

*The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Conversion* (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2010). By Richard Hoggett. 177 x 250 mm. xiv + 207 pp. 48 illustrations. 978 1 84383 595 0. Price £50.00.

Another fine book based on a Ph.D. from the School of History at the University of East Anglia, this work attempts, quite successfully, to demonstrate that the conversion to Christianity of the East Angles in the seventh century was not solely a top-down process but one that was 'widespread at a grass-roots level'. This resulted in major transformations in burial practice, notably the abandonment of the cremation ritual, the establishment both of new types of cemetery and of a new set of relationships between settlements and cemeteries, and 'precipitated a wide-scale restructuring of the East Anglian landscape'.

To tackle a major religious change through the study of material culture will always prove challenging, but Hoggett, employing Colin Renfrew's cognitive archaeological methodology, goes a long and convincing way towards squaring up the disparate strands of the spiritual and the material. Aware that Christianity is highly adaptive and moulds itself on 'existing social, political, economic and religious structures of converting societies', he makes a determined effort to treat East Anglia as a special and unique case, yet draws on parallels from other regions where appropriate and relevant.

Laying out a theoretical basis for the treatment of religion and archaeology, Chapter 1 presents a straightforward digest for anyone interested in the subject, pointing to most of the important recent approaches, and providing a very useful summary for those without the inclination to read further. Chapter 2 succinctly summarises the historical sources, and like its predecessor stands up as a highly usable resumé of what is known. The sources are few, and their paltry survival rate is put down, not to Viking destructiveness (the traditional explanation) but to poor curation, perhaps the result of the splitting of the diocese into two in the late seventh century. Even the three pages devoted to an explanation of why Bede failed to mention St Botolph and his monastery at Iken (*Icanbo*) are intriguing and far from out of place.

In Chapter 3, 'The Establishment of Missionary Stations', archaeological evidence comes to the fore. Missionary stations, a term first employed by Stuart Rigold, were founded in Saxon Shore forts, in Iron Age enclosures, and on 'topographically isolated' sites, natural islands and peninsulas. Understanding of the last of these categories is hampered by lack of full publication, and for some sites by the lack of fieldwork.

'Burial and Belief' surveys the range of funerary practice in the pagan period and demonstrates that conversion to Christianity, early in the seventh century, is visible through the cessation of cremation and the introduction of 'Final Phase' cemeteries, in which Germanic grave-goods are supplanted by those of Romano-Byzantine origin and in which weapons, food offerings and items indicative of the age and gender of the deceased are absent.

Chapter 5, 'The Landscape of Conversion', should have the greatest appeal to readers of this journal. Early Saxon cemeteries, although often located close to settlements, were 'separate entities in the landscape'. The place of 'Final Phase' cemeteries was little different. Their scarcity and the small numbers of individuals buried within them leads Hoggett to look elsewhere for the graves of the majority of the seventh-century population. Many people were inhumed in 'Missionary Station' cemeteries, but even these are insufficient to explain where most people were buried. The problem is resolved by the suggestion that they are to be found in 'churchyard-type' cemeteries. These lay at the focus of settlement sites newly founded as a result of those great changes in settlement patterns during the post-Pagan period known as the 'Middle Saxon shuffle'. Some such cemeteries may have been accompanied by a church from their foundation, others not. Some, such as that at Carlton Colville, failed to last until the end of the century, and were overlain by an expansion of settlement. Many others continued in use and remain archaeologically inaccessible beneath present-day churchyards.

Much use is made in these arguments of spreads of Middle Saxon pottery around churchyards, recorded in numerous fieldwalking projects, and also of Middle Saxon finds made within churchyards. The enormous potential of further detailed work on this subject comes through very strongly, although one major chronological problem arises: Hoggett considers Ipswich ware, the main pottery type under consideration, as a seventh-century introduction, yet Paul Blinkhorn, the chief authority on this ware, has established that its production did not begin until after 700 A.D.

The conclusions, full of hope and inspiration, suggest several major lines of research, as well as emphasising the enormous body of work produced in the past few decades. There is a surprising maturity in this volume, which at times reads like an indispensable textbook. Only its substantial price can be used as an excuse for ignoring this book, and surely numerous scholars, including many from outside East Anglia, will gain much from it.