Charting Conversion: Burial as a Barometer of Belief?

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This paper explores three ways in which the burial record of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia can be used to chart the spread of Christianity throughout the region. Attention is paid to those material characteristics which typify a Christian burial in the Middle Ages – inhumation, deposition without grave-goods and west–east orientation. It is argued that it is possible to use the adoption of these rites to trace the progress of the conversion, albeit with certain limitations.

Introduction

The following discussion presents one aspect of my doctoral research into the conversion of East Anglia.[1] Approaching the subject from a landscape-archaeological perspective, my work combines the historical and archaeological evidence for the conversion and uses it to examine the role that Christianity played in the numerous social, political, material and landscape changes which occurred during the Anglo-Saxon period. In order to achieve this aim it has been necessary to develop a number of methodologies with which to chart the initial spread of Christianity. Inevitably, given the nature of the surviving material record, funerary archaeology plays a significant role in this research, from the level of individual burial rites through to the wider landscape context of cemeteries.[2]

Limited space dictates a narrow focus and this paper concentrates upon the emergence of the three main material characteristics of the Christian medieval burial rite during the Middle Saxon period, namely inhumation with the absence of cremation, the deposition of the dead without grave-goods, and a west–east orientation to individual graves and cemeteries. The paper aims to assess the use of these criteria in charting the course of the conversion within the East Anglian region.[3] It therefore represents a pilot study instigated to assess the potential of the material evidence for addressing the processes of conversion. It is hoped that future work will incorporate the numerous unpublished sites in the

region's Historic Environment Records (HERs), but this paper focuses on the key excavated sites and makes no claims to be comprehensive. Despite a degree of caution and some provisos, it is argued that all three physical characteristics *can* be demonstrated to have the potential to be useful indicators of the adoption of Christianity, contrary to recent studies that have questioned the use of burial evidence in this way.

Burial and Belief: a Matter of Grave Importance

The archaeological study of religion, and of conversion in particular, is currently undergoing something of a renaissance, with the recent appearance of a number of publications on the subject.[4] This work has provided many new insights into the nature of conversion and the way in which societies responded to new religious influences. However, while it is certainly true that recent studies of early medieval graves have developed new approaches and interpretations, the vast majority have focused upon the social and political dimensions of burial rather than its religious and cosmological aspects.[5] With the notable exception of a handful of papers, the new thinking in the subjects of burial and religious conversion has yet to seriously converge.[6]

There are several reasons for this lacuna. Studies of Anglo-Saxon burials have traditionally been dominated by the cremations and furnished inhumations of the Early period, with particular attention paid to the many classes of artefact associated with them.[7] This bias is largely due to the archaeological visibility of the material and conversely the unfurnished burials of the period have received little attention, being rendered effectively invisible by a lack of associated artefacts.[8] The problem is compounded in East Anglia, where poor bone preservation results in a number of 'empty graves' in cemeteries, about which very little can be said.[9] As a result of such compartmentalised approaches to the material, it is currently difficult to study the full range

of burials throughout the conversion period equally as the later end of the scale is substantially under-represented. Fortunately, this situation is slowly being rectified as more sites are excavated.

Burial evidence is often employed in discussions of Anglo-Saxon religion, although again there is a distinct bias towards the Early material and the evidence that it provides for the nature of Anglo-Saxon paganism.[10] The increase in high-quality excavations and more detailed post-excavation analyses have shed a greater light on the details of the various rites enacted; our understanding of the cremation rite has benefited particularly from this type of work, although inhumation has too.[11] Sites such as Snape (Suffolk) have demonstrated the immense variation that was possible within the broader categories of inhumation and cremation and this variety is argued to be a reflection of the polytheistic and socio-political fragmentation of the Early Anglo-Saxon period in which, as Lucy puts it, 'each community actively created its own burial rite while drawing on common practice'.[12] With regard to the ways in which the burial rite changed over time, we know that inhumation was practised alongside cremation during the Early Anglo-Saxon period, but that it became the sole burial rite by the mid-to-late seventh century. In addition, although inhumation continued to be practised, the nature of the rite changed over time too, most particularly regarding the decreasing deposition of grave-goods.

The large number of known Christian burials excavated from both medieval and post-medieval contexts in this country has increased rapidly over recent decades, demonstrating that unfurnished, supine burial with a west–east orientation was, and continues to be, the normal Christian burial practice.[13] Therefore, with regard to recognising the conversion in the burial record, a simple model has been developed in which Christianity arrived and burial rites were immediately transformed from those of the Early Anglo-Saxon period to those of the Medieval period.[14] In particular, attention has focused upon the change from furnished to unfurnished burial and the increasingly regular adoption of a west–east orientation, both criteria recently described by Arthur MacGregor as being amongst 'the earliest tangible signs· of the new religion in the archaeological record'.[15] Although such interpretations persist, they have been demonstrated to be over-simplistic and are increasingly seen as not fitting the available evidence. There are a number of reasons for this change in approach, both theoretical and practical. For example, it has been argued that the absence of cremation does not in itself infer religious affiliation, that furnished burial could be absent in pre-Christian contexts as well as persist in a thoroughly Christian environment, while west–east orientation was common both before and after conversion.[16] Moreover, there are questions about what we mean by 'conversion' as reflected in the burial record: do we mean a change

of belief, a change of practice, or simply a politically expedient shift in the symbolism of death?[17]

Consequently, in tandem with the critique of inferring past ethnic groups from early medieval graves, attempting to recognise religious conversion in the burial record has fallen somewhat out of fashion. However, we should be wary of turning the problems in recognising religious change into a wholesale dismissal of religious interpretations. Although the model needs refining, as admitted by Martin Carver (a staunch advocate of the political and ideological messages inherent in early medieval mortuary practices), 'burial rites certainly do change at conversion'.[18] His comments are echoed by Alison Taylor, who has recently observed that 'religious change … is particularly likely to be marked by radical shifts in burial practice'.[19] Fortunately, new developments in our understanding of the conversion process have caused us to revise our expectations of the material record and it is now possible to revisit the burial record and use it with greater success. More traditional models saw conversion as a basic binary opposition – a society was either in one state or another – but this has now been replaced by a much more subtle model in which local trends are adapted and integrated into the Christian doctrine.[20] This aided the progression of new religious ideas, by allowing traditional practices and links to the past to remain, while at the same time furthering the cause. This may well result in a change in the character of the material record rather than its substance. It will inevitably also lead to highly regionalised variations in universal practices.[21] These ideas strike a chord with many of the observations of the changes in burial practices which occurred during the seventh century.

Another difficulty encountered in the more traditional approaches to the study of conversion is the tendency to concentrate upon the conversion of the elite, while paying little heed to the evidence for the wider population. This is a result of using the surviving historical sources as a starting point, many of which were written by, for and about the ecclesiastical and secular elites, and has given rise to a trickle-down model of conversion in which all of the major changes occurred at the top.[22] The archaeological record would seem contradict this, suggesting that religious changes took place at all levels of society and occurred comparatively quickly, primarily during the seventh century.

Reliance on the historical sources to provide a starting point for studying the conversion is in part responsible for the belief that burial evidence has little to contribute to the debate. The historical sources make little or no mention of the early Church's attitude to burial practices and it is argued that they surely would if it was a pertinent issue.[23] Indeed, there is so little documentary evidence that Morris believes 'the written records of the 7th and 8th centuries suggest that pagan burial was not regarded as a danger by the Church, or that if it did present a threat it was low on the list of priorities for elimination'.[24]
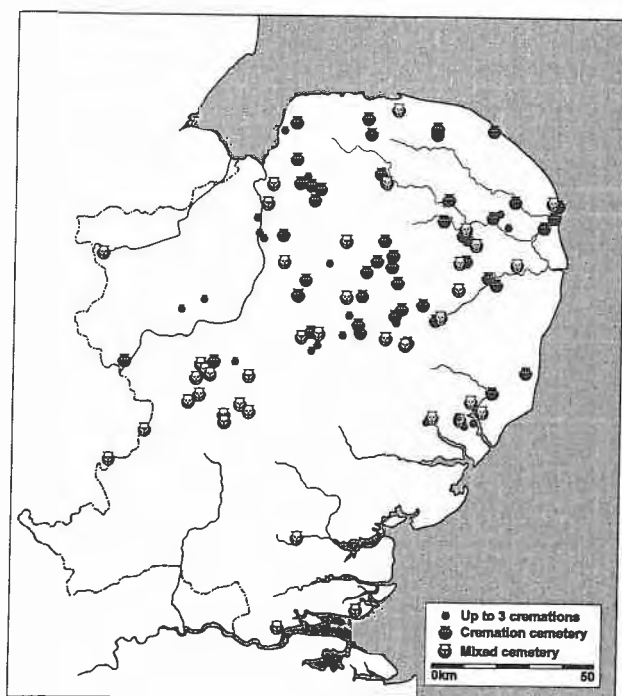
Figure 1. The distribution of cremations in East Anglia

subsequent decades.[27] In Williamson's words, with regard to understanding the ecclesiastical development of the region 'the evidence of documents will probably contribute little to our understanding in the future: the challenge is one for archaeology to answer.'[28]

Fortunately, we are increasingly well placed to answer this challenge. In direct contrast to its documentary paucity, the burial record of the Anglo-Saxon period within East Anglia is exceptionally rich. Documented accounts of discoveries occur from the mid-sixteenth century onwards and Anglo-Saxon material now accounts for many thousands of entries in the region's HERs.[29] During the last hundred years East Anglia has played host to a number of significant archaeological excavations, almost all of which have been brought to swift publication, at least in catalogue form, and many of which have since become type-sites.[30] Perhaps the most significant contribution to the data set results from the archaeological authorities' good relationships with responsible metal-detector users over the last twenty-five years, now further strengthened under the Portable Antiquities Scheme. To date in Norfolk approximately forty Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have been located through metal-detected finds alone and many more sites lie unrecognised in the numerous reported stray-finds.[31]

However, there are a lot of things which are not mentioned in the early sources, but which we know from the material record occurred, ranging from the manufacture of individual artefacts through to the management of entire estates. One cannot take an absence of historical evidence as evidence of absence. Although the historical record *is* quiet on the subject of burial, the archaeological record clearly does show that changes in burial practice occurred at the time of the conversion and these require explanation.

Anglo-Saxon East Anglia: the Body of Evidence

Out of necessity any study of the East Anglian region during the Anglo-Saxon period has to be archaeological in nature. Very few pertinent documentary sources have survived, a fact widely attributed to the destructive tendencies of ninth-century Viking raiders within the region.[25] Consequently our main source of documentary evidence for the conversion period in East Anglia is Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written in a different part of the country over a hundred years after the events it describes.[26] While Bede's all too brief comments have inspired lengthy discussions about the kings Rædwald and Sigeberht, the temple of the two altars and the identity of the individuals buried at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk), beyond drawing our attention to the first half of the seventh century Bede tells us precious little about the wider conversion of East Anglia during this time and in

Cremation: Gone to Pot

Cremations are among the most archaeologically visible artefacts of the Early Anglo-Saxon period and, within East Anglia at least, have been the subject of recorded discoveries since the sixteenth century when Leland noted 'a great many yerthen pottes' recently dug up in Kenninghall (Norfolk) in his *Itinerary* of *c.*1540.[32] Figure 1 shows the distribution of locatable cremations extracted from the HERs of the East Anglian counties. Following the categories adopted by Myres and Green in their 1973 gazetteer, the 105 identified sites have been subdivided into nineteen sites with less than three cremations, forty-seven with more than three cremations and thirty-nine mixed-rite cemeteries.[33] Although a rather blunt instrument (relative quantities are not represented here) the map clearly demonstrates that cremation was a widely practised rite within the area that now comprises Norfolk and the northern half of Suffolk. Fewer instances occurring further afield and then most often in mixed-rite cemeteries. The discrete nature of this distribution has sparked much debate about the *Adventus Saxonum*, harking back to Bede's observations on the continental origins of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes,[34] but for the purposes of this discussion it is enough to note that the cremation rite was widely practised in the region, for it is its ultimate cessation which primarily interests us here.

The chronology of cremation is of fundamental importance to this discussion, for if it can be demonstrated to have ceased to be practised before the reintroduction of Christianity to these shores, then this is clearly unrelated

to the conversion. However, if the rite can be demonstrated to have continued into the early seventh century, then we must at least consider the possibility that its ultimate cessation may be tied into the adoption of Christianity. Unfortunately, as is so often the case, things are not as clear-cut as we would like them to be. Despite the enormous quantity of curated and published material, the precise dating of cremation remains problematic and its chronological cut-off point is rarely discussed in the literature.[35] This uncertainty is largely due to the vast majority of this material, primarily cremation urns, being devoid of archaeological context and, more significantly, any associated finds. Historically the contents of an urn were usually deemed to be useless and discarded, resulting in the loss of a great deal of information.[36] To this day the main source for dating cremations remains the typology of urn styles developed by Myres, who, somewhat surprisingly, himself considered the contents of urns to be 'the least informative … of all the material relics of ancient culture.'[37] Consequently, although comprehensive, Myres' typology actually contains very few absolute dates and the largely stylistic nature of the work has been criticised for its assumption of linear and constant development over time.[38] Richards goes so far as to state that 'one might conclude that the material is undatable.'[39] Fortunately, the increasing number of cremations excavated under modern conditions are enabling more detailed dating to be achieved, both by association and also stratigraphically. The cremation rite can now be demonstrated to extend into the seventh century with some certainty. In particular, most of the examples of cremations contained within copper-alloy vessels can now be dated to the late sixth and seventh centuries, including examples from Illington (Norfolk) and Snape.[40] It is unlikely that these datable examples were isolated cases and we must assume that the more traditional urns also continued to be used at this time, although at present it is difficult to prove this assertion.

This brings us to what seem likely to be among the latest instances of cremation in the archaeological record of East Anglia, the cremations at Sutton Hoo, dated to the first quarter of the seventh century.[41] The fact that the cremation rite was enacted here is perhaps the most telling physical clue in ascertaining the relationship between the end of cremation and the acceptance of Christianity. Over a number of years Martin Carver has promulgated the theory that the Sutton Hoo burial complex represents an overtly political statement of pagan defiance 'provoked by the perceived menace of a predatory Christian mission.'[42] In particular he draws attention to the use of what he takes to be iconic pagan practices at the site: barrow burial, boat burial and cremation.[43] Barrow and boat burials were both very rare, telling us little about the burial practices of the lower echelons of society, but, as we have seen, cremation was widely practised at a grassroots level, making it much more useful in charting the spread of the conversion. It is certainly telling that the last pagan kings of East Anglia

should be among the last to practise cremation in the region.[44] Taking Carver's interpretation to its logical conclusion, cremation became a totemic pagan rite, being flaunted as an act of defiance and resistance. The corollary of this is that the rite was under direct threat from these 'predatory' Christian missionaries and the episode is strongly suggestive of a Christian policy of eradicating cremation, albeit one unrecorded in early documents. Although direct evidence is sparse, the situation is not without precedent: there was a similar cessation of cremation among the Christian populations of the late Roman period, all of whom subsequently inhumed their dead.[45]

This then begs the question why the eradication of cremation should be so desirable to these early Christians? We have seen that one of the means by which Christianity achieved its widespread success was through a deliberate policy of adoption and adaptation of local customs as it expanded into new territories.[46] Yet, while this can be demonstrated to be true for many practices, of which more below, cremation appears to be one practice which was simply not tolerated. Howard Williams has recently outlined an 'ideology of transformation' in which cremation functioned as a mechanism through which the deceased was destroyed and transformed into a new ancestral form.[47] Such ideas would have been fundamentally at odds with the early Christian world-view and, although some ideologies could be assimilated into the emerging doctrine, it would appear that the destruction of the body by fire and its transformation to something Other was not one of them. Indeed, cremation remained an anathema for Anglican Christians until the nineteenth century, for in more recent times it was seen to prevent the possibility of resurrection, for which many believed that the body needed to be kept complete.[48] Stricter still, it was not until 1963 that the Roman Catholic church permitted cremation, although to this day the cremated remains cannot be scattered and must be kept together.[49] This is all suggestive of a strongly ingrained doctrine, which may well have accounted for the disappearance of cremation from the archaeological record in the early seventh century.

To return to the initial problem, with regard to recognising the conversion in the burial record it therefore follows that any cemetery which contains evidence of cremation must represent a community which had yet to adopt Christianity, at least in part, and, where they can be securely dated, these sites can be used to provide something of a *terminus post quem* for the localised adoption of Christianity. Unfortunately individual urns can be very difficult to date, but a broader perspective taking in the wider landscape context of cremation containing cemeteries will hopefully prove enlightening. This is one of the other avenues explored in my doctoral research. While the presence of cremation can be used to demonstrate the continued existence of pagan practices, its absence alone cannot be taken as
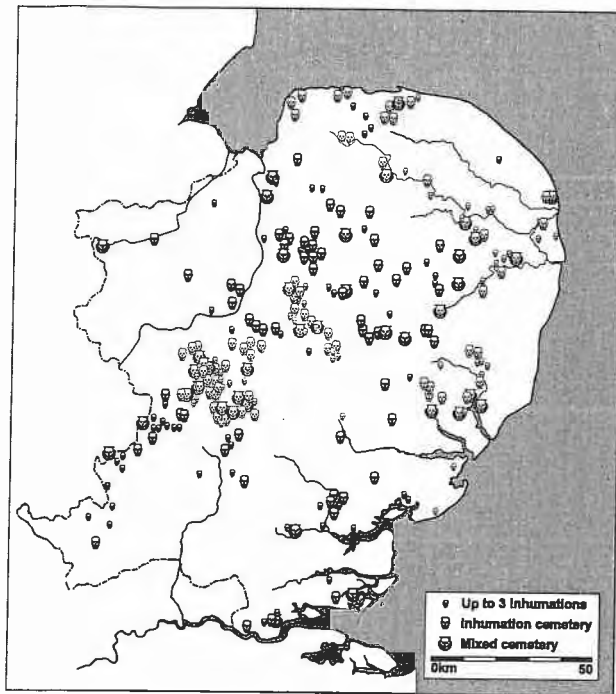
Figure 2. The distribution of fifth- to seventh-century inhumations in East Anglia.

conclusive proof of the adoption of Christianity, although it may certainly be used to strengthen the argument. Cremation was only one of many pagan burial rites and due consideration must be given to the clues offered by contemporaneous inhumation rites.

Grave Goods: Taking it With You

It is a commonly held belief that the conversion was responsible for the demise of the practice of burying grave-goods. However, this demise can actually be archaeologically dated to the first half of the eighth century, at least a century after the main period of conversion discussed in the rest of this paper.[50] Clearly then, this event cannot be related to the initial period of conversion, although it is probably related to the subsequent development of churchyard burial and the institutions that accompanied it.[51] Certainly, with the exception of some saints and members of the clergy, the vast majority of the medieval examples of Christian burial are unfurnished.[52] Even if this were not the case, the simple criterion furnished/unfurnished could not be used as an indicator of conversion, because a significant quantity of Early Anglo-Saxon burials were unfurnished anyway or, such as at Snape (Suffolk) and Harford Farm (Norfolk), were furnished with materials which cannot usually be recognised archaeologically.[53] However, given the sheer quantity of material available to study, it would be a counter-intuitive to deny the significance of the

change in the deposition of grave goods. A closer investigation of the material reveals that the practice of furnishing graves did change significantly during the course of the seventh century and this may well be a result of the conversion.

We have already seen that Anglo-Saxon burial studies have historically shown a heavy bias in favour of furnished inhumations and the volume of material involved becomes very clear when one plots its distribution. Figure 2 shows all of the fifth to seventh century inhumations listed in the region's HERs, again broken down into the categories defined by Myres and Green.[54] The locations of 224 sites are shown, 104 with less than three inhumations, 120 with more than three inhumations and the same thirty-nine mixed-rite sites as in Figure 1. Once again we must be aware of the limitations of the method. The discrete distribution exhibited by the cremations is not mirrored here, but this does not mean that regional trends are not present in the material: analyses of individual artefact types would bring them out.[55] The other crucial factor in this distribution is the contribution to the data made by metal detectorists, as many of the sites shown here are only represented by surface scatters and not excavated material.

As one might expect, grave-good assemblages have been studied in considerable detail over the years and are particularly suited to statistical analysis to determine underlying patterns in their deposition. In this manner it has been possible to demonstrate that the gender of the deceased was clearly a determining factor in the composition of grave-goods, for there is a demonstrable correlation between jewellery assemblages and female-sexed burials, while weaponry is strongly associated with male-sexed burials. However, it can equally be demonstrated that it was not the only determining factor, for fifty percent of burials either do not contain sex-specific artefacts or contain no artefacts at all.[56] It has also been demonstrated that the age of the deceased was a factor in structuring their grave-goods and a series of age-related thresholds have been identified at which the composition of the burial assemblage would be changed.[57] Although a similar proportion of cremations contain pyre-goods, it is difficult to interpret them to the same degree because of their incomplete curation and also because of the damage caused by the heat, the selective collection process and the possibility that some artefacts were added to the urn afterwards.[58] The cremated material studied by Julian D. Richards suggested to him that 'very few grave-goods appear to be sex-linked'[59] and that they 'show little or no correlation with a specific age grouping'.[60]

Over the years many authors have commented on the possible ideological reasons behind the provision of pyre- and grave-goods and, although they are many and varied, foremost among them is the suggestion that the deceased was being equipped for an afterlife in which the provided artefacts would prove useful.[61] The trends identified above are clearly indicative of deliberate funerary

practices, which in some cases reflected aspects of both the age and sex of the deceased, but there is some mileage in the notion of equipping the dead for an aspired afterlife existence as much as simply reflecting identities held at death by the living person. Many grave-goods are items of dress or ornamentation and so could have simult-aneously served to reflect identities in life and in death. The provision of weapons has traditionally been interpreted as the equipping of warriors, although it has been argued that these weapons are symbolic, as they are often not functional weapon sets and the individuals were often too young, old or infirm to use them.[62] The burial of whole animals, especially horses and dogs, is seen as an extension of including personal property in the grave, while the presence of butchered portions of animals and accessory vessels is usually interpreted as evidence of funerary feasting or of food and drink being provided for the deceased.[63] However, all of these practices could have held, at least originally, a pagan religious significance, even if they continued to be practiced after the nominal adoption of Christianity.

So grave-good assemblages can be demonstrated to be highly structured and to symbolically express a number of different messages, but to return to the issue of recognising the conversion in the material record, is this of any use to us? By far the most significant factor in the use of grave-goods is the distinct difference between the burial assemblages of the fifth and sixth centuries and those of the seventh and early eighth. These differences have long been recognised: Lethbridge's excavations at Burwell and Shudy Camps (both Cambridgeshire) in the 1930s provided the stimulus for Leeds's more detailed description of this 'Final Phase' material.[64] Early in the seventh century the character of all of the main grave-good assemblages changed and attention has been drawn to the strong Roman and Byzantine influences visible in the new artefacts. The proportion of unfurnished burials in cemeteries rose and the nature of the non-sex-specific assemblages changed: for example, glass vessels became less popular and bowls more so. Although the same types of weaponry continued to be deposited, the actual number of weapon burials declined significantly until they ceased in the late seventh century. However, jewellery assem-blages exhibit the greatest changes: the major Germanic brooch types of the sixth century stopped being used 'almost overnight',[65] as did long strings of beads and many of the girdle items which typified the earlier assemblages. These were replaced by classical-influenced single disc brooches, single pins and pairs of pins, new types of necklaces with pendants and new types of girdle item.[66]

However we wish to read the burial assemblage, the shift from Germanic to Roman/Byzantine influenced grave-goods is striking and requires explanation. Clearly it represents a radical change in wider spheres of influence and the growth of interest in Romanitas could well be ascribed to the arrival of the Church.[67] It would certainly sit comfortably with the idea of a conversion that took on and adapted existing local practices, changing their character, but not banning them outright. Although this is certainly a possibility, the evidence needs to be viewed within the context of the wider political changes that were afoot during the period; for example, Geake cites the rise of kingship as an equally important factor.[68] These processes are, of course, all bound up together and it is not unreasonable to suggest that, while the presence of Germanic grave-goods signals a non-Christian burial, the presence of Roman/Byzantine grave-goods might actually be an indication of a converting population gradually shifting its allegiance to Rome. This argument has recently been developed by Crawford, who has drawn attention to the explicitly Christian symbolism employed in some of this material, citing it as a clear indication that the new religion was a dominant factor.[69] As was referred to above, detailed study of the later end of the burial spectrum is made difficult by a lack of well excavated sites. Although Geake was able to list a number of East Anglian cemetery sites containing relevant material in her gazetteer, very few sites have been well published, Harford Farm being a notable exception.[70] However, if we accept the possibility that the change in stylistic influence reflects, directly or indirectly, the progress of Christianity, then it could be used as an indicator of the progress of the conversion. These changes in material are also related to a series of changes in cemetery location which fall outside the narrow focus of this paper, the relevance of which to this argument is considered elsewhere.[71]

Burial Orientation: Turning in the Grave

Studies of known examples of Christian burial from both medieval and post-medieval contexts have demonstrated that supine burial orientated west–east was, and continues to be, the norm for Christian burial.[72] Despite being so ingrained in Christian practice, it would appear that the reason for the adoption of this orientation has become obscured by history. It is now generally accepted that the head was placed to the west so that, come the Day of Judgement, the dead would rise up from their graves and face the east.[73] A number of liturgical explanations have been given for the Christian desire to face the east, foremost among them is the expectation that Christ will return from the east on the Day of Judgement.[74] But can the fact that Christian burials are aligned west–east be used to trace the progress of the conversion as some have suggested?[75]

Of course, it does not logically follow that just because all Christian burials are orientated west–east all west–east orientated burials must be Christian and numerous examples of deliberate west–east burials occur in many demonstrably non-Christian contexts from around the world and throughout history. Although liturgy is used to explain the Christian adoption of a west–east alignment, many of the non-Christian examples have been explained

as orientation towards the direction of sunrise and/or sunset.[76] That the rising and, perhaps more so, the setting of the sun should become linked with death is not so surprising when one considers how fundamentally important it is to life and we should certainly consider the possibility that burial orientation is another instance of Christianity adopting an already widespread practice and subsequently finding its own justification for it.

Numerous examples of west–east burials occur in many demonstrably pre-Christian cemeteries in East Anglia, such as at Snape and Westgarth Gardens (Suffolk), Bergh Apton and Spong Hill (Norfolk).[77] Clearly then, the adoption of Christian burial practice did not involve the adoption of a new tradition of burial orientation in very many instances, although its meaning may well have been redefined. While the adoption of a west–east alignment is therefore no use as a direct indicator of conversion, the Christian observance is so strict, that we can at least say with certainty that burials which are *not* aligned west–east are demonstrably not Christian. Examples of non-west–east burials can also be found at Snape, Bergh Apton and Spong Hill, and also at Oxborough (Norfolk), where most of the burials were orientated on the prehistoric barrow around which the cemetery clustered.[78]

Conclusions

To date the conversion of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia has received relatively little attention, largely a result of the meagre survival of pertinent historical sources. Any attempt to rectify this situation has to be archaeological in nature and this paper has explored ways in which the period's archaeologically rich burial record could be used to trace the spread of Christianity throughout the region. The cessation of cremation in the seventh century appears to be a result of Christianity and it can be confidently stated that cemeteries which contain cremations represent communities that had yet to convert in their entirety. The absence of cremation does not automatically equate to Christian burial, but it is a necessary criterion. The

deposition of grave-goods did not cease as a result of the adoption of Christianity, but grave-goods became rarer and there was a distinct change in their character from a Germanic to a Roman/Byzantine influence. It is possible that Germanic goods represent non-Christian burials while Roman/Byzantine goods could be seen as an indication of a converted Christian population, but this remains unclear. Unfurnished burial was practiced throughout the period to varying degrees and is not a sound criterion. Finally, while it can be stated that a west–east orientation is a necessary criterion for identifying a Christian burial and that burials which are not orientated west–east are therefore not Christian, west–east burial was also widely practiced throughout the region during the Anglo-Saxon period, effectively ruling it out as an indicator of changing beliefs. Although none of these observations can be applied without provisos, it has at least been possible to demonstrate that material traces of the conversion can be identified in the East Anglian burial record. This is encouraging, because having kept this discussion quite general and limited it to some of the better published examples, it paves the way for a more detailed examination of the East Anglian burial record, published and unpublished. Hopefully the results of this examination will allow a more detailed picture of the spread of Christianity throughout the region to be painted.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. I am based at the University of East Anglia, where my research is funded by a postgraduate scholarship from the School of History.
2. A series of papers outlining my various different approaches to this problem, including examinations of the spatial arrangement of cemeteries, their changing locations and their wider landscape context, are currently in preparation.
3. *E.g.* Rahtz 1977; 1978; Rodwell 1989, 157–80; Daniell 1997; Thompson 2004.
4. *E.g.* Morrison 1992; Renfrew 1994; Fletcher 1997; Cusack 1998; Gameson 1999; Insoll 1999; 2001; 2004a and b; Mills and Grafton 2003a and b; Carver 2003.
5. *E.g.* Parker Pearson 1999; Geake 1997; Lucy 1998; 2000; Stoodley 1999; Hadley 2001; Lucy and Reynolds 2002; Effros 2002; 2003; Ravn 2003; Thompson 2004.
6. *E.g.* Meaney 2003; Crawford 2003; 2004.
7. *E.g.* Dickinson 1980; 2002; Scull 2000; Lucy and Reynolds 2002, 1–7; Williams 2002.
8. *E.g.* Boddington 1987; Wade 1997, 48.
9. *E.g.* Bergh Apton (Green and Rogerson 1978); Morning Thorpe (Green, Rogerson and White 1987); Spong Hill (Hills, Penn, and Rickett 1984); Snape (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001).
10. *E.g.* Owen 1981, 67–125; Wilson 1992, 67–172; Arnold 1997, 149–75; Taylor 2001, 139–43; Williams 2001.
11. Wells 1960; McKinley 1989; 1994.
12. Lucy 1998, 49. See also Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 262–3.
13. *E.g.* Rahtz 1977; 1978; Rodwell 1989; Daniell 1997.
14. Reviewed in Geake 1997, 1–3; Taylor 2001.
15. MacGregor 2000, 221.
16. *E.g.* Daniell 1997; Geake 1997; 1999b; Härke 1992; Kendall 1982; Rahtz 1978.
17. *E.g.* Crawford 2003; 2004; Meaney 2003; Pluskowski and Patrick 2003.
18. Carver 1998a, 14.
19. Taylor 2001, 15.
20. Carver 2003, 4.

21. *E.g.* Carver 1998a; Urbańczyk 1998; 2003; Pluskowski and Patrick 2003.
22. *E.g.* Mayr-Harting 1991; Higham 1997; Yorke 1990; 2003.
23. Wilson 1992, 67–9; Hadley 2001, 92.
24. Morris 1983, 50.
25. Whitelock 1972, 1; Yorke 1990, 58.
26. Whitelock 1972; Yorke 1990, 58–71; Campbell 1996.
27. Williamson 1993, 137–42; Warner 1996, 108–15; Jones 1999, 30–45; Newton 2003.
28. Williamson 1993, 161.
29. Toulmin Smith 1964, 120; West 1998.
30. *E.g.* Caistor-by-Norwich (Myres and Green 1973); Spong Hill (Hills 1977; Hills and Penn 1981; Hills, Penn and Rickett 1984; 1987; 1994); West Stow (West 1985).
31. Newman 1995; Gurney 1997; Geake 2002; Chester-Kadwell 2004; 2005.
32. Toulmin Smith 1964, 120.
33. Figure 1 compiled from HER data for Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Essex up until December 2003. Sites have been defined following the categories set out by Myres and Green (1973, 258–62). Base map after Glazebrook 1997, Fig. 2.
34. *E.g.* Hills 1999.
35. *E.g.* Owen 1981; Wilson 1992; Welch 1992; Lucy 2000; Taylor 2001; Glasswell 2002.
36. Myres 1977; Hills 1980, 197; McKinley 1994, 1.
37. Myres 1969, 13.
38. Myres 1969; 1977; Critiques: Hurst 1976, 294–9; Hills 1979, 324–6.
39. Richards 1987, 25.
40. Myres 1977, 35; Dickinson and Speake 1992; Davison, Green and Milligan 1993; Geake 1999a; Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 250–5.
41. Carver 1998b.
42. Carver 1998b, 136.
43. Carver 1989; 1998a; 1998b, 134–6.
44. Carver 1989; 1998a.
45. *E.g.* Philpott 1991; Petts 2003, 135–57.
46. *E.g.* Carver 1998a; Urbańczyk 1998; 2003; Pluskowski and Patrick 2003.
47. Williams 2001.
48. Cremation Society of Great Britain 1974; Bynum 1995.
49. Cremation Society of Great Britain 1974.
50. Meaney 1964; Geake 1997.
51. *E.g.* Hyslop 1963; Meaney and Hawkes 1970; Boddington 1990; Hadley 2001.
52. Rodwell 1989, 157–80; Boddington 1990; Geake 2002, 149–52.
53. Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001; Penn 2000.
54. Myres and Green 1973, 258–62.
55. *E.g.* Hines 1984.
56. Pader 1982; Brush 1993; Lucy 1998, 43; Ravn 2003.
57. Crawford 1991; Stoodley 1999; 2000.
58. *E.g.* Myres and Green 1973, 77–113; Richards 1987, 126–30; McKinley 1994, 86–92; Williams 2003.
59. Richards 1987, 126.
60. *Ibid.*, 130.
61. *E.g.* Ucko 1969; Bahn 1996; Parker Pearson 1999, 7–11; Taylor 2001, 23–4; Effros 2002.
62. Härke 1989; 1990; 1992.
63. *E.g.* Crabtree 1995; Bond 1996; Williams 2001.
64. Lethbridge 1931; 1936; Leeds 1936, 98–114.
65. Geake 1999b, 204.
66. Geake 1997; 1999b; 2002.
67. Geake 1999b, 209.
68. Geake 1999b, 209–12.
69. Crawford 2003; 2004.
70. Geake 1997, 143–91; Penn 2000.
71. My paper addressing the changing locations of cemeteries is currently in preparation.
72. *E.g.* Rahtz 1977; 1978; Rodwell 1989; Daniell 1997.
73. Dearmer 1949, 432; Rahtz 1978; Kendall 1982; Brown 1983.
74. Rahtz 1978.
75. *E.g.* Hawkes 1976.
76. *E.g.* Ucko 1969; Rahtz 1978, 1–3.
77. Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 246–48; West 1988, 7–8; Green and Rogerson 1978, 4; Hills, Penn and Rickett 1984, 2–6.
78. Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001, 246–48; Green and Rogerson 1978, 4; Hills, Penn and Rickett 1984, 2–6; Penn 2000, 24–5.

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