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Book Reviews



CORPUS OF ANGLO-SAXON STONE SCULPTURE, VOLUME X: THE WESTERN MIDLANDS. By Richard Bryant. Pp. xvii and 596, Illus 48. The British Academy (Oxford University Press), 2012. Price: £95.00. ISBN 978 019726 515 4.

It is a pleasure to welcome this tenth volume of the Corpus, two-thirds of which comprise the catalogue, plates, and supporting appendices (notably on fonts and stoups) that describe the Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture of the counties of Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Warwickshire. Historically these territories made up most of west Mercia and the catalogued material reflects the late eighth- to early tenth-century zenith of Mercia's art, as well as a considerable amount of still vibrant late tenth- and eleventh-century material. The area of study also encompasses the two sub-kingdoms of Hwicce and Magonsæte and the broadly co-terminous dioceses of Worcester and Hereford, as well as a small portion of the Welsh kingdom of Ergyng and of the diocese of Lichfield. The remaining third of the book is taken up with a succinct, contextualizing analysis of the sculpture in ten chapters, encompassing the themes of earlier research, the historical background, the distribution of the Mercian sculpture, the regional geology, the monument types, the ornamental repertoire, the figural imagery, the archaeological and architectural context of some of the sculptures, and the Deerhurst polychromy. The last is a valuable summary of much recent, detailed, work at Deerhurst, contributed by one of its principal analysts, Emily Howe.

The range of sculptures catalogued is impressive, from the massive crosshead from Cropthorne, to the recut lintel at Acton Beauchamp, the idiosyncratic plaque from Newent (which may be a stone book for the afterlife), the St Peter Panel from Bromyard, the incomplete cross-shaft with recessed relic panel from Tenbury Wells, the stone seal matrix associated with Evesham, and to the sheer concentration of sculpture at Deerhurst: 'quite simply there is more surviving early art *in situ* at Deerhurst than at any other building from before the Norman Conquest' (p. 4). The distribution pattern of the sculptures proves not to be straightforward, with major lacunae in the record, including no sculpture from Hereford Cathedral for example, and a bias in the study of the material from Gloucestershire (of 271 pieces catalogued, 164 come from fifty-four sites in Gloucestershire). Otherwise the evidence shows all classes of ecclesiastical site deployed sculptures to varying degrees. Three workshop centres were identified around the long-recognized Worcester or Gloucester centred 'Cropthorne' group, around Worcester Cathedral, and possibly around Cirencester Abbey. The work of two single craftsmen is strongly identified in sculptures from Deerhurst, Elmstone Hardwick and Hanley Castle and in the five figural panels from Daglingworth and Warmington.

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Throughout the book there are numerous references to sculptures being reused: such as from the Roman period to the Anglo-Saxon, in the form of recut column bases, capitals and altars; within the Anglo-Saxon period itself, with twenty-four capitals and bases reused and inverted in blind arcading at Worcester Cathedral, for example; and from the Anglo-Saxon to the later medieval period, with an eleventh-century grave cover recut as a lintel for a twelfth-century doorway at Swinden St Laurence. However, the theme of cultural biography is not discussed in a concerted way and this feels like a lost opportunity to explore the changing perceptions of sculptural value. But this is a minor quibble with an evidence-packed and engagingly written account (with barely a typographic error) of some fascinating Anglo-Saxon material culture.

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