

THE TIMES OF
Bede

STUDIES IN EARLY ENGLISH CHRISTIAN SOCIETY
AND ITS HISTORIAN

PATRICK WORMALD

Edited by Stephen Baxter

 **Blackwell**
Publishing

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For Brian Wormald

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Foreword

Bede was indisputably the greatest historian of the English Middle Ages, and arguably the greatest English historian of all time. But perceptions of him as scholar and historian have changed markedly over the last generation. Modern scholars no longer contemplate the ways in which he measures up to the standards of accuracy and impartiality which they like to think they can find in themselves. Rather, they stress those values which sharply distinguish Bede's approach from that of most contemporary academics: not merely faith in miracles, but a passionate sense that history is about the working out of God's ways to Man, and that a historian's function was to expound those ways in furtherance of Man's salvation. It has come to be seen that while Bede *is* the most factually reliable source for the first century of English Christianity, he is in many ways *not* its most sympathetic, or therefore (from a modern angle) most perceptive observer. The history of the conversion of the English now takes account of factors and developments to which Bede gave little or no attention.

The four essays making up Part I of this collection were all originally written and published as variants on this theme. Each is concerned with a significant area of post-conversion experience: broadly speaking, the monastic, social, political and property aspects of early Christian culture in England. Each, while exploiting Bede's evidence to the full, seeks to set him in a wider context than his own work permits, and to explain why historians who have been content to take their perspective from Bede have thereby missed important questions and answers. The underlying thesis is that the history of early England cannot be understood without due regard to the priorities of its aristocracy, and that the circumstances of Bede's own life set him largely in opposition to them. A further theme is that English developments need to be seen in their fullest continental context, whereas Bede's own approach has inevitably encouraged the insularity which is second nature to many English historians. The four essays in Part II are reproduced here because in many ways they represent sequels to the first four, and because they show how,

despite (or because of) his detachment, Bede came to exercise a decisive influence on the self-perceptions of the English Church and people. The Appendix was rather more a *pièce d'occasion*, given at the centenary celebrations of St Hilda's College, Oxford in 1993, which here serves as a reminder that women played a more important part in the earliest phase of English Christianity than ever since.

In assembling this collection over the last thirty years, I have often had in mind a classic study of the way in which a historian was moulded by experience of his own times whilst permanently changing its image in the eyes of posterity. I have learned much of what I think about history and historians from the author of *Clarendon: Politics, History and Religion*, since it was published when I was four years old. This book is dedicated to Brian Wormald by a grateful son and pupil, as a proud and loving tribute to an important historian and remarkable teacher.

Patrick Wormald,
Oxford, 2004

Editorial Note

One of the tragedies of this book is that neither the author nor the dedicatee lived to see it published, another is that Patrick never wrote the introduction to the volume which he had planned. However, he did check and revise the original footnotes and wrote additional notes to several of the essays. The footnotes to the Brixworth lecture, which was published posthumously, were supplied by Dr Jo Story based on a set of abbreviated references supplied by the author. The publisher arranged for an external professional to proofread the essays against the original publications and to compile the index. Jinty Nelson also helped by reading a set of proofs. We have between us read the proofs, checked the index and identified some of the cross-references.

Tom, Luke and Jenny would like to add their very warm personal thanks – and indeed, Patrick’s – to Stephen Baxter, and also to Angela Cohen for all her efforts in seeing this book through to publication. Although it was coming near to completion when Patrick died, there was still a great deal to be done, and it is because of Stephen’s painstaking search through the papers Patrick left and the immense amount of work he has put in to getting the manuscript ready for publication that a book so close to Patrick’s heart is now in the state that he would have wished. We are very grateful.

Jenny Wormald and Stephen Baxter
April 2006

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2 R. T. Farrell (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974* (British Archaeological Reports 46, Oxford, 1978), pp. 32–95. Reprinted with kind permission of Archaeopress.

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Abbreviations

<i>ASC</i>	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Text: Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel</i> , ed. J Earle and C. Plummer (2 vols, Oxford, 1892–9); translation, <i>EHD</i> I, II.
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i> (Cambridge, 1972–).
<i>ASSAH</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History</i> (Oxford, 1979–).
<i>Alc. Ep.</i>	<i>Alcuini Epistolae</i> , ed. E. Dümmler (MGH, Ep. KA II, Berlin, 1895).
<i>BCS</i>	<i>Cartularium Saxonicum</i> , ed. W. de Gray Birch (3+ vols, London, 1885–99).
<i>Bede</i> , ed. Thompson	<i>Bede, his Life, Times and Writings</i> , ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford, 1935).
<i>Beowulf</i>	<i>Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg</i> , ed. F. Klaeber. 3rd edn (Lexington, 1950).
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i> .
<i>Br. Bon.</i>	<i>Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus</i> , ed. M. Tangl (MGH, Ep. Sel. I, Berlin, 1916).
Brown, <i>Religion and Society</i>	P. R. L. Brown, <i>Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine</i> (London, 1972).
Brown, <i>Society and the Holy</i>	P. R. L. Brown, <i>Society and the Holy in late Antiquity</i> (London, 1982).
Campbell, <i>Anglo Saxons</i>	<i>The Anglo-Saxons</i> , ed. J. Campbell (Oxford, 1982).
Campbell, <i>Essays</i>	J. Campbell, <i>Essays in Anglo-Saxon History</i> (London, 1986).
<i>Cap.</i>	<i>Capitularia regum Francorum</i> , ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause (MGH, Leg. Sect. II, 1883–97).
CCM	<i>Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale</i> .
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnhout).

- Chaplais, 'Augustine' P. Chaplais, 'Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Augustine', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965–9), pp. 526–42.
- Chaplais, 'Chancery' P. Chaplais, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: from the Diploma to the Writ', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965–9), pp. 160–76.
- Chaplais, 'Origin' P. Chaplais, 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Royal Diploma', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965–9), pp. 48–61.
- Chaplais,
'Single Sheets' P. Chaplais, 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on Single Originals or Copies?', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965–9), pp. 313–36.
- CHLA *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, ed. A. Brückner *et al.* (46 vols, Zurich 1954–95).
- CLA E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores* (Oxford, 1934–71).
- CSASE Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (general editors S. Keynes, M. Lapidge *et al.*).
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna).
- de Vogüé, *Benoît* A. de Vogüé, *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, Sources Chrétiennes 181–6 (Paris, 1971–2).
- Councils* *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. A. W. Haddam and W. Stubbs. Vol. III, (Oxford, 1871).
- Ecl. Hist.* B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969).
- Ecl. Hist. Comm.* J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People. A Historical Commentary* (OMT, Oxford, 1988).
- Education and Culture* P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*, trans. J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1978) (originally *Education et Culture dans l'occident barbare*, Paris, 1962, to which page references are also supplied).
- EEMSF Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile (Copenhagen).
- EETS Early English Texts Society (London, Oxford).
- EHD *English Historical Documents*, vol. I, c. 550–1042, ed. D. Whitelock (2nd edn, London, 1979); vol. II, 1042–1189, ed. D. C. Douglas (2nd edn, London, 1980).
- EHR *English Historical Review*.
- EME *Early Medieval Europe*.
- England before the Conquest* *England before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971).
- Ep. Ecgb. Epistola Bede ad Ecgbertum Episcopum, ed. Plummer.

<i>Famulus Christi</i>	<i>Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede</i> , ed. G. Bonner (London, 1976).
<i>Gesetze</i>	<i>Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen</i> , ed. F. Liebermann (3 vols. Halle, 1903–16).
<i>Greg. Ep.</i>	Gregoric Magni Epistolae, ed. P. Ewald and L. M. Hartmann (2 vol. MGH Ep., I, II)
HA	Historia Abbatum, ed. Plummer.
HE	<i>Baedae Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum</i> , ed. Plummer.
HZ	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i> .
<i>Ideal</i>	P. Wormald, D. A. Bullough and R. Collins (eds), <i>Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill</i> (Oxford, 1983).
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i> .
<i>JELH</i>	<i>Journal of English Literary History</i> .
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Society</i> .
<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> .
Levison, <i>Continent</i>	W. Levison, <i>England and the Continent in the Eighth Century</i> (Oxford, 1946).
Mayr-Harting, <i>Coming</i>	H. Mayr-Harting, <i>The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England</i> (3rd edn, London, 1991).
Leyser, <i>Medieval Germany</i>	K. J. Leyser, <i>Medieval Germany and its Neighbours</i> (London, 1982).
<i>MEL</i>	P. Wormald, <i>The Making of English Law. King Alfred to the Twelfth Century Volume I, Legislation and its Limits</i> (Oxford, 1999).
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Hannover, unless otherwise specified).
— AA	Auctores Antiquissimi.
— Conc.	Concilia (II– = Aevi Karolini (AK) I–).
— Ep.	Epistolae (III–VII = Karolini Aevi (KA) I–IV).
— Ep. Sel.	Epistolae Selectae in usum Scholarum.
— Leg.	Leges in quarto.
— SRG	Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum.
— SRM	Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum.
— SS	Scriptores in folio.
<i>MLQ</i>	<i>Modern Language Quarterly</i> .
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i> .
OMT	Oxford Medieval Texts (general editors, C. N. L. Brooke, D. E. Greenway, et al.).
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i> .
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (cited by volume and column number).

Plummer	C. Plummer (ed.), <i>Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica</i> . 2 vols (Oxford, 1896).
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i> .
Nelson, <i>Politics and Ritual</i>	J. L. Nelson, <i>Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe</i> (London, 1986).
<i>PP</i>	<i>Past and Present</i> .
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i> .
<i>RB</i>	<i>Regula S. Benedicti</i> , ed. de Vogüé, Benoît.
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i> .
<i>Rev. Bn.</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i> .
S	As has been the convention since some of these papers were first published, Anglo-Saxon charters are cited by S number (where available), from P. H. Sawyer (ed.), <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (Royal Historical Society guides and Handbooks 8, London, 1968): currently online at www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww revised edition by S. E. Kelly with S. D. Keynes; see also <i>BCS</i> , <i>BMF</i> , <i>ChLA</i> , <i>KCD</i> , <i>OSF</i> ; and as relevant the emergent corpus of British Academy cartulary editions, <i>Chart. Ab.</i> , etc.
<i>Sett. Spol.</i>	<i>Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo</i> (Spoleto).
Stenton, <i>ASE</i>	F. M. Stenton, <i>Anglo-Saxon England</i> (3rd edn, Oxford, 1971).
Stenton, <i>Prep. ASE</i>	F. M. Stenton, <i>Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England</i> , ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970).
<i>Tacitus</i>	<i>Tacitus, De Origine et Situ Germanorum</i> , ed. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Ogilvie, <i>Cornelii Taciti Opera Minora</i> (Oxford, 1975), pp. 35–62
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i> .
VC	Vita Ceolfridi ('Historia Abbatum auctore Anonymo'), ed. Plummer.
Wallace-Hadrill, <i>EMH</i>	J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, <i>Early Medieval History</i> (Oxford, 1975).
<i>Vit. Wilf.</i>	<i>Eddi Stephani Vita Wilfridi</i> , ed. W. Levison (MGH, SRM VI) – unless stipulated as <i>The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus</i> , ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927).
ZRG	<i>Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte</i> .



Dioceses and ministers, to c. 850. Adapted from Malcolm Falkus and John Gillingham, ed. *Historical Atlas of Britain* (London, 1981), p. 35.

PART I

**An Early Christian
Culture and its Critic**

Bede and Benedict Biscop

‘**W**e are his sons, if we hold by imitation to the path of his virtues, and if we do not turn listlessly aside from the regular course that he has charted.’ These are words from the homily for the *dies natalis* of Benedict Biscop, in which Bede assessed the spiritual example of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow’s founder. This paper derives its title from the consideration that, even when we have acknowledged the debt that we owe to our tutors and fellow-pupils, there remains an awareness that our character and outlook have been influenced by an educational institution as a whole. I wish therefore to glance beyond the teachers and the friends whom Professor Whitelock has discussed, at aspects of Biscop’s legacy. In doing so, I am all too well aware that we can scarcely dissociate our idea of Biscop from what Bede has chosen to tell us; there is a danger that we shall see the master only through the pupil’s eyes. Yet we can, to some extent, check Bede’s portrait against that of the anonymous biographer of Ceolfrid. It is also possible, by following the example of James Campbell in an important article, to set what we know in a wider European perspective; to clothe the frame of Bede’s story with such ready-made tailoring as can be shown to fit it. This may help us to give Biscop a social and cultural context. In doing so, we shall cast necessary light on Bede’s educational background.¹

Bede speaks of Biscop’s *semita regulari*. We may begin, therefore, with the rule of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. It was one of Biscop’s deathbed preoccupations, and it is in Bede’s account of this famous scene that we read of how words which (according to the Anonymous) were often on Biscop’s lips were spoken for the last time. The *decreta* which he had ordained for his monks were not his own untaught creation; they represented a selection of what he had found best in seventeen different monasteries which he had visited on his travels.² This rule is, of course, lost. But we are given an immediate clue to some at least of its contents when Biscop, in both accounts, compares his own plans for the succession to his abbeys with the *regula magni quondam abbatis Benedicti*.³ Presumably because of this reference, it was taken for granted, forty years ago, that Biscop’s rule was Benedictine. In the words

which Dom Cuthbert Butler quoted from Cardinal Newman: ‘Bede is as truly the pattern of a Benedictine as is St Thomas of a Dominican.’⁴ Today, thanks to the truly shattering revolution in monastic studies whose course was first charted by Dom David Knowles, we know better.⁵

No seventh-century monastery could be described as ‘Benedictine’ in quite the modern sense. In the seventh century, we are still in what is nowadays known as the age of the *regula mixta*.⁶ This is not so much because the world had yet to awaken to the exclusive merits of St Benedict as because of a rather different attitude towards the codification of the monastic life. From the fourth to the eighth centuries, the primary meaning of the *Vita regularis* was the communal life of the apostolic Church, its model the description of the Jerusalem community in the fourth chapter of Acts. In the fourth century, however, it came to be felt that certain kinds of charismatic figure offered a Christian his best chance of following that model; by about 450, it had been established, both in the East and in the West, that one could get just as far by copying a holy man’s example as by listening to his teaching.⁷ The Rules ascribed (rightly or wrongly) to the founding fathers of the monastic life were increasingly considered to encapsulate such examples. It was from the corpus of sanctified tradition thus established that holy teachers, Benedict himself included, constructed their own patterns.⁸ Thus, the writings of Cassian, the most influential of early western writers, seem to stand somewhere between a descriptive account of the Desert Fathers, a prescriptive rule for their western followers, and a verbatim record of their spiritual teaching. Thus, too, Pope Gregory the Great, in a famous passage, could recommend the rule of the holy father Benedict as a reliable guide to the abbot’s life and character, ‘for his life could not have differed from his teaching’.⁹

The sixth century was, however, an age of codifications. As bishops claimed the right to regulate the monastic communities of their dioceses, and as several noted monk-bishops legislated for their own foundations, rules throughout the western Mediterranean became increasingly similar in content and in language.¹⁰ The seventh century was thus a period of transition. Monastic legislators now felt that they had very little of their own to add to the wisdom of the ‘Fathers’, and the extant rules are largely *catenae* of quotations.¹¹ Some sources seem to regard it as a point of credit that a holy man’s rule should be indebted to the maximum number of earlier writers.¹² At the same time, the holy man retains some of his autonomy; monastic founders are still considered responsible for constructing their community’s rule. The result of all this is that we can find a close, and probably revealing, parallel to Biscop’s activity in the life of his Frankish contemporary, St Filibert of Noirmoutier. Filibert,

because perfect men always follow the more perfect, began to travel around the communities of the saints, in order to acquire something profitable from the holy tradition. He passed Luxeuil and Bobbio in review, also the other monasteries living by the norm of St Columbanus, together with every monastery in France or Italy, which

Burgundy folds within her lap. Keeping an astute eye open, like a most prudent bee, for whatever seemed to be flowering most vigorously, he selected it among his own models. He became familiar, by assiduous reading, with the inspiration of St Basil, the rule of Macarius, the decrees of Benedict, the most holy institutes of Columbanus, and thus, reeking with the scent of virtue, he displayed a holy example to his followers.¹³

This passage is from a rather later life, but it conveys a fair impression of the priorities of a seventh-century monastic founder. We can thus see why Bede will have considered his patron's rule an aspect of his charismatic example as a holy teacher. We can also guess that Biscop's circuit of seventeen monasteries is likely to have resulted in a digest of assorted earlier rules.

For these reasons, it is both possible and necessary to consider what elements could have contributed to the mixed rule under which Bede grew up. One constituent has already been isolated. What further contribution was made by the *Rule of St Benedict*? It may be that scholars have been reacting too powerfully against the traditional view.¹⁴ At least two further chapters of the *Rule* are quoted by Bede.¹⁵ The immortal story of the plague at Jarrow in the anonymous life of Ceolfrid may conceal further evidence. For Ceolfrid's initial reaction to the destruction of his community was to order that antiphons should cease, except in the evening and at matins. Now *RB* cap. 17 says that antiphons are to be abandoned if the congregation is small, and seems to be referring only to the services of terce, sext and nones.¹⁶ Ultimately, Ceolfrid reversed his decision (as the rule itself entitled him to), but not before the reader had been given a very significant glimpse of the norm.¹⁷ What, moreover, of Biscop's *cognomen*? Benedict is not a common seventh-century name north of the Alps; when Bede cites Gregory's *Dialogues* in the first chapter of the 'History of the Abbots', he hints powerfully at the source of Biscop's inspiration.¹⁸ A final point: the view that Bede and Biscop were Benedictines could prove to be one of those errors whose very existence is a signpost to subsequent commentators. For very little of what we can find out about Monkwearmouth-Jarrow is actually incompatible with the Benedictine *Rule*.¹⁹ St Wilfrid, by contrast, whose claims to be an orthodox Benedictine are often nowadays preferred to Biscop's, ignored the *Rule's* provisions for the succession and adopted an attitude to oblates more characteristic of Gallic than of Benedictine monasticism.²⁰ The fact that his pupil, St Aethelthryth, failed to fast on festivals is a further hint of Gallic influence.²¹ It would seem, then, that one of Biscop's legacies to Bede could have been as concentrated a dose of Benedictinism as was available anywhere in the seventh century.

The other components of Biscop's rule are irretrievable. There is, as Mr Hunter Blair has pointed out, a strong probability that it will have been influenced by the customs of Lérins where, between 665 and 668, Biscop was finally tonsured;²² but these customs are themselves obscure.²³ I shall return to the possible influence of Lérins in other spheres later. Meanwhile, I would like to point out that this is a very

significant and controversial period in the history of the island monastery. At some date between 660 and 680, Aigulf arrived from Fleury-sur-Loire to reform the abbey along the lines of the mixed Benedictine and Columbanian observance forged by the great Hiberno-Frankish monastery of Luxeuil. His innovations were so unpopular that, not without cooperation from the local bishop, he and his protégés were massacred.²⁴ It is not clear just where Biscop's visit fits into this pattern of events.²⁵ But the story has clear implications for our understanding of the influences upon him. First, if he arrived at an unreformed Lérins, he is most unlikely to have acquired there his high regard for the *Rule of St Benedict*. The older houses of the Rhône valley were highly resistant to reform, Benedictine or otherwise, throughout most of the seventh century. Secondly, the inspiration to reform was reaching Lérins not from Italy but from the north.²⁶ We thus reach a further set of questions about Biscop's rule. Where is the founder of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow most likely to have learned to admire St Benedict?

To this question one may return a short, and possibly correct, answer: he got the *Rule* from Wilfrid. Bishop Wilfrid, Ceolfrid's ex-abbot and Biscop's diocesan, must have been a major influence upon Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in its early years;²⁷ and he is of course reported to have introduced the *Rule* to Northumbria, more probably on his return to Ripon in 666 than earlier.²⁸ But such an answer scarcely moves the inquiry forward. What lay behind Wilfrid? The answer that will this time spring to the lips is Rome. Yet not the least of the shocks that modern research has reserved for the harassed historians of monasticism is that the early dissemination of the *Rule* owed much less to Rome than to an environment where we might least have expected to find it: the large network of north Gallic and Burgundian monasteries which drew their inspiration from St Columbanus' Luxeuil and much of their prosperity from official patronage. After an isolated, and still unexplained, appearance in south-western Gaul, the continuous history of the *Rule* began, not at Rome, where it is extraordinarily difficult to find evidence for its early observance, but at the Neustrian court.²⁹ It was under the joint patronage of Saints Benedict and Columbanus that the monastic movement exploded in northern and eastern Gaul.³⁰ (It may be noted that Luxeuil and its founder are given special emphasis in the odyssey of St Filibert.) Then, as the seventh century drew to a close, St Benedict's name began to appear unaccompanied.³¹

In the light of these points, the Frankish connections of Wilfrid and Biscop acquire a further significance. Wilfrid is unlikely to have discovered St Benedict at Lyons for the reasons described above. But he spent up to two further years in Gaul, during and after his consecration (664–6), and it may have been then that he adopted the *Rule*.³² One of his probable hosts, his patron Acgilbert, apparently belonged to the Columbanian connection, and Acgilbert's abbey of Jouarre, if Wilfrid stayed there, must have observed the joint rule.³³ Even if Wilfrid returned to Lyons, he will, by this date, have found a reforming bishop in office; for Genesisius was a protégé of Queen Balthildis, who had refounded Chelles with nuns from

Jouarre, and it was at Chelles that Genesius was buried.³⁴ Biscop himself had his links with these circles. In the winter of 668–9, on his way home from Rome with Theodore and Hadrian, he must have spent five months either with Acgilbert himself or with Emmo of Sens and Burgundofaro of Meaux.³⁵ Burgundofaro was as closely tied to the Luxeuil connection as was Acgilbert, while Emmo was at least a patron of the joint rule.³⁶ There is a final point to make here. Biscop had close and early links with Wessex, quite apart from his relations with Acgilbert. It was in Wessex that he planned to found his monastery, before his ultimate return to Northumbria.³⁷ Obscure as early West Saxon history is, two things about it are quite clear. In the first place, Frankish influence must have been extremely strong; the bishop under whom Biscop planned to settle in 672 would have been Acgilbert's cousin, Hlothere, who subscribed the only early charter with unimpeachable Frankish features.³⁸ Secondly, Wessex is an early and much-neglected outpost of Benedictine influence in Britain. St Aldhelm claimed to live by the *Rule*. St Boniface, with his shadowy West Saxon background, was the most important single figure in the history of the *Rule* between St Benedict himself and his Carolingian namesake.³⁹ I suspect myself that there is something unusual about the attitude of some Englishmen to the *Rule of St Benedict*, and that it is linked with their veneration for Pope Gregory and their interest in his *Dialogues*. Nonetheless, we must now acknowledge that their probably extensive knowledge of the *Rule* connects Biscop and Wilfrid not so much with Rome as with northern France. For all their long experiences of the Midi, they find their counterparts in the Frankish and Burgundian noblemen, whose first inclinations were towards the older communities of the south, but who were soon drawn into the orbit of Luxeuil.⁴⁰

An even more striking illustration of this paradox (if paradox it really be) could prove to be the papal charter of privilege with which Biscop equipped his foundations; it was another of his main concerns as he lay dying.⁴¹ Once again, it has been lost. But once again, one may make a reasoned guess at its contents, with Wilhelm Levison as an authoritative and well-tried guide.⁴² In doing so, there are two considerations, as Levison could see, which are of primary importance. The first is that Biscop's charter be set against the background of normal diplomatic practice, papal and episcopal, during the seventh century. We cannot realistically suppose that his charter will have been of a type unrecorded at any time elsewhere. Secondly, it can hardly be coincidence that Hadrian, Wilfrid and Biscop all secured privileges from the same pope at what may very well have been the same time.⁴³ (The Monkwearmouth-Jarrow privilege, like that of Wilfrid, was subsequently confirmed by Benedict II and Sergius I.) The links between Biscop and Wilfrid have already been noticed more than once. Those between Monkwearmouth and Canterbury are too obvious to need further comment.⁴⁴ Thus there is a much better than even chance that we shall be able to reconstruct significant features of Biscop's charter from the evidence of Eddius and from the substantially genuine text of Hadrian's privilege, especially with continental analogies to guide our judgement.⁴⁵

In the first place, Monkwearmouth-Jarrow sources tell us that the abbey's privilege and its confirmations guaranteed the freedom of abbatial elections from outside interference. Hadrian's charter contains a similar provision.⁴⁶ From Eddius, we learn that Wilfrid's charter protected the properties and revenues of his *regnum ecclesiarum*, excluded alien interference, and obstructed the conversion of Ripon into an episcopal see.⁴⁷ There is nothing in any of this that is at variance with canonical norms.⁴⁸ However, the St Augustine's privilege also shuts out the jurisdiction of any Church but the apostolic See; unless it is requested by the abbot, no ceremony may be performed in the abbey. At least from Sergius' time, moreover, Wilfrid's charter apparently invoked the disciplinary authority of the pope alone.⁴⁹ Finally, though Bishops John and Acca of Hexham are known to have officiated at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, this was by invitation only; Ceolfrid did not seek his diocesan's permission to depart as St Boniface was to do, and as canon law demanded.⁵⁰ These are all indications that Biscop's charter belonged to a new class of monastic privilege.

The early history of monastic exemptions has been complicated by their great subsequent importance. Historians have, on the whole, failed to appreciate that we cannot expect the juristic precision of the post-Cluniac age in the world of the Vulgar Law. The truth is that canonical sources vary in the emphasis that they give, from one local tradition to another and from one class of document to the next.⁵¹ The situation remains fluid to the point of embarrassment.⁵² But the fundamental position is clear enough. Monasteries were normally protected from tampering with their property, from interference in their elections, and from large-scale ceremonial in their churches. Diocesan bishops, on the other hand, retained their sacramental monopoly, from the ordination of the abbot to the blessing of chrism, and they remained responsible for the good discipline of a monastery; in effect, therefore, they could vet a community's choice of ruler. This position is obscured only by the differing emphases of the sources. The canons of the Merovingian councils and, perhaps significantly, the early English sources too, emphasize the rights of the bishop to the point of apparent tyranny.⁵³ The privileges of Pope Gregory the Great, for their part, grant not so much exemption as protection from the abuse of episcopal power;⁵⁴ and there is a class of papal privilege in the early English Church, like that of Pope Constantine for Bermondsey and Woking, which is less concerned to change the jurisdictional situation than to guarantee the status quo.⁵⁵

It now seems clear, however, that the seventh century saw new departures in monastic exemption. The relevant formulae of the *Liber Diurnus* remove all sacerdotal *dicio* from a community in favour of Petrine jurisdiction; no masses may be said except by invitation.⁵⁶ These formulae are first known to have been used in the charter of Pope Honorius for Bobbio (628); Jonas of Susa considered that they excluded the diocesan authority altogether.⁵⁷ Very similar formulae are used in Pope Agatho's charter for St Augustine's, Canterbury. Meanwhile, Pope Theodore's confirmation of the Bobbio privilege spelt out its implications in great, if

occasionally anachronistic, detail: monks were entitled to a choice of officiating bishop, whenever one was called for; failure in an abbot's authority was to result in immediate papal discipline.⁵⁸ At the same period in France, as a classic study by Professor Ewig showed, the functions of the diocesan were being either removed or limited by the bishops themselves. Their disciplinary duties were taken over, in some cases, by a college of abbots following a similar rule, or by the head of the monastic family.⁵⁹ A decisive indication that something had changed is supplied by the privilege of Pope Adeodatus for Tours (c.676) – the sole surviving papal charter from seventh-century Gaul which is of unquestionable authenticity, but one 'which there is no reason to consider exceptional'.⁶⁰ The pope was uneasy that religious places should be removed from a bishop's regimen, but he agreed to abide by the generous example of the Gallic episcopate. Returning, therefore, to Biscop's charter, we should remember that Hadrian's privilege resembles that of Pope Honorius for Bobbio, and that Wilfrid's seems to have involved direct papal authority, as Bobbio's did.⁶¹ The suggestion is then that Biscop belonged to a monastic movement whose primary concern was that episcopal power over monks should, in some respects, be limited. In the pre-Cluniac age, this fact of limitation was more important than the papal nature of the guarantee. Now, as Levison saw, there is something very suggestive about the context in which these developments originated. Whether in France or Italy, Irish influence seems to stand somewhere in the background, even if it be possible to exaggerate its long-term influence.⁶² The papal series began at Bobbio. The episcopal charters of Gaul are granted by and for the members of the connection of Luxeuil. The paradox of Biscop's rule is thus repeated. From what we know of the Monkwearmouth-Jarrow charter of privilege, it seems that even so 'Roman' a treasure as this may have found its analogues in the Irish-influenced circles of Francia and Lombardy. It may not, once again, be coincidence that both Burgundofaro and Emmo granted extensive exemptions, while Aegilbert's Jouarre was almost certainly a privileged community.⁶³ It may also be noted that Biscop visited Tours on his way home with his charter in 679–80.⁶⁴ It looks, in short, as though Biscop got more from Gaul than glaziers, architects and a few books. If I were looking for the mysterious Torhthelm, it is in these circles that I would search.⁶⁵

These, of course, are no more than probabilities, though they are the probabilities dictated by the distribution of the continental evidence. As probabilities, however, they set up a shocking contrast with the impression of Biscop's horizons that is given by Bede. In Bede's view, it is Rome and almost only Rome that counts in the making of Biscop; the Gallic episodes are asides and afterthoughts. The image of Pope Gregory, above all, seems to dominate the atmosphere at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow and perhaps inspires its air of *gravitas*.⁶⁶ How, then, are we to reconcile a Roman orientation which is manifest both in Biscop's biographies and in his rule and charter, with the fact that its closest parallels seem to lie in the barbarian north? Largely, I suggest, by thinking in terms not so much of Gallic influences as of

analogies in Gaul. We must recognize that Biscop is one of many seventh-century figures on the circumference of a circle, whose centre is a powerful Roman magnet. The Frankish contemporaries of Biscop and Wilfrid can now be seen to have shared some at least of their attraction to Rome.⁶⁷ It would not, then, be surprising if they had marginally affected the direction of his interests.

A final illustration of these shared enthusiasms is furnished by a third of Biscop's deathbed anxieties, his book collection.⁶⁸ For Bede's patron was only the most successful of the northern noblemen who plundered the libraries of Italy and southern France for their treasures in this period. Saints Amand, Gertrude and Audoin – all major figures in the new monasticism of Gaul, and all, one might add, more or less familiar with the *Rule of St Benedict* – each sought books from Rome.⁶⁹ In the central volumes of *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, one may detect a steady drift of manuscripts northwards for some time before 750. By about this date, the great royal abbey of Corbie in Picardy had established the nucleus of a collection comparable with that of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow.⁷⁰ Like Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, it had books from Vivarium.⁷¹ Significantly, it already possessed at least one, and possibly both, of the ancient Italian *codices regularum*, which contain the *Regula Magistri*.⁷² The library of the Venerable Bede can be paralleled in scope if we are prepared to add together the evidence of surviving manuscripts from identified north French *scriptoria*; this is a comparison which is bound to flatter the English house, with its Bedan maestro.⁷³ These parallels exist because, all over northern Europe, similar stimuli are at work in a similar environment. Southern culture is being sucked into the vacuum created by the awakening interest of barbarian aristocracies in the legacy of the ancient Christian Mediterranean. The achievements of the Northumbrian Church are thus part of a 'wider upsurge'.⁷⁴ The 'Cinderella' seventh century can now be considered every bit as important for the Carolingian 'Renaissance' as are the thirteenth and fourteenth for the Italian.⁷⁵

My concern thus far has been to show that Biscop is, after all, the man of his age. Yet there is both more and less to the career of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow's founder than this. Consider once again the many similarities between Biscop and Wilfrid. In outline, their careers have much in common. Both were the products of the Irish mission in Northumbria, though both gravitated early towards the *Romani*. Both set out before 664 for Rome and were subjected to two or three years of southern French culture. Both brought back ideas about the regulation and security of the monastic life that are 'Roman' in origin and appearance but which may have been transmitted through Gallic circles. Both had a taste for art and architecture *more Romanorum*. Both were aristocrats – what German scholars call *Adelsheilige*. Biscop could be said to have emerged, like many Frankish contemporaries, from the *Schola Palatii*.⁷⁶ But it would scarcely be necessary to remind you of these parallels were there not also some startling differences. If, moreover, one is prepared to take a European perspective, it is Wilfrid who is much the closer to seventh-century type. Like many Merovingian saints, Wilfrid combines monastic profession with