

Noël Duval (Hrsg.), *Naissance des arts chrétiens. Atlas des monuments paléochrétiens de la France*. Mit Beiträgen von J. Fontaine, Ch. Pietri, J.-Ch. Picard, J. Guyon, P.-A. Février, P. Périn, B. K. Young, M. Colardelle, N. Gauthier, C. Brenot, M.-Ch. Maufus, X. Barral i Altet, C. Metzger, G.-R. Delahaye, F. Baratte, M. Gauthier, D. Foy, J.-P. Caillet. *Atlas archéologiques de la France*. Ministère de la Culture/Imprimerie nationale éditions, Paris 1991. 434 Seiten.

France for the last three decades has been a powerhouse of research into the archaeology of the early church and late antiquity, and this book is a monument to the achievements of those years. It is all the more important because of the tragedy that three of the leading scholars of this period, who were also principal authors in this volume, have died since its publication, P.-A. Février and Ch. Pietri in 1991, and J.-Ch. Picard in 1992. They, with Noël Duval, were the driving force that imprinted itself on the international scene in 1986 with the immensely successful 11th International Congress of Christian Archaeology, held at Lyon, Vienne, Grenoble, Geneva and Aosta.

Some of the dynamic philosophy which lay behind this event was set out during the 1986 Congress by P.-A. Février in a paper which he read at Grenoble. "Une archéologie chrétienne pour 1986" (the title of his paper) should, he said, not only take account of all the advances in excavation technique, pursue and synthesize the resulting complexity of information provided by the material remains, and link the archaeology to the evidence of its parallel sciences of history and art-history, but beyond that should recognise that many of the traditional elements of 'Christian' archaeology – the study of churches, Christian inscriptions, art with a Christian content, Christian cemeteries – will provide in isolation only a partial picture of the society to which they belonged. Only by studying late antiquity as a whole, he suggested, is it possible to begin to appreciate the significance of Christianity in a society that was not so much Christian but on its way to becoming Christianised. "Mais que vient faire", he asked, "une archéologie chrétienne telle que [celle] envisagée par un De Rossi ou un Le Blant? Doit-on réserver ce terme à une partie seulement du donné archéologique? Et comment le faire? La prétention nouvelle de l'archéologie est d'explorer la totalité des possibles approches du monde matériel. Faut-il séparer ce qui serait une archéologie chrétienne et le reste? Autre question: le peut-on?" His answer to this question was quite clear: "Il faut à la fois s'interroger sur ce que l'on entend par chrétien et la façon de le définir, sur ce que doit être une approche du christianisme par l'archéologie, et donc sur ce qui fait la différence ou l'originalité d'une société chrétienne ou d'une société en voie de christianisation".

Février's concept, that late-antique society as a whole must be the subject of study if one wants to understand early Christianity, was in line with the most imaginative thinking of his day. In New York, for example, the 1977 exhibition concerned with the 4th–7th centuries, the "Age of Spirituality", saw the growth of Christian art as only comprehensible if presented in a total survey of the period. It was Février and his colleagues, however, who evolved the most comprehensive plan for the integration of archaeology into a thorough re-examination of early Christianity in the context of its period. This was the group that, having all served their apprenticeship in North Africa and Italy, applied the plan to Gaul.

The practical steps which have put this plan into action are impressive. Major new publications are in hand. A new "Recueil des Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule" is in progress, and two volumes have been published; and a "Prosopographie chrétienne de la Gaule" is in preparation. Particularly impressive is the "Topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule du IV^e au VIII^e siècle", of which seven fascicules have already appeared, reviewing the current state of knowledge of the Christian archaeology of the episcopal cities. There have been many new discoveries from the ground, whether in rescue excavations or in excavations organised by university teams, led for example by Michel de Bouard at Caen, or by Gabrielle Démiens d'Archimbaud and Paul-Albert Février in Provence. In Lyon Jean-François Reynaud, with the support of the team of Charles Bonnet (fresh from the triumph of their excavations in the cathedral of Geneva) saved a large portion of the episcopal group and two funerary churches. And there were many discoveries elsewhere, for example at Vienne and Saint-Romain-en-Gal, in the Dauphiné (Viuz-Faverges, Saint-Julien en Genevois, Grenoble), in Burgundy (Autun, Auxerre, Dijon), in Poitou and Languedoc. Major exhibitions have been organised, with the express purpose of synthesizing what has been discovered and making it known to a wider audience: *Des Burgondes à Bayard, 1981–1984* for the region of Rhône-Alpes, *Les premiers temps chrétiens en Gaule méridionale* on the occasion of the Congress at Lyon, Vienne and Grenoble in 1986, *Lorraine mérovingienne* at Metz in 1988, and *Romains et Barbares entre Loire et Gironde* at Poitiers in 1989. At the same time the impetus provided by the 1986 Congress transformed the organising committee of the Congress into the Association pour l'Antiquité Tardive and has thus assured the maintenance of that excitement and energy in a form which will preserve the vigorous intellectual gains of the formative years. That organising committee has become an international society of the highest standing. Its annual meetings, in France and abroad, stimulate fresh research and fresh assessments of the areas concerned.

The two major publications of the Association have already been the cause of great admiration. One is the first volume of its *Revue*, published in 1993 and devoted to the theme of "Les sarcophages d'Aquitaine". The other is the volume here under review, for which the vast programme of research began in 1983 on the initiative of the Sous-Direction de l'Archéologie (formerly the Service des fouilles) of the Ministère de la Culture.

The "Naissance des arts chrétiens" begins with an introduction by J. FONTAINE (pp. 14–29) and an account of the early history of Christianity in Gaul by CH. PIETRI (pp. 30–43). These confirm the thesis of the editor, N. DUVAL, in his preface (pp. 12–13) that the subject has progressed as much in recent years as it did at any previous time. The same emerges in studies of individual topics, such as Merovingian sarcophagi (G.-R. DELAHAYE, pp. 288 sq.) or Christian archaeology as a whole (P.-A. FÉVRIER, pp. 336–347; X. BARRAL I ALTET, pp. 348–367). A particularly good example is provided by the history of the study of cemeteries. B. K. YOUNG and P. PÉRIN (pp. 94 sq.) describe how 'Merovingian' archaeology was born about the middle of the 19th century, in the context of highly charged research on national origins. The major preoccupation of the period was the excavation of burials to find traces of the various peoples mentioned in the texts. This led to the idea that there was a clear distinction in Gaul up to about 500 between supposedly Gallo-Roman or 'indigenous' funerary customs, consisting of inhumations with little order, containing few grave-goods, and supposedly Germanic or 'barbarian' customs, consisting of burials in rows in vast cemeteries, with copious grave-goods, and that this distinction allowed German-held areas to be identified. All of the work of Édouard Salin (1912–1970) was dominated by this idea, which developed into the concept of 'synthetic' cemeteries, containing proportions of the two populations recognisable by their burial practices. In the 1970s, however, the question was discussed anew by various scholars (for example: E. JAMES, *The Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul*. BAR Suppl. Ser. 25 [1977], concerning the Visigoths; M. COLARDELLE, *Sépulture et traditions funéraires du Ve au XIII^e siècle ap. J.-C. dans les campagnes des Alpes françaises du Nord* [1983], concerning the Burgundians in the Rhône-Alpes region; H. AMENT, *Franken und Romanen im Merowingerreich als archäologisches Forschungsproblem*. *Bonner Jahrb.* 178, 1978, 337–394). Such discussion and excavation and post-excavation analysis has led to the realisation that

the variations in burial-practices reflect the development of cemeteries in space and over time rather than ethnic origins of the various individuals or groups, and that, for example at Frénouville and other cemeteries in the region of Caen, there were stable populations for a very long period.

There are five main sections in the volume, each with its own theme and set out in several articles: (1) "Institutions et société: cités et campagnes chrétiennes"; (2) "Sources écrites et numismatiques"; (3) "Édifices de culte, décor architectural et mobilier liturgique"; (4) "Sarcophages sculptés, mobilier funéraire et arts mineurs"; (5) "Histoire de l'archéologie chrétienne". Even the broad indications of these larger headings reveal that this is not a traditional art-historical volume but a series of related studies on the art and archaeology of late-antique France. It remains true to the consistent aims of the energetic group led by Duval, Février and Pietri in that it covers the 4th to 8th centuries and ignores the traditional placing of the division between late Empire and early middle ages in the purely political events of 476, and that it underlines the continuity of society, with its great estates and their slaves and the same ruling families. At the same time this book, of which Christian art is the focus, begins to look beyond a traditional division of art and archaeology into 'classical' or 'pagan' on the one hand and 'early Christian' on the other. J.-P. CAILLET (pp. 324–333), for example, in his article on ivories demonstrates that discussion cannot be limited to Christian material, while the articles on cemeteries (B. K. YOUNG and P. PÉRIN, pp. 94–121) or sarcophagi (Christian: P.-A. FÉVRIER, pp. 270–287; Merovingian: G.-R. DELAHAYE, pp. 288 sq.; plaster: P. PÉRIN, pp. 299–305) would not make sense if the Christian, christianising and pagan material were considered separately. The point is illustrated graphically at the beginning of the book, where two double-page spreads (pp. 18–21) are devoted to the 'plaque du Coudray', a 4th–5th century gold buckle-plate from the Seine, with engraved and openwork decoration, studied in detail by F. BARATTE (*La plaque de ceinture du Coudray: innovation et tradition dans les arts mineurs du bas-empire. Mon. et Mém. Piot* 62, 1979, 43–84). The captions sum up Baratte's demonstration that the decoration uses an iconography which is purely classical in its origins to express a Christian message.

In a comparatively short review it is impossible to communicate the richness of a large volume such as this, whose authors encompass so much wisdom and experience. It must not be thought, however, in the light of what has been said, that the traditional fare of early Christian art and archaeology is missing. There are, for example, two papers on religious architecture. Even here, however, as might be expected, given that N. DUVAL is the author, originality and brilliance shine through. In the first contribution (pp. 50–69: "L'*ecclesia*, espace de la communauté chrétienne dans la cité") the reader will find an analysis of the Christian community and its buildings, their functions in the urban environment, and their role in the transformation of the classical into the late-Roman city. This is the commentary to be read side by side with the fascicules of the "Topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule". It demonstrates the huge value of that project and its implications of what might be achieved in the other provinces of the Roman Empire.

The title of Duval's other paper (pp. 186–219: "L'architecture culturelle") might suggest yet another dry, old-fashioned analysis in purely architectural terms of the same few well-known churches. The chapter is something quite different, as is obvious from the opening review of previous work in this field. There have been a number of attempts, Duval points out, to characterise Christian architecture in Gaul, for example by É. MALE (*La fin du paganisme en Gaule et les plus anciennes basiliques chrétiennes* [1950]), J. HUBERT (with J. PORCHER and W.-F. VOLBACH, *L'Europe des invasions* [1967]), and M. VIEILLARD-TROÏEKOUROFF (*Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les oeuvres de Grégoire de Tours* [1976]). These and earlier writers used the textual sources, the few available inscriptions and the small numbers of standing monuments and of old excavations at Vienne, Paris, Reims and St. Bertrand de Comminges. The discoveries of the last twenty years, however, beginning particularly with the work of Jean-François Reynaud at Lyon, have thrown up such a quantity and complex of information that it is difficult to discern any general pattern and characteristics of church architecture in Gaul in the face of the great diversity which has been revealed. The only way forward is by a careful and systematic analysis of old and new information, and this is precisely what Duval offers in this chapter. He asks the most important and most interesting questions, and the reader is then privileged to learn not only the current state of the problem but also, if necessary, the inadequacy of the available evidence to solve it. More often, however, while reviewing the latest evidence, he throws light on the problems he identifies – the location of places of worship in existing buildings, the sizes of churches, their plans, domes and towers and bell-towers, apses and sacristies, crypts, lateral porticoes, atria, liturgical arrangements, and many other topics.

What emerges from one small aspect of Duval's chapter, his consideration of baptisteries and *martyria*, is typical of the whole. It demonstrates that the Christian architecture of Gaul was far more sophisticated and diverse than could be imagined from the at first sight unimpressive nature of the remains in the ground. The recognition of the originality of the baptisteries shows how much progress has been made since the syntheses published by Jean Hubert between 1950 and 1970. At the same time, however, we still do not know how far the baptisteries represent the general character of the churches of Gaul between the 4th and 7th centuries.

Duval's brilliant surveys are typical of this book as a whole. The authors in his team synthesize the evidence, both of art and archaeology, for the christianisation of Gaul in the period of late antiquity, and it is these same authors who have brought much of this new evidence to light in the enlightened energy and cooperation of the last three decades. Equally importantly, it reviews the history of the study of each of the subjects and so makes clear the difficulties caused, rather than solved, by previous theories. No facile new synthesis is offered in their place, and the volume is the valuable for that; but many valuable new insights are presented, which have important implications outside the boundaries of the province of Gaul. These are the methods which will lead to real advances in knowledge and which should be applied to the evidence of christianisation in all regions of the late-Roman empire. This is a book of profound importance, and our French colleagues have placed all the rest of us in their debt.

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