

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE EAST ANGLIAN CONVERSION. By RICHARD HOGGETT.

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In this whistle-stop tour of early medieval East Anglia, Richard Hoggett succinctly discusses the historical and archaeological evidence surrounding the region's conversion to Christianity in the seventh and eighth centuries AD. By firmly setting the 'conversion period' within a wider time-frame, beginning with fifth-century reuse of extant Roman structures in the region, the incremental process of Christianity made manifest in East Anglia is explored through long-term contrasts of belief and behaviour as well as explicitly Christian material culture and practices.

In terms of content, Hoggett provides a weighty synthesis of previous historical and archaeological research concerning East Anglia, drawing on its large back catalogue of evidence, which is no mean feat. He aims to synthesize textual sources pertinent to early medieval East Anglia with archaeological evidence outlined in four chapters: the documentary evidence for the East Anglian conversion, the re-use of Roman sites and reclamation of natural enclosures as 'missionary stations', changing burial practices and beliefs, and the unfolding visibility and impact of Christianity on the landscape.

Hoggett produces a consistently tight focus on East Anglia, which only meanders briefly when addressing inhumation rites in order to explore the wider contemporary trends in burial from across England, Scandinavia and Continental Europe. Hoggett's broad-brush approach means a considerable amount of evidence is covered and the complex stratigraphy of arguments surrounding each issue is vividly and concisely appraised. Strategic assessment of key sites, features and finds provides the detail needed to create depth and resonance of argument within the chapter without losing the overall momentum.

However, the structure of the book isolates the four strands of evidence in stand-alone chapters; there is little cross-referencing of concepts and arguments. This is particularly noticeable in the omission of the textual evidence summarized in Chapter 2 in the archaeology-focussed chapters, inadvertently underpinning the continuing and disappointing divide between historically driven and archaeologically driven research agendas for this period. The thematic structure makes it an easy text for students to dip in and out of, but to gain a sense of the time-depth involved in the process of East Anglia's conversion, some jumping around is required. Since the conclusion is largely a thematic synopsis, only the penultimate chapter concerning landscapes of conversion begins to combine the archaeological evidence into the coherent, overarching synthesis required for such different arenas of evidence, but it is frustratingly brief.

Nonetheless, by compiling many disparate studies concerning early medieval East Anglia, Hoggett has produced a solid, if not comprehensive, compendium of evidence and interpretations which, when grouped together, may illuminate a regional process of conversion that will hopefully ignite future regional approaches. Hoggett deftly weaves together the interpretations of others, creating a sense of academic rigour, yet it may seem overly familiar to the well-versed early medievalist since there are neither startlingly fresh revelations nor boat-rocking controversies within. Whether that should be a relief or a disappointment, is for the reader to decide.