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## **Local churches and the conquest of the North: elite patronage and identity in Saxo-Norman Northumbria**

### **Abstract**

The social implications of the Saxo-Norman transition are particularly intriguing in Northumbria, where Anglian, Scandinavian, and Norman social structures, identities, and traditions of material culture converged. In the north, where royal control was less secure and there was a history of political independence, negotiating the transition required a calculated balance of imposed authority and regard for the institutions of the past. Local churches, already established as a focal point of religious and secular manorial life, were one of the primary arenas in which this dialogue of power was carried out. Through an examination of the evidence for stone church buildings and funerary monuments in eleventh and twelfth-century Northumbria, this paper demonstrates how the elite utilized church patronage to negotiate authority and identity in a period of acute transition, and how the particular political and cultural characteristics of Yorkshire, County Durham, and Northumberland could affect this process.

### **Introduction**

The political and cultural upheaval of the Norman Conquest, especially as it occurred in the north of England, offers a compelling event around which to frame an archaeological discussion of the process of sociocultural transition, as well as its wider implications for material culture and patronal behaviour. It is hardly the only invasion and settlement to which the lands of Northumbria were subjected, and the incursions of the Scandinavians and the Scottish were equally influential, if not more so, on the long-

term cultural and political identity of northeastern England (Aird 1997, 30-31; Hadley 2001, 307). Nevertheless, the Saxo-Norman transition bears enormous potential for study in this region. The transition occurred in the midst of a crucial juncture in the development of medieval society, when a number of social and ecclesiastical trends were being realized. Settlement expansion and replanning, increased levels of manorialization and tenurial complexity, the expansion of the monetary economy and market commerce, and the growing influence of local, mesne lords are visible throughout England during this period (Britnell 1995, 7; Dyer 2002, 102; Newman 1988, 21).

Accompanying these secular changes were significant shifts in the ecclesiastical sphere, most significantly the on-going breakdown and modification of the minster system and its wide-ranging jurisdictions (Blair 1988, 7), and the resulting intensification of secular, local, proto-parochial church foundation and patronage (Blair 1996, 12). This in turn fundamentally influenced the eleventh- and twelfth-century 'Great Rebuilding' of wooden churches in stone (Blair 1988; Gem 1988; Morris 1989), as well as the flourishing of churchyard burial and stone commemorative markers for the secular elite (Everson and Stocker 1999; Lang 1991, 2001). While all of these developments originated independently of the Norman Conquest, they were also profoundly affected and influenced by it. Aspects of these on-going processes were in many cases actively manipulated by the elite of Northumbria in the complex negotiation of hierarchies, allegiances, and social identities that characterized the transition.

In recent scholarship, archaeology has been recognized to be of paramount importance in furthering our understanding of transition periods, emphasizing the role of material culture as an active agent in mediating social change (Gaimster and

Gilchrist 2003; Gaimster and Stamper 1997; Giles 2000; Hadley and Richards 2000). Material expression and display were integral means through which people adapted to and dealt with turbulent events, and reinforced or changed social, cultural, collective, and individual identities, as the need arose. It is thus worthwhile to examine the ways in which the patronage of material culture, in this instance architectural fabric and commemorative monuments in local churches, was employed by the elite in order to establish and maintain their authority and social location in a time of transition. The bulk of the data discussed here is drawn from research conducted into the parish churches and funerary monuments of the North Riding of Yorkshire in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries (McClain 2005). These detailed results will also be compared with material from County Durham and Northumberland, in order to assess the implications of the Saxo-Norman transition throughout Northumbria. The discussion will thus shed light on the complexities of a process that has often been framed in simple, antagonistic terms, particularly because of the fractiousness of the Norman takeover in the north and the supposed severity of the subsequent 'Harrying' (Allerston 1970; Bishop 1948; Holt 1997, *xiv*; Kapelle 1979, 3, 118; Loyn 1971, 106-107).

The particular social contexts that created the North Riding's material culture, while comparable to the experience of the whole of northeastern England, cannot necessarily be extrapolated directly to the remainder of the region. The northeast was characterized by broad cultural and political similarities, and there is evidence that the men of the north thought of themselves and their land as separate from southern and midlands England (Cramp 1999, 2; Higham 1993, 214; Hunter-Blair 1948, 125; Kapelle 1979, 11). However, early medieval Northumbria was not an internally unified or homogeneous entity (Kapelle 1979, 10). At the Conquest, there were separate

political factions in York and northern Northumbria, and the region was not considered a single territorial unit by its inhabitants (Aird 1998, 60, 65). The boundary between the ancient kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira persisted in the political mindset (Aird 1994, 3), and was reinforced by the tradition of the 'lands of St Cuthbert' between the Tyne and the Tees, and the holdings of the House of Bamburgh between the Tyne and the Tweed (Aird 1998, 66). Thus, the economic, ecclesiastical, and manorial histories and landscapes of Northumberland, County Durham, and Yorkshire at times differed substantially from one another.

In religious terms, Durham and Northumberland seem to have had a richer Anglian monastic culture than Yorkshire. The city of York did not emerge as a major monastic centre until the middle of the eighth century, considerably later than the Northumbrian monasteries (Wood 2008, 13). Indeed, apart from Whitby, the best-known of Bede's 'Golden Age' monasteries, such as Monkwearmouth, Jarrow, Lindisfarne, Hartlepool, Tynemouth, and Hexham, were all located in Durham and Northumberland (Higham 1993, 155). This pattern is not only apparent in the documentary sources, but is reinforced by the concentrations of Anglian-period sculpture in the counties. In both East and North Yorkshire, only about 20% of the surviving pre-Conquest sculpture dates to the ninth century or earlier, in contrast to about 60% of the sculpture in Durham and Northumbria (cf. Cramp 1984; Lang 1991, 2001). Similarly, Scandinavian settlement and rule appear to have had more cultural and political influence in Yorkshire and the Tees Valley than in the northern reaches of Northumbria (Hadley 2006, 71; Higham 1986, 310). Northumberland and northern Durham feature far fewer characteristically Anglo-Scandinavian cultural elements than Yorkshire, including place names, stone sculpture, and metalwork (Cramp 1984, 29, 34; Fellows-Jensen 2000, 139; Ryder 1992, 50; Thomas 2000).

In addition, while Yorkshire was a hotbed of dissent against pre- and post-Conquest southern rule throughout the eleventh century, Durham and Northumberland seem to have been even more autonomous, more fractious, and under a lesser degree of royal control (Higham 1993, 246; Kapelle 1979, 122; McCord and Thompson 1998, 22-23). The lack of authority over the area even twenty years after the Conquest is evidenced by the fact that the Domesday inquest was conducted no further north than Yorkshire, and it is debatable whether Durham and Northumberland technically fell under English or Scottish control at that time (Aird 1997, 29; Dalton 1997, 15).

The diverse backdrops of the various regions of the northeast undoubtedly had an effect on the motives behind patronage and expenditure in the Saxo-Norman period, as well as the material culture it produced. Through close examination of the North Riding's architectural and commemorative evidence, and comparison with data from the other Northumbrian counties, we may reveal which bodies of material culture and patronal actions represented region-wide responses to the Saxo-Norman transition, and which were products of more closely-defined local contexts.

In order to understand developments in the years surrounding the Norman Conquest, and their long-term impact, the preceding ecclesiastical landscape of the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian northeast must also be considered. The central role of churches and commemoration in the effective establishment of Anglo-Scandinavian rule and socio-political culture in Yorkshire and eastern England has been identified by scholars such as David Stocker and Dawn Hadley (Hadley 2001; Stocker 2000). Newly settled Anglo-Scandinavian lords and merchants readily adopted the pre-existing Anglian practices of church foundation and stone sculpture, yet altered them in style and purpose. Their new sculptural tradition appropriated the Anglian monumental form of the standing cross and many elements of design, but also introduced an

amalgamation of Scandinavian-influenced decorative conventions, Christian imagery, and secular motifs (Bailey 1996, 80-85; Lang 1991, 32, 37). Furthermore, in contrast to the large-scale crosses, sparse distribution, and ecclesiastical patrons of Anglian work, Anglo-Scandinavian funerary sculpture is typically smaller in size, seems often to be associated with secular individuals, and has been found at five times as many sites as its Anglian predecessors (Bailey 1980, 1996, 79; Lang 1991, 2001; Richards 2000a, 159; Stocker 2000, 193).

Patronage of churches by secular lords had also been a feature of the pre-Viking period (Blair 1985, 104; Blair 2005, 102), and here again the Anglo-Scandinavians adapted and altered a pre-existing practice. Secular minster foundation had generally been the preserve of royalty or the high aristocracy (Blair 2005, 102), but the Anglo-Scandinavian lords brought ecclesiastical patronage to a local level. Fragmentation of great estates into smaller holdings allowed a new class of manorial elite to contribute prolifically to churches. But instead of preserving the monastic and canonical institutions of the Anglian minster system, they took existing churches into secular ownership and founded new proprietary chapels, and erected their funerary monuments in the churchyards (Blair 2005, 323, 385; Williams 2001, 8). In both churches and monumental sculpture, patrons co-opted material languages of authority that were already established and widely understood, yet imprinted them with their own visual expressions of identity which were tied to specific social necessities of the period. Anglo-Scandinavian churches and monuments became symbols of temporal power and legitimized authority, which could communicate thegnly status, lordship, wealth, or political and cultural affinity to both the newly-conquered populace and to other members of the elite (Hadley 2000; Sidebottom 2000; Stocker 2000).



The fundamental importance of ecclesiastical material culture to the establishment of political authority and elite identity was thus solidly established by the Saxo-Norman period. Indeed, churches have long been recognized by archaeologists and architectural historians as an especially revealing form of material culture for the study of the Saxo-Norman era (Ferne 2000, 19, 208; Gem 1996, 5-6). Much scholarship has been devoted to detailing specific architectural trends and developments of the transition period (Cambridge 1994; Ferne 2000; Gem 1986, 1988; Morris 1988; Taylor and Taylor 1965a, 1965b; Taylor 1978). However, explorations of the social effects of patronage, and the local church's role as an arbiter of social standing and identity, have primarily concentrated on the later Middle Ages (e.g. Barnett 2000; Graves 1989). These themes have not often been emphasized in the Saxo-Norman period.

The study of churches in the specific context of the Norman Conquest has primarily focused on abbeys and cathedrals, which were generally quickly and comprehensively rebuilt in a Romanesque style in the half-century after 1066 (Ferne 2000, 27; Plant 2002; Reilly 1997). These great churches were undoubtedly powerful social statements of authority (Le Patourel 1976, 353), made by the highest levels of the Norman secular and religious aristocracy on a national scale. They, along with castles, were what J.C. Holt has called the 'blunt instruments' of power and domination (1997, 4). But local churches had an equally significant, if more subtle, role to play in the intricate negotiation of control that was necessary 'on the ground' at local levels.

The responsibility for confrontation and compromise at this level is not likely to have lain with the magnates, whose holdings encompassed numerous and wide-ranging estates and churches, but rather with the lesser manorial lords, whose power base was primarily locally or regionally defined (Everson *et al.*, 1991, 16; Mason 1976, 18;

Miller and Hatcher 1978, 18-19; Stocker and Everson 2006, 74). Documentation of the twelfth century provides evidence of subtenant manorial lords being in *de facto* control of the churches on their estates (Page 1914, 331; Page 1925, 342-3), and it is likely that this had been the case since the tenth century. Anglo-Scandinavian landholders had to possess a ‘bell-house and a burh-geat,’ most likely a church and a fortified residence, in order to claim thegnly status (Williams 1992, 225). In addition, the density and distribution patterns of surviving Anglo-Scandinavian grave markers (Stocker 2000, 186), as well as the imagery of military lordship and elite recreation that appears on some of the stones (Richards 2000a, 160), indicates that these same landholding elites were the likely patrons of many tenth- and eleventh-century funerary monuments.

While not as evocative as the imagery on Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, secondary symbols on non-effigial grave slabs can give insight into the identity of post-Conquest local church patrons. Indeed, the use of emblems that depict occupation and status is particularly common on northern grave slabs, and may stem from the region’s established tradition of expressing secular identities on Christian sculpture (Butler 1987, 248) (Fig.1). Military emblems—most frequently the sword—account for over half (53%) of the secondary symbols on eleventh- and twelfth-century grave slabs in North Yorkshire, mirroring the elite, thegnly/knightly identity that some patrons expressed on tenth-century monuments. Comprehensive studies in other counties have confirmed that swords are by far the most common secondary emblem on grave slabs throughout the medieval period (Ryder 1985, 1991, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005). Apart from weapons, the most common of the other early emblems are those representing females, perhaps elite wives and daughters (22%), and those representing priests and ecclesiastics (12%) (McClain 2005, 138). This indicates a restricted class of patrons who were wealthy enough to afford stone monuments, but ones who had a vested

interest in marking their lives and deaths in local churches, rather than in great monasteries. To the lesser, manorial elite, patronage of parish churches and their churchyards would have been particularly attractive. They were prominent, established, and accessible structures, located on the estates where the local lords were present and visible, and from which they drew their wealth and influence. Ecclesiastical patronage by the local elite is likely to have been particularly pertinent in the turbulence of Saxo-Norman Northumbria, where successful control may have required a calculated balance of imposed authority and integration with the institutions of the past.

### **Churches and commemoration in North Yorkshire**

In the North Riding of Yorkshire, the importance of local churches in the social and physical landscape is clearly established from a very early period. Combined sculptural, architectural, and documentary evidence reveals a network of at least 38 possible and probable Anglian minsters and their subsidiaries, dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries (McClain 2005, 161; cf. Morris 1989, 144) (Fig.2). Most parts of the Riding are broadly represented, although the density of distribution and the complexity of organization cannot match that known from Wessex (Blair 2005, 300-302). It was only in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as the ecclesiastical dominance of the minsters and monasteries dissolved under pressure from estate fragmentation and the foundation of patronal chapels, that the North Riding's church provision and secular patronage began to approach its medieval heights.

Although there is no known standing architectural evidence from the tenth century in the North Riding, there was certainly no shortage of churches at that time. There are well over 300 funerary monuments of the late ninth and tenth centuries at 67 churches, which probably represent contemporary sites of Christian worship and burial

(Morris 1988, 153). The distribution shows that a skeleton of the medieval parochial system had been established by this time, and in some parts of the Riding, such as Wensleydale and western Ryedale, almost all of the known medieval churches were already in existence by *c.*950 (Fig.2). In the Anglian period, there were five churches in existence in the Wensleydale area, and seven, possibly eight, in the western half of Ryedale. In these areas, the remaining gaps in the distribution were filled in during the Anglo-Scandinavian period, creating regional clusters in which nearly every manorial settlement featured a church. It is also significant that these areas seem to have been magnets for continuous architectural and commemorative patronage from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, featuring high concentrations not only of Anglian churches and Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, but also of Saxo-Norman architecture (cf. Figs.2 and 6). Although Anglian architecture was in most cases completely overwritten by later rebuilding programmes, it is clear that a highly visible lineage of ecclesiastical history and expenditure could serve as a significant draw to patrons wishing to make their mark through social display.

If evidence from Domesday Book, architectural fabric, and funerary sculpture is considered in conjunction, at least 123 North Riding churches—or nearly half of the medieval provision of 254 churches and chapels—were in existence by *c.*1100 (Fig. 3). This includes 112 of the eventual 190 (59%) parish churches of the Riding, but only 11 of the 64 (17%) medieval chapels and subsidiary churches. However, it is likely that by *c.*1100, there were actually far more churches than the data suggest, because the evidence skews the results towards those churches that had tax value, burial rights, or stone architecture. Undoubtedly some of the remaining 131 unrepresented churches existed at the time, but were either of low value, subordinate, or ephemerally constructed.

Of the North Riding's 123 pre-1100 churches, 34 (28%) have remnant evidence that indicates they were built in stone, demonstrating that substantial investment in their fabric had been made by patrons at an early date. The evidence in 30 of these churches dates from the period between c.1050 and 1100, while the other four have remnants of eighth/ninth-century Anglian work. Stone architecture does not seem to have been regularly employed in the tenth century in the North Riding. At any rate, the highly developed Anglo-Saxon architecture of the late tenth century seen at Earls Barton (Northants.), Barton upon Humber (Lincs.), and Deerhurst (Glos.), is not found in the region. There is the possibility, as revealed from excavations at Wharram Percy (Beresford and Hurst 1990, 61; Mays *et al.* 2007, 1, 327), that some Yorkshire churches without immediate Anglian predecessors may have been built in stone during the late tenth or early eleventh centuries. The discovery of an eighth-century cross fragment at Wharram may suggest an Anglian ecclesiastical presence near the tenth-century church (Lang 1991, 222; Richards 2000b, 195), although nothing is known of any earlier structure, and it is not on the same site as the later church (Mays *et al.* 2007, 284). It seems that if there were tenth-century stone churches in North Yorkshire, as at Wharram Percy, they were not imposing enough to survive major rebuilds in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries.

From the North Riding's architectural evidence, it seems that the first substantial intensification of stone church-building in the Riding began in the second half of the eleventh century. It is difficult to tell whether stone was the dominant medium for church building at that time, but it was probably more common than the evidence here suggests, and by the twelfth century, seems to have been exclusively used. Kirkdale is the only one of North Yorkshire's Saxo-Norman churches firmly datable to before the Norman Conquest. The well-known inscription on its sundial

places the rebuilding of the church, of which the west doorway is the chief survival, between 1055 and 1065 (Lang 1991, 164). Similar sundials at Old Byland, Great Edstone, and Skelton-in-Cleveland are also likely to date to the mid-eleventh century (Lang 1991, 2001; Wall 1997), and imply contemporary stone churches, but none of these dials are as diagnostic as Kirkdale's, nor are they accompanied by surviving eleventh-century fabric. In fact, Old Byland's Domesday Book entry specifically cites the existence of a wooden church in the vill in 1086, further complicating the relationship between the stone sundial and Old Byland's eleventh-century church or churches, as well as highlighting the shifting nature of church fabric in this period.

In light of examinations of the 'Great Rebuilding' period and revisions of architectural dating that have been carried out by Richard Gem (1986, 1988), Richard Morris (1988), Eric Cambridge (1994), and David Stocker and Paul Everson (2006), it appears that the vast majority of the North Riding's 'Saxo-Norman' stone architecture, which is primarily preserved in west towers, should be dated to the late eleventh century (Fig. 4). This dating takes on particular significance because it demonstrates that while a programme of stone church-building no doubt began before 1066, it was taken up and intensified in the aftermath of the Conquest. However, in the North Riding, where Norman tenurial control was less firm and native retention of land and subtenancy were sometimes necessary (Finn 1972, 27), this intensification does not imply a unified, ethnically-defined 'Norman' building programme of domination. Neither does the retention of several 'Saxon' stylistic features necessarily represent native conservatism or resistance. Many of these churches may have been the product of new Norman patrons establishing dominance through rebuilding programmes and conspicuous expenditure, but with elements of style familiar to the region, its inhabitants, and its masons. Equally, others may have been the product of native

patrons demonstrating that their power and wealth were still viable, perhaps even in an attempt to gain favour and status with the Norman overlords who now controlled land distribution.

The overtones of ethnic and cultural dominance that accompanied Norman architectural and sculptural styles could benefit patrons in certain situations, but as had happened in the Anglo-Scandinavian period, ethnic identity was often subordinated to the concerns and necessities of effective lordship, and to the overarching importance of elite identity (Blair 2005, 293). As Richard Morris has pointed out, Saxo-Norman churches were not the last remnants of a dying style, but rather the first examples of a newly created one (Morris 1988, 197), which had been born out of the necessary melding and negotiation of Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Scandinavian, and Norman political and ethnic cultures in late eleventh-century Yorkshire.

Funerary monuments of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, of which there are 34 at 23 churches in the Riding, are similarly ambiguous about cultural identity. While some monuments feature geometric patterns that can be tied to the developing Norman Romanesque architectural style, just as many are idiosyncratic pieces that meld the forms and motifs of Anglo-Scandinavian and recognizably post-Conquest work (Fig. 5). Interestingly, these monuments tend to be found in more northerly, isolated, and peripheral parts of the Riding—a distributional pattern diametrically opposed to that of Saxo-Norman architecture (Fig. 6). There are 16 churches with Saxo-Norman sculpture above the line of the North York Moors, but there are only four that have Saxo-Norman architecture. In contrast, there are 26 churches with eleventh-century architecture at or below that midline, but only seven with contemporary sculpture.

It seems that eleventh-century stone architecture was primarily produced in well-connected, populous, primary settlement areas, while Saxo-Norman sculpture was far more common on the tenurial and political peripheries. Centralized authority would have been even more tenuous and open to contention in the far western and northern areas of Yorkshire, where it was often necessary to create large numbers of subtenant holdings, and to integrate native landholders into the tenurial ladder to achieve control (Dalton 1994, 21; Wightman 1975, 55). In these liminal regions, it may have been more difficult for manorial landholders, whether Norman or native, to achieve the control and stability, or indeed the wealth, technological knowledge, and skilled manpower necessary to effect a full rebuilding of extant local churches. Instead, patronal focus may have shifted to a more accessible, but still permanent medium, such as monuments made by local sculptors. Both the architectural and commemorative patterns indicate that patronage of these media was an established and valued mode of elite display, regardless of the cultural affiliation of the lord. Expenditure on churches or monuments was vital for any member of the landholding elite who wished to make a tangible statement, in a permanent medium, about his or his family's place in a shifting social hierarchy.

It is clear that in the North Riding, a substantial part of the later medieval parochial system was established by *c.* 1100, and in most of the Riding, the churches of the later medieval period did not colonize new, churchless regions, but rather filled out this already-present framework. The numerous and widely distributed churches of the Saxo-Norman period support revisionist interpretations of the intensity of devastation caused by the Harrying of the North (e.g. Dalton 1994, 1; Palliser 1993), and do not reflect the traditional and still pervasive portrait of Yorkshire as an impoverished and desolate land in the decades following the Conquest (e.g. Higham 1993, 233; Kapelle



1979, 162). The presence of a great number of newly-built stone churches, commemorative monuments, and churches and priests recorded in Domesday Book indicate an active spiritual, economic, and social life throughout the North Riding in the last decades of the eleventh century, rather than the bleak pictures painted by chroniclers such as Symeon of Durham and Orderic Vitalis (Palliser 1993, 3). Even if Domesday Book values suggest that North Yorkshire was not as agriculturally prosperous or as densely peopled as other regions of the country (Maxwell 1962), the highly developed system of local churches and churchyards indicates that its elite were not only aware of wider national trends of church-building and commemoration, but were actively and intensively pursuing them.

The trends towards stone church-building and commemoration that had been firmly established in the Anglo-Scandinavian and Saxo-Norman periods continued unabated into the twelfth century, and at an even greater intensity. 174 of the 190 parish churches (92%) and 28 of 64 chapels (44%) show some evidence of patronage, whether architecture, font, or funerary monument, during the twelfth century. This is noteworthy not only in that at least 80% of the Riding's medieval churches and chapels were in existence by this time, but that the programme of expenditure at parish churches was nearly comprehensive. Almost every parish church in the North Riding was undergoing architectural refurbishment during the twelfth century, at a rate that would not be approached again until the fifteenth century.

The twelfth century also appears to be the only period in the whole of the Middle Ages in which multiple phases of construction were regularly carried out. In the North Riding, 40 churches feature multiple building phases between c. 1100 and c. 1200, and three (Pickering, Salton, and Northallerton) have surviving evidence from the early, mid, and late twelfth centuries. An additional four churches (Masham, Alne,

Stonegrave, and Hackness) have a late eleventh-century phase and a further two twelfth-century phases. Indeed, only six churches with Saxo-Norman fabric have no clear evidence of being altered again in the twelfth century. These churches demonstrate that just as the Norman Conquest cannot be put forward as the primary driver behind programmes of rebuilding; neither can the implementation of technological advances or a simple and functional transition from wood to stone.

Most of the legislative, political, and cultural shifts directly related to the post-Conquest transition were probably accomplished by the first quarter of the twelfth century, during the reign of Henry I (Dalton 1994, 107; Hollister 1987, 14). However, a breakdown of the evidence shows that the rate of patronage of churches and monuments did not drop off at this time, but rather steadily increased until *c.* 1200 (Fig. 7). The intensity of expenditure on local churches, while affected by the Conquest, was clearly not directly correlated to the imposition of Norman rule. Rather, ecclesiastical patronage seems to have been tied to the continual necessity of the manorial elite to communicate wealth and status to their subordinates, peers, and overlords—a need which was heightened in the aftermath of the Conquest, but which had existed long before it, and was equally relevant in the relative peace and prosperity of the twelfth century. Unlike the programme of building carried out at major cathedrals and abbeys, the ‘Great Rebuilding’ of local churches was not a neatly classifiable, monolithic statement that immediately reshaped the ecclesiastical landscape. It was instead a long, complex, multi-phased undertaking which was neither unified nor driven by a single, cohesive political or cultural expediency. Moreover, in terms of intensity, the ‘Great Rebuilding’ of the North Riding must be recast to encompass not only the Saxo-Norman period, but the whole of the twelfth century.

### **The Saxo-Norman transition in the northern counties**

No work of comparable breadth to that completed in North Yorkshire has yet been carried out on the churches and monuments of Saxo-Norman Durham and Northumberland (together, 'the northern counties'). Nevertheless, significant insights can be drawn through comparison of the published data for the northern counties with what is known from the North Riding. More in-depth research is clearly necessary for a better understanding of patterns of patronage in all parts of Saxo-Norman Northumbria, but until that work can be completed, this brief review will highlight some of the interesting contrasts and similarities between the Conquest experiences of Yorkshire and northern Northumbria.

In Northumberland and Durham, 67 church sites feature pre-Conquest sculpture, and it is thought that around 40% of the two counties' parish churches were in existence by the end of the tenth century (Morris 1989, 153-154). This is slightly higher, but comparable to the North Riding's 81 sites with Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture or fragments of Anglian architectural fabric, which amounts to 32% of the medieval total. Although the vast majority of the North Riding's evidence stems from Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture (Lang 1991, 2001), and the northern counties are represented more by Anglian work (Cramp 1984), the ecclesiastical provision of the two regions seems to have been broadly analogous at the cusp of the Saxo-Norman period.

Given that Durham and Northumberland were even less stable and secure than the North Riding in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, due both to Norman and Scottish pressures (Roberts 2003, 18-19), one might expect patronage and social display to have taken on even more importance. Certainly, patrons seem to have been

sensitive to the legitimizing power of the past. Robin Daniels' study of 57 churches and manors in the Tees Valley of Durham and northern Yorkshire found that over half of the churches with pre-Conquest origins had manorial sites located adjacent to them (Daniels 1996, 109-110). Although it is difficult to date the establishment of the manorial sites without excavation, or to tell whether the church and manor were contemporary foundations, it is highly likely that many of the manors also had pre-Conquest origins (Williams 1992, 233). The survival of this close association of pre-Conquest churches and manors into the later-medieval period indicates that it was often beneficial for post-Conquest lords to appropriate pre-existing centres of secular and religious authority rather than to start anew—a precedent which had already been set by Anglo-Scandinavian and late-Saxon lords' occupation of elite middle Saxon sites (e.g. Wharram Percy, N. Yorks.; Raunds, Northants.) (Hadley 2001, 279; Richards 2000a, 42; Richards 2000b, 200). In areas that were difficult to control, such as the Durham border, ruling from established and understood sites of elite power may have provided an element of legitimacy that facilitated social dominance.

From data provided in the Taylors' catalogues of Anglo-Saxon Architecture (Taylor 1978, 726-730) and Pevsner's *Buildings of England* (Pevsner 1983; Pevsner *et al.* 1992), there appears to be less Saxo-Norman architectural work in both Durham and Northumberland than in the North Riding, although it should be noted that intensive study in Yorkshire has led to a recognition of significantly more architecture of the transitional period than is listed in these surveys (McClain 2005). Durham has 13 and Northumberland has 15 possible churches with fabric dating to before c.1100, but of these, only eight and 11 churches, respectively, feature work dating to the eleventh century. The remainder retain pre-Conquest work only of Anglian date. The church at Chester-le-Street is documented as having been rebuilt in stone between 1042 and 1057

(Cambridge 1994, 145), demonstrating that, here too, the 'Great Rebuilding' was set in motion before the Norman Conquest. While both northern counties do appear to participate in the eleventh-century surge in architectural patronage, the number of churches undergoing rebuilding at that time seems to have been fewer than in North Yorkshire.

Although it is difficult to tell without Domesday evidence, one contributing factor may have been the difficulty in installing Norman lords as far down as the local level in northern Durham and Northumberland. Indeed, as late as the reign of Henry I, a number of English names can be seen in the lists of men given important positions in the region (McCord and Thompson 1998, 30). Less revolutionary changes in the tenurial hierarchy at the lower manorial levels may have led to fewer social drivers for competitive display of status. The process of the 'Great Rebuilding' was still obviously underway in the northern counties, but it was perhaps lacking the boost in intensity given by the Conquest to North Yorkshire's building patrons, where the Norman takeover was more invasive. There, the confrontations and competitions between newly established and displaced or reshuffled manorial lords were likely to be more frequent, and more social capital was at stake. The relative scarcity of Saxo-Norman building in the northern counties, which has been cited as a characteristic of peripheral areas of Anglo-Norman England (Cambridge 1994, 157-158), in some ways parallels the patterns seen in the northern and western reaches of North Yorkshire. There too, less Norman disruption and control and fewer resources may have meant less initial necessity for socially-driven investment in churches.

Another primary factor may have been the remarkable amount of standing Anglian fabric in both Durham and Northumberland (Fig. 8). Only nine churches in the North Riding have any surviving Anglian architecture, and these pieces are all

fragmentary and *ex situ* (McClain 2005, 108). In contrast, there are eight examples of substantial standing Anglian architecture from Durham and Northumberland, and numerous other examples with fragmentary remains (Taylor 1978; Cramp 1984). Jarrow is documented not only as being extant in the eleventh century, but as a place of pilgrimage for Bishop Eadmund of Durham (1022-45), and Wearmouth appears to be standing, renovated, and in use in 1070. Furthermore, even after the loss of the Anglian monastic communities, the churchyards of both churches were in continuous use for burial throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries (Cramp 2005, 35, 88-89, 173). The preservation of Anglian architecture and the persistence of the ritual significance of the sites may indicate not only a stronger continuity and memory of the pre-Viking social and ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also a more compelling need for subsequent patrons to retain those material links to a recognizable and significant past.

The lack of a strong Scandinavian presence in the northern counties and high levels of English lordship throughout the Norman Conquest period may have affected attitudes to previous and newly established ecclesiastical material culture. In North Yorkshire, Anglian architectural evidence is fragmentary when it is found at all, suggesting that while the location and history of a church could draw subsequent patronage, later Anglo-Scandinavian or Anglo-Norman patrons had little use for the physical remnants of Anglian monasticism. The situation seems to have been somewhat different in Durham and Northumberland. If local landholders of the northern counties remained primarily English throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, preserving the Anglian architectural fabric would have provided them with a strong bond to a long lineage of power, and a means of preserving regional identity in the face of Scandinavian and Norman incursions. If they were Norman, their tenuous control meant that while political and economic statements like castle-building and harrying

were useful tools of force, lords perhaps had more to gain at local levels by incorporating themselves into the lineage of authority, rather than rewriting it completely.

The nature of the patrons themselves in Durham and Northumberland may also have had an effect on building patterns. The vibrant monastic past of both counties led to concerted efforts of revival at many of those churches after the Norman Conquest, including Monkwearmouth/Jarrow (1070s); Tynemouth (1090); Durham (1093), Hexham (1113), and Lindisfarne (1150), three of which still had early church buildings standing *c.* 1100. Eric Cambridge has argued for ecclesiastical, rather than secular, sponsorship of some Saxo-Norman building programmes in County Durham, such as the addition of an eleventh-century tower to the standing seventh-century nave at Monkwearmouth (Cambridge 1994, 149). Ecclesiastical institutions would have had a particular interest in linking themselves to their ‘Golden Age,’ which was tangibly achieved through active retention of the material culture of that period.

In terms of Saxo-Norman funerary monuments, County Durham, with sixteen pieces at eleven sites (Ryder 1985), has only half of the density and distribution seen in the North Riding. The church with the most grave markers (three) is at Gainford, which lies just across the Tees from the concentrations of Saxo-Norman monuments in North Yorkshire, and may well have been associated with the same social contexts that produced those slabs. Indeed, some northern Saxo-Norman slabs feature very similar decorative motifs to those found in Yorkshire, such as on the two early slabs at Gainford 28 (Ryder 1985, 87) and Whorlton 14 (N. Yorks.) (McClain 2005), which were influenced by Norman architectural motifs (Fig. 9). While there is no obvious tie between the twelfth-century patrons or lordships of these two churches, the close

stylistic relationship between slabs separated by more than 25 miles suggests regional artistic and social connections that may also have had a political dimension.

In contrast to Durham, Northumberland features a comparably high density of 54 Saxo-Norman slabs at 21 sites (Ryder 2000, 2002, 2003), although this distribution is in some ways misleading. The majority of the Northumberland slab sites are parish churches, which have only one or two Saxo-Norman slabs each—a very similar distribution density to that seen in North Yorkshire, which suggests the patronage of the manorial lord, and perhaps his wife or a priest. However, Mitford Castle has six slabs dating to *c.*1100, and Newcastle Castle has 21. These higher concentrations of monuments are not only found at some of the few certain points of Norman strength in the whole of the county, but also in places where a number of minor lords were likely to have been living and competing with each other for status and favour, and where the opportunity to patronize ecclesiastical architectural fabric was less accessible.

It is also noteworthy that the frequency of Saxo-Norman slabs in Northumbria, which is the most remote and uncontrolled region of the northeast, is paralleled by the prevalence of Saxo-Norman slabs in the most remote and uncontrolled areas of the North Riding. This pattern may suggest that certain social necessities, technological and artistic realities, or even stylistic conservatism could be attendant on manorial structures or the social hierarchy of liminal areas in the eleventh century. The potential of a distinct social structure to substantially impact ecclesiastical patronage has been demonstrated in eleventh and twelfth-century Lincolnshire, where vills with high concentrations of sokemen show a marked similarity in church location and patronage schemes (Stocker and Everson 2006, 74-75). A comparable exploration of the relationship between the specific characteristics of a community and the nature of its patronage is complicated by a lack of Domesday evidence for the northern counties.



Nevertheless, the question is certainly deserving of further consideration, at least to see whether these patterns are replicated in other liminal regions of northern England.

Regardless of the particular Saxo-Norman densities and distributions, a constant across all areas of Northumbria was the powerful and dynamic role played by patrons of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, whose actions shaped the eventual form, fabric, and meaning of medieval churches and monuments. The stone commemoration and stone building that were such common features of later centuries were based firmly on practices, perceptions, necessities, and elite ideals that had been revolutionized and entrenched in the Anglo-Scandinavian and Saxo-Norman periods. The tenth and eleventh centuries established a wide, proto-parochial network of local churches and graveyards across the region, and more importantly, made both architectural and monumental patronage a staple of elite social life and death. Patronage of local churches was not merely an occasional practice or pious diversion of the lordly elite, but since the tenth century, had become a defining and necessary characteristic of their social location and identity. Despite the upheaval of the Conquest, the fundamentals of lordly and elite church patronage and commemoration in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries were plainly similar to what they had been prior to the arrival of the Normans. There is no doubt that this was purposeful. By adopting, expanding, and reshaping a strong and extant foundation, rather than starting anew, Saxo-Norman patrons were negotiating the transition by communicating with their peers, subordinates, and superiors through an already established vocabulary of power and status, but employing it in the service of a new social structure.

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