

Ecclesiastical Landscapes in Medieval Europe

An archaeological perspective

edited by

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Introduction: Towards an Archaeological Study of Medieval Ecclesiastical Landscapes in Europe

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Churches and monasteries are one of the most commonly studied structures in Medieval Archaeology and thousands of excavations have provided many insights into their architecture and material culture across Europe. However, it has been far less explored how this wide variety of Christian buildings (chapels, local churches, monasteries, oratories...) influenced -and were influenced by- their surrounding landscapes in physical, economic, political or symbolic terms. For decades research has remained overly focused on a consideration of building layout and there has been a reluctance to look up from the site plans and consider the wider context in which the site was founded and functioned. It has only been in the last twenty years that works have emerged beginning the process of dealing with this topic, particularly in Britain (Morris 1997; Aston 2000; Bond 2003; Pestell 2004; Turner 2006) but also in other countries such as France (Fixot and Zadora-Rio 1989; Zadora-Rio 2005; Delaplace 2005) or Italy (Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2008; Volpe 2008). Nevertheless, with the exception of the valuable work on Christian landscapes in Atlantic Europe (Ó Carragáin and Turner 2016), the fact that these works have largely been limited to quite narrow regional examples or to specific site types means that the literature on the subject is relatively fragmentary and in some regions non-existent. Moreover, a clear division between studies on Eastern and Western Christian Europe still exists. These limitations have impeded researchers from obtaining a wide and comparative approach to how the Church shaped landscapes in Medieval Europe in different areas and at different times.

This volume aims to tackle this disparity and to provide a road map for the future development of this emerging field of archaeological research by presenting case studies from across Eastern and Western Medieval Europe in order to open up a Europe-wide debate on the variety of relations and contexts between ecclesiastical buildings and their surrounding medieval landscapes from an archaeological perspective. The book is partially the product of a successful session at the 2018 European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) annual meeting in Barcelona, with the addition of new contributions that chime with the overall

themes of the session. It contains 16 papers dealing with 11 very diverse regional contexts: Tuscany, the Po Valley, England, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Ireland, Transylvania, Western Bohemia, Switzerland, Central Spain and Galicia. As a result it is hoped that the volume will offer researchers ample comparative evidence for their own research and allow for an understanding of the universal elements of ecclesiastical landscapes that transcend both chronological and geographical limits.

The volume is divided into 2 main thematic sections. The first part, **'Ecclesiastical Topographies'** comprises 8 works dealing with the spatial dimension of ecclesiastical architecture in the European Middle Ages, particularly regarding the creation of the parish system and the relationship between churches and cemeteries. From West to East, the first contribution, by Tomás Ó Carragáin examines the role of individuals of middling status in the establishment of lesser church sites in region of Corcu Duibne (Co. Kerry, Ireland). The abundance of drystone secular and ecclesiastical remains in this archaeologically rich region, combined with the relatively high level of excavation on these sites, make it possible for the author to draw a comparison between the placement churches in this landscape and their possible connection with kin-groups of varying status and to identify shifts in influence over time. The comparative density of lesser churches in the case study area explored by Tomás Ó Carragáin with other regions of Western Europe, means that his examination of agency in the proliferation of these sites will be of particular interest to researchers working on the emergence of parish networks. In the second chapter, Andrew Johnson provides an overview of the sites of medieval chapels, burial grounds and associated stone crosses and wells located on the coastal margins of the Isle of Man. Using cartographic sources and the results of field surveys, the early medieval religious landscape of the Isle of Man is investigated from the perspective of access to and from the coastline. As a result, Johnson shows the potential role of these sites in pilgrimage, communication, trade or justice.

Isabel Sánchez Ramos and Jorge Morín de Pablos provide an overview of recent fieldwork carried out

at the multi-period site of Los Hitos (Orgaz, Toledo, Spain), where the development of the features, from a pantheon to a patrimonial church, are shown to be demonstrative of the impact made by new elites on the organisation of the landscape. Using this case study as a basis, the authors also provide an overview of the implementation of a systematic programme of monumentalisation through church architecture in the landscape surrounding the capital of the *Regnum Gothorum* in Toledo. Moving to Italy, Gabriele Castiglia, Stefano Bertoldi and Cristina Menghini provide a thorough critique of the longstanding 'Violante model', which saw the Christianisation of the rural landscape in Tuscany as being stunted by a lack of engagement from the episcopal centres, and characterised by a poorly developed network of foundations. By drawing on the increased level of archaeological evidence collected since the model's development, the authors demonstrate the role played by both pastoral centres and monastic foundations in the creation of a dense, ecclesiastical landscape.

Based on archaeological, historical and architectural evidence, Martín Čechura describes in his paper the beginning of the church network in western Bohemia, the relationship between the older burial ground and the later church, and the initiation of the practice of burial around a church or in a consecrated Christian cemetery. The author debates the older historiographic theory of a large-parish system that considers the oldest churches to have been built by dukes on the main strongholds, as well as their chronology, and points out the presence of churches outside the fortified centres. In the following chapter, Maria Crîngaci Țiplic's exposition of the creation of a parish system in Transylvania is based on documentary sources and the results from archaeological evidence. Her analysis presents the spread of the first Christian communities and the emergence of the first ecclesiastical buildings as well as the earliest cemeteries around them. Viewed from the perspective of the emergence and the distribution of churchyards, the issue of the onset of the parish churches and their spatial dimension in Transylvania is also debated.

Daniela Marcu Istrate examines the way in which the architecture of the Catholic churches exercised an important influence upon Orthodox Church architecture in Transylvania. She evaluates the spatial dimension of medieval Orthodox churches that are mainly concentrated in peripheral regions of Transylvania. Based on archaeological and architectural analyses the author concludes that the design of Orthodox churches imitated nearby Catholic sites, and that they individualize themselves through the internal partitioning and especially through murals that are specific to the Byzantine style. Finally, Ioan Marian

Țiplic and Maria Crîngaci Țiplic offer an overview of the current state of the art regarding the archaeological research of medieval ecclesiastical monuments (Pre-Romanesque, Romanesque and Gothic) in Transylvania, and furthermore characterize the historiography and its concrete results. The authors emphasize the perspective of the large number of data obtained through archaeological research for the ecclesiastical constructions that represent puzzle pieces in the reconstitution of the beginning and the evolution of medieval churches, its network and landscape.

The second section of the volume is dedicated to '**Monastic Landscapes**'. Medieval monasteries are an especially interesting case study in this volume because of their recognised capacity to modify their surrounding environment, as the 8 contributions of this part of the book show. Again, moving from West to East, the first contribution of this section, by Peter Davey, explores the monastic landscapes of the Isle of Man in the central and late Middle Ages, through the case study of the Malew estate around the Cistercian Rushen abbey. Thanks to the combination of textual sources and field survey, the author is able to reconstruct most of the limits of this Cistercian monastic estate and offer new valuable data on the origin, dedication and management of these properties. In the following chapter, Derek Hall brings us the results of the recent excavations at Whitefriars in Perth (Scotland), one of the few complete excavations of a medieval friary, including the church, cloister, necropolis and monastic dependences. This work offers interesting information about life and death in a medieval monastery.

In the next paper, Freya Horsfield analyzes the territory of another Cistercian monastic estate: the property that Rievaulx abbey had in the area of Pickering Marshes, (Yorkshire, England), paying special attention to the spiritual dimension of the monastic space. By combining archaeological, textual and topographical analysis the author goes beyond the merely economic factors to explore the religious metaphors of the monastic landscape. In the following work, Sophie Hüglin and Patrick Cassitti explore the impact of the construction of St John of Müstair abbey (Switzerland) in its landscape from a diachronic perspective. By connecting the geological context and previous stone building tradition with the study of the political strategies behind the location of this monastery, they offer an interesting approach to the implications of the creation of a great early medieval monastery in its regional landscape.

José C. Sánchez-Pardo and M. García Quintela explore the material and mental transformations promoted by the Church in the early medieval landscapes of Galicia (Northwest Spain). These authors analyze two specific

cases study: the monastery of Samos as an example of ecclesiastical agency in the physical modifications of the territory, and the parish of Augas Santas, as representative of the symbolic Christian appropriation of earlier pagan spaces, and offer new reflections based on anthropological perspectives on the impact of Christianity in the landscape. In the next chapter, having as a main tool a multi-disciplinary approach, using documents, archaeology, architecture and botanical evidence, James Bond provides new observations on the evolution and changes to monastic gardens over time in England and Wales. The author assesses the role of the religious orders in the evolution of horticulture, such as the introduction of a high number of new plants in Britain, and successfully investigates the symbolism of monastic gardens.

Taking an approach that combines the results of archaeological research with a detailed consideration of the textual sources relating to early medieval monasteries, Marco Panato examines the veracity of the wilderness motif in the southern Veneto region of Italy during the late Lombard and early Carolingian periods. The article outlines the complex interaction between monastic communities, the lay population and the royal powers in the management of the rural landscape and seemingly wilderness areas. Finally, drawing on a programme of fieldwork aimed at identifying features related to water management in the area around two high medieval monastic foundations in Transylvania, Ünige Bencze examines the impact of monastic estates on shaping their surrounding landscapes and attempts to contextualise this with processes that took place both prior to and following their establishment. By dealing with both a Benedictine and a Cistercian monastery, the article attempts to discern what differences (if any) are apparent in the way in which these two orders managed their landscape.

A number of suggestions and interrelated trends arise from the pages of the volume. Despite the important temporal distance between the Christianisation of the regions explored in this volume -ranging from 4th to 11th centuries AD-, the comparison between Western, Central and Eastern Europe through a variety of approaches and methodologies invite specialists to consider a re-evaluation of how Christian landscapes were created through a network of ecclesiastical constructions. Let us to finish this introduction by highlighting only a few of the **main remarks** from the contents of the book in the hope that they may contribute to further discussions.

Several chapters show how the emergence and spread of Christianity in many European regions was accompanied by monasticism and the gradual implementation of the institutional Church organisation. Perhaps, one of

the clearest impacts of the creation of ecclesiastical landscapes in the Middle Ages is the establishment, with different rhythms, of the parish system across the whole of Europe. The parish is a very important achievement for the territorial implantation of the medieval Church, as it is not just a religious and ecclesiastical framework but often a real administrative and political structure which helps to shape deep ecclesiastical roots in the local landscape. Behind its implementation, a complex interplay took place between initiatives driven by central episcopal sees and the agency of local inhabitants. In some cases, the latter took the form of founding proprietary churches, which were later awarded more pastoral responsibilities. In other cases, we see the establishment of monastic foundations on the initiative of members of the local elites who endowed these sites with considerable land grants. While these various strands all contributed to the eventual character of the dense parish system, it is in trying to understand the complex mechanisms by which this process took place and the precise role of each of these competing influences that a landscape approach can prove essential.

Another recurrent topic in the papers in this volume is the relationship between churches and cemeteries, as seen in the contributions by Martin Čechura and Maria Crîngaci Țiplic. All across Europe we find both churches being built over previous burial areas and new Christian sacred spaces, such as consecrated cemeteries or cemeteries around a church. But churches are also built over previous cult sites and *villae*. In this sense a variety of other factors related to church location are also explored in this volume: the relationship with water (rivers, sea and marshlands), roads, markets, etc with very different results. The fact that it is not possible to establish a common pattern of church location across the areas covered in the volume reflects not only the complexity, but also the successful flexibility of roles adopted by churches and monasteries during the Middle Ages in organizing the life of European societies.

Regarding the impact of medieval monasteries in the landscape, the most famous case is Cîteaux. As can be seen in Peter Davey's contribution, it is known from texts that Cistercian reform brought important innovations (mills, water channels, new agrarian technologies, metalworking...) as well as economic benefits; however, it is not always easy to find the archaeological footprints of such changes that happened in the 12th century. The impact of a Cistercian abbey, Rievaulx, is also considered here by Freya Horsfield (Yorkshire). Several papers deal with the question of how abbeys managed monastic estates, and the intensity of their landscape modifications. In fact, Ünige Bencze makes an interesting comparison between the landscape impact of a Cistercian and a Benedictine abbey in Transylvania.

However, well before Cîteaux, there is evidence for the impact of early medieval monasteries in the landscape, such as the case of Samos abbey (Galicia) outlined by J. C. Sánchez-Pardo and M. García Quintela. Another important example can be found in the analysis of the factors that led to the foundation of the early medieval monastery of San Salvatore a Monte Amiata (Tuscany) in the paper by Gabriele Castiglia, Stefano Bertoldi and Cristina Menghini, and the transformations in the landscape carried out by monasteries in North Italy, as studied by Marco Panato in his paper.

Another key question for the consideration of early monasteries is the comparison of the representation of monastic landscapes in early medieval textual sources and the results of archaeological investigation. As important centres for the (re)production of manuscripts, we have abundant primary sources that describe to different degrees the landscapes in which monasteries were founded and carried out their functions. However, it can often be difficult to discern where to draw the line between the hagiographical ideal and the actual situation. With regards to the foundation of these sites, we are commonly presented with a motif of a founder saint into a deserted landscape (*desertum, heremus, solitudine*) to establish their place of devotion. As shown by a number of the contributions in this volume, however, the choice of foundation site has much more to do with fitting into the pre-existing socio-economic network of inhabited landscapes as opposed to a rejection of such.

However, in dealing with churches and monasteries we must not forget the importance of the symbolic impact on the landscape. In her paper, Freya Horsfield reminds us of the importance of phenomenological approaches in the study of monastic landscape. James Bond also explores the symbolism of gardens, and different types of plants, for monastic life. José Carlos Sánchez-Pardo and M. García Quintela discusses the interesting case study of Augas Santas (Galicia, Spain) with the symbolic reuse of an earlier religious landscape by the Christianity.

As the several specialists from Romania suggest in this volume, the case of Transylvania is a particular and useful one because it is an area which combines the different religions, cultures and architectural influences of Byzantium and Western Europe while maintaining connections with the Slavic world. Some of

these aspects are found in the papers by Ünige Bencze, Daniela Marcu Istrate, Ioan Marian Țiplic and Maria Crîngaci Țiplic. The influence of the Byzantine world both before and after the Great Schism became deeply rooted in South-Eastern Europe or the adoption of the Eastern Orthodox Rite is dealt with most clearly in this volume through Marcu Istrate's study of Orthodox churches.

As mentioned above, these are but a few of the many ideas that emerge from the pages of the volume, but it is hoped that each reader will find other useful inputs from the comparison of these 16 case studies that can fuel further and much needed debates on how the medieval Church shaped the European landscapes.

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