

In the late ninth and tenth centuries, men and women of Scandinavian background settled in various parts of Britain and the North Atlantic. The kingdoms of northern and eastern England were conquered, and lands were given to the new settlers. There has been great debate about the number of immigrants, but there is general agreement that the cultural landscape was transformed by their arrival. One of the major tools in assessing the impact of the immigrants has been stone sculpture. The monument still standing in the churchyard at Gosforth, Cumbria, combines a traditional Christian form (the stone cross) and motifs (the crucifixion) with iconography taken from the mythology of Germanic paganism (most obviously the stories of Viðar, Óðin's son who survived the destruction of the world, and of Loki, whose wife Signy tried to save him from a prophesied death by poison). The juxtaposition of these images can be seen as reflecting a dialogue between the two cultures, while offering an indication of how the incoming dominant group took on the religion of the host culture. It exemplifies the process of assimilation that is otherwise largely unevidenced.

Figures on south face: a stag; a wolf or dog (sideways) in interlace; a horseman with a spear; a profiled creature with human head and interlaced body

Figures on west face: a figure (sideways) with a spear and a drinking horn; a horseman (upside down) with a spear; a bound man (Loki), with a cord knotted around his neck, the cord ending in a snake's head; a woman (Signy) kneels above him, holding a cup

Figures on north face: two opposed horsemen with spears

Figures on east face: a man (Viðar) prises open the jaws of a wolf (Fenrir) with his feet; the crucifixion, with a woman (Mary Magdalen) on the right holding some kind of container and Longinus the Roman soldier on the left, piercing Christ's side with a spear

R. Bailey, *Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, vol. II (Oxford, 1988), pp. 100-104, and ills 288-208