

## A NEW DATE FOR 'CLASS A, TYPE 11A' STIRRUP-STRAP MOUNTS, AND SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THEIR DISTRIBUTION

Copper-alloy stirrup-strap mounts were fixed at the junction between stirrup and strap to prevent wear on the stirrup leathers.<sup>54</sup> All are considered to be 11th century in date.<sup>55</sup> Such mounts appear in a variety of shapes, but are mostly characterised by a prominent flange, which projects from the lower reverse edge. In 1997, David Williams classified these mounts based on their form and decoration.<sup>56</sup>

This note is concerned with Class A, Type 11A stirrup-strap mounts, hereafter called '11A mounts' (Fig. 7). These have a sub-triangular form and trilobed apex. There are three fixing holes, one at the apex (the apex loop) and two on the lower edge, just above the flange. A 'lion', looking upwards, with its foreleg raised, and tail curled between its hind legs and over the back, decorates the main field of 11A mounts. Often the lion is shown with a mane, with its mouth open. The trilobed apex of these mounts shows a pair of joined spirals, from between which a pendent lobe penetrates the frame above the lion's head. Sometimes the lion seems to reach for this lobe with its mouth. The surrounding frame is often thicker on the lower edge.<sup>57</sup>

### DATE

Williams concluded that stirrup-strap mounts (of all classes, types and sub-types) 'were in use for a comparatively short period, perhaps from the first quarter of the 11th century at the very earliest, to around 1100 or not long after'.<sup>58</sup> In the case of 11A mounts it may be possible to refine this date range by re-examining the archaeological and artistic evidence.

<sup>54</sup> P. Robinson, 'Some late Saxon mounts from Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Archaeol. Natur. Hist. Mag.*, 85 (1992), 63-9.

<sup>55</sup> D. Williams, *Late Saxon Stirrup-Strap Mounts* (York, 1997), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, *op. cit.* in note 55, 24, classified mounts by 'Class' (A, B and C) of which 'Class A' was divided into seventeen 'Types', of which Type 11 has four sub-types (A, B, C and D).

<sup>57</sup> All Type 11 mounts depict a backward-facing lion. Type 11B are sub-triangular openwork mounts. Type 11C always have a left-facing lion but not the spirals and lobed device. Type 11D are oval openwork mounts.

<sup>58</sup> Williams, *op. cit.* in note 55, 8.



FIG. 7

A Class A, Type 11A stirrup-strap mound found at Warehorne, Kent. *Image provided courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.*

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

We knew little about the archaeological deposition of 11A mounts when Williams published his research in 1997, and eight years on the situation is not much different. Just two of 95 recorded 11A mounts have been recovered archaeologically. One, found during excavations at Eynsham Abbey (Oxfordshire), was discovered in a ditch together with Saxo-Norman and late-medieval pottery, but also with pottery of the 7th and 8th centuries.<sup>59</sup> Another was found at Hawkes Yard, Taunton (Somerset) in a context sealed beneath a clay layer thought to represent a rampart of about the mid-12th century.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the archaeological evidence does not allow precise dating of 11A mounts.

<sup>59</sup> Williams, *op. cit.* in note 55, 60, no. 208; R. A. Chambers, '1990 Eynsham Abbey', *Oxford Archaeol. Unit News.*, 18.3 (1990), 25; A. Hardy, A. Dodd, and G. D. Keevill, *Ælfric's Abbey, Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire 1989-92* (Oxford, 2003), 312.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *op. cit.* in note 55, 60, no. 213; P. Leach (ed.), *The Archaeology of Taunton: Excavations and Fieldwork to 1980* (Stroud, 1984), no. 3, fig. 48, pl. 9.

## ART-HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The quasi-heraldic beast depicted on 11A mounts is quite distinct from the Anglo-Scandinavian decoration of other 'late Saxon' stirrup-strap mounts. This beast generally takes the form of a lion with its head held aloft (looking upwards) with one of its forelegs raised and its tail wrapped around its body.<sup>61</sup>

The best and most numerous parallels for such beasts in other contexts date predominantly from after the Norman Conquest. Similar beasts appear, for example, in the Bayeux Tapestry, which dates to about 1070 (Fig. 8a),<sup>62</sup> on a limestone lintel from Southwell Minster (Nottinghamshire) dating to about 1120 (Fig. 8b),<sup>63</sup> and in a manuscript probably produced at Worcester Cathedral Priory between about 1120 and 1140 (Fig. 8c).<sup>64</sup> Another lion, this time with its tail between its legs, appears on a lime tympanum from All Saints Church, Lathbury (Buckinghamshire) (Fig. 8d), of about 1090–1100.<sup>65</sup> Further, one of the crypt capitals of Canterbury Cathedral (Kent), dated to about 1096–1100, depicts two lions. Whilst they share one forward-facing head (Fig. 8e), in all other aspects they match the form of lions depicted on 11A mounts.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast to the lions on 11A mounts, those depicted elsewhere in art rarely look upwards.<sup>67</sup> This fact might suggest that the posture of those on 11A mounts was dictated by the sub-triangular form of the object. However, like most of the lions on 11A mounts, those found elsewhere in art do 'bite'. For example, a lion on one of the Canterbury crypt capitals is shown biting its own tail.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, the lions on the Southwell Minster lintel (Fig. 8b) and the Lathbury tympanum (Fig. 8d) bite onto the decorative border or other border elements.

Examples of such beasts are rare in late Saxon art, but include a lion in the Junius 11 manuscript, which was probably made at Christ Church, Canterbury in the late 10th century (Fig. 9a),<sup>69</sup> a lion flanking Christ in Bodleian Library, Douce 296, which is generally thought to be of the mid-11th century (Fig. 9b),<sup>70</sup> and on the Canterbury censer cover of the mid-10th century, now in the British Museum (Fig. 9c).<sup>71</sup> Similar lions also occur on the canon tables of the Trinity Gospels, which were probably produced at Christ Church, Canterbury in the first half of the 11th century (Fig. 9d). Interestingly however, those on folios 11v and 12r have the distinctive tail of lions on 11A mounts, but do not have a foreleg raised, whereas those in folio 14v and 15r have

<sup>61</sup> An 11A mount from Wiveliscombe in Somerset (Portable Antiquities Scheme finds database no. SOMDOR500), uniquely, depicts a griffin.

<sup>62</sup> D. Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1985), pl. 54. Stirrup-strap mounts actually seem to be depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry, though in no detail: M. J. Lewis, The Archaeological Authority of the Bayeux Tapestry (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent, 2003), 247; id., *The Archaeological Authority of the Bayeux Tapestry* (Brit. Archaeol. Rep., Brit. Ser. 404, Oxford, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> G. Zarnecki, J. Holt and T. Holland (eds.), *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200* (London, 1984), 165, no. 123.

<sup>64</sup> Cambridge, St John's College, B.20, folio 2v: C. M. Kauffman, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1066–1190* (London, 1957), 78, ill. 112.

<sup>65</sup> Zarnecki, op. cit. in note 63, 63 and 154, no. 104.

<sup>66</sup> St Gabriel's Chapel: R Gameson, 'The Romanesque crypt capitals of Canterbury Cathedral', *Archaeol. Cantiana*, 110 (1992), 27, pl. iv.

<sup>67</sup> D. Kahn, *Canterbury Cathedral and its Romanesque Sculpture* (London, 1991), 31–2. Also see Canterbury Heritage Museum (probably from Canterbury Cathedral): D. Kahn (ed.), *The Romanesque Frieze and its Spectator* (London, 1992), 71 and 74.

<sup>68</sup> Another example is Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 296, folio 40: E. Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066* (London, 1976), 96, ill. 259.

<sup>69</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11, p. 11: T. H. Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration* (Kalamazoo, 1992), 533.

<sup>70</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 296, folio 40: Temple, op. cit. in note 68, 96, ill. 259.

<sup>71</sup> British Museum, MME 1927, 11–16, 1: J. Backhouse, D. H. Turner, and L. Webster (eds.), *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966–1066* (London, 1984), 89, no. 73, pl. xxii.



a



b



c



d



e

## FIG. 8

a. A lion (No. A175) in the Bayeux Tapestry. b. A lion on the Southwell Minster lintel (Nottinghamshire). c. A lion in Cambridge, St John's College, B.20, f.2v. d. A lion on the Lathbury tympanum (Buckinghamshire). e. Lions on the Canterbury Cathedral crypt capitals (Kent).

Photographs: a, by special permission of the City of Bayeux. b, © Nottinghamshire County Council Historic Environment Record. c, by permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge. d, from the collections of Buckinghamshire County Museum. e, © Canterbury Cathedral.

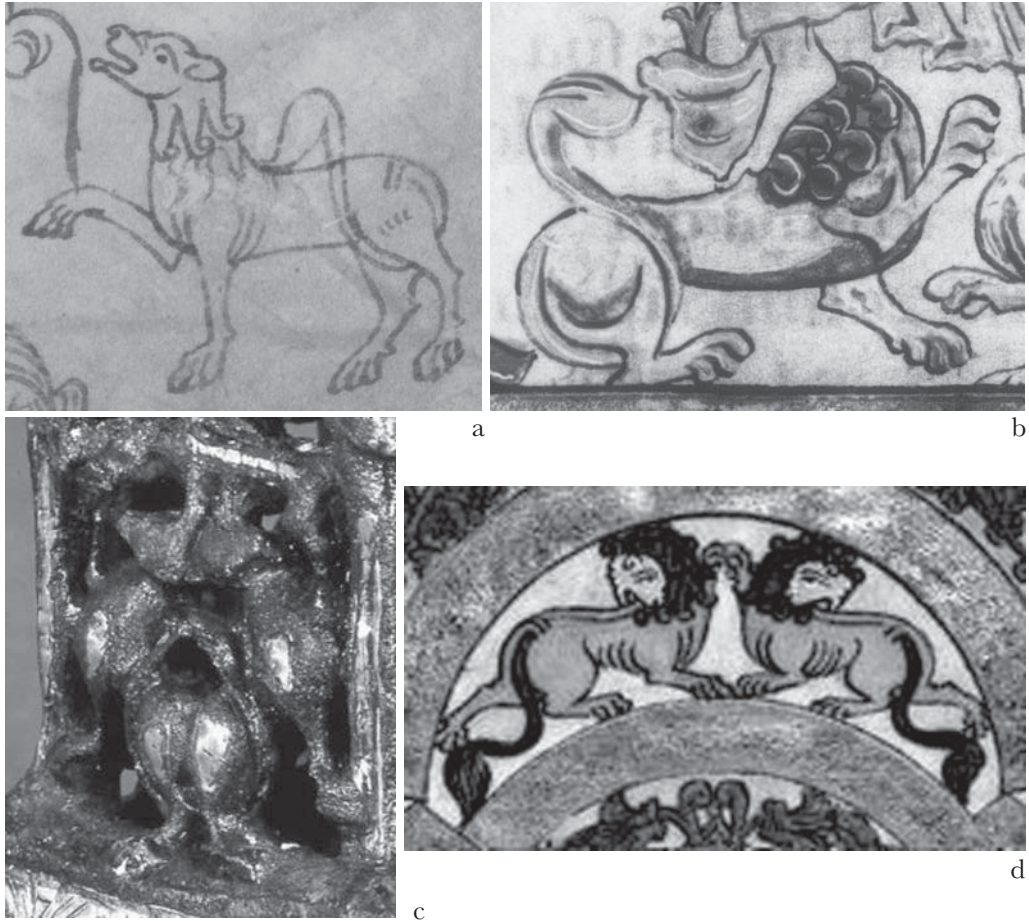


FIG. 9

a. A lion in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11, p.11. b. A lion in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 296, f.40. c. Lions on the Canterbury censer cover. d. Lions in Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 10. 4, f.14v. Photographs: a and b, *The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford*. c, with the permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. d, *The Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge*.

forelegs raised, but the tail is not curled.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, in England the motif is predominantly an early Romanesque phenomenon, and most examples date to between c. 1070 and c. 1140.

#### DISTRIBUTION

Of the 67 Type 11A mounts recorded by Williams in 1997, most had been found in southern and western England (Fig. 10).<sup>73</sup> The most northerly example was found

<sup>72</sup> Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 10. 4, folios 11v, 12r, 14v, 15r: Ohlgren, op. cit. in note 69, 353–4 and 359–60.

<sup>73</sup> Type 11A mounts only represent a fraction of the medieval artefacts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme. For example, in 2004 the Scheme's Finds Liaison Officers recorded 4,662 non-numismatic Medieval finds, of which 775 date from the Norman Conquest to the end of the 12th century: H. Geake, 'Medieval Britain and Ireland, 2003', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 48 (2004), 232.

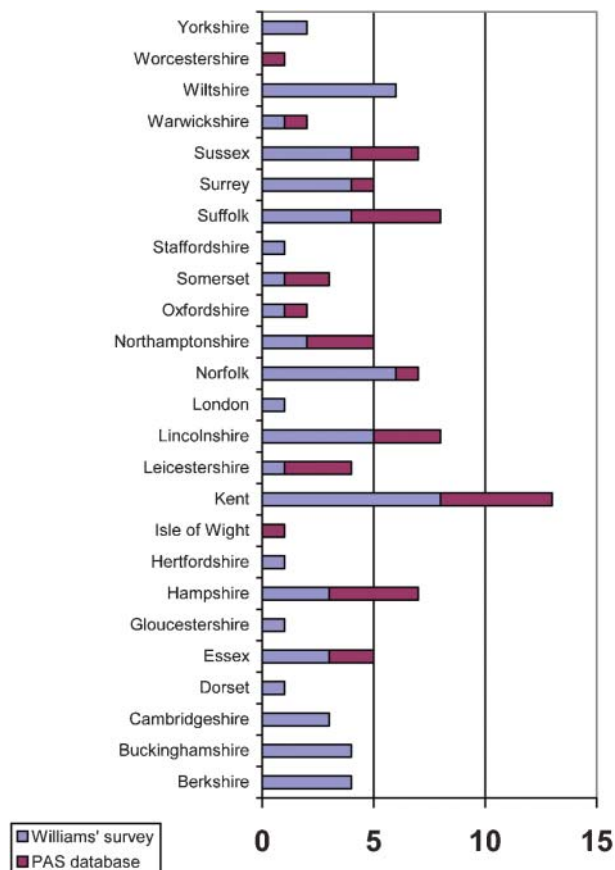


FIG. 10

The distribution of Class A, Type 11A stirrup-strap mounts found in England, showing the number of findspots of 11A mounts known to David Williams in 1997 and those recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) since 1997.

near Tadcaster (North Yorkshire) and the most westerly somewhere in Dorset. The 35 Type 11A mounts recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme since 1997 follow this distribution, with the Isle of Wight and Worcestershire recording their first stirrup-strap mounts of this type.

In 1997 Williams recorded eight 11A mounts from Kent, all recovered by metal-detectorists.<sup>74</sup> These were found in the north of the county, in the NW. districts of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway, and the eastern districts of Canterbury and Dover. Since 1997 another five 11A mounts have been discovered in Kent and recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme; again all were found by metal-detectorists (Tab. 1).<sup>75</sup> These have reinforced the spatial distribution of previous finds, which broadly follows 'Watling Street' via Canterbury to London. However, two 11A mounts have been discovered in the south of the county (in New Romney and Warehorne), which may reflect the importance of the area in the Late Saxon and early Post-Conquest Period.

<sup>74</sup> All 11A mounts recorded by Williams have the prefix 'W'.

<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, no Type 11B, 11C or 11D mounts have been found in Kent.

TAB. 1

Class A, Type 11A stirrup-strap mounts found in Kent. ('W' numbers refer to David Williams' catalogue, 'KENT' to PAS finds database.)

Area	Number	Length	Width	Thickness	Weight	Location
Cliffe	W202	47	30	10	27.77	Maidstone Museum
S. Darenth	W203	33.5	31	—	—	Finder
Walmer	W209	—	—	—	—	Finder
Boxley	W214	45	27	8	16.09	Maidstone Museum
Cobham	W217	51.5	30	—	—	Finder
Rochester	W218	47.5	30	—	—	British Museum
Canterbury	W229	—	—	—	—	Finder
O. Elmstead	W252	—	—	—	—	Finder
Southfleet	KENT-535	45	28	—	—	Finder
Bridge	KENT-3735	—	—	—	—	Finder
N. Romney	KENT-3916	45	25	5	31.93	Finder
Bonnington	KENT-4988	39	28	9	14.26	Finder
Warehorne	KENT-512116	45.92	27.62	8.68	20.2	Finder

## SUMMARY

Discoveries of more 11A stirrup-strap mounts need to be recorded if we are to make sense of their spatial distribution in Kent. The distribution pattern may be significant, but might also reflect the fact that metal-detecting is most prevalent in these parts of the county. Nonetheless, looking at the picture nationally, it is surely significant that more 11A mounts have been discovered in Kent than any other county, and this might suggest this type of mount was produced here, rather than imported from elsewhere in England.<sup>76</sup> The fact that the earliest examples of similar such beasts are mostly found in Canterbury 'art' adds to the interest of this case.

We can now say more about the age of 11A mounts. The assumption had been that most stirrup-strap mounts were Anglo-Saxon — certainly 11th century. Whilst this might be the case for most classes of stirrup-strap mounts, given the art-historical evidence this seems unlikely to be the case for 11A mounts. Rather 11A mounts are Norman, typically Romanesque, and most probably date to between c. 1070 and c. 1140.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Particular thanks go to the finders who have volunteered 11A mounts for recording with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. I would also like to thank Professor Richard Gameson (University of Durham), Dr Helen Geake (Finds Adviser, Medieval and Post-Medieval Objects), Dan Pett (Portable Antiquities Scheme ICT Adviser), Dr Andrew Richardson (Kent Finds Liaison Officer) and David Williams (Surrey Finds Liaison Officer).

MICHAEL LEWIS