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SEEING, READING, SINGING THE RUTHWELL CROSS: VERNACULAR POETRY, OLD ROMAN LITURGY, IMPLIED AUDIENCE

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There is a major difference between the design of the Bewcastle Cross and that of the Ruthwell Cross. The Bewcastle shaft has rounded corners. Two long thin vertical furrows on each face, parallel with and close to the corners, mark out at each corner a slender scroll partially detached from the shaft. Thus while all the panels have wide vertical borders, these borders are curved and unsuitable for inscription. All the inscriptions are on the flat spaces *between* panels, not on the scrolled vertical borders. But the Ruthwell cross-shaft has squared corners. Its panels have flat vertical borders suitable for inscription. As every surviving large panel is inscribed (except for the Crucifixion on the base), it is likely that the English verse (on the four long flat vertical borders on the narrow sides of the lower stone) was part of the original design. Ute Schwab (156-62) showed that byzantine reliquaries (catalogued by Frolow 1961, 1965) provided analogues for the layout of the Ruthwell verse, in particular (1) the Latin text in roman script on the 6C Cross of Justin II in the Vatican, (2) the Greek text on the 10C Limburg staurotheca, and (3) the Greek text on the 10C ivory reliquary of Cortona. There is a rich byzantine tradition of inscribing the uprights of crosses, or vertical borders of reliquaries, in short groups of letters reading left to right in *scripta continua* (without word-division), so that the inscription forms a solid vertical column of letters. In addition to the examples given by Schwab, I have so far come across (1) the large 6C Moses cross from Mount Sinai (Weitzmann & Ševčenko); (2) early byzantine silver processional crosses (Cruikshank-Dodd); (3) a series of small byzantine metal crosses: e.g. Walters Gallery, Baltimore, 6C (cf. Pelikan 56 fig. 18); Oxford, Ashmolean, No. 1952-437 (1172AD, Stauropolis); and (4) the small 10C Staurotheca of Romanus at Monte Cassino (Willard). Both crosses and cross-reliquaries were inscribed in this way. These objects were of various sizes: a small pocket-sized reliquary could be a model for a much more ambitious design like the Ruthwell Cross. The layout of the Ruthwell verse may have been a conscious effort to embody in the monument features of precious reliquaries at cities like Rome, Constantinople, or Jerusalem (the effort would be even more understandable if the cross was originally brightly painted to suggest precious metals and enamels). One likely source of eastern influence in England in the 7C or early 8C is the city of Rome, in which a preponderance of the popes between 650 and 752 were Greek-speaking, from which the Greek-speaking Archbishop Theodore had been sent to Canterbury (668AD), and which at solemn moments (such as Holy Week) used Greek as well as Latin in its liturgy (cf. Sansterre).

The Ruthwell verse is unique in describing the psychological dilemma of the Cross when faced with Christ's decision to choose his death upon it. The dilemma of the Cross is presented in terms clearly reminiscent of Mary's dilemma when, at the Annunciation, she was asked to bear Christ into life ('although I know not man', Lk 1:34). There was an ancient tradition, well known to Bede, of a fixed, solar calculation of Easter, in which the anniversary of the Crucifixion was commemorated on 25 March, the Spring equinox in the Julian calendar (ó C. 1978). At Tours and other cities in Gaul from 4C to early 7C, this solar Easter was celebrated as well as the moveable lunar Easter which came to overshadow it (Pietri 1983 451-53; 1984). More important for the present argument is the way in which the coincidence of Cruci-

fixion and Annunciation was reflected in the 7C Roman liturgy. There is no mention of the Crucifixion on 25 March in the Gelasian sacramentary, used in some 7C Roman churches. In the Hadrianum sacramentary (from the Papal court at the Lateran) the Crucifixion has a subordinate role. Just one prayer refers to it:

> [143] *Ad completa*. Gratiam tuam domine, mentibus nostris infunde, ut qui angelo nuntiante christi filii tui *incarnationem cognouimus, per passionem eius et crucem, ad resurrectionis gloriam perducamur*. Qui tecum. (Deshusses 1:128).

In the Hadrianum the title of the feast makes no reference to the Passion, nor does any other of its prayers for 25 March. But at St Peter's basilica on the Vatican the link between Crucifixion and Annunciation was on 25 March given much greater emphasis. In the Paduense, a sacramentary that reflects the tradition of St Peter's 670-690, 25 March is entitled: 'VIII KALENDAS [APRILIS] / ADNUNTIATIO SANCTAE DEI GENETRICIS / ET PASSIO EIUSDEM DOMINI.' The word 'eiusdem' has no grammatical referent, and in 7C Rome the feast was known as *Adnuntiatio Domini*: thus Antoine Chavasse (377) reconstructed the original title as *Adnuntiatio Domini et Passio Eiusdem*. In the Paduense the prayer just quoted, Hadrianum 143, is found again, this time as the collect; and the Paduense offertory prayer (Paduense 386, Deshusses 1:636) makes a much more explicit link between Annunciation and Passion. As usual in 7C Rome, this prayer presents 25 March as a feast of the Lord (rather than, as it later became in 8C, a feast of the Virgin):

> *Super obl[ata]*. Accepta tibi sit domine quaesumus haec oblatio plebis tuae, *quam tibi offerimus hodie ob incarnationem et passionem redemptoris nostri iesu christi*, te supplices deprecantes ut placatus accipias. Per eundem.

Thus from the years 670-690 onwards the liturgy of St Peter's annually presented 25 March as a feast of the Passion as well as of the incarnation of Christ. The Ruthwell poetry might well descend from songs inspired by precisely the Vatican Mass for 25 March. John the Archicantor of St Peter's gave conferences on the Vatican liturgy at St Peter's, Wearmouth, in 679-80 to clerics from all parts of Northumbria (Bede *HE* 4:18). If he brought with him *libelli* containing formularies for the Marian feasts newly popular at Rome, these would be the Vatican formularies. Through songs in English even *illiterati* could hear how (as celebrated *ad corpus S. Petri*) the new feast epitomised Christ's heroism and exemplified man's response. Incarnation and Passion both involved an encounter between Christ (divine and courageous, freely willing his humanity and his death) and a startled but cooperative creature (Mary or the Cross). The new feast of 25 March posed a major liturgical problem: how could the joy of incarnation be celebrated in lent? In 656AD the Spanish bishops had avoided the problem by transferring the feast to 18 December (ó C. 1978 132). But the Vatican Mass celebrated the Passion in the solar cycle of the incarnation. It could have enabled an English poet to see the Passion as itself an *Adnuntiatio Domini* in which Christ completed the self-giving of his incarnation 'usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis' (Ph. 2:8). Then the iconography links this fulfilment to its prototype, moving back from Crucifixion (on the base) to Annunciation (on the shaft). The Annunciation inscription is based on Lk 1:28, clauses from which were sung on 25 March as antiphons for Mass and Office (Cutter 79; ó C. 1978 134; ó C. forthcoming).

On the same side of the cross, on the badly-damaged upper stone, a panel depicts the Visitation. Much of the Latin inscription for the Visitation (in runes, not roman script) has probably been lost: the borders of the lower half of the panel are destroyed. On the battered upper half of the left hand border there

are four legible runes, 'm . r þ (a)' [I examined the inscription twice (12 July and 20 July 1987) and recorded the m, r and þ runes as legible (spaced unevenly, wide apart, reading upwards at right angles to the onlooker's vision); I could see only the ascender of the a rune]. There may possibly have been a group of five runes reading 'marþa'. The Roman liturgy of the late 7C provides a good reason why the name 'Martha' should be associated with a Visitation scene. The Annunciation was one of four Eastern Marian feasts which gradually came to be celebrated at Rome in the late 7C (Chavasse 375-402; Frénaud). Originally, all of the Mass-gospels for these feasts were taken from Luke. For 2 Feb. (the meeting of the Lord with Simeon in the temple: '*sancti Simeonis, quod Ypapanti Graeci appellant*') the gospel was Lk 2:22-32. The gospel for 25 March (*Adnuntiatio Domini*: Lk 1:26-38) was taken from Wed. of Ember Week in Advent. For 8 Sept. (*Nativitas sanctae Mariae*) the gospel was taken from Friday of Ember week in Advent: Lk 1:39-47, the Visitation. For 15 Aug. (*Dormitio sanctae Mariae*) the gospel was taken from the Greek Mass for the day: Lk 10:38-42, Martha and Mary of Bethany, ending with the verse 'But only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her'. By assigning this pericope to the Dormition-Mass the Greek liturgy used the honour Christ gave to Mary of Bethany (who had chosen not to act as handmaid but to listen to the Lord's word) as an analogy for the honour he gave his own mother (the handmaid of the Lord whose free choice to bear the Word would cause all generations to call her blessed). The liturgical use of Christ's praise of Mary of Bethany implicitly applied that praise to the Virgin Mary. Linking the two Marys was particularly startling in Roman tradition as Gregory the Great (PL76:1189; followed by Bede, CCSL120:166) identified Mary of Bethany with the Woman who was a Sinner of Lk 7:36-50. The Marian feasts of 15 Aug., 8 Sept. were both introduced in 660-680, the active lifetime of John the Archicantor. It would be difficult to find any two feasts in the course of the liturgical year which were associated as closely as these two were. Whereas 2 Feb. - 25 March were in the seventh century seen as feasts of the Lord, 15 Aug. - 8 Sept. were from the beginning both seen as feasts of Mary. As the latter two feasts fell just over three weeks apart the Mass-chants for 15 Aug. were sung again on 8 September (thus in the early antiphonaries no separate chants are provided for 8 September: cf. Frénaud 181-82). The two Masses were initially assigned the same epistle (Ecclesiasticus 24:11-13, 15-20: '... Et qui creavit me requievit in tabernaculo meo ... Quasi cedrus exaltata sum in Libano ...', taken from the oldest Roman Marian feast, 1 January). The feasts encompassed the whole life of the Virgin by celebrating her death (15 August) and then her birth (8 September). If this Visitation panel refers to 'Martha' and so to both feasts, it complements the panels at the foot of this side of the cross which, by juxtaposing Crucifixion to Annunciation, encompass the death and conception of Christ.

Lections and chants from the Advent ember-day Masses were reused to compose the Roman Masses for the new Marian feasts: as we have seen, it was as part of this wider process that the Visitation lection, already used for ember-Friday in Advent, was assigned to 8 September. But the Visitation was not a thematically appropriate Mass-gospel for Mary's birth: thus from about 700 it begins to be replaced by the genealogy of Christ, Mt. 1:1-16 (Chavasse 386). This genealogy was destined to prevail as the gospel for 8 September, but it would not be strange to find an English community using the older gospel for the feast well into the 8C. Such a community would have found it quite natural to

associate a Visitation scene (8 Sept.) with a reference to Martha (15 August). The *Mulier Peccatrix*, with whom Mary of Bethany was identified, is depicted in the panel immediately below the Visitation. It would have made sense to proceed from an image of her repentance to a verbal reminder of her close association with the Virgin Mary in the Mass for 15 August. The runes on the left border of the Visitation panel might possibly have read '[maria et] m[a]rþ(a)', balancing the possible reference to 'm(a)r[ia] m{ate}r' on the top border [for 'MR' = 'm{ate}r' see the Pictish cross-slab from Brechin (in roman script): Okasha 140 and fig. 2; but at the end of the top border of the Visitation panel there is room for at least one lost rune between **m** and **r**: the present suggestion is therefore extremely tentative]. The surviving runes '**dominnæ**' on the right border might possibly be the *incipit* of a phrase referring collectively to all four 'ladies' (*dominae*) honoured in the Mass-gospels of the related Marian feasts of 15 Aug. - 8 Sept., i.e. to the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth as well as to Martha and Mary of Bethany. The battered state of the top half of this panel, and the complete destruction of the borders of the lower half, must make us very cautious about all of its inscription. But if the inscription did associate the Visitation panel with 'Martha', the liturgy of late-7C Rome provides a reason why.

Bede knew of the early 7C Roman stational procession with candles from S. Adriano in the Forum to Santa Maria Maggiore on 2 February (PL90:351). He also used (PL90:569, cf. ó C. 1978 138) the biography of Pope Sergius I (686-701). This states that Sergius instituted processions, along the same route, on all four Marian feasts. These feasts thenceforth formed a set: it would have been natural for an 8C patron or designer to associate them. It is possible that Sergius' processions were imitated in England (as suggested by Willis 221). At Ruthwell the verse of Column III says that the followers of Christ came from afar to the Cross on Good Friday evening; the Cross bowed (to pass the body of Christ to them). Column IV describes them standing at the head of his dead body and looking upon him. Once more the iconography completes the poetry, again in liturgical terms. The second half of the programme contains a series of images of Christ's body: the fulfilment of the manna in the desert ('Mary and Joseph' panel); recognised by Paul and Anthony in the breaking of bread; recognised by beasts and dragons as 'XPS'; and adored ([A]DORAMVS) as Agnus Dei. In the second half of both poetry and iconography there are references to the Roman stational processions to Holy Cross in Jerusalem on Good Friday (ó C. 1987-88 42-50; ó C., forthcoming). Thus each half of the Ruthwell cross is associated with a set of feasts (Marian, lenten) on which processions were held at Rome. Stational processions involved communal antiphonal singing by laity as well as clerics. Such processional singing was important for the development of Western chant (Dyer 62-66).

The Annunciation, *De Ceco Nato* and *Peccatrix* panels (on the lower stone below the Visitation panel) are all inscribed in capitals with scriptural verses which were chanted, as antiphons and as gospel lections, during lent (ó C., forthcoming). But, as we have seen, the Visitation is inscribed in runes. The runes may be there by accident: maybe those who inscribed the upper stone simply got it wrong, failing to match the lower stone. But the difference in script might conceivably be intentional. On this side of the cross at any rate, all the scriptural texts (which we know were liturgically chanted) are in roman script, while runes are used for what appears to be a statement *about* scriptural figures (the '**dominnæ**'). This may be a 'secondary' text, not sung liturgically. There may be a distinction, on this side of the

cross at least, between sacred texts chanted liturgically (roman script), and an historical gloss on the liturgy (in runes).

Whether we accept this theory, or prefer to see the Visitation inscription and the mysterious '- æfauðepo -' runes on the cross-head as anomalous, there seems to be a careful balance of languages (each with its appropriate script) on the cross. English is relegated to the narrow sides. Runes, which in early Northumbria were 'regarded perhaps with antiquarian affection by the learned and religious' (R.I. Page 265), are used to tell what happened long ago on the first Good Friday. At a period in which Irish and Northumbrian scribes were developing a 'grammar of legibility' for Latin and its scripts (cf. Parkes) the vernacular verse may have been laid out in the older *scripta continua* as a piece of deliberate antiquarianism: to emphasise that these archaic runes told of ancient events. In contrast, all the Latin (and roman script) occurs on the broad sides. The iconography and Latin inscriptions develop the contemporary liturgical implications of the historical narrative told in English verse in runes. The Latin inscriptions for the large panels in the second half of the programme do not comprise extensive scriptural quotations. But some of these texts may possibly have been sung liturgically at Ruthwell. The statement that Paul and Anthony 'fregerunt panem in deserto' would have made an appropriate antiphon for the *fractio panis* of a monastic Mass. Both *sententiae* inscribed on the Christ/Beasts panel are rhythmic (two-stress phrases reminiscent of old English verses). The first *sententia* ('IHS XRS IVDEX AEQVITATIS') even alliterates ('**ie**sus-**iu**dex'). It would have made an appropriate acclamation after the consecration at Mass: eschatological acclamations are found at this point in the Stowe Missal (Warner 2:17). It is likely that the (first person plural) '[A]DORAMVS' is a statement about local acts of public liturgical adoration. Its occurrence on an Agnus Dei panel may indicate that at Mass at Ruthwell they sang the *Agnus Dei*, the public acclamation which Pope Sergius had directed should be sung 'a clero et a populo' at the *fractio panis* (ó C. 1978 134-37). An analogue to the linguistic attitudes of the Ruthwell designer, who gave pride of place to Latin and roman script and an important but secondary place to the vernacular and runes, is provided by Bede's account of how by 'meditatione scripturarum' a new language, Latin, had come into general use amongst the pre-existing language-groups of Britain (*HE* 1:1). The term *meditatio scripturarum* comprehends not only private study and meditation, but also the public proclamation of scripture in liturgy. There, above all, 'os iusti meditabitur sapientiam' (Ps. xxxvi:30; cf. Crépin 183-4, Okasha 145-6).

Every account from this early period of the performance of vernacular poetry (Caedmon, Aldhelm, Alcuin on Ingeld) refers to it as sung. The Ruthwell English poetry comprises a sequence of four *sententiae*, each occupying a column of runes. The columns are designed 'antiphonally' in that they answer each other spatially and thematically: there are close thematic links between opposite columns (I-III, and II-IV: cf. ó C. 1987-88 15-29). It is possible that on the Ruthwell Cross we have a set of four linked antiphons which were sung para-liturgically, singly or in sequence, in the presence of (or even by) 'clero et populo': perhaps when 'eager ones came thither from afar, noble ones came together' (Column III) on Good Friday. The cross is above all mnemonic: designed to remind onlookers not only of visual images they saw and scriptural texts they read, but of chants they sang and processions and liturgical actions they performed. In the early 8C, Latin and vernacular chanted music were both oral traditions, whatever the other differences between them [music-writing was

gradually introduced (in Francia) from late 8C-mid 9C: cf. Levy]. On any day throughout the year the Ruthwell Cross may have sent individuals away quietly humming to themselves, as they recalled the lenten and Marian processions and ceremonies, and the chants in Latin and English, they annually performed in community.

Any literate pilgrim to Rome in the period must have been impressed by the fact that two languages and two scripts (Latin and Greek) were used in the city (liturgically, and in inscriptions: e.g. on the walls of S. Maria Antiqua). Bede knew at least one MS (Oxford, Bodleian, MS Laud Gr. 35) in which Latin and Greek were laid out in parallel columns. To balance a closely-unified set of four antiphonal songs about the Crucifixion, in English and in ancient runes (on the narrow sides), over against liturgical chants for new feasts, in Latin and in roman script (on the broad sides), may have been another way in which the Ruthwell designer intended his *crucis tropaeum* to imitate Rome.

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