THE SYMBOLIC LIFE OF BIRDS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

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Fig. 123 Sack of Jerusalem by Emperor Titus, back, Franks Casket, eighth-century, British Museum, London (Wilson, 1984, fig. 36).
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Fig. 126 Mary with the dove descending above, triumphal arch mosaic, c.431, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Karpp, 1966, pl. 6).
Fig. 127 Weland’s flying machine, cross shaft, the Leeds Parish Church, tenth-century, Leeds, Yorkshire (Lang, 1978, pl. 8.2).
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This work is dedicated to Zbyszek Rozycki.
ABSTRACT

Through an exacting and interdisciplinary study of the symbolism of birds, I hope in this thesis to illuminate both the development of Anglo-Saxon interpretative strategies, and how meaning is attributed to specific symbols. I seek to provide insights into a particular historical period, by shedding light on the imaginative world of its authors and artists. By employing a variety of disciplinary and theoretical approaches, including iconography and semiotics, and analysing a broad spectrum of sources from different media, this study exposes the ways in which bird symbols were understood and interpreted during the period from the seventh to the ninth centuries. Furthermore, this work demonstrates what can be learned by using similar interpretative techniques to understand both literary and art historical representations, also illustrating the syncretism that took place between pre-Christian, vernacular and patristic traditions.

The term 'symbolic life' is employed throughout the work to underline the fact that the meanings assigned to birds are part of a dynamic and evolving system of correspondences, rather than a static code. By examining each example of a bird symbol individually, and in combination with those images, signs, symbols or descriptions that may accompany it, the symbolic life of each species is delineated.

This thesis will present a number of original discoveries, uncovering new sources for significant works of Anglo-Latin and Old English literature, and documenting previously unrecorded examples of bird symbolism within Anglo-Saxon art. It starts from the recognition that there was a cultural propensity for riddling and ambiguity, which drew on the natural world for its inspiration, and that birds provided strong visual and literary symbols for exploring significant themes, such as the responsibilities of a Christian, and the flight of the soul.
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**


**Aug., De Bapt.** Augustine, *De baptismo contra Donatistas libri vii*. PL 43. 107-244


CCSL *Corpus Christianorum: series latina* (Turnhout, 1953–)


**NOTE ON REFERENCING AND TRANSLATION**

All references to the Bible, unless otherwise stated, are to *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. R. Weber, B. Fischer, J. Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks and W. Thiele, 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1994). All Bible translations are from the Douay Rheims Bible [1582-1609], revised by R. Challoner [1749-1752], 3rd imprint of edition first printed 1899 (Rockford, 1989).

Translations from Latin and Old English are mine, unless otherwise stated. Details of both text and translation are given under the first reference to each text.

Colgrave and Mynors edition of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* is employed for both the Latin and English. Wherever possible the *Corpus Christianorum: series latina* is employed for exegetical texts, and where an edition is not available, *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina* or *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* is cited.
INTRODUCTION

A peacock came to Juno complaining with injured pride that she had not given him the tuneful voice of a nightingale, whose song was admired by all who heard it, while he himself was laughed to scorn the moment he uttered a sound. Then to console him the goddess said: 'But in beauty you surpass the nightingale; you surpass her in size. The brilliance of the emerald glitters on your neck, you spread a tail bedecked with jewels and gaily painted feathers.'

'Aesop's fable of 'Juno and the Peacock' suggests that every species of bird has different 'lots' assigned to it. Each has a specific and limited range of associations, and 'all these are contented with their own particular gifts.' However, as the term 'symbolic life' employed throughout this study highlights, the 'meanings' assigned to birds should be understood as part of an evolving set of correspondences,

rather than a static code. Birds have been employed throughout different cultures and periods as symbols capable of carrying a range of symbolic meanings, with each type able to assume a variety of literary and artistic manifestations.

Discovering what a bird symbol 'means' however can be difficult to determine, and depends upon a number of factors, such as the context in which it occurs, who is producing the text or image, and who is doing the reading, viewing or interpreting. Nevertheless, in the course of this study, through an exacting and interdisciplinary examination of the symbolism of birds in seventh- to ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England, both the development of interpretative strategies, and how meaning is attributed to specific bird symbols, will be explored. Furthermore, by conducting detailed scrutiny of both visual and textual evidence, predominantly from Bede’s Northumbria, it is hoped that the analysis of a limited range of symbols will shed light on the imaginative world of the authors and artists of this particular historical period.

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2 The word ‘meaning’ will be employed throughout this study. The Oxford English Dictionary definition is: ‘what is meant by a word, text, concept, or action; implied or explicit significance; intended to communicate something that is not directly expressed.’ 'Meaning noun' The Oxford English Dictionary (revised edition), ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford, 2005), Oxford Reference Online York University, accessed 19 April 2006 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e47318.

3 For the wide range of functions, roles, and religious meanings assumed by birds in different parts of the pre-historic, classical and medieval worlds, see the collection of essays in Feathers, Grit and Symbolism: Birds and Humans in the Ancient Old and New Worlds, Gisela Grupe and Joris Peters (eds.), (Rahden, 2005).


Text and Image

As indicated above, this study will examine bird symbolism in both texts and images, in Anglo-Saxon art and literature. Reading and viewing are two very different experiences. Drawing disparate media together could be seen to create an uncomfortable blend of incompatible discourses, as each is governed by its own rules and disciplines. However, this study will argue that the connection between text and image is increasingly transparent in the interpretation of symbols, and that it is possible to convey meaning in a similar manner through words and through visual representations. The interpretative leap from the object, be it textual or visual, to an associated abstract, symbolic meaning has to be made outside the text or image, by the reader or viewer. As Eco states:

To realise that /stop/ and the red light convey the same order is as intuitive as to decide that, to convince people to refrain from drinking a certain liquid, one can either write /poison/ or draw a skull on the bottle. Now, the basic problem of a semiotic inquiry on different kinds of signs is exactly this one: why does one understand something intuitively? As posited this way, the question is more than semiotic. It starts as a philosophical question (even though it can have a scientific answer too).

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6 See Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique,' in David Lodge (ed.), Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader (London and New York, 1988), pp. 16-30, especially p. 17, and Nealon (2003), pp. 21-34. For the blurring between these boundaries in the early medieval period see Rosemary Huisman, The Written Poem: Semiotic Conventions from Old to Middle English (London and New York, 1999), especially p. 41.


For the purposes of this study, symbols from different media will be examined alongside one other, and similar interpretative techniques will be employed in order to understand both literary and visual representations.10

**Interdisciplinarity**

This investigation is interdisciplinary, in that it involves dialogue between two or more academic disciplines.11 However, rather than cherry-picking information from a range of areas,12 it will be grounded in detailed scrutiny of individual texts and images, drawing upon a range of disciplines where necessary for a deeper understanding of the work under examination. As a result, this thesis will provide insight into the creative and interpretative processes involved in the development and deciphering of bird symbols. As Barthes states:

Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins effectively (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down... in the interests of a new object, and a new language, neither of which has a place in the field of sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation.13

While this study would not presume to have developed a 'new language,' which entirely breaks down the 'old disciplines,' it is attempting to move both outside and beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, in order to gain a vantage point from which to survey the symbolic life of birds in Anglo-Saxon England.

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10 See Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, ‘[Views and Overviews] Semiotics and Art History,’ *The Art Bulletin* 73.1 (1991), pp. 174-208, especially p. 174. However, it is notable that certain bird symbols, such as the peacock, are employed more frequently as visual symbols, while the sparrow is a more popular literary symbol. See later discussion of different symbolic 'vocabularies,' pages 21-22.


Symbolic Life and Symbols

Having outlined the importance of examining texts and images alongside one another, and against an interdisciplinary backdrop, those definitions and theoretical approaches that have provided a lens through which to focus the investigation will also be briefly delineated.14 Given the title of this thesis, it is apposite to begin by explaining the term ‘symbolic life.’ In her study of sixth- to eighth-century Anglo-Saxon art, Hawkes defines it thus:

‘Symbolic life’ is understood to refer to those views of life and death apparently current among the Anglo-Saxons in England which are revealed symbolically in their visual arts (i.e. by the symbols used in the decoration of their artefacts).15

This passage usefully highlights the importance of ideological issues, including attitudes towards life and death, in the interpretation of symbols.16 The present study will extend this definition, for the purposes of exploring bird symbolism. The term symbolic life will thus be employed in reference to the sequence of related artistic and literary manifestations that a specific bird symbol has assumed, as well as to the range of interpretations they can be understood to carry in each distinct instance, and in relation to one another. As Mary Douglas states:

A symbol only has meaning from its relation to other symbols in a pattern. The pattern gives the meaning. Therefore no one item in the pattern can carry meaning by itself isolated from the rest.17

14 This study does not attempt to place one theoretical approach at its centre, but applies different approaches where necessary, rather as one would use a specific tool from a toolbox. See discussion in Nealon (2003), pp. 1-7, and Peter Barry, Beginning theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory (Manchester, 2002), pp. 2-9.
This is the essential premise underlying the study of the symbolic life of different types of birds in this investigation.

This study also employs the term 'symbol' frequently. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, a symbol is 'a mark or character used as a conventional representation of an object, function, or process; a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.'\(^{18}\) This definition draws out the arbitrary nature of symbolism, stressing that there is an 'abstract' association between object and meaning. However, different methodological approaches, including semiotics,\(^{19}\) iconography,\(^{20}\) and reader response,\(^{21}\) all present slightly nuanced understandings of the term symbol in reference to language, texts and images.

**Theoretical Lenses**

**Semiotics**

While this study does not place a specific theoretical approach at its centre, a number of methodologies have informed it, and have provided a helpful backdrop against which to examine the symbolic life of birds in Anglo-Saxon England. It is worth briefly outlining these theories, in order to set out how they have proved useful. The theoretical approach that has been most instructional as a lens through

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\(^{19}\) Eco (1984), pp. 130-163, especially p. 136, outlines the semiotic arguments with regards to symbols, concluding: 'a symbol is correlated to its object by an arbitrary and conventional decision.'  
\(^{20}\) See for example, Roelof van Straten, An Introduction to Iconography trans. Patricia de Man (Berlin, 1989), p. 45: 'although a symbol can have various meanings, it usually conceals a particular abstract concept... A symbol’s meaning, and thus its interpretation, seems to depend on the context as well as the time and place in which it was used.' Hereafter Straten (1989).  
which to focus the study is semiotics, or semiology, a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. Semiotics has provided a context within which to understand how social groups use, understand, and interpret specific elements of their language and imagery. As a result, it can illuminate 'social psychology, and the ways that different audiences are conditioned to view symbols:

Semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification.

As Barthes's quote indicates, semiotics can isolate and analyse signs in both language and visual images and consequently it would be possible to couch the present investigation firmly within this methodology. However, by taking into account a number of other approaches it is hoped that a wider, more holistic study of bird symbolism will be achieved.

**Iconography**

For example, iconography has also proved useful in unlocking the symbolic meaning of birds in Anglo-Saxon England. The boundaries between these two

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22 It must be noted that the term 'semiology' is often understood to refer to Ferdinand Saussure's work, whilst 'semiotics' is associated more with Charles Sanders Peirce. However, 'semiotics' is now more often applied as an 'umbrella heading,' David Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (Routledge, 2001), p. 3. See also Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington, 1990), p. 14.


approaches, semiotics and iconography, is not always fixed. For example, the founding father of iconography, Panofsky, has been characterised as the ‘Saussure’ of art history,\textsuperscript{28} indicating the overlap of approach between semiotician and iconographer. This similarity is highlighted by Straten, for he emphasises that iconography also relies on close reading of symbols:

\textbf{What does one need for an iconographic interpretation?} Again, the most important tool is a solid knowledge of the secondary or symbolic meanings that an object, situation, certain action, or even an image as a whole may have had in a certain period. We must at last learn to spot the places where these meanings potentially exist.\textsuperscript{29}

Iconographic studies involve, among other things, the search for ‘symbolic meanings,’ as intended by the artist or artists, and this approach has provided a useful analytical tool when combined with close semiotic interpretations of signs and symbols.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Iconology}

However, iconology broadens the picture further, by determining, not only those meanings that an artist intended to convey in a work of art, but also the cultural, social, and historical background of themes and subjects:

\textbf{Intrinsic meaning or content ... is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion - qualified by one personality and condensed into one work.} \textsuperscript{31}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{29} Straten (1989), p. 11.
\textsuperscript{30} See discussion in Christine Hasenmueller, ‘Panofsky, Iconography and Semiotics,’ \textit{Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism} 36 (1978), pp. 289-301, especially p. 289: ‘there has been little active experimentation with extending the methods and concepts of structuralism and semiotics to the subject matter of art history.’
\end{footnotesize}
This quote highlights many aspects of the present study, since specific instances of bird symbols will be examined as discrete signs, as parts of works created by individual artists or authors, and as products of a culture and society. As a result, semiotics, iconography, and iconology have all provided a useful methodological grounding, and created a broad canvas upon which to examine the symbolism of birds in Anglo-Saxon art and literature.

**Reader Response**

Finally, given that this investigation is based upon ascertaining how an interpretative community, as much as an individual, understood bird symbols, it is apposite to also briefly note the relevance of reader response criticism. Stanley Fish, among others, has stated that a text does not have meaning outside of a set of cultural assumptions as determined by an informed and initiated group. In contrast to 'New Criticism,' which promotes the autonomy of the text, reader response puts responsibility for the assignation of meaning in the hands of the reader or viewer who alone can determine what the characters mean and how they should be interpreted. Eco highlights the importance of a reader or a viewer’s involvement, as well as his/her social conditioning, in the production and reception of symbolic meaning:

32 Stanley Fish, 'Interpreting the Variorum,' in David Lodge (ed.), Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader (London and New York, 1988), pp. 310-329, especially p. 320: 'discerning an intention is no more or less than understanding, and understanding includes (is constituted by) all the activities which make up what I call the structure of the reader's experience.' See also discussion in Nealon (2003), pp. 21-34.

33 This is not to say that 'New Criticism,' with its close adherence to textual detail, is not a useful methodology to inform this particular study. However, with its ultimate rejection of extra-textual sources and historical context, it is not central to this argument. For the tenets of 'New Criticism' see for example, John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (Norfolk, 1941), especially pp. 140-1.

34 See Joseph Michael Pucci, The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition (New Haven, 1998), p. ix: 'I believe that literary artists...write in discrete, rhetorically laden ways, creating for their readers tangible (real) worlds fashioned of and by and in and for the mind (imagination). I believe also that literary artists expect and, indeed, require their readers to construct mental as well as spiritual and emotional worlds.'
The sign is a gesture produced with the intention of communicating, that is, in order to transmit one's representation or inner state to another being. The existence of a certain rule (a code) enabling both the sender and the addressee to understand the manifestation in the same way must, of course, be presupposed if the transmission is to be successful.  

Informed by this approach, the present study will argue that viewers or readers receive instruction on how to interpret symbols from the cultural, social and religious environment they inhabit. They learn how to read symbols, and are primed to make abstract association between specific words or images, and their related symbolic meanings.

In the course of this study, therefore, the theoretical and disciplinary approaches outlined above can be perceived as separate lenses, through which the subject under scrutiny – in this case bird symbols – is brought into focus. The angles and viewpoints are all slightly different, but having focused each lens upon the central point, it will be possible to gain a deeper insight into the range of meanings assumed by certain symbols, as understood by the interpretative communities of seventh- to ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England.

Parameters of Study

Dates and Provenance

Having outlined the methodology for this thesis, it is now essential to establish the parameters of study. The chronological framework opens in 597 A.D., with the arrival in Kent of Pope Gregory the Great's missionaries from Rome,  

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closes with the Viking invasions of the ninth century. However, the majority of the texts and artefacts examined date from the years 695 to 735 A.D. In all chapters the primary works under discussion are the writings of Bede (c.672-735 A.D.) and Aldhelm (c.639-709 A.D.), alongside a range of contemporaneous artefacts, including the Codex Amiatinus (c.679-716 A.D.), Lindisfarne Gospels (c.698-721 A.D.), Cuthbert Coffin (late-seventh-century), Hunterston brooch (late-seventh-, to early-eighth-century), Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses (mid-eighth-century), and Masham column (early-ninth-century): all products of the so-called ‘Golden Age of Northumbria.’

Most of these works (with the exception of Aldhelm’s writings) originated in the north of England, with particular emphasis on Bede’s monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. The nature of the surviving material has to be consistently borne in mind throughout this study, for Bede, and those finds or geographical sites associated with

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39 For a map of the major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and a discussion of Wearmouth-Jarrow see Campbell (1991), fig. 50 and pp. 74-5. In the course of this investigation, the term Wearmouth-Jarrow will be employed throughout, to refer in singular to Bede’s monastic house. Although there were two separate sites, with Bede residing mainly at Jarrow, the two houses are described as *ut una utriusque loci pax et concordia* 'two houses bound together by the one spirit of peace and harmony,' Bede, *HA* 7, p. 370, trans. p. 193.
him, dominate scholarship on the period. Furthermore, only a fraction of the art and literature produced during the seventh to ninth centuries has survived to the present day. As a result, restricting the limits of the present investigation where possible to Northumbrian material produced during Bede’s lifetime will provide a sharper focus for the study.

**Bede’s Northumbria**

In order to contextualize the evidence, it will be useful to briefly outline the historical, cultural and religious climate of Bede’s Northumbria. Bede opens his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* by highlighting the fact that England north of the Humber during his lifetime was a place where cultures, styles and languages coexisted, combined, and commingled:

> Haec in praesenti iuxta numerum librorum quibus lex divina scripta est, quinque gentium linguis unam eandemque summae ueritatis et uerae sublimitatis scientiam scrutatur et confitetur, Anglorum uidelicet Brettonum Scottorum Pictorum et Latinorum, quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis.

At the present time, there are five languages in Britain, just as the divine law is written in five books, all devoted to seeking out and setting forth on and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of divine truth and of true sublimity. These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish, as well as the Latin languages; through the study of the scriptures, Latin is in general use among them all.41

A number of works dating from this period evince a high degree of syncretism between these cultural groups, with a range of possible exemplars appearing to have

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41 Bede, *HE* I.1, pp. 16-17.
influenced and informed them. One of the aims of the thesis, therefore, is to call attention to instances of syncretism that took place between Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Continental exemplars during the seventh and eighth centuries in Northumbria, and to scrutinise the role it played in evolving the symbolic lives of certain types of birds.

Beginning with the Germanic background, given the fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries, and the lack of written texts, the beliefs, practices and culture of early Anglo-Saxon tribes are difficult to illuminate with certainty. Creating an accurate picture of ‘pre-conversion’ Anglo-Saxon England must remain a speculative task, since any references to earlier traditions have been transmitted through texts written much later, after the widespread acceptance of Christianity. However, there was not necessarily a complete extinction of earlier traditions, and this may be evidenced in the symbolic lives of specific birds, such as the raven and the eagle.


While the Germanic background of Anglo-Saxon England has to be considered in the present study, it is also evident that a number of texts and images entered the country directly from the Continent during the seventh and eighth centuries. The process of importing artefacts from Europe precipitated following the Gregorian missions, with the need for religious instruction and papal direction. According to Bede’s *Historia Abbatum*, Northumbria, and his own monastic house in particular, could boast close links with Rome and the Continent. Indeed, through the movement of pilgrims and travellers, quantities of manuscripts, artworks, relics, and personnel crossed over the Channel in the seventh and eighth centuries. As Bede stated:

> Et ut ea quoque quae nec in Gallia quidem reperiri ualebant, Romanis e finibus aeccliae suae prouisor inpiger ornamenta uel munimenta conferret; quarta illo, post conpositum iuxta regulam monasterium, praelectione completa multipliciore quam prius spiritualium mercium fenore cumulus rediit. Primo quod innumerabilem liborum omnis generis copiam adportauit; Secundo quod reliquiarum beatorum apostolorum martirumque Christi habundantem gratiam multis Anglicis profuturam aduexit; Tertio quod ordinem cantandi psallendi atque in aeccliae ministrandi iuxta morem Romanae institutionis suo monasterio contradidit, postulato uidelicet atque accepto ab Agathone papa archicantore aeccliae beati apostoli Petri et abbate monasterii beati Martini Iohanne, quem sui futurum magisterum monasterii Britannias, Romanum Anglis adduceret.

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48 For those manuscripts and texts that can be attested, see Helmut Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Tempe, 2001), and Michael Lapidge, ‘Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England,’ in Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (eds.), *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 33-90. The majority of the patristic texts cited in the course of this study are attested in these volumes.
He [Benedict Biscop] was untiring in his efforts to see his monastery well provided for: the ornaments and images he could not find in France he sought out in Rome. Once his foundation had settled down to the ordered life of the Rule, he went off on a fourth visit to Rome, returning with a greater variety of treasures than ever before. In the first place he returned with a great mass of books of every sort. Secondly, he brought back an abundant supply of relics of the blessed apostles and Christian martyrs which were to prove such a boon for many churches in the land. Thirdly, he introduced in his monastery the order of chanting and singing the psalms and conducting the liturgy according to the practice in force at Rome. To this end Agatho, at Benedict’s request, offered him the services of the chief cantor of St Peter’s and abbot of the monastery of St Martin, a man called John. 49

This passage suggests that the exemplars underlying Northumbrian works such as the Codex Amiatinus might plausibly be sought from further afield, and consequently that the bird symbolism evident in these pieces may have roots in Roman or early Christian art and literature of the third to seventh centuries. 50

There is another cultural group whose influence is clear in the texts and images produced in Bede’s Northumbria, namely the Scotti ‘Irish.’ 51 Ireland provides an interesting point of contrast with Anglo-Saxon England during the fifth and sixth centuries, for while the latter was subject to invasion and occupation by Romans and then by Germanic tribes, the former had escaped the influx of those invaders that had subjugated Anglo-Saxon England. Furthermore, Christianity reached Ireland through different routes. 52 By the end of the sixth century, a distinctive type of Celtic

Christians had developed characterised by ascetic monasticism and propagated largely by Saint Columba. The head of the Columban monastic houses was Iona, north of the Scottish border, indicating the degree to which Northumbria was surrounded by the influence of Irish Christianity. The impacts of the different factions, and the many points of opposition, are also emphasised by the proceedings of the Synod of Whitby (664 A.D.), held significantly in Bede’s Northumbria. This event highlights the religious, cultural and social influences that were being exerted upon the north of England during the seventh and eighth centuries.

**Unifying factors - Riddling**

However, this study is not concerned with declaring a text or image to be ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ ‘Irish,’ ‘Roman,’ ‘Pagan’ or ‘Christian.’ Rather it seeks for the ways in which these separate influences, if they can be separated at all, may have contributed to the symbolic life of a particular symbol, and how this fusion of traditions affected the use of bird symbolism in specific works of art and literature. While different artistic and literary influences were being received and amalgamated in the north of England during the period following the Gregorian mission, the most significant point of contact between the different cultural agents was, as Bede stated, *meditatione scripturarum* ‘the study of scripture.’

The early Northumbrian Church received guidance and instruction from the papacy, from the scriptures themselves, and from the patristic texts that expounded

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them. Study of the Bible was essential to the life of a Christian, and the ‘faithful’ were expected to become a ‘library of the word of God,’ imbued with the scriptures and able to ruminate upon them. As Leclercq states:

It is this deep impregnation with the words of scripture that explains the extremely important phenomenon of reminiscence whereby the verbal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations and, in turn, a scriptural phrase will suggest quite naturally allusions elsewhere in the sacred books.

This ‘Christian’ method of ruminating upon an aspect of a text, so that a number of associations and allusions could be recalled simultaneously appears to have had a counterpart in the native riddling tradition, both Latin and vernacular. Indeed, the riddling nature of the texts and images produced in seventh- to ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England is one of its defining characteristics, as exemplified by Aldhelm’s Enigmata.

The collection of one hundred Latin riddles, written by Aldhelm in the late seventh century, reveal the Christian traditions of rumination and reminiscence. Each poem recalled a number of biblical references, and yet

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55 Bede highlights the importance of studying the Bible alongside the works of the Church Fathers. Bede, HEV.24, pp. 566-7: Cunctumque ex eo tempus vitae in eiusdem monasterii habitacione peragens, omnem meditandis scripturis operam dedi ... haec in scripturam sanctam meae meorumque necessitati ex opusculis venerabilium patrum breviter adnotare, sive etiam ad formam sensus et interpretationis eorum superadicer e curari. ‘From then on I have spent all my life in this monastery, applying myself entirely to the study of the scriptures... I have made it my business, for my own benefit and that of my brothers, to make brief extracts from the works of the venerable fathers on holy scripture, or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation.’


also drew allusions from outside the scriptures. Take for example, his examination of the dove:

Cum deus infandas iam plecteret aequore noxas
Abluteretque simul scelerum contagia limphis.
Prima precepti conpleui iussa parentis
Portendens fructu terris uenisse salutem;
Mitia qua propter semper precordia gesto
Et felix prepes nigro sine felle manebo;

When God destroyed unspeakable offences in the flood
And washed away the stain of sin in the water,
I was the first to fulfil the laws of my commanding parent,
Showing by the fruit I brought that salvation had come to earth.
Because of this, I have a gentle heart forever
And am a happy bird, devoid of dark and bitter gall. 59

In this short riddle he has combined biblical allusions to both Genesis 8:8-12 (contrasting the dove *nigro sine felle manebo* ‘devoid of dark and bitter gall,’ with the raven) and Matt 10:16 (*ergo prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae*, ‘be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and simple as doves’). 60 He has also recalled the account of the fall in Genesis, with the suggestion that the olive branch brought back to the ark was a new fruit, signalling the end of original sin. In addition to these biblical reference, Aldhelm drew on natural lore about the dove, such as that found in Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* which stated that it was a *felix prepes* ‘happy bird.’ 61 He was thus able to summarise many aspects of the bird’s symbolic life in the six-line format of a riddle.

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60 See Chapter One on doves.
61 Pliny, *HN* X.lii, pp. 360-1.
By writing a collection of one hundred riddles, Aldhelm was following a well-established literary tradition. But he brought his own distinctive approach to the genre. As Scott states:

The great achievement of Anglo-Latin poetry in the seventh and eighth centuries is a new kind of poetic heightening, which can dispense with rhetorical or verbal play. Instead it will intensify the ‘meaning’ of a visual image by its symbolic possibilities, often reinforced through multiple literary allusions, in a language relatively unaffected and simple. This will also lead to a new level of figural or symbolic unity, in which the figure is no longer an ornament of the poem, but a sustaining coherent structure of the poem itself.

Scott’s observations highlight a distinguishing feature of Aldhelm’s work: rather than employing the dove as a symbol in order to comment on other biblical, etymological or moral points, his riddles placed the bird itself at the centre, and constructed symbolic interpretations around it.

Aldhelm’s approach to the material contained with the *Enigmata* is outlined in his verse Preface. He stated:

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Limphida dictanti metrorum carmina presu
Munera nunc largire rudis quo pandere reru
Versibus enigmata quam clandestina fat.
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O master, may you now, a mellifluous poem in metre
Grant as a gift to me, that I, though ignorant, may reveal in verse,
The enigmatic nature of things, secret to tell.

It seems from his collection of riddles, that it was the ‘enigmatic nature of things’ themselves that interested him. The wonders of God’s creation are worthy of study in their own right, and the above riddle suggests that it is through the dove, as an

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62 Centenaries of riddles were written throughout both the classical and medieval periods. See Peter Dale Scott, ‘Rhetorical and Symbolic Ambiguity: Symphosius and Aldhelm,’ in Margot W. King and Wesley M. Stevens (eds.), *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honor of Charles W. Jones* (Collegeville, 1979), I, pp. 117-145. Hereafter Scott (1979). Tatwine and Eusebius also composed centenarics of riddles during the Anglo-Saxon period.
63 Scott (1979), p. 117.
65 For the importance of this premise in Anglo-Saxon art see Hawkes (1997), pp. 311-44, especially p. 312. See also Nicholas Howe, ‘Aldhelm’s *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (1984), pp. 37-59.
actual bird, as well as its range of associated symbolic meanings, that one can understand hidden mysteries. According to Saint Paul, this is precisely how God's mysteries should be approached. Until the Christian is welcomed into eternal life, through death, it is the visible things here on earth which reveal God by means of hidden truths:

videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem
nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum.

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I am known in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.

As a result, it was this distinctive approach to bird and animal symbolism that set Aldhelm's Enigmata apart. He followed the Christian traditions of rumination and reminiscence, and combined these with a focus on the natural world as a window to the divine. He was a uniquely Anglo-Saxon writer, and it is significant that he chose to write a collection of riddles, for it seems that the creation of complex riddling texts and images was a major feature of Anglo-Saxon art and literature from this period.

For example, a riddling approach to meaning and interpretation may be detected in certain objects produced in Bede's Northumbria, such as the Ruthwell Cross (Fig. 1) and Franks Casket (Fig. 2). These pieces not only include ambiguous images which function to recall diverse allusions simultaneously, but they also combine textual and visual messages which interact together to compound the symbolic resonance. In reference to the Ruthwell Cross, Ó Carragáin has employed the term multivalence to account for this many layered symbolism:

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66 See quote from Bede on the nature of riddles in the Conclusion to this thesis. Bede states that the precise function of a riddle is to understand the 'hidden mysteries of things.'
67 1 Cor. 13:12
68 For an extended discussion of these works, see Chapter Three on eagles, and Chapter Five on sparrows.
The essence of the principle of multivalence is that a particular image, through its design and through its context, is intended to suggest at once a variety of meanings. No element of meaning should be excluded, either by tying the image down too firmly in time or place, or by restricting its symbolic import by identifying it too closely with a single narrative moment.70

That a symbol can convey many meanings at once, not only within an interpretative community, but also in the mind of an individual, is intimately bound up with the practises of rumination and riddling prominent in seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Saxon art and literature. It appears that pre-Christian, vernacular and secular symbolic meanings could also co-exist alongside established biblical or patristic interpretations and be simultaneously evoked by the same symbol.71

Alongside the enigmatic artistic examples, there was a tradition of riddling in vernacular literature evinced by texts such as the Exeter Book Riddles.72 These poems (as well as the so-called elegies, including 'Wulf and Eadwacer' and 'The Husband's Message') appear to offer the promise of a single solution, but the 'answer' was obscured beneath a variety of ambiguous references.73 It was not so much arriving at the answer that mattered, but rather the reading and thought processes involved in picking apart the themes and symbols embedded in the texts.

In comparison with Aldhelm's riddles, the collection of Old English riddles in the Exeter book featured an entirely different selection of birds.74 There was a

70 6 Carragān (1994a), p. 418. See also Brown (2003), p. 346: 'recent scholarship is revealing some of the complexities of visual reading of Insular monuments in whatever medium, grounded within a ruminative approach within which meditation gradually penetrated the layers of meaning with which individual iconographic elements and their combinations could be imbued.'
71 See for example, discussion in Chapter Two on ravens.
72 Fulk (1992), pp. 404-10, and p. 389. He divides the riddle collection into two, stating riddles 1-59 (in which all the bird poems occur), can be dated 'close to Beowulf,' that is early eighth-century.
distinct symbolic vocabulary employed in the Anglo-Latin, and vernacular traditions. Indeed, the statement that Colish makes for the Celts and Franks appears to hold true for the Anglo-Saxons with regards to the symbolic life of birds:

There was little carry-over of either classical or Christian thought in the vernacular literature of the Celts and Franks even though it was composed or redacted in monastic scriptoria by the same people engaged in producing and promoting Latin Christian literature. Their desire to preserve their communities’ indigenous culture is a remarkable gauge of the capacity of early medieval authors, redactors, and audiences to retain a non-classical and non-Christian world view and literary aesthetic while simultaneously participating in and perpetuating elite culture.

It seems that differences were deliberately drawn out and emphasised, causing a separate ‘lexicon’ of bird symbolism to exist within texts written in Old English or Latin. Of the ten bird riddles in the Exeter Book and Aldhelm’s *Enigmata*, not one species is common to both. The vernacular and the Anglo-Latin traditions were entirely distinct.

However, while the range of types may be separate, birds were employed consistently throughout Anglo-Latin and vernacular literature, and in both

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75 The most obvious difference between the two sets of riddles is that the birds featured in the Old English riddles are generally native to Britain, while Aldhelm’s birds are largely native to mainland Europe. This indicates not only the nature of the source upon which Aldhelm was basing his riddles, but also an interest in the fauna of the Mediterranean world that is a characteristic of the glosses of the School of Canterbury. See Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 245-249. Hereafter Bischoff and Lapidge (1994).


78 Aldhelm composed riddles on the peacock (14), nightingale (22), cock (25), stork (30), night-raven (34), ostrich (41), swallow (46), eagle (57), raven (63) and dove (64). The Exeter Book riddles include the possible solutions of swan (5), nightingale (6), cuckoo (7), goose (8), chicken (11), jay (22), swallow (55), and the cock and hen (40). These interpretations are based on Williamson (1977), pp. 151, 153, 159, 161, 168, 207, 307 and 276.
They punctuate Bede's writings frequently, interlace in the carpet pages of the Lindisfarne gospels (Fig. 3), eat fruit from the vinescroll of high crosses (Fig. 4), form part of the decoration of the Sutton Hoo treasures (Fig. 5), and swim upon the lonely sea of the Old English elegies. While the specific types vary depending on the style, media, or context, birds are a distinctive feature of Anglo-Saxon art and literature, and it is the aim of the present study to illuminate this complex and enigmatic set of symbols, in order to shed light on the imaginative world of Anglo-Saxon artists and authors.

**Overinterpretation and Misinterpretation**

It remains to voice a final note of caution. In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice and Humpty Dumpty embark on a verbal exchange that reflects Carroll's interest in semiotics and linguistics, and his engagement with contemporary theoretical debates regarding the search for meaning in a text: 80

> 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I chose it to mean -- neither more nor less.'
> 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'
> 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master -- that's all. ' 81

Humpty's words sum up the problems involved in this study. In order to be 'master' of the interpretations put forward with regard to the use of bird symbolism in Anglo-

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79 The terms secular and ecclesiastic are used loosely here to divide the material according to function. The function of a shield may be considered primarily secular, while objects such as manuscripts or high crosses function most effectively within ecclesiastical settings. The terms are, of course, only intended in the broadest sense for such a distinction is not absolute, as shown for example, in the range of finds from the monastic site of Whitby. See discussion in Rosemary Cramp, 'A Reconsideration of the Monastic Site at Whitby,' in John Higgitt and R. Michael Spearman (eds.), *The Age of Migrating Ideas* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 64-73.


Saxon England, a word or an image must not be made to 'mean just what I chose [them] to mean.' By examining bird symbols against the broadest possible backdrop, developing an informed understanding of the cultural and social context, and basing interpretations upon a range of closely scrutinised evidence, substantiated and accurate interpretations will be proposed.  

Nevertheless, the nature of symbolism is such that the interpretations proposed must remain speculative rather than definitive, particularly when attempting to illuminate the minds of characters from the distant past. It is hoped, however, that the present study may provide an insight into the ways that certain Anglo-Saxon authors or artists perceived and interacted with their world, and how they used birds as part of a symbolic vocabulary in order to communicate with other readers and viewer whom they assumed to be capable of interpreting and unlocking their symbolism.

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82 When dealing with symbols, which by their nature have meaning imposed upon them, it is all too easy to find the 'meaning' which fits a scheme already thought to exist. See for example, Miranda A. Green, *Celtic Art: Reading the Message* (London, 1996), pp. 121-122. She interprets the berries on an armlet from the princely burial at Rodenbach as yew berries, as this fits with her proposed interpretation. However, there is nothing to identify them specifically as yew, and they could be any other berry, for example, mistletoe or holly, each of which would enable a different set of readings to those proposed by Green. See also Collingwood’s interpretation of the Masham column, where he reads the second register as scenes from the life of a saint, possibly St Cuthbert, in order that it may fit with the other ‘Apostle shafts’ that he has identified. William G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (London, 1927), p. 7. Hereafter Collingwood (1927).

CHAPTER I

THE SYMBOLIC LIFE OF DOVES IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Investigation of the symbolic life of birds in the art and literature of seventh- and eighth-century England indicates that Anglo-Saxon artists, authors and audiences responded differently to specific types or species of bird. In contrast to the raven and eagle, the dove does not appear to feature in the artistic record prior to the Gregorian mission: the former features in fourth- and fifth-century metalwork, while the latter is strikingly absent. However, by the seventh and eighth centuries the dove begins to occur in specifically Christian contexts and as the evidence presented in this chapter will reveal, in the Anglo-Saxon symbolic lexicon it appears to have become synonymous with ideas and images of the Christian missions and the early Roman Church.

While seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Latin literature, including the works of Bede and Aldhelm, makes frequent reference to the dove, and especially to its importance as a symbol of baptism in the exegetical tradition of the Church Fathers, it is significantly absent from the art and vernacular literature of Anglo-Saxon England. The one notable exception within the artwork is the Codex Amiatinus, a manuscript that, because of its Roman traits, was long believed to have

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84 See discussion in the Introduction.
85 See examples in George Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background* (Oxford, 1980), figs. 2h, 1-p, 3a, 5g, 6a, m, o, 11m, o, q, 17a, c-l. Hereafter Speake (1980). For the symbolic significance of these birds see also Kelley Wickham-Crowley, "The Birds on the Sutton Hoo Instrument," in Robert T. Farrell and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (eds.), *Sutton Hoo: Fifty Years After* (Miami, Ohio, 1992), pp. 75-82. Hereafter Wickham-Crowley (1992). See also discussions on ravens and eagles in Chapters Two and Three.
been a direct product of Italy (Fig. 6). From the evidence of the Anglo-Latin texts and the Codex Amiatinus, this chapter will propose that doves occur in Anglo-Saxon art and literature that is consciously evoking, and appealing to, the Church in Rome. Furthermore, an interesting contrast with occurrences of doves as Christian symbols in the art and literature of Iona and its affiliated monastic houses is also evident. In certain works produced within these establishments the bird assumed a further range of symbolic meanings, associated particularly with their monastic founder Saint Columba. Despite much contact between Columban monasteries and Anglo-Saxon England during the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the complex dove symbolism evinced in the Irish milieu departed from that of Bede and his contemporary Anglo-Latin authors; the latter emphasised the traditional 'Roman' connections with baptism, while the former developed a wider range of symbolic meanings, drawing on exegetical and etymological associations. In addition, while

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86 Despite the deciphered colophon, which places the manuscript firmly within Ceolfrith's monasteries of Wearmouth-Jarrow, the opinion has prevailed that the work was in fact that of Italian artists, or was copied directly from an Italian manuscript. For the suggestion that Cassiodorus's *codex grandior* was the pandect of the 'old translation' brought from Rome to Wearmouth-Jarrow and that it provided the illustrative material for the Codex Amiatinus, see John Chapman, 'The Codex Amiatinus and Cassiodorus,' *Revue Bénédictine* 38 (1926), pp. 139-50. For the *novem codices* as the source for both the text and illustrations of the Codex Amiatinus, see Pierre Courcelle, *Les Lettres Grecques en Occident: De Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris, 1948), p. 360, and Karen Corsano, 'The First Quire of the Codex Amiatinus and the *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus,' *Scriptorium*, 41 (1987), pp. 3-34. Hereafter Corsano (1987). For the *Institutiones* as a source see Bonifatius Fischer, 'Codex Amiatinus und Cassiodor,' in *Lateinische Bibelhandschriften im frühen Mittelalter* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1985), pp. 21-22. The argument for the originality of the Anglo-Saxon scribes and artists is proposed by Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus and the Codex Amiatinus,' *Speculum* 71 (1996), pp. 827-883. Hereafter Meyvaert (1996). However, for a recent exponent for the involvement of Italian scribes see Per Jonas Nordhagen, *The Codex Amiatinus and the Byzantine Element* (Jarrow, 1977), p. 8. Hereafter Nordhagen (1977).

87 Connections between the Anglo-Saxon Church and Rome have been the subject of a number of studies. See for example, Ó Carragáin (1994b), especially pp. 1-4, and O'Reilly (2003), pp. 143-148. Hereafter O'Reilly (2003). See also, Christopher Norton, 'Alcuin of York,' in Mary Garrison (ed.), (forthcoming), especially pp. 10-16.


the dove appears to feature in unique ways within Irish monastic art, its presence in the Anglo-Saxon artistic record is very limited, according with fourth- to eighth-century Italian precedents and displaying little originality.

This chapter will investigate whether the specific and deliberate use of dove symbolism by Bede and the artists of the Codex Amiatinus was introduced in response to the cult of Columba, given force by Adomnán in the early eighth century. The use of the dove as a symbol by the Northumbrian monks may be examined against the background of the Synod of Whitby in 664 A.D. and the ruling against the ‘Irish party.’ It can also be viewed alongside the rise of cults, such as that of Wilfrid, developed in those Northumbrian monasteries built *iuxta morem Romanorum ‘in the Roman style.’ That Bede and the artists at work on the Codex Amiatinus chose to couch their writings and artistic representation of the dove within the iconographic precedents outlined by the Church Fathers and fourth- to eighth-century Italian art is another manifestation of the orientation of Wearmouth-Jarrow towards Roman Christian models.

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92 The proceedings of the Synod of Whitby are recorded by Bede, *HE III.25*, pp. 294-309. Rather than interpret this event as a conflict between the ‘English’ and ‘Irish’ churches, Bede notes that the situation was more complicated. See also Myn-Harting (1991), pp. 103-116.

93 For the rise of the cult of Cuthbert as a response to that of Wilfrid, see Brown (2000), pp. 7-9.


95 Although hostile towards the British church, Bede was often very complimentary about Irish monks and saints. While he was consistent in his condemnation of the Iona attitudes towards the tonsure and the dating of Easter, he was well disposed towards Aidan, Chad, and significantly within the context of this study, Adomnán. Bede, *HE V.15*, pp. 506-7; *erat enim vir bonus et sapiens et scientia scripturarum nobilissime instructus*, ‘he was a good and wise man with an excellent knowledge of the Scriptures.’
In order to survey the Anglo-Saxon treatment of the dove as a symbol, this chapter will begin by examining instances from biblical and patristic literature and will then consider the exegetical traditions associated with its artistic and literary representations. The chapter will then investigate how Northumbrian authors and artists received and employed dove symbolism and how their attitudes different from those of the Columban Church of the eighth century.

Problems with Identifying Doves

Before beginning this investigation, however, a number of potential problems of identification in both the artistic and literary record have to be briefly outlined. One major problem results from the different types of birds associated with the word ‘dove’ in Modern English, for there are over three hundred species. This imprecision of terminology, whereby one term represents a range of ‘types,’ is reflected in both Christian and classical texts, in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. It seems that the terms used to describe the different species were not always employed consistently and the problem is further compounded when texts were

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96 Although the situation is slightly more complicated in terms of doves, the problems raised in this section, regarding the representation of specific species of bird through varying Latin and Old English names and different artistic media, have to be borne in mind throughout the thesis. See also discussion in Chapter Five on sparrows.


98 John Pollard, Birds in Greek Life and Myth (London, 1977), p. 56, gives a list of terms for pigeons and doves in Greek, which includes, peristera (domestic pigeons), peleia (rock and stock doves), oinas (rock dove), phassa, phaps (wood pigeons), and trygon (turtle dove). There is a similarly full list of names for doves in Latin, including columba, turtur and palumbes. The word yownah is most frequently rendered ‘dove’ or ‘pigeon’ from the Hebrew, but the word locr is similarly translated on occasion, as is gowzal. See www.sacrednamebible.com/kjvstrongs/CONHEB312.htm#S3123, accessed 4th April 2006.
transmitted in translation. In the course of this study the Hebrew word yownah, the Greek word peristera, and the Latin word columba have been taken as primarily denoting doves, since these are the terms used to describe the two main biblical doves: that which Noah released from the Ark, and that which descended upon Christ during his baptism. However, the other terms for species of dove have had to be considered throughout.

The inexactness with regard to types of dove in the textual evidence extends to the artistic record where they are variously depicted. Context is essential for their identification, as variations in representation mean they are often difficult to distinguish pictorially from other small birds, such as the thrush or nightingale. This potential confusion is, of course, not a phenomenon limited to the Anglo-Saxon artistic record. Some of the earliest Christian depictions of doves, including those in the third- to fourth-century Catacomb of Priscilla and of S. Callisto, both in Rome, show the bird as brown, dappled with red, blue and white feathers (Figs. 7 and 8). They are only identifiable as doves by the branches they carry, in reference to the olive branch of Genesis 8:11. Likewise, in the fourth-century mosaics of the ambulatory vault at Santa Constanza, Rome, where two grey birds are depicted on the edge of a bowl full of liquid, amid a plethora of other creatures, objects and

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101 Especially those for ‘turtledove’. These two types of bird are distinguished as carrying different symbolic meanings by later Christian authors. See for example, Isidore, Etym. XII.vii, vol. II, 60.

102 See also discussion on general bird imagery Chapter Five on sparrows.

plants, it is only their arrangement around a basin that distinguishes them as doves through their association with the sacrament of baptism (Fig. 9). 104

While earlier representations of doves often varied in colour and appearance, 105 by the fifth century the artistic decision to colour the dove white appears to have been established, as evinced in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna (Fig. 10). 106 Certainly, although the white dove is in fact not a distinct species, but a common mutation of the ringdove, Streptopelia risoria, by the seventh-century these birds were consistently depicted white, carrying a branch and positioned in relation to a symbol of Christ or the sacraments. 107 Examination of the Anglo-Saxon artistic record, however, involves not just a recognition of the dove’s apparent disparity in the wider context of Christian art, but also consideration of the manner in which the Anglo-Saxon images have survived. Such visual distinctions as the dove’s white colour and the branch it carries simply may not have remained. 108

104 That the mosaics of Santa Constanza contain a wealth of Christian imagery has been the subject of debate, but within early Christian art this arrangement of two doves around a basin is frequently used to represent baptism, as in the early-fifth-century mosaics of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna. See John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, 1997), plate 62. Hereafter Lowden (1997). For a recent view on Santa Constanza see Gillian Mackie, ‘A New Look at the Patronage of Santa Constanza, Rome,’ *Byzantion* 67 (1997), pp. 383-406. See also later discussion of doves and baptism.


107 See for example, the descending dove in the central roundel of the fifth-century Orthodox Baptistery, also in Ravenna. Lowden (1997), fig. 65. However, that variety in depiction of doves still survived into the sixth century is evident in the north presbytery wall mosaics of San Vitale, where on one side of the arch white doves are arranged around an urn, while on the left, the doves are brown and more likely to depict turtledoves. Lowden (1997), fig. 78.

Consequently any depictions of doves, originally highlighted with coloured paint, have now been lost.

Furthermore, what remains of Anglo-Saxon art and literature is only a fraction of what once existed and consequently, as is the case throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, theories have to be posited on the basis of one or two surviving examples.\(^{109}\) Therefore, as a result of the problems of identifying doves in the art and literature of Anglo-Saxon England this chapter will focus on the one simple unambiguous instance of an artistic representation of a dove in the art, that of folio 8r of the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 11),\(^ {110}\) while the literary examples will be drawn predominantly from the works of Bede and Aldhelm. However, before exploring the symbolic life of doves in Anglo-Saxon England, the bird’s representations in biblical and patristic literature must be outlined.

**Background to the Dove’s Symbolic Life**

In classical mythology, the dove had been consistently employed as an attribute of goddesses of love and fertility, including Demeter, Venus, and Aphrodite.\(^ {111}\) Furthermore, it had also been associated with chastity in classical texts, including Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*:

\[
\text{Ab iis columbarum maxime spectantur simili ratione mores. inest pudicitia illis plurima et neutri nota adulteria: coniugi fidem non violant communemque servant domum: nisi caelebs aut vidua nidum non relinquit.}
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\(^{109}\) See discussion in Introduction.


\(^{111}\) See C. Scott Littleton, *Mythology* (London, 2002), p. 162. Hereafter Littleton (2002). In the course of this study, it is important to note that Greek and Roman images or texts employed birds as attributes of a particular god or goddess, but they did not retain their symbolic meaning in isolation from other symbols or images. This contrasts with the Christian tradition, where the dove comes to stand for the Holy Spirit and was used in isolation in the earliest Christian art. For example, individual doves are found scratched into the stone at early Christian sites, such as the Catacombs of S. Sebastiano, Rome, see Nicolai, (2002), fig. 169.
Next to the partridge the habits of pigeons are most noticeable for a similar reason. These possess the greatest modesty, and adultery is unknown to either sex; they do not violate the faith of wedlock, and they keep house in company—unless unmated or widowed a pigeon does not leave its nest.  

However, while the dove’s range of associated meanings in classical art and literature were limited, it developed a further set of associations within the Bible.  

There are many references to the dove in the Old Testament and it appears to have had the potential to assume variety of associated meanings. However, one story in particular, namely the account of Noah sending the dove out from the Ark, may provide evidence for the birth of a prominent Christian symbolic tradition connected with this bird. As mentioned above, the bird with a branch in its mouth was a means by which the account could be rendered pictorially. Within the literary tradition, the dove leaving and returning to the ark was a popular topic and its contrast with the black-feathered raven, which did not return, made it a powerfully symbolic story of stark visual clarity. The account of Noah, alongside the many other instances of the dove in the Old Testament, meant that it could be

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113 In comparison to three mentions of peacocks in the Bible (1 Kings 10:22, 2 Chr. 9:2 & Job 39:13), the dove is referred to fifty times.
114 It is associated with the valleys of Palestine in Ezek. 7:16 and Cant. 2:12, with mourning voices in Nah. 2:7, beauty in Cant. 4:1, sacrifice in Lev. 1:14, 5:7, 5:11, 12:6 and Num. 6:10 (where the turtledove is also cited) and flying to freedom in Ps. 54:7. For the significance of this last extract, see Chapter Five on sparrows. The dove was given little artistic treatment in Jewish art, although the Dura Europas Torah Shrine may depict the angel that stayed Abraham’s hand as a bird, which would provide an interesting example of Jewish use of bird symbolism. See discussion in Zofia Ameisenowa, ‘Animal-Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints, and Righteous Men,’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949), pp. 21–45, especially p. 27. Hereafter Ameisenowa (1949).
115 Gen. 8:8–12. This passage is analysed in greater depth in Chapter Two on ravens.
116 The symbolism of doves and ravens is interestingly reversed in the epic of Gilgamesh. After the destruction of humanity by the flood, Utnapishtim sailed for six days until he sent out a dove and a swallow. Neither found dry land to rest on. Significantly, it was the raven which he then sent out that did not return, indicating that the floods had receded. See Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh and others* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 113–4. See also Anna Birgitta Rooth, *The Raven and the Carcass: An Investigation of a Motif in the Deluge Myth in Europe, Asia and North America* (Helsinki, 1962), especially p. 83: ‘the raven is therefore the one to give the hopeful hint.’ Hereafter Rooth (1962).
developed into a complex religious symbol in the early Christian artistic and exegetical tradition.

The dove's first appearance in the New Testament is at Jesus' baptism. It is an indication of how significant it was perceived to be as a symbolic component of the story that all four gospel writers included it. While the synoptic gospels all describe the dove's descent, John's account alone related the incident through Christ's 'witness,' John the Baptist [John 1:32-34]:

et testimonium perhibuit Iohannes dicens quia vidi Spiritum descendens quasi columbam de caelo et mansit super eum et ego nesciebam eum sed qui misit me baptizare in aqua ille mihi dixit super quem videris Spiritum descendens et manentem super eum hic est qui baptizat in Spiritu Sancto et ego vidi et testimonium perhibui quia hic est Filius Dei.

And John gave testimony, saying: 'I saw the Spirit coming down, as a dove from heaven; and he remained upon him. And I knew him not: but he who sent me to baptise with water said to me: He upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining upon him, he it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw: and I gave testimony that this is the Son of God.'

This scene is of great importance in the New Testament for it is the moment when Jesus begins his ministry. It is also a theophany when Christ is visible in his full divinity, presented by God as his Son. Unlike the other New Testament theophany, during the Transfiguration, all three parts of the Trinity are present at Jesus' baptism.

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118 The main difference between the three synoptic accounts is the insistence on Luke's part that the Spirit descended corporali specie sicut columba 'in a bodily shape just like a dove,' while the others states simply that the Holy Spirit was sicut tanquam columbam 'as a dove.' For the fact that the Holy Spirit descended 'as' a dove, see Rom. 1:20 and discussion in the Conclusion to this thesis. It is only through creatura mundi that spiritual mysteries may be understood.


120 Matt 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28. The transfiguration is not reported in John's gospel. This gives even greater weight to his account of the theophany at Jesus' baptism.
Exegesis on Christ’s baptism consistently highlighted the dove’s significance as the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit. A connection between the dove and the sacrament of baptism emerged in the writings of Augustine among others. His writings stressed the fact that it was the arrival of the Holy Spirit, in the guise of a dove, which allowed each of those baptised after Christ to receive salvation and to be baptised not just with water, but ‘with the Holy Ghost.’ Furthermore, connections were frequently made, both in the art and literature, between the dove of Noah and the dove of Christ’s baptism, both of which are shown to represent the salvation of baptism.

As Augustine writes:

Quare autem per columbam? Multa dicta sunt, nec possum, nec opus est omnia retexere: praecipue tamen propter pacem; quia et ligna quae baptizata sunt foris, quia fructum in eis inuenit columba, ad arcam adtulit; sicut meministis columbani emissam a Noe de arca, quae diluuio natabat, et baptismo abluebatur, non mergebatur.

This aspect of the dove’s symbolism is expounded in *The Physiologus*. See Michael J. Curley, *The Physiologus* (Austin and London, 1979), p. 64. Hereafter Curley (1979). For the distribution and dissemination of this text, see Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 29-82. The *Physiologus* emerged from the late antique period, where Gnosticism and other classical philosophies began to be reconciled with early Christian teachings. The date of the original text has been narrowed down to between the late second and early third century, although some believe it to be earlier, due to internal correspondences with Gnosticism and early writers including Justin Martyr (c.100–165 A.D.). Two different versions of the text were disseminated in Latin manuscripts, the Y and the B-text, although the original was in Greek. The *Physiologus* was an influential text in the Early Christian period, but its influence on early artwork has often been overstressed. See for example, Edward Payson Evans, *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Art* (New York, 1896), p. 62: ‘no book except the Bible has ever been so widely distributed among so many people and for so many centuries as the *Physiologus*.’ It is possible that some representations of animals in Anglo-Saxon art may be indebted to the *Physiologus* but this should not be assumed, as has happened in the past (cf. Evans).


Second- and third-century Roman art, including catacomb frescoes and sarcophagi often portray Noah within a box-like ark. See for example, the Cappella Graeca in the Catacomb of Priscilla, Nicolai (2002), fig. 110. The third-century Jonah Sarcophagus, from the Vatican, depicts a small Noah in a box-like ark with the dove carrying an olive branch. Lowden (1997), fig. 13. The Noah scenes, along with those of Jonah and the whale, can be understood to represent the sacrament of baptism. It is significant that doves often feature in depictions of both these scenes. For example, in the Chapels of the Sacraments in the Catacomb of S. Callisto, Rome, two doves are depicted either side of Jonah. Nicolai (2002), fig. 132.

Aug., *Joh.* 7.3.12, p. 68.
So what, therefore, of the dove? Many things have been said, but neither is it possible, nor beneficial, to reweave it all: yet chiefly however on account of peace; because the wood at the porthole is baptising, that the same dove found in fruit, and brought to the ark; similarly recall the dove sent by Noah from the ark, which swam from the flood, and was washed in baptism, not sunk.

From the earliest Christian art and literature the dove of Noah and of Christ’s baptism are consistently merged and employed to symbolise both the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of baptism. These connections are endorsed in the writings of the Church Fathers.

The fact that the dove occurs at such a significant moment in the Gospels meant that it was of great interest to early Christian writers. Furthermore, baptism was the essential and primary sacrament of Christianity, for it was the means by which the faithful were initiated into the Church. By receiving baptism, the convert is guaranteed redemption from sin and the possibility of resurrection into eternal life. These are central premises of the Christian faith and it is thus significant that the dove is often depicted at the centre of baptisteries alongside depictions of Christ’s baptism. Furthermore, Christian writers developed exegetical discussion in which the dove was assigned meaning on a number of interpretative levels. Biblical quotations were combined in order to reveal the

125 A search on CETEDOC for the word columba brings up 1914 instances in volumes I and II. 126 After the Peace of the Church a large number of elaborate baptisteries were erected to provide grand settings for the initiation rites of baptism. See for example, the discussion of the ritual and movement around both the city and baptisteries of Ravenna, discussed in Annabel Jane Wharton, Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 114-131.
127 The opening line of Tertullian, De Bapt. 1.1, p. 277, is de sacramento aquae nostrae qua ablutis delictis pristinae caecitatis in uitam aeternam liberamur, ‘happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life.’
128 See the fifth-century Orthodox and sixth-century Arian baptisteries of Ravenna. Lowden (1997), figs. 65 & 74.
inherent unity of Old and New Testaments and the wide-reaching importance of the dove as a Christian symbol.\textsuperscript{130}

Other Old Testament references to the dove acquired a new range of meanings in the light of events in Christ’s life. For example, parallels were drawn between the sacrificial doves described in Leviticus and Numbers, and both the dove at Jesus’ baptism and the sellers of doves which Jesus expels from the Temple.\textsuperscript{131} In commenting on Jesus’ expulsion of the dove sellers, certain Church Fathers drew parallels between doves and the faithful. For example, in his letter to John, Bishop of the Corinthians, Gregory the Great stated:

Scimus quippe ex euangelio quid redemptor noster per semetipsum fecerit, quia ingressus templum cathedras vendentium columbas euertit. Columbas enim vendere est de sancto Spiritu, quem Deus omnipotens consubstantialem sibi per impositionem manuum hominibus tribuit, commodum temporale percipere.\textsuperscript{132}

For indeed, we know from the Gospel what our Redeemer did in person, that He went into the temple, and overturned the chairs of those selling doves. For to sell doves is to receive a temporal payment for the Holy Spirit, which almighty God has granted to mankind as being consubstantial with himself, through the laying on of hands.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130} See for example, Tertullian \textit{De Bapt.} 8.17, p. 283. This passage interprets the symbol of the dove in a number of ways: literally and historically, it is the actual dove which Noah sent out, and which came down from heaven at Jesus’ baptism; allegorically, the dove Noah sent out was a prefiguration of the Holy Spirit that appeared at Jesus’ baptism; analogically the dove represents all Christians who have to receive baptism and avoid sin; tropologically, it symbolises the eternal salvation which the baptised will receive after death. That symbols were interpreted in this manner, see John Cassian, \textit{Collationes XIV.8, Sources chrétiennes} 54, ed. Eugene Pichery (Paris, 1958), p. 190.

\textsuperscript{131} The expulsion from the Temple is related in all the gospels, but Luke alone does not include the reference to doves. Matt 21:12, Mark 11:15, John 2:14. See also Aug., \textit{Psal.} 130.5, 37.1706.


\textsuperscript{133} John R. C. Martyn, ‘Gregory to John, Bishop of Corinth,’ in \textit{The Letters of Gregory the Great} (Toronto, 2004), vol.2, p. 399. On the same biblical event see Aug., \textit{Ioah.} 10.6.2, p. 103: \textit{Qui sunt qui oves vendunt et columbas? Ipsi sunt qui sua quaerunt in ecclesia, non quae iesa christi, ‘who are those that sell sheep and doves? Those are the same which search for the church, but not for Jesus Christ.'
Furthermore, exegesis on this episode also interpreted the sacrificial doves as representing Christ, who became the ultimate sacrifice in their place.\(^{134}\)

As a result of such associations, Jesus was understood as the new sacrifice and the dove of the Holy Spirit was the new reward. The replacement of the Old Law with the New is highlighted in Luke’s Gospel, where he actually quotes the passage from Leviticus at the point when Mary presents Jesus as the Temple [Luke 2:22-24]:

\begin{quote}
et postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis eius secundum legem Mosi tulerunt illum in Hierusalem ut sisterent eum Domino ... et ut darent hostiam secundum quod dictum est in lege Domini par turtururn aut duos pullos columbarum
\end{quote}

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord ... And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'

This deliberate acknowledgement of the Old Testament source behind the association of doves with sacrifice reveals that the gospel writers themselves were well aware of the potential symbolism of this bird. Furthermore, rather than stressing purely its symbolic function, the dove's sacrificial role in the Jewish Temple as a fact of daily life has also been emphasised in the New Testament accounts.

As well as its connection with the Holy Spirit, sacrifice, and baptism, Christian writers also drew out the dove's role as a symbol of love.\(^{135}\) It had acquired associations with notions of love and loyalty through the classical tradition and in the natural histories, including Pliny. Furthermore, in the Old Testament book the Canticle of Canticles, the object of the narrator's love is described as his 'dove.'\(^{136}\)

Patristic commentaries on these passages interpreted the 'dove' or 'beloved' as

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\(^{135}\) See John 13:34.

\(^{136}\) Cant. 2:10, 2:14, 5:2 and 6:8.
representing the Church and the link between doves and the body of the faithful is thus reinforced.\textsuperscript{137}

This association of the dove with love continued through to the writings of Isidore of Seville:

\begin{quote}
Domorum blanda semper habitatrix. Columbae dictae, quod earum colla ad singulas conversiones colores mutent; aves mansuetae, et in hominum multitudine conversantes, ac sine felle; quas antiqui Venerias nuncupabant, eo quod nidos frequentant, et osculo amorem concipiant.\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

Always gentle, it is an inhabitant of homes. They are called ‘doves,’ because with each turn of their necks they change colour. They are tame birds, and keep company with a great number of men, but without bitterness; Some of the ancients called them Venus, because they frequent nests, and begin love with a kiss.

The dove’s symbolism was extended further in some patristic texts, where it was employed as a more general reference to the Church itself. For example, in Augustine’s \textit{De baptismo contra Donatistas} it comes to stand for the body of the faithful baptised in Christ, for he described the Church as ‘the one dove.’\textsuperscript{139}

Based on its natural behaviour, its presence in the Old Testament and events in Christ’s life, Christian writers developed exegesis in which the dove was identified with God’s love for the Church. In addition it became associated with the extension of this love to all those baptised after the example of Christ and the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God who saved humanity from sin. That the situation was similar in pictorial art is also evinced in the large number of doves depicted throughout the Christian world. The symbolic significance of the dove was even

\textsuperscript{137} See Ann E. Matter, \textit{The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity} (Philadelphia, 1992), p. 51: ‘for Christian readings of the Song of Songs, especially as popularised by Origen, this assumption automatically suggested the scope of prior meanings; that is, the poems read by Jews as the love between God and Israel naturally find their ‘true’ sense as the love between Christ and the Church.’ Hereafter Matter (1992).


\textsuperscript{139} Aug., \textit{De Bapt.} III.17, 43.149.
acknowledged by the Council of Constantinople, which stated in 536 A.D. that the
dove was an appropriate visual symbol for representing the Holy Ghost.\textsuperscript{140}

However, one further example of dove symbolism from patristic texts
remains to be discussed here, namely the connection between this bird and the chief
of the apostles, Peter. In Matthew 16:15-19, the Petrine text, Jesus discussed Simon-
Peter’s former name, Simon Bar-Jonah. \textit{Iona} or Jonah, is the Hebrew for ‘dove’ and
this connection was drawn out in a number of exegetical expositions.\textsuperscript{141} In his
Commentary on Matthew,\textsuperscript{142} Jerome discussed how Peter was inspired by the Holy
Spirit, concluding \textit{siquidem Bar Iona in lingua nostra sonat filius columbae},
‘accordingly Bar-Jonah in our language is called the son of a dove.’\textsuperscript{143} Other
Christian writers also emphasised this connection between Peter and the
etymological meaning of \textit{iona} and \textit{columba}. For example, on Peter’s name, Isidore
of Seville wrote:

Simon Bar-iona in lingua nostra sonat filius columbae, et est nomen
Syrum pariter et Hebraeum. Bar quippe Syra lingua filius, Iona
Hebraeice columba; utroque sermone dicitur Bar-iona.\textsuperscript{144}

Simon Bar-Jonah in our language means the son of a dove, and the
name is equally Syrian and Hebrew. ‘Bar’ indeed in Syrian means
‘son,’ ‘Iona’ dove in Hebrew; in both ways therefore the word is said
as ‘Bar-Iona.’

It seems, therefore, that alongside the symbolic meanings associated with the dove
through its biblical occurrences, the etymological understanding of the name Bar-

\textsuperscript{140} John D. Mansi et al., \textit{Sanctorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio} (Florence, 1762), vol. 8,
pp. 1037-40.
\textsuperscript{141} This aspect of dove symbolism is discussed by O’Reilly (1994), pp. 347-350. She examines the
connections in some detail and employs a range of exegetical texts to illuminate the use of the name
columba within the Ionan church. See later discussion. See also Jerome, \textit{Liber interpretationis
\textsuperscript{142} O’Reilly (1994), p. 347, states this text was ‘very popular with Irish exegetes.’
\textsuperscript{143} Jerome, III.54, \textit{Commentarii in Evangelium Matthaei}, ed. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen, CCSL 77
\textsuperscript{144} Isidore, \textit{Etym.} VII. ix. vol. I, 4.
Jonah meant that it also came to be connected with Peter, the first pope and patron saint of Rome.\footnote{For the association of St Peter with Rome in Anglo-Latin literature, see Ó Carragáin (1994b), p. 3.}

What all this reveals is that by the time Gregory sent the Roman mission to England, the symbolic life of the dove had become relatively fixed. From its early Christian roots it had managed to develop a range of symbolic meanings associating it with the essential Christian premises of love, chastity and freedom from sin. Also, through its connection with Peter and the Council of Constantinople, the dove came to symbolise all that was orthodox and fundamental to the Church and the papacy. Having established the basis for the symbolic life of doves in the art and literature of the Church, it now remains to examine how this symbol was received, used and adapted by Anglo-Saxons artists and authors.

**Doves in Anglo-Saxon Art: The Codex Amiatinus**

To turn firstly to the artistic record, as has been detailed above, there is one prime example of the dove in Anglo-Saxon art which is of direct relevance to this study, namely the depiction on folio 8r of the late-seventh- to early-eighth-century Codex Amiatinus.\footnote{The Codex Amiatinus was written under Cæolfrith between 679 and 716. See Bede, *HA* 15, p. 379, trans. p. 203.} The dove is enclosed in a roundel at the top of a diagram presenting the division of the Bible according to Augustine (Fig. 12).\footnote{The most recent study of these pages is Lawrence Nees, ‘Illustrated Bibles from Northwest Europe,’ in John Williams (ed.), *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible* (Pennsylvania, 1999), pp. 160-173. Hereafter Nees (1999).} This page is the second in a sequence of three in the well-documented first quire of the Codex
Amiatinus. They include roundels at the top which feature respectively a lamb and the bust of a bearded man. In order for the full significance of the dove in the Codex Amiatinus to be understood, these three pages have to be examined alongside one another. The questions of how and why the Northumbrian artists chose to include the dove at this point and whether it is an original addition made at Wearmouth-Jarrow, will prove central to the present investigation.

The dove in the roundel is identifiable due to its colour and shape. It is white and appears to be flying downwards, recalling similar representations in the Arian and Orthodox baptisteries at Ravenna, where it depicts the moment at which the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ during his baptism (Figs. 17 and 18).

Furthermore, in relation to the other two roundels, this dove may be understood to represent symbolically the Holy Spirit, for it has been proposed that the three medallions are intended to depict the Trinity, with the bearded man as God the Father, the lamb as the Son and the dove as the Holy Spirit. However, combined

148 This section of the manuscript has been the subject of much investigation. For a detailed bibliography see Corsano (1987), p. 3. Recent studies include Paul Meyvaert, 'The Date of Bede's In Ezram and his Image of Ezra in the Codex Amiatinus,' Speculum 80.4 (2005), pp. 1087-1133. Hereafter Meyvaert (2005). See also Celia Chazelle, 'Ceddroid's Gift to St Peter: the First Quire of the Codex Amiatinus and the Evidence of its Roman destination,' Early Medieval Europe 12.2 (2003), pp. 129-157. Hereafter Chazelle (2003).

149 While the inscription on folio 6'states that the arrangement is that of Pope Hilarus (461-68), this study will refer to it as the Septuagint arrangement in accordance with Meyvaert (1996), p. 842. In the Institutiones Cassiodorus described the third division as that of the Septuagint, favoured by a number of the Church Fathers, including Hilarius, Pictaviensis urbis antistes, et Rufinus presbyter Aquileinsis et Epiphanius episcopus Cypri et synodus Nicaena et Calchedonensis. However, Meyvaert (1996), pp. 842-844, suggests that, in the absence of a copy of the Institutiones and through consultation of the Liber Pontificalis, the Anglo-Saxons changed the text of the codex grandior from Pictaviensis urbis antistes, to Romanae urbis antistes. Hilarus of Rome, through his association with the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, must have seemed a more appropriate source for this arrangement than Hilary of Poitiers.

150 These pages are reproduced in Alexander (1978), fig. 27, ills. 24 and 25.

151 See Meyvaert (1996), pp. 835-839. The question of the Codex Amiatinus artists' originality is also of significance within Chapters Three and Four on eagles and peacocks.

representations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as Christ Pantocrator, the Agnus Dei and the dove are extremely rare at this period.\footnote{Nees \textit{Ibid.}, provides the example of the fifteenth-century Masaccio fresco in Santa Maria Novella, which is too late to be of significance to this study.} This study will propose that these roundels have been deliberately inserted by Anglo-Saxon artists in response to questions about the nature of the Trinity current at the time of the Codex Amiatinus's creation.\footnote{Cassiodorus stated in the \textit{Institutiones} that he had these three divisions of Scripture inserted into the prefatory material of his codex grandior. See Meyvaert (1996), p. 838. It may be significant that the surviving illustrated roundels, accompanying similar diagrams from manuscripts of the \textit{Institutiones} do not feature these images, but include other decorative material in their place. See discussion below.} A number of elements in these three pages point to the possibility that, although much of the content and arrangement could have been based on Cassiodorian exemplars,\footnote{A similar argument is proposed with regards to the decoration of the cupboard on the Ezra page, in Chapter Four on peacocks. The insertion of original symbols in both the Tabernacle and Ezra scenes is also discussed in O'Reilly (2001), pp. 20-34.} the Northumbrian scribes adapted their sources, including three illuminated roundels to highlight the interests and concerns of their eighth-century monastic establishment.\footnote{These summaries and their relevance to the argument of the Wearmouth-Jarrow monk's originality is discussed at length in Meyvaert (1996), pp. 839-844.}

In order to understand the originality of the Anglo-Saxon artists at work on the Codex Amiatinus, it is apposite to begin by examining the written summaries included in frames at the bottom of folios 6r–8.\footnote{The summaries and their relevance to the argument of the Wearmouth-Jarrow monk's originality is discussed at length in Meyvaert (1996), pp. 839-844.} Through close scrutiny of these texts it may be possible to illuminate the ways in which the Northumbrian scribes employed proposed Cassiodorian exemplars, and to draw out the themes and subjects that they considered of relevance in these pages. The summaries appear to follow formulae laid out by Cassiodorus in his \textit{Institutiones}, although most probably...
transmitted to Northumbria through the codex grandior. For example, the caption on the Augustinian division reads:

Sic fiunt ueteris noui que testamenti sicut pater augustinus in libris de doctrina christiana complexus est simul libri numero septuaginta uno quibus adde unitatem divinam per quam ista completa sunt. Fit totius librae competens et gloriosa perfectio ipsa est enim rerum conditrix et vitalis omnium plenitude virutum.

Here are the Old and New testaments just as the father Augustine included in his books on Christian doctrine, it likewise has the books numbered at seventy-one, which by means of being added with divine unity is complete. In corresponding to the total number of books and glorious perfection itself, it is indeed the thing that lays to rest and give life and fullness of strength to all things.

While Cassiodorus’s Institutiones states:

Divisio Scripturae divinae secundum sanctum Augustinum Beatus igitur Augustinus secundum praefatos novem codices, quos sancta meditatur Ecclesia, secundo libro de Doctrina Christiana Scripturas divinas LXXI librorum calculo comprehendit; quibus cum sanctae Trinitatis addideris unitatem, fit totius librae competens et gloriosa perfectio.

In Christian Learning St Augustine, therefore, arranged the Divine Scripture into seventy-one books, using the arrangement of the above-mentioned nine sections that the holy Church devised. And when you have added the unity of the holy Trinity to this number, there is a satisfactory and glorious completeness to the whole measure.

There are obviously a number of points of agreement between the two extracts.

However, the discrepancies are of greater interest in this study, for they indicate that

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158 This appears to support the theory that Cassiodorus’s codex grandior was the exemplar for the Codex Amiatinus and that it contained prefatory material which in many ways mirrored the information laid out in the Institutiones. Although Corsano (1987), p. 3, argues that the Institutiones was the major source for the Codex Amiatinus, and that these captions were copied over directly from it rather than via the codex grandior, Meyvaert (1996), pp. 827-831, has shown that the Institutiones were not, in fact, known by Bede and his contemporaries. It seems, therefore, that Cassiodorus may have had information from his Institutiones reproduced in his codex grandior, and that the Wearmouth-Jarrow monks copied it from there.

159 The text of the first quire of the Codex Amiatinus is reproduced in Henri Quentin, Biblia sacra iuxta latinam vulgatam versionem ad codicum fident (Rome, 1926), pp. xxi-xxvi. Hereafter Quentin (1926).


the Anglo-Saxon scribes did not blindly copy, but made conscious choices about what to include.162

The opening lines of each of the three Codex Amiatinus summaries include the phrase sic fiunt uetefis noui que testamenti. Meyvaert states that ‘we can assume that this was Cassiodorus’s doing,’ but provides no further evidence.163 It would be entirely appropriate, however, for the addition to have been made in Wearmouth-Jarrow.164 The harmonising of the Old and New Testament is a consistent feature, not only of Bede’s many writings,165 but also of the other illustrative material included in the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 19).166 The Anglo-Saxon artists at work on the first quire seem to have added details to a number of the illustrations, in order to highlight the importance of harmonising the Old and New Testaments.167 These include inserting a cross above the door to the Tabernacle and providing Ezra with a halo, thus drawing out the Christological significance of both these images (Figs. 20 and 21).168

A further feature of both the summary below the dove on the Augustinian page and the one provided below the Jerome division, is that both have replaced Cassiodorus’s reference to the Trinity with singular references. The Amiatinus

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162 It must be borne in mind, however, that the extracts survive in later manuscripts of the Institutiones, and as there is no known copy of Cassiodorus’s codex grandior the original may have differed from those passages quoted here.

163 Meyvaert (1996), p. 840. The stress on harmonising the Old and New Testaments is a feature of the Institutiones. See for example, Cass., Inst. I.12-14, pp. 36-41. However, given its absence in these precise quotations, and the evidence that the Anglo-Saxon monks made other additions to these passages, attribution of this phrase to Wearmouth-Jarrow is also possible.


165 See for example, Bede, Temp. Prologue, p. 144, trans. p. 3: Cuius lectioni intentus quanto plura Christi et ecclesiae sacramenta antiquis indita paginia inveneris, ‘if you read it [account of the creation of the Temple] attentively, then the more you find the mysteries of Christ and the Church contained in its ancient pages.’

166 O’Reilly (2001), p. 14. She states that there is ‘sustained and varied expression of the theme of divinely inspired Scripture,’ and provides evidence from the Pentateuch page (fol. 7v), and the Christ in Majesty illustration (fol. 796v) to indicate how this was achieved through the illustrations of the Codex Amiatinus.

167 See Chapter Four on peacocks.

Augustine page adds *unitatem divinam* in place of Cassiodorus's words *sanctae Trinitatis*. This addition is included to take Augustine's 71 books of scripture to the sacred number 72, while the Jerome page adds *dominum christum*, to bring his arrangement from 49 books to the mystical number 50. In response to these changes Meyvaert states:

It is difficult to see what reasons Cassiodorus himself could have had for introducing these alterations into the summaries of his *codex grandior*. It seems more likely that someone at Wearmouth-Jarrow became a little uneasy about the explicit mention of the Trinity - even though the true God was considered one - when only a single digit was needed to complete the arithmetical computation.\(^{169}\)

In this case, therefore, it appears that the Anglo-Saxon scribes exercised some creative control and adapted their sources. To argue starting from the assumption that the Anglo-Saxon artists at work on the Codex Amiatinus made these changes, and that they were concerned with discussion on the nature of the Trinity, may illuminate their treatment of the dove and the accompanying images.

Let us now turn to the medallions themselves. It seems that while much of the illustrative material of the Codex Amiatinus may have been derived from a copy of Cassiodorus's *codex grandior*, the medallions were most likely to have been inserted by the Anglo-Saxon artists. Corsano has argued that they reflect similar roundels included in an early version of Cassiodorus's *Institutiones*, namely the late eighth-century Codex Bambergensis (Fig. 22).\(^{170}\) But as Nees points out, while the Codex Bambergensis does feature depictions of a lamb, dove and bust, they are not in direct sequence, are not associated with the authors cited in the Codex Amiatinus, and the


\(^{170}\) Bamberg, Staatsbibliotek, cod. Patr. 71. Folios 14', 15' and 15'. Depicted in Corsano (1987), pls. 2-4. She suggests that the Anglo-Saxons had access to a version of the *Institutiones* decorated in a similar manner to this eighth-century manuscript.
bust, at least, is certainly not meant to represent God the Father. It seems that, in their use of these three images, the bearded man, the lamb, and the dove, it may be possible to witness the originality and creativity of the artists at work on the Codex Amiatinus.

Beginning with the roundel above the Septuagint division which depicts a bearded bust, Nees states 'the Codex Amiatinus contains the earliest unambiguous preserved representation of the Father in anthropomorphic form.' He concludes that the most likely source for the medallion above the Septuagint arrangement is a portrait of Christ Pantocrator, depicted on the obverse of gold coins issued by Justinian II from 692-695 A.D., and from 705-711 A.D. (Fig. 23). He goes on to discuss the impact that this representation had within Rome, where it was employed in the early eighth-century decoration of Santa Maria Antiqua (Fig. 24). The Anglo-Saxons at work on the Codex Amiatinus created the manuscript in the years of Ceolfrith’s abbacy, 686 to 716 A.D. Therefore, the use of an image current on imperial coins and in contemporary Roman churches, would appear to indicate that the Wearmouth-Jarrow monks were interested in employing artistic forms that adhered to the fashions of Constantinople, and Italy under Byzantine control.

The representation of the Son of God as the Agnus Dei in this trinitarian sequence highlights the contemporary situation in another way too, for it reflects

171 Nees (1999), pp. 160-173. He highlights the fact that this manuscript has an interlaced circle in place of the Trinitarian roundels. Nees (1999), fig. 21. Furthermore, the bearded man is labelled *Domnus Donatus eximius grammaticus*, and was thus intended as a representation of the grammarian Donatus. Corsano (1987), p. 30, does highlight this point.


173 Nees (1999), fig. 23, and p. 168. This coin 'shows a sharp and obvious break with earlier Byzantine coinage.' The introduction of depictions of Christ Pantocrator seems to have had an immediate impact on Roman art. The Codex Amiatinus may, in fact, provide an essential link between the forbidding of representations of Christ in the form of the lamb, by Justinian II’s Quinisext Council of 692 (which could be seen as the impetus behind representations of Christ Pantocrator), and the introduction of the *Agnus Dei* by Pope Sergius before 701. That these arguments and images were circulating at the time of the Codex Amiatinus’s creation may thus be reflected in the roundels.

changes in the liturgies taking place in Rome.\textsuperscript{175} As proposed by Hawkes and Ó Carragáin, the use of the lamb in Anglo-Saxon art may reflect the introduction of the \textit{Agnus Dei} chant by Pope Sergius I (687-701 A.D.).\textsuperscript{176} Bede actually paraphrases the \textit{Agnus Dei} in his Homily on John 1:29-34:

Non solum autem lauit nos a peccatis nostris in sanguine suo quando sanguinem suum dedit in cruce pro nobis uel quando unusquisque nostrum mysterio sacraesantcae passionis illius baptismi aqua ablutos est uerum etiam cotidie tollit peccata mundi lauatque nos a peccatis nostris cotidianis in sanguine suo.

Not only did he wash us from our sins in his blood when he gave his blood for us on the cross, or when each of us was cleansed in his baptism by the mystery of his most sacred passions, but he also takes away every day the sins of the world, and washes us of our daily sins in his blood.\textsuperscript{177}

That Bede cites the \textit{Agnus Dei} supports the fact that knowledge of this addition to the liturgy had reached Northumbria by the mid-eighth-century. Furthermore, it reinforces the interpretation of the roundel depicting the lamb as a symbolic representation of the Son of God, and connects it with the following depiction of the dove of the Holy Spirit. Christ as the sacrificial lamb is 'cleansed in his baptism by the mystery of his most sacred passions,'\textsuperscript{178} in order that the faithful may, after his death, be baptised with the dove of the Holy Spirit. It seems that inclusion of the lamb at this point in the manuscript was similarly intended to emphasise the

\textsuperscript{175} That changes in the Roman liturgy were reflected in contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon art, such as the Ruthwell Cross, has been argued by Ó Carragáin in a number of articles. The most relevant for this study is Jane Hawkes and Ó Carragáin, 'John the Baptist and the \textit{Agnus Dei}: Ruthwell (and Bewcastle) Revisited,' \textit{The Antiquaries Journal} 81 (2001), pp. 131-152. Hereafter cited as Hawkes & Ó Carragáin, (2001).


\textsuperscript{178} Bede, \textit{Ibid.}
awareness on the part of the Wearmouth-Jarrow monks of contemporary events and issues of significance on the Continent.\(^{179}\)

It is in this context that we find the primary example of a dove in Anglo-Saxon art. The depiction recalls both fifth-century Italian models and the sixth-century declarations of the Council of Constantinople. Both in isolation and in relation to the other medallions, the dove is included as an established and orthodox way of referring to the Holy Spirit. The symbol’s arrangement and proposed symbolic meanings both accord with exegesis on the symbolism of the dove in the writings of the Church Fathers. Furthermore, by placing these three roundels together and in sequence, the Wearmouth-Jarrow artists were able to stress the importance of the unity of the Trinity.

That the nature of the Trinity was a subject of debate at the time of the Codex Amiatinus’s creation is evident from the declaration at the centre of the Council of Hatfield in 680 A.D.\(^{180}\) Bede cites the Council’s findings in his *Historia ecclesiastica*:

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Hos itaque sequentes nos pie atque orthodoxe iuxta diuinitus inspiratam doctrinam eorum professi credimus consonanter et confitemur secundum sanctos patres proprie et ueraciter Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum trinitatem in unitate consubstantiam et unitatem in trinitate, hoc est unum Deum in tribus subsistentiis uel personis consubstantialibus aequalis gloriae et honoris.
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\(^{179}\) The colophon to the Codex Amiatinus indicates a consciousness on the part of Ceolfrith and the Anglo-Saxon scribes that Rome was the core of the Christian world, while Northumbria at was its periphery. The abbot referred to himself as ‘abbot from the farthest end of England.’ The colophon was also recorded in the anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*. See Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Document: c. 500-1042* (London, 1968), pp. 697-8, and *HAAA* 37, I, p. 402. See also discussion in O’Reilly (2005), p. 127.

Following these [the Church Fathers] in all devotion and orthodoxy, we likewise believe and confess their divinely inspired doctrines and confess the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be rightly and truly a Trinity consubstantial in Unity and the Unity in Trinity, that is, one God in three substances or consubstantial persons equal in glory and honour.  

Furthermore, if this manuscript was intended as a gift for the papacy it is also possible that the images and texts chosen by the Wearmouth-Jarrow monks were selected to stress the adherence of the English Church to orthodox practices. This concern with orthodoxy should be viewed in the light of contemporary heresies or schisms, and concerns over heretical practices of the past, as highlighted by the Synods of Hatfield and Whitby.

The trinitarian medallions, alongside the divisions of scripture and the accompanying summaries, all emphasise the unique natures of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but at the same time stress their unity. These images in the Codex Amiatinus can thus be seen as pictorially reinforcing the professions of faith made by the English bishops at the Council of Hatfield. Furthermore, they also highlight the aspiration on the part of the Anglo-Saxon monks *extimis de finibus* 'at the ends of the world,' to comply with the most current practices from Rome. It seems, therefore, that the concerns and intentions of the Wearmouth-Jarrow monks

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183 The monothelite controversy, in particular, was of concern to the English Church following the 649 A.D. Lateran Council. See Bischoff and Lapidge (1994), pp. 65-81. In the person of Theodore of Canterbury (archbishop from 669-690 A.D.) the controversy had a relevance to the Anglo-Saxon Church. It seems that Theodore may be identified with *Theodorus monachus*, listed as one of the witnesses to the second session of the synod in Rome which discussed the *acta* of the Lateran Council, and which dealt especially with the monothelite controversy. Bischoff and Lapidge (1994), p. 79, suggests that Theodore's involvement with this controversy extended through to the period of his archiepiscopal presence in England.
184 Bede's writings show a concern on his part to distance the English Church from heretical practices of the past, particularly those of Pelagius. A number of his works take a vehement stance against heresy, for example, his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles. See discussion in Matter (1992), p. 97.
may be uncovered through their use of the dove as a symbol, through the artistic
decisions they made regarding how to employ the dove, and through those elements
that they chose to combine with it. Having considered the dove as an artistic symbol,
it remains to examine whether the literary record supports such findings.

Doves in Anglo-Latin Literature

The most extensive treatment of the dove in Anglo-Latin literature is in the
works of Bede. Indeed, he referred to it in his writings proportionately more than
any other Christian writer. However, while Bede developed his own unique
treatment of birds like the raven, his attitude towards the dove followed almost
verbatim the teachings of the Church Fathers. His approach can be discerned in his
Expositio Actuum Apostolorum:

Nec tamen tunc unctus est spiritu sancto quando super eum baptizatum
velut columba descendit; tunc enim corpus suum, id est ecclesiam
suam, praefigurare dignatus est, in qua praecipue baptizati accipiunt
spiritum sanctum.

Yet, Christ was not anointed with the Holy Spirit at the time when it
descended as a dove upon him at his baptism, for at that time he
condescended to prefigure his body, that is, his Church, in which the
baptised principally receive the Holy Spirit.

In this passage Bede quoted directly from Augustine's De Trinitate, and has
presented the accepted opinions of the Church Father as his own. Furthermore, as in
the patristic texts cited above, Bede drew the familiar comparison between doves and
the Church.

185 A search on CETEDOC reveals 184 instances of the word *columba* in Bede's writings.
186 See Chapter Two on ravens.
187 Bede, *EAA* X.38.24, p. 50.
Many further examples could be presented in which Bede accorded his treatment of the dove fully with the range of typological interpretations and interpretative methods established in patristic exegesis. For example, in his discussion of the dove Noah sent out from the Ark he stated:

Potest in columba, quae aperta post diluuum fenestra ramum oliuae intulit in arcam, etiam hoc praefiguratum intellegi quod, baptizato Domino in Iordane, aperti sunt caeli et descendit Spiritus sanctus in specie columbae super eum; quod, accipientibus baptisma singulis ecclesiae filiis, ad aperiendam et illis ianuam regni celestis imponitur manus a pontifice per unctionem sacrosancti chrismatis ut accipiant spiritum sanctum. 189

It is possible regarding the dove, which revealed the olive branch after the flood at the window and brought it into the ark, that it is prefigured to be understood as that at the baptism of the Lord in the Jordan, when the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended from above in the appearance of a dove; with respect to which, the individual receiving of baptism by the sons of the church will be revealed, and at that entrance heavenly power will be established in the hand of the priest through the anointing with sacred chrism so that they may receive the Holy Spirit.

In this passage the dove was shown to symbolise the Holy Spirit, the sacrament of baptism, and both the body of the faithful and the priest who imparts the ‘sacred chrism.’ By emphasising these aspects of the dove’s symbolic meanings, Bede followed the examples of Augustine and Gregory and placed himself firmly within established exegetical traditions.

In accordance with the works of Jerome and Isidore, Bede also discussed the connections between the dove and Simon Bar-Jonah. 190 By employing the interpretations of the Church Fathers, and drawing on the dove references found in both Old and New Testaments, Bede examined the connection between Peter and the dove:

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189 Bede, Gen. 2.8.1831, p. 124.
Sequentes exemplum beati Petri ... nos cum illo beati et appellari ... acceptamque a domino gratiam uirtutum filii columbae uocabimur congaudensque ipse spiritualibus animae nostrae profectibus dicet: ‘Quam pulchra es, amica mea, quam pulchra es, oculi tui columbarum.’

If we imitate blessed Peter's example... we also will be capable of being called blessed ... and on account of the gift of virtues we have received from the Lord, we will be called 'sons of a dove' and he himself, rejoicing with us in the spiritual progress of our souls will say, 'how beautiful you are ... your eyes are those of doves [Cant. 4:1].'

In this passage Bede created a connection between doves, Peter, and the body of the faithful within the Church, for like Peter, those who imitate him will also be 'blessed' doves. Furthermore, in drawing out the etymological meaning of Peter's name, Bar-Iona, Bede may also have been suggesting a connection between the dove and the Church of Rome, whose patron saint shared its name. By only including references to the dove that have direct equivalents in the works of the Church Fathers, Bede's writings indicate that he considered it important to adhere to established interpretations of dove symbolism.

A number of reasons present themselves for Bede's approach to the dove. As a member of a monastic house established 'in the Roman manner,' in a nation converted by a Roman mission, it seems that his writings are steeped in imagery largely derived from the Church Fathers and from the papacy. It is clear that inhabitants of Wearmouth-Jarrow endeavoured to model aspects of their Christian

192 It may be significant that Bede at no point extended discussion of Peter's name to include references to Iona. Furthermore, while his homily discussed the significance of those named 'sons of a dove,' he did not include any reference to Columba, founding father of Iona monasticism.
193 Although Bede did not go to Rome, he wrote with reverence of the many books, art works, relics, and practises that his abbots brought back to Northumbria from there. See for example, Bede, HA 6, p. 369, trans. p. 192, and discussion in the Introduction to this thesis.
life upon the example of the Roman Church. As a symbol of the Holy Spirit, baptism, and furthermore, of Saint Peter, Bede seemed to have considered the dove a suitable symbol to mention frequently in his writings. Likewise, it was suitable for inclusion in the decorative material of the famous manuscript produced at his monastery, the Codex Amiatinus.

**Doves in Hiberno-Latin Literature**

However, the approaches of both Bede and the artists of the Codex Amiatinus with regards to dove symbolism contrast significantly with that of Adomnán. When considering the importance of the dove as a Christian symbol in Anglo-Saxon England it is essential to remember that the Christianity established, particularly in Northumbria, had roots in both these traditions – the ‘Irish’ and the ‘Roman.’ But in terms of dove symbolism, the two traditions seem to have diverged markedly.

It is possible to detect, through their use of the dove as a symbol, the extent to which certain Anglo-Saxon authors consciously aligned themselves with the Roman Church. In contrast, within Columban art and literature the dove had been given a

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194 Many aspects of life at Wearmouth-Jarrow reveal a desire to adhere to practices current in Rome. See for example, the arrangement of the monastic complex, with its processional routes and covered walkways, discussed in Ó Carragáin, *The Term Porticus and Imitatio Romae in Early Anglo-Saxon England,* in Helen Conrad-O'Brien, Anne Marie D'Arcy and John Scattergood (eds.), *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature Presented to Joseph Donovan Pheiffer* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 13-34.


196 In the essential article on this subject, O'Reilly (1994), pp. 344-397, presents evidence from the works of Adomnán and Columbanus alongside extracts from Bede, to suggest that all these authors shared a common approach to the dove. However, the present study hopes to draw out variations between each author’s use of dove symbolism, in order to understand specific differences between the approaches of the monastic houses of Iona and Wearmouth-Jarrow. See also Douglas Dales, *Light to the Isles: a study of Missionary Theology in Celtic and Early Anglo-Saxon Britain* (Cambridge, 1997), especially p. 55.

wider range of symbolic meanings. Columba (521–597 A.D.) and Columbanus (543–615 A.D.) both consciously evoked dove symbolism through their names.

Indeed, the importance of the word *columba* as a Christian name was stressed by Bede, who stated that a person full of spiritual grace may deservedly receive the name of ‘son of a dove’ or ‘son of the Holy Spirit.’ On the origins of Columba’s name, Adomnán provided an extended account in his *Vita S. Columbae*:


There was a man... who received the same name as the prophet Jonah. For although sounding differently in the three different languages, yet what is pronounced *iona* in Hebrew, and what Greek calls *peristera*, and what in the Latin language is named *columba*, means one and the same thing. So good and great a name is believed not to have been put upon the man of God without divine dispensation. According to the truth of the gospels, moreover, the Holy Spirit is shown to have descended upon the only-begotten son of the eternal Father in the form of that little bird that is called a dove. Hence often in sacred books a dove is understood to signify mystically the Holy Spirit. Similarly in the gospel, the Saviour himself bade his disciples to have implanted in a pure heart the simplicity of doves. For indeed the dove is a simple and innocent bird. Therefore a simple and innocent person also was

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198 The distinctness of the Hiberno-Latin approach to other bird symbols, such as the eagle, has been the subject of a number of studies. See for example, O'Reilly (1998), pp. 49-94. See also Chapter Three on eagles.


rightly called by this name, since he with dove-like disposition offered to the Holy Spirit a dwelling within himself.\textsuperscript{202}

In this passage Adomnán combined biblical references,\textsuperscript{203} with the encyclopaedic learning of Isidore, etymological lore about the origin of names, and information on native uses of symbols in art.\textsuperscript{204} However, while the account reveals a full and deep appreciation for the Christian symbolic life of doves, it also contains a note of possession on the part of its author, for the founding father of Iona monasticism was named Columba. The word and its symbolic associations were controlled by Adomnán, who wove his own unique array of information together to reveal the significance, not only of the dove as a symbol, but of Columba himself.\textsuperscript{205}

In the manner of Bede, Isidore and Jerome, Adomnán and Columbanus also emphasised the connections between the dove and Peter.\textsuperscript{206} However, while Bede’s discussion of Saint Peter’s name stressed his supremacy over other Christians, in a letter to Pope Gregory, Columbanus actually referred to himself as ‘Bar-iona.’\textsuperscript{207} In this letter, Columbanus appears to have made a connection between his name and that of Peter in order to emphasise his role as a member of a community united under Petrine authority.

\textsuperscript{202} Adomnán, \textit{VC}, preface, pp. 2-5.
\textsuperscript{203} He cited both the account of Jesus’ baptism in Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22 and John 1:32-34, and his advice to his disciples at Matt 10:16, that they must be ‘wise as serpents, and simple as doves.’
\textsuperscript{204} Adomnán’s statement that ‘often in sacred books a dove is understood to signify mystically the Holy Spirit,’ provides a useful analogy for the dove-like birds that nestle in the intricate patterns of the Book of Kells. See O’Reilly (1994), p. 345, and Meehan, (1994), p. 64.
\textsuperscript{205} From my investigations I have found no other contemporary Christian text in which all these elements are woven together.
\textsuperscript{207} Joseph F. Kelly, ‘The Letter of Columbanus to Gregory the Great,’ \textit{Gregorio Magno e il suo Tempo}, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 33 (Rome, 1991), p. 216, has interpreted this phrase as ‘self-righteous’ and ‘intentionally offensive.’ O’Reilly (1994), p. 350, states however: ‘Columbanus seems to be saying that as a member of the church he is a dove, his very name proclaims it, though he is a small and wretched one; far from abrogating the authority of Simon Bar-iona he presumes to offer advice, and even admonition, to Pope’s Gregory I and Boniface IV only in the interests of the church’s unity which St Peter represents.’
In his *Vita S. Columbae* Adomnán provided yet further strands of connection between Columba and Peter. For example, the central event of Book II is an occasion when Columba’s prayers brought forth water from a rock in order to baptise a Child.\(^{208}\) This can be seen to recall the actions of Moses in Exodus 17:6, when he struck a rock and it produced water.\(^{209}\) However, it could also be posited that this scene creates an association between Columba and Peter. Christian art and exegesis traditionally drew parallels between Moses’ act of drawing water from a rock, and Peter, the rock on whom Christ founded his church, and who baptised in his name (Fig. 25).\(^{210}\) By receiving water from a rock and baptising, Adomnán cast Columba as a new Peter, and this connection was strengthened by their associated names. Consequently, Columba could be shown to be continuing the work begun by the Apostle, and to be following the examples he set.

The association of dove, Columba and Saint Peter has to be considered in the light of events contemporary with Adomnán’s composition of the *Vita S. Columbae*. This work has been described as ‘Adomnán’s answer to Northumbrian attacks on Columba which had been made during the Easter controversy.’\(^{211}\) As a result, it is tempting to interpret Adomnán’s extensive treatment of the word *columba*, and his association of Columba with Peter, as a means of emphasising the adherence of the Irish monks to orthodox practices. And yet it also stressed the antiquity of their own

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210 See for example, the Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, c.330, Museo Nationale, Rome. Furthermore, an early-third-century Italian sarcophagus, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, also depicts Peter drawing water from a rock in order to baptise his jailer, according to Acts 16:33. See www.metmuseum.org, accessed 31st May 2005. Artistic representations of Peter in the guise of Moses are discussed in Lowden (1997), p. 48.
tradition, and the importance of their holy founder, whose name, as well as miracles, indicated that he was of special significance.²¹²

Colman, the ‘Irish’ representative at the Synod of Whitby, supported their observance of Easter thus:

\[\text{pascha...hoc, quod agere soleo, a maioribus meis accepi, qui me huc episcopum miserunt; quod omnes patres nostri, uiri Deo dilecti, eodem modo celebrasse noscuntur.}\]

The method of keeping Easter which I observe, I received from my superiors who sent me here as bishop; it was in this way that all our fathers, men beloved of God, are known to have celebrated it.²¹³

In defending their actions, Colman made reference to \textit{patres nostri}, who Bede identified as Columba in his \textit{Historia ecclesiastica}.²¹⁴ Wilfrid’s reply to this suggestion, according to Bede, was \textit{Pascha quod facimus... uidimus Romae, ubi beati apostoli Petrus et Paulus uixere, docuere, passi sunt et sepulti}, ‘the Easter we keep is the same as we have seen universally celebrated in Rome, where the apostles saints Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered, and were buried.’²¹⁵ The Columban tradition, as established by \textit{patres nostri}, was thus being deliberately contrasted with the practises of Rome. Through such statements it appears, therefore, that the Synod of Whitby was not only a discussion of specific issues, such as the dating of Easter, but was also an attempt on the part of members of the Northumbrian and Roman

²¹² O'Reilly (1997) presents evidence from throughout the \textit{Vita Columbae} that Adomnán deliberately cast Columba in biblical and saintly traditions, and associated him with both Moses and Peter.


²¹⁴ Bede, \textit{HE} III.4, pp. 224-5, stated: \textit{iuxta exemplum primi doctoris illius} ‘this unusual example follows the example of their first teacher.’

²¹⁵ Bede, \textit{HE} III.25, pp. 300-1.
Churches to eradicate those unorthodox practices that had originated with Columba.\textsuperscript{216}

Adomnán assumed the abbacy of Iona shortly after the Synod of Whitby in 679 A.D. It seems, however, that Iona only accepted the Roman Easter after Adomnán’s death, in 716 A.D.,\textsuperscript{217} and his writings provide no evidence that he wanted to introduce it.\textsuperscript{218} Instead, through certain details, such as his emphasis on the range of interpretations associated with the word \textit{columba}, it appears that he was more interested in stressing the worthy provenance of specific practices of the Ionan church, as introduced by their founder Columba.

In the fifty years following the Synod of Whitby, during which Adomnán wrote the \textit{Vita S. Columbae}, the opposing factions, namely the ‘Irish’ and ‘Roman’ monastic establishments of Northumbria, produced works of art and literature that emphasised the supremacy of each house’s traditions and saints.\textsuperscript{219} The anonymous Life of Cuthbert was composed around 700 A.D., and was followed in 716–720 A.D. by Bede’s poetic and prose lives,\textsuperscript{220} while in 721 A.D. Eddius Stephanus composed the \textit{Vita} of Wilfrid. Alongside these literary works, the early eighth century saw the creation of the Lindisfarne Gospels (Fig. 26) and the Cuthbert relics

\textsuperscript{216} Bede commented on the dubious nature of Ionan practices, but tempered his criticisms with his characteristic admiration of ‘Irish’ spirituality: \textit{In tempore quidem summae festivitatis dubios circulos sequentes, utpote quibus longe ultra orbeh positis nemo synodalia paschalis observantiae decreta porrexerat, tantum ea, quae in prophetis evangelicos et apostolicis litteris discernere poterant, pietatis et castitatis opera diligentiter observantibus} “it is true that they used tables of doubtful accuracy in fixing the date of the chief festival, since they were so far away at the ends of the earth that there was none to bring them the decrees of the synods concerning the observance of Easter, but they diligently practised such works of religion and chastity as they were able to learn from the words of the prophets, the evangelist, and the apostles.” Bede, \textit{HE} III.4, pp. 224-5. See also Edward James, ‘Bede and the Tonsure Question,’ \textit{Peritia} 3 (1984), pp. 85-93.

\textsuperscript{217} For his earlier dating, see Bede, \textit{HE} III.4, pp. 224-5.


\textsuperscript{219} This is fully discussed in Brown (2000), pp. 7-9.

\textsuperscript{220} He wrote these works at the behest of the monks of Lindisfarne, see Bede, \textit{VC} Prologue, pp. 142-3.
by the monks of Lindisfarne (Fig. 27), and the making of ‘a book of the Gospels, done in letters of purest gold on parchment all empurpled and illuminated’ by Wilfrid’s monastery at Ripon.\textsuperscript{221} Similarly, it was over this period that the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow created the Codex Amiatinus and Bede composed his wide range of hagiographical, historical, computistical and exegetical texts. Each of these works can be seen to emphasise specific characteristics of the monasteries in which they were produced, the saints with which they were associated, and the artistic or literary traditions that gave them their distinctive character.\textsuperscript{222}

It therefore seems significant that, whereas works produced in Columban monasteries frequently cited doves, there was not one reference to these birds in the \textit{Vita Sancti Wilfridi}. It could be that during this period the word \textit{columba} was readily associated with the founder of the Columban church. Therefore in his account of the life of Wilfrid, who personally opposed the ‘Irish party’ at Whitby, Eddius Stephanus may have deliberately excluded the word. In contrast, however, the works of Bede and the Codex Amiatinus, produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow, indicate yet another approach to \textit{columba}. Bede did not shy away from using the word, nor did the artists of the Codex Amiatinus exclude it from their illustrations, but their use of the dove was clearly allied with the papacy and the writings of the Church Fathers.

In conclusion, it seems that, during the eighth and early ninth centuries the dove was perceived by Christian Anglo-Saxons as a powerfully evocative symbol.

\textsuperscript{221} Steph., \textit{VIW} 17, p. 124, trans. p. 126. On the creation of these works Brown (2000), p. 9, states: ‘following Wilfrid’s death, around 710, a book of splendid appearance in its lettering and ornament and enshrined within a jewelled case, was apparently a focus of attempts to establish a cult of Wilfrid at Ripon. Perhaps it was at this time that the need for a similar contribution to the shrine of St Cuthbert was deemed necessary in the form of the Lindisfarne Gospels,’

\textsuperscript{222} For example, while the artists of the Lindisfarne Gospels employed so-called ‘Celtic’ artistic techniques, such as the trumpet-spiral motif, after the manner of other Ionan gospel books, the manuscript produced in Ripon was described as ‘purpled’ which recalls Continental works. See discussion in Introduction, Brown (2000), p. 9. and David M. Wilson, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Art: from the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest} (London, 1984), p. 40.
That it had become associated with Columba, the founding father of Iona and its associated monastic establishments, appears to have encouraged Northumbrian artists and authors to employ it in ways that deliberately contrasted with the art and literature of these 'Irish' foundations. From the evidence of Bede’s writings and the Codex Amiatinus, it seems that there was a consciousness within the Wearmouth-Jarrow artistic community of the dove's ability to carry symbolic meaning. Particularly in the light of eighth-century events and issues, including discussion on the nature of the Trinity, obedience to the papacy in Rome, and concern over orthodox practices, their specific use of dove symbolism can be shown to illuminate contemporary attitudes and concerns.
CHAPTER II

THE SYMBOLIC LIFE OF RAVENS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The symbolic life of the raven at times follows the trail of that of the dove, not least through the association of both with the biblical account of the Flood.\textsuperscript{224} The blackness of the raven, in juxtaposition with the white colour of the dove, provided a visual and literary dichotomy that was exploited by Christian artists and writers from the third century onwards.\textsuperscript{225} But while the dove’s role as a symbol of the Holy Spirit was well established by the sixth century,\textsuperscript{226} the raven’s symbolism evinced considerable variety. Its multifarious appearances in the Bible, as well as its role in the story of saints Anthony and Paul,\textsuperscript{227} meant that its function and meaning varied considerably and therefore depended on its context. This chapter will explore how the raven developed a more limited, and increasingly negative, range of associations in Anglo-Saxon England, particularly in the writings of Bede.\textsuperscript{228}

Evidence from his writings will demonstrate that Bede included and emphasised certain of the raven’s possible negative symbolic meanings, while excluding more positive elements.\textsuperscript{229} He discussed its actions in Genesis 8:7 at length, basing his interpretations partly upon close examination of textual details, and partly upon the bird’s significance in larger allegorical schemes. Consistently, a

\textsuperscript{224} Gen. 8:6-12. See also discussion in Chapter One on doves, and Norman Cohn, Noah’s Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought (New Haven & London, 1999), pp. 11-21. Hereafter Cohn (1999).
\textsuperscript{225} See later discussion.
\textsuperscript{226} See discussion of the Council of Constantinople of 536 A.D. in Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{228} The most thorough study of the raven’s symbolism in Anglo-Saxon England is Milton McC. Gatch, ‘Noah’s Raven in Genesis A and Illustrated Old English Hexateuch,’ Gesta 14.2 (1975), pp. 3-15. Hereafter Gatch (1975). However, Gatch’s work now needs updating in places, see later discussion.
\textsuperscript{229} See Franklin (2003), pp. 3-18.
negative attitude towards this bird permeated his work. This in turn may have informed later Anglo-Saxon art and literature, which frequently emphasised the connections between ravens, corpses, and floating cadavers. This chapter will explore the reasons for these associations and will suggest that the bird’s roles as a beast of battle in vernacular poetry, and as a ‘pagan’ symbol of Odin, may have affected Anglo-Saxon authors and artists use of it.

In addition, by examining pictorial representations of Anthony and Paul in both Anglo-Saxon and Irish sculpture this study will also propose that, while the Columban pieces consistently include the raven, Northumbrian artists appear to have deliberately avoided it. From the seventh century onwards the sculpture produced for certain Irish and Pictish centres, including Monasterboice, County Lough, and Nigg, County Ross, emphasised the bird’s role as a heavenly messenger, sent to feed the first eremitic saints. The Ruthwell Cross, in contrast, excluded the raven from its depiction of that same scene (Fig. 28). It appears that, like the dove, different aspects of the raven’s diverse possible meanings could be chosen and emphasised depending on where, and by whom, it is was employed.

This chapter will begin by outlining the development of the raven’s symbolic life in biblical and patristic literature. It will then progress to a detailed examination of its role in the biblical account of the flood, before scrutinising how Bede treated

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229 See later discussion, and Marsden (1998), pp. 65-85, especially p. 77. This addition has also been discussed in Marsden (1995), p.204-5, and Franklin (2003), pp. 3-16.
230 Gatch (1975), pp. 6-11, provides an overview of later Anglo-Saxon instances where the raven is associated with cadavers.
231 See later discussion.
232 The different insular depictions of Paul and Anthony are described and depicted in Ó Carragáin (1988), pp. 45-51.
235 See in particular the depiction of Paul and Anthony on the Ruthwell cross discussed in Ó Carragáin (2005), pp. 153-160.
this particular biblical account. Possible reasons for Bede’s unique representation of, and attitude towards, the raven will then be proposed. The chapter will conclude with evidence from the Ruthwell Cross and Bede’s *Vita Cuthberti* which both appear to support the hypothesis that the raven was cast in a negative light in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon art and literature. Initially, however, it may be helpful to begin with a brief investigation of the bird’s symbolic background.

**Background to the Raven’s Symbolic Life**

Throughout Indo-European cultures the raven appears to have been consistently associated with death and darkness, probably due to its black feathers and taste for carrion.\(^{237}\) Encyclopaedic writers, such as Isidore of Seville, also stressed its greed for flesh, stating for example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Corvus, sive corax, nomen a sono gutturis habet, quod voce coracinet...} \\
\text{Hic prior in cadaveribus oculum petit.}^{238}
\end{align*}
\]

The *corvus*, or *corax*, is named after the sound that its throat makes, because it caws with its voice...This bird first attacks the eye of corpses.

Observation of the raven’s propensity for eating the eyes of corpses had informed its portrayal in certain biblical books, such as the Book of Proverbs.\(^{239}\) However, alongside these associations, it also began to develop a range of symbolic meanings based on other references in the Bible.\(^{240}\)

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\(^{239}\) Prov. 30:17.

\(^{240}\) It is listed among those birds forbidden for consumption as food in Lev. 11:15, a sign of God’s love for his creation in Job 38:41 & Luke 12:24, picking out the eyes of sinners in Prov. 30:17, and inhabiting wasteland in Isa. 34:11.
In the Book of Kings the raven acted as a divine messenger; it brought nourishment in the form of bread and meat to God's faithful follower, Elijah.\textsuperscript{241} It was also treated sympathetically in the Canticle of Canticles, where both the dove and raven are referred to simultaneously in describing the beloved.\textsuperscript{242} Indeed, in his ninth-century encyclopaedic work, \textit{De Universo}, Hrabanus Maurus examined the various allegorical significances of the raven in the different biblical accounts.\textsuperscript{243} The passage is summarised by Gatch:

\begin{quote}
Rabanus (\textit{De Universo} VIII.vi. P.L. 111.252) repeats Isidore's information but then goes on to speak of the bird's allegorical significations. In Proverbs, says he, the raven denotes the blackness of sinners and demons. In Job, he is an allegory of the preacher, for he chews up or pre-digests food (the Gospel) before giving it to his children. In Song of Songs, he is Christ and the church; in the Psalms, signs of infidelity; in Wisdom, tardiness in repentance.\textsuperscript{244}
\end{quote}

Thus, within the Bible, and considered alongside the scientific information disseminated by Christian writers like Isidore, the raven did not appear to have a single clear symbolic meaning. It could be interpreted in either a positive or a negative light, depending on which biblical text it occurred in, or which of its characteristics were being stressed. This multivalent range of associations continued to surface throughout analyses of ravens in Christian literature, and nowhere more so than in discussions of its most extensive treatment in the Bible: the story of Noah and the Flood.

\textsuperscript{241} 1 Kings 17:4 and 6. Also referred to at Deut. 14:14.
\textsuperscript{242} Cant. 5:11-12. The 'beloved' is described as having eyes like a dove and hair black as a raven.
\textsuperscript{243} Although later than Bede, this work highlights the types of biblical associations the raven had acquired by the ninth-century. For a discussion of the significance of Rabanus Maurus's name, which associated him with the raven or crow, and Alcuin's renaming of him, see Mary Garrison, 'The Social World of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and at the Carolingian Court,' in L. Houwen and A. MacDonald (eds.), \textit{Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court} (Groningen 1998), pp. 59-79.
\textsuperscript{244} Gatch (1975), p. 7.
The Raven in Genesis 8:7

The Genesis account described how Noah sent out a raven and a dove from the ark after forty days to determine whether the waters had receded. The raven’s actions during this incident were subject to scrutiny by a number of the Church Fathers, partly because the bird was deemed to carry a range of potential symbolic meanings at this salient point in the narrative, but also because of the divergent textual traditions of the passage in the Old Latin and Vulgate versions. It is worth quoting examples of both versions in full:

VULGATE: (Noe ... dimisit corvum) qui egrediebatur et revertebatur donec siccarentur aquae super terram

(Noah ... sent forth the raven) who was going out and was returning until the waters over the earth dried up.

VETUS LATINA: (Noe ... emisit corvum) ut videret utrum cessasset aqua et exiens non est reversus donec siccaret aqua a terra.

(Noah sent out the raven) in order that it might see whether the water had ceased and departing, it did not return until the waters over the earth had dried up.

245 Gen. 8.6-12. The story of Noah and the ark was of great significance to early Christians, and was depicted on sarcophagi to signify the salvation due to those who receive baptism. See for example, the Lateran sarcophagus, Michael Gough, The Origins of Christian Art (London, 1973), plate 31, p. 28.

246 The Vetus Latina 'Old Latin' texts were derived from the Greek Septuagint, but developed a number of variations. Different versions of the Old Latin text were transmitted primarily in the works of the Church Fathers. The Vulgate version, in contrast, was developed by Jerome to accord with both the original Septuagint and the Hebrew, and to root out the errors that had crept into Old Latin versions. For a discussion of the Old Latin versions, and their impact on future editions of the Bible, see Philip Burton, The Old Latin Gospels: A Study of the Texts and Language (Oxford, 2000), pp. 5-11, especially p. 6: 'although we have talked in terms of a division between 'Old Latin' and 'Vulgate' translations, it should be noted that this division is in practice not such a neat one. The Vulgate Gospels were, as Jerome states, intended to be a minimal revision of the existing Old Latin versions, and do bear a strong resemblance to them.' For an account of Jerome's development of the Vulgate see Kamesar (1993), especially pp. 41-72. The article which deals most extensively with this problem in Anglo-Saxon England is Franklin (2003), pp. 3-17.

247 The Douay Rheims translation deviates from the Vulgate at this point, translating this phrase, 'which went forth and did not return,' in accordance with the Old Latin account. Bishop Richard Challoner, who revised the Douay-Rheims between 1749 and 1752, adds the note: 'the raven did not return to the ark; but (as it may be gathered from the Hebrew) went to and fro; sometimes going to the mountains, where it found carcasses to feed on; other times returning, to rest upon the top of the ark.' This is a significant statement in the light of this study.

248 The Latin is from Franklin (2003), p. 13.
The most obvious difference between these two accounts is the inclusion of the negative particle non in the Old Latin version, to qualify the verb revertiere. This suggests that the raven did not continue to go out and return while the earth was flooded, as suggested by Vulgate, but that it stayed away, not returning donec ‘until’ the waters had receded.

It is striking that the different textual traditions give contrasting accounts of the raven’s actions. The Vulgate version reflects the original Hebrew, and states that the bird continued to fly back and forth.249 However, the works of most of the Church Fathers transmitted the Old Latin version, with its reading of the raven’s failure to return to the ark. Consequently, a number of patristic authors based their exegetical interpretations of this episode on the contrast between the behaviour of the dove, which returned to the ark, and the raven, which did not.250

The contrasting approaches to this biblical account are exemplified in the works of Jerome and Augustine. In his Liber quaestionum hebraicarum in Genesim, Jerome had examined both versions of the passage, and noted the differences between the Old Latin and Vulgate texts:

Post quadraginta dies aperuit Noe ostium arcae, quod fecit, et emisit coruum, et egressus non rediit ad eum, donec siccaretur aqua de terra. Pro ostio, fenestra scripta est in hebraeo. Et de corvo aliter dicitur, emisit coruum et egressus est exiens et revertens, donec siccarentur aquae de terra.251

249 The Hebrew word yatsa which occurs at this point, can be rendered a number of ways, but essentially means ‘went out,’ while the verb that accompanies it, shuwb means to come back again. There does not appear to be negation in the Hebrew shuwb, which might suggest, as the Vetus Latina states, that the raven did not return. See Strong’s Hebrew Bible at www.sacrednamebibl.com/kjvstrongs/B01C008.htm, accessed 23rd March 2006.
250 See discussion in Gatch (1975), pp. 8-9.
After forty days it happened that Noah opened the doorway to the ark, and sent out the raven, and it went out and did not return to him, until the water over the earth had dried up. For ‘doorway,’ is written ‘window’ in the Hebrew. And regarding the raven it is said differently: ‘He sent out the raven and it went out, departing and returning until the water over the earth had dried up.’

Here Jerome has examined the text itself, and the variations in the Old Latin and Vulgate passages, rather than proposing an allegorical interpretation for the raven.252

In contrast, however, Augustine included no such discussion of the textual variants. He had employed the Old Latin, and emphasised the raven’s failure to return in order to create a sustained allegorical interpretation. Citing Philippians 2.21, he interpreted the raven as the nominal Christian:

Merito de arca missus est coruus, et non est reversus; missa est columba, et reversa est: illas duas aues misit Noe. Habebat ibi coruum, habebat et columbam; utrumque hoc genus arca continebat; et si arca figurabat ecclesiam, uidetis utique quia necesse est ut in isto diluuio saeculi utrumque genus contineat ecclesia, et coruum, et columbam. Qui sunt corui? Qui sua quaerunt. Qui columbae? Qui ea quae Christi sunt quaerunt.253

Deservedly the raven was sent away from the ark, and did not return; the dove was sent out, and returned: those two birds were sent out by Noah. He had in that place a raven, and he had a dove; and the ark kept both these species safe: and if the ark signified the Church, consider certainly, because it is necessary in that time of the flood, that the Church kept both species safe, both raven and dove. Who are the ravens? Those who seek their own. Who are the doves? Those who are seeking the things of Christ.

The Old Latin biblical text accorded with his exegetical interpretation. Without the negative account of the raven’s behaviour, the passage would not accord with his proposed allegory.254

252 See also discussion in Marsden (1998), p. 77.
253 Aug., Ion., p. 54. Philippians 2.21 reads, omnes enim sua quaerunt non quae sunt Christi Iesu, ‘for all seek the things that are their own not the things that are Jesus Christ’s.’
254 The passage was treated similarly by Ambrose, who avoided discussion on the literal account of the passage, or its textual variations, in favour of a complex allegorical interpretation of the raven’s negative actions. For him the raven was the Christian who quaerenda causa, nec tamen latet quantum ad litteram pertinet ‘searches for blame, but, however, hides much of concern to account for,’ that is, the ‘sinfulness of penitent man,’ See Gatch (1975), p. 6.
As the passages from Jerome and Augustine indicate, different versions of Genesis 8:7 were in circulation in late antiquity. As well as the inclusion or exclusion of the negative particle, the tense of the two verbs of motion, *egredior* and *regredior*, were also subject to variation. In his *Liber quaestionum hebraicarum Genesim*, Jerome had quoted a redaction of the passage dissimilar to that found in other early Vulgate manuscripts. It stated the raven *egressus est exiens et revertens*, using the perfect of *egredior*, and employing the present participles *exiens et revertens*, in the place of *regredior*. Although this rendering stands apart from the Vulgate’s *egrediebatur et revertere*, Jerome’s inclusion of *exiens et revertens* as present participles also gave the impression of continual to and fro motion, as suggested in the Vulgate. 254 In contrast, however, the Old Latin versions tended to employ the form: *et exiens non est reversus*. 255 The present participle, followed by the perfect tense, does not suggest continual movement, but a defiant motion on the part of the raven, away from the ark. In *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* Augustine had used a similar version of this Old Latin recension, stating: *emissus corvus non est reversus*. 256 He included *revertere* as a perfect tense verb, and thus his exposition centred on the raven not returning. 257

Therefore it seems that there was a strong exegetical precedent for interpretation of the raven in Genesis 8:7 which focused on both the comparison of the raven’s failure to return with the dove’s more praise-worthy actions, and close analysis of the text. Following in the footsteps of Augustine, 258 Bede’s treatment of

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254 That the Hebrew is most accurately rendered by the Vulgate version, *egrediebatur et revertere*, see Marsden (1998), p. 77.
256 Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, PL 42.264.
257 The raven did not return, for Augustine states it found a corpse to float on. See later discussion on the cadaver theory, and Gatch (1975), pp. 5-6.
258 Bede acknowledges his debt to the Church Fathers in his *Historia ecclesiastica*. See Bede, *HEV*, 24, pp. 566-7.
the raven in his work *Libri quattuor in principium Genesis* presented a complex allegorical interpretation of ark, raven and dove, which centred on the raven leaving the ark and not returning:

Qui egrediebatur et non reuertebatur donec siccarentur aquae super terram. Non ait egressus est et reuersus est in arcam, sed egrediebatur, inquit, et non reuertebatur donec siccarentur aquae super terram, quia videlicet huic illucque volatu dubio uertebatur, modo abire incipientis, modo ad arcam uelut intraturus redivi, nec tamen fenestram unde egressus fuerat repetens, sed potius foris uagans usque dum remotis aquis requiem sibi ac sedem extra arcam repperiret. Cuius egressui atque itineri recte comparantur hi qui sacramentis quidem celestibus instituti atque imbuti sunt, nec tamen nigredinem terrae obelectionis exuentes, lata potius mundi itinera quam ecclesiasticae conuersationis claustra diligunt. 260

Which was going out and not returning until the water over the earth had dried. It does not say it went out and returned into the ark, but it was going out, it said, and not returning until the waters over the earth dried up, because one may see it turn its flight uncertain here and there, beginning to depart, just now as if returning to enter the ark. It is not however, returning to the window from whence it was going, but rather is wandering outdoors continually until a break in the waters, it rests itself and lights upon a seat outside the ark. Some fly and journey correctly in preparation, these who certainly are established and instructed in the heavenly sacraments, but however do not lay aside the blackness of earthly delights, considering rather the paths of the world than the cloisters of the ecclesiastic monastic life. 261

Here Bede has presented a typological scheme, whereby the ark signifies the Church, those inside the ark, the baptised, and the window through which the raven flies represents the sacraments of the divine mysteries, which the baptised must follow in

261 There is confusion in current editions of Bede's *Libri quattuor in principium Genesis*, as to whether he uses *non reuertebatur*, or not. Jones's CCSL version has it in the negative, and this is employed by Franklin (2003), p. 13. However, an error in the *Patrologia Latina* series meant that this version does not include the word *non*, stating instead that the raven *revertebatur*. This in turn led to the inaccurate statements of Gatch (1975), p. 5, that Bede keeps the positive reading, in opposition to Augustine. That Bede did include the negative version of the biblical account is verified by Jones (1967), p. iii, the text's most recent editor, who in reference to correcting errors in the work states 'the texts of the Scriptural passages, of course, present far more intricate problems, and in no instance have I departed from the consensus of Bede's manuscripts, whatever the apparent justification.' In describing the *Patrologia Latina*, the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* states: 'The intention was to choose for the new issues the best editions of each author, with suitable introductions and critical additions, which plan, unfortunately, was not always realised. The printing, too, was frequently unsatisfactory, and in most of the Migne reprints we find a number of misprints and errata.' See [www.newadvent.org/cathan/10290a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathan/10290a.htm), accessed 1st May 2006.
order to be initiated fully into the Church.\textsuperscript{262} Within this design, Bede interpreted the raven as symbolising those Christians who have been baptised, but are too easily seduced by earthly pleasures to follow the path towards Christ provided by the monastic life.\textsuperscript{263} Their path is one of indecision and wavering flight and they will not be received back into the Church through the window by which they left.

However, while Bede interpreted elements of the passage allegorically, he also grounded his interpretation in a detailed textual analysis. His elucidation differed from the examples of Jerome and Augustine, for it included the verbs \textit{egredior} and \textit{revertere}, those established by the Vulgate. He was also careful to put these verbs in the imperfect, so as to suggest the constant comings and goings of the raven. Furthermore, he deliberately cited an Old Latin version, \textit{non ait egressus est et reversus est} 'it does not say it went out and returned to the ark,' stating this was not the correct account of the bird's actions. However, rather than simply drawing attention to the differences, as Jerome did, Bede brought the frequent motion of the bird into his interpretation of this passage. He interpreted the raven's indecisive movements as signifying the Christian who does not follow the straight path towards Christ and salvation.\textsuperscript{264} Thus the textual variants in this passage, and specifically the Vulgate version of the verbs, provided Bede with further material for his exposition.

It is noteworthy, therefore, considering the attention he paid to the Vulgate forms of the verbs in this passage, that Bede did not choose to follow the Vulgate in the important question of whether the raven returns immediately or not. Instead, he stated that the raven \textit{non revertebatur}, as in the Old Latin recension. So Bede

\textsuperscript{262} For a discussion of the significance of the sacraments within Bede's writings see also O'Reilly (2001), especially p. 19.
\textsuperscript{263} More than any of the Church Fathers, it appears Bede was concerned to promote the virtues of life within the cloister. See Franklin (2003), p. 15.
\textsuperscript{264} The Jewish tradition, exemplified by the Middrash \textit{Genesis Rabbah}, drew significance from the indecisive motion of the raven, as suggested by the Hebrew verbs. See Cohn (1999), pp. 35-6.
combined readings from both Vulgate and Old Latin versions, in order to make his own adaptation of the account in which the raven did go back and forth, but also failed to return until the waters had receded. In so doing he created a unique rendering of this passage, which adhered to the Vulgate, but also cast the raven in a negative light.

Bede and the Textual Recensions of Genesis 8:7

In order to understand why Bede went to such pains to reconcile the two accounts it is necessary to examine his use of the Vulgate Bible and to assess what access he had to other versions of the biblical texts. The library at Wearmouth-Jarrow seems to have contained different versions of many of the biblical books, as well as a single pandect, which may have been a copy of Cassiodorus's codex grandior. Furthermore, the monasteries produced at least three complete Bibles during Bede's lifetime. The Historia Abbatum auctore anonymo recorded details of their commission and production. In his Historia Abbatum Bede expanded this, stating: ita ut tres pandectes nouae translationis, ad unum uetuslae translationis quem de Roma adtulerat, ipse super adiungeret, 'he [Ceolfrith] added three copies of the new translation of the Bible to the one copy of the old translation which he had brought back from Rome.' Here he emphasised that the biblical text produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow was the nouae translationis, that is, the Vulgate. One of these

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265 For an account of the creation of the Vulgate see Kamesar (1993), pp. 41-72. For the different biblical texts available to Bede see Marsden (1995), pp. 102-106.
266 For bibliography on this topic see Chapter One on doves, Chazelle (2003), pp. 129-157, and Meyvaert (1996), pp. 827-883.
267 HAA XX, 1, p. 395.
269 Franklin (2003), p. 5.
pandects has survived in the Codex Amiatinus, and is now the earliest complete copy of the Vulgate.\textsuperscript{270}

However, despite the esteem in which the Vulgate was apparently held at Wearmouth-Jarrow, Bede did not show complete deference to it. In fact, a substantial portion of his work reveals a preference for the Old Latin versions when quoting scripture directly.\textsuperscript{271} While this can be explained partly through his use of the writings of the Church Fathers, the situation, it seems, is more complicated. For example, in his \textit{Expositio Actuum apostolorum et retractatio} Bede described some of the problems he encountered with the different versions of Acts of the Apostles. He catalogues a number of errors that he has discovered in his exemplars, concluding however, \textit{namque Graecum exemplar fuisse falsatum suspicari non audeo} 'I hesitate to suppose that the Greek exemplar itself was a faulty one.'\textsuperscript{272} This implies that Bede was constantly aware of the different readings possible from separate recensions of the biblical text, and of the important role of the translator and redactor.\textsuperscript{273}

Bede’s writings indicate that he was a stringent textual critic. He based his interpretations on the biblical variants that he considered to be of greatest authority, or else which accorded with his chosen allegorical meanings. He departed from the Vulgate text on a number of occasions, particularly where he felt that retaining a different reading could be of greater significance to him and those for whom he wrote.\textsuperscript{274} It is in this context that the insertion of the word \textit{non} at Genesis 8:7 in the

\textsuperscript{270} See Marsden (1995), p. 140: ‘as our oldest complete Vulgate Bible and, for a majority of the individual Old Testament books, our earliest complete witness, the importance of Amiatinus in establishing the Hieronymian text can hardly be overstated.’
\textsuperscript{271} This is covered extensively by Marsden (1998), pp. 67-72. He provides examples from Bede’s work where he used the Vulgate text to a greater or lesser extent, and compares these with the version found in the Codex Amiatinus. The results indicate no more than sixty per cent agreement with Amiatimus.
\textsuperscript{274} See Marsden (1998), p. 73.
Codex Amiatinus, must be viewed. Recent studies have suggested that Bede may have had some influence upon both the textual and pictorial composition of this manuscript.\textsuperscript{275} Whether it was Bede's actual hand that penned the addition, or that of one of his fellow monks, his negative view of the raven's actions in the Genesis account was preserved, in direct opposition to the Vulgate reading.\textsuperscript{276} Bede appears to have reconciled the textual variants of Genesis 8:7 by combining the Vulgate forms of the verbs with the negative particle from the Old Latin. He must have felt this provided the reading which was of the greatest authority and which had greater relevance to the Anglo-Saxon audience for whom he wrote.

**Bede and His Treatment of the Raven**

Having established in *Libri quattuor in principio* Genesis which version of Genesis 8:7 would inform his work, Bede was able to extend his treatment of the raven, and this passage, in other exegetical works. In two additional works, his Homily on Matthew's Gospel, and *De tabernaculo*, he elucidated complex allegories based on the raven's failure to return.\textsuperscript{277} Whereas in *Libri quattuor in principio* Genesis he had related the raven's irregular flight to the baptised Christian's failure to follow a straight path towards Christ, in contrast these passages provided a further range of meanings:

\textsuperscript{275} Marsden (1998), pp. 78-9. That Bede may have contributed to writing the Codex Amiatinus is also proposed by Meyvaert (1996), p. 842, who suggests that Bede's handwriting may be evident in two of three division of scripture pages in the opening quire. His comments follow those of David Wright, 'Some notes on English Uncial,' *Traditio* 17 (1961), p. 452: 'one hand active in the diagram appears to have made a number of corrections throughout the Codex.' Marsden (1998), p. 79, examining the additions alongside the handwriting in the diagram pages concludes that: 'it is indeed very likely that some of the corrections in Amiatinus are by the same person who wrote the diagram script... these could be by Bede.' See also Chapter Four on peacocks, which argues that Bede's writings provide the most convincing backdrop against which to consider the illustrative material of the Codex Amiatinus.

\textsuperscript{276} Franklin (2003), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{277} For a study of Bede's use of allegory see Scott DeGregorio, 'The Venerable Bede on Prayer and Contemplation,' *Traditio* 54 (1999), pp. 1-39, especially p. 10.
Cum enim dominus in figuram futuri baptismatis originalis mundi scelerata diluuii aquis ablueret transacta inundatione scire volens Noe qualiter se facies terrae haberet emisit coruum, qui ad archam redire contempsit significans eos qui abluit licet unda baptismatis nigerrimum tamen ueteris habitum hominis emendatuis uiuendo deponere neglegunt.

When the Lord as a figure of future baptism cleansed wicked deeds at the origin of the world with the waters of the flood, as a figure of the baptism to come, Noah wanted to know how things stood on the face of the earth when the inundation had come to an end, and he sent forth a raven, which scorned to return to the ark, signifying those who, although they have been cleansed by the waters of baptism, nevertheless neglect putting off the very black dress of their old selves by living more faultlessly.  

Rather than discussing the textual variants of the passage, this work expounded the bird’s symbolism in more vehement terms. Here the raven represented not only those Christians who failed to follow the monastic way of life, but also those baptised people who ‘scorned’ the Church and continued to wear the ‘black dress’ of sin.

Bede’s treatment of the raven in De tabernaculo intensified this account still further:

The raven that went out of the ark and did not return, [signifies] those who after baptism fall away into apostasy; the branch of the olive tree brought into the ark by the dove, those who were indeed baptised outside (that is, among the heretics) but because they have the rich oil of charity are worthy to be brought into the catholic unity by the grace of the Holy Spirit; the dove that went forth from the ark and did not return again, those who fly to the clear light of the heavenly homeland when they are set free from the flesh, never to return again to the labours of the earthly pilgrimage.  

Here he has created a three-tiered system, wherein the doves are closest to salvation;

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the olive branch, symbolising those who were baptised in an unorthodox manner, but are still worthy of being embraced by the Church, follow them; and finally the raven, who represents those that 'fall away into apostasy,' are furthest from salvation. The raven represents those who have committed the ultimate sin and apostatised from the faith. Is it, then, significant that Bede portrayed these heinous sinners through the figure of the raven? Whereas Ambrose had described the raven as the penitent man who hides his sins, and Augustine portrayed it as, among others, the nominal Christian, Bede’s treatment of the bird as a symbol of an apostate who scorns God through desire for a black, earthly, sinful life, was significantly more dramatic.

Bede and the Cadaver Theory

In order to investigate how this negative attitude towards the raven evolved, it will be useful to outline a further tradition. Some of the writings of the Church Fathers suggest that the raven did not return to the ark because it found a corpse to float on. Gatch has termed this 'the cadaver theory.' An association between ravens and corpses was suggested by Isidore’s statement in his Etymologiae that the bird goes first for the eyes when feasting on carrion. However, he treated the subject at greater length in his Quaestiones in uetus Testamentum:


280 See footnote 254.

281 Of the Church Fathers, Jerome is the closest to Bede in his treatment of the raven, for he does describe it as ‘the foul bird of wickedness,’ which is expelled by baptism. See Cohn (1999), p. 31, and Jerome, Epistula LXIX, 6, Epistulae Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi - Pars I.Epistulae I-LXX, CSEL 54, ed. L. Hilberg (Vienna, 1910), p. 690.

282 Gatch (1975), p. 6. He states that the cadaver theory may have originated within Jewish circles. But this study has argued that rabbinate texts based their interpretations upon the Hebrew, with its verbs of continuous motion, thus calling this argument into question. This is also discussed in Rooth (1962), pp. 83-154

283 See above discussion.
Quod post dies quadraginta emissus corvus non est reversus, aut aquis utique interceptus, aut aliquo supernatante cadavere illectus, significat homines in immunditia cupiditatis teterimos, et ob hoc ad ea quae foris sunt in hoc mundo nimirum intentos, aut rebaptizari, aut ab his, quos praeter arcam, id est, praeter Ecclesiam baptismus occidit, seduci et teneri.\textsuperscript{285}

That the raven which was released after forty days did not return, either because somehow he was carried away by the waters or was enticed by some floating corpses, signifies most foul men, overwhelmed by the uncleanliness of cupidity and (because of that) overtly intent on those things which are external in this world, who are either rebaptised [i.e. if the raven drowned] or who are seduced and held by those people [i.e. the floating cadavers] whom baptism kills outside the ark, that is outside the church.\textsuperscript{286}

Isidore was not alone in endorsing the cadaver theory. Augustine’s \textit{Quaestiones in Heptateuchum} also provided an extended discussion, concluding \textit{quod cadaveri potuerit corvus insidere, quod columba naturaliter refugit}, ‘the raven might be able to sit on a corpse, but the dove by nature returned.’\textsuperscript{287}

Gatch suggests that Bede did not know the cadaver theory.\textsuperscript{288} However, a search of sources for Bede’s \textit{Libri quattuor in principium Genesis} reveals that he did know Isidore’s \textit{Quaestiones in uetus Testamentum}, and both Augustine’s \textit{Contra Faustum Manichaeum} and \textit{Quaestiones in Heptateuchum}.\textsuperscript{289} In fact, Bede appears to have been aware of this association, and while he did not refer to it directly, it may have affected his treatment of the raven. For example, he alluded to the cadaver theory in \textit{Libri quattuor in principium Genesis}, where he stated the raven \textit{sedem extra arcam repperiret}, ‘might light upon a seat outside the ark,’ echoing the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Isidore, \textit{Quaestiones in uetus Testamentum}, PL 83.233.
\item Translation from Gatch (1975), p. 12, note 18.
\item Augustine, \textit{Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri vii}, PL 34.551.
\item See footnote 261.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
accounts of Augustine and Isidore. Bede left space in his accounts for the cadaver theory, although he avoided connecting the raven directly with corpses.

After Bede, the association of Noah's raven with floating corpses became a distinctive feature of Anglo-Saxon literary and artistic renderings of this biblical episode.²⁹⁰ Alcuin followed Augustine in connecting this bird with corpses, and in his Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesin suggested it did not return to the ark:

Inter. 122. Quaeritur ubi corvus requieverit, si columba non invenit ubi requiesceret? Resp. Potuit corvus cadaveri cujuslibet animantis insidere, quod columba naturaliter refugit.

Question 122. It is asked where the raven might have rested, if the dove did not find anywhere it might rest. Response. The raven was able to sit on the corpse of whichever creature it pleased, while the dove by its nature flew back.²⁹¹

Indeed, Aelfric had his translation of Genesis illustrated with one of the most striking portrayals of the raven with a corpse in Anglo-Saxon England (Fig. 29).²⁹²

The cadaver theory also seems to have captured the imagination of vernacular authors. For example, Genesis A, preserved at folios 1 to 142 of the Junius Manuscript,²⁹³ reads:

Let þa ymb worn daga
þæs þe heah hlíodo horde onfengon
and æðelum eac eorðan tudres
sunu Lameches swærtne fleogan
hrefn offer heahflood of huse ut.
Noah tealdæ þet he on neod hine,
gif he on þære lade land ne funde,
ofer sid waeter secan wolde
on wæghele. Eft him seo wen geleah,
ac se feonde gespearn fleotende hreaw;
salwigfeðera secan nolde.\textsuperscript{293} 

Then after many days,
after the high cliffs had received the hoard
and also the nobles of the offspring of the earth,
the son of Lamech let the black
raven fly over the high flood out of the house.
Noah reckoned that in his greed [or of necessity?],
if he did not find land on his journeys
he would seek out the vessel over the wide water-way.
His supposition was afterwards belied,
because the enemy perched on floating carrion;
the dark feathered one did not seek out the ark.\textsuperscript{294} 

This poem, transmitted in a tenth-century manuscript, but dated to as early as the late
seventh to eighth century,\textsuperscript{295} gives an insight into attitudes towards the biblical raven
in the Old English poetic tradition. The description of the raven as \textit{se feonde gespearn}
fleotende hreaw 'the enemy perched on floating carrion' referred directly to the
cadaver theory. However, while the writings of Isidore, Augustine and Alcuin
suggested a connection between the raven of Genesis 8:7 and corpses, a further
tradition may lie behind this association. The poet of \textit{Genesis A} may also have related
this bird to cadavers because of its role in Old English poetry.

\textbf{Raven as a Beast of Battle}

Within the context of vernacular poetry, the raven, along with the wolf and the
eagle, was frequently cited as a beast of battle and was connected with the corpses of

\textsuperscript{294} Translation from Gatch (1975), p. 12, note 3.
those defeated on the battlefield. In previous scholarship, this theme had been viewed in opposing ways. Some have interpreted it as a literary flourish or convention, having no bearing on the accompanying narratives, while others have shown that each of the three beasts could carry separate meanings, and be employed to foreshadow specific themes, such as the threat of impending death. Indeed, it has been proposed that the raven may retain some of its pagan Germanic associations in these instances, and that it may even be recalling the warrior god, Odin (Fig. 30).

Certainly, the raven was employed as a beast of battle throughout Old English poetry, including poems with explicitly Christian subject matter, such as Exodus, from the Junius manuscript. Although no battle actually takes place here, the poet cited the raven and the eagle to suggest the threat of impending conflict with the Egyptians, the hare heorowulfas, 'hoary sword-wolves':

Hreopon herefugolas hilde grædig, deawigfe6ere ofer drihtneum, wonn wælceasega.

Birds of battle, greedy for the clash,
Flecked feathered, the dark scavenger of carrion
Screeched in wheeling flight after the corpses of the armies.


298 See for example, Edward D. Laborde, 'The Style of The Battle of Maldon,' Modern Language Review 19 (October, 1924), pp. 401-17. This is by no means the current thinking.
300 Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions (Syracuse, 1988), especially p. 98, and pp. 146-7, which discusses Odin’s two ravens, Huginn and Muninn. The raven is called wælceasega 'chooser of the slain,' in Old English poetry, which is equivalent to valkyrie in Old Norse. For the use of Old Norse texts as a lens for examining Germanic beliefs see Dronke (1996), p. 657.
The eagle and raven are also paired in The Battle of Maldon, which similarly deploys the birds to increase tension before the clash with the Viking aggressors, the waethwulfas ‘slaughter-wolves’. The beasts of battle theme frequently occurs at dramatic moments, in order to suggest conflict. For example, in Judith, the passage describing the raven, wolf and eagle, provides an ominous pause in the narrative, before the din of battle. It seems that, within Old English poetry, the raven functioned as an omen of impending doom or death, and its symbolism as a beast of battle may have had roots in the Anglo-Saxons’ Germanic past.

So could the raven’s role as a beast of battle, and its possible connection with pre-Christian beliefs, have affected Bede’s attitude towards this bird? It is notable that Bede does not associate the raven directly with floating cadavers, although this connection clearly caught the imagination of other Anglo-Saxon authors, writing in both Latin and the vernacular after him. Bede was certainly aware of the significance of certain pagan symbols and practices. As a result, he may have avoided connecting the raven sent out by Noah with corpses, because this in turn

304 D. Scragg (ed.), The Battle of Maldon, lines 106-7 (Oxford, 1991), p. 22. It has been suggested that the eagle, representing heroism and nobility, and the raven, providing an omen of impending death, are associated with the English troops because although they are noble, they will be defeated by the scavenging wolves, the Vikings. See www.vikinganswerlady.com/beasts.htm, accessed 21 October 2005.
306 Although the poems are preserved in later contexts, they provide evidence of earlier circulation. See Fulk (1992), especially pp. 2-3.
311 For example, in his De temporum ratione he explained the Anglo-Saxon names for the months of the year, revealing information such as that Solmonath was the month when cakes were offered to the gods, and Blodmonath was when cattle were sacrificed. Bede, De temporum ratione, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1977), pp. 329-332. See also Bede’s description of the destruction of the temple by Coifi in his Historia ecclesiastica, which reveals his knowledge that firstly, pagan temples were made of wood, secondly, a high priest was not allowed to ride a mare or carry arms, and thirdly, that casting a spear into a temple profanes it. Bede, HE II.13, pp. 184-5. See Meaney (1985), p. 9.
could have perpetuated the associations between this bird, the ravens of Odin, and the poetic theme of the beasts of battle.\footnote{While there is considerable debate over Bede's knowledge of vernacular literary traditions, this study will argue that Bede would most probably have known of the beasts of battle theme. Although none of his Old English material survives, that he composed literature in Old English as well as Latin is attested to by the account of his death. Cuthbert records a poem composed by Bede on the theme of the Last Judgement, which he introduces stating: \textit{et in nostra quoque lingua, ut erat doctus in nostris carminibus} 'and in our own language, as he knew our poems well, he would say....' See \textit{De Obitu Boedae}, ed. C. Plummer, \textit{Venerabilis Boaedae: Opera historica} (Oxford, 1896), I, p. cxxi. See also Michael Lapidge, \textit{Bede the Poet} (Jarrow, 1993), especially pp. 15-17, and discussion in sparrow's chapter.}

It seems therefore that Bede treated the raven in a specific way, choosing a vivid and didactically effective meaning that would fit with his audience's perceptions, and which could have been affected by the layers of symbolic meaning already attached to this bird in Anglo-Saxon England. It is possible that he avoided referring to the cadaver theory directly in his commentaries in order to keep the biblical raven separate from the bird's other symbolic lives. However, despite not connecting it directly with floating corpses, his treatment of the raven in Genesis 8:7 is distinctively hostile. He cast it as a symbol of the apostate and emphasised its reluctance to return to the ark, in contradiction to the Vulgate text. He thus revealed a particularly negative attitude, which may have its roots in the other meanings that he, and his contemporaries, could attribute to it.\footnote{This negative interpretation is reinforced by the evidence of the Codex Amiatinus, and the addition \textit{non}. See above discussion.} In his treatment of the raven, it may be possible to glimpse Bede's own comprehension and understanding of the symbolic life of birds.

**Ravens, Paul and Anthony**

One final aspect of the raven's symbolic life has to be considered in order to create a comprehensive impression of its significance in Anglo-Saxon England.

While the raven had an extensive presence in the Bible and patristic literature, it also
featured in saints’ lives, particularly in the story of Paul and Anthony, the first hermit saints.\(^{312}\) In Jerome’s account, a raven brought the two men a loaf of bread, in emulation of Elijah’s sojourn in the desert.\(^{313}\) Just as God had provided nourishment for his faithful servant Elijah in the desert, so the raven again acted as his messenger, and brought bread to the two saints, which they broke in imitation of Christ at the Last Supper.\(^{314}\)

It has been argued that eremitic monasticism was a distinctive feature of early Irish Christianity, in contrast to the community-based monasteries founded in Gaul and throughout mainland England.\(^{315}\) Whether or not this was indeed the case, the lives of Paul and Anthony, the hermit saints, were popular in the art and literature produced at Columban monastic establishments.\(^{316}\) They are referred to in a number of literary works and often employed as exemplars of the monastic life.\(^{317}\)

Furthermore, just as Jerome’s account describes how the two hermits broke bread by holding both sides of it,\(^{318}\) so these actions appear to have been emulated in the ceremony of *contractio*, which may have been performed in the monastery of

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Iona. In a practice most probably disseminated throughout all Columban monasteries, visiting priests were apparently invited to join the abbot in breaking the bread, after the example of Paul and Anthony. This event, along with the eucharistic and monastic themes it embodied, captured the imagination of Irish authors and artists.

Saints Paul and Anthony were depicted quite frequently on public monuments and sculptures, in both monastic and ecclesiastic sites (Fig. 31). Furthermore, it is a feature of all the identifiable instances of these characters in Irish sculpture that every example includes the raven. It is most frequently shown flying downwards, with its beak holding or touching the loaf of bread. A clear example occurs on the capstone of the late-eighth, early-ninth-century carvings of Muiredach’s cross, Monasterboice, Co. Lough, where the two saints are depicted with crosiers crossed, and the raven between them (Fig. 32). Individual details, such as the chalice in the midst of the figures legs, and the loaf placed directly above, recall the Eucharist, and perhaps also the action of confractio.

This iconography also appear to inform the scene at the top of the eighth-century Nigg stone, from Rosshire (Fig. 33). Although the monks are bent double in this scene, and carry books instead of crosiers, the chalice, bird and loaf all recall the scene at Monasterboice. It has also been suggested that the moment depicted is that of commixtio, when the priest inserts a portion of the bread into the wine, in

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319 The tradition is recorded in Adom., VC. I.44, p. 80. Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 157, shows how Adomnán deconstructed this practice in order to stress Columba’s deference to the authority of bishops.
320 The various examples are listed and described by Ó Carragáin (1998), pp. 45-51.
321 This cross has a dense iconographic scene. See Ó Carragáin (1998), pp. 22-31.
322 The Nigg stone contains details that do not occur in other examples of Paul and Anthony, namely two beasts crouched either side of the chalice. For an interpretation of these as the lions which helped to bury Saint Paul, see George Henderson, Art of the Picts: Sculpture and Metalwork in Early Medieval Scotland (New York, 2004), pp. 41-42, and pp. 139-140. See also Isabel Henderson, The Picts (London, 1967), p. 148. Ó Carragáin (1988), p. 11, interprets them in the light of the commentary of Habakkuk, where Christ will be recognised between two beasts.
order to symbolise 'the Church born from the side of Christ sleeping on the Cross.'

It seems, therefore, that the scene of Anthony and Paul breaking the bread sent by God through the raven, brought together a number of important themes. It could be seen to recall the breaking of bread during the Eucharist, and the ceremonies of confractio and of commixtio, one of which suggests monastic hospitality and equality, the other, Christ's body and blood, sacrificed for the salvation of humankind. Furthermore, the story of Paul and Anthony itself was recalled by this scene, and the fact that they were the first eremitic monks clearly appealed to the Irish church, with its propensity for ascetic piety.

It seems that Paul and Anthony receiving bread from the raven was a popular scene for depiction in Irish monasteries. There is, however, one notable example of the Paul and Anthony scene in Anglo-Saxon art, namely that on the mid-eighth-century Ruthwell cross, Dumfriesshire (Fig. 28). It differs from the majority of Irish and Pictish portrayals, for the two figures stand opposite one another, dressed in floor-length ecclesiastical robes, in the manner of a concordia apostolorum scene.  

Ó Carragáin has suggested that the Ruthwell artists have deliberately transformed a representation of concordia apostolorum into one depicting concordia monachorum, thus combining distinctly Roman imagery, with a theme of significance to their neighbouring churches in Ireland and Scotland. Nevertheless, one significant detail

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324 Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 160, suggests that a missing fragment from the loaf recalls the practice of confractio. However, recent work on the monument has shown this to have been later damage, rather than part of the original carving. Kellie Meyer, Per. Comm. June 2005.


326 The concordia apostolorum depicted Peter and Paul opposite one another, and symbolised, among other things, the inclusive nature of the Roman Church, open to Gentiles and Jews. For a discussion of this scene see Kees Veelenturf, 'Irish High Crosses and Continental Art: Shades of Iconographical Ambiguity,' in Colum Hourihane (ed.), From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and its European Context (Princeton, 2001), pp. 83-101, especially pp. 90-3.

327 Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 158. He suggests that the ceremony of confractio may be alluded to in the Ruthwell scene, and that the Anglo-Saxon monastic community there may have performed this rite as an extension of hospitality to visitors from Columban monasteries.
is missing from the depiction of Paul and Anthony on the Ruthwell Cross, namely the raven. This is a notable omission, given that every other scene on this side of the cross features a bird or beast.

The raven, it seems, was deliberately excluded. This could be because the artists wished to focus attention on the bread itself, and the act of breaking it. But given the propensity for including animals or birds in significant and meaningful ways on the Ruthwell cross, this alone cannot explain the exclusion of the bird. However, another reason may present itself in the light of this chapter. The range of negative connotations which the raven had acquired in Anglo-Saxon England by the eighth-century, as evinced in the works of Bede, Alcuin, and in contemporary vernacular poetry, suggests that including it as a symbol of God’s messenger may have been jarring to a Christian Anglo-Saxon audience. Perhaps for that reason the Northumbrian artists have avoided it, adding instead an inscription in place of the raven, in order to identify the scene as Paul and Anthony breaking bread. They were able to maintain the eucharistic and monastic symbolism of the scene, but excluded a bird whose symbolism could be potentially problematic in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England.

Ravens and Saint Cuthbert

In the light of this evidence, one final example of raven symbolism, originating within the Columban monastery of Lindisfarne and later reworked by Bede, has to now be considered. Book III of the late-seventh-, early-eighth-century

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328 There is no evidence that a bird was originally carved on this panel, and has been lost or damaged. See Ó Carragáin (2005), fig. 32.
329 Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 158.
330 See for example, the significance of the animals in the Christ in Majesty panel, discussed in Ó Carragáin (2005), pp 201-203.
anonymous life of Saint Cuthbert recounts an incident when the saint had retired to
the Isle of Farne, in the manner of a hermit. Like Paul and Anthony, Cuthbert also
had a miraculous encounter with ravens. During his stay on Farne, he was visited
by two ravens, which he had to reprimand for destroying the hay roof. The ravens
flew away, but returned, begging for forgiveness:

Seruus autem Christi intellegens penitentiam eorum, ueniam reuerendi
dedit. Illi uero corui in eadem hora perpetrata pace, cum quodam
munusculo ad insulam ambo reversi sunt, habens enim in ore suo quasi
dimidiam suis adipem ante pedes eius depositum.

And the servant of Christ recognising their penitence gave them pardon
and permission to return. And those ravens at the same hour having
won peace, both returned to the island with a little gift. For each held in
its beak about half a piece of swine's lard which it placed before his
feet.

The birds' gift to the saint recalls the story of Paul and Anthony, and the idea of the
raven as God's messenger, thus reinforcing the fact that Cuthbert was a bishop, a
saint, and a hermit.

After the translation of Cuthbert's relics and the rise of his cult, Bede was
commissioned to rewrite the anonymous life. He made some additions to the
original, but included the miracle of the ravens in a very similar form. This is
the sole and unique instance in Bede's writing where he presented the raven in a
relatively positive light. However, the small additions he did make reveal his attitude

31 B. Colgrave, Vita Cuthberti, III iii, Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of
Lindisfarne and Bede's Prime Life (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 98-9. Hereafter Colgrave (1940). Indeed,
Cuthbert's actions recall those attributed by Jerome to Saint Paul, on more than one occasion. For
example, with regard to the hermitages they constructed, Cuthbert could coelum uidercre nihil potuit,
'see nothing except the heavens above,' while Paul's cave was likewise walled around and 'open to
the sky.' See Christian Aggeler, 'The Eccentric Hermit-Bishop: Bede, Cuthbert, and Farne Island,'
32 Jerome, Vita S. Pauli, PL 23-25.
33 Colgrave, III iv (1940), pp. 100-1.
34 Colgrave, III v (1940), pp. 102-3.
35 See also Aggeler (1999), p. 21, who provides examples from the anonymous Life where Cuthbert is
compared to Saint Anthony, as well as Saint Paul.
36 Brown (2000), p 8, and Colgrave (1940), pp. 13-16. Bede was commissioned to write this life
around 721, by the monks of Lindisfarne, to whom he dedicates it. Bede, 'IC Prologue, pp. 142-3.
37 Bede added chapters 3, 6, 8-9, 19, 22, 31, 35, 43, and 46. See Colgrave (1940), p. 14.
towards these birds. For example, while the anonymous life stated simply that Cuthbert encouraged the ravens to leave, *praecipiens in nomine Iesu Christi de insular discedere* 'bidding them in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from the island,' Bede added a speech, in which Cuthbert himself angrily rebuked the birds, and he described their retreat in scathing terms:

_Sed illis imperium spernentibus, In nomine inquit Iesu Christi abite quantotius, neque in loco quem ledis ultra manere praesumatis. Uix uerba compleucerat, et confestim tristes abiere._

When they ignored his command, he said 'In the name of Jesus Christ, go away forthwith, and do not presume to remain any longer in the place that you are damaging.' Scarcely had he finished these words when they forthwith flew dismally away.

Furthermore, he included a moralising sentence at the end of the chapter, in which he stated that this miracle was significant, for it showed how, *auis superbissima iniuriam quam uiro Del intulerat, precibus, lamentis, et muneribus festinavit* 'even the proudest bird hastened to atone for the wrong that it had done to a man of God, by means of prayers, lamentations and gifts.' In contrast to the anonymous life, which concluded with the birds and saint living in harmony on the island, Bede subtly transformed the account, focusing instead on the lamentations of the *auis superbissima* 'proudest bird.' Despite the fact that he had been commissioned by the monastery of Lindisfarne, Bede was inclined to alter the raven story significantly, from one which recalled the miraculous intervention of God, and the story of saints Paul and Anthony, to one in which a sinful bird is brought to atonement.

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33v Colgrave, III.v (1940), pp. 102-3.
33x Bede, xx, IIC pp. 222-6. The difference between the chapter headings for this episode in both the anonymous Life and Bede's version, also indicates a greater level of hostility in Bede's account. His chapter in entitled *quomodo corri iniuriam quam uiro Del intulerat,* 'how the ravens atoned for the injury which they had done to the man of God.' In contrast, the Lindisfarne life reads: *De alibus exterminandis hierum que cum manusculo reversis beniam dehct,* 'concerning the driving forth of the birds and again how he pardoned them when they returned with a little gift.' Furthermore, Bede specifically names the birds as ravens, in contrast to his source.
33y Bede, xx, IIC pp. 225-6.
From the evidence of Bede’s writings, as well as the Ruthwell cross, it appears that, in eighth- and ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England, the raven was interpreted in a largely negative light. While the cadaver theory became widespread later in the following centuries, it seems that Bede, in contrast to Hiberno-Latin authors and artists, viewed the raven with suspicion. Whether this attitude developed in response to the bird’s pagan symbolism, or its role as a poetic beast of battle, is not possible to determine with certainty. But this chapter has attempted to present a range of evidence, from Bede’s exegesis, his *Vita Cuthberti*, and from the Codex Amiatinus, to illuminate how the negative treatment of the raven, which associated it with floating corpses, developed. While the Bible itself is ambivalent towards the raven, Bede, and the Northumbrian monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow and Ruthwell, actively removed some of this ambiguity, possibly under the influence of current local traditions associated with the bird. By casting it in a negative light, whether through manipulating biblical variants, or removing its association with saints, the Anglo-Saxons appear to have permanently altered the raven’s symbolic life.
CHAPTER III

THE SYMBOLIC LIFE OF EAGLES IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The eagle features frequently in both the art and literature of Anglo-Saxon England. In this respect it differs from the other birds discussed in this thesis, all of which tend to show a higher concentration of occurrences in either the artistic or literary record. Furthermore, the eagle was employed in both vernacular and Anglo-Latin literature, both 'secular' and 'ecclesiastical' artwork. Unlike the other birds, which this thesis argues have discernible symbolic lives reflected through a limited range of artistic or literary manifestations, the eagle has a more complex ambit of expression. It retained a number of symbolic meanings, interpretations, and representations, which co-exist between the sixth to ninth centuries.

In examining representations of the eagle in early Anglo-Saxon art, it appears that this bird developed at least two distinct artistic functions. In manuscript illuminations, sculpture, and metalwork, it was consistently employed as a symbol of John the Evangelist, and as one of the four apocalyptic beasts. In these instances the exact details vary, for example, whether the symbol is accompanied by an evangelist portrait, clothed with books and/or haloes, or is naked.

341 See for example, O'Reilly (1998), pp. 49-94.
342 In this thesis, the chapters on doves, ravens and sparrows employ a larger amount of literary evidence, while that on peacocks primarily analyses artistic examples.
343 For a discussion of the terms 'secular' and 'ecclesiastical,' see footnote 79 in Chapter One.
344 For example, examination of the dove in the literary record reveals a consistent symbolic life, associated with the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of baptism, alongside its connections with Saint Columba. It is employed almost exclusively in Anglo-Latin literature, and in 'ecclesiastical' art, such as manuscript illumination. See Chapter One on doves.
345 Within the art, an eagle will be identified by its characteristic hooked beak. As birds and animals are commonly broken down into abstract elements within some Anglo-Saxon art, it is this feature which seems to be consistently maintained in order to distinguish eagles from other birds. See Speake (1980), pp. 76-92.
Regardless of these variations in details, the context of most such eagles in Anglo-Saxon art enables them to be interpreted as evangelist symbols. Alongside this dominant use of the eagle, a less frequent artistic treatment also occurs. It features on armour and jewellery, such as the Sutton Hoo shield (Fig. 34) and the seventh-century pendant from Faversham, Kent (Fig. 35), in contexts that suggest a secular interpretation. It appears that these different types of symbolism could be employed simultaneously, as on the Ruthwell cross, which has both a triumphal eagle in the upper-arm, as well as an example, on its reverse, of the bird with John the Evangelist (Figs. 36 and 37).

These artistic examples were produced alongside literary works in which the eagle similarly performed a number of roles. While it was occasionally discussed as a symbol of John the Evangelist, or of the apocalypse, the extensive presence of the eagle as evangelist symbol in the art is not reflected in the literature. Indeed, while Anglo-Saxon authors, including Bede and Aldhelm, did refer to the eagle frequently in their work, it was rarely in its role as an evangelist symbol. Rather, it occurred regularly as a beast of battle within the vernacular literature, and in Anglo-Latin literature it represented a number of Christian themes, including the triumphal Christ, resurrection and ascension into heaven, the salvation of baptism, and both classical and mythological stories.

This chapter will begin by exploring different attitudes towards the eagle as evinced in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England, before discussing its presence in

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345 Even in instances where the eagle is not accompanied by the other three evangelist symbols (man, calf and lion), such as the Brandon plaque, it is still possible to identify it as an evangelist symbol. In the case of Brandon it is accompanied by an inscription, and holds a book and quill, thus clarifying its identity. See Webster (1991), plate 66a. See also discussion later in this chapter.
346 See later discussion.
347 The eagle had an extensive presence in classical art and literature, where it was often associated with Zeus. See Littleton (2002), p. 156.
the artistic record. Examples of the eagle as a symbol of John the Evangelist in early Northumbrian art, particularly the Lindisfarne Gospels, Codex Amiatinus, and Cuthbert coffin, will be investigated. Previously unrecorded anomalies in these representations will be examined for what they reveal of the originality and orthodoxy of the Northumbrian church. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion of the Ruthwell cross, which seems to combine a range of eagle symbolism.

This chapter will argue that the Ruthwell cross-head, and other instances of the eagle from the seventh to tenth century, provide evidence that Anglo-Saxon artists and authors were conscious of how they employed this bird as a symbol. It will also propose that distinctions were made with regards to the eagle’s different symbolic lives, and that it was employed in specific contexts in order to emphasise one, or a number, of its symbolic meanings. Furthermore, it is the intention of this chapter to support the claims made in the introduction to the thesis, that a symbolic ‘vocabulary’ of birds had been developed in Anglo-Saxon England, which was understood and consciously employed throughout the art and literature.

The Eagle as an Evangelist Symbol in Patristic Literature

Before examining the use of eagle symbolism by Anglo-Saxon authors, it is appropriate to briefly outline its presence in biblical and early Christian literature. In the Bible itself, although the eagle featured in both the Old and New Testaments, nowhere was it directly associated with John the Evangelist. Rather, the four beasts that came to be related to the individual evangelists are those described in

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349 This is also proposed in Chapter Four on peacocks, where the bird’s symbolic meanings appears to be nuanced depending on which medium it is executed in, and what context it occurs in.
350 See for example, Lev. 11:13; Matt. 24:28; Exo. 19:4.
visions of the apocalypse, as recounted in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel and Isaiah, and in Revelations. In Ezekiel's vision the four beasts were combined in the guise of one figure:

similitudo autem vultus eorum facies hominis et facies leonis a dextris ipsorum quattuor facies autem bovis a sinistris ipsorum quattuor et facies aquilae ipsorum quattuor

And as for the likeness of their faces: there was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side of all the four; and the face of an ox, on the left side of all the four: and the face of an eagle over all the four.

The apocalyptic vision in Revelations, however, differed in a number of ways from the Old Testament account, not least in its portrayal of the beasts. Rather than appearing combined as one figure, they were described as four separate creatures. Nevertheless, while the accounts differed in details, both identified these four beasts as the lion, man, calf and eagle, and presented them as witnesses of the Second Coming of the Lord, at the Last Judgement.

Although the symbolic associations of each of these apocalyptic beasts were not entirely fixed within the biblical texts, by the fourth century patristic writers had begun to identify them with the four evangelists. As O'Reilly has highlighted, the connection between the four creatures and a number of quaternities, for example, the four corners of the world and the four winds, is established in Revelations. Indeed, as early as the second century Irenaeus employed the four beasts, as well as other quaternities found throughout the universe, to reveal the inherent unity of the four

331 Ezek. 1:5-10, Is. 6:3 and Rev. 4:6-8. See also Dan. 7:4.
332 Ezek. 1:10.
333 Rev. 4:4-5, e.g. inclusion of the twenty-four elders and the seven lamps.
334 Rev. 4:7.
336 Rev. 7:1 described four "angels" standing on the corners of the earth, holding the winds. See O'Reilly (1998), p. 54.
gospels. However, in contrast to the pairings that became commonplace by the fifth century, Irenaeus had associated the man with Matthew, the eagle with Mark, the calf with Luke, and the lion with John.

It was Jerome, in his *Plures Fuisse*, who developed the associations between beast and evangelist that were to become widely accepted in the West. Furthermore, in other texts he created connections between each of the beasts and the opening sections of the gospels. This linking of John the Evangelist with the eagle and the opening words of his gospel was also drawn out by other patristic writers, including Augustine. However, it is of significance that in his work *De consensu Evangelistarum*, a text which greatly influenced Bede’s commentary on the apocalypse, Augustine criticised the practice of assigning a beast to an evangelist according to the first line of the gospel. He instead proposed a different ordering, based on the entire texts of the gospels, connecting the man with Mark, the lion with Matthew, the ox with Luke and the eagle with John.

Gregory the Great followed Jerome’s example and related the beasts to the opening sentences of the gospels. But his treatment extended the associations of the eagle to also include the apocalyptic visions of Ezekiel and Revelations, as well as

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358 See later discussion.
359 The significance of *Plures Fuisse* in the prefatory material of insular manuscripts is discussed in O’Reilly (1998), p. 53. Jerome assigned the man to Matthew, the lion to Mark, the calf to Luke and the eagle to John.
360 His approach can be discerned in Jerome, *Adversus Iouinianum*, PL 23.247-248.
363 Augustine, I.6.9, *De consensu Evangelistarum libri iv*, PL 36.1041.
364 Augustine did in fact accord with Jerome’s ordering in a number of his works. In *De consensu Evangelistarum* he stated that the alternative arrangement he proposed was based on the works of other Christian writers. This appears to show that, at the time Augustine was writing this work there was a good deal of debate and disagreement between exegetes as to the exact pairings of beasts and evangelists.
the opening words of John's gospel. His approach was given its fullest treatment in his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, a text widely disseminated in Anglo-Saxon England.  

He provided an account of the opening lines of each gospel, pairing each with a specific beast:

Nam quia ab humana generatione coepit, iure per hominem Mattaeus; quia per clamorem in deserto, recte per leonem Marcus; quia a sacrificio exorsus est, bene per vitulum Lucas; quia vero a divinitate Verbi coepit, digne per aquilam significatur Iohannes, qui dicens, *In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum.*

For because it begins with the human generations, deservedly through the man (is signified) Matthew; because through shouting in the desert, rightly through the lion (is signified) Mark; because it is beginning with a sacrifice, rightly through the calf (is signified) Luke; because it begins in truth with the divinity of the Word, worthily John is signified though the eagle, who says, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.'

These texts indicate that, by the seventh century a tradition had been established in the writings of the Church Fathers which connected the eagle of the apocalypse with John the Evangelist and the opening words of his gospel, although some alternative explanations still circulated. Literature concerning the four evangelist symbols was copious and each of the Church Fathers in turn dealt with these creatures at length, associating them with a range of quaternities. This enabled a large number of themes, from the four rivers of paradise to the four natures of Christ, to be represented by these beasts. It now remains to examine how these traditions were received and interpreted in Anglo-Saxon England.


366 The works of Irenaeus and Augustine, which were widely disseminated during the fifth to seventh centuries, contained two different arrangements for the beasts, as discussed above. For the significance of these arrangements to the eagle on the Cuthbert coffin, see later discussion in this chapter.

The Eagle as an Evangelist Symbol in Anglo-Saxon Literature

The aforementioned writings of the Church Fathers, were known in Anglo-Saxon England, with a large number of insular gospel manuscripts containing copies of one of Jerome's texts in particular. The association of the man symbol with Matthew, the lion with Mark, ox with Luke, and eagle with John, was widely established in the West by the sixth century, and its endorsement by Jerome and Gregory no doubt ensured its proliferation in Anglo-Saxon art and literature. It is interesting, therefore, given his great respect for Gregory the Great's writings, that Bede presented a different order for the beasts and evangelists in his commentary on Luke's gospels:

\[
\text{nde mihi uidentur, inquit, qui ex apocalipsi illa quattuor animalia ad intellegendos quattuor evangelistas interpretati sunt probabilius aliquid adtendisse illi qui leonem in matheo hominem in marco uitulum in luca aquilam in iohanne intellexerunt quam illi qui hominem matheo aquilam marco leonem iohanni tribuerunt.}
\]

From which it seemed to me, he said, that from the apocalypse the same four beasts might be understood as the four evangelists, and might to some extent be interpreted, and plausibly be applied, to those, so that the lion accords with Matthew, the man with Mark, the calf with Luke, the eagle with John, and the same are also interpreted so that the man is assigned to Matthew, the eagle to Mark, the lion to John.

In this account Bede presented the association of evangelist and beast as described in both Augustine's *De consensu Evangelistarum*, and Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*. He knew and used Gregory's *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* widely, but chose in this instance to provide alternatives to Gregory's interpretation. However, it attests to the

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369 Discussed in O'Reilly (1998), pp. 52-3.
370 The evangelists and their symbols became the most frequently depicted images in insular gospel books, see O'Reilly (1998), p. 49.
371 See for example, discussion in Thacker (1998), p. 75.
373 Bede first includes discussion of Augustine's arrangement of the beasts in his commentary on the apocalypse, see discussion in Ó Carragáin (1994a), pp. 398-436.
374 See footnote 365.
widespread acceptance of the traditional ordering, that he was on the receiving end of sharp criticism from Bishop Acca for even discussing alternative associations for the beasts.\textsuperscript{374}

Bede’s writings indicate that, while the eagle as an evangelist symbol was prevalent in Anglo-Saxon England, it was perceived by him at least to still be subject to some fluidity in its association with John the Evangelist. He was confident in his use of birds like the dove, which were given an orthodox and established range of associations by the Church, through proceedings such as the Council of Constantinople in 536 A.D.\textsuperscript{375} But the eagle had not been the subject of such treatment, and although a tradition had emerged which associated it with John the Evangelist there was considerable variety in the works of patristic authorities like Irenaeus and Augustine. Had the symbolic association between John and the eagle been inexorably established, it is unlikely Bede would have included this discussion in his work for fear of being accused of heresy.

While Bede does occasionally discuss the eagle as an evangelist symbol in his writings, in contrast to Gregory the Great, he does not often emphasise this aspect of its symbolic life. This is notably different to the Hiberno-Latin literature circulated in Irish ecclesiastical centres.\textsuperscript{376} A high proportion of Hiberno-Latin texts produced especially in Irish monasteries, featured extensive discourse on the four evangelist symbols.\textsuperscript{377} Cronin has argued that this is due to an interest in

\textsuperscript{374} See Bede, \textit{Luc.} Prologue, p. 6. This is, in fact, one of the few occasions when Bede records having been challenged over his writings. While Acca is critical of Bede’s use of Augustine’s arrangement, he encouraged Bede to expound this arrangement, rather than simply employing it in his work unexplained. This indicates that alternative arrangements were not simply dismissed, but explanations were sought.

\textsuperscript{375} See discussion in Chapter One on doves.


numerology in the Hiberno-Latin tradition, for these writers employed the four beasts in discussions of a wide range of quaternities.379 The four evangelists were interpreted as symbolically representing the four rivers of paradise, the four elements, the four natures of Christ, to name but a few.380 Hiberno-Latin commentators brought their own unique range of interpretations and understandings to the four beasts, and the high proportion of references to evangelist symbols in their literature appear to have been mirrored in the pieces of artwork originating in the same centres (Fig. 38).381

Yet, in contrast to the Hiberno-Latin literary examples, the eagle’s significance as an evangelist symbol was not given extended discussion in Anglo-Latin literature. This is also exemplified in the works of a contemporary Anglo-Saxon writer, Aldhelm.382 Bede and Aldhelm focused on other aspects of the bird’s symbolism, like its ability to regenerate when flying into the sun.383 It now remains to discuss the parts of the eagle’s symbolism that developed alongside its associations with John the Evangelist, in order to determine the range of symbolic meanings available to the Anglo-Saxon authors and artists.

381 Discussed in O'Reilly (1998), pp. 89-94. She examines the lozenge-shapes employed in the Book of Kells, alongside the four symbol pages in order to determine how the quaternities discussed in Hiberno-Latin literature were represented within Irish art.
382 He significantly avoided connecting the eagle with either the apocalyptic visions or John the Evangelist, focusing instead on its role in classical mythology and as a symbol of baptism. See later discussion.
The Eagle’s Other Symbolic Meanings

Early Christian literature, like the *Physiologus* texts, ensured that the eagle acquired a variety of symbolic meanings. Certain of the eagle’s natural habits were interpreted in the light of Christian themes, including baptism and resurrection. The *Physiologus* also employed biblical quotes, including Psalm 103:5: *innovabitur sicut aquilae inventus tua* ‘your youth will be renewed like the eagle’s,’ in order to explain why, when it ages, it ‘flies up into the atmosphere of the sun, and burns away his wings and the dimness of his eyes, and descends into the fountain and bathes himself three times.’ This association, and others based on biblical quotes and patristic exposition, were transmitted to Anglo-Saxon England through encyclopaedic works, such as Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*:

Aquila ab acumine oculorum vocata. Tanti enim contuitus esse dicitur, ut cum super maria inmobili pinna feratur nec humanis pateat obtitus, de tanta sublimitate pisciculos natare videat, ac tormenti instar descendens raptam praedam pinnis ad litus pertrahat. Nam et contra radium solis fertur obtutum non flectere; unde et pullos suos ungue suspensos radiis solis obicit, et quos viderit inmobilem tenere aciem, ut dignos genere conservat; si quos vero inflectere obtutum, quasi degeneres abicit. 387

The eagle is so called due to the sharpness of its eyes. Indeed, it is said that so great is its gaze, that when its wing bears it motionless over the water, and it is not accessible to human gazes, yet from so greatly high a point it is able to see small fishes swimming, and in the likeness of a missile dropping and grabbing its prey, it drags it to the shore. And on the other hand it bears its gaze against the sun’s ray, and does not bend it; from whence, suspending its chicks from its claw, it presents it to the sun’s rays, and if it looks at it immobile and hold its gaze, then it preserves its worthy birth; and truly if it bends its gaze, it throws one away as if inferior.

384 See footnote 121 for the specific set of problems associated with the *Physiologus*.
385 Quoted from Curley (1979), p. 12.
386 For example, Deut. 32:12 describes how the eagle takes its young upon its wings when they are ready to fly.
Such accounts of the eagle's behaviour, as well as its varied representations in the Bible, provided patristic writers with much to expound.388

Bede was aware of the eagle's many occurrences in the Bible, and also of the actions associated with it through texts like *The Physiologus* and Isidore's *Etymologiae*. In his exegetical work on the book of Samuel he not only discussed the significance of the eagle's nest in terms of the responsibilities of the church,389 but also examined the eagle's regeneration.390 Furthermore, his near contemporary Aldhelm, recorded, not only *The Physiologus* account of the eagle's renewal in a stream, but also its roles in classical myths:

Armiger infausti iouis et raptor ganimedis
Quamquam pellaces cantarent carmine uates
Non fueram prepes quo fertur
Sed magis in summis cignos agitabo fugaces
Arsantesque grues perturbo sub aetheris axe;
Corpora dum senio corrumpit fessa senectus
Fontibus in liquidis mergentis membra madescunt;
Post haec restauor preclaro lumine phebi;

The shield-bearer of unlucky Jove and the abductor of Ganymede
So the false prophets named me in their poems,
But I was not the bird who stole away that son of Troy;
Rather I put the swans to flight, high in the air
And scatter the honking geese beneath the vault of heaven.
When age has tired my worn body with feebleness,
I wash my limbs, immersing them in clear streams.
Afterwards, I am renewed in the clear light of Phoebus.391

Aldhelm's account indicates that early Christian Anglo-Saxon authors could embrace the multivalence of the eagle as a symbol.392 By including references to both its classical background, and its association with baptism, as outlined in the *Physiologus*

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388 The eagle occurs at a number of salient points in the Bible. For example, it is employed to represent God's protection of his people when they left Egypt in Ex. 19:4, and is a symbol for the regeneration of youth in Psalm 103:5.


392 See Ó Carragáin (1994a), p. 418, and discussion in Introduction on 'multivalence.'
texts, Aldhelm emphasised that he, like Bede, did not perceive the eagle as simply a symbol of John the Evangelist.  

One final aspect of the eagle's symbolic life which is worth considering in this chapter, and which no doubt influenced the art and literature produced in sixth to eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England, was its role as a beast of battle. Old English poetry, although surviving predominantly in manuscripts dating from the tenth century, consistently included the eagle as one of the three beasts of battle. It has been argued in the previous chapter that the background to this poetic theme may have influenced Anglo-Latin literature such as the writings of Bede, where it affected the symbolic life of the raven. It is possible that Anglo-Latin writers were similarly aware of the eagle's role as a beast of battle, and its range of secular and vernacular associations. Therefore, its significance in Old English poetry may have ensured that the eagle continued to be viewed as a secular image, associated with war and warriors, into the tenth century.

These examples indicate that, unlike other birds such as the dove, which had a clear and defined symbolic life, associated with a limited range of symbolic meanings, the eagle retained a number of classical, biblical, and patristic connections. Indeed, in a work attributed to Bede, this bird is described as having *multiformem significationem*, 'many types of significations.' While the most prolific example of eagle symbolism in Anglo-Saxon art is as an evangelist symbol,
the literary evidence from the seventh and eighth centuries suggests that a number of other symbolic meanings were circulating concurrently.

The Eagle in Early Christian Art

The previous discussion has outlined the different symbolic associations that the eagle had acquired in patristic and Anglo-Saxon literature. However, in order to understand the artistic treatment of the subject, it is not only necessary to consider the wide variety of literary traditions, but also the artistic manifestations that had been established in early Christian art generally. There were two main iconographic types. The first type, as evinced in the fifth-century triumphal arch mosaics of Sancti Cosmas e Damiano, in Rome, shows the eagle half-length, with wings, halo and book, emerging from a cloud (Fig. 39). The four beasts process inwards, accompanied by the seven candlesticks, towards a lamb with the seven-sealed book. In a similar composition, four half-length beasts with haloes, carrying books, process around the vault mosaic of the late-fifth, early-sixth-century Cappella Arcivescovile, Ravenna, accompanied by the four winds (Fig. 40).

Similarly, in the late-fourth-century mosaics from Santa Pudenziana the beasts are shown half-length emerging from clouds, surrounding an enthroned depiction of Christ in Majesty, against the backdrop of the heavenly Jerusalem (Fig. 41).

400 Lowden (1997), fig. 66.
401 See Krautheimer (2000), fig. 36. The heavenly Jerusalem, populated by the apostles, appears to have been based on the geography of the earthly city, for the mosaic seems to place Christ and the apostles within the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Such artistic treatment of Jerusalem may have been intended to refer to the common belief that Christ’s Second Coming would take place on Golgotha. See Karen Armstrong, ‘The New Jerusalem,’ *A History of Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (London, 1996), pp. 174-193.
Although these beasts are not carrying books, their arrangement around Christ in Majesty and the fact that they emerge from clouds, reinforces that they are of a similar type. Likewise, the fifth-century mosaic vault of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, also shows the four creatures half-length, in this instance within the four corners of the dome in a starry sky, surrounding a jewelled cross (Fig. 42).  

In contrast to these half-length beasts, another type of representation occurs in the sixth-century mosaics at San Vitale, Ravenna (Fig. 43). Although this type is not so prevalent, the beasts are depicted full-length with no attributes. They are each shown above an evangelist portrait, where the accompanying characters gaze towards the beasts overhead. Furthermore, each evangelist portrait is surrounded by sacramental imagery, such as the urn overflowing with vine, depictions of the sacrifice of Isaac (Fig. 44), Abraham feeding bread to the three angels (Fig. 45), Abel's offering of a lamb and Melchisedek's of bread on the north and south presbytery walls (Fig. 46). None of the creatures are haloed, carry books, or emerge from clouds. From these different examples it appears that two artistic traditions had developed in fifth and sixth-century Italy, whereby the four biblical beasts were depicted as either half-length with some or no attributes, or full-length without attributes. However, the context of these symbols indicate that the different types were considered as distinct, and employed in separate scenarios, to represent particular aspects of the beasts' symbolic value.

The half-length type is often accompanied by other symbols described in the Book of Revelations, such as the seven-sealed book, and the lamb. Furthermore, the

\[\text{\footnotesize 402 Lowden (1997), fig. 63.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 403 Lowden (1997), fig. 78.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 404 See Chapter Four on peacocks for a full discussion of this iconography.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 405 See discussion in Lowden (1997), p. 131.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 406 For a discussion of Anglo-Saxon pilgrimages to Rome, and the possible routes by which such imagery may have entered England, see Ó Carragáin (1994b), pp. 3-6, and discussion in Introduction.} \]
fact that they are shown processing around, or towards, an image of Christ in
Majesty, or a Majestic Cross, indicates that these beasts are meant to represent the
witnesses of the Last Judgement, as described in Revelations 4:7. Their emergence
from a cloud, and their representation against a sky or starry background, suggests
that they are appearing in the heavens at the moment described in the New Testament
account. This differs from eastern works, like the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels,
which seem to have favoured depicting the beasts according to Ezekiel's account
(Fig. 47). Consequently they show the beasts combined, with the wheels described
in Ezekiel 1:16, whirling beneath. But Roman artists, in contrast, depicted the four
creatures separately, as part of the apocalyptic account of Revelations.

However, the books that the four beasts are holding in the Cappella
Arcivescovile mosaic, and the four corners that the half-length creatures from the
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia inhabit, indicate that their association with the four
evangelists is also being suggested in these representations. As discussed above, by
the fifth-century the apocalyptic beasts of Revelations and Ezekiel were also
understood as representing the four evangelists, taking the gospels to the four corners
of the world. But the presence of other apocalyptic symbols in the majority of those
images featuring half-length beasts, suggests that this type primarily signifies the
witnesses of the Last Judgement.

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406 Rev. 7:1. The four 'angels' standing on the corners of the earth, holding the winds. This passage
may well have influenced the iconography of the vault mosaic of the Cappella Arcivescovile, in
Ravenna Cathedral, which shows four angels standing in the corners, in the manner of the four winds,
as depicted in the vault at San Vitale.
407 The Rabbula Gospels, c.586, folio 13v, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Cod. Pluteus 1,
409 While the reference to the gospel writers suggests the relevance of the witness borne of the New
Covenant of Christ by the evangelists in the light of the Second Coming, this is of secondary
importance.
The context of the full-length beasts suggests that they are to be interpreted differently. Their proximity to portraits of individual evangelists implies that it is this aspect of their symbolism that is being emphasised. The fact that they are surrounded by sacramental imagery also indicates that it is the spreading of the gospel to the four corners of the world, as well as the receiving of the sacraments, that are the premises of the Christian faith being stressed in these mosaics. Therefore, by the sixth century a tradition appears to have emerged which cast the eagle in two guises, as an apocalyptic beast, and as an evangelist symbol, in two separate ways, half-length or full-length. Both these types were transmitted to Anglo-Saxon England, but it remains to examine how Anglo-Saxon artists interpreted these representations.

The Eagle in Anglo-Saxon Art

A brief examination of eagles in early Christian art suggests that they were most frequently included to symbolise either Christ's second coming at the apocalypse, or John the Evangelist. This is certainly the case in Anglo-Saxon England, where the eagle is regularly depicted either accompanying the other three creatures, evangelist portraits, or both. But rather than being distinguished according to half-length or full-length types, the situation in Anglo-Saxon art is more complicated.

Images of the evangelists and their beasts were introduced into Anglo-Saxon England by the early seventh century, perhaps with the first wave of missionaries.


\[412\] See Kitzinger (1956), pp. 230-239.

\[413\] The man, lion, ox and eagle are among the most frequently depicted symbols in insular manuscripts. See O'Reilly (1998), p. 49.
from Rome.\textsuperscript{413} A portrait of Luke the Evangelist, accompanied by a calf, precedes his
gospel in one of the earliest surviving manuscripts, the St Augustine Gospels (Fig.
48).\textsuperscript{414} This manuscript, which was most probably produced in Italy in the second
half of the sixth century,\textsuperscript{415} shows the beast half-length with wings and a book,
emerging from a semi-circular frame above a portrait of Luke.\textsuperscript{416} It appears therefore,
that in Italy by the late sixth century the half-length apocalyptic beasts evident in the
mosaics at Sancti Cosmas e Damiano had been conflated with evangelist portraits in
gospel-book illuminations.\textsuperscript{417} Bede stated that in 680 A.D. Benedict Biscop brought
back from Rome \textit{imaginex visions apocalypsis Beati Iohannis} ‘scenes from Saint
John’s vision of the apocalypse,’ to decorate the north wall of St Peter’s church,
Wearmouth.\textsuperscript{418} While he makes no mention of the exact details of these images,
given the proliferation of apocalyptic visions in the apse mosaics of Roman and
Ravennite churches, all of which featured half-length beasts, it is not unreasonable to
assume that the half-length type may have also entered England through imported
apocalyptic scenes.\textsuperscript{419}

\textsuperscript{413} See Richard Marsden, ‘The Gospels of St Augustine,’ in Richard Gameson (ed.), \textit{St Augustine and
\textsuperscript{414} The Gospels of St Augustine, sixth-century,folio 129r, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS
286. See Webster (1991), plate I, pp. 17-19. See also, Francis Wormald, \textit{The Miniatures in the Gospel
of St Augustine, Corpus Christi College MS 286} (Cambridge, 1954), plate II.
\textsuperscript{415} Richard Gameson, ‘The Earliest Books of Christian Kent,’ in his \textit{St Augustine and the Conversion
of England} (Stroud, 1999), pp. 313-373, especially p. 318. He argues that the manuscript was most
probably produced in Rome, although southern Italy, and Naples have also been proposed.
\textsuperscript{416} It is regrettable that the portrait of John the Evangelist has not survived, as it is not possible to
reconstruct the eagle with any certainty.
\textsuperscript{417} The conveying of these half-length beasts from Italy to England by Anglo-Saxon pilgrims, may
explain the transmission of this type of half-length beast to England. For a discussion of Anglo-Saxon
pilgrimage see Levison (1998), pp. 36-45.
\textsuperscript{418} Bede, \textit{HA} 1.6, pp. 369-70, trans. p. 192.
\textsuperscript{419} Ernst Kitzinger, ‘Interlace and Icons: Form and Function in Early Insular Art,’ in R. Michael
Spearman and John Higgitt (eds.), \textit{The Age of Migrating Ideas; Early Medieval Art in Northern
Britain and Ireland} (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 3-15. Hereafter, Kitzinger (1993). He proposes that the
scheme described here by Bede places ‘iconic’ images of Mary and the Apostles on panels in the apse,
while narrative scenes taken from the gospels and the apocalypse, ran the length of the north and south
walls.
The half-length type of beast featured in Anglo-Saxon manuscript illumination, as well as stone and ivory carvings, between the seventh and ninth centuries. For example, the ninth-century Royal Manuscript, like the Augustine gospel miniature, depicts the evangelist symbols half-length (Fig. 49). It retains further evidence of a possible apocalyptic source, for the beast is emerging from a cloud. Other half-length examples, like the ninth-century cross-head from Otley, West Yorkshire, show only one or other of the beasts, but they would probably originally have been accompanied by the other three creatures. It is also likely that they were arranged around an Agmus Dei or a depiction of Christ in Majesty. However, while the half-length version of the beast does occur in Anglo-Saxon art, it is by no means depicted as frequently as the full-length type.

In contrast to the half-length type, full-page, naked evangelist symbols are found in a number of insular manuscripts, including the late-seventh-century Book of Durrow (Fig. 50) and the eighth-century Echternach Gospels (Fig. 51). Given their prevalence in Irish manuscripts, it is possible that this type was widespread in the ecclesiastical centres of Ireland, and that these ‘naked’ symbols were developed

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423 See later discussion of the Hoddom cross heads.
from a specific source imported into the insular world. Similarities have also been noted between these full-length types and the Pictish eagles, sculpted throughout the sixth to ninth centuries, as for example, on the eighth-century Brough of Birsay stone, from Orkney (Fig. 52). Furthermore, in the early-ninth-century Book of Kells (Fig. 53), the creatures are contorted, so that their hind legs rest on the floor, giving the impression that they are walking upright. Such 'humanising' of the symbols has been traced to Eastern Mediterranean examples, as opposed to Roman or Western representations. Whatever their origin, these full-page symbols frequently occur in those manuscripts identified as having been produced in Irish, or Columban, monasteries.

A final type occurs alongside these half and full-length types, namely zooanthropomorphic evangelist symbols. The early-ninth-century Brandon plaque conflates an evangelist portrait with the eagle symbol, so that the figure has the classical bust of a human, with a bird's head (Fig. 54). In this case, the eagle appears in isolation, although it would, most probably, have been accompanied by the other three symbols, perhaps as elements of a manuscript cover.

Zooanthropomorphic evangelists also occur on the mid-ninth-century cross shaft from Ilkley, West Yorkshire (Fig. 55), and on the tenth-century shaft from Halton,

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426 For a discussion of the relationship between the Book of Durrow and the Echternach Gospels, see Henderson (1987), pp. 57-99. It has been suggested that they were derived from Egypt, and that the Book of Durrow had a Coptic manuscript as its exemplar. However, Werner's suggestion (1969), pp. 9-10, that the Durrow symbols had a Coptic source is not entirely convincing, given its dependence on a single eleventh to thirteenth-century example.


428 Note also the triple-crusiform halo of the eagle in the four-symbols page of the Book of Kells, folio 27v, Trinity College, Dublin, MS 58. See later discussion.


430 For a description and analysis of the Brandon plaque see Webster (1991), p. 82.
Lancashire (Fig. 56). The ninth-century cross-shaft at Sandbach, Cheshire, depicts the four creatures with human busts and carrying books, arranged around the crucifixion of Christ (Fig. 57).

With the various types of evangelist symbols outlined, it remains to discuss whether each iconographic type can be seen to reflect a different symbolic meaning, as with the half-length and full-length symbols from Rome and Ravenna. This does not seem to be the case in Anglo-Saxon art, for each instance appears to have a different meaning depending on its context and the medium in which it is executed. Roughly speaking, it seems that, in the majority of cases, the manuscript illuminations (not surprisingly) stress the connection between the eagle and John the Evangelist, while the sculpture, particularly when placed in cross-heads, emphasises the beast’s apocalyptic associations.

The Codex Amiatinus Majestas scene aside (Fig. 58), evangelist symbols are consistently placed as illustrative prefaces to each gospel in insular illuminated manuscripts. They not only provide a visual focus for the gospel book to follow, but Ó Carragáin has also suggested that they were involved in Traditio Evangeliorum, performed during the Lenten liturgy of Apertura aurium. This

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431 For a discussion of the evangelist panels on these cross shafts see Cramp (1978), p. 126.
432 See Jane Hawkes, Sculpture on the Mercian Fringe: The Anglo-Saxon Crosses at Sandbach, Cheshire, 17th Brixworth Lecture (Brixworth, 2003), fig. 8. In insular art the symbolic beasts are often made to look more human, for example, the symbols in the Book of Durrow are arranged so they stand more upright. See Werner (1969), pp. 3-17.
433 Such a distinction, naturally, provides an over simplistic account of the material. For example, when depicted in the cross arms at Hart, the beasts carry books, in reference to the gospels, while four-page manuscript illuminations, such as those in the book of Kells, may also contain apocalyptic connotations. See O'Reilly (1998), pp. 89-94.
434 The notable exception to this in the manuscript illumination is the Codex Amiatinus, which depicts the four symbols in relation to both individual evangelists and Christ in Majesty. See O'Reilly (2001), pp. 13-4 and fig. 6.
435 It is possible that they were included in order to aid with rumination. See Leclercq (1982), pp. 89-95, and Mary Carruthers, 'The Arts of Memory', in her The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 122-155.
436 The influence of the liturgy upon Anglo-Saxon art has been discussed by Éamonn Ó Carragáin in a number of articles. The Apertura Aurium forms the focus of Ó Carragáin (1994a), pp. 398-414.
ceremony, which took place in the fourth week of Lent, was designed to prepare the catechumens for baptism and present them with the gospels. Ó Carragáin discusses how the service required gospel books to be carried the length of the church and a homily on each of the symbolic beasts to be read to the congregation.\textsuperscript{437} He suggests that it may have been as part of such a ceremony that the full-page evangelist symbols were included in insular gospel books, as they could be shown to the catechumens when they received their instruction on the unity and individuality of the gospels.\textsuperscript{438} It is clear that this ceremony was known in Anglo-Saxon England during Bede’s lifetime, for he mentions it twice in his works.\textsuperscript{439} With this in mind, these evangelist portraits appear to have performed a functional role, by allowing the individual viewer to focus on the evangelist and his gospel during the service.

The four beasts of the apocalypse, in contrast, would provide a suitable decorative and iconographic scheme for a cross-head. While they are not always depicted half-length, like the apocalyptic type found in the mosaics of Rome and Ravenna, each symbol could fit into one of the four cross arms, around a central depiction of Christ or the \textit{Agnus Dei}. This is not to say that they cease to function as evangelist symbols. In fact, on the Ruthwell cross-arm, the eagle is depicted alongside an evangelist portrait (Fig. 37). But examples such as the ninth-century cross-head from Hart, Durham, show the beasts with attributes, centring around a haloed lamb, thus recalling the iconographic scheme of the mosaics at Sancti Cosmas e Damiano (Fig. 59). Furthermore, a representation of the Second Coming was entirely appropriate as a major part of the iconographic programme of a monumental cross.\textsuperscript{440} The inclusion of these symbols in the arms of the cross-head is

\textsuperscript{437} See also Ó Carragáin (2005), especially pp. 144-5.
\textsuperscript{438} Ó Carragáin (1994a), pp. 403-4.
a uniquely insular solution to a unique type of monument, for they had no precedent for such sculptural high crosses.\textsuperscript{441}

However, regardless of the rough division between sculptural and illustrated examples, the eagle is consistently employed in a number of works to signify a range of symbolic meanings simultaneously in accordance with the principle of 'multivalence.'\textsuperscript{442} The late-eighth-century Wirksworth Slab, Derbyshire, provides a good example (Fig. 60).\textsuperscript{443} The eagle is represented as half-bird and half-man, robed and holding a book, in the lower left-hand section of a cross. The inclusion of book and gown create an association with John the Evangelist. However, the placing of the Majestas Agni, crouched in the centre of the cross, suggests that this scene may also represent the apocalyptic vision of Revelations 4:4-5.\textsuperscript{444} Furthermore, its positioning against the backdrop of a cross may suggest the crucifixion, and that the evangelists were witnesses to Christ's life and death on earth, just as the apocalyptic beasts will be his witnesses at the Last Judgement. The insertion of the eagle in its guise of evangelist symbol allows for these, and a range of associated textual and liturgical references to be recalled by viewers of this work. It seems, therefore, that in some instances the eagle was employed in Anglo-Saxon art as a multivalent symbol, designed to recall biblical, patristic and liturgical concepts simultaneously.


\textsuperscript{442} See quote and discussion in Introduction. See also Éamonn Ó Carragáin, 'Christ Over the Beasts and the Agnus Dei: Two Multivalent Panels on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses,' in Paul E. Szarmach (ed.), \textit{Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture} (Kalamazoo, 1986), pp. 377-403. Kitzinger (1993), p. 10, prefers the term 'conflation' to 'multivalence,' for he sees a number of meanings as deliberately brought together and interdependent on one another.

\textsuperscript{443} The slab has been dated to anywhere between the seventh and the eleventh centuries. For a discussion on its date and iconography see Hawkes (1995), especially p. 262.

The Eagle Alongside the Other Evangelist Symbols

Before we move onto three major examples of the eagle in Northumbrian art, it remains to briefly discuss the order in which the four beasts occur when they feature in the same image or manuscript. Beginning with the manuscript illuminations, the ordering of the symbols in some insular gospel books, was subject to some variety. This is most obvious in the Book of Durrow, where the four full-page evangelist symbols are ordered according to Irenaeus’s assignment of symbol to evangelist; so the man symbol is placed before Matthew’s gospel, the eagle before Mark, the ox before Luke, and the lion before John.445 This contrasts with the majority of insular manuscripts, which follow the order set out by Gregory and Jerome. The four beasts are also arranged differently on the four-symbol page in the book of Durrow (Fig. 61), where they follow the order man, eagle, ox, lion, while the Lichfield gospels positions the beasts in the order, man, lion, eagle, ox (Fig. 62).446

Turning to the sculptural cross-heads, it seems that there was also variety in the organisation of the four beasts.447 However, something which does occur frequently in the ordering of the symbols in Anglo-Saxon sculpture is that the prime position, often in the upper arm of the cross-head, is regularly reserved for the eagle. The pre-Norman cross-heads that retain the upper arm all have an eagle within them, namely the ninth-century arm from Ilkley, West Yorkshire, the tenth-century cross

445 The fact that the incipit for each of the following gospels is inscribed on the back of the symbol pages indicates that this order was the intended arrangement. See Werner (1969), p. 3.
447 For example, the lowermost arm of the Ruthwell cross, appears to show Matthew accompanied by his symbol, the man, while the cross head from Hart has Mark on the right, and Luke below. See Cramp (1978), p. 123.
arm from Aycliffe, Durham (Fig. 63), and the eighth-century fragments from Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire (Figs. 64 & 65).\footnote{Discussed in Cramp (1978), p. 126.} The remaining cross-head fragments from other monuments, such as those from Otley, West Yorkshire, Hart, Durham, and the late-eighth, early-ninth-century cross at St. Andrew Auckland, Durham (Fig. 66), have other evangelist symbols in the surviving arms, which suggests the eagle still took the dominant position.\footnote{See Cramp (1978), pp. 122-30. While these crosses are all pre-Norman, their dates vary.} The position of the eagle in the uppermost arm, therefore accords with the vision described in Ezekiel, in which the eagle is said to be ‘over all the four.’\footnote{Ezek. 1: 10. Although exegetes did not often stress this fact, Bede did emphasise that the eagle alone out of the four beasts, soars to the heavens. See previous discussion.}

Furthermore, this can be seen as evidence for the originality of Anglo-Saxon artists and sculptors, for while the manuscripts could be copied from exemplars, the sculpture required interpretative decisions.\footnote{See Hawkes (1999a), pp. 213-5.} By putting the eagle in the top arm, they were according with Ezekiel’s account, and creating an original solution to their new type of Christian art. So it appears from the evidence of both the sculpture and the manuscript illuminations, that the order in which the four evangelist symbols were arranged was subject to some change. The one major consistency, however, is that, in the sculptural cross-heads, and indeed, in the Majestas page of the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 59), the most privileged position is reserved for the eagle.\footnote{The eagle is at the top right-hand corner of the illumination.}

**Eagles in Eighth-Century Northumbria**

There are three notable examples of eagle symbolism, close in date and provenance, which require more detailed examination at this point. These are the late-seventh-century Cuthbert Coffin (Figs. 67 and 68), Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 58),...
and Lindisfarne Gospels (Fig. 69).\(^4\) There are a number of elements in the representations of both the eagle and John the Evangelist in these three works which appear to reveal, not only that there were common artistic traditions practised at both Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow,\(^5\) but also that these monastic establishments shared a common interest in eagle symbolism and the interpretation of evangelist symbols.

In examining folio 209v of the Lindisfarne gospels (Fig. 69),\(^6\) and folio 796v of the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 58),\(^7\) it is clear that the eagle evangelist symbols on both are very similar to one another. Both have large yellow feet with three black claws and deliberately almond-shaped eyes, emphasised by a yellow corner. In these respects, they closely resemble the full-length evangelist symbol depicted in the eighth-century Echternach gospels (Fig. 51). Furthermore, the almond-shaped eye and large clawed foot of the eagle on the Cuthbert coffin lends credence to those studies on these Northumbrian works which have attempted to show common sources for all three and an artistic interdependence between the monasteries of Wearmouth-Jarrow and Lindisfarne.\(^8\)

Before considering meaning, it is useful to look at the range of sources that might have informed the artist’s intention or reader’s rumination. In determining what their sources may have been, it appears that all three works were influenced by

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\(^4\) The earliest of the three is probably St Cuthbert’s Coffin, with the maximum possible age difference with the Lindisfarne Gospels being 23 years, since Eadfrith was bishop of Lindisfarne between 698-721, and the relics were reportedly transferred in 698 under his predecessor Eadberht. The Codex Amiatinus was written under Ceolfrith between 679 and 716. See Kitzinger (1956), pp. 299-301.


\(^7\) For a colour plate of the Codex Amiatinus page see Webster (1991), plate 88.

\(^8\) See Chapter Four on peacocks and discussion in Brown (2000), p. 8. See also, Bede, *VC* Prologue, pp. 142-3 in which he states *uestro rogatu composui* 'I have composed at your request.'
depictions of full-length evangelist symbols. However, all the eagles are haloed and bear books, in contrast to the naked type frequently represented in insular manuscripts such as the Echternach Gospels. In particular, the symbols of the Lindisfarne Gospels indicate that the Anglo-Saxon artist/s consulted at least two sources: one with full-length evangelist symbols, and one with the creatures depicted in their role as apocalyptic witnesses (Figs. 70, 71 and 72).\textsuperscript{457} Two of the symbols, the man and the lion, bear trumpets, while the bottom half and tail of the man and eagle are missing, suggesting that they may have been derived from a half-length apocalyptic source.\textsuperscript{458} Furthermore, by accompanying a depiction of Christ in Majesty, inhabiting the four corners of the field, bearing haloes and carrying books, the eagles in both the Majestas scene and on the coffin lid, imply that their roles as both an apocalyptic beast and symbol of John the Evangelist are being equally emphasised.\textsuperscript{459}

However, alongside the eagles, there are also a number of similarities between the depictions of John the Evangelist in the two manuscripts. The John portrait in the Lindisfarne Gospels reflects that of Christ in the Codex Amiatinus (Figs. 73 and 74).\textsuperscript{460} The posture is identical, down to the positioning of the feet, with the right one turned in slightly. Furthermore, the hair colour and length is similar, and even the cushion and throne upon which they both sit are analogous. The portrait of John in the Lindisfarne Gospels is distinct from the other evangelist portraits, for he faces the viewer, with a scroll instead of a book, falling loosely from his hand. Moreover, the eagle and John in the Lindisfarne gospels are distinguished from the

\textsuperscript{457} See Brown (2003), p. 353.
\textsuperscript{458} The possible symbolic reasons for these choices will be discussed later in the chapter.
\textsuperscript{459} While the Cuthbert Coffin lid does not actually depict each of the evangelists, the symbols are labelled with each of their names.
\textsuperscript{460} These similarities are discussed in Kendrick (1960), pp. 158-173.
other evangelist portraits in a number of details, most notably their red haloes, and the fact that he alone does not write, but extends his open hand. Furthermore, the eagle stares outwards and upwards from the page, unlike the other three, which stare directly at the viewer.

These features set the eagle and John the Evangelist apart from the other evangelist portraits and it is clear that a similar distinction is made in the Codex Amiatinus. While the other three evangelists hold their gospel books with a covered hand, John's hand is uncovered and disproportionately large. This is also the case on the Cuthbert Coffin (Fig. 75), where, of the twelve apostle portraits on the side of the coffin, John alone holds a book with his bare hand.\(^{461}\) The other apostles show variety in the number of fingers they hold up in relation to their books, but John is the only one whose hand is completely extended. Furthermore, unlike the other apostles, whose cloaks encircle the outstretched arm, John's arm is free, thus drawing even greater attention to his hand. Kitzinger states that this is a stylistic error on the part of the carver, but the deliberate cuff at the end of the arm implies that it was intentional.\(^{462}\) Indeed, that all three have large, open, raised hands may in fact be intended as a gesture of speech, emphasising the fact that John alone of the evangelists, was said to have spoken his gospel as opposed to written it.\(^{463}\) Therefore, in all three of these works certain distinctions have been made which set John and his eagle apart from the other evangelists and their symbols.


It is possible that the subtle variations in representation, which seem to emphasise John and his eagle in these Northumbrian works, may be indicating the special role of this evangelist and his gospel in early Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, particularly in the monasteries of Wearmouth-Jarrow and Lindisfarne.\textsuperscript{464} For example, in the account of Bede's death attention is drawn to the fact that his last act was to translate John's gospel into the vernacular, while Cuthbert's teacher, Boisil, similarly died having read this gospel in the last weeks of his life.\textsuperscript{465} Furthermore, a leather-bound copy of John's Gospel was placed into Cuthbert's coffin.

Recent scholarship has suggested that the 'cult of St John' became so advanced that this evangelist and his symbol could be depicted in isolation from the other gospel-writers.\textsuperscript{466} This does not appear to have been the case in seventh- to ninth-century Northumbria, however, for in all surviving representations of the evangelists and their symbols from this period, the harmony of the four gospels was a matter of great concern. The canon tables and concordances that preface the majority of insular gospel books testify to the desire to unite rather than divide the evangelists.\textsuperscript{467} Nevertheless, accounts indicate that John's gospel did carry a special significance within Northumbrian monasteries, and it seems that, through small artistic details those at work on these important pieces of art were able to draw attention to this evangelist. Furthermore, by the ninth century, in the Book of Kells for example, insular manuscripts were clearly emphasising the eagle and St John; of

\textsuperscript{464} See discussion in Hamburger (2002), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{465} The significance of John's Gospel to the church in Northumbria is discussed by Brown (2000), pp. 11-12.
\textsuperscript{466} The Corpus entry on the Bewcastle cross discusses the possible interpretation of the lowest scene as depicting John and his eagle, Bailey and Cramp (1988), pp. 61-72, although this is not now held to be the case, see Ó Carragáin (2005), pp. 41-47. See also discussion in Hamburger (2002), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{467} See discussion in O'Reilly (2001), pp. 11-14.
the four symbols depicted on folio 27v (Fig. 15), the eagle alone is shown with a triple cruciform halo, an attribute usually reserved for Christ. 469

But while there are similarities between both the eagles and John the Evangelist on all three of these Northumbrian works, the eagle symbol on the Cuthbert Coffin (Fig. 76) also has a significant detail that distinguishes it from the two manuscript representations. It is unique among the artistic examples in showing the bird open-mouthed. Mark’s lion was often shown with its mouth open, in reference to the opening lines of his Gospel, described by Sedulius in his fifth-century work *Carmen Pascale: Marcus ut alta fremit vox per deserta leonis*, ‘Mark as the high voice of a lion clamoured through the desert.’ 470 In contrast, the eagle is never depicted open-beaked, other than on the coffin. While the eagle resembles that of the Lindisfarne Gospels and Codex Amiatinus enough to suggest a common source for all three, 471 the artist at work on the coffin appears to have deliberately made the eagle’s beak larger, and given it a pronounced curve to the end. 472 In light of the previous discussion on the significance of John’s gospel, the open-beaked eagle could perhaps be emphasising his importance as a gospel writer.

However, there may be another reason for this choice of the distinctive representation of the eagle with an open beak. As noted above, the lion of Mark was often depicted with its mouth open, in accordance with Jerome and Gregory’s associations with the opening lines of his gospel, where the lion is the voice crying in

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469 The triple cruciform halo occurs frequently in depictions of Christ from early Christian and Anglo-Saxon art, see for example, the *De Mulliere Peccatrice* panel of the Ruthwell cross, Ó Carragáin (2005), fig. 28.


471 The evangelist symbols on the Cuthbert coffin are also interesting in that they are reared up on their back legs like those in the Lichfield gospels and Book of Kells, thus perhaps emphasising a debt to ‘Irish’ exemplars.

472 In his discussion of the eagle on the top of the Ruthwell cross, Ó Carragáin (2005), pp. 143-146, states that the bird’s large beak is emphasised in order to refer to its habit of renewing its youth, by wearing down its overgrown beak on a stone. See discussion below. It is not clear that this interpretation can be applied to the Cuthbert coffin.
the wilderness. In Bede’s writings he often made a connection between the eagle and the lion. For example, in his commentary on Samuel he stated:

Sed et per quattuor animalia designatur saluator sicut per hominem et uitulum incarnationis et immolationis humilitatem ita etiam per leonem et aquilam fortitudinem uoluit ac sublimitatem suae resurrectionis atque in caelos ascensionis indicari.

However, through the four animals are designated the saviour; just as through the man and calf thus is the incarnation and humility of sacrifice, likewise through the lion and eagle that wished to arise to a high place might be shown his resurrection and his ascension into heaven.

Furthermore, he also emphasised the loudness of the eagle’s voice in his *Expositio Apocalypseos*, which he stated was like a trumpet. It is within this same work that Bede recorded the different patristic traditions of both Augustine and Irenaeus, who swapped over the eagle and lion, stating ‘that the man is assigned to Matthew, the eagle to Mark, the lion to John.’

According to Irenaeus’s arrangement the eagle, and not the lion, would have an open mouth, for it would represent Mark’s gospel and ‘the voice that cried out in the wilderness.’ In this context, it is worth recalling that the Book of Durrow, possibly the earliest surviving insular manuscript, preserves this ordering of the evangelist symbols that precede each gospel book, and although the eagle does not have an open beak, it does introduce Mark’s gospel. It is possible that the Cuthbert

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474 Bede, *Samuel* III.17.946, p. 159.
476 Bede, II.12, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, ed. R. Gryson, CCSL 121A (Turnhout, 2001), p. 337: *In gutture tuo sit tuba quasi aquila super domum domini, id est grandi uoce praedica Nabuchodonosor ad destructionem templi venturum* ‘your throat it might be a trumpet, just like the eagle above the house of the Lord, it is proclaiming in a loud voice the coming of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of the temple.’ Based on Hosea 8:1: ‘set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle.’
477 See previous discussion.
478 It is possible that this tradition, represented by Irenaeus’s writings and the sequence of the evangelist portraits in the Book of Durrow, represent an earlier version of the evangelist symbols, perhaps brought to Ireland earlier than the Augustine mission, and from a source other than Rome. Could it be that the open-beak of the eagle symbolically refers to this early Irish tradition?
Coffin symbols were copied from an insular gospel book, which depicted the eagle as the symbol of Mark, with an open beak. The artists of the Cuthbert Coffin, while transferring the open beak from their artistic source, may have been conscious to follow Jerome’s ‘Latin order’ and consequently added the inscription, *Iohannes*, beneath the eagle. There could, however, be a greater degree of choice involved in this artistic detail, for the open beak of the eagle could also be seen as visually recalling the alternative tradition, established in the writings of Irenaeus and discussed by Bede. By including the open beak, the Lindisfarne artists could subtly be indicating their knowledge of these different traditions.

That such visual reminders of the differing patristic traditions behind the evangelist symbols could be provided in insular art may be supported by the Lindisfarne Gospels. Of the four beasts, only the man and the lion have trumpets (Figs. 70 and 71). Brown has suggested a number of reasons for this, including the possibility that these two might have been derived from a different source to the eagle and calf. However, in the light of the open-beaked eagle on the Cuthbert Coffin, another explanation could lie in Bede’s discussion of the four beasts. In his aforementioned work, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, Bede described, not only Irenaeus’s arrangement, but also that of Augustine, which attributed the man to Mark and the lion to Matthew. It is possible that the trumpets, like the open mouths on the Cuthbert Coffin, are symbolic references to the ‘voice in the wilderness.’

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479 The eagle is, however, also distinguished by its red halo. See previous discussion.
480 Brown (2003), p. 363, has proposed this, stating: ‘linking symbols of Matthew and Mark by apocalyptic trumpets, may become explicable when it is considered that Bede favoured the less usual association, promoted by Irenaeus, of the lion with Matthew and the man with Mark. Lindisfarne adopts the more orthodox ordering of the symbols, but may be acknowledging this pairing.’ Brown has mistakenly identified this ordering as that of Irenaeus, while it is, in fact, that of Augustine’s *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, but her premise is supported by this chapter’s findings.
It appears that the trumpets may have been copied from an ‘apocalyptic’ image, which depicted the symbols half-length. However, it is also clear that a certain degree of choice has been exercised as to which of the symbols will retain the apocalyptic trumpets and which will follow the proposed full-length exemplar. It may be no accident that the man and lion, both of which could represent Mark’s Gospel, have trumpets. Consequently, the evidence of the eagle on the Cuthbert Coffin alongside the trumpet-bearing man and lion in the Lindisfarne gospels, may support the theory that the artists at work on these pieces were aware of the differing traditions as expounded by their fellow Northumbrian, Bede, and were careful to include visual references to the orders proposed by Augustine and Irenaeus. However, the labels that are employed on both the Cuthbert Coffin and in the evangelist portraits of the Lindisfarne Gospels emphasise that the final ordering which both these works endorsed is that of Jerome and Gregory.

An extensive amount of work has been undertaken to examine the role of the evangelist symbols in Anglo-Saxon art and literature, but rarely have the symbols been viewed in isolation. However, by isolating the eagle and examining its range of depictions, this study has endeavoured to bring a new dimension to recent investigations. As was outlined earlier in this chapter, the eagle had also acquired a number of different symbolic lives in both the art and literature of Anglo-Saxon England. While its role as an evangelist symbol has been discussed in some detail, it is pertinent to also briefly examine the other range of symbolic meanings that this bird had acquired.

The connection between the eagle and the sacrament of baptism, as discussed in the writings of Isidore, Bede and Aldhelm, may also be discerned in Anglo-Saxon art, such as a tenth-century cross-head from Durham (Fig. 77). It appears to show an eagle, surrounded by the sun and the moon and with a branch in its beak, above a baptism scene. While it is a little late for inclusion in this survey, it does suggest that an iconography of the eagle as a symbol of baptism was certainly available by the tenth-century in Anglo-Saxon England. However, there may be an analogous representation in the upper-arm of the eighth-century Ruthwell cross, which suggests that this symbolism may well have been established earlier. It now remains to discuss this other major instance of eagle symbolism in Anglo-Saxon art, namely the Ruthwell Cross.

The Eagles on the Ruthwell Cross

The cross is currently assigned a date in the early- to mid-eighth-century, and in the uppermost arm are two depictions of an eagle (Figs. 36 and 37). On the current south side, the eagle is inserted to the left of the fragment, alongside a man holding a book. The eagle points with his claw to the book, and turns his hooked

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482 See previous discussion.
484 Pictured in Ó Carragáin (2005), figs. 30 a-c.
485 While this bird has been identified as an eagle by Coatsworth (1978), p.88, there are also grounds for identifying it as a dove, namely the object which it carries in its beak, which could be in reference to the branch found during flood account in Genesis. The inclusion of a dove would also be consistent with its depiction above a baptism scene. See discussion in Chapter One on doves.
486 The most recent full study of the cross and the eagles in the upper shaft, is Ó Carragáin (2005). He discusses the eagle specifically at pp. 137-149.
488 See Ibid. plates 11 & 20.
beak towards the man’s head. The scene is surrounded by the remains of a Latin inscription, which has been read as the opening lines to John’s gospel: *in principio erat verbum.* On the other side is another eagle, with the remains of a runic inscription around the border. While it is now too worn to be distinguished, a reading has been put forward, based on eighteenth-century illustrations of the cross, which indicates that this may have been a dedicatory inscription. Its head faces to the right and it sits with its left foot resting on a stylised plant, while its right is curled up beneath it. There are clear differences between the two birds, probably due to the need to insert another figure into the scene on the southern face, but both are unmistakably eagles.

It has recently been proposed that the upper fragment was incorrectly attached to the inserted transom and needs to be rotated 180 degrees. This would situate the eagle alongside a figure holding a book, above a similar pair of figures in the lowermost arm, where a winged man accompanies a book-holding figure. With this in mind, and given the inscription around the scene, it is possible to identify the two remaining cross arms as depictions of Matthew the Evangelist with his symbol the man, and John with the eagle. The Ruthwell Cross is unique among surviving Anglo-Saxon cross-heads in presenting the symbols alongside the evangelists in its arm, as the others all show the beasts in isolation.

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488 The eagle has been rather awkwardly inserted into the cross arm, with his body twisted, in order that it may point with its talon at the book.
492 See discussion in Cramp (1978), pp. 118-130.
As discussed above, the inclusion of the four beasts in sculptural cross heads appears generally to have been intended as visual representations of the Last Judgement. But in the case of Ruthwell, the deliberate inclusion of the evangelist figures recalls instead a composition like that of the Codex Amiatinus. As O'Reilly has argued:

The Amiatinus's single unified design makes an important theological statement. The earthly evangelists and the heavenly creatures all turn to the central image of Christ, who holds a book, identifying the incarnate Christ, revealed in the Gospels, with the glorified Christ adored by the heavenly host... the design also suggests the harmony of the Old and New Testaments.\(^{494}\)

The eagle's apocalyptic associations are of significance in this scheme and yet there is still emphasis on the connection between evangelist, symbol, and gospel. The two traditions, from the Old Testament and the New, are purposely combined to give an apocalyptic image, which is also connected with the living role of the church to spread the word of God to the four corners of the earth.

Based on the analogous scene in the Codex Amiatinus, it seems probable that the centre of the cross head would have featured either a depiction of Christ in Majesty or an *Agnus Dei*, similar to those discovered at Hoddom (Figs. 78 and 79).\(^{495}\)

However, given that the scene occurs directly above a representation of John the Baptist with the *Agnus Dei*,\(^{496}\) a central lamb would repeat the iconography, so it is more probable that there would have been a representation of Christ in Majesty (Fig. 80). Such an apocalyptic image would thus complete the iconographic scheme of the north side, which includes John the Baptist with the lamb, and Christ over the beasts.

\(^{494}\) O'Reilly (2001), p. 11. The similarities between the Christ in Majesty page of the Codex Amiatinus and the cross head at Ruthwell may add further credence to the suggestion that this cross is connected with the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. See Cramp (1978), p. 127.

\(^{495}\) See above discussion of the *Agnus Dei* with regards to Wirksworth. For Hoddom, see Ó Carragáin (2005), figs. 14 a & b.

\(^{496}\) See Hawkes and Ó Carragáin (2001), p. 146.
(Fig. 81), scenes which focus on the role of John as a witness of the second coming, and on Christ as Judge. It is in this context that the evangelist symbols appear to function on the cross head.

Returning to the eagle on the other side of the upper arm, this bird would originally have been positioned above the figure of an archer firing an arrow from a square satchel. This fragment gives a unique representation of the eagle in Anglo-Saxon art and while the evangelist symbol on its reverse appears to have a clear set of symbolic associations, this eagle has been far less convincingly interpreted. One of the more persuasive arguments is that of Farrell, who interprets the eagle in the light of Psalm 90. According to him, the archer, alongside a fragment identified by Cramp as a ‘fowler’ (Fig. 64), are included in reference to this psalm.

Psalm 90 has also been identified as the primary source behind the Christ over the Beasts panel, and if the cross head does indeed include a fowler, then an association with this psalm would seem possible. In this context, the eagle is interpreted as a symbol of Christ or ‘the Divine,’ which is referred to in the psalm as a winged creature; *sub alis eius sperabis* ‘under his wings thou shalt trust’ [Ps.

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497 This is the same scheme presented at Bewcastle, which suggests that this cross too may have had a cross head including the evangelist symbols. For a discussion of the apocalyptic connotations of these scenes see Paul Meyvaert, ‘A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross: *Ecclesia* and *Vita Monastica,*’ in Brendan Cassidy (ed.), *The Ruthwell Cross: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 8 December 1989* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 95-166.

498 Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 141, describes the satchel as square, positing that the ammunition of the archer is in fact the words of scriptures. This accords with my interpretation of the archer on the St Andrew Auckland Cross, see Nina Maleczek, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Cross at St Andrew, Auckland: “Living Stones,”’ *York Medieval Yearbook* 2 (2003), at www.york.ac.uk/teaching/history/pjyg/yearbook2.


500 Cramp (1978), pp. 118-122, identifies it as a fowler, since the figure seems to be ‘enmeshed in strands which pass over his shoulders and neck.’


502 An eighth-century Augustine manuscript from Laon, identifies the eagle, atop a cross, as Christ. See Wehrhahn-Stauch (1967), fig. 3.
90:4]. This psalm was central to the liturgy on the first Sunday of Lent, when the catechumens reject the devil in preparation for their forthcoming baptism. It is from this series of associations, and in the light of the connections made between the eagle and the sacrament of baptism by patristic writers, that the eagle at the top of Ruthwell has also been interpreted as a symbol of baptism.

Furthermore, the eagle is understood by writers such as Augustine to be a symbol of the resurrection to eternal life, due to those who receive the sacrament of baptism. The latest interpretation of this scene views the eagle in the light of such patristic associations, and views that depicted at the top of the cross as a symbol of both baptism and resurrection. In addition, Ó Carragáin interprets the bird’s large beak as a visual reference to a folktale that described how the eagle rubs its beak against a stone, to prevent it dying from hunger. This action was understood by exegetes to symbolise the rebirth of those who partake in the sacrament of baptism. While the circular posture of the eagle’s right claw may indeed suggest that it holds something round, like a stone, the bird’s beak does not, as Ó Carragáin states, appear to be oversized. However, his theories can be seen to contribute to, and enhance, the symbolic potential of this scene. Furthermore, there is an insular example of the eagle employed as a symbol of resurrection, on the east face of the early-tenth-century Muiredach’s cross, from Monasterboice, Louth (Fig. 82), where it is depicted triumphal, with its wings outspread, above the head of Christ.

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503 Dominica Prima in Quadragesima, see Farrell (1978), p. 107. This theme is expanded in Ó Carragáin (2005), pp. 120-126.
504 Quoted in full in Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 145.
505 Ó Carragáin (2005), pp. 141-150.
507 The cutting of the beak by the rock is interpreted in the light of Psalm 103, that youth will be renewed like the eagle. See Physiologus quote on page 98.
508 See Harbison (1992), vol.2, fig. 472.
The eagle on the Ruthwell cross has, however, also been viewed in more secular contexts. By the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth-century, this bird’s significance as a symbol of imperial and triumphal power had been transmitted throughout the Empire. Sixth and seventh-century finds from Anglo-Saxon England indicate that it maintained triumphal and military associations and acquired a further range of symbolic meaning, connected with battle. As evidence such as the shield from the seventh-century Sutton Hoo ship burial suggests, the eagle seems to have been considered an appropriate symbol for representing secular power and military might in early Anglo-Saxon England. It seems therefore, that as well as symbolising John the Evangelist, the sacrament of baptism, and resurrection, the eagle also had a more secular set of symbolic meanings, which persisted in the metalwork and armoury of the period, and in the vernacular poetry.

While it is clear that the Ruthwell cross is a complex work, most probably created in a monastic environment, and employing biblical, patristic and liturgical themes in its iconography, the eagle in the uppermost arm may still be interpreted as retaining secular resonance. The representation of such pursuits as hunting and falconry has been proposed for the large panel at the base of the Bewcastle cross, and the relationship between these two crosses, close in both proximity and date, is well established (Fig. 83). Above the bird of prey on the Bewcastle cross is a runic, possibly commemorative, inscription, while the eagle atop the Ruthwell cross is also

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509 See Baldwin Brown (1921), p. 125. He sees the bird as ‘nothing but a noble quarry, that the archer will presently transfix with his shaft.’ See also M. Schapiro, ‘The Bowman and the Bird on the Ruthwell Cross,’ Art Bulletin 45 (1963), pp. 351-5.

510 It is evident that the eagle as a symbol of Rome and its army was disseminated to Roman Britain. See for example, the denarius of Marc Anthony, which shows the eagle atop a standard. Depicted in Richard Reece, The Coinage of Roman Britain (Stroud, 2002), colour plates 4 & 5.

511 See above discussion on eagles and ravens as ‘beasts of battle.’


surrounded by a runic inscription, which may have provided information on the patron of the cross.\textsuperscript{514} Furthermore, its arrangement, presented frontally, may recall Roman standards and Jupiter columns.\textsuperscript{515} So it could be posited that the Ruthwell artists transformed the imagery on Bewcastle;\textsuperscript{516} the secular stress of the bird of prey and runic inscription on the front, are relocated to the upper arm, and endowed with layers of Christian meaning.

The single eagle in the upper arm of the Ruthwell cross can thus be seen to evoke the psalms, baptism and resurrection, and yet also triumphal imagery, associated with a runic commemorative inscription. This bird has been endowed with layers of symbolism which allowed it to integrate with the other scenes and inscriptions upon the cross, as part of a dense iconographic scheme. Furthermore, it may be possible that the two sides of this one cross arm are in fact both commenting on the bird’s association with John the Evangelist. It could be posited that, while one side represents John’s role as an evangelist and the eagle’s association with the gospels, the other could be stressing his role as the author and witness of Revelations and the bird’s appearance as a witness to the Last Judgement. In considering the juxtaposition of these two birds, this becomes yet another plausible layer to the multivalent symbolism of the eagle.

Finally, returning briefly to a literary source, there is another, previously unrecorded, passage which may have informed the depiction of the eagle at the top of the Ruthwell cross; namely Ezekiel 17:3-18. The prophet relates a ‘riddle’ or ‘parable’ of two eagles in which each plant seeds that transform into vines.

\textsuperscript{514} See previous discussion.
\textsuperscript{515} See the Jupiter column surmounted by an eagle, outside the temple at Maastricht. Reconstructed at www.livius.org/maa-mam/maastricht/maastricht.html, accessed 26th July 2005.
\textsuperscript{516} This theory presupposes that Bewcastle is earlier than Ruthwell, and that the eagle has been recast for a different function. On the dating of Ruthwell and Bewcastle see Bailey (1996), p. 43.
Aquila grandis magnarum alarum longo membrorum ductu plena plumis et varietate venit ad Libanum et tulit medullam cedri summitatem frondium eius avellit et transportavit eam in terram Chanaan in urbem negotiatorum posuit illam et tulit de semente terrae et posuit illud in terra pro semine ut firmaret radicem super aquas multas in superficie posuit illud cumque germinasset crevit in vineam latiorem humili statura respicientibus ramis eius ad eam et radices eius sub illa erunt facta est ergo vinea et fructificavit in palmites et emisit propages et facta est aquila altera grandis magnis alis multisque plumis et ecce vinea ista quasi mittens radices suas ad eam palmites suos extendit ad illam ut inrigaret eam de areolis germinis sui in terra bona super aquas multas plantata est ut faciat frondes et portet fructum et sit in vineam grandem. 316

A large eagle with great wings, long-limbed, full of feathers, and of variety, came to Libanus, and took away the marrow of the cedar. He cropped off the top of the twigs thereof: and carried it away into the land of Chanaan, and he set it in a city of merchants. And he took of the seed of the land, and put it in the ground for seed, that it might take a firm root over many waters: he planted it on the surface of the earth. And it sprung up and grew into a spreading vine of low stature, and the branches thereof looked towards him: and the roots thereof were under him. So it became a vine, and grew into branches, and shot forth sprigs. And there was another large eagle, with great wings, and many feathers: and behold this vine, bending as it were her roots towards him, stretched forth her branches to him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation. It was planted in good ground upon many waters, that it might bring forth branches, and bear fruit, that it might become a large vine.

The description of the vine ‘bending,’ and of it bearing fruit, recall the image of the eagle on the Ruthwell cross, which stands on a vine that bends beneath him, laden with fruit. While this passage may not be the single source for the eagle on the Ruthwell cross, it adds yet another layer to the symbolic interpretation of this bird.

The most recent study of the Ruthwell Cross sums up this ‘multivalence’:

‘The ‘Eagle on the branch,’ at the top of the first side of the cross, has a double function. First, this image of rebirth and victory over death, completing the sequence of Lenten images on the first side of the programme, proclaims the monument as ‘a symbol of victory’ (‘sigebecn’) like the Bewcastle Cross: Anglo-Saxon clerics knew that the ‘eagles’ of the Roman legions were images of victory. Secondly, it is an image of eucharistic desire, and so a transitional image which

316 Ezk.17:3-17.
looks forward 'full of longings' to the sequence of eucharistic images on the second broad side of the cross.  

Ó Carragáin perfectly summarises the complex nature of the eagle's symbolic life that this chapter has also sought to illuminate. It is clear that the Anglo-Saxons responsible for such works as the Codex Amiatinus, the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Cuthbert Coffin, and the Ruthwell cross, not to mention the writings of Bede and Aldhelm, were also well aware of the many meanings this bird had acquired. The eagle functioned differently depending on where, when and how they chose to employ it. However, with this bird, more than any other, the principle of multivalence proves to be the key to unlocking its many symbolic lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE SYMBOLIC LIFE OF PEACOCKS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

There are a limited number of peacocks in the surviving art and literature of Anglo-Saxon England. Only four identifiable examples are now extant from the artistic record, while hardly a handful of literary sources mention them. Unlike the eagle, raven or dove, the peacock is not mentioned often in the Bible, nor does it feature greatly in patristic literature. It does not appear to have functioned as a part of the symbolic vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons prior to the arrival of Pope Gregory’s mission, and is rarely mentioned in surviving vernacular literature. Consequently, the peacock may not necessarily be one of the symbols most readily associated with Anglo-Saxon art and literature.

However, it is in many respects exactly these limitations which make it a suitable lens through which to examine the use of bird symbolism in Anglo-Saxon England. Because the range of examples is small, the study can be sharply focused. Peacocks are relatively easy to identify in the literature, designated by the Latin pavo and Old English pawa/pawe or pea, while in the artwork, they often feature two or more of the following characteristics: a long tail (occasionally with discernible ‘eyes’), an outstretched neck, a small head with pointed beak, surmounted by a crown, and long legs with clawed feet. Moreover, the identification of these birds is

519 The works discussed in this chapter are Aldhelm’s Aenigmata, the Hunterston brooch, Æthelwulf ring, Masham column and Ezra page of the Codex Amiatinus.
520 The exception is Augustine, who cites it in his work De Civitate Dei. See later discussion.
521 The birds included in fifth- and early-sixth-century metalwork, for example, are more commonly hook-beaked, recalling the eagle, and there are no identifiable instances of the peacock. See Speake (1980), figs. 2h, l-p, 3a, 5g, 6a, m, o, 11m, o, q, 17a, c-1, and Wickham-Crowley (1992), pp. 75-82.
522 The only reference in Old English to the peacock is in the Exeter Book poem, The Phoenix, and then it is only employed to qualify the mythical phoenix. See later discussion.
523 The term pea should be rendered more as ‘peafowl,’ for ‘peacock’ is more accurately designated by the word pawa. However, the Exeter Book Phoenix refers to the peacock as pea.
facilitated by their frequent representation in specific arrangements, where they are often accompanied by distinctive sets of symbols.\textsuperscript{524}

This chapter will begin by examining the range of symbolic meanings that the peacock had acquired in early Christian and Anglo-Saxon literature. It will then investigate artistic instances of this bird up to the ninth century, before progressing to detailed examinations of four Anglo-Saxon examples; namely the seventh-century Hunterston brooch (Fig. 84), ninth-century Æthelwulf ring (Fig. 85), ninth-century Masham column (Fig. 86), and the early-eighth-century Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 21).\textsuperscript{525} The examples of peacock symbolism in each of these works will be analysed to determine, firstly what the bird symbol alone can be understood to mean. Then, by investigating them alongside, and in relation to, the other symbols that they accompany, in order to determine how they contribute to larger iconographic or semiotic schemes.\textsuperscript{526} In addition, this chapter will highlight the ways in which the bird's symbolism is nuanced depending on the medium in which it is executed. It is apposite to begin, however, with a brief examination of the peacock's literary symbolic background.

**Peacocks in Literature**

The popularity of the peacock as a Christian artistic symbol is striking given that it does not feature often in the Bible. It is listed amongst the riches brought by the navy of Thar'shish to enrich King Solomon in the Book of Kings,\textsuperscript{527} and is


\textsuperscript{525} Although not chronologically ordered, the objects are discussed in this sequence because of the mediums in which they are executed: metalwork, sculpture and manuscript illumination. The peacocks on the Ezra page of the Codex Amiatinus, in particular, have not received extended discussion, and had not even been identified within the extensive body of literature on this manuscript. This chapter will analyse these birds alongside the other symbols that decorate the cupboard. See later discussion.

\textsuperscript{526} See Introduction to thesis for an overview of iconographic and semiotic approaches.

\textsuperscript{527} 1 Kings 10:22, and 2 Chronicles 9:21.
included among the wonders of creation made by God in the Book of Job.\textsuperscript{528}

However, it is not mentioned at all in the New Testament, and the Old Testament examples do not ascribe any specific symbolic meaning to it. Indeed, in biblical and patristic literature the only extended discussion of the symbolic significance of the peacock occurs in Augustine's \textit{De Civitate Dei}:

Quis enim nisi Deus creator omnium dedit carni pauonis mortui ne putesceret? Quod cum auditu incredibile uidetur, euenit ut apud Carthaginem nobis cocta apponeretur haec auis, de cuius pectore pulparum, quantum uisum est, decerptum seruari iussimus; quod post dierum tantum spatium, quanto alia caro quae cumque cocta putesceret, prolatum atque oblatum nihil nostrum offendit olfactum. Itemque repositum post dies amplius quam triginta idem quod erat inuentum est, idemque post annum, nisi quod aliquantum corpulentiae secioris et contractoris fuit.\textsuperscript{529}

For who but God the Creator of all things has given to the flesh of the peacock its antiseptic property? This property, when I first heard of it, seemed to me incredible; but it happened at Carthage that a bird of this kind was cooked and served up to me, and, taking a suitable slice of flesh from its breast, I ordered it to be kept, and when it had been kept as many days as make other flesh stinking, it was produced and set before me, and emitted no offensive smell. And after it had been laid by for thirty days and more, it was still in the same state; and a year after, the same still, except that it was a little more shrivelled, and drier.\textsuperscript{530}

This account of the peacock's flesh is included in Book XXI of \textit{De Civitate Dei}, where Augustine pleads the case for the orthodox Christian idea of bodily resurrection.\textsuperscript{531} He endorsed the view that the faithful are resurrected both in spirit and in body, and that the body will be perfect in its final state.\textsuperscript{532} Consequently, he

\textsuperscript{528} Job 39:13.
\textsuperscript{530} Translation Marcus Dodds, \textit{The City of God} (New York, 1950), pp. 766-76.
\textsuperscript{531} For a recent overview of the significance of Christ's bodily resurrection and its implications for Christians see Richard Swinburne, \textit{The Resurrection of God Incarnate} (Oxford, 2003), especially pp. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{532} See Marcia L. Colish, \textit{Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400-1400} (New Haven & London, 1997), pp. 6-10. See also, 1 Cor. 15:42-4.
employed the peacock as evidence from God’s creation of one of the central mysteries of the Christian religion.

Augustine was unique among classical and patristic authors in assigning such meaning to this bird. Centuries later, Isidore reinforced his association, stating that *cuius caro tam dura est ut putredinem vix sentiat, nec facile coquatur*, ‘its [the peacock’s] flesh is so hard that it barely decays and is difficult to cook,’ but other writers traditionally associated the theme of bodily resurrection with the phoenix.

For example, Tertullian wrote in his work, *De resurrectione carnis*:

>Cui alii rei tale documentum? Deus etiam in scripturis suis, Et florebis enim inquit velut phoenix, id est de morte... Multis passeribus antestare nos dominus pronuntiavit: si non et phoenicibus, nihil magnum. Sed homines semel interibunt, avibus Arabiae de resurrectione securis?

>For what other matter is there such a proof? For in his scriptures God says: ‘And he will flourish like a phoenix,’ that is, from death ... The Lord declared that we are of more value than many sparrows; this would mean little if it did not also apply to phoenixes. And will men die, once and for all, when Arabian birds are sure of Resurrection?

This passage indicates that Tertullian understood resurrection in a perfect state to be symbolised by the mythical phoenix, not the peacock. However, that these two birds continued to be associated with one another is exemplified in both Lactantius’s poem *De Ave Phoenice*, and the Old English poem based upon this work. In the later text, the bird is said to resemble the peacock closely in appearance: *se fugel is*

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533 See for example, the *Physiologus*, which does not include a description of the peacock, but has instead, an account of the phoenix to represent the themes of spiritual and bodily resurrection. See The *Physiologus*, Curley (1979), pp. 13-4. See also Roelof van de Brock, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden, 1972). Hereafter Brock (1972).
on hiwe æghwas ænlic, onlicost pean 'this bird is in appearance entirely glorious, most like the peacock.'

It is possible, therefore, that Augustine conflated the phoenix’s symbolism with that of the peacock. He was able to cite a real and identifiable bird, as evidence from God’s creation of bodily resurrection, thus providing the fabulous with a more realistic equivalent. It is clear that both the phoenix and peacock had well established symbolism within classical art and literature, connecting them with the theme of resurrection prior to Augustine’s account. While a detailed examination of the phoenix in early Christian and Anglo-Saxon literature is not the purpose of this study, it is nevertheless significant that the association of both peacock and phoenix with bodily resurrection was transmitted to England via the works of Lactantius and Augustine.

Augustine’s account of the peacock was certainly known in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England, for Aldhelm referred to it directly in his prose De laudibus virginitatis:

Siquidem beatus Augustinus in libro Civitatis Dei, quod pulpa pauonis imputribilis naturae sit, experimentis se comprobasse testatur.
St Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei*, testifies that he has found it to be empirically true that the flesh of the peacock is of an incorruptible nature.\(^5^4^4\)

Aldhelm also penned the only extended literary description of the peacock to survive in Anglo-Latin literature.\(^5^4^5\) In his *Enigmata*, he highlighted a number of the bird’s physical features, describing it as ‘a marvel of the world’:

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Pulcher et excellens specie mirandus in orbe
Ossibus et nervis ac rubro sanguine cretus;
Cum mihi vita comes fuerit nihil aurea forma
Plus rubet. Et moriens mea numquam pulpa putrescit.
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I am beautiful and wonderful to see, a marvel of the world;
I was created out of bones and nerves and red blood;
As long as life is my companion, no golden form
Shines more brightly than I; when I die, my flesh never decays.\(^5^4^6\)

His poem emphasised the physical nature of the peacock, its bones, nerves and blood, most probably in order to recall Augustine’s account of the incorruption of its flesh.

Furthermore, Aldhelm appears to have included the peacock among his *Enigmata* for similar reasons to Augustine, namely as evidence to his contemporaries of the wonder of God’s creation and the Christian promise of spiritual and bodily resurrection.\(^5^4^7\) Literary references to peacocks are rare in Anglo-Latin and Old English texts, but the remaining examples indicate that these birds were associated

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\(^5^4^6\) Quoted from Stork (1990), p. 115.

\(^5^4^7\) It could be argued that Aldhelm had yet a further interest the peacock, for it could be seen to provide information on the exotic natural landscape of the ‘Christian world.’ See Malcolm L. Cameron, ‘Aldhelm as Naturalist: A Re-examination of Some of his *Enigmata,*’ *Peritia* 4 (1985), pp. 117-133, and Michael Lapidge, ‘Aldhelm’s Latin Poetry and Old English Verse,’ *Comparative Literature* 31 (1979), pp. 209-223. Aldhelm also spent time at Theodore and Hadrian’s school in Canterbury, where an interest in the exotic and unfamiliar seems to have been fostered. Bischoff and Lapidge (1994), especially pp. 245-9.
primarily with resurrection. From the sparse literary record, let us move on to examine the artistic one, in order to determine whether this limited symbolism is reflected in the material culture.

**Peacocks in Early Christian Art**

While the phoenix appears to have enjoyed widespread appeal as a literary symbol of resurrection, it was the peacock that became a prominent feature of the artwork. Peacocks occur in the earliest surviving frescoes of the catacombs (Fig. 87) and continue to appear in the artworks produced in each century, up to the Anglo-Saxon period and beyond. Furthermore, they are depicted throughout mainland Europe, are executed in a variety of media, and are consistently included on prestige objects, such as the sarcophagi, gifts, and the buildings of emperors, kings and bishops.

Peacocks already had a well-developed symbolic life in pre-Christian Roman art, where they had acquired imperial symbolism during the reign of Augustus (31 B.C.–14 A.D.), and were employed in pagan burial contexts as symbols of resurrection (Fig. 88). During the emergence of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, peacocks were employed in imperial art, possibly to recall both

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548 It appears that a different symbolic vocabulary existed within the literary and artistic records. The phoenix is occasionally represented in early Christian art, such as the apse mosaic from Sancti Cosmas e Damiano, and Santa Prassede, see Lowden (1997), figs 71-73, 95 and 98.

549 For late-second, early-third-century representations, see the frescoes from the Cubiculum of the Seasons, in the Catacomb of Sancti Pietro and Marcellino, and the Cubiculum of the Velatio, in the Catacomb of Priscilla, both in Rome. See Nicolai (2002), figs. 109 & 107 respectively.

550 See Lother (1929), pp. 33-56.

551 That peacocks continued to be used on high status objects is suggested by the Hunterston brooch and royal finger-ring. See later discussion in this chapter.

552 See Lother (1929), plate I. Peacocks and phoenixes both appear on the coins of this period, alongside slogans describing the eternal rule of Rome, see Broek (1972), pl. 8.

553 See for example, the peacocks depicted on the catacomb walls in The First Tomb of the Caetennii, beneath St Peter’s, Vatican, see Toynbee (1956), pp. 44-51, fig. 6. This symbolic association may be rooted in the mythological account of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and the peacock’s association with Juno. See Littleton (2002), p. 158.
aspects of their symbolism: the themes of imperial power and of Christian resurrection.\textsuperscript{554} The fourth-century Constantina sarcophagus, for example, executed in porphyry with putti and vinescrolls, shows the birds turned towards the corners (Fig. 89).\textsuperscript{555} A similar arrangement occurs in the late-fourth-century mosaics from Hagios Giorgios, Salonika, where peacocks stand atop palatial buildings, and face away from one another (Fig. 90).\textsuperscript{556} In such contexts, the birds appear to offer the promise of immortality and spiritual wealth, alongside the imperial prosperity they had previously symbolised.

In the following centuries peacocks continued to be writ large in the decorative schemes of churches, as for example in the sixth-century mosaics of San Vitale, Ravenna, where four decorate the corners of the presbytery vault (Fig. 91).\textsuperscript{557} However, from the fifth century onwards, these birds were most frequently employed in the context of funerary art. Their use within such contexts is exemplified by the sixth-century sarcophagus of Archbishop Theodore, San Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna (Fig. 92). It depicts two confronted peacocks either side of a roundel containing the Chi-Rho and Alpha-Omega.\textsuperscript{558} The roundels continue on the lid, where they alternate with cruciform Chi-Rhos, recalling Christ's death and resurrection.\textsuperscript{559} In this context, the birds appear to be included as symbols of resurrection. However, the fact that vines, laden with grapes hang behind them, also

\textsuperscript{554} For the recasting of imperial imagery within Christian contexts, including that of birds and animals, see Thomas F. Matthews, \textit{The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Christian Early Art} (Princeton, 1995), especially pp. 3-22.
\textsuperscript{555} See Lowden (1997), fig. 19.
\textsuperscript{556} John Beckwith, \textit{Early Christian and Byzantine Art} (Yale University Press, 1993), p. 47. Hereafter Beckwith (1993), p. 47. As Beckwith suggests, this may be emphasising 'the glory of Roma aeterna in a new Christian guise.'
\textsuperscript{557} Lowden (1997), figs. 76 and 77. Recent studies have revealed that the lambs within the sixth-century apse mosaics at San Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, were originally peacocks, but were redesigned. \textit{Per. comm.} Jane Hawkes, April 2005. For a similar representation see the fresco from Arkosolgrab in S. Gennaro, Neapel, Erste Galerie. Lother (1929), pl. 5.
\textsuperscript{558} See Beckwith (1993), fig. 100.
\textsuperscript{559} See discussion in Beckwith (1993), p. 122.
suggests further layers of interpretation, regarding Theodore's participation in the sacraments of the community, as one of the branches in the body of Christ's Church. The vine can be understood to symbolise the Eucharist and Christ's blood, when he stated _ego sum vitis vera_ 'I am the true vine.' Consequently the peacock could represent the faithful Christian nourished by the Eucharist.

By the sixth century the iconography of peacocks in Christian art appears to have been established. The birds are nearly always confronted, often on either side of a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection, such as the Chi-Rho, or an urn containing vine scroll. Their eucharistic symbolism is also directly connected to their role as symbols of resurrection, for through receiving the sacraments Christians can attain the reward of eternal life. Therefore, peacocks surrounding a chalice, urn, or Chi-Rho, may be understood to represent the promise of resurrection and immortality conferred on those that participate in the sacraments, and the activities of the body of the faithful in the Church.

While peacocks are most frequently associated with death and resurrection, especially on sarcophagi of the fourth to eighth centuries, they also featured in manuscript art during this period. In the majority of instances they continued to

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559 See also a mid-sixth-century marble slab, from San Apollinare in Classe, Beckwith (1993), fig. 99, and archiepiscopal throne of Maximian, Lowden (1997), figs. 67 and 8. The peacocks on the throne are arranged around the archbishop's monogram, perhaps as a means of conferring immortality, or even protection. For a discussion of talismanic symbols see Kitzinger (1993), pp. 3-15.

560 John 15:1.

561 Indeed, they seem to have had such currency, that they may have been included in the decoration for the front of Old Saint Peters, Rome. See Ó Carragáin, _Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poem of the Dream of the Rood_ (Toronto, 2005), plate I, pp. 249-51. Hereafter Ó Carragáin (2005).

562 See John 15:9-10.

563 See the sixth-century mosaic from San Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, where two peacocks flank an urn directly below a representation of the Raising of Lazarus. See Grabar (1969), fig. 68.

564 See for example, the white marble sarcophagus from the Church of Saint-Pierre in Vienne, depicted in Jean Hubert, Jean Porcher & Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, _Europe in the Dark Ages_ (London, 1967), fig. 31. Hereafter Hubert (1967). Peacocks also appear to have been associated with burial in early Anglo-Saxon England, for they were found in a grave from Long Whittcnham, Berkshire. See Hawkes (1989), I, p. 101.
represent the promise of resurrection, and to be employed alongside the same range of symbols, such as the chalice or Chi-Rho. However, a couple of different arrangements were also introduced into the manuscript illuminations of the eighth and ninth centuries. In some cases peacocks seem to have been included primarily for decoration, for example, when placed above, or on either side, of canon tables, as in the sixth-century manuscript from the Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican (Fig. 93). But they could also accompany other sets of symbols, including the Cross of the Redemption, and the Fountain of Life (Fig. 94 and 95). A further type of representation depicted paired peacocks around a crucifixion scene or an image of Christ, as in the eighth-century manuscript from Würzburg (Fig. 96).

The inclusion of peacocks in these instances creates a further set of symbolic associations between creation, death and judgement, while also extending the sacramental symbolism of these birds, and developing their connection with baptism and resurrection. Therefore, it appears that the symbolism of this bird could be altered slightly depending on context (both in terms of those symbols or images that accompany it, and the objects or building which they adorn), but that its primary

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566 See the seventh-century Codex Valerianus, in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, MS Clm 6224, fol.81v, where the peacocks hold a chalice between their beaks. Hubert (1967), fig. 151.
567 These arrangements are also evinced in earlier examples from Armenia and Ethiopia. See Underwood (1950), pp. 41-138, pls. 32, 34-38, 53-4.
568 Vatican, folio 2v, Biblioteca Apostolica, Lat. 3806. Alexander (1978), pl. 15. For the possible talismanic significance of peacocks in the prefatory material of manuscripts see discussion of the Evangelia veritatis acrostic in the Augsburg Gospels, in O'Reilly (1998), pp. 49-94.
571 In the Old English poem 'The Phoenix,' the mythical bird is also associated with a fountain, which could be interpreted as the Fountain of Life. See The Phoenix, lines 106 and 335-350 (1964), p. 47 and p. 54.
572 See also Rom. 6:3-4, for the association of baptism with death.
symbolic function was to represent the theme of resurrection. Shifting the focus closer to Anglo-Saxon England, it seems that the full remit of peacock symbolism is evinced in insular art. A number of the bird’s modes of representation and nuances of symbolic meaning are exploited, for example, in the illuminations of the early-ninth-century Book of Kells. 573

Peacocks in Insular Art

Peacocks are pictured throughout the Book of Kells. 574 Most frequently they are associated with eucharistic symbols, as on folio 8r, where two hold a disc between their beaks, and a chalice sprouting vines is depicted directly below (Fig. 97). 575 However, a further range of interpretations are suggested on folio 3r, where a pair of peacocks grab two lions by the neck (Fig. 98). Opposite these beasts, on the facing page, the peacocks are replaced by an image of Christ holding the lions (Fig. 99). The Kells artists thus appear to be making an explicit association between Christ and the birds. 576

Possibly the fullest expression of the association between Christ and peacocks occurs on folio 32v (Fig. 100). Here Christ is depicted in Majesty, with two confronted birds arranged either side of his head, their wings enclosing eucharistic

575 See also folio 2r, where a pair intertwined peacocks eat grapes. Meehan (1994), fig. 65.
576 Such an association is continued on folio 8r, where a peacock stands on top of a snake, recalling the trampling of the beasts described in Psalm 90. For a discussion of the significance of this Psalm within the Book of Kells, see Farr (1997), pp. 51-52. See also Ó Carragáin (2005), p. 121-2. The trampling of the beasts in Psalm 90 appears to have informed a number of works of Anglo-Saxon art, including the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses, the Durham Cassiodorus manuscript, and the Genoels-Elderen Ivories. See also Janina Ramirez, Art History Rubric: Early Medieval – The Genoels-Elderen Ivories, published at www.york.ac.uk/inst/cms/students.yrk/rubrics/arthis/arthefrm, and discussion of the Psalms in Chapter Five on sparrows.

Eight more peacocks decorate the columns either side of Christ, the placing of a cross between their heads recalling his death and resurrection. Moreover, the eucharistic imagery suggests another layer of symbolic meaning, for it associates Christ’s death and rebirth with that of all the faithful, who will receive the reward of eternal life after death through participation in the sacraments.\footnote{For similar iconographic meaning in the Codex Amiatinus, see O’Reilly (2001), especially p. 33, and later discussion in this chapter.} It seems, therefore, that the insular artists at work on the Book of Kells were aware of the full spectrum of symbolic meanings that the peacock had acquired in Christian art from the third century onwards.

This conscious use of peacock symbolism is also evinced in insular sculpture, on the east face of the mid-eighth-century Kildalton cross, Islay (Fig. 101).\footnote{For the Kildalton Cross, see Graham Richie, \textit{The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland: Argyll Volume 5 – Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Oronsay} (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 205-212.} As with those birds depicted on folio 32v of the Book of Kells, the peacocks on this sculpture face one another and there is a disc shape between their beaks. This indicates that they can similarly be understood to represent the reward of eternal life due to those that partake in the sacraments. However, further down the shaft, Old Testament narrative scenes also accompany the birds.\footnote{This high cross with a ringed head, probably made by and for the Irish monastery at Iona, displays a number of iconographic similarities with both the Book of Kells, and the column at Masham, Yorkshire. See later discussion in this chapter. While the peacock scene at Masham is placed alongside a depiction of David and the lion, at Kildalton the peacocks occur below the same scene. However, while the iconography of the scenes are similar, the styles are very different, with the Kildalton cross betraying its Irish origins in the Mithraic pose of David (see Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 97), and the Masham column’s carving appearing much more akin to the classical ‘Apostle shafts,’ such as those at Otley and Easby. For an account of the various ‘Apostle shafts’ see Lang (1999), pp. 271-282.} Each of these scenes have been...
interpreted exegetically as bearing christological significance connected with Christ's sacrificial and triumphal death. For example, Bede drew out the significance of certain Old Testament scenes when describing the pictures Benedict Biscop brought from Rome:

Imagines quoque ad ornandum monasterium aecclesiamque beati Pauli apostoli de concordia ueteris et noui Testamenti summa ratione compositas exibuit; uerbi gratia, Isaac ligna, quibus inmolaretur portantem, et Dominum crucem in qua pateretur aeque portantem, proxima super inuicem regione, pictura coniunxit. Item serpenti in heremo a Moyse exaltato, Filium hominis in cruce exaltatum conparauit.

His treasures included a set of pictures for the monastery and church of the blessed apostle Paul, consisting of scenes, very skilfully arranged, to show how the Old Testament foreshadowed the New. In one set, for instance, the picture of Isaac carrying the wood on which he was to be burnt as a sacrifice was placed immediately below that of Christ carrying the cross on which He was about to suffer. Similarly the Son of Man lifted up on the cross was paired with the serpent raised up by Moses in the desert.

It appears that, alongside the two birds on the Kildalton Cross, these narrative scenes were designed to recall aspects of Christ's death and resurrection. Furthermore, by including this combination of images together, the monument's iconographic scheme centres on the hope of eternal life promised to those Christians that participate in the sacraments, as a result of Christ's ultimate sacrifice and triumph over death.

The significance of associating these Old Testament scenes with peacocks will become clearer upon comparison with the ninth-century Masham column. However, for the purposes of this study, it is of note that these complex and

582 The significance of these scenes is discussed in Hawkes (2005), pp. 259-276. Hawkes does not mention the peacocks on the Kildalton Cross, although she does examine the importance of non-figural symbols, such as lions, within similar scenes on the St. Martin Cross, Iona.
583 See for example, Bede, H14 9, p. 373, trans. p. 196.
584 See later discussion.
multivalent instances of peacock symbolism occur in examples of manuscript illumination and sculpture produced in eighth-century Ireland. It remains to examine how these artistic traditions were transmitted to, and employed in, Anglo-Saxon art. Let us begin, however, with examples from the metalwork that appear to highlight, not only these Christian symbolic meanings, but also a range of more secular associations.

Peacocks in Anglo-Saxon Metalwork

The previous section indicates that, in the majority of examples, the peacock had developed a limited range of symbolic meanings, connecting it with the themes of bodily resurrection, the sacraments, and Christ's triumph over death. However, alongside these, the peacock also seems to have retained its imperial or royal significance through the fifth to eighth centuries, and it continued to appear upon prestige objects and in high status buildings, as in the early-sixth-century palace church of St Polyeuktos, Constantinople (Fig. 102). Turning to the examples of peacocks in Anglo-Saxon metalwork, it appears that it continued to carry connotations of secular power when depicted in this medium. This is suggested by two significant objects: the late-seventh- to early-eighth-century Hunterston brooch (which combines Celtic, Pictish and Anglo-Saxon features), and the early-ninth-century Æthelwulf ring (Figs. 84 and 85).

586 For a discussion of Anicia Juliana, her imperial connections, and her use of imperial imagery, see Martin Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: the Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana's Palace Church in Istanbul* (London, 1989), especially pp. 15-41, and figs. 31 and 34. The inscription, which refers to the church’s powerful patron, originally ran around the walls of the church, and was accompanied by large peacocks, concealed underneath each arch. See also Roy M. Harrison, 'Anicia Juliana's Church of St Polyeuktos,' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32.4 (1982), pp. 435-42.
Beginning with the earlier of the two, the Hunterston brooch displays a unique example of peacock symbolism. Its size, as well as the detail of its decoration, indicate that it was a high status object. In addition, its decorative scheme appears to feature a number of potentially symbolic elements. For example, it has been suggested that the square panel on the front of the brooch may be intended to represent a gospel-book. It is possible that both this panel, and the similar design on the back, emphasised in gold appliqué, were included either to confer protection on the wearer, or to act as a discrete expression of faith (Fig. 103).

At the terminals of the brooch are two bird heads, identifiable as peacocks due to the prominent and defined crowns. They have pointed beaks, and contrast significantly with the hook-beaked birds surrounding the central panel. In the light of a cruciform image, perhaps suggesting a manuscript, on the front of the brooch, it is possible that the symbols decorating this piece were designed to recall Christian themes and imagery. It could be, therefore, that the peacock heads at the terminals


588 Its form, a pseudo-penannular brooch, originated in Ireland and Scotland, while its decoration looked to Northumbria, recalling the motifs of works such as the Lindisfarne Gospels. See Howard E. Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches* (London, 1980), especially pp. 3-11.


590 See Hawkes (1997), pp. 321-323, especially figs. 10-3. Hawkes draws a connection between the hook-beaked birds above and below this panel, and those that surround the cross on the Herbreach Stone, Monkwearmouth.

591 Such features recall objects like the seventh-century buckle from Eccles, Kent, which has interlaced serpents and a double-headed beast on the front, but conceals a fish, a symbol with Christian resonance, on the inner side. See discussion in Hawkes (1997), pp. 323-324. Both the Benty Grange and Coppergate helmets include a variety of Christian and non-Christian symbols, perhaps to ensure protection. Depicted in Webster (1991), pp. 59-62, figs. 46 and 47.

592 For the deliberate distinction of hook-beaked and straight-beaked birds, and the differing symbolic meanings associated with them, see discussion of the Franks Casket in Chapter Five on sparrows. The arrangement of hook-beaked birds as a framing device is evinced on the back panel and lid of the casket, as well as on the Wearmouth plaque, see Hawkes (1997), p. 321-323.

593 That such syncretism between Christian symbols and pre-conversion artistic techniques took place during the sixth and seventh centuries is also implied by finds such as the Wilton and Ixworth crosses, and the Crumsdale buckle See Webster (1991), pp. 24-8, figs. 6, 10 & 11.
could also be seen to embody Christian themes, such as the promise of resurrection after death.

However, the arrangement of the birds, and the fact that they are not accompanied by other symbols, such as the urn or Chi-Rho, means that any symbolic meaning apart from the general association of peacocks with bodily resurrection is difficult to determine. Furthermore, the peacocks are not confronted, as was typical in early Christian examples, but point away from one another.\footnote{See previous discussion on the Constantina sarcophagus. Although it must be recalled that while they turn away from one another on the sides of the sarcophagus, they point towards the possible eucharistic vine symbols on the ends, where two confront on either corners. See also discussion of the peacocks that surround palatial buildings in the mosaics of Hagios Giorgios.} Given that they are arranged in this way, and included on a piece of high status jewellery, the peacocks could instead be recalling the imagery of imperial art, and the secular power that such representations suggest.

It is clear that the artists at work on this piece made conscious artistic choices. They included a symbol, the peacock, which up to the sixth century was apparently absent from the artistic vocabulary of ‘pagan’ Anglo-Saxon art. Furthermore, they deliberately contrasted these birds with the hooked-beaked birds of prey depicted on the front.\footnote{There are no surviving instances of peacocks in fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon metalwork, but there are a number of examples of hook-beaked birds. See footnote 520.} As a result, it could be posited that this self-conscious use of the peacock may have been intended to recall both the imperial and Christian symbolism of these birds. While the exact meaning of the peacocks, and the reasons for their inclusion on this piece of sixth-century metalwork, prove elusive, the fact remains that the Hunterston Brooch includes them in a unique, ambiguous, and original manner.

The other example of peacocks in Anglo-Saxon metalwork occurs on the mid-ninth-century \AEthelwulf ring (Fig. 85).\footnote{Webster (1991), pp. 268-9, fig. 244. The description has been paired up with the wrong figure reference. I have indicated the correct plate, although the description is that for figure 243.} The ring has a triangular shaped...
bezel, in which two birds confront an object described as a ‘tree of life motif’ (composed of two disks, each containing a cruciform motif, the lower of which terminates in a cup-like base). The birds are identifiable as peacocks, for they have crowns upon their heads, and their tail feathers terminate in distinctive ‘eyes’. They have been deliberately contorted to fit into the space, and gesture at the lower disk, which they hold between their clawed feet. The iconography of this ring recalls images such as that of folio 32v of the Book of Kells, where two peacocks confront a cross and stand upon chalices, the crossed disks creating an abbreviated and stylised version of the Kells iconographic scheme (Fig. 100). In the light of such similarities therefore, it may be possible to interpret the birds on this ring as symbolic of eternal life after death, the reward due to those that partake in the sacraments.

The crosses, chalice and arrangement of the birds, indicate that the Æthelwulf ring was most probably designed with Christian themes and exemplars in mind. Indeed, another contemporaneous ring with which it has traditionally been associated features a similarly Christian set of images (Fig. 104). It depicts a haloed image of Agnus Dei, surrounded by the letters ‘A’ and ‘D,’ in the position of the peacocks on its bezel. However, there is a significant difference between the two royal rings,
for the name on this smaller ring Æthelwith Regina ‘Queen Æthelwith,’ is concealed, etched on the inside of the bezel, while Æthelwulf Rex ‘King Æthelwulf,’ on the other ring is placed boldly beneath the peacocks. This could suggest a possible link between the symbols above and the royal name below.

Another roughly contemporary object, the Alfred Jewel, similarly juxtaposes the king’s name with symbols that carried both imperial and Christian meanings (Fig. 105). Here the name Ælfred ‘Alfred’ is placed in capital letters around the outside of the object, providing an interesting parallel for the Æthelwulf ring. The scene above depicts an enthroned figure clasping two foliate rods, recalling Christ in Majesty and also the imperial imagery of consular diptychs. Furthermore, the connections between the two objects extends to the inclusion on both of a tree-of-life motif (Fig. 106). In the light of such similarities, the Æthelwulf ring and Alfred jewel appear to indicate that courtly gifts were produced during the ninth-century, which included deliberately multivalent symbols, designed to recall both the Christian faith and kingly or imperial power. While two centuries separate the

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602 The name has been connected with Alfred the Great’s father (839–858 AD.). For a discussion of the ring and King Æthelwulf see Campbell (1991), pp. 139–143, fig. 128.
603 It has been suggested that this was not the king’s personal ring, but that it was intended as a royal gift. Webster (1991), p. 269. This association of inscription and peacock imagery recalls imperial donations, such as the decoration of St. Polyeuktos, Constantinople, where Anicia Juliana’s dedicatory inscription is placed directly above a series of peacocks. See above discussion.
605 Although it is not accompanied by the word Rex, it has been traditionally associated with King Alfred, and specifically the æstel se bîd on fiftegum manscessa ‘pointer worth fifty manscuses,’ that he ordered to be distributed with his copy of Gregory’s Pastoral Care. Hinton (1984), p. 5 provides evidence that the royal title was not always required to indicate royal patronage.
607 The Alfred Jewel has one etched on its reverse. See Hinton (1984), plate I.
Hunterston brooch from the Æthelwulf ring,\textsuperscript{608} nevertheless, the fact that both these high status metal objects include peacocks may suggest that they were considered appropriate for representing, not only Christian themes, but also secular authority, especially upon metal objects.

**Peacocks in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture**

In the light of such evidence it appears that the peacock's symbolic meanings could vary, depending upon factors such as the medium in which the birds were executed, and the symbols that accompanied them. Both these issues come to bear upon interpretation of the peacocks on the early-ninth-century Masham column, Yorkshire (Fig. 86).\textsuperscript{609} It provides the only surviving and identifiable example of peacock symbolism in Anglo-Saxon sculpture.\textsuperscript{610} Furthermore, the birds are accompanied by a number of figural and non-figural scenes, with the column divided into four horizontal registers, each separated from the other by a sculpted band, and further demarcated by seven columned arches.\textsuperscript{611}

\textsuperscript{608} For a discussion of the religious changes during this period see Mayr-Harting (1991), pp. 117-128.


\textsuperscript{610} For a discussion of peacocks in insular sculpture see earlier discussion on page 142. There are a number of birds depicted in Anglo-Saxon sculpture, usually within inhabited vinescroll or interlaced panels, but these are not distinctive enough to be identified as any specific species. See also Jane Hawkes, 'The Plant-Life of Early Christian Anglo-Saxon Art,' in Carole P. Biggam (ed.), From Earth to Art: The Many Aspects of the Plant-World in Anglo-Saxon England (Amsterdam and New York, 2003), pp. 263-86.

\textsuperscript{611} Only three scenes from the second register, and the upper register, can be discerned with any certainty. Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 80, suggests that these bands may originally have carried inscriptions, identifying the scenes above. This work provides the most detailed and extensive description and iconographic discussion of the Masham column. For a more recent discussion see Jane Hawkes, 'The Legacy of Constantine in Anglo-Saxon England,' in Elizabeth Hartley, Jane Hawkes, Martin Henig and Frances Mee (eds.), Constantine the Great: York's Roman Emperor (York, 2006), pp. 104-114.
The lower-most register contains panels of inhabited interlace (Fig. 107), while the scenes on the third register are largely eroded. Figural scenes can only be identified with any certainty on the upper register, and in four panels of the second register. The peacocks occur on this row, and are identifiable as such due to their long necks and tails (Fig. 108). They are confronted above an object that is now too worn to be identified with complete certainty, but appears to resemble an urn. The outline of a round disc is still visible between their beaks. Their tails curve down the length of the panel, and a branch can be made out, stretching diagonally beneath the body of one of the birds.

From what remains, one can surmise that the peacocks were accompanied by an urn or amphora, containing shoots of vine, and a eucharistic host. Therefore, along with the Æthelwulf ring and the Book of Kells, the imagery of this panel can also be understood to represent the eternal life due to the faithful that partake in the sacraments. The fact that the birds are executed in stone, and arranged in this way, suggests that the peacocks on the Masham column carry the range of symbolic meanings established in the fourth- to seventh-century exemplars cited above. However, in order to fully appreciate their significance within the iconographic

612 It is impossible to state which direction the birds originally faced, as the column appears to be in a secondary position, Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 90.
613 The sculpture has deteriorated to such an extent that this is now hard to make out certain details. However, in earlier photographs this feature is still evident. Hawkes (1989), 2, plate 7.
615 The birds themselves are the focus of the scene, being enlarged and positioned as a frame to the other symbols. See Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 104. The urn and host were carved in lower relief. They are unique in art of this period, being matched in size and arrangement only by a tenth-century chancel plaque from Constantinople. See Jean Lassus, The Early Christian and Byzantine World (London, 1967), fig. 96.
scheme of the overall sculpture, the peacocks have to briefly be examined alongside the other images that surround them.\footnote{These scenes have been discussed at length by Hawkes (1989), 1, pp. 80-136, and the following paragraphs summarise her findings in order to illuminate the significance of the peacocks. See also Hawkes (2002), pp. 337-348 and (1999a), pp. 204-216.}

Beginning with the upper register, although it is severely weathered and obscured by a metal cap, the remains of a seated and enthroned figure can be discerned, surrounded by twelve standing figures, each paired and enclosed within an arch (Fig. 109). Given the number of characters and their arrangement, it is most probable that this register depicts Christ with the twelve apostles.\footnote{See William G. Collingwood, 'Anglian and Anglo-Danish Sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire,' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XIX (1907), pp. 267-413, especially p. 363. He was able to view more of the upper register, as the metal cap, added in 1988-9, had not yet been attached, and the effects of water erosion which it has accelerated, was not so advanced. However, he describes the central character as seated on a hill, not a throne.} By showing him empty-handed and seated, both his instruction of the apostles and his sending them forth as missionaries, have been amalgamated.\footnote{It has been suggested that the designers of this scene have combined two iconographically distinct types traditionally depicted in fifth- and sixth-century Italian art. The first of these usually shows Christ seated, holding a book, as in the fresco in the mid-fourth-century Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, see Nicolai (2002), fig. 95. The second depicts him standing with his hands raised, sending the apostles to the four corners of the world, each of whom carry attributes, as evinced in the dome mosaics of the fifth-century Orthodox baptistery, Ravenna. See Lowden (1997), fig. 65, and discussion in Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 92.} The resulting composition emphasises his divine authority, while also recalling his role as both redeemer, and judge.\footnote{Hawkes (2002b), p. 343.} It can act as a visual exhortation to continue the work of the apostles in spreading God's word,\footnote{Pope Leo III rebuilt the Triclinium in 798-9 A.D. to include a depiction of Christ with the twelve Apostles. It has been suggested that the upper register at Masham was designed to show Christ in ultimate authority, surrounded by the twelve Apostles, thus emphasising that the various branches of the Church, as well as the newly imperial State, should be in deference to papal authority. See Hawkes (2002b), p. 345.} therefore providing a unique interpretation of the Christian themes of instruction and mission.

Below the image of Christ seated, to the left of the peacocks on the second register, it is possible to discern a figure standing above a beast (Fig. 110). He holds the animal's head in his hands, while the outline of another small creature can still be...
distinguished, standing by the front leg of the larger figure. This arrangement of beasts and man recalls images of David and the lion. Exegetical exposition on this biblical event consistently emphasised that the triumph of David over the lion may be understood symbolically as God overcoming the evils assailing his faithful flock. This in turn was associated with Christ's Harrowing of Hell, during which he will defeat Satan, and also his final Judgement, when he will return as the divine judge to overcome sin.

The panel directly to the right of the peacocks depicts a seated character holding an object in his hands, surrounded by a number of other figures (Fig. 111). It appears to show David dictating the psalms, a theme that patristic writers, including Bede, linked with good kingly behaviour and the Church's responsibility in passing on the word of God. Therefore, it seems that the two scenes either side of the peacocks both depict King David, in different guises. There is a parallel for such representations in the illustrations of the eighth-century Durham-Cassiodorus manuscript, the first full-page illustration depicting David as Psalmist (Fig. 112), and the second labelling him Rex, as a typus Christi (Fig. 113).

As with the paired manuscript illuminations from the Durham Cassiodorus, the Davidic scenes on the Masham column can be understood to depict the two-fold

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622 See for example, Aug., De Ovitate Dei, XIX, p. 762. For the transmission of this association to Anglo-Saxon England, see Aelfric quote in Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 124.
624 It also resembles an illumination from folio 30v of the Vespasian Psalter. Depicted in colour in Campbell (1991), fig. 98. In the manuscript illumination, David faces the viewer, in the 'aulic' pose, while at Masham he is positioned to the side of the scene. See Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 106.
625 See for example, Bede, In Psalmum LV: De titulis psalmorum, PL 93, 774-778.
nature of David, and by extension, Christ. Augustine attests to this interpretation in his *Enarrationes in psalmos*:

Erat quidem David, ut novimus, propheta sanctus, rex Israel, filius Jesse: sed quia ex ejus semine venit ad salutem nostram secundum carnem Dominus Jesus Christus, saepe isto nomine ille figuratur, et David pro Christo in figura ponitur, propter originem carnis ipsius. Nam secundum aliquid filius est David, secundum aliquid Dominus est David: filius David secundum carnem, Dominus David secundum divinitatem.

David indeed was, as we know, a holy prophet, king of Israel, son of Jesse: but because out of his seed there came for our salvation, afterwards the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ, often under that name, he is figured, and David instead of Christ is set down as a figure, because of the origin of the flesh of the same. For on the one hand, he is son of David, while on the other, he is the lord of David; son of David after the flesh, lord of David after the divinity.

Therefore, given the connection between peacocks and Christ, as evinced in other artistic examples such as the Book of Kells, it appears that the two birds on the Masham column are performing a similar function. Both the Davidic scenes, the peacocks, and the final identifiable panel on the second register, which appears to depict Samson with the Gates of Gaza (Fig. 114), contain christological significance.

All the figural scenes on the second register allude to Christ through symbolic or typological signposts. It appears, therefore, that the scenes carved on the Masham

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628 Christ as warrior-king, defeating Satan, and as a good ruler, instructing his faithful followers to spread his word. See also Bailey (1978), pp. 10-12, plates 1 and 2. The Davidic scenes can also be interpreted in the light of contemporaneous events, such as Charlemagne’s papal coronation, and the apparent increase in discussion by commentators such as Alcuin of the bond between church and state. Charlemagne was referred to as ‘David,’ and his palace at Aachen called the ‘second Rome.’ See Janet L. Nelson, ‘Charlemagne,’ in Mary Garrison, Janet L. Nelson and Dominic Tweddle (eds.), *Alcuin and Charlemagne: The Golden Age of York* (York, 2001), pp. 15-23, especially pp. 21-23, and Mary Garrison, “The Franks as the New Israel: Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne,” in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge 2000), pp. 114-61, especially pp. 154-156.

629 Aug., *Psal. 54*, 36.628.

630 Exegetical references to Samson and the Gates of Gaza indicate that this event was seen to prefigure Christ’s descent into Hell, whereby he achieved eternal life for Christians and defeated evil. Therefore, this panel can be understood to represent the theme of Christ’s victory over death. See for example Gregory, 21.7, *Homiliae xl in Evangelia, PL 76.1173*, cited in Hawkes, 2, note 133, p.68.
column are not a randomly collected group of images, but work together to suggest a coherent iconographic scheme. As David and Samson provided typological parallels for Christ, so the peacocks provided a symbolic rendering of his death and resurrection. These scenes are then given literal expression in the upper register, where Christ appears surrounded by his apostles, represented as eternal judge and victor. The lowermost register is the most abstract, depicting creatures within interlace, perhaps in reference to the body of the faithful, nourished by the ‘true vine’ of Christ. The sculpture thus appears to progress from non-figural scenes at the base, to typological and symbolic imagery, before culminating in a depiction of Christ himself. It is in this context that we find the only unambiguous representation of peacocks in sculpture: alongside a range of scenes that both allude to Christ’s death and resurrection, and to the body of the faithful.

Peacocks in Anglo-Saxon Manuscript Illumination

Having outlined the occurrences of peacocks in both Anglo-Saxon metalwork and sculpture, it now remains to examine instances of these birds in manuscript illumination. The scant artistic record is similarly reflected in the manuscript evidence, for there is only one definitive example. Despite the fact that they have not

631 It appears that a cross-head may have been placed on top of the column, completing the iconographic scheme with a representation (either symbolic or figural) of Christ’s crucifixion. The column has a hole at the top, into which a further piece of stone could have fitted. Hawkes (1989), 2, note 2, p. 59.
632 See Hawkes (1989), 1, p. 121. Although Hawkes suggests that the creatures at the base of the column do not carry the traditional significance of inhabited vine scroll, namely, the community of the Church protected by the ‘true vine’ of Christ, this could be a possible interpretation in the light of this investigation. Furthermore, the shape of the Masham column precluded depiction of the creatures winding up the column in vinescroll, as on crosses such as those at Ruthwell or Bewcastle.
633 Other Anglo-Saxon crosses display similar levels of allegorical, typological and literal levels of meaning. For example, the St Andrew, Auckland cross has inhabited vinescroll on it narrow shafts, an apparent depiction of Ecclesia, with her wings wrapped around a figure, and a representation of St Andrew being crucified. See Nina Maleczek, “The Anglo-Saxon Cross at St Andrew, Auckland: ‘Living Stones,’” York Medieval Yearbook 2 (2003), published at www.york.ac.uk/teaching/history/pjps/yearbook2.
previously been identified as such, there are two peacocks in the pediment of the cupboard on the famous Ezra page of the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 115). The peacocks, identifiable due to their long tail-feathers and crown (clear on the left-hand bird), are picked out in white, against the dark brown of the cupboard.

As with the birds on the Masham column, these have to be examined alongside the other symbols that surround them, in order for their symbolic meaning and position within any potential iconographic scheme to be discerned. Beginning with the birds themselves however, they are positioned either side of a cross, which stands atop what appears to be a stepped base, or a representation of a recess. Given this arrangement, the cross may be understood to represent Christ’s cross at Calvary, with its implications of bodily death and burial. By grouping the peacocks around this symbol, the iconography reflects that of other contemporary manuscripts, such as the eighth-century Würzburg manuscript where peacocks surround a crucifix (Fig. 96). Therefore, it seems that the primary symbolic meaning of the peacocks and cross in the pediment of the cupboard is to represent bodily death and the promise of resurrection into eternal life.

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634 The Ezra Page is fol. V, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiatino 1 (CLA Vol. 3, p. 299). This forms the subject of an article, ‘Sub Culmine Gazas: the peacocks in the Codex Amiatinus,’ submitted to Gesta.

635 See O’Reilly (2001), p. 8. While this study does not elaborate on the cupboard’s decoration to a great extent, the presence of a pair of birds in the gable is noted. See also Rupert Leo Scott Bruce-Mitford, The Art of the Codex Amiatinus (Jarrow, 1967), p. 11: ‘at the top and bottom of the cupboard the white paint is used to execute late antique vases, animals and birds, crosses, and little bifid leaf motifs.’ Hereafter Bruce-Mitford (1967).


637 The recess is clearly suggested by the shadows on the left, which give the impression of a hole in the gable. The cavity could be understood to represent a possible reliquary. That recesses may have been used to hold relics in the Anglo-Saxon period may be indicated by the late eighth-century Hedda’s Tomb, Peterborough, see Bailey (1996), p. 9, fig. 5, plate 5.


639 See previous discussion.
As well as the peacocks and cross, other symbols, picked out in white, decorate the lintel and baseboard, and a set of nine books, each with an inscription, are depicted in the body of the cupboard. In addition, the full-page illumination bears an inscription and an enigmatic scribal portrait. Each of these elements carries a specific set of meanings within the context of this illustration, and must be examined in turn in order to illuminate the peacocks, and vice versa.

The book-chest is the largest and most dominant element of the page, filling nearly half the background of the scene. It closely resembles that depicted in the fifth-century Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, and in a similar manner, the cupboard’s panelled doors are topped with a classical pediment that recall architectural features, such as the doors of a church (Fig. 116). However, there are two major differences, namely that the cupboard in the Codex Amiatinus illumination is decorated, and that it contains nine books, instead of the four gospels pictured in the Ravennite mosaic. The mosaic cupboard is not decorated, and has only a small cross depicted above the pediment. On the Ezra page, a scribe is

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639 It has been proposed that this scene was copied from a frontispiece to the codex grandior, depicting Cassiodorus in his library, with his three major works - the small Vulgate pandect on the floor, his codex grandior on his lap, and the novem codices in the cupboard behind him. Corsano (1987), p. 15. However, close reading of Bede’s early work indicates that the monks at Wearmouth-Jarrow did not know of Cassiodorus’s connection with their great Bible from Rome, and therefore would not have associated the seated man before a cupboard, with him. Meyvaert (1996), pp. 872.

640 The fact that the other apparently wooden objects in the scene – namely the seat, footstool and table – are much lighter in colour, with only a little decoration picked out in lighter or darker shades of brown could indicate that the cupboard was meant to form the focus, and that it was either original or copied from another source. See also Nordhagen (1977), p. 6, who argues that the cupboard was part of an original source, copied with all its inconsistencies.


642 This was kindly suggested to me during discussion at the 11th International Medieval Conference in Leeds, July 2004.

643 Lowden (1997), fig. 62.
placed to one side of the scene, his bent posture, slanting legs and pointing finger,
leading the viewer to the cupboard.\textsuperscript{645}

Immediately above the scribe's book, and emphasised by his extended finger,
is the base of the cupboard, decorated with a centrally placed bird. It is distinctly
round with comparatively small wings, suggesting it can be identified as a land-
dwelling bird, such as a quail or, more probably, a partridge.\textsuperscript{646} The \textit{Physiologus}
expounds the symbolic meaning of this bird,\textsuperscript{647} but it is the Old English poem on the
same subject that fully develops its significance.\textsuperscript{648} In this account, the stress is not
so much on the foolish nature of the bird, but on the choices that the individual,
represented by the partridge, can make and the beauty of the eternal reward they shall
receive if they choose to seek God.\textsuperscript{649}

\begin{verse}
Uton we \textit{by} geornor gode oliccan,  
firene feogan, \textit{fipes} earnian,  
dugudæ to dryhtne, \textit{penden} us \textit{dæg} scine,  
\textit{þæt} swa \textit{æpeln}e eardwica cyst  
in wuldræs wîte wunian motan.
\end{verse}

Let us the more eagerly please God,  
Hate sin, earn refuge,  
Salvation from the lord, while day shines on us,  
So that we may occupy the noble best of dwellings,  
in the splendor of glory.\textsuperscript{650}

\textsuperscript{645} For the significance of such gestures see earlier discussion. That this feature was included in
Anglo-Saxon manuscript art can be seen in the Codex Amiatinus itself, on folio 796v, the Christ in
Majesty page, where Christ points to a book.  
\textsuperscript{646} The partridge occurs in both pagan and Christian art in Rome, and is depicted very similarly in the
\textsuperscript{647} The \textit{Physiologus} states that the partridge warms the eggs of other birds, and are then abandoned by
the chicks. Quoted from Cutley (1979), p. 46.  
\textsuperscript{648} See Ann Squires, \textit{The Old English Physiologus} (Durham, 1988), pp. 19-22. Hereafter Squires
(1988). Although the poem does not mention the name of the bird, it has been identified as a partridge
from both the content, and the fact that the three poems occur in the same sequence in both the Y and
B texts of the Latin \textit{Physiologus}.  
Tradition,' \textit{Florilegium} 1 (1979), pp. 15-41.  
\textsuperscript{650} \textit{The Partridge}, lines 12-16, Squires (1988), p. 46.
In this poem, and the Christian tradition that preceded it, the partridge represents the Christian who, with the free will to choose, has the capacity for either good or evil, but will receive heavenly rewards if choosing the right path through life (Fig. 117).

The relevance of the partridge to the decoration of the cupboard may well be indicated by the cross that features prominently to the right of it (it was presumably balanced by a similar motif on the left). Furthermore, the frame containing the cross is bordered on both sides by vertical rows of arrows, while the lower rim of the baseboard is decorated with a series of small crosses within tessellated triangles. By placing the cross so close to the bird, it is possible that the partridge was intended to represent the individual who has faith in Christ, but has no knowledge of the scriptures or the sacraments. The directional arrows, Y-shapes and triangles, may in turn symbolise the fact that any individual, like the partridge, has the free will to choose the path to salvation or to damnation, towards knowledge, or away from it. Consequently, the books of scripture form the next logical step in the iconographic scheme.

Moving up from the baseboard, inside the cupboard are a series of nine books and a set of scribal equipment. While the order and arrangement of the volumes has been the subject of scholarly debate, it is clear that they accord with the arrangement of a Vulgate pandect like the Codex Amiatinus itself, and are intended to represent the scriptures in harmony. The nine books are arranged on the shelves

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651 The peacock and partridge/quail are interestingly also paired in the Cubiculum of the Velatio, in the Catacomb of Priscilla. See Nicolai (2002), p. 95. It has been posited that the fresco on the back wall depicts the ages of man, or journey of the soul. The alternating peacock and partridges in the central vault, reflect a similar transition from earthly bird to celestial bird, as implied by the Ezra page cupboard’s decoration.


653 The total number of books listed on the spines is seventy-one, and the books are divided according to Augustine’s arrangement, as set out in the prefatory material of the Codex Amiatinus itself. See Meyvaert (1996), p. 844.

in such a way that their covers, as well as the spines and sides, are visible.\textsuperscript{655} While the eye may lead upwards from the baseboard and scribe, to the lowermost books (guided by the struts on the cupboard doors), the labels on the spines read downwards like a page of text. Such an arrangement could be understood to represent the practise of rumination, for, just as the eye moves from Old Testament volumes to New and back, so a Christian reader must return to all the books of scripture to constantly refine understanding.\textsuperscript{656} In addition, the scribal equipment arranged in and around the cupboard may indicate that a complete knowledge of the scriptures may not involve simply reading, but also requires an active part to be taken in their elucidation and dissemination.\textsuperscript{657}

Above the books is the lintel, which, like the baseboard, is also decorated. At each end is a lozenge; these flank urns, beasts, stars, and centrally, a cross. The lozenge is a complex symbol that recalls the quaternities of the Christian faith, for example, the four gospels, the rivers of paradise, the senses of scripture, and the natures of Christ.\textsuperscript{658} It has an extensive symbolic tradition, and is most often employed to indicate the many aspects of the Christian faith (Fig. 38).\textsuperscript{659} By crossing the lozenge, the artists of the Codex Amiatinus have also transformed it into a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection in such a way as to refer to the universal nature of his salvation. Accordingly, it could be interpreted as a complex profession of faith.

\textsuperscript{655} It is also worth noting that the complex symbol of the lozenge adorns the covers of the Old Testament books, while the New Testament books bear the cross. See O'Reilly (1998), pp. 49-94.
\textsuperscript{656} This provides a contrast with the mosaic cupboard in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, where only the four gospel books are depicted. See above discussion.
\textsuperscript{657} The monasteries at Wearmouth-Jarrow, like that at Vivarium, were dedicated to the spreading of the Word through copying, editing, and writing. See Bede, \textit{HE} V.24, pp. 566-67, and discussion in Marsden (1998), pp. 65-85.
\textsuperscript{658} See O'Reilly (1998), pp. 51-52, and discussion in eagles chapter.
\textsuperscript{659} Lozenges appear throughout the Codex Amiatinus itself, on the book covers in the Ezra page, within the letter O of ANATOL on folio IIv-IIIr, the Tabernacle page, and around the border of the Christ in Majesty Page, folio 796v.
The urns, placed close enough to almost touch the lozenges, have two handles, and recall examples such as the one depicted in the foreground of the fifth-century mosaic from Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Fig. 118). Furthermore, a similar urn is pictured in the Tabernacle miniature of the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 20). Here it represents the laver in which priests were ritually purified in order to enter the Temple. Bede stated in *De templo* that these priests represent not only ordained Christian priests but also all Christians who partake in Christ’s priesthood through baptism:

> Neque enim episcopis solis aut presbyteris, verum universae Ecclesiae loquebatur apostolus Petrus, cum ait: ‘Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis.

> After all, it was not just to bishops and priest alone, but to all God’s Church that the apostle Peter was speaking when he said, ‘But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood.’

As a result, the urns on the lintel can be seen to carry symbolic meaning relating to the rite of baptism. However, similar urns are also often shown overflowing with vine, as on the sixth-century throne of Maximian, Ravenna, where they can be understood to represent his body and blood, his sacrifice on the cross, and by extension, the Eucharist (Fig. 119). Thus, the empty urns could, in the context of the Codex Amiatinus, be considered as symbolic of both these sacraments.

Directly beside the urns, and touching them on the right, are two creatures with sturdy bodies, broad shoulders and long slim tails. They can be identified as

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660 See André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (London, 1969), pl. 143. A similar late antique urn appears under the table where Abraham serves the three angels, also from Maria Maggiore, indicating that this symbol could accompany images of bread, to symbolise the body and blood of Christ. See Frederick van der Meer, *Early Christian Art* (London, 1969), pl. 33.

661 This feature, among others, has led the illustration to be wrongly identified as a depiction of the Temple, while it is in fact of the Tabernacle. See for example Bruce-Mitford (1967), colour plate D. Bede states that he saw images of both the Tabernacle and Temple in Cassiodorus’s *codex grandior*, (see Meyvaert (1996), pp. 832-835), so it is possible the laver was included from the Temple picture. This may mean that the Wearmouth-Jarrow artists conflated both images.


663 See Lowden (1997), figs. 67 and 68.
oxen, for they are depicted in a similar manner in a seventh-century sculptured frieze from Hexham (Fig. 120). Oxen have an established Biblical meaning through Saint Paul, who connects them with missionaries and the role of spreading the Gospels. Moreover, in his description of the twelve oxen around the base of the laver in De templo, Bede established a connection between the oxen, the Apostles and the spreading of the Gospels by all Christians. Only two oxen are portrayed, rather than the twelve that Bede described, but their placement next to the urns, facing inwards, continues and expands the potential sacramental and priestly allusions of the lozenges and urns.

Next to the oxen are two four-pointed stars that flank the central cross within a roundel. Such an arrangement is exemplified in the eighth-century apse mosaic at St Sophia, Thessalonika, where stars are arranged between the arms of a cross, which also has beams radiating from its centre, like the one on the cupboard’s lintel, and is also contained within a circle (Fig. 121). As a result it can be understood to represent the triumphant cross, stretching across the cosmos with its arms touching all the corners of the universe. Indeed, this ‘Cross in Majesty,’ alongside the other symbols on the lintel, collectively mirrors aniconically the figural iconography of folio 796v of the Codex Amiatinus (Fig. 58). Here Christ in Majesty is enthroned

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665 Paul interprets oxen as believers in 2 Cor. 6:16, while in 1 Cor. 9:8-10 he identifies the ox treading out grain with the Christian missionary. See discussion in Robert M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 8-9.
667 Lowden (1997), fig. 89. See also the fifth-century mosaic decoration of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, in Lowden (1997), fig. 63, and in the sixth-century apse mosaic at San Apollinare in Classe, near Ravenna, Lowden (1997), fig. 83.
within a circular mandorla, surrounded by the four Evangelists, who will carry the Gospels to the four corners of the world.\textsuperscript{669}

Viewed in this manner, the decoration of the cupboard presents a number of identifiable and intelligible symbolic motifs, and like the Masham Column, it appears that these are not merely a randomly collected group of images.\textsuperscript{670} Rather, this set of symbols seems to have been consciously employed by the Anglo-Saxon artists who created the manuscript. However, the significance of the iconographic scheme to this study of peacock symbolism in Anglo-Saxon England depends on whether the symbols that decorate the cupboard on the Ezra page are perceived as original creations of the Wearmouth-Jarrow community.

The Codex Amiatinus has often been scrutinised for possible links with Cassiodorus's monastery at Vivarium due to its putative inspiration from the \textit{codex grandior},\textsuperscript{671} and it is possible that the Anglo-Saxon artists that produced the Ezra page copied the cupboard, complete with symbols, from a Cassiodorian exemplar.\textsuperscript{672} However, in the light of recent studies,\textsuperscript{673} and the findings of this thesis,\textsuperscript{674} it appears that the illustrations of the Codex Amiatinus can be analysed as the products of an Anglo-Saxon scriptorium. It could be proposed that, just as the high priestly garb and

\textsuperscript{669} See Bruce-Mitford (1967), p. 3. The Christ in Majesty illumination is accepted as a distinctly Anglo-Saxon creation, not copied from a Cassiodorian exemplar.

\textsuperscript{670} For a similar interpretation of peacocks within iconographic schemes see Talila Michaeli, 'Iconography and Symbolism of Vaults and Ceilings in Painted Tombs in Israel,' in László Borhy (ed.), \textit{Plafonds et Voûtes à l'époque antique: Actes du VIIe Colloque de l'Association Internationale pour la peinture murale antique (AIPMA) 15–19 mai 2001: Budapest et Veszprém, Hungary} (Budapest, 2004), pp. 79-87, especially p. 84.

\textsuperscript{671} It is possible the \textit{codex grandior} was the pandect of the 'old translation' brought from Rome to Wearmouth-Jarrow, described in Bede, \textit{HA} 15, p. 379, trans. p. 203. See previous discussion in Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{672} See Bruce-Mitford (1967), p. 13.


\textsuperscript{674} For example, the discussion on the Trinitarian roundels in the doves chapter.
inscription have been added to transform Cassiodorus into Ezra as a *typus Christi*; so the cupboard, perhaps originally intended as a receptacle for Cassiodorus’s *novem codices*, has been decorated with symbols, suggesting that it may likewise be interpreted symbolically.

Furthermore, it is evident that many of the sources of reference for the cupboard’s decoration lie within the Codex Amiatinus itself, such as the urn in the Tabernacle complex and the image of Christ in Majesty. What an understanding of the cupboard’s iconographic scheme may provide, therefore, is a greater understanding of how it was designed as an integral part of the manuscript — included as a frontispiece, it may have been intended to introduce many of the themes articulated in the other miniatures.

If the symbols depicted on the cupboard are understood to have been deliberately included by the Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes, and to refer symbolically to other aspects of the manuscript illumination, then they must be studied alongside one another, as parts of an overall iconographic scheme. It appears that the illumination can be ‘read’ in a similar way to the Ruthwell Cross, as described by Ó Carragáin:

Their [the tituli] unique design reverses that of the great Roman triumphal columns, whose figural programmes read from left to right in spiral moving gradually upwards. The Ruthwell design instead stresses verticality: the programme on the broad sides must be read upwards, from ‘earth’ to ‘heaven,’ and a similar upwards movement is natural when looking at a tree or a vine-scroll; but the runic verse tituli, and most (though not all) of the tituli on the vertical borders of the broad sides, must be read downwards, from ‘heaven’ to ‘earth.’

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675 See O’Reilly (2001), p. 30, and Meyvaert (1996), p. 875. Meyvaert argues that, while Cassiodorus may have had himself portrayed at the front of the *codex grandior*, he would not have portrayed himself in the guise of a Jewish High Priest, and certainly not as Ezra.
677 Meyvaert (1996), pp. 860-66, discusses the original arrangement of the illuminations of the first quire. He concludes that the Ezra page would have originally been placed alongside the dedication page before the other prefatory material.
Likewise, the decoration of the cupboard can be ‘read’ both upwards and downwards, from ‘earth’ to ‘heaven,’ and back again.

Beginning at the base of the cupboard therefore, the partridge can be interpreted as symbolising humanity, which has the potential to choose to follow the Father and search for eternal salvation. Alongside the partridge, the small arrows and tessellated triangles on the baseboard that point upwards and downwards represent the free will of Adam’s descendants, and that God’s love for his creation gave humankind free choice. The cross in the panel beside the bird is perhaps acting as a simple profession of the individual’s faith. However, while the individual may burn with ardours, he also has to have an active thirst for knowledge and a greater understanding of God’s mysteries and this quest is represented by the books in the cupboard above.\(^679\)

Moving on to the lintel, the urn, oxen and lozenges, may indicate that an individual is also expected to participate in the sacraments, and the spreading of the gospels through missionary or priestly activities to the four corners of the world. They will then be able to recognise Christ in his Majesty, symbolised by the cross in a circle surrounded by stars, and will have a more complete understanding within which to ground their ardour and faith. It is significant that the cross from the bottom is then mirrored at the top. By repeating the motif the artist may be intending the viewer to understand that the basic faith in God, depicted at the start of the individual’s journey towards heaven, has remained the same but grown in understanding and fervour. At the top of the cupboard, which is symbolic of the end

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\(^{679}\) See O’Reilly (2001), p. 20. She quotes Origen, and states that the ‘faithful reader’ needs to set up an ‘inner tabernacle or Ark of the Covenant’ and become a ‘library of the books of God.’ See also discussion in Introduction.
of the individual's journey towards salvation, is death and resurrection, represented by the Christ's cross and the peacocks.

Bede highlights many of these aspects of the individual's search for salvation in *De tabernaculo*:

> Et nos si doctores nostros ad altitudinem divinae contemplationis sequi non possumus, curemus solliciti, ne aliqua nos tentatio a vicinia montis Dei retrahat, sed juxta modulum nostrum virtutum operibus insistamus, inhaerentes stabili corde sacramentis nostri Redemptoris, quibus imbuti sumus; et gratiam Spiritus eius, qua signati sumus, intemeratam in nos nobis conservare curantes.

And if we are unable to follow our teachers to the height of divine contemplation, let us take solicitous care lest temptation should somehow draw us away from the mountain of God. Instead let us persevere in good works according to the measure of our powers, cleaving with unwavering heart to the sacraments of our Redeemer, into which we have been initiated, and taking care to preserve undefiled in us the grace of his Spirit, with which we have been sealed. 679

'Divine contemplation,' 'good works,' an 'unwavering heart' and the 'sacraments' will all enable the individual to ascend the 'mountain of God' towards the heavens.

In a similar manner, the Anglo-Saxon artists of the Ezra page have shown, through the decoration of the cupboard, that an individual has to move towards heavenly salvation by reading and understanding the scriptures, spreading God's word to the four corners of the world, keeping his/her love and ardour burning, and partaking in the sacraments. The peacocks at the apex of the cupboard represent the eternal reward which both Bede and the Ezra page artists desired, namely resurrection into eternal life alongside Christ.

If the cupboard and its decoration can be understood to symbolically represent the progress of an individual towards heavenly salvation, then the other artistic elements of the Codex Amiatinus may contain similar layers of meaning. For

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example, the seated scribe next to the cupboard can be seen to interact with this iconographic scheme, and to represent the Christian endeavouring through the study of scripture and partaking in the sacraments, to be resurrected with Christ. In addition, elements from the other Codex Amiatinus illustrations may similarly refer to the salvation of the faithful. All the images, including the Harmony pages, Pentateuch diagram and the Canon Tables, stress the unity of the Old and New Testaments and of all the books of scriptures which the Wearmouth-Jarrow scribes had brought together in the pages of their pandect. The peacocks, their explicit symbolic meaning, and their placing in relation to the other decoration on the cupboard may provide a key for unlocking the meaning behind other illustrations in the Codex Amiatinus.

While each representation of peacocks in Anglo-Saxon art is slightly different, there does appear to be a surprising degree of uniformity in the symbolic meanings that they carry, and the ways they function within iconographic schemes. The four extant examples of peacock symbolism in Anglo-Saxon art – the Hunterston Brooch, Æthelwulf ring, Masham Column and Ezra page – all accord with earlier representations in showing the birds paired, while the latter three depict them confronted around eucharistic or crucifixion imagery. The literary record, although sparse, supports the associations found in the artwork, of peacocks with

\[681\text{ The images are self-referential. For example, the triumphant cross and books of Scripture illustrated on the Ezra page can be perceived as short-hand references to the plan of the Tabernacle and the Christ in Majesty page: the cupboard is both the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant seen in the Tabernacle illustration, and the new Covenant, represented through Christ and his universal church, as in the Christ in Majesty scene. See O'Reilly (2001), p. 14.}\]

\[682\text{ See Carol A. Farr, 'The Shape of Learning at Wearmouth-Jarrow: The Diagram pages in the Codex Amiatinus,' in Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (eds.), Northumbria's Golden Age (Stroud, 1999), pp. 336-345.}\]

\[683\text{ The illustrations also seem to be linked with Bede's three original works, De templo, De tabernaculo, and In Ezram et Neemiam. Their popularity is indicated by Lul's request for multiple copies of In Ezram et Neemiam from archbishop Aethelbert. See M. B. Parkes, The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow (Jarrow, 1982), p. 15. On the date of these works, see Meyvaert (1996), pp. 832-3, and (2005), pp. 1087-1133.}\]
resurrection after death. As a result, this study has been able to show how Anglo-Saxon artists and authors perceived peacocks as symbols, and how they consciously employed them according to established literary and artistic traditions.

However, the Masham column and Codex Amiatinus are of particular interest, for they employ these birds as part of complex iconographic and symbolic schemes, designed to challenge viewers to uncover layers of meaning. While the arrangement and primary meanings of peacocks in Anglo-Saxon art accord with those established in sixth- and seventh-century ecclesiastical art, their use alongside images such as David dictating the psalms, the Cross at Calvary, and biblical books stored in a cupboard, is unique to Anglo-Saxon art. It is only in eighth- to ninth-century Northumbria that this bird’s full range of symbolic meanings is exploited, enhanced, and employed as part of detailed, riddling objects or images.
CHAPTER V

THE SYMBOLIC LIFE OF SPARROWS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The symbolic life of sparrows in Anglo-Saxon England presents a different set of challenges to those evinced by the other birds covered in this investigation. There is only one unambiguous reference to sparrows in Anglo-Latin literature and there are no identifiable instances from the artwork. However, the context of this bird in the literature, namely in the famous ‘speech of the nobleman’ in Book II of Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica, means that any study of birds in Anglo-Saxon England would be incomplete without a discussion of it.

This passage, and the sparrow’s role in it, has been the subject of a number of recent studies. These investigations all, to different degrees, focus on the significance of the bird in this episode, and the biblical passages that it recalls. However, the present study will propose new biblical sources, and will also reveal a more complex series of ruminative echoes associated with the sparrow. Furthermore, it will argue that the sparrow’s lack of a complex and specific iconographic or symbolic tradition in Anglo-Saxon England, and its association in the psalms with the term avis, allowed Bede to employ it as a more general bird

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684 Me spaffow is harder to identify than the dove, as it has no standard means of differentiation, such as the olive branch described in the Book of Genesis. See Chapter One on doves, although there are a number of unidentifiable, small birds in Anglo-Saxon artwork. See Introduction.

685 Bede, HE II.13, pp. 182-5.


687 Fry (1979), pp. 195-197, notes the influence of Psalm 83 on this passage, while Toswell (2000), pp. 8-10, suggests a further set of echoes from Old English literature.

688 None of the previous studies note the significance of Psalm 54 to Bede’s ‘Speech of the Nobleman,’ or the fact that passer is rendered as the more general avis in parts of the Vulgate.
symbol, which in turn recalled the concept of the flight of the soul through life. That this connection between birds and the soul was exploited in both Old English literature and Anglo-Saxon art will also be proposed with recourse to the Exeter Book elegies, the anonymous life of Gregory the Great, and the Franks Casket. 

Background to Sparrows

The sparrow features in a variety of classical mythological and poetic texts. In these instances, it is most often included as a symbol of licentiousness and is associated with sexual passion or love. Pliny, for example, states, *passer minimus vitae, cui salacitas par,* 'the sparrow, their [doves] equal in salaciousness, has a very small span of life.' However, in both the Old and New Testaments, it occurs as a symbol of the notice taken by an all-seeing God of the least of his creation. For example, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus states:

> nonne duo passereres asse veneunt et unus ex illis non cadet super terram sine Patre vestro vestri autem et capilli capitis omnes numerati sunt nolite ergo timere multis passeribus meliores estis vos

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: better are you than many sparrows.

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690 Pliny, *HN* X liii, p. 360-1. It is perhaps significant that Pliny pairs the sparrow with the dove. See later discussion in this chapter. Isidore states simply that the sparrow gets its name, *passer,* from being small, *parvus.* Isidore, *Etym.* XII.vii, vol. II, 68.

691 Matt 10:29-31. See also Luke 12:6-7. Luke’s account reads: *nonne quinque passereres veneunt dipundio et unus ex illis non est in oblivione coram Deo sed et capilli capitis vestri omnes numerati sunt nolite ergo timere multis passeribus pluris estis* ‘are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? Yea, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: you are of more value than many sparrows.’ See also Suzetta Tucker, ‘ChristStory Sparrow Page,’ *ChristStory Christian Bestiary* (1998). http://ww2.netnitco.net/users/legend01/sparrow.htm, accessed 15 Feb. 2006. She argues that this passage describes the practice of Jewish children, who caught and plucked sparrows, tying two together on a rope, and selling them for small amount of money.
Here the sparrow is employed allegorically to suggest that even the smallest bird is cared for by a loving God. Augustine quoted the passage in *De Civitate Dei*, in relation to the assurance of life after death that the faithful Christian receives through God's love. This passage was also interpreted as a sign of his ultimate power over life and death. In addition, the sparrow is mentioned in the Book of Proverbs, where its flight to and from its nest is compared to an unjust curse.

However, it is in the psalms that it receives its most extensive treatment. As previous scholars have noted, the sparrow is a pivotal symbol in Psalm 83 (84): 1-13. It is worth quoting the passage in full:

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unti pro torculari filiorum Core canticum
quam dilecta tabernacula tua Domine exercitium
desiderat et defecit anima mea in atria Domini cor meum et caro mea
laudabunt Deum viventem
siquidem avis invent domum et passer nidum sibi ubi ponat pullos suos
altaria tua Domine exercitium rex meus et Deus meus
beati qui habitant in domo tua adhuc laudabunt te semper
beatus homo cuius fortitudo est in te serenitae in corde eius
transeuntes in valle fletus fontem ponent eam
benedictione quoque amicietur doctor ibunt de fortitudine in
fortitudinem parebunt apud Deum in Sion
Domine Deus exercitium exaudi orationem meam ausculta Deus Iacob
semper
cliceus noster vide Deus et adtende faciem christi tui
quoniam melior est dies in atris tuis super milia elegi adiunctus esse in
domo Dei mei magis quam habitare in tabernaculis impietatis
quia sol et scutum Dominus Deus gratiam et gloriam dabit Dominus
nec prohibebit bonum ab his qui ambulant in perfectione Domine
exercitium beatus homo qui confidet in te

Unto the end, for the winepresses, a psalm for the sons of Core.
How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of host!
My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and
my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.
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692 Aug., *De Civitate Dei*, XII.viii, p. 401. See also Chapter Four of this thesis on peacocks.
693 See Augustine, 31, *De Dono Perseuerantiae*, PL 45.1011, cum rationales vel damnandae vel liberandae sint animae; quandoquidem nec passer cadit in terram sine voluntate Patris nostri qui in coelis est ‘when rational souls are either to be condemned or delivered, although, indeed, not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of our Father which is in heaven?’
694 Prov. 26:2. This example also pairs the sparrow with another bird, rendered as *drowr* in the Hebrew, which is the same word translated as ‘turtledove’ in the Douay Rheims version of Psalm 83.
695 The Vulgate numbering for the Psalms are used throughout, although the King James numbering is included in brackets at the first reference.
For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle\textsuperscript{696} a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones: Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord: they shall praise thee for ever and ever.

Blessed is the man whose help is from thee: in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps,

In the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set.

For the lawgiver shall give a blessing, they shall go from virtue to virtue: the God of gods shall be seen in Sion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob.

Behold, O God our protector: and look on the face of thy Christ.

For better is one day in thy courts above thousands. I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners.

For God loveth mercy and truth: the Lord will give grace and glory.

He will not deprive of good things them that walk in innocence: O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

In this psalm God is portrayed as a refuge, just like the nests of the sparrow and the turtle-dove (or the more general avis employed in the Vulgate), thus symbolising that even the lowly are brought under his care and protection.\textsuperscript{697} The Psalmist has directly associated the passer and avis with anima mea and cor meum of the line above, so that the birds act as a symbol for the soul.\textsuperscript{698} Furthermore, Christ’s allegory of the sparrows can be seen as a reworking of Psalm 83, in both its sparrow imagery and its references to the body and the soul.

However, while these are the most memorable references to the sparrow in scripture, there are a couple of instances elsewhere in the psalms where the Vulgate Bible reads avis, but exegetes and other biblical recensions have rendered it passer.

This is evident, for example, in Psalm 10 (11); \textit{in Domino speravi quomodo dicitis animae meae transvola in montem ut avis} ‘in the Lord I put my trust: how then do

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\textsuperscript{696} The King James version employs ‘swallow’ here, to render the Hebrew drowr. The Vulgate provides avis, which the Douay-Rheims translates as ‘turtle-dove.’

\textsuperscript{697} For a discussion of the Temple and Tabernacle as symbols of Christ and the Church see O’Reilly (2001), pp. 30–4.

\textsuperscript{698} The association between sparrows and the soul made in Psalm 123:7, is also consistently endorsed by Jerome, see for example, Jerome, \textit{Commentarii in Ezechielem}, ed. F. Gorie, CCSL 75 (Turnhout, 1964), p. 400.
you say to my soul: Get thee away from hence to the mountain like a sparrow?" 699

Similarly, Psalm 101 (102) reads *vigilavi et fui sicut avis solitaria super tectum*,
which the Douay-Rheims translation renders as, "I have watched, and am become as
a sparrow all alone on the housetop." 700 This ambiguity arose from the Hebrew,
which reads *tsippowr* in all these instances, but can be translated as ‘small bird’ or
‘fowl,’ as well as ‘sparrow.’ 701 Different Latin translations of the Hebrew appear to
have alternated the use of *avis* and *passer* to reflect the different possible range of
meanings in the word *tsippowr*, but it is clear that the connection between sparrows
and more generic bird terms was established in the biblical texts.

Exegesis on these psalms compounds the confusion between *avis* and *passer.*
Augustine referred to a *passer* ‘sparrow’ in his commentary on both Psalm 10 and
102, indicating perhaps that the Old Latin texts he used had the word *passer* (where
the Vulgate would have had *avis*), in both instances. He also goes on to associate the
*avis* ‘birds’ mentioned in these psalms, with the *passeres* of Psalms 10 and 83:

Habeo domum ubi requiescam, quia in Domino confido: nam et passer
invenit sibi domum, et factus est Dominus refugium pauperi. Dicamus
ergo tota fiducia, ne dum Christum apud haereticos quaerimus,
amittamus: In Domino confido; quomodo dicitis animae meae:
Transmigra in montes sicut passer? 702

I have a house where I may rest, in that I trust in the Lord. For even
‘the sparrow hath found herself a house,’ and, ‘The Lord hath
become a refuge to the poor.’ Let us say then with all confidence,
lest while we seek Christ among heretics we lose Him, ‘In the Lord
I put my trust: how then do you say to my soul: Get thee away from
hence to the mountain like a sparrow?’

699 Psalm 10:2 (11).
700 Psalm 101:8 (102).
701 Strong’s Hebrew Bible states that this word should be translated ‘sparrow’ at Psalm 84:3 and
102:7, and while Psalm 10:1 includes the same word, *tsippowr*, he suggests it should be translated
‘bird,’ along with Pro. 26.2. Indeed, only these two psalms have the word translated as ‘sparrow.’ He
provides ‘fowl’ and ‘bird’ for all other instances of the Hebrew *tsippowr*. Search conducted at
The references to sparrows in these psalms recall specifically the souls of the faithful, who seeks protection with the Lord. Augustine continued this connection between *avis/passer* and souls in his commentary on Psalm 101:

> Factus est sicut passer volando, id est ascendingo: singularis in tecto, id est in coelo.... ibi interpellat pro nobis. Caput enim nostrum passer est, corpus illius turtur. Etenim passer invenit sibi domum. Quam domum? In coelo est, interpellat pro nobis. Et turtur nidum sibi, Ecclesia Dei nidum de lignis crucis ipsius; ubi ponat pullos suos parvulos suos. Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer singularis in tecto.  

He became as a sparrow by flying; that is, by ascending, ‘all alone on the house-top,’ that is, in heaven.... He there intercedes on our behalf. For our head is as the sparrow, his body as the turtle-dove. ‘For the sparrow hath found herself an house.’ What house? In heaven, where he mediates for us. ‘And the turtle-dove a nest,’ the Church of God hath found a nest from the wood of His Cross, where ‘she may lay her young,’ her children.

In this commentary Augustine cited a range of birds (including the owl and pelican of Psalm 101), to represent symbolically the stages of both Christ’s life, and the life of a Christian. Although he presented different species of bird for each phase of the spiritual life, *unus homo potest habere personam trium avium* ‘one man may represent the three birds.’ Significantly perhaps, it is the sparrow that represents the ascent of the soul into heaven.

In this passage, Augustine also drew a connection between the sparrow of Psalm 83, and the *turtur* ‘turtledove,’ one of which represents the head, and the other the body. This association between sparrows and doves was also elaborated by Jerome:

> Sicut ergo passer et turtur aves castissimae nidos sibi in sublimioribus faciunt, sic ergo tabernacula et atria et domus non sunt in humili ista terra, sed in excelsa, hoc est in regnis caelorum.

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703 Aug., Psal. 101, 37.1300.
As the birds of purity, the sparrow and the dove make their nests in the higher places, so the tabernacles, courts, and houses are not on this lowly earth, but on high in the kingdom of heaven.

He equated both the dove and the sparrow, paired in Psalm 83 and again in Proverbs 26, with the faithful, who strive to find God. These birds both represent the ascent of the soul into the kingdom of heaven.

There is one more psalm worth quoting in the context of this study, namely Psalm 54, since it continues this connection between doves and the soul:

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cor meum conturbatum est in me et formido mortis cecidit super me
timor et tremor venit super me et contexit me tenebra
et dixi quis dabitt mihi pinnas sicut columbae et volabo et requiescam
cece elongavi fugiens et mansi in solitudine expectabam eum qui
salvum me fecit a pusillanimitate spiritus et tempestate...
ego autem; ad Deum clamavi et Dominus salvabit me
vespere et mane et meridie narrabo et adnuntiabo et exaudiet vocem
meam
redimet in pace animam meam ab his qui adpropinquant mihi
quoniam inter multos erant mecum707
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My heart is troubled within me: and the fear of death is fallen upon me. Fear and trembling are come upon me: and darkness hath covered me. And I said: Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest? Lo, I have gone far off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness. I waited for him that hath saved me from pusillanimitiy of spirit, and a storm... But I have cried to God: and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning, and at noon I will speak and declare: and he shall hear my voice. He shall redeem my soul in peace from them that draw near to me: for among many they were with me.

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706 This differs from Augustine, who makes a distinction between the two, stating, *caput enim nostrum passer est, corpus illius turtur* 'for our head is as the sparrow, His body as the turtle-dove.' PL 37.1300. While in the New Testament the dove developed an association with the Holy Spirit and the account of Christ's baptism, in the Old Testament its role is more general, as a symbol of the soul's ascent to heaven. See doves chapter. Furthermore, it is consistently associated with the sparrow in the Old Testament. The Hebrew presents yet further difficulties, for what Jerome, Augustine, and the Vulgate Bible render as *turtur* in Psalm 83, is actually *drowr*, which is more akin to a swallow or a swift. See Strong's Hebrew Bible at, www.sacrednamebible.com/kjvstrongs/CONHEB186.htm#S1866, accessed 1st May 2006.

707 Psalm 54:5-9, 17-19.
While the ‘dove’ of this passage is rendered *columba* rather than *turtur* in the Vulgate,\(^{707}\) as with Psalm 83:5, this bird is also related to *cor meum* and *anima mea*. Furthermore, it is the emphasis on flight and wings which is of significance, for it is the bird’s ability to move away from earthly strife, towards rest, that the Psalmist is recounting.\(^{708}\) This theme is also evident in patristic literature on Psalms 54, including Augustine’s *Enarrationes in psalmos*:

> ‘Quis,’ incite, ‘dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae, et volabo, et requiescam?’ Requiescet, ubi? ... aut sicut ait Apostlus, ‘Dissolvi, et esse cum Christo, multo enim magis optimum ... Columba a molestis quaevit avolationem, sed non amittit dilectionem.’\(^{709}\)

> ‘Who, he saith, shall give me wings as to a dove, and I shall fly and shall rest? Shall rest, where? ...as the Apostle said, ‘To be dissolved and to be with Christ, for it is by far the best thing’... A dove seeketh a flying away from troubles, but she loseth not love.’

Augustine’s commentary on this psalm stressed that the rest which the bird (in this case a dove) desires, is to be found through being ‘with Christ.’ Through him, the bird can fly away from earthly troubles to rest, like the soul’s flight towards death. In the light of these consistent associations between *passer, turtur/columba,avis,* and *anima,* it now remains to examine how Bede may have responded to, and employed, these traditions with regards to the sparrow in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.

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\(^{707}\) The Hebrew has *yownah* at Ps 54:7, which can be translated as ‘dove’ or ‘pigeon.’ See Strong’s Hebrew Bible at, [www.sacrednamebible.com/kjvstrongs/CONHEB312.htm#S3123](http://www.sacrednamebible.com/kjvstrongs/CONHEB312.htm#S3123), accessed 14th March 2006. The distinctly white dove, that comes to be associated with the Holy Spirit, is a mutation of this species, but this distinction is not made in the Hebrew Bible.

\(^{708}\) For the importance of birds as a point of contact between heaven and earth see Hart (1988), p. 2.

\(^{709}\) Aug., *Psal. 54,* 36.633.
Bede and the Sparrow

In Book II of his *Historia ecclesiastica* Bede included a speech delivered to King Edwin by one of his noblemen.\(^{710}\)

Cuius suasioni uerbisque prudentibus alius optimatum regis tribuens assensum continuo subdidit, 'Talis' inquiens 'mihi uidetur, rex, uita hominum praesens in terris, ad conparationem eius quod nobis incertum est temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministriis tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio et calido effecto cenacula, fiorentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemaliium pluuiarum uel niuium, adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exerit, ipso quidem tempore quo intus est hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruiissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens tuis oculis elabitur. Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Vnde, si haec noua doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur.' His similia et ceteri maiores natu ac regis consiliarii diuinitt admoniti prosequebantur.

Another of the king's chief men agreed with this advice and with these wise words then added, 'This is how the present life of man on earth, King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all. If this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it.' Other elders and counsellors of the king continued in the same manner, being divinely prompted to do so.\(^{711}\)

In the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Edwin's decision to convert to Christianity was of fundamental importance, for Bede stressed that it enabled the English people, not to mention himself, to progress *de potestate Satanae ad fidem Christi* 'from the power

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\(^{710}\) Plummer stated it is a scene which 'lives in the heart of every one of us.' Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae: Opera historica* (Oxford, 1896), I, p. xliii. For its impact on later art and literature see M. Higbie, 'Flight of the Swallow in the *Mayor of Casterbridge*,’ *English Language Notes* 16 (1979), pp. 311-12.

\(^{711}\) Bede, *HE* II.13, pp. 182-3.
of Satan to the Faith of Christ. In the context of this study, therefore, it is interesting to find that Bede chose to punctuate this event with a strong visual image: that of the sparrow’s flight through the hall.

Bede specifically included a sparrow at this point in his narrative. However, in order to discuss its meaning, it is apposite to begin by examining potential sources and comparanda. The first question one must ask within this context is whether the bird was an original creation, or if Bede translated the detail from an oral or written informant. In this respect, it is worth comparing this scene with another royal conversion with which Bede was familiar, namely that of Clovis, in Gregory of Tours’s *Historia Francorum.* While there are many points of similarity between the accounts of the two kings and their conversions, for example, the persuasive attempts of their queens, the aid of God received during a time of need, and the calling of a meeting prior to accepting the faith, there are also notable differences. Most significantly, no symbolic event or allegorical tale is related to punctuate Clovis’s acceptance of Christianity, while Edwin’s conflict of mind is played out dramatically through the speeches of his noblemen. It seems, therefore, that although Gregory of Tours work may have provided the basis for a narrative of

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714 It may be significant that immediately after this speech, a symbolic spear wielded by Coifi is cast through the air into the heathen temple at Goodmanham, thus punctuating both the birth of Christianity and the death of paganism with an image of flight. See Bede, *HE* II.13, pp. 184-187, and discussion in ravens chapter.
718 For example, while Gregory states explicitly that the voice of God spoke through Clovis’s supporters, encouraging him to give up his paganism, Bede makes the suggestion of God’s intervention subtler. See Greg., *History*, II.31, p. 144.
conversion, Bede crafted Edwin’s acceptance of Christianity uniquely in comparison to this written source.\(^\text{718}\)

It is also possible that the nobleman’s speech was relayed to Bede through oral traditions associated with the legends of Edwin.\(^\text{719}\) However, given the fact that material on this king can be surmised to have been transmitted mainly in conjunction with the tales of Paulinus, as opposed to through a series of separate legends, no evidence remains of a separate oral tradition.\(^\text{720}\) The anonymous *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii*, which most probably pre-dates Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*,\(^\text{721}\) was written at Whitby,\(^\text{722}\) and may have been based on a set of orally transmitted legends, makes no mention of Edwin’s council.\(^\text{723}\) Nor does it include reference to a nobleman’s speech or a sparrow. While the absence of evidence cannot be taken to be an evidence of absence, there is no surviving tradition outside of Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica* that connects a sparrow with Edwin or his conversion.

What’s more, the choice of a sparrow seems incongruous in the context of a pagan nobleman’s speech. In the ‘Lament of the Last Survivor,’ a nobleman associates a hawk with the soul’s flight at death; *ne god hafoc geond sæl swunged* ‘no longer will the hawk go swooping through the hall.’\(^\text{724}\) It could be posited that an

\(^{718}\) For Bede’s use of Eusebius and Gregory see Robert Markus, *Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography* (Jarrow, 1975), especially pp. 3-7.

\(^{719}\) The accounts of Edwin’s conversion may have been preserved at the monastery in Whitby, with which Edwin’s Deiran descendants had a close connection through Hilda and Aelflæd. See Bede, *HE* III.24, pp. 288-295, and Kirby (1996), pp. 352-3. See also John McNamara, ‘Bede’s Role in Circulating Legend in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*,’ *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 9 (1994), pp. 61-69.

\(^{720}\) See Kirby (1996), p. 353, who notes that Bede only named Deda, abbot of Partney, as his informant for information on Paulinus’s work with the king. Bede, *HE* ii.16, pp. 190-193. See also Bertram Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Kansas, 1968), pp. 46-7. Hereafter Colgrave (1968). Colgrave suggests that the legends associated with King Edwin were transmitted alongside accounts of the lives of Gregory the Great and Paulinus. Also see later discussion.

\(^{721}\) See Colgrave (1968), p. 57.

\(^{722}\) Colgrave (1968), p. 46. The author states Edwin’s relics were brought *nostrum...coenobium* ‘to our monastery,’ which implies he is writing at Whitby.


original speech delivered by a pagan noblemen to his king was more likely to have featured a 'battle-bird,' such as the hawk, raven or eagle. Bede's account, while retaining the elements of a heroic recitation, included a biblical bird, the sparrow, in the hawk's place. Fry is probably correct when he states, 'we now perhaps have a pagan speech controlled in its imagery by a Christian psalm.'

The nobleman's speech is especially pertinent, for Bede deliberately placed it, and its biblical echoes, in the mouth of an anonymous nobleman. By doing so, he was able to imply that this was the voice of God, working through a 'noble pagan' messenger. Indeed, the speech concludes with the phrase, His similia et ceteri maiores natu ac regis consiliarii divinitus admoniti prosequebantur 'other elders and counsellors of the king continued in the same manner, being divinely prompted to do so.' Thus, while Gregory of Tours had emphasised that Clovis's supporters shout out in unison, through God's power, Bede had suggested, through this final line, that the nobleman's speech was similarly divinely inspired, and he emphasised this through the image of the sparrow.

It seems likely, therefore, that the sparrow might have been inserted into the nobleman's speech by Bede, and through this artistic choice he was able to present a spectrum of ideas and associations. To a monastic author, the sparrow did not simply indicate the bird itself, but would also recall biblical and patristic passages,

726 See Chapters Two and Three on ravens and eagles.
728 However, Fry (1979), p. 202, proposes that the nobleman may have already been exposed to the Psalms, and that he may have been consciously employing them in his speech. Our admiration for the speaker is not, however, diminished if he is presented, instead, as a mouthpiece for God's divine message. He does not need to be 'Proto-Christian' to perform such a task.
729 Bede, HE II.13, pp. 184-5.
730 See above discussion.
731 Even if the sparrow had featured in an earlier source, or in one of the legends associated with Edwin, the fact that Bede chose to include it, and surround it with vocabulary and imagery suggestive of the psalms, is sufficient to argue convincingly that the sparrow is symbolically significant within Bede's account. See also discussion in Toswell (2000), p. 9.
which would, in turn, suggest more layers of interpretation, as each text promotes a
further series of echoes and ruminations. Therefore, a monastic mind like Bede’s,
permeated as it was with Christian traditions and symbols, would employ the image
of a sparrow with a degree of consciousness of the religious significance such a
symbol would carry. The sparrow can be imagined as literally flying through a hall,
as a simile for the soul’s journey through life and as an indication of the biblical texts
informing and inspiring both the nobleman’s speech and Bede’s writings.

Analysis of the Passages

The image of the sparrow seems at first to be transparent, for the king’s chief
man likened the life of man on earth to its flight through a hall. However, the
simplicity of this scene resonates with layers of associations from the scriptures and
patristic literature, in particular the psalms. From examining two psalms in
particular, namely 54 and 83, it appears that Bede has allowed distinctive echoes
from each to inform the speech. It is also evident that the passage gains much of its
atmosphere and vocabulary from combining the two psalms. The nobleman describes
two landscapes, one of safety and security inside the hall, and one of raging storms
outside. Thus, while only Psalm 83 mentions the sparrow directly, Psalm 54 appears

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732 The importance of rumination upon the Scriptures is stressed by Bede himself. Bede, HE V.24, pp. 566-7. See also Leclercq (1961), p. 91, and discussion in the Introduction to this thesis.
733 However, Bede’s ruminations would also have recalled the writings of the Fathers. See footnote 259.
734 Benedicta Ward, Bede and the Psalter (Jarrow, 1991), especially pp. 5-6. Hereafter Ward (1991). She states that the Psalms influenced Bede on a number of different levels – through the liturgy, through scholarly investigation, and through compunctio cordis.
735 This is an original approach to this passage, for other articles, such as Fry (1979), have proposed Psalm 83 as a source, but have not noted the relevance of Psalm 54.
to have also contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the passage, and similarly includes a bird in association with the flight of the soul. 736

Beginning with Psalm 83, it is possible to discern a number of echoes between this passage and the nobleman’s speech. 737 As the psalm refers to the tabernacula ‘tabernacles’ of the king, likewise the nobleman also includes a reference to rex in his speech, while his description of the hall as caenacula ‘hall’ could be seen to evoke a secular tabernacula. 738 Similarly, the atria Domini ‘courts of the Lord’ of Psalm 83 are recalled in the description of the Edwin, residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministris ‘sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns,’ the heavenly, however, suitably balanced by the earthly. The most obvious point of contact between Bede’s passage and Psalm 83 is, of course, the description of a sparrow. As in Psalm 83, Bede placed the same word, domum ‘house/hall,’ directly next to passer, thus echoing the biblical passage; passer invenit sibi domum ‘the sparrow has found herself a house.’ However, while these similarities are interesting in themselves, many more illuminating verbal echoes appear when parallels from Psalm 54 are noted.

Whereas Psalm 54 does not contain the symbolic signpost of the sparrow, it does present a complementary landscape and set of images, which complete the imagery of the nobleman’s speech. Therefore, while the atmosphere of Psalm 83 is one of consolation and security – the safety of the sparrow in the hall – Psalm 54 is set against the background of a storm, which reflects the turbinibus hiemalium

736 Discussion does not need to be limited to two psalms, for Bede has employed language that recalls a number of different passages. However, it is these two that may have been foremost in his mind, and seem to combine most effectively in this context.
737 Some of these points have already been noted by Fry (1979), pp. 191-207.
738 Fry (1979), p. 196, describes caenacula as a ‘pun’ on tabernacula, but while this may be the case, it is more likely that Bede has inserted this word as a suitable parallel. It would be inappropriate to describe the hall of an earthly pagan king as a tabernacula, and Bede’s use of caenacula, which translates as ‘eating hall,’ can perhaps be seen as a literal Latin rendering of an Old English term, such as seledream or medoheal, which accurately described Edwin’s hall, yet still recalled Psalm 83.
pluviarum usel niuium 'wintry storms of rain and snow,' and the hiems tempestas
'stormy and wintry tempest,' which the nobleman describes. The repetition of hiems
in the nobleman's speech, stresses that the sparrow's flight is very specifically set
against hostile weather conditions, which are at odds with the spring-time landscape
of Psalm 83. 738

Furthermore, while there is no sparrow in Psalm 54, there is a dove, with
which the sparrow is paired in other biblical passages. 739 As the dove wishes to
volare et requiescere 'fly away and be at rest,' Bede's sparrow citissime pervolare
'flies swiftly through,' and experienced paruissimo spatium serenitatis 'the briefest
moment of calm,' before it hiems regredior 'returns to winter.' 740 Therefore, it seems
that, while Psalm 83 offered Bede the central image of the sparrow and the calm
warmth of the hall, Psalm 54 may have inspired the nature of the sparrows flight, its
association with the souls of the faithful, and the conditions outside the hall. Bede
interwove reminiscences from these two psalms, and by blending imagery and
vocabulary from both he created an original and complex scene with layers of
symbolic associations.

Psalm 83, it seems, was a favourite of Bede's and he quoted it at other points
in the Historia ecclesiastica. 741 The first example can inform our understanding of
the sparrow in the nobleman's speech, for he cited it at the point when Saint Wilfrid

738 The reference to birds making nest and producing young suggest a spring-time backdrop and new
life, contrasting with the reference to death in Psalm 54. If both psalms have informed Bede's speech
then together they could be understood to symbolise the journey of the soul, from birth to death.
739 See previous discussion.
740 Furthermore, the dove of Psalm 54 found 'an abode in the wilderness,' and is separate from
society, like the sparrow who only comes into the company of men for a moment. Bede stressed the
solitude of the dove in Psalm 54, when he cited it in his Homily on Mark 1:48. Bede, Hom. 1.1, p. 3,
trans. p. 3. He described the faithful, like John the Baptist, as seeking to withdraw from company like
the dove.
171.
converted the people of Sussex, and *ab erumna perpetuae damnationis ... eripuit*

‘rescued them ... from the misery of eternal damnation’

Sicque abiecta prisca superstitione, exsufflata idolatria, cor omnium et caro omnium exultaverunt in Deum vivum; intellegentes eum, qui verus est Deus, et interioribus se bonis et exterioribus caelesti gratia ditasse.

So casting off their ancient superstitions and renouncing their idolatry, ‘the heart and flesh of all rejoiced in the living God,’ for they realised that He who is true God had, of His heavenly grace, endowed them with both outward and inward blessings.

The same psalm is quoted at another point in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, again when English people are being converted. It seems, therefore, that Bede may have come to associate this psalm with the process of conversion to Christianity. Benedicta Ward states that Bede was keen to ‘discover new and immediate meaning in the psalms,’ and he seems to have done so in the nobleman’s speech, for he related Psalm 83 in particular to the conversion of the English.

Bede’s allegory is enhanced by comparison with both Psalms 54 and 83, and the patristic interpretations of these texts. Psalm 54 is a cry to God, a plea that the supplicant may be saved from the storms and tempests, and from the wickedness of their enemies, and taken to a place of rest by God. Psalm 83 is a description of that place of rest, an abode of plenty and bounty, where the faithful are guaranteed a part in the eternal peace of the soul. By echoing elements of both psalms in the

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745 Bede describes the arrival of Fursey in East Anglia, and his diligent preaching: *multos et exemplo virtutis et incitamento sermonis uel Incredulos ad Christum convertit* ‘thus he converted many both by the example of his virtues and the persuasiveness of his teaching, turning unbelievers to Christ.’ Bede, *HE III.19*, pp. 268-9.


747 Interestingly, the anonymous author of the *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregoris* evoked Psalm 54 when describing the death of Pope Gregory, who had brought salvation to the English; *Hoc enim proprie iam sanctorum est perfectorumque tantum hominum ita mortem amare...posse dicere...Et formatum mortis cedit super me,* “Now it is properly the sign only of a saint or of a perfect man to love death thus and to be able to say...” The terrors of death are fallen upon me.” Colgrave (1968), pp. 136-7. See also discussion in O’Reilly (2005), especially pp. 127-8.
nobleman’s speech, therefore, Bede has contextualized Edwin’s decision to convert to Christianity. The underlying texts from the scriptures indicate he, and the English, will receive freedom from earthly hardship and eternal security with God. Indeed, when the nobleman stated: *si haec nova doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur* ‘if this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it,’ Bede had, in fact, provided the answer through the biblical texts that inform the speech, and through the image of the sparrow.\(^{747}\)

The ‘Bird of the Soul’ in Other Literary Accounts

Regarding the question of sources and intentions, whether or not Bede inserted the sparrow into the nobleman’s speech, he was responsible for developing and elaborating the image in relation to patristic tradition, therefore creating a dramatic scene which could evoke a range of reminiscences in his audiences. The choice to include a sparrow in the nobleman’s speech appears to have been both deliberate and emotive. However, by associating this bird with *vita hominum praesens in terris* ‘the present life of man on earth,’ it seems that Bede may have been conscious, not only of the biblical connections between this bird and the soul,\(^ {748}\) but also more vernacular sets of associations.\(^ {749}\) The imagery in Bede’s speech of the nobleman was specific and accessible to audiences at his time. As well as recalling biblical texts, it carefully and consciously reflected familiar aspects of Anglo-Saxon

\(^{747}\) Bede, *HE* II.13, pp. 184-5.

\(^{748}\) Each of the biblical texts cited above associates the sparrow with the soul. Christ’s allegory states *et nolite timere eos, qui occidunt corpus, animam autem non possunt occidere* ‘and fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,’ Matt 10:28, while the Psalmist states *concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atra Domini cor meum et caro mea exsultavit in Deum vivum* ‘my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God,’ Psalm 83:2-3.

\(^{749}\) See also Scott (1979), pp. 117-44, especially pp. 124-5.
life. The speech is set in the heroic hall, with the king surrounded by his retainers. Furthermore, Bede included references to a bleak landscape that, while suggesting the setting of Psalm 54, also resembled the wintry backdrops familiar to exiles in the Old English elegies. The safety of the hall, contrasted with the dramatic and unknown natural world outside, is a recurrent theme of Old English literature.

The connections between the nobleman’s speech and the Exeter Book elegies could be viewed as extending to the use of birds as symbols of the soul’s journey through life:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædre} \\
\text{earmne anhogan oft gebindað} \\
\text{þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten} \\
\text{clyppe ond cyssse, ond on cneo lege} \\
\text{honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær} \\
\text{in geardagum giefstolas breac.} \\
\text{Donne onwæceneð eft wineelas guma,} \\
\text{gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,} \\
\text{bajian brimfuglas, brædan fehra,} \\
\text{hreosan hrim ond snaw hagle gemenged.}
\end{align*}
\]

194


Often when sorrow and sleep both together constrain the wretched solitary, it seemed to him in his mind that he embraces and kisses his liege lord, and on his knee lays hands and head, just as from time to time in days of old he received gifts from the throne. Then the friendless man awakens again, he sees before him dark waves, the sea birds bathing, stretching out their feathers, while frost and snow fall mingled with hail.

In *The Wanderer*, the *brimfuglas* 'sea-birds' replace the comforts of the hall and the *mondryhten* 'lord,' as the narrator *onweæn ðæt* 'awakens' from his dream. He sees the birds, *braedan feðra hresan hrim ond swan hagle gemenged* 'stretching out their feathers, while frost and snow fall mingled with hail,' in a similar manner to the bird imagined by the nobleman that flies through the hall: *mox de hieme in hiemē regrediens tuís oculis elabitur,* 'it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again.' In a reversal of the nobleman's speech, it is the hall which the exile sees *on mode* 'in his mind,' instead of the imagined sparrow which *ad modicum apparet* 'appears but for a moment.' The birds are the reality to which he awakes, the creatures that inhabit and represent the *flodweg* 'sea-journey.'

This association between birds and the journey on the sea of life is expressed more fully in *The Seafarer.*

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Hwilum ylfete song
dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleopor
ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
mæw singende fore medodrince.
Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
isigféþera; ful oft þaet earn bigeal,
urigféþra; ne ænig hleomæga
feasceaitig ferð frefran mealhte.⁷⁵⁹

Sometimes I made the song of the swan
my entertainment, the cry of the gannet
and the sound of the curlew, in place of the laughter of men,
the singing seagull, in place of mead-drinking.
There storms pounded the rocky cliffs, where icy-feathered tern
answered them; very often the eagle screeched,
dewy-feathered: nor were there any protective kinsman
to comfort the spirit of the desperate one.

The Old English poet included a range of sea birds, including the ylfete ‘swan,’
ganetes ‘gannet,’ and mæw ‘seagull,’ which together take the place of the exile’s
friends within the hall. As the nobleman in the Historia ecclesiastica likens his soul
and those of his fellow aristocrats to birds, so too the seafarer, exiled from the hall,
makes a similar connection turning the birds into substitutes for his companions.

Furthermore, the Old English version of Bede’s Historia ecclesiastica
employed a set of words and expressions similar to the elegies in its rendering of the
nobleman’s speech:⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁶⁰ The earliest surviving copy is from the tenth-century, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 10. Four
other manuscripts also survive. However, it seems that the text itself was translated in the ninth-
century. See Dorothy Whitlock, ‘The Old English Bede,’ The Proceedings of the British Academy 48
(1962), pp. 57-90, especially pp. 71-78.
O king, the present life of man on earth, in comparison with the time unknown to us, seems to me, as if you sat at table with your chief men and followers in wintertime, and a fire was kindled and your hall warmed, while it rained, snowed, and stormed without; and there came a sparrow and swiftly flew through the house, entering at one door and passing out through the other. The wintry scene is evoked through words such as hrin, sniwe and styrme. Similarly, the scene of the king, swæesendum sitte with his ealdormannum in the warm hall, is consistently described throughout the elegies, and contrasted with the harsh natural elements. Although rooted firmly within the Anglo-Latin tradition, Bede’s speech of the nobleman contains a number of symbolic signposts, such as the hall, the weather and the bird, which recall elegiac poetry. The translator of Bede’s work into Old English recognised this fact, for he employed similar poetic vocabulary in his version of this account.

**Birds in the *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii***

There is one more text that may shed light on the links between birds and the soul, as reflected in Bede’s writings and the Old English elegies. The *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii* provides a useful source against which to compare Bede’s account of Edwin’s conversion, for both Anglo-Latin texts relate similar events, and yet each did not appear to know of each others work. Furthermore, the anonymous life provides an insight into two differing attitudes towards Anglo-Saxon bird symbolism: one that recalls a bird’s ‘pre-conversion’ symbolic life, and another that connects the ascension of a saint’s soul with a bird. In the first instance, the author described how Paulinus ordered a youth to shoot down a *cornix* ‘crow’ from a

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763 Colgrave (1968), pp. 56-9.
tree as proof to 'those who were still bound...to heathenism,' that divine matters can not be understood through birds:

dicens etiam sibi ipsi avis illa insensata mortem cavere cum nescisset, immo renatis ad imaginem Dei baptizatis omnino hominibus, qui dominantur piscibus maris et volatilibus celi atque universis animantibus teffe nihil profuturum prenuntiet,

'For,' he said, 'if that senseless bird was unable to avoid death, still less could it foretell the future to men who have been reborn and baptised in the image of God, who have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing upon earth.'

This passage indicates that birds such as the crow may have been understood to have connections with divinity, and to symbolise matters of life and death to some members of early seventh-century Northumbrian society. Furthermore, it reveals that Paulinus sought to actively control this bird's symbolic life by killing the crow, perhaps indicating how deeply rooted these associations were.

In another passage, however, the association between birds and the soul was recast within a Christian guise, for Paulinus's own soul was said to have assumed the shape of a swan at his death:

Nam fertur a videntibus quod huius viri anima in cuiusdam magne, qualis est cignus, alba specie avis, satisque pulchra, quando moritur migrasset ad celum.

Because it is related by some who saw it that, when he died, his soul journeyed to heaven in the form of an exceedingly beautiful great white bird, like a swan.
The soul was associated with swans in Norse mythology, but this was not a common feature of Christian texts. It is possible, therefore, that this scene developed from a set of established cultural associations between certain birds and the soul. Had a different bird, such as the dove, been cited at this instance, it could be argued that the roots of this account lay in Christian exegetical and hagiographical tradition. However, the inclusion of a swan indicates a different source for this episode. It perhaps also reveals a consciousness on the part of the anonymous author, or even of Paulinus himself, that the meanings associated with certain types of birds were an established part of the Anglo-Saxon imaginative and symbolic world.

These two accounts from the *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii* are therefore significant, for they were most probably recorded from oral tradition, and the author chose to include them in the knowledge that his/her audiences would understand the significance of the birds in both these instances.

**The ‘Bird of the Soul’ in Anglo-Saxon Art**

The nobleman’s speech in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, the hawk in *Beowulf*, the sea-birds of the Old English elegies, and both the swan and crow of the *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii*, provide evidence for the association of birds with the soul’s progression through life in Anglo-Saxon literature. Similarly, instances from the art appear to support this connection. For example, the birds that inhabit the narrow shafts of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses, depicted in floriated interlace, nourished by the fruits of the vine, could be understood to represent the faithful.

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768 See later discussion on page 192.
769 Doves are cited in other hagiographical texts, when describing souls departing from the body. See discussion in Colgrave (1968), note 67, p. 150, where he describes the death of Scholastica, St Benedict’s sister.
770 For the use of a specific ‘vocabulary’ of birds, see discussion in the Introduction.
under the protection of the Church (Fig. 4). However, the theme is treated most intelligibly on the eighth-century Franks casket (Fig. 2). This complex object, with its combination of runes and Latin text, Christian and pagan images, seems to reveal a consciousness and awareness of the syncretic roots of the symbols and stories it evokes. Furthermore, birds appear on four of its five panels.

Two separate types of bird are identifiable: a hooked-beak bird of prey, and a straight-beaked bird. The former, more abstract, type is consistently represented as two interlaced or connected half-birds, and occurs within the arched structures on the lid and on the back panel (Figs. 122 and 123). The other type occurs three times: on the front-left panel, in the Magi scene (Fig. 124), and then at the bottom of the right-hand panel (Fig. 125). This bird is depicted in its entirety, with both feet visible, is less stylised than the 'bird or prey,' and its beak is long and straight. The artists at work on the Franks Casket appear to have deliberately distinguished between these two types, one of which is employed as part of architectural structures, the other of which provides a point of focus in each of these scenes.

That the straight-beaked birds on the Franks Casket function within the casket's iconographic schemes has been acknowledged. James Lang has proposed

772 See discussion on page 138.
773 The Franks Casket is depicted in Webster (1991), pp. 101-3. All the panels are shown as either colour or black and white plates in Leslie Webster, 'The Iconographic Programme of the Franks Casket,' in Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (eds.), Northumbria's Golden Age (Stroud, 1999), pp. 227-246. Hereafter Webster (1999). For its date and provenance see also Leslie Webster, 'Stylistic aspects of the Franks Casket,' in Robert T. Farrell (ed.), The Vikings (London and Chichester, 1982), pp. 20-32, and for a later date see Amy L. Vandersall, 'The Date and Provenance of the Franks Casket,' Gesta 11.2 (1972), pp. 9-26. Hereafter Vandersall (1972). Many thanks to Amanda Denton for her help with this topic.
774 Indeed, it has been described as 'self-consciously clever,' by Ian N. Wood, 'Ripon, Francia and the Franks Casket in the Early Middle Ages,' Northern History 26 (1990), pp. 1-19, especially p. 5, and as 'one of the most striking examples known of Northumbrian eclecticism,' by Vandersall (1972), p. 10.
that they act as a thematic linking devise, leading the viewer around the box, in the direction in which it was intended to be read.\footnote{James Lang, 'The Imagery of the Franks Casket: Another Approach,' in Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (eds.), \textit{Northumbria's Golden Age} (Stroud, 1999), pp. 247-355, especially p. 248.} However, while the birds are acknowledged in scholarship on the casket, they are rarely interpreted except in the most general terms.\footnote{Eleanor Grace Clark, 'The Right Side of the Franks Casket,' \textit{Publications of the Modern Language Association of America} 45.2 (1930), pp. 339-353, especially p. 353. Hereafter Clark (1930). 'There is ... a bird, which may be the Holy Spirit in the likeness of a dove, though there is nothing to prove it so. It could, as a matter of fact, as well represent one of the 'birds that were souls' that are described in the \textit{Solar Ljod} (83-84) as flying about Hel. Of course it may even be one of Odin's ravens, though it seems rather isolated for that.'} In the context of this investigation, however, it is possible that more certainty can be brought to bear on their role in potential iconographic schemes.

Of the scenes depicted on the casket only one is recognisably Christian in its subject matter, namely the Adoration of the Magi.\footnote{See for example, Philip Webster Souers, 'The Magi on the Franks Casket,' \textit{Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature} 19 (1937), pp. 249-54, especially p. 249.} Two others are based on Roman history and myth (the back panel depicting the Fall of Jerusalem,\footnote{The Ark of the Covenant on the back-panel appears to have been transformed from another source, most probably depicting the ark with cherubim above and oxen below. These features have been stylised into birds of prey and possible donkeys. See discussion in Webster (1999), p. 236.} and the left-hand panel showing Romulus and Remus), while three are understood to depict episodes from Germanic myth.\footnote{Vandersall (1972), p. 9, identifies these as 'Weland the Smith, and two scenes, one commonly identified as an episode from the Sigurd legend, the other as one from an unrecorded episode of the adventures of Weland's brother Egill.'} The birds appear to function differently in each panel. On the front, as it is now reconstructed, a straight-beaked bird nestles alongside the Magi, in front of the Virgin and child. There is no precedent for a bird in this position, in a scene depicting the Adoration of the Magi, but it is possible that it represents the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (Fig. 126).\footnote{Vandersall (1972), p. 13, has noted that 'there are no early Christian parallels for either the bird that precedes the Magi, or for the form of their gifts.' A possible precedent for the association of a dove with a scene of the Adoration of the Magi occurs in the apse mosaics from Santa Maria Maggiore. Lowden (1997), fig. 30. For a discussion of the iconography see Suzanne Spain, 'The Promised Blessing: the Iconography of the Mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore,' \textit{Art Bulletin} 61 (1979), pp. 518-40, and Emile Male, 'Sta Maria Maggiore,' in \textit{The Early Churches of Rome} (London, 1960), p. 65.} If this is the case,
then the bird may have been included to symbolise the promise of eternal life which the birth of Christ and incarnation of the Holy Spirit offered to all those who partake in the sacraments.\textsuperscript{781}

The scene alongside, which has been identified as the story of Weland the smith seeking revenge, may include a bird in reference to the flying machine he used to escape from his captor, Nidud.\textsuperscript{782} This legend appears to have had wide currency in Anglo-Saxon England, for it is referred to in the Old English poem \textit{Deor},\textsuperscript{783} and was depicted in Anglo-Saxon sculpture as a means of representing ascension and resurrection (Fig. 127).\textsuperscript{784} It could be that this bird was meant to recall a swan, for Old Norse versions of this story describes how Weland and his brothers were married to swan-maidens.\textsuperscript{785} That the swan held symbolic significance, and was understood to represent the soul in Anglo-Saxon literature may be suggested by the \textit{Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii},\textsuperscript{786} and by Riddle 7 of the Exeter Book Riddles, which seems to describe the passage of the soul through life, in terms of a swan:

\begin{quote}
mec seo fripe meæg fedde sippan, opþæt ic aweox, widdor meahte, sipas asettan; heo hæfde swærsa þy læs suna ond dohtra, þy heo swa dyde.\textsuperscript{787}
\end{quote}

Mother-care quickened my spirit, my natural fate to feed, fatten, and grow great, gorged on love, bating a fledgling brood, I cast off mother-kin, lifting windward wings for the wide road.

\textsuperscript{781} See discussion in Chapter One on doves.
\textsuperscript{786} See above discussion.
\textsuperscript{787} Riddle 7,' lines 9-12, Williamson (1977), p. 73.
In the light of other literary sources connecting swans with the passage of the soul after death it is possible that the bird being strangled by Weland on the front of the Franks Casket is a swan and is included in reference to escape from life.

The final straight-beaked bird that we encounter on the Franks Casket occurs on the right-hand panel. The overall meaning of this panel has been much discussed, with a range of diverse, and sometime bizarre, interpretations proposed. However, elements within this scene provide an insight into its underlying meaning. At its centre is a burial mound, with a small human body shrouded within. To the right three characters, presumably women, huddle together, while a mournful looking horse and a chalice hover in abstract plant motifs around the mound. To the left a horse-headed creature, bearing two branches, possibly rods of authority, sits on a mound while a warrior stands in front.

The symbols that feature in this scene, including the cup of the hall and the horse, are described in The Wanderer as the trappings of a warrior, which may shed light on the character buried beneath the mound. Therefore, at first glance this enigmatic scene appears to depict the end of a warrior's life, whereby the wyrd sisters, symbolic of fate, are arranged at one side, while the warrior's journey to the underworld, the gateway of which is protected by a monstrous creature, occurs to the left. Significantly, a large bird flies across the bottom of the scene, between the tomb and the creature on the mound. Various identities have been proposed for

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79 See footnote 603.
792 Clark (1930), p. 350, suggests that the character with the horse's head is Urd, the guardian to Hel, as described in the poem Sonatorrek.
this bird, including raven and swan, but whatever its exact identity, it is similar to those depicted on the front. 794

It seems that this bird may symbolise the flight of the soul in its passage from death to the afterlife. Because it resembles the other birds, those connected with Weland’s flying machine and that at the Adoration of the Magi, it may be possible that all three are in fact intended to give different insights into the motions of the soul. The Christian panel at the front seems to employ the bird in reference to the incarnation of the Holy Spirit at Christ’s birth, and the possibility of rebirth and everlasting life after death offered to all Christians in the light of this event. The birds in the Weland scene may similarly be referring to resurrection, for the flying machine could be understood to symbolise escape from the hardships of life. While the bird in right-hand panel may be interpreted as depicting the soul in its procession from death to the after life.

Each bird’s meaning is slightly different depending on the context in which it occurs, but all are employed in reference to the journey of the soul through life and into death, regardless of type or species. By employing the same straight-beaked bird in each of these contexts, it seems that the Anglo-Saxon artists at work on the Franks Casket were able to use one symbol, which had different symbolic resonance depending on cultural and religious context, to explore complex themes in a variety of related, yet distinct, ways. From the evidence of the Franks Casket, it seems that these recurring birds, whether the dove of the Holy Spirit, the swan-maidens, or the ‘birds of the soul’ that circle Hel, 795 provided a point of contact between different aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture, and were bound up with the notion of the soul’s progress through life.

Birds have the gift of flight, which means they can cross the divide between the heavens and earth. It appears that this association may have manifested itself in Anglo-Saxon art and literature through the use of birds as symbols of the soul. Artists and authors employed different techniques and types of bird to emphasise this connection. Bede included the sparrow, and recalled echoes of biblical passages, while the authors of the Old English elegies employed sea-birds, with the narrator stranded on the 'sea of life.' It is the artists of the Franks casket, however, that expressed the over-riding 'meaning' that birds appear to have had in Anglo-Saxon England. Different birds could 'mean' different things, but predominantly they were of significance with Anglo-Saxon art and literature because they represented the passage between heaven and earth, known and unknown, life and death.

CONCLUSION

Enigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum, ut: ‘Pennae columbae deargentatae, et posteri ora dorsi eius in specie auri,’ cum significet eloquia Scripturae spiritalis diuino lumine plena, sensum uero eius interiorem maiori caelestis sapientiae gratia refulgentem, uel certe uitam sanctae ecclesiae praesentem, uirtutum pennis gaudentem, futuram autem, quae in caelis est, aeterna cum Domnio claritate fruituram.

A riddle is a sentence not well understood because it plays on a hidden similarity between things, such as ‘The wings of the dove are plated with silver and the feathers of its back are gold,’ when this signifies the eloquence of holy scripture, full of divine light, and the inner meaning of this shines with the greater grace of celestial wisdom, and is either the present life of the holy church rejoicing on the wings of virtues, or the future life in the heavens where (the faithful) will enjoy eternal light with the Lord. 797

This passage from Bede’s De schematibus et tropis highlights the riddling nature of bird symbolism. A specific bird, such as the dove, can assume a range of meanings and be associated with different themes, ideas or manifestations, depending on the context in which it is employed. However, as Bede emphasised, it is the search for the ‘hidden similarity between things’ that mattered. Much as Saint Paul stated that God can only be perceived per speculum in enigmate ‘through a glass in a dark manner,’ 798 so it is that by appreciating the mysteries of the ‘holy scriptures,’ the ‘holy church,’ and also of the wonders of creation, the ‘inner meaning....of celestial wisdom’ can be gleaned. 799 Birds provided Anglo-Saxon artists and authors with a set of symbols, drawn directly from nature, that could express other aspects of life’s mysteries. While Bede’s words indicate that the search for ‘divine light’ entailed ‘rejoicing’ in what is ‘hidden’ within the riddles of life, the present study has sought to pin-point these abstract associations as far as is possible.

798 1 Cor. 13:12, and discussion in Introduction.
799 See discussion in Stork (1990), pp. 70-78.
and to delimit the range of meanings assumed by certain types of birds within Anglo-Saxon art and literature.

In the course of this investigation it has become evident that the symbolic life of each type of bird can be separate and unique. While the symbolism of different species could overlap, and might be based on sets of shared associations, the differences between bird symbols could also be drawn out in order to emphasise a specific range of themes or allusions. In the case of the dove, it acquired a range of interpretations from the third to seventh centuries, which were largely connected with its role in the biblical stories of the flood and Christ's baptism. Consequently, it was employed in Bede's writings and in the Codex Amiatinus as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of baptism, in contexts that recalled earlier Christian, and specifically Roman, exemplars.

However, the fluidity of bird symbolism is attested by the use of the dove in Columban art and literature. In the works of Adomnán, for example, the set of associated meanings was expanded, and the symbol of the dove was endowed with further layers of significance, connected with Columba. Through careful manipulation of this bird's symbolism, Adomnán was able to subtly position himself and the Columban monastic establishments, in relation to the 'Roman' party with regard to their traditions and practices. By symbolically tracing their traditions back through Columba, to Peter, by means of the dove, the 'Irish' party sought to defend their antiquity and orthodoxy.

The symbolic life of the raven similarly provides an insight into the contemporary concerns of seventh- and eighth-century Northumbria. Through variant

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799 See for example the symbolic lives of doves and ravens, especially the overlapping of symbolism discussed on page 61.
800 'Long before any attempt was made by the artist to identify birds according to species, the bird was employed to suggest the spiritual, as opposed to the material.' Ferguson (1966), p. 12.
readings in the Vulgate and Old Latin versions of Genesis 8:7, and Bede’s endorsement of the latter, the raven’s failure to return to the ark until after the flood was drawn out in Anglo-Saxon art and literature as an integral part of its symbolic life. Perhaps also due to its association with the pagan god Odin, or its role as a ‘beast of battle’ in vernacular literature, Bede developed a number of exegetical expositions in which the raven was compared to apostates or to those seduced by earthly pleasures. This emphasis on the negative aspects of the raven’s symbolism was propagated at Wearmouth-Jarrow, where the word ‘non’ was inserted into the Vulgate text of the Codex Amiatinus, to highlight the fact that the raven failed to return to the ark.

The accentuation of the darker aspects of the raven’s symbolic life appear to have culminated in ninth- to tenth-century Anglo-Saxon art and literature, with the emergence of the cadaver theory and depictions of the raven pecking the eyes from a decapitated head in the Claudius manuscript. It could be posited that Bede sought to draw out the negative aspects of the raven’s symbolic life, despite contradicting the Vulgate Bible, because this bird has strong associations with pre-Christian beliefs and secular imagery. By contrasting it with the dove, he was able, perhaps through these two bird symbols, to contribute to the supersession of one symbolic vocabulary by another.

In contrast to the dove and raven, both of which had a limited range of symbolic meanings connecting them primarily with biblical texts, the eagle assumed a variety of literary and artistic manifestations in both Anglo-Saxon art and literature. Moreover, depending on how and where it was employed, and what other symbols accompanied it, this bird symbol could be understood to carry a range of meanings, connected with both spiritual themes, such as baptism and resurrection, or secular
ones, including victory in battle. Predominantly, however, it was employed as one of the four apocalyptic beasts, and to symbolise John the Evangelist.

This aspect of its symbolism was drawn out in unique ways by the artists of the Codex Amiatinus, Lindisfarne Gospels and Cuthbert coffin, all of which used subtle visual clues to indicate the distinctiveness of John and his symbol. However, its use on both sides of the uppermost arm of the Ruthwell cross provides evidence for the multivalence of the eagle as a bird symbol, and it appears that the artists at work on this monument were aware of the range of meanings that this individual bird could assume.

A further type of symbolic life is evinced by the peacock. Despite its prevalence in third- to sixth-century Christian art, it did not develop a diverse range of symbolic meanings like the eagle. Instead, both literary and artistic examples employed it somewhat uniformly to symbolise the theme of bodily resurrection. In early Christian artistic examples the peacock was accompanied by a limited set of symbols, all associated with the sacraments and the rewards of eternal life after death. However, in contrast to this well-established symbolic tradition, Anglo-Saxon artists appear to have employed it as part of more complex iconographic schemes.

Within works such as the Masham Column and the Ezra page, it is the transparency of the peacock’s symbolism that enables it to function as a part of a more complex codification. The peacock’s range of symbolic meanings can be positioned alongside other symbols, figures, or narrative scenes, to provide an emblematic representation of the theme of bodily resurrection. By understanding its symbolic life, wider iconographic schemes can be brought into focus, for the peacock can provide a key to discerning further symbolic allusions.
The final bird examined in this study, the sparrow, is unique in being referenced only once in the extant material. However, the context in which it occurs, in Bede's 'speech of the nobleman,' means that it is of fundamental importance to a study of bird symbolism in Anglo-Saxon England. Bede's reference to the sparrow reveals a range of verbal echoes from the Bible, most particularly Psalms 83 and 54. However, the scene also recalls vernacular poetry, such as the Exeter Book elegies, and other Anglo-Latin texts, including the *Vita antiquissima Sancti Gregorii*. In both these texts other birds take the place of the sparrow, yet are similarly employed to represent the journey of the soul through life.

This theme is also represented on the Franks Casket, where three similar birds occur in different contexts. However, in each they appear to allude to aspects of life and death. Whether the similar-looking birds represent the dove of the Holy Spirit, or the 'birds of the soul' that circle Hel, each appears to be bound up with the journey of the soul. While the imagery of each panel recalls different religious, mythical or historical themes and events, the use of birds serves as a linking device. The casket's iconography deliberately draws upon shared symbolism as a point of contact between each of its scenes, with the same bird functioning as a meaningful symbol in mythical, historical and Christian scenes. Consequently, it may be possible to view the bird symbolism on the Franks Casket as a unique expression of the syncretism that took place in seventh- and eighth-century Northumbria, and that way the different symbolic vocabularies could be amalgamated, understood and manipulated.

With their location on the 'edge of the world,' and poised as they were on the boundaries between Mediterranean Christianity and the pagan northern territories, the Anglo-Saxons were uniquely placed to develop an understanding of

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802 See Clark (1930), p. 344.
803 See footnote 179.
different symbolic vocabularies. This understanding, appreciation and exploitation of symbolism is, however, particularly transparent in their presentation of birds, for they are employed consistently throughout the art and literature produced during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.

In studying one set of symbols it has been possible to undertake a sharply focused study of the imaginative world of Anglo-Saxon artists and authors. By examining the symbolic lives of different types of birds, the texts and images produced during a time of intense religious, social, and cultural changes can be opened up from the inside out. The traces that have been left upon a bird symbol from different sources and influences can be illuminated, and as a result, the historical period itself can be brought into focus. Honing in on one set of symbols has thus enabled a ripple effect to develop, whereby the echoes of the environment that produced them can still be discerned:

What a splendid book one could put together by narrating the life and adventures of a word. The events for which a word was used have undoubtedly left various imprints on it; depending on place it has awakened different notions; but does it not become grander still when considered in its trinity of soul, body, and movement.803

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Fig. 21

CODICIBUS SACRIS HOSTILICLAE PERVITIFS
ESRA DO SERVENS HOC REPARAVIT OPVS
Fig. 112

Fig. 113