NOTES

THE BOWMAN AND THE BIRD ON THE RUTHWELL CROSS AND OTHER WORKS: THE INTERPRETATION OF SECULAR THEMES IN EARLY MEDIAEVAL RELIGIOUS ART

MEYER SCHAPIRO

I

In interpreting works of mediaeval religious art, the question often arises whether all figures represented in them are properly understood as religious in content. There is one class in particular that is uncertain in meaning: the animals and associated humans—the hunters, bowmen, and struggling figures engaged with beasts. For a student who is convinced that all in mediaeval art is symbolic or illustrates a religious theme, it is not hard to find a text that seems to justify a moral or spiritualistic interpretation of the hunter and the beasts. But there is also the famous letter of St. Bernard denouncing the fantastic sculptured capitals of the Cluniac cloisters as completely devoid of religious significance. This powerful, vehement statement of a great churchman, who was also a poet, confirms the view that Romanesque art includes much that was not designed as symbol or as illustration of a sacred text.¹ There are, nevertheless, examples to which Bernard's strictures might not apply and where our intuition about a possible religious content of the animal image leads us to inquire further into the criteria of interpretation. Sometimes we observe that the images of animals and hunters, whether in the main or marginal field, resemble neighboring themes which have an undoubted religious sense. But even this resemblance is not decisive, for the problematic theme may elaborate freely an extra-religious aspect of the religious representation as in images of violence from the Old Testament bordered by scenes of animal and human combat in the frame. Thus on one of the Meigle stones in Scotland, Daniel with the Lions is surrounded by hunters, hounds, a centaur with two axes, a man with a club, and a dragon fighting a horned beast.² Centuries later, and no doubt independent of insular tradition, above a capital in the cloister of Moissac with the story of Daniel in the Lions' Den, is an impost carved with droll figures of little men fighting with birds, beasts, and monsters.³

On the twelfth century bronze doors of Augsburg, a man struggling with a lion is probably Samson, since on a nearby panel the same figure wields a jawbone against a crowd of smaller figures who can only be the Philistines.⁴ But there is also a scene of a bear at a tree with birds, a lion devouring a calf, a youth and a snake, and a centaur shooting a lion.⁵ Are these to be taken as religious symbols too? According to the late Adolf Goldschmidt, one of the keenest and most sober students of mediaeval art, the figure of Samson is a type of Christ and an example of the triumph over sin; his presence here points then to the meaning of the less obvious scenes with animal figures.⁶

Could one not reverse the order of interpretation and, proceeding from the manifest meaning of the un-Biblical scenes of animal force, see the two themes from the story of Samson as a Biblical equivalent of the profane subjects? For Samson is a legendary figure of human force, a hero who overcomes beasts and human enemies, as in so many literatures of primitive and barbaric peoples. As such he is named together with David, Hercules, Achilles, and others in the citation of exemplary heroes by the story-tellers of the time.⁷ It may be that for the priest or monk who commissioned the artist, the choice of Samson in this context of animal violence could be justified by the exegetical notions of the schools. But these would not explain the particular choice of the ante-type of Christ from among so many others offered by the Old Testament, nor would they illuminate the obvious unity of Samson and the surrounding scenes of animal life. There would remain, of course, for the reading of the profane imagery of the problem of discerning the specific sense of the animals chosen—the interest in the bear, the snake, the lion, and the centaur. For these nuances of meaning we must turn to secular literature, to legends and folklore, and to the conditions of everyday life in the Germanic world of the eleventh century, just as we consult the religious beliefs and practices for the decipherment of the sacred themes.

A text of the twelfth century throws an unexpected light on the equivalences of the sacred and the secular with respect to themes of force. In the famous Scholastica Diversarum Artium, the monk-author, Theophilus Rogerus, writing about the proper decoration of repoussé gold and silver vessels, counsels the craftsmen to represent on them "horsemen fighting against dragons, the image of Samson or David tearing the jaws

Moissac," ART BULLETIN, XIII, 1931, p. 334, fig. 79.


5. Ibid., pl. 67 ff.

6. Ibid., pp. 29 ff.


of the lion, also single lions and griffins strangling a sheep, or anything you please that will be suitable and appropriate to the size of the work" (Book III, ch. 77). What unites all these varied subjects is the content of force embodied in nameless fighting men, Biblical heroes, and voracious beasts.

II

These reflections on the animal themes bring me to a problem raised in a recent article in the ART BULLETIN by Professor Ernst Kantorowicz on the meaning of the archer and the bird on the top of the Ruthwell Cross. His interpretation of the figure as Ishmael, founded on the resemblance to the drawing of Ishmael shooting a bird in the manuscript of Aelfric's Paraphrase of the Heptateuch (Figs. 1, 2), seems to confirm and to draw some support from my own paper on the religious meaning of the sculptures of the Cross. For Ishmael as a figure of the desert would belong with the central eremitic content of the scenes and figures below: Christ with the beasts in the desert, John the Baptist, Paul and Anthony, and Mary Magdalene.

It would be agreeable to accept his view, but I am not convinced by it. I shall set forth here the reasons for my doubt, which have a bearing on the interpretation of a large class of mediaeval images of the hunter and the beast.

In his argument Professor Kantorowicz treats the bowman as if he were a unique figure in Hiberno-Saxon art, whose meaning is to be grasped through the connection with neighboring subjects on the Cross. The fact is that he occurs in several other works where the interpretation as Ishmael would appear far fetched.

11. See A. W. Clapham, English Romanesque Architecture before the Conquest, Oxford, 1930, pp. 70-72, for examples of "archers carved at the base of the shafts, shooting at the birds and beasts above"; pl. 21 shows examples at Bishop Auckland (Durham), fig. 18, at Bradbourne and Sheffield (now in the British Museum). See also W. G. Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age, London, 1927, p. 40, on this motif, and the examples at Hexham (fig. 28), Halton (fig. 92), and Sheffield (fig. 93). Other representations of the archer aiming at a bird or beast are cited by A. S. Cook, "The date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses," Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, New Haven, Conn., XVII, 1913, pp. 274ff. These are at Bakewell and Camus-ton (Scotland) and in later Romanesque art in England and France.
12. I write loosely in describing the archer as aiming at the bird. It is possible, however, that there were birds on the missing (now restored) horizontal arms of the Ruthwell Cross, as on the cross-head at Croythorne (Yorkshire), Clapham, op.cit., pl. 16.
13. The example has been noted and reproduced by Clapham, op.cit., pl. 25. For the connection of the ornament of this initial with insular art, see my article: "The Decoration of the Leningrad manuscript of Bede," Scriptorium, 12, 1958, same conception of a bowman and a bird appears on Saxon stone sculptures at Hexham, Halton, Sheffield, and elsewhere. On some of these the arrow is not pointed exactly at the bird, which merely surmounts the archer as on the Ruthwell Cross. In a psalter from Corbie, ca. 800, strongly influenced by English art, an archer aiming at a bird fills the initial B of Beatus in Psalm 1 (Fig. 3). At a later time, in the twelfth century, a bowman, in another posture, is represented repeatedly on the bronze doors of southern Italy. He occurs twice on the same door at Trani and in a field that elsewhere is reserved for images of hunters, riders, and archers, whom we cannot easily connect with the religious scenes beside them. Such figures from secular life are extremely common in Romanesque art.

But already in the seventh and eighth centuries, they have a prominent place in the art of the British Isles, even on monuments with religious scenes, including the stone slabs and crosses. On the Bewcastle Cross a figure with a falcon is carved at the base. In Scotland, not far from the region where stand the Bewcastle and Ruthwell Crosses, are many representations on stone of hunters and riders. They seem to express the interests and mode of life of the native rulers and nobility for whom these religious monuments were made and perhaps preserve motifs which in pagan times had some significance as marks of rank or as symbols of virile qualities.

It was because of the frequency of the hunter in the sculptures of the seventh to the ninth centuries in the islands, in varied contexts and compositions which seemed incompatible with a religious explanation, that

pp. 193, 106.
14. See A. Boeckler, Die Brotmysterien des Bonamus von Pisa und des Bariamus von Trani, Berlin, 1953, figs. 97, 100, 101, 126, 127, 131, 151, for the examples at Trani, Ravello, and Monreale, and p. 64 n. 199, on the ancestors of this motif in the Byzantine ivory caskets and classic hunting scenes. Two bowmen aiming at a bird on a tree between them are represented on the lid of a sarcophagus of 1179 with relics of the soldier saints, Sergius and Bacchus, in the Museo Civico at Verona—see Hans Decker, Romanesque Art in Italy, New York 1959, fig. 256.

The theme of the archer and bird is discussed a propos of the archer aiming at a squirrel on the bronze door of Gniezno in the magnificent publication of this important monument: Dwoje Gnieźnieńskie, edited by Michael Walicki, Wrocław, 1959, 3 volumes, with French summaries, in the chapters by Lech Kalkowski, "The ideological and esthetic content of the Door of Gniezno" (in Polish), ii, pp. 91ff., 156, and by Zdzisław Kepiński, "The symbolism of the Gniezno Door," ii, pp. 161ff., 290ff.
15. Cf. musicians, acrobats, dancers, and horsemen on the archivolts of doorways in southwest France. Many instances of the archer fighting with wild beasts in English Romanesque sculpture are listed by A. S. Cook, op.cit., pp. 274ff.
16. Cf. the sculptures of Breedon (Leicestershire), attributed to the late eighth century by Clapham, op.cit., pls. 274ff., and the crosses mentioned in note 11 above.
18. See Stewart Cruden, op.cit., pls. 5, 7-10, 13, 18-20, 27. On p. 12 the author calls the Pictish crosses "a huntingman's art."
1. Ruthwell Cross, Uppermost Section
   (Drawing by Miss A. C. Esmeijer)

2. Ishmael with Hagar and His Egyptian Wife. Brit. Mus. Cotton ms Claudius
   B. iv, fol. 36v (photo: courtesy of the British Museum)
3. Initial B. Amiens, Bibl. mun. Cod. 18, fol. 95r
   (photo: Foto Marburg)

4. Tympanum (detail), Andlau, Abbey Church, West Porch
   (photo: Foto Marburg)

5-6. Details, Reliquary of St. Stephen, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum,
   Weltliche Schatzkammer (photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum)
in writing on the Ruthwell Cross I interpreted the archer there as a secular figure. 19

Professor Kantorowicz supposes that since I call it a "secular figure" I regard it as "purely decorative." 20 21 If by that he means to say that I deny to the figure any value or significance beyond the contribution of its form to the rhythm of lines and of light and dark on the Cross, he misunderstands me. I believe that such motifs of decoration, especially since they represent a human or animal figure, have moving connotations and qualities for the people of their time, even when they are not symbols of status. (I have written about this aspect of mediaeval decoration in an article: "The Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art."). 21 The alternatives are not, as is often supposed: religious meaning or no meaning; but religious or secular meanings, both laden with affect. Like metaphor in poetry, such marginal decoration is also a means of dwelling in an enjoyed feeling or desire.

As I have said before, we are not always able to distinguish these two fields of meaning, since the choice of religious figures is influenced by their secular interest, and themes chosen at one time for their qualities of force may be interpreted later as moral and religious symbols.

Is it surprising that the barbarian Christians, for whom the chase was a virile and noble sport and had also an economic value, should delight in images of the falconer, the hunter, and the rider? 22 These were important figures for the imagination of the new masters of Western Europe in the early Middle Ages. 24 All that pertained to human and animal force seems to have attracted them. The frequency of animal themes on the portals and doors of churches, as in the examples at Augsburg and Trani, may be connected with the place of this imagery on the exterior of the church, which is turned to the secular community. The barbarian Christians could also find many such representations in the last works of classic art. The fowler had appeared already in pagan calendars and in verses on the months as typical for October or November. 25 Scenes of the hunt are rendered on pagan tombs where they have a possible religious significance. 26

It is remarkable that in illustrating the story of Ishmael in the manuscript of Aelfric's Paraphrase of the Heptateuch (Fig. 2), a later Anglo-Saxon artist approached the pattern of the archer and bird in the Ruthwell Cross. But the Bible text about Ishmael's hunting—"he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer" (Genesis 21:20)—written on the margin of the scene, already accounts for the presence of the archer; and the artist who had to represent this subject shared a tradition at least 300 years old in the rendering of an archer aiming at a bird. The same conception may be found in the already mentioned psalter at Amiens of about 800, in the decoration of the initial B, which has been strongly influenced by English art (Fig. 3). 27

That Ishmael was a figure of the desert makes it conceivable that he could be associated with Christian hermits. But for other reasons this association is improbable on the Ruthwell Cross. For although Professor Kantorowicz can cite a church father, John Chrysostom, on Ishmael as a pious man living in the desert under God's protection, by the end of the seventh century Ishmael stood for the Molems who were Christendom's greatest enemies. While the truly eremitic figures of Christ in the Desert, John the Baptist, Paul and Anthony, etc., on the Ruthwell Cross, are often named in early insular writings, I have yet to find a mention of Ishmael as a model of ascetic life in that literature. Bede, who was a younger contemporary of the sculptor of the Ruthwell Cross, speaks of Ishmael in a very different sense, as the ancestor of the Saracens—homeless and destructive heathens, the "lues Saracenorum." 28 What Christian of the seventh century,
reading Genesis, could forget the angel's prophecy to Hagar: "He shall be a wild man; his hand will be against all men, and all men's hands against him" (16: 13)?

III

As an early example of the use of the extremities of sacred objects as marginal fields for an imagery of force, the archer of the Ruthwell Cross reminds us how many features common in Romanesque art arose in insular sculptures and manuscript decoration of the seventh to the ninth century.

There is an interesting parallel to this problem in the interpretation of two figures on the Romanesque tympanum of the abbey church at Andlau in Alsace.20 Flanking a central Christ who gives the keys to Peter and the book to Paul, one figure aims an arrow at a bird on a tree (Fig. 4); his counterpart on the other side of Christ wields a sling directed at a bird above him. Several scholars have interpreted the trees as those of Paradise, the birds as human souls, and the hunters as symbols of evil. I incline instead to view them as a heraldic of force drawn from the profane world, like other figures on the same portal. Most of the sculptures of Andlau are of beasts: there are lions, dragons, a centaur shooting with a bow, an elephant, a griffin, fighting horsemen, a banquet scene, a butcher, the combatants of David and Goliath, and of Samson and the lion.21 No doubt, a cleric of the time invited to comment on these figures would have found in them an occasion to speak of good and evil, the soul and Satan. But it seems to me unlikely that such was the thought of the artist (or even his directing patron) in selecting these particular figures.

All this should not be taken to mean that the bowman and the bird are always a purely secular theme. I may cite here an example from a mediaeval psalter in which a picture of the shooting of a bird serves to symbolize a religious concept. In the Canterbury Psalter (Paris, Bibl. nat. Ms lat. 8846), Psalm 89 (90), which speaks of the shortness and miseries of man's life, is illustrated by a series of figures representing the seven stages of life.22 A child plays with a top, a youth aims his arrow at a bird on a tree, a more mature figure with a falcon rides a horse, etc. Here the connection with the text and the adjoining themes makes the meaning explicit. "We spend our years as a tale that is told; the days of our years are three-score and ten; and if by reason of strength they be four-score years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (lines 9, 10). It is interesting, too, that the naturally pagan world of childhood and youth are symbolized by games and the hunt, and the later years by an elderly man reading a book and an ancient sitting and praying.

IV

In proposing to interpret the archer of the Ruthwell Cross as an image of force, with a poetic and emotional significance, I have ignored one familiar sense of such figures. Since the archer and bird are at the top of the Cross, they may be seen as apotropaic, like the lion heads and other emblems of force on the cornices or pediments of buildings.23 There the repetition of an element, while contributing to the rhythmical order of the whole, does not exclude a symbolic meaning and may even reinforce it. For the archer and the bird there is a mediaeval parallel in a context with an inscription that speaks directly of protection from evil powers. On the famous gold bursa with the relic of St. Stephen in the treasure of the Holy Roman Empire in Vienna, a North French work of the ninth century closely related to the art of Reims, the two narrow sides are stamped twice with a tiny medallion image of a bowman aiming at a bird (Fig. 5).24

The lines of St. Paul, also entertains the possibility that the archer aiming at the bird is Ishaem, the son of Abraham secundum carmen, persecuting Isaac, the son secundum spiritum of the sursum Jerusalem.


31. Will, op.cit., pp. 5-9. In explaining the bowman and the bird as "symbolic of the devil's attempt to gain possession of the soul, which remains unharmed because it is under the protection of Christ," Baum (p. 498) ignores the other figures of combat and animal force.

32. It is reproduced by H. Omont, Psautier du X11e siecle, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, n.d., fig. 98. The manuscript was written at the end of the twelfth century, but certain of the miniatures, including the illustration of Psalm 89 (90), were painted in the fourteenth century in Catalonia, as Millard Meiss has shown ("Italian Style in Catalonia," Journal of the Walters Art Gallery, iv, 1941, pp. 73-76).

33. On the same themes in Greek buildings, see the important article by Emanuel Löwy, "Übergründen der bildenden Kunst," Vienna, 1930 (from the Aimanach, Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Jhg. 86).

34. It was a reliquary of the blood of St. Stephen and was said to have belonged to Charlemagne, though the decoration is surely later than his time. For the fullest account of this
Beside this figure appear the images of a fisherman four times and of a horseman six times (Fig. 6). The meaning of these medallions is intimated by a fourth subject: an angel with the inscription "MALIS VINDICTA" (Figs. 5, 6). This medallion occurs eight times and may be the key to the whole. It is not clear why the angel who protects against evil should be accompanied by the rider, the bowman and the fisherman. Are they, in some vague sense, emblems of virile occupations, suited to a noble? One can cite texts from the Bible, and especially the psalter, that speak of the bowman as a figure of evil and also of the fowler with his snare, and others in which the bird is the soul.8

But for comprehending these ornaments as a whole, the most relevant texts, I believe, are those of mediaeval magic prayer. In a manuscript of the ninth century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms lat. 1799, I find on the last page (fol. 250v) an inscription: "Nec malus omo, nec mala linga, nec mala fantasma, non in campo, nec ad arma, nec a bastone, non insidiat me." An incantation against the three-fold ubiquitous evil one occurs in a different form in a later manuscript from Grasse (Paris, Bibl. nat. lat. 5231, fol. 120v), also at the end of the book: "Non in silva, non in agro, non in domo, etc." It follows a series of prayers for protection against evil and includes examples from the Old Testament of divine aid in extremis, as in the prayers for the dying. These incantations suggest that the repeated images on the bursa in Vienna, with their order of frequency—two, four, six, culminating in the eight medallions of the angel—represent the three elements or fields in which evil is to be averted: air, water and earth, symbolized by the archer, the fisherman and the rider.8 This interpretation is, of course, a conjecture and it may be, as Marc Rosenberg has said, that of all the medallions those with the angels have a religious sense.87

That the archer on the Ruthwell Cross is an apotropaic figure is hardly certain. A more extensive study of the examples and the texts would be needed for testing this interpretation. But I believe that the view advanced earlier—that the archer belongs to the class of secular figures of force congenial to a barbarian and emerging feudal society—is the most consistent with the variety of contexts in which the hunter appears in mediaeval art, although it may acquire in particular works an apotropaic and even a moral-religious sense.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

A NOTE ON PIERRE DE MONTREUIL AND SAINT-DENIS

ROBERT BRANNER

When Henri Stein, in 1902, published a charter containing the phrase, "Magistro Petro de Mosterolio, cementario de Sancto Dyonißio," he thought he had discovered that Pierre de Montreuil was the thirteenth century architect of St.-Denis.7 Cementarius, according to Stein, identified the man as a mason, and magister as master, and the combination meant that he was the architect-in-chief, the designer of the work. Later, in another context, Stein tried to buttress this conclusion by proving that cementarius alone was sufficient to indicate a chief architect.8 And in 1912, he published a charter of 1265 in which Pierre de Montreuil is called "Magister Petrus de Monsterolio, cementarius, magister operum b. Marie Parisiensis," or Master of the Works of Notre-Dame.8

Stein's argument on the meaning of cementarius does not seem to require much refutation, since it is

work, see Marc Rosenberg, 'Das Stephanareliquiar im Lichte des Urrechtsalters,' Jahrbuch der preusischen Kunstsammlungen, XXIII, 1923, pp. 169-184.

35. Cf. Psalm 91:3-5: Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler... He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day...." On the symbolism of the fowler in mediaeval literature and its Biblical sources, see B. G. Koonce, "Satan the Fowler," Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, XXI, 1959, pp. 176-184.

36. For related magic prayers, exorcisms, and meditations with elements grouped in threes, see Eugène de Rozière, Recueil général des formules utiles dans l'empire des Francs du Ve au Xe siècle, Paris, 1859, 11, and particularly p. 885, no. 646: "non per auru, non per argenteum, neque per lapidibus praeciosis [sic]," nec dormientem, nec sedentem, nec ambulantem." "coelum et terram, mare et omnia quae in eis sunt." Cf. also the formula in the fictitious letter of Christ to Abgar, that was used as an apotropaic incantation: "sive in mare, sive in terra, sive in die, sive in nocte, sive in locis obscuris, ei quis hane epistolam habuerit securus ambuleti in paci," compiled by E. von Dobschütz, "Charmes et Amulettes (Christian)," in J. Hastings, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, New York, 1911, 111, p. 425. My friend, the late Ralph Marcus, professor at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, called to my attention many years ago the spell published by A.


2. H. Stein, "Un architecte de la cathédrale du Mans au XIlle siècle, Thomas Toustain," Mémoires, Soc. Ant. Fr., LXXII, 1911, pp. 115-134, 118; cf. idem, "A propos de Thomas Toustain: comment on désignait les architectes au moyen âge," ibid., LXXV, 1915-1918, pp. 81-83. While it is difficult to agree with the suggestion made by Stein's principal contemporary opponent, the abbé Ledru, to wit, that cementarius meant mason and lathomus master mason, Ledru's chief criticism of Stein's interpretation of the Le Mans text is precisely the same one that is raised here. In view of the rapid evolution of architectural practice, it would, I think, be incorrect to adduce twelfth and even very early thirteenth century examples in the present context.