

Religion and the Landscape – How the conversion affected the Anglo-Saxon landscape and its role in Anglo-Saxon ideology

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The term 'Landscape' has been viewed in many different ways throughout recent human history. Its changing definitions within archaeology demonstrate this case effectively (see Bender 1993, Gosden 1999, Tilley 1994). How did the perceptions of 'Landscape' change though the Anglo-Saxon conversion? Such far-reaching changes in ideologies would surely affect how the landscape was perceived and utilised by the people who were subject to this conversion. The landscape was a useful tool to the Christian missionaries, a medium for the expression of ideas which all people regardless of social standing and regional identities could understand. This essay will explore the role of Landscape in conversion and analyse the changes which Christianity wrought upon the English Landscape.

Landscape as a concept

There has been a recent vogue for landscape studies within archaeology, manifested in the academic work of archaeologists like Tilley (1994), Richards (1996a), Jones (1998) and Bradley (1993), the reorientation of Sites and Monument Records to 'Historic Environment Records' and the use of GIS. The landscape has become a new focus and the way in which it is seen has changed dramatically, with the growing awareness that our understanding of landscape has been moulded by the experience of our cultural past. The move towards a landscape-orientated form of archaeology began in the 1960's with the increasing convergence of human geography and archaeology within the 'processual' theoretical movement (Thomas 2001, 20). However, the view of landscape held by many scholars at this time was as a 'container' or abstract dimension, decentred from agency and meaning (Tilley 1994, 10) or a neutral external backdrop for

human activities (Ingold 1993, 510). According to many scholars this abstracted view of landscape stems from the sixteenth century, when the term 'Landscape' was used to describe particular artistic representations, which have resulted in a western understanding of landscape as a visual entity, viewed from a fixed point (Gosden 1999: 153, Bender 1993).

A change in the ways of viewing landscape within archaeology was stimulated by anthropology and ethnography, the findings of which opened the eyes of prehistoric archaeologists in particular to other ways of understanding landscape (see Bourdieu 1970, Humphreys 1995, Moore 1986, Strathern 1988). Post-processual approaches have been saturated in landscape, notably Tilley's (1994) phenomenological study and the interpretations of Jones (1998) and Richards (1996a, 1996b) among many others. The landscape has changed from 'abstract and objective places' to the 'lived experience of place' with stress on the mutual creation of people and landscape (Gosden 1999, 153-4). Most of these studies however are prehistoric. Historical archaeology *seems* to be lagging behind theoretically.

Within prehistoric archaeology several interesting interpretations have been produced from this post-processual framework, notably Jones' (1998) and Richards' (1996a) interpretations of Neolithic Orkeney. A lot of this work involves the reconstruction of cosmologies. A cosmology is a world view particular to a society, which offers an understanding of the lived environment relative to landscape, cultural and social context. Archaeologists believe that these cosmologies can be inferred from their material traces, as every meaningful action would conform to the structuring principles of a cosmology, creating fractal patterning in the archaeological record which can be sought at every scale of human expression. This approach has strong relationships with anthropology and makes use of ethnographic analogy, for example Richards' study of the Balinese house in attempting to understand Neolithic social space (1996b). Colin Richards (1996a) has emphasised the role of cosmologies in Neolithic Orcadian culture and has used this to explain the structuring principles behind the Orcadian henge, as an architectural microcosm of the landscape. The banks, water-filled ditches and stones of the henge represent the surrounding topography of hills and water, placing the henge at the centre of the imagined world.

Andrew Jones (1998) has used the animals which are located in certain geographical zones to suggest a kind of totemic map, in which animals and birds are used to create certain kinds of identities which exist at different kinds of places.

These kinds of interpretations have been prevalent in prehistoric archaeology; however seem lacking in historical archaeology. The potential however is obvious. We have archaeology, the written word and art to support our arguments. More could be done to explore this potential.

Johnson explains the lack of theorized arguments as resulting from the English landscape tradition evolving from Romanticism, and the unequal marriage between history and archaeology which leaves archaeology secondary to documentary scholarship (Johnson 2007, 134-136).

The Anglo-Saxon Landscape

If models involving past cosmologies are applied to the conversion period, one can see how difficult it must be to convert a population, as these cosmologies set to stabilize a society through particular ways of understanding the world which both justify and reproduce themselves through repeated activity and arguably, religious practice. Modern scientific understanding can be seen as adhering to these principles as organized religion had before it. The landscape would be vital to these understandings due to the reliance people had upon it for sustenance, as well as being an integral space for the expression of various aspects of the cosmological system. Maintaining a status quo may involve an interaction with the landscape. It is important therefore to examine the religious landscapes of both pagan and Christian periods. The similarities and differences may give us clues to understanding how the landscape operated throughout and was integral to the transition.

It is first essential to note the changes which the landscape underwent during the years between the fifth century and the Norman Conquest in 1066. As people experienced the landscape through living in it, settlement patterns can give us some idea of the radical transformation it underwent. Typical settlements of the pre-conversion period (5-6th centuries) were small in scale, unplanned and dispersed, consisting of halls and smaller Sunken Featured buildings (Hamerow 2002, 93-94). They were unenclosed and archaeological evidence suggests they may have shifted across the landscape. Mucking (Essex) is an example of one such settlement (Hamerow 1993). During the seventh and eighth centuries settlements became more firmly inscribed in the landscape, having enclosures and more defined units evidencing a planned settlement layout, for example Charlton (Hants) (Hamerow 2002, 97). By the tenth century, a new type of 'thegnly' settlement had emerged which compromised high status settlements with their own church and estate, which would become the predecessor to the parish system which still structures the British landscape today (Reynolds 1999, 130). Hamerow (2002) sees these settlement changes as resulting from alterations in the socio-economic structure due to agricultural intensification (*ibid.*124). Turner (2006) however recognises the importance of the ideological changes during this period and relates changes in settlement patterns as to conforming to a Christian world view.

In 596 the English kingdoms were without exception Pagan, but a century later the country would be essentially Christian (Gameson 1999, 5). Christianity arrived after a period where Rome had abandoned the Island to the North Sea tribes, and large scale migration had affected the ethnic identities of the different regions as recognised by Bede (Colgrave & Mynors 1969).

The Pre-Christian sacred landscape

The people of Britain were the practitioners of a polytheistic paganism which is reflected in place names containing the names of the gods *Wōden/Wēden*, *Thunor* and *Tiw*, for example Wodneslawe (Bedfordshire), Wednesbury (Staffordshire), Thundersley (Essex), Thunresfeld (Wiltshire), Tysoe (Oxfordshire) and Tislea (Hampshire) (Gelling 1997, 158-161). They also had a strong heroic tradition reflected in the origin myths of kingdoms, like Hegt and Horsa of Kent and in poems such as *Beowulf*, which despite its Christian associations may represent part of this tradition. This pagan landscape is difficult to reconstruct and few archaeologists have attempted it (Semple 2007, Wilson 1992). However we have a rich database which lends us clues to unravelling the mysteries of the pagan ideology, particularly in the study of landscape. One way of determining pagan religious attitudes would be to work backwards from the conversion, to determine which pagan elements were assimilated into the Christian landscape and which were rejected.

Historical Evidence

A good place to start is the documentary evidence for the conversion. There are several letters from Pope Gregory to Augustine, instructing how to conduct missionary activity. In a letter from Pope Gregory the Great to Mellitus in 601, as noted by Bede, he says:

When Almighty God shall bring you to the most reverend Bishop Augustine, our brother, tell him what I have, after mature deliberation on the affairs of the English, determined upon, namely, that the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed, but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples - let altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts and, knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. (Colgrave & Mynors 1969, 107-109)

In the same letter he also describes how the sacrifice of animals should be replaced by religious feasting, and that huts should be made around churches and recently converted temples to celebrate God. Flora Spiegel (2007) interprets this as Gregory comparing the conversion of Britain to the conversion of the Jews of Israel in the Old Testament. However this letter reflects the sophisticated ways in which the missionaries converted the people of Britain. Christianity adapted to and assimilated paganism, rather than using aggressive methods which may have met more resistance.

We do not know if Gregory was well informed as to the religious practice of the pagan Anglo-Saxon community, for archaeological evidence for temples is scant. One widely accepted example of an Anglo-Saxon pagan temple is building D2 at seventh century Yeavinger, Northumberland (Hope-Taylor 1977, 158). This building is elaborately constructed with two layers of walling which are probably contemporary and contains a cache of animal bones, with a high proportion of oxen skull which may have been stacked against the eastern wall. Human interments surrounded the building to the south, many focused on D2 and its possible annexe or fenced enclosure (Fig. 1). Post holes surrounding the building have also been interpreted by Flora Spiegel (2007) as being possible evidence for the 'huts' mentioned by Gregory, above (not shown in Fig.1). Yeavinger was a royal site, described by Bede as being the place where Paulinus of York converted King Edwin of Northumbria and his people. The site is also pregnant with the remains of prehistoric activity, with Bronze Age barrows and Henge monuments which the layout of the Anglo-Saxon 'royal vill' seems to incorporate and respect. This Royal vill was evidently an important high status place before and after the conversion, and its pre-Christian significance may have been enhanced by the incorporation of monuments built by their ancestors (Bradley 1987).

Sarah Semple has done much work on 'the past in the past' during the Anglo-Saxon period. In her 2007 paper she analysed place-name evidence and the term 'Hearg' which in old English is thought to mean temple, holy place, idol or altar to identify potential temple sites (*Ibid.*365). She found these place name types to be spatially apart from settlement, burial or 'square shrines' (as identified by Blair (1995) as potential pre-Christian sixth century shrines imposed onto prehistoric burial mounds) but to be associated instead with seemingly natural features and on hilltops, low, or distinctive rises of land (*ibid.* 368). By investigating three 'Hearg' sites; Harrow Hill (Sussex), Harrow Fields (Cheshire) and Wood Eaton (Oxfordshire), she concluded that these places occupy dramatic topographies and also seem to be associated with long term use of a particular place from prehistory through the Roman occupation of Britain and into the early middle ages. The landscapes of the three case studies yielded finds to suggest these places had held their significance over vast amounts of time and held cultic significance to the pre-Christian occupants

of 6th-7th century England. Semple argues that 'Hearg' does not refer to a religious structure but 'a naturally significant location that formed a place of gathering and ritual for many generations ... Christianity cut short their active lives, weaving them into a mythology of landscape aligned to stories and tales of religious conversion' (Semple 2007, 385).

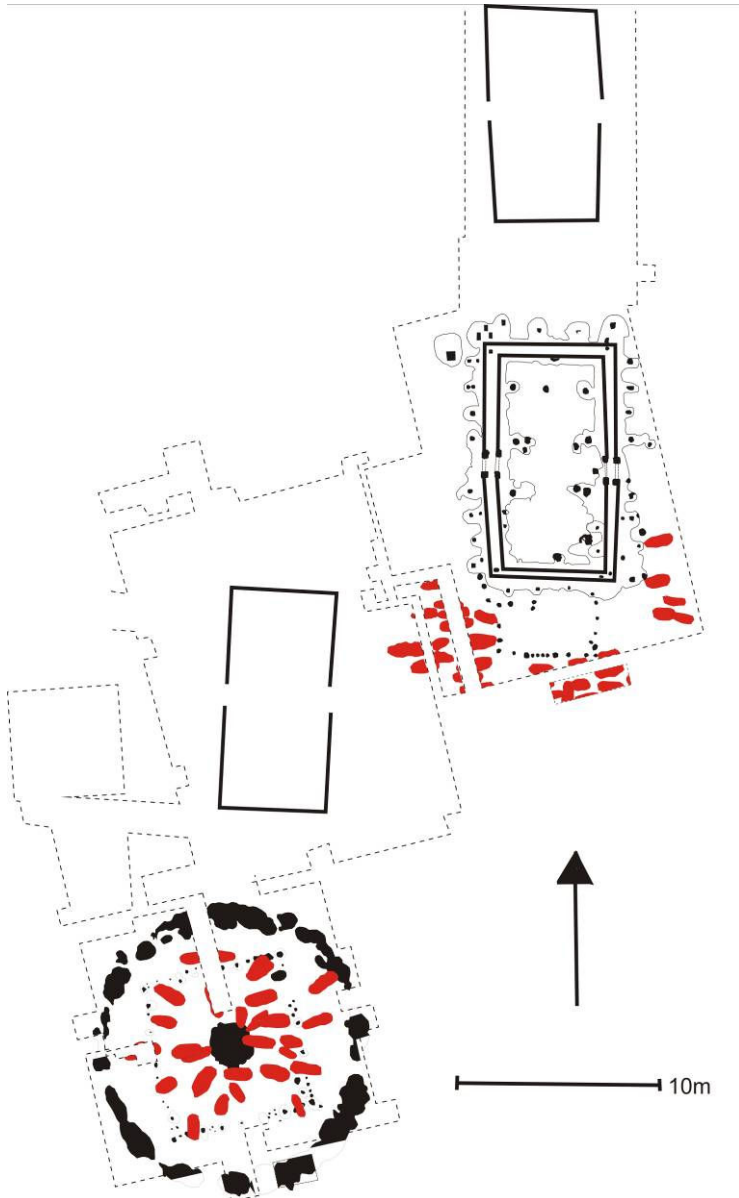


Fig1: Building D2, surrounding buildings, burials and prehistoric mound (redrawn from Hope-Taylor 1977).

Other archaeological evidence for pagan temples is tentative, there are a few examples of structures from burial grounds which maybe interpreted as temples, for example the rectangular structures at Bishopstone, Sussex and Lyminge, Kent (Wilson 1992, 48). Slots and post holes occasionally crop up in cemeteries, as does the architectural embellishment of certain graves, however their purpose is still a mystery and they cannot be proven to have religious significance. One interesting case however is that of Blacklow Hill (Warwickshire) which comprises 270 circular pits, a series of slots cut into sandstone bedrock, 52 rectangular post holes which may form enclosures and two inhumations as seen in Figure 2 (*ibid.* 64). The site is clearly not domestic, and no purpose can be attributed to the slots, even for drainage or architecture. The meaning cannot be uncovered without further investigation or the discovery of a similar site but a case has been suggested for an artificial sacred grove (*ibid.* 66).

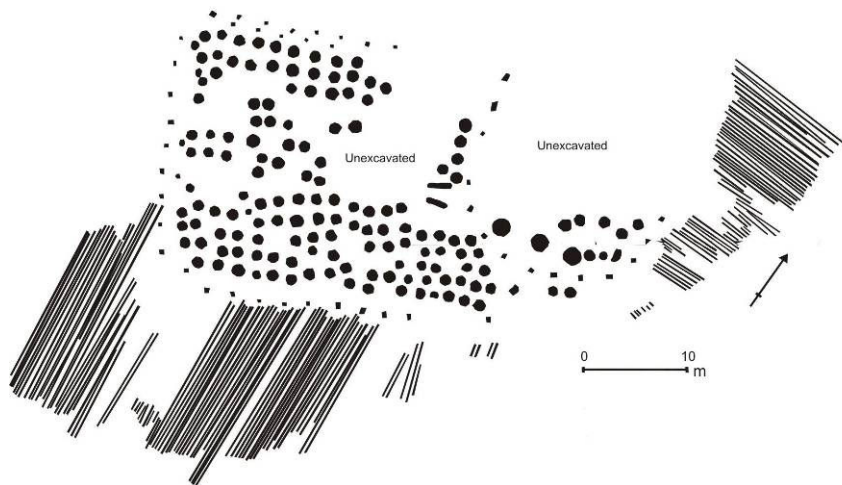


Fig2: Blacklow Hill. (redrawn from Wilson 1992).

The evidence Semple has put forward points towards pagan worship taking place in open spaces without architectural embellishment, which doesn't come as a surprise considering the lack of archaeological evidence for 'temples' in the literal sense. Tacitus describes German religious practice in the first century as occurring in woods and groves; they 'do not consider it consistent with the grandeur of celestial beings to confine the gods within walls' (Halsall 1996). Place name evidence supports this and the work of Margaret Gelling (1997) has revealed that many early Anglo-

Saxon place names include topographical elements in combination with those which indicate pagan worship. There are an intriguing number of names which relate to woodland or groves, for example Thunreslea (Hampshire) and Thursley (Sussex) which mean 'Thunor's grove'. There is also historical evidence for holy trees, for example the 'ash tree which the ignorant call sacred' in the charter bounds of Taunton, Somerset (Blair 2005: 477, Turner 2006, 131). It is important to bare in mind the significance of woodland and forest in the early medieval landscape, as places of production, hunting etc but also as places of untamed nature and danger, where specialist knowledge would be needed to navigate and survive in such places, as is highlighted by ethnographic studies of other forest dwelling communities (Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995, LeGoff 1988). This evidence for sacred groves supports Wilson's (1992) interpretation of Blacklow Hill, discussed above. Other manmade landscape features also refer to pagan deities in their names, for example Wansdyke (Wiltshire), a prehistoric ditch which is attributed to Woden (Grinsell 1936, 79).

The burial record

Burial is a very specific use of landscape, which may involve ritual significance. The places chosen to bury the dead and the manner in which they bury them have long been recognised as useful clues towards religious affiliation. However the record brings with it many problems. No sharp break in burial tradition is observable with Christian burial style and location varying little from pagan burial. Cremation was decreasing in popularity before the conversion, and orientated graves were becoming more common (Geake 1997). Pagan burial grounds were usually unenclosed and away from settlements, and the only noticeable characteristic being their variability. Burial around a church was a later development, not becoming standard until the tenth to twelfth centuries AD (Zadora-Rio 2003) and was probably reserved only for the elite during the early phases of Christianity (*ibid.*). Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were often mixed rite, and many were probably used both by pagans and Christians. David Wilson (1992) has investigated evidence for paganism within graves, and his work suggests that there are many grave attributes which derive from a pagan religious affiliation and that these provide clues for reconstructing Anglo-Saxon Paganism. These include the building or reuse of burial mounds (which can be argued to occur in Christian contexts too), grisly single and double burials, grave goods and their gender and age affiliations and use of symbolism, amulets, animal burials and cremations and cremation urns. These statistical correlations provide interesting patterns for the archaeologist. Perhaps with further investigation into all aspects of the pagan world, including clues left in landscape and documents, these patterns can be fitted into broader patterns for the reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon pagan world view.

An interesting feature which crops up again in the burial record is the reuse of prehistoric mounds and other ancient structures as burial foci, as studied by Howard Williams (1998). Williams states that 25% of known Anglo-Saxon burial sites exemplify certain, probable, or possible reuse of ancient monuments, 61% of these are Bronze Age round barrows (*ibid.*92). Williams attributes the significance of this reuse to the construction of social identities, myths of origin and relations with the distant past. Examples of early 'pagan' barrow reuse cemeteries are Saxton Road, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) and Bishopstone, East Sussex (*ibid.*95). Linear earthworks, Henges, long barrows, Hill forts and Roman structures were also frequently reused as burial foci in the early medieval period, and were frequent until the seventh century, when increased instances of isolated high status burials are found, before the practice dies out almost completely. This evidence further supports the possibility of prehistoric features of the landscape being significant to pre-Christian ritual, and long term veneration of particular places within their cosmologies, as is argued by Semple (2007) and Bradley (1987) as detailed above.

Settlement

Settlements, though frequently used by prehistorians (Boivin 2000, Parker Pearson & Richards 1994, Richards 1996b) are perhaps an underestimated source of information within Anglo-Saxon archaeology for understanding past ideologies, though a recent publication edited by Frodsham and O'Brian (2005) does address these issues. However given an understanding of the cosmological aspect of religion perhaps this would be a productive area of study in understanding how Anglo-Saxon paganism worked on a domestic level. In my own work (Foster 2007), I have suggested that many early medieval settlements present interesting spatial relationships to prehistoric monuments, for example Yeavinger (Northumberland), (first noted by Bradley, 1987), as well as Bishopstone, (East Sussex), Barrow Hills, Radley (Oxfordshire), Ringlemere (Kent), Prospect Park, Harmondsworth (Middlesex), Hurst Park (Surrey) and New Wintles (Oxfordshire). Given the established predisposition to associate burials, and religious sites with such monuments, this may be evidence of the sacred entering the domestic sphere and further evidence for religion within domestic space should be sought.

The types of sites which may be deemed significant to pagan ritual are varied in type and are as dispersed in nature as early Anglo-Saxon settlements. Semple's (2007) arguments suggest that a particular type of place was significant and that this type of place would have been recognisable to the Anglo-Saxon people, either local or travellers through a distinctive form of landscape grammar. The place-name evidence and the archaeological evidence for the veneration of ancient monuments suggest

that this grammar would often draw on the physical remains of past as well as cultural memory. An ethnographic analogy can here be drawn with the Aboriginal Australian concept of landscape. Tilley (1994) has used this same ethnography to illustrate a phenomenological way of thinking about prehistoric British landscapes. Aboriginal Australians' culture is so immersed in landscape that they can hardly be separated, and the landscape is totally socialized (Tilley 1994: 37-8), as their creation myth appropriates the landscape to their cosmologies. They believe in a concept called 'the dream time' set in a mythical past where their ancestors left their marks on the landscape, which resulted in the formation of the topographical features which shape their physical world for example rivers, hills, lakes. This has created a kind of 'ancestral map' (*ibid.*38). Topographic features are hence crucial to formation of concepts of creation, spiritual power and world order (*ibid.*40) this is reflected in their art and the way in which they divide their land territorially, they are bound to the land emotionally and involves an attachment to and knowledge of the land, marked by natural features and relate to mythical barriers to the ancestors (Tilley 1994:40). This order makes the land a collective resource constantly being drawn on in daily experience (*ibid.*). The pagan Anglo-Saxon landscape may also be viewed in this way, considering the ways in which the past may be being drawn into the sacred landscape. This comparison also reminds one of the Norse origin myths, in which 'Middle Earth' was created by the gods from the corpse of a frost-giant named Ymir (Wagner & MacDowall 1884). Although Norse paganism differs greatly in time and space from Anglo-Saxon paganism, Scandinavian links are attested by the material culture found at Sutton Hoo, and the names and deeds of the gods of both regions are known to be roughly comparable, however it is important to be critical of this type of analogy as the Norse religion was not recorded until between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, by which time Scandinavia was essentially Christianized (*ibid.*).

The Christianization of the Landscape

The medieval Christian religious landscape appears *prima facie* to be totally different from the pagan religious landscape. The network of churches, monasteries and other minor sacred sites are more visible in the archaeological record and better understood from our modern western view point. However this Christian landscape still bears testament to pagan sacred topography, in both its positive and negative appropriation.

The church in Britain developed under a monastic model, using minsters and monasteries to spread and organise Christianity throughout the landscape (see Blair 2005). Monasteries were one type of Christian sacred site, which differed greatly from the known pre-Christian sacred sites mentioned above. These were often large high status sites, containing

churches and settlements housing a monastic community and holding land within estates usually granted by the crown or nobility. They acted as centres for spirituality, scholarship, art and often economy and attracted great numbers of people encouraging permanent settlement around them, for example the lay settlements clustering around Brixworth (Northamptonshire) and Ely (Cambridgeshire) (Blair 2005, 252-56). Rosamond Faith (1997) has even argued that monasticism, different from 'extensive lordship' in that revenue, rather than being collected by a king travelling around his kingdom, was brought to a permanent ecclesiastical centre and that this was the advent of the manorial system of land governance. However Blair (2005) warns caution to this approach, as so little is known of lay aristocratic estates at this time (*Ibid.* 253).

Monastic sites are often recognisable by their distinctive enclosures, and are readily identifiable in Aerial photography, maps and street plans (Blair 1992, 1996). During the earliest phases of minster building, these minsters were often built in the remains of roman walled sites (Blair 2005, 66). There have been many arguments as to why these sites were chosen, ranging from positivist interpretations of reuse involving the convenience of a brown field site, perceived architectural fittingness and a 'classical renaissance' (Geake 1997). What is recognisable however is that the physical remains of the past are being actively used as a resource to express the aspirations of the present. Prehistoric enclosures are also often used, with examples like Hanbury (Worcestershire), Malmesbury (Wiltshire) and Tetbury (Gloucestershire) and possibly Breedon Hill (Leicestershire) (Blair 2005, Williams 1997).

Sarah Semple, in her PhD thesis refers to the volume of examples where early churches can be found next to Bronze Age burial mounds, possibly reflecting the practice of converting places important to the pagan community, for example Brampton (Oxfordshire) which can be seen in Figure 3, Fimber and Ripon (Yorkshire). There are also examples of 'pagan' Anglo-Saxon mounds being treated in this way (eg. Taplow, Buckinghamshire) illustrated in Figure 4.

The burial record

Barrow burial also continued into the Christian era, but was most common for isolated high-status burials for example Swallowcliffe Down and Ford (Wiltshire) and Uncleby (Yorkshire) (Williams 1998). Mounds were also erected at this time, like Taplow, mentioned above as well as Benty grange (Derbyshire) and Sutton hoo (Suffolk). This distinctive architectural form harks back to the Bronze Age monuments which are often close to their prehistoric predecessors (Williams 1998). This high status expression reflects a change in society; it appears more hierarchica l

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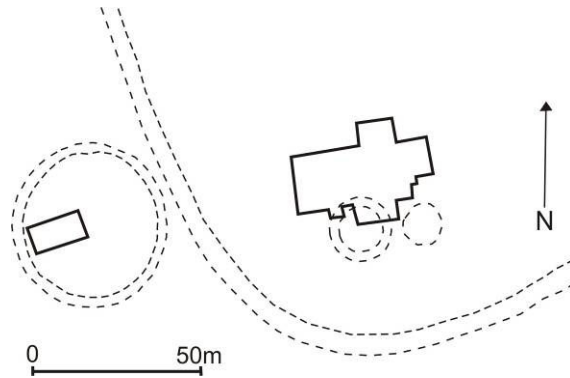


Fig3: Brampton, Oxfordshire. Showing churches and prehistoric mounds (redrawn from Semple 2002).

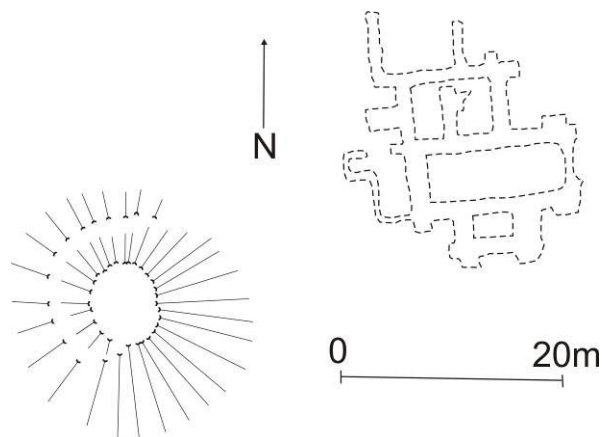


Fig4: Taplow, Buckinghamshire. Showing Anglo-Saxon mound and possible church identified through geophysics (redrawn from Semple 2002).

reflecting the changes which Christianity arguably influenced, with its monotheistic concept more applicable to monarchical rule. But continuing reuse is suggestive of continuity in the way the landscape was used spiritually. This reuse of Roman and prehistoric features in the Christian era shows something of the same landscape vocabulary as the pagan examples above. The same language appears to be used but for a Christianized message.

The church offered little liturgical instruction for burial (Lucy 2002, Meaney 2003) and seems to have accepted people's concern to be interred in ancestral burial grounds, as attested by Irish documents (Blair 2005, O'Brian 1999). Church orientated burial is a later, probably 10-12thC development and marked a change in attitudes towards place of burial intimately linked with growing local identities related to local patronised churches. Until this point the gap may have been filled by what are known as 'Final Phase' burials, small, unfurnished, enclosed and consistently orientated 7-8th century burial grounds, possibly representing the lay community, with the elite being buried next to their churches which acted as monuments to themselves and their family (Burnell and James 1999).

Historical Evidence.

The historical evidence for Christian landscapes takes many forms. Pre-Renaissance education fell largely to the monasteries and the early medieval Bestiaries show the natural world as understood by clerics, with nature being studied for divine symbolism. This exemplifies a Christian world view and cosmology, but we know frustratingly little of the attitudes of the lay community. Other ecclesiastical texts give reference to the landscape. The lives of Saints frequently being attached to specific places and landscape features. In Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac, it is told that Guthlac went to live in a prehistoric barrow for spiritual isolation, there he fought demons, and when he died he was buried and eventually an Abbey was built in its location (Colgrave 1956). The association with supernatural malevolent beings hints at a negative appropriation possibly related to the pre-Christian significance of the barrow. St. Samson of Cornwall is said to have found apostates worshipping a standing stone, and Christianized both the people and the stone (Turner 2006, 132). Saints are often involved in the cutting down of sacred groves of trees (for example Boniface destroying sacred trees in Germany (Blair 2005, 481) but they also often create them, for example Adhelm, Cynehelm and Eadwold created ash trees from forcing a staff into the ground (Blair 2005, 476). Le Goff (1988) describes the significance of woodland and forest to the medieval imagination, mentioning that it was a popular place for hermits to spend time, and it was seen as an equivalent to the biblical desert, interesting considering the significance of forest and woodland to pagan beliefs as determined from the historical and place name evidence above (*ibid.* 47-55).

Sarah Semple (1998, 2003) has used poetic and artistic evidence to argue for a 'fear of the past', in which monuments like barrows were imbued with negative supernatural beings, citing St. Guthlac and the dragon's prehistoric barrow lair in the eighth century poem *Beowulf* and the 'ghost' which resides earth bound in a barrow in the '*The Wife's Lament*' (c.950-1000). There seems to be an ambiguous nature to the Christian

view of potential pagan sites held by ecclesiastics possibly changing after Christianity became an established institution in Britain.

Settlement

Place names often identify potential negative appropriation of potential pagan sacred sites, for example 'scuccan hlaew' in land charters means 'devil's barrow'. There are also 'devil's ditches (Berkshire) 'devil's humps' (Sussex) (Grinsell 1936, 42). Roymans (1995) has argued a change in attitudes to the urnfields of the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt region of North Belgium and the Netherlands during the conversion to Christianity, which lead to the destruction of many urnfield sites. During the high medieval period the land was reclaimed and 'ritually purified' by the Christians (*Ibid.* 19). He noted that those in marginal places were imbued with negative folkloric stories and names, developing a concentric model of settlement and landscape consisting of an inner cultivated core and an outer marginal zone inhabited by evil spirits. Similar theories have been developed by Reynolds (1999), Semple (1998) and Turner (2006) for the Anglo-Saxon landscape. Reynolds (1999) states that execution cemeteries are commonly associated with burial mounds, for example Malling Hill, Lewes (East Sussex) and Walkington Wold (Yorkshire) (*ibid.* 105) and that these are commonly on hundred boundaries. Turner argues that the new Christian ideology occupied the cultivated land and that 'ritual sites were encompassed within it and imbued with Christian significance, either as part of that ideology or metaphorically and physically beyond its rule, and thus the feared margins of society' (Turner 2006, 169).

The change in settlement patterns during the Middle Ages can be seen to have been affected by Christianity, with more permanent settlements developing, fixed by their local churches. Before this the 'minster hypothesis' has been used to describe pastoral organisation, with monastic sites supplying pastoral care (Blair 2005). These establishments and the developing systems of land administration stabilized the landscape, giving rise to ownership and control of land. The ideological shift from gods and a landscape that was socialized, to one true god left a substantial impact on medieval thought and landscape, manifested in the organization and treatments of particular categories of place. This way of understanding the landscape is reminiscent of the arguments of prehistorians like Richards (1996a, 1996b) for monumental expression and fractal understanding and expression of ideological frameworks.

This reuse of Roman and prehistoric features in the Christian era shows something of the same landscape 'vocabulary' as the pagan examples above. The same language appears to be used but for a Christianized message. Perhaps the landscape offered a method of transmitting ideas that everyone could understand.

Conclusions

I have hopefully shown that more about Anglo-Saxon paganism can be discerned from the archaeological record, and that archaeologists of the historical periods can use theoretical frameworks that are used by prehistorians. Further study into the landscape, historical and artistic evidence could help us delve much deeper into 'middle earth', to understand how cosmologies and therefore society worked on a ritual and domestic level.

The conversion to Christianity changed the landscape forever, but the Christian landscape was not arbitrarily imposed onto the British landscape but was determined in part by the pagan landscape which preceded it. In many cases it is possible that the Christian clerics were trying to erase paganism from the landscape, but by these very efforts it was preserved. Analysing the archaeological, historical and place name evidence, it becomes clear that the landscape held an important part in the conversion to Christianity. In an illiterate society it was probably an important medium for expressing ideas, as exemplified by Gregory's letter. The different strategies employed, both positive and negative appropriation would be important messages to the people of early medieval Britain, communicating religious superiority. Another important role of the conversion of the landscape is for the transference of cosmological structures. Converting from a polytheistic religion based in nature to a monotheistic religion which encourages urbanism would inevitably have involved an alteration of the underlying cosmological principles which make the world work for the inhabitants. Landscape could therefore be used as a vehicle for conversion, in that if the surrounding world of a pagan was made to make sense to a Christian ideological framework, conversion could take place more seamlessly. The pagan ritual topography was appropriated in ways which left the pagan ritual foci important to Christian religious and social space. Gradually this pagan religious landscape became embedded in negative attitudes towards heathen practice leaving place names and folkloric evidence which seems confusing in light of an early medieval abandonment of key cosmological principles, and leaving a ritual landscape which seems detached from its predecessor, but which ultimately played a key role in its formation.

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