

Twitter Thread by Byzantine Ambassador



Byzantine Ambassador

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Bede's Sources: A Thread ■

Bede gives James the Deacon, a companion of Paulinus (first Northumbrian missionary) surprisingly short shrift. Esp as Paulinus was resolute enough to remain in the North when Paulinus' mission broke down (& he lived to play a part in the Synod of Whitby).

It's difficult to see why James (who lived mostly nr Catterick) didn't become one of the great legendary figures of the Northumbrian Church, unless he was either really dull or his oral record didn't survive until the point a monastery could jot it down.

Earliest extant life of an English saint is the anon. Lindisfarne Life of Cuthbert, bishop of Lindisfarne and hermit of Farne, written c.699.

Whitby is rly the star of Bede's work. It was to Whitby that the relics of Edwin were translated and traditions about Edwin were included in the Whitby "Life of Gregory [the Great]" written c.704. It was at Whitby that Oswiu was buried etc.

First-hand eye-witness could take Bede back quite a way; he had spoken to men who could remember Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne (d. 652).

Bede got info (inc his material on Oswald) from Acca, bishop of Hexham, the most important bishop in Bernicia who had been a companion of Wilfrid (bishop of York). It was to Acca that Bede dedicated most of his theological works.

Bede's knowledge of Ninian and the southern Picts comes from Bishop Pecthelm of Whithorn (d. 735), a personal acquaintance of his.

The two sets of traditions (the Bernician about Oswald and the Deiran about Oswine) reflect the rivalry between the two kingdoms. If Oswald is the "most Christian King" of the Northumbrians, Oswine is so pious that the Northumbrians are said to be unworthy of him.

A weak point is British evangelisation & ecclesiology. That St Chad was able to find two British bishops to consecrate him in 665 leaves us asking more questions than Bede seems willing to answer. Has all reference to British missionaries been suppressed?

York is also a weak point. Despite the fact some of Edwin's relics were at York and three Whitby men became its bishops (Bosa, John of Beverley & Wilfrid II) it's a relative omission – indeed Bede's knowledge of York's history appears slight.

The Bernician counterpart to the Deiran monastery of Whitby was originally the monastery of Coldingham (known as St Abb's). The reason nobody talks about this double-monastery full of Irish and Angles is that it was burned down v. early (680s).

Bede's vision is skewed away from his own times. He believed the great days of the Church led up to (Byz) Archbishop Theodore and after his reign the vigour had dissipated. Oddly, few men are wont to see the heroic age extend to their own generation.

Bede's treatment of York – this important Deiran centre – is remiss. He records little after departure of Paulinus. He taps almost nothing of the huge vein of York tradition.

Bede's primary debt was to Abbot Albinus of Canterbury for info on St Augustine's mission. Much of it was brought to Bede by Nothelm – a LDN priest – who visited Rome for more papal info. Other Kentish parts like Rochester hardly gain more than a reference.

This Canterbury angle is most obvious on the Theodore section. Canterbury appears to have been oblivious to the part played by Benedict Biscop of Monkwearmouth/Jarrow in bringing Theodore to Ingerland.

Still, there are tidbits that throw up interesting regional evangelisation. East Anglia for instance was converted by the bishop Felix from Burgundy. Sigeberht gave Felix a See at Dunwich where both founded a school.

Daniel, bishop of Winchester, was Bede's primary source for Wessex. Daniel was interested in conversion of the Thames valley Saxons under Cynegils & Cwichelm in early C7th by Birinus, a missionary from Rome, & the est. of a bishopric at Dorchester on Thames.

The Dorchester bishopric was transferred in the reign of King Cenwalh to Winchester. Winchester's diocese was later divided & had South Saxon diocese of Selsey attached to it.

There may have been two royal lines in Wessex. One at Dorchester on Thames and one at Old Sarum. c. 685 the Dorchester line in person of Caedwalla consolidated Wessex & the two genealogies were fused to give the appearance of one royal line with one apostle, Birinus.

Glastonbury appears to have been a British foundation (& not Anglicised until King Ine's reign). It is possible that Sherborne and Shaftesbury too were originally British monasteries. Malmesbury was certainly founded by an Irish scholar Maildulf. Another at Bosham, Sussex.

Bede recounts an odd episode in Sussex which suffered a drought for three years. Mass suicides resulted. The men joined together at the tops of cliffs & flung themselves into the sea. This was a v. Germanic/Nordic pagan way to die.

Mercia is the massive omission in Bede. It is unfortunate that Bede's sources were at their most defective RE: main kingdom bordering on Wales & British Church.

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