

## **Bodies, Stones and Prayer: the hogbacked stones of early medieval Britain in their cultural and ritual context**

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The striking 'hogbacked' gravestones of northern England and southern Scotland, created between the ninth and eleventh centuries AD, have attracted much scholarly interest, but there is no consensus about what they mean or whence they draw their inspiration, although they are often ascribed to Viking incomers. The term 'hogback' encompasses an extraordinary variety of different types of monument, and it is likely that they are instantiations of several different ideas. However, a significant number of surviving monuments are markedly asymmetrical, with one end being both higher and wider than the other, a feature that has not hitherto been the focus of research. This paper is a contextualising case study of the stones from Meigle (Perth and Kinross), Govan (Glasgow) and Inchcolm (Fife). It explores the meaning of this asymmetry, arguing that the stones shadow the form of the recumbent human body and that the genre intersects with indigenous pre-existing practices of shrouding or otherwise containing the corpse in more fugitive materials. This is set within the context of increasingly elaborate lay memorialisation towards the end of the first millennium.