok to *Weltuntergang* myths of the Christians and Persians. He argued that the various pairs of lupine serpents that appear above and below the “Crucifixion” scene and above the staff-bearing figure on the west side represent Death and the Devil, both defeated by Christ, who also appears on the monument multiple times on horseback. Such vignettes as the hart chased by the hound symbolized for him the soul overcome by Death.

Likely due to economic depression and war, thirty years passed before the next major publication on the Gosforth cross. In 1958, Knut Berg published his interpretation of the Gosforth iconography. He considered elements of the cross to illustrate the onset of the Ragnarok and others to illustrate “themes surviving from Celtic myths.” The entire monument embodied the notion of the Christian conversion of pagan peoples. The old ways were only shown as a counter example in a similar manner to the more well-known example of the role of Synagogue as a foil to Ecclesia.

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440 Ibid., 155.
441 Ibid., 156-57.
442 Reitzenstein, "Die Nordischen, Persischen und Christlichen Vorstellungen vom Weltuntergang."
444 Ibid.: 42.
445 Berg considered these to be the identities of the figures below the cruciform figure, and that this showed a Continental origin to the iconography.
Richard Bailey has written the most modern scholarship on Cumbrian sculptures, including his prominent *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England*. In this work, Bailey expressed the view that on the Gosforth cross, even if the individual scenes were Forn Síð narratives, the entire monument was didactic, paralleling those stories to Christianity and communicating the latter’s supremacy—the “pagan iconography of Christian ideas.”

Bailey’s view that the Gosforth monuments were essentially Christian, only expressed in the narratives and myths of the North, has remained unchallenged.

During this time, the ambitious project to catalog all pre-Conquest sculpture in England, the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England*, commenced under the direction of Rosemary Cramp through Durham University. The Gosforth monuments appeared in the second volume with an entry written by Bailey. Here, he summarized well the problems analyzing the Gosforth iconography. Three difficulties complicate interpreting the cross’s iconography; the first is in distinguishing decorative from narrative elements, the second is that the vignettes are not visually separated from one another, and the third is that the illustrated stories originated in Scandinavia and Iceland, “far distanced both geographically and temporally from Viking-Age Cumbria.” In short, the cross presents a jumbled, non-linear story that has no contemporary record for it.

One fallacy of previous scholarship is that writers have generally attempted to read the cross in a manner that would produce a single cohesive narrative about the final days of the world; the product of this research may reflect more our modern desire for linear narrative even if such an approach does not best describe the nature of the Gosforth carvings. Rather, each face is designed thematically, drawing on aspects of broad narratives about the characters depicted. The west face concerns Heimdall and his nemesis, Loki, the east face Odin, and the south face northern mythological cosmology.

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446 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 125.
447 Cramp, *CASSS 2*, 100-09.
448 Ibid., 101.
The narrative and/or characters of the north face are more difficult to identify because they possess no specific iconographic attributes.

The absence of a specific narrative on the Gosforth cross is evident once the iconography on each face is clarified. Rather than attempting to fit the separate vignettes into a tight chronology of events within a mythological plot arc, the cross illustrates the characters of myth independent of a specific narrative. Each face focuses on a particular Æsir, or god, of the Forn Siðr. Similar to depictions of Greek gods, whose attributes may derive from a number of different individual stories, the subjects of the Gosforth cross are pictorially defined by multiple accounts of them across the corpus of existing texts. Because the gods’ deaths are as much a part of their characters as their lives, aspects of the Völsþpa are present, but this need not necessitate that the entire monument was meant to illustrate this single story.

6.1.1 West Face: Heimdall and Loki

The west face has some of the most unequivocally Forn Siðr iconography on the cross. [PLATE 7] Neither of the distinct scenes on this face have any Insular iconographic equivalent in any material across the extant medieval corpus but each has a comparative example in Iceland and Gotland, respectively; the interpretation of these scenes comes from thirteenth-century Icelandic textual sources. The lowest scene shows a man bound at the feet, arms and neck with a long pigtail down his back. [PLATE 81] Above him kneels a woman, indicated by her long dress and braided pigtail, holding out a crescent-shaped vessel above the man’s head. Hanging down on the left side of the vignette is a snake, its body twisted around a ring and extending over the couple to provide a framing element for the scene. Calverley first identified this with the

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449 The main texts are the Old Norse poetry recorded in the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to), referred to as the Elder Edda or the Poetic Edda, apocryphally associated with Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056-1133), and Snorri Sturlusson’s Younger Edda or Prose Edda (GKS 2367 4to), the former recorded c. 1270 and the latter c. 1225-1240.
assistance of Stephens as the bound Loki being tended by his wife, Sigyn. The scene illustrates the same story recorded textually in the *Gylfaginning* (The Deluding of Gylfi) in Snorri’s *Prose Edda*:

> Then Skadi took a poisonous snake and fastened it above Loki so that its poison drips on to his face. But Sigyn, his wife, placed herself beside him from where she holds a bowl to catch the drops of venom. When the bowl becomes full, she leaves to pour out the poison, and at that moment the poison drips on to Loki’s face. He convulses so violently that the whole earth sakes – it is what is known as an earthquake. He will lie bound there until Ragnarok.

Loki received this punishment on account of his typical chaos-minded trickery that resulted in Baldr’s untimely, albeit foreseen, death. This scene also appears in the *Völuspà* verse 34-35:

> Then oppressive bonds were twisted
> Rather sever fetters, made of Vali’s entrails.
> She saw a captive lying under the grove of hot springs,
> that evil-loving form, Loki she recognized;
> There sit Sigyn, not at all happy
> about her husband—do you understand yet, or what more?

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450 Calverley, "The Sculptured Cross," 145-46. In this article, Calverley saw the cross as showing “pure heathenism” but contextually in the service of Christianity and the process of Conversion. Here, he provides the most detailed analysis of the Eddic texts as they relate to the cross’s iconography. This paper was republished with minor revisions as Calverley and Collingwood, *Early Sculptured Crosses* (1898). In this later version, Collingwood added additional editorial commentary at the end of each section.


452 Stanza 34 does not appear in all versions of the text and in the *Hauksbók* it appears as the first half of stanza 35 with stanza 35 becoming 34. For its inclusion here, see Sigurður Nordal, ed. *Völuspà*, Durham and St. Andrews Medieval Texts (Durham: Dept. of English Language and Medieval Literature, 1978), 70-71.

Berg suggested that the Loki scene showed more specifically the moment when Sigyn is forced to expose her husband to the burning venom while emptying the filled vessel, triggering either the earthquake, one of the many signs of the impending Ragnarok, or even more specifically the very moment that Loki’s bonds of entrails are broken, marking the beginning of the end of time.\footnote{Berg, “The Gosforth Cross,” 35.} This interpretation is unnecessarily precise and unlikely.

While Loki is a frequent character in Old Norse literature, only four sculptural depictions of him are known. In addition to the scene on the Gosforth cross, he is argued to be shown on a fragmentary monument at Kirkby Stephen (\textit{CASSS Kirkby Stephen 1}), Cumbria,\footnote{Cramp, \textit{CASSS 2}.} a hearth stone found at Snaptun, Denmark,\footnote{Hans Jørgen Madsen, “The God Loki from Snaptun,” in \textit{Oldtidens Ansigt: Faces of the Past,} ed. Queen of Denmark Margrethe II, Poul Kjærnum, and Rikke Agnete Olsen (Copenhagen: Kongelige Nordiske oldskriftselskab, 1990), 180: 180.} and an extremely fragmentary example on the Isle of Man (Jurby 125 (98)). [PLATES 82, 83 and 87] The Kirkby Stephen fragment appears to be a section of a plank-type cross shaft. A single, horned figure fills one face. His heavy arms and thin legs are interlaced with rings in a similar manner to the Gosforth Loki. He has a long, triangular beard, extended moustache and what have been interpreted as horns curling down from each side of his head; these horns are the source of the carving’s colloquial name: the “Bound Devil Stone.”\footnote{Bailey is non-committal about the figure’s identification, listing the possibilities as the devil (in various compositions), Loki, Gunnar, Mors, or a damned soul. Bailey also notes parallels to the Leeds and Great Clifton Wayland figures. Cramp, \textit{CASSS 2}, 120-21.} If this figure is Loki bound with the entrails of his son Nari and even if the missing portions of the stone had Sigyn and the torturous serpent, the composition is entirely different. The Kirkby Stephen figure faces frontally, his bound body displayed for the viewer. He stares out with a perplexed expression formed from large, circular eyes and a downturned mouth. The top portion of his head is missing, so the visual context for the curled “horns” projecting from the sides of his head is gone. The Gosforth artist may have seen the
Kirkby Stephen carving—the village is near the Stainmore Pass across the Pennines in the southern tip of the Eden Valley. The numerous carved fragments there indicate the settlement did attract the attention of artists and the Gosforth artist likely went through there on his westward journey. Because the dating, even relative, of the English pre-Conquest sculptures is rather speculative, whether the “Bound Devil Stone” predated the Gosforth artist’s visit is unknown. Regardless, the Gosforth scene is not a direct compositional copy of Kirkby Stephen’s even if the subject matter may be the same.

The hearthstone found in the mid-twentieth century on a beach near Snaptun, Denmark was carved from a large soapstone imported from Norway or Sweden. The top of the stone is incised with a frontal face over a hole that may have been used as a conduit for bellows. The triangular face stares out with wide, almond-shaped eyes under a single heavy brow. Short hair is indicated at the top of the head and inward curls at the temples could be ears, horns, or locks of hair. Under a long nose is a thin, elegantly curled moustache that extends well past the man’s cheeks. Above a small, pointed chin is a horizontal mouth with four vertical incisions across it; this “stitched” mouth is what gave rise to the identification as Loki from the passage in the Skaldskaparmál from Snorri’s Prose Edda where the dwarf Brokk sews Loki’s lips with the leather cord named Vartari. The hearthstone has been dated to c. 1000, so likely post-dates the Gosforth iconography, but if its identification as Loki is correct, it demonstrates how potent the “old” stories were amid the Christian conversion processes. A fourth tenth-century depiction of Loki is at Jurby 125 (98) on the Isle of Man, but this figure is extremely fragmentary and can only be identified as Loki within the context of the slab’s iconography. A single bound foot similar to the bindings depicted on the Gosforth cross survives.

458 Kirkby Stephen, along with Aspatria, Gosforth, and Penrith, is one of the most important sites for the study of tenth-century sculpture in Cumbria due to the quantity and quality of the sculpture there.


460 Sturluson, Prose Edda, 92-94.
While neither of these comparisons is strong and neither informs the specific iconography at Gosforth, the scene could have been adapted from another medium. Three literary sources preserve Forn Síðr “ekphrasis”: the Ragnarsdrápa, and Haustlöng, two works that describe and explain the stories depicted on painted shields, and the Húsdrápa, that explain the stories painted onto “panels” in a house or kitchen. No painted shield or carved (presumably wooden) panels survive from the ninth and tenth centuries when these poems were first written, but their description in literature provides a tantalizing glimpse of the possible visual world of that time. Mythological narrative scenes could not have been wholly uncommon if they were included as a literary convention in three distinct works by three separate authors. Finally, the scene, as all the others at Gosforth, may have been copied from iconography on a moveable but perishable medium. None of this potential material survives with which to make a comparison. Four extant versions of Loki indicate that he was at least a somewhat popular subject for art. While he features in much of Old Norse literature as an antagonist to the Æsir, three of the four depictions of him show him bound. Despite his agency throughout myth, he must have been considered to be contained in the tenth century and was shown as such. This also would have reinforced the continuous and effective power of the Æsir against the forces of chaos.

Above the Loki vignette is a horseman, upside-down with respect to the ground; another upside-down horseman appears on the north face. [PLATE 84] All four horsemen on the Gosforth cross are carved in the same manner, perhaps indicating the use of a

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462 Fuglesang, in “Iconographic traditions,” said in speaking of Scandinavian iconography, “The use and distribution of iconographic models in the viking period has received little scholarly attention. However, there are some indications that such practices existed. […] Other scenes which survive, like Thor’s Fishing expedition and Sigurd piercing the snake both belong with the eleventh century, but seem to stand in the tradition of emblematica from the early viking period of concentrating on the one dramatic scene, the pivotal event of the tale. However, there is another aspect to this concentration: the most dramatic scene is also the one which most effectively displays the strength and prowess of the protagonist. In this way even the narrative scenes contribute to the general impression that viking iconography centred on strength, prowess, and status.”
template—only the orientation differs.\textsuperscript{463} The context of the horseman is different on each face, but whether the identification of the horseman is different is unclear. Two horsemen stand opposed on the north face, suggesting two different individuals. Perhaps the upright horsemen are one person and the upside-down horsemen another.\textsuperscript{464} All the horsemen carry a spear, but this is not an attribute unique to any single Eddic character. The style of these horsemen is similar to the horseman decorating a gilt-bronze ornament from the Gokstad ship of c. 900 and a small silver figure of a rider from Birka, Uppland, Sweden.\textsuperscript{465} [PLATE 85]

The figure above the horseman stands with his feet upon the left edge of the cross and his head toward the right. His left hand extends down and he holds an upright, curved horn. [PLATE 86] His right hand holds a staff or spear vertically with respect to his body. He wears a belted tunic with a pointed hem, identical to other standing figures on the cross. His staff guards against twin, respectant, lupine interlaced monsters. This character is universally agreed to be Heimdall, the warden of the Bifrost bridge and the sworn enemy of Loki, here represented below him.

Heimdall is described in the \textit{Gylfaginning} as “powerful and sacred” and it names him the “white god.”\textsuperscript{466} The edda also describes him as “golden toothed” and names his horse, Gulltopp, and home, Himinbjorg. It notes his task of guarding the bridge against giants and his hearing as so acute that he can hear grasses growing. He is also named as the owner of the Gjallarhorn, the horn that he will blow at the start of the Ragnarok:

\begin{quotation}
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\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{463} Bailey, \textit{England’s Earliest Sculptors}.

\textsuperscript{464} Too much should not be read into the orientation of figures on the cross. Figures appear oriented in every manner with respect to the ground, indicating that the pictorial space of the cross many not be conceived with any relationship to the ground.


\textsuperscript{466} Sturluson, \textit{Prose Edda}, Ch. 27, p. 36-37.
The sons of Mim are at play
and fate catches fire
at the ancient
Gjallarhorn;
Heimdall blows loudly,
his horn is in the air.  

Heimdall’s horn blast calls the gods to assembly against Loki’s host of giants and monsters, including Loki’s own monstrous offspring of Hel, Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, and Fenrir, the great wolf. The twin creatures above Heimdall that he bars with his staff indicate that these giants and world destroyers are kept at bay, the same message delivered by the depiction of a bound Loki below him. His position, horizontally across the width of the cross shaft, has the effect of transforming the cross into Bifrost itself, linking Midgard, the ground, to Asgard, the sky.

Heimdall is not a popular subject among known tenth- and eleventh-century sculpture. His only other certain appearance is on a cross slab at Jurby, Man.  

[PLATE 87] Here, a man in a buttoned tunic blows a long horn, which extends across the top of the slab above the relief cross. He has a beard, a sword and he wears a hat or helmet. On the other side of the cross standing atop the other horizontal arm is the fragmentary iconography of a figure wearing a tunic with a loop around one surviving leg. This is likely Loki bound; the oppositional relationship between the two gods on the Gosforth cross is reiterated at Jurby.

That Heimdall rides against Loki in the final battle between the gods may allow us to tentatively identify the horseman on the west side of the cross as Heimdall. With his head toward Loki, the artist may have indicated a relationship between the two. By representing Heimdall twice, his role as the protector of the world is stressed. He actively

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467 Larrington, ed. The Poetic Edda.
468 Jurby 125 (98). Kermode and Wilson, Manx Crosses, 185-89.
469 This comparison is especially relevant in light of the many strong similarities between Manx sculptures and the specific details of style at Gosforth.
protects the world against the chaos of giants and he is the destroyer of the ultimate chaotic force, Loki.\textsuperscript{470}

Above these figures, the uppermost portion of the west face is filled with a ring chain motif surmounted by a lupine head biting up at the lowest arm of the cross. An upward-biting monster is carved on three of the four faces, with only the north face missing this element. These beasts, at least those on the east and west face where the cross head is fully visible, represent the wolves perpetually chasing the carts of the sun and the moon across the sky. They are described in the \textit{Prose Edda}:

\begin{quote}
There are two wolves, and the one who is chasing [the sun] is called Skoll. He frightens her, and he eventually will catch her. The other is called Hati Hrodvinisson. He runs in front of her trying to catch the moon. And, this will happen.\textsuperscript{471}
\end{quote}

These wolves are part of the mythic cosmology and not directly related to a specific narrative. The \textit{Völuspà} states,

\begin{quote}
The sun turns black, earth sinks into the sea, 
the bright stars vanish from the sky; 
steam rises up in the conflagration, 
a high flame plays against heaven itself.\textsuperscript{472}
\end{quote}

No mention is made here of the devouring wolves, instead describing the destruction of Creation more objectively.\textsuperscript{473} The wolves act more as a poetic device to explain the rapid motion of the sun and moon than as specific agents of destruction. Interestingly, Snorri recorded a passage from the \textit{Vafþrúðnismál} and said of the aftermath of Ragnarok:

\begin{quote}
A lost lay, \textit{Heimdalargaldr (Heimdall’s Song)} is mentioned as the source of the verse, “Of nine mothers I am the child / of nine sisters I am the son” from the Prose Edda, but no copy of the complete work survives. This work certainly had more complete information about Heimdall’s nature and tasks, and knowledge of it would inform the west face iconography better.

\textsuperscript{470} Sturluson, \textit{Prose Edda}, Ch. 12.

\textsuperscript{471} Larrington, ed. \textit{The Poetic Edda}, 57.

\textsuperscript{472} A. Olrik, \textit{Om Ragnarok, Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed} (1902), 279-80.
One daughter
is born to Alfrodul [Sun]
before Fenrir destroys her.
When the gods die
this maid shall ride
her mother’s paths. 474

This verse implies that Fenrir, the great lupine offspring of Loki that devours Odin, is also responsible for the darkening of the sun in contradiction to Snorri’s record. Snorri recorded the “old” stories centuries after his native Iceland officially converted to Christianity and he certainly embellished or added elements that were not present in the original texts. 475 Therefore, when interpreting the iconography of the Gosforth cross, the presence of the upward-biting lupine monsters should be considered as part of the cosmic condition and not a specific reference to the Ragnarok.

This analysis shows that the west face, rather than illustrating the specific narrative sequence from the Ragnarok, shows instead the character of the world with Heimdall guarding Bifrost, Loki bound and tortured, tended by his wife, Sigyn, and the wolf in continuous pursuit of the sun or moon above. The horseman may indicate Heimdall riding against Loki in the final battle, but this may be used to remind the viewer of Heimdall’s nature and less as a narrative device. This side records Heimdall and his important function within the pantheon of Norse gods while Loki, the agent of chaos, is Heimdall’s nemesis. Loki and his monstrous children are those forces from which Heimdall protects the world. A similar scene may be depicted on Ovingham 1 in Northumbria. [PLATE 88] Bailey argues for the identification of Loki breaking his bonds, Fenrir swallowing the sun, and Heimdall with his horn. 476 Cramp suggests the scene may show David, a lion, and Goliath though, “…these depictions are so crude that it is difficult to be certain that any one interpretation is correct.” 477

474 Sturluson, Prose Edda, Ch. 53.
476 Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 133, 253.
477 Cramp, CASSS 1, 215-16.
The message of the Gosforth cross’s west face is apotropaic. Loki is bound and Heimdall protects the world from chaotic forces such as giants and Loki’s monstrous children. It stands as a reminder of the forces of law and order. Rather than illustrating the end of the world, it reinforces the Æsir’s continual and efficacious struggle to delay it. It communicates clearly that the gods are constant and active in the world.

6.1.2 South Face: Cosmology

The cross’s south face has the greatest number of distinct vignettes. [PLATE 8] The south face fits poorly into the Ragnarok narrative imposed upon the cross by scholars. Rather than being narrative, the south face shows the cosmology of the Forn Siðr beliefs. The interlaced figure at the bottom may be Hel, one of Loki’s monstrous offspring, who rules the underworld where dwell those who have died of disease or old age.478 [PLATE 89] She is described as being half dark flesh and half light flesh, something that may have been conveyed with paint and would account for the interlacing of the potentially bicolored arms and legs. Above her is Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, another of Loki’s children. The Midgard Serpent is so named because Odin threw the beast into the sea surrounding Midgard, the Middle Earth of the World Tree, Yggdrasil, where humans dwell. The creature grew so immense that it circled the world and will remain there, swallowing its own tail, until Thor destroys it in the Ragnarok. While the serpent over Hel is not biting its own tail, its braided length stretches across the width of the cross as if encircling it.

The horseman above the Midgard Serpent may represent general humanity, called the “greater and lesser men of Heimdall,”479 occupying the space of Midgard or Middle Earth. [PLATE 90] Conversely, the horseman could also represent the Æsir, the race of

478 Sturluson, Prose Edda, Ch. 34.

479 L. 3–4, meiri ok minni / mögu Heimdalar. This verse in the opening stanza of the Völuspá is unique in surviving Eddic literature and refers to the creation myth recorded in the Rígsþula that tells of the creation of the social orders of Men by a god named Rig, identified by scholars as Heimdall. See pg. 5-6 of Nordal, ed. Völuspá. This lay is in contrast to Snorri’s version of humanity, in part derived from the Biblical Genesis, in the Prose Edda.
gods, who dwell in the lofty realm of Asgard beneath the leaves of the World Tree. This horseman may specifically be Odin, the All-Father, atop his horse, Sleipnir, bearing his spear. While the south face horseman cannot be definitively identified as any single individual, the tradition of an eight-legged Sleipnir may not have been recognized in northern England in the tenth century. Most likely, the horseman represents noble or warrior Men or simply the race of the Æsir, most of whom have horses named in poems. Bailey more recently proposed that this figure be identified as Týr and the beast above him as Fenrir-bound. In the course of his capture, Fenrir bit off Týr’s right hand, as Snorri described in the Gylfaginning, verse 34. This identification is not convincing because the left arm is shown foreshortened, not missing, and the hand still grasps the reins.

The next vignette is the quadruped leaping over a tangle of interlace. Some scholars have considered this animal together with the deer above as a “hart and hound” motif popular with Anglo-Scandinavian sculptors. However, the typical arrangement for this motif is a leaping stag with the hound carved over its back. On the Gosforth cross’s south face, the quadruped is not necessarily related directly to the hart above. Adequate room exists above the hart’s back to have carved a small hound, but the sculptor elected not to do this. Additionally, the hart is calmly cantering, not leaping away from a pursuer. No other version of this motif places the hound so far away from the hart. Therefore, the “hart and hound” is not pictured on the Gosforth cross.

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480 In his Gylfaginning, Snorri describes Sleipnir as possessing eight legs and being the fastest of the Æsir’s mounts. Only Snorri’a Prose Edda records Sleipnir’s octopodism; there, he relates that during the building of a great fortress by a Giant, an eight-footed Sleipnir was born to Svadilfari, the giant’s horse, and Loki, who took the form of a mare to tempt Svadilfari away from the work of hauling stones for the fortress. The poems of the Poetic Edda, Grimmismal 44.4, Sigrdrifaumal 15.5, and Hyndlulied 40.2, Snorri’s main source, makes several mentions of Sleipnir, but only by name. Odin riding Sleipnir is pictured elsewhere, most famously on a picture stone from Alskog Tjängvide, [PLATE 115] where Sleipnir has eight legs positioned in pairs.


482 This motif appears in its more typical form at Lancaster, Dacre, Bride, Andreas, and Michael.
Instead, the quadruped is Ratatoskr, the chatty squirrel, who according to Snorri runs up and down the World Tree exchanging “slanderous” gossip between Nidhogg, a dragon-like monster, who gnaws at the deepest root of the tree in a brood of serpents, and an unnamed eagle, who “knows many things” and sits in the upper branches with the hawk, Vedrfolnir, between its eyes.⁴⁸³ Snorri’s drew his authority on Ratatoskr from the Grímnismál:

Ratatoskr is the squirrel’s name, who has to run upon the ash of Yggdrasill; the eagle’s word he must bring from above and tell to Nidhogg below.⁴⁸⁴

Ratatoskr’s orientation with respect to the cross makes him appear to be leaping up amid the branches of Yggdrasil, pictured “below” him, to the right on the cross shaft. Their disordered entwining suggests unchecked vegetal growth; this messy arrangement was certainly purposeful because the carver was fully capable of carving intricate, regular interlace as seen elsewhere on the cross.

The hart that appears above Ratatoskr represents collectively the four stags that gnaw at Yggdrasil’s vegetation. These stags, together with Ratatoskr and Nidhogg, are the main agents responsible for the decay of the World Tree:

The ash of Yggdrasill suffers agony more than men know: a hart bites it from above, and it decays at the sides, and Nidhogg rends it beneath.⁴⁸⁵

These agents are an intrinsic part of the World Tree’s nature and its power against forces of constant decay. Most scholars have identified the hart as Eikthyrnir, the hart who

⁴⁸³ Sturluson, Prose Edda, Ch. 16.
⁴⁸⁴ Larrington, ed. The Poetic Edda, Grímnismal 32.
⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., Grímnismal 35.
stands upon the roof of Odin’s Valhalla and nibbles at the overhanging foliage of Lærad, a tree conflated by scholars with Yggdrasil:

Eikthyrnir is the hart’s name
who stands of Father of Hosts’ hall
and grazes Lærad’s branches;
and from his horns liquid drips into Hvergelmir,
from thence all waters have their flowing…

Calverley compares the hart, Eikthyrnir, the source of all rivers, to the Christian divine hart, the fountain of living waters. While Eikthyrnir is a named component of the Norse cosmos, he should be considered part of the host of Asgard and not part of Yggdrasil’s nature. The unnamed harts that dwell within the branches of the World Tree are a better identification for the carved deer because they are a fundamental part of Yggdrasil, whereas Eikthyrnir has a different role as a source of waters and as an inhabitant of Asgard. The only direct iconographic comparison for the Gosforth deer is a foliage-grazing deer preserved on a bone ring found in an Icelandic cairn. The ring’s interlaced foliage also compares favorably to the winged creature on the cross’s north face, perhaps indicating a connection of the ring to Gosforth, perhaps as an import good into Iceland. [PLATE 93]

Above the hart is a creature gagged with a ring; scholars have identified it as Fenrir bound, an identification supported here. [PLATE 94] The myth of Fenrir’s binding relates how he was able to break several attempts at chaining him until the dwarves fashioned a magical, ribbon-like fetter that Fenrir would not deign to have placed on his leg until Týr offered to place his right hand in Fenrir’s mouth as a troth that

486 Ibid., Grimnismal, 26.
487 Calverley, "The Sculptured Cross," 149.
488 Galerie nationale du Canada, "The Vikings Exhibition."
489 Parker and Collingswood, "A reconsideration of the Gosforth cross."
    ; Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses; Berg, "The Gosforth Cross."
    ; Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture.
no trickery was afoot. The cord bound him tightly and Týr’s hand was bitten off during Fenrir’s struggle to free himself. Then, the gods stuck open his jaw with a sword as he bit at them. The artist elected not to depict this literally, although given the details of the ring fetters binding Loki’s hands and feet still visible in the Loki scene, he was perfectly capable of carving such a thing. Instead, he made the wolf’s body from the vertebral ring chain used on the west and east faces. The ring chain body possesses no feet, so the artist placed a ring around the beast’s neck; the jaw is held open by passing the ring behind the lower and in front of the upper jaw. Fenrir’s open jaw is an important attribute because it is the source of the River Van (Hope). This divergence may also indicate a change in the story. Snorri wrote the *Prose Edda* almost three centuries after the Gosforth cross was carved. A detail such as the nature of Fenrir’s fetter could have changed over time. This is the only one of the cross’s lupine creatures that is bound or gagged in any fashion, making its identification as Fenrir in his bound state probable. This carries the theme of evil tempered through the efforts of the Æsir featured on the west face.

The final element on the south side, the curly tailed monster biting up at the cross head, may represent the dragon-like Nidhogg, the gnawer of one of Yggdrasil’s roots. This is the only lupine interlace monster on the cross with a clear tail, although the two creatures provoking Heimdall on the west face are similarly formed but without the curled tails. Another possibility is that Nidhogg was originally carved on the top of the cross base, similar to the cross base at Brigham, Cumbria, which has a deeply and intricately carved serpentine creature encircling the aperture that would have held either a stone or wooden sculpture. I argued in Chapter 2 that the Gosforth base may have been recarved by a later hand on account of its poor craftsmanship that is not in keeping with the demonstrated abilities of the carver of the Gosforth cross. If the Gosforth base had been recarved, it may have had additional iconography upon it. The Gosforth cross may

\[490\] Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, Ch. 34.

have originally been encircled at its base by Nidhogg as perhaps at Brigham. This must remain, of course, speculative.

The iconography of the south face represents the Forn Siðr cosmology of the World Tree. A twisted Hel dwells at the bottom with the Midgard Serpent’s world-encircling length just above. The detailed horseman occupies the space of men and gods, perhaps specifically representing Odin riding Sleipnir. Ratatoskr and the hart represent the torment of the World Tree as it is gnawed and chewed by these creatures and above them, the ever-present threat of a bound Fenrir. Fenrir is fated to be free of his fetters during the Ragnarok and he will devour Odin in battle. Here, Fenrir is still bound, making him not an element within an unfolding Ragnarok narrative but rather a constant element in the nature of the world, the destructive force held at bay by the grace of the Æsir.

6.1.3 East Face: Odin

The east face has eight distinct iconographical elements, the most of the cross’s sides. [PLATE 6] The lowest is a tangled interlace terminating in two monstrous heads that bite at each other. [PLATE 95] The heads are fashioned similarly to the other monsters on the cross with open jaws and lupine features. Their identification is unclear, but they may represent the line from the *Grimnismal*:

More serpents lie under the ash of Yggdrasil
than any fool can imagine
Goin and Moin, they are Grafvitnir’ sons,
Grabak and Grafvollud,
Ofnir and Svafnir I think for ever will
bit on the tree’s branches. 492

The serpents are countless, but they are named in pairs, a common convention in an oral tradition. The two combating heads and the dense interlace represent the collective dualism of the mass of serpents.

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492 Larrington, ed. *The Poetic Edda*, 34.
The cross’s east face has drawn the most intensive scholarship on account of the so-called “Crucifixion” scene. [PLATE 96] The scene consists of three figures: below, a man in a tunic on the left holds a spear upright and a woman in a trailing dress on the right extends an object before her. Above them a larger figure wears a belted tunic like Heimdall’s, with two points extending down from each hip. His arms extend out to each side, his hands touching the sides of the cross. A rope molding surrounds him forming a rectangular field, which separates him from the figures below. The figure appears to stand on the bottom molding and his hands overlap it on each side. The man below has pierced his right side with his spear, which extends into the rectangular field, and a stream of blood issues forth.

Because of its obvious comparison to the iconography of the Crucifixion of Christ, this vignette on the Gosforth cross is often referred to as the “Crucifixion” scene. Scholars have interpreted in one of two ways: it either represents the Resurrection of Baldr, a god killed by the trickery of Loki, an event to take place after the end of the Ragnarok, or it shows the Crucifixion of Jesus with Longinus and Mary Magdalene as attendants.493

If the identification of the scene as Baldr is correct, the attending figures are difficult to explain. Baldr’s resurrection is foretold in the Völuspá:

Without sowing the fields will grow
all ills will be healed, Baldr will come back;
Hod and Baldr, the gods of slaughter, will live happily together
in the sage’s palaces – do you understand yet, or what more?494

493 Parker argues for this as Baldr’s return (Parker, The Gosforth District, 69.) In CASSS 2, p. 101, Bailey argues for a Christian interpretation of the scene, stating, “The only clear Christian scene on the cross is the Crucifixion depiction on the east face, though even its iconography does not fit easily into conventional classifications.”

494 Larrington, ed. The Poetic Edda, 62.
Snorri reiterates this in the *Gylfaginning* by saying, “Next, Baldr and Hod will arrive from Hel,” but the entire matter is stated as fact more than being an event with its own distinct narrative.\(^{495}\) If these figures illustrate Baldr’s return from Hel, the iconography is a complete invention of the Gosforth artist, especially specifically conflating it with the Passion of Christ. Baldr’s return would need to be equated with the act of killing Jesus, a complicated theological leap to be sure.\(^{496}\) Baldr’s foreseen death was the result of Loki’s complex trickery and was one of the three harbingers of Ragnarok.\(^{497}\) When Hel agreed to release him from death should everything on earth mourn for him, a single giantess, Þökk, refused. When the Æsir discover the giantess was Loki in disguise, he was bound in the manner illustrated on the cross’s west face.

However, other than Snorri’s long prose on Baldr’s death and Loki’s punishment, he is a god featured rarely in the surviving texts. Even his origins are uncertain. Snorri, writing in Iceland, presents a vastly different version of Baldr’s demise than does Saxo, writing in Denmark.\(^{498}\) The twelfth-century writers may record divergent stories, but his very status as a god is uncertain during the Iron Age.\(^{499}\) Davidson even questions key details in Snorri’s version of Baldr’s death. She argues that rather than being felled by an errant twig of mistletoe that Snorri may have conflated the common trope of Odin-centered myths of a seemingly harmless stick transforming into a deadly weapon and a legendary sword called Mistletoe.\(^{500}\) Jan de Vries believed Baldr to be a human hero.\(^{501}\) Lindow disagrees with this, accepting Baldr’s divinity, and considers the myth to reflect

\(^{495}\) Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 53.

\(^{496}\) This is Bailey’s view in the *Corpus*.


\(^{499}\) “There is little evidence of any early cult of Balder, and the question appears to be largely one of literary sources and traditions linked with his name.” Davidson, *Northern Gods and Legends*, 183.

\(^{500}\) Ibid., 189.

the blood-feud society of early medieval Scandinavia. Whatever the case, Baldr, god or warrior, had little impact on the material world. Few place-names derive from him and no objects stem from his worship. If the Gosforth cross represents Baldr, it would be unique. However, to equate Baldr, whose very role in the mythology is poorly understood, to the central figure for the Christian faith is a fallacy. Aspects of their stories are similar (the young son of God tragically killed), but the sources for our understanding of the Baldr myth(s) are penned by men strongly influenced by Christianity. If twelfth-century sources suggest a connection between Baldr and Christ, those may not have been present in the tenth century. The interpretation of the cruciform figure on the Gosforth cross as resurrected Baldr, likened to the crucified Christ, is tenuous at best.

For those who believe the scene to show the Christian Crucifixion, the absence of a cross and the identification of the attending figures is bothersome. Bailey, who compared the scene to a “crossless Crucifixion” plaque at Penrith, offers the most compelling explanation for the unusual iconography. The Penrith plaque is iconographically similar to several bronze “crossless” Crucifixion plaques from Ireland and suggest that the artist of the Penrith plaque may have been familiar with possible imported models. Christ’s cross is absent from the bronze plaque because whatever surface onto which they were mounted would have depicted the rood. As for the attendants, Berg offered a convoluted identification of the female as Ecclesia, drawn from Carolingian models. Bailey interprets them as Longinus and Mary Magdalene, who represents the converted heathen.


503 Cramp, *CASSS* 2, 140-42. I am not entirely convinced that the Penrith carving lacks a cross. This reading depends on how one interprets certain incised lines.


plaque is sound and provides an excellent argument for the transmission of the iconography, but it disregards the specific context of the scene on the cross with regard to its interpretation.

The Gosforth “Crucifixion” scene can also be read as the hanged Odin. One important aspect of Odin is that he journeyed to the realm of the dead to receive their knowledge in the form of the mystic runes. The Runatal states:

I know that I hung on a windy tree
nine long nights,
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
myself to myself,
on that tree of which no man knows
from where its roots run.
No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,
downward I peered;
I took up the runes, screaming I took them,
then I fell back from there.  

His side pierced, denied food and drink—his words focus on his physical suffering at the hands of unnamed torturers. At Gosforth, the artist chose to adapt Crucifixion iconography to stress the physical suffering of Odin, just as the inclusion of Ratatoskr and the gnawing harts on the south face stress the suffering of the World Tree.

Linguists and theologians have drawn parallels between this passage and the Passion of Christ since the translations of the Icelandic texts in the late nineteenth century. Despite a century of research, debate continues whether these Norse beliefs developed from or were heavily influenced by contact with Christians or if they developed independently from a common Indo-European tradition. Regardless of the final verdict, the two stories are not the same. The Odin myth promises nothing of redemption, nothing of a New Covenant. In Odin, we see the opposite of Christ. Technically, Jesus is killed by the Romans while Odin hangs himself, although the

507 Larrington, ed. The Poetic Edda.
theology of self-sacrifice is present in both. Jesus’ resurrection confirms victory over death through the will of God. Odin’s resurrection is temporary because his ultimate fate in the jaws of Fenrir is inevitable. Jesus’ sacrifice is for the absolution of mankind. Odin’s sacrifice is for his own knowledge and power.

No specific iconographic tradition representing Odin hanged survives, unlike the story of Thor’s fishing expedition. The reasons for this are unknown. Perhaps a cultural injunction against depicting the myth existed or perhaps it was a less attractive narrative for illustration than others. Another possibility is that a highly symbolic iconographic tradition does survive, but it is not one that is yet recognized. Whatever the reason, the Odin scene on the Gosforth cross has no parallel within known Scandinavian works. When the Gosforth sculptor wanted to illustrate Odin’s death-by-hanging, he elected to fashion it in the mode of local Christian iconographic traditions from western Ireland, the English Midlands, and Man.

Many obvious parallels exist between Christian crucifixion iconography and the Gosforth scene, especially when compared to Irish High Cross crucifixion scenes. Scandinavians settled throughout the Irish Sea region and almost certainly saw the High Crosses and took inspiration from them. However, the Gosforth crucifixion scene is hardly a faithful copy of an Irish Crucifixion. The differences, not the similarities, are what indicate that the Gosforth image should not be interpreted as a Christian scene. Two key details are the absence of a cross behind the figure and the presence of a female attendant at the lower right.

The lack of a supporting cross has been compared to the Irish crucifixion plaques, but two of these plaques do have crosses, a third has a pseudo-cross, and the other two openwork plaques are inconclusive—they may have been mounted on a substrate that would have provided a cross for the Christ figure. [PLATE 98] Only one is a true “cross-less crucifix.” Bailey compared these plaques to the carved sandstone plaque at Penrith in Cumbria, though Christ’s robes on the Penrith plaque give such a

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509 Cramp, CASSS 2.
strong impression of a cross that perhaps the underlying motif is no longer necessary.\textsuperscript{510} The Gosforth sculptor may have seen these Irish models directly or he may have developed his Odin iconography through such secondary iterations as the Penrith plaque.

The Gosforth figure, however, is most certainly cross-less. One could argue that a now-lost cross may have been added behind the figure—the assumption being that these high crosses were originally painted—but because the Gosforth carver included many details still visible on the monument, including belts and horse hooves, so central a detail as the cross itself would not have been left to painting alone. Also, the figure’s hands overlap the rope molding. If a cross had been painted behind the figure, then the frame should encapsulate it. This frame also complicates a Christian interpretation of this scene, for it separates the man from the figures of the spearbearer and woman below, although the spear crosses into the framed space around the central figure. This makes more sense because Odin is pierced by his own spear, sacrificing himself to himself.

The market cross at Kells is a good example of the way Crucifixion iconography could be adapted for the mythology of Odin.\textsuperscript{511} [PLATE 99] The Kells cross shows Christ crucified at the center of the cross-head. Longinus and Stephaton flank him. The arms of Christ are held out and down, palms out, slightly penetrating the sculptured arms of the cross monument. The Kells Market Cross is not an isolated crucifixion scene; the stone cross itself bears the crucified Christ at its center. The cross does not simply represent the Crucifixion, it \textit{is} the Crucifixion. The Kells Market Cross’s carver did not carve a Crucifixion scene on a cross, but rather transformed the cross into a Crucifixion by placing Christ at the center of the cross head. A Christian could easily interpret the figure in the center of the stone cross with his arms held out on the horizontal arms as Christ on the Cross.

\textsuperscript{510} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{511} See Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland}. 
The Gosforth artist did something similar with the Gosforth cross. Here, the rope by which Odin is hanged surrounds him above the figures below. It passes around his body and over his hands, binding him to the underlying tree – the Gosforth cross itself. Odin is literally hanging on the Gosforth cross, now the windy tree, by means of an encircling rope. Because the scene is removed from the cross and placed low in the iconographic panel, it relates to the sculpture differently than Crucifixions centered in the cross head. The Anglian tradition often follows the Irish tradition in this respect, with Jesus carved onto the cross head like at St Mary Castlegate, York (CASSS 3, St Mary Castlegate 2) and the Durham (CASSS 1, Durham 1-4) cross heads. Examples also survive of Crucifixions carved into the lower shaft at Ruthwell and Aycliffe (CASSS 1, Aycliffe 1). The Ruthwell Crucifixion is extremely damaged making a detailed comparison difficult, but the contemporary Aycliffe version is well preserved. The panel has a central cross with Jesus wearing a knee-length tunic. The sun and moon are above the cross and Stephaton and Longinus are beneath, to the right and left, respectively. This is an entirely common early medieval version of the Crucifixion in northern England and one that the Gosforth artist could have seen. If he had wanted specifically to depict a Crucifixion in a panel on the lower part of a cross shaft, he had access to exempla such as Aycliffe’s. The changes to the iconography at Gosforth show that the scene was designed independently to illustrate a different story than that of the crucifixion of Christ.

The second detail, the woman attendant, has been interpreted as Mary Magdalene holding forth a curved alabastron. Alabastrons may be elongated, but they are typically not curved. More convincing is interpreting the image as a Valkyrie, one of Odin’s female attendants in his Valhalla in Asgard, holding an upside-down drinking horn.

512 Lang, CASSS 3, 96-97.
513 Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses. The object the woman holds is, truthfully, difficult to discern. Its shape appears to change with the angle of the light. The amount of erosion also has affected negatively the clarity of the vessel’s shape. Having looked at it carefully, the vessel appears to me to be curved.
These Valkyrie would greet Odin upon his return home by offering him a drink. This is pictured on the Alskog Tjängvide image stone and a hogback fragment from Sockburn, Yorkshire, albeit only the lower half on the figure survives in the latter. This is also likely the correct interpretation of a number of small pendants from Sweden. [PLATE 100] The iconography of the pendant is almost identical to that of the Gosforth scene save for the inversion of the horn, which explicitly illustrates how Odin was “denied food and drink from a horn,” part of the physical suffering endured by the god. Odin subsists purely on wine as told in the *Grimnismal*:

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Geri and Freki, tamed to war he satiates  
the glorious Father of Hosts;  
but on wine alone the weapon-magnificent  
Odin always lives.
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Denying him this wine conveys both his hunger and thirst. This suffering is also accentuated by the spearbearer who has pierced the god’s side causing blood to flow. This practice was typically part of Viking executions by hanging. The spear’s penetration of the corded frame stresses the active torture of direct bodily harm; the separation of the drink from the frame illustrates the passive torture of starvation and thirst. Combined, the scene offers the viewer an opportunity to contemplate Odin’s suffering and sacrifice.

Odin appears on other tenth-century sculptures in England, though not in a cruciform position. At Kirklevington, YN, a fragmentary cross shaft (CASSS 6, Kirklevington 2A) has on one face a frontal figure. [PLATE 101] He wears a tunic with long sleeve and a pointed cap. His feet protrude from the hem of his tunic in simple points. His face is weathered, but the traces of two circular, incised eyes, a broad nose and a small mouth remain. Two large birds perch on his shoulders facing each other;

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Lang interpreted these as ravens and identified the figure as Odin.\(^5\) Odin may appear less ambiguously at Sockburn, Co. Durham, \((CASSS\text{ 1}, Sockburn 3)\) but Cramp argues this could also be a secular image commemorating a warrior.\(^6\) [PLATE 102] He may also have been in the now missing section of a Sockburn hogback \((CASSS\text{ 1}, Sockburn 15)\) that preserves the lower portion of a woman in a long dress holding out a drinking horn. [PLATE 103] A similar image appears in Gotland. [PLATE 104]

Above the hanged Odin is a length of median incised ring chain identical to that on the south face that comprises the body of the wolf biting up at the cross head. Parker interpreted this as a “description of the new world” that would be created in the aftermath of the Ragnarok after the return of Baldr, whom he believed was depicted below.\(^7\) Others interpreted this as a beheaded monster, perhaps even the same one that appears on the south side.\(^8\) Both of these interpretations are unsatisfying. The wolves pursuing the sun and moon are never beheaded in surviving myth. The ring chain on the other faces do function as the bodies of monsters, but the ring chain appears independently on other Gosforth monuments and in those cases is not part of a monster. The interlace above Odin on the east face does not need to function as a narrative character, beheaded or not, but it may represent some temporal change between his hanged state and the revenge of Viðar upon Fenrir. By pressing narrative meanings onto the ring chain interlace, the resulting interpretation feels forced.

Above the ring chain is the highest human figure anywhere on the cross. [PLATE 105] A man wearing a belted tunic is positioned horizontally across the cross shaft with his feet to the right. He holds a staff or spear behind him with his right hand

\(^{5}\) James T. Lang, "Illustrative Carving of the Viking Period at Sockburn-on-Tees," \emph{Archaeologia Aeliana, ser. 4} 50 (1972): 235-48, 243-44. Collingwood believed the image to be of a secular nature and identified the image as a secular depiction of the deceased. Collingwood, "Anglian and Anglo-Danish sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire," 352.

\(^{6}\) Cramp, "Sockburn before the Normans."

\(^{7}\) Parker, \emph{The Gosforth District}, 68.

\(^{8}\) Berg, "The Gosforth Cross."
and his left arm extends forward where it grasps the upper jaw of a lupine monster, which descends on him with an open mouth from above. The man’s foot is planted firmly into the lower jaw of the beast. The monster’s forked tongue extends out on each side of the man.

Parker and Calverley identified this scene as Vidar (Víðar) avenging his father, Odin, by slaying Fenrir to bring a close to the Ragnarok.

Then the great son of War-father [Odin] Vidar, advances against the Beast of Slaughter with this hand he stabs his sword to the heart of Loki’s kinsman; then his father is avenged.\(^\text{520}\)

The \textit{Völuspà} describes Fenrir’s death as a blow to the heart with a sword, but a different source for Fenrir’s death is carved on the Gosforth cross. It comes from a work separate from the \textit{Völuspà}, the \textit{Vafthrudnismal} (Vafthrudnir’s Sayings), a riddle contest between Odin and the giant Vafthrudnir, where Odin seeks information about the Ragnarok. Vafthrudnir says:

The wolf will swallow the Father of Men [Odin], Vidar will avenge this; the cold jaws of the beast he will sunder in battle.\(^\text{521}\)

Vidar is also described by Snorri as the owner of the “thick shoe” that will be used to protect his foot against Fenrir’s maw.\(^\text{522}\) This indicates that the \textit{Völuspà} was not the main source for the Gosforth cross’s iconography, further undermining such attempts as Collingwood’s to correlate it to the Ragnarok narrative.\(^\text{523}\)

\(^{520}\) Larrington, ed. \textit{The Poetic Edda}, 54.

\(^{521}\) Ibid., \textit{Vafthrudnismal}, 53.

\(^{522}\) Sturluson, \textit{Prose Edda}, 29.

\(^{523}\) Collingwood, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses}, 159.
Obvious parallels exist between the Gosforth iconography of Vidar slaying Fenrir and later depictions of the Christian hell mouth motif, but there is no evidence to suggest that one was influenced by the other.\textsuperscript{524} Early hell mouth imagery, such as on a possibly eighth-century English ivory in the Albert and Victoria Museum,\textsuperscript{525} [PLATE 106] may have had Ottonian or Byzantine origins (either of which could have influenced Viking artists), but it is more likely that the visual imagery developed from parallel textual traditions of devouring mouths in torturous underworlds. Bailey notes that the Vidar iconography is “unparalleled”; no other known depiction of Vidar exists.\textsuperscript{526} The inclusion of Vidar within the iconographic narrative of the Gosforth cross has been used as proof that the cross illustrates the Ragnarok. Rather, Vidar functions similarly to Loki on the west face—as part of Odin’s identity. Vidar’s function within myth is primarily as his father’s avenger. While this function is necessarily part of the Ragnarok events, here he is symbolic of Odin’s second death, his first, the hanging, shown below.

The final element on the east face is part of the Vidar image. The wolf whose jaws Vidar is rending apart is interlaced with another lupine monster who bites up at the cross head in a fashion similar to the creature on the east face. Fenrir and the pursuing wolf, either Skoll or Hati Hroðvitniss,\textsuperscript{527} each have separate serpentine bodies braided together into a single yet complex decorative element. This may also indicate Snorri’s belief that Fenrir is responsible for devouring the sun.

The iconography of the east face focuses on the two deaths of Odin: his self-sacrifice to gain the knowledge exclusive to the dead and his more permanent death in the

\textsuperscript{524} Gary D. Schmidt, \textit{The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century} (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995). Schmidt discusses the Gosforth monument at the end of his first chapter (28-31), but draws no direct connection between the Vidar and hell mouth imagery.


\textsuperscript{526} Cramp, \textit{CASS} 2, 101.

\textsuperscript{527} Larrington, ed. \textit{The Poetic Edda}, Grimnismal, 39.
maw of Fenrir, here alluded to by his son, Viðar, enacting his revenge. Both scenes have strong parallels to Christian iconography, but if such iconography served as direct models, it was altered significantly to serve the stories of the Norse All-father.

6.1.4 North Face: Freyr(?)

Four individual forms decorate the north face, the fewest of any of the cross’s sides. [PLATE 5] The lowest is a three strand, median incised plait, with no figural features. This field of interlace has been interpreted variously as “portents” and the plain of battle for the Ragnarok.  

Similar to the ring chain interlace on the east face above Odin, the north side’s interlace does not have a specific narrative function within the Ragnarok narrative.

Above the interlace field, two horsemen are placed one above the other; the lower is upside down with respect to the ground. The horsemen, irrespective of their orientation, ride in the same direction as the other horsemen on the cross. The identification of the horsemen is less certain. Parker, who understood the cross as illustrating the events of the Ragnarok, believed the lower to be Surt the Black, a fire giant who rides in from the south bringing destructive flames to the battle plains during the Ragnarok:

Surt comes from the south with the harm of branches,  
the sun of the slaughter-gods glances from his sword;  
the rocky cliffs crack open and the troll-women are abroad,  
men road the road to hell and the sky splits apart.  

If the lower horseman is Surt, the upper horseman could be identified as Freyr, the god of fertility, who battles Surt to their mutual deaths. Freyr is known as “Beli’s Bright Bane” because he slew the giant, Beli, with a stag’s antler. He must use an antler because he

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gave his good sword to Skirnir, his manservant, and he will be without this sword when he faces Surt.\textsuperscript{531} Loki asserts that Freyr will rue this choice:

\begin{quote}
With gold you bought yourself Gymir’s daughter
and so you gave away your sword;
but when the sons of Muspell ride of Myrkwood,
do you know then, wretch, how you’ll fight?\textsuperscript{532}
\end{quote}

Neither of the horsemen is carrying a sword; both are armed with spears. Freyr’s weapon of choice for the Ragnarok is not recorded. Spears were common weapons and male “Viking” burials often included a spear in addition to a sword or other grave goods. If the monstrous creature that descends from the cross head is the giant Beli, a possibility because the monstrous creatures on the cross are all depicted similarly, then the antler used by Freyr as a weapon could have been visually replaced by the artist with a standard spear. Another possibility is that the details of the myth as recorded in the Codex Regius changed between the ninth and tenth centuries and their recording in the thirteenth.

However, if the north side is interpreted as a continuation of Odinic myth, then it may illustrate Odin’s voyage to the Well of Mimir, a font of wisdom; Odin famously sacrificed an eye to drink from it. The north face may also represent Odin riding to Mimir’s Well to gain knowledge of runes and Odin facing off against Fenrir, who descends from the sky. The narrative could also be a scene from the Sigurd legend, a popular epic more commonly illustrated on the Manx crosses. Unfortunately, none of the figures’ details are specific to any given mythological character nor is the composition complex enough to identify the narrative of the north face satisfactorily. Another complication to interpreting the iconography of the north face is that the myths recorded in Icelandic manuscripts are not necessarily the entire complement of myths. If the north face represents a specific narrative that is lost, efforts to interpret it properly are fruitless. The north face is the most difficult to read because it is the only face never to receive

\textsuperscript{531} Larrington, ed. \textit{The Poetic Edda}, Skirnismal.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid., Lokasenna, 42.
direct sunlight and it is often backlit by the sun. This may have prompted the sculptor to reduce the complexity of its iconographic program.

6.1.5 Overall Form

In addition to the iconography on the four faces on the upper cross, the entire form of the sculpture is symbolic. The Gosforth cross does mimic the High Cross form used in Ireland, Scotland and England to express the Christian faith but rather than featuring the Crucifixion, saints, events of the Passion, and/or Old Testament stories, it instead shows the Forn Síðr pantheon and cosmology. The cross monuments across Cumbria are often interpreted as evidence of the conversion of the North from the polytheistic Norse mythology to Christianity. While this conversion eventually did take place, the status of the religious beliefs of the Norse immigrants in the tenth century is unknown and that these crosses serve as evidence for universal tenth-century conversion is simplistic.

The Gosforth cross is the most extreme example of the round-shaft type of standing cross. This type of cross is found scattered across northern England with concentrations in Lancaster, North Yorkshire, and Cumbria. The cross is oriented, the crosshead facing east and west. What has encouraged a Christian interpretation of this monument is its form. It is easy to take the cross shape at face value and assume that a non-Christian culture would never erect such a monument. However, unlike the sculptural crosses of Ireland, aside from the general shape of the sculpture, nothing else at Gosforth suggests a Christian reading and the iconography strongly indicates that this community was not Christian.

The biting, lupine monsters just below the cross head on three of the four faces of the cross are an indication that the cross head is as much a part of the iconographic program as the figural scenes below it. These biting wolves and the lack of separation

533 The general assumption that these Insular sculptures were painted would make the cross’s iconography more legible, but the north face would still be more difficult to read than the other faces.
534 Berg, "The Gosforth Cross."; Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture.
between the cross head and the panels suggest the cross head was envisioned to be the sun (Sol) and/or moon (Mani) within the greater composition of Forn Siðr cosmology. The central, raised boss and equilateral, flaring arms support this interpretation. The Irish crosses are quite different in their design in the way the entire monument is formed as a Christian cross, although the long lower arm is often paneled into separate narrative scenes rather than being a continuous narrative. While both have rings, probably functioning as nimbi, the effect is different on each. On Irish crosses, the center of the cross holds the crucified Christ with the glory of his divinity radiating out. At Gosforth, the ring acts similarly but instead of surrounding Christ it simply represents the halo of light that occurs naturally around the sun and the moon, especially in certain weather conditions such as thick high altitude stratocirrus cloud cover. [PLATE 107] Sun halos also appear in extreme cold and appear more often at high latitudes such as in Scandinavia. When paired with parhelia (sundogs) and heavy high altitude ice formation, the effect of flaring refracted light beams and one or more solar halos is not unlike the design of the Gosforth cross head. High altitude ice crystals can also cause a halo around the moon, especially when it is full.

Despite the possible difference in meaning between Irish and Anglo-Scandinavian ringed crosses, the tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian type was imported from Ireland. Ringed cross heads are not carved in England before the Norse exile from Dublin in 902. Anglian crosses predating the tenth century have free-armed cross heads. Whatever the incoming Norse-Irish thought about the meaning of the Irish high crosses, they enjoyed their appearance and patronized hundreds of examples in England. Tenth-century sculpture in northern England tends to have secular iconography in the form of hunting scenes or animal motifs and some are decorated only with knotwork, which makes for an ambiguous religious interpretation; others, such as the Gosforth monuments, overtly copy

536 Cramp, CASSS 2, 29-32.
the overall sculptural trends of making stone crosses but adapt them with Forn Siðr iconography.\textsuperscript{537}

The relationship of the Gosforth cross’s head to the overall monument of the Gosforth cross is not restricted to its position within the panels’ iconography. Multiple relationships exist within the monument. The iconography, in isolation, suggests the cross head represents the sun and moon, but the entire form of the cross represents Yggdrasil, the sacred tree, whose cosmology is illustrated on the cross’s south face. Elsewhere in Cumbria, there is evidence that the cross shape does not necessarily represent Christianity. In Dearham, the standing cross is formed similarly to Irish crosses with a long lower arm and shows a stylized tree on the western face with the original ground line cutting through the relief bulb of the tree’s lower trunk.\textsuperscript{538} [PLATE 24] The tree sprouts from the ground and the looping branches support stylized foliage made of the same ring chain field found at Gosforth on the churchyard cross and on the horizontal arms of a fragmentary cross head (CASSS Gosforth 3). The occurrence of this foliage pattern on the lower half of the Gosforth cross indicates that the cross’s overall form represents a tree with the ringed cross head as the arms of the tree, but calling the field of ring chain “foliage” might be incorrect. The bark of the European Ash (\textit{fraxinus excelsior}) tends to separate in drawn out Y shapes as the tree grows. [PLATE 108] It could also represent any one of several types of parasitic fungus that favor hardwoods, such as the Shaggy Bracket (\textit{inonotus hispidus}). [PLATE 109] The ring chain pattern on the Gosforth cross’s lower shaft is not simply decorative, it is emulation of natural phenomena.\textsuperscript{539} This pattern, along with the tendency of the immature ash to grow tall and straight with sparse foliage, transforms the cross into a tree.

\textsuperscript{537} The “Sigurd” shaft at Halton, Cheshire is one example. Bailey, \textit{CASSS} 9, 177-83. On one face, a detailed scene from the Sigurd legend decorates one side of a fragmentary column, probably a cross shaft.

\textsuperscript{538} Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2, 65-68.

\textsuperscript{539} Viking art across media often engages with the natural world in the form of animal ornament, although the highly stylized interlaced animals do not reflect that engagement through realism. However, the Gosforth cross, the Alstad rune stone, the gilt-bronze weathervane from Källunge and other works all demonstrate strong naturalism in their animal forms with the inclusion of detailed paws with dewclaws, separate teeth, and specific ear types.
There is a tradition of conflation between cross and tree in the Viking-period sculpture in England. Examples of Insular sculpted crosses sprouting leaves occur at Kirkby Wharfe YN, [PLATE 110] Sherburn YN, and Romsey HA.\textsuperscript{540} This “sprouting” cross also occurs in Anglo-Saxon Christian manuscripts, drawing from the imagery in Revelations of the Tree of Life from Revelation (Rev. 2:7, 22:2 and 22:19). The specific image of the cross-as-tree comes from Acts (Acts 5:30, 10:39 and 13:29) and is reiterated in the Anglo-Saxon poem \textit{The Dream of the Rood}, which begins with a vision of a jeweled cross described as a “sylicre treow,” a most wondrous tree; portions of the poem itself are carved upon the Ruthwell cross.\textsuperscript{541} However, arguing that the Gosforth artist was aware of specific language in Acts and Anglo-Saxon homilies and then incorporated that into a proselytizing sculpture is a stretch. Christianity did not give birth to the cross, but rather adapted it. The tree-like qualities of the Gosforth cross may also derive from a potential functional aspect of the sculpture as a focus of ritual activity.\textsuperscript{542}

That the stories of the two mythologies are so similar allows their symbols and iconography to be interchanged, but, ultimately, the Gosforth cross is not Christian. Heimdall is there, overseeing Loki’s punishment, the chasing wolves forever seek the sun and moon, Viðar avenges his father and, nearby on the Fishing Stone, Thor fishes for his nemesis, Jörmungandr. Where are the saints and Apostles? Where are scenes of the Passion or Old Testament prophets? The learned programmes on pillars at Masham and Dewsbury and upon crosses at Durham and Ruthwell are just a few Anglian exempla the

\textsuperscript{540} Bailey, \textit{Viking Age Sculpture}, 146-48. Examples also exist in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript tradition, but these books could not have directly influenced sculpture at Gosforth. The iconography could have been conveyed on ephemera or fabrics. See Barbara C. Raw, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of Monastic Revival}, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).


Gosforth artist could have seen. Irish crosses provide even more. Yet he created unique iconography, not of Christian stories, but of the Forn Siðr. If this was, as some claimed, to show the supremacy of Christianity over the old beliefs, it was an extremely subtle message. Rather, a cross bearing Forn Siðr iconography need not to have been Christian. The cross could have symbolic meaning beyond the confines of the Crucifixion, even if Christians would prefer that it did not. With the exegetical and linguistic conflation of roods (from the Anglo-Saxon *rod*, wooden rod or beam), crosses and trees, the potential of the Gosforth cross to offer multiple meanings is no surprise.

Regardless of any one interpretation of the Gosforth cross, it has among free-standing crosses the *proportionally* smallest cross head of known monuments. This small cross head is further elevated over four meters making it appear smaller still (see fig. 1, pg. 29). Although the sculpture maintains the form of a cross, its extreme proportions suppress its nature and transform art in the service of Christianity to the service of the Forn Siðr. This apparent undermining of a native tradition was not necessarily adversarial but rather the result of a “latent identity.” This relates nicely to cubiculum O of the Via Latina catacomb in Rome, where William Tronzo argued for the Christian “usurpation of the pagan past.” This was driven by the economic and social status of adherents when the religion expanded into the Roman political center. Not all Classical motifs and iconography were recontextualized. Stories and symbols that related to the redemptive message of Christianity were preferred over more problematic material. In the same way, the Christian qualities of the Gosforth cross are those that most easily adapt to the needs of the Forn Siðr. Christ becomes Odin, the Cross becomes the Sun (and Moon), the monument becomes a tree.


The Gosforth cross both records the cosmology and pantheon of the Forn Siðr and stands as a simulacrum of the World Tree, Yggdrasil, which supports all of Creation. The Gosforth artist used iconography and motifs from a broad number of sources including Irish Christian sculpture, Odinist sculpture of the Tees valley, where he trained, and regional Cumbrian knotwork from the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods, but some are the product of his own imagination.

6.2 Gosforth 3 – The Second Cross

With the argument that the Gosforth cross does not show the narrative of Ragnarok but instead shows the gods—mortal gods whose deaths function as attributes of their natures—the second cross may have depicted other major gods not shown on the extant cross. In 1842, Samuel Jefferson noted, “On the column which was destroyed there were two indistinct ‘figures of horses and men.’” Gods important in the Norse pantheon are Thor, Týr, Baldr, and Freyr and/or Freyja. This is, of course, speculative because no fragment of the second cross’s iconography has been found. While the identity of the indistinct “horses and men” can remain only speculative, if other gods were depicted, then the major pantheon of the northern gods would have been present in the public sculpture at Gosforth. If pursuing wolves were also carved on the second cross, the two crosses together would have represented the sun and the moon. Aspects of the Ragnarok could have appeared with these other gods as well.

The Gosforth 3 fragment has no figural iconography on the exposed face; the sides and reverse are obscured due to its installation in a wall and these faces have not been recorded. One may assume that the carving on the hidden faces to be inferior to that

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545 Jefferson, *The History and Antiquities of Allerdale Ward*, 303. Also noted in Parker, "Notes on Gosforth Church and Churchyard, and on Sculpture Fragments there." He says Jefferson quoted this “without giving his authority.”

546 One of Thor’s narratives is already carved at Gosforth on the Fishing Stone. The destroyed cross may also have shown scenes from various myths or legends, such as the *Volsung* saga. Without any surviving material these arguments can only be speculative.

547 Planned mitigation archaeology in the old Parson’s garden to the east of the churchyard may yield additional sculptural fragments.
of the exposed face. It was often the practice when installing fragmentary sculpture into walls that the better face was left exposed. That it is unrecorded is unusual, which may indicate that either the decoration was extremely damaged or it bore nonconforming iconography. Only removing it from the wall would reveal the reason. The visible face is extremely worn and its decoration consists entirely of various knotwork motifs. The vertical arms have a simple three-cord median-incised plait but the horizontal arms are filled with the same ring chain field that decorates the lower round cross shaft on the Gosforth cross. The repetition of this motif on both tall crosses further connects the two visually. If the extant cross depicts cosmological aspects of Forn Siðr and not a distinct narrative of a specific story, then the second cross may have functioned similarly. Jefferson’s description of horses and men tantalizes, but unless additional fragments are found to confirm this, the second cross at Gosforth must remain purely speculative.

6.3 The Fishing Stone

The Fishing Stone has often been cited, along with Gosforth 1, as an example of the “radical theological insights” taking place at Gosforth in the late tenth century.\textsuperscript{548} [PLATE 19] The general consensus on the iconography is that the lower scene represents Thor fishing for Jörmungandr and the upper scene represents the Hart or Lamb trampling the Serpent, a vignette representing Christ’s defeat of Death/Satan. The occurrence of these scenes together has been interpreted as showing Christianity’s triumph over paganism, because the Christological scene sits above the Norse mythological scene.\textsuperscript{549}

The carved face of the 70 x 33 cm stone is divided into two fields by a straight, horizontal line 2.5 cm wide. The lower region occupies three-fifths of the face and the upper occupies two-fifths. The two fields each contain a separate vignette, both of which have been reduced at the edges. Both scenes have been damaged by erosion, more greatly along the right side; the right quarter of the stone along the entire height of the relief has been severely abraded. [PLATE 113]

\textsuperscript{548} Bailey in Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2, 33.

\textsuperscript{549} Parker, \textit{The Ancient Crosses}; Calverley, \textit{Early Sculptured Crosses (1888)}; Cramp, \textit{CASSS} 2.
The lower scene represents the Norse myth of Thor fishing for Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, who along with Fenrir and Hel is one of Loki’s monstrous offspring with the giantess, Angrboda [Sorrow-Bringer]. Snorri records that Odin, upon meeting the children, threw the serpent into the sea surrounding Middle Earth, the land of humans, and it subsequently grew so large that it swallowed its own tail.\(^{550}\) Thor and Jörmungandr are great enemies and each will be the death of the other at Ragnarok.

This myth is one of the more complex of those recorded by Snorri Sturlusson.\(^{551}\) It begins with Thor traveling with Loki to Utgarda, the Outer Lands, although the purpose of this trip is not stated. In the hall of the giant-king of Utgarda, Utgarda-Loki (in this story the companion of Thor, not to be confused to Asa-Loki the Trickster), Thor is deceived into believing that he and his companion have lost various contests of strength, one of which involved lifting the bulk of Jörmungandr, who was disguised as a large gray cat. In Snorri’s account, Thor, in order to regain his wounded pride at losing the contests, left Utgarda, and disguised as a boy, presented himself to Hymir, the wise frost-giant.\(^{552}\) Thor proposed to go fishing with Hymir and tore the head from Hymir’s best ox, Himinhrjot, to use as bait. He then tricked Hymir into rowing farther out to sea than he would normally fish and into the region inhabited by Jörmungandr. Thor cast his strong line with the ox head on the hook as bait and when Jörmungandr took the bait, Thor wrestled with it, intending to strike its head with his hammer, Mjollnir. Hymir, fearing that Thor would sink his boat, used his bait knife to cut Thor’s fishing line, which caused Jörmungandr to escape Thor’s wrath.

The epic *Hymiskvida* tells a similar story although the narrative context for Thor’s fishing expedition is different. The fishing episode is imbedded within the story of the journeys of Týr/Thialfi as they journey to Hymir’s home to get from him his great

\(^{550}\) Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 34.

\(^{551}\) Ibid., 44-48.

\(^{552}\) In the *Hymiskvida*, Hymir owns the cauldron that Týr (Larrington, *Prose Edda*, p. 273 believes Thor’s original companion was Thialfi) and Thor are attempting to obtain for beer-making. He is called here in verse 5.2 “Hymir the very wise,” although Snorri never refers to him as such.
cauldron with which the Æsir wish to brew beer for a feast. The narrative progresses in essentially the same manner as Snorri’s, however the version recorded in the Codex Regius is poorly preserved, leaving Snorri’s account as the most complete source for this myth. A third, much-abbreviated version of the story is mentioned in the Húsfraupa as being illustrated on a wooden panel or shield. 553

The scene carved on the lower half of the Fishing Stone captures the moment when Thor throws his line baited with the head of Himinhrjot into a sea full of fish. 554 Hymir holds aloft the knife with which he will cut the line once Jörmungandr is hooked. 555 Unlike many of the other myths appearing at Gosforth, a number of examples of the Thor fishing scene survive: on a runestone at Altuna, Uppland, Sweden (where Thor’s foot is shown breaking through the bottom of the boat); [PLATE 114] on the famous Ardre VIII image stone near Stânga, Gotland County, Sweden; [PLATE 115] and the crude version on a stone at Hørðum, Thisted Municipality, Denmark. No other Insular version is known to survive but, as demonstrated by the Húsfraupa ekphrases, less permanent depictions on wood or fabric certainly existed. The Gosforth version is by far the most pictorially complex of surviving examples.

The lower scene shows two figures in a boat with fish below and an interlaced serpent above. Thor, the left figure, holds a fishing line baited with an ox head, identifiable by its curved horns. The right figure is Hymir, the giant, who holds a knife aloft. The boat is nearly the width of the stone and is viewed from the broad side in profile, as if seen from the water line. The stern and prow rise to tapered points in the

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553 The collection of skaldic poems recorded as Húsfraupa 1-12 is attributed to the poet Ulfr Uggason, who lived in the second half of the tenth century.
554 Due to their relatively large size, the fish may be whales, two of which are caught by Hymir in the Hymiskvida, 21.2.
555 Most scholars have identified this as a hand axe or hatchet, although the texts consistently use the word “agnsax – inu, ins” to describe Hymir’s blade, with “sax” being a knife of some sort. The extensive abrasion on the right side of the stone has obliterated the iconographic details.
manner of other depictions of boats in tenth-century northern Europe.\textsuperscript{556} [PLATES 104 and 116] A mast extends up from the center of the boat between the two figures; it is the same height as the figures and ends in a small square. In the CASSS, Bailey interpreted this as a “hunn” used for raising and lowering the sails, but it is more likely that the square represents the entire sail.\textsuperscript{557} This is similar to a depiction of a longboat with a mast and sail on one of the Överhogdal tapestries, radiocarbon dated between 800 and 1100 CE.\textsuperscript{558} [PLATE 117] A less likely possibility is that instead of being a mast with a sail it is instead an oar, for the texts talk about how the pair rowed out into Jörmungandr’s waters. A braided plait in the form of a serpent is above the boat representing Jörmungandr encircling the world. The iconography on the stone so closely parallels written accounts across Icelandic literature that there has been little debate since its identification by Stephens in 1866/1884.

While other depictions of Thor fishing show him struggling against Jörmungandr’s pull, often with his foot breaking through the bottom of the boat as on the Altuna runestone (U 1161) and the Hørdum stone.\textsuperscript{559} [PLATES 114 and 118] These Scandinavian depictions probably post-date the Fishing Stone, but they also demonstrate a different approach to depicting the myth. The Gosforth artist, on both the Fishing Stone and the churchyard cross, prefers moments of narrative anticipation. Where Heimdall is shown blowing his horn at Jurby, at Gosforth he stands watch. Viðar is in the act of revenging Odin, his father, but the moment is held in suspension, with the god’s ultimate victory still uncertain. Below, where Odin hangs on the windy tree, he gazes out at the viewer with both eyes, not yet having traded one to Mimir for knowledge of the mystic

\textsuperscript{556} The only other depiction of a Viking-Age boat in England is found on the Lowther hogback (CASSS 2, Lowther 4). [PLATE 116] Boats are also pictured on Stora Hammars 1, Lärbro parish, Sweden, and on two stones from Högbro parish, Sweden.

\textsuperscript{557} Cramp, CASSS 2, 108.


runes. So too, on the Fishing Stone, Thor casts his line. It waits amid the lesser catch of Hymir for Thor’s great foe, the World Serpent, who will be his death in the final battle. The capture of the anticipatory moment, the moment before which fate turns, sets the Gosforth artist’s work apart from contemporary versions.

The primary figure in the top vignette is a backward-looking beast. The animal’s body is positioned horizontally across the slab with the full chest to the left tapering to narrow hindquarters at the right and its head looks back over its back. The top of the head, including the eyes and ears, is missing, indicating that the stone was once larger and perhaps the upper and lower fields were the same size. Below the beast, two knotted snakes twine through its legs. The left snake is positioned under the neck and chest and the right snake below the hindquarters.

The significance of the iconography of the upper portion of the Fishing Stone is more difficult to determine than the more complex but more easily identified iconography of the lower portion. Parker, who discovered the carving on the stone that had been used as a stair for the sundial, first described the upper scene of the Fishing Stone, “In the upper panel is a hart, the horns not seen, trampling upon the serpent which is knotted twice.” Both authors assumed the Fishing Stone was a fragment from a cross, although, as argued in the fourth chapter, it was more likely architectural ornament. A century later, Bailey reiterated this view when he uses the “complementary nature” of the lower and upper scenes of the Fishing Stone to support his reading of the Christian nature of the community and “the same type of mind as planned the iconography of Gosforth 1 [the Gosforth cross].”

The iconography on the upper half of the Fishing Stone is unfortunately fragmentary, with the top portion of the large quadruped missing. If the animal were a deer or hart, its antlers would have been in the missing portion. I question this

560 Parker, "Notes on Gosforth Church and Churchyard, and on Sculpture Fragments there," 409. Calverley agrees with this interpretation in Calverley, Early Sculptured Crosses (1888), 248.
561 Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 132; Cramp, CASSS 2, 109.
identification on the basis that the animal form pictured on the Fishing Stone is not within the iconographic tradition of stags in the tenth-century sculpture of northern England, which was a popular sculptural motif in the tenth century. It appears frequently in Cumbria and Yorkshire as part of the “hart and hound” vignette.\textsuperscript{562} [PLATE 92] This vignette is composed of an antlered stag shown in profile running forward beset by a wolf carved over its back. Occasionally, multiple harts and/or hounds are present. In none of these “hart and hound” cases is the hart looking over his back, although he has good reason to do so.

Harts also appear as single, isolated figures. The most important instances of this occur along the Tees in Co. Durham and North Yorkshire. Three instances of harts in this region, Brompton 4, [PLATE 119] Kirklelington 11, [PLATE 120] and Sockburn 7, [PLATE 121] are all modeled in a plastic manner with tubular bodies, forked antlers, and stubbed tails.\textsuperscript{563} Cramp and Bailey have argued for a workshop of similarly trained sculptures in this region and in the previous chapter I have connected the Gosforth artist to this workshop. Two of these sculptures, Brompton 4 and Sockburn 7, are extremely similar – so much so that Lang argued for the former being an “ambitious” copy of the latter.\textsuperscript{564} The iconography at Gosforth that is inarguably a hart, the antlered animal on the south face of the extant cross, compares favorably to the Yorkshire harts [PLATES 119-121] with its forked antlers and a stubby tail, although the Gosforth example is carved as if striding forward in a similar manner as the horses on the cross.

\textsuperscript{562} In North Yorkshire: Forcett 1, Kirklelington 11, Melonsby 3, Wath 4; in East Yorkshire: Ellerburn 5; in Cumbria: Dacre 2; Waberthwaite 2 in England. The iconography is even more popular on the Isle of Man. The iconography may have been transmitted to England from hunting scenes on Irish crosses and its occurrence in English areas with Irish connections. Lang argues for a secular interpretation while Bailey argues for a Christological meaning. Lang, \textit{CASSS} 6, 34; Richard N. Bailey, "The Meaning of the Viking-Age Shaft at Dacre," \textit{Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society} 77 (1977): 61-74, 68-71. Collingwood considered the hart on the south side of the Gosforth cross, along with the quadruped just below it, to be a form of this scene. Collingwood, \textit{Northumbrian Crosses}, 152.

\textsuperscript{563} A fourth, Stanwick 9, [PLATE 123] is too fragmentary to be a useful comparison. Only the front half of the hart survives, although what survives is modeled in a similarly fleshy manner to others in the region.

\textsuperscript{564} Lang, \textit{CASSS} 6, 68. The sculptures are not exact duplicates. Both are fragmentary. The same motifs appear on both but their arrangement is altered and the style of Brompton 4 is noticeably more crude.
Only two examples are known in Insular sculpture of what is clearly a hart looking over its back. One is on the base of the Kells Market Cross, Co. Meath. [PLATE 122] Two deer are carved at the leftmost end of the broad side of the base. The left deer looks forward but the right looks over its back at the pursuing hounds, one of which may be jumping onto its back, but this animal may be a wild boar also being pursued by the hunters. The second backward-looking deer is found on a font in St. Mary’s, Melbury Bubb, Dorset. 565 [PLATE 124] This hart, complete with a full rack of antlers, twists his head around to bite at a vine or serpent. 566 The CASSS authors date the font to the early eleventh century but admit that the style and subject matter are not conclusively Anglo-Saxon or Norman and therefore the date is uncertain. These two disparate examples, both geographically distant, and one post-dating the Gosforth group, do not serve as strong evidence for the identification of an animal looking over its back as a deer. 565

Collingwood, in Northumbrian Crosses, noted almost as an aside within his discussion of the “hart and hound” motif the “tenth century beast with head inverted” above the hart and hound on the Dacre cross shaft. 567 [PLATE 92] Bailey connected what he called the “backward-looking animal” with the Anglian metalwork tradition of the crouching beast. 568 While he may be accurate in this, the context for the image is quite different between an isolated motif on a harness or brooch and as an element on pictorially complex stone sculpture.

566 William Yapp argued this font shows animals as described in medieval bestiaries. Here, the hart swallows a serpent. W. B. Yapp, "The font at Melbury Bubb: an interpretation," Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society 111 (1989): 128-29.
567 Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses, 151.
568 Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 73.
These backward-looking beasts occur throughout the sculpture of the North. Each instance has a similar configuration: a quadruped, either standing or striding looks over its back. The animal often has a long snout, circular eye, and small ear, either pointed or round. The two examples from Lythe, one on the lower panel of a cross shaft (Lythe 1) and the other on a shrine-type hogback (Lythe 19), [PLATES 125 and 66] are almost identical in their design although their size difference precludes the use of a single template for both. In both the Lythe examples, the snout of the animal appears to disappear behind its back, making identification of the type of animal difficult. The ears or horns turn back slightly and taper to a point, which also complicates identification. The Lythe backward-looking beasts are the best comparison to the Gosforth type in terms of their composition and proportions.

Other backward-looking beasts provide more evidence, both positive and negative, for what sort of animal they represent. The Brompton cross shaft (4) backward-looking beast stands stationary on long legs. [PLATE 119] Its thin neck hooks back and supports a small, earless head. It flips its medium-length tail up over its back toward its head. In the panel above is a stag, identifiable by its rack of antlers. Key differences between the two carvings indicate that the backward-looking beast is not meant to represent a stag. First, the tail of the stag above is a blunt, rounded tip protruding from the top of its rump. The backward-looking beast below has a longer tail flipped over its back. Second, the forelegs of the backward-looking beast are jointed in the manner of a carnivore with a long ulna and radius and a short, stocky fibula. The stag above has straight legs with jointed knees, accurate to the anatomy of a deer. This suggests that the backward-looking beast is meant to be a type of carnivore. A similar monument,

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569 In Lancashire: Walley 1; in Cumbria: Aspatria 7, Dacre 2, Gosforth 6, (Penrith 5); in Co. Durham: Gainford 2, Sockburn 4, 7 and 21; in North Yorkshire: Brompton 4, Lythe 1 and 19; Stanwick 1; in East Yorkshire, Nunburnholme 1.

570 Lang, CASSS 6, 153-54, 60.

571 Gosforth and Lythe are also highly comparable in their hogback types. See Chapter 3.
Sockburn 4, has the same backward-looking animal and the legs of what is most certainly a deer on the reverse. [PLATE 126]

The animals in the model for the Brompton cross shaft are slightly more ambiguous in their morphology. The fragmentary shaft at Sockburn (CASSS 7) [PLATE 121] also has a stag and a backward-looking beast, although they appear on opposite sides of the monument. The animals are almost identical in form to those at Brompton albeit better rendered. The stag has antlers and a small tail and the backward-looking beast, here with a more obvious carnivore-type snout and ear, has a longer tail flipped over its back. While the legs are rendered in a similar fashion on both the stag and backward-looking beast, the full, round chest and S-shaped body of the backward-looking beast conceals the leg joints. Another backward-looking beast, Sockburn 4, is similar to that on Sockburn 7 but it faces the opposite direction and its head is too badly damaged to be a useful example. This S-shaped body type is common among the examples of backward-looking beasts, including the Fishing Stone example at Gosforth. This type is seen at Lythe, Gosforth, and Sockburn. At Brompton, the backward-looking beast has the suggestion of an S-shaped body, but it is poorly formed and, unusually for tenth-century representations of deer, the stag above it has this same body type.

Two additional examples of backward-looking beasts confirm that the motif is not meant to be a deer or any other type of herbivore. Brompton (5) [PLATE 127] Gainford (2) [PLATE 128] and Stanwick (2) [PLATE 112] have fragmentary remains of fanged backward-looking beasts. In the Brompton example, the beast fills a panel on a damaged cross shaft. The bottom half and right edge is broken away, resulting in missing legs and rump. What remains is a backward-looking beast with the suggestion of an S-shaped body where the stomach rises to the hind legs. The animal’s snout is long and it

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572 Cramp describes it as “a doglike creature looking backwards.” Cramp, "Sockburn before the Normans," 17-18.

573 Lang, CASSS 6, 69, 202-03.
has two pointed fangs, one each on the upper and lower jaws. It has the same tail flipped over its back as the other example at Brompton (4). [PLATE 119]

The backward-looking beast at Stanwick does not stand alone but is rather part of a more complex composition where it is entangled with a cord or serpent. The motif is slightly different here where the beast still possesses an S-shaped body, small ear, incised eye and looks over its back, but the flipped tail is now absent and the legs terminate in multi-toed paws. Here, as at Brompton 4, the beast’s mouth is open and bears fangs. A second backward-looking beast may appear below it within the same field, but damage has obscured this motif.

All of these Tees valley sites, Brompton, Sockburn and Stanwick, have strong stylistic connections to Gosforth. All three sites have both stags and backward-looking beasts clearly represented, often carved by the same hand. This is also the case at Gosforth, where the same artist who carved the Fishing Stone and its backward-looking beast also carved the churchyard cross on which is featured an antlered stag. In the same way that the backward-looking beasts compare favorably among all four sites, so too do the stags, all antlered with delicate, forward-pointing heads and squared bodies.

These comparisons demonstrate that the backward-looking beast motif featured in the upper portion of the Fishing Stone should not be interpreted as a deer trampling serpents but rather as a carnivorous beast. The program of the Fishing Stone, rather than juxtaposing the former, erroneous “heathen” belief (Thor fishing for Jörmungandr but failing to kill him) with the superior Christian belief (Christ’s victory over evil symbolically represented as a hart trampling a serpent), instead shows Thor fishing, one of the more important episodes from Norse mythology due to its preservation in multiple texts and images, and what is possibly a depiction of Fenrir, the great wolf. Thor, disliking all of Loki’s monstrous offspring, has an antagonistic relationship with Fenrir and the entire stone serves to demonstrate the efficacy of the gods against the creatures of chaos.

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574 See chapter 3.
An intriguing possibility is that this motif is Garm, the “finest/best of hounds,” who is described by Snorri in the *Gylfaginning*.575 “By now the hound Garm, who was bound in front of Gnipahellir, will also have broken free. He, the worst of monsters, will fight against Týr. They will be each other’s death.”576 This is the only negative account of Garm. He is mentioned three times in a repetitive manner in the *Völuspá*:

Garm bays loudly before Gnipa-cave  
the rope will break and the ravener run free  
much wisdom she knows, I see further ahead  
to the terrible doom of the fighting gods.577

While the verse suggests that the second line is meant to describe the first, it could just as equally be describing Fenrir, often referred to as a “devourer” or “ravener.” Garm may be baying to warn the Æsir of Fenrir’s escape.

In the poetic texts, Garm is described positively in the *Grimnismál* alongside other creatures of the heavenly realm:

The ash of Yggdrasill is the noblest of trees,  
and Skidbladnir the best of ships,  
Odin best of the Æsir, Sleipnir of horses,  
Bilrost of bridges, Bragi of poets,  
Habrok of hawks, and Garm of dogs.578

Snorri is the only source for a clear negative affiliation with Garm. Given that only fragmentary texts of Norse mythology survive, we do not have a full explanation of Garm’s function or affiliation. One possibility is that he is the guardian of the entrance to Hel, the “Gnipa-cave,” but that he guards the outside to prevent the monsters in Hel from escaping into Midgard. He then bays at the onset of the Ragnarok to warn the Æsir, in the

575 *Grimnismál* 44.
577 This stanza recurs at 44, 49 and 58. Orchard translates *gnipa* as “looming.”
578 Larrington, ed. *The Poetic Edda*, Grimnismal, 44. In a note, Larrington described Garm as “the dog whose baying portends Ragnarok.”
same manner that Heimdall blows his horn from his position guarding Bifrost. Equally, the “Gnipa-cave” may be where Fenrir is bound. Snorri may have conflated Garm’s function with the hellhound of *Baldurs Draumar* where Odin meets within the cave of Hel an unnamed hound whose front is covered in gore. Snorri gives no authority for his knowledge of Garm’s nature or his confrontation with Týr.

The identification of the tenth-century sculptural tradition of the backward-looking beast as Garm is further strengthened if we consider what type of dog Garm would have been. A number of modern dog breeds originate in Scandinavia, many with claims to an ancient pedigree, such as the Norwegian Elkhound, the Icelandic Sheepdog, the Siberian Laika, and the Buhund. These are all dogs of the Spitz type, defined by its likeness in appearance and temperament to wolves, its heavy, full-chested body, pricked ears, strong legs, and a medium-length tail that is often held flipped over the back. Archaeological evidence confirms that Viking Age Scandinavian nobles kept such dogs. The Gokstad ship burial, c. 900, included six dog skeletons, five of which were of a lightly-built spitz type. A noted quality of many Scandinavian spitz-type dogs is their distinctive practice of baying at game to alert the hunter to the location of the prey and to startle the animal until the hunter arrives. This is similar to Garm’s mythical function.

The Fishing Stone, long held to be a graphic example of the supremacy of Christianity over the pagan beliefs of the Anglo-Scandinavians, was evidently no different than the churchyard cross in its iconographic program. It illustrates a popular story about Thor fishing for the Midgard Serpent and above that displays a motif typical within tenth-century sculpture in northern England. This backward-looking beast motif could be decorative, a continuation of an Anglian animal form that the northern sculptors found appealing, perhaps because it was easily associated with multiple myths, but here it

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579 Orchard suggests doubt as to the identity of the hellhound as Garm. Orchard, ed. *The Elder Edda*, 338.


certainly represents a specific mythological figure such as the wolf, Fenrir, or the hound, Garm. Identifying the backward-looking beast as Garm is slightly more satisfying than its identification as Fenrir, but both these are more reasonable than a deer. As Thor battles the great Jörmungandr below, so Garm battles lesser serpents above.

The backward-looking beast motif examined here is specific to England, but a motif related to the version at Gosforth, an animal entwined with serpents, had broader appeal in the late Viking Age. Urnes-style motifs of a “fantastic” animal entwined with serpents occur on a brooch found in southern Iceland [PLATE 129] and on the famous Urnes stave church door portal carving. [PLATE 45] Combined with a depiction of Thor fishing for the Midgard Serpent, together they represent the efficacy of the gods against the forces of chaos and destruction. Its location at a door would have provided an additional apotropaic function.

6.4 The Hogbacks

The two hogbacks at Gosforth are, unfortunately, difficult to interpret iconographically. [PLATES 13-18] As previously demonstrated, the Saint’s Tomb hogback is stylistically attributed to the Gosforth artist, who carved all the Gosforth monuments, other than the Warrior’s Tomb. Both are what Lang called “illustrative” hogbacks. Briefly, the Saint’s Tomb iconography features human figures entwined with interlaced beasts in what has been interpreted as a “men battling serpents” motif. Bailey accepts the frequent occurrence of this narrative trope in Scandinavian mythology, but he prefers to interpret these scenes from the Anglo-Saxon Christian perspective of hell. Both these arguments have validity, but to favor a Christian interpretation over

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582 Lang, "The Hogback," 99-100. For England, he lists Heysham, Gosforth (the Warrior’s Tomb but not the Saint’s Tomb) both examples at Lowther, and three at Sockburn. Two more in Scotland, Tyningham and Brechin, are not included in this publication.

583 Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture, 140-42. The iconography on both sides is similar although on one side the illustrative quality morphs into a simple decorative braid.

584 Bailey argues for the influence of the poem Christ and Satan, which describes naked men doing battle with serpents and adders. Ibid.
the local narratives of heroes such as Sigmund and Weyland battling various monsters may be ethnocentric. The sculptures provide ample evidence for a artist (and/or possible patron) knowledgeable about Forn Siðr stories, but no overt reference to Christian literary traditions. At best, Christian narrative influence at Gosforth is minimal and the Saint’s Tomb is no more overtly Christian than the other monuments.

Likewise, the shallow, linear carving of two groups of men with shields confronting each other on the Warrior’s Tomb is also vague. This scene may represent two armies either in aggression or one surrendering to the other, or it may represent two equal groups of men in a peaceful interaction. This scene could be mythological or historical. The carving is extremely shallow and differentiating between purposeful lines by the hand of an artist and incidental lines caused by nature or damage is difficult.\textsuperscript{585} Similarly, the “warrior” depicted on one of the gabled ends is crudely fashioned and damaged. Without a broader context for the figure or proof that it is part of the original iconography, little can be said of the Warrior Tomb other than that it is an example of secular, warrior-class iconography common among tenth-century sculpture in northern England.

6.5 The Gosforth iconography in Context

The overall iconographic program of the Gosforth cross is, essentially, expressing aspects of Forn Siðr narrative. The question that looms over the monument is whether the Forn Siðr iconography is an indication of religious conversion. Despite the amount of ink spilled pursuing an answer, the author believes this question to be unanswerable. Northern England during the tenth century was too heterogeneous in its cultural components to speculate convincingly on how individual or community belief translated into artistic production. The forces driving sculptural patronage are economics and the desire to display power and wealth. While artistic patronage is often connected to religion in situations where religious practice is governed by a powerful authority, in cultures

\textsuperscript{585} Three dimensional laser scans of the stone may reveal greater detail than is visible by the eye.
where this is not the case, patterns of conspicuous consumption can appear arbitrary and illogical.  

Parker’s early reading of the Gosforth cross’s iconography was that it was didactic or at least demonstrative of the victory of Christianity over the pagan beliefs. This is a lovely workaround to maintain Christ on the Gosforth cross, but by Occam’s razor, identifying the cruciform figure as Odin vastly simplifies the analysis. Odin is there, sacrificing himself to himself, with his son above, avenging his true death, and accompanied on the other panels by his cohorts among the Æsir. If one wished to make the argument that these gods were pictured with such sensitivity in order to undermine them, one would have a difficult time finding a comparative example of this practice.

However, if Parker is correct in his argument that the Gosforth cross demonstrates the superiority of Christianity over the old ways, the monument does a poor job. The female attendant undermines the only overly Christian iconography, the Crucifixion on the east face. Her inclusion in the scene is unorthodox from both the Irish version, which had Longinus and Stephaton in attendance, and the Anglo-Saxon version, which had Mary and John. If this vignette is Christian, it is placed at the bottom of the panel, a position that casts doubt on the overall aim of the program to demonstrate the victory of Christianity. A crucifixion at the bottom of a cross has precedent at Ruthwell, but the Ruthwell cross is undeniably Christian, with multiple iconographic elements that reference each other to create multiple readings. At Gosforth, Norse gods reference the Crucifixion motif, and not in a way that decisively places the crucified Christ in a superior position.

Art in the service of a religion often casts that belief as superior to others. Examples of this from the Middle Ages alone are too numerous to list here, but an early example that seems to parallel that of the Gosforth cross is the fifth-century mosaic cycle

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at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The early Christian basilica’s nave preserves a detailed Old Testament cycle of scenes from Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua. The specifically Christian aspect of the building’s decoration is focused at the apse. Superficially, the use of Old Testament iconography as prefiguration of Christianity seems to parallel similar arguments about the Gosforth cross, where Forn Siðr iconography appears to be used to show the “truth” of Christianity. However, key differences between the monuments demonstrate that the two are not directly comparable. S. Maria Maggiore is undeniably a Christian space and the focus of its symbols at the apse places them at the most potent place in the structure. Additionally, while the Old Testament cycle is not strictly Christian, it is a recognized part of Christianity. Despite differences in interpretation between Judaism and Christianity, especially in adherence to certain practices, early Christians fully recognized the sanctity of Biblical books. Christianity was not an entirely separate religion with a distinct nascence and practices that had to place itself against a more established and powerful faith, it was initially based on a messianic cult within first century BCE Judaism. The relationship between Forn Siðr and Christianity is entirely different, where one is not a schism of the other. Certainly, contact between the two faiths appears to have had mutual influence in aspects of narrative and apocryphal tradition, but the elaborate Norse iconography on the Gosforth cross is not there in deference to Christianity.

The way in which a patron or artist disparages one faith in favor of another is to cast the wrong religion in a negative fashion. This is common in medieval art in such depictions as the blindfolded Synagoga, representing Judaism’s stubborn blindness to the divinity of Jesus, or the tenth-century Byzantine iconoclasts, cast as Jews, whitewashing icons of Christ in the Khludov Psalter. While all of these examples do illustrate

589 See the various essays in Carver, ed. The Cross Goes North.
incorrect belief or practice, no *detailed* program of the “other” is included; it is reduced or distilled to a single image or stereotype. The Gosforth iconography is a sympathetic record of Norse narrative and, if anything, reduces Christianity to a single and somewhat inaccurate image.

If Christ must be present on the Gosforth cross, then rather than undermining the accompanying Forn Siðr iconography it would instead support it. Jesus would join the Norse pantheon, one of a cast of ineffable powers that could be called upon for assistance. Blending Christianity and paganism is hardly orthodox, but for a culture whose oral traditions are adaptive, such is not unheard of. While the original meaning of the Gosforth cross’s iconography included Odin, contemporary and later Christians were free to bring their own meaning to the sculpture. At any rate, the Gosforth iconography is certainly not a simple, self-evident matter and in that it reflects the religious fluctuations of society that created it.

If the cross records the gods of Forn Siðr to the exclusion of Christianity, or if it positions them as superior to Christianity, then what place do these narratives have on a free standing cross? While the form could very loosely be interpreted as tree-like or the wheeled, equilaterally-armed cross head could represent the sun and the moon, this is only a way in which the overall sculpture might be read with consistency to the Forn Siðr imagery. The simplest explanation is that the Gosforth sculptor, like other tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian sculptors, copied the established regional practice of free standing sculpture, which in the Irish Sea region was in the form of crosses.

Non-Christian Anglo-Scandinavians did not simply mindlessly reappropriate sculptural types while affixing meaningful illustrations to them. The cross form was adopted and adapted precisely because it conveyed permanence, power, and wealth in a manner that was clear to the indigenous population while at the same time being flexible

591 The mythology of ancient Greece was similarly adaptive even without being an oral tradition. While certain gods were relatively stable features, others gained and lost prominence based on the needs of the time, e.g. individual heroism (Perseus, Hercules) in Archaic period, the rise of the cult of Asclepius in the Hellenistic period.
enough to serve the needs of the immigrants. Wealthy Anglo-Scandinavians in northern England publically displayed their new wealth and power by the same means as the locals. If free standing crosses impressed everyone, then a free standing cross must be had. While the monument type had developed originally within a Christian, probably monastic, context the form was co-opted by laity and non-Christians alike, with or without understanding the symbolism behind the object type, and thus these artists would think nothing of substituting the iconography on them with their own cultural and religious stories. The use of Crucifixion iconography on the Gosforth cross is no different from the ways medieval Jews appropriated Christian iconography to illuminate *haggadot* in the fourteenth century.\(^{592}\)

Interpreting the Gosforth cross as a “Norse” monument cautiously informs its patronage and/or audience. How the community at tenth-century Gosforth identified itself is difficult to argue without the support of further artifact finds, but the cross and the remains of a possible turf-roofed longhouse discovered in the forecourt of the Jacobean manor house, now the Gosforth Hall Inn, suggest that a pointed effort was made to express a Scandinavian heritage. The possible longhouse at Gosforth was a stronger indicator of the community’s identity than was cross because the cool, damp conditions in Cumbria are poor for the longhouse architectural type. Turf roofs are manageable in freezing winters with a long snowpack, but are degraded by constant rain. The decision to build such a structure in Gosforth must have been, in part, an expression of cultural solidarity more than one of practicality.\(^{593}\) This, with the iconography on the cross and the Fishing Stone, indicates that the community at Gosforth was purposefully expressing ties to their Scandinavian heritage. This does not, however, mean that the people at Gosforth did not consider themselves members of their local society with allegiances to Dublin and/or York. The Gosforth patron(s), if they had been born in England to people born in England from people who lived at Dublin, themselves the children of Hiberno-

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593 Jones, "Title," (Unpublished)
Norse, may very well have considered themselves every bit as “local” (not necessarily “English”) as the neighboring Christians, simply with a divergent ancestry, in the same way Scandinavian culture is prominent in Minnesota due to the concentration of Scandinavian immigrants there in the mid-nineteenth century, but does not undermine the population’s American identity.

Was this expression of Scandinavian heritage at Gosforth aimed internally or externally? The answer to this question is speculative because nothing is known about the “ethnic” population at Gosforth, but the combined evidence of the longhouse and the iconography of the Gosforth cross and the Fishing Stone suggests this community wished to align themselves with the Norse descendents who ruled the Irish Sea region rather than with the contemporary Christian Anglo-Saxon king, Æthelstan. This message of allegiance may be so strong at Gosforth as a response to Æthelstan’s unification of England, to the detriment of Dublin’s interests there. Given that the Gosforth group is late in the chronology of tenth-century sculpture, certainly no earlier than the mid-tenth century, the unsettled events and shifting alliances between the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 and the assassination of Eric Bloodaxe in 952 provide a compelling backdrop for a strong anti-English, non-Christian statement.

This reevaluation of the Gosforth cross and the Fishing Stone complicates the theory of religious conversion that counts such locales as Gosforth as Christian because of the cross-shaped sculptures and such potent Christian motifs as the “Hart trampling the Serpent” and the Crucifixion. A vignette that has clear connections to Christian iconography, the “Crucifixion” scene on the east face of the Gosforth cross does not adhere to typical types and while it may be purposefully likening Odin to Christ, a true Christian convert would probably not make the types of changes to the iconography that were made in light of a fixed, orthodox Christian iconography that was readily available.

What can be said about the sculptural iconography at Gosforth is that it demonstrates a community steeped in the traditional mythology of the North. The iconographic details compare favorably to surviving texts even if extant copies of those texts are not contemporary with the sculptures themselves. What makes the group
compelling, and what aided in the sculptures’ survival, is that these scenes from Northern mythology are carved onto a cross. While for some this is uncontroversial evidence for Christian conversion, I challenge that assumption. This apparent cultural and religious plurality has analogies to previous periods of transition, which are themselves recorded in the landscape through earlier monumental traditions.\(^{594}\)

The previous chapter showed how the Gosforth artist came to Gosforth from the Tees valley workshops, his closest stylistic ties being to the affiliated communities of Brompton, Sockburn, and Stanwick. Crosses were carved at all of these sites but none of them with any overtly Christian message. The iconography there is secular or illustrates Forn Siðr stories, although the monuments with the latter are extremely fragmentary.\(^{595}\) While Bailey argued that such monuments demonstrate the superiority and victory of Christianity over the old beliefs, I would argue that the expense and complexity of the monuments and their non-Christian iconography shows quite the opposite. Belief in these myths was still widespread in the North in the early and middle tenth century as testified to by the sculptural evidence. While these myths may have been influenced by Christianity and influenced Christianity (especially Anglo-Saxon visions of Hell)\(^{596}\) this does not equate to real conversion.

What we see at Gosforth, then, is not the expression of the superiority of Christianity over Forn Siðr but instead the ultimate expression of the Forn Siðr in reaction to more than a century of efforts at Christianization. The sculptural evidence at Gosforth indicates that a great deal of wealth and effort was put into this expression and the resulting monuments display an intricate knowledge of the myths and legends of

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\(^{595}\) A focused destruction of such sculptures may have been intentional by later generations.

Scandinavian heritage. The “Crucifixion” scene could just have easily been designed to show the Truth of Odin, undermining the Christian Christ. The Gosforth cross, with its attending sculptures, was an overt statement of an alternate faith in the face of a religion with a dominant “brand.” Whether the Gosforth community experienced Christianity as predatory or passive, they felt the need to put into stone the mythological foundations of their culture.  

The Conversion of the North was not a homogenous process of territorial creep. People of different backgrounds and faiths mingled in many places, and aspects of each were accepted and maintained by single individuals. Scholars have argued for Christian belief and representation combined with the “un-Christian” practice of using grave goods. Coins minted at York in the early part of the tenth century display Thor’s hammers alongside crosses, all minted by the local bishopric. [PLATE 94] Carver pointed out that, “Christianity had at its disposal the material language of thousands of years of prehistory, the aspirations of Empire, the scrap yard of imperial technology and the ethos of the Northerners’ heroic soul.” That the old ways should lose to such a spiritual powerhouse is, in hindsight, not surprising. However in the tenth century, the outcome of this spiritual warfare was uncertain and, perhaps, unlooked for. There is the real possibility that the iconographic message of the Gosforth cross was not so much religious as political and economic. It was a strong statement to take up the Cross and

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598 An impressive investigation of religious contact and conversion is presented in Carver, ed. The Cross Goes North. See especially Martin Carver’s introduction, p. 3-13.


601 Carver, ed. The Cross Goes North, 12.
adorn it with Norse gods. The sculptures communicated clearly that Christian Anglo-Saxons did not control Gosforth. Given that the region was not surveyed in the Domesday Book of the 1080s, it is apparent that they were not.

The Gosforth sculptures are a prime example of how the narrative of religious conversion can overshadow what were no doubt the more pressing political and economic concerns for the community. The Gosforth cross is not a Christian monument, nor does it promote Christianity above Forn Siðr. Rather, it and the Fishing Stone proclaim the stories of Odin and Thor, Heimdall and Loki to be every bit as sophisticated as the Christian stories of their neighbors. While they are the eventual losers to Christ, in the middle tenth century the competition between the two faiths was still at hand. Perhaps the political losses to the Christian Anglo-Saxons portend religious conversion, but only through the hindsight of Christianity’s victory can the Gosforth monuments be interpreted as recording that success. From the perspective of the tenth century, they instead undermine attempts to control the region from the south and they visually align the community with the, presumed, more like-minded peoples of the “Viking” Irish Sea.
7 Remembering Where: the Mental Landscape of the Irish Sea

This study thus far has focused on various physical aspects of the Gosforth sculptures to conclude that the art promoted a community that identified more with the “Viking” Irish Sea culture that stretched from York to Dublin rather than with the Anglo-Saxons, whose kings were consolidating power over English lands through the tenth century. This chapter will extend these findings to explore how the Gosforth sculptural group, specifically, and Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture in the northwestern Danelaw, generally, functioned within the human geography of the Irish Sea. The free standing crosses of northern England established places for immigrating Anglo-Scandinavians in new lands by creating a visible presence with familiar religious narratives that reinforced cultural norms. While the specific Forn Siðr iconography was new to England, the practice of painting or carving popular stories from Scandinavia, a long-standing cultural practice of the immigrants, was combined with the already-established custom of erecting stone crosses. In this way, the Anglo-Scandinavians invested their new communities with culturally significant visual status that was comfortably familiar to their new neighbors. The sculptures also reflect a spirit of competition between these communities suggested by the superlative qualities of the Gosforth group. Additionally, the superlative qualities of the Gosforth sculptures suggest a competitive component to artistic patronage and production; the sculptures in turn influenced the developing trade network to promote economic investment in communities perceived to be stable and wealthy.

Scholars have debated the primary functions of free standing crosses but answers satisfying for one area or group may not hold for others. The proposed answers are different depending on the crosses in question. Jane Hawkes, in her monograph on the Sandbach crosses, offers no focused discussion of their possible function.\(^{602}\) Richard Bailey argued that the round-shaft crosses of the Peak District marked boundaries between farms and/or fiefdoms.\(^{603}\) Phil Sidebottom showed that, in Derbyshire, crosses may have played a role in defining political


\(^{603}\) Bailey, \textsc{CASSS} 9, 38.
identity versus the West Saxon kingdoms. J. Cox suggested that these same monuments signaled travel routes. While the Peak District crosses may have been erected over a brief period of time as a response to a particular situation, the crosses of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, by contrast, were erected over a relatively long period of time and reflect the contentious, long-term political, religious, and economic identity in the region. Illustrative crosses such as those at the Irish monasteries of Clonmacnoise and Monasterboice, and the “Northumbrian” shafts at Ruthwell and Bewcastle probably had, in some manner, a didactic function, although the specific role they played in monastic life remains unclear. Dorothy Verkerk believed the Irish crosses functioned as a surrogate pilgrimage, recreating, in a way, Rome itself. While all of these various arguments may be entirely valid, none of them is satisfactory for Gosforth.

The function of the Gosforth sculptures has been discussed by scholars for a century. Charles Parker believed the Gosforth cross functioned didactically, illustrating the victory and promise of Christianity over the old ways (Forn Siðr) to a fledgling Christian community, “embodying the confidence of those who had recently been heathen that their new faith would


606 David Stocker, "Monuments and Merchants: Irregularities in the Distribution of Stone Sculpture in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire in the Tenth Century," in *Cultures in Contact*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 179-212. Stocker focused on patterns of deposition for funery monuments, the most common Anglo-Scandinavian sculptural type in Lincolnshire, and similar types from Yorkshire. He argued that the sculpture post-dated the founding of the towns and so did not have a direct economic function. He pointed out that the Lincolnshire and Yorkshire trading markest “owed their existence to topography rather than politics,” but in coastal Cumbria there is no evidence for settlement continuity for many of the locations with tenth-century sculpture.


conquer the dying powers they still feared but no longer trusted. Parker’s view has not been adequately challenged, although the previous chapter cast doubt on this interpretation and showed that the cross’s iconography is neither properly Christian nor a direct narrative of the Ragnarok. Rather, it describes the community’s cosmology of the world and its gods, incorporating, but not merely illustrating, narrative elements from contemporary oral mythology and codifying them in emulation of similar Christian monuments. However, if the cross is no longer Christian, then it can no longer function as an instrument to promote Christianity.

The social forces used to explain the stone sculpture of the tenth century are often discussed in terms of social dichotomies: Christian and pagan, Anglian and Scandinavian, north and south. These elide what was the likely reality of the time: in Cumbria, people did not necessarily recognize the same divisions that are meaningful today but rather affiliated themselves with those who controlled or improved their economic interests; they likely identified more with local power centers and cared more about commonality of language and custom than with the abstract, modern constructions of “Anglo-Saxon,” “Hiberno-Norse,” et cetera. Evidence that people did not have or need the same purity of religion required by Anglo-Saxon homily writers is abundant.

A better answer to the question of the Gosforth sculptures’ function lies in understanding the broad trends of sculptural production in the Danelaw. There, the interaction between two

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609 Parker, The Gosforth District, 69.

610 Matthew Innes, "Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism, and Political Allegiance," in Cultures in Contact, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 65-88. Although occurring at least a long generation after the height of sculptural production in Cumbria, the St Brice’s Day massacre and the anti-“Danish” rhetoric that preceded it indicates that the culture of the Danelaw was still distinct in the year 1000.

groups, those who inhabited the region prior to the Anglo-Scandinavian settlements and the immigrants—both of whom were involved in artistic production in the region and both of whom were undergoing profound cultural transformations—provides the context for the sculptures. This chapter argues that whatever the original or primary function of the sculptures, their secondary function was to create what Robert Dodgshon called “cultural inertia,” the material investment made by a culture to reaffirm group identity and reduce cultural drift, in a new place that had to persist both in the physical world and in the collective memories of the region. Invested with this inertia, the sculptures then became recognizable features of the landscape—mnemonic devices by which the regional network could be remembered and traversed. The sculptures helped to consolidate trade and identity across the region, and they also reflected a spirit of artistic competition between patrons and/or communities. Neither monuments nor landmarks, they were fixed points for cultural memory and cognitive space that served individual identity, created a place in the wider physical and mental world, and facilitated interactions between single individuals and contrasting cultures and traditions.

Dodgshon has argued that the rate of cultural change results from the efficacy of its agents of cultural inertia, that is, aspects of a society that discourage change. These can be part of the built environment, such as monuments, architecture, and earthworks, or they can be memory referents such as burials, myths, and history. The accumulation of these agents of inertia promotes cultural conservatism and slows change. Cultural change, then, becomes more likely when these agents of inertia are destroyed through physical destruction or forgetting, or by physically removing a population from them through migration. In terms of Gosforth, previous inhabitants and new immigrants brought different knowledge and expectations to its sculptures; focusing on how they were received by one group does not necessarily hold for another. The Gosforth community had a purchase in the iconography, culture, and patronage that an external audience, who may have brought an entirely different set of cultural references to bear, may not have had.

613 Ibid., 104-22.
To be successful sources of cultural inertia, the sculptures invoked a geographically large regional network and competed within it as a mnemonic feature, altering the physical and mental landscape. This mnemonic function of the Gosforth sculptures can be approached through three levels of scale: micro- (individual to local), meso- (local to regional) and macro- (regional to global). The Gosforth sculptures function within the various networks formed at all three scales to create a place that has cultural agency through its inertia. This chapter discusses these scales in three sections. On a micro-level, the growing population of the tenth century pushed through the land, exploiting more territory to support its needs. Occupying new land undermined the cultural cohesion of the immigrants in the region, who were no longer solely concentrated in urban centers. The sculptures aided in maintaining regional links for economic, social, and cultural reasons. The resulting network, like all abstract networks, was not only manifest physically but also existed strictly in the cognitive space of those that operated within it. Because of their superlative qualities, the Gosforth sculptures had a lasting mnemonic effect. The mythic associations of the iconography also played an important role by reifying ancient stories that connected individuals in the present to their ancestral beliefs and practices, even if the bodies of those ancestors were absent. The monumental sculptures encrusted with the potent and protective gods and heroes continuously reminded the Gosforth community of their common past and its continuity to the present.

In terms of the meso-scale of cultural memory, the Gosforth sculptures functioned somewhere between that of monuments and landmarks. Both of these affect the memory, the former connecting time and the latter connecting space. However, the sculptures took aspects of the functions of both without becoming strictly one or the other. The second section will argue that the sculptures created a mnemonic attractant at Gosforth, a point of cultural inertia that, just as gravity attracts mass, gathered and reinforced cultural associations, connected the cultural inertia generated at the micro-scale and injected it into the meso-scale. They were agents of collective memory linking geographically separated communities together through cultural


615 Howard Williams, Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
association. They also established a temporal point at Gosforth by suggesting a powerful foundation that, due to the materiality of the stone, promised permanence and referenced culturally significant points both backward and forward in time.

The group also maintained spatial connections to similar sites throughout the region, sites remembered as being near or distant, but still fixed in the world. The third section discusses how the regional network of sculptures gained inertia from the presence of individual sculptures in each location with each community borrowing and lending cultural significance to the others. In this way, the practice of erecting free standing sculpture was a key component in the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement of northern England. The settlers consciously made new places that established points of cultural inertia in a new land, borrowed the local form of art, in this case stone crosses, as a means of lending their own versions greater cultural legitimacy, and altered those forms to serve their own needs. Regardless of whether any individual sculpture was erected as a monument, landmark, or overt statement or wealth, religion, or political power, collectively they created a network of places that were essentially “Anglo-Scandinavian.”

Untangling the function of tenth-century sculptures is difficult. One clue lies in their numbers. When compared to the Anglian period, sculptures attributed to the Anglo-Scandinavian influx are between three and five times more, depending on the location.\(^{616}\) The reason for the explosion of cross building in the tenth century is hard sought. It is not enough to extend the functions and meanings true for eighth-century cross production to the tenth-century, nor is the ninth- and tenth-century environment that gave rise to them simply one of competing religions. The crosses are not petrified relics of a sweeping and inexorable conversion. While previous scholars have preferred to focus on the religious and related identity problems presented by tenth-century Insular free-standing crosses, none of them has considered their spatial function or the effect that would have had on the region’s communication, economy, and cultural practices. Most recently, Catherine Karkov stated that the Gosforth cross was a material statement of power, but only religious, political, and cultural.\(^{617}\) While it could be argued that economic

\(^{616}\) Cramp, *CASSS 2*, 27. The distribution of Anglian-period sculpture is 29 pieces over 20 sites. Comparatively, the distribution of Viking-period sculpture is 116 pieces over 38 sites.

power is political power, this is not strictly true. Economic power may, indeed, become political power, but there is no evidence that either regional or long-distance Scandinavian economic relationships and exchange were dependent on, directly subject to, or a precursor of internal centralized political power. The efforts of various kings and would-be kings to take control of shipping routes indicate that they did not enjoy direct power over them, nor were they responsible for their formation.

The Gosforth sculptures are a statement of wealth and power, but this is only one aspect of their nature and to accept this simple answer to a complex question is inadequate. The sculptures affirm their presence through elaborate physicality, which certainly indicates the comparative wealth available to the community, but their physical qualities also have an effect on the memory, creating a fixed place and adding cultural inertia in the changing landscape of tenth-century northern England.

7.1 Making Place

Establishing how the Gosforth community created a new place for itself is important for understanding the function of the sculptures. The act of place-making is not trivial. Scholarly interest in how place is created and maintained permeates nearly every academic discipline, attested to by the number of specialized journals alone. Often, the concept of place is discussed with space, with one often taking its meaning from the other. Although space and place are bound together, they are not a strict dichotomy, like the well-worn adage of two sides of a coin. Rather, they exist as necessary parts of a singular whole. Research on the subject has spurred entire academic sub-disciplines, making the vast bibliography impossible to address here. There is urban space, rural space, sacred space, virtual space, literary space, postmodern space, et cetera.

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618 Geography and its subfields have seen the most publishing on space and place, notably the Environment and Planning series, especially D: Society and Space.

619 Early, seminal works acknowledging the intrinsic difference between space and place were published in the 1970s. Tuan, Space and Place; E. C. Relph, Place and Placelessness (London: Pion, 1976). Ideas of space and place have changed from that of undifferentiated “space” containing and connecting “places” to a more subjective, multi-functional and phenomenological definition. Harvey, "From Space to Place."; Edward Casey, "How to get from space to place in a fairly short stretch of time: phenomenological prolegomena," in Senses of Place, ed. Stephen Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996); Cresswell, Place: a Short
Joseph Flay elegantly contextualized space versus place through an example of a map of the United States of America. The map does not show the place of the United States, rather it represents a specific moment in time of a specific space. For him, place is distinct from space and from time. Separate places then derive from a human indexed primordial place, from which the subjective consistency to distinguish one place from another originates. Edward Casey argued that place does not develop from blank space but rather is the human response to the configuration of the world, supporting a primacy of place. Clifford Geertz supported a similar view when he argued that all that can be known is local and therefore place and one’s sense of being in it precedes the concept of generalized space. This, I believe, is more honest to the medieval experience.

The aim of this section is not to reduce the various approaches to place in pursuit of an inclusive understanding of it. What place is can change depending on the context of the investigation. Here, place is considered somewhat narrowly, functionally more than

Introduction. Later geographers countered the earlier view that, in terms of geography, dots were “places” and lines demarcated “spaces.” Joel Wainwright and Trevor J. Barnes, "Nature, economy, and the space-place distinction," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 27 (2009): 966-86, 968. Recent interpretations of place and space approach the problem from a variety of perspectives, but this has only resulted in a massive amount of scholarship rather than any sort of consensus. Current studies on space and place are fractured across and within disciplines, with each taking a different tack. Cresswell, Place: a Short Introduction.


621 He continued by demonstrating how an individual’s primordial place then contextualizes the relationship between secondary places through his/her/its perception of the relationship of time to space, noting that a great distance with respect to time for one individual may be a trifle to another. This fundamentally alters how those individuals conceive of and navigate, both physically and mentally, those places.

622 In opposition to the Enlightenment priority to space as derived from by Emmanual Kant in Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, ed. and trans. M. Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974 [1797]).


624 Part of the problem with addressing space and place is the semiotic weakness in the terms themselves. “Place” is both a noun and a verb, an abstract concept and a geographic definition, a mental construction and a fixed dimensional object. “Space” has similar problems. The phrase “A place in the world” can be interpreted in a myriad of ways from a physical dwelling to social status to an occupation (both in the sense of bodily existence and in the sense of a professional career).
conceptually, realized rather than idealized or theorized. Restricting the concept of place to that of a focused geographic area with physical and mnemonic definition provides purchase toward understanding how the Gosforth sculptures created, promoted, and defined place in the tenth century. This approach, then, clarifies the processes through which Insular sculptures connect, in a practical sense, the built and cognitive environments and create, in an ideal sense, important cultural reference points to increase and maintain social cohesion.

It is unclear how much, if any, resistance the early Scandinavians in northern England faced. Certainly, in Ireland and Mercia, locals pushed back against territorial incursions, but in Scotland and Cumbria, no evidence exists for a protracted struggle for land. The movement of people, large or small, introduced different cultural practices and habits. For example, James Barrett showed how archaeological evidence from western Scotland indicated a greater economic reliance on deep-sea fishing and flax production after Scandinavian settlement than was present before. However, a change in practice does not necessarily reflect a cultural crisis. Indeed, the Norse settlement of western Scotland can be traced archaeologically because of those very changes they introduced. Settlers carried on in Scotland as they carried on in Scandinavia, bringing their sailing technology and related support industries with them. Some of the locals may have also taken advantage of the lucrative influx of wealth. The settlers’ decision to continue their previous cultural practices was far more practical than ideological: deep-sea fish, herring, and such flax products as rope, oil, and fabric were economically lucrative. Whatever the case, the immigrants do not appear to have abandoned many aspects of their traditional ways.

625 Unlike the various ways space is considered in the recent volume Frances Andrews, ed. *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages* (Donington, UK: Shaun Tyas, 2004). Here, the concept of space is defined differently by each contributor. Some approach space geographically, but others define it in terms of architectural demarcation or temporal passage.


of life. However, the Anglo-Scandinavians do appear to have adopted some of the indigenous social structure in their administrative and legal practices.628

The combination of sculptural types at many Anglo-Scandinavian sites is evidence of the dual processes of invention (the hogbacks) and adaptation (the stone crosses). If there were marked differences between the locals and the newcomers, this may have produced a need for the immigrants to establish themselves fully in their new home. They would have seen the, by now, ancient sculptures at sites like Beckermet, Irton, Bewcastle and Ruthwell, as well as Irish examples, and have been moved to emulate them for their own communities.629 In this account, the choice to make stone crosses may have had little to do with religious identity; the breezy attitude some of the “converted” kings had toward their conversions attested to the loose understanding the Anglo-Scandinavians could have toward Christianity. Rather, new communities wanted stone crosses because that is what old, established communities had. The invention of the hogback form shows that these sculptors and their patrons did not simply copy older forms but wished to make their own artistic statement apart from traditional practice. However, crosses far outnumber hogbacks and while a site may have crosses and no hogbacks, they never have hogbacks without crosses.630

The form of the cross may not have necessarily invoked the Passion of Christ for the Anglo-Scandinavians, but building them may have placated their established neighbors and improved local and regional relations by presenting themselves as having familiar cultural practices. Early contact with the Scandinavians was not positive from the perspective of the Christians of the British Isles. Documentary evidence from the period interprets the eighth-century raids as part of the narrative concerning the decline of the Christian faith in latter days,


629 This is similar to the way Greek architectural orders were applied to Etruscan building types during the late Roman Republic and early Imperial Rome to satisfy the “necessary dignity” for public buildings. John W. Stamper, The Architecture of Roman Temples: the Republic to the Middle Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. chapter 4.

630 Of course, the hogbacks were systematically disposed of during the twelfth century when many of them were buried or used as building material in churches. The continued presence of crosses has helped us to recover many of them. A hogback site with no cross would be difficult to discover.
but these documents record a particular perspective. Simply because one side was engaged in a cosmic culture war, it does not necessarily follow that the other was. The decision to raid coastal monasteries was, from the perspective of the raiders, likely not based on religion; rather it was one of wealth, geographic opportunity, and lack of military resistance.631

After the Norse expulsion from Dublin in 902, the refugees were granted land on the Wirral by Æthelflæd.632 Once established around Cheshire, the Dublin refugees (calling them Scandinavians at this point is hardly appropriate) moved on York. Rather than challenging Anglo-Saxon Wessex, they gained lands throughout Yorkshire, Northumbria, Lancaster and Cumbria. These lands were far easier to take and control, and place-name evidence, as problematic as it can be to make specific claims, strongly suggests how linguistic and cultural patterns common to Scandinavian descendants became established in these regions.633 Once established in northern England, there was no reason for them to change the way they did business.

Concerning place, Christopher Tilley wrote, “Places and landscapes produce spaces and times in relation to the bodies that inhabit, move around and use them, rather than the other way round. [...] Places gather together persons, memories, structures, histories, myths and symbols.”634 What makes Gosforth an interesting case in the discussion of place is its tenth-century genesis. No evidence exists for a previous permanent settlement there, nor is it associated with any reused ancient structure, such as a stone circle or Roman foundation. The tendency of the Anglo-Scandinavians to establish communities in marginal lands, the best having

631 Chroniclers may have also favored recording monastic attacks over secular attacks due to knowledge of one over the other and the magnitude of the event in terms of perceived historical and cultural interest. Their outrage stemmed from the “heathens” abhorrent disregard for Christian sacred sites and sanctified remains and the destruction of communities valuable for the maintenance of spiritual well-being.


633 Fellows-Jensen, "Scandinavian Settlement in Cumbria."

already been inhabited by that time, gave rise to an intense period of place making. So one might say rather that, “Persons, memories, structures, histories, myths and symbols gather together to make places,” and once those places are determined, only then do they gain Tilley’s agency over their animate and inanimate inhabitants.

To say that the sculptures at Gosforth create a place is on the one hand obvious and simplistic, but on the other hand staggeringly complex. Given that the very concept of “place” is debated, one can hardly argue convincingly for how this elusive “place” is made. Starting from the definition that, “Persons, et alia, gather together to make places,” Gosforth was very much a gathering point of these. Most of the original agents in the creation of Gosforth are gone, but echoes of their agency still reside in the sculptural group. However, it is not enough to say that the sculptures alone created a place. Their tenth-century context would have been one of architectural structures, language, people, roads and industry, all combining to create a meaningful place. Any given Anglo-Scandinavian settlement would have had these things to a greater or lesser degree, yet not all of them had art as distinctive as the Gosforth sculptures. Therefore, part of the Gosforth sculptures’ function was to be visually distinctive within the context of Anglo-Scandinavian settlements.

The Gosforth sculptures create a point of multi-faceted distinction against their environment by being visual distinct in the way they stand apart from the “natural landscape” by virtue of being clearly man-made. They are separate from the functional built environment as superfluous to the basic physical needs of a community (food, shelter, protection, et cetera) and are also distinct from similar sculptures by their large sizes, their volumetric designs, and their complex and possibly unique iconography, although all viewers may not have had direct knowledge of comparable sculptures. Though it seems an obvious point, the sculptures also exist by occupying physical space and interacting with the bodies of the community. Their presence imposes on the viewer and interacts with his memory as an aid for remembrance. In the words of

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Andrew Jones, “This is not to say that objects experience, contain, or store memory; it is simply that objects provide the ground for humans to experience memory.”

Broadly, the sculptures affect memory by creating a mental difference through their distinctive visual qualities, both as different from “nature” and different from other works, though this last distinction is known most keenly in the mind of the artist, who has mental access to the most comparative material. The memory the sculptures effect may be tied to death, ritual, myth, narrative (historical and mythological), and/or absence (both physical and temporal). Any and all of these aspects, as well as others, could be energized in any given viewer and different ones could be heightened at different viewing times depending on an individual’s expectations or needs. None of these individual responses can be recaptured, but the Gosforth cross’s longevity is due to preservation over time by the community, which, despite cultural changes, clearly valued the sculpture’s ongoing and evolving agency. This indicates that the Gosforth cross, at least, had a strong function within the collective memory of the immediate, local population.

The specific primary function of the Gosforth cross is unknown. It could have marked a grave, been a focus for religious rite or observance, designated a sacred or ritual space, been didactic, decorative, or commemorative of a person, people, or event. For crosses firmly associated with Christian foundations, whether monastic or ecclesiastic, their function was bound to their place, either as boundary markers, preaching instruments, or reflections of a foundation’s wealth and modernity. These functions cannot be assumed for the tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian material because their spatial context is not necessarily the same as Anglian or

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637 Andrew Jones, Memory and Material Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20, 22.

638 Collective or cultural memory is part of both individual and group identity. It comprises a group’s agreed upon narratives of a “fixed” past that may inform why the present is as it is. Alasdair MacIntyre argued that narrative is so fundamental to the human condition that it has become essential not only in the understanding of the past, but also in the understanding of ourselves. “[M]an is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.” Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216. Paul Connerton also defined “cognitive memory,” which is learned but not experienced knowledge, and “habit-memory,” which is the reproduction of action or performance, such as knitting or driving a car. Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22-24. The study of memory and its related topics is fragmented between the individual (psychology) and the group (sociology, anthropology, communication, history) but. For an overview of these issues, see James V. Wertsch, Voices of Collective Remembering (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33-55. Key studies in the field of collective memory include Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
Irish examples. The forces that gave rise to the earliest stone crosses were different from the tenth-century milieu. Whereas the first stone crosses were an invention, the tenth-century stone crosses were the continuation of established practice.

There is a dearth of site-specific archaeology associated with Anglo-Scandinavian material, especially for coastal Cumbria. While some Cumbrian sites, such as Beckermet St. Bridget and Lowther, have sculptural evidence for pre-Anglo-Scandinavian settlement, and presumably some associated Christian structure, many other sites have only tenth-century sculpture and evidence for neither prior settlement nor associated Christian architecture. If tenth-century sculpture cannot be directly associated with the same kind of specific land use as Irish and Anglian Christian sculpture, then the function cannot be assumed to be the same.

Gosforth, like many other sites of tenth-century sculptural production in the Danelaw, has no evidence of previous intense habitation. When Anglo-Scandinavian immigrants settled there, they formed communities in marginal areas such as uplands and poorer quality agricultural land. In terms of Dodgshon’s theory, these communities began with low inertia, leaving them exposed to change from the embedded population. The settlers used their currency wealth to erect stone sculptures as agents of inertia, transferring their wealth in silver into a fixed cultural collateral. These anchored the new settlements as places in their own right in both the land and in the memory, from that point onward gaining the agency articulated by Tilley.

The inertia that sculptural groups established in their communities created a mental focus or place for its inhabitants and reinforced the shared culture between individuals, but their cultural capital had greater implications for the cultural cohesion of the region. Magdalena Naum argued something similar at the community level for the cultural cohesive burial rites of early

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639 Potential excavations and scanning may not produce useful data concerning early structures because subsequent church construction, especially that of the twelfth-century Normans, obliterated much of the earlier architecture. Given that the Gosforth hogbacks were discovered as part of the foundational material for the Norman church, part of the purpose of the twelfth-century changes to the community was to erase the indigenous, localized identities and unify England by means of standardized architecture. For a detailed study of Norman architecture in England, see Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

640 Fellows-Jensen, "Scandinavian Settlement in Cumbria."

medieval immigrants, where participation in a remembered ritual contributed to cultural cohesion.⁶⁴² However, where burials have immediate, local agency, the rites surrounding them are forgotten. The tenth-century sculptures of northern England served a similar purpose, but their scope was both local and regional, their agency more permanent.

The awareness of other places facilitated by the Gosforth sculptures also indicates a spirit of artistic competition between communities. Like other Anglo-Scandinavian sculptures, they were devised and executed locally, not the distributed products of centralized production. Rather than strictly emulating earlier models with modest changes in interlace or iconography, the better sculptors developed new designs combining aspects of other innovative sculptures. This competition may have existed strictly between the artists, but more likely it reflects a conscious awareness of the positive effects of elite sculpture for a community and is key to understanding the broader regional relationship between these newly made places. These effects reached beyond the local to reference and served to rank other communities in the memories of the inhabitants.

7.2 Between Monument and Landmark

The mnemonic aspect of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture operates in the local population but has regional consequences and indeed, memory operates most profoundly at the meso-scale, bridging the local and the regional. Two sculptural types that have mnemonic function are monuments and landmarks; this section argues that in terms of their local conception or regional function the Gosforth sculptures are neither wholly monuments nor landmarks. Rather, they reaffirm the elite status of the Gosforth community and transcend immediate memory and strict place-making by striving to be the most memorable examples of their type, which invests them with the greatest amount of cultural inertia and solidifies the community’s claims to place.

The terms “monument” and “landmark” are used loosely in reference to art. An object can be a monument of Renaissance sculpture or a landmark of architecture, or an individual work can be monumental in that it is of great size. However, these terms have specific meanings in

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terms of function. Whether the Gosforth sculptures functioned as monuments or landmarks may seem pedantic, but an investigation reveals how they become features of the landscape and repositories for cultural inertia. How they are neither and both monument and landmark is more interesting in terms of negotiating the change in scale from the Gosforth community to the wider region. As monuments, they recalled a world-view external to their land; as landmarks they differentiated one new community from another. Additionally, perception or use of objects can shift between monument and landmark depending on how individuals or a group interpret an object’s use and so regardless of initial intent, the sculptures could have rapidly taken on additional roles.

Strictly speaking, a monument is a structure erected to memorialize a person, place, or event, or to serve as a territorial boundary. Monuments are often associated with the dead, either erected directly with a burial, or apart from the body in general remembrance. The grave itself can become a memorial as well. However, the term can also apply more broadly to structures of cultural interest that have historical importance or are memorable examples of a type. The word derives from the Latin *monere*, to remind, and in all uses of the term *monument*, memory is omnipresent. On the other hand, a landmark is a recognizable feature, be it natural or man-made, of a landscape, but not necessarily one that is immutable or permanent. It is by nature subjective, transient, situational, and active. Some landmarks have the impression of permanence, but this façade relies on their continual enactment and contextualization and it never becomes real. Whereas landmarks are invested with meaning through their physical presence, a monument is a repository of historical information about a person, place, or event either local or distant from the object itself. Landmarks facilitate memory of what is present and monuments of what is absent.

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643 For example, a monument in the strictest sense can become strictly a landmark if the individuals “using” it are doing so for the purposes of geographical navigation, especially if the cultural significance signaled by the monument is unknown to the users of it, such as a foreign tourist navigating the variously named piazzas of Rome. Likewise, an object that previously functioned as a landmark or landscape feature can become a monument if it is imbued with additional mnemonic information. This often happens at the site of personal or community disasters, such as the World Trade Center in New York City.

644 Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*.

645 Even those landmarks that are not physically constructed by humans are still ‘man-made’ in the sense that they are selected from the environment as different.
Three aspects of landmarks intersect with those of monuments in terms of large-scale sculpture. The first is that they be physically present in the world. Monuments are independent creations that, while contextualized in an environment, exist in their own right.\footnote{Erika Doss notes, quoting from the work of cultural theorists, that even in temporary memorials, “things matter.” Memorials and monuments must possess physicality for them to have efficacy in the memory. Erika Doss, \textit{The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials: Towards a Theory of Temporary Memorials} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 12-19.} While part of their meaning is derived from previous acts of remembrance, they must be at least initially physically present to do this. Landmarks are also features of the physical landscape, and although they are not required to operate as long-term sinks for cultural inertia, they must be recognizable and memorable.

The second intersection between landmarks and monuments seems rather trivial insofar as they can both mark territory, but this is not a pedantic observation. Their physicality and presence alters the space around them, and they become markers for a political entity, whether this is an individual or an organized state. Both landmarks and monuments can be placed on boundaries or, as is the case at Gosforth, define territory through line-of-sight. The position of the Gosforth sculptures indicates that they were central to an enclosure.\footnote{Clifford Jones, personal communication. Jones has performed the only known modern excavation at Gosforth, recorded datable architectural features for the tenth century, and studied the regional landscape archaeology for decades, publishing several books on the Roman period.} Evidence for the boundary is not conclusive, but a slight rise in the terrain approximately three to four meters wide can still be seen west of the cross along the Wastwater road that runs east-west just south of St. Mary’s. The boundary is demarcated more convincingly at its southern extent where an ancient hedge may preserve the course of the tenth-century community. Julian Richards made a similar observation at Cottam in East Yorkshire.\footnote{Julian D. Richards, "Identifying Anglo-Scandinavian Settlements," in \textit{Cultures in Contact}, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 295-309: 295-309.} Archaeological excavation there revealed an Anglo-Scandinavian farmstead bounded by shallow ditches and a complex gateway structure, “comprising a massive external ditch, an internal rubble bank […] and a timber superstructure.”\footnote{Ibid. 304.} The gateway, he argued, was a status symbol, visible to any along the
trackway. While the archaeology at Gosforth is limited, the indication of enclosing earthworks may also suggest a gate.650

A lake or widening of the River Bleng was to the southeast of the sculptures, the shoreline of which is still visible in the landscape. The water has since receded, but because the boundary rise does not extend into the old lake basin, the lake was present in the tenth-century and its shore served as a territorial boundary.651 How long this lake remained is uncertain, but given that the village limits still conform to the 50 meter altitude line, itself roughly the shoreline, it probably persisted through the medieval period. Modern building to the northwest of the church has obliterated any trace of an ancient boundary there, but the traditional northern extent of the Jacobean manor suggests the older community. [PLATE 130] The Gosforth crosses, as the most visible of the sculptural group, functioned as a boundary marker through their visibility in the immediate landscape; any territory that had visual access to the crosses was part of their community.652 This function is shared with the plain Peak District crosses, which may have also been boundary markers, but the latter are hardly elaborate sculptures on the order of the Gosforth cross. [PLATE 131] As the intricate relief carving indicates, the Gosforth sculptures are engaging with their community in a more complex manner than simply acting as boundary markers.

The third shared aspect of landmarks and monuments is memory. Monuments more obviously function mnemonically but landmarks do as well, albeit differently. Where monuments invoke a specific other, whether a person, event or time, landmarks function as points of site-specific memory as having some perceived difference from its surroundings. They


652 The position of the other monuments is entirely unknown save for reports of a second cross near to the Gosforth cross. The hogbacks are assumed to have been close to the cross because they were used as building material for the church.
are necessarily agents of memory because their function as landmarks is only successful if they are remembered *in absentia*. They must be recalled and recognized, both of which are memory operations.

Landmarks were important in the Middle Ages for navigation purposes. Surviving itineraries, often presented as a list of verbal descriptions of the features encountered, demonstrate how memorable places and things defined and dictated spatial travel.\(^653\) The best places could be known from description alone and the function of the earliest medieval maps was not to provide an objective, top-down view of the physical world but rather to relate known places to one other.\(^654\) Knowledge of the world was more phenomenological than in the present, where modern cartography appears to have affected how people navigate.\(^655\) Spatial navigation relied on recognizable or known features of the environment through experience or description, not through the abstraction of maps.\(^656\) Landmarks were much more important in this subjective environment than they are today, where most navigation happens via passive means such as GPS and seemingly objective surveyed maps.\(^657\) These landmarks were memorized, recognized, and recollected—all memory operations.

An attempt to define the Gosforth sculptures as exclusively monuments or landmarks introduces problems. Landmarks, being subjective features by which a person can navigate, are entirely contextual. Although a given landmark can be stable, widely recognized and used by many people (a river bend, a bridge, a mountain) or a built structure, anything can be used as a landmark—even seemingly ephemeral things (a tree, a group of livestock) if necessary. Given


\(^{657}\) The reliance on such systems has become so ingrained that people have developed a predisposition toward orientation to the north. Julia Frankenstein et al., "Is the Map in Our Head Oriented North?," *Psychological Science* 23, no. 2 (2012): 120-25.
the position of the Gosforth crosses in the center of an enclosure, they could not have functioned strictly as simple physical landmarks because their centrality would prevent their use in immediate spatial navigation. They are also not monuments insofar as they do not contain specific information that promotes individual recollection without oral knowledge. While the absence of evidence does not absolutely prove they were not monuments, a comparison to contemporary memorial practices shows how a strict function as a monument was unlikely.

The Viking-age Scandinavians, a literate people who shared a fixed system of writing that was reasonably stable across the regions they settled, built many memorials to specific people that still survive. Most of these take the form of stone inscriptions. Some of the Manx crosses do have elaborate runic inscriptions that are overtly memorial. Gaut’s cross in Maughold says, “[…] this to the memory of Ofeig, his father, but Gaut Björnson, of Cooley, made it.” Another of Gaut’s crosses from Michael states, “Mael Brigde, son of Athakan, the smith, erected this cross for his own soul [and that of] his brother’s wife. Gaut made this and all in Man.” Most Manx inscriptions formulaically cite the person who had the monument raised and in whose memory it stands. Many of them are highly fragmentary and so the full effect of the memorial is presently lost. Those people remembered mostly represent sons and wives. An occasional political statement survives as well as the names of some rune-cutters. The inscriptions appear on crosses ornamented only with interlace and on those with Norse and Christian iconography. A few inscriptions appear on otherwise uncarved stones. Generally, runic inscriptions appear with greater frequency on Anglo-Scandinavian cross slabs than earlier wheel head crosses, perhaps indicating a general increase in vernacular literacy. While these inscriptions invoke the memory

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658 The numbers of runic inscriptions across the Viking world is reasonably large, and these only reflect the monumental tradition. For England, see George Stephens, *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (London: Williams, 1884); Holman, *Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions in the British Isles: Their Historical Context*. See also the various regional sculptural corpus projects for England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and, for Man, Kermode and Wilson, *Manx Crosses*. Excavations in Novgorod have recovered a large cache of birch bark writing dating from the eleventh through the sixteenth century, mostly of early Slavic languages but with some representation from early Finnish and Old Norse. These documents indicate that basic vernacular literacy in northern Europe may have been more widespread than could be assumed from surviving inscriptions alone. The best resource for the complete birchbark database is A. B. Artsikhovsky et al., "Birchbark Literacy from Medieval Rus: Contents and Contexts," http://gramoty.ru.

659 Similar runic inscriptions began to appear in Scandinavia as well. Stephens, *Old-Northern Runic Monuments*. 
of the deceased, none of them has been found directly in the context of a direct burial. Similar memorial inscriptions in Scandinavia also appear removed from the body, invoking a person’s memory with a dedicated bridge or stone instead.

The relationship between memorial inscriptions and sculpture is far different in Cumbria. None of the known tenth-century sculptures there bear any sort of inscription, memorializing or not. This is surprising because the Manx material is hardly more than a generation removed from similar Cumbrian sculptures. The absence of a memorializing text on the Gosforth sculptures does not mean that they were not conceived and erected to be monuments, but conclusive evidence is missing. Because their memorial function cannot be proven, arguing that they are monuments in the strictest sense of the word is problematic. Additionally, none of the Cumbrian sculptures is associated with a known burial. Sepulchral art can be argued to have a memorial function even without an inscription or iconography invoking the death because of its spatial association with the body. If the monument’s association with the body is forgotten and cultural expectations of monuments change, the monument could lose its commemorative status, even to the point of being conceptually unmade. This unmaking then allows for the reuse and repurposing of culturally significant material, objects and sites.

660 Most of the slabs have certainly been moved from their original locations, so they very well may have originally been associated with burials.
661 Anglian inscriptions, both runic and uncial, survive at Beckermet, Bewcastle, Carlisle, Irton, and Urswick.
662 Art historians use the term “monument” more generally to denote a distinctive or superlative representative of an artistic form or style and the Gosforth sculptures are certainly monuments in this way. I think at least the first half of this note either appears too late or is superfluous.
663 Williams, Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain.
664 For example, a modern Western European may expect a memorial to feature an inscription (text) to focus the individual memory toward the cultural memory for fear that the absent subject of the memorial will be lost. The ancient tree at the Kumano Hayatama Jinja no Nagi shrine in Shingu City, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan was planted in commemoration of the shrine’s founding. Without the context of the shrine, the tree’s status as a monument would be at risk.
The Gosforth sculptures therefore are neither monuments nor landmarks, but they share the mnemonic aspects of both. This agency within collective memory—social beliefs shared between individuals and communities that form a group identity—is how the Gosforth sculptures ultimately create place. The sculptures’ agency permeates the various scales of human society, micro- (the individual), meso- (households and their communities), and macro- (regional and global), operating in the scaled networks between them. It is the shared information important within the meso- and macro-networks that forms cultural patterns. At the individual and community level, people make and remake decisions that establish and reestablish themselves as, for individuals, part of the community and, for communities, part of a society. The propensity for that information to change over time and space is related to the amount of environmental inertia.

One of the ways information is regulated at the meso- and macro-scales is through shared narrative. The Gosforth cross and Fishing Stone preserve elements of the shared mythology of Forn Siðr and participate strongly in communicating and preserving those narratives. Understanding individual reaction or contemporary interest in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture requires additional evidence such as ekphrasis, although three skaldic poems dated to the tenth century record the existence of narrative iconography decorating walls and shields.

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667 Geertz, "Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols."

668 Dodgson, Society in Time and Space.


670 Ragnarsdrápa (Bragi Boddason the Elder), Haustlöng (Thiódólfr of Hvin) and Húsdrápa (Úlf Uggason), skaldic poems composed in the ninth and tenth centuries, describe the presence of art (paintings and carvings) illustrating the myths recorded in the poems. However, the language in the poems describes the full narrative suggested by the iconography rather than describing visual details of the iconography itself. All of the poems tell multiple stories indicating that the customary approach was to illustrate several narratives in the same space. Because no visual descriptions of the objects themselves survive, it is unknown if the narratives were presented continuously, within
Individuals clearly engaged with figural art both visually and linguistically. The sculptures, being public works rather than personal items, had a clear and purposeful cultural function in the collective memory of the community by representing and preserving cultural narrative. The specific iconography at Gosforth indicates a deep engagement with the oral traditions of Scandinavia.

Oral narrative tradition is often set against written history, and though there are key differences between them, they both transmit information to an audience. The ways they do this are not, however, equivalent. One difference resides in the impression of accuracy. Written texts possess an air of unchanging authenticity—indeed, they have authors whose authority and credentials become crucial to the perceived truth of the narrative. Their content is fixed to a greater or lesser degree. The information itself is reified as an object in its own right, an object that is fixed and objective, although the reception of the text is still a subjective one. The physical text may survive long past the lifespan of its originator.

Oral texts are validated by the audience through their retelling. The narrator must conform to established narrative expectations or the audience will disregard the performance.

panels, or at all. Bragi described his shield having “many a story,” and Thiódólf of Hvin spoke of a “costly colored shield” where his elaborate double narrative “painted is this all.” That all stanzas of the poem were illustrated on the shield is unlikely. Probably one or more key scenes were rendered to remind the viewer of the rest. These stories were popular and a key scene from one would have been sufficient, as the image of the Crucifixion is sufficient for a Christian to recall the Passion. However, no indication is given as to which scene(s) was/were actually pictured on the shield. Unfortunately, Úlf Uggason’s Húsdrápa is too fragmentary to have preserved any description of the actual space. The context for the poem instead survived in the Laxdœla saga. The saga records that one summer circa 978, an elaborate hall, more decorated than any had previously seen, was finished. “There were pictured famous olden tales on the wainscoting and also on the roof timbers … Úlf Uggason was also at the feast. He had composed a poem about [the chieftain] and about the tales that were figured in the hall…[]” (author’s emphasis) Hollander, The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems, with Introduction and Notes.

671 The text of the Torah, for example, is fixed to the degree that any copy of the text must be without difference when tested against a master version. Conversely, copies of the Christian Bible are not subjected to such rigor in duplication and the validity of errant versions is not necessarily questioned (based on the severity of the textual aberration.) I wonder if you need to cite something “authoritative” here 😊

672 The Anglo-Saxon concept of a “word-hoard” (weordhord), the collection of memorized phrases, kennings, and characters, which is kept in the breast and opened by the singer during a performance, reflects the idea that it is not enough to relate a story, but that the performance of it is part of its efficacy.
Oral texts are also ephemeral, existing only in the moment of their retelling. Writing down an oral narrative preserves only one instance of it and necessarily reflects the needs of the writer. The dynamic relationship between oral and written narrative is reflected in the academic discourse between oral historians and researchers of collective memory. The oral historians are typically interested in the individual whereas the collective memory researchers favor group knowledge and reception.

As argued in the previous chapter, the Gosforth iconography reflects a knowledge of and engagement with Scandinavian narrative and religious traditions by illustrating key moments or characters of widely known stories. Similar images appeared on honorary shields and architectural decoration, as recorded in some skaldic verse. Because in the tenth century these stories were preserved primarily in the memory, the Gosforth sculptures are activating them, reaffirming a shared identity between those who recognize the stories and the sculptures’ community. They invoke established cultural norms and make them present, creating a point of cultural inertia that remains active in both individual and group memory. By doing this, the Gosforth sculptures themselves become part of the shared culture, objects by and through which other individuals and communities can infer identity.

The sculptures then operate as narrative devices, mnemonically comparable to other sources of visual narrative, but they also project their physical inertia regionally as part of the widespread practice of stone sculpture. They bring such portable objects as shields and such architecture as decorated halls together with oral tradition and geographic place through the evocation of other sculptures. This forms a complex shared environment that gives individuals purchase in the global culture mediated through the social practices of the community.

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673 With modern audio recording equipment, this no longer holds true, but it certainly would have been the case in the tenth century.


676 "The inscription of images and texts, whether those of the Renaissance, the high Medieval period, the Luba, or prehistoric Iberia or Ireland, act as aide memoires for other things – places, people, artefacts, ideas." Jones, Memory and Material Culture, 188.
The Gosforth sculptures are a cluster of neurons, of a sort, within the “distributed mind” of the culture, the various things it references creating a spatial and temporal network, all of which has greater cultural inertia, which resists change. Jones described this distributed mind:

In this sense we can consider the object world as a kind of ‘distributed mind’, not only spatially distributed, but also temporally distributed. In taking this line of argument, the concept of the index is critical because it allows us to consider how things are related. [...] the notion of the index enables us to conceptualise the links between assemblages of artefacts, whether physically located in one place like caches or hoards or as cultural assemblages distributed across a landscape.\(^677\)

In this way, the Anglo-Scandinavian sculptures reference and reinforce one another as a cultural assemblage set in a landscape invested with inertia that then reinforces the strength of that cultural assemblage.

The Gosforth sculptural group’s peculiar qualities set it apart from its contemporary and historical corpus, but it still references and participates in that corpus with its crosses and hogbacks. The likenesses between Gosforth and other sculptures, both Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian, make a cultural statement. The round shaft associated it with the established Cumbrian population, who erected formally similar crosses at Beckermet and Penrith; the ringed cross heads and hogbacks were the fashion of the Anglo-Scandinavian immigrants who settled in the region during the tenth-century; the Forn Siðr iconography signaled the religious alignment of the patron(s) and/or community and at the same time invoked the pictorial complexity and grandeur of Irish scriptural crosses.

All of this indicates a community well aware of and participating in its spatial/regional and temporal context. Regardless of the sculptures’ primary functions, if Gosforth were a newly settled site at the time of their commission, which it seems to have been, their secondary function as memory agents within the regional landscape is important to recognize. Casey argued that “There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it. [...] To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know

\(^{677}\) Ibid., 225-26.
the places one is in." A person who had not been to Gosforth could not imagine what sculptures awaited him there, regardless of any florid description offered from an experienced observer. Once seen, the knowledge of the sculptures irrevocably altered that person’s perception of all that was spatially and mnemonically associated with them. Once seen, the knowledge of place found was assured. The sculptures act as agents within the memory, both individual and collective, and in the space, both physical and temporal, of the community. More specifically, the Gosforth sculptures function as a mnemonic and spatial focus within both the natural and built environments, creating a place of memory in the economically and culturally competitive atmosphere of northern England in the tenth century.

7.3 The Role of Art in the Settlement of the North

At the local and community level, the Gosforth sculptures reinforce cultural norms and forge a connection between its place and similar places across the region. This macro-effect is compelling because it provides evidence for the distribution and concentration of economic and political power. The art played a role in establishing and maintaining that power, but it did so by facilitating the cognitive map of the culture’s collective memory. The places marked by the sculptures across northern England were economic and population centers that established and supported the burgeoning trade-based economy.

Discerning patterns of urbanization around the Irish Sea during the Viking Age is a tricky proposition. The Irish longphorts are unlike such possible predecessors in Scandinavia as Kaupang and Birke. Kaupang, at its largest, had an estimated population between 400 and 1000. While a settlement of this size may qualify as “urban,” it is hardly comparable to the true cities of the Mediterranean: Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. In Ireland, Scandinavian

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678 Casey, "How to get from space to place."

679 When scholars talk about medieval urbanization, they can follow a strict interpretation of an urbs, a large population center with built defenses such as walls, or they can be more liberal with the term, including or even focusing on population centers of a thousand people or less. No true urbs existed in northern England. Sindbæk considered sites to be urban with as few as 300 people. Søren M. Sindbæk and Paul Arthur, "Trade and Exchange," in The Archaeology of Medieval Europe, ed. James Graham-Campbell and M. Valor (Århus: Århus University Press, 2007), 289-315: 289-315.

680 Griffiths, Vikings of the Irish Sea, 119.
settlers established new ports of trade, but their major centers in England, Chester and York, had
been founded by the Romans. The Western Isles (Shetland, the Faroes, and the Isle of Man)
bucked the urbanization trend; no conclusive evidence of large trading or population centers has
been found there.\textsuperscript{681}

Northern England enjoyed its own type of urbanization. After their expulsion from
Dublin in 902, the Hiberno-Scandinavians vacated to the Lancaster coast. The famous Cuirdale
hoard indicates the amount and nature of the wealth that suddenly flowed into England.\textsuperscript{682} The
displaced Dubliners were exceedingly wealthy and had the desire and means to re-establish
trading bases, now near Chester, and carry on as before. Desiring the vast wealth and power of
York, they captured the city that the Danes had, in 866, taken from Northumbria.\textsuperscript{683} The city was
politically unstable for the next fifty years, but archaeological evidence suggests it developed
dramatically in that time. New streets were lined with timber storefronts, all dated
dendrochronologically between 900 and 935. Dublin also enjoyed economic growth after the
return of the Hiberno-Norse in 917 and its territory expanded to include a greater hinterland.
During this period, direct political influence between Anglo-Scandinavians in England and
Scandinavia collapsed.\textsuperscript{684} The fortunes of each would take separate courses, although not
without conflict.

The intense urbanization from circa 920 to 935 correlates to the sudden, extensive period
of monument building in northern England. Urban centers enjoyed an influx of wealth under
Ragnall of York, who captured Waterford, and his ally/brother, Sigtryggr, who recovered Dublin
in 917 and later took Northumbria after the death of Ragnall. Despite the seeming political
instability, this period would have been reasonably stable for the Tees valley with most of the

\textsuperscript{681} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{682} Graham-Campbell, "Viking Treasure from the Northwest."
115-21, 117.
turmoil staying well to the south. 

York was a political, religious, and economic center since the second century, but it grew in power and predominance starting in the middle ninth century under its Danish overlords. The Danelaw enjoyed separate legal distinction through the mid-tenth and eleventh centuries. Edgar “the Peaceful” (r. 959–975), in his fourth law code issued in 962–3 or 970s, stated that “there should be in force among the Danes such good laws as they best decide on.”

This does not necessarily indicate racial perceptions or divisions, but it does show that the Danelaw had partial autonomy for it to have been considered separately in the legal code. The place-name evidence indicates that the effect of the Anglo-Scandinavians on the social and spatial fabric of northern England was a lingering one. While there is no Christian text from England written in Old Norse, the language appears to have remained in use in the North even after the Conquest.

Central in this autonomous region, the power of York continued to expand under the Dublin kings. Despite possible religious differences, York’s bishopric participated in high-level political matters and its support was often extended to Anglo- or Hiberno-Scandinavian leadership. The official currency of York was minted by the Church, which used this power to sanction York’s kings, issuing coinage to the taste of whomever held the throne.

As the population of the Danelaw grew, its overall wealth also grew both as an effect of increases in both trade and agricultural production. A newly landed elite had both the financial and territorial means to erect stone sculptures, the presence of which suggests that they controlled organized

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685 Halloran believed the Battle of Brunanburh to have been located north of the Firth of Solway. Its traditional location is Bromborough, Wirral. A good number of tenth- or eleventh-century sculptural fragments there attest to the site’s participation in the same cultural development as the rest of the north, but the surviving art is of rather poor quality, not indicative of an important center. Bailey, CASSS 9, 52-57.

686 Whitelock, ed. English Historical Documents, no. 41.


688 Fellows-Jensen, "Viking Settlement."


villages, which served as local economic centers, rather than isolated farmsteads. The sculptures, most with evidence of weathering, were public to the extent that visual access to them was unrestricted. Their numbers indicate the involvement of multiple patrons even at one site, who enjoyed sculptural variety. Regardless of the specific form or iconographic message of the monuments, they were a conspicuous effort on the part of their patrons. Their human or greater-than-human scale demanded to be seen. Once enhanced with paint as is likely, the results were something designed to attract the eye.

The population comprised settlers from York and the Irish Sea, who lived among the native Northumbrians, themselves a mix of Britons, Scots, Romans, and Continental peoples, as much as any of those identifiers were meaningful even by the early tenth century. Some were farmers displaced by war, others were ex-soldiers with new lands, and yet others were craftspeople. Regardless of their political, religious, or familial associations, a common cultural tradition was that of monumental stone sculpture. The monasteries at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, Lindisfarne, and Whitby all produced a large amount of carved stone, albeit mostly architectural and funerary. Even so, early crosses at Ruthwell, Bewcastle, and Durham testify to monumental, public sculptural practices prior to Scandinavian settlement that were continued in the tenth-century, even if there was not a direct, continuous practice of it.

Although free standing stone monuments were made in northern England from the eighth through the eleventh centuries, there are differences between their functions. The early phase of cross building was associated with monastic foundations and numbers were limited. Some, such as Irton, occur in isolation, others, such as at Jarrow, were part of the broader use of carved architectural decoration. The tenth-century sculptures, in contrast, very rarely appear in isolation. Even at sites with poor-quality carving in few numbers, more than one sculpture was commissioned. This suggests that the function of free standing sculpture changed between the eighth and tenth centuries as the people who commissioned them changed. In the eighth century,

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691 Specifics of economy and trade in early medieval Europe is only recently being understood through focused investigations. The first section of The Long Morning of Medieval Europe, eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick, comprising four studies focused on the early medieval economy, especially on the Continent. Søren Sindbæk’s work on network and trade in the North Sea is also a valuable contribution.

692 Cramp, CASSS I.
the massive, ornate crosses with clear Christian figural iconography in a monastic or ecclesiastic context were a focal point for faith, even if questions of their conception and use remain unresolved.

The tenth-century sculptures are quite different. The trend was for smaller sizes and greater numbers, less figural iconography in favor of plain knotwork or animal interlace, and their geographic context is not proven to be associated with a Christian foundation. The figural iconography that survives is divided between that with a likely Christian meaning, that with a likely Norse mythological meaning, and that which is secular, or at least not obviously religious or mythic.\textsuperscript{693} While many of the sculptures are currently associated with Christian foundations, little evidence survives from their original contexts. Many sites (Brompton, Gosforth, Aspatria, Lythe, and Penrith) are currently churchyards, but the establishment of these parishes can be confirmed no earlier than the Norman period. Many fragments or unwanted sculptures at these types of sites were incorporated into the architectural fabric of Norman churches, indicating that the Normans found and reused old sculptural fragments, or destroyed unwanted sculptures by using them as foundation material. Other sites, such as Lowther and Durham, have Anglian sculpture and seem to have been ecclesiastical in the eighth century, but they also have tenth-century sculptures, some of which have clearly non-Christian iconography, further suggesting the shifting affiliation of the populace over time and place.

Regardless of the high-level religious interpretation of stone crosses, they all functioned at a basic level as an inertial, mnemonic feature within the cultural landscape. Regional groups of tenth-century sculptures may have been commissioned within a relatively narrow timeframe as the population grew and exploited marginal land.\textsuperscript{694} Phil Sidebottom suggested that sculptures in Derbyshire were erected as a response to the West Saxon conquest, functioning to reinforce claims to land between differing elites.\textsuperscript{695} Northern sculptures functioned similarly, but rather

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item An isolated warrior could be a secular image, or it could have been intended to represent a specific legendary character. Given the fragmentary nature of both the sculptural and literary evidence, the original identification of these types of figures cannot be resolved, e.g. Sockburn 3.
\item Sidebottom, "Viking Age Stone Monuments and Social Identity in Derbyshire."
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
than simply staking exclusive claims, they imbued the region with cultural inertia achieved through the self-referencing visual network they created. A few centers, such as Brompton, Lythe, Sockburn and Penrith, have a number of sculptures that are so similar that they may have been carved by a small group of artists, but they also share broader similarities within a smaller sub-regional network. Each community’s sculptures then contributed to the greater whole and served as a physical reference to the regional cognitive landscape.

7.4 The Cognitive Landscape of the Irish Sea

The role of the Gosforth sculptures at the macro-scale can be understood by returning to the concept of sculptures-as-cultural inertia and how it relates to tenth-century economic life of northern England. At the micro-scale, individuals can be influenced by objects with high cultural inertia, but this can also have an effect at the macro-scale by altering the perception of a community’s status and permanence. Dodgshon’s original theory of cultural inertia was primarily grounded in economic interests that influenced cultural change or continuity; material and institutional investment promoted cultural stability. The process in the nascent Danelaw was slightly different, but the underlying theory is the same. On an individual basis, communities co-opted the visual language of free standing stone sculptures from the native population to integrate themselves as centers of the new elite. However, the effect of sculpture in all these communities was to influence how the trade network between them was formed and maintained. In this way, the sculptures had a powerful economic role in northern England; the competition for status had real consequences by attracting trade.

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696 If the dispersion of style and motif across the corpus of northern sculpture is indicative of the movement and connections between people, then Sindbæk’s strong, hub-based network from the North Sea may also be present for the Irish Sea region, but more site specific archaeology needs to be done to investigate this.


Much of the tenth-century sculpture in the Danelaw was erected in newly founded communities. The rather sudden influx of a relatively wealthy population spurred this light urbanization supported by agriculture and trade. Dublin refugees, if possible, would have attempted to maintain lucrative trade connections to urban centers from their new communities. Such sites as Brompton have so many high-quality sculptures that they must have been a focal point for ongoing trade. This show of wealth created a regional demand for similar sculptures and the artists moved on to communities like Sockburn, Lythe, Kirklelington, and Northallerton, copying Brompton models, evoking older sculptures such as the odd round-shaft example at Follifoot and executing innovative designs. While not every community with a sculptural group was necessarily an important trading center, it probably did serve as a gathering point for the nearby rural population.

This competitiveness is suggested by the comparison of such sites as Gosforth and Penrith. The sculpture at both sites is similar: two tall, round shaft crosses, at least one plank type cross, multiple hogbacks, and loose carvings of uncertain function (at Gosforth the Fishing Stone and at Penrith the Crucifixion plaque). The crosses at Penrith are of a slightly older type and so the Gosforth community was purposefully invoking the other, but with taller, thinner, more elaborate sculptures. This competition was not necessarily mean-spirited, but it demonstrates a regional awareness on the part of the sculptures’ patrons and a desire to simultaneously emulate and exceed previous groups. In commissioning works from a sculptor capable of the feats of engineering executed at Gosforth, the community there could certainly claim victory in the “arms race” of standing crosses and decorated hogbacks.

Over time, this network developed to extend across northern England. Seemingly disparate communities like Gosforth and Lythe enjoyed similarities because, although geographically separated, the social and trade network which bound them was not. Indeed, because this network grew so rapidly, its social aspect was stronger than in a slow-growing network because the individuals involved in its expansion actively knew one another. If the Gosforth artist was trained at Brompton, he was a direct connection between the two sites, able to facilitate not only the trade of such ideas as sculptural forms but also potentially could mediate relations that would have an impact on trade.
This network in northern England initially expanded between 902 and 915, certainly overlapping the existing network of exchange established by links between monasteries. Part of it spread north from York into Northumbria, part spread west from Chester, linking the Irish Sea coast over land with York, part spread south from the western Scottish coast through coastal Cumbria and also east into Northumbria.\(^{699}\) When Dublin was regained in 917, the somewhat isolated *longphorts* of the Irish coast were now no longer long-distance stopovers on the trade artery between Scandinavia and the Mediterranean, they were destinations in their own right, controlling a complex regional network with centers at Dublin, Chester, and York. Evidenced by the urbanization that took place across the British Isles during the tenth century, the currency types found at fortified farmsteads like Cottam, and the stylistic cohesion of personal effects between England and Scandinavian, this Anglo-Scandinavian network established and cultivated both regional and long-distance trade.\(^{700}\)

The network became robust between 920 and 950 and this is the period in which the “Viking Age” sculptures of northern England were erected. The regional networks represented by the Circle Head group in Cumbria were probably centered in Strathclyde. The same relationship appears in northern Yorkshire with the Brompton School. These “parochial” groups of sculptures suggests that exchange network structures similar to those argued by Sindbæk for Denmark and indirectly argued by Mary Valante for Ireland may have existed in England.\(^{701}\) Stylistic comparisons between the sculptures suggest a small-world network where isolated debased forms were copied from better examples that were clustered at a few sites; there is no reason to think that the sculptures do not reflect the social and economic connections within the networks. Unfortunately, a dearth of focused archaeology for trade goods at non-urban sculptural sites makes absolute correlation between the sculptures and trade speculative.\(^{702}\) The non-

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699 Cramp, *CASSS* 2, 5.


702 Most Viking age archaeology in England is focused on such urban trade centers as York and Chester and their hinterlands are less understood, however, understanding the urban centers will make contextualizing the “rural” archaeology easier. Richard Hall, "York," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London; New
sculpture material record would reveal more concerning the nature of the trade network, but more and focused excavation needs to be done to illuminate this question.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter argued that the free standing crosses of northern England were erected to establish places for immigrating Anglo-Scandinavians in new lands. The communities competed with one another with the quality of their sculptures; those with the best sculptures would have been the most memorable, perhaps for the purpose of attracting trade, and would have been more likely to survive. They did this by creating a visible presence in the communities with which the presence of narratives familiar to individuals would reinforce cultural norms. While the sculptural iconography was new to England, the practice of painting or carving popular stories from Scandinavia was a long-standing cultural practice. This was combined with the already-established local practice of erecting stone crosses, mostly known from Anglian monastic sites. In this way, the Anglo-Scandinavians created cultural inertia for their new communities but did so in a way that would have been comfortably familiar to their new neighbors. By renegotiating space and place through monumental sculpture, newly defined territories drew on established intellectual and cultural practices, both borrowing and adapting those past practices in the present.  

The original significance for any given sculpture may be impossible to reconstruct, but this chapter demonstrated how tenth-century sculpture in northern England possessed secondary agency. The sculptures then become recognizable features of the landscape, mnemonic devices by which the regional network could be remembered and traversed. The sculptures helped to consolidate trade and identity across the region, but they also reflect a spirit of artistic competition between patrons and/or communities. Neither monuments nor landmarks, they were fixed physical points for fluctuating cultural memory and cognitive space to reference that could

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serve an individual’s need to reaffirm identity, to feel a place in the wider physical and mental world, and to facilitate interactions between single individuals and conflicting cultures.
8 Identity Revisited

This dissertation argues that the sculptures at Gosforth contributed to the creation of a new place in the tenth century, a community settled by people who shared cultural ties with other newcomers to the north of England. King Alfred recognized the autonomy of the north as the Danelaw circa 884 in the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum, which created an autonomous region in central England that changed dramatically over the next century. Two culturally similar groups, one driven out of Dublin in the early tenth century to settle along the Wirral near Chester and the other immigrating to eastern England from Denmark and controlling York, shared a similar northern Germanic heritage that was different from, but not diametrically opposed to, the Anglo-Saxons in southern England. During this period, the influx of people and their wealth sparked demand for the production of free standing stone sculpture.

This demand for sculpture was driven by a desire to invest cultural value, or inertia, in the land that would stave off local challenges to cultural identity, facilitate the establishment of communities relative to previously established populations and new foundations, and serve as mnemonic devices for regional economic exchange and cultural cohesion. This regional agency created competition as the numbers of sculptures increased: a sort of artistic arms race as later communities desired distinctive works. The sculptures of the Gosforth group were the superlative winners of this competition, being the largest and most decorated tenth-century sculptures known, with the most extensive extant Forn Siðr iconography surviving from the tenth century.

The iconography at Gosforth demonstrates the mid-tenth century popularity of skaldic stories like Thor’s Fishing Expedition. The most-studied scene, the cruciform figure with attendants on the east face of the Gosforth cross, shows not the supremacy of Christianity but the adaptation of northern Anglian and Irish Christian iconography in the service of the legend of Odin’s self-sacrifice. The Gosforth artist was well-traveled, inventive, and had a large cache of design elements at his disposal, many of which he brought to bear in the Gosforth sculptures.

also used an unusual construction technique for the tall, slender cross, carving it from the bias of a block to strengthen it against the elements. A few sculptural fragments in Yorkshire show similar construction. This technique, along with specific stylistic details, suggests that the Gosforth sculptor worked previously in Yorkshire. The relationship of his corpus to regional sculptural groups provides evidence to support a short period of intense artistic activity between c. 920 and c. 950, with the Yorkshire and Cumbrian sculptures preceding the Gosforth group, which in turn appears to have been influential for the designs of Manx cross slabs.

The style and iconography of the Gosforth sculptures refer to points across the Danelaw and eastern Ireland and visually drew together the wider community of Anglo-Scandinavians, legitimizing their claims in northern England by creating a large amount of capital inertia, which bridged the needs of the new population with the cross-building traditions of the old. This purposeful but somewhat artificial continuity between the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian traditions allowed the immigrants to communicate claims of “local” ancient heritage and traditions to the indigenous population while at the same time reinforcing a separate heritage to the immigrants.

The Gosforth artist’s regional awareness and engagement indicates that English cultural geography of the tenth century should continue to be reassessed. Much of Cumbria has traditionally been painted outside the Danelaw, and in terms of Anglo-Saxon legal status this may be accurate, but the strong artistic ties between Gosforth, the Tees Valley, Ireland, the Isle of Man, and Strathclyde suggest that western Cumbria may not have been so politically distant or distinct after all. Although all of these political entities may have had separate kings, culturally they may have been relatively homogenous. Their league against Æthelstan at Brunanburh suggests that they felt greater ties to one another than to the Anglo-Saxon South.

While the self-identity of the Gosforth population cannot be recovered, the community appears to have identified with the other builders of free standing stone sculpture across northern England and throughout the coastal Irish Sea. This indicates that the entire region had its own internal artistic language and forms of expression that were formed by a large body of works, themselves supported by common language and mythological narrative. By virtue of its political, religious and linguistic continuity to the present, Anglo-Saxon England has always been privileged in studies of tenth-century England, especially in terms of its contribution to English
identity. The Danelaw and its companion domains of the North are cast rather as an interruption in the unity of the English nation. The North had its own legal, economic, artistic and linguistic identity, and was in these aspects certainly the equal of the South. Most studies of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture consider them, by way of the cross forms, to be instruments, hallmarks, or reflections of Christian conversion. The reality complicates the narrative of a triumphant Christian England that suffered but overcame aberrations into heathendom. These non-believers, with exposure to the True Faith, turned from their wicked ways. This suggests that our understanding of the history of English Christianity may be a result of our modern biases, which are not necessarily favorable to the reality of the tenth century. Indeed, during this period Christianity itself was far from monolithic in its interpretation or practices.

Of course, comparing a superlative case of the primary artistic type of the North, the Gosforth cross, to the primary artistic type of the South, Anglo-Saxon monastic art, demonstrates the primacy the two cultures placed on religious identity. While both traditions visually blend and borrow, an Anglo-Saxon Gospel book does not equivocate its stance on the Christian Truth. By comparison, the Gosforth cross draws together rather than excludes, and communicates subjectively and openly using the established visual language of different faiths in a cohesive whole. It defies Christianity with Loki and Heimdall, Odin and Viðar, but it recognizes and incorporates Christianity as part of its function to unify time between the old and new, and to unify space, binding together communities both “Anglian” and “Anglo-Scandinavian.” That religious affiliation does not appear to have been a primary cultural marker of identity in the Danelaw sets the region apart and, in the eyes of those who look for the birth of modern England, disrupts its continuity with the present. In fact, the making of identity in the Danelaw may provide insight into how identity was formed and maintained elsewhere in the tenth century. Even seemingly simple aspects of identity, such as religious affiliation, can be called into question:

705 Martin Carver’s assessment of the mound burials at Sutton Hoo and his continuing efforts to complicate the narrative Conversion of the North have significantly altered the debate on religious identity in the European early middle ages. See bibliography.

706 Pluskowski and Patrick, "How do you pray to God?"
We ought not to pass over in silence the fact that the Northalbingians on one occasion committed *a great crime* and one of a terrible nature. When some unhappy captives, who had been taken from Christian lands and carried away to the barbarians, were ill treated by these strangers, they fled thence in the hope of escaping and came to the Christians, that is to the Northalbingians who, as is well known, live next to the pagans, but when they arrived these Christians showed no compassion but seized them and bound them with chains. Some of them they sold to pagans, whilst *others they enslaved, or sold to other Christians*. 707 (emphasis mine)

Clearly, the act of enslaving (whether it was to profit from the slave trade or to keep slaves) was not necessarily exclusive to “heathens.” True, Anskar believed the Northalbingians to have committed a “great crime” of a “terrible nature” by capturing some escaped slaves and selling them to both Christians and non-Christians and keeping some for themselves. Not only are the Northalbingians Christians who practice slavery, but other Christian communities near them do too. Even worse, while he does not state it directly, Anskar says the captives were “taken from Christians lands,” implying that they were Christian too. The same treaty that established the Danelaw cites as its fifth provision, “And we all agreed on the day when the oaths were sworn, that no *slaves* nor freemen *might go without permission into the army of the Danes*, any more than any of theirs to us.” 708 The treaty does not cite the religious affiliation of either side’s slaves, but it indicates that Anglo-Saxon territories may not have been entirely Christian (or Christians there kept Christians as slaves), perhaps, ultimately, being as mixed as the Danelaw.

With religious identity uncertain, a better understanding of the free standing sculpture can be developed from an economic perspective. The sculptures were salesmen, of a sort, advertising the wealth and connectivity of the communities. They were commissioned by people with wealth for people with wealth, and their religious ambiguity drew from a desire to avoid alienating potential trading partners. They provided a storied past for the new immigrants and did so in the visual language of the locals, showing that, ultimately, religious identity may mean more to modern researchers than to tenth-century farmers and traders, or even certain archbishops of


708 Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents*. 
York. Anglo-Saxon Christian monks could pontificate about the scourge of Northman heathens, but it seems that once they settled in, the Vikings made decent neighbors. If anything, the Saxon kings persisted in recovering Mercia and York rather than the Anglo-Scandinavians looking for more southern territory after Alfred’s establishment of the Danelaw. With all of central England connected, producing, and trading through Dublin and York, the Anglo-Scandinavians had more to lose than gain from continued warfare with the South. That both the Anglo-Saxon and Norwegian kings showed an interest in ruling this land attests to the wealth there.

The land, dotted with sculptures carved with images and interlace, was soon infused with cultural inertia by the new elite and established locals. Speakers of Old Norse named the land in their language, but often with local conventions. The now-established material world of the wider Danelaw set it apart from the South. Their effect, not entirely erased during periods of erasure by the Normans, Tudors, and Cromwells of history, is real.

The material milieu may have an almost determining effect on people. A person can be constrained or triggered by objects and features, consciously or unconsciously. Objects and other stuff may be produced or appropriated with specific intentions, and yet influence future actions in an unpredictable way. [...] The built-up environment is as much an active generator of social behaviour as it is constituted by it.

The Gosforth sculptures are products of a group operating within a complex exchange network; they reflect the process of making and negotiating the internal and external identity of the community, a process that is inclusive and adaptive, yet exclusive and inventive. By reading them as a response to population displacement and advocates for cultural continuity, the unique expression of foreign stories told through the use of Insular (even Christian) iconography need no longer be pigeonholed to the service of one or another faith. Instead, the Gosforth iconography and its sculptural context functioned as a cultural mediator in a contested landscape of identity, power, and place.


How long the Gosforth sculptures invested their community with cultural prestige is uncertain, but by the early thirteenth century, the population there had changed a great deal. The Norman kings did not control western Cumbria in the late eleventh century and what happened at Gosforth during that time is unknown. What can be said is that the Gosforth cross and its possible companion were there along with the third plank cross, although how intact they were is speculative. The hogbacks too were visible but may not have retained their primal location by that time. By or in the early years of the thirteenth century, a church was built at Gosforth. Whether this replaced a Christian church or some other kind of sacred structure is unknown. During the construction of this church, the hogbacks were used as building material for the foundations, effectively destroying them. No cross fragments were identified in the foundation walls, so these survived for at least some time. At some point, the plank cross was destroyed, either by accident or intent, and its head was used as rubble infill to seal the north door. Its body, I argue, was later appropriated by Muncaster and installed on the castle grounds. By now, perhaps only the Gosforth cross and its similar companion remained until the mid-eighteenth century when the companion was felled. This second cross may not have been intact at this point, but its destruction was then permanent. Its head was later found in a nearby garden.

To visit Gosforth now is to perceive only a sense of the impact its sculptures would have had. A single, unadorned and decaying cross, although still stoically majestic, is the lone survivor of a millennium of change. Despite its survival, it may have been decontextualized rapidly and may have taken up a new role as a promoter of the Christian faith. Without the cultural knowledge suggested by its companion hogbacks, the horsemen and creatures on the Gosforth cross’s faces blend away into a mysterious past where lived monsters and heroes. As the lichens further obscured the old gods, only the form of the cross remained to pronounce emphatically the ancient truth of the mysteries of Christ.

This dissertation concludes by returning to the question of identity in tenth-century Cumbria. Although this question remains difficult to answer considering the dearth of even the most general historical information about the region, to say nothing of the perspective of individual persons or communities, the distinctly non-Christian nature of the Gosforth cross allows for some conclusion. While “English” identity has been sensitively considered in the last
decade, these discussions are necessarily limited to regions for which we have at least cursory historical (textual and/or archaeological) information. Indeed, attempts to discover an ethnogenesis for any given group has proven to be problematic. What can be shown is that the example of Gosforth casts doubt on easy Conversion narratives, even the more nuanced ones of recent scholarship. Instead of making a case for Gosforth as evidence of broader patterns, this art historical approach to the Gosforth sculptural group demonstrates how limited historical, linguistic, and archaeological approaches are in offering answers to the complex questions of settlement and identity in the borderlands.

The inhabitants of the Danelaw formed a unique culture in the ninth and tenth centuries that was different from those present in the British Isles before their immigration, and it had a lasting effect on the islands even after political unification. The Anglo-Scandinavians had a distinct culture that was neither “Anglian” nor “Scandinavian,” but nor was it simply an arbitrary conglomerate of both. Aspects of the Anglo-Scandinavians can certainly be traced to one of their two namesakes, but their politics, trade, and art was more complex than simply the combination of these two parts. Anglo-Scandinavians are neither Anglian nor Scandinavian, but there is, unfortunately, no better term.

This dissertation has demonstrated the need for a greater focus on the Danelaw as its own political, cultural, and economic culture, and further research would be welcome for similarly problematic sculptures at other sites. Most important is the need in western Cumbria for more archaeological data derived from excavation and such non-invasive techniques as remote sensing and geophysical survey. Rather than being a region of low population and little cultural acumen, Gosforth’s engagement with and knowledge of the Danelaw and western Ireland indicates that it may be home to an important cache of information about the tenth century, such as specific burial practices, land use, economic systems, and communication.

711 Hadley, "Viking and Native: Re-thinking Identity in the Danelaw," 45-70; Sidebottom, "Viking Age Stone Monuments and Social Identity in Derbyshire."

General questions concerning the political structure of the tenth century in northern England would also benefit from further study. The distribution of stone sculpture and the stylistic affinity between the individual works suggests a wealthy, well-connected region. The regional divisions of the various sculptural corpus projects create artificial divisions based on modern political boundaries that obscure the historical record. While these corpus projects are invaluable resources for recording, studying and preserving information, cultural information stemming from the sculptures would be better understood if the nuances of such groups as the Brompton school and the Circle Head school were the subject of more intense focus. While sculptural fragments are not attractive research foci due to their lack of impressive figural carving and excessive fragmentary states, a closer consideration of individual sites and fragments would be beneficial toward unraveling the complexity of life in the early Danelaw. While the Anglo-Saxons and their Christian writers will always be of interest in reconstructing early England, the less verbose but economically powerful Danelaw, from York to Dublin, is now being recovered. A great deal of work is being done in Yorkshire and Northumberland to this end. This dissertation demonstrates how the entirety of the North should be considered with less focus on modern political boundaries and the academic biases those produce. Such approaches have thus far revealed little about Cumbria, but Cumbria’s past has much to offer to further the understanding of a pivotal time in European history.


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