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### Review Philippa Turner and Jane Hawkes (eds.), *The Rood in Medieval Britain and Ireland, c. 800 – c. 1500*

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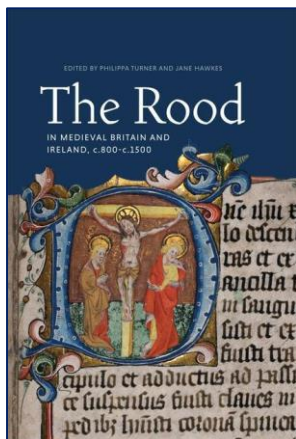
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# PEREGRINATIONS

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**Review** Philippa Turner and Jane Hawkes (eds.), *The Rood in Medieval Britain and Ireland, c. 800 – c. 1500* (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 248 pp, 14 colour/ 48 b&w illustrations; £60 (hardback); ISBN 978-1-78327-552-6.

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With its fundamental centrality and ubiquitous presence,

the cross, or rood, has attracted a rich wealth of scholarship

in recent decades on a diverse range of topics and themes. Scholars have considered the cross' role in liturgy, ritual and religious performance,<sup>1</sup> as the focal point of developing cults, legends and feast days,<sup>2</sup> as well as its placement in both the natural landscape and built environment.<sup>3</sup> These studies have tended to be narrow in focus, concentrated on individual regions, specific timeframes, and detailed cases. The present volume's intervention, as stated in the introduction, seeks to examine the

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Colum Hourihane, *The Processional Cross in Late Medieval England: The Dallye Cross* (London, 2004); Sarah Keefer, 'The Performance of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England', in Karen Louise Jolly, Catherine E. Karkov and Sarah Larratt Keefer (eds.), *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies in Honor of George Hardin Brown* (Morgantown, 2008), 203-41.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Julianna Grigg, 'The Black Rood of Scotland: A Social and Political Life', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 48 (2017), 53-78; Nikolas Jaspert, 'The True Cross of Jerusalem in the Latin West: Mediterranean Connections and Institutional Agency', in Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Benai and Hanna Vorholt (eds.), *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem* (Turnhout, 2014), 207-22.

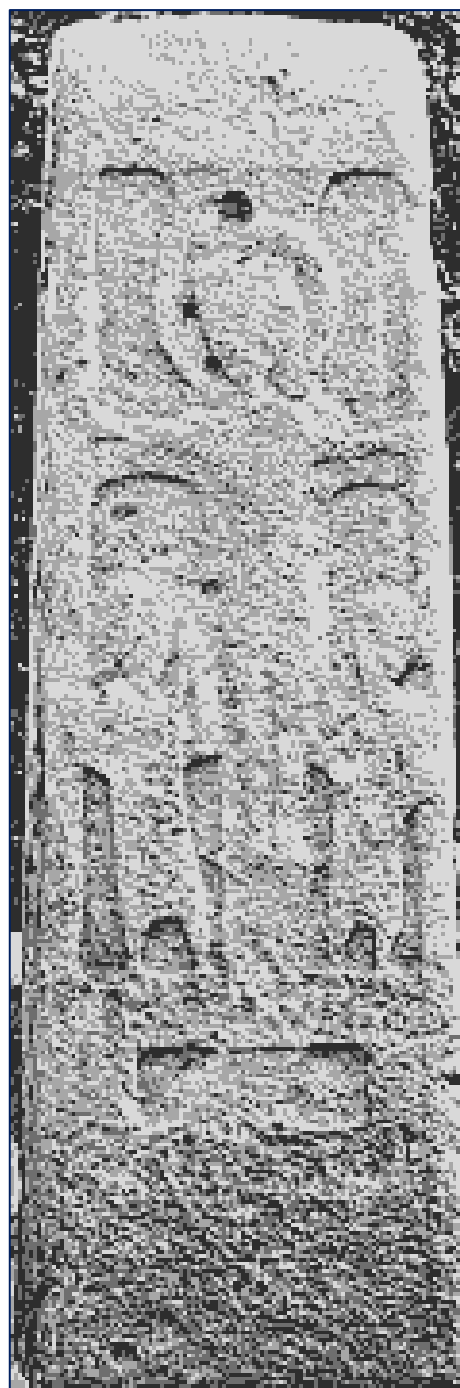
<sup>3</sup> See for example, Spike Bucklow, Richard Marks and Lucy Wrapson (eds.), *The Art and Science of the Church Screen in Medieval Europe: Making, Meaning, Preserving* (Woodbridge, 2017); Peter Harbison, 'Old Testament prefigurations of New Testament events on Irish High Crosses', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 118C (2018), 123-39; Jacqueline Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200-1400* (Cambridge, 2013); Clare Stancliffe, 'The Riddle of the Ruthwell Cross: Audience, Intention and Originator reconsidered' in Eric Cambridge and Jane Hawkes (eds), *Crossing Boundaries: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Art, Material Culture, Language and Literature of the Early Medieval World* (Oxford, 2017), p. 20.

cross “from a new perspective, one that does not run along established lines of scholarship, but which encourages us to see the threads that tie them” (p. 8). The result is a work which self-consciously traverses traditional geographic and temporal boundaries by spanning the early to late medieval era across Britain and Ireland. The intention to subvert traditional categories of academic study does not end there. The volume further endeavours to consider depictions of the cross across a wide range of artistic media, from monumental stone structures to wooden sculpture, as well as include the insights of a variety of documentary evidence, from records of religious visions to medical remedies.

Over the course of nine chapters, the collection aims to address well-established questions of meaning and function in order to engage with wider academic conversations taking place around ‘how medieval people constructed, perceived, understood and used the “stuff” of devotion’ (pp. 8-9). It combines the contributions of nine experts in the fields of medieval art and religious culture whose essays are largely based on papers delivered at a conference of the same theme which took place at the University of York in 2016.

Jane Hawkes, co-editor, opens the volume with a chapter on sculpted crosses in the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England. She stresses how these crosses were incredibly ornate and visually striking multi-media objects, originally decorated with paint, glass, and precious metals. Hawkes analyses the crucifixion iconography of extant cross-shafts, including Hexham (**Fig. 1**), in order to argue that the salvific

**Figure 1** Cross- shaft, Hexham  
 (Northumberland), 8<sup>th</sup> century, Hexham Abbey  
 Photo:  
<https://www.hexhamabbey.org.uk/heritage/Articles/AccaCross.html>)



features and physical proximity of the imagery served to inspire the viewer to contemplation and veneration similar to artistic representations of the crucifixion found within the church building.

The following chapters, written by Kate Thomas and John Munns, contemplate conceptions of the cross in under-utilized documentary evidence. Thomas' discussion revolves around *cristes moel*, a term employed in Old English medical remedies, which required the subject to either swear an oath upon a physical cross in the landscape or to make the sign of the cross. She reveals how these material and immaterial invocations of the cross were similar in function to relics, as their inherent holiness could be drawn upon not only for spiritual reflection but, more significantly, as a practical aid to ease suffering. Meanwhile,

**Figure 2** Stained glass scene, King Louis IX Carrying the Crown of Thorns, 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Cloisters Collection, Met Museum. Photo: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471218>



Munns explores the idea that elaborations in later medieval crucifixion iconography can be traced in the mental images documented in 12<sup>th</sup>-century visionary records. Munns reveals that visual tropes, such as the crown of thorns, can be witnessed in early accounts of visionary experiences before key developmental moments, such as Louis IX's acquisition of the crown relic (**Fig. 2**), raising the intriguing question as to whether these motifs were already in existence and familiar to the visionary. Munns argues that these accounts supply a crucial piece of the puzzle in understanding shifts in artistic depictions, especially significant in a field where insights are restricted by limited material survival.

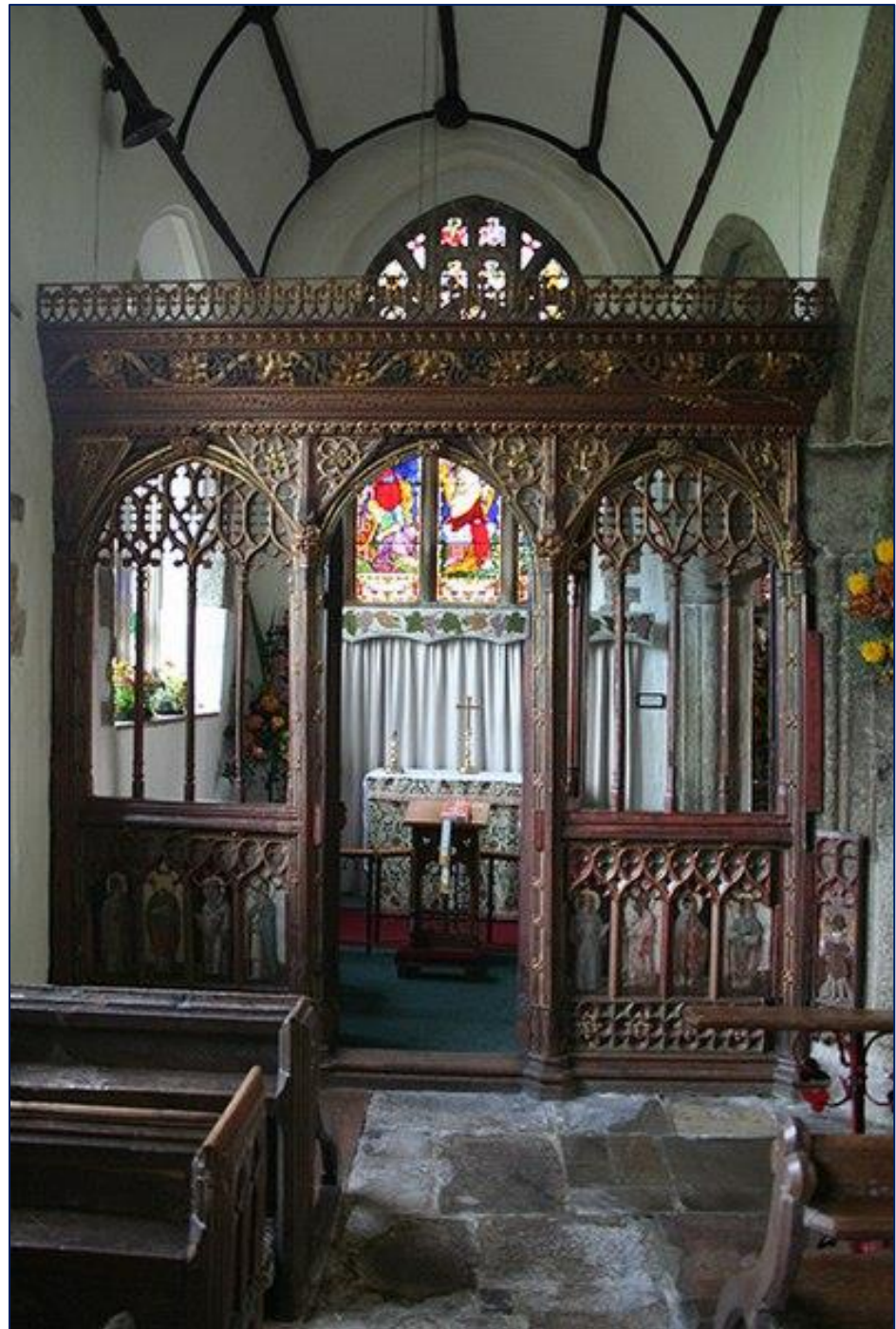




**Figure 3** Rood screen, St Helen's Ranworth (Norfolk), 15<sup>th</sup> century. Photo: Author.

Maggie Williams and Sara Carreño follow this with essays exploring links between Irish monumental crosses and the Continent. Williams locates the design of Irish crosses, croziers, and representations of the crucifixion against a backdrop of Irish religious reform and secular power structures in the long 12<sup>th</sup> century, whilst also stressing how many iconographic features reflect wider devotional and pictorial trends in Europe. Next, Carreño examines stone crosses erected in Galicia, Spain in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, showcasing their links with early Irish crosses. After analyzing their illustrative program as demonstrative of emotional forms of late-medieval spirituality, she explains how the crosses were used in 19<sup>th</sup>-century discourse by Galician nationals as key symbols of national identity and Celtic heritage. She reminds the reader that monuments such as these are continuously being redefined and endowed with new significance by different generations which makes a

**Figure 4** Rood screen, St Mary's Cheriton Bishop (Devon), 16<sup>th</sup> century. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.



strong object.

Religious communities are the focus of contributions from Philippa Turner, co-editor of the volume, and Małgorzata Krasnodębska-. Turner draws on well-known documentary evidence, such as the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Rites of Durham*, to locate the

original position of the Black Rood of Scotland in the south choir ambulatory of Durham Cathedral Priory, and to consider its function within the wider devotional topography of the building. She notes how the Black Rood became a key object of identity not only for the site, but also for the priory's community and relationship with its patrons. Krasnodębska-D'Aughton continues this theme, exploring the association of plant and Tree of Life tropes with crucifixion imagery within the material culture of Irish Franciscan friaries. Krasnodębska-D'Aughton demonstrates how such iconography filtered through from the Continent, fitting within the broader ideology, history, and devotional preferences of the order and showcasing a cohesion within Franciscan identity.

The final chapters of the volume concentrate on the parish church, setting the rood within the iconographic context of the building and examining its relationship to other furnishings. Through a technical analysis of colour pigments and materials, Lucy Wrapson turns her attention to the evidence of surviving rood screens located in East Anglia and Devon, such as Ranworth and Cheriton Bishop (**Figs. 3-4**), and explores the idea of a vertical hierarchy in their design and decoration. She argues that parish communities deliberately employed costlier materials not only on the public facing parts of the screen, but, most crucially, on the upper sections, the doors, and the vault which drew the eye upwards to the rood. In keeping with this, Sarah Cassell rounds off the volume by taking the reader into the loft of the parish church by setting the rood in relation to extant angel roofs located in East Anglia.





**Figure 5** Angel roof, St Nicholas' King's Lynn (Norfolk), 15<sup>th</sup> century. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

Utilizing case studies, such as King's Lynn (**Fig. 5**), she notes that the eucharistic and passion motifs displayed here would have been in direct dialogue with the sacrificial and salvific themes displayed in the rood, as well as those presented in supporting screens and doom paintings. She concludes by asserting that this combined to subsume the viewer into the redemptive reality of Christ's death upon the cross.

Overall, this thoroughly researched volume offers fascinating insights into the

rich diversity and complexity of this central religious symbol. Together, the essays successfully reveal the cross as a powerful lens through which one can uncover the intricate connections between the material and immaterial, imaginative, and textual, visual, and theological spheres of medieval Christianity. Most powerfully, they reveal the cross as an object in which culturally and socially specific identities were formed and vested, at the same time as it united wider ideas and communities beyond regional or national boundaries. Thus, whilst there is much here that adds to the established body of knowledge on materiality and theology, the steer this volume gives us to use these objects to reach the community that made, used and conserved them is of the greatest value to the reader. 🐉