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THE EXCEEDINGLY RARE "MASHAM CROSS SHAFT FRAGMENT" LOWER WENSLYDALE WORKSHOP 9TH/10TH CENTURY.

THE FULL HISTORY AND IMAGES ARE IN THE CORPUS OF ANGLO-SAXON STONE SCULPTURE, BY JAMES LANG. VOLUME VI: NORTHERN YORKSHIRE.

BELOW IS A COPY OF THE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION OF THIS RARE SAXON CARVED STONE SHAFT FRAGMENT.

Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume VI: Northern Yorkshire

by James Lang

Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy

published 2001

catalogue entry on page 172



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MASHAM (St Mary)

SE 226806

MASHAM 3. Shaft fragment1 (Ills. 645–8)

PRESENT LOCATION The property of Mr J. Yarker, formerly cathedral mason, Ripon Minster

EVIDENCE FOR DISCOVERY Illustrated by J. Fisher as ‘Part of a Saxon cross, found in a wall near Masham church. See p. 430’ (Fisher 1865, caption to fig. facing 152). But on p. 430 (and on pp. 309–10), it is made clear that the various stones illustrated were ‘brought to light in the course of the restoration of the church’, commencing in 1860.

The stone is said to have been subsequently rediscovered in the 1950s by Mr Yarker on a rockery in Borrage Lane in Ripon, and kept for some time in the masons’ yard at the cathedral (information by courtesy of Dr E. Coatsworth). However, a letter dated 25 November 1975 from the former Dean of Ripon, Edwin Le Grice to Professor R. Cramp states that Mr Yarker got the stone ‘from a man who removed rubble from the site of the present Roman Catholic St Wilfrid’s Church here [in Ripon] when they were doing some building work there’ (copy in Corpus archive, signatory kindly identified by Dr R. A. Hall). St Wilfrid’s church is in Coltsgate Hill, Ripon, and was built in 1860–2, shortly after the discovery of the stone at Masham.

It is not clear when or why the stone was removed from Masham to Ripon, unless it was built into the new Catholic church (a possible example of ‘iconic’ reuse: see Stocker with Everson 1990, 93–8), but the illustration in Fisher 1865, which shows all four sides of the stone in their present condition, makes the identification certain.

D.C.

H. 57 cm (22.4 in)

W. 29.5 > 22.2 cm (11.6 > 8.8 in)

D. 14 cm (5.5 in)²

STONE TYPE Unobtainable

PRESENT CONDITION Incomplete; one narrow face dressed for reuse

DESCRIPTION A (broad): An irregular flat edge moulding exists on the right, turning as a hacked plinth across the base. The left-hand edge did not have an edge moulding. The face is occupied by three half-coiled snakes surmounted by random clusters of pellets. The arrow-heads of the serpents converge on a frontally disposed human figure who stands in the lower right-hand corner. His knees are slightly bent and his arms are raised in the orans position with clenched fists. His oval head has primitive features: from drilled eyes a U-shaped incision depicts the nose. A narrow beard descends from the chin. His very short kirtle reveals the figure to be phallic.

B (narrow): Within a plain border is part of a closed circuit pattern of three-cord plait, with pellets filling the ground between and the unpinned loop below. The broad flat strands are irregularly cut.

C (broad): There is a rudimentary undulating edge on the left. The right-hand edge has been dressed off. The face is filled by a human figure almost identical with that on face A. Three half-coiled snakes attack him and clusters of irregular pellets serve as fillers.

D (narrow): Dressed off and chamfered, but with traces of interlace at the top probably identical to face B.

DISCUSSION This piece belongs to the Lower Wensleydale workshop (Chap. VI, pp. 49–50), and the rough carving and trick of incising facial features are indications of that group. Compare with Coverham 1 (Ill. 125) and Thornton Steward 2 (Ills. 793–6).

DATE Ninth to tenth century

REFERENCES Fisher 1865, 309–10, 430, fig. facing 152; Allen and Browne 1885, 352; Cunliffe-Lister 1978, 18, fig.; Hall 1990, 38, ill. 19; Lang 1991, 84

J.L.

Footnotes

1. The following is an unpublished manuscript reference to no. 3: BL Add. MS 37552 no. XIV, item 683 (Romilly Allen collection).
2. The measurements were kindly provided by Dr Elizabeth Coatsworth. (Eds.)

STOCK NO 1684.

SOLD

Dimensions:

Height: 22.4 inches (56.9 cms)

Width: 11.6 inches (29.5 cms)

Depth: 5.5 inches (14.0 cms)

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