

Medieval Architecture

February 19-21 2002

The North, Early Medieval and Carolingian  
Architecture

Reading:

Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture*, 29-57;  
63-81

K. Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque  
Architecture*, “Northern Architecture in the  
Reign of Charlemagne” pp 43-68

We are dealing with both with the shadowy afterlife of the Roman Empire accompanied by the loss of the technological means that had made possible buildings like those of ancient Rome or H. Sophia.

### Three architectural traditions

1. Local traditions of stone construction with continuing contact with the Mediterranean (The South; Spain and Italy)
2. Local construction in wood or simple stone (The North; Ireland)
3. Direct imports of alien forms from the Mediterranean under particular circumstances. The power of certain prototypes. The Krautheimer thesis

1. Southern countries like Italy and Spain had a strong continuing tradition of masonry construction, including the elements of the classical orders (columns and capitals, many re-used) rudimentary articulation and vaulted construction. Classicizing capitals continued to be carved in the Aegean and in workshops in the Pyrennees

In Spain the pre-Islamic population (Visigoths) already had a powerful tradition that continued after the expulsion of Islam in the northern provinces. Asturian architecture. Fine columns, capitals, ashlar construction, horseshoe arches, vaults and complex plan types

San Juan de Banos, c 661, built by King Recceswinth

Zamora, San Pedro de la Nave, c. 691

Italy--the continuing use of the wooden-roofed basilica and the centralized type

2. The North. Local traditions of construction in wood or simple stone

What did early medieval northern buildings look like?

Most existing structures are later (ninth century). Can we extrapolate evidence?

Check the Website Homepage under Roger Stalley--early Irish churches.

Are “primitive-looking” buildings necessarily early??

But links between the Mediterranean and the North were always present in our period.

The case of Anglo-Saxon architecture.

Roman Christianity was brought to England by Saint Augustine, sent from Rome by Pope Gregory in 597

Augustine was welcomed in the kingdom of Kent by King Ethelbert whose Frankish wife, Bertha, was already Christian Augustine established Christianity with the direct instructions of the Pope as far as architecture was concerned.

The Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* wrote an account of the earliest Roman Christian architecture in England

“As soon as they had occupied the house given to them they began to emulate the life of the Apostles and the primitive Church. ... A number of heathen, admiring the simplicity of their noble lives and the comfort of their heavenly message, believed and were baptized

On the east side of the city (Canterbury) stood an old church, built in honor of Saint Martin during the Roman occupation of Britain. Here they assembled to sing the Psalms, to pray, to say Mass, to preach, and to baptize, until the king's own conversion to the Faith enabled them to preach openly, and to build and restore churches everywhere.”



3. The appearance in the North of types of building that were clearly imported from elsewhere. The creation of meaning through architectural quotation. Buildings that look like other buildings

This had always been the case--but reached a new level of intensity in the period of the Emperor Charlemagne.

“The Carolingian Renaissance”

## Charlemagne (Charles the Great; *Karolus Magnus*)

Charlemagne's family had been high officials (mayors of the palace) of the earlier Merovingian dynasty that descended from Clovis (465-511)

Charlemagne's grandfather Charles Martel had defeated the invading Moslem army at Poitiers in 732. His father Pepin consolidated the power of the dynasty through an alliance with the Papacy.

Charlemagne ruled from 768 to 814. He wanted to distinguish himself from the war-lords who were his ancestors through the ideology of the Roman Empire and authority of the Catholic Church. The church provided three things: the basis of economic prosperity; the only means of educating bureaucrats to administer the Empire and the ideology of the Emperor as God's lieutenant on earth. Architecture provided the best means of expressing this across the geography dominated by the Empire. The contrast between the varying natural forms of northern Europe and the sameness of the great churches--under Charlemagne some 16 cathedrals and 232 monasteries were either newly founded or reconstructed.

Charlemagne himself campaigned in Italy 773-4 and crushed the Lombards. By 800 his lands stretched from central Germany to northern Spain. Secured by Charlemagne's military energy and his bureaucracy staffed by ecclesiastics. Charlemagne took an interest in education and the conservation of classical knowledge. His patronage of Alcuin of York. He was fluent in Latin and knew a little Greek but could not write.

According to his biographer Einhard, Charlemagne commanded his bishops and abbots to “restore sacred edifices which had fallen into ruin whenever he discovered them throughout the whole of his kingdom.’

Monasteries had scriptoria for the copying of classical texts

On Christmas day 800 Charlemagne was crowned Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III. His royal seal commemorated the event with the inscription RENOVATIO ROMANI IMPERII. He was hailed as a new Constantine and described by his biographer Einhard as a new Caesar Augustus. It was to be expected that he would project this imperial power through a program of architectural construction, and that his buildings would make direct reference to Roman buildings.

The Palatine Chapel at Aachen designed by Odo of Metz, begun in 792  
and dedicated to the Virgin by Pope Leo III in 805

Charlemagne had his architect base the entire palace complex on the  
Lateran palace in Rome and the chapel on San Vitale in Ravenna.

Problems of cognition and description: when we define and describe a building we do it with other buildings in mind.

“He had the curved exedrae removed and the triple-arched screens were restricted to the gallery. Without the curve, the columns of the upper screen hit the main arch of each bay in an arbitrary fashion, a solicism that no classically trained architect would have tolerated. Yet only the most perceptive members of the Carolingian court would have spotted these details...” (Stalley p. 71).

Germigny des Pres, c.806. An adaptation of the palatine chapel type.  
The patron was Theodulph, bishop of Orléans, a Goth from Septimania  
(south, near Narbonne) and a member of the imperial court circle.  
Cross-in-square type--closely linked with Mediterranean prototypes,  
including the Near East.

Saint-Riquier (Centula), northern France near the mouth of the river Somme. A major Carolingian city with a population of around 7000 (today it is closer to 2,000). Monastic establishment with about 300 brothers--with novices, servants etc closer to 500. A kind of holy city.

Construction of a new monastery completed c799. The founder-abbot, Angilbert, was in Charlemagne's inner circle--he had a son by one of the Emperor's daughters. He was nick-named Homer. A close group of *litterati*. Angilbert served as imperial legate to the Pope.

Monastery dedicated to the “Holy and Indivisible Trinity”