BECKWITH REVISITED: SOME IVORY CARVINGS FROM CANTERBURY

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The material under consideration in this paper lacks the kind of associated information that allows scholars to address it in historical terms. The origins, dates and purposes of the objects are unknown, and their histories before they were acquired by various relatively late collectors are also mysterious. This, indeed, is probably why the material has tended to be neglected despite its potentially rich implications. Two notable and relatively early exceptions to this scholarly uninterest are the "corpus" scholars Goldschmidt and Beckwith, whose concept of completeness, in accordance with the values of their time, ensured these objects' inclusion in their work. The method they used to classify the material, which is the same method used perforce by any historian faced with objects (not texts) that have become divorced from all useful information pertaining to them, is stylistic analysis. It is perhaps unfortunate that stylistic analysis has become associated, in some scholars' minds, exclusively with the connoisseur's search for "great" works, and that the concept of greatness itself has come to be seen as undesirably elitist. Since the connoisseur and the great artist are both products of a Romantic consciousness which favoured the production of large scale, emotionally expressive works of a kind that did not, and could not, exist in the early Middle Ages, it is doubly unfortunate that this perception should undermine the most powerful and useful tool historians (not critics) have available to them, and that the use of this tool should now have to be justified for the benefit of critical theorists.

In this paper, stylistic analysis involves the detailed analysis and comparison of form, iconography, and technology (where visible). The purpose is to demonstrate that the objects belong together in coherent groups, and that provenances can be suggested for these groups that throw new light on our understanding of the ivory trade, the transmission of ideas and ages, and the presentation of royal and institutional identity. The attempt to do so is justified, as I have

explained elsewhere,[1] by the documented fact that early Medieval art objects were required to declare their *raison d'être*: that is, to declare the identity of their patron and of the object they decorated, and to declare the grounds that patron and object could claim for jurisdictional authority. I have shown that in practice these declarations were made through the appearance of the objects (that is, through their style and iconography), rather than through associated texts or inscriptions, although these could be added later in the object's history. If this paper successfully argues that the ivories under consideration here are not provincial Continental works (as suggested by Goldschmidt), but Anglo-Saxon ones deriving from Canterbury (as suggested by Beckwith) and possibly also Winchester (my suggestion), and that they belong to the eleventh century rather than the ninth and tenth (my suggestion), then it will have provided grounds on which to attempt a more valid reading of the international political positioning of Anglo-Saxon royalty and its monastic centres than has been possible before.

We already have some idea of the kinds of manuscript work produced at Canterbury before the Conquest, but we presently have very little evidence about work in complementary media, such as metalwork and ivory carving. This paper seeks to suggest that the evidence of ivory carving in Canterbury has been overlooked because it shows a range of unidentified and apparently Continental styles. Most of this large group of ivories were presented by Goldschmidt in 1914,[2] and by Beckwith in 1972,[3] but they have tended to be ignored, perhaps because the two scholars came to different conclusions about them. The only example which has attracted any further scholarly attention is a re-used plaque decorated with inhabited interlace,

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[1] "What's in the Cupboard? Ezra and Matthew Reconsidered", Northumbria's Golden Age, 345-59, esp 346-7; "Inscriptions on Pre-Norman Irish Reliquaries," The Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Vol 96 (C), 1996, 1-48, esp 3-4

[2] Adolf Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sachsischen Kaiser, VIII–XI Jarhundert (Berlin 1969, 1975), vol. 1, cat. nos. 69, 70 and 179, 71a, 71b, 107 and 186, 156 and 183, 157 and 184, 178, 180, 185a, 185b.

[3] John Beckwith, Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England (London 1972), cat. nos. 4 and 21, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 22, 9, 23, 24.

and opinions about it also vary.[4] The ivories interest me because some of the later examples remind me forcibly of the attractive plaques from Reims in the style of the Utrecht Psalter, but they are flatter in profile and apparently less adroitly executed. As we know, the Utrecht Psalter was in Canterbury being copied at various times during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and it has always seemed strange to me that this manuscript should have influenced Anglo-Saxon drawing so strongly but apparently had no effect on Anglo-Saxon ivories. Yet almost certainly it would have had ivories in the Reims style on its covers, and these must have caught the attention of patrons and/or artists.

As currently identified, the group consists of eleven plaques, several of which have been cut down and recarved to produce sixteen carvings altogether. It is not possible to illustrate more than one example of each style here, but the following table may help the reader to match them to the illustrated catalogues by Beckwith and Goldschmidt, to understand their physical relationships to each other, and to keep track of them in the following discussion.

Subject	Location	Beckwith Catalogue	Goldschmidt Catalogue	Fig
Transfiguration (front)	London, Victoria & Albert Mus.	21	69	4
Angel waking the dead	no. 253-1867	4	178	1
Entry into Jerusalem & House of Simon (front)	London, Victoria & Albert Mus.	-	107	
Baptism and Ascension	no. 257-1867	5	186	3
Foliate medallions (front)	Paris, Cluny Museum	-	156/7	
Baptism & Ascension diptych	Cl. 139	6	183/4	
Majesty with angels (front)	Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmus.	7	185a	
Inside of older diptych, no. cut down	MA 158		185b	
Ascension (front)	London, Victoria & Albert Mus.	22	70	
Inhabited interlace	no. 254-1957	8	179	2

[4] This is Beckwith, Ivory Carvings, cat. no. 8, discussed by David Wilson, Anglo-Saxon Art from the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest (London 1984) p. 67, p. 64, and by Leslie Webster, in Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse, eds), The Making of England (London 1991), cat. no. 140.

Virgin and Apostles (front)	Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmus.	9	180	
Inside of older diptych	no. MA 164	-	-	
Traditio Legis	Paris, Bibliotèque Nationale	23	71a	5
(unknown)	Cod. lat. 323	-	-	
Enthroned Madonna	Paris Bibliotèque Nationale	24	71b	
(unknown)	Cod. lat.323	-	-	
Crucifixion	Walters	-	-	6
(unknown)		-	-	
Arrest of Christ in three tiers	Paris, Louvre	-	-	
(unknown)		-	-	

Goldschmidt identified the earlier examples as deriving from widely disparate regions. He saw the inhabited interlace panel (Figure 2), the Angel Waking the Dead (Figure 1), and the Virgin and Apostles (an Ascension or Assumption) as deriving from Tours around 800[5]. But he identified the Majesty with Angels, the Baptism and Ascension panel (Figure 3), and the Baptism and Ascension diptych, as "oriental" and dated them in the late seventh or early eighth century.[6] The Transfiguration (Figure 4) and the Ascension, and the Traditio Legis (Figure 5) and the Enthroned Madonna, he identified as a late branch of the Reimsian Liuthard group, belonging to the end of the ninth or early tenth century.[7] Finally, he attributed the Entry into Jerusalem to the School of Metz, late ninth or early tenth century.[8] To this set I would add two more plaques which seem to have been unknown to Goldschmidt and Beckwith: the Walters Crucifixion (Figure 6), and the Louvre Arrest of Christ.[9] Presumably attributing the Walters Crucifixion to Goldschmidt's late Liuthard Group, Randall dated it to the later ninth century.

Beckwith saw these works differently. In his Ivory Carvings in Medieval England, he

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[5] Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. nos. 179, 178, 180 respectively.
[6] Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. nos. 185, 186, 183-184 respectively.
[7] Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. nos. 69, 70, 71a, 71b respectively.
[8] Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. no. 107.
[9] R. H. Randall, Jr., Masterpieces of Ivory from the Walters Art Gallery (New York, 1985), p. 245.

identified all but the Entry into Jerusalem as Anglo-Saxon. The first six he placed within the eighth century,[10] and the rest in the late tenth[11]. In 1984, David Wilson accepted the inhabited interlace plaque (Figure 2) as Anglo-Saxon, dating it by implication sometime before the middle of the eighth century,[12] but he commented that some scholars preferred to see it as a "Continental" production. He did not say who these scholars were, but they evidently include David Wright and Leslie Webster. In her catalogue entry for The Making of England, Webster described the plaque as "Continental, in the Insular style", citing the Virgin and Apostles plaque and the Bischofshofen Cross as comparanda.[13] These had been shown as likely Continental products by David Wright.[14] Webster then commented on the "late Carolingian" carving of the Ascensionon the reverse of the inhabited interlace plaque, and mentioning the companion carving of the Transfiguration and the settings for lost hinges and locks on both, she went on to suggest that these plaques had later become the doors of a Carolingian shrine. Thus she rejects Beckwith's Anglo-Saxon thesis for both sides of the plaque and, by implication, for the group as a whole.

On the whole, then, Beckwith's view of the ivories has been rejected. Nonetheless, Beckwith has made a number valid points, and if his thesis were substantiated, we would be provided with an unexpectedly clear indication of the kind of work and range of styles probably produced in Canterbury before the Conquest. A consideration of his identification and chronology is therefore in order.

Beckwith began with the inhabited interlace panel (Figure 2), the Virgin and Apostles, and the Angel Waking the Dead (Figure 1).[15] He made quite strong comparisons between them

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[10] Beckwith, Ivory Carvings, cat. nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 respectively.

[11] Beckwith, Ivory Carvings, cat. nos. 21, 22, 23, 24 respectively.

[12] Wilson, Anglo-Saxon Art, p. 67 and p. 64, where he suggests that the designs are earlier than the Ormsside bowl which he dates "tentatively" to the first half of the eighth century.

[13] Webster and Backhouse, Making of England, cat. no. 140.

[14] David Wright, "The Byzantine Model of a Provincial Carolingian Ivory", Abstracts of Papers, Eleventh Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Toronto, Oct. 25–27, pp. 10–12.

[15] Beckwith, Ivory Carvings, pp. 22–25.

to suggest that they all derived from a single center. Thus, for example, he compared the treatment of the faces in the Angel Waking the Dead and the Virgin and Apostles panels, allowing us to see similarities between the finely hatched, short straight hair, the neat eyes with very close brows, and the short straight mouths; to see similarities in the use of a rather flaccid, flat beading in the frame and draperies of the Virgin and Apostles panel, and in the architecture and draperies of the Angel Waking the Dead panel. We might also note the distinctive treatment of wings in these panels: seen from the inside, they have a plain triangular area framed by a thin ridge, and the edges are hatched with chevrons. This might seem like an obvious way to produce notional wings, but in fact it is very rare. The chevroned edge and inner triangle can only be paralleled in early Byzantine ivories.[16] Beckwith then compared the border of the Virgin and Apostles panel with that of the inhabited interlace panel, pointing out the similarities in the treatment of the foliage which branches into horned goat heads, and entangles romping dogs and birds who snap at bunches of grapes. Thus all three plaques arguably derived from a single center at much the same time.

Beckwith also compared these three panels with four others which are clearly not of the same style.[17] However, they do have a surprising number of features in common. Thus, as Beckwith pointed out, the Angel Waking the Dead and the Baptism and Ascension panels share the use of an open twist in the frame which was made by drilling neat holes at the centers and edges, and the Majesty with Angels duplicates the use of drilled beads also found in the Angel Waking the Dead. It could further be argued that the treatment of the faces in the Baptism and Ascension and the Majesty with Angels panels parallel those in the Angel Waking the Dead and the Virgin and Apostles panels, with their use of closely hatched, short straight hair and etched facial details. All four of these new panels share the use of large lopsided haloes decorated with the same flaccid, flattish beads seen in the previous group. They are also typified by the use of

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[16] A ninth-century Evangelist plaque from Ravenna is a particularly clear example. See Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. no. 33.

[17] Beckwith, Ivory Carvings, pp. 24–25.

etched lines and punched dots: these can be seen in the mandorlas of both the seated Christ figures, and on the tub of the Baptism, and on the robe of the Virgin in the Virgin and Apostles plaque. More generally, the designs are jostlingly full in all seven ivories.

Thus, despite the apparently enormous difference in style, the technical habits of the craftsmen suggest that they were all trained in the same center, and that these ivories should probably all be seen as contemporary. Here I differ from Beckwith, who acknowledged the differences in style and perhaps also a perceived difference in quality by placing the second group some fifty to a hundred years earlier than the first. Thus he invited us to infer a process of improvement and change which would have seemed logical in traditional methodological terms. I prefer to pay more attention to the craftsmen's technical habits, which are unlikely to change regardless of whatever style they may choose or be required to use. Whether these ivories are Anglo-Saxon, however, and to what date(s) they should be assigned are the next questions.

Inhabited vine scrolls are well known in Anglo-Saxon England, and Beckwith pointed to a late eighth-century cross from St Andrew, Auckland, Co Durham, and mentioned several other examples too. None of his examples had zoomorphic terminals, however, and these are much harder to find. Something analogous occurs on the Bischofshofen Cross,[18] whose date is not established, but the design is less crowded and less foliate, and the animals lack the long horns found on the ivories. In fact, this feature just does not occur elsewhere very often, thus it may be yet another argument in favor of a single center of production. Unfortunately, it does not help to date or locate that center. While it is tempting to go with Beckwith and assume an eighth-century date for these inhabited vine scrolls, it should be remembered that the motif continued common right into the eleventh century, when it is found, for example, on the Basel Antependium.

It is more productive to consider the Angel Waking the Dead (Figure 1). Dating the panel to the late eighth or early ninth century, Beckwith stated that it was the earliest image of the Last Judgement known in the west, but this is worth further consideration. He gave no reason for this

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[18] See Webster and Backhouse, Making of England, cat. no. 133 for a clear detail.

date, but perhaps the most valid comparison to emerge from his comparative material (but which he did not discuss in relation to the plaque) is between the dancing angel at the center of the panel and the Luxuria figure in a late tenth-century manuscript of the Psychomachia.[19] But I find the mid eleventh-century example now in Corpus Christi College Cambridge more compelling, because it combines the cross-legged stance with less frenetic drapery.[20] In fact, the cross-legged stance became common all over Europe in the early eleventh century; one only has to think of Sto. Domingo de Silos, for example, or Toulouse.

But there is a more definitive feature than this. The Jaws of Hell at the base of the panel are an Anglo-Saxon invention, of which an early example is in the New Minster Liber Vitae of 1031 where it appears complete with cross-legged angel, and doubled-over naked soul.[21] Even the ball-like shoulder and bulging buttocks are paralleled. Indeed, one might also compare the round towered city of heaven in the top register of the same page with the similar city behind the mouth of death on the ivory. Comparable features include the turrets with finials, string courses, and paired arched windows. I therefore suggest that the Angel Waking the Dead is Anglo-Saxon, as Beckwith stated, but I find his date implausibly early and prefer to place it the first half of the eleventh century. By extension, I place the other five ivories (Beckwith's catalogue numbers 4 to 9 inclusive) with it.

This has implications for the remaining members of the group. For example, the Angel Waking the Dead has clearly been re-used. Much of the detail is lost because it has been scraped flat, and the edges have been cut down. This same is true of the inhabited interlace panel (Figure 2), whose size is now identical with that of the Angel Waking the Dead. On the backs of these panels are the Transfiguration (Figure 4) and Ascension panels respectively. These belong to the set Goldschmidt, Wright, Webster and Randall identify as Carolingian—although, if my argument holds, that is no longer tenable. Further, if they are not Carolingian, then there is no

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[19] See Beckwith, Ivory Carvings, p. 32 fig. 32 and p. 35 fig. 37.
[20] See Hans Holländer, Early Medieval Art (London 1974), p. 184 fig. 151.
[21] See Wilson, Anglo-Saxon Art, p. 185 fig. 232.

particular reason to see them as Continental either.

The ivories do, however, have much in common with both Carolingian and Ottonian carving. They are very reminiscent of the Liuthard group, with which Goldschmidt identified them. The best parallel for the central apostle of the Transfiguration (Figure 4), for example, is found on the Psalter of Charles the Bald, where it appears as the Nathan figure.[22] It reappears as the Psalmist on the Prayer book of Charles the Bald (Psalm 26), and presumably was quite common.[23] The treatment of the ground on the other cover of the Prayer book of Charles the Bald looks like a likely stimulus for the treatment of the clouds and ground of the Ascension, too. In more general terms, one might note the outward splay of many figures' hands which is found both in the Reims ivories and in the later ones discussed here, and the tendency to produce squat figures with fat tummies. On another Reims ivory, the Marriage at Cana in the British Museum, the bulging tummies are particularly pronounced, and the two figures of Christ on that panel could even be seen as models for the prophets on the Transfiguration plaque (Figure 4).[24]

The Walters Crucifixion plaque (Figure 6) duplicates the border style of the Transfiguration, and the ground style of the Ascension, and seems to use the figure of the Virgin from the Marriage panel as a model for the first Mary. This plaque, however, has an even better parallel in the Reims ivory now on the cover of the Pericopes of Henry II (4452).[25] This three-tiered design includes a crucifixion scene, with similar living cross, and similar stances for Stephaton and Longinus, and for the Virgin and John the Evangelist. The sepulcher scene on the lowest tier also similar.

The last two plaques are the Traditio Legis (Figure 5) and Enthroned Madonna, whose borders and haloes duplicate those of the Transfiguration, Ascension and Walters Crucifixion.

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[22] See John Beckwith, Early Medieval Art, Carolingian, Ottonian, Romanesque, London 1974, p. 47, fig. 37, or Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbein Skulpturen, vol. 1, pp. 24–25, cat. nos. 40a, b.

[23] See Beckwith, Early Medieval Art, p. 49, fig. 40 (both covers, psalms 26 and 24), or Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbein Skulpturen, vol. 1, pp. 26–27, cat. nos. 42, 43 (43 depicts Psalm 26).

[24] See Peter Lasko, Ars Sacra 800–1200, 2nd ed. (New Haven 1994) p. 118, fig. 163; or Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. no. 46.

[25] See Beckwith, Early Medieval Art, p. 48, fig. 3; or Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen, vol. 1, cat. no. 46

Similarities include the inner frame of flat beading on Christ's mandorla in the Traditio Legis, which duplicates that in the Ascension scene, and the three-branched trees with lobed foliage under the Madonna's throne which appear on both the Transfiguration and Ascension plaques. Finally, the Eridanus figure at the base of the Traditio Legis panel is a combination of the two personifications at the foot of the Pericopes Crucifixion.

As already mentioned, this group also shows Ottonian influence. This is seen most generally in the relative flatness which is in noticeable contrast with the Reims ivories. Ottonian ivories also show this flatness, as on the panels from the Magdeburg Antependium of ca.980, where the enlarged, rimmed haloes and foliate mandorla also appear.[26] Furthermore, the Virgin's throne and footstool reflect Ottonian designs, and can be compared with those of the Registrum Gregorii of 983, for example.[27] These Ottonian features occur throughout the group, which thus emerges with a surprisingly coherent character. I suggest then, that despite the range of style, this set of carvings too should be seen as deriving from a single center at much the same time, which can be no earlier than the eleventh-century Angel Waking the Dead on the back of the Transfiguration.

Where might that center have been? Beckwith favored Canterbury on no very specific grounds other than suggesting that the plaques might be associated with the copying of Carolingian manuscripts at that center. Beckwith's early dating of the ivories forced him to remain non-committal about this. But if my suggested later dates are acceptable, it may be possible to strengthen Beckwith's argument. As we know, the Utrecht Psalter was at Canterbury from ca.1000 AD, where it was copied at least three times. It seems very likely that it would have had Reims style ivories on its covers to complement the drawing style inside, and I suggest that these probably stimulated the Pseudo-Carolingian work examined here. As some measure of support for this, it might be noted that the figures on the Reims ivories are stockier and bulgier than the drawn figures in the Utrecht Psalter itself, and this trait seems to have appealed to the

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[26] Beckwith, Early Medieval Art, p. 126, fig. 107.
[27] Beckwith, Early Medieval Art, p. 100, fig. 83.

Anglo-Saxon craftsmen, who exaggerated it. It might also be noted that the outward splayed hands which are noticeable on the Transfiguration and Ascension plaques are much more common in Reims ivories than in the Utrecht Psalter where the hands tend to be held parallel. Thus I suggest with Beckwith that these last ivories were produced at Canterbury, but I place them later than he did, sometime in the eleventh century.

There is much work still to be done, and the evidence needs further consolidation, but the provisional findings may now be summarized. We are presented with a set of ivories which seem to have been produced in two phases. The earliest group seems to date to the first half of the eleventh century and to have been produced at some Anglo-Saxon center. The iconography of the Angel Waking the Dead plaque is so similar to the New Minster Liber Vitae that it is tempting at this stage to place the whole group at Winchester. We also know that there was exchange of personnel between Winchester and Canterbury, and it looks as if these first ivories may have been transported to Canterbury some time during the eleventh century where several (Figures 1, 3, 2) were speedily re-used to produce work reminiscent of Carolingian and Ottonian styles.

In light of the contemporarily documented purpose of art mentioned above, these findings are significant. The use of elephant ivory, and of Carolingian and Ottonian figurative styles lay visible claim to international political connections whose potentially public nature argues that the possibility of exploiting those connections was envisaged and provided for. If the findings in this paper are tenable, the potential value of these objects as historical evidence has been much increased.

CAPTIONS FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Last Judgement (Angel Waking the Dead). London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Figure 2. Decorative Panel, London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Figure 3. Baptism and Ascension, London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Figure 4. Transfiguration, London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Figure 5. Traditio Legis, London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Figure 6. Crucifixion and Three Women at the Sepulchre, Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery.

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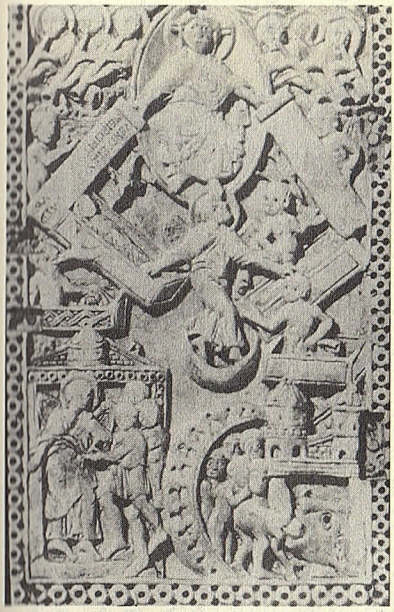

Figure 1. Last Judgment (Angel Waking the Dead), London, Victoria & Albert Museum. (After Beckwith, 1972.)

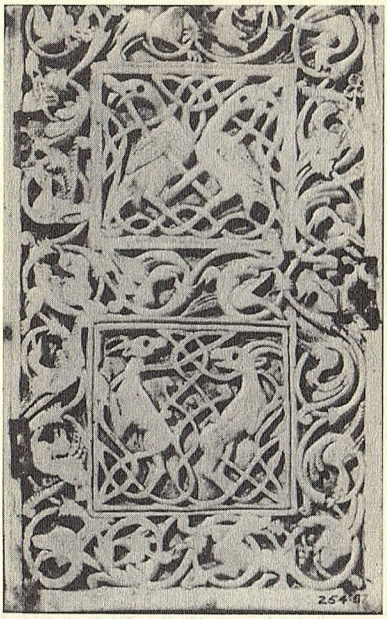

Figure 2. Decorative Panel, London, Victoria & Albert Museum. (After Beckwith, 1972.)

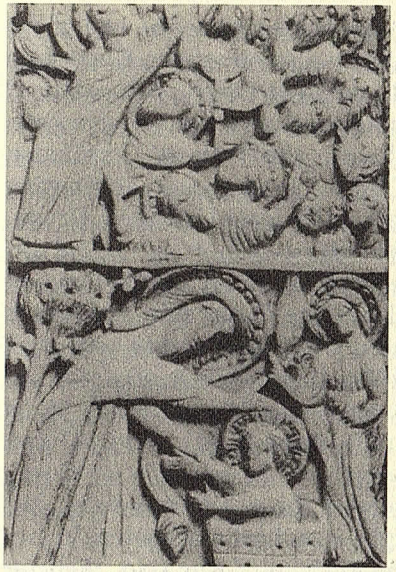

Figure 3. Baptism and Ascension, London, Victoria & Albert Museum. (After Beckwith, 1972.)

Figure 4. Transfiguration, London, Victoria & Albert Museum. (After Beckwith, 1972.)

Figure 5. *Traditio Legis*, London, Victoria & Albert Museum. (After Beckwith, 1972.)

Figure 6. Crucifixion and Three Women at the Sepulcher, by permission of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.