

2018 Higher Level Question 2

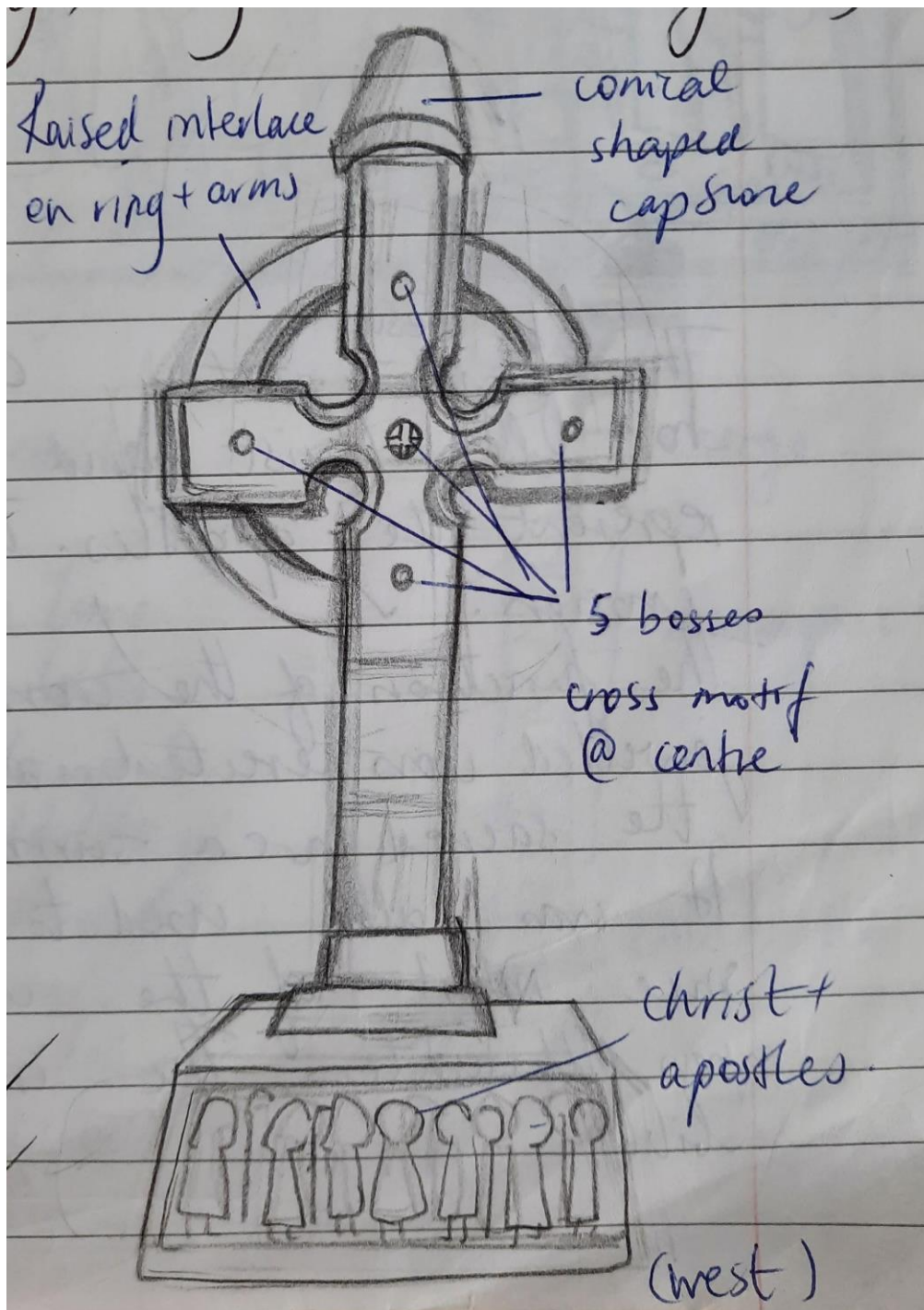
Developments in both the structure and the decoration of stone carving from the 6th century onward resulted in the magnificent stone artefacts of the High Christian period. Discuss this statement with reference to two named stone crosses that you have studied. In your answer refer to the form, structure and decoration of each of the examples you have chosen. AND Briefly describe and discuss the functions of the Irish High Crosses. Illustrate your answer.

The Celtic high cross was a natural development from the Greek cross. Remains of over 200 high crosses exist in Ireland, but this may represent only a part of the number that once existed. Most of the crosses were estimated to be erected in the 9th and 10th centuries when the Columban order created an impetus for cross construction. The reason for the shape of the cross seems to originate in the large jewelled cross that was erected on the hill Golgotha, where Christ was believed to be crucified, in Jerusalem by Emperor Constantine by his mother, St Helena in the 4th century AD. The cap on top of crosses is thought to represent the church Constantine built over the Holy Sepulchre. At this time, a ring is added around the arms, which was influenced by Coptic Egypt, which are found in the deserts of Egypt. It was for technical support and also to symbolise Christ's victory over death. It also represents eternity or the universe.

The high crosses were seen as a symbol of resurrection, which was the centre of Christian belief. They were also used to illustrate Bible stories for the mostly illiterate public. They were also a focus for prayer and repentance- most of the crosses with bible scenes were designed to be read from the bottom up, starting from the eye level of a penitent kneeling in prayer. The three main types of high crosses are plain, ornamental or scripture. Most of the Irish high crosses are carved in sandstone as it was easier to sculpt, but in the area around Kildare, there are several crosses carved in granite. This hard, granular stone was difficult to carve fine detail into and a smooth finish was also hard to achieve. However, despite these difficulties, magnificent stone crosses were created.

Ahenny North Cross

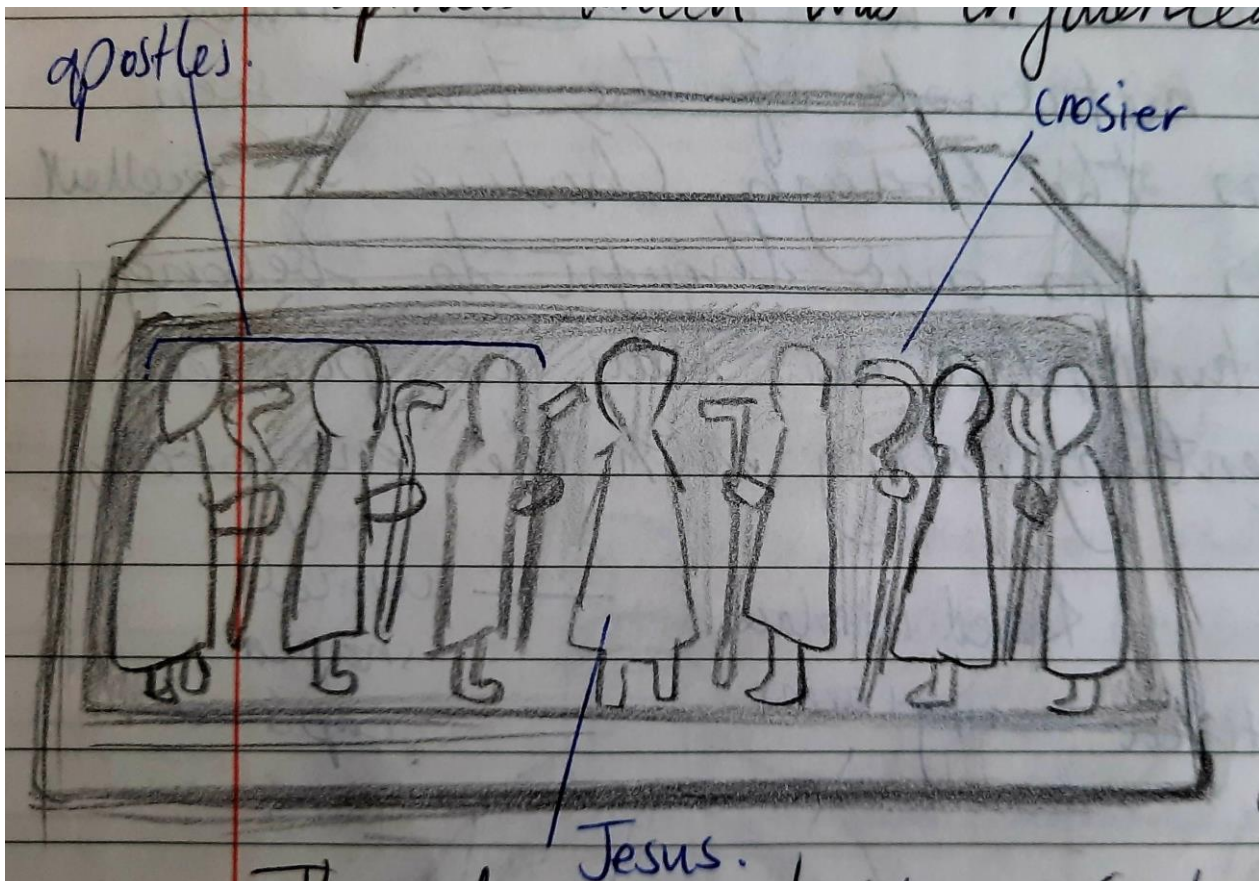
The Ahenny group of crosses is situated in a river valley north of Carrick on Suir, Co. Tipperary, on the border with Kilkenny. This is the site of two decorative/ornamental sandstone crosses, which stand in an isolated graveyard in the middle of a large field sloping down to the river which divides Munster and Leinster. They are situated on a monastic site dedicated to St Crispin. The crosses are decorated with geometric and zoomorphic designs. There is one panel showing figurative interlace on the North Cross which shows an influence from metalwork of the time seen on works such as the Ardagh Chalice. The group of crosses was once thought to belong to the 8th century, but now they are placed in the early 9th century, along with the majority of high crosses.



The North Cross is identified with its unique beehive shaped capstone and incomplete ring. It stands 3.13cm tall on a stepped base. The wheel is thin and narrow and connects the four arms. The point of intersection of the four arms has a decorative semi-circular indentation.

The cross itself is completely encased in an abstract pattern and figurative design. A raised border of rope carving surrounds the cross, which is similar in style to the metalwork from the time. The designs are all mathematically worked out and very accurate. The five crosses carved (represent the five wounds of Christ) in high relief mimic the metal glass enamel studs. The cross

is covered in an intricate network and the shaft is decorated with panels of interlace and geometric design. One panel in particular on the east side shows a design made up of trumpet spirals which were influenced by the La Tène Style. On the west face of the base is a group of seven figures with crosiers, representing Christ's minion to the apostles. The style of figure carving is simple and non-classical, perhaps a special style was set out for religious art The figure at the centre facing forward is thought to be Christ and the figures on either side represent the apostles. They all carry different styles of crosiers.

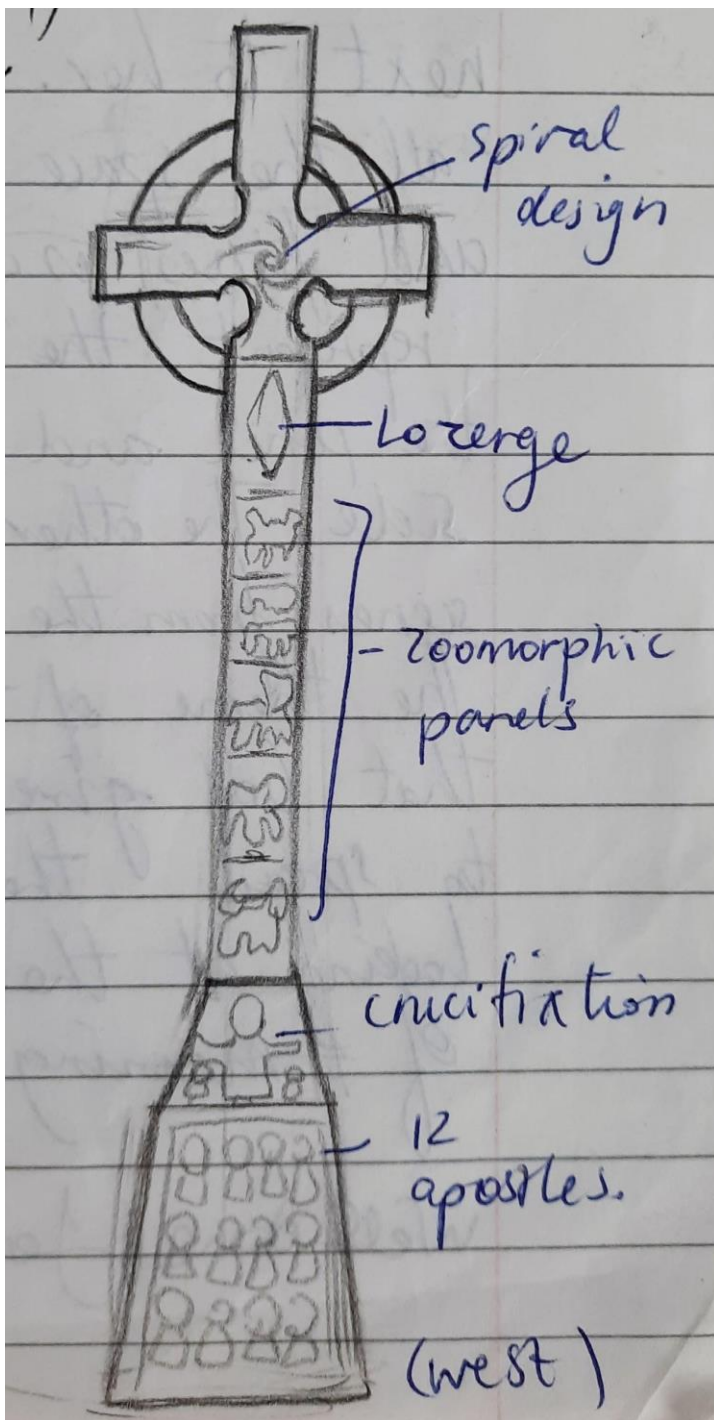


The function of the cross seems to commemorate the jewelled cross erected at Jerusalem and marks the sacred area surrounding the monastery. It was also used to spread the word of God since most of the community at the time was illiterate. The crosses were a “poor man's bible”.

The Cross of Moone

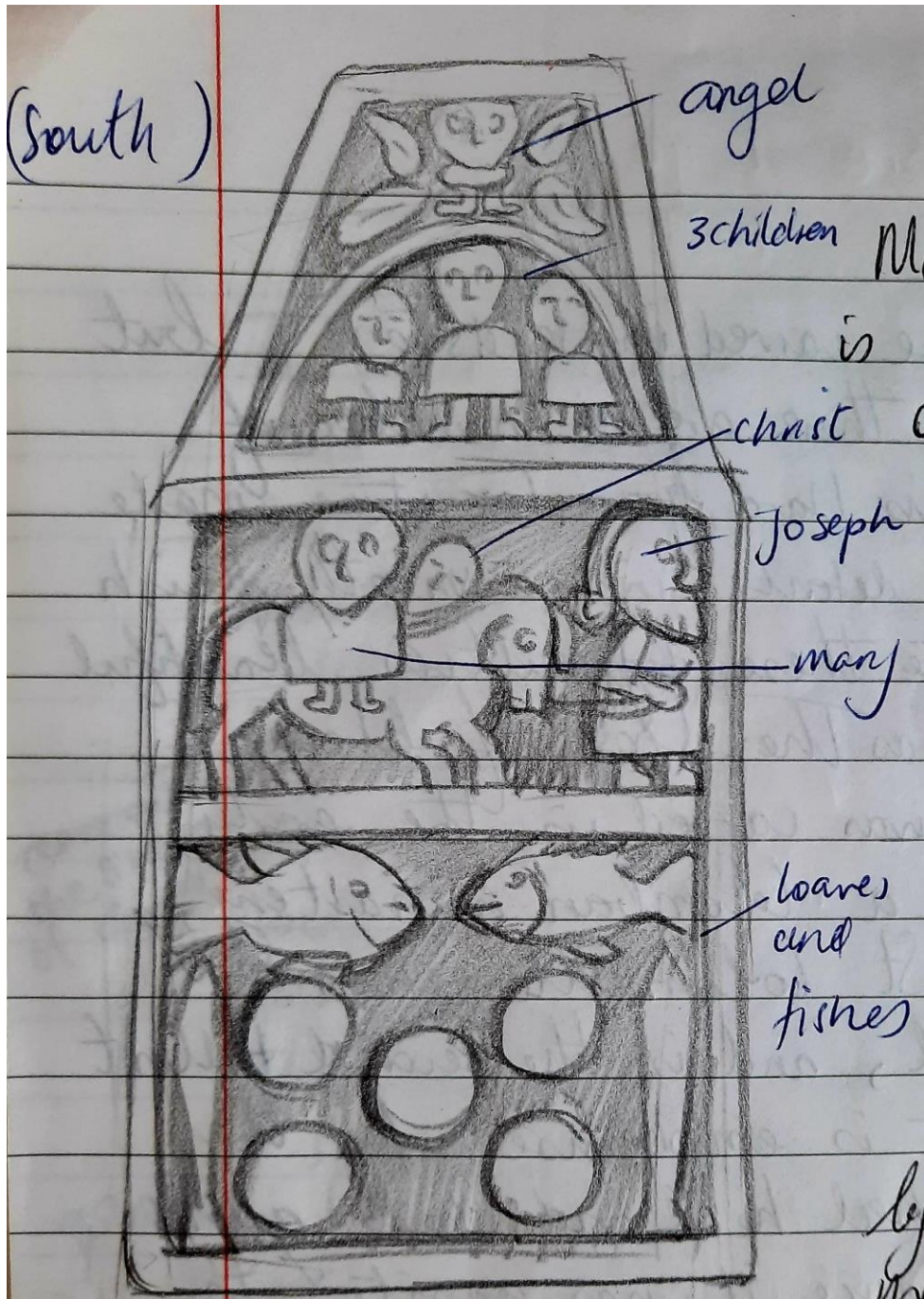
Another example of a High Cross is The Cross of Moone, in Co. Kildare. This cross was carved in the early 9th century on the site of a Colombian monastery and is also known as St Columcille's

cross. The cross is over 7m tall and is the second tallest cross in Ireland. Its height is emphasized by the narrow shaft and small wheel head on short arms. The capstone is missing.



Since it was granite, the sculptor was not able to carve fine detail so therefore the background was carved away leaving space around the figures so it is easy to distinguish. The simple carvings depict scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The theme is believed to be the "Help of God" and may have been painted with a vegetable base paint since the style closely resembled those seen in manuscripts. The style is unique for the time and related to a Celtic

tradition rather than a Classical Style. The carvings are child-like and the figures appear flat and similar to the style seen in the late Iron Age sculpture. They are also closely related to the figures in the Book of Durrow. Most of the upper part of the cross is carved with patterns. A figure of Christ appears on the crossing on the east side and animals appear on the panels on the west side of the shaft. The tall base has figure scenes on every side, set in panels. On the south side, the first scene depicts the three children in the fiery furnace, from the Book of Daniel, which are protected by an angel overhead. The sculptor made use of the entire panel; all the figures fit in perfectly. They are carved with teardrop heads, flat noses and box bodies with no arms. Their feet are pointed outwards. Below that, is the flight into Egypt. It shows Mary on a donkey with Christ's child's head next to her. The much larger figure of Joseph takes up all the space on the right. The miracle of the loaves and fishes is in the lower panel. The five circles represent the loaves, two chubby fish fill the top of the panel and two skinny fish are squeezed at each side. The other panels on the base are filled with more scenes from the Bible.



The theme of the Cross of Moone seems to be the help that God gives his faithful followers. This was used to spread the good work of God and anyone looking at the scenes would have deciphered layers of meaning in the illustrations.