

CHAPTER V

THE REPTON SCULPTURES

by Martin Biddle

Of the thirty entries for Anglo-Saxon and slightly later stone sculptures from Repton in the catalogue which follows, five (nos. 19–23) relate to sculptures still in position on or preserved in the church of St Wystan. Three sculptures (nos. 18, 24 and 25) were found by chance in the churchyard in the nineteenth century, and twenty-two (nos. 1–17 and 26–30) were recovered in the course of archaeological excavation between 1974 and 1988 and in 2016 in the grounds of Repton School and in the vicarage garden. The approximate locations of the sculptures still in position on the church or found in excavation are shown on Fig. 20 in the context of the church of St Wystan and of the Viking winter camp of 873–4 (p. 57).

The dates assigned on stylistic grounds to the sculptures are shown in Table 3, in parallel with the dates of the architectural or archaeological contexts of which they are a part or in which they were found (p. 54). Because a significant number of the sculptures were found in association with graves of the successive cemeteries encountered in the excavation, these cemeteries and the dates to which they are assigned are also given.

THE WRITTEN EVIDENCE FOR ANGLO-SAXON REPTON

Repton, ‘the only really archaic name in the county’ of Derbyshire, first appears in the last quarter of the seventh century in a charter now datable 675 × 691 by which Frithuric *princeps* granted 31 *manentes* called *Hrepingas* to Hædda, abbot of Breedon, now in Leicestershire (Cameron 1959, 653; Sawyer 1968, no. 1805; Dornier 1977b, 158; Rumble 1977). There has been much discussion of this charter, preserved only in a copy of twelfth-century date, but the association together of *Hrepingas*, Bermondsey (originally in Surrey) and Woking (in Surrey) in other documents suggests

that the three place-names denote ‘dependencies or offshoot foundations of Breedon in the seventh century’ (Dornier 1977b, 159–60; Mellows 1941, 15, n. 11; PASE 2 Hædde 1–3, accessed 9 February 2016). The evolution of the name, perhaps originally meaning the ‘hill of the *Hrype* or *Hreope* people’ saw the loss of the initial ‘H’ in the eleventh century and the gradual emergence of the modern Repton (Cameron 1959, 653–4).

Friduricus princeps Aedilridi regis was a member of the Mercian royal house, subregulus of Surrey and perhaps a son of King Æthelred (674–716) (Campbell 1986, 89; PASE 2 Frithuric 1 and 4, accessed 8 February 2016), and the land he gave, perhaps roughly equivalent to a thousand modern acres, seems to have provided the site for a new foundation dependent on the monastery at Breedon.

The monastery at Repton (*monasterium Hrypapun*) mentioned for the first time in Felix’s ‘Life of Saint Guthlac’, written before 749, was then ruled by an abbess, Ælfthryth, and was therefore a double house for men and women (Colgrave 1956, 9, 15–16, 84–7). That it was already a well-established community under the Roman rule is shown by Guthlac’s treatment on his entry at the age of twenty-four, when he was robed (*clericali habitu*) and received the apostolic or Roman (not the Celtic) tonsure. Over the next two years from about 697–9 Guthlac, himself of Mercian royal lineage, was taught his letters (*litteris edoctus*) in Latin, learned to chant the psalms, and was educated in scripture and instructed in monastic discipline (Colgrave 1956, 84–7). He left the monastery at Repton perhaps in 699 to become a hermit at Crowland in the Lincolnshire fens.

The association of the Repton monastery with the royal house of Mercia in the persons of Frithuric and Guthlac was perpetuated over the next two centuries by the burial at Repton of at least three kings of the Mercian dynasty. The earliest may be the burial of

Merewalh, king in the western part of Mercia, i.e. of the Magonsæte (d. after 675), brother of Wulfhere, king of Mercia (657–74), and grandson of Penda: but the source is late (Rollason 1982, 26, 77, 81, 93; Biddle and Kjølbbye-Biddle 1985, 235, n.8; PASE 2 Merewalh 2, accessed 10 February 2016). The burial at Repton of Æthelbald, king of the Mercians (716–57), is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Earle and Plummer 1892, 49; Whitelock 1961, 31; PASE Æthelbald 4, accessed 10 February 2016). The date of death of Wiglaf, king of the Mercians (827–9 and 830–c.840) is not recorded (PASE 2 Wiglaf 1, accessed 11 February 2016), but his burial in a mausoleum at Repton is mentioned in surviving versions of the *passio* of his grandson Wigstan (St Wystan) (PASE 2 Wigstan 8, accessed 11 February 2016).

Following the death of his father Wigmund, son of King Wiglaf, in 849 Wigstan seems to have been unwilling to take the throne, preferring to follow the religious life, only to be killed in a family quarrel over the re-marriage of his mother. His burial is first noted in the initial, probably ninth-century section, of the list of saints' resting places known as the *Segan*: 'St Wigstan rests at the monastery of Repton near the River Trent' (Rollason 1981; 2004). The 'Chronicle of John of Worcester', completed by 1140 and perhaps relying here on a lost *Passio Wistani*, records that Wigstan's body was taken to Repton and 'laid in the mausoleum of his grandfather Wiglaf (*delatum in mausoleo aui sui regis Wiglaui est tumulatum*)' (Darlington and McGurk 1995, 262–3; cf. Macray 1863, 331; Rollason 1983, 5–9).

In 872 the Danish Great Army took up winter quarters (*wintersetl*) at Torksey on the south bank of the River Trent, in the present-day West Lindsey district of Lincolnshire (Whitelock 1961, 47, C, D; Hadley and Richards 2016). The following year 873 the army moved 45 miles upstream to Repton on the same bank of the river 'and took up winter quarters (*wintersetl*) there and drove King Burgred across the sea and conquered all that land' (Whitelock 1961, 48, C). The next year 874 the army divided: one part under Healfdene went into Northumbria, the other three kings went from Repton to Cambridge 'with a great force and stayed there a year' (*ibid.*).

For the next two and a half centuries nothing is said of monastic life at Repton. The only recorded event is the removal by Cnut of the remains of Wigstan from Repton to the abbey of Evesham (Macray 1863, 83, 331–2; *Gesta Pontificum*: Winterbottom 2007, 452–5, cap. 161; Thomson 2007, 210–11; cf. *Gesta Regum*: Mynors *et al.* 1998, 392–3, cap. 212; Thomson 1999,

201), and the recollection by William of Malmesbury that Repton was 'a monastery famous in those days [i.e., of Wigstan, in the 860s] though now it is a vill of the earl of Chester. Its glory decayed with the years' (Winterbottom 2007, 454–5; cf. Mynors *et al.* 1998, 392–3). At Repton in 1086 Domesday Book records a church and two priests, but no other sign of former importance (Morgan 1978, 1, 20). Signs of that former role survived however in the name of the deanery and (jointly with Gresley) in that of the hundred, and in the large extent of Repton parish with its chapelries of Bretby, Foremark, Ingleby, Measham, Newton Solney, Smithsby, and Tickenhall, spread over a distance of some five miles along the south bank of Trent.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ANGLO-SAXON AND VIKING REPTON

The written evidence for Repton's past ensured that the importance of the church was never forgotten, but it was the discovery in 1779 of the crypt, 'one of the most precious survivals of Anglo-Saxon architecture in England' (Pevsner 1953, 15, 204–5; Pevsner and Williamson 1978, 26, 303–5; cf. now Hartwell, Pevsner and Williamson 2016, 18–19, 561–5), which directed attention to the building itself. Meticulously recorded in a plan, a section, and a view (Fig. 19) by the noted architectural draughtsman, Frederick Nash (1782–1856), for the Lysons' *Derbyshire* published in 1817 (Lysons and Lysons 1817, ccxix, pls. VI and VII), the crypt rapidly became well known to the scholarly world, and the architecture of the exterior of the chancel above the crypt at Repton was also soon being compared with the east end of the church at Wing in Buckinghamshire, itself above a crypt comparable in some ways to that at Repton (Biggsby 1854, 122–6, figs. 3–9, pl. 4).¹ From then on, Repton church has been at the centre of studies of Anglo-Saxon architecture, notably in the work of Dr Harold Taylor over the half century from 1936 to 1990.²

To address the problems identified by Harold Taylor in his study of the church and particularly of its Anglo-Saxon crypt, archaeological excavation began at Repton in 1974. From the south side of the crypt, excavation extended in subsequent years to its east and

1. Biggsby's plate is a lithograph after a drawing by Sir J. G. Wilkinson, the founding father of British Egyptology. For Wing, see now Gem 2017.

2. Taylor and Taylor 1965, II, 510–16, pls. 554–8, with full bibliography; and later principally Taylor 1971, 1987, and 1989.



FIGURE 19

St Wystan's Church, Repton, Derbyshire, looking west, annotated with the Z–S/S–Z sequence of the twists of the columns. Engraved after a drawing by Frederick Nash (1782–1856), published in D. Lysons and S. Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, 5, *Derbyshire* (London, 1817), pl. VI.

north sides, continuing to the end of the field project in 1988. During these years excavations also took place elsewhere in the grounds of Repton School and in the garden of Repton vicarage to the west of the church (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1985, 1992, 2001; Biddle, Blunt *et al.* 1986; Biddle, Grierson *et al.* 1986; Jarman, Biddle *et al.* 2018; Kjølbye-Biddle 1998, 762–8, figs. 5–9, pls. 2–3).³

The archaeological identification of the impact of the short-lived Viking episode of 873–4 (see below, p. 56) provided a key demarcation in the history of the site, defining with brutal clarity the end of Anglo-

Saxon monastic life. It also marked the start of a new and long-lasting period in the history of Repton. Christian burial appears to have continued without observable break to the west and east of the church and in other areas investigated.

By the early twelfth century Repton had passed under the control of the earls of Chester who built a short-lived motte and bailey castle to the north-east of the church. Early in the reign of Henry II (1154–89) Countess Matilda of Chester made arrangements for the Augustinian canons of Calke to move to Repton, and thus 'became in effect the founder of Repton priory' (Colvin 1982, 103–4). From about 1172 when the canons came into residence, the ancient church of St Wystan was presumably served by the canons until their monastery was in its turn demolished in 1538, its

3. Further excavation directed by Professor Mark Horton and Dr. Catrina Jarman took place in 2016–17 in the vicarage garden and will continue: no. 9 was found in these excavations in 2016.

TABLE 3

Repton 1974–93: cemetery dates, the assigned dates of the Anglo-Saxon stone sculptures, and the dates of the archaeological contexts in which they were found, arranged in order of assigned dates.

Site date	Cemetery	CASSS number	CASSS assigned date	Archaeological context date	
c.670–c.740	Cemetery 1	24	Late 7th to 8th cent?	Found 1884	
		25	Late 7th to 8th cent?	Found 1884	
		27	Before 873–4	Before 873–4	
c.740–873	Cemetery 2	1	Late 8th or possibly early 9th cent.	11th to early 12th cent.	
		10	Early to mid 9th cent.	In 1914 trench	
		9	8th to 9th cent.	Before 873–4? ¹	
		26	8th to 9th cent.	13th or ?14th cent.	
		15	Late 8th to early 9th cent.	14th cent. or later	
		2–5	Early to mid 9th cent.	Before 873–4	
		13	Probably 9th cent.	Before 873–4	
		14	Uncertain	Late or post-medieval	
		19a–c	?mid 9th cent.	In position in crypt	
		20a, b, 21a, b	?mid 9th cent	In position in nave	
		28	9th cent.?	In foundation of NE angle of N porticus, 9th cent.?	
		873–4	Viking graves and burial mound	–	–
		post 873–4	Cemetery 3M: burials on and around Viking burial mound	–	–
late 9th–mid 12th cent.	Cemetery 3	7	9th or 10th cent.?	Late or post-medieval	
		16	9th to 10th cent.	Late 11th or early 12th cent.	
		17	Late 9th or 10th cent.	Late 11th or early 12th cent.	
		6	? 9th cent.	Mid to late 11th cent.	
		8	Probably 10th cent.	In medieval wall	
		18	10th cent.	Hogback, found 1801/2	
		22a, b, c	10th to 11th cent.	In position on exterior of chancel	
		23a, b	10th to 11th cent.	In position on exterior of east porticus	
		30	11th or possibly 10th cent.	Mid 12th cent.	
		29	Pre-conquest or late 11th cent.	Re-used as cover of medieval stone coffin	
		11	Uncertain	19th cent. ?flower bed	
		12	Uncertain	Late 11th to early 12th cent.	

¹ Found in archaeological excavation in 2016 in a layer of broken quern stones and finds of Viking type probably dating from the winter camp of 873–4.

west cloister range becoming the home of the school founded in 1559 under the will of Sir John Port which still occupies the site.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE AND THE CONTEXT OF THE SCULPTURES

(Table 3)

1. The first signs of human occupation on the bluff on the south bank of the River Trent at its junction with the Repton Brook are worked flints and possible traces of habitation in the Mesolithic period some 8000 years ago. Scattered finds of Roman pottery probably come from farming activity related to an enclosure or field system investigated in 2012 and 2014 to the south-west of the church on the site of a new science block for Repton School (Hurford *et al.* 2014).

2. Continuous occupation began in the sixth or seventh century with the construction of substantial timber buildings, one 8 m (26 ft) wide and presumably at least 16 m (52 ft) long, lying north and south of the later crypt. These buildings, of which there were at least three stages dating back perhaps to the earlier seventh century, are directly related in site and structural evolution to the earliest phases in the development of the church, and may represent the central structures of the estate given by Frithuric for the foundation of the monastery in 675 × 691 (see above, p. 51).

3. Since no traces of the first church have so far been identified, it presumably lies further to the west, probably on the same alignment, but beneath the nave of the present church, and not accessible for excavation. Its construction is likely to have been associated with a drain composed of the local red-brown Bunter sandstone (the earliest stone structure found) which ran from west to east to the north of the later crypt across the site of the earliest timber building, perhaps to take rainwater away from the new church. Burials (Cemetery 1) now began to the south of the drain, extending south across and beyond the site of the later crypt, but there were no burials to the north where the earlier timber buildings remained in use.

4. In the vicarage garden, some 55 m (180 ft) to the west and lying slightly north of but parallel to the axis of the Anglo-Saxon church, a two-celled sunken building, its lower courses constructed entirely of large blocks of Bunter sandstone, was excavated in 1980–6.

Although cut down to ground-level in 873–4 and re-used as the chamber of a Viking burial mound (see below, §8), the building was clearly in origin a detached chapel of the Anglo-Saxon monastery. A date for its construction in the later seventh or eighth century seems likely. The floor of the original structure was cut into the contemporary ground surface to a depth of about 0.9 m (3 ft), its sunken nature suggesting that it was perhaps a mortuary chapel, possibly for one or more of the known royal burials at Repton in the late eighth and ninth centuries (see above, pp. 51–2). Lintels of Bunter sandstone (nos. 24 and 25) found in the expansion of the vicarage garden in 1884 probably came from this building or from another of the same type as yet undiscovered. Five sculptures (nos. 9, 10, 11, 13 and 15) and fragments of pilasters (no. 27) may also have been associated with this building (see p. 56).

5. The use of Bunter sandstone to the exclusion of Keuper greensand in the drain from the first church [§3] and in the sunken western building [§4] suggests that Bunter sandstone was the first type of stone to be used at Repton (see the next paragraph).

6. The primary stage of the crypt below the east end of the church was a sunken structure cut down through one of the earlier timber buildings and through burials of Cemetery 1 to a depth of 1.2 m (4 ft). A sceatta of *c.*740 found in the construction spread (Biddle, Blunt *et al.* 1986, 124–6) indicates that in its original form the crypt was not built before the middle of the eighth century. This primary stage is faced externally with large blocks of brown Bunter sandstone, set or cut to form a series of stepped courses. The introduction of Keuper greensand for the interior facing appears to indicate a significant change in building practice (see no. 19a). The crypt may initially have been a free-standing structure, perhaps a baptistery, built over a spring the water from which was drained away by a channel of Bunter sandstone passing out under its east wall.⁴ The most important of all the Repton sculptures (no. 1, a major cross of perhaps the late eighth century) was erected during this period when the baptistery was surrounded to north, east and south by the burials of Cemetery 2. These burials continued down to the Viking arrival in 873.

7. In the next stage the nave of the so far undiscovered

4. For the drain, see Kjolbye-Biddle 1998, fig. 6 (plan, with outline of the possible baptismal basin) and pl. 2; see also Biddle and Kjolbye-Biddle 2001, fig. 4.8 (section of E1116, a stone-lined channel at the north end of section).

original church was apparently rebuilt with aisles and north, south and east porticus (nos. 20 and 21). The east porticus could not have been built before the crypt had been reconstructed by the insertion of a vault of nine compartments supported on four twisted columns and eight panelled shafts or pilasters, two against each wall (no. 19a–c), for these were needed to support the walls of the porticus above. Since the capitals of the columns which originally stood in the nave to either side of the opening into the east porticus (no. 20a–b) are identical to the capitals of the columns in the crypt (no. 19c), they must be considered contemporary. If so, they will probably date from after 849 when Wigstan was buried in the mausoleum which had been created out of the former baptistery (see below, p. 59 and n. 10). The earlier use of the crypt as a baptistery now ceased, the drain being stopped by the setting into it of a Greensand boulder supporting the north-east column.

8. The identification in 1976 of a major defensive ditch terminating at the south-east corner of the crypt as possibly part of the defences of the Viking winter camp of 873–4 (Fig. 20) led to a wider examination of areas to the east, north, and west of the church. This established the extent and confirmed the identification of the Viking camp. Graves of Viking character around the church, one with a gold ring and five silver pennies of the earlier 870s, allowed the proposed dating of the crypt and the original structure of the north porticus of the church (no. 19a–c) to be firmly assigned to the period before the Viking wintering of 873–4 (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 65–7; Pagan 1986b).⁵ A second parcel of five silver pennies datable no later than 873/4 was found in the vicarage garden among the disarticulated bones of at least 264 individuals (253 adults and 11 juveniles) placed in the cut-down remains of the two-celled sunken chapel (see §4 above), the eastern compartment of which was now used as the chamber of a low burial mound marked out in Viking style by an encircling kerb of broken stones (Biddle, Grierson *et al.* 1986, 111–24; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 67–80; Pagan 1986a). A third Viking burial lay beneath a square stone setting immediately north-east of the crypt (Fig. 42). Here Grave 511 was the burial of a mortally-injured man, his sword by his side and a Thor's Hammer of silver alloy at his neck, accompanied in the adjacent Grave

295 by a younger man buried only with an iron knife, perhaps his companion, his weapon-bearer (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 41–2, figs. 3–6; Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 60–6). The stone cairn above these graves contained three broken fragments of a carved stone cross-shaft and a fourth was found close-by in a later feature which had cut through part of the cairn (nos. 2–5). It is a reasonable assumption that these fragments can only have been broken up during the Viking presence at Repton.

9. Following the departure of the Viking army in 874, and after an interval of unknown duration, action was taken to repair the church. It has long been noted that all three outer walls of the chancel and the east face of the north aisle display a change in stone type from brown Bunter sandstone below to Keuper greenstone above. This change, which occurs at the same 'level about 51m [above] O.D. round all the eastern parts of the church',⁶ has always been difficult to explain in terms of structural sequence, since it is clear that the lower walling of several different periods was cut off at a consistent level. The explanation given by Harold Taylor in his last publication, that 'the walls of all these buildings ...were all raised much higher using a markedly whiter stone, and with a horizontal string-course and vertical pilaster strips' is undoubtedly correct (Taylor 1989, 11), but it was only after the end of excavation north of the crypt in 1988 and while considering its implications that it was possible to link this reconstruction with a clear phase of clearance and reconstruction (nos. 22–3). This had left traces in construction deposits and post-holes for the erection of scaffolding, the stratification of which showed that the work had taken place after the area north of the crypt was reused for burial during the Viking occupation.⁷

CROSS-HEADS AND SHAFTS

Eleven of the thirty entries in the Repton catalogue appear to be fragments of carved stone crosses, four from cross-heads (nos. 3, 6, 9 and 10) and seven from shafts (nos. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 12, and 13). With the exception of 'The Repton Stone' (no. 1), these are all relatively small fragments, suggesting that significant

5. For a new analysis of the radiocarbon dating of this and the other graves mentioned below, confirming their association with the Viking presence at Repton in 873–4, see now Jarman, Biddle *et al.* 2018.

6. Taylor 1987, 226–8, fig. 10: the change from dark to lighter stone is clearly seen in pls. XXVIII A and B.

7. The first printed record of this conclusion occurs in Taylor *et al.* 2002, 11.

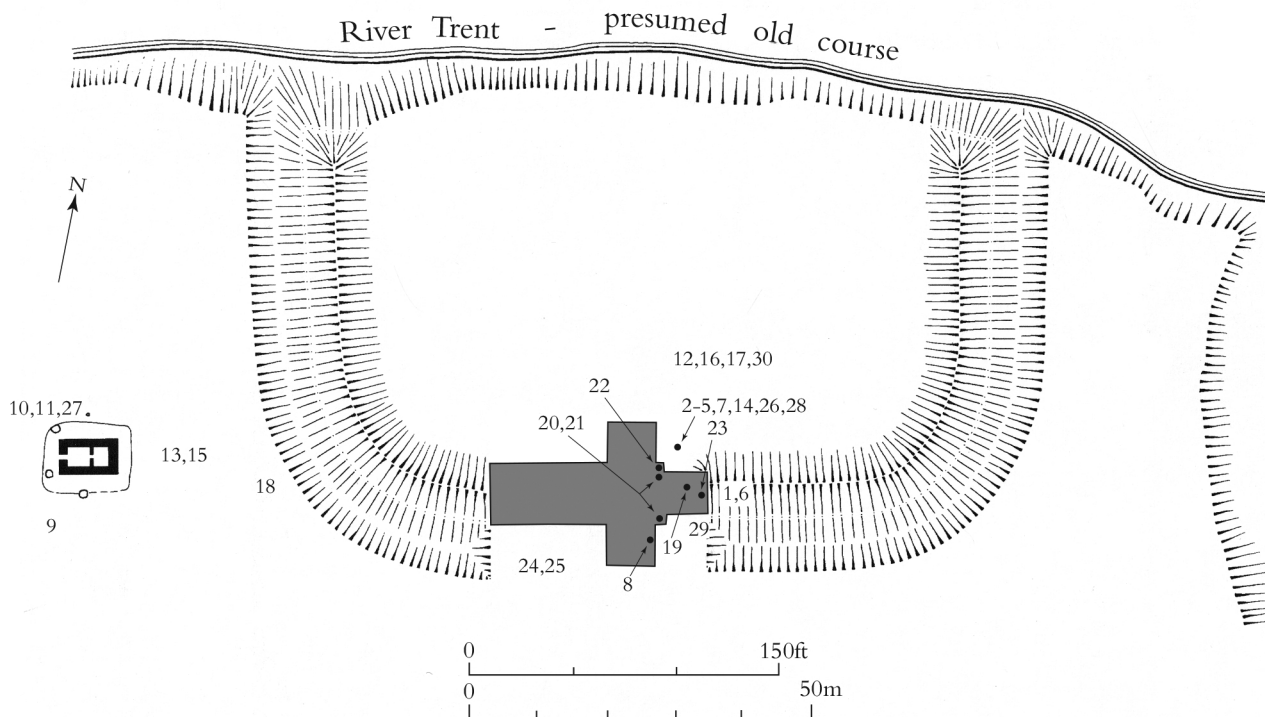


FIGURE 20

St Wystan's Church, Repton, Derbyshire, in the context of the defences of the Viking winter camp of 873–4, showing the approximate location of the finding of CASSS entries 1–30.

effort had been used to break the crosses into many pieces. A clue to this is given by the three cross fragments (nos. 2–4) found in a square stone setting laid, as described above, to cover the burials of a Viking warrior (Grave 511) and his male companion (Grave 295) immediately north of the church (Fig. 42), together with a fourth carved stone found nearby (no. 5). A second clue is given by a group of broken pilaster fragments (no. 27) found in the stone packing of an offering pit (Feature 924) forming part of the ceremonial closure of the mound covering the Viking mass-burial in the vicarage garden. A third clue is provided by the small fragment of a cross-head (no. 9) found in a layer of debris including objects of Viking type found in 2016 in an excavation immediately south of the same mound (see note 3).

These associations suggest that standing stone crosses were a particular target for attack during the episode of 873–4 at Repton, presumably because they presented the pagan Vikings with the defining emblem of the Christian faith. The evidence from the relatively small areas so far excavated does not show

how many crosses the Vikings destroyed, let alone how many stood around the Anglo-Saxon church, but does suggest that they were once a striking feature of the Christian landscape at Repton.

THE SUNKEN MORTUARY CHAPELS AT REPTON

There are two sunken buildings at Repton. One is the two-celled chapel in the vicarage garden, found by archaeological excavation in the 1980s, which was sunk to a depth of 0.9 m (3 ft) when built in the later seventh or eighth century. The other is the crypt below the chancel of the church of St Wystan, which appears deeply sunk today, due to the rise of the external ground level, but was sunk only to a depth of 1.2 m (4 ft) when first built in the mid to later eighth century (see above, p. 55, §4). It is not the depth but the fact of sinking which is important: Anglo-Saxon churches are only rarely sunk into the ground, and then normally only for crypts, as at Brixworth and Wing.

THE SUNKEN CHAPEL IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN

An earlier mortuary chapel appears to have been built detached on approximately the same axis as the present church with its east end 55 m (180 ft) to the west in what is now the vicarage garden (see above, p. 55, §4). Excavation from 1980–6 showed that it was a rectangular two-celled structure, built entirely of large blocks of Bunter sandstone, 8.5 m long overall east–west and 5.3 wide (28 × 17 ft), with a west door leading down from the external level. Internally there were two compartments, the larger western measuring 3 m east–west by 3.2 m north–south (9 ft 10 in × 10 ft 6 in), leading through a narrower door to a smaller eastern compartment measuring 2.2 m east–west by 3.2 m north–south (7 ft 3 in × 10 ft 6 in), with its floor at a slightly higher level. The floor of the western compartment was sunk about 0.9 m (3 ft) below the approximate level of the contemporary external surface. There were no burials below the floor but enough space in each compartment for at least one burial in a stone coffin to either side of the passageway.

This building was demolished to ground level during the Viking occupation of 873–4 and its eastern compartment used for the burial of a single individual surrounded by the stacked bones of at least 264 others, the whole then covered by a low mound (see above, p. 56). No trace of the original (pre-Viking) burials or their coffins survived in place, but five sculptures of high quality were found in the excavation of the Viking mound (nos. 9, 10, 11, 13 and 15).⁸

When the mound in what is now the vicarage garden was first opened about 1680 by Thomas Walker, he found that it contained ‘a Stone Coffin, and with Difficulty removing the Cover, [he] saw a *Skeleton of a Humane Body ... and round it lay One Hundred Humane Skeletons, with their feet pointing to the Stone Coffin*’ (Degge 1727–8, analysed and discussed in Biddle, Grierson *et al.* 1986, 111–15; see also Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 67–84).

No trace of the stone coffin was found in the excavation of the mound but in 1984 an exceptionally fine coped grave-cover datable to the later eighth or early ninth century was found immediately adjacent

to the south-east of the Viking mound (no. 15, Ill. 335). This cover lay on top of layers containing late medieval pottery and was clearly in a secondary position (Table 3), but had been placed virtually on the axis of St Wystan’s church, fifty or so metres to the east, presumably with deliberation. There can be no proof, but it may be suggested that the Vikings had re-used this cover (which carries no Christian symbol) to cover their own central burial, and that it is the cover which Thomas Walker had difficulty removing in the 1680s. When the Lady of the Manor insisted on the closing of the mound, we may suppose that the cover was laid to one side, and then or later placed in a significant position on the axis of the church.⁹ If this is correct, it seems possible that the cover (and its now missing stone coffin) came from one of the burials originally in this mortuary chapel.

As to whose burials these may have been, the analogy with the use of the former baptistery, now the crypt under the present church, suggests that one at least might be that of Merewalh, king in the western part of Mercia, who died at some date after 675 (see above, pp. 51–2).

A second sculpture from the mound in the vicarage garden is part of the head of a cross (no. 10, Ills. 311–22). It was found in 1981 in the filling of a narrow and shallow trench dug by Repton schoolboys in 1914 across the top of the Viking mound (Macdonald 1929, 19). The stone was either not spotted or thought of no importance. As the catalogue entry shows, however, it is of exceptional importance and must come from a significant, indeed exceptional, tomb. The fact that it was found on the mound, where broken stones of similar size, including pilaster fragments, were used by the Vikings to form a kerb marking the limits of their burial site and to seal a series of offering pits (see above p. 57), may suggest that the monument from which it came was one which the Vikings had broken up, one indeed of those once in the mortuary chapel itself.

THE CRYPT BELOW THE EAST END OF ST WYSTANS’ CHURCH

The crypt below the chancel of St Wystan’s church was originally built as a baptistery, taking advantage of the periodic rising of the water-table which still occurs at this point today. The baptismal basin was apparently in the centre of the floor and was drained

8. Due to the disturbance of the mound c.1680, in 1797, and again in 1914, and especially by the Vikings in 873–4, all five stones were found in later deposits and cannot therefore be dated by the context in which they were found. In this instance it is the *place* where the stones were found which is important and not the archaeological *layer* from which they were recovered.

9. Two other early grave-covers (nos. 16 and 17) and two or perhaps three later examples (no. 18—a hogback—and nos. 29 and possibly 30) should also be noted.

by a stone-lined channel which passed out under the east wall (see above, p. 55). According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Æthelbald, king of the Mercians, was buried at Repton in 757 (Whitelock 1961, 31). His place of burial is not recorded, but the discovery immediately outside the east window of the Repton crypt of the remains of a great standing cross of a slightly later date but arguably commemorating Æthelbald (no. 1) may suggest that he was buried in the baptistery, the archaeological dating of which to the mid-eighth century accords with this interpretation.

When Wiglaf, king of the Mercians, died c.840, he was buried in a mausoleum at Repton in which his grandson Wigstan was in turn buried, in or shortly after 849 (see above, p. 52). The baptistery might already by this date have been converted into a mausoleum, but use of a baptistery for burial is not unknown at this date in England. From the middle of the eighth century some of the archbishops of Canterbury were buried in the baptistery of St John which stood immediately east of and very close to (but not adjoining) the east end of the cathedral church, a location similar to that of the baptistery at Repton (Taylor 1969, 102, 122–3, 126; Gem 1971, 198).

The reconstruction of the Repton crypt in the mid ninth century with twisted columns accurately recalling the setting of the Tomb of Peter in the Vatican basilica (see below, pp. 60–8) suggests that the reconstruction was designed to create a burial place suitable for the cult of a saint. The initial, probably ninth-century, section of the list of saints' resting places provides what must seem to be the context for this remodelling, when it records that 'St. Wigstan rests at the monastery of Repton' (see above, p. 52), the first indication of his sainthood. If this is correct, it would seem that it was not only the baptistery which was remodelled at this time but, as shown above (p. 56), the whole eastern part of the church. This need not be inconsistent with the burial of Wigstan in the mausoleum of his royal grandfather Wiglaf, whose burial had taken place in what had then still been a baptistery.

THE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE CRYPT

The crypt below the east end of St Wystan's church is one of the most famous monuments of Anglo-Saxon architecture, celebrated since it was first illustrated in 1817 in the drawings of Frederick Nash (Fig. 19). The structure is clearly of two phases, a square undecorated sunken baptistery, into which a vault of

nine compartments supported by four pillars and eight pilasters was subsequently inserted (Figs. 21 and 44). The elements of both phases are described in detail below (Repton 19a–c, pp. 219–23). Here an attempt is made to set the columns, the pilasters and their capitals in the wider context of Early Christian architecture.

THE REPTON COLUMNS

The columns of the Repton crypt are unique in known Insular architecture (Figs. 27a, b; no. 19c, Ills. 349, 352–5). Their shafts are twisted, that is to say carved to a gentle spiral, a helical twist like a screw, up the hollows of which there is a continuous raised rib. The capitals of the columns are 'reeded' (i.e. grooved) like the capitals of the pilasters (no. 19b, Ills. 356–66), but are taller than the capitals of the pilasters and have more prominent basal roll mouldings. In this they are comparable to the capitals on the columns originally in the nave, but now in the porch (no. 20b, Ills. 367–8).

Classical architecture knew two types of 'spiral' column. Columns with straight parallel-sided shafts decorated throughout their length with close-set spiral flutes are common (Benson 1959). The other type is exceedingly rare: these are columns which are themselves spirally twisted, helical columns where the hollows of the helix were sometimes filled with vine-leaf decoration of greater or lesser complexity. The problem of distinguishing between the two types has resulted in the view that the Repton columns should be compared to the spirally fluted columns 'in the mid-eleventh-century churches of St Lebuinus in Deventer and St Peter in Utrecht, both in the Netherlands, and in Anselm's extension to Canterbury Cathedral in the 1090s, and four others in the main body of the churches at Durham, Norwich, Waltham and Dunfermline' (Ferne 1989, 21; cf. Ferne 1983, 119–21).¹⁰

10. In later publications, Professor Ferne has modified his dating of the Repton columns to 'the eleventh century' and 'probably early in the eleventh century' (Ferne 2000, 284), and to 'the ninth or early eleventh century' (Ferne 2014, 62, 151). Most recently, in a lecture at the Society of Antiquaries on 10 December 2016 he argued that the pillared crypt at Repton dates from the rebuilding of the east porticus following the Viking wintering at Repton in 873–4. He saw this as part of a major Mercian restoration of the church associated with the 'canonisation' of Wigstan. There is no written, sculptural, or archaeological evidence to support this view, which would place the major reconstruction of the church in the period following the Viking episode for which there is only silence. Eric Ferne is however correct to stress that columns of the Repton type can only have been erected to house the relics of a saint. The evidence suggests that this took place in the context of a major reconstruction of the church in the years between Wigstan's murder in a family struggle for power in 849 and the Viking arrival in 873.

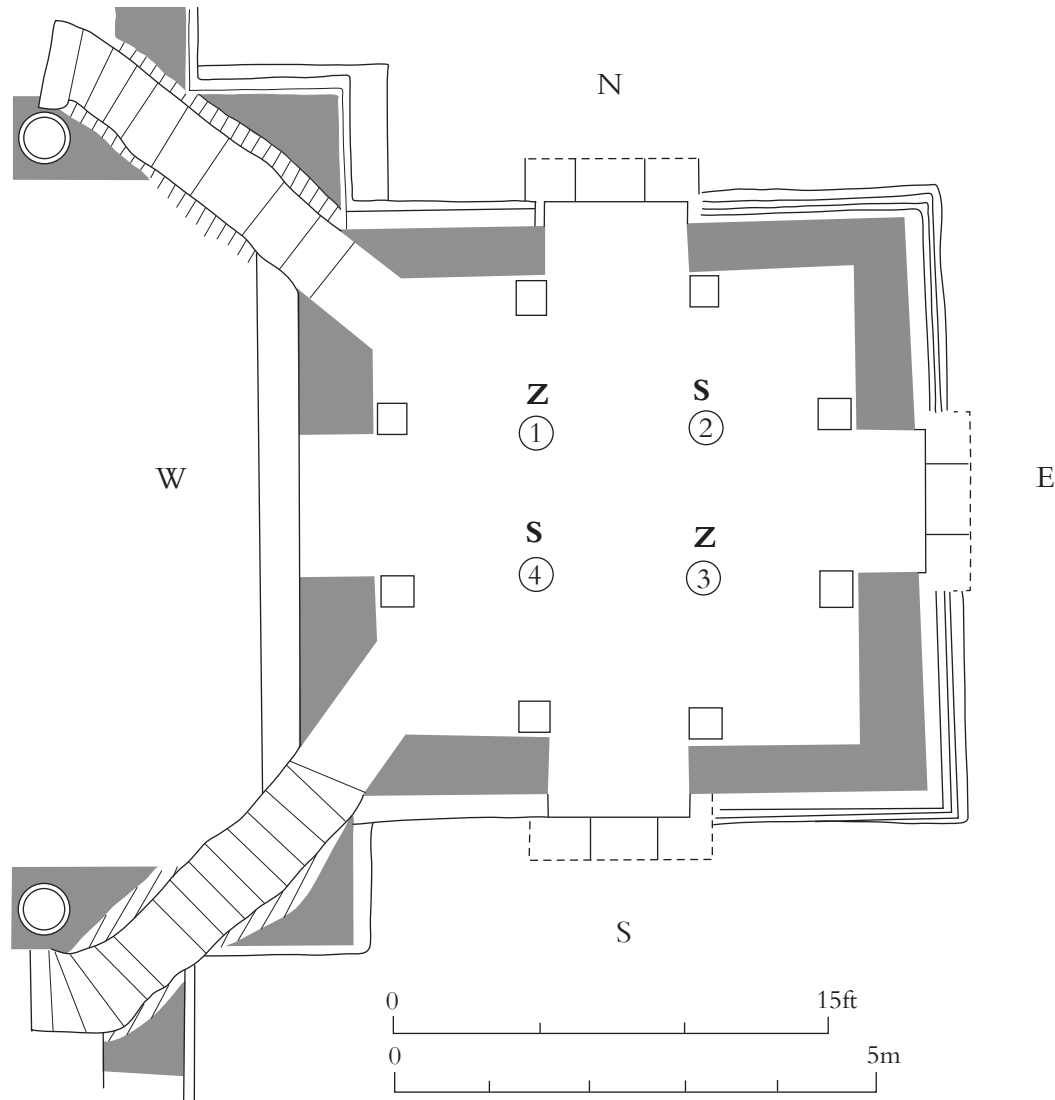


FIGURE 21

St Wystan's Church, Repton, Derbyshire, plan of the crypt, showing the Z-S/S-Z sequence of the twists of the columns. See also Fig. 44, p. 220.

The Repton columns are however neither close-fluted nor straight-sided, but helically twisted, and their ultimate source must be in the original set of six twisted columns given by Constantine to St Peter's in Rome which are decorated with alternating zones of spiral fluting and scroll-work. Later additions include another set of six, five of which still survive, given by Pope Gregory III (731–41).¹¹ Two others, apparently

from another donation, were used to decorate the chapel of Pope John VII (705–7) but were moved again in the sixteenth century and are now on the altar of S. Francis in the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament (Kinney 2005, 18, 20–39, figs. 14–16). Together with a third, now known as the *Colonna santa*, these are rather different to the others in that some have long stretches of uninterrupted vine-leaf decoration where the principal branches curve up the twists of the helical shafts (Ward Perkins 1952, 24, 26, set 3, pl. V).

These columns in their various forms provide the only parallel for the single raised rib spiralling up the

11. There is a vast literature, but see initially Ward Perkins 1952, 21–5, revised Toynbee and Ward Perkins 1955, 194–239, which remains the clearest exposition in English.

hollows of the Repton columns, which can be seen as the curving branch of what in the originals had been luxuriant vines. These are the so-called *colonne tortili*, ‘Solomonic’ (Vandenbroeck 2014), or colloquially ‘barley-sugar’, columns seen most famously today in the bronze columns erected by Bernini in 1627 over the tomb of St Peter in Rome (Lavin 2005, 116–30). Bernini’s immense columns were designed on the basis of the set of six marble columns given by Constantine the Great which in various arrangements and with the later additions described above had surrounded the site of the tomb from the construction of the basilica in 326 until finally dismantled in 1592 (Ward Perkins 1952, 24). These columns ‘were well placed to attract attention and to excite admiration’, and ‘since the day they were made, they have never been lost to sight; ... there can be few monuments of antiquity that have exercised a longer and more widespread influence on the art of succeeding generations’ (ibid., 31, 33).

THE REPTON PILASTERS AND THEIR CAPITALS

The eight pilasters (no. 19b, Ills. 356–66) carry on each of their three faces a slightly tapering, recessed, round-headed panel bounded by a plain raised border running down to the floor but without any defined base. Within the raised border the background rises to form a vertical ridge which runs down the centre line of the pilaster towards, but (mainly perhaps because of decay) not always reaching the base. The upper end of the ridge ends level with the inward curve at the top of the panel, leaving the raised area to die away into the curved head.

The pilasters and their capitals are straight-jointed against the lower double string course of the first stage of the crypt, but the upper single string-course in the angles of the vault is straight-jointed against the capitals, showing that the capitals were in place before the vault itself was raised (no. 19a, Ills. 350–1).

The pilasters appear to be unique in Anglo-Saxon architecture but have not have attracted discussion. Similar pilasters occur however in early medieval buildings in many parts of Italy, not least in Rome.¹² The flaring capitals of the Repton pilasters are reeded,

like the capitals of the columns, and find parallels in Italy, although not with reeding.¹³

ICONOGRAPHY AND INTERPRETATION

The four twisted columns in the Repton crypt (Figs. 27a, 27b; no. 19c, Ills. 352–5) are of two types: to use the language of threads, two have Z-twists and two have S-twists (<www.superiorthreads.com/education/thread-twist-s-and-z>). The four columns stand in relation one to another in such a way that they form four pairs, each pair consisting of one column with a Z-twist, the other with an S-twist. This relationship is easy to comprehend one pair at a time, but becomes complicated when it is realised that adjacent pairs are inevitably Z–S or S–Z, and that in the set of four columns there is a sequence Z–S, S–Z, Z–S, S–Z (plan, Fig. 21). The contrasting twists present a further difficulty, for S-twists rise to the left and fall to the right, while Z-twists rise to the right and fall to the left. Frederick Nash’s drawing of the Repton crypt looking inwards from east to west shows this well (Fig. 19, p. 53): the two columns in the foreground (Z-twist to the left, S-twist to the right) contrast with the rear pair of columns (S-twist to the left and Z-twist to the right). Inevitably, the pairs to north and south display similar contrasts.

There may also be a hierarchy in the arrangement of the spirals when seen from outside the set of four columns. When viewed from the exterior of the set, the Z–S pairs to west and east display spirals rising inwards and upwards, while the S–Z pairs to north and south have the spirals falling downwards and outwards. As we shall see, the Z–S pairs suggest that the important axis of the Repton crypt was from west to east or vice-versa.

Whether the columns in the Repton crypt are to be dated to the later eighth or (as seems more likely) to the mid-ninth century, the only known parallel to them and to their arrangement is in the twisted columns which stood originally around the supposed site of the tomb of Peter in the Basilica of St Peter in Rome.

12. The principal source is the *Corpus della scultura altomedioevale*. See, for example, Melucco Vaccaro 1974, pl. XXXIII, nos. 86–7 (two pilasters at SS. Giovanni e Paolo); pl. LIV, nos. 148–9, 150, 151–2 (two pilasters at SS. Quattro Coronati, pp. 183–5); pl. LXVII, no. 213 (p. 220); pl. LXXXIV, no. 269 (p. 248). See also Casartelli Novelli 1974, pls. XV–XXIII (Abbazia di Santa Maria, Cavour, pp. 80–7); Raspi Serra 1974, figs. 252, 279, 393 (Nepi, duomo, pp. 174–5, etc.). See also Tagliaferri 1981, 656 (Grado, baptistry).

13. For example in Rome: see Melucco Vaccaro 1974, pl. XIX (S. Maria in Aracoeli, pp. 102–3, where called ‘capitello a stampella’), and cf. Dufour Bozzo 1966, where such ‘flaring capitals’ are noted as very common. It should be noted however that they are not ‘reeded’ but usually decorated with grape-vines.

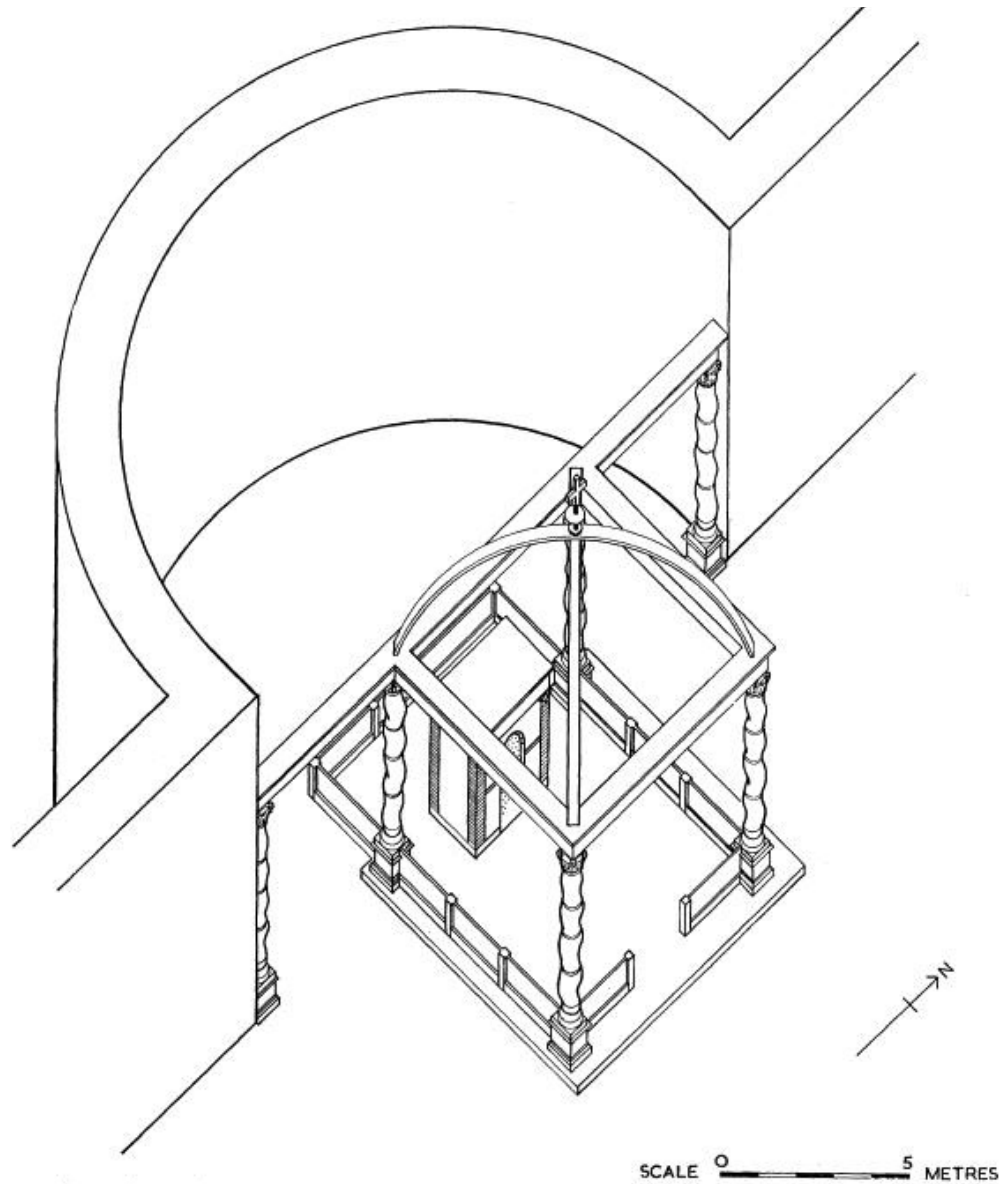


FIGURE 22

The Tomb of St Peter in the Vatican Basilica, Rome, in the fifth century showing the four twisted columns arranged around the tomb. After Ward Perkins 1952, fig. 1.

The emperor Constantine began the building of the basilica late in his reign, probably after 324. At an early stage he brought six *columnae vitineae*, 'vined columns', *de Grecias*, 'from Greek lands'.¹⁴ Of these, four twisted columns of white marble, *mirae elegantiae*,

'of wonderful elegance', supported the *ciborium sepulchri*, 'the canopy over the tomb', with two other columns of the same kind set further back to either side (Fig. 22) (Ward Perkins 1952, 22, fig. 1).¹⁵ Two centuries later, perhaps in the time of Pope Gregory

14. *Liber pontificalis*: Duchesne (ed.) 1955, 417; Davis (trans.) 2000, 18. For 'vined columns' see Nobileoni 1997.

15. Described by Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria martyrum*: Krusch (ed.), 2010, 54 (504); Van Dam (trans.) 2004, 46.

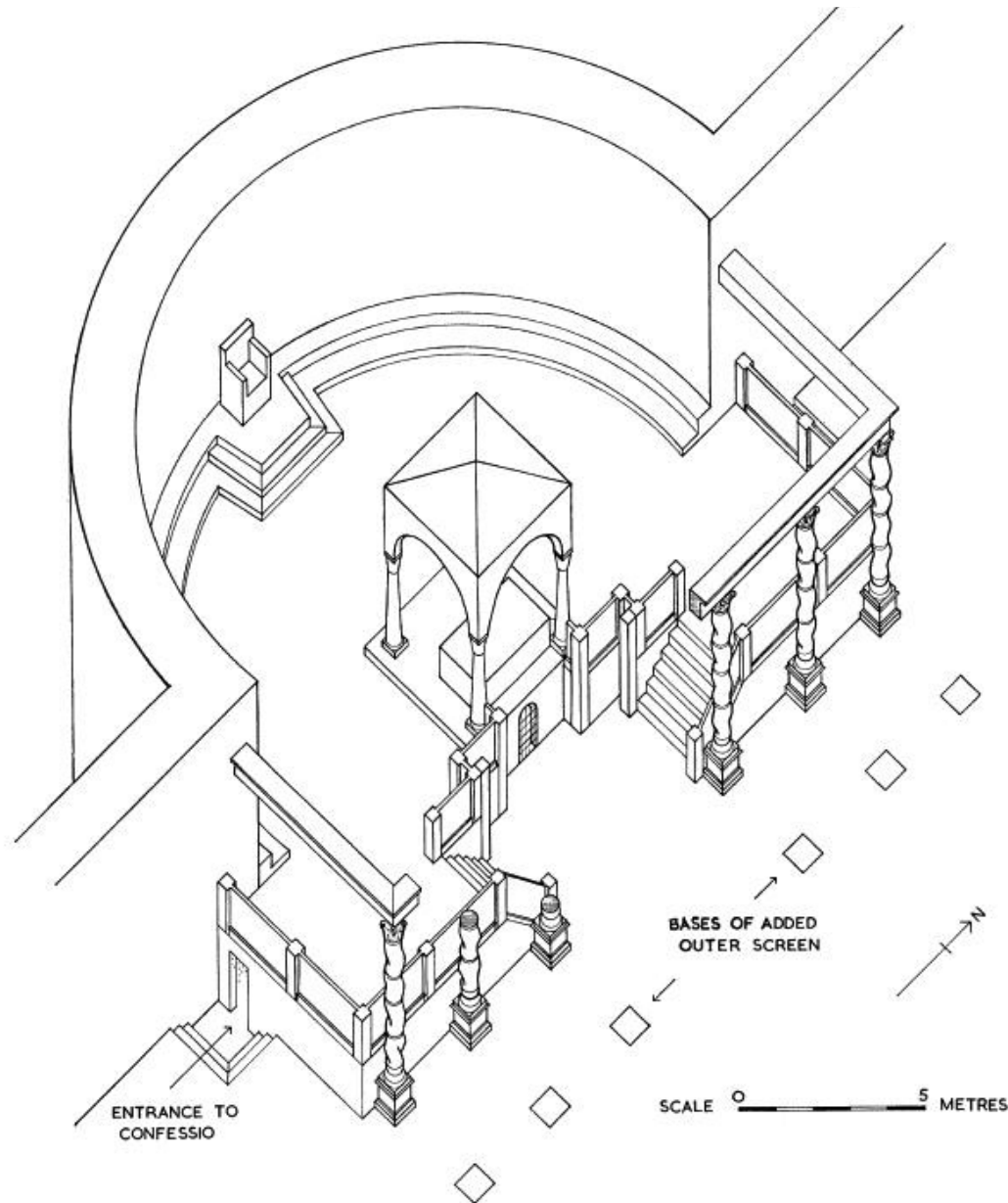


FIGURE 23

The Tomb of St Peter in the Vatican Basilica, Rome, in the seventh century showing the twisted columns re-arranged in a line in front of the tomb. After Ward Perkins 1952, fig. 2.

I (590–604), the columns were re-arranged to form a screen composed of six columns erected across the space in front of the tomb (Fig. 23) (Ward Perkins 1952, 24, fig. 2). To these an outer screen of six more columns of the same kind was added in the eighth century. The two rows of columns stood throughout the Middle Ages until 1507 when the outer row was

removed. The inner row remained in place until dismantled in 1592–6 (Ward Perkins 1952, 44).¹⁶

Columns of the inner row were drawn and painted,

16. Eight survive today in pairs to either side of the niches with statues of saints which look down on Bernini's *baldachino* from the piers of the crossing; e.g. Kinney 2005, figs. 14, 15.



FIGURE 24

Raphael, 'The Healing of the Lame Man', 1515–16 (cartoon for a tapestry, detail), showing the central pair of the twisted columns in St. Peter's in their Z- and S-twist arrangement. © Victoria and Albert Museum, Royal Loans 4.



FIGURE 25

Followers of Raphael, 'The Donation of Constantine', 1520–4 (wall painting in the Vatican, Sala di Costantino), detail showing the columns as they were then still standing in their seventh-century arrangement in a line in front of the tomb of Peter (cf. Fig. 23). Photo Vatican Museums' Images and Rights Department © Governatorato S.C.V. – Direzione dei Musei.

first by Raphael in his cartoon (Fig. 24) for 'The Healing of the Lame Man' (1515–16),¹⁷ and later by his younger colleagues, probably Giulio Romano and/or Gianfrancesco Penni, in the fresco of the legendary 'Donation of Constantine' painted between 1520 and 1524 in the Raphael rooms in the Vatican (Fig. 25).¹⁸ The superb detail of both paintings, especially of Raphael's cartoon, allows us to be quite certain of the nature of the twisted columns 'of wonderful elegance' which had stood at the site of the tomb from the fourth century onwards. The importance of the 'Donation' fresco is that it shows the four central columns of the earlier of the two rows of six as they were then still standing in place in the sixteenth century in front of the tomb of Peter.

The arrangement of the columns in rows of six in front of the tomb cannot explain the arrangement of the four columns in the Repton crypt which is too complex to have been created by chance (Figs. 19 and 21). Since the twisted columns of St Peter's are to all intents unique (Ward Perkins 1952, 26–30) and may have come originally 'from some building in or near the northern Aegean, perhaps from Constantinople itself or from its immediate neighbourhood' (Toynbee and Ward Perkins 1955, 205), it is clear that the columns around the tomb in Rome provide the only likely model for the Repton crypt. How could that be?

The Repton columns have neither the sophistication nor the elegance of the columns in St Peter's. The Repton columns are reduced to the bare essentials



FIGURE 26

Ivory casket from Samagher, near Pola, early fifth-century, the back panel showing the twisted columns around the Tomb of Peter as originally arranged (cf. Fig. 22).

© Archaeological Museum, Museo Nazionale, Venice.

17. Victoria and Albert Museum, Royal Loans 4, rcin 912946. The twisted columns were used here by Raphael as if they were at the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem, a conceit justified by the tradition that the twisted columns had indeed come originally from the Temple, hence the term 'Solomonic' used for columns of this type: Toynbee and Ward Perkins 1955, 249–50.

18. Musei Vaticani, Stanze di Raffaello, Sala di Costantino. We are most grateful to Dott.ssa. Rosanna Di Pinto of the Musei Vaticani for her kindness in providing this image and for permission to reproduce it.



FIGURE 27a

The Repton crypt (no. 19), looking south-west with Column 2 in the foreground.
 Photograph © James O. Davies.

of helical form emphasised by a climbing scroll. But they are more than that, for the helical twists and their matching scrolls are of two sorts, Z-twisted and S-twisted, and the columns of each sort are carefully placed, as shown in plan (Fig. 21) and image (Figs. 19 and 27a and b).

In the imaginary setting of the Temple in Jerusalem

Raphael arranged his central columns on the main axis of the Temple in exactly the same way, Z-twist to left, S-twist to right (Fig. 24). In the real setting of St Peter's in the 1520s his followers painted the central columns of the screen as it then still stood directly in front of the Tomb of Peter, Z-twist to left, S-twist to right (Fig. 25). The screen had then been in position



FIGURE 27b

The Repton crypt (no. 19), looking north-east with Column 4 in the foreground, concealing Column 2. Photograph © James O. Davies (cf. Hartwell *et al.* 2016, ill. 3).

since the seventh century and could have the model for the Repton columns, but there is a more complex and perhaps a more likely model, the Tomb of Peter itself as originally surrounded by four twisted columns (Fig. 22). This is shown in remarkable detail on the back panel of the fifth-century ivory casket found at Samagher (Croatia) in 1906 and now in the Museo

archeologico nazionale in Venice (Fig. 26) (Longhi 2006; Guarducci 1978).¹⁹ Here the front columns are Z-twist to left and S-twist to right, and the two back columns are the same. The Samagher casket, thought

19. We are most grateful to Dott. Daniele Ferrara, director of the Polo Museali de Veneto for this image and for permission to reproduce it.

to have been made for the emperor Valentinian III (425–55), shows that representations of the Tomb of Peter could be produced, probably in a variety of materials, whether as three-dimensional carvings, as Samagher, or as models, although no others are at present apparently known. Such a model, whether two- or three-dimensional, seems likely to have been the source of the columns in the Repton crypt.

The significance of the Z-twist and S-twist arrangement seems not previously to have been brought into the discussion. There is the added implication, from both the Samagher model (Fig. 26) of the fifth century and the St Peter's columns as recorded in the sixteenth century (Figs. 24 and 25), that a principal approach is marked by Z-twist to the left and S-twist to the right, as in the western pair at Repton, the first to be seen when approaching down the steps from the nave (Fig. 27b). The eastern pair at Repton is also Z-twist to the left and S-twist to the right (Fig. 27a; cf. Fig. 19), when seen from outside the set. This might be an indication that approaches could be made from either or both directions in the course of a processional liturgy. Further examples of such twisted columns may yet be found, but only as fragments since no other standing example is known.

Many Anglo-Saxon travellers made the journey to Italy and Rome (Peltert 2011; Sauer and Story 2011). Some returned bringing with them copies of epigraphic texts from St Peter's and the catacombs (Story 2010). They may have brought other things as well,²⁰ and models of holy places such as the Tomb of Peter may have been among them, to survive in a Mercian monastery or royal house until the moment came to make a suitable setting for the burial of the murdered Wigstan in the years between his death about 849 (see above, p. 52) and the Viking wintering at Repton in 873–4. The opportunity seems to have been taken in those years—to judge from the similarity of the capitals of the columns in the crypt and those of the columns in the nave—to undertake the rebuilding of the whole eastern part of the church. Wigstan's body must have been removed to safety when the Viking presence down-river at Torksey in 872–3 became a threat to Repton in 873–4, and later returned, for his body was at Repton when Cnut decided to translate it to Evesham sometime before 1035.

20. The anecdote that Aldhelm brought back from Rome in ?688 a large stone altar top which was broken (and miraculously repaired) when dropped by the camel carrying it, may be more believable than it has seemed: Thomson 2007, 275–6.