The Contrasting Fortunes of St Martin in early medieval Northumbria: Lindisfarne, Whithorn, and the enigmatic Bede

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I. Introduction

1) 'Comment passe-t-on de la diffusion d'un livre à l'établissement d'un culte? ou en posant la question autrement: le tombeau du saint était-il le seul lieu possible de développement du culte?'   Bruno Judic,   'Les modèles martiniens dans le christianisme des Ve – VIIe siècles', *L'empreinte chrétienne en Gaule du IVe au IXe siècle*, ed. Michèle Gaillard (Turnhout, 2014), pp. 91-109 at p. 96

2) Veneration of St Martin could, potentially, have been introduced from 4 different sources, and each of these could in theory have had a different image of St Martin. The cult might also have taken different forms. NB odd distribution of dedications to St Martin. The four potential sources whence veneration for St Martin could have been introduced are:

> **The Britons /** British (*Brettones, Britanni*): original inhabitants of Britain, Christianised in Roman and post-Roman periods; speakers of a Celtic language now represented by Welsh.
- NB must be differentiated from the Anglo-Saxons / English (*Angli, Saxones*) who were pagan, Germanic-speaking incomers who settled in eastern Britain and expanded west and north at the expense of the Britons.

> **Gaul / Frankia**: via Northumbrian kings marrying Kentish princesses of Merovingian descent. Bertha and her Frankish chaplain, Liudhard, implanted the cult of St Martin in Kent.

Clovis

Chlothar I

Chilperic   Charibert I
d. 584   d. 567

Chlothar II   Bertha = Æthelberht, King of Kent (d. 616)
                   brings Frankish chaplain, Liudhard

Dagobert I   Æthelburh = Edwin, King of Northumbria (d. 633)
629-39   arrives with chaplain;
                   returns to Kent 633

                   Eanflæd = Oswiu, King of Northumbria 642-70
                   grows up in Kent, brings
                   chaplain, Romanus, from Kent

via Northumbrians visiting Gaul: Wilfrid at Lyon in 650s; bishop of Northumbria 669-78, imports masons from Gaul to build stone churches

- Benedict Biscop, founder of Wearmouth/Jarrow, trains as monk at Lérins for 2 years, frequent visitor to Gaul and Rome

> **Iona**: an Irish monastery (in what is now western Scotland).*c.*635 Aidan, missionary monk-bishop from Iona converts Northumbria, and founds monastery of Lindisfarne on Holy Island

> **Rome**: source of mission to Kent; and a Roman bishop accompanies Æthelburh to Edwin's court. Frequently visited by Benedict Biscop. In 679 Biscop brings John, archcantor at St Peter's and abbot of St Martin's, Rome, back to Wearmouth-Jarrow to teach chant. En route they visit Tours, and some monks from there accompany him to Northumbria (*HE* IV.18)

II. Lindisfarne (Holy Island)

3) St Martin was venerated in Ireland and on Iona; but this veneration was not linked to relics of St Martin, or church dedications. For the difference in saints' cults / *erlam* in Ireland, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam:* The patron-saint of an Irish church', *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford 2002), pp. 267-90

4) *Deus Domine meus*, an Irish hymn to St Martin (probably 7th century), ed. Michael Lapidge, *Celtica* 21 (1990), pp. 240-51

Verses 6-7: Mihi adiutorium
erit per naufragium
Christi militis miri
suffragium Martini

Volo te uisitare:
fac me ad te uenire
qui es uirtutis tantae
O mi Sancte Martine

5) Lindisfarne *Life of St Cuthbert* IV. 1 (written 698-705), closely following Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St Martin* ch. 10. Translation is adapted from that of J. Fontaine. Parallel wording to *VM* is italicised.

Après quelque temps *il a accédé à l'épiscopat, et quelle fut sa conduite alors, quelle en fut la grandeur, il n'est pas en notre pouvoir de l'exposer tout au long. . . En effet, avec une fermeté parfaite, it restait semblable à celui qu'il avait été auparavant. Même humilité en son cœur, même pauvreté dans son vêtement. C'est ainsi qu'il remplissait les fonctions épiscopales, plein d'authorité et de prestige, sans déserter sa profession monastique ni ses vertus* érémitiques.

6) And let no one be surprised that, though we have said above that in this island of Lindisfarne, small as it is, there is found the seat of a bishop, now we say also that it is the home of an abbot and monks; for it is actually so. For one and the same dwelling-pace of the servants of God holds both; and indeed all are monks. Aidan, who was the first bishop of this place, was a monk and always lived according to the monastic rule together with his followers. Hence all the bishops of that place up to the present time exercise their episcopal functions in such a way that the abbot, whom they themselves have chosen by the advice of the brethren, rules the monastery; and all the priests, deacons, singers and readers, and the other ecclesiastical grades, together with the bishop himself, keep the monastic rule in all things.   Bede, prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, ch. 16, ed. B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*

7) Bede on Iona: This island always has an abbot for its ruler who is a priest, to whose authority the whole kingdom, including even bishops, have to be subject. This unusual arrangement follows the example of their first teacher, who was not a bishop but a priest and a monk.
Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* III. 4

III. Whithorn

8) Bede on Ninnian (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* III. 4, trans Monat & Robin, SChr 490):

En effet, pour ce qui est des Pictes du Sud, qui résident en deçà de ces montagnes, il y avait longtemps, dit la tradition, qu'ils avaient laissé l'erreur de idolâtrie pour recevoir la vraie foi; celui qui leur avait prêché la Parole était Ninian, évêque très respecté et très saint homme, issu de la nation des Brittons, qui avait appris à Rome, dans les règles, la foi et les mystères de la vérité; son siège episcopal, célèbre par le nom et l'église de l'évêque saint Martin, où son corps repose en compagnie de plusiers saints, appartient encore maintenant à la nation anglaise. Ce lieu, qui fait partie de la province des Berniciens, est appelé communément *Candida Casa*, "Maison Blanche", parce qu'il y a fait construire une église en pierre, pratique insolite chez les Brittons.

9) Archaeological excavation at Whithorn 1984-91 under Peter Hill revealed finds of:

a) Pottery from the Mediterranean, chiefly amphorae (B ware), Phocean Red Slipware (early 6th century) and a little African Red Slipware.

b) Pottery and glass from the continent, probably the western coastal area of France. The earlier phase comprised D-ware (Rigoir's Atlantic group of the *sigillées paléochrétiennes grises;* known from Tours *inter alia*) and glass, especially conical drinking vessels (production centres in N-E France, Belgium, Rhineland, but also Bordeaux area); 6th century in date. The later phase comprised E-ware, later 6th and 7th century. The glass imports continued into this second phase.

Provides a possible context for transmission of cult of St Martin to Whithorn?

IV. Bede

10) Au reste, un jour que nous l'interrogions sur la fin du monde, il [Martin] nous dit que l'Antéchrist et Néron viendraient d'abord. . . Finalement, l'Antéchrist ferait périr Néron lui-même, et le monde entier et l'ensemble des nations seraient ainsi réduits sous son pouvoir, jusqu'à ce que l'Impie soit écrasé par l'avènement du Christ. Mais il ne faisait pas de doute que l'Antéchrist, conçu par l'Esprit mauvais, était déjà né, qu'il se trouvait déjà dans ses années d'enfance, et que, parvenu à l'âge légal, il prendrait le pouvoir suprême.   Sulpice Sévère, *Gallus, Dialogues* II. 14, trans. J. Fontaine

11) According to a book of I know not what heretic, . . . though the day and hour of Judgement cannot be known, the year can. . . On this matter I confess I am quite grieved, and often irritated to the limit of what is permissible, or even beyond, when every day I am asked by rustics how many years are left in the final millenium of the world, or learn from them that they know that the final millenium is in progress, when out Lord in the Gospel did not testify that the time of His advent was near at hand or far off, but commanded us to keep watch . . .
Bede, ep. to Plegwin, trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool 1999), pp. 412-13