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The orientation of early medieval churches in England

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Abstract

Early medieval (seventh to early twelfth century) churches in central and southern England display an average alignment which is close to true east ($\chi^2 = 88^\circ T$, $n = 183$). This near liturgically-correct orientation can only have been achieved by astronomical means. Sixty-two per cent of the measured buildings lie within the range $80^\circ \hat{a} \text{€} 100^\circ T$; such relatively minor discrepancies may be due largely to foundation setting-out errors. A considerable proportion of those churches which deviate significantly from true east were probably established on sites which were constrained by older structures in towns, and perhaps by the natural topography in rural areas.



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