Title: In His Silvis Silere: The Monastic Site of Annegray - Studies in a Columbanian Landscape.

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September 2012

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this thesis which I submit for the award of Ph.D is my own work and that I have no obtained a degree in this university, or elsewhere, on the basis of this work.

__________________________

Emmet Marron
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Abstract

The monastic site of Annegray lies in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains in eastern France. Founded by the Irish saint, Columbanus, at some stage around 591A.D., it was the first of what was to become a group of three monasteries in this small corner of the Vosges, with its sister foundations of Luxeuil and Fontaines lying 15km further to the west. For a site that is so well known from the account of Columbanus’ hagiographer Jonas of Bobbio, relatively little else is known about Annegray, particularly in relation to the earliest phase of the monastery.

This thesis sets out to explore the origins and early development of Annegray. While the departure point is the same as used by many authors, the description in Jonas’ *Vita Columbani*, the work carried out as part of this project has added new data to the field of study. A campaign of fieldwork consisting of geophysical prospection and excavation has taken place over the past three years at Annegray, which offers tantalizing insights to our understanding of the monastery. This is complemented by a landscape treatment of the site, which aims at contextualising the archaeological data, but also at identifying the mechanisms that led to the establishment of a monastic community in what Jonas tells us was a *desertum*. Indeed a key consideration will be how the historical account relates to the archaeological data exposed as part of the investigation. A further consideration is the characterisation of the Vosges monasteries, by later authors, as Irish foundations on the continent and the veracity of such an image.
Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my supervisors Mr Conor Newman and Dr Mark Stansbury for their guidance and encouragement throughout this process and in particular for their unfaltering support for the work at Annegray. I also wish to thank the other staff members in the department of Archaeology for their assistance, especially Joe Fenwick for his time and patience in imparting the dark arts of geophysical prospection. Much of the work at Annegray owes itself to the tireless and professional dedication of Dr Ger Dowling and Dr Roseanne Schot and I would like to thank them for their assistance and good company. Thanks are also due to my fellow postgraduates in the Archaeology department, Ros Ó Maoldúin and Kate Leonard, who gave a lot of time, sweat and advice on the 2012 excavation.

I wish to express my thanks to the staff at NUI, Galway, and in particular the administrative staff at the Moore Institute, Ms. Martha Shaughnessy and Ms. Kate Thornhill and the ever-helpful staff at the James Hardiman Library. I would also like to thank my fellow postgraduates in the Moore Institute and in particular my colleague on the Columbanus’ Life and Legacy Project Dr. Orla Power for her constant advice.

The work at Annegray represents the first archaeological intervention on a French site by Irish researchers, however it would not have been possible without the collaboration of Dr Sebastién Bully and I would like to thank both him and his wife Morana Čaušević Bully for their warm welcome and their untiring assistance. Dr Bully’s team played an integral part in the three years of fieldwork at Annegray and I am forever grateful to Laurent Fiocchi and David Vuillermoz for all the help the so freely gave over this period. I also acknowledge, with thanks, the time and effort given by the students who volunteered at Annegray and whose good nature led to such an amicable atmosphere on site, to Thomas Chenal, Ivan Valent, Alicia Mougin, Adrien Saggi, Cécile Jerome, Mireille Schmitt and Jessy Crochat.

Over the past four years I was fortunate enough to benefit from the knowledge and assistance of a number of scholars from a range of universities and I wish to thank them for their insight and encouragement. A by no means exhaustive list includes Dr Eleonora Destefanis, Dr Christian Sapin, Dr Pascale Chevallier, Dr Alain Dubrecq, Dr Tomàs Ó Carragàin, Dr. Ian Wood and Dr Alexander O’Hara.

Finally I would like to thank my friends and family for their constant, undying support. They contributed in so many ways to the completion of this thesis and I cannot thank them enough. My utmost gratitude must go to my parents, without whom none of this would have been possible. I would also like to thank my brother Peter, who put work aside to help out at Annegray. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my partner Veronica, for standing by me through these past four years, for tolerating my wanderings in France and for always being there to provide me with some much needed pragmatism.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir
Chapter 1

Introduction: “Apud coenubium Lussovium”

Fig. 1.1: Excavation underway at Annegray, August 2012.

Three Months in the Forests of France was the evocative title chosen by the renowned Irish art historian Margaret Stokes for her collection of letters about the remains of Irish saints in France published in 1895. If such a precedent were to be followed by the present writer, this work might be so bold as to presume the title “Four years in forests of the Vosges”. Although the initial aim of this

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1 The title phrase comes from an inscription of the Gallican Lectionary attesting its provenance from Luxeuil, which subsequently became one of the bedrocks of the establishment of the Luxeuil Script as a unique writing hand particular to the Vosges monastery, see e.g. Lowe. E.A. (1972) “The ‘Script of Luxeuil’: A Title Vindicated”
research may have been to investigate all three Columbanian foundations in the Vosges, Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaines, much as Stokes had done all those years before, for various logistical reasons, it was decided at quite an early stage to concentrate on Annegray, the first Columbanian foundation.

It is an incredibly beautiful place, particularly when dressed in its cloak of autumnal colours, as it was at the time of my first visit there. A rural, green-field site, its’ amenability to fresh archaeological research was instantly apparent. The partially reconstructed wall-footings of a medieval church and a scatter of sarcophagi on top of a small hillock are really all that signal the location of the monastery today. To the north is a large area of communally owned pasture and on the other sides, a patchwork of fields of different sizes and shapes variously suitable to the types of geophysical techniques that were used during the first stage of the fieldwork analysis. The hamlet of Annegray itself; for it is no more than that; lies immediately to the south-east of the monastic remains. Adjacent, and partly dug into the side of the hillock is a tiny oratory that has served as the site ‘hut’ over the past three years of fieldwork. Although exploratory excavations were commenced in 2012 on the remains of the church, the most intense fieldwork occurred in the pasture below where, as we shall see, geophysics revealed evidence for quite an amount of activity.

For a site whose existence is mentioned so frequently in texts relating to Columbanus, relatively little was known about his first monastery. Aside from the location of the modern hamlet of Annegray, which corresponds with the Anagrates of Columbanus’ hagiographer Jonas of Bobbio, nothing was known of the exact location of the site, its size, its layout, its nature at the time of the arrival of Columbanus, and so on. It was clear, then, that before any broad synthesis of the three Vosges monasteries could be written, it was first necessary to expand our knowledge of each of them individually, and Annegray being the first monastery, seemed an apt starting point. So it was that following on from this initial visit, numerous others were made, in all weather conditions, at all hours of the day and times of the year, by car, on foot and by bicycle. Each of the roads and laneways, fields and lakes, hilltops and hollows, towns and villages
around the site have been explored over this time, in order to gain an appreciation not just of the site itself, but of the sense of place and of its temporality, in short, all of the things that combine to make up Annegray.

The three campaigns of fieldwork carried out at Annegray in particular, in 2010, 2011 and 2012, have provided ample time to get beyond the superficial familiarity of the brief visitor and to become intimately acquainted with the place; its sights, smells, and sounds, and most importantly for this study, its archaeological remains. This in turn has allowed for an understanding of Annegray that goes beyond the few lines written by Jonas of Bobbio. It is in effect this sense of place, this appreciation for Annegray, that this thesis hopes to convey. Essentially, the aim of the work is to put some meat on the bones of the information provided to us by Jonas, to consider his description of it as a deserted wilderness against the archaeological, historical and topographical evidence, and to try to better understand the mechanisms that led to the establishment of a monastery by an Irish monk in this little corner of the Vosges mountains, and how that monastery would have fitted in to its surrounding landscape, the physical and the man made.

This study of Annegray is the first scientific survey undertaken of the site and represents the first on French soil by a team Irish of researchers. It is to a large part, the product of a fruitful collaboration between The Columbanus’ Life and Legacy Project at NUI Galway and a team led by Dr Sébastien Bully of the CNRS Dijon (Artehis), who had previously carried out excavations at nearby Luxeuil.

The Columbanus’ Life and Legacy Project at NUI Galway, which commenced in 2008, is funded by the Higher Education Authority under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions cycle 4 (PRTLI 4). The project compliments Professor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín’s Foundations of Irish Culture project (PRTLI 3) which looked at, inter alia, Irish manuscripts on the continent. The Columbanus Project set out to contribute three specific items to the oeuvre of scholarship, viz. a newly edited life (in prep), an art historical study of reliquaries of the Early Medieval period, and this archaeological study of the three French foundations.
This latter project was intended to, as it were, put flesh on the bones of a saint whose existence was otherwise restricted to the domain of documentary sources. Stokes in a way attempted to do this in her quite literary account of these Vosges foundations. This project attempted to add more science and new empirical data to this emerging picture. Another ambition of the Columbanus project was to create a forum where could be collectivised the quite considerable but disparate community of scholars of Columbanian studies around the world, but in particular in Europe, under one roof in anticipation of the 2015 commemoration of Columbanus’ death. It was the ambition of the project to bring fresh research to the table, and particularly archaeological research, which had thus far been absent from the narrative.

An ambitious programme such as this requires a considerable amount of preparatory groundwork. Initially this involved the identification of scholars whose research interests matched the aims of the projects, in France, Switzerland and Italy, where the study of the Columbanian tradition is significantly more developed than in Ireland. There followed a lengthy process of introductions and the gaining of confidence, especially necessary in this case considering that we were coming, essentially, from the outside into a research community that had already been collaborating periodically for a considerable amount time. The initial contact was made with members of the Centre d’Études Médiévales in Auxerre, and this connection was built on gradually over the course of the four years of the project, with new opportunities for collaboration exploited as they arose. The successful result of the process was the formation of an International Scientific Committee that acts as the focal point for Columbanian studies and allows for the collaboration between researchers working on the subject in a number of different European countries. To date the Committee consists of scholars from Ireland (Jean-Michel Picard, UCD, Chairperson), the United Kingdom (Dr Ian Wood, Leeds University), France (Dr. Sébastien Bully, CNRS Dijon; Christian Sapin, CNRS Dijon; Michèle Gaillard, Univ. Lille 3; Alain Dubreucq, Univ. Lyon 3; Jacques Prudhon, Amis de St Colomban Luxeuil) and Italy (Eleonora Destefanis and Gisela Cantino-Watagin, Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale; Alessandro Zeroni, Università di Bergamo),
with the collaboration of a number of Swiss researchers (notably Peter Eggenberger, excavator of Romainmôtier and Jacques Bujard, Université de Fribourg). As a result of the committee’s existence a number of round table events have already been held, as well as an international conference centred on the topic of Columbanian monasticism at Luxeuil in November 2011. Further such events are planned for the next three years, leading up to the 1400-year commemorations of Columbanus’ death, starting with an upcoming conference at Bobbio in November 2012. Indeed, conferences have been an integral part of the process in development of the international aspect of the project; the presentation of the work of the Columbanus project at sessions at Leeds (2009), The Irish Conference of Medievalists (2010 and 2011), Luxeuil (2011) and Munster (Alsace) (2012), as well as the regular attendance of conferences in France, has allowed for a platform to air the aims of the project and also to attract any interested scholars to the table.

From an archaeological perspective it is significant that the committee brings together the only researchers currently working on the archaeological remains of Columbanus’ monasteries, allowing for a greater deal of collaboration than previously existed in this field. In addition to the work at Annegray, this has precipitated an additional collaboration between the Columbanus Project and Dr Eleonora Destefanis3, which will see an initial campaign of geophysics carried out at Bobbio in November of 2012, thus further broadening the scope of the project. Funding from the Mellon Foundation in particular allowed for the internationalization of this aspect of the project.

Needless to say, the success of the Columbanus Project, the work at Annegray and by extension the completion of the present work, was dependent on this preparatory work, demanding though it may have been in terms of time and attention. As an Irish researcher coming to a previously unstudied site in a rural corner of eastern France it was essential to have a support structure which encompassed both the local research community and members of the public as it opened doors which would have otherwise remained closed. Special mention

must go to both Sébastien Bully and his team and to the Amis de Saint Colomban, without whose co-operation and willingness to collaborate, it would have been difficult to complete the project in the prescribed time.

In a general sense one could say that the project has effectively mimicked the actions of its subject, requiring the collaboration of archaeologists and historians from Ireland, France, Switzerland and Italy, just as Columbanus was compelled to do with his counterparts from those lands 1400 years previously. The fieldwork was carried out by mixed teams of students from France and Ireland, who, residing in the modern Abbey de St Colomban in Luxeuil, lived and worked side by side, just as the French and Irish followers of Columbanus had done. The text of the thesis has also followed the trajectory of the Saint, with parts of it written in each of those countries through which he passed. Although the relative dearth of information at the outset of the project means that the current work must be considered merely a first step in the deepening of our knowledge of the monastic foundation of Annegray, the links and connections made throughout the course of the project means that there will be much more to add in the future to our knowledge of this fascinating site.

**Sources**

In order to provide as thorough an account as possible of the nature and context of the site, a wide range of sources was drawn upon during this work. Foremost among these are the results of the fieldwork carried out at Annegray (outlined in Chapter 4), which have contributed a whole new set of data to the study of Columbanian monasticism. Two campaigns of geophysics were carried out in 2010 and 2011, followed by test trench excavation in 2011 and open-plan excavation in 2012. As the 2012 excavation is winding up at the time of writing, much of the information and analysis contained in this thesis is based on the results of the previous year’s investigations, however a brief summary of the latest results and their implication for the arguments set out in this thesis will be provided as a coda at the end of Chapter 4.
As is normal in a site study of this nature, the sources used varied in accordance with the particular theme of each section of the work. Thus the landscape survey reported on in Chapter 3 is based primarily on archaeological survey records, in particular the *Carte Archéologique de la Gaul* (Haute-Saône 70)\(^4\), a paper based survey of archaeological finds up to 2002, which the writer up-dated using a range of other sources relating to archaeological work in the area, such as the online archive of the *Institut National de Recherches Archeologiques Préventives* (INRAP), as well as recent excavation summaries published in academic journals relating to the area such as the *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* and the *Revue Archéologique de l'Est* and *Gallia*. The archives of the *Service Régional de l'Archéologie* (SRA) in Besançon were also consulted in order to identify any information relating to sites that may have been surveyed in the past but for various reasons had never been published. A consultation of the cartographic sources relating to the area was also an essential part of this phase of the study, incorporating not only the State ordnance maps, from the Napoleonic Cadastre onwards, but also more specific maps such as Matty de Latour's\(^5\) series of maps depicting the results of exploratory excavations to determine the extent of the region's Roman Road network.

With regard to written sources, the main primary source consulted was the *Vita Columbani* written by Jonas of Bobbio in the decades after Columbanus’ death and which is the traditional source of information on the Saint’s life and career\(^6\). Indeed, not only was the *Vita Columbani* a key primary source for the thesis, but a central concern of the project is also to assess the correlation between the information provided by Jonas in relation to the Vosges foundations, and that provided by recent archaeological work. It is hoped that such an approach will enable future research to discern which aspects of the text are artefacts of hagiographical *topos* and which aspects provide a more accurate account of life.

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in the early Columbanian monasteries. In addition to the *Vita Columbani*, the writings of Columbanus himself, his *epistulae*, *regula* and *penitentia*, provide a further insight to the character of his earliest foundations in the Vosges\(^7\). To these two sources are added the accounts of near contemporaries of the Irish saint, the most important of whom, Gregory of Tours, gives a fascinating picture of Merovingian France on the eve of Columbanus’ arrival and as such offers many insights into the dynamics that framed his settlement in and eventual departure from eastern France.

The relative lack of research on the specific topic of Columbanian monastic archaeology, with the admirable exception of the work of Eleonora Destefanis\(^8\) at Bobbio and Sébastien Bully\(^9\) at Luxeuil, necessitated widening the scope of the research to incorporate recent work carried out on the early monastic settlement on the Continent in general, from both an archaeological and a textual perspective\(^10\). As monasteries did not exist in a vacuum, it was important to consider also the question of early medieval settlement patterns in order to deduce how such an institution might have negotiated its way into the local socio-political landscape\(^11\). Evidence from France, Switzerland, Italy and the British Isles, corresponding with a large part of the old Roman West as well as Columbanus’ native Ireland, was considered.

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\(^11\) See e.g.
Theory and methodology

Landscape archaeology is one of the most heavily theorised domains of archaeological practice, to the extent that it has become something of a sub-discipline. The approach adopted in this thesis attempts to remain true to the most current writing on the subject, which has been overwhelmingly shaped by the introduction of a phenomenological perspective to the analysis of places and the people who created them which is nowadays predicated on interdisciplinarity and indeed transdisciplinarity. This latter is not a goal per se of this thesis even though there exists a veritable ‘cult’ of Columbanus, central to which are Les Amis de Saint Colomban, focused on keeping the heritage of Columbanus alive on the continent. A distinct challenge of this thesis has been that of merging different strands of evidence, historical and archaeological, that are quite disproportionate to one another: there is considerably more work done on the history than on the archaeology. This imbalance corresponds in some ways to that experienced at the outset of the Discovery Programme’s Tara Project, which threatened to undermine the emerging meta-narrative. Tara had become an almost entirely historical construct and the archaeological evidence was always considered through that window12. The same can be said of Columbanus, about whom we possess a wealth of historical documents and an even bigger corpus of commentaries, which contrasts with his corporeal anonymity. Phenomenologically speaking the ‘world’ of Columbanus remains largely unknown to us. In the case of the Tara project, once a balance of sorts was achieved the point of convergence between the two perspectives was found to lie in the places associated with the kingship. To paraphrase Schot et al. ‘it is the monuments, place-names and histories that make up the Columbanian Landscapes because they are correlated expressions of the universal phenomenon of place making’. Columbanus made his home in this part of Eastern France, and applying the perspective of landscape archaeology allows us to begin to reimagine that home. It is a moot point whether this is achievable

now given how little we still know about the archaeology of Annegray and the surrounding area.

On a broader level, this thesis does not set out to defact the interpretation of the evidence through the prism of any particular theoretical lens, even though it might be loosely described as post-processual. In fact, given that it is an examination of the presence, work and achievements of a foreigner in Merovingian France it might be claimed that it is underpinned by a structuralist’s rationale in the sense that, as far as the writer is concerned, the meaning of the evidence is context-informed and context-specific: Columbanus the man, like any foreigner, found himself defracted through the very complex prism of socio-political Merovingian eyes, and indeed vice versa: a stranger in these parts his initial understanding would have been through Irish eyes.

This, of course, introduces the problématique of ethnic identity and material culture which is the subject of Chapter 2. While much of the debate in relation to ethnicity in the early medieval period has revolved around the contentious issue of ethnogenesis, and in particular in relation to the Germanic peoples who established the post-Roman kingdoms, many of the concepts regarding the viability of connecting material culture with ethnic identity that have emerged from this sometimes acrimonious debate were deemed relevant to the discussion below and, as such, have informed the interpretation of the available material relating to these Vosges foundations.

Furthermore, while the period in question encompasses a chronological span traditionally described as “the dark ages”, as the choice of secondary source material and discussion thereof will demonstrate, an approach that characterises the period as one of continuity and progression, as opposed to abandonment and decline, has highly influenced this interpretation of the early seventh century landscape of Annegray.

The fieldwork at Annegray and the study of its landscape setting represent the bedrock of this consideration of the first monastery of Columbanus. The
fieldwork occurred in two stages: an initial investigation by means of geophysical prospection, the results of which were then tested through archaeological excavation. The use of geophysical prospection tools allowed for a broad impression of the underlying archaeological remains in the vicinity of Annegray, with a total of 6 hectares of terrain being surveyed. Two often complimentary geophysical techniques were employed, magnetic gradiometry and electrical resistance. The initial, exploratory survey was carried out using two Bartington Fluxgate gradiometers. These instruments can cover a large amount of ground in a relatively short amount of time, and allow for a quick general impression of the underlying archaeology. This was then followed up with electrical resistance survey (a more time consuming process) on a number of the features highlighted in the initial prospection, as well as in the areas which were unsuited to magnetic gradiometry in the first place.

The geophysical prospection was highly successful, providing a wealth of information about the archaeological remains of Annegray and its environs. One feature in particular, a large previously unknown rectangular enclosure, appeared in data from both of the surveys. It is not, however, of a type that can be securely classified on the basis of inferred morphology alone and therefore it was decided to carry out test excavations in 2011 and 2012. The first season of excavations did not yield up dating evidence for the enclosure itself but uncovered an earlier horizon dating from the late Gallo-Roman Period that provides a general terminus ante quem for the enclosure itself. Of equal importance was the knowledge that was acquired about the soil and drainage conditions: this is an area with a complex pedosphere of alluvial deposits. Full discussion of the 2011 excavation is set out in Chapter 4, to which a coda is appended outlining the main findings from the 2012 season which only finished up in mid-September.

This fieldwork, though broadening our knowledge of the settlement history of Annegray, was naturally confined to the Commune of Annegray itself. In order to gain an understanding of the wider context of the site a general landscape survey was carried out and is discussed in Chapter 3. This study area, centred on
Annegray, was described by a combination of geographical and administrative boundaries (outlined below), with the resulting footprint providing a fairly representative sample of topographical geomorphological conditions in the immediate hinterland of the site. Ideally one would have conducted field walking, geodetic survey and so on, however, a decision was taken early on to direct our resources into survey and excavation at Annegray because, simply stated, this was a one-off opportunity. Survey of the wider landscape comprised, therefore, of a desk study of archaeological material and commentaries of this and neighbouring regions where much more work has been undertaken in recent years.

Considering the range of sources and material needed to construct a narrative of Annegray, one could say that we are dealing with quite a mixed bag of evidence here. However it must be said that in spite of their differing provenances, the evidence is overwhelmingly complimentary and a number of common themes can be found to run throughout the body of the data. Foremost amongst these is the impression that far from settling in a remote wilderness, as Jonas would have had us believe, in establishing his first monastery, Columbanus was in fact astutely and adeptly inserting his community into already existing networks, political, social and religious. Linked to this there is the strong impression of appropriation, both material and social, suggesting that instead of seeing the holy man as a creator of something novel, *ex novo*, we should instead consider him in terms of an able forager, expertly using what he found in place for the benefit of his cause and of his community. These themes will, of course, be discussed at length in the following pages but first it might be useful to remind ourselves of the traditional narrative of events described by Jonas in his *Vita Columbani*.

**Columbanus: A life**

As mentioned above, the main source for the events in the life of Columbanus is the *Vita Columbani*, composed by Jonas of Susa. Born in Frankish controlled Italy, the young Jonas entered the monastery of Bobbio, founded by Columbanus, in
619, just four years after the death of the subject of his most famous text\textsuperscript{13}. While the text of the Vita was not completed until the early years of the 640s (under the Abbotship of Bobolenus), Jonas’ entry into Bobbio in the early years of its existence would have put him into direct contact with contemporaries of the Irish monk, who, along with the considerable library of the monastery itself, would have provided him an ample source for the compilation of his text. While many commentators have questioned the agenda behind much of what is written by Jonas in the Vita (for discussion see below, Ch. 2), the proximity of the text to the lifetime of the subject makes it a valuable source of information for the narrative of Columbanus’ life. In addition to Jonas’ text, we are also fortunate to possess the writings of Columbanus himself; a series of communications written to various popes, to the Council of Mâcon and to his own followers, as well as the Regula and the Penitentia. Although these texts are not necessarily concerned with recounting the life of the author, they can offer us valuable insights into the conditions at his monasteries in Burgundy prior to his expulsion, and provide a useful counterbalance to the text of the Vita.

Of his early life in Ireland, Columbanus himself is quite reticent, and we are dependent on Jonas, whom, it would appear is on more solid ground when dealing with events on the Continent. Nonetheless we can garner a few pieces of information from his treatment of Columbanus’ youth. It would appear, for example, that Columbanus was by birth a native of Leinster, which Jonas names as Lagenorum terram\textsuperscript{14}. We know nothing of his birth, his social status or his background. An excellent student from an early age, Columbanus is compelled to enter into monastic life, according to Jonas, in order to avoid the temptations of the flesh caused by his attractiveness to the young women of his area\textsuperscript{15}. Against the wishes of his mother, he leaves home and takes up his studies with the renowned monk Sinilis, most commonly associated with Sinell son of Mianiach, along with the Vita Columbani Jonas is also known to have penned the much shorter hagiographical text the Vita Johannes, see e.g., Diem, A. (2008) ‘The Rule of and Iro-Egyptian Monk in Gaul: Jonas’ Vita Johannis and the Construction of a Monastic Identity’, in Revue Mabillion, vol. 19 pp 5-50.

\textsuperscript{13}Jonas, Vita Columbani, I.3.
\textsuperscript{14}Jonas, Vita Columbani, I.3.
\textsuperscript{15}Jonas, Vita Columbani, I.3.
abbot of Claen Inis on Lough Erne. Further study is undertaken at Bangor, where he is under the tutelage of another major monastic leader of the time, Congall. It is at Bangor that Columbanus is first inspired to depart from his homeland and undertake *Peregrinatio pro Christo*, a departure into unknown lands in order to deepen one’s faith. Once again Columbanus’ wishes to depart are met with resistance, this time by his abbot, and it is only with heavy heart that he finally acquiesces, insisting that he take a band of brethren with him in order to assure his safety on the journey ahead.

The exact route taken by this group of men is not easily reconstructed, with the use of ‘Britanicos’ in the text leading to uncertainty whether they landed first in Cornwall, before progressing to France, or whether they landed directly in Brittany. Whatever the case, once in Frankish-controlled Gaul he and his followers lose no time in starting to preach to the local population, with the result that they quickly come to the attention of the king, named in the text as Sigebert, King of Burgundy and Austrasia, before whom they are hastily brought. Here we encounter yet another conundrum in the earliest phase of the Columbanian mission, for not only was Sigebert never king of both Burgundy and Austrasia, the placing of Columbanus’ arrival in Gaul during his reign would seem to be contradicted by the account of the saint himself, who, in his letter to the Bishops at Châlon in 603, asserts that he has spent 12 years in their land, placing his arrival at some time between 591 and 592. Sigebert, however, died in 575 leaving as the most likely contender for Columbanus’ earliest patron Sigebert’s son Childebert II, who not only succeeded his father as king of Austrasia, but also his uncle Guntram as king of Burgundy in 593. What is certain from the text, however, is that the result of the meeting was the endowment of land, possibly part of the royal fisc, to Columbanus for the

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20 Jonas also contradicts himself, as he later claims that Columbanus was expelled from Gaul, in 612, 20 years after his arrival in that land, once again suggesting an arrival date of c.591/592. Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.
21 For further discussion on the problems associated with the naming of Sigisbert in the text of the *Vita Colombani*, see Ch 2.
establishment of a monastery\textsuperscript{22}. The sole piece of evidence we possess for the foundation of this first monastery is the account of Jonas, who tells us that:

\textit{Erat enim tunc vasta heremus Vosagus nomine, in qua castrum diritum olim, quem antiquorum traditio Anagrates nuncupabant. Ad quem vir sanctus cum venisset, licet aspera vastitate solitudinis et scopolorum interpositione loca, ibi cum suis resedit, parvo alimentorum solamine contentus, memor illius verbi, non in solo pane hominem vivere, sed verbo vite satiatus, adfluente dape habundare, quam quisquis sumptam esuriem nesciat in evum}\textsuperscript{23}.

Although it is the establishment of Annegray and its development that is of primary concern to this thesis, this was, however, just the first step in Columbanus’ mission in Gaul. While the picture that Jonas paints of its establishment conforms to the \textit{topos} of the ascetic monk, departing into the wilderness to seek solitude, Columbanus’ next move would seem to contradict this. Jonas tells us that Columbanus’ \textit{fama} spread far and wide, and that his initial settlement was thronged with followers, so much so that it required the establishment of a new foundation. Luxovium, modern day Luxeuil-les-Bains, 15km down the valley from Annegray, was not only in a much more accessible place, located as it is in the lower lying lands below the Vosges foothills that surround Annegray, but despite Jonas’ attempt to depict it as a deserted settlement, possessed not only a Roman \textit{castrum}, but was also an important secondary town of the Roman Province of Sequania. The chances that such an important town had been completely abandoned by the time of Columbanus’ arrival are quite slim and have since been proven otherwise (see Chapter 3), and instead it seems that the decision to locate his second foundation in such a place would have had the result of making his community even more accessible to potential followers, thus increasing the population. It in turn was followed by

\textsuperscript{22}The fact that the ensuing establishment was, by Jonas’ account in the Diocese of Besancon, may mean that it was not actually founded until 593, when Burgundy, and the Diocese of Besancon along with it, were added to Childebert’s realm. The location of Annegray, just inside the border of the diocese of Besancon, which was at that time part of the kingdom of Burgundy, may suggest that a foundation date of as late as 593 is possible.

\textsuperscript{23}Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani} 1:6. Ionaec \textit{Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis}, ed. Krusch, B. Hannover, Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani, (1905); “At that time there was a great wilderness called Vosagus, in which there was a \textit{castrum} that had long been in ruins and that an ancient tradition called Anagrates. When the holy man came to that place, he settled there with his followers, despite the harsh desert of solitude and the habitable places interspersed with cliffs. He was content with a meager consolation of food, mindful of the saying that, man does not live by bread alone (Deut 8:3), but is sated by the word of life, overflowing with bountiful food, which, whosoever shall taste, shall never know hunger any more.”
one further, final settlement in the area, at Fontaines, 8km across the forest-covered plateau to the north of Luxeuil.

The roles of the two new settlements may perhaps be discerned from the anecdotes relating to them in the *Vita Columbani*. Luxeuil is the most frequently mentioned of the three foundations in the text, suggesting its role as principal monastery from an early date, a possibility that is supported by the fact that it is to Luxeuil that the king Theuderic comes to meet Columbanus and from there that his men take the saint into custody. The monumental, built-up nature of the town, in contrast to the other foundations is evident from the mentions of it in the text, from which we can tell that it possessed at a minimum, a refectory, a storehouse, a church, and was, according to Jonas, endowed with a *septa secretiora* to separate the community from the lay visitors, for whom a specific area (possibly a *hospitalium*) was reserved. If Luxeuil was intended to provide increased access to the community, it would seem from the text of Jonas, that Fontaines was to provide it with nutrition, for the few times it is mentioned, the story narrated invariably relates to agricultural practices. Interestingly, following the initial mention of its position as the first monastery of the fledgling community, Annegray is not mentioned at any subsequent stage in the text of the *Vita Columbani*, a possible sign of its early subordination to the much more logistically practical and infrastructurally developed Luxeuil. Whether this also implies that Annegray was, as a result, less developed than the foundations that came after it, with the focus shifting down the valley towards Luxeuil, remains to be seen, but it is a question that may in part be clarified by the results of the fieldwork undertaken as part of this project.

Having suspended his *peregrinatio* to build a monastic community that encompassed three foundations in a small area of the Vosges foothills, Columbanus did not follow the example of other founding fathers and retreat
into a life of solitude and prayer. In fact, despite the support offered to him from
the court in the establishment of a community, relations quickly soured between
the polemical saint and his royal patrons. According to the Vita, the source of the
dispute was Columbanus’ refusal to bless the illegitimate sons of Theudereric at
the behest of their great-grandmother Brunhild. With the queen mother stirring
up the court and bishops against the upstart foreigner who slighted her thus,
matters further deteriorated when Theudebert attempted to enter the sacred
space of the monastery reserved for postulants, precipitating a stand-off with
Columbanus the result of which was the Irishman’s arrest, removal from his
monastery and imprisonment in Besançon. Jonas, as will be seen later, is not
neutral in his account of the dispute, and many of the intricacies of the affair are
obscured by the overall propaganda of his text. It is not the intention of the
present account to parse the details of the falling out between Columbanus and
his Merovingian hosts, as it is a matter that has been dealt with adequately
enough elsewhere, however, what is clear is that the affair resulted in the
expulsion of Columbanus and his Irish followers from the Vosges monasteries,
leaving a still sizeable community under the command of his trusted aid Athala.
While Jonas depicts the departure in terms of a tearful farewell\(^29\), the writings of
Columbanus himself suggest that even within the walls of his monastery all was
not well; his letter \textit{ad monachos suos} suggests a conflict amongst those left
behind and compels his monks to follow the command of his appointed
successor\(^30\). If that were to fail, the letter also includes a contingency plan, \textit{viz}
the appointment of a more acceptable abbot, Waldalenus, whom he is confident
would be able to reach a settled solution. In such an eventuality, Athala is
instructed to follow Columbanus. That the side opposed to Columbanus’
preferred successor won out in the end is suggested by the eventual departure of
Athala and appointment of Waldelenus in his stead, an event that may be seen as
the first step in a gradual ‘Frankification’ of the monasteries that is the subject of
discussion in Chapter 2.

\(^{30}\) Columbanus, \textit{Epistulae}, IV.2.
Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaines left behind to their own devices, Columbanus and his band of followers were escorted to the sea at Nantes where there were to deported back to Ireland at Theuderic’s behest. However, with the boat assigned to them unable to leave the port due to unfavourable sailing conditions which are taken as a sign of God’s will for Columbanus to remain in Gaul\textsuperscript{31}, the group then follow a circuitous route that leads them through the lands of his former adversary’s rivals, most notably the king’s cousin, Clothar II king of Neustria. It is in this period that much of the groundwork is laid for the eventual success of the monasteries he was forced to leave, as he is hosted by many of the noble families that would eventually go on to support Luxovian familia (see Chapter 2), while also being entertained by Clothar himself. Although Columbanus refuses the entreaties of the Neustrian king to settle in his kingdom, he does, according to Jonas, predict his eventual victory in the civil war that is brewing between the various Merovingian rulers, a fact that is not forgotten by the future king of all the Merovingian kingdoms\textsuperscript{32}. Eventually his wanderings were to lead him into the kingdom of Theuderic’s brother and rival, Theudebert who, perhaps prompted by his animosity for his sibling, granted Columbanus land on the edge of his kingdom for the establishment of a further monastery at Bricantia, commonly associated with modern day Austrian town of Bregenz on the eastern shore of Lake Constance\textsuperscript{33}. The location for this new monastery is described by Jonas as ‘oppidum olim dirutum, quem Bricantias nuncupabant’\textsuperscript{34}, a phrase which recalls the portrayal of Anagrates earlier in the vita, and while we must consider the reality of this claim of abandonment\textsuperscript{35} in light of the evidence presented below for Annegray, the account would seem to chime with the overall theme of appropriation of extant structures by Columbanus for the establishment of his monastic foundations. Although the stated reason for the settlement at Bregenz was the evangelisation of the local Swabian population, the project, according to Jonas’ account, is somewhat of a failure, and even those who accepted the word

\textsuperscript{31} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.47.
\textsuperscript{32} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.61.
\textsuperscript{33} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.51.
\textsuperscript{34} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.51.
\textsuperscript{35} Indeed he later refers to the site as \textit{Brigantiem urbem}, (Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.54.) suggesting that there was more to this ‘ruined fort’ than first meets the eye, just as will be shown to be the case with the ‘ruined fort’ of Luxeuil.
of God that he preached to them continued to live in ‘heathenish unbelief’\textsuperscript{36}. Partly because of this lack of progress, but also by the intensifying hostilities between his new patron Theudebert and his old enemy Theuderic, Columbanus is forced once again to leave behind a foundation and recommence his \textit{peregrinatio}\textsuperscript{37}.

With the situation in Francia complicated by internecine wars, the remnants of the group that left Luxeuil was forced to make its way southwards across the Alps into the Lombard kingdom of Agilulf, where, in spite of the Arian faith of his new sovereign, Columbanus once more managed to win favour and assistance in the foundation of a new abbey\textsuperscript{38}. The foundation of this latest abbey too fits into the established pattern of building anew on the ruins of former structures. The site, Bobbio, was located on fiscal land in the Appenines, and not only did it consist of an extant settlement, but it even possessed a basilica, dedicated to St. Peter\textsuperscript{39}. Bobbio, in the fullness of time, would go on to become one of the most important and influential monasteries in northern Italy in the early middle ages, even receiving a Papal exemption which allowed it free reign over its own possessions, independently of the local bishop. It was also to be the alma mater of Jonas, Columbanus’ hagiographer, who wrote his vita at the behest of Columbanus’ successors.

Bobbio was also the final destination for its founder. Having criss-crossed large parts of west-central Europe in his \textit{peregrinatio}, courted both the support and enmity of kings, popes and bishops, founded numerous monasteries and enticed flocks of followers into his community, Columbanus, the \textit{villis Columba} in his own words, finally ended his journey high in the Apennines at the monastery of Bobbio, where he died on the 23 November 615\textsuperscript{40}.

\textsuperscript{36} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.53.
\textsuperscript{37} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.59.
\textsuperscript{38} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.59.
\textsuperscript{39} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.60.
\textsuperscript{40} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.61.
Between them Luxeuil and Bobbio constituted two of the most important and influential monasteries of seventh-century Western Europe. Both boasted the support and patronage of their rulers, were endowed with extensive landholdings and subordinate foundations, and were the centres of impressive manuscript production. The importance of these two houses is evident today in the large towns that built up around them and in the impressive architectural remains, which attest to the centuries of privileged position that they enjoyed. In contrast, Annegray, the foundation that initiated all of this, which provided Columbanus with a foothold in a new and foreign land, is largely still only known from the few lines written by Jonas. Let us now, having considered its position in the biography of its founder, turn to consider in more depth the story of Annegray itself.
Chapter 2.

Annegray: An Irish Monastery on the Continent?

In the previous chapter the narrative of Columbanus’ life was laid out: his birth and early life in Ireland, his arrival in Gaul and establishment of a group of monastic settlements in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains, and finally his wandering and final years at Bobbio in the Apennines. Subsequent chapters will explore the archaeological evidence for the earliest of the three Gaulish settlements, Annegray. Before moving on to consider this evidence, however, we must first deal with one of the questions that previous scholars have often seen as central to its interpretation, namely its ‘Irishness,’ which will be the subject of this chapter.

Is it correct to approach the archaeology of the site in the traditional paradigm of “Irish monasteries on the continent”, and as such to search for a site with ‘typical’ Irish aspects on the basis of the Irish formation of its founder, or rather are we dealing with a much more complex picture, in which the vicissitudes of the local political, religious and social structures played an equally, if not more important role? This chapter will examine the textual and manuscript evidence relating to the earliest phase of these establishments in order to deduce whether there really were any obviously discernable “Irish” characteristics which distinguished them, and which in turn would lead us to search for similar distinguishing characteristics in the archaeological remains of the sites themselves. Having looked at the political and cultural ambit evident in the textual record, the final section will explore the feasibility of applying such ethnic cultural labels to archaeological sites of this type. The theme of this chapter is relevant to the subsequent study of the archaeology of Annegray since much of the previous work related to Columbanus has tended towards an interpretive framework which brought his Irish background to the fore in the study of his legacy in the Frankish Kingdoms. Indeed, as recently as 2008 Richter adopted such an
approach in his treatment of the Columbanian legacy at Bobbio; while bemoaning the lack of archaeological work at the monastery he states that ‘a feasible and perhaps more rewarding comparison would be with early Irish monasteries even though no early medieval drawings are available for them comparable to the plan of St. Gallen’ and elsewhere that ‘potential comparative material is available from Ireland’. We must therefore consider whether such an approach is applicable to the data presented hereafter.

The question of ethnicity and ethnic markers in late antiquity and the early medieval period is a problematic and highly contentious one. While most accept the general lines along which ethnicity was conceived, a sense of common ancestry or origin, of common culture, language, a common identity in the face of a perceived other, there is still a large amount of debate over the subtleties of these boundaries. Some would point to the unreliability of the source material in our conception of ethnic groupings, written as they so often were from the point of view of a Romanized ‘self’ describing a non-Roman ‘other’, with the resultant effect that many otherwise distinct groupings were often conflated together in a hodgepodge stereotype that spoke more to the self image of the writer than the nature of his subject. Others would question the distance between the markers which we use to interpret ethnic difference and the markers which were actually used by the ethnic groupings themselves, not to mention the fluidity with which those markers were stressed or repressed according to the presence or absence of other ethnicities. Furthermore, in the

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3 Thus the problem of assigning ethnic terms found in source material to cultural material in the archaeological record. Essentially the question is whether these terms can be taken to represent the “actual ethnographic situation”, the genuine self image of ethnic groups recorded accurately by roman writers? Or are they just another exercise in the categorisation of the seemingly innumerable barbarian masses? See e.g. Kulikowski, M (2007) *Rome’s Gothic Wars*. Cambridge. p 58; Halsall, G. (2007) *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*. Cambridge. p.50; see also Wells, P. (2008) *Barbarians to Angels: The Dark Age Reconsidered*, New York. pp. 28ff.
4 In relation to Columbanus and his Irish followers settling in Gaul perhaps we should consider the ’context specific' nature of ethnic culture as espoused by Barth: “The overt cultural forms which can be itemized as traits exhibit the effects of ecology. By this I do not mean to refer to the fact that they reflect a history of adaptation to environment; in a more immediate way they also
context of this chapter, it is also questionable whether aspects of something like monasticism can be ascribed an ethnic character such as “Irish” or “Frankish”, given that they were to a large extent the product of more universal doctrinal discourses as opposed to any inherent ethnic identity of the individual practitioners.

In the case of Columbanus, the problem alluded to above of reliability of the author in describing the ethnic identity of the observed is not a problem. The writings of Columbanus himself provide us with a clear picture of his self-image and it is clear from them that he strongly identified himself as an Irish monk and an outsider. In his letter to Pope Boniface, for example, he declares that ‘all we Irish, inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Ghost’. Elsewhere, when writing to Gregory the Great, he stresses the difference in the position of his countrymen to that of his adoptive land, Gaul, in matters of Computus. He also asks the Bishops of Gaul that he and his fellow countrymen, whose fides and canones ‘nos moverunt de patria’, be accommodated in their kingdom without having to adapt to what he sees as erroneous practices (once again the calculation of the Easter calendar). Jonas, in his *Vita Columbani*, also alludes to this Irish heritage of his subject in the opening sections, in which he paints him as essentially the archetype of the wandering Irish pilgrim, who carried a pure form of Christianity, unpolluted by the ravages of the Barbarian hordes, back to the continent from whence it had come:

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reflect the external circumstances to which actors must accommodate themselves. The same group of people, with unchanged values and ideas, would surely pursue different patterns of life and institutionalize different forms of behavior when faced with the different opportunities offered in different environments?; Barth, F. (1969) *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of culture difference*. Oslo. p.12. A further question is how markers were often appropriated by differing ethnicities but used in a subtly different manner and how penetrable these subtle differences are for the modern researcher, see e.g. Effros, B. (2006) ‘Grave Goods and the Ritual Expression of Identity’, in Noble, F.X. (e.d.) *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, Oxford. pp.189-232; Brather, S. (2002) ‘Ethnic Identities as Constructions of Archaeology’ in Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*, pp. 149–76


In spite of the apparent agenda behind much of Jonas’ writings, it was this narrative which formed the backbone of our modern image of Columbanus and his legacy. Thus for much of the twentieth century scholars argued that the development of a new, “Iro-Frankish” model of monastic life in his Vosges monasteries, more vigorous and ascetic in its practice, breathed life into the nascent monastic milieu of the Frankish kingdoms, providing a practicable framework for the disparate trends that existed until then in post-Roman Gaul.

The monasteries that he founded were seen as bastions of Irish culture on the continent, imbued with Irish characteristics by their founder, qualities which were passed on to the rash of daughter houses that sprung up following his departure from France which carried on his traditions. In his appraisal of the development of monastic practices in the Diocese of Besançon, Moyse argues that ‘l’objectif de ces Irlandais était fort différent de celui des moines du Jura... : il ne s’agissait plus de se retirer du monde, mais, au contraire, de transformer ce monde, de l’évangéliser’.

He also attributes the confrontation between Columbanus and the diocesan leaders as stemming directly from the ‘caractère original du monachisme irlandais’. Following Moyse, other continental scholars were equally keen to focus on the particularly ‘Irish’ character of the innovative

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7 Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I.11. ‘Thus they left the British coast and traveled to Gaul, where at that time the power of religion had almost been wiped out, either by the number of external enemies or the negligence of the bishops. The Christian faith scarcely remained, for the healing of penitence and the love of mortification were rarely found and in few places. The venerable man acted, so that in whatever place he traveled, he announced the word of the Gospel’.

8 As Dierkens, (1989 372) puts it, the traditionally accepted vision is that ‘Lors de son arrivée en Gaul à la fin du VIe siècle, Colomban aurait insufflée une vigueur nouvelle à la vie religieuse régulière, tant par ses fondations monastiques directes... que par les fondations suscitées par son carisme ou sous son influence’. ‘Prolégomènes à une histoire des relations culturelles entre les Îles Britanniques et le Continent pendant le Haut Moyen Âge. La diffusion du monachisme dit colombanien ou iro-franc dans quelques monastères de la région parisienne au VIIe siècle et la politique religieuse de la reine Bathilde’, in Hartmut Atsma (éd.), *La Neustrie. Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850. Colloque historique international. Sigmaringen*, t. II, p. 371-394.


11 Ibid. p.67
form of monasticism as espoused by Columbanus. According to Fredrick Prinz what was in question here was ‘a qualitative break in monastic development that is connected causally with Irish monasticism’. He even goes further to state that ‘the organizational structure of Irish monasticism had also contributed to the coming of the medieval type of aristocratic family’\(^\text{12}\). Writing at the same time, Pierre Riché supports Jonas’ dark ages depiction of the situation of the church in Gaul upon Columbanus’ arrival and argues that he was so successful in his evangelical mission that he brought about a situation in which ‘there were thus two Churches in seventh-century Gaul—the national Church and the Insular Church—and the latter began to grow in the monastic foundations patronized by the lay aristocracy’\(^\text{13}\).

To a large extent this vision of a Insular church drawn on by continental scholars was informed by the ‘Celtic Church’ school of thought, concerned as it was with stressing the differences of church organization on the island of Ireland in the Early Christian period\(^\text{14}\). The common consensus among researchers of the early Christian church in Ireland saw a gradual shift from an Episcopal form of organization as left in place by St Patrick\(^\text{15}\) towards an organization built around the monastic \textit{paruchia} in which the abbot of the chief monastery was the head of the church in a particular area\(^\text{16}\). The conflict between Columbanus and the local bishopric could be explained away by the fact that, as proponents of the Celtic Church saw it, the Saint’s background in a context in which Abbots enjoyed independence from bishops would lead him to be naturally wary of continental


\(^{15}\)O’Corrain (1981). This model even survived criticism of the Patrick model of conversion; Doherty (1991) e.g. states categorically that ‘in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century the first dioceses (with their concern for pastoral care) were established’. He conjectures that the bishops of these dioceses were aristocratic British and Gaulish clergy of the \textit{domnach} churches, whose putative hostility to the monastic sympathies of Patrick could account for the rapid spread of monasticism, as a reaction to it, during the course of the 6\textsuperscript{th} c.

Annegray: An Irish Monastery on the Continent?

Bishops and their desire for control over his monasteries\textsuperscript{17}. The same goes for the assertion that the monasteries founded by Columbanus and their eventual offshoots, were bound together in bond of union similar to the ‘parruchia’ so beloved of Hughesian scholarship\textsuperscript{18}. However in recent years there have been increasingly louder calls to reconsider the traditional perception of a progression from one wholly exclusive system of church organization to another. Richard Sharpe and subsequently Colman Etchingham have both attempted to put forward an alternative model that stresses the diversity of organizational models in operation in early Christian Ireland. Etchingham’s work, for example, based on reinterpretation of the historical texts such as the \textit{Collectio Cannonum Hibernensis}, argues in favour of a plurality of organizational structures; episcopal, monastic and coarbal systems of governance co-existing throughout the country\textsuperscript{19}. Indeed the \textit{paruchia} model which for so long was the dominant means of understanding the early Irish church, has recently come under further attack from Charles-Edwards who has questioned how a system which is to a large extent based on an observation made by Bede on the organization of Iona could be taken and applied so freely to the whole of Ireland\textsuperscript{20}.

That the monastic rule set down by Columbanus was revolutionary in its approach and gained widespread appeal is not at question here. What is, however, is the assumption that simply because its architect was of Irish origin it should be seen as a uniquely Irish concept, and that those monasteries who followed its praxis were to be considered, by extension, Irish monasteries. A clear example of this conflation of ethnic identity and monastic practices can be seen in one of the main pieces of supporting evidence drawn upon by proponents of the ‘Irish’ nature of the monasteries in the Vosges: the so called Agrestius affair. In the second book of the \textit{Vita Columbani}, Jonas acknowledges criticisms of the Columbanian foundations by an erstwhile brother monk by the


\textsuperscript{19} Etchingham, C. op. cit.

name of Agrestius. Having departed Luxeuil to undertake evangelical work amongst the Bavarians, Agrestius enters the Nestorian stronghold of Aquilea and, based on their interpretation of the Three Chapters debate, becomes a harsh critic of his alma mater. In addition to criticising them for accepting the edicts of the Council of Chalcedon, which outlawed the Three Chapters, he also calls into question a number of the practices common in the monasteries using the Columbanian Rule. He cites specifically the tonsure used, the way in which the mass is conducted and the way in which they bless themselves. Traditionally these words of Agrestius have been taken to mean that the way in which these practices differed from the norm was due to the Irish origins of the monastery, that they were divergent from the practices of other monasteries in the Frankish kingdom due to the fact that they had been instigated by an Irish monk and continued faithfully by his successors. However at no stage during the polemic launched by Agrestius is an ethnic identifier mentioned, and to subsequently apply one is to assume that Columbanus’ ethnicity, and not his understanding of exegesis or Christian doctrine, was the fundamental factor in the development of his regula.

Essentially it is this conflation of ethnic identity, monastic practices and material culture that is at the heart of the discussion in this chapter. Beyond Columbanus’ own self-identification as an Irish monk, is there anything from the evidence relating to the earliest phases of the monasteries that he founded that show that his own ethnic background was a determining factor in their organization and outlook? Indeed, is it reasonable to expect this identity would have manifested itself in the footprint of monastery itself? This chapter will consider the viability of viewing Annegray and the foundations that came after it as possessing intrinsically Irish characteristics, of being Irish monasteries on the continent. A broad range of evidence, textual, hagiographical, palaeographical and

22 Cumque illi urgurent, tandem criminis causam depromit, se suae regulae habere cocleam, quam lamberent, crebo cruces signo signari et ingressum cuiuslibet domus intra coenubium tam introiens quam egressi benedictionem postulare.
23 Dunne, “Columbanus and Charisma”, p. 3, for example, states explicitly that 'Agrestius attacked the Irish style of signings and crossing along with some aspects of Columbanian intercessory practice. However, it is likely that the real issue at stake were the Irish tonsure and, most importantly, the method of calculating Easter';
archaeological will be considered in order to deduce whether there was genuinely something ‘unique’ about the monasteries founded by Columbanus that owed its uniqueness to his Irish origin, or whether they would be better viewed in the broader terms of the particular context in which they were founded.

Setting the Context

In order to understand the complexities of Columbanus’ impact on the continent and how his monasteries compare to those that existed upon his arrival it is important to first consider the monastic context in Gaul prior to his arrival. We shall also explore the connections between the monasteries and contemporary power structures to see if these can give us an insight into the cultural and political outlook of the community in its earliest phase, and by extension whether this played as important a role in defining the character of the monastery as did the ethnic identity of its founder.

Far from being ‘la Gaule Barbare’, in desperate need of re-Christianisation, as implied by the traditional narrative, the church in the sixth-century Frankish kingdoms was flourishing. The Gallic bishoprics were gradually establishing themselves as the key players in many of the major cities of the new kingdoms. Their position in the higher echelons of society by the mid-sixth century is perhaps best epitomised in the person of Gregory of Tours. The son of a Roman Senator, he chose to make his way up through the ranks of the local church hierarchy, rather than within the senate, the traditional ambit of Gallo-Roman politics. With the Roman Senate effectively rendered defunct by the devastating Gothic Wars in Italy, an alternative organization for the cursus honorus was required by the old Gallo-Roman senator class, a function which the church duly provided. The case of Gregory does not represent the start of this process, it is

24 The last recorded mention dating to the Senate as a functioning body dates to 580 when it sent a plea to Constantinople for aid against the invading Lombards, but it would appear that by this stage it had all but disappeared as an institution, Brown (1984, 21).
25 The extent to which this was the case can also be seen in the senatorial family of Gregory, who could boast a Great Grandfather, Grand Uncle, and Uncle as the bishops of Langres, Lyon and
merely indicative of a shift that had been underway from the fourth century onwards, with increasing numbers of young nobles entering ecclesiastical life as seen fit by their social status, with the examples of Sulpicius Severus and St. Martin providing appropriate role models. Indeed, even prior to Gregory, the growing importance of, not only the church, but the position of the bishops in particular, can be seen in the political intrigues of Clovis I, who in 511 called a church council in Orleans, at which he attempted to stamp his mark on the organization of the church hierarchy. The council effectively gave him the power to appoint bishops, thus allowing him extend his ever centralising power over the nobility in both the secular and religious spheres, placing 'his men' in the most prestigious Episcopal seats, thus at once ensuring his control over the ecclesiastical organization and using the bountiful position of Episcopal power as a reward for his most loyal henchmen.

While it would not be until the kingdom’s reunification under Clothar II in the early seventh century that the church would become all-pervasive in Frankish society, the distinctly noble flavour of the higher echelons of the Gallic church meant that it held a considerable amount of sway in secular society. The role of the church in urban society is most evident today from the remains of the extensive ecclesiastical complexes constructed in the heart of cities such as Lyon, Geneva and Arles from the fourth century onwards. Closer to Luxeuil, at Besançon, there is evidence of an episcopal presence from the mid fourth century respectively; Goffart, W. (1988), The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550 – 800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon. Princeton. p.112.; see also Halsall, G. (2007) Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568. Cambridge. p.353.


27 Ibid. p. 148. On this see also Hen on this: Hen. Y. (2007) Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West. London. p.122-123. Here he suggests that this phenomenon really becomes obvious in the 7th c under Chlothar, but is already evident in the attempts by earlier rulers to 'place their men in the positions of power in the church'.

28 Ibid.


century when a Bishop Pancharius is attested in the attendance notes of the council of Cologne\textsuperscript{32}. Here also a shaping of the religious space of the city is seen in the construction of an ecclesiastical complex, comprising a basilica and various satellite churches dotted throughout the old Roman urbs\textsuperscript{33}. As in other parts of the post-Roman west, the building of churches had become the means by which social prestige was sought, meaning that the bishops of these major urban centres were the overseers of an ever expanding and increasingly grandiose property portfolio\textsuperscript{34}.

However it would be wrong to view the Gallic Church as confined to the heavily Romanised urban centres. As mentioned previously, the model set by the likes of St. Martin of Tours encouraged many young members of the nobility to renounce their privileged lifestyle and to enter monastic life. This phenomenon manifested itself in various ways, from monasteries on the fringes of large cities\textsuperscript{35}, or for those nobles whose families possessed large estates, on the fringes of these familial lands, to foundations whose locations suggest an attempt to create a greater break with urban society by seeking out more remote or hard to reach locations, the prime example of which being the island monastery of Lérins\textsuperscript{36}.

The* Vita Patram Jurensism*, which describes the origins of the foundation of Condat, provides us with ample evidence relating to the organization of one of the main precursors to Columbanus’ monasteries\textsuperscript{37}. Moreover, Gregory of Tours, in his writings, makes constant references to the spread of this phenomenon, not only in the Auvergne region, with which he is most familiar, but throughout central and Eastern France, citing numerous individuals who had left the urban milieu to take up eremitic lifestyles founding *monasteria, hospitalia* and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Conc. Gall, I, p.26-27.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} St Martin’s own foundation of Marmoutier being a prime example: *Vita Sancti Martini*, X. 4,6; Gillion, P. (1997) *‘Sites et Implantations Monastiques en Gaule aux IVe-VIe Siècles*’ in *Abbaye et prieurés de Picardie et d’ailleurs*. Amiens. p. 19-59 (Histoire médiévale et archéologie ; 8).
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Gillion, P. ‘Sites et Implantations...’ pp. 33-37.
\end{itemize}
xenodochia\textsuperscript{38}. Sidonius Apollinaris, writing earlier in the fifth century, also attests to a vigorous network of monasteries in south-eastern Gaul, which he argues were heavily under the influence of the Leranian school, stretching from the French Rivera along the Rhone valley as far north as Soissons\textsuperscript{39}. In addition to purely monastic settlements, there is a growing body of archaeological data suggesting that the process of Christianisation of the rural landscape was underway in earnest from at least the fourth century, through the construction of a network of rural churches to serve the local communities\textsuperscript{40}, or funerary churches which seem to have served the needs of a smaller community, such as a the families who patronised their construction.

The attitudes of the various bishops to this newly developing phenomenon was diverse and to a large extent reflected the concerns of their increasing ambits of power\textsuperscript{41}. While on the one hand there is a suggestion that in many cases bishops were content to turn a blind eye to the monastic foundations sprouting up in the hinterlands of their urban centres, or even to actively encourage them as they were viewed as an important tool in the Christianisation of the countryside\textsuperscript{42}, there are also indications that from an early stage a certain friction existed between the centralising interests of the Episcopal sees and the independent wishes of the newly established monastic foundations, a fact that can be seen most clearly in the edicts of the Church Councils. Perhaps not surprisingly the island monastery of Lérins, one of the most influential of the pre-Columbian


\textsuperscript{40}Codou, Y. Colin, M.G. Le Nézet-Céléstin, M, et. al.(2007). ‘La christianisation des campagnes (IVe-VIIIe s.). in Gallia. Tome 64. pp. 57-83.The installation of many of these churches in still functioning villae suggest a certain amount of personal impetus, however bishoprics……..


\textsuperscript{42}Ibid, p433. Delaplace argues that ‘L’érémétisme fut donc un élément déterminant de la christianisation contrôlé d’ailleurs par l’épiscopat gaulois qui reussit à l’instar de Grégoire de Tours, à établir un compromis entre la nécessité de regulation de l’érémitisme et l’utile exaltation de ces modèles d’ascèse’.
Frankish monasteries, was to the forefront in the contention of power between bishops and monasteries. As early as 455 at the Council of Arles, it was granted a privilege that constrained the authority of the local bishop to a solely sacramental one; the confirmation of clerics, as opposed to any authority over the property or organization of the monastery. Such was the fame and prestige of Lérins, that nearly 60 years later, in asserting their rights to independence at the council of Carthage in 525, a group of North African monks, represented by a certain Abbot Peter, cite the example of Lérins to claim precedence in this matter. This is an important point in the consideration of the prelude to Columbanus’ arrival in Francia and his interaction with the local bishopric, because it would appear that he was not the first to take an independentist stance with regard to the control of his monastery. As Magnou-Nortier, in her thorough outline of the various currents of ecclesiastical thought in sixth-century Gaul states: ‘l’exemption, telle qu’on la rencontrera chez les Colombaniens du VIIe siècle, est-elle déjà formulée en termes explicites et pratiquée à Lérins et en Afrique au début du VIe siècle’.

Perhaps an even more striking example of how Columbanus’ position in relation to the independence of his monasteries was more in tune with previous practices in the Frankish kingdoms comes from the activity of his greatest adversary, Queen Brunhild. In his *Vita Columbani*, Jonas is at pains to present the king’s grandmother as the bête noir of the Burgundian kingdom, someone who conducted a vicious campaign against Luxeuil and its abbot that brought about his expulsion from the monasteries he had founded (along with his Irish followers). However as Ian Wood has pointed out, her correspondences with Pope Gregory the Great show another side of the infamous queen, particularly in relation to the monastic foundations under her own patronage. Through her contact with Gregory, she obtained papal privilege for Autun as well as a number of other foundations towards which she was favourable. As Wood has noted, this

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44 ibid. p143.
action ‘protected the possessions of the three foundations; placed the appointment of abbot or abbess in the hands of the king, who was to act in concert with the community on a question; and forbade payment to a king or bishop for any services’\(^46\). These were greater privileges than anything we have evidence for existing in Luxeuil prior to Clothar II’s intervention (by which time Columbanus was already at Bobbio) and demonstrate once again that his wishes for autonomy were by no means a unique product of any Irish formation, but rather an interest shared by non-Irish contemporaries in the Frankish monastic community and their secular patrons.

When considering the early history of the monastic foundations of Columbanus in the Vosges, in fact, perhaps one of the most striking factors is the level of assimilation into local society and politics that is evident from the sources. It should not come as such a surprise that Columbanus, in relation to his stance with the local bishopric on the independence of his monasteries, was acting in a manner similar to contemporary monastic leaders in the lands in which he settled, for the evidence would seem to suggest that despite his position as an outsider, he integrated himself into local society and politics both quickly and adeptly. As has been shown in the previous chapter, Columbanus established his first monastery not as a lone ascetic retreating into the wilderness, but with the aid of the local ruler who provided him with land\(^47\) and the text of Jonas’ \textit{Vita} goes on to demonstrate the extent to which the local aristocracy sought to ingratiate themselves with the charismatic saint. As Jonas puts it:

\textit{While he was staying there [Luxeuil] the distinguished man began building a monastery and people eagerly rushed there from everywhere and dedicated themselves to the practice of religion on account of its great renown, so that the building of the one monastery was scarcely able to hold the great throng of monks brought together there. The children of the nobles, despising the rejected trappings of this world and the pomp of present riches, strove to rush there from everywhere in order to seize eternal rewards}\(^48\).

\(^46\) ibid.
\(^47\) Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I, 12.
\(^48\) Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I, 17. \(Ibi\) residens vir egregius, monasterium construere coepit, ad cuius famam plebes undique concurrere et culti religionis dicare curabant, \(ita\) ut plurima monachorum multitudo adunata, \(vix\) unius caenubii collegio sistere valeret. \(Ibi\) nobelium liberi undique concurrere nitebantur, \(ut,\) exaspera faleramenta saeculi et praesentium pompam facultatum temnentes, aeterna praemia caperent.
One example of the local nobility ‘striving’ to ingratiate themselves with Columbanus concerns Duke Waldelenus who, we are told, ruled over the peoples living between the Alps and the Jura. He and his wife, unable to conceive, travelled to Luxeuil and begged Columbanus to intercede on their behalf, promising to give the child into his care for his education. Columbanus’s prayers prove successful and the son born to them is named Donatus, in recognition of the agreement that he would be given over to the care of Columbanus’s foundation for the sake of his education when he came of age. Donatus, following his formation at Luxeuil, would later go on to enter the royal court and by the time of Jonas’s writing, was Bishop of Besançon. This was just one of many families who sought out Columbanus’s intercession, and whose offspring went on to hold important positions in Frankish society, both secular and religious.

To Donatus one could add the examples of nobles who hosted Columbanus following his expulsion from Luxeuil. Burgundofara, whose parents had Columbanus bless her as a young girl, in later life went on to found the monastery of Faremoutiers, while her brother Burgundofaro became the bishop of Meaux. Another family of consequence to host Columbanus was that of Autharius and Agea and their sons Ado and Dado; Ado would go on to found the important monastery of Jouarre while Dado (or Adouin) not only founded Rebais, but was one of the leading lights in the court of Clothar II.

The reasons behind this establishing of a connection with such a polemical figure are not altogether clear. A number of commentators have recently invoked the importance of the charisma of the holy man in his attracting the support of the local aristocracy, which was no doubt a crucial factor. However, in addition to

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49 Jonas, Vita Columbani, I. 22.
50 For thorough treatments of the elite networks spawned by the foundations of Columbans see e.g. Hen, Y. Roman Barbarians. pp. 107ff; Wood, L. Merovingian Kingdoms. pp. 181ff.
52 Jonas, Vita Columbani, II, 27.
any charisma Columbanus was imbued with it may be that his hard-line stance on the independence of his monasteries from episcopal control, led the regional nobility to see in Columbanus a natural ally. By aiding their offspring to found monasteries in the tradition of Luxeuil, they may have been attempting to guarantee the control of their own land, since the abbot or abbess, being a member of the family, would retain control over the familial land assigned to them, thus keeping it from the grasp of episcopal or royal control. The Columbanian rule, therefore, adopted by these new monasteries could be seen as a sort of short-hand for where they stood on the on-going debate on the rights and liberties of monastic foundation. This may in part help to explain the rash of monasteries springing up practicing the rule of Columbanus and patronised by members of the local aristocracy, particularly in the wake of the Papal exemption for Bobbio; the Columbanian rule thus could have been seen as a shortcut to obtaining similar privileges. But it is important to reiterate that although Columbanus may have acted as a useful ally in this debate due to his unwavering line on the subject, seen for example in the face of pressure from the Council of Mâcon, it would be wrong to suggest that the debate came about at his instigation and due solely to his “Irish” formation or any aspects inherent in Irish monasticism which differentiated it from the contemporary practices on the continent. It was rather, a discourse that had long been raging prior his arrival in Francia and one that would have taken its course with or without his intervention. That he came down so strongly on the side that favoured monastic independence certainly would have singled him out for the attention of the local institutions which he left behind him. See also Dunn, M. (2008) “Columbanus, Charisma and the revolt of the monks of Bobbio’ in Peritia.

55 See e.g. Hen, Y. Roman Barbarians “…as time passed an increasing number of aristocrats were attracted to the new monastic opportunity, and so family interests mingled with pious ones. Hence, under the rule of Chlothar II and Dagobert I, the control of monastic communities was established as one of the most important building blocks of aristocratic power in Francia”. Elsewhere, Wood, S. (2006) The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West. Oxford. p.111 and more explicitly p119 where she states: “To begin with, we can postulate a whole range of interests that the family might have in the foundation and its future control. These might start with security, even if for the Frankish nobility of the seventh century the worst insecurity was over. Their right to ancestral lands might be retrospectively affirmed by a literate community with an interest in asserting it; and in putting land into a monastery’s keeping they might hope for a surer hold on it than was otherwise possible for successive generations of laymen and women dividing their inheritances”.

56 Columbanus, Epistulae, II. In Walker, G.S.M. (ed.) Sancti Columbani Opera, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Vol. II.
nobility and led them to gravitate towards him in order to suit their own needs. Indeed, this cross pollination between the aristocracy and monastic founders in relation to this issue is underlined by the fact that it is Dado, as a member of the royal court of Clothar II, who is instrumental in enacting legislation ensuring the rights of monasteries over their land and possessions\textsuperscript{57}.

What these events demonstrate more than anything is the extent to which, from the very start, the monasteries in the Vosges were integrated into the local, Frankish, networks of power and to the local community. To focus solely on Columbanus’ Irishness as the determining factor in the identity of the foundations is to ignore the role played by the section of the community of local provenance, to effectively render them a silent majority. Columbanus, despite his clearly-stated Irish identity, was integral to this process; he courted the aristocracy for their support, and the success and growth of his monasteries came about with the influx of young Frankish nobles who joined in their droves. Certainly it could be said that his positioning himself on the side of Clothar in the civil war that ensued between the Neustrian king and his close relatives Theuderic and Theudebert, paved the way for these young nobles to enjoy the success that they subsequently did. Upon taking the throne in 613, Clothar II quickly set about the task of establishing a re-united Merovingian kingdom, while simultaneously stamping out any vestiges of Brunhild’s power\textsuperscript{58}. Luxeuil, the victim of the late queen’s spite, was to prove a useful ally in this mission, and although the king could not persuade Columbanus to return, he did promise the ageing monk protection for the monasteries he had left behind in France\textsuperscript{59}. It is in these subsequent years, while under the protection of Clothar II, that Luxeuil’s star begins to rise and it is under the Frankish successors of Columbanus that its influence begins to spread throughout the Merovingian realms\textsuperscript{60}. However, one could also argue that the groundwork for this close association with the royal court had been laid by Columbanus himself, prior to his departure. His close ties

\textsuperscript{57} The extent of his success is seen in the attendance at the council of Paris held in the year following his enthronement, which the chronicler Fredigar tells us was attended by the bishops of Aquitaine, Burgundy, Austrasia and Neustria. Chronicle, IV.40-42.

\textsuperscript{58} Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani}, I.36.

\textsuperscript{59} See Wood, I. \textit{The Merovingian Kingdoms} p.190.
to the local aristocracy meant that the monastery was already plugged into the networks of the local elite, their sons were part of the monastic community, or had received their education from it, meaning that its ranks were swollen with the future leading lights of Frankish society. In fact, it would seem that apart from Columbanus’ followers who had travelled with him from Ireland, and subsequently departed with him to Italy, the body general of the community was very Frankish in its character, and as time went on they were circulating ever more in the ambit of Frankish court politics. It may indeed have been this Frankish character that made Luxeuil so acceptable to the newly-enthroned Clothar II, as it could provide a ready stock of well-educated young Frankish nobles ideally placed to take up positions in the ranks of the royal court. It is certainly a phenomenon that becomes more apparent later under Chlothar’s successors; the enduring loyalty of Luxeuil to the king, for example, is further emphasized by an episode in the *Passio Leudegari* which states that not one, but two rebellious bishops were confined to the monastery during this time at the order of king Childeric, implying that by the mid-seventh century Luxeuil was seen as a staunch ally readily relied upon to carry out the will of the king. In fact so staunch was their support of the court that when queen Balthilda decided to patronize a royal monastery at Corby, it was from Luxeuil that she chose its first abbot. The question of identity at Luxeuil in following Columbanus’ departure has recently been problematized by Sven Meeder, who argues that there was neither a self-conscious impression on behalf of the monks of Luxeuil of their having any particular Irish identity, nor is there anything written by contemporary outsiders which would give the impression that they were seen as possessing any intrinsically different characteristics. While we have already

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61 See, e.g. O’Hara (2009) “The *Vita Columbani* in Merovingian Gaul” in *Early Medieval Europe, Vol. 17* (2). Oxford. pp. 126-153. p.143 ‘In contrast to Columbanus’s day, when the Gallo-Frankish bishops seem to have been the Irish saint’s staunchest opponents, the new breed of bishops that emerged in the mid-seventh century – many of whom had been educated at Luxeuil and had been in the royal service before becoming bishops – became the most avid supporters of Columbanian monasticism’.


63 Wood, I. *The Merovingian Kingdoms* p.186. For the network of Luxeuil alumni with which Balthilda relied upon see e.g. Dierkens, op. cit. p372.

64 Meeder, S. op. cit. ‘The Irish foundations and the Carolingian world’. p.472: In relation, for example, to the self-identity of the Luxeuil community, he references the ninth-century Luxovian scholar Angelomus in stating that ‘There is…..nothing in his lengthy descriptions to suggest the
questioned the level to which we can assign ethnic markers to something such as monastic practice, the evidence presented here would suggest that at least on a political and societal level, the monasteries of Columbanus were very much in tune with contemporary Frankish society. Even if there had been a quintessentially “Irish character to the monastery” ab initio it would seem not to have been so strong as to survive the departure of the saint, as within a single generation it would appear to be wholly Frankish in its outlook and its connections.

An indication of the extent to which the cultural outlook of Luxeuil in the early seventh century was convergent with contemporary Frankish society comes from the *Vita Columbani* itself. It has been noted by a number of commentators that for an historical document of the life of an Irish saint there is very little typically Irish about the protagonist of the work, rather Columbanus appears very much in the tradition of Frankish holy men as depicted in Merovingian hagiography. The fact that Jonas, in writing on behalf of these monasteries, uses motifs and topoi that are part of the Merovingian canon of saints’ lives may not simply be explained by his own background, but may also betray something about the cultural tastes of those for whom he was writing; the fact that Jonas so readily evokes episodes from earlier Merovingian hagiographical texts suggest something of a familiarity amongst his audience. However not only does the text of the *Vita Columbani* tell us a great deal about the cultural outlook of the monasteries that requested its production, but it may also help to underline the close political links with the Merovingian court alluded to above. This is most clearly apparent in two famous instances; the naming of Sigibert as the king who granted the land to Columbanus to found his first monastery, and the treatment Irish heritage was accorded a central place in Luxeuil’s self-image; Angelomus mentions neither Columbanus, or a sense of connection with Luxeuil’s Irish heritage, with the Irish tradition of scholarship, or indeed with the exegetical methods sometimes associated with the Irish’. Elsewhere Destefanis, E. (2009) ‘Il Monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedievale: fonti scritte e dati materiali’, p.79-81, counters Richter’s recent attempts to reassert the Irish nature of the monastery of Bobbio which was preserved over a period of centuries, see esp. n.59. p.81.

Wood, I. (1982) “The *Vita Columbani* and Merovingian Hagiography”, in *Peritia*, Vol. 1, pp. 63-80, see esp. p. 80. ‘Earlier saint’s lives gave Jonas models for his description of Columbanus’ confrontation with Theuderic, as of his ascetic life. That there was little specifically ‘Irish’ about the resulting picture does not matter – Columbanus was a European figure’.
of Queen Brunhild, although it must be said that the two are interconnected and relate to the same phenomenon.

The ‘Sigibert question’ has long plagued Columbanian scholars attempting to pin down a plausible chronology for the Saint’s activities in France. In the *Vita Columbani*, Jonas relates that upon his arrival in Francia, Columbanus’ fame spreads far and wide, so much so that he is called to the court of the ruler, named explicitly as Sigibert, who is so impressed by this charismatic foreigner that he is desperate to keep him within the borders of his kingdom and thus provides him with land on which to found his first monastery. This, however, raises an intriguing contradiction, for Columbanus himself, writing in 603, clearly states that he has been residing in the territory for a period of 12 years, i.e. since c.591, a full 16 years after the death of Sigibert. Generations of scholars have tied themselves in knots attempting to accommodate these two contradicting pieces of evidence, some suggesting that Jonas may not have had a good enough grasp of the history of previous Merovingian rulers and as such confused them, others labouring over the use of ‘duodecim annis’ by Columbanus, attempting to fit it into a chronological framework that would allow it to correspond with the reign of Sigibert. However, it is now widely accepted that the reference to Sigibert may have been a deliberate attempt on the part of Jonas to hide a more uncomfortable fact; the role of Brunhild and her offspring in the founding of the monasteries of Columbanus. The twelve years as mentioned by Columbanus would place the founding of Annegray firmly in the reign of Childebert II, the eldest son of Brunhild, who was greatly under her influence. Rather than recognise the uncomfortable fact that the foundation took place with the aid of one who’s death is portrayed in such gruesome fashion later in the text as a moral lesson against the maltreatment of a holy man, Jonas instead conducts a sleight of hand, drawing a veil over the actual events and instead placing them in the reign of a ruler more acceptable to contemporary tastes. This, let us not

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forget, is at a time when the new dynasts were attempting to establish themselves as the legitimate rulers of Francia and stamp out all record of those with whom they had recently fought a bitter civil war. The concurrence of this explicit placing of the monastery’s foundation in the reign of Sigibert with the contemporary campaign of royal damnatio memoriae being undertaken by Clothar II is made all the more plausible by the fact that the king himself, in issuing the Edict of Paris in 614, recognises Sigibert as the last king previous to him whose acts he recognises, thus demonstrating his relative acceptability in the propaganda of the contemporary political milieu70.

Jonas, writing at the behest of Columbanus’ successor at Luxeuil, Eustasius, among others, is on message with the court line, not only in this matter, but also it would appear, in relation to Brunhild in general. In comparison to the generally favourable treatment of the queen by, for example, Gregory of Tours, or as seen in her correspondence with Gregory the Great, Jonas’ depiction of Brunhild is that of a power hungry, almost maniacal figure, who stirs up the local bishopric against the upstart monk Columbanus and ultimately engineers his expulsion from the monasteries that he had founded, an act for which she ultimately receives justice in being torn asunder by bolting horses71. Indeed, so wholly negative is the picture that Jonas paints of Brunhild that it has been taken by some commentators as demonstrative of the fact that the audience of the Vita Columbani extended beyond the monks within the walls of his monasteries and that considering the extent to which Jonas is at pains to toe the court line on matters political, further reinforces the idea that this was an audience with close links to the highest echelons of power72.

In light of the evidence provided above for the ‘Frankish’ flavour of the Vosges foundations, particularly in the years following Columbanus’ departure, we must

70 O’Hara. op.cit. p150; such had already been argued by Wood, I. The Merovingian Kingdoms, p. 196.
71 Jonas, Vita Columbani, I.58.
72 Diem, A. “Monks, Kings, Sanctity…”, argues that the Vita could be interpreted in part as a manual for members of the aristocracy in how to deal with the foundations of Columbanus. Elsewhere, O’Hara, A. “The Vita Columbani…” p 153, explicitly uses the damnatio memoriae which occurs in the text as support for his argument that it had a wider dissemination than previously accepted. Contrast with Wood, I. “The Vita Columbani…”, p. 68.
reconsider the weight given by previous authors to the events of the Agrestius Affair in arguing for the Irish nature of the Annegray and its sister houses. Columbanus certainly considered himself as an Irish monk, and was keenly aware of his differing position to the local church on matters such as computus. This ‘foreignness’ may even have contributed to the *fama* which drew so many to him. However, what is evident from the context established here is the integration of his monastic community with the local Frankish society from an early stage, and its dependence upon it for both support and a steady stream of postulants. Given these close relations and the overwhelming number of local members of the community, we must question how successful Columbanus and his followers could have been in implanting an Irish-style monastic site in the Breuchin valley, and how much this would have been mitigated by the local component of the community. The following section will consider one area in the role of this local contingent of the monastery is evident from the sources: the manuscript tradition of Luxeuil.

**Cultural Output**

The evidence considered thus far has demonstrated that when considering the origins of Columbanus’ French foundations it is imperative to look beyond the Irishness of their founder and to consider them in a more nuanced manner, taking into consideration not only the local background of a large part of the

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73 In fact, given the fact that the accusations levelled by Agrestius make no specific reference to any ‘ethnic’ origin, an alternative way of reading the situation could be that Agrestius may have been criticising the successors of Columbanus for having abandoned the praxis he had laid down, replacing them instead with practices more acceptable to the cultural circle with which they were increasingly becoming involved. In spite of Jonas’ attempt to paint Columbanus as thoroughly orthodox in his theology, we know from the saint’s own writings that this was far from the truth and that he disagreed with the papacy not only in relation to matters of Computus, but also in relation to the Three Chapters debate. The fact that Agrestius in such matters was closer, it would appear, to Columbanus’ position than the communities that Jonas’ was writing on behalf of, may suggest that he himself may also have been more ‘loyal’ to Columbanus’ monastic practices also and as such was criticising his successors for abandoning them. Certainly Columbanus himself, in writing to the monastic community he left behind at Luxeuil gives the impression that all is not well, and that the brethren have revolted against his appointed successor Atalla, necessitating him to name Waldelenus as a replacement, which might display a certain divide between the Frankish core of the community and its founder; Columbanus, Epistulae, IV.2. On the convergence of Agrestius’ views with those of Columbanus see Wood, I. “Jonas, The Merovingians and Pope Honorius’, p 101.
community, but also the extent to which Columbanus himself is seen to have integrated himself and his monasteries into local networks of power. It has been argued that it was this networking by the charismatic outsider that allowed Luxeuil to position itself in a relationship with the royal court following his departure for Italy, a relationship that was so close as to be almost symbiotic. Thus far the tone and propaganda of the *Vita Columbani* have been evoked as a sign of this close relationship between the royal court and the monastery. We also have evidence for this process in an even more tangible body of evidence, namely script. During the seventh century the monastery of Luxeuil began producing manuscripts written in a distinctive script that survives today in 33 manuscripts and fragments.\textsuperscript{74}

Let us begin our discussion by establishing what is meant by the term “script of Luxeuil”, what the term refers to and how it came about. In the current debate, the script of Luxeuil is considered to constitute a distinctive type of Merovingian miniscule handwriting found in manuscripts dating to the late seventh and early eighth century and believed to have been produced at the monastery of Luxeuil. Although this may seem like a simple, bland statement, it has in fact proved highly contentious over the years. Therefore in order to base any argument on the script of Luxeuil as a distinctive script we must consider how it came to be considered as such.

We should begin by recognizing that the complexity of this problem is partly a result of the ambiguities concerning the nature of scriptoria in the early medieval period and the difficulty of attributing texts to a particular centre or “scriptorium”. While we may have evidence for scriptoria for the later medieval period, much of what has been written on the early medieval period remains conjectural\textsuperscript{75}. Since the modern researcher is often dealing with a body of manuscripts dispersed throughout the world, far from their original source (in many cases a text might be divided between 2 or more libraries) one could argue that the determination to argue for the existence of a particular scriptorium is to

\textsuperscript{74} Ganz, Luxeuil 200–202.

a large extent driven by a desire to make some sense of a divided and dispersed body of material. The difficulties of establishing the existence of a scriptorium are further confounded by the vagaries in the nature of a scriptorium, seeing as such an entity could not have existed in a vacuum. They were, instead, subject to various influences all of which would have impacted on the nature of the texts they produced; the diverse origins of scribes, the origins, aims, education and influences of those who thought and oversaw the scribes, the sources and nature of the texts that were being copied at the centre, not to mention the political influence exerted on the centre, depending on its proximity to local or state power\textsuperscript{76}. All of these peculiarities make it harder for the modern researcher to pin down absolutes, and to determine what were the unquestionable characteristics of a particular centre of manuscript production\textsuperscript{77}.

Despite this fairly negativist attitude in relation to what we can state for certain about the nature and existence of early medieval scriptoria, there are large bodies of manuscripts which, when presented together, are found to display such consistent characteristics as to make it fairly obvious that they could only have been produced in the same region and possibly even at the same place and under the same direction. In general terms one can talk of regional characteristics, national writing styles as it were. It is found, for example, that the successor kingdoms of the Roman Empire, having inherited the bureaucratic system of the former Roman provinces, developed characteristic writing styles which derive ultimately from the informal legal and bureaucratic cursive hands used previously in the respective provinces of the late Roman Empire that they replaced\textsuperscript{78}. Thus, Merovingian miniscule is found to have developed out of the bureaucratic handwriting used by scribes in the state apparatus of the province of Gaul, Visigothic miniscule derives from the legal handwriting particular to the Hispanic provinces, and in Italy the legal cursive gave rise to a style known as Beneventan miniscule\textsuperscript{79}. Once the existence of such overarching “national” styles has been established, one can then focus in on peculiarities within these styles in

\textsuperscript{76} ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Batelli ( 1999 147).
order to define specific “types”, subgroups that possess certain definable characteristics which set them apart from the rest of the “species”. The paleographer E.A. Lowe argued that one is quite justified in considering a group of manuscripts as being of a certain specific “type”, produced in the same location, if they meet a number of conditions, namely that they must possess features differentiating them from other examples of the same overarching species, these features must be consistent not sporadic, and the different elements of the text, capitals, miniscule and illustration, must all have a harmonious style\textsuperscript{80}.

Fig. 2.1: An example of the Merovingian charter hand that developed out of the bureaucratic writing hand of late Roman Gaul.

The Luxeuil script became known as a distinct “type” following centuries of comparison of dispersed texts, which were found to bear numerous similar traits. The term “script of Luxeuil” was first coined by the German scholar Traube when he alluded to the similarities in handwriting styles between a text known as the \textit{Gallican Lectionary} and various other manuscripts, arguing that since the script was so similar they must have been produced at the same location and under the same tutelage\textsuperscript{81}. Since the \textit{Gallican Lectionary} had the most secure context of the texts Traube was examining, having been brought out of the library at Luxeuil in 1684, he argued that Luxeuil was the obvious centre from which these texts must have issued. The matter was far from settled, however. Others pointed to texts with similar handwriting found in Verona and Ivrea and contended that the writing style could have equally been developed in

\textsuperscript{80} Lowe (1953 389)
Italy\textsuperscript{82}, while still others alluded to the liturgical content of the \textit{Lectionary}, arguing the attention given to saints such as Genevieve, Julian and Basilissa meant that it could not have been written at Luxeul, but rather still at a monastery where these saints were especially revered\textsuperscript{83}. It was not until 1953 that E.A. Lowe settled the matter in favour of Luxeuil. In a detective-like treatment of the manuscript tradition he based his argument on the two pieces of evidence with the most secure contexts, The \textit{Gallican Lectionary} which had been brought out of the library of Luxeuil in 1683 and a manuscript known as \textit{Morgan MS. 334}, which bears an inscription stating that it was written “\textit{apud coenubium lussovium}” in the 13\textsuperscript{th} year of the reign of King Clothar III\textsuperscript{84}. When he scrutinized the form of the capitals of these two texts, he found that there were a large number of similarities; similarities which he then presented as the characteristics of the Luxeuil “type” consistent with the criteria set out above. With this “type” established, and shown to have a secure Luxeuil provenance, he went on to argue that the other 20 or so manuscripts that shared the same characteristics of the ‘type’ must also have been produced at Luxeuil, thus establishing it as the location of a scriptorium with quite a considerable output\textsuperscript{85}.

The body of texts which Lowe had shown to have been produced at Luxeuil represent an attempt by the scribes of that establishment to formalise the chancellery hand of the late Roman and early Merovingian state apparatus, with the aim of producing a calligraphic book hand suitable for the copying of sacred texts. At a glance it is clear that the miniscule script bears strong similarities to the cursive hand used in Merovingian royal charters (compare Fig. 2.1 with Fig.2.2), and although it is a calligraphic development of this hand it maintains the characteristic form of Merovingian miniscule; compact steep letters written in a compressed hand, with long sinewy tails extending above and below the lines on letters such as \textit{b, d, p} and \textit{r} and convoluted ligatures used as a shorthand.

\textsuperscript{83} Lowe, “Script of Luxeuil”, p.393.
\textsuperscript{84} ibid. 394ff.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid p.397.
for letter groups which occur frequently. In addition to these general characteristics, however, the Luxeuil minuscule is seen to have developed particular idiosyncrasies, which occur regularly enough to set it apart from the rest of Merovingian miniscule. The most notable feature is the letter a which is drawn open, to look like a pair of the letter c, and which has led some commentators to dub the style “Merovingian script, type ‘a’”. The ligatures used in these texts are also quite distinctive, in particular the ex ligature where the bow of the letter e extends downwards to form the following x. One further distinctive feature found in the minuscule texts of the Luxeuil type is the sign of a double v with dots used in the margins to denote when the passage is a direct quotation.

As expounded by Lowe, for a writing style to be considered a “type” it must possess characteristic components in all sections of the text. Thus in manuscripts with the text written in Luxeuil minuscule we often find that the introduction pages, executed in capital letters, also possess their own peculiarities. The capitals are long and slender and while similar capitals are found in various Merovingian texts, there are unique letter forms found only in texts produced at

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88 Bischoff, op. cit. p.104.
89 McKitterick, op. cit. p.188.
Luxeuil. Most distinctive are the A which has a bent, v shaped, crossbar, the H with a sinewy crossbar, a lozenge shaped O, and perhaps most notable of all, the strange “wayward” X\(^90\). In fact these letterforms are so distinctive and so consistent in Luxeuil manuscripts that they are the basis upon which Lowe established his definition of the Luxeuil “type”.

The manuscripts of the Luxeuil tradition are also notable for the novel approach taken to the incorporation of ornamentation into the text in order to enliven it, making it less monochrome and more engaging to the reader\(^91\). Certain devices, like the ornamental capitals discussed above, are utilized to set apart important sections of the text such as chapter introductions. This incorporation of ornamentation into the text is probably best demonstrated by the decorative initials, which range from long thin letters extending the length of the page and filled with interlaced decoration, to large round playful letters composed of the bodies of fish and birds\(^92\). These decorative motifs are helpful aids to the scribe not only in establishing a structured layout to the work, but also in imbuing the text with a greater importance by giving it an ornamental aspect\(^93\). Although a number of these aspects were developing across the broad spectrum of Merovingian manuscript production, it is in the texts of Luxeuil that they found their apogée, achieving an aesthetic perfection and a standardization not seen elsewhere\(^94\). Yet again these features are found to be consistent across the body of manuscripts considered to have been written in the ‘script of Luxeuil’, a fact which combined with the extent of regularization seen in the other components of the text (Fig. 2.3) would seem to support the idea that this body of

\(^90\) Lowe, op.cit. p.394.


\(^92\) Branner (1954 683-684)

\(^93\) Branner (1954) “The Art of the Scriptorium at Luxeuil”, in Speculum, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct, 1954), pp. 678-690. p.681. One further mode by which the scribes break with the monochrome nature of previous styles is by alternating the colour of ink used in successive lines of text, with an aim at emphasizing particular sections over others. ibid p.682.

\(^94\) Branner, op. cit. p.687; McKitterick, op. cit. p.192.
manuscripts could only have been the product of scribes educated and working under the command of a single centre\textsuperscript{95}.

When placed in the historical context outlined above, the usefulness of the paleographical textual analysis provided here becomes apparent. For it is precisely at this time, when the historical texts suggest that the monastery had been effectively “Frankified” and brought close to the royal court, that the first manuscripts in the distinctive Luxeuil script similar to the royal charter hand begin to appear in the record. Our only securely datable exemplar, Morgan MS. 334, exhibits a fully developed calligraphic form of the chancellery script used at court by the year 669, that is, less than 50 years after our earliest datable royal charter written in charter hand\textsuperscript{96}, a considerably short space of time given the conservative nature of calligraphic development. The similarities which this script bears to Merovingian chancellery script has already been noted, but just how quickly these developments took place and how similar the two actually were would seem to corroborate the strong connections between the monastic centre and the political establishment alluded to in the mid-sixth century sources explored above. Moreover, that this development occurred with no traces of insular Irish writing styles would seem to support McKitterick’s contention that there had been no copying of texts at the monastery during Columbanus’ time, suggesting that the development of a scriptorium had been a product of the new Frankish establishment at the monastery, greatly influenced by their Frankish outlook in both the cultural and political sphere\textsuperscript{97}. Columbanus may have founded Luxeuil and given it a monastic rule, but on a cultural level, it would appear that his 20 years were brief in the overall scheme of things. In the years following the departure of the Irish monks, the authorities at Luxeuil had shaken off all vestiges their “Irish” heritage and embraced their new connections with the Frankish world.

\textsuperscript{95} Lowe and Ganz would argue that the peculiarities of the Luxeuil script are so consistent and so idiosyncratic that they could only have been the product of systematic tutelage at a particular centre. See Ganz, “Texts and scripts” p.188, Lowe, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{96} McKitterick, op. cit. pp.184-185.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. 185.
Fig. 2.3: A section of the Ivrea manuscript showing the characteristic miniscule, capital and decorative forms together.
After McKitterick (1981 183)

It must be noted that these new connections were not confined to the lofty heights of court politics, but it is probably due to the privileged position that the monastery held that its influence spread over such a large area. Dissemination from Luxeuil is clearly demonstrable in the fact that of the 33 manuscripts, fragments and labels executed in Luxeuil script, only the Gallician Lectionary was found in the library of Luxeuil\(^{98}\). These texts are now housed in libraries and museums throughout the world and as such it is difficult to determine the context in which they were found, but the large geographical spread has led paleographers such as David Ganz to suggest that the scriptorium of Luxeuil specialized in producing manuscripts destined for the libraries of friendly establishments\(^{99}\). The notion that the scriptorium was held in high regard both far and wide is best demonstrated by an ornate presentation copy of the *Regula Pastoralis* commissioned from as far afield as the Italian city of Ivrea by a bishop named Desiderius (Fig. 2.3). In fact connections across the Alps were apparently quite strong; manuscripts with Luxeuil script have also been found in Verona.

and it is interesting to note that although the monks of Luxeuil had only recently shrugged off their indebtedness to Columbanus, the close links with the Irishman’s later foundation at Bobbio, as evidenced by the life and career of Jonas of Susa may be underlined in a material sense by a manuscript in the Vatican library (Vatic. Urbin. Lat. 115) which boasts a main body of text in a Bobbio hand with additions at the end in Luxeuil miniscule insurance.

In cultural terms, then, we can say that the monastery of Luxeuil was something of a trend-setter in the Merovingian realms. Thanks to its close connections with the royal court, it had produced a uniquely Frankish style of calligraphic writing suitable for copying important sacred texts, a style which proved so popular among its fellow Frankish establishments that they requested copies for their libraries or even tried to emulate it by producing their own versions based on the script of Luxeuil. Perhaps the most important thing to note for our discussion here is that the script produced by the monastery founded by Columbanus bares no trace of the characteristics of Insular script insurance, rather, it is a hand of the Merovingian tradition. As McKitterick has argued, the fact that the monastery was founded by an Irishman has ‘misled many scholars into assuming that it was a centre of learning and a scriptorium from the time of its foundation onwards, and that both learning and writing depended upon Irish inspiration’. In this matter the script provides us with further, tangible, evidence for role played by the local contingent within the monastery and serves as a reminder of the process of integration and assimilation argued for above, further strengthening the impression that the three Vosges monasteries were broadly convergent with

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100 Vatic. Urbin, Lat. 1154 in Lowe (1934) ‘Codices Latini Antiquiores I: Vatican City’. Oxford. p.197. This rapprochement, suggested here by manuscript evidence, might also be seen in the life and work of Jonas of Susa, a monk who had lived and worked in both Bobbio and Luxeuil and was a close confident of the abbots of both establishments, his life of Columbanus could be seen as an attempt to build bridges between the two.

101 Putnam (1963) counters Lowe’s late assertion that there are traces of Irish influence evident in the script, namely in the wedge shaped ascenders, the way in which the pages were ruled and the *diminuendo* effect evident at the start of some chapters. However, argues Putnam, the wedge shaped ascenders are to be found in Italian manuscripts of the sixth century, and thus should not be taken solely as indicative of Irish influence (although it must be said that the point of Putnam’s discussion is to argue for a provenance other than Luxeuil for the manuscripts) and surmises that “the Insular influence is scanty enough to be of dubious value’: Putnam, M.C.T. (1963) ‘The Origins of the Script of Luxeuil’, in *Speculum*, vol. 38 no. 2. pp. 226-256. See also McKitterick, op. cit. p185.
their contemporary monastic establishments, in both cultural and political senses. It reinforces the argument raised in the previous section for a greater consideration of the role played by the autochthonous members of the community in the development of a monastic identity, as opposed to focusing solely on Columbanus’ Irish origin, and perhaps suggests that a parallel consideration should be adopted for the treatment of the archaeological remains hereafter.

**Archaeology and Identity**

Having looked at the context in which these sites were founded and the political and cultural outlooks evident from the earliest phase of their existence, we shall now consider the repercussions of this evidence for our consideration of the archaeological remains of Annegray. Thus far the evidence presented would seem to argue against the adoption of an approach which would see Columbanus’ Irish origin as a determining factor in the interpretation of the archaeological data that follows, instead compelling us to interpret them as a product of the particular context in which the were founded.

Perhaps even more so than the material dealt with so far, the attribution of ethnic identity to archaeological remains is problematical. Far too often, ideas of modern identity and nationalism were brought to bear all to easily on the
cultural material of the past, resulting in the creation of pure cultural identities that spoke more to the contemporary politics of the time in which they were written, than of any historically accurate situations\textsuperscript{102}. While the past 20 years have seen a considerable amount of revision in this topic, aimed at assessing past cultural identities as more fluid and complex than the monolithic, homogenous categories impervious to any outside influence that they were once perceived to be, many of the traditional concepts of identity still prove hard to shake from the national psyche\textsuperscript{103}.

The treatment of the archaeological material relating to early monasteries in Ireland is no exception. Just as the idea of the Celtic Church was expounded by scholars studying the texts relating to early Irish monasticism, so too those studying the remains of the monasteries in which they were written strove to place an emphasis on the uniquely Irish characteristics that differentiated them from their continental counterparts\textsuperscript{104}. In an Irish context, two models of monastic habitation have predominated in the traditional narrative; the multivallate concentric circular enclosures as typified by places such as Clonmacnoise, Armagh and Kells\textsuperscript{105}, contrasted with the more modest, austere, remote hermitage, most heavily represented along the western seaboard\textsuperscript{106}.

\textsuperscript{102} As set out by Foucault, “knowledge is inextricably linked with relations of power” (McEwan 2003), thus our vision of the past is highly influenced by the political systems in which we live and our relations with them. It is perhaps natural, given this fact, that newly emerging Irish nation would spawn a vision of its golden period of Saints and Scholars that emphasised its difference from the norm and by extension, set it apart from the cultural heritage of its colonial occupier.

\textsuperscript{103} For a discussion on the archaeology of ethnicity in a French context see e.g. Fehr, H. (2002) “Volkstum as Paradigm: Germanic People and Gallo-Romans in Early Medieval Archaeology since the 1930s”, in Gillett, A. On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages. Turnhout. pp. 179-199.


\textsuperscript{105} “There ought to be two or three termini around a holy place: the first in which we allow no one at all to enter except priests, because laymen do not come near it, nor women unless they are clerics; the second, into its streets they crowds of common people, not much given to wickedness, we allow to enter; the third, in which men who have been guilty of homicide, adulterers and prostitutes, with permission and according to custom, we do not prevent from going within. Whence they are called, the first sanctissimus, the second sanctior the third sanctus, bearing honour according to their differences”: Collectio Cannonum Hibernensis. In his seminal 1985 paper Charles Doherty presented a form of ecclesiastical organization which was to provide the basis of our understanding of early monastic settlement for much of the preceding decades. This reading, based on the text of the Collectio Cannonum Hibernensis and supported with reference to the archaeological material from the important ecclesiastical centres of Clonmacnoise and Kildare,
The strong bias in the archaeological record towards sites pertaining to the latter category, situated on the western seaboard is to a large extent the product of academic bias in the preceding decades, and greatly influenced by the pioneering work of Francoise Henry. Perhaps not surprisingly the debate relating to the organization of the “Celtic Church” had a large and lasting impact on the archaeological research of the early Christian period and to a large extent informed archaeologists in their interpretation of early Christian sites. The West Kerry region in particular was a focus for those who wished to demonstrate the authenticity of this consensus by means of the archaeological record. The preponderance of well-preserved small ecclesiastical sites in remote locations coupled with the assumption that the combination of small size and seemingly remote location could only be indicative of monastic settlements appeared to support the idea of the dominance of the monastic church in early Christian Ireland. Indeed this was taken as providing ample support to the “Hughesian orthodoxy’ of early church organization which saw territorial dioceses as monastic collectives of dispersed local churches. It is not surprising, given the abundance of well preserved sites and the determination to provide archaeological support to the reading of textual evidence, that so much research took place in the west Kerry region.

However, in saying this, more recent archaeological investigation has not been slow to accommodate the reinterpretation of the church organization as offered by the likes of Etchingham, Sharpe and Charles-Edwards. As with the paruchia proved very popular among scholars and still today is relied upon an important aid to interpreting the layout of monastic centres of early medieval Ireland. However the problems with searching for such monolithic homogenous forms of settlement will be discussed below.

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106 An attitude seen all too clearly in Francoise Henry’s interpretation of all the sites she covered in her famous 1958 paper as monastic sites. The contradiction of sites which from an ideological perspective represent a separation from the world, occurring in such high densities to make such separation difficult has already been pointed out and more recently O’Carragain has offered a much more nuanced criticism of Henry’s reading along with a productive reappraisal of some of these sites.

model before it, the growing appreciation for plurality of organizational models in the textual evidence is having an impact on our appreciation of the archaeology of early ecclesiastical sites and raising its own set of research dilemmas, to a large extent aided by a recent increase in the number of excavated early sites. On the basis of the acceptance of a pluralistic reality, for example, it has recently been argued that very few early monasteries were in fact monasteries in the primary sense and, elsewhere, that it is very difficult to differentiate between ecclesiastical centres, that is sites whose primary function is to provide pastoral care to the local community, and monastic sites, those that boasted a resident community of monks and functioned as retreats from the surrounding world. The re-interpretation offered by Tomás Ó Carragáin of the ecclesiastical centres of the Iveragh peninsula, for example, has a lot in common with the impression developed from the textual evidence by Etchingham. Instead of the one-dimensional appraisal of all the sites as eremitic monastic centres as seen in Henry’s thesis, Ó Carragáin has argued, on the basis of size, distribution, church size and characteristics such as burial tombs and related artwork, that there was much diversity in the function of ecclesiastical sites in this area, some acting as regional power centres, others providing pastoral care to the surrounding community and others still being primarily monastic centres catering for the needs of cenobitic communities. The emerging orthodoxy is a pluralistic one; one that recognises the differences apparent in the


109 Etchingham, op. cit. although Mytum had already raised doubts in this regard. The two site types share many characteristics, the termon, a church, cemeteries. However while cemeteries may be common to both, they may also provide a useful tool for establishing whether a site was monastic or not. Features such as a preponderance of male burials and a lack of burial goods two indicators that might indicate that what we are dealing with is a community of monks who were buried among their own, rather than an ecclesiastical site that catered for the burial of the community at large.

110 He argues it is likely that a site primarily concerned with pastoral care would have articulated this identity by investing more in its church than in other ritual foci, contrasting this with monastic sites where more attention seems to be paid to the burial monuments and leachta which formed part of the conceptual framework of the settlement.

111 In reference to the density of ecclesiastical sites in this area already alluded to and in support of Sharpe’s model he states, for example, ‘such a dense distribution of sites would seem to support the model of a diverse church in which some sites were more concerned with pastoral provision than others’. Ó Carragáin, T (2006) ‘Church Buildings and Pastoral Care in Early Medieval Ireland’ In: E. Fitzpatrick and R. Gillespie (eds). The Parish in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
archaeological record and the inconsistencies in the textual evidence, one that assesses ecclesiastical sites in their wider landscape setting and relationship with other sites as opposed to the traditional view that so readily equated diminutive size and location with eremitic monastic lifestyle. In light of this new orthodoxy, the variation in sites evident in excavations such as Reask\textsuperscript{112}, Clonmacnoise\textsuperscript{113}, Clonfad\textsuperscript{114}, Illaunloghan\textsuperscript{115} and Caherlehillan\textsuperscript{116} is all the more understandable, and it is ever more apparent that instead of searching for an overarching organizational model which can be applied to Irish monasteries as a whole, research now has to invest more time into understanding these differences, both regional and functional, how they became manifest in different locations and also how they were common to wider trends in monastic habitation emerging across Europe at that time.

Considering this growing appreciation for diversity in the Irish monastic context, which tends towards viewing the layout of early Irish monasteries as being largely a product of the location and context in which they were constructed while at the same time manifesting characteristics which were becoming increasingly common across western Europe with the spread of monastic lifestyle, it may perhaps be somewhat imprudent for us to seek any ‘typically Irish’ ethnic characteristics with which to define the community which inhabited these monasteries in the archaeological remains revealed. Instead of trying to force any archaeological results into a pre-defined model of Irish monasticism, the aim of this thesis is instead to consider them on their own merits, as a product of the particular context (political, religious, landscape) in which they were founded, without recourse to reductive ethnic shorthands. As with the historical and paleographical evidence discussed above, the aim is to understand how this community integrated itself into the cultural context of late sixth and

\textsuperscript{112} Fanning, op. cit.
early seventh-century Burgundy, and to start with any presuppositions of Irish character would be misguided. Considering the evidence of assimilation into the local community seen from the evidence above, it would perhaps be more practical to assess the archaeological evidence as the product of integration and interaction between Columbanus and his followers and the local context in which he settled.

Support for this approach comes from the archaeological remains of Luxeuil itself. Over the past number of years the historical centre of the town has been the subject of a series of programmed excavations in advance of renovation works. The works have allowed the excavator, Dr. Sébastien Bully, to open test trenches in three of the central squares of the town, allowing for a greater understanding of the development of late antique and early medieval Luxovium. Contrary to the image given in the *Vita Columbani* of a deserted Roman fort, the evidence emerging from the trenches at Luxeuil would tend to support a greater level of continuity from the late antique urban centre into the early medieval period. What is particularly interesting when considering the implantation of a monastic complex in the town is the presence of ecclesiastical structures, which date prior to the arrival of Columbanus in Gaul. Test trenches in Place de la Baille, for example, revealed sections of a large rectangular structure built in *opus africanum*, with an obvious funerary function. Bully has argued that the building represents, at the very least, a re-use of earlier building material, or even possibly the consecration of an upstanding, late-antique, structure to serve as a funerary chapel. In either case the datable material would seem to suggest use of the structure as a sacred space from at least as early as the fourth century. Perhaps more explicit evidence is to be found in the work carried out in Place de la Republique, less than 100m to the north west. Here the remains of a church, identified as the Eglise de Saint Martin, were the subject of a four-year campaign of excavations. The stratigraphic evidence for the church revealed that the

earliest phase of the structure was built upon the remains of a late antique *domus*, with very little evidence for a hiatus between the two. This first phase of the church, which incorporates a late-antique necropolis into its layout, has been dated to the fifth or sixth centuries, once again affirming the impression that prior to the establishment of a monastic community in the *castrum* of Luxovium, the town was already host to a Christian community, which was quite active in shaping the public space of the urban centre. That such a community could exist in what Jonas stresses is a pagan place at such an early date, is not at all surprising given the level to which the Frankish episcopal sees were active in developing their network through the construction of church sites in the hinterland of their power bases. Luxeuil, a heavily Romanised urban centre, located on the main road between Besançon and Langres, would naturally have been a prime target for such a process of expansion.

Given the tantalizing archaeological evidence for the existence of a Christian community in Luxeuil prior to the arrival of Columbanus and the establishment of his monasteries, one must further question the extent to which the Irish monk would have been able to implant his vision of monastic layout\(^\text{119}\), based on a formation in an Irish context, on the site, and to what extent he would simply have been appropriating the extant structures of the settlement to suit his own needs. In the case of the latter, it is quite difficult to see how any typically “Irish” features could be discerned in the archaeological remains without recourse to an overly biased interpretation of the remains informed by a desire to reduce the origins of the site to the ethnicity of its historical founder. To do so would be to fall into the same overly simplistic, nationalistic models criticised at the outset of this chapter.

\(^{119}\) Notwithstanding the problems with such a concept raised above
Fig. 2.5: Excavations of the Église St. Martin in Luxeuil, showing the sarcophagi arrayed around the apse (centre).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the question of cultural identity and its markers at Annegray and its sister house Luxeuil from textual and archaeological sources. The overwhelming impression that is beginning to emerge from the evidence discussed here is one of integration and assimilation, as opposed to the implantation of a culturally unique edifice, which as if in a vacuum, preserved the ethnic characteristics of the founder, rendering these monasteries ‘bastions of Irish culture on the continent’. The context set out in the opening section demonstrates the dependence of the fledgling community on the local population and questions how, given this support and local character of the monastery, Columbanus’s Irishness could have transferred onto his monastic foundations in any tangible or lasting sense. This questioning was supported in the appraisal of the Script of Luxeuil which, bearing little semblance to the Insular manuscript tradition of Columbanus’s homeland, further stresses the importance of the connections his monasteries built up in his adoptive land as well as the role of the local contingent of followers in shaping the cultural outlook of the foundations already alluded to. The final section attempted to draw the
questions raised in relation to the mixing of the ethnic identity of Columbanus and material culture on to the archaeology itself, firstly by questioning the practicality of searching for “Irish” characteristics in the archaeological remains of Annegray, before looking to the recent excavations at nearby Luxeuil to suggest that the built environment of the location prior to Columbanus’s arrival may have precluded, or at the very least, mitigated the implantation of any such vision of monastic layout on the landscape of the Breuchin Valley. Given the level of integration into the local society evidenced here, one must question the relevance of the traditional approach which sought to bring Columbanus’ Irishness to the fore when dealing with these foundations, in our consideration of the archaeological evidence presented hereafter. This is, of course, not to say that it was not a factor in the formation of these sites, or that its relevance is wholly negligible. However, in light of the evidence explored here, it is proposed to progress on to the consideration of the landscape of Annegray and of the fieldwork carried out there in the course of this project, with a theoretical framework that reflects this new paradigm; one that holds the Irish provenance of the founder as just one factor in a complex, multifarious dynamic; one that takes into consideration the role which the Breuchin Valley, its political and social networks, its local population and dynamics, played in the origins and the development of Annegray.
Chapter 3

The Landscape Setting of Annegray.

Erat enim tunc vasta heremus Vosacus nomine, in qua castrum diritum olim, quem antiquorum traditio Anagrates nuncupabant. Ad quem vir sanctus cum venisset, licet aspera vastitate solitudinis et scopulorum interpositione loca, ibi cum suis resedit, parvo alimentorum solamine contentus, memor illius verbi, non in solo pane hominem vivere, sed verbo vite satiates, adfluenti dape habundare, quam quisquis sumptam esuriem nesciat in evum\(^1\).

This brief account by Jonas of Susa of the founding of Annegray has for generations represented the starting point from which any treatment of Columbanus’ missionary work in the Vosges has progressed. However, despite the rivers of ink that have been spilled in describing the first flourish of Columbanian monasticism in Frankish Gaul, we still know very little about the nature and the development of this most important of sites. The excavations carried out on the site of Annegray in the 1950s by Dr Giles Cugnier, a local ophthalmic surgeon with little archaeological experience\(^2\), did little to shed any light on the earliest phases of the monastery. Although the fieldwork carried out in the course of the Columbanus’ Life and Legacy Project has aimed at bringing about some clarification in this respect, the results are no more valuable unless they are put into a wider context of the settlement patterns of the area. In recent years landscape archaeology has become a useful means by which to build up a more nuanced image of processes that shaped the genesis and development of historic places. By going beyond the confines of the archaeological site itself and

\(^{1}\) Jonas, \textit{Vita Columbani} 1:6. Ionae \textit{Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis}, ed. Krusch, B. Hannover, Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, (1905); “At that time there was a great wilderness called Vosagus, in which there was a castrum that had long been in ruins and that an ancient tradition called Anagrates. When the holy man came to that place, he settled there with his followers, despite the harsh desert of solitude and the habitable places interspersed with cliffs. He was content with a meager consolation of food, mindful of the saying that, man does not live by bread alone (Deut 8:3), but is sated by the word of life, overflowing with bountiful food, which, whosoever shall taste, shall never know hunger any more.”

The Landscape Setting of Annegray

considering a large range of data, cartographical, aerial photography, toponyms, archaeological field reports, historical and hagiographical texts all relating to an area, one can provide a richer, more complete account of the site in question. Jonas, in his account, provides us with a blank canvass on which to build our treatment of the landscape of Annegray, the task at hand here is to bring together the requisite data to provide as faithful as possible a narrative which reflects the circumstances surrounding its foundation and its development. In building up an image of both the physical and built landscape that faced Columbanus on his arrival in the Vosges one hopes to gain interesting insights into the many factors which may have dictated the course of events for the fledgling community. Such a treatment should also raise questions about the traditionally accepted narrative and generate new areas of research for the future: was the area really as deserted as Jonas claims, or is this merely part of the hagiographical topos that accompanied the accounts of monastic lifestyle from Anthony to Martin to Benedict? Was Columbanus genuinely the pioneering figure has so frequently been portrayed as, who carried the flame of Christianity into the darkness of the Vosges forests? Or should we consider that a much more complex set of factors were at play in the process that led to the foundation of Annegray and its sister houses, Luxeuil and Fontaines?

It is particularly in relation to the built landscape, the man-made remains of the past, that our knowledge of the process and influences at play may be informed. Landscape is deceptively complex term and much debate has taken place as to how it should be perceived and applied, but it is useful to think of landscape as it has so often been described, as a palimpsest: on to the canvass of the natural

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3 Christie, N. (2004), ‘Landscapes of Change in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval Ages: Themes, Directions and Problems’ in Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Ashgate. pp. 1-38

geography of the land each generation adds its mark, layer upon layer, invariably influenced by what has been built before and in turn influencing the landscape of the future\textsuperscript{5}. While the archaeological record for Annegray is only now being developed, we can garner much useful information by considering the development of the landscape around it and how these remains fit into what came before it and what developed after it. The aim of such an exercise is not to devalue the account of Jonas, for so long the foundation stone of our account of Annegray: as a close contemporary of Columbanus and someone who spent time at these monasteries, his is an invaluable source of information. The intention is rather to bring together all the available information in order to flesh out the image of Columbanus and his Frankish monasteries as provided by Jonas. In so doing an image of Columbanus at odds with the traditional narrative may develop, but it is one no less interesting or thought provoking.

The Physical landscape of Annegray

The Vosges is a mountainous region of Eastern France, close to the borders of Germany and Switzerland. Extending over 120km north to south and reaching 60km at its widest point, it covers an area of 4000km². Presenting as a leaf-shaped massif, running roughly north to south between the Rhine and Saône rivers, it contains a surprising number of microcosms for such a relatively small mountain range. On the western approach it rises gradually from the rolling plains of Burgundy and Lorraine, beginning as small rounded foothills, progressing to upland plateaux, before rising to the heights of the Grand Ballon des Vosges at 1424m in the southernmost reaches of the terrain. On the eastern side the change in altitude is much more sudden and dramatic, descending quickly from the highest mountain tops down to the broad valley floor of the Rhine basin in less than half the distance that it took to accumulate on the western side. There is less of the gradual progression from high to low ground found on the western side where there is little to distinguish the ending of the Burgundian plain and the start of the Vosges. On the eastern side, the limit is more apparent, blatant almost, defined by the broad, flat-bottomed valley of the Rhine, heavily populated by the cities of Colmar, Mulhouse and Strasbourg in contrast to the mountainous land to its east. In aspect the Vosges are much less spectacular than the jagged high peaks of the Alps and Jura mountains immediately to the south, indeed they more readily recall the terrain of the Black Forest which lies opposite the Rhine Valley on the same latitude. This similarity between the two mountain ranges is in part explained by the fact that in geomorphological terms they both form part of the vast Varacian belt of crystalline mountains created during the Precambrian period that stretch from Brittany in the west to Bohemia in the east. The Vosges and the Black Forest became dislocated during the Tertiary period when a large graben, namely the Rhine Valley, formed between them, causing an uplift of land on either side and producing the dramatic change.

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in altitude on the eastern side of the Vosges. From a geological perspective the range is composed of two broad areas; a predominant underlying bed of crystalline metamorphic rocks constitute the southern mass of the mountain range and forms its highest peaks. These peaks have been greatly eroded by long periods of glaciation and today have a much rounded profile, leading to the name most commonly ascribed to them, the Ballons des Vosges, literally the Vosges Balloons. To the north and east this bed of metamorphic rocks is covered by a substantial layer of sedimentary red sandstone laid down in the Mesozoic period, which provides a primary material for the architecture of the area. Varying in depth from north to south, it reaches its greatest magnitude in the Voge plateau, to the north of Luxeuil-les-Bains. Interestingly for our present study both Luxeuil and Annegray lie on the frontier between these two geomorphologic zones.

At 1425m Le Grand Ballon is the highest point in the massif and one of the few points where the range breaks through the heavy tree cover that represents the main characteristic of the terrain. From the Grand Ballon a ridge of high peaks runs generally northeast, petering out into the plain of Lorraine to the north. This ridge marks a significant limit in the watershed represented by the mountain range, with the valleys running off roughly perpendicular to the east of it feeding the Rhine system, while the valleys on the western side of the ridge feed into the Saône and Moselle. Together with the Jura in the south of Franche Comté, the Vosges present a substantial hindrance to travel over land between the plains of France and central Europe. Much of the traffic is forced through the small stretch of low lying land between the two ranges known as the Belfort Gap, immediately to the south of Luxeuil and Annegray.

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Moving further west one is presented with the river basins of the Saône and the Ongon, which have had an important role in shaping the habitation patterns of Haute-Saône over centuries. The most clearly manifest effect they have had on the landscape are the rich fluvial deposits they and their tributaries, fed by the Vosges mountains, have over time built up into deep terraces of arable low lying land. This is in contrast to the land in the Vosges foothills around Annegray, where the highly acidic soil and harsher winter climate limits agricultural activities leading to a higher level of livestock breeding\(^{12}\), the Saône and Ognon river basins are much more amenable to the cultivation of crops. Perhaps just as important in terms of their influence on habitation patterns is their role in facilitating transport. The Saône is navigable as far up river as Porte-sur-Saône, and perhaps even as far as Corrè\(^{13}\), and given the fact that down river it connects to the larger Rhône and then on to the Mediterranean, the connectivity that this fluvial route-way provides should not be understated.

The forest is ever-present in this corner of France. Indeed it has for generations been the defining characteristic with which minds have conceived the Vosges mountains. Ermold the Black, an Aquitaine prince exiled to Strasbourg in 829, was not enamoured by the range summing them up as “malheureuses Vosges, battues par le vent et la pluie, n’offrant pour tout trésor que du bois à brûler”\(^{14}\). Even Columbanus himself, in his letter to the Bishops at Macôn, refers to his community living “in his silvis silere”, in the silence of these woods. Despite heavy deforestation, caused to a great degree by the increase in industry in the area from the seventeenth century onwards, the forest still dominates the Vosges. In recent years it has even been increasing in cover and high levels of emigration away from the land in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) and 20\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries have led to a situation where land was increasingly turned over to forestry use. In the north east of Haute-Saône, the area defined as the Vosges Comtoises, over two thirds of the land


\(^{13}\) P 64.

(65.8%) is taken up by forest, as opposed to a mere 22.4% of arable land. Despite the acidity of the land, deciduous trees, particularly oak and beech, traditionally dominated the make up of the forest, however in recent years there has been a steep rise in conifers, due to their commercial viability, with the majority forestry planted in the past 40 years consisting predominantly of spruce and douglas pine.

The south-easternmost zone of the Vosges, in the department of Haute-Saône, is characterised by a vast upland plateau of marshy land covered by a dense blanket of forest interspersed by hundreds of small lakes. Known as the Plateau des Milles Etangs, this frontier between the mountains and the plain was formed by piedmont glaciers spilling out from their valley walls in the central parts of the Vosges Mountains and extending over this vast area (200km²), leaving behind a jumble of moraines, drumlins and bogs, cut through by a number of later small glacial valleys (most significantly the Breuchin valley and the Ognon valley). An important caveat when dealing with the Plateau de Mille etangs is that the majority of the over 800 lakes scattered over its surface are man made, some certainly during the medieval period, but many in the early modern and modern period. The extent to which one can consider the role of these small lakes in the landscape of the first monastic community is constrained by this factor, perhaps in dealing with the Plateau de Mille Etangs the presence of bogs and marshes (which were commonly the features amended to produce the lakes) should be brought to the fore. The ubiquitous forest cover, so characteristic of the Vosges as a whole, extends also to the Plateau des Milles Etangs, being disturbed only on the valley floors and in the immediate hinterland of hamlets for the purposes of cultivation, or in the more exposed boggy patches of the uplands.

Annegray

Today Annegray is a small hamlet in the commune of La Voivre (Haute-Saône) consisting of a few houses around a small country crossroads on the very edge of the Plateau des Mille Etangs. The site considered locally as the location of the monastery of Annegray, that excavated by Cugnier in the 1950s, lies on a small rise at the entrance to the hamlet, which although not exceeding 20m, affords clear views of the Breuchin Valley to the north east. Turning south the rest of the hamlet is apparent, with communal grass prairies extending up as far as the tree line which surround it on three sides. The economic usage of these prairies, at least in the recent past, is apparent from the local names they still hold, Pres Les Boeufs, Clos de la Place and Breuil d’Annegray to name but a few. To the south east of the remains lies a small man-made fish pond, which from discussion with the owner is known to be a recent feature, constructed in the late 1990s, however the location may have previously held a similar function. There is also a local tradition relating to a number of larger ponds covering much of the Pres les Boeufs to the southwest, the so-called ‘etangs de Colomban’. Traces of large curvilinear banks, similar to those observed revetting lakes elsewhere in the plateau area are still discernable in the large field today, although the likelihood that such potential structures would date to the time of the eponymous saint is doubtful given the relatively late date for many of the man made etangs.

Leaving Annegray, moving eastward along the Breuchin Valley, the valley narrows and becomes ever more typical of highland pasture, the limit of which is constantly defined by the tree line extending down from the high plateau. The Breuchin River itself is fed by streams emanating from the Plateau de Mille Etangs, with one major source in particular originating in the area of Beulotte St Laurent, in the interior of the plateau. As one moves ever eastward and upward the valley comes to a close at the Col du Mont de Fourche above the hamlet of Coravillers on the border with Lorraine, at an altitude of 620m. In crossing over the pass one descends into the very interior of the Vosges Mountains and the Valley of the Moselle river, which passes through Nancy, Metz and Trier before joining with the Rhine at Koblenz. The journey westward from Annegray is much
less taxing. One travels down river, along the gentle course of the Breuchin which meanders through pasture and forestry towards Luxeuil, the location of Columbanus’ second monastic settlement, which sits at the point where the valley opens up. The upland forested areas of the Plateau de Mille Etangs and the Voge plateau are significant presences to the north and east of Luxeuil, but to the south and south west the land levels out and becoming more characterised by rolling hills of cultivated land than by forestry, as the Breuchin makes its way to join up with the Saône.

Annegray, then, is located very much in a topographic interface, in more sense than one. In its broader context it is located in the frontier zone between the Vosges Mountains proper and the fertile plain of lower Haute-Saône where the Breuchin River joins with the Saône. However even within this context it is very much on the edge. The modern day hamlet is positioned in small side valley off the main course of the Breuchin valley, just at the point where it turns northwest and narrows towards the interior of the massif. Apart from the north-western approach to the hamlet, which is open and affords clear views of the Breuchin Valley, it is surrounded on all other sides by small hills which mark the beginning of the Plateau des Mille Etangs. Such a location places it on the limit between the fertile valley bottom, which leads out to the Saône flood plain, and a densely forested highland, which extends for over 200km² to the south and west.
Fig. 3.1. The Vosges Mountains.
Fig. 3.2. The Physical Geography of Haute-Saône. (Faure-Brac, 2002)

Fig. 3.3. Annegray and the upper Breuchin Valley.
**Landscape Setting: Historical Settlement**

Having considered the physical landscape of Annegray, its setting in what has been shown to be a rich and varied landscape that surrounds it, we now turn our attention to the man made landscape in which the monastery was built and developed. Our concern here is to discern whether *Anagrates* was indeed, as Jonas attests, a wilderness upon Columbanus’ arrival, or if this description is born more out of the hagiographical necessity to depict the saint, as many before him, departing into the desert to deepen his faith\(^{18}\). Our main concern, in terms of the archaeological record, is the material dating to the Roman period, which as will be seen had a substantial effect on the landscape of this area, as well as the material dating to the early medieval period which saw the arrival of Columbanus in the area.

The survey, based primarily on a consideration of the archaeological finds on a commune-by-commune basis, is intended to give a clearer impression of the wider archaeological context in which Annegray sits. Where possible the limits of the survey area were dictated by the landscape, thus the upper valley of the River Ognon on the far side of the Plateau des Mille Etangs defines the southernmost reaches of the area, to the east the limit is provided by the line of high peaks in the Vosges which also act as the border with Lorraine and Alsace. On the west and north there is a less clearly perceptible change in landscape, consequently in order to avoid over-stretching our scope and to keep the focus on Annegray a decision was made to fix the limits based on cartographic limits: to the north the border with Lorraine provides a helpful limit, while a line passing north-south through the commune of Saint-Loup-sur-Semouse was imposed as an artificial eastern edge of our study area.

It is important to begin this discussion of the man made landscape with a consideration of the source material available. The primary source is the *Carte Archeologique de la Gaule for Haute-Saône*, which identifies all the archaeological

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finds attested to date in the Haute-Saône region on a commune by commune basis. While it is certainly an invaluable source of information, it must be noted that it is a paper-survey, compiled solely by consulting published material on the sites included as opposed to a field-survey of the region. Although the latter would have been more demanding in terms of labour and expense, it would have doubtless produced a more detailed map of the archaeological landscape since it would mean that new sites may have been revealed, surveyed and documented. In order to compensate for the gaps in information, a number of partial field studies carried out on behalf of the Conseil Regional de Franche Comté and deposited in the archives in Besançon have been consulted, as well as the database of the national archaeological research agency INRAP which contains up-to-date information on all excavations carried out in advance of construction work for each region. However, even in this respect it must be said that given the low level of major construction projects in this part of northern Haute-Saône, the level of newly-identified archaeological sites outside of the main urban centres is quite low. In light of this fact, it was felt necessary to take into account the results of important large-scale landscape projects conducted in recent years in neighbouring regions (Lorraine, Ardennes and Western Switzerland in particular) with the hope that the pictures of landscape settlement that they have provided could be extrapolated onto the evidence emerging from Haute-Saône with the intention of producing a clearer narrative of events.

One final factor that must be highlighted here is the bias in the data towards the Roman period. This is caused by a number of factors, primary among which is the long-standing interest in the period by academics from the eighteenth century onwards which has produced a substantial body of work, far exceeding that of any later period\textsuperscript{22}. Indeed a large number of artefacts from the area, collected and recorded by antiquarians, are known to us today solely through their bibliographical records. A further, more significant factor in the bias towards the Roman Period is the construction methods used which renders sites more visible on the modern landscape, be it Roman roads or villas from aerial photography, or pottery spreads and earthworks which can be identified by fieldwalking\textsuperscript{23}. Traditionally research into the early medieval period in Franche Comté has focused on the large grave sites focussed around Montbelliard and the Belfort Gap. The ephemeral nature of settlement from the fifth century onwards makes it much more difficult to detect by field walking and aerial photography\textsuperscript{24}. In neighbouring regions, however, the advent of large-scale construction projects such as the TGV Nord line has led to the discovery of substantial rural settlements dating to the early medieval period and increased our appreciation of the settlement patterns of post-Roman Gaul\textsuperscript{25}. Once again it would be imprudent not to take the results of such work into consideration in our study of the landscape of Annegray.

\textsuperscript{22} The stimulus for research into the Roman period was provided by the creation of societies such as the Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Besancon in 1752, but also dependent on the individual pursuits of scholars such as E. Clerc and N.G. Matty de Latour, who both produced maps of the Roman road system and spread of antiquities in the region; Clerc, E (1847) La Franche-Comté a l’Époque Romaine Représentée par ses ruines. Besancon, Bintot; Matty de Latour (1865) Voies Romaines. System de Construction et d’Entretien. ms Bibl. Institut de France.

\textsuperscript{23} Christie, N. 2004 pp. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

The Landscape Setting of Annegray

A Romanised Landscape.

While the location of Annegray may be marginal in a geographic sense that is not to say that it was luminal in terms of settlement patterns, that it was, to use Jonas’ words, a wilderness. Indeed Jonas himself alludes to the built landscape on Columbanus’ arrival in the area when he refers to a *castrum* at Annegray\(^26\) as well as a *castrum* and pagan cult sites at Luxovium\(^27\). In terms of settlement patterns during the Roman period *Luxovium*, modern day Luxeuil-les-Bains, represents the sole genuine urban centre known to date in the Haute-Saône region. While other large agglomerations have been excavated at Mantouche\(^28\), Porte-sur-Saône and Vesoul revealing evidence for intensive occupation from the Iron Age onwards, Luxeuil is the most developed of all the sites in the region in terms of urban characteristics\(^29\). The settlement possessed a complex street pattern based around a north-south oriented *cardo maximus*, which more or less corresponds with the modern Rue Victor Genoux and Rue Carnot\(^30\). The exact layout of the town during the Roman period is still a cause for debate and the hypothetical plan of the town proposed by Christian Card and Yves Jeannin with its focal point on the plateau to the north of the modern centre and a grid system of streets running off the *cardo maximus* has been questioned in recent years by excavations in the urban centre\(^31\). What is clear, however, is the high level of diversification present in the settlement. The north-western section of the town, for example, possessed a substantial baths complex, also mentioned by Jonas\(^32\), which took advantage of the naturally-occurring hot springs in the locality\(^33\).


\(^{27}\) Jonas, *Vita Columbani* 1:15.


\(^{32}\) Jonas, *Vita Columbani* 1:15.

Excavations at Chatigny in the north east of the town have revealed the remains of a substantial pottery workshop, consisting of at least 8 ovens which produced a type of terra sigillata typical to Luxeuil (terra sigillata Luxovienne)\textsuperscript{34}. The town is also notable for the substantial production of funeral stellae, characterised by Walter as peculiar to Luxeuil and dated to between the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries A.D.\textsuperscript{35}. Largely anepigraphic, save for the initials D.M. (\textit{dis manibus}) and in some cases a name, they contain figurative representations of the deceased in profile, often surrounded by relatives. Such stellae have been discovered throughout the modern urban centre of Luxeuil, but a considerable concentration has been observed in the area around Place the la Baille, Place de la République and Place de l’Abbaye which would have marked the southern edge of the town during the Imperial period\textsuperscript{36}. Excavations in recent years in this area of town, prompted by a remodelling of the centre by the town council, have revealed a complex picture of this sector of Roman Luxovium. While there is clearly a significant funerary function to the area, it would be incorrect to consider it uniquely as a necropolis since recent discoveries include a large structure of a likely public function built in \textit{opus africanum} (most likely a temple)\textsuperscript{37} and a nearby domus, which possessed a series of outhouses and cellars\textsuperscript{38}. It would appear that by late antiquity, in fact, that the focus of the town had shifted southwards and that the \textit{castrum} attested to by Jonas in the \textit{Vita} may have had this sector of the town as its nucleus.

Luxovium’s importance was to a large extent based on its location, lying as it does between the Belfort Gap and the important Roman city of Langres. Our knowledge of the Roman road system of Haute-Saône is greatly affected by work in the nineteenth century, carried out largely by antiquarians but also by government-appointed geographers who were determined to produce a

\textsuperscript{36} C.A.G.-70: Commune 310, p.273.
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definitive map of the region in the Roman period\(^{39}\). Unfortunately, following this first flurry of investigation, the twentieth century has seen very little research into the Roman route system of Haute-Saône, which leaves us with a considerable amount of blank spots in our knowledge. This is especially unfortunate since the range of surveying methods developed in the past 20 years, allied with more precise excavating techniques would go a long way to generating a more genuine representation of the Roman road system of Haute-Saône. From what is known however, we can envisage at least three important routes passing through, or close to, Luxeuil during the Roman period (Fig. 3.4).

The most important of these is without a doubt that which originates in Langres and passes through Luxeuil before making its way through the southern reaches of our study area on its way to Belfort and on to the Rhine area, in doing so taking full advantage of the strategic opening presented by the Belfort Gap between the Vosges and the Jura Mountains\(^{40}\). Remnants of the road are still discernable today as it passes through forestry in a number of the communes incorporated in this study, particularly those which lie to the south of the Plateau de Mille Etangs, namely Baudoncourt\(^{41}\), Linexert\(^{42}\), Lantenot\(^{43}\), Saint-Germain\(^{44}\), La Neuvelle-les-Lure\(^{45}\) and Malbouhans\(^{46}\). A second major artery was discerned by researchers in the nineteenth century approaching Luxeuil from the south, most likely from the regional capital Besançon, formerly Vesontio the chief city of Sequania\(^{47}\). Large sections of the road are evident as it leaves Vesoul to the south, passing through Rioz\(^{48}\) and Echenoz\(^{49}\) with a trajectory that clearly leads towards Luxeuil, although to date

\(^{39}\) The resulting works vary in terms of their quality and trustworthiness, but particular mention should be made of the map produced by Matty de Latour, the result of an exhaustive campaign of test trenches carried out in order to verify the roman origin of a number of routes, in particular that between Besançon and Langres: Faure-Brac, O. 'Les voies de communication en Haute-Saône à l'époque romaine', in Faure-Brac, O. ed Carte Archeologique de la Gaule : La Haute-Saône. Paris, 2002. p 66.

\(^{40}\) As first envisaged by Matty de Latour (1865) Voies Romaines. System de Construction et d'Entretien. ms Bibl. Institut de France; Faure-Brac, O. 2002 p.66.

\(^{41}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 055, p.111.

\(^{42}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 304, p.258.

\(^{43}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 294, p.256.

\(^{44}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 464, p.399.

\(^{45}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 385, p 365.

\(^{46}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 328, p. 317.


\(^{48}\) C.A.G. 70: Commune 447, p.396.
Fig. 3.4: Map of Sequania during the Roman period, showing Roman routeway system and main settlements.
Fig 3.5: Map of study area showing the location of the known Roman Routeway system.

Possible Roman Fort:  
Roman Road System:  

Fond de carte David Vuillemeroz / UMR ARTeHIS 5594 CNRS d’après IGN RGE 2011
no sections have been excavated within our study area. This route, having passed through Luxeuil, would then seem to head north towards the plains of Lorraine and the city of Plombières: substantial sections are visible as it passes through the forestry between the communes of Fontaines-les-Luxeuil50 and Fougerolles51 on the northern edge the study area.

This then, is the current state of knowledge as to the route system in the northwest corner of Haute-Saône. However when relating this network to the landscape of Annegray it is important to stress the bias of the nineteenth century authors upon who’s work the current map of Roman roads in the area is based. The majority, apart from Poly that is, were members of antiquarian societies in Belfort and Besançon, hence the detail in which the roads leading to and from those to cities are afforded52. Needless to say the Breuchin Valley, less accessible before the age of mass transport, figured little in their studies and as such the absence of any recorded road dating to the Roman period along the course of the valley should be taken at face value. Admittedly had further research taken place over the past century, the picture might be different, but as of yet no such initiative has been undertaken. There are, however, a number of indicators that suggest that a more dispersed network of smaller routes existed and which might allow us to hypothesise that one of them may have passed up along the Breuchin Valley (Fig.3.5). The long straight stretches of the modern Route Departmental 6 from Luxeuil are certainly reminiscent of other stretches of Roman road in the department and its course is littered with evocative toponyms such as ‘le bon voie’, ‘route des Romains’ and ‘le vielle voie’ which elsewhere have been found to be good indicators of routes tracing their origins to the Roman period. Two such localities of particular interest are to be found in the commune of Coravillers at the very end of the valley, just at the point where

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the road rises up to the Col du Mont de Fourche. The col, at a height of 620m marks the point of transit into the upper valley of the Moselle River, which contains the important centres of Nancy, Metz and Trier. The potential provided by this relatively low col and by extension the Breucin Valley itself to provide a more direct link to the important population hubs in the Moselle region than skirting around the northern edge of the mountains would certainly not have gone unnoticed. The possible existence of a Roman routeway in the area, however minor, is further strengthened by the series of sites along the valley floor, which have been interpreted as possible Roman forts: three in total, in the communes of Raddon et Chapendu, Prosliere et la Langle to which can be added Jonas’ assertion of a Roman fort at Anagrates which has produced promising evidence in the latest campaign of fieldwork. Although they have yet to be thoroughly surveyed, they may be representative of the series of route-way forts built in late antiquity to secure the boarders of the Roman Empire. It must be reiterated that the existence of such a road would need to be supported by further research, but it would go a long way to explaining the diffusion of Roman material throughout the valley.

So much for the urban environment and road system, which has been shown to be anything but marginal in the Roman period, we shall now turn to the rural landscape of Annegray with the hope of discerning the traditional patterns of land use in the area. While research into late antique and early medieval urban settlement on the continent has flourished in the past 20 years, demonstrating a dynamic and prospering image of urban life in contrast to the earlier perception of decline and abandonment, research into the rural settlement remains somewhat monotone, with a heavy focus on the villa as sole expression of rural

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56 Jonas, Vita Columbani 1:12.
life in late antiquity\textsuperscript{59}. If we were to extrapolate this model to Haute-Saône, a cursory glance at the distribution map of Roman villae would have one believe that the north eastern corner of the region was uninhabited at this time (Fig. 3.6), with much of the rural population of the region was focused around the Saône and Ognon river basins\textsuperscript{60}. The levels of luxury and architectural accomplishment attainable by landowners in the wider Vosges area is no better exemplified than at the site of Chassey-les-Montbozon, on the banks of the Ognon down river from Lure, it represents the apogee of villa building in the area. Located at the furthest point of navigation along the Ognon, and close to the road leading from Besançon to Luxeuil, although outside of our study area, it forms part of the larger landscape of the Southern Vosges\textsuperscript{61}. The villa is immense: spread over 6400m\textsuperscript{2} it consists of a large courtyard surrounded on three sides by buildings which house over 50 rooms in total, including a substantial bath complex, with the fourth side taken up by a large ornamental pond\textsuperscript{62}. The site has a long and complex development, originating in the first century A.D. and continuing in use well into the early medieval period, and will merit more attention in our discussion below. Another site that demonstrates the extent of wealth exhibited by villa building in Haute-Saône is Jonvelle. To the east of Luxeuil along the Langres-Rhine road and on the upper reaches of the Saône river, the villa possesses one of the most extravagant bath complexes discovered to date in the region, endowed with richly-decorated mosaics and a fine hypocaust system\textsuperscript{63}. These sites certainly demonstrate the high levels of \textit{otium} attainable to large landowners in this part of the Roman province of Greater Sequania, all within a short distance of our study area, but it would be wrong to


\textsuperscript{61} The communication links with Luxeuil are evident from the discovery during the campaign of 1992 of pottery originating in the workshops of Chatigny; Barbet, G. and Gandel, P. (1993) Troisième Campagne de Fouilles Archéologiques sur le Site Antique de Chassey-les-Montbozon. Rapport, S.R.A. Besancon.


see them as the archetypal rural settlement of the area. Their large plan and the materials used make them particularly detectable to modern survey techniques, but we should not let this distort our image of rural settlement during this period. As a matter of fact, recent studies have shown that there was a much greater variety in building techniques employed in rural settlement, particularly in later antiquity, used to produce a greater variety of site types. Van Ossel’s survey of rural settlement in late antique northern Gaul, for example, demonstrates a gradual shift throughout late antiquity towards settlements of smaller size with an increased utilisation of wood as a construction material, a factor which naturally changes the footprint of sites and makes their identification by field walking and aerial photography all the more difficult. In any consideration of the rural habitation of northern Gaul, we should bear this in mind as the current survey techniques fail to take these factors into account, in many cases smaller more ephemeral sites only come to light as the result of large scale construction projects, demonstrating that that far more complex settlement patterns were in existence than are evident from the consideration of excavation reports and the results of field walking exercises alone.

There is no doubt that the better-quality land in the lowlands around the Saône and Ognon supported the large farmsteads such as the villae mentioned above represented, however, it is hard to believe that the upper Breuchin Valley was so marginal in terms of land use as to be deserted. It should be stressed that blank areas on a distribution map of archaeological sites do not necessarily represent an absence of sites, they can equally represent an absence of investigation. The map evoked above is compiled on the basis of published reports of excavations meaning that unless a potential site has been excavated and published in the past 50 years it does not figure on the map of rural settlement in Haute-Saône. In light of this, it is interesting to consider a series of survey projects undertaken by A. Guillaume on behalf of the Societe Historique et Archéologique de la Region de Lure and deposited at the Services Regionaux d’Archaeologie (S.R.A.) in Besançon (Fig. 3.9). The surveys consist of field walking in areas along the known route of Roman roads, primarily the Langres-Rhine road which passes through Lure. The

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64 Van Ossel, 1997 p. 82.
most typical indicators of Roman habitation are large spreads of durable material, such as tegulae and imbrices or datable ceramic and in many cases the toponyms of the fields in question, “champ des tuiles” or “champs rougeux”, are evocative of these material spreads. Of the communes included in the study area of Annegray a total of eight, namely Saint Barthelemy, Saint Germain, Neuvelle-les-Lure, Linexert, Magnivray, Citers, Ehuns and Fougerolles, all within close proximity to the Roman route-way system, contained sites producing evidence for structures dating to the Roman period. As with the map of Roman roads before, the absence of communes in the Breuchin Valley from the results of this survey should not be taken as an absence of habitation in the Roman period given that the project examined only the areas along the Langres-Rhine route. It is highly likely that in the event of a similar project of prospection undertaken in the area around Annegray similar results would be produced. This is supported by the fact that Froideconche, the sole commune that makes part of the Breuchin Valley proper included in the last series of SHARL surveys, produced evidence of Roman habitation. As it stands, therefore, we can at least say that it appears from the evidence that the rural area to the south and east of our site were populated during the Roman period so the idea that similar patterns of habitation extended also up the Breuchin Valley is not beyond the realms of possibility.

Although documented evidence may thus far be lacking in terms to the spread of habitation sites through the Breuchin Valley, there are other factors that point to its existence and which may help us to understand its extent and organisation, namely the spread of artefacts datable to the Roman period which have turned

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up throughout the area over the past 200 years. These mainly consist of stray finds thrown up during building projects and recorded by antiquarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though in some cases there are more recent, well documented finds which underline the extent of material present in this corner of Haute-Saône. The importance of Luxeuil as a focal point of cultural activity in the area is stressed, for example, in the spread throughout the valley of funeral stellae, whose artistic components have led Walter to classify them as belonging to the same production source as those found in the necropolis around Place de la Republique. Not surprisingly a number of these occur in localities that are to be found along the course of the major route-ways discussed above and in close proximity to the urban centre itself, such as Ormoiche, Sainte-Marie-en-Chaux and Saint Saveur. However the cultural orbit also extends up into the Breuchin Valley, as attested by fragments of stellae found in Breuchotte on the valley floor, in the forestry around Raddon-et-Chapendu and as far north as Saint-Bresson, a small hamlet located in a minor side-valley which descends from the Plateau des Mille Étangs. Ritual activity in the area is further evident from the common occurrence of statuettes representing sacred figures. Froideconche, at the point where the valley begins to narrow, has produced two small bronze statuettes, one depicting Hercules brandishing a club with a lion skin draped over his shoulder, the other a representation of Cupid. Similar statuettes have been found in the ‘less accessible’ areas of forestry to the north, at Saint Valbert and even on the Plateau des Mille Étangs, at Esboz-Brest. Perhaps the most noteworthy discovery, however, was that of a number of intriguing items relating to the cult of Diana, made over the course of the eighteenth century at the summit of Montagne Saint Martin in Faucogney-et-la-Mer, whose dominant position overlooks the site of Annegray itself. The most

76 C.A.G. 70: Commune 398, p.373.
78 C.A.G. 70: Commune 473, p401.
82 C.A.G. 70: Commune 258, p.234.
83 C.A.G. 70: Commune 475, p404.
84 C.A.G. 70: Commune 216, p222.
celebrated item is a bust of the goddess carved in bas-relief, crowned with a crescent moon pointing upwards. The carving has unfortunately since been lost, however we do possess a number of sketches. Other items revealed at the time include a statuette depicting Priapus as well as a number of small bronze animal figurines, interpreted as ex-voto offerings that according to the account were unearthed in the nave of the church that now stands on the site. The importance of Diana, at what may be interpreted as a cult site dedicated to the goddess, was emphasised by the discovery in 1747 of a further small bronze statuette, this time of the goddess herself crowned with a diadem and dressed and armed for the hunt.

The range and spread of ritual deposits and cultic material suggests a very strong sense of ‘place’ within the Breuchin Valley. They also reflect the fact that there was probably a sizeable population in the valley in the Roman and late antique period even if this has yet to be verified by the discovery of actual habitation sites. Though these ritual sites and deposits were clearly endowed with significance by those for whom the Breuchin Valley was home, the extent to which the area around Annegray was a lived in ‘place’ as opposed to a deserted wilderness is made even clearer by the frequency of finds relating to matters other than ritual activity. Monetary hoards are the most common discovery relating to economic activity in the region. Just as with the ritual deposits, they demonstrate just how much this was a landscape that was inhabited in the Roman Period for they not only occur close to the main urban settlement, but throughout the surrounding countryside. A number of finds confirm the pattern of settlement spread along the known road systems as evidenced by the SHARL fieldwalking projects; at Saint Barthelemy and Fougerolles finds were made close to the major road outlined above leading from Langres to Belfort. However, just how diffuse the settlement in the area may have been can also be seen in the discovery of monetary deposits in more ‘inaccessible’ locations in the landscape. Between Lantenot and Ringoville, for example, on the Plateau des Mille Etangs, a large hoard of coins was discovered by a farmer digging in a field in 1843, the sole remaining coin of which is an aureaus dating to the reign of Lucius Verus. Further still into the Plateau, a hoard of 20 coins bearing the images of Gordien

III and of Trajan were unearthed by a farmer digging in a field close to the hamlet of Servance on the upper reaches of the Ognon river. Elsewhere stray finds of coins have also taken place in Esboz-Brest (in the same woods in which the statuette mentioned above was discovered) and Froideconche at the mouth of the Breuchin Valley. The most spectacular discovery, however, was made close to Luxeuil-les-Bains in the late 1970s. Construction works on the military base at Chapelle-les-Luxeuil to the south-west of the town along the route of the Langres-Belfort road, disturbed a monetary hoard of vast proportions, estimated at anything up to 15,000 coins. Sadly no proper excavation was conducted and the exact scale and nature of the hoard is therefore unknown, with many of the artefacts being taken by personnel stationed on the base prior to the declaration of the find. What is apparent, however, is that the coins, which all date to a short period between 318 A.D. and 341 A.D., were deposited in four wooden troughs placed parallel to one another set into specially dug channels. The short chronology of production, the lack of forged or native coins, good quality of the items (many of which retained their outer layer of silver), provenance from the closest major mints and orderly deposition all suggest that the hoard may have been destined primarily for the payment of troops stationed in the area, possibly during action against the Francs and Alamans in the 340s. Nonetheless, what is clear from the find and those in other parts of our study area, is that they once more demonstrate the wealth, importance and connections of Luxeuil, stressing that the town and by extension its hinterland including the Breuchin Valley were in no sense liminal spaces, wildernesses, or deserts in the Roman Period.

Fig 3.6. Distribution of excavated villas in Haute-Saône. (Faure-Brac 2002)

Figs. 3.7 and 3.8 above: Distribution of Funeral Stellae and Ritually Deposited Roman Material in Haute-Saône. (Faure-Brac 2002)
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Possible Habitation Site: [icon]

Roman Road Network: [lines]

**Fig 3.9.** Map of Study area showing sites that revealed Roman habitation material.
Fig. 3.10. Map of study area showing the location stellae and ritual finds.

Fig 3.11: Map of study area showing the location of monetary hoards.
Early Medieval Period

Compared to the wealth of evidence relating to the Roman and late Antique history of the area surrounding Annegray outlined above, the Early Medieval Period, the period which saw the arrival of Columbanus in the area, is notable for the scarcity of evidence relating to settlement patterns. On a general level this can partly be explained by a traditional bias in research in French archaeology towards the preceding and following periods, with the early medieval period seen at best as a period of transition between two much more important periods, at worst as a dark age much less worthy of investigation. Such misconceptions were not helped by the less visible nature of Early Medieval dwellings, which built from less durable materials, do not appear so readily in field based prospection or aerial photography. Prior to the 1980s French Medievalists were far more concerned with the spectacular grave sites of the Merovingian period that were being uncovered along the border with Germany than investigating the actual dwellings of the people buried in them, to such an extent that by the early 1970s only one Merovingian settlement had been fully excavated. Traditionally, and not surprisingly given these biases, early medieval rural life was characterised as a period of large-scale depopulation caused to a large extent by the instability brought about by the barbarian invasions, which brought about a decisive break with the pre-existing network of villae and in turn led to a move towards settlement in urban centres for the purpose of greater security. What settlement that did exist in the countryside was characterised as squalid and miserable, a view very much in tune with the attitude of degradation in the level of living standards following the fall of the Roman Empire. Such attitudes seemed only to have been supported with the

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90 James. E. ‘Archaeology and the Merovingian Monastery’ in p 33
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discovery of the first thoroughly excavated early medieval settlement at Brebieres (Pas de Calais) which revealed a number of sunken hut structures measuring no more than 6m x 4m and which subsequently, under the term *Grubenhauser* or *fonds de cabanes*, came to be considered the archetypal form of Early Medieval dwelling, a vision which chimed very much with the image of reduced quality of living standards of the Dark Ages\textsuperscript{93}. When placed alongside the vast sumptuous villae of the preceding centuries it is somewhat understandable that these small structures were widely discussed in terms of decline.

However, in the intervening period the picture of Early Medieval settlement has been transformed. A major factor in this shift has been an increased level of major development projects that, while problematic for many archaeologists from an ethical perspective, have revealed sites that would otherwise have gone unnoticed as they were barely perceptible on the modern landscape\textsuperscript{94}. The vast numbers of early medieval settlement sites that have been uncovered in recent years have forced researchers to rethink such previously held concepts, and instead think more along the lines of continuity and adaptation as opposed to destruction and abandonment. In general terms building styles gradually began to favour less durable material from late antiquity onwards, with wooden structures becoming more common\textsuperscript{95}. The hundreds of excavations carried out in the past 20 years have demonstrated that the typical dwelling structure was not the Grubenhausen, but rather long wooden buildings supported either by post built frame or set upon sill beams laid at ground level, in most cases divided into numerous rooms and often found in relation to smaller structures found to be dotted around the main dwelling\textsuperscript{96}. Frequently these structures are found to form part of small conglomerations ranging from one or two habitation structures with associated features, to small ‘hamlet’ type groupings with quite

\textsuperscript{93} Perin, P. ‘The Origin of the Village in Early Medieval Gaul’ in *Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Ashgate.

\textsuperscript{94} Perin, P. ‘Settlements and Cemeteries’, p 78.

\textsuperscript{95} Christie, N. ‘Landscapes’, p23; Van Ossel ‘Formation de l’Habitat Rural’, p83.

\textsuperscript{96} Lorren, C and Perin, P. ‘Images de la Gaule rurale au VI\textsuperscript{e}siècle’ in Gauthier, N. and Galinié, H. *Grégoire de Tours et l’Espace Gaulois: Actes du Congres International Tours, 3-5 Novembre 1994*, Tours, Revue Archelogique du Centre de la France; Peytemann, E. ‘L’Établissement Rural’.
developed levels of diversification and division; the various individual agricultural units being divided by trenches or palisades and placed alongside already existing road systems or in relation to early church and cemeteries\textsuperscript{97}. Thus it gradually became apparent that the enigmatic grubenhausen, which for so long served as a marker of socio-economic decline, most likely served the purpose of an ‘outhouse’ structure in the settlement pattern, rather than actually constituting the dwelling structure itself.

Another long standing idea, that these simpler dwellings reflect the influence of the barbarian invaders, so strikingly different are they from the villae of Roman Gaul, and as such are demonstrative of a change in the ethnic character of rural settlement, would also seem to be far too simplistic. Van Ossel, for example, has demonstrated the gradual progression towards an increased utilisation of wood as a building material from the mid-fourth century onwards. At sites such as Germain-les-Corbiel (Seine et Marne) improvements to the villa complex were increasingly made with wood, and although at many of these sites the improvements differed not only in material but also layout, it is significant in relation to the question of continuity, that at Marolles-sur-Seine the wooden structures erected in the fifth century mimicked the layout of the former stone structures\textsuperscript{98}. The continuity in building practices over this period, for so long characterised by rupture and decline, has led Van Ossel to declare that ‘...l’habitat, tel qu’il existe dans les campagnes a partir du Vle siècle, résulte avant tout d’une évolution interne du monde rural gallo-romain’\textsuperscript{99}. Continuity is a recurring theme in many excavations of early medieval settlements. While Van Ossel estimates that one in two villae were occupied until at least the early Merovingian period, many more villae have evidence for later occupation in the nearby vicinity, in fact the placement of early medieval settlements near to the ruins of earlier Roman settlements is a common theme found in the excavation of early medieval sites. As Halsall has found in relation to the area surrounding the

\textsuperscript{97} Perin, P. ‘The Origins of the Village’, pp 258-265.
\textsuperscript{99} Van Ossel, ‘habitat rural’, p81.
city of Metz, ‘there was general continuity between the late Roman and Merovingian settlement patterns. Roman sites still in use by the later fourth century may themselves have been abandoned but settlement often persisted in the immediate vicinity’. Although there was certainly an evolution in how land was held and divided and of the dwellings themselves, in terms of the actual placement of sites there is little evidence for a mass depopulation, instead there seems to be what could be termed a contiguous concept of place as new settlements were established along pre-existing networks, either close to routeways which were still largely in use, close to or even upon earlier sites which had been the focus of habitation in Late Antiquity.

When it comes to the region of Haute-Saône the factors which for so long led to a lack of understanding of early medieval rural settlement are compounded by the fact that in the past 30 years very few of the large infrastructural projects which have shone a light on it in neighbouring regions have taken place. The deficit in our knowledge is demonstrated by Edith Peytremann’s very thorough survey of early medieval habitation sites in northern France, in which the sum total of sites excavated in Haute-Saône lies at just one. No full-scale survey of Early Medieval settlement has taken place in the region, or even appears to be possible in the current climate, and medieval features are particularly conspicuous by their absence from the *Carte Archeologique de la Gaul* drawn up for Haute-Saône. It goes without saying, therefore, that the picture of medieval settlement in the Breuchin Valley at present is less than helpful to researchers working in this field. Therefore in order to deduce how the landscape of Annegray may have been inhabited during this period one is required to take into consideration the knowledge gained in relation to the settlement patterns of neighbouring regions already mentioned which have benefited from work in recent years and attempt to extrapolate the findings onto our own study area. There is no reason to think

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101 As pointed out by Chavarria and Lewit ‘Most authors now agree that the transformation of the countryside does not necessarily indicate a depopulation and abandonment of cultivated land, and that, while villa residences may have been disused, in general the existence of a local population and the cultivation of land continued, as evidenced by the use of villa buildings for wither utilitarian or cult purposes’.

102 Peytremann, E. ‘L’Établissement Rural’, p139.
that the Breuchin Valley and its wider vicinity should have undergone processes too different from neighbouring regions, especially when culturally and politically it was so closely tied to them. Of the six early medieval settlements discovered in the Department of Franche Comté over the past 30 years two present elements of continuity of settlement location, albeit with a certain hiatus: both Choisy\textsuperscript{103} and Ruffey-sur-Seille\textsuperscript{104} being constructed close to earlier Gallo-Roman structures which were occupied by necropolises in the early medieval period. At Vellechevreux, the sole example from Haute-Saône, there is no evidence for a preceding Roman period settlement, however the interaction with the Roman landscape is evident from its positioning alongside a secondary Roman road (from Mandure to Vesoul) the course of which is littered with the remains of earlier villae\textsuperscript{105}. Thus the pre-existing settlement pattern as attested by the SHARL study would seem to persist. As with the models outlined for other regions, one can infer from the small amount of evidence available that in this part of Haute-Saône, while the existing settlement pattern may have undergone a certain changes, it most likely did not experience a complete collapse or depopulation. This theme of continuity is highly significant for our current study, for although there may be a dearth of archaeological evidence relating to habitation in the early medieval period for the area surrounding Annegray (which as already stated, is more demonstrative of a lack of targeted research than a lack of potential sites), the previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated the extent to which this valley had a very strong sense of place in the Roman and Late Antique periods, alluding to a fairly substantial level of occupation throughout the area, possibly on a par with adjoining areas which have received closer attention. It is not beyond the limits of reason to suggest that in the area of Annegray similar processes were taking place to the ones at Vellechevreux or in the area around Metz or in numerous other sites throughout eastern France whereby there was a continuation of rural settlement into the


Early Medieval period, which although characterised by a certain departure from the architectural norms of the past, relied on the remains of that past still existent on the landscape to shape its present. A pertinent example of this shaping is represented by the Roman route-way passing from Luxeuil up through the valley towards Rupt. Just as its successor the RD6 dominates the landscape today, the Roman road, by its very presence and monumentality, would have informed the placement and development of settlement, would have provided a connection with urban settlements and markets, and by extension would have made rural settlement in this area highly viable. Importantly, it is this connectivity which would have proved such a valuable and appealing asset for the fledgling community of Columbanus: spread over three sites in close proximity, the Roman road system would have allowed for a level of cohesion which would have facilitated the centralised power of the abbot as advocated in the Regula of Columbanus. We have previously discussed the likelihood that during the Roman and Late Antique period the Breuvin Valley would have been inhabited just as intensively as nearby valleys which have been the subject of more in-depth research. While this remains quite hypothetical and requires much more fieldwork in order for it to be substantiated, it nevertheless requires us to also consider to what extent such habitation may have persisted into the Early Medieval period. If the models of habitation found in surrounding regions, with a trend towards reoccupation of sites inhabited in Late Antiquity as opposed to a cataclysmic depopulation of the countryside, are found to have been replicated here in the area surrounding Annegray then the impression that we get from Jonas’ account of Columbanus settling in a deserted landscape to found his first monastery is an erroneous one, based more on the necessities of the hagiographical treatment of monastic leaders in Merovingian literature than on the real situation. We should hardly be surprised that the landscape would be populated by Frankish landholders given Jonas’ account elsewhere of local youngsters flocking to join his monastery, many of whom were members of the local élite. Indeed, such was the importance of their landholdings to these élite families that Hen has argued Columbanus’ popularity in the area was largely due to the fact that his monastery, independent as it was from the local bishopric at
Besançon, offered them a means with which to assert their independence from the increasingly expansionist policies of the Merovingian court. One might argue, on the basis of this growing picture of the settlement in the Annegray area, that the desert which Jonas evokes is rather the religious desert of an un-Christianised landscape. However once again there is tantalising evidence that this may not be the case either. At Luxeuil, for example, the latest series of excavations have unearthed the remains of a funerary church known from seventeenth-century cartographic sources as the *Eglise Saint Martin*. The excavations are now in their post-excavation report phase, but the earliest indications demonstrate that there was no hiatus in occupation of the site between late antiquity and the early medieval period and that the church developed out of the remains of a Roman *domus*. A number of the earliest burials relating to the first phase of the church have been carbon dated to the mid 4th to late fifth century, suggesting that there was a Christian community present on the site long before Columbanus’ arrival in the area. It would be wrong, on this evidence, to draw a simple contrast between a Christian urban centre and a pagan, un-Christianised countryside, a spiritual desert suitable for Columbanus’ first establishment. The presence of church sites in the Gallic countryside from an early date is evident from legislation relating to them in the Council of Clermont (535) which states that it is forbidden to practice mass in private oratories located on estates on the most important of feast days, on which occasion the prelate and congregation are required to attend the parish church or cathedral. Elsewhere Gregory of Tours makes frequent references to oratoria in rural settings in his *Histories*, with the likelihood that many of the buildings being referred to are private funerary churches intended to serve the needs of local elites rather than parish churches providing pastoral care to the wider community. Unlike the habitation sites discussed above, one does not

have to look to neighbouring regions in order to find archaeological material to support the existence of rural church sites in Haute-Saône. At Chassey-les-Montbozon, the Roman villa discussed earlier, one of the most notable discoveries was that of a paleo-Christian church constructed a short distance to the north-east. The small church, consisting of a simple nave oriented north-east/south-west, measuring 15m by 10m with a small circular absode on the northern end and a number of lateral annexes giving it a cruciform plan\textsuperscript{110}, is broadly similar in style to numerous other churches dating from the period spread over the area of Franche-Comté and the Western Alps region\textsuperscript{111}. The numerous sarcophagi found inside its walls contained material which suggested that the building was in use at the earliest in the mid-sixth century. Closer still to our study area, a Roman villa excavated in advance of construction work at Saint-Quentin on the outskirts of Lure was found to have been reused as a cemetery in the early Merovingian period, with a total of 170 sarcophagi interred within the \textit{pars rustica} of the site. The excavator has proposed that the burials were placed around a focal point, possibly a church building, which may have, like at Luxeuil, reused part of the ruins of the earlier Roman site\textsuperscript{112}. The likely presence of an ecclesiastical building on the site is confirmed by its mention in the Council of Macon in 617\textsuperscript{113}. A similar hypothesis is advanced for the Eglise des S.S. Pierre et Paul in Melisey, in the south of the study area, where work around the twelfth-century church revealed 4 Merovingian sarcophagi which may have been associated with an earlier church located on the same site\textsuperscript{114}. In addition to this excavated material, Yves Jeannin has carried out a project of prospection in the graveyards of rural churches in Haute-Saône and found that a considerable number contain material relating to Roman construction, leading

\textit{XI\textsuperscript{e} siècles}, 2004, for a discussion on the tendency for many of these private proprietary churches to gradually take on parochial functions.


\textsuperscript{111} See, e.g. Colardelle, M. \textit{Sepulture et Traditions Funeraires du V\textsuperscript{e} au XIII\textsuperscript{e} siècle ap. J.-C. Dans Les Campagnes des Alpes Francaises du Nord}, Grenoble, 1983.


\textsuperscript{113} \textit{ibid}

him to suggest that the phenomenon of building early churches on recently abandoned (or even still inhabited) Roman sites was as common in Haute-Saône as it has recently been shown to have been in neighbouring regions\textsuperscript{115}.

Most interestingly, however, in relation to the question of Annegray, there is tantalising evidence that this process of Christianisation of the rural landscape may have extended into the heart of our study area. Immediately to the north of Annegray, directly overlooking the modern commune from atop a small hill sits the church of Saint Martin. The existing structure dates to the twelfth century but its coursework contains a substantial amount of spolia with Merovingian decoration, suggesting that it may have replaced an earlier church building. The situation of this earlier church is significant given the sheer amount of material discovered in the vicinity relating to Roman pagan practices; a stella bearing the image of Diana was discovered in 1718 followed by the discovery of a number of small animal statues in 1724 (the truncated nature of which would suggest they represent ritual deposits) as well as the further discovery of a small bronze statuette assumed to be a representation of Priapus, unearthed in the very nave of the church\textsuperscript{116}. The dedication to Saint Martin may also be of consequence, a number of authors have highlighted the fact that the appellation, along with that of Saint Maurice (e.g. Chassey-les-Monthbozon), is the most commonly associated with the earliest phase of church building in the area: of the sites highlighted by Jeannin in his study of Roman ceramic presence on church sites, for example, the vast majority are dedicated to Saint Martin\textsuperscript{117}. Given the potential represented by the site for our understanding the immediate landscape of Annegray, a Ground Penetrating Radar survey was conducted on the interior of the structure as part of the latest campaign of fieldwork (August 2012) (\textbf{Fig. 3.12}). The results of the survey revealed evidence for earlier structures underlying the current fabric of the church, with a particular concentration in the eastern end of the structure. While the data is relatively fresh and will require further interpretation, an initial


\textsuperscript{117} Jeannin, Y. ‘Eglises Rurales’, p 102-103.
consideration of the features revealed suggests that they may relate to an earlier, semi-circular apse, which pre-dates the current Romanesque apse, or even more intriguingly, a possible circular stone-built structure.

The combination of material relating to Roman pagan practices, the early nature of the Saint Martin dedication in the region and the results of the Ground Penetrating Radar Survey, all combine to suggest that the current Eglise Saint Martin is more than likely the last in a sequence of churches on the site, the earliest of which may even have been constructed directly on the location of the suddenly defunct temple and, as such, could have represented a very early attempt to Christianise the landscape of this end of the Breuchin valley. What clearer way is there to demonstrate a shift in the communal mindset than the potent symbology of a former pagan temple in a location which dominates the valley floor for miles around and as such would be effective in setting the character of the lived space, being replaced by a house of God? That such a process may have taken place prior to Columbanus’ arrival at Annegray, as has been suggested equally at Luxeuil, is also quite likely. We only have to turn once again to the words of Jonas to see evidence for the existence of Christian communities in the Annegray landscape for it is Jonas himself who tells us that the fledgling community at Anagrates suffered from starvation and would have been wiped out were it not for supplies sent to it by a monk named Caromtoc who oversaw a nearby monastic community at a place referred to as Selucis. The exact location of the Selucis mentioned in the text is still unknown. Work undertaken as part of this project in the nearby commune of Beulotte Saint Laurent, a name which shares etymological roots with Selucis, to detect the presence of an early church site, was inconclusive. However, what is significant is that although Jonas insists on using the term desertum in relation to the landscape of Anagrates, he is quickly forced to recognise the reality that this was not only an inhabited place, but one which already had a Christian presence.

118 Jonas, Vita Columbani, 1, 14.
Fig. 3.12: Results of Ground Penetrating Radar survey in the interior of Eglise St. Martin (Faucogney). Readings are taken at intervals of 25cm depth (l-r), with lighter areas (green-white) suggesting concentrations of rubble or stone built material. Two significant concentrations were located in the eastern end of the church, indicating the presence of earlier structures, possibly a semi-circular apse on the eastern end.
The Landscape Setting of Annegray

Fig. 3.13: View from exposed remains at Annegray, showing the Eglise Saint Martin's dominant position overlooking the site. Structure A lies in the lower lying land in the middle ground.

Fig. 3.14 (Above): The Romanesque Eglise Saint Martin, the north face of which bears spolia (Fig. 3.15 above right) broadly datable to the Carolingian period.

Conclusion

We began with a single quote from Jonas describing the founding of the monastery of Annegray in the desert of the Vosges. The intention of this chapter has been not only to question the veracity of this statement, but also to bring together the material disposable to us as modern researchers in order to build some flesh on the bones of Jonas’ account, to go from the monochrome picture of the landscape as a desert to one that was a vibrant populated space, with all of the cultural, economic, political and religious markers and historicity that go with that. The current state of the archaeological record for the area is quite restricted and it is clear that the region is in need of targeted research projects to tackle a number of key themes, such as rural habitation in antiquity and the early medieval period if we are to go beyond the hypothesis outlined here, based on extrapolating evidence from neighbouring regions, to a more concrete picture. Nonetheless, the material available has allowed us to demonstrate that the landscape was far more dynamic and developed than previously thought; certainly more than Jonas would have us believe. It was a landscape very strongly shaped by the Roman experience; by its proximity to an important cultural, economic and political centre; by its location along the route which would have provided Luxeuil with a connection to the Moselle and by extension the Germanic hinterland. The close proximity of that Germanic hinterland is also further demonstrated by the series of forts, of which that mentioned at Annegray may have been but one, constructed at a time of increasing pressure on the Empire’s borders. That it was more than just a deserted thoroughfare is evident from the host of Roman material that has been recovered over the years, pointing not only a settled population, but particularly in relation to the religious objects, of a sense of place endowed by said population. As argued above, that population did not simply disappear prior to Columbanus’ arrival, rather they formed part of the fabric of the landscape, along with nature and the visible remains of the Roman past, which he and his followers would have to come to terms with in order for their community to flourish. The image of Columbanus as presented by Jonas is one of a tireless pilgrim, bravely carrying the flame of Christianity into the darkness of the wilderness, founding his monasteries in the
desert as befits one who follows in the ways of Saint Anthony. What is emerging from the evidence presented here, however, is a different story. It would seem that far from operating in a vacuum, or indeed a deserted No-Mans land, Columbanus was actually opportunistically using the local resources of an inhabited agricultural landscape, slotting his monastic community into the existent settlement patterns of the Breuchin Valley, both secular and religious.
Chapter 4

Fieldwork at Annegray

The overview of the landscape setting of Annegray and of the surrounding archaeological sites provided in the previous chapter can act as a useful guide to the archaeological and historical context of the site. When considered as a whole, and placed alongside the considerations of historical events elaborated in Chapter 3, it can begin to provide us with a window on the past, through which to discern the processes that led to the establishment of a fledgling monastic community in this corner of the Vosges. There is a suggestion from the evidence just presented, for example, that the Breuchin Valley area was not as deserted upon Columbanus’ arrival as Jonas would have had us believe in his account of the foundation. Furthermore, there would seem to be substantial evidence that the area had already undergone a process of Christianisation, and that that process involved the appropriation of earlier sites present in the landscape. It must be acknowledged, however, that the window provided by the evidence is an imperfect one, hampered primarily by the incomplete nature of the archaeological record, arising from a lack of intensive studies carried out in this area of Haute-Saône. In order, therefore, to provide a more thorough account of the earliest monastic settlement at Annegray, fieldwork on the site has been essential.

While nearby Luxeuil has, in recent years, received a considerable amount of archaeological attention, culminating in the discovery of a paleochristian church in one of the central squares of the town, its nearby sister monastery, Annegray, has not received the same level of academic research. Prior to the instigation of the Columbanus’ Life and Legacy Project there had been only one, brief

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archaeological intervention at Annegray, unsatisfactory both in its execution and its documentation. Consequently our knowledge of the nature of the site was greatly limited and many questions remain to be answered. Where was the focal point of the earliest monastic settlement? What was the extent of this initial settlement? Did the earliest monastery at Annegray display the Irish form of concentric circular enclosures? If not, is there anything to support Jonas’ assertion of the foundation in a ruined Roman fort? Did the site present the continuity of habitation alluded to in the evidence in the previous chapter?

The shift in focus to Luxeuil so soon after its foundation, combined with the lack of intensive habitation in the intervening period, means that today Annegray is a wholly greenfield site: from a research point of view it provides pretty much a clear canvas upon which to carry out investigation. For that reason, it was decided to use a range of techniques, both invasive and non invasive, in order to discern the nature and extent of the earliest monastic settlement in the area. By using both geophysical prospection and excavation it would be possible to generate a considerable amount of new data with which to shed light on a number of the key research questions that lay at the heart of this study.

There have been two seasons of fieldwork; the first consisting of two weeks in October of 2010, followed by a slightly larger scale campaign of three weeks in September 2011. This work was conducted as part of an ongoing collaboration between the Moore Institute of NUI Galway, represented by the Columbanus Life and Legacy Project, and Sébastien Bully of the CNRS (UMR 6298, ARTeHis). The project was made feasible by funding provided to the Columbanus Life and Legacy Project by the Mellon Foundation and is gratefully acknowledged.
Fieldwork at Annegray

Geophysical Prospection

As this was our first intervention at Annegray, it was felt pragmatic to take an exploratory approach initially, through the use of non-invasive techniques, in the hope of revealing archaeological remains that could in the short term provide some answers to the above thematic questions, while in the long term also allowing for the more precise planning of any subsequent invasive investigations. Two types of geophysical prospection were employed, magnetic gradiometry and electrical resistance, both of which have different merits in terms of what features they pick up in prospection (see below) but when used in conjunction can give a very clear image of the underlying archaeology. The combined results not only detect and provide information about buried archaeological features, but can also be invaluable when deciding on where to place excavation trenches.

As the primary goal of the prospection was to detect any features that might relate to the earliest monastic settlement on the site, the exposed remains of the Romanesque church excavated in the 1950s acted as the focal point for the fieldwork, with the work progressing outwards from this point (Fig. 5.1). No magnetometry took place in the immediate vicinity of the remains, however, due to the likelihood of contamination of the data given the highly-disturbed condition of the area. The fact that much of the land in the commune consists of large open fields in pasture means that it is ideal for geophysical prospection, allowing for maximum coverage of the site. The roads which run through the commune are not heavily trafficked, leading to minimal disturbance to the magnetic readings of the gradiometer, while apart from the area immediately beside the Route de Faucogney there are no overhead cables which might interfere either. With so much of the surrounding land in open pasture, as much of the terrain as possible was covered in order to determine whether any further archaeological remains relating to the original monastic settlement could be detected and, if so, what their relation may have been to the known remains. Three separate areas surrounding the church remains were chosen to carry out the survey, with a total of almost 6 hectares being covered over the course of the two campaigns. Permission to survey the land was obtained with the help of the
Amis de Saint Colomban, with the landowners overwhelmingly open to the project\(^2\).

**Fig. 4.1:** The total extent of geophysical prospection, both Magnetic Gradiometry and Electrical Resistance carried out in the vicinity of Annegray. (after Vuillermoz, D.)

Prospection commenced with magnetic gradiometry in the area immediately to the north of the churchyard (Area 1) in order to investigate the high ground on which the remains are located and in particular an escarped curvilinear feature which defines its limits. Subsequently the range of this sector was extended to take in the commonage to the north, a large open field known as the *Breuil*.

\(^2\) Our thanks to Jacques Prudhon and Roger Dirand for their tireless efforts in this regard.
*d’Annegray*, which is divided north to south by a series of irrigation ditches and separated from the base of the rise by a small stream which originates on the plateau and is from there carried by the irrigation system into the Breuchin river. Two further areas (Areas 2 and 3) were surveyed, one to the west of Area 1 on the other side of the small road which passes through the hamlet and the other to the south west in the northernmost section of a large pasture known as the *Pres les Boeufs*. The primary aim of the survey in these areas was to determine whether the curvilinear escarpment evident in Area 1 continued in a circuit around the site as had been suggested on the basis of a number of aerial photographs taken of the site in 2005. The significance of such a potential feature, reminiscent of the circular enclosures commonly found on early Irish monastic sites, was seen to merit such an extension of the survey area as it would help to problematize the issues relating to monastic form raised in Chapter 2, while it also broadened the knowledge of the underlying archaeology in the vicinity of the churchyard. The magnetometry was complimented with a more targeted campaign of electrical resistance, which included prospection in the immediate vicinity of the excavated ecclesiastical remains (Area 4) since, as this method is not as adversely affected by anthropogenic contaminants, it was considered useful to explore the possibility of any features immediately surrounding this site. The survey area was set out using a Total Station and subdivided into 20m by 20m grid squares whose locations were plotted relative to a fixed point in the churchyard and other surrounding topographical features.¹

Fig. 4.2: The geophysical prospection results in relation to the topography of the area.
Fieldwork at Annegray

Area 1

Magnetic gradiometry was carried out using Bartington Grad 601-1 (single sensor) and Grad 601-2 (dual sensor) fluxgate gradiometers. These instruments operate by detecting anomalies in the magnetic component of the soil, some of which are caused by underlying archaeological features. The alteration in the soil’s magnetic content by the high temperatures of burning, for example, will be evident in the data, typically reading as a positive magnetic response. Negative or cut features such as fosses, ditches or pits are also detectable as the positively charged soil of the fill will be visible against the background of the surrounding soil. Conversely, however, the instruments are less dependable in the detection of stone or clay built structures unless the magnetic content of the construction material greatly differs from the surrounding soil⁴.

Although this was the first campaign of geophysics on the site, and was intended largely as a prospection exercise to guide further fieldwork, it was decided to conduct the survey at a high resolution to maximise clarity of the data and aid with any subsequent interpretation. Consequently, readings were logged at 0.25m intervals, south to north, along parallel traverses spaced 0.5m apart giving a total of 3,200 individual measurements of magnetic data per 20m by 20m grid. Where barriers were encountered, such as large irrigation ditches, streams, or field boundaries, ‘dummy’ values were entered manually on the instruments, which result in blank spots on the accompanying image. The data were downloaded using the Bartington software and have undergone a number of simple processing procedures on Geoplot V.3. Survey panels have been de-drifted and edge-matched. The data range has been ‘de-spiked’ to remove excessively high and low magnetic anomalies, mostly caused by ferrous litter which can often mask more subtle anomalies of archaeological significance, and was subsequently clipped to highlight such features.

The busiest panel in terms of geophysical anomalies with possible archaeological significance was Area 1, the largest of the four panels, which extends northwards

away from the exposed remains of the church site. Over the expanse of this vast pasture a number of intriguing features, some clearly modern, others evidently more ancient and more still of an uncertain or non-geometrical nature, were revealed. The modern use of the land is evident from a number of features relating to drainage and infrastructural works (Fig. 5.3). A series of irrigation channels running north/south, parallel with those still in use, appear on the survey as lines of negative magnetic gradient. At the points where the current irrigation channel crossed the survey path ‘dummy values’ were entered and appear on the image as a ‘blank’ or white line.

Fig. 4.3: Anomalies relating to modern disturbance.
Fieldwork at Annegray

Where possible the modern field boundary was also ‘dummied out’, however in the instances where it was not possible to remove metal stakes they appear as strong dipolar readings on the survey. Detritus from many years of agriculture is apparent in the large scatter of ferrous material throughout the field, which also appears on the survey as a rash of dipolar anomalies. In the western sector of the field a large L-shaped lineation of strong dipolar readings trending north to south along the course of the field corresponds with the location of a metal service pipe indicated on maps of the commune provided by the mayor in advance of prospection.

Of the all the features identified by the survey in the Breuil d’Annegray, by far the most interesting is a large rectilinear enclosure (‘Structure A’) measuring approx. 40m x 35m located just below the hill on which the church site stands (Figs. 5.4 and 5.5). The discovery of this feature was quite unexpected as there was no clear suggestion of it in the aerial photography and while evidenced in the field by a slight change in the ground surface, this is so slight as to make it almost unnoticeable to the eye upon initial investigation. On the basis of the survey results this would appear to be quite a complex structure, consisting of a number of enclosing elements with quite a lot of activity occurring on the interior. The innermost enclosing element (G1) presents as a wide band of positive magnetic values, which is normally indicative of a ditch or fosse, with the positive magnetic charge coming from the positively charged soil of the ditch fill. As we shall see, however, the resistivity data suggests otherwise, namely that the innermost enclosing feature may in fact be a bank. The feature is significantly broader on the northern and western ranges (approx. 5m as opposed to approx. 2m on the eastern and southern ranges) which may be as a result of disturbance to the eastern parts of the structure or, alternatively, of a slight masking of the feature due to the build up of alluvial matter in this part of the site subsequent to its abandonment. Immediately flanking this on the northern and western sides of the monument is a narrow band of negative magnetic gradient (G2), which could be interpreted as the ploughed out remains of a possible bank or stone wall. Outside this again, surrounding the monument on all four sides, but most clearly visible on the northern and western sides, is a narrow, sharply defined band of
Fieldwork at Annegray

positive magnetic gradient \((G4)\). The slight width of the feature combined with its clarity would lead to a suggestion that it may represent the slot trench of a palisade surrounding the monument. Measuring 65m x 50m in total, and with its rounded corners, it mirrors the inner enclosing elements with which it is concentric. The space between the interior and exterior enclosures \((G3)\) is characterised by a broad band of comparatively negative magnetic gradient, which could be interpreted as the ploughed out material of a bank or could simply be part of a ‘halo effect’ caused by the strong positive magnetic gradient readings on either side of it. At no point along the course of any of the enclosing elements is a clearly defined entranceway apparent.

![Fig. 4.4: The large rectilinear enclosure ('Structure A), and right, interpretive drawing based on the magnetic gradiometry data (after Schot, R and Dowling, G.).](image)

In comparison with the surrounding areas, the interior of the structure contains a large amount of magnetic anomalies which are likely to be the result of human activity \((Fig. 5.5)\). The most immediately apparent of these anomalies is a semi-circular area \((G5)\) of strong positive magnetic gradient measuring about 5m in diameter and located close to the centre of the feature. The strong magnetic response of this anomaly would suggest that it might be the product of intensive burning. The southeast corner of the monument is occupied by an arcuate band of positive magnetic gradient describing an area about 10m in diameter \((G6)\), which would appear to intersect directly with the enclosing elements. A possible
interpretation of this feature is that, it is the wall footing or a slot trench for the foundations of a circular building. Between these two features is a concentration of weaker anomalies (G7) consisting of a narrow U-shaped band of positive gradient which is flanked on the outside by at least 6 points of positive gradient, with a further single point of positive magnetic gradient on the interior. These small points of positive magnetic gradient may represent the fill of post holes or pits, while the U-shaped band of positive gradient may represent the fill of a slot trench. Taken as a whole these anomalies could be interpreted as another possible circular wooden structure on the interior of the feature. A variety of other similar features, both linear and circular in form are spread across the interior and their large number and apparent intersection would seem to indicate that they are most likely not contemporary, but instead relate to different phases of use.

Fig. 4.5: Anomalies suggestive of buried archaeological structures and features on the interior of “Structure A”.
**Electrical resistance survey of Structure A**

As mentioned already the discovery of a large enclosure in the immediate environs of the church site was quite unexpected considering the lack of indication on the ground surface or in aerial photographs of the area. However, the significance of such a feature, given the mention of a Roman *castrum* at *Anagrates* by Jonas, could not go unremarked. Following consultation with our French colleagues, it was decided that the discovery was worthy of further investigation, and in particular of excavation, in advance of which it was decided to complement the results of the magnetometry prospection with a campaign of electrical resistance on the same feature, as resistance highlights different aspects of the underlying archaeology. The resulting combined data might aid in placing the test trench.

The resistance survey was conducted using a Geoscan RM15 electrical resistance meter configured as a twin-probe array with a 0.5m probe separation. The instrument measures the resistance in the soil at any given point to an electrical current passed through the probes. Features such as stone walls show up as anomalies since, due to their low moisture content, they offer high resistance to the current; waterlogged features, such as ditches or pits, appear as low resistance anomalies since the electrical charge can pass more easily through them. Resistance data were collected at 0.5m intervals with a traverse spacing of 0.5m, giving 1,600 readings per 20m by 20m grid square (i.e. half the resolution of the gradiometer survey). Minimal processing of the data, including edge-matching of adjacent grid squares, was undertaken using Geoplot V.3 software. In some instances, a high pass filter has been applied to reduce the geological background response and this is indicated on the accompanying images. The resistance survey was laid out on the same grid as the magnetometry, covering an area of approximately 0.65ha, with maximum dimensions of 100m west-northwest/east-southeast by 90m north-northwest/south-southeast. Like the gradiometer survey, the results of the resistance survey are remarkable in their clarity, and despite some normal variation in detail – particularly in relation to
internal structures – there is a striking degree of correspondence between the features recorded by both techniques.

The electrical resistance was particularly useful in providing a clearer image of the composition of the enclosing features of Structure A (Figs. 5.6 and 5.7). As outlined above, the magnetometry survey had given the impression that the feature (G1) might consist of an internal ditch, flanked by a narrow stone feature (G2) possibly a wall, outside of which was an open area and an outer palisade. In the electrical resistance survey, however, the innermost enclosing element (R1) showed up as a broad band, between 1m and 3m wide, of consistently high resistance, suggesting the presence of compacted earth and stone. When considered in conjunction with the magnetically positive readings for the feature (G1) in the gradiometry there is the likelihood of a particularly high soil content in its composition. Thus on the basis of the combined results it would appear that the data refers to a substantial bank of compacted soil and stones, and not a ditch as it appeared at first sight.

![Annegray, Electrical Resistance Survey](image)

**Fig 4.6:** Electrical Resistance Survey of “Structure A”
Immediately surrounding the innermost enclosing element on all four sides is a broad area of low electrical resistance (R2), which corresponds with the wide band of reduced magnetic response (G3) on the gradiometry survey. While the results of the gradiometry had been tentatively interpreted as an area containing ploughed out wall material, the impression given by the resistance data is more that of a negative, moisture rich, feature such as a large ditch. If such contained a large amount of alluvium it would explain the gradiometry readings because alluvium can retain enhanced negative charge. This area between the inner and outer enclosing feature is quite broad in both data sets, measuring on average 7m in width, however it would be incorrect to conclude that a ditch enclosing this feature was of such massive proportions. In fact the electrical resistance results, upon closer inspection, reveal a very faint line of slightly enhanced resistance (R3), most clearly visible on the northern and western sides, on average 3m from the bank, which could possibly delimit the outside edge of the ditch in question.

As in the gradiometry survey, the outer enclosing element (R4) is most clearly discernable on the northern and western sides of the monument, although there is a slight trace of it on the southern flank in the areas where it has not been disturbed by the water channel. It is evident in the resistance survey as a thin band of high electrical resistance and, while this is often indicative of features such as stone walls, in this case, when allied with the thin line of positive magnetic gradient with which it corresponds (G4), one could postulate that it more likely represents the foundation trench of a palisade with an amount of stone infill. As with the magnetometry results, no clearly discernable entranceway is visible in the electrical resistance results for this feature.

On the interior of the feature there was further correlation between the two survey techniques, while the resistance also revealed features which were not picked up with the magnetometry. Whereas the magnetometry revealed a series of potential small structures, the results from the resistance were slightly more amorphous in nature. Two large areas of high electrical resistance (R5 and R6)
were detected in the western and north-eastern sectors of the interior. Although it is possible that these areas relate to a spread of building material pertaining to a demolished stone structure, for the time being it is not possible to speculate further on their makeup. In addition to these two large areas of resistance, there are a further two smaller curvilinear anomalies that have been detected which correspond to features in the earlier survey. The larger of the two consists of a faint thin band of high resistance approx. 16m in diameter (R7), concentric with a smaller circular band of low resistance in the south-eastern corner of the monument. Although this corresponds with a circular anomaly of positive magnetic gradient in the magnetometry results (G5), suggesting that they could relate to the stone and earth filled slot trenches of a circular wooden structure, the results of the test trench placed in this area were inconclusive (see below). Another smaller curvilinear line of high resistance can be seen intersecting with the westernmost area of high resistance (R8), and once again this corresponds with the location of a possible circular feature detected in the gradiometry survey (G6). The fact that the two data sets vary slightly in the features that they detect on the interior of the feature could point to the possibility of longevity of use of the enclosure, with the gradiometry picking up wooden buildings relating to one or more period of building, while the electrical resistance is picking up the material spread of more solid stonework.

Fig. 4.7: Anomalies detected on the interior of ‘Structure A’ during the electrical resistance survey.
The combination of the two prospection methods (Fig. 5.8), therefore, allows for a clearer impression of the composition of the rectilinear structure. Based on the combined results a revised summary of the feature can be advanced. The innermost element, possibly consisting of a ploughed-out embankment of compact soil and stone, encloses an area of 20m x 15m. This is surrounded by a possible fosse measuring on average 3m wide, the outer edge of which is delimited by a bank which may be surmounted by a small wall or palisade. Outside this again, at a distance of 5m is a further enclosing element, possibly a palisade.

**Fig. 4.8:** Preliminary interpretive plan of ‘Structure A’ based on the combined results of the Magnetic Gradiometry and Electrical Resistance. (after Schot, R. and Dowling, G).

Magnetic Gradiometry survey of Area 1 continued.

South of Structure A is a further concentration of anomalies (Fig. 5.9) with possible archaeological significance. These occur on the low hill to the north of the exposed ruins of the church and include a possible large sub-circular feature of approx. 17m in diameter (G8) located on the southern edge of the survey area close to the boundary fence with the churchyard. While very faint, the feature is
defined by a number of positively magnetic points and slight curvilinear anomalies with a further series of positively magnetic points arrayed in a circular fashion near its centre. These anomalies may be caused by the positively charged fill of slot trenches or postholes and as such could be consistent with a wood palisade enclosure or perhaps even house structure. A further possible circular structure was discovered on the north-eastern side of the hill at a point where the slope evens out into a small platform (G9). This feature consists of a circular band of positive magnetic gradient measuring 8m in diameter with a number of points of strongly positive magnetic gradient on the northern side. The north-eastern quadrant of the feature is dominated by a small square anomaly of positive magnetic gradient 5m x 5m, however there is no indication that the two features are contemporary and they may in fact represent two separate phases of activity.

Fig. 4.9: Possible archaeological features on the raised ground adjoining the church yard. Below, enlarged image of possible circular structure (G8) with interpretive drawing.
One of the initial aims of the prospection was to investigate the large curvilinear embankment on the side of this hill, evident both in the aerial photographs of the area and on the ground. The significance of such a feature if found to continue around the church site, on a site founded by an Irish monk, would be quite marked, given the preponderance of circular enclosing features in an Irish monastic context. It was not possible to survey the southernmost arc of the bank due to the steep incline, and as such it appears on the survey image as an arc of ‘dummy’ readings. The easterly continuation of the bank, however, presents as a broad band of negative magnetic gradient, consistent with a stone or rubble feature (G10). In order to determine whether the feature may relate to an enclosing wall, or simply constituted a field boundary placed at the edge of the slope at this point, prospection was carried out in the adjacent fields (Areas 2 and 3) in the hope of finding a continuation, however as outlined below, the results were inconclusive.

In addition to these more obvious archaeological features, various features of unknown origin interest were revealed during the course of the prospection in area 1 (Fig. 5.11). Two very faint parallel lines of negative magnetic gradient, for example, cross the survey from east to west at right angles to the irrigation ditches. The regular nature of these features would suggest that they are man made and most likely relate to historical field boundaries, however it is not possible to proffer a likely date from the geophysical data alone. A series of more irregular lines of negative magnetic gradient, again most probably the remains of ancient field boundaries, are to be found in the southern sector of the field close to (and in some cases intersecting with) the large rectangular monument described above. In the northern sector of the Breuil a number of very faint curvilinear anomalies were detected, the largest of which was a large (27m diameter) circular band of positive magnetic gradient varying in width from 0.5m to 1.5m. It is unclear as to whether this very faint feature is anthropogenic in origin given the amount of disturbance in the underlying geology in this northern end of the field caused by alluvial action, however, it could represent the positively charged fill of a ring ditch or alternatively the slightly magnetic foundations of a stone structure. The feature occurs in the same general area.
where circular crop marks were noted by members of the local historical association, however since no detailed map of these marks exists it is not possible to corroborate the two pieces of evidence at this juncture.

**Area 2**

As mentioned above, in addition to the large panel of prospection carried out on the Breuil d'Annegray and the adjacent hill, two further panels of prospection were also carried out over the course of investigation on the site. The purpose of these extensions was twofold; firstly it was felt that if the curvilinear embankment revealed in Area 1 did extend around the church site then some vestiges of it might be detected in the adjacent fields, while there was also the additional aim to cover as much of the surrounding open terrain in the hope of finding any remains that might shed light on the earliest monastic settlement on the site.

**Area 2 (Fig. 5.10)** is located to the east of Area 1 and is separated from it by a small road that passes through the commune of Annegray. The prospection area consists of a long narrow field that extends along the northern slope of a ridge descending eastwards from the small hill on which the church site is located. With the exception of a copse of trees in the western extremity of the prospection area, for which dummy values were entered when encountered, the fact that the field was in pasture meant that geophysical prospection could be quite easily conducted. In contrast to the array of possible features in the adjacent panel, there was little of archaeological interest detected, with anomalies primarily consisting of strong dipolar readings most likely indicative of ferrous litter, the product of generations of agricultural activity (indeed the these dipolar anomalies increase in concentration in the vicinity of the neighbouring farmhouse). As regards the possible extension of the embankment mentioned above, there was no indication of a continuation of the negative magnetic feature detected in Area 1 into this panel.
Area 3

The final area to be investigated was Area 3 (Fig. 5.11), on the south-facing slope of the ridge. Separated from Area 2 by a narrow thicket of trees that dominates the top of the ridge, the area consisted of the northern section of a large pasture known locally as *Pres les Boeufs*, suggesting its long-standing use as an area of pasture. The feature most immediately apparent in the area is a series of narrow lines of negative magnetic gradient extending east west along the length of the field, most likely the product of ploughing. As with the adjacent Area 2, there are a large number of dipolar anomalies as a result of agricultural activity scattered throughout the field, however, once again there is no indication from the magnetometry results for any continuation of the bank revealed in Area 1 into this sector of the prospection.
Fig. 4.12: Various anomalies of uncertain origin revealed in the course of prospection in the Breuil d’Annegray (area 1).
Fig. 4.13: Preliminary Interpretive plan of the features uncovered during the course of Magnetic Gradiometry at Annegray. (after Schot, R and Dowling, G.)
Electrical Resistance

The Church Site
Electrical resistance survey was also extended to the area immediately surrounding the church site uncovered by Cugnier in the 1950s (Area 5). As this method is not adversely affected by magnetic ‘noise’ caused by later activities like the gradiometer it was decided to take the opportunity to deduce whether any other features possibly relating to early habitation on the site may lie in the immediate vicinity of the previously excavated remains. Following its acquisition by the Amis de Saint Colomban in the middle of the last century the church site has undergone a considerable amount of landscaping, including the erection of a stone cross and altar, the planting of trees and shrubs, and the installation of a metal commemorative plaque. Where these proved obstacles to the survey dummy values were entered. The size and shape of the plot of land were also a constraint, meaning that the total surveyable area amounted to 7 partial 20m x 20m squares. Despite these constraints it was considered worthwhile to carry out the survey since it would provide more information relating to the underlying archaeology of Annegray.

Although several features of archaeological potential were identified, a combination of modern ground disturbance and geological variations is likely to account for many of the anomalies recorded (Fig. 5.14). The increased background levels and variable responses (R9) recorded across the western half of the survey area, for example, are probably the result of modern landscaping, while a geomorphic origin is suggested for the broad, high resistance lineations (R10) at the north-eastern edge of the survey, which correspond with the edge of the rise on which the church remains are situated. Natural variations in the underlying geology or soils may also account for the irregular area of increased responses (R11) flanking the latter anomalies to the south, which is associated with two discrete, high resistance responses (probably near-surface stones). Adjacent to these on the west is a more unusual anomaly consisting of a wedge-shaped area of low resistance delimited on two sides by a band of higher resistance readings (R12). On the basis of anomaly form, an anthropogenic
origin is proposed but whether it is ancient or modern is unclear; its location beside the church and sarcophagi, however, suggests that it may be a product of ground disturbance associated with the 1950s excavations, such as a back-filled excavation cutting.

Of perhaps greater archaeological interest are several faint lineations of increased resistance (R13 and R14) which may represent buried wall foundations at the eastern end of the church. Vague suggestions of an easterly continuation of the northern and southern walls are apparent in this area, as are a few linear anomalies oriented parallel to the western wall of the church. However, none is sufficiently well defined to determine its true extent and significance, though the westernmost example (R13) (inside the church) corresponds with a sharp rise in the ground surface which appears to mark the limits of the excavation, and is unlikely to be of archaeological interest. A final feature worth mentioning is a discrete high-resistance anomaly (R15) located several metres to the west of the exposed sarcophagi (B), which could conceivably mark the location of another, as yet unexcavated, sarcophagus.
Fig. 5.14: Greyscale image of the resistance results from the church of Saint-Jean-Baptiste with, below, the location of the church remains in relation to the survey area.
Excavation

Given the potential significance of the discovery of Structure A and the possible repercussions such a discovery may have on our understanding of the earliest phase of the Columbanian monasteries on the continent, the logical progression was to carry out a test excavation on the site to clarify the hypotheses drawn up on the basis of the geophysics, in order to establish whether the site could provide answers to the research questions set out at the start of this chapter. Permission for excavation was obtained by consulting with the landowner (in this case the Commune of La Voivre as the site is located on a parcel of communal land) and the Archaeological Conservator of the Department of Haute-Saône. The excavation took place in from the 5–17 September 2011 and was carried out by the same team who carried out the geophysics, aided by a number of students from the University of Besançon.

The primary objectives of the test trench were threefold: to ground truth the information provided by the geophysics, including an examination of possible habitation structure alluded to on the geophysics (G6); to obtain dating evidence for the use of the site since structures of this form have a long and diverse use in a French context; and to determine research objectives for future fieldwork.

Fig. 4.15: Relief plot of resistance data, showing the location and layout of the test trench opened on ‘Structure A’.
A test trench was placed across the southeast sector of the feature in order to cut the enclosing elements and to determine the nature of the circular anomaly present in the geophysics. A trench measuring 9m x 3m aligned southeast northwest was laid out with the aid of a total station, the position being tied into the same grid used to carry out the geophysical prospection, thus allowing the resulting information to be collated with the data from the prospection (Fig. 4.15). A mechanical digger was used to carry out the de-sodding as well as for the initial part of the excavation, this was followed by manual excavation. The total depth of the stratigraphy, down to the natural layers, was 1.73m, which not only demonstrates the considerable levels of alluvial action taking place in the area, but may also offer an explanation for the lack of visible features on the ground in the surrounding area due to masking by alluviation over the course of centuries.

Section A-B (Fig. 4.17) captures approximately 6m of the interior area of Structure A and 3m of the enclosing fosse, which is clearly visible at the east (B) end of the section drawing. Four phases are in evidence. The earliest corresponds with a level containing Gallo-Roman material. This is overlain by natural alluvium, which was cut during the construction of the innermost fosse surrounding Structure A (represented by the pink shade in Fig. 5.18). The earliest fill visible in section comprises collapse from the inner counterscarp embankment (1.1003). This collapse material was in turn cut on the easternmost end (Fig. 4.19), with layers 1.1011, 1.1008 and 1.1007 comprising the fill of this phase of the ditch. The remainder of the ditch fills are in horizontal plane and represent the gradual demise of the enclosure.

The water table was encountered at approximately 1.90m below present ground level, which is just 10cm below the basal layer of the cutting which comprises a stony, possibly mettled, surface in a matrix of clay. 1.1005 is overlain by 1.1009 which represents the oldest archaeological horizon on the site, producing both tegulae and slag. Remembering that this activity predates the construction of 'Structure A' by an unknown amount of time, the presence of the tegulae implies the former existence of a production kiln and/or a tile-roofed building in the
vicinity. Provisionally this can be described as an occupation surface but only further excavation will reveal its precise function. It should also be noted that, on account of its depth, this horizon is not registered in the geophysical survey.

Finds associated with context 1.1009.
Apart from a small amount of terracotta flecking in the alluvial layers, the artefact assemblage was wholly restricted to the earliest context, 1.1009. The most common are (Fig. 4.18) pieces of terracotta, the largest of which (A), with its distinctive raised border, is readily recognisable as part of the side ridge of a terracotta roof tile or tegula. Pieces (B) and (C), thinner fragments of flat terracotta with a pattern of narrow incised ridges, have been interpreted as a type of wall tile found commonly in this area and used at the base of building facades to protect them from rainwater. In addition to the construction materials, there were also a number of pieces of common Gallo-Roman ware, although the pieces were too fragmentary to form an opinion on what type of containers they belong to. There is also an indication of metalworking taking place on the site at this stage, with a number of pieces of metal slag present in this stratigraphic layer. Although fragmentary in nature the terracotta artefacts can be broadly dated to the first or second century A.D., providing us with a useful *terminus ante quem* date for the construction of Structure A, which was built some time later.

![Fig. 4.18: Artefact assemblage from layer 1.1009.](image)
This horizon (1.1009) is overlain by a deposit of natural alluvium, layer (1.1004), up to 80cm thick in places. This material may have been deposited during one protracted flooding incident, but is more likely to have been the result of many years of repeated flooding in this area. In any case the sheer depth of the layer demonstrates very clearly the unique problematic of the stratigraphy in this part of the Breuchin Valley. As outlined in the preceding chapter, the site of Annegray sits in a small bowl-shaped side valley, surrounded on three sides by the vast Plateau des Mille Etangs, an upland area of lakes and marshes. This source of run off rich in alluvium, combined with the bowl-shaped depression of Annegray acting as a reservoir for such material, would lead to a situation whereby during extreme flooding events large amounts of alluvium are deposited across the area causing a sandwiching of the archaeological and natural layers in the stratigraphy. Indeed, the proneness of the area to such is evidenced on an almost annual basis as the Breuil d'Annegray becomes flooded during the winter rains. The next anthropogenic activity is represented by layers 1.1006, 1.100, 1.1003 and cut 1 which truncates layer 1.1004 at the east end. This cut is also traced in the mid trench sondage, E-F [Fig. 4.19], where the approximately 45° incline of the cut is at its clearest. A point to note is how in section E-F the cut assumes a 90° angle at the base of the trench. This feature is also evidenced in section A-B, though is perhaps less marked. This clearly represents just one side of the fosse and indicates, moreover, that it is potentially quite deep: in the trial trench the fosse achieved a depth of 2m without bottoming out.

The earliest fill exposed in section is 1.1003, which assumes a virtually identical profile, including the 90° angle at the base. This part of 1.1003 is considerably more stony than elsewhere across the interior of the enclosure which suggests that it is collapsed counter-scarp bank material, which would in turn find support in the geophysical data. The consistent thickness and regularity of this deposit suggests deliberate, one-event, destruction of the bank rather than gradual erosion by the elements which would produce a more club-shaped profile.
The abrupt 90° angle at the base of 1.1003 introduces the possibility of a re-cut of the ditch, which would imply that layers 1.1011, 1.1008 and possibly 1.1007 are fills of a second phase in the life of the fosse and possibly of the enclosure too. Tantalizing though this possibility may be with respect to the Columbanian phases of activity at Annegray, given the comparatively small area available for examination it is probably prudent to defer further analysis of this possibility to future seasons of excavation.

Layers 1.1007, 1.1010 and 1.1016 comprise the fill of the fosse, laid in a horizontal plain they represent the gradual silting up of the ditch. The lowest of these, 1.1007, varying in depth between 20cm in section A-B and 3cm in part of section E-F, consists of a matrix of mid-brown silty clay containing a large amount of stones (most clearly evident in section B-D). Overlying this, 1.1010 is a very thick layer (50cm) of light alluvial material, quite similar to layer 1.1004 in consistency and depth. The very light silty nature of this layer, combined with its depth and even distribution would lead one to suggest that it is the product of intensive flooding, with the fosse of Structure A acting as a receptacle for the alluvial material. Once again this serves to re-enforce the picture of frequent extreme flooding events in this sector of the Breuchin Valley. This in turn is overlain by 1.1016, a thin layer (12-15cm) of slightly more clayey soil evident in section A-B and also partially in sections B-F and E-F, with a higher
concentration of stone intrusions where it meets the bank in section A-B. Notwithstanding the continuation recorded on the section diagram (A-B) between layers 1.1001 and 1.1017, this level probably represents the plough-soil and abandonment of Structure A. These layers are immediately succeeded by the natural topsoil (1.100), which averages 50cm in depth across the whole site.

Two samples of carbonised wood were recovered from the fill of the ditch, one from the lowest excavated layer, 1.1012 and one from the abandonment phase, 1.1017. These samples are currently undergoing C14 analysis, the results of which will be crucial in establishing a chronology of the occupation of the site. While it had been hoped to determine whether the circular anomaly visible in the south east corner of the structure in the geophysics represented a possible structure, unfortunately in this instance the results of the test excavation were inconclusive. There was nothing evident in the stratigraphy that one could unequivocally correlate with the anomaly, but it would be too simplistic to come to the conclusion that there is nothing there at all since such a strong anomaly could not be present in both data sets without corresponding to a physical feature. There are two possible explanations for this inconsistency, either the feature is so ephemeral that it is not easily discernable to the naked eye, or alternatively, the placement of the trench just narrowly missed the feature. In either case suffice it to say here that the question of the possible circular structure remains unresolved pending further archaeological investigation of the feature in the future.

**Implications**

On the basis of the excavation data an outline of events on the site can be sketched. The earliest occupation, based on the artefact assemblage, dates to the Gallo-Roman period. Although material relating to building and metalworking activity has been recovered from the site, there is no indication as to the organisation or nature of the occupation at this stage. The material does, however, lend credence to the argument outlined in the previous chapter concerning the potential intensity of habitation in this area of the Breuchin Valley despite the scarcity of material in the archaeological record to date.
A series of flooding events in which a large amount of alluvial material is deposited on the site separates this early phase of activity from the next one. This hiatus, of unknown duration, is then followed by the digging of a large fosse and building up of a counterscarp embankment to form the large rectilinear enclosure identified in the geophysics. The unearthing of the possible bank and of the fosse which it defines confirms the hypotheses advanced on the basis of the geophysical prospection for the inner enclosing elements detected through prospection. The combination of earth and stone in the composition of the bank explains why the feature showed up both as a band of positive magnetic gradient on the gradiometry and as a band of high resistance on the electrical resistance. The high alluvial content of the ditch fill also fits in with the combination of negative magnetic gradient reading from the magnetometry and low electrical resistance. The profile of the primary fill of the fosse in both the A-B and E-F sections raise the possibility of a re-cut and by implication refurbishment, redesign, or possibly re-use of the site at a later period, a fact which at the very least suggests a further phase of activity, which might have interesting implications for our understanding of the site in relation to Columbanus’ arrival in the area. However as previously stated such an interpretation is dependent on further investigation of the feature. The final phase of the site is represented by the gradual silting up of the fosse and the abandonment of the feature.

As no artefacts were recovered from the layers relating to the cutting of the ditch and of its silting up, we are dependent on the return of the radiocarbon dates to establish more conclusively the amount of time which elapsed between the abandonment of the Gallo-Roman site, the construction of the enclosure and its abandonment.

As regards the initial aims of the excavation it could be said that the exercise has been a success. Although the datable material obtained from the earliest stratigraphic layers relate to a phase preceding the construction of Structure A, the establishment of the initial habitation on this site in the Roman period provides a useful terminus ante quem for the interpretation of the site. In addition to the exploratory data from the geophysics we now have stratigraphic
evidence that the internal enclosing features highlighted by the magnetometry and electrical resistance consist of a counterscarp embankment surrounded by a considerable ditch, outside which is a putative further outer palisade.
Interpretation

Without a doubt the most interesting discovery of this period of fieldwork is the large rectangular structure, (‘Structure A’), revealed to the north of the existing remains. It is also the one that has the most potential to challenge our perceptions of Columbanus’ first foundation. It should be noted that when such large rectilinear structures occur in an Irish context they are often considered a hallmark of later settlement (i.e. from the Viking age onwards), however in a French context they have a much longer period of currency, from the Neolithic to the late medieval period. From the point of view of morphology, there are a number of monument types common in the archeological record of this area which bear strong similarities with the structure uncovered in the Brueil d’Annegray.

One such monument type is an Iron Age enclosed farm (Figs. 4.20 and 4.21). A number of these sites have been uncovered recently across northern and north-eastern France in the course of emergency excavation in advance of construction projects carried out by teams from the Institut Nationale des Recherches Archeologiques Preventives (INRAP). Generally they consist of a habitation area comprising dwelling and storage structures, enclosed by a series of rectilinear ditches and banks, with adjacent field systems attached directly to the enclosing structure. One site in particular, La Huberdière (Brittany) (Fig. 4.20), bears quite striking parallels with the structure at Annegray, specifically in relation to the alignment of the round cornered bank and ditch features, with a wide inner fosse enclosed by an earthen bank. On other sites, such as Chateugiron (Brittany), Prasville (Eure et Loir) (Fig. 4.21), extensive field systems, radiating out from the central habitation enclosure in an irregular pattern have been discovered, evoking the series of linear features revealed in the vicinity of the rectilinear structure at Annegray.

A second comparable monument type is the so-called ‘Belgic sanctuary’, common throughout much of north eastern Gaul (Fig. 4.22). The most noteworthy example, at Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise), was excavated in the 1970s and once again bears striking similarity with the structure at Annegray. During the first phase at Gournay the sacred space was enclosed by a 2m wide ditch and external wooden palisade with rounded corners, measuring 45m x 38m. Successive structures of wood and later stone were placed at the centre of the enclosure, while ritual deposits were placed irregularly throughout the sacred space as well as in the ditch, which was filled with deposited weapons and animal bones. The activity evidenced in the interior of the Gournay sanctuary is evocative of the series of anomalies on the interior of ‘Structure A’, however an important caveat to this comparison is that Belgic type sanctuaries, as their name would suggest, are most heavily distributed in northern Gaul, above the Meuse and Oise rivers. In Haute-Saône, which would have been part of Sequani territory, the only two examples of Celtic sanctuaries excavated to date are of the smaller, so-called fauna type, where a square stone cella is enclosed by an outer stone enclosure.

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Fig. 4.21: Plan of the Iron age enclosure at Prasseyville showing the extensive field system found in relation to the site.

Fig. 4.22: The first phase of the sanctuary at Gournay (after Brunaux)
There is however another, more fundamental problem with linking the above site types to the feature uncovered at Annegary and that is the dating evidence from the excavation. In light of the fact that the feature we are dealing postdates an occupation layer that displayed evidence for use in the 1st to 2nd centuries, it is necessary to narrow the scope of our interpretation to the period following these dates. This brings us to our third and possibly most intriguing parallel. Jonas’ life of Columbanus, our only record for the foundation of the monastery, refers to the ruins of a *castrum* in the place called *Anagrates*. The term *castrum*, in modern research, is most commonly used when referring to the large multivallate legionary camps of the Imperial period, with their ‘playing card’ layout and complex internal division. However by late antiquity the defensive needs of the Empire had changed, particularly in the areas close to the *limes*, requiring a multifaceted approach to defensive building. With the problems in maintaining the security of the Empire’s borders, there was a greater emphasis on securing the safety of the immediate hinterland through defense of the road network with the result that a large number of small route-way forts were constructed throughout areas such as Greater Sequania\(^8\). These route-way forts *(Fig. 4.23)* consisted of a small enclosure (usually no larger than 40m x 40m) formed from a bank and ditch often with an accompanying outer palisade. The remains of defensive buildings within the enclosure, just as the enclosure itself, are often quite ephemeral, commonly being of wooden post construction rather than stone.

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Fig. 4.23: Roman route forts (after Brulet).

Fig. 4.24: Preliminary interpretive plan of 'Structure A' based on the combined results of the Magnetic Gradiometry and Electrical Resistance.
In terms of morphology the structure uncovered at Annegray bares many of the traits of a routeway fort; size, layout, earthen bank and ditch defensive system with an external palisade, ephemeral internal structures. It would also fit into the date range prescribed above on the basis of the excavated material. In the context of the evidence presented in the previous chapter relating to the possible presence of a Roman road running through this end of the Breuchin Valley, as well as possible accompanying forts attested to in the archaeological record, the presence of a routeway fort at Annegray would not be exceptional. In dealing with the evidence at Annegray, we must momentarily put aside our modern conception of a *castrum* as exclusively referring to a legionnaire camp and consider what the term meant to Jonas when he used it. Already by the fourth century, the term had developed a certain ambiguity, meaning to different authors a permanent military post, a fortified civilian settlement, or even the population of thereof. It is possible that by the time that Jonas was writing in the seventh century, the term *castrum* may have been applied to a defensive structure in the landscape whether large or small.

The implications of this interpretation are quite intriguing, given Jonas’ assertion that the first monastic community at Annegray settled in the ruins of a deserted castrum. It is becoming increasingly apparent from excavations carried out at Luxeuil-les-Bains, for example, that the early monastic community was not averse to appropriating the built remains of the past for their own use and it is wholly feasible that the remains of the fosse from a deserted Roman routeway fort could have acted as the *termon* for a fledgling monastic community attempting to settle in this location. While this rectangular form is unfamiliar to those who study the early monastic settlements of the British isles, it is not such an unusual concept in a French context. In fact the plausibility of this thesis is borne out by the site of Hamage (Nord) in the Scarpe Valley, the only Merovingian monastery excavated to date in France. The first phase at Hamage consists of a rectilinear fosse varying from 3m to 5m in width and accompanied

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9 Ibid.
10 A similar process has been argued for the earliest phases at the monastery of Columbanus’ namesake on Iona, MacCormick, F. ’Excavations at Iona, 1998’, *Ulster journal of archaeology*, vol. 56, 1993, p. 78-108.
by a wooden palisade, enclosing an area of no more than 43m x 40m (Fig. 5.26). The slight vestiges of a number of circular post-built structures were found to occupy the interior, along with a substantially larger rectangular structure interpreted as the church or oratory and a series of large pits which would have acted as grain silos\textsuperscript{11}. These features are broadly comparable with the anomalies relating to Structure A, in particular the series of intriguing positive anomalies found on the interior which may represent the remains of post-built structures with similar circular form to the ‘cellae’ at Hamage. Annegray and Hamage are broadly contemporary monastic sites, but any argument which attempts to draw comparisons between ‘Structure A’ at Annegray and the earliest monastic settlement at Hamage is made all the more interesting when we consider one further connection between the two; Jonas himself. Following his brief spell at Luxeuil under the abbot Eustasius, Jonas undertook missionary work in the Scarpe valley along with Saint Amandus, who was at the time a bishop of a territory which included the newly established monastery of Hamage. One could argue that the political links between the two were certainly strong enough that the idea of a monastic settlement with a rectangular form should not have been too foreign a concept for the Columbanian community.

Of course, tantalizing as such an interpretation may be, it remains a working hypothesis based on the current data exposed through fieldwork carried out over the past number of years. While the dating material provides us with a terminus ante quem for the structure which would make the above a possibility, there remains one further later interpretation, which cannot be ruled out in the consideration of the feature at the present juncture; that of a Medieval moated site (maison forte). These defensive farmsteads (Figs. 4.27 and 4.28), much as in an Irish context, often consist of a large rectangular bank and ditch enclosure surmounted by a wooden palisade, surrounding a rectangular interior, which often would have contained relatively ephemeral, post built structures. The form and, in particular, the likely size of the surrounding ditch bear similarities with other such sites located in Franche-Comté, at Cosges, Lavoncourt and Lomont. To this can be added the attestation of a Lord of Annegray, a subordinate to that of Faucougney, in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, although as has been noted, while the family took the name of Annegray, the exact connections with the hamlet is unknown and no family seat in the area is recorded. Despite the lack of material dating to the high medieval period

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12 See for example : Terrier, J. and Jougin-Reglin, M. "Rouelbeau : un château en bois édifié en 1318 au sommet d’un tertre artificiel ", in Archéologie suisse, 32/2 (2009), Bâle, p. 54-63.
recovered in the 2011 excavation, the combination of the morphological similarities and the historical records mean that this must also remain a possibility pending further archaeological investigation.

Fig. 4.27 and 4.28 above: Two examples of maisons fortes surveyed in Franche-Comté at Lomont (l) and Cosges (r).

There remains the question of the features revealed closer to the Romanesque church site. While it was not possible to find a continuation of the bank feature (G10) revealed in Area 1 in the adjacent fields, its existence cannot be completely ruled out. Construction of the road immediately beside the area prospected, and landscaping of the area to the south of the church site may have destroyed any such remains, or left them undetectable to geophysics. The detection of two possible circular structures (G8 and G9) in the immediate surroundings of the bank feature (G10), further underlines the importance of continuing investigation in this area in the construction of a narrative for the establishment of the earliest monastic community at Annegray.

What the discovery of a potential Roman routeway fort in the vicinity of Annegray does do, however, is to force us to consider alternative narratives to the traditional concept of the foundation of a characteristically Irish monastery in a deserted section of the Vosges. The presence of material dating to the Roman
period in the lower levels of the excavation helps to underpin the argument outlined in the preceding chapter for a greater level of activity in the Breuchin Valley during antiquity than previously thought. On the basis of patterns of continuation of habitation from antiquity through to the medieval period seen in neighbouring areas, there is a strong likelihood that much the same was happening in the Bruechin Valley, which would bring into question Jonas’ picture of a deserted landscape upon Columbanus’ arrival. Furthermore, should the structure uncovered in the Breuil d'Annegray be demonstrably shown to be a Roman fort (results from the C14 analysis of carbonised wood from the fosse should go some way to clearing up this matter, while further excavations are planned at the time of writing) then at the very least we must consider how the presence of such a structure informed Columbanus’ choice of location. There remains, however, the exciting possibility that the structure may have acted as the focus for the initial establishment, providing a ready made termon/vallum for the fledgling community. If this turns out to be the case this would not only correlate with Jonas’ assertion that Columbanus founded his monastery in the castrum of Annagrates, but it would also tie in with the wider trends of re-occupation of earlier sites as posited in the previous chapter, demonstrating once again that Columbanus, far from acting as an outsider in a foreign land, was adept at integrating himself into the local fabric of the Breuchin Valley.
Fieldwork at Annegray

Coda: 2012 Excavation

The 2012 excavation season lasted for six weeks (from 6 August to 12 September) during which two cuttings were opened on the rectangular enclosure (Structure A), one in the interior and one across the fosse. The one in the interior (Cutting 2) was located in the south-west quadrant of the enclosure, measuring 15x7m with a small extension into the fosse on the western edge. Cutting 3 was located outside of this and measured 12mx5m. A small field stream/drainage channel, with free flowing water, runs across this part of the site and is the reason why the two cuttings are separated, with the result that we do not have a complete, uninterrupted section across the fosse.

![Fig. 4.29: Relief plot of resistance data, showing the location and layout of cuttings 2 and 3 opened on ‘Structure A’ in August 2012](image)

The primary aims of this season were to investigate (i) the interior of Structure A in an area where the geophysics had indicated the presence of arcuate features; (ii) to further investigate the enclosing fosse; and (iii) to investigate an area of high resistance outside the enclosure that may have represented an appended structure.
The excavations confirmed that there were at least two horizons of activity, viz a late Antique phase of uncertain nature and Structure A itself that was built on top of it. This year’s excavations indicated that the Structure A is of Medieval date, based on associated finds which include ceramics and organic material: a leather off-cut from the fosse has been C14 dated to the later thirteenth century. In Cutting 3, however, the exterior bank of Structure A was found to sit on top of an earlier, stone-revetted bank. This latter is of unknown date. It may relate to the late Antique phase of activity but this remains to be proven. From primary fills on the interior side of the fosse came a sherd of Merovingian wheel-stamp decorated pottery which raises the intriguing possibility of an early medieval horizon, if not on the enclosure itself then in the immediate vicinity.

**Fig. 4.30:** The southern section of Cutting 3, showing the two phases of the bank, with the earlier stone revetted bank in situ. In the centre of the frame a small outer ditch containing the remains of a fish trap.

The exposed part of the interior of Structure A comprised a thick (>70cm) platform of stones, angular and water-rolled. This appears to have been laid down in order to create a dry, firm surface. A number of features were dug into this but none that appear to be structural: some may relate to later drainage.
While the aim had been to investigate structures on the interior none was identified. In fact we learned this year that the field had been ploughed within living memory (though there was no visible evidence of this in the section) which means that the occupation layers were at best plough-truncated. The Ap horizon reached a maximum thickness of about 20cm.

As mentioned already, this is a very damp area, with a high watertable and consistent run-off from the surrounding slopes. The area is also prone to flooding, as we have seen, and this would seem to explain the need for such a substantial and thick stone surface. In contrast, the fosse was waterlogged which resulted in the survival of organic material, including a very interesting range of objects such as shoe leathers, bucket staves, a lathe-turned bowl, wooden pegs, planks and a possible fish-trap. Macro fossils also survived, including hazelnuts and walnuts.

On the basis of this we can conclude that Structure A is Medieval in date and that it overlies a late Antique horizon. There are tantalising hints of an intermediate
horizon that may date from the Merovingian period. The presence of in situ material relating to a Late Antique horizon, once again confirms the argument advanced in Chapter 2 for habitation in this part of the Breuchin Valley prior to Columbanus’ arrival, thus further bringing into question Jonas’ assertion for the establishment of the initial settlement in a *desertum*.

![Fig. 4.32: Overview of 2012 excavation.](image-url)
Chapter 5

Reflections on Annegray

The primary aim of this thesis was to propose a narrative of the monastic site of Annegray that went beyond the few lines of Jonas’ description of it as simply a desertum, where the saint and his followers settled in pious solitude. While the present work must be considered, above all, a first step in the process of unravelling the history of Annegray, a number of initial conclusions may be drawn from the concurrence of the large range of sources stitched together in the construction of this narrative.

Perhaps the most emphatic conclusion relates to the question of the desertum itself. Many commentators have previously questioned this characterisation of the location of the first monastery: given its preponderance in hagiographical writing there was a sense that it constituted no more than a topos that was useful in the fabrication of a saint’s image, in this case Columbanus’s. Nonetheless, it should now be apparent, given the weight of evidence presented above, just how far from the actual situation that confronted Columbanus the description of a desertum actually is. The landscape survey outlined in Chapter 3 has allowed us to gain a clearer impression of the area prior to Columbanus’ arrival and the image that emerges is of a continuously inhabited landscape. From the Roman period onwards in particular, we can say that Annegray was by no means remote or desolate, rather it was very much part of the cultural ambit of the nearby town of Luxovium. The spread of cultural material up the Breuchin attests to this, while the likelihood of a Roman road passing by Annegray linking with the Moselle Valley strengthens the idea that this was very much a lived-in place. The ritual deposits discovered at the site of the Eglise St. Martin, immediately overlooking the site, corroborates this image. Indeed, the argument advanced on the basis of the landscape survey, that Annegray was more than likely an inhabited space upon Columbanus’ arrival, has also been confirmed by the two years of excavation carried out on the site, with both campaigns revealing evidence for occupation in Late Antiquity and perhaps even in the early medieval
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period. More intriguing is the suggestion that not only was Annegray an inhabited place but that it may also have already been part of a wider Christian landscape, with the Eglise St. Martin acting as a focal point for this pre-existing Christian community.

In light of this emerging picture we must reconsider the meaning of the term *desertum* as used by Jonas in his description of Annegray, and afterwards Luxeuil. The intention here is not to debunk Jonas’ description; there is no sense that in this he was intentionally attempting to mislead the reader, rather we must consider why such a *topos* was used, what it meant to Jonas. It may be a sight too simplistic to take Christine Delaplace’s view that in evoking the *desertum* Merovingian hagiographers were attempting to raise their subjects to a level of parity with the prestige of the desert fathers, and inserting this *topos*, regardless of how far the reality of the situation in which they founded their monasteries was from it, was part of the conceit.1 Perhaps a more fruitful approach would be to consider the role of the ‘interior desert’ as espoused by Goehring in relation to the monastic foundations of Pachomius.2 Unlike those of his predecessor Anthony, the isolation of Pachomius’ foundations were not predicated on their physical distance from the population, in many cases they were founded in ‘deserted space’ available in still inhabited villages. In many cases also settlements subsequently built up around the monasteries but this did not infringe on the separation of the community from the lay society as it was the ‘interior desert’ that was more important to their monastic ideal. This could be a valuable means of assessing the picture emerging at Annegray, that although the landscape was not deserted in a literal sense, within it there were spaces which could be occupied by Columbanus that allowed for a certain spiritual isolation.

The establishment of a monastic settlement in such an area would have required interaction, integration and political *savoir faire*, which was the dominant motif

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arising from the consideration of the historical context outlined in Chapter 2. That Columbanus was not acting alone, as a pioneer in the wilderness, is evident from the support he received from the royal court in the granting of land for the monastery, and also from the local aristocracy who provided both sons to his burgeoning community and political support in his dispute with the local bishopric and his erstwhile patrons. The level of integration can be seen in the strong links with the royal court from an early stage, links which grew even stronger after Columbanus’ departure as the autochthonous element of the community took control and participated even more fully in the intrigues of the contemporary Frankish elite, religious and secular.

Allied to these two questions of integration and pre-existing settlements, is the question of appropriation. The reuse of earlier structures for the foundation of monastic communities is a constant theme of Jonas’ treatment of Columbanus, a fact that would seem to be borne out by the recent excavations at Luxeuil where earlier churches were incorporated into the fabric of the embryonic monastery. One cannot rule out the possibility that such a process also took place at Annegray, with the appropriation of a castrum as an ad hoc enclosure in the earliest stages of the monastery’s life, although the results of the excavation have not been overly conclusive in this matter, either in the location of the castrum itself or in the determination of a later monastic settlement.

Quite apart from dispelling the over simplistic reading of the desertum the familiarity with Annegray that has been built up over the last four years has led to a deep appreciation of what this end of the Breuchin Valley has to offer its inhabitants. It is very much at the head of a valley and the immediate sense is of topographical enclosure, as if in the bolus of an amphitheatré, surrounded on most sides by far higher ground. The hills can be quite brooding when the weather is overcast, and quite illuminated in sunshine. The hills determine the amount of direct sunlight on the site: in August the morning sun does not hit the site until 9 a.m. and in the evenings the hills cast long shadows over the valley floor. This would have a direct effect on ambient temperatures in and around the monastery and in turn in crop production. Even today this end of the valley is
given over mostly to pasture, whereas further down the valley towards Luxeuil are fruit and cereal crops profiting from longer hours of direct sunshine. The forest is omnipresent, which can be seen in the fact that today hunting is still commonplace on the hills around Annegray. While there will be detailed paleoenvironmental work done on the organic material recovered from the fosse of Structure A in 2012, the macro fossil remains of hazel and walnut speak not only to food resources but also to tree cover. Both species still thrive in this area. The enclosed aspect of the topography also affects airflow, the air can be quite still at Annegray, contributing to a general sense of dampness.

Being at the bottom of a valley, in an area of quite high precipitation, water run-off and flash flooding have to be contended with even today in this valley. Active water management viz drainage channels, sump holes/reservoirs and man made ponds, are facts of life and the excavation has demonstrated the long history of water management in this area. Indeed the discovery of the fish trap is really quite remarkable as it proves the existence of a stream large enough to have fish in it, literally beside the monastic remains. Water and fish were close to hand and not surprisingly both factor highly in the *Vita Columbani*. Notwithstanding these potential resources, the first years of any such community would be precarious and we know from the account of Jonas that the community at Annegray was saved early on by the intervention of the abbot of a nearby monastery referred to as Selucis. Preliminary investigations have begun to assess whether this is one and the same as Beulotte Saint Laurent, approx. 15km to the east, on the top of the plateau. Indeed the two sites are, as it were, connected by a stream, making it comparatively easy to reach Annegray. Against the identification of Beulotte as Selucis is the possibility that the place referred to is actually the modern day Saulx, a small village to the south of Luxeuil-les-Bains.

In spite of being surrounded by high ground on most sides and with the caveat that this might be a purely contemporary inclination, the dominant topographical feature from the perspective of site itself is without a doubt the hill of St. Martin. While there is a, perhaps valid, criticism of landscape archaeology that being written from the perspective of a modern mind, it is
impossible to really appreciate the landscape as those who lived in it in the past would have, one could also argue that certain aspects of the landscape are immutable in their impression on the viewer. Re-reading Margret Stokes’ account of her first visit to Annegray, I was struck by the fact that also to her St. Martin dominates the landscape of Annegray, the chapel ‘standing clear against the blue sky’\(^3\). Perhaps then it is unsurprising that there are cultural remains recurring on this site, as it is an obvious focal point for this end of the Breuchin Valley. In fact, such is the potential for our understanding of the immediate hinterland of Annegray that the hilltop, and the church itself, will form an integral part of future research conducted as part of our collaboration with our French colleagues.

In the introduction some consideration was given to how an imbalance in the record, in this instance between the historical and the archaeological books of evidence, can have a negative impact on the landscape meta-narrative. Annegray, as has been seen, suffers from such an imbalance and it is the archaeological record that requires development. So little work has been carried out on the archaeological record of this corner of Haute-Saône that presenting a detailed synthesis of the landscape as encountered by Columbanus is difficult. Nonetheless the work carried out as part of this project represents a solid starting point in redressing the situation.

Structure A is of medieval date. Two structural phases are identified in the excavations, though it is not clear whether they represent two phases of the same monument or two separate monuments, one above the other. In the case of the latter the possibility remains that the earlier embankment belongs to the putative castrum where the monastery was first built. Reason would dictate, however, that even with the comparatively small amount of excavation so far, had a monastery existed on the same spot as the moated site, something of its presence would have been unearthed. With the caveat that this question can only be answered with further excavation, at this stage the balance of probability is that the monastery was not located here but somewhere else, in all likelihood on

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\(^3\) Stokes ‘Seven months….’ p. 22
the little hillock immediately to the south where the remains of the medieval church occur. This would conform to patterns occurring elsewhere in the region, where later churches are found to have been built on the sites of earlier ones. It would also account for the elevation of the ground here which, though probably an esker, was undoubtedly raised by burials and other activity in a way which, again, is commonplace.

The discovery of Structure A, however, adds considerably to our understanding of the historical development of the site. In fact the location is quite ideal for the construction of a moated site which by its nature requires water. The magnitude of the water management issues would have been disadvantageous structurally to monastic settlement, in particular the building of a church. The presence of the moated site populates the later chapters of the history of Annegray. The dating of at least one phase of the medieval structure is broadly contemporaneous with the medieval lordship of Annegray, a subordinate to the nearby Lord of Faucogney. While there is no question that the monastery was abandoned at this stage; for there are still records of a community at the time of the French Revolution; it is possible that this occurrence signified a change in the power dynamic. Although Annegray was seemingly still governed from Luxeuil, the construction of a moated site in such close proximity to the monastery speaks to more local power dynamics.

Despite this sense of foreshortened horizons, this is not a completely enclosed, imprisoned place. On the contrary, apart from the connectivity with Luxeuil, there are passes from here to north, east and south. To the north, there is the access through the narrower section of the Breuchin Valley to the Moselle, the importance of which we have already discussed in depth. However, to the south and east are passes that bring the traveller directly up onto the Plateau des Milles Étangs, which may have been of equal importance in the quotidian life of the inhabitants of Annegray, given the abundance of resources that the plateau provides. Furthermore the southern pass across the plateau would also lead the traveller into the upper reaches of the Ongnon Valley, which is both fertile and highly settled, containing a number of ecclesiastical settlements of quite early
date. The interconnectivity of the valley floor and the Plateau, in fact, has already been highlighted in terms of the quantity of archaeological finds made over the course of the last two centuries, demonstrating that one should not conceive of the plateau as cut off from the lowland settlement, but rather as very much part of the wider landscape of the area.

It may well be that the combination of isolation and connectivity that characterises Annegray was exploited by Columbanus as he navigated his way thorough what must have been labyrinthine local and regional politics. Undoubtedly the respective importances of Luxeuil on the one hand and Annegray on the other were offset against one another. As we have seen in the introduction, all of the political activity concerning Columbanus as outlined by Jonas takes place at Luxeuil, which quickly assumes the mantle of primary foundation. Considering this, Annegray could well have provided not just the type of quietude that lends itself to religious meditation but provided a retreat in other ways as well: removing oneself from the fray, rendering oneself incommunicado, is a standard political stragtem. It allows one assume the high ground.

In terms of this relationship between Annegray and Luxeuil, we must also consider another issue raised in the introduction; the physical/material effect that the early rise to dominance of Luxeuil had on the settlement at Annegray. Although the geophysical prospection has been successful in highlighting previously unknown features on the site, and informing our previous and future investigations, what is perhaps most striking is the evident lack of intensive settlement, either in the immediate vicinity of the exposed church remains or elsewhere. This may be indicative of the fact that, with the wealth of upstanding structures at Luxeuil providing the community with many of the features necessary for the successful running of a monastic community, there was little need to invest further in the original settlement at Annegray. This is not to say that the foundation was completely abandoned. However, with no need for the monumental architecture readily available at Luxeuil, what construction did take place would likely have been much more ephemeral in nature, explaining the
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difficulty in locating it through prospection. This is of course, an initial impression, formed following this first phase of investigation at the site, but it is one that we must be cognisant of in forming the basis of further research.

One aspect of the foundation that we can perhaps draw more solid conclusions from is the question of any typically Irish form of monastic layout. The doubts raised in Chapter 2 as to the likelihood that the site should bear any features characteristic of Irish monastic settlement based solely on the provenance of its founder, would seem to be supported by results of the geophysics. In the 6 hectares covered surrounding the exposed remains, there is no indication of any features that could be associated with the concentric circular enclosures typically ascribed to Irish sites, although the modern disturbance to the area immediately surrounding the church means that such a feature cannot be completely ruled out. However, in light of not only this, but also the questions raised in Chapter 2 and the level of integration and appropriation seen throughout this thesis, it would be more prudent to progress with an approach that viewed the form of the monastery as being informed by the particular context it was established in, or of broader trends in western monasticism.

There is a more than tacit, but for all that still vague and quite simplistic expectation of an Irish character to the Columbanian foundations; not just in how they were organised and run but in their architecture, layout and physical appearance, and, moreover, that this will have been predicated on Columbanus’s Irishness, his ethnic background. The probability is that such expectations are founded more on romanticism than science — the romanticism, that is, of the Irish and of the Germans, French and Italians. To Irish scholars working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the image of early Christian Ireland as a ‘Land of Saints and Scholars’ provided a glorious past in which to root the identity of the emerging nation state; one that instilled pride in its citizens and distinguished them from other nations, most notably their colonial rulers. A natural progression from the concept of an Ireland splendidly isolated on the fringes of Europe, preserving a uniquely pure strain of Christianity, was the creation of a fictionalized Irish character equally impervious to malign outside
influences. Thus, the Irish saints who travelled throughout Europe were painted as standard bearers of this immutable identity, conserving it intact on their travels and, through the force of its uncompromised purity, reinvigorating the decaying edifice of the continental church. This narrative was not only attractive to an Irish audience, however, it was broadly accepted by German, French and Italian scholars and writers as well, influenced to a large extent by their own romantic visions of Ireland. One has only to look at the writings of Françoise Henry, or the literature of Heinrich Böll, to see how well the image was exported and consumed by a ready audience, enthralled by what they saw as an antidote to the ills that modernity had wreaked on their own societies. In other words there was more than just an Irish agenda at work in the construction of the identity and legacy of Irish churchmen on the continent. Indeed, vestiges of this still remain.

This suggests that the question of ethnic Irishness among the foundations may well be a red herring. If not, it is a question that cannot be answered without reference to the literature on and critiques of ethnogenesis. Although the debate on ethnogenesis was invoked as part of the theoretical framework surrounding analysis of the character of these monasteries, it is perhaps the arguments that

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4 These were ideas that long persisted, see e.g. Chadwick, N. (1960) *The Age of Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, Felinfach; Hughes, K. (1960) *The Church in Early Irish Society*, London;

5 McNeill, J.T. (1974) *The Celtic Churches: A History A.D. 200-1200*, Chicago. e.g. p. 86, asserts that in Ireland the early church fathers were ‘able to implant and preserve a Christian culture like a cultivated garden amid a wilderness of disorder – to the measureless advantage, not only of Ireland, but……of Western Europe’ and elsewhere that following the Barbarian Invasions, there followed a second invasion of Europe by ‘unarmed, white robed (Irish) monks, with books in their satchels and psalms on their lips, seeking no wealth or comfort but only the opportunity to teach and to pray’ p. 155.

6 See. e.g. Prinz, F. (1981) ‘Columbanus, the Frankish nobility and the territories east of the Rhine’, in: H. B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (edd.), *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, Oxford. 73–87.; also Richter, M. (1988) *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, Dublin, where he claims that it ‘should nevertheless be strongly emphasised that Ireland in early times produced Christians who were convinced, one could even say inspired. The extreme ascetic behaviour of particular individuals may have impressed observers and led them to an attitude of respect’, p. 66.


have been recently marshalled against the *Traditionskern* model of ethnogenic development that are most relevant to the evidence presented here. Were Columbanus and his followers to be viewed through the prism of a *Traditionskern* narrative, the image would be of a man and his Irish compatriots who preserved their ethnic distinctiveness through the kernel of their Irish traditions, as if in a vacuum, with these traditions imbuing every aspect of the foundation that they established. However the picture that emerges here is much more complex. Although Columbanus has been shown to have been acutely aware of his Irishness, and not above exploiting the fact tactically, he remained open to integration and assimilation on many levels, particularly if it benefited his monasteries. Specifically, the ethnogenic agenda is at odds with evidence from the monasteries themselves which thus far appear to be anything but Irish. Therefore, by focusing primarily on Columbanus’ Irish identity, we risk ignoring so many other factors in the creation of the character of his monasteries. Most important is the fact that these were not monasteries founded solely by an Irishman in a *desertum*, with a *tabula rasa* upon which to impose his vision of a monastery. Rather the monasteries were founded on land awarded by the king, in an area that was already populated, and possibly already Christianised. Not only did this population become involved with the monastery from an early stage, but the monastery itself was built in the remains of upstanding structures that were already part of the landscape of the community. The importance of this autochthonous element of the monasteries is evident in the fact that soon after Columbanus’ departure the foundations are integrated thoroughly into the intrigues of the highest echelons of Frankish society.

Although there were undeniably certain positions which Columbanus took which set him apart and which even he himself asserts are a product of his formation in an Irish context (the Easter debate being a prime example), to extrapolate this fact onto all other aspects of the monasteries, and specifically on to the material culture of the foundations in searching for an Irish layout in the archaeological remains, is perhaps a bridge too far. The mistake is to confuse ethnic and cultural notions: while Columbanus was undoubtedly a member of a different ethnos and
cognizant of that fact, this did not necessarily translate into every aspect of his actions. As set out by Brather, ‘the nature of archaeology as a historical discipline does not rest upon and cannot be reduced to the question of ethnic interpretation’\textsuperscript{10} to do so in the case of Columbanus’ monasteries, would be to participate in what Brather would term an ‘archaeological form of nationalism’\textsuperscript{11}. Given the very particular context in which the monasteries were founded and developed, the Irish ethnicity of their founders should rather be seen as just one in a whole range of factors which formed its character, as opposed to instrumental in that process.

In addition to the insights that have been outlined above, some much more practical knowledge has been acquired over the past four years. We now know that the soils in the area are receptive to both standard methodologies of geophysical prospection, magnetometry and electric resistivity. While just over 6 hectares have been prospected, there are a number of fields that are in private ownership that have not yet been surveyed, and one hopes that an opportunity will arise in the not too distant future to extend our investigation to these areas. Of particular interest would be the fields constituting the large oval enclosure to the east of the church site. Against this is the problem raised by the high level of alluvium contained in the soil, which as it is laid in considerably thick layers, can have the effect of masking any underlying archaeological remains, rendering only the latest deposits and features visible to geophysical prospection. For instance, as we saw with Structure A, the high level of alluvium deposited in the ditch of the feature, made interpretation of its composition quite difficult on the basis of the gradiometery results alone. Furthermore, it is the rapidity with which alluvial layers accumulate in this area that impacts on the viability of field walking in the area. For instance, the antique layer discovered in the 2011 excavation was at a depth of 1.75m below the AP horizon.


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
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The excavation has given us considerable insights into solifluction and water management issues in the area immediately surrounding Annegray, information that will predicate any further excavation here. Indeed it also has financial implications viz conservation of organic objects which are so well preserved at the lower levels. On the plus side, such would lead one to be optimistic about the possibility of quite refined paleoenvironmental data becoming available in the future.

It must be said that the research undertaken as part of the project, while adding greatly to our understanding of the first monastic establishment of Columbanus on the continent, and in particular its installation in this area of the Vosges, has also raised a raft of new questions, signalling possible avenues for future research. If it is the case, for example, that the earlier phase of Structure A cannot be unequivocally shown to be the castrum mentioned by Jonas, and if no other feature comparable to such a structure is evident in the geophysics carried out, then the scope must be broadened in our attempt to locate it. Furthermore, while two seasons of investigation have been undertaken on Structure A, it is perhaps now appropriate that the focus of the research turn once again to the area in the immediate vicinity of the church remains exposed by Cugnier, in order to determine what, if any, associated structures may be detected. In addition to all of this, there is also the huge potential presented by the area in the vicinity of the Eglise St. Martin, which could aid greatly in contextualising the implantation of the original settlement by Columbanus at Annegray. Over the course of the past four years strong connections have been made with local archaeologists working on the question of Columbanian monasticism in the region and it is hoped that in the future this collaboration can be continued with the aim of investigating these new research avenues.

Finally we may consider what the information garnered from this study of Annegray tells us about its founder. While the image of Columbanus that emerges from this study may not be overly similar to that which one finds in the Vita Columbani, it is no less appealing for that matter. It is an image of a man, who although a stranger, artfully inserts a monastic community into the very
fabric of this area, an act that would have required skill and political acumen. It is a picture of a man who was prepared to use what infrastructure was available to him to benefit the survival of his nascent community. A man possessing a certain amount of flexibility and one who was willing to adapt to the ways of the valley in which he settled if it benefited his greater plan. The importance of Annegray in the development of the Columbanian project cannot be underestimated, for not only did it provide its founder with a foothold in Frankish territory, it was also a testing ground for many of the approaches that Columbanus used to great success in the founding of further monasteries not only nearby in the Vosges, but also further afield in Austria and Italy. Therefore it is in the further research of Annegray that we may learn a great deal about the Columbanian foundations as a whole.
Bibliography


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