P. Rahtz and L. Watts, *St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, North Yorkshire. Archaeological Investigations and Historical Context* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021). ISBN 978-1-78969-482-6.

Thanks to a range of texts the history of the early medieval Church in the kingdom of the Deirans (now Yorkshire) is unusually well served. Though there is no (certain) mention of the church at Kirkdale, historians and archaeologists have identified it as the site of a religious community (Old English *mynster*, Latin *monasterium*).

The Old Norse place-name, *kirkja-dæl*, suggests a significant church in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Two stone grave covers, dated to the late eighth or early ninth century, were once built into the west wall of the nave, north and south of the tower, but presently stand inside the church. One has an incised cross, with a central recess thought to be for a jewel, and plant scroll. The other has geometrical interlace and, on its sides, tassels, suggesting it was a skeuomorph of a textile. Further crosses date from the later ninth or tenth century, one with an Irish influenced crucifixion. Most famous is an eleventh-century sundial with Old English inscriptions, currently set over the south door of the nave inside the porch. The inscriptions say: (i) 'Orm the son of Gamal bought St Gregory's minster when it was utterly ruined and collapsed and he had it rebuilt from the foundations (in honour of) Christ and St Gregory in the days of King Edward and in the days of Earl Tosti.' (ii) 'And Hawarð made me and Brand PR̂S.' (iii) 'This is the day's sun-marker at every hour.' Architectural historians have suggested that parts of the current church belong to the eleventh century.

Together this has suggested an early medieval religious community. Ryedale, as Ian Wood and Richard Morris have revealed, was home to a dense network of such communities, perhaps because it was a strategic corridor between the Deiran heartlands, around the Yorkshire Wolds, and the Vale of York. As Richard Morris suggests, a community to which

Bede's abbot Ceolfrith travelled, called *Cornu Vallis*, could have been at Kirkdale, the Latin name referencing the horn-shaped valley. Pope Gregory the Great was promoted as apostle to the English and, if the Kirkdale dedication is early, it might reflect that fact. The grave-cover with skeuomorphic textile, as Alan Thacker has argued, probably represented the pall laid over a saint's shrine, suggesting veneration of a now unknown member of the community. The crucifixion could imply continuity of religious life into the tenth century. The sundial inscriptions reveal that it was recognised as a religious community, albeit ruined, in the eleventh century. Following analyses by Richard Fletcher and Stuart Wrathmell, this ruined community was purchased by a grandson of the political heavyweight, Thorbrand the Hold, probably as part of a wider family strategy to stabilise social status through church building. Since, as John Blair has observed, the sundial may be a reused Roman slab and translates a Roman Latin inscription into Old English, this seems to have been an ambitious enterprise. That sundial might have marked the canonical hours, and, as Richard Morris observed, the abbreviation PRS could refer to priests in the plural – another religious community.

Excavations by the late Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts in the 1990s, whose results are presented by Lorna in exemplary fashion in this volume, added substantially to this existing knowledge. The topography of the dale, Rahtz and Watts note, may explain its longer-term significance: a Limestone aquifer, by which the Hodge Beck disappears, was used as a ford at a junction between a route along Ryedale and a path (known as Thurkisti) onto the North York Moors. Traces of possible earlier Roman activity were uncovered – a pre-Middle Saxon stone structure associated with what might be tessera (p. 97); and what may be Roman masonry, some reused in an Anglo-Scandinavian period building, including a piece of small, finely-finished column. Aspects of the Roman past and present were activated through the foundation of early medieval religious communities, and this seems visible at Kirkdale in the dedication to Gregory and the eleventh-century sundial, so these traces deserve further

investigation. Trenches around the present church identified several phases of building: a mid-Saxon stone structure with a curved wall, perhaps the earliest church; an Anglo-Scandinavian stone structure, probably a second church, which was burnt down, perhaps the ruined church of the sundial inscriptions; then an eleventh-century church, likely the result of Orm's rebuilding. A trench in the north field, away from the church, turned up a 'builder's yard', associated with Orm's rebuilding: here were more items suggesting an eighth- or ninth-century religious community, perhaps deposited as a result of stripping and recycling – most notably, an inscribed lead plaque probably referring to a coffin/ bone-chest/ bone-cloth, and a fragment of coloured glass rod associated with the decoration of glass vessels and ornamental plaques. Around the church was a cemetery including burials radio-carbon dated to the ninth, tenth, or eleventh century. This incorporated men, women, and children, sharing a profile with other rural communities. Amongst them was a stone sarcophagus, suggesting a high-status eleventh-century burial – possibly Orm himself.

This well-presented and thoughtful report will be of interest from a wide range of perspectives. The excavations show how to use targeted trenches disturbing only a fraction of the available archaeology to unravel the history of a church. The explanations of stratigraphic sequences and logical inferences from the structure of the building show how to go about distinguishing the phases of a building, and are revealing about how rebuilding was undertaken. The expert osteoarchaeological analysis of the bodies, by Lizzie Craig-Atkins, adds a valuable cemetery population to our corpus. The catalogue of individual artefacts encompasses fragments of stone sculpture, fired clay, pottery, glass, melon beads, jet, a copper alloy strap end, and metal-working slags. The final overview and interpretation shows the limits of what our broader historical models and interpretations of the Anglo-Saxon Church can do when they are confronted by the sequence of developments at a single site.

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