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## **Pausing at the Threshold: Considering Space, Symbolism and Eschatology in the Wilfridian Crypts at Ripon and Hexham**

Meg Boulton

The discussion of the seventh-century crypts in the Wilfridian foundations at Ripon and Hexham presented here arose from my wider research on conceptual space in Anglo-Saxon Art and Architecture, and is informed by an understanding of the crypts as complex architectural spaces and by the wider context and significance of such architectural spaces within this milieu. These crypts, constructed by Wilfrid at Ripon in 655 and Hexham in 674, are two of the earliest surviving extant architectural structures in England, unique in their form and completeness. As such, they present intriguing case-studies for the discussion of architecture, symbolic significance and ecclesiastical identity as constructed by the Roman Church as it established itself in Anglo-Saxon England through the building of churches in stone.

However, before turning to address the crypts themselves, because of their very uniqueness, it is first necessary to locate them within the scholarship of Anglo-Saxon architecture and to consider the intellectual contexts that shape and surround them. Given that ideas of space, place and symbolic significance are largely intangible and somewhat obscured by the fragmented reflection of Anglo-Saxon material culture as understood through the material record, the extant architecture of the sixth-ninth centuries functions as a vital source for research into such ideas — as important as text or image in informing scholarly (re)constructions of symbolic significance, materiality and meaning.

Arguably, architecture is among the most public of all art forms, a highly visible statement of identity, and the ecclesiastical buildings of Anglo-Saxon England were no exception to this — making a deliberate statement on the Anglo-Saxon landscape with their Romanising form and lithic material identity.<sup>1</sup> Placed, as these buildings were, prominently into the landscape, the physical structures of the early Anglo-Saxon Church would have been highly visible

<sup>1</sup> Jane Hawkes, 'Iuxta Morem Romanorum: Stone and Sculpture in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, ed. by Catherine E. Karkov and George Hardin Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 66–99; Michael G. Shapland, 'Meanings of Timber and Stone in Anglo-Saxon Building Practice', in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 21–44. See also Michael G. Shapland, 'The Cuckoo and the Magpie: The Building Culture of the Anglo-Saxon Church', in *The Material Culture of the Built Environment in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale Owen-Crocker (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2015), pp. 92–116.

expressions of the material and ideological identity of the institution, as has been discussed by Jane Hawkes and Michael Shapland, among others. These stone-built spaces were striking, monumental forms, constructed in an idiom far from that of the indigenous wooden structures familiar in post-Roman Anglo-Saxon England before the advent of the Augustinian Mission in 597, and the subsequent (re)construction of stone buildings this heralded.<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid's crypts retain all the symbolic nuance and eschatological resonance of the other extant ecclesiastical buildings from the period, but arguably present them to an extended degree. The crypts retain all of the imposing qualities and identities of the stone buildings of the early church, but are constructed *underground* — adding to their alien and unfamiliar qualities. This imposing, unfamiliar architectural identity created by the use of stone — moreover, by stone placed under the earth in the case of the crypts — was arguably used to an imposing effect on those encountering them within the post-Augustinian culture of church building in Anglo-Saxon England.

Indeed, it is perhaps primarily through studying extant fabric from the period, such as that presented by the crypts, that we, as modern scholars, can experience a sense of connection to the people and the places of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>3</sup> However, such an encounter is rare, as many of the architectural spaces built in this period remain only as fragmentary and partial traces. This makes the Wilfridian crypts at Ripon and Hexham particularly important, as they present two well preserved architectural spaces from the seventh century that remain to be experienced today. Through engaging with these remarkable spaces, particularly when employing a phenomenological mode of inquiry as here, we can gain layered and multivalent insights into the subtleties of the relationships with space and place as produced in and by the Anglo-Saxon Church. Further, through considering the symbolic identity and architectural nuance presented by these crypts, it is possible to suggest that the Anglo-Saxon relationship to space reflects earthly *and* heavenly iterations of the sacred, both as it was encountered through the architectural, ecclesiastical spaces created by Wilfrid and his ilk and also how it was conceptually employed to frame an eschatological understanding of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England.

While the spaces and structures of the Anglo-Saxon world are now frequently addressed using research methods springing from diverse fields, including art history, history, archaeology, literature, and theology, the foundational scholarship concerning the identification of Anglo-Saxon architecture as a discrete style came from a predominantly antiquarian milieu, the implications of which I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. Boulton and J. Hawkes, 'The Early Churches of Kent: Rome and Jerusalem in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland, 300–950*, ed. by P. Barnwell, Rewley House Studies in the Historic Environment, 4 (Donington: Tyas, 2015), pp. 92–118.

<sup>3</sup> There is an argument to be made that such a sense of connection arises from a set of cultural constructs, and is therefore something we, as scholars, should be wary of — rather than being something we should embrace. However, such sites nevertheless offer unparalleled opportunities for an experiential encounter with past places, and as such these material remnants, and the connections they offer, are worthy of consideration as we seek to interrogate the past.

<sup>4</sup> See Meg Boulton, '(Re-)Viewing "Iuxta Morem Romanorum": Considering Perception, Phenomenology and Anglo-Saxon Ecclesiastical Architecture' in *Sensory Perception in the Medieval World: Manuscripts, Texts, and other Material Matters*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Simon C. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 207–26; Boulton and Hawkes, 'Early Churches of Kent'. This type of early scholarship prioritised the recognition, cataloguing, classification and description of the extant architecture above any other method of enquiry, and, as such, has a limited value to our treatment of such material today — which seeks to go beyond the recognition and classification of material and site.

Since this initial antiquarian interest in Anglo-Saxon architecture (which shaped the academic approach to these buildings for several generations), there has been considerable discussion of the subject, ranging from Thomas Rickman's foundational *Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture* in 1817,<sup>5</sup> to the comprehensive catalogue of extant architectural fabric produced by Harold and Joan Taylor in the 1960s,<sup>6</sup> to more recent work addressing the importance and significance of architecture in a more synthetic and comprehensive manner, such as that in Helen Gittos' recent publication on *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England*,<sup>7</sup> or Charles McClendon's *The Origins of Medieval Architecture: Building in Europe A.D. 600-900*.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the particularities of scholarly approach to the fabric, places and spaces presented by such architectural examples, the churches of Anglo-Saxon England, composed of stone, brick and glass 'in the Roman manner',<sup>9</sup> are widely acknowledged to be remarkable structures.<sup>10</sup> Besides offering insights into the scale and scope of the architectural, intellectual and ecclesiastical climate of early-Christian Anglo-Saxon England for the modern viewer, such buildings may also be understood as monumental archetypes that simultaneously occupy and present space/s and place/s beyond those of the lived, local landscape of the early English Church or those of the wider, global, institutional network of reflexive, built spaces that represented the Church in the medieval period. The physical space of a church in Anglo-

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Rickman, *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture from the Conquest to the Reformation* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817). For further reading providing a brief history of the scholarly engagement with Anglo-Saxon architecture see G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1925-26), II: *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (1925); Alfred William Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture Before the Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930); E. A. Fisher, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Architecture and Sculpture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959); E. C. Fernie, *The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: Batsford, 1983); Richard Morris, *The Church in British Archaeology* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1983); Charles B. McClendon, *The Origins of Medieval Architecture: Building in Europe A.D. 600-900* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). See also the essays in *Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland, 300-950*, ed. by P. S. Barnwell (Donington: Tyas, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> H. M. Taylor and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965-72).

<sup>7</sup> Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> McClendon, *Origins*. For an analogous approach to Medieval architecture that is challenging and holistic in its treatment of the subject, and for similar discussion, albeit addressing a slightly later period see E. C. Fernie, *Romanesque Architecture: the First Style of the European Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (hereafter *HE*), I, 22-27, which gives the account of the arrival of the Augustinian Mission, and recounts their ecclesiastical activities and reuse of Roman structures once established in Canterbury. Cited from *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 68-79. For discussion of the churches constructed in Northumbria by Benedict Biscop, see Bede's *Historiam abbatum*, V.XXIV, where the church of St Peter's at Wearmouth is explicitly described as built 'in the Roman manner' (*iuxta Romanorum quem semper amabat morem facerent*). Cited from *Venerabilis Baedae Historium ecclesiasticum gentis Anglorum, Historiam abbatum* ..., ed. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1896), p. 368. The translation is from 'Bede: Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow', in *The Age of Bede*, ed. by D. H. Farmer (New York: Penguin Classics, 1983). For further discussion of this site see Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, pp. 338-49, 432-46, and Rosemary Cramp 'Monkwearmouth and Jarrow: The Archaeological Evidence', in *Familulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 5-18; 'Monastic Sites', in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by David M. Wilson (Cambridge: Methuen Young Books, 1976), pp. 201-41; *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites*, Volume 1 and 2 (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005 and 2006); and 'Monkwearmouth and Jarrow in their Continental Context', in *Churches Built in Ancient Times*, ed. by Kenneth Painter (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1994), pp. 279-94.

<sup>10</sup> See further Hawkes, 'Iuxta Morem Romanorum'.

Saxon England was simultaneously understood to connect the earth to the heavens, to create sacred space out of Anglo-Saxon place, to recall the temporally and spatially distant sacred spaces of Jerusalem, to evoke the institutional identity of the Church of Rome, and to eschatologically prefigure the heavenly Jerusalem to come — embodying a complex nexus of relational understandings largely performed through material presence and architectural identity.<sup>11</sup>

That said, although the scholarly study of Anglo-Saxon architecture is now well established, with scholars regularly addressing iconographic and symbolic significances alongside studies of style and form as a matter of course, the analogous study of space (and to a lesser extent place) in Anglo-Saxon England is still somewhat in its infancy in art-historical circles. The ways in which the Anglo-Saxons may have conceptualised and experienced space are not overly analysed in established scholarship (although this has begun to be readdressed);<sup>12</sup> perhaps because any such approach to the extant material inevitably requires a certain amount of reconstruction, intuition and uncertainty alongside measured evaluation and analysis. In order to consider ideas of space, place, and acts of viewing as they may have carried weight and meaning in their own time, today's viewer must combine current ideas surrounding making, meaning and viewing with a scholarly understanding of the parameters and potential of medieval exegetical thought, conflating and collapsing assumptions we may hold about the manner in which space and surface functioned in the medieval world.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, despite the potential difficulties surrounding a modern consideration of the spatiality of the medieval gaze, the surviving early medieval material demonstrates considerable thought on the subject of space, its (meta)physical properties and complexities, and its conceptualisation — as fully demonstrated by the crypts constructed by Wilfrid in his foundations at Ripon and Hexham.

While it is doubtless true that the architectural spaces that remain to remind and inform us of long-lost Anglo-Saxon building schemes give little immediate impression of the grandeur and intellectual sophistication of the original building(s) as they must once have stood in the

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion, see Meg Boulton, 'The Conceptualisation of Sacred Space in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria in the Sixth to Ninth Centuries', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Despite the rather recent scholarly turn toward analysing ideas of space in art historical circles, the spatial turn has been well studied across the humanities, and has a more established scholarly focus within the field of literary scholarship. For discussion see James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, and Richard H. Schein, 'Introduction', in *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, ed. by James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, and Richard H. Schein, Blackwell Companion to Geography, 4 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), pp. 1–8; Barney Warf and Santa Arias, 'Introduction: The Reinsertion of Space into the Social Sciences and Humanities', in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (New York: Routledge 2009), pp. 1–10. See also *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. by Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and *Wearmouth and Jarrow: Northumbrian Monasteries in an Historic Landscape*, ed. by Sam Turner, Sarah Semple and Alex Turner (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2013). For an analogous treatment of ideas of conceptualising space in a slightly different context, see Scott T. Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). For a recent discussion of the role of spatial representation in Old English poetry, see Daniel Thomas, 'Spatial Dialectics: Poetic Technique and the Landscape of Old English Verse' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> See further Boulton, '(Re-)viewing "Iuxta Morem Romanorum"': "The End of the World as We Know It": The Eschatology of Symbolic Space/s in Insular Art', in *Making Histories: Proceedings from the Sixth International Conference on Insular Arts*, ed. by Jane Hawkes (Donington: Tyas, 2013), pp. 279–90; and 'Art History in the Dark Ages: (Re)considering Space, Stasis and Modern Viewing Practices in Relation to Anglo-Saxon Imagery', in *Stasis in the Medieval West?: Questioning Change and Continuity*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and others (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 69–86.

medieval landscape, they *remain* nonetheless, albeit isolated or fragmented.<sup>14</sup> The surfaces and spaces of the Wilfridian crypts, for example, must be encountered in an intellectual place formed somewhere between direct experience of them as physical, architectural spaces when one is stood within their confines, and one largely constructed through scholarly intuition and the imagination (as we have lost both the material that was housed in these spaces and the specific liturgical knowledge that would provide the context for their use). Such an engagement with these spaces, as places that may be both experienced and (re)constructed, must also acknowledge them as part of wider ecclesiastical structures, imaginatively actualising them as they might once have functioned within the context of the churches that surrounded them. This being so, the encounter with the crypts suggested here, lying, as it does, somewhere between an actual experience of their stone spaces and an imagined encounter with their prior iterations based on that experience, may prompt new understandings of the conceptualisations of space they present.

Complex spatial conceptualisation is clearly demonstrated throughout the extant sacred spaces and structures of Anglo-Saxon England, but it is perhaps demonstrated *particularly* well in spaces of the crypts at Ripon and Hexham. The crypts are unusual examples of a type of space already rare in an Anglo-Saxon context.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the effect of encountering them was once memorably described by Richard Bailey, who noted that ‘only on these two sites is it possible to stand completely enclosed within walls and roofs built during the first century of Anglo-Saxon Christianity’.<sup>16</sup>

The act of building the church at Ripon was described by Wilfrid’s biographer Stephanus in the following manner: ‘he built and completed from the foundations in the earth up to the roof a church of dressed stone supported by various columns and side aisles’.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, of the crypt and ecclesiastical structure at Hexham, he writes:

The depth of the foundations in the earth, and its crypts, of wonderfully dressed stone, and the manifold buildings above ground supported by various columns and many side aisles, and adorned with walls of notable length and height surrounded by various winding passages with spiral stairs running up and down, for our holy bishop, being taught by the spirit of God, thought out how to construct these buildings; nor have we heard of any building on this side of the Alps, built on such a scale.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Boulton, ‘The Conceptualisation of Sacred Space’, and “‘The End of the World’”, pp. 279–90. For scholarship revisiting these ideas see Jennifer O’Reilly, ‘Introduction’, in *Bede: On the Temple*, trans. by Seán Connolly (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), pp. xvii–lv; Jane Hawkes, ‘Stones of the North: Sculpture in Northumbria in the “Age of Bede”’, in *Newcastle and Northumberland: Roman and Medieval Architecture and Art*, ed. by Jeremy Ashbee and Julian M. Luxford (Leeds: Maney, 2013), pp. 34–53 and ‘A Sculptural Legacy: Stones of the North from the “Age of Wilfrid”’, in *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint: Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conferences*, ed. by N. J. Higham (Donington: Tyas, 2013), pp. 124–35.

<sup>15</sup> For the most recent scholarly discussion of the crypts in the wider context of Northumbrian ecclesiastical architecture, see Rosemary Cramp, ‘Northumbrian Churches’, in *Places of Worship*, ed. by Barnwell, pp. 152–68. For discussion of these spaces within the context of Wilfrid’s life, see essays in *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint*, ed. by Higham.

<sup>16</sup> Richard N. Bailey, ‘St Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham’, in *Studies in Insular Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Catherine Karkov and Robert Farrell (Oxford OH: American Early Medieval Studies and the Miami University School of Fine Arts, 1991), pp. 3–24.

<sup>17</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, pp. 34–37 (ch. 17): ‘nam Inhrypis basilicam polito lapide a fundamentis in terra usque ad summum aedificatam, variis columnis et porticibus suffultam, in altum erexit et consummavit.’ Text and translation from *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927).

<sup>18</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Wilfrid*, pp. 44–47 (ch. 22): ‘fabrefactam fundavit: cuius profunditatem in terra cum domibus mire politis lapidibus fundatam et super terram multiplicem domum columnis variis et porticibus multis

Today, almost nothing remains of the imposing above-ground architecture described by Stephanus that once stood over the crypt spaces, but the churches of Ripon and Hexham must once have been magnificent.<sup>19</sup> The primary-source description is interesting, as it explicitly places Wilfrid in the role of architect, conceiving and constructing spaces that were designed and inspired by God. The structures he produced as described by Stephanus are complex and elaborate multi-storied stone spaces, which were overbuilt, in the case of Ripon, on a site which had prior Irish monastic associations, whose buildings were most likely made of wood.<sup>20</sup> The Wilfridian architecture thus contains all the ideological resonances that building in stone brought in the Anglo-Saxon world; but with the added complexity of crypt spaces that were constructed of stone *beneath* the earth.

The spaces of the crypts have proved a source of both fascination and of frustration for scholars: unique and disorientating to experience even today, they are, in fact, pretty tortuous to describe on paper, as demonstrated by previous scholarly accounts which leave the reader with an opaque and diffuse impression of their spatial reality. Their twists and turns and details (both in their similarities and differences to other extant crypts, on the Continent and in England) prove somewhat difficult to express in words (figure 1). Hexham crypt is described by Taylor and Taylor thus:

This wonderful underground structure has fortunately remained almost intact. It is of exceptional interest both in itself and also for comparison with the crypt at Ripon, which resembles it so closely. It has now only one entry, from the nave, by a steep flight of stone steps, all of which are original except for a few at the top. This western flight of steps led pilgrims into a barrel-vaulted chamber, about 9 ft by 5 ft, from which, no doubt through a strong grille, they would be able to view the relics that would be displayed in the main chamber, also barrel-vaulted, and about 14 ft by 8 ft. The pilgrims would then pass northward into a small rectangular chamber, whose ceiling is made of pairs of stone slabs placed to form a triangular-headed vault. From this chamber a narrow passage led eastward, beside the crypt, and then turned north, and then again east, up flights of about thirteen steps. From the main chamber of the crypt yet a third passage led into another small rectangular chamber with a triangular-headed vault, whence another narrow passage led eastward, and then south, and then again east, up steps, to the ground floor. No doubt this passage would have led to an area reserved for the clergy, while the other two communicated with areas open to the public.<sup>21</sup>

From this detailed description of below-ground architecture, the idea of a highly sophisticated space emerges, full of twists and turns and passages, a complex space to move through, displaying a range of building techniques and requiring skill to construct. Similarly, the earlier crypt at Ripon is described as follows:

suffultam mirabileque longitudine et altitudine murorum ornatam et liniarum variis anfractibus viarum, aliquando sursum, aliquando deorsum per coeleas circumductam, non est meae parvitatis hoc sermone explicare, quod sanctus pontifex nostre, a spiritu Dei doctus, opera facere excogitavit, neque enim ullam domum aliam citra Alpes montes talem aedificatam audivimus<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> This remains true even with the widely-acknowledged tendencies of Wilfrid's biographer to employ exaggerated and grandiose rhetoric. For a contemporary scholarly engagement with the possible form of the church at Hexham see H. M. Taylor and J. Taylor, 'The Seventh-Century Church at Hexham: A New Appreciation', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, 39 (1961), 103–34; Richard Bailey, 'The Anglo-Saxon Church at Hexham', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 4 (1976), 47–67; Eric Cambridge, 'C. C. Hodges and the Nave of Hexham Abbey', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 23 (1995), 51–138.

<sup>20</sup> Cramp, 'Northumbrian Churches', p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, p. 301.

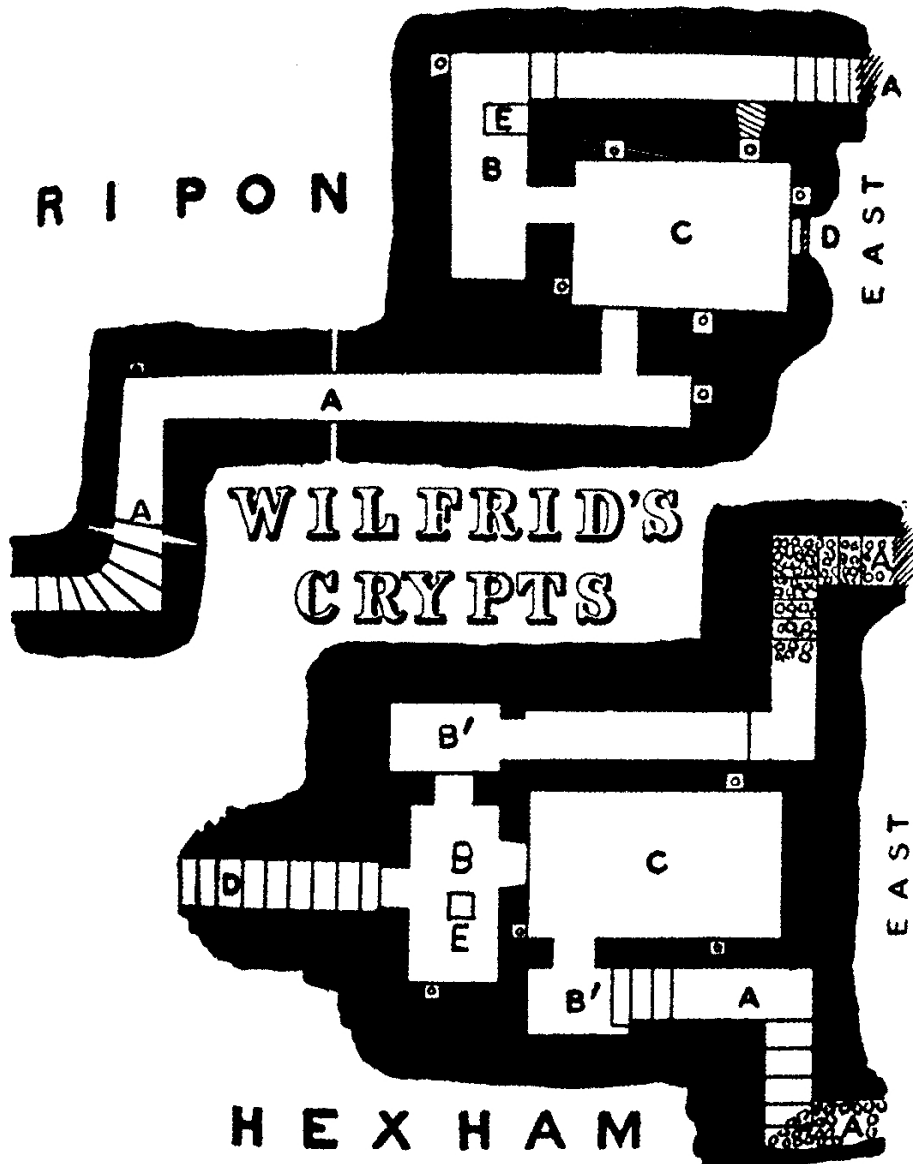


Figure 1. Plan of crypts at Hexham and Ripon (after G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1925–26), II.



Although there now remains of this church only a crypt of similar form to that of Wilfrid's other church at Hexham, the workmanship is of a quality which well justifies the use by Eddius of the description 'dressed stone'. It is similar to the crypt at Wilfrid's other monastery at Hexham; but has only two passages, one leading to the ante-chamber and one to the crypt itself, whereas the more ambitious arrangement at Hexham had three passages. The crypt at Ripon consists of an ante-chamber oriented from north to south, and a main chamber oriented from east to west covered by a barrel vault about 9 ft high from the floor to the crown of the arch. The walls of the chamber are built of carefully dressed large blocks of stone and contain four small recesses presumably designed to hold lamps. There is also a large recess or passage in the east wall, perhaps to receive large relics. The main chamber is entered from a western ante-chamber, or vestibule as at Hexham, but unlike Hexham this vestibule is covered by a quadrant-shaped half vault instead of a semi-circular barrel vault; and it has only one passage of access so that pilgrims must either have been allowed into the crypt itself or must have returned to the church by the single narrow passage.<sup>22</sup>

Again, this description calls to mind an elaborate structure, composed of a series of spaces, involving complicated and controlled access to and through this underground place.

More recently McClendon has discussed the twinned spaces of the crypts. He writes:

The subterranean crypt was a feature that had first appeared in Rome under Gregory the Great and no doubt this association was known to Wilfrid as it was to Bede who states that the "blessed Pope Gregory decreed that Mass should be said over the tombs of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul in their churches." Indeed, the angular passage-ways of the crypts at Ripon and Hexham show a striking resemblance to the crypt arrangement at St. Paul's-outside-the-Walls. Presumably, the designs of the crypts at Ripon and Hexham were meant to resemble the dark winding corridors of the catacombs as well, such as those that underlie the church of S. Agnese, built by Honorius I (625-38). In other words, it would seem that Wilfrid's crypts represent a conscious attempt to emulate one of the most recent architectural developments in Rome. To be sure, the plans of these crypts are not exact copies of their Roman counterparts. After all, Wilfrid had not been in Rome for twenty years at the time of their construction, and comparisons have also been made to subterranean burial chambers in Gaul, such as the "Hypogée des Dunes" in Poitiers [...] which may have inspired the central relic space. Nevertheless I would contend that the Roman element is predominant and not limited to the design of the crypts, for the building material is also Roman.<sup>23</sup>

The suggested connection between the Wilfridian crypts and Rome is one that is frequently acknowledged in the scholarship on these spaces, and it is important to note that this is an idea that is not limited to the structures at Ripon and Hexham; rather it underlies much of the discussion of the ecclesiastical architecture of early Christian Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>24</sup> Unsurprisingly, the widespread importance of the inheritance, appropriation and emulation

<sup>22</sup> Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, pp. 517–18. For further information, see Bailey, 'St Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham' and *St Wilfrid's Crypts at Ripon and Hexham* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> McClendon, *Origins*, pp. 66–67.

<sup>24</sup> References to Rome and *Romanitas* within the stone architecture of Anglo-Saxon England are hard to escape, being a fundamental part of the scholarly discourse. For a cross section of this research see, for example, Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture*; Fernie, *Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 11–31; David Parsons, *Books and Buildings: Architectural Description Before and After Bede*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St Paul's Church, 1987), p. 31; R. A. Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.15; J. Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West, c. 300–1200* (Oxford: Oxford University

of Rome to scholarly understandings of the post-Augustinian architecture of Anglo-Saxon England and the explicit connection between the Anglo-Saxon spaces of the crypts and the assumed *Romanitas* that shapes their identity as claimed by McClendon (following earlier scholarship) is noteworthy here, but not in an unqualified manner. Indeed, Rosemary Cramp highlights this question in her recent discussion of the crypts in their wider Northumbrian ecclesiastical context, where she picks up on Stephanus' description of the crypt as being the only one of its scale *north of the Alps*. She notes that 'in other words, it rivalled anything in Gaul [a place with which Wilfrid was intimately familiar], but not of course Rome'<sup>25</sup> — underlining that the Wilfridian crypts are an impression rather than a replica of Roman churches or spaces.<sup>26</sup>

Both crypts have similar layouts, and imply similar influences, although there is some suggestion that the design at Hexham sought to improve that of the earlier design of Ripon. As set out in the scholarly descriptions of the crypts above, both structures have a long narrow passage on the north leading into an ante-chamber, both have a large central chamber, and both have another passage on the south leading away from the main space of the crypt. However, Hexham has an extra set of steps leading from the side-chamber up into the main body of the church above. This adaptation of the design at Ripon would have had an interesting effect if these spaces were, in fact, used for liturgical purposes, with those using the crypt for ritual purposes emerging from darkness below into the lighted church above — interesting, perhaps to think of in relation to celebrations such as Easter.

However, despite the widespread scholarly association with Rome presented in relation to the material form of Wilfrid's crypts (largely through the employment of symbolic *Romanitas* and the use of *spolia*),<sup>27</sup> McClendon's insistence on a Roman influence behind the spaces constructed to Wilfrid's design, while extremely persuasive and born out in other scholarly engagements with the crypt space/s, overlooks the equally plausible scholarly assertion that the crypt spaces have a strong association with ideas of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre, as first suggested by Bailey, as will be discussed below.

Both of these assertions of Anglo-Saxon architectural and spatial association with the geographically disparate spaces and structures of Rome and Jerusalem have merit, both are valid, and both are to be found in the material and conceptual identity presented by the crypts. As sites of conceptual locus for the early Christian Church, both Rome and Jerusalem offer much for the exploration of possible Anglo-Saxon conceptualisations of space

Press, 2000), pp. 91–93; Helena Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements The Archaeology of Rural Communities in North-West Europe 400–900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Hawkes, 'Iuxta Morem Romanorum', pp. 69–99 and *Sculpture on the Mercian Fringe: The Anglo-Saxon Crosses at Sandbach, Cheshire*, Brixworth Lecture (Brixworth: Friends of All Saints' Church, 2003), pp. 19–36; McClendon, *Origins*, p. 59; Catherine E. Karkov, *The Art of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011); Leslie Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art* (London: British Museum Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Cramp, 'Northumbrian Churches', p. 158.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the argument made by Bailey ('St Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham') that directly links the influence of the Roman catacombs to the form of the Wilfridian crypts. For further discussion of the scholarly distinction between what is said about a building's exemplar and the architectural reality of the subsequent structure, see Richard Krautheimer, 'Introduction to an "Iconography of Architecture"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942), 1–33, and, as more specifically discussing the Anglo-Saxon crypts at Ripon and Hexham, Richard Gem, 'Towards an Iconography of Anglo-Saxon Architecture', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 46 (1983), 1–18.

<sup>27</sup> For a full discussion of the *spolia* in the Hexham crypt, see P. Bidwell, 'A Survey of the Anglo-Saxon Crypt at Hexham and its Reused Roman Stonework', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 39 (2010), 53–146.

as demonstrated through the architecture of Wilfrid's crypts — which, like the wider context of Anglo-Saxon built structures — are founded on the implicit understanding that built earthly places can evoke other spaces through association, reception and actualisation.

In thinking through the scholarly reception of these spaces it is perhaps noteworthy that both McClendon and the Taylors, despite writing over four decades apart, employ similar methods of enquiry and modes of description to interrogate the crypts at Ripon and Hexham. Their descriptions of the subterranean spaces are full of references to the winding corridors of the crypts, the diverse types of stonework and *spolia* with which these spaces are constructed and, to a certain, albeit lesser extent, the probable manner in which they were used as liturgical or theologically significant sites within the wider architectural spaces of the churches that once stood over them.

All these aspects — material, structure, form, conceptual identity — collectively go to inform the academic understanding of these spaces. Recent research has stressed the significance of the reuse of Roman stone in Wilfrid's crypts on a more local level than the universalising narratives embedded in the material as it is discussed here, tracking the likely provenance of the raw material for these spaces to local Roman sites in the surrounding landscape and further tying the ecclesiastical identity of crypts to that of an ideological inheritor of Rome.<sup>28</sup> However, despite these marked architectural commonalities, the provenance of the material, and the ubiquity of critical references to a sense of *Romanitas*, it is interesting to note that these churches (and the crypts they contain), in spite of being explicitly linked in early medieval writing to a Roman style of building, bear little direct resemblance to any extant large-scale basilica of Rome, as noted by Cramp.<sup>29</sup> In order to fully explore the connections between Rome and stone in Anglo-Saxon England, then, it is necessary to look past strictures of form and notions of material identity or replication to examine the nuances and detail of surface and structure, paying close attention to the elaborate use of Roman *spolia* within the crypt spaces.

While associations with Rome, whether implicitly or explicitly (re)constructed in Anglo-Saxon spaces and structures, undoubtedly served to lend authority to the Anglo-Saxon Church — forming links with the institutional identity of the Church of Rome and thus, to a large extent, determining the liturgical and political identity of the Church in England — associations with Jerusalem (in both its earthly and heavenly incarnations) function in a slightly different manner. When the earthly Jerusalem was recalled within the Anglo-Saxon Church (mainly through symbolic references to the Temple, or the Holy Sepulchre), it is arguably less a matter of denoting earthly authority and power than of reminding the earthly of the unearthly, the temporal of the atemporal, and the present of the omnipresent, all understood through an eschatological lens. As stated, Bailey has argued that the crypt at Ripon is representative of the Holy Sepulchre, by means of a comparative analysis of the measurements and form of the crypt-space and the presence of the slab of stone in the corner of the crypt, which precisely replicates the directional (North West) setting and dimensions of the stone/grave-slab in Jerusalem. This Jerusalemic reading of the space, made possible through analysis of the dimension and symbolic scale of the central chamber of the Ripon crypt, is heightened and complemented by the symbolic associations suggested by the colouration of the plastered surface of the walls of the crypt, with the white(ish)/pink rendering of its

<sup>28</sup> Bidwell, 'Survey', pp. 53–146.

<sup>29</sup> Cramp, 'Northumbrian Churches', pp. 158–60.

plastered chamber, described by Bailey as a ‘primary aspect of the crypt’, as it would have been originally encountered (figure 2).<sup>30</sup> In the Anglo-Saxon lexicon, there is overwhelming symbolic significance attributed to whiteness and brightness, as primarily understood to be linked to the semantic fields of holiness, power, and covenant as demonstrated in the literature of the period.<sup>31</sup> These associations, in turn, arguably connote secondary associations with the contemporaneous descriptions of the heavenly Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple as described in the exegetical and visionary literature of the period. This association, highlighted by Bailey, plausibly makes the trace presence of white plaster still discernible on the stone surfaces of the crypt at Ripon (a feature that is far less discernible in the later structure of Hexham) doubly suggestive, as the plaster — alongside the architectural dimensions of the space — arguably emphasises the connection between the Anglo-Saxon crypt and with the metaphysical spaces and structures of Jerusalem, in both earthly and heavenly iterations.<sup>32</sup> In this instance, while the dimensions of the chamber recall and actualise the space of the Tomb of Christ within the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England, as noted by Bailey, it may be further argued that such a reference goes beyond a mimetic (re)presentation of the Sepulchre, forcefully manipulating space and time as the sacred sites of Jerusalem are mapped onto an Anglo-Saxon landscape. Further, the chromatic significance of ‘white’, ‘bright’ and ‘shining’ with associated ideas of ‘holiness’ and an analogous understanding of the holy and the sacred being transmitted through a lineage of replicated sacred spaces could be understood to clearly link the space of the crypt with another of the sacred monuments of the Holy Land, such as the archetype of the Temple — which was exegetically understood to prefigure both the church on earth and the New Jerusalem to come — thus emphasising the possible, eschatological references made by these spaces.

It is possible to take the Jerusalemic reading suggested by Bailey one step further. Given the common practice throughout the medieval period of one space being referenced and recognised within another, consistently demonstrated throughout the early Church (most notably through (re)constructions of both physical, earthly spaces and representations of the metaphysical, imaginary spaces of the heavens beyond), the structure of the crypt at Ripon may be thought of not merely as a *representation* of the holy sepulchre (and so also of the associated space of the heavenly Jerusalem), but as a space which *actualises* the Holy Sepulchre *in* Ripon. In this reading of the subterranean space, as constructed through the architectural language and symbolism of the stone crypt (including the symbolic significance of the multivalent *spolia* on site) Jerusalem becomes *present* in the space of a crypt in Anglo-Saxon England; indeed, is presented by it. Spoliated material, that is to say (in this particular case) carved Roman stone that had a previous identity in an Imperial architectural context, here deliberately reused within the architecture of the Anglo-Saxon crypts, carries rich and multivalent significances, from both their original and secondary contexts of use. Thus, through the architectonic details and dimensions of the crypt at Ripon, the Holy Sepulchre becomes *present* in Northumbria, through the actualised, symbolic space employed to emphasise the unity of the Church across different geographies and temporalities. This involves an eschatological interplay of time, space, place, and material significance that is

<sup>30</sup> Bailey, ‘St Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham’.

<sup>31</sup> For further reading see P. B. Taylor, ‘The Old English Poetic Vocabulary of Beauty’, in *New Readings on Women in Old English Poetry*, ed. by H. Damico and A. Hennessey (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 211–21.

<sup>32</sup> Bailey, ‘St Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham’.



Figure 2. Central Chamber of Ripon Crypt, detail. Photograph the author's own.

explicitly connected with Jerusalem; however, as at Hexham, through the presence of dressed, carved, reused Roman stone, the ideological, cultural and material identity of Rome is also simultaneously and symbiotically presented in a relational understanding that evokes both the earthly and heavenly church (figure 3). Indeed, Cramp has suggested that in the deliberate use of these ornately carved Roman stones the creators of the Hexham crypt were setting out to induce ‘a disorienting feeling of entry into another world, and a more ancient world in which there were visible signs of the Roman past with the sculptures and inscriptions’.<sup>33</sup> This thought is an intriguing one, as it underscores the nuanced temporalities at play within the crypt as produced by the stone, which, like that at Ripon, presents potent and symbolic associations with both the Christian present, as linked to a Roman authority, and the eschatological future, as represented by Jerusalemic allusions.

It is perhaps important to note that the connection between the (re)building of the space/place of Jerusalem and the ‘actualisation’ of heavenly space arguably occurs to some degree in all ecclesiastical buildings. The Heavenly Jerusalem is a ubiquitous trope within the early Church, and may be considered a causal link in prompting the relationship between the conceptualisation of sacred space and its replication across architectural forms — heaven as prefigured by the earthly Church. Because of such established associations, it is an ideal that is seemingly deliberately and systematically implemented by Wilfrid across his programme of building in Northumberland. This fact is emphasised by the literary style of the *Vita* written by Stephanus, which is constructed with markedly Old Testament references. The linguistic style of the *Vita* consistently forms dynamic parallels with scriptural and Christological events, in a prefiguratory relationship also borne out in the architectonic form of the crypts. For example, of Wilfrid’s elaborate ecclesiastical adornment Stephanus writes: ‘as Moses built an earthly tabernacle [...] so the blessed Bishop Wilfrid wondrously adorned [the church ...] with gold and silver and varied purples’; ‘vested it in purple woven with gold’; ‘supported by various columns and many side aisles, and adorned with walls of notable length and height’ and he ‘provided for this manifold building splendid ornaments of gold, silver, and precious stones’.<sup>34</sup> With such explicit reference to the tabernacle and to Moses (the giver of the Old Law, and the keeper of the Old Covenant with the Israelites), Wilfrid’s actions are made to take on the aspect of the Old Testament prophet providing for God’s chosen people, here the Christian community of Northumbria as laid out through powerful echoic rhetoric.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, through the description of these elaborate schemes of building (themselves rare occurrences in the extant literature) the architecture constructed by Wilfrid also takes on scriptural significance, becoming irrevocably associated with the pre-figuring structures of

<sup>33</sup> Cramp, ‘Northumbrian Churches’, p.160

<sup>34</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Wilfrid*, pp. 34–37 (ch. 17): ‘sicut enim Moyses tabernaculum seculari manu factum ad exemplar in monte monstratum a Deo ad copncitandam Israhelitico populo culturae Dei fidem distinctiss variss coloribus aedificavit, ita vero beatissimus Wilfrithus episcopus thalamum very sponsi et sponsae in conspectu populorum, corde credentium et fide confitentium, auro et argento purpuraque varia mirifice decoravit. Nam Inhrypis basilicam polito lapide a fundamentis in terra usque ad summum aedificatam, variis columnis et porticibus suffultam, in altum erexit et consummavit’.

<sup>35</sup> For an analogous argument about a conceptual connection between the Anglo-Saxons and the Israelites, see Flora Spiegel, ‘The *tabernacula* of Gregory the Great and the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 36 (2007), 1–13. See also Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) and *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007). There is much to be said about the manner in which these spaces may speak to the way the Anglo-Saxons envisioned their identity as tied to place, as understood through symbolic material and structure, but it is beyond the scope of this article to do so.



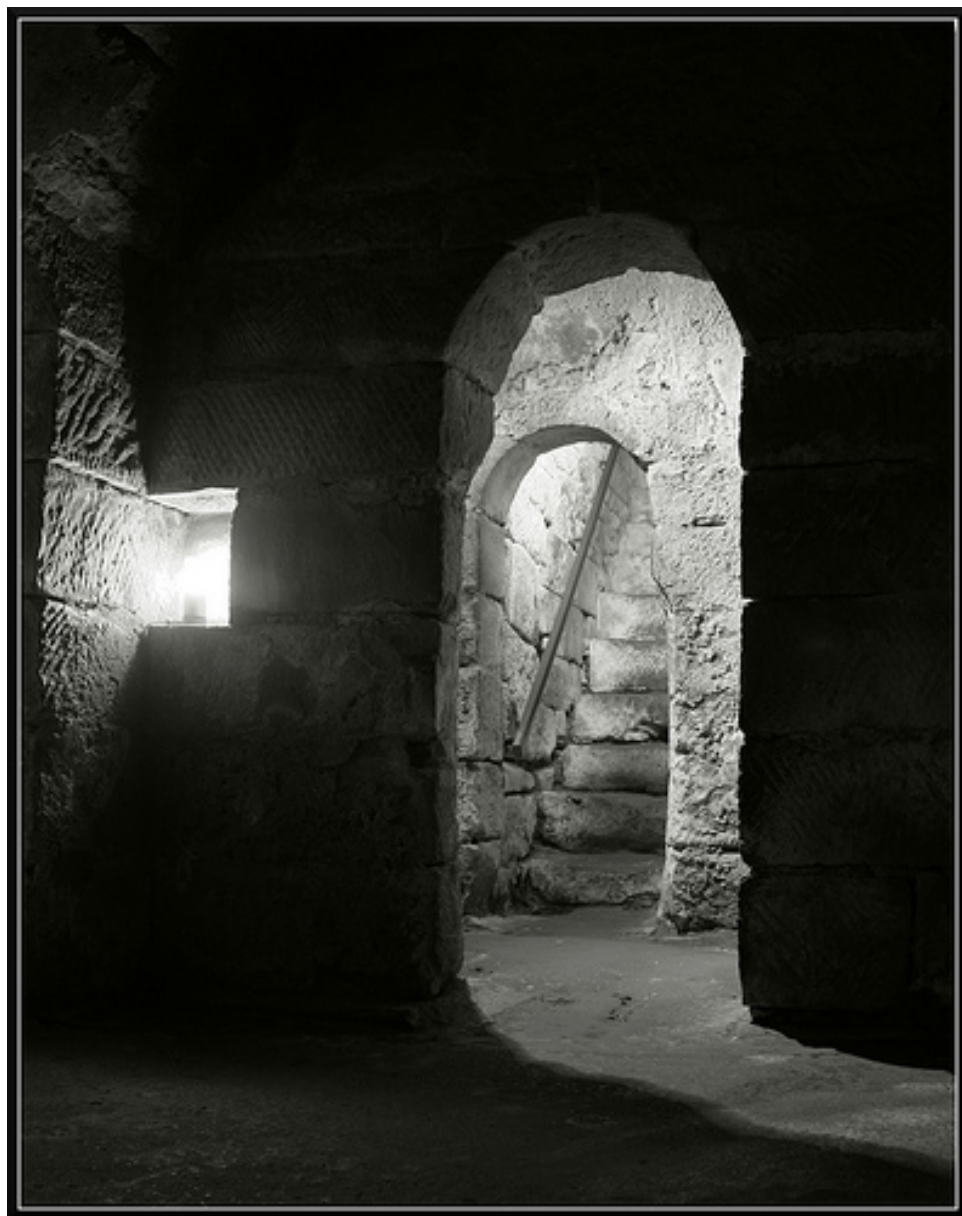


Figure 3. Central Chamber of Hexham Crypt, detail. Photograph author's own.

the Old Testament, whereby archetypal ideas of Tabernacle and Temple were reflected in the churches and crypts built to house the sacred in Anglo-Saxon England. Through close reading of such passages, combined with the evidence for such symbolic understandings presented by the extant spaces of the crypts themselves, the conclusion may be drawn that Wilfrid was consciously and deliberately (re)constructing Jerusalem in seventh-century Northumbria through the crypt space at Ripon, as well as borrowing from the Imperial language and inheritance of Rome.

Compared to the relatively solid evidence for such associations presented by Ripon's chromatic and architectural reference/s to Jerusalem, identified by means of the crypt's form, plasterwork, dimensions and, most persuasively, the unique presence of the Christological 'tomb' slab in the central chamber as identified by Bailey, the crypt at Hexham is somewhat more ambiguous as an articulation of the heavenly Jerusalem. Indeed, at first glance, it offers no immediately apparent Jerusalemic symbols, if by 'Jerusalemic' we mean references to the Temple or Sepulchre as arguably demonstrable in the earlier structure built by Wilfrid at the foundation in Ripon. Hexham, instead, seems to draw its chief influence from Rome, as outlined in much of the scholarship surrounding the crypts. The symbolic significances of this would have far-reaching implications for its identity as a built space. Yet, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that it too may have been perceived to function in a complex network that goes beyond a single set of associations in a manner similar to the crypt at Ripon which coherently presents both Rome and Jerusalem through its material identity.

While the walls of Hexham are not rendered today, as are the surfaces that survive at Ripon, and therefore cannot be definitively stated to have been *white, per se*, the crypt at Hexham may well have 'shone', due to the lamps in niches in the central chambers of both crypts — eight at Ripon and four at Hexham, which would have provided ample light for the space.<sup>36</sup> This said, the idea of the crypts 'shining' may not have been limited to the proven use of lamps within these subterranean spaces, but may also have been linked to the probable use and contents of the crypts. That is to say, the suggested display of relics that likely went on in these spaces, which may well have been constructed to provide access for their veneration.<sup>37</sup> If the crypts were designed to hold relics as part of their function, which seems highly probable, then the proximity of these sacred objects to these subterranean structures would have lent further associations to the space. The presence of such relics in Ripon and Hexham would form a direct link to the bodies of the sacred, understood to reside in the heavens,<sup>38</sup> thus forming a direct connection between the sanctified space of heaven, and the sacred space of the crypts built into the Anglo-Saxon earth, enshrining the relics in the macro context of the architectural surroundings of the crypts (and indeed the wider structures of the churches that surmounted them) — as well as the micro context of the reliquaries that likely contained them. The connection between heaven and earth physically enacted by the relics would have affected the space of the crypt in both a material and immaterial sense; creating a sacred environment constructed by means of the relics themselves,<sup>39</sup> especially if these were contained within

<sup>36</sup> Cramp, 'Northumbrian Churches', p. 158; Bailey, 'St Wilfrid, Ripon and Hexham'.

<sup>37</sup> Cramp, 'Northumbrian Churches', pp. 160–61.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For further discussion see Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–Circa 1204* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2013) and *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Karkov, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 60.



shining metal or jewel-encrusted reliquaries such as those found across the Insular world and Continental Europe — all of which may have added to the shining characteristics of the crypt spaces.

Further support for such interpretations at Hexham are found in the physical articulation of the space, as was implicitly suggested by Paul Bidwell in his examination of the Roman fabric used in the crypt as part of the paper he presented at the 2009 Wilfrid conference in York.<sup>40</sup> He employed a cross-section diagram of the space of the Hexham crypt which demonstrated the steeply pointed triangular roof lines of the two small chambers marking the ‘ends’ of the access passages, an architectonic detail not immediately visible to someone standing in the physical space of the crypt (figure 4). This steeply pitched, triangular feature found in the side chambers of the crypt sharply sets these spaces apart from the flat ‘roofs’ that top the passages leading to these spaces and connects them to the central chamber. It is noteworthy that, seen in cross section, these side chambers strongly recall a profile view of the house-shaped shrines so typical of the period. This visual, architectonic counterpoint within the structure of the crypt forcibly evokes the precious small-scale shapes and spaces of shrines and reliquaries. This is both suggestive and significant as it explicitly connects the space of the crypt (which is more than likely to have been a processional space with controlled access to the chambers of the crypt and its sacred contents) with an archetypal space designed to hold and house the sacred. This echoic use of a shrine shape, in both the macro and micro contexts of reliquary and architectural structure, actively engages the sacred — bringing the sacred into the Anglo-Saxon built environment through the symbolism and shape of the fabric of the structure itself.

As with the possible architectonic references to Jerusalem noted at Ripon, the multivalent articulations of the abbreviated shrine shapes built into the stone spaces of the side chambers at Hexham *may* also support an oblique reference to the Holy Sepulchre, albeit differently to the symbolic articulation found at Ripon. The Sepulchral interpretation at Hexham is arguably formed through the understanding of the space of the Holy Sepulchre itself being considered to be the definitive ‘empty’ reliquary. That is to say, the space of the Sepulchre was the place that once contained the most sacred body in Christian theology, but that body subsequently rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, leaving no corporeal relics for later veneration by the Church. Thus, the space of the Sepulchre performs to mark or enshrine the space of the absent body, which remains conceptually present by the very marking of its absence.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the demarcation of the sacred space of the Sepulchre serves to make present the absent body of Christ in an atemporal, intangible sense, frequently evoked through the contained and empty space of the tomb, later turned into the more permanent form of a monumental church that enclosed and enshrined the tomb itself. Thus, through this systematic and consistent enshrining of sacred space/s and sanctified bodies (themselves understood to create and produce intercessional devotional encounters with the heavens), all subsequent shrines, reliquaries, and the wider containing spaces of churches constructed by the early Church could be said to reference this first, empty, relicless space. If so, this association would reinforce the precious and conceptually complex nature of the many and varied containers

<sup>40</sup> Bidwell, ‘Survey’, pp. 53–145.

<sup>41</sup> For further discussion on this topic, see Johanna Kramer, *Between Earth and Heaven: Liminality and the Ascension of Christ in Anglo-Saxon literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 72–106. See also Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).



Figure 4. Detail of the spolia in the side chamber of Hexham Crypt. Photograph author's own.

of sacred objects and spaces housed within the architecture of the Church — including the Wilfridian structures that are the subject of this discussion.

The seemingly deliberate and systematic employment of the conceptual spaces of both Rome and Jerusalem seen across the spaces of Wilfrid's crypts enabled an eschatological 'visualisation' of heaven *and* an expression of the institutional identity of the earthly Church to be actively present in the churches of Hexham and Ripon as understood through their physical, material and architectural articulations.

Bailey's argument that the crypt at Ripon is representative of the Holy Sepulchre is further supported by the distinctive form of the passage-ways within the crypt. Like those at Hexham with their peculiar spoliated triangular rooflines (made of single large slabs of reused, carved Roman material that differ from the more usual squared stone blocks of *spolia* that form the bulk of the masonry in the crypts) the passageways at Ripon have a unique appearance — although again, there are marked visual distinctions in the form of both crypts, Ripon lacking the distinctive shrine-shapes of the later crypt at Hexham. The corridor spaces of Ripon, like those at Hexham, produce a sense of disorientation and unearthly unfamiliarity when one moves through the narrow underground passageways, which is arguably intrinsic to the success of the manner in which the crypts perform as complex spaces. The blind turns and perceived dead ends of the constricted corridors present powerful in-between spaces for those moving through the crypt — somewhere between the above-ground and the below, between the entrance to the subterranean crypt and the central chamber, and, perhaps, through the intercessionary capabilities of the relics the crypts were likely to have contained, somewhere between heaven and earth.

The corridors of the Anglo-Saxon crypts are expressive of the liminal experience of being caught between one place and another, or perhaps more accurately, of being on the threshold of one space and the next, a feeling and understanding that is extremely significant in terms of the probable underlying symbolic identity of the spaces. In a unique example found within the crypt space at Ripon there is a section of spoliated masonry that is of particular note: namely the end point of the passage leading to the central space of the structure, which terminates in a doorway leading to the central chamber of the crypt. This doorway has an unusual appearance, both as an example of Anglo-Saxon stone work, and as compared to the other doorways within the crypts, at both Ripon and at Hexham. When traversing the narrow and dimly lit confines of the corridor this doorway appears suddenly, unexpectedly; it forms a squared opening at the end of a blind turn which, although narrow, gives a glimpse of the larger, lighter space of the chamber beyond.

This is, in and of itself, both dramatic and symbolic, light appearing out of darkness, with the doorway revealing the space of the central chamber that evokes the space of the Sepulchre, the salvation offered by the institution of the Church and the heavenly Jerusalem. This effect would add a dramatic, performative element to any liturgical function the crypt may have held. However, when standing in the space of the central chamber looking back toward the doorway through which one has entered the space, the doorway takes the form

<sup>42</sup> I am grateful to Richard Morris and David Stocker for discussions of the form and possible significance of this doorway within the overall architecture of the crypt. They have been exceptionally generous with their time and expertise. For further discussion of possible analogous masonry that employs reused roman stone affecting the identity of the space through explicit *Romanitas*, albeit in a later setting, see their forthcoming discussion of the stonework in the crypt at Lastingham, originally delivered at the *Spolia* conference, held at Durham in March 2013: Richard Morris and David Stocker, 'CASUAL, FUNCTIONAL AND ICONIC? The Roman past in Anglo-Saxon Lastingham and elsewhere', to be edited by Sarah Semple.

of a round-headed opening: the horizontal lintel is replaced by a round-headed one over the *same* doorway.<sup>42</sup> This change in architectural form as employed within the crypt is seemingly deliberate, as it is the only instance of the phenomenon in either of the crypts constructed by Wilfrid, and is a striking and anomalous feature of the space (figures 5a & 5b). The main question surrounding the suggestion that this feature may be deliberately used as a piece of symbolic masonry within the crypt hinges on ascertaining whether or not the transformatory, shifting shape preserved in the lintel as it bridges one side of the threshold to the other was intended in the Anglo-Saxon context of its spoliated use within the crypt or not. If not, then it might be pertinent to ask whether the stone was carved into its present dual form at the time the crypt was constructed — if, as with the majority of the stone employed in the crypts constructed under Wilfrid's auspice, it was reused Roman stone.

Given that we lack concrete information about the probable use and function of these crypt spaces, the likelihood of determining the 'original intention' of a specific piece of stonework is slim; particularly given the allusive or truncated nature of most architectural descriptions that appear in the contemporaneous literature, that present scanty outlines largely concerned with documenting when and where churches were built. The relative obscurity that surrounds much Anglo-Saxon architecture is an unavoidable facet of engaging with these spaces and structures. In the absence of any authorising textual background informing us of their purpose and function, it is necessary to treat the material fabric of the buildings as the primary source for scholarly engagement with them. That being so, we must look to the spoliated lintel itself to tell us what it can of its possible nature.

In his consideration of the lintel, Bailey observed that that the mason clearly wanted a 'round arch' effect on the inner face (lending it its distinctive semi-circular form as viewed from the central chamber) but had 'given up' when cutting all the way through — although the work is almost the equivalent of full arching. 'Clearly the Wilfridian masons were aiming at round headed doorways throughout both their crypt structures, whatever the nature of the lintel with which they started'.<sup>43</sup> This observation does not allow for the possibility of a deliberate shift in form, created through the employment of the lintel, such as that suggested here; however, the visual coherence of both sides of the lintel as seen and experienced from either the passageway or the central chamber would seem to suggest a certain amount of deliberation in the choice of carving (if carved *in situ*), or of careful and considered (re)use (if original *spolia*, as is more likely the case)<sup>44</sup> — as well as in the thoughtful placement of the stone — all of which produced such a marked iconographic effect at one of the most intriguing architectural points of the crypt. If this is indeed the case, then the use of this threshold within the crypt adds an additional layer to the symbolic nexus of stone within the space as a whole. The carved lintel, positioned as it is, at one of the most significant threshold spaces in the crypt, presents an irregularity of form that arguably supports Bailey's reading of the crypt as being designed to reference the Holy Sepulchre, with its potent Jerusalemic references.

This reading is made possible through the symbolic forms presented by the doorway, and the shifting shape of the lintel that frames it to either side. Aniconically, the curved form seen from the central chamber functions as an abbreviated symbol for the dome of the heavens, as understood across the space and form of domes and apsidal spaces throughout Christian ecclesiastical architecture. In a similar manner, but in an opposing iconographic reading, the

<sup>43</sup> Richard Bailey, personal communication, 1/12/2015.

<sup>44</sup> When visiting the site, Richard Morris and David Stocker both expressed the opinion that this piece of Roman stone was likely reused in this form when it was placed within the crypt.





Figure 5a. Detail of the carved lintel leading to the central chamber of Ripon Crypt. Photograph author's own.



Figure 5b. Detail of the carved lintel leading to the central chamber of Ripon Crypt. Photograph author's own.

straight line and squared form of the doorway seen from the corridor side of the crypt, arguably represents the square, rectilinear form which is commonly understood to denote the four corners of the earth within ecclesiastical art and architecture of the early medieval period.

With these symbolic readings of dome and square in mind as they were understood to function throughout the church, it is possible to understand the act of walking through the doorway of the crypt at Ripon as symbolic and highly charged. According to this interpretation the very act of crossing the liminal threshold into the central chamber is transitional and performative in nature. Once the doorway is crossed, and the straight lintel is left behind for the curved, rounded arch that gives on to the central (Sepulchral) chamber, the earthly space is similarly left behind and, as the space of the crypt is entered, so too is the implied space of the heavenly kingdom as presented by the evocation of the space that once housed the body of Christ. In this reading of the crypt the crossing of this central threshold is thus understood to be a transformative act, which, again, would be emphasised and underscored by the sacred nature of any relics contained within the space — lending a tension to the moment of entering or exiting the central chamber, paused between the earthly and the heavenly.

Given the overtly eschatological framework of the early Church, and the widespread belief in the coming end of earthly time — alongside the conceptualisations of space, structure and time as understood through material expressions such as those demonstrated within the architectural space of Wilfrid's crypts and the early Church more generally — the crypts of Ripon and Hexham may be interpreted as creating a complex nexus of conceptual spaces which were understood to perform within the wider eschatological context of the earthly Church. The crypts are complicated and sophisticated spaces, constructed of stone, comprised of *spolia*, and built under the surface of the earth, presenting the disparate spaces of Rome and Jerusalem through material and symbolic vocabularies performing across time and space. The crypts built into the Anglo-Saxon landscape draw together the past, physical, earthly spaces of the history of the Church through representations of Old and New Testament structures in Jerusalem; the earthly site of its present authority, through references to the contemporary ecclesiastical structures of Rome, the New Jerusalem and the progenitor of the Augustinian mission of (re)conversion under Gregory. Moreover, when read in an eschatological context, the crypt spaces constructed by Wilfrid at Ripon and Hexham also perform to shed light on the heavenly Jerusalem of future times for the earth-bound Christian community of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria — an eschatological message that is underlined and supported by the very stones of Wilfrid's architectural constructions, serving, as they do, to embed the salvific message of the Church deep within the soil of Anglo-Saxon England.