
Titus Panhuysen*

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Abstract: In the eighties of the last century a massive excavation was carried out in the Church of St Servatius in Maastricht in the context of an overall restoration of the church building which dates from the 11th to 15th century. The Servatius Church was originally a grave church that was founded in the sixth century by Bishop Monulph of Maastricht creating a pilgrim centre to honour his fourth-century predecessor Servatius, the first Bishop of Tongeren (BE). The excavations have not only brought to light remains of the sixth-century church building of Monulph, but also a hitherto unknown and richly decorated basilica that was in use between c. 650 and 950 A.D. as an abbey church. The diggings were extremely meticulously carried out over 40 connecting excavation trenches and the whole is very well documented and drawn in nearly 374 plans and sections. The digging is done entirely by hand and the soil is sieved dry as much as possible in stratigraphic units. That has resulted in a large amount of dating sherds within a reliable Harris-Matrix. Special material groups were found such as window glass, tesserae (cubical or cuboid mosaic stones) and fragments of wall paintings. The 133 mosaic stones from this excavation will be discussed here within their find contexts, from which something can be deduced about their original use and significance. This article is the result of a presentation during a most important Workshop in Belgium in March 2015 in the former Abbey of Paix-Dieu (Amay, BE) under the title Early medieval tesserae in north-western Europe (VIth-Xth century).


The excavations

In 1981 a beginning was made with extensive restorations of the basilica of St Servatius in Maastricht (Fig. 1).1 Initial excavations took place in the winter of 1981-1982 in the so-called Stifts Chapel, a twin chapel which was constructed in the 11th century against the northern wall of the north transept and which functioned as treasury and oratory.2 This exploratory research took place in anticipation of a planned relocation of a number of late medieval gravestones which were still in their original locations with the original burials underneath.

Some years later these were followed by comprehensive excavations in the church itself (1985–1989), when pits were dug throughout the church for the purpose of heating.3 The trenches were mostly planned in the locations of the planned pits. However, matters were complicated by the fact that the archaeologists’ research had to be planned within the confines of the order of restoration activities of the walls and vaults of the church which necessitated huge scaffolding reaching to the ceiling. As a result, excavations were carried out in 40 small, hand-dug trenches (2135 m³) covering an area far larger than taken up by just the heating pits which were filled in with concrete ‘cellars’, soil or a pure inert sand. Afterwards (Fig. 2). Of course this method wasn’t conducive to an overview of the site, but it did lead to very detailed documentation. In total, 174 plans were drawn (4787m²)

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1 Oswald et alii 1990, p.188; Jacobsen et alii 1991, p. 257.

* University of Amsterdam, e-mail: tasmpanhuysen@gmail.com.