Reflecting on the Dead: Productive Relations and Changing Burial Practices in Early Medieval England[1]

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From the fifth-century end of Roman social and political institutions to the conversion of the early English kingdoms to Christianity by the end of the seventh century, many of those living in Britain changed the places and the methods by which they buried their dead. Changes in something as fundamental as burial practices would seem to signal profound alterations in the whole of early English society. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, archaeologists and historians commonly concluded that the evidence for fifth- through seventh-century changes in practices like burial and settlement documented a substantial "invasion" by and settlement of continental Germanic peoples in Britain, although many of those scholars also acknowledged that this invasion was essentially invisible—what Frank Stenton called "national movements of which nothing [certain] is told" in the surviving sources.[2] Early twentieth-century archaeologists and material historians like E. T. Leeds and Gerard Baldwin Brown constructed for those who followed them an interpretive framework by fitting material evidence, often from burials, into a chronology extrapolated from works like Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that were written centuries after the *adventus Saxonum*.[3]

The last half-century of scholarship has upended these assumptions and the chronology based on them. Archaeologists and historians now apply a critical awareness of how early medieval texts functioned as ideological statements rather than as "objective histories" to interpret a growing body of material evidence for sub-Roman and early medieval Britain. The post-processualist grounding of archaeological interpretation in evidence-based understanding of both social

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[1] This article originated in a paper I presented at the 49th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo. Its development and refinement are the result of the incisive and constructive criticism I received at that time and subsequently from the anonymous reviewers for *Enarratio*.

[2] Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 277–278.

[3] For examples, see John Hines, "The Archaeological Study of Early Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries," in *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework*, ed. Alexandra Bayliss and John Hines, The Society of Medieval Archaeology Monograph 33 (London: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2013), 14–17; Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600-c.850*, BAR British Series 261 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997), 2; James Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain: An Archaeological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3; and Helena Hamerow, "Migration Theory and the Anglo-Saxon 'Identity Crisis,'" in *Migration and Invasions in Archaeological Explanation*, ed. John Chapman and Helena Hamerow, BAR International Series 664 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1997), 3–4.

structure and social change also has helped reveal complex interrelationships among fifth- through seventh-century grave goods, funerary practices, and burial locations. This disruption of old interpretive schemes has made it trickier to frame some historical questions about the lives and thought of those who, by the eighth century, had become known as the *Angli Saxones*, the "Anglo-Saxons" or Saxons of England.[4] Some archaeologists and materially-focused historians now assert that early medieval graves and grave goods are mute on religious ideology. This is in part because critical analysis has raised severe doubts about the "migration and replacement" model, and also because fifth- and sixth-century burials in Britain reflect a variety of practices that could derive from multiple ethnic and religious origins and that often appear in site-specific combinations. Additionally, textual sources in England and on the continent suggest that the Christian church did not begin to regulate burial in until the seventh-century conversion of early English kingdoms was well underway.[5] It is easy to understand scholars' hesitation when the once-prevailing interpretation of this period, which Susan Oosthuizen rightly has characterized as an outmoded "paradigmatic straight-jacket,"[6] consistently fails to correlate with material evidence. But because history from a social-historical perspective seeks to comprehensively determine what

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[4] Hines, 27. While the term "Anglo-Saxon" has a long tradition beginning with Bede's *Anglorum sive Saxonum gens* (*Historia ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum* i.15), even Bede was, at best, repeating eighth-century origin myths. Critical consideration by scholars like N. J. Higham (*(Re-)Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context*) and Steven Bassett ("In Search of the Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms") demonstrates that early English narrative and genealogical sources reveal their authors' and royal patrons' use of history for political ends far more reliably than they accurately record the identities and movements of peoples. While medieval writers may have thought of the early medieval inhabitants of eastern Britain as the "English Saxons," the influences that shaped those inhabitants were far more complex that that label allows. Moreover, the contemporary association of the term "Anglo-Saxon" with at best Anglophony and at worst "whiteness" and racist ideology renders its tainted beyond rehabilitation. In response to these issues, I have chosen to refer to the peoples who entered eastern Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries and participated in a broadly identified Germanic cultural system as people of "continental Germanic" origin. They, together with native Britons, developed societies distinct from those of the Brittonic-speaking regions to the west and far north of the island, and I call those eastern British societies "early English" and the region they inhabited "early medieval England."

Though I reject the term "Anglo-Saxon," I nevertheless use the often-maligned term "pagan" that originated as a Roman slur against the ignorant dwellers of the *pagus* or countryside. A look at even the most recent of medieval bibliographies shows that "pagan" remains widely used to denote European non-Christian religious beliefs and practices, just as "Anglo-Saxon" remains in use. However, "pagan" does not share the same racist frisson as "Anglo-Saxon;" instead, it serves as a useful way to categorize ancient and medieval religions without defining them solely in relation to Christianity (as the terms "pre-Christian" and "non-Christian" do). I therefore call the religious practices of this period that are not identified as Christian "pagan" with the provision that active syncretism surely meant that a number of religious symbols and activities were connected to both pagan and Christian ideologies, as well as to economic and social ideas, in the minds of early medieval British peoples.

[5] For examples, see Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400–1070*, The Penguin History of Britain 2 (London: Penguin, 2011), 148; Guy Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 246–7; and Bailey K. Young, "Merovingian Funeral Rites and the Evolution of Christianity: A Study in the Historical Interpretation of Archaeological Material" (University of Pennsylvania, 1975), 77.

[6] Susan Oosthuizen, "Recognizing and Moving on from a Failed Paradigm: The Case of Agricultural Landscapes in Anglo-Saxon England c. AD 400–800," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 24, no. 2 (June 2016): 181.

changed in early England's economic, religious, and political ideologies to produce social and material changes, it should consider religion as well as ethnicity and status even though the marks those ideologies leave on material evidence are complicated to trace.

From this social-historical perspective, how communities buried their dead was part of the whole fabric of their society. Religious understanding shaped and reinforced material reality as much as it did ideas about death and the transition to the afterlife. Societies used funerary rituals not only to minimize and redirect the psychosocial and cosmological disruption caused by the death of a member of the community but also to demonstrate and reinforce the wealth, power, and status of the dead and their kin. Moreover, on the most basic material level, death could disrupt both land-holding and lordship, relationships for which we have very little early English textual evidence. Exploring changes in burial in regions of fifth- and sixth-century Britain that were influenced by continental Germanic populations therefore is critical to understanding early English history.

Historical materialism, grounded as it is in evidence of lived experience, presents a useful framework for understanding these changes. Even though Marx's and Engel's "specific empirical claims about medieval Europe" are as outdated as previous generations of Anglo-Saxonists' claims about grave goods and Christian conversion,[7] a marxist-derived approach can reveal the "interpenetration and interdependence of society's forces and relations of production, politics, law, and ideology" and help us make sense of social interrelationships, structures, and idea that shaped early English life and death.[8] According to this approach, the choice of how to bury the dead, the deposition of grave goods, and the initial creation and later abandonment of cemeteries focused on prehistoric monuments all were actions grounded in the reproduction of particular social relations—the particular ideas, roles, and relationships that enabled elites to control land and people alike. Moreover, because, as John Moreland emphasizes, people actively employ both material and texts to produce "community and self,"[9] we can create an historical understanding from burial evidence of how economic and social identities and structures developed in the fifth and sixth centuries. That understanding then enables us to explore how seventh-century agents of the Christian church would have found in early English a repertoire of burial practices and social relations that could be made congruent with their own ideologies of burial, community, and authority. This made it possible for them to shape and use these practices to inculcate Christianity into early English society while reinforcing the social reproduction of the established economic basis of that society.

The analysis that follows surveys burial practices from the fifth through the seventh centuries, primarily in the east of Britain (the region of early medieval England). After first grappling with some of terminological challenges this setting demands (challenges that themselves demonstrate how lively and timely debate

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[7] Stephen H. Rigby, "Historical Materialism: Social Structure and Social Change in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 498.

[8] Rigby, 509.

[9] John Moreland, *Archaeology and Text* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 82.

over the transition from Roman Britain to early medieval England remains), it examines evidence for economic and social relations of production in Britain after Rome and how those relations can be seen in the varied and changing burial practices of the fifth and sixth centuries. It then discusses how agents of a newly-adopted religious ideology, Christianity, could interpret and adapt existing burial practices in ways that continued to support established relations of production while asserting their own participation in and religious interpretation of them. Underlying all of this is the exploration of how the organizing idea of social relations of production—the institutions and ideas that express and reinforce specific economic relations and shape "the social, political and intellectual life-process generally"[10]—can provide a framework that supports analysis of material and textual evidence to understand the interactions among economic structures, ethnic identity, social status, and religious affiliation in sub-Roman and early medieval Britain.

Economic and Social Relations in Britain after Rome

One of the fundamental areas of contention that reassessing sub-Roman and early English burial evidence from an historical-material perspective can help resolve is the extent to which late Roman Britain became early medieval England as the result of incursion by continental Germanic peoples. After the early fifth-century withdrawal of the Roman military, Britain entered a substantially undocumented but materially active "dark age"[11] that lasted until the beginning of the piecemeal seventh-century conversion of the region's rulers to Christianity. Material evidence indicates that the loss of Roman military support occurred late in a chain of events that unraveled the province's economic and political fabric. Both Britain's urban centers and its villas appear to have been in decline by the early fifth century.[12] Studies of coin loss show that no Roman coinage was issued in Britain after 402 CE, with that last issue not making it as far north as Hadrian's Wall. In what had been a heavily militarized region separating Romano-Britons and non-Romanized peoples to the north, the disappearance of coins lost from soldiers' pay packets suggests that most if not all of the provincial legions had been withdrawn to the south of the island before leaving for good some time before the mid-fifth century.[13]

What, however, did the end of Britain as a Roman province truly mean for fifth-century British society? It could be that the loss of Roman culture, with its currency-based economy, stone building, urban life, and, likely, Latin as the

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[10] Karl Marx, "'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 159–160.

[11] A term I use advisedly to mark a period with almost no textual witnesses, a designation for which this nearly two-century span certainly qualifies.

[12] Fleming, *Britain after Rome*, 25.

[13] Kevin Greene, *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 55 figs. 19 and 56.

language of the upper class, represented a fundamental cultural collapse, at least in eastern Britain where some combination of the remaining Romano-British inhabitants and incoming continental Germanic peoples subsequently created a distinctly post-Roman society. However, evidence for daily life and economic production in Britain east and west reveals fundamental continuities from late Roman Britain to early medieval England. During the Empire, agriculture had supported urban centers, and Romanized British elites had participated in and benefitted from the "surplus extraction from localized economic and social systems"[14] that Rome's political economy made possible. The rapid but not immediate "disappearance of coins, a money-using economy, and the apparatus of the Roman state"[15] in the early fifth century may have produced a windfall for those elites, who would have been able to keep the surplus production they once had transferred to the state as taxes. Material evidence indicates that landowners used this newly freed surplus to obtain high-status foreign goods from continental networks,[16] support clients, and pay mercenaries, strategies that would have enabled them to retain the authority that previous had been legitimized by their association with Rome.[17] Mercenaries would have been critical to that effort, as then not only defended and expanded elites' land holdings but also supported coercive control over the peasants on whose production elites depended. The one Romano-British text that survives from the early sixth century, the western British bishop Gildas's jeremiad *De excidio Britanniae* (*The Ruin of Britain*), recounts that continental Germanic warriors were invited into Britain by a "tyrant"—that is, by an illegitimate British ruler (illegitimate either because of his lack of legal authority or because of his sinfulness, both of which approbations would fit Gildas's tone)—and states that this tyrant gave these warriors *epimenia*, monthly rations, "as if they were [Roman] soldiers (*veluti militibus*)."[18] Post-Imperial Romano-British elites who had relied on Roman political and military authority, then, likely found that clients and mercenaries enabled them to continue to appropriate surplus even though no overarching state still demanded it.

This was not the only adaptation they made. Studies of field boundaries and animal remains indicate that, at least in some parts of the island, elites responded to the loss of Roman state structures by replacing labor-intensive large-scale Roman agricultural production with pastoral operations that demanded fewer laborers.[19] This scaling-back put Britain's economy in line with early medieval northern European pastoral economies in Ireland, whose legendary history featured cattle raids as the way those with lordly ambitions gained status and

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[14] James Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain: An Archaeological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 86.

[15] Gerrard, 99.

[16] See Gerrard, 176–177; and Ian Riddler and Mike Trevarthen, *The Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel, Kent*, ed. Jacqueline McKinley, CTRL335 (Oxford: Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture and London and Continental Railways, 2006), 62–63 for examples.

[17] Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain*, 251–3.

[18] Gildas, "*De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*," in *Auctorum Antiquissimorum Tomus XIII*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Berlin: Wiedman, 1898), III: 39.

[19] Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain*, 103.

power, and the North Sea coastal regions of continental Europe.[20] Both the continental Germanic peoples who dominated the east of Britain from the fifth century on and the Brittonic-speaking peoples who dominated the north and west of Britain became familiar with pastoral economies, including managing herds and herders and collecting and trading secondary animal products like leather and bone.

Nevertheless, moving from a primarily agricultural to a primarily pastoral means of production would not have required alteration of the fundamental social relations of production vis a vis the relations between those who controlled labor and those who provided it. To what extent peasants' lives and work changed with this transition is a point of debate. Jairus Banaji has asserted that direct control of the land and those who worked it is not something that landholders would have abandoned when the structure of estates and what they produced changed.[21] More recently, Susan Oosthuizen has argued convincingly that communities of peasants in Britain not only controlled common grazing lands during the Roman occupation but also extended that control to arable lands and agricultural production after the Roman period, creating a communal social and economic structure that English lords acknowledged and, beginning in the eighth century, used to exert their authority over those peasants and their production.[22] Fifth- and sixth-century peasants likely were economically and legally subjected to aristocrats and kings in a number of ways: some as unfree peasants who made direct tribute or rent payments to lords, and others as free peasants, called *ceorlas* in early English law codes, who paid less but still acknowledged those lords' political authority.[23] Whether singly or collectively, as Oosthuizen and Chris Wickham suggest, free and unfree peasants engaged in economic and social relationships that subordinated them to the aristocrats who controlled land and its production. That subordination was fundamental to the social relations of what Marx called the "feudal mode of production" but that John Haldon, based on the characterization of Samir Amin, usefully has described as a general "tributary mode of production" through which ruling lords' extracted surplus as some form of tribute, tax, or rent from peasant communities.[24] That extraction depended on a continuum of coercion; peasants gave up their surplus not only to secure protection or deter predation by a lord's men, but also in response to custom and tradition. Whether "British" or "English," those living on land controlled by a lord were bound by those elements of social relations that made control of their labor possible. Therefore, from the fifth century on, peasants individually and

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[20] Aidan O'Sullivan, "Europe's Wetlands from the Migration Period to the Middle Ages: Settlement, Exploitation, and Transformation, AD 400–1500," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wetland Archaeology*, ed. Francesco Menotti and Aidan O'Sullivan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29–30.

[21] Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*, Historical Materialism Book Series 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 203–4.

[22] Susan Oosthuizen, *Tradition and Transformation in Anglo-Saxon England: Archaeology, Common Rights and Landscape* (London : New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 192.

[23] Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 323.

[24] John Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London: Verso, 1993), 66–67.

collectively continued in their subordinate status even as the identities and material expressions of their societies changed.

What, then, of Romano-British aristocrats—the "Romanized" British aristocracy of the early fifth century who had owned agricultural *villae* and managed the province's urban centers? Among the general trajectories that Banaji proposes for the post-Roman European aristocracy are that they dispersed in the face of invasion in some regions while in others becoming rulers of subkingdoms through benefaction by superior monarchs and the "circulation of estates [*villae*] within the ruling establishment."[25] Gildas's account of armed conflict and the loss of territory to Germanic invaders seems consistent with the first of these models, as do his and continental authors' accounts that identify British Christians and their bishop as immigrants to mid-fifth-century Amorica (Brittany).[26] These accounts founder on the fact that, as Oosthuizen cogently summarizes, the archeological record does not support the long-accepted model of a large-scale invasion by continental Germanic peoples of a substantially weakened and depopulated Britain and those peoples' expulsion of the remaining Romano-British inhabitants.[27] In response, N.J. Higham and others have argued that Gildas's "advent of the Saxons" consisted of "an elite takeover by a small number of [Germanic] individuals filling the power vacuum left by the retreat" of Rome and its institutions.[28] The discovery of relatively few richly-furnished Germanic-style fifth- and sixth-century graves does not necessarily preclude the assertion that a small number of continental Germanic elites led a much larger number of their retainers and subordinates to take control of eastern Britain,[29] but computer simulations examining "the rate of increase in overall frequency of chromosomes" found only among continental Germanic peoples support the hypothesis that these peoples initially rose to dominance not by sheer numbers, but by preserving their ethnic identity through social practices such as the control of intermarriage between themselves and native Britons.[30] Nevertheless, if pots are not necessarily people, then neither are chromosomes; the spread of "English" culture derived from even a small group of successfully assertive continental Germanic peoples could have happened as easily through trade and other contacts as through migration and ethnic dominance. Nothing would have prevented Romano-British elites in other parts of eastern and southern Britain from confirming their own lordship by dominating peasants and legitimizing that domination through the management of symbolic displays, such as burial practice, that associated them with burgeoning early English culture. Once they adopted that culture and

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[25] Banaji, *Theory as History*, 209.

[26] Lloyd Robert Laing, *The Archaeology of Celtic Britain and Ireland, c. AD 400–1200* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 244–245.

[27] Oosthuizen, "Recognizing and Moving on from a Failed Paradigm," 190–1.

[28] Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain*, 181; N. J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[29] Sally Crawford, "Britons, Anglo-Saxons and the Germanic Burial Ritual," in *Migration and Invasions in Archaeological Explanation*, ed. John Chapman and Helena Hamerow, BAR International Series 664 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1997), 67.

[30] Mark G. Thomas, Michael P. H. Stumpf, and Heinrich Härke, "Evidence for an Apartheid-like Social Structure in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 273, no. 1601 (October 22, 2006): 2651–2657.

"ethnicity," then intermarriage would have become that much easier. Moreover, expansion of culture is congruent with a fifth-century change to a pastoral economy as well, since both British and English elites could have used the same modes and social relations of production to control land, assemble and reward their followers, dominate peasant producers, and obtain and deploy status-affirming luxury items.

Despite Britain's fifth- and sixth-century division into often-acrimonious populations headed by Romano-British- and Germanic-descended elites, both the British areas to the west and far north and the English areas to the south and east appear to have developed similar socioeconomic structures. They did this despite fundamental differences in religion, ethnicity, and language because their differing ideologies and material expressions supported the same mode of production. This is because, as John Haldon convincingly asserts, it was "the fundamental economic relationships of exploitation, surplus appropriation, and distribution" and "the connection between these and their forms of expression in structures of political power" and social practice that essentially defined pre-modern societies.[31] Burial practices were part of the repertoire of material expressions of these social relations of production.

BURIALS AND LORDSHIP

Fifth- and sixth-century British and Germanic elites shared similar approaches to asserting lordship and controlling surplus. One thing that does seem to have separated them through the end of the sixth century was religion: elites whose background was Romano-British were Christian, while elites from continental Germanic backgrounds were pagan. So flat a statement naturally covers a mass of qualifications, but fundamentally there is no critical or material reason to question the earliest medieval witnesses on this point. Within the Insular world, Irish Christianity and its influence in the north of Britain is well recorded in the fifth and sixth centuries, while the bishop Gildas wrote about Christian relics and shrines in sixth-century western Britain.[32] None of these sources describe continental Germanic peoples who entered Britain as Christian—quite the opposite—and there is no evidence of organized Christianity among inhabitants of eastern and southern Britain until the end of the sixth century.

Whether sub-Roman and early medieval British elites were Christian or pagan, however, their burial of the dead was both a religious and a social event. While graves may not say much directly about religious adherence, as we shall see, other ideological elements like status and identity that supported the dominant mode of production are visible in mortuary practices. Status is only effective when

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[31] Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production*, 6.

[32] Richard Morris, *The Church in British Archaeology*, Research Report 47 (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1983), 25. Huw Price also writes that "inscribed memorial stones show that Christianity was well established in Wales by the fifth and sixth centuries;" "Pastoral Care in Early Medieval Wales," in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1992), 41.

communicated, and the social communication of status involves "standing out" by employing such markers as the use of restricted items or materials or the construction of monuments. Evidence from the fifth through the sixth centuries shows that the developing early English culture employed mortuary practices that concretely demonstrated the elevated status of a landholding elite.

The repertoire of mortuary practices found in the south and east of Britain in the fifth- through seventh-century included either internment of the corpse or cremation and the burial of cremains, frequently in urns; internment of material objects with the corpse or cremains; and the creation of or the incorporation of graves into existing, usually pre-Roman, monuments.[33] Many cemeteries included both cremation and inhumation burials over their periods of use, but it generally appears that cremation was the earlier of these practices. The first two phases of burial at the extensive sub-Roman cemetery at Spong Hill in Norfolk, which ranged roughly from 400/425 CE through 455/480 CE, were of cremations, primarily in urns, while the last phase (which ended between 520 and 535 CE) included a cluster of inhumation graves that likely were created over the span of a few generations and centered on a single burial, a rectangular wooden chamber that was roofed with turf and covered with a now ploughed-over mound.[34] In contrast, at the burial complex north of the village of Saltwood in Kent, a location that saw activity from the Bronze Age onward and where at least three distinct sub-Roman and early English cemeteries were in use from 500–750 CE, the few cremation graves present date from prior use of the site in the first or second century CE.[35]

The choice of whether to inhume or to cremate could have signaled a variety of different ethnic identities and religious beliefs. Although Romans, especially Roman Christians, rejected cremation, inhumation graves were not necessarily Christian. Inhumation did not supersede cremation in northern Britain until the early fourth century and prevailed even later in southwest Britain,[36] even through the Roman troops there likely were predominantly Christian by both

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[33] Martin Carver, "Agency, Intellect and the Archaeological Agenda," in *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited*, ed. Martin Carver, Alex Sanmark, and Sarah Semple (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 9.

[34] Catherine Hills, "Spong Hill and the *Adventus Saxonum*," in *Spaces of the Living and the Dead: An Archaeological Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Karkov, Kelley M Wickham-Crowley, and Bailey K Young, American Early Medieval Studies 3 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 20–21; chronological phasing is given in Catherine Hills and Sam Lucy, *Spong Hill Part IX: Chronology and Synthesis*, McDonald Institute Monographs (Cambridge, UK: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, 2013), 232.

[35] Andrew Reynolds, "The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods," in *On Track: The Archaeology of High Speed I Section I in Kent*, ed. Alex Smith, Monograph, no. 4 (Oxford: Oxford Wessex Archaeology, 2011), 350; Ian Riddler, "Late Iron Age and Romano-British Burial," in *The Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel, Kent*, ed. Jacqueline McKinley, CTRL335 (Oxford: Oxford Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture and London and Continental Railways, 2006), 22–23.

[36] Elizabeth O'Brien, "Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England: The Burial Evidence Reviewed" (University of Oxford, 1996), 23, https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:e415687f-4964-4225-8bc3-23e4ab8e5e78.

demographics and imperial policy.[37] Cremation, which as we have seen was practiced again beginning in the first half of the fifth century, did not disappear rapidly from early English regions with the Christian missions of the seventh century; examination of mixed cremation and inhumation cemeteries in parts of southern England that were proximate to the Roman mission of St. Augustine of Canterbury in the last decade of the sixth century has turned up cremation burials that plausibly date from then.[38] Adding to the complexity, inhumation was not a uniform practice. Most bodies, but not all, were interred supine, and graves could be oriented on a north-to-south axis as well as on the east-to-west orientation that frequently is considered a marker of "Christian" burial.[39]

Despite this almost bewildering variety of mortuary practices, it does seem that burial in the areas where continental Germanic peoples settled generally remained closely tied to continental practices. This is witnessed by the "deployment in furnished inhumation of distinctive clothing and material culture suites clearly derived from Continental Germanic antecedents of the earlier fifth century and cognate with contemporary material cultures in the North Sea coastal region of the continent and southern Scandinavia."[40] This circulation of burial practices between Britain and the continent,[41] rather than any Christianizing influence, plausibly accounts for change from cremation to inhumation in Britain. An elaborate inhumation burial found at Högom in northern Sweden dates from the fifth century CE, a period when that region was not likely "to have been under much pressure from Christian missionaries."[42] Northern European cemeteries of this period also displayed a mixture of north-south and east-west grave orientations and, like early English cemeteries at Saltwood and elsewhere, were located at sites with prehistoric earthworks.[43] Without denying that Christian burial was done by inhumation, it seems clear that in the early English period, choosing to cremate rather than to inter the corpse of the deceased signified not the deceased's religious affiliation but instead their "Germanic" rather than British identity. Moreover, that identity was expressed primarily by expressing difference. Howard Williams asserts that burning rather than burying the body of the deceased was a choice made "to articulate social distinctions in different ways in different burial environments," so that the persistence over generations of cremation as a minority practice within what were otherwise inhumation cemeteries likely represents conscious preservation of a kin group's or distinct

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[37] Per Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7 table 1.1.

[38] Nick Stoodley, "Discussion: The Early Cemetery and Its Place Within Southern England," in *The Origins of Mid-Saxon Southampton: Excavations at the Friends Provident St. Mary's Stadium, 1998-2000*, ed. Vaughan Birbeck (Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology, 2005), 76.

[39] Crawford, "Germanic Burial Ritual," 63.

[40] Christopher Scully, "Burial Practice in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework*, ed. Alexandra Bayliss and John Hines, The Society of Medieval Archaeology Monograph 33 (London: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2013), 526.

[41] Something that Robin Fleming argues was a factor in the quick adoption at Spong Hill of changing continental mortuary practices; *Britain after Rome*, 66–67.

[42] Carver, "Agency, Intellect and the Archaeological Agenda," 9.

[43] Crawford, "Germanic Burial Ritual," 63.

population's ethnic identity.[44] If displaying Germanic-derived rather than British ethnicity in life was important to the status of elites, then they would have displayed that difference in death as well.

So, while we can say that all cremation burials were not the burials of Christians, we cannot say that all inhumation burials necessarily *were*. In the past, two other types of mortuary evidence frequently have been considered reliable markers of a non-Christian religious identity: burials furnished with grave goods, and burials placed in association with prehistoric earthworks. The deposition of grave goods was not a strictly pagan phenomenon; instead, both religion and ethnicity factored into the choice of what to deposit both in the grave and on the pyre. In the regions of the Magonsætan on the central Welsh-English border and the Hwicce in the west Midlands, where Christian Romano-British culture likely still prevailed when continental Germanic peoples settled there in the sixth century,[45] grave goods were never found outside the locations of Germanic settlement, and furnished burials subsequently "tended to disappear, except on the peripheries, much earlier" in those locations than in neighboring, more predominately Germanic regions.[46] Grave goods seem to have marked the deceased as "of Germanic ethnicity" and, although with less certainty, "not Christian" in regions where both British and Christian identities prevailed. Once again, though, religion may have mattered little. Furnished inhumation burial was practiced in Christian Merovingian regions from the fifth through the seventh centuries, when both secular and ecclesiastical laws were "largely indifferent to rites and modes of burial."[47] The practice of furnished burial appears most securely to have been grounded in ethnic identity and social status rather than in religious affiliation.

Particular assemblages of grave goods similarly appear to have communicated membership in specific kin groups. Although a number of early English graves before the seventh century included weapons among the goods interred, someone's being buried with a weapon did not always mean they wielded one in life. Both children and men whose skeletal remains indicate they could not have used a sword or spear were interred with weapons, while men whose remains evidence battle wounds were buried weaponless, leading Heinrich Härke to conclude that, rather than saying "this was a warrior," weapon deposition instead signaled membership in a particular family or kin group independent of the deceased's martial ability or experience.[48] The stature of and heritable phenotypes expressed by skeletal remains in early English cemeteries also lead Härke to assert

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[44] Howard Williams, "A Well-Urned Rest: Cremation and Inhumation in Early Anglo-Saxon England," in *Transformation by Fire: The Archaeology of Cremation in Cultural Context*, ed. Ian Kuijt, Colin P. Quinn, and Gabriel Cooney, Amerind Studies in Anthropology (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 99–100.

[45] Katharine Bridget Pretty, "Defining the Magonsæte," in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Steven Bassett (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 182–3.

[46] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 3 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 71–72.

[47] Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481-751*, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 144–5.

[48] Heinrich Härke, *Angelsächsische Waffengräber des 5. bis 7. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag, 1992), 226–7.

that most of the adult males buried with weapons were of continental rather than British ancestry and that those kin groups who buried men with weapons "buried some (but not all) of their children" with weapons as well.[49] Even how weapons were placed in the grave conveyed information about the identity of the deceased. Three of the sixty-seven burials first uncovered at the Saltwood Tunnel site had a spear laid along the body's midline with the point down toward the feet, a continental Frankish burial practice[50] that underscores cross-Channel influence and suggests that some who identified or were identified as Franks lived (or at least died) in this sixth-century Kentish settlement.

Finally, grave goods could both be gendered and speak to history as well as to identity. Helen Geake has shown that well into the seventh-century era of conversion to Christianity, women in early English regions were buried with decorative objects such as beads of Insular manufacture that were similar to classical Roman beads even as other, "more emphatically Germanic," items fell out of fashion, suggesting a revival of ideas of classical (rather than Byzantine) *Romanitas* among early English elites that correlates with the introduction of Roman Christianity by way of southern Britain.[51] This "classicizing," in fact, and the concomitant "flattening out" of distinctly Germanic-derived assemblages of grave goods first seems to have begun around 580 CE in Kent,[52] the region of Britain most proximate to continental influence but one where, by Bede's account, Christianity would not be introduced until 595.[53] Such classicizing was not limited to the end of life, either. Bede wrote that Edwin of Northumbria had Roman-style standards carried before him into battle and along his royal circuit.[54] These standards also reflect the coinage he and other early English kings created, coins that "made an independent selection of suitable emblems, taking them mainly from the reverses of imperial coins of the Constantinian period and the fourth century [that were] 'treasure' coins … produced from hoards rather than acquired by trade."[55] Graves with classical Roman coins in Geake's sample of conversion-era burials occur near what had been Roman settlement sites in Kent, East Anglia and Hwicce, and most of these coins were pierced or had mountings indicating that they were worn.[56] While it may be unlikely that seventh-century English elites considered these Roman-derived objects to be wholly divorced from association with Roman Christian religion, certainly it was not necessary for elites

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[49] Härke, *Angelsächsische Waffengräber*, 227.

[50] Canterbury Archaeological Trust, "North of Saltwood Tunnel, Kent: ARC SLT 98C Detailed Archaeological Works, Interim Report" (Canterbury, UK: Canterbury Archaeological Trust and Union Railways (South) Ltd, 1999), 9.

[51] Helen Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c.600-c.850*, BAR British Series 261 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1997), 120.

[52] Geake, 129–30.

[53] Bede writes in *Historia ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum* [=*HE*] ii.5 that Æthelberht ruled for 56 years and died in 616, twenty-one years after his conversion; *Bede's The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 149–51.

[54] *HE* ii.16, 193.

[55] Margaret Deanesly, "Roman Traditionalist Influence among the Anglo-Saxons," *The English Historical Review* 58, no. 230 (April 1, 1943): 142.

[56] Geake, *Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England*, 32, 205.

to convert to Christianity to wear and deposit such items—not even explicitly Christian ones like the baptismal spoons found with what are otherwise religiously neutral if not ambiguously pagan grave goods in the early-seventh-century ship burial at Sutton Hoo.[57]

While early English grave goods may have little to say about belief, looking at how graves relate to other features in cemeteries and how cemeteries relate to the constructed human landscape does enable us to approach questions of religious adherence. Sarah Semple has emphasized that early English cemeteries before Christianization demonstrate that those who created them employed a "full pre-Christian repertoire" of topographic relationships that signaled "an appreciation of natural places and of previous prehistoric practice" through such practices as associating graves with both Roman and pre-Roman earthworks.[58] This was not solely an Insular phenomenon; Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows commonly served as foci of Roman Iron Age cemeteries in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia, much as they did in Britain in the fifth through the seventh centuries when graves often were oriented radially in respect to or aligned on the same axis as barrows and earthworks.[59] Cemetery users even imitated Bronze Age earthworks. At Saltwood, penannular ditches surrounded sixth-century graves, including two of the richest, in apparent imitation of the site's Bronze Age barrow, while a seventh-century furnished grave cut into that barrow as well.[60] Similarly, 500 meters north of the famous large-scale seventh-century ship burial at Sutton Hoo lies a Bronze Age (1800–900 BCE) barrow and ring ditch that likely was a focus for an early English cemetery (around 510/20–580/600 CE), which contained thirteen cremation and thirty-two inhumation graves and associated ring ditches.[61] This sixth-century "folk" cemetery, which investigators J.M. Bond and A.R.R. Mustchin have stated is comparable to sites like Spong Hill,[62] appears to have fallen out of use when the much more elaborate "royal" cemetery to the south developed at the beginning of the seventh century.[63] Andrew Reynolds is right to point out that the sixth- and seventh-century creators of these cemeteries "would not have had a sense of the actual antiquity of what we now know to be Bronze Age barrows,"[64] but their appropriation and imitation of existing features in the

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[57] Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial* (London: British Museum, 1975), 102.

[58] Sarah Semple, "In the Open Air," in *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited*, ed. Martin Carver, Alex Sanmark, and Sarah Semple (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 42–43.

[59] Howard Williams, "Monuments and the Past in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *World Archaeology* 30, no. 1 (June 1, 1998): 95, 97–99.

[60] Canterbury Archaeological Trust, "North of Saltwood Tunnel," 5–7.

[61] Christopher Fern et al., "Prehistoric Remains," in *Before Sutton Hoo: The Prehistoric Remains and Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Tranmer House, Bromeswell, Suffolk*, East Anglian Archaeology, Report No. 155 (Bury St. Edmunds, UK: Suffolk County Council, 2015), 22–23; phasing from Christopher Fern, *Before Sutton Hoo*, "Introduction and Background," p. 9 and Chapter 7: "Anglo-Saxon Chronology," p. 188 fig. 7.6.

[62] J.M. Bond and A.R.R. Mustchin, "Human, Animal and Environmental Remains–Cremated Animal Bone," in *Before Sutton Hoo*, 157.

[63] Christopher Fern, "Anglo-Saxon Chronology," in *Before Sutton Hoo*, 186 fig. 7.5.

[64] Reynolds, "The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods," 350.

landscape clearly show that they sought to actively participate in those monuments' significance.

Early English peoples not only considered the long history of their mortuary landscape but also associated new graves with the graves of important ancestors. Over the course of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, four inhumation graves whose furnishings included Byzantine-style hanging bowls of a type frequently found in high-status graves of the period[65] were placed in a line in the northern part of the central cemetery at Saltwood. These graves, which in turn were surrounded by satellite graves, eventually became the focus of the cemetery itself.[66] Again, it is clear that those who were significant to the community in life retained that significance in death, and that this significance shaped the community's mortuary landscape.

Considerations of family, kin, and ethnicity clearly led early English peoples of the fifth and through the seventh centuries to decide how and where to bury their dead. Asserting the significance of their ancestors, maintaining links to distinct identities, and even expressing a fashionable "Romanness" were among the factors that shaped those decisions. Religion was part of this; as Sally Crawford has asserted, "mortuary assemblages can be understood only if changing belief systems, and not merely [changing] marking of social structures, are at stake."[67] Nevertheless, the religious and social ideologies that shaped these practices should not be seen as having acted in different ways or to different ends. The creation of elaborate graves for significant kinsmen and kinswomen and the association of those graves with prominent features, either "natural" or man-made, suggests that burial was undertaken within a "numinous landscape" in which religious and social ideological significance was maintained over generations.[68] Landscape is public; the mounds of the cemeteries at Saltwood flanked prehistoric trackways, were hard by the contemporary settlement, and, given their placement on the elevated edge of the plateau on which that settlement was set, must have been readily visible for quite a distance around.[69] These significant burials "lorded over" the surrounding region and likely were centered on the graves of local elites whose kin continued that lordship.

In summary, early English burial practices reflected that "communal identity, both in local and regional terms, may have been bound up with the ways in which they used and perceived the landscape," and their forging of associations with the landscape constituted a statement about "legitimacy or authority and ownership."[70] "Control" would be more accurate than "ownership" in this context, with lordship being rooted "in the exercise of force" (and, it must be noted, in ideological and normalizing power as well) over the people of a region rather than

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[65] Reynolds, 360; see as well Helen Geake, "When Were Hanging Bowls Deposited in Anglo-Saxon Graves?," *Medieval Archaeology* 43 (1999): 1–18.

[66] Graves C1048, C1081, C6421, and C6653 in the grave catalogue; Riddler and Trevarthen, *Funerary Landscape at Saltwood Tunnel*, 65.

[67] Sally Crawford, "Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual," *World Archaeology* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 88.

[68] Semple, "In the Open Air," 43.

[69] Canterbury Archaeological Trust, "North of Saltwood Tunnel," 12.

[70] Semple, "In the Open Air," 42.

in Roman-style ownership of land, which depended on a legal system no longer existent.[71] These practices all communicated the significance of kinship, ethnicity, and religious meaning to the maintenance and expression of social status and social relations of production. They also, together with evidence from place names and charters, help indicate the presence of many small lordships (often referred to in the sources as "provinces" or "regions") that were created during the foundation of early medieval England, some of which later would be listed as tribute-paying polities in the seventh- or eighth-century Tribal Hidage.[72] What these burials show us is part of the process by which these lordships were identified and maintained as regions of economic and social control, likely even down to the locales served by the cemeteries at Saltwood and Spong Hill.

REORIENTING THE DEAD: CHRISTIAN PLACES AND CHRISTIAN BURIAL

Given all the ideological elements connected with burial practice, when Christian missionaries came to convert the pagan peoples of eastern Britain, they found a ruling elite who signaled their status and who made manifest an ideological connection with the land they controlled through the burial of their dead. We have no record that these missionaries initially tried to change these burial practices; indeed, even in Frankish lands that had been putatively Christian since the early-sixth-century reign of Clovis I, clerics did not attempt to shift control of burial from kin groups to the church until the end of the seventh century.[73] Over the centuries that followed, however, Christian clergy created a different set of associations with the landscape, a landscape that they also understood to be numinous but one in which that spiritual quality was mediated through the activity of holy men and women.[74] They did this through what was effectively a "land-claiming," using methods that, while expressive of Christian ideology, also made sense to Early English elites in the context of their own claims of lordship.

One of the first Christian claims was at Canterbury, a place that must have seemed to Augustine and his party from the urban Mediterranean a drearily unlikely spot from which to found the Church in Britain. Although Æthelberht of Kent's Christian queen Bertha had been given one of the old Roman churches there so that her priest could perform the ritual of the mass for her,[75] Canterbury had been abandoned in the fifth century and was little more than a "rural settlement superimposed upon" a ruined Roman urban grid when the missionaries

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[71] Rosamond Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 6.

[72] Steven Bassett, "In Search of the Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms," in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Steven Bassett (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), 17–18.

[73] Bonnie Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (University of California Press, 2003), 173.

[74] As is made clear in the exploration of hagiographic sources in Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World,* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[75] Bede i.26, in *Ecclesiastical History*, 76–77.

arrived.[76] Nevertheless, by the end of the seventh century, Kentish royal support had enabled Canterbury's monks to rebuild part of the site as an ecclesiastical complex comparable Merovingian complexes like the one at Tours, with a cathedral and the bishop's residence inside the restored Roman walls and a row of extramural churches along the road to Richborough that ran alongside a Roman cemetery.[77] Canterbury town revived as well, although as late as 700 CE it consisted of little more than rough *Grubenhäuser* and timber buildings erected among the Roman ruins inside the eastern wall.[78] As at Saltwood, the significance of the past was acknowledged, but at Canterbury the significant past explicitly was that of the Roman Empire.

Canterbury served as a model for how Roman and Christian associations would shape landscape and communities from the seventh century on, with ecclesiastical structures established so as to interact with and dominate secular settlements. New ecclesiastical buildings were sited in conjunction with both current settlements and surviving Roman buildings, cemeteries, and city walls, and new cemeteries frequently took newly-built churches and monasteries as their foci. Reflecting this model, while the first buildings of the seventh-century monastery at Wearmouth almost certainly aligned with an existing settlement, its cemetery instead centered on the monastic church.[79] Burials at Wearmouth also show that its community extended far beyond the monks who resided there. 107 adults and fifty-three adolescents, children, and infants were buried during the cemetery's period of use, with women, who were thirty-six percent of all those buried, mostly interred west of an "elaborately decorated covered walk or passage" that led south from the monastic church.[80] Abbots of monasteries like Wearmouth and abbesses of dual monasteries like Whitby, which was headed by Hild, the daughter of a nephew of King Edwin of Northumbria, exerted lordship over peasants whose subservient labor sustained and enriched those ecclesiastical institutions. Although few texts speak of these people, burials witness their presence; although gold thread discovered in a few graves right next to the walls of the monastic church at Wearmouth indicate that at least some high-status women were buried in that favorable spot,[81] the rest of the women's and children's graves demonstrate that a non-elite lay populace was identified closely enough with the monastery for them to be allowed a place in its community in death.

Not all seventh-century English men and women were buried in these new Christian cemeteries, and even newly-established seventh-century cemeteries were not unequivocally Christian. At Caisor St Edmund in East Anglia, the two cemeteries founded when the settlement was established in the fifth century fell out of use in the early seventh century, at which point a church with its own

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[76] Richard Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London: J.M. Dent, 1989), 17–18.

[77] Morris, 18.

[78] Tim Tatton-Brown, "The Anglo-Saxon Towns of Kent," in *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, ed. Della Hooke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 214–5.

[79] Rosemary Cramp, *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005), I:111.

[80] Rosemary Cramp and Susan McNeill, "The Wearmouth Anglo-Saxon Cemetery," in *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites*, ed. Rosemary Cramp (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005), I:84.

[81] Cramp and McNeill, I:88.

cemetery had been founded within the settlement's Roman walls. But even though that church had its own cemetery, another new cemetery was established outside the settlement's wall, apparently to replace the abandoned ones, and remained in use until the eighth century.[82] Establishing a place for burial outside the church's purview suggests that local mortuary practices remained under the control of families and kin, as they had been before the missionaries arrived in Britain. Caisor St Edmund and other sites underscore that any notion of clerical pressure or royal fiat ending a distinctly pagan "way of burial" in the seventh century must be discarded. Elites certainly had heavily invested in an established repertoire of burial practices that maintained interdependent hierarchies of wealth, status, and social relationships of production, defined communities of lordship, and tied peasants to control by lords. Within this seventh-century context, the institutions of the Roman church—which, after all, depended on land granted and protection provided to them by elites, and which also frequently drew its clergy from aristocratic families—needed to find ways of Christian burial that also had significance and meaning within this repertoire.

In response, the church employed its funeral liturgy to shape established burial practices to its own ideological ends. As churchmen began to advocate the reorientation of cemeteries away from sites associated with kin and ancestors and toward sites resonant with Christian meaning, the words they spoke during funeral rites likewise helped reorient the dead away from the living community and towards an eternal Christian one. The early medieval *ordines* for burial were, until the last part of the eighth century, close to those found in the "Old" Gelasian sacramentary (Vatican manuscript *Reginensis latinus* 316).[83] That liturgy, which is witnessed in the six earliest surviving of the Gelasian or "Gelasian mixtum" sacramentaries used in England,[84] was well suited for this task of changing the kinship of the dead. Item 91 in the Old Gelasian sacramentary is the *ordo* for the funeral rites, which start at the point of death with the proclamation that the deceased will, though God's actions alone, "sit among the crowned martyrs, advance among the patriarchs and prophets, be eager to accompany the apostles of Christ, [and] proclaim among the archangels the fame of God"[85] and end with the burial itself. The liturgy reiterates in the fourteen mass prayers that follow that *ordo* that the deceased is now a member of the heavenly community. For example, the post-communion prayer of the funeral mass for those recently baptized states, "May our prayers ascend to you, O Lord, and lift up in everlasting joy the soul of your servant whom you have decreed *through adoption* to be a participant in your

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[82] Richard Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 15 (Woodbridge ; Rochester, N.Y: Boydell, 2010), 204–5.

[83] Richard William Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42.

[84] Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series 15 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), s.v. items 292, 791, 836.5, 856.3, 893.5, 929. The earliest of these is a fragment of a sacramentary (MS St. Gallen 1394 pp.95–98), which dates from 700–720 CE.

[85] III.xci.5, in H.A. Wilson, ed., *The Gelasian Sacramentary (Liber sacramentorum Romanae ecclesia)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 269.

inheritance."[86] While both pagan and Christian early English burial practices were centered on communities, rather than focusing on incorporating the dead into a social and ancestral mortuary landscape, the Christian rite located the deceased at the center of the sacred community by burying those who were most favored closest to the church as at Wearmouth. It also affirmed through liturgy the place of the dead among the heavenly extension of the earthly community. Marilyn Dunn has pointed out that many non-Christian funerary practices are designed to guide the soul of the deceased through an extended transition out of the world of the living and into the world of the dead, a transition that was accomplished in part by burial in the community's cemetery. The early Christian *ordines* did this as well, but they emphasized and celebrated the dead's assumption, by God's adoption, of a heavenly afterlife.[87] In effect, this ceremony facilitated the dead's transition from being among the elite of the earthly manifestation of Christian community to being among the elite of the heavenly one.

Prayers for the dead also had didactic force, reiterating to those present at the funerary rites the significance of Christian practices like baptism and penance. The Gelasian sacramentary provided prayers for those who failed to complete a penance imposed on them, prayers that asked God to absolve the deceased from all sins "that by benefit of penance [the deceased] had hoped to destroy but was prevented by death."[88] The timing of the burial also reinforced the necessity of penance; the rite for one who died with penance undone took place not on the third day after death but on the thirtieth day, following the completion of a seven-day fast by the family of the deceased.[89] Although the early English laity attending the liturgy likely would not have understood much of these Latin prayers directly, the clergy, whose pastoral mandate included teaching these people about Christianity and Christian behavior, would have explained to them how ideas of sin, confession, and penance were expressed in these prayers and within the context of burial. Moreover, liturgical text is only part of ritual; intonation, gesture, and ritual action must all have helped communicate these ideas as well. In this way, Christian clergy asserted ideas about death that helped conform early English societies to Christian norms, while English elites asserted their status by associating themselves with and supporting those norms. Moreover, those elites' support for such living monuments as Wilfrid's church honoring St. Andrew at Hexham, with its "vast superstructure" and "gold and silver ornaments" all made possible by Queen Æthilthryth's donation of land (and its accompanying peasant labor),[90] would have supplanted the building burial mounds and the displaying and depositing into graves precious objects as markers of the status that justified social and economic domination—likely, would have justified it even more

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[86] III.xcvii.3, in Wilson, 305.

[87] Marilyn Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons, C. 597–700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife* (London: Continuum, 2009), 8–13.

[88] III.xcviii.1, in Wilson, *Gelasian Sacramentary*, 306.

[89] Antoine Chavasse, *Le Sacramentaire Gélasien (Vaticanus Reginensis 316): sacramentaire presbytéral en usage dans les titres Romains au VIIe siècle* (Tournai: Desclée, 1958), 70.

[90] Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Wilfrid*, 22, in D. H. Farmer, ed., *The Age of Bede*, trans. J. F. Webb (London: Penguin, 1998), 130.

effectively since those ecclesiastical monuments buttressed that secular lordship with the institutions of Roman Church authority.

In with the new eventually did mean out with the old. From the eighth century on, the church condemned one of the most visible elements of pre-Christian burial: the association of graves with barrows and other earthworks. Contact with these places that once had served as foci for burial and its relationship with kinship, ethnicity, status, and religious practice[91] was condemned by the late eighth-century complier of the pseudo-Egbert penitential and by abbot Ælfric (*c.*950–1010), who called these sites places where evil women and men went to speak with or raise the dead.[92] It may be that early English clergy and laity retained or at least recognized the belief that the dead continued to exist within the mounds, a belief analogous to that of the Irish who identified former ancestral tomb sites as the hillforts of the *sidhe* once settlements were moved from those sites down into the lowlands, breaking their inhabitants' physical connection with the resting places of their kin.[93] Whether Christian clergy thought that the dead lived on in the earthworks within and around which they were buried, or whether they thought that demons took advantage of the remnants of pagan tradition to trap the superstitious, their pastoral warnings indicated that they were wary of any elements of early English belief that might persist after burial came under the control of the church.

CONCLUSIONS: CHANGES IN BURIAL, CONTINUITY IN RELATIONS

Both Christianity and the pagan religion it replaced supported social relations characterized by lordship and subservience. Early English elites, along with elites in western Britain and Ireland as well, controlled regions small and large through kinship, authority, and power expressed in many ways. The act of burial provides some of the best surviving evidence for that control. Christianization altered early English burial practices from the seventh century on, but it did not sever the relationship between burial and lordship that had been entrenched in English society centuries before that. To the contrary: it substantially re-centered mortuary ritual from the secular community to the sacred one, associating the graves of elites with the churches that grew up under their patronage while providing a religious ideology congruent with social relations of production based on lordship and subservience.

Cemeteries in Britain were extensions of vibrant communities. Burial practices reveal social beliefs about life and death that connect to material and non-material worlds. The type and contents of burials and the siting of graves and cemeteries bear witness to the different statuses, ethnicities, and religions found

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[91] But, notably, not contact with the Bronze Age megalithic monuments, which in fact were not commonly reused for early English burials.

[92] Sarah Semple, "A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England," *World Archaeology* 30, no. 1 (June 1998): 115–118.

[93] Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 46–48.

in fifth- through seventh-century Britain. They also reveal the sometimes slow-going changes wrought by conversion to Christianity. By striving to understand pagan and Christian burial within the context of complex and sustained systemic changes and continuities in early English society, we reveal burial practices as significant co-constitutive shapers and maintainers of the social relations that supported a prevalent mode of production based on control of land by lords and provision of tribute and taxation by peasants and peasant communities. The various types of early English funerary practice and ritual were components of a repertoire of symbolic objects, actions, and relationships that all functioned in a few discrete ways independent of their ethnic or religious affiliations.

While those economic relations are the bedrock of social-historical development, ethnicity, politics, and religion are neither merely epiphenomenal nor wholly dependent on economic conditions. Looking at burial as the locus for these interdependent community relations avoids the oversimplification that arises from parsing pre-modern societies into discrete and anachronistic "secular" and "religious" categories.[94] Early medieval English peoples' ideas about society and its institutions, culture and its meanings, and worldview all connected and were expressed in their burial practices. Because societies consist of structures that "maintain and reproduce the sets of social relations of production of which they are composed," practices like burial are both "institutionally autonomous and structurally integral to the reproduction of the social relations of production." [95] Neither control of the means of production nor conversion and Christianization were imposed on early English peoples by force; instead, secular and religious elites alike shaped and maintained society and their places in it by employing well-established ideas about both life and death.

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[94] John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985), 170–1.

[95] John Haldon, "Theories of Practice: Marxist History-Writing and Complexity," *Historical Materialism* 21, no. 4 (2013): 49.

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