



Phot: Courtauld Institute of Art
West doorway, Monkwearmouth

III.—SOME PROBLEMS OF EARLY NORTHUMBRIAN ARCHITECTURE

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THE CENTRALLY PLANNED CHURCHES

The existence of centrally planned churches in early Northumbria has received surprisingly little attention, perhaps because the fact is so surprising. Yet the importance of these churches even in European art-history is surely very great.

In general the centrally planned church is an eastern feature, the west using characteristically the basilica. Byzantine churches tend to represent a compromise. Churches such as S. Sophia and S. Mark's, Venice, have elements of both types, though the central planning perhaps predominates. The main home of the centrally planned church seems to have been Armenia.

The centrally planned building is of course common enough in the west at all dates, but it is not usually a church, or not primarily a church. It is usually primarily a building of special purpose such as a baptistery or mausoleum. Examples of such buildings are plentiful enough in Italy and Merovingian Gaul.¹ In the Carolingian age on the contrary we find buildings which, though used as mausolea, were nevertheless predominantly churches. Thus for instance this is true of the most famous of all Carolingian buildings, Charlemagne's palace chapel at Aachen used as a Cathedral from the beginning. It was built by Eudes de Metz, said to have been of Armenian blood. This seems to have also

¹ Frejus, Riez, Aix, etc.

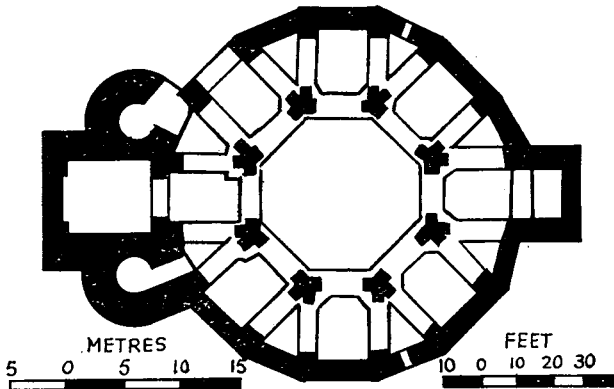


FIG. 1. THE PALATINE CHAPEL, AACHEN, BASED ON A. W. CLAPHAM.
By courtesy of the Oxford University Press.

been true of Germigny des Prés and of the Michelskirche Fulda, where Boniface's tomb was in the crypt.

Whence then this sudden irruption of eastern practice in the west? Those who know little about English architecture take it for granted that the influence is eastern. Thus for instance the usual story is that Aachen is a copy of the Byzantine church of S. Vitale Ravenna. Germigny, where Eudes de Metz was also active, is noted as being close in plan to the cathedral of Etchmiadsin, Armenia, dating to 628, nearly two hundred years earlier. But in fact Aachen differs quite considerably (Fig. 1) from S. Vitale (Fig. 2). Above all it is not a pillared church, i.e. the walls do not rest on pillars, but on piers. It is true that it has many pillars, some of them taken from S. Vitale, so it is said, but they are merely decorative, and carry little or nothing, being mostly enclosed in arches which take the real strain. Then again, Aachen is without the internal exedra in each bay of the internal octagon which characterise S. Vitale. Thirdly, where S. Vitale is an octagon within an octagon, Aachen is an octagon within a sedecagon. Fourthly, where S. Vitale had a polygonal apse, Aachen had a rectangular sanctuary. Fifthly, there is none of the external arcading typical of S. Vitale, at

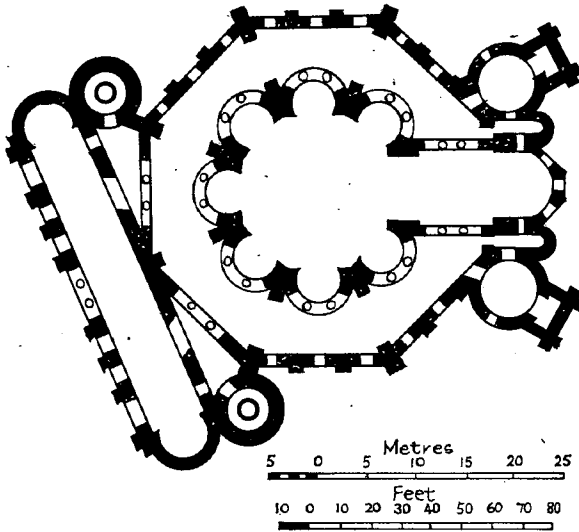


FIG. 2. S. VITALE, RAVENNA, SIMPLIFIED FROM A. W. CLAPHAM, *English Romanesque Architecture*.
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Aachen; sixthly, where S. Vitale had a west narthex, Aachen has a west tower, covering a barrel-vaulted west porch, a totally different conception. I am afraid that we cannot allow that all these divergences are due to the barbaric maladresse of German architects. This is the kind of *a priori* argument which appeals to some people, and for which there is not an iota of evidence. It is really inconceivable that the court architects of Charlemagne meant to build an apse, and built a rectangular sanctuary by mistake, or that they meant to build a narthex, and built a west tower by mistake. Besides, some at least of these features occur elsewhere, and that elsewhere is in fact in England. Thus, for instance, it is characteristic of early Saxon architecture, and at a date well anterior to the Carolingian, that it repudiated the pillared church. There is not a single case of a pillared early Saxon church; where the nave is arcaded, it is arcaded on piers, as at Brixworth, certainly pre-Carolingian. S.

Paul's Jarrow is another case. I made it plain in my article in the *Proceedings*² of this society in 1955 that I did not consider the arcaded piers at Jarrow original, but I think they are still pre-Carolingian. The west tower, not yet higher than the main building and containing a barrel-vaulted porch, occurs also at Monkwearmouth, a most remarkable equation; it is difficult to say which is earlier; but I now incline to think that Monkwearmouth is. In view of these striking facts, and the known connections between the Anglo-Saxons, and Carolingian Germany, e.g. Alcuin, should we not look more carefully at the Bernician centrally planned churches?

The very fact that Bernicia had centrally planned churches is itself significant of the revolution now attributed to Charlemagne himself. Their very existence shows that we had here a new departure in western architecture, and creates an *a priori* likelihood that Charlemagne looked to England and not to the east for his direct models. There are in fact two of these very important buildings, one in Deira; one in Bernicia. The one in Deira is the second cathedral of York, a building which, for some obscure reason, is ignored by Clapham in his list of Anglo-Saxon centrally planned churches.³ The difficulty about both these churches, of which the second is Wilfrid's Lady Chapel at Hexham, is that we are entirely dependent on textual evidence for our knowledge of them. No one yields to myself in distrust of textual evidence, and where monumental evidence exists, textual evidence should in my opinion be ignored as invariably unreliable. In this case, beggars cannot be choosers; we have nothing else.

The first cathedral at York was a wooden building erected by Edwin early in the seventh century; but it was speedily superseded, though not destroyed, by the second cathedral, which was of stone, and enclosed the first within itself. Of this building, begun by Edwin and finished by

² *P.S.A.N.* 5th Series. Vol. I, 108 (1955).

³ *English Romanesque Architecture before the Conquest*, 144.

Oswald, we have a fair amount of literary evidence. As it is alleged to have been inspired by the Italian Paulinus, we should have expected it to be a basilica. To our surprise we learn that it was square on plan.

Mox autem curavit, docente eodem Paulino, majorem in loco et augustiorem in lapide fabricare basilicam in cuius medio ipsum quod prius fecerat oratorium includeretur . . . Bede 2 14.

Praeparatis ergo fundamentis in gyro prioris oratori per quadrum coepit aedificare basilicam . . . Bede 2 14.

Sed priusquam altitudo parietis esset consummata . . . (he died) Bede 2 14.

As usual the texts are not crystal clear. The second quotation cannot mean that he built a square church within the oratory, because the oratory was within the church. Hence it means that he built a square basilica *with circular foundations* round the wooden oratory. It cannot mean that the oratory was circular. "In" cannot mean "Round". I agree therefore with the usual translation. This church had at least one *porticus*, that to S. Gregory, in which King Edwin's head was buried.⁴ This would not normally be the sanctuary, the east *porticus*. On the analogy of the burial of the Kentish Kings in the southern *porticus* of S. Austin's at Canterbury, King Edwin's head would be buried in a southern *porticus* at York, but the dedication to S. Gregory might imply a northern *porticus* since this was the case at Canterbury, where the archbishops were buried in S. Gregory's *porticus* on the north of the church while the kings were buried in S. Martin's *porticus* on the south. In any case it is likely that the literary evidence can be taken as implying *porticus* on the north-south axis. Equally it seems reasonable to assume an eastern *porticus* as a chancel, and perhaps also one at the west and thus I would suggest that the point of the circular foundation under a square church, not immediately obvious, is precisely to carry four *porticus*, one on each axis, and the need for such a foundation, which was probably of rubble concrete, indicates not only that there

⁴ Bede, *H.E.*, 2 c20.

was a central tower, which is fully implied, but that the *porticus* had themselves some height, and very possibly were of two stories.

The question now arises as to whether the building had an ambulatory, that is aisles, or not. I think we ought to realise first of all that this was no minor building but a major one. There are good reasons for thinking this. First of all to think anything else is grossly to underestimate the wealth and magnificence of these potentates of the Merovingian period. The Sutton Hoo burials show us something of what we can expect of a minor royalty of the period in England. The Merovingian churches of France were infinitely more opulent than anything seen later. S. Denis, Paris had a roof of pure silver; S. Vincent, Paris had a roof of copper encased in gold; S. Martial of lead; Nantes and Bordeaux of tin. Ceilings were sometimes gilded as at S. Vincent; walls and apse were covered in mosaics. Edwin was a great king of a great country. He was one of Bede's Bretwaldas. Furthermore Bede refers to this building with great respect. He calls it a *basilica*, intending only a term of respect of course, our archaeological language was not then invented. He gives this mark of importance to few, if any other, churches. Thus Canterbury Cathedral is merely an *ecclesia*; so is Rochester Cathedral, and S. Mary's Lichfield, and S. Peter's Lichfield, and S. Austin's Canterbury, and strangest of all so also is Wilfrid's church at Hexham. These are all *ecclesiae*; only the cathedral at York is *basilica*.⁵

On this evidence I believe that we can assume that it had aisles.⁶ In that case, it was a square within a square, just like Etchmiadsin. That this church was an eastern type should be obvious, and much more Armenian than Byzantine. It antedates any Byzantine church of this type

⁵ The exact meaning of Bede's use of these terms is of course obscure. *Ecclesia* could well and often does mean a cathedral. But S. Peter's York was certainly a cathedral. I suspect he used the word precisely because S. Peter's York had aisles, whereas I suspect that none of the other churches, which are mentioned, did.

⁶ Further evidence pointing the same way is Bede's use of the word *paries* for the walls. If aisleless he would have said *muri*.

by hundreds of years, but is exactly contemporary with Etchmiadsin. This was the age, the Merovingian, when crowds of easterners, called in the texts *Syrians*, a term implying any easterner, could be found in the west, whereas in the later Carolingian age there were few left owing to the loss of control of the Mediterranean to the Arabs.

If, by any chance, the Cathedral had no aisles, it was still an eastern type, and would have resembled a church like Mastara, of c. 650. At Mastara the tower was octagonal, but I would think this unlikely at York. More probably the tower was square as at Germigny des Prés.

Now although this was probably an extremely magnificent and ornate church, richly endowed, and probably with mosaics, yet it lasted very poorly, in fact only about twenty years, when it had to be extensively rebuilt by Wilfrid. The description of Wilfrid's work is given in a poem attributed to a monk called Frithegode, who lived in the tenth century. We really do not know what happened eventually to this church; it was burnt in A.D. 741, but a stone church is unlikely to have been finally destroyed by fire. It is quite possible that Frithegode's account was written with the church still before him, and if not, that its details were still well remembered, as they would be if it had been finally destroyed in A.D. 867 when the Danes overran the north. There is no particular reason however to suppose that the Danes destroyed it, as the archbishopric was not interrupted.

As for what Frithegode says about Wilfrid's work, this is not so important, though it is basically true enough, as much of it is taken from Eddius, who makes it plain that the roof had gone when Wilfrid restored the building; thus Eddius says:

The roof let in water; the windows were unglazed; birds rested in it flying in and out. The walls were disgusting with the debris of showers and birds. Our bishop . . . first renewed the rotten roof ridges; skilfully leading them over; he glazed the windows against wind and birds;
. . . he whitewashed the walls . . . (Eddius c. 16).

What is important in Frithegode is the architectural details involved, which as I say he may well have seen, and if not, were probably in easy memory of the oldest inhabitant.

Ecclesiae vero fundamina cassa vetustae
 Culmina dissuto violabant trabe palambes
 Humida contrito stillabant assere tecta
 Livida nudato suggrundia pariete passa
 Imbricibus nullis pluriæ quacunq̄ue vagantur
 Pendula discissis fluitant laquearia tignis
 Fornice marcebant cataractae dilapidato . . .

The architectural details mentioned here are the foundations; the roof ridge (*culmina*), the wooden roof (*trabe*), the *pole* (*assere*), the ceilings (*laquearia*) and finally the vault (*fornice*) which, in a square building, can have been nothing but a dome. *Fornix* cannot here mean "arch" because if the arches had gone the whole building would have fallen down; it would not have been a matter of admitting water. The failure of the vault or dome would have done precisely that.

The natural interpretation of this evidence is therefore that S. Peter's York had a dome covered with a saddleback roof,⁷ or possibly a Rhenish helm, but certainly covered with roofs, and that underneath the dome there were flat ceilings (*laquearia*) in the Merovingian manner, which would probably be painted, as would the walls, possibly even, there were mosaics in the walls. The dome is of course quite commonplace at this time in eastern buildings; and Theodoric's tomb at Ravenna had a peculiar dome. Moreover the Irish had been doming *ab initio* in their beehive manner. I do not suppose that S. Peter's had a beehive finish; it was more ambitious, probably too ambitious; the very fact that it fell in after less than twenty years suggests that this was a dome, not a wooden roof. It is incredible that the Anglo-Saxons

⁷ A similar arrangement existed at Aachen. See Baldwin Brown, *Arts in Early England*, 2, p. 294, Fig. 91.

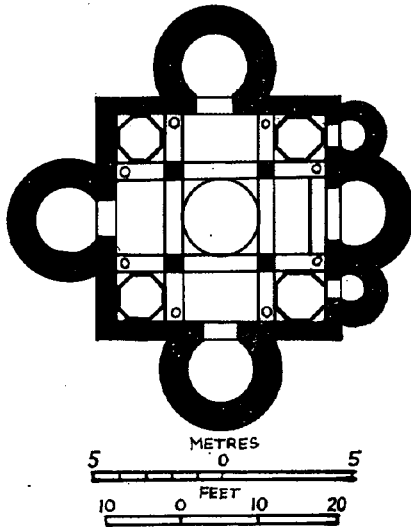


FIG. 3. GERMIGNY DES PRÉS, BASED ON A. W. CLAPHAM.

By courtesy of the Oxford University Press.

should build a wooden roof which fell in after less than twenty years. They were experienced carpenters.

If then we assume that S. Peter's York was a square within a square, with four *porticus* on the axes, and a central domed lantern tower, we have the remarkable fact that it was an almost exact anticipation, by nearly 200 years, of the building at Germigny des Prés (Fig. 3). And what is still more remarkable is that the architect of the latter was known to Alcuin; that Alcuin himself lived at Tours, only a few miles from Germigny; and that Alcuin's own home was York. It is a queer concatenation of coincidences, if coincidences they are, which I doubt. York is a great deal nearer Germigny than Etchmiadsin is.⁸

WILFRID'S CHURCH AT HEXHAM

This church is mentioned in Clapham but we know very

⁸ Germigny may have had a dome. Lisch thought so. Others are perhaps too cautious.

little about it. In fact we know little more than what Clapham tells us,⁹ that it lay south east of the main church of Wilfrid, and was

ecclesia mirandi operis, et scilicet in modum turris erecta, et fere rotunda, a quattuor partibus totidem porticus habens . . .
(Raine, *Hexham* I 14).

This evidence comes from Richard of Hexham in the twelfth century, and can only be regarded as evidence for the seventh century with reservations. Clearly Richard thought it was the Lady Chapel that Wilfrid built in the early years of the eighth century, and it still existed when he wrote. But the form mentioned is more like that of a baptistery than of a Lady Chapel, and it is quite possible that Richard wrongly identified it. Clapham gives the Arian baptistery at Ravenna as the probable model. This was an octagon within an octagon, with apses at the interior cardinal points. I doubt if this is a perfect analogy. The Saxon *porticus* is normally external not internal, and it is bad logic to postulate an exceptional case without evidence. Moreover I doubt if an octagon would be described as *fere rotunda*. The phrase indicates something unusual, whereas octagons were common enough. Far more likely it was a sedecagon, externally anyway. If it was an octagon within a sedecagon it exactly anticipates the palace chapel at Aachen. At the very least we can say that in being *fere rotunda* it certainly anticipates Aachen, which is also *fere rotunda*. And in its *porticus* disposition it certainly anticipates Germigny des Prés.¹⁰

What then to sum up, are the chances that the Carolingian Aachen and Germigny des Prés looked immediately not to the east, but to England for their design? What is the chance that Eudes de Metz was influenced by Alcuin, in the designs that he chose? For after all there are a great many

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁰ Tarasa in Catalonia is a pillared, not a piered church and has only one, not four, apses. The type however may have reached England via Visigothic Spain.

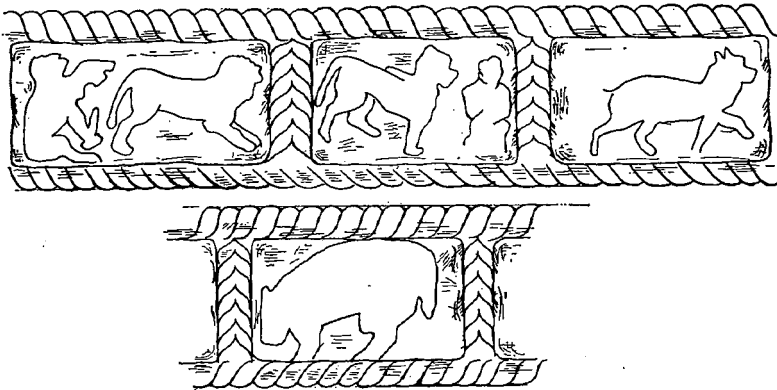


FIG. 4. PARTS OF THE CARVED STRING COURSE OF THE WEST FACADE AT MONKWEARMOUTH, PARTLY RESTORED FROM C. C. HODGES' DRAWING OF 1893

other Armenian models which he might have chosen. I should imagine that the chances are really pretty big.

THE ORNAMENTED WEST FACADE AT MONKWEARMOUTH

When I wrote in 1947,¹¹ I gave reasons for thinking this represented inserted work of *c* A.D. 800. The enriched work consists of:

1. The west arch of the west porch. This has an arch of stone voussoirs recessed in two planes. This is not a true double ordered arch (plate II) but seems to be a reminiscence of the Ionic architrave, which however is recessed in three planes. The impostes are straight-chamfered, and piped on the arrises. The jambs are in Long and Short, with a single rhythm of Long-Short-Long. The upper long is recessed to carry two baluster shafts, of a very northern appearance. The lower long and the short are carved with a beaked serpent, very northern also.
2. Above this arch is or was a carved string course with naturalistic animals in relief set in cable moulded panels

¹¹ Gilbert, *A.A.* 4, Vol. XXV, 1947.

(fig. 4). This is a Syrian motif, and something similar can be seen at Serdjilla and Safa,¹² where the vertical cables are seen to be classical twisted columns. According to Raleigh Radford¹³ this must have continued on adjoining *porticus* now lost (fig. 5). There must have been therefore an oriental narthex, with the central partition rising as a low tower.

3. Above this is a window, now modernized externally but internally with cable moulded arrises.
4. In the gable of the porch-tower was what has commonly been described as a Rood in relief, shewn in fig. 5 by the surviving stones with which it was backed. Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, with characteristic generosity, have offered the suggestion, taken from their forthcoming book, that the figure which has hitherto passed as a Rood, may not be one, as there seems insufficient room for the arms of a Rood. They suggest the figure may be that of S. Peter to whom the church is dedicated.

In 1947 I gave architectural reasons why the arch and the string course would not be original. Briefly there are four doorways on the ground floor of the present porch, with jambs in upright and flat technique, i.e. Long and Short, more developed in the west arch, but basically similar, and which must be contemporary, and none original because the east doorway replaces an original entrance of different technique. All four doorways have voussoired arches, while the early one has stone tiles. The string course goes with the second, raised, first-floor level and not with the original first-floor level, and is equally not original. On the other hand, none of this work is likely to be Romanesque. We have numerous west belfries of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and none are like this. The tenth century ones have no external openings on the ground floor. They are not porches. Nor can the balusters or carving be paralleled in this tower series. Baldwin Brown gives more, cogent, reasons against a

¹² De Vogue. *Syrie Centrale*. Paris 1865-77.

¹³ *Arch. Journal*, III, 1955.

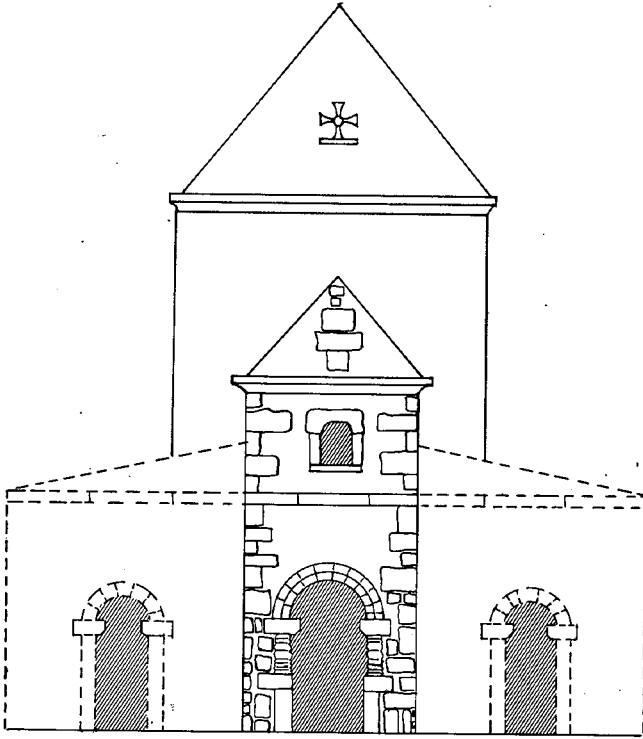


FIG. 5. DIAGRAM SHOWING POSSIBLE FORM OF WEST FACADE,
MONKWEARMOUTH, c. A.D. 850

late Saxon date. There remains however the question of whether this work is Biscop's or later. For practical purposes there are three building periods here.

1. With a single storied west porch or none. Biscop's work before 687.
2. With a two storied porch, floor at about 11'. I put this to the early eighth century and probably not Biscop's work.
3. With a raised floor carried on a barrel vault of good workmanship.

Because of the equation between the string course and the barrel vault which cannot be earlier than the third period, I put all the ornamented work in that period and c. 800. Mr. Raleigh Radford equates it with Biscop's work. But if Plate II is examined carefully it will be seen that the west arch does not appear original. Its southern jambs seriously incommode the south west quoins, some of which are broken away to admit it, and it is backed by a line of rubble. In view of this picture I do not see that any weight can be based on claims that the arch is original.¹⁴ Mr. Raleigh Radford was also affected by the supposition that this church must have been an "aisled basilica" from the beginning, like Jarrow, and that this pre-supposes the oriental narthex, certainly part of the ornamented structure. There is however no certainty that Jarrow was an aisled basilica *ab initio*, since eighteenth century plans are not evidence for a seventh century church. One is therefore thrown back on general considerations, which are against the idea, for the characteristic church of the seventh century is the Kentish basilica, which is unaisled, as was S. Peter's Bywell, and Ledsham, the nearest analogies to Monkwearmouth. I do not think the *porticus*-surrounded basilica, for this is what it was, with oriental narthex, should be assumed in England, before c. A.D. 750. In fact I think it was introduced both to England and to Europe by Acca, and hope to come back to this subject later. The oriental narthex seems more against Biscop's authorship than for it.

Bearing on this subject is the form of the narthex. Raleigh Radford and the Taylors¹⁵ take it to have had pent roofs to the flanking chambers leaning against the west wall of the church. This would give a sloping line on the porch-tower, of which the traces seem to me too vague to be reliable.

¹⁴ Dr. Taylor writes: Having seen the original (for A. W. Clapham's Plate 7, *Romanesque Architecture Before the Conquest*) I can now trace in Clapham's Plate 7 an earlier and taller round arch headed opening displaced northward from the present West Portal (of the West Porch) just as in the west wall of the nave the earlier and taller blocked opening is displaced southward. There does therefore seem to be evidence that the set of four doorways at present existing is a set inserted later, and not the original openings of the porch.

¹⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, by H. M. and Joan Taylor. C.U.P. (due 1964).

Alternately, the flanking *porticus* carried towers, as at Corvey. No such arrangement is known in England. Finally the chambers may have had pent roofs against the porch, leaving sloping lines on the west wall of the church, which has been much rebuilt. Certainly they do not shew here, but they would hardly be expected to, and they shew very clearly at Escomb, suggesting this as the contemporary practice in England.¹⁶ To me, the fact that the Kentish basilica was still the prevailing type of church in the seventh century, and that literary evidence favours it at Monkwearmouth,¹⁷ and also the parallel with Bywell and Ledsham,¹⁸ is a very serious argument indeed against ascribing the narthex to Biscop. Then again I do not think Long and Short came in till about 750. It is inserted work both at Monkwearmouth and Corbridge, and the Jarrow Lady Chapel shows little sign of it.

To these arguments can now be added others from continental affinities, where we have better evidence of dating. Very important is the affinity to Aachen. On an entirely different scale the two west ends show remarkable similarities. Both have barrel vaulted west porches, otherwise very rare; above this both had a Kaiserhalle; and above this again, in both, came a dwarf room, which at Aachen was a treasury.¹⁹ The difference is only that at Aachen these rooms were contemporary; at Deerhurst successive; and in the scale.

A word now about the Kaiserhalle. Clapham describes it as the entire west transeptal narthex.²⁰ It was in fact the Kaiser's private church or chapel. Since the altar was usually or invariably on the first floor, it seems more accurate to reserve this name for the room in which the chapel and altar occur. No doubt it gave the name to the whole complex. At Aachen the entire upper floor of the octagon is the Kaiserhalle and the room over the west porch-tower is only

¹⁶ H. M. and Joan Taylor, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Gilbert, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ H. M. and J. Taylor, *op. cit.* (under Ledsham).

¹⁹ Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, p. 15.

²⁰ *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe*, p. 167.

an annexe to this. At Monkwearmouth the Kaiserhalle was originally only the one upper room of the porch. This betrays its character by having a window to the nave through which the main altar of the church is visible. Mr. Radford says that such rooms were called cenaculae, i.e. supper rooms or attics. Attics the Kaiserhallen were not, as anyone who has seen the superb Kaiserhalle at Maastricht does not need to be told. Supper rooms, yes, but it was the Lord's supper that was celebrated there.

When the ornamented work was put in, the Kaiserhalle was swept away at Monkwearmouth, and a dwarf room substituted. In view of the parallel at Aachen this must have been a treasury and this explains its most peculiar feature of having no door of entrance. The explanation of this change must be that the Kaiserhalle, incidentally the first surviving in England, and perhaps in Europe, was for Kaiser Aldfrid or a later Kaiser, at a time when the monastery was closely associated with royalty. When the treasury was put in, this connection must have been lost, so no Kaiserhalle was any more necessary.

Passing from Aachen, well dated to c. 800, we must consider also Corvey.²¹ This church of the ninth century has a dummy three-storied porch in its west façade, closely resembling the general appearance of that at Monkwearmouth but having no reality inside. The inference is that it was built at a time when the west porch was still in use but old-fashioned, and the architect not wanting to offend the old-fashioned, and not wanting to use one compromised with a dummy.

Certain distinctive features from Monkwearmouth occur also in Carolingian work. One is the highly significant imitation of the Ionic architrave moulding, round the arch. This occurs correctly used at Aachen in the atrium arches c. 800 and in the sanctuary arch at the divine Michelskirche at Fulda, of much the same date. Moreover at Fulda as at Monkwearmouth the arch springs from straight chamfered

²¹ Conant, *op. cit.*, Fig. 5, p. 25.

imposts. The nearest parallel to the cable-moulded string is at the Torhalle, Lorsch, *c.* 774, where there is a beautiful deep midwall string course with raised edges carved with an eastern pattern in the sunk centre. At Deerhurst there is also a comparable midwall decorative string course dating probably from *c.* 700, but this depends on moulding, not on sculpture for its effect.

The cable-moulded arrises of the window find many parallels in the sanctuary of Germigny des Prés *c.* 800. It is true that this is nineteenth century work, but there is no reason at all to suppose that the restorer Lisch was not copying the original to the best of his ability. The Rood appears on the English crosses *c.* 700, and figure sculpture probably in Acca's work at Hexham *c.* 720, and at the Tempietto, Friuli, Italy *c.* 774; S. Riquier *c.* 796.

The best analogies to Monkwearmouth run therefore from about 700 to 850, and cover the late Merovingian and early Carolingian periods. On the whole, however, the ornamented west façade is not a Carolingian feature. Few Carolingian churches have retained façades. Where they have, at Aachen, Corvey, and Petersberg, for instance, they are plain, and very remote from this barbaric ornateness. The proper conclusion seems to me that Monkwearmouth is late Merovingian, and dates rather earlier than Aachen, say with the Torhalle *c.* 774. There are however churches in Gaul with ornamented façades consisting of enriched string courses, often billet moulded, or even embattled, but occasionally with bands of sculpture. Examples are at Azay-le Rideau, S. Mesme, Chinon, and the Basse Oeuve, Beauvais. This work is immeasurably inferior to that at Monkwearmouth and the Torhalle. It is usually called late Carolingian and dated to the tenth century. It would be better described as proto-Romanesque, and is substantially different from Monkwearmouth.

It does not seem to me at all reasonable to try and separate the ornamented west door from the other ornamented work, and I can think of a great many reasons why

this ornamented work should not be Biscop's, apart from the technical evidence given above. There is no abstract reason why Merovingian work of this type should not come from Biscop's time, but there are a number of concrete reasons. One of them is that Monkwearmouth was almost certainly a Kentish basilica. But we have the west fronts (or parts of them), of three Kentish basilicas, those at Bradwell, S. Pancras, and S. Martin's, Canterbury, and none of them shows any sign at all of an ornamented Merovingian west front: They are in fact quite plain and built no doubt "more Romano" i.e. with Italian influence at the back. It seems to me we must go on what evidence we have, and not on hunches.

Moreover, as if this was not enough, we are told explicitly by Bede that Biscop built *more Romano*. Then again there is Baldwin Brown's remark that the ornamented work is the product of a *wealthy connoisseur*. Emotionally this is right, and I have elsewhere pointed out that the last thing you could call Biscop was a *wealthy connoisseur*.

Taking into account these facts, the general resemblance of the developed west end of Monkwearmouth and Aachen;²² the affinities of detail with Carolingian work, and adding the technical reasons given in 1947, I have no doubt at all that we ought to regard this work including the west arch as Merovingian work of about 774. I would suggest that the history of the west façade, enriched as at Monkwearmouth, is that it came from the east, possibly Syria, was taken up in Merovingian Gaul, where all examples are lost, passed to England, where this one priceless example has survived.²³ I think that the Carolingian renaissance frowned on this unseemly barbarism, but could not entirely eradicate it, and when its effect wore off, the ornamented façade returned, somewhat diminished in its glory, finally swelling into one of the greatest features of Romanesque, as at Notre Dame, Poitiers, for instance.

²² Conant, *op. cit.*, Plate 2.

²³ Deerhurst as rebuilt c. 800 comes nearest.

If this is the correct analysis, and I believe that it is, then Monkwearmouth is of first-class European importance, as the only surviving example of the Merovingian ornamented façade, for the west face of the Torhalle, though comparable, is parallel to the long axis of the building, and in any case the Torhalle is not a church. If by any chance the ornamented façade skipped Merovingian Gaul, and came straight to England, as the Syrian effect of the cable-moulded panels suggests is possible, then Monkwearmouth acquires an even greater importance historically.

There can be no question that in Monkwearmouth England possesses a monument of rare historical importance. There still remains much that is mysterious about it, particularly in the northern and teutonic elements in it, the beaked serpents, and astounding but beautifully worked baluster-shafts, which have no known antecedents, unless at Jarrow, which merely transfers the problem a few miles further north. However I must warn my readers, and particularly my American friends, that practically nothing of all this is still intact today. Monkwearmouth must be looked at today with the eye of faith.²⁴

²⁴ I am grateful to Dr. and Mrs. Taylor for reading the text and making various suggestions, more especially the suggestion that the figure on the gable at Monkwearmouth may be S. Peter and is probably not a Rood. I am much indebted to Miss S. Hutchinson and the Editor for assistance with the figures.

