A very fine chalice-shaped Romanesque font in St. Cassian’s church at Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, is decorated with a variety of interlace ornament carved in horizontal bands along the rim, the nodus, and the base [Fig. 1]. Below the rim, there are four fierce monsters shown in profile, baring their sharp teeth and with one leg up and the other down, to imply the creatures’ rapid movement. The animals have no hind legs and their bodies continue as two-stranded tails, disappearing in the jaws of the monster behind. These tails are echoed by entwining bands, each making two loops round the tails and one strangling each of the beasts. Thus, the decoration of the bowl matches very well the interlacing bands above and below, but in addition, it is endowed with a dynamic energy and ferocious power. If any meaning was intended for this sculpture beyond mere decoration, these monsters surely represent the evil of original sin which the sacrament of Baptism redeems.

The Chaddesley Corbett font is recognized as the work of the so-called Herefordshire School of sculpture, active in the second quarter of the twelfth century in Herefordshire and the adjoining counties of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Monmouthshire. In one instance, works by a sculptor of the school are found even in a church in Warwickshire.

The term “school” as employed in this article should be understood as referring to the activities of a number of sculptors using similar motifs and a fairly similar style within the two dioceses of Hereford and Worcester between c. 1130 and c. 1160. In my doctoral thesis of 1950, I suggested that the building of Shobdon Priory provided an opportunity for a pilgrimage by the principal sculptor to Santiago de Compostela, and that the journey through Aquitaine was particularly fruitful for the decoration of Shobdon, which is indebted to the iconography and style of such churches as, for example, Parthenay-le-Vieux and Aulnay. The team of sculptors from Shobdon went on to decorate other churches in the region, the best preserved of which are the church of St. Mary and St. David at Kilpeck [Fig. 2] and Leominster Priory. It can be assumed that some of the sculptors left the team and started to work on their own.

Aquitaine was not the only source of inspiration for the sculptors of the Herefordshire School. Pevsner claimed northern Italian connections for the chancel arch at Kilpeck, though this is open to dispute. Raspi Serra links the school with the Como-Pavia style, and Meredith also sees connections between certain works of the Herefordshire School and Lombardy. All these assertions are to some extent justified, though Raspi Serra’s dogmatic views tend to overstress the Italian element and neglect the strong local artistic tradition.

In the case of the font at Chaddesley Corbett, it is undeniable that the heads of the monsters, with the double outlines of
the mouth, upturned snouts, and large triangular teeth, closely resemble the head of a monster on the celebrated pulpit in the abbey of San Giulio on the island of San Giulio in Lake Orta, in Piedmont, the work of a sculptor from Como, dating from c. 1120 [Fig. 3]. But the intertwining tails and the strangling loops on the English font have no parallels in Italian art. The sculptor of the font was clearly well-pleased with the motif of the dragon strangled by its own tail, for he repeated it on a number of plaques at Alveley in Shropshire, leaving out the ferocious teeth and substituting protruding tongues [Fig. 4]. What was, at Chaddesley Corbett, in part an Italian motif, at Alveley became entirely indigenous, retaining the interlace and the strangling loop, the two elements which are demonstrably of very ancient origin, not Italian but Germanic.
2) South doorway, church of St. Mary and St. David, Kilpeck, Herefordshire.
These elements occur in profusion in both Styles I and II described by Salin in his justly famous book. These Germanic animal styles were brought to England in the years of the Saxon settlement and were at first, as in Germanic lands, restricted to metalwork. But with the advent of Christianity, this intricate but barbaric animal ornament invaded illuminated manuscripts and sculpture. The motif of a beast entwined and strangled by an interlace which is often part of its own body, became commonplace in Anglo-Saxon and Irish art [Fig. 5], and was reintroduced to the Continent in the eight and ninth centuries. It is found, for instance, on the Tassilo Chalice [Fig. 6], a work made under a strong insular influence but executed perhaps in Salzburg between 777 and 788 at the order of Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria, for his newly founded abbey of Kremsmünster, where the chalice still is. On this splendid object the interlaces are formed by limbs, tails, ears, and tongues of single animals, of pairs, and even groups of three or more. The advent of Carolingian art gradually put a stop to this type of decoration on the Continent but in England it continued to flourish, and its most vigorous examples are found in the territories settled by the Vikings, e.g., in Yorkshire [Fig. 7].

How is it possible to be sure that the motif on the Chaddesley Corbett font was derived from these ancient sources reaching back to pagan times, and not simply invented by the Herefordshire sculptor? As it happens, there is yet another motif used by the same sculptor in a different context and place, which points to a similar ancient Germanic source. The place is the church of St. Peter and St. Paul at Rock in Worcestershire, to which I shall return later. The motif to which I am referring is even more savage, and involves a form that is pierced and penetrated.
5) Folio 192v in Ms. 57 (The Book of Durrow), detail, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

6) Animal on the Tassilo Chalice. From Günther Haseloff, Der Tassilokelch.

7) Animal on a grave slab in York Minster. From Ian R. Pattison, "...Anglo-Danish Sculpture in York."

by another. It can be an animal, bird, monster, plant, or interlace. On the back cover of the Lindau Gospels [Fig. 8], the fields between the arms of the cross are filled with an intricate interlacing pattern in which snake-like creatures are pierced by sinuous, almost leafless stalks, which enter the bodies and reemerge. The idea most likely originated in needlework, where the thread can be used in this way more logically than in metalwork.

The piercing of the body also occurs on the Tassilo Chalice [Fig. 6] where, in a most perverse way, the bodies of the quadrupeds are penetrated by their own tails and limbs; in one case, a single body is pierced four times in an act of self-inflicted cruelty.

Both the chalice and the book cover were influenced by Anglo-Saxon art, so it comes as no surprise to find that a similar motif of the penetration of animal bodies by ribbons or tails, is found on the Fejø Cup in the National Museum, Copenhagen, a work believed to have been produced within the Carolingian empire but which was also closely influenced by Anglo-Saxon art.
In trying to trace the sources for these bizarre motifs, it is necessary to turn again to Salin’s Style II, for it is in the numerous Scandinavian metalworks that they are found in profusion [Fig. 9]. They are also found on objects from the grave of the Frankish Queen Arnegunde in the abbey of Saint-Denis. These objects are particularly important as they can be dated fairly precisely. Arnegunde was a consort of Chlotar I, who was king of the Franks between 558 and 561.

Some of the objects from the Sutton Hoo ship burial provide “a classic example of penetration” [Fig. 10]. These objects have strong affinities with eastern Scandinavian styles. It is also in Scandinavian art, in the wood carvings of the Oseberg ship burial, that the most exuberant examples of animals with voids and penetrations are to be found; here they are combined with the
Animals pierced by their own tongue, legs, or bands of ornament are quite frequently employed in Anglo-Saxon sculpture. There are even human figures used in this way, as, for instance, on a fragmentary cross-shaft built into St. Cuthbert's church, Billingham, County Durham, where a man with a bird on each wrist is pierced by a strand of interlacing ornament, which enters his belly and reappears a short distance farther on in a horizontal band, almost like a belt. Commenting on this sculpture, Cramp writes, "The piercing of the body by a bar is also a feature of Scandinavian ornament." She dates it to the early tenth century.

During the Romanesque period, the motif of a pierced body remained very popular in the sculpture of Scandinavian countries. In the carved wooden portals of Norwegian stave churches, the motif of winged dragons, endlessly pierced by ribbon-like members of their bodies or foliage, appears in many variations, notably at Hurum [Fig. 11], Torpo, and Sauland. Even more startling are the numerous representations of the motif of an animal pierced by its own tail that are found carved on portals and fonts in Denmark [Fig. 12]. In one case (Grønbæk), the Agnus Dei is pierced by the cross which it supports with one leg. An admirable catalogue of them was published by Dorte Lorenzen Belling, who also cites comparable examples in other countries. The foreign examples quoted in this paper include a drawing incised on the wall of the barrow at Morke, Jylland, Denmark.
GERMANIC ANIMAL MOTIFS

Maeshowe in the Orkney Islands, a cross-shaft in St. Alkmund’s church at Derby, a capital at Rozier-Côtes-d’Aurec, and a pavement mosaic at Ganagobie in Provence. The first two are of obvious Scandinavian inspiration, but the others seem to be of northern Italian workmanship. Animals and monsters pierced by their own tails are numerous at Ganagobie—there are three in the apse, four in the north transept, and one in the south. These outstanding mosaics were studied by Guy Barrois, who attributed them to Lombard influence. Half of the Ganagobie monsters not only have their bodies pierced by their own tails, but the tails reemerge by piercing the body for the second time [Fig. 13]. This method had already been used on the Lindau book cover and is found, as we have seen, over and over again in Romanesque sculpture in Denmark. One of the pierced animals in the Ganagobie apse, probably a lion, displays a detail which hints at some further connection with Scandinavian art. The silhouette of the lion is emphasized by multiple contours and the tail penetrates the body between the contours and the body [Fig. 14]. Another Romanesque example of this feature is found on the portal of the church at Sahl in Denmark, where the tail of an animal passes under the double contour of its belly, and then again under that of the back.

An earlier and splendid example of this method, this time from Norway, is the gilt bronze shop weather vane from Heggen, now in the University Museum of National Antiquities in Oslo [Fig. 15]. Its engraved design is in the Ringerike style, and dates from the eleventh century. But the tradition of this design goes much further back, once again to Salin’s Style I, with intermediaries in eighth-century book illumination.

The motif of a pierced body was not unknown in France, but its enthusiastic use at Ganagobie in its Scandinavian version confirms that the source of the mosaics is northern Italy, or more precisely, ornamental initials, for these “have little to do with a Mediterranean heritage and find their ultimate sources in the inspired lettering of scriptoria in Northern Europe in the early Middle Ages.”

Four examples will show the adoption of this northern motif in Romanesque illumination in Italy. In the first two manuscripts, one from the Biblioteca Comunale at Siena, the other from the Biblioteca Capitolare at Modena, the quad-
rupeds are pierced by foliage. At Siena, two stalks penetrate the belly, while at Modena, one branch of foliage penetrates the belly and binds the forelegs together, and another pierces the neck three times, the animal appearing to give a howl of agony [Fig. 16].

The next example is in the Biblioteca Capitolare at Piacenza (Cod. 62, fol. 178) [Fig. 17]. Here the animal issues a stalk from its mouth and this stalk pierces the neck of the beast and then also the belly. In another twelfth-century manuscript in the Biblioteca Capitolare at Modena (O.III.1), a nude human figure is pierced by scrolls of foliage a number of times, creating a disturbing, even repulsive image [Fig. 18].

In many cases, the penetration of forms is ambiguous. Are, for instance, the three stalks on the springer from the cloister
19) Springer from Reading Abbey, Reading Museum and Art Gallery.
of Reading Abbey [Fig. 19] piercing the body of the bird? One certainly pierces the leg but the others may well be hidden behind the neck and wing.37 A similar composition on a capital in the former priory at Goult in Normandy [Fig. 20]38 is, on the other hand, quite explicit: the foliage penetrates the body of the bird to emerge below it. The very handsome initial of the early twelfth century in the Chronicle of Battle Abbey [Fig. 21],39 which includes a representation of an enthroned King William the Conqueror, founder of the abbey, admirably illustrates the ingenious ways in which the illuminator employed the motif of piercing to produce a balanced and integrated design. Here, leaves are penetrated by the stalks from which they grow, the tail of a dragon pierces a large leaf crowning a curving stem which, in turn, appears to pierce the dragon’s body. The piercing of leaves in Romanesque illumination was enormously popular for it was useful in creating the intricate, integrated designs needed for painting initials. But it had no connection with the animal styles derived from the Germanic tradition.

With my last example I shall return to the Herefordshire School, with which I began. In the chancel arch of the church of St. Peter and St. Paul at Rock, there are a number of capitals decorated by a sculptor of the school [Fig. 22], most likely the same one who carved the font at Chaddesley Corbett. Two of the capitals have the familiar motifs, in one instance a lion

whose tail pierces its own two hind legs and then ends in the mouth of the beast, and in the other, a band or ribbon pierces each of the two thighs of a crouching human figure. While the lion at Rock can be compared to the initial from Piacenza [Fig. 17], the human figure is reminiscent of that from Modena [Fig. 18].

In view of the claims that the Herefordshire School owes a debt to northern Italian sculpture (Meredith stresses in particular Milanese features40), it would be tempting to attribute the Rock capitals with “pierced motifs” to a sculptor who knew Lombardy. As far as I am aware, however, there are no such motifs in Italian Romanesque sculpture, but only in manuscript

23) Tassilo Chalice, detail, Kremsmünster Abbey, Upper Austria.
illuminations, and it would be absurd to assume that the Rock sculptor had access to them. But it is the striking similarity of the lion capital to the animal on the Tassilo Chalice [Fig. 23] that is most telling, and strongly suggests that, as in the case of the Chaddesley Corbett font, the sculptor was drawing on very ancient models.

I wish to express my gratitude for the assistance given to me by friends and institutions while working on this paper. I am particularly indebted to Eric Mercer for information on the Alveley plaques; to Erla Bergendahl Hohler for her help with the Scandinavian material and for photographs of objects under her care; to the Trustees of the British Library for Fig. 21; to Constance Hill, head of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, for Figs. 8, 17, and 18; to the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England, for Fig. 4; to George Speake for Fig. 10; to Roger Stalley and Trinity College Library, Dublin, for Fig. 5; and to Photo Zodiaque for Figs. 11, 13, and 14. Last but not least, I am very grateful to Hazel Gardiner for helping with the manuscript and word processor. Illustrations not acknowledged are by the author.


4 Such surely was the case at Rowlstone, where the doorway and the chancel arch of St. Peter’s church are carved in the Shobdon/Kilpeck style, but by a sculptor of somewhat lesser ability. The same can be said of the tympana in St. John the Baptist’s church at Ruardean in Gloucestershire, and in St. Leonard’s at Ribbesford in Worcestershire, while the doorway in St. Kenelm’s church at Romsley in the same county is clearly the product of a rustic imitator. The tympanum there is almost a caricature of the work at Shobdon and Kilpeck.

5 N. Pevsner, Herefordshire, Harmondsworth, Mdsx., 3rd ed., 1977, pp. 24–25, 203. He writes, “The figures placed one on top of the other in the chancel arch of Kilpeck are North Italian in origin (Modena, Ferrara) rather than inspired by the Puerta de las Platerías at Santiago de Compostela, although it is known that the founder of Shobdon went on a pilgrimage to Compostela before the church was built” (p. 25). The mention of Compostela alludes to my hypothesis that the Kilpeck columns are based on a sketch of one of the marble columns of the Puerta, on which there are three pairs of figures in a vertical arrangement (Zarnecki, “Regional Schools of English Sculpture,” 1950, p. 301). There is nothing in Modena cathedral that could have provided a model for Kilpeck, and as for Ferrara, the figures on the cathedral portal are not three one above the other as at Kilpeck, but only two, and they are not carved on columns as at Kilpeck, but on square jambs. Moreover, both works are practically contemporaneous and Kilpeck could even be the earlier of the two.


8 B. Canestro Chiovenda, L'ambone dell'Isola di San Giulio, Rome, 1955, esp. p. 83. The author calls the two-legged monster “il coccodrillo”!
9. The plaques were brought to my notice by Mr. Eric Mercer, to whom I am very grateful. They came, no doubt, from the local church of St. Mary and were reused as building materials in the Old Bell Inn. I hope to publish them fully after they are cleaned of many layers of whitewash.


12. See G. Haseloff, *Der Tassilokeich*, Munich, 1951, figs. 2, 4, and 6; and pls. 7a and 7b.


23. I am very grateful to my friend Erla Bergendahl Hohler, of the University Museum of National Antiquities in Oslo, for supplying me with a list of Norwegian examples of the motif, and for drawing my attention to the article listed in n. 24, below.


25. V. Pritchard, *English Medieval Graffiti*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 168, connects this drawing with the presence on the islands of Norwegian crusaders during the winter of 1150–51, and reads into it a symbolic significance, but he misread the drawing, believing that a sword is piercing the monster and not its own tail!


29. See Lorenzen Belling, “Gennemstukne dyr,” fig. 11.


31. Salin, *Die Altgermanische Thierornamentik*, fig. 574.


41. The work on Herefordshire has been entrusted to Neil Stratford and me.