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Chrisitanity in Insular Artwork from the Seventh to Tenth Centuries

By

Alexandria E. White

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of

at

Lindenwood University

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTIANITY IN INSULAR ARTWORK FROM THE SEVENTH TO TENTH CENTURIES

Alexandria White, Master of Art History, 2022

Thesis Directed by: Dr. James Hutson, PhD

With the birth and spread of Christianity to the British Isles, there was a fusion between the different cultures that existed on these islands that resulted in a style known as Insular Art. These cultures are the Scottish Picts, the Irish Celts, the Anglo-Saxons, the Welsh, and the Vikings. In examining several works of art from these different cultures in this paper, the syncretism of Insular Art will be explored. Their traditionally Pagan symbols were given new meanings from Christianity as it spread. Through the study of various symbols and iconography employed in this art style, the author will establish the syncretic artistic traditions in this work of religious art and trace its lineage back to its Pagan roots.

Keywords: *Book of Kells, Lindisfarne Gospels, Franks Casket, Aberlemno Stones, Tarbat Ness, Sutton Hoo, Ezra Page, Codex Amiatinus, Cadfan Stone, Gosforth Stone, Thorvald's Stone, Christian, Pagan, Anglo-Saxon, Hiberno-Saxon, Insular, religious, Horror Vacui, Celtic, Irish, Scottish, Viking, monasteries*

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The British Isles (consisting of Modern day Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales, as well as the surrounding islands like the Isle of Man and the Hebrides), were home to numerous Celtic tribes that had descended from Iron Age peoples. Julius Caesar was the first contact and interaction from Rome to the British Isles (though this was not his first interaction with Celtic tribes as some tribes lived on the continent in modern day Spain and France) in 55 BCE. Roughly a century later, in 43 CE, the Roman Emperor Claudius began a slow invasion of the isles that ended with Roman occupation in 87 CE. There were some revolts and uprisings from the native tribes during this time, the most famous being the Iceni queen Boudicca in 60-61 CE. After nearly succeeding, the revolts were squashed down. The Romans were not able to suppress all the Celtic tribes, the most famous group here being the Picts in Scotland, so around 122 CE, the Emperor Hadrian built a wall in what is now modern northern England to separate the “wild” from the “civilized”. Over time, due to a slowly collapsing Rome (and the overspreading of influence, money, and resources), Rome was completely out of the British Isles by about 400 CE, leaving a power vacuum.

Not a decade later, this loss of power was filled by the invasions of Germanic tribes; the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians to name a few (hitherto called the Anglo-Saxons, due to the predominance of those cultures). For the next couple of centuries these Germanic peoples set up kingdoms and seemingly wiped out the Celts almost entirely.¹ Around the year 800 CE, the Vikings started invading and pillaging the British Isles and especially the Christian monasteries along the coast. This tumultuous land of conflicting peoples, cultures, religions, and ideas is

¹ This assumption is due to the amount of Early Germanic language in Old English and lack of Celtic vocabulary. However, there is recent scholarship that says that while Celtic words may not have influenced Old English, the grammar found in Old, Middle, and even Modern English may be able to be traced to Celtic languages.

where the stage is set, a place of swirling artistic styles and ideologies that will influence Insular Art.

In regards to religion, it is often thought that Christianity came to the British Isles with Saint Augustine in the last years of the 6th century (he did organize the religion) or with Saint Patrick in the mid 5th century (though he did help popularize it). In actuality, Christianity came with the Romans in the 1st century. However, with the organizing from Saint Augustine, “the six decades from the late 590s to the 650s, and particularly the period from around 620 to 655, saw a substantial and major change in the professed religion of much of England”.² This new religion, which combined with the surrounding Pagan religions in regards to symbols and holidays, such as Christmas and the celebration of the winter solstice, steadily grew thanks to the numerous Irish monasteries. These monasteries fell under the authority of the Bishop of Canterbury, but were distanced from the hand of Rome. This allowed for the eventual syncretism of the Pagan and Christian religions and cultures, culminating in a style referred to as Insular Art, or sometimes Hiberno-Saxon Art. This art was created from mostly the cultures that either previously existed or currently existed in and on the British Isles.

Though many scholars debate on specifics, Insular art can be generally defined as the art that existed in the British Isles after Rome’s occupancy until about the Tenth Century. It is different from the art style that existed in the rest of Europe at this time and is typically ornamental and consists of constant and repeating patterns. “Rich in Christian symbolism, this art combines intricate geometric ornament (interlace knotwork, spirals, key-patterns) with figurative scenes depicting Christian imagery and details of everyday life, including dress,

² Robert J. Wallis. “The ‘Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring’, Falconry and Pagan–Christian Discursive Space.” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30, no. 3 (August 2020): 413–32. doi:10.1017/S0959774320000025. P. 427

transport and weaponry.”³ Insular Art is different from the art style that existed in the rest of Europe at this time and is typically ornamental and consists of constant and repeating patterns.

³ Sally Foster, Kathryn Forsyth, Susan Buckham, and Stuart Jeffrey. 2016. “Future Thinking on Carved Stones in Scotland: A Research Framework.” *Carved Stones*.
http://www.carvedstones.scot/uploads/4/4/0/3/44032535/cs_scarf_full.pdf. P 18

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are five main cultures that contribute to Insular Art: the Scottish Picts, the Irish Celts, the Anglo-Saxons, the Welsh, and the Vikings. These cultures and their contribution will be examined in a selected few works of art apiece. Each culture added to this style and the depictions of the Christian faith that existed throughout the world. While these labels are more broad and there are smaller tribes within these groups, they do share the same beliefs and cultures which contributes to the classifications provided.

As stated in the background section, Christianity had a big influence on Insular art early on mostly due to the various monasteries throughout the British Isles. Thus, it is imperative that an understanding of the integration of Christianity among Paganism be explored. This foundation will be built with an examination of *The Book of Kells* and *Lindisfarne Gospels* and their creation. Lorcan Harney (2017) looks at Irish ecclesiastical sites using archaeological evidence and dissects this new amalgamated religion which helps further a mastery of the art in these illuminated manuscripts. Harney argues that the early converts of Christianity strategically and purposefully chose spots and adapted traditions of their Pagan neighbors to help “ease” the conversion of others.⁴

Fiona Leitch (2015) focuses on the religion and religiosity of the Celtic monks discussing the specific rigors of their monastic rules and beliefs.⁵ She describes them as individuals that allowed the Holy Spirit to work within them, helping them spread their religion and testify through the works they created. It is suggested that some of these monks may have had a hand in

⁴ Lorcan Harney. “Christianising Pagan Worlds in Conversion-Era Ireland: Archaeological Evidence for the Origins of Irish Ecclesiastical Sites.” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 117C (2017): 103–30. <https://doi.org/10.3318/priac.2017.117.07>.

⁵ Fiona Leitch. “The Celtic Way: Order, Creativity, and the Holy Spirit in the Celtic Monastic Movement,” (2015) <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/honors/540>

the creation of *The Book of Kells*. This understanding of their religion, including “an emphasis on hearing from the Holy Spirit and the creativity of individuals and cultures” is a key factor in understanding why the script and imagery were created the way that the Master-Artist and Artist-Scribe did.⁶

Some influences on Insular Art were Pre-Christian. There is some influence from Rome seen in a couple works of Celtic Art and this is explored in Lloyd Laing’s “*The Roman Origins of Celtic Christian Art*” (2005).⁷ He evaluates a couple of styles seen on many discovered Celtic brooches, like the La Tene style, whose influences can be seen in the *horror vacui* patterns in Insular illuminated manuscripts. He concludes that these patterns, which were themselves combinations of Pre-Iron Age Celtic and Roman styles, were “grafted” with other influences, ushering in the “Golden Age” of Insular Art. From this foundation, the next layer must be added to understand the specifics of Insular Art.

For the 2018 Ferrell Lecture Series for the American Society for Irish Medieval Studies, Marina Smyth (2018) gave a lecture called “Monastic Culture in Seventh-Century Ireland”,⁸ In it she examines primary sources and contemporary writings attempting to discern what life was like in Irish monasteries in the 600s. She describes the composition of the churches and monasteries, both the building material of wood and those who lived in and around them. She explores the economies within the monasteries, mentioning that these communities had such a system set up that they were free from most basic survival cares, freeing their time and attention for other tasks. She even describes some of the resources made and provided by these

⁶ Leitch, “The Celtic Way: Order, Creativity, and the Holy Spirit in the Celtic Monastic Movement” P. 9

⁷ Lloyd Laing. “The Roman Origins of Celtic Christian Art.” *Archaeological Journal* 162 (July 2005): 146–76. doi:10.1080/00665983.2005.11020623.

⁸ Marina Smyth. “Monastic Culture in Seventh-Century Ireland.” *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies* 12 (2019): 64–101. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26763328>.

monasteries that helped them succeed, giving a real insight to the monks who lived and worked there.

Martin Carver (2009) discusses Christianity and monasteries in Scotland during the seventh to tenth centuries and the prehistoric tendencies that helped pave the way for this new culture.⁹ He compares the monasteries that existed in Scotland to those that were in Ireland and England and explores the ties and connections between Pagan temples and the later Christian churches (some of which shared the same site, just decades or centuries later). Carver looks at how different Insular manuscripts were varied from those on the continent. He concludes the article with his belief that sites of early monasteries in Scotland weren't random scraps of land, but rather sites that already held sacred value for the previous Pagans, who worshiped on these lands in earlier years.

The Celts, which refer to the peoples and cultures existing at this time in Ireland, are often considered the most associated with Insular Art. This culture, though originally from Central Europe in the Late Bronze Age, is currently more heavily associated with Dublin, Ireland than its original area of Hallstatt in Austria. Regardless of origin story, by the 600s this culture was well established in the British Isles. The works of art selected to represent this culture are *The Book of Kells* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. It is of note that there are overlapping stylistic features that will be analyzed in this section that apply to other cultures discussed.

When examining Insular Artwork patterns, starting with a strong foundation is key. Regarding artistic traditions contemporary to these illuminated manuscripts, Dorothy Verkerk reviews the history of Irish Medieval History (2015) in regards to the methodologies used and

⁹ Martin Carver. "Early Scottish Monasteries and Prehistory: A Preliminary Dialogue." *The Scottish Historical Review* 88, no. 226 (2009): 332–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27867579>.

then discusses *The Book of Kells* and its resurgence into the limelight of study.¹⁰ Her writing is important as it gives context to the opinion of scholars regarding *The Book of Kells*, especially in recent years. The chapter “Art of Worship and Devotion”, out of the book *Art and Architecture in Ireland: Volume 1*, lays a framework from the Royal Irish Academy regarding the many illuminated manuscripts that were produced throughout Ireland during Middle Ages, exploring the fundamentals of these religious works.¹¹

The text, specifically the script, is one of the more popular topics in the scholarship of Insular illuminated manuscripts. There were several writings, including two dissertations, that probe into various aspects of *The Book of Kells* especially. Two of these scholars cover the specific way of writing, called “turn-in-the-path”. William Enders (2010) argues that the specific way that the words are written and their inclusion and interaction with the imagery on the page are fundamentally a precursor to graphic design and that interconnection is paramount to the success of illuminated manuscripts.¹² Donncha MacGabhann’s (2016) dissertation gives detailed analysis, providing support of the “Two Scribe-Author” theory, which states that a Master-Artist and a Scribe-Artist co-authored *The Book of Kells*. He establishes details of the “turn-in-the-path” writing system used by the Scribe-Artist.¹³

In Principio letters, as discussed by several authors, are the big, capital letters at the beginning of passages in these manuscripts. One of the authors, Małgorzata

¹⁰ Dorothy H Verkerk. "Medieval Irish Art History." *Studies in Iconography* 36 (2015): 135-54. Accessed October 2, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44735521>.

¹¹ Andrew Carpenter, and Rachel Moss, eds. *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume I: Medieval c. 400–c. 1600*. 1st ed. Vol. I. Royal Irish Academy, 2015. 224-327 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14jxtv1>.

¹² William Enders. “The Turn-In-The-Path Imagery in the Book of Kells.” *International Journal of the Book* 7, no. 3 (2010): 119–30. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9516/cgp/v07i03/36828>.

¹³ Donncha MacGabhann. “The Making of the Book of Kells : Two Masters and Two Campaigns,” 2016. <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.752884>

Krasnodebska-D'aughton (2002), argues that the use of the highly decorated *In Principio* letters are a manifestation and expression of the author the idea that God, as the Great Creator, is often likened to the Great Artist. By decorating the first letter of each passage, the authors are directing the reader's attention to the greatest artist of them all.¹⁴ Jeffery Hamburger (2011) equates seeing (as in visually taking in) to be an essential part of reading and uses *In Principio* letters as evidence of that.¹⁵ Heather Pulliam (2010) poses her idea that every mark and the way each word is written with the intent to inspire thought and meditation in the reader.¹⁶ Ben Tilghman (2011) also argues this print of font used to encourage meditation.¹⁷

Beyond the heavily scrutinized font and writing techniques, Tilghman (2011) also states the languages used in the text of *The Book of Kells* and similar illuminated manuscripts might have used different languages to exhibit the traditions inherited by Insular monasteries.¹⁸ Rebekah Cochell (2020) investigates actual writing of *The Book of Kells*.¹⁹ She compares the way information was written to more modern day examples, such as textbooks, proving that everything about *The Book of Kells* was to enhance the reader's experience.

¹⁴ Malgorzata Krasnodebska-D'aughton. "Decoration of the In Principio Initials in Early Insular Manuscripts: Christ as a Visible Image of the Invisible God." *Word & Image* 18, no. 2 (April 2002): 105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2002.10404981>

¹⁵ Jeffrey F Hamberger. "The Iconicity of Script." *Word & Image* 27, no. 3 (July 2011): 249–61. doi:10.1080/02666286.2011.541118.

¹⁶ Heather Pulliam. "Exaltation and Humiliation: The Decorated Initials of the Corbie Psalter (Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 18)." *Gesta* 49, no. 2 (2010): 97–115. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41550541>.

¹⁷ Ben C. Tilghman "The Shape of the Word: Extralinguistic Meaning in Insular Display Lettering." *Word & Image* 27, no. 3 (July 2011): 292–308. doi:10.1080/02666286.2011.541129.

¹⁸ Ben C. Tilghman "Writing in Tongues: Mixed Scripts and Style in Insular Art." academia.edu. Penn State University Press, 2011. https://www.academia.edu/1498997/Writing_in_Tongues_Mixed_Scripts_and_Style_in_Insular_Art.

¹⁹ Rebekah Cochell. "Easily Read, Easily Forgotten: Reassessing the Effects of Visual Difficulties and Multi-Modality in Educational Text Design," 2020. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/620>

Daniel McCarthy (2014) analyzes only a single image and its accompanying text contained in *The Book of Kells*.²⁰ He explores the image in *Folio 114RV*, whose subject matter and characters have been debated for over 150 years. This specific image has a corresponding scripture depicted (Matthew 26:30) in the background of the image. McCarthy contends that based on this scripture that the image is not of Christ being arrested, but of Christ going into the Mount of Olives with his disciples. His scholarship is important as it provides an insight to the religiosity and understanding of gospel stories that are expressed in Insular manuscripts.

Robert Stevick explores the interlacing patterns found in *The Book of Kells* and *Lindisfarne Gospels*. He explains its history and how these patterns were achieved.²¹ Using mathematical figures and equations, Stevick's argument is that the "coherent geometry" (which he uses different depictions of interlacing from Insular Art) is a purposeful design choice that has been used in Celtic and Insular art since the La Tené style in the Iron Age. Regarding the images, patterns, and other illustrated items contained in *The Book of Kells*, another article by Heather Pulliam (2012) discusses color and its more modern understanding in addition to the symbolism behind the colors chosen for the images. She suggests that the colors utilized in these images have specific meanings and interpretations in mind, not just because they were readily available or aesthetically pleasing.²²

As far as surveying the Pagan remnants in Insular Art, two authors discuss traditional Pagan patterns and iconography used. Susan Youngs (2001) analyzes the abstract, curvilinear

²⁰ Daniel McCarthy. "The Illustration and Text on the Book of Kells, Folio 114RV." *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 1-38. Accessed October 2, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924786>.

²¹ Robert D Stevick. "The Ancestry of 'Coherent Geometry' in Insular Designing." *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 134 (2004): 5-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25549914>.

²² Heather Pulliam. "Color." *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 3-14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924264>.

ornamentations seen in early Insular metalwork in conjunction with these works' enameling, tracing a tradition reaching back to Iron Age Celts.²³ In regards to Pagan iconography, John Soderberg (2004) probes into the longstanding tradition of depictions of red deer in secular and religious works,²⁴ claiming that use and significance of red deer jumped onto the page in early Medieval Irish work from reality which is another example of the amalgamous nature of Insular Art.

The next group with impact on Insular Art are the Picts and those who lived in what is today Scotland. D.V. Clarke examines some of the greatest legacy of the Picts; their standing stones.²⁵ This piece of scholarship is vital to this look at Insular Art, because he looks at all classes of stones (which include pre-Christian or at least Pagan religious iconography from the Picts). Clarke also discusses their connection to one another as well their potential use as burial markers. He contends that the Class II and III stones (the two styles that feature some or almost exclusively Christian iconography, respectively) were created around the same time as the Class I stones (no Christian iconography) because those who had converted to Christianity were trying to adapt their heritage to their newfound faith. Meggan Gondex looks at Scottish Cross-Slab stones and their Pictish art. Her argument that the stones were not pre-Christian but also not anti-Christian, but rather somewhere in the middle, denying neither belief system, gives new insight to the area of study.

²³ Susan Youngs. "Insular Metalwork from Flixborough, Lincolnshire." *Medieval Archaeology* 45 (January) (2001): 210–20.

²⁴ John Soderberg. "Wild Cattle: Red Deer in the Religious Texts, Iconography, and Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 8, no. 3 (2004): 167–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20853054>.

²⁵ D. V. Clarke. "Reading the Multiple Lives of Pictish Symbol Stones." *Medieval Archaeology* 51 (June 2007): 19–39. doi:10.1179/174581707x224642.

Anouk Busser assesses the connection between the Picts and the Vikings.²⁶ He looks at the Aberlemno II stone which is a Class II stone in Scotland that contains both Pictish works of art and Christian Iconography. On this stone he focuses on the battle scene (which could be either a record of an actual battle or an example of a symbolically religious war) that is on one side of it. Martin Carver takes a broader approach to the three classes of Cross-Slab Stones.²⁷ From there he provides an analysis of some Class II stones and how they developed from previous Cross-Slab Stones. He posits the idea that the monastery at Portmahomack was as important in early Scottish Christianity and in the production of Class II standing stones as Iona.

Sally Foster, Kathryn Forsyth, Susan Buckham, and Stuart Jeffrey, in their joint publication, give an in-depth analysis and more contemporary view of the different classifications of the Cross-Slab Stones.²⁸ This work is one of the most comprehensive reports of the cross-slab stones, and while its purpose is to encourage the continued study of these stones, the insights into their history, making, and meaning is invaluable. In addition, Toby Griffen researches some Pictish symbols seen on these cross-slabs that were adopted and their meanings, which were changed to a more Christianized theme.²⁹ While he tries to discern the meaning of some of these symbols (some with more success than others), he concludes that until more context is found, some of the images used may never reveal their original meanings.

²⁶ Anouk Busser. 2020. "Connecting Places: Insights on Pictish Sculpture from Swedish Rune Stones." In *Peopling Insular Art: Practice, Performance, Perception*, 115–26.

²⁷ Martin Carver. "An Iona of the East: The Early-Medieval Monastery at Portmahomack, Tarbat Ness." *Medieval Archaeology* 48 (June 2004): 1–30. doi:10.1179/007660904225022780.

²⁸ Sally Foster, Kathryn Forsyth, Susan Buckham, and Stuart Jeffrey. 2016. "Future Thinking on Carved Stones in Scotland: A Research Framework." *Carved Stones*. http://www.carvedstones.scot/uploads/4/4/0/3/44032535/cs_scarf_full.pdf.

²⁹ Toby D Griffen. "The grammar of the Pictish symbol stones." *LACUS Forum* 27 (2000): 217+. Gale Literature Resource Center. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A307270793/LitRC?u=anon~c1419ee&sid=googleScholar&xid=3559f64c>.

The Anglo-Saxons are another group that had some influence on the shaping of Insular Art. In the article “What Has Weland to Do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England”, Richard Abels (2009) reviews *The Franks Casket*, a box (perhaps a reliquary or perhaps a resting place for an illuminated manuscript according to some scholars) that contains both Christian symbolism and Anglo-Saxon iconography in a beautiful combination.³⁰ This qualitative iconographical methodology explores the melding of two religious art styles, similar to what can be seen in other works of this period. “The ‘Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring’, Falconry and Pagan–Christian Discursive Space” by Robert J. Wallis (2020) is an important article as it explores a ring and the Pagan-Christian symbolism in its design, exploring this new integrated dual-religious art style that is also seen in other contemporary Insular Art.³¹ Wallis claims that this ring played an important role in the dynamics of Christians and Pagans.

Elizabeth Coatsworth looks specifically at the depiction of a “robed” Christ (which is typically seen in art from Wales, Ireland, and Scotland) as opposed to the more commonly depicted “loin-cloth” Christ in Anglo-Saxon work.³² She traces both of these ways of depicting Christ as well as finding comparisons amongst contemporary art found on the continent.

Sarah Semple (2003) looks at the Christian theme of Damnation as depicted in Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts.³³ She also looks at their understanding of Hell and asserts

³⁰ Richard Abels. "What Has Weland to Do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England." *Speculum* 84, no. 3 (2009): 549-81. Accessed October 3, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40593585>.

³¹ Robert J. Wallis. “The ‘Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring’, Falconry and Pagan–Christian Discursive Space.” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30, no. 3 (August 2020): 413–32. doi:10.1017/S0959774320000025.

³² Elizabeth Coatsworth. “The ‘robed Christ’ in Pre-Conquest Sculptures of the Crucifixion.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 153–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44512784>.

³³ Sarah Semple. “Illustrations of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003): 231–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510324>.

that not all of the adopted symbols from Paganism ended up in a positive light, such as the Anglo-Saxon burial mounds becoming equated with evil spirits. Turning to an Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscript, Janina Ramirez looks at one specific page (Ezra Page) of the Codex Amiatinus, which was made at a monastery in Northumbria.³⁴ She posits that the carefully curated items in and near the cupboard of Ezra page all have specific meanings which give the reader the path to Salvation and the actions needed to perform to get there.

In *The Vikings*, the authors explore the Vikings' culture and its dispersion throughout Europe.³⁵ While they do an excellent job of delving into the different parts of Europe invaded by the Vikings, the section on the British Isles is what is relevant here. Nordeide and Edwards are able to explore the Vikings' footprints and influence in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and England looking at cultural exchanges, especially that of religion and art. They discuss the Gosforth Cross in the English County of Cumbria which they argue is a Viking and Anglo-Saxon work of Christian art with some Norse mythology sprinkled in. They also state that the diverse group of Vikings that settled in different parts of the British Isles converted to Christianity rather easily and quickly.

Another discussion on the Gosforth Cross (and other Viking carved stones) is had in Richard N. Bailey's article in which he discusses the possible Christianized scenes of Ragnarok being used to depict the Christian Hell as well as using other Norse iconography (such as a dragon, which is seen in other Insular works of art) and representations of Leviathan as seen

³⁴ Janina Ramirez. "Sub Culmine Gazas: The Iconography of the Armarium on the Ezra Page of the Codex Amiatinus." *Gesta* 48, no. 1 (2009): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/29764893>.

³⁵ Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, and Kevin J. Edwards. *The Vikings*. Past Imperfect. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=2229936&site=ehost-live>.

throughout the chapters of Isaiah in the Bible.³⁶ He suggests that the patron purposefully chose more ambiguous scenes in Christianity that could have Pagan meanings to help spread Christianity amongst the Vikings.

Continuing this look at the Gosforth Cross is Amanda Doviak's writings.³⁷ She looks at its dual nature of being created in an Anglo-Saxon area yet containing similar yet predominantly Scandinavian Iconography to depict Christian themes. She argues that this cross-slab was meant to provoke contemplation of the viewer's own judgment and the ultimate triumph of Christ.

Dirk Steinforth's book *Thorvald's Cross* examines the "Kirk Andreas MM 128" Cross-Slab on the Isle of Man and its Iconography arguing a similar theme of ambiguity in religious scenes to help ease conversion.³⁸ Lilla Kopár wrote her dissertation on Viking art and Iconography in Anglo-Scandinavian communities found in Northern England.³⁹ She looks at the religious "accommodation" and integration between these two similar Pagan belief systems and Christianity. She argues against the long suggested theory that the church adopted Pagan Iconography to show its "inferiority" but rather an accommodation practice between the two belief systems and their followers.

Though there are few modern sources found on Welsh Insular Art and artists, Emily Stanton addresses the small amount of scholarship on Welsh Insular Art and focuses on their

³⁶ Bailey, Richard. 2000. "Scandinavian Myth on Viking-Period Stone Sculpture in England." http://sagaconference.org/SC11/SC11_Bailey.pdf.

³⁷ Amanda Doviak. "Doorway to Devotion: Recovering the Christian Nature of the Gosforth Cross." *Religion* 12 (2021): 228.

³⁸ Dirk H. Steinforth 2021. *Thorvald's Cross : The Viking-Age Cross-Slab "Kirk Andreas MM 128" and Its Iconography*. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd.

³⁹ Lilla Kopár. 2003. "The Iconography of Viking -Age Stone Sculptures: Visual Evidence of Religious Accommodation in the Anglo-Scandinavian Communities of Northern England." Dissertation, University of Szeged. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11978947.pdf>.

apparent lack of desire to attribute art to its maker.⁴⁰ She also analyzes the spread of Christianity to Wales and how the Welsh depicted and expressed their conversion in their stone carvings.

Studying a classic key feature seen in Insular Art at this time (and in the art of the contributors to Insular art), Elana Gertsman (2018) reviews the *horror vacui* in late Medieval art and manuscripts.⁴¹ *Horror vacui* is present in it and this article establishes some of the more psychological reasons behind it. In the vein of psychological reasons behind artwork, several works, while focusing on a singular folio, she explores the *horror vacui*, patterns, and in one case, lack of imagery in some Insular illuminated manuscripts, all agreeing on the importance of sight, its educational ability, and the meditative quality of these patterns.

Kirk Ambrose (2007) explores the importance of sight by arguing that by using the visual syntax and the traditional ornamentation, that meditation and introspection were the desired results in the viewer/reader.⁴² Ben Tilghman discusses this same concept in three different works of scholarship and considers their meditateness (specifically their inflection-inspiring quality of the patterns used in illuminated manuscripts) and the decisive use of iconography, color, and “unfinishedness” to help teach the religious stories contained in *The Book of Kells* and other contemporary illuminated manuscripts. In *Ornament and Incarnation in Insular Art* (2016), Tilghman argues that the juxtaposition of the “undecorated” Matthean Genealogy in *The Book of Kells* is done on purpose with the message that because there is nothing being “shown”, the reader/viewer is challenged to interpret the scripture on their own and reflect.⁴³ Tilghman’s

⁴⁰ Emily R. Stanton. 2019 "A World Without Artists?: In Search of Medieval Welsh Stone-Carvers," *Field Notes: A Journal of Collegiate Anthropology*: Vol. 10 , Article 14. <https://dc.uwm.edu/fieldnotes/vol10/iss1/14>

⁴¹ Elina. Gertsman “Phantoms of Emptiness: The Space of the Imaginary in Late Medieval Art.” *Art History* 41, no. 5 (November 2018): 800–837. doi:10.1111/1467-8365.12399.

⁴² Kirk Ambrose. “The Sense of Sight in the Book of Kells.” Source: *Notes in the History of Art* 27, no. 1 (2007): 1–9. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23207978>.

⁴³ Benjamin C. Tilghman. “Ornament and Incarnation in Insular Art.” *Gesta* 55, no. 2 (September 2016): 157–77. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687152>.

article *Pattern, Process, and the Creation of Meaning in the Lindisfarne Gospels* (2017) posits that the whorls used in the carpet pages of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* are meant to represent Divine Will in the medieval mind.⁴⁴ Lastly, *Patterns of Meaning in Insular Illumination: Folio 183r in the Book of Kells* (2017) Tilghman argues a similar point; that the “visual experience” of looking at *Folio 183r* was an automatic reminder that a knowledge of Divine Will and the scriptures were absolutely necessary for a meditative experience (which was to be inspired and prompted by reading and viewing the manuscript).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Benjamin C. Tilghman “Pattern, Process, and the Creation of Meaning in the Lindisfarne Gospels.” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 24, no. 1 (March 2017): 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1086/693796>.

⁴⁵ Benjamin C. Tilghman. “Patterns of Meaning in Insular Manuscripts: Folio 183r in the Book of Kells.” In *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, 163–78. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2017.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This analysis will feature predominantly qualitative research, though there is some mention of quantitative research, regarding the various art styles that culminated into the one visual style that is Insular Art. I will, using one to two works of art per culture, explore the art of different cultures that existed in the British Isles at this time and explore how the interactions between these populations helped and contributed to this art style. This in-depth analysis will look at the different qualities of these works and find deeper meaning.

An overwhelming amount of the scholarship available takes an Iconographic approach when looking at these works of art. This methodology is helpful as it allows both Christian symbols and Pagan iconography to be studied individually or together which will give meaning and context to Insular works of art. However, these works were influenced by the other cultures that occupied the area. There are other similar works of art that will be examined in this paper that showcase the Insular Art style and the syncretistic religion that existed in the British Isles. On top of an Iconographic look, a few other methodological approaches will be used. These are Psychoanalysis (used to look at the psyche of these artists), Reception Theory, New Historicism, and Cultural Studies. It is these approaches that this paper will focus on which allows for a new perspective on Insular Art.

Insular Art was a product of its time, the cultures, and religions that existed in the British Isles. The Pagan styled Christianity that existed in the region was unlike any other branch of Christianity. It created a specific style of art, which led to religious works, such as the Book of Kells and the Cross-Slab stones which are found throughout Britain, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Most methodological approaches to this topic have been Iconographical. This approach can be limiting as it only analyzes the imagery and meaning within the work, and while helpful,

it excludes valuable information, such as the artist's intent. Thus, it is the purpose of this research to take a deeper look at Insular works of art, using the methodologies of Iconography, Psychoanalysis, New Historicism, and Cultural Studies.

ANALYSIS

This analysis will study works of Christian Insular Art and the more predominant cultures (the Scottish Picts, the Irish Celts, the Anglo-Saxons, the Welsh, and the Vikings) that lived on these islands during the Seventh to Tenth centuries. These five groups will be investigated in case studies as individual cultures and their unique motifs (though they may share some similarities between one another) will be explored. Through this examination of the whole, rather than the part, it will be established that Christianity as expressed in Insular Art is different from that found on the continent and this analysis will prove that by first, looking at the different cultures that contributed to this style, and second, the combinations of these styles that can be seen in Insular Art.

THE SCOTTISH PICTS

In Scotland, the people (consisting of different tribes, for the sake of ease will be addressed as the “Picts”, one of the most predominant tribes) took their new integrated faith and engraved it, not upon the palms of [their] hands (Isaiah 49:16), but upon the stones of their lands as their ancestors had done for millennia before. These cross-slabs (also referred to as carved standing stones, high crosses, and cross pillars) are an important piece and key in understanding Christianity in the British Isles, some of which predate later religious works of art and devotion.

There is rather a large body of these decorated stones. Some scholars have tried to organize and group these carved stones to provide meaning. One such scholar, Leah Tray, grouped them up by size for her analysis due to the current understanding that some of these stones were moved early on in their creation.⁴⁶ This system of organization is beneficial in

⁴⁶ Leah M. Tray "Mysterious Symbols in the North: An Analysis of Scotland's Pictish Symbol Stones." PhD diss., University of Wyoming. Libraries, 2017. P 27

establishing meaning as it is difficult to decipher their purpose because the original context provided by the artist's intended location has been lost.

However, the more common and widely accepted version has three classifications of stones. These were first created in 1903 by J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson. Class I refers to stones that are unworked (little dressing of the stone) but still have a few symbols carved on them. A majority of these stones date to the Sixth to Eighth centuries. Class II stones are largely rectangular and have crosses engraved as well as other Christian motifs and Pictish (therefore Pagan) symbols on one or both sides of the stone. These stones mostly date to the Eighth to Ninth centuries. Class III is the last class and includes stones that have no Pictish symbols, only Christian iconography. These include shrine stones and grave markers which also date to the Eighth to Ninth centuries. It is important to note that there are some stones from each category that are contemporary to one another, meaning there were still people who held to their Pagan beliefs while others had converted to Christianity.

Experts find both the carvings on the stones and its location (if the stone is in its original setting) to be important sources of information in regards to the beliefs of the artist and/or patron. "Stones with crosses, considering the lack of documentary sources and definitive 'church' sites, are a major source for understanding the spread of Christianity. Symbol stones are generally considered non-Christian, but should not necessarily be considered either pre-Christian or anti-Christian."⁴⁷ While late Medieval Christians crusaded against those they saw as anti-Christian, protecting the cradle of Christianity from heathens, this was not the situation in Early Medieval Scotland. These Insular stones were a combination of beliefs rather than the adaptation of some "pretty" symbols and motifs.

⁴⁷ Meggen Gondek. "Investing in Sculpture: Power in Early-Historic Scotland." *Medieval Archaeology* 50 (June 2006): 105–42. doi:10.1179/174581706x124202. P 115

In fact, as mentioned previously, the cross-slabs adhere to a much older pagan belief system; stone circles. These stone circles were a round formation made of standing stones that designated either a holy or similarly significant spot. They often correlated with the movements of the heavens as well. "... [It] can [be] note[d] that large vertical monoliths were not exactly innovations in the north and west of Scotland. Tall standing stones, singly or in rows or circles, were specialties of the Bronze Age, and [scholars] know the early Christians could see them, because many still stand today."⁴⁸ Some of the most famous of the stone circles (some of which date further back than the Bronze Age) are the Ring of Brodgar, the Standing stones of Stenness (both on the Scottish island of Orkney), and, of course, Stonehenge.

It is Class II that is important to this analysis. These seemingly bi-religious works of art show a group of people integrating new information and a new culture. This "realignment" has given context as to why Class II stones were created. They feature both Pictish iconography as well as Christian symbolism.⁴⁹ This adoption of culture and art style was popular throughout the British Isles, though albeit displayed in different ways.

D.V. Clarke, in the article "Reading the Multiple Lives of Pictish Symbol Stones", considers the Pictish symbols as a form of language that evolved when Christianity was introduced to include the new religious iconography. "In this view the use of the symbols on Class II stones would be as a subordinate component in the start of a new symbolic language aligned with the emergence of Christianity and built around the imagery of the cross. And it may

⁴⁸ Martin Carver. "Early Scottish Monasteries and Prehistory: A Preliminary Dialogue." *The Scottish Historical Review* 88, no. 226 (2009): 332–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27867579>. P 339.

⁴⁹ Martin Carver. "An Iona of the East: The Early-Medieval Monastery at Portmahomack, Tarbat Ness." *Medieval Archaeology* 48 (June 2004): 1–30. doi:10.1179/007660904225022780. P 25

well have been in existence while Class I stones were still being erected.”⁵⁰ Again, the Class II stones were potentially being created harmoniously with other non-Christian stones.

In fact, Clarke goes on to say that “[t]he appearance of the symbols on Class II stones, albeit now in relief and in new and more extensive combinations, is to be seen as an acknowledgment that these social memories still have some significance in the new Christian world.”⁵¹ Meaning, when Christianity was introduced, the Picts did not throw away their whole existences previous to the new religion, but integrated the significant parts with their new faith, combining their old way of life with this new belief. He suggests that the Pagan Pictish symbols eventually became so fused that Class III stones did not have any “non-Christian symbols” because those Pictish symbols became Christian symbols in this new Insular religion.⁵²

One of the most popular and best examples of Class II stones is the Aberlemno II stone (figures 1 and 2). This stone is praised for its indisputable religious value as it sits in a Christian churchyard. Its combination of Pictish and Christian iconography give it an air of mystery and scholars have continuously tried to decipher its meaning over the years.⁵³ Often praised for the intricate carvings, the group Historic Environment Scotland described it by saying “represent[s] the highpoint of lowland Insular fusion in Pictish art, likely carved in the late eighth century, exhibiting some of the most complex of all knotwork on a Pictish carved stone.”⁵⁴ They further

⁵⁰ D. V. Clarke. “Reading the Multiple Lives of Pictish Symbol Stones.” *Medieval Archaeology* 51 (June 2007): 19–39. doi:10.1179/174581707x224642. P 36

⁵¹ Clarke. “Reading the Multiple Lives of Pictish Symbol Stones.” P 36

⁵² *Ibid.* P 37

⁵³ Historic Environment Scotland. “Aberlemno Churchyard Cross Slab.” *Historic Environment Scotland*. (2015)
<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=533f0f32-ac75-4919-8efa-a74400d10abd>. P 10

⁵⁴ Historic Environment Scotland. P 2

detail it noting that this combined Pictish and Christian symbolism is purposeful and is meant to share a complex message during this time of conversion on the islands.⁵⁵

Found in the kirkyard (churchyard) in Aberlemno in Angus, Scotland, one side (figure 1) of the stone is of an ornate cross, covered and surrounded in the classic Insular interwoven design. The cross features a circle at the intersection of the two bars, like most Celtic crosses, which often symbolizes eternity. Its interlacing is exceptional and is often used as the perfect example of the fusion of Insular art.⁵⁶ The other side (figure 2) predominantly features a battle scene.

Anouk Busset offers two readings of this side of the Aberlemno II stone. The first supposition is that it's a depiction of a real-life battle that took place in the late Seventh century. The other popular interpretation is that the battle scene is more symbolic, an allegory for religious teachings.⁵⁷ “It is interpreted as symbolising a battle between the Picts and the Angles, and usually thought of as representing the Battle of Nechtansmere (or Dunnichen) in 685 AD, where the Picts were victorious. However, this once ‘seductive idea’ is now unlikely, as the battle location is now thought of as being in northern Pictland.”⁵⁸ Archaeological evidence is starting to show that the real-life battle interpretation may not be as likely as this battle happened approximately two centuries before the stone was carved.

When looking at the cross-slabs at Iona and other monasteries, Martin Carver divided them into three phases based on the time periods in which they were created (not to be confused with the classification of stones previously discussed that divided them based on their engravings). Phase I corresponds to the Sixth and Seventh centuries, Phase II denoting the Eighth

⁵⁵ Ibid. P 3

⁵⁶ Ibid. P 8

⁵⁷ Anouk Busser. 2020. “Connecting Places: Insights on Pictish Sculpture from Swedish Rune Stones.” In *Peopling Insular Art: Practice, Performance, Perception*, 115–26.

⁵⁸ Historic Environment Scotland. P 3

and Ninth centuries, and Phase III representing the Ninth to Eleventh centuries. Carver states that this date range allows for a better study of the evolution of designs used, especially since some of the stones in different classes are contemporary to one another.⁵⁹

Describing the Class II stones found throughout Scotland, he makes note of the seeming change of the stones stating that “[s]telae of the sixth and seventh century are ubiquitous and modest and mark the head or foot of a grave, sometimes carrying a simple cross, incised in free-hand, or geometrically cut or raised in relief. These are the unequivocal badges of the new religion.”⁶⁰ It is from this tradition of stonework stele commonly found in early Christianity (combined with the millennia long tradition of stone circles) that create the cross-slabs. Carver uses the analogy of plants growing from seeds to express the idea that these traditions inspired the cross-slabs which, in turn, would inspire other works of Insular Art.⁶¹

Christianity and monasteries were thriving in the British Isles. In fact, the success and growth of the Cult of Columba can be measured by the amount of stones carved during the 700s-800s in places such as Iona.⁶² Some of these monasteries in Scotland were near Ireland and thus the artwork is similar (besides being “Insular art”). “The ornament and iconography of the Portmahomack cross-slabs shows them to be work of around A.D. 800 and closely related to *The Book of Kells* as well as to the neighbouring monuments erected at Nigg, Shandwick and Hilton of Cadboll.”⁶³ But, it was not only the Ireland side of Scotland that had monasteries making cross-slabs.

⁵⁹ Carver. “Early Scottish Monasteries and Prehistory: A Preliminary Dialogue.” P 338.

⁶⁰ Carver. P 338.

⁶¹ Ibid. P 338.

⁶² Gondek. “Investing in Sculpture: Power in Early-Historic Scotland.” P. 121-22

⁶³ Martin Carver. “An Iona of the East: The Early-Medieval Monastery at Portmahomack, Tarbat Ness.” P 16

On the other side of Scotland, Tarbat Ness was also flourishing in Paganized Christianity that was encapsulated by Insular Art. The Tarbat Ness stone (figures 3 and 4) strongly suggests a close community in which the secular and religious realms were integrated. The stone hints at individuals leading the community that had Pictish names, all of this occurring on the cusp of the Ninth century.⁶⁴ The Pictish and Christian cultures were blended almost seamlessly in Early Medieval Scotland.

Pictish iconography changed, morphing with Christian symbolism.⁶⁵ But, it was not just Pictish symbols that came to represent Christian ideas and scenes. Pagan figures were given new meanings within the Christian faith. “In the Christianization of Pictland, the Archer Guardian was taken over as the one who guards heaven for the elect, at least according to the doctrine of predestination, which was in fact prevalent in Britain at the time.”⁶⁶ Thus, as Pictish and Pagan symbols and figures found new definitions, the line between Christianity and Paganism became more blurred.

THE IRISH CELTS

The Celts and those living in Ireland at this time are often the most associated with Insular Art. Though Iona, the location where *The Book of Kells* was written, is in Scotland, its monastery was established by the Irish. This, in conjunction with the current location of the illuminated manuscript in Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, cements their relationship with Insular Art. In fact, scholar Martin Carver points out the “Irish” depictions of Christ, saying that “[t]here are no Phrygian caps, no turbans or other exotic costumes that feature in contemporary

⁶⁴ Carver “An Iona of the East: The Early-Medieval Monastery at Portmahomack, Tarbat Ness.” P 16

⁶⁵ Ibid P 34.

⁶⁶ Toby D. Griffen. "The grammar of the Pictish symbol stones." *LACUS Forum* 27 (2000): 217+. Gale Literature Resource Center. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A307270793/LitRC?u=anon~c1419ee&sid=googleScholar&xid=3559f64c>.

representations of non-Westerners... ”⁶⁷ This depiction of Christ as a red-headed, white man (figure 5) in *The Book of Kells* is common in Insular Art.

This Insular style took some features from Roman art and combined it with Celtic art. The ornamentation seen in Insular Art was also present in the Roman Art of Britannia and Hibernia, though it featured predominantly in metal work.⁶⁸ By the time illuminated manuscripts were being created, there were already examples of this amalgamation of cultures. Almost contemporary to the creation of *The Book of Kells*, Alcuin, an abbot at St. Martins, wrote to another English Bishop in 797, complaining about the mingling of Germanic and Christian cultures.⁶⁹ Some of the works of art that are included in this complaint are the Franks Casket (figure 9) and the Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon ring (figure 8) which will be discussed further in this analysis.

One of the reasons *The Book of Kells* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels* are well known may be due to the fact that they survived, whereas others did not. “This may be because of uneven patterns of survival, but inventories and scattered references seem to support the view that the demise of the Insular gospel coincided roughly with twelfth-century Church reform...”⁷⁰ Iconoclasts in later centuries may have destroyed other illuminated manuscripts, but somehow missed these works. Whatever the cause, they are some of the greatest examples of Insular art.

⁶⁷ Kirk Ambrose. 2007. “The Sense of Sight in the Book of Kells.” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 27 (1): 1–9. P. 2

⁶⁸ Lloyd Laing. 2005. “The Roman Origins of Celtic Christian Art.” *Archaeological Journal* 162 (July): 146–76.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=505136999&site=ehost-live>. P. 171

⁶⁹ Richard Abels. "What Has Weland to Do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England." *Speculum* 84, no. 3 (2009): 549-81. Accessed October 3, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40593585>. P. 549

⁷⁰ Art of Worship and Devotion. (2014). *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume I: Medieval C. 400–c.1600 Art and Architecture of Ireland*. doi:10.3318/978-1-908996-62-6.ch5 P. 225

In regards to *The Book of Kells*, Dorothy Verker described it as “...unquestionably the most richly decorated of the manuscripts to survive from early medieval Britain and Ireland and its decoration and symbolic imagery are the most varied and imaginative. It is the most complex example of the most evolved and elaborate phase of the 'Hiberno-Saxon' or 'Insular' style... .”⁷¹ *The Book of Kells*, as seen with other illuminated manuscripts, took the Pagan anthropomorphic figures, interlacing, and *horror vacui* and melded them with Christian stories, figures, and symbols.

One such example is the short symbol of Christ’s name in Greek. Abbreviated to the first two or three letters of Christ, the “Chi-Rho” or “Chi-Rho-Iota” ($\chi\rho/\chi\rho\iota$) was the most popular way to physically integrate Christ into the decorated images of the manuscripts.⁷² The *Chi-Rho* page of *The Book of Kells* (figure 6) is one of the most ornate examples of this shorthanded way of naming Christ. The Artist-Scribe and Master-Artist who were responsible for the decorated page “...[were] capable of ornament of such extraordinary fineness and delicacy that his skills have been likened to those of a goldsmith. The artists employed the untypical technique of adding as many as three pigments on top of a base layer.”⁷³ The intricate patterns and interlacing appear to almost dance on the page which often stands out to observers of the work.

As for some of the art in illuminated manuscripts, three samples of decoration and ornamentation will be examined in this case study. The first example is the empty space or lack of color. During the Medieval Ages, the idea of blank space was a reference to the devotee’s heart, referring to the idea of the Word (or Christ) filling all emptiness in a person, which is the

⁷¹ Dorothy HVerkerk. "Medieval Irish Art History." *Studies in Iconography* 36 (2015): 135-54. Accessed October 2, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44735521>.

⁷² *Art of Worship and Devotion*. P. 227

⁷³ *Art of Worship and Devotion*. P 239

same idea as being filled with God's Spirit.⁷⁴ Described as awaiting inscription by some scholars, the empty page allowed God to work through someone.⁷⁵ "On the one hand, the fleshliness of the parchment points to that other act of creation, of the Word made flesh (John 1:14), its emptiness anticipatory of the acceptance of the Word."⁷⁶ The emptiness was a way to focus the reader's attention to scripture and the Glory of God.

Through the use of Insular ornamentation, these illuminated manuscripts emphasize scripture and the acceptance of the Word with the gradual emergence of color and design.⁷⁷ "[A] robust conceptual basis that validates and makes more coherent several longstanding readings of these pages: as apotropaic devices, as aids to meditation, as visualizations of the beauty and complexity of scripture, and as evocations of God-given cosmic order."⁷⁸ This aesthetic choice can be seen in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* as well, with a couple of letters on some pages only outlined in black and without filled-in color.⁷⁹ The artists and writers chose to do this not only to the pages around scripture passages; they also employed this strategy when making the initials,⁸⁰ borders, and other images surrounding scripture to help emphasize meditation, which is another potential reason for the empty spaces.

⁷⁴ Elina Gertsman. 2018. "Phantoms of Emptiness: The Space of the Imaginary in Late Medieval Art." *Art History* 41 (5): 800–837.
doi:10.1111/1467-8365.12399. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=so&db=aft&AN=505243931&site=ehost-live>. P. 804

⁷⁵ Gertsman P. 804

⁷⁶ Ibid P. 808

⁷⁷ Benjamin C. Tilghman. "Ornament and Incarnation in Insular Art." *Gesta* 55, no. 2 (September 2016): 157–77. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687152>.

⁷⁸ Benjamin C. Tilghman. "Pattern, Process, and the Creation of Meaning in the Lindisfarne Gospels." *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 24, no. 1 (March 2017): 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1086/693796>.

⁷⁹ Benjamin C. Tilghman. "Pattern, Process, and the Creation of Meaning in the Lindisfarne Gospels."

⁸⁰ Heather Pulliam. 2010. "Exaltation and Humiliation: The Decorated Initials of the Corbie Psalter (Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 18)." *Gesta* 49 (2): 97–115.
doi:10.2307/41550541

These manuscripts place significance on the Christian perspective of eternal consequences of past events and present choices. Those who fight against the temptations of Satan will be rewarded in the next life, while the wicked will be punished.⁸¹ This understanding was one of many things that were supposed to be meditated about during introspection. “Any blank space on parchment is implicated in the substance of the exposed, rubbed, or cut skin: an implication that has far-reaching consequences for the construction of emptiness.”⁸² Meaning, the empty spaces were not left empty without a purpose or with little regard.

Interestingly, there is a Pagan artistic choice seen in Insular Art during this time called *horror vacui*, or the fear of empty spaces. This is the second example of decoration and ornamentation. It may seem in contradiction with the previously explained purposeful empty space, however these two concepts actually work together, much like the Pagan and Christian symbols. The empty spaces described above are for reflection, meditation, and representative of the reader being filled with God. *Horror vacui* is the occupying of meaningless space. “The impulse to fill in visual lacunae is a trait frequently ascribed to later medieval imagery [though it can be and is seen in earlier images], which is regularly defined by its allegedly omnipresent *horror vacui*....”⁸³ The implementation of *horror vacui* allowed for the strategic placement of empty space for introspection while filling the vacancy that did not share the same purpose.

While there may be a purposefully blank page next to the beginning of each of the four gospels, *horror vacui* is specifically the interlacing and filling in of the borders on pages or the overabundance of artwork seen on churches and cathedrals. “Book margins teeming with grotesques, the profusion of sculpture on church portals, images colonizing road interstices on maps: all contribute to the collective conception of medieval art as a paragon of crowded spaces,

⁸¹ Ibid P. 97

⁸² Gertsman, P. 804

⁸³ Ibid P. 801

which strives – with certain mindless insistence – to plug and veneer every possible gap by whatever means necessary, generating meanings through sheer profusion.”⁸⁴ The meaningless lacunae were most often filled with never-ending interlacing, which is frequently ascribed the meaning that God is infinite.

The third design and ornamentation choice is interlacing. This interlacing is one of the most common motifs found in Celtic art, from illuminated manuscripts to Celtic crosses. This interlacing seems almost reverent. Benjamin Tilghman noted that these linear marks are perceived as the viewing of a holy act of ritual performed by the artist in the making and designing of metalwork, carving stones, and of course, manuscripts.⁸⁵ The steady rhythmicity of interlacing was practically worship in and of itself.

Though not mathematically whole or in reference to sacred numbers, the “uneven” measurements of the design and ornamentation were also meant to inspire. Every line from the artist’s quill was made intently, each stroke had purpose on carpet pages. The *horror vacui* was not a bored push of an idle hand but rather a tool used by the creator. Tilghman elaborates on this filling of meaningless space by saying that;

[Regarding] the carpet pages, then, we might posit that scribes would have seen geometric processes as properly imitative of divine creation. The outward appearance in the finished product of groupings of four, six, fifteen, or forty might indeed work iconographically to remind beholders of biblical events and theological concepts, but that outward symbolic value was underwritten by generative numbers that created the physical objects of the carpet pages.⁸⁶

While these patterns of “uneven” numbers and formulas used are not logical in Christian numerology, they make sense in the Celtic way of thinking. These patterns reference a story in Celtic mythology which brings meaning in their new Christian context. In the Irish Epic *Táin Bó*

⁸⁴ Ibid P. 801

⁸⁵ Benjamin C. Tilghman. “Pattern, Process, and the Creation of Meaning in the Lindisfarne Gospels.” P. 17

⁸⁶ Ibid. P. 15

Cúailnge, a blacksmith's life is threatened by the hero Cú Chulainn from Irish lore to make a shield using a new and unique pattern.⁸⁷ These “new and unique patterns” that stem from Irish mythology combine with Christian symbols to help further the amalgamated heritage and art styles of this era.

Understanding this Pagan Celtic perspective, more of the artwork in illuminated manuscripts fall into place. “Seeing geometric processes as necessary and divinely constituted procedures can enrich our understanding of some of the longstanding interpretations of the carpet pages, namely, that they emphasized the sacredness of the text, that they held apotropaic power, and that they aided monastic meditation.”⁸⁸ Insular iconography, as it is seen in the artwork of the Irish Celts, is a fusion of Christianity and Pagan symbolism.

ANGLO-SAXONS

Anglo-Saxons (consisting mostly of Angles, Saxons, Frisians, and Jutes) were among the first of the Germanic tribes from continental Europe that settled in the British Isles and contributed to Insular Art. In one of the more well-known Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts, the *Codex Amiatinus* (which is the oldest surviving complete copy of the Bible) purposely showed a large amount of Christian iconography. The fact that these symbols are found and in other contemporaneous works of Northumbrian art and literature implies that the artists of the Ezra page (figure 7) knew of their connotations which is why they were included in the work of art.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 16

⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 17

⁸⁹ Janina Ramirez. “Sub Culmine Gazas: The Iconography of the Armarium on the Ezra Page of the Codex Amiatinus.” *Gesta* 48, no. 1 (2009): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/29764893>. P. 3

Some of the iconography is as follows: the partridge is the Christian living on the Earth, representing the ability to choose between right and wrong.⁹⁰ The arrows and other upward or downward pointing items represent the choices of a person, with correct choices leading one to Heaven and incorrect choices leading down to Hell.⁹¹ The separate books of the Bible on the shelves are the next step towards salvation (study),⁹² and “[i]n addition, the scribal equipment quills, ink, and vellum arranged in and around the cupboard may indicate that a complete knowledge of the divine scriptures should involve not simply reading and memorizing, but that the Christian should take an active part in their elucidation and dissemination.”⁹³ The *Codex Amiatinus* also displayed some iconography that was common in Insular Christianity.

A popular item in Insular Christian iconography is the lozenges, or diamond shape. These shapes can represent “the many quaternities of the Christian faith, for example, the four Gospels, the four rivers of paradise, the four senses of scripture, and the four natures of Christ. The lozenge occurs frequently in insular contexts, as on fol. 290v of the Book of Kells and throughout the carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels.”⁹⁴ While no specific meaning can be ascribed, all of these options are viable and can be seen as nearly interchangeable.

By about the late 7th century, Christianity was on the British Isles and had been introduced to the Anglo-Saxons. However, there was one more injection of Paganism to come; the Vikings in the 9th century.⁹⁵ They attacked monasteries and coastal towns, eventually settling and mixing with the people there. In regards to the Anglo-Saxons, they added one more mix of

⁹⁰ Ramirez “Sub Culmine Gazas: The Iconography of the Armarium on the Ezra Page of the Codex Amiatinus.” P. 4

⁹¹ Ibid. P. 4

⁹² Ibid. P. 5

⁹³ Ibid. P. 5

⁹⁴ Ibid. P. 5

⁹⁵ Sarah Semple. “Illustrations of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003): 231–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510324>. P. 231

Scandinavian Pagan beliefs. This prompted Christian religious figures to use a “hellfire and brimstone” approach to bring their fellow Christians back to the fold. One way this method was implemented in Anglo-Saxon art was through the depictions of Hell.

Though other selections of Insular Art in this research do not cover the concept of Hell, the particular design choices and, more specifically, the forced introspection and meditation these images were meant to cause and inspire is a fundamental part of Christian Insular Art. They can be seen in other illuminated manuscripts, such as those previously discussed. In these depictions there were “... scenes [that] depict small rocky openings and earth-covered pits containing single figures or small figurative groups....”⁹⁶ and “... chimneys or vents [to] convey a feeling of multiple access points to hell, emphasizing the concept that hell and torment were literally immediately below one's feet.”⁹⁷ The burial mounds that housed the bodies of the Anglo-Saxons’ Pagan ancestors soon became the real-life earth-covered pits of these depictions of Hell.

It is interesting to note that in one of the illustrations in the Harley 603 Psalter, there are mounds present on the ground (covered and potentially made up of the lost limbs of the damned). These mounds were common burial practices for the Pagan Anglo-Saxons who lived centuries before. There is some evidence for the mingling of Christianity and Paganism in these mounds as early as the first part of the 600s CE (specifically the burial mound at Sutton Hoo, which will be discussed further along). The mounds in the image use elements that involve secular practices and popular beliefs of the Anglo-Saxons, but in a negative way.⁹⁸ Most other works use Pagan traditions and styles in tandem with Christian Art, such as the use of *Horror*

⁹⁶ Semple P. 236

⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 236

⁹⁸ Ibid. P. 237

Vacui in illuminated manuscripts. While in a negative light, these depictions did, in effect, combine Christianity with the popular local Pagan ideology.⁹⁹

As far as depictions of Christ, the Anglo-Saxons preferred to follow the tradition of the continent which illustrates Christ in a loincloth while the rest of the occupants in the British Isles tended to portray him clothed or “robed”.¹⁰⁰ Clothing, or lack thereof, was not the only difference in the portrayal of Christ. There are a few instances, however, of the Anglo-Saxons following in the Insular tradition of a robe (albeit ungirdled) rather than the continental traditions.¹⁰¹

On an ivory panel, most likely from a book or manuscript, is a crucifixion scene.

Coatsworth describes the scene in the following way;

[I]t can be seen that Christ had a cruciform nimbus; that his robe was long and apparently ungirdled... and that he was accompanied by the sun and moon, the two thieves with their arms tied behind their backs, and the spear- and sponge-bearers. The surviving detail is close in iconography to earlier and contemporary depictions in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, differing only in its selection of the spear- and sponge-bearers from the larger group, instead of John and Mary. This variation was, however, one of the defining characteristics of the crucifixion in Hiberno-Saxon art.¹⁰²

This crucifixion is a perfect example of the syncretic art style that is Insular Art. This example, due to the use of the vine scroll, can be dated to the mid Eighth century as it was introduced into the art of Northumbria at the beginning of that century. The degree of modification also shows how familiar the local and period style were to the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁰³

As mentioned previously, Christianity came to the British Isles very early on, but was really established in the Seventh century. The first half of this century, specifically 620-655, saw

⁹⁹ Ibid. P. 243

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Coatsworth. “The ‘robed Christ’ in Pre-Conquest Sculptures of the Crucifixion.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 153–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44512784>

¹⁰¹ Coatsworth. “The ‘robed Christ’ in Pre-Conquest Sculptures of the Crucifixion.” P. 158

¹⁰² Ibid. P. 158

¹⁰³ Ibid. P. 159

Christianity become the predominant religion throughout most of England.¹⁰⁴ During this time, leaders would often convert to Christianity as a means to secure power more than personal faith or conversion, though true conversion was not uncommon. There were still strong ties to their Paganism, their ancestors, and sometimes to other similar cultures.

Another earlier syncretic treasure, the Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon ring (figure 8), dated stylistically to around 580-650 CE, also had Christian symbols, including an anthropomorphic figure with a bird of prey while holding a long cross. “Rather than read this imagery and that upon the ring as syncretic or evidencing a ‘transition’ from a Pagan past to a Christian future, these objects arguably occupied a complex ‘discursive space’ of creative religious adaptation and were active in the construction of new identities.”¹⁰⁵ These peoples living together, from different religions and backgrounds, were creating a new art style, Insular Art or sometimes Hiberno-Saxon Art. As more Pagans converted to Christianity, they brought with them their Pagan heritage, furthering this new identity. This is a concrete link to Scandinavia and Christianity. The use of raptor imagery in the ring is a strong connection to East Anglia and beyond that, Scandinavia while the cross is an obvious icon of Christianity.¹⁰⁶

Robert J. Wallis says of the importance of the amalgamism of the ring that:

The ring dates to a period when socio-religious identities across the region were in flux. The choice to use... animal ornament might be seen as a political statement... . But the Staffordshire Hoard [where the ring was found] with its raptor imagery adds significantly to this picture of Style II politics, suggesting not only that there was ‘continuous contact’ between parts of Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia during the seventh century, but also that Style II was masterfully integrated into the ornamentation of Christian artefacts by the mid seventh

¹⁰⁴ Robert J. Wallis. “The ‘Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring’, Falconry and Pagan–Christian Discursive Space.” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30, no. 3 (August 2020): 413–32. doi:10.1017/S0959774320000025. P. 427

¹⁰⁵ Wallis. “The ‘Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring’, Falconry and Pagan–Christian Discursive Space.” P. 427

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* P. 415

century. Incorporating both Scandinavian and Frankish elements, the ring reflects... that in Essex the iconography of status was bound up in engagement with long-distance social networks. The combination of high status object of fine manufacture with multi-cultural imagery, then, suggests the ring played an important role in international relations.¹⁰⁷

Finds that date to this time period often are attributed to the delicate exchange that comes when two different cultures and religious belief systems begin to interact and start that process of syncretism. The elite (and potentially royal) status of the ring would have played a role in the political balancing of the two religious landscapes while also giving a definite example of the combination of these belief systems.¹⁰⁸ Having one foot in the Pagan door and one foot in the Christian door, so to speak, allowed leaders to be able to navigate the intricacies of representation of both cultures. It also put both cultures on equal footing instead of giving one culture (which historically would have been Christianity) an advantage.

Wallis explains further that a reason that the owner of this ring wanted to be associated with both cultures is due to Pope Gregory's admonition that Paganism was not to be challenged, but rather assimilated. However, this ring shows more of an equal partnership than one culture assimilating into another. He further posits that for those who were followers of both belief systems, such as the Anglo-Saxon leader Rædwald, this combining tradition would have been of comfort in turbulent times.¹⁰⁹

Wallis explains that the use of raptor birds in Anglo-Saxon art is indicative of a Germanic style and feature which is why it, and so many other bird styles, are in common with the art from Scandinavia. There is also a tie to the influence of Romano-British art. They also typically used

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. P. 419

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. P. 427

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. P. 427

many animals and animal styles, especially these birds of prey, in their brooches which are dated all the way back to the Second and Third centuries.¹¹⁰

These birds of prey were reinforced and given new meanings as they were used in Christian art and in Christian contexts. One of the greatest examples of the blending of these two belief systems was this use of birds. This was previously not seen in Christian art which became amalgamated in Insular Art. For example, there are birds on the Sutton Hoo purse lid (figure 10). This new religious meaning that was being given around this time with other depictions of birds in a Christian setting gives a new milieu to the purse-lid in the burial, which was discovered with other definitively Christian items located around the head and around where the body would have lain.¹¹¹

Sutton Hoo (which predates the art discussed thus far) is one of the best examples of the mixing of the different cultures and religions happening in the British Isles. “[T]he Sutton Hoo goldwork shows an amalgam of Swedish, Frankish, Kentish, Celtic and local elements... .”¹¹² Each of these cultures (and the religions therein) can be represented by different items in the burial.

Of the items that make up the burial at Sutton Hoo, the boat burial is often the most noticeable. This tradition is seemingly derived from Scandinavia and only a handful of examples exist on British Soil (Sutton Hoo, Snape, Casister-on-Sea, and Ashby Dell and Catfield, though these last two are not as likely).¹¹³ The representation of both Christian and Pagan iconography and symbolism is contained at this site. “The pagan nature of the burial rites, involving a ship

¹¹⁰ Carola Hicks. “The Birds on the Sutton Hoo Purse.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986): 153–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510812>. P. 156

¹¹¹ Hicks. “The Birds on the Sutton Hoo Purse.” P. 160

¹¹² Michael Parker Pearson, Robert Van De Noort, and Alex Woolf. “Three Men and a Boat: Sutton Hoo and the East Saxon Kingdom.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993): 27–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510902>. P. 44

¹¹³ Pearson, et al. P. 41

and so many grave goods, contrasts with the inclusion of possible Christian accessories. The silver bowls with cruciform decoration and the two baptismal spoons all lay to the right of where the man's head would have rested, suggesting that the mourners perceived these had a special significance.”¹¹⁴ The spoons (figure 11) are of great importance as they likely were ceremonious in nature, representing either baptism or the Eucharist.

Mike Parker Pearson, an expert on death and burial in the British Isles, said the following about the spoons and their significance:

The reading of the words as +PAVLOS and +SAVLOS, representing Paul's conversion, can be countered by the presence of a cross in front of the name of Saul and the possibility that the first letter was carved sideways in error by an inexperienced craftsman, so that both spoons refer to St Paul. Their location in the ship, immediately on the right hand side of where the head would have lain, indicates their significance as personalized items for the deceased.¹¹⁵

Whether the leader buried at Sutton Hoo was converted by faith, power, or simply hedging his bets, the mix of Pagan and Christian items and Iconography speaks volumes. Though they were not the last of items that would be significant in this burgeoning culture and Insular Art style.

There is a contemporary chest called the Franks Casket (also called the Auzon Casket), made of whale bone (figure 9). In low-relief are carved several stories of great importance to different religions and cultures. The first is the Christian story of the Adoration of the Magi. The second is some Roman history (specifically a scene dealing with Emperor Titus' sack of

¹¹⁴ Ibid. P. 28

¹¹⁵ Ibid. P. 48

Jerusalem). Third is the Roman Mythological story of Romulus and Remus. The last is the Germanic mythological story of Weland¹¹⁶, all surrounded by Old English runic inscriptions.¹¹⁷

It mixes elements from both late antique styles and contemporary Insular items for its unique and syncretic style.¹¹⁸ However, it tends to find more similarities amongst Insular works of art. “Closer to the Franks Casket in style are several other eighth-century Insular artifacts. The warriors on its lid, for example, resemble those in a battle scene on the Pictish Aberlemno Stone [II]... .”¹¹⁹ ¹²⁰ While the *Franks Casket* was a work attributed to the Anglo-Saxons, it shared some commonalities with other contemporaneous work.

The chest, which draws from all of the popular Insular Art styles, as well as Norse mythology and Christian tradition, is made of a valuable material, along with the intricate and elaborate decorations, imply that it was created to hold something of great worth though there is no definite way of knowing for certain what it had been commissioned to hold.¹²¹ Scholars have been hesitant to declare it a reliquary despite its similarities to other contemporary and earlier reliquaries because of the inclusion of the Pagan scenes. However, because of the iconography, it has been suggested that it was made to hold an illuminated manuscript.¹²² Interesting that an item that has both scenes of Pagan and Christian myth could have been created to hold something of extreme Christian value, which indicates how much these coexisting cultures had blended.

¹¹⁶ Weland, sometimes spelled Wayland, was an expert black smith and, according to some versions of the legend, lord of the elves. He was captured by a Swedish King, wounded to prevent his escape, and forced to work in the King’s smithy. Exacting his revenge, Weland killed the King’s two sons, raped (and, according to some versions, impregnated) his daughter, and escaped by magically flying away.

¹¹⁷ Richard Abels. "What Has Weland to Do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England. P. 553

¹¹⁸ Richard Abels. P. 552

¹¹⁹ Although the comparison is correct, Abels has referenced the incorrect stone. He describes the Aberlemno II stone while calling it the Aberlemno III stone.

¹²⁰ Ibid. P. 553

¹²¹ Ibid. P. 560

¹²² Ibid. P. 561

THE WELSH

There are some cross-slabs in Wales that harken to the style discussed previously in regards to the Picts (there are also some in Ireland, which are not discussed in this analysis). The classification of the Welsh stones follows the same grouping with the Pictish cross-slabs including their original use as a grave or burial marker. Most of these stones bear an inscription *hic iacit* (Latin for 'here lies') which signifies a proximity to a grave. However, the purpose of some of these stones appeared to be twofold. They also served as boundary markers.¹²³ These stones that contained similar iconography to other cross-slab stones, it seems, were used more to mark important sites than to tell religious stories.

Like with other cultures and peoples on the islands, the once important Pagan sites, rituals, and symbolism soon were adopted by Christianity. "Before the spread of Christianity in Wales in the 5th and 6th centuries, springs were associated with Celtic deities, and thus were considered bounded sacred spaces. Cerrig derfyn, 'boundary stones,' may have delineated these areas. The sacred springs tradition continued in the Christian period under the guise of holy wells associated with Celtic saints."¹²⁴ While these stones may not have had the same purpose, they did establish sites that became significant to both Pagan beliefs and Christianity such as the *Cadfan Stone* (figure 12).

Emily Stanton, while discussing the Welsh stone carvers describes a common Celtic and Insular design trait and its adaptation and new meaning in Christianity. She said:

Celtic knot-work can function as both apotropaic and Christian symbols. I do not find this particularly surprising, as Christianity in Wales incorporated and appropriated previous 'pagan' traditions and forms of artistic expression. In this

¹²³ Emily R. Stanton. 2019 "A World Without Artists?: In Search of Medieval Welsh Stone-Carvers," *Field Notes: A Journal of Collegiate Anthropology*: Vol. 10 , Article 14. <https://dc.uwm.edu/fieldnotes/vol10/iss1/14> P. 107

¹²⁴ Stanton. "A World Without Artists?: In Search of Medieval Welsh Stone-Carvers" P.

dual function as demon-traps and symbols of Christianity, these monuments have a ‘secondary’ or relational agency. In addition to guiding people through the landscape, and helping to order their experiences, these monuments also provided protection, particularly those serving as boundary markers of graves, fields, sacred springs, or churches. Monuments communicate meanings, memories, and messages...¹²⁵

The use of Pagan symbols turned Demon traps has also been said of some of the motifs used in illuminated manuscripts, showcasing perfectly the similarities between all of these cultures discussed. Though not much recent scholarship can be found discussing the Welsh and their impact on Insular Art, it is important to note that their emphasis on the sacred Pagan sites was combined with Christianity and gave the new Insular religion important ties to the land and the means to connote those ties.

THE VIKINGS

The Vikings, discussed in minor amounts throughout, are the last (both mentioned and in regards to the timeline of arrival in the British Isles) to have their influence discussed. Though the last to arrive, they did leave their mark on Insular Art as much as the other groups analyzed. The *Gosforth Stone* (figure 13) is a cross-slab in Cumbria, a Viking conquered Anglo-Saxon town. The scenes are interesting on both this carved stone and the *Thorvald's Stone* (discussed below) as they contain scenes that can be interpreted with both Pagan and Christian stories.

For example, “many of the snake-wrestling scenes such as those from Gosforth... often identified with the encounters of Ragnarøk, are more likely to be Hell scenes allied to the type seen in pre-Viking sculpture at Rothbury - or draw upon the encounters with dragons and leviathans familiar from Isaiah, Job, the Psalms and the Book of Revelation,”¹²⁶ This double

¹²⁵ Ibid. P. 120

¹²⁶ Richard Bailey. “Scandinavian Myth on Viking-Period Stone Sculpture in England.” In *Saga Conference*, 2000. http://sagaconference.org/SC11/SC11_Bailey.pdf. P. 17

meaning scene is not unique to Viking works of art, as it has been explored previously in regards to other cultures. The scenes are different, however.

One scene that is specifically Christian in nature is the Crucifixion scene. Much like the Ivory Anglo-Saxon panel, it has a few changes that reflect local understandings and beliefs as opposed to continental ideas about the crucifixion. Richard Bailey addresses these by saying:

First there is the crucifixion scene.... Normally Longinus, the spearman, would be partnered by Stephaton, the sponge bearer. Here, ... he is set against Mary Magdelene, carrying her alabastron with its long tapering neck. The manner in which she is drawn, with pigtail and trailing dress, is one which has a long history in Scandinavian art but, to the ruminating onlooker, what would be more significant would be the challenge she presented to interpret her significance when paired with Longinus. ... [S]he was a symbol of the converted gentiles who recognised Christ's divinity; this is the interpretation given by Bede in both his commentary on Luke and in one of his homilies. Longinus was a figure who was equally loaded with symbolism for the early Christian world but he, too, represented the recognition of Christ's godhead by the gentiles; in apocryphal narrative his eyes were literally opened by the flow of Christ's blood which, unusually in such scenes, is actually depicted here at Gosforth and thus leads us to this layer of meaning denoted by his presence.¹²⁷

Furthermore, the scenes around the crucifixion begin to take on a meaning of conversion and syncretism from the Pagan world to the Christian world. Each image takes on double meaning. The snakes below the depiction of the crucifixion are in reference to the serpent form Satan takes in some of the stories throughout the Bible. However, they also reference the snake-like forms that will take place during Ragnarok. The depiction of Mary Magdalene and her container of oil can also be read as Sigyn and her bowl.¹²⁸ The frame around the crucifixion scene is suggested to invoke similar retroflection and meditation as seen with Byzantine Icons.¹²⁹ The scene above the crucifixion of a figure triumphantly defeating a monster by breaking its jaw

¹²⁷ Bailey. "Scandinavian Myth on Viking-Period Stone Sculpture in England." P. 21

¹²⁸ Ibid. P. 21

¹²⁹ Amanda Dovaik. "Doorway to Devotion: Recovering the Christian Nature of the Gosforth Cross." *Religion* 12 (2021): 228. P. 7

can be either Vithar or Christ.¹³⁰ These double-storied figures also exist on another contemporary Viking work of art.

On the Isle of Man, where Vikings first made contact in the last years of the Eighth century, is part of a carved stone that features a cross. This carved emblem is called *Thorvald's Cross* (sometimes *Thorwald's Cross*) (figure 14). While the cross on it is a definite symbol of Christianity, it features Insular style figures similarly carved in other cross-slabs discussed. It also features scenes that can represent moments in both Norse and Christian mythology and scripture. For instance, “[a] Christian figure angling for a fish first suggests the allegory of God trying to lure and catch Satan in the form of the Leviathan, a Biblical aquatic monster, by means of a fishing rod, using Christ as bait.”¹³¹ The fish hanging from the line represents the triumph of Christianity and God over Paganism and the Devil.¹³² However, to a different audience, it would represent a story from Norse mythology. “... [T]he motif of the ‘fisherman allegory’ is considered to be related to the Norse legend of the god Þórr (Thor) fishing for the terrible Midgard-Serpent...”¹³³ The multi-religious imagery was designed to be read by believers of both religions. Another “two-sided” image with a Christian and Norse story is the image of the “Triumphant Christ” who is depicted as defeating the hounds of Hell after His crucifixion and resurrection. This can also be attributed to Víðarr (Vidar) killing the Fenris-Wolf.¹³⁴

Lilla Kopár addresses these carved Viking stones saying that while these carvings that include Pagan iconography are only a small percent of surviving works of Viking art, the total

¹³⁰ Bailey. “Scandinavian Myth on Viking-Period Stone Sculpture in England.” P. 21

¹³¹ Dirk H Steinforth. “Thorvald’s Cross : The Viking-Age Cross-Slab ‘Kirk Andreas MM 128’ and Its Iconography.” (2021) Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. P. 27

¹³² Steinforth “Thorvald’s Cross : The Viking-Age Cross-Slab ‘Kirk Andreas MM 128’ and Its Iconography.” P. 27

¹³³ Ibid. P. 29

¹³⁴ Ibid. P. 48-52

number and widespread locations suggest that it isn't a local phenomenon.¹³⁵ She further addresses the duality saying that “...in the case of intended parallels between Pagan and Christian themes it is hard to determine the borderline, that is to identify particular scenes as Pagan or secular, as opposed to Christian, since in some cases we might have a borrowing of a common iconographical pattern from one cultural tradition and its reinterpretation in the other.”¹³⁶ This spread of Viking symbology can be seen in Insular Art as well by the stories selected from the Bible.

Just like the leaders of Anglo-Saxon England did not necessarily convert because of new found faith, the Vikings’ interest was more due to political and social motivations at first rather than true conversion. This faith represented power, and to a group of people such as the Vikings, power was everything.¹³⁷ Lilla Kopár addresses the purposeful mix of Pagan-Norse and Christian beliefs:

The survival of the pagan tradition is indirectly reflected in literature and art in a number of deliberate attempts to harmonize pagan and Christian elements. In *Beowulf*, for example, the pagan monster Grendel is interpreted as an offspring of Cain, and the Franks Casket shows Weland sharing the front panel with the Adoration of the Magi. Besides being a natural approach to reconcile coexisting but conflicting cultural traditions, moderate harmonization was also promoted by the early missionaries, following the advice of Pope Gregory to adapt pagan practices to Christian use rather than prohibit them.¹³⁸

The Vikings’ contribution to Insular Art was a combination of things already discussed.

The stories in Christianity that were similar to stories in Norse mythology added to the repertoire

¹³⁵ Lilla Kopár. “The Iconography of Viking -Age Stone Sculptures: Visual Evidence of Religious Accommodation in the Anglo-Scandinavian Communities of Northern England.” (2003) Dissertation, University of Szeged. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11978947.pdf>. P. 43

¹³⁶ Kopár. “The Iconography of Viking -Age Stone Sculptures: Visual Evidence of Religious Accommodation in the Anglo-Scandinavian Communities of Northern England.” P. 43

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* P. 145

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* P. 152

of the stories used in Insular Art. They also used *horror vacui* in their art, though their interlacing often ended in animal heads, similar to what is seen in Anglo-Saxon artwork.

CONCLUSIONS

Depictions of Christianity have existed all throughout the world since the religion's founding in the First century CE. The different regions have specifics in their portrayal of Christianity, but also adhere to the unique "Christian" elements. The people of the British Isles are no exception. While this style in comparison with other Christian areas is similar, it is different from what is seen on the continent. When Christianity spread to Britain and the surrounding area, it interacted differently with the native art style and that union resulted in Insular Art. It has been largely understood that Christianity elsewhere in the world had a conquering relationship with Pagan cultures and beliefs still active in the subjugated area. While some beliefs and holy days were assimilated, a majority of their practices were not. It was more nuanced in Insular Art.

In this region, Christianity did not only adopt Pagan art styles; it fully integrated with the native Paganism in depictions in art, creating a symbiotic relationship. While Christ simply took the sun disk that became the halo from Helios in his Roman depictions, Christ became merged with the interlacing found in Insular Art (quite literally in the case of the *Chi-Rho-Iota* page [figure 6] in *The Book of Kells*). The motifs that had long been part of Native Britons' art were reworked and given new additional meanings with Christianity. This subtle difference may be hard to distinguish at first, but Insular depictions of Christianity were more integrated with the Pagan designs and beliefs in this region than with other depictions of Christianity in continental Europe.

This nuanced difference seen in the British Isles of sharing rather than conquering has been analyzed in singular works. For instance, there are many studies that probe individual

carved stones and folios in illuminated manuscripts in Insular Art. However, there are few works of scholarship that look at this subtle, yet distinct Christianity as a whole in this style of art.

Each of these main cultures (the Scottish Picts, the Irish Celts, the Anglo-Saxons, the Welsh, and the Vikings) and their most popular portrayals of Christ and Christianity have been examined. Analyzing the similarities between these cultures and the differences Insular Art has from continental European Christian Art, it is apparent that the Pagan qualities of Insular Art have an equal relationship with Christianity. All of these cultures provided similar characteristics to this art style. Motifs, such as interlacing and *horror vacui*, were used to help inspire introspection and meditation. Different Biblical stories were specifically used as they shared similar themes to stories from Pagan mythology found on the British Isles. Previously Pagan iconography, such as birds of prey, found new life in Insular Christian Art. Pagan symbols were as important in art as Christian iconography while the new religion spread. The traditional burial mounds became literal pits of Hell. And though Christianity did spread and became predominant throughout the British Isles, its use of Pagan Art was never forgotten or stripped of its original meaning. The different conquerors and people that have populated the British Isles have contributed to this unique style that still retained some of its ancient “Pagan-ness”; the syncretic Insular style resulting in a form of art and Christianity not seen anywhere else.

FIGURES

Figure 1, *Aberlemno II Stone*, Cross Side



Figure 2, *Aberlemno II Stone*, Battle Side



Figure 3, *Tarbat Ness Stone*, Beast and Partial Cross Side



Figure 4, *Tarbat Ness Stone*, Four Apostles Side

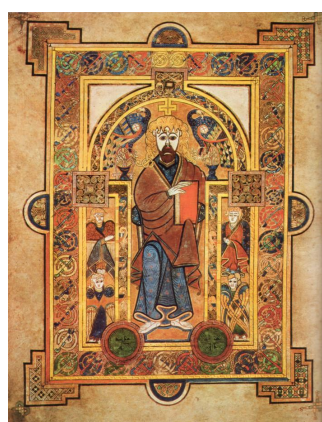


Figure 5, *Jesus Christ Enthroned*, The Book of Kells, Old Library at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland



Figure 6, *Chi-Rho page*, The Book of Kells, Old Library at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland

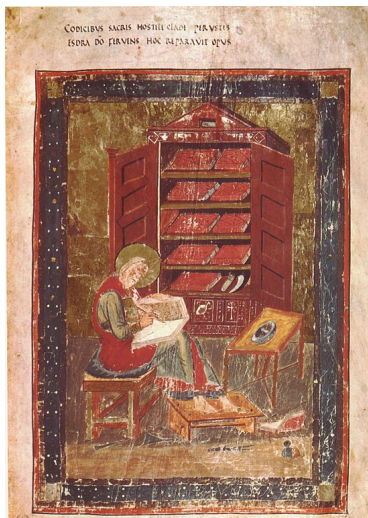


Figure 7, *Ezra Page*, Codex Amiatinus, The British Library



Figure 8, *Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring*, Saffron Walden Museum in Saffron Walden, England



Figure 9, *Franks Casket*, British Museum, London, England



Figure 10, *Sutton Hoo Purse Lid*, The British Museum



Figure 11, *Sutton Hoo Spoons*, The British Museum



Figure 12, *Cadfan Stone*, St. Cadfan's Church



Figure 13, *Gosforth Cross*



Figure 14, *Thorvald's Cross*

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