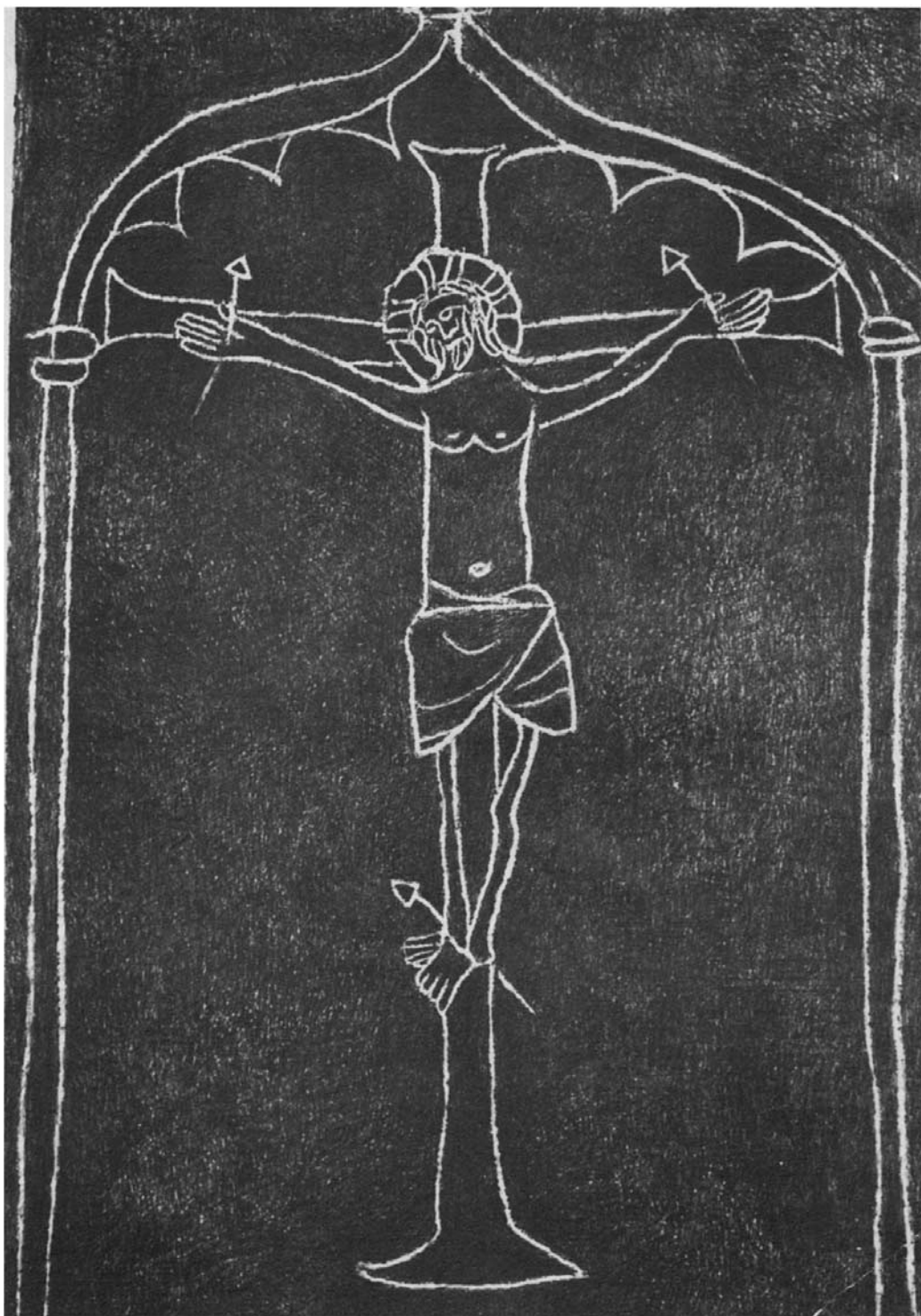


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BY
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TO
S. H. PRITCHARD

Συγγνώμη πρωτοπείρα

CONTENTS

<i>Frontispiece</i>	
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page viii
<i>Foreword by the late M.A. Murray</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	x
Introduction	xi
Descriptions of individual graffiti	i
Conclusion	168
APPENDIX I: Fleur-de-lis	175
APPENDIX II: List of Swastika-Peltae	177
APPENDIX III: Historical Graffiti at Ashwell, Hertfordshire, <i>by Bruce Dickins</i>	181
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	184
<i>Index</i>	190

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V. PRITCHARD

FOREWORD

In this book Mrs Pritchard has opened up a new and almost untouched field of research. Except for G.G. Coulton's paper 'Mediaeval Graffiti' (1915), and pertinent matter in his book *Art and the Reformation* (1928); also Reginald L. Hine's paper (1919), and his reference to graffiti in his book *Relics of an Uncommon Attorney* (1951), followed by unpublished notes and rubbings, now in the Society of Antiquaries Library, London, nothing has appeared regarding this wealth of information and interest to be found on the walls of our cathedrals and ancient parish churches.

The book is valuable, not only for the variety of the graffiti and the accuracy of their reproduction, but also for the equally accurate scholarship of the accompanying text, which makes it an essential contribution to our knowledge of life in England during the early Middle Ages.

It is important to note that, far from being mere scribbles and doodles, many of the graffiti were drawn by hands trained in draughtsmanship and the use of tools. There is no faltering in the curves, their bold sweep is as strong and firm as if made with a pencil on paper, and the features of the faces are often well drawn. The written graffiti are as clear and precise as in any manuscript.

As there could not have been artists in each of these remote villages, and as much of the work was done by trained and practised hands, it would seem that the graffiti were made by some educated person in the village, possibly the parish priest. If this was the case, it shows a surprisingly high standard of education and artistic ability in the priesthood.

Though the number of surviving graffiti is very great, half-obliterated remains are greater still, these having suffered from the cleaning of the church walls in the great outbreak of church-restoration in the nineteenth century. Mrs Pritchard's book, however, shows how rich a harvest can still be reaped.

M. A. MURRAY

ABBREVIATIONS

B.M.	British Museum
<i>D.N.B.</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
R.C.H.M.	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments
R.S.	Rolls Series
<i>V.C.H.</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>

NOTE

Beneath each reproduction of a graffito is indicated the amount of any reduction or, occasionally, enlargement. This is given to the nearest eighth or, where more accurate, in thirds or in fifths. Where there is no indication the illustration is the same size as the original.

INTRODUCTION

A graffito has been defined as 'A drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surfaces, as at Pompeii and Rome.'¹

The study of graffiti embraces a great number of subjects. The field of research is virtually unexplored in this country and its bearing on history and art has hitherto been neglected. Dr G.G. Coulton was probably the first person to appreciate that there were local graffiti; he mentioned them in his *Art and the Reformation*,² and earlier, in 1915, wrote a paper 'Mediaeval Graffiti', which appeared in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*. Apart from Dr Coulton's work little has been published.

The present study deals with certain inscriptions and drawings, confined, with a few exceptions, to those existing on walls and pillars in churches mostly within a radius of sixty miles of Cambridge.³ Graffiti are usually more numerous on the pillars than elsewhere; but this distribution may be due to the greater disturbance and rebuilding suffered by other surfaces, such as those of towers and walls. Most of the graffiti I have examined are incised on clunch;⁴ comparatively few are found on sandstone or harder building material.

The inscriptions and drawings, especially the exquisitely fine writing which is often found, may have been incised with a stylus; others may have been carved with a fine chisel. Owing to the constant cleaning and scraping of the stone surface, some of the graffiti only show the deeper part of the incision and much of their original beauty and craftsmanship has thus been lost.

In dating graffiti it should always be remembered that worked stone from a ruined structure

was often used in building or repairing a later edifice. Perhaps the best proof of this practice is the documentary evidence which states that Lanfranco, the master-mason, actually quarried for Roman material with which to build his wonderful cathedral at Modena.⁵ Roman pillars have often been used again in a later building, and among the many examples in England and abroad are the monolith pillars now supporting the Norman arcades of Ickleton Church, near Cambridge. Again, the priory at Lanercost was built with a large number of Roman stones filched from the Roman Wall, and one of these stones bears the inscription 'C. CASSI PRISCI'.⁶ Other examples indicating constant replacement of stones can be seen at Gamlingay (fig. 50), where a small crowned head is on a stone too near the floor to have been originally drawn there, and at Bottisham where graffiti are found at a height of twelve feet. Sometimes the incompleteness of a drawing shows clearly that the stone has been cut in order to fit it into its new position. I have emphasized the use of ancient material as it is important not to rely too much on the style of architecture as a means of dating graffiti.

The dating of graffiti is most difficult; but the majority appear to have been incised between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. In a few cases, mostly in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, the date is inscribed (fig. 108).

Many of the graffiti were covered with medieval paintings, traces of which often exist in the incised lines. Later, whitewash and paint

¹ C.T. Onions (ed.), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1944).

² Oxford, 1928.

³ See p. 173.

⁴ A soft limestone forming one of the beds of the Lower Chalk.

⁵ A.K. Porter, *Lombard Architecture* (New Haven, Conn., 1917), vol. III, p. 22.

⁶ J.R.H. Moorman, M.A., D.D., *Guide to Lanercost Priory* (Brampton, 1945), p. 22: 'The Century of Cassius Priscus'.

obscured them altogether. The majority probably have not been visible for several centuries, and it is only now, when whitewash and paint are flaking off, that they are revealed.

Certain designs drawn in the form of a single motif recur in a number of churches. Nearly all have an intricate pattern (fig. 43) and are difficult to draw. The intervening distances and the isolation of the churches in which they occur suggest that these signs were widely known and understood by those who saw them. It is possible that they represent badges of a religious or knightly Order.

‘The ceremony used in the creation of knights in the middle ages was most impressive. The Church sanctioned and took part in it: the shield and banner of the knights were consecrated, and after service in the Crusades they became objects of veneration.’¹ This explains, no doubt, the presence of many shields, weapons, crests and badges found among the graffiti.

M.R. James, describing the Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral, writes: ‘The more closely we study the remains of early sacred art the more frequently do we detect that the smallest details have a meaning’,² a statement which can equally well be said of the graffiti.

The method used here to reproduce the graffiti is a rubbing made with a hard pencil. In many cases the scraping marks made by cleaners have, to some extent, obscured the lines of the drawings. I have therefore eliminated these marks and any deliberate or accidental scratches where they are definitely not part of the graffiti. No line however has been, or indeed could be, added. In figs. 34 and 35, two rubbings of the same graffiti are illustrated, one showing the untouched drawing, the other the

same design with the scratches and scraping marks removed and the background darkened. This is in no way a ‘restoration’, for I should like to emphasize that nothing has been added. By this method the original graffiti are not changed. The originals are still on the walls and pillars for all to see. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to show two rubbings of every specimen, as too many figures would be required.

Graffiti are not to be found everywhere. A search, for example, in several of the more important abbeys and pre-Reformation churches in south-east Scotland yielded only consecration marks, masons’ marks, and architectural plan drawings.³ Rosslyn Chapel, begun in 1346, has a magnificent collection of masons’ marks, and, on the wall of the crypt, a good example of a mason’s sketch: the drawing is a plan of the Gothic arches⁴ now in the east aisle of the chapel. Torphichen Priory also has a good architectural drawing. These two buildings are built of hard stone. In the churches of Wales graffiti are even scarcer.

The inscriptions are written mostly in medieval Latin, a number in Middle English, and a few in Norman-French.⁵ Some of the writing is very beautiful and, as I think the figures will show, equals the manuscript work of the same period.

The drawings are in some ways of greater interest than the inscriptions, for they invoke the past in a manner which no inscription could achieve. A picture arrests time and brings to life a lost moment in a century long past. Many of the drawings are hitherto unknown gems of medieval art: lost treasures refound, only to be lost again for ever if steps are not taken to preserve them.

¹ S.T. Aveling (ed.), *Boutell’s Heraldry*, 3rd edition (London, 1898), p. 373.

² M.R. James, *The Sculptures in the Lady Chapel at Ely* (London, 1895).

³ Huntley Castle, Aberdeenshire, has a few graffiti on the walls of the passage leading to the dungeon.

⁴ It is particularly interesting as it shows Portuguese influence in the decoration. See Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, 14th edition (London, 1948), p. 468.

⁵ G.G. Coulton, ‘Mediaeval Graffiti’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vol. XIX (1915), Pl. XIV, p. 60.