

Tabernacle, Temple or Something in Between? Architectural Representation in Codex Amiatinus, fols II^v–III^r

Folios II^v–III^r of the Codex Amiatinus present one of the most fascinating architectural diagrams of the early Middle Ages—not least because there has been a large degree of debate over quite what the Amiatinus image depicts [fig. 1].¹ Consequently this diagram raises some interesting questions about what medieval architectural representation *was*. Architecture and architectural language appear throughout early English literature in both Latin and the vernacular; pictorial depictions of architecture were not uncommon either, although the Codex Amiatinus provides one of the earliest surviving examples. A well-established body of scholarship on this architectural representation has sought to plumb the depths of the available materials which clearly had a significance far beyond simply depicting physical buildings and structures.²

¹ Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Amiatino 1, fols II^v–III^r. My thanks to the editors, both of this volume and *Leeds Studies in English*, for helping to improve this article; all errors remain my own.

² E.g. Joanna Kramer, ‘‘Ðu eart se weallstan’’: Architectural Metaphor and Christological Imagery in the Old English *Christ I* and the Book of Kells’, in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, and Thomas N. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 90–112; Mark Atherton, ‘The Image of the Temple in the *Psychomachia* and Late Anglo-Saxon Literature: Artistic and Literary Parallels in Liturgical Manuscripts and Homiletic Works’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 79 (1997), 263–85;

The Amiatinus diagram has itself been the subject of a sophisticated analysis as an example of monastic mnemotechnical and meditational strategies.³ Rather oddly, such an approach aligns the diagram with the abstract complexity of cross-carpet pages in Gospel manuscripts of the same period, both becoming mandala-like foci for active meditation: the architectural quality of this depiction of an elaborate structure and its contents might seem, therefore, almost unimportant.⁴ Was early medieval architectural representation simply representation *with* architecture, where forms, images and language derived from buildings and their construction were imbued with external significance? Or was it the representation *of* architecture itself? Like any piece of monastic culture the Codex Amiatinus image was susceptible to complex use by individuals skilled in the arts of *lectio divina* and rumination. Nonetheless, it was also, I will argue, a representation of a specific piece of architecture, a particular built structure whose identity determined the content of the image. Attempting to understand the intentions of long dead artists is always risky, but by looking closely at the Amiatinus diagram and reading it in the light of the surrounding exegetical tradition, we can provide quite a plausible explanation of the dominant ideas which shaped the decisions made by its creators.

The Codex Amiatinus was produced at the Northumbrian monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow in the early years of the eighth century—finished at the latest by June 716. A pandect, an entire Bible in one volume, it constitutes the oldest complete copy of the Vulgate still in

Ruth Wehlau, “*The Riddle of Creation*”: *Metaphor Structures in Old English Poetry* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997). See also Hannah Bailey’s article below.

³ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 231–7.

⁴ Carruthers, *Craft*, p. 236.

existence. Pandects were unusual in the early Middle Ages because of the vast quantity of parchment (and therefore livestock) which they consumed and the Amiatinus was one of three such volumes made at Wearmouth-Jarrow under the direction of Abbot Ceolfrith (in office c.689–716).⁵ All of these consisted of a newly edited version of Jerome’s translation of the Bible, clearly representing a major scholarly and artistic achievement on the part of the Wearmouth-Jarrow community.⁶ The Amiatinus (the only one of these manuscripts to survive intact) was probably always intended to be a gift for the pope; in Rome it would form a special link between the head of the universal Church and its two distant outposts in St Peter’s church in Wearmouth and St Paul’s in Jarrow, where the other volumes lay.⁷ That papal audience in part explains the striking *romanitas* of the manuscript with its highly readable uncial script and Mediterranean styles of decoration, which clearly differentiate it from other Insular manuscripts of the time.⁸ But the Codex’s *romanitas* probably also derives

⁵ Richard Gameson, ‘The Cost of the Codex Amiatinus’, *N&Q*, 39 (1992), 2–9.

⁶ For the text of the Codex Amiatinus: Richard Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 140–201.

⁷ Celia Chazelle, ‘Ceolfrid’s Gift to St Peter: the First Quire of the Codex Amiatinus and the Evidence of its Roman Destination’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 12 (2004), 129–57; Celia Chazelle, ‘Painting the Voice of God: Wearmouth-Jarrow, Rome and the Tabernacle Miniature in the Codex Amiatinus’, *Quintana*, 8 (2009), 15–59 (p. 48).

⁸ For a recent reappraisal of the manuscript’s *romanitas* (and its ideological underpinnings): Jennifer O’Reilly, ‘“All that Peter Stands For”: The *Romanitas* of the *Codex Amiatinus* Reconsidered’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 157 (2009), 367–95. For the

from the extensive use of a Late Antique Bible from Italy as its exemplar. Painstaking detective work over many generations means that we can now be quite certain that the Codex Amiatinus was designed with the Codex Grandior, a now-lost pandect produced on the orders of the Roman monastic leader Cassiodorus in the sixth century, as its model, albeit one not followed slavishly.⁹ Possessing this magnificent manuscript inspired the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow to produce their own Bible and to give a Northumbrian spin to the Italianate style of the original.¹⁰ The Amiatinus thus presented an argument about the Anglo-Saxons' membership of the universal Church which was centred upon Rome, and this ecclesiological agenda has proved vital to many interpretations of the pandect.

Much within the Codex Amiatinus remains striking and worthy of comment, but perhaps the most impressive single element in the manuscript is the colossal architectural

Codex's script: Malcolm Parkes, *The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St Paul's Church, 1982), p. 3.

⁹ Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus and the Codex Amiatinus', *Speculum*, 71 (1996), 827–83.

¹⁰ While traditionally the 'mirror-like faithfulness' of the way the Amiatinus replicated the Grandior was emphasised in scholarship (e.g. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, *The Art of the Codex Amiatinus*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St Paul's Church, 1967), p. 24), more recent work has highlighted the original Northumbrian contributions: Celia Chazelle, "'Romanness" in Early Medieval Culture', in *Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies*, ed. by Celia Chazelle and Felice Lifshitz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 81–98; Lawrence Nees, 'Problems of Form and Function in Early Medieval Illustrated Bibles from Northwest Europe', in *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible*, ed. by John Williams (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 121–77.

diagram which stretches across a complete bifolium of the opening quire [fig. 1]. At one time secondary literature often referred to this as a depiction of the Temple of Jerusalem, but following serious attention to the pandect's artwork in the latter part of the twentieth century that identification was rejected in favour of the Mosaic Tabernacle as described in the book of Exodus.¹¹ On the face of it this was very clear from a relatively cursory study of the image, not least because Moses and Aaron's names are written within the enclosure which surrounds the sanctuary and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and their numbers inscribed around the edge of the enclosure, mapping out the pattern in which they encamped around the Tabernacle in the desert.

In recent years, however, the certainty that the diagram is a depiction of the Tabernacle has faded away and a new interpretation has begun to gain ground. This rejects reading the Amiatinus image as a simple work of 'literal depiction' and suggests that it is 'architecturally ambiguous', a spiritual image of the Tabernacle and Temple combined, possibly with the New Jerusalem of Revelations also in the mix.¹² Understanding the diagram not as a straightforward architectural plan or 'map', but as a complex piece of exegesis that comments upon the typological relationships between historical structures and eschatological states, which deliberately combines anachronistic details to warn the viewer away from thinking they gaze upon an image which merely represents architecture, has proved to be a

¹¹ Bruce-Mitford, *Art of the Codex Amiatinus*, p. 3, still described the image as the Temple; the identification with the Tabernacle was clearly established by James W. Halporn, 'Pandectes, Pandecta, and the Cassiodorian Commentary on the Psalms', *Revue Bénédictine*, 90 (1980), 290–300 (p. 299); Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus', p. 844 n. 85.

¹² Jennifer O'Reilly, 'Introduction', in *Bede: On the Temple*, trans. by Seán Connolly (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), pp. xvii–lv (p. liii).

popular approach.¹³ It certainly acknowledges the background of sophisticated monastic spirituality which lies behind the making of the Codex Amiatinus.

Bianca Kühnel provided one of the earliest readings of the diagram in this light. Amidst an erudite study of depictions of the Temple and the New Jerusalem in early Christianity, she pointed out the presence of a small cross upon the diagram, located just above the entrance to the Tabernacle proper. The effect of the cross, Kühnel argued, was to Christianize the Jewish structure and transform it from the desert Tabernacle into the promised heavenly Temple about which John speaks in Revelations—the viewer is meant to gaze through the architecture of the biblical structure and see the heavenly edifice of which it was a type.¹⁴ Kühnel also argued that the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow had been working off a model (the lost image from the Codex Grandior) that had combined Temple and Tabernacle in one image. Cassiodorus had described in his *Institutiones* how he had come to add the features of the ‘Tabernacle and the Temple’ to the Grandior and Kühnel read this as an explicit statement about the composite nature of the Grandior image which served as the Amiatinus’s exemplar.¹⁵

¹³ For the diagram as a map: P. D. A. Harvey, *Maps in the Age of Bede*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St Paul’s Church, 2006), pp. 14–15.

¹⁴ Bianca Kühnel, ‘Jewish Symbolism of the Temple and the Tabernacle and Christian Symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre and the Heavenly Jerusalem’, *Jewish Art*, 12/13 (1986/1987), 147–68 (p. 166).

¹⁵ Kühnel, ‘Jewish Symbolism’, p. 165; Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, I.V.2, ed. by R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 23: ‘commonuit etiam tabernaculum templumque Domini ad instar caeli fuisse formatum; quae depicta subtiliter lineamentis propriis in pandecte Latino corporis grandioris competenter aptavi’.

These initial suggestions were later built upon by Jennifer O'Reilly, who made the key point that the details of the diagram do not entirely reflect the description of the Tabernacle provided in Exodus. The great bronze basin in which the priests washed their hands and feet, the *labrum* or laver, is in the wrong place in the Amiatinus Tabernacle enclosure: Exodus clearly indicates that it should be between the altar of holocausts and the sanctuary, but here it lies before the altar and just to one side of the entrance to the enclosure. This is where the laver's counterpart in the Jerusalem Temple, the bronze 'sea' which rested upon twelve bronze oxen, sat, and so O'Reilly here provided specific evidence to support Kühnel's idea that the pandect depicted a structure which was part Tabernacle and part Temple.¹⁶ She also pointed out that the traditional numerological meaning of 'Adam', whose name is spelt out by the cardinal directions, which appear in Greek (*Arctos, Dysis, Anatol, Mesembria*) within the Amiatinus Tabernacle, was forty-six: the number of years which it took to build the second Temple.¹⁷ In this way exegetical meaning was layered into the image in a manner intended to raise it above simple architectural representation. In recent years Alan Thacker has also read the entire image as a careful combination of Temple and Tabernacle, suggesting additionally that the pillared barrier around the enclosure (depicted at an angle in the Codex so that the viewer sees the external side of the East and South walls and the internal side of the North and West walls) brought to mind the cloister-like stone structures which surrounded the courts of the Temple.¹⁸

¹⁶ O'Reilly, 'Introduction', p. liii.

¹⁷ O'Reilly, 'Introduction', pp. liii–liv. On the cardinal directions see also Carruthers, *Craft*, p. 236.

¹⁸ Alan Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo: History and Figure in Sacred Text*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St Paul's Church, 2005), pp. 28–30.

All these approaches to the Amiatinus diagram have much to commend them, but I want to suggest something slightly different here, arguing that the image is a rather more straightforward piece of architectural representation than they would suggest. The fact remains that most of the details of the image very closely follow the literal description of the Tabernacle provided in Exodus. Kühnel's supposition that Cassiodorus specifically designed his architectural diagram as a composite depiction of the Temple and Tabernacle appears to be a misreading of the *Institutiones*' phrase *tabernaculum templumque* as implying the two structures were one;¹⁹ elsewhere, in his massive commentary on the Psalms, Cassiodorus spoke again about the images which he had added to the Codex Grandior in terms that leave little room to doubt that there were two distinct images, one of the Tabernacle and one of the Temple: 'For we ourselves made to be painted both the Tabernacle, which was its [the Temple's] image originally, and the Temple itself, and we chose to arrange them in our larger pandect [the Codex Grandior].' ²⁰ If the Wearmouth-Jarrow monks depicted a composite Temple/Tabernacle in their pandect then they had to actively construct such an image, there being no exemplar for them to follow.

Since the Northumbrian brethren did not recreate it in the Codex Amiatinus, the likely appearance of Cassiodorus's lost image of the Temple has had to be reconstructed from the

¹⁹ As pointed out by Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus', p. 834 n. 41. See note 15 above for the Latin.

²⁰ Cassiodorus, *Expositio in Psalmum*, LXXXVI.1 in *Magni Aurelii Cassiodori. Expositio Psalmorum*, ed. by M. Adriaen, CCSL, 97–98, 2 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), II, 789–90 (ll. 40–43): 'Nos enim et tabernaculum, quod eius imago primitus fuit, et templum ipsum fecimus pingi et in pandecte nostro corpore grandiores elegimus collocare'. I follow the reading established by Halporn, 'Pandectes', p. 294. All translations my own.

evidence of the writings of Bede (d. 735), who examined the diagram when composing his exegesis on the Temple. From Bede we can deduce that the Temple was depicted as enclosed by multiple concentric walls, separating the various courts (of the priests, women, gentiles, etc.), which reflected the hierarchy of ritual purity operating in the Temple.²¹ Bede showed a good deal of interest in these structures, which he thought of as buildings, describing them on occasion as *porticus*: structures with an enclosed wall at one side and an open colonnade at the other, probably not dissimilar from the covered walkway which existed at eighth-century Wearmouth, and which seems to have been called a *porticus* by the community there.²² If the Amiatinus artists wanted to bring the Temple *porticus* to mind then it would have made more sense had they represented multiple enclosures in their architectural drawing, since this formed such a distinctive part of the image of the Temple.

²¹ Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus', pp. 853–9; see also the reconstructed image in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, ed. by W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 142–3.

²² Bede, *De templo*, II, in *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II: opera exegetica*, 2A, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL, 119A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), pp. 141–234 (pp. 192–3); Bede, *In regum librum XXX quaestiones*, XVIII, in *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II: opera exegetica*, 2, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL, 119 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1962), pp. 289–322 (pp. 311–12). See also Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, pp. 30–1; Éamonn Ó Carragáin, 'The Term *Porticus* and *Imitatio Romae* in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature Presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer*, ed. by Helen Conrad-O'Briain, and others (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 13–34; Rosemary Cramp et al., *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites*, 2 vols (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005–2006), I, 95–8, 112.

The decision to display only a single barrier around the enclosure draws the diagram in the Codex much closer to the Tabernacle than to the Temple. Furthermore, an examination of the barrier depicted in the pandect suggests that the artists were certainly trying to show the temporary cloth structure of Exodus and not the elaborate stone buildings which Bede imagined around the Temple of Solomon. The pillars peek out above and below the barrier itself, which hangs down from a rod running along the top of the pillars,²³ regardless of the angle from which it is being depicted. A curtain and not a stone wall springs to mind on examining the Amiatinus image in detail. Such a depiction would not make much sense if the intention had been to represent a colonnade, cloister, or similar architectural structure. I remain unconvinced therefore that the cloth barrier of the Tabernacle here was designed to represent simultaneously the (stone) *porticus* of the Temple.²⁴

If the barrier around the Tabernacle enclosure was depicted with a close eye for such detailed accuracy, then it might be deemed that the cross above the entrance to the Tabernacle itself must be a deliberate anachronism, added by the monks to warn the viewer from reading the diagram too literally.²⁵ Certainly it may appear that way to us, but we should avoid importing anachronistic ideas about anachronism into the eighth century. Would the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow have seen a cross as necessarily out of place upon an ancient Jewish structure? It may prove helpful to remember that they understood the typological interpretation of Old Testament Jewish cult not as an intellectual game played by human

²³ Cf. Halporn, 'Pandectes', p. 299.

²⁴ Cf. Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, p. 30.

²⁵ Kühnel, 'Jewish Symbolism', p. 166; Chazelle, 'Painting the Voice of God', pp. 44–5.

minds, but as the intended, ‘real’ meaning, encoded into the cult by God.²⁶ Bede believed that Moses had been openly shown the ‘sacraments of Christ and the Church’ and scripture alluded to this when it mentioned the models of the Tabernacle and its objects which Moses had seen upon Mt. Sinai.²⁷ Moses knew that Christ was to come and die upon the cross and built the Tabernacle in that knowledge: not an uncommon belief in early medieval theology.²⁸ The cross on the Tabernacle in the Codex Amiatinus suggested a typological interpretation, but that does not mean that it might not also have constituted accurate architectural representation in the minds of its artists.

Obviously, the Greek cardinal directions inscribed within the Tabernacle diagram are partly simply a guide to help the viewer orientate the image but they are weighed down with so much possible exegetical meaning as to render it impossible to narrow them to a single interpretation. In Insular culture the first letters of the cardinal directions (*Arctos*, *Dysis*, *Anatol* and *Mesembria*) were recognised as spelling out ‘Adam’, indicating the universal

²⁶ Conor O’Brien, *Bede’s Temple: An Image and its Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 50–1, 99–100.

²⁷ E.g. Bede, *De tabernaculo et vasis eius ac vestibus sacerdotum*, I, in *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II: opera exegetica*, 2A, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL, 119A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), pp. 1–139 (p. 40): ‘Ostensum namque est Moysi in monte exemplar candelabri quod faceret quia in altitudine intimae contemplationis didicit aperte multifaria Christi et ecclesiae sacramenta’.

²⁸ For some of the patristic background to such ideas: Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 245.

stretch of Adam's progeny to the four corners of the world;²⁹ such symbolism seems to me to be entirely in keeping with reading the diagram as the Tabernacle, traditionally understood as referring to the Church in this world.³⁰ The numerical value of Adam's name as forty-six in turn connected it with Christ because of the forty-six years which it took to build the second Temple (identified with Christ's body by John 2.21, which took forty-six days to gestate in Mary's virgin womb according to the Fathers); the Amiatinus artists were no doubt glad to have this Christological reference worked into their diagram (though it does not appear that Insular exegetes, unlike Augustine, often made the complete leap from the Greek directions to Christ's body as Temple).³¹ While all this enriches the diagram it does not necessarily make it an image of the Temple, or of the Temple and Tabernacle spiritually combined: Bede only linked the four Greek directions to Adam 'through whose progeny the entire world was filled', Adam who 'begot from himself the corrupted lineage of the human race', to save which 'the second Adam came, that is the Lord himself and our creator, born of a virgin'.³²

²⁹ Karen Corsano, 'The First Quire of the Codex Amiatinus and the *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus', *Scriptorium*, 41 (1987), 3–34 (p. 10).

³⁰ O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, p. 97.

³¹ Walter Berschin, '*Opus deliberatum ac perfectum*: Why did the Venerable Bede write a Second Prose Life of St Cuthbert?', in *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200*, ed. by Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 95–102 (pp. 99–101); O'Reilly, 'Introduction', pp. liii–liv.

³² Bede, *In Genesim*, I, in *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II: opera exegetica, I*, ed. Ch. W. Jones, CCSL, 118A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), p. 93: 'multumque decebat ut nomen protoplasti omnes mundi plagas in se mystice contineret, per cuius progeniem mundus erat

The Greek on the Amiatinus Tabernacle diagram probably served to prompt meditation on Christ's saving work for the entire human race, not recognition that this was a composite image of Tabernacle and Temple.

In other words, the only detail on the Amiatinus bifolium which I think really is problematic for reading it as an attempt to depict the Tabernacle is the great laver, the water basin, which is without a doubt (as O'Reilly showed) where it ought to be in the Temple. On its own, this might seem like a rather weak argument for the composite image interpretation; the artists could have also included some of the many objects which existed in the Temple but not the Tabernacle, or they could have avoided including Moses and Aaron's names in the image and thereby historicizing the structure quite so ostentatiously. A solitary architectural reference to the Temple cannot stem the tide of evidence that this is the Tabernacle in the desert represented in loving detail. Why then did the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow decide to place the laver in the wrong location?³³ How could its peculiar position be consistent with their desire to show the Tabernacle of Moses? And why is the laver so oddly depicted as a massive classical vase with two arms, certainly looking very different from the great bronze 'sea' constructed by Solomon in the place of which this laver has been put?

omnis implendus'; p. 26: 'corruptamque ex se prosapiam generis humani procreavit, uenit secundus Adam, il est Dominus ipse et conditor noster, natus ex uirgine'.

³³ Assuming, of course, that the Northumbrian brethren *did* decide upon the laver's location. Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus', pp. 884–5, argues that the Tabernacle diagram must be copied exactly from Cassiodorus's *Codex Grandior* as otherwise the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow would surely have placed the laver in the scripturally accurate position. As I show in what follows, there is good reason to suppose that the basin's location was a matter of deep thought at Wearmouth-Jarrow and unthinking copying here seems unlikely.

The last question is the quickest and easiest to answer. The Codex Amiatinus almost certainly follows Cassiodorus in representing the laver as the Italianate water vessel which appears in its Tabernacle diagram; this is entirely in keeping with the other aspects of Late Antique Mediterranean style which can be seen in the manuscript.³⁴ We have reason to suppose that Cassiodorus would have conceived of the Temple's water basin as the kind of two-armed vase we see in the Amiatinus. He probably had in mind a water vessel or fountain of the kind often placed outside Late Antique churches, usually in a courtyard, for the congregation to wash their hands and feet before entering the house of God. At least some such water features were probably *canthari*, stone vases with two scroll-like arms, strikingly similar to the object depicted in the Northumbrian pandect.³⁵

At the beginning of the fifth century, Paulinus of Nola had just such a *cantharus* built within his magnificent church dedicated to St Felix at Cimitile, something which he wrote about in his surviving poetry. There he explicitly linked the water vessels of his courtyard with the 'sea' of Solomon's Temple, and indeed some Old Latin versions of the Book of

³⁴ See Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus', p. 845.

³⁵ Annewies van den Hoek and John J. Herrmann, Jr., 'Paulinus of Nola, Courtyards, and Canthari', *Harvard Theological Review*, 93 (2000), 173–219. Ritual ablutions probably took place in early Anglo-Saxon monasteries also, but I know of little evidence for this practice and any water vessels used would not have been *canthari*. I am grateful to Daniel Anlezark for discussion on this point. See Anthea Harris and Martin Henig, 'Hand-washing and Foot-washing, Sacred and Secular, in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period', in *Intersections: The Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 400-1200*, ed. by Martin Henig and Nigel Ramsay (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), pp. 25–38.

Kings seem to have described the Temple's water basins as *canthari*.³⁶ Paulinus's writings were known in Wearmouth-Jarrow, where Bede drew upon them quite extensively (even adapting his *Life of Felix* from Paulinus's poetry), but there is no reason to suppose that the monks drew their image of the *cantharus* from a literary work.³⁷ Cassiodorus presumably drew upon his experience of Late Antique Italian church architecture and possibly also its exegesis when deciding how Solomon's bronze 'sea' would appear in his Codex Grandior; the monks at Wearmouth-Jarrow copied this in turn in the early eighth century.³⁸

Having suggested an explanation for the appearance of the laver, let us return then to the key question of its location. The solution here has already, I think, been proposed in passing by Celia Chazelle, who suggests that the image in the Codex Amiatinus encourages the viewer to look first at the laver and then move on to look at the altar of the holocausts, which is analogous to 'the entrance of the catechumen into the Church through the cleansing

³⁶ Van den Hoek and Herrmann, 'Paulinus', pp. 177, 181–2.

³⁷ For Bede's knowledge of Paulinus: Neil Wright, 'Imitation of the Poems of Paulinus of Nola in Early Anglo-Latin Verse', *Peritia*, 4 (1985), 134–51 (p. 135).

³⁸ The Greek images of the tradition decorating Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography*, which probably supplied exemplars upon which Cassiodorus's Codex Grandior drew, often depict a vase with looped handles in the Tabernacle; this represents the jar of manna but might have influenced Western depictions of the laver: see Maja Kominko, *The World of Kosmas: Illustrated Byzantine Codices of the Christian Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 107, 264–5. The *Christian Topography* never mentions or depicts the laver and so provides no evidence for its location in Cassiodorus's image (Kominko, *World*, p. 122).

of baptism followed by the sacrifice of the eucharist'.³⁹ This, the baptismal significance of the laver's position at the entrance to the enclosure, probably explains why the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow chose to depict the Tabernacle in this interesting, and technically incorrect, fashion. As discussed above, typology formed part of the historical reality of the Tabernacle in Christian thought, but here in the Amiatinus diagram we can see a glimmer of tension within the desire to be both historically and exegetically accurate. Claiming a baptismal significance for a water-vessel designed for religious ablutions probably does not seem very insightful and the apparent 'obvious' nature of such an explanation seems to explain why Chazelle does not spend a lot of time discussing this interpretation. In fact, good reason exists to believe that a baptismal interpretation of the laver in the Codex Amiatinus resulted from substantial exegetical reflection at Wearmouth-Jarrow going beyond traditional understanding of the Jewish water basins.

Patristic exegesis on the whole had very little to say about the great laver of the Tabernacle or its counterpart, the Temple's bronze 'sea'. Pope Gregory the Great had written in some detail about the clothing of the Aaronic priesthood who serviced the Tabernacle and concerning the various sacred objects which were used in its cult, but he nowhere made the link between these water vessels and baptism. In his *Pastoral Care*, where most of his influential exegesis of the Tabernacle appears, he briefly discussed the 'sea' of the Temple (a discussion which also appears word for word in one of his letters). His interpretation mainly focused on the twelve bronze oxen upon which the basin rested, interpreting them as pastors who cleanse sins through confession, not through baptism: 'whoever strives to enter the door of eternity may show his temptations to a pastor's mind, and, as it were, wash the hands of

³⁹ Chazelle, 'Painting the Voice of God', p. 46.

his thought and of his deed in the laver of the oxen.’⁴⁰ The main focus of his work was on the moral difficulties for the pastor who, in helping others cleanse themselves of temptations, is exposed to those very temptations themselves.

Elsewhere, in one of his homilies preached in Rome, also focusing upon the issue of preaching and the Christian pastorate, Gregory addressed the laver of the Tabernacle, which he understood with reference to the internal cleansing of compunction: ‘Moses put there a bronze laver in which the priests had to wash when entering the Holy of Holies, because God’s law orders us first to wash through compunction, that our uncleanness may not be unworthy to enter the cleanness of the secrets of God.’⁴¹ Gregory spent most of his time speaking about how the laver had been made from the mirrors of the Israelite women which suggested how Christians can gaze into the heavenly commandments and use them to see the sins within themselves, which must be repented for and washed away through compunction.⁴²

⁴⁰ Gregory, *Regula Pastoralis*, in *PL* 77, col. 34: ‘ut quisquis intrare aeternitatis januam: nititur, tentationes suas menti pastoris indicet, et quasi in boum lutere cogitationis vel operis manus lavet.’ See also Gregory, *Registrum Epistularum*, I.24, in *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistularum Libri I–VII*, ed. by D. Norberg, CCSL, 140 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), p. 29.

⁴¹ Gregory, *Homilia XVII* in *Gregorius Magnus. Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. by Raymond Étaix, CCSL, 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 116–35 (p. 124): ‘Labrum quippe aeneum Moyses ponit, in quo sacerdotes lauari debeant et sancta sanctorum ingredi, quia lex Dei prius nos lauari per compunctionem praecipit, ut nostra immunditia ad penetrandam secretorum Dei munditiam non sit indigna.’

⁴² Gregory, *Homilia XVII*, p. 125.

Gregory was almost certainly the most important Christian commentator on these Jewish water vessels before the eighth century and the few other exegetes who spent time addressing the lavers of either Temple or Tabernacle (the former much more popular than the latter) usually followed the general lines of his interpretation. Late Antique commentary by a Bishop Fortunatianus, preserved in a possibly Irish work on the gospels from a ninth-century Frankish manuscript, swiftly ran through a variety of meanings of the Temple's 'sea' and its oxen, but baptism never featured amidst its meanings:

Twelve calves having been made under the bronze sea and positioned in groups of three with the backs to the temple, the heads however to the four winds: the four gospels are revealed. The twelve calves are a figure of the twelve apostles. Being placed in threes demonstrates the Trinity. The sea indicates the world. The backs to the temple are turned away from the Synagogue. The heads to the four winds, that is to all the seed of Adam, which seems to be spread in the four parts of the world.⁴³

⁴³ *Quaestiones vel Glosae in Evangelio Nomine*, 53, in *Scriptores Hiberniae Minores. Pars I*, ed. by R. E. McNally, CCSL, 108B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1973), pp. 133–49 (p. 146): ‘Nam uitulus sub mare aereo duodecim fabricatis et terno positos dorsa ad templum, capita autem a quattuor uentis, quattuor ostenduntur euangelia. Duodecim uituli duodecim apostolos figurantur. Terni positi Trinitatem demonstrant. Mare saeculum declarant. Dorsa ad templum auersa sinagoga. Capita a quattuor uentis, id est ad uniuersum semen Adam, qui est in quattuor partes mundi spansum esse uidetur.’

Another Irish commentary, probably of the eighth century, provided a rather more straightforward reading of the bronze ‘sea’: it signified the cleansing of one’s heart in line with the sixth beatitude (‘Blessed are the pure in heart’).⁴⁴

Isidore of Seville saw the oxen as the twelve apostles who have washed the entire circuit of the world through teaching all its people so that they might be baptized.⁴⁵ This is in fact the only explicitly baptismal interpretation of the laver which I have been able to identify before the creation of the Codex Amiatinus. For Isidore, however, the bronze oxen dominated how he understood the laver as a whole, and so the baptism in question was the figurative baptism of the entire globe, the baptism of all the gentiles as instructed by Christ, rather than the sacrament as an important stepping stone in the life of a Christian, which Chazelle sees the Codex Amiatinus Tabernacle suggesting.⁴⁶ The issue of the laver or the bronze sea’s position does not seem to have loomed very large for any of the exegetes examined here and in general their work suggests that the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow did not follow some pre-existing commentary in depicting the Tabernacle laver in the position of the Temple ‘sea’.

⁴⁴ *Liber Questionum in Evangeliiis*, 5.9, in *Scriptores Celtigenae. Pars V*, ed. by J. Rittmueller, CCSL, 108F (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), p. 92: ‘Per sapientiam eorum cor mundatur, quam figurat “mare aeneum” in templo.’

⁴⁵ Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum: In Regum Tertium*, I.8, in *PL* 83, col. 416: ‘Labrum autem orbem terrae intelligimus, cujus ambitum lustraverunt apostoli, docentes gentes, ut baptizarentur in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti.’

⁴⁶ Isidore, *Quaestiones*, I.7–8, cols 415–6.

However, this does not mean that they blazed trails in an utterly revolutionary manner in their work on the Codex Amiatinus.⁴⁷

Mention of the four cardinal directions in the Fortunatianus exegesis certainly calls to mind the Greek directions in the Amiatinus diagram. Fortunatianus, and his later readers, may have made an instinctive leap from the Trinitarian and apostolic overtones of the twelve bronze oxen (arranged in four groups of three each) to the great commission of Matthew 28.19: *docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti* ('teach ye all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'). Certainly Isidore made this connection and it seems plausible that others did so also without recording the fact in writing. The Northumbrian monks were not the first Christians to see baptism hovering just beyond the standard interpretations of the laver. Nonetheless, it appears that in the early eighth century they took the link with baptism far beyond this traditional focus on universal mission, introducing a new attentiveness to the individual reception of the sacrament within the Church. This seems to have encouraged them to think, in a manner not previously attested, about the importance of the laver's location.

The work of Bede provides us with a wonderful view of the interpretations of scripture circulating in Wearmouth-Jarrow in the early eighth century, just when the Codex Amiatinus was being put together, and it allows us to see an increased interest in the water vessels of both the Temple and the Tabernacle at just this time. Bede first commented upon the bronze 'sea' in his massive work *On Luke*, which he was writing between roughly 710 and 715, that is in the years just before the Codex Amiatinus left Northumbria in 716 and

⁴⁷ The next paragraph owes much to the comments and suggestions of Jennifer O'Reilly, whose sudden death prevented this article from further benefitting from her vast knowledge, always generously shared.

when the finishing touches are likely to have been added to the manuscript. Discussing the fact that Christ was thirty years of age when he was baptized, Bede suddenly went off on a tangent about the great laver of the temple: the connection being that the mouth of the water basin was thirty cubits in circumference. Having used numerology to bring the bronze ‘sea’ into his discussion of baptism, Bede declared that ‘because mention of the bronze sea has been made, it is pleasing to inquire how it might agree with the rule of baptism also in the rest of its details’ and went on to provide possibly the longest exegesis of the object yet written by a Christian.⁴⁸ Throughout, the focus remained upon the baptismal meaning of the laver, and Bede even considered the location of the laver – all in a section of the commentary (by no means one of Bede’s most original) for which no direct sources have been identified.⁴⁹

Bede later returned to the bronze ‘sea’ very briefly in *On Luke* and here again the symbolism was baptismal and in a manner much closer to the significance of the sacrament for the individual than in Isidore’s interpretation examined above. The ‘sea’ symbolised the ‘life-giving waves by which all entering the Church are baptised’.⁵⁰ A very similar interpretation appears in Bede’s commentary on the Song of Songs, which he probably also

⁴⁸ Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium Expositio*, I, in *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II: opera exegetica*, 3, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL, 120 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960), pp. 1–425 (p. 86): ‘Et quia maris aenei mentio incidit libet et in ceteris quomodo baptismi regulae congruat inquirere.’

⁴⁹ Bede, *Lucae*, I, p. 86

⁵⁰ Bede, *Lucae*, VI, p. 363: ‘... mare aeneum cuius unda uiuificatrice cuncti ecclesiam intraturi baptizentur’.

wrote in the years just before 716.⁵¹ There, in fact, he went further than he did in *On Luke* and appears to have effectively equated the Temple's 'sea' and the Tabernacle's laver in sharing the same baptismal significance, suggesting that both appeared at the entrance to the relevant cult site:

it was most beautifully figurally symbolised in the Tabernacle or the Temple of Solomon, in the entrance of which the laver or bronze sea was placed, where the priests, entering, washed their hands and feet certainly because of the mystery that the Lord provides us with a bath of heavenly teaching, a fountain of regeneration, initiated in which we can enter both the society of the present Church and the resting-place of the eternal house which is in heaven.⁵²

Bede here equated the meanings of the Tabernacle's laver and the Temple's sea, making them both symbolise baptism, by apparently 'mistakenly' putting them both in the same location: the mistake is effectively that of the Codex Amiatinus.

⁵¹ For the date of this commentary: Arthur Holder, 'The Anti-Pelagian Character of Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs', in *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Claudio Leonardi and Giovanni Orlandi (Florence: Sismel, 2005), pp. 91–103 (pp. 101–3).

⁵² Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum*, IV, in *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II: opera exegetica, 2B*, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL, 119B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), pp. 164–375 (p. 322): 'Quod apertissime ac pulcherrime figurabatur in tabernaculo uel templo Salomonis in quorum introitu labrum uel mare aeneum erat positum ubi ingressuri sacerdotes manus suas pedesque lauarent certi utique causa mysterii quia lauacrum nobis doctrinae caelestis quia fontem regenerationis dominus procuraret quo initiati uel praesentis societatem ecclesiae uel mansionem aeternae domus quae est in caelis possumus ingredi'.

Why would Bede make this mistake? The wider discussion of baptism in which this sentence appears provides the context. Bede had been talking about the washing of the Temple sacrifices in the pool in Jerusalem known as *probatica*; this showed, he said, that it is right that those ought to be first washed in the waters of regeneration who would be led to the altar and offered to the Lord in sacrifice.⁵³ He mapped out here a sacramental pathway where baptism comes before the eucharist, understood as a sacrifice of the self as much as of Christ; it is a path which calls to mind the Temple's order of basin, altar, sanctuary rather than the Tabernacle's order of altar, basin, sanctuary. It is striking that Bede decided to write as if the Temple's order held good for the Tabernacle also and did so at probably the same time that decoration and design of the Codex Amiatinus was being completed.⁵⁴ We have here, I suggest, a window into the Wearmouth-Jarrow artists' reasoning when choosing to depict the Tabernacle with the Temple's water basin.

Close examination of what Bede said in *On the Song of Songs* shows that he associated the Tabernacle with 'the society of the present Church' and the Temple with 'the resting place of the eternal house which is in heaven'.⁵⁵ This interpretation was a common one in Bede's works, indeed it was well established in patristic tradition, and probably lies behind the Codex Amiatinus's makers' decision to represent only the Tabernacle in their

⁵³ Bede, *Cantica*, IV, p. 322: 'in aquis regenerantibus prius ablui decet eos qui ad sanctum altare producendi et in hostiam sunt domino offerendi'.

⁵⁴ For the ways in which the making of the Codex Amiatinus was influencing Bede's writings (including *On Luke* and *On the Song of Songs*) at this time more generally: O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, pp. 184–7.

⁵⁵ See note 52 above.

manuscript.⁵⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, its makers probably intended the Amiatinus Tabernacle to be read as the present Church, as an image of the Church still struggling, wandering, journeying in the desert of this world: a reminder to the reader of the work they still had to do.⁵⁷ The journey through the sacraments which we have just seen Bede discuss constituted part of this journey through life for the Christian; one entered the present Church through baptism and, paradoxically, therefore, the Temple's bronze 'sea' and its significant location were far more in keeping with the overall message of the Amiatinus diagram than the architecturally more accurate location of the laver between the altar and the sanctuary. The Codex's makers positioned the basin where they did not because they wanted to represent two structures at once, but because they wished to represent a single structure with a spiritual accuracy which surpassed that of the historic edifice itself. But they did this not because of any longstanding tradition, rather, because of what appears to be a creative piece of exegesis, built thoughtfully upon patristic foundations.

The making of the Codex Amiatinus seems to have provided the occasion for the development of this exegesis. In the years after 716 Bede turned to address the Tabernacle and the Temple in elaborately detailed commentaries, which necessarily had to address the specifics of the water basins; here he could not get away with the blurring of the lines between the different locations which we see in *On the Song of Songs* and in the Codex Amiatinus. Writing in the early 720s in *On the Tabernacle* Bede made clear that the laver built by Moses came after the altar of holocausts, not before, and that, while on the spiritual

⁵⁶ Arthur G. Holder, 'The Mosaic Tabernacle in Early Christian Exegesis', *Studia Patristica*, 25 (1993), 101–6 (p. 105), overstates Bede's originality here; see O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, pp. 44–5.

⁵⁷ O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, pp. 97–100.

level one could understand it as the water of baptism, the details of Exodus indicated that this water vessel most perfectly symbolised the tears of compunction.⁵⁸ Gregory the Great's - popular exegesis provided Bede's primary source here, as he explained that the laver's position refers to the progress one makes through the different types of compunction (tears of repentance preceding tears of joy) rather than through the sacraments.⁵⁹ Any baptismal interpretation was swiftly set aside, apparently because Bede believed that the details of the Tabernacle, specifically the position of the laver, could not sustain it. But when Bede wrote about the bronze 'sea' in *On the Temple* years later it was the baptismal significance of that object which dominated and defined his exegesis.⁶⁰

On the Temple also touched upon the sacramental progression mentioned above. Bede understood the fact that the Temple's water basins for washing sacrifices came before the altar upon which the animals were then burnt as symbolising the way which the Christian moves from baptism to confirmation, where the Spirit descends like fire upon them through

⁵⁸ Bede, *De tabernaculo*, III, p. 136: 'Potest quidem hoc labio siue labro ut in sequentibus appellatur principaliter aqua baptismatis intellegi cuius lauacro necesse est purgentur omnes qui ecclesiae ianuas ingrediuntur. Verum quia in tabernaculum testimonii et altare holocausti positum est quia bis cotidie idem ipsi sacerdotes ... cum ingrederentur ad altare thimiam domino oblaturi in eo lauari praecepti sunt aqua autem baptismi non nisi semel lauari ualemus consequentius labrum hoc ablutionem nobis compunctionis et lacrimarum commendat qua semper opus habemus maxime autem cum mysteriis caelestibus ministraturi appropiamus.'

⁵⁹ Bede, *De tabernaculo*, III, pp. 136–8.

⁶⁰ Bede, *De templo*, II, pp. 207–12.

the hands of the bishop.⁶¹ This is slightly different to the eucharistic interpretation in *On the Song of Songs* (such flexibility in approach being a common feature of Bedan exegesis) but the essential point remained the same in the understanding of the Christian life as a journey through the sacraments, a journey symbolised by the relative positions of the cultic objects in the Temple.⁶² *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple* help to make clear, therefore, that the baptismal significance of the Old Testament water vessels was primarily associated with the Temple's 'sea', not the Tabernacle's laver, and that the reason for this was the position of the objects relative to the altar of holocausts. These texts help us to understand why the laver's position is the only aspect of the Amiatinus image which follows the Temple and not the Tabernacle.

I have argued that the diagram on folios II^v–III^r of the Codex Amiatinus constitutes a serious attempt at architectural representation in the sense that we might now understand the term: its purpose is primarily to depict the real structure of the Tabernacle as it existed within human history, not to represent an imagined composite building nor to build a purely abstract

⁶¹ Bede, *De templo*, II, p. 214: 'Lauatur namque in lutere hostia cum quis fidelium aqua baptismi perfunditur, offertur uero in holocaustum cum per impositionem manus episcopi donum spiritus sancti accipit.' Bede (as was standard in the early Church) understood confirmation as the completion of baptism, rather than an entirely separate sacrament, but the basic point still stands.

⁶² For more relevant discussion on the link between Jewish cult and Christian sacraments in Bede's thought: Giovanni Caputa, 'Aspects of the Priestly Ministry According to Saint Bede', in *Priests of Christ: In the Church for the World*, ed. by Giovanni Caputa and Julian Fox (Jerusalem: Studium Theologicum Salesianum, 2010), pp. 70–95 (pp. 83–6, 91–2).

focus for meditation out of architectural features. But the Tabernacle, as a piece of architecture, had significance in itself; the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow understood it as having been built in order to express figural meaning and therefore the image which they included in the Codex Amiatinus was a representation of a representation. The Tabernacle's architectural features symbolised the Church in the present world but the Northumbrian monks seem to have realised something which none of their predecessors had, that one feature in the Temple (the bronze sea's position) expressed the sacramental journey of the Christian within the present Church far better than the alternative position of the Tabernacle's laver. They therefore decided to include the Temple's water vessel within the Amiatinus diagram, not to weaken its association with the Tabernacle, but, paradoxically, to strengthen it.