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Sacralised Secular Images on the Ruthwell Cross: the Archer Panel and Christ "Miþ Strelum Giwundad"

Éamonn Ó Carragáin

An archer, and arrows, are self-evidently heroic images. In *Beowulf* the young Geatish hero, accompanied by Hrothgar, the Danish king, and their Danish and Geatish warriors, sets out to take vengeance on Grendel's mother, who has slain the warrior Æschere. As they reach the giants' mere, they are shocked to find Æschere's head placed on the cliff which overhangs the monster-filled lake (1417b–24). A Geatish warrior shoots ar a monster with his bow [*flanboga*] so that a deadly war-arrow [*herestæl hearda*] sticks in the monster's body:

> Sumne Geata leod
> of flanbogan feores getwæfde, yðgewinnes, pret him on aldre stod herestræl
> hearda; he on holme wæs
> sundes þe sænra, ðe hyne swylt fornam. (1432b–36).[1]
>
> With bow-and-arrow one of the Geatish warriors cut off one [monster] from its life, from its struggles with the water, so that a deadly war-arrow pierced its heart. It was more sluggish at swimming, when death seized upon it.

Later on in *Beowulf*, we are told how Hæðcyn, the second son of King Hreðel, accidentally shot his elder brother with an arrow which is described as a dart [*flān*] and even as a spear [*gār*]. Particularly in poetry, the words *strǣl*, *flān* and *gār* were associated: arrows seem to have been imagined, realistically enough, as spears shot by a bow.[2] This association between *arrow* and *spear* will be important in understanding the metaphoric meanings the word *stræl* can carry in *The Dream of the Rood*:

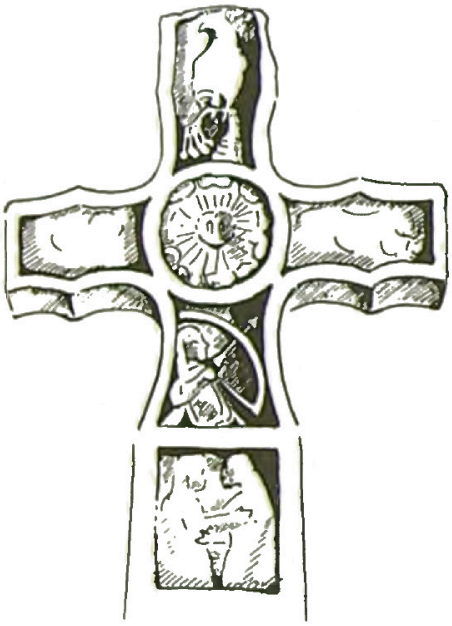
> Wæs þæm yldestan ungedefelice
> mæges dædum morþorbed stred,
> syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
> his freawine, flane geswencte,
> miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscet,
> broðor oðrne blodigan gare. (2435–40).[3]

1 *Beowulf and Judith*, ed. by E. Van Kirk Dobbie, New York, 195 ("The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records. A Collective Edition", 4), pp. 44–45.

2 See *A Thesaurus of Old English*, ed. by J. Roberts, Ch. Kay, L. Grundy, London. 1995. 2 vols., 1, p. 608, section 13.02.08.04.04.01: "An arrow, dart, bolt: *anga*, *arewe*, *bolt*, *earh*, *fla*, *flan*, *gar*, *stræl*.

3 *Beowulf and Judith*, pp. 75–76.

Shockingly, a bed of slaughter was prepared for the eldest [son] by the act of a kinsman, when Hreocyn with a curved bow shot him, his lord, with an arrow. He missed the mark and shot his kinsman: brother shot brother with a bloody dart [spear].*



On the first broad side of the Ruthwell Cross, the lower panel of the equal-armed cross-head which tops the obelisk-shaft shows an archer, drawing his bow to shoot an arrow towards the right-hand arm of the transom: unfortunately, as the original transom is lost, we can no longer know what the archer was aiming at.[4] It is likely that this is the earliest visual image of an archer in English art. When examining the panel, it is important not to underestimate the "shock of the new", the visual impact which such realistic images, from a foreign artistic tradition, are likely to have had on the earliest audiences at Ruthwell. Apart from any awareness they may have had of surviving ancient Roman fragments in the area, they would have been entirely unfamiliar with sculpture in the Mediterranean tradition.[5] The narrow sides of the Ruthwell Cross are covered with great vine scrolls, images of the Tree of Life. The Ruthwell designer provided these great panels with runic *tituli* in English

4 The present transom was reconstructed in the early nineteenth century, under the direction of H. Duncan, the Presbyterian minster of Ruthwell parish, and a fine antiquarian. For recent speculation on what the iconography of this side of the transom may have been, see Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the* Dream of the Rood *Tradition*, Toronto, 2005, p. 146. On the drawing, see note on p. 2.

5 There are other early Anglo-Saxon archer-images, but none as early as the Ruthwell Cross: for example: the cross at St. Andrew Auckland, a fragmentary shaft from Hulton, and the later Sheffield cross: further references in M. Schapiro, "The bowman and the bird on the Ruthwell Cross and other works: the interpretation of secular themes in early mediaeval religious art", *The Art Bulletin*, XLV, 1963, pp. 351–55 (at p. 352, note 11). and in B. Raw, "The archer, the eagle and the lamb", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXX. 1967, pp. 391–94 (at p. 391).

*A note on professor Ank Esmeijer's drawing of the upper stone at Ruthwell (on p. 2).

The drawing on p. 2 is by Professor Ank Esmeijer of Rotterdam, and is reproduced with her permission. It was originally published as part of Ernst Kantorowicz's article, "The Archer in the Ruthwell Cross", *Art Bulletin*, 42 (1960), 57-59. It shows the upper part of the first broad side of the Ruthwell Cross as originally constructed. In the drawing, the archer panel appears below the missing transom, and the panel with the eagle on the vine-scroll appears above the transom on this side of the upper arm of the cross-head. In the nineteenth-century reconstruction of the fragmented cross-head, the upper arm was mistakenly reversed.

verse. The designer edited these two *tituli* most carefully: each *titutus* has two columns of runes, and each column contains a separate coherent *sententia* (i.e. a distinct unit of thought). At the beginning of the second *sententia* of the second *titulus* (the fourth and last *sententia* of the Ruthwell poem), Christ's dead body is said to be "miþ strelum giwundad" ('wounded with arrows'). Here, the word *strǣl* is clearly a metaphor for the five wounds in Christ's body; the quotations from *Beowulf* have shown us that *strǣl*, associated with words like *flān* and *gār*, could be used as a metaphor to encompass both the four wounds of the nails in his limbs, and also the wound of the spear in his side.

Scholarly discussion of the sculpted archer-panel has focussed on two points: whether the panel is "secular" or "sacred", and whether the archer is morally good or morally evil. The present paper will argue that scholars need also to raise both of these questions of the verse "miþ strelum giwunad". In 1833, Henry Duncan published the first description of the archer panel. Unsurprisingly, he saw it in secular terms, and in relation to Roman art: "[…] immediately below the arms of the cross, is a figure in a sitting posture, in the act of drawing a bow, which on a Roman column might have been taken for a Cupid".[6] Secular interpretations of the panel held the ground well into the twentieth century: for example, in 1921 Gerald Baldwin Brown stated that

> The meaning of the archer and his relation to the eagle on the top panel are obscure, but it is quite possible that there is no recondite symbolism involved, or at any rate present in the mind of the carver, and that the eagle, treated with such spirit and natural feeling, is to the artist nothing but a noble quarry, thsr the archer will presently transfix with his shaft.[7]

In 1943 Fritz Saxl argued that the archer might have had a religious meaning, but that it was a negative one: "But who is the archer beneath the cross-beam […]? We are reminded of 'the arrow that flieth by day' (Psalm 90:5)".[8] Saxl admitted that, as the inscription to the panel was illegible, there was no external evidence on the Ruthwell Cross to support this negative interpretation. He then argued that the missing transom may have had, in its central roundel, "a group, showing Christ holding a large key over the bent figure of St Peter, a symbol of the institution of

6 H. Duncan, "An account of the remarkable monument in the shape of a cross, inscriped with Roman and letters, preserved in the garden of Ruthwell Manse, Dumfriesshire", *Archaeologica Scotica: or, Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, IV/2, 1833, pp. 313–26 (at p. 325).

7 G. Baldwin Brown & A. Blyth Webster, *The Arts in Early England*, 6 vols. in 7. London, 1903–37, 5 (1921), pp. 125–26.

8 F. Saxl, "The Ruthwell Cross", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VI, 1943, pp. 1–19 (at p. 6).

the Church of Rome".[9] From this speculative hypothesis, Saxl argued that "the Cross was erected in the brief space of Roman might in Britain between Whitby and Bede […]. Assuming such a reconstruction and interpretation of the lost part of the Cross the archer would stand for the enemies by whom the Roman Church in Northumbria was surrounded, pagans and heretics alike".[10]

The next year, Meyer Schapiro independently published an interpretation of the Ruthwell Cross. Whereas Saxl had seen the Cross as reflecting the ideology of the Roman Church in Northumbria, Schapiro emphasized its "Celtic" spirituality, which he saw to be particularly reflected in panels celebrating eremitic life in the desert. Like earlier scholars, Schapiro argued that the archer should be seen as a secular motif:

> I do not believe that the archer and the bird on the back of the little cross above the main shaft have a definite religious sense; […] It is one of the oldest mediaeval examples of secular imagery at a terminal point of a religious monument, and is paralleled by the falconer at the base of the Bewcastle Cross and the numerous figures of riders, huntsmen and combatants on the bases or lower areas of the Irish and Scottish crosses.[11]

Ernst H. Kantorowicz later suggested that the archer might represent Ishmael in the wilderness (Genesis 21:12–21; Galatians 4:22–31), and thus that the panel might fit closely into Schapiro's programme of eremitic life in the desert.[12] This new "religious" interpretation was, however, immediately challenged by Schapiro himself, who as the title of his article emphasized, held to a secular interpretation of the panel.[13] He reaffirmed his view that the panel was marginal to the religious meanings of the cross, but that in medieval art such "marginalia" provided an important refuge for the expression of secular values. As part of his argument, Schapiro made an interesting, if problematic, point about the concepts "sacred" and "secular":

9 At this point, Saxl made the interesting suggestion that a set of three late fragmentary cross-heads preserved at Durham Cathedral might provide analogues for the missing Ruthwell transom: on at least one of these, there is an eagle on the upper cross-arm, as on the corresponding upper arm at Ruthwell. This suggestion is discussed in Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 146–47.

10 Saxl, "The Ruthwell Cross", p. 7.

11 M. Schapiro, "The religious meaning of the Ruthwell Cross", *The Art Bulletin*, XXVI, 1944, pp. 232–45 (at p. 238, note 57).

12 E.H. Kantorowicz, "The archer in the Ruthwell Cross", *The Art Bulletin*, XLII, 1960, pp. 57–59.

13 Schapiro, "The bowman and the bird": Schapiro demolished Kantorowicz's hypothesis by pointing out that, in the writings of Bede, the figure of Ishmael is seen, never as a desert ascetic, but always as the ancestor of the Muslims, whom Bede calls "homeless and destructive heathens", and "the homeless Saracen nomads who raid all the peoples bordering on the desert and are fought by all of them" (Bede, *Hexaemeron*, IV, on Genesis 16:13 in *PL*, vol. 91. col. 159): further references in Schapiro, "The bowman and the bird", pp. 353–54 and note 28.

> The alternatives are not, as is often supposed: religious meaning or no meaning, but religious or secular meanings, both laden with affect. Like metaphor in poetry, such marginal decoration is also a means of dwelling in an enjoyed feeling or desire.
>
> […] we are not always able to distinguish these two fields of meaning, since the choice of religious figures is influenced by their secular interest, and themes chosen at one time for their qualities of force may be interpreted later as moral and religious symbols.[14]

We shall return, at the end of the present article, to the implications of this passage.

Four years later, Barbara Raw provided a revolutionary, and deservedly influential, interpretation of the archer-panel.[15] She pointed our that "in medieval symbolism arrows represent not only the attacks of the devil but also the word of God".[16] For Raw, the archer was no longer secular, and marginal to the programme of the cross, but religious, and central to that programme; Raw was the first to give the archer, nor a negative religious interpretation (as in Saxl's weak "enemies of the Roman Church" hypothesis) but a convincing positive one: in effect, a messenger of God, such as a preacher, who shoots God's words into the hearts of his hearers. Though there was some initial resistance to Raw's hypothesis,[17] it has proved to be decisive in all recent scholarship. It prompted the present author to suggest that the square object in the satchel which hangs before the archer's body, in effect his quiver, may represent a gospel-book: this archer shoots God's words from scripture.[18] In a forthcoming article, the present writer will point out that, in the *Introit* for Mass on the feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist (VIII kalendas iulias: 24 June) John is called "sagitta electa", 'the chosen arrow'.[19] This *Introit* was based on Isaiah 49:1–2, in which the Messiah himself is called "sagitta electa", and is said to be 'hidden in [God's] quiver' ("in faretra sua abscondit me"). The archer therefore encapsulates the issues involved in the Visitation panel directly below, where in Elizabeth's womb one of God's chosen arrows, John the Baptist, leaps to recognise the other, Christ, in Mary's womb. On this first side of the Cross, both

14 Ibid. p. 353.

15 Raw, "The archer, the eagle and the lamb".

16 Ibid. p. 393.

17 R.T. Farrell, "The archer and associated figures on the Ruthwell Cross – a reconsideration", in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by R.T. Farrell (*British archeological reports*, 46), Oxford, 1976, rejected Raw's argument, and still continued to support Saxl's negative interpretation.

18 Ó Carragáin, *The Ruthwell crucifixion poem*, pp. 41–42 and Plate III; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 141–43 and fig. 29.

19 R.J. Hesbert, *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex*, Brussels, 1936 (reprinted Rome, 1985), pp. 134–35, No. 119: the *Introit* "De ventre matris meae vocavit me Dominus nomini meo & posuit os meum ut gladium acutum sub tegumentum manus suæ protexit me posuit me quasi sagittam electam".

babies are still 'hidden in God's quiver'; but on the opposite, second side, they are revealed in the splendour of heaven, where John the Baptist, a seated majestic figure but still acting as the messenger (*nuntius*, *angelus*), points to Christ, revealed to be the Agnus Dei of the heavenly liturgy (Apocalypse 4–5).

Thus, the long debate on whether the Ruthwell archer-panel is "religious" or "secular" has been resolved decisively in favour of a "religious" interpretation. This interpretation is decisive precisely because it enables us to see the unity of both sides of the upper stone, and so to see that the archer-image makes a decisive contribution to the whole *logic* of the monument. What was most startling about Raw's brilliant hypothesis was the way in which it suggested that the archer was a positive image: an agent or messenger of God himself. This brings us to the final question of the present paper: if in the *Dream* Christ is "miþ strelum giwundad", who shoots the arrows that wound Christ's body? How is the audience to react to Christ's "limb-weary" body?

There is no need to assume that the designer planned a relationship between the iconographic image of the archer and the poetic image ("miþ strelum giwundad"). The archer is on the first broad side of the Ruthwell Cross, the side that now faces south: assuming that the Ruthwell Cross was oriented as the Bewcastle Cross still is, this would origina1ly have been the eastern side of the cross, and the archer would have shot towards the north.[20] But the fourth *sententia* of the Ruthwell poem is on the side of the cross that now faces West: if that cross was oriented as the Bewcastle Cross still is, this was originally the south side of the monument. That is, the archer with the book-satchel aims, not at the image of Christ "wounded with arrows", but away from it. Nevertheless, the runic verse *tituli* on the lower stone, and the archer on the upper stone both come from the same intellectual milieu. It is reasonable to assume that similar at titudes to heroic images, such as archers and arrows, lie behind both the visual and the poetic images.

The verse "mip strelum giwundad", with which the fourth Ruthwell *sententia* begins, corresponds to the second verse of line 62 of *The Dream of the Rood*. There, the phrase refers to the Cross:

> Genāmon hīe þǣr ælmihtigne God,
> āhofon hine of ðām hefian wīte. Forlēton mē þā hilderincas
> standan stēame bedrifenne; eall ic wæs mid strǣlum forwundod. (60b–62).[21]
>
> There they seized almighty God, raised him up from the severe torture. The warriors left me standing there, drenched with moisture; I was all wounded with arrows.

20 Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood* cit., p. 143.

21 *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. by M. Swanton, Exeter, 1987. p. 97.

In *Dream* 62b, the word 'eall' and the prefix 'for' are each designed to intensify the audience's reaction to the poem: such emotional intensifiers may well have been added to (oral or written?) versions of the *Dream* much later than the Ruthwell Cross: indeed, at any time between the eighth and the tenth centuries.[22] It seems certain that the eighth-century Ruthwell runic *tituli* were by no means the earliest version of the Old English Crucifixion songs: that they were edited from an earlier sung poem. It is, perhaps, even likely that the sung Crucifixion-narrative was written down for the first time (perhaps directly into runes? Or perhaps drafted in roman letters first of all, and then transliterated into runes?) as part of the process of editing the Ruthwell *tituli*. However that may be, the decision of the Ruthwell designer to provide the two vine-scrolls with broad flat borders suitable for inscription and then, probably before the lower stone was erected, to inscribe carefully-edited runic *tituli* on those borders, ensured that the *Dream* was no longer simply part of the oral tradition. The two runic *tituli* for the vine-scrolls on the lower stone made the Ruthwell Cross speak, and speak of its own experience on Calvary. It seems to have been the unique decision of the Ruthwell designer-editor to edit the phrase "miþ strelum giwundad" so that it referred, no longer to the Cross, but to Christ's dead body which the Cross hands to his followers to contemplate:

13 *m*iþ s*trel*um giwundad
14 alegdun hiæ *h*inæ limwœrignæ . gistoddu[n *h*]*i*m [æt *his lic*]æs [*hêâ*]f [*du*]*m*
15 [*bih*]êà[*ld*]u[*n*] [*h*]i[*æ*] [*þ*]e[*r*] {*hêâfunæs dryctin*} […]

13 wounded with arrows
14 they laid him down limb-spent; they took their stand at the head and feet[23] of his corpse
15 there they looked upon {*the lord of heaven*} […]

Professor John McKinnell and his colleagues, in their excellent edition of the Ruthwell runes, have recently argued convincingly that these runic verse *tituli* are quotations from a pre-existing poem or song. Unfortunately, as part of this convincing theory, they raise an unnecessary grammatical objection to taking Christ as the person to whom the phrase "miþ strelum giwundad" (line 13) refers.

22 On the theory of "an *eall*-reviser", who attempted to increase the emotional impact the *Dream* by inserting that word where it is metrically redundant (at lines 9b, 12b, 20b, 48b, 55b, 58b, 62b, 94b and 125b), see É Ó Carragáin, "Crucifixion as Annunciation: the relation of 'The Dream of the Rood' to the liturgy reconsidered", *English Studies*, LXIII, 1982, pp. 487–505 (at p. 499, note 48).

23 In translating the phrase "æt his licæs heafdum", literally "at the heads of his corpse" as an elliptical phrase for "at his head and feet", I follow A. Bammesberger, "Altenglisch *æt heafdum* und der elliptische Dual", in *Novalis Indogermanica. Festschrift für Günter Neumann zum 80. Geburtstag*, hrsg. M. Fritz, S. Zeilfclder, Graz, 2002, pp. 25–34.

They write:

> Despite the probable omission of ll. 60–62a of the Vercelli text, *giwundad* must refer to the Cross itself; had it been meant to refer to Christ, it would have had the acc. masc. sg. ending *-næ*? This suggests that this panel [the second runic verse *titulus*] contains a single quotation from the poem, but it must still be a quotation, since it begins with an odd second-half line ["Krist wæs on rodi" = *Dream* 56b] — something which is never done in OE poetry except when something has been lost. The odd half-line = 62b may point towards the same conclusion.[24]

This illuminating passage contains an invalid syntactical point, and it is necessary to dispose of this point quickly, before we examine the wider implications of the authors' argument, which are convincing and important. *Pace* McKinnell and his colleagues, in the fourth Ruthwell *sententia* both "giwundad" and "limwœrignæ" are in apposition, and are both in the accusative case. Alastair Campbell has pointed out that in verse "a parallel may be uninflected if the case is clearly indicated in the expressions with which it parallels"; that is, in verse the case of a word may be indicated, not by inflection, but by its context.[25] In the Ruthwell *runic* edition of the Dream-narrative, the accusative case of the uninflected "giwunded" is indicated by the inflected "limwœrignæ" which provides a poetic varia tion on "giwundad". It is, however, likely that in all the sung versions of the *Dream*, earlier and later than the Ruthwell Cross, the phrase "miþ strelum giwundad" always referred to the Cross, and not to Christ. If so, ir was the highly original decision of the Ruthwell designer-editor to provide a new context for the phrase, so as to make it, for perhaps the only time in the history of this poem, refer directly to Christ. This unique decision may well have been surprising to any early audience at Ruthwell who read the runes or heard them chanted.

Why did the Ruthwell rune-master omit the phrase "ic wæs" and put the

24 *Runes, Magic and Religion: a Sourcebook*, ed. by J. McKinnell, R Simek, K. Düwel, Wien, 2004 (*Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia*, 10), p. 109. A. Bundi, in her important article, "Per la ricostruzione dei passi frammentari dell'iscrizione runica della Croce di Ruthwell", *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale* (*Filologia germanica*), XXII, 1979, pp. 21–58, at p. 54, had already argued that "miþ strelum giwundad" must be quoted from a pre-existing poem, and that it cannot refer to Christ. The problem was already discussed by the present author in "The Ruthwell Crucifixion Poem in its Iconographic and Liturgical Contexts", *Peritia*, VI-VII, 1987–88, pp. 1–71, at pp. 26–27; there he came to a somewhat different conclusion than the one fur which he argues at present.

25 A. Campbell, "The Old English Epic Style", in *English and medieval studies presened to J. R. R. Tolkien on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*, ed. by N. Davis, C.L. Wrenn, London, 1962, pp. 13–26, at p. 22, where Campbell gives nine examples of the phenomenon. See also *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. by J. Roberts, Oxford, 1979. p. 70, note on the "uninflected participial adjective in variation" in line 1019 (*gesoht*) of *Guthlac B*: as she states, "sporadic examples can be found in verse from all periods"; and, for further discussion, B. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, Oxford, 1985, 2 vols., 1, pp. 602–04.

truncated (but still metrically convincing) verse at the beginning of the fourth *sententia*? The first gain was a practical one. The runic verse *tituli* made the Ruthwell Cross speak, from the heart of its own experience of Christ's Passion. But the Ruthwell Cross did not have a Crucifixion scene.[26] It did not make visual sense to have that cross apply any version of *Dream* 46–7a ('they pierced me with dark nails; the wounds are to be seen on me, open strokes of malice') or 62b ('I was all wounded with arrows') to its own iconography.

But if the designer was simply aiming to make the great cross speak realistically of its own visual images, he or she could simply have omitted the verse "miþ strelum giwundad". Instead, the designer chose, as John McKinnell has pointed out, to provide, as the *incipit* of the fourth *sententia* "an odd second-half line" which itself begins, most unusually, with the preposition *miþ*.[27] A designer who accepted such oddities in order to preserve the image "wounded with arrows" must have seen the phrase as vital for the design and meaning of the fourth *sententia*. The most immediate reason is not far to seek. Without the phrase, no audience could have grasped the full force of the idea that the dead Christ was "limwœrignæ": it was primarily because his body had been "miþ strelum giwundad" that his dead body could be seen by his followers (both his followers in the poem who look upon his dead body, and his followers at Ruthwell who contemplate that body in imagination) as 'limb-weary', 'limb-spent'. This vivid image is an example of the Anglo-Saxons' fondness for litotes: when the *Beowulf* poet says that Grendel is lying 'battle-weary' (*gūþwērigne*, 1586) that grimly ironic understatement means that the monster has been killed in battle; similarly, to say in the *Dream* that Christ is 'limbweary' is to focus our attention on the wounds in his limbs that have brought his body to death.[28]

But the designer may have also had a more general devotional reason to re-edit the *Dream* so as to preserve, for his high cross, the verse "miþ strelum giwundad". "Arrows", *sagittae*, is a fundamental image in scripture. Its metaphoric meanings are particularly explored in the Psalter, and all conscientious clerics, nuns or monks, required to chant the Psalter at least once a week, would normally have got the Psalter by heart as soon as possible after their religious profession.[29] In

26 Such a scene was added at the bottom of the base of the first broad side in the late eighth- or early ninth-century; but the cross itself was set up much earlier, perhaps as early as 730–40, the last decade of the lifetime of Bishop Acca of Hexham: see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 211–13, 282–85.

27 *Runes, Magic and Religion*; A. Bundi, *Per la ricostruzione*, p. 54: "Sarebbe, inoltre, opportuno cercare dei paralleli circa la costruzione della frase, la quale inizierebbe con un complemento"; see also the discussion in Ó Carragáin, *The Ruthwell poem*, note 54.

28 *Beowulf* 1586a–7a; see *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 1, pp. 31–32, Section 02.02.03.02, and 2, p. 1144, under *limwerig*, 'state of being dead'; see also Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 181–82.

29 The psalms are here referred to by their Latin numbering, and quoted from the *Septuagint, Old*

the psalter, *sagittae* often has a negative meaning: thus, for example, the wicked sinners "bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart".[30] But, equally often, God himself is the archer who, for example, "sent out his arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them".[31]

One of the most important strengths of the metaphor "miþ strelum giwundad", is that it encourages a meditative reader of, or listener to, the poem (whichever version: the Ruthwell *titulus* or the manuscript *Dream*) to look beyond the literal nails and spear with which the Roman soldiers wounded Christ, to the fundamental metaphysical question of who ultimately was responsible for his wounds. In his edition of the *Dream* Michael Swanton convincingly quotes Vercelli Homily IV, in which "the devil has a bow and arrows" ("bogan ond stræla"): here, the arrows are hatred, envy and the other deadly temptations the devil shoots at people daily.[32] This passage is not irrelevant to the poem, but an awareness of how the "arrows" image is used in the psalms suggests that an early monastic audience would not have seen the metaphor in such comfortingly abstract allegorical terms, where the arrows are not wielded by human beings at all, but by the devil, the adversary of God and of human beings. For example, Psalm 37 (the third of the seven Penitential Psalms) was read as a prophecy of Christ's Passion, with particular reference to verses 7–18 and 20–23: several of these verses are quoted, or referred to, in the New Testament Passion narratives. For example: one series of early medieval *Tituli Psalmorum* quotes, as its *titulus* for Psalm 37, Luke 23:49, "Stabant omnes noti eius a longe" ('and all his acquaintances stood afar off'), taking up verse 12b of the psalm, "et qui iuxta me erant de longe steterunt" ('and they that were near me stood afar off).[33] The Passion according to Luke was solemnly chanted on Wednesday in Holy Week when the Roman stational Mass was at Santa Maria Maggiore.[34] Luke 23:49 is part of a description of the immediate aftermath of Christ's death: the part of the Passion also described, in

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Roman, ed. by R Weber, *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgalam Versionem*, Stuttgart, 1994. Translations are based, with occasional modifications, on the Douai version.

30 Ps. 10:3: "[…] peccatores intenderunt arcum / paraverunt sagittas suas in faretra / ut sagittent in obscuro rectos corde" [Vulgate: "posuerunt sagittam suam super nervun"]. Psalms m which God's adversaries appear as archers include Psalms 36:14; 56:5; 63:4–8; and 90:6.

31 In the psalms, *arrows* are often, as here (Ps 17:15) used as metaphors for lightning. Psalms in which God acts as archer include 7:13–14; 44:6; 76:18; and 143:6.

32 *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. by Swanton, pp. 125–26, note to line 62b. The passage is now edited in D.G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and related texts*, London, Early English Text Society, o.s. 300) pp. 102–03, Homily IV, lines 308–21.

33 *Psalterium Liturgicum. Psalterium crescit cum psallente Ecclesia*, ed. F.M. Arocena, J.A. Goñi, Vaticano, 2005, 2 vols., 1, p. 121: *Tituli Psalmorum*, B.2.2. (763).

34 On the significance of St Luke's Passion, and of the Papal Stational Mass at Santa Maria Maggiore on Wednesday in Holy Week, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 311–16.

poetic terms, in the second Ruthwell *titulus*.

But Psalm 37 begins with the startling idea that the speaker is himself a sinner, and that it is God who, in his righteous anger, has transfixed him with arrows:

> [1]PSALMUS DAVID IN REMEMORATIONEM DE SABBATO
> [2]Domine ne in furore tuo arguas me
> neque in ira tua corripias me
> [3]Quoniam sagittae tuae infixae sunt mihi
> et confirmasti super me manum tuam
> [4]non est sanitas carni meae a facie irae tuae
> non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum
> [5]quoniam iniquitates meae supergressae sunt caput meum
> sicut onus grave gravatae sunt super me […].

> [1]A PSALM FOR DAVID, FOR REMEMBRANCE OF THE SABBATH
> [2]Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thy indignation, nor chastise me in thy wrath:
> [3]For thy arrows are fastened in me: and thy hand has been strong upon me.
> [4]There is no health in my flesh, because of thy wrath: there is no peace for my bones, because of my sins,
> [5]For my iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me.

With reference to these opening verses, one of the early medieval *Tituli Psalmorum* interprets Psalm 37 as 'a fervent plea by a sinner placed in extreme danger' ("obsecratio peccatoris in extrema periculo constituti"). [35]

Saint Augustine's exposition of Psalm 37 concentrates precisely on the ambiguous position of the speaker, who in successive verses appears as a sinner and as Christ himself:

> Where do they come from, the arrows that have found their mark in him? Perhaps what he calls arrows are the punishment, God's vengeance itself, plus the pains of mind and body which are unavoidable in this life. Holy Job also mentioned arrows of this sort; amid his woes he said that the arrows of the Lord had lodged in him [see Job 6:4]. However, we customarily take arrows as representing God's words, so surely it is impossible for anyone struck by them to suffer in this way? [*Solemus tamen et uerba Dei sagittas accipere; sed numquid ab his posset iste sic dolere se percuti*?] The arrows of God's words inflame love, not pain. Or is it that love itself cannot be free from pain? Yes, surely that is true, because if we love something and do not possesss it, we inevitably feel pain.[36]

35 *Psalterium Liturgicum*, 2, p. 121: *Tituli psalmorum*, B.2.2 (762); see also, on the same page, Nos. 764, 765, 766, 767, and 769.

36 Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos I-L*, eds. E. Dekkers, J. Fraipont, Turnhout, 1956 (*Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, 38), ps. 37, par. 5 (p. 385); from Augustine *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. M. Boulding, New York, 2000–2004, 6 vols., 2, p, 149,

To explain the ambiguities of the speaker's position, Augustine, in section 6 of his Exposition, provides an extended statement of his theory that, in the Psalms, Christ speaks sometimes in his own persona, as the Head of the Church, and sometimes in the persona of his Body, the sinful but repentant Church: [37]

> Sed: *Non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum*. Quaeri solet cuius sit uox; et aliqui accipiunt Christi, propter quaedam quae hie dicuntur de passione Christi, ad quae paolo post ueniemus, et nos agnoscemus quia de passione Christi dicuntur. Sed: *non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum*, quomodo di ceret qui nullum peccatum habebat? Coartat nos ergo intellegendi necessiras ad cognoscendum tamquam plenum et totum Christum, id est caput er corpus. Cum enirn Christus loquitur, aliquando ex persona solius capitis loquitur, quod est ipse Saluator, natus ex Maria uirgine; aliquando ex persona corporis sui, quod est sancta ecclesia, cliffusa toto orbe terrarum.[38]

> *There is no peace in my bones in the face of my sins*. The question usually asked is, 'Who is speaking here?'. Some take this to be Christ's voice, on account of all that is said a little later about his passion. We shall come to these statements shortly, and we too shall discover that they are indeed made about the passion of Christ. But how can one who was guilty of no sin say, *There is no peace in my bones in the face of my sins*? [Ps. 37:46] The need to make sense of this forces us to recognize that "Christ" here is the full Christ, the whole Christ: that is, Christ, head and body. When Christ speaks, he sometimes does so in the person of the Head alone, the Saviour who was born of the virgin Mary; bur at other times he speaks in the person of his body, holy Church diffused throughout the world.[39]

Augustine's theory that in the Psalter the 'whole Christ' (*tofus Christus*) speaks, enables us to see how important it was for the Ruthwell designer to state that, when Christ's followers gather at his head and feet to contemplate his body, that dead body was "miþ strelum giwundad". Christ, the head of the Church, suffered without guilt. But both the onlookers in the poem and the early audiences of the Ruthwell Cross knew themselves to be sinful members of his body, the Church. They would see the *arrows* that had wounded his body primarily as symbols of their own sins, which Christ had taken on himself "on his body on the tree":

> [21][…] quia et Christus passus est pro vobis
> vobis relinquens exemplum ut sequamini vestigia eius
> [22]qui peccatum non fecit

37 The best modem analysis of Augustine's theory, and of the patristic tradition behind it, is M.-J. Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier* (*III^e^-V^e^ siècles*), Romo. 1982 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 219–20), 2 vols., especially 2, pp. 365–88.

38 Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos I-L*, ps. 7, par. 6 (p.386).

39 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, ps. 36, par. 6 (p. 150).

nec inventus est dolus in ore ipsius
[23]qui cum malediceretur non maledicebat
cum pateretur non comminabatur
tradebat autem iudicanti se iniuste
[24]qui peccata nostra ipse pertulit in corpore suo super lignum
ut peccatis mortui iustitiae viveremus
cuius livore sanati estis (I Peter 2:21–24).

[…] because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps: "Who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9). Who, when he was reviled, did not revile; when he suffered, he threatened not; but delivered himself to him that judged him unjustly. Who in his own self bore our sins on his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live to justice: by whose stripes you were healed (cf. Isaiah 53:5, I John 3:5).

When, in the *titulus* to the second great Tree of Life at Ruthwell, the followers of Christ look on his dead body, they look on him whom they themselves have pierced.[40] One reason why the disturbing metaphor "miþ strelum giwundad" was carefully preserved, and re-edited by the Ruthwell designer to refer directly to Christ's body, may have been to remind early audiences at Ruthwell that Christ had taken on his body on the tree the punishments which they themselves, as sinners, merited.

We may conclude that the phrase "miþ strelum giwundad", like the archer panel, is central to the designer's religious purposes. Schapiro's distinction between "secular" and "sacred", quoted above, was far too simplistic. When early Anglo-Saxon clerics, familiar with Old English heroic literature, got the psalter by heart, they made another ancient body of heroic literature their own: they would certainly have appreciated that its 150 songs continually used vivid heroic images. The Patristic tradition had for centuries explored how such heroic images should be used, precisely because of their heroic force, to understand the heroic nature of Christ and the heroic lives to which, as members of his body, Christians were called. Contrary to what Schapiro thought, on the Ruthwell Cross the archer-panel is sacralised by using it to bring out the symbolic implications of the Visitation panel just below; similarly, the phrase "miþ strelum giwundad" is sacralised, not by denying its heroic quality, but the very reverse: by editing it so as to link the qualities of force, associated with the heroic image of *sagittae* in the Psalter, directly with the body of Christ, exhausted even of its blood, at the moment of his heroic death.[41] The Ruthwell Cross shows, both in its visual images and in the

40 Cf. Zechariah 12:10, cited in John 19:37 and Apocalypse 1:7.

41 That moment was, of course, one of birth as well as of death, of triumph won out of heroic defeat. The Patristic tradition insisted that the life-giving sacraments of the Church. symbolised by water (of Baptism) and blood (of the Eucharist), were born from the wound in Christ's

runic verse *tituli* for its great Trees of Life, how naturally the new, and subversive, Christian heroic traditions, based not on pride but on the heroic humility of *kenosis*, could be inculturated within Northumbrian monasteries.[42]

side (John 19:34–37). For a full survey of the tradition, see S. Tromp, "De Nativitate Ecclesiae e Corde Iesu in Cruce", *Gregorianum*, XIII, 1932, pp. 488–527; and, for the relevance of the tradition to the Ruthwell Cross and the *Dream*, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 81, 151, 187 and 351.

42 For a rich discussion of the importance of inculturation in Early Medieval culture. see B. Luiselli, "La formazione della cultura europea Occidentale" (*Biblioteca di cultura Romanobarica*, 7) Roma, 2003, *passim*. On the relevance of *kenosis* and humility to *The Dream of the Rood*, see Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, pp. 94, 164–66, 180–83, and 287–92.