



# Revisiting the Cloisters Cross

Edited by

Cecily Hennessy  
T. A. Heslop



# COURTAULD INSTITUTE

Revisiting the Cloisters Cross  
Edited by Cecily Hennessy and T. A. Heslop

With contributions by:

Charles T. Little  
Neil Stratford  
Sabrina Harcourt-Smith  
Robyn Barrow  
Cecily Hennessy  
T. A. Heslop

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Front Cover: Dispute between Pilate and Caiaphas, Ascension, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access.

Back Cover: Adam and Eve at the Foot of the Cross, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access.

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of Contributors</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	<b>11</b>
<b><i>Dramatis personae</i></b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Introduction: Revisiting the Cloisters Cross</b>	<b>28</b>
Cecily Hennessy and T. A. Heslop	
<b>‘Through a Glass Darkly’: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Cloisters Cross</b>	<b>46</b>
Charles T. Little	
<b>The British Museum and the Cloisters Cross</b>	<b>70</b>
Neil Stratford	
<b>Reflections on the Cloisters Cross in a Preaching Context</b>	<b>78</b>
Sabrina Harcourt-Smith	
<b>The Cloisters Cross and the Walrus Tusk</b>	<b>92</b>
Robyn Barrow	
<b>The Cloisters Cross and the Sphere of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England</b>	<b>108</b>
Cecily Hennessy	
<b>The Cloisters Cross and the Oslo Corpus Revisited</b>	<b>142</b>
T. A. Heslop	
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>170</b>
Cecily Hennessy and T. A. Heslop	
<b>Primary Bibliography</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Secondary Bibliography</b>	<b>178</b>

# List of Contributors

**Robyn Barrow** is a historian of medieval art. Her object-based research explores the exchange of art and resources in the Nordic and circumpolar worlds. She received her MA at the Courtauld Institute of Art and her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently a visiting assistant professor at Middlebury College.

**Sabrina Harcourt-Smith** (née Sabrina Longland) was an assistant to Nikolaus Pevsner on the series Buildings of England, a research assistant at the Cloisters, and assistant keeper in the Department of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

**Cecily Hennessy** was curatorial assistant at the Seattle Art Museum, lecturer and head of adult programmes at the Courtauld Institute of Art, and academic director of Christies Education, London.

**T. A. (Sandy) Heslop** is professor emeritus at the University of East Anglia where he taught from 1976–2019. He has published extensively on English art and architecture of the period 1000–1500.

**Charles T. (Chuck) Little** was curator in the Medieval Art Department and the Cloisters at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and president of the International Center of Medieval Art (ICMA).

**Neil Stratford** was keeper of medieval and later antiquities at the British Museum.

# List of Illustrations

A note on the dating of objects:

Where the authors propose alternative dates for objects, those dates are used in the List of Illustrations and captions in their essays; otherwise, generally accepted dates are given. For the illustrations of the Cloisters Cross in the Introduction, the broad dating (1150–90) reflects differing scholarly opinions.

## Figure 1.1

Front, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.2

Back, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.3

Moses and the Brazen Serpent, front central roundel, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.4

Dispute between Pilate and Caiaphas, Ascension, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.5

Good Friday Plaque, front right finial, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.6

Easter Plaque, front left finial, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.7

Adam and Eve at the Foot of the Cross, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.8

Lamb of God and Synagoga, back central roundel, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.9

Mark Plaque, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

## Figure 1.10

Luke Plaque, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 1.11**

John Plaque, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 2.1**

Front, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph © Malcolm Varon, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

**Figure 2.2**

Back, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph © Malcolm Varon, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

**Figure 2.3**

Replica of the Cloisters Cross, ca. 2004, in candlelight. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.4**

Very Reverend James Atwell (right), Ronald Street (centre), and Charles Little (left), with a replica of the Cloisters Cross, September 2004, at St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.5**

Ante Topić Mimara (1898–1987). Photograph in the public domain

**Figure 2.6**

Wiltrud Mersmann (1919–2022). Photograph in the public domain

**Figure 2.7**

James Rorimer (1905–1966). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

**Figure 2.8**

Carmen Gómez-Moreno (1914–2008). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

**Figure 2.9**

Thomas Hoving, (1931–2009). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

**Figure 2.10**

Harry Bober (1915–1988). Photograph courtesy of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York

**Figure 2.11**

Margaret Freeman (1899–1980). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**Figure 2.12**

Kay (Katherine) Serrell Rorimer (1908–2000). Photograph courtesy of the Rorimer family

**Figure 2.13**

Sabrina Jane Longland, now Sabrina Harcourt-Smith (b. 1939). Photograph courtesy of the Harcourt-Smith family

**Figure 2.14**

Wiltrud Mersmann at the Munich Central Collecting Point in March 1946. Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Photograph courtesy of the Archives of the National Gallery of Art

**Figure 2.15**

Job, from the *Bury Bible*, ca. 1125–36. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 2 fol. 344v. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by Harry Bober, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

**Figure 2.16**

Detail of Malachias, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.17**

Seal from Bury St Edmunds, ca. 1150. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Suffolk ch. 10. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by Julian Gardner, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

**Figure 2.18**

Detail of an Angel, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.19**

St Albans Head, ca. 1151–66, excavated. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London

**Figure 2.20**

Detail of Abdias, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.21**

Ascension, from the *Pembroke College Gospels*, 12th century. Pembroke College, Cambridge, MS 120, fol. 5v. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by permission of the Masters and Fellows of Pembroke College

**Figure 2.22**

Detail of the Ascension, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.23**

Crucifixion, from the *Arundel Psalter*, MS157, fol. 10v, dated here ca. 1200–1210. British Library, London, Arundel 157 fol. 10v. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of the British Library

**Figure 2.24**

Detail of the *titulus*, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.25**

Gold cross (now folded strip) from the Staffordshire hoard, inscribed in Latin: 'Help us O God—Arise, O Lord, and may your enemies be torn apart and those who hate you will flee from your face' (Numbers 10:35), 600–70. Birmingham Museums, cat. no. 540. Artwork in the public domain

**Figure 2.26**

Initial *L* to Saint Matthew's Gospel, with the Four Evangelists, frontispiece to a gospel book, probably made for the Abbey of Le Parc at Louvain, mid-12th century. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 241, fol. 7v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum

**Figure 2.27**

Ascension of the Virgin, from the *Stammheim Missal*, Hildesheim, 1170–80. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. MS 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 145v. Artwork in the public domain

**Figure 2.28**

Ivory element with St Peter and prophets (now lost), 1100–1200. Artwork in the public domain; photograph after Wiltrud Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz der Sammlung Topić-Mimara', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 25 (1963), 94, fig. 84.

**Figure 2.29**

Detail of prophets, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.30**

Brazen Serpent from *Dialogus de laudibus scantae*, Prüfening Abbey, Regensburg, ca. 1170–80. Staatsbibliothek, Munich, clm. 14159, fol. 3. Artwork in the public domain

**Figure 2.31**

Detail of the Brazen Serpent, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1150–60, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author

**Figure 2.32**

Oslo Corpus on the Cloisters Cross for *The Year 1200* exhibition, 1970, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

**Figure 2.33**

Detail, Oslo Corpus, dated here ca. 1150–1200, walrus ivory. Photograph by the author

**Figure 3.1**

Rupert Leo Scott Bruce-Mitford, 12 November 1976, photograph, Bassano Ltd, half-plate film negative. London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG x171707. Photograph © National Portrait Gallery

**Figure 3.2**

Ante Topić Mimara with dog, photograph in the public domain

**Figure 3.3**

Peter Lasko (centre) with George Zarnecki and Reg Dodwell (to the left), 1965. Photograph in the Zarnecki Archive FAHZ834; image courtesy of the Photographic Collections, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, supplied under a CCBYNC licence

**Figure 3.4**

Initial *L* to Saint Matthew's Gospel, with the Four Evangelists, frontispiece to a gospel book, probably made for the Abbey of Le Parc at Louvain, mid-12th century. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 241, fol. 7v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum

**Figure 4.1a–b**

The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park, Washington Heights, New York. Photographs in the public domain

**Figure 4.2**

Front, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 4.3**

Right side showing the *Cham ridet* couplet, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 4.4**

Left side showing the second part of the *Cham ridet* couplet, Cloisters Cross, 1150–90, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 4.5**

Bernard of Morlais, page from Liber 1, *De Contemptu Mundi*, 12th century. British Library, London, MS Cotton Cleopatra A.VIII.2.2. Courtesy of the British Library

**Figure 4.6**

Bernard of Morlais, page from *De Contemptu Mundi*, in Matthias Flacius, *Varia doctorum piorumque virorum, De corrupto Ecclesiae statu, Poemata* (Basel: Ludwig Lucius, 1556/57), <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/de-contemptu-mundi>

**Figure 4.7**

Peter Comestor, page with marginal notes from *Historia Scholastica* showing a discussion of Genesis 9:20–29, with the *Cham ridet* couplet in the bottom margin, copied late 12th century. Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican, Vatican City, lat. 1973, fol. 14v. Courtesy of the Vatican

**Figure 4.8**

Stephen Langton, extract from the allegorical exposition of Genesis 9:20–27 in *Postillae super Genesim* showing the second line of the *Cham ridet* couplet, copied 13th century. British Library, London, Royal MS. 2. E. XII, fol. 25v. Courtesy of the British Library

**Figure 4.9**

Odo of Cheriton, detail from Sermon 12 of the passage containing the *Cham ridet* couplet in *Sermones Dominicales*, probably copied in Spain, 13th century. Real biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Madrid, Cod. lat. 0. II. 7, fol. 36v. Courtesy of the Real biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial

**Figure 5.1**

Astri Tonoian, *For Our Sins*, 2023, bronze, Kongen Marina, Oslo. Photograph by Eirik Anzjøn.

**Figure 5.2**

Front, Cloisters Cross, dated here second half of the 12th century, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 5.3**

Detail, liturgical chair from Tydal Church, ca. 1150–1200, wood carving. National Historisk Museum, Oslo. Artwork in the public domain, © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph by Alexis Pantos (CC BY-SA 4.0)

**Figure 5.4**

Oliphant of Sainte-Chapelle, ca. 1150, walrus ivory. Bargello National Museum, Florence. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author

**Figure 5.5**

Oliphant bearing the insignia of Christian I and Dorothea, 14th century, walrus ivory, 505 x 53 mm. National Historisk Museet, Stockholm, 17922\_LRK. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author (CC BY 4.0)

**Figure 5.6**

Narwhal tusk from St Mary's Church, Utrecht, 11th or 12th century. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photograph provided by the Rijksmuseum (CC0)

**Figure 5.7**

Purse reliquary, ca. 1125, walrus ivory, 7.7 x 13.4 x 2.8 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photograph by the author (CC0).

**Figure 5.8**

Detail of the Good Friday Plaque, Cloisters Cross, dated here second half of the 12th century, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Photograph by the author (CC0)

**Figure 6.1**

Christ, saints, and Henry the Lion and Matilda of England and their families, from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 171v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.2**

Easter plaque, front left finial, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.3**

Illuminated initial, Resurrection of Christ, from the *Ratmann Sacramentary*, Hildesheim, 1159. Dom-Museum, Hildesheim, DS 37, fol. 75r. Artwork in the public domain, © Dom-Museum

**Figure 6.4**

Sleeping soldiers and the Resurrection of Christ, from a prayer book, second half of the 12th century. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Cod.2739\*, fol. 65v. Artwork in the public domain, © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

**Figure 6.5**

Ascension of Christ, walrus-ivory plaque, Cologne, second-half of the 12th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. 258.67. Artwork in the public domain, © Victoria and Albert Museum

**Figure 6.6**

*Ascension of Christ*, stone baptismal font, late 12th–early 13th century. Collegiate Church of St Boniface, Freckenhorst. Artwork in the public domain, © Baptisteria Sacra Index; photograph courtesy of Harriet Sonne de Torrens

**Figure 6.7**

Frontispiece from the Gospel of Matthew with author portrait, 1105–13, from *Quattuor Evangelia*, Ms. 16, fols. 1v–2r. Bibliothèque du Château, Chantilly. Artwork in the public domain; photograph CNRS-IRHT © Bibliothèque du musée Condé, Château de Chantilly

**Figure 6.8**

Burial of Christ, Maries at the Tomb, from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 74v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.9**

Maries at the Tomb, from the *Stammheim Missal*, Hildesheim, 1170s. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, MS 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 111. Artwork in the public domain

**Figure 6.10**

Copper-gilt disk-cross flabellum, ca. 1170–80. Kremsmünster Abbey, Kremsmünster. Artwork in the public domain, © Stift Kremsmünster; photograph by the Best Kunstverlag, courtesy of Kremsmünster Abbey

**Figure 6.11a–b**

Page from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188: a) the Flagellation and Crucifixion of Christ, and b) detail of Synagoga. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 170v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.12**

Synagoga and the Lamb of God, back central roundel, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.13**

Crucifixion of Christ, Werden, 11th century. Stadtbibliothek, Trier, MS 14, Folio 9v. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of the Stadtbibliothek

**Figure 6.14a–b**

Ascension of Christ and the Dispute between Pilate and Caiaphas: a) front top finial, and b) detail of inscription on the *titulus*, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.15**

Adam and Eve, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.16**

Crucifixion of Christ; Adam and Eve, from Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Zwiefalten. Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, Cod. hist. 2° 418, fol. 3r. Artwork in the public domain, © Württembergische Landesbibliothek

**Figure 6.17**

Moses and the Serpent, front central roundel, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.18**

Herod's Feast, from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 73v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.19**

Good Friday Plaque, front right finial, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.20**

Christ in the House of the Pharisee, from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 111v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.21**

The Good Samaritan, from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 112r. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.22**

Ascension of Christ, from the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 75r. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of Herzog August Bibliothek

**Figure 6.23a–c**

Triumphal Cross Group: a) facing East, b) prophets, and c) Adam, Halberstadt Cathedral, 13th century, linden, oak, and spruce wood with paint and gilding. Artworks in the public domain, photographs by the author and Richard Plant

**Figure 6.24**

Prophets, back crossbar, Cloisters Cross, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.25a–b**

Eilbertus Altar, Cologne, mid-12th century: a) from side, and b) top. Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Karen Bartsch, CC BY-SA 4.0

**Figure 6.26**

Processional Cross, Hildesheim, 1190s, copper alloy, gilding, *champlevé* enamel with a wood core. Basilica of St Godehard, Hildesheim. Artwork in the public domain

**Figure 6.27**

Holy Sepulchre altarpiece, Lower Saxony, mid-12th century, cast and chased bronze. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, KG 159. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by G. Janssen

**Figure 6.28a–c**

Aquamanile, Hildesheim, 1200–1220, copper alloy: a) aquamanile, b) detail, and c) detail. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Inv. 1959.307. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe

**Figure 6.29**

Cover, *Gospel of Saint Godehard*, Hildesheim, ca. 1170/80. Hohe Domkirche, Domschatz, Trier, No. 70, Cod. 141 (olim 126). Photograph by Ann Münchow, courtesy of Hohe Domkirche Trier – Domschatz

**Figure 6.30**

Cloisters Cross when taken apart, dated here ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Open access

**Figure 6.31**

Deposition and Ascension, sculpted wall face, 1160/70, Externsteine, Teutoburg Forest, Lippe. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author

**Figure 6.32**

Drawing of the Externsteine relief, from *Die Gartenlaube*, 1862, 380. Artwork in the public domain

**Figure 6.33**

Lamentation and the Maries at the Tomb, ca. 1200, fresco. West wall (south part) of the refectory, Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, Patmos. Artwork in the public domain; photograph © Svetlana Tomeković, courtesy of Catherine Jolivet Lévy

**Figure 6.34**

Steatite fragment of an icon with scenes from Christ's Passion, 1100s. Artwork in the public domain; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, no. 1962.27. Open access

**Figure 6.35**

Deposition, Lamentation and Embalming, Maries at the Tomb, and the Harrowing of Hell, ca. 1180s, fresco. East wall, Holy Sepulchre Chapel, Winchester Cathedral. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author

**Figure 7.1**

Pilate plaque, here identified as a repair to the (lost) lower terminal of the Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1200, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.127. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.2**

Good Friday plaque, Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.3**

Easter plaque, Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.4**

Oslo Corpus (Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, Inv. No. 10 314) on the Cloisters Cross in 1970, here dated 1188, both walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.5**

Reconstruction of the missing parts of the Oslo Corpus on the Cloisters Cross. Graphic by the author

**Figure 7.6**

The figure of Christ on the Good Friday plaque of the Cloisters Cross. Graphic by the author

**Figure 7.7a–b**

Details of the drapery on the figure of a) Moses on the front boss of the Cloisters Cross, The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12, and b) the loincloth of the Oslo Corpus, Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, Inv. No. 10 314, showing similar conventions of damp-fold drapery: nested V folds, a thin roll of cloth beneath the knee, and ‘bridges’ across furrows.

**Figure 7.8**

Oslo Corpus on the Cloisters Cross, from the right side. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author, taken in 1974.

**Figure 7.9**

Oslo Corpus on the Cloisters Cross, from the left side. Artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author, taken in 1974.

**Figure 7.10**

Rear view, Oslo Corpus, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, Inv. No. 10 314. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.11**

Crucifixion plaque, perhaps Mosan, ca. 1100?, elephant ivory. British Museum, London, Acc. No. Maskell 1856,0623.35. Artwork in the public domain; photograph © British Museum

**Figure 7.12**

Crucifixion plaque, detail of Christ on the Cross, Metz, ca. 860, elephant ivory. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. No. 251-1867. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

**Figure 7.13**

Front, Oslo Corpus, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, Inv. No. 10 314. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.14**

Reverse inscribed with biblical texts, Gunhild’s Cross, Denmark, ca. 1110, walrus ivory. National Museum, Copenhagen, Inv. No. 9087. Artwork in the public domain; photograph © Lennart Larsen

**Figure 7.15a–b**

Lettering of the word SYNAGOGA on a) the Cloisters Cross, The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63, and b) Gundhild’s Cross, National Museum, Copenhagen, Inv. No. 9087.

**Fig. 7.16**

Map of Denmark showing places named in the text of this essay. Map © Frederick John Sekules Heslop.

**Figure 7.17**

*Titulus* board, Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.18**

Dispute between Pilate and Caiaphas, Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.19**

Head of Christ on the Cross, southern England, ca. 1050, walrus ivory. Victoria and Albert Museum, Inv. No. 7943-1862. Artwork in the public domain; courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

**Figure 7.20**

Head of Christ, Oslo Corpus, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, Inv. No. 10 314.

**Figure 7.21**

Kings David and Solomon, Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.22**

The great seal of King Cnut VI of Denmark. Photograph after Henry Petersen, *Et Dansk Flag fra Unionstide i Maria-Kirken i Lübeck* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1882).

**Figure 7.23**

Prophet Balaam, Cloisters Cross, here dated ca. 1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 63.12. Artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Florens Deuchler and modified by the author

**Figure 7.24**

South door, Ribe Cathedral, here dated between 1190 and 1220. Photograph by the author

**Figure 7.25**

Detail of the gable over the south door, Ribe Cathedral, here dated between 1190 and 1220. Photograph by the author

# *Dramatis personae*

**Boase, T. S. R. (Thomas Sherrer Ross) (1898–1974).** Second director of the Courtauld Institute of Art (1937–47); president of Magdalen College (1947–68).

**Bober, Harry (1915–1988).** Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (1954–88); founding member and first secretary (1956–59) of the International Center of Medieval Art (ICMA).

**Boyd-Carpenter, John (1908–1998).** Member of Parliament (1945–72); chief secretary of H.M. Treasury and Paymaster General (1962–64).

**Brown, Julian (1923–1987).** Professor of palaeography, King's College London (1961–84).

**Bridgewater, Bentley (1911–1996).** Secretary of the British Museum (1948–73).

**Clark, Sir Kenneth (later Lord) (1903–1983).** Director of the National Gallery, London (1934–45); Slade Professor at Oxford University (1946–49); chairman of the Arts Council (1953–60); broadcaster (1954–66).

**Dodwell, C. R. (Charles Reginald) (1922–1994).** Librarian, fellow, and lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge (1958–66); Pilkington Chair in the History of Art at Manchester University (1966–89).

**Francis, Sir Frank (1901–1988).** Secretary of the British Museum (1946–48); director and principal librarian of the British Museum (1959–68).

**Freeman, Margaret (1899–1980).** Lecturer, then assistant and associate curator of the Cloisters (1928–55); head curator of the Cloisters (1955–65).

**Gardner, Stephen (1948–1991).** Architectural historian with a PhD from Princeton University; taught at Columbia University and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

**Gómez-Moreno, Carmen (1914–2008).** Assistant curator in the Medieval Department of the Cloisters (1956–73); curator-in-charge, Department of Medieval Art (1973–78) of the Cloisters; retired as curator in 1984.

**Green, Rosalie, (1917–2012).** Director of the Index of Christian Art at Princeton University (1951–82).

**Hamel, Christopher de (b. 1950).** Worked at Sotheby's in the Department of Medieval Manuscripts (1975–2000); academic librarian and author.

**Harris, Sir Ronald (1913–1995).** Private secretary to Secretary of the Cabinet (1939–43), second crown estate commissioner (1955–60); third secretary of H.M. Treasury (1960–64).

**Hohler, Christopher (1917–1997).** Medievalist at the Courtauld Institute of Art.

**Hoving, Thomas (1931–2009).** Associate curator and then curator (1959–66) in the Medieval Department of the Cloisters; director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1967–77).

**Knowles, David (1896–1974).** Benedictine monk; Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge (1954–63).

**Lasko, Peter (1924–2003).** Assistant keeper in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum (1950–65); professor of visual art at the University of East Anglia (1965–74); director of the Courtauld Institute of Art (1974–85).

**Lee, Sherman (1918–2008).** Director of the Cleveland Museum of Art (1958–83).

**Mersmann, Wiltrud (1919–2022).** Art historian (wife of Ante Topić Mimara).

**Meyer, Erich (1897–1967).** Scientific assistant at the Kunstgewerbemuseum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (1927–41) and later curator at the museum (1941–47); director of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg (1947–61).

**Milliken, William M. (1889–1978).** Assistant curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1916–17); curator (1919–30) and then director of the Cleveland Museum of Art (1930–58).

**Müller, Theodor (1905–1996).** Worked at the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich (1928–68) and was director of the museum from 1948.

**Mütherich, Florentine (1915–2015).** Art historian at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich.

**Pächt, Otto (1902–1988).** Visiting professor at Princeton University (1956–57), then at New York University (1956–57), and as reader at Oxford University; professor at the University of Vienna (1963–72); director of the Department of Manuscripts of the Austrian National Library (1969).

**Parker, Elizabeth C. (b. 1931).** Professor emerita at Fordham University.

**Parsons, Harold W. (1882–1965).** Art historian and dealer.

**Pope-Hennessy, John (1913–1994).** Keeper of the Department of Sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum (1954–67) and then director of the Victoria and Albert Museum (1967–74); director of the British Museum (1974–77); consultative chairman to the Department of European Painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (1977–86).

**Pretty, Edith May (1883–1942).** Owner of the Sutton Hoo estate in Suffolk, site of the famous early Anglo-Saxon ship burial.

**Randall, Richard (1926–1997).** Assistant curator and then associate curator of medieval art at the Cloisters (1953–59); assistant curator of decorative arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1959–64); assistant director and then director of the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (1964–81).

**Rorimer, Kay (Katherine) Serrell (1908–2000).** Worked in the library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was a researcher at the Index of Christian Art at Princeton University (wife of James Rorimer).

**Rorimer, James (1905–1966).** Assistant curator, then associate curator, then curator in the Department of Medieval Art at the Cloisters (1927–55); chief of Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section of the Seventh United States Army, Western Military District (1944–45); director of the Cloisters (1949–55); director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1955–66).

**Schnitzler, Hermann (1905–1976).** Director of the Schnütgen Museum, Cologne (1953–70).

**Swarzenski, Hanns (1903–1985).** Studied in Freiburg, Berlin, and Bonn; worked at the state art museums in Berlin (1929–39); curator of decorative arts and sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1956–73) (son of Georg Swarzenski).

**Topić Mimara, Ante (1898–1987).** Dealer and first recorded owner of the Cloisters Cross.

**Turner, D. H. (Derek) (1931–1985).** Assistant keeper and then deputy keeper of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum (1956–73); curator at the British Library (1973–85).

**Volbach, Friedrich (Fritz) (1892–1988).** Worked at the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin (now the Bode Museum), in the Vatican library, and as professor at the Papal Institute for Christian Archaeology; later worked as director of the antiquities museum in Mainz (post-war–1958).

**Wormald, Francis (1904–1972).** Assistant keeper of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum (1927–49); chair of palaeography at Kings College, London (1950–60); director of the Institute of Historical Research (1960–67).

**Zarnecki, George (1915–2008).** Conway Librarian (1949–59) and then deputy director (1961–74) at the Courtauld Institute of Art; retired from the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1982; co-founder of the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland.

# Introduction: Revisiting the Cloisters Cross

Cecily Hennessy  
T. A. Heslop



Figure 1.1  
Front, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

It is only rarely that a major work of art emerges from complete obscurity.<sup>1</sup> Such was the fate of the of the walrus-ivory cross acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1963, now generally known as the Cloisters Cross. In the same year, it was published in an article by Wiltrud Mersmann, the wife of its previous owner who went under the name Ante Topić Mimara (hereafter Topić, as he was generally known).<sup>2</sup> Mersmann argued that the Cross originated in England in the middle decades of the eleventh century—which is to say before the Norman invasion of 1066 and the subsequent conquest of the English kingdom by William, duke of Normandy. While her suggestion of an English origin has been perpetuated in much of the later scholarly literature, the dating of the Cross to the pre-Conquest era has long been abandoned in favour of one a century or more later. The Cloisters Cross is now regarded as High Romanesque in style and exemplifying currents in the art of north-western Europe, including England but also other Latin-Christian polities north of the Alps. The place of the Cross' production (and consumption) has included regions from northern France and the Low Countries to the Rhine Valley and Saxony, although England and Bury St Edmunds in particular still dominate in mainstream literature. The Metropolitan Museum of Art currently (2025) dates it to circa 1150–60 with a 'British' place of origin, while stating, 'It has often been suggested that the cross comes from the English abbey at Bury Saint Edmunds in Suffolk'.<sup>3</sup>

The Cross' transnational credentials are evident in both its visual imagery and the scholastic, almost encyclopaedic commentary on Christ's crucifixion by means of biblical quotations which prophecy or reflect upon it. This was an era of intense biblical exegesis, especially in the 'schools' of northern France. By the mid-twelfth century, the focus was in Paris, though fuelled by earlier projects such as the compilation known as the *Glossa ordinaria* sometimes associated with Laon. But undertakings elsewhere by the likes of Honorius Augustodunensis (ca. 1080–ca. 1140), in England and southern Germany, and Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075/1080–ca. 1129), in northern Germany were symptomatic of a general renaissance in biblical commentary, compilation, and analysis which is clearly registered in the texts inscribed on the Cloisters Cross.

Some of the visual and verbal rhetoric can be regarded as vehemently anti-Jewish. This is most obvious in the Latin verse (in large letters) on the side of the Cross claiming that 'the Jews laugh at the pain of God's death' and the image of Synagoga piercing the Lamb of God in the central roundel on the reverse. Furthermore, the careful deployment of tall, conical hats to identify Jews in the various narrative carvings enabled the artist to participate in the business of defamation. This signifying tendency was particularly prevalent in the twelfth century in the parts of Europe where Romanesque art and scholasticism flourished. Words and images were accorded equal status and regarded as virtually interchangeable in the transmission of religious, Christian truths. Visions could be recorded in words or pictures, and though artists were not themselves visionaries or prophets, their job was to envisage and make visible the ideas of those who commissioned work from them. They developed a language of seeable signs that was as valid as any other means of communication. This was fundamental to the visual artist's profession. Those who mastered this art were sought after by social and



Figure 1.2  
Back, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

intellectual leaders as their publicists.

Approaches to the history of art are as prone to changing fashions as are the dynamics of art itself. Considering this 'fact' and the importance of the Cross and the many unresolved issues concerning it, we organised a workshop colloquium in May 2023, sponsored by the British Archaeological Association and the Courtauld Institute of Art. The aims were to revisit manifold issues: to explore new discoveries in walrus ivory as a medium for medieval objects; to consider how and why the Cross had been bought by the Metropolitan Museum of Art rather than another museum; to tackle once more the knotty problems of its dating and place of origin; and to discuss critical features of both the allusive texts displayed on it and the complex iconography.

Although only just over fifty-seven centimetres high, the Cross is decorated with some 180 figures and inscriptions. These provide a wealth of detail, with both clear and veiled messages about Christ's life and mission and contemporary attitudes towards believers and non-believers. The shafts of the Cross on the front depict the severed branches of the tree of the Crucifixion, while on the back is a series of Old Testament prophets, all

Figure 1.3  
Moses and the  
Brazen Serpent,  
front central  
roundel, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
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with scrolls referencing their predictions and allusions (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). The central roundel on the front includes most prominently a scene from the Old Testament: Moses and the Brazen Serpent (Numbers 21:5–9), a typological reference to the Crucifixion with added figures and inscriptions (Fig. 1.3). Above this scene is the dispute between Pilate and Caiaphas over the designation used for Christ in the *titulus*, which here reads ‘King of the Confessors’ rather than the otherwise ubiquitous ‘King of the Jews’. Above this, on the finial, is the Ascension (Fig. 1.4). On the two remaining front finials of the Cross are scenes depicting events of Christ’s Passion; the Deposition with the preparation for burial, known as the Good Friday plaque; and the Resurrection with the Maries at the tomb, known as the Easter plaque (Figs. 1.5 and 1.6). At the bottom of the cross shaft, above where a lost finial would be, are Adam and Eve (Fig. 1.7). On the back, in the centre, is a depiction of the Lamb of God, apparently having been pierced by Synagoga, a reference to Christ’s redemptive sacrifice and its rejection by non-believers (Fig. 1.8). On three finials (the bottom finial is again missing) are three of the Evangelists’ winged symbols: Mark’s lion, Luke’s ox and

John’s eagle (Figs. 1.9–1.11).

In the first three essays in this volume, curators and scholars recall and reassess their knowledge of the Cross and revisit some of their earlier ideas about the object; these are followed by three longer research articles in which new ideas about the object’s origins and purpose are explored. There is no attempt here to present a single thesis or ‘answer’. The essays are offered together in the spirit of expanding the debate (both in content and audience).

Numerous publications on the Cross post-date the 1963 article by Mersmann.<sup>4</sup> She had been working on this for several years, and, prior to its purchase by the Metropolitan Museum in early 1963, no photographs of the Cross had been made public. Mersmann assigned the Cross to eleventh-century Winchester, and it was this view that was disseminated by Topić in his attempts to sell it. He had probably owned the Cross from at least the early 1950s, perhaps from 1948, and it came discreetly on the market within a decade. Directors and curators from the Western world’s principal museums with medieval collections were interested in it, including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. A full account of the various negotiations between Topić and the museums has never been published, in part, perhaps, because the provenance of the Cross was always, and probably always will be, a secret. In his contribution here, Neil Stratford revisits the British Museum’s archives and his own recollections to reveal why the Cross was let go by the museum, despite the fact that many thought it should come to Britain, considering it was at the time largely agreed to be English.

The fullest discussion at the time was undertaken by a committee of specialists assembled to advise the Trustees of the British Museum. It comprised some dozen art historians, historians, and palaeographers with relevant expertise and the authority that went with it. Lists on file in the British Museum’s archives name those who should be approached, though it is not clear what the committee’s membership eventually was. It seems there was a meeting of the group, and the closest we get to a full list of participants is the signatures appended to the ‘minutes’, in effect a communiqué, signed in November 1962.<sup>5</sup> It was clearly important that an agreed document should be authenticated by recognised experts. The committee members could not have seen the Cross itself, so their conversations were based on long-awaited photographs of it that had recently been given to the museum. There were further exchanges with the vendors who were then expected in London. It was mooted that Mersmann would offer a short article on the Cross to be published in *The Burlington Magazine*. But Rupert Bruce-Mitford, keeper of the Medieval and Later Antiquities Department at the British Museum, was not in favour, presumably because he thought the publicity would be unhelpful at this juncture.

It would be a digression too far to excavate what ‘English’ meant to the authorities who might grant the money to buy the Cross; suffice it to say that the committee came up with four reasons that the Cross was English. First, the ‘Lopped Cross’, that is to say, a cross shown as a tree trunk with severed branches, was widely represented in England in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (though details are not given). Second, the so-called Disappearing

Figure 1.4  
Dispute between  
Pilate and  
Caiaphas,  
Ascension,  
Cloisters Cross,  
1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
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Figure 1.5  
Good Friday  
Plaque, front  
right finial,  
Cloisters Cross,  
1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
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Figure 1.6  
Easter Plaque,  
front left finial,  
Cloisters Cross,  
1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
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Christ at the Ascension was ‘virtually decisive’, referring to images in which only Christ’s lower legs are left visible while his upper body is engulfed by a cloud. Third, the ‘mummified’ body of Christ and its anointing were shown on the Good Friday plaque, and although no parallel was specified, examples such as the *St Albans Psalter* and the *Winchester Psalter* were well-known to both Francis Wormald and Otto Pächt.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the ‘flamboyant’ use of scrolls was cited, with the *Guthlac Roll* of circa 1220 offered as a parallel, though other earlier instances could have been invoked.<sup>7</sup> These can indeed be seen as justifying claims for the Cross’ English connections, but as the qualifier ‘virtually’ signals (in perhaps the least contentious instance, the Ascension), these claims are suggestive, not conclusive. Committee members would have been conscious that all these phenomena could be found on the Continent by the second half of the twelfth century, and in some cases earlier. Indeed, the Lopped Cross originated in the Carolingian empire at the time of Charles the Bald (ca. 860).<sup>8</sup> There is perhaps a sense that the scholars involved found it easier to feel the work was English rather than wholeheartedly to believe it. Clearly, under the circumstances, any alternative propositions were not to be entertained. At the time, Winchester or Canterbury were discussed as places of origin, not Bury St Edmunds.<sup>9</sup>

But at least one expert could not attend the meeting and wanted amendments. This was T. S. R. Boase (then president of Magdalen College, Oxford). In the end he agreed to sign, despite expressed misgivings, because the important thing was unanimity. A note by Peter Lasko (then assistant keeper in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum) in the museum’s files records that Boase ‘was not entirely convinced of the early date we would like, nor that it was English . . . but what he called “Channel School”,’ meaning if it were not English, certainly it was registering strong English influence in northern France or Flanders. He also thought the iconography ‘could be later twelfth century’.<sup>10</sup> According to a note by Thomas Hoving (then curatorial assistant at the Cloisters), George Zarnecki (then deputy director of the Courtauld Institute of Art) thought the Cross was ‘possibly French’.<sup>11</sup> Lasko himself may also have had doubts. In his book *Ars Sacra*, first published in 1972, he included the Cross in the chapter on ‘Lotharingia: Rainer of Huy’, locating it ‘between the Liège ivories and their English relatives’.<sup>12</sup> Christopher Hohler (Courtauld Institute of Art), who was not on the committee, wanted the Cross for the British Museum, so decided to agree that it was English. As far as can be seen in the files, what that meant in the twelfth century in a recently conquered country in regard to the cultural and ethnic origins of patron, artist, or ‘learned adviser’ was never explored. This was an era in which there was a sense that there was an ‘Englishness of English Art,’ to quote the title of Nikolaus Pevsner’s broadcast lectures and much-reissued book first published in 1956, which adopted and supported the widespread idea that a work of art was supposed to embody national character. That was not necessarily presumed to be the result of the artists’ input: ‘If Holbein’s and Van Dyck’s English portraits look unmistakably English,’ it is because of ‘the actually English features and deportment of their sitters’.<sup>13</sup>

The committee, then, had done its job (so far as it was possible) to justify the Cross’ Englishness, if not to demonstrate that it was indeed English. But, in face of the fact that Topić would not or could not demonstrate

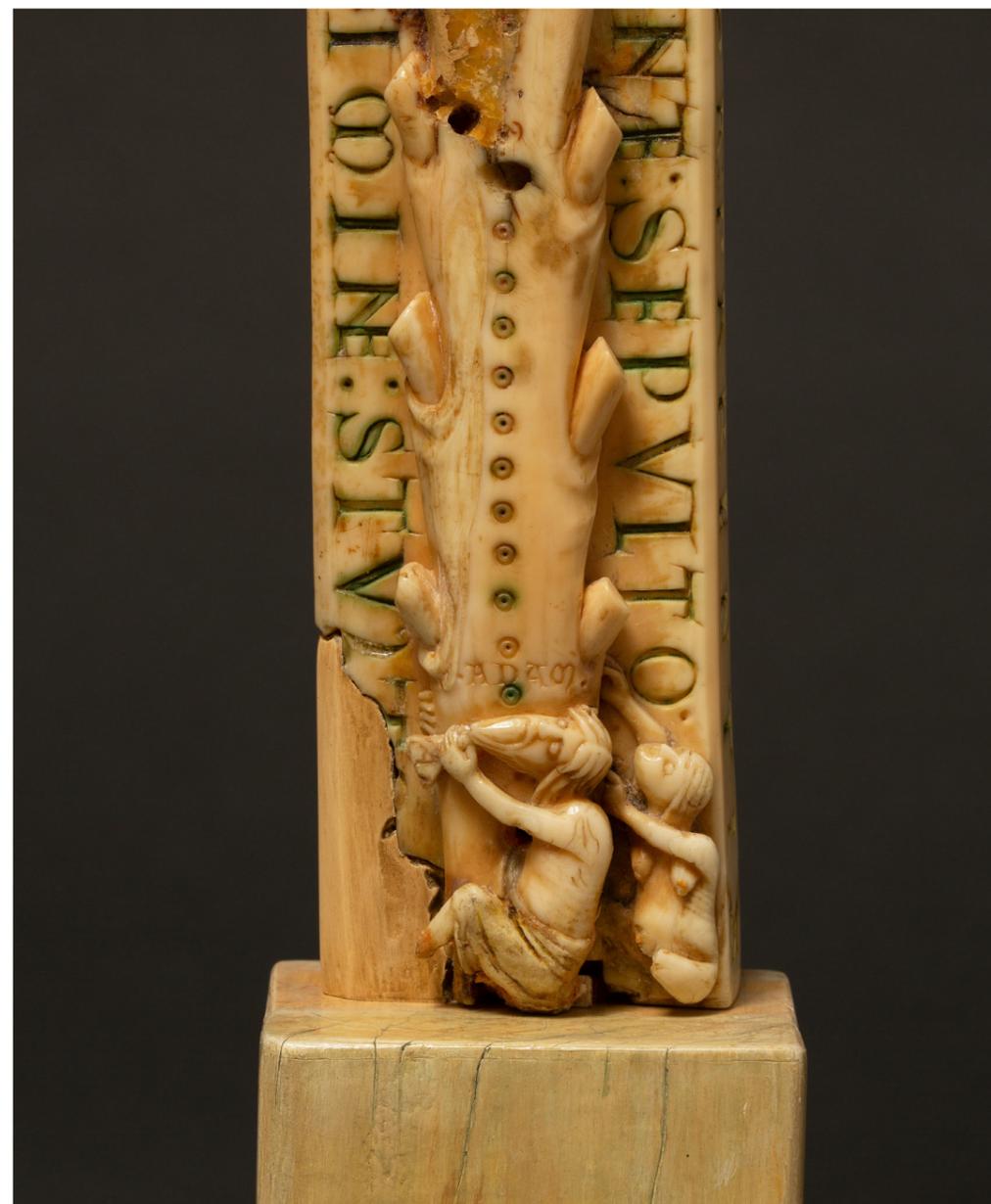


Figure 1.7  
Adam and Eve  
at the Foot of the  
Cross, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
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his legitimate ownership of the object, the necessary funding from the Treasury was withheld. A sense of increasing desperation is evident in the British Museum documents from January 1963. Bruce-Mitford rehearsed some familiar arguments. If someone else had a claim on the Cross, why would Mersmann be publishing it? That would merely serve to advertise its present whereabouts and value. The Cross was both dirty and damaged when Topić acquired it, so it had not been a viable object for display or religious veneration for centuries. Fritz Volbach was apparently also shown one part of it in this state soon after the Second World War when he was living at the Vatican (working in its library and as a professor at the Papal Institute for Christian Archaeology), as he told Peter Lasko.<sup>14</sup> Other points mentioned in the files could have been reiterated, such as the number of other objects bought and sold without any documentation deemed necessary.

Perhaps it was the combination of the high price and the fact that Topić had worked at the Munich Central Collecting Point at the end of the war that principally troubled those in Whitehall.

Too much depended on assertion (oral transmission, memory) and trust. Even when things were written down, they could be altered, so, for example, in the British Museum's files, Volbach's name was first typed as Venturi, but corrected, and 'Balkan' as a potential provenance was supplemented by 'Baltic', subsequently explained as a possible mishearing.<sup>15</sup> By early 1963, Baltic was the preferred alternative. Bruce-Mitford noted that 'the Baltic provenance would be exactly right for an English object of this date' and that Topić 'said . . . he had a feeling that the fragments of the cross probably came from the Baltic states'. He also records that 'its last change of hands was fifteen years ago. It was in 1948'.<sup>16</sup> Bruce-Mitford does not mention, perhaps he did not know, that Topić was then in Munich.

By late February 1963, sale of the Cross to the Metropolitan Museum must have been effectively a done deal, but Topić continued to lead the British Museum on, suggesting it was still not too late. But it was. Whether the Treasury's refusal to purchase the Cross was driven primarily by fear of complicity in the acquisition of a potentially looted work of art is not clear. Intriguingly, the latest communication on file in the British Museum is an email from Hoving, dated 30 March 2000.<sup>17</sup> He wanted to see the museum's dossier on the Cross in light of two recent publications by Jonathan Petropoulos: *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* and *The Faustian Bargain*.<sup>18</sup> Hoving was apparently interested in pursuing the question of Topić's career, having found out he was involved with 'truly nasty things, like murder and dealing in Holocaust art', and the reasons why the British Museum pulled out of the purchase of the Cross.<sup>19</sup>

The Cleveland Museum of Art had also been interested in purchasing the Cross. Sherman E. Lee (director, 1958–83) had been in touch with Topić at least since 25 August 1958, when Lee wrote to Topić that his predecessor, William Milliken (curator of decorative arts and director, 1930–58), had seen 'some of your things' in Zurich in 1956.<sup>20</sup> By November 1959, when Lee met him in Paris, Topić had offered the Cross for the price of \$750,000; Lee then wrote to him in January 1960 that 'the cross of course is uppermost in our minds'.<sup>21</sup> The dealer Harold Parsons acted as a go-between for Topić and Lee. In March 1960, Lee wrote to Parsons, 'we are wildly enthusiastic' but that the 'crazy price' needed to be 'substantially modified'.<sup>22</sup> The following month, Parsons wrote to Lee that Topić was hoping the Victoria and Albert Museum would find a donor to buy the Cross and urged Lee to make an offer; by July, Parsons told him that several museums, including the Musée du Louvre and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts were interested in it.<sup>23</sup> When William Wixom (assistant curator/ curator of medieval and renaissance decorative arts, 1958–79) spent a day in Paris with Topić in November 1960, the price had come down to \$500,000.<sup>24</sup> By July 1961, Wixom wrote to Topić to say that Lee and the Trustees of the Cleveland Museum of Art could not consider purchasing the Cross that year and maybe not the next, and that 'the price is too high'.<sup>25</sup> This is later reiterated in a letter in November from Lee to Topić, saying he had discussed the Cross with the curators and decided it was too expensive.<sup>26</sup> But was that the whole story?



Figure 1.8  
Lamb of God  
and Synagoga,  
back central  
roundel, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

By 1963, Hoving, now casting himself as the victorious purchaser after dallying with other views, became convinced the Cross was not eleventh but twelfth century and rather than from Winchester was from Bury St Edmunds. He published his justifications in 1964.<sup>27</sup> His starting point seems to have been the similarities he identified between the Cross and illuminations in the *Bury Bible*, produced about 1135, a suggestion which was originally made by Harry Bober of the Institute of Fine Arts in New York in 1963.<sup>28</sup> However, Hoving also linked the texts on the Cross to events in the 1180s and 1190s and so created a complex scenario in which the Cross was carved circa 1150 and the inscriptions added between 1181 and 1190.<sup>29</sup> Hoving also published a gripping, but less than reliable, account of his achievement in securing the Cross for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>30</sup> The more straightforward (and questioning) account of its purchase by funds from the Cloisters, where it is housed, is presented in this volume by Charles T. Little, who later succeeded

Figure 1.9  
Mark Plaque,  
Cloisters Cross,  
1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access



Figure 1.10  
Luke Plaque,  
Cloisters Cross,  
1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access



Figure 1.11  
John Plaque,  
Cloisters Cross,  
1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access



Hoving as curator of medieval art and who co-wrote with Elizabeth Parker the substantial monograph on the Cross, published in 1994.<sup>31</sup> Parker and Little's book provides an extensive description and discussion of the iconography and inscriptions on the Cross. It largely supports the Bury St Edmunds attribution and a date in the mid-twelfth century while discussing and assimilating work published since 1964.<sup>32</sup>

Among the key publications Parker and Little revisited were three detailed articles by Sabrina Longland on the textual sources of the inscriptions and an analysis of some aspects of the imagery, all appearing in 1968–69.<sup>33</sup> Aspects of the iconography included the use of the forked stick holding up the serpent raised in the wilderness by Moses, depicted on the front central roundel; the piercing of the Lamb of God by Synagoga, on the back central roundel; and the dispute between Caiaphas and Pilate over the naming of Jesus. Longland linked one of the couplets on the Cross with the widely disseminated work of scholars associated with the Victorines in Paris,

a topic which she explores further here (writing as Sabrina Harcourt-Smith) in terms of the educational functions of the Cross.

The following year, in 1970, the Cross was a centrepiece in a seminal exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art titled *The Year 1200*.<sup>34</sup> As Sandy Heslop explains in his essay here, the Cross was displayed with a corpus (body of the crucified Christ) brought to light in Copenhagen in 1884, which many by then considered original to the Cross. He goes on to develop significant connections between the Cross and Denmark. It is largely agreed that a corpus would have been attached to the Cross, but whether this has survived or been correctly identified is disputed. The Cross was also displayed with a panel depicting Christ before Pilate that was thought to be from the missing lower-front finial of the Cross. This small plaque first appeared at a sale in Paris in 1920 and was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1963. Like the Corpus, the panel is no longer attached to the Cross, though it might have been made either to replace a lost finial or as part of an accessory base. In a review of the exhibition, Willibald Sauerländer belittled the idea that either the Oslo Corpus or the Pilate plaque was made for the Cross.<sup>35</sup> The Pilate plaque was later discussed in detail by Bernice Jones.<sup>36</sup>

In 1971, Rosalie Green, director of the Index of Christian Art, held a graduate seminar on the Cross at Princeton University and set the students the task of analysing aspects of its iconography. Several of them, including the architectural historian Stephen Gardner, who was then a student, concluded that it was of 'Saxon' origin, that is from northern Germany, and associated it with Henry the Lion. Gardner's findings have not been published but are viewable in the Cloisters' archive and discussed here in Hennessy's essay, which also shows how Hoving and others had considered this option. Similar suggestions came to the fore in reviews of Parker and Little's monograph. Heslop suggested that while 'an English provenance for the Cross remains a possibility, its origin elsewhere, namely Germany, now needs to be acknowledged as more probable.'<sup>37</sup> G. D. S. Henderson noted the many Continental parallels in Parker and Little's book and wondered why the English connection had not been abandoned. He also suggested that the Cross had a relic on the front, rather than a corpus.<sup>38</sup>

In 1985 Ursula Nilgen focused on St Albans as the Cross' place of origin and argued through stylistic comparisons that it showed French or 'Channel Style' influences, brought to England in the 1170s by Thomas Becket and his associates.<sup>39</sup> This developed thoughts earlier espoused by Boase (see above) and subsequently endorsed by Stratford in a letter in *The Burlington Magazine* in which he summarised that the Cross 'was carved in the third quarter of the twelfth century on one or the other side of the Channel'.<sup>40</sup> For Boase and others, 'Channel style' expressed the character of manuscripts associated with Becket and Herbert of Bosham, produced by teams of scribes and illuminators whose origins, training, and places of work were no doubt varied. The term was also used, in a related context, by Walter Cahn in outlining the career of the so-called Simon Master, an illuminator employed by Abbot Simon of St Albans.<sup>41</sup> His work is found in manuscripts made for patrons in England, France, and Denmark. While there is no reason to doubt that he travelled from place to place fulfilling commissions for wealthy institutions and individuals, we have no hard evidence regarding

the formation of his style. In this respect he is paralleled by the artists of the *Winchester Bible* who possibly went from England to northern Spain to work on the chapter house at Sigüenza.<sup>42</sup> The oeuvre of their contemporary, the metalworker Nicholas of Verdun, also comprises important projects in various European centres, at Klosterneuburg (near Vienna), Cologne, and Tournai. The demand for talented and prestigious artists was an important element in disseminating Romanesque and (later) Gothic art and architecture, giving these styles international currency in Latin Europe and making the quest for origins perilous. Is the answer to the context of the Cross' manufacture to be found among artists and their styles, theologians and their ideas, or the meeting of the two? A brief article by John Munns set out some comparisons with the *Stammheim Missal* made at St Michael's Abbey in Hildesheim in the 1170s, which could be seen to work in both respects.<sup>43</sup> However, it elicited a 'pro-Channel School' response in support of Nilgen's proposal.<sup>44</sup> Less ambiguously, the belief that the Cross is in some real sense English persists. Rainer Kahsnitz, in his *Goldschmidt Addenda* volume, published in 2022, assigns both the Cross and the Pilate plaque to 'England, 3. Viertel 12. Jahrh.' (third quarter of the twelfth century).<sup>45</sup>

The varying, indeed fluctuating, opinions about the Cloisters Cross complicate attempts to localise its production and consumption. Stylistic analysis only goes so far: even if the Simon Master or any other 'Channel' artist had predilections like those of the artist of the Cross in regard to figure gestures and poses, facial types, and drapery arrangements, that indicates little more than a general, elite, 'international' milieu in the second half of the twelfth century.

One topic that has never been explored at length is the material aspect of the Cross. In her contribution here, Robyn Barrow gives a fresh understanding of medieval trade in walrus ivory, how it was collected and transported, and how the Cross fits within the wider sphere of Arctic ivory in the Middle Ages.

We hope that the essays in this collection will stimulate discussion and promote awareness of the Cross and its seemingly unique potential for developing our thinking about medieval culture in the decades before and around 1200. In revisiting its past and complex and (perhaps intentionally) obscure history on the art market; looking at reminiscences about the purchasing dilemmas faced by the Western world's leading museums; and summarising subsequent scholarship and the unravelling of possibly hastily made attributions and the Cross' interpretation, this book hopes to dilate the questions and perceptions of the provenance and the meaning of this singular object.

1. We would like to thank the British Museum for giving us access to their archives on the Cloisters Cross. Cecily Hennessy would also like to thank the Society of Antiquaries for a Philips Grant for research in the United States; and the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Cloisters for generous use of their archives.
2. Wiltrud Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz der Sammlung Topić-Mimara', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, 25 (1963): 7–108.
3. 'The Cloisters Cross', The Met Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470305>.
4. Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz'.
5. See 'Romanesque Ivory Cross Reporting Committee', GR. NO. 351/62, Bury St Edmund Ivory Altar Cross (Offered by Ante Topic Mimara), Correspondence 1960–Jan. 1963, BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London. The signatures include those of Peter Lasko, George Zarnecki, Francis Wormald, Derek Turner, Hugo Buchthal, and Otto Pächt.
6. The *St Albans Psalter* (now Dombibliothek Hildesheim HS St. God. 1, Cathedral MS 1, p. 48), shows the mummified body and a man holding a vial, and the *Winchester Psalter* (BL Cotton MS Nero C IV, f.23) shows the anointing and Christ's body 'in grave clothes'. See Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell, and Francis Wormald, *The St. Albans Psalter Albani Psalter: 1. The Fullpage Miniatures by Otto Pächt; 2. The Initials, by C. R. Dodwell; 3. Preface and Description of the Manuscript, by Francis Wormald*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 25 (London: Warburg Institute, 1960); and Francis Wormald, *The Winchester Psalter: With 134 Illustrations* (London: Miller & Medcalf, 1973), published posthumously.
7. See *Guthlac Roll*, MS Harley Roll Y 6, British Library, London.
8. As on the ivory cover of the *Codex Aureus of St Emmeram*, Clm 4452, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich. See Jennifer O'Reilly, 'The Rough-Hewn Cross in Anglo-Saxon Art', in *Ireland and Insular Art AD 500–1200*, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1987), 153–58; and John Munns, *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Norman England: Theology, Imagery, Devotion* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016), 116–20.
9. As noted in a letter from Jack Schrader (then curator at the Cloisters) to James Rorimer, 8 January 1963, reporting a conversation with Rupert Bruce-Mitford, in Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
10. T. S. R. Boase, *English Art, 1100–1216* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953, repr. 1968), 162, mentions the Cross only in a footnote referring to Thomas P. Hoving and James J. Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 22, no. 10 (1964): 317–40: 'Ingenious as are his arguments, it must be remembered that the association with Bury rests upon stylistic resemblances that cannot be held entirely conclusive'.
11. The date and full quotation are given in Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
12. Peter Lasko, *Ars Sacra, 800–1200* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 168.
13. Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art: An Expanded and Annotated Version of the Reith Lectures Broadcast in October and November 1955* (London: Architectural Press, 1956), 198.
14. Related by Peter Lasko in conversation with Heslop in the early 1980s.
15. See Bury St Edmund Ivory Altar Cross (Offered by Ante Topic Mimara), Correspondence 1960–Jan. 1963, BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London.
16. Letter from Bruce-Mitford to Sir Frank Francis, 17 January 1963, Bury St Edmund Ivory Altar Cross (Offered by Ante Topic Mimara), Correspondence 1960–Jan. 1963, BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London.
17. Copy of email from Thomas Hoving to Suzanna Taverne (managing director of the British Museum), 30 March 2000, secretariat file no. A 45/51/114, BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London.
18. Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
19. See email from Thomas Hoving to Suzanna Taverne, 30 March 2000, secretariat file no. A 45/51/114, BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London.
20. Letter from Sherman Lee to Ante Topic Mimara, 25 August 1958, no. 3, Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH.
21. Offering price quoted in a letter from Harold Parsons to Sherman Lee, 12 November 1959, no. 3, Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH. Parsons also listed those who had seen the Cross: Fritz Volbach, John Pope Hennessy, Richard Randall, Georg Swarzenski. See letter from Sherman Lee to Ante Topic Mimara, 6 January 1960, no. 3, Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH.
22. Letter from Sherman Lee to Harold Parsons, 3 March 1960, no. 3, Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH.
23. Letter from Harold Parsons to Sherman Lee, 13 April 1960, no. 3., Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH; and letter from Parsons to Lee, 6 July 1960, in the same file.
24. Letter from Harold Parsons to Sherman Lee, 18 November 1960, no. 3, Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH.
25. Letter from William Wixom to Ante Topic Mimara, 17 July 1961, no. 3., Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH. Wixom gives the price then as '200,000 Pounds'.
26. Letter from Sherman Lee to Ante Topic Mimara, 22 November 1961, no. 3, Topic-Mimara, A., 1958–1965, Sherman E. Lee, box 70, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives, Cleveland, OH.
27. Hoving and Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', 339 (dating summary). The foreword to this article is by Rorimer, then director of the museum. For Hoving's earlier thoughts, see the quotation in Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
28. Kay Rorimer, 'Trésor de l'art roman anglais: La croix du Cloister à New York', *Estampille*, February 1988, 54. See also *Bury Bible*, 1121–43, MS 2, Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge; and Hoving and Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', 334–36, figs. 22, 25–27, 29, 33.
29. Hoving and Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', 339.
30. Thomas Hoving, *King of the Confessors* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981).
31. Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994).
32. Parker and Little, *The Cloisters Cross*, esp. 197–277.
33. Sabrina Longland, 'Pilate Answered: What I have Written I Have Written', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 10 (1968), 410–29; Sabrina Longland, 'The "Bury St. Edmunds Cross": Its Exceptional Place in English Twelfth-Century Art', *The Connoisseur* 172 (1969): 163–73, figs. 6–9, 13, 16, 20; and Sabrina Longland, 'A Literary Aspect of the Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 2 (1969): 45–74.
34. Konrad Hoffmann, *The Year 1200: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 12 to May 10, 1970* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970).
35. Willibald Sauerländer, "'The Year 1200," a Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 12–May 10, 1970', *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 4 (1971): 506–16.
36. Bernice R. Jones, 'A Reconsideration of the Cloisters Ivory Cross with the Caiaphas Plaque Restored to Its Base', *Gesta* 30, no. 1 (1991): 65–88.
37. T. A. Heslop, Review of *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning*, by Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little', *The Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1096 (1994): 459–60.
38. G. D. S. Henderson, Review of *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning*, by Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little', *The English Historical Review* 111, no. 444 (1996): 1240–41.
39. Ursula Nilgen, 'Das Große Walroßbeinkreuz in den "Cloisters"', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 48, no. 1 (1985): 39–64.
40. Neil Stratford, 'The Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 156, no. 1336 (2014): 464.
41. Walter Cahn, 'St. Albans and the Channel Style in England', in *The Year 1200: A Symposium*, ed. Konrad Hoffmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 187–230. For the phenomenon, see also Christopher de Hamel, *Glossed Books of the Bible and the Origins of the Paris Booktrade* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1984).
42. Walter Oakeshott, *Sigena: English Romanesque Paintings in Spain and the Winchester Bible Artists* (London: Miller and Medcalf, 1972), following Otto Pächt, 'A Cycle of English Frescoes in Spain', *The Burlington Magazine* 103, no. 698 (1961), 166–75. For a recent assessment of this, see Neil Stratford, 'The Hospital, England and Sigena: A Footnote', in *Romanesque and the Mediterranean: Points of Contact across the Latin, Greek and Islamic Worlds c. 1000 to c. 1250*, ed. Rosa Bacile and John McNeill (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 109–16.
43. *Stammheim Missal*, MS 64, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA. See John Munns, 'Relocating the Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 155, no. 1323 (2013): 381–83.
44. See Stratford, 'The Cloisters Cross'.
45. Rainer Kahsnitz, *Goldschmidt Addenda: Nachträge zu den Bänden I–IV des Elfenbeincorpus von Adolph Goldschmidt, Berlin 1914–1926*, Sonderdruck aus der Zeitschrift des Deutschen Verein für Kunstwissenschaft 68, 72/73 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2022), nos. 155–56.

## Endnotes

- 1 We would like to thank the British Museum for giving us access to their archives on the Cloisters Cross. Cecily Hennessy would also like to thank the Society of Antiquaries for a Philips Grant for research in the United States; and the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Cloisters for generous use of their archives.
- 2 Wiltrud Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz der Sammlung Topić-Mimara', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, 25 (1963): 7–108.
- 3 'The Cloisters Cross', The Met Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470305>.
- 4 Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz'.
- 5 See 'Romanesque Ivory Cross Reporting Committee', GR. NO. 351/62, Bury St Edmund Ivory Altar Cross (Offered by Ante Topic Mimara), Correspondence 1960–Jan. 1963, BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London. The signatures include those of Peter Lasko, George Zarnecki, Francis Wormald, Derek Turner, Hugo Buchthal, and Otto Pächt.
- 6 The *St Albans Psalter* (now Dombibliothek Hildesheim HS St. God. 1, Cathedral MS 1, p. 48), shows the mummified body and a man holding a vial, and the *Winchester Psalter* (BL Cotton MS Nero C IV, f.23) shows the anointing and Christ's body 'in grave clothes'. See Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell, and Francis Wormald, *The St. Albans Psalter Albani Psalter: 1. The Fullpage Miniatures by Otto Pächt; 2. The Initials, by C. R. Dodwell; 3. Preface and Description of the Manuscript, by Francis Wormald*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 25 (London: Warburg Institute, 1960); and Francis Wormald, *The Winchester Psalter: With 134 Illustrations* (London: Miller & Medcalf, 1973), published posthumously.
- 7 See *Guthlac Roll*, MS Harley Roll Y 6, British Library, London.
- 8 As on the ivory cover of the *Codex Aureus of St Emmeram*, Clm 4452, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich. See Jennifer O'Reilly, 'The Rough-Hewn Cross in Anglo-Saxon Art', in *Ireland and Insular Art AD 500–1200*, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1987), 153–58; and John Munns, *Cross and Culture in*

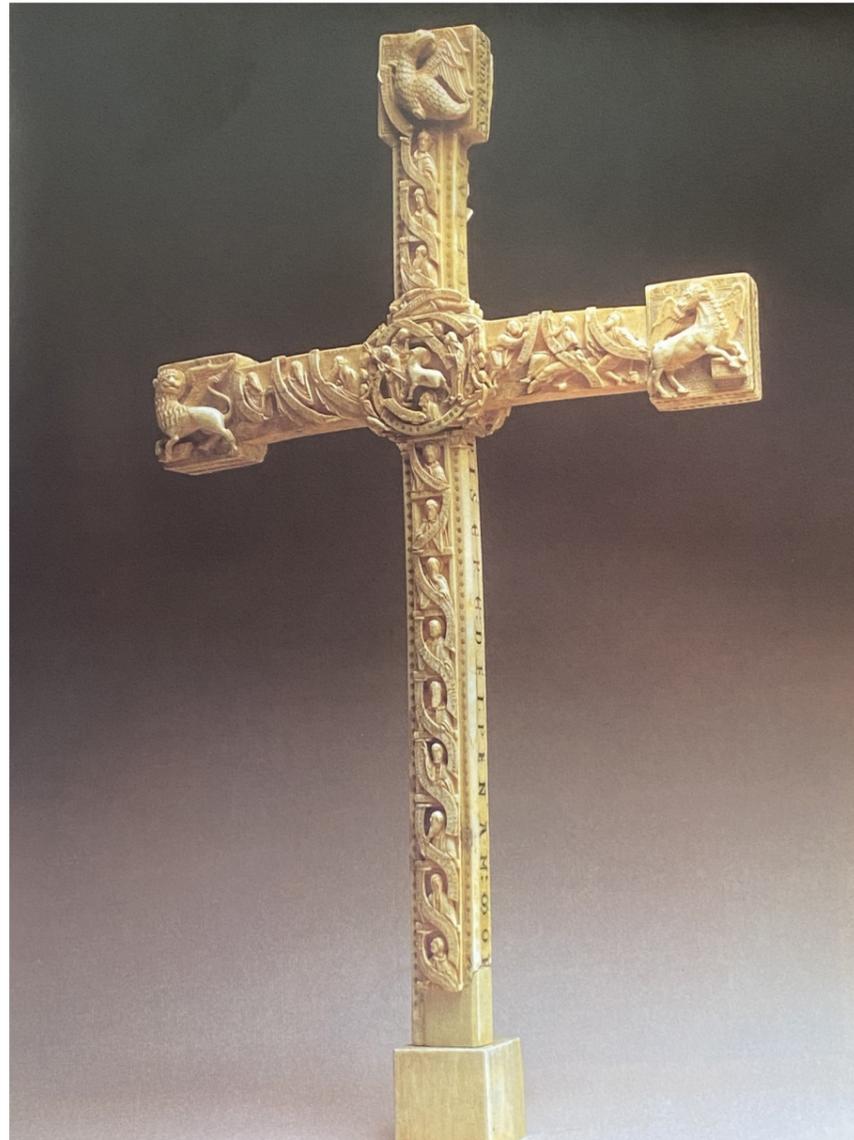
# ‘Through a Glass Darkly’: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Cloisters Cross

Charles T. Little



Figure 2.1  
Front, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1150–  
60, walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph ©  
Malcolm Varon,  
courtesy of The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art

Figure 2.2  
Back, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1150–  
60, walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph ©  
Malcolm Varon,  
courtesy of The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art



The walrus-ivory cross, now called the Cloisters Cross (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2) is displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's medieval branch called the Cloisters. Its purchase was provided by an endowment established by John D. Rockefeller Jr. (1874–1960) for the enrichment of its collection.<sup>1</sup> It has resided there since 1963, except for short sojourns to the museum's main building on Fifth Avenue in New York for the 1970 exhibition *The Year 1200* and for loan exhibitions in London, Oslo, Venice, and Milan.

The Cloisters Cross now stands about twenty-three inches (57.7 cm) high, with its entire surface covered with narrative and symbolic scenes incorporated on a Tree of Life cross with more than ninety-two figures, and ninety-eight inscriptions.<sup>2</sup> A seemingly clear inference is that the Cross was not intended for a large public liturgical ceremony. This is especially clear if the Cross is seen by candlelight, as it certainly was in a darkened church setting. Using a replica of the Cross with this condition in mind, it indeed radiates 'through a glass darkly' (Fig. 2.3). In the current display of the Cross in the Cloisters Treasury, the lower light levels reinforce this fact. Also, self-evident

and recognized immediately—especially with a strong light—are its superb artistic qualities and detailed craftsmanship. The microcarved standing figures are under 4 centimetres and some less than 2.5 centimetres; the Evangelist symbols are the largest (4.5 x 4.5 cm). The carvings are taken to an exceptional level of detail in a medium that is not as easy to work as elephant ivory. Emotion is conveyed mostly by gesture. The energy of the figures can be easily seen when they are enlarged photographically and monumentalized with 'digital gymnastics', thus opening new frontiers for study and enlightenment.

In 2003 the Met was approached by the dean of St Edmundsbury Cathedral (Suffolk), the Very Reverend James Atwell, who requested a replica of the Cloisters Cross for display in the newly rededicated cathedral and treasury, principally for cultural and educational purposes. Two painstakingly exact replicas were made in epoxy resin by the Met's reproduction studio, headed by Ronald Street. I directed the project (Fig. 2.4). One replica is in Bury St Edmunds; the other was made available for scrutiny at Revisiting the Cloisters Cross: A One-Day Colloquium held at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London on 12 May 2023. Its surface is like that of a walrus tooth, and touching and handling it led to a better understanding of its ingenious construction, iconography, style, and inscriptions. The surfaces of the replicas are tinted to match the decorative patterns and inscriptions on the original Cross, which show evidence of early applications of waxy red and green pigments.<sup>3</sup>

For whom, and for what purpose, was this exceptional Cross created? After sixty years of study, these issues are still being investigated and debated. Let us begin with some key facts around the Met's determination in 1962 to purchase the Cross that have not been previously acknowledged and then work backwards in time.

The Met's Curatorial Acquisition Form was approved by the Purchase Committee on 18 October 1962, subject to the director's approval. The Cross was eventually assigned the acquisition number 63.12, meaning it was the twelfth item purchased in 1963. The form is brief and says only the following: 'Cross, Walrus ivory, Northern European, 12th century'. It is signed by Margaret B. Freeman, curator of the Cloisters, not by Thomas Hoving, associate curator, although it was his project. The acquisition form bluntly states, with no discursive analysis:

The feeling of the Department about the object can be summed up most accurately by quoting Dr. George Zarnecki, of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, London, who was asked to expertise the cross for the British Museum: 'The institution that acquires this cross can consider itself the most fortunate in the world'. [Included on the form is a note: 'Prof. Kurt Weitzmann . . . stated: "I have no reservations as to its genuineness"'.]<sup>4</sup>

In June 1964, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* featured an article entitled 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', written by Hoving. In a prefatory note, James Rorimer, the Met's director, said the Cross 'was first called to our attention in 1956' and was examined in September 1961 in Zurich by Hoving and Carmen Gómez-Moreno, assistant curator.<sup>5</sup> Why the sudden change in the identity and origin of the Cross from simply 'Northern European' to 'Bury St Edmunds'?

Figure 2.3  
Replica of the  
Cloisters Cross,  
ca. 2004, in  
candlelight.  
Photograph by  
the author



The main *dramatis personae* in the initial stages of the modern rediscovery of the Cross, its acquisition, and research pertaining to it are the following (Figs. 2.5–2.13): Ante Topić Mimara (1898–1987) (hereafter Topić, as he was generally known), who had the Cross for sale; Wiltrud Mersmann (1919–2022), Topić’s eventual wife; James Rorimer (1905–1966), curator in the Department of Medieval Art at the Cloisters (1929–55), and then director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1955–66); Carmen Gómez-Moreno (1914–2008), assistant curator in the Medieval Department of the Cloisters and later department head; Thomas Hoving (1931–2009), associate curator in the Medieval Department of the Cloisters and later director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1967–78); Harry Bober (1915–1988), Avalon Professor of the Humanities at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, whom Rorimer and Hoving consulted; Margaret Freeman (1899–1980), curator of the Cloisters (1928) and head of the Cloisters (1955–65); Kay (Katherine) Serrell Rorimer (1908–2000), wife of James; and Sabrina Jane Longland, now Sabrina Harcourt-Smith (b. 1939), research assistant at the Cloisters after the acquisition of the Cross. With the help of these people, the search began for understanding the making, meaning, and identity of one of the most remarkable works of art to survive from the Middle Ages. Now, with a flood of publications appearing over the course of sixty years—at least 120 listings in the Met’s bibliography—we again try to make sense of the Cross.

How did the quest for its origin really begin and develop?

In 1963, the Met’s director, Rorimer, recommended that Hoving show the Cross to Professor Bober of the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. Bober suggested to Hoving that he look closely at the *Bury Bible*.<sup>6</sup> Bober had his own personal photos of this Bible from the Warburg Institute in London.<sup>7</sup> Hoving never acknowledged Bober’s role in understanding the Cross in any form, but it was to be fundamental for what followed.

In today’s predominantly secular world, issues of an artwork’s production, material, style, provenance, and place within a culture overwhelm its fundamental meaning and purpose, which is especially true of a great religious object like the Cloisters Cross. Its meaning and purpose were primarily simple and direct: ‘to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was God’s Anointed one—Messiah in Hebrew, *Christos* in Greek—and chosen to serve all who acknowledge Him as ‘King of Confessors’’.<sup>8</sup> Confession is a way to one’s salvation. As a kind of private devotion, the maker and/or owner of the Cross was likely seeking his own redemption in the process. In essence, the Cross attempts to demonstrate, both visually and verbally, that the Old Testament confirms Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. While the means of seeking one’s salvation are major theological questions, they suggest that the Cross’ singularity, and the cohesiveness of its images and texts, point to one maker/designer. This, however, does not rule out a more public and occasional ceremonial usage for the Cross.

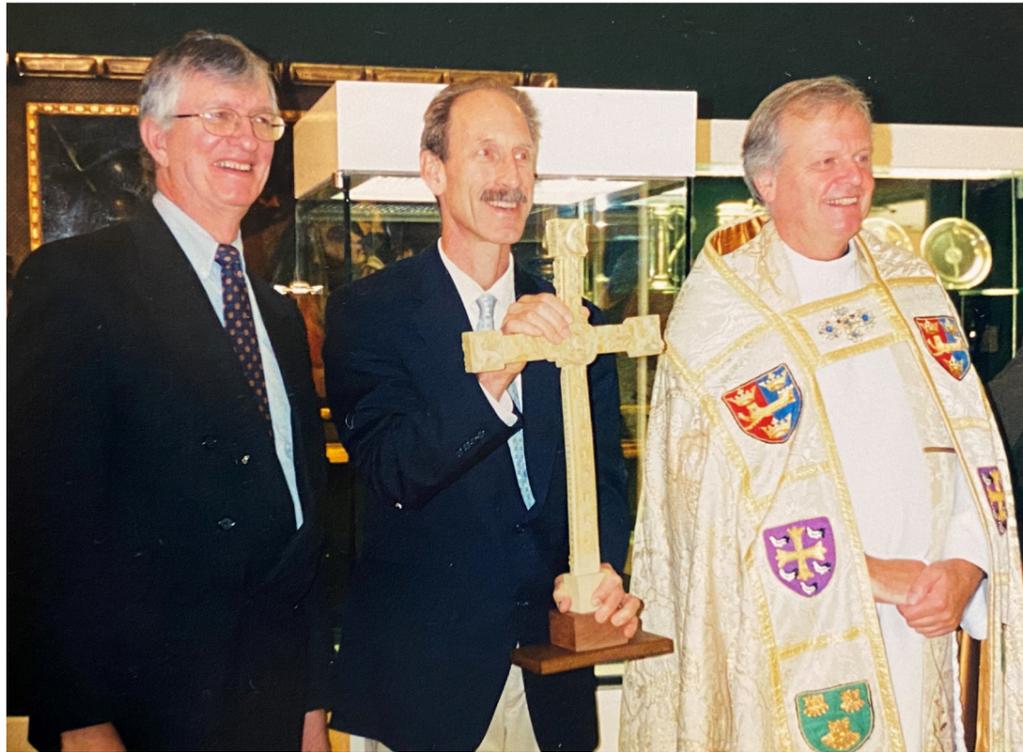
I would like to address several overlapping scenarios of provenance for the Cross. Admittedly, these are speculations and remain shadowy, but they also contain some demonstrable realities.

### First Scenario

Josef H. Kugler (1920–1994), a Hungarian engineer who had emigrated to the United States in the 1950s, told Hoving in late 1981 that he saw the Cross around 1930. Kugler had just read the December 1981 issue of *Reader’s Digest*, a popular magazine, that contained an excerpt from Hoving’s new book *King of Confessors*.<sup>9</sup> On 16 April 1986, I interviewed Josef Kugler with Elizabeth Parker (a professor at Fordham University and my co-author on a publication on the Cloisters Cross) when he was visiting family near Philadelphia, coming from his home in Carlisle, Ohio. He told us that he saw the Cross circa 1932 or 1933 at the age of twelve when he visited a Father Veit at the Cistercian monastery at Zirc with his grandfather. Kugler said that Father Veit had said that pieces of the cross were found with ‘junk’ in an armoire he had acquired from the Premonstratensian abbey in Zsámbék and only later taken to Zirc. Kugler recalled that the Cross was thought to have been cursed. (An inscription on the Cross reads: ‘Maledictus omnis qui pendet in ligno’ [Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; Galatians 3:13].) He said that the papers in which the multiple pieces of the cross were wrapped within the armoire indicated that it ‘was taken on a crusade by a soldier—identified only as G—who was bringing it to Jerusalem to be blessed’.<sup>10</sup>

Kugler told us that he was later drafted into the German army; he was in the Fifth Panzer Division during the Second World War and saw action at the siege of Stalingrad and at the Battle of the Bulge. Can his scenario

Figure 2.4 Very Reverend James Atwell (right), Ronald Street (centre), and Charles Little (left), with a replica of the Cloisters Cross, September 2004, at St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Photograph by the author



Clockwise from top left:

Figure 2.5 Ante Topić Mimara (1898–1987). Photograph in the public domain

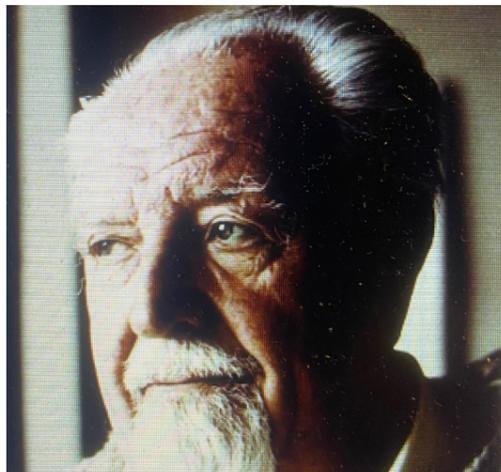


Figure 2.6 Wiltrud Mersmann (1919–2022). Photograph in the public domain

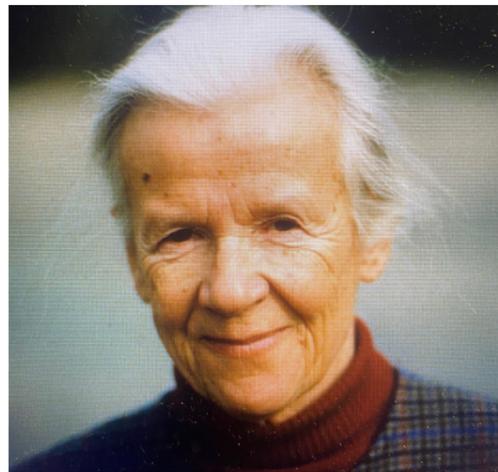


Figure 2.7 James Rorimer (1905–1966). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 2.8 Carmen Gómez-Moreno (1914–2008). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Clockwise from top left:

Figure 2.9 Thomas Hoving, (1931–2009). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

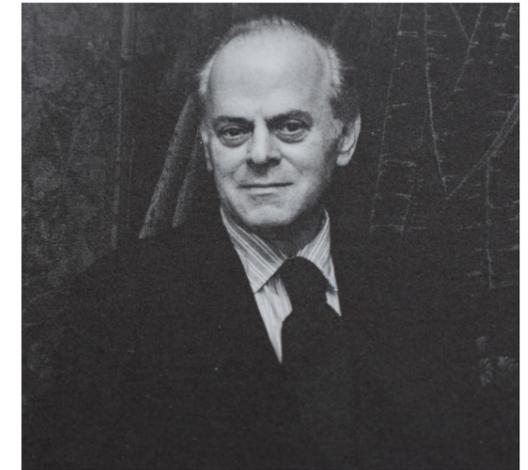


Figure 2.10 Harry Bober (1915–1988). Photograph courtesy of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York



Figure 2.11 Margaret Freeman (1899–1980). Photograph in the public domain, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 2.12 Kay (Katherine) Serrell Rorimer (1908–2000). Photograph courtesy of the Rorimer family



Figure 2.13 Sabrina Jane Longland, now Sabrina Harcourt-Smith (b. 1939). Photograph courtesy of the Harcourt-Smith family

be trusted? Here was one person who had the strong likelihood of having seen the Cross in modern times, but we never dreamed of asking him the more challenging questions of what he really did during the war and in its aftermath, and whether he then also later returned to Zirc. He may have remembered or learned of the Cistercians' dire predicament after the war, when the Soviets closed the Zirc monastery in the autumn of 1950 and forced the monks' departure. Indeed, it is known that some of the Cistercians of Zirc fled to Western Europe, but about a dozen eventually formed a new community called Our Lady of Dallas in Irving, Texas (1954–61). The abbey is today an active Cistercian centre. Attempts to pursue this scenario found no confirmation from the order in Texas and they never acknowledged any awareness of the Cross' existence.<sup>11</sup>

This narrative is not unlike what Topić reputedly had told Hoving—that he found the Cross in a monastery in 1938 and persuaded the monks to sell it—but again, Hoving also indicated that this happened 'around 1947/48'.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, Kugler seemed to be telling us honestly that he remembered the Cross from his youth at the Hungarian monastery at Zirc. Is there independent confirmation that Kugler saw the Cross? Yes, I think his recollection that the Cross was in multiple pieces was not generally known or published until images were included in our 1994 monograph. Topić reportedly showed a single piece of the Cross to Erich Meyer, curator of the Schloss Museum, Berlin, in 1938. Again, Hermann Schnitzler in Cologne, director of the Schnütgen Museum, circa 1950/1951, may also have seen the upper portion of the Cross.<sup>13</sup> Hoving rarely spoke about this fundamental fact that the Cross was in multiple (five) pieces or of its particular method of construction.<sup>14</sup>

### Second Scenario

There is another scenario: that the entire Cross, or portions thereof, were associated with the Central Collecting Point in Munich and there became available to Topić. This may have happened with the aid of Mersmann in her secretarial position at the Central Collecting Point, starting in March 1946 and ending in June 1949 (Fig. 2.14).<sup>15</sup> She may also have learned of other works, like the Cross, that were not actually there. This was subtly suggested by Mersmann herself in her letter to me in 1987: 'The Cross was with a clerical community; they wanted to sell [it] and start a new life in Western Europe; Topić promised them [that he would] not reveal this'.<sup>16</sup> The reason Mersmann said no more about its provenance may confirm what Topić apparently promised Hoving: that he would leave a notice at his death concerning its provenance, but to our knowledge, Topić never did this. Did these events take place in the 1930s or the late 1940s, or in 1950 or 1955? Was this 'clerical community' that Mersmann mentioned in fact the Cistercian abbey at Zirc—founded in 1182 by King Béla III of Hungary on royal farmland in the Bakony Forest (see below)—where Kugler said he saw the Cross?

Does this information constitute a verifiable modern provenance for the Cross in Hungary? Again, I think yes, because linking this scenario to that of the fate of the abbey of Zirc produces the strong possibility that Mersmann was correct in saying that Topić got the Cross, or parts thereof, around 1950 or before, and could not reveal its origin.<sup>17</sup> Ideally, historical verification of the



Figure 2.14  
Wiltrud  
Mersmann at the  
Munich Central  
Collecting Point  
in March 1946.  
Archives of  
the National  
Gallery of Art,  
Washington,  
DC. Photograph  
courtesy of the  
Archives of the  
National Gallery  
of Art

provenance of the Cross would be based on independent confirmation from multiple sources. In my opinion, and based on the information outlined here, there is a high degree of probability that the Cross, in modern times, came from Zirc or another monastic foundation in the region, such as Zsámbék. After all, Topić's base was in Zagreb, and Zirc is geographically within two hundred kilometres as the crow flies. So, together, the scenarios of Topić and Kugler are plausible and have some consistency.

### Third Scenario

Among other possibilities, there is also a convenient medieval historical link between England and Hungary that may support an English origin for the Cross. In 1160, Thomas Becket, then chancellor of England, negotiated nuptials for Margaret of France, infant daughter of Louis VII of France and Constance of Castille, to Henry, the eldest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Prince Henry was five and a half and Margaret was two. They were married in Winchester on 2 November 1160. When Henry died in France in 1183, Margaret, now age twenty-five, immediately became an eligible widow. Margaret was then betrothed to Béla III of Hungary in August 1186 by her brother, Philip II of France, known as Philip Augustus. This was a Capetian/Hungarian political manoeuvre of alliances. Margaret went to reside in Esztergom and was accompanied there by a retinue of French and English knights. She took 'treasure' with her, likely her dowry.<sup>18</sup> A nearby chapel

in Esztergom was dedicated to Thomas Becket in homage to him, as the recently martyred archbishop of Canterbury, and to her English connections. There is also an association with Zirc. In 1182, Béla III founded a Benedictine monastery at Zirc which eventually became Cistercian.<sup>19</sup> In April 1196, Béla died and his widow Margaret accompanied the Hungarian crusade to the Holy Land where she died at Acre in September 1197. She was buried in the city of Tyre. Overall, this scenario is more reflective of the political dynamics of the period than specific documentation thereof or the movement of explicit works of art.<sup>20</sup>

### Where Did the Cross Originally Come From?

If the Cross was created somewhere in northern Europe and then taken to Hungary, what were the circumstances? It is made of multiple pieces of walrus ivory, making it both compact and portable. Its ingenious interlocking elements aided in ensuring its survival. I would maintain that the linking of its principal elements reflects carpentry knowledge utilizing a kind of double-lap join method that is more typical of shipbuilding technology evolving from the age of the Vikings.<sup>21</sup> The considerable amount of walrus ivory required to create the Cross demanded the resources of a major and wealthy ecclesiastical institution, either monastic or episcopal. One cannot also rule out a royal patron.<sup>22</sup> The walrus material could come from anywhere around the North Atlantic, not necessarily from Nordic lands or Greenland.<sup>23</sup> For example, in 1521 Albrecht Dürer sketched a walrus that he noted in the inscription came from the Netherlands sea.<sup>24</sup>

When first displayed at the Cloisters, following Hoving's publication, the Cross was labelled 'The Bury St. Edmunds' Cross'. In our 1994 monograph it was called 'English' and we recommended that site as likely. Presently, the Cloisters Cross is called 'British', though this term is more valid only after 1603 and the accession of James I.<sup>25</sup> Over the last sixty years, a variety of geographic (and temporal) attributions have been put forward for the Cross: Anglo-Saxon England, Romanesque England, Bury St Edmunds, St Albans, or Winchester. Likewise, there are various Continental advocates: the English Channel area, Belgium and the Meuse Valley, Abbey of Le Parc (near Louvain), Liège, the Rhineland, Hildesheim and Lower Saxony, and Denmark and Ribe, or just 'the North'.<sup>26</sup>

The clear problem for any geographic placement of the Cross has been the challenge of having all the following criteria function in concert for a more secure origin/location: the material, the figure style and composition of the subjects, and the iconographic peculiarities and the inscriptions. A single stylistic or type comparison is unlikely to be compelling. Therefore, like the question of provenance, the artistic and geographic origins of the Cross have, after sixty years, seen the 'net' being cast ever wider. Each position is rich and provocative, but all have gaps. From a visual or stylistic point of view, Erwin Panofsky's witty and true maxim that 'if one wants to prove their point, do not illustrate it!'—quipped in lectures and seminars—should be kept in mind. Nevertheless, it may be fruitful to review some geographic options, at least those for which artistic, historical, and cultural placements have been made.



Figure 2.15  
Job, from the  
*Bury Bible*, ca.  
1125–36. Corpus  
Christi College,  
Cambridge  
MS 2 fol. 344v.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
Harry Bober,  
courtesy of the  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York



Figure 2.16  
Detail of  
Malachias,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here  
ca. 1150–60,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters.  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author

Left:  
Figure 2.17  
Seal from Bury  
St Edmunds, ca.  
1150. Bodleian  
Library, Oxford,  
MS Suffolk ch.  
10. Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
Julian Gardner,  
courtesy of the  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York



Right:  
Figure 2.18  
Detail of an  
Angel, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1150–  
60, walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author

Figure 2.19  
St Albans Head,  
ca. 1151–66,  
excavated.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
courtesy of the  
Conway Library,  
Courtauld  
Institute, London

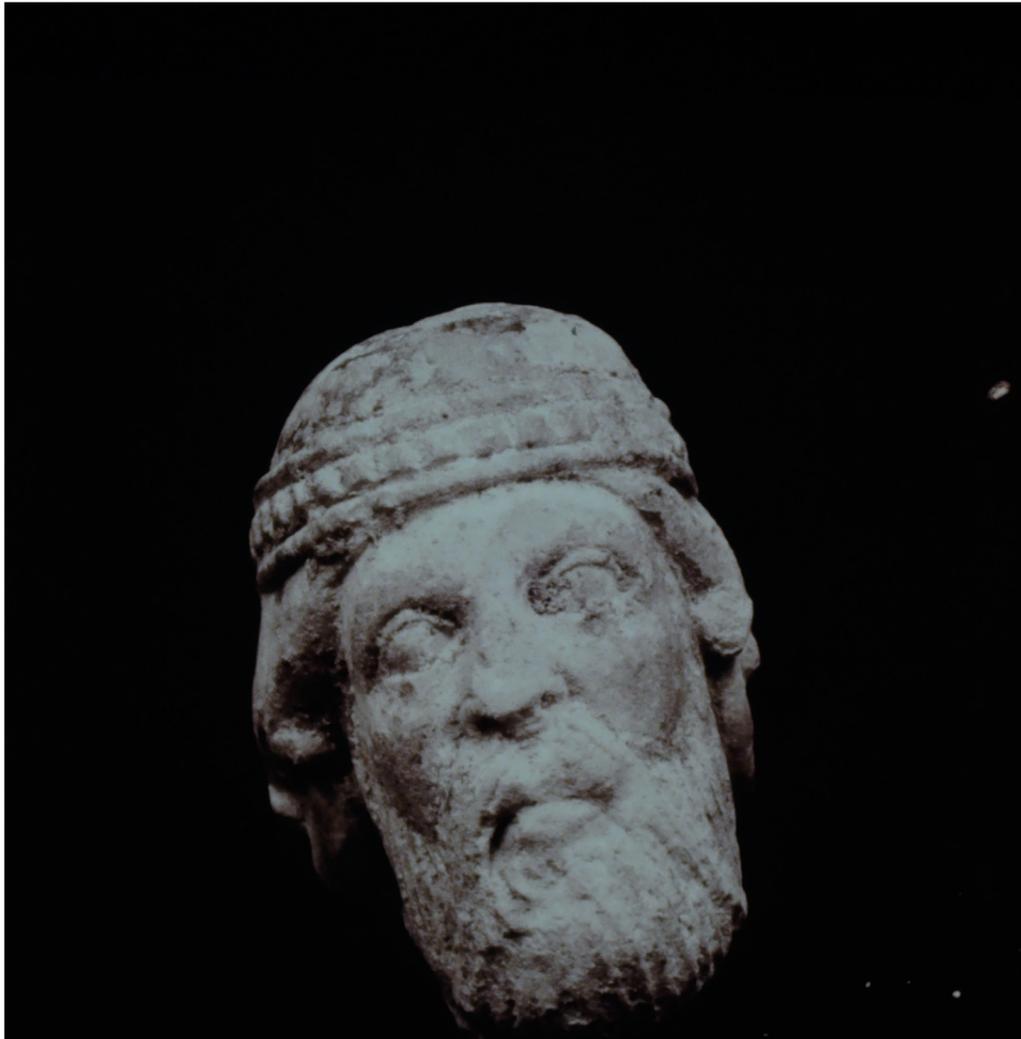


Figure 2.20  
Detail of Abdias,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here ca.  
1150–60,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author

## England

The Met initially assigned the Cross to Bury St Edmunds and to the hand, or style, of Master Hugo. The 'Hugo style' was innovative. However, his origins as a professional artist are debated by scholars.<sup>27</sup> The reason favoured by many for an English attribution (and possibly Bury St Edmunds) is that England held, or appeared to hold, the weight of a higher degree of probability when considering all the factors of where, when, who, and why that ideally should function in unison. A key question is: Do style, relief technique, and composition surpass iconographic themes and inscriptions and texts?

Figure 2.21  
Ascension, from  
the *Pembroke  
College Gospels*,  
12th century.  
Pembroke  
College,  
Cambridge,  
MS 120, fol. 5v.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
permission of  
the Masters and  
Fellows of  
Pembroke  
College



Figure 2.22  
Detail of the  
Ascension,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here  
ca. 1150–60,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author

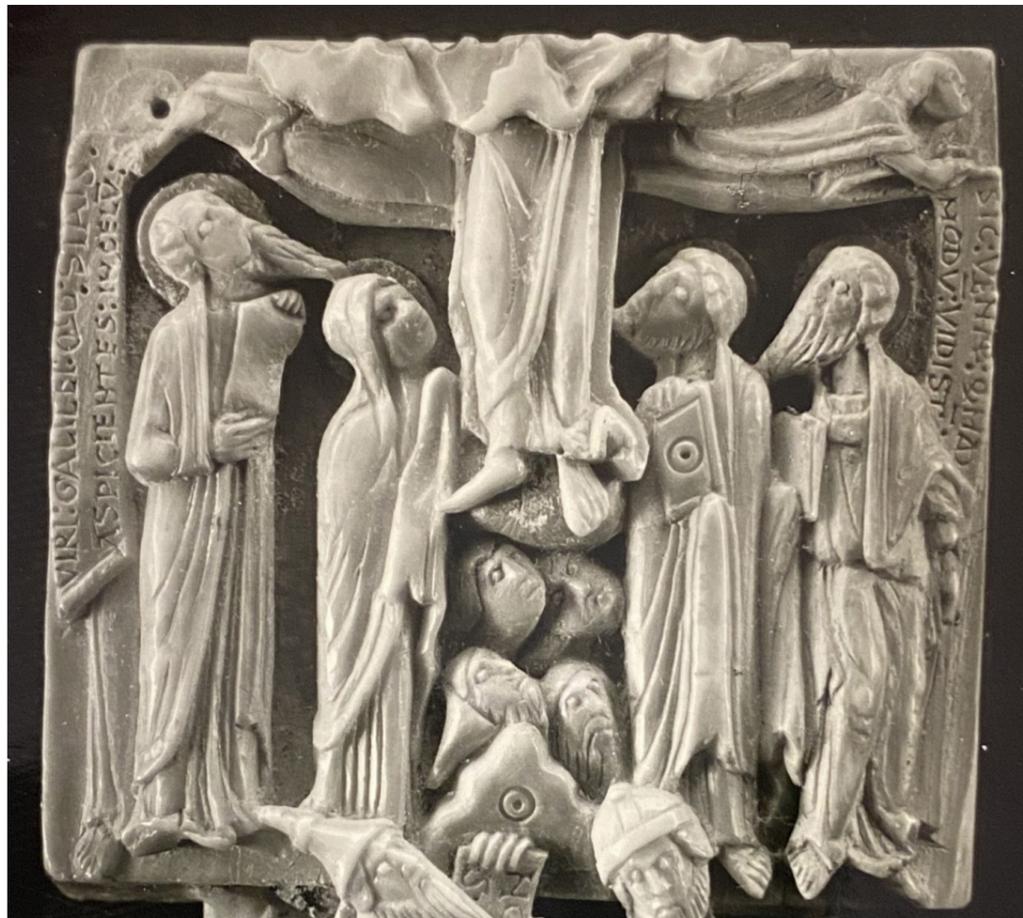


Figure 2.23  
Crucifixion, from  
the *Arundel  
Psalter*, MS157,  
fol. 10v, dated  
here ca.  
1200–1210.  
British Library,  
London, Arundel  
157 fol. 10v.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
courtesy of the  
British Library



Figure 2.24  
Detail of the  
*titulus*, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1150–  
60, walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author



The case for Hugo's involvement was based on multiple factors, mostly stylistic and compositional: his making of the great *Bury Bible* for Sacrist Hervey (ca. 1125–36) (Figs. 2.15 and 2.16), the double doors of the abbey that were carved (not cast) by the hands of Master Hugo (*in sculpti digitis*), a bell made for Bury in the time of Anselm (1121–48), and a cross for the choir with Mary and John that was 'carved incomparably' in the time of Sacrist Elias (1148–56).<sup>28</sup> Hugo also likely made the seal matrix for the abbey—small in scale and of high quality—that appears to be related to figural forms on the Cross (Figs. 2.17 and 2.18).<sup>29</sup> Hugo was well travelled. For example, his distinct figure style was reflected directly in the apostles depicted on the lead baptismal font at Walton-on-the-Hill.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, excavated figurative sculptures at Bury St Edmunds and at St Albans Abbey, albeit of vastly different scales and materials, have been compared (Figs. 2.19 and 2.20). The composition of the Cross' Ascension scene with Christ disappearing into a cloud—with wingless angels—is a form often considered initially English, with numerous examples, such as the *Pembroke College Gospels* or the *Hunterian Psalter*, the form was also prevalent at the same time on the Continent (Figs. 2.21 and 2.22).<sup>31</sup> The rare *Rex confessorum titulus* on the Cross is echoed pictorially elsewhere only in the early thirteenth-century *Arundel Psalter* as *Rex confitentium*—and seems to be a further relevant English parallel (Figs. 2.23 and 2.24).<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, the phenomenon of 'talking crosses' is apparently part of a long tradition in England and Ireland rather than on the Continent. One of the earliest examples may be the seventh-century gold cross with inscriptions from the biblical book of Numbers (part of the Staffordshire hoard discovered in 2009) (Fig. 2.25); others include the Ruthwell cross and the Angel cross (Otley, Yorkshire).<sup>33</sup> The most visible large inscriptions on the Cross, *Cham ridet* and *terra tremit*, both incised and inlaid with green, waxy pigment, are difficult to read unless the Cross is rotated and in good light. Both inscriptions are special or unique—such as being formerly painted in the choir at Bury St Edmunds—and are not found elsewhere in Europe, except as a variant, such as at the Abbey of Saint-Denis and later in the *Biblia pauperum*, as already noted by Mersmann and Longland.<sup>34</sup> Thus, they collectively may, or may not, point to a particular centre for the Cross' making in England.

### The Continent

Nevertheless, from an early date, and after the Met's acquisition of the Cross, other geographic attributions were proposed by many scholars: the English Channel area, the Low Countries—home to the Abbey of Le Parc in Louvain, for example (Fig. 2.26)—and the Rhineland and Saxony.<sup>35</sup> For the most part, these scholars focused on style and compositional links rather than iconographic issues. For example, the *Stammheim Missal*, produced in Hildesheim, has figures with jutting beards and holding scrolls (Fig. 2.27).<sup>36</sup> Similarly, other Continental manuscripts contain Old Testament prophets clutching scrolls. This extends to ivory carvings and sculptures that are not unlike the prophets on the Cross (Figs. 2.28 and 2.29).<sup>37</sup> Thus, many of these visual aspects may be more universal than initially thought. In a similar vein, the particular Brazen Serpent composition or type of form was found on the Continent at about the same moment as the Cross, as seen, for example, in



Figure 2.25 Gold cross (now folded strip) from the Staffordshire hoard, inscribed in Latin: 'Help us O God—Arise, O Lord, and may your enemies be torn apart and those who hate you will flee from your face' (Numbers 10:35), 600–70. Birmingham Museums, cat. no. 540. Artwork in the public domain



Figure 2.26 Initial L to Saint Matthew's Gospel, with the Four Evangelists, frontispiece to a gospel book, probably made for the Abbey of Le Parc at Louvain, mid-12th century. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 241, fol. 7v. Artwork in the public domain, courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum

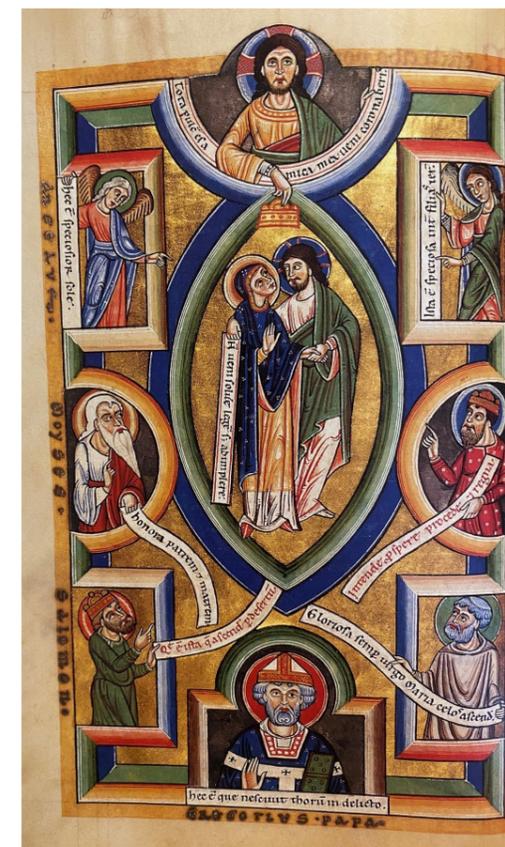


Figure 2.27 Ascension of the Virgin, from the *Stammheim Missal*, Hildesheim, 1170–80. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. MS 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 145v. Artwork in the public domain

Left:  
Figure 2.28  
Ivory element  
with St Peter and  
prophets (now  
lost), 1100–1200.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
after Wiltrud  
Mersmann, 'Das  
Elfenbeinkreuz  
der Sammlung  
Topić-Mimara',  
*Wallraf-Richartz-  
Jahrbuch* 25  
(1963), 94, fig.  
84.



Right:  
Figure 2.29  
Detail of  
prophets,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here  
ca. 1150–60,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author



Left:  
Figure 2.30  
Brazen Serpent  
from *Dialogus de  
laudibus scantae*,  
Prüfening Abbey,  
Regensburg,  
ca. 1170–80.  
Staatsbibliothek,  
Munich, cfm.  
14159, fol. 3.  
Artwork in the  
public domain



Right:  
Figure 2.31  
Detail of the  
Brazen Serpent,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here  
ca. 1150–60,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author



Figure 2.32  
Oslo Corpus on  
the Cloisters  
Cross for The  
Year 1200  
exhibition, 1970,  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York.  
Photograph  
courtesy of the  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art



a manuscript of the *Dialogus de laudibus scantae crucis* from Prüfening Abbey in Regensburg (Figures 2.30 and 2.31).<sup>38</sup>

One can further expand the possibilities to more Northern geographic attributions for the Cross. Before the Met's 1970 exhibition *The Year 1200*, the possibility that the Oslo Corpus was originally part of the Cross was raised, first by Martin Blindheim, leading the Met to bring them together on that occasion (Figs. 2.32 and 2.33).<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, this also returns to T. A. Heslop's earlier and current position.<sup>40</sup> To reconstruct and to complete the Oslo Corpus anatomically, using the Met's replica, the initial result appeared to demonstrate a steep angle for the arms and a single nail for the feet. This must also be reconsidered but still may not rule out the possibility of the Oslo Corpus being an early replacement for the original, now lost corpus.<sup>41</sup>

Figure 2.33a  
Detail, Oslo  
Corpus, dated  
here ca. 1150–  
1200, walrus  
ivory. Photograph  
by the author



Figure 2.33b  
Detail, Oslo  
Corpus, dated  
here ca. 1150–  
1200, walrus  
ivory. Photograph  
by the author



## Conclusions

Over the years, the understanding of the Cloisters Cross has gone through what is perhaps best characterized as the Hegelian process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis and is likely to continue to evolve. The Met's preliminary attribution of the Cross to 'Northern Europe' may, in retrospect, have been a wise and prescient decision, most plausibly by Rorimer, who, as the museum's director, was ultimately responsible for its acquisition and thus making it available for future generations to enjoy. The colloquium *Revisiting the Cloisters Cross* offered yet more new perspectives on and possibilities for understanding one of the greatest surviving portable masterpieces of the Middle Ages.

1. My thanks to the organizers of *Revisiting the Cloisters Cross: A One-Day Colloquium*, held on 12 May 2023 at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, for the opportunity to reflect on the Cross again after a life of being a museum curator and the Cross always being present. I was happily aided by Elizabeth Parker, who offered sensible comments and clear recollections. The Met's selective bibliography on the Cloisters Cross is available in its The Museum System (TMS) collection search, under its accession number 63.12. This article is dedicated to Libby Parker to recognize her lifelong devotion to the study of the art of the Middle Ages.
2. Today the Cross survives in five pieces. The lower shaft, though broken at the base, is the longest (34.4 cm) and is made of a single walrus incisor tooth; the normal size of such a tooth for a male walrus is a maximum of circa 50 cm. The main cross arm is 25 cm, with the two end terminals secured to it with a flat, interior tang. The upper shaft is 21 cm, including the interior tongue.
3. In September 2004 one replica was presented to St Edmundsbury Cathedral at a sung Eucharist. Later, a musical drama composed by Judith Bingham, *The Ivory Tree*, was presented. A commercial version of the Cloisters Cross is still available from the Met; however, it is of significantly lower quality and made in one piece. On the construction of the Cloisters Cross, see Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 22–28.
4. Curatorial Acquisition Form, 18 October 1962, Acquisition Papers, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
5. Thomas P. Hoving and James J. Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 22, no. 10 (1964): 317.
6. *Bury Bible*, MS 00211, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.
7. Bober's photographs are in the Met's files. Indeed, Bober's son, Jonathan, former Mellon Curator at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, confirmed this in an email to the author (3 March 2023): 'As you certainly know, Harry did resent that he had made the essential observations and connections, but that the showman Hoving claimed discovery, research, and all'. Additionally, Elizabeth Parker wrote a personal letter to Hoving on 27 January 1976 (author's copy), saying 'Professor Bober once mentioned in a lecture having discussed the stylistic parallels to the Bury Bible with you when you were writing your first article, and the connections have always seemed most compelling'.
8. Katherine Rorimer wrote a 161-page unpublished monograph titled 'Thus Spake Obadiah'. The manuscript is in the Cloisters archive, gifted by her daughter, Anne, in May 2004. It chronicles in detail the problems of Thomas Hoving's book, *King of the Confessors* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981). See Katherine Rorimer, introduction to 'Thus Spake Obadiah' (unpublished manuscript), p. 1, Cloisters Cross Research Papers, subseries IIC: KSR Manuscript Drafts, folder 15, box 11, Cloisters Library and Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Her learned, insightful, and unique perspective is essential to a better understanding of the Cross and its place in medieval scholarship. On Harry Bober, see Rorimer, 'Thus Spake Obadiah', 140.
9. Thomas Hoving, 'Quest for the Lost Cross', *Reader's Digest*, December 1981, 242–88.
10. Josef Kugler, interview by Charles T. Little and Elizabeth Parker, 16 April 1986, held in a restaurant in a hotel near Philadelphia.
11. See Abbot Anselm Nagy to Janos Adam, 17 October 1987 (regarding Father Veit [i.e., the Cistercian Father Tibor Humpfnér (1885–1966)]), Charles T. Little and Elizabeth C. Parker Personal Papers. Elizabeth Parker said this was John (Janos) Adam (d. 2010), a Hungarian Jesuit and philosophy professor at Fordham University, who wrote to him on behalf of Parker. See memo from Elizabeth Parker to Father Janos Adam, 12 April 1986. Abbot Nagy, of the Texas community, replied, saying that he 'doubted [the Cross] was ever in the hands of a Cistercian Father'. See Abbot Anselm Nagy to Janos Adam, 10 November 1987, Charles T. Little and Elizabeth C. Parker Personal Papers. Given the Cistercians' extremely precarious situation in Zirc, their total silence is understandable. At the time of our interview with Josef Kugler, our discussions with him were filled with wonder and eagerness but also naïveté. See also Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 14–16.
12. Thomas Hoving, *King of the Confessors: A New Appraisal* (Christchurch, Le Vergne: Cybereditions, 2001), 266. However, Hoving, in correspondence with John Beckwith around the latter's exhibition of 1974 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, says that 'Topić found the cross around 1947–48'. See Thomas Hoving to John Beckwith, 22 April 1974, Thomas Hoving records (bulk 1967–1977), series IV, Correspondence, Metropolitan Museum

- of Art Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. For Beckwith's exhibition, see John Beckwith, ed., *Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England, 700–1200* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts Council, 1974). There is another narrative in Thomas Hoving, *The Chase, The Capture: Collecting at the Metropolitan* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 70–96. The prologue of Hoving's *King of the Confessors* sets the stage for his approach to the Cross by quoting Michel de Montaigne: 'The excitement of the chase is properly our quarry'. See Hoving, *King of the Confessors* [1981], 18.
13. See Hoving, *King of the Confessors* [1981], 207–9 (regarding Schnitzler), 210–13 (regarding Meyer). See also Parker and Little, 1994, 15 and n3.
  14. See Hoving, *King of the Confessors* [1981], 212 (quoting Topić).
  15. The following account is at variance with the chronology of Hoving's colourful account. I was introduced to Mersmann by Florentine Mütterich (1915–2015), whom I had known since the early 1970s. Mütterich had known Mersmann in school in Berlin, where Mütterich received her PhD. Mersmann received hers from the University of Vienna. See Craig Hugh Smyth, *The Central Art Collecting Point in Munich*, Veröffentlichungen des Zentralinstituts für Kunstgeschichte in München 63 (Passau: Dietmar Klinger, 2022), 42, fig. 20 (photograph). The photograph shows Mersmann (later a professor at the University of Salzburg) with Wolfgang Lotz (later professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and then director of the Biblioteca Hertziana, Rome) and Theodor Müller (curator and then director at the Bayerische Nationalmuseum, Munich), among others, at the Central Collecting Point in March 1946. Rorimer was central to establishing the Central Collecting Point in Munich in 1945. See James J. Rorimer, Louis Rorimer, and Anne Rorimer, *Monuments Man: The Mission to Save Vermeers, Rembrandts, Da Vincis, and More from the Nazis' Grasp*, new ed. (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2022), 294–95. Craig Smyth (1915–2006) was in charge from June 1945 to March 1946.
  16. Wiltrud Mersmann to Charles T. Little, 17 September 1987 (author's copy). Mersmann's son, Nikolaus Topić-Matutin, confirmed this statement to me in 2010 and noted that his recollection of the Cross goes back to around 1955.
  17. Elizabeth Parker believed that Topić wanted to keep protecting the Cistercians from whom he got the Cross and maintained this source with silence. This approach is not unlike that of the Monuments Men, who never talked about what they did during those years.
  18. See Marta Pellérdi, 'Margaret of France: Conciliator Queen of England and Hungary', in *Norman to Early Plantagenet Consorts: Power, Influence, and Dynasty*, ed. Aidan Norrie et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 139–57.
  19. See Konstantin Horváth, *Zirc Története* [History of Zirc], Zirci Könyvek 1 (Veszprém: Egyházmegyei Ny., 1930).
  20. In a similar way, the marriage of Matilda of England to Henry the Lion of Saxony in 1168 created other artistic interchanges and potential scenarios. On this, see Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
  21. In general, see Gareth Williams, *The Viking Ship* (London: British Museum Press, 2014).
  22. See T. A. Heslop's essay in this volume.
  23. Given newer DNA and C-14 analytical methods of investigation, an updated initiative would be desirable. See Robyn Barrow's essay in this volume; and Robyn Barrow, 'Gunhild's Cross and

the North Atlantic Trade Sphere', *The Medieval Globe* 7, no. 1 (2021): 53–75.

24. Albrecht Dürer, untitled drawing of the head of a walrus, 1521, SL.5261.167, British Museum, London. In translation, Dürer's note says: 'the animal represented here of which I portrayed the head was caught in the Netherlands sea'.
25. For example, see James Shapiro, *1606: William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 40–42.
26. See especially Elizabeth C. Parker, 'Editing the "Cloisters Cross"', *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006): 147–60, for an assessment of the Cross' literature prior to 2007. See also, among others, Denis Blomfield-Smith, *The Walrus Said: A Long Silence Is Broken* (Lewes: Book Guild, 2004); and Stephen Gardner's unpublished essay for a Princeton University seminar on iconography for Professor Rosalie Green, fall 1971, presented as a Frick symposium talk (28 April 1973) informally titled 'Resurrection Plaque of the Cloister's Cross'. On the latter, see Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
27. Was Master Hugo similar to the artist Nivardus, active around 1000, who came from Milan and was working at Abbey de Fleury (St-Benoit-sur-Loire)? Or was he like Engelram, whose Germanic name is a surprise for an artist active in Castile-León and at San Millán de la Cogolla (La Rioja)? Or was he like Tuotilo, the celebrated artist at Sankt Gallen around 900, who worked in multiple media—painting, gold, and ivory—and, although of monastic fame, was celebrated enough to travel for commissions in Metz and Mainz?
28. Elizabeth C. Parker, 'Master Hugo as Sculptor: A Source for the Style of the Bury Bible', *Gesta* 20, no. 1 (1981): 100 and n18.
29. Parker, 'Master Hugo as Sculptor: A Source for the Style of the Bury Bible'. For another view, see Blomfield-Smith, *The Walrus Said*.
30. See, among others, Parker, 'Editing the "Cloisters Cross"'; Rainer Kahsnitz, *Goldschmidt Addenda: Nachträge zu den Bänden I–IV des Elfenbeincorpus von Adolph Goldschmidt, Berlin 1914–1926*, Sonderucke aus der Zeitschrift des Deutschen Verein für Kunstwissenschaft 68, 72/73 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2022), no. 155, 52–61; Rodney Thompson, 'The Bury Bible: Further Thoughts', in *Tributes to Nigel Morgan: Contexts of Medieval Art; Images, Objects and Ideas*, ed. Julian M. Luxford and M. A. Michael (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), 175–81; and George Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Lead Sculpture: Lead Fonts of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 7, 28–29.
31. *Pembroke College Gospels*, MS 12, fol. 5v, Pembroke College, Cambridge; and *Hunterian Psalter*, MS Hunter 229, fol. 14, University Library, Glasgow. See also Parker and Little, *The Cloisters Cross*, figs. 65 and 66.
32. See *The Book of Psalms, Psalter of the Virgin Mary, and Little Office of the Virgin Mary*, MS Arundel 157, fol. 10v, British Library, London. See also, for example, Sabrina Longland, 'The "Bury St. Edmunds Cross": Its Exceptional Place in English Twelfth-Century Art', *The Connoisseur* 172 (1969): fig. 12.
33. See Chris Fern, Tania Dickinson, and Leslie Webster, eds., *The Staffordshire Hoard: An Anglo-Saxon Treasure* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 2019), 103. See also Wiltrud Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz der Sammlung Topić-Mimara', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 25 (1963): fig. 84 (a lost ivory reliquary with Apostles, possibly having painted inscriptions) and figs. 85–86 (the ninth-century Angel cross).
34. On Bury St Edmunds, see Sabrina Longland, 'A Literary Aspect of the Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal*, 2, 1969, 46–74. See also Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz', 8n10.
35. See Parker, 'Editing the "Cloisters Cross"'; and the Met's bibliography under 63.12 on the museum's website.
36. *Stammheim Missal*, MS 64, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. See the facsimile edition of Elizabeth C. Teviotdale et al., *Das Stammheimer Missale/ The Stammheim Missal* (Lucerne: Quaternio Verlag, 2020).
37. This is already noted in Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz', fig. 84; and Neil Stratford, 'The Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 156, no. 1336 (2014): 464. See also John Munns, 'Relocating the Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 155, no. 1323 (2013): 381–83.
38. *Dialogus de laudibus scantae crucis*, clm 14159, fol. 3, Staatsbibliothek, Munich. See Ursula Graepler-Diehl, 'Eine Zeichnung des 11. Jahrhunderts im Sangalleensis 342', in *Studien zur Buchmalerei und Goldschmiedekunst des Mittelalters: Festschrift für Karl Hermann Usener zum 60. Geburtstag am 19. August 1965*, ed. Karl Hermann Usener and Frieda Dettweiler (Marburg: Verlag des kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars der Universität, 1967), 175, fig. 8.
39. See Blindheim's initial observations in Martin Blindheim, 'En romansk Kristus-figur av Hvalrosstann', in *Kunstindustrimuseet i Oslo Arbok*, 1969 (Oslo: Kunstindustrimuseet, 1968–69), 22–32; and Martin Blindheim, 'Scandinavian Art and Its Relations with European Art around 1200', in *The Year 1200: A Symposium*, ed. Konrad Hoffmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 429–68, esp. 434. See also Tage Christiansen, 'Ivories: Authenticity and Relationships', *Acta Archaeologica* 46 (1975): 119–33. Christiansen also states that if the Oslo Corpus goes with the Cross, then both 'might once have been Danish property'; see Christiansen, 'Ivories', 125. Christiansen indicated that the so-called Caiaphas plaque, whose subject was initially identified by Kurt Weitzmann, represented 'Christ before Pilate'; see Christiansen, 'Ivories', 125.
40. See T. A. Heslop's essay in this volume.
41. For example, Willibald Sauerländer, "'The Year 1200," a Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 12–May 10, 1970', *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 4 (1971): 512; Christiansen, 'Ivories'; and T. A. Heslop's essay in this volume.

# The British Museum and the Cloisters Cross

Neil Stratford

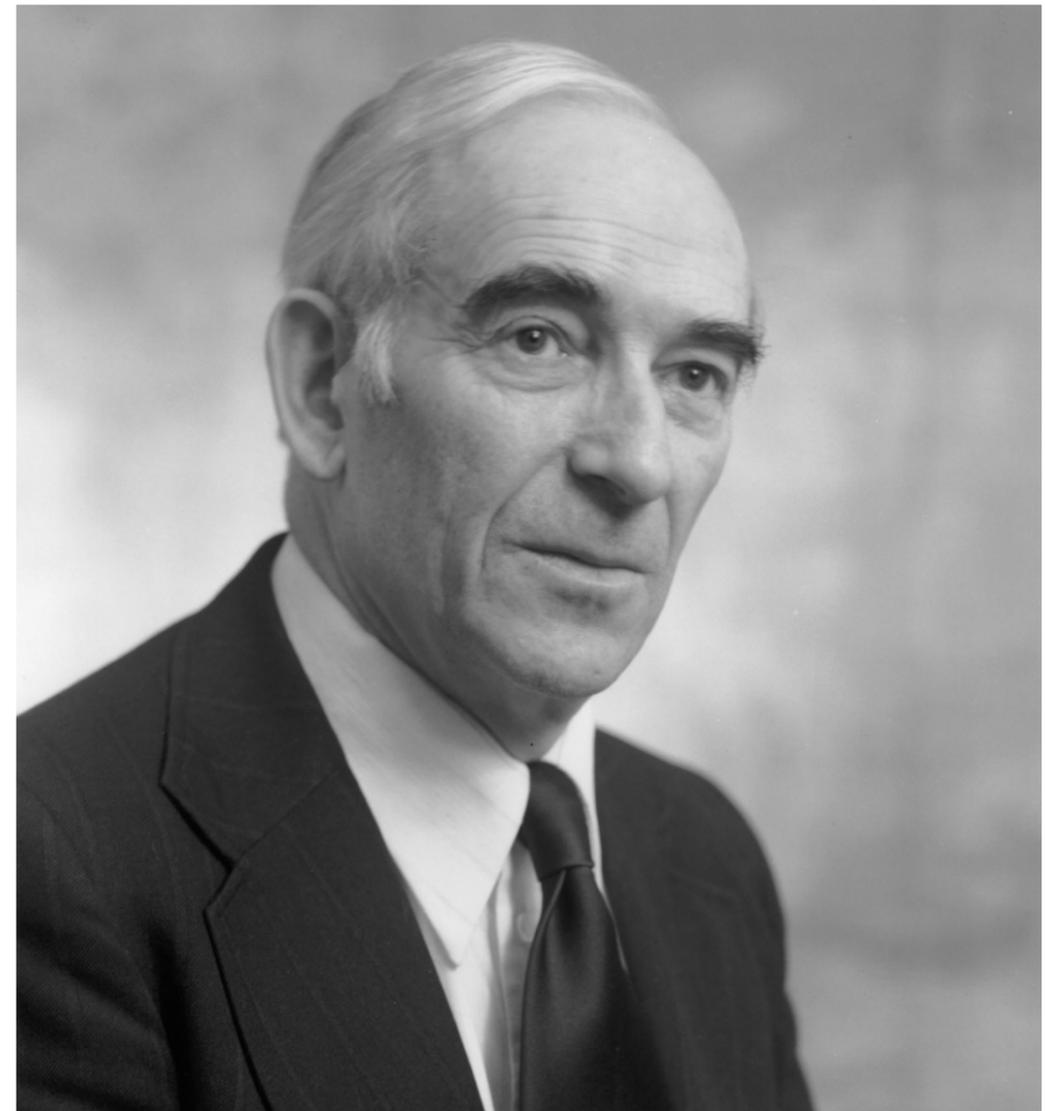


Figure 3.1  
Rupert Leo Scott  
Bruce-Mitford, 12  
November 1976,  
photograph,  
Bassano Ltd,  
half-plate  
film negative.  
London, National  
Portrait Gallery,  
NPG x171707.  
Photograph ©  
National Portrait  
Gallery

In May 1961 the keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, Rupert Bruce-Mitford, was in his mid-forties and had been keeper for seven years (Fig. 3.1).<sup>1</sup> He was a passionate archaeological researcher, chiefly renowned for his work on the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial. He was a man of enormous tenacity and charm; I knew him well and we became friends. One day he drove me like a dervish in a small, turquoise-blue car to Sutton Hoo, where we visited the mounds and had tea with Mrs Pretty, the sister-in-law of the deceased donor, also Mrs Pretty, who had been told to give the finds to the nation in a séance by her dead husband. We overlapped by two years, after I was appointed in 1975 to succeed him, and he was a role model of correct behaviour, never interfering—he had been made a research keeper directing a team charged with the publication of Sutton Hoo. He died prematurely in 1980. He is one of the principal actors in the story I am going to tell.

The other actor is Ante Topić Mimara (hereafter Topić, as he was generally known) (Fig. 3.2). Croatian by birth, his true name is in doubt as is his date of birth. By 1961 he was probably over sixty years of age. His career

Figure 3.2  
Ante Topić  
Mimara with dog,  
photograph in the  
public domain



can scarcely be reconstructed, as so many different claims and lies and half-truths have been thrown into the pot, not all by himself. For instance, the claim that he was a Yugoslav spy seems fragile, or that in Berlin during the war he was a close friend of Hermann Goering.<sup>2</sup> But that he was in Munich in the American zone in 1948, at the Central Collecting Point for the return of works of art stolen by the Nazis, is indisputable. He was supposedly, and perhaps genuinely, representing the Yugoslav government. He oversaw the shipment of a very large number of paintings and objets d'art to Yugoslavia, many of which have never resurfaced and anyway had not come from Yugoslavia. He had charm and he was plausible. He was clearly a man beyond the comprehension of a Bruce-Mitford, and of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I suspect.

Topić paid a preliminary visit to the British Museum in December 1960, when he showed closely guarded photographs of an ivory cross (now the Cloisters Cross) to Peter Lasko, who was an assistant keeper there and who from the beginning advised Bruce-Mitford on the Cross. On May 18, 1961, Topić visited Bruce-Mitford at the British Museum. He again showed photographs of the Cross; the object itself he kept deposited in a bank vault in Zurich. He offered to sell the Cross to the museum's trustees for £200,000, a vast sum at the time. When Sir Frank Francis, the director and principal librarian of the museum, replied to Bruce-Mitford's memorandum about the visit, he pointed out that a special grant from Parliament would be necessary to purchase the Cross, and that to make such a request, 'full details of the pedigree' of the Cross must be given as well as 'convincing evidence of its importance as an English work of art'. Thus, from the start, the question of the Cross' provenance, which was to remain an insurmountable obstacle to its purchase, was raised and would never go away.

Curiously enough, the 'Englishness' of the Cross (if I can call it that) was never seriously put in doubt during the negotiations, either in England or in America. We learn from these early exchanges in the museum that the Cross 'had been inspected in Zurich by Mr Pope-Hennessy of the Victoria

and Albert Museum some time ago'. It is also stated that the Cleveland Museum of Art 'had offered \$500,000' for the Cross, though this sounds like a very vague rumour.<sup>3</sup> Cleveland, through its medievalist William Milliken, had bought the Guelph Treasure in 1930, and Milliken was still very active even after his retirement from the directorship of the museum in 1958. I think he would have pursued the Cross if it had been offered. The other factor in Francis's memorandum is the necessity for the Cross itself to be inspected. No photographs were left at the museum at this stage. Why? Because Topić's wife, the much younger Wiltrud Mersmann, an art historian from Bavaria who had been with Topić at the Munich Central Collecting Point, was writing a book on the Cross; the images were under her thumb until the book was published. The book, never finished, was due out at the end of 1961. She came to London in July of that year and met everybody at the museum. There is a letter of thanks from Lasko to Topić's wife in which Lasko suggests that the Cross is not of the Anglo-Saxon date which she is proposing but rather is post-Conquest. Lasko was to become a central figure in the pursuit of the Cross. In Figure 3.3 he can be seen at a border post near Maastricht, seated in front of the car. With him on the left are George Zarnecki and C. R. (Reg) Dodwell. I am inclined to think that the photograph was taken at the Dutch-German border post when they were on their way to the great Charlemagne exhibition of 1965 in Aachen. Zarnecki was among the key authorities who supported Bruce-Mitford's campaign for the Cross.

In January 1962, Bruce-Mitford and Lasko made a second trip to Zurich and the bank vault; they had made a preliminary visit in June 1961. The delay is understandable. I will not describe the protocols which had to be surmounted for a servant of the Trustees of the British Museum to undertake such a journey, spending public money, for heavens' sake. In July 1962 when Bruce-Mitford finally made a submission to the trustees for the purchase of the Cross, he says: 'The cross is said by the owner to have come from a Balkan monastery'. He adds: 'The cross is regarded by all experts who have so far seen it, including Professor Francis Wormald and Dr George Zarnecki, as certainly English, and the most likely date would be from the late 11th century to about 1120'. The initiative to buy the Cross was received by the trustees with enthusiasm. Notwithstanding any reservations that may have been expressed at their meeting, general support for its purchase was apparently unanimous, and by the autumn Bruce-Mitford had begun to try to raise the money from H.M. Treasury. Without following all the details of the bid, it is enough to say that he succeeded, with the written help of many others; but the promise of the money was always on certain conditions having to do with the legal title to ownership of the Cross and its provenance. Who was the person who had sold Topić the Cross?

Bentley Bridgewater, the museum's secretary and a man of considerable influence, intervened and negotiated with the Treasury, but always the same conditions of the title and provenance of the Cross were specified. And so things dragged on, with Topić adamant. It may be asked why Topić was so patient in all this, given that the Metropolitan Museum of Art was clearly interested too. I think it was due to his wife's pressure. She believed passionately, as she worked on what was to become her article in the *Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch*, that the Cross was a great English work of art and that its proper place was in the British Museum.<sup>4</sup> This was a view

Figure 3.3  
Peter Lasko  
(centre) with  
George Zarnecki  
and Reg Dodwell  
(to the left), 1965.  
Photograph in  
the Zarnecki  
Archive  
FAHZ834; image  
courtesy of the  
Photographic  
Collections,  
Courtauld  
Institute of  
Art, London,  
supplied under a  
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tenaciously held throughout by both Mersmann and Topić. It was the source of their ultimate disillusion with the museum and their long-held reluctance to sell the Cross elsewhere. As I have said, there was one overriding obstacle to the Cross' purchase: its total lack of provenance and title. It must be remembered that 1961 was only sixteen years after the end of the Second World War. In 1963, Topić actually said that he had had the Cross for fifteen years, a span of time that would get us to 1948 and the Munich Central Collecting Point. Among other things which he let drop at times were that he had bought it from an elderly dealer whom he knew well and that it was from 'Eastern Europe'. It is clear from a remark of the great art historian who worked under Adolph Goldschmidt, Hermann Schnitzler of Cologne, that he had been shown one of the five pieces which make up the Cross, a remark partially confirmed by a letter from the art historian Florentine Mütterich in the British Museum Archives.<sup>5</sup> She was approached by Bruce-Mitford because Derek Turner in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum had heard that she knew of the Cross. She replied that she only knew of its existence secondhand, from Schnitzler who had seen one part of it.

Topić tells us that the Cross was covered in soot and grime when he first acquired it, and that he spent a lot of money having it cleaned, restored, and put together. As mentioned, in 1948 he was at the Munich Central Collecting Point, where objects of Nazi provenance were the daily bread for redistribution.

Lasko was always very bitter about the Treasury's refusal to buy the Cross without its provenance and legal assurances of its ownership. In a memorandum from Bruce-Mitford to Bridgewater, after the Metropolitan Museum of Art had bought the Cross, Bruce-Mitford casts aspersions on the

Met and its director, James Rorimer, who had himself been at the checkpoint in Munich as an American member of the Allied Forces' Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives unit at the end of the war. He writes: 'I do not believe that the Met are worried over the legal or political aspects of the purchase'.<sup>6</sup> That was certainly true. It was also 'sour grapes'; what should we think?

We are now more than fifty years after the date of purchase of the Cross. Even so, I would not be totally surprised if the Cross does turn out to be a time bomb. Speaking personally, I have a lot of sympathy for Sir Ronald Harris at the Treasury and the Paymaster General at the time, John Boyd-Carpenter, when they finally withdrew their offer of the grant to purchase the Cross in early 1963. The British Museum Archives contain Bruce-Mitford's graphic account of the final meeting with Topić and the Americans in Zurich:

We found that Rorimer's brightest young man [this is Thomas Hoving—the first time he appears in the museum's files], had arrived in Zurich just before us with an offer to purchase not only the cross but four other pieces in the collection for \$900,000. The money had been transferred to a Zurich bank and was there ready for instant collection. Only his word to me stood between Mr Topić Mimara and the collection of the cash. The atmosphere was electric. After we all had met at dinner and walked back to the hotel where we and Topić were staying, the American asked Topić to go on for a little shot in his hotel. We stayed up, drinking coffee, till he came back. He said that Hoving had told him that next year he had said that he was to be the head of the Cloisters and could then have a purchase fund of \$600,000 at his disposal and would undertake to purchase further items from Topić in the following year.

So that was that. So many people were involved in this two-and-a-half-year saga, thanks largely to Bruce-Mitford's absolute refusal to give up. The committee formed by Bruce-Mitford comprised the great and good supporting his efforts: Thomas Boase and Zarnecki but also Otto Pächt, Francis Wormald, Julian Brown, Turner, and Lasko, of course.<sup>7</sup> Many letters of support were received, including, for instance, from Dame Joan Evans, at that time president of the Society of Antiquaries. Here, too, is an extract of a letter from Sir Kenneth Clark: 'It is indeed a most marvellous object and the kind of thing I like best in the world'. And Dom David Knowles, the great historian of Christian monasticism, based at Peterhouse, Cambridge, wrote: 'The cross is a most magnificent and breath-taking work and it is a matter for congratulation that you and others should have decided to make every effort to secure it for the nation. To my mind, the art of the early twelfth century is absolutely—not only on account of its historical or antiquarian value—one of the greatest aesthetic achievements of north-western Europe. Personally, it moves me more than the mature Gothic art of the thirteenth century'.

As to the provenance of the Cross, perhaps we will never know. Topić absolutely refused to name it or the vendor from whom he claimed to have bought the Cross. He died in 1987 after the opening of the museum housing his collection in Zagreb. I was visited by the curator of that museum and shown photographs of many of the pieces to be exhibited. It was embarrassing: a poor assemblage. But earlier in 1982, with the encouragement of my friend Hanns Swarzenski, who knew him, I wrote Topić a letter, very official, in one last attempt to persuade him to divulge the

Figure 3.4  
Initial L to Saint  
Matthew's  
Gospel, with the  
Four Evangelists,  
frontispiece to  
a gospel book,  
probably made  
for the Abbey  
of Le Parc at  
Louvain, mid-  
12th century.  
Fitzwilliam  
Museum,  
Cambridge,  
MS 241, fol. 7v.  
Artwork in the  
public domain,  
courtesy of  
the Fitzwilliam  
Museum



provenance of the Cross, undertaking that the British Museum would keep his letter under seal until his death or until any date he specified. His reply was bitter but polite: 'I cannot help you at this time since the man who sold the object to me is younger [*sic*] than me and still alive, and I also gave him my word that I will never disclose the information concerning the person who sold the object to me'.

As to Hoving's part in all this, it is difficult to sort out truth from semi-truths and pure fiction. I have not seen the Met's files, but if Rorimer's preface to Hoving's first article on the Cross is accurate, the Met was first

aware of the existence of the Cross in 1956, and in 1959 Hoving and Carmen Gómez-Moreno saw the Cross in Zurich. However, Hoving's name does not appear in the British Museum Archives until 1963. Indeed, if Hoving was already involved in 1959, he was not effective. For, nearly two years later, Topić was offering the Cross to the British Museum. Yes, in 1963 he was there to clinch the deal (he called it 'my cross'), but he was only able to do so because the Treasury refused to acquire a highly suspicious object. Credit to Hoving for the purchase must therefore be relative. He was, of course, responsible for the subsequent noise about Bury St Edmunds and Master Hugo, Abbot Samson, and the anti-Jewish theory. But to quote Marlowe: 'But that was in another country and besides the wench is dead'.<sup>8</sup>

If I am allowed a postscript, I published in July 2014 a letter in *The Burlington Magazine*, which, like all such letters, seems to have attracted little or no notice.<sup>9</sup> My letter was accompanied by the single figured initial in the gospel book from the Abbey of Le Parc at Louvain, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge (Fig. 3.4). I hope that the image speaks for itself. It is 'Channel School', and I also referred in my letter to the admirable article of 1985 by Ursula Nilgen, who held a similar opinion.<sup>10</sup> Her article seems to get lost from many of the bibliographies on the Cross.

1. This essay appears here, with minor revisions, as it was delivered to the conference Revisiting the Cloisters Cross: A One-Day Colloquium, held at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London on 12 May 2023. The notes were added by the editors of this volume. All the correspondence cited in this essay is found in the British Museum Archives under the misleading rubric 'Bury St Edmunds Ivory Altar Cross' (Offered by Ante Topic Mimara), in three box files labelled Correspondence 1960–Jan. 1963; Correspondence Feb. 1963–; and 45/51/114 (a Secretariat file), BEP, Potential Purchases, British Museum Archives, London.
2. For some background on this, see Konstantin Akinsha, 'News Reports: Ante Topic Mimara, "The Master Swindler of Yugoslavia"', News Reports, Lootedart.com, September 2001, <https://www.lootedart.com/MFEU4T15383>.
3. For more on this, see the introduction to this volume.
4. Wiltrud Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz der Sammlung Topić-Mimara', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 25 (1963): 7–108.
5. Also see Charles Little's essay in this volume where he discusses Mutherich's friendship with Mersmann.
6. For the Metropolitan Museum of Art's purchase of the Cross, see Charles Little's essay in this volume.
7. For these and other people mentioned, see the *Dramatis personae* in this volume.
8. Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, act 4, scene 1.
9. Neil Stratford, 'The Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 156, no. 1336 (2014): 464.
10. Ursula Nilgen, 'Das Große Walroßbeinkreuz in den "Cloisters"', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 48, no. 1 (1985): 39–64.

# Reflections on the Cloisters Cross in a Preaching Context

Sabrina Harcourt-Smith



Figure 4.1a  
The Cloisters,  
Fort Tryon Park,  
Washington  
Heights,  
New York.  
Photographs  
in the public  
domain



Figure 4.1b  
The Cloisters,  
Fort Tryon Park,  
Washington  
Heights,  
New York.  
Photographs  
in the public  
domain

On a Monday morning in early May 1964, I turned up for work at the Medieval Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Thomas Hoving, then associate curator, drove me uptown to the Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park (Fig. 4.1a–b). Without delay, he installed me at the top of the tower at a table with the Cloisters Cross in pieces before me and disappeared. Within minutes, a clap of thunder shook the tower, the heavens opened, and lightning rent the skies. A dramatically cataclysmic thunderstorm raged around us—a sound-and-effects team could not have bettered it. Tom, always a cheerful soul, put his head round the door, laughed and said, ‘Are you alright? This is *terra tremit* [the earth trembles] . . . come to visit us’.

Figure 4.2  
Front, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access



In June 1964, Hoving's article in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, hot off the press, threw open an array of mysteries and questions surrounding the Cross and offered many paths to go down.<sup>1</sup> This essay seeks to highlight a singular aspect of the Cross: its didactic role in a preaching context. Within this context, reflections on a possible milieu for its inspiration will be suggested. Certainly, the Cross can be seen and read as a sermon of scriptural typology, embellished by its figures. It could have been used for display and discussion, both for the laity and within monastic and scholarly circles. It may also have served as a sort of 'travelling sermon'.

A clue to the preaching aspect of the Cross lies with the two rhyming hexameter couplets that are so elegantly and prominently inscribed in majuscules down its front and sides (Figs. 4.2–4.4). On the front is the verse 'TERRA TREMIT MORS VICTA GEMIT SURGENTE SEPULTO. VITA CLUIT SYNAGOGA RUIT MOLIMINE STULT[O]' (The earth trembles, Death defeated groans with the buried one rising. Life has been called, Synagoga has collapsed with great foolish effort). On the sides is the verse 'CHAM RIDET DUM NUDA VIDET PUDIBUNDA PARENTIS. IUDEI RISERE DEI

Figure 4.3  
Right side  
showing the  
*Cham ridet*  
couplet, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

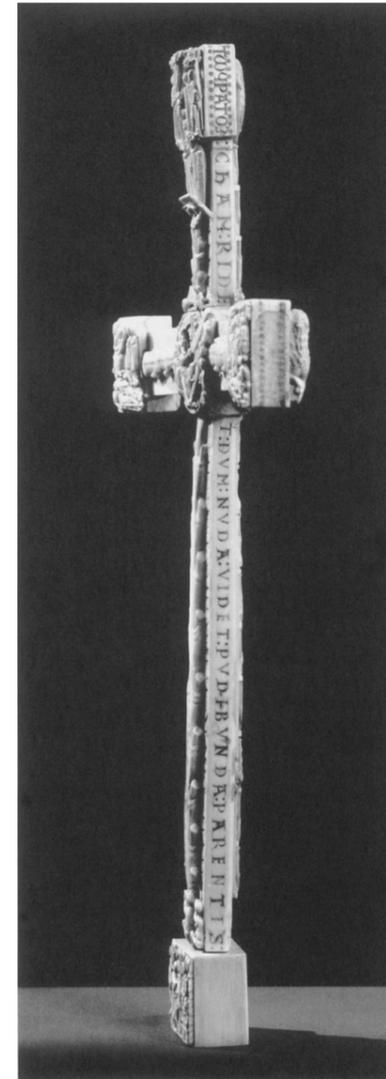
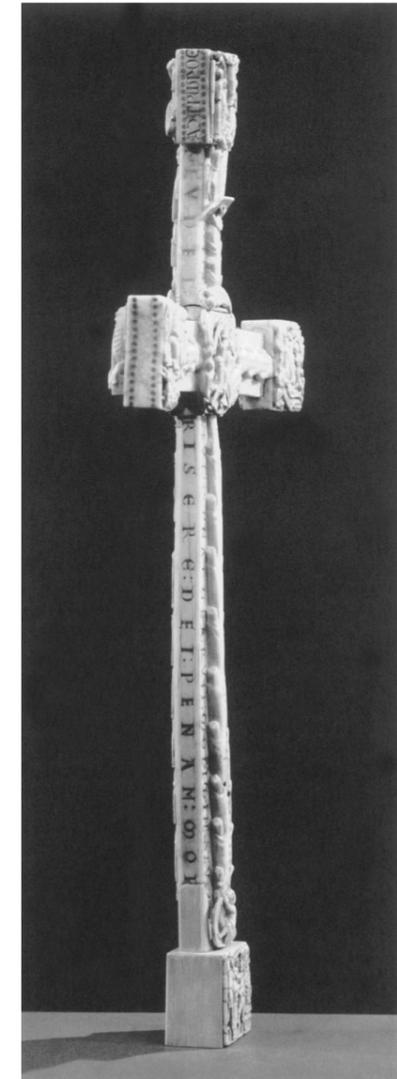


Figure 4.4  
Left side  
showing the  
second part  
of the *Cham ridet*  
couplet, Cloisters  
Cross, 1150–90,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access



PENAM MOR[I]ENTIS]' (Cham laughs when he sees the naked private parts of his parent. The Jews laughed at the pain of God dying). The late Christopher Hohler pointed out to me that the distinctive and unusual metre of these verses is the same as that used by the Cluniac monk, Bernard of Morlas or Morlais/Morlaix (Bernard of Cluny), in his long, satirical, and moralising poem *De Contemptu Mundi*, dedicated to Peter the Venerable and written probably about 1144 (Fig. 4.5).<sup>2</sup> Peter the Venerable also composed with this metre in his *Rhythmus in laude Salvatoris*. Both the Cross and Bernard's verses are written in rhyming couplets of dactylic hexameters with two-syllable end rhymes, used in Greek and Latin poetry.

In his prologue, Bernard says that he composed in verse because it would appeal to people more than prose and that rhymes are easier to remember and thus to learn from. He also refers to his achievement in having written such a lengthy poem (three thousand verses) in such a difficult metre. He adds that he could not have done it without divine inspiration.<sup>3</sup> André Cresson throws much light on this poetic monk. Cresson expounds on the heroic, difficult 'versification', disclosing at least fifteen extant manuscripts

Figure 4.5  
Bernard of  
Morlais, page  
from Liber 1,  
*De Contemptu  
Mundi*, 12th  
century. British  
Library, London,  
MS Cotton  
Cleopatra  
A.VIII.2.2.  
Courtesy of the  
British Library

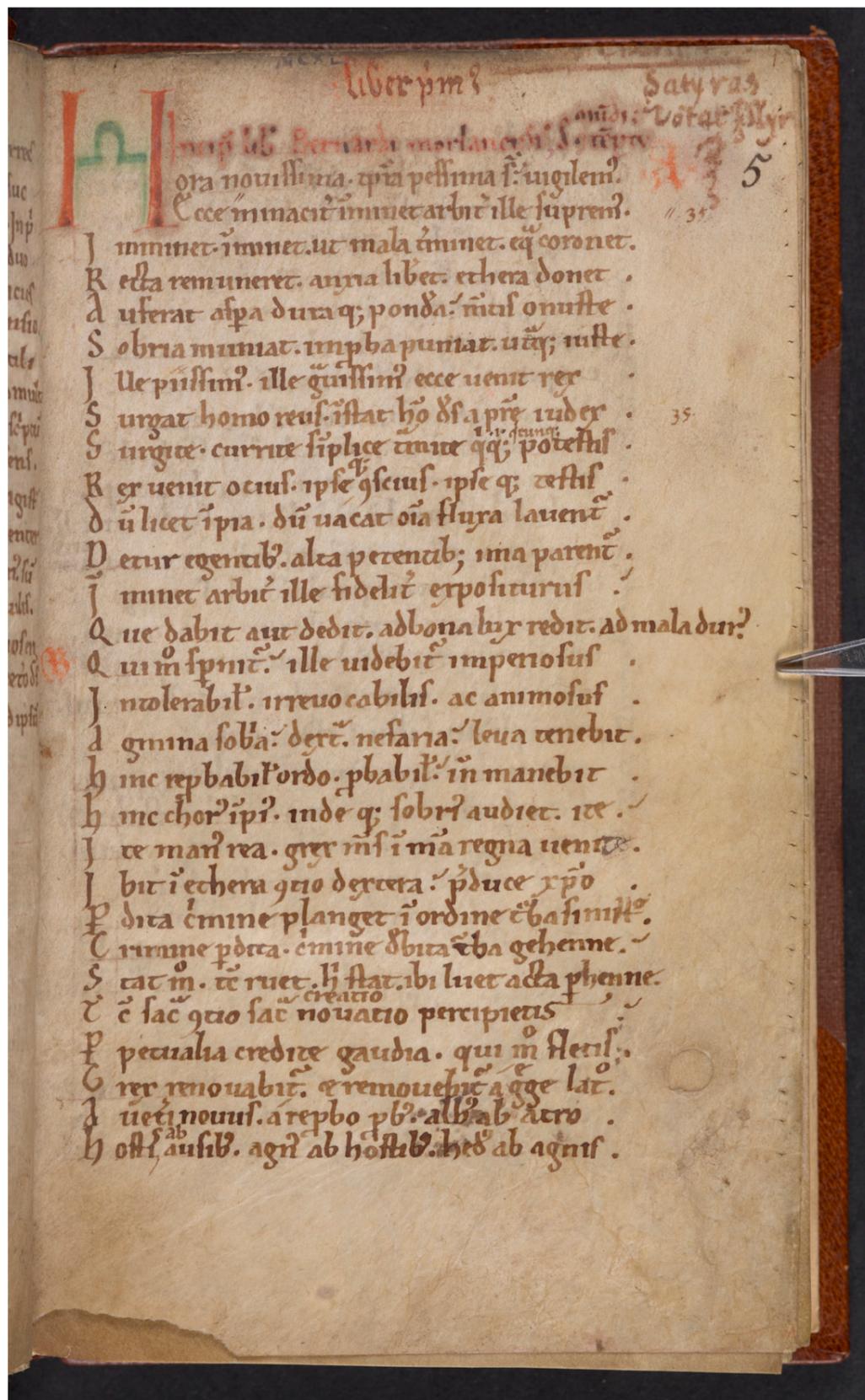
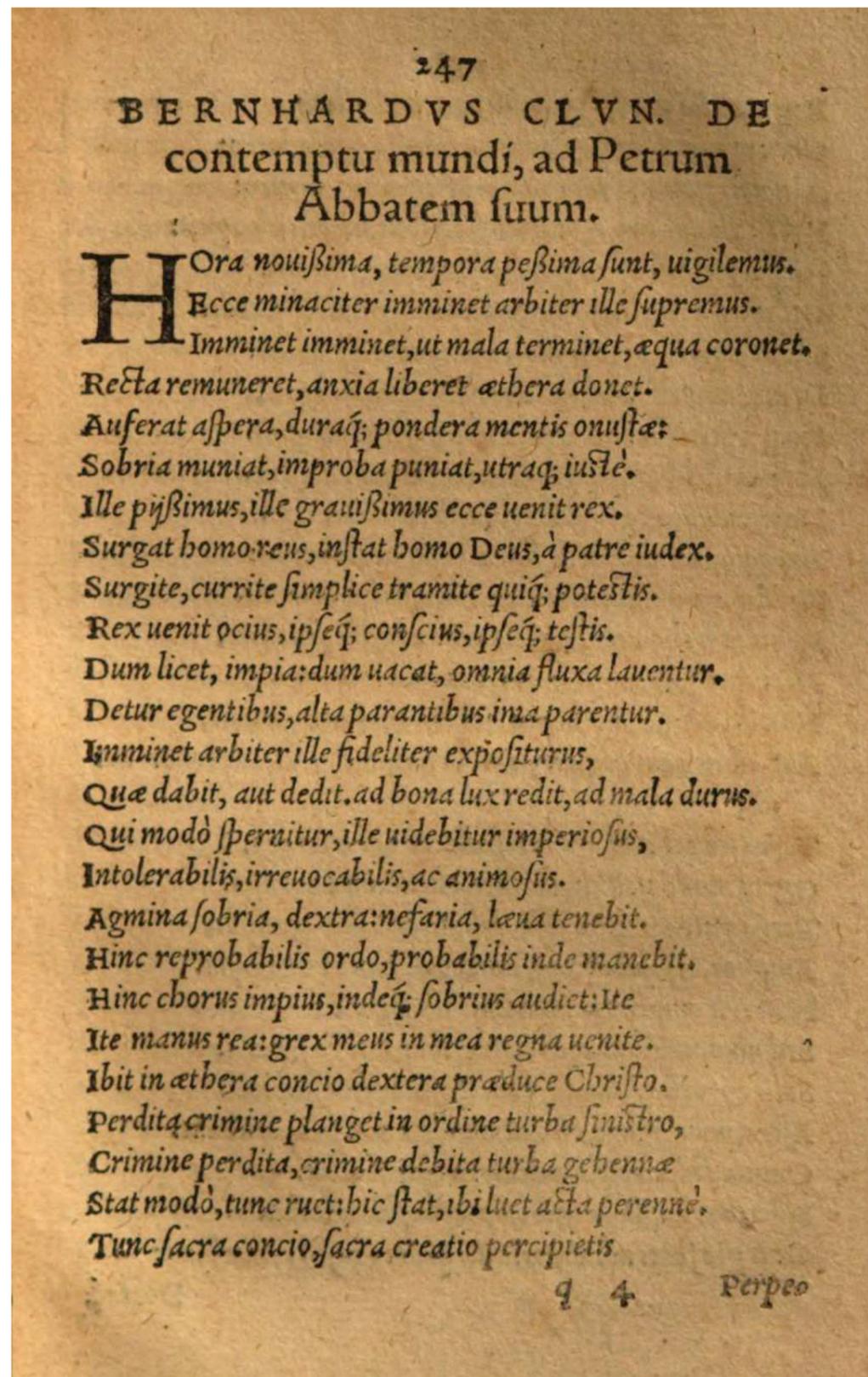


Figure 4.6  
Bernard of  
Morlais, page  
from *De  
Contemptu  
Mundi*, in  
Matthias Flacius,  
*Varia doctorum  
piorumque  
viorum, De  
corrupto  
Ecclesie statu,  
Poemata* (Basel:  
Ludwig Lucius,  
1556/57)



in present-day libraries which include those in Paris, Toulouse, Douai, and Saint-Omer.<sup>4</sup> It is clear from sources that Bernard's unusual rhyme scheme and metre attracted interest and approval from his own time through later centuries. Because *De Contemptu Mundi* censors the corruption of monasteries, popes, and clergy, it became popular with hard-line reformers in the sixteenth century, in particular Lutheran theologian Matthias Flacius (1520–1575), who edited it in 1556 (Fig. 4.6).<sup>5</sup> The opening stanzas, starting with 'Ora novissima, tempora pessima sunt vigilemus', were famously translated and adapted by Victorian hymn-writer the Reverend J. M. Neale as 'The world is very evil the times are getting late'.<sup>6</sup> Another Victorian who praised Bernard's lyrics was American hymn-writer Samuel W. Duffield.<sup>7</sup>

Hohler emphasised to me that this particular style of writing poetry with moralising content belonged very much in the mid-twelfth century. Other significant users of this poetic construction were Marbod of Rennes (1035–1123) and Hildebert of Lavardin (1066–1133). Marbod used it in his poem *Stella maris, quae sola paris*. Hildebert was bishop of Le Mans in 1096/97, then archbishop of Tours until his death in 1133. In his *Prologue*, Bernard of Cluny praised Hildebert for being one of the few remarkable users of this rhythm.<sup>8</sup>

The selection of the two couplets as prominent statements on the front and sides of the Cross will surely have been made for in-depth reasons and with scholarly planning. A search for the sources of such verses lies always with their use. The source of the *terra tremuit* verse presents possibilities and queries. Suger, abbot of Saint-Denis from 1122 until his death in 1151, had constructed a Great Cross, which he describes, and relates how it was made:

Therefore we searched around everywhere by ourselves and by our agents for an abundance of precious pearls and gems, preparing as precious a supply of gold and gems for so important an embellishment as we could find, and convoked the most experienced artists from divers parts. They would with diligent and patient labour glorify the venerable cross on its reverse side by the admirable beauty of these gems; and in its front—that is to say in the sight of the sacrificing priest—they would show the adorable image of Our Lord the Saviour, suffering, as it were, even now in remembrance of His Passion.<sup>9</sup>

This cross disappeared, but the pedestal was copied on a smaller scale on the pedestal of a cross originally in Saint-Bertin, now in the museum of Saint-Omer.<sup>10</sup> On the capital, two of the figures were Terra and Mare. Suger's distich reads, 'Terra tremuit, pelagus stupet, alta vacillat abyssus; Jure dolent domini territa morte sui' (The earth trembles, the sea is stunned, the deep abyss sways; Rightly terrified by the death of its Lord).<sup>11</sup> Erwin Panofsky pointed out that Suger's verse was patterned on Genesis 1:2: 'Terra autem erat inanis et vacua, et Tenebrae erat super faciem abyssi, et spiritus dei ferebatur super aquas' (And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters).<sup>12</sup> David, author of the Psalms, holds a scroll with the words *terra tremuit* (trembled) on the Klosterneuburg ambo of 1181, adjacent to a scene of the Harrowing of Hell (Psalm 75[76]:9).<sup>13</sup> This clearly links the earth shaking with liberating the souls of the dead from limbo and is appropriate to the images of Adam and Eve brought back to life at the foot of

the Cloisters Cross.<sup>14</sup>

The acerbic *Cham ridet* couplet was in use in a moralising context in mid-to-late twelfth-century biblical studies in the Paris schools. Moral or allegorical interpretations of the story in Genesis 9:20–27 of Noah's drunken behaviour and his son Cham's derision can be found in early church writers such as Isidore of Seville, Rabanus Maurus and, notably, in mid-twelfth-century biblical writings from the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris. Richard of Saint-Victor, who died in 1173, devoted a whole chapter to it in his *Allegoriae*. He writes, 'Noah signifies the prelates . . . who . . . when they are full of human weakness . . . Cham laughs at the shame [and signifies] the sinners (*reprobi*)'.<sup>15</sup>

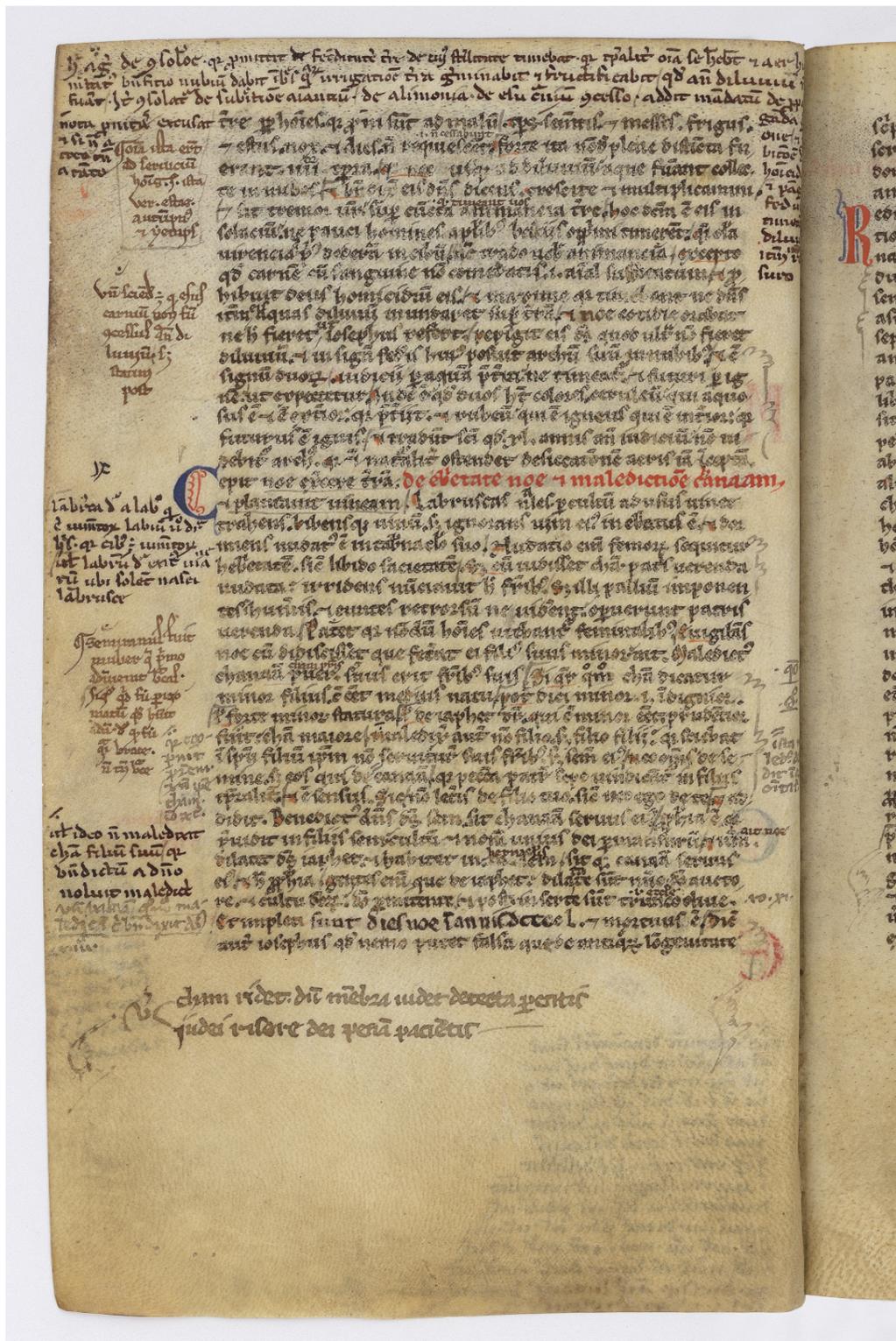
Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, sometimes called *The Histories*, was a sort of historical narrative of the Bible, and it rapidly became a prescribed text for theology students. A late twelfth-century copy has a marginal annotation to the text of Genesis with a gentler version of the *Cham ridet* couplet, using *detecta* (revealed) instead of *nuda* (naked flesh), *membra* (limb/genital member) instead of *pudibunda* (shame), and *patientis* (suffering) instead of *morientis* (dying) (Fig. 4.7).<sup>16</sup> Comestor was an active, indeed pivotal, biblical scholar in Paris, having arrived there possibly in 1164. He became chancellor of Notre Dame from sometime between 1164 and 1168, holding that position until 1178 or 1180. He probably completed the *Historia Scholastica* between 1169 and 1173. It became a standard textbook of scholastic theology and was copied and sometimes annotated. After he left his post at Notre Dame, Comestor is thought to have retired to the Abbey of Saint-Victor, where he was buried. As chancellor he made a significant contribution to the emerging University of Paris as it evolved from its beginnings as the Cathedral School of Notre Dame.

In northern France other variants of the *Cham ridet* couplet can be found. One is part of a large collection of verse compiled in the late thirteenth century in a volume from Reims Cathedral.<sup>17</sup> This is the only example, so far discovered, where the wording is exactly the same as that found on the Cross. The *Cham ridet* couplet is also found in a late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century collection of anonymous verses from the Abbey of Notre-Dame at Lyre, Normandy.<sup>18</sup> This example of the couplet has the milder words of *membra* and *detecta* but ends with the more severe *morientis*, as on the Cloisters Cross.

Past research by Elizabeth Parker discovered that a version of the verse can be found in copies of the *Glossa ordinaria*.<sup>19</sup> The *Glossa* can be described as a vast reference book, as it were, of the Bible, which emerged in the late 1130s or the 1140s, possibly originating from the circle of Anselm of Laon. The earliest known example of a complete twelfth-century *Glossa* is a six-volume set of the 1130s or 1140s that came from a library in Germany.<sup>20</sup>

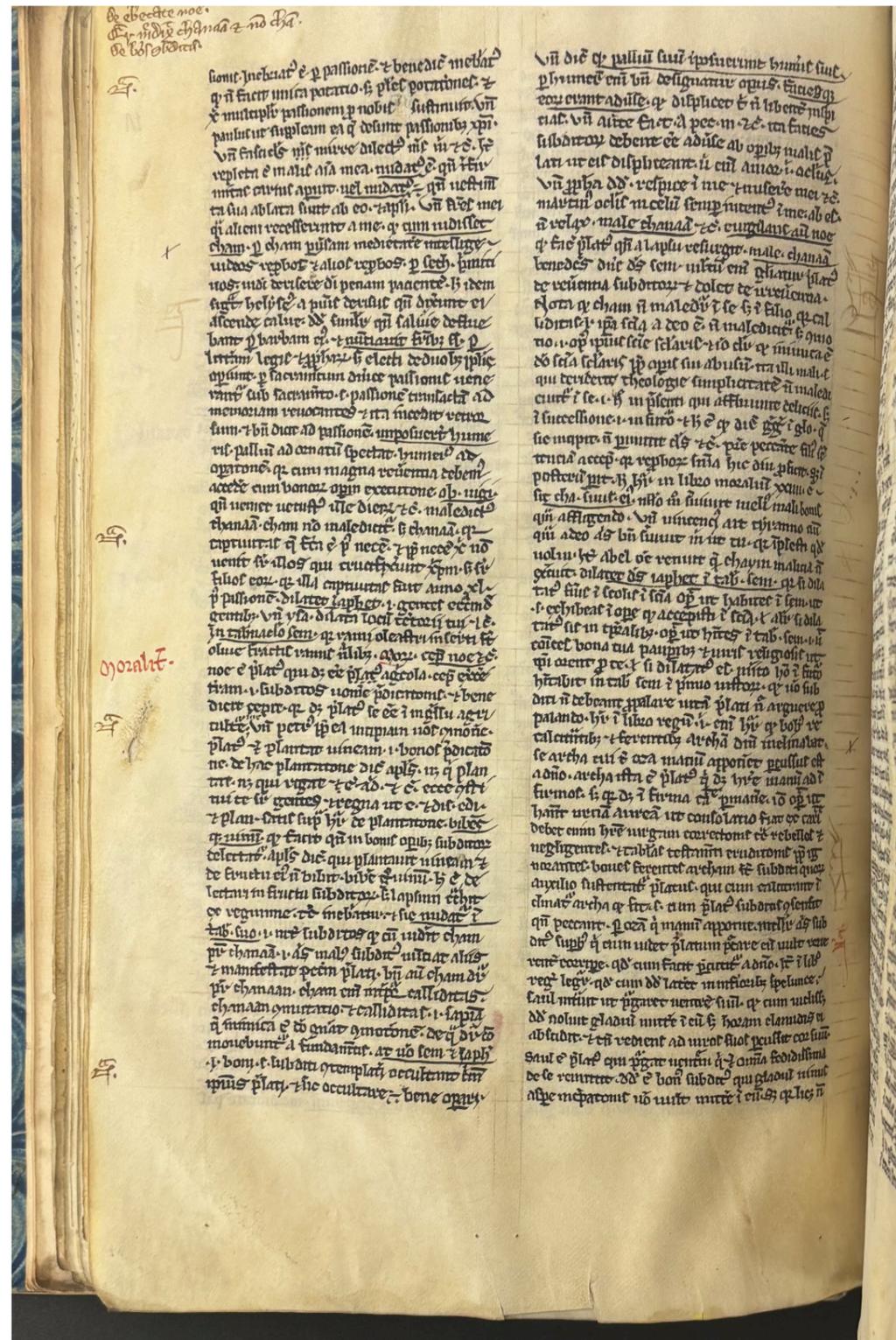
Another interesting user of the verse was Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury from 1207 and a well-known preacher and scholar as well as a diplomatic negotiator with King John over the Magna Carta. He studied in Paris from circa 1170, was made a Master of Theology and the Liberal Arts within the next few years, and was soon teaching at the newly blossoming University of Paris. Langton produced his *Commentary on the Histories* before 1176. It is no surprise to find that in his *Postillae super Genesim*, a commentary on Genesis, he uses a version of the *Cham ridet*

Figure 4.7 Peter Comestor, page with marginal notes from *Historia Scholastica* showing a discussion of Genesis 9:20-29, with the *Cham ridet* couplet in the bottom margin, copied late 12th century. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, lat. 1973, fol. 14v. Courtesy of the Vatican



De ebrietate noe... de maledictione canaan... Cham ridet die mēbra uider decetia pentis... iudei uolere dei pena pacietis

Figure 4.8 Stephen Langton, extract from the allegorical exposition of Genesis 9:20-27 in *Postillae super Genesim* showing the second line of the *Cham ridet* couplet, copied 13th century. British Library, London, Royal MS. 2. E. XII, fol. 25v. Courtesy of the British Library



De ebrietate noe... Cham ridet die mēbra uider decetia pentis... iudei uolere dei pena pacietis

verse in an allegorical exposition of the Noah and Cham story from Genesis 9. The moralising allegory is similar in content to Richard of Saint-Victor's *Allegoriae* mentioned above. One manuscript of the *Postillae* was copied in the early thirteenth century, probably in England, and is in the British Library, but other copies exist in European libraries (Fig. 4.8).<sup>21</sup> Langton wrote it in Paris, probably around or after 1180, by which time he had become a Master of Theology. Contemporary sources tell us that Langton was a popular and prolific preacher during his thirty or more years in Paris (ca. 1170 to shortly after 1200). In May 1207, Pope Innocent III wrote to King John attesting Langton's renown as a doctor in theology and the liberal arts.<sup>22</sup> The body of extant manuscripts of his sermons and exegetical works is enormous.

Modern research by scholars has unravelled the intricate influences between the works of Langton, Comestor, Peter Lombard, and Peter the Chanter—in other words, the top biblical scholars of the day in Paris.<sup>23</sup> Mention should be made here also of the works of the English writer Odo of Cheriton (ca. 1185–1247), who also knew and used a version of the couplet. His writings are notable for his satirical sermons, often with allegories, fables and *exempla*. He turns the whole Noah story into a moralising admonition about lapsed prelates, with the *Cham* couplet as a sort of colourful proverb (Fig. 4.9).<sup>24</sup> His habit of using the 'allegory' and the 'moral' stemmed straight from Langton, whose pupil he was in Paris before Langton left in 1206. Odo's use of the couplet in his popular Sunday Sermons represents a preaching aspect of the Cloisters Cross. Odo's works were too late for any connection with the Cross; however, their documented role as preaching guidance for clergy from around the second decade of the thirteenth century gives an idea of how such didactic writings were of value to clergy and, as Albert Friend phrased it, 'clearly designed to serve as models for preachers', with Odo's *Summa* 'intended as a simple guide or handbook for priests'.<sup>25</sup>

During the second half of the twelfth century, the scholastic influence of the Abbey of Saint-Victor waned. Beryl Smalley, in her seminal volume *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, writes how the three Paris 'Masters of the Sacred Page' made themselves responsible for continuing the Victorine tradition: Comestor, Peter the Chanter, and Langton.<sup>26</sup> These three masters of overlapping generations had 'a common interest in biblical studies and in practical moral questions'.<sup>27</sup> In their hands *lectio divina* changed into the academic lecture course. Smalley writes of 'the inquisitive energy which abounded at Paris in those years'.<sup>28</sup>

Langton was undoubtedly the most influential theology teacher of his time in Paris, even though the concept of 'theology' as a subject was only slowly emerging. The schools (*scola*) of the last quarter of the twelfth century were slowly being transformed from their association with institutions such as the cathedral of Notre Dame and the Abbey of Saint-Victor and from being cathedral-run into a university. Langton's classes would have been small, but nonetheless a vibrant and thriving milieu for biblical exchanges and discussions. His sermons and lectures are full of biblical quotations, allegories, and moralising *exempla*. A man of his intellect and stature is a key figure in the intriguing puzzle of tracing elusive texts. He would have been a channel through whom ideas, knowledge and unusual texts spread within and beyond his own sphere.

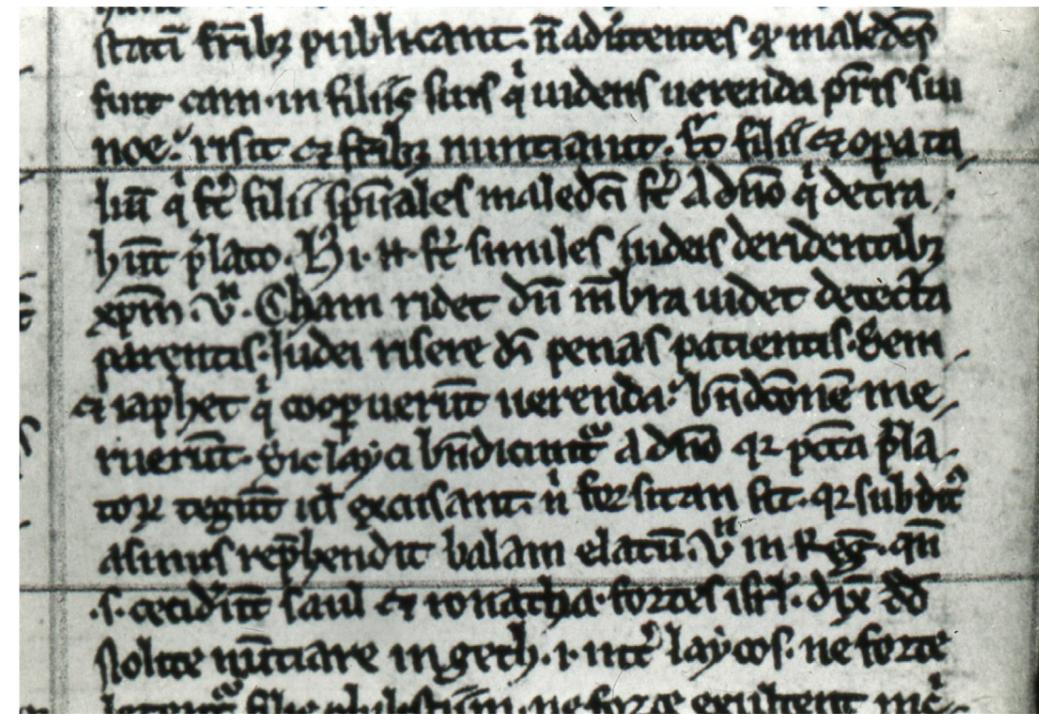


Figure 4.9  
Odo of Cheriton,  
detail from  
Sermon 12 of  
the passage  
containing the  
*Cham*  
*ridet* couplet  
in *Sermones*  
*Dominicales*,  
probably copied  
in Spain, 13th  
century. Real  
biblioteca del  
Monasterio de  
San Lorenzo  
de El Escorial,  
Madrid, Cod. lat.  
0. II. 7, fol. 36v.  
Courtesy of the  
Real biblioteca  
del Monasterio  
de San Lorenzo  
de El Escorial

Christopher de Hamel has studied the new types of books that were emerging in scholarly circles, especially Paris, from around 1180 through the next four decades. The gradual change was from monastic, church-based writings to books of information such as encyclopaedias, anthologies, collections of literary extracts including verse, and miscellanies.<sup>29</sup> The circle of Langton and his colleagues was undoubtedly the kind of forum where such new books would have been acquired for perusal and study. Verse collections were popular. In his *Verses in Sermons*, Siegfried Wenzel highlights the trend in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for setting doctrine into poetry.<sup>30</sup> The *Cham ridet* couplet appears in twelfth- and thirteenth-century anthologies, but in the Paris-inspired Comestor and Langton texts it is singled out for use in a preaching context.

Undoubtedly other examples of the *Cham ridet* couplet, complete or only one line, can be found in Genesis commentaries and in verse collections, from about 1160 through the thirteenth century. Its use in writings by Comestor and Langton is evidence enough that it was already in circulation by the 1170s. Details regarding the different variants of the inscription have been published elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

The harsh wording of *nuda*, *pudibunda* and *morientis* found on the Cross and in the manuscript in Reims Cathedral was subsequently altered to the gentler version. It is not impossible that Langton himself altered the wording in the early 1200s. *Deus moriens*, the concept of God actually dying, would certainly have been considered heretical. *Deus patiens*, the suffering God, was a more fitting choice and probably the original.

This essay suggests that whoever chose the moralising verses for the front and sides of the Cloisters Cross was likely to have been someone able to draw not only on the resources of their own (possibly monastic) library but also on the inspiration of the new books of the Paris schools in the

scholarly metropolis of Northern Europe.<sup>32</sup> There, no doubt, the *Cham ridet* couplet would have been found to be adjusted and reworded for use on the Cloisters Cross. The opening words of the *terra tremuit* verse could be found, written on a Great Cross at nearby Saint-Denis. Was this the stimulus for a new composition, following the structure of *Cham ridet*? Unless it can be found somewhere else, the possibility must be that it was devised specifically for the Cloisters Cross, with all that implies about the origin, function, patronage, and interpretation of that remarkable object.

1. Thomas P. Hoving and James J. Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 22, no. 10 (1964): 317–40.
2. Bernard of Morlais, Liber 1, *De Contemptu Mundi*, twelfth century, MS Cotton Cleopatra A.VIII.2.2, British Library, London; and Bernard le Clunisien, *Une vision du monde vers 1144: Texte latin, introduction, traduction et notes*, ed. André Cresson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009). I am grateful to Neil Stratford for this reference.
3. Bernard le Clunisien, *Une vision*, 73–74.
4. Bernard le Clunisien, *Une vision*, 73.
5. Bernard de Morlaix, *The Rhythm of Bernard de Morlaix, Monk of Cluny, on the Celestial Country*, 7th ed., ed. and trans. J. M. Neale (London: J. T. Hayes, 1866), 5. Successive reprints include editions in 1597, 1610, 1626, 1640, and 1820.
6. Bernard de Morlaix, *The Rhythm*, 13.
7. Bernard de Morlaix, *The Heavenly Land from the De Contemptu mundi of Bernard de Morlaix Monk of Cluny (XII. Century)*, trans. Samuel W. Duffield (New York: Randolph, 1867), vii–x, xv.
8. Bernard le Clunisien, *Une vision*, 73–74.
9. Sugerius Sancti Dionysii Abbas, *Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis*, chap. XXXII, *De crucifixo aureo*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 186 (Paris, 1854), 1231–40; and Suger, Abbot of St.-Denis, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, ed., trans., and annot. Erwin Panofsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), 56–59.
10. Suger, *Abbot Suger*, fig. 11.
11. Translation with the author by Chris Whittick. Panofsky notes that *abyssus* is the Latin equivalent of 'the deep' in the King James Bible; Suger, *Abbot Suger*, 177. See also Philippe Verdier, 'La grande croix de l'abbé Suger à Saint-Denis', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 13 (1970): 17; and Jacques Doublet, *Histoire de l'abbaye de S. Denys en France* (Paris: Nicolas Buon, 1628), 253.
12. Suger, *Abbot Suger*, 177.
13. Also see Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
14. Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 97.
15. Palémon Glorieux, *Répertoire des maîtres en théologie de Paris au XIIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Vrin, 1933), no. 104; author's translation.
16. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, late twelfth century, Vat. lat. 1973, fol. 14v, Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican, Vatican City.
17. Collection of vitae, sermons, and verses, late thirteenth century, MS. 1275, fol. 188v, Bibliothèque Municipale, Reims; and Sabrina Longland, 'A Literary Aspect of the Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 2 (1969), 63, fig. 10.
18. Collection of verses, largely sermons, late twelfth century, MS. A. 452, fol. 452v, Bibliothèque Municipale, Rouen; and Longland, 'A Literary Aspect', 61–63, fig. 9.
19. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*.
20. Christopher de Hamel, *Glossed Books of the Bible and the Origins of the Paris Booktrade*. (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1984).
21. Stephen Langton, *Postillae super Genesim*, thirteenth century, Royal MS. 2. E. XII, fol. 25v, British Library, London.
22. Innocent III, *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III Concerning England (1198–1216)*, ed. C. R. Cheney and W. H. Semple, Nelson's Medieval Texts (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 87; and Longland, 'A Literary Aspect', 72.
23. See, for instance, Mark J. Clark, 'Peter Lombard, Stephen Langton, and the School of Paris: The Making of the Twelfth-Century Scholastic Biblical Tradition', *Traditio* 72 (2017): 171–274; Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c. 1100–1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).
24. Odo of Cheriton, *Sermones Dominicales*, thirteenth century, Cod. lat. 0. II. 7, fol. 36v, Real biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Madrid.
25. Albert C. Friend, 'Master Odo of Cheriton', *Speculum* 23, no. 4 (1948): 641, 657.
26. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 196.
27. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 197.
28. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 196.
29. Christopher De Hamel, *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 371.
30. Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: 'Fasciculus morum' and Its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1978).
31. Longland, 'A Literary Aspect'.
32. See, for instance, Richard W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 199.

# The Cloisters Cross and the Walrus Tusk

Robyn Barrow



Figure 5.1  
Astri Tonoian,  
*For Our Sins*,  
2023, bronze,  
Kongen Marina,  
Oslo. Photograph  
by Eirik Anzjøn.

From October 2021 until August 2022, a large marine mammal far from her Arctic home went on an ill-fated, indeed, ultimately fatal, tour of European coastlines. This young, six-hundred-kilogramme walrus visited Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, and Northumbria, sunbathing, interacting with her growing number of human fans, and occasionally sinking boats.<sup>1</sup> Likely driven from her home in Svalbard by rapid Arctic melt, Freya the walrus drew international attention with her antics, her growing publicity leading to anxiety on the part of the Norwegian government about the danger she posed to public safety. On 13 August 2022, a team of four men was dispatched to kill Freya in the Oslo harbor.<sup>2</sup> It took multiple shots with special ammunition from a rifle to kill the walrus, her tough hide and incredible size offering significant protection. When the news of Freya's demise got out, it was met with outrage and grief from the international community who had tracked her progress through the waterways of northern Europe.

On 30 April 2023, a publicly funded sculpture was erected in Oslo commemorating Freya. The image in bronze shows the walrus curled on her side, flippers folded, her small tusks (a particular feature often used to identify her) just peeping from her lips. The artist Astri Tonoian entitled the work *For Our Sins* (Fig. 5.1).<sup>3</sup> The work and its title immortalize the walrus as a martyr, casting blame upon not only the Norwegian officials who ended her life but also the public who got too close to her in their zeal and, more broadly, all of humanity, who drove her from her home in the melting ice and who endanger all Arctic life through careless resource extraction.

This walrus body, transformed into an image to remember and to charge with the sins of humankind, recalls a medieval work of art of ongoing international interest: the Cloisters Cross (Fig. 5.2). Like the sculpture of Freya, the Cloisters Cross is an afterlife, a remembrance of both its material origins in the Arctic and its iconographic manifestation of the Christian cosmology. The tusks, synecdoches for a dead walrus body, become the cross and missing corpus of the martyred Christ. One violence echoes in

the other, a strong message of condemnation against sin and especially the medieval Jewish community, now carved into the ivory's surface. This essay will consider the mechanisms of extraction, transportation, and refinement of this walrus ivory and contextualise the Cloisters Cross within the wider exchange of Arctic ivory in the Middle Ages.

Walrus ivory, like elephant ivory, is dentine from the enlarged tooth of a large mammal. It is a lustrous and carvable material composed of a dense structure of mineralized collagen fibers. Walrus tusks tend to be somewhat straighter than elephant tusks, more consistent in diameter from root to tip and more irregularly ovoid in shape. Unlike elephant ivory, walrus ivory has two distinct dentine structures: the primary dentine, which is similar to elephant ivory in colour and composition, and an interior, secondary dentine, which has an irregular crystalline texture.<sup>4</sup> As explained by eleventh-century Iranian scholar Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī: 'A Khwarazmian happened to find a tooth which was very white on the side. He had hasps of daggers and knives made from it. The natural patterns described upon it were very thin, white, and pale. It resembled the down of a cucumber if peeled in such a manner that the seed grains are also cut off'.<sup>5</sup> This description vividly evokes the chunky, marbled secondary dentine of walrus ivory.

In the early Middle Ages, these so-called fish teeth were traded through the Volga River systems from the Far North into the Middle East, where they were usually used for knife handles.<sup>6</sup> The scope of long-distance trade of Greenlandic tusks was demonstrated in 2020 by James Barrett and others using DNA to extend their reach as far as Ukraine and the Baltic river routes which connected Scandinavia to Byzantium and even Asia, debunking earlier assumptions that the walrus ivory farther east all originated in the White Sea or Asia.<sup>7</sup>

In Scandinavia and Western Europe, walrus ivory was a prized material used in luxury carving, particularly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when disruption to long-distance trade routes between sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe limited access to elephant ivory.<sup>8</sup> Walrus tusks were a major incentive for settling Greenland, as earlier sources for walrus ivory in Iceland and the White Sea were already dwindling. In the first known written reference to walrus (in Old Norse, *hrosshalvr*, or horse-whale), the adventurer Ohthere [OH-theruh] told King Alfred about his voyages in the White Sea around 890 that '[h]is main reason for going there, apart from exploring the land, was for the walrus, because they have very fine ivory in their tusks . . . and their hide is very good for ship-ropes'.<sup>9</sup> Walrus hides, due to the network of thickly bundled collagen fibrils in the reticular layer of the skin's dermis, produced the strongest ropes for navigating treacherous waters and, for this reason, were highly valuable. *The King's Mirror*, a thirteenth-century Norwegian didactic manuscript, notes '[walrus] hide is thick and good to make ropes of; it can be cut into leather strips of such strength that sixty or more men may pull at one rope without breaking it'.<sup>10</sup> Already by the tenth century, overhunting had resulted in all but the total extinction of Iceland's walrus population, and genetic testing has established that by the twelfth century tusks entering Europe via Greenland entirely dominated the walrus ivory trade.<sup>11</sup> Because of the size, shape, and compositional constraints of walrus ivory, compared with elephant, most extant objects carved in the material are fairly small: luxury game pieces,



Figure 5.2  
Front, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here second  
half of the  
12th century,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

reliquaries of intimate size, or small units that were combined into larger objects like the Cloisters Cross.

In the 1994 publication *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning*, carbon-14 (C-14) dating on the Cross dated the ivory to the seventh century, five hundred years before it was carved.<sup>12</sup> Understandings of radiocarbon dating have advanced considerably since then. This erroneous dating is due to a skewed interpretation of the data caused by the marine reservoir effect. Because marine animals come in contact with carbon in the ocean that is

considerably older than carbon on land the C-14 dating must be recalibrated for this discrepancy; if it is not, it will date marine samples centuries too early. Research on recalibration for the marine reservoir effect is in active development. As recently as 2019, scientists attempting to date walrus ivory from the Foxe Basin region of Arctic Canada reaffirmed the significant variability between samples collected from different areas, meaning that C-14 dating of walrus samples still remains rather uncertain.<sup>13</sup> Walrus can dive to depths of up to five hundred metres, and populations in different regions show distinct diving habits in waters with differing compositions.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, none of the recent, groundbreaking genetic testing of medieval walrus DNA by Barrett's team has used the C-14 method.<sup>15</sup> Rather than carving ancient walrus-ivory tusks harvested long before either Iceland or Greenland were settled by the Norse, the artist of the Cloisters Cross was far more likely to have had access to twelfth-century Greenland walrus tusks.

Given the conclusions of Barrett's team, the Cloisters Cross almost certainly began its life in the waters of the North Atlantic as the enlarged upper canines of a large sea mammal in Disko Bay, the walrus-hunting ground on the western coast of Greenland. Spanning one hundred kilometres from east to west and one hundred and fifty kilometres north to south, Disko Bay is the largest open bay on Greenland's west coast. Given the team of four men with heavy-duty modern weaponry that it took to kill Freya in 2022, it is fascinating to consider what the experience of walrus hunting must have been like for medieval Europeans and early Inuit hunters whose livelihoods depended, in different ways, on the walrus populations.<sup>16</sup> In six-oared boats [*sexæringr*], hunters could set out from the Western Settlement, around modern day Nuuk, and row for about fifteen days, weather permitting, north to Disko Bay, which had already been a popular hunting ground among Arctic peoples for thousands of years.<sup>17</sup> This is due to its nutrient-rich waters, with high densities of zooplankton, mollusks, and small fish, which attract marine predators such as whales, seals, and walrus.<sup>18</sup> In the springtime, polar ice calves (breaks off to form icebergs) in the Ilulissat Icefjord and falls into the sea.<sup>19</sup> These massive icebergs stir up the rich sediment on the marine shelf of Greenland, filling the shallows with food for marine mammals, who spend their springs grazing on this wealth of small organisms. Walrus bulls, cows, and their young live in communities, and have historically hauled out on the ice floes in this area in great numbers.<sup>20</sup> With their immense size, walrus are unlikely to retreat from a human hunter's approach. Walrus are incredible animals, well-adapted to survival in the High Arctic. At up to fifteen hundred kilogrammes, they are enormous, well-armed with up to metre-long tusks and possessing very strong hides.<sup>21</sup> Hunting these powerful and intelligent animals was dangerous work. However, walrus are slow and far less manoeuvrable when out on the ice, which made springtime hunting trips to Disko Bay ideal. Hunters, whether armed with blades or projectiles, such as a crossbow, harpoon, or bow and arrow, had to be close enough to these formidable animals for their weapons to drive through their tough hides; the skin and blubber of a male walrus is around ten centimetres thick around its neck. In the early spring, although the Eastern Settlement, all located in the current municipality of Kujalleq, was still iced in from winter, the waters of the Western Settlement, warmed by the Gulf Stream, were open, allowing the Norse hunters to travel to Disko Bay to hunt large populations of walrus on

the ice floes there.<sup>22</sup>

The large, male walrus (or walrus) whose teeth became the Cloisters Cross was likely killed during the summer migration by Norse hunters, who took its skull and hide back with them on the long journey from the hunting ground to their settlements on the southern coast of Greenland. These Arctic exports, walrus tusks and hides, were the underpinning of life on Norse Greenland from its foundation in the tenth century until the end of all Norse settlement around 1415.<sup>23</sup>

Once they arrived in the Norse settlements, tusks like those used in the Cloisters Cross would have needed to be cured to avoid cracking, then transported to Europe via ships from Bergen. Due to their limited timber for shipbuilding, Norse Greenlanders were essentially marooned by the twelfth century.<sup>24</sup> In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, at the height of walrus-ivory demand and Greenland's communication with the wider Old Norse world, the Norse Greenlanders could generally expect a merchant ship to arrive in the Eastern Settlement in late summer each year.<sup>25</sup> These merchants would set off from Bergen sailing due west and arrive at the southern tip of Greenland, which fell on the same latitude (sixty degrees north) as their port, before sailing up the western coast of the island to the Eastern Settlement.<sup>26</sup> There, in exchange for the walrus ivory and skins, the merchants could supply the Norse Greenlanders with essentials, like iron, and luxuries, like timber, wine, grains, and glass.<sup>27</sup> These merchants would overwinter in the settlements, lodging with locals until they could safely sail away again. However, Greenlandic weather was, as it is today, highly variable, with unpredictable summers, often-low visibility, and restless seas. With such a narrow window of time for departure, merchants might end up prolonging their stay in Greenland for multiple years; alternatively, years might pass when no merchant ships arrived in the settlements to trade.<sup>28</sup> The Norse Greenlanders had to maintain a high level of self-sufficiency in order to withstand these unpredictable conditions.

Perhaps the Cloisters Cross tusks were traded in this way, or perhaps they were tithed, part of the annual tenth sent to the archbishop of Nidaros in Norway, the most northerly archbishopric in the world, still more than twenty-eight hundred kilometres from Gardar Cathedral in Greenland. This tithe of tusks and hides was given, when collection was possible, by the Greenlanders from the foundation of their own bishopric in 1123 until the community was neglected, forgotten, and finally dwindled into nonexistence by the early fifteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The walrus products would be shipped to the archbishop's storehouse in Bergen and from there they could either be sold into the European market, taken on to the archbishopric at Trondheim, or gifted.<sup>30</sup>

Testing of medieval walrus rostra has identified the major urban nodes of ivory distribution at Dublin, Trondheim (the modern name of medieval Nidaros), Bergen, and Ribe, a part of the medieval Danish kingdom.<sup>31</sup> Here, tusks not already extracted from skulls at the Western Settlement in Greenland could be removed. To extract a tusk from a relatively fresh walrus skull is difficult, and significant portions of thick maxillary bone must be removed. Once extracted, tusks could then be exported to other workshop centres such as Winchester, Oslo, and Cologne.

Though walrus ivory was present in much of medieval Europe, there is little textual evidence to suggest it was well understood. In Iceland and Scandinavia, however, Arctic mammals were verifiably well known. The archbishop at Nidaros and the Scandinavian elite whose wealth was enmeshed in the trade sphere, which included the luxury resources of the Arctic, would have been explicitly aware of the source of their ivory. *The King's Mirror* provides this thoughtful description of the animals:

There still remains another species which the Greenlanders count among the whales, but which, it seems to me, ought rather to be classed with the seals. These are called walrus and grow to a length of fourteen ells or fifteen at the very highest. In shape this fish resembles the seal both as to hair, head, skin, and the webbed feet behind; it also has the swimming feet in front like the seal. . . . Its appearance is distinguished from that of other seals in that it has, in addition to the other small teeth, two large and long tusks, which are placed in the front part of the upper jaw and sometimes grow to a length of nearly an ell and a half [about 50 cm].<sup>32</sup>

A detail of the arm of a chair from Tydal Church (ca. 1150–1200) in Norway features two walrus in combat, their dragon-like necks interlocked, tusks at one another's throats (Fig. 5.3). These walrus, perhaps the earliest surviving images in the European canon of the animal, are impressive likenesses, even possessing flippers.

Though walrus ivory was clearly in relatively widespread circulation in Western Europe, the existing artistic corpus and archeological finds do not suggest it was ever commonplace or even particularly plentiful. For northern traders and elite patrons, walrus ivory, as a luxury good exclusively sourced from the Nordic world, was considered an apt gift for kings and saints, either carved or in raw form. The previously mentioned ninth-century chronicle recording Ohthere's White Sea voyages mentions that he gifted King Alfred a tribute of walrus ivory.<sup>33</sup> A thirteenth-century Icelandic saga concerning late twelfth-century events, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, relates another such gift of whole tusks following a walrus hunt, this time to a saint's shrine:

A walrus came up on land, and men went after it and wounded it, but the whale leaped into the sea and sank, because it had been wounded internally. The men took to their ships and began to drag the bay, hoping to draw the whale up onto land, but nothing came of it. Then Hrafn called on the Holy Archbishop Thomas to help them recover the whale. He vowed that he would give him the whale's tusks, still fixed in its skull, if they could bring the whale up onto land. And after he made that vow, it wasn't long before they got the whale.<sup>34</sup>

As he promised, Hrafn departed the Westfjords in Iceland for England in the spring and gifted the skull with its tusks to the shrine in Canterbury. This passage is fascinating in that it reveals the rarity of spotting a walrus in Icelandic waters in the twelfth century, inspiring such zeal in the hunters that they are willing to attempt to drag the incredibly dangerous coastal waters of the Westfjords in ships. Hrafn's choice of saint to call upon for help indicates the flowering cult of Thomas Becket on Iceland, but, more importantly for our purposes, it characterizes walrus skulls and tusks in this raw form as an appropriate gift for a saint, taking on a relic-like quality at the martyr's shrine.<sup>35</sup> Preserved in this state rather than refined for carving,



Figure 5.3  
Detail, liturgical  
chair from Tydal  
Church, ca.  
1150–1200,  
wood carving.  
National Historisk  
Museum, Oslo.  
Artwork in the  
public domain,  
© Museum of  
Cultural History,  
University of  
Oslo; photograph  
by Alexis Pantos  
(CC BY-SA 4.0)

they also function as wonders, valuable as tokens of the saint's miraculous intercession.<sup>36</sup>

Enlivened by the textile industry centred in Flanders in the thirteenth century, the northern maritime sea routes of Western Europe provided the markets of northern Europe with a steady inflow of large and high-quality elephant tusks from sub-Saharan Africa, meaning that, at least beyond Scandinavia, the desirability of walrus ivory waned.<sup>37</sup> Even as walrus-ivory carving became less prevalent in Western Europe, Scandinavian powers continued to gift walrus ivory diplomatically. A walrus-ivory oliphant of mid-thirteenth-century Norwegian provenance from the treasury of the Sainte-Chapelle was likely a gift from King Magnus VI of Norway to French King Philip III in exchange for a thorn from the Crown of Thorns (Fig. 5.4).<sup>38</sup> To commemorate the reunification of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in the 1397 Kalmar Union, a carved walrus tusk bearing the insignia of King Christian I and Queen Dorothea, the rulers who had last maintained rule over the three kingdoms, was gifted to the new ruler, Eric of Pomerania (Fig. 5.5).<sup>39</sup> As an emblem of Scandinavian power and luxury, this carved tusk, inherited by one ruler from another, symbolized the kingship of the three unified realms. As a wonder and a curiosity and a rare and exceptional material on which the North held a monopoly, walrus ivory, as gift, embodied Nordic prestige. Gifted to European neighbors, carved or uncarved, ivory could therefore solidify diplomatic bonds. Walrus tusks could even function in similar ways to the tusks of narwhal whales, often understood as unicorn horns. These long, spiraling tusks could also only be obtained, with far less consistency, if a dead narwhal happened to wash ashore off the North Atlantic coasts of the Arctic Ocean.<sup>40</sup>

The three narwhal tusks now housed at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, originally part of the treasury of St Mary's Church in Utrecht, are

Figure 5.4  
Oliphant of  
Sainte-Chapelle,  
ca. 1150,  
walrus ivory.  
Bargello National  
Museum,  
Florence.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
the author



Figure 5.5  
Oliphant bearing  
the insignia of  
Christian I and  
Dorothea, 14th  
century, walrus  
ivory, 505 x 53  
mm. National  
Historisk Museet,  
Stockholm,  
17922\_LRK.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
the author (CC  
BY 4.0)



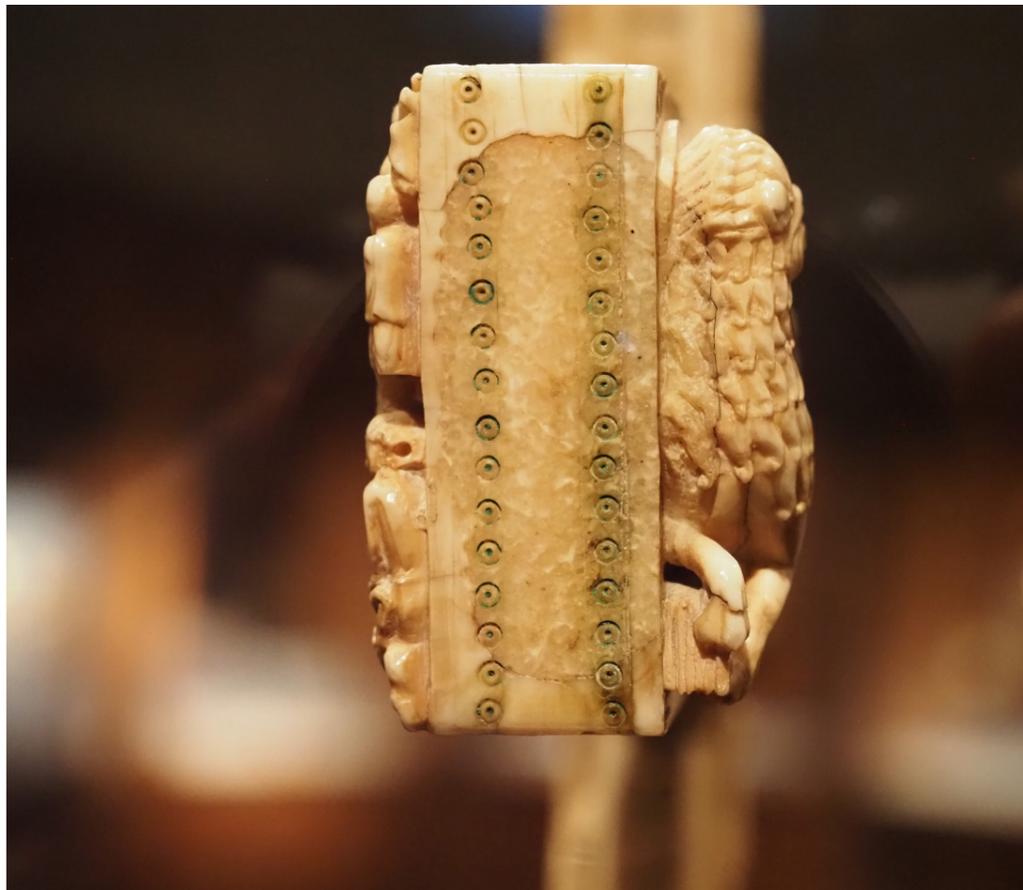
Figure 5.6  
Narwhal  
tusk from St  
Mary's Church,  
Utrecht, 11th or  
12th century.  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam.  
Photograph  
provided by the  
Rijksmuseum  
(CC0)



Figure 5.7  
Purse reliquary,  
ca. 1125, walrus  
ivory, 7.7 x  
13.4 x 2.8 cm.  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam.  
Photograph by  
the author (CC0)



Figure 5.8  
Detail of the  
Good Friday  
Plaque, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here second  
half of the  
12th century,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Photograph by  
the author (CC0)



among the oldest narwhal tusks in a European treasury (Fig. 5.6). Church tradition claims that these tusks were a royal donation by Emperor Henry IV, who was instrumental in the founding of the church in the eleventh century.<sup>41</sup> Runes scratched into the ivory surface, using the long-stemmed, younger Futhark alphabet frequently in use through the twelfth century, allude to the steps of exchange from the Arctic to the treasury.<sup>42</sup> This series of trades, gifts, and donations spanned great distances of open ocean, encompassing a vast expanse of both time and space in which material understandings were perhaps in flux yet the prestige and importance of the object was maintained.

At Trondheim, the seat of the archbishop of Nidaros, there is significant archeological evidence for the presence of walrus ivory.<sup>43</sup> Very large, uncarved tusks and walrus skulls have been found in the area. Objects discovered elsewhere, such as a purse-shaped reliquary now in the Rijksmuseum, have been attributed to Trondheim, based upon similarities to the stone carving in Nidaros Cathedral (Fig. 5.7). Trondheim was a major scholastic centre in Norway, with deep ecclesiastical and artistic ties to the English church.<sup>44</sup> Its Augustinian canons, along with many sons of the Scandinavian elite, were educated at the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris.<sup>45</sup> Pilgrim roads to the shrine of Saint Olav at Nidaros connected Trondheim to Canterbury, Compostela, Rome, and Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> Walrus ivory and objects carved from walrus tusks lubricated trade systems and eased diplomatic relationships abroad.

How many walrus tusks were needed to carve the Cloisters Cross? Walrus tusks grow over the lifetime of the animal and can vary significantly in size depending upon the walrus species, gender, age, and nutrition. One material sign, visible on the Good Friday plaque at one end of the cross arm, provides a clue (Fig. 5.8). At 5.9 centimetres in height, 5.4 centimetres in width, and about four centimetres in thickness, this plaque is essentially a cross-cut of a tusk, whose original diameter can be estimated to have been between seven and eight centimetres, with a thickness of about five centimetres. Though there are only circumstantial data establishing the ratio of walrus-tusk maximum diameter to length, this indicates a tusk of impressive size. The largest pieces of walrus ivory utilized in medieval objects generally have a maximum width of about seven centimetres.

In order to accommodate the shape of the walrus tusks and the dual textures of the material, the medieval carver had to work expertly, taking advantage of as much of the primary dentine as possible to create deep relief carving without exposing the interior. Particularly on the shaft of the Cloisters Cross, the carver worked conservatively with the material, revealing and carving the less desirable secondary dentine. In the vertical and horizontal arms of the Cross, the artist attempted to disguise the subtle curvature of his material. The rectangular insert above the head of the Lamb of God in the central medallion, which cuts through an inscription banner and the shoulders of the mourning figure of Saint John the Evangelist, also speaks to a careful use and patching of the material to achieve the composition. These choices demonstrate that the material was not unlimited. The Cloisters Cross is large for a medieval walrus-ivory object. It is substantially carved from five solid pieces, each of significant size, and very little secondary dentine is visible. It can therefore be concluded that the Cloisters Cross was carved from a single pair of large tusks.

The attribution of the Cloisters Cross to Bury St Edmunds has long been a prevalent theory, and one that has lasting significance for the cathedral at Bury today. Though the arguments for a connection between the Cloisters Cross and Bury have been adeptly challenged, the long-standing association still bears some, if not conclusive, weight and provokes the historical imagination.<sup>47</sup> In 1180, Øystein Erlendsson, the most important early archbishop of Nidaros, fled his seat and went into exile in England. Funded by Henry II, he stayed three years in England, perhaps in that time working on the liturgy of the cult of Saint Olav, of whom he was the most significant patron.<sup>48</sup> Øystein, who became archbishop in 1161, was a major figure in consolidating church power in Norway, replacing the bishops in Iceland with his own choices and, for the first time, meaningfully instrumentalising tithing throughout the archbishopric.<sup>49</sup> This means that Archbishop Øystein undoubtedly had walrus tusks from Greenland at his disposal.

Funded by Henry II, Øystein stayed at least six months in the empty abbot's house at Bury St Edmunds.<sup>50</sup> He was a major advocate to the king for the monks being allowed a free election and encouraged the election of Abbot Samson in 1182. The following period was one of great momentum within the community, with a rebuilt choir and towers for the abbey and, of course, an intense rise in anti-Jewish sentiments and violence.<sup>51</sup> It is intriguing to wonder whether a gift of tusks from the visiting Norwegian archbishop to Bury St Edmunds might have facilitated the carving of the Cloisters Cross, in a style that recalls that of Master Hugo while also incorporating other stylistic and iconographic choices circulating in the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the bizarre and frustrating provenance of the Cloisters Cross, it is an object set rather adrift within the international milieu of twelfth-century Romanesque carving, with only stylistic attribution available for art historians to contextualise the object.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of whether the Cross was carved on the continental mainland, in England, or in Scandinavia, grounding interpretations in the mechanisms of the exchange, use, and meanings of walrus ivory in the Middle Ages can help us draw somewhat nearer an object which continues to defy and resist firm attribution. The Cloisters Cross is one of the largest and most complex walrus-ivory objects to survive from the Middle Ages. It demonstrates not only ideological intensity and artistic virtuosity but a particular, material-specific skill in its artistic manipulation. The artist of the Cloisters Cross made the most of the tusk, densely working its surface in three dimensions in a way that mostly conceals the secondary dentine. The carver must have been an experienced master carver of walrus ivory, familiar with the affordances and pitfalls of the material and with long-time access to and experience with walrus tusks.<sup>54</sup> The Cross stands as a foremost monument to the skills of the Romanesque walrus-ivory carver, enabled and nourished by the tusks supplied through the North Atlantic trade sphere at the height of their circulation.<sup>55</sup>

As walrus hunting in Greenland went on into the thirteenth and then fourteenth centuries, the value of walrus ivory also fell.<sup>56</sup> The drop in value meant that greater numbers of tusks were required to supply the Greenlanders, who essentially lived at the subsistence level. Desperate to maintain their main source of contact with their wider cultural and economic sphere, the Greenland settlers increasingly exported smaller female tusks in

greater numbers.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the Greenland settlement's viability, it was walrus much like Freya, our 2022 martyr, who became their principal prey.

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10. 'Húð hans er góð ok þykk til reipa, ok rista menn þar af sterkar álar, svá at vel draga sex tigr manna eitt reip eða fleiri, ok geta þó eigi slíttit'. *Speculum regale*, 1265–85, MS Amí Magnússon 243, fol. B, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen. See also Rudolph Keyser, P. A. Munch, and C. R. Unger, eds., *Speculum regale [Konungs-Skuggsjá] Konge-Speilet et philosophisk-didaktisk skrift, forfattet i Norge mod slutningen af det tolfte aarhundrede: Tilligemed et samtidigt skrift om den norske kirkes stilling til staten* (Christiania: Werner, 1848), 39; and Laurence Marcellus Larson, trans., *The King's Mirror [Speculum regale-Konungs Skuggsjá]* (New York: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1917), 140.
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20. Due to climate change that has reduced ice for walrus to haul out on, Atlantic walrus are under extreme threat. The total population of Atlantic walrus in the Baffin Bay region now numbers approximately 2500. See Kristin L. Laidre et al., 'Arctic Marine Mammal Population Status, Sea Ice Habitat Loss, and Conservation Recommendations for the 21st Century', *Conservation Biology* 29, no. 3 (2015): 724–37; Robert Stewart et al., 'Estimates of Minimum Population Size for Walrus near Southeast Baffin Island, Nunavut', *NAMMCO Scientific Publications* 9 (2013), 141–58; and Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, 'COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Atlantic Walrus *Odobenus rosmarus rosmarus*, High Arctic Population, Central-Low Arctic Population and Nova Scotia-Newfoundland-Gulf of St. Lawrence Population in Canada' (Ottawa: Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, 2017).
21. Hervé Monchot, et al., 'The Modus Operandi of Walrus Exploitation during the Palaeoeskimo

- Period at the Tayara Site, Arctic Canada', *Anthropozoologica* 48, no. 1 (2013): 25.
22. Arnved Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland: Viking Peasants in the Arctic* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2019), 174–75.
  23. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 212; and Jette Arneborg, 'The Norse Settlement of Greenland,' in *The Cambridge History of the Polar Regions*, ed. Adrian Howkins and Peder Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 148–49.
  24. Lisbeth M. Imer, *Peasants and Prayers: The Inscriptions of Norse Greenland*, Publications from the National Museum: Studies in Archaeology & History 25 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2017).
  25. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 198.
  26. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 196.
  27. Lísabet Guðmundsdóttir, 'Timber Imports to Norse Greenland: Lifeline or Luxury?' *Antiquity* 97, no. 392 (2023): 454–71; and Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 163.
  28. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 198–200.
  29. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 361.
  30. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 122.
  31. Barrett et al., 'Ecological Globalisation', 6.
  32. 'Nú er þat enn eitt kyn eptir, er Grœnlendingar kalla í tolu með hvólum, ok virðisk mér svá, at þá megi heldr telja með selum, er rostungr heitir, ok verða þeir at vexti fjórtan álna eða fimtán, þeir sem lengstir verða. Vöxtr þess fisks er allr sem sels, bæði hár ok höfuð ok húð ok fitjar aprt, ok sundhreifar frammi svá sem í sel. . . . En þat bregðr af vexti hans frá öðrum selum, at hann hefir tennr tvær stórar ok langar umfram aðrar smátennr, ok standa þær í efra gómi í öndverðu höfði, nálga hálftrar annarrar álmar langar, þær sem lengstar verða'. *Speculum regale*, 1265–85, MS Arní Magnússon 243, fol. B, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen. See also Keyser, Munch, and Unger, *Speculum regale*, 39; and Larson, *The King's Mirror*, 140.
  33. Orosius, *Two Voyagers*, 19–20.
  34. at rosmhalvr kom upp á land, ok fóru men til a særa hann, en hvalrinn hljóp á sjó ok sokk, því at hann var sædr á hol. Síðan fóru men til á skipum ok gærðu til sóknir ok vildu draga hvalinn at landi ok unnu engar lyktir á. Þá hét Hrafn á inn helga Tómas erkibiskup til þess, at násk skyldi hvalrinn. Hann hét at gefa hausfastar tennr ór hvalnum, ef þeir gæti nátt hvalinn at landi fluttan'. *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, 1625–72, AM 155 fol., 2v, Arní Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, University of Iceland, Reykjavík. See also Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, ed., *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (London: Clarendon, 1987), 3.
  35. Margaret Cormack, 'The Cult of Thomas Becket in Iceland', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 20, nos. 3–4 (2020): 180–93.
  36. Barrett, 'Ecological Globalisation', 12.
  37. Sarah Guérin, *French Gothic Ivories: Material Theologies and the Sculptor's Craft* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 18–23.
  38. See Kirsten A. Seaver, 'Desirable Teeth: The Medieval Trade in Arctic and African Ivory', *Journal of Global History* 4, no. 2 (2009): 277; and Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, 'L'Oliphant', in *Gli avori del museo nazionale del Bargello*, ed. Ilaria Ciseri (Milan: Officina libraria, 2018), 115–16.
  39. Seaver, 'Desirable Teeth', 277.
  40. Aleksander Pluskowski, 'Narwhals or Unicorns? Exotic Animals as Material Culture in Medieval Europe', *European Journal of Archeology* 7, no. 3 (2004): 297.
  41. Marieke van Vlierden, 'De eenhoorns van Sint-Marie', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 37, no. 1

(1989): 5.

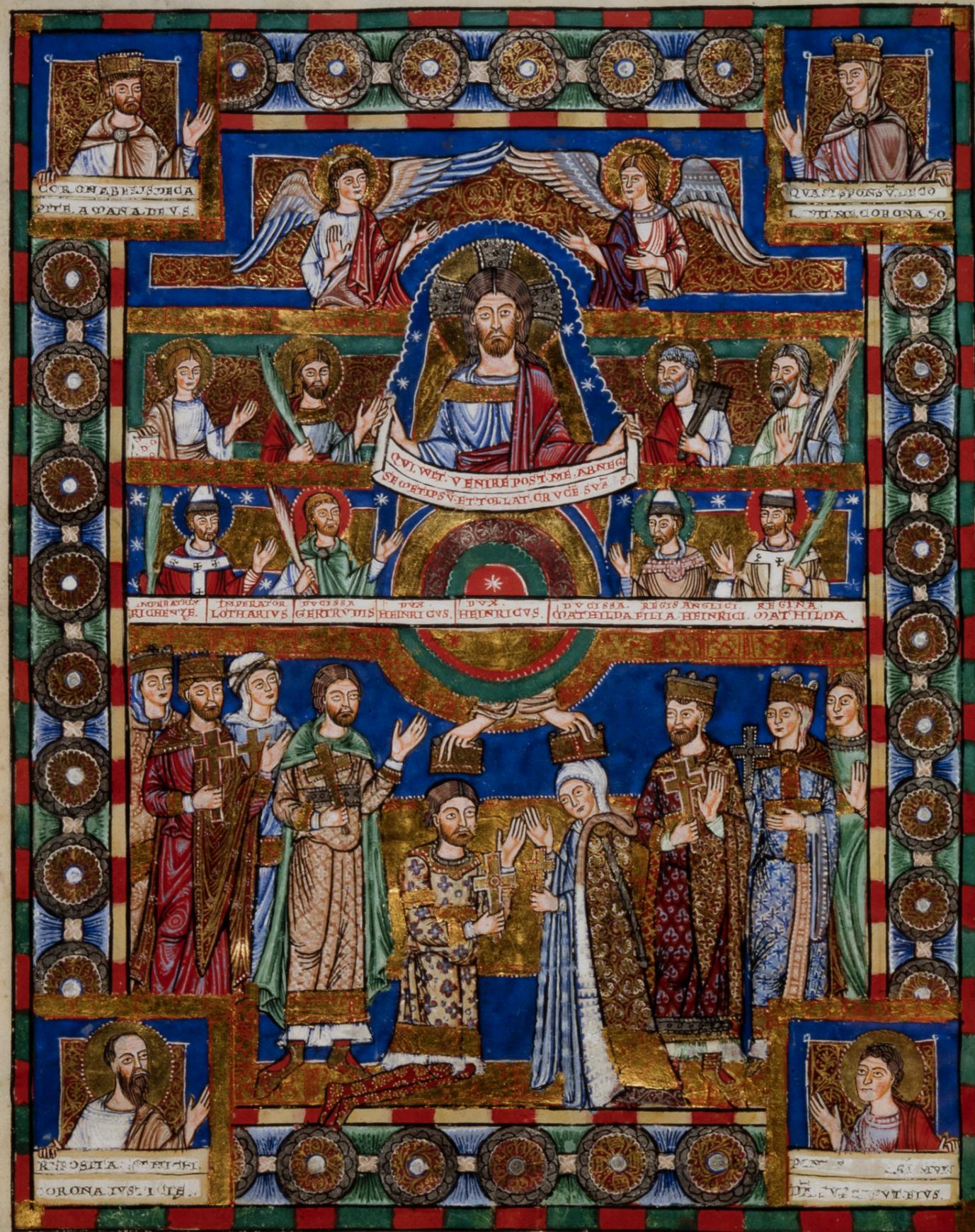
42. Vlierden, 'De eenhoorns van Sint-Marie', 8.
43. Nedkvitne, *Norse Greenland*, 172; Else Roesdahl, *Hvalrostand, elfenben og nordboerne i Grønland*, C. C. Rafn-forelæsning 10 (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 1995), 21; Neil Stratford, *The Lewis Chessmen* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1997), 44–45; and Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, 'Handel og vareutveksling, in *Kaupangen ved Nidelva: 1000 Års byhistorie belyst gjennom de arkeologiske undersøkelsene på Folkebibliotekstomten i Trondheim 1973–1985*, ed. Axel Christophersen and Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, Riksantikvarens Skrifter 7 (Oslo: Riksantikvaren, 1994), 248–49.
44. Relations between the English and Norwegian churches is an extensive topic only touched upon in this essay, but Saint Olav Haraldsson's conversion campaign was supported by English clergy he brought along as allies, including Grimkell, later bishop of Selsey and Elmham. In the 1140s, English Cistercians brought the monastic order to Norway. For artistic connections, see, for example, Paul Binski, 'Liturgy and Local Knowledge: English Perspectives on Trondheim Cathedral', in *The Medieval Cathedral of Trondheim: Architectural and Ritual Construction in Their European Context* ed. Margrete Syrstad Andås, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 21–46.
45. Lars Boje Mortensen, 'The Anchin Manuscript of Passio Olavi (Douai 295), William of Jumièges, and Theodorius Monachus: New Evidence for Intellectual Relations between Norway and France in the 12th Century', *Symbolae Osloenses* 75 (2000): 165–89.
46. Mihai Dragnea, 'The Cult of St. Olaf in the Latin and Greek Churches between the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Hiperborea* 7, no. 2 (2020): 144–66.
47. The association between Bury St Edmunds, Master Hugo, and the Cloisters Cross has been a contentious issue, as discussed in the introduction to this volume.
48. Jocelin of Brakelond, *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, Concerning the Acts of Samson, Abbott of the Monastery of St Edmund*, ed. and trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949), 15–16; Uacante abbatia perhendi- nauit Augustinus archiepiscopus Norweie in domibus abbatibus, habens per preceptum regis singulis diebus .x. solidos de denariis abbatie (While the abbot's position was vacant, Augustine, Archbishop of Norway, continued to stay in the abbot's house, having by the king's command ten shillings a day from the abbey's funds). See also Anne Duggan, 'The English Exile of Archbishop Øystein of Nidaros (1180–83)', in *Exile in the Middle Ages: Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8–11 July 2002*, ed. Elizabeth van Houts and Laura Napran (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 110; Roman Hankeln, 'Texting Techniques in St. Olav's Augustine-Responsories', in *Studies in Medieval Chant and Liturgy: In Honour of David Hiley*, ed. Terence Bailey and László Dobszay (Budapest and Ottawa: Institute for Musicology, 2007), 274–94; and Eyolf Østrem, *The Office of Saint Olav: A Study in Chant Transmission*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Musicologica Upsaliensia: Nova Series 18 (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2001).
49. Helgi Þorlákson, 'Iceland and Norway in the Middle Ages', in *Church and Art: The Medieval Church in Norway and Iceland*, ed. Lilja Árnadóttir and Ketil Kiran (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Cultural

Heritage Research, 1997), 13.

50. Duggan, 'The English Exile of Archbishop Øystein of Nidaros', 111; and Samuel Patrick Bidwell, 'Across the North Sea and Back Again: A Comparative Study between the Cults of St. Olav and St. Edmund' (master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2017), 54. For more on the inscriptions on the Cloisters Cross and anti-Semitic tension in Bury at this time, see Sabrina Longland, 'A Literary Aspect of the Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 2 (1969): 45–74; Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*; and Norman Scarfe, *Suffolk in the Middle Ages: Studies in Places and Place-Names, the Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial, Saints, Mummies and Crosses, Domesday Book and Chronicles of Bury Abbey* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), 87–89, 93.
51. Elizabeth C. Parker, 'Editing the "Cloisters Cross"', *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006), 147–60.
52. For more on Master Hugo, see T. A. Heslop, 'The Production and Artistry of the Bury Bible', in *Bury St. Edmunds: Medieval Art, Architecture, Archaeology and Economy*, ed. Antonia Gransden (Milton Park: Routledge, 1999), 172–85.
53. For more on the Cross' strange provenance and Thomas Hoving's role in its acquisition, see Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 14–16.
54. Affordances, in the words of Ann-Sophie Lehmann, are 'the properties of a thing, a substance or material that encourage the performance of particular actions with them'. Ann-Sophie Lehmann, 'The Matter of the Medium: Some Tools for an Art-Theoretical Interpretation of Materials', in *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c. 1250–1750*, ed. Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela H. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 31, interpreting James Jerome Gibson, 'The Theory of Affordances', in *Perceiving, Acting and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, ed. Robert Shaw and John Bransford (New York: Halsted, 1977), 67–82.
55. For more on an interlocking system of 'trade spheres' as applied to the pre-modern world, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
56. Guérin, *French Gothic Ivories*, 18–23; and Guérin, 'Avario d'ogni Ragione', 164–73.
57. Barrett, 'Ecological Globalisation', 11.

# The Cloisters Cross and the Sphere of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England

Cecily Hennessy



Previous page:  
Figure 6.1  
Christ, saints,  
and Henry the  
Lion and Matilda  
of England and  
their families,  
from the  
*Gospel Book of  
Henry the Lion  
and Matilda  
of England*,  
ca. 1188.  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf. 105  
Noviss. 2°, fol.  
171v. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
Bibliothek

The Cloisters Cross has puzzled dealers, curators, museum directors, and art historians since it came on the market in the late 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Its place of origin, its date, its function, and its mysterious provenance, as well as the complex meanings that can be found in the compilation of its iconography and texts, have led to much speculation. This essay revisits some of these arguments but focuses on material that links the Cross to Germany, especially those parts of it ruled by Henry the Lion (1129–1195), duke of Saxony and Bavaria, a view which has occasionally been aired. He also had considerable ties with England and with Normandy, which may explain some of the echoes of English and northern French work which have been identified on the Cross.

Henry the Lion was the duke of Saxony from 1142 and duke of Bavaria from 1156, titles he inherited from his father, Henry X. His mother was Gertrude of Süpplingenberg, and her parents were the Holy Roman Emperor Lothair II and Empress Richenza. Henry the Lion was a prolific builder and a great patron of manuscripts, reliquaries, crosses, and altars. He ruled over a vast area: Saxony, Bavaria, and also Swabia while married to his first wife Clementia of Zähringen (married 1147; marriage dissolved 1162). His second wife, Matilda, whom he married in 1168, was the eldest daughter of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine. They are pictured in a very fine manuscript, made for their church in Braunschweig, known as the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England* (Fig. 6.1).<sup>2</sup> Henry the Lion gained land through his inheritances and through grants of territory beyond the Elbe by his cousin Frederick Barbarossa, and secured further territory extending up to the Baltic coast through military campaigns. He refounded both Munich and Lubeck, founded new towns, and gained the right to establish churches and bishoprics in Oldenburg, Mecklenburg, and Ratzeburg.<sup>3</sup> He achieved this great power in part by his political and military acumen. However, he lost his titles in 1180 through conflict with Frederick Barbarossa but lived on until 1195.<sup>4</sup> Matilda died in 1189.

Connecting the Cross with Henry the Lion is not a new idea. The earliest reference I have found is in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: a scribbled, much corrected draft of a memo dated 2 October 1962 from Thomas Hoving (then curatorial assistant at the Cloisters) to James J. Rorimer (director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), which reads:

We strongly disagree with those who attribute the Topic-Mimara cross to England, XI century. (The presence & very shape of the tall, conical hats worn by the Jews is but one indication of many that this ivory is not English & does not date ca. 1050–1066.)

Zarnecki says the cross is XII century, and possibly is French. We concur with his date, but are not convinced that it is French. A number of comparisons in style, iconography & inscriptions with manuscripts, metalwork & sculpture dating ca. 1150–1180 made in Westphalia & Lower Saxony indicate that the cross is in some way linked to that Region.<sup>5</sup>

A letter from Hanns Swarzenski (curator of decorative arts and sculpture, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1956–73) to Hoving, dated 2 a.m. on Easter Sunday 1963 (14 April), also refers to parallels with Saxon manuscripts, the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, and the *Hildesheim Missal* (*Stammheim Missal*), among others.<sup>6</sup> These both came from Benedictine monasteries. The *Gospel Book* was made at Helmarshausen



Figure 6.2  
Easter plaque,  
front left finial,  
Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

Abbey, probably in the 1180s, and the *Missal* at St Michael's Abbey, Hildesheim, in the 1160s–70s.<sup>7</sup>

In 1971, the young architectural historian Stephen Gardner gave a paper for a graduate seminar held by Rosalie Green at Princeton University in which he identified various similarities between the iconography on the Cross and art produced in Germany in the twelfth century, and specifically that with links to Henry the Lion. Gardner then presented his findings in a paper at the Frick in New York in 1973.<sup>8</sup> Each of the students had been given an episode depicted on the Cross to analyse, using principally the resources of the Index of Christian Art at Princeton, of which Green was director. According to Roberta Olson, who took part in the seminar, Green was hoping that the students in her class would agree on where the Cross came from. She did not expect the connection with Henry the Lion, but this was the group's consensus.<sup>9</sup>

Gardner's text focused on the Easter (Resurrection) plaque, on the front left finial of the Cross, depicting the events of Easter morning (Fig. 6.2). He noted the 'Continental elements which play such a large part in the rather complex iconography of this scene'.<sup>10</sup> On the far left of the plaque, Christ is stepping out of the tomb, as seen in the *Ratmann Sacramentary* from Hildesheim dated to 1151 (Fig. 6.3).<sup>11</sup> Other similar examples show Christ from the side, as in a prayer book possibly made in Winnigen in the Mosel valley (Fig. 6.4).<sup>12</sup> Gardner maintained that this is also a rare example in the twelfth century of Christ holding a double-armed cross staff as on the

Figure 6.3  
Illuminated initial,  
Resurrection  
of Christ, from  
the *Ratmann  
Sacramentary*,  
Hildesheim,  
1159. Dom-  
Museum,  
Hildesheim,  
DS 37, fol. 75r.  
Artwork in the  
public domain, ©  
Dom-Museum



Figure 6.4  
Sleeping soldiers and the Resur-  
rection of Christ,  
from a prayer  
book, second  
half of the 12th  
century. Österrei-  
chische National-  
bibliothek, Vien-  
na, Cod.2739\*,  
fol. 65v. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, © Öster-  
reichische Natio-  
nalbibliothek



Figure 6.5  
Ascension of Christ,  
walrus-ivory  
plaque, Cologne,  
second-half of  
the 12th centu-  
ry. Victoria and  
Albert Museum,  
London, no.  
258.67. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, © Vic-  
toria and Albert  
Museum



Figure 6.6  
Ascension of  
Christ, stone  
baptismal font,  
late 12th–early  
13th centu-  
ry. Collegiate  
Church of  
St Boniface,  
Freckenhorst.  
Artwork in the  
public domain, ©  
Baptisteria Sacra  
Index; photo-  
graph courtesy of  
Harriet Sonne de  
Torrens



Cross. He compared the image on the Cloisters Cross with the Ascension as it appears in a walrus-ivory plaque made in Cologne, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and on a stone font in the Church of St Boniface in Freckenhorst in Westphalia (Figs. 6.5 and 6.6).<sup>13</sup>

In the adjacent scenes on the plaque are the Maries at the tomb; the angel holding the text from Mark 16:6, *Jesum queritis Nazarenum, crucifixum* (you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified); and five sleeping soldiers. Gardner associated the form of the angel holding out a scroll with that of St Matthew in German evangelist portraits, such as in an early twelfth-century gospel book made in Essen (Fig. 6.7).<sup>14</sup> He argued that angels at the tomb holding scrolls only occurred to a limited degree at this time, and those were often German, such as in the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England* (Fig. 6.8).<sup>15</sup>

The conflation of the Maries at the tomb and the Resurrection is rare but occurs in two works from Saxony. In the *Stammheim Missal*, an angel, seated on the tomb, addresses two Maries beneath a baldacchino, while Christ, rising from his tomb, emerges above the baldacchino, looking towards the hand of God (Fig. 6.9).<sup>16</sup> On a disk-cross flabellum from Kremsmünster Abbey, which was probably made in Saxony, in the upper left quadrant, the three Maries approach the open tomb in which stands the resurrected Christ (Fig. 6.10).<sup>17</sup> This is paired with the Ascension in the upper right quadrant, where Christ is striding to the left, grasping a flagged cross.

Sabrina Longland cited manuscripts which have German origins as comparisons to the Cross. She showed that in the Crucifixion scene in the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, Ecclesia and Synagoga stand on each side of the cross; Synagoga turns away from Christ and holds a spear against the Lamb of God resting beneath her to her left, with his head by the feet of John the Evangelist (Fig. 6.11a–b).<sup>18</sup> This motif is also in the back-central medallion on the Cross (Fig. 6.12). In both instances, Synagoga holds a scroll with the inscription *Maledictus omnis qui pendet in ligno* (Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree) (Galatians 3:13).<sup>19</sup> Longland also identified a Crucifixion scene in an eleventh-century psalter from Werden, in which the placard placed over Christ's head is inscribed in Latin with *Q[uo]d scripsi scripsi. Di[xi]t Pilat[us]* (What I have written, I have written, said Pilate) (Fig. 6.13).<sup>20</sup> Pilate maintained he would not change the epithet on the *titulus* board reading 'Jesus King of the Jews'. This rare scene is also on the Cloisters Cross, with Caiaphas and Pilate shown arguing; however, here the words on the *titulus* above Christ's head were changed to 'King of the Confessors' (Fig. 6.14).

In their very comprehensive study of the Cross published in 1994, Charles Little and Elizabeth C. Parker made several comparisons to Continental and at times specifically German works drawing on similarities between them and the Cross, some of which have already been discussed. They made analogies with the *Stammheim Missal* and the Kremsmünster flabellum as well as Synagoga and the Lamb image in the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*.<sup>21</sup> They demonstrated the correlation of death with Synagoga and the Church with Life in the Bavarian *Uta Codex* (ca. 1020), commissioned by Abbess Uta of Niedermünster in Regensburg.<sup>22</sup> They pointed out that in the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England* there are numerous figures with testimonial texts. Such texts



Figure 6.7  
Frontispiece  
from the Gospel  
of Matthew with  
author portrait,  
1105–13,  
from *Quattuor  
Evangelia*, Ms.  
16, fols. 1v–2r.  
Bibliothèque du  
Château, Chantilly.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
CNRS-IRHT ©  
Bibliothèque du  
musée Condé,  
Château de  
Chantilly

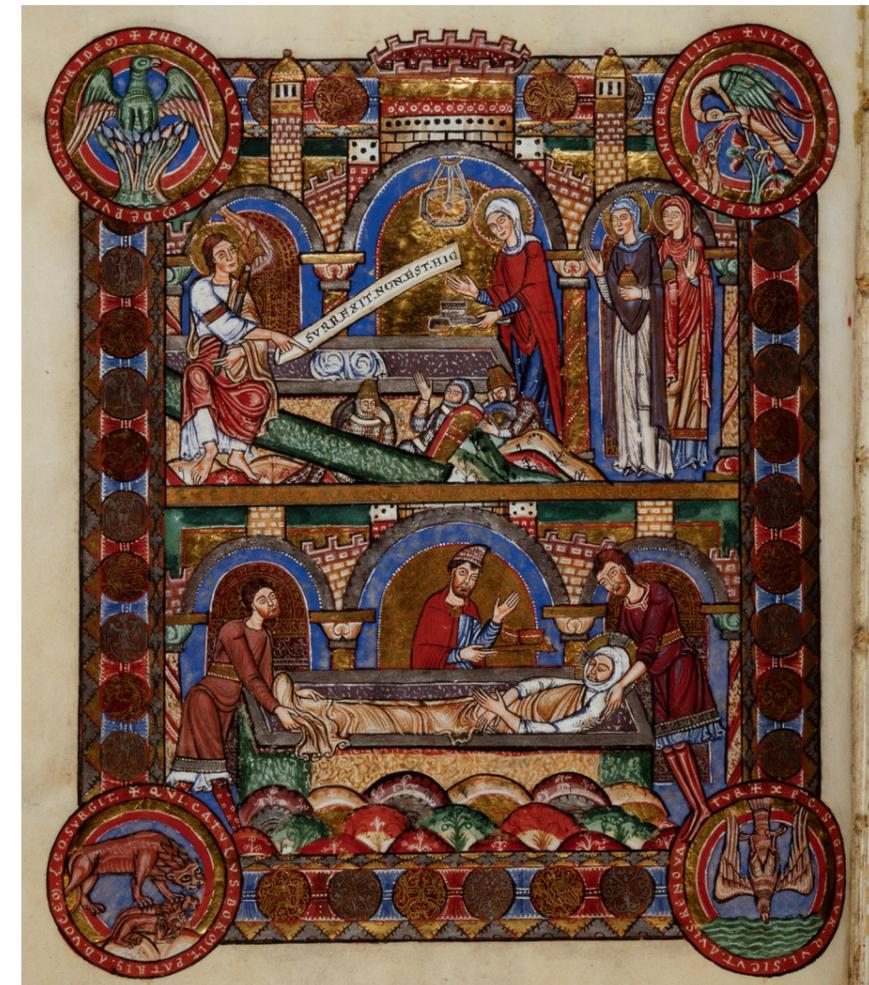


Figure 6.8  
Burial of Christ,  
Maries at the  
Tomb, from the  
*Gospel Book of  
Henry the Lion  
and Matilda of  
England*, ca.  
1188. Herzog  
August Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf.  
105 Noviss. 2<sup>o</sup>,  
fol. 74v. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
Bibliothek

Left:  
Figure 6.9  
Maries at the  
Tomb, from the  
*Stammheim Mis-  
sal*, Hildesheim,  
1170s. J. Paul  
Getty Museum,  
Los Angeles, MS  
64 (97.MG.21),  
fol. 111. Artwork  
in the public  
domain



Right:  
Figure 6.10  
Copper-gilt disk-  
cross flabellum,  
ca. 1170–80.  
Kremsmünster  
Abbey,  
Kremsmünster.  
Artwork in the  
public domain, ©  
Stift Kremsmün-  
ster; photograph  
by the Best  
Kunstverlag,  
courtesy of  
Kremsmünster  
Abbey



also appear on the Klosterneuburg altarpiece, formerly the parapet of an ambo, dated to 1181, where typological cycles interweave the Old and New Testaments.<sup>23</sup> Between the Descent into Limbo and the Resurrection scenes, David holds a scroll inscribed *terra tremuit* (the earth trembled), from Psalm 75(76):9.<sup>24</sup> Similar words are also found in the couplet starting on the top left side of the front of the Cross, where the complete verse, in translation, reads, 'the earth trembles (*tremit*), death defeated groans with the buried one rising, Life has been called, Synagogue has collapsed with great foolish effort'.<sup>25</sup>

Parker and Little showed that Adam and Eve, at the foot of the Cloisters Cross, are found in the same position in the ivory Crucifixion panel made for Archbishop Adalberus of Metz (984–1005) and in a copy of Flavius Josephus's *Antiquitates Judaicae* made in Zwiefalten in 1180 (Figs. 6.15 and 6.16).<sup>26</sup> On the same page of the book, Moses is depicted facing the brazen serpent, shown hanging on a forked stick, the theme of the central medallion on the front of the Cross (Fig. 6.17). The Israelites were plagued with snakes, but those who looked on Moses's serpent were healed (Numbers 21:5–9). Here an analogy is made between Christ raised on the cross and the serpent lifted up by Moses. The serpent hanging over the stick is not common in Romanesque England, and most surviving examples are German.<sup>27</sup> An example is in the tenth-century *St Gall Sacramentary*, where the serpent is suspended on a rough-hewn cross.<sup>28</sup> This is also found in a manuscript from Regensburg dated 1170–75.<sup>29</sup>

In a review of Elizabeth Parker and Charles Little's monograph, published in 1994, Sandy Heslop pointed out that aspects of the iconography were 'best attested east of the Rhine'.<sup>30</sup> A compelling article by John Munns, published in 2013, made further connections between the Cloisters Cross and the *Stammheim Missal*, pointing out that the depiction of, for instance, beards and hats are not typical of English examples but are attested in the

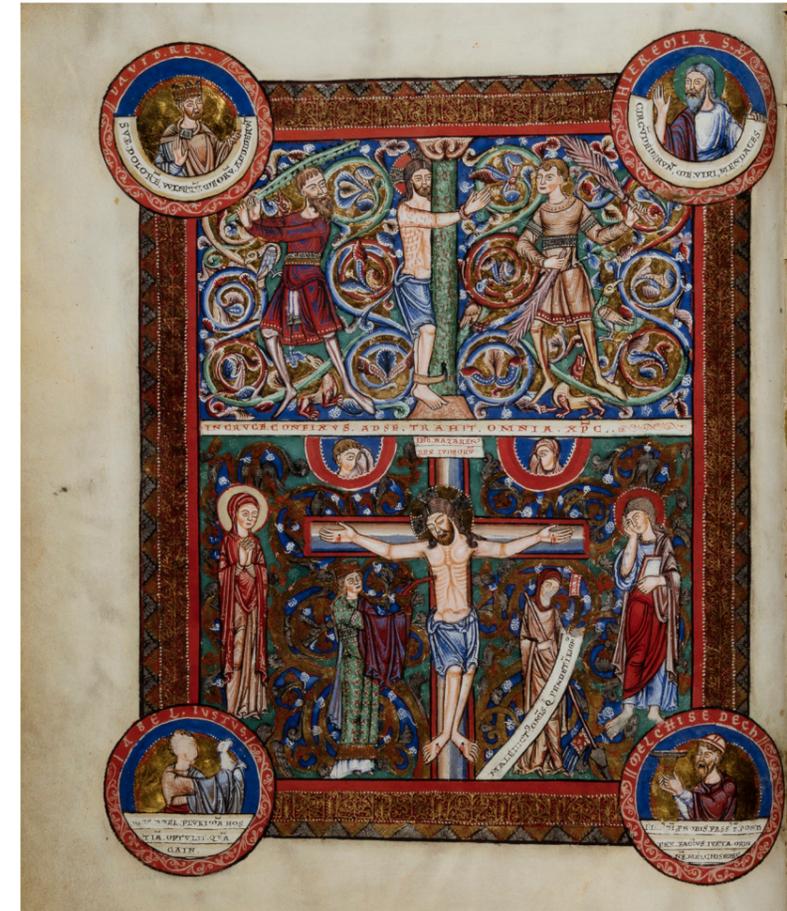


Figure 6.11a  
Page from the  
*Gospel Book of  
Henry the Lion  
and Matilda of  
England*, ca.  
1188: a) the  
Flagellation and  
Crucifixion of  
Christ. Herzog  
August Biblio-  
thek, Wolfenbü-  
ttel, Cod. Guelf.  
105 Noviss. 2°,  
fol. 170v. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
Bibliothek



Figure 6.11b  
Page from the  
*Gospel Book of  
Henry the Lion  
and Matilda of  
England*, ca.  
1188: detail  
of Synagoga.  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf. 105  
Noviss. 2°, fol.  
170v. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main, courtesy of  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek

Left:  
Figure 6.12  
Synagoga and  
the Lamb of God,  
back central  
roundel, Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory. The  
Cloisters Collec-  
tion, The Metro-  
politan Museum  
of Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Open access



Right:  
Figure 6.13  
Crucifixion of  
Christ, Werden,  
11th century.  
Stadtbibliothek,  
Trier, MS 14,  
Folio 9v. Artwork  
in the public do-  
main; photograph  
courtesy of the  
Stadtbibliothek

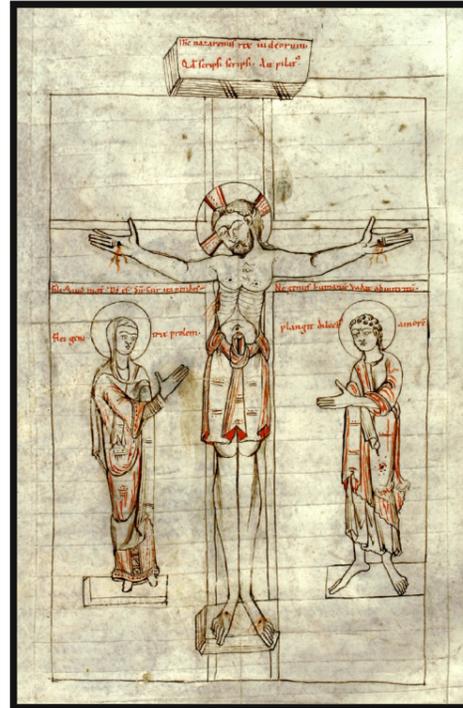


Figure 6.16  
Crucifixion of  
Christ; Adam and  
Eve, from Flavi-  
us Josephus,  
*Antiquitates  
Judaicae*, Zwie-  
falten. Würt-  
tembergische  
Landesbibliothek,  
Stuttgart, Cod.  
hist. 2° 418, fol.  
3r. Artwork in the  
public domain,  
© Württember-  
gische Landesbi-  
bliothek

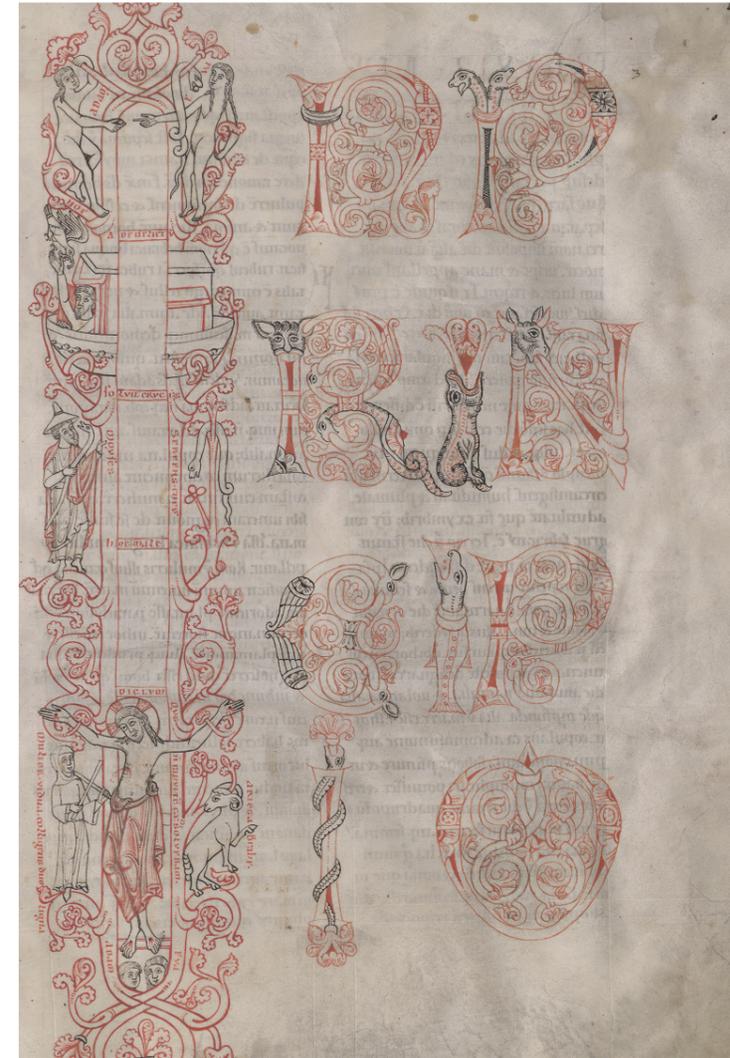


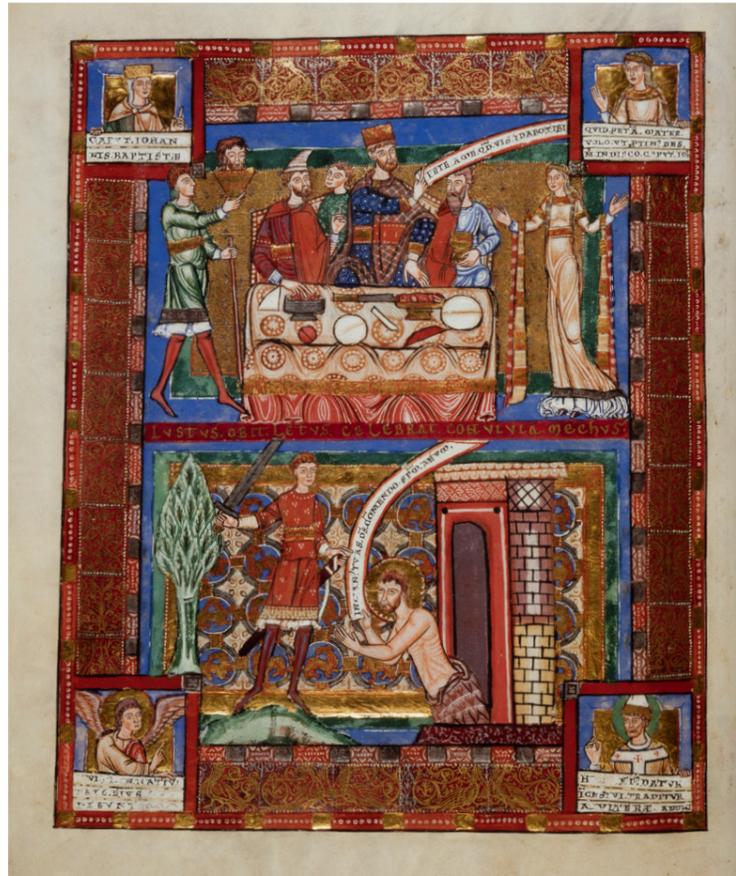
Figure 6.14a–b  
Ascension of  
Christ and the  
Dispute between  
Pilate and Caiaphas: a) front top  
finial, and b) de-  
tail of inscription  
on the *titulus*,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here ca.  
1188, walrus  
ivory. The Clois-  
ters Collection,  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
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Bottom Left:  
Figure 6.15  
Adam and Eve,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here ca.  
1188, walrus  
ivory. The Clois-  
ters Collection,  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

Bottom Right:  
Figure 6.17  
Moses and the  
Serpent, front  
central roundel,  
Cloisters Cross,  
dated here ca.  
1188, walrus  
ivory. The Clois-  
ters Collection,  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

Figure 6.18  
Herod's Feast,  
from the  
*Gospel Book of  
Henry the Lion  
and Matilda  
of England*,  
ca. 1188.  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf. 105  
Noviss. 2°, fol.  
73v. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
Bibliothek



*Missal*.<sup>31</sup> He suggested that the Cross was more likely to come from the 'artistic environs of Hildesheim'.<sup>32</sup>

There are thus several letters, papers, and publications to date which have highlighted correspondences between the Cloisters Cross and work produced in Germany in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of these, as was pointed out by Gardner, come from what can loosely be termed the sphere of Henry the Lion and Matilda in Saxony and in or near Bavaria. There is further material closely associated with Henry and Matilda and the Guelph dynasty and the central lands of their territory in and around Braunschweig which provides close parallels with the Cross.

In 1173, Henry started to build a collegiate church dedicated to Saint Blaise at Braunschweig. The *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England* was probably made for the Marian altar in the church, which was consecrated by the bishop of Hildesheim, Adelog (1171–90), in 1188.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the scenes of Synagoga piercing the Lamb and the angel holding the scroll at the tomb, there are various other parallels between the *Gospel Book* and the Cross. In numerous illuminations, key figures hold scrolls with sayings pertinent to the scene depicted. Several images include men wearing pointed hats, as in the scene of Herod's Feast and Salome's Dance where one of the guests wears the pointed cap which tilts slightly forward, as seen in two figures to the right of Moses on the central medallion on the front of the Cross (Fig. 6.18).<sup>34</sup> This is also, however, worn by Longinus standing with his shield on the far left in the Cross' Good Friday plaque on the front



Figure 6.19  
Good Friday  
Plaque, front  
right finial,  
Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

right finial (Fig. 6.19). In this same plaque, the hat with no forward tilt, worn by the mourner kneeling at Christ's side and by three figures in the crowd behind Nicodemus (as he removes the nail from the cross), is worn in the *Gospel Book* by the pharisee to the left of Christ in the scene of Christ in the House of the Pharisee (Fig. 6.20).<sup>35</sup> This same hat is worn by two of the shepherds in the Annunciation to the Shepherds, and by the Good Samaritan (Fig. 6.21).<sup>36</sup> In contrast, in the scene of John the Baptist Preaching in the Wilderness, two men on the left wear hats with broad brims.<sup>37</sup> This is not precisely found on the Cross, although Caiaphas's hat in the scene with Pilate has a small brim or band around the bottom. Furthermore, the inscribed text running in front of Christ in the page of the Ascension (Fig. 6.22) makes the lower part of Christ very similar to the carved Ascension scene on the Cross (see Fig. 6.14).<sup>38</sup> The *Gospel Book* also features prophets with pointy beards and scrolls, such as Habakkuk and Jeremiah, although on the Cross some of the prophets have short (Malachi) or rounded beards (David, Solomon, Hosea), and in the *Gospel Book* there are many variations.<sup>39</sup>

In the church at Braunschweig, Henry the Lion had installed a multifigured, triumphal-cross group in front of the altar of the Holy Cross. This was lost to fire in the nineteenth century, but documents testify to its history.<sup>40</sup> Other examples, however, give an indication of its probable appearance. For instance, the thirteenth-century one in Halberstadt Cathedral has similarities with themes on the Cloisters Cross (Fig. 6.23a–c), such as the prophets

Figure 6.20  
Christ in the  
House of the  
Pharisee, from  
the *Gospel Book  
of Henry the  
Lion and Matilda  
of England*,  
ca. 1188.  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf. 105  
Noviss. 2<sup>o</sup>, fol.  
111v. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
Bibliothek



Figure 6.21  
The Good  
Samaritan, from  
the *Gospel Book  
of Henry the  
Lion and Matilda  
of England*,  
ca. 1188.  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf. 105  
Noviss. 2<sup>o</sup>, fol.  
112r. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
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Figure 6.22  
Ascension of Christ, from the  
Gospel Book of  
Henry the Lion  
and Matilda  
of England,  
ca. 1188.  
Herzog August  
Bibliothek,  
Wolfenbüttel,  
Cod. Guelf. 105  
Noviss. 2<sup>o</sup>, fol.  
75r. Artwork  
in the public  
domain, courtesy  
of Herzog August  
Bibliothek

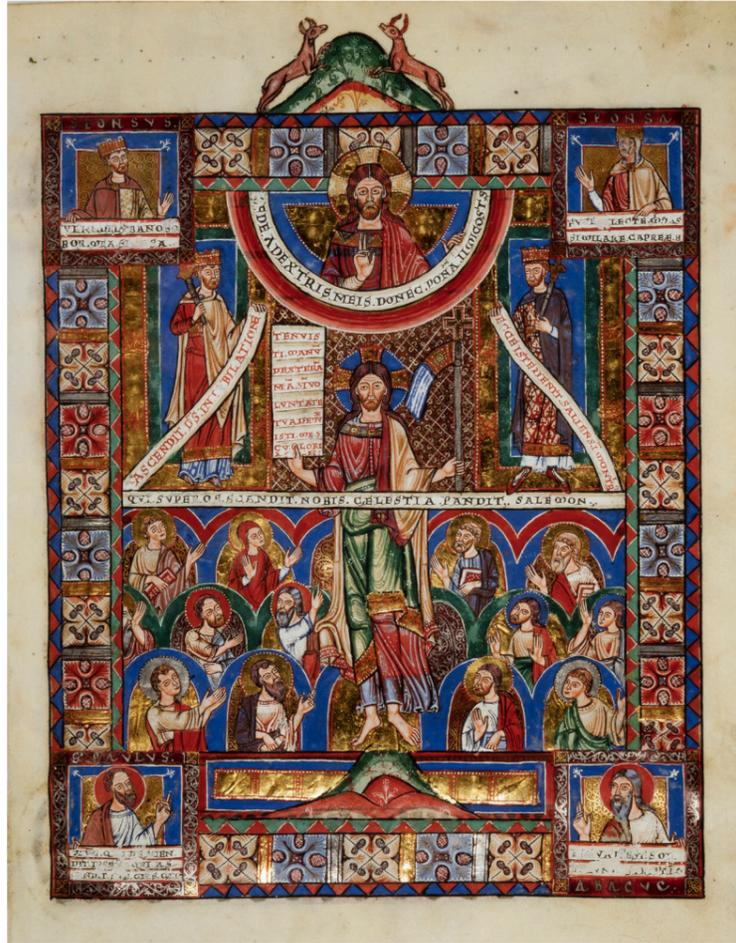


Figure 6.23a  
Triumphal Cross  
Group: facing  
East, Halberstadt  
Cathedral, 13th  
century, linden,  
oak, and spruce  
wood with paint  
and gilding.  
Artworks in the  
public domain,  
photographs by  
the author and  
Richard Plant



Left:  
Figure 6.23b  
Triumphal Cross  
Group: prophets,  
Halberstadt  
Cathedral, 13th  
century, linden,  
oak, and spruce  
wood with paint  
and gilding.  
Artworks in the  
public domain,  
photographs by  
the author and  
Richard Plant

Right:  
Figure 6.23c  
Triumphal Cross  
Group: Adam,  
Halberstadt  
Cathedral, 13th  
century, linden,  
oak, and spruce  
wood with paint  
and gilding.  
Artworks in the  
public domain,  
photographs by  
the author and  
Richard Plant

along the horizontal beam (Fig. 6.24), and Adam at the foot of the cross (see Fig. 6.15).<sup>41</sup>

Henry the Lion's family treasure, known as the Guelph Treasure, was housed in the cathedral at Braunschweig. The collection was started by Countess Gertrude, Henry's great-grandmother on his mother's side, in the early eleventh century. It includes a gilt-copper reliquary cross from the eleventh century with standing female figures, who may be Synagoga and Ecclesia, an unusual feature in sculpture of this time.<sup>42</sup> The Eilbertus Altar, made in Cologne in the middle of the twelfth century, has enamel figures holding scrolls, very similar to those on the Cloisters Cross, with the prophets with their prophetic texts on the sides and the apostles on the lid (Fig. 6.25a–b).<sup>43</sup> It has similar motifs on the lid, such as the soldiers at the foot of the tomb lying head to toe on top of each other, depicted in the far-right panel on the second register and in the Easter plaque on the Cross, or the representation of the Ascension depicted in the lower right panel, borrowed for Christ's Resurrection in the Easter plaque on the Cross. Christ, though reversed, has the same sideward-facing head, looking up towards the hand of God, with one hand raised and one clasping a cross (although here the cross has a single horizontal bar). Similarly, the elaborate, dome-shaped reliquary, made in Cologne in the late twelfth century from walrus ivory and enamel, has ivory apostles holding scrolls around the dome and standing prophets holding scrolls around the lower register.<sup>44</sup> Scrolls appear to be a particularly popular feature in German iconography of this period.

Looking to further objects originating from areas within the sphere of Henry the Lion and Matilda, a processional cross in the Basilica of St Godehard was made in Hildesheim in the last decade of the twelfth century (Fig. 6.26).<sup>45</sup> It has been restored and the scenes rearranged. There is an enthroned Ecclesia at the top, an Anastasis or Harrowing of Hell at the bottom, and the Supper at Emmaus on the left. In this, the half figure of Christ in the Ascension is indicated by showing only the lower part of his body clad in a long robe and with naked feet as on the Cross. This form is also used on one of four enamel plaques from an altar table from Hildesheim, dated to

Figure 6.24  
Prophets,  
back crossbar,  
Cloisters  
Cross, dated  
here ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access



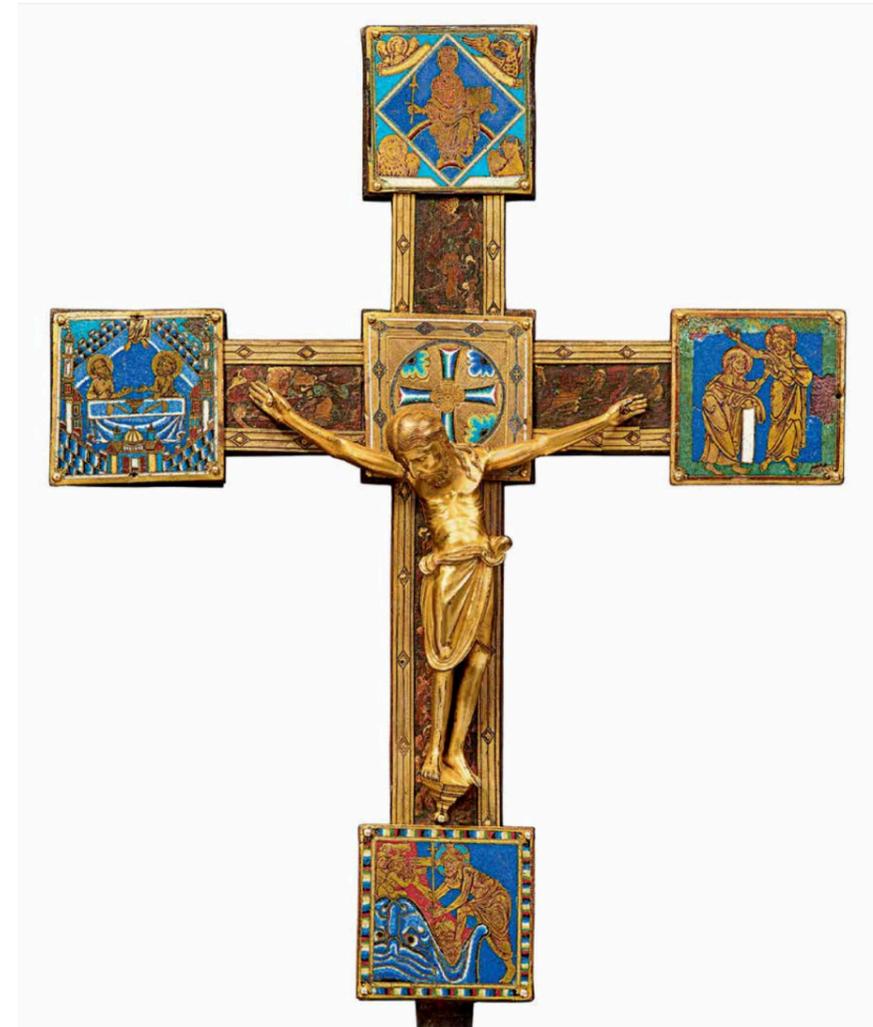
Figure 6.25a  
Eilbertus Altar,  
Cologne, mid-  
12th century:  
from side.  
Kunstgewerbe-  
museum, Staat-  
liche Museen zu  
Berlin, Berlin.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
courtesy of the  
Kunstgewerbe-  
museum, Staat-  
liche Museen zu  
Berlin / Karen  
Bartsch, CC BY-  
SA 4.0



Figure 6.25b  
Eilbertus Altar,  
Cologne, mid-  
12th century: top.  
Kunstgewerbe-  
museum, Staat-  
liche Museen zu  
Berlin, Berlin.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
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courtesy of the  
Kunstgewerbe-  
museum, Staat-  
liche Museen zu  
Berlin / Karen  
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Figure 6.26  
Processional  
Cross,  
Hildesheim,  
1190s, copper  
alloy, gilding,  
*champlevé*  
enamel with a  
wood core.  
Basilica of St  
Godehard,  
Hildesheim.  
Artwork in the  
public domain



the 1180s.<sup>46</sup> This type of Ascension, known as the Disappearing Christ, was well-known in England at this time, where it appears to have originated, and clearly had by the 1180s reached Saxony.<sup>47</sup>

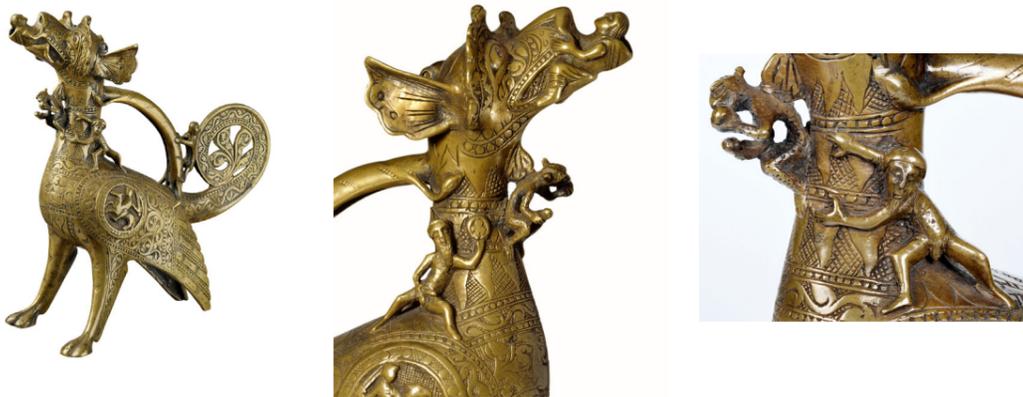
Similarly, a Holy Sepulchre altarpiece made in Saxony or Lower Saxony in the mid-twelfth century again has stylistic and iconographic similarities with the Cross (Fig. 6.27).<sup>48</sup> It features Nicodemus, shown here with pliers, and the body of Christ hanging limply next to the Virgin with her arms covered. In terms of secular sculpture, and dated a little later, a vessel made in Hildesheim has a man represented as a Jew in a pointed hat and elongated beard, as on the Cross, and holding what appears to be the three-ball symbol of the pawnbroker. Another man has the rounded headgear and pointed chin also found on men on the Cross, perhaps also indicating someone of Jewish heritage (Fig. 6.28a–c).<sup>49</sup>

Numerous examples of Ecclesia and Synagoga appear in objects produced in the Hildesheim area.<sup>50</sup> For instance, the Crucifixion page from a gospel book, now a single leaf, housed in the Hunt Museum, Limerick, shows Ecclesia to the left of the cross and Synagoga to the far right beyond Saint John. While Ecclesia is crowned and holding a victory flag, Synagoga's crown is falling through the air and her flag is facing down.<sup>51</sup> Her headgear

Figure 6.27  
Holy Sepulchre  
altarpiece, Lower  
Saxony, mid-12th  
century, cast and  
chased bronze.  
Germanisches  
Nationalmuseum,  
Nürnberg, KG  
159. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main; photograph  
by G. Janssen



Left to Right:  
Figure 6.28a-c  
Aquamanile,  
Hildesheim,  
1200–1220,  
copper alloy:  
a) aquamanile,  
b) detail, and  
c) detail. Mu-  
seum für Kunst  
und Gewerbe,  
Hamburg, Inv.  
1959.307.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
courtesy of  
the Museum  
für Kunst und  
Gewerbe



looks like it has slipped as if to cover her eyes and indicate her blindness. Both carry lamps in a reference to the wise and foolish virgins.<sup>52</sup> The elaborate book cover of the *Gospel of St Godehard* from Hildesheim (ca. 1170/80) has an enamel showing Ecclesia to Christ's right, gathering his blood in a chalice and grasping a pennant, while Synagoga, blindfolded, turns away from him in rejection, with her staff pointing down and her crown falling beside her (Fig. 6.29).<sup>53</sup> This image is repeated on an enamel box with a central rectangular panel depicting the Crucifixion.<sup>54</sup> A similar rendition is on a semicircular enamel plaque, again from Hildesheim, dated circa 1160/70.<sup>55</sup>

The Cloisters Cross has often been discussed as an altar cross, the use of which had become widespread by the mid-twelfth century.<sup>56</sup> However, the Cloisters Cross probably had a more specific function. It was most likely used during Holy Week, as it includes Old and New Testament readings from the liturgy commemorating Christ's Passion and Resurrection, as discussed at length by Parker and Little.<sup>57</sup> The texts are standard in missals, and some seem to go back to the tenth-century *Regularis concordia*, drawn up at Winchester in 970.<sup>58</sup> This text describes the liturgical enactment when on Good Friday, following the Veneration of the Cross, the cross was wrapped in a linen cloth and taken back to the altar where a 'sepulchre' had been prepared and the *Depositio crucis* was performed. In this, the cross or sometimes the host, a crucifix or perhaps a figure of Christ was in some way buried. This was followed on Easter Sunday with the *Elevatio* when this 'buried Christ' was 'resurrected' and returned to the altar.<sup>59</sup> After this, priests enacted the *Visitatio sepulchri*, the visit of the Maries to the Sepulchre and their dialogue with the angel. It has been shown how this enactment (known as the *Quem quaeritis*) was well-established in Germany by the tenth and eleventh centuries at Benedictine monasteries, with St Gall, then part of the Holy Roman Empire, providing the earliest text.<sup>60</sup> There was a strong tradition of these enactments in Saxony, including at Braunschweig.<sup>61</sup>

If the Cross were designed to be used in Holy Week, perhaps in a Holy Sepulchre Chapel, then a corpus, which it is generally agreed was attached to the front, could have been removed and buried.<sup>62</sup> The Cross can also be easily taken apart, since the top and bottom bars slot into the central medallion, and the side finials are removable (Fig. 6.30). Sometimes an entire crucifix was buried during the Easter liturgy, and it is possible that the Cross would have been taken apart and buried along with the corpus. The iconography on the two plaques at each end of the horizontal bar encapsulate all the elements of the liturgical ceremonies, the Deposition, the Embalming/Burial, the Women Visiting the Tomb, and the Resurrection.

Certain churches had spaces either set aside or particularly suitable for Easter veneration, now known as Holy Sepulchre chapels, as they seem to have been intended to recreate the space of the burial and Resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem. Of these chapels, an early example is the Abbey of Gernrode in Saxony, which was founded for the use of secular canonesses. The abbey had a space in the south aisle that seems to have represented Christ's place of burial and was by the eleventh century incorporated into two chambers evoking the Holy Sepulchre Chapel in Jerusalem, with sculpture both on its external and internal walls indicating its function.<sup>63</sup> Another possible but unusual example is at Externsteine, just a little north of Paderborn. It comprises a complex of three excavated cave spaces

Figure 6.29  
Cover, *Gospel of Saint Godehard*,  
Hildesheim, ca.  
1170/80. Hohe  
Domkirche,  
Domschatz, Trier,  
No. 70, Cod.  
141 (olim 126).  
Photograph by  
Ann Münchow,  
courtesy of Hohe  
Domkirche Trier  
– Domschatz



seemingly used for Christian ritual, possibly from the tenth but certainly in use in the twelfth century.<sup>64</sup> On the external wall of the cave a relief sculpture combines scenes from Christ's Passion (Figs. 6.31 and 6.32). The date of the carving is disputed, although more recently it has been dated to 1160/1170.<sup>65</sup> It depicts the Deposition and the Ascension but also refers to the Crucifixion, with Adam and Eve shown encircled by a snake-like creature at the foot of the cross. This can be compared with Adam and Eve at the foot of the Cloisters Cross, where the snake is not included. In the Externsteine Deposition, Nicodemus to the right of the cross, whose left arm and legs are now lost, has lowered the corpse of Christ into the arms of Joseph of Arimathea to the left of the cross. Beside him is the Virgin and on the far right is Saint John. In the top register, Christ, ascended and holding a victory flag,



Figure 6.30  
Cloisters Cross  
when taken  
apart, dated  
here ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12. Open  
access

points down towards the scene. He is flanked by circular representations of the sun and moon. These are similar to those on the Cloisters Cross and are more often found in Crucifixion rather than Deposition scenes.<sup>66</sup> The caps worn by Joseph and Nicodemus are like that worn by Nicodemus at the far left of the Good Friday plaque and by the various figures already discussed in the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*. The sculpture and its setting are unusual but have various elements linking them with the iconography on the Cloisters Cross.

On the Good Friday plaque, Christ appears to be laid not in a sarcophagus but on a stone, the stone of unction. The relic of the stone was taken from Ephesus to the Great Palace in Constantinople in 1169/70 by the Byzantine emperor Manuel I.<sup>67</sup> This is one of the earliest representations of the stone of unction in medieval art. In Byzantium, the first extant representation of the stone, perhaps from about 1200, is from the refectory of the Monastery of St John, on Patmos (Fig. 6.33). The scene is labelled 'Ο Ἐπιτάφιος θρῆνος (the sepulchral Lamentation).<sup>68</sup> In this scene, as on the Good Friday plaque, there are women mourning Christ, kneeling behind his body with their covered hands raised to their faces in grief. On the Cross, two mourning women hold their uncovered hands to their faces, behind Christ's embalmed body. This is again a very early, if not the earliest, example of the mourning women with hands to their faces during the Deposition or Lamentation of Christ in Western medieval art.

In Byzantine art, similar iconography occurs in the twelfth century, for instance in a steatite fragment of an icon in the Cleveland Museum of Art where the Mother of God and another woman are mourning next to Joseph of Arimathea at the side of Christ, with what appears to be their hands raised to

Figure 6.31  
Deposition and  
Ascension,  
sculpted wall  
face, 1160/70,  
Externsteine,  
Teutoburg  
Forest, Lippe.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
the author



Figure 6.32  
Drawing of the  
Externsteine  
relief, from *Die  
Gartenlaube*,  
1862, 380.  
Artwork in the  
public domain

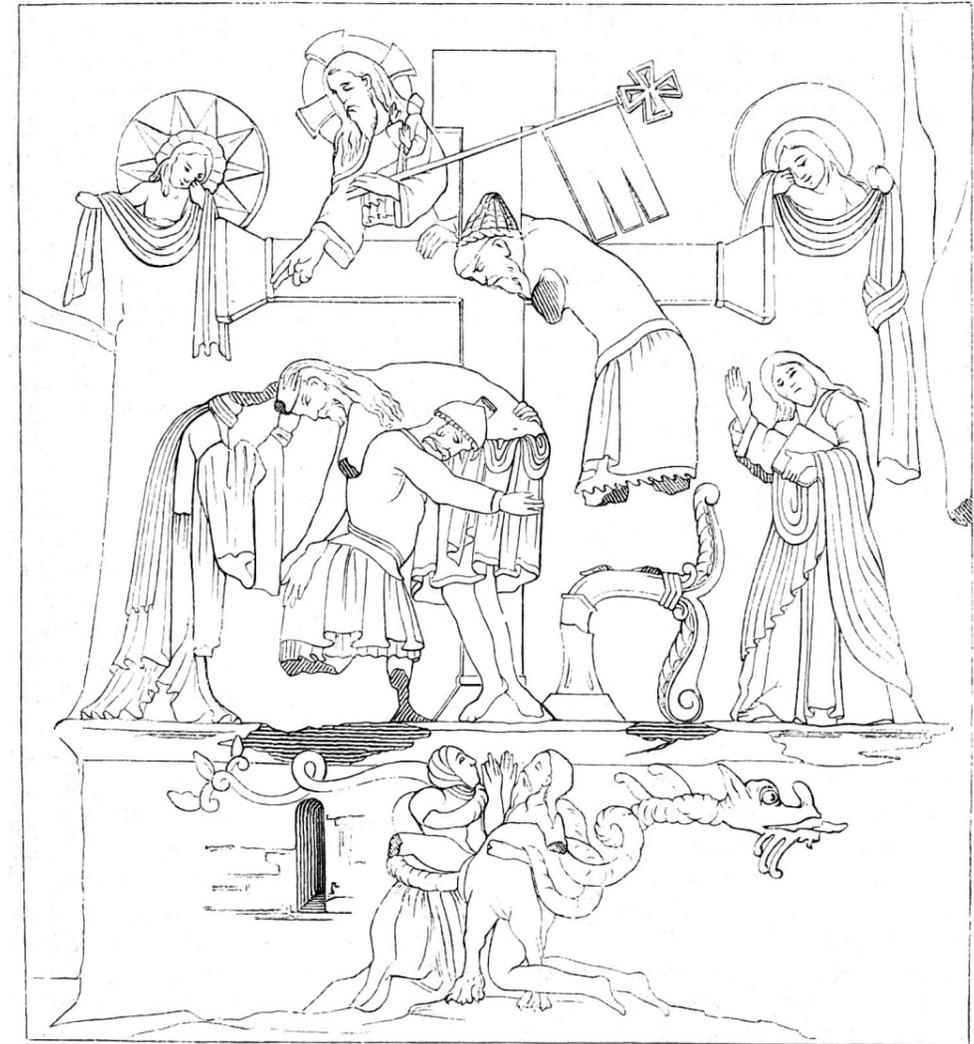


Figure 6.33  
Lamentation and  
the Maries at the  
Tomb, ca. 1200,  
fresco. West  
wall (south part)  
of the refectory,  
Monastery of  
Saint John the  
Theologian,  
Patmos.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
© Svetlana  
Tomeković,  
courtesy of  
Catherine Jolivet  
Lévy

the sides of their faces (Fig. 6.34).<sup>69</sup> Two more women are behind to the left, with their hands raised in grief.<sup>70</sup> In other examples from a group of ivories with similar characteristics, often referred to as the 'frame group', women to the left of the scene, standing back from Christ, also have their covered hands raised to their faces in mourning.<sup>71</sup>

As David Park has shown, key points in the Easter liturgical ceremony, the Deposition, the Embalming/Burial, and the Women visiting the Tomb, are included in wall paintings in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel in Winchester Cathedral, dated to the 1180s (Fig. 6.35).<sup>72</sup> There is a Deposition in the top register and the Lamentation and Embalming below with the Maries coming to find the angel sitting with the empty tomb, and finally, to the right, the Harrowing of Hell, or Anastasis. The Harrowing of Hell may have been the theme of the lost plaque at the foot of the Cross, although this is disputed.<sup>73</sup>

There are some similarities between the iconography of the embalmed Christ in both the Winchester paintings and on the Cloisters Cross. In both, Christ appears to be lying on the stone of unction. It is very unusual to find the stone depicted at this date; it is possible that knowledge of it was brought to Winchester by Henry the Lion, who visited Manuel in Constantinople twice in 1172 while en route to Jerusalem and again on his return. Henry the Lion and his family were in Winchester during a period of exile in the 1180s.<sup>74</sup> A rare and slightly later use of the stone of unction in an illumination is in the *Ingeborg Psalter*, made for the Danish queen of France, Ingeborg (1174–1237), who married Philip II in 1193. It was probably made circa 1195–1210.<sup>75</sup> Henry the Lion's daughter Gertrude, born to his first wife Clementia of Zähringen, married Cnut VI of Denmark in 1177 after she was widowed as a young teenager. Cnut was Ingeborg's brother and so provides a link with the French court, although of course there is no proof of Gertrude's influence or involvement in making or commissioning the psalter, nor in the Cross.<sup>76</sup>

Imagery from Saxony and the edges of neighbouring Franconia; from Freckenhorst, Essen, Werden, Cologne, Winingen, Braunschweig, Hildesheim, Halberstadt, Externsteine and Helmarshausen; and from Bavaria and Swabia, Regensburg, Kremsmünster, Zwiefalten, and St Gall, bears many similarities to features of iconography on the Cloisters Cross. In addition to the lands ruled by Henry the Lion and territory added in the Baltic region, he and Matilda spent considerable amounts of time in Normandy and England with Matilda's family in 1182–85, and Henry also returned to Normandy and England in 1189. He travelled widely during his military campaigns and also on pilgrimage to Santiago, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, in which he celebrated Easter in 1172.<sup>77</sup>

There is a theory that the Cross was housed in the 1930s in the monastery at Zirc in Hungary and had come there from the abbey at Zsámbék.<sup>78</sup> This has connections with Matilda's family. When she was very young, her eldest surviving brother, Henry, known later as the Young King, married Margaret, the infant daughter of Louis VII of France. After the Young King died in 1183, the widowed Margaret married Béla III of Hungary. He had earlier sought to marry Richenza Matilda, the daughter of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England, who was then living in the court of her grandparents, Henry II and Eleanor. They turned down the marriage proposal, and Béla turned to the hand of their widowed daughter-in-law, Margaret.<sup>79</sup> In 1186, Béla granted land at Zsámbék to Aynard, a knight who

had escorted Margaret to her marriage in Esztergom, and on this land, which became a place of burial for the family, an abbey for the Premonstratensians, a branch of the Augustinians, was built from about 1220.<sup>80</sup> This is, of course, after the Cross is thought to have been made, and the truth or falsity of the provenance of the Cross from Zsámbék abbey via Zirc monastery will probably never be determined, along with the answers to many of the other questions that remain about the Cross' origins. However, the potential connections of the family of Henry II and Eleanor, their sons and daughters, and the siblings' spouses with the Cloisters Cross indicates how far-reaching that family's influences were, filtering through the court and ecclesiastical circles of the rulers of the Western world. This includes their involvement in the rapidly expanding cult of Saint Thomas Becket, which has been associated with the 'Channel Style' and so with the Cloisters Cross.<sup>81</sup>

While Georg Swarzenski argued for parallels between objects in Henry the Lion's orbit and English work, Neil Stratford warned against linking surviving objects to well-known names, ignoring the lesser-known people in their retinues, the extent of their travels, and the numerous commissions by men of the church.<sup>82</sup> It has been emphasised by many who have speculated about the Cross that the complex selection of iconography and texts are the work of an expert in religious doctrine.<sup>83</sup> What are the connections with Saxon men of learning? Longland identified the Parisian writings from the circles of Richard of Saint-Victor and Peter Comestor as sources for the *Cham ridet* couplet and, as she indicated, their learning was widely disseminated.<sup>84</sup> Parker and Little looked to Theophilus, possibly the Benedictine monk Roger of Helmarshausen, the author of *De diversis artibus*, as a prime example of a learned religious man and a skilled artisan.<sup>85</sup> They also pointed to the influence on the Cross of Hugh of Saint-Victor and the Victorines, attributing to him links between Jewish and Christian learning and a bridge between the monastery and cathedral schools.<sup>86</sup> Hugh was of Saxon heritage, having been educated at the Augustinian Priory of Saint Pancras at Hamersleben, near Halberstadt, before going to Paris.<sup>87</sup>

Hildesheim was particularly prosperous in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries because of the flourishing mining sites in the Harz mountains, which were part of the diocese. The city also became a great centre of metalwork, all testifying to the extreme wealth available. Bishop Bruno (1153–61) had donated large numbers of books to the cathedral. The library was the third largest in Europe and shared its collection with other institutions.<sup>88</sup> It was a vibrant centre of learning and had a renowned cathedral school with close ties to the intellectual centres in Paris. Gerhard Lutz attributed the religious zeal and generous patronage to competition to elevate two bishop saints and the churches connected to them: Godehard (1022–1038), canonised in 1131, and Bernward (993–1022), canonised in 1192. Lutz emphasised the links with France, for instance in the design of the Benedictine Basilica of St Godehard, founded by Bernhard bishop of Hildesheim in 1133, with an ambulatory and radiating chapels.<sup>89</sup>

This cultural and theological centre at Hildesheim and the extensive patronage of Henry the Lion at Braunschweig recommend the area as a likely milieu for the making of the Cloisters Cross. It is possible that Adelog, bishop of Hildesheim, was the clerical mind behind the iconography on the Cross. Both he and his predecessor, Bernward of Hildesheim, had connections

Figure 6.34  
Steatite fragment  
of an icon with  
scenes from  
Christ's Passion,  
1100s. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main; Cleveland  
Museum of Art,  
Cleveland, no.  
1962.27. Open  
access



Figure 6.35  
Deposition, La-  
mentation and  
Embalming,  
Maries at the  
Tomb, and the  
Harrowing of  
Hell, ca. 1180s,  
fresco. East  
wall, Holy Sep-  
ulchre Chapel,  
Winchester Ca-  
thedral. Artwork  
in the public do-  
main; photograph  
by the author



with Paris.<sup>90</sup> He came from a noble family related to the Lords of Dorstadt in Lower Saxony. He was at the cathedral in Hildesheim from the early 1160s as a canon and was provost in Goslar and bishop of Hildesheim from 1178 until his death in September 1190.<sup>91</sup> Adelog was behind some major building projects in the area, including the completion of the Basilica of St Godehard, Hildesheim; the construction of the Neuwerk monastery in Goslar; and the restoration of St Michael's Church, Hildesheim, after the fire of 1186. This church, of course, was closely associated with Bernward and was the home of both the *Ratmann Sacramentary* and the *Stammheim Misssal*. Adelog also founded an Augustinian nunnery in Dorstadt in 1189. In the disputes between Frederick Barbarossa and Henry the Lion, Adelog kept a foot in both camps before finally siding with the emperor but was clearly on good terms with Henry, since he dedicated the Marian altar in Braunschweig in 1188. It was at this time, it has been suggested, that the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England* was given to the church. The making of the Cloisters Cross may be contemporaneous with the gift of the *Gospel Book*, indicating a date for the Cross of circa 1188.

Gardner focused only on the Easter (Resurrection) plaque and concluded that, although no firm connection between Henry the Lion and the Cloisters Cross could be made, his influence could be identified in its production, even if only indirectly.<sup>92</sup> Instead, this essay has looked at the Cross as a whole and several features of its iconography, comparing them with previously published German imagery. These comparisons have been supplemented with others, including additional scenes from Henry and Matilda's *Gospel Book*, illuminations from other manuscripts, objects from the Guelph Treasure, pieces of sculpture, a relief from Externsteine, and various objects associated with the church at Braunschweig, all closely linked to Henry and Matilda or their heartland. Their strong connections with England and with northern France may also account for those elements on the Cross which have been associated with English and 'Channel Style' work. The accumulated evidence, while by no means conclusive, certainly indicates a strong argument for links between the Cloisters Cross, Henry the Lion and Matilda, and their sphere.

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2. *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*, ca. 1188, Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 171v, Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel (cited hereafter as Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, HAB, Wolfenbüttel).
3. Karl Jordan, *Henry the Lion: A Biography*, trans. P. A. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 45–46, 66.
4. For Henry's life, see Jordan, *Henry the Lion*; on Henry's Baltic lands, see Jordan, 66–88. See also Austin Lane Poole, *Henry the Lion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1912).
5. Memo from Thomas Hoving to James Rorimer, 2 October 1962, Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The phrase 'is in some way' is altered from 'must must have roots in'. According to Kay Rorimer, the suggestion that the Cross came from Bury was originally made to James Rorimer by Harry Bober of the Institute of Fine Arts in 1963. See Kay Rorimer, 'Trésor de l'art roman anglais: La croix du Cloister à New York', *Estampille*, February 1988, 54 (held in folder 11, box 11, Cloisters Cross Research Papers, subseries IIC: KSR Manuscript Drafts, Cloisters Library and Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). George Zarnecki was then deputy director of the Courtauld Institute. On

- this, see also Charles Little's essay in this volume.
6. Swarzenski to Thomas Hoving, 2 a.m., Easter Sunday [14 April 1963], Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The 1963 date is presumed, as it appears to have been written shortly after the purchase of the Cross by the Metropolitan Museum. See Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, HAB, Wolfenbüttel; and *Stammheim Missal*, Hildesheim, 1170s, MS 64, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
  7. Reiner Hausscherr, 'Zur Datierung des Helmarshausener Evangeliers Heinrichs des Löwen', *Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 34 (1980): 3–15; and Elizabeth C. Teviotdale, *The Stammheim Missal* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001).
  8. Typed seminar paper, autumn 1971, and handwritten notes for a paper given at the Frick, April 1973, William Stephen Gardner Papers, Cloisters Library and Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The seminar paper 'Consurget Homo: The Iconography of the Resurrection Plaque on the Walrus Cross in the Cloisters' was given in a seminar on iconography at Princeton University. Elizabeth Parker referred to the giving of this paper but not to the existence of its text. See Elizabeth C. Parker, 'Editing the "Cloisters Cross"', *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006): 149, 156n14.
  9. My thanks to Roberta Olsen for her email conversations, including one on 22 April 2022.
  10. A quote from Gardner's handwritten paper given at the Frick, April 1973, p. 1, William Stephen Gardner Papers, Cloisters Library and Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
  11. *Ratmann Sacramentary*, DS 37, fol. 75r, Dom-Museum, Hildesheim (donated to St Michael's in 1159); and Michael Brandt, ed., *Abglanz des Himmels: Romanik in Hildesheim; Katalog zur Ausstellung des Dom-Museums Hildesheim, 2001* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2001), 3.9.
  12. Cod. 2739, fol. 65v, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (dated to the second half of the twelfth century).
  13. No. 378-1871, Victorian and Albert Museum, London; and see Paul Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings: Early Christian to Romanesque* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), no. 73 (baptismal font, late twelfth–early thirteenth century, Collegiate Church of St Boniface, Freckenhorst).
  14. Frontispiece from the Gospel of Matthew, *Quattuor Evangelia*, 1105–13, Ms 16, fol. 2r, Bibliothèque du Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly, Chantilly.
  15. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 74, HAB, Wolfenbüttel; and Jochen Luckhardt and Franz Niehoff, eds., *Heinrich der Löwe und seine Zeit: Herrschaft und Repräsentation der Welfen 1125–1235: Katalog der Ausstellung Braunschweig 1995*, vol. 1 (Munich: Hirmer, 1995), cat. no. D31, 206210; Horst Fuhrmann and Florentine Mütterich, eds., *Das Evangeliar Heinrichs des Löwen und das mittelalterliche Herrscherbild: Ausstellung, 18. März–20. April 1986* (Munich: Prestel, 1986), plates 27–30; and Ingrid Baumgärtner, ed., 'Kronen im Goldglänzenden Buch: Mittelalterliche Welfenbilder und das Helmarshausen Evangeliar Heinrichs des Löwen und Mathildes', in *Helmarshausen: Buchkultur und Goldschmiedekunst im Hochmittelalter* (Kassel: Euregioverlag, 2003), 33–34, 123–46.
  16. *Stammheim Missal*, Hildesheim, 1170s, MS 64, fol. 111, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
  17. Gilt-copper disk-cross flabellum, ca. 1170–80, Kremsmünster Abbey, Kremsmünster. Swarzenski, however, suggested the flabellum could be English. See Hanns Swarzenski, *Monuments of Romanesque Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 64, fig. 321.
  18. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 170v, HAB, Wolfenbüttel; and Sabrina Longland, 'The "Bury St. Edmunds Cross": Its Exceptional Place in English Twelfth-Century Art', *The Connoisseur* 172 (1969): 168.
  19. Longland, 'Bury St. Edmunds Cross', 172; and Teviotdale, *The Stammheim Missal*, fig. 46b. This quote also appears on the *Stammheim Missal*, fol. 86 (the Crucifixion). See Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 267n96.
  20. MS 14, fol. 9v, Stadtbibliothek, Trier; and Sabrina Longland, 'Pilate Answered: What I Have Written I Have Written', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 10 (1968): 412, 414, fig. 4.
  21. For the *Stammheim Missal*, see Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 86, fig. 58; for the flabellum, see Parker and Little, 86.
  22. *Uta Codex*, Clm 13601, fol. 3v, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich; and Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 56, ill. 130.
  23. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 97.
  24. On this, see Harcourt-Smith's essay in this volume.
  25. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 241.
  26. The Adalberus ivory, dated before 1005, is located today in the Musée de la Ville, Metz. See also Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 139, fig. 125. For *Antiquitates Judaicae*, see MS Hist 2° 418, fol. 3, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart; and Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 52, fig. 27. The iconography of the Zwiefalten *Antiquitates* is also mentioned in a letter from Hanns Swarzenski to Thomas Hoving, dated 14 April 1963, held in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
  27. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 62–63.
  28. *St Gall Sacramentary*, MS 342, fol. 281, Stiftsbibliothek, St Gallen; and Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 62, fig. 38.
  29. *Dialogus de laudibus sanctae crucis*, 1170–75, MS Clm. 14159, fol. 3, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich; and Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 62.
  30. T. A. Heslop, Review of *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning*, by Elisabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1096 (1994): 459.
  31. John Munns, 'Relocating the Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 155, no. 1323 (2013): 381–83.
  32. Munns, 'Relocating the Cloisters Cross', 383.
  33. Jordan, *Henry the Lion*, 201. For discussion of the dating of the manuscript, see Jitske Jasperse, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power: Matilda Plantagenet and Her Sisters* (Baltimore: Arc Humanities Press, 2020), 69–70, 69n11, 70n12.
  34. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 73v, HAB, Wolfenbüttel.
  35. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 111v, HAB, Wolfenbüttel.
  36. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fols. 111r, 112r, HAB, Wolfenbüttel.
  37. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 74r, HAB, Wolfenbüttel.
  38. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 75r, HAB, Wolfenbüttel.
  39. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 170v, HAB, Wolfenbüttel.
  40. Gerhard Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel: Die sächsischen und westfälischen Kreuzfixe der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2004), 90–92.
  41. Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 24, 75–106.
  42. Inv. no. W10, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin; W. A. Neumann, *Der Reliquienschatz des Hauses Braunschweig-Lüneburg* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1891), no. 4; and *The Guelph Treasure: Catalogue of the Exhibition* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1931), no. 16. On the Guelph Treasure, see also Patrick M. de Winter, 'The Sacral Treasure of the Guelphs', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 72, no. 1 (1985): 2–160.
  43. Inv. no. W11, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin; Neumann, *Der Reliquienschatz*, no. 19; and *The Guelph Treasure*, no. 17. On the relation of the technique, style, and motifs of the Eilbertus Altar to Byzantine art, see Krijna Nelly Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople: The West and Byzantium, 962–1204: Cultural and Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 236.
  44. Inv. no. W11, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Neumann, *Der Reliquienschatz*, no. 23; and *The Guelph Treasure*, no. 22.
  45. Basilica of St Godehard, Hildesheim, 1190s; Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 4.27; Luckhardt and Niehoff, *Heinrich der Löwe und seine Zeit*, vol. 1, no. G33; and Gerhard Lutz, 'Ein Hildesheimer Vortragekreuz mit Grubenschmelzen', *Aachener Kunstblätter* 60 (1994): 223–36.
  46. Inv. no. DS 30, Dom-Museum, Hildesheim; and Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 4.11.
  47. See Meyer Schapiro, 'The Image of the Disappearing Christ: The Ascension in English Art around the Year 1000', *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 23 (1943): 133–52; and Robert Deshman, 'Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images', *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 3 (1997): 518–46.
  48. KG 159, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg. See also Luckhardt and Niehoff, *Heinrich der Löwe und seine Zeit*, vol. 1, D44.
  49. Aquamanile, 1200–1220, Inv. no. 1959.307, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg.
  50. For a summary, see Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 142.
  51. Crucifixion page from a book of Pericopes, Hildesheim, twelfth century, L 006, The Hunt Museum, Limerick; and Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 3.8b.
  52. Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 133.
  53. Cod. 141 (*olim* 126), Domschatz no. 70, Hohe Domkirche, Trier; and Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 4.7.
  54. Enamelled pyx, Hildesheim, ca. 1170/80, inv. no. CMA 1949.431, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland; and Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 4.34.
  55. Inv. no. CI 13068, Thermes de Cluny, Musée National du Moyen Age, Paris; and Brandt, *Abglanz des Himmels*, 4.18a.
  56. For a representation of a cross on an altar, see New Minster *Liber Vitae*, Winchester, ca. 1031, MS Stowe 944, fol. 6r, British Library, London. See also Wiltrud Mersmann, 'Das Elfenbeinkreuz der Sammlung Topić-Mimara', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 25 (1963): 13, fig. 6; Longland, 'The "Bury St. Edmunds Cross"', 163; and Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 136, fig. 122.
  57. For a detailed recounting of the liturgical events in Holy Week and Easter Week, see Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 149–73.
  58. Thomas Symons, ed. and trans., *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation [Regularis concordia Anglicae nationis monachorum sanctimonialiumque]* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953); and Justin Kroesen, *The Sepulchrum Domini Through the Ages: Its Form and Function* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 153–56. For references to such ceremonies at Winchester and elsewhere, see David Park, 'The Wall Paint-
- ings of the Holy Sepulchre Chapel', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Winchester Cathedral: The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions for the Year 1980*, ed. T. A. Heslop and Veronica Sekules (London: British Archaeological Association, 1983), 60n102; and T. A. Heslop, 'A Walrus Ivory Pyx and the Visitatio Sepulchri', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 157–60. On the development and understanding of the ritual, see Melanie Laura Batoff, 'Re-Envisioning the Visitatio Sepulchri in Medieval Germany: The Intersection of Plainchant, Liturgy, Epic, and Reform' (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013), 21–40.
59. Symons, *Monastic Agreement [Regularis concordia]*, 42–45; and Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 156–57.
  60. On St Gall, see Helmut de Boor, *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967), esp., 23, 30–39, 48–52; for a summary of early developments of the *Quem quaeritis*, see Boor, 67–68. See also Batoff, 'Re-Envisioning the Visitatio Sepulchri in Medieval Germany', 42.
  61. Dunbar H. Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 41–51; on Braunschweig, see Ogden, 912–13n9. See also Walther Lipphardt, ed., *Lateinische Osterfeiern und Osterspiele*, vol. 5 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 1489–1501.
  62. On a corpus attached to the front of the Cross, see, with a summary of the arguments, Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 30–33; on the Oslo Corpus, see Parker and Little, 37, 159, 253–260. For a different view on the Oslo Corpus, see T. A. Heslop's essay in this volume.
  63. For the most recent comprehensive publication on the chapel at Gernrode, see Hans-Joachim Krause, Gotthard Voss, and Rainer Kahnsnitz, eds., *Das heilige Grab in Gernrode: Bestandsdokumentation und Bestandsforschung*, with Angelica Dülberg (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2007).
  64. Rainer Budde, *Deutsche romanische Skulptur, 1050–1250* (Munich: Hirmer, 1979), 30–31, plate 29; and Kroesen, *Sepulchrum Domini*, 29, fig. 16.
  65. For a summary of the Externsteine site, see Gustaf Dalman, *Das Grab Christi in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1922), 37–41. For the date of the carving, see Mechthild Schulze-Dörlamm, 'The Use of Caves for Religious Purposes in Early Medieval Germany (AD 500–1200)', in *Caves and Ritual in Medieval Europe, AD 500–1500*, ed. Knut Andreas Bergsvik and Marion Dowd (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018), 228–29, with further references.
  66. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 77.
  67. John Kinnamos [Ioannes Cinnamus], *Epitome Rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, ed. Augustus Meineke, CSHB (Bonn: Weber, 1836), 277.7–278.5; John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, trans. Charles M. Brand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 207–8; Niketas Choniates, *Niketas Choniates, History*, ed. Jan-Louis van Dieten, CFHB 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 222.76–86; Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 125; and Iohannis Spatharakis, 'The Influence of the Lithos in the Development of the Iconography of the Threnos', in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Doula Mouriki, Christopher Frederick Moss, and Katherine Kiefer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1995), 437–38.
  68. Spatharakis, 'The Influence of the Lithos', 438, fig.

- 6.
69. No. 1962.27, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (twelfth century).
70. See also manuscripts with similar iconography: cod. gr. 1156, fol. 194v, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City; cod. 5, fol. 90v, Biblioteca Palatina, Parma; and cod. Q908, fol. 85v, Institut Rukopisej, Georgian Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, in Spatharakis, 'The Influence of the Lithos,' 437, 439, figs. 3–4; and Henry Maguire, 'The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977): 144, 146. See also Kurt Weitzmann, 'The Origin of the Threnos', in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 486 and fig. 16.
71. See, for instance, no. 43, Rosgarten-Museum, Constance. See also Adolph Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1930), no. 208, 75, plate 68 (dated to the eleventh century).
72. Park, 'The Wall Paintings'.
73. A 1976 press release by the Metropolitan Museum of Art explains that Thomas Hoving thought the plaque had on its back an angel, the symbol of Matthew, and on its front the Harrowing of Hell. A \$1000 reward was offered for finding the plaque. See 'Search Instituted for Missing Section of Bury St. Edmunds Cross – Cross Now on View Again at the Cloisters', press release, August 1976, Ivory Cross Notes, Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. For a summary of the suggested iconography on the plaque, see Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 91–92.
74. Cecily Hennessy, 'Winchester's Holy Sepulchre Chapel and Byzantium Iconographic Transregionalism?', in *The Regional and Transregional in Romanesque Europe*, ed. John McNeill and Richard Plant (London: Routledge, 2021), 99.
75. *Ingeborg Psalter*, Ms 9, fol. 28v, Musée Condé, Chantilly. See also Florens Deuchler, *Der Ingeborgpsalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 57–58, fig. 32.
76. On the possible Danish connections with the Cross, see T. A. Heslop's essay in this volume.
77. On Henry the Lion's visits to Jerusalem and Constantinople, see Hennessy, 'Winchester's Holy Sepulchre Chapel', 99.
78. On this, see Charles Little's essay in this volume.
79. Abbas Petroburgensis Benedictus, *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis. The Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II. and Richard I. A.D. 1169–1192; Known Commonly under the Name of Benedict of Peterborough*, ed. William Stubbs, vol. 1 (London: Longman, 1867), 346; and Ferenc Albin Gombos, ed., *Catalogus fontium historiae Hungaricae*, vol. 2, (Budapest: Szent István Akadémia, 1937), 1054, no. 2510. See also Ferenc Makk, *The Árpáds and the Comneni: Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th Century* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 120.
80. Dezső Dercsényi, *Romanische Baukunst in Ungarn* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1975), 197.
81. On Henry II's children, their spouses, and the cult of Becket, see Cecily Hennessy, 'Thomas Becket, Henry II, Daughters and Sons: A Family Affair', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 176 (2023): 71–95. On the 'Channel Style' and the Cross, see Ursula Nilgen, 'Das große Walroßbeinkreuz in den "Cloisters"', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 48, no. 1 (1985): 39–64; and Neil Stratford, 'The Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 156, no. 1336 (2014): 464. See also Neil Stratford's essay in this volume.
82. Georg Swarzenski, 'Aus Dem Kunstkreis Heinrichs der Löwen', *Städel-Jahrbuch* 7/8 (1932): 241–397; and Neil Stratford, 'Lower Saxony and England: An Old Chestnut Reviewed', in *Der Welfenschatz und sein Umkreis*, ed. Joachim Ehlers and Dietrich Kötzsche (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1998), 243–58, esp. 258; on Cologne merchants having their own Guildhall in London before 1170, see Stratford, 256.
83. See, for instance, Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 218–22, in relation to Bury St Edmund's. In relation to the *Cham ridet* couplet, see Sabrina Longland, 'A Literary Aspect of the Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 2 (1969): 45–74.
84. Longland, 'A Literary Aspect', esp. 54. On the integration of learning among the Victorines through everyday interaction, and recent bibliography on the Victorines, see Joseph Hopper, 'Intellectual Community in Saint Victor: 1108–c. 1200', *Historical Research* 20 (2025): 1–15. See also Sabrina Harcourt-Smith's essay in this volume.
85. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 218.
86. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 185–86, 285n57.
87. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 222–23. See also Gerhard Lutz, 'The Canonisation of Bernward and Godehard: Hildesheim as a Cultural and Artistic Centre in the 12th and 13th Centuries', in *Romanesque Saints, Shrines and Pilgrimage*, ed. John McNeill and Richard Plant (London: Routledge, 2020), 42.
88. Lutz, 'The Canonisation of Bernward and Godehard', 44–47.
89. Lutz, 'The Canonisation of Bernward and Godehard', 42–43, fig. 4.1.
90. Lutz, 'The Canonisation of Bernward and Godehard', 42–43.
91. On Adelog's tombstone, see Lutz, 'The Canonisation of Bernward and Godehard', 52n36.
92. This is summarised in Gardner's handwritten paper given at the Frick, April 1973, p. 20, William Stephen Gardner Papers, Cloisters Library and Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

# The Cloisters Cross and the Oslo Corpus Revisited

T. A. Heslop



Figure 7.1  
Pilate plaque,  
here identified  
as a repair to  
the (lost) lower  
terminal of  
the Cloisters  
Cross, here  
dated ca. 1200,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.127.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
provided by  
Florens Deuchler  
and modified by  
the author

Nothing is known about the history of the Cloisters Cross during the first 750 years or so of its existence.<sup>1</sup> Its likely origins in northern Europe are suggested by its material, walrus ivory, and its style has generally been perceived as High Romanesque of a type developed across the regions around the North Sea. The complexity of the Cross' construction, the intricacy of its figural sculpture, and the plethora of inscriptions on an object not quite two feet high offer an abundance of material for analysis, but this has not resulted in a widely accepted attribution or understanding of its character. I first became interested in the Cross over fifty years ago and have puzzled over it intermittently ever since. What follows is an attempt to explain what I now think and why I think it. It is not a plea to be believed; rather it is a request for consideration (and criticism) of my methods, observations, and arguments, and an invitation to improve on them.

At the time of its purchase, the Cross was incomplete, missing its lower terminal and, more importantly, the central figure of Christ. To begin with the former, a remarkably appropriate walrus-ivory plaque showing Christ led before Pilate (Elizabeth Parker and Charles Little, following Bernice Jones, say Caiaphas) was identified as a 'missing part' and acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1963 (63.127) (Fig. 7.1).<sup>2</sup> Almost everything is in favour of the common origin of the plaque and the Cross. The plaque is the same size and has figures on the same scale as the other terminals, and has many characteristics found elsewhere on the Cross. These include an inscription, poses, and costume details, especially hats. As on the Cross itself, the tall, conical Jewish hat sometimes has a

surrounding band at mid-height, whereas 'Romans' (with spears on the Cross' Good Friday [Fig. 7.2] and Easter plaques [Fig. 7.3]) are shown with distinctive helmets or bonnets which are shorter and have a point at the front.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, like the Good Friday and Easter plaques, the Pilate plaque is a composite scene uniting discrete moments in the narrative so as to capture a sequence of events. The Good Friday plaque shows both the Deposition and the anointing of Christ's body, and the Easter Sunday plaque combines Christ rising from the tomb and the visit of the Maries to the tomb. On the Pilate plaque, the first element shows a Jew with a tall, conical hat striking Christ and saying *Prophetiza*, as in the episode in Matthew (26:68) and Luke (22:64) when Christ stands before the Sanhedrin. Then (as in Mark and John) Christ is led into the presence of Pilate and his soldiers in the Praetorium. On the plaque, they are shown with 'military' bonnets and some hold spears. The combination of Jews (two more on the Pilate plaque look up towards Christ on the Cross) and Romans shows that both are party to Christ's Passion, but the implication of his being already robed and crowned with thorns is that the Jews had so delivered him to Pilate. In John's account, Christ's transfer to imperial authority is followed by the scourging and the mocking by the Romans and the words (John 19:5), 'Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said "behold the man"' (*ecce homo*). That is significant because the reverse of the plaque (still missing) would have borne the symbol of Matthew, that is, a (winged) man. Hence this combination would echo the pairing of John's eagle and Christ's Ascension on the upper terminal of the Cloisters Cross, and the other standard pairings: Mark's lion with the Resurrection and Luke's ox with Christ's sacrificial death on the lateral termini. The only problem in linking the Pilate plaque with the Cross is that their styles do not quite match: the plaque looks more classicising than late Romanesque in its figure poses and drapery folds. In my view, it is a copy made circa 1200 but based on the original to replace it when the lower terminal was damaged (the base of the Cross is cracked and fragmentary). The plaque was first recorded in 1920, in a sale at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris, and was subsequently in a private collection (Frau Fuld) in Berlin.<sup>4</sup> Its earlier provenance is unknown.

Meanwhile, the search for the missing figure of the crucified Christ from the front of the Cross resulted in the identification of a potential candidate in the Kunstindustrimuseet in Oslo. The Oslo Corpus was duly displayed on the Cloisters Cross in *The Year 1200* exhibition in 1970 (Fig. 7.4), and the association was generally accepted.<sup>5</sup> Various people claimed credit for this 'discovery', including Thomas Hoving, Florens Deuchler, and John Beckwith, but only Martin Blindheim, so far as I know, had already put it in writing (in 1969).<sup>6</sup> However not everyone was convinced, most significantly Willibald Sauerländer, who in his review of the exhibition was dismissive of the whole idea. His scepticism was couched thus: 'On the one hand we have a highly sophisticated composition with tiny figures, covered by inscriptions and charged with a complicated and pretentious program, on the other a piece of the highest quality of carving depending for its appeal on the vigour of its physical appearance and the drama of form, rather than a network of allegorical interrelations'.<sup>7</sup> An unfortunate implication is that the Cross is not a piece of carving of the highest quality and its figures lack vigour and drama. But is that true of, for example, the central medallions? And how



Figure 7.2  
Good Friday  
plaque, Cloisters  
Cross, here  
dated ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
provided by  
Florens Deuchler  
and modified by  
the author



Figure 7.3  
Easter plaque,  
Cloisters  
Cross, here  
dated ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of  
Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph  
provided by  
Florens Deuchler  
and modified by  
the author

Figure 7.4  
Oslo Corpus  
(Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo,  
Inv. No. 10 314)  
on the Cloisters  
Cross in 1970,  
here dated 1188,  
both walrus ivory.  
The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan Mu-  
seum of Art, New  
York, Acc. No.  
63.12. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main; photograph  
provided by  
Florens Deuchler  
and modified by  
the author



would it be possible for the Oslo Corpus on its own to comprise ‘allegorical interrelations’? It clearly needs the context of a cross, such as the Cloisters Cross, for such relations to be apparent or even possible. I will argue in due course that when the two objects are seen together, any stylistic differences are entirely the result of scale (and the amount of detail possible) and that a dialogue between the two pieces becomes insistent, complementary, and compelling.

The main problems identified by critics have been that Christ as shown on the Oslo Corpus wears the Crown of Thorns; and the position of his legs have suggested to Sauerländer and some subsequent commentators that his two feet overlapped and were pierced by a single nail.<sup>8</sup> Ergo, the Corpus is Gothic whereas the Cross is late Romanesque; they could not possibly belong together. This perception was endorsed as recently as 2022 by Rainer Kahsnitz for whom the carving in Oslo is ‘nach 1200/1210’, while he dates the Cross (and the Pilate plaque) to the third quarter of the twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> The use of only three nails and the presence of the Crown would, such critics argue, push the Oslo Corpus into the thirteenth century, when the Crown and three nails, rather than four, were increasingly preferred. However, as Christ’s lower legs are missing from the Corpus, it is not clear to me how any conclusions can be drawn about the nail or nails in his feet—it is far from obvious that his legs were crossed, and if they were side by side his feet could have been too. Also problematic is how late we would have to date the Corpus for a single nail and the Crown of Thorns to be commonplace—

arguably the second half of the thirteenth century. But the style of the drapery of the Corpus suggests a late Romanesque origin.<sup>10</sup>

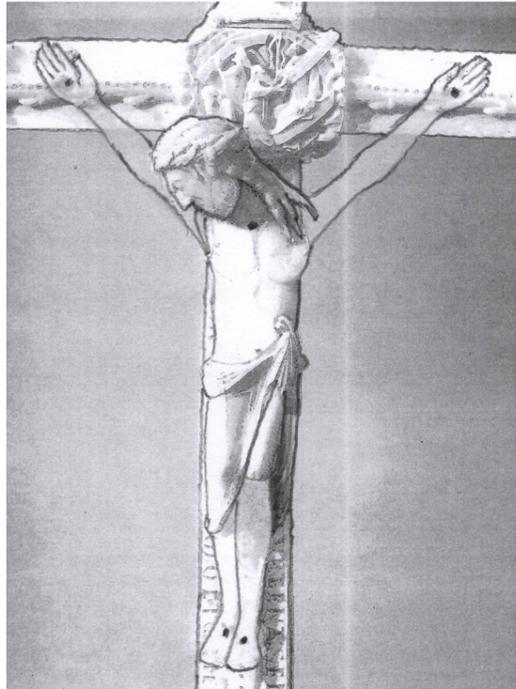
Perhaps for these reasons, other scholars persisted in linking the Cross and the Corpus: they were shown together at Beckwith’s exhibition of English ivories at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1974 and in *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200* at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1984.<sup>11</sup> In Hoving’s *King of the Confessors*, published in 1981, they were still treated as a unit (he seems always to have retained this view), but in the community of historians of medieval art, mention of their association was gradually abandoned, without the case in its favour ever being set out in any detail.<sup>12</sup>

### The Relationships between Corpus and Cross

The close connection between Cross and Corpus can be argued on the basis of style, iconography, and cultural ideology, which is what this section of my essay explores. Its final part turns to the consequences that follow if the two pieces were indeed made for each other. My long-standing view is that there are so many points of visual cross reference between the two carvings that they are likely to be contemporary and related. An obvious place to start is a comparison of the figure of Christ in the Good Friday plaque on the Cross with the Oslo Corpus. Firstly, despite the discrepancy in size (35 mm in height for Christ in the Good Friday plaque versus 210 mm in height, when complete, for the Oslo Corpus—six times larger), the proportions are remarkably similar (Figs. 7.5 and 7.6). When the Deposition figure is scaled up, it will be seen that Christ’s shoulders, navel, knees, and feet are about level with those of the Corpus and can be linked with almost parallel horizontal lines. Secondly, both figures show the loincloth disposed to uncover the left thigh of Christ, and both loincloths have a remarkably similar knot at Christ’s left hip. When it comes to anatomy, we may note the similar arrangement of ribs (shallow curves) and the notched sternum, and perhaps the wavy hair falling on the shoulders. The tress of hair on Christ’s right (dexter) shoulder on the Good Friday plaque was once matched by one on the Oslo Corpus, as the extant hairlines on the latter make clear. Just as telling are the common elements in the rendering of drapery. Both the Corpus and the Cross employ a late version of so-called damp fold, in which areas of cloth cling to the body. These adhering patches are articulated in some places by nested V-folds, occasional curving rolls (like thin pipes), and small ‘bridges’ over furrows at the edges of garments (Fig. 7.7). I do not know another single, three-dimensional crucifix figure in any medium with all these characteristics.

But this is so formalist—the Oslo Corpus is great sculpture, as Sauerländer recognised. The carving of the face depicts the pain of Christ’s death, which is what can be read on the side of the Cloister Cross in the words *Dei penam mor . . .* (the pain of the death of God, or the pain of God dying) (Fig. 7.8).<sup>13</sup> This juxtaposition is unlikely to be just happenstance, for the inscription on the other edge, adjacent to Christ’s naked thigh, includes the words *nuda videt pudibunda* (he [Cham] sees the naked shame) (Fig. 7.9). The location of these verses has been selected to highlight the rare visual characteristics of the Oslo Corpus, or something very like it. If, for

Left:  
Figure 7.5  
Reconstruction  
of the missing  
parts of the Oslo  
Corpus on the  
Cloisters Cross.  
Graphic by the  
author



Right:  
Figure 7.6  
The figure of  
Christ on the  
Good Friday  
plaque of the  
Cloisters Cross.  
Graphic by the  
author

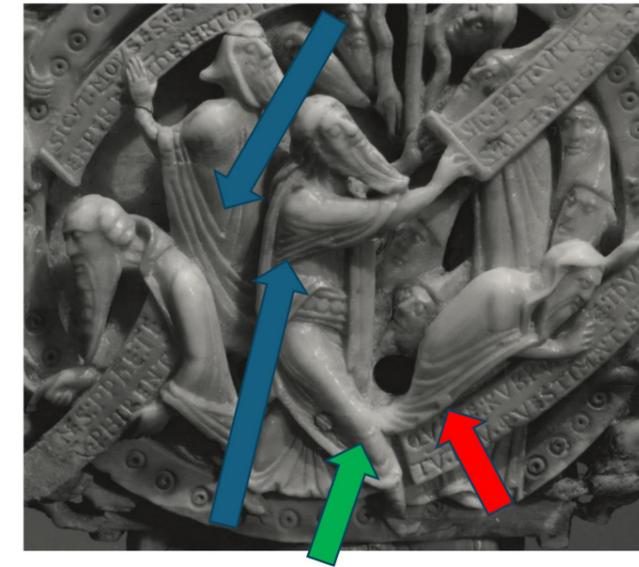
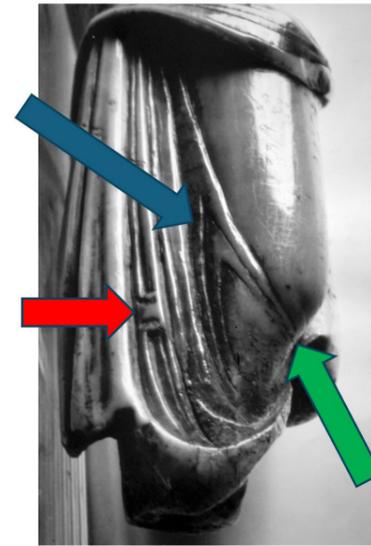


Figure 7.7a–b  
Details of the  
drapery on the fig-  
ure of a) Moses  
on the front boss  
of the Cloisters  
Cross, The Clois-  
ters Collection,  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York, Acc.  
No. 63.12, and  
b) the loincloth of  
the Oslo Corpus,  
Kunstindustri-  
museet, Oslo,  
Inv. No. 10 314,  
showing similar  
conventions  
of damp-fold  
drapery: nested  
V folds, a thin roll  
of cloth beneath  
the knee, and  
'bridges' across  
furrows

Damp fold (clinging cloth): clinging knee roll (green), vested V folds (blue) and bridges over furrows (red).

example, the *terra tremit* (the earth trembles) couplet had been written there, no expressive connection would be found.

Another eloquent aspect of the original corpus (even if it was not 'Oslo') would have been the raised arms of Christ. The large central roundel, with its concentration of imagery and texts at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical arms of the Cloisters Cross, makes it virtually certain that this figurative 'halo' was meant to be readily visible, which would have necessitated lowering the position of Christ's head, tipping it to one side, and angling his arms at about forty-five degrees, as suggested by the 1970s positioning (see Figs. 7.4 and 7.5). It seems that Christ's right arm rose up against the side of his face, as though it was supporting the weight of his head. Photographs of the Corpus from the back indicate an angle of about 135 degrees for the mortice joint on the shoulder of the carving (Fig. 7.10). Indeed, the angles of the socket holes for the arms of the Oslo Corpus indicate, as Parker and Little realised, 'that the arms originally sloped sharply upwards', noting however that 'such a position is difficult to equate with a Romanesque corpus'.<sup>14</sup> But logic suggests that this had to be the arrangement. For either Christ's body was low on the Cross, with raised arms and bowed head, or his arms were shorter and outstretched horizontally, with the rest of his body (head to foot) being higher up the Cross, obscuring the central medallion. The locations of the nail holes securing Christ's hands and feet determine their positions. It is quite apparent how unnatural the proportions of his trunk and limbs would be if a standard, cross-shaped Romanesque crucifix figure had been intended.

Although they are not common, antecedents of this pose can be found from the time of the Gero Cross in Cologne cathedral (late tenth century) onwards and invariably contribute to a sense of the torture of crucifixion. Another early example is the engraved Crucifixion on the reverse of the



Figure 7.8  
Oslo Corpus on  
the Cloisters  
Cross, from  
the right side.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph by  
the author, taken  
in 1974.

Left:  
Figure 7.9  
Oslo Corpus on  
the Cloisters  
Cross, from the  
left side. Artwork  
in the public do-  
main; photograph  
by the author,  
taken in 1974.



Right:  
Figure 7.10  
Rear view, Oslo  
Corpus, here  
dated ca. 1188,  
walrus ivory.  
Kunstindustri-  
museet, Oslo,  
Inv. No. 10 314.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph pro-  
vided by Florens  
Deuchler and  
modified by the  
author



Lothar Cross; there also are three ivory plaques on or from book covers that have this characteristic.<sup>15</sup> The ivory plaques have been dated to the mid-eleventh century and their origin located in Echternach (in modern Luxembourg) or the Middle Rhein. One of the plaques, now in the British Museum, may be the latest of the group (Fig. 7.11).<sup>16</sup> This format is nothing like *Christus triumphans* nor *Christus patiens*, the suffering Christ, but depicts instead the moment of his death. Sabrina Longland's research long ago showed that *patientis* (suffering) was the usual word chosen for the many variants of the *Cham ridet* verse, but on the Cross it is changed to *mor[ientis]* (dying).<sup>17</sup> This is a cross concerned with death (albeit with the hope of eternal life). Its soteriological position is that those who will be saved are those who believe that this was the purpose of Christ's death. For me, the detailed carving of the figured halo and the raised arms and facial expression of the Oslo Corpus speak of a carefully coordinated vision composed for this crucifix to the extent that it makes the combination of unusual but not unparalleled features all the more purposeful. As an example, the scroll held by Isaiah as he looks down from the central halo asks 'why are you red in

your apparel?' (Isaiah 63:2), which continues 'like one who treads grapes in the winepress'. The loincloth of the Oslo Corpus has surviving traces of red pigment—not a widespread colour for it in any medium. The point here is that in his sacrifice Christ has prepared the wine, which is his blood, for the redemption of humankind. Surely if the Cloisters Cross is a 'great work of art' (and if it isn't why the fuss?) we would expect a careful coordination between its parts, in which case there is no more reason for the figure of the crucified Christ to be conformist than the Cross itself is. We should be impressed, rather than surprised, at the ways the artist has contrived an emotionally consistent, distinctive and expressive masterpiece.

There are hundreds of depictions of the crucified Christ in Romanesque art in many different media. The most comprehensive collection is Peter Bloch's catalogue of copper-alloy corpora. They number over six hundred, but very few can be identified as having any relevant characteristics. Focusing on one detail, the knot in the loincloth at Christ's left hip and his uncovered thigh, there are about a dozen depictions (2 percent of the total) which are broadly similar, the earliest of which is on Bernward of Hildesheim's silver cross.<sup>18</sup> The origin of the format can be found on various Carolingian ivory plaques, usually book covers attributed to Metz between 850 and 900 (Fig. 7.12); it also occurs on engraved crystals of similar date.<sup>19</sup> This Carolingian ancestry indicates the formal origins of the figure of Christ on the Good Friday plaque and the Oslo Corpus. But although widely disseminated in northern Europe, Christ's naked thigh was not often depicted in the Romanesque period, presumably because it was shameful. Two other characteristics of the Deposition point to similar sources: the Virgin's bowed head and veiled hands and St John's expression of grief, resting his tilted head on his right hand. Both are attested on ivories and in manuscripts from the mid-ninth century, for example in the Crucifixion initial of the *Drogo Sacramentary*.<sup>20</sup>

To summarise the essentials, the Good Friday plaque strongly suggests that the main figure of Christ crucified be shown with his loincloth knotted at his left hip and his left thigh exposed. The elaborate central boss on the front of the Cross effectively requires the arms of the corpus (whether the Oslo Corpus or any other) to be raised at a steep angle so that Christ's head does not obscure the detailed carving. As it happens, the position of the nail holes on the Cross allows a reconstruction of the Oslo Corpus which matches the proportions of Christ on the Good Friday plaque. Juxtaposition of 'the pain of dying' with the expression on Christ's face and of 'naked shame' with his uncovered limb is more than coincidentally appropriate. And stylistically the draperies on the Cross and the Corpus share the same characteristic quirks of late Romanesque damp fold, with a similar commitment to articulating the bodies beneath the cloth.

#### Danish Contexts for the Cloisters Cross

The Oslo Corpus (Fig. 7.13) was bought for only ten kroner (perhaps equivalent to about fifty euros today) in a Copenhagen antique shop in 1884 by an art student named Emil Hannover.<sup>21</sup> So, if the Corpus belongs to the Cross, perhaps the whole ensemble had a Danish provenance and was originally made in Denmark for a Danish patron. Exploring the possibility

Figure 7.11  
Crucifixion  
plaque, perhaps  
Mosan, ca.  
1100?, elephant  
ivory. British Mu-  
seum, London,  
Acc. No. Maskell  
1856,0623.35.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph ©  
British Museum



Figure 7.12  
Crucifixion  
plaque, detail  
of Christ on the  
Cross, Metz, ca.  
860, elephant  
ivory. Victoria  
and Albert Mu-  
seum, London,  
Inv. No. 251-  
1867. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main, courtesy of  
the Victoria and  
Albert Museum

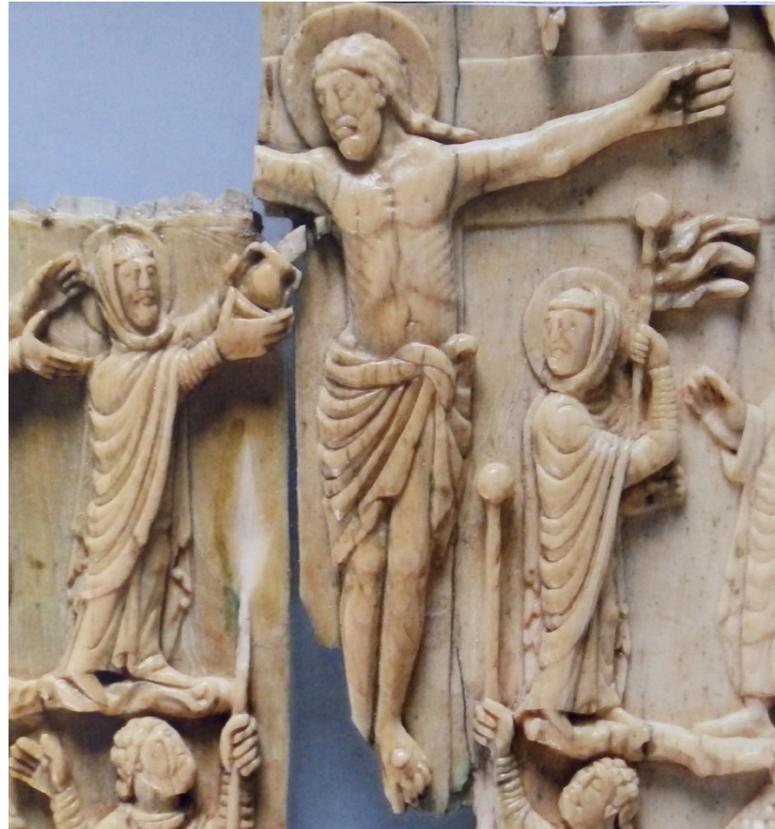
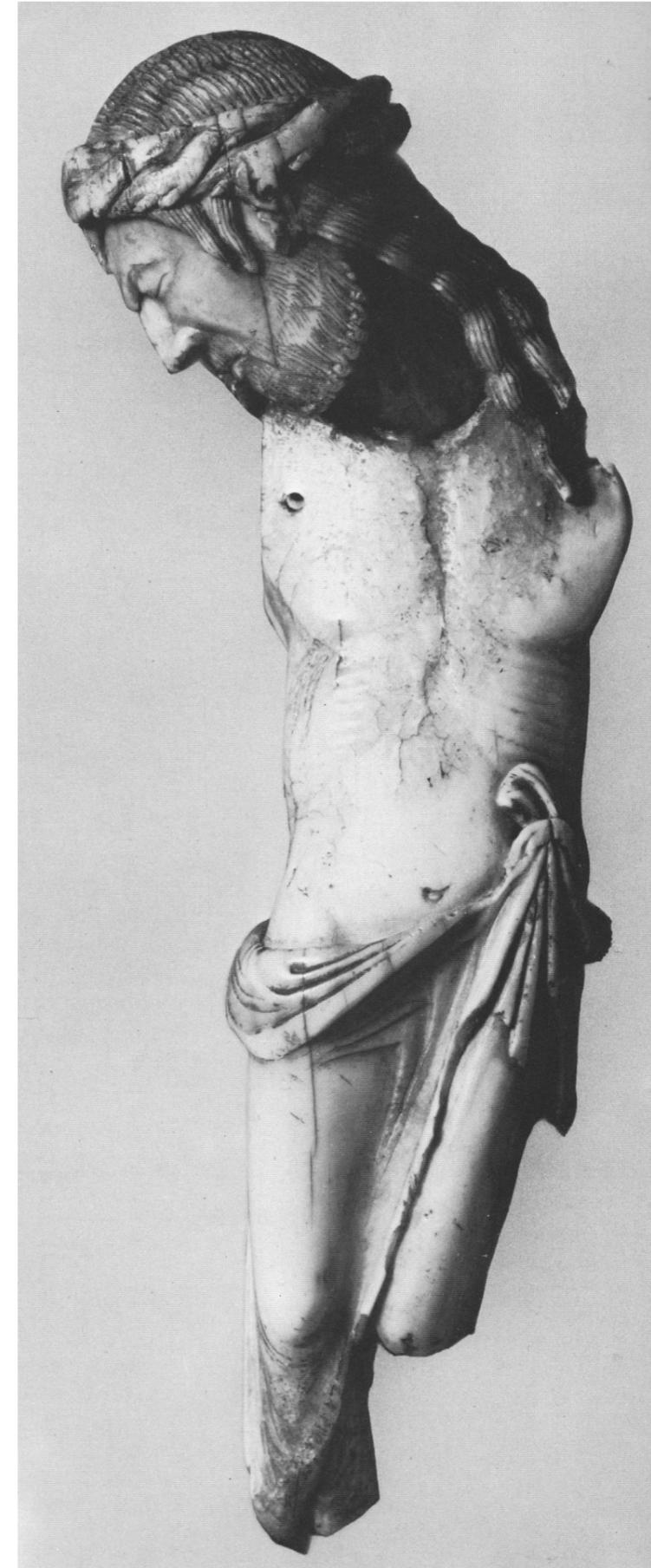


Figure 7.13  
Front, Oslo Cor-  
pus, here dated  
ca. 1188, walrus  
ivory. Kunst-  
industrimuseet,  
Oslo, Inv. No. 10  
314. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main; photograph  
provided by  
Florens Deuchler  
and modified by  
the author



that the Oslo Corpus is Danish brings to the fore its connections with a comparatively well-documented walrus-ivory cross made circa 1110 for a princess called Gunhild, a daughter of Sweyn Magnus, king of Denmark (d. 1075).<sup>22</sup> Gunhild's Cross (Fig. 7.14) is invariably mentioned in discussions of the Cloisters Cross because it too is 'literary'. Its inscriptions quote Luke 24:39, Matthew 25:34 and 41, and part of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Luke 16:24–25. Although it lacks the sheer density of inscription found on the Cloisters Cross, there are some telling similarities. One is the use of colour to highlight the capital lettering. The pigment range here is gold, black, red, and green. Many of the letter forms are also similar: the varieties of A, the round and square C and G, the undulating horizontal strokes of Z, and the dotted Y.<sup>23</sup> A juxtaposition of the capital-letter style of the word *SYNAGOGA* on the two artefacts indicates an almost exact replication of their forms (Fig. 7.15a–b). It is also worth drawing attention to the positioning of certain words on the two crosses. The front faces of both include *VITA*, *MORS*, and *SYNAGOGA*, and they are quite similarly located: *VITA* at or near the top, *SYNAGOGA* roughly halfway between the top and the base, and *MORS* at or nearer the base. And just as the lower roundel of Gunhild's Cross shows the figure labelled *MORS* awakening from death, so the Cloisters Cross shows Adam and Eve *surgente sepulto* (the buried one rising) and both Adam and Death (*Mors*) have engraved trickles of Christ's blood as the agent of resurgence.

I have argued in some detail that Gunhild's Cross was presented to one of two monasteries in Odense (one a nunnery, the other for monks) by Gunhild, the sister of King Cnut IV (Cnut the Saint) of Denmark. He was martyred and buried in the city in 1086 and formally canonised by the pope circa 1100; his relics may still be visited in Odense (Fig. 7.16). That context is relevant to the next turn in my argument, which is that the Cloisters Cross was made for, or on behalf of, yet another King Cnut of Denmark, the sixth, perhaps to be given to the monastery at Ringsted, where in time he was interred. Cnut VI is principally famous in art historical circles, following Patricia Stirnemann's persuasive arguments, as the prince for whom the *Copenhagen Psalter* was made by itinerant 'English' artists, one of whom, the so-called Simon Master, practised a style quite close to that of the Cloisters Cross.<sup>24</sup> Two distinctive features of the psalter are a unique image of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, with an angel holding a large, jewelled cross above the entrance and a relic list naming the *lignum domini* (wood of the lord, that is, the Cross) as belonging to a certain *dominus* (lord), though unfortunately the name of the lord has been erased. It seems the owner(s) of the psalter had a particular devotion to the cross.<sup>25</sup>

Cnut was crowned as co-ruler with his father, King Waldemar, at a tender age in 1170 and became sole ruler on the latter's death in 1182. In 1177 he married Gertrude, a daughter of Duke Henry the Lion and his first wife, Clementia of Zähringen, hence the likelihood of a close engagement with art and personnel from Saxony. Attention has been drawn to the similarities between the inscriptions on the Cross and in manuscripts from Helmarshausen and Hildesheim.<sup>26</sup> The commonest of them is 'maledictus omnis qui pendet in ligno' (cursed are all who hang on a tree [Galations 3:13]), but 'o mors ero mors tua' (O Death I will be your death [Hosea 13:14]) and 'quare rubrum est vestimentum tuum' (why is your apparel red [Isaiah 63:2]) also occur.<sup>27</sup> Both these texts are found on the Crucifixion page of the



Figure 7.14 Reverse inscribed with biblical texts, Gunhild's Cross, Denmark, ca. 1110, walrus ivory. National Museum, Copenhagen, Inv. No. 9087. Artwork in the public domain; photograph © Lennart Larsen

*Stammheim Missal*.<sup>28</sup> Although Cnut and Gertrude's marriage was childless and they were reputedly chaste, there is no indication of an estrangement. The appearance of Adam with Eve at the base of the Cross may suggest that whoever commissioned it was alert to the importance of stressing salvation for both men and women. Although Eve is often shown being rescued from Limbo by Christ, she is much less commonly shown alongside Adam at Calvary.<sup>29</sup>

But are there reasons for thinking the Cloisters Cross is a royal commission? Three observations pertain. The Hand of God within the *titulus* board blesses the word *rex* (king) (Fig. 7.17). That could be unintentional (it has been suggested that the *Dextra dei* [right hand of God] is blessing Christ rising from the tomb on the left plaque).<sup>30</sup> However, in the adjacent dispute between Pilate and Caiaphas about the wording of the *titulus*, the index finger of the Roman governor also points to the word *rex* as he says 'what I have written, I have written' (Fig. 7.18). Again, this could be chance rather than careful orchestration. But then there is the Crown of Thorns on the head of the Oslo Corpus. In my view, this draws attention to the trials and tribulation of kings as consecrated rulers (*Christos*, written on the top edge of the Ascension plaque, means chosen and anointed). Why did St Louis, king of France, want so much to possess the Crown of Thorns? The question is rhetorical, though ongoing contacts between French and Danish kings were persistent. St Louis's grandfather Philip II, known as Philip Augustus, was married in 1193 to Cnut VI's sister Ingeborg. She may have commissioned

Figure 7.15a–b  
 Lettering of the word SYNAGO-  
 GA on a) the  
 Cloisters Cross,  
 The Cloisters  
 Collection, The  
 Metropolitan  
 Museum of Art,  
 New York, Acc.  
 No. 63, and  
 b) Gunhild's  
 Cross, National  
 Museum, Copen-  
 hagen, Inv. No.  
 9087



**Gunhild's cross, the Cloisters cross and Letter forms.**

Fig. 7.16  
 Map of Denmark  
 showing places  
 named in the  
 text of this essay.  
 Map © Frederick  
 John Sekules  
 Heslop



Figure 7.17  
*Titulus* board,  
 Cloisters Cross,  
 here dated ca.  
 1188, walrus ivo-  
 ry. The Cloisters  
 Collection, The  
 Metropolitan Mu-  
 seum of Art, New  
 York, Acc. No.  
 63.12. Artwork in  
 the public do-  
 main; photograph  
 provided by Florens  
 Deuchler and  
 modified by the  
 author



Figure 7.18  
 Dispute between  
 Pilate and Caia-  
 phas, Cloisters  
 Cross, here  
 dated ca. 1188,  
 walrus ivory. The  
 Cloisters Collec-  
 tion, The Metro-  
 politan Museum  
 of Art, New York,  
 Acc. No. 63.12.  
 Artwork in the  
 public domain;  
 photograph pro-  
 vided by Florens  
 Deuchler and  
 modified by the  
 author



the *Bible moralisée*, now in Vienna, for their brother Waldemar, king of Denmark, whose name in an erased inscription has been revealed in the Vienna manuscript by multispectral imaging.<sup>31</sup>

The presence of the Crown of Thorns on the Oslo Corpus merits particular attention, as it has been argued that representations of the Crown do not predate the acquisition of the relic by King Louis IX of France in 1239. However, there are exceptions to this ‘rule’, two of them ivory carvings. The earlier is Anglo-Saxon, perhaps circa 1050, and attached to a gold and enamel cross now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Fig. 7.19).<sup>32</sup> Christ’s head bears a circlet in the form of a two-ply twist, his eyes are closed, and his expression pained—similar, in those respects, to the Oslo Corpus. It may be noted that the Abbeys of Abingdon and Malmesbury both claimed relics of the Crown of Thorns as gifts from King Athelstan (r. 924–937).<sup>33</sup> A second, later example (ca. 1200) is also English and now in the Hunt Museum in Limerick.<sup>34</sup> The Crown of Thorns was also seen in two late twelfth-century visions, at Dunstable in 1188 and the Abbey of Eynsham in 1196.<sup>35</sup> The former occurred in the context of preparations and recruitment for the Third Crusade, implicitly criticising the warfare between France and England as a distraction from the fight that is worth fighting. All versions of the vision at Dunstable stress the blood flowing from the body of Christ crucified. Its purpose as a ‘recruiting agent’ for the Third Crusade in August 1188 (on the vigil of Saint Laurence) is hard to ignore.<sup>36</sup> There is no denying the words ‘and crowned with thorns’ (*et spinæ coronatus*) in one recension of Roger of Howden’s text, but several commentators have sought alternative readings of the headbands on the V&A and Hunt carvings, such as ‘wreath’ or ‘rope crown’. This seems to me like special pleading.<sup>37</sup> In the absence of examples of rope crowns, why would a viewer of the V&A crucifixion reliquary think to interpret it in such a way?

The presence and explicitly thorny character of the Crown on the Oslo Corpus also suggests a specific focus on the trials and tribulations of kingship (Fig. 7.20). Cnut VI had good reason to be conscious of the hazards of his inheritance. As noted above, his predecessor-namesake Cnut IV (Cnut the Saint) had been martyred by his own men at Odense in 1086 and formally canonised by the pope around 1100. Cnut VI’s grandfather Cnut Lavard, duke of Schleswig and subsequently also of Holstein (and recognised in Jutland as King Cnut V), was assassinated by his cousin Magnus in 1131 and canonised in 1170.<sup>38</sup> His burial place was the Benedictine monastery at Ringsted where his son King Waldemar and grandson, Cnut VI himself, ultimately joined him. It was the family mausoleum and, perhaps, the church for which the Cloisters Cross was made.

Kings David and Solomon are represented on the Cloisters Cross with prophetic scrolls and placed above the *titulus* board and Hand of God as if stressing that this upper section of the vertical shaft of the Cross leading up to the Ascension was especially dedicated to ordained monarchy. Rather unexpectedly, David and Solomon do not wear lily crowns or diadems but helmets (Fig. 7.21). This form of headgear (sometimes called *Spangenhelm* [barred helmet] or *Kreuzbügelkrone* [cross-framed crown]) had been an option for rulers from antiquity onwards, but by the twelfth century was decreasing in use. An exception is Cnut VI, who chose it for the majesty side of his great seal (Fig. 7.22). Its military connotations express an important



Figure 7.19  
Head of Christ  
on the Cross,  
southern  
England, ca.  
1050, walrus  
ivory. Victoria  
and Albert  
Museum, Inv.  
No. 7943-1862.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
courtesy of the  
Victoria and  
Albert Museum

aspect of Cnut’s foreign policy: the suppression and conversion of the pagan Wends, who lived to the east of Denmark along the southern shores of the Baltic Sea.<sup>39</sup> There were military expeditions against them throughout Cnut’s reign, often supervised by Absalon, archbishop of Lund, ‘close to being the greatest ever campaigner and warrior here in the north’.<sup>40</sup> This policy had been paramount for a century or more and was political and territorial as much as religious. Such ‘struggles’ were ongoing, but after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187, the ultimate triumph of Christianity faced other more important foes: Jews and Muslims. One way of seeking to comprehend the decision to designate Christ as ‘king of the confessors’ is that redemption will come only to those who acknowledge his lordship. But as so many did not, those Christians in power, such as the Western European kings, were forced into the fundamentalist position of striving to make the whole world (as it was then understood) believe in salvation through commitment to Christ.

One of the manifold uncertainties about the Cloisters Cross is its

Figure 7.20  
Head of Christ,  
Oslo Corpus,  
here dated ca.  
1188, walrus ivory.  
Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo,  
Inv. No. 10 314

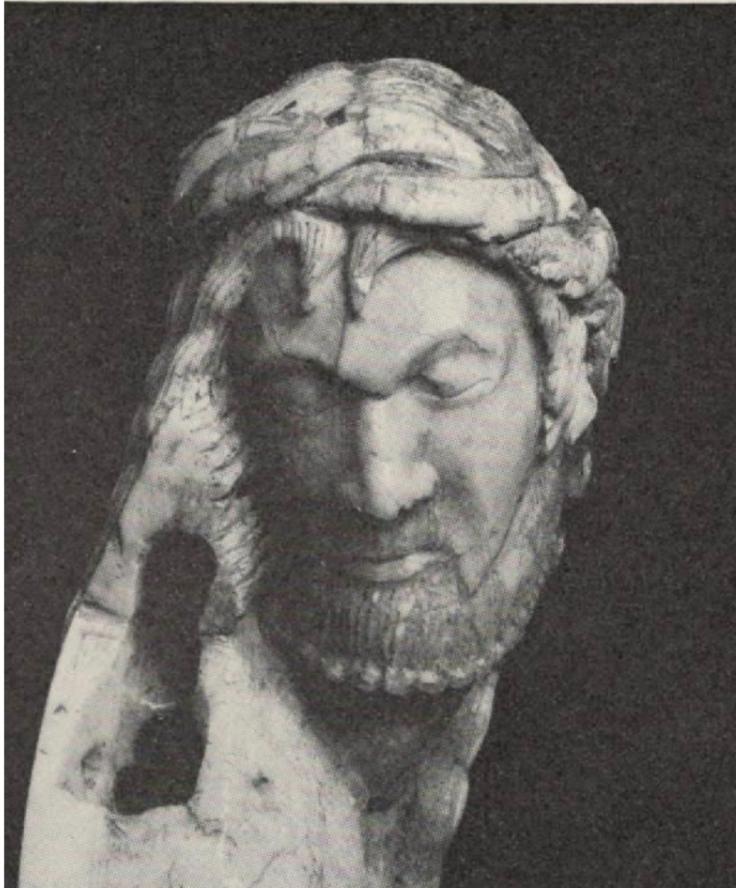


Figure 7.21  
Kings David and  
Solomon, Cloisters  
Cross, here dated ca.  
1188, walrus ivory. The  
Cloisters Collection, The Metro-  
politan Museum  
of Art, New York,  
Acc. No. 63.12.  
Artwork in the  
public domain;  
photograph pro-  
vided by Florens  
Deuchler and  
modified by the  
author



Figure 7.22  
The great seal  
of King Cnut  
VI of Denmark.  
Photograph after  
Henry Petersen,  
*Et Dansk Flag  
fra Unionstide  
i Maria-Kirken  
i Lübeck*  
(Copenhagen: C.  
A. Reitzel, 1882)

date, which impinges on how it is interpreted. For example, if its making follows the fall of Jerusalem in October 1187 and the initiation of the Third Crusade, it coincides with a widespread persecution of the Jews in Europe, which then becomes a factor in assessing the vitriol of its main inscriptions. It must be stressed that there was no Jewish community in Scandinavia at the time. Their presence in visual and verbal polemic is adoptive, being used to convey alterity and highlight what good Christians are not.<sup>41</sup> Other aspects of the Cross can be brought into play here, notably the pairing of Synagoga and the *agnus dei* on the central roundel of the reverse and the scroll held by the adjacent figure, the prophet Balaam (Fig. 7.23). Synagoga is normally contrasted with Ecclesia, as on Gunhild's Cross, but for some reason that was not the best option in this context where the Lamb of God—the sacrificial Christ, not the living Church—is deemed more appropriate. However, the foes do not confront each other; Synagoga turns her back on the Lamb and he turns his head away from her while leaving his breast exposed to her lance, very much as happens in the *Gospel Book of Henry the Lion and Matilda of England*.<sup>42</sup>

Balaam's scroll merits attention too, for it gives his prophecy in Numbers 24:17 as 'consurget homo de Israel' (a man shall arise from Israel), substituting *homo* for the Vulgate's *virga*, so a man shall arise rather than a rod or sceptre.<sup>43</sup> This may in part have been because *virga* was often interpreted as relating to the Virgin Mary (*virgo*) rather than Christ (who was the flower on the rod). Whatever the case, the text clearly triggered or was prompted by a reminiscence of Isaiah's prophecy (11:1) that the Messiah would come from the rod and root of Jesse. That might justify the next quote on Balaam's scroll, from Isaiah 11:10: 'et erit sepulchrum eius gloriosum' (and his sepulchre shall be glorious). This is the only scroll on the Cross to conflate texts from separate books of the Bible (Numbers and Isaiah). Also, non-Vulgate quotations are generally hard to find on the Cross (*homo* for *virga*), the obvious significant exception being *rex confessorum*. The designer was clearly well versed in Holy Writ, and the carver was careful in

Figure 7.23  
Prophet Balaam,  
Cloisters Cross,  
here dated ca.  
1188, walrus ivory. The Cloisters  
Collection, The  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New  
York, Acc. No.  
63.12. Artwork in  
the public do-  
main; photograph  
provided by  
Florens Deuchler  
and modified by  
the author



transcribing and abbreviating the texts he was given, so these are more likely to be premeditated changes than accidental errors.

One explanation for the tactic is that by rewriting *virga as homo* in relation to *sepulcrum*, the designer of the Cross alluded specifically to Christ's resurrection and its location in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Sepulchre was often specified as the ultimate goal of a crusade: the entry on Urban II in *Liber pontificalis* credits Gregory VII with the idea of 'an expedition to Jerusalem for the defence of the Christian faith and the liberation of the Lord's Sepulchre from the hands of enemies', and this focus was maintained for the next century.<sup>44</sup> In 1190, Pope Clement III called the Third Crusade 'the journey to the Holy Sepulchre'.<sup>45</sup> The enemies of the faithful are specified in Isaiah 11:13–14, where Isaiah prophesied that the coming together of the faithful would defeat or subdue the ungodly, identified as Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. It is a rallying cry to unite the righteous by implication, so that the god-man's tomb may once again be glorious and purged of unbelievers. There is a purposeful decision evident in bolting Isaiah 11:10, and implicitly what follows in the rest of the chapter, onto Numbers 24:17, for it reinforces the suggestion that the anti-Jewish rhetoric on the Cross should be understood more broadly as an attack on all non-Christians at a time of aggravated hostility.

As regards the Third Crusade itself, the Danes were early on the scene, their ships helping to blockade the port of Acre in September 1189 after it had fallen to Saladin. A letter from Pope Clement III to Emperor Isaac

II Angelos praises the Danes for their prompt response. Their squadron, perhaps assembled under the auspices of a recently formed naval military order, the *piratica* of Roskilde, presumably had royal support.<sup>46</sup> According to a contemporary witness, the Danish expedition comprised fifty ships and twelve thousand men of whom 'hardly 100' survived the recapture of Acre.<sup>47</sup> Another contingent of fighters set off from Denmark two years later: four hundred men and a mysterious *nepos regis* (king's nephew), though which relative of Cnut's has never been firmly established.<sup>48</sup> They arrived in 1192, after Richard I and Saladin had concluded their three-year truce, and so they returned from the Levant to Denmark in 1193.<sup>49</sup> This prompted the composition of a panegyric, the *Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam*, with a dedicatory letter addressed to a *dominus K*, most probably the king himself.<sup>50</sup>

Contemporaneous visual evidence for crusading interests in Denmark may be identified on the elaborate sculpted gable over the south door of Ribe Cathedral (Figs. 7.24 and 7.25). The gable imagery has been interpreted before as a call to arms to fight the infidel, but against the pagan Slavs rather than in the Holy Land.<sup>51</sup> However, Ribe's location is hardly suitable as a rallying point for a campaign in the Baltic, whereas it is well-placed as the rendezvous for a seaborne journey to the Mediterranean, especially as it was joined by a Frisian contingent. Positioned above an earlier carved tympanum depicting the Deposition, the gable's central focus is reminiscent of a Coronation of the Virgin, with Mary (labelled *S' MARIA*) crowned and enthroned alongside Christ, also crowned. Above them is inscribed *CIVITAS IERUSALEM*, and between them is a cross, its lower shaft held jointly in their hands. Beneath their feet are a queen, a king, and a bishop. To either side are angels holding scrolls, on the dexter side with the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, 'Beati pauperes spiritu' (How blessed are the poor in spirit [Matthew 5:3; cf. Luke 6:20]), and opposite 'Venite ascendamus ad montem dei'. The latter derives from Isaiah 2:2–3: 'Et erit in novissimus diebus praeperatus mons domus domini in vertice montium et elevator super colles; et fluent ad eum omnes gentes, et ibunt populi multi, et dicent "venite et ascendamus ad montem domini, et ad domum dei iacob, et docebit nos vias suas"' (and it will happen in the latter days that the mountain of God's house will rise higher than the heights and tower over the hills, then all the nations will flock to it. Many peoples will come to it and say 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of God, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways'). This gathering of the peoples to learn the ways of the Lord is clearly an earthly event, 'quia de Sion exhibit lex et verbum Domini de Jerusalem' (for the Law will issue from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem), and is surely encouraging a 'pilgrimage' to the mount where Christ set out his manifesto. These texts effectively rule out the possibility that heavenly Jerusalem was specifically intended. Is there a need for preaching in Heaven, would access to it be open to any who did not already know the ways of the Lord? The *Historia de profectioe Danorum*, mentioned above, adopts the trope (in chapter 6) that the expedition of 1191 was going to 'the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey' (ut videre mererentur terram promissionis fluentem lac et mel). The author proceeds to conflate this land with the Virgin Mary.<sup>52</sup>

There is no reason for this crusading rhetoric not to be applicable at

Figure 7.24  
South door, Ribe  
Cathedral, here  
dated between  
1190 and 1220.  
Photograph by  
the author



Ribe at any date after 1188. The fact that the earthly king, below Christ and Mary, holds a cross which he raises up to Mary, to whom the cathedral is dedicated, and that she touches it with the extended fingers of her right hand as though consecrating it, implies that sanction is being sought from Mary for the expedition made by the crowds gathered below as they embark for Jerusalem. The inclusion of the suppliant king and queen below is possibly just a patriotic gesture, showing the loyalty of the bishop of Ribe or perhaps Archbishop Absalon, who combined the roles of spiritual and military director of Cnut's kingdom. I am not suggesting here that the gable sculpture is

Figure 7.25  
Detail of the  
gable over the  
south door, Ribe  
Cathedral, here  
dated between  
1190 and 1220.  
Photograph by  
the author



prospective but rather that it was a commemorative tribute carved after the event to enhance the record of Cnut and Gertrude's commitment to crusading in general and the liberation of Jerusalem in particular. That makes its date uncertain, except for a *terminus post quem* of 1188, though it may be pertinent that the bishop of Ribe from 1204 was Olaf, previously Cnut VI's chancellor and recorded as having given an ivory cross to his cathedral.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to cultural and ideological factors, it seems to me that the composition of the Ribe gable has some formal similarities with the Cloisters Cross, perhaps most noticeably in the tilted heads and long

jutting beards of the lower figures and, of course, the scrolls with biblical inscriptions. The sense of dense activity and the variety in the letter forms also make interesting comparisons. While not suggesting that the gable is as sophisticated in conception or skilled in execution as the Cloisters Cross, to my eye both are plausibly carvings from the same artistic milieu. This is not to argue that the Cross and the gable are directly dependent on each other but rather that they evince comparable approaches to biblical text and its use in militant Christian rhetoric.

The Cloisters Cross is a dour object and the Oslo Corpus complements it physically and ideologically. Together they constitute a sophisticated, complex, but carefully planned work of art which must have been conceived in its extraordinary detail by a churchman of considerable learning and an inventive turn of mind. An obvious candidate would be Absalon, bishop of Roskilde and archbishop of Lund, who studied in Paris in the 1140s. Another possibility is his friend and contemporary William of Aebelholt, the sub-prior of Saint-Victor in Paris, who in 1165 was chosen by Absalon to be abbot of Eskilso, just north of Roskilde in Zealand. William retained close contacts with Paris, most notably in the negotiations with King Philip Augustus over the repudiation of his queen, Cnut VI's sister Ingeborg. But several other leading clerics in Denmark had links with Paris, including Omer, bishop of Ribe, who corresponded with Stephen of Tournai, the abbot of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris. Stephen had been a canon at Saint-Victor and later became bishop of Tournai (1192–1203). Stephen was also closely connected with Queen Ingeborg and perhaps involved in the production of her grand illuminated psalter.<sup>54</sup>

There has been an unfortunate tendency to regard Denmark, and Scandinavia in general, as peripheral to the great centres of high medieval artistic and intellectual endeavour. But during the reigns of Cnut VI and his brother Waldemar II, 'the Danish king was one of the greatest powers in Europe'.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the late twelfth century was almost unparalleled in its internationalism; much evidence shows the strength of Denmark's connections with the British Isles, northern Germany, the Low Countries, northern France, and the Mediterranean.<sup>56</sup> It is those contacts with learned churchmen and accomplished artists that underpin the remarkable creation of the Cloisters Cross and its figure of the crucified Christ now in Oslo.

To be clear, this is not an overarching claim that the Cross and its corpus need be of purely Danish manufacture (whatever that might mean): the carver could have been English or German by origin or training; the 'learned advisor' who selected the content very probably studied in Paris. Attempts to determine such things depend perhaps on pursuing small, unusual, and apparently minor details. But small details, such as the beading on the lopped cross—suggesting perhaps that it is both jewelled and a rough instrument of torture—are meaningful (alluding to both pain and triumph) and are likely to matter as much to the patron as to the artist or the designer of the iconography.<sup>57</sup>

The way forward proposed in this paper for approaching such conundrums is that establishing the impulse for creation is critical. Who would have wanted such an object as the Cloisters Cross and in what circumstances? It is easy to underestimate the physical, ideological, intellectual, and artistic effort (the capital) that would go into an ivory carving.

The decision to turn Christ's halo into a complex of figures and inscriptions had ramifications: making its content visible required rethinking the 'normal' position of Christ on the Cross. Various other entailments, perhaps including composing the *terra tremit* verse, required an awareness of options and a flexibility in organising them into a coherent whole. Where did this energy and determination come from? This is a rhetorical question, but also a challenge for anyone seeking to locate the Cross. My tentative resolution of these questions has been guided by three principal considerations. First is the conviction that the Oslo Corpus was made for the Cloisters Cross and, as a corollary, that a Danish provenance has to be taken seriously. Then there is the relationship with Gunhild's Cross, which serves as a precursor to the Cloisters Cross in several respects. Finally, there are the people, the cultural environment, and (perhaps most importantly) the political moment that could have occasioned this artistic statement of fundamental Christian beliefs: effectively a credo carved in ivory.

1. I would like to thank Margit Thøfner, Lloyd de Beer, and Nick Trend for their help with aspects of this essay, and Jack Heslop for drawing the map.
2. Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994); and Bernice R. Jones, 'A Reconsideration of the Cloisters Cross with the Caiaphas Plaque Restored to Its Base', *Gesta* 30, no. 1 (1991): 65–88.
3. On Jewish hats, see, for example, Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible Moralisee* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 15–19. The Roman headgear is similar to many war bonnets shown in imagery representing kings and nobles in military guise in the second half of the twelfth century. For example, see the Geoffrey of Anjou enamel plaque in Le Mans (Peter Lasko, *Ars Sacra, 800–1200*, 2nd ed. [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994], 247–48, plate 338); or the great seals of King Stephen (George Zarnecki, Janet Holt, and Tristram Holland, eds., *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at Hayward Gallery London, 5 April–8 July 1984* [London: Arts Council, with Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984], cat. nos. 331 and 332, both illustrated at 303).
4. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 262–63n26.
5. Konrad Hoffmann, *The Year 1200: A Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), cat. nos. 60 and 61, colour photo of the Cross and the Oslo Corpus together on xviii.
6. Martin Blindheim, 'En romansk Kristus-figur av Hvalrosstann', in *Kunstindustrimuseet i Oslo, Arbok*, 1969 (Oslo: Kunstindustrimuseet, 1968–69), 22–32.
7. Willibald Sauerländer, "'The Year 1200'", a Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 12–May 10, 1970', *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 4 (1971): 512.
8. Sauerländer, "'The Year 1200'", 512–13. See also, for example, Tage Christiansen, 'Ivories: Authenticities and Relationships', *Acta Archaeologica* 46 (1975): 123–33.
9. Rainer Kahsnitz, *Goldschmidt Addenda: Nachträge zu den Bänden I–IV des Elfenbeincorpus von Adolph Goldschmidt, Berlin 1914–1926*, Sonderdruck aus der Zeitschrift des Deutschen Verein für Kunstwissenschaft 68, 72/73 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2022), cat. nos. 157, 155, 156, respectively.
10. It would be interesting to know the date (precise or approximate) of the earliest extant instance anyone can find of Christ crucified with three nails and wearing the Crown of Thorns.
11. John Beckwith, ed., *Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England, 700–1200* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts Council, 1974), cat. no. 61 for the Cross and cat. no. 62 for the Corpus; Beckwith, 96: 'This figure [the Oslo Corpus] may well belong to No. 61'. See also Zarnecki, Holt, and Holland, *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200*, cat. nos. 206, 207 and 208.
12. Thomas Hoving, *King of the Confessors* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 329.
13. For reasons of poetic consistency, the final word is usually extended as *morientis*, but there does not seem to be enough room for so many letters. This was pointed out in a lecture (unpublished) by Hoving. The alternative, *mortis*, will fit the space but does not have the same metre of short and long syllables.
14. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 255.
15. For the Lothar Cross, see Lasko, *Ars Sacra*, 101 and plate 139 (where it is dated ca. 985/91), or more legibly in Hanns Swarzenski, *Monuments of Romanesque Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), plate 29, fig. 71.
16. For the ivory plaques, see Adolph Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser, VIII.–XI. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1914), cat. nos. 29–31. The first two are still found on the covers of manuscripts. Goldschmidt compares the workmanship of no. 31 (in the British Museum) with an ivory Virgin and Child relief now in Antwerp (his no. 33). They have very similar foliate scroll borders and a liking for patterned surfaces which look to my eye to be more mature Romanesque (twelfth century) than ca. 1050.
17. Longland notes the harshness of *nuda pudibunda* (naked shame) as against *detecta membra* (uncovered limbs) and *morientis* (dying) as against

- patientis* (suffering). The English translations are inevitably approximate; the Latin words had more subtle connotations in the twelfth century. Sabrina Longland, 'A Literary Aspect of the Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 2 (1969): 54, 56, 74.
18. Peter Bloch, *Romanische Bronzekruzifixe*, *Bronzegeräte des Mittelalters 5* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1992), VI A 1, with related examples following. It may be noted that the late twelfth-century derivative, VI A 2, has arms more steeply raised.
  19. For example, Lasko, *Ars Sacra*, plates 36, 69, 77. For a discussion of V&A Inv. no. 251-1867, illustrated in Fig. 7.12, see Paul Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings: Early Christian to Romanesque* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), cat. no. 44.
  20. Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 255–66, fig. 27.
  21. Emil Hannover, 'Et middelalderligt norsk Hvalros-Krucifix i dansk Privateje', in *Kunst og Haandverk, Nordiske studier (til) Johan Bøgh 1848–1918*, ed. A. W. Brøgger, Emil Hannover, and Axel L. Romdahl (Kristiania: Cammermeyers forl, 1918), 96–102.
  22. T. A. Heslop, 'Gunhild's Cross, Seeing a Romanesque Masterwork through Denmark', *Art History* 43, no. 2 (2020): 433–57.
  23. Of the two forms that do not appear on Gunhild's Cross but are on the Cloisters Cross, the more common is a capital *L* with a curving upright and horizontal bar; it occurs widely in Saxony. The rarest form on the Cloisters Cross is the curious ampersand seen on the scrolls held by David, Solomon, and Job, among others. The closest parallel I have found is in the prayer *Suscipere digneris* added to the *Copenhagen Psalter* soon after 1200. See Christopher Norton, 'Archbishop Eystein, King Magnus and the Copenhagen Psalter – A New Hypothesis', in *Eystein Erlendsson: Erkebiskop, Politiker og Kirkebygger*, ed. Kristin Bjørlykke, Øystein Ekroll, Birgitta Syrstad Gran, and Marianne Herman (Trondheim: Nidaros Domkirkes, 2012), fig. 6.
  24. *Copenhagen Psalter*, MS Thott 143.2, Royal Library, Copenhagen. Patricia Stirnemann, 'The Copenhagen Psalter Reconsidered as a Coronation Present for Canute VI', in *The Illuminated Psalter: Studies in the Content, Purpose and Placement of Its Images*, ed. F. O. Büttner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 323–38.
  25. The Entry into Jerusalem miniature and the relic list are discussed by Norton, 'Archbishop Eystein, King Magnus and the Copenhagen Psalter', 185–215. The name in the erased inscription (Norton's fig. 8) seems to have had three ascenders at the beginning and another very soon after, so it could be Waldemar (Cnut's brother and successor) but is hard to construe as Magnus, Norton's preferred candidate.
  26. John Munns, 'Relocating the Cloisters Cross', *The Burlington Magazine* 155, no. 1323 (2013): 381–83; and see Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
  27. The passage continues 'like one who tramples grapes'—the reference as a whole thus implicitly comparing the wine of the Eucharist with Christ's blood.
  28. *Stammheim Missal*, MS 64, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. See Elizabeth C. Teviotdale, *The Stammheim Missal* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 63–65.
  29. One instance is the Adalbero ivory book cover of ca. 1000 in Metz. See Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, ill. 125.
  30. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 65, 86.
  31. *Bible moralisée*, cod. 1179, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, is one of the grandest manuscript projects of early Gothic illumination. See Katherine Tachau, 'The King in the Manuscript: The Presentation Inscription of the Vienna Latin *Bible Moralisée*', *Gesta* 60, no. 1 (2021): 1–30. There are many resonances between the Cloisters Cross and the Vienna Latin *Bible moralisée*, not least the hostility directed at unbelievers characterised as Jews. See Lipton, *Images of Intolerance* for this analysis of the contents. It might be worth exploring whether the contemporaneous Vienna French *Bible moralisée* (cod. 2554, ÖNB, Vienna) was made for Ingeborg at the time of her reconciliation with King Philip in 2013.
  32. Inv. no. 7943–1862, V&A. It is reproduced on a large scale in colour in John Beckwith, *Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England* (London: Harvey Miller and Medcalf, 1972), frontispiece, and cat. no. 20.
  33. Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen zur Kunst in England, Wales und Schottland vom Jahre 901 bis zum Jahre 1307*, vol. 3 (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1956), 219–20, nos. 5944, 5946.
  34. Beckwith, *Ivory Carvings* (1972), cat. no. 109. The imagery has been misunderstood. A chalice is held up (presumably by Ecclesia—the figure is missing) to catch the blood from Christ's side wound; the figure opposite holds a vase but turns away. This is Synagoga with a vase of manna from heaven as kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Hebrews 9:4), that is to say, the heavenly food superseded by the Eucharistic wine. It seems likely that this pierced walrus-ivory relief was originally mounted on a portable altar. Synagoga with the pot of manna is found elsewhere in England, for example in the picture cycle prefacing a mid-thirteenth-century Apocalypse in *The Eton Roundels*, MS 177, fol. 75, Eton College. See Avril Henry, ed., *The Eton Roundels: Eton College, MS 177 ('Figurae bibliorum'): A Colour Facsimile with Transcription, Translation and Commentary* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 133–34. The origin of this composition is the painted vault of Worcester Chapter House, ca. 1100–10. See T. A. Heslop, 'The English Origins of the Coronation of the Virgin', *The Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1233 (2005): 790–97.
  35. John Munns, *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Norman England: Theology, Imagery, Devotion* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), esp. 59 for Eynsham and 260 for Dunstable. In both cases, stress is laid on the tortured and bloody body of Christ.
  36. Interestingly, William of Newburgh post-dates the vision to late 1189. In his chronology he notes an upsurge in English anti-Semitism and the pogroms of 1190. The Jewish persecutors of Christ were one with the Muslim conquerors of Jerusalem who had seized the Holy Cross. This was a war against all unbelievers.
  37. Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 258; and compare Munns, *Cross and Culture*, 260n54.
  38. His canonization coincided with Cnut VI's first coronation. See Gabor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. Eva Pálmai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
  39. Kersti Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics in the Baltic Sea region, 1100–1250*, trans. Aet Varik (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
  40. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, eds. and trans., *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark* (Odense: Odense University Press for the City of Odense, 1986), 179; for 'one of the greatest warriors ever to be born in Denmark', see Pálsson and Edwards, 161.
  41. Jonathan Adams, "'Untilled Field" or "Barren Terrain"? Researching the Portrayal of Jews in Medieval Denmark and Sweden', in *Antisemitism in the North: History and State of Research*, ed. Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 21–40. See also Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, especially for the representation of Judaism in the context of the Albigensian crusade against the Cathars of southwestern France.
  42. See Cecily Hennessy's essay in this volume.
  43. The Septuagint text of Numbers 24:17 shows *anthropos*, which means 'man'. *Anthropos* is the word written on the dexter side of the Ascension plaque. See Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, ill. 67.
  44. I. S. Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073–1198: Continuity and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 325.
  45. Cited by Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073–1198*, 325. See also these words from the *Chronicle of Monte Cassino*: 'to wrest the Lord's Sepulchre from the Saracens', quoted in Robinson, 328. Clement III (1187–91) allowed that a vow to take the cross could be replaced by 'a subsidy to enable others to make the journey to the Holy Sepulchre', quoted in Robinson, 336.
  46. For this suggestion, references, and a narrative of the expedition, see Paul Riant, *Expéditions et pèlerinages des Scandinaves en Terre Sainte au temps des croisades: Thèse présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie Ad. Lainé et J. Havard, 1865), 275–95.
  47. Helen J. Nicholson, trans., *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 74. Nicholson suggests (p. 10) that this section of the account was 'written by a crusader . . . [who] arrived in the Holy Land with the fleet from the north in early September 1189'.
  48. For *nepos regis*, see Nicholson, *Chronicle*, 82; and Robert Lee Wolff and Harry W. Hazard, eds., *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 2, *The Later Crusades, 1189–1311* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 50–51, 65.
  49. Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, *A Journey to the Promised Land: Crusading Theology in the Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam (c. 1200)* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2001).
  50. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Journey to the Promised Land*, 8, takes this person to be a 'superior cleric'. The unique (now lost) manuscript of the *Historia de profectioe Danorum* also contained the *De bello Judaico* of Josephus (about the capture of Jerusalem in AD 70) and a 'life' of St Geneviève of Paris. The manuscript was in the council library of Lübeck along with King Waldemar II's *Bible moralisée* and was probably part of the Danish royal collection until its seizure in 1226. The proposition is set out in Tachau, 'The King in the Manuscript', 24.
  51. For discussions of the imagery, see Per Kristian Madsen, 'Trekantrelieffet over Ribe Domkirkes Kathoveddør – et monument over en angrende, retmæssig konge' [The Gable Relief above the gate to the southern transept of the Cathedral of Ribe – a monument to a repentant, rightful king], *By, marsk og geest* 12 (2000): 5–28; Niels Haastруп, 'Om Ribes Kathoveddør. To notater: Kattespor og Kongesønnen som metafor', *Romanske Stenarbejder* 5 (2003): 281–96; Markus, *Visual Culture and Politics*, 104–8; and for echoes of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in the architecture of Ribe, see Markus, 37–39.
  52. 'Terra ista Virgo Maria fuit, generans Jesum Christum, Deum et hominem' (This land was the Virgin Mary bringing forth Jesus Christ, both God and man). Quoted in Skovgaard-Petersen, *Journey to the Promised Land*, 53. The implication is that milk comes from the body and figures Christ's humanity, whereas honey comes from the dew of heaven and signifies his divinity.
  53. Christiansen, 'Ivories', 127, citing Ellen Jørgensen, 'Ribe Bispekrønike', in *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger*, ser. 6, vol. 1, ed. J. Oskar Andersen (Copenhagen: Society for Danish Church History, 1933), 31, where the ivory cross is called a *crucifixum de dente ceti* (a crucifix of a whale's tooth).
  54. *Ingeborg Psalter*, MS 1695, Musée Condé, Chantilly. See Florens Deuchler, *Der Ingeborgpsalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 97, 109n107, 113–14, 146, 148n238; and Tachau, 'The King in the Manuscript', 18n68, 19nn73–77, 20nn78–79.
  55. Tachau, 'The King in the Manuscript', 11.
  56. Martin Blindheim, 'Scandinavian Art and Its Relations with European Art around 1200', in *The Year 1200: A Symposium*, ed. Konrad Hofmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 429–68.
  57. For another example of this combination of details, see the Deposition ivory discussed in Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings*, cat. no. 104. The Deposition ivory has recently been acquired by the V&A: Inv. no. A.10-2024.

# Conclusions

Cecily Hennessy and T. A. Heslop<sup>1</sup>

Like many famous works of art, the Cloisters Cross is a contested object. Its origins, function, provenance, ownership, and meaning have been and will continue to be subjects of debate. This collection of essays offers new data and fresh interpretations to add to those already generally available, with a view to encouraging further research. The sophistication of technology for analysing materials, as discussed by Robyn Barrow, is becoming increasingly more fruitful. The ivory of the Cloisters Cross (and the Pilate plaque and the Oslo Corpus) could be examined in more detail as regards its age and the genesis and habitat of the walrus(es) from which it comes, although the origin of the walrus tusk does not, of course, necessarily indicate where or when it was carved. The paint on these objects also deserves careful assessment of pigments, medium, and mode of application.

The introduction and the first two essays have revealed some of the dilemmas faced by the great collecting institutions of England and the United States, less than two decades after the Second World War. These essays put into the public domain conversations, memos, and relationships that are not widely known as well as the views of some of the deeply knowledgeable minds who tackled an understanding of the Cross, with no access to reliable information about it. Although coming to the subject from different angles, all the authors of the essays here have posed views on the Cross which complement each other in various ways. None of us is arguing for a date for the Cross earlier than about 1150 or later than 1190. There is agreement that the material and the sophistication of its carving imply familiarity with the character of walrus ivory, which indicates manufacture in north-western Europe or by an artist trained there. Its textual content, as has been reiterated here by Sabrina Harcourt-Smith, almost certainly derives from biblical scholarship of a kind developed around Paris from the mid-twelfth century but which spread widely. All the essays point to recognition that the investment of time, money, expertise, and imagination in the creation of the Cross imply an elite context. One direction in which this might point is secular patronage in association with monastic or episcopal involvement, though of course virtually all great churches had secular patrons. Among those mentioned here, Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony, and Matilda of England; Cnut VI, king of Denmark and Gertrude of Bavaria; and Béla III, king of Hungary and Margaret of France, all had close connections with monarchs and their courts in England, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. They also had close if sometimes turbulent relations with the religious authorities of their day.

As implied in several of the essays here, in the case of a complex work such as the Cloisters Cross, it is likely there were at least three parties concerned with the eventual outcome, the finished object. They were the patron (perhaps both the funder and intended recipient, though they may be separate people or institutions), the maker(s), and the advisors, who may have helped create the brief and acted as intermediaries while the work was in progress. It is quite unlikely that the motivation came primarily from the artist because of the need for such resources as time, money, and materials. The impulse to commission may, however, have depended on there being an artist with the known ability to do the work and to do it well. That said, it is rarely clear how much detail is specified and what is left to the creativity of the artist. Whatever the patronage, the chances are that the Cross was

eventually preserved in a church (or chapel) treasury. Where that was is unknown and may remain so.

As has been shown here by Charles T. Little and Neil Stratford, the intentional evasiveness and contradictory hints of Ante Topić Mimara (hereafter Topić, as he was generally known), the first known owner of the Cross, have obscured its post-war provenance and perhaps also its place of origin. In terms of areas where further research could perhaps prove useful, one is the possible eyewitness recollection offered by Josef Kugler, re-evaluated here by Little. According to Charles T. Little and Elizabeth Parker's interview with Kugler, he saw the Cross in 1932–33. He claimed that the Cross was with 'papers', indicating that the 'Cross was taken on a crusade by a soldier who was bringing it to Jerusalem in order for it to be blessed'. According to Little's evaluation, 'the idea was that it never reached Jerusalem and was left behind.'<sup>2</sup> Kugler's story would be a curious (and unnecessary) one to invent. He had read the *Reader's Digest* shortened version of Thomas Hoving's book on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's purchase of the Cross.<sup>3</sup> This contains a his/story of where Topić found the Cross, in a monastery in eastern Europe in 1938, and also notes that the Cross was then in five pieces.<sup>4</sup> Kugler may have had some personal investment in telling a tale. But, like Topić, that might have been to put people off the scent rather than to solve the puzzle. It would be good to know more about Kugler's activities and his whereabouts during and after the war. Similarly, further investigation into Topić's career and any evidence of a relationship with Kugler could possibly give useful leads. There is still mystery about when and where art historians, including John Pope Hennessy, Erich Meyer, William Milliken, James Rorimer, Richard Randall, Hanns Swarzenski, and Fritz Volbach, first became aware of the Cross and what they may have known about it.<sup>5</sup> Rorimer's published statement that the Met knew of the Cross in 1956 seems entirely possible; several others may have known about it before then or shortly afterwards.<sup>6</sup> As has been shown here, all these uncertainties add to the mystery and to the impulse to suspect a coverup or a conspiracy. Hoving's various accounts of the pursuit of his 'quarry', their relation to what is otherwise documented, and some strange absences in and additions to the narrative contribute further to the sense that the requisite genre is the detective thriller set in the turmoil of post-war Europe rather than art history.

The essays here reflect art historical methods that contribute to the dating and attribution of an object. With architectural sculpture, wall painting, or stained glass, usually tied to a fixed location, issues of date and patronage are often resolved by the building from which the work comes. For illuminated manuscripts, there are multiple means of approach: the character of the script, the source of the text, the style of decoration, and/or an ex libris inscription or other indication of ownership help clarify where, when, and for whom a book was made. Small-scale metalwork, ivory carvings, and textiles are another matter. Some helpfully carry on them the names of their maker and patron; would we otherwise know or even be able to guess that Gunhild's Cross was made by a 'German' artist, Liutger, for a Danish princess? But for undocumented and portable *Kleinkunst*, scholars have tended to rely in the first instance on assessments of artistic style. This is true, for example, of ivory carvings (from the Early Christian period through to the Gothic) and of Romanesque crucifixes, predominantly made of cast-

copper alloys. One way forward is the identification of stylistic or iconographic groups. A 'group' may have a pattern of distribution revealing a common area of origin or shared patronage. Using stylistic analysis and iconographical details, the essays here have suggested various places of origin. However, in a multicultural environment with a complex interplay of familial and political relationships, movement of artisans and artists, and exchange of artistic practices, such specifics are hard to tie down. For an anonymous, seemingly unique, custom-made artefact such as the Cross without known provenance, it remains a challenge to tie it to a particular place or cultural context.

Working from well-documented cases, it would be possible to systematise, in general terms, how medieval art was produced. This can, however, only suggest something like 'normal' procedure, and in acting as a rough guide, its analytical potential is limited. All this is not to discount the wealth of experience, research, conversation, collaboration, and thought that has gone into the essays in this book, which we trust bring significantly more insight to our understanding of the Cross. Analysis of the Cross and deductions about the circumstances of its creation also impact our understanding of related objects and contexts. In such cases as the Cloisters Cross, proof is often elusive. We offer, however, several hypotheses that individually or together suggest solutions for some of the Cross' riddles, adding pieces to a jigsaw which may help to make sense of the picture as a whole.

1. Cecily Hennessy would like to thank the Society of Antiquaries for a Philips Grant for research in the United States. She is grateful to the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art for generous use of their archives.
2. This account appears in a memo from Charles T. Little to The Files, 18 April 1986, in Correspondence 1970–, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
3. Thomas Hoving, 'Quest for the Lost Cross', *Reader's Digest*, no. 716 (December 1981): 242–88; and Thomas Hoving, *King of the Confessors* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981).
4. Hoving, 'Quest for the Lost Cross', 179; and Hoving, *King of the Confessors*, 294–95.
5. In 1961, in a letter dated 24 July from Harold Parsons to James Rorimer, Parsons lists the people who he knew or thought had seen it. Parsons said he saw it four years ago [1957?], and continued: 'I then reported the Winchester Cross [now the Cloisters Cross] almost contemporaneously to you, to Milliken, who was still Director at the time, and to Kenneth Clark; also to Swarzenski. Kenneth Clark immediately sent Pope-Hennessy [sic] to see the object. Then came Milliken, then Swarzenski, then Randall sent by you, then Sherman Lee who had just come to the Directorship, accompanied by Severance Milliken, later William Wixom, recently appointed curator of medieval art; finally [Rupert] Bruce-Mitford'. Harold Parsons to James Rorimer, 24 July 1961, Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. There is also a handwritten note from Hoving to Peg [Margaret Freeman], saying 'concerning the Topić cross, [Theodor] Müller gave me a great deal of info on Topić himself. I called [Hermann] Schnitzler in Köln from the Münchener Zentralinstitut, he

remembers having seen a part of the cross years ago (for Topić had to buy it in pieces—on the instalment plan) and believes it OK as far as he can remember'. Thomas Hoving to Peg [Margaret Freeman], 29 October 1961, Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

6. See Thomas P. Hoving and James J. Rorimer, 'The Bury St. Edmunds Cross', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 22, no. 10 (1964): 317. A letter dated 1956 from Richard Randall to Topić thanks him for showing him objects in Zurich but says, 'None of them are of interest to the museum for acquisition', implying either that the Cross was not among them or that he was not wishing to show interest. Richard Randall to Ante Topić Mimara, 25 October 1956, Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Seven months later, however, Harold Parsons wrote to Miss Freeman [Margaret] at the Cloisters saying that Volbach accepted the ivory crucifix 'beyond question'. Harold Parsons to Margaret Freeman, 22 May 1957, Cloisters Cross, file 1, Correspondence 1956–April 1963, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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