The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories in the Early-Medieval Landscape of France and England in the 7th–12th Centuries: A Reconsideration

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NEW developments in burial archaeology and recent re-assessments of historical evidence compel a reconsideration of the transition from unassociated burial-grounds to churchyards. This paper focuses on five inter-related aspects: the interpretation of scattered burials in Early-medieval settlements, the re-use of barrows and Roman buildings for burial, the doctrinal elaboration of the churchyard as a bounded sacred place, the process of the reduction of burial-grounds and the relationship between burials and parish boundaries. It is argued that a great variety of burial locations were in use during the Early Middle Ages, and that this does not constitute evidence for evaluating the level of Christianization among the rural population. It is only between the 10th and the 12th centuries that the churchyard was established as the sole legitimate burial place for the parish community. The archaeological evidence for the topographical evolution of burial-grounds mirrors the shifting boundaries between the living and the dead, and between sacred and profane spaces. The comparison of archaeological evidence on both sides of the Channel reveals more similarities in the development of burial practices than might be expected.

For a long time the burial archaeology of the Middle Ages, both in France and in England, was dominated by the problem of migrations and the question of Christianization. Interest was focused almost exclusively on Early-medieval cemeteries because of their conspicuous assemblages of artefacts. The cessation of burial with grave goods, which declined from the 7th–8th centuries onwards, made the dating of later graves almost impossible. The situation changed rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s: radiocarbon dating, by improving the dating of bones, has allowed the development of churchyard archaeology; and the increase in excavations of Early-medieval settlements has provided new data for the study of the relationship between settlement and burial. This renewed provision of archaeological documentation, and the subsequent revisiting of historical evidence, entails a reconsideration of the transition from unassociated burial-grounds to churchyards. On both sides of the Channel, archaeological finds draw attention to parallel developments while historiographical models often provide different explanatory frameworks.

SCATTERED BURIALS WITHIN EARLY-MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENTS

Until recently, the Christianization of the countryside and the construction of rural churches were considered to have brought about the rapid creation of churchyards, and simultaneously the abandonment of earlier burial-grounds at the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century.

The idea that Christianization provoked a drastic change in burial practices and that from a very early stage it entailed the obligation for Christians to be buried within churchyards has been considered as a matter of fact by archaeologists and historians, but it does not find any confirmation in Early-medieval ecclesiastical legislation. It has long been recognized that the church never objected to burial with clothing or with grave-goods — and more recently it was noticed that the church did not try to impose a place for burial before the 10th or even the 11th century.[1] Neither grave orientation nor the presence or absence of grave goods are now considered to be indicative of pagan or Christian beliefs.

The view that pre-churchyard cemeteries were always situated at some distance from the settlement has also been challenged by the results of recent excavations, but the relationship between the two remains very unclear. Even if Early-medieval cemeteries are often situated near settlements, they stand clearly apart from them and nothing is known of their catchment area: it is hard to tell whether they were used by the inhabitants of just one settlement or more. In some cases, groups of burials stand out in their orientation, probably for the purpose of maintaining their identity, but it is difficult to say whether these clusters discriminate between family plots, neighbouring settlements or other kinds of social groups.[2] We know nothing about how these cemeteries, some of which lasted for several centuries and held hundreds or even thousands of graves, were managed. What level of community and co-operation between families, even between settlements, should we suppose? The written sources say nothing about this. The canons of the councils, together with the law-codes, are only interested in the individual tomb, to forbid the robbing or re-use of the grave.[3] The very expression 'row cemetery' is probably misleading because it suggests general planning. In fact, the impression of regularity is produced by the common orientation of the graves, the place of which must have been made apparent at the surface, but the existence of actual rows is not very frequent, and they are generally limited to a small number of graves.

During the last decade, one of the most surprising results of large-scale excavations has been the discovery of small groups of graves or isolated burials within Early-medieval settlements. This practice represents a major change in

[1] D. Bullough, 'Burial, community and belief in the Early Medieval West', 177–201 in P. Wormald (ed.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983); R. Morris, *The Church in British Archaeology* (CBA Res. Rep., 47, London, 1983); C. Treffort, *L'Eglise carolingienne et la mort* (Lyon, 1996); D. M. Hadley, 'Burial practices in northern England in the later Anglo-Saxon period', 209–28 in S. Lucy and A. Reynolds (eds.), *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (Soc. Medieval Archaeol. Mon., 17, London, 2002).
[2] A. Nice, 'La nécropole mérovingienne de Goudelancourt-les-Perrepont (Aisne): Présentation générale', *Revue Archéol. Picardie*, 1/2 (1994), 3–7; P. Demolon, 'Hordain (Nord)', 59–62 in M. Fixot and E. Zadora-Rio (eds.), *L'Eglise, le terroir* (Paris, 1989).
[3] Bullough, op. cit. in note 1.

comparison with the Roman Period, in which only the newborn were buried inside settlements, sometimes even inside houses.

This phenomenon is very widely represented in France, mainly in Ile-de-France, which is probably the region with the greatest number of excavations of Early-medieval rural settlements, but it is also found in Picardy, Normandy, Burgundy, Alsace, the Loire valley, and in the south of France in Languedoc.[4] In fact, there are few Early-medieval settlements which do not display some scattered graves. Small groups of burials have also been discovered in a few Anglo-Saxon settlements, at Flixborough, New Wintles Farm (Eynsham), Barton Court Farm, Sutton Courtenay, and possibly other sites in Oxfordshire.[5] They have been found elsewhere in Europe: isolated burials or small groups of graves are reported in Germany, notably in Kircheim (7th–8th century), and in other contemporary settlements in Bavaria.[6] Similar findings have been noted in The Netherlands, at Dommelen and Geldrop, where they are dated from the 7th–8th centuries.[7]

In France, such scattered burials are often found in settlements which also had an Early-medieval church and graveyard. The settlement of Saleux, in Picardy, was occupied from the 7th century to the 11th.[8] The first graves are from the 7th century and pre-date the church, which was first built in the 8th century. Only one stone sarcophagus, dating from the 7th century, was found. It remained at the centre of the successive ecclesiastical buildings and is interpreted as the founder's grave. The churchyard, within a boundary ditch, remained in use until the 11th century and contained nearly 1,200 burials. There were also a few scattered graves in the settlement. They are contemporary with the use of the churchyard, but their precise dating is as yet unknown. At Serris, in Ile-de-France,

[4] R. Guadagnin, ' "La Place de la Ville" à Villiers-le-Sec', 142–4 in *Un village au temps de Charlemagne: Moines et paysans de l'abbaye de Saint-Denis du VIIe siècle à l'An Mil* (Musée national des arts et traditions populaires, 28 novembre 1988–30 avril 1989, Paris, 1988); C. Lorren and P. Périn (eds.), *L'habitat rural du haut Moyen Age (France, Pays-Bas, Danemark et Grande-Bretagne)* (Actes des XIVe Journées internationales d'Archéologie mérovingienne, Guiry-en-Vexin et Paris, 4–8 février 1993, Rouen, 1995); *L'Ile de France de Clovis à Hugues Capet du Ve siècle au Xe siècle* (Musée Archéologique Départemental du Val d'Oise — Service Régional de l'Archéologie, 1993); A. Garnotel and C. Raynaud, 'Groupés ou dispersés? Les morts et la société rurale en Languedoc oriental (IVe–XIIe siècles)', 139–52 in H. Galinié and E. Zadora-Rio (eds.), *Archéologie du cimetière chrétien* (11e Supplément à la *Revue Archéologique du Centre*, Tours, 1996); M. Châtelet, 'L'habitat du haut Moyen Age en Alsace: Une nouvelle approche à partir des découvertes récentes', 57–69 in S. Brather, C. Bücker and M. Hoeper (eds.), *Archäologie als Sozialgeschichte: Festschrift für Heiko Steuer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Rahden, 1999); T. Bonin, 'Le site de Chessy et l'occupation du sol en Ile-de-France (VIe–Xe siècles)', *Archéol. Médiévale*, XXIX (2000), 1–68; E. Faure-Boucharlat (ed.), *Vivre à la campagne au Moyen Age: L'habitat rural du Ve au XIIe s. (Bresse, Lyonnais, Dauphiné) d'après les données archéologiques* (Lyon, 2001).

[5] C. Loveluck, 'Flixborough — the character and economy of a high status Middle Saxon settlement in northern England', 179–94 in G. De Boe and F. Verhaeghe (eds.), *Rural Settlements in Medieval Europe: Papers of the Medieval Europe Brugge 1997 Conference*, 6 (Zellik, 1997); idem, 'Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption: Flixborough and its importance for Middle and Saxon rural settlement studies', 79–130 in H. Hamerow and A. MacGregor (eds.), *Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain: Essays in Honour of Rosemary Cramp* (Oxford, 2001); A. Boddington, 'Models of burial, settlement and worship: the final phase reviewed', 177–99 in E. Southworth (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: A Reappraisal* (Stroud, 1990), 195; J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), 72–3.

[6] S. Winghart, 'Bemerkungen zu Genese und Struktur frühmittelalterlicher Siedlungen im Münchener Raum', 7–47 in L. Kolmer and P. Segl (eds.), *Regensburg, Bayern und Europa: Festschrift Kurt Reindel zum 70. Geburtstag* (Regensburg, 1995); C. Bücker and M. Hoeper, 'First aspects of social hierarchy of settlements in Merovingian southwest Germany', 441–54 in C. Fabech and J. Ringtved (eds.), *Settlement and Landscape* (Højbjerg, 1999).

[7] F. Theuws, 'Changing settlement patterns, burial grounds and the symbolic construction of ancestors and communities in the Late Merovingian southern Netherlands', 337–48 in Fabech and Ringtved (eds.), op. cit. in note 6.

[8] I. Catteddu, 'Le site médiéval de Saleux 'Les Coutures': habitat, nécropole, et églises du haut Moyen Age', 143–8 in De Boe and Verhaeghe (eds.), op. cit. in note 5.

a large-scale rescue excavation has revealed an Early-medieval polyfocal settlement occupied from the end of the 7th to the early 11th century, with a graveyard containing more than 950 graves associated with two buildings, one of which is interpreted as a chapel.[9] In the 7th and 8th centuries, this graveyard co-existed with two small burial-grounds containing about 60 people. Furthermore, there were in the same period several groups of two to four people in various places in the settlement, and a few isolated burials. During the final phase of the settlement, in the 9th–10th centuries, only the main graveyard was in use, and the small clusters of graves were abandoned.

Some important questions cannot be answered until the detailed analyses of the excavations are made available. One of these is whether scattered graves in settlements with an Early-medieval graveyard date from an early phase in the development of the churchyard, or whether these isolated burials represent a long-lasting alternative mortuary practice.

In the case of Serris, it seems that from the start there were several apparently contemporary burial groups, and that one of them developed around a chapel. A similar development has been noted at Tournedos, in Normandy. During the 7th–8th centuries, there were three contemporary grave-groups, at about 200 m distance from one another, and each one of them was located around a neolithic barrow.[10] One of these was associated with a settlement occupied from the 7th century to the end of the 10th, and is the only one to have developed further while the others were abandoned. During the 8th century, a church was built on this burial-ground, close to the neolithic barrow (Fig. 1). The churchyard remained in use until the 14th century, long after the settlement had shifted. Over 1,600 graves from the 7th to the 14th century have been excavated. It was only in its last stage that the churchyard was enclosed by a curvilinear fence (Fig. 2).

How should we interpret these scattered graves within Early-medieval settlements? Interpretation is made more difficult by the fact that most of these excavations are not yet fully published. These graves are generally attributed to the period from the 7th century to the 10th, but dating is often still uncertain, as the results of radiocarbon analysis are not yet all available.

In the case of Geldrop and Dommelen (The Netherlands), Frans Theuws suggested that the 7th-century furnished burials excavated in different locations within the newly founded settlements were the founders' graves. In his view, the location of the burials was aimed at creating new ancestors directly related to the individual farmsteads.[11] The use of burials to represent claims on the land has also been proposed to account for the richly furnished Roman graves which are found

[9] B. Foucray and F. Gentili, 'Le village du haut Moyen Age de Serris (Seine et Marne), lieu dit "Les Ruelles" (VIIe–Xe siècle)', 139–43 in Lorren and Périn (eds.), op. cit. in note 4; F. Gentili, 'Villages, maisons et annexes autour de l'An Mil', 28–39 in *L'Ile de France médiévale* (Paris, 2001).

[10] F. Carré, 'Le site de Portejoie (Tournedos, Val-de-Reuil, Eure), VIIe–XIVe siècles: organisation de l'espace funéraire', 153–62 in Galinié and Zadora-Rio (eds.), op. cit. in note 4.

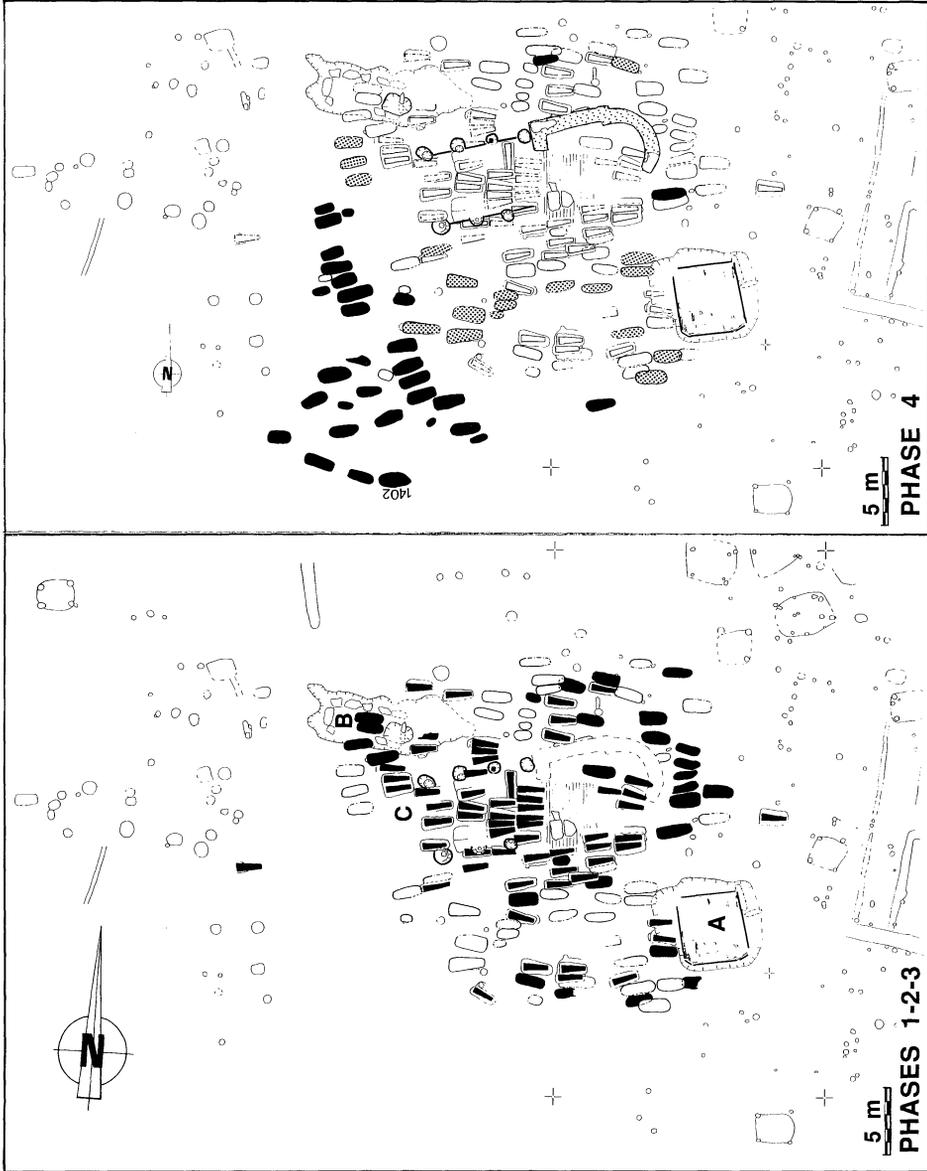[11] Theuws, op. cit. in note 7.

FIG. I

Tournedos (Eure): the first phases of burials (7th–9th/10th centuries). A: Sunken building; B: neolithic barrow; C: church.
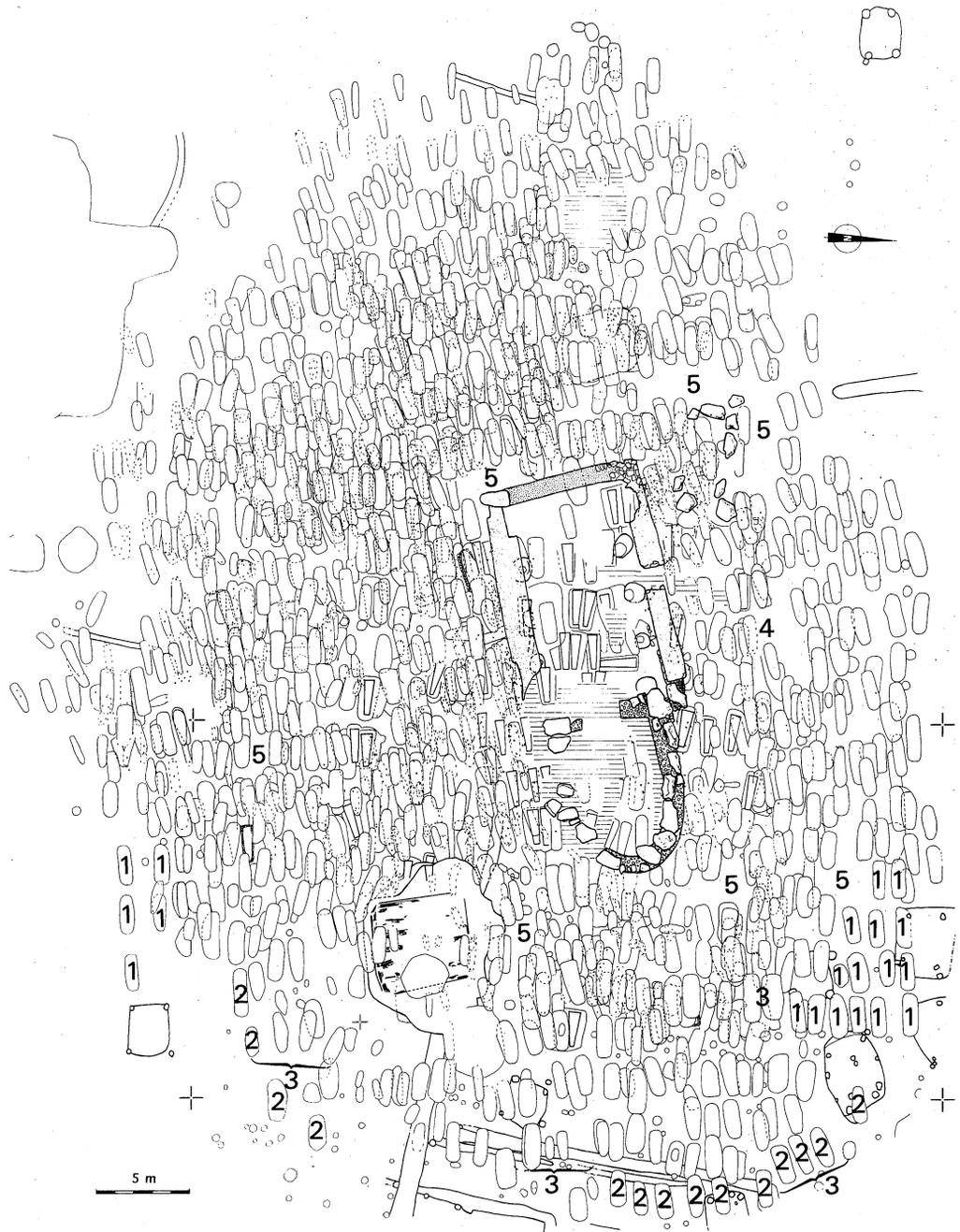*Courtesy of Florence Carré.*

FIG. 2

Tournedos (Eure): general plan of the graveyard (7th–14th centuries). *Courtesy of Florence Carré.*

at a distance from the buildings of villas.[12] In Ireland, this interpretation is substantiated by Early-medieval laws.[13] When only archaeological evidence is available, it is hardly possible to assess its validity when clear connections cannot be established between individual burials and individual settlement units.

In France, the first discoveries, made at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, were interpreted as the burials of outcasts, but this hypothesis no longer seems acceptable in view of the large numbers involved and also because there is nothing unusual or deviant about these graves or about the positioning of the bodies, which are buried supine, sometimes even with grave-goods.[14]

It has also been suggested that these burials scattered within settlements proved that the Christianization of the rural population was still incomplete by the 8th and 9th centuries.[15] It seems to me that one could just as well insist upon the contrast with pagan Antiquity represented by the introduction of graves within the settlement, and see in this a result of the closer relationship between the living and the dead which is characteristic of Christianity. Work by Philippe Ariès in the 1970s highlighted this process of mingling the living and the dead in the context of Christianity, and the desire of Christians to be buried *ad sanctos* was held responsible for the abandonment of field cemeteries.[16] Such a supposition seemed obvious: no one imagined that graves could have penetrated inside settlements independently from the existence of a church, and when dating evidence was lacking for its building, it was automatically deemed to be contemporary with the earliest graves around it.[17] This hypothesis has been called into question by the discovery of scattered graves within Early-medieval settlements, and we have to acknowledge the fact that the shifting of burials could result from multiple factors unrelated to the existence of a church.[18]

In any case, these graves scattered in the settlements reveal a change in the attitude towards the dead compared with Antiquity, and challenge a long-accepted idea: that of an immediate relationship between the abandonment of field cemeteries and the creation of churchyards. It is now well established that the penetration of burials inside villages could have happened independently from any place of worship, and the link between the abandonment of pre-churchyard

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[12] A. Ferdière and A. Villard (eds.), *La tombe augustéenne de Fléré-la-Rivière (Indre) et les sépultures aristocratiques de la cité des Bituriges* (Mémoires du Musée d'Argentomagus, 2, 7e Suppl. à la *Revue Archéologique du Centre*, Saint-Marcel, 1993); L. Tranoy, 'La mort en Gaule romaine', 111–12 in E. Crubézy et al. (eds.), *Archéologie funéraire* (Paris, 2000); A. Ferdière, 'Archéologie funéraire et société en Gaule romaine: Interprétation ou sur-interprétation?', in *Archéologie des pratiques funéraires* (Colloque de Bibracte, June 2001, forthcoming).

[13] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Boundaries in Irish Law', 83–90 in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement* (London, 1976).

[14] A. Garnotel and D. Paya, 'Permanence et évolution du cimetière médiéval: Exclusion et cohésion sociale en Languedoc du Ve au XVe siècle', 303–21 in *L'identité des populations archéologiques: XVIe Rencontres internationales d'Archéologie et d'Histoire d'Antibes* (Sophia Antipolis, 1996). This does not mean that this interpretation should be rejected in all cases. It can probably be retained, for instance, in the rare cases of burials discovered in disused storage pits: I. Catteddu, 'L'Habitat rural mérovingien de Genlis (Côte d'Or)', *Revue Archéol. de l'Est*, 43 (1992), 39–98.

[15] J. Chapelot, 'L'Habitat rural: organisation et nature', 178–99 in *L'Ile de France de Clovis à Hugues Capet du Ve siècle au Xe siècle* (Musée Archéologique Départemental du Val d'Oise — Service Régional de l'Archéologie, 1993).

[16] P. Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris, 1977), 1–49.

[17] E.g. C. Lorren, 'L'église Saint-Martin de Mondeville (Calvados): Quelques questions', 251–76 in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire médiévales en l'honneur du Doyen Michel de Boüard* (Geneva, 1982), at p. 257.

[18] E. Zadora-Rio, 'Le village des historiens et le village des archéologues', 145–53 in E. Mornet (ed.), *Campagnes médiévales: l'homme et son espace, Etudes offertes à Robert Fossier* (Paris, 1995).

cemeteries and the development of their churchyard successors accordingly becomes much less straightforward. There is no doubt that burial-types and locations displayed a wide diversity during the Early Middle Ages and that there was no general pattern of churchyard burial. The new possibilities resulting from the increased use of radiocarbon dating might result in a revision of the chronology of unassociated burial-grounds: the available dating evidence for their abandonment in the 7th–8th centuries relies entirely upon the grave-goods, which disappear from this period onwards. Most of these cemeteries, however, also contain a significant number, if not a majority, of unfurnished graves, which could prove to belong to a much later period.[19]

THE RE-USE OF BARROWS AND ROMAN BUILDINGS FOR BURIALS

One critical question must be left pending until the full publication of the archaeological evidence for scattered graves is completed: it is not yet clear whether they were placed in the immediate vicinity of dwellings that were still occupied, or whether they were located at the periphery of the settlement, in deserted areas. In the latter case, the phenomenon should perhaps be compared with the re-use of Roman structures for Early-medieval burials. This practice, which has frequently been reported in France as well as in England for more than a century, is probably overemphasized in archaeological records, because the excavation of Roman buildings has a much longer tradition than the excavation of Early-medieval settlement, especially in France.[20] In a recent study it has been claimed that ancient monuments (including both prehistoric barrows and Roman ruins) were one of the most important factors determining the placing of the dead in the early Anglo-Saxon landscape, and that the aim was to achieve some kind of ritual appropriation of the past.[21] This interpretation is quite convincing with regard to barrows, but it is more doubtful for Roman buildings: the collected data contain a large number of old and very partial excavations, which do not allow for the evaluation of the archaeological context of these discoveries. Recent excavations have shown that there was often an Early-medieval settlement nearby which could account for these graves re-using Roman ruins, and the fact that these decayed buildings were reoccupied by burials might reflect the shift of the settlement rather than a symbolic value attached to ancient monuments. However, a possible symbolic importance of abandoned buildings should not entirely be rejected, and Roman ruins could indeed remain focal points in the Early-medieval landscape, but one would need stronger proof than re-use for burial to validate this idea: for instance if the graves were disposed in a specific relation to the buildings, or in conspicuous locations.

[19] E. Lorans, 'Le Monde des morts de l'Antiquité tardive à l'époque moderne (IVe–XIXe s.)', 155–97 in Crubézy et al. (eds.), op. cit. in note 12, at pp. 157–62; Hadley, op. cit. in note 1, 212.

[20] J. Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters:a topographical review', 227–66 in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), at pp. 235–46; P. A. Février, 'La marque de l'Antiquité tardive dans le paysage religieux médiéval de la Provence rurale', 27–35 in M. Fixot and E. Zadora-Rio (eds.), *L'environnement des églises et la topographie religieuse des campagnes médiévales* (Paris, 1994); J. Le Maho, 'La réutilisation des édifices funéraires antiques en Normandie au cours du haut Moyen Age', 10–21, ibid.

[21] H. Williams, 'Ancient landscapes and the dead: the reuse of prehistoric and Roman monuments as Early Anglo-Saxon burial sites', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XLI (1997), 1–32.

The excavation of the site of Rigny, in Touraine, has shed new light on the transition from a burial-ground consisting of scattered graves re-using decayed buildings to a parish churchyard.[22] The partial excavation of the graveyard has yielded 1,750 graves dated from the 8th to the mid-19th century. With the exception of one female burial which was associated with a purse containing four coins of Louis the Pious and a loomweight, the Early-medieval graves were unfurnished, and their dating was obtained mainly through radiocarbon analysis. In the 7th century, before it was used for burial, the excavated area held two large stone buildings, together with a small church also built in stone. Documentary evidence from the end of the 7th century allows the identification of the site with the *colonia Riniaco* that belonged to the monastery of St Martin of Tours and had at least seven tenants at that time. During this phase, the inhabitants of the site were buried elsewhere, probably in a cemetery situated further afield. During the 8th century the stone buildings were abandoned, and the graves progressively began to occupy the ruins and the spaces in between. Their density was low, and their disposition recalls that of burials excavated in Early-medieval settlements or Roman ruins. Some of them were aligned along the walls, which must have been still partly standing; however, they all cut through the first destruction layers, and none of them occupied any sort of remarkable location within the building. It is interesting to note that at this stage the church does not seem to have attracted graves in any particular way. The burials, isolated or in small groups, were dispersed on a patch of land encumbered with ruins, close to the settlement, the permanence of which, after the 8th century, is attested through the presence of waste, hearth remains and domestic structures in the burial area. The positioning of the graves cannot therefore be explained by any symbolic value attached to the older buildings, nor by any polarizing role played by the church. Instead, it shows the progressive coming together of the living and the dead which marks a break with pagan Antiquity, in which the graves were kept at a distance from the settlements. It was only in the course of the 10th century, when the church was enlarged, that the funerary area was recentred around it: the parts of the graveyard which were furthest away were abandoned, and the graves were progressively drawn closer around the church. This transformation, installing a closer relationship between the graves and the church, marks the transition from a loose funerary area to the churchyard, and it may well have corresponded to an important stage in the conceptualization of the parish community.

THE MAKING OF THE CHURCHYARD AS A BOUNDED SACRED SPACE

Philippe Ariès was the first to point out the contrast between the Roman concept of the tomb as a self-contained holy place and the medieval idea of the entire cemetery as a bounded communal sacred space: the 'bosom of the Church'

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[22] E. Zadora-Rio et al., 'La fouille du site de Rigny, 7ᵉ–19ᵉ s.: l'habitat, les églises, le cimetière. Troisième et dernier rapport préliminaire (1995–1999)', *Rev. Archéol. du Centre*, 40 (2001), 167–242.

(*ecclesiae gremium*) in which the faithful await for Resurrection.[23] Recent work by
Eric Rebillard has established that the word *coemeterium* in late Antiquity was used
to designate an individual tomb and not a cemetery.[24] He has shown, that contrary
to a long-accepted idea, early Christians did not have anything like exclusive
burial-grounds.[25]

　　Prohibitions on burying the dead within the church can be found from the 6th
century, and Merovingian councils forbade the re-use of graves, but they were
mainly concerned with preserving the rights of their owners, directly following
Roman legislation which considered tombs as private property.[26] There is no
Merovingian canonical disposition imposing burial within churchyards or the
obligation of abandoning pagan cemeteries. The evidence of Sidonius Apollinaris
in the 5th century, together with that of Gregory of Tours a century later, indicates
that there was nothing wrong with burying Christians in pagan graveyards.[27]

　　A first separation, established during the course of the 6th century, discrimin-
ated beween lay and monastic communities, not between Christians and pagans or
renegades. This shift has been made apparent by field archaeology in the case of St
Martin's basilica in Tours. In the 4th century, the western necropolis, where
Martin was buried in 397, was located well outside the walls according to Roman
norms. With the development of his cult, Christians gathered to be buried *ad
sanctos*, as near as possible to the saint. In the excavated area, south of the church,
no change in burial practices has been observed. In 471, Bishop Perpetuus built a
monumental basilica over Martin's grave. Burial in the area south of the basilica
ceased for a time — probably a few decades. It had resumed by the mid-6th
century, and from that time onwards only male burials, according to osteological
analysis, can be found near the basilica. Some 20 m further away there were mixed
male and female burials. Up to the 6th century and the establishment of a
community on the Saint Martin site, the basilica had to be served by clerics living
within the walls of the *castrum*. The interruption in burial-use of the space south of
Perpetuus' new basilica was followed by a major break in this pattern, when living
men came to share the space reserved for the dead. The males buried near the
basilica must have included both clerics from the *castrum* and the new residents
belonging to Saint Martin's own community. According to Henri Galinié, this
mingling of the living and the dead was initially limited to clerics, but the buried
population quickly expanded, offering evidence to support the hypothesis of an
integrated and diversified community of layfolk and clerics cohabiting with their

[23] Ariès, op. cit. in note 16, 47–9.
[24] E. Rebillard, '*Koimhthrion* et *coemeterium*: tombe, tombe sainte, nécropole', *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome,
Antiquité*, 105 (1993), 975–1001; idem, 'Les *areae* carthaginoises (Tertullien, *Ad scapulam* 3, 1): cimetières
communautaires ou enclos funéraires de chrétiens?', *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome, Antiquité*, 108 (1996),
175–89.
[25] E. Rebillard, 'Eglise et sépulture dans l'Antiquité tardive (Occident latin, 3ᵉ–6ᵉ siècles)', *Annales Hist. Sciences
Sociales*, 5 (1999), 1027–46.
[26] Bullough, op. cit. in note 1; on the influence of Roman legal categories, see M. Lauwers, 'Le Cimetière dans le
Moyen Age latin: lieu sacré, saint et religieux', *Annales Hist. Sciences Sociales*, 54 (1999), 1047–72.
[27] Bullough, op. cit. in note 1, 187; C. Treffort, 'Du cimiterium christianorum au cimetière paroissial: Évolution
des espaces funéraires en Gaule du VIᵉ au Xᵉ siècle', 55–64 in Galinié and Zadora-Rio (eds.), op. cit. in note 4.

dead in the *vicus christianorum* mentioned by Gregory of Tours.[28] Rebillard has also shown the emergence, in the course of the 6th century, of a Christian discourse on the necessity for a communal monastic burial-ground, which led to the exclusion of laymen and women from it. The vindication of a necessary continuity between a community in life and in death constituted an important step in defining a Christian funerary space, but it took several centuries for this monastic ideal to spread throughout the Church.[29]

The theory that Christians used exclusive burial-grounds during the Merovingian Period has been advocated recently by Bonnie Effros, but her argument is questionable.[30] She makes no distinction between burials *ad sanctos* and consecrated cemeteries, although the difference between the two concepts is important: in the first case, the emphasis is laid on the individual tombs, and the ground is made holy by association; in the second case, the space designed for burial is bounded and consecrated by a ritual ceremony.[31] The two cases from the 6th century which she considers to be most significant are the well-known narratives of Gregory of Tours about Count Palladius, who committed suicide, and of Gregory the Great about the monk Justus, who was guilty of hiding three pieces of gold. Both were buried within a monastery, but as a punishment for their sins they were denied a resting place close to the monks. In both cases the context shows clearly that this was meant to deprive them of the benefit of the liturgical commemoration of the souls of the deceased monks rather than to exclude them from a consecrated bounded space. Another shortcoming in Effros's argument is that she does not acknowledge the fact that church burials were subject to special restrictions. For example, Antoninus, an unworthy man according to Gregory of Tours, did not deserve to be buried in the basilica of St Vincent, and his sarcophagus was twice found lying in the courtyard of the church on the morning following its burial — but this tells us nothing about the supposed exclusiveness of ordinary burial-grounds. To substantiate the idea that 'preventing the integration of pagan and Christian burial places among the recently converted populations represented an issue of more immediate concern among clerics in Anglo-Saxon England than in contemporary Gaul', she quotes Theodore's Penitential, which advises against the consecration of an altar in a church where unbelievers are buried. Once again, however, the latter text refers to church burial and not to ordinary graveyards.[32]

The only Carolingian document imposing a change in places of burial is Charlemagne's Saxon Capitulary from the end of the 8th century, which stipulates

[28] H. Galinié, 'Tours de Grégoire, Tours des archives du sol', 65–80 in N. Gauthier and H. Galinié (eds.), *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace Gaulois: Actes du congrès international, Tours, 3–5 novembre 1994* (Tours, 1997); idem, 'Tours from an archaeological standpoint', 87–106 in C. E. Karkov, K. M. Wickham-Crowley and B. K. Young (eds.), *Spaces of the Living and the Dead: an Archaeological Dialogue* (Oxford, 1999).

[29] Rebillard, op. cit. in note 25, 1045–6.

[30] B. Effros, 'Beyond cemetery walls: early medieval funerary topography and Christian salvation', *Early Medieval Europe*, 6 (1997), 1–21; *Caring for Body and Soul: Burial and the Afterlife in the Merovingian World* (University Park Pennsylvania, 2002).

[31] Bullough, op. cit. in note 1, 192; C. Treffort, 'Consécration de cimetière et contrôle épiscopal des lieux d'inhumation au Xᵉ siècle', 286–99 in M. Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident: Etudes comparées* (Paris, 2001).

[32] Effros 2002, op. cit. in note 30, 65. On contemporary restrictions upon church burial in Gaul, see Treffort, op. cit. in note 1, 137–9.

that the bodies of Christian Saxons must be buried in churchyards and not in pagan graves, but the particular context of conquest and the forced Christianization of Saxony in which this law was promulgated does not really allow us to use it as the basis for generalization. Another well-known text is that of Jonas, bishop of Orleans at the end of the 9th century, who condemned those who demanded payment for allowing the burial of people in their fields — but as Cecile Treffort has pointed out, what the bishop disliked was the greed involved, not the burial in unconsecrated ground.[33]

The work of Dominique Iogna-Prat on Cluniac ecclesiology has shown that the construction of sacred space resulted from the doctrinal elaboration of places of worship over a long period of time, a process in which Carolingian liturgical exegesis played a crucial part.[34] He argues that the early church Fathers of the Latin West, preoccupied with eschatology, had spiritualized society rather than providing it with a territorial framework. It was not until the Carolingian period, particularly in the course of the 9th century, and later in the 11th and 12th centuries, that clerical writers outlined the boundaries separating sacred from profane time and space, the definition of the space belonging to the dead, the regulations concerning acceptable sites for the Eucharistic sacrifice. The notion that the church and its surrounding graveyard were the physical expression of the Church community, uniting both the living and the dead, was first stated by Hincmar (845–882) in his *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis*.[35] It was not before the end of this process that cemeteries became integrated into the hierarchy of sacred spaces based on the degree of proximity from the altar. The rites for consecrating cemeteries are first mentioned in the Pontificals in the beginning of the 10th century. The prohibition of the burial of a breaker of oaths in a consecrated graveyard, which is stated in the laws of the Anglo-Saxon King Aethelstan (925–932), is the first documentary evidence for the relationship between the consecration of the graveyard and the exclusion of those who do not belong to the Christian community.[36] It is also from the 10th–11th centuries that the possession of a churchyard became a decisive means of determining the hierarchy of churches. In the writings of Gregory of Tours or in the canons of the Merovingian councils, the main churches were those which had the right to perform baptism; however, from the 10th–11th centuries, the mother-churches are above all defined by their burial-rights. In the Anglo-Saxon law-codes, it is also from the 10th century that the possession of a churchyard defines the rank of a church in the ecclesiastical hierarchy: the laws of King Edgar make a distinction between private churches with a graveyard, which were entitled to a third of the tithe paid by their owners, and lesser churches.[37] However, it would probably be a mistake to consider that the churchyard, as an institution, was firmly established everywhere in the

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[33] Treffort, op. cit. in note 1, 168–9.
[34] D. Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom face Heresy, Judaism and Islam (1000–1150)* (Ithaca, 2002), 156–81.
[35] Hinkmar von Reims, *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis*, ed. M. Stratmann (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiqui, 14, Hannover, 1990).
[36] Bullough, op. cit. in note 1, 189–90; Treffort, op. cit. in note 1, 141–3; H. Gittos, 'Creating the sacred: Anglo-Saxon rites for consecrating cemeteries', 195–208 in Lucy and Reynolds (eds.), op. cit. in note 1.
[37] R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989), 129.

11th–12th centuries, or that it constituted the only legitimate place of burial. In fact, the obligation for a Christian to be buried in a churchyard seems to have long remained an object of debate. The use of churchyards is known to have been questioned by heretical movements, as is shown in the acts of the Synod of Arras in 1025.[38] At the beginning of the 12th century, the heretics of Soissons, according to Guibert de Nogent, made 'no distinction between the sacred ground of churchyards and other lands'. Even an orthodox author like Honorius Augustodunensis, at the beginning of the 12th century, was not convinced of the necessity for a Christian to be buried in a churchyard; his opinion was that 'since the whole world is the temple of God, consecrated by the blood of Christ, it is not indispensable for the just to be buried in the churchyard'. In contemporary records, references to the consecration of graveyards are extremely rare before the end of the 11th or even the 12th century, and it is not certain that the rite was widely practised before this period. At the end of the 11th century, in Provence, poor pilgrims were still being buried in a field outside the castle of Tarascon, and it was Pope Urban II who consecrated a graveyard and had a church built there during his journey through France in 1096.[39] Iogna-Prat has shown that in the course of the Gregorian reform consecrating churches became one of the most conspicuous rituals of western liturgy, and that this evolution may be connected with the elaboration of a eucharistic doctrine which stressed the 'reality' of the transformation of the bread and wine of the mass.[40] Promoting the consecration ritual was certainly on Pope Urban II's agenda on his journey through France in 1095–1096. In addition to the twenty-nine churches he dedicated, he consecrated several graveyards. The contemporary description of the consecration of the graveyard of St Nicolas in Marmoutier, which follows the dedication of the abbey church, shows that some of these churchyards could have huge dimensions.[41] The most famous consecration ceremony performed by Pope Urban II during his journey through France was certainly the making of the sacred ban that outlined the limits of Cluny's immunity.[42]

THE CONTRACTION OF CHURCHYARDS

The excavation of the churchyard in Rigny has highlighted a progressive reduction in size of the burial-ground which started as early as the 11th century and ended in the beginning of the 19th, just a few decades before the churchyard was transfered to a remote location (Fig. 3).[43] This observation was quite unexpected. When the excavation started, the working hypothesis was either that

[38] M. Lauwers, '*Dicunt vivorum beneficia nichil prodesse defunctis:* Histoire d'un thème polémique (XI^c–XII^c siècles)', 67–192 in M. Zerner (ed.), *Inventer l'hérésie? Discours polémique et pouvoir avant l'Inquisition* (Nice, 1998).
[39] E. Zadora-Rio, 'Lieux d'inhumation et espaces consacrés: Le voyage d'Urbain II en France (1095–1096)', 197–213 in A. Vauchez (ed.), *Lieux sacrés, lieux de culte, sanctuaires: approches terminologiques, historiques et monographiques* (Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome 273, Rome, 2000).
[40] D. Iogna-Prat, 'Léon IX, pape consécrateur', in B. M. Tock (ed.), *Léon IX* (Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, June 2002, Turnhout, forthcoming).
[41] Zadora-Rio, op. cit. in note 39.
[42] B. H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1999); D. Méhu, *Paix et communautés autour de l'abbaye de Cluny, X^c–XV^c s.* (Lyon, 2001).
[43] Zadora-Rio et al., op. cit. in note 22, 229–35. For other examples of shrinking churchyards in France, see Fixot and Zadora-Rio (eds.), op. cit. in note 2.
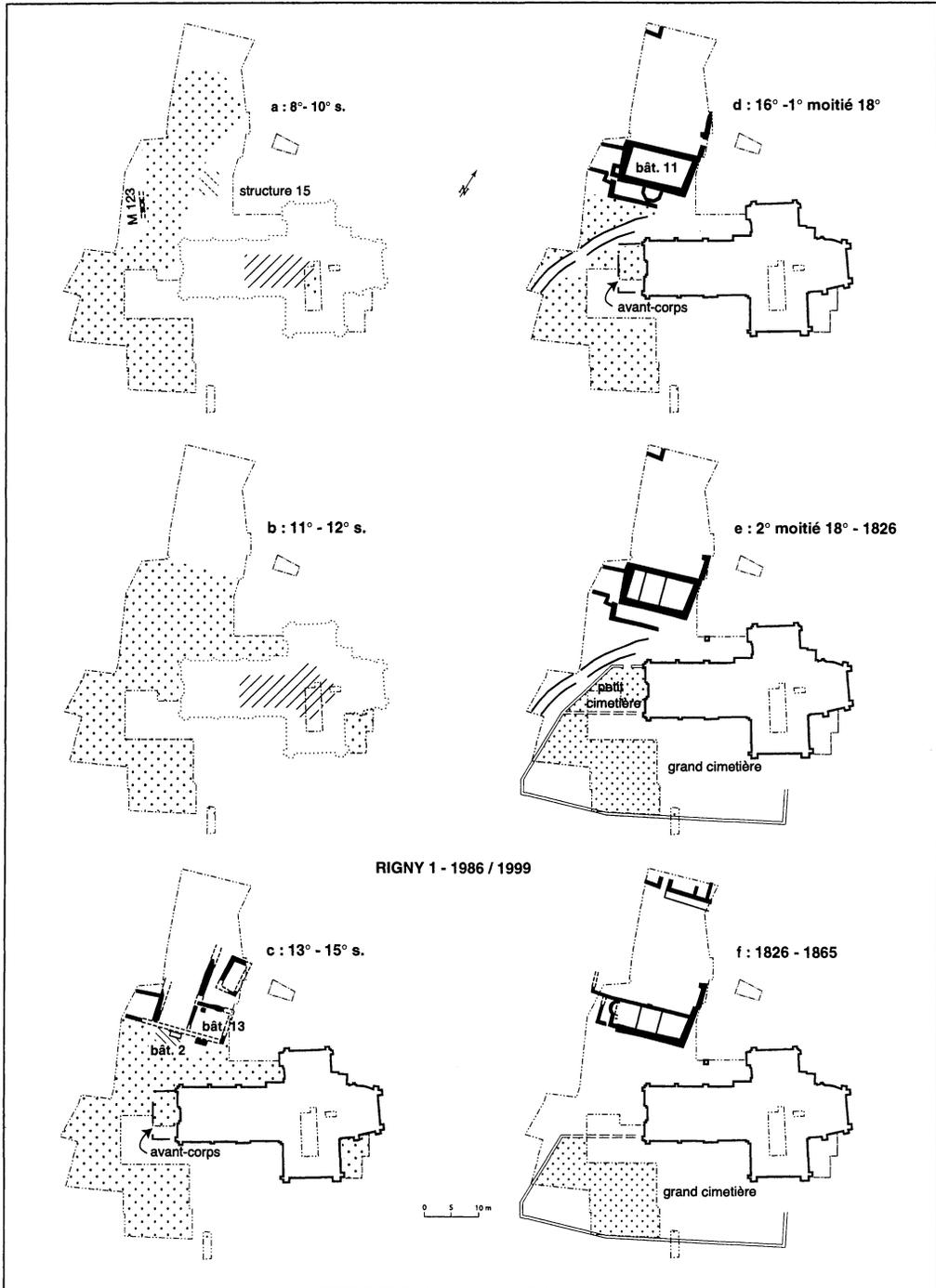
FIG. 3
Rigny (Indre-et-Loire): evolution of the graveyard (8th–19th centuries). *Drawn by C. Theureau.*

the graves had spread outwards from an initial cluster around the church, or that
the churchyard developed within a predefined boundary, as at Raunds. The
dynamic model which can be reconstructed from the archaeological evidence in
Rigny is quite different. There is no doubt that the burials belonging to the early
phase of inhumation, between the 8th and 10th centuries, occupied the greatest
area. A first contraction occurred by the end of the 10th century, when the church
was enlarged and the graves clustered around it. This process was interpreted as
evidence for an important change: the polarization of the burial-ground around
the church is deemed to be the physical expression of a new sense of church
community; it provides evidence for the making of the parish churchyard, as
opposed to the loose pattern of Early-medieval burials spreading across ruined
buildings. At this stage, the burial-ground was not enclosed and it was not yet
reserved exclusively for the dead.

In the 12th or 13th century, the construction of a boundary wall resulted in a
further reduction of the graveyard on the northern side of the church, and houses
were built on the former burial-area. Although the churchyard was clearly
bounded, the evidence of domestic structures and rubbish pits shows that activities
unrelated to burial were still carried out in the burial-ground, and a new building
with a large hearth was constructed within the graveyard at the end of the 15th
century. According to the archaeological evidence, it was during this period,
between the 12th/13th century and the end of the 15th, that the proximity between
the living and the dead was at its greatest. In the 16th century, the building of a
vicarage with a new boundary wall entailed an insignificant reduction of the burial-
ground area, but it marked a major transformation in the behavioural pattern of
the inhabitants. From the 16th century onwards, there is no more evidence for
domestic activities in the churchyard, which was now exclusively reserved for the
dead.

The final reductions of the churchyard occurred after 1752, with the
construction of boundary walls enclosing the 'Small cemetery' (petit cimitière) for
children and the 'Large cemetery' (grand cimitière) for adults, and shortly before
1826, with the suppression of the 'Small cemetery', resulting in the burial of adults
and children together in the 'Large cemetery' (Fig. 3). These last contractions were
certainly related to a well-known process: the modern hygienist prescriptions,
which led in France to the relocation of most cemeteries far away from villages in
the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Each of the successive reductions of the churchyard entailed an increased
density of burial, an accelerated turnover of the graves, and more frequent
intercuttings between them. The archaeological evidence therefore suggests that
the restriction of the surface of the churchyard must have been related to the
changing pattern of use of the burial-ground rather than to a fall in the size of the
buried population.

The dynamics of change at Rigny reflect a transformation of the relationship
between the living and the dead. It may be considered as a remote echo, both
delayed and distorted, of the medieval doctrinal discussions on the boundaries
separating sacred and profane spaces and the place belonging to the dead. The
ritual consecration of churchyards probably led to the conception of the burial

space as separate, and to the gradual exclusion of domestic activities from the churchyard. The will to eliminate dwellings from the graveyards is clearly stated in the synodical statutes of Angers, written in about 1220, and soon after adopted in all the bishoprics of western France: the statutes forbade the erection of new buildings in churchyards, and prohibited the rebuilding of any house left in ruins for one year.[44] This change in the conception of burial-grounds expressed in the ecclesiastical legislation as early as the 13th century seems to manifest itself at a much later period in the actual practice of the rural population: at Rigny, the constitution of a burial zone exclusively meant for the dead was only achieved in the 16th century.

A similar contraction of the graveyard has been noted in England at Rivenhall, Aylebury, Brixworth, Addingham, Crayke, Dacre, Jarrow, Monkwearmouth and several other places where late Anglo-Saxon burials have been excavated outside the limits of the medieval churchyard.[45] The interpretation proposed by John Blair is that the contraction of the churchyard resulted from a decline in the buried population, due to the expansion of the parish network. He believes that Saxon minsters would have needed a very large burial-ground to serve the population of their extensive parish territories while the subsequent development of parish churches with burial rights entailed a reduction of both territories and church-yards.[46] This explanation is widely accepted by many archaeologists, but con-sidering how few churchyards have been fully excavated, it would be worthwhile making allowance for an alternative hypothesis examining the possibility that the contraction of medieval burial-grounds in England might have resulted from a process similar to that which has been highlighted at Rigny.

BURIALS AND PARISH BOUNDARIES

The relationship between burial and territorial boundaries has attracted more interest in Britain than anywhere else in Europe because of the rich set of Anglo-Saxon charters incorporationg burial sites into boundary clauses. Following seminal papers by D. J. Bonney on early Anglo-Saxon burials in relation to parish boundaries, which suggested that pagan communities buried their dead at the limits of their estates,[47] Ann Goodier made an interesting attempt to investigate more closely the relationship between Anglo-Saxon burials and boundaries. Unfortunately, her statistical study is largely inconclusive because of the poor quality of the archaeological data (most of the burials are known only through excavations of many years ago; they cannot be located more precisely than within

[44] O. Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux français au XIIIᵉ siècle: I. Les statuts de Paris et le synodal de l'Ouest* (Paris, 1971), 158.
[45] R. Morris, op. cit. in note 1, 59; W. J. Rodwell and K. A. Rodwell, *Rivenhall: Investigations of a Villa, Church and Village 1950–1977* (CBA Res. Rep., 55, London, 1986), 79–106; Blair, op. cit. in note 5, 72; S. Wrathmell, 184–8 in M. Adams et al., 'Excavation of a pre-Conquest cemetery at Addingham, West Yorkshire', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XL (1996), 151–91; Hadley, op. cit. in note 1, 216–18.
[46] Blair, op. cit. in note 5, 72; idem, 'Introduction: from minsters to parish church', 1–19 in J. Blair (ed.), *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950–1200* (Oxford, 1988).
[47] D. J. Bonney, 'Early boundaries in Wessex', 168–86 in P. J. Fowler (ed.), *Archaeology and the Landscape: Essays for L. V. Grinsell* (London, 1972); idem, 'Early boundaries and estates in southern England', 72–82 in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976); Hadley, op. cit. in note 1.

a hundred metres and their dating is not accurate), and because of the small size of the sample.[48]

The subject has recently been revisited both by Martin Welch, who has suggested that the incorporation of barrows into estate boundaries merely reflects the practicalities of land surveying in the later Anglo-Saxon Period, and by Andrew Reynolds, who investigated the nature of the charter evidence.[49] According to Reynolds, burial sites incorporated into boundary clauses were related to contemporary practice rather than a distant memory of local toponyms preserved by late Anglo-Saxon surveyors. He claims that the term 'heathen burials' refers to the places of execution and burial of capital offenders and other outcasts, and that individual named burials represent deviants, perhaps dispossessed owners of the estates upon whose boundary they lie. According to him, the liminal burial of outcasts represented a new practice within the context of the Conversion.

Up to now the archaeological evidence in support of these interpretations has been very scanty, and the discussion of the relationship between burials and parish boundaries in England relies heavily on the Anglo-Saxon boundary charters, for which there is no equivalent in France. It is therefore impossible to determine which factors were specific to Anglo-Saxon England: the presence of burials on boundaries, or the habit of writing down boundary clauses, or both.

The nature of documentary evidence in France has directed investigations along a different line of enquiry. It is argued that the use of graveyards as a guide to the ranking of churches constituted an important step in the process of fixing the boundaries of rural parishes from the 10th century onwards. Contrary to a long-accepted idea, there is no real reason to think that the Merovingian baptismal churches were at the head of a parish territory. As Paul-Albert Février has pointed out, the term *parrochia* in the acts of the Merovingian councils designates either the church or the Christian community, but not the parish territory.[50]

One determining factor in the fixing of the parish boundaries was the tithe, although certainly not before the 9th or 10th century. When the council of Mâcon, in 585, imposed this payment, it made no mention of parishes; the tithe was then a general tax to be allocated by the bishop, and not a revenue attached to particular churches.[51] It was therefore of no consequence to territorial boundaries.

In the beginning of the 9th century, the so-called ecclesiastical Capitulary tried to constitute coherent fiscal land units by stipulating that each church must have a territory and receive the tithe of the vills within it, but the documentary evidence shows that this was far from being the rule in the 9th and 10th centuries:

[48] A. Goodier, 'The formation of boundaries in Anglo-Saxon England: a statistical study', *Medieval Archaeol.*, XXVIII (1984), 1–21.

[49] M. Welch, 'Rural settlement patterns in the Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon periods', *Landscape Hist.*, 7 (1985), 13–25; A. Reynolds, 'The definition and ideology of Anglo-Saxon execution sites and cemeteries', 33–41 in G. De Boe and F. Verhaeghe (eds.), *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe: Papers of the 'Medieval Europe Brugge 1997' Conference*, 2 (Zellik, 1997); idem, 'Burials, boundaries and charters in Anglo-Saxon England: a reassessment', 171–94 in Reynolds and Lucy (eds.), op. cit. in note 1.

[50] Février, op. cit. in note 20; F. Hautefeuille, Structures de l'habitat rural et territoires paroissiaux en bas-Quercy et haut-Toulousain du VIIᵉ au XIVᵉ siècle (unpubl. thesis, University of Toulouse, 1998); E. Zadora-Rio (ed.), *Des paroisses de Touraine aux communes d'Indre-et-Loire* (forthcoming).

[51] J. Gaudemet and B. Basdevant (eds.), *Les Canons des conciles mérovingiens* (Paris, 1989), 462–3. I am grateful to Martin Heinzelmann for discussion on this subject.

the territorial base for the tithe was often constituted of separate plots of land, sometimes many miles apart, which provided the basis for church revenues, but certainly not a coherent parish territory.[52] This would suggest that, even though attempts were made from the beginning of the 9th century to make the territorial basis of the tithe coincide with that of the vill, the establishment of coherent territories around the churches was far from straightforward. The constitution of churchyards certainly played an important part in this process of defining territories.

Historical records from the 11th–12th centuries reveal a strong link between the territory of the tithe and that of the catchment area of the churchyard. Documentary evidence indicates that the place of burial could be used as the basis for being considered a resident of a particular parish. For instance, in 1125, in a judgement dealing with a conflict about the tithe of a territory disputed between two churches, the decisive factor was held to be the burial place of people dwelling in the area: land formerly occupied by the deceased belonged to the parish in whose churchyard they were buried. It was the cemetery which ensured the parish boundaries.[53] This accounts for the violent disputes which sometimes occurred over burials, occasionally even those of very poor people. Historical documents of the 11th and 12th centuries tell of monks and nuns kidnapping dying people, exhuming and stealing corpses at night and fighting each other with candlesticks. What was really at stake was not the small amount of money paid for the burial but rather establishing to which parish the dead person's dwelling place belonged.[54]

CONCLUSION

The results of recent excavations and the subsequent revisiting of historical documents undoubtedly bring some commonly accepted ideas into question.

Archaeological evidence has shown that the introduction of graves into rural settlements was not necessarily linked to the construction of a church. The choice of a burial location does not in itself allow the evaluation of the level of Christianization among the population, as the Early-medieval Church did not impose any restrictions in this matter. During the Early Middle Ages, the choice of burial location probably depended on the family, and a great diversity of burial-grounds seems to have been used simultaneously, in the vicinity or at a distance from the church, within or at the outskirts of the settlements. The scattered burials cannot be interpreted as the graves of outcasts or non-Christians: they could only have been a sign of exclusion if community burial-grounds for lay people had existed at the same time, and these seem to have gained a status only at a late date, around the 10th or 11th century.

[52] F. Bange, 'L'ager et la villa: Structures du paysage et du peuplement dans la région mâconnaise à la fin du Haut Moyen-Age (IXᵉ–Xᵉ siècles)', *Annales Economies Sociétés Civilisations*, 3 (1984), 529–69; E. Lorans, *Le Lochois du haut Moyen Age au XIIIᵉ siècle* (Tours, 1996).

[53] E. Zadora-Rio, 'The role of cemeteries in the formation of medieval settlement patterns in western France', 171–86 in C. L. Redman (ed.), *Medieval Archaeology: Papers of the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies* (Binghamton, 1989).

[54] J. M. Bienvenu, 'Les conflits de sépulture en Anjou aux XIᵉ et XIIᵉ siècles', *Bullet. philol. hist. du Comité des Travaux Hist.* (1966), 673–85.

Documentary evidence suggests that the 10th century constituted an important stage, with the first references to the rite of consecration and the new importance of the churchyard in the ranking of rural churches. It is only between the 10th and 12th centuries, that the churchyard was established as the only burial place for the parish community and contributed to fixing the territorial boundaries of the parish.

The process of contraction of churchyards which has been noted both in France and in England is an important development which deserves further investigation. In the case of Rigny, it is argued that the shrinking of the graveyard is related to the changing pattern in the use of the burial-ground rather than a decline of the buried population. Various factors were responsible for this process of reduction. The key factor in the first contraction of the graveyard around the end of the 10th or beginning of the 11th century was the polarization of the burial-ground around the church, marking an important stage in the conceptualization of the parish community. The second reduction is related to the construction of the first boundary wall and the gathering of houses closer to the church and churchyard in the course of the 12th or 13th century. The third reduction in the 16th century is connected with the exclusion of domestic activities, revealing a new conception of the churchyard as a place strictly meant for funerary purposes. The archaeological evidence reflects the shifting boundaries between sacred and profane spaces and between the living and the dead.

In many respects, archaeological finds suggest that the pattern of development of burial practices on both sides of the Channel was more similar than expected, and that the Conversion period in England is probably less peculiar than usually believed. The decline of furnished burials in the 7th–8th centuries, the re-use of barrows and Roman buildings for inhumation, the presence of scattered graves within Early-medieval settlements, the diversity of burial locations in use until the 10th or 11th century, the late emergence of a general pattern of churchyard burial and the process of contraction of the graveyard are recorded both in France and England. The differences in the explanatory frameworks need a closer examination, and might be more related to the nature of the historical documents and historiographical traditions than to the archaeological evidence, as in the case of the close relationship between burials and estate and parish boundaries which is strongly emphasized in England and is unrecorded in France.