VI

THE PROVENANCE, DATE, AND STRUCTURE OF *DE ABBATIBUS*

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IN HIS admirable edition of the Anglo-Latin poem *De Abbatibus* the late Professor A. Campbell has considered sources, manuscripts, text, language, and rhetoric fully but mentioned provenance, date, and structure only briefly.[1] The poet, however, has left such clear and consistent evidence that one can easily identify the place and time of composition and analyse the structural principles of the work.

The poet's Little Preface names him *presbiter Aediluulf*, and his concluding Salutation names him *Lupus Clarus*. Æthelwulf calls his monastery a *cella* and states that it was founded during the tyranny of Osred I, King of Northumbria, A.D. 704–716. As the founder, Ealdorman Eanmund, sought help from one Bishop of Lindisfarne (Eadfrith, A.D. 698–721) and the poet dedicated his work to another (Ecgberht, A.D. 803–821), one infers that the house was a dependent cell of Lindisfarne. Æthelwulf implies in chapter v that the journey from his house to Lindisfarne was short.

Bishop Eadfrith provided for the monks an instructor, Ecgberht, who was found *Scottorum finibus* (114). Later the cell attracted a gifted scribe and illuminator, *Vltan, Scottorum gente* (209). Later still, one of the poet's instructors in his youth was *Eadfridus de Hibernia* (748–750). Professor Campbell has explained Æthelwulf's *castra beorum* (577) as a "half-translation of the Gaelic phrase *tir nam beo*, 'land of the living'".[2] If the house stood near Lindisfarne, within the sphere of Irish influence, it must have been in Bernicia rather than Deira.

As the cell had not by the poet's day suffered persecution or destruction (600–601):

[1] A. Campbell (ed.), *Æthelwulf De Abbatibus*, Oxford 1967, pp. i–xlix.

[2] *ibid.*, p. 46 n. 3.

quod sine nos meritis tribuit non hostibus umquam,
imperio procerum secli nec subdidit imos,

it was probably inland, less vulnerable to Viking raids than a coastal house.

Æthelwulf's church stood on a site formerly occupied by evil men (160–171), a low hill with a smooth top and a path leading down the eastern side (132–136):

collis non magnus decliuo tramite flexus,
quo sol consurgens trutinantis timpora Librae
peruolat; hunc spinae spissa cum fronde coronant.
falcibus has cisas toto cum germine, frater,
aequoris et dorso predicti auferre memento....

The church was dedicated to St. Peter (75, 122, 147, 657). It was rectangular (632), paved with marble (194, 230, 297), lofty (620), and roofed with lead (144, 452). It had remarkable glass windows (621–623). The fourth abbot, Sigbald, enlarged the church by building an *aula*, a *porticus*, which contained an altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary (431–437).[3]

As one of the brothers was a celebrated metal worker, *Cuicuinus ferrarius*, the church acquired many precious metal objects: a gold chalice decorated with silver and jewels (449–451, 649), a silver paten (650), several silver reliefs (633–645), rows of lamps and hanging bowls (446, 632), and some brass bells with copper clappers (453–454).

The fifth abbot, Sigwine, erected a tall cross (537–539), probably similar to contemporary monuments which have survived at Ruthwell and Bewcastle.

The cell had a scriptorium, in which the monks copied and illuminated sacred books which they covered with gold (210–215, 636–640).

The only sites seriously advanced as the location of Æthelwulf's cell have been Lindisfarne and Crayke.[4] But neither of these is possible: both foundations were more ancient than Æthelwulf's, and the Lindisfarne abbatial succession differs from Æthelwulf's. The village of Bywell in Northumberland is about fifty miles from Lindisfarne as the crow flies. It stands well within the borders of Bernicia, on the banks of the River Tyne, inland, but accessible to the Irish by way of the Solway Firth and the road along Hadrian's Wall. Bywell has two pre-Conquest churches, of which the larger and probably older is dedicated to St. Peter and the smaller to St. Andrew:[5]

> St. Peter's stands on a mound which forms a promontory round which the river bends. There are records of this mound having been used as a refuge when the rest of the village was flooded and it is altogether a much more prominent site than that of St. Andrew's.

The nave of St. Peter's is rectangular, exceptionally long and narrow; its walls are thin and unusually high. Its dimensions are closely comparable with those of Monkwearmouth.[6] It has

[3] The poet's usage in line 720 implies that he means by *aula* "room" or "hall", not "building" or "separate church". Here *aula* and *porticus* are synonymous.

[4] Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. x–xiii, xxiv–xxvi.

[5] E. A. Fisher, *The Greater Anglo-Saxon Churches*, London 1962, p. 60.

[6] E. Gilbert, "New Views on Warden, Bywell, and Heddon-on-the-Wall Churches", *AA*[4] xxiv (1946), p. 173. Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 54. H. M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, Cambridge 1965, Vol. I p. 124.

a row of round-headed north windows with sills twenty feet above the floor. The church formerly had *porticus* overlapping the junction of nave and chancel on the north and south. The roof-raggle of the north *porticus* is still visible.[7] Several reliable authorities have inferred from the architectural evidence that St. Peter's was an Anglo-Saxon minster belonging to Period A (A.D. 600–800),[8] and other evidence supports this:[9]

> Certainly, sooner or later, Bywell St. Peter (the "black" church) was connected closely with the Black Benedictine Monastery of Durham, in whose patronage it was until [1886].

Bywell remained until the modern period a remarkable centre for metal workers:[10]

> An official report of the date of Queen Elizabeth (survey by Sir W. Homberston, H.M. Commissioner, March 18, 1569) describes a long street then existing at Bywell, closed at either end by a gate; the residents, it tells us, were workers in metal—forgers and manufacturers of armour and of arms, of bits, spurs, and horse gear.

These craftsmen may have produced the bells at St. Peter's, one inscribed

TV ES PETRVS: ABCDEFGHIKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ+

and the other

+UT SURGANT GENTES VOCOR HORNET CITO IACĒTES.

W. Featherstonhaugh has read the latter as *Ut surgant gentes voco ... et cito jacentes*,[11] and Canon Dwarris has amended it to *Ut surgant gentes voco horam et cito jacentes*, "I proclaim the hour for people rising, and summon those still in bed".[12] One ought, however, to accept the verse as received: "I am called Hornet that lying folk may rise quickly". The name Hornet (Old English *hyrnetu*) and the "large Gothic capitals of the Perpendicular period" suggest that these bells cannot be identical with Æthelwulf's, though they may have replaced ancient bells about which he wrote.

Bywell had a village cross, of which only the foundation survived into the modern period.[13] Whether this cross was identical with Abbot Sigwine's is uncertain, but even if it was a late medieval work, it may have replaced an ancient monument mentioned by Æthelwulf.

The most striking external literary evidence for the identity of Æthelwulf's cell with Bywell is a well known passage by Simeon of Durham:[14]

[7] Taylor, *op. cit.*, fig. 56, p. 125.

[8] Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 173. Fisher, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–60. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. xxv, 124–126. C. A. Ralegh Radford, "Pre-Conquest Minster Churches", *AJ* cxxx (1973), p. 128.

[9] Canon Dwarris, "Notes on Bywell", *AA*^{2} xi (1886), p. 11.

[10] *ibid.*

[11] W. Featherstonhaugh, "Saxon Sculpture at St. Andrew's, Bywell", *AA*^{2} iii (1859), p. 34.

[12] Dwarris, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

[13] *ibid.* J. C. Hodgson, *A History of Northumberland*, Newcastle 1902, Vol. VI p. 240.

[14] T. Arnold (ed.), *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia* (Rolls Series 75), London 1882, Vol. I p. 52.

et Egbertus in locum ejus electus et consecratus, Eanbaldo archiepiscopo, et Eanberto, et Baldulfo, aliis quoque episcopis in locum qui dicitur *Biguell*, iii. idus Junii, ad ejus ordinationem convenientibus.... At Egberto, peractis in episcopatu decem et octo annis, defuncto, Heathured successit....

Æthelwulf addressed his first Salutation to Bishop Ecgberht: *ad episcopum de propinquis et monachis celle eius.* His verse celebrates men of Ecgberht's own family: *proceres propria de sanguine.* Æthelwulf may well have meant that "his cell" was Ecgberht's because it was the site of his consecration as Bishop of Lindisfarne on Trinity Sunday, 11 June, 803.

The poem must belong to the period of Ecgberht's episcopate, 803–821. More precisely, the alliterative Preface seems to have been addressed to the bishop in his old age:

Sume, pater, placidus modulantis uota poete,
quatinus aeterno capias cum rege quietem,
atque petas superas meritis splendentibus arces.
nunc memorare libens semper, lectissime presul,
sancta supernorum conscendens sceptra polorum
mercedemque tuam, quam iussit reddere caluus.

De Abbatibus may be an occasional poem, its 819 lines representing the year of its presentation, within two years of Bishop Ecgberht's death.

Professor Campbell's assertion that the poem "can be recovered from the manuscripts in practically its original form" applies to the layout as well as the text.[15] The poem is arranged in verse lines, each of which begins with a small coloured initial. Each chapter of the poem is clearly defined, separated from the others by blank space, introduced by a large coloured initial, and prefaced by a short prose heading in rustic capitals. Professor Campbell has inferred from the valuable information preserved in the chapter headings that they are "original and integral parts of the poem".[16] The internal divisions of the poem are thus perfectly clear. Æthelwulf wrote a *Prefatio* in hexameters, a short prose *Prefatiuncula*, and two *Salutationes* in elegiac couplets. The rest of the poem is in hexameters.

At the end of chapter xv Æthelwulf gives a detailed account of the monks' antiphonal singing (495–498):

dum ueneranda dei sanctorum festa redirent,
classibus in geminis subter testudine templi
fratribus inmixtus psalmorum concinat odas,
dulcisona antiphonae modulantur carmine fuse.

In chapter xxi he describes a song which he heard spirits sing one night in the chapel (669–673):

intrant sidereo candentem luce delubrum
spiritus, ac geminis distincti classibus ymnos
tales concinnunt; quatitans ad culmina cantus
ascendit caeli, insonuit laquearibus altis,
et si non structura, tamen meritis micat almis.

[15] Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. xv.
[16] *ibid.*, p. xxi n. 3.

These passages imply that Æthelwulf prized structure and order in poetry and that from the monastic liturgies he had developed a special love for balanced antiphonal poems. Although he referred to his work as *rustica dona* and to himself as *indoctus, uilisque per omnia scriptor*, the poem shows a meticulous concern for balance and structural detail, chiefly symmetry or chiasmus and parallelism.

The first *Salutatio*, chapter i, is symmetrically arranged in blocks of 1–2–5–2–1 elegiac couplets.

cum te sancta manus prestantem reddidit Anglis
haec tibi conplacuit rustica dona dare.

rustica sed stolidis sudent si pectora dictis,
non stolidum carmen rustica plectra dabunt,
nam tibi dum proceres propria de sanguine signant,
iam domino placidus gaudia magna capis.

suscipe, docte pater, dilecti munus amici,
et grates Christo semper ubique cane,
quod tua tam electi meruerunt stirpe creati
pastores, domino qui placuere suo,
nec minus et monachos premiro munere claros
hic mirare legens scandere lucis iter.
si quid in his cartis te dignum reddere grates
inuenias domino maxime nunc moneo;
sin alias, uati ueniam dignare canenti
iam tribuere pius: quod potuit cecinit.

hanc tuo nam cupio requiem prestare labori,
carmina que domino sanctificata sonant.
aduersum est quicquid moneo tolerare modeste,
nec querela in quoque corda mouere tua.

mens requiem capiat semper sine fine benignam
in domino Christo prosperitate pia.

This is balanced by the concluding *Salutatio*, chapter xxiii, also in elegiac couplets.

Chapters ii–xxii are further arranged symmetrically. The central chapter, xii, describes the death of the founder. Chapters ii–xi describe the foundation of the cell, its outstanding monks, and its possessions. Chapters xiii–xxii describe the abbatial succession, outstanding monks, and possessions. Surveying the contents of the poem, Professor Campbell has noted six episodes which give "lesser glimpses into the other world".[17] These occur in chapters vi, viii, x, and xiv, xvi, xviii, which Æthelwulf has arranged chiastically. The first and sixth episodes concern birds as heavenly messengers (174–177, 575–578):

[17] *ibid.*, p. xxxii.

dent domino grates, mittit qui ad uota piorum
aligeras uolucres, mingent que ad septa sacelli.
innumeris precibus sumptis ad sidera tranant,
ante deumque ferunt, pandentes quas tamen ipse
pandat . . . ;

uitam perductus ad almam,
corpora deseruit; nitidis comitatus ut ipse
alitibus testatus erat, pia castra beorum
ingreditur felix, letatus sorte superna.

The second and fifth episodes concern the heads of saints (238–242, 518–521):

concinnunt pulchre miranda ad gaudia cunctis,
insuper atque alis sancti caluaria uelant,
sicque diem totam non cessant ossibus ipse
officium praestare piis, et cantibus odas
fundere prepulchris . . . ;

in caput sancti peditat benedictio larga,
nec oculis cernens cernit de pectore gnaro,
spiritus atque pios carnis fraudatus ocellis,
nec non atque nigros mentis perspexit ocellis.

The third and fourth episodes concern troops of angels and of saints (310–320, 441–443):

iam chorus e caelis ueniens, cum luce coruscus . . .
angelici cunei modulantes carmina, caelum
clauditur extimplo;

omnes ast sancti medii pauimenta sacelli
seruantes colitant per tempora cuncta maniplis
innumeris.

Æthelwulf's chiastically arranged episodes may be represented thus:

	1–12	12	Prefatio
i	13–34	22	Salutatio uatis
ii–xi	35–394	360	Foundation of the cell, monks, and possessions
vi			Birds as heavenly messengers
viii			Miracle involving the head of a saint
x			Miracle involving a throng of angels
xii	395–402	8	Death of the Founder, Ealdorman Eanmund
xiv			Miracle involving a throng of saints
xvi			Miracle involving the head of a saint
xviii			Birds as heavenly messengers
xiii–xxii	403–795	393	Abbatial succession, monks, and possessions
xxiii	796–819	24	Salutatio uatis
		819	

Æthelwulf has also arranged some of his chapters in parallel patterns. Professor Campbell has noted major episodes which afford "glimpses into the world to come".[18] The first of these, in chapter xi, concerns Merhtheof's vision of his children and abandoned wife, his return to life, and his repentance.[19] The others, in chapters xxi and xxii, concern the poet's visions of spirits and of his former tutors. These major visions occur in the same relative position, at the ends of the groups of ten chapters. Chapters xi and xxii are the two longest chapters in the poem.

Within the groups of ten chapters, v and xvi also occupy the same relative position. Both are twenty lines long. In both Æthelwulf refers to priests, learned doctors who had instructed the monks of his cell. In the former he wrote of Bishop Eadfrith, from whom Eanmund had sought a teacher (101–103):

> cui prompta mente sacerdos
> pectore de gnaro pandit salutaria dicta,
> imbribus atque piis sitientis corpora potat.

In the latter he wrote of Hyglac, priest and lector, who was also the subject of another poem by Æthelwulf (512–513):

> que si quis cupiat cum gnaro noscere corde,
> currat et haec sitiens se algosis mergat in undis....

Professor Campbell has found it impossible[20]

> to explain this section, unless with Traube we assume that the waves, into which interested persons must plunge, are the poem in which Æthelwulf had spoken about Hyglac.

One reason for the awkwardness of these verses may be that the poet strained to reproduce the imagery of chapter v in the parallel chapter xvi.

Æthelwulf bound the stories of his abbots' careers in a different fashion. The founder and first abbot was Ealdorman Eanmund (56–60):

> nobilis hic nimium, proceri de sanguinis ortu,
> exstitit, in populis summo celebratus honore.
> nobilior domino summe pro culmine mentis
> dux uenerandus erat, fecit cui candida corda
> omnipotens genitor....

He ruled the cell a long time (*diu*, 395). The sixth and last abbot mentioned in the poem, Wulfsig, was a humble man, who had to be persuaded to assume the office (542–546):

[18] *ibid.*, pp. xxxi–xxxii.

[19] Campbell asserts that the poet "falls into inconsistency by making Merhtheof hint in later life that he had had a vision of punishments (389–90): he had had no such vision...", p. xxxiii. But Merhtheof did see many faces threatening him in the dark, and he was buffeted by rough winds in his vision (326–329). Surely that was enough to induce repentance. The poet himself was terrified even at the sight of blessed beings (696, 709, 729).

[20] *ibid.*, p. 40 n. 3.

abnuit in primis mestus humilisque sacerdos,
se fore non dignum contestans pondera tanta
sumere, sed fratrum precibus se uincere tandem
gaudet, et aecclesiae gaudentis regmina sumpsit.
uir fuit hic humilis, uerbis factisque modestus....

Wulfsig ruled only a short time (*paucis annis*, 574). The second and third abbots were brothers, Eorpwine and Aldwine. So were the fourth and fifth, Sigbald and Sigwine. Eorpwine and Sigbald seem to have ruled a long time, (*per cuncte tempora uitae*, 410, and *longo tempore*, 470).[21] Eorpwine and Sigwine brought to the cell great wealth, which they distributed generously (406–412, 475–494):

diuitias tribuit laxato mentis opimo
iam gremio monachis, quos lurida inedia pressit,
inque modum mirum dispersae ad premia certa
diuitiae crescunt; cumulat reuerentia Christi
munera sparsa sibi per cuncte tempora uitae.
largus erat miseris, nimium sibi parcus in omni
uictu, namque escis pascebat corpora siccis.

dapsilis hic nimium minimis magnisque per omnem
extiterat uitam, miseris largitur egenis,
diuitias tribuit, dominus quas auxerat altus....
cumque suis largus semper tribuisset amatis,
diuitiae crescunt diuersa in parte locorum,
ac segetes spisso cumulantur germine cultae,
at pecus omnigenum pastoris munere demptum
in numero dampnum gregibus desumere nescit....

Aldwine and Sigbald led the monks by their life and doctrine (427–430, 468–472):

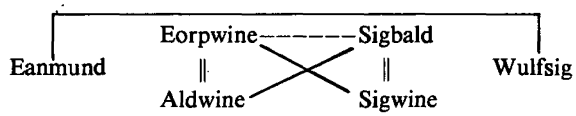
Aldwinus hic fuerat carnali nomine dictus.
moribus hic uerax et uerbis omnibus extat,
signifer est clarus, subiectos uocibus hortans,
ut sua uota pii trans aethera principes signent.

ac fratres precibus mulcet sollempnia festa
ad letos caelebrare pie genetricis honores.
presbyter hic doctus dum longo tempore felix
talia per cellam meruit iam facta nouare....

Æthelwulf bound the stories of his first and sixth abbots by contrasts in their social standing and the lengths of their reigns. He bound the second and third and the fourth and fifth by ties

[21] The poet says nothing about the lengths of Aldwine's and Sigwine's abbacies, but since the former is mentioned in only four lines of text it may have been short and uneventful. Whether Aldwine's and Sigwine's abbacies should form a pair is unclear.

of kinship and alliteration, the second and fourth by the lengths of their abbacies, the second and fifth by the theme of good management of worldly affairs, and the third and fourth by the theme of exemplary life and doctrine.



Æthelwulf first mentions himself at lines 509–511 and then frequently (527–534, 549–552). He praises Hyglac, the priest and lector who taught him, and Wulfsig, with whom he shared a house in his youth. Hyglac and Wulfsig reappear in the vision in chapter xxii, upon waking from which Æthelwulf states that he wrote the poem. Recurrent reference to these men in lines so far apart implies that he intended to divide his poem, separating his account of the cell into one period from the beginning to his day and another from his profession to the time of writing. The division occurs between chapters xv and xvi, between lines 506 and 507. He has marked the division by reference to his other poem about Hyglac, in the mannered passage cited above, and by reference to himself as *indoctus, uilisque per omnia scriptor*. Such words in the mouth of a poet as learned as Æthelwulf are very suspicious. They really imply that he has just done something clever.

In a poem which conforms to the Golden Section the minor part (m) relates to the major part (M) as the major part relates to the whole: m/M=M/(m+M)=0.618. The minor part of the poem, describing the period during which Æthelwulf belonged to the cell, occupies 313 lines (507–819). The major part, describing the history of the cell from its foundation to the poet's day, occupies 506 lines (1–506). 313/506=0.6168. 506/819=0.6178. *De Abbatibus*, like many other Old English and Medieval Latin poems, conforms to the Golden Section.[22]

Since many features of Æthelwulf's church can be found at Bywell St. Peter's, *De Abbatibus* may serve as a useful guide to archaeologists. The poem may also aid palaeographers seeking the homes of early insular manuscripts. Professor T. J. Brown, for example, has suggested that Northumbria, Pictland, Iona, and Ireland may be possible homes for the *Book of Kells*, though he would prefer one to start looking "at Lindisfarne, in the middle years of the eighth century" for "a great insular centre ... subject to Northumbrian influence ... in eastern Scotland".[23] Bywell had connections not only with Lindisfarne. The Ecgberht who first instructed the monks *Scottorum finibus* between 704 and 716 remained after 716 at Iona. The Irish scribe and illuminator, Ultan, must have flourished during the mid eighth century at the

[22] For analyses of such composition in classical poetry see G. Le Grelle, "Le Premier Livre des *Géorgiques*, Poème Pythagoricien", *Les Etudes Classiques* xvii (1949), pp. 139–235. G. E. Duckworth, "Mathematical Symmetry in Vergil's *Aeneid*", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* xci (1960), pp. 184–220. For analyses of such composition in medieval poetry see "Form and Genre in *Beowulf*", *Studia Neophilologica* xlvi (1974), "The Structure of the *Ecbasis Captivi*", *ibid.* xlvii (1975), "The Structure of 'The Dream of the Rood'", *ibid.* xlviii (1976), "*Se Giddes Begang of* 'The Fates of the Apostles'", *English Studies* lvi (1975), and W. G. East, "A Note on 'Maxims II'", to appear in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*.

[23] T. J. Brown, "Northumbria and the Book of Kells", *Anglo-Saxon England* i (1972) p. 243.

latest if by the first quarter of the ninth century no *modernus scriptor* could equal his work. Without further evidence one can affirm only that Æthelwulf's cell was in the right place, with the right ecclesiastical associations, with adequate facilities and craftsmen qualified to produce a work like the *Book of Kells* in the mid eighth century.