

The influence of Merovingian Gaul on Northumbria in the seventh century

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THE OBJECT of this paper¹ is to offer some suggestions as to the influence of Merovingian Gaul on Northumbria in the 7th century. This centres largely on the travels and activities of Benedict Biscop (628–90) and Wilfrid (634–709). They were both Northumbrians of noble birth. They had both spent their early years at Lindisfarne. They set out to visit Rome via Gaul in 653, Biscop then being 25 years old and Wilfrid 19. Wilfrid spent a year at Lyons on his way to Rome, and on his return journey he spent three years there under the tutelage of Archbishop Annemundus, from whom he received the tonsure. He narrowly escaped with his life when Annemundus was martyred.

After visiting Rome Benedict Biscop travelled widely in Gaul. There were many attractions for a British visitor to Gaul in the mid 7th century. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were emerging from illiterate paganism, and an absence of architectural tradition. Although a number of Roman buildings survived at least as ruins, Christianity had been virtually extinguished before the arrival of Augustine in Kent in 597.

The picture in Gaul of the 6th and 7th centuries was vastly different. Certainly in Provence, and to a lesser extent in other parts of Gaul, the advantages of Roman civilization and culture had never been wholly lost. In Rome Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid would have seen the great post-Constantinian Basilicas, but few, if any, contemporary building projects. After the barbarian depredations of the 5th century and the overthrow of the Roman Empire in the West, Italy was in decline. On the other hand there was prolific ecclesiastical activity and architectural construction in Gaul throughout the 6th and 7th centuries. Most Gaulish cities had their Bishop and their Cathedral. St Martin, who died in 397, had been the nineteenth bishop of Tours. It has been calculated² that in 600 there were no less than 200 monasteries in Gaul (Fig. 1). Benedict Biscop in the course of his travels in Gaul visited at least seventeen of these monasteries,³ primarily to compare their monastic rules but incidentally he must have appreciated their architectural arrangements.

There is a paucity of surviving Merovingian buildings in Gaul, and there is also the difficulty of assessing the extent to which earlier buildings had been restored

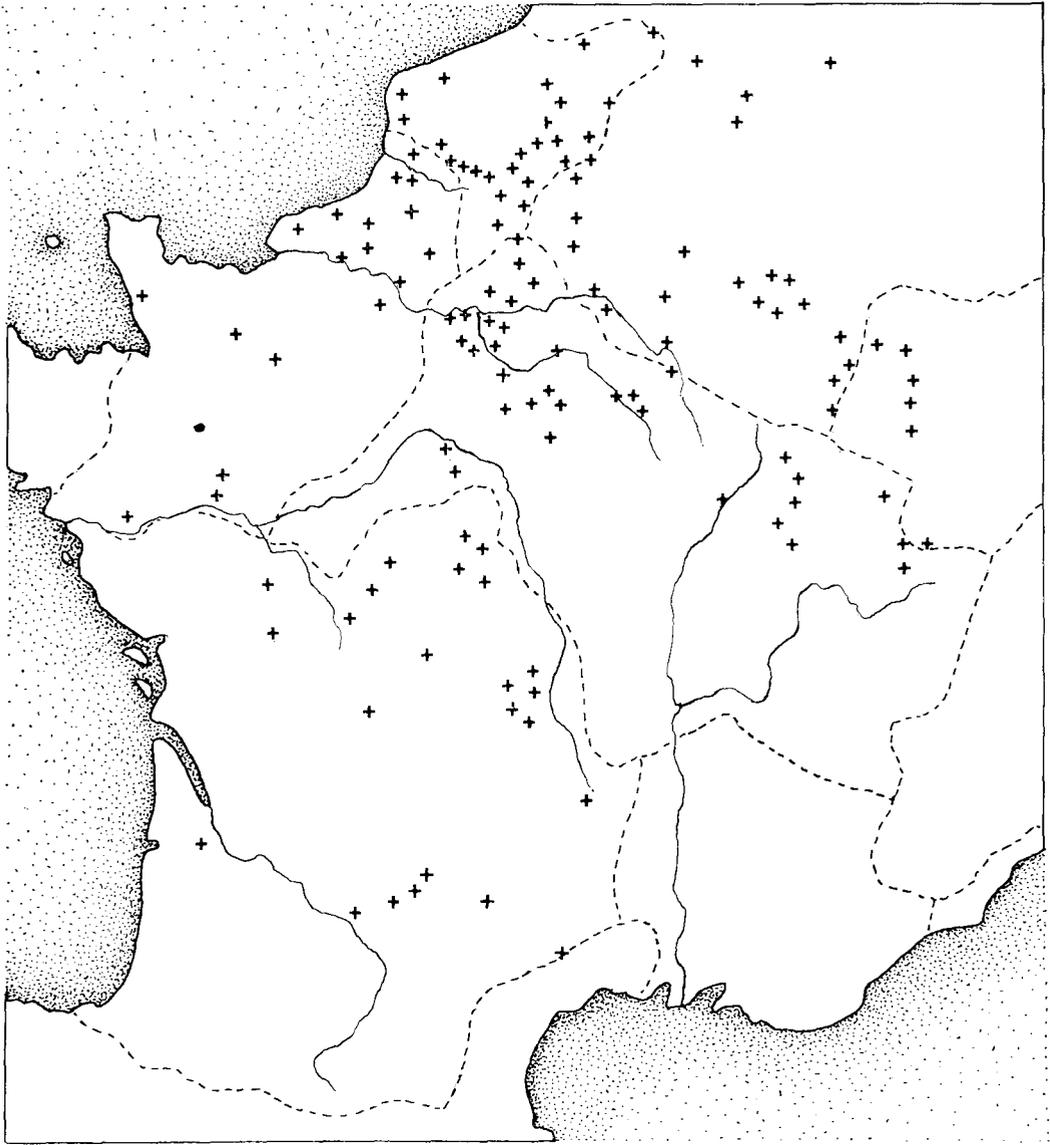


FIG. I

Map showing monasteries in Gaul founded in the 7th century
 (after J. Hubert, *L'Europe des Invasions*, Paris, 1967)

or altered in Merovingian times.⁴ There is however no doubt about their magnificence. Churches that once rivalled those of Rome and Ravenna have completely disappeared, but texts survive in literature which enable us to visualize something of their splendour.⁵

There has been much speculation among French historians as to the length of time during which Roman traditions of architecture survived. Thus J. Hubert in his

monumental work⁶ argues for the survival in Gaul throughout the Merovingian period of the architecture of the Late Roman Empire. J. De Lasteyrie, after referring to the numerous churches recorded by Gregory of Tours '*construits avec luxe*' and of which nothing remains, writes⁷ 'By their mode of construction, their plan, their decoration, the churches built in *Gaul* in Merovingian times resembled Roman basilicas. No province of the Empire bore more strongly the imprint of the Roman genius. It is not surprising that the Merovingian churches were built in a style similar to those of Rome. Roman traditions were only slowly lost in Gaul. And there survived in the 7th century architects anxious to observe these traditions and workmen capable of building churches in this grand style'.⁸

The most impressive group of buildings in Gaul that survived from the earliest period are those at Ligugé and Poitiers, comprising remains of St Martin's original monastery at Ligugé (c.361-70), the Baptistry of St John at Poitiers and the Church of St Croix. There is however no agreement as to what they looked like in the 7th century — and there is no evidence that either Wilfrid or Benedict Biscop⁹ ever went to Poitiers.

Of greater significance for an English historian is the famous Abbey on the small Isle of *Lérins*, some five miles off the S. coast of France opposite Cannes. This was founded about 410 by St Honorat and intended as a hermitage for himself, but he was soon joined by a number of disciples. Consequently the monastery soon combined a mixture of coenobitic and eremitic life. Initiates were at first required to share a common life in a central building, and only after they had some experience of this were they allowed to retire and occupy one of the cells at the extremities of the island and live as hermits. The foundations of some of these primitive dwellings survive.

Lérins was fortunate to escape the successive depredations in Provence that followed the Fall of Rome. Its fame spread throughout the West, and it acquired in the 5th and 6th centuries a reputation for sanctity and learning. It became a seminary from which the churches in Gaul chose their bishops. Six monks from Lérins became successively Bishops of Arles, the senior metropolitan see in Gaul. Among those who sought a retreat at Lérins was Cassian, the founder of St Victor's monastery at Marseilles, but the tradition that St Patrick visited Lérins cannot be supported. When St Augustine's monks took fright about their mission to Kent, he left them at Lérins while he went to seek instructions from Pope Gregory.¹⁰

It was at Lérins that Benedict Biscop spent two impressionable years.¹¹ He contemplated staying permanently but on a return visit to Rome he was persuaded by Pope Vitalian to accompany Theodore to Canterbury. These two years of Benedict Biscop's residence occurred at a significant period in the life of the Monastery. The Rule of St Benedict had been introduced. Lérins had ceased to be (even in part) eremitic and became fully coenobitic. The monks were recalled from their hermitages or separate cells, and a communal life was established around communal monastic buildings (cloister, refectory, chapter house etc.). The Rule of St Benedict with adaptations was adopted by both Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop

when they founded their Northumbrian monasteries at Ripon (671), at Hexham (673), at Monkwearmouth (674) and Jarrow (682).¹² Benedictine monasticism of the second half of the 7th century was totally distinct from the earlier type of Irish monasteries as at Lindisfarne, Old Melrose, Coldingham and Abercorn. It would also seem that an incidental consequence of the introduction of Benedictine principles in Northumbrian monasteries was to put an end to the foundation of mixed monasteries which had been common in the mid 7th century.

The Isle of Lérins is an ideal (perhaps the only) site where one can study the transition from eremitic to coenobitic monastic life. After numerous vicissitudes, the modern Abbey was built in the 19th century by the Cistercian Order of Sénanque. It encapsulates much of the original monastery. The monastic church is new but the cloister, possibly of the 7th century, is preserved intact, measuring 22 m on each side with corridors $3\frac{1}{2}$ m wide pierced by round slender arched openings (Pl. iv). This extraordinary massive cloister was presumably where Benedict Biscop was cloistered.

On the periphery of the island (which is only one mile in length) are seven chapels, some in ruins, said to be built on the sites of the dwellings of the original monks. The most remarkable of these chapels is that of The Trinity (Fig. 2).¹³ Though much restored externally (Pl. v, A), the interior is of striking purity with a

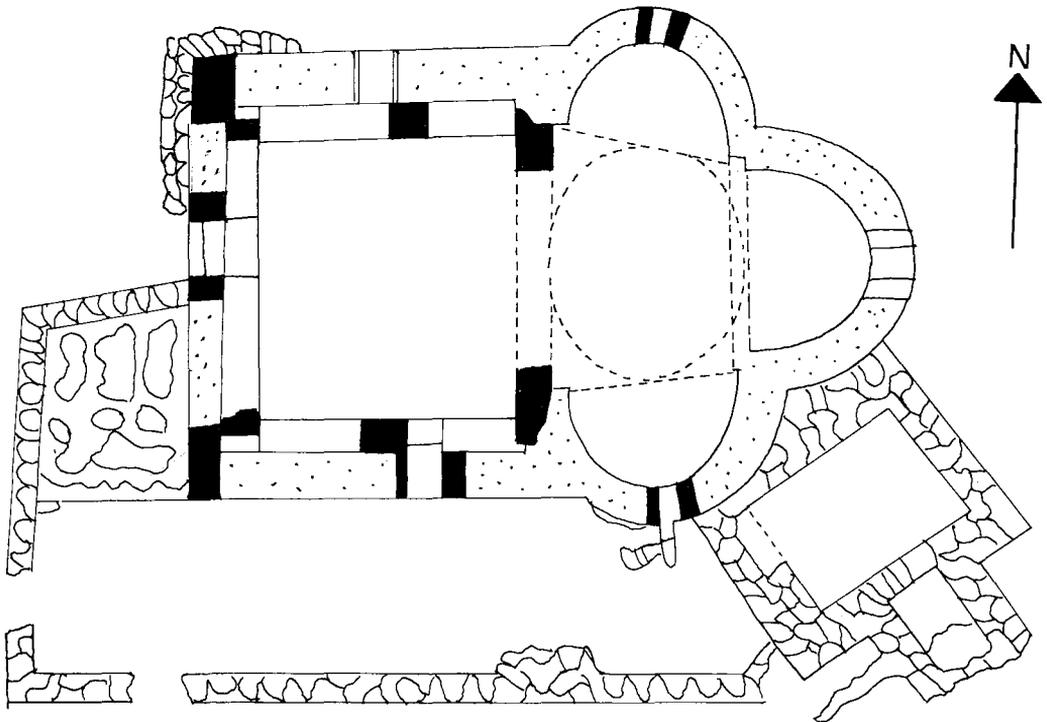


FIG. 2
Plan of The Trinity Chapel at Lérins

short nave of two vaulted bays resting on monolithic columns and leading to a triple apse (Pl. v, B). Archaeological research might perhaps determine whether this most ancient Christian building is of 5th or 7th-century origin. The chapel is surrounded by a cemetery suggesting that it may have originally served as a funerary chapel, although on the S. side there are indications of an ancient hermitage with a small cloister. Of the six other chapels the most interesting is the Chapel of Saint Sauveur which is octagonal and was thought by Prosper Mérimée¹⁴ to have been originally a baptistry.

Today it is not difficult in the silence and tranquillity at Lérins to realise how in the 5th, 6th, and 7th centuries its monastery (together with its offshoots and with St Victor at Marseilles, Fréjus and others) radiated a spiritual atmosphere based on a dedicated life of prayer and contemplation that made a profound impression on the barbarian inhabitants of France. The monastic life which Benedict Biscop shared at Lérins laid the foundation of all that was best in the Christian civilization of the West throughout the Middle Ages. Moreover just as Lérins became distinguished in the 5th and 6th centuries for its intellectual activities as a recognized centre of theological and literary studies, so the same scholarly traditions were reproduced in the monasteries of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow founded by Benedict Biscop.

One writes at length about Lérins because so relatively little has been written about it in English literature,¹⁵ and because of Benedict Biscop's association with its monastery. More familiar to English visitors are the crypt at St Victor at Marseilles and the Baptistry at Fréjus — both of which must have been visited by Wilfrid as well as Benedict Biscop.

When St Cassian founded the monastery of St Victor at *Marseilles* about 416 he found the grotto (which is still visible) which had served as a Catacomb for early Christians before the time of Constantine. He erected adjoining his Abbey church a small chapel or oratory as a 'memoria' or martyrium over the tombs of two early martyrs. This small oratory (where mass is still celebrated) today forms part of the crypt of the present church. It is basilican in shape with a nave with two aisles having vaulted arches supported not by columns but by piers.¹⁶ The apse has disappeared. The chapel is preceded by a vast Atrium, which seems disproportionately large in comparison with the chapel, but is a reminder that in the primitive Christian church it was necessary to accommodate large numbers of neophytes or catechumens awaiting instruction before they could receive baptism and be admitted to the main church.

The significance of baptism in the early Church is emphasized by the grandeur and elaborate size and decoration of a number of 4th, 5th, and 6th-century baptistries — notable examples of which survive at Fréjus and Poitiers, but were common throughout Gaul. A less well-known example is at the Abbey of Port Bail in Normandy founded c.693 where excavations are currently taking place.¹⁷ A baptistry was an essential adjunct to any early Christian cathedral or church, and many survive today (inter alia) in the Holy Land, in Greece, in Italy, in Asia Minor and in North Africa. A particularly fine specimen is the superb baptistry in mosaic of the 6th century from Kelibia now to be seen (with special permission) at the Bardot Museum in Tunis. One observes that there are no known baptistries in Anglo-Saxon

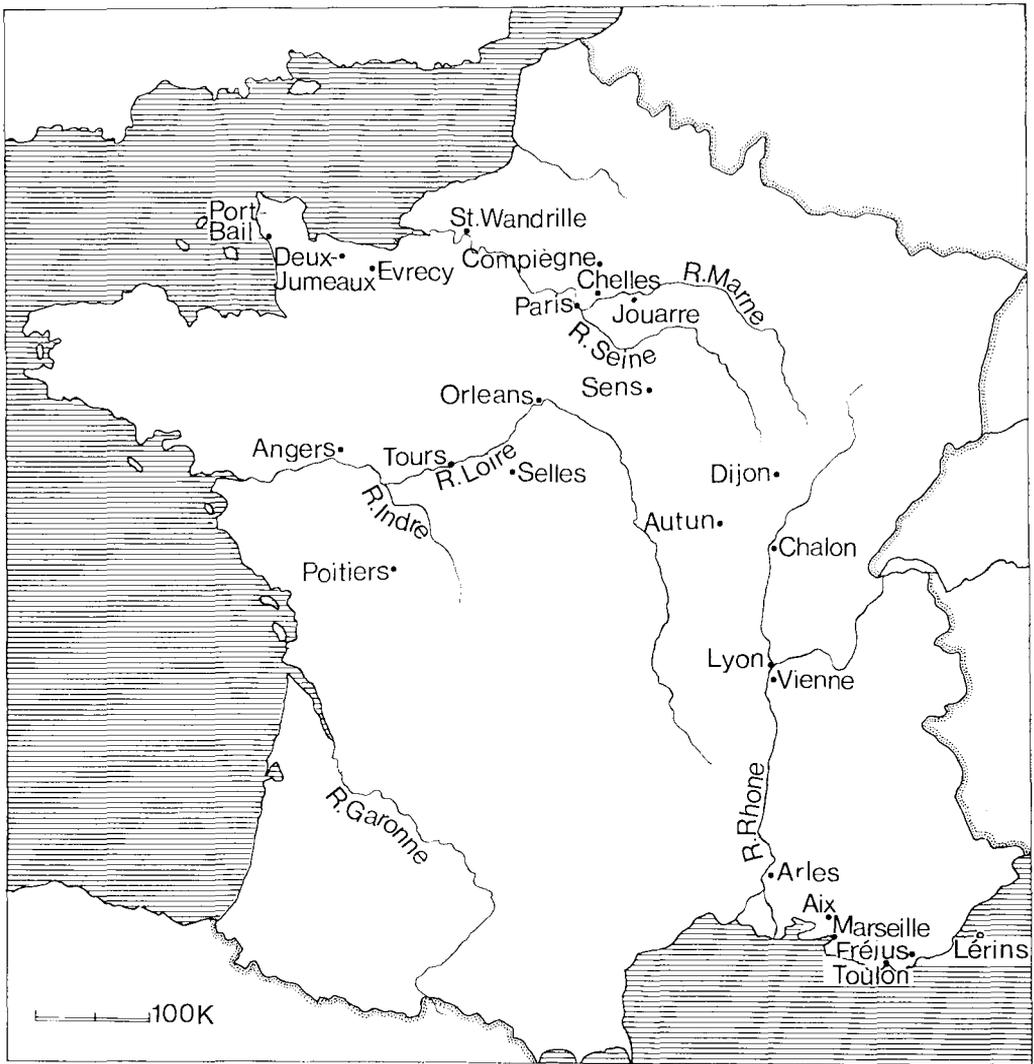


FIG. 3
Map of sites in Gaul mentioned in the text

England.¹⁸ Prolonged preparation for baptism was inappropriate in the case of mass conversions. Both Augustine and Paulinus used the local river or stream for baptismal purposes as did Birinus at Dorchester and were following the precedent set by Philip and the Ethiopian.¹⁹

We have no positive evidence of the routes taken by Wilfrid or Benedict Biscop in their journeys in Gaul and only incidental references to some of the cities they visited. We can surmise the route taken earlier by Augustine from the list of letters of introduction sent by Pope Gregory²⁰ and from the subsequent commendatory

letters sent at the time of the mission of Mellitus in 601. It is reasonable to assume that any visitors from Britain to Rome passed through Marseilles, Arles, Aix en Provence, Vienne, Lyons, Autun, and Paris (see Fig. 3).

Arles succeeded Trier as the seat of the imperial court when Trier was threatened by the barbarians, and became the senior metropolitan see of the Gaulish Church. Three British bishops attended the Council of Arles which met as early as 314, only a few years after Constantine's Edict of Milan in 311. It was at Arles that Augustine came to be consecrated as Archbishop by Vergilius (who incidentally had been a monk at Lérins). But no architectural remains survive from Arles.

Vienne was a flourishing city of ecclesiastical activity in the 7th century. There are said²¹ to have been 1,165 monks and nuns in Vienne distributed among 12 monasteries in the city, and there were 60 other monasteries in the diocese. We know that Benedict Biscop visited Vienne at least twice and had friends there from whom he collected books. There was a 7th-century group of three episcopal churches, but the most impressive architectural monument is the basilica dedicated to St Pierre built in the 5th century. This has undergone many modifications since then, but follows the plan of the original foundation, and has preserved as one striking feature, the two superimposed orders of marble columns lining the side walls.²² Sir Alfred Clapham cites the unusual length of the nave of St Pierre, Vienne, in proportion to its breadth as indicating the affinity between the churches in Gaul and those of Northumbria.²³ Excavations have been taking place since 1977 of the 5th-century church of St Ferreol outre Rhone, Vienne.

There is nothing surviving from *Lyons* where Wilfrid spent three years which has any bearing on our subject although great antiquity is ascribed to the crypt at Sainte Irénee.

At *Autun* the Abbey Church of St Martin was founded between 589 and 600 by Queen Brunhild the Visigothic princess married to one of the grandsons of Clovis, the aunt of Queen Bertha of Kent, and a dominant figure at the Merovingian court. With the aid of ancient descriptions of the church M Jean Hubert has published a reconstruction of the plan.²⁴ This, if authentic, shows a nave flanked by two aisles with a narrow apse at the E. end and a projection further E. for a lady chapel. At the W. end there are two porticos entered from the nave. This church with its great vaulted roof and walls built of blocks of stone from 3 to 5 feet long bound together with bands of iron rather than cement drew the admiration of the engineers who viewed it before its destruction in 1741.²⁵

It is however from the Merovingian achievements in the Paris region and North-West Gaul that influence on Northumbria seems to have been particularly derived. The Franks were the last of the barbarian invaders (until the much later Vikings) to be converted to Christianity. But they were the first to establish a strong monarchy throughout Gaul. Clovis and his successors having conquered their enemies maintained themselves by bloodthirsty cruelties which enabled them to produce a considerable degree of stability. Without this stability the monasteries in Northern France which became the guarantee of Western civilization would not have been possible. The monastic movement of the 6th century was given a further impetus in the 7th following the arrival in 595 and missionary zeal of Columbanus.²⁶

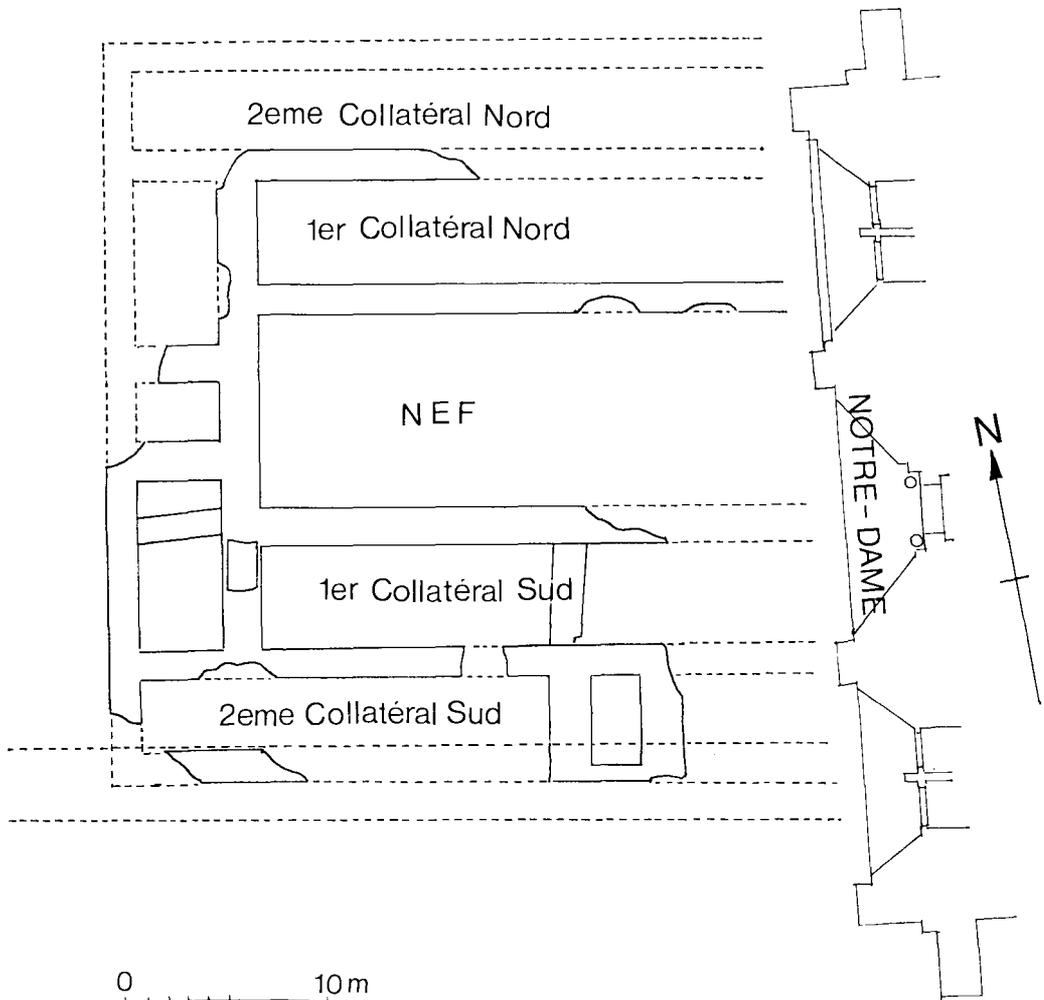


FIG. 4
Plan of St Etienne's Cathedral in Paris

Though the evidence of Merovingian architecture is sparse, enough remains to enable us to appreciate its size and magnificence.

One must begin with the Merovingian Cathedral of St Etienne in *Paris*. The remains of a group of episcopal churches in Paris going back to Merovingian times have been known since the middle of the 19th century. The former excavations were described by Hubert in an article first published in 1964 and recently reprinted.²⁷ These have been recently re-examined in the light of further excavations by M Michel Fleury, Director of Ancient Monuments in the Paris region. Fleury has published his conclusions in an article²⁸ from which the attached plan is taken (Fig. 4). This plan shows a basilica with a façade (the foundations of which in fact can be seen) 135 feet (35 m) long, corresponding to a central nave of 34 feet (10 m)

flanked on each side by double aisles, the interior of 5 m in width and the external of 3.20 to 3.60 m. The length of the basilica cannot be precisely known because the eastern part lies under the present Notre-Dame but would presumably be at least double the width, giving a measurement of 70 m or 270 feet. In the centre of the façade massive foundations have been found, presumably for a tower.

Fleury observes that a grandiose monument of this size was at that time unique in Europe outside Rome and was perhaps inspired by St Peter's and St John Lateran. The date of St Etienne is a matter of conjecture. It must have been built by Clovis or by one of his sons or grandsons. Fleury, after examining the alternatives, takes the view that it was constructed by Childebert, 'roi de Paris', during his long reign from 511 to 558. Substantial parts of the Merovingian foundations and walls are to be seen (by arrangement) under the Parvis of Notre-Dame, and for the benefit of the public the outlines of the end of the Merovingian cathedral are traced in distinctive coloured stone on the Parvis.²⁹

One must therefore visualize the Merovingian cathedral of St Etienne as being of the same size and grandeur as the present Notre-Dame. One knows the impression made by Notre-Dame on modern visitors to Paris. Similar emotions must have been produced by St Etienne on Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop when they were there in the 7th century. Was it at St Etienne that was held the great Council of Paris of 641 attended by almost all the archbishops and bishops of France and two members of Augustine's Church in Kent?

Wilfrid after his return to England in c.658 came under the patronage of Agilbert, formerly Bishop of the West Saxons, subsequently Bishop of Paris, who ordained him a priest in 663. After his forensic success at the Council of Whitby in 664 Wilfrid was chosen as head of the Northumbrian Church. He immediately proceeded to Gaul and was consecrated a bishop at Compiègne by Agilbert together with eleven other Merovingian bishops. After his consecration he stayed on in France for some two years with Agilbert his patron and host. He would thus have had first hand experience not only of Agilbert's Cathedral of St Etienne, but also of the *nearby* Abbey Church of St Denis. We may reasonably suppose that he visited some of the many other 7th-century monasteries being established in the neighbourhood, Jouarre, Chelles, Faremoutiers, Saint Faron and elsewhere, all within a few miles E. of Paris on the R. Marne.

Benedict Biscop must have had a similar opportunity of studying the masterpieces of Merovingian architecture. After staying at Lérins and again visiting Rome he accompanied to Britain Theodore of Tarsus, the inspired nominee of Pope Vitalian to the vacant archiepiscopal see of Canterbury. They spent the winter of 668/69 with Bishop Agilbert in Paris.

Fortunately enough remains from literary sources and recent excavations to enable us to assert that St Etienne in Paris just described was not unique among Merovingian monuments.

The literary evidence is that King Dagobert I in 634 granted the monastery of St Denis permission to establish an annual fair, which was soon visited by Anglo-Saxon merchants.³⁰ Recent excavations indicate that the primitive 5th-century church ascribed to Sainte Geneviève was enlarged, and that in the mid 7th century

there was a basilica 44 m in length with an eastern apse and 16 m in width. The accompanying figure is conjectural (Fig. 5).³¹ This was the burial chamber of the Merovingian royal house. Clapham has observed that Wilfrid's crypt at Hexham bears a close resemblance to the crypt in Dagobert's church.³²

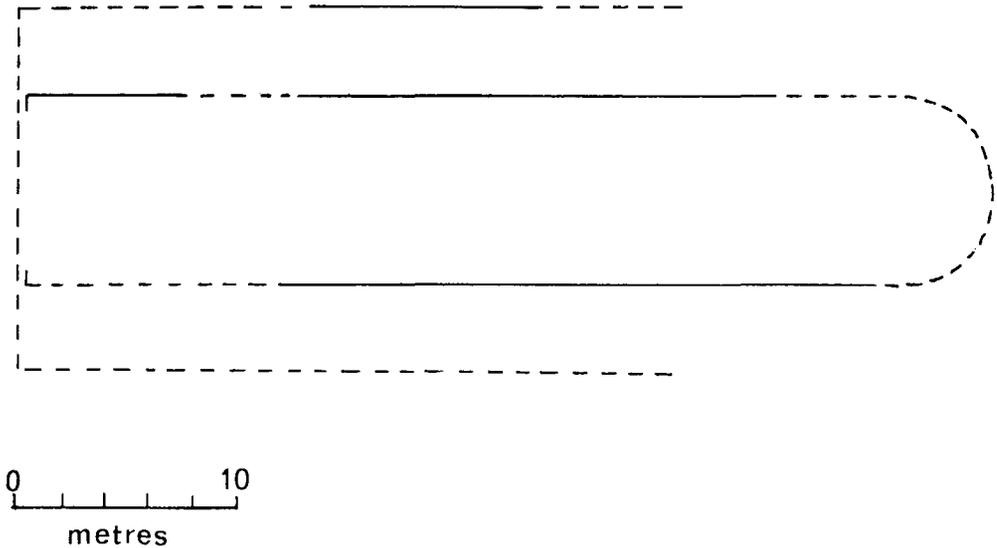


FIG. 5
Outline plan of St Denis in the time of Dagobert

It was the custom in the 7th century for the Anglo-Saxon kings to send their daughters to Chelles, Jouarre, or one of the other Gallic monasteries for monastic instruction and general culture (much as in recent years many aristocratic English families have sent their daughters to 'finishing schools' in Paris). These 7th-century princesses often returned to England to become later the heads of Anglo-Saxon double monasteries.³³

Thus Earconbert King of Kent sent his daughter Earcongota to one of these Merovingian monasteries. Anna King of East Anglia sent his daughter Saethryth and his step-daughter Aethelburh or in French Aubierge to Faremoutiers, where they both became abbesses. Others such as Ethelberga, Mildred, Milburga and Hilda's sister Hereswith returned to preside over a double monastery in England. Chelles, as well as Corbie in Picardy, was founded by Queen Balthild who was of Anglo-Saxon parentage and married to King Clovis II (639-57).³⁴ Hilda herself before becoming Abbess of Whitby had intended to go to Chelles, but for some reason unknown abandoned her intention.³⁵

The case of Milburga the daughter of King Herawald of Mercia who returned to England to become Abbess of Much Wenlock is particularly instructive.³⁶ It is not surprising that a powerful Anglo-Saxon king should wish to have one of his family (preferably a daughter) to occupy a prominent place in the political and

religious life of his kingdom and there is every likelihood that the Abbey of Much Wenlock with its large possessions combined administrative with religious functions, particularly in a place of strategic importance.

Of these Merovingian monasteries the best known is *Jouarre* because in the crypt of Jouarre a fragment of the monastery, but only a fragment, yet of great significance, still survives in situ. It has been the subject of much controversy by French historians, and has recently been exhaustively considered in a voluminous posthumous publication by the Marquise de Maillé.³⁷ It is not easy, despite the detailed descriptions given by the Marquise de Maillé, to visualize a reconstruction of the crypt as seen in Wilfrid's day. The Monastery of Jouarre was founded about 630 by Adon, whose niece Theodechilde, sister of Agilbert, became the first Abbess. It suffered several vicissitudes during the centuries since its foundation in the 7th century. Today one sees two adjoining crypts. They were the object of substantial repair and restoration between 1632 and 1640. They were then for a time lost from view. Extensive archaeological excavations were undertaken by Abbé Thiercelin in 1869 and 1870.³⁸

The date of the crypt of St Paul (Pl. vi) was for a long time the subject of controversy. It was once thought to be either Gallo-Roman or a Roman construction. It is now confidently established, thanks to the work of Hubert, as a 7th-century construction.³⁹ A manuscript of 1656 recites that it was built by Agilbert himself. It is technically described as an 'augmentum' to a funerary church and was built as a family mausoleum for the founders of the Abbey and their near relations.

One enters the crypt by descending some twelve steps but originally the crypt, constructed as a mausoleum, was built on the natural rock at ground level. The rise in the surrounding levels shows that, as with the Repton crypt in Derbyshire, what was originally a structure at ground level has in the course of time become partly submerged. It may well be the case that in subsequent rebuilding at Jouarre this original mausoleum was converted into an actual crypt beneath the sanctuary of a later church that has since disappeared.

One of the outstanding features uncovered during the excavations of Abbé Thiercelin is the beautiful decorated wall of the 7th century in the style known as 'opus reticulatum'. It forms a mosaic in stone with an inlaid pattern of successive bands of stone laid in rectangular, square, lozenge and octagonal design. It is paralleled in the somewhat later two-storied gatehouse at Lorsch.

The vaulting in the crypt of St Paul as changed in the 17th-century restorations rests on six ancient columns of different coloured marble — presumably reused from a Roman building — surmounted by 'Corinthianesque' capitals (see Pl. vi). These are described by G. T. Rivoira as Merovingian.⁴⁰ De Lasteyrie suggests that they date from the 4th or 5th century.⁴¹ The Marquise de Maillé considers that they were produced in the 7th century from a quarry in the Pyrenees, at a workshop where similar capitals were made and distributed throughout Gaul. The Marquise de Maillé, like Hubert, considers these columns and capitals to have been part of the original construction of the crypt.

This is not the occasion to dwell on the remarkable sculpture on the tombs and sarcophagi in the crypt. For our purpose it is merely necessary to stress that the

surviving crypt at Jouarre is indicative of a large basilican complex of a type existing in the 7th century with which both Wilfrid and Biscop must have been familiar.

Of the eight tombs in the crypt the cenotaph of Theodechilde occupies the place of honour. In its sheer nobility and elegance, it is one of the most perfect works of the Middle Ages. The cenotaph of Sainte Aguilberte also bears distinctive marks of the Merovingian aesthetic taste for ornamentation. The repetition of circles, squares and diamond shapes on the tomb of Sainte Aguilberte produces a geometrical beauty and sense of mystique.

It is, however, the sarcophagus of Agilbert, traditionally said to have been designed by Agilbert himself, that is of particular interest to English readers because of its unique sculptural decoration (Pl. VII, A). In conformity with the practice of the time, the tomb is decorated on two faces only — one of the lateral faces and the top of the tomb. Since the tomb no longer occupies its original position in the crypt it is only the lateral face that is visible today. The Marquise de Maillé has, however, reproduced a photograph of a moulding made about 1870 of the bas-relief at the top of the tomb. The tomb of Agilbert, the patron of Wilfrid and the host of Biscop, in the crypt of Jouarre is the symbol of the close connection between Merovingian culture and Northumbrian architecture towards the end of the 7th century. For the purposes of this article the significance of the crypt at Jouarre is that it was merely a funerary church or mausoleum forming part of a large monastic complex with two or three churches and the usual conventual and domestic buildings required for a substantial community able to live in civilized and comfortable conditions, if not indeed in luxury.⁴² We know that Jouarre was sufficiently large and important to be able to furnish a quantity of nuns for the establishment of the monasteries at Chelles in 660 and at Soissons in 667.

There is nothing today to be seen at *Chelles* beyond the presumed site of the monastery. There are three sites of Merovingian buildings in Normandy which could have been visited by Wilfrid or Benedict Biscop and have not been well publicized in England. Of these the most picturesque is at Fontenelle.

In 650 St Wandrille built and endowed a monastery at *Fontenelle*⁴³ (now known as St Wandrille), building within or for it a large basilica of squared stone and three oratories.⁴⁴ The monastery was destroyed, but there still stands on the perimeter of the present Abbey the curious and attractive Chapel of St Saturnin (Fig. 6; Pl. VII, B). This is clearly a very early construction; it is thought to be on the site and to follow the plan of one of the original three Merovingian oratories.⁴⁵ If one assumes that the present Abbey occupies the extent of the Merovingian foundation and its successors then the relationship of this surviving oratory on the perimeter of the main monastic buildings is surely an indication of the vast size and importance of this Merovingian monastery.

Deux Jumeaux and *Evrecy* are two important sites in the context of Merovingian culture. *Deaux Jumeaux* is 20 km W. of Bayeux. *Evrecy* is 15 km SW. of Caen. The distance between them is some 45 km or approximately 30 miles. They formed a double monastery like Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. The historical evidence that they were ruled by a single abbot, Abbot Annobert, at the end of the 7th century, has been confirmed by archaeological evidence. A series of important excavations at

Deux Jumeaux was undertaken by M l'Abbé Jean Langlois and M Lucien Musset between 1958 and 1961 and is fully documented in a detailed publication by the latter.⁴⁶ Both monasteries were founded in the 7th century, that of Deux Jumeaux being apparently somewhat earlier in date than Evrecy, and both disappeared under the Norman invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries.

The excavations at Deux Jumeaux have revealed the foundations of two small rectangular churches, one of which by virtue of containing a sarcophagus of Merovingian type is assumed to have been a sepulchral church. These buildings were in close proximity to a Roman villa of the 2nd — 4th centuries, which it is conjectured served as the habitation for the earliest monks. No other conventual buildings have come to light. The excavations have however produced a large quantity of ceramic material and Merovingian sculpture, as have those at Evrecy. Musset has drawn a plan of the foundations of the Merovingian churches at Deux Jumeaux as well as a plan of the later church at Evrecy.⁴⁷ Little is known of the Merovingian buildings at Evrecy.

Whereas, however, the excavations at Deux Jumeaux have added little to our appreciation of the architectural distinctions of this double monastery, the large and imposing quantity of sculptural remains at both sites is an invaluable source of information about the chronological development of sculpture in Gaul and its use as architectural decoration. There would seem to be resemblances between the sculpture used for architectural decoration at Deux Jumeaux and Evrecy with that found in Northumbria at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. It has also been suggested that the incised baluster shafts at Evrecy are similar to those found at Monkwearmouth

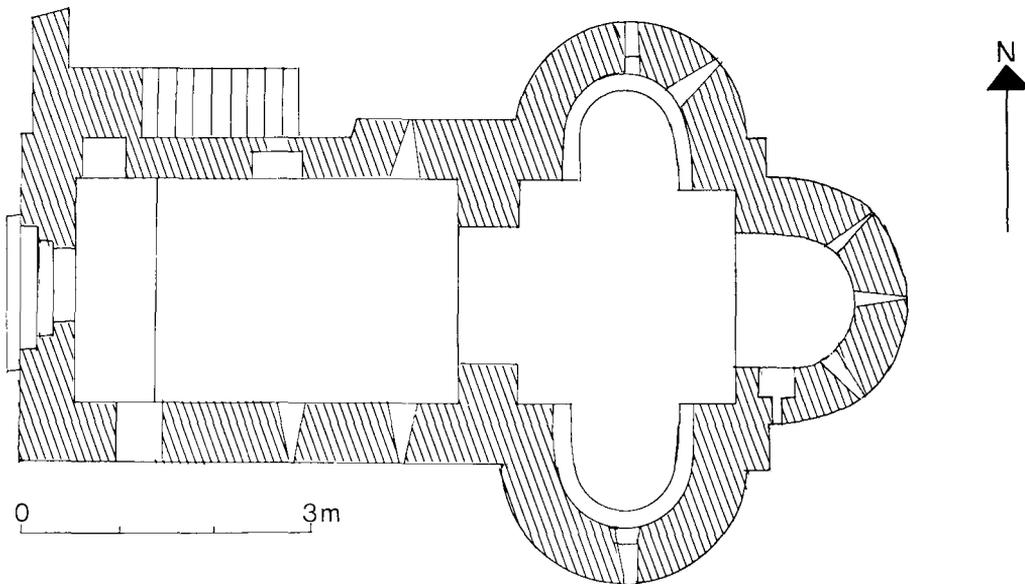


FIG. 6
Plan of St Saturnin, Fontenelle

and Jarrow.⁴⁸ This ancient sculpture is in any circumstances indicative of the grandeur and importance of the double monastery of Deux Jumeaux and Evrecy.

Against this background it would not be surprising that when Wilfrid embarked on his ambitious projects in Northumbria he relied on the expertise of the Merovingian architects, stone-masons and craftsmen whom he had collected in Gaul.⁴⁹ His retinue is said to have numbered 120. For three years between 666 and 669 he was frustrated in his ministry in Northumbria and exercised episcopal functions in Mercia. It is at least possible that during this period he built the well-known but enigmatic church at Brixworth — a typical Roman basilica if there was one in England. Wilfrid, when restored by Archbishop Theodore as Bishop of the North, set about the repair of the church at York and the construction or reconstruction of the two famous monasteries associated with his name — Ripon in 671, and Hexham in 673. It is true that Eddius does not state expressly that the architects and masons included in Wilfrid's retinue came from Gaul and were Merovingians, but it would seem reasonably certain that they had been recruited by Wilfrid during his two-year stay in Gaul, while he was making preparations for his episcopate in Northumbria. It has however been stated by some historians that the masons who accompanied Wilfrid were not Merovingian but came from Italy. This error, as Baldwin Brown pointed out,⁵⁰ was due to a misreading of Eddius by William of Malmesbury and Prior Richard of Hexham and was typical of the Romanizing tendencies of 12th-century writers.

Ripon was a basilican structure of dressed stonework carried up to the summit with the support of numerous columns and aisles.⁵¹ St Andrew's Hexham was even more elaborate.⁵² It was 100 feet long and 65 feet wide. The nave was divided into four bays by three massive rectangular piers on each side. 'There were crypts of wonderfully dressed stone, and manifold buildings above ground, supported by various columns and side aisles, and adorned with walls of notable length and height, surrounded by various winding passages with spiral stairs leading up and down . . . nor have we heard of any other house on this side of the Alps built on such a scale'. Wilfrid may have been inspired by the magnificent 4th and 5th-century basilicas and other churches he had seen in Rome, but they were not contemporary buildings, and therefore for architects and masons who knew how to erect comparative buildings he was dependent on Gallic, not Italian, architects and masons. Similarly, there is no doubt about the provenance of the architects and stone-masons employed by Benedict Biscop for the building of his twin monastery of Monkwearmouth (674) and Jarrow (682).⁵³

Biscop on arriving in England with Theodore in 669 for two years presided over the monastery of St Peter's (later called St Augustine's) at Canterbury. He then made a further visit to Rome to collect books and relics and to make another call at Vienne. On his return he was given by King Egfrid of Northumbria a tract of land on the R. Wear to build the monastery which became St Peter Monkwearmouth.

For this purpose Biscop in 674 made a special visit to Gaul to obtain from his friend Abbot Torthelm both master builders (*architecti*) and stone-masons (*cementarii*) to build a church in the Roman style which he had always admired.

One observes that whereas Wilfrid when he left Gaul in 666 fully intended as Bishop of York to build churches and monasteries and for this purpose had collected a retinue to accompany him to Britain, Biscop on the other hand when he left Gaul in 669 to become Abbot of St Augustine's had no immediate intention of building. It was only after two years at Canterbury that he was asked to set up monasteries in Northumbria and given land for that purpose. Accordingly he had to make a special journey to Gaul to recruit the necessary technicians.

It will be appreciated that the reference in the Latin texts, to '*juxta Romanorum*' or '*more Romanorum*' does not imply any direct importation from Rome or even from Italy. By Roman style is meant the form in use throughout the Roman Empire, including Gaul. In a narrower sense it may merely indicate a building in stone or brick as distinct from timber ('*more Scottorum*').⁵⁴

Because of the former tendency among historians of Saxon architecture to turn to Italy for prototypes one must stress that whereas both Biscop and Wilfrid went to Rome to collect books, pictures, manuscripts, relics and ornaments and to study Roman liturgy and Canon law, they turned to Merovingian Gaul for architects, stone-masons and craftsmen to build their churches. Furthermore, when Monkwearmouth was nearing completion Biscop sent to Gaul for glass makers to glaze the windows of the church, the cloisters and the refectories.⁵⁵

If one asks why both Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop needed to obtain from Merovingian Gaul both architects to design and craftsmen to build their ambitious structures the answer is two-fold. The skilled men they wanted to build their churches and monastic buildings did not exist in Northumbria and perhaps not in Britain — but were available in Gaul.

We know very little of the 7th-century monasteries established in Britain prior to Wilfrid's time. They have recently been exhaustively reviewed by Professor Rosemary Cramp.⁵⁶ Some of the most important, e.g. Tynemouth and Hartlepool, seem to have contained only timber buildings.⁵⁷ In those cases such as Whitby, where there were stone buildings, they seem to have been of a simple and unsophisticated type. There was indeed a group of early and mid 7th-century stone buildings in Kent and elsewhere, St Pancras Canterbury, St Peter and St Paul Canterbury, St Andrew Rochester, Reculver, St Mary Lyminge, and possibly St Peter-on-the-Wall, Bradwell, all built by masons who accompanied St Augustine and Paulinus and were the result of or inspired by the Italian missions. They are all relatively simple unambitious structures sharply divided from the Northumbrian group of some years later built by Wilfrid and Biscop. The early church at York was so ineptly built that it soon collapsed and became in a ruinous condition.⁵⁸ Nevertheless Wilfrid found it worthwhile to restore it and have it glazed. A more remarkable stone church built by Paulinus at Lincoln was also in ruins in Bede's day as a result of neglect or enemy damage.⁵⁹

There were indeed several Roman buildings still standing in Northumbria to be copied if one knew the technique and had the necessary skill and expertise. In Wilfrid's time this skill and technique was available in Merovingian Gaul, but not in Northumbria. We may well regard a Merovingian monastery as being a prototype copied by Benedict Biscop for Monkwearmouth-Jarrow.

Our appreciation of the size and grandeur and resources of the Northumbrian monasteries of 671–82 has been transformed in the last few decades by the important archaeological research undertaken by Professor Cramp of Durham. Thanks to Professor Cramp we can now visualize Monkwearmouth-Jarrow as substantial, well-built, stone monasteries equipped with comfortable and perhaps sumptuous quarters plastered inside and out, including a library and scriptorium around a cloister and available for a large number of inmates with facilities for writing and study, as well as for devotional purposes.⁶⁰ Professor Cramp has found quantities of glass fragments at Monkwearmouth corroborating the statement by Bede that Benedict Biscop imported glass-makers from Gaul.

It is some indication of the size and scope of the monastery at Jarrow that it was only in the third year after its foundation that work began on building the church.⁶¹ The establishment of the domestic monastic quarters obviously had priority.

It might not be too much to argue that Wilfrid and Biscop by their introduction into Northumbria of Merovingian architects and craftsmen brought about a revolution in British methods of church and monastic architecture. Nothing of the size of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, nothing of the elaborate structure of Hexham had been attempted before. One must of course enter a caveat about Brixworth, which, if it is to be regarded as a 7th-century building, is more likely to owe its inspiration and foundation to Wilfrid than to anybody else.

If this general thesis is accepted one must conclude that the best examples of Northumbrian architecture in the 7th century were the result of Merovingian experience and influence.⁶²

NOTES

¹ The substance of this paper was given in an abbreviated form to the Society's conference at Poitiers in March 1979.

² H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity* (Bristol, 1972), 83–84. J. Hubert, *L'Europe des Invasions* (Paris, 1967), has printed a map showing those founded in the 7th century.

³ *The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrid*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), c. 6.

⁴ One of the perennial problems in this field is, when looking at a Romanesque edifice of the 11th century or later which supersedes an earlier structure, to say how much of the underlying remains are Merovingian or Carolingian.

⁵ E.g. the description of the church at Nantes by Venantius Fortunatus in *Opera Poetica* III 7 and other texts mentioned by E. James, *Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul*, I (Oxford, B.A.R. Int. ser. 25, pt. i, 1977), chapter 8.

⁶ J. Hubert, *Europe in the Dark Ages* (English trans. by S. Gilbert and J. Emmons, London, 1969), 42.

⁷ J. De Lasteyrie, *L'Architecture Religieuse en France à l'Époque Romane* (Paris, 1929), 37.

⁸ 'des constructeurs soucieux de les observer, et des ouvriers capables de construire des églises en grand appareil'. De Lasteyrie adds 'Architectural art continued in a declining form until the Carolingian Renaissance. But it never fell so low with us as it did in Italy, and I doubt whether that country preserved, during the sad days of the 7th and 8th centuries the spirit of originality which our architects manifested.'

⁹ It has been suggested by P. Wormald in *Famulus Christi*, ed. G. Bonner (London, 1976), 149 that Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 18 implies that Benedict Biscop (accompanied by the Archchanter John) visited Tours. From *Historia Abbatum*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1896), para. 3 and Plummer's note on p. 357 it is clear that Benedict Biscop came to Britain with Theodore in 669 and was not detained in Gaul with Hadrian.

¹⁰ The only authority I know for this is contained in *L'Île et L'Abbaye de Lérins* (1930) by the Abbot of Lérins, p. 49.

¹¹ There is some doubt whether this was in 658/9 or later.

¹² This subject is fully discussed in an article by Wormald, *op. cit.* note 9, 141, and also by H. Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede, The Rule of St Benedict, and social class* (Jarrow lecture, 1976).

¹³ This is fully described with photographs and plans in an article by M. F. Benoit, 'Les chapelles triconques Paléochrétiennes de la Trinité de Lérins et de la Gayole', *Rivista di Archaeologia Christiani*, xxiii–xxv (1947–49), 129–42.

¹⁴ P. Mérimée, *Notes d'un voyage dans le midi de la France* (Paris, 1835).

¹⁵ There is a vast literature about Lérins in French. A full bibliography is contained in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, Tome 8^e (Paris, 1929). Cf. in particular Mérimée, op. cit. note 14; H. Morris, *L'Abbaye de Lérins* (Plons, 1909); and the Abbot of Lérins, op. cit. note 10.

¹⁶ M. F. Benoit, *L'Abbaye de Saint-Victor à Marseilles* (Petites monographies des grands édifices de France, Paris, 1936). See also E. Mâle, *La Fin du Paganisme en Gaule* (Paris, 1950), 155 and 326; and Hubert, op. cit. note 2, 10.

¹⁷ A. A. Miçlot, *La Petite Histoire de Port-Bail* (1966).

¹⁸ P. D. C. Brown, *Britannia*, II (1977), 225-31 suggests that remains of a possible baptistry from Roman Britain survive at Richborough. There was possibly but doubtfully one at the Lullingstone House Church. It has also been suggested by N. Davey, *Wiltshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Mag.*, LIX (1964), 116-23, that there was a baptistry forming part of a 10th-century timber church at Potterne, Wilts.

¹⁹ Acts 8, 35.

²⁰ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I. 24. *The Atlas of the Early Christian World* (London and Edinburgh, 1958), 40, traces the conjectured route taken by Augustine.

²¹ Vita Clari (*A. A. ss* Jan. 1st, Vol. 1, 55-56). This information is taken from an article by I. Wood, 'A prelude to Columbanus: the monastic achievement in the Burgundian territories', to be published shortly.

²² Hubert, op. cit. note 2, 27; and De Lasteyrie, op. cit. note 7, 43.

²³ A. W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture before the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1930), 42.

²⁴ Hubert, op. cit. note 2, plan no. 71.

²⁵ James, op. cit. note 5, 271.

²⁶ As P. Lasko puts it in *The Dark Ages*, ed. D. Talbot Rice (London, 1965), 215, the floodgates were open to monastic expansion between 610 and 650 and by the end of the 7th century there were over 400 monasteries in existence.

²⁷ *Mémoires et Documents Publiés par la Société de L'Ecole Des Chartes* (1964), being a collection of articles by J. Hubert.

²⁸ M. Fleury, 'La Cathédrale merovingienne Saint-Etienne de Paris', *Landschaft und Geschichte, Festschrift für Franz Petri* (1970), 211-21, reviewed by F. Salet, *Bulletin Monumental*, CXXVIII (1970), 320. Fleury has supplemented his research by further excavations reported in *Gallia — Fouilles et Monuments Archéologiques en France Métropolitaine*, xxxiii (1975), Fascicule 2.

²⁹ A photograph is published in *L'Archéologie à Paris* (1976).

³⁰ Cf. W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the eighth century* (Oxford, 1946), 7.

³¹ The most authoritative account in English of the Abbey of St Denis is Professor Crosby's first volume, *The Abbey of St. Denis 475-1122* (Yale Univ. Press, Hist. Pubs. in the History of Art, Vol. III (1942)), chapter IV, 65-73. Further light on the church in Dagobert's time must await Professor Crosby's report on the important excavations currently in progress. The measurements in the accompanying figure follow the plan published by M. Fleury, *Document-Archéologia*, xxxii (jan.-fev. 1979).

³² Clapham, op. cit. note 23, 45.

³³ J. Campbell has pointed out in his stimulating article, 'The first century of Christianity in England', *Ampleforth Jnl.*, LXXVI pt. I (Spring, 1971), 12-29, that it is not only in monastic associations that there is considerable evidence of close relationship between Britain and Merovingian Gaul in the 7th century.

³⁴ Cf. Levison, op. cit. note 30, 9, 10.

³⁵ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV, 23.

³⁶ St Milburga's Testament drawn up by St Milburga herself has been translated by H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester Univ. Press, 1961), 197-216, and other medieval manuscripts relating to Much Wenlock have been considered by A. Edwards in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis for the Univ. of London. See also E. D. C. Jackson and E. G. M. Fletcher, 'The pre-Conquest churches of Much Wenlock', *Jnl. British Archaeol. Assoc.*, xxviii (1965), 16-38.

³⁷ Marquise de Maillé, *Les Cryptes de Jouarre* (Paris, 1971).

³⁸ Thanks to the research of the present archivist at Jouarre, R. M. Telchilde de Montessus, the manuscript notes of Abbé Thiercélin have recently come to light and were made available to the Marquise de Maillé.

³⁹ J. Hubert, *Les Cryptes de Jouarre* (4th Congress de l'Art du Haut Moyen Age, Melun, 1952).

⁴⁰ G. T. Rivoira, *Lombardic Architecture*, II (London, 1910), 51.

⁴¹ De Lasteyrie, op. cit. note 7, 113.

⁴² Campbell, op. cit. note 33, 25, observes that the Gallic monasteries were supplied with buildings of some splendour.

⁴³ Near Caudebec on the right bank of the Seine, and near Jumièges, and opposite to the celebrated (and later) Abbey of Bec.

⁴⁴ M. Deanesley, 'Early English and Gallic minsters', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 4th ser., xxiii (1941), 40.

⁴⁵ L. Musset, *Normandie Romane — La Haute-Normandie* (1974), 259. The accompanying plan (Fig. 6) is taken from a recent article by B. Hernad, *Cahier* (Univ. of Paris X — Nanterre Centre de Recherche sur L'Antiquité Tardive et le Haut Moyen Age), xi (1977), 124.

⁴⁶ L. Musset, 'Deux Jumeaux, Resultat des fouilles sur le site de l'ancien prieuré (1958-1961)', *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie*, LVI (1961), 469-568. There is also a summary and review by M. de Bouard in *Gallia*, xxii (1964), 284.

⁴⁷ L. Musset, 'L'Eglise d'Evrecy (Calvados) et ses sculptures préromanes', *Bulletin des Antiquaires de Normandie*, LIII (1955-56), 116-68.

⁴⁸ Cf. Campbell, *op. cit.* note 33, 25.

⁴⁹ Eddius, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. xiv: '*Cementarius omnisque paene artis institoribus*'.

⁵⁰ G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, II (London, 1925), 150.

⁵¹ Eddius, *op. cit.* note 49, c. xvii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, c. xxiii. For a sustained examination of Wilfrid's abbey at Hexham, see Baldwin Brown, *op. cit.* note 50, 149 seqq. See also H. M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, I (Cambridge, 1965), 297-312, and articles by E. Gilbert, 'Saint Wilfrid's church at Hexham', *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D. P. Kirby (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1974), 81-114; and by R. N. Bailey, 'The Anglo-Saxon church at Hexham', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, IV (1976), 47-67; and by R. N. Bailey and D. O'Sullivan, 'Excavations over St. Wilfrid's crypt at Hexham, 1978', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, VII (1979), 144-57.

⁵³ '*Benedictus oceano transmisso Gallias petens cementarius qui lapideam sibi ecclesiam juxta Romanorum quem semper amabat morem faceret*', *Historia Abbatum*, *op. cit.* note 9, c. 5. *The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrid*, *op. cit.* note 3, c. 7 written some fourteen years before Bede reads '*Secundo fundati monasterii anno, Benedictus mare transiens architectos a Torthelmo abbate, dudum in amicitia juncto, quorum magisterio et opere basilicam de lapide faceret, petiit, acceptos que de Gallia Britanniam perduxit*'. It has been necessary to spell out in detail the authorities for Biscop's visit to Gaul for his builders because even R. H. Hodgkin erroneously stated that they came from Italy, in *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, I (Oxford, 1935), 348.

⁵⁴ Cf. G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, II (London, 1903 edition), 32. It is not necessary to assume as Sir Alfred Clapham did that the Roman manner of building survived only in Southern Gaul and that Biscop sought his masons from Provence (*op. cit.* note 23, 50, and note on 41). Monastic buildings were much more prolific in Biscop's time in the northern parts of Merovingian Gaul.

⁵⁵ Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, *op. cit.* note 9, c. 5.

⁵⁶ R. Cramp, 'Monastic sites', in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. M. Wilson (London, 1976), 201-52.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 219-22.

⁵⁸ Eddius, *op. cit.* note 49, c. xvi.

⁵⁹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II, 16. The foundations of this church at Lincoln have recently been recovered by excavation, and reported in *Medieval Archaeology*, XXIII (1979), 214.

⁶⁰ Cramp, *op. cit.* note 56, and reports in *Medieval Archaeology*, VIII (1964), 232; IX (1965), 171; and X (1966), 170.

⁶¹ *The Anonymous Life of Ceolfrid*, *op. cit.* note 3, c. 12.

⁶² In preparing this paper for publication, I am grateful for valuable suggestions received from Dr C. A. Ralegh Radford, Professor Rosemary Cramp, Dr Richard Gem and Mrs Susan Youngs.