The Anglo-Saxon Cross at St. Andrew, Auckland: 'Living Stones'.

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Abstract

The remains of the High Cross at Auckland St. Andrews are well-known, but little documented. Rosemary Cramp[1] describes and dates the cross (to between the end of the eighth-century and the beginning of the ninth), and while it is referred to in the work of Collingwood[2], Coatsworth[3] and others, it cannot boast the extensive study that sculptures such as the Ruthwell, Bewcastle and Rothbury crosses have received. The main reason for this seems to lie in the apparent simplicity of its figural scenes. However, by examining the St. Andrews cross in relation to other contemporary sculptures, by reassessing its figural scenes, and by questioning its function within the context of its religious and natural landscapes, it becomes clear that the cross does present an overall, coherent theme, which reflects the religious climate during which it was created, and which could even be connected to its function. In the course of this essay I hope to argue against a relatively simplistic reading of the cross's figural scenes, and show instead that they are intimately linked to contemporary scriptural exegesis, issues regarding the role of the apostles in teaching and baptism, and the ecclesiastical relationship between late eighth-century England and the Papacy.

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[1] Cramp, R, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture,* (Oxford, 1984), pp.37-40.
[2] Collingwood, Northumbrian Crosses of the pre-Norman age, (London, 1927), pp.114-19.
[3] See Cramp (1984), p.39.

Introduction

That stone crosses were being erected across the English landscape following the Synod of

Whitby has been interpreted by Lang[4] as a form of ecclesiastic propaganda, designed to

show the Anglo-Saxon Church's allegiance to the Papacy and its perceived foundation by St.

Peter. Stone buildings in eighth-century England were associated with the Late Antique

Roman world, and it is possible that, post-Whitby, under the guidance of Romanophiles such

as Biscop and Wilfrid[5], stone crosses were erected as a suitable medium for advertising the

permanence and power of the Orthodox Roman Church[6]. The St. Andrew's cross is

analogous to those found at Easby, Otley and Collingham, in that it contains portraits of the

Apostles, many of which can be compared with Roman memorial slabs[7]. The Apostles

symbolized orthodoxy, and their inclusion on these stone crosses emphasize the Church's

allegiance to Rome.

However, their symbolism runs deeper, for the relationship between pillars and the

apostles is stressed by Bede in *De Templo*, and references throughout the New

Testament emphasize that the Temple of the New Church is composed of the baptized

faithful, the saints and apostles, and Christ Himself:

Come as living stones, and let yourself be used in building the spiritual temple. (1

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[4] Lang, 'The Apostles in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture in the Age of Alcuin', in *Early Medieval Europe,* 8, (1999), p.272.

[5] For example see Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid,* ed. Webb, (London, 1965), p.110.

[6] See Cramp, 'A Reconsideration of the Monastic site at Whitby', in Higgitt, *The Age of Migrating Ideas*, (Edinburgh, 1993), p.70.

[7] Lang, 'Survival and Revival in Insular Art', in Higgitt (1993), p.263, cites four slabs, which may have been observed by pilgrims to Rome, and suggests that their format was emulated.

Peter 2:4-9).

That the St. Andrew cross was intended to emphasize strict adherence to the Apostolic See of Rome is clear by the Apostles' portraits on the base. However, by incorporating them in a stone pillar, which contains an inhabited vinescroll (symbolizing the Christian community), other figural scenes emphasizing faith and obedience, and depictions of an archer and the evangelists symbols, it appears that the overall scheme of the cross was designed to stress the loving nature of the Church, brought to the people through the words of God, and the role of the individual as a pillar within the church, brought to the community through baptism.

The form and decoration - iconographic significance

The four remaining fragments of the St. Andrew Cross have been reconstructed in the west nave of the thirteenth-century church. The carvings are in very good condition, and while it is probable that this cross was also painted, and possibly built up with gesso in the Roman manner, as has been suggested for that at Otley[8], there is enough detail remaining to begin making suggestions regarding the form and meaning of the figural panels.

Beginning with the base, it is without parallel among the corpus of Anglo-Saxon sculptures, for it is a figural truncated pyramid. There are other examples of truncated pyramidal bases, for example, at Lindisfarne, but the St. Andrews cross-base is the only one which displays figural carvings. This however, is a feature of Irish high crosses[9]. It may

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[8] Lang (1999), p.273.
[9] A good example would be the cross at Moone, Co. Kildare, which also has the twelve apostles confined to the base. See Stalley, *Irish High Crosses*, (Dublin, 1996), p.17.

indicate a direct borrowing from an Irish exemplar, it could show a connection with either Ripon (which had previously been an Irish monastery[10]) or some other Irish monastery, or it may be emulating the York pyramids, which were based on Gaulish models[11]. Whatever the direct source, this base is an example of the 'Janus-headed'[12] nature of Northumbrian art, and emphasizes that a single, simplistic reading of this cross is not possible.

The east face of the base displays three figures, each with big hands, long fingers and sharply pleated folds. The figures are three-quarter length, and the arrangement in threes is analogous with the figures on the Easby shaft. The central figure is frontal, while those either side appear to be subordinated to him, for they draw attention away from themselves and towards him, with their long fingers touching him. All are haloed, so must be saints. No definite identification for these figures have been posited[13], but the tonsured head of the central figure, and his beardless, youthful appearance is similar to contemporary representations of St. Peter, such as that on St. Cuthbert's coffin. The truncated pyramidal base of Irish crosses have been interpreted as Golgotha, but there is no scene of Christ's crucifixion on the St. Andrews cross, and I wish to represent a more positive interpretation for the form of the base.

In Galatians 2:9, James, Cephas and John are described as pillars. Gregory the Great identifies Cephas with Peter, and thus the presence of these three characters at the base of the pillar would be appropriate. Furthermore, it is these three Apostles who were present at

[10] Bede HE, ed. Shirley-Price, 4th edn. (London, 1990), p.187.
[11] Bailey, *England's Earliest Sculptors* (Toronto, 1996), p.37.
[12] Lang (1993), p. 261.
[13] The only identification I have come across is Calvert's, who suggests either Wilfrid or Acca as the central character, both of who could have achieved saintly status by this stage, but the prominent position and distinctive style of the character offer a more obvious candidate.

the Transfiguration. Rather than Golgotha, the base could represent the mountain upon

which the three observed Christ 'shining like the sun'[14]. This would create a link with the

two figures on the west face, as it is currently reconstructed, who could represent the Old

Testament prophets Moses and Elijah.

    The two remaining sides of the base show similar figures, tonsured in the Petrine

manner; thus it appears that all twelve Apostles were represented on the base. The

representation of the Apostles as the pillars of the Temple, three of each facing north, south,

east and west, was patristic commonplace, and also testifies to their role as teachers,

spreading the word of God to the corners of the earth. The Apostles as teachers, bringing

the word of God to the faithful, and bringing all Christians to the love of God through

baptism, was stressed by Bede and the Fathers, and by kneeling at the base of the St.

Andrew's cross it is this loving, unifying image of the twelve Apostles which would have

impressed the viewer. Exploring these links, O'Reilly has demonstrated that, when

describing the twelve oxen, arranged in groups of three around the base of the water laver in

the Temple,

> Bede interprets the oxen not only as the twelve Apostles, but as their successors as
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> well, 'all the ministers of the Word' taking belief in the Trinity to the four corners of
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> the world, teaching and baptizing all nations[15].

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[14] Matt. 17:2.

[15] O'Reilly, 'Introduction to *Bede on the Temple',* in Connolly (Liverpool,1995), p.xxxiv. Also see Mann (1994), p.193 for a description of the names of the Apostles above the doors in the heavenly Jerusalem, each facing to the Four Corners of the earth.

Moving up the current east face, if the central figure on the front of the base can be identified with Peter then this provides a link with the panel placed directly above. It shows a crucifixion scene, with a bearded man strapped to a cross, while two haloed figures stand above either arm. Calvert[16] has argued that this panel depicts the crucifixion of St. Andrew. She provides analogies from the Pericopes of St. Ermentrud in Munich, which shows Andrew being crucified by being bound to a Latin-shaped cross. The inscription on the cross arms, which could be read as PASSIO ANDREAE, supports her conclusion.

The crucifixion scene on the St. Andrews cross has been described as Christ's crucifixion by Coatsworth[17] because of the confused identity of the two haloed figures above the arms of the cross. Calvert suggests that they are Stratoclyes and Maximillia[18], two of Andrew's converts, but technically they should not be haloed. The problem can be explained if it is postulated that the scene is meant to be comparable to a version of Christ's crucifixion. The Christ above the Beasts panel on both the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses suggest that templates were probably used for figural scenes, and it is possible that the sculptors of the St. Andrew cross were using a template of Christ's crucifixion. But the ambiguity was possibly intentional and designed to create the impression of Christ's martyrs as Christ-like.

Returning to the link between the base and this panel, the connection between the brothers Peter and Andrew was heavily stressed by the Petrine Church, for example the

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[16] Calvert,'The Iconography of the St. Andrew Auckland Cross', *Art Bulletin* 66 (1984), pp.544-9.
[17] See Cramp (1984), p.39.
[18] Calvert (1984), p.546.

preface to the fourth-century second mass formula for the vigil before the Feast of St. Andrew testifies to the link between the brothers.

> Andrew who was verily a brother of the glorious Apostle Peter, through the fate of birth … they are joined in the heavenly kingdom with a similar crown[19].

In John 1:42 Christ calls Peter Cephas, which means rock, and states that he will be the rock upon whom he builds his Church. Thus, it would be fitting for Peter to be at the base, while his brother, with whom he shares 'a similar crown' is above him, depicting the obedience to Christ required by martyrdom. Furthermore, by placing Peter as the rock upon which all the Church is built, the design of the St. Andrew cross avoids aligning itself with the Eastern Church, which was claiming the primacy of Andrew during the sixth to eighth-centuries, and stresses instead the unity of the Church built upon Peter and Rome.

That the martyrdom of St. Andrew was well known in eighth and ninth-century England is supported by the ninth-century poems *Andreas* and *Fates of the Apostles.* His mode of crucifixion is alluded to in *Fates,* where it states he 'gealgan þehte' ('*was stretched out on the gallows'*), and throughout *Andreas,* the saint, and his punishments, are compared to Christ's, a comparison which was no doubt intended to extend to his mode of death:

> Syþþan hie oncneowon Cristes rode
>
> On his mægwlite, mære tacen,
>
> Wurdon hie þa acle on þam onfenge[20]. (Lines 1237-9)

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[19] Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium* (Harvard, 1958), p.152.
[20] Krapp, *The Vercelli Book,* (Columba, 1932), p.40.

When they perceived the Cross of Christ upon his (Andrew's) face, the glorious sign,

then in the act of seizing him they were terror-stricken[21].

As the *Andreas* poet draws parallels between Christ's death and the martyrdom of Andrew, so the cross's scene can be seen to do the same. The panel could be instructing its viewers to attain to be Christ-like, and to be prepared to suffer Christ's death, like Andrew did, in obedience to God.

That St. Andrew was held in high esteem by both Wilfrid and Acca is attested by Bede and Eddius, for Wilfrid dedicated his church at Hexham to him, and Bede states Acca,

greatly beautified and enlarged the structure of his church, which was dedicated in honour of blessed Andrew the Apostle[22].

However, although St. Andrew Auckland is in close proximity to Hexham, this does not necessarily imply that the cross was a product of this monastery, but rather that the example of St. Andrew had become acceptable in Rome (Gregory the Great dedicated his monastery to him). Thus, this panel on the St. Andrews cross stresses again allegiance to Petrine Rome, but also could provide an example of love and obedience, which the members of the Church should aspire to.

Directly above the crucifixion scene are two figures, arranged under an arch. The two figures are differentiated by their facial shapes (one is more pointed than the other), by their

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[21] Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, (London, 1982), p.144.
[22] Bede HE, ed. Shirley-Price, 4th edn. (London, 1990), p.307.

hairstyles (one has a fillet, like figures on the Rothbury cross, while the other has loose hair), and by the fact that the right-hand figure carries a sceptre. A close look at the panel shows that the wing on the right-hand side belongs to the angel on the left, and is actually enclosing the right-hand character, in a gesture of protection. Calvert suggests that these are two angels, and that they are linked with the Andrew scene, for angels feature in the literature of his life. However, as it appears that there is only one angel, enclosing a sceptered woman, it seems that Kurth's analysis of this scene as Ecclesia is more fitting[23]. Cramp suggests that this could be an Annunciation scene[24], for Mary is occasionally pictured with objects other than the distaff or flower, but the placing of an Annunciation scene at this point on the cross would not fit with the overall iconographic scheme. Similarly, contemporary representations of the Annunciation, such as that on the Ruthwell cross, show the two figures facing one another, and overall, it seems more likely that it depicts Ecclesia.

Above this scene the cross-head has been reconstructed, incorporating one of the original arms. Cramp states that she can see 'part of a winged and haloed figure possible holding a book'[25], and interprets this as an Evangelist sign. I was unable to make out any such figure, but her analysis would be in keeping with the scheme which I propose for the cross, namely that Ecclesia could represent the power and protection of the Church, composed as it is of every individual, along with the Apostles, saints and martyrs, while the evangelist symbols relate to the teaching role of the Apostles and the Evangelists, who

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[23] Kurth, 'Ecclesia and an Angel on the St. Andrews cross', *Journal of Warburg Courtauld Institute* 6 (1943), pp.213-14.
[24] Cramp (1984), p.39.
[25] Cramp, 'The Evangelist Symbols', in Studies in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, (London, 1992), p.124.

spread God's word to the Four Corners of the world from the top of the shaft, just as they do from its base.

Directly behind the Ecclesia scene, on the current west face, are two three-quarter-length figures. Both are bearded, one holds a scroll. Their haloes merge, and their stance balances the two figures of the Ecclesia scene, for they face inwards, almost forming one composition. I have already proposed the identities of Moses and Elijah for these two characters, which would relate this scene to the three Apostles on the front of the base. The beards and dress of these two figures distinguish them from the other characters on the cross, most especially the two clean-shaven, tonsured figures directly below them. Using facial hair to differentiate subjects is employed on the Rothbury cross, and from examples such as the Ezra portrait in *the Codex Amiatinus*, it appears that a

beard could be a means of differentiating prophets from saints. Thus, I propose that, whether they are Moses and Elijah or not, they are intended to represent the Old Testament, while the two characters below represent the New. That one holds a scroll could identify him with Moses, for he was responsible for bringing God's words to the Jews. It appears that the four figures on the west shaft form a distinct unit, and are designed to balance one another. Irish crosses, such as Muiredach's cross at Monasterboice, create a hierarchy of scenes, often with Old Testament scenes placed below those from the New, in order to emphasize how Old prefigured New. But on the St. Andrews cross the emphasis is on the Apostolic church, thus it is fitting that the Old Testament characters are further from view, while those of the New are at eye level. The two clean-shaven characters are too worn to identify, but they appear to be strategically placed directly behind the head of the

crucified St. Andrew, and so they may also represent martyred saints, thus further progressing the theme of love and obedience.

On the north and south faces of the cross are inhabited vinescroll, similar to that found on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses. The use of a vine to represent Christ's relationship with the members of His Church stems from His words in John 15:1-7.

I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit… I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love.

While Bailey[26] suggests that the symbolic meaning of the inhabited vinescroll may have been lost by the late eighth-century, and become merely a stylistic formula, this extract from John's gospel seems to touch upon the theme of the St. Andrews Cross's iconographic programme. Through baptism one attains membership to the Church community, supported as it is by the teaching of the Evangelists and Apostles, and through continual obedience to God (represented by Andrew's martyrdom), and faith (represented by Ecclesia) one can receive the love and salvation offered by Christ. Thus, the symbolic resonance of the inhabited vinescroll is fundamental to an understanding of all the figural scenes.

It is from this understanding of the motif that the significance of the figure of the archer can be considered. While much of the iconography of the St. Andrews cross has been ignored, the image of the archer has been cited in a number of articles[27]. The interpretations of this character range from Calvert, who proposes he is the devil assailing the human soul,

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[26] Bailey (1996), p.52.
[27] See Calvert (1984), p.552 for examples.

through to Schapiro, who suggests he is a purely secular figure[28]. Even Raw, who realizes

the importance of the archer symbol on the 12th century reliquary now in the Victoria and

Albert Museum, states, 'it is possible that the archer in the vine-scroll on the Auckland cross

has no religious significance'.[29]

    If the archer is secular, or even has 'no religious significance' then why his prominent

position on the cross? At eye level on the south shaft, the archer does not call to mind the

devil tormenting the soul. Instead I am tempted to agree with Meyvaert, who cites

Augustine's commentary on Psalm 119:4 'sagittae potentis acutae'.

    The 'sharp arrows of the powerful one' are the words of God. They are aimed and

    they pierce the heart. But when hearts are transfixed by the arrows of God's words,

    death does not result; instead, love is enkindled[30].

The archer is aiming his arrow at the beasts inhabiting the vinescroll. In the same way God's

words are aimed at firing love into the hearts of his faithful. Thus, the image expounds the

themes of love, faith and teaching depicted across all the panels of the St. Andrews Cross.

    In her discussion of Bede's use of the architectural imagery of the physical

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[28] Schapiro,'The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross', in *Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art* (London, 1980), pp.177-86.

[29] Raw, 'The Archer, the Eagle and the Lamb', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 30 (1967), p.392.

[30] Meyvaert, 'A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross', in Cassidy, *The Ruthwell Cross* (Princeton, 1992), p.143.

building of the Temple, O'Reilly states that it acts 'as a metaphor for the incorporation of the faithful into Christ'[31]. The actual form of the St. Andrew's Cross calls to mind the body of Christ during his crucifixion, yet within the confines of this image are all the 'faithful'. The Apostles support the cross, through their role as teachers and baptisers, while the faithful martyr, Andrew, and possibly the two haloed figures on the west shaft, are above them. The Old Testament prophets reside behind the image of the New Church, represented by Ecclesia, and the word of God is spread throughout the faithful by the archer and the Evangelists. By reassessing the figural scenes on the St. Andrew Auckland cross it has become apparent that there is something more complex being depicted than simply a piece of 'propaganda art reaffirming the Roman roots of a Northumbrian church aspiring to metropolitan status'[32].

Function of the Monument

The role of Anglo-Saxon stone crosses in the rituals of the Church are little understood, but the St. Andrews cross provides some grounds for speculation. From the figural scenes depicted on the cross it is clear that the importance of the saints and Apostles, and of Baptism, are two features of its iconography. I wish to propose that the cross was used as a reliquary, and also that it may have served as a point for administering the sacrament of Baptism.

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[31] O'Reilly (1995), p.xxiii.
[32] Lang (1999), p.272.

Holes have been discovered in a number of Anglo-Saxon sculptures, for example, the Bewcastle cross has one beneath the arm of the lowest figure, and the Ruthwell cross has one between the two figures in the Annunciation scene. The hole on the St. Andrews cross is placed between the heads of the two figures on the west shaft, which I have interpreted as either New Testament saints, or martyrs. In all the monuments cited all the holes are placed at what would have been eye level. The St. Andrews hole seems to have good grounds for being a reliquary because of its placement in relation to St. Andrew's head. The holes would have been covered over and painted, but it is possible that the inclusion of relics within the portrait of a saint endowed it with a sense of divine power[33]. The portraits of saints, like the imperial portraits they developed from, were designed as substitutes for the people they represented. Their format goes back to the early church, where the catacombs were painted with the portraits of the dead person contained within. It is possible that the depiction of St. Andrew in front of the cross may have been intended as a portrait of the relic contained within the stone. Bede and Eddius both state that many relics were brought back from Rome by Biscop and Wilfrid, and the crypts at Hexham and Ripon may suggest that the display of relics within stone cavities was not uncommon[34]. The St. Andrews Sarcophagus in Scotland has a similar hole between a pair of hands, while the Hedda stone has holes above the heads of certain saints, and by the keys of St. Peter. The cult of the saint was gaining in popularity during the eighth century in Anglo-Saxon England, and the presence of a reliquary within a permanent stone monument is plausible. The St. Andrews Cross offers support for this argument, for its saints are represented as a

[33] See Raw, *Anglo-Saxon crucifixion iconography* (Cambridge,1990), p.16.
[34] Bailey, 'St. Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham, in Karkov and Farrell', *Studies in Insular Art and Archaeology* (1991), pp.3-22.

part of the living iconographic scheme of decoration which may have been intended to stress the power and importance of the saints to the Church.

The St. Andrews cross is situated close to the Roman fort of Vinovia, on a major north/south route, close to a bend in the river. The Bewcastle, Easby and Otley crosses and the Marsham pillar are all similarly situated near cross roads and rivers. Lang[35] proposes that seven monuments acted as points for the baptism of the faithful in the nearby river. He cites Bede's account of Paulinus baptizing at Yeavering. However, by the late eighth-century the practice of baptizing in rivers was probably discontinued in favour of a more Continental style of baptism, such as the baptistery at Ravenna. However, no Anglo-Saxon baptisteries have been convincingly identified. The church at St. Andrews, Auckland may offer an exception, for within the side aisle is a hollowed out Roman pillar which has been turned into a font. The practice of hollowing out stones for baptism may be supported by the account of the Life of the seventh-century Saint, Rumwold, where the child calls out for a hollow stone to be filled with water so that he may be baptized before his impending death[36]. That the Apostles played a part in the Baptism rite is suggested by the dome above the baptistery at Ravenna, where they dominate the decoration. Lang states 'rising from immersion in the font, the freshly baptised's first sight would have been of the Apostles'[37], and the association of the St. Andrews Cross with the font at the same site may suggest a similar function.

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[35] Lang (1999), pp.280-2.

[36] Foot, 'By Water in the Spirit, in Blair and Sharpe', *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester,1992), p.171. This version of the Life is dated to the eleventh-century, but it could provide evidence for Anglo-Saxon practices.

[37] Lang (1999), p.181.

Conclusion

While the function of the St. Andrews Cross can only be speculated, its figural scenes, and its emphasis on the Apostles, are designed to reveal the security and continuity that can be gained through obedience and faith in God. The St. Andrew cross, like the Rothbury cross, relates to its audience at a more basic level than the complex liturgical arrangement of the Ruthwell cross's iconographic programme. The message is clear to all who view it, although it's only through meditating on each of the panels in relation to the cross as a whole that the overall meaning becomes apparent. I interpret the underlying theme to be a positive one – that God, through his Church, will love and protect those who are obedient and strive to emulate the example of the saints and martyrs. In commenting on the Apostolic portraits arranged around the church at Monkwearmouth, Bede states

> All who entered the church, even the unlettered, no matter in what direction they turned, would be able to contemplate the lovable likeness of Christ and his saints, even though only through an image[38].

It is through the images on the St. Andrews cross that the love of Christ has been made visible, yet the viewer must allow his mind to move from the visible to the invisible in his search for the true meaning presented by these living stones.

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[38] Meyvaert (1992), p.124.

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