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Two of a Kind

Conceptual Similarities between Cremation and Inhumation in Early Anglo-Saxon England

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INTRODUCTION

The physical difference in the archaeological traces of the bodies produced by cremation and inhumation have polarized discussions of these two burial practices. Conceptually, the wet, fleshy, decaying inhumed body has long been viewed as the binary opposite of the dry, skeletal, fragmentary cremated body. Inhumed bodies rot *in situ*, usually below ground, while cremains become portable, capable of being stored above ground. Recent studies aimed at re-integrating our understanding of cremation *and* inhumation have tended to focus on transitions between the hiatus of one burial mode and the (re-)introduction of another (e.g. Rebay-Salisbury 2012). However, in early Anglo-Saxon England (fifth to seventh centuries AD), cremation and inhumation were concurrently practiced, often in the same cemetery for tens if not hundreds of years. Therefore focusing only on transitions substantially reduces the field of investigation.

Such different but contemporaneous burial modes may well have been influenced in part by contrasting and evolving beliefs concerning the body, death and the afterlife. In a recent transhistorical study of cremation and inhumation, Katherine Rebay-Salisbury (2012) identified religion as the primary influential context for funerary practices, with social concerns influencing the choices made *within* religious practices. However, any divergent cosmologies underpinning this difference still remain frustratingly veiled (Hutton 2010). While early Anglo-Saxon burials reveal a degree of genuine difference in the type and quantity of grave goods and animals accompanying cremations and inhumations, a range of similarities also exists between them,

ripe for further exploration. Cemeteries from Essex and Cambridgeshire provide particularly useful evidence of both cremation and inhumation practices, especially in light of recent publications of organic-rich burial sites of the fifth and sixth centuries AD from this area, notably Mucking I and II (Hirst and Clark 2009) and Springfield Lyons (Tyler and Major 2005).

Three overarching concepts of body orchestration are addressed: containment, wrapping, and structuring, the evidence for which is first outlined thematically, then discussed as a whole. These shared concepts may be symptomatic of broader concerns for managing cadavers, which transcended the cremation-inhumation divide that is most clearly expressed through artefact and animal selection. As will be discussed, the groups directly managing bodies, burials and cemeteries remains unclear, yet acts of body containment, body wrapping, and structuring burial space may reveal physical responses to social anxieties surrounding the consignment of the dead to the earth that are shared between communities deploying cremation and inhumation.

DIFFERENCES: EARLY ANGLO-SAXON MORTUARY PRACTICES

A brief overview of early Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation differences is first necessary to highlight the multi-faceted approach to death and burial in these communities, and the polarising influence on scholarship. Cremation had largely died out in Roman Britain by the late third/early fourth centuries AD (Philpott 1991: 50–3) and was reintroduced by Continental and Scandinavian communities to eastern England in the early fifth century and later in that century (albeit to debateable degrees) across central and southern England (Lucy 2000: 120; Hills and Lucy 2013: 297–331). Cremation diminished in the sixth century and was rare by the seventh century. Widespread Christian belief, practice and cosmology following the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to Christianity during the seventh century required the physical integrity of the cadaver for future resurrection, which ruled out any persistence of cremation practices and accompanying animal sacrifices (Lucy 2000: 121; Meaney 2003: 238). However, new research suggests cremation may have already been increasingly rare long before formal Christian conversion (Hills and Lucy 2013; see also Williams 2014b). For the fifth and sixth centuries, commonly suggested motives for the simultaneous practice of inhumation and cremation include shifting belief systems and/or different ethnic communities sharing the same burial ground (see Hoggett 2007 for review). Paganism has been strongly linked with cremation burials since earliest antiquarian interests as part of their attempt to categorise pre-Christian 'races' in early medieval Europe (Content and Williams 2010). The approval and

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survival of inhumation as a suitable Christian method of body disposal, maintaining its physical integrity for the Resurrection and Final Judgement, has foregrounded some earlier inhumations as 'proto-Christian' (Meaney 2003).

Inhumations have thus received a compendium of social analyses. The vast grave good assemblages from fifth- to seventh-century inhumations have been harnessed for various quantitative studies. Wealth scores have been applied to artefact types to determine an 'Anglo-Saxon' culture not based on ethnicity per se but on a common type of social organization (e.g. Arnold 1980). More recently, age and gender-specific 'kits' of dress accessories and grave goods have been identified (e.g. Pader 1982; Brush 1988; Härke 1989, 1990; Lucy 1997, 2000; Stoodley 1999, 2000; Crawford 2000).

Conversely, cremated bodies from early medieval cemeteries, often lacking specific age and sex indicators and indiscernible pyre goods, have subsequently received fewer social analyses, which are particularly hampered by the challenges of conducting thorough osteological analyses of cremated human remains. Julian Richards (1987) conducted a seminal study of urn size and form, which could broadly correlate with the osteological age and sex of the deceased it housed. Mads Ravn (1999) produced a unique study of gendered pyre goods from Spong Hill by using correspondence analysis to identify three distinct male 'kits' and one female assemblage. Nonetheless, 'pagan' cremations have been explored through alternative avenues, including their pyre technology (e.g. McKinley 1994a, 2006), urn and animal symbolism (e.g. Richards 1992a), and the psycho-sensory effects of the body's fiery transformation (e.g. Williams 2001, 2003, 2004a, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a).

Divergent approaches to cremation and inhumation have been warranted, given the differences in provision of mortuary objects and animals for both burial modes. Early Anglo-Saxon inhumations have been notable for their weaponry, almost exclusively in male burials (Stoodley 1999: 75), yet few examples appear in cremations (Williams 2005a). Conversely, cremations commonly included combs and toiletry equipment in the form of tweezers, shears and razors, some of which were non-functioning miniatures (Williams 2003, 2007a). Inhumations, however, contain far fewer toiletry items, and those included are full-sized, while combs are also less commonplace (Williams 2003, 2007a). This suggests certain funerary rites were intrinsic to the type of burial selected by mourners and influenced by the type of body produced by the funeral.

Inhumation and cremations in this period could also be accompanied by a variety of animals, predominantly domestic. Horse, cattle, sheep, goat, pig, dog, and fowl are most commonly recovered (Bond 1996; Lee 2007). Yet animals dominate cremations in Eastern England but are less frequently noted in cremation burials elsewhere, and in inhumations generally (Poole, pers. comm.). Studies concerning the social patterning of mortuary animals have emphasized important differences. Fern (2007) noted that early Anglo-Saxon inhumed

horses had a stronger affiliation with males, whereas cremated horses were more widespread across age and sex groups. This built on similar findings by Bond and Worley (2006b: 92–3), who found cremated horses were more commonly afforded burial with adolescents and young adults of both sexes. As with certain grave and pyre goods, the significance of certain mortuary animals varied between the two burial modes, even when sacrificing the same species, such as horses.

Yet cemeteries with high numbers of cremation burials in southern England have produced very low numbers of cremated mortuary animals, despite substantial modern excavation and analyses. These include Mucking II (Hirst and Clark 2009), Heybridge (Newton 2008), Rayleigh (Ennis 2008), Springfield Lyons (Tyler and Major 2005) and Great Chesterford (Evison 1994), all located in Essex, and further west at Lechlade, Gloucestershire (Boyle et al. 1998), Worthy Park (Hawkes and Grainger 2003), and Portway, Andover, Hampshire (Cook and Dacre 1985). This contrast between eastern 'Anglian' and southern 'Saxon' cremations would suggest a regional difference in cremation practice rather than a distinct 'cremation rite' where animal sacrifice is to be expected. Thus the difference in animal provision between the two burial types may have been overestimated from a regional perspective. Nonetheless, genuine differences between these two burial practices have remained a key source of study. Crucial similarities between these burial modes have remained largely overlooked, and it is to these we now turn.

SIMILARITIES: SOME OBSERVATIONS

Howard Williams (2014a) suggests an important similarity between the deployment of pottery vessels in early Anglo-Saxon inhumations and cremations. He identifies conceptual parallels between pots nourishing the inhumed body and urns redefining the boundaries of the cremated body. Building on these initial suggestions by Williams, some further similarities can be proffered. Firstly, neither burial method was restricted to or dominated by a particular age of sex/gender group: all ages and genders could be inhumed or cremated (Squires 2012, 2013). Secondly, many cremated and inhumed bodies show evidence of being dressed prior to burial or conflagration in the form of dress accessories (Williams 2004a: 269), although slightly harder to detect in cremations. As discussed, the type and frequency of grave and pyre goods varies, with some crucial distinctions noted between the two burial modes. Nonetheless, it was deemed necessary for many cremated and inhumed bodies to be accompanied by a selection of goods, and animals as companions, symbols and food (Bond 1996; Lee 2007). Both body types were laid out for display in the grave and on the pyre, and presumably prior to arriving at the cemetery.

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Furthermore, multiple burials of humans are found in both cremation and inhumation. Nick Stoodley's (2002) study of multiple inhumation burials has recently been compared with multiple cremation burials (Nugent 2011: 124–65; also Squires 2012). While a detailed comparison is not possible here, crucially, the type and frequency of age and sex combinations found in both cremated and inhumed multiple burials were near identical (Nugent 2011: 124–65). In both burial modes, paired individuals represented the most frequent grouping, with triple and quadruple burials playing a minor role in each burial type. The choice between cremation and inhumation did not affect decisions to place certain types of individuals together in death. Thus multiple burial preferences largely transcended the cremation–inhumation divide.

BODY CONTAINMENT

The similarities discussed so far centre on body management, rather than artefacts and animals. This can be expanded by addressing the range of 'microboundaries' installed around inhumed bodies, pre-cremation cadavers, and cinerary vessels containing cremains. Microboundaries include containers, such as body containers ('coffins') and vessels; artificial layers of textile, animal skins, wooden planks or clay surfaces; and structural supports and partitions such as flints, stones, and turves. Installing microboundaries is inherently linked with the process of preparing both the body (inhumed or cremated) and burial space and containing the body is a primary concept.

In early Anglo-Saxon England, the dissolute fragments of the cremated body were usually collected and contained within a ceramic vessel, which was (eventually) buried. The urn itself may be viewed as a new membrane or 'body' for the cremains to inhabit, restoring a sense of corporeal boundaries to fragmentary remains and hiding the exposed bones under a new 'skin' (see Richards 1987; Williams 2003, 2004a: 277–8; Nugent 2011). Thus the literal and conceptual boundaries of the cremated body were reconstituted and corporeal 'order' restored. Indeed, Williams (2007a) has linked the predominance of toiletry equipment found in cremations, particularly hair-related items such as combs, shears and tweezers, with this desire amongst mourners to provide a mode of re-embodiment for the cremated dead.

Inhumed bodies were also contained. Basic body containers in early Anglo-Saxon burials have long been observed (e.g. Lethbridge 1932; Reynolds 1976) but their conceptual purpose has not received any explicit discussion or synthesis. This is presumably due to an a priori notion of functionality to transport and protect the cadaver. Yet the deployment of body containers presents a prime opportunity to explore degrees of physical and conceptual segregation.

The substantial number of containers recovered from organic-rich inhumation cemeteries indicates provision of wooden boundaries may have been far more common than previously thought (Hirst and Clark 2009: 468, 648–9). For example, 60 per cent of graves at Mucking I and 40–47 per cent at Mucking II had evidence of body containers or biers (Hirst and Clark 2009: 468, 646–9). At Edix Hill, 24 per cent of 115 inhumations had been buried in containers and possibly as many as a third of the population had received some kind of wooden container or 'boxed grave' (Malim and Hines 1998: 26, 33). Around 20 per cent of graves at Springfield Lyons produced either shrouds or containers and a further 18 per cent of graves had container soil stains (Tyler and Major 2005: 6). Some plank-built containers may have simply surrounded the cadaver, since bases could not be detected (Hirst and Clarke 2009: 647).

These body containers could act as extensions of the body's surface, restraining the seepage and eventual appearance of the internal, hidden body. They could reinforce or even substitute for the fragile, temporary skin-boundary of the human body which death had begun to dissolve. In this paradigm, seepage, decay, and even death itself may have been perceived as being (temporarily) delimited and quarantined by installing microboundaries around the cadaver. This may have been perceived as a stay of decay only during the cadaver's laying out, transportation, display, and immediately following burial. This in turn may have been seen as influencing the preservation of the body's dissolving boundaries.

Evidence of dug-out tree-trunks used as 'coffins' appeared in 55 per cent (21) of the noted container inhumations at Mucking II (Hirst and Clark 2009: 468, 649). Enclosing a cadaver in the heart of a tree encourages reflection on the similarities between human bodies and trees; both grow taller the longer they live, both can be 'killed' and both will eventually decay after death. Moreover, wood was as much an agent of fiery transformation in cremations as it was an agent of containment in inhumations. It is possible that wooden containers similar to those used in inhumation may have been used during the cremation funeral, if not also placed on the pyre. Building on suggestions by Williams (2005a: 269, 2006: 91–6) that the urn was a type of body, it could be postulated that tree-trunk burials were bodies-within-bodies potentially resonating with cremated bodies within urn-bodies (Nugent 2011: 86–165).

Furthermore, wooden containers appear in cremations as well. For example, at Heybridge cremation 1658 had been buried in a wooden vessel, evidenced by a surviving metal staple repair (Newton 2008: 79). The largest amount of cremated bone from Heybridge (750.6g) came from a wooden bowl repaired with a double-headed lead plug (Newton 2008: 104). At Girton College, the bronze hoop of a postulated wooden stave bucket was found encircling cremated remains in a pit near grave 42 (Hollingworth and O'Reilly 1925: 26). While these are rare examples, probably due to poor survival and, in some

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cases, excavation methods, the practice of wooden containment for cremation is evident and potentially under-represented.

Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina's (1998) notion of stone equating with death and wood equating life, with regard to prehistoric monumentality, contrasts with this analysis. The use of wood in early Anglo-Saxon funerals and burial spaces may have echoed human life being brought to a sudden but inevitable death. Wood may have reflected the same qualities as the human body in both inhumation and cremation contexts. In this respect, wood may have been perceived as transcending the rite; it was not necessarily about how wood was used during funerals but how its physical attributes could mirror human frailty in either burial rite, decaying with the inhumed body or reduced to ashes by fire. If boundaries and interfaces were conceptual extensions of the deceased's own bodily boundaries, then enveloping the cadaver in wood may have operated on two levels; as a container to quarantine death and abject effluvia, and as a second body, akin to the urn-body in that it contained the deceased and yet lacking the durability of ceramic vessels. As the container rotted so did the cadaver. Conversely, as long as the urn and its contents were kept relatively dry and intact, they would endure whether above or below ground. In this light, despite underlying similarities between elements of these two burial practices, ultimately different bodies were produced by inhumation and cremation.

The role of various containers, boards and textiles also reveals an investment in and ownership of burial *space* (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury 2010: 60) as well as the body. In lieu of grave goods, as container burials frequently were, it may be that the grave was not secondary to the body but was dressed and decorated in the same way cadavers were dressed for the inhumation or cremation funeral. The Oberflacht inhumation containers remind us that they may have been painted and carved and, as with the Sutton Hoo ship burial, draped with textiles (Crowfoot 1983: 407–9; Hirst and Clark 2009: 469–70). Thus the identity of the deceased may have been expressed not only through costume and portable artefacts but through the burial environment, creating a sense of individual privacy and comfort.

WRAPPING THE BODY

Sue Harrington (2007) has explored early Anglo-Saxon inhumation graves as meaningful spaces in which layers were created through the deployment of textiles. She notes these were not passive backdrops but created an active space through which the identity of the deceased could be communicated. However, textiles were employed in both inhumations *and* cremations. Mucking I and II have provided the largest collection of early Anglo-Saxon textile evidence to date from 165 inhumations and a further three cremations at Mucking II, with

little difference of textile type between the two cemeteries (Crowfoot 2009: 428). Mucking I had two possible examples of swaddled bodies in grave 253 (a crouched adult) and grave 255 (an adolescent/adult lying on their left side). Both were buried near each other on the northern cemetery edge in 'an anomalously southern orientation' and neither had any traceable artefacts, although this is not unusual in such an artefact-poor cemetery (Hirst and Clark 2009: 652–3). Bodies in graves 886 and 496 at Mucking II were also closely outlined by a similar, suggesting swaddling in a textile or skin (Hirst and Clark 2009: 478).

At Mucking I, grave 119 had an organic layer beneath the body, but as textiles do not seem to have left stains at Mucking, it may not have been a cloak or rug and it was argued a plant layer was also unlikely (Hirst and Clark 2009: 650). Alternatively, the body may have lain on a thicker material, such as leather, fur, a thick pelt or bark, and although there was no mineralized evidence for this, there are examples from other Anglo-Saxon graves (e.g. Snape (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001: 241)) and Liebenau, Lower Saxony (Hirst and Clark 2009: 650). At Great Chesterford, a possible ox hide under-lying the body in grave 9 was suggested by a horn core at the right foot of the individual (Evison 1994: 92). While horn-cores may present further evidence of skins used to carry and underlie the deceased, staining presents more conclusive evidence of this act.

At Edix Hill, two cases of the 'parallel-sided' effect of the shoulders and arms were observed in graves 44 and 76, suggesting shrouded cadavers (Malim and Hines 1998: 34). Grave 69 also had a series of iron stains following the contours of the skeleton, which, if an accurate record, would present a currently unique example of iron-fastened body wrapping (Malim and Hines 1998: 34). A presumed male in grave 1 and a female in grave 3 at Ardale School had staining which extended beyond the body, suggesting a cloak or blanket laid over or under the body (Wilkinson 1988: 46, 48). In grave 4, an elongated stain 1.6m wide limited to the head and trunk could represent the longer waist-length head-dress/veil worn by women in the seventh century (Walton-Rogers 2007: 177). This was potentially manipulated to act as a grave and body covering as well as head-gear.

To complement these rich and varied examples of coverings from inhum-ation graves, early Anglo-Saxon cremation deposits and urns could also be wrapped in textiles. Examples of metal vessels containing bone and covered with cloth have been recovered from Coombe (Kent), Illington (Norfolk), Manton Common (Lincolnshire), Brightwell Heath (Suffolk); two hanging-bowl cremations were recovered from Loveden Hill (Lincolnshire) and two vessels at Sutton Hoo (Ellis Davidson and Webster 1967: 1–2, 12–13). The Brightwell Heath bronze bowl had been covered with cloth tied below the rim, while the bronze cremation bowl from Mound 4 at Sutton Hoo had two different cloths wrapped around the outside and covered by a third cloth.

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A feather-filled pillow may also have lain atop the bowl (Crowfoot in Ellis Davidson and Webster 1967: 38–9).

Many ceramic urns may have been wrapped with organic covers which have failed to survive (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001: 250). Urns with ceramic lids are rare in this period (McKinley 1994a: 103). Yet lidded urns were more likely to collapse under the weight of backfilled earth, rather than uncovered urns packed with soil. The survival of many largely intact urns suggests some were covered or wrapped in a degradable material. At Springfield Lyons, cremation 6935 had little soil inside the urn from the time of burial, indicating an organic covering (Tyler and Major 2005: 44). Such lids may have been wooden, textile or animal skins (McKinley 1994a: 103).

Similarly, cremains could be 'shrouded' in cloth like the textile laden and swaddled inhumations. At Mucking II, 84 cremation burials (18 per cent) were definite un-urned depositions, possibly contained in leather/textile bags, which may even have born motifs similar to those on urns (Hirst and Clark 2009: 631). The same practice was noted at Spong Hill where un-urned burials may have been placed in a wooden box or bag (Hills and Penn 1981: 4). Nine un-urned cremation burials were also noted at Cleatham based on their tightly packed and occasionally 'globular' appearance, suggesting 'bag' burials (Leahy 2007: 29). It is unclear how common this practice was, because un-urned cremains are difficult to detect especially when only token amounts were buried (McKinley 1994a: 85–6). Un-urned cremation burials deposited directly into the earth could be argued to bear a resemblance to inhumed bodies also placed directly into the grave without textiles or containers. This may even represent mirroring of inhumations during the transition from cremation to inhumation in the seventh century (Davidson and Webster 1967: 16).

This may not represent a deliberate symbolic parallel between the two rites in the treatment of cadavers and their corporeal boundaries. Yet the choice to deposit different types of cadavers within organic containers reflects yet another echo of similarity between the two burial modes, albeit on different scales.

STRUCTURING THE BURIAL SPACE

Structuring the burial space is the third concept shared between cremations and inhumations in this period. This can be divided into two themes: bodily segregation and burial support. Segregation could be enacted by installing partitions between bodies or by separating the body from its immediate surrounding beyond the use of shrouds and body containers. For example, grave 10 at Great Chesterford contained a row of large stones along the left side, dividing it from a possible container burial in grave 20 (Evison 1994: 67). Eight graves at Mucking II (281, 323, 343, 355, 448, 493, 497, 776) had stains

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suggestive of a board or textile layers separating the body from the bottom of the grave (Hirst and Clark 2009: 478). Timby (1996: 18) also suggests planks laid over bodies may have been a foundational platform onto which the backfill could form a mound over the burial, thus serving to segregate the body from the back fill and act as a burial marker.

Mineral layers, such as clay or charcoal, could be used to segregate and structure cremation burials. Deliberate deposition of clay layers appeared in barrow-burials at Asthall, Oxfordshire (Dickinson and Speake 1992: 116–17) and Coombe, Kent (Ellis Davidson and Webster 1967: 1, 9–10). At Loveden Hill, two un-urned cremation burials were deposited in circular pits lined with blue clay (Fennell 1964: 95). Cleatham produced an unusual unfired clay 'envelope' (cremation 687) containing a large amount of burnt bone and tweezer fragments (Leahy 2007: 29–30). Dickinson and Speake (1992: 116–17) suggest a link between clay layers beneath barrow cremations and Scandinavian examples, which represent pyre sites, although they also admit clay occurs naturally in the vicinity of Asthall barrow. However, the natural occurrence of clay does not necessarily indicate it was irrelevant to the burial.

At North Shoebury, cremation M653 had a discrete charcoal spread beneath the urn base, accompanied by twenty pieces (15 g) of burnt clay (Wymer and Brown 1995: 50). At Great Chesterford, cremation 16 'rested on a pressed gravel layer *c.*15cm thick which extended about 3m to the south'; the gravel layer was not found with any of the other cremations and large stones had been placed near the urn which was not a common practice at this cemetery (Evison 1994: 115). While the reasoning behind this is unclear, concerted effort had been made to create an artificial interface between the cremains and the ground. Selecting or creating mineral layers beneath urns is akin to the installation of interfaces beneath the inhumed cadaver. It mirrors the desire to segregate the body from the earth despite being buried in it.

Both cremation pits and inhumation graves could also contain structural features. At Springfield Lyons, cremation 6680 had been propped upright with two large flints on the west side of the pit (Tyler and Major 2005: 42). At Great Chesterford urns 16 and 23 were 'surrounded by stones' (Evison 1994: 155). At Mucking II, cremations 317, 729 and 732 had been packed with flints to support them and cremation 514 had been anchored in clay (Hirst and Clark 2009: 587). At South Elkington (Lincolnshire), urns were consistently packed with 'massive flint nodules ~~were packed~~ around, above and below the vessels' (Webster 1952: 26). Supporting an urn may have been a practical, even emotive, concern to avoid knocking it over when backfilling. This potentially resonates with a desire to avoid disrupting the image of the cadaver by backfilling directly onto it. Anchoring urns into their respective pits also bears overtones of territoriality and ownership of space by demarcating and safeguarding the burial site.

Inhumations also received structural devices. Grave 126 at Mucking I contained deliberate flint deposition in the grave fill (Hirst and Clark 2009: 654). At Soham a thin layer of flints had been placed above the body in grave 22 ('a young person') and grave 23 (female adult) (Lethbridge 1932: 163). In grave 15 at Soham, a postulated elderly female had been inhumed over a deposit of 'carbonized wood' (although this could be an organic stain from textiles or unburnt wood) extending from left shoulder to hip (Lethbridge 1932: 162). Over her body were '[t]wo rough slabs of sandstone and large flints in a layer' (Lethbridge 1932: 162), segregating her on two horizontal planes: above and below. Adding flints may have acted as a structural interface between the ground surface and the body, protecting the cadaver from footfall above and attempts to re-open the grave.

At Spong Hill, turves helped support lids and walls of inhumation containers (Hills, Penn, and Rickett 1984: 6). At Mucking I, graves 92, 99, 120, 123A and 272 also had turves included in the backfill, although their structural role is unclear (Hirst and Clark 2009: 654). At Springfield Lyons, grave 4737 had a large stone on the south side of the grave away from the body, potentially upholding something (Tyler and Major 2005: 9). Large stones in graves 24, 33, 50 and 51 were presumed to have shored-up soft-soil grave edges (Evison 1994: 28). One or two large stones were also recovered from graves 9, 28, 32, 53, 124 and 142 at Great Chesterford (Evison 1994: 28). At Girton College, graves 9 and 56 were internally bordered with Roman bricks still embedded in mortar (Hollingworth and O'Reilly 1925: 35) and at Alwalton graves 1263, 1336, 1355, and 1435 were lined with stones (Gibson 2007: 245). In four cases where graves intercut at Great Chesterford, a row of stones had been laid along the grave-edge to prevent earth falling into the previous burial (Evison 1994: 28).

Stones in burials do not necessarily represent a necrophobic act, but in these cases may relate to the orchestration and enhancement of the cadaver and maintaining the structural integrity of the burial space. Demarcating and upholding pits, urns and graves manifested in both burial modes. Demarcating space creates a sense of ownership as it now 'belongs' to someone and the boundaries separate the deceased (individual) from the rest of the cemetery (the group). It simultaneously seals in the deceased both physically and conceptually. Death signified by the cadaver is contained and restrained, locked into a physical area, sealed by three planes of space; depth, width and length. This appears to be true of both inhumation and cremation burials of the period.

BODY MANAGEMENT

Exactly how early Anglo-Saxon cremation and inhumation burials, or indeed cemeteries, were managed, or by whom, remains unclear. It therefore remains

difficult to address specific motives underpinning the range of containments, wrappings and burial structures found across cremations and inhumations. The installation of these physical interfaces, or microboundaries, may reflect a range of responses to the known decay and disturbance of the dead. There is certainly evidence that cadavers, in various states of decomposition, were encountered long after death.

Preserved fly puparia identified on grave assemblages at the organic-rich Suffolk cemeteries of Buttermarket (Turner-Walker 2009: 226) and Snape (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001: 75–9) indicate at least some bodies were kept above ground, dressed in burial clothes, for several weeks. Such examples suggest the funeral was delayed while mourners travelled from further afield and arrangements were more complex. The pre-cremation cadaver may also have been kept in a similar state while the funeral was arranged and the pyre constructed.

It is unclear how common this was in early Anglo-Saxon England, but certainly the breakdown of the body in these cases would have been evident. All cadavers have a very real, visible breakdown of corporeal boundaries as the body undergoes biological decay. At death, substances seep and leak out of the body's orifices, the cadaver will swell rapidly within hours, blood settles into regions nearest the centre of gravity and dermal layers of skin begin to visibly separate (Quigley 1996: 4–5, 227). Seeping and leaking are the uncontrollable actions of a corpse and the original inhabitant of the body may no longer be held responsible for this social transgression (Douglas 1966; Kristeva 1982; Tarlow 2008). Common physiological reactions to corpses (e.g. nausea, vomiting, repulsed by the smell) are also universal responses triggered by the revolting smell caused by the rapid decay processes at work ~~with~~ hours and days of death (Quigley 1996: 222–30). The installation of microboundaries around the body and within the burial space may have been a response by those managing delayed funerals in response to this unpleasant biological process.

Helen Geake (2003) has suggested female practitioners were overseeing disposal of the dead, training up other females to pass on the knowledge of funerary practice. John King (2004) argues that alternate sequences of grave goods and backfilling, in certain cases, indicates the presence of several mourners placing items with the deceased during the funeral. There is also a minor but relatively widespread occurrence of later burials cutting through a previous burial, evacuating an occupied grave or re-opening a burial for an additional interment (for a full review see Nugent 2011: 166–92). In many cases the grave-diggers would have been confronted by a decaying inhumed body, either recently buried or only partially skeletonized. Indeed, the inclusion of additional bodies to recent burials suggests some funerals were conducted with the remains of an earlier occupant on display in the grave (Nugent 2011: 166–92). Alison Klevnäs (2010) has also documented several examples

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of graves re-opened and decomposing bodies manipulated, potentially by
family members, to retrieve family grave goods. Multiple examples of bodies
re-exposed during grave-reopening and from new grave cuts indicate there
were certainly some individuals in early Anglo-Saxon England ~~were~~ familiar
with corpses in various states of decay and dissolution. An awareness of the
body's decay in inhumation contexts may have contributed towards the
incorporation of wooden containers, textiles and other structural features in
graves as a protective measure against future disturbance, particularly where
invasive secondary burials were taking place.

The reorganization of corporeal boundaries of dead bodies, in various states
of dissolution, may, or may not be directly linked to afterlife beliefs. What is
important is that the containment, wrapping, segregation and structuring of
cremated and inhumed bodies bear degrees of similarity that may have been
symptomatic of broader concerns for socially constructed body images and
investment in burial space.

DISCUSSION

Containing bodies is a form of body 'capturing', creating a self-contained
environment in which the body may or may not have an on-going active
nature. Artificial surfaces surrounding the body, such as planks, biers, textile
layers, stones, flints, tiles, vessels, and coffins all delimit the body, confining it
to a space demarcated in three dimensions: height, length, and width. The
decay of inhumed bodies within the decaying tree-trunk coffins and wooden
body containers suggests a meta-body has been constructed of bodies within
bodies. This is not limited to inhumations. Cremains within urn or bowl
'bodies' also indicate meta-bodies of a more durable type. While the fleshy-
wooden bodies decay together, the cremated bodies endure inside enduring
vessels. Subtle similarities such as these continue to present intriguing
differences.

Supplying cremains with an 'outer skin' or ceramic/metal membrane may
have been an act of restitution for the loss of flesh. Rather than simply
understanding this as a way of re-ordering the dissolute cremains into a
coherently 'embodied' entity, restitution could indicate an exchange has
taken place between the living and the dead. The mourners take away the
outer surfaces of the body through heat and fire (debiting the corporeal state)
but supply a secondary, cool-to-the-touch body of cold ceramic or metal
(adding to the corporeal state). Viewing the loss restitution of body mass
during and after cremation as a transaction may enable us to consider how a
corporeal-cosmic balance was maintained. This could be particularly useful
when approaching communities underpinned by gift-giving systems, such

as those in early Anglo-Saxon England. No debt is left outstanding if restitu-
tion has been made to the cremated dead. This goes beyond, and may even
be separate from, the supply of grave goods and pyre goods for the dead,
since it concerns the deceased's own body rather than artefactual indices of
social identity.

Wrappings vessels and bodies in textiles visually disconnected the recent
dead from the living. The physical reality of death was veiled. This perhaps
mediated the confrontational nature of the cadaver and potentially deflected
mourners' disconcerting ruminations on their own mortality. A sense of
privacy was also afforded to individual bodies, vessels, and even artefacts.
Although the funeral was a predominantly public event, these wrapped bodies
were deemed private affairs, whether inhumed, pre-cremated or urned. The
face of death could not be gazed upon in these instances. Interfaces lain
between inhumed bodies, cremains, and urns segregated these corporeal
remains from the near environment.

Individually wrapping bodies, urns, animals and even artefacts suggests
concern to segregate the dead not only from the living but from the other
dead. However, these wrappings were biodegradable interfaces, ultimately
merging the body with its burial environment. In that respect, they may
have been temporarily segregated body *from* burial space, but they ultimately
decayed with the inhumed body and around the urn-body, helping to merge
body *with* burial.

Composite surfaces could be created, consisting of degradable and non-
degradable materials: soil, wood, turves, textiles, skins and stones, flints,
ceramics, and metals. Such interfaces were a complex collection of permeable
and impermeable surfaces, arguably mirroring bodily qualities of the inhumed
and cremated dead. Parts of these bodies would degrade or burn away, while
other elements—bones and teeth—would probably survive their environments.

Urns and inhumations could be structured and supported with turves,
stones, flints, and mineral layers. This was primarily a pragmatic concern,
sustaining the physical environment long enough to complete the funeral
and backfilling. However, there is a suggestive undercurrent to structuring
and supporting the burial environment. A desire for a degree of control over,
and investment in, the burial space is apparent. Creating a more robust burial
context and anchoring the body or body-urn to the land generates a sense that
an enduring cavity or capsule has been built underground. The physical reality
of decomposition was suspended inside a place constructed through com-
memorative funerary acts. Cemeteries contained a multiplicity of these cap-
sules, many housing the cremated and inhumed dead alongside each other, if
not in the same burial. Thus elements of the inhumed and cremated dead, and
their burial environments, would simultaneously survive and decay together.
Each capsule was enclosed on all four sides, veiled underground but locatable
(if only temporarily) by the terrain aboveground. This multifaceted process of

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human decomposition and bodily survival, cremated and inhumed, was therefore hidden in plain sight.

CONCLUSION

Early Anglo-Saxon cremations have long been understood in terms of their key differences, particularly the provision of artefacts and animals and the type of bodies produced by these burial processes. Conceptually, the inhumed body has long been ~~is~~ viewed as the binary opposite of the cremated body: it is wet and fleshy. Conversely, the cremated body has long been discussed in terms of its dry, fragmentary nature. Cremation affords burnt materials a robust endurance, allowing them to survive in a variety of climates, above or below ground.

Yet similarities are apparent. Multiple bodies could be structured and spaced in similar ways, regardless of burial mode. Un-urned deposits and wooden vessels may have had a similar, although not identical, relationship with the earth as inhumed bodies, through the eventual decay of an organic surround: the wooden body and cremains containers and the textile urn covering or 'bag' burials. The creation or selection of containers, structures and supports, seemingly on a burial-by-burial basis, reveals a considerable investment in burial space itself~~,~~ (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury 2010: 60) regardless of the chosen burial method.

The deployment of containers, coverings, and interfaces in inhumation and cremation contexts has been argued to have reinforced the literal and conceptual boundaries of the cadaver. In inhumation contexts they may even be viewed as extensions of the dead body's corporeal boundaries, acting as barriers between the living and death-as-contaminant. Microboundaries delayed and contained the inevitable seepage of the inhumed corpse. Ceramic vessels, and occasionally other containers, restored corporeal boundaries to the cremated body, once more hiding the inner body.

This is not to suggest that similarities between the two rites are symptomatic of an overarching belief system which transcended differences. Nor does this study claim that inhumation and cremation were attempting to achieve the same cosmological, transformative goals; this is clearly untenable. Certainly there are specific differences apparent between early Anglo-Saxon burial modes, particularly according to the selection of grave- and pyre goods and animals in certain regions. Yet cremation *and* inhumation can be situated within a broader concept of funerary corporeality, manifested in a specific time and place. Rather than approach cremation as the binary opposite of inhumation, a comparative approach may suggest certain concepts of bodily management and investment in burial space had currency in both forms of

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burial. Although cremation and inhumation differ in the level of physical integrity of the cadaver during the funeral, urn-bodies and inhumed bodies and their respective burial spaces could be treated in similar ways. The technology involved may have been different but concerns for the dead body and its resting place could transcend these respective rites.

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