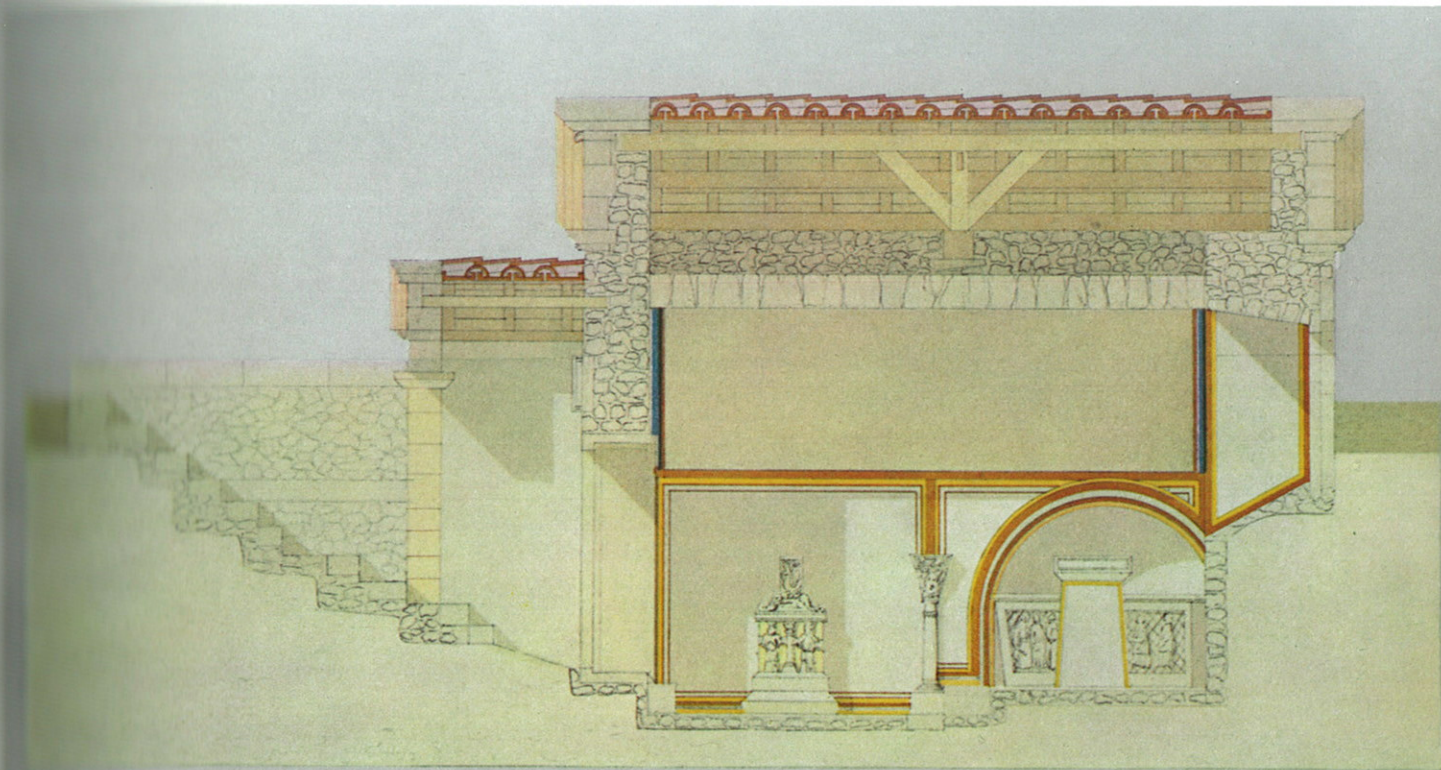


66 - SAINT-DENIS, BASILICA. PART OF A CLOSURE SLAB. DÉPOT LAPIDAIRE, BASILICA OF SAINT-DENIS.



67 - SAINT-DENIS. CLOSURE PILASTER. DÉPOT LAPIDAIRE, SAINT-DENIS.

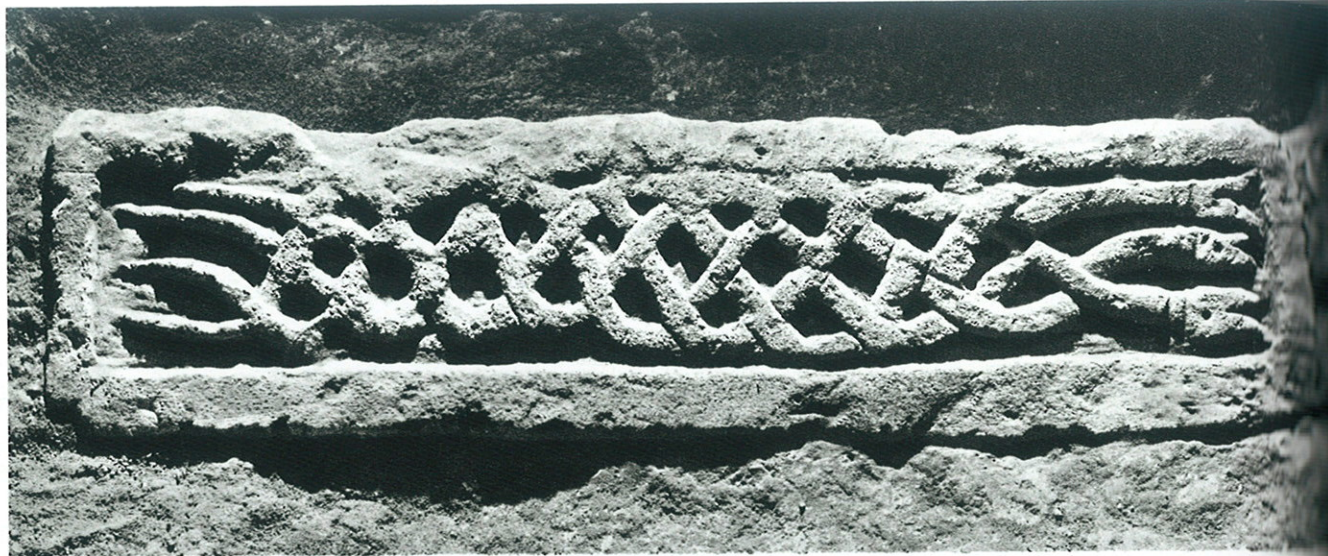
As against this art of the Loire Valley which had been so profoundly marked by Mediterranean influences, mention must be made of the very unusual partition slabs, fragments of which were found in the basilica of Saint-Denis during the excavations conducted by Jules Formigé. These carvings probably date to the seventh century. The design on one of them is like an enlargement of the curves and counter-curves which were a favourite motif with the barbarian goldsmiths.



89 : POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYPOGÉE DES DUNES.' LONGITUDINAL SECTION (AFTER LE PÈRE DE LA CROIX).

Another monument at Poitiers, though less imposing than the baptistery, is equally renowned, for it has contributed a great deal to the understanding of the Gallo-Franks of the seventh century whose beliefs and way of life still remain something of a mystery. In 1878, a funerary oratory was discovered in an ancient cemetery south-east of Poitiers; it came to be known locally as the Hypogée des Dunes. Lying partly underground and roofed at some time in the past with a semi-circular vault, this small hypogeeum recalls the stone-built tomb chambers in which wealthy Gallo-Romans had themselves interred. Here is a striking example of the survival of a type of edifice already four centuries old at the very least. The only differences lie in the rough masonry of the walls and the new use made of the building. Inscriptions and the presence of an altar prove that it served both as an oratory and a place of burial. Ten steps led down to the underground chamber. 'Here is the tomb of Abbot Mellebaude, Christ's debtor. Hither men come to worship Christ. Hence go consoled the faithful who came laden with the grievous burden of their sins.' The inscription continues on the door-jambs and ends on a minatory note: 'If there be any man who here refuses to worship Our Lord Jesus Christ or dares to destroy this work, may he be anathema for evermore!' Further precautions were taken against possible violation of the tomb. The three steps nearest the door are

90 : POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYPOGÉE DES DUNES.' OVERALL VIEW FROM THE WEST.



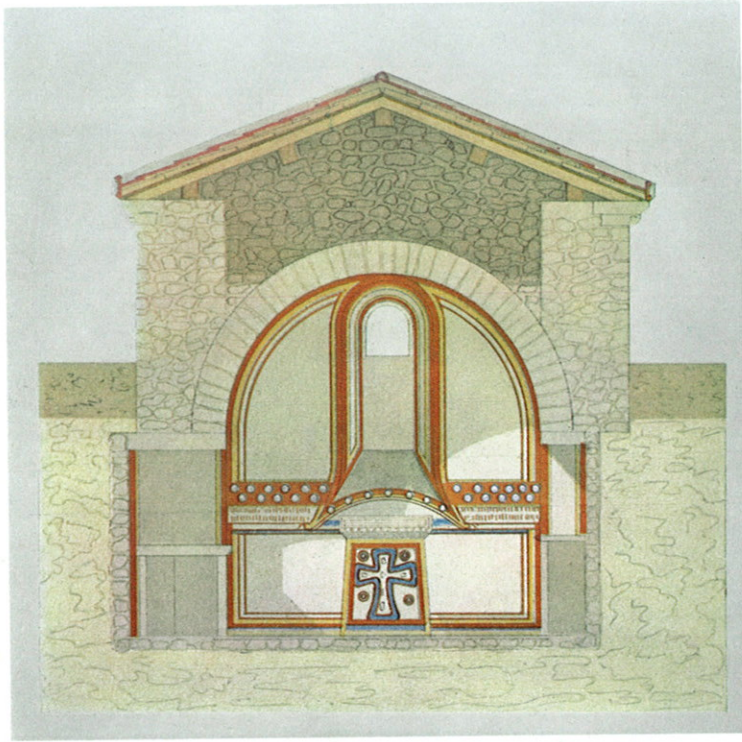
70 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYPOGÉE DES DUNES.' THREE STEPS OF THE STAIRWAY.



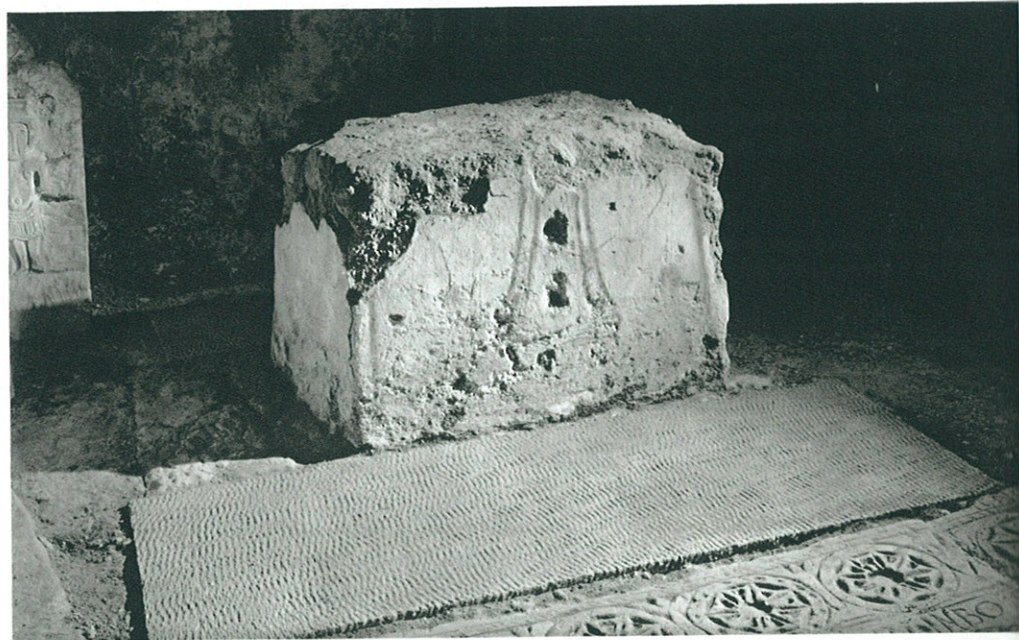
71 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYPOGÉE DES DUNES.' MAGIC INSCRIPTION AT THE ENTRANCE.

decorated with motifs incised deeply enough in the stone for the foot to trip over them. On one step are three intertwined snakes, on the second some fishes, on the third some ivy tendrils. Fish and ivy were symbols of immortality in early Christian times. Intertwined snakes are a motif of Germanic origin; they occur very often on the bronze buckles discovered in seventh-century tombs. That all three motifs are used here with a magical intent is shown clearly by the cabalistic rune engraved on the step serving as the threshold of the tomb:

GRAMA GRVMO ANA-AY CAX PI/IX.



72 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYOGÉE DES DUNES.'
CROSS SECTION (AFTER LE PÈRE DE LA CROIX).

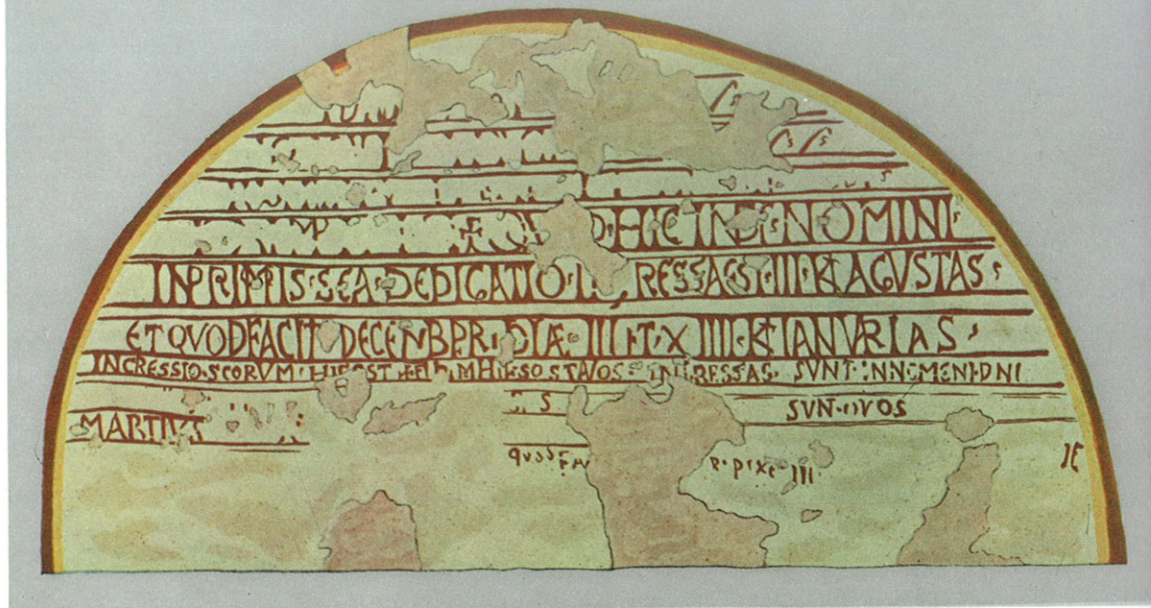


73 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYOGÉE DES DUNES.' LOWER PART OF THE ALTAR.

Inside the hypogeum there is no trace of this primitive sorcery. For the protection of his tomb, Abbot Mellebaude trusted to the sanctity of the altar—a cube of masonry painted on the main side with a cross embellished with glass beads—and to that of relics enclosed in stone shrines. These shrines are roughly carved with figures of apostles, archangels and saints.

74 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYOGÉE DES DUNES.' NORTH SIDE OF THE SANCTUARY.





75 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYPOGÉE DES DUNES.' COPY OF AN INSCRIPTION (AFTER LE PÈRE DE LA CROIX).

Carved on a stele are two figures, each bound to a cross, who for a long time were thought to be local martyrs. Victor Elbern has shown, however, that this fragment of sculpture represents the two thieves undergoing punishment at the foot of the Cross. This is an important discovery, for this work, taken in conjunction with the cross of St Eligius formerly at Saint-Denis, proves that monumental crosses existed at that time in churches and cemeteries. This one, so far as its height can be judged from the surviving fragment, was too tall for the small hypogeum. It was a monumental cross made to figure in a large choir or the open air. It may have stood originally in the large basilica which must have existed in the Cimetière des Dunes, as in all the suburban cemeteries of the Merovingian period. The basilica having been burned down or demolished by the Arabs, the fragments of the cross would then have been placed in the hypogeum to safeguard them from desecration. (This of course is purely conjectural.) In any case the stone-carved crucifixion at Poitiers proves that bas-reliefs were used to decorate churches or the approaches to them. It should be noted that in this period the Aquitanian sculptors showed less skill in figure carving than in ornamental work on sarcophagus lids.

In its origin and development, Christian iconography was of a character radically different from that of pagan religious statuary. In the East, the doctrines of Neo-Platonism encouraged the creation and proliferation of a copious imagery which, by its very excesses, gave rise eventually to a violent reaction—iconoclasm. The resulting quarrel over images had little effect on the art of the West. At Poitiers the sculpture is of poor quality, but the painted and engraved inscriptions—and of these there are many—speak for a fairly high standard of culture. The Latin is correct and the lettering elegant. One of these inscriptions, however, expresses a deep-seated pessimism: 'All things go from bad to worse and the end of time is near!' This resigned expectancy of the coming end of the world was not an attitude conducive to progress.

76 - POITIERS, HYPOGEUM: 'HYPOGÉE DES DUNES.' BASE OF A MONUMENTAL CRUCIFIXION



From Aquitaine in south-western France, we may turn now to the Marne Valley east of Paris. Here we find a funerary edifice approximately contemporary with the hypogeum of Poitiers: the famous 'crypts' of Jouarre, an abbey founded about 630 near Meaux, in a region then still thickly wooded but fertile, settled and controlled by barbarian nobles. And here we see the rise, in the first flush of its brilliant promise, of that new world despaired of by Abbot Mellebaude of Aquitaine. It is an arresting contrast, one that brings home to us the fact that, by the end of the seventh century, the northern lands had become the true continuators of the Mediterranean civilization.

Jouarre was one of the seven abbeys founded in the Marne Valley by the Irish monk Columban. In Poitou very few monasteries had been built in the opening years of the seventh century, whereas north-eastern Gaul at that time was being almost literally 'conquered' by the monks. The number of monasteries founded there from the late sixth to the early eighth century can be reckoned at something over two hundred. Many of them were housed in the surviving structures of the old Gallo-Roman estates. The churches were plain, rectangular buildings, as we know from excavations and the early plans of those at Nivelles, Moûtier-Grandval, Fleury and Nouaillé, but each abbey had more than one. In the seventh century it was the custom, if not the rule, for both monasteries and cathedrals to be surrounded by several churches, forming an imposing group of buildings often covering a vast area. By the end of the seventh century the abbey of Jumièges had been girdled with a square wall fortified with towers. The finest buildings, described by a contemporary chronicler as 'admirable,' stood at the entrance and were set aside as guest quarters. The edifices reserved for the monks stood between two large churches and three oratories; they were adorned with gushing fountains and porticoes with stone columns. Facing south, the dormitorium measured over 300 feet in length. It was a two-storey building, well lit by large windows. On the ground floor were living quarters, kitchens and other dependencies. Such is the description of Jumièges that has come down to us; it tells us nothing of the nature of the architecture and little enough of its actual appearance. Nevertheless this was a period of fairly intense building activity, for the total surface area covered by the monasteries founded in the seventh century represents twenty or thirty times the area of Paris in the Gallo-Roman period. That this architectural activity extended also to the towns is proved by the number of suburban churches erected at this time whose exact site is known. At Le Mans, in the late sixth and the seventh century, eight monasteries and hospitals were built outside the town walls, on the Roman highways, at distances varying from 200 to 900 yards from the town.

The foundress of Jouarre, Abbess Theodechilde, belonged to one of the families of barbarian nobles in close touch with the court, to whom had fallen the lion's share of the great landed estates as well as the high offices of Church and State. Jouarre in the Middle Ages included two churches near the monastic buildings and a third, dedicated to the hermit Paul, which stood inside a cemetery. Excavations made in 1867 brought to light the original walls of this cemetery church. They



77 - JOUARRE, ABBEY. NORTH CRYPT FROM THE SOUTH-WEST



78 - JOUARRE, ABBEY. NORTH CRYPT, WITH THE SOUTH CRYPT AT THE FAR RIGHT.

formed a rectangle, and inside it were found three superimposed tiers of tombs. The walls of this church are no longer visible, but the vast burial vault built under the apse in the late seventh and early eighth century has survived, and it testifies to the high civilization of the late Merovingian period.

This burial vault became a crypt, in the modern sense of the word, only after the original layout had been altered. An underground, tunnel-vaulted passage was built beneath the central axis of the church of St Paul, and as a result the floor level was raised. This passage enabled worshippers to enter the burial vault directly, without passing through the church. Originally the east vault was level with the



79 - JOUARRE, ABBEY. WEST WALL OF THE NORTH CRYPT.

church, of which it formed the back part of the apse. Privileged burial places of this kind were frequent in the seventh century, as we learn from the records, and a similar one has been found in the apse of the main church of the monastery of Nivelles. The vault at Jouarre was altered in the Romanesque period, but it has retained its original west wall and the original marble columns, crowned with fine Aquitanian capitals, which supported what was probably a barrel vaulting by means of stone architraves, of which a few fragments survive in an annexe built in the eighth century to house the tomb of Ebregesilus, bishop of Meaux. The masonry of the west wall reproduces the most ingenious device transmitted by Roman architects—*opus reticulatum*. Here, as at Lorsch a little later, the wall surface is divided into three registers filled successively by square, lozenge-shaped and octagonal stones. These dressed stones were not taken over from an earlier building, and it is apparent that the masonry is quite as carefully bonded as in similar stonework of the Gallo-Roman period.

This is neither a creation of 'barbarian art,' nor a slavish copy. Such fine



80 - JOUARRE, ABBEY. CAPITAL IN THE NORTH CRYPT.

masonry called for great skill on the part of both stonecutter and mason. It can only have been executed by highly specialized workers, men who probably roamed far afield, catering for rich and powerful patrons. As in Gallo-Roman times, the aristocratic art of the early Middle Ages was not limited to any special place, nor was it dependent on materials available locally. The same remark applies to the columns and the handsome capitals crowning them.

The columns are 'second-hand'; they were taken over from ancient monuments, and were probably delivered by teams of craftsmen who ransacked existent Roman ruins, in order to procure materials conforming to the same module. The capitals, however, are not Roman work. The quality of the marble and the peculiarities of their ornamentation prove that they were made in the seventh century by Pyrenean stone-carvers.

They must have been shipped to Jouarre by sea, then up the Seine and the Marne. About fifty capitals of this type are known today, spread over the whole of France but most numerous in the south-west. Here, then, in Merovingian Gaul,



81 - JOUARRE, ABBEY. CAPITAL IN THE NORTH CRYPT.

was an industry which supplied architectural elements ready-made—'prefabricated' is the term we would use nowadays.

This in itself is proof that, after the invasions, the specialized workshops and long-distance transport system of Roman times had been successfully revived.

A similar specialization can be observed in Gaul in the seventh century for the manufacture of stone and plaster coffins. The sarcophagi found in Normandy and the Marne Valley must come from Parisian workshops, since they are made of 'vergelet' or Saint-Leu stone. Northern France and Champagne were supplied by quarries and workshops in the Dijon region. Nantes and its environs were supplied by Poitou. Coffins carved in the stone of Bourbon-l'Archambault and Coulandon are found in ancient cemeteries within the area bounded by the Loire, the Allier and the Cher, and throughout the Sologne region as well. Sarcophagi in moulded plaster made in and around Paris were shipped down the Seine to Normandy.

Coffins of this type were found at Jouarre in the funerary church which extended west of the crypts. Three stone sarcophagi have been piously preserved



FIGURE 10. JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. CENOTAPH OF ST THEODECHILDE. DETAIL.

to this day in the north crypt. The magnificent carvings on them have an unflinching interest for art lovers and archaeologists. For, taken in conjunction with the oldest of the sculptured crosses in the British Isles and a small number of contemporary bas-reliefs in Lombardy and Spain, they testify, half a century before the Carolingian period, to a most remarkable renaissance of religious sculpture and funerary epigraphy in barbarian Europe. The three sarcophagi at Jouarre were not carved in the same workshop, but all three alike show a feeling for monumental sculpture which seems to have been peculiar to this region of France.

In the vault made for her, the tomb of Abbess Theodechilde occupies the place of honour in the centre. It consists of the sarcophagus, in which the body was placed, surmounted by a kind of cenotaph. An inscription in Latin verse, running over both sides of the cenotaph, celebrates the virtues of the first abbess of the convent, who is described as 'blessed.' The letters of this beautifully engraved inscription are very similar to the capital letters of titles and headings in Frankish manuscripts of the first half of the eighth century. Antique art comes to life again in this splendid epitaph, which is set off by rows of admirably carved shells glittering like mirrors when their facets catch the light. This masterpiece of decorative carving far surpasses even the finest contemporary sculpture of Italy, such as that of the tomb of Theodota at Pavia.

FIGURE 11. JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. CENOTAPH OF ST THEODECHILDE.



84 - JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF BISHOP AGILBERT WITH THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Another sarcophagus stands against the north wall of the crypt. Like most seventh-century sarcophagi, it is higher and wider at the head than at the foot. According to a very old local tradition, this was the tomb of Agilbert, one of the outstanding churchmen of the seventh century. Born a member of the Frankish nobility, Agilbert left his family to cross the sea and study the Scriptures in the remote fastnesses of Ireland. He was elevated to the bishopric in England and in 667 transferred to the see of Paris. A near relative of the first abbess, he is said to have retired in old age to the monastery of Jouarre. The carvings on his sarcophagus cover one of the long sides and also the short side at the head of it. On the long side is a Last Judgment which, besides being full of character, has one feature for which

85 - JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF BISHOP AGILBERT, DETAIL





86 - JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF BISHOP AGILBERT, DETAIL.

there is no parallel in any other figuration of this theme, either in sculpture or painting: the elect have their arms uplifted like the Orants in Coptic stelae of the same period.

The rugged beauty of these carvings is so unusual for the art of Merovingian Gaul that the Agilbert sarcophagus raises a knotty problem for the art historian. These outstretched hands and these faces reveal an intense feeling for life that not only has nothing in common with the academicism of Late Antique art but is also very different from the brilliant stylizations of medieval artists. In fact this sculpture of the seventh century of our era brings to mind certain images of prehistoric art—except for one thing: the burning faith that emanates from the rapt figures of this Last Judgment. This is not the embodiment of a dream but the transposition of an inner vision radiant with a hope and a conviction that nothing can frustrate.

At the head of the Agilbert sarcophagus is a figuration, no less remarkable, of Christ enthroned in a mandorla and surrounded by the four evangelist symbols.

87 - JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF BISHOP AGILBERT, DETAIL.





JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF BISHOP AGILBERT, SHORT SIDE: CHRIST BETWEEN THE EVANGELIST SYMBOLS.

It suggests an hypothesis concerning the origin of this image. One is struck by the fact that the symbolic animals are not looking towards Christ, as they are in all the sculptures and paintings executed in the West during the Middle Ages; instead, they turn away from Him, their forms arranged like rays projecting outward from the centre of the composition. This is a peculiarity which occurs only in an Early Christian mosaic at Salonica and in the paintings in Egyptian and Cappadocian basilicas. From this it may be inferred that the Jouarre sculptor had probably been trained in a Coptic workshop whose members fled to Europe when the Arabs invaded Egypt. A similar hypothesis has been advanced to account for the origin of the sculptured crosses of the British Isles.

JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF BISHOP AGILBERT, SHORT SIDE, DETAIL.



90 - JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. TOMB OF ABBESS AGILBERTA.

The third of the carved sarcophagi in the Jouarre crypt is, according to tradition, that of Abbess Agilberta. It consists of two fragments fitted together which may have belonged originally to two different tombs. One piece is decorated with a Greek key-pattern frieze which recalls certain contemporary carvings in Great Britain. The style of insular sculpture is generally quite different from that of the abbey of Jouarre, but future discoveries may throw further light on their common sources.

For we know from the Venerable Bede how close were the ties between the British Isles and the monasteries founded by St Columban in the Brie region, one of which was Jouarre.

91 - JOUARRE, ABBEY, NORTH CRYPT. STELE: CENSING ANGEL AND ANOTHER FIGURE





92 - MONASTERBOICE. 'MUIREDACH' CROSS.



93 - BEWCASTLE CROSS, DETAIL: HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN.

94 - BEWCASTLE CROSS, DETAIL: CHRIST.

The Celts of the British Isles were converted in the fifth century. At the time of the barbarian invasions this former Roman province, at one of the northern extremities of Europe, was left in an isolation that explains the striking originality of its art. The autonomous character of Celtic churches is one of the commonplaces of art history. By the seventh century, however, things had changed. Jouarre was one of those monasteries in the Brie region which, as Bede tells us, maintained such close relations with his country that the kings and nobles of Northumbria sent their daughters there to finish their education. The origin of the Jouarre carvings and that of the famous sculptured crosses of Northumbria and Ireland raise the same problems and—we would stress this point—the same uncertainties. Most of the crosses that have come down to us cannot be dated earlier than the ninth or tenth century, but it has been proved that this type of cross with figure reliefs goes back to the seventh century and that it played an important part as a place of station and prayer in the processions that wound their way through church cemeteries. There is an obvious connection here with similar practices on the continent. From a copy of



95 - JEDBURGH. FRAGMENT OF A CROSS. JEDBURGH MUSEUM.



96 - EASBY CROSS: CHRIST AND APOSTLES. — 97 - EASBY CROSS: DETAIL OF THE SHAFT. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON.

the rules of the abbey of Saint-Riquier, we learn that a procession took place every day in the large monastery church built by Angilbert at the close of the eighth century, and that the monks halted for prayers in front of panels decorated with painted carvings representing the Nativity, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. These bas-reliefs were not accompanied by altars. The Nativity stood at the church entrance, the Passion scenes in front of the east choir, between the Resurrection on the north and the Ascension on the south. Placed inside the church, these figure reliefs were made of stucco and they are described as being, each of them, a marvel of craftsmanship. The crosses of the British Isles, standing out of doors and exposed to the weather, were made of stone. They varied considerably in size and conception, but their carvings served the same purpose. They are remote ancestors of the great monumental sculpture of the Middle Ages.



98 - SAN PEDRO DE LA NAVE. EXTERIOR FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

Far distant from Jouarre, and well beyond the frontiers of France, in regions of Spain that were conquered by the Arabs in the eighth century, several churches can still be seen which antedate the Moorish occupation. I shall discuss only those which can be certainly assigned to the seventh century: the church of San Juan Bautista de Baños in the province of Palencia, dated 661; the church of San Pedro de la Nave in the province of Zamora, not far from the Portuguese frontier; and the church of Quintanilla de las Viñas in the province of Burgos. This last has not come down to us intact. The nave goes back only to the Middle Ages, but the outer walls of the choir and transept make an unforgettable impression on all who see them, for the fine stonework of the masonry is enhanced by friezes set out on both storeys and containing exquisitely carved figures. Here the structure, which derives directly from the porticoes of the Later Empire, is as perfect in its kind as that of the Syrian churches and Byzantine edifices of the sixth century.

99 - SAN PEDRO DE LA NAVE. INTERIOR





100 - SAN PEDRO DE LA NAVE. CAPITAL: DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN.

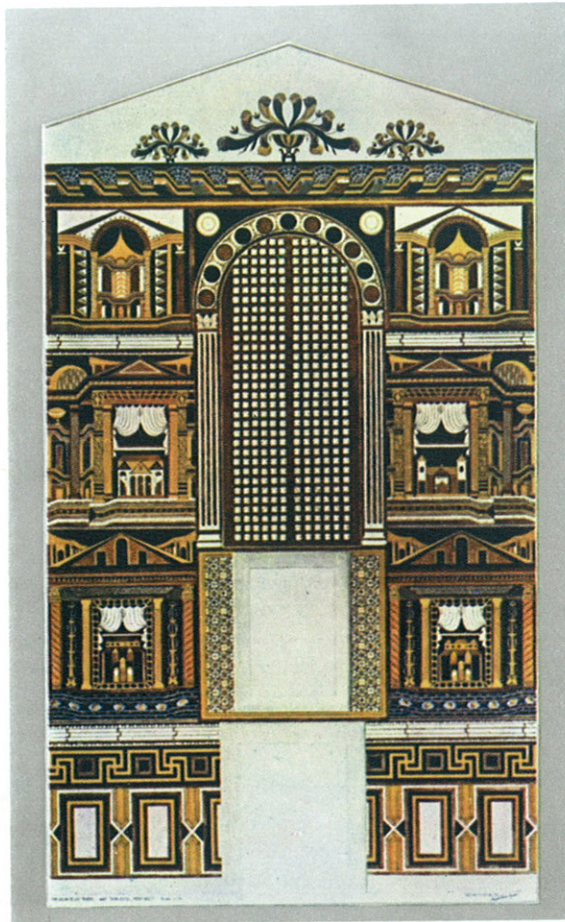
None of these three churches is very large, but all are well proportioned. Their plan, which does not include an apse, is based on an ingenious arrangement of straight lines. The interior was deliberately divided up and partitioned off so as to provide support for the vaulting which partially covers the church. As in ancient buildings, the window openings are not splayed and the columns are simply backed against the walls, none of them being embedded in the masonry. But there are novel features as well, all the more striking since here they have all the air of tentative precursors of Romanesque architecture and decoration. In the church of Quintanilla de las Viñas the ornamentation and figure carvings in stone are given an exceptional prominence. A rectangular panel bears the effigy of the Saviour, somewhat naively represented between two angels; on another is a representation of the sun. The capitals in this church and in San Pedro de la Nave have unusually thick abaci. More remarkable is the fact that two of the sculptured capitals in San Pedro represent Old Testament scenes: Abraham's Sacrifice, Daniel in the Lions' Den. Hollowed out behind the figures, the ground produces the impression of a fresco transposed in low relief to the surface of the stone. Faint traces of colour show that these carvings



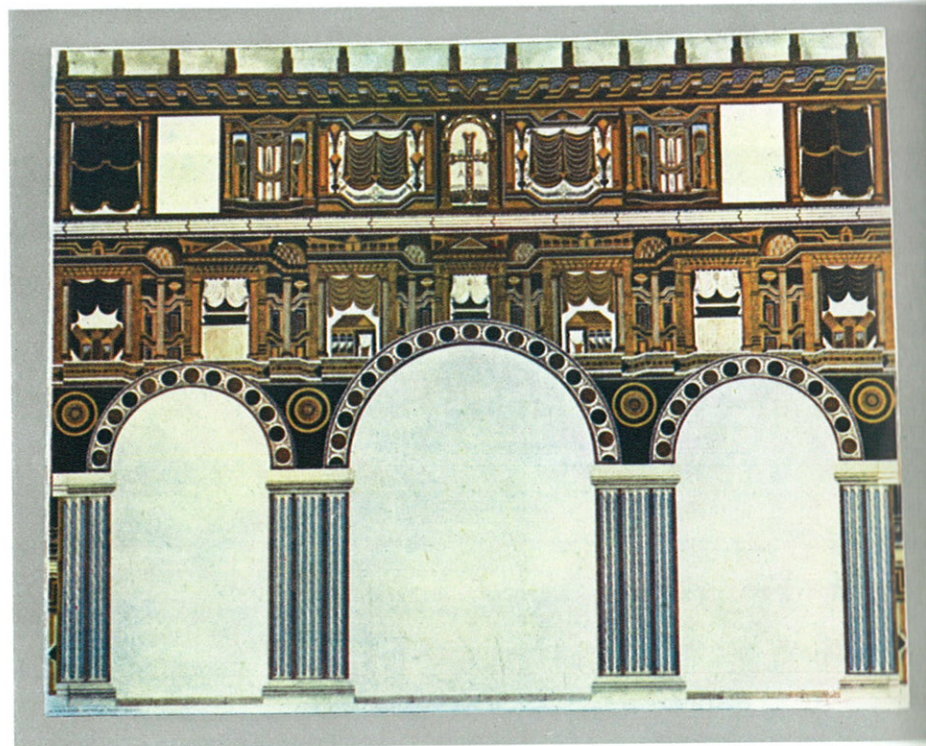
SAN PEDRO DE LA NAVE. CAPITAL: THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC.



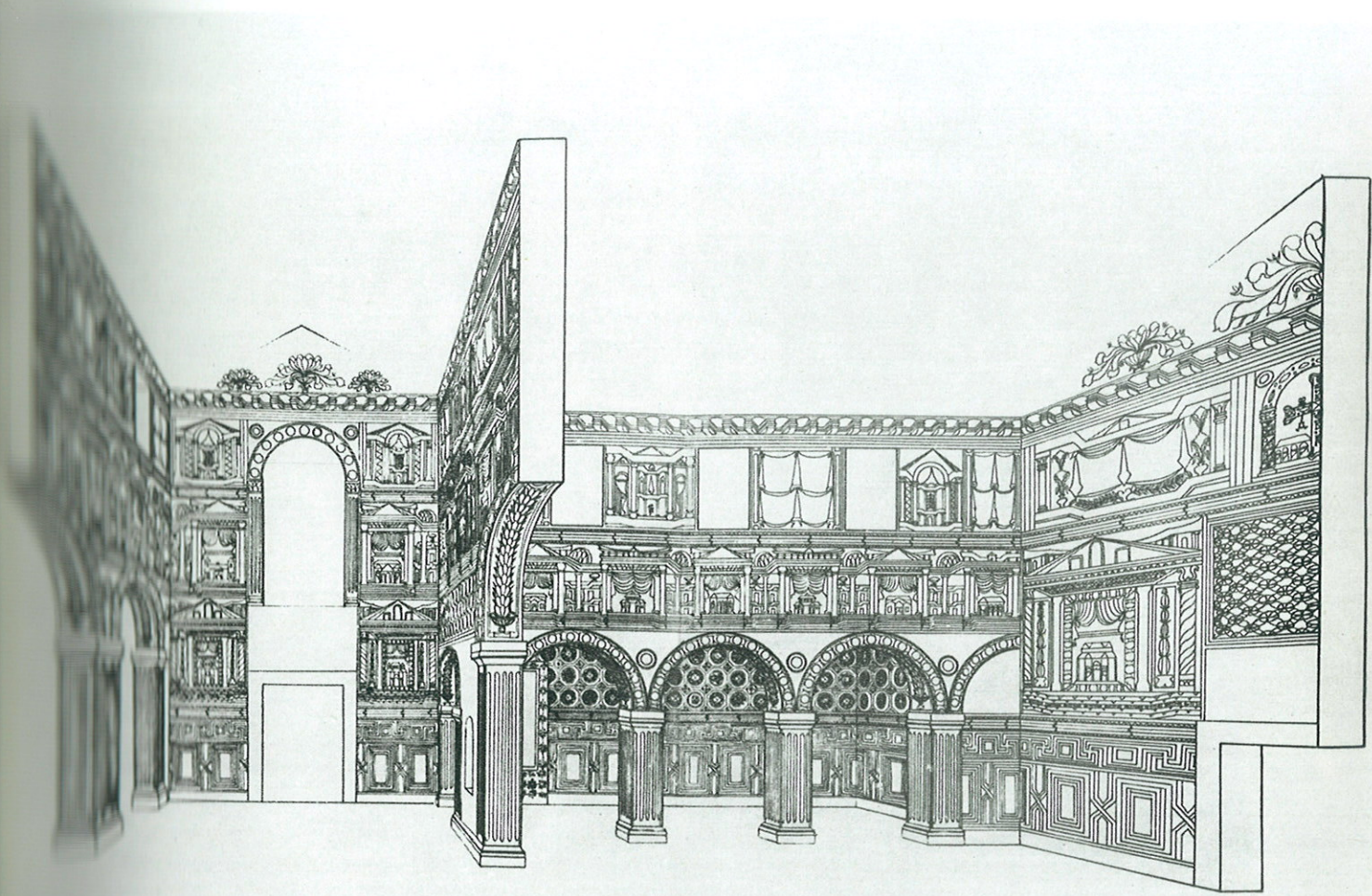
QUINTANILLA DE LAS VIÑAS, SANTA MARIA. FRIEZE: CHRIST BETWEEN TWO ANGELS.



103 - OVIEDO, SANTULLANO CHURCH. COPY OF PAINTINGS.



104 - OVIEDO, SANTULLANO CHURCH. COPY OF PAINTINGS.

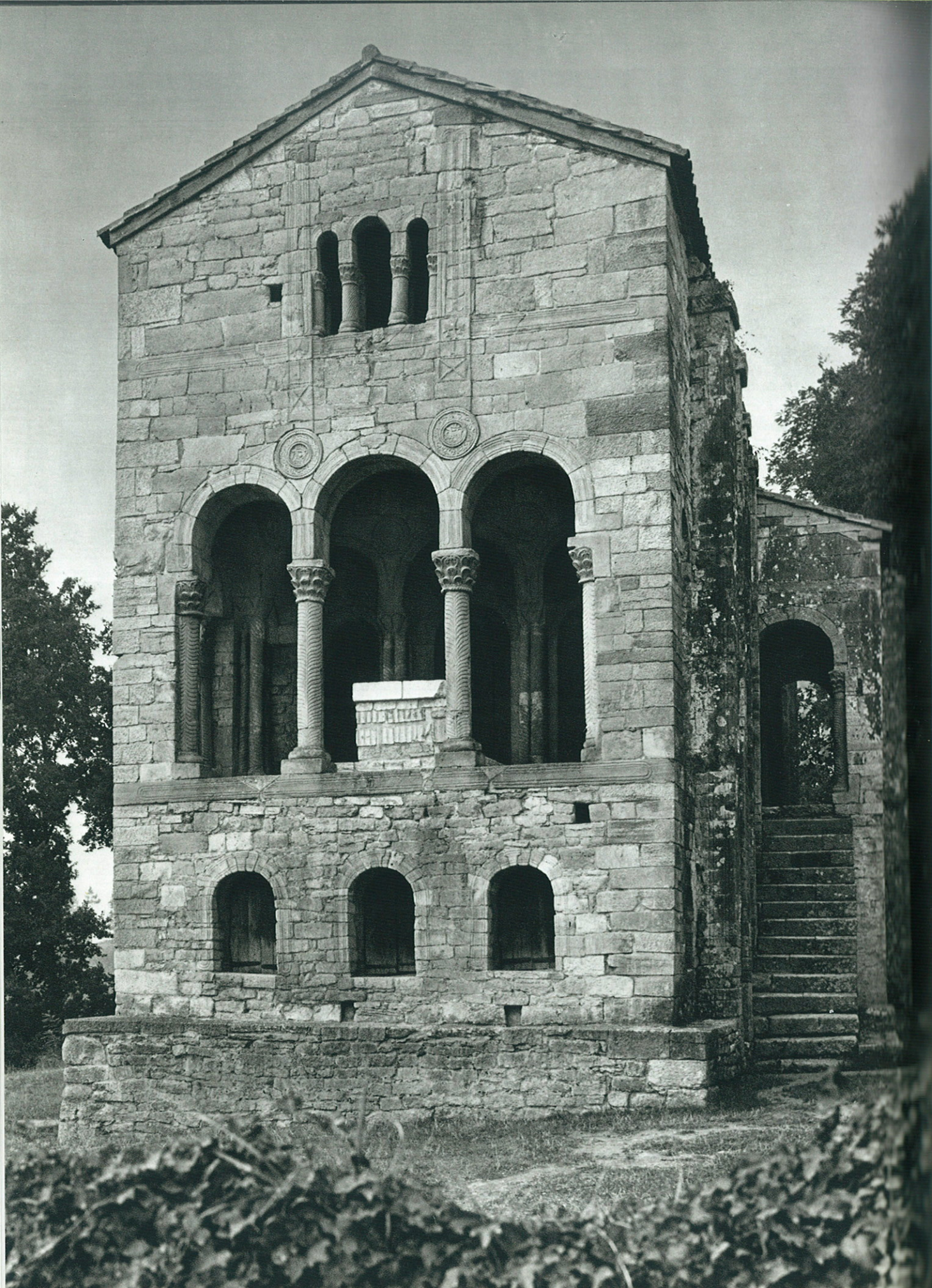


105 - OVIEDO, SANTULLANO CHURCH. RECONSTRUCTION (AFTER MAGIN BERENGUER ALONSO).

were originally painted. The figures are not so expertly carved as the rinceaux of vine-patterns decorating the tops of the arches and the upper part of the walls.

The impression of beauty we get from a visit to these churches is largely due to the fineness of the masonry of both walls and vaulting. The stones, of fairly large size, are smooth and regular to a quite remarkable degree. They are given clear-cut edges and the joints are so thin that they look as if they had been bonded without cement.

Thanks to the early copies that were made of them, we can form a good idea of the wall paintings, now almost invisible, which once decorated the church of San Julian de los Prados, called Santullano, near Oviedo. The church was built about 812 by Alfonso II to serve a royal villa. Its paintings in *trompe-l'œil*, disposed on the walls like superimposed orders, attest the survival into the ninth century of iconographic practices which go back to the fourth.



107 | SANTA MARIA DE NARANCO, PALACE. INTERIOR OF THE MAIN HALL.

Had all the religious architecture of the ancient Roman province of Spain the same high qualities as these on the eve of the Arab conquest? We have every reason to believe so. In Oviedo, a region where the invaders failed to set foot, the Asturian churches of the ninth and tenth centuries and the charming little palace of Naranco, built by King Ramiro I (842-850), have many distinctive features proving them to be in the direct line of descent from that wonderful seventh-century Spanish architecture which was the only one in Europe that employed methods retaining something of the fine perfection of antiquity.

108 | SANTA MARIA DE NARANCO. VIEW OF THE PALACE.



108 - SANTA MARIA DE NARANCO, PALACE. GALLERY AT THE END OF THE UPPER ROOM, DETAIL.

The Arab conquest put an abrupt end to the art activities of barbarian Spain, and Spanish art exercised an influence only on Gaul, and this to a very limited extent. North of the Pyrenees, Septimania still remained an integral part of the Visigoth kingdom and it seems highly probable that the buildings erected by Desiderius, bishop of Cahors, in his see during the seventh century—notably the vaulted apartments in his episcopal palace—were the work of craftsmen brought from Spain. Somewhat later Bishop Theodulf, who came of a Gothic family settled in Spain,



109 - SANTA MARIA DE NARANCO, PALACE. EXTERNAL ARCADING, DETAIL.

enriched the Carolingian renaissance with contributions deriving from the ancient Hispanic culture. But the influence of this civilization, whose architecture had been so full of promise in the seventh century, went no further. This explains why in the domains of wall painting and architecture the Carolingian renaissance owed far less to Spain than to North Italy.

A startling discovery made during the last war has confirmed this, so far as painting is concerned. Some eighteen miles north of Milan, Castelseprio is no more



110 - CASTELSEPRIO, SANTA MARIA FORIS PORTAS. VIEW FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

today than a small, out-of-the-way village situated in a hilly, thickly wooded countryside. In 1944 some soldiers amused themselves in their off hours scraping off the coat of plaster on the walls of the church and brought to light some truly remarkable paintings. Arranged in superimposed tiers, these frescoes depict the childhood and life of Christ. They represent one of the summits of religious painting of all time. The church itself, a seventh-century building, has an elegant simplicity. The walls are well constructed, with windows shaped like key-holes. This was not a mere village church but a sort of palatine chapel, for the bishops of Milan made Castelseprio their summer residence. The frescoes must have been painted a good while after the church was built, but when and by whom is a problem which still gives rise to heated controversy. Though the technique is undoubtedly Byzantine, the choice of themes and layout conform to western, not eastern, practice. Moreover one of the painted inscriptions is so faulty that it must have been written by a man of Latin origin, unfamiliar with Greek. All things considered, it would seem that these frescoes were made in the eighth or early ninth century; in other words that they were not anterior to the first productions of the Carolingian renaissance. But, whatever their date, the Castelseprio paintings have an exemplary significance, for they illustrate one of the ways in which Byzantine influences took effect in the West, leading as they did to a revival of wall painting of which the pioneers of the Carolingian renaissance were quick to take advantage. Byzantine influences in Italy were not confined to Rome and Ravenna. The team of Lombard craftsmen employed



111 - CASTELSEPRIO, SANTA MARIA FORIS PORTAS, EAST APSE. THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

at Castelseprio had certainly been trained by Greeks, and many features of their creations pointed the way to the early ninth-century frescoes of Malles and Müstair; even to some wall paintings of the Ottonian period. (See also page 121.)

The same applies to architecture. Thus the church of Germigny-des-Prés, built by Theodulf about the year 800, reveals the Spanish background of its founder only



113 : GRENOBLE, SAINT-LAURENT. INTERIOR OF THE CRYPT.

in certain details of the mosaic decoration. Most of the distinctive architectural features of this oratory roofed with alternating domes and barrel vaults derive from a region straddling the Alps, comprising parts of present-day Switzerland, south-eastern France and upper Italy.

The edifice most typical in this respect is the one long known to archaeologists as the 'crypt' of Saint-Laurent at Grenoble on whose west side recent excavations have brought to light a number of long-buried vestiges of antiquity. This oratory (for such it was) was built in a very ancient graveyard. Given a quatrefoil plan and vaulted throughout, it is now located, cryptwise, under the nave of a church built in the early Romanesque period. Originally, however, it was at ground level and had no structure above it. Its plan and certain characteristic details of the decoration enable us to date it, without a doubt, to about the end of the eighth century. The trefoil plan of the oratory proper has exactly the same proportions and dimensions as the eastern part of a mausoleum built between 798 and 813 east of the church of Saint-Nizier at Lyons to shelter the tombs of erstwhile bishops of that city. It is

114 : GRENOBLE, SAINT-LAURENT. EAST APSE OF THE CRYPT.



113-116 - GRENOBLE, SAINT-LAURENT. CAPITALS AND ABACI IN THE CRYPT.

interesting to note that the abaci above some of the Grenoble capitals are given the characteristic form and decoration of the symbolic vase found only in sculptures of Italy and Switzerland dating to the second half of the eighth century. This proves the building to be contemporary with the beginnings of the Carolingian renaissance, but it owes nothing to the art of the North. It was constructed and decorated by an indigenous team of workers whose methods linked up with those of North Italy and the south of Switzerland. The arch-stones employed are alternately of stone and brick, and the clampings of the walls and the central barrel vault are of brick. In front of the walls all is designed with an eye to spectacular effect. Columns with capitals topped by abaci carry architraves, and at the entrances of the two apses, east and west, small coupled columns placed above the architrave support the triumphal arch. The aim here is evidently to produce the illusion of a second order. The structure of the ribbed vaults of the apses is highly ingenious. These vaults rest on wall arches supported by consoles. The main apse has a decoration in stucco, with, in its upper part, a cross rising up between foliage scrolls in the

113-116 - GRENOBLE, SAINT-LAURENT. CRYPT, DETAIL.



117 - GRENOBLE, SAINT-LAURENT. CAPITAL AND ABACUS. — 118 - NARBONNE. SLAB: EXALTATION OF THE CROSS. MUSÉE LAPIDAIRE, NARBONNE.

119 A AND B - PAVIA, SANTA MARIA DELLA PUSTEROLA. TOMB OF ABBESS THEODOTA. MUSEO CIVICO MALASPINA, PAVIA.

Mediterranean style. In the places where the stucco does not carry decorations in relief, a sort of trellis was sketched in with a pointed instrument to simulate a decorative motif, and the small columns at the base of the springers of the wall arches were also entirely made of stucco.

On the other hand, the scrollwork on the abaci has nothing in common with that of the classical epoch or the Later Empire, but is closely affiliated to that of eighth-century North Italian closure slabs. The layout of the chancel slabs adorned with scrollwork, interlaces and rosettes suggests that this type of decoration originated, shortly before the middle of the eighth century, in the region of stone quarries lying round the meeting point of the present-day frontiers of Italy, Switzerland and Austria; thence it gradually spread west and north, at the same time as it made

headway in the direction of central Italy. The exportation of the products of this industrial art led to the creation of local workshops in distant regions, where they were sedulously copied. The fact that the chancel slabs constituted the only decorated element in many of the smaller churches accounts for the expansion of this industry, which flourished not only in Helvetia and the Rhone Valley but also as far afield as south-western Gaul. The Narbonne panel, carrying a rather crude image of the Adoration of the Cross by two male figures, is a carving conceived and executed on the same lines as the sculpture of the Swiss closure slabs.

In drawing attention to the crypt of Saint-Laurent of Grenoble at the end of this chapter, our intention was to stress the importance of the part played by Italy and its confines at the close of the barbarian epoch, on the eve of the Carolingian



120 - READING-DESK ATTRIBUTED TO ST RADEGUND (SEEN FROM BEHIND). ABBEY OF SAINTE-CROIX, POITIERS.

renascence. Despite the widespread havoc wrought by the Lombards in the first phase of their occupation, Northern Italy continued to benefit both by the heritage of antiquity and by artistic contributions from the Byzantine provinces. At the end of the early Middle Ages this art lacked any sort of cohesion, traversed as it was by a multitude of cross-currents, but once Charlemagne set order in it and it was enriched by the manifold achievements of the art centres of Gaul during the seventh and eighth centuries, these scattered fires commingled in a flame illuminating all the West.

JEAN HUBERT

PART TWO