

## ODDA'S CHAPEL, DEERHURST: PLACE OF WORSHIP OR ROYAL HALL?

The inscribed stone known as Deerhurst 1 (Fig. 4) was found in 1675 buried in an orchard immediately to the north of a farmhouse a short distance south-west of St Mary's church, Deerhurst.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, in 1885, the farmhouse was found to incorporate a very substantial part of a two-celled masonry building of Anglo-Saxon type.<sup>2</sup> This was interpreted as an ecclesiastical structure, partly on the evidence of the inscription. The Latin text, incised in capitals into the surface of the stone, reads as follows:<sup>3</sup>

+ Odda dvx ivssit hanc regiam aulam  
constrvi atque dedicari in hono  
re S Trinitatis pro anima g  
ermani svi Ælfrici qve de hoc  
loco asvpta Ealdredvs vero eps  
qvi eande dedicavit II idi  
bvs apl xiiii avte anno \$ reg  
ni Eadward regis Anglorv

Earl Odda ordered this royal church to be built and dedicated in honour of the Holy Trinity for the soul of his brother Ælfric which was taken up from this place. And Ealdred was the bishop who dedicated the same on 12 April and in the fourteenth year of the reign of Eadward king of the English [1056]

The two mentions of dedication imply that the structure to which the inscription refers was an ecclesiastical one. Since the dedication recorded in the inscription is to Holy Trinity, while the parish church is dedicated the St Mary, and since the stone was found close to the building identified in 1885, it has generally been assumed that the inscription refers to the latter rather than to the parish church. This view received support from a second inscribed stone which was discovered in the course of the restoration work, not unfortunately *in situ*, but built into a post-medieval chimney stack (Deerhurst 11).<sup>4</sup> This second inscription is far from complete because the stone was cut, presumably during the Middle Ages, to form a window head of plain lancet shape. However, Okasha was able to propose a reconstruction of the text, for which a more detailed argument was later put forward by H. M. Taylor.<sup>5</sup> The subject matter is once again a dedication to Holy Trinity, which Taylor regarded as referring to an altar. On the somewhat insecure evidence of these two inscriptions the two-celled building is widely regarded as a former church and generally known as 'Odda's Chapel'.

However, the first inscription describes its subject as *regia aula*. This expression has rarely been questioned, although more clearly ecclesiastical terms, such as *ecclesia*, *ecclesiola* or *monasteriolum*, might seem to be a more obvious choice. It is tempting to interpret the words literally as referring to a royal residence rather than a church or chapel,<sup>6</sup> though there are difficulties with such an argument. One view suggests that there is no case to answer: church foundations were held to derive from the king, whatever the ascription to local patrons.<sup>7</sup> If that is so, why should Deerhurst alone be singled out by the use of *regia* in the dedication text? After some four centuries of church building and dedication, surely

<sup>1</sup> E. Okasha, *Hand-list of Anglo-Saxon Non-runic Inscriptions* (Cambridge, 1971), no. 28.

<sup>2</sup> H. M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 1-11 (Cambridge, 1965), 209.

<sup>3</sup> The inscription is cited here in the form of Okasha's transliteration (loc. cit. in note 1), but the original line breaks have been maintained; the English translation is hers.

<sup>4</sup> Okasha, op. cit. in note 1, no. 29.

<sup>5</sup> H. M. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, III (Cambridge, 1978), 738-9.

<sup>6</sup> This interpretation was briefly alluded to by Okasha, loc. cit. in note 1, though the conventional one was preferred: 'presumably "royal church" not "royal hall"'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> D. R. Howlett, pers. comm.; see also the entry *aula* in the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, prepared by R. E. Latham and D. R. Howlett, 1 A-L (Oxford 1975-97), 161-2.

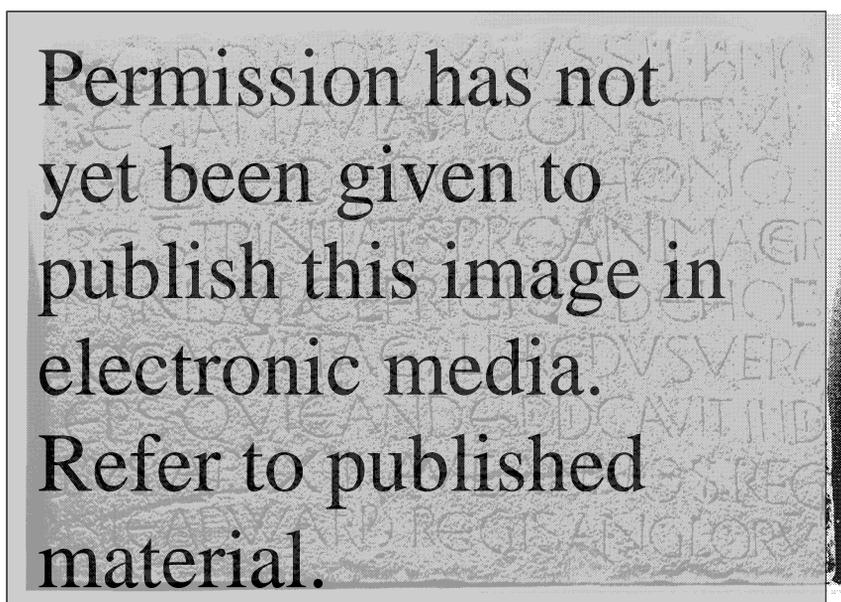


FIG. 4

Deerhurst, Gloucestershire. Inscribed stone tablet (Okasha Deerhurst 1) found in the vicinity of Odda's Chapel.

*Courtesy of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.*

the ultimate involvement of the king would be taken for granted? If, on the other hand, the hall is interpreted as a secular structure, to what extent could it be regarded as 'royal' in view of its clear attribution to Earl Odda? Further, how can one explain the dedications to the Holy Trinity recorded in the two inscriptions? In relation to the first inscription there is a possible argument which regards the nave as a secular hall, with the 'chancel' as its private chapel; the altar to which the second inscription refers would have stood in this chapel. But if the *aula* was a secular hall, why should the main inscription include an ecclesiastical dedication?

The literary background in the early Middle Ages suggests that *regia aula* should not be taken literally and that there is no need of such tortuous explanations. The phrase appears ultimately to have originated in the Early Christian Period. Eusebius, writing in the first half of the 4th century, describes one of Constantine the Great's churches as βασιλειον οἶκον (royal hall),<sup>8</sup> of which the Latin *regia aula* is a direct translation. This was an appropriate description for a church founded by the emperor (βασιλεύς) himself: it was in a true sense a 'royal hall', though not a residence. Subsequent definitions of the Greek and Latin terms show the development of early medieval thinking on the subject.

Glossaries of the 9th century and later render the Greek οἶκος as *domus* (house), which does not immediately help with the Deerhurst inscription, but interestingly Latin-Greek equivalences render *aula* as οἶκος or βασιλικός.<sup>9</sup> The *Glossarium Amplonianum Secundum*, which survives in a 9th-century MS., explains *aula* as *domus regia vel proatrio* (a royal house or hall).<sup>10</sup> This definition was already known to Bede c. 700 from the writing of Augustine:

<sup>8</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, x, iv, 42; Loeb edn with English translation by K. Lake (London, 1912-13).

<sup>9</sup> *Glossae Latinograecae et Graecolatinae*, ed. G. Goetz and G. Gundermann (Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum, II, Leipzig, 1888), 26 and 380.

<sup>10</sup> Placidus, *Liber Glossarum; Glossaria Reliqua*, ed. G. Goetz (Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum, v, Leipzig, 1894), 269, line 27.

*aula latine domus regia est, aula graece atrium dicitur* (in Latin *aula* is a royal hall; in Greek it is called *atrium*).<sup>11</sup> It was cited a century earlier in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, who further glossed *basilicae* as *regum habitacula* (the dwellings of kings).<sup>12</sup> In all these cases *aula* could refer to a secular residence rather than a church. Nevertheless, if the meaning 'church' is intended, the concept of royalty is unspecific and might be held to refer to the status of a church's founder. Isidore, however, offers a further explanation of the term *basilica* which links it specifically to the Deity:

*divina templa basilicae nominantur, quia ibi regi omnium Deo cultus et sacrificia offeruntur*

(Temples of the Lord are called basilicas because worship and sacrifices are offered in them to God, king of all.)<sup>13</sup>

In the 9th century Walafrid Strabo's discussion of the term *basilica* gives a similar interpretation:

***Basilica Graece, latine regalis vel regia dicitur a basileo, id est rege . . . Nostra autem domus orationis ideo regia dicitur, quia Regi regum in ea servitur***

(The Greek *basilica* is called in Latin 'kingly' or 'royal' from βασιλεύς, that is 'king' . . . So our house of prayer is similarly called 'royal' because the King of kings is worshipped in it.)<sup>14</sup>

In the following chapter, which discusses Germanic expressions and their Classical equivalents (*Quomodo Theotisce domus Dei dicatur*), Walafrid similarly defines *domus Dei*:

*Sicut itaque domus Dei, bacilica [sic], id est regia, a rege . . .*

(Just as the house of God, *basilica*, that is 'royal' from 'king' . . .)<sup>15</sup>

The term *basilica* is explained in much the same way in the Romano-German Pontifical:

*quod latine regia interpretatur, ut habitaculum regis eterni monstretur*

(which is interpreted in Latin as 'royal' as it refers to the house of the Eternal King.)<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these glossarial instances, there is evidence of this interpretation in narrative sources. Between 839 and 842 the monk Ermanrich of Ellwangen wrote a *Life of Sola*, an Anglo-Saxon pupil of St Boniface, who established a hermitage on the River Altmühl upstream from Eichstätt around the year 750, and who died in 794.<sup>17</sup> The tenth chapter of this *Life* describes Sola's translation by Gundhramm the deacon, who was briefly Prior of Solnhofen, around 838–9. The saint had been buried on the north side of his church (*ex aquilonali oratorii latere*), where a memorial to him could be seen. His remains were now to be exhumed and placed in a shrine 'at a higher level' but in almost the same place as his original grave. This suggests the normal early-medieval practice of replacing the remains of buried saints in tomb-like structures at floor level. This interpretation of Ermanrich's account is consistent with the archaeological evidence for the Carolingian church at Solnhofen.<sup>18</sup> In the list of chapter headings at the beginning of the *Life*,

<sup>11</sup> *De Orthographia*, ed. C. W. Jones, 3–57 in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera*, pt. 1: *Opera Didascalica* (Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, 123A, Turnhout, 1975), here p. 8; I owe this reference to Professor Michael Lapidge.

<sup>12</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, xv.iii.3 and iv.11. Ed. W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX* (Oxford, 1911).

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, in note 12, xv.iv, 11. I am grateful to John Higgitt for the references to Isidore.

<sup>14</sup> Walafrid Strabo, *De ecclesiasticarum Rerum Exordiis et Incrementis*, vi, col. 925 in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, cxiv (Paris, 1852). Italics are here used to distinguish Latin text from English translation; the bold emphases represent the italics of the original, which is otherwise set in normal typeface.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, ed. Migne, col. 927.

<sup>16</sup> C. Vogel (ed.), *Le pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle* (Vatican City, 1963), 92. I am grateful to John Higgitt for this reference.

<sup>17</sup> A. Bauch (ed.), 'Das Leben des heiligen Sola', 189–246 in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Diözese Eichstätt*, 1: *Biographien der Gründungszeit* (2nd ed., Regensburg, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> D. Parsons, 'Some churches of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries in southern Germany: a review of the evidence', *Early Medieval Europe*, 8 (1999), 31–67, at 57–62.

Ermanrich describes the wonderful aroma which on the occasion of the translation filled the church; the latter is called *regia domus*.<sup>19</sup> This is expanded in the text of chapter ten as

*ut tota basilica suavissime ex eo [mirafici odoris fumo] redoleret impleta*

(so that the whole basilica was everywhere most agreeably redolent of it [the smell of the wonderful fragrance]).<sup>20</sup>

Ermanrich continues

*At nos nimis attoniti, in parte qua steteramus domus regiae ut fragiles procumbimus*

(Now we weak creatures prostrated ourselves in total amazement in that part of the *domus regiae* where we had been standing).

In the parallel German translation of Bauch's first edition, *domus regia(e)* was rendered as *Königshof* ('royal hall' or 'court'), which drew the comment from one reviewer that since according to the first statement the odour of sanctity filled the basilica, and since the observers were present in the church (*oratorium*) itself, *domus regia* was no more than a synonym for basilica, and did not constitute proof that there was a royal hall or palace in Solnhofen.<sup>21</sup> Löwe referred to the *Glossarium Amplonianum secundum*, from a 9th-century manuscript, where the equation *basilica graece domus regalis* (*basilica* in Greek [means] royal house) is given.<sup>22</sup> Bauch evidently accepted this argument, since he silently amended his translation in the second edition to *Gotteshaus* (house of God).<sup>23</sup> It is of passing interest to note that Ermanrich, the author of the *Life*, visited Walafrid on the Reichenau in 846 x 849, which may have afforded him the opportunity to become aware of the glossator's interpretations quoted above.

It is clear that the equation of *basilica* and *aula/domus regia/regalis* was well established by the 9th century and that the term *regia/regalis* was taken to be a reference to God as the King of Kings. The development of this usage can be traced back to Constantinian times, but the immediate context for it was the revival of classical Greek in 9th-century Europe, which was discussed many years ago by Laistner.<sup>24</sup> At the time the revival was ascribed to Irish scholars, but a more recent examination of literary material from 10th-century England found no evidence for direct Irish influence in the development of the Greek-inspired 'hermeneutic' style, for which a purely Carolingian transmission is proposed.<sup>25</sup> Although no specifically English parallels for the words of the Deerhurst inscription can be found, it would appear that late Anglo-Saxon England shared in the renaissance of Greek in the Carolingian world and the author of the inscription would have been well aware of the implications of the use of *regia aula* to describe the building being dedicated. His immediate source may have been writings of the monastic reform movement of the previous century, whose penchant for the use of Graecisms has been explored by Lapidge. There is no reason, therefore, to strain after a secular meaning for the words in question. In the context of the Carolingian texts discussed above there can be no difficulty in accepting the traditional interpretation of *regia aula* as 'church'. In the light of this argument, the word 'royal' in Okasha's translation of the Deerhurst 1 inscription may be regarded as superfluous and even potentially misleading.

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<sup>19</sup> *Vita Sualonis*, ed. Bauch, op. cit. in note 17, 206.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>21</sup> H. Löwe, review of Bauch, op. cit. in note 17, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 20 (1964), 237-8.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. in note 10, 270, line 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Vita Sualonis*, ed. Bauch, op. cit. in note 17, 233.

<sup>24</sup> M. L. W. Laistner, 'The revival of Greek in Western Europe in the Carolingian Age', *History*, 9 (1924-5), 177-87.

<sup>25</sup> M. Lapidge, 'The hermeneutic style in tenth-century Anglo-Latin literature', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 4 (1975), 67-111.