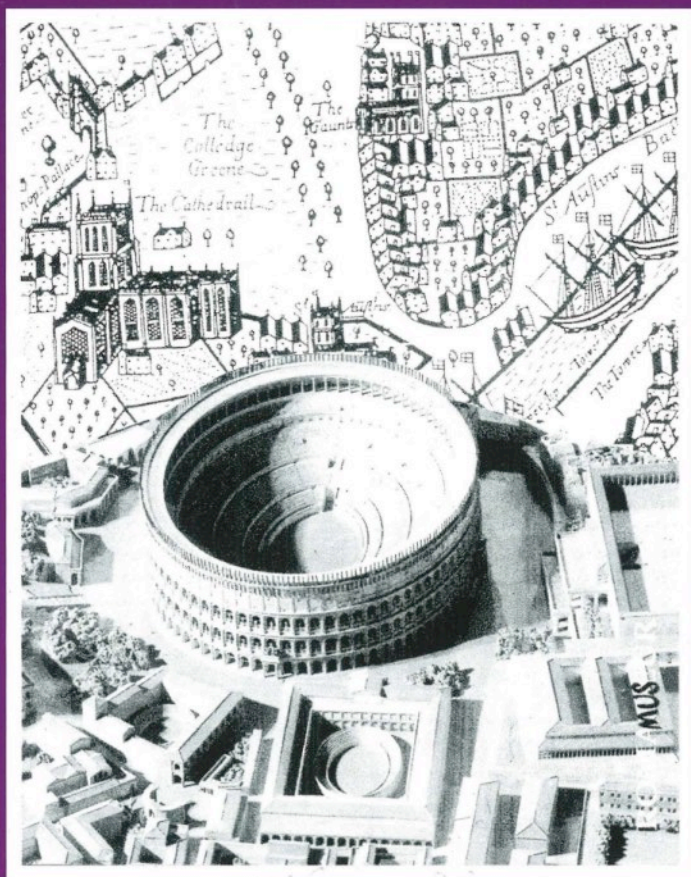# SAINT JORDAN OF BRISTOL: FROM THE CATACOMBS OF ROME TO COLLEGE GREEN AT BRISTOL

DAVID HIGGINS

THE BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

Saint Jordan of Bristol: from the Catacombs of Rome to College Green at Bristol is the one hundred and twentieth pamphlet in this series.

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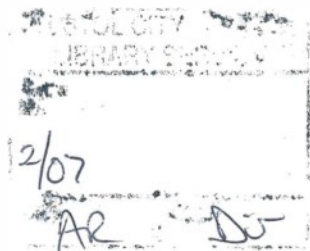
SAINT JORDAN OF BRISTOL: FROM THE CATACOMBS OF ROME TO COLLEGE GREEN AT BRISTOL

THE CHAPEL OF ST JORDAN ON COLLEGE GREEN

Intercessions at daily services in Bristol Cathedral conclude with the following act of commitment and memorial:

> We commit ourselves, one another and our whole life to Christ our God ... remembering all who have gone before us in faith, and in communion with Mary, the Apostles Peter and Paul, Augustine and Jordan and all the Saints.

Patron Saints of a city, as opposed to a country, are a matter of local choice and tradition - in England he or she is normally the patron saint of the city's Cathedral: St Paul (London), St Augustine (Canterbury), St Mary and St Ethelbert (Hereford); while St David of Wales and St Andrew of Scotland gave their names to the cities in question. Our cathedral is dedicated to the Holy and Undivided Trinity; but in the days before the Reformation, when our cathedral was an abbey, the candidature for the city's patron saint, if not St Peter, may have been St Augustine of Canterbury, to whom the abbey was dedicated in 1140 AD. But an equally worthy candidate might have been the saint whose name humbly follows St Augustine's in the Cathedral's daily prayers: St Jordan, long accepted in Bristol tradition as the junior colleague of St Augustine of Canterbury in the field of Christian mission in our part of early seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England.

St Jordan, active three centuries or more before the foundation of the town of Bristol, must therefore be counted among the thirty monks and priests, unnamed by Bede, of St Augustine's original party of nearly forty missionaries which set out from Rome in 597 AD. The relatively uncommon name of Jordan appears to have been particularly popular in Bristol in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, arguably evidence of a strong local cult of the saint (Walker 1997). It was in the twelfth century that both church and abbey on College Green, each dedicated to St Augustine, were founded by Robert FitzHarding, whose youngest brother had also been christened Jordan. Part of a long oral tradition also

1

assigned to College Green the location of St Augustine's historic conference with the leadership of the British church in 603 AD. Judging from the account of the great historian of the English Church, the Venerable Bede, St Augustine stayed only briefly in the west country in that year while, according to the Bristol tradition, he left the later work of evangelism to his younger colleague. The association with Rome, the origin of St Augustine's mission and journey, is important and is something which will be revisited in an investigation of the possible historical background of Saint Jordan.

It appears, therefore, that it was the vigour of this ancient local tradition concerning St Jordan and the conference of 603 AD that inspired Robert FitzHarding of Berkeley to dedicate his new abbey to St Augustine of Canterbury. Strictly speaking, St Augustine was not, as English historians have held, the 'Apostle of the English'. This title belonged properly to his master, the contemporary Pope Gregory I 'the Great', who, although no stay-at-home (he had been *apocrisiarius* - 'spokesman' or representative - for the city of Rome at the court of the Roman emperor Justinian in Constantinople), never crossed the Channel. The mission to the English was conceived, planned and launched by Gregory in Rome in the late sixth century, while St Augustine was the 'team-leader' of the mission, chosen by Gregory to execute his master-plan. FitzHarding's new abbey of St Augustine of Canterbury, constructed on the lands of his Anglo-Norman manor of Billeswick, was therefore conceived arguably as the crowning part of a ritual landscape. It was planned by its founder - with his young friend king Henry II's approval and material help - to lie symbolically adjacent to - and lovingly to watch over - the already ancient mausoleum chapel of St Jordan, which once lay on what is now College Green. Thus a proper historic protocol would be re-established by symbols in stone: the greater shepherd St Augustine of Canterbury would henceforth be seen as taking correct fatherly precedence over St Jordan, his former student (*discipulus*), thereafter his junior colleague or companion (*consors*) and, in monastic terms always his 'son' (*filius*), a relationship that would also be manifested in the day-to-day religious life - its services, holy day festivals and processions - of the very young, rapidly growing, port and town of Bristol.

The earliest documentary proof that we have for the existence of a chapel dedicated to St Jordan dates from 1393 when, in the probate of widow Agnes Spelly of Bristol, a legacy was left to be executed by 'John, hermit of the chapel of St Jordan' (Wadley 1886). However, the first written evidence which explicitly and authoritatively links St Jordan with St Augustine of Canterbury and which provides the earliest proof

that the chapel dedicated to him also contained his remains, is found in a Book of Hours (*Horae*) now in Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge (James 1895). From internal evidence the following can be understood: that the vellum manuscript itself can be dated to 1450, that it was once in the possession of a Bristolian (an unknown male) and that it was used in St Jordan's chapel itself. Above all, the Book of Hours, a century before the merely anecdotal information of John Leland in his *Itinerary* (see below), contains the crucially important evidence that, in the understanding of the Church itself (for such devotional works were subject to the Church's scrutiny), St Jordan had worked with St Augustine of Canterbury in evangelising our part of the west country. The Book, as has been said, also first provides us with the fact that the oratory of St Jordan on the Green was his mausoleum. The information is contained in the first five lines of the Book of Hours' hymn to St Jordan, as follows:

Ad honorem dei et sancti Jordani

O felix christi confessor concivis caeli Jordane

Sis pro fide intercessor nostre gentis anglicane

Quam in fide perfecisti Augustino baptizante

Cui consors extitisti ipso anglis predicante.

Huius loci sis patronus in quo iaces tumulatus ...

[Hymn '*To the Honour of God and of St Jordan*': O Jordan, blessed confessor of Christ and citizen of Heaven, intercede for us by virtue of the faith we of the English church profess, whom Augustine [first] baptised and you perfected in that holy trust, whose colleague (*alt.* companion) you were in his preaching to the English. Be our Patron [saint] in this place where you lie entombed....].

With this, the evidence of St Jordan's identity and role in the early history of the Church is as complete and authoritative as it could be - barring of course the unlikely discovery of further correspondence between Pope Gregory and St Augustine concerning the western extension of the English mission - correspondence that Nothhelm and Albinus, Bede's research assistants, may have failed to gather from the archives of Canterbury and Rome in the eighth century.

The first reference to the existence on College Green of an open-air pulpit - probably in the vicinity of St Jordan's chapel - is made in a report of the visit of Henry VII to Bristol in 1486 (see later), while the earliest written evidence of the *location* of the chapel there occurs in the *Compotus* (accounts) rolls of 1491-2, which record income from a collection box (pyx) 'within the chapel of St Jordan on the Green' (Beachcroft et al. 1938).

St Augustine's conference of 603 AD, according to Bede, was called in order to effect a reconciliation between the Christian Church centred

on Rome and the unreformed post-Roman British Church in the western part of our Island, which the Anglo-Saxon invaders had not yet conquered. This native but venerable 'Celtic' Christian church - much influenced latterly by indefatigable missionaries from Ireland - had existed as an unbroken institution from the time of Constantine the Great in late Roman times and highly valued its independence from the rule of Rome:

'Meanwhile Augustine, employing the help of [his patron] king Aethelberht [of Kent], summoned the bishops and teachers of the neighbouring British kingdom to a conference at a place which is still called in English....'Augustine's Oak', on the borders of the Hwicce and the West Saxons.' (Bede *The Ecclesiastical History* II.2).

Investigation of this oral tradition in the light of modern Anglo-Saxon scholarship indicates that while it cannot be proved that College Green was the location of the conference of 603 AD, by the same token it cannot be ruled out, something that Bristol's early historian, Samual Seyer, a believer in the distinguished history of Bristol's most ancient sacred site, would have found congenial (Seyer 1821). It is known that in harmony with the ancient tradition of St Augustine's visit to College Green for the purposes of his conference and St Jordan's preaching on the same site, public sermons were regularly preached through the centuries from the outdoor pulpit of St Jordan's chapel. The most memorable of the public sermons took place on Corpus Christi Day in 1486 before king Henry VII, the year after the battle of Bosworth, who on a royal visit to Bristol:

'went in procession about the great Grene ther called the Sanctuary, whither came al the processions of the Towne also, and the Bishop of Worcestre prechide in the *pulpit* in the midds of the foresaid Grene, in a great audience of the Meyre and the substance of all the Burgesse of the Towne and ther wiffs ...'

Indeed, the abbey's historic rolls for 1491-2, already quoted, show regular employment of the pulpit for public sermons on the Green: 'in viridea placea' (Bettey 1985 and 2004). Following the delivery of the address, the contrite populace would have processed to confession, absolution and Mass in the nearby abbey itself: the whole cycle of redemption completed, therefore, at one time in one sacred arena, College Green, commemorating the evangelical work of St Jordan centuries before.

Documentary evidence for the existence of the chapel of St Jordan and its pulpit on College Green, as has been seen, is real and reliable enough and a sacred building which corresponds to the chapel is recorded on maps from the late medieval period to the seventeenth century.

School House (the Cathedral's Grammar School), formerly the chapel of St Jordan. Millerd's cartography slightly displaces its location on College Green
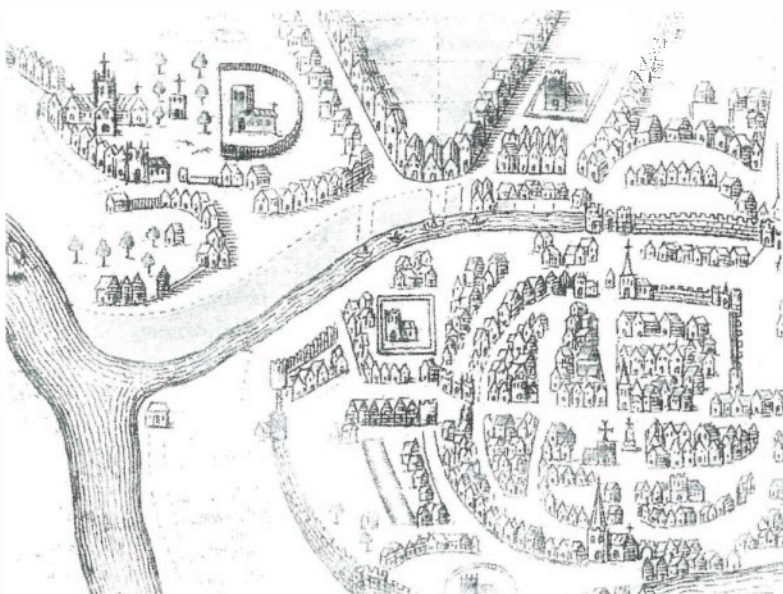
The city's High Cross transferred in the 18th century probably to occupy the former site of the ancient St Jordan's Chapel and pulpit

College Green (Millerd's plan, 1673)

College Green (John Roque's plan, 1742)

Bristol in the late medieval period. Top left: St Jordan's Chapel on College Green between the double row of trees as described in Camden's 'Britannia'

But the dates of the chapel's construction and its demolition are unknown. The early records of the cathedral of Bristol in its days as an abbey church (ca 1140-1539) are unfortunately scanty, due in part to the heavy-handed interventions of Henrician reformist agents in 1539 and to irresponsible Whiggish rioters and their paid mob in 1831, whose destructive aims were fortunately only partially fulfilled. The rioters of 1831 broke into the Chapter House, then used as a library, and set fire to the muniments - account rolls, calendars and other manuscripts. The fire destroyed much written evidence of the abbey's past, even if most of the fabric of the finest twelfth-century Chapter House in England was finally spared. However, since St Jordan's chapel was also his mausoleum ('loc[us] ... in quo iaces tumulatus', above) an approximate *terminus post quem* for its construction can be attempted.

Two factors must be borne in mind in calculating the dates of Jordan's life: (a) that his master Augustine (ca 545-604 X 610 AD) was probably a generation older than Jordan, and (b) that in order to complete his novitiate and education in Rome and be ready thereafter to assume the responsibilities of leading missions in the remote far west of Britain, at the opposite end of the country from Canterbury, Jordan was probably between twenty-five and thirty years old. Conjecturally, therefore, St Jordan's birth might be set at ca 575 AD; thus he would have been aged twenty-one when he was selected (596 AD) to be part of the English mission, and aged twenty-eight when he was left behind to begin his west-country mission at the conclusion of the conference at St Augustine's Oak. His death may well be put before the Synod of Whitby in 664 AD, when he would have been in his ninetieth year. He is not mentioned in the surviving accounts of that crucial assembly when, because of its momentous decisions, the presence of notable churchmen was carefully recorded. For example James, the deacon of Bishop Paulinus of Northumbria, who like St Jordan was also of the original mission of St Augustine, was noted as present - at hardly less than ninety years old. Allowing St Jordan his 'biblical span' of seventy years, he would have been interred on College Green in 645 AD. Indeed, if the fabric of his mausoleum chapel were roughly contemporary with his death and interment in the mid-seventh century, its foundations - had they survived - would have provided by far the oldest Anglo-Saxon remains in Bristol available for archaeological investigation.

The subsequent history of St Jordan's chapel up to the date of its demolition - hitherto not established - can be briefly attempted. Both Leland (*Itinerary* 1534-1543) and William Camden (*Britannia* 1586) record the survival in their days of St Jordan's chapel on the Green; yet earlier, in 1511-12, offerings to the images of St Clement and St Jordan

were no longer being made within the chapel, but in a side-chapel seemingly *within* the abbey itself (Walker 1998). The question therefore poses itself as to the material condition and even function of St Jordan's chapel even in the early 16th century, before the Reformation. Certainly, by 1579 in early post-Reformation times, its religious use had terminated and reverted to education. Depositions concerning an affray in that year between the retainers of two of Bristol's leading families, the Youngs and the Smyths, reveal that it already housed 'the Grammar School' of the Cathedral (Bettey 2004), confirming Camden's reference to it later as 'a Free School' situated, with a 'stone pulpit', amongst 'a double row of trees along the middle of the Green'.

Indeed, the appearance, size and site of St Jordan's chapel are hard to judge from contemporary accounts; from the early maps of Bristol (all of approximate scale) its location appears to lie between the abbey and the chapel of St Mark's (Gaunt's) Hospital which lay on the far (northern) side of the Green. A lease of 1674 probably best indicates its location when the chapel had already become Camden's schoolhouse. The subject of this lease was a property or 'tenement', its site now occupied by the south end of the Council House, which stood next to the old Deanery (the latter abutting the Norman gatehouse where now the City Library stands). The lease (text in Sabin 1991) describes the tenement as extending 'east on the great Green *towards the schoolehouse there*'. The schoolhouse-chapel appears to be depicted on Millerd's plan of 1673, the year before the issue of the lease in question, but in the guise of a conventional house of the period, with terminal chimney stacks, a pitched roof and a central gable. Clearly certain adaptations of the ancient fabric had been made for its new role. A further ninety years of use, adaptation, damage and repair followed as school-premises - and, into the bargain, its illegal use as 'a common tennis court' when lessons were over (see documentation of Archbishop Laud's Visitation of 1634 in Sabin 1991). This was not tennis as played on a regulated Wimbledon-style lawn tennis court, but probably a version of Etonian or Winchester 'fives', played - as at other church sites in Somerset in the period - against the outer walls and buttresses of the building (Bettey 2004). Stripped of its sacred role, the chapel had therefore also become an *ad hoc* recreational venue - arguably Bristol's first known sports-centre - if to the not unreasonable distaste (also recorded) of the Dean and Chapter.

All the adaptation, battering and abuse of what now would be considered a starred Grade I historic building, therefore probably account for Millerd's reductive iconography of 1673. On the other hand, the map engraved a century earlier by William Smith in 1568 (Rogan 2000), depicts the chapel symbolically as an ecclesiastical building, although it

7

is unlikely that St Jordan's *sacellum* quite resembled the icon. Yet interestingly (if not entirely reliably) Smith lends it a fenced, ovaloid church-yard which, if based on genuine observation, might just indicate a late British or transitional Anglo-Saxon foundation. Hoefnagle's plan of 1581 also repeats the feature.

Camden's description of 1586 is of the utmost importance, since it locates the chapel *and* its pulpit in the middle of the Green, between a double row of trees. These trees are those shown precisely in an anonymous Bristol plan of the period (see illustration), which indicates the chapel if not the pulpit. This lack of detail may be a deficiency of the primitive conventional symbolism employed by the cartographer - unless the pulpit were part of the fabric of the chapel itself. The type of 'pulpit' on the Green is not recorded, nor the exact relationship of the two constructions. However, the pulpit was probably a preaching cross of the sort that embodied a covered platform or 'pulpit' for the convenience of the preacher. The *Great White Book of Bristol* (Ralph 1979) records the legal consequences of a fray on College Green in 1496, which includes the deposition of a witness, Thomas Godard, a London mercer. Godard expatiates importantly on the uses to which the Green was put, including the preaching of sermons at Easter and the three following days, which were preached 'by the great crosse'. At the same time, the *Compotus Rolls* of 1491-2 refer to Easter sermons preached on the Green by the *fratres praedicatores*, that is to say the Preaching Friars - the Black Friars of the Dominican Order, whose House lay at what is now Quakers Friars in the city. This foundation was the creation of Sir Maurice Gaunt, the elder brother of Sir Henry who founded St Mark's (Gaunt's) Hospital on the north side of the Green, with which the abbey was often in contention. This family connection perhaps confirms that the 'pulpit' or 'great crosse' was a preaching pulpit of the sort favoured by the Dominicans, and that it was probably similar to that found at the Blackfriars in Hereford - the only remaining example of a Friars' preaching cross left in the country (see illustration of the original remains before restoration by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the nineteenth century and compare the typologically related Poyntz memorial preaching cross at Iron Acton).

What St Jordan's chapel contained by way of architectural features, fittings or ornamentation, when it was finally pulled down, is not recorded. Nor is it known exactly when it was so razed. But an arguably suitable time for its demolition would have been following the events of 1703, when Bristol's chronicles record the occurrence of a severe storm of hurricane force, which destroyed some of its buildings and damaged many others (Nicholls and Taylor 1881). It was a widespread tempest,
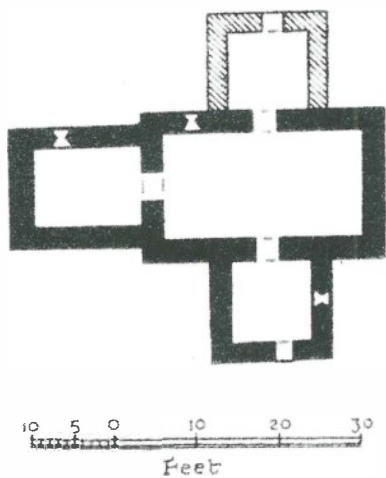
Hereford: Dominican preaching-cross or pulpit of 14th century at Blackfriars
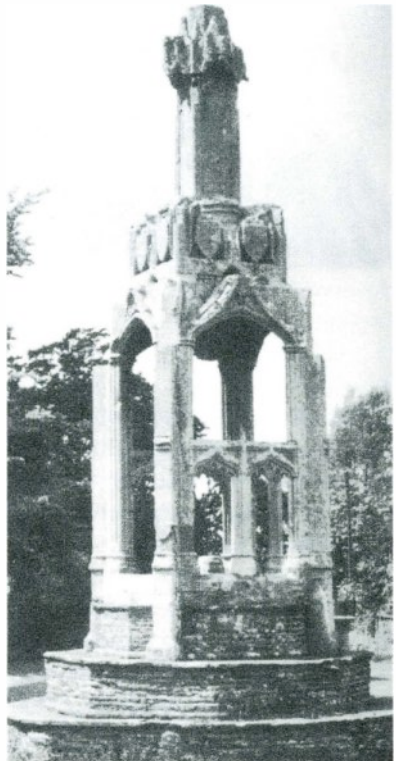
Iron Acton: Poyntz Memorial preaching-cross or pulpit of early 15th century

9

*Bradford-on-Avon:
the Anglo-Saxon chapel of
St Laurence. Foundations
and probably stone-work
up to the string course
of late 7th century*

10

which also severely damaged university and college buildings in Oxford. Amongst the recorded damage in Bristol was the toppling of the double row of ancient trees on College Green noted by Camden. It is known that new limes and elms were planted with a post-and-rail fence in 1709, but the destruction of the old trees, well over two centuries in age, must surely have also damaged, perhaps irremediably, the chapel (now school-house) of St Jordan and the adjacent pulpit. Interestingly, the demolition of the chapel at this time would also have made space available for the re-siting of Bristol's old High Cross which had stood in the centre of the medieval town. After it was dismantled and put into storage, it was set up again in the middle of the Green in 1733. So the demolition of the chapel of St Jordan and the pulpit appears to have occurred between two dates: 1703 (the Great Storm) and 1733 (when the old City Cross was re-erected on the Green). It was in this interim, therefore, that integral portions of the chapel's Anglo-Saxon stonework would have been released for other uses, including arguably the bas-relief of the 'Harrowing of Hell' (perhaps better entitled 'Christ Preaching in Limbo'), a master-piece of ca 1000-1050 AD now preserved in the south transept of our cathedral. Therefore it is conceivable that this imposing late Anglo-Saxon bas-relief - if originally part of the fabric or furnishing of St Jordan's chapel - became available for timely, even ritual, 're-cycling' as infill in 1713, ten years after the Great Storm, when the floor of the Chapter House was raised by about a metre upon its adaptation for use as the Cathedral's new muniment room and library.

The foundations of St Jordan's chapel were tragically obliterated - before any rescue archaeology could be mounted - during the building of the Council House and the landscaping of College Green in the nineteen-fifties. The pattern of the mausoleum may have been that of the Anglo-Saxon chapel of St Laurence at Bradford-on-Avon (see illustration and plan). This Wiltshire shrine suffered a fate during its long history not too unlike that of St Jordan's chapel, but in the end survived. Like its Bristol counterpart, the chapel at Bradford-on-Avon was also commodious enough for its nave, in post-Reformation times (ca 1715), to be converted into a two-storey schoolhouse with the schoolmaster's accommodation above the class-room, while the chancel was adapted as a cottage under separate tenancy. We can conclude from their identical secular roles as schools with paired dwellings, that the two buildings in Bristol and in Wiltshire may well have been of more or less the same dimensions. And this is confirmed also when one considers that the seventeenth-century Bristol cartographer, Millerd, seems to have lent the St Jordan's chapel 'conversion' two chimneys, indicating perhaps dual accommodation, corresponding to the development of St Laurence's chapel with two separate properties incorporated into its fabric.

Both St Jordan's and St Laurence's chapels were arguably conceived as mausoleum chapels in the first place; Bradford-on-Avon's certainly became one, in order to house the relics of Edward the Martyr, king of the English, who died in 979 AD, but he may not have been its first occupant. The Wiltshire chapel has a difficult chronology: William of Malmesbury, in the early twelfth century, reported in his *Gesta Pontificium* that St Aldhelm had built a chapel (presumably this one or raised on its foundations) in this well-defended settlement at some time after 674 AD, when he became Abbot of Malmesbury: not too long after the putative date of St Jordan's death possibly between 645 (if aged seventy) and 655 AD (conceivably). Opinion on the age of St Laurence's chapel is divided: it was H.M. Taylor's considered view (1973) - but his text indicates not a categorical stance - that the whole had probably been conceived in one single period ca 979 AD. On the other hand, Kenneth Conant (1954) was clear that the fabric shows seventh-century stone-work at least below the string course. But, given the earlier date, the original purpose of the Wiltshire chapel is not clear if it, too, had not been conceived as something akin to a mausoleum chapel in the first instance (perhaps for a forgotten early West Saxon Christian saint or princeling). Indeed, Leslie Grinsell (1980), who could not commit himself on the chronology, was not confident of its purpose either, simply concluding that it was in any case too small a structure to have served as a parish church for such an important early medieval defended settlement (now revealed also as a major Roman villa site) as Bradford-on-Avon. What is defensible is the notion that if the foundations and the lower stone-work of St Laurence's binary-celled chapel are more ancient than its elaborate upper work and belong fundamentally to St Aldhelm's era, then its appearance may not have been very different from that of St Jordan's chapel on College Green. Indeed, if 674 AD is accepted as the year of foundation of St Laurence's chapel in Wessex by St Aldhelm, it would coincide nicely with the coronation of king Eanhere of the neighbouring kingdom of the Hwicce, whom Bede calls Christian 'as were [his] people'. This is an indirect tribute, on the part of Bede, to St Jordan himself, for Eanhere's people also included the inhabitants of the Bristol region north of Wansdyke, amongst whom, under the king's pagan forebears, St Jordan had lived, worked and recently died. With Eanhere's coronation and with the consecration soon afterwards of the first bishop of the Hwicce, the ideological climate would have favoured, for the first time, the confident building of specifically Christian monuments in the Hwiccan kingdom, such as Deerhurst St Mary and, conceivably, St Jordan's mausoleum chapel on College Green.

THE ROMAN ORIGINS OF ST JORDAN OF BRISTOL

In the edition of the *Acta Sanctorum* of 1688, under 'Decima Dies Iulii' (the 10th July), amongst several other saints who are especially commemorated, are the Seven Brothers (*Septem Fratres*) of Rome and their mother Felicity (*Felicitas*). They are recorded as having died for their faith in one of the several imperial persecutions of Christians which took place in the second century of our era, from the reign of the emperor Hadrian to that of Marcus Aurelius. The deaths of these saints of the 10th July constitute a multiple martyrdom, which is historically verifiable but which was probably elaborated later according to the typology of the story of the seven heroic Jewish brothers of the Machabees (2 Macc. 6-7). Genuine brothers or not, four of the martyred youths Januarius, Felix, Philippus and Silvanus are buried in different cemeteries or catacombs of Rome. But buried extramurally on the Via Salaria Nova in the 'Coemeterium' or 'Catacumbas Iordanorum' (Cemetery or Catacombs of the Jordani Family), are Saints Alexander, Vitalis and Martialis; whilst their mother Felicity is buried fifty or so metres away in the adjacent *Catacumbas Maximi ad Sanctam Felicitatem*. The fuller, official version of the name of the Catacombs of the Jordani (as I shall henceforward refer to them) includes the dedication '*ad Sanctam Alexandrum*', which was appended early on in the catacombs' history, not least for the benefit of pilgrims, to denote the major saint who was buried there (as also for example the Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus '*ad Sanctam Helenam*' on the Via Labicana). The traditional name of the catacombs could also indicate their location - as in the prototype of all the underground cemeteries of Rome, that of Saint Sebastian '*ad Catacumbas*' (lit. 'at the catacombs') on the Old Appian Way. But where the qualifying phrase was a saint's name, it could also indicate the dedication of a very early basilica or oratory built over the entrance and stairway to the catacombs themselves, for the purposes of contemplation, prayer and the recital of divine office - Christian acts of worship and piety known in the earliest centuries as the *Opus Dei*. Such worship was mostly led by monks of the primitive monasteries of Rome - that is, of those monasteries or nunneries that existed before the time of the great monastic innovator St Benedict of Nursia (480-550 AD), Abbot of Subiaco and Monte Cassino, when the prevailing regime in monasteries was generally known as the 'Rule of the Master'.

The Jordani mentioned in the Roman name of the *Coemeterium Iordanorum* on the Via Salaria Nova were very probably an early Christian family of Roman land-owners, whose family cemetery, since it lay outside the walls of Rome, could legitimately be incorporated in the grounds of their suburban *villa*, either adjacent to the building or

Left: 'Christ Preaching in Limbo' otherwise 'The Harrowing of Hell', a late Anglo-Saxon bas-relief of ca 1000-1050 AD, once arguably associated with St Jordan's Chapel on College Green, now in the south transept of Bristol Cathedral

Bottom left: Catacomb of Pamphilius, Rome. A typical galleria (corridor) of robbed or legally emptied loculi

Bottom right: St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City, Rome. The most elaborate of the crypt catacombs has a stairway that leads down to the atrium or confessio before the bronze doors under the main altar. These open into the 'niche of the pallia' then into a cruciform chapel with a small altar behind which is St Peter's simple mausoleum
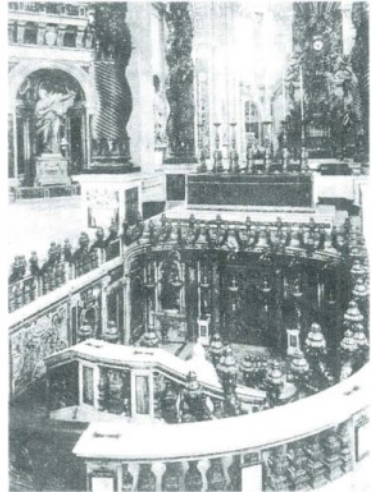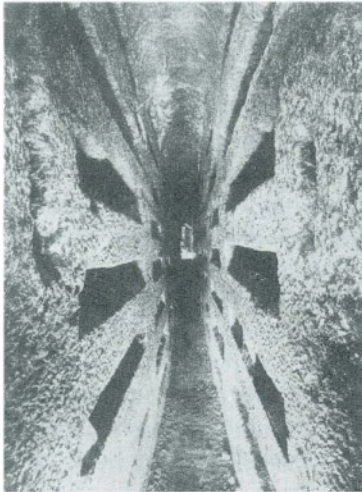
even beneath it, in the basements. Other such names of catacombs that include the personal names of the landowners include the families of the Maximi and the Pontiani, and those of individuals of note such as Praetextatus (aristocratic descendant of pagan priests), Domitilla (of imperial birth) and Priscilla (of Christian patrician birth). Normally, use of the proprietors' family cemetery was eventually opened up to fellow Christians and their baptised kin, who belonged to the owner-family's house-church. It was at house-churches that the Christian religion, suspected of subversion by the Roman State, was largely practised, until after much persecution, the cult was officially recognised or 'tolerated' by the Roman State in 313 AD, in the Edict of Milan. Thereafter purpose-built churches could legitimately be built. However, despite the persecutions, Christian burial grounds seem to have been allowed to exist from the second century onwards, and there are surviving records of law-suits which were won by early Christians in Rome who wished to establish or continue to use such cemeteries. There is impressive evidence also for such early house-churches in the iconography of the mosaics of villas even in our own region of Bristol, at Frampton-on-Severn, Chedworth, Wemberham, Keynsham and Brislington, whilst on the margin of our territory, the recently discovered major villa-site at Bradford-on-Avon appears to have included a purpose-built baptistery. But no purpose-built Roman church is known with any certainty in our region, like those at Silchester, St Albans and Canterbury (St Martin's chapel known to St Augustine). The Edict of Milan, the crucial historic accommodation of the Christian church with the Roman State, known also as 'the peace of the Church', came about under Constantine the Great and his fellow *imperator* Licinius, when 'parish' churches (*tituli*) were officially permitted to be built and congregations permitted to attend them. *Titulus* was the term for a local church in Roman Italy; it referred to the building's legal status (its title-deeds) as a public gathering place of an *ecclesia* or congregation. Our parish churches mostly began in late Anglo-Saxon times as 'proprietorial' foundations, built and financed by the thegn of the manor, in the wake of territorial mother-churches or 'minsters' (e.g. Bedminster and Westminster - the latter the early name of Westbury-on-Trym).

As the cemeteries of the Christian land-owning Roman families outside the walls of Rome filled up, shafts were sunk through the surface *pozzolana* (loose volcanic ash used for cement) into the substratum of harder tufa beneath, where passages (*fossa*) were excavated by skilled 'diggers' (*fossores)* to extend the cemetery's capacity - and thus the catacombs were born. *Catacumbas* was a Latin neologism, deriving from Greek *cata* 'near' + *cumbas* 'the hollows', in reference to the first such

cemetery, already mentioned, of *Saint Sebastian 'ad catacumbas'* of the second century, which lay near the old *pozzolana* quarries behind the family tombs along the Via Appia Antica. The Roman catacombs of the Jordan family had been in use from at least the fourth century AD; their first mention occurs in the Codex Calendar of Philocalus of 354 AD, the most important surviving Roman calendar (Salzman 1991). Once recorded, the name of the Jordan family's catacombs hardly disappears from the early literature: it is found similarly in early pietistic works of note such as the Sacramentary of Pope Leo the Great (440-461), in the influential fifth-century Martyrology of pseudo-Jerome, and it occurs in the eighth century in the official calendar of the city's cemeteries, the *Index Coemeteriorum*, and importantly in the official *Lives of the Popes* (the *Liber Pontificalis* published by the Vatican) in the biography of the eighth-century Pope Hadrian I (772-795 AD). The catacombs of the Jordani therefore have a long pedigree, but importantly, the earliest reference appears in the fourth century - two centuries before the Mission of St Augustine to the English in 597 AD.

But who were the Jordani? The name *Iordanus* itself is, in appearance, rather un-Roman and in fact, from a prosopographical point of view, it is relatively rare and certainly late in its currency. It has an eastern flavour - based of course, as it seems to be, on the name of the river Jordan in Palestine. In origin it may well have been, as happened in the era of the Crusades five hundred years later, a name adopted by a Christian family who had made the difficult pilgrimage, fraught with the dangers of banditry and disease, to the river in the Holy Land in which Christ himself had been baptised by John the Baptist, and had returned home with a supply of its water for use in the baptisms of their children or of their church's wider membership. The English surname Palmer was similarly formed in the Middle Ages as the impressive record of an individual's costly and daring journey to Jerusalem in order to worship at the great shrines there of the Christian church in services on Palm Sunday itself, conducted to commemorate Christ's entry on an ass into the Jewish capital city, and his joyous reception by the people waving palm fronds. It was certainly necessary that pilgrims brought back home some unmistakable token of their journey, such as a palm-branch, in order to qualify, with public assent, for their use of the surname. Similarly formed were the English surnames Pilgrim (also Peagram and Peagrim) and Rome.

Pilgrimage to Rome became commonplace even before the medieval popes had introduced their great Jubilees of the Church every fifty years. For example, by the seventh century, a dedicated hostel had been established near St Peter's on Vatican Hill exclusively for the use of

Anglo-Saxon pilgrims to Rome, the *Schola Saxonum* (Moore 1937). From very early guide-books, the visits of pilgrims are known to have included the catacombs and the early monasteries of the city. For Anglo-Saxons such visits would doubtless have included sites associated with the founding Mission to the English conceived by Pope Gregory the Great and carried out by St Augustine of Canterbury in the late sixth century. It is a reasonable assumption that any Anglo-Saxons of the Bristol region could not have failed to visit existing sites linked to St Jordan.

Naturally, in this review of names denoting pilgrimage, the font-name Jordan must be included. The wealthy twelfth-century Bristolian merchant Harding named his fourth son Jordan, while it was Jordan's eldest brother Robert FitzHarding, later first Lord of Berkeley, who, in 1140 founded the abbey of St Augustine of Canterbury on College Green, hard by the chapel dedicated to St Jordan which has now vanished and is largely forgotten. Further research in prosopographies of Late Antiquity has shown, under the entry 'Jordanes' or 'Jordanus' significantly very few cases; but such instances confirm that the name, although deriving from the river of the Holy Land, was in use in the two geographic halves of the Roman Empire of Late Antiquity: both Western or Roman and Eastern or Byzantine. The most recent prosopography includes the name *Iordanes* in two important contexts. The first is that of the historiography of Late Antiquity: Jordanes, the mid sixth-century author of the *Getica* based on the abridgement of Cassiodorus's *History of the Goths*. This particular Jordanes was certainly not of an old Roman family that might have owned the land of the Catacombs of the Jordani on the Via Salaria outside Rome, but a German and a first-generation Christian, the clever Latin-speaking son and grandson of pagan Ostrogothic nobles (Alanoviiamuth and Paria). Since the foremost of the modern European historians of the catacombs, Ludwig Hertling (1960), dates the Jordani cemetery outside Rome even to the mid-third century (but unusually does not cite his sources), Bristol's St Jordan was not - with reasonable certainty - related to the author of the *Getica*. But this case has to be mentioned, because historians had assumed, before Martindale's prosopographic work of 1992, that this Ostrogothic lawyer was the same person as the following bearer of the name known to history: bishop Jordan of Crotone.

Crotone lay in Bruttium (now Calabria) in the south of Italy, on the Gulf of Taranto. The historical background of this sixth-century bishop is important; he was appointed by the See of Rome to an Italian diocese, i.e. chosen and promoted personally by the Pope - not by his rival the Patriarch of the imperial city of Constantinople. There is a strong likelihood therefore, given the mutual hostility between the churches in

17

the Western and Eastern halves of the Empire at the time, that the bishop of Crotone was an Italian not a Greek. Indeed, in 551 AD, bishop Jordan of Crotone was one of the ten Italian bishops who endorsed the heretofore quite unprecedented and politically explosive *damnatio* and excommunication of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Mennas, and one other eastern bishop, Theodore Askidas of Cappadocia, the protégé of the empress Theodora. This solemn act of religious exclusion, with its eternal consequences, was issued by Pope Vigilius in an heroic episode of his otherwise even tragic papacy. His career as pope began with accusations levelled against him of political opportunism, and finally foundered, anomalously, because of his intellectual integrity - on the rocks of the so-called Three Chapters doctrinal dispute. In this rancorous and extended crisis, Vigilius found himself pitted against the Emperor of the Roman Empire in Constantinople, Justinian, and his consort Theodora.

It was during an earlier stage of this long-lasting politico-theological crisis over the re-emergence of the Monophysite heresy which would irrevocably split Christianity, that in November 545 AD, Pope Vigilius, who had refused the Emperor's demand that he condemn the Three Chapters out of hand, was outrageously arrested in Rome by an officer sent expressly for the purpose from the imperial court at Constantinople. Due to the impending winter months (it was November) and the unpredictable sailing conditions in the Mediterranean at this time (when strictly speaking a *mare clausum* law operated to prevent official voyages), the orders of Justinian were to have Vigilius brought to his capital city on the Bosphorus via the south of Italy and Sicily. Embarcation at the obvious port for Constantinople - Ravenna - would have involved a cold, fatiguing not to say dangerous journey from Rome along the Via Flaminia, through Ostrogothic territory, to the Exarchate of Ravenna and Pentapolis on the Adriatic and an equally long sea passage. Instead, the Pope's party found itself stranded for six months in Catania in Sicily until the weather along the sea-lanes improved, and it is here that Vigilius, an able and indefatigable politician, took the opportunity to prepare a few plans of his own, including an appeal to his fellow-bishops in the Western half of the Empire. Many princes of the Church in Italy and elsewhere travelled down to Catania to support him in his hour of need and several, including Jordan of Crotone, were later to endorse the extraordinary counter-blast of the excommunication of the Patriarch of Constantinople and his colleague.

If, as seems probable - and this is the essence of the case - bishop Jordan of Crotone was a member in the sixth century of the distinguished Jordan family of Rome, with its already ancient Christian roots and
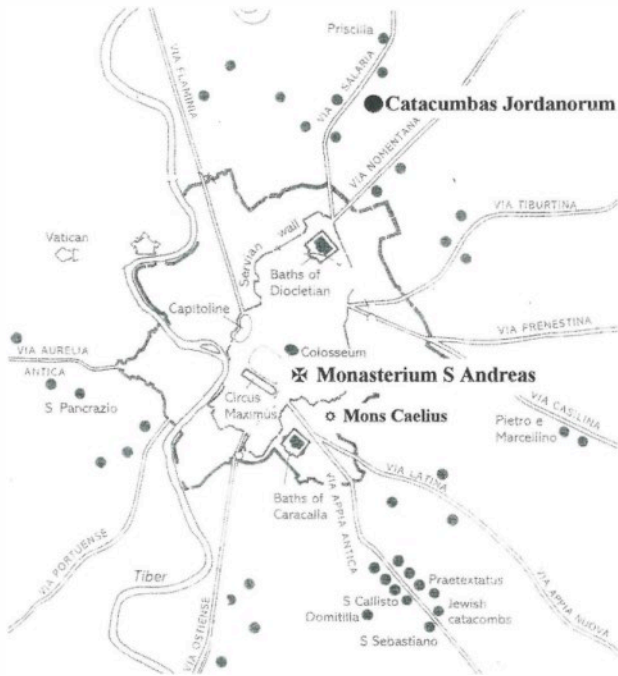
Rome in the sixth century. St Gregory's Monastery of St Andrew and the Catacombs of the Jordani family

Below: the Catacombs of the Jordani family on the Via Salaria Nova

Subject: Christ's multiplication of the loaves. Theme: God's providential care

Mural paintings beneath left arch: suite of religious subjects

traditions, and with its family *villa* the site of a catacomb-cemetery, with basilica or oratory, then his meeting with Pope Vigilius in Catania would not have been the first one. Indeed, bishop Jordan may have been consecrated personally by Pope Vigilius. Their families would have been arguably of distinguished status (*dignitas*) amongst the upper reaches of Roman society. Vigilius, as the son of a Roman consul and the brother of a Roman senator, was certainly counted amongst the aristocratic *clarissimi* ('most outstanding'), while Jordan - if of Rome - was clearly of a family of some wealth and distinction in the Capital, at least of the important decurion (councillor) class into which Christianity had rapidly spread in the third century. From both of these elevated echelons of society, bishops of the post-Constantinian Christian church were most frequently drawn, some of whom would have been *papabiles* (worthy of papal candidature). The importance of the connections of family and vocation in Rome of the fifth-sixth century, as in earlier centuries too, cannot be over-emphasised (Salzman 2002). Whose blood flowed through your veins - and who you knew and with whom you were on equal terms, socially and culturally - counted quite decisively in the progress of a career - not least also in the governing circles of the new religion of Christianity, patronised by imperial families - with few exceptions - since the time of Constantine.

That Pope Vigilius had known the Jordani family personally is demonstrated by the fact that before he became embroiled in the Three Chapters controversy, he had been active in the restoration of the Roman catacombs that had been desecrated by the army of the Ostrogoths, during their siege of Rome from the March of 537 to the March of 538. Indeed, a tablet was put up in the catacombs of the Jordani family, shortly after Vigilius's restorations, to commemorate his work together with that of his fourth century predecessor, Pope Damasus. Inscribed on the plaque is an eleven-line *carmen* (ode). Parts of this stone tablet and its lettering have survived, while the missing lines or words have been supplied by a transcription fortuitously made by an early medieval Frankish pilgrim, in a MS from Verdun in northern France:

Dum peritura Getae posuissent castra sub urbe
    moverunt sanctis bella nefanda prius,
istaque sacrilego verterunt corde sepulchra
    martyribus quondam rite sacrata piis;
quos mostrante deo DAMASUS sibi PAPA probatos
    affixo monuit carmine iure coli.
Sed periit titulus confracto marmore sanctus,
    nec tamen his iterum posse latere fuit;
diruta VIGILIUS nam mox haec PAPA gemescens,

20

hostibus expulsis OMNE NOVAVIT OPUS.
Vitali, Martiali, ALEXANDRO scis martyr.

When the (Ostro-) Goths pitched their cursed camp before the City
    they began a wicked war upon the saints,
and sacrilegiously threw down these tombs
    dedicated from ancient time to the blessed martyrs,
whom Pope DAMASUS in his wisdom had discerned
    and had ordered their veneration in verse.
But although the tablet with its inscription was shattered
    it did not happen that its message was forgotten;
for shortly after, Pope VIGILIUS, deploring the vandalism,
    thrust out the enemy and made all things new again.
To the holy martyrs Vitalis, Martialis and ALEXANDER.

It was only four or five decades (hardly more than a generation) after this tablet was set up in the catacombs of the Jordani, that St Augustine, in 596 AD, was asked by Vigilius's successor Pope Gregory the Great to select a party of forty trained monks from Rome for the mission to convert the English. Amongst the Roman party chosen by St Augustine, we now know, was Bristol's St Jordan, whose mausoleum chapel was to be built some decades later on the sacred ground of College Green. The monks of St Augustine's mission are known to have been Romans recruited from St Gregory's own monastery of St Andrew, in the quarter of the Mons Caelius, the Caelian Hill, in S.E. Rome (see diagram). This was formerly the urban *villa* of St Gregory's ancient senatorial and Christian family of the Anicii *ad clivum Scauri*, adapted and enlarged for the purpose (fragments of its monastic building, known as the 'library of Agapetus', on the present Clivo di Scauro can still be visited). Here St Augustine had risen to hold the second most important position as Prior (*praepositus*) of the monastery, subordinate only to Gregory, who before his elevation to the papal throne, had been abbot of the monastic establishment which he himself, from his family's wealth, had founded and endowed. The young men of the early monasteries of Rome appear to have come from moderately wide social origins; but this apparently egalitarian tendency must not be misread or overestimated in Rome at any stage of its history. Some novices in the monastic system were undoubtedly 'fast-tracked' to high office - and these were invariably from families of historic social standing in the City of Rome who, importantly, had received the best of educations under professional rhetors. Such academic 'high-flyers' were, therefore, often members of the ancient Roman aristocratic clans who had elected to stay on in Rome

rather than migrate to Constantinople in the wake of the emperor Constantine the Great. Constantine had built the new capital of the Roman Empire on the site of the old Greek-speaking town of Byzantium and soon removed thither much of the apparatus of his government. On the other hand, many of the most ancient families of consular rank remained in Rome, some of whom still clung to the remnants of their redundant pagan civilisation, obliging the emperors at Constantinople to create a new aristocracy in order to fill the higher offices of Church and State in the East, unfortunately also creating the conditions for rivalry and eventual schism.

In Rome, as elsewhere in their Empire, divisions of class are therefore discernible and were vitally important to the structure of society and its government, the *polis* and the polity. As has been said, aristocratic amongst ecclesiastics was St Gregory himself, of a senatorial family, as was also (according to Bede) Augustine's colleague Mellitus, the first Bishop of London and third Archbishop of Canterbury. Upper class (*decurio*) was probably St Augustine, of whose family, surprisingly, nothing is known (St Patrick's family was of the same - but residual - social class in post-Roman Britain). Augustine's name is complex: while it was that of the great Roman north-African theologian St Augustine of Hippo of the previous century, given to him at a postulant's ceremony of admission to the conventual life (where name-changing was common: Dominicus, Deusdedit and Donatus were similar), the name also has the aristocratic overtones of Imperial Rome, as based on that of the first Roman Emperor, Augustus. St Augustine's rise without reported difficulty through the ranks of early monasticism is impressive, ascending to the rank of prior in Pope Gregory's own monastery of St Andrew, then to abbot and eventually to archbishop in order to lead the pope's personally sponsored evangelical mission to convert the English. He was also allowed the extraordinary authority to create twenty-four new bishops and dioceses throughout northern and southern England, when the occasion arose.

All this hints strongly at the prominence of Augustine's family in Rome at this time; indeed, St Jerome mentions that members of several old Roman noble families had become monks in a widespread ascetic movement in his period during the late fourth century. And very probably we should include together with St Gregory's and St Augustine's prominent families, that of St Jordan of Bristol if we have correctly illuminated his origins. As St Augustine's pupil - or in modern terms - his student (*discipulus* in Leland - but his source is unknown), Jordan would have been trained for at least three years in St Andrew's monastery in Rome. Thus personally known and trusted by Augustine, Jordan may

well have accompanied his master and Archbishop to the conference with the British Church at 'St Augustine's Oak' in the west of Britain in 603 AD. By now in his twenty-ninth year, he must have been considered of sufficient stature, in terms of his sixth-century Roman family background and education, as well as of his spirituality and experience, in order to be left behind in geographical and political isolation to evangelise our region to the north of Wansdyke. This isolation should not be overlooked; St Augustine's priorities laid down by St Gregory in Rome were to establish London (in the event it turned out, for sound political reasons, to be Canterbury) and also York as the new Christian metropolitan provinces of pagan England. The far west of Britain may well have been the next object of mission and development into a diocese, aims which, on account of the untimely death in Kent of St Augustine's patron, king Aethelbehrt, followed by a widespread, hostile pagan reaction south of the Humber, never materialised in these very early years of Christian England.

Because of what appears to be the weighty responsibilities of mission heaped on St Jordan of Canterbury by St Augustine - preaching, baptising and founding churches - he (St Jordan) arguably had very special gifts. As will be discussed in contradiction of Arthur Sabin's views (1991), St Jordan could not have been one of the uncultivated and relatively illiterate fair-haired Anglians bought as slaves in the markets of Marseille by St Gregory's papal agent, Candidus, with the express purpose of using them as interpreters for his mission. Nor is St Jordan likely to have been drawn from among the casual Frankish interpreters whom St Augustine is known to have recruited *en route* across Francia (old Roman Gaul) on his journey to Kent in 597 AD. Such candidates would have been quite deficient in their cultural and spiritual formation, whether in education, in their grasp of theology, in their monastic training or in mature missionary commitment. Above all, they and more importantly their families, would have been quite unknown on a personal level to St Augustine himself, whom therefore he could not have earnestly recommended to his master and friend in Rome, Pope Gregory, the founder of the English mission. St Gregory was the very person on whom, it is known from their surviving correspondence, St Augustine deeply and touchingly depended for all his larger decisions.

Arguably therefore, on the grounds of St Jordan's very probably distinguished family and social background, his education, his by then proven spirituality, and by virtue of normal practice and precedent in the early Church, a strong case can be made that he was a member of the same Roman family of that name, the Jordani, known earlier, certainly, to Pope Vigilius and acceptable therefore in the closed circle of the

foremost Christian families in sixth-century Rome, to Pope Gregory and to Augustine, prior of St Andrew's monastery. St Jordan's family and social roots lay arguably amongst such Roman families of ancient and select pedigree, from whom the holders of high office in the early Church were so frequently drawn. Of the same family, perhaps two generations earlier, had arguably been bishop Jordan of Crotone, one of the major supporters of Pope Vigilius in his struggles with the emperor Justinian over the damaging Three Chapters controversy.

Postilla

Beyond the historical links which arguably connect St Jordan with the Roman saints Gregory and Augustine, an arcane literary link exists which connects St Augustine, senior colleague of St Jordan of Bristol with St Alexander, the most prominent of the Seven Martyr Brothers of Rome and the major saint of the catacombs of the Jordan family in Rome (the Catacombs of the Jordani *ad sanctum Alexandrum*). In the volume of the *Acta Sanctorum* of the 10th July, which commemorates the martyrdom of the Seven Roman Brothers and their mother Felicity, is also related the following purportedly true story which the late eleventh-century chronicler Goscelin of St Bertin, an early biographer of St Augustine, had been told by a renegade monk (*apostatus*) who had finally returned, a penitent, to his mother church at Canterbury. This is taken from Goscelin's own account in Latin of the *Miracles following the Translation of St Augustine* under May 26th, the official festival of St Augustine. It concerns a miracle performed by St Augustine, dead for nearly five hundred years, after his remains had been ceremoniously 'translated' (i.e. transferred) in 1091 to his final resting place in his enlarged abbey church at Canterbury. The background to the story is the similar transfer of some of the relics of St Alexander of the Seven Brothers, early in the sixth century, from the catacomb of the Jordan family in Rome to a monastery dedicated to him (St Alexander) at Ottobeuren in the south of Germany. The returned renegade of Canterbury related to Goscelin how, with two other monks, he went to seek shelter in some other, distant monastery, where his past was unknown. The chosen new monastery was that of St Alexander at Ottobeuren. It was during a devastating fire at a hostelry during his journey thither that our terrified fugitive monk, fearing for his life, invoked St Augustine of Canterbury, after his translation, to come to his aid. St Augustine thus called up, duly and spectacularly appeared ('per ipsas flammas erumpens') and recognising that the one who had invoked him in the blaze was clergy (*clericus*), immediately rescued him from a perhaps not entirely undeserved fate.

Like other matter reported by Goscelin, who does not often let the truth spoil a good story, the apparition of St Augustine may be apocryphal. But what is interesting is to read this late eleventh-century account by a Canterbury monk from the point of view of form-criticism. This uncovers the impersonal structuring of the story, which seems to disclose an historic link - presumably well known for centuries at Canterbury and arguably reliable - between St Augustine of Canterbury (the major saint of the English mission) and St Alexander of Rome (the eponymous saint of the Jordan family's catacomb in Rome). Aggregate this with the fact that St Jordan was allegedly St Augustine's colleague, chosen especially to accompany him on his mission to the British bishops of the West Country in 603 AD, and there emerges the reasonable assumption that Bristol's St Jordan was a member of the same Roman family of the Jordani on whose land lay the catacomb dedicated to St Alexander.

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