

THE BISHOP'S THRONE IN NORWICH CATHEDRAL

By C. A. RALEGH RADFORD

Set into a lofty platform behind the high altar of Norwich Cathedral are two upright slabs of carved stone. Both pieces have been damaged by fire and by weathering; neither is complete. The first record of these stones dates from the 18th century, when they appear in their present position in the plan published by Blomefield.¹ The platform and steps leading up to the throne have recently been renewed and a movable chair of wood set with its base between the two slabs and with its wide arms covering and protecting them.

Description

The northern stone measures 8 ins. thick and 1 ft. 11 ins. wide. The greatest height preserved is at the back, where it stands 2 ft. 3 ins. above the base. A short length cut flat at this level may form part of the original top. The rest of the upper edge is fractured and weathered. At the base a piece 1 ft. 1 in. high and 5 ins. wide has been cut out of the slab; this appears to be an original feature. The angle above this is fractured and missing, but the original rear edge survives near the top of the stone. The stone has been set 3 ins. deep into the floor, which is now bevelled off to expose this base; lack of weathering and damage to this part of the stone shows that this was the original arrangement. On the inner face, 1 ft. 6 ins. above the base (1 ft. 3 ins. above the original floor level), is a ledge 3 ins. wide, above which the slab is only 5 ins. thick. The surface for some 3 ins. above this ledge is undamaged, showing that it supported a horizontal slab of stone (Pls. IXA and B).

Except at the base, the whole outer face of the stone has been badly damaged by fire. The surface has been calcined to a depth of 2 or 3 ins., the yellow colour being burnt to a bright red, shading into pink. The face is now blackened and badly weathered, so that many fragments of the surface have become detached and have had to be replaced. Intense and prolonged heat by heavy timbers lying in contact with the stone would have been necessary to cause this degree of calcination. The subsequent weathering must also have been prolonged—of the order of a century rather than a single season of exposure. The inner face of the stone is only affected to a slight extent by fire and the part below the ledge is not weathered.

The outer angle of the front of the slab is emphasized by two vertical cuts to form an attached colonnette with a roughly moulded base. This edge must therefore have been higher to complete the colonnette with its capital, proving that the present top is damaged and not original. The inner angle is chamfered, but this appears to be a recutting. With the exception of the unweathered base, which is plain, the whole outer surface is covered with a carved design in low relief (Pl. IXc). Weathering has flattened the modelling and the subsequent detachment of certain pieces of the surface makes it difficult to recover the original

¹ F. Blomefield, *History of the County of Norfolk*, II, 489.

pattern. In the writer's opinion there was an interlaced panel with large bold coils; the strands are of varying dimensions and the arrangement is asymmetrical. Larger swellings near the centre should be interpreted as the bodies of animals or, less probably, of birds. A vine-scroll is unlikely as the coils at the base, where the surface is least damaged, curve round and do not spring from the ground.

The southern stone measures 1 ft. 6 ins. by 8 ins. and now stands 9 ins. high. About 3 ins. were set below the floor. The edge at the back is not certainly original and may have been cut. The top is now flat, but has been cut. The inner face of this stone has been heavily burnt, though not to the same extent as the outer face of the northern slab. The outer face of the stone is only affected by fire to a very limited extent. The whole surface, except the base below floor level, is weathered.

The ornament on this stone is quite different from that on the other. The only feature that corresponds is the chamfered inner angle, which, again, does not appear to be original. The curve at the top suggests the body of an animal, but, in the writer's opinion, it is not possible to determine how this was designed. A heraldically couchant position, or a beast seated on its haunches, with the forepaws erect, would seem the most likely solutions.

Date

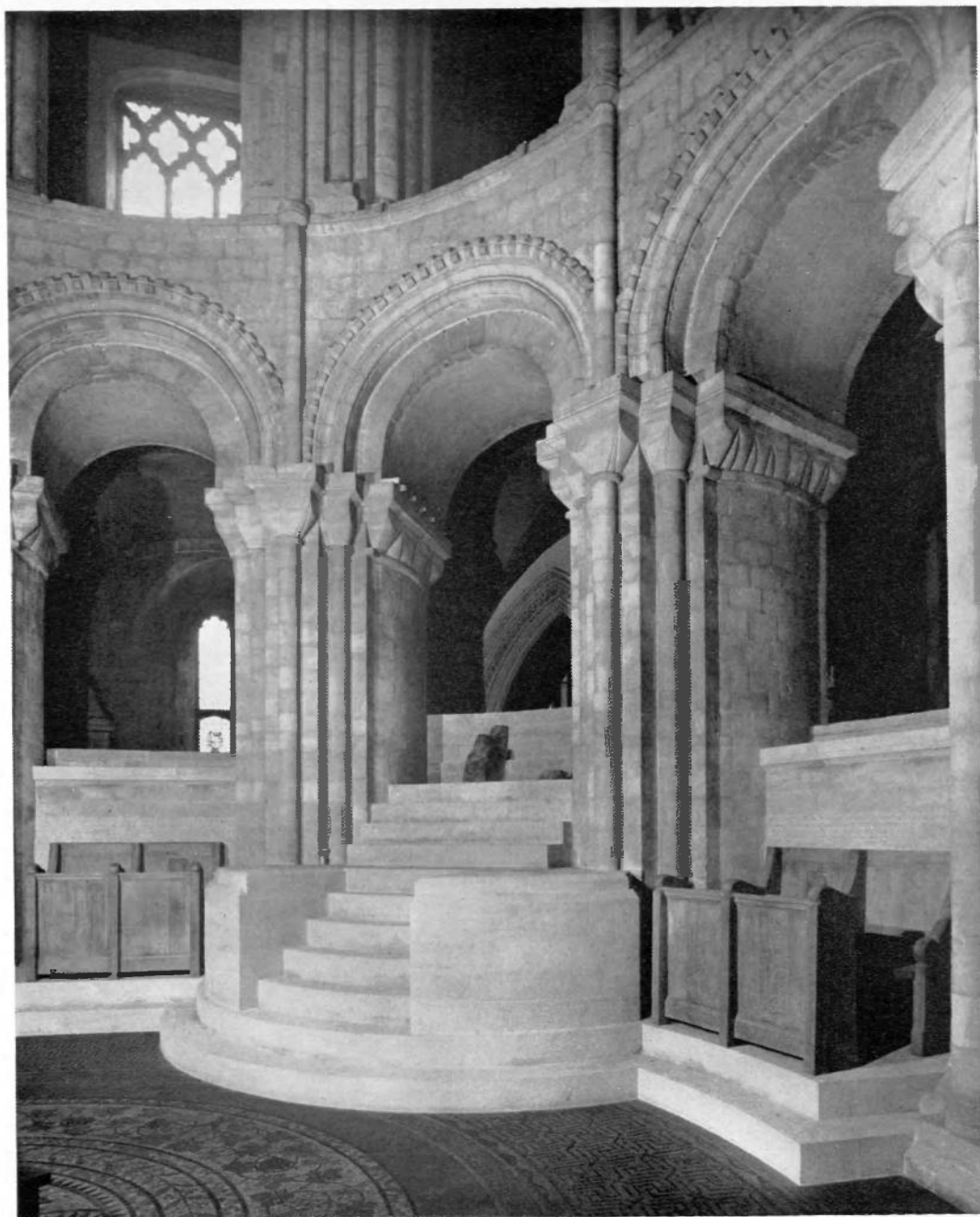
The damaged surface of the stones and their fragmentary nature make any determination of the date a matter of some hazard. It may be said at the outset that the material, the degree of weathering and the intensity of the burning can nowhere be paralleled in the adjacent parts of the cathedral. These factors alone would preclude the acceptance of the stones as Romanesque work of the late 11th or 12th century *in situ*.

The northern stone, being the larger, with a more extensive carved surface remaining, may be considered first. The design, even in the blurred and damaged state now available, is unlike Romanesque work contemporary with the east end of the cathedral. Moreover the diagonal tooling visible on the inner face of the stone lacks the regularity and the characteristic appearance of 12th-century work; at most it could be regarded as a rough retooling of this date, perhaps contemporary with the chamfered inner angle. The irregular coils of the panel on the outer face inevitably suggest a comparison with pre-Conquest work. The type to which they most nearly correspond is the 'Anglian beast'. This form is characteristic of the pre-Danish period in Mercia and was later adapted to the Scandinavian taste. The rather heavy design of the slab at Norwich finds its nearest analogies in work of the 8th century, such as the cross shafts at Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire.¹ In the same series there are also panels enclosed with arches borne by small colonnettes with moulded bases.² A local example of this type may be noted from St. Vedast, Norwich.³ The flat surface and the formalized design on this slab already show signs of Scandinavian taste;

¹ E.g., *Archaeologia*, 77, Pl. xxxv b.

² *Ibid.*, Pl. xxxix and xli.

³ *Victoria County History: Norfolk*, II, 556-7.



Norwich Cathedral. Bishop's throne, showing position in centre of apse

(*Photograph: E. C. Le Grice*)



A. The throne as reset in 1959
(*Photograph: E. C. Le Grice*)



B. The north side before restoration
(*Photograph: Norwich Castle Museum*)



C. Plaster cast of north side, 1959
(*Photograph: E. C. Le Grice*)

it has been attributed to c. A.D. 920. In spirit and in execution it is very different from the stone in the cathedral. The latter can hardly be placed in the post-Danish series, and a date before the Danish conquest of East Anglia in the third quarter of the 9th century must be postulated. Within this earlier period an ascription to the 8th century, the age of the great Mercian school, seems preferable either to the 7th century, which tends towards a more classical and naturalistic treatment of the design with the vine-scroll as a dominant theme, or the 9th century when the beast is more likely to stand out against an interlaced background.

The southern slab lacks clearly marked features. Material and damage link it with the other stone. The design does not suggest post-Conquest work. While it would be consistent with an 8th-century date, so close a determination would not, in the writer's opinion, be justified. If this slab stood alone it could not be classed more closely than pre-Conquest.

Function

The foregoing description makes it clear that the two stones do not form a pair and that their present association as sides of the throne is not original. It must further be accepted that they were brought to Norwich Cathedral from some other place. It is first necessary to consider their original function.

The northern slab may be accepted as the dexter arm of a chair or throne, with a stone seat resting on the ledge. It would have been one of a pair. The thickness of only 3 ins. for this seat, as indicated by the extent of the weathering above the ledge, would be exceptional in a structure of this sort. It may perhaps be explained by the rebating of the edge of the seat, to fit over the ledge. Though this would weaken the seat, the margin of thickness in structures of this type is usually more than sufficient and such a process is in accord with the rough wooden constructional devices used by the stone masons of the pre-Conquest age. The piece cut out of the back shows that the throne was placed over an offset on the wall against which it stood. As an offset only 10 ins. above floor level is unlikely it is probable that the throne was raised on a platform. This is the normal arrangement of a Bishop's (or Abbot's) throne placed in the centre of the apse of an early church. The offset would then mark the back of the bench, extending the full circuit of the apse and forming the synthronon. Above this back the decoration of the wall would begin.

The conclusion that the present northern slab formed the dexter side of a stone throne is based on an examination of the stone. If accepted it would afford an explanation for the incorporation of this damaged and rather incongruous relic in the new Norman Cathedral at Norwich. It could well have come from the older pre-Conquest Cathedral and have been reset in its traditional place in order to legitimate the Bishop in the eyes of his flock. Such a motive would have been in accord with the ideas of the time and it may be conjectured that any emphasis on the continuity of the See would have been welcome to a Norman churchman set to rule over a diocese of mixed Saxon and Scandinavian ancestry.

The structural evidence also provides a suitable setting for the remaining slab. This was presumably one of the bench ends of the synthronon. Such a position would account for the similarity of material, the difference in the burning and the weathering as well as the lack of correspondence between the two designs. The arrangement with a synthronon ceased to be normal in England in the Saxon period and few fragments that can be identified as bench ends of this type are recorded. It is however significant that those found at Monkwearmouth and published by the late Sir Alfred Clapham are also formed with animal figures¹ (p. 126).

The Position at Norwich

The setting of the stones in the cathedral must next be considered. They now stand on a high platform at the east end of the quire, under the central arch separating it from the ambulatory. This arch forms part of the earliest work in the cathedral; it is intact as is the contemporary groined vaulting of the ambulatory. It seems hardly possible that heavy beams falling from the roof of the quire during the fire of 1171 could have lodged against the outer face of the northern stone and burned with such intensity as to cause the degree of calcination noted. Nor would such a catastrophe account for either the differential burning between the two stones or the subsequent damage by weathering. Moreover there is no evidence of such intense burning on either the platform or the masonry of the adjacent walling. Such burning as occurs on the platform or on the screen wall is more consistent with the reuse of slightly burnt stones than of burning *in situ*.

The structural sequence in this part of the cathedral may be summarized. The arcade, together with the walls and groined vault of the ambulatory are original and must date from the end of the 11th century or the first years of the 12th. At this period there was probably a stone vault over at least the eastern bays of the quire. Stone screens, butted against the bases of the piers, remain in the arches on either side of that covering the throne. Externally these have blind interlaced arcading with Corinthianesque or cubical capitals and prominent chamfered abaci. Their style is more advanced than that of the original work; a date about 1120 or, at latest, during the second quarter of the 12th century may be postulated. The level of the platform at the head of the first flight of stairs—about 4 ft. above the present floor of the sanctuary—is consistent with the throne having been placed against a similar screen in the central arch. It is not unreasonable to suggest that these inserted screens are connected with the arrangements for the enthronement of Bishop Everard of Montgomery in 1121. He was the first bishop to be enthroned at Norwich and this would provide a suitable occasion for the transfer of the old throne and its installation in the traditional position in the new cathedral.

The throne now stands at the head of an additional flight of steps—6 ft. 6 ins. above the present floor of the sanctuary. The slabs are set in the top of a platform of masonry, which takes the place of the screens in the flanking arches.

¹ *Arch. Aeliana*, IV, xxviii, 1-6.

At the rear, towards the ambulatory, this platform is hollowed out to form a deep niche, presumably intended to hold relics set directly under the throne. The niche is framed with colonnettes with reeded capitals carrying a moulded arch of advanced Romanesque character; a date in the third quarter of the 12th century would be appropriate. This niche bears traces of burning. The fire occurred inside the niche and the flames burst out staining the masonry of the arch and the stones above. These traces are localized and cannot be connected with the fire of 1171. They can most easily be explained by the burning *in situ* of a reliquary kept in the niche and have been attributed to the fire of 1463, which necessitated repairs to the entrance to the Lady Chapel.¹ It is a reasonable conjecture that the raising of the throne and its placing on the platform are part of the rearrangement carried out after the fire of 1171.

The Position at North Elmham

If the preceding arguments are accepted it follows that the two slabs at Norwich were brought from an earlier cathedral. They were doubtless at Thetford, where the See was located between 1075 and 1093. Before that period they must have been at North Elmham, the site of the cathedral after the division of the old East Anglian See in 673. There may well have been a Saxon minster on this site even before 673. From this date until the Danish conquest of East Anglia in c. 870 the existence of the bishopric is not in doubt. That it ceased to function at the time of the Danish conquest is inherently probable and, in fact, our next record dates from the middle of the 10th century, when the name of a bishop is mentioned. This probably marks the re-establishment of the See and the rebuilding of the cathedral.

The church at North Elmham has recently been investigated by the Ministry of Works, disclosing evidence of a wooden church, succeeded by two building phases in stone. The published note suggests that the transept 'was probably added in the early 11th century to a stone nave of c. 1000' and that 'the lateral doorways discovered in the west part of the nave, the blocking of the original door and the enlargement of the tower arch seem stylistically to belong to the later 11th century'².

The earliest masonry now visible is the south wall of the nave, built of local conglomerate with a slight offset at ground level. The north wall of the nave, where the base of the masonry is now covered with soil, is certainly contemporary. That there was a quire contemporary with this nave is likely by analogy with other minster churches and is shown by two scars in the masonry of the west wall of the transept, which show that the line of the side walls of the nave once extended further to the east. The earliest stone church should probably be restored with an approximately square quire of the same width as the nave and an apse on the line of that now outlined on the ground.

¹ *Friends of Norwich Cathedral*, 1952, 5.

² *Medieval Archaeology*, I, 154-5; *Ant. Journ.*, vi, 402-9. The Ministry of Works Guide by S. E. Rigold, which appeared after these paragraphs were in proof, sets out a different interpretation, but still maintains the late pre-Conquest date of the building. I see no reason to alter the opinion expressed in the following paragraphs.

This apse has been almost entirely destroyed by later medieval work, but there is slight evidence that the stub of the wall on the north side is older than the buttress of the second period. It is hardly likely that this church represents the Saxon Cathedral of 1000 or even of *c.* 950. It would be difficult to point to a minster of this period with so modest a plan. There is nothing in the earliest masonry visible at Elmham to suggest a post-Danish date and a pre-Danish ascription accords better both with the architectural remains and the historical probabilities.

This cathedral was probably ruinous when the re-establishment of the See took place about the middle of the 10th century. It is at this date, rather than after 1000, that the enlargement of the church by the addition of the transeptal chapels with the stair turrets in the western angles might be expected. There is no reason to suppose that the side walls of the old quire were then removed; it is more likely that arches were cut through them and that the church was designed to conform to the plan normal in late Carolingian and Ottonian work in the Empire. This is the form that the church at Glastonbury assumed when enlarged under St. Dunstan in *c.* 950. Normally such a church would have a projecting eastern arm, but this could well be omitted when the community was small and poverty stricken. Though the evidence is not conclusive there is, in fact, some suggestion that the refacing of the scars on the west wall of the transept is contemporary with the blocking wall between the nave and the crossing, which forms part of the 14th-century adaption of the building as a manor house by Bishop Despencer. The union of the three parts of the transept may well have been designed at that date to provide a camera for the bishop at the upper end of his hall.

SUMMARY

This examination of the relevant evidence suggests that the two stone slabs, now incorporated in the Bishop's throne in Norwich Cathedral, belonged to the synthronon of the first stone cathedral at North Elmham, which is likely to have been erected during the 8th century, to replace an earlier wooden church. They were damaged by fire, probably in the course of the Danish conquest of East Anglia about 870. The subsequent weathering occurred during the period when the See was in abeyance and the church stood derelict. This period may have lasted as long as 70 years. When the cathedral was reconstituted, probably about 950, the two best preserved stones from the old furnishing of the apse were recovered and reset to form a new throne. This course was adopted as the synthronon was no longer a normal feature in English churches of the 10th century, and there was no need to reconstitute the whole of the original arrangement. From the reconstituted church at North Elmham these venerable relics were transferred first to Thetford and then to Norwich.

THE SYNTHRONON IN WESTERN USAGE

The interpretation of the fragments at Norwich and Monkswearmouth as parts of the synthronon must be seen in the light of the use and significance of this feature in the churches of the Christian west. There is evidence that the liturgical arrangement with which it is associated, dates from a very early period, and that it has never been entirely displaced by the layout with the bishop's throne on the south side of the quire, which became normal in England in the later Middle Ages.

The most important evidence for the early usage occurs in a chapter called 'How to build a church' in the 5th-century treatise entitled *Testamentum Domini nostri Jesu Christi*.¹ This is preserved in a Syriac version and the language suggests that it represents contemporary Syrian practise. This source does not invalidate the document as an interpretation of Western usage, since careful examination of the churches of Gerasa in the 6th century and earlier has shewn that 'their internal arrangement . . . is much more like that to which we are accustomed in the West than that which now obtains in the Greek Orthodox Church . . . The Gerasa arrangement is that which was common in Italy, Greece and Constantinople during the period, and it is interesting that it should have been retained so faithfully in the West when a radical change . . . has spread all over the East.'² The relevant passage from the *Testamentum* may be quoted in full, using the new translation by the Rev. D. J. Chitty, published in 1938:³

'And let there be the Throne towards the east; to the right and to the left places of the presbyters, so that on the right those who are more exalted and more honoured may be seated, and those who toil in the word, but those of moderate stature on the left side. And let this place of the Throne be raised three steps up for the Altar ought also to be there.'

The concept expressed in the *Testamentum* can be traced back beyond the Peace of the Church; it is already explicit in the 3rd-century text, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which also survives in a Syriac version. The relevant passage runs:⁴ 'Keep a place for the presbyters on the east side of the house (i.e., the *domus ecclesiae* or church) so that the throne of the bishop be placed among these and that the presbyters sit with him'.

The Peace of the Church and the rich endowments of Constantine and his successors led to a revolution in ecclesiastical architecture. The basilican plan was adopted for many important churches, in an attempt to provide for the growing numbers of the congregations. The secular basilica, when used as a law court, often had at one end an apse with a raised platform or *tribunal*, on which sat the judge and his assessors. Third century documents, such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Constitutiones Apostolicae* already shew the bishop and his presbyters acting as judge and assessors in the administration of ecclesiastical or canon law.⁵ The conflation of the two traditions—the architectural

¹ Published with a Latin translation by Patriarch Rahmani (Mainz, 1899).

² J. W. Crowfoot in *Gerasa* (ed. C. H. Kraeling), 184 (cited as Gerasa).

³ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴ *Didascalia Apostolorum*, cap. xii (trans. M. D. Gibson, 1903).

⁵ C. H. Turner in *Cambridge Medieval History*, I, 178.

and the administrative—was inevitable; the addition of an apse to the Christian church and its allocation to the bishop and presbyters became a normal liturgical practice in the course of the generations following the Peace of the Church. Nor was the relationship purely fortuitous; its conscious acceptance is occasionally betrayed by the language chosen to describe the 'east' end of the church. Prudentius writing of the church at Porto (Ostia),¹ one of the suburban bishoprics of Rome, says:

*Fronte sub adversa gradibus sublime tribunal
Tollitur, antistes praedicat unde Deum.*

The use of the technical term *tribunal* can hardly have failed to convey to his readers some sense of connection with the secular law courts.

Later alterations and elaborations make it difficult to give a clear picture of the arrangement of the synthronon as it emerged in the 4th and 5th centuries. In particular the greater emphasis placed on the altar and the desire to enhance its setting and dignity have contributed to disguise the original appearance of the east end in those churches which have remained in use. The Cathedral at Poreč (Parenzo in Istria) is perhaps as good an example as we may hope to find. The present building (Pl. X) was erected by Bishop Eufrasius in the middle of the 6th century, probably between 543 and 554.² Much of the decoration is of this date. The conch of the apse and the upper zone of the wall, between the windows, retain the original mosaics. A cornice of stucco and an inlaid classical frieze run continuously around the wall, below the sill level, forming the frame of a lower zone of intarsia panels. These panels, mostly with formal designs, are also of the 6th century; some of them incorporate the monogram of Bishop Eufrasius. At the base of the wall, extending the full semicircle of the apse is the synthronon, a double tier of stone benches, with a raised throne in the centre. The view (Pl. X) shews the bench ends forming the western terminations of the synthronon, while the top of the throne can be seen rising above the altar. The throne (Pl. XIb) is marked by a shorter panel of intarsia, placed above the high back and distinguished with the design of a cross flanked by candlesticks (*cf.* St. Peter and St. Paul, Gerasa). The low transennae, though reformed, are in their original position. The altar itself dates from the 15th century with later additions, while the ciborium above it is of 1277. The columns supporting the ciborium are of the time of Bishop Eufrasius. It is possible that they came from a simpler canopy set above a small altar resembling the arrangement in the raised presbytery of St. Peter, Rome, to which reference will shortly be made.

The picture afforded by the Cathedral at Poreč may be filled out with the information provided by the eleven excavated churches at Gerasa. The latest, the church built by Bishop Gennadius in 611, may be disregarded; it already shews features introduced to conform with the liturgical changes effected in the

¹ *Prudentii Peristephanon*, xi, 225.

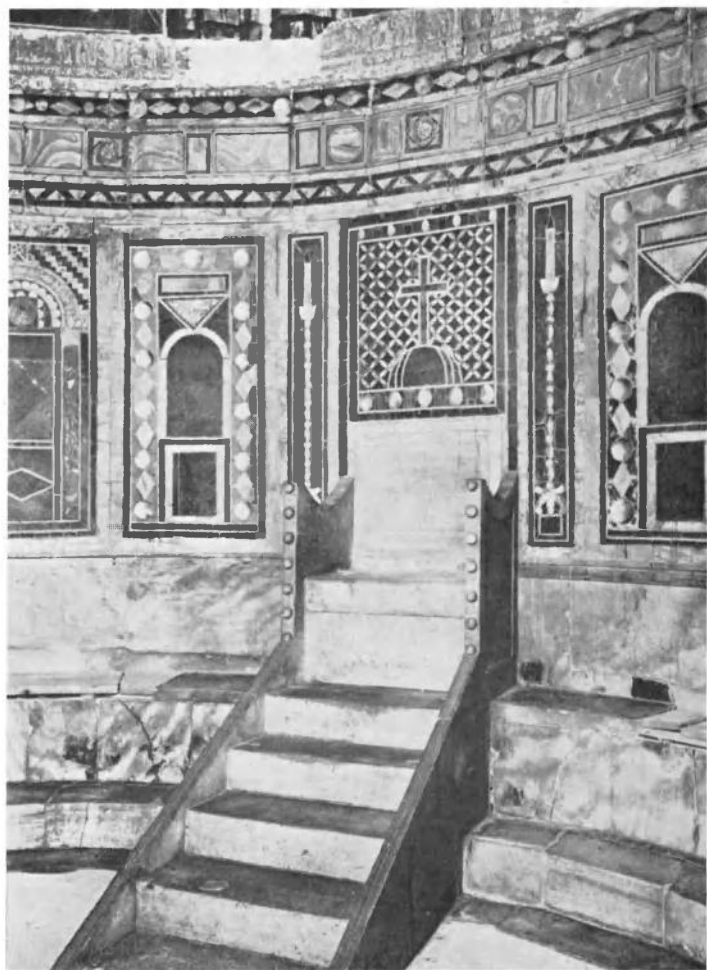
² *Cf.* P. Toesca, *Storia dell' Arte Italiana*, I, 102, 202-5 and 311.



Poreč, Istria. The Cathedral, showing nave and apse



A. Gerasa, the church of St. Peter and St. Paul
(*Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the University of Yale*)



B. Porec Cathedral. The Bishop's throne
(*Photograph: Alinari*)

East in the later 6th century. The other ten range in date from the 4th century to the third quarter of the 6th. They afford a good conspectus of Syrian practise in this period. Many of the buildings are exactly dated and there is no reason to think that any of them has been extensively 'restored' or modernised since the beginning of the 7th century. Though poverty stricken, the churches were still in use in the 8th century, but by 1122 the site had long been deserted.¹

The relevant part of the summary by the late J. W. Crowfoot² may be quoted in full:

'The Synthronon. Except in the Propylaea Church, the seats for the clergy, called the *synthronon*, were built round the semi-circle of the apse with a higher seat in the centre for the bishop. These seats were fairly well preserved in the churches of Procopius, St. George, St. Peter and Genesius; there were usually two or three tiers, and the earliest church of all contained provision for the smallest presbytery. In the Propylaea Church foundations of seats were found outside the apse in the east half of the rectangular portion of the chancel.'

The fittings of these churches have all been robbed, but the solid masonry generally remains and the position of the furniture can normally be traced by stone bases or sockets in the pavement. The church of St. Peter and St. Paul, here illustrated (Pl. XIA), is ascribed to c. 540.³ 'The wall of the central apse . . . is surrounded by a double range of seats, increased to three in the centre. Above the raised seat there is a cross in a circle carved in relief, standing on a conventional Calvary. Immediately in front is a reliquary formed of a square block fixed in the floor . . . On the north face of the block is a fragment of marble revetment, but there is no trace of the altar, which probably stood west of the reliquary where the stone paving is interrupted.'

The arrangement found in the churches of Gerasa can also be followed at Rome, though full evidence is often lacking by reason of later rearrangement. In a number of cases it seems likely that the stone benches were replaced with wooden seats and the throne was at times a portable chair set on the raised platform. Santa Balbina⁴ provides incontestable evidence. This church is first mentioned in 595, but the main structure, including the apse, is attributed to the 4th century, probably about 370. An integral part of the brickwork is a shallow niche set low down in the centre of the apse. This now holds a Cosmatesque throne of the 13th century, but there is no reason to doubt that, from the beginning, it was designed for a fixed or movable chair. The church was restored in 1928 by Muñoz.⁵ A bench for the presbyters was then added. Though without ancient authority, this *synthronon* now provides an excellent example of the arrangement in many early Roman churches. The throne and bench in Santa Cecilia,⁶ though partly cased in later marbles, belong to the original arrangement of the church erected by Pope Paschal I (817-24). The upper church of San Clemente,⁷ rebuilt after the Norman sack of the city in

¹ Gerasa, 171-3.

² *Ibid.*, 183-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁴ R. Krautheimer, *Corpus Basilicarum christianarum Romae*, I, 82-92, esp. fig. 59; cf. G. Clausse, *Les Marbriers romains*, 255-7.

⁵ *Capitolium*, 1931, 34.

⁶ Krautheimer, *op. cit.*, I, 94-111, esp. Pl. xiv-xv.

⁷ E. Junyent, *Il Titolo di San Clemente*, 186-225, esp. figs., 62, 65 and 73.

1084, reproduces the older arrangement. The throne (Pl. XIIA) belongs to this period and the benches, though reformed at a later date, carry on the older tradition. There is a fine example of the synthronon with lions forming the arms of the throne in the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin (Pl. XII B); this forms part of the work carried out by Cardinal Alfano and dedicated by Pope Calixtus II in 1123.¹ The synthronon is obscured by the later ciborium and the lion motif is better illustrated by the throne in the Cathedral at Anagni, made by the Roman Vassalectus for Bishop Landulf (c. 1257-62).²

The foregoing paragraph lists only a few of the more important and better preserved examples in Rome. It shews that the primitive arrangement with the synthronon set in the apse remained a vital element in basilical planning right down to the 12th century. Among the more important examples no longer extant is the apse of Old St. Peter, which was provided with a synthronon when the raised presbytery was inserted in the late 6th century.³

Nor, in the West, is the arrangement confined to Rome. The Eufasian Cathedral at Poreč, which has already been discussed, stands at the end of a long series of buildings, reaching back beyond the Peace of the Church. The stage preceding the existing cathedral was aisled with a single apse and rather shorter than the present building. The base of this apse with the well-preserved remains of the synthronon can be seen beneath the pavement of the cathedral. These remains date from c. 400. A recent study of the early churches in the northern dioceses of the metropolitan province of Aquileia provides examples of a different type, in which the synthronon is set within the church, free of the eastern wall. A number of these buildings are apsidal but others represent the more primitive rectangular hall, such for instance as it is found at Rome in the 4th century and earlier.⁴ Not all these northern buildings shew the raised platform for the central throne, though this is present in two examples at Kirchbichl and Lavant in eastern Tyrol. These churches north of Aquileia date from the 4th to the 6th century and afford a good conspectus of practice in this important missionary area.⁵ The synthronon set free of the eastern wall of the church is not confined to this region, or to the west; it has already been noted in the Propylaea Church at Gerasa (p. 123 above). The apse cannot be traced in Christian architecture before the age of Constantine and it is possible that these examples of the synthronon set free at the east end of the hall afford a better illustration of the type of building familiar to the writers of the earliest texts.

An impression of the synthronon in use is afforded by a few early representations. Among the best is the mosaic in one of the apses of the Chapel of Sant' Aquilino in the Church of S. Lorenzo at Milan.⁶ (Pl. XIII). In the centre, on a raised throne, Christ is seated, teaching, in the attitude of an ancient orator;

¹ Clausse, *op. cit.*, 115-27.

² *Ibid.*, 243-6.

³ B. M. Apollonii-Ghetti, *Esplorazioni sotto la Confessione di San Pietro in Vaticano*, 183-7; J. M. C. Toynbee and J. Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter*, fig. 22.

⁴ Junyent, *op. cit.*, 99-130.

⁵ G. C. Menis, *La Basilica paleocristiana nelle Diocesi settentrionali della Metropoli d'Aquileia*, 209-12, with figs. 59 and 60; cf. R. Noll, *Frühes Christentum in Oesterreich*, passim s.v. *priesterbank*.

⁶ Toesca, *op. cit.*, 208-9.



A. Rome, S. Clemente, Throne of Pope Anastasius

(Photographs: Anderson)



B. Rome, S. Maria in Cosmedin



S. Lorenzo, Milan. Apse mosaic in the chapel of S. Aquilino

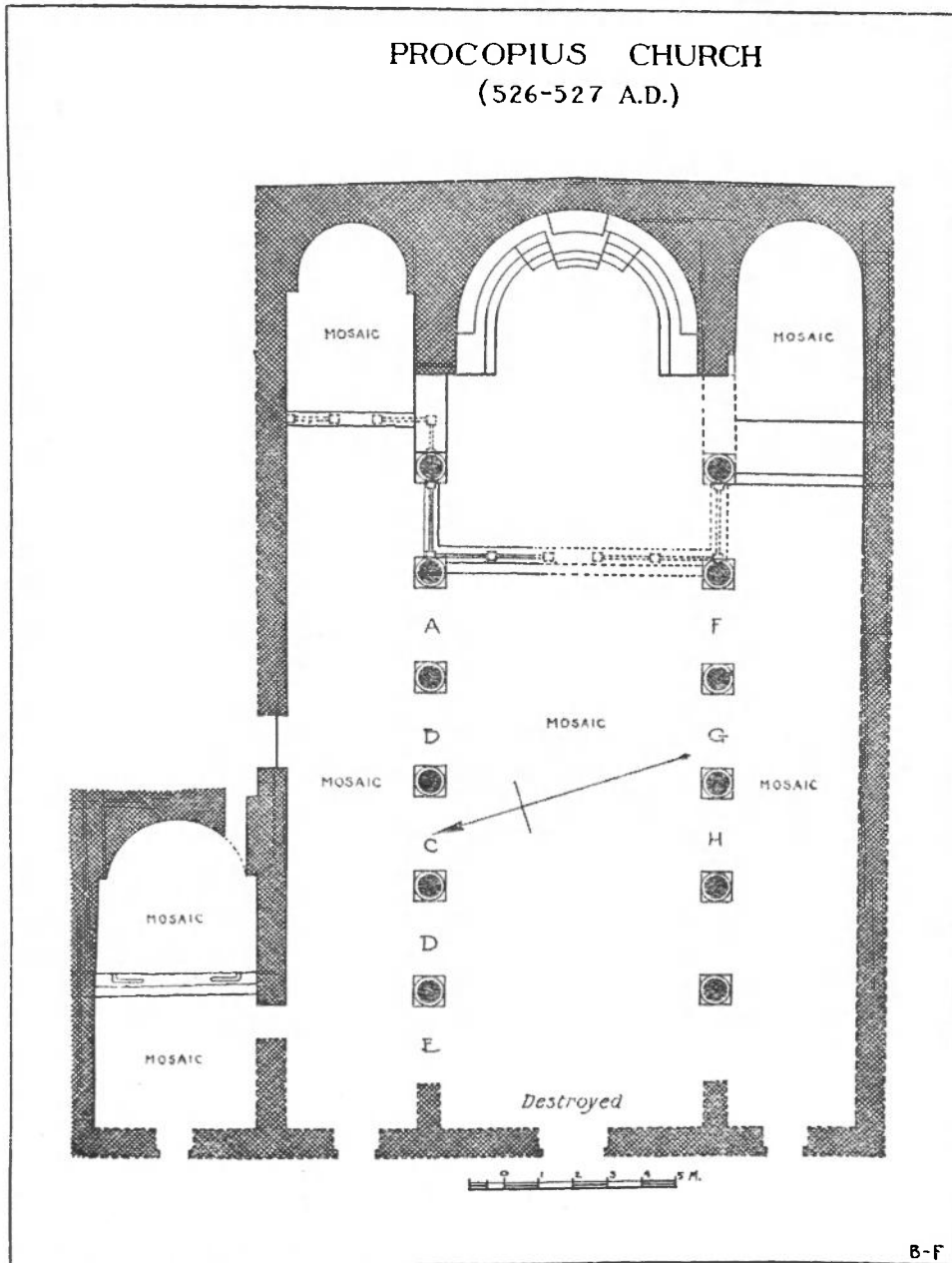


Fig. 1. Gerasa, Procopius church

on either side in double rank are the Apostles, whose figures follow the curve of the conch. Christ, clearly in the act of preaching, represents the bishop flanked by his attendant clergy. The impressionistic mosaic, which probably dates from the 5th century, is in the classical tradition. The plain gold of the background and the schematic foreground contrast with the naturalistic design of the accompanying mosaic and shew that the scene was set within a building. Christ and the Apostles are clearly modelled on the bishop and his clergy during service, more particularly at the moment during the synaxis when the Bishop was delivering his sermon.

The evidence already cited—and it could be multiplied—shews that the synthronon set in the apse or, more rarely, a short distance to the west, is common in the early church. The celebrant at the eucharist then stood behind the altar facing the congregation; during the synaxis, preceding the eucharist, he occupied the throne. The arrangement in origin was practical and convenient for the conduct of the liturgy. Normally, when present, the bishop would himself be the celebrant, but the arrangement, as has been seen, was common to all churches and is not confined to cathedrals. In monastic churches the abbot would occupy the throne. In the Sacramentary of the abbey of Marmoutiers, now preserved at Autun,¹ there is a fine representation of Abbot Rainaud (mentioned in 844-5), giving the blessing from an elaborate throne. But from a very early period the throne was particularly associated with the bishop; it was the symbol of his teaching office, the place from which he delivered the liturgical sermon, which formed an essential part of the synaxis.²

Apart from the Norwich fragments, which form the subject of this paper, the only early pre-Conquest examples in England are the thrones at Hexham³ and Beverley and the fragments from Monkwearmouth identified by the late Sir Alfred Clapham.⁴ The first of these, a monolithic seat of stone with small panels of early interlace, may well be the throne of St. Wilfrid, executed in conscious imitation of Roman models, when his church was built in the late 7th century. The fragments at Monkwearmouth also probably date from the foundation by Benedict Biscop in the late 7th century. They include parts of the bench ends, shewing that a synthronon of the normal type was part of this church.

Eadmer's description of the cathedral which preceded Lanfranc's new work at Canterbury, affords evidence of the arrangement in the most important late Saxon church;⁵ he was describing the building as he remembered it before the Conquest. At the east end, close to the wall of the apse, was the greater altar (*maius altare*), with the body of St. Wilfrid, brought from Ripon by Archbishop Odo (942-58). Set before this and separated by a fitting space (*congruo spatio*)

¹ Cabrol et Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, iii, 75.

² G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 38-41.

³ A. W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture before the Conquest*, 74, Pl. 30.

⁴ *Arch. Aeliana*, Ser. IV, xxviii, 1-6.

⁵ From the treatise *de Reliquiis S. Audoeni* in Gervase of Canterbury, (*Gervasii monachi Cantuariensis opera historica* in Rolls Series, lxxiii, i, 7).

was an altar in honour of Christ, 'at which the holy mysteries are daily celebrated. To these altars it was ascended by several steps (*nonnullis gradibus ascendebatur*) from the quire of the singers, which the Romans call a crypt or confession'. A passage from the curve of the crypt led west to the place of rest of the blessed Dunstan, which was separated from the crypt by a thick wall. 'For the same holy father lay buried before the same steps at a great depth in the earth, with the shrine (*tumba*) raised up over him in the form of a great and lofty pyramid, having the morning altar at the head of the saint. Thence westwards the quire of the singers extended into the nave of the church . . . The end of the church (i.e., the west end) was adorned with the oratory of the blessed Mother of God, Mary. To which, since the structure was such, access was only by steps. In the eastern part of which (*sc.* of the oratory) was an altar . . . When the priest (?bishop: *sacerdos*) celebrated the holy mysteries at this altar he was facing east, with his face towards the people, who stood below to the east; behind him to the west was the pontifical throne (*cathedram pontificalem*), . . . far removed from the Lord's table, since it stood next the wall'. The altars connected with St. Wilfrid and St. Dunstan at the east end of the cathedral are clearly additions of the 10th or 11th century. Both these altars and the raised quire at the west end of the church recall Carolingian practise and it may be suspected that the placing of the throne in the west end of the cathedral was an innovation of the same date. The raised presbytery at the east end with the crypt, evidently a ring crypt, below recalls earlier planning; it must go back beyond the Danish troubles and may be part of the Augustinian building, consciously modelled on the then new arrangement in St. Peter at Rome (p. 124). At that date a synthronon of the normal type might be expected in the eastern apse, but the only evidence for this arrangement at Canterbury is analogy.

The post-Conquest position at Canterbury must next be considered. The relevant information has been assembled in an article by Rev. C. S. Phillips, D.D., which is partly based on an unpublished Register of the See.¹ The position in the middle of the 12th century is recorded by Gervase, who describes Conrad's quire completed in 1130 and rebuilt after the fire of 1174.² 'At the base of the pillars (i.e., those separating the eastern arm from the aisles and the ambulatory) was a wall of marble slabs, which enclosed the quire and presbytery, the high altar (*altare magnum*) dedicated in the name of Jesus Christ and the altars of St. Dunstan and St. Alphege, together with their holy bodies. Upon the aforesaid wall in its circuit, behind the high altar and opposite it, was the patriarchal chair, made of a single stone, in which the archbishops, according to the custom of the church, were wont to sit on the principal feasts during the solemnization of the mass until the consecration of the sacrament, for then they descended to the altar of Christ by eight steps.' It is clearly inferred that the archbishop himself celebrated on these occasions and that he celebrated from behind the altar, facing west. It may also be deduced that when present on other occasions, the archbishop had another seat. The throne referred to was damaged or destroyed in the fire of 1174. On Palm Sunday 1181, a greater

¹ *Ant. Journ.* xxix, 26-36 (cited as Phillips).

² Gervase of Canterbury, *ut supra* p. 13.

feast at Canterbury, the *Domesday Monachorum*¹ describes the archbishop, 'celebrating mass and, after the Collect, sitting in the usual manner in his cathedra, near the horn of the altar'. This cathedra must have been a temporary arrangement as the new throne was only made in 1201-4. Taken together these two passages suggest that in the 12th century the throne in the apse was only used on what may be termed 'ceremonial' occasions and that normally the archbishop sat in a chair on one side, almost certainly on the south side, of the high altar, a position that corresponds with the later sedilia. The 'ceremonial' use of the apsidal throne looks like a revival of the older practise, perhaps under Roman influence, introduced at the Conquest and replacing the late Saxon custom described by Eadmer, which must rest on Carolingian precedents. This 'ceremonial' use of 12th century Canterbury corresponds to a ritual that was still normal in 11th and 12th century Rome (p. 124).

The official account of the enthronement of Archbishop Winchelsey in 1295² records that at 'the beginning of the service' I quote from Dr. Phillips, 'while the pallium lay on the high altar and the *Te Deum* was sung the archbishop went apart to his wooden seat in the choir (*ad sedem suam ligneam in choro declinavit*)'. He was then enthroned in the marble chair by the Prior. Immediately after the enthronement 'the Mass of the Holy Spirit was begun 'the new archbishop standing in front of his chair turning to the east began *Gloria in excelsis* . . . But after the saying of the Offertory he descended from his chair and came in front of the high altar . . . and from there finished mass nor did he that day return to his chair'. The same order of enthronement is recorded by Stone for Archbishop Stafford (1443) and his successors.³ By this time the marble throne must have been invisible even from the quire. The reredos set above the high altar by Prior Eastry (1320-20) would have obscured the view even before it was entirely obliterated by the great silver gilt tabula of Prior Chillenden (1394-1400).⁴ The actual enthronement could be carried out behind the reredos in the presence of a few participants and witnesses, but when the archbishop celebrated mass he must have occupied a more convenient seat. In fact later records make it clear that he sat 'in front of the altar of St. Dunstan', which stood south of the high altar. This phase could apply to the wooden seat in the choir mentioned in connection with Archbishop Winchelsey's enthronement (*v. sup.*) or to sedilia set in the normal position. The wooden seat, as is known, stood at the east end of the south range of the quire stalls. By the 15th century the 'ceremonial' use of the marble throne had apparently become restricted to a symbolical use at the actual enthronement. The original functional use as a part of the normal liturgy had been entirely disused. The evidence from Canterbury is borne out by the arrangement of other English cathedrals in the full Middle Ages. The normal position for the Bishop's throne was in the south side of the quire at the east end of the stalls.⁵

¹ Phillips, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 29, based on Canterbury Register Q.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30, based on Stone's *Chronicle*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

⁵ A. Hamilton Thompson, *Cathedral Churches of England*, 120.

The reason for this change, and for the associated change of the position of the priest during the celebration of the mass, must be sought in the development of the cult of relics. The custom of raising a reliquary above the pavement east of the altar is already illustrated in the 6th century church of St. Peter at Gerasa (Pl. XIA). This small chest, designed for representative relics, would cause no inconvenience to the functional use of the synthronon. But in parts of the West, and particularly in Gaul, it became usual to place in this position the sacrophagus with the body of the martyr or founder and to adorn this shrine with more and more elaborate ornament. As early as 574 the shrine of St. Denis, in the abbey church outside Paris, stood near the altar and was built up like a tower (*turritum erat tumulum*).¹ In the middle of the 7th century St. Fursey's shrine at Peronne is explicitly described as a little house on the east side of the altar (*constructa ad orientalem partem altaris domuncula*).² In Carolingian churches the practise went even further and a separate altar or shrine was provided a little distance east of the main altar, the additional space required being sometimes provided by the interposition of an extra bay between the transept and the apse. This is the type of plan adopted in the abbey church of Centula (St. Riquier) begun about 790.³ The original draft shewn in the parchment plan of St. Gallen, dating from about 820,⁴ indicates a church following the same model. The internal arrangement of these two churches is either known or can be reasonably inferred. The two Carolingian plans recovered under the Cathedral of Cologne⁵ shew a similar type of arrangement, though the details of the layout are not fully known. These and similar Carolingian models lie behind the Saxon Cathedral at Canterbury (p. 127) and doubtless influenced other pre-Conquest churches in England.

This type of plan, associated with the increasing prominence of the shrine east of the altar, makes the functional use of the synthronon difficult. If the seats remain in the apse they are obscured and inconvenient; if they are brought forward the view of the shrine is obstructed.⁶ As a result the old arrangement was normally abandoned; the priest took up his position in front of the altar for the celebration of the eucharist and seats to the side, later the sedilia, were provided for the use of the celebrant, during the synaxis.⁷

There is no comprehensive survey of the development of the usage in English medieval cathedrals and it would take too long to assemble and assess the evidence in each individual case. *A priori* it is likely that Canterbury, the English church with the most venerable traditions, would be among the last to retain the old arrangement for symbolical purposes and, as has been seen, the throne was reset in the traditional position after the fire of 1174. New churches at this date normally had a square east end, and this in itself implies that the synthronon was no longer regarded as a necessary part of the furnishing.

¹ *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis liber in gloria Martyrum*, 71. (*Mon. Germ. Hist., Scriptorum rerum merovingicarum*, i, 536), cited in *Arch. J.* cxii, 56.

² *Vita Fursey abbatis Latiniacensis*, 10 (*Mon. Germ. hist.: Scriptorum rerum merovingicarum*, iv, 439), cited in *Arch. J.*, cxii, 56.

³ Clapham, *op. cit.*, 79, fig. 19.

⁴ *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, xvi, 125-39; cf. *Arch. J.*, v, 85-117.

⁵ *Neue Ausgrabungen in Deutschland*, 322-8.

⁶ Cf. Phillips, p. 27.

⁷ Cf. Dix, *op. cit.*, 591.

Even in pre-Conquest churches of the post-Danish age the apse is a rarity¹ and the abnormal form of the few that are known suggests that it was no longer functional and that the synthronon had already disappeared.

The apse forms part of the restored cathedral at Elmham (p. 119), but it is now impossible to say whether it was furnished with a synthronon or whether the cathedral of the 10th century retained no more than a 'ceremonial' eastern throne. No other Saxon Cathedral exists sufficiently complete to disclose the original arrangement of the east end. To illustrate the trend of later developments in the cathedrals of medieval England it will be sufficient to examine two examples—Salisbury and Exeter.

Salisbury Cathedral, built on a new site in the second quarter of the 13th century, may be taken as expressing the ideal of that age. The eastern arm of the great cruciform church is planned with three bays leading to a second transept in line with which was a larger bay originally covering the high altar. Three further bays behind the high altar complete the eastern arm, covered by the high vault.² The quire must originally have been in the eastern part of the nave, since there is no room for both quire and presbytery in the four forward bays of the eastern arm. The bays behind the high altar can hardly have been designed for any use other than the shrine of St. Osmund, so that the layout provides an exact parallel to that of Westminster Abbey, built rather later in the same century, but in a less spacious form as the plan was governed by the earlier remains. There is no trace of an eastern throne at Salisbury and the plan precludes a functional throne in this position.

Exeter Cathedral, replanned in an older frame, represents the 14th-century ideal, as Salisbury represents that of 100 years earlier. The quire lay entirely in the eastern arm with the high altar set against a very lofty and elaborate reredos standing only a few feet west of the end of the high vault. The narrow space between the reredos and the east end was used as a sacristy.³ There was no eastern feretory and no possibility of an eastern throne. The only bishop's throne in the rebuilt cathedral is that erected in 1302-7 and still standing on the south side of the quire at the east end of the stalls, an arrangement exactly parallel to the wooden seat in the quire of the archbishop at Canterbury.

The disuse of the synthronon in medieval England and the adoption of the eastward position for the celebration has been traced back to the development of the cult and enshrinement of relics, a custom which reached its fullest flower in the 13th century. In those regions where the older practice of placing these relics in the crypt or within the altar remained normal, there was not the same reason for change and the older ritual was not everywhere abandoned. In such cases the synthronon could still remain an effective element in church planning.

¹ Clapham, *op. cit.*, 95.

² *Wilts. Arch. Mag.*, xvii, 129-35.

³ H. E. Bishop and E. K. Prideaux, *The Building of Exeter Cathedral*, 30-64.

Perhaps the most striking example of this survival is afforded by the 17th century replanning of St. Peter at Rome. There the Papal cathedra, flanked by the stalls for the attendant clergy, was reset in the centre of the apse, behind the high altar, where it forms the focal point of the great vista. This paper may fittingly conclude by quoting Dr. Fokker's appreciation¹ of this crowning achievement of the early Roman Baroque:

'Bernini covered the glaring light of the central window with a decorative pattern which shews, in a dazzling oval pane of glass of a yellow colour, which gradually deepens into a golden glow, a white dove flying towards the altar and emitting rays of light. A wreath of gilt clouds and sheaves of gilt rays shooting out on every side surround the glass frame. In and on the clouds innumerable angels of different orders and sizes float and hover in all directions. The pure white light which surrounds the dove gradually shades into yellow and ultimately melts into tangible golden rays. The dust which dances on its beams materializes into heavenly children and messengers from the Universe beyond. Our responsive imagination excitedly extends the narrow opening of the window into limitless space.

Bernini walled up the central recess below the window. A bronze receptacle shaped like a massive throne encloses St. Peter's chair. Two angels, conscious indeed of their youth and loveliness, are resting against the lower part of the seat. A curious supporting podium with curved shafts, resting upon a formless but substantial cloud, upholds the precious relic and its costly covering. St. Athanasius and St. Gregory of Nazianzen, bareheaded and clad in episcopal vestments, stand next to this podium, while, at a further distance, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, mitred and robed, hold ribbons which are attached to the shafts. Their distribution allow each of the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church to be seen to advantage. They are splendid patriarchs of gigantic stature with flowing beards and streaming locks. Their gestures are meaningless and dignified; their robes are disposed in broad deep folds. They have a careworn and pathetic look, noble victims of high thought and grave sorrow. They are magnificently spectacular.

The chair is evidently the principal object in this composite decoration. Flowing scrolls and curves confer a festive likeness on this very substantial reliquary. Parts of the ornaments on the chair, of the draperies and vestments, are gilt. The splendid gilding contrasts with the dark bronze of the smooth parts of the chest, of the faces and hands and of the hollows of the folds. The copious robes of the four Fathers suggest powerful and impressive masses, whereas the dark furrows between the glittering folds lend an appearance of surprising agility to the huge figures. A contemporary critic felicitously praised the 'grave elegance' of this group.

The 'Holy Ghost' and the 'Cathedra', fantastic apparitions of golden light and glittering bronze, framed in the gigantic baldacchino and flanked by the two papal tombs, captivate the faithful on entering the church and fascinate them until they turn to leave the precincts. There is no possible escape from the sensation of a very definite space and of a clearly defined path which must be followed traversing it from end to end. To achieve this effect by their combination is the principal function of the decoration of the high altar and the three recesses and the central window of the western cross-arm'.

¹ T. H. Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, 44-5.

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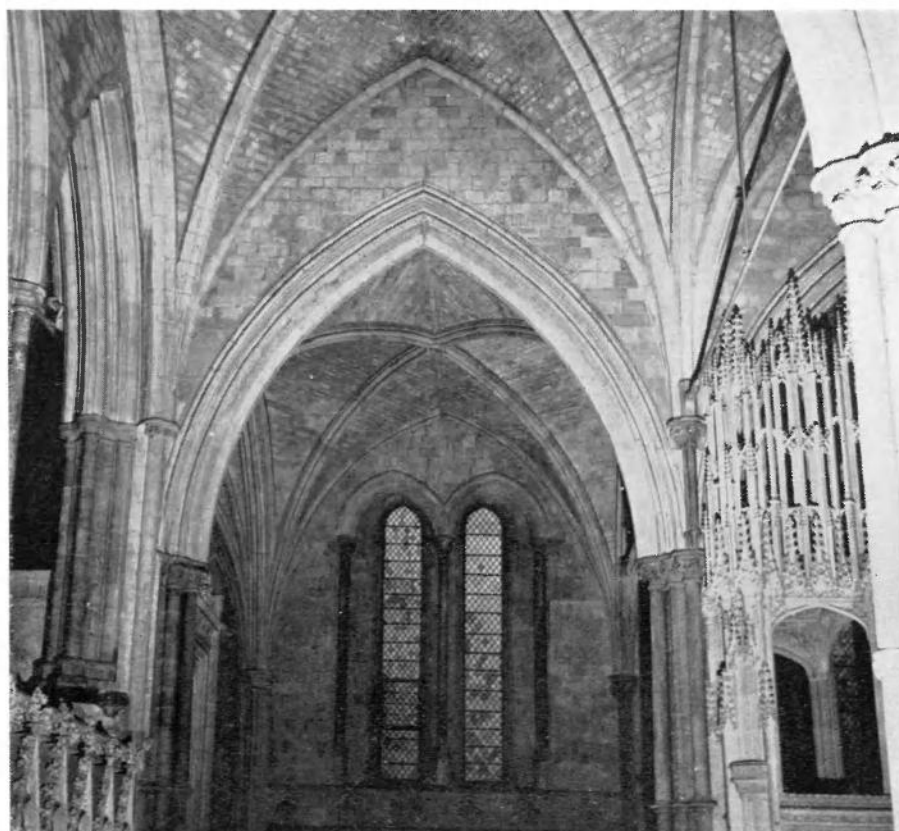
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Winchester Cathedral. The Lady Chapel from the retrochoir
(*Photograph by courtesy of A. W. Kerr, Coulsdon, Surrey*)



A. Vaulting of the retrochoir nave



B. View from the nave into the aisle
(Photographs: Frank Smith, B.Sc.)