The *Dictionary of Old English*, the Archaeology of Ritual Landscapes, and the Burial Ritual in Early Anglo-Saxon England

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Early Anglo-Saxon mortuary ritual may be seen as a repeated pattern of performances and actions in the landscape (from the place of death to the grave) and on and around the body before, during, and after death, where communally recognized movement, words, sounds, sights, and objects created what have been termed "technologies of remembrance," through which the burial is both a reflection of the loss of an individual to the community and a familiar re-affirmation of the community and re-enactment of its traditions.[1] Only a small portion of the rituals attending the burial of the dead can be recognized in the archaeological record: specifically, the relationship between the final place of disposal of the body and features in the landscape such as settlements, geological features or ancient built features, the position of the body in relation to other burials, the layout of the body in the grave, and the presence or absence of archaeologically recoverable objects associated with the body. Studies of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries show that disposal of the body involved patterns of behaviour within a broad normative ritual, but the ritual was not static over time, nor do all graves conform to a single template.[2] Burials were ritualized, but not to the

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1 Recent explorations of technologies of remembrance and mortuary ritual include Devlin, *Remembering the Dead*; Williams, *Death and Memory*; Jones, *Memory and Material Culture*; and Chesson, ed., *Social Memory, Identity and Death*.

2 The tension between individual differences and the broad normative pattern, which remains unresolved, is at the heart of continuing debates in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary studies; see Dickinson, "The Present State," and Scull, "How the Dead Live," for reviews of the debates to the end of the 20th century.

exclusion of individual agency.[3] Mortuary ritual, with its repetitive, ritualized "vocab-ulary" of behaviour and patterning, has been described as "an appropriate place to look for material manifestations of communicative action; it is arguably more semi-otically charged than most archaeologically observable behavior."[4] It is not merely a handy metaphor that the construction and composition of the furnished burial rit-ual has often been discussed in linguistic terms. There is a "vocabulary" of grave goods together with a "grammar" of ritual.[5]

Every aspect of the burial ritual — location, grave structure, layout of the body, clothing, and artefacts deposited with the body, monuments built around the body, and the larger location of the mortuary space in the landscape — forms part of a complex sequence of signals and communications about the dead, their ascribed social status before and after death, and their "value" to the community at the point of their bur-ial, as well as ideas about the relationship between profane and sacred landscapes. There is a consensus among archaeologists that the burial ritual was a form of com-munication, a "dialogue with the dead."[6] Unfortunately, there is no dictionary to explain the "language" of burial, and there is much debate among Anglo-Saxon archaeologists about exactly what meanings the burial was supposed to articulate. It is evident that biological age and sex, as well as social constructs of age and gender, had a part to play in the mortuary ritual, and it seems likely that social status (though whether of the individual, the family, the community, or another aspect is debatable) was also com-municated.[7] The burial ritual expressed aspects of Anglo-Saxon perceptions of iden-tity, social status, and the relationship between the living and the dead, but have archae-ologists translated the vocabulary of the grave with accuracy? There is an extensive surviving word-hoard in Old English which may help shed light on the problem.

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3 See especially Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations*, and more recently Ravn, *Death Ritual and Germanic Social Structure*, for the complexities of burial ritual, revealed through computer analysis.

4 B. Arnold, "The Limits of Agency," 211.

5 Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*; B. Arnold, "The Limits of Agency," 216; Carver, "Burial as Poetry." For a detailed discussion of possible Old English words relating to the Mound 1 burial and its con-tents at Sutton Hoo, see especially Roberts, "Anglo-Saxon Vocabulary."

6 Ravn, *Death Ritual and Germanic Social Structure*, 18.

7 Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations*; C. Arnold, "Wealth and Social Structure"; Shephard, "The Social Identity of the Individual"; Richards, *The Significance of Form and Decoration*; Crawford, "Children, Grave Goods and Social Status"; Stoodley, "From the Cradle to the Grave"; Lucy, "Housewives, Warriors and Slaves?"; Härke, "'Warrior Graves'?"; Brush, "Gender and Mortuary Analysis"; C. Arnold, "Territories and Leadership"; Stoodley, "Burial Rites, Gender and the Cre-ation of Kingdoms."

Several publications have considered the terminology of the grave and the material culture associated with it. Jane Roberts assessed the specific materiality of the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 Ship burial, and more recently Victoria Thompson and Andrew Reynolds have both considered vocabulary linked to bodies and coffins in the Old English lexicon, not least terms such as *līc*, *byrgels*, *byrgen heaðan byrgels*, *flæschama*, *lichama*, *eorðscræf*, *græf*, and *licgan*.[8] Focusing on three examples — the value of objects, social age and age thresholds, and sacred spaces in the landscape — this paper will suggest that study of specific ranges of words may help move forward current areas of archaeological debate.

The attempt to bring together Old English vocabulary with archaeological evidence is fraught with difficulty, not least because there is a chronological gap between much of the archaeological and lexical evidence, and, of course, vocabularies shift as societies change — and the change from pre-Christian and proto-Christian society to Christian society was huge. This paper is meant to provide a starting point for thinking about ways in which a closer and more analytical study of vocabulary may help archaeologists find new ways of accessing the grammar of the mortuary ritual. Language is one way of communication; communicative action — the "coordination via consensus of individually pursued plans of action" such as those visible in the mortuary record and in the landscapes of the dead — is another.[9] With the creation of the *Dictionary of Old English*, and with its convenient availability online, there now exists a searchable database of material to complement the corpus of excavated Anglo-Saxon cemeteries: using the *DOE* may open up fruitful ways of accessing the language of the Anglo-Saxon funeral tradition.

Landscapes of the Dead

Landscapes, like burials, are shaped by "communicative action." Human activity in places — both use of and separation from — may be read as a "text," not only for social and economic activity but also for articulating Anglo-Saxon perceptions of their spiritual, as well as physical, world.[10] The single greatest contribution of the study of Old English vocabulary to archaeology has been in the area of place-name studies

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8 Roberts, "Anglo-Saxon Vocabulary," 194-95; Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 103-107; Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 274-77.

9 B. Arnold, "The Limits of Agency," 211; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

10 Semple, "Sacred Spaces and Places"; Fabech, "Reading Society."

in recognizing and conclusively demonstrating, through close comparison of place names and topography, that the extensive Old English word-hoard for aspects of the landscape did not reflect a random application of tautological expressions, but rather that Anglo-Saxon use of words to name their settlements conveyed precise information.[11] The Old English words for "hill," for example — *dun*, *hlāw*, *beorg*, *hyll*, *clud*, *hoo*, and *dene* — all refer to details concerning shape, slope and height, function, and regionality, and together they demonstrate a range of meaning that modern English vocabulary is not wholly capable of articulating.[12] Recent research continues to demonstrate the precision with which words communicate use of landscape in place names, as well as showing that Old English was dynamic: the semantic shift in the meaning of *feld* from "open country" to "communally-cultivated arable" to "enclosed piece of ground" has been convincingly tracked through place names and landscape.[13]

Studies of Old English vocabulary have demonstrated that Anglo-Saxons not only recognized, linguistically, a far more nuanced landscape than modern vocabulary allows, but that they had a very different perception of their environment from the modern one. There is no Old English word, for example, to mirror the modern idea of a "natural world," a world which specifically excludes the supernatural and human elements; moreover, "This gap in Old English vocabulary is not an accident caused by the loss of manuscripts. It reflects the absence of the concept itself."[14] How people responded to their landscapes, how natural features were interpreted and experienced, and how movement through the landscape and activities within it were controlled, directed, and focused by cultural responses to natural features — these issues have been the focus of new archaeological research which attempts to understand past cultures through the ways in which natural features acquire cultural significance.[15]

The extent to which early Anglo-Saxon landscapes were also locales for intersection between the human and the supernatural becomes clear in John Hines's recent review of Anglo-Saxon place names, delineating the links made between fields and groves.[16] Early English place names reference a variety of supernatural creatures —

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11 Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* and "Place-Names and Landscape"; Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names.*

12 Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, 164-69.

13 Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, 269-79, at 269-270.

14 Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, 2.

15 Bradley, *An Archaeology of Natural Places*, esp. chaps. 3 and 7.

16 Hines, "Religion: The Limits of Knowledge."

elves, monsters, demons, and giants — which were associated with pits, wells, pools, and dykes in the landscape.[17] Some of the associations of fissures and other openings in the ground with evil spirits may relate to the conversion period and later Christian ideas which link hell with the grave and other underground locations, but place-name evidence argues for pre-Christian imaginative alliances between nooks, hollows, fissures, and other habitations of supernatural creatures.[18]

Archaeology has so far failed to identify sacred sites in the early Anglo-Saxon landscape apart from burial grounds: evidence for the temples and ritual buildings mentioned by Bede has so far proven elusive.[19] But recent studies of Old English place names have emphasized that modern perceptions of religion as being associated with single sacred *loci* do not match an Anglo-Saxon perception of the supernatural as an essential part of the landscape: the gap in Old English vocabulary for "natural world" is filled by the vocabulary of landscape, which encapsulated the accessibility or visibility of places: place names are "a resource offering a means of understanding how elements of the landscape were perceived in terms of their shape, form, colour, and even sound."[20] Hilltop locations, for example, have long been associated with the place name *hearg* (temple, shrine), illustrated by the distinctive hilltop at Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex.[21] Other *hearg* sites, such as at Wood Eaton, Oxfordshire, or Harrow Hill, Sussex, are located on fairly modest or relatively hidden rises, suggesting that prominence and visibility in the landscape were not the only factors defining a *hearg*; aspects of the journey to achieve the summit may have been equally relevant.[22] But the natural hills which formed the foci of *hearg* places were surrounded by long-lived ritual activity; these distinctive locations were part of a dialogue between community and environment which continued through centuries.

The evidence of Old English vocabulary suggests that Anglo-Saxon ways of imagining the sacred world include man-made modifications to, or versions of, natural features: barrows and cemeteries as well as hills; posts and beams but also living trees; and prehistoric and later features including henge monuments, Roman villas and

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17 Semple, "Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to the Past," 286-87.
18 Semple, "Illustrations of Damnation"; Hall, "Are There Any Elves"; Blair, "Saint Cuthman, Steyning and Bosham."
19 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, i.30. Blair "Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines"; Crawford, "Votive Deposition."
20 Semple, "Sacred Spaces and Places"; see also Gelling, "Place-Names and Landscape," 75 and 97.
21 Stenton, "The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies," 10-11.
22 Semple, "Defining the OE *hearg*."

other buildings, and Anglo-Saxon halls and settlements.[23] The Old English words *beam* and *stapol*, after which places such as Thurstapol in Kent or Bampton in Oxford-shire are named, indicate sacred beams or pillars. In the case of Thurstapol, the link with a specific deity is clear, while excavations at Bampton over several decades indi-cate the extent and the longevity of ritual in the landscape of which Bampton was a part. The Anglo-Saxon minster at Bampton, dating from at least the ninth century, was superimposed on a Bronze Age barrow, and its chapel on another. Half a mile to the east of the minster is a place known as "The Beam." Here, seventh-century buri-als have been found, on the edge of a Roman settlement, burials which in turn may have been the focus for the chapel of St. Andrew, first recorded in the twelfth century.[24] At nearby Shifford, an Anglo-Saxon sword, possibly part of a ritual deposition, was found in the Thames. The significance of pre-Christian sacred beams is reinforced by the archaeological evidence from sites such as Yeavering, Northumberland, identified by Bede as the royal vill of King Eadwine visited by Paulinus.[25] Prior to the 600s, however, the site had already seen centuries of activity. Anglian additions to the site included the creation of a cob-walled square building, usually interpreted as a shrine, over a small stone circle, and a large standing post was inserted into the Bronze Age barrow. These two monuments became the focus of small cemeteries, and other rit-ual structures were created between them, including the "amphitheatre," which itself was centred on a post or pillar.[26] A study of Anglo-Saxon vocabulary for places sheds light on the way in which Anglo-Saxons conceptualized their environments — and helps define meanings of topographical terms.

Place names for built features are also important for understanding the ways in which communities imagined the sacred. Past human activities were identified in topographical place names, too. There is a variety of Old English terms for springs and wells, but there is good reason for suspecting that the nineteen known place names with the element *funta*, such as Chalfont, Buckinghamshire, and Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, specify a spring with Roman stonework: archaeological excavation has yet to reveal the significance of this association, but the links between precise use of place-name vocabulary, the establishment of Christianity, the location of the dead

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23 Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, 2; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 53-54 and 476-79; Meaney, "Pagan English Sanctuaries"; Semple, "Sacred Spaces and Places."

24 Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, 186.

25 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii.14.

26 Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 54-55; Gittos, "Yeavering."

and their sacred spaces, and pre-Anglo-Saxon human activity suggest that *funta* sites will be a fruitful area for further research.[27]

Hlāw place names describe man-made hills. The distribution of *hlāw* place names is limited to the south and south midlands. Often becoming meeting places (for example, the Mutlows in Cambridge and Essex, "moot tumulus"), they are often formed with the genitive of an Old English personal name — Scutchamer Knob in Berkshire is the Old English *Cwicelmeshlæwe*, Taplow in Buckinghamshire probably means "Tæppa's tumulus," and Cutteslowe in Oxfordshire memorializes "Cutha." Though a link between a personal *hlāw* name and the Anglo-Saxon burial mounds has long been posited, archaeological evidence to prove this theory has been scant. There is no evidence for burials at Scutchamer Knob; the mound at Cutteslow seems to have been a Neolithic chambered tomb; and while the mound at Taplow did contain the remains of a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon prince and his grave goods, the barrow has recently been shown to lie within a Bronze Age hill fort complex. The evidence suggests that *hlāw* was a term for a non-geological mound, including prehistoric burial mounds and meeting mounds, rather than specifically referring to a burial mound.[28] Archaeology indicates that the re-use of Bronze Age barrows as burial mounds (as in the case of *Posses hlāw*, Wiltshire, the site of a rich seventh-century female bed burial) and the identification of pre-existing monuments in the landscape with Anglo-Saxon personal names formed part of an Anglo-Saxon pattern of claiming and memorializing the landscape through words, burials, and associations.[29]

Given the lack of archaeologically identifiable structures which may be recognized as pagan shrines, and given the relative scarcity of evidence for ritual activity in the early Anglo-Saxon period, it has been suggested that early Anglo-Saxon folk

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27 On *funta* place names, see Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 84-86. On the need to examine the relationship between springs, wells, and sacred sites in Christian contexts, see Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 375-82 and 477.

28 For a discussion of Cutteslow, see Blair, "Anglo-Saxon Pagan Shrines," 39; for a discussion of place names which refer to tumuli, see Gelling, *The West Midlands*, 49; Hooke, "Burial Features in West Midland Charters," 15 and 28; for connections between "low" place names and Anglo-Saxon barrows, see Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 154-57; and for circumstantial evidence linking barrows and "low" names, see Allen, Hayden, and Lamdin-Whymark, *From Bronze Age Enclosure* [. . .] *Excavations at Taplow Hillfort*. For the most recent discussion of the secondary use of barrows for deviant burials, see Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 58.

29 For doubts that the masculine genitive *posses* in *posses hlāw* could refer to the Anglo-Saxon woman buried within, see Speake, *A Saxon Bed Burial on Swallowcliffe Down*, and Gelling, *The West Midlands,* 49.

cemeteries formed part of the numinous link between the living and the dead, the human and the spiritual world. In some cases these links appear to have been explicit; thus, at Ripon, Yorkshire, a prominent natural hill was called, by 1228 C.E., *Elveshowe* (plausibly "elf's barrow") and was the focus for a small early seventh-century cemetery.[30] Votive deposition, an aspect of ritual practice in many early British societies, is notably absent from the early Anglo-Saxon archaeological record, but the conspicuous and permanent deposition of objects into the grave which characterizes pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon mortuary behaviour may be interpreted as a manifestation of an impulse to donate or dedicate material and thereby remove it from the community as part of sacred or ritual practice.

Cemeteries and the Value of Objects

Relating Old English words to geographical features and archaeology is illuminating. Less explored is the use which archaeologists might make of the relationship between vocabulary and the social interpretation of the burial ritual. The excavated furnished cemeteries from this period indicate that the familial, tribal communities who were using the folk cemeteries during the fifth to seventh centuries for the burial of their dead were witnessing, in the funerary ritual, the deliberate loss of considerable quantities of material to the grave. The removal of such resources from the living community can have been no small matter. Although the economies of early Anglo-Saxon settlement are still unclear, evidence for the mending of metal artefacts, in particular the mending of small knives, might lead to the conclusion that access to resources, particularly metal resources, was not necessarily a given.[31] Every pot, every piece of fabric, every bone comb or metal brooch found in the grave represents an individual or community investment of time, material, resources, and skills which were permanently removed from circulation as part of the burial ritual.

In the selection, manipulation, and deposition of artefacts, the burying community was using objects to convey a message, in both the inhumation and cremation rituals.[32] Objects are the vocabulary of the mortuary ritual. The problem lies in

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30 Hall, "Are There Any Elves"; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society,* 185; Crawford, "Votive Deposition."

31 Brookes, "The Early Anglo-Saxon Framework," 92.

32 For the symbolism of the cremation ritual, see Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*, 25-27; Richards, *The Significance of Form and Decoration*; and Williams, "Material Culture as Memory." See also Crawford, "Votive Deposition," 91.

understanding and interpreting the message: the language of the ritual is obscure, and the import of the message is unclear — there is not even a scholarly consensus whether the objects were supposed to say something about the individual dead person, about the death of that person, about the society in which the person died, about the Anglo-Saxon idea of death, about the Anglo-Saxon idea of the past, or about something else altogether.[33] Equally, it is not clear who the readers of the message were supposed to be — the dead? Those receiving them in the afterlife? The mourners at the funeral? Or others, who would have the story of the funeral and its associated objects told to them, so that the objects in the grave would continue to convey their message long after they had been removed from human sight and circulation, as the objects associated with the burials recorded in *Beowulf* are still visible through the words of the poem?[34]

To access the social, political, religious, or economic value of the artefact at the time of deposition, however, a starting point is to try to understand the purpose of the ritual for those doing the burying. What was the social meaning of the ritual, and what was the purpose of the objects buried with the dead? Why were particular objects selected for burial? What messages did these objects convey? The issue here is *intention*. Objects did not drop casually into the grave: choices were made in their selection. Further deliberation determined the way in which the objects were placed in, around, and on the grave. Even objects associated with dress — belts and brooches, for example — display levels of intentionality in their selection. It is probable that, in most cases, the dead did not dress themselves. Even if they were buried in the clothes they were wearing at the moment of death, those carrying out the ritual made decisions about whether to leave objects — including objects which could be deemed economically valuable due to their scarcity or foreign origin, such as crystal beads, silk, and artefacts incorporating garnet — on or with the dead or whether to remove them.[35]

One approach to interpreting the differences between burials is to assess the level of investment — of time, energy, and wealth — that went into each burial event.

33 See, for example, Williams, "Material Culture as Memory," on the ritual as a form of social memory; Geake, "Invisible Kingdoms: The Use of Grave-Goods," on the ritual as an expression of wealth and power; Sayer, "Drei südenglische Gräberfelder," on burial and community; and Stoodley, "From the Cradle to the Grave," on burial as an expression of age and gender.

34 Carver, "Burial as Poetry," 40-48; and Devlin, *Remembering the Dead*, 83-84.

35 For an influential attempt to rank grave goods by value according to these criteria, see C. Arnold, "Wealth and Social Structure."

Mortuary theory is founded on the assumption that effort expended in the mortuary ritual is related in some way to the social personae of the person or people commemorated by the burial.[36] At its simplest, this theory would indicate that great energy would be expended on the burial of a high-ranking person, and less on that of a person of lower rank, always reflecting the nuances of the political and social circumstances of the burial and the messages the burial was intended to convey.

The energy expended on a grave is not necessarily easy to identify from the archaeological record. Only those types of behaviour which leave a trace in the ground can be observed; repeated obsequies, prayers, feasts, processions, and other activities which demand a heavy investment of time and energy are often completely absent in readings of the archaeological evidence. Other details of the burial, however, can be taken into account: the depth and size of the grave, for instance, as well as any monuments associated with the burial, such as postholes and barrows, and any materials included in the grave. This is particularly relevant for the early Anglo-Saxon furnished burial ritual, where all the items included in the burial — any wood or textiles for the coffin or shroud, all objects associated with the costume of the dead, including knives, belts, brooches, and buckles as well as other objects placed in the grave such as spears, shields, buckets, bowls, beds, and food offerings — were artefacts which received a ritual "death" at the moment of interment or cremation, because they were burnt or buried with the intention of permanent removal from circulation in the living community.[37] Anglo-Saxon inhumation graves are characterized by an absence of contemporary grave robbing to retrieve artefacts.

In these circumstances, it is not unreasonable for archaeologists to theorize that those buried with the most artefacts must have been, very broadly speaking, more valued by the burying group at the time of death than those buried with very few, or no, grave goods. Given the range in quantity and quality of grave goods buried within Anglo-Saxon inhumation graves, the folk cemeteries appear to reflect the burial of people with varying social status at the time of death, from the very poor (possibly slaves) to the very rich (possibly royal or aristocratic, at least by the

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36 Saxe, "Social Dimensions"; Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations*; C. Arnold, "Wealth and Social Structure," 106.

37 See especially Crawford, "Votive Deposition," suggesting that *all* grave goods, whether associated with the costume of the deceased or placed in the grave with the body, constituted deliberate votive offerings.

seventh century).[38] After three decades of vigorous debate on the theoretical interpretation of the social dimension of mortuary ritual, although any discussion of the social relationship between grave goods and social status must be hedged with awareness of multiple interpretations, the principle that quantity and quality of grave good deposition relates to social status in Anglo-Saxon archaeology remains essentially valid.[39] It is not surprising, then, that the burials of those with the most precious metals or with imported objects are labelled burials of "princes" or "princesses" — the recent discussion of the grave of a rich young woman at a Cambridgeshire cemetery is a good example of the way in which wealth in grave goods is routinely interpreted as reflecting high status.[40]

This interpretation of mortuary symbols is not without its problems. How is the relative value of the objects inserted with the dead to be assessed? With the introduction of computer databases and associated analysis, the 1980s saw new attempts to analyse Anglo-Saxon burial ritual based on the comparison of a large number of graves. The most immediate problem raised by this process of analysis was how to create a scale of values for artefacts. How could the comparative wealth of different grave assemblages be assessed? Should rarer artefacts, such as swords, count for more than common artefacts such as knives, and should artefacts made with precious metals count for more than the same objects made from iron?[41] Solutions were sought in the creation of artificial scales to allow the counting of data, but these attempts have not provided particularly satisfactory results, not least because assigning a cultural value to an object requires that a variety of attributes (chronological, technological, economic, social, and religious) be taken into account.[42] In the following section of this

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38 For equations between lack of grave goods and low status, see, for example, C. Arnold, "Wealth and Social Structure," 106-107, and Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, 76; but see also cautionary notes by Carnegie and Filmer-Sankey in "A Saxon 'Cremation Pyre'," and for wealthy barrow burials, see Shephard, "The Social Identity of the Individual."

39 For a review of theoretical approaches this century, see, for example, Chapman, "Other Archaeologies and Disciplines," and for early medieval archaeology, see Dickinson, "Review Article: What's New." Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death*, provides an accessible synthesis of theoretical approaches applied to Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

40 For continuing interpretations of wealthy burials as evidence for aristocratic burials in folk cemeteries, see, for example, Lucy et al., "The Burial of a Princess?"

41 C. Arnold, "Wealth and Social Structure," 108-109; for the use of Arnold's system to score and rank burials, see, for example, Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire*, 96-102.

42 C. Arnold, "Wealth and Social Structure"; Shephard, "The Social Identity of the Individual"; Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations*; but see, e.g., Boddington, "Raunds, Northamptonshire," for early criticism of these approaches.

paper, Old English vocabulary relating to the body and the objects placed with it will be tested against archaeological interpretations of relative value, with specific reference to words for "old" and "new," "rich" and "poor," and "young" and "old."

"Old" and "New," "Rich" and "Poor," "Young" and "Old"

It is tempting to suggest that, when a broken or worn object was placed in the grave, it acted as a less valuable substitute for a complete or new version of the same thing. Attention has been drawn in a number of site reports to worn or damaged artefacts which imply that objects were discarded, rather than donated, in the burial ritual. Equally, however, the reasonable possibility that some older items held personal value for the deceased, even if they had lost a wider community value, has been discussed. The worn and mended pectoral cross placed on the body of St. Cuthbert, for example, has been identified as Cuthbert's own personal cross, rather than an object donated into the grave by another giver, precisely because it was worn and mended. Its damaged state indicates, to a modern interpreter, that its value lay chiefly in its long association with its wearer.[43] In other contexts, however, a broken object is interpreted as being of little value either to the deceased or to the burying community: the iron penannular brooch, missing its catch, buried with the young girl at Sewerby, for example.[44] At the other end of the scale from the modest burial at Sewerby, there is a contrast, at the princely Sutton Hoo Mound 1, between the sumptuous gold and garnet jewellery, and the relatively old ship showing signs of repair which contained the burial, the burial chamber, and the treasure.[45]

The *Dictionary of Old English*, however, cautions against reading old or broken objects as either personal possessions of the deceased, or as objects which, because of their age and condition, were no longer considered valuable within the living community. The *DOE* entry under *eald* I.B.1.d.i reads, "of prized or valuable possessions (esp. of treasure, armour, weapons): old, ancient, from long ago (and therefore good); *eald laf* 'ancient heirloom;' cf. *ealdgestreon*." The sword from Brighthampton grave 31 had fittings of various dates from the early fifth to the early sixth century, demonstrating that it had been in circulation for at least a century before its final "death" in the grave; it was an *eald laf*, and the decision to remove this sword from circulation as an

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43   Coatsworth, "The Pectoral Cross."
44   Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire.*
45   Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial,* 412-13.

heirloom cannot have been taken lightly.[46] The mended gold and garnet composite brooch from Harford Farm, Norfolk, grave 11, has a text to confirm its value as *ealdgestreon* — its repairer proudly recorded his name on the reverse of the brooch.[47] Even the patched ship at Sutton Hoo may have been used for the royal burial, not because it was old and no longer seaworthy, but precisely because it was a valuable old vessel: the *DOE* entry under *eald* notes that it is linked specifically to ships: I.B.1.d.ii. "of ships: old (and therefore of proven excellence)."[48] Old English vocabulary reinforces the suggestion that, whatever else the burial ritual represented, it offered a sacrificial form of donation of goods as important as donations to churches at a later date, or ritual deposition in wells or lakes at an earlier date in British prehistory; moreover, the presence of old or worn artefacts in graves did not necessarily represent token or substitute deposition, or an avoidance of the economic burden of grave-good deposition.

Just as the Old English vocabulary insists that the basic conceptualization of the environment was fundamentally different from ours, so studies of Old English vocabulary indicate that ideas of "wealth" and "poverty" — distinctions on which much of the discussion of early Anglo-Saxon mortuary ritual hinges — were not interchangeable with our own. In particular, Old English vocabulary indicates that non-material aspects — luck, happiness, and success — were more important to ideas of wealth than current meanings of the word "rich."[49] Recent reviews of burial evidence have noted wealthy female graves at sites across the country, where, in each case, the skeletal evidence indicates that the women were suffering from deforming pathologies which would have been evident to their communities.[50] At Beckford, Herefordshire, rich burial 11a shows probable leprosy; at Quarrington, Lincolnshire, the woman in grave 15 was the richest in the cemetery — in terms of numbers of grave goods and presence of precious metals — and had suffered from tuberculosis.[51] At the furnished inhumation cemetery of Edix Hill, Cambridgeshire, three burials show similarities.

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46   Amos, "Old English Words for *Old*"; Härke, "The Circulation of Weapons," 393.

47   Penn, *Excavations on the Norwich Southern Bypass*, 81.

48   See also the evaluation of economic worth of the ship, in terms of material, equipment, skills, and labour required to produce it, and aesthetic value in Schoenfeld and Schulman, "Sutton Hoo: An Economic Assessment," 20-21.

49   Kossmann, "'Rich' and 'Poor' in the History of English," 6.

50   Crawford, "Special Burials, Special Buildings," 201-202; Lee, "Changing Faces," 66.

51   Evison and Hill, *Two Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Beckford*, 43-44; Dickinson, "An Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Quarrington."

All three were females; all three were very rich in terms of grave goods; all three showed skeletal changes indicating bodily disfigurement as a result of chronic illness; and all three included the burial of an infant or small child within the grave.[52] The pattern of privileged burial for diseased and deformed women was not restricted to pagan early medieval burials; at Filton, South Gloucestershire, a woman in her late twenties or early thirties was the focus of a group of twenty-five unfurnished Christian burials, and had special features in terms of the layout of the body and the construction of the grave not shared by the other burials; she suffered from skeletal deformations, including bowing of the femora.[53] A late eleventh- or twelfth-century female burial at West Hall, Sedgeford, Norfolk, may also represent an expression of this cultural perception of disease and its link to status: the excavators note that the woman was suffering from spinal curvature and a deformed right leg, but the "context of the burial raises the possibility that she was a woman of religion or of high status."[54]

At the same time, comparisons of stature and skeletal pathologies in weaponed and non-weaponed burials indicate that taller men with fewer signs of nutritional deprivation or stress-related injuries were more likely to be buried with swords.[55] The Old English words *rice* "powerful" or *maga* "having means" might reasonably be applied to the powerful warrior-status men, but what of the diseased women? *Gesælig* "fortunate, happy"? *Eadig* "blessed, wealthy"? Further close study of Old English words for "rich" and "poor" in the context of the vocabulary of mortuary ritual offers an interesting way forward in interpreting mortuary ritual and understanding both Anglo-Saxon concepts of gender difference and ideas surrounding social and sacred power.

Computer-generated analysis of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries has demonstrated that the mortuary ritual was most closely correlated with gender, the secondary correlation being with age. The gender of the burial is signalled through gender-specific artefacts — brooches, beads, spindlewhorls, wristclasps, and girdlehangers for women, for example, and swords, spears, and shields with men. A range of items, including knives and pots, were gender-neutral. Age-related signals are less rigidly present, but

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52 Malim and Hines, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Edix Hill (Barrington A)*, Table 8.3, 294 and 312-13.
53 Cullen et al., *A Post-Roman Cemetery at Hewlett Packard, Filton*, 6.
54 Van Twest et al., "Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project, Fourth Interim Report," 512-16.
55 Härke, "'Warrior Graves'?" 37-40.

some information can be readily deduced. There is no class of child-specific arte-facts, for example; children's graves are instead characterized by an absence of adult-specific artefacts — artefacts which are also closely linked to gender statements, particularly in the graves of men.[56]

Although age correlation is evident in the mortuary ritual, it has taken a considerable length of time for this correlation to be identified and understood. In the 1980s, archaeologists were still puzzling over the apparent fluidity of age-related mortuary vocabulary: "children" appeared to be buried with "adult" grave-goods, though re-interpretation of the evidence suggested that archaeologists were comparing different age bands and were basing their ideas of what constituted a "child" on chronological, rather than cultural, age boundaries.[57] A seminal paper arguing that the placing of weapons in the grave represented a symbolic status, rather than any warrior-related activities in life, used the presence of weapons in the graves of children as evidence that not all those buried with weapons could have actually fought in life.[58]

Age grades, like other aspects of the life-course — gender, health, status — are, to a significant extent, cultural constructs, though related to biological factors. The point at which a child becomes an adult is a matter of social negotiation in which a range of factors is taken into account, of which physical maturity is an important but not overriding component; gender may also be relevant. There has been a persistent idea that children in the medieval past were no more than miniature adults: "Children in medieval society were thought to be essentially the same as adults, except that they were smaller and less experienced. A child's world was that of the adult in miniature."[59] At first sight, the vocabulary of the mortuary ritual seems to reinforce the impression of a society which barely recognized childhood as a separate state from adulthood and which never noticed attributes or conditions of childhood. It might be expected that there would be a comparatively limited range of terms for a social group that, according to the archaeological evidence, was hardly defined. If childhood is a social construct, then, without the language to describe that construct, there can be no concept of childhood.[60] The apparent poverty of words in medieval

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56 Crawford, "Children, Grave Goods and Social Status."
57 Crawford, "When do Anglo-Saxon Children Count?"
58 Härke, "'Warrior Graves'?"
59 McMunn and McMunn, "Children's Literature in the Middle Ages," 21.
60 Nelson raised this possibility in the discussion of the lack of a word for "childlike" in medieval Latin; Nelson, "Parents, Children, and the Church," 81 and 85.

French and English with which to describe stages of childhood was one of the key pieces of evidence used by Philippe Ariès in his influential *Centuries of Childhood* to insist that, in the Middle Ages, there was no "*sentiment*" of childhood.[61]

The Anglo-Saxons, however, not only had words for "child" (*cild*, *bearn*) but also for the state of childhood (*cildhad*), and, perhaps more importantly, for behaviour specifically pertinent to childhood (*cildisc*, *cildsung*). There is a limited surviving vocabulary for words to describe artefacts belonging peculiarly to the world of children, such as children's clothes or appurtenances (*cildclaðas*, *cildcradol*, *cildtrog*), and words to define relationships between adults and children: *cildfostre* "child fosterer, nurse" and *bearnmyðra* "an infanticide," as well as words to define stages of childhood: *cild*, *geoguð*, *bearn*, *cnapa*, *cniht*. Old English vocabulary leaves no doubt that the Anglo-Saxons had a range of words to describe a concept of childhood, and that there were material artefacts closely linked to childhood. Though Anglo-Saxon adults have been found buried in their seventh-century beds (a material culture manifestation of the Old English synonym for a grave, *dēaþbedd*),[62] no equivalent baby cots have yet been identified. Though the Anglo-Saxon mortuary evidence — and, indeed, the evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement — is characterized by an absence of child-related objects, Old English vocabulary suggests that this is a feature of ritual depositional practices, rather than a feature of daily life: infants were not placed in the ground in their cradles because cradles were not appropriate to the burial ritual, though adult beds, for the elite, were.

There were four words for "old" in Old English. The first, and by far the most common, was *eald*, related to a number of words: *yldu* "old age," *ylde* "men," *ealda* "an elder, or a chief," and *ealdor* "leader, prince, chief."[63] The idea of age, it would appear, was synonymous with leadership and authority. The second most common synonym is *frod*, derived from a word family that denotes "wisdom." *Har*, derived from an old Germanic stem referring to the colour "white" or "grey," is also paralleled by the Old High German *her*, which can mean "high" and "venerated." Finally, *gamol*, the least common adjective, has the most obscure derivation. It may simply mean "grizzled" or "grey."[64] People were given a positive association through the use of *eald* as an

61 "Dans la société médiévale, que nous prenons pour point de départ, le sentiment de l'enfance n'existait pas"; Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale*, 134.

62 Roberts, "Anglo-Saxon Vocabulary," 194.

63 Amos, "Old English Words for *Old*," 95-106 at 95.

64 Amos, "Old English Words for *Old*," 96-97.

intensifying compound — *ealdhlaford* "hereditary lord," *ealdwita* "venerable man," *ealdwine* "old friend," and *ealdgesiþ* "old and loyal companion."[65] *Eald-* (or *Ald-*) is frequently documented as the first part of a personal name: Aldhelm, Aldfrith, and Aldred are well known, and Ashley Crandell Amos has found 263 other individuals with names using the same first element. All these instances argue that age was regarded as positive — an old helmet or lord, old peace, and old wisdom or counsel. These were all valuable because tried, tested, and known not to fail.[66] As Crandell Amos remarks, "Reading modern idioms using *old* is a lowering experience, and a drastic contrast to the Old English patterns."[67] If a vocabulary indicates how people think, then Old English writers had a very positive cognitive map of old age.

This said, there is an argument that "old age" as a recognized, specific phase in the life course is a modern construct that would have had no relevance or meaning to Anglo-Saxon society: "old age is a typically human phenomenon, of recent date, thanks to life-prolonging advances in medicine. From here it is only a step to denying the existence of old people before the nineteenth century," notes Georges Minois, who continues, "The early Middle Ages were in fact not aware of old age as specific entity. [. . .] In a world where no one, apart from a few great individuals, retired, there was no distinction between adults and old adults."[68]

There are difficulties in using the cemetery data to identify mortuary rituals pertaining to old age. The method of identifying the biological age of skeletons in current published site reports is based on a simple analysis of tooth development and wear and on epiphyseal fusion. Age at death can also be gauged by levels of arthritis and bone thinning, but it is difficult to hazard any guesses regarding the precise age of an adult Anglo-Saxon at the time of death, and for the vast majority of the excavated skeletal material, the ages ascribed to adults are broad in range, predominantly relative, and probably underestimated at the upper end of the age scale.[69] However, it is reasonable to say that the oldest section of an Anglo-Saxon mortuary population relative to others in that burial group can be recognized with a fair degree of confidence and that, no matter what their chronological age at death, these people would have been perceived to be, within that community, significantly older than "normal." Given the

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65 Amos, "Old English Words for *Old*," 99-100.
66 Amos, "Old English Words for *Old*," 99.
67 Amos, "Old English Words for *Old*," 104.
68 Minois, *History of Old Age*, 3 (citing Philibert, "Le statut de la personne agée") and 154.
69 Chamberlain, "Commentary: Missing Stages of Life," 249; Waldron, *Counting the Dead*, 20; Chamberlain, *Demography in Archaeology*, 11 and 82.

uneven survival of skeletal material from excavation and given the probability that the majority of known cemetery sites have only been partially excavated, there is no way at present of calculating a population pyramid for the Anglo-Saxon period. However, based on available statistics for similar populations, it could be argued that distinctly "old" people above the age of about fifty are unlikely to have made up more than ten percent of the living population.[70] The archaeological evidence from the furnished inhumation cemeteries suggests that "older" people made up fifteen percent of the total, where approximate age could be identified. This rather high figure should not be taken to reflect the actual population pyramid: children are notoriously absent from Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, and it is relatively easy to assign an "over forty-five" age to older skeletons on the basis of the skeletal characteristics noted above. It should also be noted that, as Shulamith Shahar argued on the basis of textual evidence from the later medieval period, "old age" was as much a social and cultural perception based on appearance and functional capability as it was a biological stage marked by chronological years.[71]

My own study of earlier Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery evidence suggests that, within the mortuary ritual, old age did not bring with it a dramatic decline in the presence of grave goods with age, but the "value" of artefacts, as measured by the presence of precious metals and stones, decreased.[72] Gender differentiation also became weaker with increasing age, for both males and females: the number of shields and spears as a proportion of the grave assemblage declines for older males.[73]

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70 Chamberlain argues that there must have been a considerable number of people over fifty in ancient populations; Chamberlain, "Commentary: Missing Stages of Life," 249.

71 Shahar, "Who Were Old in the Middle Ages?"

72 Information derived from a database of over 1000 aged skeletons from 5th- to 7th-century Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries; for data and methodology, see appendices in Crawford, "Age Differentiation." The statistics discussed below are drawn from a database of over 1600 excavated skeletons and their associated archaeologically recoverable attributes from inhumation cemeteries. Only 54% of the identifiable "children" were buried with grave goods, while 82% (336 out of 410 burials) of "adults" and 84% (107 out of 127) of "old people" were buried with grave goods. 36% of the grave assemblages associated with "adults" contained silver, while only 13% did in the "old" population. Gold is not a common inclusion in grave assemblages, but it is least likely to occur within the older population — 1.8% of older people's assemblages included gold, compared to 3.6% of those of "children" and nearly 6% of "adults."

73 Statistics derived from Crawford, "Age Differentiation": 19% of older people are buried with spears, compared to 24% of "adults"; see also Stoodley, "From the Cradle to the Grave," 462.

At the local, rather than national, level, a more detailed picture of the place of old males within the mortuary communities emerges. At the large furnished inhumation cemetery at Buckland, Dover, Kent, the excavation report identified seventeen "old" males. The Buckland site can be divided into plots, phased on the basis of artefact typology. Old men are scattered fairly evenly throughout the site, which contained around 200 bodies. Of the eleven old males buried within the phases before *c.*650 C.E., eight were buried with weapons. The remaining old males were buried in the phases after *c.*650 C.E., when weapon burial seems to have decreased in frequency across Anglo-Saxon England. In plots A, B, D, and G, no old male is without weapons, while in phase E, the only weapon burials are those of the three old adult males in graves 61, 63, and 65. It is also in this sector that two of the unweaponed old male burials are located. These five old men seem to be buried in a group, their burials clustered next to a pre-Anglo-Saxon barrow.[74]

At Sewerby in Yorkshire, about sixty bodies were interred in a cemetery relatively poor in artefacts. Only two of the burials include a shield and spear. One, grave 55, was too badly preserved for an age to be established, but the other, grave 45, contained an old male.[75] At Alton in Hampshire, only two of around fifty burials could be identified as those of males aged over forty-five; both were buried with a spear, although sword burials do occur here with younger men.[76] At Appledown in Sussex, a mixed cremation/inhumation cemetery, only two inhumations (out of around 121 burials) were marked by post-hole structures. Grave 157 contained an elderly woman whose burial was marked by a six-post structure, but whose only furniture was an iron buckle, while grave 99 contained the remains of a male aged over forty-five, whose burial was marked by a four-post structure and whose grave goods included a shield, a spear, and a knife. This was also one of only two exceptionally deep graves at the site.[77]

If weaponry was an indicator of a particular role or status within Anglo-Saxon society, then the decrease in weaponry among some males (assuming that men in the "warrior status" groups had similar chances of surviving to old age as men in other status groups) would imply that some men who had had "warrior" role or status in earlier life were yielding it or replacing it with another role in later life —

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74 Evison, *Dover: The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, 369.

75 Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire*, 90.

76 Evison, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Alton, Hampshire*, 38.

77 Down and Welch, *Chichester Excavations 7: Apple Down and the Mardens*, 202.

perhaps passing this social persona on to their sons, who might now have reached their physical prime. This could explain the pattern of burial at Alton, where the older males are buried with weaponry but not with swords. However, for a few males, old age brought with it a reinforcement and accentuation of the role symbolized by weapons, as at Buckland, where there is a positive correlation between old age and weaponry, and at Sewerby, where one of the only two burials with male-gendered weapon sets contained an "old" man. Nick Stoodley noted that, while his analysis of earlier Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries showed a decrease with age in the proportion of male burials with two weapons, there was a rise in the number of male burials with three or more weapons — an unusually high number of weapons with burials as a whole — as age increased, and that this elderly group recorded "some of the longest spears and knives."[78] There was a positive link between age and spear length in the Anglo-Saxon burial ritual, so the fact that the oldest males in the mortuary community were buried with the longest spears and knives is worth further thought.[79] It might not be unreasonable to suppose that the older males with the longest spears and knives, and with a relative excess of displayed weaponry, were the leading males in the leading families of the communities using the burial grounds.[80]

Further Relations between the *Dictionary of Old English* and Archaeology

As Richard Bradley rightly argued, though Anglo-Saxon archaeologists have established their discipline on its own terms, with archaeological theory and methodology, they are losing a resource if they insist on treating the Anglo-Saxon period and its archaeological evidence as a "vague, amnesiac prehistory."[81] There are texts, and while archaeologists have demonstrated that the evidence provided by material culture offers important approaches to the past, written sources contribute to elucidating the archaeological evidence. In particular, Old English words may have an important part to play in unravelling the obscure vocabulary of the archaeological mortuary ritual, especially in helping archaeologists assess the cultural value of the objects placed in the grave.

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78   Stoodley, "From the Cradle to the Grave," 462.
79   For a discussion of spear length and age, see Härke, "'Warrior Graves'?" and Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, 157-63.
80   Crawford, "'*Gomol is snoterost*': Growing Old in Anglo-Saxon England," 57-58.
81   Bradley, "Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries," 175.

   In this paper, preliminary suggestions for ways of contextualizing words for burials and landscapes of death with a social "vocabulary" of the grave have been explored. The burial event carried emotive force for the mourners at a number of levels, as words and music spoken at the grave, as actions — ritualized performances — carried out before, during, and after burial, as smells and tastes of plants, funerary food, earth or fire, and as a visual display of clothing and objects laid out with the dead. The sensory messages intertwine and link with both the performance of the event itself and later articulation of the experience.[82] Further consideration of the context in which words have been used — whether in charters, legal documents, or prose and poetry — might offer the opportunity to make interesting comparisons between the physical realities of death and the poetic sensitivities of mortuary ritual and death, an avenue of research which will be greatly facilitated by the *Dictionary of Old English*.

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82   Halsall, "Burial Writes: Graves, 'Texts' and Time," 222-23; Williams, "The Emotive Force."

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