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978-0-521-76154-3 - Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland

Sarah Tarlow

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Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland

Drawing on archaeological, historical, theological, scientific and folkloric sources, Sarah Tarlow's interdisciplinary study examines belief as it relates to the dead body in early modern Britain and Ireland. From the theological discussion of bodily resurrection to the folkloric use of body parts as remedies, and from the judicial punishment of the corpse to the ceremonial interment of the social elite, this book discusses how seemingly incompatible beliefs about the dead body existed in parallel through this tumultuous period. This study, the first to incorporate archaeological evidence of early modern death and burial from across Britain and Ireland, addresses new questions about the materiality of death: what the dead body means and how its physical substance could be attributed with sentience and even agency. It provides a sophisticated original interpretive framework for the growing quantities of archaeological and historical evidence about mortuary beliefs and practices in early modernity.

Sarah Tarlow is Senior Lecturer in Historical Archaeology at the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester. She is the author of *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality* (1999) and *The Archaeology of Improvement in Britain, 1750–1850* (Cambridge 2007) and co-editor of *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain* (1999) and *Thinking through the Body* (2002). She has published widely on archaeological theory, later historical archaeology and the interdisciplinary study of death.

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*To Olwynne Tarlow
And in memory of Michael Tarlow*

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Preface

This book is one of two major publications resulting from my involvement in the ‘Changing Beliefs of the Human Body’ research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. It is a companion to Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow (forthcoming). Whereas Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow is a more descriptive and data-rich survey of archaeological evidence relating to death and disposal in Britain and Ireland over the last 500 years, this book is an interpretive and inter-disciplinary study of beliefs about the dead human body. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for funding the project and to the universities of Leicester and Cambridge for supporting its administration and resourcing. Zoe Crossland and Annia Cherryson, my colleagues in this research, have been invaluable sources of information, ideas, critiques and support at every stage. Many other individuals and organisations have offered their advice, drawn our attention to sites and made available their archives. A fuller list of our collective debts of gratitude is in Cherryson, Crossland and Tarlow (forthcoming), but here I would like to record my personal thanks to colleagues on the ‘Changing Beliefs’ project, especially John Robb and Oliver Harris, for productive and challenging discussions. Maryon Macdonald, Oliver Harris and Annia Cherryson read a draft of the whole manuscript, and I thank them heartily for their useful suggestions, as I also thank the two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press. Many thanks to Nick Pearson of On-Site Archaeology and Andrew Chamberlain of Sheffield University, who discussed the York Barbican site with me and provided photographs.

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Finally, I thank my family: Mark, Rachel, Adam and Gregory, for being full of life when I was peering into the grave. My parents, Mike and Olwynne Tarlow, have always supported and indulged my interest in things funereal. My father's death during the writing of this book was a painful personal encounter with the complexities of belief and mortality. This book is dedicated to his memory and to my mother.