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Abstract

The fifth to seventh centuries CE, or the Migration Period, marked the development of Anglo-Saxon culture and society in England. The early Anglo-Saxons are known largely through their material culture and mortuary practices, left behind in medieval cemeteries that twist their way across the English landscape. The remains of early Anglo-Saxons tell rich and interesting histories about past peoples, but within the broader landscapes of these cemeteries are deviant burials. These are burials that are specifically typified as ones that 'deviate' from the norm, usually indicating that the inhumed individual was punished in death for actions committed in life. These graves and burials are often elusive in their meaning, and scholars in mortuary studies have only just begun to dig deeper into the sociocultural implications of these burials, as well as into the identities of these unusual dead. In particular, interpretations of evidence have proposed that some of these burials belong to Anglo-Saxon cunning women (or folk) and witches, which this paper will review, drawing conclusions about how viable these interpretations are. An additional key aspect will be to discern the possibilities (and limitations) of analyzing abstract concepts like magical belief and paganism from archaeological remains.

Mortuary ritual is an essential aspect and detail of a culture, as well as for interpreting the human condition within that culture. The way a society's dead are laid to rest, as well as the ways in which the living acknowledge death, indicates the cultural values and beliefs of a people. Different cultures mourn and grieve in different ways, but the ritual of death is a common facet of civilization. While it is important to consider the treatment of the 'normal' or respected dead, understanding the treatment of those scorned is just as essential, because the burial practices for individuals who were ostracized from a community are theoretically distinct. Such a distinction has typically been discerned through analyzing macro-patterns of mortuary ritual throughout cemeteries. Essentially, scholars have made calculations of behavior based on space, treatment of remains, and grave find typologies.[1] A founding principle of mortuary archaeology relies on the idea that individuals were treated in death as they were perceived in life: a wealthy individual buried with finery and ornaments, a warrior at rest with their weapons, or a person without finery or weapons lying prone in an unusual grave.[2] The ways in which the dead are laid to rest can indicate potential ways that the living lived, largely in terms of cultural values and practices. As a result, it is possible to identify the archaeological remains of perceived social deviants.

Early medieval burials in eastern Britain indicate a significant shift in mortuary culture and practice, particularly those which date to the fifth to sixth centuries or the Anglo-Saxon Migration Period. The Romanization of Britain meant that cremation burials were considered the dominant mortuary rite by the time of its decline in the fifth century; what followed this demise

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[1] Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs,* Medieval History and Archaeology, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

[2] Bettina Arnold, and Robert J. Jeske, "The Archaeology of Death: Mortuary Archaeology in the United States and Europe 1990-2013," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43, no. 1 (2014): 325–46; Lewis R. Binford, "Mortuary Practices: Their Study and Their Potential," Memoirs of the *Society for American Archaeology* 25, no. 25 (1971): 12; Arthur A. Saxe, "Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1970), 74; See also: Lewis R. Binford, "Mortuary Practices: Their Study and Their Potential," Memoirs of the *Society for American Archaeology* 25, no. 25 (1971): 6–29.

was a resurgence of inhumation style burial practices in what was Roman-Britain.[3] Cremation burials were still widely practiced but the resurgence of inhumation burial, which was an uncommon Roman mortuary rite, indicated a new cultural force on the post-Roman landscape. These changes are largely attributed to the influx of migrants from continental Europe, a theory which draws evidence from weaponry within inhumation burials. The graves mirror burials in northern Gaul and do not represent a common rite in Roman Britain, thus providing some evidence of a cultural shift in Britain and its inhabitants during this period.[4]

After the collapse of Roman-Britain, a dynamic state of cultural identity emerged in the region, particularly in terms of belief systems.[5] Ambiguous lines between pagan tradition and Christian belief at the end of the sixth century further complicate interpretations of religious practice and spirituality among early Anglo-Saxons.[6] What is clear is that the dynamics of belief were locally distinct, and as such, Pagan belief systems and practice between the fifth and sixth centuries were likely saturated within the cultural ethos of a place. Individual behaviors connected to these practices would have been largely based on community needs and relationships, rather than an institutional ideology.[7] Localized behavior would have still been based on common beliefs, which for early Anglo-Saxon paganism were entrenched in holistic practices deeply connected to the natural world and were largely centered around medico-magical rituals.[8] These natural ritual practices oppose much of what (later) written texts describe as pagan belief, which is largely because the momentum of Christianization among Anglo-Saxon

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[3] Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 23.

[4] Sam Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 1-4.

[5] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 4-5.

[6] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 4.

[7] Katherine Myers Emery, "Preparing Their Death: Examining Variation in Co-occurrence of Cremation and Inhumation in Early Medieval England," PhD. diss., Michigan State University, 2016, 238.

[8] M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1993), 130.

society during the Conversion Period influenced how paganism was recorded and interpreted in textual sources, as well as across historical memory.[9] All of which are ideas and topics that will be further explored.

The purposes of this paper are twofold: 1) to describe the state of early Anglo-Saxon paganism and magic through gender analysis; working to bring the Anglo-Saxon 'witch' to life, and 2) to distinguish the limitations of interpreting magical belief and sociocultural identity through archaeological remains. Effectively, this research will synthesize the various attempts to unearth the Anglo-Saxon witch through evaluation of prone deviant burials and argue for a more systematic approach when evaluating cosmological belief from material evidence.

Overall, this paper encompasses three sections of discussion. The first outlines social deviance, what it is, and how it is reflected in both the textual and material evidence. This explanation specifically includes an introduction to Anglo-Saxon burial practices and breaks down what is considered to be the 'norm' versus what is identified as deviant. The second section deals primarily with textual evidence, which assists in defining mortuary rituals, paganism, and definitions of witchcraft within early Anglo-Saxon cultural boundaries. Following this discussion, the third section will focus on the material (or archaeological) evidence. Also included is a broader conversation about deviant burials across Europe to contextualize the similarities and differences of these regions to what is seen in England. Finally, the section includes the interpretations of the evidence within the contemporary literature and my own conclusions about how abstract sociocultural ideas, like magical belief and witchcraft, can be represented in material remains, as well as the limitations in drawing these conclusions. All of these sections and discussions will grapple with the interpretations of gender in the historic and

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[9] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity,* 1991, 29.

archaeological record, as well as determine its significance in deciphering the existence of occult practices in past cultures.

Throughout the paper, four central terms will be used to describe different, but integral, aspects of the topic: deviant (burial), paganism, witch/witchcraft, and cunning woman (folk). All of these terms permeate the current literature about Anglo-Saxon deviant burials. To start, "deviant" or "deviant burial" is in reference to things that are outside of the norm, in this case Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices. Deviant burials as a subsection of Anglo-Saxon archaeology and mortuary studies has been defined by Andrew Reynolds as burials that are, "prone, or face-down, burials, decapitations, and instances of the removal of other body parts, as well as burials treated abnormally, such as those covered with stones."[10] This is the definition and considerations applied to this research when referring to deviant burials, the term "deviant" applying more broadly to individuals who have been identified as abnormal from a larger group.

Similarly, the use of "paganism" in this study draws on definitions and explanations set forth by Karen Jolly and Henry Mayr-Harting in their respective works. Jolly's use of the popular religion model to describe paganism through non-Christian practices, as well as Mayr-Hartings spatial description of paganism as non-Christian practices that existed and were influential alongside Christian belief from the Romano-British period in England both inform its use in this paper.[11] "Witch" and "witchcraft" are much trickier terms to define. The term comes from the Old English word *wicca* (male) or *wicce* (female), and largely is used with a malicious connotation as a practitioner of magic. A myriad of other words and translations have been used to note similar ideas, but "witch" (similar to the use of witchcraft) is most present in the

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[10] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 37.

[11] Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2-3; Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity,* 1991, 22-30.

secondary literature and will be used to describe magical practitioners.[12] "Cunning woman" (or folk for a more gender-neutral term) will be used as a way to imply the identity of a magical practitioner that is not steeped in the same connotations as "witch." This term has been used by Audrey Meaney and Tania Dickinson to describe Anglo-Saxon women who may have been seen as magical or ritually powerful and is a more neutral term that can imply malefic or benevolent magical acts. "Cunning" comes from "cunnug" in Old English means "knowledge" and as a result the idea of a "cunning woman" notes an individual who has knowledge about ritual topics.[13] The phrase has become more popular in the literature and will be used to set off the negative connotations of "witch" when appropriate.

Despite the relative directness of the general research topic, the limitations of the necessary source bases weigh on this analysis. The textual sources which are needed to define the historical background of the topic, as well as to extrapolate specific perspectives of sociocultural viewpoints, largely date to after the initial Migration Period and were written by individuals who were influenced by Christian doctrine, which colored their interpretation of pagan practices in a negative light. Furthermore, the scope of these texts are often limited in their demographic diversity. Much of the documents reflect the perspectives of literate, powerful men within Anglo-Saxon society and fail to adequately address the lives and perspectives of the common folk, particularly women. These limitations create difficulty when trying to discuss fully the relationship between pagan practices and gender.

The material evidence considered in this paper is restrictive for two primary reasons. First, the only available access to the source base for this project is through site reports that

[12] Anatoly Liberman, "The Oxford Etymologist goes Trick-or-Treating," OUPblog, accessed April 17th 2022. https://blog.oup.com/2007/10/witch/
[13] Alexander Marr, Raphaele Garrod, Jose Ramon Marcaida, and Richard J. Oosterhoff, *Logodaedalus: Word Histories of Ingenuity in Early Modern Europe*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 229-30.

describe the archaeological sites, artifacts, and environmental properties associated with the cemeteries and burial remains. No physical examination of the relevant sites or artifacts was able to be completed. Second, while material evidence speaks to a broader scope of demographic analysis, discerning abstract thought from tangible remains is particularly difficult. Nonetheless, we can only consider the evidence that is available. From what *is* available, it is possible to consider the possibilities of finding the remains of witches as social deviants.

SECTION ONE: Outlining social deviance in the textual and archaeological records.

Conceptually, social deviance is culturally structured. To be a deviant, an outcast, or a social other is to be recognized as maliciously different by the larger group−whether this be societal or more local in scope. The crime of the social deviant is subjective and depends largely on the different cultural values enacted within a society to be upheld by the larger populace. In the case of deviant burials, this idea is reflected in how an individual is treated in their death. Identifying what is 'normal' in a culture's mortuary practices leads to specific patterns that can indicate a deviation from normal behavior, thus indicating a transgression against the cultural values of a society or community. What is important in making this determination is classifying how social deviance may be presented societally and acknowledging who is in control of upholding social consequence for breaking cultural rules. This is a central element to defining how magic and witchcraft fit into the sociocultural framework of early Anglo-Saxon society; was it an inherent taboo, a facet of everyday life, or a coalescence of the two?

Alternatively, social deviance in terms of burial practice can be reflected through necrophobic behaviors and represent something more akin to acknowledgment of reputation rather than criminalized deviant behavior. This is an interpretation more commonly associated with the archaeology of fear, which indicates that while manifestations of social deviance can

reflect an individual's status as an outcast or social other, it can also reflect a collective acknowledgment of an individual's reputation.[14] Essentially, the power individuals held in their lives, in this case assumed to be supernatural or mystical, could be reflected in the way they were treated in their deaths. So, when the burial of an individual reflects necrophobic patterns, this could be an indication of a fear and precaution against the dead rising again, not necessarily institutional punishment for unacceptable social behaviors. The same pattern could potentially manifest in prone burials; deep burials; the dead being weighed down by stones or other heavy materials, buried in specific types of coffins; or various combinations of these characteristics.[15] The archaeology of fear is an important angle to consider, largely because it shifts the schema for analyzing the identity of the Anglo-Saxon witch within deviant burials. Changing the perspective of witchcraft or magic as a criminalized, social offense to a characteristic embodied with powerful supernatural forces to be acknowledged even in death—so much so that an individual would be buried in such a way to ensure they could not return to the realm of the living—implies largely different ideas about early Anglo-Saxon culture and society than what is only represented in the written record. While these considerations are not mutually exclusive, they offer different ways of interpreting aspects of early Anglo-Saxon paganism that were (and were not) considered deviant in the traditional definition of the term, as well as for what reasons.

Anglo-Saxon written sources show varying degrees of sociocultural values represented in society.[16] Pieces of Anglo-Saxon cultural values and practices are present in the documents; however, by the time of the Conversion in the seventh century, the texts were transcribed by

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[14] Anastasia Tsaliki, "Unusual Burials and Necrophobia: An Insight into the Burial Archaeology of Fear," in *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record* ed. Eileen Murphy (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2010), 2.

[15] Tsaliki, "Unusual Burials and Necrophobia," 2010, 5.

[16] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, edited by Bertram Colgrave, and R. A. B. Mynors, (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1969), 136, 153; John T. McNeil, and Helena M. Gamer, trans. *The Medieval Handbook of Penance,* (New York: Octagon Books, 1979), 179-216.

Christianized people within a society being recrafted by an institutional dogma. This is apparent

in the *Penitential of Theodore* (c. 668-690) which was created by the archbishop of Canterbury,

Theodore of Tarsus, and dates exceptionally close to the outlined study period.[17] It is a document

made up of Theodore's responses to questions posed to him by a presbyter, Eoda. The document

as it stands today (sans translation) was edited by an unknown scribe who likely was familiar

with Irish penitential literature.[18] This introduces the potential issues surrounding the accurate

portrayal of Anglo-Saxons within the source because of copying from the *Cannons*. However, in

comparing the two most prominent penitentials in this literature, *Finnian* and *Cummean,* any

overlap is minimal. The organization and word choice of the entries that specifically define

witchcraft or elements of paganism are unique enough to determine that they are not just blind

copies; rather, they are integrated into the cultural ethos of Anglo-Saxon England.[19] While the

text's connection to Anglo-Saxon tradition is clear, a direct connection to paganism among

Anglo-Saxons is less so. For instance, the 'sin' according to the *Penitential of Theodore* of

placing a child on a roof or in an oven to cure fever is not what determines deviance; it is the

moralization of what that action represents, which is witchcraft from a Christianized perspective.

However, from an early pagan perspective it is more likely systems of belief and practice that

informed vernacular folk knowledge, likely medicinally.[20] From the text, we can discern that this

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[17] "The Penitential of Theodore," in *The Medieval Handbook of Penance,* translated by McNeil and Gamer, 1979, 179.

[18] "The Penitential of Theodore," in *The Medieval Handbook of Penance*, 1979, 180-1.

[19] "The Penitential of Finnian" in *The Medieval Handbook of Penance,* translated by McNeil and Gamer 1979, 89-97; I saw no glaring repetition between these two across all sections. The structure of Finnian's (F.) text differed from Theodore's (T.) and there was no distinct (outside of wat would be expected) repetition of wording, phrases, or content; "The Penitential of Cummean" in *The Medieval Handbook of Penance,* translated by McNeil and Gamer 1979, 98-116; The structure of Cummean's (C.) text was much more similar to T.'s than F.'s. C.'s begins with the first section "Gluttony" and T.'s begins with the first section "Drunkenness." McNeil notes that C.'s penitential was likely referenced by Theodore and Eoda, and the slight repetition would attest to this–however, the sections that are pertinent to paganism and witchcraft are distinct and do not repeat between the two.

[20]"The Penitential of Theodore," in *The Medieval Handbook of Penance*, 1979, 198.

action was seen as sinful and was cause for penance, which shows some level of social othering associated with the act.

But how is social deviance reflected materially? Evidence for this is collected archaeologically through burials and cemeteries, specifically drawing on the aforementioned theory that the perception in life remains consistent in death. If this hypothesis is accepted, burials that are objectively rare or that deviate from normal behavior must reflect perceived abnormalities of the inhumed. However, for an effective investigation of deviant behavior in the archaeological record, different pieces of burial evidence must be compared to an established normative baseline. In this way, evaluating which burials reflect deviant behavior as opposed to those that reflect relatively normal cultural patterns is possible. The following paragraphs will describe what is classified as 'normal' in Anglo-Saxon burial practice as determined by archaeology, in addition to how 'normal' as a category is not easily discernible.

Ideas about 'normal' early Anglo-Saxon burials can be misleading. Burials and graves are inherently personal and unique because they involve individual people. Thus, the individuality of burials poses a disconnect in potential interpretations that is important to acknowledge. The individuality of burials and remains means that important information can be determined about the inhumed individual, but it is much more difficult to successfully extrapolate that data to broader burial patterns, largely because regional differences in burial practice, belief, and familial ritual are factors that must be considered. Spatial analyses of specific burial practices across England show some identifiable patterns in terms of common inhumation practices, even across deviant burials. It is important to acknowledge that familial preference and ritual likely influenced how early Anglo-Saxons buried their dead, especially

because of the fluctuating cultural identities that persisted during the initial migration period.[21]

As such, "normal" Anglo-Saxon burial practices are not universal across cemeteries or burial

sites, but some indicators do present themselves in relatively common types of burial style and

grave goods.

Early Anglo-Saxon burial styles and forms are either cremations or inhumations.[22] While

cremation practices are often seen as older and more indicative of pagan influence, both burial

styles were commonly used as mortuary rites; however, by the end of the sixth century,

cremation practices did become less common, likely due to the beginnings of Christian

conversion.[23] It is significant, however, that while two different approaches to burying the dead

were in practice, arguments can be made that some level of similarity in ritual practice during the

burial occurred for both cremations and inhumations (in the form of shrouds/dressings for the

dead, use of vessels, and animal remains).[24] While the practices are a central piece of Anglo-

Saxon mortuary studies in a broader sense, this paper reflects analysis of inhumations because of

the current inability to discern anything particularly deviant about cremation burials. As such,

this paper will only illustrate examples of 'normal' inhumation burials.

Inhumations could often be furnished with either coffins or shrouds that housed the dead,

which is determined through the remains of organic wood and textile materials in the soil.[25]

Some chamber graves and barrows have been interpreted as wealthier graves, and, though these

forms do tend to be more rare styles of burial, they do not constitute the same questions and

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[21] Fleming, *Britain After Rome,* 2010, 62-3.
[22] Howard Williams, "Mortuary Practices in Early Anglo-Saxon England" in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, edited by Helene Hamerow, David Hinton, and Sally Crawford, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 241.
[23] Williams, "Mortuary Practices in Early Anglo-Saxon England" 2011, 241.
[24] Williams, "Mortuary Practices in Early Anglo-Saxon England" 2011, 241.
[25] Williams, "Mortuary Practices in Early Anglo-Saxon England" 2011, 253.

uncertainty of the deviant rites explored in this paper because few follow deviant rites or have unique grave goods that have traditionally suggested occult associations.[26] Inhumation burials constitute a common burial rite among Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and grave sites and are individually distinct. In addition to this burial form, the grave goods that can be associated within the burials themselves also assist in interpreting the differences between normal and deviant early Anglo-Saxon graves.

Material culture in burials is important for representing both identity and memory of the dead. These tangible objects are particularly useful for dating Anglo-Saxon burials, as well as adding to the typology of "normal" grave goods, such as the jewelry and dress ornaments often found in female graves. The early fifth and sixth century is marked by monochrome bead strings, while the late sixth and seventh centuries are more defined by polychrome beads.[27] Specific brooch types also correlate to specific centuries and styles of dress.[28] Further, other significant and symbolic objects included latch-lifters as well as girdle hangers, which are representative of simple keys.[29] Arrays of ceramic and glass vessels, combs, and buckets also appear in the archaeological record, though buckles and knives are the most common across the fifth through seventh centuries.[30] While not every burial has all of these grave goods (some burials have no material objects at all), these items represent common artifacts that are often found in early Anglo-Saxon graves. However, uncommon artifacts appear on occasion and can often be interpreted as being amuletic, or ritually distinct. Likewise, much of the evidence used to speculate about the identity of cunning folk in burials comes from these amulets and ritualistic

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[26] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 101.
[27] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 25.
[28] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 29-40.
[29] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 25.
[30] Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death,* 51-8.

finds; in fact, they can be found in some deviant burials and have been argued to show evidence of witch burials, but this will be discussed at more length in the third section of the paper.

In Anglo-Saxon mortuary studies, the presence of different deviant burial typologies introduces the possibility to identify individuals who were ostracized from their communities and punished in death. This also allows for some level of speculation for how their actions in life reflect specific types of deviant behavior. The most recent literature on Anglo-Saxon deviant burials is reflected in Andrew Reynolds' book *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (2009)*.* A paramount feature of Reynolds' book is his redefining, based on the synthesis of current evidence, of what is and is not considered a deviant burial. He bases his work largely on the classifications of Helen Geake, though Reynolds does rule out four burial types from the deviant categories and instead illustrates why they should be considered "normal" burial rites: crouched, multiple, shallow, and cramped burials.[31] While they are not evidence of deviant association on their own, combinations of these burial practices with deviant rites potentially elevates the significance of the burial. Largely, the normality of the aforementioned burial rites is dependent upon their regional popularity, meaning that they are not necessarily rare, just that regionality is relevant to where these burial forms are found.[32]

Reynolds identifies four main deviant rites: decapitation, amputation, stoned burials, and prone burials.[33] While these first two burial rites are categorized as deviant, they are not currently interpreted as having an inherent association with witches, cunning folk, or magical rituals by current scholarship. Decapitation is one of the simplest forms to identify in the archaeological record, though generally older site reports fail to note specifics about skull

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[31] Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 62-3.
[32] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 62-8.
[33] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 63.

placement within the grave or any kinds of markings associated with pre- or post-decapitation.[34]

Amputations are similar to decapitation where a purposeful removal of body parts is present, and

typically these are thought to indicate the burials of thieves or other criminals.[35]

Stoning burials refer to inhumations that are covered in stones of varying size and

quantity.[36] Reynolds notes four instances of burials associated with cunning women due to

amuletic grave goods found in the burials in addition to the stoned characteristic but provides

limited discussion on the comparison between these examples and prone burials.[37] Prone burials

are the deviant rite most commonly associated with witchcraft or magical practice. This type of

burial is identifiable when individuals are laid face-down in the grave, sometimes with their feet

or hands bound.[38] The potential associations with witchcraft are derived from the idea that

physically incapacitating the dead (by heavy objects to hold them in place or by hindering their

access to the surface) would theoretically make it less likely that they would be able to return and

haunt or harm the living. This particular belief was common across cultural boundaries and is

seen in mortuary practices from the European continent, specifically Germanic and

Scandinavian.[39] This indicates that prone burial is a rite that was likely used for the burial of

individuals who were powerful in life and feared in death (and further indicates the relevance to

the archaeology of fear perspective). Similar arguments could be made about stoning practices,

though Reynolds does not make this explicit connection like he does with prone burials.

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[34] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 76-7.
[35] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 85.
[36] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 81.
[37] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 83.
[38] Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs, 2009, 68.
[39] Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead?" 2013b, 114; Alterauge, Meier, Jungklaus, Milella, and Lösch, "Between Belief and Fear," 2020, paragraph 1-2.

Using both the archaeological evidence and the written sources helps to create a foundation for defining social structure and hierarchy within early Anglo-Saxon culture. This subsequently determines how deviant behavior fits into that framework, as well as indicating whether or not gender is a significant factor in deviant burial analysis—especially when working to dissect the identity of the Anglo-Saxon witch. It is a common and well-accepted assumption in Anglo-Saxon archaeology that grave goods are an indication of gender, and as such, can be used to determine the sex of a skeleton when they are unearthed from within the same context. However, the issue arises that this logic, while seemingly straightforward, can become quite circular. Often there are few grave goods found in a burial, as well as potential errors when attempting to accurately sex skeletal remains through osteometric analysis (typically because of deteriorated bones). It is standard practice to sex a skeleton through analyzing the pelvic bones (or *os coxae*) when the bone survives in the archaeological record. Sexual dimorphism in humans often presents in the structure of the pelvic bones in men and women, with male pelvises being more narrow and less flexible than female pelvises. While recent analytical methods indicate a relatively high confidence level for accurately sexing skeletal remains, the majority of the site data for early Anglo-Saxon deviant burials is from the mid-to-late twentieth century.[40] While it is likely that there were no glaring errors made during osteometric analysis of these remains, it is possible, and gender analysis should be done carefully as a result.

The limitations of this study and source material do not allow for a close examination of gender evidence further than referring to past site reports. While this analysis will work from the available data and presume that previous excavations were acceptably accurate, it is important to

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[40] Jaroslav Brůžek, Frédéric Santos, Bruno Dutailly, Pascal Murail, and Eugenia Cunha, "Validation and Reliability of the Sex Estimation of the Human Os Coxae Using Freely Available DSP2 Software for Bioarchaeology and Forensic Anthropology," *American Journal of Biological Anthropology* 164, no. 2 (2017): 441.

acknowledge that errors are possible. Ideally, future studies that grapple with these topics and questions will revisit the material evidence as closely as possible, while also referring to the old reports and field notes relevant to the site. Furthermore, the nuance of sexing archaeological remains means that any kind of sociocultural gender binary from contemporary culture that is applied to both the remains and sites of the past should be scrutinized for any potential biases.

SECTION TWO: Considering the written sources and textual evidence.

While the tangible remains of the past can indicate both cultural practices and identity, they can also provide insight into the treatment of people who acted outside of acceptable cultural values. Evidence of deviant individuals in the material record may record the actions of social punishment, but Anglo-Saxon law codes further reflect ideas of social normalizing from the perspective of the powerful. However, the use of law codes to determine social deviance can really only inform how those creating and writing the laws viewed disorder and unacceptable behavior within a society. There is no clear indication that these laws were followed by the local population or that the actions described in the laws were common. This means that examples of law codes that condemn witchcraft or use of magic do not necessarily indicate that Anglo-Saxon society was full of wizards or sorcerers casting curses on the unsuspecting; rather they show that the powerful and literate made choices to condemn magical practices they deemed unacceptable. In this way, Anglo-Saxon law codes do not accurately portray the actions of deviant behavior of common people. Instead, they can indicate how individuals in power worked to define societal expectations. More particularly, these law codes (written by nominally Christian or newly converted peoples) show a Christianized perspective on how pagan practice became criminalized and deviant.

Athelstan's law codes from the twelfth century provide some insight into these concepts, particularly entry six, which notes that "witchcraft and sorceries and deadly spells will be punished by death."[41] It is clear that the associations of witchcraft and sorcery with "deadly spells" indicates a certain level of malicious intent related to these specific magical acts. Similar patterns are shown in Edward and Guthrum's laws within the Dane's Treaties. The eleventh entry stresses that magical practitioners who intend to cause magical harm would be severely punished or killed.[42] However, the nature of this law code being a forgery created by Wulfstan, the bishop of Worcester (c. 1002-1023) to be a continuation of the early codes of Alfred and Guthrum, indicates less that witchcraft in early Anglo-Saxon society was prevalent and punishable by execution, but more so that into the eleventh century pagan ritual had likely met some kind of revival with the arrival of the Danes.[43] This largely illustrates the complexities of belief in England, even centuries after the Migration Period and initial Christian Conversion.

Malefic magical actions are implied to be capital offenses, or at least criminalized to the extent of public execution, but this does not mean that *all* or even *most* accusations actually resulted in death. Also, it is important to reemphasize that regionality among early Anglo-Saxon England affected how magical acts were perceived. Some communities may have reacted to different magical acts as more harmful or serious than others—in essence the cultures of individual and more localized places would have had a greater bearing on determining the differences between magic or ritual paganism and malevolent witchcraft. These more vernacular

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[41] II As 6.1 in *The Laws of the Early English Kings,* edited and translated by Frederick Attenborough, (London: Cambridge University Press), 131.

[42] EGu 11 in *The Laws of the Early English Kings,* edited and translated by Frederick Attenborough, (London: Cambridge University Press), 109.

[43] Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999) 390.

interpretations would then not be accurately presented in the law codes or penitentials that are closest to the study period.

Despite the limited perspective of the written documents, the textual evidence exists and can provide some insight into the reactions to magical practice nearer the conversion period. Not all accusations of witchcraft resulted in execution, as some law codes imply. Instead, mentions of magical practice, like in the *Penitential of Theodore* are met with varying assignments of penance for the sin. For instance, in "Book XV Of the Worship of Idols" there are five entries that refer in some way to pagan ritual and magic, none of which condemn the sinner to death but to varying degrees of penance from five to ten years.[44] The inclusion of acts of magical practice in the penitential indicates two important considerations, that witchcraft and magical practice developed into a sin within the Christian perspective, and that what was determined to be witchcraft was likely not viewed the same way by early Anglo-Saxon pagans. Rather, the fluctuating cultural identities of Anglo-Saxons across the study period complicated ideas of magical practice.

Ideally, it should be determined how potent these ideas of social normalizing were at a local scale in early Anglo-Saxon England. In terms of material evidence, regional patterns for deviant burials can indicate how frequent different rites were and where they occurred. While this does not necessarily determine what behaviors those deviant rites were in response to, they can show a spatial distribution of burial data. Written records are more complicated to define regional differences from. This is because there is a distinct lack of written sources from the same study periods that are represented materially and also because these documents often present content from authority figures, not necessarily from common people that archaeology is

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[44] "The Penitential of Theodore," in *The Medieval Handbook of Penance,* 1979, 198.

much more adept at representing. Regional interpretations are thus limited here, but ideas about

"middle practices" can provide some clarity.[45] "Middle practices" are presented by Karen Jolly

and refer to the intersection of dichotomous concepts that are presented as mutually exclusive.[46]

This approach emphasizes especially that Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity could not have

been stark or sudden, rather the dissemination of new cultural practices would have been gradual.

Instead of separating the past into "Pagan" and "Christian" we can infer that the identities of

early Anglo-Saxons continued to fluctuate between a married version of the two until a

predominately Christianized society took hold. Similarly, Jolly's approach applies to the

definition of magic as it would have been perceived by early Anglo-Saxons.[47] For instance, Jolly

describes how paganism and Christianity converged, particularly in the context of medieval

charms:

> In the charms we find elements of Christianity and survivals of paganism, miracle and magic, and liturgy and folklore, all united through a holistic view of the world in which physical and spiritual realities were intertwined and interdependent. The manuscripts contain both medical and liturgical elements, from both Roman Christian and Germanic traditions. What appears to the modern eye to be a confusion of sources was actually a coherent synthesis drawing on common ideas about the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm.[48]

We cannot make anachronistic distinctions between what was 'magic' and what was 'religion'

because either concept would have represented, or at least been an intersection of, cosmological

ideas. In this way, defining witchcraft and magic-use as social deviance from textual sources

works only for how Christian authorities viewed pagan practices and rituals.

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[45] Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England,* 1996, 3.

[46] Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England,* 1996, 3.

[47] It is important to note that Jolly is plainly discussing "late Saxon religion" here through Christian charms, but the logic behind her approach is applicable to more than just her own defined study period; Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, 1996, 4.

[48] Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England,* 1996, 97.

The written evidence is relatively clear on what was socially unacceptable in the texts, but the process for interpreting examples of social deviance materially is more problematic. This is because abstract intentions behind burial practices cannot be explained like subjects in written documents. Much of the Anglo-Saxon written record are sources that were transcribed after the established study period for this paper, and while these sources outline the sins and criminalized acts that could result in execution or penance, they do not indicate any methodology for burying these deviants, even if their crimes were sorcery or witchcraft. As a result, it is important to define how the concepts of witchcraft and magic fit into the larger cultural ethos of early Anglo-Saxons. Anglo-Saxon paganism was a broad sociocultural system of belief and knowledge that drew on traditions of Germanic and Scandinavian influences, which encompassed more than simply what was magical or non-magical. As a result, it is necessary to define, with as much specificity as possible, how ideas of both magic and witchcraft existed in early Anglo-Saxon society.

The distinction of gendered spheres of influence within pagan practice is largely accepted within historiography. Women are interpreted to have been closely connected to magical practices within pagan traditions, which in turn informs why the prone burials of women have been proposed as potential witch burials. Further, the origin of Anglo-Saxon paganism is interpreted as a result of the Germanic migration into Britain during the fifth century. It is likely that the pagan practices and ritual behaviors of these cultures merged with the cultural practices of individuals already settled in the area.

Customs of early Germanic pagans indicate a specific emphasis on the prophetic abilities of women.[49] Skills of prophecy and mystic foretelling elevated the value of Germanic women's

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[49] Indeed, Tacitus' Germania is a source far removed from the outlined study period in this paper. It was published in the first century CE, which is centuries removed from the period of Anglo-Saxon migration. Further, Tacitus is writing

opinions, which allowed them to operate, to some degree, in a sphere of mystical authority

within these culture groups. These women were looked to as healers, trusted voices, and vital

practitioners of ritual belief.[50] The roles of Germanic women as healers emphasize the

connection of paganism to the natural world. Places of spiritual connection and power were

located in groves and wooded holy places, emphasizing the necessary connection of man's

spirituality to the natural world.[51] Ritual practices in these locations were often overseen by a

priest or high-ranking holy man, which indicates a unique distinction of pagan practices between

women and men.[52] Subtle evidence for blurred gender perception in ritual practice is presented

by Tacitus, particularly about the Naharvali who "proudly point out a grove associated with

ancient worship. The presiding priest dresses like a woman; but the deities are said to be the

counterpart of Castor and Pollux…they are certainly worshipped as young men and brothers."[53]

Here it is possible that religious practices, while often performed by [male] priests, were less

starkly divided down gendered lines, and at the very least were more nuanced than current

historical interpretations of gender expression imply. Additionally, this emphasizes the

importance of women in pagan ritual, and that religious interpretation and practice depended on

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as a Roman with a Roman perspective. The bias of his position obviously colors his interpretation of Germanic people and customs. Though, there are some aspects of Tacitus' account that prove the general reliability of his work.fragment Particularly in the accuracy of his descriptions of Germanic dress (as compared to archaeological evidence) and his willingness to distinguish the similarities and differences between Germanic cultures and the Romans (see page 27-8 of trans.). In my opinion Tacitus' descriptions of women, their role in ritual practice, as well as the larger image he constructs of Germanic paganism are convincing enough to establish a thread of continuity to the paganism of early Anglo-Saxons. While the evidence should by no means be taken to describe Anglo-Saxon pagan customs in full, the migration of Teutonic culture from the continent into England and the resulting ethos of the Anglo-Saxons allows for an accurate degree of ethnographic speculation to be conducted; Cornelius Tacitus, *The Agricola and The Germania,* edited by Harold Mattingly and S.A. Handford (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 108.

[50] Also noteworthy is Tacitus' description of Venedi Germanic women, stating that they "support themselves by hunting, exactly like the men; they accompany them everywhere and insist on taking their share in bringing down the game,"; Tacitus, *The Germania,* 1970, 107 and 141.

[51] Tacitus, *The Germania,* 1970, 108, 133-4, 137.

[52] Tacitus, *The Germania,* 1970, 109-10, 153.

[53] Tacitus, *The Germania,* 1970, 137.

gender. The possible remnants of ambiguous gender perception, as well as the connection to

nature and holistic ritual, were then maintained through the migration of Germanic peoples

through the settlement of early Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century.

Aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture also mirror some Scandinavian cultural practices and

material culture, particularly in the ways that folk knowledge about death and magical ritual

manifest.[54] As such there are specific gender connections to make with paganism that are also

indicated in saga literature, particularly in the *Eyrbyggja Saga*. While the use of sagas as a

legitimate historical source is sometimes controversial, The *Eyrbyggja Saga* in particular

illustrates vivid examples of pagan ritual practice that is largely similar to actual archaeological

evidence of these practices, in both Scandinavia and England.[55] For this reason, the *Eyrbyggja*

Saga will form an aspect of the literature used to dissect Anglo-Saxon paganism.

In the text, magical practice is connected to feminine identity through Thorgrima Witch-

Face and Geirrid. Both of these women represent a powerful individual with some connection to

ritual and magical practice in varying degrees. For instance, Thorgrima Witch-Face is seen being

paid to do magic, particularly to cause a blizzard.[56] Thorgrima is relevant to this discussion

because she represents a figure with well-known influence in ritual practice, magic, and pagan

beliefs. Additionally, in the saga, Geirrid is accused of being a night-witch and bewitching

Gunnlaug, the son of Thorbjorn the Stout, and injuring him after he leaves from learning magic

from her. Geirrid is eventually judged not guilty, though her depiction in the literature is of a

woman who is well versed in magical arts and is in a place of authority.[57] Her position as a

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[54] Williams, "Mortuary Practices in Early Anglo-Saxon England" 2011, 241.

[55] Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead?" 2013b, 114; See section three of this paper for a more in-depth discussion of the connections between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon deviant burials.

[56] *Eyrbyggja Saga,* translated by Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 106-7.

[57] *Eyrbyggja Saga,* 1972, 45-7.

teacher of magical arts not only provides further evidence that a specific connection between women and magic existed in pagan cultures, but that a level of status in these communities could have potentially been achieved by these women. Interestingly, it is clear that while associations of women with witchcraft in Scandinavian tradition is prevalent, it was not an exclusively feminine trait, seen by Gunnlaug's education in witchcraft from Geirrid.

The representation of death and burial is also present in the *Eyrbyggja Saga*. In the story several deaths occur and much revolves around the interactions between the different realms of humans and ghosts. Thorolf's death is a prime example of this because there is prominent discussion about correct practices for interacting with the dead as well as proper burial methods and belief that the dead could rise again. First, when Thorolf is found dead in his high seat, people are warned to not cross in front of the corpse before his eyes have been closed.[58] This indicates a kind of powerful association with corpses and the power they can potentially still hold over the living. Further, when Thorolf is buried, a wall is built around his tomb.[59] While it is not an example of prone or stoned burial, the physical act of implementing a barrier between the living and dead is reminiscent of the reasoning behind those burial rites. It is largely informative about potential attitudes felt towards the dead as something to be weary and careful of.[60]

Transitioning from the saga literature, the remnants of Anglo-Saxon charms are indicative of pagan traditions and can show aspects of folk knowledge that permeated the English landscape post-Migration.[61] Specifically, these charms can give context to at least some of the actions mentioned in the law codes and penitentials previously mentioned, as well as

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[58] *Eyrbyggja Saga,* 1972, 93.
[59] *Eyrbyggja Saga,* 1972, 93-5.
[60] *Eyrbyggja Saga,* 1972, 93-5.
[61] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* Edited by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity,* 1991, 40-50:

inform what would have been considered witchcraft. Whom, or even what the early Anglo-Saxon 'witch' was, is difficult to discern. Not only is the linguistic origin for the word hazy, but its connections to gender is also ambiguous. 'Witch' also does not refer to every practitioner of magic, it specifically indicates an individual who uses magic for malicious purposes. Examples may include injuring others through poisons, curses, or through instigating harm through malefic creatures (like elves).[62] Some evidence for this exists in different types of Anglo-Saxon charms, which have combined aspects of paganism and Christian influence, but nonetheless indicate some level of cultural associations to magic.[63]Take for example, the elf remedy in Leechbook One, lxiv:

> Against every evil wisewoman [leodrunan], and against elf trick [aelfsidenne], write this writing for him with these Greek letters: <#> + + A + + O + yHpByM + + + + + BeppNNIKNETTANI. <#> [crosses with alpha and omega, possibly huios, ichthus; Veronica].[64]

The notation of an "evil wisewoman" likely connects to older interpretations of women and pagan ritual, specifically emphasizing the potential malice of magical practices. The charm clearly draws from some Christian influence; the remaining instructions state the practitioner to say "nine masses" over the afflicted, however the use of herbal remedy and medicinal knowledge within the charm are likely informed by folk knowledge, particularly the knowledge and older oral traditions of pagan women.[65] Nonetheless, the majority of evidence for dissecting pagan

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[62] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity,* 1991, 28: Common in both Germanic and Anglo-Saxon cultural beliefs, it was believed that elves were often the cause of disease and would attack an individual with illness by physically "shooting" them. Furthermore, charms in the Lacnunga are both medicinal and folkloric in he sense that the purposes of many are to ward off or cure "elfshot.": John Henry Grafton, ed. *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text "Lacnunga."* Translated by Charles Singer. Philadelphia: R. West, 1978.

[63] Paola Tornaghi, "Anglo-Saxon Charms and the Language of Magic." *Aevum* 84, no. 2 (2010): 439–64.

[64] Karen Louise Jolly, Anglo-Saxon Charms: Leechbook One, lxiv, University of North Carolina, accessed March 28th, 2022. http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kjolly/unc.htm.

[65] Jolly, Leechbook One, lxiv, http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kjolly/unc.htm; The problems of scholarship biases can reflect a different kind of uncertainty in medieval gender interpretations. In her master's thesis (2003), Keri Sanburn describes the "indexing" of women in medieval history. The concept refers to the perpetual treatment of medieval

practices of early Anglo-Saxons draws from the medieval charms that illustrate the coalescence

of pagan influence and Christian interpretations.[66]

Due to the limitations of textual evidence and the presence of women within it, the

material record is necessary for beginning to reconstruct their past identities. This is also true for

a wider range of demographics that were not well-represented in the texts. Archaeological

evidence is then an essential piece when attempting to reconstruct the identities and cultures of

past people.[67] While they are not absent from the textual record, the appearance of men is

disproportionate to that of women, and it is largely high-ranking or elite women that are

represented, not common or peasant women.[68] Depictions of women in written sources are

limited largely because of the (perceived) unbalanced social positions of men and women. This

meant that while women are mentioned in Penitentials, law codes, literature or hagiographies,

women in research as an index term rather than a fully realized and integrated component of reconstructing medieval history and society. Sanburn notes the ludicrous idea of listing 'men' as an index term, because the pages would be far too numerous to be useful, whereas 'women' is a term that, when it appears in the indices of history publications, is lucky to have a few associated entries outside of footnotes. The indexing of medieval women relates to the larger trend of unbalanced gender analysis in research. Sanburn notes that when women are acknowledged as active historical actors, it is often a conceded point by the scholar. Usually, a disclaimer or general statement that indicates that of course women were *likely* or *could have been* involved within the making of history. Despite this acknowledgment, no further work is usually taken to effectively analyze evidence that reflects this possibility. Essentially, the wayward historian pens their inclusive blanket statement and pivots right back into the general assumptions of men being the genesis of historical evidence; the presumed man's word is final, and their perspective is the baseline for historical interpretation. Sanburn presents this concept as a way to argue that the medical and metrical charms from the early Anglo-Saxons were likely to have been created and preserved by women. She pushes back on the idea that just because it is likely a man transcribed these texts, does not mean that their inception was or even should be credited to a man. Sanburn's analysis, thesis, and conceptual argument are important to this paper because her position about Anglo-Saxon women and their medicinal knowledge is important for understanding the relationship between gender and magic; her concept of indexing (and un-indexing) medieval women is also applicable to the gender analysis in this work because it advocates for a more critical approach for how we perceive gender in historical evidence, and to reevaluate how our own gender biases may color interpretations of the past, see: Keri Elizabeth Sanburn (Behre), "The Indexing of Medieval Women: The Feminine Tradition of Medical Wisdom in Anglo-Saxon England and the Metrical Charms," Master's diss., Florida State University, 2003, 2. Accessed March 28th 2022.

[66] Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, 102.

[67] Christine E. Fell, Cecily Clark, and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: British Museum Publications, 1984), 22-3.

[68] Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* 1984, 26.

they are still often represented with a lesser legal and religious competency than men. The reality that it was likely a majority of men transcribing these documents may also affect this unbalanced terrain of textual evidence. Nonetheless, medieval women existed and by default were active makers of history, whether the evidence visibly records them or not.

Gender interpretations by historians and archaeologists tend to follow a socially constructed binary that defines societal roles and perceptions of identity. It is difficult to discern the legitimate perceptions of gender in the past, and further through an incomplete material record. While this does give cause to reinterpret traditional views on gender and how it is applied as an analytical tool in archaeology to study different cultural groups, gender in Anglo-Saxon England appears to be standardized in a male/female binary.[69] With these general divisions of gender in mind, it is important to reflect on the specific ways Anglo-Saxon women and men each contributed to defining their culture, particularly in folklore and religion. While it is likely that women were heavily involved with the medico-magical practices and pagan ritual, these practices are not clearly defined as a female space. Men are just as likely to have been medico-magic practitioners, because indeed the traditions were interpreted into Christianized practices and transcribed largely by men. The relationship between Geirrid and Gunnlaug is an example of this. Their dynamic as a teacher and student of magical ritual indicate that magic was not a women-only sphere of power or influence. As such, defining gendered religious practice typically follows a public versus domestic ritual sphere. Women were often the vectors of familial, sometimes communal, and religious ritual.[70] As such, they likely participated in medico-magical healing practices along with their male counterparts—in some cases dominating

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[69] Hines, *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century,* 1997, 130.
[70] McNeil, and Gamer, *The Medieval Handbook of Penance,* 1979, 38.

the practice given the depiction of women as teachers, instructors, and carriers of ritual tradition within communities.

SECTION THREE: Considering the archaeology of deviant burials.

Before moving to discuss the material evidence of Anglo-Saxon deviant burials, it is relevant to consider other deviant burial practices across other European regions and culture groups. It is not the main focus of this paper to dissect the similarities and differences of deviance between Anglo-Saxon burials and other European burials. Rather the following paragraphs provide a brief overview of relevant literature that describes the similarities and differences of broader European and Anglo Saxon deviant burials. Establishing any relevant continuities in these patterns provides a strong indication of continued pagan influences manifested through these deviant rites and specific mortuary practices. For instance, the Irish examples of deviant burials share a variety of characteristics found in Anglo-Saxon examples, particularly in the typologies of deviant burials, which follow largely the same criteria set forth by Reynolds.[71] There is little discussion about witchcraft or occult practices being displayed through deviant rites but nonetheless Irish burials closely mirror Anglo-Saxons examples, as well as having bodies of primary source literature that have some influence over the other.

On continental Europe, there is a clearer distinction in the specifics of regional and cultural influences. Studies of Polish deviant burials have historically focused heavily on the idea of revenants and vampires as the explanation for deviant rites due to the regional folklore of Slavic cultures. More recent perspectives are following the model that Reynolds defined in his book by focusing on execution sites and asking questions about judicial practices through

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[71] Maura Farrell, "Prone, Stoned, and Losing the Head: Deviant Burials in Early Medieval Ireland in the 5th to 12th Centuries" *Trowel AYIA Conference Proceedings*, 13 (2012): 56 and 72.

interpretations of the burials in tandem with historical evidence.[72] While the Polish burials

include many of the same observable rites (prone, stoned, and decapitated) they are unique to

Anglo-Saxon burials due to a prevalence of stakes (made of metal or wood) which are found

within the graves and are used to seemingly *keep the body within the grave*.[73] Prone burials are

still the most emphasized, though the majority of these burials are of adult men with little to no

grave goods, and typically date between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. This is particularly

interesting because according to Gardela's analysis there is little evidence for "female ritual

specialists" in Polish burials, which is the primary focus of this paper. Gardela even notes that a

particular grave from Gwiazdowe, a young woman referred to as Grave 2, is one of the most

exceptional female prone burials found in Poland.

> She had her head to the south and her face towards the west, and three temple rings (a typical Slavic head-ornament) of lead were found with her: two by her left temple and one by the right scapula. An iron knife in a leather scabbard decorated with bronze foil lay in the grave, while a bronze finger-ring…and a small silver ring lay below the woman's ribs. It is puzzling that, despite being accompanied by such a broad range of objects, the woman was buried in a non-normative way. If such a grave was found in an Anglo-Saxon context, it would probably be regarded as a 'cunning-woman.'[74]

The statement Gardela makes here about Anglo-Saxon cunning women is especially relevant to

the crux of what this paper works to discuss. While the interpretive details about Slavic vampires

and Anglo-Saxon witches differ in the minute details (as well as the type of supernatural force

being dealt with) they illustrate a shared reference to threads of older pagan folk knowledge and

ideas.

Examples of prone burials in central Europe draw from Germanic influences, which

directly connect to Anglo-Saxon paganism. A recent study works to center prone burials at the

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[72] Leszek Gardela and Kamil Kajkowski, "Vampires, Criminals or Slaves? Reinterpreting 'Deviant Burials' in Early Medieval Poland" *World Archaeology* 45, no. 5 (2013a): 781.

[73] Gardela and Kajkowski, "Vampires, Criminals or Slaves," 2013a, 782.

[74] Gardela and Kajkowski, "Vampires, Criminals or Slaves," 2013a, 785-6.

forefront of analysis and draws examples from Switzerland, Germany, and Austria–though the burials date between 950 CE and the twelfth century. This situates the burials in a largely Christian context.[75] Similar to the prone burials found in Poland, the majority of the inhumed individuals are men, with female and unsexed individuals being underrepresented in the study.[76] The larger conclusions of this piece mirror the ambiguous patterns of interpreting abstract concepts from material evidence, that"with the exception of other atypical positions, most prone burials have an otherwise normal appearance. Their rarity suggests that we are dealing with personalized acts for specific individuals."[77]

Scandinavian deviant burials are also pertinent to this discussion because clear threads of Norse tradition are tied to Anglo-Saxon cultural practices, similar to the Germanic influences mentioned previously. Based on saga literature, emphasis on revenants or fear of reanimated corpses are especially prevalent in Viking burial and mortuary ritual interpretations, particularly in the case of individuals who die an unusual death or have unfinished business in the living world. Particular types of beliefs and behaviors then developed to stop the dead from returning to the world of the living, one such example is the belief in the evil eye, which is "the gaze of the dying or dead which could bring misfortune or death."[78] While the same deviant rites are observed in Scandinavian burials (decapitation, stoned, and prone) they are represented in largely different proportions than Anglo-Saxon burials. For instance, the prevalence of stoned burials is the greatest out of the three, while decapitation and prone examples are much rarer in the

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[75] Amelie Alterauge, Thomas Meier, Bettina Jungklaus, Marco Milella, and Sandra Lösch, "Between Belief and Fear - Reinterpreting Prone Burials During the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period in German-speaking Europe" *Plos One* 15, no. 8 (2020): paragraphs 1-2, 15.

[76] Alterauge, Meier, Jungklaus, Milella, and Lösch, "Between Belief and Fear," 2020, paragraph 37.

[77] Alterauge, Meier, Jungklaus, Milella, and Lösch, "Between Belief and Fear," 2020, paragraph 48.

[78] Leszek Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking-Age Deviant Burials," In *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by L. Słupecki and R. Simek, (Vienna: Verlag Fassbaender, 2013b), 104.

archaeological record.[79] There is some focus on gender and interpretations of magic in Scandinavian examples which somewhat align with the current Anglo-Saxon literature. In various examples there is evidence of deviant rites being interpreted with amuletic grave goods and sacrifices in female graves, which could indicate magical or ritual associations. Some of these interpretations have been made for male graves as well, which opposes typical approaches in Anglo-Saxon archaeology, which almost exclusively connects magical and ritual practice within the material record to women.[80] The importance of Scandinavian burial practices to this discussion is the similarities to Anglo-Saxon examples and border cultural trends mentioned previously in section two and throughout this paper. The connection between the two culture groups, largely through Viking conquest, could indicate some trace of Anglo-Saxon cultural memory within the saga literature–though this is by no means an iron-clad interpretation due to centuries of differences between all of these occurrences.

Moving on to the specific Anglo-Saxon examples, if early Anglo-Saxon women had the opportunity to practice magical acts and define a ritual sphere, it stands to reason that some women were able to rise to somewhat influential positions within their communities. This idea is potentially reflected in a sixth century burial from an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, suggesting that some women may have held a level of status due to their abilities in magical or ritual practices. Later excavations of the site in 1973 found an unusual burial, the remains were determined to be female and the grave she was found in was labeled as "HB2." HB2 was, and continues to be, an unusual case indeed. Upon unearthing her grave, archaeologists noted two key details that set her burial apart from other Anglo-Saxon burials standard to the period. Namely, the quality and quantity of her grave goods.

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[79] Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead?" 2013b, 114.
[80] Gardela, "The Dangerous Dead?" 2013b, 112-20,

After the initial excavation, Tania Dickinson interpreted the case study of HB2 and

published an article calling her an early Anglo-Saxon "cunning woman" twenty years later.[81] The

concept of Anglo-Saxon cunning folk has been promoted by Dickinson and Audrey Meaney as a

way to explain magical belief systems in the material record. Dickinson's argument in particular

depends heavily on the analysis from HB2's grave finds. She illustrates that not only does the

grave have more traditional material goods found in Anglo-Saxon women's graves, but that

several unique and amuletic items present themselves in the finds. This builds directly off of

Audrey Meaney's amulet hypothesis, which identifies specific examples of amulets from Anglo-

Saxon material culture and contends that they indicate evidence of witch burials. Meaney's work

provides a relatively comprehensive analysis of amuletic grave goods found in known Anglo-

Saxon burials.[82]

The considerations of amulets in grave good finds are significant because they constitute

rare artifacts in the larger archaeological record, but also because the presence of amulets in an

Anglo-Saxon grave is the most adequate evidence for determining the tangible associations of

witchcraft in the archaeological record. Meaney builds her research on the definition of an

amulet given by W.L. Hildburgh that they are,

> a material object whose retention there is sought the averting of some result displeasing,
> or the obtaining of some outcome pleasing, to the possessor of the object…primarily it is
> the retention of the object for the sake of its presumed apotropaic, medicinal, or magical
> virtues which make it as an amulet…[83]

Meaney makes one exception, defining the "curing stone" as different from an amulet on

the basis that these stones are often submerged in a liquid that is meant to be drunk. Curing

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[81] Tania M. Dickinson, "An Anglo-Saxon 'Cunning Woman' from Bidford-on-Avon., *In Search of Cult* ed., Marvin Carver, (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1993), 45-54.

[82] Note that this data is only as recent as 1981 and there is likely room to expand on this study presently; Audrey L. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones,* (Oxford: B.A.R., 1981).

[83] Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* 1981, 3.

stones are used by "the cunning man or woman" and is where a remedy draws its power from.[84] The study Meaney conducts analyzes the textual evidence for both herbal and mineral amulets relevant to the early Anglo-Saxons. The notable examples of these are amethysts, spindle whorls (of various materials), crystal balls, shells (cowrie, whelk), thread boxes, and some jewelry like rings and pendants. Meaney describes the use of amulets and curing stones as transient, meaning that the uses of either could transition with individual interpretations of the object. In this way, however, it is often unclear whether or not the presence of amulets indicate a cunning person, or an individual who owned amulets. Nonetheless, Meaney's hypothesis creates much of the foundation for speculation about witchcraft in the material record.

If we accept Dickinson's interpretation of HB2 as a "cunning woman" then the burial becomes a defining metric for how we read associations with witchcraft and magical practice in the archaeological record.[85] The representation of HB2 as the standardized measurement for determining how an individual's association with the occult was reflected in death means that it makes sense that other early Anglo-Saxon burials would mirror these attributes. This would draw largely from the amulets associated with the burial, which are documented as the bucket pendants interpreted as hanging around her neck by a leather bib, and the remnants of a bag at the hip with textile pieces, thread, and rings, as well as a bone-handled knife which resembles a "scalpel," with no obvious purpose like other knives found in similar burials.[86]

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[84] Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* 1981, 4.

[85] Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 2009, 90; Leyser, *Medieval Women, 1995*, 17; Other scholars in historiography and relevant literature consistently cite Dickinson's interpretation for describing the relationship between burial practice and witchcraft.

[86] Dickinson, "An Anglo-Saxon Cunning Woman,", *In Search of Cult*, 1993, 50-2; The significance of the textile pieces within a bag is that it represents an earlier version of Christian thread boxes that were used by Anglo-Saxon women and are viewed with a distinct mystical connotation due to weaving being primarily women's work. A similar discussion is seen here, though the subject is more focused on kinship connections and aristocracy, the importance of sewing and weaving in the role Anglo-Saxon women assumed is largely present: Laura Michele Diener "Sealed with a Stitch: Embroidery and Gift-Giving Among Anglo-Saxon Women," *Medieval Prosopography* 29 (2014): 1–22; A similar discussion and reference to this is made in the first chapter of Henrietta Leyser's work cited in this paper.

However, some interpretations of HB2's grave are unclear; For instance, Andrew Reynolds discusses the connotations of witchcraft associated with the grave when he explains the connections between prone burial and evidence of witchcraft.[87] During his discussion of the deviant prone burial rite, Reynolds introduces the relationship between an individual perceived as a witch and this burial practice, as well as provides specific examples to illustrate this point like with HB2's grave. Reynolds' discusses HB2 in the midst of his prone burial analysis because the grave is such a monumental example of a potential cunning woman. However, Reynolds' discussion of the burial is in error because site reports from the excavation demonstrate that *HB2 was not buried prone*.

> Certain graves, particularly those of women contain artefacts of an amuletic nature (see Ch. 5), and it is possible to suggest that these individuals were so-called 'cunning women' as discussed by Tania Dickinson and Helen Geake (Dickinson 1993; Geake 2003). *Perhaps they were buried prone* because at their deaths they had passed on the mantle of wisdom to younger women and such a transition required a guarantee that the former holder of that wisdom would not return to the world of the living.[88] (emphasis mine).

In addition to his unclear connection of HB2 to prone burial rites, Reynolds does not actually list the Warwickshire burial in his Appendix 2.1, which synthesizes all recorded Anglo-Saxon prone burials (up to 2009). Instead, it is the vast array of amuletic artifacts that provide the foundational evidence of HB2's potential connection to magical practice. Reynolds' language, as well as his methods for including HB2 in this specific section of his analysis, are unclear. In doing so, the implication is that HB2 fits into the framework Reynolds has created to describe prone burials,

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[87] Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 2009, 90.

[88] Whatever the reason may be for using HB2 to illustrate the idea of witchcraft or magic in the material record, the language used in this analysis is ambiguous and leaves the potential (wrong) interpretation that the grave is a prone burial when in fact HB2 was found supine; Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 2009, 90.

but this is inaccurate and could potentially skew analyses seeking to measure the associations between prone burials and witchcraft.

This does not mean that HB2's grave is irrelevant to this discussion, however. This burial is effectively one of the most well-received (potential) examples of Anglo-Saxon witchcraft and cunning women in the archaeological record. The large quantity and quality of amuletic grave goods associated with HB2 provide relatively good evidence that women who were perceived as ritually powerful in life were recognized as such in their death.

There is nothing inherently deviant about HB2's grave, at least in terms of social ostracization and traditional positioning of the remains. So, if HB2 is evidence of a cunning woman, what is the implication of her non-deviant burial? Surely, if magical practice and ritual paganism was socially unacceptable, there would be clearer evidence in HB2's grave of social retribution. Instead, her grave is relatively 'normal,' with a high quantity of unique grave goods being the most unusual aspect of her burial. In this instance, it is possible to speculate that HB2 is an example of a woman who participated in ritual practices and was defined by that role, resulting in her extraordinary burial and identification by her community for her magical associations. This means that not all magical practice was viewed negatively, as supported by the medico-magical implications of Anglo-Saxon charms, remedies and folklore. Defining how magical associations may present as deviant behavior is then necessary, and the live burial at Sewerby is the typical example of this given by scholars.

In contrast to HB2, the prone position of Grave 41 at the Sewerby cemetery is notable, particularly when coupled with the large "beehive quern" set across her lower back.[89] This potentially has necrophobic implications and was done to ensure she could not come back to the

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[89] Sue M. Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire* (York: York University Archaeological Publications, 1985), 39.

world of the living. Even more striking about Grave 41 is her positioning above the coffin burial

of another, seemingly wealthier, woman.[90] Grave 41's grave goods largely reflect dress

ornaments; there is nothing inherently amuletic about her finds. Rather, what makes her burial

interesting is the aforementioned double grave, but also that it is speculated that her burial was a

live one.[91] There have been numerous oppositions to this claim, namely that the two graves are

separated by 0.3m of soil.[92]

If we are to follow the reasoning associated with the archaeology of fear, it is possible

that Grave 41 was not killed in punishment for any action she committed; rather, upon her death

there was a perceived need to ensure she would not rise from her resting place. This could

explain the stone placed on her lower back. Originally thought to physically hold the woman in

place (if she was, in fact, buried alive) it has been noted that the stone is not necessarily heavy

enough to do this.[93] Instead, the stone could represent a more symbolic idea of keeping Grave 41

inside her grave and hindering her from haunting the living; as seen in other potential cunning

woman burials, as well as representations of hindered corpses in the aforementioned saga

literature. Whether Grave 41's death was the result of her own malignant action, or her burial

represents necrophobic intentions, it is clear that some kind of power was associated with this

woman.

Another potential cunning woman is Grave 71 from Butler's Field Cemetery in Lechlade.

Though not buried prone, Grave 71 represents a unique display of potentially amuletic artifacts

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[90] Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby,* 1985, 39.
[91] Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby,* 1985, 38-9.
[92] Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 70.
[93] Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 70.

that date much closer to the seventh century.[94] Grave 71 was found as an outlier grave in the cemetery at the south-west corner with 195 loose garnets that were thought to be held in a bag.[95] The collection of garnets is quite extraordinary for Anglo-Saxon graves, and in addition to the gems was a cowrie shell, as well as bronze and silver fastenings that archaeologists thought represented the remains of a container.[96] Also interesting is the age of Grave 71, a 40-45 year-old woman, whose grave goods and spatial positioning in the cemetery could indicate evidence of a cunning woman without any particular malefic associations, because no other deviant rites were associated with her to imply a negative connotation to her grave. Her older age gives pause for future analysis to consider age as well as gender more comprehensively within deviant burials.

Standard analysis for determining associations of witchcraft in the archaeological record is to refer to prone burials because of the greater association to female graves, but also because prone burial acts are seen as a deliberate method to stop the dead from coming back into the world of the living. In association with prone burials, Reynolds discusses a particular example of a stoned burial (mentioned previously) that could be indicative of a cunning woman or an association with witches. This is particularly evident when compared with another prone burial from the same cemetery and further indicates why prone burial as its own characteristic is not enough evidence to indicate the presence of a witch or cunning woman.

Abingdon in the Saxton Road Cemetery, which was excavated in the 1930s, also contains prone burials that are dated within the study period. Out of the 119 inhumations, three were prone burials that were identified as female. Reynolds describes how Grave 1 had no associated

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[94] Angela Boyle, David Jennings, David Miles, and Simon Palmer, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Butler's Field, Lechlade, Gloucestershire,* Volume 2: *The Anglo-Saxon Grave Goods Specialist Reports, Phasing and Discussion* (Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit/Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1998), 143.
[95] Boyle, Jennings, Miles, and Palmer, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Butler's Field,* 1998, 86.
[96] Boyle, Jennings, Miles, and Palmer, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Butler's Field,* 1998, 143.

grave goods and was buried below a "supine adult male, also without finds."[97] In particular, this grave informs little about the context or identity of the individuals. It is possible that the man and woman were part of a family or kinship group, and as such were buried together, or the burial site was reused for some reason for the male burial–reuse of older burial sites was not an uncommon practice by Ango-Saxons. Either way, there is little in the form of solid interpretation for Grave 1 because she has no identifiable grave goods. Grave 29, on the other hand, presents a much clearer image of a potential cunning woman or witch. Her iron bag ring is particularly reminiscent of ritual boxes associated with magical ritual and folk belief as well as a potential amulet in her ivory-distaff ring.[98] Most interesting about her grave, however, is that she is laid prone, but also that she is completely covered in large stones. Reynolds notes that she is the only known and recorded example of this practice, which is especially significant because this burial represents the combination of two deviant rites that are most applicable to associations of witchcraft within the material record.[99] Particularly, this grave may be an indication of actual malefic magical practice due in part to the potential amuletic nature of her grave goods and the combination of two deviant rites meant to keep the dead away from the living world. However, that the actions of this woman's life were not malicious, rather a reflection of spiritual and cultural power, is just as likely and indicates extra caution for keeping Grave 29 in her resting place and away from the living. Reynolds also mentions that all three of the prone burials found were all located at the periphery of the cemetery.[100] The spatial aspect of deviant burials is

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[97] Edward T. Leeds and Douglas B. Harden, *The Anglo Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon, Berkshire,* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1936), as cited in Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 185. Due to limitations on source acquisition, the Abingdon site report was not able to be received. Reference to the burials comes from Reynolds (2009) and will be cited as such hereafter.

[98] Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 185.

[99] Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 186.

[100] Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 186.

considered throughout Reynolds' book at considerable length, and while largely dependent upon region, this example could indicate some form of social othering.

Two of the prone graves at the West Heslerton cemetery (excavated from 1977-1987) stand out from the rest of the inhumations, again, because of their amuletic grave finds. Both women in Graves 113 and 132, while also buried prone, were adorned with amulets made of copper with walnut pendants.[101] Each grave had amber beads as well, and Grave 113's was further fashioned with a beaver tooth pendant, which is noted by Meaney and Dickinson as having amuletic qualities, as well as one antler bead.[102] Other burials at the cemetery that have potential amulets are Graves 152, 167, 172, and 177, who were all buried with bucket pendants (the same that were described in Warwickshire with HB2).[103] Besides Grave 172, all of these individuals were able to be determined as female.[104] Both the prone burials and the 'normal' supine graves with the bucket pendants indicate further how dependent the cunning woman theory is on amuletic grave goods within the archaeological record.

The previous selected examples briefly represent the best examples of evidence for arguing for the interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon cunning woman within the archaeological record. Other examples of prone burials, or even the other deviant rites discussed throughout the

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[101] Christine Haughton and Dominic Powlesland, *West Heslerton the Anglian Cemetery,* vol. 2, (Yedingham, UK: The Landscape Research Center, 1999) 92, 118; based on some potential bindings on the prone burials, it is suggested that these were live burials. Not much more explanation or analysis is given beyond citing the Sewerby example and as such it is not considered in the larger analysis of this paper.

[102] Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton the Anglian Cemetery,* vol. 2, 1999, 115; Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* 1981, 136-7; Dickinson, "An Anglo-Saxon Cunning Woman,", *In Search of Cult*, 1993, 45-54.

[103] Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton the Anglian Cemetery,* vol. 2, 1999, 115, 264, 292, 300, and 310.

[104] Grave 172 only contained the remains of the individual's cranium along with their grave goods. The materials found in the grave were kinds typically associated with women, though this is clearly insufficient for determining sex and further points to the complications of trying to reconstruct sexual and gender identities from limited material remains, see: Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton the Anglian Cemetery,* vol. 2, 1999, 300.

paper, exist throughout the English landscape.[105] They do not, however, offer more than the presence of a deviant rite that can be considered spatially and temporally within the region those burials occupy. The presence of similar deviant burial practices across the past Anglo-Saxon landscape provide continuity from rites in continental Europe, as well as general patterns to unpack (as Andrew Reynolds has done, for example, on execution cemeteries).[106] But what is lacking is the ability to adequately determine deviant burials as the sole indicator of perceived witches or cunning women in the material record. Amuletic artifacts offer more plausibility to the theory, but without them, little more about the burial can be assumed (and even with them the

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[105] While it is not feasible to include every instance of prone burial from the period and location outlined in this study (particularly because very few of the prone burials provided convincing evidence for deviant magical practitioners), the following represent the sampling of reports that informed the conclusions of this paper: Brian Adams and Dennis Jackson, "The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Wakerley, Northamptonshire, excavations by Mr. D Jackson, 1968-9," *Northamptonshire Archaeology* 22 (1990): 69-183; H. F. Bidder, and John Morris, "The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Mitcham," *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 56 (1959): 51-131; J. P. Bushe-Fox, ed., *Fourth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent,* Reports on the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949); M. J. Darling, and D. Gurney, *Caister-on-Sea Excavations by Charles Green, 1951-55. East Anglian Archaeology*, 60 (Dereham: Norfolk Museums Service, 199); Deck, "Notice of Remains of the Anglo-Saxon Period, Discovered at Little Wilbraham, Cambridgeshire," *Archaeological Journal* 8 (1851): 172-8; Tania M. Dickinson, "Excavations at Standlake Down in 1954: The Anglo-Saxon Graves,' *Oxoniensia* 38 (1973): 239-57; Gail Drinkall and Martin Foreman, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Castledyke South, Barton-on-Humber* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Vera I. Evison, and Prue Hill, *Two Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Beckford, Hereford, and Worcester,* Council for British Archaeology Research Report, 103 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1996); William Filmer-Sankey, and Tim Pestell, eds., *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery: Excavations and Surveys 1824-1992. East Anglian Archaeology*, 95 (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council, 2001); Neil Holbrook, "The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Lower Farm, Bishop's Cleeve" Excavations Directed by Kenneth Brown 1969," *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 118 (2000): 61-92; Thomas Charles Lethbridge "The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Burwell, Cambs" *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 27 (1924-5): 72-9; Thomas Charles Lethbridge, *A Cemetery at Shudy Camps, Cambridgeshire: Report on the Excavation of a Cemetery of the Christian Anglo-Saxon Period in 1933,* Cambridge Antiquarian Society, Quarto Publications, 3. Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1936; Christopher Loveluck and David Atkins, *Excavations at Flixborough.* 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007-2009); John Nowell Linton Myres, and Barbara Green, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Markshall, Norfolk,* Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, 30. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973); Christopher J. Scull, ed., "Excavations and Survey at Watchfield, Oxfordshire, 1983-92," *Archaeological Journal* 149 (1992): 124-281; Stephen J. Sherlock, and Martin G. Welch, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Norton, Cleveland.* Council for British Archaeology Research Report, 82, (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1992); Martin G. Welch, *Early Anglo-Saxon Sussex.* 2 vols. (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports British Series, 1983); West, Stanley E. West, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Westgarth Gardens, Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk,* East Anglian Archaeology, 38. (Bury St. Edmunds: Suffolk County Planning Department, 1988).

[106] Reynolds, *Deviant Burial Customs,* 2009, 35.

interpretation of abstract meanings behind non-utilitarian artifacts is circumstantial and difficult to do).

CONCLUSIONS

While the availability of material evidence leads some to hope for more concrete interpretations of the past, the tangible record can be just as indefinite as the written sources. Evidence is rarely transparent, whether it is material or textual. Often, to create a legitimate historical argument based on archaeological evidence it is necessary to use some level of speculation. Otherwise, all that archaeology can inform are the actual contexts of artifacts and features found *in situ*. Placing these materials within their physical contexts is useful to an extent, but analysis that moves from archaeological to historical is dependent on ethnographic interpretations of archaeology. Determining what level of speculation is acceptable is the key because the line between baseless proclamation and legitimate hypotheses is a difficult one to walk. Traditionally, speculation about witchcraft and magic being represented in prone deviant burials has been approached cautiously and without much narrow research or focus. Scholars fall back to the same limited body of evidence to propose the possibility, while emphasizing that the limitations of the material record cannot prove that prone burial was *only* a rite used for witch or cunning folk burials.

It is easy to let idealized versions of what we think the past should look like define how we interpret evidence. The excitement and mystery of occult topics draws interdisciplinary interest. Additionally, the popularity of magic in both popular history and culture may give rise to clouded interpretations of the past, where human errors of preconceived judgements about a topic are applied to a study and may influence interpretations.[107]

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[107] For instance, the witch crazes of the late Medieval and Early Modern Period deal with vastly different cultures, time periods, and political schemas that created the identity of the female witch.

The distinction between deviant and normal burials says much about the sociocultural behaviors in Anglo-Saxon society. Prone burials in particular have been interpreted as being associated with witchcraft and witch burials, particularly because it has been acknowledged that the majority of these burials belong to women. This majority has been revealed to be only slight and incredibly varied in terms of regionality. This reasoning also fails to adequately address the prone burials of men, children, and unsexed skeletons aside from the concession that prone burial was of course not a rite purely used for individuals associated with the occult. A larger trend of potentially magical women may be perceived, but this does not discount the potential participation of men. The lack of amuletic grave goods in male burials compared to what is found in female burials may weaken this evidence, but realistically this also emphasizes the circumstantial and often biased assumptions of female prone burial. Meaning that if we analyze *only* the practice of identical prone burials, both male and female, there would be no other indication of witchcraft besides the perceived sex of the remains.

On their own, remains in a prone position can only indicate that a rarer form of a burial rite was used for an individual. Rather, all tangible associations of magic and witchcraft derive from interpreted grave finds. These grave finds are perceived as amuletic in nature; however, there is a level of discretion that must be used in determining what is and is not an amulet in the archaeological record. Further, it is essential to remember that a deviant burial does not necessarily have to be a representation of social rejection, rather they can also represent the reputation of a powerful individual, though the two are not mutually exclusive. This distinction further indicates the possibilities of neutral magic and ritual practice by cunning folk versus the more malignant connotations of witches. In specifying between the two, it is possible to speculate on what magic truly meant in early Anglo-Saxon paganism, how it was used, who was

conducting its practice, and how these practices were being incorporated into an emerging

Christian landscape.

"I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized
help on this work."
-SM

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