Book Section:

Carver, Martin orcid.org/0000-0002-7981-5741 (2001) Why that? Why there? Why then? The politics of early medieval monumentality. In: Hamerow, H., (ed.) Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain: Essays in honour of Rosemary Cramp. Oxbow Books , Oxford, UK , pp. 1-22.

1

Why that? Why there? Why then?
The Politics of Early Medieval Monumentality

Martin Carver

The hypothesis presented in this paper has already appeared in various fragmentary forms (Carver 1986, 1993, 1998b), but has not hitherto been drawn together, so it is fitting that I should try to do this in honour of my best teacher and most telling critic. After all, it would not do for Professor Cramp's *Festschrift* to be too burdened by flattering emulation; it should contain something exasperating as well. So I look forward to her leafing through these pages with growing despair, culminating in the tart response familiar from my carefree student days: 'really Mr Carver, I have no idea what you are talking about', meaning: 'actually, I know perfectly well; you on the other hand...'

In brief, the hypothesis concerns the history of the early medieval period in north-west Europe and our ability to read it from archaeology, or more specifically from its major investments such as burial mounds, churches, illuminated manuscripts and sculpture: the word 'monumentality' of my title is intended as shorthand for all these things. Confidence in the idea that monuments had (and have) a meaning beyond some vague celebration of an individual or propitiation of an unseen omnipotence has been growing among prehistorians (e.g. Bradley 1993), and is an accepted feature of the historic period. We know that monuments are more than passive memorials because written commentaries, poetry and inscriptions declare their active purposes for us. Monuments comprise the vocabulary of a political language, fossilized versions of arguments that were continuous and may have related more to what was desired than what had occurred (Carver 1993). At the same time, we need not suppose that the expression is necessarily so subtle, sceptical or to use a fashionable word, ironical, as to lose all hope of making equations between a society and its ideas. That architecture, sculpture, burial mounds and brooches have messages beyond the functional which are dependant on their social, economic and above all their ideological context was never an issue: to understand their real meaning is the goal and the aim of each generation that

studies them. It is very likely that the motives I attach to the construction of the monuments to be discussed are equally inadequate characterizations of the profound stresses that motivated and were concealed by their makers. That said, the monuments are what survive, and *our* story must temporarily keep the candle burning until *their* story can be told.

Some assumptions

The argument requires a number of assumptions to be declared. First, all archaeologists are obliged to acknowledge that whereas their efforts have the advantage of generating new evidence, there is never a good moment to argue from it; even newer evidence can quickly take the shine off too detailed a model. Reasoning from documents has the disadvantage that so few survive, but the advantage that no new sources are likely to appear suddenly in the midst of the six-year-long composition of a major synthesis. Archaeological reasoning and historical reasoning have naturally different rhythms, and the world is a more interesting place because of it. But, in order to offer a historically acceptable model, the archaeologist is obliged to assume that it is legitimate to argue from the material culture we have; to assert that in certain matters, such as the occurrence of churches and burial mounds, the distribution will not now alter markedly: that what we have is not exactly what there was, but is an acceptable representation of what there was. Having declared this assumption, the archaeologist should be permitted to develop a model on evidence that is partial; the documentary evidence is partial too, but it is legitimate to attempt to write history from it.

A second assumption is that the repertoire of material culture at our disposal is heterogeneous and cannot be interpreted through a single theoretical exegesis. Not every object or site has an equal claim to be treated as intentionally expressive. If the Sutton Hoo mound 1 burial or the Lindisfarne Gospels can be seen as having agency, representing material culture in its active voice, there is no need to impute the same intentions to a spade or a spindle whorl. The old definition of a 'culture', pulled this way and that since Gordon Childe used it the preface to *The Danube in Prehistory* (1929), can be seen as neither all cultural, nor always seeking identity, status or affiliation, but multi-purposed, a set of different statements addressing different audiences or none. If economic information is incorporated in the layers of midden heap, political meaning is most likely to be embedded in sites and objects of high investment and public access. In our period, the prominent candidates are burial mounds, jewellery, churches, illuminated manuscripts and sculpture. These appear not only in a single place at successive times, but at the same time in different places. If assumption number 1 is tenable this variation has a meaning and was intended to have one.

If the choice of the vehicle of expression is intentional, how far is it *sui generis* and how far is it owed to the emulation of the neighbours? This

depends firstly on whether the neighbours are visible, and the third assumption I make is that in early medieval northern Europe they were. The Anglo-Saxons knew about the Romans, the Irish, the Picts, the British, the Franks, the Swedes, the Danes and the Norwegians at both a general and a personal level, and we can infer this both from books (Bede) and from graves (see, for example, Hines 1984). It is these contacts and the transmissions between them that allow us to suppose that the commissioners of seventh-century monuments could fish in a large reservoir of ideas. George Henderson invokes the broad range of stimuli available to the composers of the Book of Durrow in AD 680: 'Discrete national traits, in design, technique and the selection of motifs, came into conjunction in the peculiar, small-scale, packed circumstances of the British Isles, with its ever-changing political scene, under the constant cohesive influence of the internationally active Christian church, writing and speaking Latin to all ears' (Henderson 1999, 53). But to these same people, the local traits of Scandinavia and Saxony were also visible or at least were known – the patterns on cremation urns, the wrist clasps and square-headed brooches which had been worn by East Anglian nobles. The bracteates or *guldgubbe* made in Fyn are sources for Insular Art potentially no more obscure than Coptic bowls or stamped Mediterranean pottery. So why were their ideas not recycled on the pages of the gospel books? The animals of the Sutton Hoo shoulder clasps and purse lid and of the Durrow carpet pages are links in the same technician's chain. But a great deal more of the Sutton Hoo menagerie, on helmet, sceptre, and sword was not adopted by the Christian artisans. Eastern Christian figurative art was known to the kings of East Anglia, as can be seen from a sixth-century bucket found in a field a few hundred metres north of Sutton Hoo (Mango *et al.* 1989). But it was not incorporated into the Sutton Hoo jewellery. The point is an obvious one. The Anglo-Saxons were not 'eclectic' in the sense of taking motifs at random from some workshop floor or exotic street scene. They were not indiscriminately 'influenced' by things they had seen in the halls of Danish relatives or on trips to Rome. They were creative and selective, not eclectic, but choosy. There was, potentially, a broad range of accessible options and since the different options were equally available, the choice which was actually made must have a meaning.

The next assumption is that the repertoire of possible choices does not need to be contemporary; in other words the maker of expressive artefacts and monuments can also fish in the pool of the past. The metal-smiths of later Celtic Britain and Ireland can revive La Tène styles after an interval of 500 years, just as Roman motifs, lettering, ornament and pottery are reintroduced in seventh-century Northumbria, the courts of Offa and Charlemagne, the *burhs* of Alfred, and in numerous subsequent renaissances (Carver 1993). It was recently argued that the notched shield seen on the St Andrews Sarcophagus derived from something last seen (so far as we are aware) in the Iron Age of southern Britain (Carver 1999a). There are two ways in which this transmission

can be achieved, the most easily acknowledged being survival of the object or site itself. Bailey (1992) suggests a 'conservatism' to account for the gap between Sutton Hoo and Durrow (see below), while Henderson prefers to see the transmission occurring via surviving pattern books (Henderson 1999, 50). Roman things no doubt turned up or were dug up from time to time, certainly when former Roman sites were being redeveloped from the tenth-century onwards; this easily explains why the form of late Saxon pottery was drawn from Roman, not Frankish models (Carver 1999b, 42). The argument has been extended to sites; former prehistoric ceremonial centres being commandeered by later authorities for their own legitimation (Bradley 1988), and it is likely that the Anglo-Saxons had quite a sophisticated knowledge of 'landscape archaeology'. Bronze Age burial mounds were suitable places for the emulation of Pagan status, while Christian missionaries should be assigned old Roman forts like Burgh Castle (Johnson 1988).

It is more difficult to use the 'survival' argument to explain the readoption of certain other practices such as ship burial, arguably seen previously in that form neither in Scandinavia nor Britain when it was practised at seventh-century Sutton Hoo and Snape. Here the assumption required is that the idea of ship-burial was present in the previous century and perhaps long before, but not then practised. The archaeologist cannot excavate these ethereal images, which are transmitted through unrecorded space like children's rituals in the playground (Opie and Opie 1977). Unless we suppose an early archaeological expedition to the Pyramid city at Gizeh, the idea of ship-burial came out of the heads of people and became archaeologically visible only when it was reified in some moment of exceptional stress. Ship-burial is therefore not a custom but a statement in context, and our interest in it is not so much in the innate meaning of the ritual as the meaning it had for seventh-century East Anglia: why that, why there, why then? (Carver 1995).

The contextual explanation may be thought to deserve precedence over the cultural. For example, there were burial mounds in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries in Britain, but this is not simply a 'burial custom' that evolves or endures. The style and location of seventh-century mounds is different from their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, being larger and more solitary (Shephard 1979). In any case, the burial mound does not have to carry exactly the same significance in the seventh century as in the sixth: it depends what else was happening. At Sutton Hoo the use of burial mounds can be deemed 'expressive' or even polemical on two counts: first they represent a higher level of investment than the mounds of previous centuries, and second, they are constructed at a time at which quite different monuments are being constructed in adjacent lands, for example in Kent. By contrast, Kent, rich in burial mounds in the sixth century, is investing in a new repertoire in the seventh – the apsidal churches of Canterbury.

If this is merely to say that monuments have political meaning, and the choice of monument reflects a political agenda, that is already a great deal for

some to accept. But it is axiomatic for what follows. I want to propose that early medieval investments, prestige buildings and artefacts, can be used to write political as well as cultural history, and that if this is acceptable, we can paint a picture of confronted polities pursuing different agendas during the fifth to the eighth centuries both within the island of Britain and beyond.
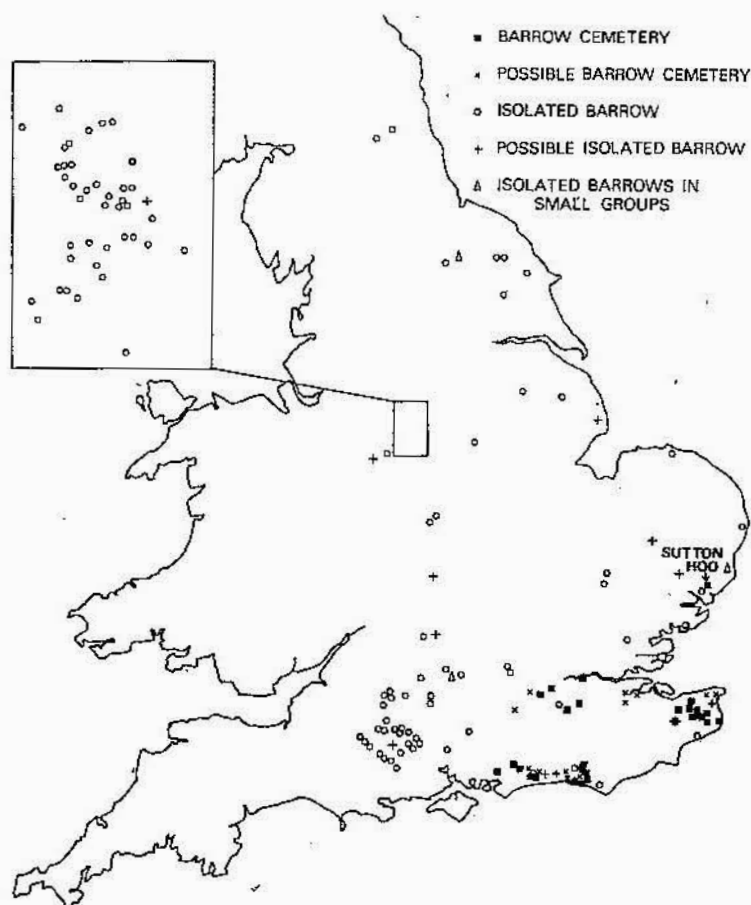

Fig. 1.1. Monumental mound-burial in Britain in the sixth and seventh centuries AD (Carver 1986, after Shephard 1979).

Reactionary mound-building

The conflated version of Shephard's map (Fig. 1.1; Carver 1986) shows a trend: cemeteries with numerous small burial mounds are present in sixth-century Kent, and larger more solitary barrows are built in the late sixth into the seventh century outside Kent. We should seek some explanation for this
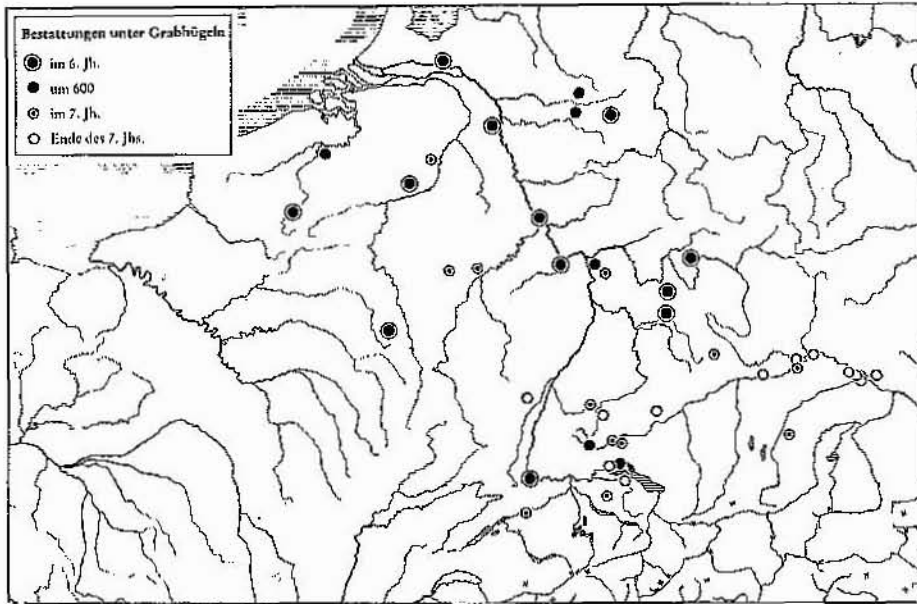
Fig. 1.2. Burial under large mounds, sixth to late seventh century AD in the Rhineland (Böhme 1993, Abb. 101).

apparent contrast, and can easily find one in the pivotal ideological event of the period – the documented arrival of the Christian mission from Rome in 597. If Christianity depressed barrow-building in Kent, it provoked it among the unconverted neighbours in a more militant form. Taplow, Sutton Hoo, and many other monumental constructions of around 600 in Saxon lands, can be read as reactions against the Christian mission (Carver 1986, 1998a, 1998b).

The work of H. W. Böhme enables us to propose a similar process for the Rhineland (Böhme 1993; Müller-Wille 1998), where the building of monumental mounds begins at the Rhine mouth in the fifth century and moves steadily upstream, arriving in Switzerland by the eighth (Fig. 1.2). In an equally thorough census, Böhme has also tracked the building of early churches in the same area; this second kind of monument can be seen to shadow the first – the earliest churches replacing the earliest barrows and the latest churches following the later barrows (Fig. 1.3). This should mean not just that churches replaced monumental barrows: they provoked their construction in the first place. We can imagine this 'bow-wave' effect taking many forms. When the mission of Adam of Bremen arrived at the ceremonial centre of Gamla Uppsala in Sweden, the grotesque sacrificial practices were noted: animals and men were hung on a great tree – and it was naturally assumed that this was a first encounter with an annual barbaric custom. Such it may have been, but the practice of sacrifice has been hard to find archaeologically, except on a small
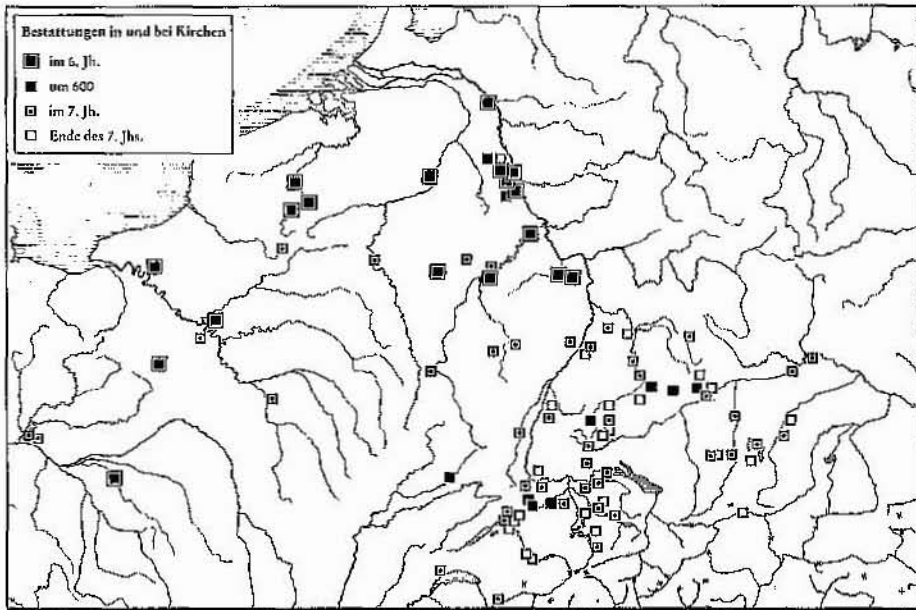
Fig. 1.3. Burial in or in association with churches, sixth to late seventh century, in the Rhineland (Böhme 1993, Abb. 99).

scale – for example animals slaughtered and included in graves. Possibly the text is intended to exaggerate the barbarity and justify the incursion. But if the event really took place, it might have done so out of the insecurity and anxiety caused by the Christian presence itself. The sacrificial practices were not so much discovered by the Christians as provoked by them. The same might have been true of Cortés in Mexico; the increasing orgy of Aztec sacrifice being caused by fear of the alien adventurers who denounced it.

Leslek Pawel Słupecki (1997) argues for similar processes in a study of the impact of Christianity on the eastern Slavs, and cites earlier work along the same lines (for example H. Lowmianski in 1979): the observed surge in Pagan religion was an ideological response to the advances of Christianity. Human sacrifice increases, temples are built and the role of the priest develops. There was even an example of altars to pagan and Christian gods being placed in the same temple, as had been notoriously perpetrated by the East Anglian king Raedwald in similar circumstances two centuries earlier and a few thousand miles westwards (Słupecki 1997, 186). The proximity of Christianity provoked opposition to its ritual power, a menace occasionally molified by dressing in its clothes.

It would not do to ascribe every monumental burial mound in north-west Europe to anti-Christian anxiety; but it must have played an important role. The general map produced by Robert van de Noort (1993; now amended Lutovsky
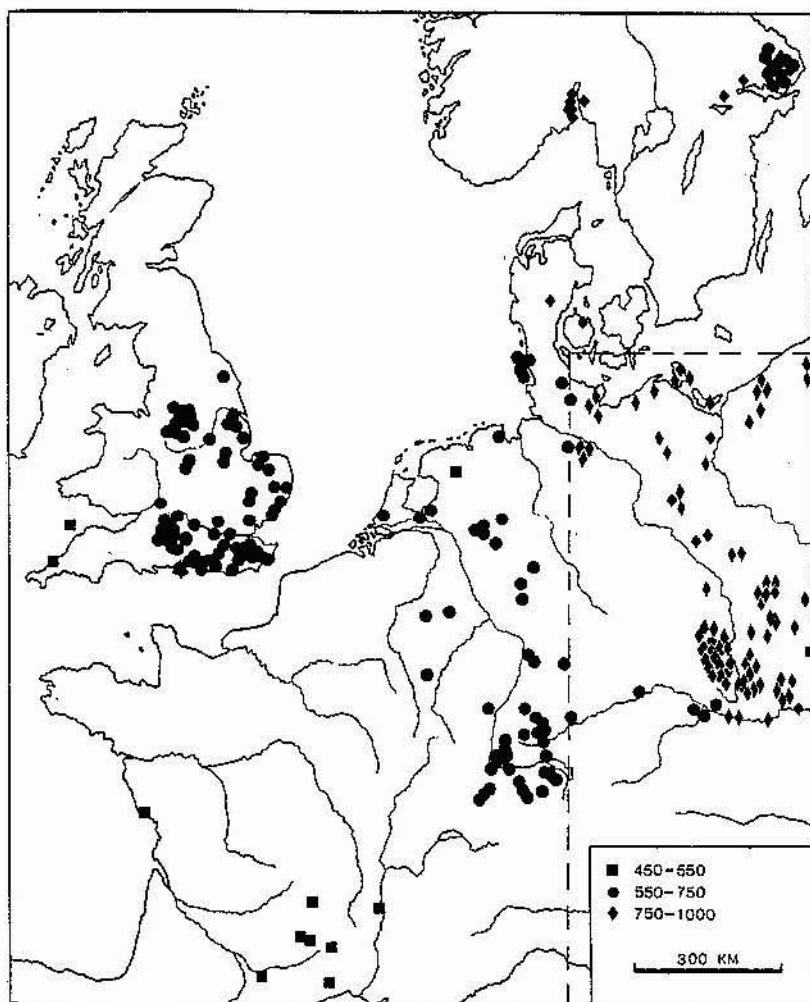
Fig. 1.4.   Distribution of dated burial mounds and barrow cemeteries
(including some graves with ring ditches, thought to have been mounds)
(Lutovsky 1996, fig 1b).

1996) shows a chronological trend which for the most part pre-echoes
conversion (Fig. 1.4), but not every case fits the model. The mounds at Högom
in Medelpad, Sweden (Ramquist 1992) are too early (at fifth or sixth century)
to be reacting to a Christian menace. But that is not to say that no equally
stressful circumstances were involved; for every monument we need to seek
both the impetus and the motive.

This argument suggests that the building of a monumental burial-mound is best regarded as a historical event, the result of the conjuncture between a set of beliefs and the circumstances of the time. The circumstance most likely to provoke these monuments is political insecurity, and Christianity with its declared programme of conversion and Roman imperial associations must be counted among the provocative forces of the age. Is it right to regard the signals of barrow-burial as 'political' (in that they are seen as mainly expressing power, alignment and allegiance), rather than ethnic, customary or religious? They *could* be seen as ethnic in the sense that a certain group of people who regard themselves as related might act together; or customary, in that barrow burial had existed previously amongst those people as a small-scale ritual ready for political inflation when needed; or religious in the sense that a common set of beliefs might be implied in order for similar events to provoke a similar response. But these factors are neither necessary nor sufficient for monumentality, and they do not explain why monumentality is intermittent. Only politics are sensitive to events, so politics should lie behind change. If political motivation has primacy, this would help to explain why people living in different lands can use the same signals in emulation of each other, without claiming ethnic affiliation or acknowledging the same gods. So to explain Sutton Hoo, for example, we do not need to claim that East Angles worshipped Odin or were Swedes; only that they well understood the philosophies of Pagan thinking and the language of its monumentality. In the sixth century the East Angles muttered their allegiance to the ideology, but in the seventh they felt obliged to shout it.

A monumental hiatus

Sutton Hoo ceased to be used as a high-status burial ground about AD 625, and became for the next 200 to 300 years a place of execution: the ideological struggle had been resolved in favour of rigorous Christian kingship (Carver 1998a). In the aftermath to the documented conversion, however, and not just in East Anglia, there is a curious lull in material expression of nearly half a century from about 625 to 675, when society seems to be holding its breath. Furnished graves have proved difficult to assign to this period (Geake 1997, 124), as have churches (Taylor and Taylor 1965), sculpture (e.g. Hawkes 1999, 404) and illuminated manuscripts (Alexander 1978). It is has to be assumed, nevertheless, that churches were being built and monasteries founded, because the documentary record tells us so. The sixth-century monasteries of Iona and Whithorn were active in the north and the episcopal centre at Canterbury active in the south. A church of wood was built at York in 626 and a bigger one planned in stone. Aidan was in Lindisfarne and Birinus at Dorchester in 635. Ceanwealh built the church of St Peter at Winchester in 648. Christianity became compulsory in Kent in 640; temples were destroyed in Essex in 665. Barrows may also have been built: Penda kept the pagan flag flying until his

death at The Winwaed in 655. But investment in objects and constructions on
the monumental scale are difficult to find on the ground, and maybe material
expression was deliberately modest. Perhaps this was a period in which the
actual message of Christian purism was briefly effective, and even the
aristocracy lived briefly by precepts of generosity towards others and reserve
in celebrating themselves.

On the boundaries, as we have seen from the case of the Rhineland, a
more lively monumental confrontation may take place. A British example
seems to have been discovered by Edwina Proudfoot in the course of her work
at the Hallow Hill and amplified in a brilliant paper by the late Ian Smith
(Proudfoot 1996; Smith 1996). Here a range of different monument types –
square-ditched barrows and Class I symbol stones in the north and long cist
graves and stone crosses in the south are confronted across a seventh-century
boundary running across Fife. Objections have been raised that long-cist burials
do not have to be diagnostic of Christianity, because they are found in
prehistoric variants and are distributed further north. But they certainly
resemble the Christian cist graves of the Alpine region (Carver 1987) more
closely than any Bronze Age predecessor. If it were an attribute of Christianity,
the long-cist would be found to move over Scotland revealing the itinerary of
successful conversion. The early Christian pressure on the Picts intimated by
Bede (*HE* III.4) is persuasively captured in Smith's snapshot of a monumental
frontier (Fig. 1.5)

The Northumbrian forum

Further south, the monumental machine seems to start up again at the end of
the seventh-century. Ripon and Monkwearmouth are founded, Brixworth built,
the Book of Durrow and Durham A II 10 illuminated. It is of the greatest
interest that, in Northumbria and the other English kingdoms, furnished burial
also restarts in the later seventh century and continues into the early eighth
(Geake 1997, 124). It is furnishing of a very particular kind: necklaces and
ornaments of a marked Roman and Byzantine (rather than Frankish) character
are found predominantly in female graves. One burial with a purseful of
sceattas at Garton-on-the-Wolds, is certainly as late as 720. By this time, plain
incised grave-markers were being erected at Whitby and Hartlepool, the
Lindisfarne Gospels with its virtuoso insular ornament had been completed at
Lindisfarne, at Jarrow Bede was writing his history and the immense *Codex
Amiatinus* with its meticulous adherence to Cassiodorus' classical prototype
had been lost on its way to Rome. Northumbria in the early eighth century
was not only a hive of creative endeavour; it was also a mass of alternative
expressions, the re-ified ideas of clerics and warriors, northerners and
southerners, men and women, those who live on the Wolds and those who
lived in the Vale of York or by the Tees, the Wear or the Tyne. The society was
presumably stable enough to allow differing opinions and the distribution of

Class I stone/s
+ _Eccles_ place-name
⊙ long-cist cemetery
■ square-barrow cemetery
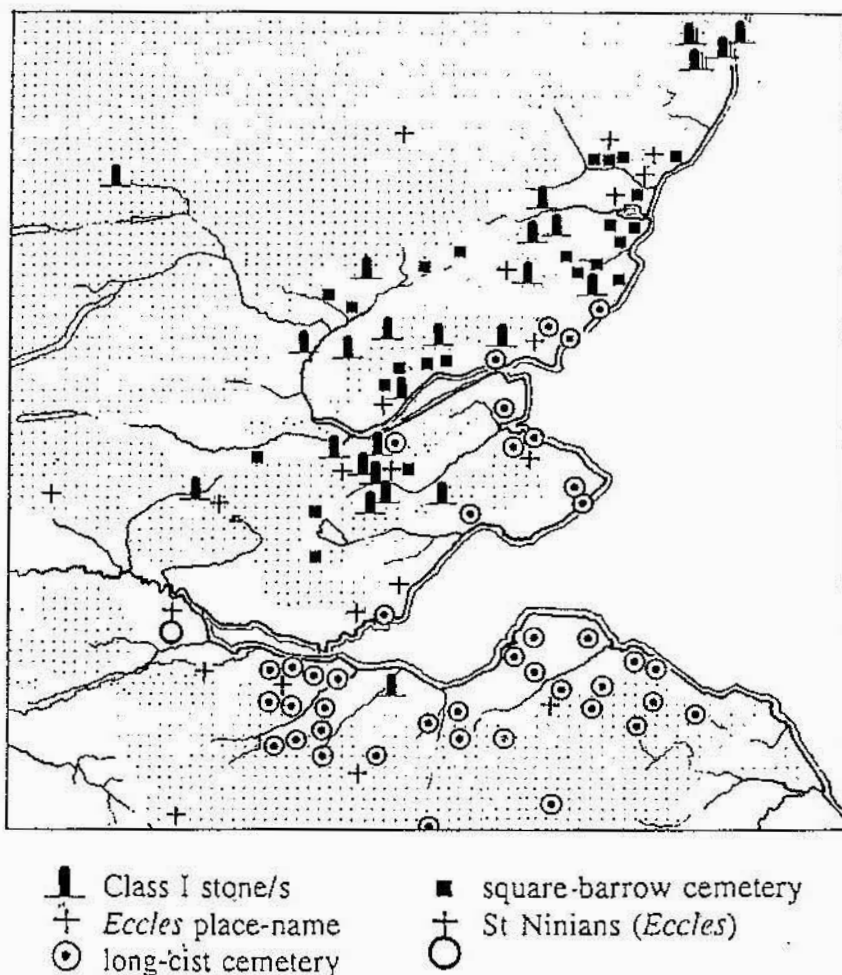+ St Ninians (_Eccles_)
○

Fig. 1.5. *The seventh-century argument in Fife. Map prepared by Ian Smith (Smith 1996, fig 2.5).*

resources was generous enough to allow plural and varied expressions in stone and vellum.

In 710, Nechtan, King of the Picts, sent to Ceolfrid, abbot of Wearmouth/ Jarrow for advice on the expression of Christianity in the Northumbrian manner: not just how to calculate the date of Easter, but the correct form of the tonsure, and how to build a 'Roman' church (*HE* V.21). And yet the consequences of his initiative seem to have resulted in no network of monastic *scriptoria* producing Pictish gospels and hagiographies. What they have left us is something very different: scores of monumental slabs, carrying Pictish

symbols as well as Christian motifs that were familiar in the local repertoire of Iona or Northumbria.

It is hard to resist the conclusion that Canterbury, Jarrow, Iona, the Garton burials, the *Codex Amiatinus*, the Lindisfarne Gospels, and the Class II Pictish stones on Tayside actually represent different reactions to Christianization. Was this because the peoples concerned were ethnically distinguished, or felt they were? Angles, Britons, Scots and Picts spoke a different language, Bede tells us, so why should the language of their art and material investment not differ too? Yet it seems strange that a shared ideology should take so many different forms between neighbours, and in the case of the Garton burials and the *Codex Amiatinus*, the same linguistic group was presumably involved. Do the late seventh- and early eighth-century burials proclaim an enclave of dissident women, resentful of the Christian project? Or are some women guarding their family claims by imitating the imperial ornaments of Theodora, in order to express aristocratic membership of a Roman 'folk', as opposed to the illiberal clerical alliances of Wilfrid?

On the supposition that material culture is meaningful, and that the style of investment is deliberately chosen, we are entitled, I think, to read into it different political stances. There seems no good reason to allow these forms of expression to be simply local, cultural, vague, ill-informed, confused or 'syncretic' (Fletcher 1997, 126–153). That seems a negative way to view a people who emerge from the pages of Bede as predatory, extravagant and fiercely opinionated, just as likely to express themselves forcefully in words and material culture as any other privileged class through the ages. Conversion did not, it seems, produce a homogeneous culture for us to find, but appears to have expressed itself in very different ways – differences here ascribed to politics. How could such political stances be defined? The archaeology has a pattern to it, and the documents give us hints of inter-Christian dissent, so as a first step we could set out to seek correlations between them.

Different roads to Christianity

Since we are concerned here with political signals within communities that have adopted Christianity in some form, we should be searching for a model that distinguishes between the different kinds of Christian organization and economics. At least three varieties of Christian organization or socio-economic control are well known and provide us with a starting point. In the episcopal system, a bishop holds authority over a territory (the diocese) and draws revenue from it. This is the system that most closely echoes Roman imperial administration and requires a similar method of taxation to run it. The archaeological correlate is the episcopal centre of which the finest example has been given by Charles Bonnet's excavation of the episcopal group at Geneva (1993). The attributes are the basilica, itself a type of Roman government building, the baptistery and the pulpit. At Geneva, the baptistery, initially a

small tank, developed with the increasing demand until it acquired its own supply of piped water. The trappings of an episcopal church, with its imperial aura, can be contrasted with a materially more elusive but intellectually more influential variant, the monastic church. Whatever the detailed circumstances of early monasticism, it has the general appearance of an autonomous movement, if not exactly dissident then at least less a creature of state than the hierarchy of bishops (Chitty 1977). Whatever else drove the earliest eremitic monks to the desert, an economic consequence would be a freedom from tax or tythe. When the hermits clubbed together in the coenobitic communities, the seeking of independent non-taxable endowment would have been an early method of survival, one which was later adopted in northern Europe. Columba received Iona from the Picts and King Oswald 'gave lands and endowments to establish monasteries' including Lindisfarne (*HE* III.3) and Jarrow was supported by lands on which Bede was born (*HE*, see autobiographical note, p 336).

The Christianity practised by the monasteries of Egypt would not have been organized and delivered in the same way as the imperial Christianity at Geneva or Hagia Sophia, and it seems highly likely that there was confrontation. Such a confrontation has been postulated as endemic in the late Roman town, where the 'episcopal group' is situated inside the official city and grafted into the late Roman administration, while the 'monastic centre' grows up in the extra-mural cemetery around the person of a martyr (Perinetti 1989). Either or both these centres may then act as a kernel for the growth of the early medieval town, providing two nucleii which each presumably had its declared and fiercely argued rationale. This phenonemon, which Perinetti terms 'bipolarity', can be seen at Aosta and Salona. At Geneva, the episcopal centre within the walls wins the battle for hearts and minds and town lay-out, while at Tours the monastery proved to have the greater magnetic force.

The archaeological correlates for northern monasteries earlier than the St Gall plan in the ninth century are notoriously hard to define. The remains in the Egyptian desert invite us to look for simple cells of hermits, perhaps clustered together, a vision which has influenced the identification of Skellig Michel and Tintagel as monasteries. There has long been an assumption that early insular monasteries should be sited in an oval or circular or curvilinear enclosure, the British *lan* of Wales and Cornwall. Few of these have been dated: at Whithorn, a ditch 10m long and 1m wide containing an undated sherd of glass was extrapolated into a monastic boundary enclosing half a hectare (Hill 1997, 29, 77). At Hoddom, the *vallum* and pallisade, traced on the ground as a D-shaped enclosure, gave five radiocarbon dates in the seventh century, prompting the excavator to suggest a date of construction between 600 and 680 (Lowe, in press). The sites of some documented Irish monasteries (for example that at Kiltiernan) are found in association with circular banked enclosures (Mytum 1992, 80); but in so far as they resemble the prehistoric *rath*, they might represent the recycling of a local idea (Ryan and Mitchell 1998,

260), while other forms of monastic enclosure, such as that at Clonmacnoise, are apparently rectangular. The site of the present monastery on Iona is enclosed by a penannular bank, but this has lately yielded a prehistoric radiocarbon date (Fisher 1996). The possibility must be considered that monastic communities took whatever disused fort they were offered by the king, as did Fursa when he moved into the redundant Saxon Shore fort at Burgh Castle, courtesy of King Sigebert of East Anglia (above).

Inside the enclosures, we look for ways of distinguishing the monastic from any other kind of estate centre in which there has been educated investment at a high level. In the north, a number of the documented monastic sites are signed by grave markers with simple crosses and inscriptions: for example Jarrow, Monkwearmouth and Hartlepool. Whitby has 41 (Hawkes 1999) and Iona has numerous examples (Fisher 1996), although many of these may have accrued during the lingering aftermath of the early Christian period. Monasteries use and produce books, so that vellum production or finds of styli ought to be diagnostic. But accepting that the middle Saxon aristocracy provided leadership both for those who fight and those who pray, it would not be impossible for attributes of the literate sector to appear on a seigneurial estate (see Loveluck, this volume). As we can so far see them, the markers of monastic centres, while they echo those of a secular estate, at least differ from those of episcopal centres. Since the peoples of Britain and Ireland potentially had access to the full range of Christian models, we are entitled to deduce that such a difference had a meaning behind it and was deliberately chosen.

A people unused to taxation would find the endowment of monasteries preferable to the imposition of a permanent revenue required to support bishops. But another tendency has long been present in Christian practice, and there seems good reason for supposing that it would have been an option as early as the conversion period; it would moreover require far less of an organizational upheaval in a pagan people. In this adoption of the Christian structure, the faith is administered neither by bishops or monks, but directly by the landowner or local aristocrat who can appoint and pay his own priest. Such a 'secular' or 'private' option should be signalled by individual and decentralized investment, so is bound to be harder to see. The most persuasive examples are provided by those communities that erect monuments in dispersed patterns – patterns which prompt an association with estates. The impression of secularity is reinforced if the iconography is varied and features everyday life, rather than being merely iconographic, repetitive and orthodox. The Pictish Class II and the Anglo-Scandinavian monuments seem to be strong candidates in this respect (Carver 1998c).

A less visible but equally telling example is offered by the small personal funerary crosses found in central Europe, and recently studied by Müller-Wille (1998b; Fig 1.6). In fifth- to seventh-century Trentino, cross-shaped brooches were deposited with females; in the central Rhine/Mosel area, cross-shaped brooches of the late seventh century were also found in the graves of females;
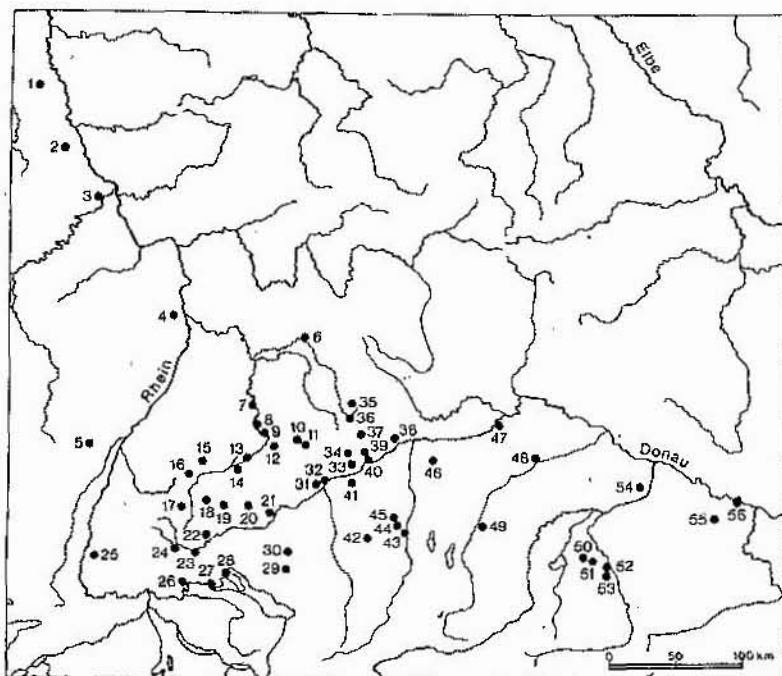
Fig. 1.6. Distribution of sixth- to eighth-century gold foil crosses in the Alamannic area between the Rhine and Danube (Müller-Wille 1998b, fig 6).

while in the Alamannic district between Rhine and Danube, both sexes were buried with gold foil crosses from the sixth to the eighth century. In each case, the cross was the main Christian signal. It is specifically noted that in Alamannia none of the gold-foil crosses was found in connection with the earliest churches; moreover this is not an imitation of an earlier Christian practice, since no grave with a cross is known from the period from the first to the fourth century in the Mediterranean. One reasonable interpretation of this pattern is that the date and distribution of the burials accurately reflect the progress of a gradual conversion northwards (ibid., fig 3); but without having to challenge that general picture, it can be noted at least that the acceptance of Christianity was signalled in these territories in different ways. If the converted landlords of the Rhineland replaced their barrows with churches, and the citizens of Geneva expanded and improved their massive episcopal centre, the people of Alamannia, sandwiched between them, indulged in the less extravagant practice of sewing small gold crosses on to the tunics of their dead. Was this modesty, poverty or ignorance? Or does the chosen signal represent a non-centralized economy and a belief in maintaining authority at community level – in short a different political stance?

This case for a confrontation between Christian prescriptions depends on the archaeological identification of their correlates and their distribution. But some support can also be found in the sparse documentation, for example as was revealed in Wilhelm Levison's classic essay of 1946, which records instances of tension between bishop and monastery and Christianized aristocrats in the eighth century. Already in 672 the Hertford Canons state 'No Bishop is to disturb a monastery or take its property by force' the implication being that they might be tempted to do so (Levison 1946, 23), while the Synod of Cloveshoe in 747 was aimed at restoring 'the hierarchical order and a regular church administration – provinces under an archbishop in direct contact with Rome, dioceses with a monarchical bishop supervised by the archbishop and controlling the whole clergy of his district' (ibid. 86). The Bishop was sacramentally necessary but their function was sometimes exercised by 'wandering bishops and other bishops without dioceses but attached to monasteries' (ibid. 97). Politically powerful converts preferring the secular option could apparently operate in a similar way. Cuthbert and seven continental bishops of English origin sent a letter to King Ethelbald of Mercia to admonish him and reprove him for his dissolute life and his encroachments on possessions and privileges of monasteries (ibid. 92) – a glimpse of an alternative secular church which probably delivered more satisfactorily the economic and political interests of the Mercian aristocracy. Levison summarized the tendency of landowners to form their own 'proprietary' churches and monasteries (*Eigenkirchen, Eigenkloster*) and reminds us that 'such tendencies might be a source of danger to the monastic ideals' (ibid. 28). It is clear that bishop, abbot and lord had a discourse in which much was claimed and definitions were blurred. It would have been in the interests of Bishops to claim jurisdiction although they had none, and for landlords to acknowledge Rome but to pay nothing and do nothing which would encourage Roman control of their affairs. Wandering bishops would have been useful in ordaining priests and giving them liturgical authority and sacred powers, but they would have brought no necessary allegiance to an archbishop or to the whole Roman apparatus – of which the northern Europeans were (and still are) endemically suspicious. We should expect ideological difference to be denied in documents even while it was practised or proclaimed on the ground. This suggests that the search for expressions of local political resistance or alignment through the study of monuments is a legitimate quest.

In Britain, perhaps the object of investment most sensitive to the local Christian prescription is the standing stone monument, a field to which Rosemary Cramp has made an immeasurable contribution. Like barrows, the stone crosses may have started as memorials to an individual ancestor, whose descendants continued to profess control of the same land. Like barrows, they may have acted as places to meet and dispense justice. If family and power are signalled in cross-slabs such as those from St Vigeans or Aberlemno roadside, so are the elements of Christian doctrine; enough at least to merit the benefits

of the Christian commercial network without sacrificing autonomy to either king, bishop, abbot or pope. At a later date the cross might have been joined by a church and this too might have been a local or private commission. If we can make its social label stick, the standing stone monument is going to be a powerful tool with which to write history – because we have plenty of them (see Edwards, this volume). Anna Ritchie (1995) has made the case that centres such as Meigle produced monuments, especially the widely distributed standing cross-slabs, through lay patronage in the ninth and tenth centuries. Such monuments, bearing a cross and other icons, were surely estate-markers that reflected the taste and aspirations of the landlords, but also satisfied the need for a ritual focus for a community accustomed to associate spiritual orthodoxy with a local war-leader. George Henderson (1999, 209) observes: 'According to the *Hodoeporicon* or guide book, taken down from the verbal report of St Willibald, the English missionary who died as Bishop of Eichstadt in Germany in 785, it was the custom on nobleman's estates to have the standard of the holy cross set up as a focus for daily prayer... The cross monument was evidently a place of resort in time of crisis.'

The newly-converted Vikings seem to have preferred the secular mode of Christian control to the monastic or episcopal model (Fig. 1.7). Jim Lang's survey of East Yorkshire (1991) showed that the grave-markers of the seventh and eighth centuries were distributed among a handful of monastic sites, a point reinforced by Jane Hawkes (1999, 405) with reference to northern Northumbria: of 'approximately 230 pieces of carved stone associated with pre-Viking contexts north of the Tees, nearly 180 come from just five sites: Lindisfarne, Hartlepool, Hexham, Wearmouth and Jarrow'. But this distribution changes radically in the ninth century. In East Yorkshire, the monuments are more numerous and more dispersed, as well as displaying a more individual iconography. It was Rosemary Cramp's observation, made many years ago (1980, 18), that 'the Vikings secularised art just as they secularised landholding', that set me thinking (in the context of the politics of our own day) that perhaps the Scandinavian hostility was not to Christianity but towards state control, taxation and the alienation of land to non-wealth creators. The Vikings, by dissolving the monastic system and substituting a secular alternative, had succeeded in effecting a conversion of their own (Carver 1998c).

Conclusion

These case studies, briefly expounded, are held to imply that the episcopal, the monastic and the secular church represented three different strategies for developing a Christian kingdom which has shed paganism. Each mode of religious control had very different implications for the people – especially the aristocracy – in terms of self-determination, inheritance, prosperity and alliance. A fly on the wall of a Dark Age hall must have heard the argument

over and over again: loss of sovereignty and increased taxation is the penalty, heaven and an expanded market the reward. A soft strategy for the king (who had most to gain from the church's protection of his dynasty) was to endow some of his own land and encourage others to do the same, in the hope of qualifying for the Christian alliance, while avoiding the alienation of his own peerage. But some leaders would not be strong enough to achieve even this compromise. Landowners resist an irreversible commitment to extreme and *dirigiste* doctrines, preferring to cherish the northerner's ancestral ethos: every man his own lord, in control of his own land and with his own link to God. But there would be no harm in adding Christ's escutcheon to one's shield, especially if it earned useful contacts and warded off the threat of a take-over or conquest on trumped-up ideological grounds.

How likely is this picture? Was the eighth-century inhabitant of Britain really capable of such ingenious decision-making? How far does this model superimpose on early Christianity the intellectual fragmentation of all that has happened since that time? Does it urge a particular version of Christianity to which certain local politics of our own day inclines? William Frend (1996, 61) uses the term 'confessional interests' to describe scholarship driven by a particular branch of Christian ideology, showing how loyalty to the success of the Roman imperial past had inhibited the archaeological recognition and rediscovery of the Donatists. But Donatism was a Christian variant which most certainly existed, was professed, debated, opposed, championed and expressed in monuments. The native inhabitants of Numidia (now Libya) had under Rome adopted a religion ruled by a sacrifice-hungry god ('Saturn') which demanded human victims. In 260–290 'the religion of the great majority of the Numidians swung irreversibly towards a biblically-inspired form of Christianity in which the blood-sacrifice of martyrdom replaced the blood-sacrifice to Saturn. This was central and southern Numidia, the heartland of the Donatist movement' (ibid. 118). On the ground Donatism was traced through inscriptions which carried 'recognizably Donatist formulae' and by association sculptural themes, such as martyrdom (ibid. 69, 231). For Frend himself (1996, 168), one of the duties of archaeology is to release some of those alternative voices long suppressed by orthodoxy: 'Donatists, Montanists, Manicheans and Coptic and Nubian Monophysites at last could begin to speak for themselves through inscriptions, papyri and the steady accumulation of material evidence'.

A number of Frend's great French North African predecessors had asserted that the roots of Donatism lay in Berber (i.e. indigenous) nationalism. A 'local rebuilding' of the incoming doctrine happened again under Islam when the Maghreb produced a number of sects culminating in that of the Fatimids which was to spread far and wide. It is certainly tempting to see all the monumental variations cited here as due to an endemic, indigenous viewpoint. On this interpretation, the Scots, Picts, Northumbrians and Saxons would not be expressing their differing politics, but adapting the incoming
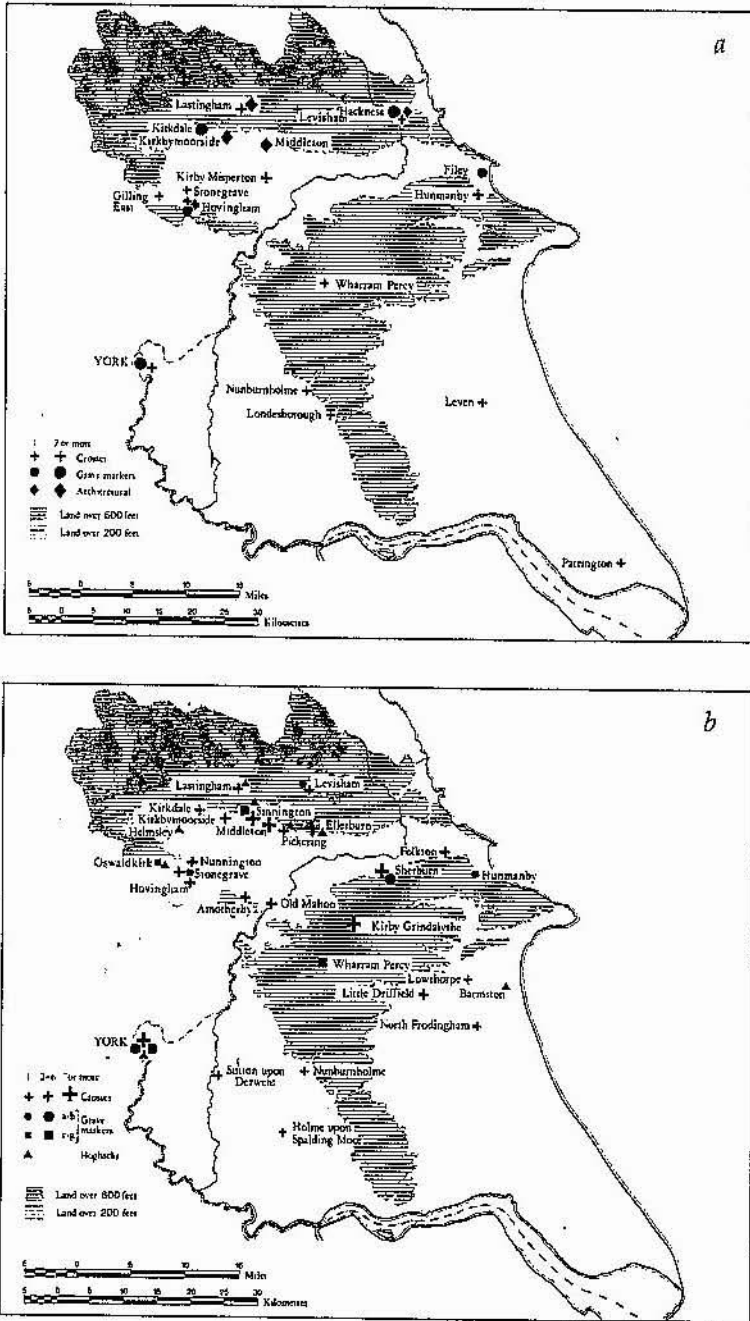
Fig. 1.7. Distribution of sculpture in East Yorkshire (Lang 1991): a) seventh to eighth centuries; b) ninth to eleventh centuries.

doctrines to an unchanging and inevitable individual preference. This is an ethnically determinist argument which, instead of arguing for immigration of new ethnic groups to explain cultural change (e.g. the Anglo-Saxons) attributes the change to the different reactions of permanently rooted native groups occupying adjacent territories. For Northumbria at least, this could be questioned: here within a territory that extended from York to Lindisfarne, were produced in the same decade the Lindisfarne Gospels, the *Codex Amiatinus* and the Garton-on-the-Wolds burials (above). This is an era of experiment rather than adaptation.

Recent scholars have gone out of their way to diminish the differences between any 'Celtic' church and others (Fletcher 1997, 92; Blair 1996, 6; Blair and Sharpe 1992). My thesis is intended to bring into focus and interpret such differences as we can find, and to suggest that behind them lay real conflict. But it should be noted that I have attempted to explain these differences not on ethnic or even cultural grounds, but on the basis of politics. I have nothing to say about a 'Celtic' church either, only that during the seventh and eighth centuries, some of those living in the west appear to have adopted a different monumental programme to those living in the east, and that this must indicate something. That something, in my view, would not be an incorrigible ethnicity but a different way of thinking and a different approach to power. It would probably be sensible at this stage to allow the possibility that deep-rooted local culture might have an effect on whatever monumentality was practised. But the facility of communication and awareness of pressure should have allowed the big issues to be debated in a communal forum. With the variation of political stance known from North Africa, we can hardly doubt that such variations were also manifested in the north of Europe, both in the seventh century and over the next 1,000 years.

References

Alexander, J. G. 1978. *Insular Manuscripts, 6th to the 9th Century* (A Survey of Manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles), London: Harvey Miller

Bailey, R. N. 1992. Sutton Hoo and seventh-century art, in R. T. Farrell and C. Neuman de Vegvar (eds), *Sutton Hoo: fifty years after*, 31–34, Oxford, Ohio: Miami University

Bede. *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, B. Colgrave and R. Mynors (eds and trans), Oxford: Clarendon Press

Blair, J. 1996. Churches in the early English landscape: social and cultural contexts, in J. Blair and C. Pyrah (eds), *Church Archaeology: Research directions for the future* (CBA Res Rep 104), 6–18, York: CBA

Blair, J. and Pyrah, C (eds) 1996. *Church Archaeology: Research directions for the future* (CBA Res Rep 104), York: CBA

Blair, J. and Sharpe, R. (eds) 1992. *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, Leicester: Leicester University Press

Böhme, H. W. 1993. Adelsgräber im Frankenreich. Archäologische Zeugnisse zur Herausbildung einer Herrenschicht unter dem merowingischen Königen, *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zetralmuseums Mainz*, 40, 397–534

Bonnet, C. 1993. *Les fouilles de l'ancien groupe épiscopal de Genève (1976–1993)* (Cahiers d'archéologie genèvoise 1), Geneva

Bradley, R. 1988. Time regained: the creation of continuity, *J Brit Archaeol Assoc*, 140, 1–17

Bradley, R. 1993. *Altering the Earth: the origins of monuments in Britain and continental Europe: the Rhind Lectures, 1991–92*, Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

Carver, M. O. H. 1986. Sutton Hoo in context, *Settimane di Studio*, 32, Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 77–123

Carver, M. O. H. 1987. Santa Maria foris Portas at Castel Seprio: a famous church in a new context, *World Archaeology*, 18 (3), 312–29

Carver, M. O. H. 1993. *Arguments in Stone: Archaeological research and the European town in the first millennium AD*, Oxford: Oxbow Books

Carver, M. O. H. 1995. Boat burial in Britain: ancient custom or political signal?, in O. Crumlin-Pedersen (ed), *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, 111–24, Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark

Carver, M. O. H. 1998(a). *Sutton Hoo. Burial ground of Kings?*, London: British Museum Press

Carver, M. O. H. 1998(b). Überlegungen zür Bedeutung angel-sächsischer Grabhügel, in A. Wesse (ed), *Studien zür Archäologie des Ostseeraumes von der Eisenzeit zum Mittelalter. Festschrift für Michael Müller-Wille*, 259–68, Neumünster: Wachholtz

Carver, M. O. H. 1998(c). Conversion and politics on the eastern seaboard of Britain: some archaeological indicators, in B. E. Crawford (ed), *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World*, 11–40, St Andrews: University of St Andrews

Carver, M. O. H. 1999(a). Review of Ian Stead, *The Salisbury Hoard*, *British Museum Magazine*, (Spring 1999), 39

Carver, M. O. H. 1999(b). Exploring, explaining, imagining: Anglo-Saxon archaeology 1998, in C. Karkov (ed), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: basic readings*, 25–52, New York and London: Garland

Carver, M. O. H. in press. Burial as poetry: the case of Sutton Hoo, in E. Tyler (ed), *Anglo-Saxon Treasure*, York: Centre for Medieval Studies

Childe, V. G. 1929. *The Danube in Prehistory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

Chitty, D. J. 1977. *The Desert a City: Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism under a Christian empire*

Cramp, R. J. 1980. The Viking image, in R. Farrell (ed), *The Vikings*, 8–19, London: Phillimore

Fisher, I. 1996. The west of Scotland, in Blair and Pyrah, 37–41

Fletcher, R. 1997. *The Conversion of Europe*, Berkeley: University of California Press

Frend, W. H. C. 1996. *The Archaeology of Early Christianity. A history*, London: Chapman

Foot, S. 1990. What was an early Anglo-Saxon monastery?, in J. Loades (ed), *Monastic Studies: the continuity of a tradition*, 48–57, Bangor: Headstart History

Geake, H. 1997. *The Use of Grave Goods in Conversion-period England c.600-c.850* (Brit Archaeol Rep 261), Oxford: BAR

Hawkes, J. 1999. Statements in stone. Anglo-Saxon sculpture, Whitby and the Christianization of the North, in C. Karkov (ed), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: basic readings*, 403–21, New York and London: Garland

Henderson, G. 1999. *Vision and Image in Early Christian England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hill, P. 1997. *Whithorn and St Ninian: the excavation of a monastic town 1984–1991*, Whithorn and Stroud: Whithorn Trust and Sutton Publishing

Hines, J. 1984. *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the Pre-Viking Period* (Brit Archaeol Rep 124), Oxford: BAR

Johnson, S. 1983. *Burgh Castle: Excavations by Charles Green 1958–61* (East Anglian Archaeol Rep 20), Gressenhall: Norfolk Museum Service

Lang, J. 1991. *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, 3, York and Yorkshire,* Oxford: British Academy / Oxford University Press

Levison, W. 1946. *England and the·Continent in the Eighth Century,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Lowe, C. forthcoming. *Excavations at Hoddom, Dumfriesshire: An enclosed holy place of the late first millennium AD,* Edinburgh: Historic Scotland

Lutovsky, M. 1996. Between Sutton Hoo and Chernaya Mogila: barrows in eastern and western early medieval Europe, *Antiquity,* 70, 671–6

Mango, M. M., Mango, C., Evans, A. and Hughes, M. 1989. A 6th century Mediterranean bucket from Bromeswell parish, Suffolk, *Antiquity,* 63, 295–311

Mitchell, F. and Ryan, M. 1998. *Reading the Irish Landscape,* Dublin: Town House

Müller-Wille, M. 1998(a). Zwei religiöse Welten: Bestattungen der fränkischen Könige Childerich und Chlodwig, *Abhandlung der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur,* Mainz: Steiner Verlag

Müller-Wille, M. 1998(b). The Cross as a symbol of personal Christian belief in a changing religious world. Examples from selected areas in Merovingian and Carolingian Europe, *KVHAA Konferenser* 40, 179–200, Stockholm: KVHAA

Mytum, H. 1992. *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland,* London: Routledge

Opie, I. and Opie, P. 1977. *The Lore and Language of School Children,* London: Granada

Perinetti, R. 1989. Augusta Praetoria. Le necropoli christiane, *Actes du XI Congrès International d'archéologie Chrétienne,* 1215–26, Vatican City

Proudfoot, E. 1996. Excavations at the long-cist cemetery on the Hallow Hill, St Andrews, Fife 1975–7, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot,* 126, 387–454

Proudfoot, E. 1998. The Hallowhill and the origins of Christianity in Scotland, in B. E. Crawford (ed), *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World,* 57–74, St Andrews: University of St Andrews

Ramquist, P. H. 1992. *Högom. The excavations 1949–1984,* Umeå: University of Umeå

Ritchie, A. 1995. Meigle and lay patronage in the 9th and 10th centuries AD, *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal,* 1, 1–10

Sharpe, R. (trans) 1995. *Adomnan of Iona. Life of St Columba,* Harmondsworth: Penguin

Shephard, J. 1979. The social identity of the individual in isolated barrows and barrow cemeteries in Anglo-Saxon England, in B. Burnham and J. Kingsbury (eds), *Space, Hierarchy and Society: interdisciplinary studies in social area analysis* (Brit Archaeol Rep, Int Ser, 59), 47–79, Oxford: BAR

Smith, I. 1996. The archaeology of the early Christian church in Scotland and Man AD 400–1200, in Blair and Pyrah, 19–37

Słupecki, L. P. 1997. Einflüsse des Christentums auf die heidnische Religion der Ostseeslawen im 8.–12. Jahrhundert: Tempel – Gottbilder – Kult, in M. Müller-Wille (ed), *Rom und Byzanz im Norden. Mission und Glaubenswechsel im Ostseeraum während des 8–14. Jahrhunderts,* 177–89, Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur

Taylor, H. M. and Taylor, J. 1965. *Anglo-Saxon Architecture,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

van de Noort, R. 1993. The context of early medieval barrows in Western Europe, *Antiquity,* 67, 66–73