THE HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF THE \textit{OPUS ALEXANDRINUM} PAVEMENT IN THE TRINITY CHAPEL IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL, KENT, ENGLAND

A thesis submitted to the College of the Art of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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Chapter I

Introduction

In his early seventh century letter to Bertha of Kent (ca. 560 – 612), Gregory I (Pope from 590 to 604) began with this advice: “They who desire, after earthly dominion, to obtain the glory of a heavenly kingdom ought to labor earnestly to bring in gain to their Creator.”¹ Through hard and Godly work the soul would earn a place in Heaven; an eternal gift that Bertha would attain having led a life in service to her faith, to her husband and to her newly baptized Christian kingdom of Angli. By comparing her to Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine I, Pope Gregory elevated Bertha to the highest of honors and spiritual regard.

Queen Bertha’s gifts of charity to missionaries like Augustine and his monks, and her establishment of churches and missions in her husband’s kingdom testify to the depth of Bertha’s faith and to the influence she had within the royal court at Canterbury. Much like Helena and earlier Frankish queens before her, Bertha endowed St. Martin’s and Canterbury Christ Church with liturgical gifts, relics and money. It was the conversion of King Æthelbert, Bertha’s husband, that earned her the mightiest of praise from Gregory. Because of Bertha’s continued spiritual influence on her husband, this powerful Anglo-Saxon king became a Christian along with many others throughout his kingdom.² This secured and affirmed Christianity’s foothold on the island to the present day.

The conversion of “Angles to angels” (to paraphrase Gregory) was a monumental


historical event and most likely was commemorated in the commissioning of a rare, imperial porphyry *opus Alexandrinum* floor by Bertha close to 600. Bertha’s desire to mark her husband and his peoples’ conversion with a significant pavement in the imperial manner began something that persists to the present at Canterbury Cathedral. This “reliquary church” of England as the primal Papal See in that land contains sacred objects that attest to its history and the site’s continued use from Roman times to today.\(^3\)

My thesis proposes that the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement now in the Trinity Chapel of Canterbury Christ Church Cathedral was inspired by and created under the patronage of Bertha to commemorate both the baptism of her husband and the conversion of the Angli to the Roman faith. Under-researched and historically misunderstood, the pavement has not received much scholarly attention. The existing documentation of the pavement dates from the eleventh century and later centuries have also modified the pavement's dating. I hold that the heart of the *opus Alexandrinum* floor reflects Queen Bertha’s faith and virtues, and is a locally made, unique example of Romano-Saxon stonework (see figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). Because Bertha had direct contact with Gregory I, and her Merovingian family on the Continent, she alone was able to obtain the necessary materials and artisans, along with salvaged porphyry columns and revetments (*spolia*) from old Roman cemeteries and mausoleum complexes located along Kent’s main roads to the sea.

The nearly 17 foot by 17 foot purple and green porphyry quatrefoil pavement follows the shape of floors in Early Christian immersion baptisteries, and could have easily been the

\(^3\) Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsay, and Margaret Sparks, eds., *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1995), 37. Old Sarum was an Iron Age hillfort, ca. 400 BCE, that was occupied by the Roman Army ca. 43 CE. Much like Canterbury, it sat on a series of important roads, and played a key role in the Norman Conquest. It became the royal castle to William (the Conqueror), ca. 1066, in August 1086, William called all of the important landholders in England (as recorded his *Doomsday Book*), and had them swear a loyalty oath known as the “Oath of Sarum” solidifying the French king's absolute power over the land and his people. In 1130, a cathedral was built there by Bishop Roger (of Sarum) who was Henry I's regent and in 1173-1189 it became the prison for Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, after inciting a revolt with her sons against their father, Henry II of England. The cathedral and site were translated in 1220 to New Sarum (Salisbury), and the cathedral's close connection with the monarchy ended.
pavement that graced the detached baptistery of the newly constructed cathedral at Canterbury. The *opus Alexandrinum* pavement’s format is similar to those seen in the earlier baptisteries of St. John Lateran Archbasilica (*Arcibasilica Papale di San Giovanni in Laterano*, Rome, ca. 324, with early fifth century additions) and St. Ambrose’s octagonal baptistery found under Milan Cathedral (*Basilica di Santa Tecla in Milan*, ca. 350 – 400). Both were seen by Augustine of Canterbury and his monks on their travels from Rome to Canterbury. In addition, the designs in the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement, now in Trinity Chapel, have ties to those seen in seventh century manuscripts produced in the British Isles in Hiberno-Northumbrian or Hiberno-Saxon centers. Finally, the early accounts by Augustine of Canterbury about his mission of 597 and of the conversion of the Saxons (by the Venerable Bede, ca. 730), as well as other accounts from the eighth to the eleventh century will support my hypothesis about Bertha’s role in commissioning the pavement and outline the survival of this remarkable work of art.

The confluence of influential people and ideas at Canterbury in 597 was unique, much like the great porphyry pavement itself. Gregory’s religious convictions were as powerful as Bertha’s, their faith united them in forging the first English Roman church on the islands. The porphyry pavement is a manifestation of this united effort. Bertha, born a Frankish princess and now an Anglo-Saxon queen through political marriage, used these powerful imperial and spiritual influences to create a multidimensional artistic symbol that identified her: her faith, her own royal lineage, her husband’s willing conversion to her faith, and her newly Christianized English kingdom. The commissioning of the pavement was how she could “labor earnestly to bring in gain to (her) Creator.”

The significance of the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement cannot be fully appreciated without understanding what influenced Bertha of Kent. Her primary influence and her spiritual father

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was Gregory I. It was she and her family on the Continent who invited him to Canterbury entreating him to send spiritual representatives to strengthen their faith. Gregory I set his initial sights on Kent, knowing that Bertha and her father, Charibert, the king of Paris, were both devout Christians and loyal to Rome. Æthelbert of Kent, third king of the Anglo-Saxons and Bertha’s husband, allowed her to worship her faith freely in the old Roman basilica church of St. Martin, just outside Canterbury’s walls.

Even before she wrote to Gregory requesting him to send missionaries, Christianity was already established in Kent. Bertha and her chaplain Bishop Luidhard were publicly practicing their faith. This was why Augustine of Canterbury began his missionary work in Kent and not at York or London. He already knew, from the correspondence between Gregory I and Bertha, that she and her pagan husband would graciously welcome the missionaries. This they did, giving them food and accommodations inside the city walls, and allowing them to preach freely, eventually even giving Augustine and his monks quarters within Æthelbert's palace.

Gregory I and Augustine of Canterbury well understood the importance of establishing a Trinitarian church in Britain. Attacks from the heretical Arian (or Unitarian) Lombards and political power grabs within the fractious Byzantine Empire threatened the weakened Church in the West. If the Roman Church could secure its spiritual primacy on the Continent, it would need the help, power and resources of the already converted Franks, who were in regular correspondence with Gregory I. The pope foresaw the importance of Christian marriages between Frankish nobles and the Anglo-Saxons as a foundation on which he could build. These marriages were essential if his missionary plan were to succeed, and the marriage between

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Bertha and Æthelbert of Kent was the most critical to his operation.

Æthelbert was at the height of his power as bretwalda, King of the Britons, and his marriage to the Frankish princess Bertha further enhanced his power. Æthelbert understood the importance of securing his political and spiritual connections to Rome if he were to subdue and rule the other Germanic tribes in Britain. Bertha recognized that her physical and spiritual well-being rested within her faith. These four individuals, a pope, a queen, a missionary, and a king came together to build a new Rome on British, and specifically English, soil. Bertha’s opus Alexandrinum pavement stands as a testament to their mission.

I began my thesis by introducing these four individuals, Pope Gregory I, Bertha of Kent, Augustine of Canterbury, and Æthelbert, Bertha’s pagan husband. Each would play a part in the making of the opus Alexandrinum pavement. I will continue all through the thesis to cite the correspondence between Gregory and Bertha and that between the pope and other women of the Frankish courts. It was through this avenue that the necessary artisans, craftsmen, and materials, especially the porphyry, were acquired from neighboring monastic institutions and Christian kingdoms on the Continent to build a pavement of such importance. I hope to show how after his conversion, Æthelbert worked together with his wife, and with Augustine and his followers, in establishing a Papal see at Canterbury Christ Church. This See has seen a complex spiritual and political history, full of intrigue, murder, destruction, rebuilding and relics since its initial consecration in 601. Canterbury Cathedral still exists as England’s most important “reliquary church.”

My Chapter Two focuses on the political and religious questions in Northern Europe in the sixth and seventh centuries and on these same issues in the Roman Church during the same time span. The first half of this chapter concerns the Germanic tribes and the newly converted
Franks. Only the Franks followed the Trinitarian beliefs of the Roman Church; the other tribes were Unitarians converted by missionaries of the Arian creed. The second half is specific to the Eastern and Roman Churches and reforms needed within Rome. Gregory I, seeing incursions from the Arian Lombards in the North, began his mission to Britain to reaffirm the faith and to bring the peoples of Britain into the Roman Church.

Moreover, a more detailed account of Gregory I’s mission to Christianize Britain led by Augustine of Canterbury will be given. This Gregorian mission affirmed the links between the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Romans. I will highlight further details of Augustine’s mission, where he traveled, with whom he met and what he saw along his journey as well as his interactions with the barbarians, Frankish queens and Frankish bishops that supported (and ordained) him along the way. I conclude with his relationship with Bertha and her importance as the person who initiated the creation of the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement.

Chapter Three will focus on the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement itself. I will do a comprehensive description and analysis of this porphyry floor now located behind the throne of the archbishop in Trinity Chapel at Canterbury Christ Church Cathedral. By examining the materials, stonework, construction and style of this pavement and that of contemporary Hiberno-Roman art forms, such as manuscript decoration and jewelry, I will show its design is local (i.e., Kentish). The pavement’s original parts, coupled with my arguments about Bertha of Kent’s patronage, will demonstrate the unique character of this floor that sets it apart from other porphyry pavements made from Ancient times up to the Baroque. This will also firmly establish a seventh century date for the original pavement.

Because the quatrefoil design of the pavement points to a baptistery, I will compare it with other baptistery floors that Augustine and his missionaries saw on their journeys to and
from Canterbury. This also necessitates some accounting of the liturgical and theological changes regarding baptism within the Roman Church between the fourth and sixth centuries. Such a discussion allows us to see how the opus Alexandrinum pavement functioned within the ritual. This also allows us to suggest that the amount of purple and green porphyry in the Canterbury floor referred to both Imperial Rome and to its reuse in baptismal fonts. Furthermore, only one individual in Britain had the desire and the means, as well as the will, to acquire the materials for this large porphyry pavement, and she understood the power of her position as well as the importance of ornamentation, be in it porphyry, vellum, silk or sable.

Chapter Four will focus on the history of the Canterbury pavement from the seventh century through to the reign of Henry VIII and the destruction of the Shrine of Thomas Becket. I will briefly relate the mysterious fires that plagued the cathedral grounds during the Anglo-Saxon period, which caused the destruction of the earliest records of the pavement. The sack of the Priory by the Vikings in the tenth century, followed by the destruction caused by the Norman invasion in the eleventh century nearly wiped out all that was Anglo-Saxon within the cathedral. Records of the pavement surfaced with Eadmer the Singer’s accounts in 1130. Eadmer had seen Archbishop Lanfranc tear down the rotting Anglo-Saxon cathedral in 1070. About a century later, Gervase of Canterbury, a monk at the time of Thomas Becket’s murder in 1174, tells us of the rebuilding by William of Sens and William the Englishman. These writings, which I quote and analyze, support the candidacy of Bertha of Kent as the patroness of the pavement. The opus Alexandrinum floor supported the new Shrine of Thomas Becket from 1220. It survived the destruction of this Shrine under order of Henry VIII. This last event is especially puzzling, for it should have been easy to dismantle it and cart the various stones off to Westminster or elsewhere. Perhaps the pavement was more than just a floor, perhaps it was seen as a physical
link with the past, a relic of the very beginnings of the Church in England.

This brings us to Chapter Five and my Conclusion. I reiterate my findings regarding the commissioning of this art work. In addition, I briefly recount how I discovered the role of Bertha of Kent and why it is important to research, in spite of few documents and little historical interest by earlier scholars, the patronage of women in early Medieval Europe. Their omission by early Church Fathers and historians (like Bede) severely limits our knowledge of how an art work was made, by whom it was commissioned, and how such art works – whether royal, ecclesiastical or secular – functioned. This brings us to the description of Canterbury Cathedral as a “reliquary church” in which the relics are themselves the fragments of history. A cathedral such as Christ Church Cathedral at Canterbury is more than just an ecclesiastical structure. It is indeed a repository of English history, heritage and culture from Anglo-Saxon times or earlier up to the current day. My final statements include my ideas for future research on the opus Alexandrinum pavement by myself and by fellow historians. I restate how essential it is to examine the role women played as patrons in Medieval world. Without Bertha requesting that Gregory I send missionaries to Kent to help convert the Angles, the Gregorian mission of 597 and the uniquely “English” opus Alexandrinum pavement in Trinity Chapel would not have happened.
Chapter II

Historical Background of the Kingdom of Kent

Canterbury had long been a special place. Its location and proximity to the sea led the region of Kent to develop permanent settlements and a rich history by 175 BCE. Canterbury was also the hub for trade with the European mainland, only a very navigable 19 nautical miles across the Channel. The town also marked two starting points on Watling Street, the main Roman road in southern England that linked the coastal towns of Dubris or Portus Dubris (Dover), Rutupiae (Richborough), Lemanis (Lympne), and Regulbium (Recculver) together (see figure 7). Roads and garrisons were important components enhancing the wealth and control of the Empire, joining tribal capitals and administrative centers. The Romans built their temples and cemeteries on them, the remains of which (spolia) would find their way into the fabric of the new Anglo-Saxon churches, including the opus Alexandrinum pavement made for Queen Bertha, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Kent’s towns also provided fortified garrisons for the Roman navy along the Dour estuary, and these same towns were later occupied by troops that protected the coastlines of the English Channel from incursions by Rome’s enemies. The Byzantine Empire had set up the port

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7 The peninsula of Kent is the entreport used by Bronze and Iron Age Britons (ca. 1500 – 600 BC) and by migrating settlers from mainland Europe. This area of Kent sits on a spectacular chalk rim, the “white cliffs of Dover.”


of Tintagel, in county Cornwall, and exported tin back to Constantinople by 410, but never
challenged Rome’s civilizing influence on the island.\textsuperscript{10} This was southern Romano-Britain at the
beginning of the fifth century.

**The New Kingdoms of the North: The Anglo-Saxons and the Franks**

The collapse of Roman Britain was of monumental historical significance for the western
world. Starting in 410 the Roman army withdrew from Britain and the “barbarian” Germanic
tribes (the Goths, Saxons, Burgundians, Franks, Lombards, and Bavarians) and the Slavs began
to migrate westward, some crossing the Channel, being pushed from their own territories by
marauding Huns and other Asiatic peoples.\textsuperscript{11} Those Christians left on the British Island were
under constant threat of further incursions throughout the fifth century, and to protect themselves
they hired German mercenaries made up of Angles, Saxons and Jutes. Close to 500, Vortigern,
King of the Britons, was besieged by the Scots. Finding himself unable to break this siege, he
appealed to the Saxons and invited them to the British Island to help him. The Saxons liked what
they saw, broke their contract with Vortigern, and moved inland, rampaging across the land
taking Vortigern’s communities and property. Just as quickly, the Angles settled in the region of
Northumbria and Mercia. In the south, the Saxons and Jutes settled Wessex, Sussex and Kent
(see figure 8).

The barbarian tribes were not that dissimilar from the citizens of the early Roman
Republic (the *caput mundi*); both groups shared similar values of authority, rule, war, filial piety
and veneration of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{12} *Romanitas* or the value of “Roman-ness,” along with the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Leslie Webster and Michelle Brown, editors, *The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400 – 900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 208 – 209.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Peter S. Wells, *Barbarian to Angels: The Dark Ages Reconsidered* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 26 – 27.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Webster and Brown, *The Transformation of the Roman World*, 210-211.
\end{itemize}
attributes of being a charismatic leader were respected Roman characteristics. These virtues were part of ‘the Roman way,’ the unwritten ‘Code of the Ancestors’ or mos maiorum. Romanitas governed a person’s behavior, how they acted and dressed, how they built their homes, their temples and their public spaces. It defined a person’s identity. Based on strict class divisions and ceremony, the role of Romanitas in the formation of the Roman Church was applied since the reign of Constantine I, and his sponsorship and support of the Edict of Milan, 313, which granted tolerance to Christians, allowing him to craft his identity as spiritual leader of the western world. The display of Romanitas in the governance of the barbarian kingdoms is evidenced in a Saxon law code already in effect by the early sixth century. In 602, Æthelbert was the first Anglo-Saxon king to systematize a law code based on Roman and Saxon values. He focused on the fair distribution of land and agricultural production; he codified the concept of the wergild which gave financial restitution for wronged parties, and brought justice to Kent. Æthelbert exemplified what it meant to be a “good King” – he protected his family and lands, he upheld his promises to his wife and to the Frankish kingdoms, and he was the driving force behind the creation of the new Roman Sees in Canterbury, London and York.

These new kings were hard and toughened by their former nomadic lifestyles, as a result they trafficked in valuables that were durable and easily portable. Personal objects of identity (jewelry, weapons, coins, tools, etc.) that displayed the owner’s power, status, sophistication and wealth from this era were excavated in the nineteenth century throughout Kent. More recent examples are the Canterbury St. Martin’s Hoard, consisting of eight Byzantine and Merovingian

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15 Wells, Barbarians to Angels, 140 – 141.

coins, and the Staffordshire Hoard discovered in 2009, containing battlefield loot and the largest Anglo-Saxon treasure belonging to the Mercians.\textsuperscript{17} The grave goods of the East Anglian King Rædwald (d. ca. 625), purportedly the king buried in the great ship at Sutton Hoo, contained intricate gold and silver enameled broaches, buckles, coins, bowls and plates from Constantinople, a Coptic hanging brass bowl, a state sword and drinking horns.\textsuperscript{18} Whether a Roman noble or a Saxon king, a person's physical adornments displayed their identity and enhanced their reputation by symbolically connecting them to important peoples, places and events throughout the known world.\textsuperscript{19}

Anglo-Saxons kings made it a practice to reuse Roman buildings, burial sites and roads as suitable places for their own ancestor worship.\textsuperscript{20} Between the fifth and seventh centuries, pagan burials (both inhumations and cremation burial containing a blend of Bronze Age, Roman and Early Christian objects) were built within the old Roman temples, mausoleums, baths and villas.\textsuperscript{21} St. Martin’s in Canterbury, a church used by Æthelbert's queen Bertha and Bishop Luidhard before Augustine’s arrival in 597, was an old Roman basilica church.\textsuperscript{22} The reuse of earlier structures should not surprise us, as evidenced by Bede’s writings about Augustine’s dealings with pagan and ‘well built’ Roman sites:

\textsuperscript{17} These recent finds inspired the BBC’s television hit comedy \textit{The Detectorists} and may have inspired weekend would-be treasure hunters armed with spades and metal detectors to wreck havoc on unsuspecting fields and flower gardens hoping to find a rare coin or gold jewelry.

\textsuperscript{18} Wells, \textit{Barbarians to Angels}, 42.

\textsuperscript{19} W. H. C. Frend, “Pagans, Christians, and the “Barbarian Conspiracy” of AD 367 in Roman Britain”, Britannia 23 (1992), 121 – 131, especially 123.

\textsuperscript{20} Wells, \textit{Barbarians to Angels}, 110.

\textsuperscript{21} These were discovered and excavated at Orpington, Eynsford and Canterbury, see Haverfield, “Early British Christianity,” 430.

\textsuperscript{22} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book 1, Chapter IV, p. 12. From the second century on there was a Christian presence in Britain. The Venerable Bede recounts the conversion of Lucius, King of the Britons (ca. 182), who appealed to the Church in Rome to be made a Christian. His request was granted by Pope Eleutherus, and King Lucius had the church of St. Martin built to honor and preserve the faith. This gives particular gravitas to Bertha’s church of St. Martin just outside the walls of Canterbury.
The temples of the idols in that (English) nation ought not to be destroyed, let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed.\textsuperscript{23}

Since the second century there had been a Christian presence in Britain, the earliest “post-invasion” missionaries to arrive came through Ireland. Monks like Germanus and Patrick, ca. 430, set up small monastic centers throughout Ireland, the Scottish Lowlands, England and Wales. These monastic settlements lived in accord with the newly arrived German barbarians.\textsuperscript{24} Men like Palladius in the north of Britain, Ninian and his conversion of the northern Picts in the early 400s, along with Columba in the 500s, brought a Christianity strongly influenced by Arian theology to Britain.\textsuperscript{25} Seeing the threat by the Unitarian belief taking root within Britain, Gregory I planned his mission of 596/597 to rout out the heresy and impart the values of Romanitas upon the Anglo-Saxons.

As a young ruler, King Æthelbert took over the abandoned Roman metropolis of Canterbury.\textsuperscript{26} The roofs and walls of the Roman houses had collapsed and were now covered by weeds and other detritus. There was no attempt to rebuild, with new residents living in small huts and temporary structures within the abandoned ruins of the city until the arrival of Æthelbert's queen, Bertha, a Frankish princess. Bertha imparted her faith, her court and her influence on the

\textsuperscript{23} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book I, Chapter XXX, 70.

\textsuperscript{24} Patrick also brought with him the arts of the Celts to the new peoples that inhabited the large island. There was a growing trend to “re-Christianize” the peoples living on these islands. Although both the indigenous and new peoples were considered barbaric, warrior-like and rooted in pagan beliefs, there was a push from the churches in the Mediterranean to bring them back, or introduce them to, Christianity. And, although culturally different from each other, the Saxons, Franks and Celts seemed to quickly, if not enthusiastically embrace the faith, and would remain some of Christianity’s fiercest champions in centuries to come.


\textsuperscript{26} Collinson, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., \textit{A History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 6.
Anglo-Saxon king via her marriage in ca. 580. She asked one condition of her new husband, that she be able to practice her faith in Æthelbert's kingdom, and that she could bring her spiritual companion, Luidhard, with her to Canterbury.\(^{27}\) Metaphorically and literally, Bertha pulled back the weeds covering mosaics, temples and grave shrines surrounding her new home and began the spiritual campaign that she shared with Pope Gregory to restore Christianity to Britain.

Queen Bertha was born into the fractious but unified Merovingian dynasty and was a princess of the Franks, the first of the German tribes to convert to Roman Trinitarian Christianity. Clovis I, King of the Franks, who after marrying Clothilde, a Catholic Burgundian princess, was converted and baptized in 496 by Remi, sainted Bishop of Reims, along with 3,000 members of Clovis’ army.\(^{28}\) It is clear from the account written by Gregory of Tours that Clothilde was instrumental in the conversion of Clovis and the Franks, much like her granddaughter Bertha would be in the conversion of her husband and of the Anglo-Saxons. The marital influence of these women forever sealed the connection between Frankish women and the Roman Church.\(^{29}\)

Pope Gregory recognized the importance of women in Christianizing pagans:

> Then the queen (Clothilde) asked saint Remi, bishop of Rheims, to summon Clovis secretly, urging him to introduce the king to the word of salvation. And the bishop sent for him secretly and began to urge him to believe in the true God, maker of heaven and earth, and to cease worshiping idols.\(^{30}\)

The Frankish women were the keepers of the faith; their men, be they Christian farmers or nobles, were warriors first. Reverent wives raised their children in the Christian faith, and by Bertha’s generation Merovingian women were ardent and passionate Christians. This is

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\(^{27}\) Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* Book I, Chapter XXVI, 50.


\(^{30}\) Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400 – 1100*, 81
evidenced by the old Roman church that Bishop Luidhard rededicated to Bertha’s family saint, Martin of Tours. The Queen and Bishop worshiped there for years before Augustine arrived in Britain and they opened the church of St. Martin to his missionaries to preach there and to baptize the Anglo-Saxons.  

Bertha was the great political ally of Gregory I and was so important to his late sixth century Gregorian Mission that she was favorably included in Bede’s *History of the English Nation* (ca. 730). Rarely did contemporary historians – mostly ecclesiastics – record the lives and accomplishments of women in the early Church. Often they and their deeds were grouped into two categories: that of the pure and pious women, or that of the cunning disobedient one who always met her untimely demise, usually violently. In the early Middle Ages noble women did not enjoy much political or social freedom, but what power they did have was usually exhibited through the gentle influencing of their husbands.

Like most noble women of her generation, Bertha’s marriage was arranged by the men of her family and designed to politically advance the kingdom of the Franks and to enhance her husband’s status. The Franks, as with other Germanic tribes, were not known for their bloodless transitions; many kings practiced polygamy, which led to political intrigue, murder and war. Most families ruled for only one generation. Upon a ruler’s death, the sons divided the kingdom amongst themselves. Women could not rule or hold lands independent from their male relations.

A woman who was a member of the monastic community whose family ties gave protection and financial stability to an abbey or a convent enjoyed some freedom. Though

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31 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, Book 1, Chapter XXVI, p. 48. According to Charles Roach Smith, “Merovingian Coins,” *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Numismatic Society* 7 (April, 1844 – January, 1845): 190. During an excavation, looped Merovingian coins, along with Roman intaglio in cornelian. These pieces appear to have formed a necklace or decoration for a person of distinction, and was most likely a possession of Queen Bertha. This was a custom common with the Greeks and Romans.

limited, it was through the Roman Church that a woman could gain some moderate control over her life, as a possible benefactress if married, or as an abbess or a nun if she entered the cloister. Early Christian communities and convents flourished because of the generosity of faithful Christians, particularly wealthy noble families. Never fully civilized, the Frankish kings exhibited varying degrees of civility towards the Roman Empire and the Roman Church. It was the Merovingian who refined and Christianized the dynasty.  

In building their churches the Franks adopted, as much as they could, the architectural style of the early Roman churches. Many of these were built over ancient temples or other Roman buildings. The interior decorations of these churches reflected both regional (the ornamental and highly decorative stone work and mosaics seen in Ravenna and Eastern Byzantine revetments) and Roman architectural types (i.e., the reuse of basilicas) that visually reinforced spiritual and political loyalty to Rome. The Franks adopted much of the Trinitarian Roman liturgy and consequently dressed their churches much in the same way as those in Rome. For the Franks, it was also essential to show the importance of ‘seeming’ Roman, to identify as a Roman, even if you were not. For example, Childeric I (d. 482, Bertha’s great-grandfather) was buried in a suit of Roman armor with Bronze Age grave goods, Roman jewelry and Roman coins bearing his name. He identified himself as a Roman, but he was a Merovingian and specifically the King of the Franks, as demonstrated by the unique gold and garnet jewelry, and use of a bee as the symbol of his dynasty (see figure 9).  

This was an important divergence from Roman tastes in design and it shows an  

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identifying trend starting in the territories outside of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{36} It is a style that is recognizably Roman, but unquestionably Frankish: a blending of both cultures that is specific to a political, economic or spiritual shift or event (be it the waning Roman Empire or the ascendance of the Merovingian dynasty. This reflects a hybrid people – the Franks – historically, politically, economically, and socially connected to Rome, while retaining their traditional tribal identity.\textsuperscript{37} The artisans tasked to create these new identities were able to combine styles that were uniquely Frankish, Alemannic, Gothic, or Anglo-Saxon with the \textit{Romanitas} that their patrons also craved.

\textbf{The Roman Church in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries}

Gregory I was a man caught at the crossroads of a changing empire in the late sixth century, with incursions from enemies within and without its borders and the evolving Christian faithful. With Emperor Justinian I’s capture of the city of Rome in 547, political authority shifted as Ravenna and Constantinople now dictated Roman law. Disillusioned, Gregory resigned his office as Roman Prefect and took monastic orders. He gave his inheritance to the Church and founded six monasteries on his estates in Sicily and a seventh on his family’s property on the Caelian Hill, which he dedicated to St. Andrew. Gregory spent several years there as abbot, along with many of the monks who were later sent on the mission to Canterbury.

In 578, Gregory was called by Benedict I (who died shortly after and was followed by Pope Pelagius II) to be one of seven deacons of Rome sent to Constantinople as a permanent ecclesiastical ambassador to the Byzantine Court.\textsuperscript{38} There Gregory witnessed the splendor of the

\textsuperscript{36} Wells, \textit{Barbarians to Angels}, 68.

\textsuperscript{37} Wells, \textit{Barbarians to Angels}, 42 – 43.

Byzantine capital; he experienced the dramatic interior of the recently finished *Hagia Sophia* (337 – 350s) and the various art works and architectural marvels of the eastern Mediterranean. In the porphyry clad interior of *Ayasofya* (*Hagia Sophia*), in the ornate rooms making up the rebuilt Sacred Palace (originally Constantine I’s), Gregory - with Emperor Tiberius (r. 578 – 582) and Eutychius I, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 582) - discussed the political and spiritual problems caused by the invasions of the Arian Lombards, a problem that would not be resolved for centuries.\(^{39}\)

From the hours spent discussing weighty theological matters in Constantinople, one expects that an easy friendship grew between these men. While they might have disagreed on ecclesiastical interpretations, Gregory gained in wisdom and confidence. These diplomatic skills served him well when he became pope a decade later in 590, and must be considered in the context of his mission to Britain to establish a new ‘new Rome’ at Canterbury. Gregory is remembered fondly in the Orthodox Church, and revered as St. Gregory the Dialogist for his wisdom and for the diplomacy he showed to people, regardless of their identity or their beliefs. This is something our own modern leaders should study. His contemporary, Gregory of Tours, proclaimed that Gregory I was an adept scholar, unparalleled in Rome. Well educated and versed in grammar and law, Gregory I was a prolific writer, sending over 800 letters during his papacy, and was a generous giver of religious gifts. He also enjoyed collecting and receiving sacred relics.\(^{40}\)

When Gregory was proclaimed pope, he understood the problems facing the Western Church. Disloyalty in the ranks of the Roman army, along with the ongoing attacks (both

\(^{39}\) Gregory I himself would be a factor in this resolution, sending Theodelinda, the Queen of the Lombards about 600, important gifts from Rome. But the Lombards captured Ravenna in the late sixth century and ruled Northern Italy and threatened Rome until defeated by Charlemagne in the 770s.

political and military) by the Lombards, and by the Byzantine army attempting to reclaim Ravenna, forced him into tenuous negotiations.\textsuperscript{41} Arianism was a real threat to the Trinitarian Roman Church, and although it was waning by the start of the 600s, it was very present in the north of the continent among the Franks, especially before they converted to the Roman Church at the end of the fifth century.\textsuperscript{42} Reasoning that he could retain more control over the region by growing a greater Church presence in the north, Gregory needed both the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons to join physically and spiritually to Rome.\textsuperscript{43} This resulted in his plan, today known as the Gregorian Mission of ca. 595 - 598, which would use Latin as the language of diplomacy, and included spiritual leaders bearing religious icons and regalia that were specifically Roman and Christian.

Gregory’s primary objective was to reestablish a Christian center in Britain and to evangelize and convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons. The two provinces he desired were the old cities of \textit{Eboracum} (York) and \textit{Londinium} (London) and he proposed twelve bishops to serve as administrators as well as to teach the faith to the newly converted people. Essential to the success of Gregory’s plan was his choice of spiritual leaders to guide these early English churches. Gregory picked his trusted friend and spiritual brother, Augustine (ca. 530 – 604) to head the mission. He was familiar with the strength of Augustine’s faith and with his skills in organizing the affairs of a large church. Augustine had served as Prior to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Andrew on the Caelian Hill in Rome, the very institution Gregory I founded when he took his own vows. Filled with doubt by the enormity of the pope’s mission, Augustine was already 65 years old when he began his journey to Britain in the spring of 596.

\textsuperscript{41} Bitel, \textit{Women in Early Medieval Europe}, 91.

\textsuperscript{42} Webster and Brown, \textit{The Transformation of the Roman World}, 39.

\textsuperscript{43} James, \textit{The Franks}, 103.
Some 30 to 40 other men made up the retinue accompanying Augustine as he landed on the shores of Ebbsfleet, Kent in 597. Bede tells us:

In this island (Thanet) landed the servant of our lord, Augustine, and his companions, being, as reported, nearly forty men. They had, by orders of the blessed Pope Gregory, taken interpreters of the nation of the Franks, and sending to Æthelbert, signified that they were come from Rome, and brought a joyful message … (of God).  

As Bede states, among the group were monks from Rome and interpreters from the Frankish courts. Kings Clothar II of Soissons (r. 584 – 628), Theodoric II of Orleans (r. 595-613) and Theudebert II of Reims and Metz (r. 595 – 612) and Bishop Syagrinus of Autun (r. 560 – 600) provided these interpreters. Peter of Canterbury, a monk from St. Andrew’s in Rome was traveling with Augustine. Peter became the first abbot of Sts. Peter and Paul (later St. Augustine’s Abbey), founded in Canterbury in 598. He drowned off Amblesteuse near Boulogne while traveling back to France after 614.

Augustine’s group was a testament to Gregory’s political connections among the Christian Franks. His route to Canterbury took Augustine to the large, politically active bishoprics like Aix, Arles, Vienna, Lyons, Autun, Tours, Boulogne, Reims and Amiens (see figure 10). Scholars are unsure if Augustine began his mission by water, traveling from the Roman port Portus (Ostia) and if he docked at the Isles of Lerins (near Cannes) or at Marseilles, or if he traveled by land, through the towns of Umbria and Tuscany to Genoa, then via ship to the coastal towns of Nice, Antibes, and Cannes. The journey of the missionaries halted at one point in their journey to Canterbury, for fear of traveling into the hostile north. These were older men, not young adventurers – they probably wanted to spend their remaining days in St. Andrew’s.

According to Bede, the group was:

44 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* Book I, Chapter XXV, 46.
…seized with a sudden fear, and began to think of returning home, rather than proceed to a barbarous, fierce, and unbelieving nation, in whose very language they were strangers; and this they unanimously agreed was the safest course. In short, they sent back Augustine, who had been appointed to be consecrated bishop in case they were received by the English, that he might, by humble entreaty, obtain of the Holy Gregory, that they should not be compelled to undertake so dangerous, toilsome, and uncertain of a journey. 47

Bede also cites the reply given to Augustine by Gregory I, that was read to his band of monks, stating that the rewards in Heaven will outweigh the toils of the mission, and that they should get on with their journey constructing a new Rome in the British Isles.

Augustine rejoined his companions in Marseilles in late summer 596, followed by the arrival of several more letters from the pope requesting charity and kindness from the Frankish churches for Augustine's missionaries. 48 Gregory I wrote to Desiderius of Vienne and to Syagrius of Autun, Bishops of Gaul:

We have dispatched Augustine, the servant of God, the bearer of these presents, whose zeal and earnestness are well known to us, with other servants of God, in behalf of souls in those parts; from whose account of things when you have fully learned what is enjoined on him, let your Fraternity bestow your succor on him in all ways which the case require, that you may be able, as is becoming and fit, to be helpers of a good work. 49

Bishop Syagrius of Autun was instrumental in supporting Augustine’s laborious mission throughout France, as was Vergilius of Arles, both of whom would receive the papal pallium from Gregory I, at Queen Brunhild’s insistence (Queen Bertha of Kent’s aunt), for their support of the missioners. That circuitous route taken by Augustine’s mission (outlined above) showed that the group encountered resistance and found little help from some churchmen. It took many diplomatic meetings between the Roman missionaries and the Frankish bishops to guarantee the protection and resources needed to make Gregory’s mission a success.

47 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* Book I, Chapter XXIII, 43.
The journey to Britain was exhausting and dangerous, coupled with navigating the politically motivated Frankish bishops who viewed the Gregorian mission as a maneuver to re-establish papal control of the northern churches. Gregory I needed their support, along with that of the Frankish queens, in order for this mission to succeed. Through regular correspondence and generous papal gifts, Gregory strengthened his relationship with the Franks, and increased the power of the Roman Church with spiritual *Romanitas*, thus mitigating the ongoing political strife caused by Milan, Ravenna and Constantinople. This special relationship between the Roman Church and the Franks, particularly with the noble and holy women, continued to grow throughout the seventh and eighth centuries as both the Church and the Franks pulled away from Arianism and the Eastern Church.

Gregory I understood the power of these women, particularly when they were regents, and used their devotion and wiliness to share their faith with their subjects. Queen Bertha of Kent, wife of King Æthelbert, had petitioned the Frankish monasteries and convents for religious guidance, but had received no help due to the political infighting among the four Frankish kingdoms. Moreover, Bertha and her aunt Brunhild had petitioned Pope Gregory for perhaps a decade, asking him for spiritual guidance and intervention from heretical influences in the north, and supporting the Roman conversion of the “Angles” to Christianity. Much like Bertha of Kent, Brunhild was a woman of influence within the Merovingian courts. Receptive to their wishes, 


53 Queen Brunhild was a cultured Visigothic princess who was given in marriage to the Merovingian king Sigebert I of Austrasia. She was fundamentally involved in Gregory I’s mission to Britain and her support was indispensable to Augustine. Through her family connections, Brunhild linked courts across western Europe. Her grandparents were Clovis I and Clothilde. She was regent for her son Childebert I (r. 575 – 595) and for her grandsons Theoderic II (r. 595-613) and Theudebert II (r. 595-612), who sent interpreters to Augustine’s mission. The viciousness of the family and dynastic infighting among the Frankish families is exemplified by Brunhild’s later life. Both of her grandsons will fight over her, with the oldest, Theudebert II, expelling her from his court. In typical *Game of Thrones* fashion, plots, subterfuge and discord are sown, people are killed, and
Gregory I began his plans for the mission to Britain.

According to Bede, when Æthelbert first heard that Augustine and his entourage of monks, interpreters and other church officials had landed in Kent bearing gifts and a message from Pope Gregory, he made them stay on the Isle of Thanet for a short time. Bede relates that the king was suspicious of the Roman missionaries:

The king having heard this, ordered them to stay in that island where they had landed, and that they should be furnished with all necessaries, till he should consider what to do with them. … Some days after, the king came to the island, and sitting in the open air, ordered Augustine and his companions to be brought into his presence. For he had taken precaution that they should not come to him in any house, lest, according to an ancient superstition, they practiced any magical arts, they might impose upon him, and so get the better of him.54

Bede used this story to illustrate Æthelbert's pagan roots. While he waited several days to meet with the missionaries, it is to be sure that he spoke with his wife. He would have sought her counsel, as he had before in matters of his court. The organization of the king's court was influenced by Queen Bertha and Bishop Luidhard, and was modeled in imitation of the Frankish kings, with lay officers, based on Roman bureaucratic customs.55 Bertha would have known of Augustine’s arrival; she may have seen the Isle of Thanet from the walls of St. Martin’s church. It is difficult to imagine that once the missionaries reached Kent, Bertha would allow such an important endeavor to fail. She had requested a spiritual presence in Canterbury since her marriage nearly two decades before. Bertha’s encouragement supported her husband’s meeting with the missionaries, and once their meeting took place, Æthelbert welcomed them, saying:

Your words and promises are very fair, but as they are new to us, and of uncertain import, I cannot approve of them so far as to forsake that which I have so long

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54 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, Book I, Chapter XXV, 46.

followed with the whole English nation. But because you are come from far into
my kingdom, and, as I conceive, are desirous to impart to us those things which
you believe to be true, and most beneficial, we will not molest you, but give you
favorable entertainment, and take care to supply you with your necessary
sustenance; nor do we forbid you to preach and gain as many as you can to your
religion.Æ

Æthelbert allowed them safe passage through the walls of Canterbury, and the Roman ruins
became their living quarters (see figure 11). He also allowed Augustine to preach freely to his
subjects.

Augustine began his missionary work in Bertha’s ‘Roman church,’ St. Martin’s,
purportedly the oldest church in Britain, located nearly two thousand feet east of Canterbury
Christ Church Cathedral (see figure 12). As Bede relates:

In short, several believed and were baptized, admiring the simplicity of their
innocent life, and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine. There was on the east
side of the city a church dedicated to the honour of St. Martin, built whilst the
Romans were still in the island, wherein the queen, who, as has been said before,
was a Christian, used to pray. In this they first began to meet, to sing, to say
mass, to preach, and to baptize, till the king, being converted to the faith, allowed
them to preach openly, and build or repair churches in all parts.

Although Æthelbert allowed Augustine and his missionaries to preach freely, the last sentence in
Bede’s passage above specifies “openly” preach, meaning that once the king was converted and
baptized in his wife’s church, he allowed the Christians to preach all through his kingdom. The
conversion and baptism of Æthelbert, the most powerful king in the land, took great diplomacy
and spiritual courage. Their reward was his conversion, which Bede describes:

When he (King Æthelbert), among the rest, induced by the unspotted life of these
holy men, and their delightful promises, which, by many miracles, they proved to
be most certain, believed and was baptized, greater numbers began daily to flock

56 Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, Book I, Chapter XXV, 47.
59 Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation Book I, Chapter XXVI, 48-49.
together to hear the word, and forsaking their heathen sites, to associate themselves, by believing, to be the unity of the church of Christ.\textsuperscript{60}

These writings by Bede have spurred much debate and mistranslations. There is almost nothing else left in the historical record that tells us about the earliest of the Canterbury churches. For example, legend states that St. Martin’s contained a stone baptismal font in which Æthelbert was baptized. However, the font that is there today is Norman in design and is comprised of more than 25 pieces of salvaged materials.\textsuperscript{61}

While Augustine would never again falter as he had at the beginning of the mission, it is clear that the conversion of the new German tribes throughout England was not easy; as the case of Rædwald proves.\textsuperscript{62} Ever wary of the power and political intrigues surrounding the Merovingian Church, Æthelbert waited for a bishop from Rome to baptize him.\textsuperscript{63} The baptism of Æthelbert in St. Martin’s church marked the first public acceptance of Roman Christianity by the Anglo-Saxons. The news of this event and of the power of the Roman Church speeded the conversion process throughout the pagan kingdoms of Britain. Here, too, this could not have happened without the help of a woman. Gregory wrote to Brunhild in July 601, commenting on the mission to Kent, and mentioned Brunhild’s help and charity to Canterbury, implying that

\textsuperscript{60} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book I, Chapter XXVI, 48-49.


\textsuperscript{62} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book II, Chapter XII, 116-120, Chapter XV, 125. Rædwald, king of East Anglia, reigned from ca. 599 – 624. He was the first king of the East Angles to become a Christian, converting at Æthelbert's court before 604. In 616, at the Battle of the River Idle, his army defeated Æthelfrith of Northumbria. King Edwin, who was deeply influenced by Rædwald, became the king of Northumbria, and married Æthelfrith's daughter, Queen Bertha's and King Æthelbert. From around 616, Rædwald was the most powerful of the English kings south of the River Humber. According to Bede he was the fourth ruler to hold \textit{imperium} over other southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. In the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} he is called a bretwalda. Rædwald is most likely the occupant of the Sutton Hoo ship-burial.

\textsuperscript{63} Augustine, was twice made a bishop, first at Rome by Gregory and then at Arles, by Bishop Virgilius for Canterbury. As abbot, and head of Gregory's mission, Augustine was already a bishop \textit{ex-officio}, see the quote and reference in footnote 58. Virgilius of Arles consecrated and confirmed Augustine as Bishop of Canterbury, before he arrived at Canterbury. There was no prior Bishop of Canterbury, now Augustine was that bishop, this is a new office, on top of the earlier office he had in Rome. As Bishop of Canterbury Augustine could consecrate and dedicate the cathedral church, which Bede tells us he did.
Æthelbert's conversion was aided in part by her contributions and connections with Bertha:

…with love of the Christian religion that you do not cease to do with devout mind and pious zeal whatever you know pertains to the gain of souls and the propagation of the faith. With how much favor, how much help, your excellence supported our most reverend brother and co-bishop Augustine on his way to the Angles, fame did not cover with silence before and afterwards certain monks who came back from him to us subtlety reported. And indeed some are amazed at your Christianity, to whom your benefits up to now are less known, but to us, who have already experienced them, it is cause that for wonder but for rejoicing that you help yourself in what you do for others. What miracles and how our redeemer worked in the conversion of the above mentioned nation, is already known to your excellence.

According to Gregory I, before the year 597 was over, ten thousand of Æthelbert's subjects had received baptism. He wrote to Eulogius, Bishop of Alexandria of this event:

While the nation of the Angli, placed in a corner of the world, remained up to this time misbelieving in the worship of stocks and stones, I determined, through the aid of your prayers for me, to send to it, God granting it, a monk of my monastery for the purpose of preaching. And he, having with my leave been made bishop by the bishops of Germany, proceeded, with their aid also, to the end of the world to the aforesaid nation; and already letters have reached us telling us of his safety and his work; to the effect that he and those that have been sent with him are resplendent with such great miracles in the said nation that they seem to imitate the powers of the apostles in the signs which they display. Moreover, a solemnity of the Lord's Nativity which occurred in this first indiction, more than ten thousand Angli are reported to have been baptized by the same our brother and fellow bishop.

Bede relates that Gregory now directed Augustine to continue his proselytizing in Kent, and that Æthelbert received gifts sent by the pope to celebrate his conversion to the faith. These gifts could have included the porphyry spolia that can be found in the opus Alexandrinum pavement, now preserved in Trinity Chapel of the Cathedral at Canterbury.

When Augustine returned from Gaul, Æthelbert gave him his palace, which was an old Roman basilica, as the place for the first English Anglo-Saxon Cathedral church in Britain.

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Augustine consecrated and dedicated this structure to Jesus Christ the Savior or ‘Christ Church’ Cathedral, the Canterbury Cathedral we know today (see figures 13, 14, 15 and 16).\textsuperscript{67} The remains of Augustine’s cathedral are under the nave floor of the present day building. Bede cites an earlier church dedicated to Christ on the same site:

\begin{quote}
(Augustine) being supported by the king, recovered therein a church, which he was informed had been built by the ancient Roman Christians, and consecrated it in the name our holy Savior, Good and Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and there established a residence for himself and his successors.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

Augustine adapted Æthelbert's palace because it was a useable Roman basilica, just like Bertha’s smaller church of St. Martin, and just like the churches the earlier Roman Britons had built. If Bede is correct, he used the Roman foundations and endowed the church he designed in imitation of the papal Cathedral of the Lateran in Rome, which also incorporated an older Roman basilican palace.\textsuperscript{69} This conscious modeling on the Lateran complex made Augustine's Canterbury cathedral spiritually and politically a ‘new Rome,’ an idea that was implied by Pope Gregory in his letter to Brunhild in 601.\textsuperscript{70}

This consecration also cemented the growing ties between Bertha, Augustine and Æthelbert. As a result, as Bede tells us, the Gregorian Mission grew so successful that Augustine wrote to Gregory asking for more monks to help with the conversions:

\begin{quote}
Pope Gregory, hearing from Bishop Augustine, that he had a great harvest, and but few laborers, sent to him, together with his aforesaid messengers, several fellow laborers and ministers of the word of whom the first and principal were Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, and Rufinianus, and by them all things in general that were necessary for the worship and service of the church, sacred vessels and vestments for the altars, also ornaments for the churches, and vestments for the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} Today this church is the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury who is the Primate of all England, the Diocesan Bishop of the diocese of Canterbury and the leader of the Anglican Communion.

\textsuperscript{68} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book I, Chapter XXXIII, 57.


priests and clerks, as likewise relics of holy apostles and martyrs; beside many books.\textsuperscript{71}

Along with the new missionaries named, who will become bishops of the new English churches throughout England, the above passage also mentions ‘ornaments for the churches,’ which could easily include salvaged porphyry or pieces of pavement to use for liturgical purposes. These same ornaments could also function as \textit{Romanitas} relics. I will elaborate on this idea in Chapter 3.

Æthelbert and Augustine constructed the monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul, ca. 598, renaming this the Abbey of St. Augustine after his death in 604. Located one thousand feet east of Christ Church, this became the burial church for the Anglo-Saxon kings and for the bishops of Canterbury. Bede writes:

\begin{quote}
(Augustine) also built a monastery not far from the city to the eastward, in which, by his advice, Æthelbert erected from the foundation the church of the blessed apostles, Peter and Paul, and enriched it with several donations; wherein the bodies of the same Augustine, and of all the bishops of Canterbury, and of the kings of Kent, might be buried. However, Augustine himself did not consecrate that church, but Laurentius, his successor.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

St. Augustine and King Æthelbert established Holy Sees at Canterbury, Rochester and London. Even though Augustine was unable to complete Gregory’s plan mentioned above in his lifetime, he did establish the first monasteries and built a ‘new Rome’ at Canterbury. Augustine initiated a tradition of ecclesiastical documentation to support the new Bishopric of Canterbury (monasteries, education, scriptoria) at Canterbury, which connected the artisans and theologians in England to Rome. Augustine built his ecclesiastical city in stone, as at Rome, and not in wood, as we see in contemporary northern churches. The pragmatic alliance of Æthelbert's power and Augustine’s display of Roman \textit{imperium}, along with Bertha’s role in initiating the

\textsuperscript{71} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book I, Chapter XXIX, 68.

\textsuperscript{72} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book I, Chapter XXXIII, 77.
Gregorian Mission, made this moment in history the perfect time for the commissioning of a grand example of commemorative *Romanitas*: the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement now preserved in Trinity Chapel in the new Canterbury Cathedral. This is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter III

The opus Alexandrinum Floor

In this chapter I will discuss how the opus Alexandrinum pavement now displayed in Trinity Chapel of Canterbury Cathedral Christ Church originated as the floor of an immersion baptistery and was made as an ornate Roman-Saxon Pavement. After a detailed description of the floor, I will consider the connections signaled by the use of local spolia in the pavement identifying Canterbury’s kinship to the Roman Empire, to the Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire, and to the Germanic peoples. This pavement thus expressed a Romanitas and imperium that commemorated, among other important things, the baptism of King Æthelbert and the historic conversion of the English. As such, contemporary artistic styles preserved in Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, locally recovered jewelry and mosaics, opus sectile work and the buildings in which they were used also support the baptismal function of the Canterbury opus Alexandrinum pavement and allow us to place its date of execution to the early seventh century. This evidence, in turn, supports my identification of Queen Bertha of Kent, Æthelbert's wife, as the patron responsible for its commission.

73 Antonio Nibby, Delle Antichita di Roma, Libre XII, Volume 1 (Rome: Universita di Roma, 1830), 67. This style is also referenced by Rev. Robert Willis MA, FRS, The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral (1845; repr., Richmond: Tiger of the Stripe, 2006), 113, though Rev. Willis incorrectly dates the Trinity Pavement as a contemporary to Westminster's Cosmati pavement at the high altar. Opus Alexandrinum is defined by Prof. Nibby as a distinct decorative style, comprised solely of purple and green porphyry, forming an elegant carpet that was made popular during the rule of Emperor Alexander Severus (r. 222 to 235 CE). Prof. Nibby goes on to give examples of opus Alexandrinum which I included below, and within this paper, in his original text: Elagabalo colli medesimi due porfidi rosso e verde, cioe colle pietre porfiritca e lacedemonia, lastrico piaze sul Palatino che chiamo antoniniane. Ma Alessandro Severo perfeziono questo metodo riandando insieme i tre metodi diversi di lastricare i pavimenti, e servendosi principalmente delle medesime due pietre, onde tal modo di far pavimenti venne appellato opus Alexandrinum. Consiste questo nell'alternare le due pietre predette unite ad altre, tagliarle oro in lastre grandi, ora in scudetti, ora in tasselli minuti di varia figura, e formare nel tutto insieme una specie di ricco ed elegante tappeto. Questa specie di pavimenti fu molto in uso ne tempi della decadenza e nel medio evo, e se ne hanno in Roma esempi bellissimi nelle chiese più antiche, como in s. Croce in Gerusalemme, in s. Giovanni e Paolo, in s. Clemente, in s. Maria in Cosmedin, in s. Lorenzo fuori la mura ec. L'esempio più recente di questa sorta di pavimenti si ha in s. Giovanni Laterano, dove fu fatto da Martino V.
It is my opinion that Pope Gregory I wanted to build a new Rome in Canterbury, that is to establish the Trinitarian confession of the Roman church among the Angles and Saxons. The closest connections Gregory had at Canterbury were to his missionary Augustine and Bertha, Augustine’s host. King Æthelbert was included, once he was converted. Through spiritual influence, guidance and gifts coming from Rome and the Franks, Bertha and Augustine assembled the materials (including spolia) and the monks of the mission along with local goldsmiths to fashion the opus Alexandrinum pavement. Porphyry was the imperial stone of Rome and specifically of Emperor Constantine. With it he built monuments honoring Rome’s official adoption of Christianity.

Constantine’s mother, Helena, who was instrumental in his conversion, was the woman to whom Gregory compared Bertha in his 601 letter. Kent, her husband’s kingdom, was then at its height of power. The Venerable Bede remarks on the strength and longevity of Æthelbert's rule and of his papal correspondence with Gregory I, who compares the English king to Constantine. With her commission, I will argue that Bertha wanted to commemorate the conversion and baptism of her husband, along with the actual mission of Augustine and the establishment of the Roman church in what is now called England. She was likely alive long enough to see the pavement completed and installed. Both Gregory and his missionary were dead by the end of 604 and after that year Æthelbert and Laurence, Augustine’s successor, concentrated on establishing new Roman Catholic diocese throughout England – particularly in London, York and Rochester – to strengthen Christianity's hold on the island’s nascent and somewhat rebellious converts. Only Bertha had the time, the spiritual and political powers and

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75 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, Chapter XXXII. Bede's 'oversight' of Queen Bertha's contributions in Canterbury is purposeful. He was supporting the Northumbrian connection to the early English church, and not the Frankish connection. I will develop this further in Chapter 5.
connections, and the vision to invest in the creation of this pavement.

**Description of the Floor**

Canterbury’s *opus Alexandrinum* pavement is made up of a lozenge (a rhombus or diamond) set in a quatrefoil (four symmetrically overlapping circles forming a square design) set, in turn, in another square which is set, in turn, in a much bigger lozenge overlapping four circles (see figure 3). The much repaired Canterbury pavement that we see today measures almost 17 feet from opposing angles. It is comprised of pieces of purple and green porphyry, giallo antico, breccia giallo, black limestone and basalt set in a three millimeter framework of brass or latten strip. The western angle of the pavement now in Trinity Chapel, is oriented to the archiepiscopal chair of St. Augustine and its easterly angle is pointed towards the demolished shrine of St. Thomas Becket. The northern angle points to the Altar of St. Edward the Confessor and the southern angle points towards the old detached baptistery of Augustine’s Christ Church (founded 597). Only the eastern and western portions of the pavement are of original workmanship and are made up almost entirely of purple and green convex pieces of porphyry set in Purbeck marble – the natural stone of England (see figure 17). The pavement’s current location in Trinity Chapel makes it nearly impossible to see it in its fullest beauty. The public cannot access the uppermost gallery level and are confined solely to the pilgrim’s stairs on the cathedral’s side aisles. The pavement was never meant to be seen at such an extreme angle; it is a floor and was meant to be stood upon and looked at from above, in meditation and prayer.

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The Innermost Square

I will be as consistent as I can in reading from the innermost to the outermost perimeters of the pavement, beginning with the innermost patterned square of black and white marble meander or Greek / Roman key design. This innermost square of the opus Alexandrinum pavement is the most curious. Its overall style is common in early Greek floors (see figure 18). There is a large 10 ½ x 9 ½ inch black square in the center of the pavement, but it is not original to the design and does not match the geometrical precision found in rare marble pavements. This addition is surrounded by lunettes and two bands of bi-colored triangles (see figure 19). In the four corners of the Greek key pattern are squares containing black six-pointed stars set in white marble. The meander or key pattern is followed by a porphyry band around its perimeter with alternating green and purple diamonds and white triangle infill. Within most of the black and white marble pieces that also make up the four small roundels in the central square are curiously drilled holes.

The Central Square

The central square of the Canterbury pavement measures approximately 8 by 8 feet and is the most luxurious, containing the inner meander which is enclosed by a quatrefoil set within a large square of ornate tracery with roundels at each corner (see figure 20). The inner quatrefoil’s perimeter contains purple and green porphyry saltaires with white marble infill (see figure 19 in the bottom right and left corners of the pavement). Within each of the clover-shaped lobes are

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81 Dudley Canterbury Cathedral: Aspects of Its Sacramental Geometry, 123.
three purple six-pointed stars, set in a square, surrounded by green porphyry lunettes, reflecting the repeating designs found within the inner meander. The lobes are filled in with varying sized pieces of marble, each more or less triangular in shape (see figure 21).

In the interior north-east, north-west, south-east, and south-west corners of the central square are four roundels, in alternating green and purple porphyry. Each symmetrically designed roundel has square-in-square designs, with geometric infill (see figure 22). The center square is enclosed by a larger, pierced white marble square, enclosed by a thin porphyry border. Lunettes surround the central design, and in turn, are encircled by a sawtooth band of alternating triangles which is set within a square frame of black marble with evenly spaced drill holes and drilled white marble infill (see figure 23). On the outer side of the black frame square are larger lobes comprised of three white pierced lunettes, two green or purple petlae (or shields) and a pierced white marble triangle, banded again by alternating green and white isosceles triangles (see figure 24). Partially curved strips of pierced white marble and purple porphyry enclose the roundel, setting it nicely in the corners of the pavement's central square and giving the design symmetry and balance. The tracery of the central square is a diverse combination of bi-colored porphyry and marble in segmented patterns of saltire, herringbone, meanders and swastikas set in dark Purbeck stone.

The Outer Quatrefoil

The outer quatrefoil measures 16 ¾ x 16 ¾ feet and contains a mixture of opus Alexandrinum and opus sectile work, the result of repairs to damage from overly zealous pilgrims and kings along with massive restoration to the northern and southern points during the nineteenth century. The four corners of the largest outer square point in the cardinal directions.

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Elizabeth Eames “Notes on the Decorated Stone Roundels in the Corona and Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral” in
in each of which is a small square void that might mark the posts for the canopy of St. Thomas Becket’s shrine (see figure 25). The tracery of the outer quatrefoil separates the design’s spaces, with the largest outer square bisecting the four lobes that encapsulates the corners of the central square (see figure 26). The original eastern and western tracery sections have the same six-sided stars, and poly-lobed designs for infill patterns that are found in the pavement's central square. The complexity of designs found within the pavement point to its physical, political and spiritual functions.

**The Unique Nature of the Floor – opus Alexandrinum**

Floor designs have a long and rich heritage. In the earliest civilizations river stones and tiny shells were used in figurative and geometric pebble mosaics. By the Hellenistic and early Roman societies (late second century BCE) artisans and designs became more sophisticated, and the use of glazed square tiles or tesserae became the norm in vestibules of stately houses and baths. Mosaic floor pavements were made up of either *opus vermiculatum* (see figure 27), which used very small pieces to achieve fine detail, or *opus tessellatum*, which employed larger glazed tiles and was more frequently used by artisans (see figure 28).

In the construction of sacred or imperial sites, such as palaces, temples, tombs and churches, cut and polished stone shapes (usually marble) were used in creating flat geometric

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Woodman *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral*, 224 – 225. Desiderius Erasmus, (1466-1536) the Dutch humanist and theologian, made four visits to Canterbury, and wrote about the elaborate ceremony for displaying of the ornate gold and jeweled reliquary that contained Becket's skull, which was covered by a wooden box that was raised daily by the use of pulleys and curtains. This idea is also discussed by Rev. Robert Willis MA, FRS, *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral* (1845; repr., Richmond: Tiger of the Stripe, 2006), 113.


The art of decoration has been part of our human experience and creative processes since the start of civilization – there are murals at Catalhoyuk (in modern Turkey) dating to 7000 BCE, and temple mosaics in Mesopotamia dating to 4000 BCE.
pavements known as *opus sectile* (see figure 29). Opus sectile floors that are complete and intact are extremely rare. The ones found in Rome and Athens (dating to the first century) were simple, symmetric, continuous floors. After the fourth century opus sectile floors became more complex in design, and were pieced together like carpets, from spolia and polychromed marbles.

*Opus Alexandrinum* is a specific type of *opus sectile* work which used porphyry, the imperial stone, as the primary stone for the revetments of walls and floors. The only quarry for imperial-grade purple/red porphyry was located in Egypt's south-east desert, and was transported up the Nile, to Alexandria. The rarer green porphyry in the Canterbury pavement was quarried on Mt. Tayestos on the Peloponnese peninsula in Southern Greece, which had been stripped of its precious stones by the first century BCE. Access to these quarries were lost to westerners after the Islamic conquest in the late seventh century. Porphyry was the hardest of all known marbles and withstood high temperatures, although it wore out cutting tools and cracked easily. Consequently, there are no great slabs or rotas left like the ones seen in the Pantheon in Rome (118 – 125), in St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican (1506 – 1623) or in Suleyman the Magnificent’s great mosque (1550 – 1557), that are not cracked and pieced together.

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86 *Opus sectile* is not truly considered ‘mosaic work’, but rather is a process of cutting stone in varying shapes to fit an overall pattern (much like marqueterie). It was a more costly technique, and required skilled artisans to cut and polish the precious stones. The rarer the stone, like porphyry, or the more polychromed it was, like alabaster, the more desirable in a geometric floor design. Fine and colorful marbles were mainly used, for both their beauty and carve-ability.


88 Ambrose M. Poynter “Remarks on Three Sectile Pavements in Greece” *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 3 (1896/1897), 176.

89 Pajares-Ayuela *Cosmatesque Ornament* 30. Consider this, the porphyry we see today is 600 million-years-old, it formed as andesitic rock in the Arabian-Nubian Shield.


91 Dudley *Canterbury Cathedral: Aspects of Its Sacramental Geometry*, 123.
Porphyry, or *porphura* ('purple' in Greek), was a material and color reserved for the noble class (see figure 30). It was the material of choice for the Roman and Byzantine Empires to express power, status, a significant event or a burial site.\(^{92}\) *Porphyrogenitus*, or “being born to the purple” became the rule in Constantinople by the early eighth century when Byzantine empresses literally gave birth in a purple porphyry chamber.\(^ {93}\) Since the founding of Rome there had been a long tradition of honoring the dead’s identity in life. Nobles used biographical and mythological scenes on carved mausoleums and funerary altars to eulogize their status and deeds.\(^ {94}\) It became popular in the late third century for Roman nobility to use porphyry in funerary effigies, pavements and revetments in round or octagonal tombs.\(^ {95}\) The pagan buildings were absorbed and repurposed with the coming of Christianity, which identified porphyry with Godly rule on Earth.\(^ {96}\) The idea of earthly and heavenly union was underscored when Helena, Constantine’s mother, was buried in a magnificent purple porphyry sarcophagus.\(^ {97}\)

Porphyry was widely used in Imperial Rome. At Ravenna, with its Byzantine connections, *opus Alexandrinum* became more ornate in design in the sixth century (see figure 31).\(^ {98}\) Other examples of sixth century sectile work are found in the presbytery of the Basilica of Sta Maria Antiqua in Rome, in the Taberna VIII of the Basilica Emilia in the Roman Forum, and

\(^{92}\) Foster *Pattern of Thought*, 35.

\(^{93}\) Robin Cormack *Byzantine Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 81 and 86. Built in the Great Palace complex in 717 to demonstrate Byzantine power, it postdates Bertha’s pavement, but not the imperial value of porphyry. It will be destroyed in the coming iconoclastic outbreak later in the century. Foster *Pattern of Thought*, 35, supports this point.


\(^{95}\) Elsner *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100 – 450*, 158 – 159.

\(^{96}\) Lex Bosman “Spolia and Coloured Marble in Sepulchral Monuments in Rome, Florence and Bosco Marengo: Designs by Dosio and Vasari” *Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut* 49, no. 3 (2005), 372.

\(^{97}\) Elsner *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* 21.

in the apses of San Saba and San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, also in Rome. The Early Christian
baptisteries where porphyry becomes a staple material in construction and decoration along with
contemporary examples will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the sixth and seventh centuries the Franks were also making works in porphyry, most
notably the highly esteemed Eligius from Limoges, a goldsmith and jeweler who worked for the
Frankish court. He was an uncommonly wealthy man, which was noted by his contemporaries
who describe how he dressed and looked:

He wore gold and precious stones on his clothing. He had a gold belt and
gold decorated purses, richly embroidered shirts, and coats bordered with
gold. All of his clothes were very costly, many of silk.

If this is how a wealthy goldsmith dressed, just imagine what the Merovingian court must have
looked like in their full regalia! Eligius was commissioned by Chlothar II to make the gold
jeweled *opus Alexandrinum* cross for the Abbey of St-Denis around 630.

The spiritual and political symbolism embedded within the porphyry stones at Canterbury
were significant characteristics that Bertha as a Frank, understood, and had seen and experienced
earlier in her own family’s churches in Reims, Paris and Tours. Bertha and Augustine were
exposed to Roman and Byzantine mosaics and *opus sectile* pavements through their times at
court – whether in Gaul, Rome or Constantinople – and in the Roman ruins and remains found
throughout Kent. They understood the historical permanence of building in stone, how stone
buildings hold their identity. Suetonius, in *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (ca. 120 CE) credits
Emperor Augustus (who ruled from 27 BCE to 14 CE) with rebuilding Rome in stone,

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99 Pajares-Ayuela *Cosmatesque Ornament* 130-131.

100 Wells *Barbarians to Angels. The Dark Ages Reconsidered*, 142 – 143. The Franks were known for their love of luxury and
jewelry. See, for example, the display of Frankish objects from this time period in Gallery of The Cleveland Museum of Art.

101 James *The Franks. The peoples of Europe*, 197. Unfortunately, this cross was destroyed during the French Revolution, but a
panel painting of ca. 1480 by the Master of St. Giles shows it and the Carolingian Gold Altarpiece on the High Altar at the Royal
Abbey Church of St-Denis is still intact.
Since the city was not adorned as the dignity of the empire demanded, and was exposed to flood and fire, he so beautified it that he could justly boast he had found it built of brick, and left it in marble. He made it safe too for the future, so far as human foresight could provide for this.\textsuperscript{102} 

This is a eulogizing testament to Augustus’ passion to rebuild Rome in a manner that upheld his dignity, his power, and his legitimate claim as Rome’s first emperor. Bertha, Gregory, Augustine and Æthelbert followed his example.

\textbf{Influences of Geometry, Metalwork and Manuscript Design within the Canterbury \textit{opus Alexandrinum} Pavement}

The Canterbury pavement is based on quadratic proportions, and creates a symmetrical design that has the overall effect of repeating squares set within one another on the diagonals.\textsuperscript{103} The overall design of the pavement is a study in “natural geometry,” with all of the measurements being derived from the master mason’s square and compass, rather than from any complex calculation.\textsuperscript{104} Formulas for the calculation of the area of figures are attributed to Pythagorus, Hippocrates of Chios and others, however, geometric concepts were applied by the ancients long before the writings of these Greek mathematicians. Architects purposefully challenged themselves to create circle-in-square designs. Seen as “perfect” forms since all sides are alike, circles and squares naturally lent themselves to cosmological diagrams and microcosmic and macrocosmic relationships, and expressed divine order and harmony.\textsuperscript{105}

The universality of the Golden Ratio was considered a reflection of the divine, of universal harmonic proportions, symmetry, the very essence of God’s handiwork, and were


\textsuperscript{103} Dudley, pg. 152-153. Quadrature design involves the process of constructing a square with an area equal to that of a circle, or of another figure bounded by a curve.

\textsuperscript{104} Foster \textit{Patterns of Thought}, 6 – 7.

personifications of Philosophy and Wisdom. In the Roman world, the Vitruvian formula of ideal proportion in the symmetry and imagery of forms and shapes were, therefore, expressed in quadrature designs. Interestingly, the pavement now in Trinity Chapel was divided into four sections, in nearly perfect symmetry, and that design choice continues throughout the later history of rebuilding in Canterbury Cathedral, Christ Church. In the thirteenth century, the Four Elements, Four Seasons, Four Humors, and Four Ages of Man, the four cardinal directions, and the zodiac and heavenly bodies were connected to theological truths most frequently presented in orderly diagrams, and translated easily into pavement design. These same cosmological ideas are present in the 36 oolite roundels given as a gift from King Henry III to decorate the shrine floor of St. Thomas Becket in Trinity Chapel ca. 1220.

It is tempting to date the Canterbury pavement’s creation between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. During that time span old Roman and Anglo-Saxon buildings were torn down and replaced. The Canterbury pavement was itself moved or at least repaired shortly after the “suspicious” fire in 1067, but it was not made then or created afterward. The geometry of the pavement predates the existing Norman construction. Bishop Lanfranc’s plan (ca. 1070) and the subsequent rebuild in 1174 by William of Sens aligned the entire cathedral complex in the ad Quadratum mode, intersecting the pavement’s geometry within the church fabric. The pavement must have already existed by then; it could not have been made after the Norman Conquest. I will elaborate further on this in Chapter Four.

Certain shapes and patterns within the Canterbury opus Alexandrinum pavement are seen


109 Dudley *Canterbury Cathedral*, 63.
in every section’s design. The meander symbolized water, motion, and the labyrinthine progression of time; the square referred directly to the Earthly world.\textsuperscript{110} The saltire, or St. Andrew’s Cross, often used curved porphyry pieces for the “X” shaped cross-arms of that motif. Another frequent pattern was the quatrefoil, which mimics the design of a centrally-planned church or baptistery. The Star of David, and other six-pointed stars, represented the perfection of creation and echoed the shape of some Early Christian baptisteries.\textsuperscript{111} Repeating blocks of chessboards, petlae (stylized Greek shields), herringbone and chevron patterns are also formed by the repeated geometric shapes; dog’s tooth and saw toothed bands of isosceles triangles are common throughout the Canterbury pavement’s design and can be found in scabbard work and bowl decorations dating back to the fifth century BCE.\textsuperscript{112} All of these visually resonate with Britain’s early history up to the seventh century CE.

The Canterbury pavement is radiant to behold when lit by the natural light in the cathedral. When viewed from an angle (for example, standing on the side aisles or from the Pilgrim's Stairs,) you can see that the original pieces of porphyry are convex and reflect the light like faceted gems (see figure 17).\textsuperscript{113} The entire pavement is “set” like a precious gem in a piece of jewelry, like a brooch or fibula, in a thin brass frame.\textsuperscript{114} This is typical of cloisonné work, and is first seen in an imperial setting within the gold and garnet clad grave goods of Childeric I.\textsuperscript{115} Not many examples of wearable jewelry work with porphyry survive; instead red stones like

\textsuperscript{110} Hachilili \textit{Ancient Mosaic Pavements}, 180.

\textsuperscript{111} Foster \textit{Patterns of Thought}, 4.

\textsuperscript{112} Laing and Laing \textit{Celtic Britain and Ireland}, 40 – 41.

\textsuperscript{113} Dudley, \textit{Canterbury Cathedral}, 122. As mentioned before, this pavement is the only one in England with porphyry pieces of convex surfaces.

\textsuperscript{114} Dudley, \textit{Canterbury Cathedral}, 122.

\textsuperscript{115} Lawrence Nees, \textit{Early Medieval Art} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 82. He also summarizes Childeric’s associations with Roman counts and others in imperial offices.
rubies and garnets were used predominantly by the Franks.116 Throughout the Germanic tribes, personal jewelry and embellishments were precious and valued, though quite distinctive. As Michelle Brown states, “you could tell a Pict, a Copt, a Frank, an Angle or a Saxon” by how and what they wore.117 Jewelry and decorations displayed the owner’s wealth and tastes, and their status and identity to a region or culture.118

**Hiberno-Saxon Influences and Connections to the Pavement**

The beautifully complex “Insular” or “Hiberno-Saxon” designs created in jewelry of the sixth to eighth centuries represent the Golden Age of artistic creation in the British Isles, drawing as it does from Roman, Frankish, Celtic, and Saxon sources, and this uniquely English style permeates the art, particularly in Northumbrian manuscripts.119 Geometric interlace patterns that created intricate, symmetrical designs of repeating meanders, knot work, and spirals, sinuously looped throughout the colorful and bejeweled spaces (see figures 32 and 33).120

In an effort to relate the Canterbury pavement’s connection to later manuscript designs, some historians have conjectured that the drilled holes found in the black and white marbles pieces once contained gold.121 Although this would have created a stunning visual effect, it is highly unlikely that someone in later years took the time to lift the marble *sectiles*, melt out the gold, and then replace the pieces precisely. These drilled holes are probably embellishments to

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116 James *The Franks*, 204.


119 Nees, *Early Medieval Art*, 107 – 114, discusses the sources of “Hiberno-Saxon” ornamentation in the context of the grave goods from the Sutton-Hoo Ship Burial. This is dated to the early seventh century, between 616 and 628.


121 Dudley, *Canterbury Cathedral*, 123.
the stone, as others suggest. Stippling, or using dots to create gradients and dot-contour patterns within a design, was a common motif in Insular knot work and in some later Merovingian manuscripts created in the style of the Franco-Saxon school and Carolingian codices.

When used as decorative ornamentation, the fluid, animated forms found in Insular Art unify the overall design. Worn on shimmering buckles or gold fibulae arrayed across the chest and shoulders, these held the attention of anyone beholding the wearer and they immediately communicated his or her status and identity. The Anglo-Saxons produced very similar designs and blended Frankish, Byzantine, and Northumbrian tastes as evidenced by the broaches, crowns and torques found in the grave goods in the southeastern region of Britain. When geometric designs were applied to bejeweled manuscript bindings and carpet pages, or in revetments for shrines, relics or floors, they create the same mesmerizing response in the beholder.

The northern monastic centers, far from the influences of Rome, produced some of the finest examples of art in all of the British Isles. Established during the sixth century missions of St. Columba, these northern libraries and scriptoria made magnificent works like the *Book of Durrow* (ca. 675), the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (ca. 700-715), and the *Book of Kells* (ca. 800), (see figures 34, 35 and 36).

122 Eames, “Notes on the Decorated Stone Roundels in the Corona and Trinity Chapel”, 67.


125 Wells, *Barbarians to Angels*, 149 – 151.


goldsmiths, and naturally used their knowledge of metalwork and design during the manuscript’s construction. All through the manuscripts are marks in the parchment where grid lines and compasses were used to layout the organized, geometric pages. These tools and the geometric patterns were the same ones used in designing and laying the Canterbury *opus Alexandrinum* pavement.

The most sumptuous of these Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts is the Lindisfarne Gospels, which contained the four Gospels and the Letters of St. Jerome, and was written in the Latin Vulgate (or the language of Pope Gregory I). Eadfrith, a master goldsmith and monk and later Bishop of Lindisfarne on Holy Island in Northumbria, made the manuscript to support and honor the cult of St. Cuthbert (ca. 637 – 687). Fantastically illuminated, the construction of the Lindisfarne Gospels showcased Eadfrith’s learning and knowledge of church history; his choice of symbols and design reflected his identity within the Romano-Christian world. Regardless of the fantastical bestiary running on its parchment leaves, the *Lindisfarne Gospels* are ordered, with symmetrical, repeating precision, and borrowed on the artistic styles of the classical world and from the “Romanizing” influence of the Archbishopric of Canterbury. It was a blend of both Roman and Insular tastes in manuscript design and embellishment. The Gospel’s incipit and carpet pages shared very similar patterns with the Canterbury pavement's unifying Purbeck tracery work and geometric infill designs. There are absolutely no figural representations within

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130 Laing and Laing, *Celtic Britain and Ireland*, 102.  
135 Laing and Laing, *Celtic Brittain and Ireland*, 139.
the original Canterbury floor, unlike the thirty-six anthropomorphic stone roundels which were added to the pavement when it was installed in Trinity Chapel in the early thirteenth century.

There are numerous references in Pope Gregory's letters and from Bede's writings that Augustine brought books with him to Canterbury, and that while he was there, members of the Frankish court and other missionaries sent by Gregory also brought manuscripts with them for Augustine and the new bishoprics.\textsuperscript{136} Bede specifically mentions a Gospel book, now known as the 'Gospels of St. Augustine,' that was made in Rome during the late sixth century, that drew upon symbols and imagery found in early manuscript illuminations.\textsuperscript{137} The framing style seen within the full page design of St. Luke the Evangelist has more in common with the pagan Roman philosopher portraits and elaborate story registers of the fourth and fifth centuries than it does with the textual integration and embellishments of the \textit{Lindisfarne Gospels} nearly one hundred years later (see figure 37). There was a clear shift occurring that emphasized literacy and personal meditation in the Northumbrian monasteries, as witnessed by the integration of embellished script (like the Chi Rho page) that involved the viewer (the silent, contemplative reader) and not the listener (through recitation), as the standard uncial script used in earlier Roman Gospel books.\textsuperscript{138}

I believe this shift towards silent meditation affected Queen Bertha, as the sole Christian noble woman in pagan Saxon lands. With only Bishop Luidhard as a spiritual companion, she would have understood the reflective nature of meditation. As a young woman, she would have been exposed to the burgeoning Insular styles seen in the early Frankish jewelry present in the courts of her homeland. She saw the mesmerizing geometrical and zoomorphic designs, but her

\textsuperscript{136} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation} Book 1, Chapter XXIV and XXIX.

\textsuperscript{137} Nees, \textit{Early Medieval Art}, 155.

\textsuperscript{138} Nees, \textit{Early Medieval Art}, 157.
Christian upbringing was influenced by Rome, and not Ireland.\textsuperscript{139} Even though the Frankish churches removed themselves from the political influences of Rome, they did call upon the popes when the feuding kingdoms and bishops required papal protection.\textsuperscript{140} There is no reason to believe that Queen Bertha and Bishop Luidhard would have done any differently by calling upon the support of Gregory the Great to help reclaim the British lands for Rome. That is why the Canterbury pavement has distinct framing techniques that we can see in the Augustine Gospels, like the square, quatrefoil and lunettes, that make it so clearly a baptistery floor. The \textit{opus Alexandrinum} pavement was Roman in design, because it was Augustine, a Roman monk who through sacramental baptism, converted her husband and her kingdom. But, the pavement's intricate geometric inlay and embellishments so admired by the Franks and Germanic peoples were a product of her own tastes. This was from the influences of Christian missionaries from the churches of Ireland, Gaul and Constantinople.\textsuperscript{141} The creation and design of the \textit{opus Alexandrinum} floor embody the religious and political changes that were happening in Canterbury. It was a pavement that was a hybrid of Roman and Frankish tastes honoring the faith of a woman who created a Christian family in her undomesticated kingdom with help from her spiritual supporters both near and abroad.

The Canterbury \textit{opus Alexandrinum} pavement is and was unique. Because it shares so many qualities with seventh century regional manuscript designs it had to be produced in a major monastic center in the early seventh century. Common geometric themes of circle-in-square, semi-circular framing, symmetry and embellishments within Northumbrian manuscripts demonstrate close connections between the geometric patterns in the \textit{opus Alexandrinum} floor. In

\textsuperscript{139} Webster and Brown, \textit{The Transformation of the Roman World Ad 400-900}, 42.

\textsuperscript{140} Herrin, \textit{The Formation of Christendom}, 115.

\textsuperscript{141} Webster and Brown, \textit{The Transformation of the Roman World Ad 400-900}, 45.
the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, the St. Luke Carpet-page has repeating meanders within the diamonds (squares) that comprise the carpet-page's main design, stippling frames the illuminated letters that start the gospel's text, the most ornate carpet-pages of the Northumbrian manuscripts are geometric, and not figurative, in design. Tools like the compass and straight edge helped scribes goldsmiths design the manuscripts' pages and the Canterbury floor.

**Spolia and How the Canterbury Pavement Differs from Other Early Floors**

Roman *spolia* gave credibility, or *imperium*, to the object or space. Rare building materials have always been re-used, for example a section of the Flavian Colosseum in Rome is now the fabric of the Palazzo Farnese, the porphyry that was used in the Pantheon is now in St. Peter’s, the missing foot of San Marco’s Tetrarchs rests comfortably back in Istanbul.

Claudius, the emperor who brought porphyry to Rome, began the trend of bringing precious marbles to outlying Roman provinces. The polychrome marble *spolia* that once decorated the Basilica Julia in Rome were taken to Colchester for the building of the eight-sided Temple of Claudius (ca. 49 – 60 CE), which was later destroyed by Boudica in 61 CE. After Constantine destroyed pagan temples in Rome, many of the porphyry pieces were removed from the sites, only to be reused for important religious artifacts for the new churches the emperor built throughout the Empire.

Gregory I did the same with reusing materials from the severely despoiled and deteriorating ancient Roman buildings and churches when he became Pope in 590. This Pope

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was an avid collector of relics who used them to sanctify churches, and he often corresponded with queens and noble women in their acquisition.\textsuperscript{146} Gregory also sent relics and books from Rome to Canterbury with Augustine for use in the Gregorian Mission.\textsuperscript{147} He intentionally chose to reuse Roman and Byzantine \textit{spolia} for its deep historical and imperial connections to the Ancient world, which supports my ideas about the choice of materials used by Bertha in the creation of the pavement now in Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral.\textsuperscript{148}

Ornate and sophisticated, the villas built during the Roman occupation in Kent had palatial homes, temples, baths, outbuildings, mausoleums, fish ponds and other necessary structures to support the community. By the fourth century beautiful mosaics that depicted pagan gods, spirits and nature were common, and these designs often became overlaid with Christian meanings.\textsuperscript{149} Figurative designs were enclosed by symmetrical geometric patterns, often symbolically representing water, fields and the cosmos, mimicking the natural order and cycles of the universe, much like what we see in the floor now in Trinity Chapel. Colors of ochre, reds, greens and black adorned the spaces, giving the rooms depth while connecting them to refined tastes found in the heart of the Empire.\textsuperscript{150} The Lullingstone Roman Villa in Eynsford, Kent (ca. 80 – 90), is the oldest known Roman villa-house near Canterbury. During twentieth century excavations two marble busts were found buried in the villa’s cellar.\textsuperscript{151} One was of the Governor Pertinax (185-186) and the other of his father-in-law, Publius Helvius Successus. On the floor of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{nees} Nees, \textit{Early Medieval Art}, 137. Augustine and his twelve monks brought both books and icons in 596. A second set of missionaries in 601 carried additional books and implements (perhaps even \textit{spolia}) for their new churches.
\bibitem{pynner} Poynter, “Remarks on Three Sectile Pavements in Greece,” 175 – 176.
\bibitem{webster} Webster and Brown, \textit{The Transformation of the Roman World}, 31.
\bibitem{clayton} Clayton, \textit{A Companion to Roman Britain}, 84.
\end{thebibliography}
the villa’s *triclinium* (dining room,) lavish Roman-British mosaics depicted the Rape of Europa and Bellerophon Killing the Chimera (see figure 38). By the early fourth century, this room was repurposed as a Christian chapel.

Villas excavated in Wessex territories belonging to the Saxon kingdom, approximately 80 miles southwest of Kent, had beautiful mosaics containing the earliest representations of Christ within the floor design. Buried in a field under centuries of dirt, a nearly complete mosaic (ca. 270 – 350) was found in the modern village of Hinton St. Mary (see figure 39). Almost contemporary to the floor at Lullingstone, the Hinton St. Mary mosaic had scenes from pagan mythology, but the central roundel held a portrait bust of Christ identified by the Chi-Rho monogram, with pomegranates, a symbolically rich fruit, framing the figure. The tessellated floor’s coloring included red, yellow, and cream, and used local stone. The quadrature symmetry of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic is similar to the ordering of the Canterbury *opus Alexandrinum* pavement in the use of lunettes as well as in the cosmological references displayed in Trinity Chapel’s later stone roundels and shrine to St. Thomas (ca. 1220).

The reuse of *spolia* became even more pronounced in Britain during the sixth through eighth centuries through the reclamation of old Roman buildings, shore forts and basilicas that dotted the Kentish landscapes by Christians, like Bertha, for their places of worship. Several examples in Roman towns like Dover, Richborough, Reculver and Lyminge attest to the impetus of connecting the Anglo-Saxon Christians to Rome. The lighthouse at Dover Castle (ca. 40 BCE)

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155 Salway, *The Oxford Illustrate History of Roman Britain*, 520.
looks toward the Isle of Thanet and had already seen the crossing of many travelers when it became a church sometime in the fourth to sixth centuries. Richborough Castle (ca. 40 BCE to 227 CE) was the start of the Watling Street trading route, which was most likely the route Emperor Claudius employed when traveling through the southern Roman outposts in Britain (see figure 40). Early Christians used the fort at Richborough Castle, and there is strong archeological evidence for a detached baptistery within the fort complex.\(^{158}\) St. Mary’s Church at Reculver was founded ca. 670 by Bertha’s great grand daughter. It was built within the ruins of the old shore fort. Reculver was a prosperous Roman town, comparable to Canterbury in that it too had a bath with a tessellated floor and a hypocaust system.

After being raised in her uncle’s court, Bertha spend her formative years in Paris and Tours, where she was most likely baptized. This childhood exposed her to the decorative arts and spolia used by Frankish nobility in their palaces and churches. She could recognize the ruins, particularly of early imperial buildings in Kent.\(^{159}\) When Augustine arrived in Canterbury in 597 he found Bertha already worshiping in the old Roman church of St. Martin of Tours, as she had for years.\(^{160}\) Clearly, St. Martin of Tours was special to Bertha; it was the church where her husband was baptized and most likely had a tessellated floor, as was the norm in Roman buildings, and it looked like the churches she and Bishop Luidhard, her spiritual adviser, knew from their homeland.\(^{161}\) When Æthelbert was baptized on the opus sectile floor of St. Martin’s it became a relic and a lasting symbol of the conversion of Britain. It is my belief that during the building of Christ Church (begun in 597 and dedicated by Augustine in 602) Bertha had the floor


\(^{159}\) Salway, \textit{The Oxford Illustrated History of Roman Britain}, 519.

\(^{160}\) Deanesly, “The Court of King Aethelberht of Kent,” 114.

pulled up from St. Martin's and had it incorporated as spolia into the opus Alexandrinum pavement to commemorate her husband’s baptism and to serve as a permanent visual link between Kent and Rome.

The church of St. Martin’s was already a relic in the eyes of Bertha, Æthelbert and Augustine. The small surviving basilican church was probably originally a tomb and sat just outside the walls on Watling Street, surrounded by graveyards containing small shrines, marble temples and mosaics dating from the first century BCE. Evidence from grave goods found throughout Kent attest to Canterbury as a thriving early Romano-Christian community under the Romans. This space had gravitas and imperium; there is a reason Bertha chose to worship there. By the time Augustine saw the church of St. Martin it would have been embellished and sanctified by Bishop Luidhard. The newly arrived missionaries from Rome would have been comfortable beginning the Gregorian Mission within St. Martin’s walls.

There can be no doubt that Bertha used recovered Roman ruins and relics to adorn her husband’s palace according to her Frankish tastes. Bede called it a palace and Canterbury a metropolis, since Augustine and his monks lived inside its walls until the Monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul was begun in 598. The dwelling place given to them must have made an impression since it is mentioned 150 years later in Bede’s writings. Bertha would have given her husband’s palace a courtly air and she saw excellent examples to use as models throughout Kent and southeastern Britain that were produced by the masons and mosacists who worked at

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164 Tatton-Brown, ”The Font at St. Martin's Church (in the 6th and 7th Centuries),” 11.

165 Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation Book 1, Chapter XXVI.
Dorchester, Cirencester and Canterbury to fulfill the needs of the late Roman Empire. The nearest examples to her were those found on Butchery Lane (just outside the shadow of the future cathedral) of two small stylized and geometric mosaics. Dating to ca. 270, this mosaic would have been part of the Roman complex that Bertha and Æthelbert used for the residence and court. When William of Normandy invaded and conquered England, he did the same at Old Sarum, by creating a Norman structure on the old Roman and Wessex ruins, elevating the ancient space to the same reliquary status as Canterbury's connection to the Christian world.

**Accurately Dating the Canterbury *opus Alexandrinum* Pavement**

The Canterbury *opus Alexandrinum* pavement could not have been created after Bertha’s death or even after the end of the seventh century. Nor could it date from before her birth (ca. 560). First, the design alone can only be from late Roman antiquity, which I will analyze in the following paragraphs. Secondly, this was a commemorative baptistery floor, which celebrated the baptism of a pagan king of ca. 600, an event that significantly shaped the history and power of the See of Canterbury. Thirdly, shortly after Bertha’s death Kent and most of Anglo-Saxon England plunged into decades of dynastic civil wars (beginning 616 to 625, with later outbreaks as well). The nascent roots of the English church were sorely strained all through the seventh century. These facts, coupled with the quick succession of three or four Popes after Gregory the Great’s death in 604, secure Bertha as the only royal candidate for the patron of the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement on the floor of the Trinity Chapel.

Imperial Roman floors, like those found in the Pantheon and Old St. Peter’s Basilica in

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Rome, and in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Istanbul), all have exceptionally large roundels, nearly two to three feet in diameter, of purple porphyry within the grand floor design. These large pieces are found in the capital cities of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Early Roman floors were bichrome and used smaller, but still large, pieces of porphyry infill. These were composed mainly of designs in purple and green porphyry, as we see in the Canterbury opus Alexandrinum pavement. In the Canterbury pavement, the purple and green marble would have come from Roman spolia, reused from the earlier floors and temples found surrounding Kent, and from gifts to Bertha’s court from her Frankish relations and from gifts sent to Canterbury from Pope Gregory.

It is the size of the pieces of porphyry and the various colorful marbles used in contemporary and later Romanesque cosmatesque designs (ca. twelfth and thirteenth centuries) that signal the Canterbury pavement as an early seventh century creation. Contemporary Byzantine pavements, like those in Ravenna and Constantinople, contain glass tesserae, gold and silver inlays, as well as porphyry and polished stones (see figure 41). This is not the case at Canterbury, where there are no glass tesserae or polished stones at all.

**Function as a Baptistry Floor**

It is my contention that the design and anomalies present in the Canterbury opus Alexandrinum pavement demonstrate unquestionably that the pavement was commissioned by Bertha for the detached baptistery newly begun at Christ Church. As such, it included the opus sectile floor from the baptistery of St. Martin’s church. Augustine (under direct patronage of Æthelbert and Bertha’s Frankish influence) initiated this construction of a new and larger baptistery which followed the same style, design and function that he saw in the fourth century
baptisteries and churches of Rome, Milan, Provence and Gaul on his travels to Kent in 596.

Fourth century Christians saw the interior of the church and baptistery as a temple where God and Earth were united.\(^{169}\) Codified by the first Council of Nicaea in 325, baptism was the holiest sacrament in the Christian tradition. Full immersion was the norm in Roman churches after the fourth century. Baptism was a moment of transition from the old life through ritualized death and spiritual rebirth; consequently, the early baptisteries either adopted or incorporated the architecture of Roman mausoleums, which were cruciform, and based on quadratic proportions.\(^{170}\) Baptisteries were detached from the church apse and were enclosed hexagonal or octagonal buildings, with a centralized floor plan, a vaulted roof and a sunken floor for the pool and baptismal font.\(^{171}\) They were also built near the royal palace, under imperial patronage, and were lavishly designed and decorated.\(^{172}\)

The fifth century poet Flavius Merrobaudes praised the marble baptistery font as “the jewel, once liquid itself, carries the liquid.”\(^{173}\) The most important feature of a baptistery was the font. The theme of water was present throughout the baptismal rite, consequently, early baptismal fonts were highly ornamented, lined and paved with porphyry, which ancient poets believed was the color of the sea.\(^{174}\) Baptisms could only be performed in rivers, or fonts with


\(^{173}\) Fabio Barry, “Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 4 (Dec. 2007), 630 – 631. He is talking about the nature of marble, in that as a sedimentary rock when small sea creatures died on the bottom of the ocean floor, they were permanently encased in a solid 'ocean of marble,' and could be seen easily within church revetments and floors. The Church of San Marco, in Venice, has some magnificent examples of fossilized marble within its lavish stone decorations.

\(^{174}\) Barry, “Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” 630.
flowing water, in representation of Christ’s wounds during the Passion.\textsuperscript{175} The font’s mechanical process became God’s will when converts were washed of their sins and baptized in the “Living Waters.”\textsuperscript{176} The ritual of baptism was transferred into the physical architecture and decoration of the baptistery, and played a major role in the conversion process.\textsuperscript{177} Even the octagonal shape was important. Eight was the number of regeneration, the world began on the eighth day after creation, Jesus rose from the dead on the eighth day of the Passion cycle.\textsuperscript{178} Competing beliefs on how or if God should be depicted in church designs caused fundamental divisions between early Christians. Beginning with Jewish law and tradition, graven images on floors were forbidden.\textsuperscript{179} In an effort to avoid graven images and desecration, Medieval artists used geometric (and floral motifs) to depict Divine cosmology on floors.\textsuperscript{180} The monolithic and opulent Baptistery at St. John Lateran in Rome (ca. 318) and the Basilica Nova in Milan (ca. 335) were stunning examples and directly influenced designs throughout Christendom.\textsuperscript{181} Augustine saw both of these baptisteries, updated during the following century, on his trip north in 596.

Built atop ancient ruins, Emperor Constantine’s San Giovanni in Fonte, located beside the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome, was the preeminent site for baptisms in the forth century.\textsuperscript{182} Its design was inspired by the centrally-planned architecture of the Pantheon and

\textsuperscript{175} Peter Cramer, Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c.200-c.1150, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9 - 10.

\textsuperscript{176} Cramer, Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c.200-c.1150, 13 – 14.

\textsuperscript{177} Hachlili, Ancient Mosaic Pavements, 91.

\textsuperscript{178} Wills, Font of Life, 8.

\textsuperscript{179} Hachlili, Ancient Mosaic Pavements, 96. From ca. 250 to 800, we find no images of the Creator (only the Hand of God) in church mosaics – e.g., the mosaics in San Vitale at Ravenna; the ceiling mosaics in the Orthodox Baptistry and the Arian Baptistery at Ravenna.

\textsuperscript{180} Hachlili, Ancient Mosaic Pavements, 284-285.

\textsuperscript{181} McClendon, The Origins of Medieval Architecture, 17.

\textsuperscript{182} Jensen, Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity, 53.
featured eight porphyry columns that surround the octagonal pool and porphyry font.\textsuperscript{183}

Constantine’s patronage of churches was monumental both in scale and scope. He gave over 500 pounds in gold for the Lateran basilica of St. John’s vault alone.\textsuperscript{184} His sponsorship sparked a flurry of competitive patronage of churches by aristocrats and bishops.\textsuperscript{185} Symbolically imbued as the “Fountain of Life”, the Lateran Baptistry became the model throughout northern Italy, first in Milan, and in Gaul in the following centuries.\textsuperscript{186}

The foundations of the fourth century Basilica Nova (ca. 335), dedicated to St. Thecla, lie under the Duomo in Milan.\textsuperscript{187} Sections of tessellated black and white marble floors and font were discovered in the ruins during the construction of bomb shelters in World War II, and these were comparable in size and shape to the contemporary Lateran Baptistery in Rome.\textsuperscript{188} This is the supposed font where St. Ambrose and St. Augustine of Hippo were baptized in the fourth century.\textsuperscript{189} The detached octagonal baptistery of the Basilica Nova was 62 feet wide and was decorated in the same polychrome stonework as the basilica. The immersion pool was 20 feet square and nearly 30 inches deep, with continuously running water fed by pipes and drains from all corners.\textsuperscript{190} St. Ambrose’s design inspired the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia and the baptisteries

\textsuperscript{183} Elsner, Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph, 226, and Judith Herrin, The Formation of Christendom (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 188. It is interesting to note that following Pope Gregory’s death in 605, Boniface IV (b. 550 – 615) redecorated and consecrated the Pantheon, stripping it of its pagan attributes, and consecrating it to the Virgin Mary and all the Martyrs in 609. His actions triggered the trend in the center of Rome of refurbishing old pagan buildings or destroying them.

\textsuperscript{184} Stalley, Early Medieval Architecture, 20.

\textsuperscript{185} Elsner, Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph, 225.

\textsuperscript{186} McClendon, The Origins of Medieval Architecture, 151.


\textsuperscript{188} Elsner, Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph, 225.

\textsuperscript{189} Wills, Font of Life, 5 – 6.

\textsuperscript{190} Wills, Font of Life, 6.
at San Vitale and Charlemagne’s Palatine Chapel in Aachen.\footnote{William D. Wixom, “A Glimpse at the Fountains of the Middle Ages,” \textit{Cleveland Studies in the History of Art} 8 (2003), 10.}

The odd anomalies within the Canterbury pavement make sense when compared with the early Christian baptisteries in Rome and Milan. I believe the void in the center of the pavement was once the location of the central font or ciborium that held the holy oil. The four voids in the quatrefoil of the Canterbury pavement’s outer corners once contained posts for a baldacchino. Pavements used in baptisteries or baths had drains for wells or faucets.\footnote{Hachlili, \textit{Ancient Mosaic Pavements}, 35.} That explains the presence of drill holes in the black and white marble, which can only be found in the inner and middle square of the pavement; they were part of the font’s drainage system (see figure 19). The outer quatrefoil’s lobes created a private niche for the catechumen to undress in before entering the font.\footnote{Wills, \textit{Font of Life}, 109.}

At Canterbury, the cathedral church was dedicated to Jesus Christ, whose baptism was fundamental in establishing Christian doctrine, much like King Æthelbert's baptism was in establishing the English church. It was Bertha’s holiest obligation to give the \textit{opus Alexandrinum} baptistery floor to the new building her husband and Augustine built, especially after the saint died in 604. Bertha had the wisdom, as a cultured Frankish royal patron, to recognize that the pavement marked the point in time where the English church was created. Her \textit{opus Alexandrinum} pavement thus marked that event and honored Augustine, her husband, and Pope Gregory.
Chapter IV

The later History of the *opus Alexandrinum* Pavement

After the death of Bertha (d. 612) and Æthelbert (d. 616), plagues and wars between the Germanic kings slowed Christianity’s progress in what we now call England, but communication with Rome never faltered.\(^{194}\) Until the late eleventh century, the Archbishops of Canterbury and the Kings of England worked together to establish spiritual and political ties between England and Rome. There would never be another confluence of imperial and religious patronage as there was in 597 at Christ Church. Even through disastrous fires and raids, the clergy of Canterbury established Christ Church as a preeminent pilgrimage destination, with miracle working relics and the bones of the early church fathers.\(^{195}\) The Cathedral’s thousand year relationship with Rome came to an end with Henry VIII, King of England from 1491 to 1547, and the destructive Reformation he triggered. Canterbury's *opus Alexandrinum* pavement survived it all within the same priory grounds where it was first installed. Later bishops would commission works of art and create architectural splendors for the Cathedral, but until about 1220 when the pavement was incorporated into the shrine for St. Thomas Becket, these could not match that work Queen Bertha had made to honor her husband’s baptism. How Bertha’s pavement survived is the subject of this chapter.

Missionaries

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Missionaries played such a crucial role in the building of the Canterbury pavement, and the monastic centers they established became centers of learning and repositories of history. They shared books, scribes and letters. They competed with one another for relics and spiritual leaders, and often disagreed over theological beliefs and liturgical rituals. Though 'Christianized,' these monasteries, who were funded and protected by the English kings' armies, became embroiled in dynastic and territorial feuding throughout the island. There was safety in the monastical orders, and education.

It was evident Bertha's spiritual influence on her husband was inherited from her powerful and devout mothers. There were limited ways for a medieval noble woman to mark her legacy in history and time; for many it would be through religion. Women like Radegund, Bertha's step grandmother, was married by force to Chlothar I (her grandfather). Childless, she rejected her marriage and fled to the monastery of Noyon, became a deaconess and then founded the Convent of the Holy Cross at Poitiers. As Abbess, she remained in close contact with the Frankish courts, who patronized her monastery, thereby extending the influence of the Church upon the lands. Whether it be as a nun or abbess, or as a patron of ecclesiastical and liturgical arts, Christianity gave women the authoritative, spiritual and intellectual foothold they needed to grow and flourish in by creating works of charity and helping others.

Bertha was the spiritual role model for her own daughter, and grand daughter. Æthelburg, Bertha's daughter, married Edwin, King of Northumbria, in 625. Like her mother, she converted her husband to the faith, and with the help of Paulinus, First Bishop of York, united the Christian peoples of Northern and Southern England. After her husband's death she establisheds at Lyminge one of the first Benedictine nunneries, St. Mary & St. Ethelburga Churches, (ca. 633) in England,

on the grounds of an old Roman basilica.\textsuperscript{197}

The monastery of Monkswearmouth-Jarrow had the largest library in all of eighth century England, and was where the Venerable Bede learned of the classical world.\textsuperscript{198} Many of Bede's accounts of early missionaries to Britain are borrowed from the earlier polemic writings of Gildas, (ca. 500–570) a Pictish born noble, who converted early in life, and studied in a Welsh monastery under St. Illtud. As a missionary, Gildas traveled throughout Britain, Ireland and Brittany, and is writing during the Saxon conquest of Kent, and the growing Germanic settlements on the island. The reason we have information about the early Christian churches in Anglo Saxon England is due to the habit of writing down the activities of the church by highly literate, often politically and spiritually polarizing, astute men and women in the monastical orders. Amongst them were the great historians like the Venerable Bede (ca. 673-735) who wrote about the missions to Christianize Britain in \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, (ca. 731). He spent his life in Lindisfarne, in the twin monasteries of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, the most 'Romanizing' of the northern monasteries.\textsuperscript{199}

\textbf{The Anglo-Saxon Period to 1066}

When the Eighth Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, a Byzantine-trained monk, and Hadrian of Africa were sent by Pope Vitalian to Canterbury in 669, a new chapter began in the Archbishopric. According to Bede:

\begin{quote}
Being a fellow laborer in his teaching work, he (Hadrian) would take great care to prevent Theodore from introducing into the church over which he presided any
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{197} Robert C. Jenkins, “The Basilica of Lyminge; Roman, Saxon, and Mediaeval,” \textit{Archaeologia Cantiana, Kent Archaeological Society} 9 (1874): 206.

\textsuperscript{198} Brown, \textit{The Lindisfarne Gospels and the Early Medieval World}, 35.

\textsuperscript{199} Webster and Brown, \textit{The Transformation of the Roman World Ad 400-900}, 114.
Greek customs which might be contrary to the true faith.\textsuperscript{200}

Being true to the principles of the Roman Church and the earlier Synod of Whitby (664), Theodore was “the first archbishop whom all the English obeyed”.\textsuperscript{201} The pedantic Theodore traveled across England, consecrating bishops for the vacant holy sees left by outbreaks of the plague, building churches and founding schools, most particularly at Canterbury.\textsuperscript{202} Archbishop Theodore, along with Hadrian, the Abbot of St. Augustine’s Abbey, were talented organizers and administered the will of the Archbishopric throughout England. At the Council of Herford (673) the See of Canterbury was recognized by Rome as the official center of the English Church. As such, the values of \textit{Romanitas} and the Roman Church’s traditions were practiced at Canterbury through the sixteenth century.

Cuthbert (d. 760), the Eleventh Archbishop of Canterbury, built a small church dedicated to St. John the Baptist around 740. This was directly off the eastern apse of Canterbury Christ Church and was used until 1011, when it burned down.\textsuperscript{203} Built on the same axis as the cathedral, specifically as a baptistery and burial place for the archbishops, it was inside the walled city of Canterbury instead of outside the wall like the church of Sts. Peter and Paul, as was the Roman custom.\textsuperscript{204} Cuthbert was the first bishop of Canterbury to be buried in St. John’s. This choice of burial spot caused quite a conflict between the two churches, primarily over the revenues visiting pilgrims brought, and the prestige that came with such patronage.\textsuperscript{205}

\textit{It is not known when or if the detached baptistery built earlier by Augustine and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{200} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation}, Book IV, Chapter I, 217 – 218.
  \item \textsuperscript{201} Bede, \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation}, Book IV, Chapter II, 220.
  \item \textsuperscript{202} Collinson, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., \textit{A History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 341.
  \item \textsuperscript{203} Collinson, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., \textit{A History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 36.
  \item \textsuperscript{204} Willis, \textit{The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{205} Brooke and Brooke, \textit{Popular Religion}, 21.
\end{itemize}
Æthelbert at Christ Church (see figure 16) was absorbed into Cuthbert’s new church dedicated to St. John the Baptist, or if the opus Alexandrinum pavement made for that earlier baptistery became part of the floor at St. John’s nearly 150 years later. But it would make sense that it had, considering its proximity to Christ Church and that the baptistery font would have been located in the western nave of St. John’s basilica, as was the custom of Roman churches. This may be confirmed by the later (Norman) “waterworks” drawing of the Canterbury Cathedral grounds and the location of the quarterfoil font and baldacchino, which signals the location of the opus Alexandrinum and the Trinity Chapel today, (see figure 42). During the tenth through twelfth centuries, a practice known as The Ordeal was introduced by which the innocence or guilt of an accused was determined by the king and priest through a trial of water or iron. In Canterbury, there are records of the baptismal font being used during the trials. If a bound man sank in the font, he was innocent, if he floated he was guilty. The opus Alexandrinum pavement was large enough to be used in such a font.

The tradition of Canterbury Christ Church as the “shrine” church of England grew throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. During the reforms of Dunstan, Twenty-fifth Archbishop of Canterbury, the spirit of Romanitas blended with elaborate rituals and new ideas. Dunstan, who died in 988, was responsible for constructing a Benedictine monastery in the priory of Christ Church. Dunstan became a favorite saint among the English and a principal saint in the Anglo-Saxon Christ Church. It was under his guidance that the cathedral became a burial church for venerated saints and bishops, but he was building upon something that had already begun in the

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206 Brooke and Brooke, Popular Religion, 107. In colonial Virginia, during the late seventeenth century, dunking the accused (bound up to prevent any movement) in ponds was used to determine the innocence of those accused of witchcraft. Virginia Beach’s Witchduck Pond retains its name to the present day.


208 Collinson, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., A History of Canterbury Cathedral, 12.
ninth century.

Plegemund, the Nineteenth Archbishop of Canterbury, had returned from Rome with the relic of St. Blasius, which was placed in Christ Church by 891, and a considerable amount of gold and silver. Later in the tenth century, beams were installed across the high altar of Christ Church to display important relics, as was the custom in English churches. Around 950, Archbishop Odo enlarged Canterbury Christ Church to accommodate large numbers of pilgrims visiting England's first church. According to Eadmer, writing in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, the beams above the high altar at Christ Church held seven chests filled with relics of diverse saints, three icons of Christ in Majesty, St. Dunstan, and the martyred St. Elphege, Twenty-ninth Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1011), and was covered in gold and silver. This was all destroyed in the fire of 1174. At the beginning of the eleventh century, Christ Church was among the largest churches in England, measuring nearly 100 feet in width on its eastern and western transepts, and possibly 300 feet in length, making it comparable to many cathedrals in northern Europe.

Major Viking raids and other catastrophes were visited upon Kent and Canterbury, resulting in the loss of much of the original writings done by contemporaries of Augustine and Pope Gregory I. We have only Bede’s references to the books, relics and liturgical vessels and vestments brought to Canterbury by Augustine on his mission. From records made in the reign of Aelfred the Great, King of Wessex, King of the Anglo-Saxons (d. 899), we learn of the treasures

212 Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture*, 164. Eadmer’s account tells us that Lanfranc kept many of the Anglo-Saxon treasures intact and incorporated them into his new church after 1070.
of the early church. But these are spotty at best.

**The Normans and the Rebuilding After 1070**

More complete records of early Canterbury survive from the Norman period. The writings of Eadmer and Gervase of Canterbury are the best examples. Eadmer, a singer and cantor at Christ Church, knew the late Anglo-Saxon cathedral and was a novice studying in the monastery when Lanfranc, the Thirty-fifth Archbishop of Canterbury, tore down the old cathedral to build his own in 1070. Eadmer chronicled the history of this new cathedral and the rule of Anselm, who succeeded Lanfranc, as it redressed itself as a Norman Romanesque cathedral. Eadmer maintained that the earlier Anglo-Saxon church had been built in imitation of St. Peter’s in Rome. Gervase of Canterbury, chronicler and monk at Christ Church and contemporary of Thomas Becket, wrote the architectural history of the new cathedral. He gave us a first hand account of the fire of 1174, writing “they tore their hair and beat the walls and pavement of the church with their heads and hands,” in grief that so many precious relics had been lost. It is in the writings of Eadmer and Gervase, and their contemporaries, that we first hear of the *opus Alexandinum* pavement in Christ Church.

In 1011, pagan Danes and Viking marauders had burned down much of Canterbury, including the roof of Christ Church Cathedral. Moreover, they murdered nearly every member of

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214 Collison, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, 343.


217 Brooke and Brooke, *Popular Religion*, 20. Lanfranc died in 1083 and Anselm was named bishop in 1093. He died in 1109.


220 Willis, *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral*, 37. These laments concern the loss of Lanfranc and Anselm’s Christ Church. Eadmer and Gervase’s writings were translated and collected into Willis’ indispensable text.
the monastic community, including the Archbishop Elphege. St. Elphege became an important saint within the church and its monastic community. Thomas Becket prayed to Elphege for courage just before his own murder in the cathedral in 1170. Another victim of the raids of 1011 was St. John’s Church, which burned “accidentally” shortly after the sack of Canterbury. The town and the cathedral complex remained in disrepair from 1011 to 1066.

The Normans, under Duke William of Normandy, invaded Britain in 1066 and ended Anglo-Saxon rule, and the Papal banner flew from William’s ship, as we can see in the Bayeux Tapestry. Over the next century, many medieval churches were enhanced with additions and other improvements. Within fifty years of Lanfranc’s Council of London in 1075, all of the old Saxon cathedrals and most of the large abbeys in England had been rebuilt. These were constructed in the quadrature geometric style which came back into fashion and resembled those built by the Ottonian Emperors and Capetian kings during the late tenth and eleventh centuries in Normandy, France, Switzerland, and the Holy Roman Empire.221

Every repair or addition at Canterbury reflects the quadrature symmetry of the opus Alexandrinum pavement, the columns, the windows and the geometry of the original Trinity Chapel, as well as the new Trinity Chapel and the Cathedral itself.222 In spite of the rebuildings of Lanfranc and Anselm, begun in 1070 and after the fire of 1174, the opus Alexandrinum pavement sits today over the same spot as it did in the Anglo – Saxon Canterbury Christ Church Cathedral.

An earlier ‘accidental’ fire about 1067 had burned down much of the cathedral complex and left it destroyed beyond repair. The remaining vestiges of old Christ Church were pulled down by Bishop Lanfranc in 1070.223 The foundations of Cuthbert’s Church of St. John the

221 Stalley, Early Medieval Architecture, 55 – 56.


Baptist was absorbed into the footprint of the new cathedral, and Christ Church was rebuilt and reconsecrated by Lanfranc in 1077.\textsuperscript{224} The cathedral was further enlarged in 1093 to 1096 by Anselm, the Thirty-sixth Archbishop of Canterbury, to accommodate visiting pilgrims. Anselm (d. 1109) was a renowned, wise and saintly scholar of noble Italian birth. Following plans left by Anselm, around 1114 the eastern apse of Christ Church was rebuilt, and the new choir was added by master mason Blitherus, a Saxon, in 1130.\textsuperscript{225} When the newly rebuilt choir was dedicated on May 4, 1130, King Henry I of England, King David of Scotland, Empress Matilda, and all of the bishops of England attended.\textsuperscript{226} Gervase comments, “So famous a dedication has never been heard of on the earth since the dedication of the temple of Solomon.”\textsuperscript{227} William of Malmesbury (ca. 1095 – 1143), a renowned twelfth century English historian and monk (Malmesbury Abbey, in Wiltshire), wrote of the spectacle, “nothing like it could be seen in England, either for the brilliancy of its windows, the beauty of its marble pavement, or the many colored pictures.”\textsuperscript{228} This could be when the \textit{opus Alexandrinum} pavement was moved to the Trinity Chapel.

It was also under Anselm’s authority that two priors Ernulf and Conrad caused the spectacular crypt to be built, the largest in England, to accommodate pilgrims, underneath the elevated eastern end of Christ Church (see figure 43). This crypt was complete with amazingly diverse pillars and capitals, whose geometric styles are also found in pavement above.\textsuperscript{229} During construction the old crypt remained intact while the enlarged burial chambers were being built.

\textsuperscript{224} Collison, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., \textit{A History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 33.

\textsuperscript{225} Stalley, \textit{Early Medieval Architecture}, 132.

\textsuperscript{226} Woodman, \textit{The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 76.

\textsuperscript{227} Willis, \textit{The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 21.

\textsuperscript{228} Willis, \textit{The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 18-19, and 21. Malmesbury's \textit{Gesta Regum Anglorum} (The Deeds of the English Kings, ca. 1125), was comparable to the Venerable Bede's, \textit{Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum}.

\textsuperscript{229} Willis, \textit{The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 153.
the area of underground work was confined to the eastern transept, and the parts lying between the great tower and the Trinity Chapel.\textsuperscript{230} The great piers and pillars that support the crypt and the cathedral vaults are slightly misaligned, and show the work and adaptation of plans by the two Williams (Englishman and Sens), Ernulf, and Lanfranc and the slightly wider crypt transept and the two bays (\textit{severeys}), (see figure 44).\textsuperscript{231}

The most famous martyr of Canterbury Christ Church was Thomas Becket. His death in 1170, and the establishment of the cult of Becket shortly thereafter, restored the waning popularity, resources, and religious power of Canterbury Cathedral and the Archdiocesan See.\textsuperscript{232} In the northwest transept, the Martyrdom or Sword’s Point altar, marks the spot where Becket was assassinated by four knights (possibly on orders from Henry II), for refusing to hand over the power of the English Church to the king.\textsuperscript{233} Becket’s murder caused immediate outrage, with its violent desecration of the cathedral and sinister overtones, and Becket was quickly canonized in 1173. King Henry II was said to be unnerved by Becket’s death, and he gave large amounts of money for building the shrine of Thomas Becket as well as publicly atoned for his murder in 1174. The king walked barefoot, dressed in sack-cloth, through the streets of Canterbury while being flogged by eight monks.\textsuperscript{234} When Becket’s body was interred in the crypt, and provided with funds from the king, Christ Church became an even more popular pilgrimage site.

Canterbury and the relics of St. Thomas Becket rivaled Santiago de Compostela with its shrine of

\textsuperscript{230} Willis, \textit{The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 81 – 83.


\textsuperscript{232} Collison, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., \textit{A History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 69.

\textsuperscript{233} Benton, \textit{Art of the Middle Ages}, 202 - 204. This account summarizes the dispute between the church and the king. Becket’s death belongs to the century long dispute known as the Investiture Controversy, which began during the reign of Pope Gregory VII and will continue through the early 12th century. Even Henry VIII’s difficulty in getting his bishops to support his request of an annulment and the recent disputes in this country about whether the Catholic Church should hand over pedophile priests to local law courts are examples of the ongoing issues making up the Investiture Controversy.

\textsuperscript{234} Collison, Ramsay, and Sparks, eds., \textit{A History of Canterbury Cathedral}, 62 – 63.
St. James, Cologne and the Reliquary of the Three Kings, and Rome with the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.  

Another devastating fire in 1174 ripped through the interior of Canterbury Christ Church Cathedral and destroyed much of Lanfranc and Anselm’s church. Although important relics and treasure were lost, the timely fire allowed for the rebuilding of the cathedral starting in 1175 which subsequently, after 1179, focused on moving the shrine of Becket in the crypt to the new Trinity Chapel behind the main altar (see figures 45 and 46).

During the first stage of the reconstruction of the building, the Gothic style was introduced into England by the architect-mason William of Sens, who probably designed the new upper choir at the Abbey Church of St-Denis for Abbot Suger (ca. 1140 – 45). At Canterbury, William of Sens had to first assess what to keep and what to pull down of the ruined walls. In the end, almost all of Anselm’s Norman interior was beyond saving, but the exterior walls, the double transepts with their towers, and the various chapels extending from these exterior walls were strong. William of Sens could rebuild the interior, construct a retro-choir that was elevated above the relatively undamaged crypt, and design the new Trinity Chapel that extended over the chapel in the crypt that held the shrine of St. Thomas Becket. William of Sens’ designs for the

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235 Benton, *Art of the Middle Ages*, 12.


238 Nicola Coldstream, *Medieval Architecture* (Oxford History of Art) (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002), 184 – 187. Robert G. Calkins, *Medieval Architecture in Western Europe, from AD 300 to 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 219 – 222, who also gives comparative plans of Lanfranc’s church, Anselm’s church, and the new cathedral built by William of Sens and William the Englishman (after 1179) on p. 220. According to Calkins, William of Sens kept the “Romanesque nave with cylindrical columns; the transept ends with eastern chapels; a Norman hall crypt; and a shell of surrounding peripheral Romanesque chapels.” The “Romanesque nave eastward to the west piers of the east transept” were built by 1177 and to its east piers by 1178.” This is when William of Sens fell from the scaffolding. William probably designed Trinity Chapel from his sickbed, but could not return to the actual work site.
elevated retro-choir gave the expansive eastern end of the building the impression of two churches having been joined together.\textsuperscript{239}

According to Dudley, the \textit{opus Alexandrinum} pavement marks the starting point of the 1175 ground plan by William of Sens. This plan reflected the quadrature geometry of the pavement, as stated by Dudley,

\begin{quote}
it (was) a circle, the diameter of the sphere of the heavens reducing geometrically and infinitely at every stage to a tenth of its diameter, while at the same time multiplying in number at every stage by a factor of four, all rotating at each stage by forty-five degrees.\textsuperscript{240}
\end{quote}

After the architect-mason suffered a fall from scaffolding while working on the east transept in 1178, he returned to France where he died in 1180.\textsuperscript{241} William the Englishman completed William of Sens’ designs between 1179 and 1184, finishing the Trinity Chapel and completing the nearly circular Corona at the extreme east end.\textsuperscript{242} The Englishman also extended the crypt below to carry the weight load of the chapel above, allowing the monks to view the pilgrims who came to see the shrine of St. Thomas Becket.\textsuperscript{243} Offerings and donations made by pilgrims together with other church funds went to the embellishment of the altar marking Thomas’s martyrdom, the cloister and choir.

\textbf{This is not a Cosmati Floor}

Often compared to Cosmati work, it is critical to my thesis that I demonstrate why the

\textsuperscript{239} Benton, \textit{Art of the Middle Ages}, 202-204.

\textsuperscript{240} Dudley, \textit{Canterbury Cathedral}, 152 – 153.

\textsuperscript{241} Benton, \textit{Art of the Middle Ages}, 202.


\textsuperscript{243} Stalley, \textit{Early Medieval Architecture}, 187.
Canterbury pavement could not be the creation of the prestigious eleventh to thirteenth century Roman family of artisans, or from the 'Cosmatesque' schools that follow them. Their classically inspired designs came from seeing the first through sixth century opus Alexandrinum pavements throughout their city. The ornate Cosmati opus sectile designs used small pieces of porphyry, gems, gold, glass tesserae and marble within flat, polychrome geometric designs; a style more in common with Byzantine art than early Roman, with sharp edges. Cosmatesque stonework was tetrachrome and more detailed, since few large pieces of precious marble were available after the eleventh century.

All of the original porphyry pieces at Canterbury were rounded at the edges, like gemstones, all of the porphyry in Cosmatesque work was ground down flat because artisans used repurposed stone from salvaged floors, columns and statues, filing down the uneven marble surfaces to create an even, smooth, reflective surface with sharp edges. Cosmati work was colorful, breathtaking and prized by cathedrals, earning commissions for pavements and revetments for columns, Paschal candlesticks, Bishops' thrones and pulpits. Culminating in the Great Pavement in the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey, London (ca.1268), the Cosmati work at King Henry III's (1207 – 1272) royal church represented a continued Romano-English artistic exchange that began at Canterbury with Queen Bertha and Pope Gregory in the late sixth century (see figure 47).

The Canterbury Pavement resembles the Westminster Pavement to the lay historian; some scholars even suggest (incorrectly) that they were laid by the same workshop. Though similar,

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245 Hutton, *The Cosmati: The Roman Marble Workers of the XIIth and XIIIth Centuries*, 27.


the floor at Christ Church is not a Cosmati design, since it is missing the signature spiral designs, the *ogees*, that the thirteenth century Westminster and Italian Cosmati pavements have in common. Odoricus (Cosmati), the craftsman of the Great Pavement at Westminster, sinuously entwined the tracery of both the outer roundels and the central square arrangement into one continuously revolving, symbolically imbued *quincunx*. In sheer execution of craftsmanship which, next to the artisans who designed the floors at Montecasino (ca. 1070), there were no equals who matched the skill of Odoricus.

The Cosmati floors with flowing *ogees*, were created through the use of bright white Carrara marble tracery (see figure 48). Designed as a continuous chain or *guilloche*, *ogees* were a signature of the Cosmati. They were used to link all of the sections of the pavement together sinuously, and shared more dimensionality with Insular knot work. The Canterbury pavement did not have these features; its stone bands physically intersect and crossed one another as flat, patterned segments, and are not interlaced or dimensional. The *opus Alexandrinum* tracery was not the customary Italian marble, it was Purbeck, a grey-green limestone that contained large, fossilized shells, and is found only on the south coast of England. It could be polished and passed off as a marble, and its use in Bertha's pavement attests to its local manufacture. The Canterbury pavement, while influenced by Insular designs and possibly created by jewelers from nearby northern monasteries, lacks the anthropomorphic figures, shading and interlace patterns so loved by the Germanic speaking peoples.

Some historians believe the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement was created in the early thirteenth century to decorate the floor of the Trinity Chapel's new shrine to St. Thomas. The complexly designed geometric pavement in porphyry was not made then. The rare marble was no longer quarried, and there simply was not enough, in large enough sections, available to England.

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to complete the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement in 1220.
Chapter V
The Conclusion

I would like to offer some final thoughts on the scope of my research. Challenged by the passage of time and the lack of depth in contemporary sources, proving Queen Bertha’s patronage of the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement has been a journey. Delving into the lives of early Christian women, and the often turbulent history of the Germanic kingdoms in which they belong has required diligent detective work and hours of guidance from professors and scholars. The best comparison I can make to this is to liken the research to putting together a puzzle with missing and extra pieces that never came in a box with a picture of the completed design. The only solid evidence I had when I began this thesis was that a porphyry pavement existed in Canterbury Cathedral. That was it.

Then, I traveled to London over Thanksgiving break in 2010 to see the recently uncovered Cosmati pavement decorating the high altar in Westminster Abbey. Initially I considered researching King Henry III's (1207 – 1272) commission of this *opus sectile* floor, in hopes it would turn into my thesis proposal. While there, I took the early morning train to Kent to see for myself the pavement that Cosmati scholars, like Richard Foster and Paloma Pajares-Ayuela, said was a contemporary to Westminster's. From the moment I walked up the Pilgrim's Stairs and saw the pavement for myself I knew that I was looking at a much older, and far more important floor than London's. Over the next six years, I researched all that I could on the origins of Holy See of Canterbury, trying to place the inspiration for a porphyry floor that was over a thousand miles from Rome. This is how I uncovered the story of Bertha, a little known Frankish
princess, and her efforts to elevate her newly Christianized Anglo-Saxon kingdom as the most powerful church on the British Isles.

Women

There have been times that I wished I had chosen a more contemporary subject for my thesis work. The 1420 years between the events of the early seventh century and today has allowed memory to be lost and facts to be distorted. Few surviving letters from the clergy and nobility can be reliably dated to the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and the two texts (Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) I had to rely on, were written almost a century and a half later. Written by men, these accounts describing Anglo-Saxon England have a politically masculine and monastic tone and do not elaborate on the earlier bishops and popes working with noble Christian women.

From these scant resources, the life of an early medieval woman seem bleak indeed when viewed by the eyes of the twenty-first century woman. Such women, like Queen Bertha of Kent, were inexorably tied socially, spiritually, financially and politically to the men they married and who governed their lives. While much can be learned through research regarding the role and status of women in the Medieval world, there are few reputable, contemporary sources that focus on their lives during the sixth and seventh centuries. What exists is written in the 'language of men,' as described by the brilliant German Benedictine abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098 – 1179).  St. Hildegard is also my patron saint.

Hildegard was part of a small but growing group of educated, noble women who wrote in the female voice about gender-specific spiritual, physical and sociological experiences. This is rare indeed. Most Medieval documents were written by monks or other clergymen who voiced their judgment and biases (whether consciously or not) on the actions and merits of

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249 Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe 400-1100*, 289. St. Hildegard is also my patron saint.
women within their context of state and church politics. Hagiographers like Bede had an agenda. He wanted to display the power and influence of Northumbria on the establishment of Christianity in England, he was not interested in Canterbury's Frankish connections or the role of Queen Bertha in the success of the Gregorian mission, so she was written out of the history of the early English church. This has made it challenging tracing her deep connections to the original Gregorian Mission and in supporting my conclusion that she commissioned the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement.

The first rulers of the Germanic kingdoms looked to the old Roman laws, then modified and adopted them as a way to govern within their barbarian lands. Influence from Frankish laws and that of Rome can be seen in the first Anglo-Saxon law code that King Æthelbert issued and recorded in 602. In this, he addressed the worth and value of females, and by the early tenth century women of noble birth and status, including abbesses, could inherit property in England. The rules for governing females, whether forbidding the intermarriage between kingdoms, dynastic succession or inheritance directly affected women, and could easily support or destroy her future and the future of her children. Through inheritance, dowry, marriage and progeny, women secured their power, as evidenced by Frankish and Saxon laws written by these early Christian kings and mentioned in the contemporary writings of Gregory of Tours and the Venerable Bede.

Women were assigned a value, a *wergeld*, that was the measure of her material worth, and if harmed or murdered, it was to be paid to the men in her kin-group. A noble woman's

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wergeld was generally less than a noble man's, unless she were of childbearing age, then, depending on her bloodline, her value could be twice that of a man's of a similar age and status. In legal actions, a Germanic woman needed to be represented by a man. Upon her betrothal, her father transferred her inheritance to her husband. She was absent from participating in oaths and contracts, and could not herself participate in any legal action, without the permission and involvement of her legal guardians.²⁵⁴

Noble women were not exempt from these rules, and consequently, were used politically as pawns, more often than not, in marriage contracts. The early Merovingian queens, almost all foreign-born, brought significant dowries to their marriages; great treasures and estates were common. More importantly, the Romanized (Christian) wife was highly valued; her education, courtliness and morality made her cultured, which helped to civilize her barbarian subjects.²⁵⁵ In her betrothal to the king or his sons, such brides were seen as 'peace-weavers,' binding potential rival families into an uneasy and, often, short lived political alliance.²⁵⁶ The late sixth century political marriage between Æthelbert of Kent and Bertha, a Frankish princess, at Canterbury was no different.

It is important to understand the power a Merovingian noble woman had within the confines of a political marriage. She was not helpless. Growing up in a court within a divided kingdom, Bertha like other Frankish girls were introduced to intrigue and politics on par with Hollywood's glamorized historical dramas so popular today. A woman's power came from her family connections which, combined with well-defined societal roles, determined how she functioned within that society which were crucial in the formation of the new Christian states. It

²⁵⁴ Bitel, Women in Early Medieval Europe 400-1100, 71


²⁵⁶ Bitel, Women in Early Medieval Europe 400-1100, 81.
was the female's role in courtly affairs that allowed women like Bertha, Brunhild (her aunt), and Radegund (her step grandmother) to wield their royal power and influence.\textsuperscript{257} Considering the length of Æthelbert's reign, which Bede said lasted for 56 years, and that he was married to Bertha during the time that he ruled Kent, he was undoubtedly deeply influenced by her faith and Frankish culture. According to Gregory of Tours, Bertha’s mother, Ingoburga, died in 589, at the age of 70 years, which may place Bertha's birth ca. 560, and her marriage to Æthelbert ca. 580.\textsuperscript{258} There seems no reason why we should not continue to accept Bede's dating in which case Æthelbert and Bertha must have been married nearly twenty years before the coming of Augustine, time enough to build up a court on the Frankish model.\textsuperscript{259}

Bertha's influence in Canterbury was monumental. She came from and brought with her the imperial culture of the Franks. Bishop Luidhard and Bertha’s Frankish interpreters were the ones that communicated with Augustine's Roman monks and with the pagan peoples of Kent, Augustine's mission would not have been possible without them. When Augustine arrived in Canterbury he gained quick favor with the king because Æthelbert already knew about their mission, because his wife (through Pope Gregory I) was the person who invited them into Kent. The conversion of the Angles and Saxons and monumental building projects that spring from these key events came about because of Queen Bertha's influence.\textsuperscript{260}

The connection between women and the cathedral continue with Bertha's daughter, Æthelburg (ca. 600 - 647). Touted by Bede to be King Edwin's 'Christian virginal companion,' Æthelburg, like most early Medieval women, are left in the histories because of their virtuous

\textsuperscript{257} The accounts we have of the political infighting of the Franks comes from the writings and 'voice' of men.

\textsuperscript{258} Gregory of Tours, \textit{The History of the Franks}, Book 4, Chapter 26

\textsuperscript{259} Deanesly, “The Court of King Æthelbert of Kent,” 114.

\textsuperscript{260} Deanesly, “The Court of King Æthelbert of Kent,” 103.
help in converting their husbands (with assistance from their bishops, like Paulinus). In his following chapter, Bede includes the letter from Pope Boniface IV to Queen Æthelburg encouraging her to be diligent in her husband's conversion, and mentions an exchange of papal gifts like a silver mirror and gilt ivory comb. In 627 King Edwin is baptized in York, by Bishop Paulinus, as are their children, who were all later buried in the new metropolitan bishopric in Northumbria that King Edwin builds in stone, much like that of Canterbury. Bede focuses his attentions on York in his writings and continued to push for reforms there, reminding the newer archbishops of Pope Gregory I's initial vision of creating metropolitan sees in London and York.

**Canterbury as a reliquary church**

Recognizing Canterbury's divine, cosmological characteristics, its *genius loci* or 'the spirit of a place,' has been critical in my research. This is an area of the world that was inhabited well before our recorded history. You can sense the land's gravitas when looking over the rolling coastal hills or when standing within the bowels of the Cathedral's crypt, situated directly below the *opus Alexandrinum* pavement. There is a reason why Canterbury Cathedral, and the porphyry floor therein have withstood the ravages of time. Canterbury Cathedral is a reliquary church that embodies the entirety of Christian history outside of Rome. No other Christian church through the seventh century could claim the spiritual and political power that was reserved for the Primal See in Canterbury. During the middle ages, Canterbury increased its ties and spiritual power with Rome as the English kings consolidated power in Westminster in London. Several kings

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262 Collinson, Ramsay, and Sparks, *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, p. 3. It is evident in Bede’s writings that Canterbury was never meant to surpass York in papal status.
advocated moving the papal see to London, but were thwarted by the archbishops of Canterbury. Canterbury Cathedral literally created a physical barrier between London and Rome, allowing the bishops to exercise religious control over the island without interference from whichever king was vying for power at the time.

Beginning with Queen Bertha, the grounds of the Cathedral and St. Augustine's Abbey incorporated the relics of the Roman missionaries, archbishops, saints and early church fathers who advanced the mission of Christianity throughout the world. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the relics housed within the Anglo-Saxon church worked miracles, and were actively venerated by all. It seems as though from the time of Augustine, Benedictine rites of burial for saints and nobles shaped the building plans at Canterbury up to Archbishop Lanfranc. This is a significant, intentional choice to continually demonstrate or highlight the political and spiritual ties of the English monarchy to Rome, and there is good reason why the cathedral has occupied the same spot in the north-eastern section of the city since King Æthelbert's original land grant to St. Augustine ca. 597. Immense wealth and great swaths of land continued to be granted to the archbishopric as Bertha and Æthelbert's progeny ruled in Kent until ca. 764, when it came under Mercian rule. By then, it was a thriving Christian community. King Offa of Mercia (ca. 757 – 796) and King Cenwulf (ca. 796 - 821) knew better than to start a power struggle with Canterbury, as evidenced by the recent Carolingian usurpation of the Frankish kingdoms. The English Church and nobility needed to be united, collectively increasing each others' powers.

It is my hope that as the field of art history, digital archival systems and integrated research technologies advance in the twenty-first century, scholars will uncover and demystify evidence of female patronage in the Medieval world. Further scholarship is also needed in the


cataloging of floors from the same time period, which could help eliminate the tendency to group all porphyry pavements as either ancient Mediterranean in origin or later, post Carolingian Cosmati work. I would very much have liked the opportunity to research in the libraries of Canterbury during the writing of this thesis. However, I am grateful for having done this research, and when I travel abroad with students in tow, I make it a point to always point out the floors we are standing on and how they are interacting within the spaces. Then we look up!
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