

Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy submitted by Claes Theliander, January 21st 2006, 13.00 in room T 302 Arkeologen, Olof Wijksgatan 6, Department of Archaeology, Göteborg University, Sweden.

Abstract

Västergötlands kristnande. Religionsskifte och gravskicket förändring 700–1200 (The Christianisation of Västergötland. Changing religion and mortuary practice AD 700-1200).

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In my PhD-thesis I present issues that deal with the transformation of ancient Scandinavian religion into Christianity, a transformation which is evident in the mortuary practices from 8th to 12th century AD in the region of Västergötland, in western Sweden.

In part one I discuss and evaluate the relevant theoretical and methodological considerations and formulate a critical realistic and existential inspired archaeology. My point of departure is influenced by the theories of British philosopher Roy Bhaskar and the Swiss psychoanalyst Ludwig Binswanger and on the basis of this theoretical approach I argue that man is formed by nature as well as culture. Furthermore I argue that an objective reality does exist and can be studied but that our knowledge of this is theoretically dependent and subjective.

In the second part of the dissertation the archaeological material is presented in a comprehensive catalogue and in tabular form. This material comprises of all the graves examined in the province, which can, with relative certainty, be dated to the time period of the 8th to 12th century AD (approximately 800 graves at 190 sites).

A qualitative analysis of the material in the catalogue is carried out in part three. In the material two distinct traditions can be discerned: an older ancient Scandinavian and a younger Christian tradition. The older tradition's external and interior burial custom seems, with time, to develop into a monotonous, quiet, custom and my interpretation of this transformation is that this is evidence of an advanced stage in the contemporary secularization of this society, an important condition for a shift in religion. The traditional older burial grounds, and thereby the older tradition, stop being used in the middle of the 10th century AD and instead Christian mortuary practices appear at new sites. This coincides with the emergence of Christian congregations at this time, i.e. approximately one hundred to two hundred years before the majority of the Scandinavian populations define themselves as Christians.

Key words: Change of religion, mortuary practice, graves, critical realism, existentialism, early medieval, iron age, Sweden, Västergötland

English revision by Fiona Campbell.