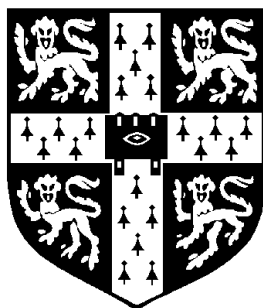


KATHLEEN HUGHES MEMORIAL LECTURES 13

NANCY EDWARDS

THE EARLY MEDIEVAL SCULPTURE OF WALES:  
TEXT, PATTERN AND IMAGE



HUGHES HALL  
&  
DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hughes Hall was founded in 1885 to take women graduating from the universities and give them a one year training to become teachers. As the first college in Cambridge specifically for graduates it broke new ground. Originally called the Cambridge Training College (CTC) it was re-named in 1948 in honour of its first Principal, Elizabeth Phillips Hughes, who had been one of the early students of Newnham College and became a respected leader in the theory and practice of education.

E. P. Hughes came from Wales and was a proponent of the language and culture of Wales. But, apart from this Welsh heritage, there is no known connection between the College and the scholar now commemorated in this series of lectures.

Hughes Hall became a full college of the university in 2006. It consists currently of around 50 Fellows and some 650 student members, men and women, who study for doctoral or M.Phil. degrees, for the postgraduate diplomas and certificates offered by the University, and, as mature undergraduates, for the BA degree. The academic community of Hughes Hall is now extremely diverse, including students of over 60 nationalities and representing almost all the disciplines of the University. Enquiries about entry as a student are always welcome. Information can be found on the college website at <http://www.hughes.cam.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate-admissions/>

Kathleen Winifred Hughes (1926-77) was the first and only Nora Chadwick Reader in Celtic Studies in the University of Cambridge. Previously (1958-76) she had held the Lectureship in the Early History and Culture of the British Isles which had been created for Nora Chadwick in 1950. She was a Fellow of Newnham College, and Director of Studies in both History and Anglo-Saxon, 1955-77. Her responsibilities in the Department of Anglo-Saxon & Kindred Studies, subsequently the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, were in the fields of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh history of the early and central Middle Ages. Her achievements in respect of Gaelic history have been widely celebrated, notably in the memorial volume *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe*, published in 1982.

The Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures both acknowledge her achievements and seek to provide an annual forum for advancing the subject. Each year's lecture will be published as a pamphlet by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic on behalf of Hughes Hall.

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The Early Medieval Sculpture of Wales:  
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The Early Medieval Sculpture of Wales: Text, Pattern and Image

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## **PREFACE**

In 2000, thanks to an anonymous benefaction, an annual lecture was established at Hughes Hall in memory of Dr Kathleen Hughes, 1926-1977. A Fellow of Newnham College, Kathleen Hughes was the first Nora Chadwick Reader in Celtic Studies in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (ASNC).

Over the years the lectures have embraced a wide range of topics in the early history and culture of the British Isles, reflecting the wide scholarly interests of Kathleen Hughes. Each lecture has been published as a printed pamphlet to coincide with the following year's lecture. They are listed on the back cover of this booklet. Hughes Hall is grateful to the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic for acting as publisher. Copies are available from ASNC.

The College is pleased to host the annual lecture and hopes that this academic initiative will make a significant scholarly contribution in the research areas in which Kathleen Hughes was a distinguished scholar.

**Anthony Freeling**  
President  
Hughes Hall

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<i>CASSS</i>	<i>Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture</i>
<i>Corpus</i>	<i>A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales</i>
<i>ECMW</i>	<i>Early Christian Monuments of Wales</i>
<i>RIB</i>	<i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i>

## THE EARLY MEDIEVAL SCULPTURE OF WALES: TEXT, PATTERN AND IMAGE

My first acquaintance with Kathleen Hughes's work was as a first year undergraduate in the mid-1970s. I was set an essay which led me to analyse the differing approaches of Kathleen Hughes in her book on *The Church in Early Irish Society* and Nora Chadwick in *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*. This was a seminal exercise for me and helped to shape my interest in the archaeology and history of the early medieval churches in Britain and Ireland. I read many more of Kathleen Hughes's publications during the course of research for my PhD on early medieval Irish sculpture and since, and have continued to value her deep scholarship and clear writing style. I have recently read of her interest in medieval art nurtured by Francis Wormald<sup>1</sup> and I am very pleased to be able to offer this lecture in her memory.

### *Introduction*

In addition to the approximately 150 fifth- to mid-seventh-century inscribed memorial stones, over 400 pieces of early medieval sculpture are now known from Wales.<sup>2</sup> A substantial proportion of these are simple cross-carved stones, some with Latin, or in one case Welsh,<sup>3</sup> inscriptions, which date from around 600 onwards and continue into the twelfth century. The majority would have functioned as grave-markers, though some, as is indicated by the inscription from Llanfihangel Ystrad, Cardiganshire, recorded the donation of land,<sup>4</sup> while others may have marked route-ways and landing places.<sup>5</sup> However, from the later eighth century onwards, there is also a significant number of more ambitious pieces of sculpture, mostly free-standing crosses and cross-slabs, which are largely associated with major church foundations which in many cases are likely to have been monastic.

One of the most interesting collections of sculpture in Wales is housed in the newly renovated Galilee Chapel of St Illtud's Church, Llantwit Major, in the Vale of Glamorgan. This was the site of St Illtud's

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<sup>1</sup> McKitterick, 'Kathleen Winifred Hughes', p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i; Edwards, *Corpus*, ii–iii.

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, Tywyn 2, MR25, pp. 422–30.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, ii, CD20, pp. 166–7.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. *ibid.*, Fishguard South 1, P16, p. 323, Marloes 1, P59, p. 379; Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, CN13, p. 264.

monastery which, according to the probably seventh-century Life of St Samson of Dol,<sup>6</sup> was where the saint studied under St Illtud. According to the Life, Samson's education included learning to read, memorising the psalms and studying the Old and New Testaments.<sup>7</sup> The early medieval sculpture, which is the only archaeological evidence for the foundation, includes the remains of three free-standing crosses, all with inscriptions, which are indicative of the significance of the monastery and its scriptorium. The first, a cross-shaft, is dominated by a lengthy Latin inscription on one of the broad faces with a vertical band of plaitwork on one of the sides; the other two faces have no surviving ornament. The inscription reads: *In nomine D(e)i Summi incipit · crux · Saluatoris quae preparauit Samsoni · apati · pro anima sua [et p]ro anima Iuthahelo rex · et Artmali [et] Teca[ni]* + ('In the name of God the Most High begins the Cross of the Saviour that Abbot Samson prepared for his soul, and the soul of King Iuthahel, and of Artma(i)l (and) Tecan +').<sup>8</sup> Gifford Charles-Edwards argued that the lettering 'showed signs of emanating from a milieu with a working scriptorium, but with a simplified "common hand" in general use in monoline [wax-]tablet letter-form'.<sup>9</sup> Iuthahel has been identified as probably a later eighth-century king of Glywysing, thereby suggesting a date for the monument.<sup>10</sup> The inscription, which appears to be dedicatory but also implies the continuing remembrance of those named, therefore demonstrates a close bond between the monastery and the rulers of that kingdom who were its patrons. This link continued. The second monument (Pl. 1) is a disc-headed ring-cross carved in low relief with well-executed interlace and fret patterns. The dedicatory Latin inscription reads: *[I]n inomine D(e)i Patris et [S]peretus Santdi (h)anc [cr]ucem Houelt prope[a]bit pro anima Res pa[tr]es e(i)us* ('In the name of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, Houelt prepared this cross for the soul of his father Res').<sup>11</sup> Hywel ap Rhys of Glywysing died in 886 so this cross must date to the mid to later ninth century.<sup>12</sup> The third, the shaft of a composite cross, is likewise decorated with interlace and frets.<sup>13</sup> However, the three inscriptions are of particular interest: each is made up

<sup>6</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 66, 637–40.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *Life of St Samson*, §§ VII, X–XI, pp. 13–14, 16–17.

<sup>8</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, G65, pp. 377–82.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381; Radford, 'Two Datable Cross Shafts?'; Sims-Williams, *Celtic Inscriptions of Britain*, pp. 277–8.

<sup>11</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, G63, pp. 368–73. It is intriguing to note that, though God the Father and the Holy Spirit are named in this inscription, God the Son is not. Whether this omission was intentional is unclear, though there would have been sufficient space for the inclusion also of God the Son.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, G66, pp. 382–9.



of two adjacent rectangular panels placed side by side on the broad faces which are incised with simplified half uncials with some geometric capitals and initial crosses. The first, now incomplete, names Illtud, the patron saint, alongside Samson the king. The second names Samuel and Ebisar,<sup>14</sup> both of which are Old Testament names, which were particularly favoured by Welsh churchmen,<sup>15</sup> while Samson was an Old Testament hero. The third, perhaps incomplete, inscription records that + *Samson posuit h[a]nc crucem + // [-] pro anima eius +* ('Samson set up this cross ... for his soul'), thereby indicating his role as the patron. Gifford Charles-Edwards has suggested that the second pair of inscriptions, which are joined by thin horizontal bands at the top and bottom, represent wax-tablets linked by leather thongs, while the third pair has the appearance of an open book,<sup>16</sup> thereby underlining the significance of the written word. Those mentioned cannot be identified in the written sources but the cross has been dated to 'probably the early tenth century'.<sup>17</sup>

These crosses are all carved with texts and ornament but not images, a pattern repeated on many other carved stone monuments in Wales: for example, the cross known as the Pillar of Eliseg (datable to c. 808 × 854/5) with its lengthy propaganda inscription,<sup>18</sup> the later ninth- or earlier tenth-century Penally cross and cross-shaft which, uniquely in Wales, are decorated with plant-ornament indicative of Anglo-Saxon influence,<sup>19</sup> and the crosses at Carew and Nevern which may be broadly dated to the second half of the tenth or early eleventh centuries.<sup>20</sup> In the course of my research on the early medieval sculpture of Wales I have frequently been reminded of how few monuments have any figural iconography and the small number of scenes from the Bible. I will begin by examining representations of the Crucifixion. I will then consider various other types of Christian iconography as well as secular and Viking heroic scenes. Finally, I will address the question of why there may have been so little figural iconography and why texts and patterns may have been preferred.

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<sup>14</sup> + *Ilt[uti] // Samson regis; Samuel + // Ebisar +*.

<sup>15</sup> Davies, 'Old Testament Names'.

<sup>16</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, pp. 386–7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388; see also *Corpus*, ii, pp. 89–90, fig. 8.3.

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, D3, pp. 322–36.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, ii, P82–3, pp. 410–17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, P9, pp. 303–10, P73, pp. 396–401.

### *The Crucifixion*

The only Biblical scene which may be securely identified on early medieval sculpture in Wales is the Crucifixion. There are several different types. Possibly the earliest depiction is on a pillar with multiple crosses from an otherwise unknown site in Llanychaer parish in the Gwaun Valley of northern Pembrokeshire which may be dated art-historically to the late eighth or ninth century (Pl. 2).<sup>21</sup> The image is now very weathered but clearly shows Christ, his head and body erect, with open lentoid eyes joined to the nose and a half oval mouth. He is clad in a knee-length tunic with two short vertical bands at the neck, suggesting priestly dress.<sup>22</sup> His arms are foreshortened with prominent hands, and traces of his legs, but not his feet, can be seen below the hem of his garment. It is unclear whether there is the outline of a cross behind the figure. This simple representation does not show the crucified Christ as suffering or dead. Instead this image is intended to be multivalent. Christ is shown alive in the priestly *orans* position,<sup>23</sup> thereby also representing his triumphant victory over death and the Second Coming.<sup>24</sup> Details of the Llanychaer image are comparable with representations in Ireland, particularly on metalwork. For example, Christ's stylized facial features are reminiscent of those on the St John's Rinnagan Crucifixion plaque, Co. Westmeath, which also shows Christ in the *orans* position and dressed in a priestly robe; this has been variously dated to the eighth or ninth centuries.<sup>25</sup>

The more complex representation of the Crucifixion on the disc-headed cross at Llan-gan in the Vale of Glamorgan (Pl. 3) also has clear links with Ireland. Christ is shown alive and erect. He has lentoid eyes, prominent ears and an open mouth. His beard is delineated by short vertical lines. He seems to be wearing a loincloth and his feet face outwards.<sup>26</sup> There are no traces of a cross. Squashed into the available space on either side are two figures: Stephaton, the sponge bearer, is on the left, and Longinus, who is about to pierce Christ's left side, is on the right. The fact that Longinus is shown on the right makes a specific connection with Irish representations, such as that on the South Cross, Duleek,<sup>27</sup> since these also usually show Stephaton piercing Christ's left

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, P49, pp. 362–6.

<sup>22</sup> See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, ii, figs 329–32.

<sup>23</sup> O'Reilly, 'Seeing the Crucified Christ', p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> Veelenturf, *Dia Brátha*, pp. 69, 121–50.

<sup>25</sup> Youngs, *The Work of Angels*, pp. 140–1; Murray, 'Irish Crucifixion Plaques', p. 194.

<sup>26</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, G43, pp. 337–9.

<sup>27</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*, ii, fig. 246.

side rather than his right which is the norm on early representations of the Crucifixion elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> It has been suggested that, as with some of the Irish examples, there might once have been angels in the upper quadrants of the cross,<sup>29</sup> but there is no visible evidence for this and nothing can be seen on the late nineteenth-century cast. The fact that Christ is bearded allows comparison with representations on some of the later Irish Crucifixion plaques which were probably once affixed to wooden crosses and some of these, like Llan-gan, show Longinus with long hair curled upwards.<sup>30</sup> Crucifixion images with a bearded Christ accompanied by Stephaton and Longinus with angels are also found in Northumbria, notably in the late seventh- or early eighth-century Durham Gospels,<sup>31</sup> and on the probably tenth-century carved Crucifixion panel from Penrith, Cumbria, which Richard Bailey has compared with Irish metal Crucifixion plaques.<sup>32</sup> It is likely that the model for Llan-gan was also derived from metalwork.

The figure below the Crucifixion is puzzling. Now incomplete, he is shown face-on and seems to be wearing a robe or tunic. In his left hand is a horn and in his right possibly an incomplete sword or a cross. Various suggestions have been made, none of which is very convincing.<sup>33</sup> If the figure is holding a cross he might represent the risen Christ as is found in a number of different scenes on the Irish crosses, but on these he holds the flowering rod representing the eternal priesthood, not a horn.<sup>34</sup> If, as seems more likely, the figure is holding a drinking horn<sup>35</sup> and sword, he is most likely to represent a secular elite figure, very possibly the patron.<sup>36</sup>

In north-west Wales a further representation of the Crucifixion, probably datable to the second half of the ninth or first half of the tenth century, also has Irish parallels. The small cross-head from Llanfachraith, near Caer Gybi (Holyhead) on Anglesey, shows an incomplete figure of

<sup>28</sup> O'Reilly, 'Seeing the Crucified Christ', p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> Redknapp and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, pp. 338–9.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, 'Irish Crucifixion Plaques', pp. 295–9. Murray has dated these to between c. 1000 and 1150, p. 288.

<sup>31</sup> Durham Cathedral Library A.II.17, fol. 38a<sup>v</sup>; Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, no. 10, pl. 202; Coatsworth, 'Decoration of the Durham Gospels', pp. 58–62, pl. II; O'Reilly, 'Seeing the Crucified Christ', pp. 57–64, pl. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Bailey, 'A Crucifixion Plaque from Cumbria'; Bailey and Cramp, *CASSS*, ii, pp. 140–2, ills 524–31.

<sup>33</sup> Summarized in Redknapp and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, p. 339.

<sup>34</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*, pp. 295–302.

<sup>35</sup> A drinking-horn terminal has been found on Llan-gors crannog, Breconshire, Redknapp 2004, p. 178.

<sup>36</sup> Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, p. 136, suggested he might represent a huntsman.

Christ face on with his head erect (Pl. 4).<sup>37</sup> He is probably wearing a loincloth. His remaining outstretched hand is enlarged. Similar Crucifixion figures with enlarged hands are a feature of several representations on the Irish crosses, for example, the crosses at Monasterboice, Co. Louth, and there are particularly close parallels with a small cross-head from that site.<sup>38</sup> In this case there is also written evidence suggesting that the foundation of Cell Mór Mochop, Co. Meath, mentioned *c.* 1200 in the life of St Cybi, was closely linked to the major church of Caer Gybi on Anglesey.<sup>39</sup>

So far I have examined a small number of Crucifixion images which show cultural links with Ireland. More intriguing, however, are three representations of the Crucifixion which include elements of figural iconography but do *not* include the figure of Christ on the cross. The first is on an incomplete disc-headed slab cross from Margam, west Glamorgan (Pl. 5), which was first noted near Margam Abbey.<sup>40</sup> The important collection of early medieval sculpture from the vicinity of this Cistercian abbey indicates that it was founded on the site of an important earlier church.<sup>41</sup> One broad face is dominated by a cross carved in relief with a central boss decorated with plaitwork and simple interlace knots. Its form and ornament suggest a metalwork model and it may once have been painted in colours which would have underlined this. On each side of the shaft is a figure and both are turned slightly towards the cross. These may be clearly identified as St John the Evangelist on the left and the Virgin Mary on the right. St John is shown as robed and bearded. There are indications of hair and perhaps a sprawling halo above. He either holds a book or, more likely, a book satchel hangs from his shoulders thereby identifying him as St John the Evangelist. The Virgin Mary also has long robes, the folds of which she may catch in her hand, and a veil and/or halo. The two triquetra knots which act as ornamental fillers are most likely to have been chosen as symbols of the Trinity.<sup>42</sup> Uniquely, the dedicatory Latin inscription is incised vertically rather than horizontally in the upper and lower left-hand quadrants of the cross-head and reads: *Conbelin posuit hanc [c]r[u]cem p(ro) anima Ric[-]* ('Conbelin set up this cross for the soul of Ric...'). The second name is

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, AN11, pp. 157–9.

<sup>38</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*, i, no. 179, p. 153; ii, figs 504–5.

<sup>39</sup> Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae*, pp. 240–1; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 607.

<sup>40</sup> Redknapp and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, G79, pp. 411–20.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 576–7.

<sup>42</sup> Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period*, p. 154.

not now entirely legible. The cross has most recently been dated to the late ninth or early tenth century.<sup>43</sup>

Although the identification has recently been disputed,<sup>44</sup> there is, as Nash-Williams suggested,<sup>45</sup> a second probable example on a pillar from the site of a chapel at Nash Manor, Llanblethian, in the Vale of Glamorgan (Pl. 6). Like that at Margam, this ringed cross with its central boss was once decorated with interlace thereby recalling a metalwork model. Two small figures stand on the plinth of the cross. They are shown in profile reaching out towards the cross thereby suggesting their role as witnesses. The slim upright robed figure on the left may hold a book in his right hand, thereby indicating he is John the Evangelist, while the smaller bowed figure in more voluminous robes on the right suggests the Virgin Mary expressing her grief.<sup>46</sup> The monument has been dated to the tenth or possibly the eleventh century.<sup>47</sup>

The third representation is on a small, incomplete, poorly executed cross-slab in Llanhamlach Church, Breconshire (Pl. 7).<sup>48</sup> The identification of the *orans* figures on either side of the cross has caused some debate. Most recently the female figure on the right has tentatively been identified as St Eiliwedd, a local saint.<sup>49</sup> However, Nash-Williams suggested that these figures also represent St John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary.<sup>50</sup> This would certainly make more sense of what is shown. The prominent breasts of the figure on the right, here shown with radiating lines indicating the flowing milk, identify her as the Virgin Mary and draw attention to her role as the Mother of Christ. An important comparison may be made with the depiction of the Virgin and Child in the Book of Kells in which the forms of her breasts and nipples are clearly delineated beneath her imperial purple over-garment.<sup>51</sup> In a recent discussion Heather Pulliam was unable to find a parallel for the depiction of the Virgin's breasts in this image, where she suggested that the groupings of three white dots on her robe may indicate her breast milk as well as her purity,<sup>52</sup> but the image on Llanhamlach can provide one. The three 'doughnuts', two on either side of the Virgin's head and one above,

<sup>43</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, p. 420. Nash-Williams favoured a late tenth- or early eleventh-century date, *ECMW*, no. 234, p. 152.

<sup>44</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, G34, p. 318.

<sup>45</sup> Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, no. 250, p. 157.

<sup>46</sup> A grieving Mary touching the cross is also found on Newent 2, Glos., Bryant, *CASSS*, x, p. 238, ill. 402.

<sup>47</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, p. 319.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, B32, pp. 210–13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213; Ettlinger, 'Contributions towards an Interpretation', pp. 290–4.

<sup>50</sup> Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, no. 61, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> Dublin, Trinity College MS 58, fol. 7v; Meehan, *Book of Kells*, pp. 46–7.

<sup>52</sup> Pulliam, 'Looking at Byzantium', pp. 66–9, 72–5.

are more perplexing, but might represent celestial bodies or possibly, as has been suggested for similar shapes on the Anglo-Saxon memorial slab from Newent, Gloucestershire, skeuomorphs of metal rivets.<sup>53</sup> The figure on the left at Llanhamlach clearly holds a book in his right hand and, like the Margam cross, this aids his identification as an evangelist. One of the two inscriptions on the adjacent face, though now incomplete, also reads *[I]ohannis*, which may be interpreted as '(The Cross) of John', which likewise supports the identification of St John the Evangelist; the other reads: *Moridic surexit hanc lapidem* ('Moridic raised this stone')<sup>54</sup> and presumably refers to the patron. The poor quality of the monument makes it difficult to date art-historically but a tenth- or possibly earlier eleventh-century date would seem most likely.

Like the crucified Christ with Stephaton and Longinus, this image with the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist is derived from the account in St John's Gospel.<sup>55</sup> Superficially, the placing of these figures on either side of the cross suggests the influence of late Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion models but in practice it is more complex. In southern Anglo-Saxon England Crucifixion scenes are characteristic from the second half of the tenth century and now mainly survive in manuscripts or on ivories,<sup>56</sup> though sculptured representations, chiefly in the form of roods, are also known.<sup>57</sup> They usually show the suffering Christ, bearded and dressed in a loin-cloth, accompanied by the Virgin Mary on the left and St John the Evangelist on the right, sometimes with a pair of angels flying above the cross-arms and some other features, such as the hand of God (*dextera Dei*) above Christ's head.<sup>58</sup> An increasing interest in the cult of the Virgin can also be traced from this time as part of the Benedictine Monastic Reform movement.<sup>59</sup> In late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts the Virgin and St John are either shown without emotion, standing as witnesses on either side of the cross, as, for example, in the Sherborne Pontifical,<sup>60</sup> or the Virgin, and less often St John, are shown grieving, as

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<sup>53</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, x, p. 238, ill. 402.

<sup>54</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, pp. 212–13.

<sup>55</sup> John 19.

<sup>56</sup> Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*.

<sup>57</sup> e.g. Braemore and Headbourne Worthy, Hants, but these have only survived in a very mutilated form, Tweddle *et al.*, *CASSS*, iv, pp. 251–3, 259–60, ills 425–8, 448–50.

<sup>58</sup> Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*.

<sup>59</sup> Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, pp. 158–78.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173–4; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 943, fol. 4v, Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 35, pl. 134, dated to the end of the tenth century.

in the Ramsey Psalter.<sup>61</sup> The Virgin is sometimes shown in an *orans* pose, which has its origins in early Christian representations, and St John may be depicted likewise.<sup>62</sup> He frequently holds a book, emphasizing his role as both witness and Evangelist. Barbara Raw has suggested that the inclusion of the praying figure of Mary underlines her faith and her role as an intercessor, as well as indicating the divine nature of Christ.<sup>63</sup> The purpose of such images was devotional. They would help ensure protection at death and continuing prayer thereafter would secure the welfare of the soul in purgatory.<sup>64</sup>

The three Welsh representations should also be regarded as devotional and the presence of inscriptions on the monuments at Margam and Llanhamlach indicates a wish for the continuing remembrance of those named. Indeed, the form of the latter is comparable with slightly smaller panels depicting the Crucifixion at Romsey, Hampshire, and St Dunstan's, Stepney, in London<sup>65</sup> which, it has been suggested, may have acted as foci for private prayer.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless there are significant differences. In the Anglo-Saxon images the Virgin is always shown on the left, St John the Evangelist on the right. On the Welsh images this is reversed. The emphasis on the Virgin's breasts in the Llanhamlach representation in this context also appears unique. Above all there is no figure of Christ; instead we see the symbol of the cross, in two cases elaborately decorated, as a sign of his victory over death. There is therefore evidence here of the construction of images, probably from a variety of models, with different emphases to suit different religious needs.

The Llanveynoe St Peter Crucifixion panel from the Olchon Valley, now just on the Herefordshire side of the border, should also be considered here (Pl. 8). The image is carved in false relief with a simple figure of Christ on the cross. Though his short arms are straight, in contrast to the depictions of Christ discussed so far, his body appears slightly twisted with both feet turned to the right. Furthermore, his head is tilted to the left to symbolize his suffering, but his surviving eye appears open. He is beardless and wears a plain loincloth with a waistband. A

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<sup>61</sup> London, British Library MS Harley 2904, fol. 3v, Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 41, pl. 142, dated to the last quarter of the tenth century. See also the Newent slab, Bryant, *CASSS*, x, p. 238, ill. 402.

<sup>62</sup> e.g. The Sherborne Pontifical and the Ahrenberg Gospels, New York, Pierpoint Morgan Library, 869, fol. 9v, Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, nos 35, 56, pls 134, 171; Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, pp. 100–2.

<sup>63</sup> Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, pp. 100–5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61–2.

<sup>65</sup> Tweddle *et al.*, *CASSS*, iv, pp. 229–30, 261–3, ill. 354, 453, 455.

<sup>66</sup> Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, p. 58.

tenth- or eleventh-century date has been suggested.<sup>67</sup> The representation is very simple and therefore it is difficult to draw parallels, but those made by Redknap and Lewis<sup>68</sup> with images of Christ in a loincloth on late Irish crosses do not seem very convincing. Bryant, however, suggests a comparison with the fragmentary Crucifixion from North Cerney, Gloucestershire, though here the figure on the cross appears upright, but that on the slab from Newent shows Christ still alive on the cross but with his head tilted to the left.<sup>69</sup>

The final image of the Crucifixion to be considered here<sup>70</sup> is that on the cross-slab from Meifod, Montgomeryshire, which I have dated art-historically to the late eleventh or early twelfth century (Pl. 9).<sup>71</sup> The foundation at Meifod, associated with the cult of St Teilo, was important during this period and the rulers of Powys were patrons. The cross-slab is dominated by an interlace-decorated Latin cross surmounted by a ring-cross with bosses in the quadrants on which the figure of Christ is shown. He is face-on, his head and body erect, his eyes open. There are nail marks in both his outstretched palms and his feet, which point downwards. There are possible traces of a loincloth and a depression may indicate the wound in his right side. Again models would seem to be drawn from metalwork. The figure of Christ himself is very simple but was most likely derived from a metalwork Crucifixion figure, such as the unprovenanced Romanesque example from St Mel's College, Co. Longford.<sup>72</sup>

### *Other Biblical Iconography*

When we come to examine other figural iconography on sculpture in Wales which may have represented Old or New Testament scenes or other types of Christian iconography, we face a major problem. This is because the representations are often much simplified and quite frequently poorly executed, thereby making a secure identification impossible. To take only a couple of examples: firstly, the pillar from Llanfrynach Church, Breconshire (Pl. 10). At the top of the major face is an *orans* figure with a cross above and a small sun and crescent moon

<sup>67</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, x, pp. 288–9, ills 512–13; Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, H5, pp. 534–5.

<sup>68</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, p. 535.

<sup>69</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, x, p. 240, ills 402, 413–14.

<sup>70</sup> There are two other possible images of the Crucifixion on sculpture in Wales: St Dogmaels 7, Pems., Edwards, *Corpus*, ii, P116, pp. 469–70, and the fragmentary Bardsey Island 2, Caerns., Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, CN12, pp. 259–60.

<sup>71</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, MT6, pp. 443–6.

<sup>72</sup> Ó Floinn, 'Irish Romanesque Crucifix Figures', p. 169.



beneath it. Redknap and Lewis have ingeniously suggested that this representation could depict the baptism of Christ, since the interlace strands below engulf his legs, thereby giving the impression of water, and there appears to be a bird and two triquetra knots symbolizing the Trinity at the bottom of the pillar.<sup>73</sup> Nash-Williams, however, thought that, since the sun and moon were included, it might be the Crucifixion.<sup>74</sup> If the inscription on the back, which is not currently visible, does read IOHIS, an abbreviation for *Ioh[ann]is*,<sup>75</sup> this might refer to St John the Baptist and thereby support a representation of the Baptism of Christ, but it might also refer to St John the Evangelist who was present at the Crucifixion. Equally, there are the complex scenes on the reused ogam and roman-letter inscribed stone from Llywel, Breconshire, now in the British Museum.<sup>76</sup> It has been argued, most recently by Howlett and Thomas, that these very simplified images might represent, Noah and the ark, Moses crossing the Red Sea and David the shepherd,<sup>77</sup> but again, because of the simplicity of the images, this remains virtually impossible to substantiate.

When it comes to the depiction of angels, however, identification is easier, though the images are sometimes so simplified as to be almost unrecognizable. The earliest representation of an angel is to be found on a ninth-century fragmentary cross-slab from St Davids (Pl. 11), which by this time, as the figure of Asser indicates, was a foundation of international significance with a reputation for learning.<sup>78</sup> Yet this is the only piece of sculpture to survive which is carved with a figural representation. The angel, who faces the cross and was originally one of a pair, is highly abstracted. He has three wings with spiral terminals, which are representative of six, thereby indicating a seraphim. As with the interlace cross, the best parallels for the angel are with metalwork, notably the seraphim on the Irish St John's Rinnagan Crucifixion plaque.<sup>79</sup> It is also interesting to note that the human head shown between two dragonesque beasts at the end of the cross-arm is comparable with the two figural plaques attached to the wooden cross of eighth- or ninth-century date from Tully Lough, Co. Roscommon. Griffin Murray has recently suggested that this might represent Christ between two beasts.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, B26, p. 202.

<sup>74</sup> Nash-Williams, *ECMW*, no. 56, pp. 74, 76.

<sup>75</sup> '(The Cross of) John'. See Westwood's drawing reproduced in Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, ill. B26a.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, B42, pp. 235–40.

<sup>77</sup> Howlett and Thomas, 'Three Sculpted Scenes'.

<sup>78</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, ii, P90, pp. 427–9.

<sup>79</sup> See n. 25.

<sup>80</sup> Murray, 'Irish Crucifixion Plaques', pp. 290–3.

Angels are also found on two cross-slabs of a similar type from Monmouthshire in south-east Wales, one from St Arvans (Pl. 12), the other, a fragment, from Caerleon which is likely, originally, to have been very similar.<sup>81</sup> There are three pairs of robed angels on St Arvans. The carving is worn and they are not well executed and therefore have sometimes been mistaken for birds, but they are best understood as angels depicted horizontally in flight, with their heads face on, their arms reaching to touch the central interlace cross, their wings stretched out to either side and their legs stuck out behind. As Redknap and Lewis have noted these angels demonstrate the influence of southern Anglo-Saxon art of the Reform period and the Welsh monuments are therefore likely to be of a similar date.<sup>82</sup> Good parallels may be made with the lower pair of angels in the Winchester New Minster Charter of 966 and a fragmentary walrus ivory panel, also from Winchester, probably part of a small shrine, dated to the second half of the tenth century.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, it is such small, portable items which are most likely to have provided models. Some of these angels were originally associated with Crucifixions, as for example, the pair from Bradford upon Avon, Wiltshire, which were once part of a carved stone rood.<sup>84</sup>

Jane Hawkes has summarized the evidence for a widespread interest in angels in early medieval Britain and Ireland, their various functions, their relationship with humanity and their important role in the liturgy.<sup>85</sup> We know comparatively little about how angels were perceived in early medieval Wales since few relevant written sources have survived. Nevertheless, some inkling of their roles as messengers and intercessors can be seen in Rhygyfarch's *Life of St David* (c. 1091 × 1093).<sup>86</sup> It may be suggested, however, that, if these cross-slabs acted as devotional images and foci for prayer, as many of the surviving inscriptions on such monuments in Wales imply, they should be seen, not just as messengers and intercessors, but as 'figures of contemplation in fellowship with humanity'.<sup>87</sup> On St Arvans it is possible that the image again represents the Crucifixion without the figure of Christ on the cross, while on the other face the two seated, drooping figures on either side of the cross, as

<sup>81</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, MN1, MN5, pp. 503–4, 510–15.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 513–14.

<sup>83</sup> London, British Library, MS Cotton, Vespasian A. VIII, fol. 2v, Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 16, ill. 84; Backhouse *et al.*, *Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*, nos 26, 114, pp. 47, 114–15, pl. IV.

<sup>84</sup> Cramp, *CASSS*, vii, pp. 203–4, ills 404–6.

<sup>85</sup> Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and Angelic Mediation', pp. 438–42; see also Cramp, *CASSS*, vii, pp. 59–60.

<sup>86</sup> Sharpe and Davies, 'Rhygyfarch's Life of St David'; Davies, 'Some Observations', p. 160.

<sup>87</sup> Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and Angelic Mediation', p. 439.

Redknap and Lewis have suggested,<sup>88</sup> could represent the sleeping soldiers at the tomb with the cross signifying Christ's Resurrection, though the three Marys are absent. Parallels are hard to come by but there is an example of two kneeling soldiers with a miniature cross between them on the Cross of Muiredach at Monasterboice.<sup>89</sup>

### *Hagiography*

By comparison with Biblical iconography, images of saints on early medieval sculpture in early medieval Britain and Ireland were comparatively rare. However, in addition to the evangelists and apostles, examples of scenes are also found from the lives of the desert fathers SS Paul and Anthony since they were considered important exemplars for the monastic life. Depictions of two episodes were favoured, the first from St Athanasius' Life of St Anthony, which was translated into Latin by Evagrius, and the second from St Jerome's Life of St Paul. The first shows St Anthony being tempted by demons, reflecting Christ's forty days in the wilderness; the second SS Paul and Anthony in the desert breaking bread brought to them by a raven, which has strong eucharistic associations. Such scenes are relatively common on the Irish crosses and are also found on some of the Pictish monuments, as well as on the Ruthwell Cross.<sup>90</sup> In Wales, however, there is only a single example. This is found on one of the two Viking influenced, mid-tenth-century, circle-head crosses from the important foundation at Penmon, Anglesey, where St Anthony is shown face-on, confronted by a dog-headed figure on the left and probably a goat-headed figure on the right (Pl. 13).<sup>91</sup> As might be expected on Anglesey, the closest parallels are Irish, for example, the representation on the Market Cross, Kells, Co. Meath.<sup>92</sup>

### *Secular, Heroic and Mythical Images*

A small number of carved stone monuments in Wales have iconography which would have appealed to the taste of the secular elite who are likely to have been their commissioners. The most startling image is on the pillar from the church at Llandyfaelog Fach, Breconshire, which has been

<sup>88</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, p. 512.

<sup>89</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*, iii, fig. 910; see also representations on the Tall Cross, Monasterboice, Co. Louth, and the Market Cross, Kells, Co. Meath, *ibid.*, ii, figs 336, 495.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, i, pp. 302–9; Henderson and Henderson, *Art of the Picts*, pp. 139–41; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 153–6; Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, p. 99.

<sup>91</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, AN51, pp. 224–5, ills AN51.3, AN51.5.

<sup>92</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*, iii, fig. 949.

dated to the late tenth century (Pl. 14).<sup>93</sup> Below the cross stands a tall and commanding figure. He is shown face on with simple facial features, including a long, thin beard, and is dressed in a knee-length tunic. In his left hand he probably holds a knife; the object in his right was reconstructed in the later nineteenth century as a club or staff of office, but its original form is unknown. Beneath is an inscription with an initial cross, framed by a cable moulding reminiscent of metalwork, which reads +BRIAMAIL FLOU, a personal name. This imposing figure is undoubtedly a portrait of the patron named in the inscription who is seeking remembrance and the prayers of those who view the monument. Long ago, J. O. Westwood made the interesting suggestion that this unique image might have been influenced by portraits of the deceased on Roman grave-stones, such as the double portrait, which includes a man in a knee-length tunic, on a Roman tombstone originally from the nearby fort at Brecon Gaer.<sup>94</sup> This is entirely plausible and the possibility of the influence of Roman portrait sculpture on early medieval figure carving in Northumbria has also been raised by James Lang.<sup>95</sup> However, the Llandyfaelog Fach portrait is also part of a wider phenomenon since it is broadly contemporary with Viking Age patron portraits, such as the various armed warriors on the crosses from Middleton in Teesdale.<sup>96</sup>

There is also a small number of horsemen and hunting scenes. The best example is on the base of the disc-headed slab cross from Margam (Pl. 15).<sup>97</sup> It seems originally to have been located on the main face of the cross below the Crucifixion considered above (Pl. 5) but it is now facing back-to-front. On the left is a stag being attacked by two hounds and behind are two pursuing horsemen shown in profile, the first probably holding a round shield. Both riders turn to face the audience and one wonders whether they also might be patron portraits representing Conbelin and the other man named in the inscription on the cross-head above. There is also a hunting scene on the cross from Penmon and below the Temptation of St Anthony discussed above is a horseman shown in profile facing left, possibly with a hawk on his outstretched wrist, who would seem most likely to be the patron.<sup>98</sup> Horsemen and hunting scenes are also found on the bases of some crosses in Ireland, for example the Market Cross, Kells, Co. Meath, and such images were particularly popular in Pictland, for example, on both sides of the cross-slab at

<sup>93</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, i, B16, pp. 185–90.

<sup>94</sup> Westwood, *Lapidarium Walliae*, p. 59; Collingwood and Wright, *RIB*, no. 404, p. 136, pl. VI.

<sup>95</sup> Lang, 'Survival and Revival in Insular Art', p. 262.

<sup>96</sup> Lang, *CASSS*, iii, ills 676–7, 686, 688.

<sup>97</sup> Redknap and Lewis, *Corpus*, ii, G79, pp. 414, 418, ills G79c, G79g.

<sup>98</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, AN51, pp. 99–100, 222, 224–5, ills AN51.2–3.

Kirriemiur, Angus, and again one wonders whether these are portrait images of the patron or commemorand.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, there is just one Viking Age circle-head cross in Wales from near Whitford, Flintshire, with surviving Scandinavian-inspired iconography;<sup>100</sup> it is commonly known as *Maen Achwyfan*.<sup>101</sup> Although another very similar cross is known from Meliden nearby, the figural representations are no longer extant.<sup>102</sup> The principal scene on *Maen Achwyfan* is at the bottom of the east face of the shaft (Pl. 16). It shows a possibly naked man face on, armed with various weapons including an axe in his left hand, which is distinctively Viking.<sup>103</sup> To his left is a curling serpent and the surrounding spirals are reminiscent of waves. There is also a face-on, armed figure on the adjacent face, who may be about to attack a serpent below, and a horse at the bottom of the shaft.<sup>104</sup> Although in this case the stories can no longer be identified, these images clearly belong to the genre of heroic or possibly mythical representations with Scandinavian origins found in both northern England, notably on the Gosforth Cross, and the Isle of Man during the tenth century and which are characteristic of the period after the Vikings' conversion to Christianity.<sup>105</sup> The cross-head of *Maen Achwyfan* may be compared with monuments in Chester and West Kirby,<sup>106</sup> where there was a substantial Hiberno-Scandinavian element in the population, and it is clear that there was also some settlement in Tegeingl, west of the Dee estuary, as well as to the east.<sup>107</sup>

### *Discussion*

So far my examination of early medieval sculptural monuments in Wales has revealed a comparative lack of figural iconography of any kind and almost all of the examples I have discussed date art-historically from the tenth century onwards. Identifiable Biblical iconography is largely limited to the Crucifixion where a number of different representations are found, including one type where the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist are shown, but not the figure of Christ on the cross. This

<sup>99</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*, ii, figs 334, 340; Henderson and Henderson, *Art of the Picts*, pp. 125–9, 381, pls 183, 263.

<sup>100</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, F12, pp. 366–71.

<sup>101</sup> 'Cwyfan's Stone'; Cwyfan (probably the Irish saint, Kevin) is associated with the nearby church at Dyserth, *ibid.*, pp. 353–4; pers. comm. Fiona Edmonds.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, F7, pp. 359–62.

<sup>103</sup> Halpin, *Weapons and Warfare*, p. 163.

<sup>104</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, pp. 367–8, ill. F12.2.

<sup>105</sup> Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, pp. 101–42; Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*.

<sup>106</sup> Bailey, *CASSS*, ix, pp. 62–9, 133–5, ill. 75–99, 351–4.

<sup>107</sup> Griffiths, 'Maen Achwyfan and the Context of Viking Settlement'.

comparative lack contrasts with the situation in Anglo-Saxon England, notably with Northumbria in the first half of the eighth century, which may be exemplified by products such as the Ruthwell Cross with its complex iconography.<sup>108</sup> It also contrasts with parts of Northumbria and Mercia in the early ninth century exemplified by sculpture from Otley, West Yorkshire,<sup>109</sup> the Sandbach crosses in Cheshire,<sup>110</sup> and the Lichfield Cathedral angel.<sup>111</sup> The expansion of figural iconography in southern England associated with products of the so-called Winchester School from the tenth century onwards is also significantly different from what has been observed for Wales.<sup>112</sup> Equally, from the eighth century onwards, sculpture in Scotland included a great variety of figural iconography, and though Biblical scenes are fairly restricted, they included both the Virgin and Child and scenes from the David cycle.<sup>113</sup> In Ireland the so-called 'Scripture' crosses of the second half of the ninth and earlier tenth centuries are carved with an enormous array of Old and New Testament scenes, including the Passion cycle, the Crucifixion and the Last Judgement.<sup>114</sup> In all these instances, we can detect influxes of foreign models which could be adapted to local tastes and needs; in the earlier part of the period from the Continent, including Rome, and sometimes from Byzantium; later, we can see the influence of Carolingian models and in southern England Ottonian ones as well. From the tenth century, Viking art styles and iconography are also apparent on some sculpture, particularly on the Isle of Man and in the northern Danelaw.

In Wales, however, though it has proved possible, mainly in the west, to trace some iconographical influences coming across the Irish Sea, as well as contacts with southern England in the south-east towards the end of the period, and some Viking influences in areas of Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement, evidence for a range of models, including exotic ones, is very difficult to identify. This is all the more puzzling when we know, for example, that Asser of St Davids spent significant periods at the courts of Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder and that the Welsh ruler Hywel Dda visited Rome in 929 and had regular contact with King

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<sup>108</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*.

<sup>109</sup> Coatsworth, *CASSS*, viii, pp. 215–21, ill. 552–78.

<sup>110</sup> Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*; Bailey, *CASSS*, ix, pp. 99–121, ill. 244–312.

<sup>111</sup> Rodwell *et al.*, 'The Lichfield Angel'.

<sup>112</sup> Backhouse *et al.*, *Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*; Tweddle *et al.*, *CASSS*, iv, pp. 57–60.

<sup>113</sup> Henderson and Henderson, *Art of the Picts*, pp. 129–32, 148; Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, e.g. the Iona and Kildalton crosses, pp. 18–19, 131–4, 138–9; Hawkes, 'Constructing Salvation'.

<sup>114</sup> Harbison, *High Crosses of Ireland*.

Athelstan.<sup>115</sup> However, this comparative lack is not entirely confined to Wales but is also detectable on sculpture in some parts of England, southern Scotland and the Isle of Man, which largely remained British, or only came under lasting Anglo-Saxon or Viking control from the tenth century onwards. In Cornwall, for example, there is little sculptural iconography and the representations of the Crucifixion, which characterize the tenth- and eleventh-century Penwith group of crosses, have been tentatively attributed to Irish influence.<sup>116</sup>

Let me now return to my original question: why is there so little figural iconography on the Welsh sculpture and why is it that texts and patterns may have been preferred? I do not pretend to be able to answer this definitively but a number of different interlinking points should be considered. First, I think it is fair to say that we simply do not know how much Welsh ecclesiastical art has been lost which, had it come down to us, might serve to give a different perspective. Wooden sculpture may have been common but does not survive. On stone sculpture the upper parts of many crosses are no longer extant and were presumably thrown down following the Reformation or during the Civil War. Many other pieces only survive as fragments preserved by reuse as church masonry. Nevertheless the extant stone monuments in Wales show a marked preference on the part of those commissioning them for abstract patterns and dedicatory inscriptions, sometimes elegantly carved, rather than figural iconography. Where images are used, they frequently lack finesse.

Second, there is the important question of how and in what ways wealth in early medieval Wales was invested in ecclesiastical foundations.<sup>117</sup> Here Wendy Davies has emphasized the limitations of geography and climate on much of the land in Wales and the resulting comparative poverty compared with many other parts of early medieval Britain and Ireland.<sup>118</sup> Using the Llandaff and other charter material, she has also demonstrated that early medieval Welsh ecclesiastical foundations often held large landed estates which provided a range of products in the form of renders.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, apart from the sculpture, which can show a substantial investment in terms of resources on the part of the commissioners – sometimes the stone has been transported up to

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<sup>115</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 327, 452–4; Dumville, *Annales Cambriae, s.a. 928*.

<sup>116</sup> Preston-Jones and Okasha, *CASSS*, xi, pp. 77–80.

<sup>117</sup> Pryce, 'Ecclesiastical Wealth'.

<sup>118</sup> Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 4–58; Davies, 'Thinking about the Welsh Environment'.

<sup>119</sup> Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*.

65km by sea<sup>120</sup> – other evidence is thin. With notable exceptions, the St Chad Gospels, which were on the altar at Llandeilo Fawr in the 820s, possibly the Hereford Gospels and works of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries associated with the family of Sulien, there are almost no illuminated manuscripts associated with Wales.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, Gifford Charles-Edwards has suggested the continuing importance of wax tablets as a writing medium, as indicated by their depiction on the cross-shaft at Llantwit Major,<sup>122</sup> rather than the use of vellum, which was inevitably a luxury. Equally, surviving ecclesiastical metalwork is confined to a handful of bells and a few metal-detector and other finds.<sup>123</sup> This raises the question as to what extent investment was made in objects of display in the early medieval Welsh Church and whether or not there might also have been religious and ideological considerations at play.

On the one hand, Thomas Charles-Edwards has recently re-emphasized the growing rift between British Christians, who traced their origins back to the Roman past, and the Anglo-Saxon Church with its increasing adherence to Rome articulated most clearly in the writings of Bede.<sup>124</sup> This is seen above all in the very late adoption in Wales of the Roman Easter in 768.<sup>125</sup> Wendy Davies has also underlined the conservatism of the early medieval church in Wales.<sup>126</sup> In such a climate, and with the growing hostility of Mercia during the eighth century, it is perhaps less surprising that iconographical models largely failed to reach Welsh ecclesiastical foundations from outside. On the other hand, there is some hagiographical evidence for an important and continuing emphasis on asceticism in some major Welsh monastic foundations, which could have deterred the display of ecclesiastical wealth. The Life of St Samson of Dol we encountered earlier, suggests the existence of ascetic practices at Llantwit Major<sup>127</sup> while Rhygyfarch's Life of St David incorporates earlier material suggesting the continuing importance of an ascetic way of life at St Davids.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>120</sup> e.g. Llanbadarn Fawr 1, Cards., Carew, Pembs., Edwards, *Corpus*, ii, CD4, p. 136, P9, p. 303; Bardsey Island 2, Caerns., Dyserth 1–2, Flints., Edwards, *Corpus*, iii, CN12, F2–F3, pp. 259, 351–2, 355.

<sup>121</sup> Edwards, 'Decoration of the Earliest Welsh Manuscripts'.

<sup>122</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'The Palaeography of the Inscriptions', pp. 77–9; see n. 16 above.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards, 'Celtic Saints and Early Medieval Archaeology', pp. 249–50, 256; Redknap, 'Early Medieval Metalwork and Christianity'.

<sup>124</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 396–410.

<sup>125</sup> Dumville, *Annales Cambriae, s.a.* 768.

<sup>126</sup> Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', pp. 18, 21.

<sup>127</sup> Taylor, *Life of St Samson*, §§ ix, xv.

<sup>128</sup> Sharpe and Davies, 'Rhygyfarch's *Life of St David*', §§ 20–32.



If we accept that in at least some parts of the early medieval Welsh Church there were tendencies which encouraged continuing archaism, isolationism and an ascetic outlook, we might tentatively carry this one stage further and ask whether and how this might have affected the use of Christian iconography, including images of Christ. More specifically, there is some evidence of a continuing interest in Pelagius in Wales up to the eighth century<sup>129</sup> and Michael Herren and Shirley Ann Brown have argued that continuing adherence to aspects of Pelagianism in what they term ‘Celtic Christianity’ led to ‘strictures against luxury combined with [a] literal interpretation of the scriptural injunctions against imagery’<sup>130</sup> – in other words an adherence to the second commandment concerning the prohibition of graven images.<sup>131</sup> Herren and Brown say little about Wales and the term ‘Celtic Christianity’ should definitely be set aside. Whether and to what extent Pelagianism continued to be influential is a matter for debate, but if there was a continuing adherence to the second commandment in the Welsh Church this might help to account for the relative lack of Biblical representations, including those of Christ. In this context the unique Welsh Crucifixion images at Margam, Llanblethian and Llanhamlach, which show the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist on either side of the cross but *without* the figure of Christ, would support this. The Virgin Mary and St John were human so they might be depicted but Christ, as the son of God, could not.<sup>132</sup> The cross-form, often decorated with abstract ornament and recalling the *crux gemmata* in Jerusalem, was therefore a symbol of Christ and his victory over death, and acted as a focus for prayer and devotion. The significance of the cross-symbol might also be accentuated by text as on several cross-carved grave-markers associated with St Davids which are inscribed with an *alpha* and *omega* and the abbreviated sacred monograms for ‘Jesus Christ’.<sup>133</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Publication of the complete *corpus* of early medieval sculpture in Wales has enabled a reassessment of the use of text, ornament and image on monuments across the Principality. This has revealed a preference for stone sculpture decorated with crosses, patterns and inscriptions while

<sup>129</sup> Dumville, ‘Late-Seventh- or Eighth-Century Evidence for the British Transmission of Pelagius’; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 618; pers. comm. Alison Bonner.

<sup>130</sup> Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> Exodus 20: 4.

<sup>132</sup> Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, p. 186.

<sup>133</sup> Edwards, *Corpus*, ii, pp. 96–7, P93–4, P97, P103, P123–4, P130, P139.

figural iconography is comparatively rare. In this lecture I have concentrated on an analysis of the various different types of figural iconography found on early medieval sculpture in Wales, particularly the Crucifixion, to try and determine why certain images were chosen, their broader cultural and religious context, as well as possible models and functions. The reasons behind the comparative lack of figural iconography in Wales compared with that on stone sculpture in most other parts of early medieval Britain and Ireland are not easy to determine, but I have suggested that it may be broadly linked with the conservatism, isolationism and comparative poverty of the Welsh Church at this time which was, at least partially, driven by ideological preference.

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Pl. 1 Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan, cross with fret patterns and an inscription recording the patron, Hywel ap Rhys, king of Glywysing, who had the cross made for the soul of his father (Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)



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Pl. 3 Crucifixion, Llan-gan, Glamorgan (photo: author)

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Pl. 4 Crucifixion, Llanfachraith, Anglesey (photo: Jean Williamson. Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

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Pl. 5 Cross with the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist, Margam, Glamorgan  
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Pl. 6 Upper part of a cross-slab showing the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist, Llanblethian, Glamorgan (Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales)

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Pl. 7 Cross-slab showing the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist, Llanhamlach, Breconshire (Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

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Pl. 8 Crucifixion, Llanveynoe, Herefordshire (Copyright: Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, photographer K. Jukes)

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Pl. 9 Cross-slab with Crucifixion, Meifod, Montgomeryshire (Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)



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Pl. 10 Pillar, Llanfrynach, Breconshire (Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

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Pl. 11 Fragmentary cross-slab, St Davids, Pembrokeshire (Crown copyright:  
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Pl. 12 Cross-slab, St Arvans, Monmouthshire, showing a cross with flying angels  
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Pl. 13 Detail of the Temptation of St Anthony on the cross at Penmon, Anglesey with a horseman below (photo: Jean Williamson. Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

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Pl. 14 Secular patron portrait on the pillar at Llandyfaelog Fach, Breconshire (Crown copyright: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

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Pl. 15 Cross-base with hunting scene, Margam, Glamorgan (Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales)

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Pl. 16 Detail showing a heroic armed figure on *Maen Achwyfan* Cross, near Whitford, Flintshire (photo: author)

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