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DEAD BODY LANGUAGE:

DECIPHERING CORPSE POSITIONS IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Sian Mui

ABSTRACT

This work provides a study of corpse positioning as an aspect of mortuary practice. The positional representation of the dead body is fundamental to the perception of death and the deceased, but this aspect of burial treatment has been overlooked and under-theorised in archaeological and anthropological scholarship. With an aim to explore the significance of the positioning of the corpse and its place within wider debates surrounding dying and death, this research examines burial positioning in inhumation graves in early Anglo-Saxon England, c AD 400–750. Bringing together 3,053 graves from 32 cemeteries, this thesis combines statistical methods, artistic reconstructions, typological analysis, grave artefacts, osteological data, literary sources, and representational art to produce a new and challenging examination of funerary remains.

This work has identified a positional norm of supine deposition, extended legs, and arms positioned according to one of seven 'main types'. Patterns and variations in burial positions were manifested as an interplay between conformity to this positional norm and variations beyond it: from the individual level to regional practices, and in relation to long-term changes through the early Anglo-Saxon period. The arrangement of the cadaver was intimately linked with the deceased's social identity and relationship with other people, mediated by the bodily engagements that took place between the living and the dead in the mortuary performances. The positions of corpses can be argued through this new evidence to be comparable as a source to human representations in art, revealing a wider gestural repertoire in the early medieval world. This work has offered new and exciting insights into living and dying in early medieval England, and has set new agendas for studying body positions from archaeological contexts. This has far-reaching methodological and interpretive implications for the study of death and burial, in the past as well as the present.

DEAD BODY LANGUAGE

DECIPHERING CORPSE POSITIONS IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Sian Mui

(Lechlade Grave 81)

Volume I
Of two volumes

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
PhD in Archaeology

Durham University
Department of Archaeology

February 2018

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PREFACE

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

This thesis is 88,368 words long.

All translations from Old English are my own unless otherwise stated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Teque deprecor, bone Iesu, ut cui propitius donasti uerba tuae scientiae dulciter haurire, dones etiam benignus aliquando ad te fontem omnis sapientiae peruenire, et parere semper ante faciem tuam.

I pray you, noble Jesu, that as You have graciously granted me joyfully to imbibe the words of Your knowledge, so You will also of Your bounty grant me to come at length to Yourself, the Fount of all wisdom, and to dwell in Your presence for ever.

(Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V§XXIV, translated by Sherley-Price 1955: 331)

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

> 'Do you know how my little brother is, sir?' I inquired.
> Mr. Omer shook his head.
> 'RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat.'
> 'He is in his mother's arms,' said he.
> 'Oh, poor little fellow! Is he dead?'
> 'Don't mind it more than you can help,' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes. The baby's dead.'
> My wounds broke out afresh at this intelligence.
>
> (*David Copperfield*, Dickens 1981[1868]: 134)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, the protagonist is at school at Salem House when his mother, Clara Copperfield, dies. Upon travelling back to his home village Blunderstone, David Copperfield learns from Mr Omer, the funeral furnisher, that his infant half-brother has died too, and has been placed in the arms of his mother. The imagery of Clara holding her baby in her arms is not simply a descriptive account of a woman–child double burial, but a compelling visual symbol in this pivotal episode in David Copperfield's life. In his last memory of his mother, David saw her holding her baby up in her arms, looking intently at him, and bidding farewell as he departed for school on a carrier's cart. At school, this vivid recollection of his mother holding her baby haunted his dreams. The imagery of the baby in his mother's arms foreshadows the pair's death and their positional arrangement in the grave. Meanwhile, the positioning of the bodies in the grave allows David to liken himself with the dead child: the grave becomes a symbolic burial of David's own childhood, which is 'hushed for ever on her bosom' (Dickens 1981[1868]: 142). Ironically, the motherhood of Clara had been reversed at her deathbed, as she laid her head in the arms of the nurse Peggotty and 'died like a child that had gone to sleep' (Dickens 1981[1868]: 141). Through Clara's transition from a living mother—through a dying child—to a dead mother, her identity and those of David, Peggotty, and the unnamed infant shift, and their relationships are changed.

The bodies of Clara Copperfield and her baby are poignant, unsettling, and evocative. The bodies become mnemonic tools by which the survivors may construct and reorganise memories of Clara and her baby, and negotiate relationships among the living. The meticulous arrangement of the bodies elicits emotional and moral responses, subtly affecting how the bereaved perceive the deceased and themselves. The corpse positions hover between life and death, bearing the signature of living bodies in bodily manner, posture, and deportment, but embodying memories from the past and visions for the future.

The present work is a study of the positioning of dead bodies in the grave. The physical arrangement of the cadaver is a readable narrative of the encounter with the dead human body by the living. The positional articulation of the corpse frames the ways in which the deceased is perceived, interacted with, and experienced by the mourners and onlookers. The dead body can be arranged in a variety of positions: facing up, lying on one side, facing down, or even in seated or upright positions. The legs can be straightened, flexed, or tightly folded in a compact, crouched position. The arms and hands can also be placed in different positions around the head, chest, waist, or other areas. In a funerary context, the process of laying out the dead body is regulated by spoken and unspoken rules about how the corpse should be presented. Conscious or unconscious, the micro-decisions made in this process are deeply ingrained in the specific death culture, in which the deceased and the mourners are situated. Although cross-cultural variations in corpse-positioning practices are attested in archaeological and anthropological literature, this fundamental aspect of funerary rites remains conspicuously under-studied and under-theorised in the archaeology of death and burial.

This work examines the significance of the positioning of dead bodies, through an exploration of burial positions in early Anglo-Saxon England, c AD 400 to 750. The lives of these Anglo-Saxon people were realised through their bodies, whether eating or sleeping, walking or talking, laughing or crying. In death, they left behind their bodies to be disposed of by their families and friends or their community. Against a landscape of profound social, political, economic, and religious changes through the early medieval period, these people considered and debated the human body in physical and symbolic terms. By examining how dead bodies were positioned and perceived in the early Anglo-Saxon period, this study uncovers the perception of and attitudes towards living, dying, and death in the early

medieval world, and the methodological and theoretical implications of this method for funerary archaeologists more widely.

1.2 THEORISING THE CORPSE

The corpse is the ultimate objectification of death. Once itself a living, breathing person, the corpse is markedly liminal in its uncomfortable position between a person and an object, but neither fully one nor the other. It is an extremely ambivalent entity which cannot be categorised, embodying subject and object, presence and absence, past (memory), present (reality), and future (the unknown). While the corpse is a tactile biological reality that is universally recognised, the approaches to and perceptions of the dead body are extremely diverse across different societies and cultures, as discussed by sociologists, anthropologists, and archaeologists (Turner 1967; Metcalf and Huntington 1979; Bloch and Parry 1982; Hallam et al 1999; Parker Pearson 1999; McHugh 1999; Kus 2013). Thus, as a point of intersection between biology and culture, the corpse attests to the universal reality of death, as well as the immense capacity and creativity of humans to generate a vast range of responses to the state of human existence.

Through the corpse, we understand the reality and inevitability of human mortality. Paradoxically, our understanding of death perpetually creates the corpse which we perceive and experience. Funerary treatment of the corpse is a process by which the corpse undergoes layers of elaborations through social practices (Hallam et al 1999: 20–21). These elaborations mediate the ways in which the corpse is constructed and experienced. Noting the medical ambiguity, temporal persistence, and consequences of death, Binski (1996) conjectures that the state of death can only be approximated. Hence, 'death as a state can rightly be regarded not as something which is sometimes represented, but rather as something that can only be represented' (Binski 1996: 70). Since the cadaver never exists in a cultural vacuum, the encounter with it is structured and conditioned by its contexts of experience and cultural understanding.

In his work on the historical development of the concepts of death, Ariès (1983) argues that the use of shrouds, coffins, and catafalques in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries structured the viewing process of the cadaver and progressively concealed it from sight. The representation of the corpse, in this instance, was not a static tableau but rather a temporal performance. The funeral is a performative ritual: funerary treatment of the corpse involves

differing stages of actions and representations, from the initial preparation of the body to its disposal, through inhumation, cremation, or other means. The temporal aspect of death rituals does not end with the disposal of the body, as graves may be subsequently visited or even reopened for different reasons: to commemorate the dead, to remove, rearrange, or re-bury the remains, to inter another body, to implement measures against revenants, or to rob the grave of precious objects. Furthermore, the decaying corpse itself embodies temporality and transformation through processes of decomposition. Its involvement in the funeral and other related events, therefore, would have been dynamic and engaging.

Indeed, between the deceased and the bereaved, the experience of death does not strictly follow the contour of the physicality of death. The death of a loved one may act on the embodied experience of the living, in such a way that grief and bereavement become an intercorporeal process. In a contemporary study, Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik (2014) explores how emotional grief may impinge on the physical experience of the bereaved, such as the feeling of bodily pain at the death of a loved one and the use of body analogy in expressing sorrow. This intercorporeality is immensely powerful, as what governs experience is not material presence but embodied memory: a relationship that is inscribed upon bodies, such that the memory of the deceased persists in the bodily experience of the bereaved (Gudmundsdottir 2009; Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik 2014; Davies 2017).

Archaeology has direct access to the bodies of past people through the recovery and study of funerary remains. Until the recent two decades, the archaeology of death and burial had been preoccupied with interpretations of social structures and processes, in which the body was mostly deployed as a provider of age and sex information, no more than a backdrop for 'more interesting' grave artefacts or monuments (Sofaer 2006:14–21). With an increasing interest in body theory in the wider social sciences as well as post-processual fascination with 'materiality', 'meaning', 'agency', and 'identity', the body has emerged as an attractive point of departure for archaeological theorisation and criticism (Robb and Harris 2013). This interest has resulted in an explosion of body-oriented literature exploring past bodies through dress (Lee 2000), art (Osborne 2008), gender (Hollimon 2000), memory (Thomas 2000), landscape (Tilley 1994), identity (Thomas 1996), subjectivity (Bulger and Joyce 2012), sensory experience (Skeates 2010), and so forth. On the other hand, some writers have noted that under this theorisation, the physical body is often lost in abstract writing (Nilsson Stutz 2008; Sofaer 2006). The emphasis on the socially-constructed body overshadows the

physicality of the human body, creating an irony where 'the body... remains conspicuously rare within the archaeology of the body' (Nilsson Stutz 2008: 21).

The immediacy of the actual bodies of past people makes funerary archaeology a field where biology and culture naturally intersect. Human remains are both a source of biological information and the material effect of social practices from the past. Bioarchaeology has long been employed in burial archaeology to provide information about the age and sex of the deceased. Such information is crucial to our understanding of past populations and has fruitfully informed works that shed valuable light on past societies, but 'age' and 'sex' are more than labels ascribed to static skeletons. From the outset, they are fluid and dynamic constructs rather than bounded categories. While ageing and sexual maturity are manifested physically in the body, their physiology shapes and is shaped by social practices and conceptions of identities (Gowland 2006; Sofaer 2007). Recent work has emphasised the link between osteological data and their cultural and historical contexts, addressing the impact of human social participation on the the skeleton, which provides unique information about the social world from which it comes (Sofaer 2006; Gowland and Knüsel 2006; Gowland and Thompson 2013).

The cadaver, in this light, ceases to be a generic person but becomes an individual with a lived historical presence. This individuality does not assume autonomous, bounded personhood as per western individualism. Instead, it describes skeletons as historical bodies and funerals as historical events, with their own material resonances and temporal trajectories. Each skeleton is not simply a neutral object of scientific investigation, but indeed a corpse which once embodied a person. Each grave represents the individual historical event which produced it, and is unique in terms of the assembly of funerary attendants, the time frame within which the event unfolded, and the experiential implications for the mourners (Price 2002, 2010; Giles 2012). The cadaver in its grave captures the unique existence of each deceased person, as the life that this person lived and the choices that he or she made may be inscribed upon the archaeological corpse. Recognising the physical body in its cultural context of existence, the skeleton is what remains of a person who would have been a lover or a spouse, a parent or a child, a sibling or a cousin, a friend or a neighbour, of the people who buried him or her. This network of identities and relations produced the dynamics and creativity underlying the burial record (Price 2010: 146–150). Importantly, the corpse is a significant part of funerary rituals, and how it is treated is integral to the

understanding of living and dying. The archaeological cadaver, therefore, is not a static by-product of past lives but rather the centre itself of the mortuary ritual.

Within the scope of the present study, the cadaver is approached as an entity that is simultaneously materially rendered *and* symbolically potent. The positioning of the dead body plays a fundamental part in funerary representations, approximating the state of death, and reproducing sets of ideas and ideals about mortality, corporeality, and identity. Meanwhile, the corpse does not and cannot escape the historical framework ascribed by the existence of the individual which it embodies, whether it be an Aztec woman who lived to an old age, a Roman infant girl who died at birth, or a contemporary British man who died in a road accident. Their body necessarily occupied a temporal and spatial locus in the landscape and was realised through material interactions with other living and non-living entities, including persons, animals, plants, rocks, hills, rivers, objects, buildings, and so forth. Ultimately, in death, the body remains a constant—the body which was known in life is the same body which is present in death.

1.3 CORPSE POSITIONING PAST AND PRESENT

In the anthropology handbook *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, a contribution on 'Burials' by Charles Hercules Read states 39 questions relating to funerary practices to be asked by the field anthropologist (Garson and Read 1892: §LVIII). Most of these questions concern the treatment of the dead body; three of them directly address its positioning:

> 3. What is done with the body immediately after death? Are the limbs straightened or bent up?
> …
> 18. What is the posture of the body in the grave?
> …
> 30a. In what posture is the body carried to the grave?

These questions acknowledge that, first of all, preferences for cadaver positions vary from one society to another, and are important things which the field anthropologist should observe and record; and second, the positioning of the body has a performative dimension, and may carry particular significance at different points in the unfolding funerary ritual.

In the western Christian tradition, the corpse is almost invariably laid out facing upwards with extended legs. This position has been the standard practice in western Europe for over a millennium, alongside the predominant preference for inhumation and the west-east

orientation of the grave and body. Even though cremation has become commonplace, especially in Britain, this extended supine position remains to date the most frequently employed position for the corpse in the coffin. Nevertheless, what constitutes a normative corpse position may vary greatly between different cultures. Neanderthal burials, for instance, show a broad pattern of preference for burying the corpse in flexed positions (Pettitt 2011: 130). Beaker burials of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age Europe were also commonly associated with flexed or folded legs and the body lying on one side, generally accompanied by grave goods, often including a beaker pot (Thomas 1999: 157). At Cladh Hallan in the Outer Hebrides, excavations uncovered two composite skeletons from the Bronze Age period (Hanna et al 2012). One of the skeletons, in particular, had no indication of its composite nature on the basis of its posture: it lay on its left side in a tightly crouched position, although it was clear that its lower legs were exposed for a considerable period of time and had become detached by the time of burial (Hanna et al 2012: 2274). Results from ancient DNA analysis reveal that this skeleton was in fact composed of elements from at least three different individuals (Hanna et al 2012: 2279). This suggests that the dead bodies were curated for a long time and body parts were reassembled to recreate a complete body, even in the preferred crouched fashion used in Bronze-Age Britain and Ireland (Harding 2016: 167).

The variability in preferences and practices of corpse positions is also evident in ethnographic records. In Tibetan sky burial, the body is arranged and wrapped to secure a tightly crouched position with the hands in front of the chest and the head against the knees. The body is then carried to the charnel ground in a ritual procession, before it is cut and prepared for excarnation (Burnett 2014: 106–109). In the funerals of many contemporary Islamic communities, the corpse is washed and shrouded following specific sets of routines (which may vary between different regions and communities), and buried with legs extended and the body on its right side, such that the dead person faces *qiblah* (Insoll 2001: 129). Arms may be arranged in a praying position, with the left hand on the chest and the right hand on top of the left (Al Khoei 2014: Issue 635). The careful arrangements of the head, arms, and fingers are sometimes observed in Christian communities as well. In Russian Old Believer communities, for example, it is customary to cross the arms of the deceased on the chest, and arrange the fingers to form the sign of the cross (the forefinger and middle finger extended, and the ring and little fingers bent to join with the thumb) (Morris 1991:92). In preparing the dead body in Basque Murélaga, Spain, dabs of candle wax are applied to the

eyes to close them, and the mouth is closed and tied with a strip of cloth. The hands are placed at the chest and tied together in a prayerful gesture, holding a crucifix or candles (Douglass 1969: 24). Praying gestures are often depicted in medieval and early modern tombs and effigies (Ariès 1983: 251–259), and it has also been argued that arm positioning in burials in medieval northern Europe represent gestures of worship and prayer in the context of death (Atzbach 2016).

Sometimes, more than one body may be placed in the same grave; these bodies may reference each other in their positional articulation. The 6,000–7,000-year-old 'Lovers of Valdaro' from Mantova, Italy, captured a great deal of media attention when the site was excavated in 2007: the pair of skeletons, male and female young adults, were interred with their arms wrapped around each other (Corti et al 2013). Children may also be arranged with adults in graves, such as Grave 81 in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Lechlade (Gloucestershire), which contained the bodies of five individuals, including a woman who held and embraced an infant in her arm (Boyle et al 1998: 89–91). To this day, despite great improvements in medical research and pregnancy support as well as a reduction in maternal and infant mortality, intimate positioning of corpses retains its power to evoke emotional response from the bereaved and funeral attendants. In a contemporary example, it is reported that a pregnant woman from south-west Scotland died 14 weeks before the baby was due, and her family 'tucked him [the baby] into the crook of her arm just like they were both sleeping and we [the family] decided that they will be buried together that way' (McPherson 2016).

The positioning and posture of the corpse may also have practical implications. For example, it has been suggested that the ideal body position for embalming is extended and supine, with the upper arms tucked closely alongside the torso, the elbows flexed, and the lower arms resting across the abdomen (Hanzlick 1994). Embalmers often employ equipment such as headrests, arm supports, and body positioners to hold body parts in desirable positions for washing, embalming, and dressing (McGrouther 2017: 4). The practical aspect of body positions have also been considered in some archaeological interpretations. Commenting on the prevalence of crouched positions in Neanderthal burials, Pettitt remarks that since 'some Neanderthals were placed within natural depressions and fissures, this position could simply relate to the constraints of space available for burial, rather than to any symbolic meaning of this position' (Pettitt 2011: 130). In other instances, the positioning of the corpse has been linked with its visual affordance, such as Hirst's argument that the supine position offered

the best display of grave goods, based on her excavation of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sewerby (Yorkshire) (Hirst 1985: 38). On the other hand, a lack of care in the positioning of the dead may suggest hasty or intentionally disrespectful disposal. This is sometimes the case in mass graves where the dead, from the plague victims to fallen soldiers, are deposited in a disorderly manner, and limited attention is paid to their positioning (McCormick 2015; Gaudio et al 2015). At Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) a number of burials survived as dark stains on the soil and were arranged in unusual positions; some seemed to have their hands or feet bound and some were decapitated. This has led the excavator to suggest that the site was used as an execution cemetery in the eighth and ninth centuries AD (Carver 2005: 347–349).

Sometimes, dead bodies are arranged in unconventional positions in funerals as markers of special statuses or individual preferences. In the funerary procession and cremation of Jaina ascetics, the corpse is placed in a funeral palanquin covered with a canopy, and arranged in a sitting position, upright, cross-legged, and meditative (Flügel 2015). Contrasting with Hindu, Buddhist, and conventional Jaina funerals, where the dead body is generally carried in a lying position, the sitting position was historically restricted to the funeral of royalty. That dead Jaina ascetics are carried in a sitting position may be an allusion to their rebirth in the upper world as kings. The corpse is then placed on the pyre and cremated in a meditative cross-legged 'lotus posture' (*padmāsana*) (Flügel 2015: 24). The dead may also be displayed or buried in life-like postures, such as the well-known Victorian post-mortem photography where corpses were often arranged as if sleeping, sitting, or standing; or the curious case of Jeremy Bentham who left instructions for his body to be dissected, preserved, and displayed as an auto-icon at the University of London after his death (Marmoy 1958). A more recent example is the New Orleans woman Miriam Burbank who died in 2014 and whose dead body was propped up at a table with a provision of cigarettes, beer, and whisky, as if enjoying a party at her house (Newcomb 2014). The most extreme case is probably Gunther von Hagens' *Body Worlds* exhibition, which displays the inner anatomical structures of human bodies and body parts preserved by plastination (von Hagens and Whalley 2013). The bodies are often accompanied with objects and arranged in various life-like postures, as if dancing, playing football, wrestling, playing card games, and so on.

That these unconventional treatments of the dead attract so much media attention points at the fascination, anxiety, and discomfort we feel towards the dead body, especially when arranged in socially unsanctioned positions. On the other hand, while unconventional corpse

positions—especially life-like ones—may communicate a sense of defiance against death, their simulation of liveliness may also help mourners in the grieving process. It has been reported that in families who experience the sudden death of their children, parents might choose to position their children in their natural resting positions, such as lying prone or flexed on one side, which relate 'to the child's comfort and relaxation, but especially, were his or her own style of rest' (Gyulay 1989: 85). In an example from contemporary Britain, an infant died in early 2017, only four weeks after birth. Grieving the loss of their child, the parents made use of a cuddle cot and continued to interact with the body of the child for 16 days, holding her and taking her for walks in a pram (Scott 2017). The corporeal interaction between the dead and the living thus plays a significant role in the bereavement process and in negotiating the relationship between the deceased and the mourners.

In present-day western society, where the management of dead bodies is largely given to hospitals, mortuaries, and funeral homes, cadavers are frequently sanitised, beautified, and hidden from sight. However, this distancing from the bodies of deceased loved ones is a fairly new phenomenon. Funeral wakes, for example, were widely practised in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, where the dead body was watched and visited by the mourning families and friends for a few days before the funeral (Litten 1991; Hurren 2011: 50). Meanwhile, a body that was not watched and looked after signalled a bad death, such as in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* when Scrooge sees his grim fate of dying alone during the final ghostly visitation: 'A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man' (Dickens 2006[1843]: 70).

Before increased medicalisation and legislative regulations of death hid the corpse from the public gaze (Hallam et al 1999: 61–62), mourners would have been (or had more opportunities to be) familiar with the appearance, texture, and temperature of the corpse. The process of positioning the dead body in a desired position would have involved close physical intimacy with the corpse and all its physical and emotional qualities. Corpse positioning would thus be dynamically played out through a sensually intense performance based on the intercorporeality between the mourners and the deceased, through the sight of the simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar dead, the sensation of lifelessly cold skin, the eerie silence of death, and possibly also the pungent smell of the decomposing corpse. This intercorporeality has profound material and emotional implications in funerary cultures in

the past as well as the present. The positioning of dead bodies, therefore, has relevance not only to the human response to death, but also the beliefs and traditions of the living, the grief and emotions of the bereaved, and the identity and relations of the deceased.

1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Given its cultural variability, symbolic significance, and emotive implications, it is surprising that corpse positioning remains largely under-studied in anthropology, archaeology, and death studies. In most cases, the positioning of the body and body parts is at best acknowledged, without further explanation or theorisation. The present work addresses this fundamental but much overlooked aspect of death rites, and seeks to uncover the vibrancy and significance of 'dead body languages'. As archaeology is well-adapted to studying the material manifestation of human social and cultural lives, it also has notable strengths in attending to the nuances of burial contexts, the physical body, its positional articulation, and patterns and changes over the long term. Exploring these nuances may shed invaluable light on the physical affordances and the symbolic powers of the funerary cadaver, with potentially significant contributions to ongoing debates surrounding body theories, materiality, and human mortuary behaviour.

This thesis presents the first systematic, in-depth study of corpse positioning as a mortuary practice. It selects the burial record from early Anglo-Saxon England, c AD 400 to 750, as the primary data for analysis. The richness of the Anglo-Saxon funerary record, in terms of surviving skeletal remains, grave assemblages, and contextual cemetery evidence, has been the subject of over a century of scholarly work. This uniquely rich and extensive body of evidence offers an ideal ground for developing new approaches to funerary evidence and evaluating their application. Furthermore, the wealth and range of artefactual, art-historical, and documentary evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period provide secure contexts for dating, offering a robust ground for assessing the attitude towards the dead and its place within a landscape of vast political, economic, and religious changes in the early medieval world. Thus, the aim of this project is twofold:

1. By exploiting archaeology's unique strengths in the study of funerary rituals, this study aims to establish a new method in examining corpse-positioning practices, and evaluate the significance of the positioning and posture of the cadaver in the human response to dying and death.

2. It aims to achieve a new understanding of the perception of and attitudes towards the dead body in Anglo-Saxon England and their changes over the long term, by examining the patterns, variations, and changes in the positional representation of the body in inhumation rites.

To achieve these aims, this work seeks to answer the following questions:

– What information about the past can we glean from detailed analyses of burial positions?

– What role did the cadaver play in early Anglo-Saxon funerary rituals?

– What preferences and patterns existed in positioning the corpse in early Anglo-Saxon inhumations?

– How did social, political, and religious changes throughout the early medieval period, within and beyond Britain, impact upon the treatment of the dead?

– What are the methodological and interpretive implications of the ways in which archaeology has approached the positioning and posture of the corpse, and how can archaeologists approach it more insightfully and productively?

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The first three chapters of this thesis lay out the background, rationale, and methodology of the study. The present chapter introduces the thesis by exploring the theoretical background of the study of corpses and death rituals, and reviewing the variability and symbolic significance of the positions and postures of corpses across different cultures and societies, past and present. It also outlines the research aims and objectives of this study. The next chapter presents a review of previous scholarship on burial positions in archaeology, and previous approaches towards the dead body in early medieval studies. Chapter Three discusses the nature of the data, the composition of the dataset, methods for analysing the data, and the strengths and limitations of the evidence and methods relevant in this study.

The remaining chapters present the analyses of the data, results, and interpretations. Chapter Four explores the patterns and variations in the treatment of the dead body by analysing the burial data through statistical means. This chapter identifies and discusses the preferences,

variations, and changes in body positioning practice, in relation to aspects of social identities including gender, age, status, and regionality. It produces a statistical basis for the discussions and interpretations on corpse positioning that follow in the subsequent chapters. Chapter Five focuses specifically on the practice of multiple burials in early Anglo-Saxon England, where two or more bodies were buried in the same grave. This chapter begins with a statistical overview of the practice within the scope of the present data set, which is further expanded and explored thematically.

The positioning of the cadaver in the context of mortuary theatre is discussed in Chapter Six. This chapter addresses questions about body symbolism, performance and display, and the interplay between bodies and objects. It examines the representation of the cadaver as a dynamic construct, bringing together commemorative features including grave goods, containers, wrappings, and animal offerings. Chapter Seven picks up on the theme of body symbolism, and expands the discussion on burial positions to gestures and gesticulation in figural representations from Anglo-Saxon England and beyond. With an aim to identity an Anglo-Saxon gestural repertoire in the context of burial, this chapter brings in art-historical evidence from comparable contexts in late antiquity, medieval Europe, and the Byzantine world, and examines the recurrence of postural motifs and its significance in funerary practices. It considers the existence of a common gestural grammar that may have influenced corpse positioning in early Anglo-Saxon England and persisted within the visual repertoires of the later era.

The results from these chapters are then brought together in Chapter Eight, and examined within a multi-disciplinary framework that integrates archaeology with historical and literary evidence. This chapter contextualises the cemetery data to offer a new interpretation of the treatment and representation of dead body in Anglo-Saxon England. The implications of this re-contextualised body for Anglo-Saxon funerary culture are situated against the social, political, and religious landscape of early medieval England. It provides a critical evaluation of the theoretical implications of corpse positioning in archaeology. Chapter Nine summarises the thesis and offers some conclusions about the perception of and attitudes towards the body and death in Anglo-Saxon society, before discussing future directions in the study of body positioning as a means of informing contemporary understanding of living and dying in past as well as present societies.

CHAPTER TWO
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

> The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the
> actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a
> biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from
> their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance.
> (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The body grounds the physical reality of human existence, projecting around itself a meaningful space, through which it makes sense of the world in relation to itself. While the body seems immediate and real to us, we experience and understand bodies already through a lens coloured by our cultural presuppositions: since the seventeenth century, the Cartesian dualistic view of the body and the mind has influenced the development of modern science and shaped the ways in which nature and society have been understood. This thesis aims to establish a new understanding of the significance of corpse positioning in funerary practices, using burial data from the early Anglo-Saxon period. In order to extrapolate the Anglo-Saxon body from archaeological evidence, however, it is necessary to discuss what the body is in the first place, and how archaeology can inform us about it. This chapter explores the body in socio-theoretical literature and previous archaeological work on body positioning, and reviews the history of the study of the Anglo-Saxon body.

2.2 A HISTORY OF CORPSE POSITIONING IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The body has been a topic of archaeological interest since the earliest systematic investigations by antiquarians, and skeletal remains provided a source of evidence for osteological categorisation to support interpretations of racial differences, cultural development, and migration patterns (Stocking 1968; Trigger 1989). Variations in body positioning were acknowledged and described in written communications. For example, Johann Georg Ramsauer's 1846 excavation of the Iron Age burial site at Hallstatt, Austria, famously included a series of detailed watercolour illustrations of the graves, showing the positions of the skeletons and accompanying grave artefacts (Hodson 1990). Hallstatt was

remarkable for its time in the attention paid to body positions, but antiquarian records of body positions were generally brief and simple. Interests in bodies were often overshadowed by much more ardent interests in grave monuments and artefacts.

The development of processual archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s moved towards a more positivist and systematic approach to archaeological remains. With the increased emphasis and application of scientific methodologies—including osteological analysis, radiocarbon dating, rigorous statistical inquiry, hypothesis-testing, and model-building—the body became a more coherent 'unit' of archaeological analysis (Sofaer 2006: 14–18). These new ways of approaching the body allowed burial positions to develop as models or tools. In a study of arm and hand positions in Egyptian mummies, P. H. K. Gray (1972) analysed X-ray images of 111 mummies dated from the Dynasty 21 to the Roman period. He found that the preferences for the positioning of arms and hands changed chronologically, and contended that arm positioning could be used to help date Egyptian mummies. In a like manner, Scandinavian archaeologists established chronologies based on the positioning of arms in Nordic cemeteries (Redin 1976; Kieffer-Olsen 1993; cited in Atzbach 2016: 35). Body positions were also used to identify ethnic groups, such as Margaret Faull's (1977) attempt to infer the survival of the native 'British' populations and continuity of 'British' traditions in Anglo-Saxon northern England, based on the crouched burial position.

On occasion, individual graves with atypical burial positions were given special attention. At Garton Slack (East Yorkshire), an Iron Age square-ditched barrow contained a double burial of a probable male and a female, with a premature foetus (Brewster 1980). The two adults were buried close together, with a wooden stake at the centre of the grave driven to its base, securing the bodies in place. The intimate positions of the bodies, the foetus beneath the woman's pelvis, and the possible ritual significance of the stake had led the excavator to imagine a story of two star-crossed lovers and their ill-fated love which ended in judicial killing (Brewster 1975: 115). Similarly, a prone skeleton from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Worthy Park (Hampshire) had been creatively interpreted as a teenage girl who was raped, impregnated, killed, and buried as an outcast (Hawkes and Wells 1975). These imaginative story-tellings, however, have led to frustration among some archaeologists who complain that 'the production of a pseudo-ethnography, based on material not remotely contemporary with the bodies under consideration… gives no assistance to those struggling to understand

the significance of buried bodies; and that means that archaeology can remain as the laughingstock of historians' (Reynolds 1988: 718).

Regardless, the emergence of the body as a subject of interest in processual archaeology foregrounded the post-processual programme of the body as a social agent. The body under theorisation in postmodern philosophy has become a fertile ground for research in social and cultural lives, providing a metaphorical yet tangible vehicle for actors and agents to be realised. The work of Michel Foucault represents a major influence in this development (Turner 1984; Armstrong 1983). For Foucault, the body is a product of discourse, which has no *a priori* existence but only comes into being through the exercise of power. The Foucauldian concept of the discursive body has gained especial attention from feminist scholars who elaborate on the contingency of the body to argue that sexual categories are socially constructed and perpetuated through embodied behaviours (e.g. Butler 1990, 1993; Bordo 1993). Growing scepticism towards modern science has problematised the notion of a purely naturalistic body and moved towards a social constructionist account of the body, which holds that the 'natural' is a construction of the 'social'. Any description or understanding of the biological body, therefore, is fundamentally cultural.

While the social-constructionist approach to the body recognises the role of society in shaping the ways the human body is conceptualised and approached, it has been criticised for overlooking the physical, sensual experience of embodied social life (Hallam et al 1997: 7). Indeed, some writers complain that in writing about the body under layers of theoretical rendering, 'the body dissolves into language' (Bynum 1995: 1)—'If the body is a metaphor for our locatedness in space and time and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge, then the postmodern body is no body at all' (Bordo 1990: 145). In his attempt to reconcile the naturalistic and constructionist views of the body, Shilling describes the body as 'an entity which is in the process of becoming' (Shilling 1993: 5). For him, the physical body is shaped and transformed by participation in everyday social and cultural life. Meanwhile, it also enables and constrains individual agency in such participation. Body and self thus collapse into one entity, one embodied human agent. The notion of embodiment provides an account of the body as a physical entity embedded in society. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) uses the term *habitus* to conceptualise the embodied knowledge by which actors are predisposed to act. Habitus is an emergent property of day-to-day social interaction which is constantly reproduced through individual agency, giving rise to a dialectic between 'agent'

and 'structure' in which the material and the mental collapse upon each other (Giddens 1991).

The embodied human agent provides an attractive focal point for theorisation among post-processual archaeologists interested in the relationship between materiality and agency. By locating embodied human agents in a material world, archaeological remains may serve as a crystallisation of the habitus of past people through series of material interactions. Moving away from the simplistic and non-discriminatory use of burial positions as models or tools, greater emphasis has been placed on understanding social change and agency behind the positioning of bodies in funerary contexts. Body positions are increasingly interrogated as part of wider studies about the society in question; for example, in studies about age (Lewartowski 1995), gender (Stoodley 1999), local identities (Pader 1982; Lucy 1998), and dress (Brush 1993). Notably, Ellen-Jade Pader (1982) was the first and most cited person to systematically address the cultural significance of body positioning in past funerary rites. In her analysis of two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Holywell Row and Westgarth Gardens in Suffolk, Pader identifies subtle local variations in positioning of the body, the selection of grave assemblages, and the arrangement of objects in relation to the body. The importance of her study lies in its emphasis of the complexity of meanings and relations which underpins the positioning of the corpse, from large-scale regional change over the long term to ephemeral local nuances. Pader stresses that mourners were located within their local community and cultural contexts, giving rise to intra-site variations in the burial record.

Meanwhile, increased attention on the body as a product of culture has made way for the study of gestures and gesticulation in archaeology (de Jorio 2000; Morris 2001; Morris and Peatfield 2002; Watt 2004; Heyn 2010). While the majority of this research effort focuses on gestural symbolism in representational art, some archaeologists extend their studies to the mortuary realm and consider the symbolic significance of burial position. In their discussion of the Hirschlanden figure, a sandstone statue from the Iron Age burial mound at Baden-Wurttemberg in southwestern Germany, Armit and Grant (2008) compare the gesture of the statue with the arm and hand positions of skeletons from contemporary cemeteries. They observe that, while the statue is an ithyphallic figure in warrior attire, the gesture represented was most commonly associated with contemporary female burials. By juxtaposing the masculine body with a feminine gesture, they argue that the Hirschlanden figure subtly conveys ambiguity, embodying the complex relationships 'between life and death, male and

female, indigenous and exotic, and perhaps more' (Armit and Grant 2008: 421). More recently, Atzbach (2016) studies burial postures and identifies evidence for devotional and praying gestures in medieval Christian burials in Scandinavia. He challenges the chronological model of Nordic arm positions previously established (Redin 1976; Kieffer-Olsen 1993; cited in Atzbach 2016: 35), and argues instead for a more nuanced reading of corpse positioning in relation to its social and religious symbolism.

Another branch in the study of corpse positioning focuses on a specific group of burials that display non-normative, or 'deviant', positioning practices (see various papers in Murphy 2008). Very often, 'deviant' burials stand out because they are disturbing to the sensitivity of the modern eye: for instance, buried prone, decapitated, with hands and feet mutilated or seemingly bound. In his study of deviant burials in Anglo-Saxon England, Reynolds (2009) explores such deviant corpse positions to interpret the changing attitudes towards crime, punishment, and death in the early medieval period. Claassen's (2010) analysis of burials in hunter-gatherer societies in southern Ohio Valley in the Archaic period, c. 5,000–2,000 BC, does not begin with the most curious corpse positions. Instead, she observes that the vast majority of the burials in her study area were deposited flexed and laid on one side. Supine burials were very rare, and high percentages of them were associated with violent death (Claassen 2010: 114–120). Juxtaposing corpse positioning practice with the circumstances of death, she conjectures that supine burial position is reflective of violent death, punishment, or possibly human sacrifice (Claassen 2010: 120–121).

Careful excavation and close attention to burial contexts have made possible greater emphasis on the performative and theatrical aspect of the funeral, which highlights the individuality of past people and events that ultimately created the archaeological record we study (Williams 2006; Price 2010; Giles 2012). For example, Giles (2015) explores how funerary performance articulated the pain, grief, and tension in the aftermath of violent death in Iron Age Britain and Ireland. By drawing upon osteological evidence of trauma, ritual destruction of weapons, the arrangement of objects around the body, and the positioning of the body in the grave, Giles argues that the unfolding funerary theatre presented means to deal with traumatic deaths, materially referencing and negotiating the relationship between the dead and the living. Importantly, an approach known as 'archaeothanatology' applies taphonomic knowledge in studying burial contexts and interpreting the conditions of burial (Duday 2006, 2009). Through careful excavation and detailed examination of the *in situ*

arrangement of human remains, artefacts, and grave structures, it is possible to reconstruct the original positions of the body and accompanying objects, the manner of burial, the presence of container, lining, or superstructure, and possibly the ritual process (Harris and Tayles 2012; Littleton et al 2012; Klaus and Tam 2015). Until recently, excavation records have been hardly detailed enough to provide clear and adequate information for the study of body positioning. However, with increased recognition and greater engagement with archaeothanatological methods, some have called for standardised burial terminology to facilitate holistic and accurate field recording, robust interpretations, and effective communication among researchers (Knüsel 2014).

Increased attention paid to burial contexts is accompanied by significant developments in bioarchaeological methods and understanding, which have allowed a finer scrutiny of the diet, health, living conditions, mobility, occupational activities, and even appearance of the individual (Prag and Neave 1997; Gowland and Thompson 2013). Crucially, when we make use of osteological data, DNA, or isotopic analysis in our interpretation, we are taking an epistemological stance as we assume a universal account of what being a human entails. This epistemological stance grounds the interpretive possibility of bioarchaeology and its approach to human remains as biological and universal, which is presupposed by any interpretation about sex, age, pathologies, diet, or demography. Meanwhile, the physical body is shaped and understood by the social and cultural settings in which it is situated. Recent bioarchaeological efforts emphasise the link between osteological data and their cultural and historical contexts (Sofaer 2006; Gowland and Knüsel 2006). This emerging body of work has shown that physical bodies are not static adjuncts external to cultural lives; rather, they are inextricably linked with human social participation, shaping identities, social practices, and lifestyles (Gowland and Thompson 2013).

By acknowledging the reality of embodied living and dying that is shared between past and present people, archaeologists are able to interrogate and understand the past. Thus, we may understand that past people lived and died and existed by virtue of their bodies, just like we do today. Archaeology, with its strength in exploring the material manifestation of human lives, is uniquely positioned to shed light on the diversity of bodies past and present. The body is neither a complete cultural construct separable from its physicality, nor a 'natural' given presupposed by all cultural elaborations. 'Nature' and 'culture' constitute only facets of what we called 'bodies'. The present study does not intend to provide an ultimate

definition to circumscribe the body. Instead, by using the 'body' as a heuristic tool, it seeks to account for the vibrancy and creativity both captured and unleashed by a multiplicity of bodies which fascinated past people as much as us.

2.3 A HISTORY OF THE ANGLO-SAXON BODY

2.3.1 Anglo-Saxon body lore

From the Germanic 'pagan' period through to the post-Conversion Christian period, the Anglo-Saxon people found much humour, disgust, as well as fascination in their bodies. Metal artefacts often contained human representations, sometimes as full articulated bodies, other times fragmented and recombined with other human and animal bodies. Manuscript illustrations are abundant in representations of human bodies from the moment of birth to the deathbed and the grave. From the obscene onion of Exeter Riddle 25, to the naked and shipwrecked Apollonius, Old English prose and poetry are filled with bodies whole and body parts. In the context of profound social, political, and religious change through the Anglo-Saxon period, the body also evolved, shed or retained old meanings, and acquired new ones over time.

Lowland Britain in the fifth century AD was characterised by a marked change in settlement patterns, burial practices, and material culture. This change has been attributed to the migration and settlement of Germanic tribes from northern Germany and southern Scandinavia—whom we now call the Anglo-Saxons (Hills 2003: 9, 14; Lucy 2000: 1–4). Although direct textual evidence is severely lacking in the earlier period, archaeological evidence suggests that the body was a source of fear and fascination for the inhabitants of early Anglo-Saxon England. The corpse was an object of concern and was often treated with great care. Both inhumation and cremation were practised in the fifth and sixth centuries, although the cremation rite was more strongly associated with the eastern regions (with a concentration of large cremation cemeteries around the Wash in Norfolk and Lincolnshire) in the fifth century (Williams 2011: 242). Cremated bones are found in hand-made pottery urns and buried in the ground, sometimes accompanied by burnt pyre goods or unburnt grave goods such as dress fittings, combs, and toilet implements (Williams 2011: 245–246). Cremation would have involved a physical transformation of the body from flesh to charred remains, visibly enacting a dramatic alteration of the body (Williams 2011: 249). It has been suggested that the processes of preparing the body, cremating it, and collecting remains and

placing them in an urn might have also facilitated transformation, creating a reformulated, second body for the deceased (Williams 2004).

Inhumation burials from the early Anglo-Saxon period were often furnished with grave goods, including brooches, beads, spearheads, shield bosses, spindle whorls, coins, and buckles (Lucy 2000a: 16). Some individuals were accorded peculiar treatment, such as non-normative positioning (Hirst 1985: 39), inclusion of unusual objects (Meaney 1981: 249–262), use of chalk on the body (Crawford 1993), and burial with multiple individuals (Stoodley 2002). These practices reflect an underlying notion of what constituted appropriate treatment of corpses, specific to the local communities and the individuals being buried. The concern with dead bodies and the appropriateness of burial in the early Anglo-Saxon period is manifested, in some cases, in reopened graves. For instance, Grave 11 from Bradstow School, Broadstairs, showed clear signs of human disturbance which took place after skeletonisation was complete. The skull was turned over facing down and held in place with two flints, possibly in a deliberate attempt to confuse the corpse and stop it from getting up and walking about (Klevnas 2011: 170).

Literary evidence may suggest a belief in an immaterial soul in Germanic myths, which is in some sense different to the body in substance: an idea of the journeying soul, a liminal phase between life and death, and the necessity for the soul to travel between them (Sanmark 2010). Thus, careful treatment of the physical cadaver may reflect a concern for the spiritual well-being of the dead. The idea of an immaterial soul may be linked with the wider theme of bodily fluidity and transformation, a prominent motif in Germanic art in the early medieval period (Hedeager 2010). In the Norse tradition, the notion of transformation is evident in Icelandic sagas, where gods such as Odin, Freyja, and Loki could leave behind their bodies, and their spirits could shape-shift into animals (Sanmark 2010: 161; Hedeager 2010: 117). Animal teeth and bones commonly occurred in cremations and occasionally in inhumations as well, suggestive of food offerings or amulets (Meaney 1981; Pluskowski 2010: 114–115). It has also been suggested that the inclusion of animal parts might have reinforced the idea of transformation upon death (Williams 2001). Furthermore, among common grave goods and pyre goods were toilet implements and combs, suggesting washing and grooming of the body prior to burial (Williams 2007a). Using these objects in preparing the body would have altered the appearance of the corpse, materially bringing about transformation. Williams (2007a) argues that the process of plucking, cutting, and shaving of hair articulated the

changing relationship between the living, the deceased, and the ancestors at the funeral; it represented a transformation and reconstitution of the body and the soul, constructing new identities for the living and the dead.

In Anglo-Saxon art, naturalistic representation of the human body was extremely rare in fifth- and sixth-century England, but the human body was often broken into limbs and faces and mixed with animal body parts, forming recombinant hybrid creatures from fragmented parts (Leigh 1984: 40). These objects with zoomorphic designs were frequently deposited as dress fasteners or grave goods for the dead. The fragmentation and recombination of human and animal bodies, characteristic of Salin's Style I, have been argued to be depicting metamorphosis of men into animals or *vice versa*, expressing a notion of bodily fluidity and transformation and reflecting a cosmology wherein men and the natural world are interdependent (Leigh 1984; Hedeager 2010; Webster 2012: 36–37). Moreover, the depiction of body parts on metal artefacts, the gestures represented on the figures, and the changing visual dynamics of the represented bodies through using and engaging with the artefacts, point towards the immense symbolic power of bodies and bodily gestures in the early Anglo-Saxon period (Brundle 2013, 2014)

From the seventh and eighth centures onwards, a new corpus of naturalistic images of humans emerged and appeared in stone sculptures, ivory carvings, and manuscript illustrations. This dramatic change in figural representation has been attributed to the influence of Christianity which presented new ways of conceptualising the human body (Webster 2012: 8–9; Cramp 2008: 9–10). The arrival of Christianity introduced the notion of *Imago Dei* which privileged humans in God's Creation and separated them from animals, expressing a more anthropocentric understanding of the cosmos. No longer did the human body fragment and recombine with animal body parts; instead, it became stabilised and bounded. In the Anglo-Saxon literary record, the body was often understood as under constant threat from creatures in the earth, such as the *moldwyrmas* from the *Soul and Body* poems, and body needed to be protected (Thompson 2004: 142, 148–152). While furnished burial rites came to an end, new practices emerged to contain and protect the body, including chest burial (Craig-Atkins 2012), charcoal burial (Holloway 2010), and shrouded burial (Mui 2013). Anglo-Saxon medical texts, likewise, reflect a notion of order and unity, the disruption of which causes diseases and ill health (Cameron 1993: 12–14).

A concern for preserving bodily integrity was bound up with the notion of sin. Peter Brown (1988) argues that the body lore in early Christianity was folded in the theology of sin and death. As the body became a site of lust and sin, bodily integrity must be maintained by abstinence, as in a sermon by Ælfric:

> Þonne forrotiað þa nytenu on heora meoxe, þonne flæsclice men on stence heora galnysse geendiað heora dagas. As gif we ða myrran Gode gastlice geoffriað, þonne bið ure deadlica lichama fram galnysse stencum ðurh forhæfednysse gehealden.

> As cattle rot in their dung, so carnal men end their days in the stench of their wantonness. But if we spiritually offer myrrh to God, our mortal bodies are preserved from the stenches of wantonness through continence.

> (Thorpe 1844: 118)

Fleshly desires caused the body to decay, but sexual abstinence preserved the boundary of the body, and thus the bodies of virgin saints became incorruptible (Brown 1988: 182). The association between the violated body and iniquity may also be reflected in the infliction of physical punishment. Evident in law codes from later Anglo-Saxon England, body mutilation was used as punishment for crimes and as a marker of criminal offence (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1998). Corporal punishment is manifested archaeologically in burials in unconventional positions, sometimes decapitated or with hands or legs bound, and situated physically and symbolically within the liminal, ritualised realm of exclusion and punishment; the denial of bodily integrity and banishment to liminal spaces thus served as punishment for crime (Reynolds 2009).

Nevertheless, the changing perception of the body in early medieval England was more complex than a shift from the fluid body to the bounded body after the conversion to Christianity. The Christian body paradigm did not simply replace the pagan one completely, but they interacted to produce what we see in the literary and archaeological evidence. While the body ceased to be constantly morphing into animal forms but received a boundedness, this bounded body is paradoxically fluid: a fluidity that was remarkably consistent from pre-Christian to Christian contexts. Nevertheless, unlike the pre-Christian tradition, this fluidity did not presuppose physical transformation. Instead, it afforded a body which slipped between the material world and the world of symbolism. In her study of the representation of the sexual body in Old English literature, Clare Lees (1997) conceptualises a process of *translatio*, or 'metaphorical substitution', by which the body is transformed into symbolism:

'The passage of the body into writing, into the symbolic, whereby it becomes the locus for a variety of often contradictory cultural meanings, provides evidence for the distinctively Anglo-Saxon dynamic'.

Transformation of the body by metaphors was prevalent in Anglo-Saxon literary culture, but the human body no longer lay comfortably within the natural world of animals and plants. Instead, it was relocated to a world of culture, handiworks of men. The conception of the body as a bounded building or container is reinforced in kennings such as *banhus* ('bone-house'), *bansele* ('bone-hall'), *banfæt* ('bone-vessel'), *sawolhus* ('soul-house'), and *feorhhus* ('life-house') (Gardner 1969: 112). Similarly, the analogy between the body and words, which bears a significant resonance with the Word made flesh, was commonplace in the Christian medieval West, not least in later Anglo-Saxon England. It has been argued, for example, that Cynewulf's anagrammatic runic signatures in his poems were used to signify his broken body, which is to be reassembled by the reader through the act of reading (Clements 2014). Books, bearing words, were particularly bodily (the Exeter Riddle 26 (the Bible) is especially telling; Dale 2017: 100–101). Recent scholarship on *Beowulf* has also highlighted the blurring of the boundaries between the human body and manmade objects. As Cavell (2014: 157) contends, '…the Old English literary tendency to depict the body in the terms of a cultural product makes a great deal of sense; the body cannot be entirely denied because it is inseparable from human life, yet to align it with the natural world would produce a conflict with the anti-natural world attitude depicted in Anglo-Saxon writings. And so, the body is instead translated into the language of culture'.

Thus, by allowing the same physical body to be reconstructed into multiple symbolic possibilities, the body may metaphorically transform into something else whilst retaining its physical form. While gaining boundedness and shedding its transformative capacity, the body paradoxically retained its fluidity and transformative potential. This attitude of ambivalence has been identified as characteristic of Anglo-Saxon culture, which facilitated religious interaction and conversion in Anglo-Saxon England (Lees 1997; Lees and Overing 1998; Karkov and Brown 2003). This ambivalence helped the communication of the new Christian lore to a pagan world, and allowed reconciliation between conflicting realities through the religious and ideological change during the early medieval period. Meanwhile, in tracing the development of body lore in Anglo-Saxon England, it is important to also make room for local dialogues, endorsement, and dissent, challenges in the translation of languages and

ideas, and the specific cultural and political contexts of such interactions. A single coherent Anglo-Saxon body lore is not evident, perhaps because there was never a singular discourse (Brundle 2014).

2.3.2 An overview of Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology

Anglo-Saxon graves have long been known to produce rich assemblages of artefacts. The antiquarian and culture-historical traditions accordingly focused mostly on the study of artefacts, paying limited attention to the body in Anglo-Saxon funerary practices. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, information about human remains, if recorded at all, was mentioned at best in terms of the number of skeletons discovered. In the rare instances where skeletal arrangements were recorded, they were noted in relation to the positions of grave artefacts. In his *Nenia Britannica* (1793), James Douglas gives an account of the orientation of the body and the placement of artefacts around it. Douglas was the first person to identify 'Saxon' finds in his excavations of burial barrows in Kent between 1779 and 1793 (Lucy 2000a: 8). Notably, he includes his own illustrations of some of the artefacts and their burial contexts. Douglas' attention to archaeological contexts was certainly remarkable for his day, but his work went largely unnoticed in the subsequent decades. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, publications of excavation findings often contained catalogues and illustrations of artefacts. Although information about the body remained limited, observations of the treatment of bodies were occasionally made. Charles Roach Smith, publishing the findings from Bryan Faussett's eighteenth-century excavations as *Inventorium Sepulchrale*, describes the positioning of grave objects in relation to the body and its arrangement in the grave (Roach Smith 1856). In his report of the cemetery at Dartford (Kent), Spurrell comments that the skeletons were 'laid on their backs' with stones or lumps of chalk or clay 'under the back of the head, to raise it' (Spurrell 1889: 314). Variations in grave orientation at Dartford were noted, which Spurrell interprets as 'the result of indifference' (Spurrell 1889: 314). Grave plans were uncommon, reserved for exceptionally wealthy graves such as the chamber-grave at Taplow (Buckinghamshire) (Stevens 1884).

By the early twentieth century, Anglo-Saxon graves were more systematically recorded and published, notably through the works of T. C. Lethbridge and E. T. Leeds. Excavation publications often included descriptions of the positioning of skeletons and grave artefacts, with illustrated site plans showing the layout of the cemetery and the graves in it (e.g. Smith 1912; Lethbridge 1931). The excavation report of Abingdon (Berkshire), for example,

includes a site plan as well as a catalogue of inhumations, comprising detailed descriptions of orientation, the positioning of the torso, arms, legs, and the direction of the face, and the positions of objects in relation to the body (Leeds and Harden 1936: 31). When Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) was excavated in 1939, the absence of the body was a topic of discussion. It was explicitly addressed in C. W. Phillips' report of 1940, in which he contends that a body was never buried in the barrow (Phillips 1940: 175–177). In the later report, however, Bruce-Mitford (1975) conjectures that a body was present, but did not survive due to the hostile soil condition.

More rigorous excavation methodologies from the 1960s resulted in more systematic and regular recording of individual graves, although many of these excavations were not published until two or three decades later, and discussions of bodily treatment remained limited until the 1970s and 1980s. Margaret Faull (1977), for example, argues that the early medieval rite of crouched burial in northern England was a development from contracted burial rite found in in Neolithic cists and Iron Age barrows. The crouched position, she contended, was suggestive of the survival of native 'British' traditions (Faull 1977). Burial practices were sometimes explained in terms of pragmatic considerations, such as Hirst's passing comment that the supine burial position was most commonly adopted at Sewerby (East Yorkshire), because it offered the best display of grave goods (Hirst 1985: 38). While the supine position has been thus dismissed, the famous prone burial (Grave 41) at Sewerby has attracted a great deal of attention. The grave contained the remains of an adult woman aged between 35 and 45 at death, buried in a prone position with arms bent at the elbows. This grave, placed on top of another female skeleton (Grave 49, supine), has been interpreted as a 'live' burial by the excavator (Hirst 1985: 39) and remains an oft cited example of human sacrifice or punishment in early Anglo-Saxon society (see Williams 2006: 96–100).

Another notable discussion of the prone burial rite and possible corporeal punishment is by Hawkes and Wells (1975) in their paper titled 'Crime and punishment in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery?'. Based on a lesion on the left femur and the prone burial position of the 16-year-old individual buried in Grave 78, Worthy Park (Hampshire), Hawkes and Wells imagine the story of a teenage girl who was injured during a sexual assault, impregnated, condemned as an adulteress, killed, and buried in an unusual position (Hawkes and Wells 1975: 121–122). This creative interpretation combines osteological information, archaeological contexts, and documentary evidence. However, it has been challenged by Nicholas Reynolds (1988)

through a reassessment of skeletal, taphonomic, and textual evidence. In his concluding remarks, Reynolds accuses Hawkes and Wells of constructing a 'pseudo-ethnography' (Reynolds 1988: 718). Paraphrasing Giles (2012: 110), Hawkes and Wells' story of violence and rape may tell us more about attitudes towards sex in the 1970s than in the sixth century AD.

Despite Reynolds' scepticism, the story nonetheless emphasises the lived presence of individual people, whose graves and bodies may encapsulate their life events. Moreover, it highlights that archaeological interpretation is an informed creative venture. These ideas began to be more fully explored with the advent of the post-processual movement. Addressing the symbolic significance in the construction of graves in early Anglo-Saxon England, Ellen-Jade Pader (1982) situates mourners within their local community and cultural contexts. In her analysis of two Suffolk cemeteries at Holywell Row and Westgarth Gardens, she identifies subtle local variations in positioning of the body, the selection of grave assemblages, and the arrangement of objects within the grave. Pader's thesis, supervised by Ian Hodder and situated within the post-processual turn, set new agendas for the study of mortuary evidence and has laid the foundation for many that have followed her.

The post-processual movement moved into full swing in the 1990s, notably with the work of Sam Lucy who has turned 'identity' into presently one of the most used keywords in Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology. The significance of Lucy's work lies in her emphasis on regional variations and an explicit critique of the notion of ethnicity. In her study of early medieval burial rites in East Yorkshire, Lucy (1998) demonstrates the diversity of practices in terms of individual grave composition as well as cemetery layout and location. Instead of any essentialist character of one's ethnic identity, she argues that these variations represent the exertion of social identities constructed and perceived by the people themselves. The burial record, therefore, is not a reflection of static, bounded ethnic groups, but a dynamic, situational construct that arose in its cultural context. In response to Faull's (1977, see above) argument that the crouched burial position in northern England suggests continuity of native 'British' practice, Lucy (2000b) reconsiders the excavated data and evidence of dates, observing that the crouched position was not practised to any great extent until the seventh or early eighth centuries. She contends that instead of a ritual continuity or survival, the crouched burial practice resurged in the seventh century, possibly as a deliberate exertion of a local, Deiran identity against the unified kingdom of Northumbria (Lucy 2000b: 16–17).

As developments of gender studies and body theory in the wider social sciences penetrate archaeological interpretations, the treatment of the corpse is increasingly addressed as an integral part of funerary practices, and the body is often interrogated as parts of wider synthetic studies. Karen Brush (1993), for example, addresses the cultural implications of funerary costumes and argues for the significance of bodily adornment in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary rites. Nick Stoodley (1999) focuses on the expression of gender in the funerary arena, and has demonstrated that gender identity was intimately linked with body representation through burial positions and material culture (Stoodley 1999: 74). The question of the body in society has also facilitated developments in theoretical approaches in bioarchaeology, and encouraged increasing engagements between bioarchaeology and burial archaeology. A number of studies have attempted to reconstruct social biographies and assess individual and group identities, by combining osteological information with grave goods, dress, grave structure, and spatial arrangements (Gowland 2006, 2007; Groves et al 2009; Groves 2010, 2011).

Offering a holistic view of the grave encompassing the body, objects, and other features, the idea of a funerary tableau is a common theme in recent interpretative approaches of the early Anglo-Saxon burial evidence. The tableau, where jewellery or weapons were laid out around the body for an impressive visual display of identity, was the final scene of the funeral before the pyre was lit or the grave backfilled (Geake 2003: 260). In particular, the latter is archaeologically recoverable as furnished inhumations, which are construed as 'images' composed of the holistic view of the body, its clothing, accompanying dress ornaments and grave goods, the structure of the grave, and other elements or inclusions. Guy Halsall (2003), in his study of early Merovingian burials, argues that every element of the grave is imbued with symbolic possibilities and put together following a 'grammar of display': the underlying cultural principles that govern the performance of burial rites. Graves, like texts, may be read and interpreted by mourners through holistic engagements with the assemblage.

A similar idea of the language of burial has also been developed by Martin Carver (2000). He suggests that graves may be understood as poetry, by which he emphasises the complexity of meanings and the possibility of multiple readings by difference audiences. For Carver, 'a burial is itself not reality and is not meant to be' (Carver 2000: 37). The composition of the grave, with its body and goods, constructed manifold allusions, meanings, and relevances akin to the reading of poetry. Applying this grave-poetry analogy to his consideration of

Sutton Hoo Mounds 1 and 17, Carver argues that the burials captured the unique existence of the two deceased individuals and the historical presence and creativeness of the two funerary events (Carver 2000: 46–47). More recently, Neil Price (2010) has put forward the notion of mortuary theatre to encapsulate the drama and performativity of funeral tableaux. Each burial, for Price, tells an individual story of the deceased person and his or her unique social presence. The funeral is a 'materialised narrative' crystallised as archaeological remains.

The body, in this reading, is more than an element of a static tableau. Instead, the treatment of the body—how to prepare it for burial, lay it in the grave, or put it in a container—was incorporated in the mortuary performance which progressively constructs the body. Price (2010: 131–137) discusses the famous account of a Viking funeral by the tenth-century Arab soldier Ibn Fadlan, in which bodies play an integral part in the unfolding of the story. After his death, the body of the Viking chieftain was buried in a temporary grave. A slave girl was chosen to accompany her master and participates in ten days of feasting and drinking. On the tenth day, the body of the dead man was exhumed, dressed, borne to the ship, and placed in a seated position. The slave girl went into the tents of the dead man's kinsmen and copulated with each of them in turn. When she was taken to the ship, she was raped before being stabbed and strangled and eventually burnt alongside the dead man. In this account, the bodies of both the dead man and the slave girl are dynamically involved in the funeral through stages of ritual acts, from sexual performance to grave construction. Viewing mortuary rituals as 'materialised narratives' which objectify drama and stories, Price emphasises the individuality of early medieval graves and the communicative potentials of mortuary rituals (Price 2010: 146–147). Through the performative manipulation of objects and bodies in personalised funerals, individual stories could be constructed and communicated.

The Ibn Fadlan account may be footnoted throughout with archaeological parallels, including no less than the ship burials from Oseberg and Kaupang, Norway, and the seated burials from the chamber graves at Birka, Sweden (Brøgger et al 1917; Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen 1995; Arbman 1940–43). However, like Carver's examples of Sutton Hoo Mounds 1 and 17, these burials are exceptional in that the effort and wealth involved were certainly reserved for a selected few of the social elites. Interpreting the 'materialised narratives' of the common masses may be considerably more challenging as a result of smaller-scale funerals and less material investment. While not everyone was buried with

ostentatious display of wealth, most graves would have contained one or more corpses, regardless of whether they survived archaeologically. The treatment of the corpse—how to prepare it for burial, lay it in the grave, or put it in a container—was incorporated in a mortuary performance that progressively constructed the funerary body. As the object of inquiry for this thesis is the corpse itself, this thesis seeks to use the corpse position as the stepping-off point from which to develop and apply a new approach to the study of funerary practices, and to provoke new thoughts on how archaeologists may understand and interrogate past societies by means of the positions of bodies recovered from the ground.

2.3.3 Visual representations of graves in archaeology

Images are powerful in representing, reinforcing, and perpetuating archaeological knowledge (Swogger 2000; Perry 2014). From sketches and plans in the field, to the publication of excavation reports and synthetic studies, and to visual displays in museum and popular culture, visual representations play a significant role in shaping discourse on the past in both academic and public contexts (Moser and Gamble 1997). Images have been central to the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon burials since the early antiquarians. The earliest illustrations were often detailed drawings of artefacts recovered from graves, although plans for notable—often weapons-containing—graves were sometimes produced (Williams 2009: 171–172). The plan of 'Tumulus 1' from Chatham Lines (Kent), serving as the frontispiece in James Douglas' Nenia Britannica (1793), depicts the extended and supine skeleton at the centre of the grave, with a shield boss, a sword, a spearhead, and various objects arranged around it. It accompanies a textual description of the discovery, including the size of the stone cist, the positioning of the skeleton, and an inventory of finds and their locations within the grave (Douglas 1793: 3–4). With more systematic excavation methodologies in the twentieth century, cemetery and grave plans from excavations of Anglo-Saxon sites became more regularly used in field recording and publication (e.g. Leeds and Harden 1936; Phillips 1940). Photography and maps also became increasingly widely used over the course of the twentieth century, and continues to be invaluable in recording and interpreting sites, features, and finds, as well as the relationships between them.

Today, archaeologists readily deploy visual tools such as plans, maps, and photographs which give an aura of scientific objectivity. While the use of these images remains largely taken for granted by archaeologists, there is also an increasing effort in producing and reproducing artists' reconstructions of graves in excavation reports, museum displays, and media

coverage of archaeological discoveries. These include the reconstruction of the burial chamber of the 'Prittlewell Prince' from an oblique perspective (MOLA 2004: 22), the reconstruction drawings by artist Victor Ambrus (2006) for the *Time Team* television programme, and the recent example of the reconstruction drawing of a tree-trunk coffin from Great Ryburgh (Norfolk) which has been reproduced in news media (Wilkes 2016). Despite greater recognition of the value of grave reconstructions in communicating research findings, the potentials of reconstructions in informing the research process remain overlooked and understudied, further perpetuating the notion that reconstructions are assumption-loaded, and should thus be reserved only for use in research dissemination and public engagement.

Nevertheless, the opposition between objective scientific data and subjective art is not a useful one. This emerging body of work on visual representations in archaeology has addressed the process of their production and the epistemological implications of the use of images in archaeology (Moser 1992; Smiles and Moser 2005). Recent research has highlighted the fact that reconstruction images are not simply inert summary of information, but they are potent in feeding back into the production of knowledge (Moser 2009). This thesis produces and utilises reconstruction drawings of nearly 2,000 graves to study the significance of body positioning in early Anglo-Saxon burials (for methodology, see Section 3.4.2 in Chapter Three). Acknowledging the knowledge-making characteristics of visual representations in archaeology, this thesis uses reconstruction images as a tool to scrutinise body-positioning practice in the early Anglo-Saxon period. By challenging the opposition between 'objective data' and 'subjective art', it seeks to demonstrate the potentials of reconstruction art in contributing to academic research (a discussion can be found in Section 8.4.2 in Chapter Eight).

2.4 CONCLUSION

The body—the site where experience and understanding begin—represents the fundamental means of interaction between people, and between people and their surroundings. The body has gone through centuries of philosophical reasoning and decades of theorisation and reflection in the social sciences. Recent theoretical development has allowed the body to emerge as a unit of enquiry, and has provided a context for past bodies whole and body parts to be scrutinised, interrogated, and understood. While some scholars have complained about the abstractness of postmodern bodies which are too often disconnected with the real,

tactile, material bodies, funerary archaeology is uniquely positioned to study the tactile bodies of past people. Archaeological studies of body positioning in burials, however, remain patchy and under-theorised, and systematic investigation of the practice and significance of corpse positioning has until now been absent in the body discourse.

Thus, this thesis seeks to examine the significance of the positional representation of corpses, and its relevance to the perception of and attitudes towards embodied living and dying, through an exploration of corpses in pre-Christian funerary rituals in England. Situated within profound social, political, and religious change, Anglo-Saxon bodies evolved, contended, and persisted. Varied regional and local funerary practices in the early Anglo-Saxon period provide an ideal context to test new methodological and theoretical approaches to the funerary body. Detailed and careful study of Anglo-Saxon corpses may shed invaluable light on the relationship between bodies, group and individual identities, and the social and cultural milieu from which they arose, as well as the theoretical implications of archaeological corpses in studying the human response to living, dying, and death.

<div align="center">

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

</div>

Men ne cunnon secgan to soðe seleraedenne hæleð under heofenum hwa þaem hlæste onfeng.

Men—hall-ruler or hero under heaven—cannot say with certainty who took hold of that cargo.

(*Beowulf*, ll 50b–53).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As it drifts on the wind and the tide, Scyld Scefing's funerary ship continues its mysterious journey in the ocean's sway. It is a fanciful thought that the Anglo-Saxon mourners might have shared the same sentiments as the *Beowulf* poet, as they gradually lost sight of the corpse as the grave was being backfilled, and pondered what would happen to it. It is perhaps even more fanciful to think that it is the archaeologist who eventually receives that treasure-loaded, body-bearing cargo in the present. Pondering over the skeletons and grave artefacts that the Anglo-Saxon people left behind, the archaeologist seeks to understand what happened to the corpses when they were mourned and buried.

The present thesis examines what happened to the inhumed corpses in the early Anglo-Saxon period, and this chapter explains and discusses the methodology of this thesis in four sections. The first section considers the nature of the burial evidence, the retrieval of corpse-positional information, and its implications for the study of funerary activities. The second section delves into the methods employed in this present thesis. This section explains the selection of data, the structure of the database of burials which forms the central stem of this work, and the methods of analysis presently used. This is followed by the third section which discusses in detail two new methods introduced in the present study of corpse positions, namely artistic reconstruction and typology, before offering a self-reflexive consideration of the limitations of the present data set and methods in the last section.

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE DATA

3.2.1 Some definitions

The Anglo-Saxon period largely refers to the period of British history from c AD 400 to 1100, and 'Anglo-Saxon' predominates as a name for the people who, in this period, dwelt in the land which corresponds roughly to present-day England. It is important to make a note on the definition of 'Anglo-Saxon England'. Despite the perpetual use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' in scholarship, Anglo-Saxon England was by no means a coherent political or cultural unit. The concept of 'Anglo-Saxon England' did not exist in the minds of the earliest Germanic settlers in eastern Britain. The notion of an 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'English' identity had only become more coherent from the eighth century onwards, evident in the writings of Bede and Boniface referring to the 'English people' (Hills 2003: 14–15). The ideology of a unified English identity was further intensified with the Viking invasion, the unification of England under Wessex in the tenth century, and further political contestation with Viking settlers. In the present work, 'Anglo-Saxon' is used heuristically to encompass the cultural groups which generated the burial evidence from fifth- to seventh-century eastern Britain, and their cultural descendants thereafter up to the Norman invasion in the mid-eleventh century.

'England' refers to the historical land where these people inhabited, although the western and northern fringes of this land were often contested. Conceptually, 'England' is used in this thesis as a shorthand for the parts of Britain where archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon activities has been established by previous scholarship, without assuming any fixed boundaries, geographical or temporal. Methodologically, however, 'England' as defined by present-day borders may sometimes circumscribe the archaeological evidence, such as in the case of county Historic Environment Records (HERs) or the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). Where appropriate, the term 'present-day England' will be used to avoid confusion. 'Anglo-Saxon England' is used synonymously with 'early medieval England', while the term 'early medieval' may be used to refer to the period in northwestern Europe that is contemporary with the Anglo-Saxon period in England.

3.2.2 The nature of the burial evidence

Archaeological evidence for mortuary practices in the Anglo-Saxon period primarily comprises human remains from inhumation and cremation burials, artefactual evidence,

earthwork or stone monuments, and the layouts and locations of cemeteries. Human remains and their archaeological contexts provide crucial information about the lives of past people, those who buried them, and the society from which they came. The preservation of human remains is dependent on a number of factors, such as the depth of the grave, soil type, pH, water and oxygen availability, the methods and tools used to construct the grave, and the effects of accompanying grave objects, containers, or other features (Martin et al 2013: 107). Due to moderate environmental conditions in eastern and southern Britain, most Anglo-Saxon cemeteries yield dry bones (Lucy 2000a: 65–67). Some regions, particularly along the East coast, have acidic soil which causes rapid decomposition of skeletal remains. In a handful of cemeteries, such as Sutton Hoo and Snape in Suffolk, the original positions of bodies are indicated by dark silhouette—the so-called 'sand bodies'—left behind after the bones have dissolved away (Carver 2005: 58–59; Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001). Fibrous body parts such as hair and nails may survive in waterlogged environments, such as at Quernmore, Lancaster (Lancashire), where locks of hair, fingernails, and toenails from a later Anglo-Saxon shrouded burial have been preserved by the peaty soil (Glover 1990). Occasionally, body tissues may be preserved by mineralisation on metal artefacts, such as the patch of skin mineralised on the back of an applied brooch from Grave 11, Dinton (Buckinghamshire) (Hunn et al 1994: 139).

Skeletal remains are an important source of information about the age, sex, disease, trauma, and diet of the deceased, providing insights into the health, lifestyle, and demography of the population (Sofaer 2006; Gowland and Thompson 2013; Roberts 2013). Although cremated remains are brittle and fragmented, careful osteological analysis may recover a great deal about the deceased and the cremation ritual. Remains of teeth or epiphyses, for example, are useful indicators of age at death; depending on the fragmentation and survival of the cremated bones, it may also be possible to determine sex if, for example, the sciatic notch of the pelvis or distinctive skull features are preserved (McKinley 2000). Isotope analysis of skeletal remains may reveal evidence for interpreting the diet and movement of individuals (Martin et al 2013: 206–207). Bones may also be radiocarbon dated to provide absolute dating evidence; this has recently been combined with new artefact typologies to produce a rigorous chronological framework for dating early and middle Anglo-Saxon burials (Bayliss et al 2013).

In cremation burials, animal bones and artefacts are commonly found placed in urns with cremated human bones, suggesting that corpses were dressed and provisioned with pyre goods, foodstuffs, or animal companions before they were burnt (Hills 1977; Richards 1987; Bond 1996; Bond and Worley 2006). Occasionally, unburnt objects are placed in urns as grave goods. At Spong Hill (Norfolk), for example, 70% of the cremation burials contained pyre goods or grave goods (Hills 1999: 17). The cremation process would have been affected by a range of factors such as pyre technology, humidity, temperature and oxygen level of the environment, body mass, the position of the body, the placement of pyre goods, and the unfolding of the ritual, causing differing fragmentation patterns and possible fusion of melted glass or metals to bone (McKinley 1994a). It is possible to infer the layout of the body and the goods on the pyre based on the patterns of the burning of the cremated bones, such as in Bándi and Nemeskéri's (1971: 26) work on cremation in Middle Bronze Age Hungary. As the centre of the pyre would have been the hottest, the extremities would have received less heat, particularly if the pyre was undersized, which might result in incomplete cremation of the hands and feet, if the body was laid out with extended legs and arms by the side (McKinley 1994b: 83–84).

Nonetheless, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the position of the body on the pyre to the accuracy afforded by inhumation burials. The latter offers much more ready access to information about the treatment of the corpse and its representation at the funerary event. Skeletons excavated from inhumation graves are the products of the decomposition of corpses after they were buried. Detailed study of the positioning of skeletons in graves may retrace the decomposition process and reconstruct the representation of the cadaver at burial (Duday 2009). Like bodies, objects left undisturbed in graves would have remained in the position as when they were buried with the body. It is thus possible to interpret the arrangement of objects around the body by studying burial contexts. In her study of early Anglo-Saxon costumes, Walton Rogers (2007) utilises the positions of dress fasteners and mineralised textiles to reconstruct clothing styles and regional dress culture. In some cases, the decomposition of soft tissues and organic materials may cause displacement of objects or bones, which can be observed and studied through careful excavation and recording. For example, Reynolds (1976) observes that at the cemetery of Empingham II (Rutland), many weapon graves contained shield bosses that were found in theoretically unlikely positions, such as tipped sideways or upside-down, or too close to the edge of the grave. He argues that the body could have been covered with a timber plank, on top of which the shield was

placed; as the wood decayed, the shield boss fell into the grave, dismantling itself and smashing the bones underneath (Reynolds 1976: 142–143).

At sites where hostile soil conditions caused poor preservation of bones, detailed record of grave profiles and sections may alternatively provide interesting insights into burial procedures. At Snape (Suffolk), for example, in the absence of skeletal remains, grave contexts suggest that some corpses were underlaid with textile and scattered with pottery sherds during backfilling (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001: 241, 244–246). Entomological evidence preserved by mineralisation also allows interpretation of the time elapsed between death and burial, the offering of foodstuffs, and posthumous insect infestation (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001: 226–227); this has also been considered at two other Suffolk cemeteries at Butter Market and Boss Hall (Turner-Walker and Scull 1997). Unfortunately, due to the acidic soil condition, these cemeteries do not provide adequately preserved skeletal remains and thus information about the arrangement of the cadaver in the grave.

3.2.3 Taphonomy

In order to interpret the treatment and representation of the body in Anglo-Saxon England from excavated human remains, it is necessary to take into account the processes by which buried corpses survived into the present day, and the various factors that might confuse the original placement of bodies and objects, such as grave robbing, plant or animal activities, and natural taphonomic processes. Taphonomy is the study of the postmortem modification of the remains of dead organisms (Haglund and Sorg 1997: 3). The basis for a taphonomic approach to archaeology is the principles which govern the decomposition of the body and materials or objects in association with it. Following death, the body's homeostatic mechanism ceases to operate and no longer regulates internal conditions. Decomposition occurs through two simultaneous processes: autolysis (the breakdown of cells by enzymic digestion internally) and putrefaction (decomposition by external agents such as bacteria and fungi). The activities of enzymes and micro-organisms are affected by temperature, pH, the depth of burial, the availability of water and oxygen, all of which affect the rate of decomposition (Rodriguez 1997: 459–461).

The application of taphonomic knowledge in interpreting archaeological funerary deposits has been espoused by French archaeologist Henri Duday in his 'archaeothanatology' (2006, 2009). This method requires careful excavation and detailed recording of the *in situ*

arrangement of skeletal elements and spatial relationship with other features. By accounting for the alteration in burial remains caused by taphonomic processes, this information can be used to reconstruct the original positions of bodies, the presence of objects or containers, and accompanying ritual activities (Garland and Janaway 1989; Bello 2005). For example, if a body was buried in the ground without the use of containers or coverings, the soil around the body would hold the remains in place as the body decomposed (Duday 2009: 38–40). In cases where bones found *in situ* have tumbled, it may suggest the use of containers or timber covering, above-ground storage for a long period of time, or transportation of the body for some distance prior to burial (Reynolds 1976; Duday 2009: 32–38; Boddington 1996: 48). Different body parts have differing preservation patterns: the cranium, the mandible, and long bones generally survive better than other parts of the skeleton, while small bones of the hands and feet are often poorly preserved (Bello and Andrews 2006: 3–5). As a result, in reconstructing burial positions, information about the arrangement of arms and legs is more likely to survive, while the exact positions of the feet, hands, and fingers are often lost. Infant and juvenile bones are more naturally susceptible to chemical or mechanical degradation than full-grown adult skeletons, and thus tend to be less well-preserved and frequently under-represented in the cemetery record (Bello and Andrews 2006: 5–7; but see Sayer 2014 for a cultural explanation for the under-representation of infant and child burials).

In Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology, taphonomy remains largely unaddressed, with only a few oft-cited exceptions. Nicholas Reynolds (1976), for example, is able to infer the use of coffins or grave covers at the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Empingham II (Rutland), by studying in detail the positions of skeletal remains and artefacts. In the same vein, in the absence of textile remains, Boddington (1996: 13) identifies shrouded burials at the later Anglo-Saxon church in Raunds Furnells (Northamptonshire) based on compact skeletal arrangements. More recently, with increased recognition of the value of archaeothanatology, research is exploring the potential contribution of the archaeothanatological approach in middle and late Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology (Green in prep). For the present study, however, the majority of cemeteries included in the data set have not been excavated and recorded to the amount of detail required for a comprehensive archaeothanatological approach.

Certainly, not all elements of the original funerary event would have survived archaeologically. Even though these studies have demonstrated the possibility to reconstruct part of the funerary process through detailed study of burial deposits, other parts are

invariably lost to archaeological access. Grave-robbing, for example, results in disturbed graves whose original contents were confused in antiquity and thus lost to the excavator and the interpreter. However, studies of grave disturbance in the early medieval period have shed light on the mortuary practices and associated post-burial events, providing interesting insights into the continued relationship and contention between the living and the dead (Aspöck 2011, 2015; Klevnäs 2013).

3.2.4 Artefactual, historical, and literary evidence

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to integrate archaeological record with historical and literary evidence, this thesis interrogates and situates the burial evidence alongside the portrayal of the body in other media. This interdisciplinary approach seeks to provide a comprehensive insight into early medieval attitudes towards the body and death, and their implications for local cultures and beliefs within a landscape of political and religious change across the fifth to eleventh centuries. This situates the Anglo-Saxon body in the wider context of its cultural, political, and religious landscape in early medieval northwestern Europe, taking into account only physical corpses, but also the manifestation of the body in different forms. Discussion draws upon and reassesses previous work on a variety of subjects, including artefacts related to bodily treatment in funerary preparations (such as toilet implements, combs, and amulets) and representation of the human body on metalwork and manuscript art (Dodwell 2000; Williams 2003, 2007a; Ratican 2014; Brundle 2014).

Latin and vernacular literature from the later Anglo-Saxon period has proven to be a fertile ground for exploration of the body, as demonstrated by previous studies (Johnson 1980; Lionarons 1994; Lees 1997, 2012; Lees and Overing 1998; O'Brien O'Keefee 1998; Scheil 2000; Karkov 2001a; Withers and Wilcox 2003; Thompson 2004; Hofmann 2007; Cavell 2014; Clements 2014). Poems, riddles, homilies, hagiographies, law codes, and medical texts are rich in references of the body, providing crucial information about the understanding of the body in Anglo-Saxon society. Art-historical evidence such as metalwork ornamentation, manuscript illustrations and stone carvings also offer a glimpse of the early medieval representation of the body (Karkov 2001b, 2003; Watt 2004; Hedeager 2010; Brundle 2014). These will be juxtaposed with archaeology to contextualise the cemetery data and to offer a view of the Anglo-Saxon account of the body over the long term. The aim is to integrate different sources and disciplinary perspectives to produce a novel and critical appraisal of

the notion of the body in Anglo-Saxon England from the fifth century through to the eleventh century.

3.3 METHODS

3.3.1 Data selection

In order to reconstruct and interpret the treatment of corpses and its cultural significance, detailed burial records from recently excavated sites are crucial. This research takes a national approach to scrutinise well-excavated and recorded inhumation cemeteries across present-day England. The scope afforded by a national approach offers a comprehensive insight into the regionality of practices, but is not circumscribed by presupposed geographical frameworks. The chronological focus of the cemetery data is between c AD 400 and 750, which covers the period from the end of Roman Britain to the consolidation of the Church in England.

The selection of sites is based on size (minimum of 15 graves), the availability of data, and the date of the excavation, in order to maximise the quality of the data. Sizable cemeteries afford adequate numbers of graves for meaningful intra-site analyses, thus providing insights into local funerary practices. Larger cemeteries also provide larger mass of data to produce statistically significant results (Baxter 1994: 113). The availability of data refers to access to individual grave details in the form of *in situ* photographs or illustrated grave plans in their excavation reports, as published papers, monographs, or grey literature. The requirement of information about *in situ* grave layouts rules out the majority of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries excavated prior to the 1970s, with a handful of exceptions. Using burial record from more recent excavations ensures the data were obtained by excavation methods and osteological techniques up to modern standards. This has been facilitated by the introduction of PPG 16 (Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning) in 1990, which advised adequate recording and dissemination of results from developer-funded excavations.

There are two main considerations for assigning a cut-off date for the cemetery data's chronological scope in the eighth century. Firstly, a shorter span of time may afford scope on nuanced changes and local variations, which would be difficult in a complete study of cemeteries from the fifth to the eleventh centuries. Secondly, data from cemeteries dated later than the eighth century are generally limited and inadequate. The majority of these cemeteries do not provide information about graves at the individual level, sometimes with

the exception of a small number of graves with outstanding features that warrant attention. This may be due to a general lack of artefact deposition in graves and the assumption that Christian burial practices were homogenous and thus uninteresting (although recent works on early Christian funerary rites in Britain have refuted this assumption, see various papers in Buckberry and Cherryson 2010; Craig-Atkins 2012; Maldonado 2013).

Since different types of evidence implicate different sets of considerations in reconstruction and interpretation, the main data set includes only inhumation burials that survived as dry bones. This is a methodological measure to maximise comparability within the corpus of raw data in the main data set, and thus the significance and reliability of results. Therefore, although cremation evidence of the fifth and sixth centuries and the 'sand bodies' discussed in the previous section fall within the chronological scope of the analysis, they will not be included in the main data set. However, cremation practice engages notions about the treatment of the corpse at its core, and necessarily involves an explicit and visible transformation of the body. The implications of cremation rites will be considered in discussion by drawing upon data from cremation and mixed-rite cemeteries, especially in parts of eastern England, to assess the practicalities of cremation, its emotive quality, and the impact of Christianisation on the practice.

While the main analysis of inhumation data will be confined to the fifth to late seventh and early eighth centuries, the study will extend the scope of discussion to the eleventh century. This contextualises the cemetery data with wider social changes that occurred over the long term, and offers a means to assess the historical context of the body in Anglo-Saxon England. Therefore, although cemeteries from the later Anglo-Saxon period will not be included in the main data set as outlined above, they will be brought into discussion to shed light on the historical development of the Anglo-Saxon account of the body and, in particular, to assess changes in the conception of the body before and after the conversion to Christianity.

3.3.2 The database

3,053 graves (3,201 individuals) from 32 cemeteries across England have been included in this study (Table 3.1) (Figure 3.1). The complete grave catalogue can be found in Appendix One, and the descriptions of the cemeteries can be found in Appendix Five. A site code
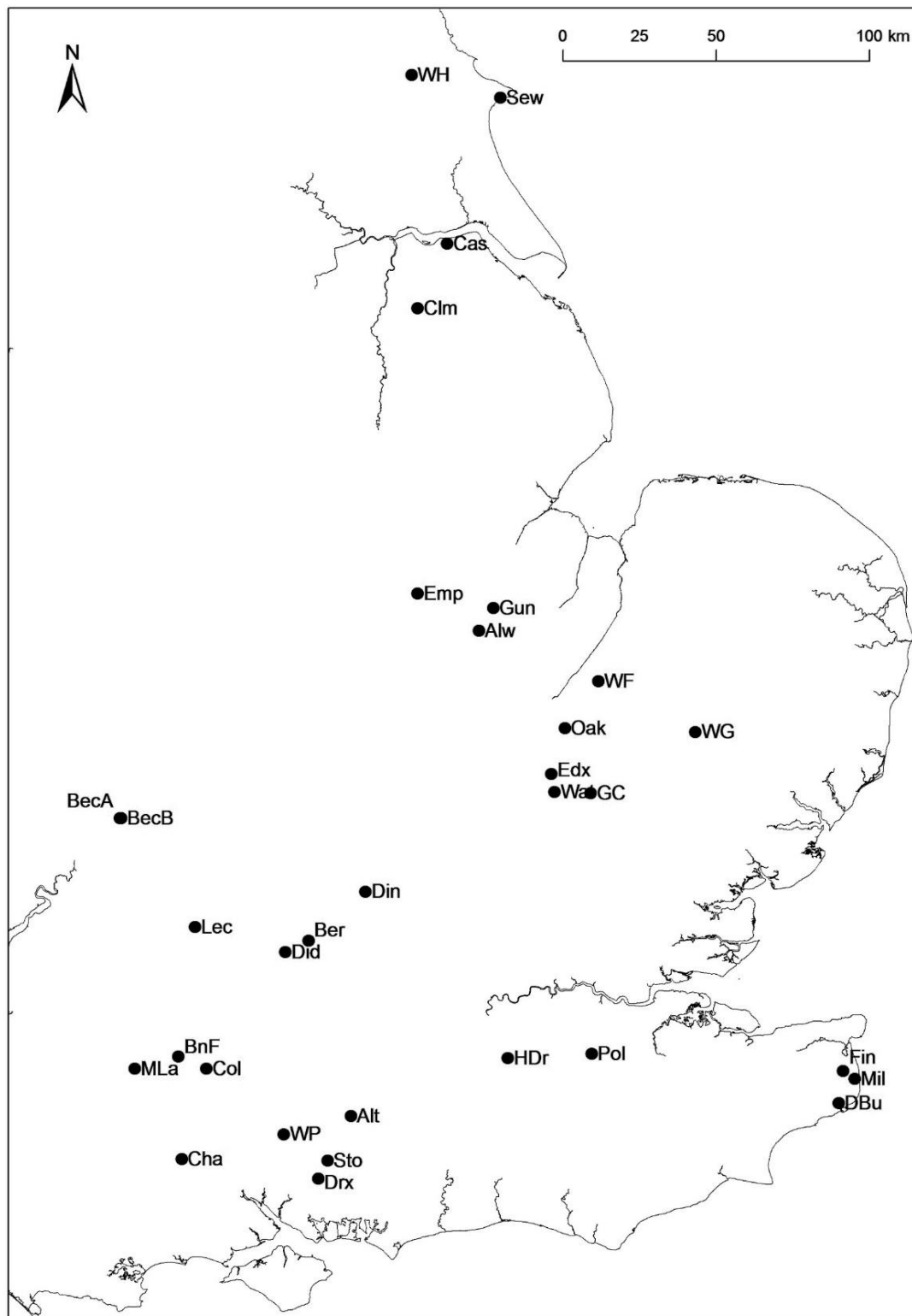
Figure 3.1 Map showing the locations of 32 cemetery sites included in this study.

consisting two, three or four letters is assigned to each cemetery. Each grave is inputted into the master database, listed by its site code, grave number, age, sex by skeleton, gender by goods, wealth index, the positioning of arms, legs, and torso, posture type and type cluster (for a full description of the posture typology, see Section 3.4 below), orientation, assigned phase and the resolution of the dates (see below for a full explanation), a note on multiple bodies where applicable, and further remarks.

Site	County	Site code	No. of individuals	Date (century)
Dinton	Buckinghamshire	Din	20	5th–6th
Alwalton	Cambridgeshire	Alw	33	late 5th–early 7th
Edix Hill	Cambridgeshire	Edx	148	6th–mid 7th
Gunthorpe	Cambridgeshire	Gun	35	6th
Oakington	Cambridgeshire	Oak	112	6th
Water Lane, Melbourn	Cambridgeshire	Wat	56	7th
Westfield Farm, Ely	Cambridgeshire	WF	15	late 7th
Great Chesterford	Essex	GC	166	5th–6th
Sewerby	East Yorkshire	Sew	59	5th–7th
Lechlade	Gloucestershire	Lec	223	5th–7th
Alton	Hampshire	Alt	49	5th–7th
Droxford	Hampshire	Drx	41	5th–6th
Storey's Meadow, West Meon	Hampshire	Sto	48	5th–7th
Worthy Park	Hampshire	WP	109	5th–7th
Dover Buckland	Kent	DBu	432	5th–7th
Finglesham	Kent	Fin	227	6th–7th
Mill Hill, Deal	Kent	Mil	81	6th
Polhill	Kent	Pol	138	7th
Castledyke	Lincolnshire	Cas	203	5th–7th
Cleatham	Lincolnshire	Clm	62	5th–7th
West Heslerton	North Yorkshire	WH	185	late 5th–early 7th
Berinsfield	Oxfordshire	Ber	114	5th–early 7th
Didcot	Oxfordshire	Did	17	7th
Empingham	Rutland	Emp	154	5th–6th

Site	County	Site code	No. of individuals	Date (century)
Westgarth Gardens	Suffolk	WG	66	5th–7th
Headley Drive, Tadworth	Surrey	HDr	47	late 6th–7th
Blacknall Field	Wiltshire	BnF	104	5th–mid 6th
Charlton	Wiltshire	Cha	44	5th–7th
Collingbourne Ducis	Wiltshire	Col	34	6th–7th
Market Lavington	Wiltshire	MLa	42	5th–early 7th
Beckford A	Worcestershire	BecA	28	5th–mid 6th
Beckford B	Worcestershire	BecB	109	5th–mid 6th

Table 3.1 List of sites in the present data set (listed alphabetically by counties) and their site codes.

Grave numbers in the present database correspond to the numbering of graves given in the site reports. In the rest of this thesis, mentions of specific graves in the data set will be given as [site code] [grave number], e.g. GC 55 (=Great Chesterford Grave 55). At sites where the graves are not re-numbered post-excavation, such as at Alwalton, the present grave catalogue will retain these numberings, e.g. Alw 1032 (=Alwalton Grave 1032). At sites where burials are given two numbers (grave numbers and skeleton numbers), such as at Edix Hill, the present catalogue will follow only the grave number, e.g. Edx 79 (=Edix Hill Grave 79, Skeleton 428). In the case of multiple burial, the coding of skeletons follows the preference in the site reports, e.g. Edx 96A (=Edix Hill Grave 96, Skeleton 547A), Lec 81/4 (=Lechlade Grave 81/4).

Age and sex are assigned according to the specialist reports in the excavation publications, with the exception of Berinsfield, Worthy Park, and Alton for which more recent osteological analysis has been undertaken and made accessible for this research (courtesy of Dr Rebecca Gowland). In the database, age is classified by the present author using the following categories:

I	0–2	Infant
II	2–6	Younger child
III	6–12	Older child

IV	12–17	Adolescent
V	17–25	Young adult
VI	25–40	Middle adult
VII	40+	Old adult
adult	—	Unaged adult
subadult	—	Unaged subadult
unaged	—	Unaged

These categories are designed based on previous research on age threshold and lifecycle (Stoodley 2000; Gowland 2006), to examine the significance of life stages including puberty and sexual maturity on body image and representation. However, methods and categories used for ageing are not standardised across different osteological reports. In cases where the age range spans two age groups, the mean number will determine the group in which the grave belongs. If the mean number falls on the boundary, it will be placed in the upper age group. In cases where the age range spans three or more age groups, the burial will be classified as *adult*, *subadult*, or *unaged.*

Sex is assigned according to the information given in the excavation reports as male (*M*), possible male (*M?*), female (*F*), possible female (*F?*), and unsexed (*U*). The two 'possible' groups include probable and possible males or females as given in the reports. Juvenile skeletons and unsexed adults are both placed in the *unsexed* category. In case of doubt, apparent misprint, or discrepancies in the reports, the skeleton in question will be classified as *unaged* and/or *unsexed* to avoid skewing the results.

Previous studies have shown that in early Anglo-Saxon England, gendered grave goods correspond largely consistently (although not invariably) with the biological sex of skeletons (Stoodley 1999: 74–75). In the database, gender is assigned by the present author to account for the relationship between material manifestation of gender and body representation. Furthermore, it allows unsexed and juvenile skeletons to be examined in terms of gender identity. Burials containing shield bosses, fittings, spearheads, or swords are classified as masculine (*M*); burials containing brooches, wrist-clasps, weaving tools, or girdle items are classified as feminine (*F*); burials containing no identifiable gendered goods are indeterminate (*ID*); burials with no recorded grave goods are grouped under no finds (*NF*).

Some artefacts such as beads and pins may belong to either the feminine or indeterminate group, depending on their numbers and positions in the grave. For example, if more than 7 beads were found in the neck area, the grave would be classified as feminine on the account that the beads probably represent the presence of a necklace (e.g. Edx 5).

In terms of the material wealth of the grave, the database adopts the scoring method of 'Range of Identifiable Artefact Categories' (RIAC), developed by Malim and Hines (1998: 301–302). The value of RIAC records the number of the different categories of artefacts recovered in the grave, as opposed to the number of objects. This method avoids giving misleadingly high scores to objects that tend to occur in large quantities, such as brooches, beads, and wrist-clasps. In the present database, animal remains constitute a category and add towards the RIAC value.

Body positions are recorded in terms of arms, legs, and torso. The positioning of the individual arm is recorded, in terms of its flexure and the placement of the hand. Thus, those skeletons with only one preserved arm can also be included in the database, which allows analysis of patterns related to laterality. Arm flexure is recorded according to the degree of flexure at the elbow as follows: *extended* (approximately 150°–180°), *flexed* (approximately 90°–150°), *folded* (approximately <90°), and *unknown* (not well enough preserved to be discerned). The position of the hand is recorded with reference to the torso as *side*, *abdomen*, *waist*, *chest*, *shoulder*, *raised*, *front*, *back*, or *unknown*. The *front* position is associated with one-sided deposition which offers a dimension of arm placement unattainable if the body was buried supine or prone. The hand position is considered in relation to the body itself: a hand placed in the front of the abdomen in a prone burial, for example, will be recorded as *abdomen* instead of *front* or *back*.

Legs are considered in terms of their flexure, which is recorded in a similar way to that of arms. Categories are assigned according to the degree of flexure at the knees as: *extended* (approximately 150°–180°), *flexed* (approximately 90°–150°), *folded* (approximately <90°), and *unknown* (not well enough preserved to be discerned). In the case of significantly different degrees of flexure between the two legs, flexure will be determined by the more tightly bent leg. The arrangement of the legs is recorded in a separate column as:

- *Parallel*: where legs are placed alongside each other

- *Crossed*: where one leg crosses over the other leg

- *Splayed*: where legs projects outwards

- *Left*: where flexed or folded legs pointing left

- *Right*: where flexed or folded legs pointing right

- *Unknown*: where not well-preserved enough to be discernible

The deposition of the body is recorded in terms of the placement of the torso in the grave as: *supine*, *prone*, *LS* (left-sided), *RS* (right-sided), *sitting*, or *unknown*.

Two columns in the database, 'Type' and 'Cluster', identify the posture type and type cluster that the burial has been assigned to, according to the typological method used in the present study. A burial may be assigned one of 53 types and one of seven type clusters. This will be fully explained in Section 3.4 below. Not all burials have been assigned a type (e.g. if only one arm was preserved), in which case these two columns are left blank.

'Orientation' is the articulation of the body in relation to cardinal directions, recorded in terms of the position of the head. For instance, 'W' denotes the positioning of the head at the west end of the grave, and by implication the feet at the east.

The 'Multiple' column identifies multiple burials in the data set, which describes the number of bodies contained in the grave, given as tuples. This column only notes the multiple burials that can be confidently attributed to deliberate human actions: either burials that contained multiple individuals buried at the same time, or burials that had been reopened at a later event to fit another interment. A separate catalogue for multiple burials can be found in Appendix Two.

'Dates' records the assigned chronological phases of the burials. Seven phases have been classified, by drawing upon the recently published *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework* (Bayliss et al 2013). The date ranges of the seven phases are designed to capture the points of change as identified in the *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods* project (Bayliss et al 2013: 459–462). They are intended to scrutinise the relationship between changes in burial positions and in the deposition of grave goods, as well as to provide an anchor point from which burial positioning practice can be

contextualised within established chronological frameworks. Dates are recorded in the database using the following shorthands which correspond to date ranges:

a. AD 450–500

b. AD 500–550

c. AD 550–585

d. AD 585–610

e. AD 610–640

f. AD 640–680

g. AD 680–750

The dates for the graves in the database are assigned according to their dates postulated in their respective excavation reports. Some reports provide dates for individual graves, but some provide only general dates for the whole site. If a grave spans more than one date range (e.g. AD 525–600), all of relevant date ranges are recorded (e.g. *b*, *c*, *d*). For the undated graves, they are recorded according to when the cemetery was postulated to be in use. For example, for cemeteries that spanned from the fifth to the eighth centuries, the undated graves within them are recorded as '*a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g*' (i.e. all the possible date ranges). A small number of graves have been archived in the online *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods* project database (Hines 2013). These graves are assigned phases by referring to the grave good typologies, radiocarbon dates, date phases published in the project monograph (Bayliss et al 2013). Only a handful of graves in the whole data set can be closely dated to only one phase; the vast majority of them span multiple phases. The column 'Date Resolution' records the number of phases which the grave spans (for example, a grave that is given date ranges '*b*, *c*, *d*, *e*' has a date resolution of 4). The smallest possible value for date resolution is 1, and the largest possible value is 7. The smaller the value means the higher the resolution, and thus the more refined the dates are for the grave. The way in which date resolutions is utilised in analysis will be explained below in Section 3.3.3.

3.3.3 Methods of analysis

The positioning of the body is cross-tabulated against different variables in order to examine the correlation between body positions and other attributes of the graves, including the age and sex of the skeleton as well as the grave assemblage. The contingency tables produced are thus tested for statistical significance using the χ^2 test (the significance threshold is set at

0.05). This is done by applying the `chisq.test` function in R. In this thesis, p values will be given as absolute values if they are higher than 0.001, or as < 0.001, if they are lower.

The method for recording the dates of graves has been explained in Section 3.3.2 above. This presents a multi-valued (i.e. spanning multiple date ranges) method, which allows greater flexibility in recording dates. However, since these multi-valued graves are reckoned multiple times, the count of graves according to date ranges does not reflect the absolute numbers of graves in the database. To differentiate between the absolute numbers and the artificial numbers, the latter will hereafter be referred to as 'data points'. To illustrate, Table 3.2 shows the dates and date resolutions for five graves from the cemetery at Lechlade (Gloucestershire), and Table 3.3 shows the number of data points attributed to each date phase. The five graves with different date resolutions produce 12 data points in total.

Data points are not the actual number of graves, but a projection of frequencies built upon overlapping date ranges. In analysing chronological patterns and changes, data points are normalised as percentages and provide the shape of the data.

Grave	Dates	Number of phases spanned (= Date resolution)
Lec 16	a, b, c, d	4
Lec 17	b	1
Lec 18	c	1
Lec 19	a, b	2
Lec 20	a, b, c, d	4

Table 3.2 The date ranges and date resolutions of the graves Lec 16–20.

Date phase	Number of data points
a (AD 450–500)	3
b (AD 500–550)	4
c (AD 550–585)	3
d (AD 585–610)	2
	Total = 12

Table 3.3 The number of data points for each date phase, based on the graves Lec 16–20.

Setting a parameter for date resolution allows the inclusion or exclusion of graves in analysis based on how refined their dates are. The date resolution threshold is expressed using the 'less than' symbol, or '<', followed by a value. As the smaller the value means the more refined the dates, raising the date resolution threshold to a smaller value would produce more accurate results for chronological patterns. However, this needs to be balanced with the number of graves that have been closely dated enough to give high resolutions, in order to produce statistically significant results. Figures 3.2–8 show the results of the changes in body deposition over time, from the lowest resolution (< 8) to the highest (< 2). They show that shapes of the graphs are very heavily influenced by the date resolution. At the lowest resolution (< 8), hardly any pattern or change can be observed. Clearer patterns and changes only become observable at a date resolution of < 4 or < 3. The highest resolution (< 2) does not yield enough burials to produce a meaningful graph. In the reminder of the thesis, where relevant, analysis of chronological patterns sets the date resolution threshold at either < 4 or < 3, depending on the number of graves. The date resolution threshold used will be explicitly stated.
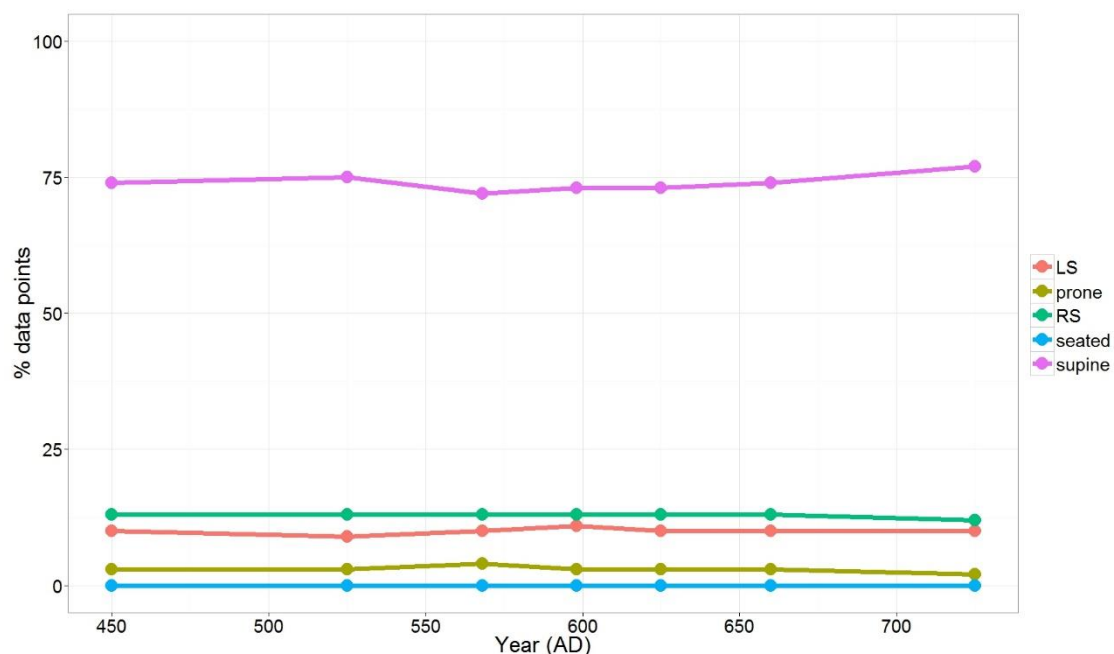
Figure 3.2 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 8 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 7373, number of graves reckoned = 3201).
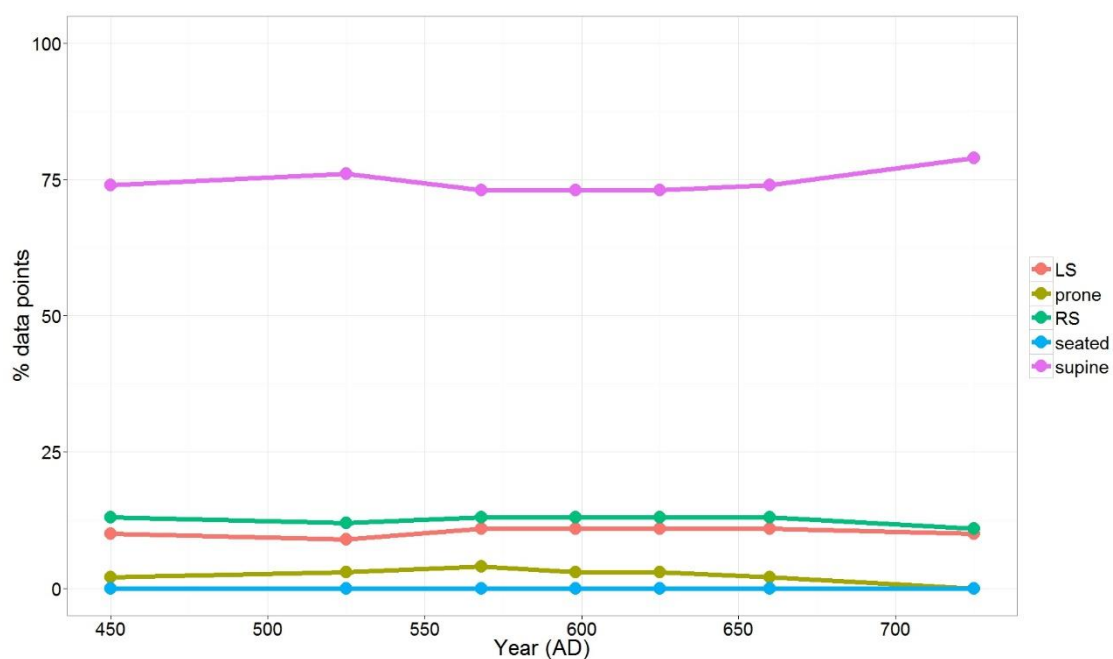
Figure 3.3 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 7 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 6029, number of graves reckoned = 2829).
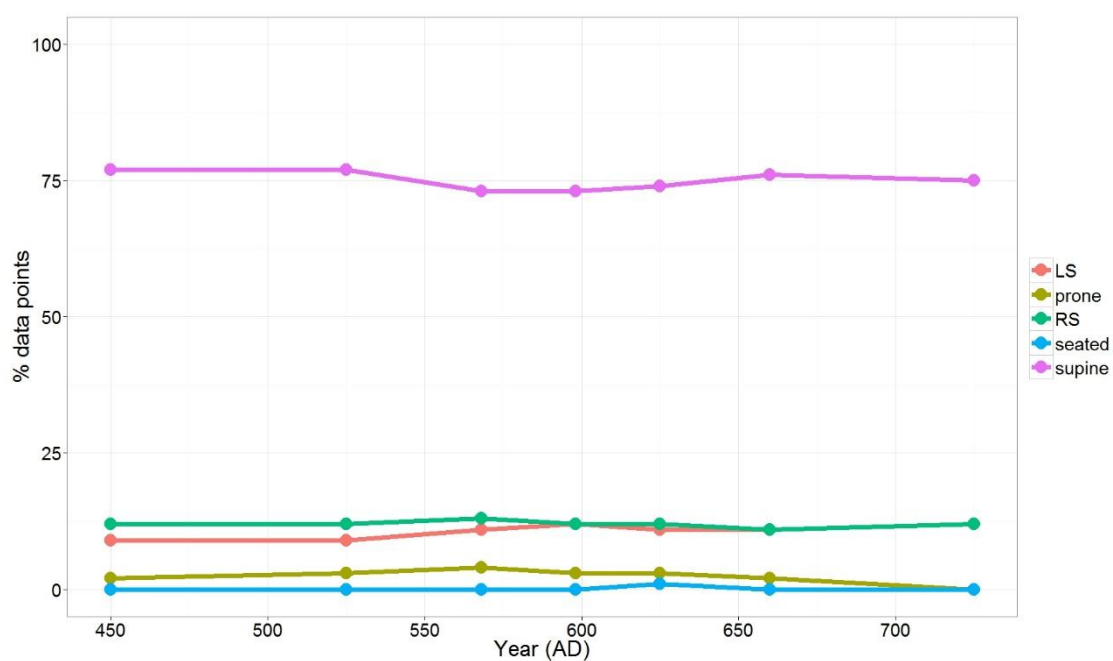
Figure 3.4 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 6 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 4253, number of graves reckoned = 2350).
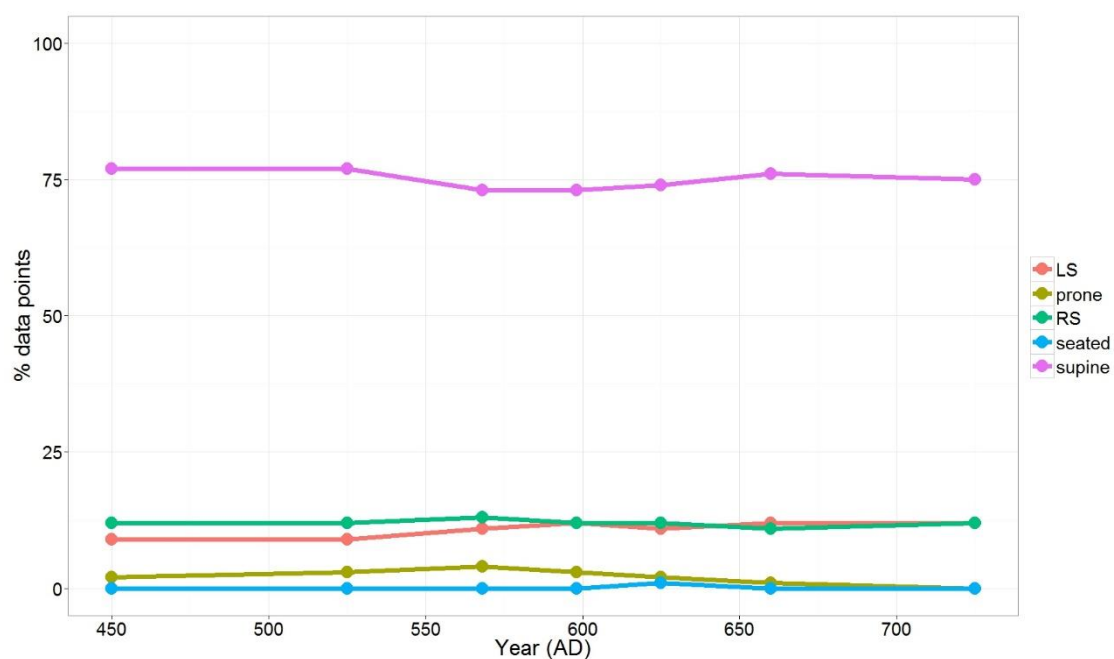
Figure 3.5 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 5 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 4098, number of graves reckoned = 2300).
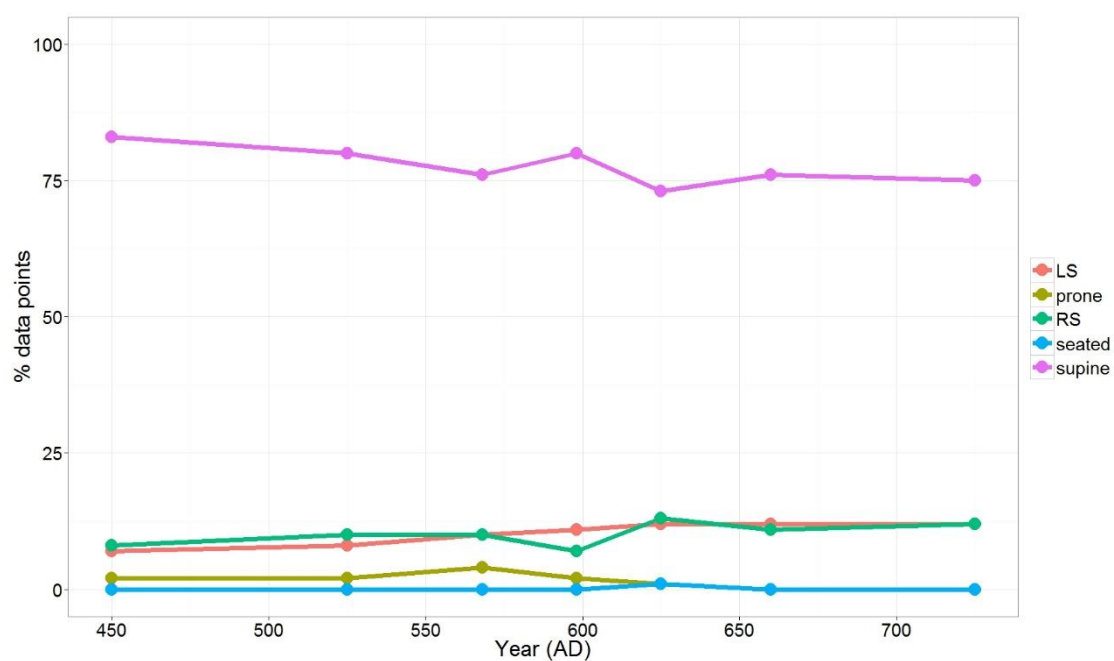
Figure 3.6 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 4 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 2486, number of graves reckoned = 1698).
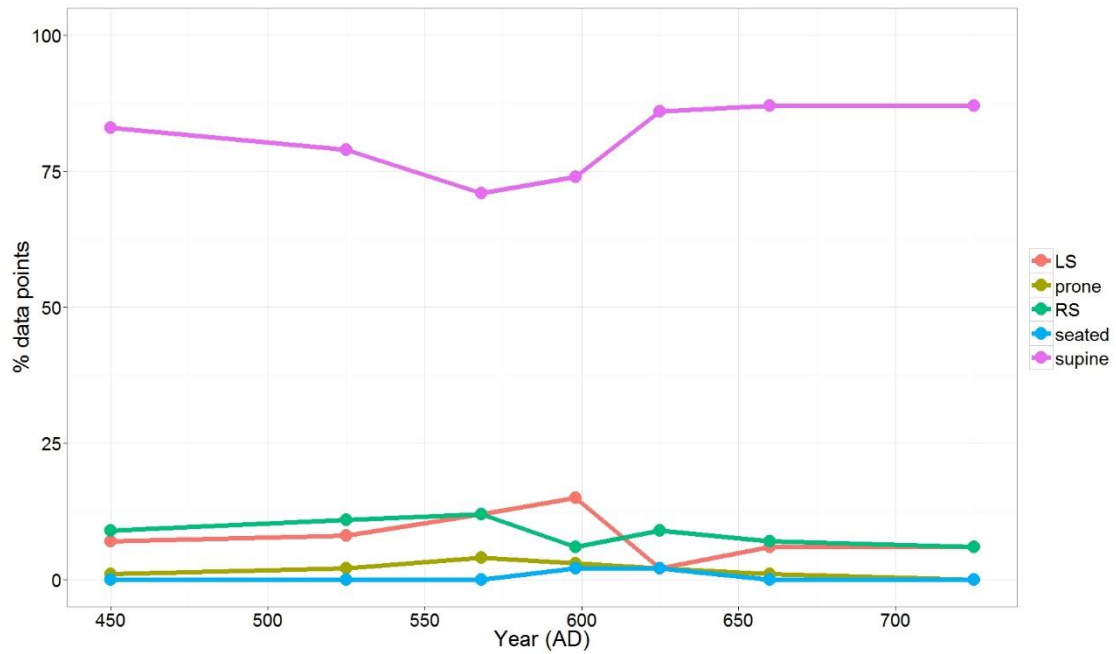
Figure 3.7 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 3 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 1625, number of graves reckoned = 1229).
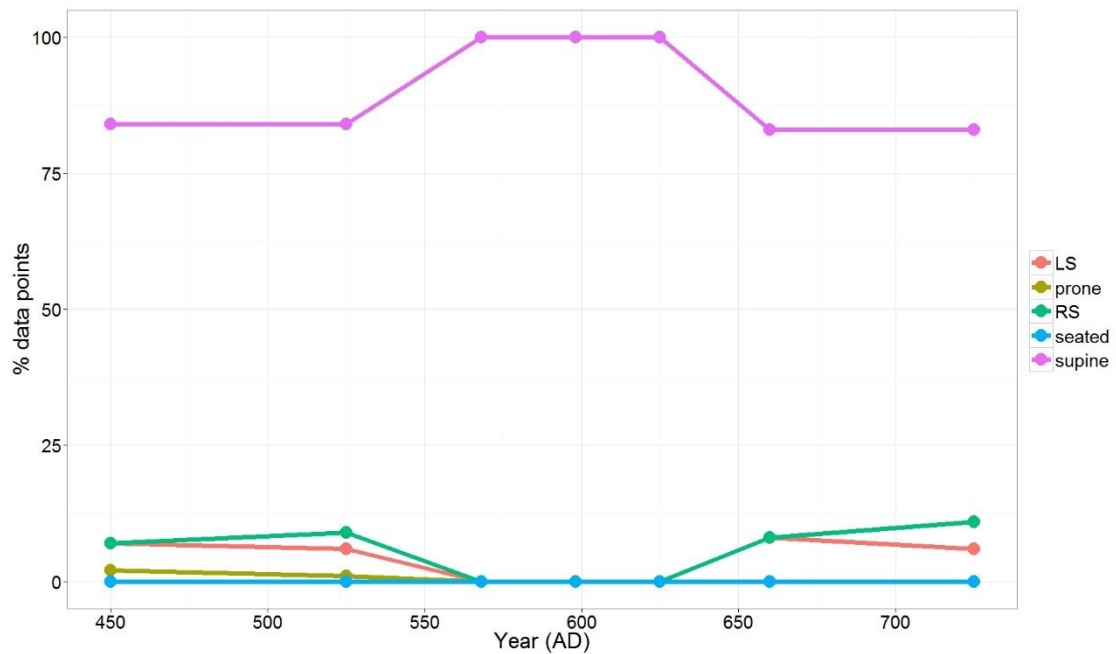
Figure 3.8 Body deposition over time by data points at date resolution < 2 (number of data points excluding 'unknown' = 319, number of graves reckoned = 411).

Spatial analysis has been conducted for two Kentish cemeteries, Dover Buckland and Polhill, on ArcGIS, to examine any spatial patterning of burials by positions within these cemeteries. Similar analysis for Lechlade (Gloucestershire) and Berinsfield (Oxfordshire) has also been undertaken by the present author in her MPhil research (Mui 2014). These analyses have

identified no significant correlation between body positioning and locations within these cemeteries. Taking into account the confines of the present study and the failure of preliminary analysis in producing significant results, an examination of the spatial patterning of burial positions within cemeteries is omitted in this thesis. Similarly, textile evidence is not considered systematically as part of this thesis, as careful examination of such data at first hand would have not been possible in the remit of the study. Nonetheless, these remain areas of investigation to be explored in future studies.

3.4 A TYPOLOGY OF BODIES

3.4.1 An overview

Typology is the classification of phenomena based on their patterns of attributes, used extensively by archaeologists since the early antiquarians to organise, describe, and study objects and sites. Nevertheless, archaeology has a longstanding love–hate relationship with typology. On the one hand, typology turns unorganised masses of individual phenomena into a coherent corpus of archaeological information (Doran and Hodson 1975: 158). In doing so, typology aids the identification of variations and changes and allows effective descriptions of such patterns. On the other hand, the arbitrariness and rigidity of types have drawn serious criticisms and reconsiderations of the interpretive limitations of typologies. Typology has been accused of imposing arbitrary differences onto archaeological phenomena, and obscuring the fluidity and variations of types and groups of types. For example, John Otis Brew, writing in 1946, warns that the 'force of the [type] scheme itself produces a new type of archaeological conservatism, the conservatism of false reality. … These schemes often lead us into what A. N. Whitehead calls the fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Brew 1946: 61). Meanwhile, others have emphasised that typology should be viewed not as an end in itself, but as a means by which objectives are attained (Rouse 1960: 313). As a multiplicity of types and typologies can be constructed for the same given set of phenomena, the specific typology should align with the specified objectives of the study. As the objectives vary, the typological tool must also vary (Hill and Evans 1972: 247–248).

Recent debates have focused on appraising and reconfiguring the theoretical basis of typology, while emphasising its value within archaeological research (Sørensen 2015). Recognising the weaknesses of typology and the challenges in its implementation, this new development has moved away from discussions on issues of truth, 'correct' knowledge, and

misplaced concreteness, but has instead called for more refined approaches which situate the morphology of types within contexts of chronology, regionality, relationality, and identity (Wilkin 2011). In the wake of these new theoretical reflections, the present work applies a typological approach to archaeological bodies. Taking inspirations from recent development of body theories, symmetrical archaeology, and relational ontologies (Sofaer 2006; Witmore 2007; Fowler 2013), the typology presented here posits bodies as material culture, complex entities which are simultaneously circumscribed by their physical affordances and constructed by cultural practices and networks of social relations. Hence, the typology aims to scrutinise patterns, variations, and changes in body positions in the data set, situated against the wider context of early Anglo-Saxon social and cultural lives.

The application of the typological approach to studying burial positions is not altogether new, and there have been previous attempts in establishing chronological frameworks based on differences in burial positions (Gray 1972; Redin 1976; Kieffer-Olsen 1993). To differentiate from these previous approaches, the typology of bodies developed here does not seek to present a de-contextualised tool for dating or classifying early Anglo-Saxon burials. Instead, the typology is constructed as an experiment to tease out the nuanced patterns and variations in the mourners' choice of burial positions, and contextualise them against the sex, gender, and age of the dead, accompanying objects in the grave, local and regional traditions, and the wider repertoire of gestural motifs in early medieval Europe.

The present study constructs a typology of bodies using reconstruction drawings of corpses based on the arrangement of skeletal remains recovered in graves. By combining the strengths of visual reconstructions and typological analysis, this thesis seeks to provide an account of the nuances of corpse postures in the early Anglo-Saxon period, to a level of detail that has hitherto remained unachievable. The aim is not to produce a comprehensive typology that can be applied in other contexts, but to provide new insights on burial diversity, patterns, and changes in the context of the present study. Therefore, taking heed of its methodological and interpretive limitations, the typological approach, when used with care, may shed invaluable light on past social and cultural lives, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate.

3.4.2 Reconstructing corpses

As described in Section 3.3.2 above, the data set includes 3,053 graves from 32 cemeteries across England. Of these graves, 1,999 reconstruction drawings have been made by utilising

illustrated grave plans and photographs contained in the excavation reports. The complete corpus of grave drawings presently produced can be found in Appendix Three. These reconstructions envision the corpses in their original arrangements, along with the excavated positions of accompanying artefacts, as simple contour drawings. Human anatomy and the mechanism of taphonomic processes are taken into account in producing these drawings. A note on taphonomy can be found in Section 3.2.3 above. Each reconstruction drawing is produced following a set of steps:

1. The positioning of the skull, clavicles, spine, and pelvis are noted in the first instance, as they provide key information about the basic shape and form of the torso, as well as useful anchor points for the reconstructed flesh to build upon.

2. The limbs are added to the contour of the torso, with reference to the positions and angles of the clavicles and pelvis if they are present. The radius/ulna, and the fibula/tibia are useful indicators of the flexure of limbs.

3. The sketch is amended and refined and finally traced over with solid lines to provide a defined contour.

4. Accompanying artefacts (e.g. brooches, spearheads, beads, buckles, knives) are added to the drawing, placed in relation to the positions at which they were excavated.

5. The finished drawing is scanned onto the computer and is tidied, adjusted, and enhanced digitally.

Clothes are not represented in these drawings. It is to maintain clarity and simplicity, and avoid making assumptions about whether the burials were clothed or naked, as some burials might have been clothed but left no archaeologically recoverable evidence. Although clothing is not considered, some graves contained dress fasteners such as brooches or buckles; and the positions of these artefacts are drawn. Sexes and sexual features are not represented, i.e. no breasts or genitals, and the drawings are made before consulting the sex of the skeletons in the osteology report. This minimises preconceived, gender-related notions about the image of the body, but focuses on reconstructing the body based primarily on the skeletal arrangement and contexts. Nevertheless, in cases where the body was buried prone, the gluteal region of the body may be emphasised to clarify that the body faces down.

In the reconstruction drawings, the direction at which the head points may not straightforwardly replicate the original placement of the head. This is because the majority of the graves in the data set do not contain sufficient information about intentional positioning of the head, as the articulation between the occipital bone and the atlas is often not recorded *in situ* (see below in Section 3.5.1). Where facial features are drawn, they simply indicate the positioning of the skull on the grave plan or photograph. Where the head is drawn with no facial feature, the excavated grave contained remains of the skull in anatomical position, but its direction was not recorded or discernible. It should be noted that although a side-facing skull may have originally been a forward-facing head which has decomposed and collapsed to one side, the reverse is very unlikely (Duday 2009: 17–19). In other words, if a skull has been excavated facing forward, it is reasonable to assume that it was originally placed as such. In some drawings, parts of the body are omitted (e.g. lower limbs, an arm, etc) because the surviving skeleton gives enough information about the positioning of some parts of the body only, while other parts are not discernible. Where the head is omitted, the excavated grave contained no traces of a skull.

The reconstruction drawings seek to standardise the bodies that are presently studied. It should be noted that cemetery reports have been written and edited by different people over a few decades, and the styles of grave plans may vary significantly from one site to another, despite a careful attempt to maintain consistency in the drawings in the present thesis.

3.4.3 Establishing a typology

The 1,999 reconstruction drawings produced are brought together, compared, and classified, through a series of visual processing and discrimination. Systematically sorting through the reconstruction drawings one by one, bodies with similar postures were grouped together. These groups were then compared and lined up against each other. As more groups were differentiated, they were evaluated and might be subdivided or combined where appropriate. The result is a typology of corpse postures consisting of 53 posture types, comprising a total of 1,548 individuals (a small number of bodies do not fit into any type and are thus stand-alone phenomena, as far as the extent of the present study is concerned. These include prone and tightly crouched burials which will be discussed in Section 7.3 in Chapter Seven).

Similar types are grouped into type clusters, based on the degrees of variations in arm flexures and deposition. A type cluster emphasises the distinctive characteristics shared between a

number of types, and neutralises small differences between similar types (e.g. gripping (waist) and gripping (chest): whether the hand is placed on the waist or on the chest). Since these clusters necessarily include more burials, they provide larger sample size for more significant statistical testing. Seven type clusters have been differentiated:

- Gripping
- Straight
- Stomach
- Waist-chest
- Elbow
- Clasped
- Front

3.4.3.1 The gripping cluster

The gripping cluster represents the largest posture type cluster with 422 burials. The types within this cluster are characterised by the posture where one arm is extended by the side, and the other arm is flexed to differing degrees.

Type	Description
Gripping (abdomen)	One arm extended by the side, the other arm flexed with hand on abdomen
Gripping (waist)	One arm extended by the side, the other arm flexed with hand on waist
Gripping (chest)	One arm extended by the side, the other arm folded with hand on chest
Elbowing	One arm extended by the side, the other arm flexed with forearm lifted and elbow pointing outwards
Arm-away (abdomen) supine	Supine burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with hand on abdomen
Arm-away (waist) supine	Supine burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with hand on waist
Arm-away (chest) supine	Supine burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with hand on chest
Elbowing arm-away supine	Supine burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with forearm lifted and elbow pointing outwards
Arm-away (abdomen) OS	One-sided burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with hand on abdomen
Arm-away (waist) OS	One-sided burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with hand on waist

Arm-away (chest) OS	One-sided burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with hand on chest
Elbowing arm-away OS	One-sided burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm flexed with forearm lifted and elbow pointing outwards
Straight shoulder	One arm extended by the side, the other arm tightly folded with hand by shoulder
Straight shoulder arm-away	One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm tightly folded with hand by shoulder

Table 3.4 Descriptions of posture types in the gripping cluster.

Gripping (abdomen)
(DBu 9)

Gripping (waist)
(DBu 317)

Gripping (chest)
(Drx 8)

Elbowing
(Ber 110)

Arm-away (abdomen)
supine
(MLa 22)

Arm-away (waist) supine
(Oak 85)

Arm-away (chest) supine
(Edx 39)

Elbowing arm-away
supine (BecB 53)

| Arm-away (abdomen) OS (Cas 147) | Arm-away (waist) OS (Cas 155) | Arm-away (chest) OS (Wat 98) | Elbowing arm-away OS (Cas 93) |

| Straight shoulder (BnF 31) | Straight shoulder arm-away (Sto 1117) |
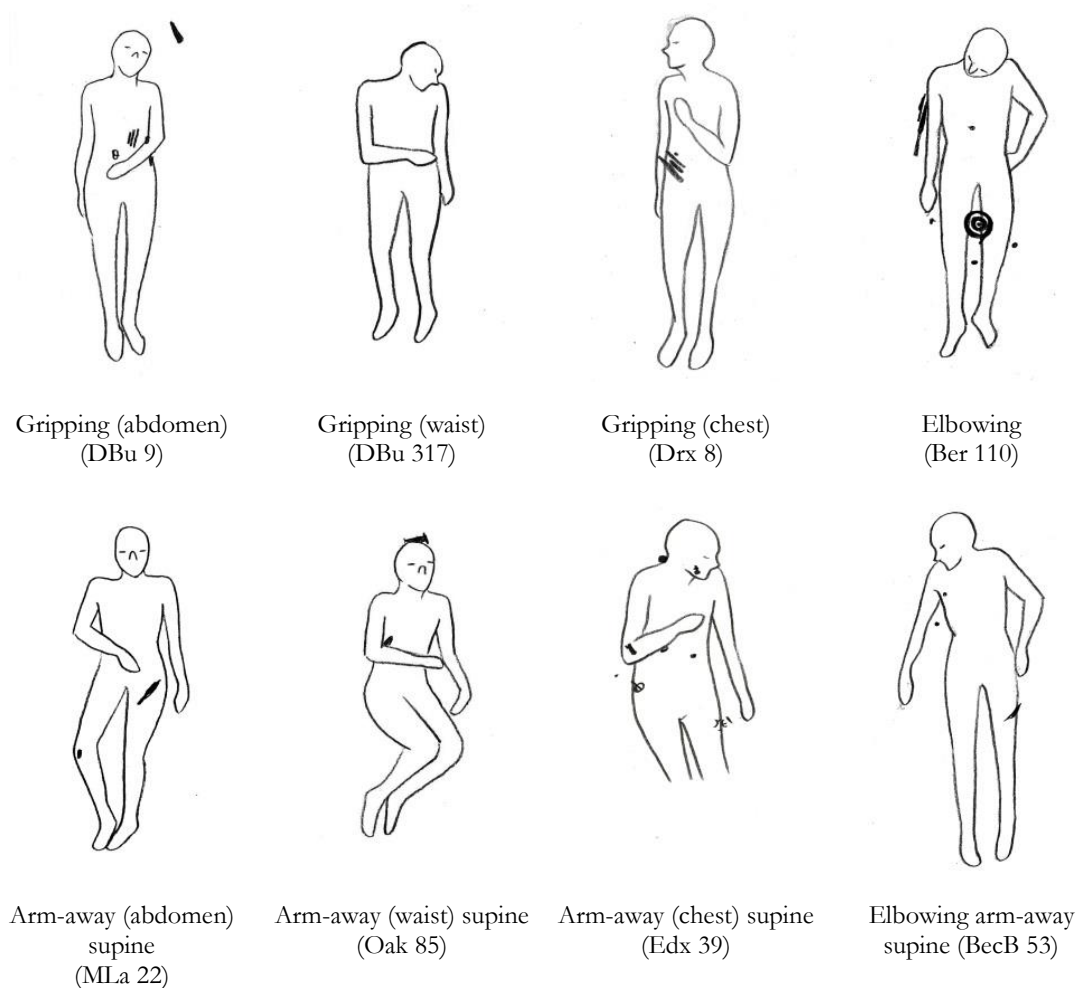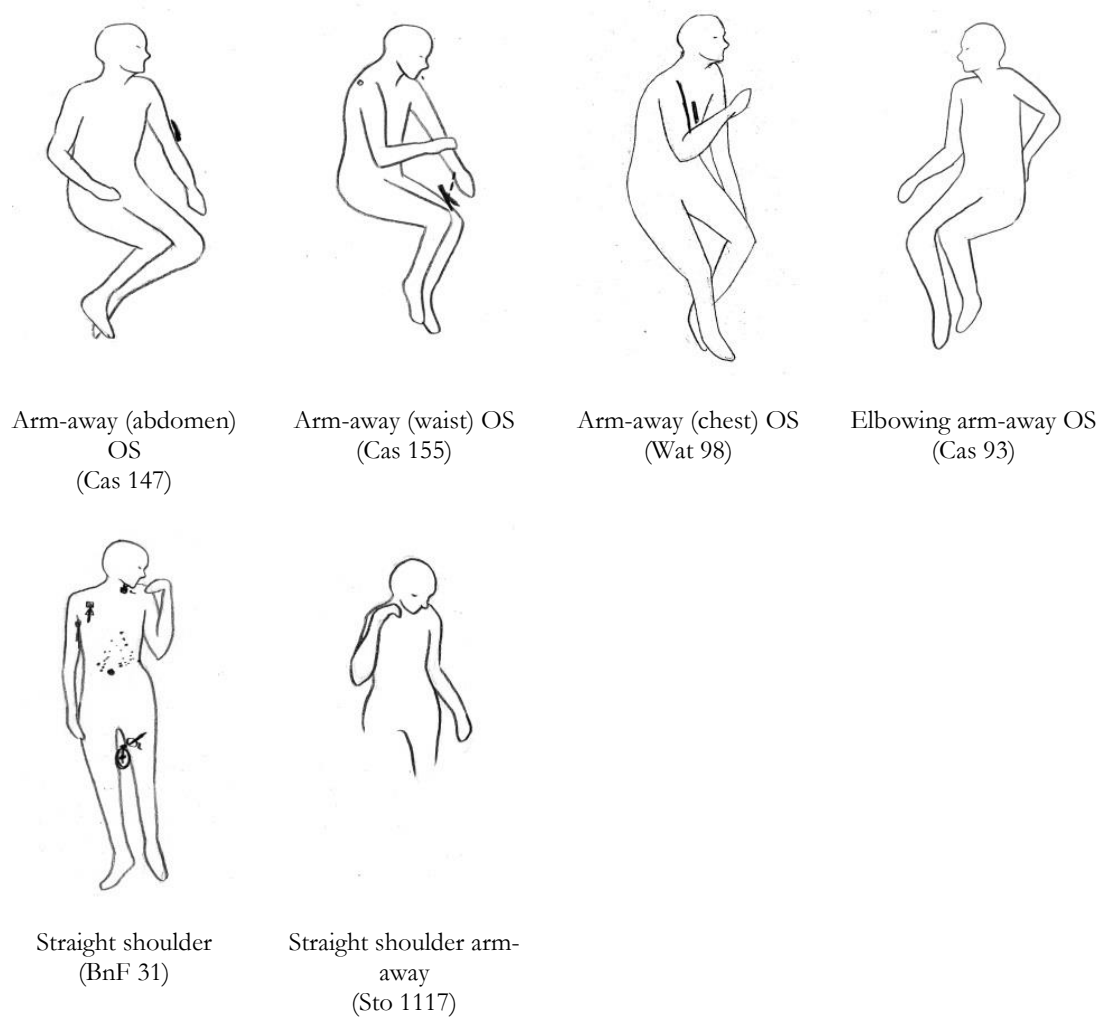
Figure 3.9 Posture types of the gripping clusters

3.4.3.2 The straight cluster

Closely following the gripping cluster, the straight cluster is the second most prominent type cluster in the present data set with 421 burials. This cluster includes the posture types where both arms are largely extended or slightly flexed and are placed on the pelvis or by the side.

Type	Description
Straight	Both arms extended by the side
Side straight	One-sided burial. Both arms extended by the side
Straight arm-away	Both arms extended and positioned slightly away from the torso
Straight bent-away	Both arms slightly flexed and positioned slightly away from the torso
Not straight	Both arms extended or slightly flexed by the side with hands on pelvis

Gripping (pelvis)	One arm extended by the side, the other arm extended or flexed with hand on pelvis
Arm-away (pelvis) supine	Supine burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other arm extended or flexed with hand on pelvis
Arm-away (pelvis) OS	One-sided burial. One arm extended and positioned slightly away from the torso, the other extended or flexed with hand on pelvis

Table 3.5 Descriptions of posture types in the straight cluster.

Straight (Alt 12)	Side straight (WP 45)	Straight arm-away (Lec 41)	Straight bent-away (Alt 23)

Not straight (Fin 57)	Gripping (pelvis) (GC 140)	Arm-away (pelvis) supine (GC23)	Arm-away (pelvis) OS (Sto 1103)
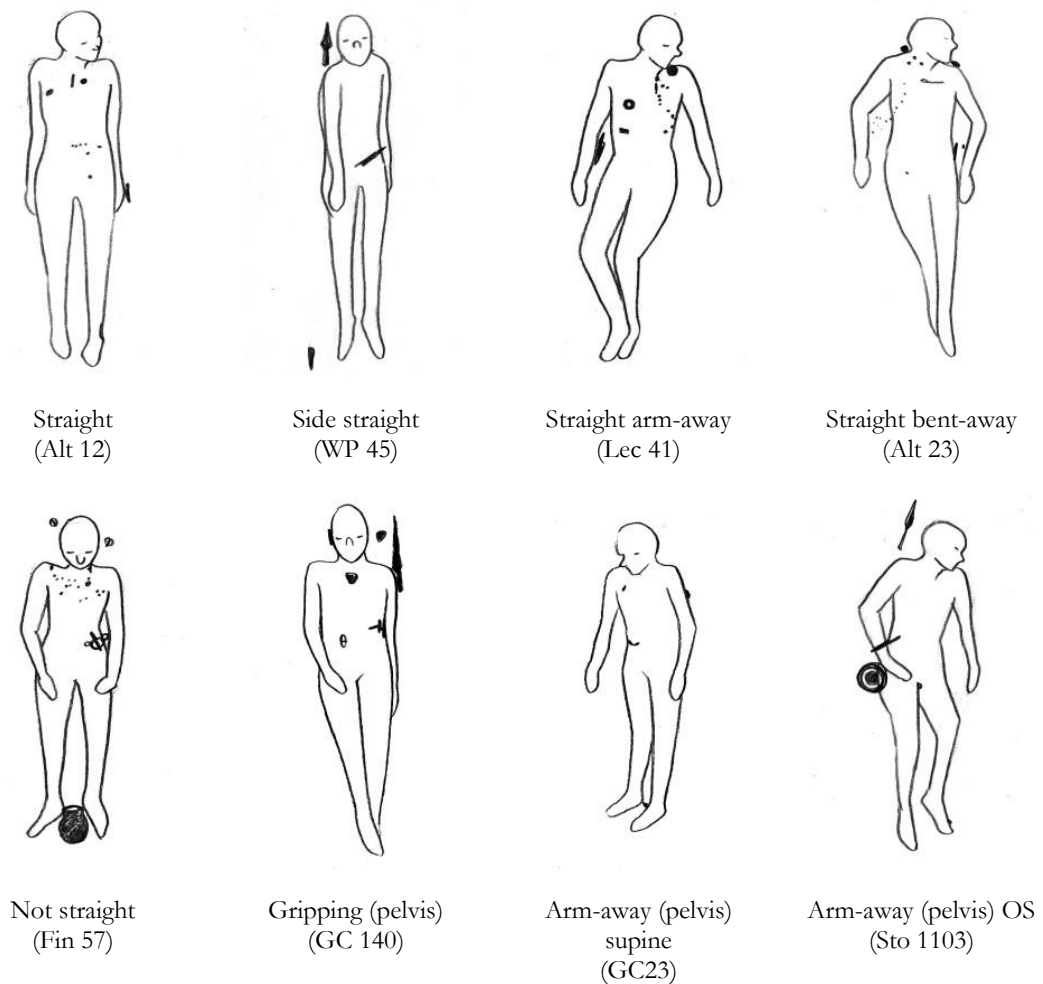
Figure 3.10 Posture types of the straight cluster.

3.4.3.3 The stomach cluster

The stomach cluster comprises posture types where both hands are placed over the abdomen. It is the third largest cluster with 298 burials.

Type	Description
Stomach	Both arms flexed, hands meeting over abdomen
Side stomach	One-sided burial. Both arms flexed, hands meeting over abdomen
Almost stomach	Both arms flexed, hands over abdomen but not touching
Crossed-arm stomach	Both arms flexed over abdomen, one crossed over the other
Waist-abdomen	One arm flexed with hand over abdomen, the other flexed across waist
Elbow-abdomen	Both arms flexed with hands over abdomen; forearms slightly lifted and elbows pointing away

Table 3.6 Descriptions of posture types in the stomach cluster.

Stomach	Side stomach	Almost stomach	Crossed-arm stomach
(HDr 12B)	(BnF 56)	(DBu 60)	(GC 51)

Waist-abdomen	Elbow-abdomen
(DBu 280)	(Edx 2C)
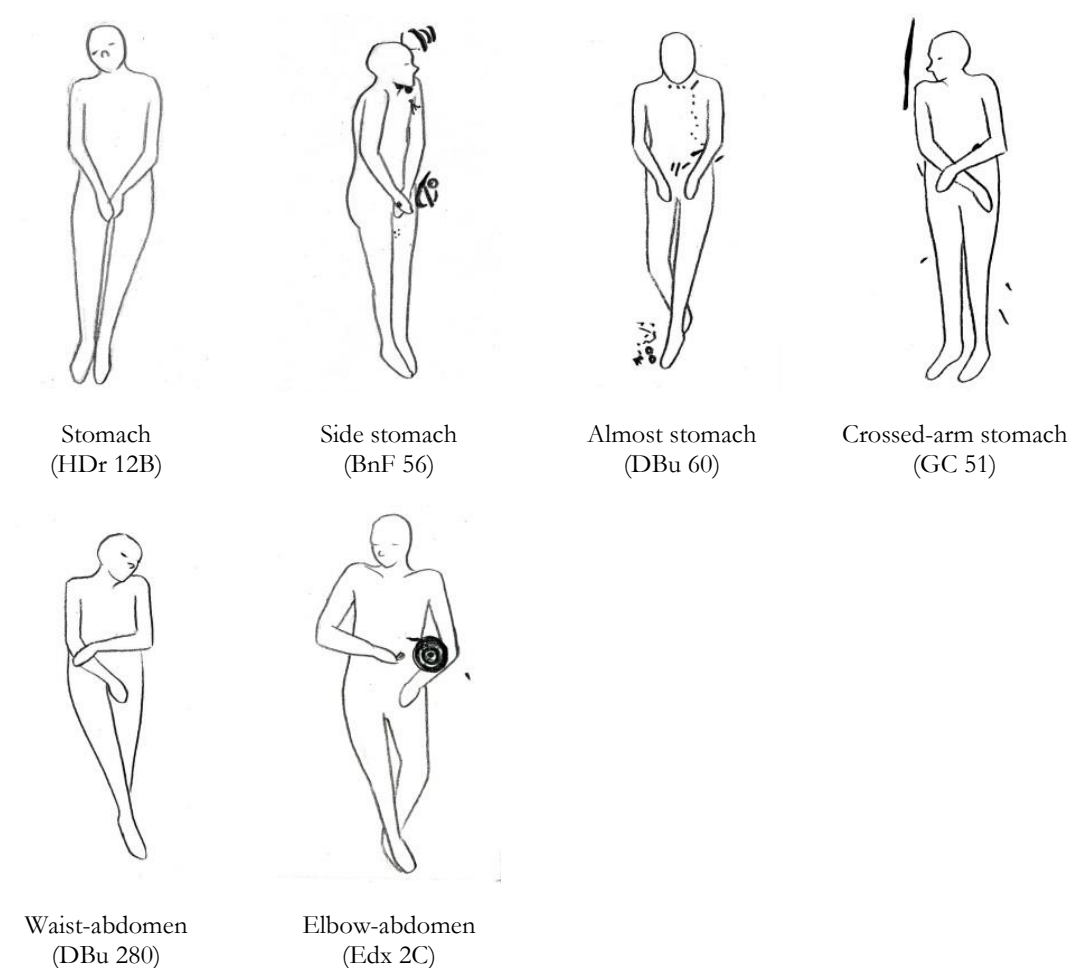
Figure 3.11 Posture types of the stomach cluster.

3.4.3.4 The waist-chest cluster

The waist-chest cluster contains posture type variants where both arms are asymmetrically flexed, with one arm across the waist and the other tightly folded. It can be subdivided into two groups: (1) where upper hand is on the upper abdomen or chest, or (2) where the upper hand is near the shoulder or the face. 150 burials in the present data set are identified with one of the eight type variants in the waist-chest cluster.

Type	Description
Waist-waist	Both arms flexed across waist
Waist-chest D1	One arm flexed across waist, the other folded across chest
Waist-chest D2	One arm flexed with hand on abdomen, the other folded aross chest
Waist-chest D3	One arm flexed with hand on pelvis, the other folded across chest
Waist-shoulder D1	One arm flexed across waist, the other folded with hand under chin
Waist-shoulder D2	One arm flexed across waist, the other tightly folded with hand by shoulder
Waist-shoulder D3	One sided burial. The arm underneath the body tightly folded with hand by shoulder, and the other arm folded across lower chest.
Waist-shoulder D3 [R]	One sided burial. The arm underneath the body folded across lower chest, and the other tightly folded with hand by shoulder

Table 3.7 Descriptions of posture types in the waist-chest cluster.

Waist-waist (WP 63)   Waist-chest D1 (Pol 44)   Waist-chest D2 (Fin 18)   Waist-chest D3 (Lec 55)

| Waist-shoulder D1 (DBu 12) | Waist-shoulder D2 (Ber 106) | Waist-shoulder D3 (BecB 50) | Waist-shoulder D3 [R] (BecB 73) |
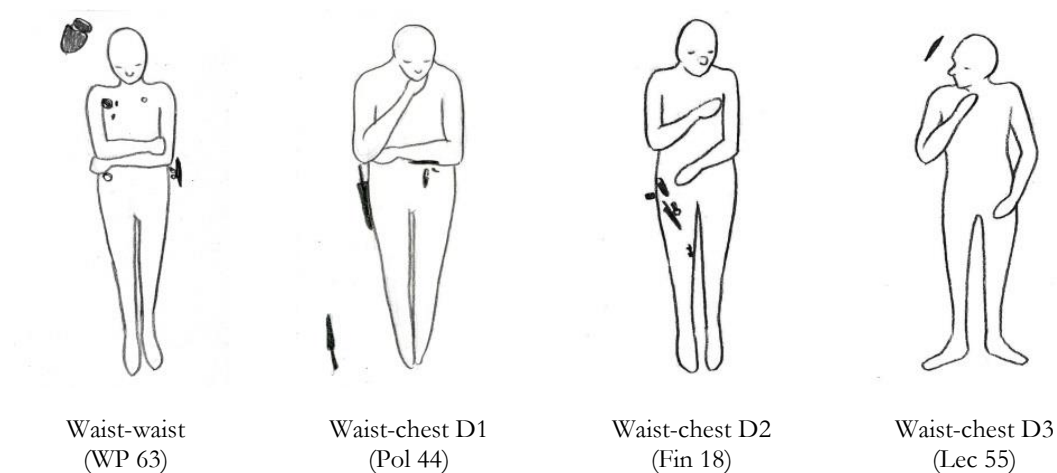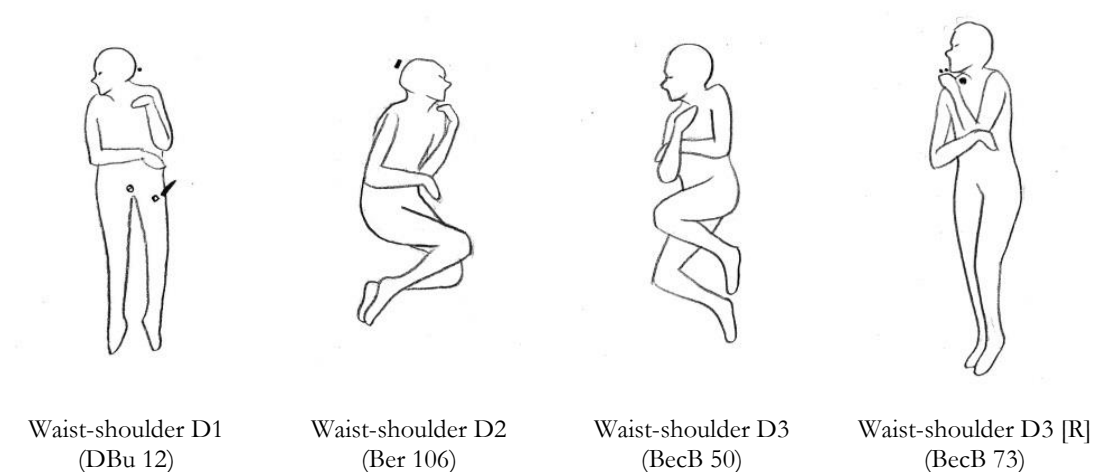
Figure 3.12 Posture types of the waist-chest cluster.

3.4.3.5 The elbow cluster

124 burials have been identified with the elbow type cluster, which includes burials where one arm is flexed and elbow pointing away from the torso, with the forearm pointing back towards the torso. This lends to a small space between the torso and the arm, as if 'hugging' something. The other arm may be flexed to different degrees, with the hand reaching towards the hand, elbow, or shoulder of the 'hugging' arm.

Type	Description
Elbow D1	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent back towards the torso, the other flexed with hand over abdomen
Elbow D2	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent back towards the torso, the other flexed across waist, hand on the hand of the 'hugging' arm
Elbow D3	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent back towards the torso, the other flexed across waist or chest, hand on the elbow of the 'hugging' arm
Elbow D4	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent back towards the torso, the other folded across chest, hand on the shoulder of the 'hugging' arm
Elbow upwards I	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent upwards towards the chest, the other flexed across waist
Elbow upwards II	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent upwards towards the chest, the other folded across chest
Elbow upwards II [R]	One forearm stretched out and lower arm bent upwards towards the chest, the other folded over the 'hugging' arm and across chest

Table 3.8 Descriptions of posture types in the elbow cluster.

Elbow D1	Elbow D2	Elbow D3	Elbow D4
(Drx 19)	(Lec 196)	(Clm 50)	(BecB 95)

Elbow upwards I	Elbow upwards II	Elbow upwards II [R]
(Clm 27)	(Cas 134)	(Edx 3)
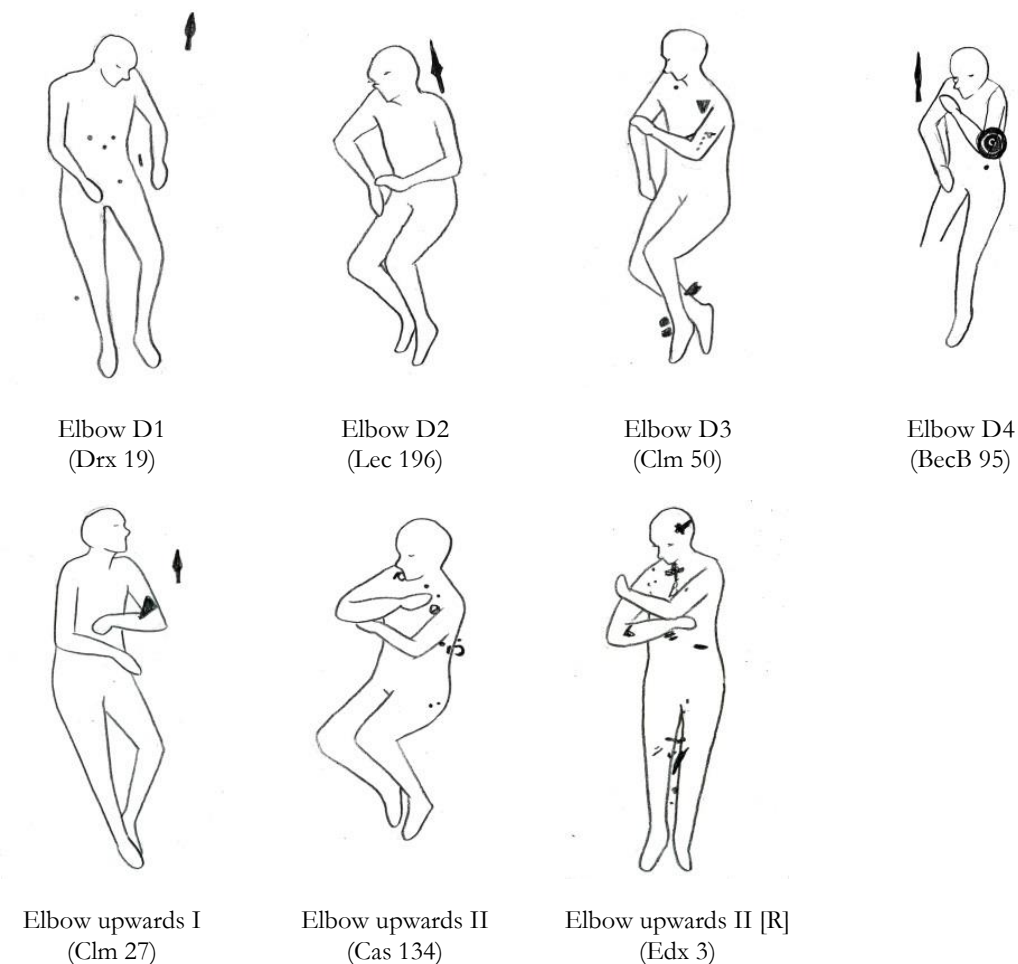
Figure 3.13 Posture types in the elbow cluster.

3.4.3.6 The clasped cluster

82 burials in the present data set have been identified with the clasped posture type cluster, which includes types where both arms are folded with hands on the chest or shoulders.

Type	Description
Clasped D1	Both arms folded across chest, one hand placed over the other
Clasped D2	Both arms folded over chest, hands on upper chest
Clasped D3	Both arms folded over chest or to shoulder, hands not touching
Upper stomach	Both arms folded, elbows pointing outwards, hands together over upper waist/lower chest
Clasped OS	One sided burial. Both arms folded in front of and close to chest
Raised clasped	Both arms folded with at least one arm raised over the shoulder

Table 3.9 Descriptions of posture types in the clasped cluster.

Clasped D1   Clasped D2   Clasped D3   Upper stomach
(GC 96)   (Emp 45)   (Lec 184)   (Lec 14)

Clasped OS   Raised clasped
(MLa 35)   (Col 10)
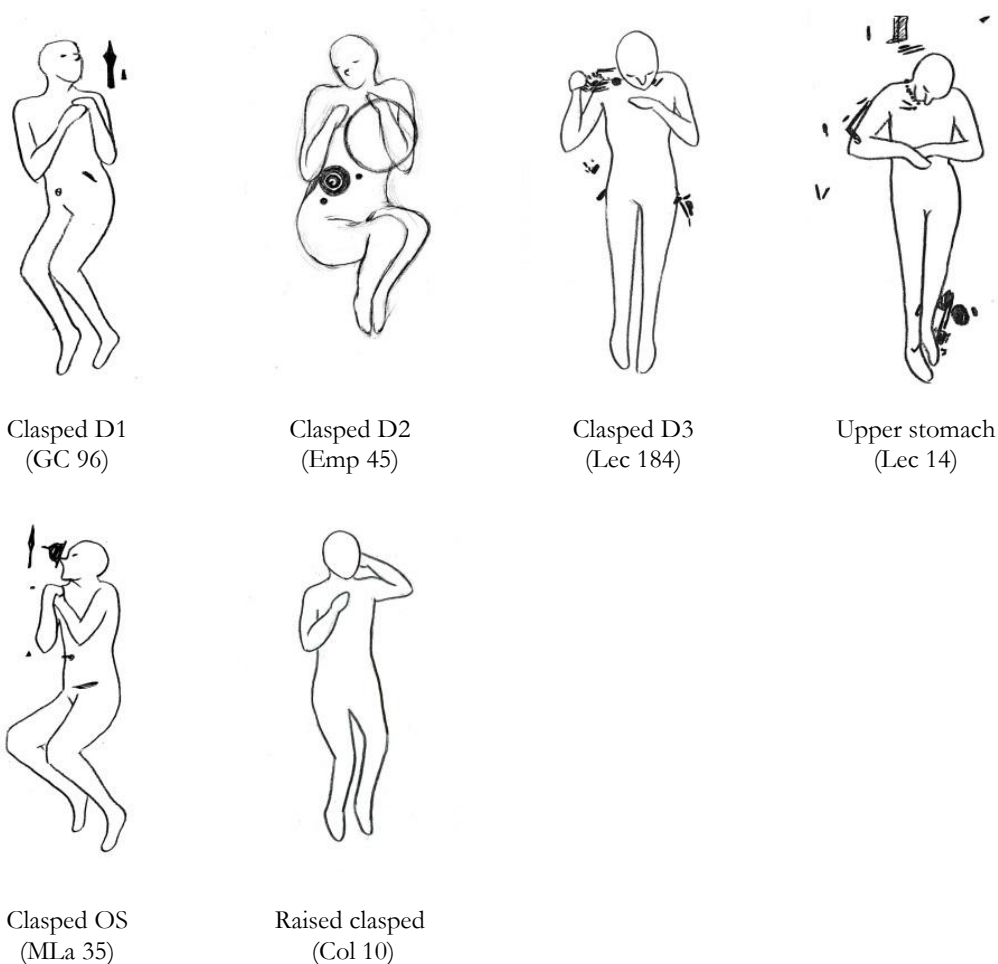
Figure 3.14 Posture types of the clasped cluster.

3.4.3.7 The front cluster

The front cluster comprises only four posture types, all of which presuppose one-sided deposition. This cluster includes the burials where both arms are placed in front of and away from the torso, a dimension only feasible with deposition on the side. 51 burials belong in this cluster, making it the smallest of the seven type clusters.

Type	Description
Front (clasped)	Both arms folded and stretched in front of chest
Front (waist)	Both arms flexed and stretched in front of the waist or lower chest
Front (abdomen)	Both arms flexed with hands in front of abdomen area
Front (straight)	Both arms extended and stretched in front of the torso

Table 3.10 Descriptions of posture types in the front cluster.

Front (clasped)	Front (waist)	Front (abdomen)	Front (straight)
(Cas 128)	(Emp 56)	(Ber 56)	(BecB 55)
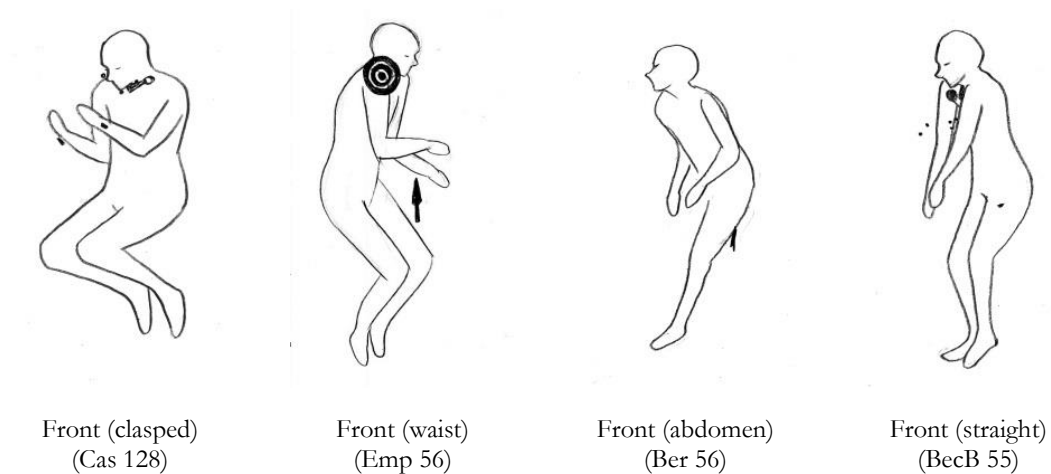
Figure 3.15 Posture types of the front cluster.

3.4.4 Typology map

The resulting types are mostly differentiated based on the positioning of the hand (e.g. gripping (pelvis) and gripping (abdomen), or elbow D1–4). Some are differentiated based on the deposition of the torso which affects the relative positions of the arms and hands (e.g. side stomach, side straight). Some bodies are ambiguously situated between two types, and they are grouped together to form a separate type (e.g. waist-shoulder D1, elbow-abdomen).

The posture types are organised into a typology 'map' (Figure 3.3). The map is dominated by a central axis, at the centre of which is the 'straight' type, wherein both arms are extended and placed by the sides of a supine torso. To the left of the 'straight' type, the map shows variant types in which the arms are flexed symmetrically, into the 'not straight' type, the 'almost stomach' type, and the 'stomach' type, and so on. To the right, on the other hand, are variant types in which one arm remains extended by the side, and the other arm is flexed in various degrees, into the 'gripping (pelvis/abdomen/waist)' types and so on. The rest of the types are variants arisen from this main axis.
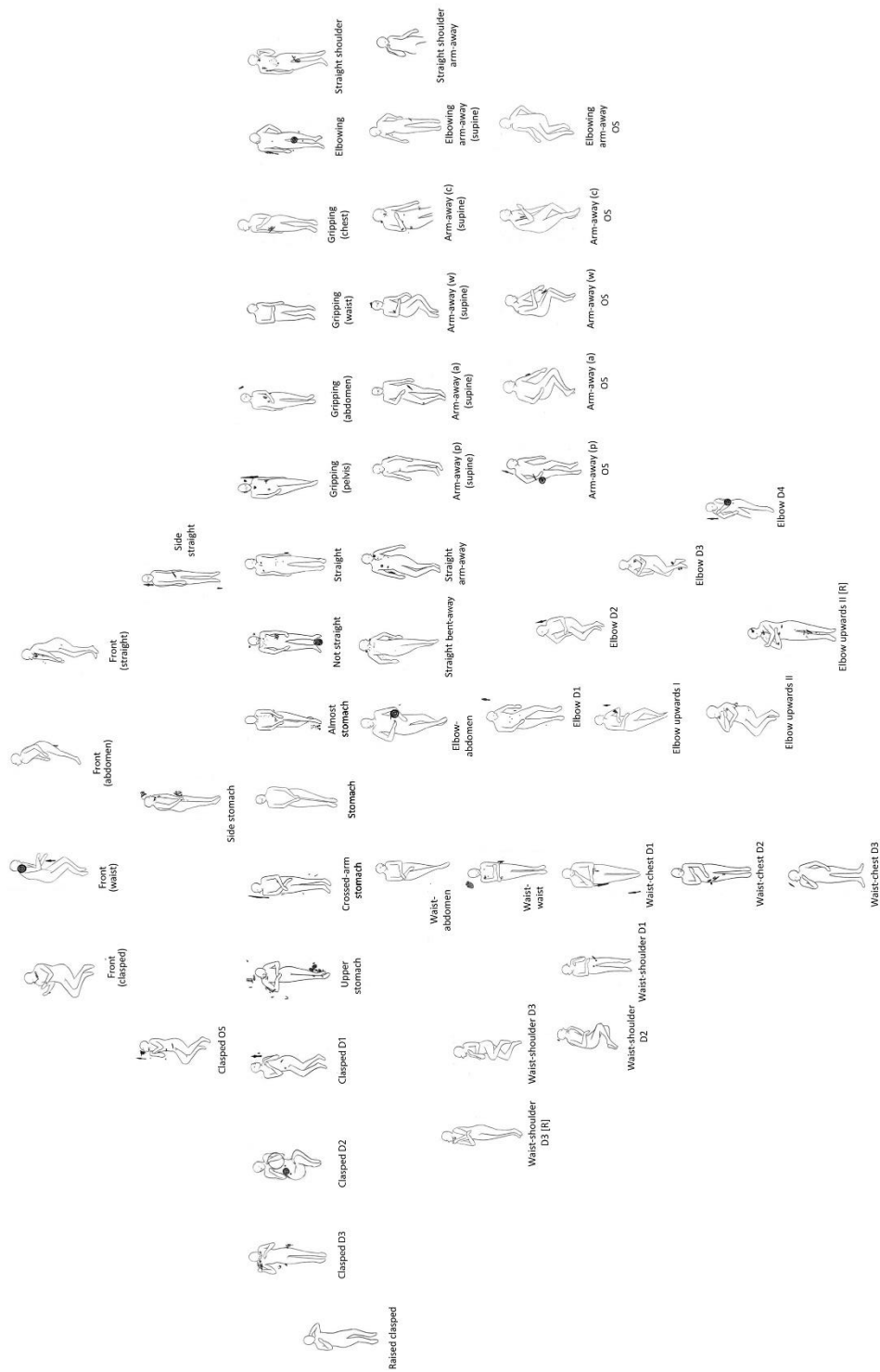
Figure 3.16 A 'typology map' of posture types.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

3.5.1 Subjectivity and bias

Since data selection is limited by the quality and availability of excavated burial records, there are unavoidable biases. Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are most often excavated in commercial contexts, and most of them have only been partially excavated. The graves in the database represent only the portions of the populations that survive and are recovered archaeologically. The information recorded for the graves vary across different site reports, as do drawing styles of grave plans and cemetery plans. In the case of confusion or lack of enough information, the respectively field of the datum will be classified as *unknown*.

The database utilises the results from the bone specialists' reports. However, as mentioned above, many osteological reports do not have standardised age or sex categories, which renders inter-cemetery comparison difficult. Moreover, although the ageing and sexing of skeletons is well-researched and widely applied, the process is based upon the osteologist's experience and judgement. It is important to bear in mind that this study's interpretations of the burial data ultimately rely on these potential biases and the integration of these biases.

The categories of body positions and the typology are arbitrarily created by the present author as a methodological means to demarcate one position from another. This process necessarily imposes boundaries and presupposed meanings on position categories, and overlooks some of the nuances in the burial data. For example, in some graves, it is difficult to ascertain whether a hand was placed on the waist or the abdomen, or on shoulder or the chest. The process of assigning a body part to a certain group relies on this author's subjective understanding and judgement. The position categories are designed to capture the more archaeologically prominent body parts, including the limbs and the torso. The positioning of smaller bones, such as the neck, hands, and feet is more difficult to access due to varying quality of excavation recording and preservation issues. For this reason, the direction at which the head is pointing is not recorded in the database. This is due to insufficient information about the *in situ* position of the atlanto-occipital joint (the articulation between the atlas and the occipital bone), which would be necessary in determining whether the head had been intentionally placed facing a certain direction, or if it was the natural result of decomposition (Duday 2009: 17–19). On the other hand, a

number of graves have good enough information about the positioning of hands and feet for more detailed study, and these will be discussed in the later chapters.

3.5.2 Dating

The methods and rationale for recording and analysing dates in the present thesis have been explained in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3. Although the methods have been designed with the intention to scrutinise the variations and changes in Anglo-Saxon body-positioning practices in as much detail as possible, there are a number of limitations and potential problems.

The date phases are assigned to the graves in the database based on the chronologies given in the excavation reports. Due to the confines of this study, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive reworking of the dates of all the burials in the data set, in light of the new chronological framework established by the recent work by Hines and Bayliss (Bayliss et al 2013). Nonetheless, there is room to revisit and refine the chronologies of the individual graves in future studies. Another potential problem is that the date ranges presently designed are not at regular intervals. Narrower date ranges are given for the second half of sixth century and the first half of the seventh century, because furnished graves during this period provide higher resolutions of dates as a result of the varied types of grave goods. On the other hand, nuanced changes before and after this period (over the course of the late fifth to the second half of sixth century, or in the late seventh early eighth centuries) may be obscured, as the graves have not been as closely dated and wider date ranges are recorded.

Furthermore, as explained in Section 3.3.2, analysis of dates in this study takes a multi-valued approach and scrutinises 'data points' instead of absolute number of graves. While it provides greater flexibility in the recording of dates, this approach shows only the shape of the data but is fundamentally lacking in precision. This problem is partially resolved by the introduction of a date resolution threshold, which defines the parameter of the date resolution of the burials that are included in the analysis. As explained in Section 3.3.3, the threshold is best set at < 4 or < 3, a balance between the refinement of dates and the quantities of burials. However, four out of the 32 cemeteries included in the data set did not contain any graves that are dated to a resolution of < 3. Only 1227 burials (38% of total) meet the requirement of a date resolution of < 3. Of these, a proportion did not contain well-preserved enough information for body positioning (for example, 256 of these graves did not contain information for body deposition; 253 had no information about leg flexure;

519 cannot be assigned posture type). This is complicated by the problem that it is difficult to provide refined dates for unfurnished or poorly furnished burials with no obvious stratigraphic relationship with other datable graves. As a result, many of the unfurnished and poorly furnished burials are left out of chronological analysis. This means that the results of changes in burial positions over time may skew towards the burials with greater material wealth. This issue cannot be resolved until it becomes feasible to obtain more radiocarbon dates, or when new methods of dating independent of artefacts have been developed. Nonetheless, chronology aside, this study may contribute towards an alternative and complementary perspective of the past to the one provided by material culture, by focusing on bodies in graves.

3.5.3 Literary sources

Alongside the burial record, the present study also draws upon historical and literary sources from early medieval England to provide a fuller picture of the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the body. A multi-disciplinary approach brings together the methodological and interpretive strengths of different disciplines which complement each other's shortcomings. Textual sources, however, should not be applied to archaeological interpretations without critical considerations. The relationship between archaeology and history is a long and contested one, and not without a considerable amount of contempt and scepticism on both parts. Wary of the tradition of using archaeology as the provider of material evidence to prove and substantiate analysis of texts (for instance, the extravagance of Sutton Hoo Mound 1 often compared with Scyld Scefing's ship funeral in *Beowulf*, ll 26–52, see Owen-Crocker 2000), Anglo-Saxon archaeology has developed into a specialised field of study in its own right. This difficult relationship may be reflected in the disciplinary organisation, within which Anglo-Saxonists are spread across departments of Archaeology, History, and English.

More recently, however, increasing efforts have been made on all sides to bring these sister disciplines together, recognising the potential benefits of interdisciplinary collaborations in providing access to different forms of cultural manifestation (Fleming 2006; Hines 2008). In this context, it is important to reconsider what the historical and literary sources are, what they stand for, and how they should be used to inform archaeological interpretations. Anglo-Saxon England had a remarkably rich vernacular culture, promulgated no less by Alfred the Great of Wessex in his education reforms in the later ninth century. Latin was also widely read and used, at least among learned churchmen. The majority of manuscripts from Anglo-

Saxon England, nevertheless, are dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries or later. It would be problematic, therefore, to indiscriminately apply these texts in studying the earlier period. Literacy was closely linked with the consolidation of the Church and the establishment of monastic centres. Thus, most of the literature would have been composed and transmitted by the hands of monks and set within a Christian agenda. Likewise, manuscript art was produced within its specific social contexts, and the ideas it reflects cannot be transferred directly into the earlier, pre-Christian world. The production of texts and images, moreover, was confined to a small part of society, namely the monastic sector responsible for learning and teaching. Therefore, their narratives might not reflect Anglo-Saxon society as a whole, which leaves Anglo-Saxonists pondering the lives of the illiterate populace.

Heeding these limitations, on the other hand, it would be a serious oversight to disregard this body of evidence altogether. Instead, when used with suitable caution, historical and literary evidence may shed light on aspects of Anglo-Saxon society otherwise inaccessible. Exactly because the production of texts and images was necessarily historically situated, they were products of the development of cultural ideas along their temporal trajectories. Shifting the focus from ephemeral social phenomena to the persistence and change of cultural worldviews over the *longue durée*, the historical sources highlight and enhance archaeology's strength in revealing long-term social developments. Therefore, instead of providing mere snapshots of anachronistic cultural moments, documentary evidence helps contextualise archaeological data, constructing a diachronic framework within which archaeology, history, and literary studies may contest, challenge, and complement each other.

CHAPTER FOUR
BURIAL POSTURE AND SOCIETY

Ða þær Byrhtnoð ongan   beornas trymian,
rad and rædde,   rincum tæhte
hu hi sceoldon standan   and þone stede healdan,
and bæd þæt hyra randas   rihte heoldon
fæste mid folman,   and ne forhtedon na.

Then Byrhtnoth began to encourage the warriors there,
riding and ruling, instructing the men
how they must stand and keep the place,
and ordered that they hold their shields correctly,
fast with the hands, and not be afraid.

(*The Battle of Maldon*, ll 17–21)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The bodily posture of Byrhtnoth's soldiers reinforces a sense of bravery, strength, and warriorhood, for both the soldiers themselves and their enemies. Likewise, the posture, manner, and behaviour of the body may carry meaning and communicate information which pertains to how the person perceives oneself and their relationship with other people, things, and the environment, and influences how they are perceived by others. This body language may be carried into the funerary context, shaping the ways in which corpses are arranged and represented in graves. This chapter presents the analysis of funerary body positioning in the context of early Anglo-Saxon society, and examines the relationship between corpse postures, bodily manner, and the perceptions of the self, of others, and of the social world at large.

As Mike Parker Pearson notes, '[w]e cannot say a great deal about one body on its own but we can infer much when it can be compared to hundreds of other' (Parker Pearson 1999: 6). In this thesis, over 3,000 graves are analysed statistically with the aim of revealing patterns and variations in body positioning, local and regional practices concerning the treatment of the corpse, and how these related to the conception and expression of individual and collective identities within social and historical contexts. As we will see below, during periods

of social, political, and religious contestation, burial postures persisted and changed, reflecting a shift in the attitudes towards death and corporeality from the fifth to the eighth centuries.

4.2 AN OVERVIEW

Two-thirds of the burials in the dataset are well-preserved enough to discern the positioning of legs and the method of deposition, and just over half of the burials survived well enough to provide information on arm positioning. Unless otherwise stated, the percentages quoted in this discussion include only the burials where the particular positional information is well-preserved enough to be recorded, and thus exclude 'unknown'. This is to normalise the data and avoid skewing them due to varying degrees of preservation across different sites and different burials.

The full results complete with charts and tables can be found in Appendix Four. An overview of the results can be summarised as follows:

– In terms of the **deposition of the body**, the supine position was the most common, amounting to 76% of all the burials with known deposition. For one-sided burials, right-sided burials were marginally more common than left-sided ones (12% and 9% respectively) (Figure 4.1).

– In terms of **leg positioning**, the extended position was the most common (61%). As for leg placement, the parallel position was the most common (60%) (Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

– In terms of **the positioning of arms and hands**, the placement of the hand by the side assumes majority (42% of left hands and 47% of right hands), followed by placement on the abdomen (27% of left hands and 22% of right hands). The right arm was roughly equally likely to be placed extended or flexed, but the left arm was 1.2 times more likely to be placed extended than flexed (Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6).

The present work has introduced a typology in which corpse positions are classified into types (see Section 3.4). Of the 3201 individuals from the present data set, 1548 (48.4% of the data set) were well-preserved enough to be assigned posture types.
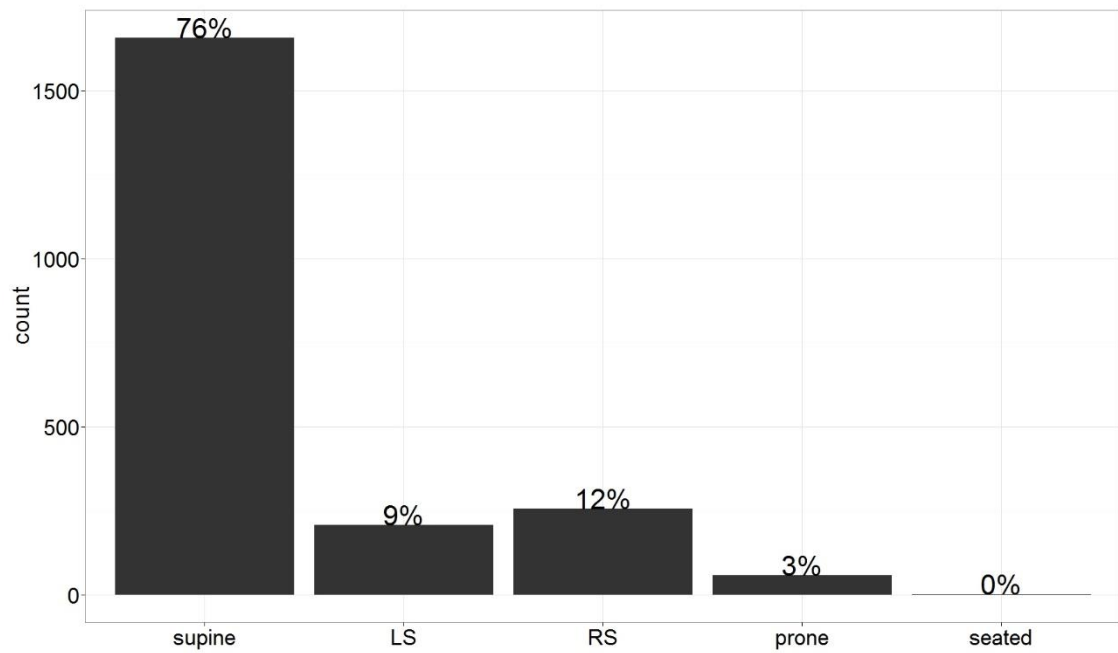
Figure 4.1 Overall deposition of the body.
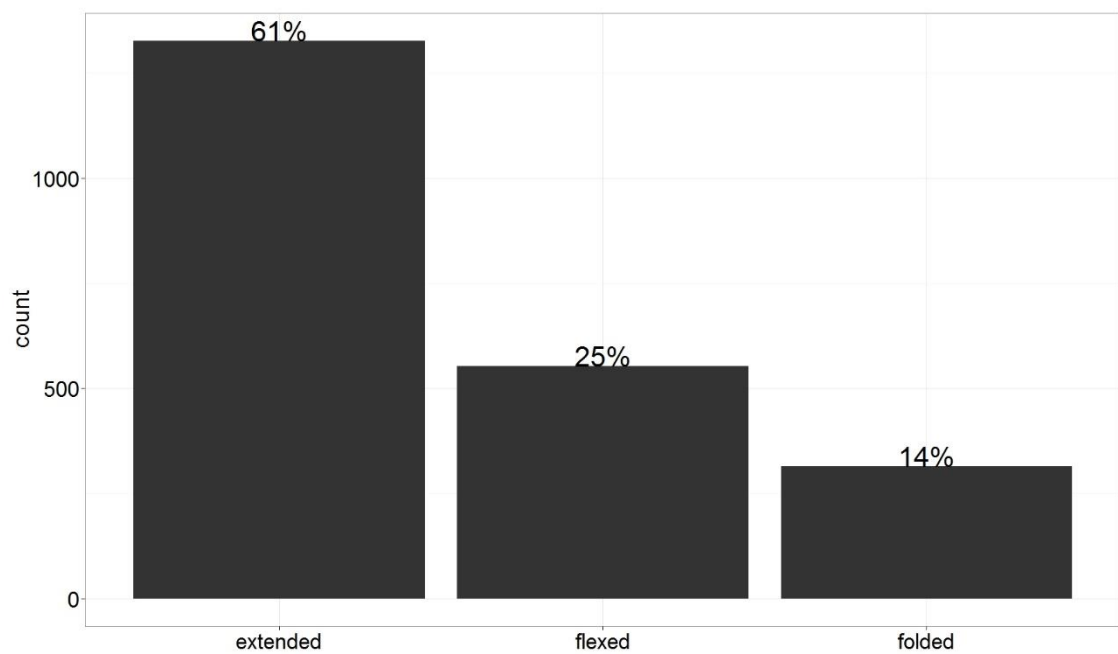
Figure 4.2 Overall leg flexure.
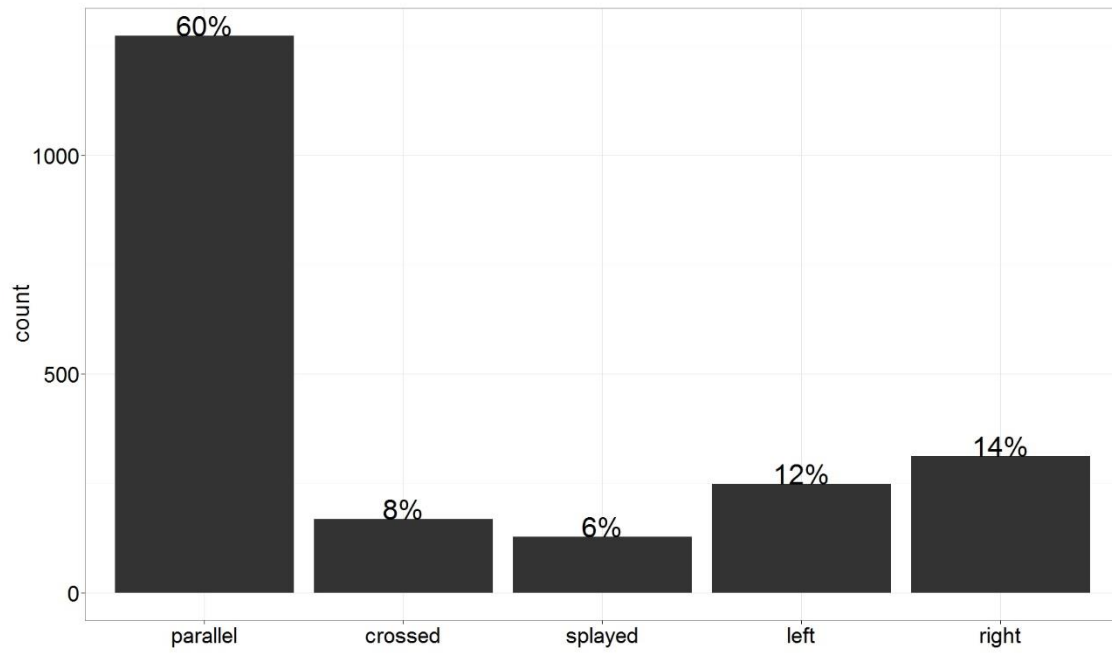
Figure 4.3 Overall leg placement.
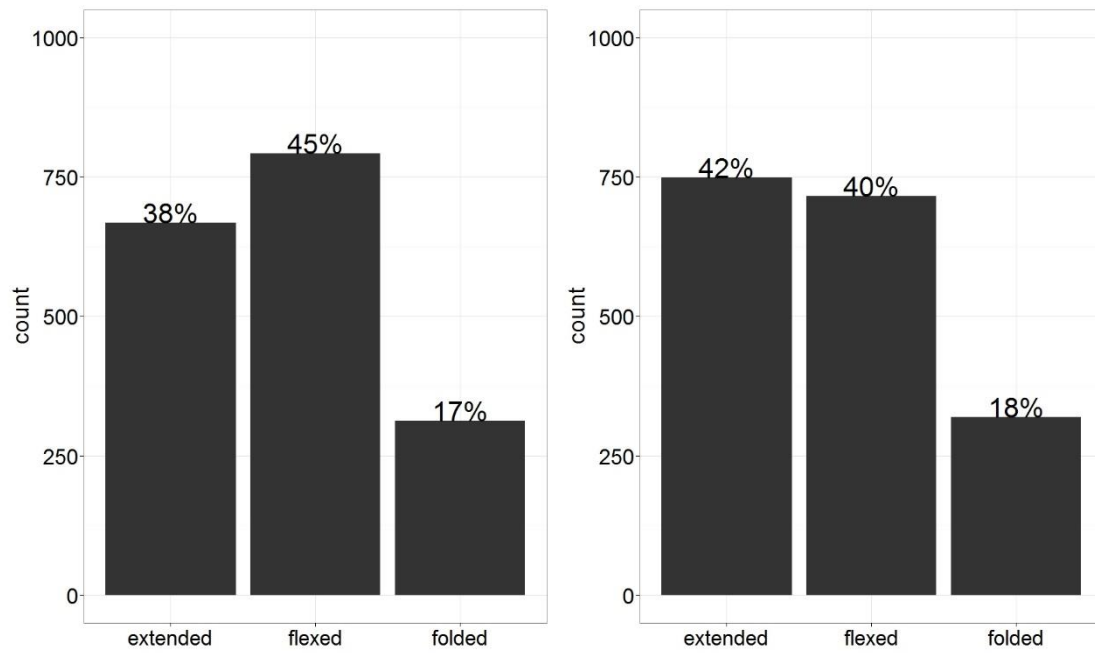
Figure 4.4 (Left) Overall flexure of left arm. (Right) Overall flexure of right arm.
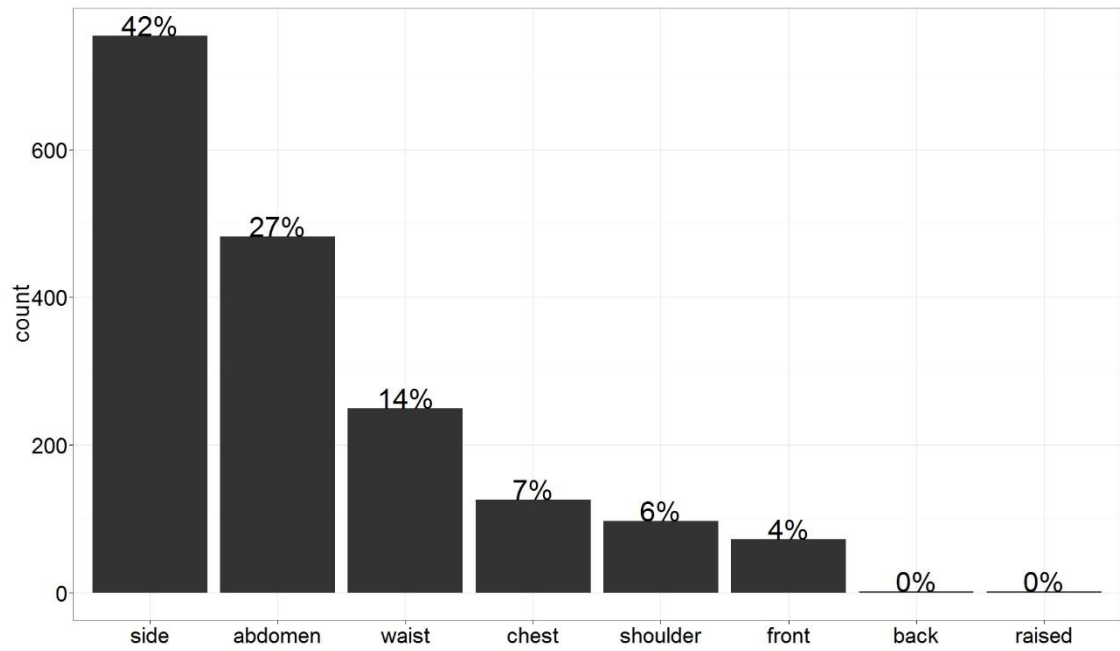
Figure 4.5 Overall placement of left hand.
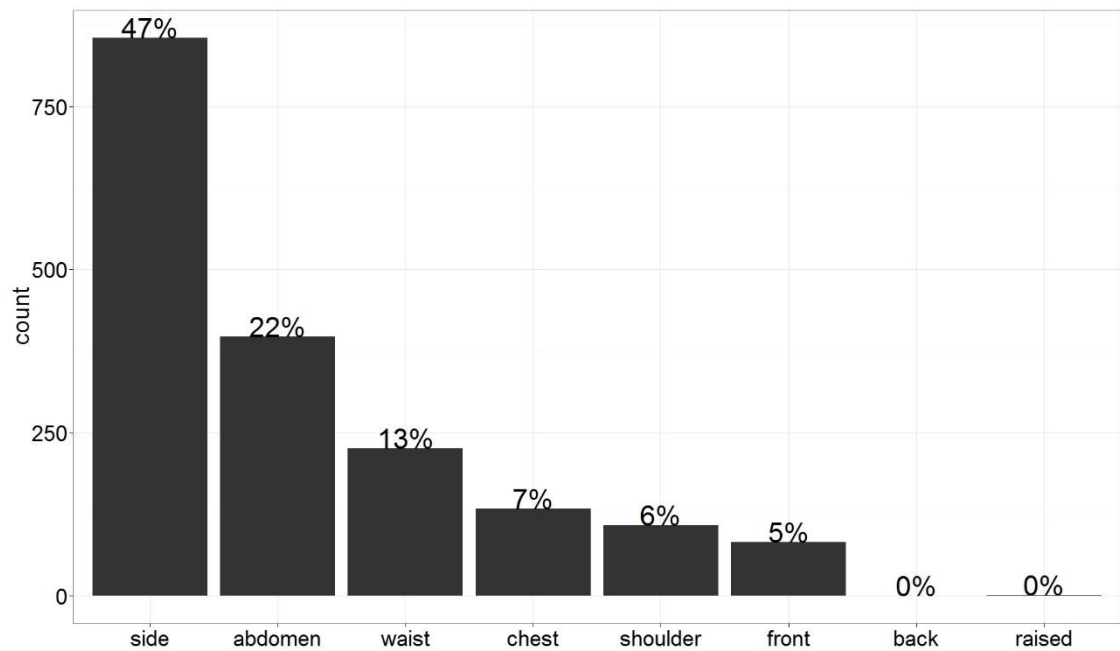
Figure 4.6 Overall placement of right hand.

Figure 4.7 A 'typology map' of posture types. The seven main posture types are highlighted.

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Seven posture types were most prominent, accounting for nearly half (45%) of all the burials where posture types have been assigned (Table 4.1; Figures 4.7 and 4.8). These seven types, hereafter referred to as the seven 'main types', were ubiquitous across England. On the other hand, the peripheral types and type-variants were much less common, and appear to occur haphazardly in different regions. This will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.3 below. The seven main types are:

Type	Type cluster	Number of burials
Stomach	Stomach	98
Almost stomach	Stomach	78
Not straight	Straight	100
Straight	Straight	123
Gripping (pelvis)	Straight	78
Gripping (abdomen)	Gripping	118
Gripping (waist)	Gripping	107
		Total = 702

Table 4.1 The seven main types, their respective type clusters, and frequencies.

| Stomach | Almost stomach | Not straight | Straight | Gripping (pelvis) | Gripping (abdomen) | Gripping (Waist) |
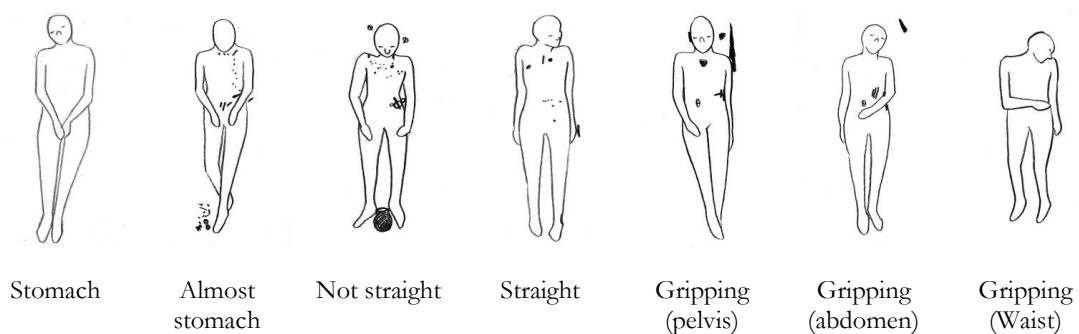
Figure 4.8 The seven main posture types.

Table 4.2 below shows the number of burials that belong to each type cluster and its occurrence in each sex, gender, or age group. The terminology and classification of the seven type clusters have already been explained in Section 3.4.3. In this table, the percentages quoted are the number of burials that belong to the type clusters over the total number of burials in the particular group according to the row header. Thus, every row adds up to 100%.
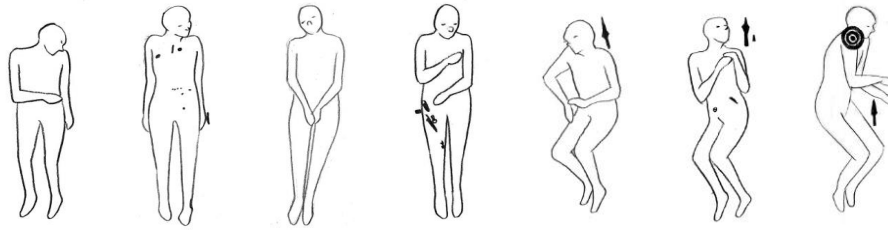
Cluster	Gripping	Straight	Stomach	Wst-Chst	Elbow	Clasped	Front
No. of burials	422	421	298	150	124	82	51
Sex (percentage in brackets includes possible female or possible male skeletons)							
F (n=639)	28% (29%)	25% (25%)	19% (19%)	10% (10%)	11% (10%)	5% (5%)	2% (2%)
M (n=583)	28% (30%)	32% (31%)	19% (20%)	10% (10%)	4% (4%)	4% (4%)	2% (2%)
U (n=326)	20%	25%	18%	9%	12%	9%	7%
Gender							
F (n=506)	28%	24%	19%	10%	12%	5%	3%
M (n=313)	29%	30%	22%	7%	5%	4%	2%
ID (n=479)	25%	30%	16%	11%	8%	6%	4%
NF (n=250)	28%	25%	24%	9%	4%	7%	4%
Age							
0–2 (n=27)	22%	26%	7%	0%	19%	7%	19%
2–6 (n=51)	20%	31%	12%	2%	16%	2%	18%
6–12 (n=99)	24%	28%	14%	6%	12%	12%	3%
12–17 (n=91)	15%	16%	29%	14%	12%	9%	4%
17–25 (n=302)	28%	24%	24%	11%	8%	4%	2%
25–40 (n=396)	28%	30%	18%	10%	8%	5%	1%
40+ (n=361)	29%	32%	18%	9%	6%	4%	3%
adult (n=178)	33%	20%	18%	13%	6%	7%	3%
subadult (n=16)	25%	19%	31%	0%	6%	6%	13%
unaged (n=27)	15%	44%	22%	15%	0%	0%	4%

Table 4.2 Table showing the percentage frequencies of type clusters according to sex, gender, and age groups. Each row adds up to 100%.

A few observations can be made here:

– Gripping and straight clusters represent the two most prominent type clusters in the data set, constituting between 30% and 61% of burials in each sex, gender, or age group.

– The straight cluster is more prominently associated with male burials and burials with masculine assemblages, than female burials and burials with feminine assemblages.

– This is reversed in the elbow cluster, which is more prominently associated with female burials and burials with feminine assemblages than male or masculine graves.

– The waist-chest cluster is almost exclusively associated with adolescent and adult burials.

– Children have significantly higher percentages of burials associated with the elbow and front clusters than adolescents and adults.

In short, the present data suggest that the most common burial position in the early Anglo-Saxon period was supine deposition, with legs buried extended and feet parallel. Arm and hand positioning were more varied, but arms were most commonly positioned according to the seven 'main types'. However, the data also show significant inter- and intra-site variations in the positional articulation of the dead body, in reproducing this burial-positional norm or deviating from it. These variations are explored below in relation to aspects of regional, local, gender, and age identities, and their changes over time.

4.3 REGIONAL PRACTICES

In her influential study of local funerary practices at the two Suffolk cemeteries at Holywell Row and Westgarth Gardens, Pader contends that every cemetery had its own unique symbolic system (Pader 1982: 200). Developing on this idea, Lucy reveals nuanced regional variations of funerary rites, which she argues to be linked with how local communities expressed their own identities and responded to changes around them within their cultural and historical contexts (Lucy 1998). In the present study, there is clear evidence for regional

variations in the treatment and positioning of the corpse, reflecting different traditions and preferences in burial positioning in different parts of Anglo-Saxon England.

In southern England, burials were predominantly deposited facing upwards: supine burials constitute 90% and 85% of the burials with known deposition in cemeteries in Kent and Wessex respectively. The supine prevalence is less marked in central and northern England ($p < 0.001$). In fact, the further north, the more varied the method of deposition. Supine burials made up 78% of the burials with known deposition in the Upper Thames Valley, 68% in the East Midlands. In the northern England, supine burials amount to only 50%, while 25% were buried right-sided and 17% left-sided. Prone burial remains a minority rite in all regions, but is most visible in the North, amounting to 8% of burials with known method of deposition. In other regions, prone burials made up only 1 to 3% of the graves.

A similar pattern of regional difference is also evident in the positioning of legs ($p < 0.001$). Kent represents the least varied region, as 86% of the burials with known leg positions were deposited extended, and 83% of burials were placed with legs in a parallel position. The other regions show greater variations. In Wessex, two-thirds of the burials were buried extended. In the Upper Thames and East Midlands regions, however, the extended position was recorded in just over half of the burials, while the flexed position amounts to about 30%. Burials in the North of England stand out as 48% of the burials with known leg position were buried with tightly folded legs, 34% with flexed legs, and the extended position made up only 18% of the burials.

Figure 4.17 schematically visualises the most frequently occurring posture type(s) in each cemetery in the data set. Terminologies and type cluster classification are explained in Section 3.4.3. In southern parts of England, the straight and stomach types appear to dominate the map, followed by variations of the gripping position. Cemeteries in East Anglia, the East Midlands, and the Upper Thames Valley favour types variants of the stomach and gripping clusters, while those in northern England favour more tightly bent arms, reflected in the prevalence of the gripping (waist) type and other variants from the elbow and waist-chest clusters.

The variations reflected in this schematic map are observed in statistical analysis of posture types and type clusters. As seen above with regards to body deposition and leg positioning,
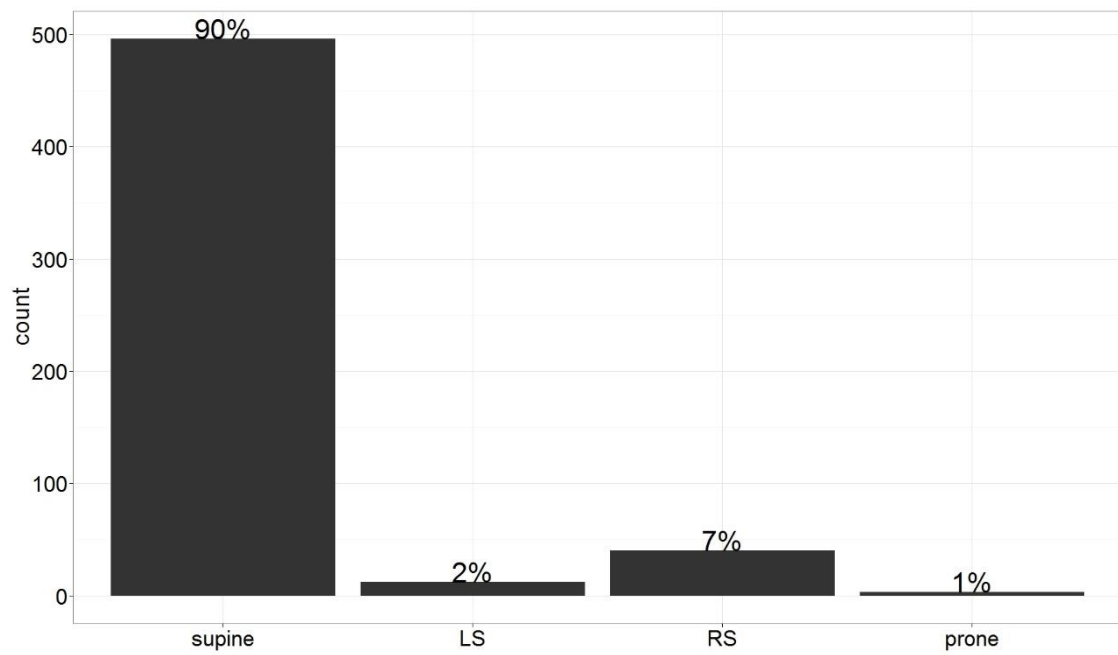
Figure 4.9 Deposition of the body in Kent (Dover Buckland, Finglesham, Headley Drive, Mill Hill, and Polhill).
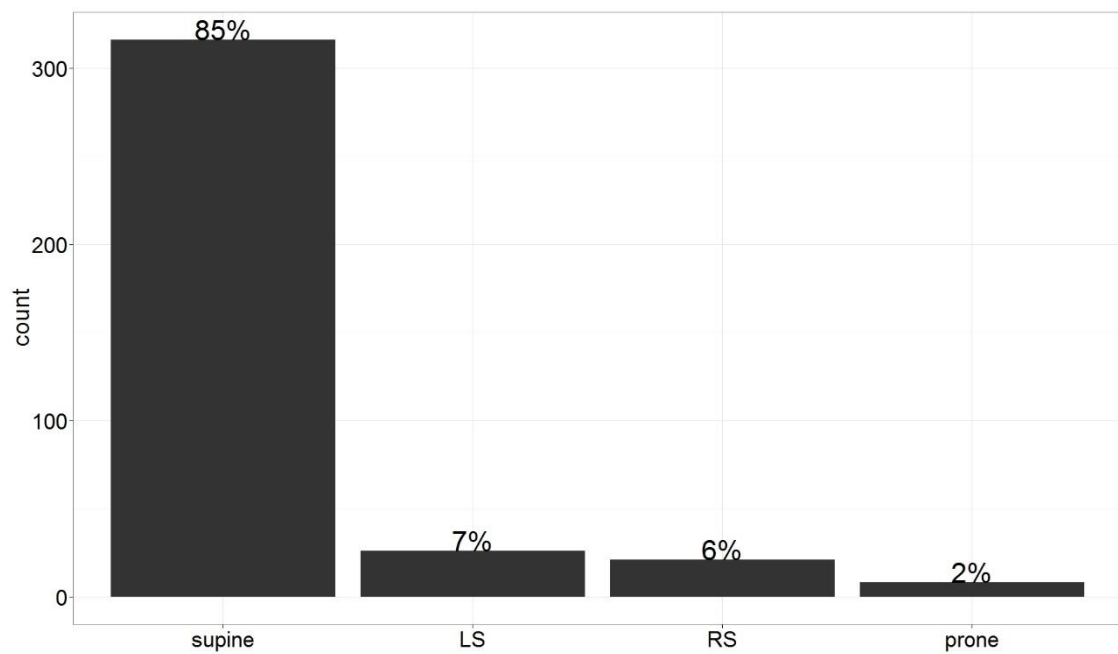
Figure 4.10 Deposition of the body in Wessex (Alton, Blacknall Field, Charlton, Collingbourne Ducis, Droxford, Market Lavington, Storey's Meadow West Meon, Worthy Park).
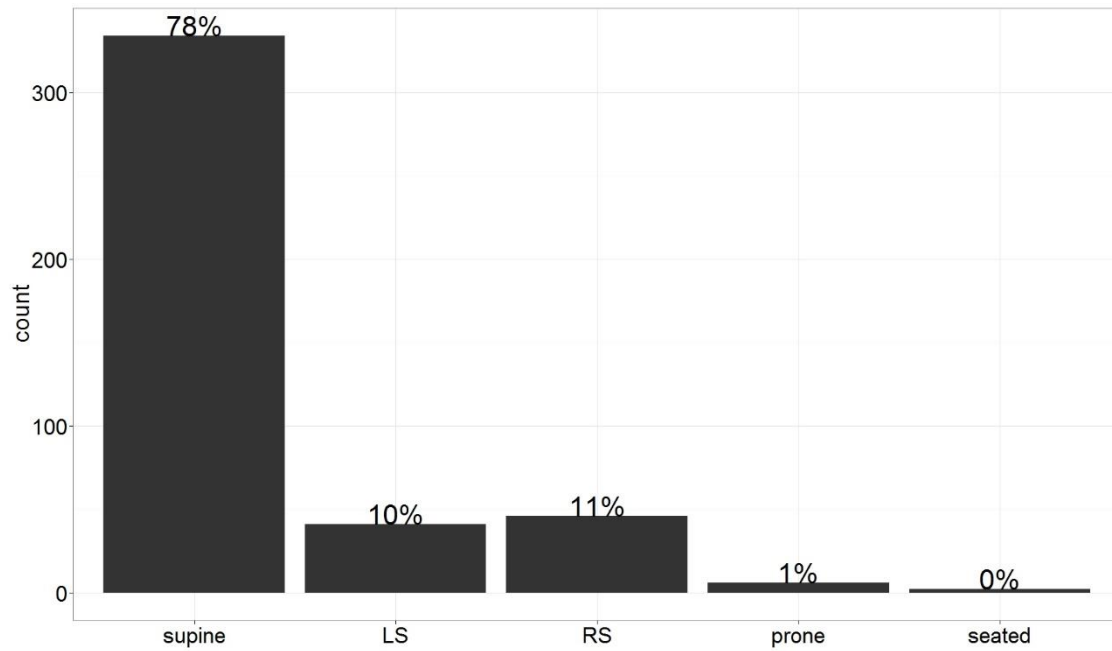
Figure 4.11 Deposition of the body in the Upper Thames Valley (Beckford A, Beckford B, Berinsfield, Didcot, Dinton, Lechlade).
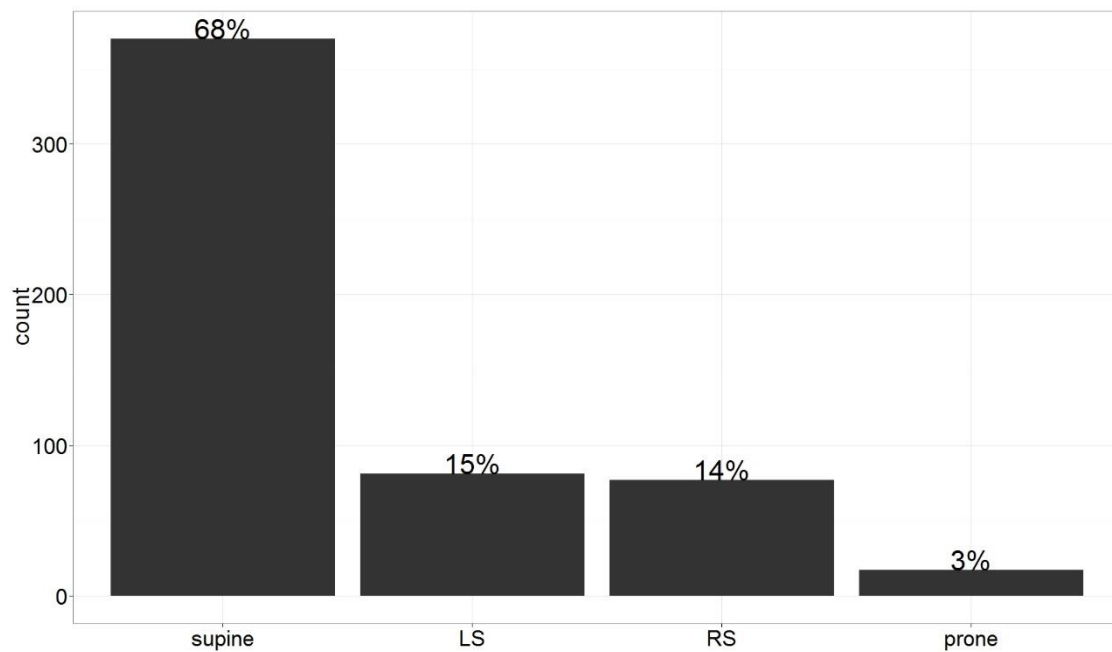
Figure 4.12 Deposition of the body in the East Midlands (Alwalton, Edix Hill, Empingham, Great Chesterford, Gunthorpe, Oakington, Water Lane, Westfield Farm, Westgarth Gardens).
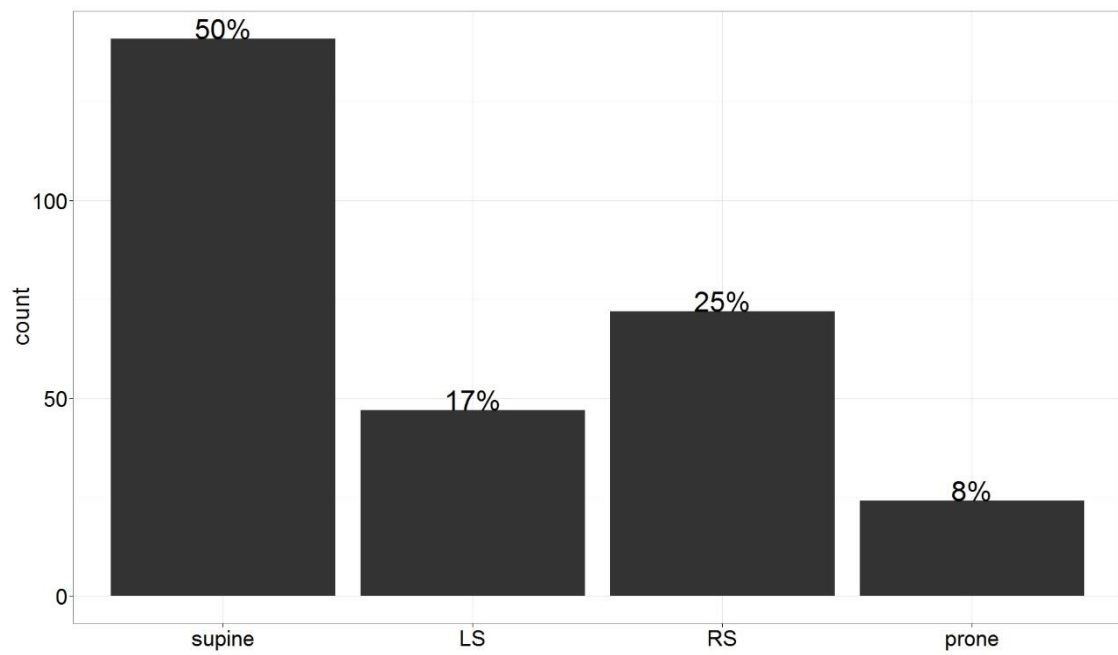
Figure 4.13 Deposition of the body in the North of England (Castledyke, Cleatham, Sewerby, West Heslerton).
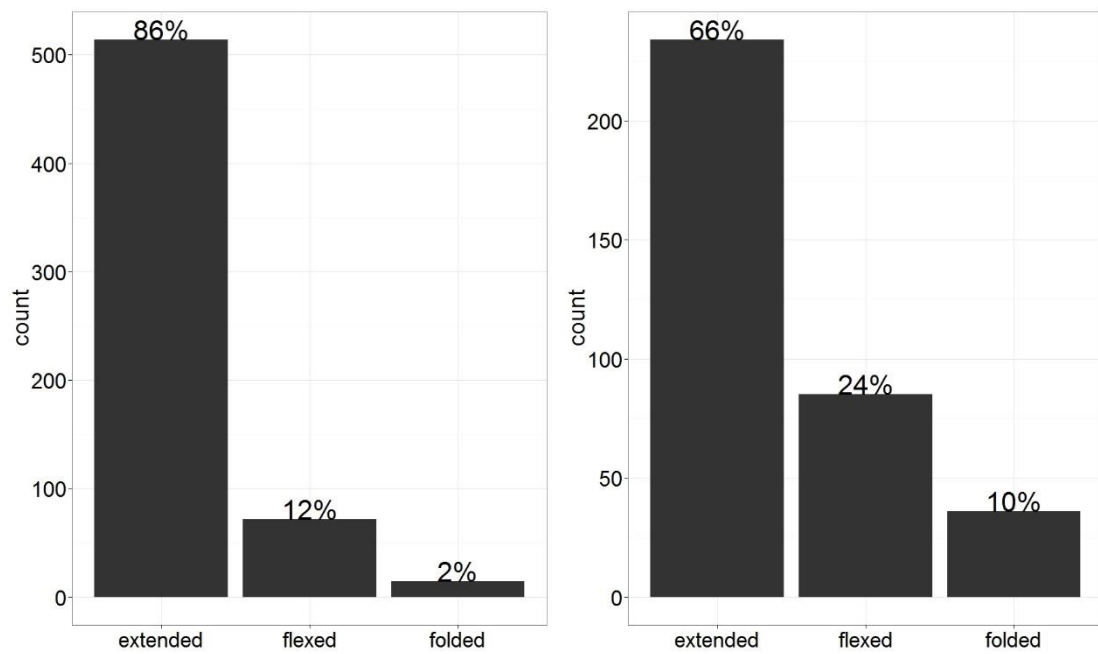
Figure 4.14 (Left) Leg flexure in Kent. (Right) Leg flexure in Wessex.
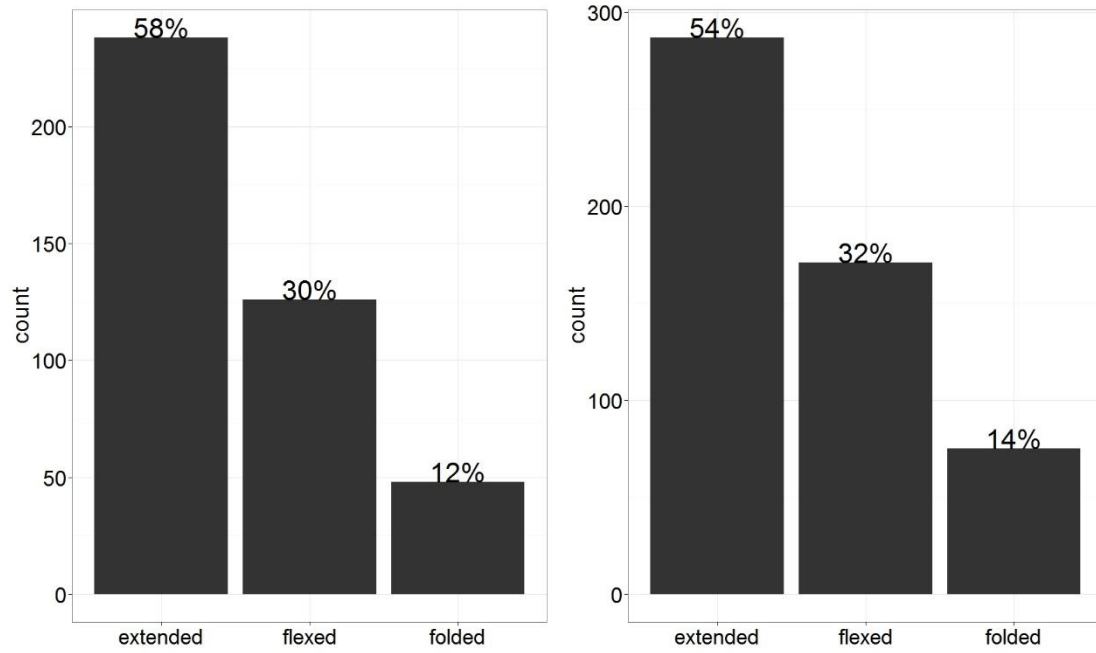
Figure 4.15 (Left) Leg flexure in the Upper Thames Valley. (Right) Leg flexure in the East Midlands.
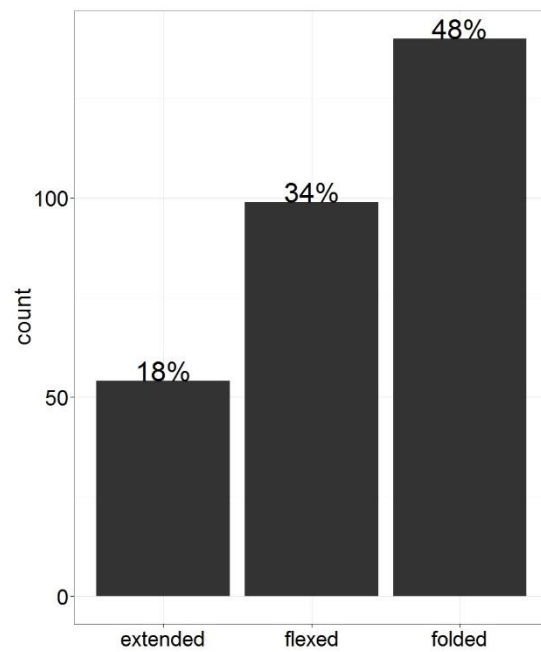
Figure 4.16 Leg flexure in the North of England.
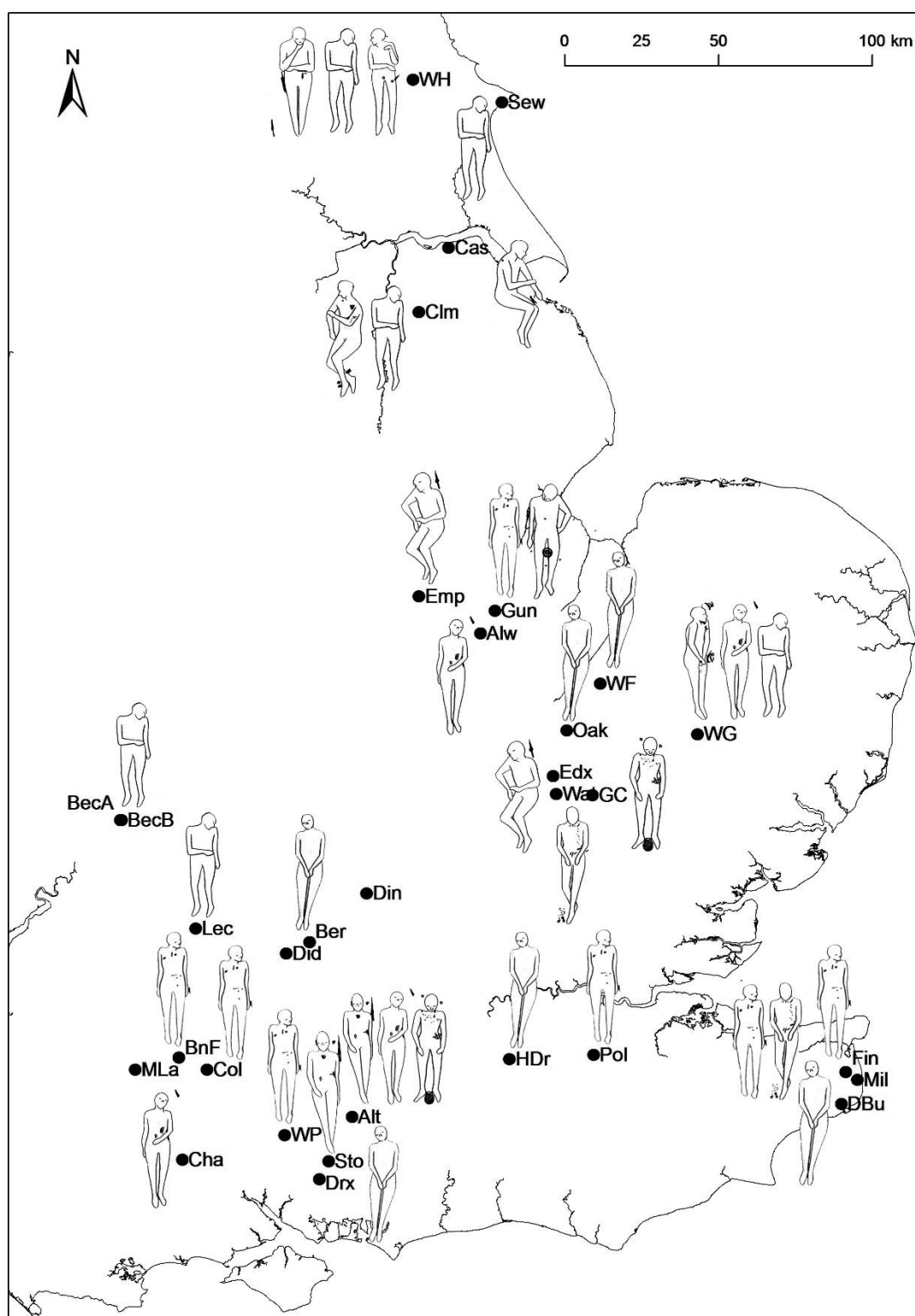
Figure 4.17 Map showing the most frequently occurring posture type(s) in each cemetery in the data set. Market Lavington, Dinton, and Didcot are not displayed, as the types found in these cemeteries occur only once or twice. Some cemeteries have more than one most frequently occurred types (Mill Hill, Alton, Westgarth Gardens, Gunthorpe, Cleatham, and West Heslerton); all of these types (up to three) are displayed.
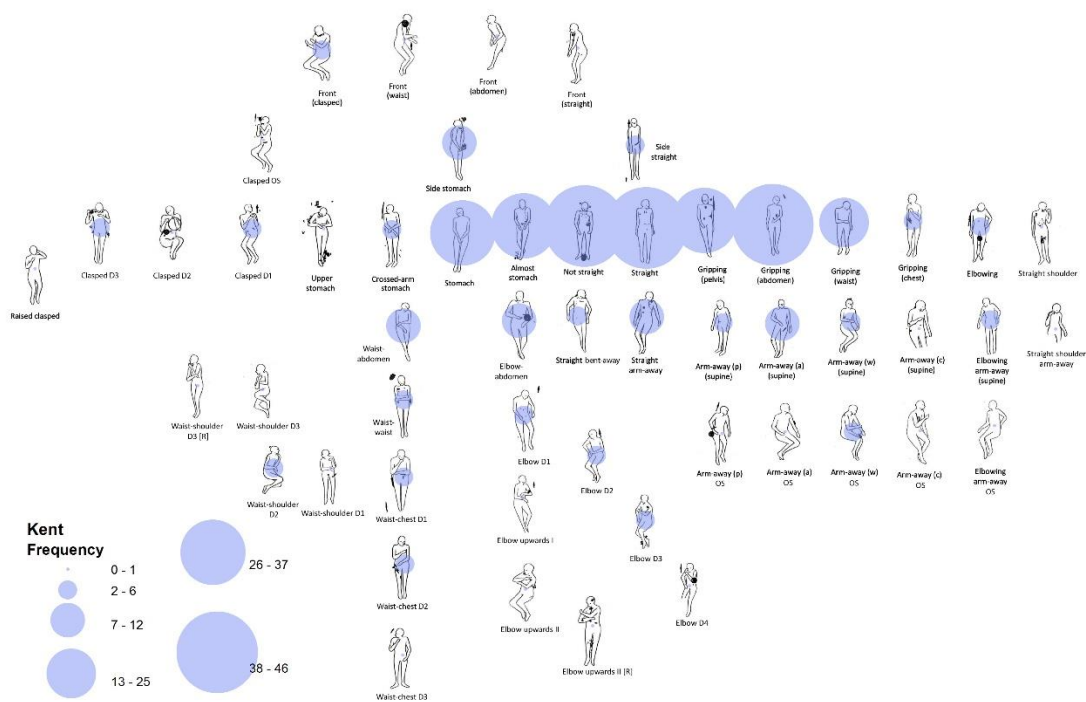
Figure 4.18 Frequency of posture types found in Kent.
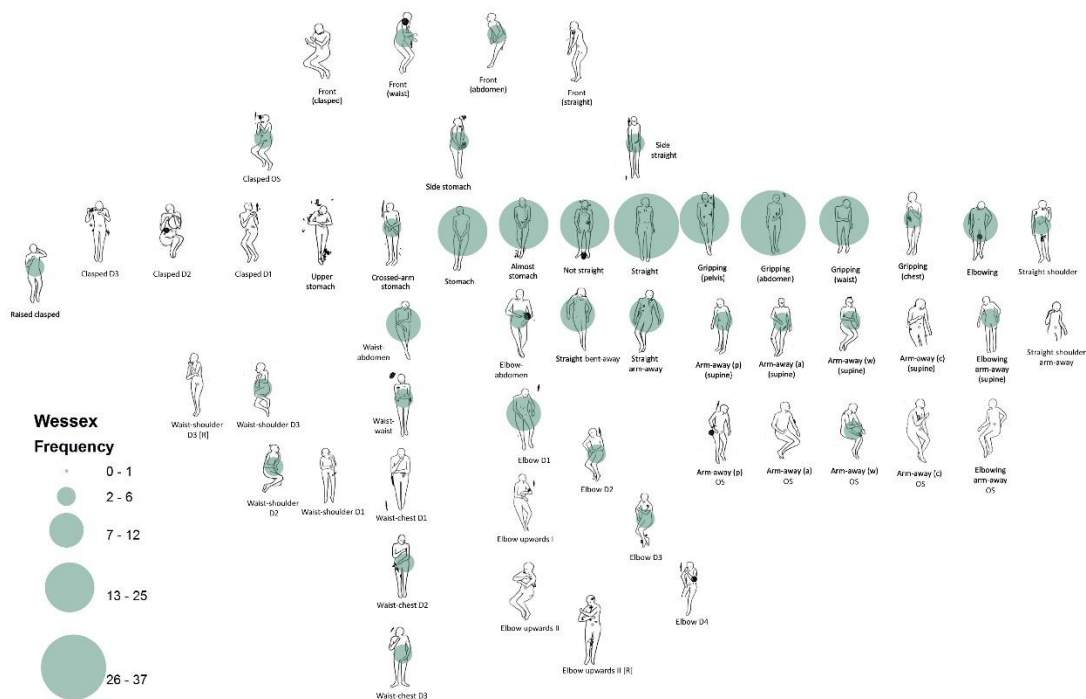
Figure 4.19 Frequency of posture types found in Wessex.
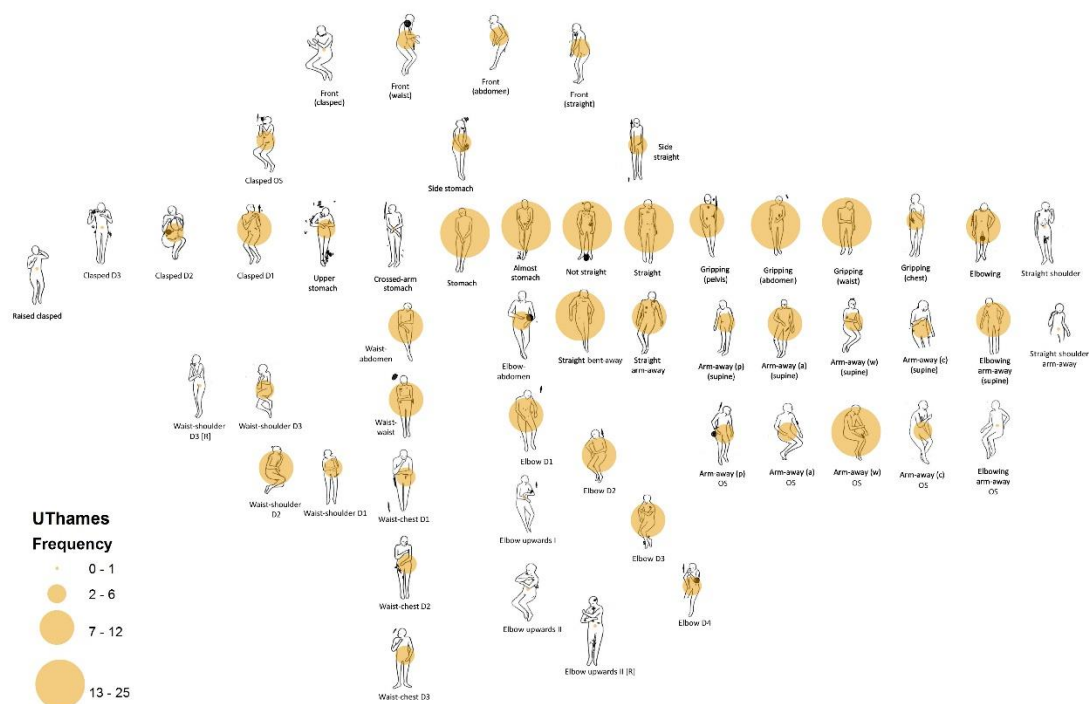
Figure 4.20 Frequency of posture types found in the Upper Thames Valley.
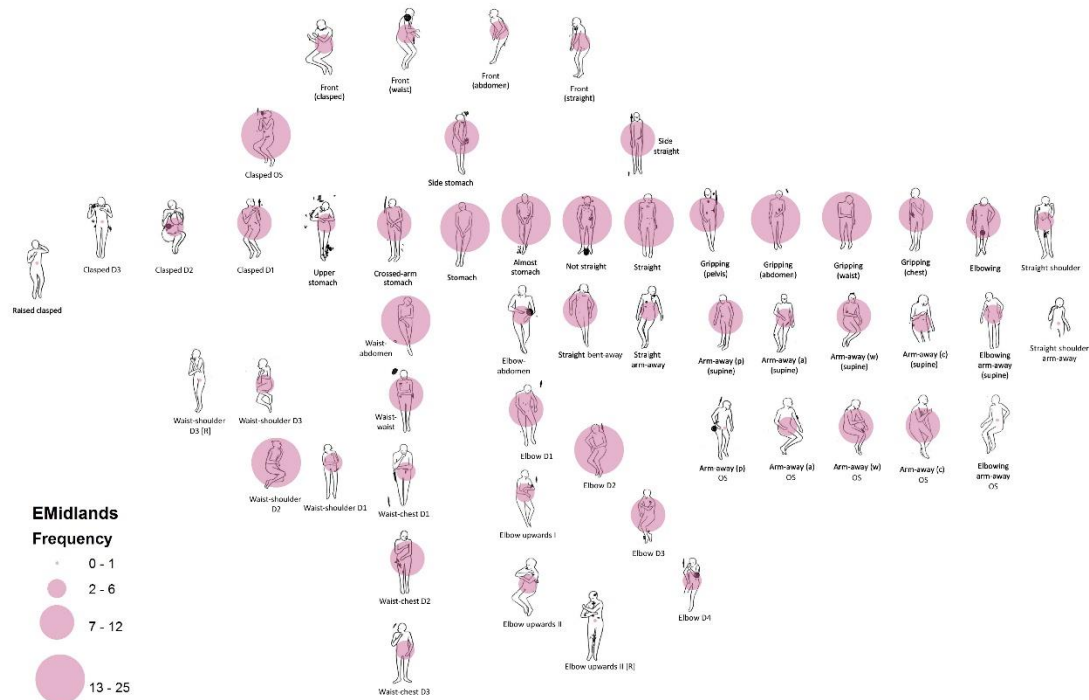
Figure 4.21 Frequency of posture types found in in the East Midlands.
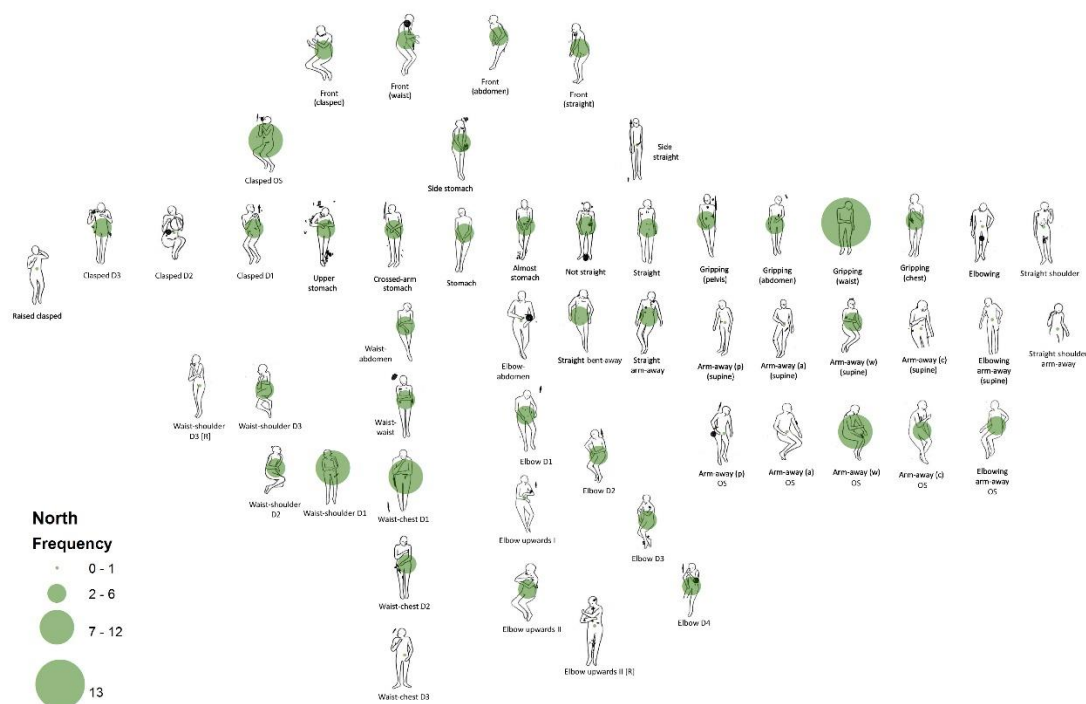
Figure 4.22 Frequency of posture types found in the North of England.

postural variability is the most limited in Kent and Wessex, where the seven main types account for up to 69% of the burials (Figures 4.18 and 4.19). The further north, however, the more variable the burial positions were. The Upper Thames Valley and the East Midlands show much greater degree of variation in their positional repertoires beyond the seven main types (Figures 4.20 and 4.21). The North of England displays the most variability and the least conformity to the seven main types (Figure 4.22). Only 35 out of 161 burials (21.7%) which have been assigned types belonged to the seven main types, of which a third (13 burials) were the 'gripping (waist)' type.

Figure 4.23 shows the relative proportions of type clusters in each cemetery in the data set. In the southern regions, it is clear that three main groups dominate: straight (dark blue), stomach (light blue), and gripping (green) clusters. In fact, these three groups made up over 90% of the burials in Kent where both arms survived: the straight cluster (39%), the stomach cluster (29%), and the gripping cluster (23%). These groups were also the most common type clusters in Wessex, the Upper Thames and the East Midlands, but these regions show much greater variations compared to Kent in their arm-positional repertoires ($p < 0.001$). In

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each of these regions, the elbow (red), the waist-chest (yellow), the clasped (orange), and the front (purple) clusters each amounts to between 3% and 12% of the burials where both arms survived. In the North of England, the gripping, elbow, and waist-chest clusters were the most common groups, although there are notable variations between cemeteries. The straight cluster, prominent in all the other regions, was remarkably rare in this region.

Kent has been known to produce diverse material culture from Anglo-Saxon graves (Hawkes 1956; Richardson 2005: 27–33), but this analysis has shown that, by contrast, body-positioning practice in Kent was very conservative. Meanwhile, Kent shows the strongest evidence for lateral difference in the positioning of arms: the left arm is equally likely to be placed extended or flexed, but the right arm is 62% more likely to be extended than flexed ($p = 0.003$) (Figure 4.24). A similar lateral preference is observed in the Wessex sites, although it is not as strong as in Kent. The other regions do not display significant lateral difference, and the flexed arm position is most commonly observed for both arms. Particular regional practices in Kent might be reflective of its strong surviving late Roman traditions and cultural links with the Continent (Richardson 2005: 53–54, 249–256; Scull 1995; Hawkes 1982), although closer examinations of Roman and Merovingian burial positions are yet to be carried out (see Young 1977). The extended supine position was widely practised in late Romano-British cemeteries, alongside the adoption of west-east orientation by the beginning of the fourth century (Watts 1991: 5, 56). Burials in other positions, such as the crouched or prone position, are often interpreted as pre-Roman and non-Christian practices which occurred and persisted to differing extents in different regions, possibly relating to the differing influence of *Romanitas* in different areas (Watts 1991: 56–58, 196). The prevalence of the extended supine burial position in Kent may suggest a continuity of late-Roman Christian burial practices or management, although the evidence for the survival of Romano-British Christianity in Kent is largely tenuous and problematic (Clay 2003). In light of the nuanced variations in positioning practice identified in the present analysis, there is a need for a critical reassessment of the interpretation of burial positions in the Roman period.

Meanwhile, the North of England displays distinctive positioning practices that contrast strikingly with the rest of England. In particular, the North shows a strong preference for contracted positions: in terms of legs as well as arms. Previous studies have suggested that crouched burials were particularly prominent in northern England (Stoodley 1999; Lucy
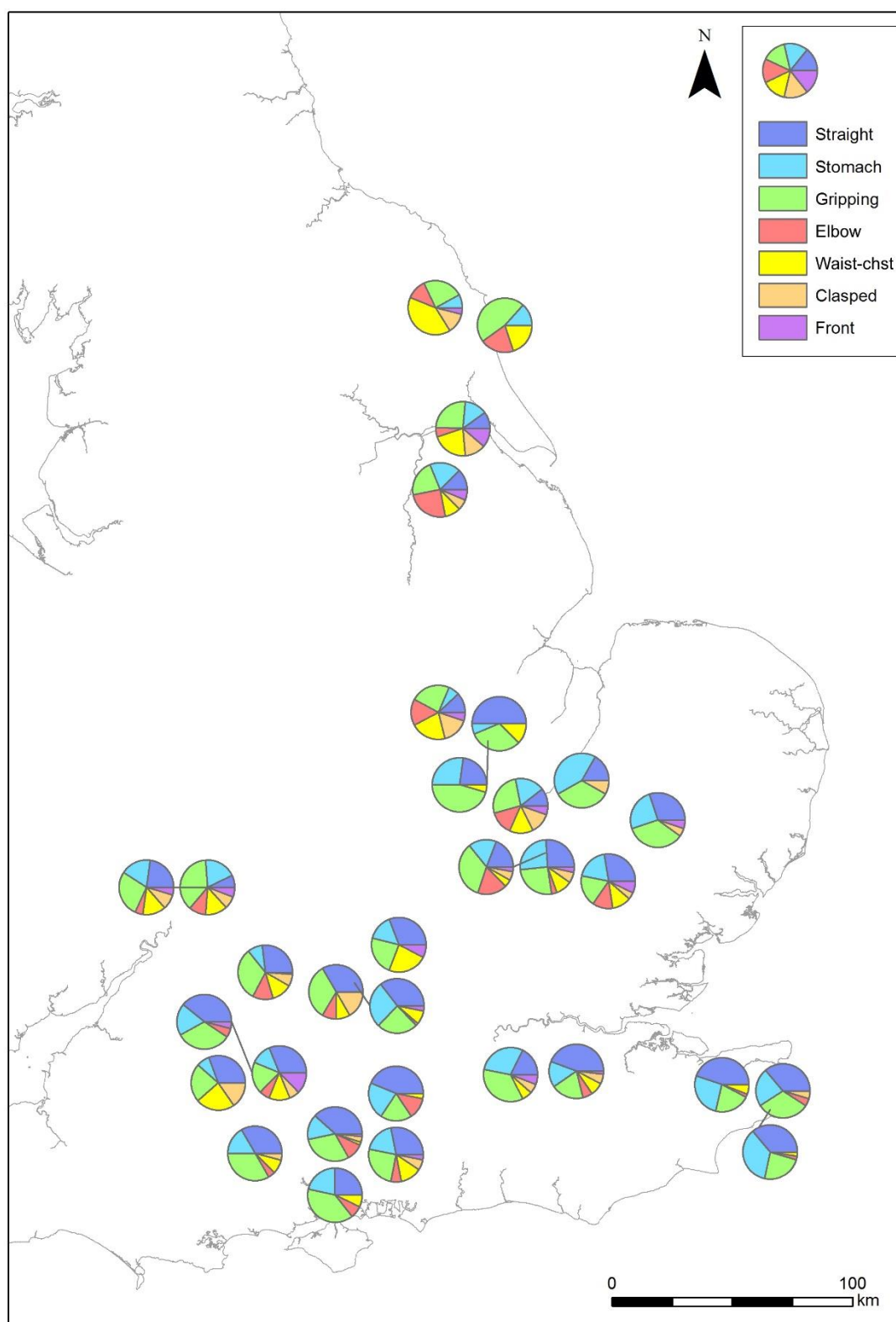
Figure 4.23 Map showing the percentages of type clusters in each cemetery as pie charts.
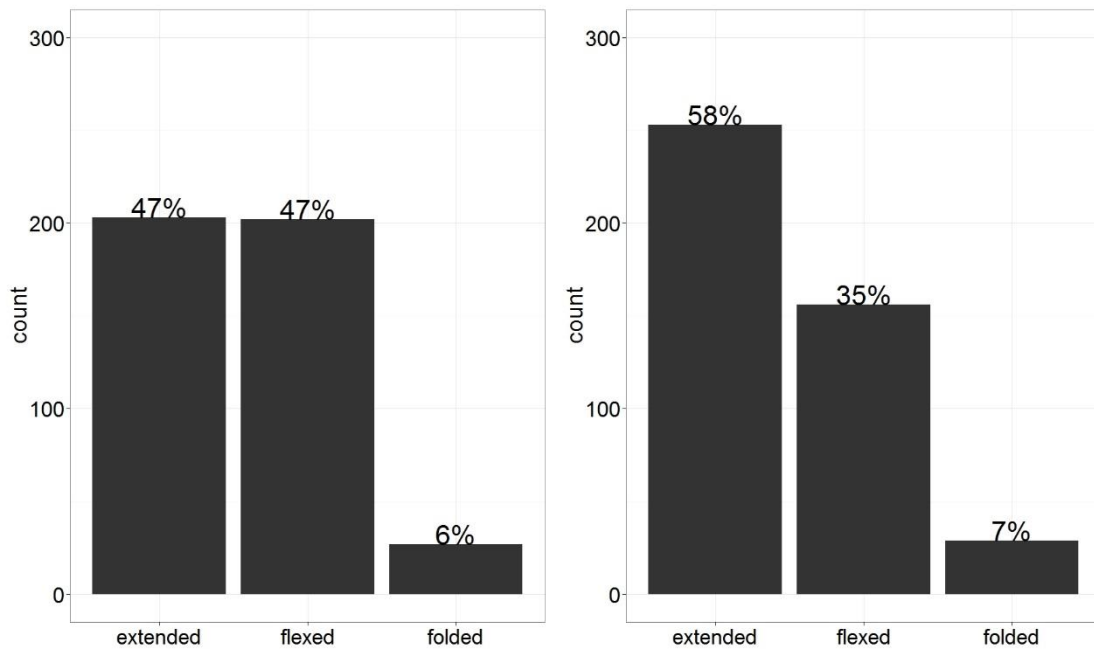
Figure 4.24 (Left) Flexure of left arms in Kent. (Right) Flexure of right arms in Kent.

2000b), and some have argued for indigenous British influence in burial practices (Faull 1977). This prominence of tightly folded burials is supported by the present data, as well as a strong preference for bent arm positions: the tightly folded arm position is almost as common as the flexed position, while the extended arm position made up less than a quarter of the burials with known arm positions. However, nuanced variations in arm-positioning practices suggest that the picture was far from a simple native–Germanic acculturation as previously assumed (see also Lucy 2000b). Given the variations between and within cemeteries, the preference for contracted corpse positions may describe a more localised, family- or community-based management of burial rituals.

It is worth noting that the positioning of arms in Anglo-Saxon burials has hitherto received limited attention, but it is clear from this analysis that arm-positional, gestural preferences varied greatly not only between different parts of England, but also between and within individual cemeteries. Thus, mourners within their local cemetery contexts had greater freedom to perpetuate old practices or to create new ones than our existing archaeological narratives have allowed for. Even though many cemeteries particularly in the southern parts of England show relatively limited variations in arm positioning compared to other regions, it is evident that there was not one standard method of arm positioning, but at least three

(and up to seven, according to the present posture typology) positions were more as less equally preferred. This next section looks at how positional preferences and variations were played out and negotiated in the complex interplay between the body and identity.

4.4 SOCIAL IDENTITY AND THE BODY

'Identity' is a slippery concept, albeit one that has been widely discussed and used in archaeological discourse, and has persisted in the study of early Anglo-Saxon funerary practices since late 1990s and 2000s. While a useful heuristic tool for interpreting variations in the Anglo-Saxon burial record, 'identity' is itself a contested notion with its theoretical implications. The body, on the other hand, no less fluid or contested, provides a material and symbolic site for notions of identities to be created, expressed, and transformed. In positioning the body, the corpse in the tableau creates an image—an 'intersensory, spatial and temporal unit' (Weiss 1999: 10) which embodies the ongoing dialogue between the body of the deceased and the bodies of the mourners, and between corporeality and idealisation. Within this image, the posture of the corpse perpetuated and renegotiated the experience and meanings of the identities of the deceased, of the self, and of others.

Many recent studies have explored the significance of dressing and displaying the body in early medieval funerary rituals, and how dress and bodily adornment reproduced and enacted individual and collective identities of the deceased and the community (Stoodley 1999; Brunning 2013; Martin 2015; Felder 2015). Playing an important part in Anglo-Saxon funerary representations, body positioning could have communicated and negotiated the persona of the deceased, as well as conveying ideas perhaps about their life. The positioning of bodies in funerary practices, therefore, may shed an interesting light on the Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards personhood and society.

4.4.1 Gendered bodies

Previous research has studied and debated gender identity in Anglo-Saxon England with regards to burial practices (Stoodley 1999; Hadley 2004), artefacts (Brunning 2013; Felder 2014), costumes (Brush 1993; Martin 2015), literature (Lees and Overing 2001; Beaumont 2006), diet and activities (Poole 2013), and art (Dockray-Miller 2003; Karkov 2003). For the most part, gender in Anglo-Saxon society has been understood as being relatively consistently linked with biological sex (Lucy 2011: 689). Nevertheless, gender identity has been shown to develop and change through the life course (Stoodley 2000; Gowland 2006;

Cave and Oxenham 2017). The material expressions of gender identities may also vary between individuals, and occasionally contradict the biological sex of the skeleton (see Stoodley 1999: 76; Lucy 2011: 692). Thus, on the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon perception of gender was intimately linked with the physicality of bodies and the temporal existence of individuals. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxon gender identities were actively and dynamically constructed, and expressed and understood within their cultural context.

The present data show notable gender-related patterns in body positioning in early Anglo-Saxon inhumations. Of the burials with known method of body deposition, 82% of the male burials and 80% of the female burials were deposited supine, but for the unsexed burials (albeit less than half of which survived well enough for deposition to be discernible), only 64% were supine, while one-sided burials amount to 33%. Looking at gender by grave goods, the picture is more interesting. An overwhelming 84% of burials with weapons were buried supine, while 78% of graves with feminine artefacts were supine. Supine burials in gender indeterminate burials amount to 73%, and 71% in graves with no finds. In terms of the flexure of legs, burials with masculine assemblages are again the least varied group, with 70% of them buried extended, 19% flexed, and 11% folded. In contrast, extended burials amount
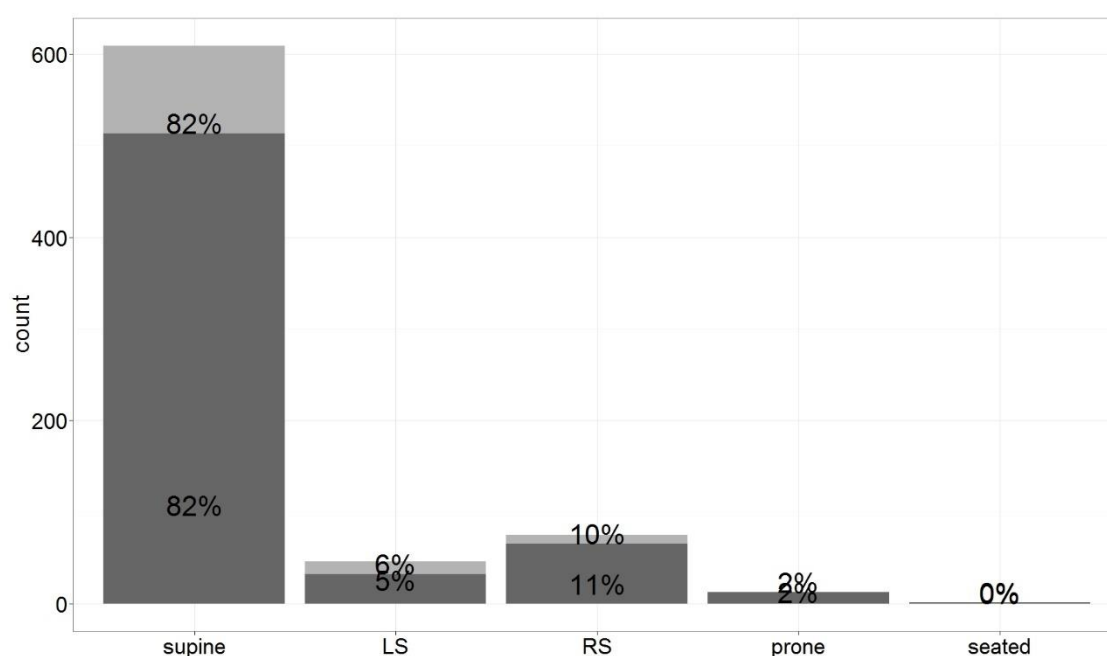
Figure 4.25 Deposition of the body in male burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain male skeletons and the light bars, those of possible male skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain male skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain and possible male skeletons.
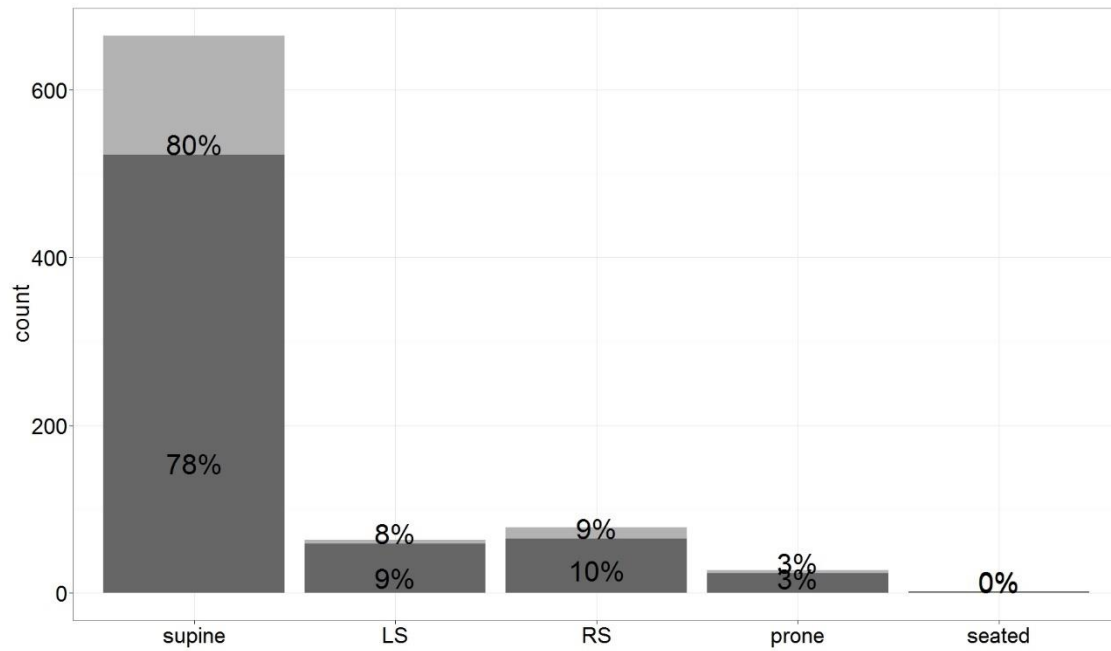
Figure 4.26 Deposition of the body in female burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain female skeletons and the light bars, those of possible female skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain female skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain and possible female skeletons.
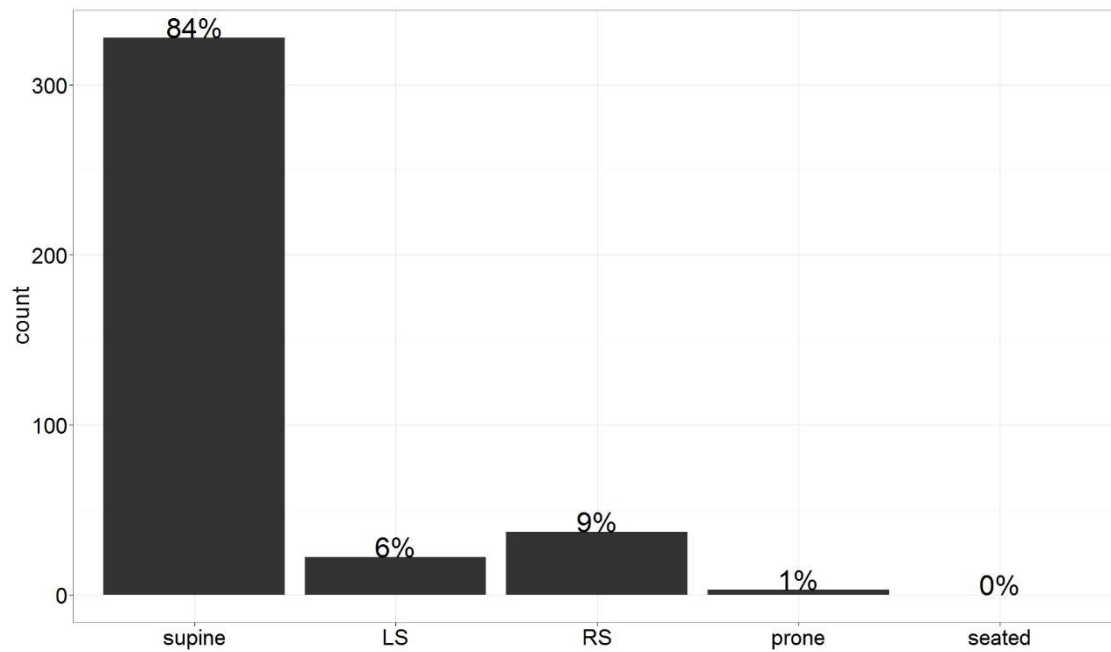
Figure 4.27 Deposition of the body in burials with masculine assemblages.
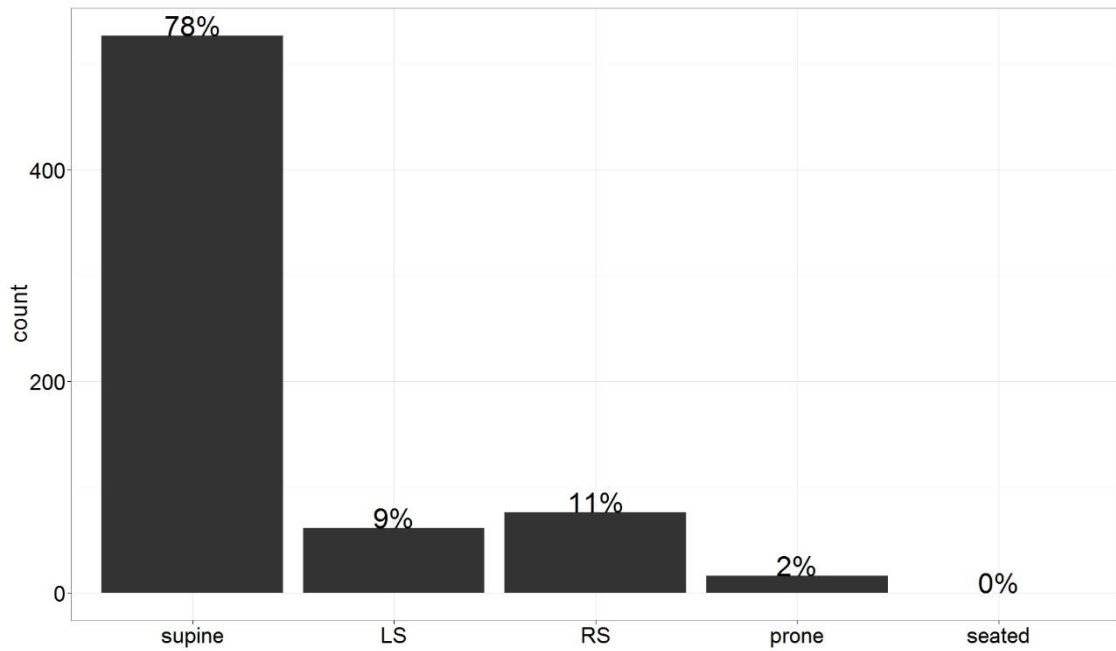
Figure 4.28 Deposition of the body in burials with feminine assemblages.
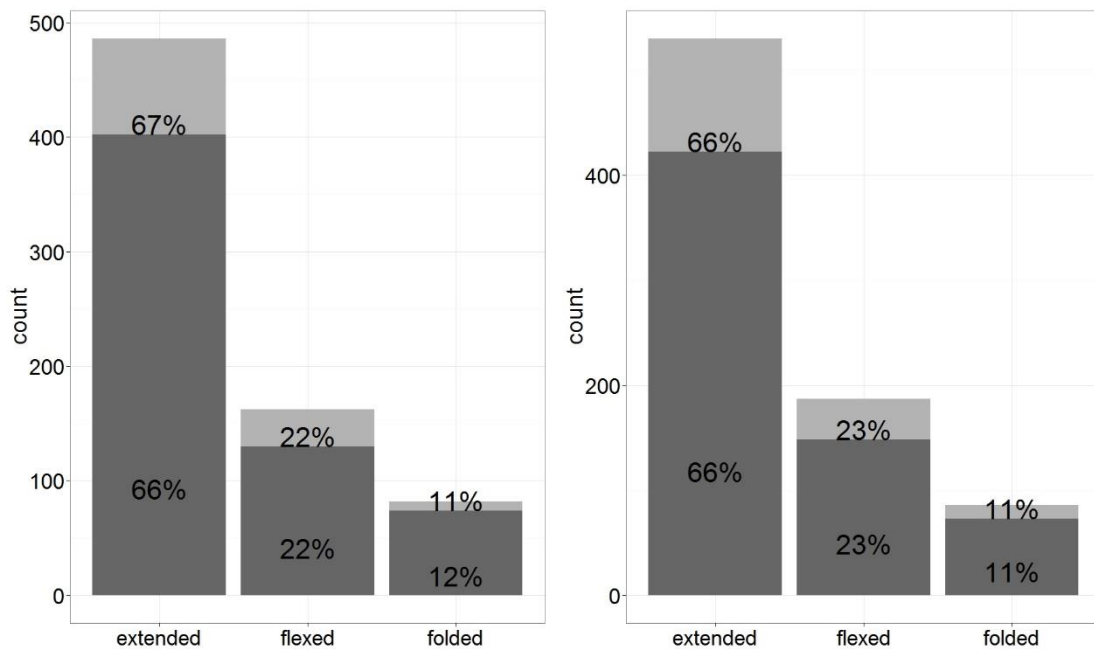
Figure 4.29 (Left) Leg flexure in male burials. (Right) Leg flexure in female burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain-sexed skeletons and the light bars, those of possible-sexed skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain-sexed skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain- and possible-sexed skeletons.
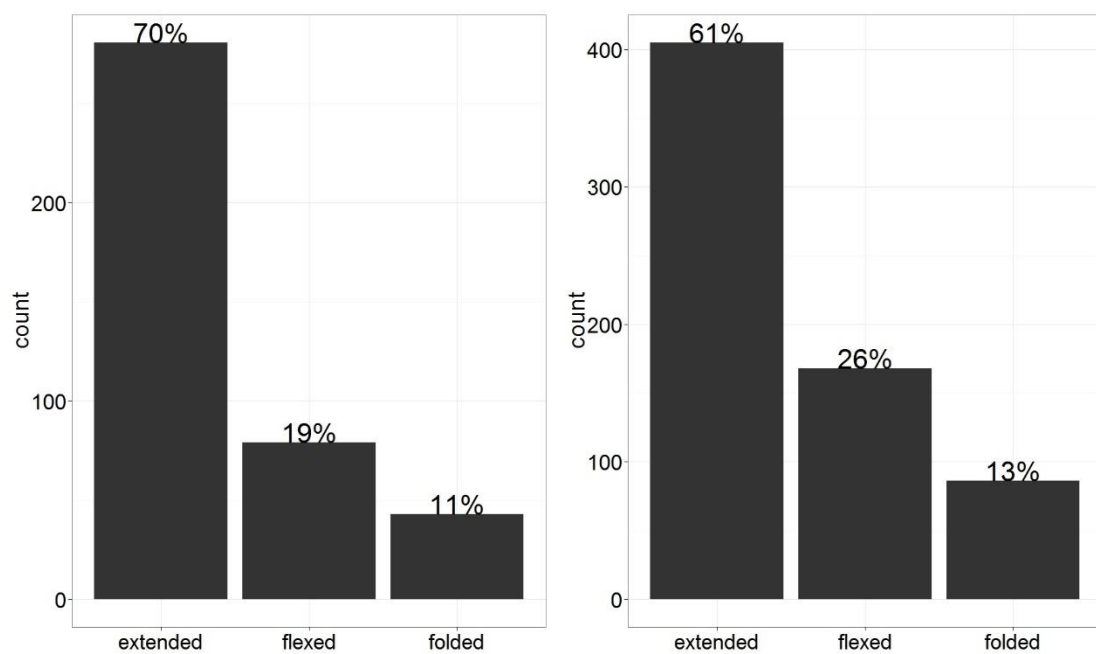
Figure 4.30 (Left) Leg flexure in burials with masculine assemblages. (Right) Leg flexure in burials with feminine assemblages.
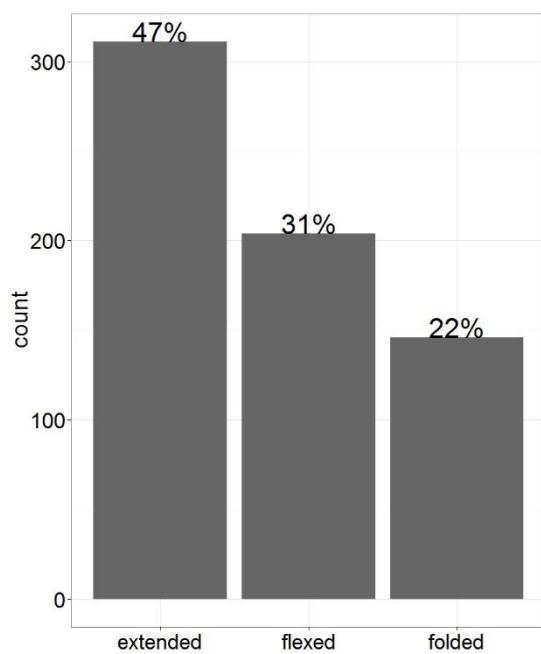
Figure 4.31 Leg flexure in unsexed burials.
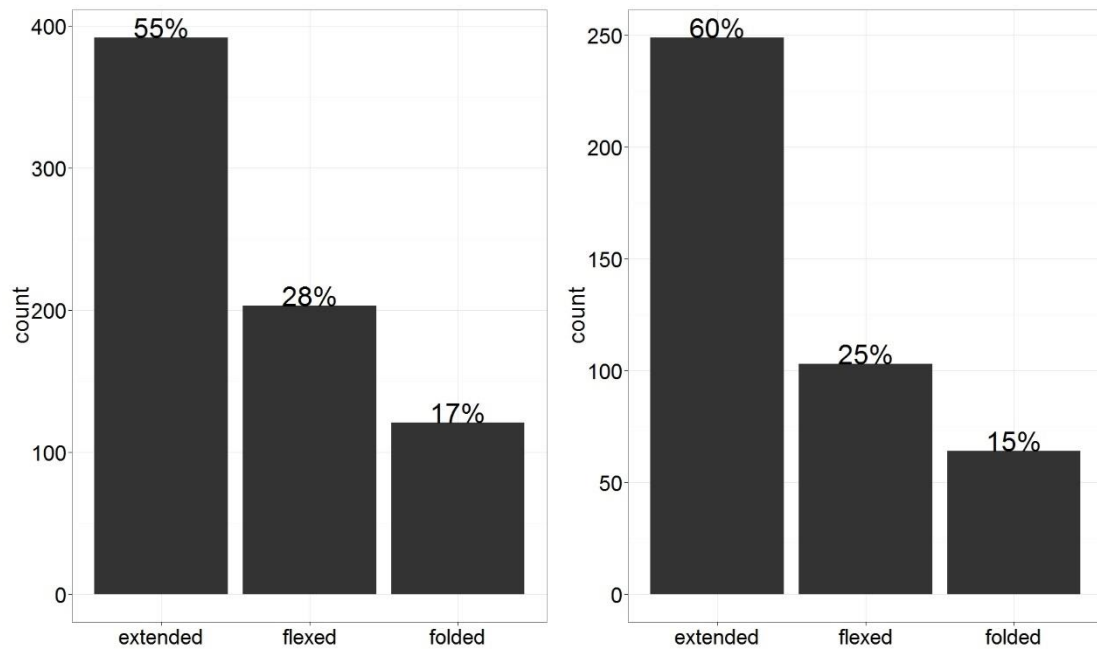
Figure 4.32 (Left) Leg flexure in burials with gender indeterminate assemblages. (Right) Leg flexure in burials with no finds.

to 61% in graves with feminine assemblages, 55% in graves with gender indeterminate assemblages, and 60% in graves with no finds. In short, male burials, particularly those with weapons, were more likely to be positioned in accordance with the positional norm of the extended supine position than other burials (results of all four χ^2 tests yield $p < 0.001$).

There is notable gender difference in arm positioning in the present data (Figures 4.33–36). Among male burials, the extended arm position is the most common (45% of left arms and 50% of right arms). Meanwhile, the flexed arm position assumes majority in female burials, with 47% and 41% (left and right arms respectively) buried flexed. The folded arm position amounts to only 15% of arms (both left and right) in male burials, but it is more common in female burials (19% and 21% of left and right arms respectively). In other words, male burials were more likely to be buried with extended arms than bent arms, but this is reversed in female burials ($p > 0.001$, both left and right). In particular, the tightly folded arm is more strongly associated with female burials. The association between the bent arm and women is also reflected in burials with feminine assemblages. Nearly half of the burials with feminine assemblages with known arm positions were buried with flexed arms, about a third with extended arms. The graves with masculine assemblages, however, show little differential preference between flexed and extended arms ($p = 0.035$ (left) and $p < 0.001$ (right)).

The association between female burials and the bent arm is suggestive of a body image expressed in a compact, contained posture, which might have been associated with femininity, contrasting with an 'open', wide, masculine posture (Martin 2014: 30–32). Arranging arms in flexed or folded positions may allude to an embracing posture, which might have been linked with the idea that the feminine body was timid, petite, and gracile compared with the masculine body. In fact, the elbow cluster of posture types is much more strongly associated with female burials (F=55, F?=9, total=64) than male (M=20, M?=2, total=22) or unsexed burials (total=38) ($p < 0.001$) (see Table 4.1). 59 burials with feminine goods in the data set were associated with the elbow cluster, compared to only 17 burials with weapons. The embracing posture might have hinted at the female role in caring for the family and children. This link may be reflected in a handful of multiple burials in the present dataset, where women and children were intimately arranged, such as Emp 79 and Lec 81. In each case, the woman was arranged with her arm(s) around the child, as if hugging it. The implications of body positioning in multiple burials will be further explored in Chapter Five.

The desire to express the feminine body as compact and petite may be reflected in leg
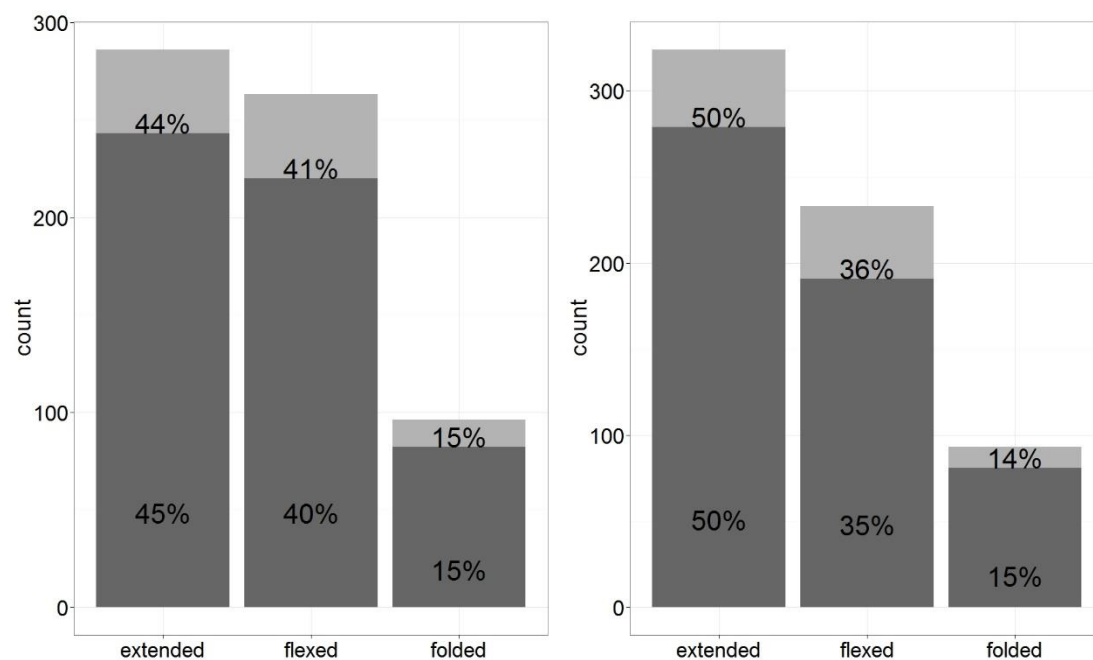
Figure 4.33 (Left) Flexure of left arms in male burials. (Right) Flexure of right arms in male burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain male skeletons and the light bars, those of possible male skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain male skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain and possible male skeletons.
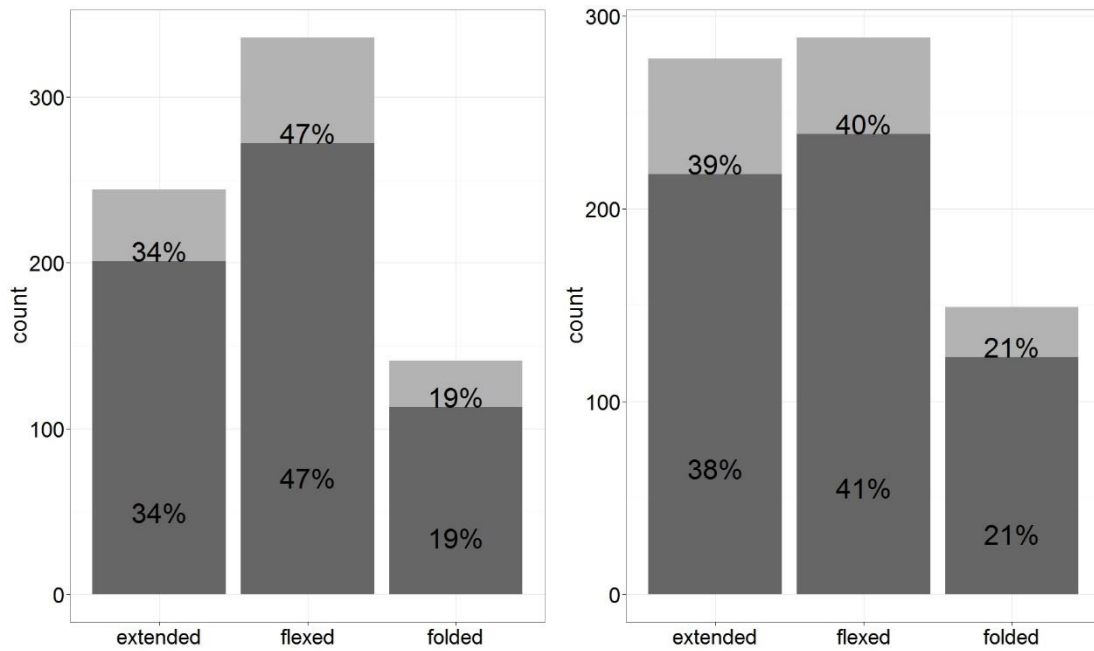
Figure 4.34 (Left) Flexure of left arms in female burials. (Right) Flexure of right arms in female burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain female skeletons and the light bars, those of possible female skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain female skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain and possible female skeletons.
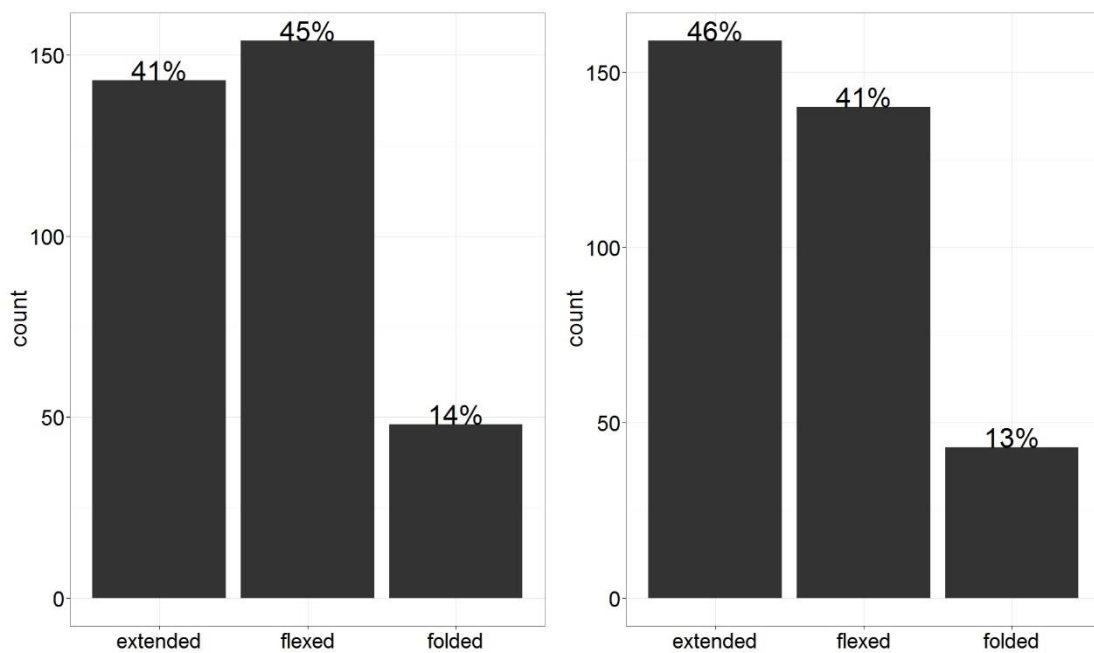
Figure 4.35 (Left) Flexure of left arms in burials with masculine assemblages. (Right) Flexure of right arms in burials with masculine assemblages.
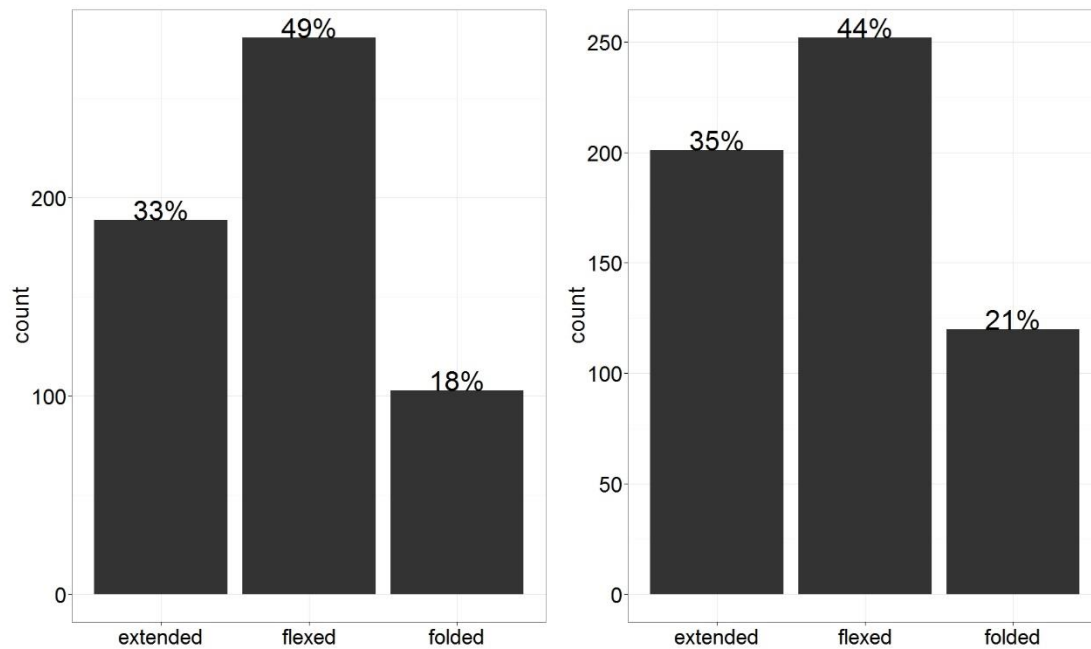
Figure 4.36 (Left) Flexure of left arms in burials with feminine assemblages. (Right) Flexure of right arms in burials with feminine assemblages.
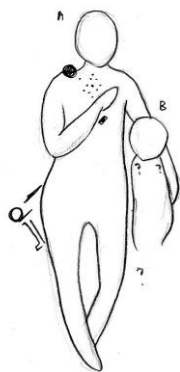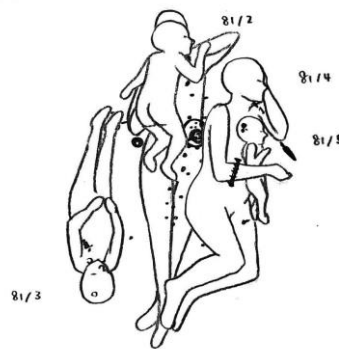
Emp 79   Lec 81

Figure 4.37 Emp 79 and Lec 81.

positioning as well, as female burials (4%) and burials with feminine artefacts (5%) appear less likely to be buried with splayed legs than their male or masculine counterparts (both 7%) ($p = 0.002$). In practical terms, this might also have been a result of the restrictions of clothing: longer gowns or undergarments worn by women (Owen-Crocker 1986: 34, 72) might have limited the space for the legs to manoeuver, both during the funeral when the corpse was arranged and as the body decomposed. The body language afforded by

positioning communicated feminine bodily ideals, which could corroborate the representation of womanhood alongside costumes, dress accessories, jewellery, spindle whorls, girdle hangers, and other objects associated with femininity (Brush 1993; Stoodley 1999; Felder 2014).

The crossed leg position is particularly associated with male graves and burials with masculine assemblages, as these two groups have higher percentages of crossed position relative to other sex or gender groups (10% and 11% respectively, compared to 6–8% in female, unsexed, feminine, indeterminate, or no finds groups, $p = 0.018$). It is possible that positioning the feet crossed had the practical function of helping to keep the legs and feet in place, but it might also have other, possibly symbolic, implications. In the triple grave Emp 26, all three bodies had their feet arranged in the crossed position. Given the close attention paid to the feet positioning of these bodies, it seems reasonable to suggest that it was intentionally executed. In the double burial Oak 78, the adult female was buried prone with extended legs and crossed feet. It is noted by the excavators that the crossing of feet may suggest that the feet were tied, although they also note that this interpretation is rooted in the assumption that the prone position implies punitive circumstances, and the same interpretation would not have been made for supine burials with crossed feet (Sayer 2013: 39).

From the present data set, the number of prone female burials (F=23, F?=4, total=27) is double that of prone male burials (M=12, M?=1, total=13). Additionally, there are four prone unsexed adults and 14 unsexed subadults. Prone burial is often considered 'deviant' rite by archaeologists (Arcini 2009; Murphy 2008), and while such practices offer interesting

Emp 26   Oak 78
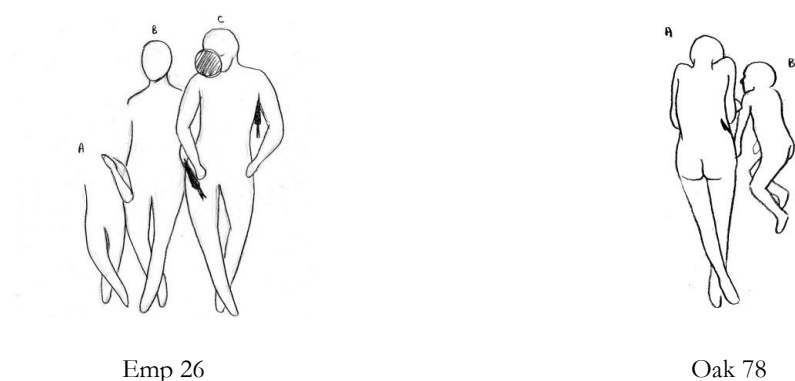
Figure 4.38 Emp 26 and Oak 78.
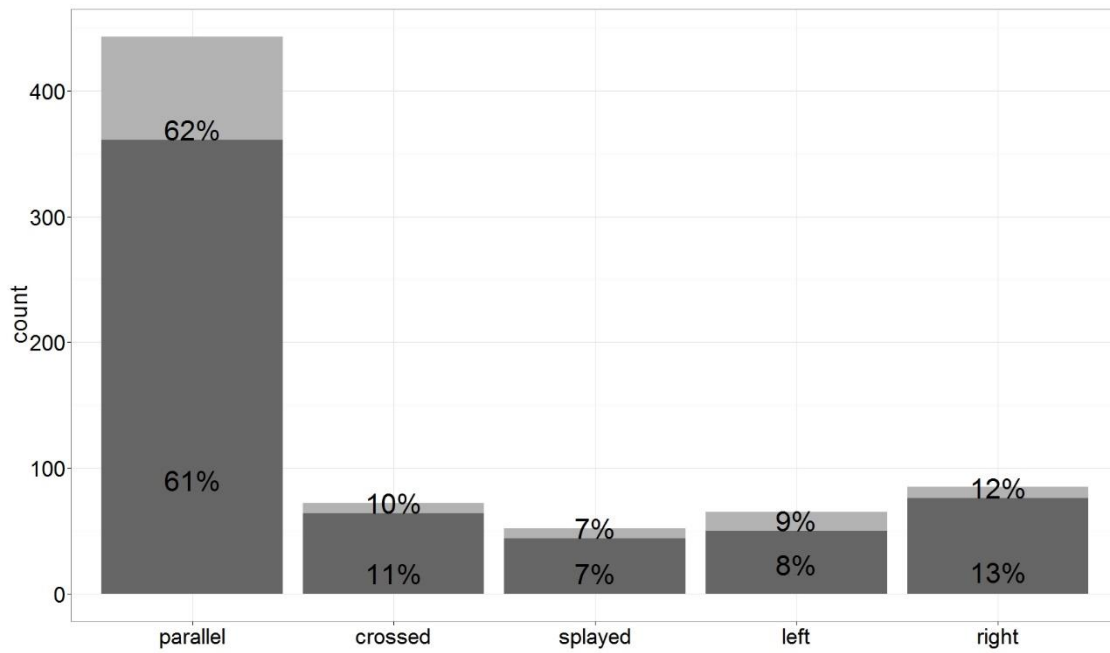
Figure 4.39 Leg placement in male burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain male skeletons and the light bars, those of possible male skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain male skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain and possible male skeletons.
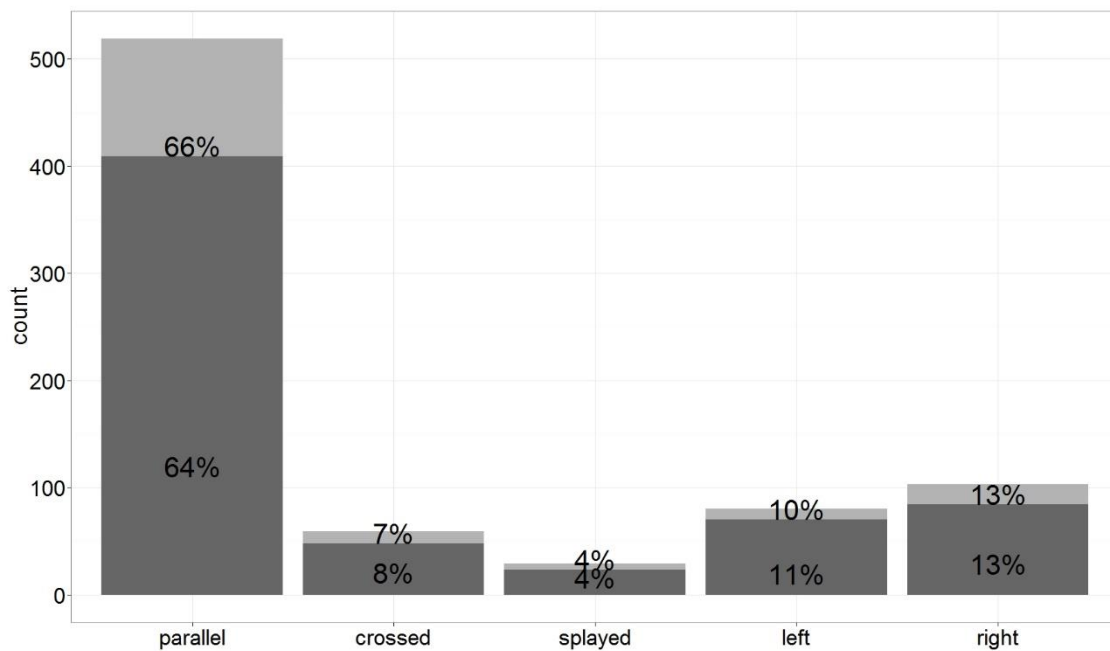
Figure 4.40 Leg placement in female burials. The darker bars represent the counts of certain male skeletons and the light bars, those of possible male skeletons. The bottom row of percentage values includes only certain male skeletons; the top row of percentage values includes both certain and possible male skeletons.

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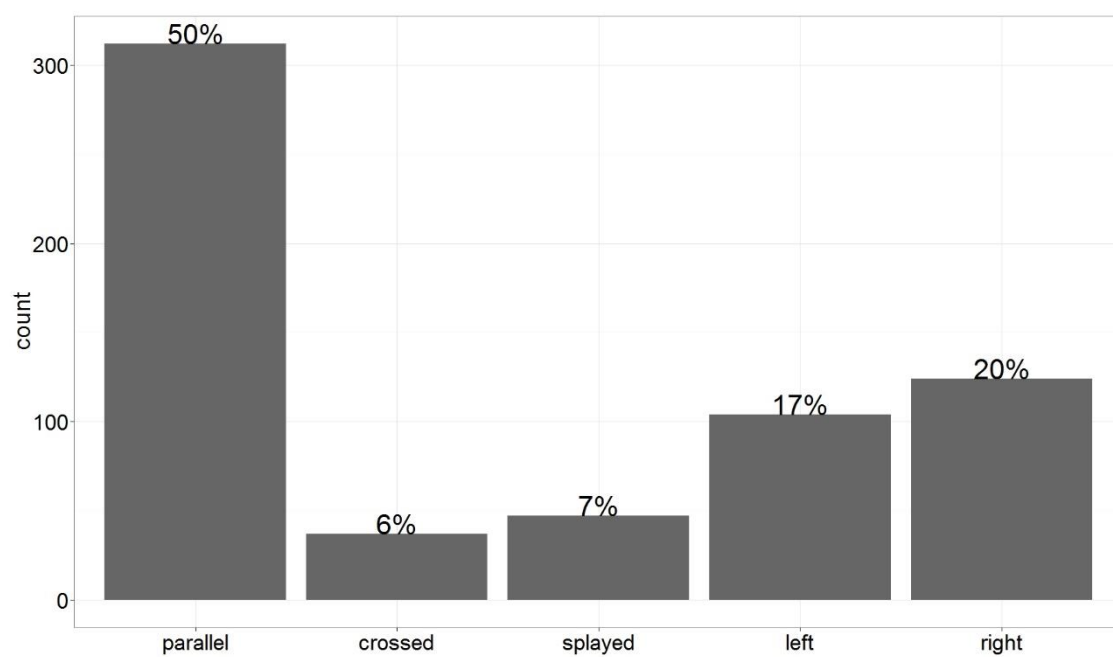
Figure 4.41 Leg placement in unsexed burials.
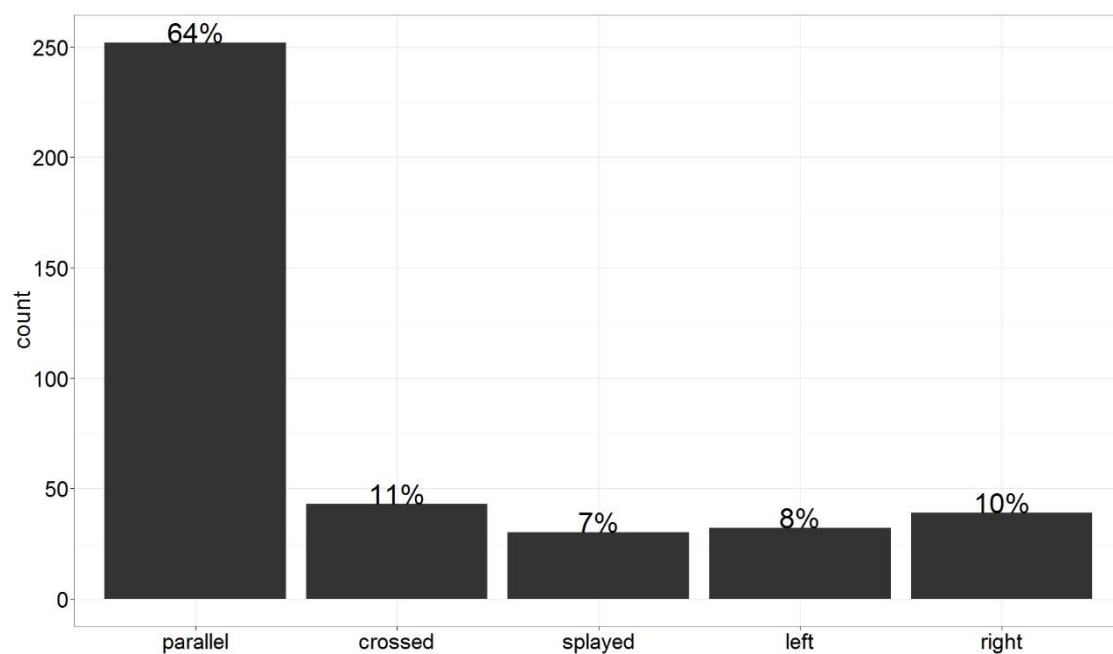
Figure 4.42 Leg placement in burials with masculine assemblages.
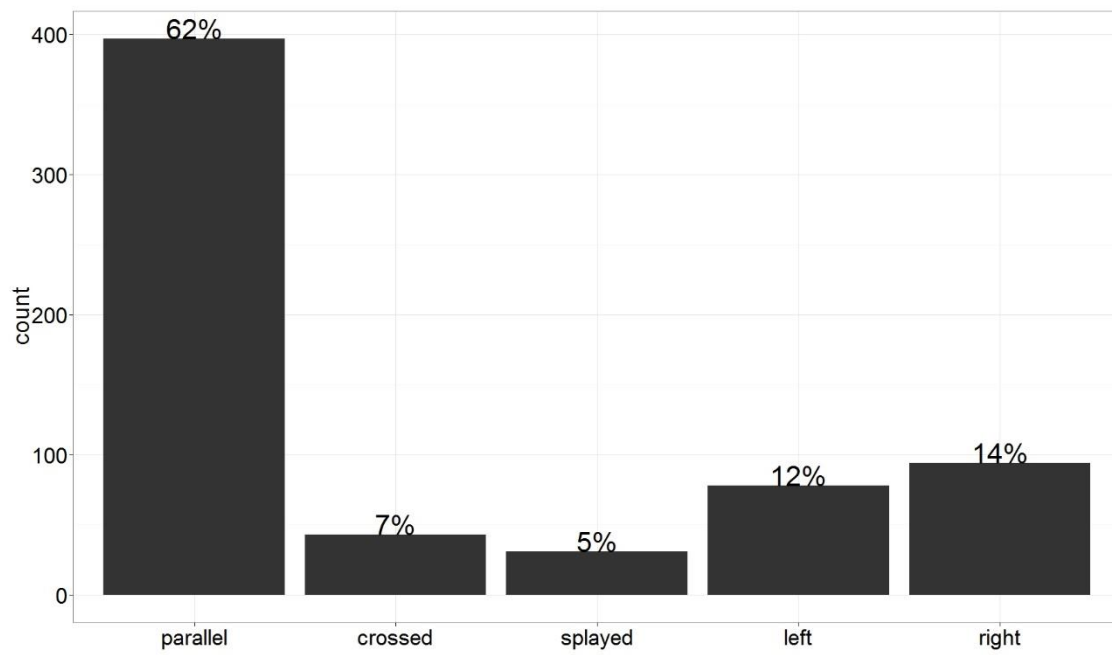
Figure 4.43 Leg placement in burials with feminine assemblages.
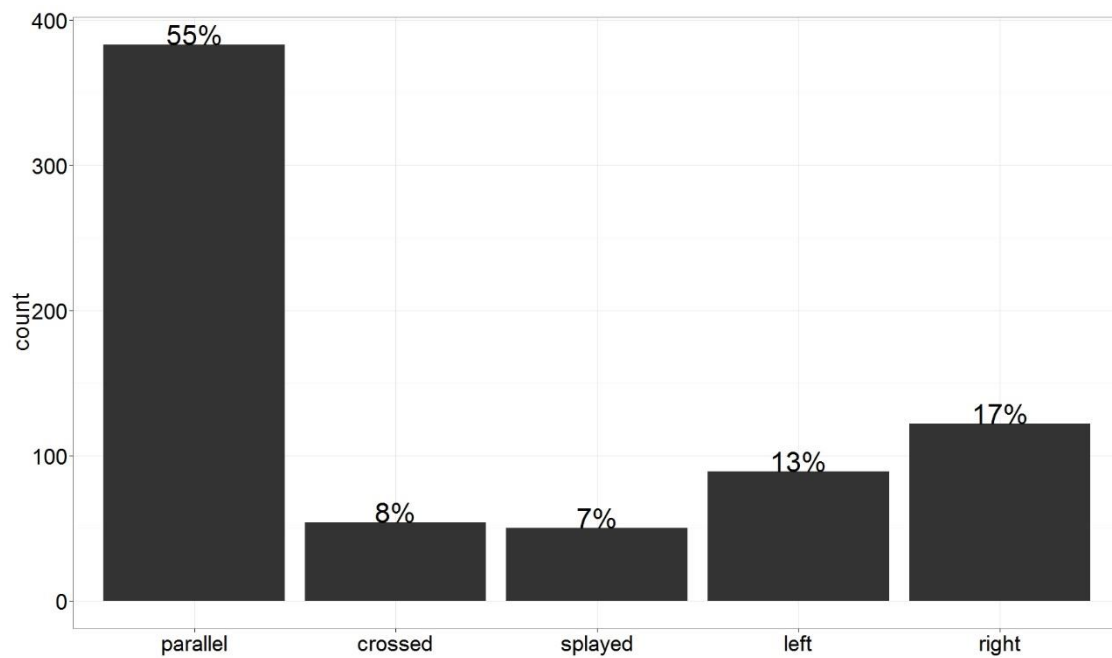
Figure 4.44 Leg placement in burials with gender indeterminate assemblages.

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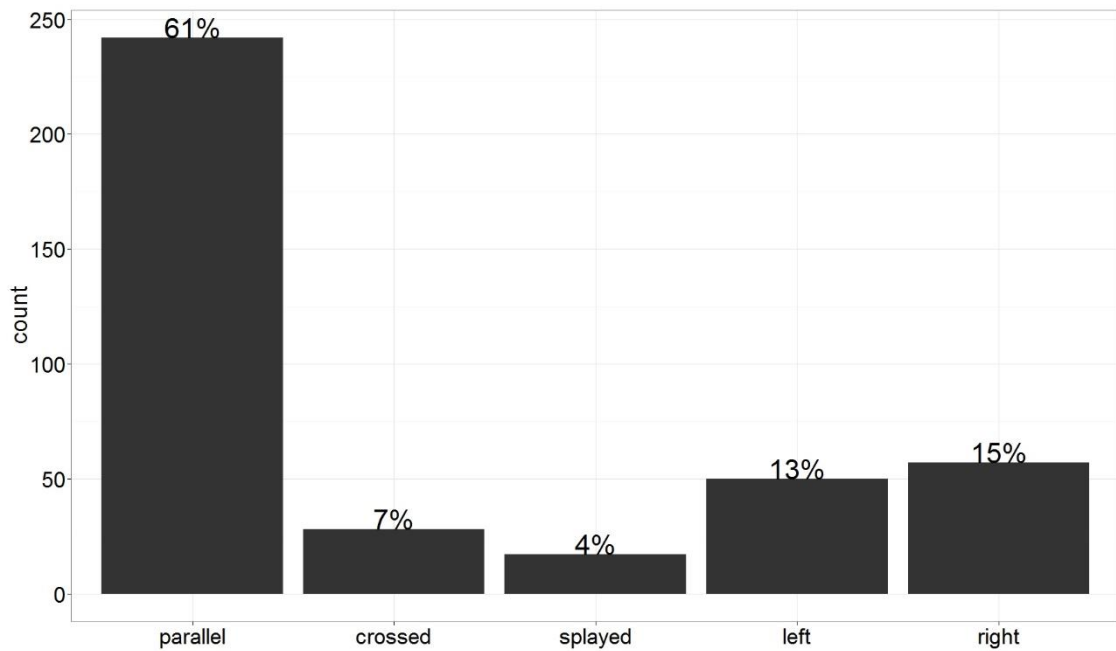
Figure 4.45 Leg placement in burials with no finds.

insights into past judicial activities and attitudes towards social outcasts, it is not the present study's primary concern to explore in great detail deviant burials from Anglo-Saxon contexts, as it has been dealt with extensively in previous studies (Harman et al 1981; Reynold 2009; see also Klevnäs 2013). In discussing gender identities at play in corpse positioning, there are a few points worth highlighting. It has been stated in previous studies that, in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, there were more prone female burials than there were male ones (Harman et al 1981: 187–188; Sherlock and Welch 1992: 26; Reynolds 2009: 72–75). In his sample of 115 prone burials from 60 cemeteries, Reynolds (2009: 72) recorded 37 males, 52 females, 17 unsexed adults, and 9 unsexed juveniles. Notably, 15 burials from his sample were exceptionally well-furnished female burials, which may be suggestive of their special status in society, possibly representing the so-called 'cunning women' (Reynolds 2009: 73–74). 'Cunning women' refer to a group of females whose graves which contained seemingly peculiar objects, such as shells, glass, coins, fossils or broken pieces of artefacts, sometimes placed in bags (Meaney 1981; Dickinson 1993). It has been argued that these 'cunning women' represent ritual specialists or individuals with magic power, and prone burial might have a special practice that corroborated the peculiarity of these graves (Reynolds 2009: 73).

The notion that women, or at least some women, had some kind of ritual power raises interesting questions relating to the symbolic significance of gender difference and gender roles in early Anglo-Saxon society. Helen Geake (2003) suggests that these 'cunning women' might have also assumed the role of burial specialists, overseeing funerals and transmitting knowledge regarding funerary preparations. Even though the majority of prone burials were female, there were still a significant number of males and children that were buried prone, not to mention great variations in terms of the range of grave furnishing. In the present data, most of the prone burials contained no finds (41% of all prone graves), but three prone burials contained weapons, six were buried with feminine objects, 19 were poorly furnished with gender indeterminate finds. Given the significant inter- and intra-site variations in body positioning discussed in Section 4.3, it seems more likely that a variety of viable interpretations exist for prone burial rite, and that it was practised for different reasons in different communities at different times.

4.4.2 Age and death

Like sex and gender, age is both physical and cultural: different societies and cultures construct their understanding of ageing and maturity differently, marked by events such as learning to walk or talk, initiation, marriage, childbirth, widowhood, and so on; meanwhile, age cannot be understood as a purely social construct but is fundamentally linked with the physiology of the body and its changes over time, including puberty, maturity, and degeneration (Sofaer 2006: 119–124; Gowland 2006; Gowland and Thompson 2013). In studying age in the funerary record, the issue is more complex because individuals might die at the 'wrong time'—whether it be that the individual was too young and their life perceived as having been 'cut short', or that it implicated unsettling consequences as a result of the person's death (for instance, a woman who died and left behind young children). Crucially, age and gender are not distinct but they overlap with each other: the gender role of the individual shifted as they aged. Taken as a whole, age as an object of interrogation may reveal not only the Anglo-Saxon perception of ageing and the life course, but also their responses to life, death, and the life that could have been.

In the present data, infants (aged 0–2) were almost twice as likely to be buried one-sided (37% left-sided and 30% right-sided) than supine (33%) (Figure 4.44). The older the individual, however, the more likely he or she was buried in a supine position. 61% of the burials with known deposition among young children (2–6) were buried supine, 72% among

older children (6–12), and 74% among adolescents (12–17) (Figures 4.44 and 4.45). The supine majority is the most prominent in the young adult group (17–25) at 82%, and it falls to 79% and 80% in middle adult (25–40) and mature adult (40+) groups respectively ($p <$ 0.001) (Figures 4.46 and 4.47). A similar trend is observed for leg positions: it was three times more likely for infants to be buried with bent legs than with extended legs, and almost twice more likely for young children (aged 2–6) (Figures 4.47 and 4.48). Older children (aged 6–12) and adolescents (aged 12–17) were equally likely to be buried extended or flexed; but by adulthood (aged 17+), two-thirds of the burials with known leg positions were buried extended (Figures 4.49 and 4.50). The splayed position is also more prominent among infants and young children, amounting to 14% and 17% respectively, but it is much rarer in other
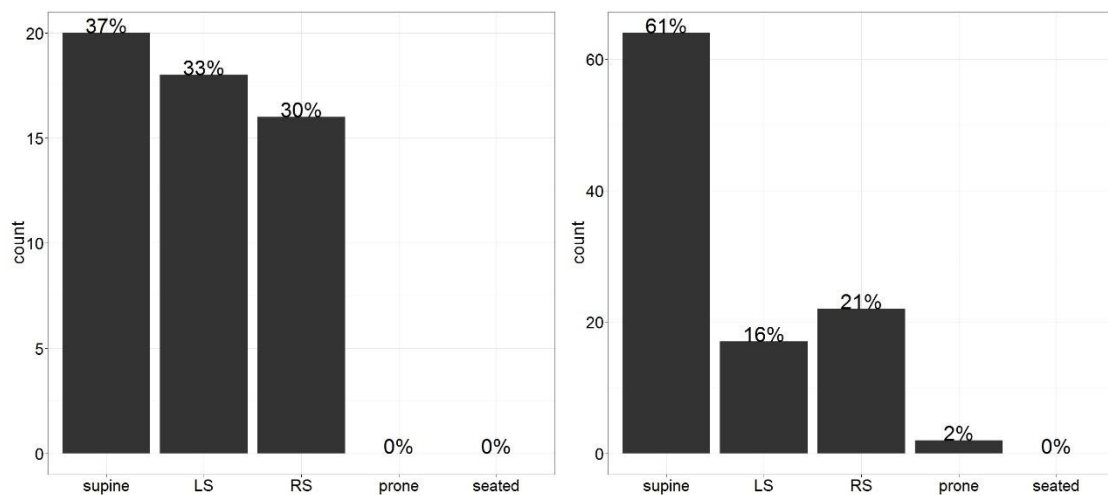
Figure 4.46 (Left) Deposition of the body in the age group (0–2). (Right) Deposition of the body in the age group (2–6).
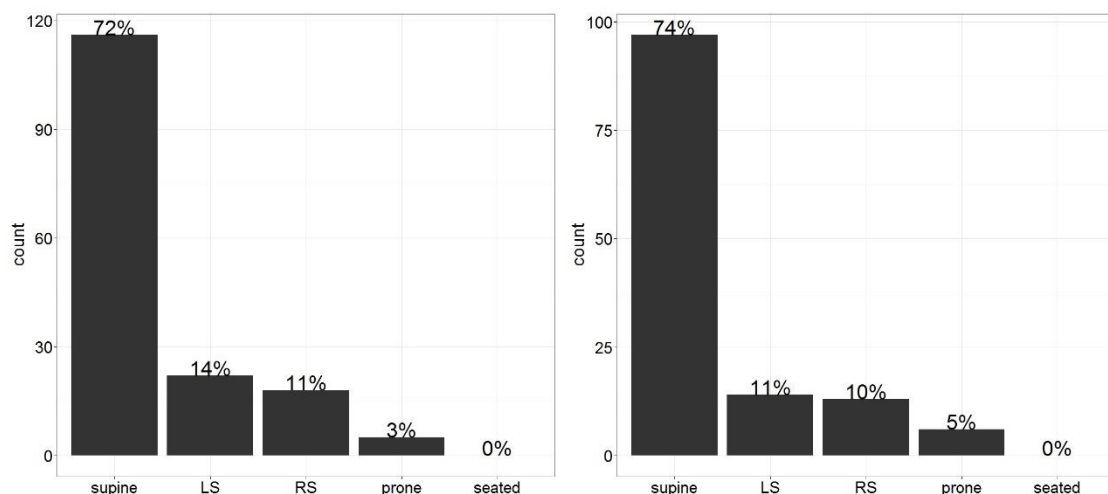
Figure 4.47 (Left) Deposition of the body in the age group (6–12). (Right) Deposition of the body in the age group (12–17).
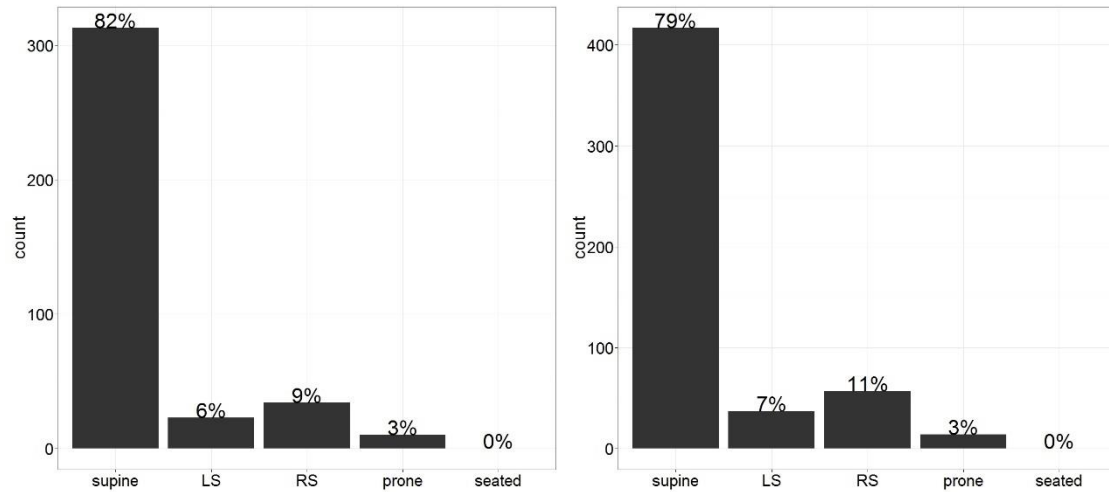
Figure 4.48 (Left) Deposition of the body in the age group (17–25). (Right) Deposition of the body in the age group (25–40).
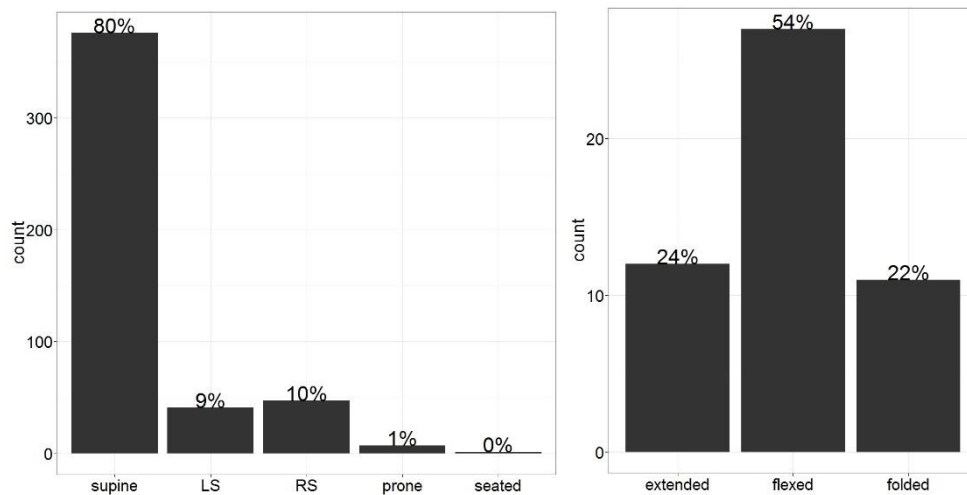
Figure 4.49 (Left) Deposition of the body in the age group (40+). (Right) Leg flexure in the age group (0–2).
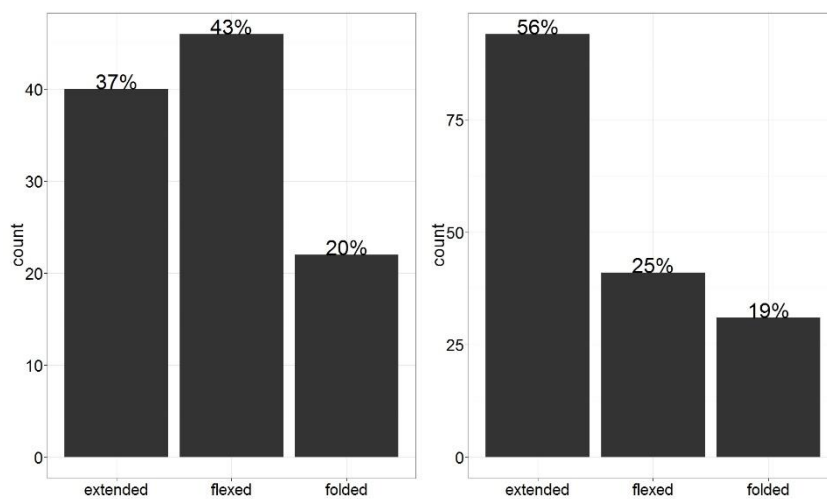
Figure 4.50 (Left) Leg flexure in the age group (2–6). (Right) Leg flexure in the age group (6–12).
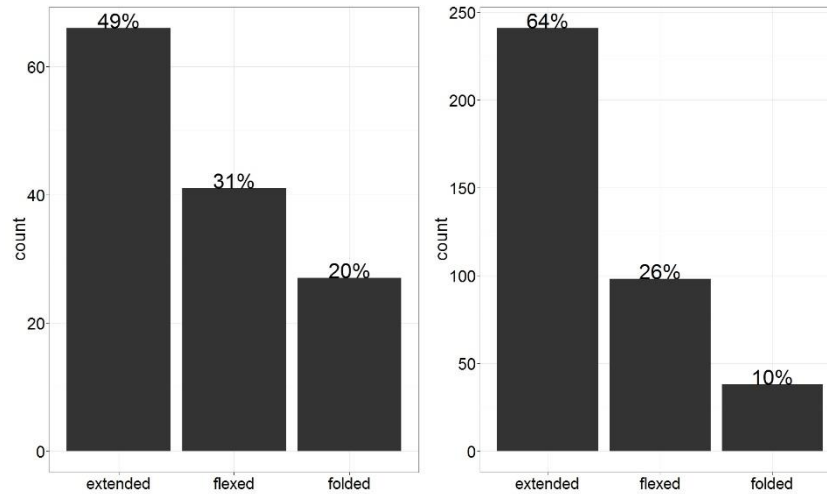
Figure 4.51 (Left) Leg flexure in the age group (12–17). (Right) Leg flexure in the age group (17–25).

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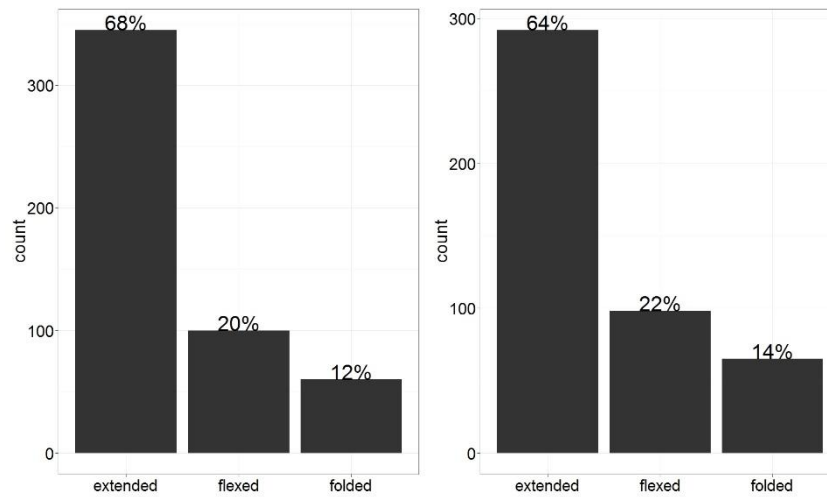
Figure 4.52 (Left) Leg flexure in the age group (25–40). (Right) Leg flexure in the age group (40+).
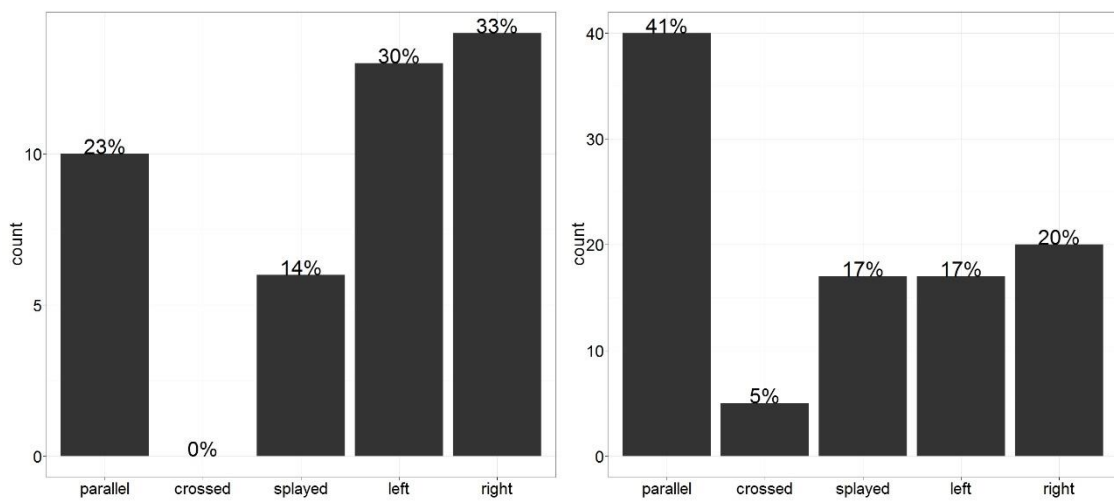
Figure 4.53 (Left) Leg placement in the age group (0–2). (Right) Leg placement in the age group (2–6).

age groups at between 4% and 6% respectively ($p < 0.001$) (Figure 4.51). Results for age-related patterns in arm-positioning are not conclusive, but it is important to note that arm-positional information survives less well than body deposition and leg positions. This is particularly true in burials of younger individuals (among infants, for instance, only 28% of the burials have known left arm positions, and only 24% of right arms).

It thus appears that adult burials—particularly young adults (17–25)—were more likely to conform to the positional norm of the extended supine position than subadults ($p > 0.001$). This observation is particularly apparent in cemeteries in the Upper Thames Valley: body deposition was more varied in the younger age categories; the proportion of supine burials increases with age and reaches a peak in the young adult group (17–25) (91% supine), after which the proportion of supine burials drops again in the older age groups and deposition becomes more varied again. The young adult peak in conformity to positional norm does not seem to be apparent in other parts of England. Interestingly, in her study of the material expression of age in early Anglo-Saxon graves, Gowland (2006) finds that female burials of the age group 18–24 exhibits the largest deposits of beads and most uniformity in brooch types. Older females, on the other hand, had generally fewer items but greater variety of brooch types, which might reflect age-related differences in dress (Gowland 2006: 150). More standardised positioning of the body in the young adult group might represent a desire to express a consistent image of the body, fitting for the age and gender identity of the deceased. As for male graves, Gowland finds that the age group 18–24 also appears to represent an important threshold, as this group exhibits a marked increase in the weapon burials compared to the younger age categories. It has been argued by some authors that weapon burials were strongly associated with young adult males, representing images of warriors in their 'prime' (Härke 1995; Stoodley 1998, 1999), although Gowland shows that this association has been overstated, and older males were frequently buried with weapons as well.

Regardless, the late teen and early twenties appear to mark an important age threshold in early Anglo-Saxon society. Herlihy (1985: 76–8) suggests that the age of marriage for Anglo-Saxon men and women was in the mid to late twenties, based on written sources from religious estates. A more recent interpretation by Sayer and Dickinson (2013), however, argues that Anglo-Saxon women got married in their late teens or early twenties, as a measure to minimise pregnancy complications and obstetric death. This along with the burial

evidence suggests that this stage in the life course marked the transition into adulthood, into maturity. Marriage would have created new links between different households and necessitated mobility, as well as bringing about responsibility within the family through childbirth and child-rearing, which might also be linked to responsibilities within the wider community. This is important not only for the individuals themselves but also their parents, who might anlso see a change in status or age identity as their children get married and/or have children themselves. The death of a young adult might thus incur particular sets of emotional responses: for their parents who might never become grandparents; for their young widow or widower who was left with no children; or if they had children, for their very young children now without a mother or father.

The death of a spouse, particularly early in marriage and with no surviving children, might have been especially unsettling for women. Documentary sources suggest that fertility was important for women in the Anglo-Saxon period, and childbearing would have facilitated a change in social status for women, as the Law of Æthelberht (c AD 600) states that:

> **78.** Gif hio cwic bearn gebyreþ, healfne scæt age, gif ceorl ær swylteþ.
> …
> **81.** Gif hio bearn ne gebyreþ, fæderingmagas fioh agan 7 morgengyfe.
>
> **78.** If she bears a living child, she may have half the property, if the ceorl dies earlier.
> …
> **81.** If she bears no child, [her] paternal relatives may have the property and the morning-gift
>
> (*Law of Æthelberht*, Attenborough 1922: 14)

Considering the importance of childbearing, particularly for women, becoming grandparents might mark another important threshold. If we accept Sayer and Dickinson's suggestion that the age of marriage for Anglo-Saxon women was around late teens and early twenties, most grandmothers would have been about 40 years old when they had their first grandchild. Grandfatherhood is more difficult to trace, but if Anglo-Saxon men got married around the same age as the women, most of them would also have been around 40 years. The slight increase in positional variability among burials of older individuals might have accompanied this change in age identity and associated body image. One of the only two seated burials in the data set is a mature adult (40+) (and the other is an unaged adult). Transition to a different stage in the life course through grandparenthood might signal a change in status within

society, where deviation from the positional norm became more acceptable and common (Cave and Oxenham 2017). However, as Sayer (2010: 66) points out, the Old English words for grandchildren are the same as the words for nephews and stepchildren, which may imply that living grandparent–grandchild relationship was quite rare.

It has been noted in previous studies that in the early Anglo-Saxon period, older subadults and younger adults were more likely to be buried with gendered grave goods, while the very young and the very old in the age spectrum tended to be buried with fewer grave goods and with gender neutral items (Stoodley 2000; Gowland 2006: 151; Cave and Oxenham 2017). Often, fewer grave goods is interpretively associated with lower status burials. Assessing the positional articulation of the body, however, allows age and material culture to be assessed separately. It appears that wealthier graves were less likely to deviate from the positional norm. The seven wealthiest burials in the dataset, with Range of Identifiable Artefact Categories (RIAC) at 12 or above, are all supine. Of the 45 burials which have RIAC at 9 or above, 37 of them were extended. The notable exceptions are:

- Lec 18 has the highest RIAC in the dataset (RIAC = 16). It was buried supine with flexed legs.

- DBu 391B (RIAC = 14) is the only burial with RIAC > 9 to be buried supine with crossed leg placement.

Poorly furnished or unfurnished graves were more likely to display variations in body positioning, including one-sided deposition and flexed or folded legs. Burials in the folded position are notably not very well-furnished, with RIAC ranging from 0 to 8. Overall, graves with less material investments appear to be more varied with regards to the positioning of the legs, while those with more grave finds seem more likely to conform to an extended and parallel position.

On the other hand, beyond a material cultural perspective, age enables, limits, and shapes the physical affordance of the body, which might have influenced body positioning in the grave. As explained above, infants and small children were commonly buried on one side and with flexed legs. This is possibly related to their natural lying-down position: human infants are biologically adapted to being carried, and the spine of a newborn baby is slightly rounded, which causes restriction in the movement of the thigh such that the legs are flexed

and abducted (Schön and Silvén 2007: 106–107). The flexed, one-sided burial position might have been an unplanned natural arrangement afforded by the physicality of the body of a young child; or, it could also have been intentionally instigated to simulate sleep: given the spine development of infants, lying on one side with flexed and splayed legs may be a preferred position of rest for many infants and small children. The sleep metaphor in body positioning may also be inferred in some burial gestures as well as multiple burials, as will be explored in Chapters Five and Seven. If some of these burials were indeed intentionally arranged in sleeping positions, the process of positioning the corpse would have had profound emotive and performative implications. A sleeping position may project a space where the mourners and funeral participants could interact with the corpse through embodied actions that would have been performed in life, such as stroking one's hair and singing a lullaby, only re-enacting them in death. An exploration of the corpse positions within the performativity of early Anglo-Saxon funerary rituals will be given in Chapter Six.

4.5 CHANGING BURIAL POSTURES

England in the sixth and seventh centuries was undergoing profound social, political, economic, and religious change, concomitant with significant shifts in funerary practices: the decline of cremation rite, the emergence of high status burials from late sixth through to the mid-seventh centuries, changes in material culture and types of grave artefacts, the decline and cessation of the deposition of grave goods, and the rise of churchyard burial grounds. Against this backdrop of a changing landscape, corpses embodied the people's changing attitudes towards the body, death, and the social world in their positional articulation, manifested in an interplay between burial uniformity and variations. 'Uniformity' is linked with the positional norm of supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types'. 'Variation', on the other hand, refers to positioning practices that do not conform to the norm. The extent of positional variation, therefore, can be measured by the percentages of burials that conform to the positional norm: the lower these are, the greater the variation.

The chronologies outlined in this section and their limitations are discussed in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3. To summarise, from the present data, positioning practices in Anglo-Saxon inhumation graves were relatively consistent up to c AD 550: there were some variations, but they were somewhat limited. After this date, there was a notable upsurge in variations in
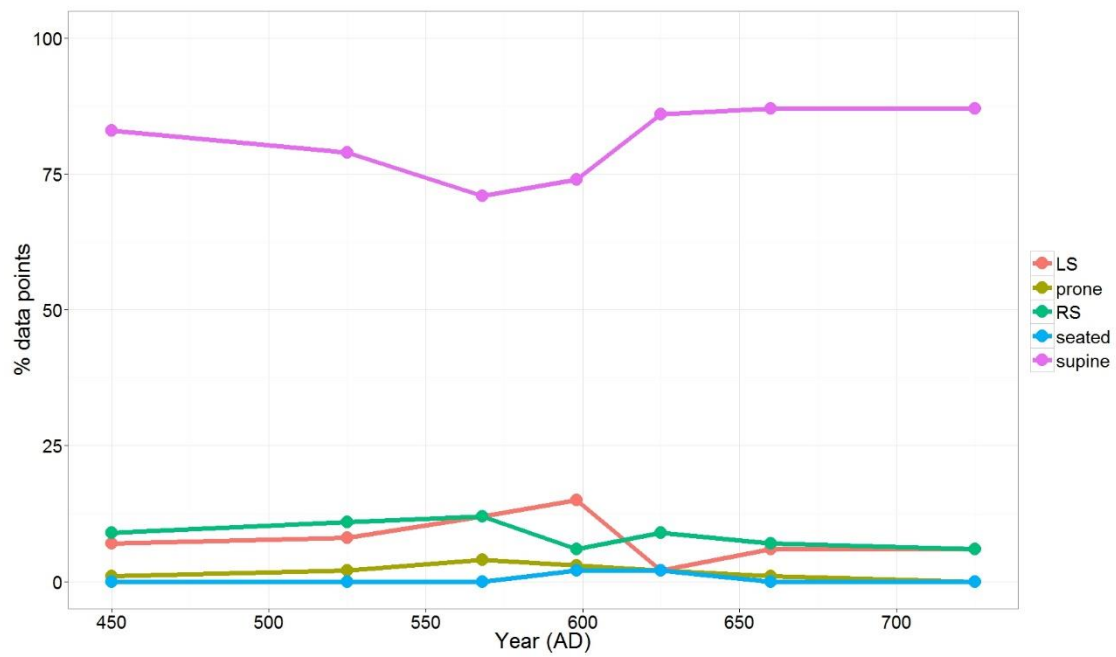
Figure 4.54 Deposition of the body over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.
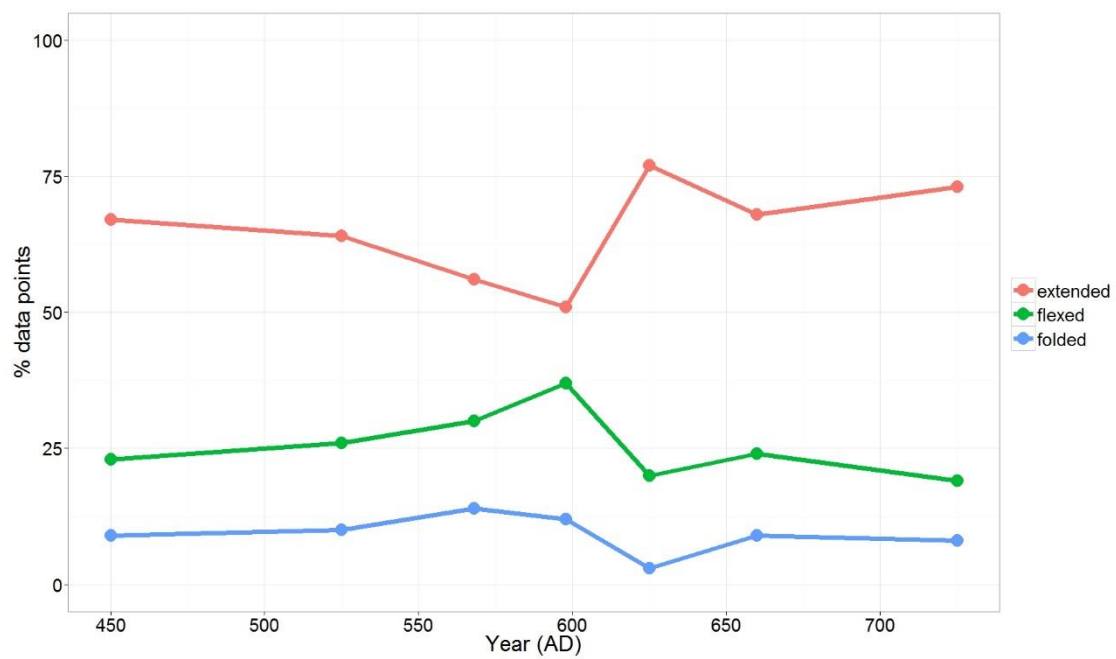
Figure 4.55 Leg flexure over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.
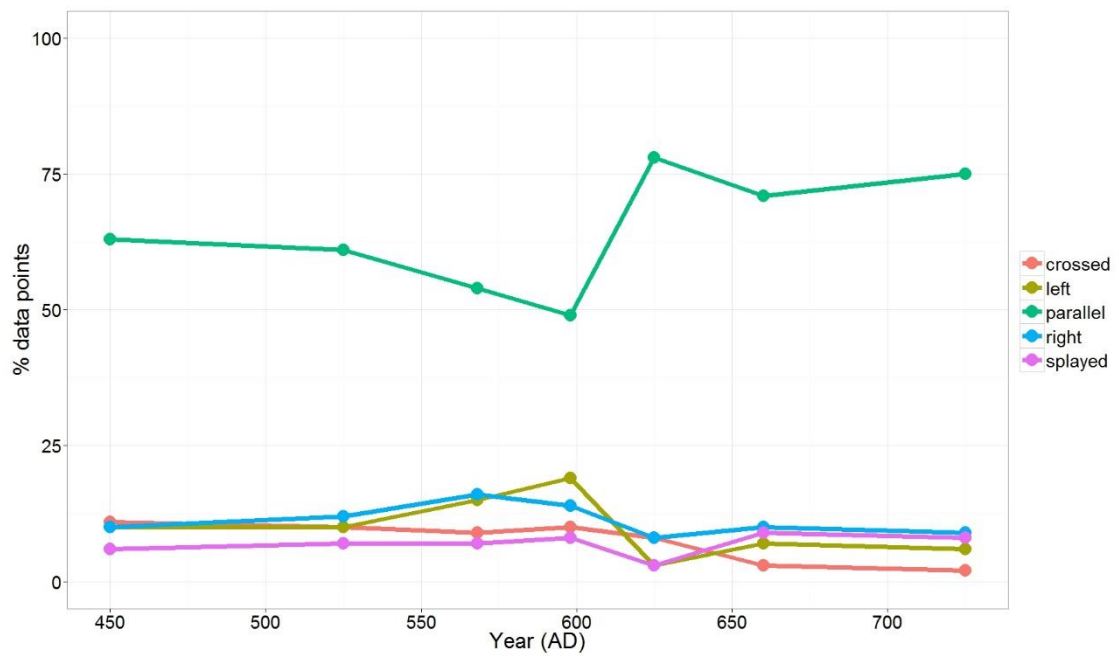
Figure 4.56 Leg placement over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.
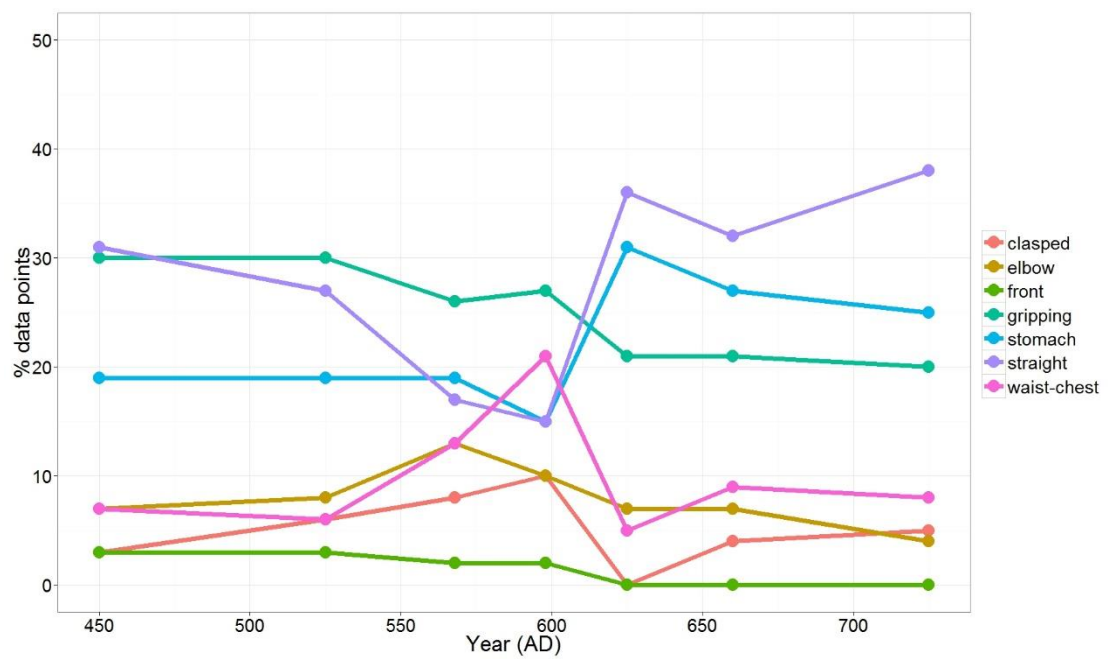
Figure 4.57 Posture type cluster over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.

burial positions, particularly in the last quarter of the sixth century, which appears to be the most varied period in terms of positioning practices. From c 600, however, there was a marked drop in positional variation and increased uniformity, until the 630s or 640s, when variations surged again, albeit only slightly. From about the 660s onwards it levelled out and steadily increased in uniformity that continued into the eighth century (Figures 4.54–57).

It is evident from the present data that body positioning practice was tied in with changes apparent in other aspects of funerary practice and in the broader historical context. In their recent redating of Anglo-Saxon graves and grave goods and reassessment of the chronological framework, Bayliss et al (2013) identify a marked decrease (at least 80%) in furnished male and female burials in the period 550–575, and remained at a steady low rate from the 580s until the 630s. Juxtaposing Bayliss et al's new chronological framework with the present body-positional data, it appears that at the point, c 550, when Anglo-Saxon England saw a dramatic drop in furnished burial rite as well as narrower range of grave goods, corpse positioning practices became, conversely, more varied than before. The decline in furnished burials has argued to be linked with the increasing economic and political power of regional elites and the growing impact of ecclesiastical institutions, but the increased variations in corpse positioning in the late sixth century warn that any models linking growing burial uniformity and centralised management of control must not be taken too simplistically.

As Bayliss et al's study has noted, these changes happened before the arrival of Christianity, or at least before the Gregorian mission. On the other hand, England was already undergoing significant change: the economic and political reconfigurations of the late sixth century saw the emergence of regional elites and early kingdoms, and with them a shift in political power from small, local, community-based groups to centralised land control and administration from estate centres. As it has been suggested, '[t]hese changes over time are surprisingly fast and homogeneous across England, and this homogeneity implies that the disposal of the dead is being actively controlled and managed' (Geake 2003: 261). Increasing centralised control might have fuelled a need for local communities and family groups to assert their own traditions, to be different. In their seminal *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) contend that traditions are often relatively new, or 'invented', cultural practices that are framed as 'old' and perpetuated with the purpose of promoting unity and legitimising political claims. A possible example of invented traditions in Anglo-Saxon

England is the resurgence of crouched burials in East Yorkshire in the seventh century, which Lucy (2000b) argues to be an attempt in asserting a Deiran identity against a destabilising political landscape and a difficult relationship with Bernicia to the north.

Furthermore, it is possible that burial management, which resulted in a drop in furnished burial practice, had triggered new emotional anxieties with regards to the treatment of the dead. As previous studies have suggested, funerary dress and grave goods played important roles in communicating and negotiating individual and collective identities (Lucy 1998; Martin 2015; Felder 2014), in reconfiguring the relationship between the living and the dead (Williams 2006), and in producing and mediating memories (Devlin 2007; Williams 2006, 2010). With the decline in grave goods deposition from the third quarter of the sixth century, when it was less feasible for these processes and ideas to be articulated with grave artefacts, mourners resorted to the very material corpses themselves. Thus, body positioning might have provided an alternative means for mourners to negotiate and express their grief. Taken together, greater variations in corpse positioning practices could have been a result of emotional outpouring, which was also fused with political anxiety.

After roughly half a century of increased positional variations, burial positions became much more uniform from c 600. The end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century saw the phenomenon of ostentatious furnished male burials, including Sutton Hoo (Suffolk), Taplow (Buckinghamshire), and Prittlewell (Essex). The assimilation of small kingdoms and tribal groups under larger kingdoms and the emergence of regional hegemony caused radical shifts in the distribution of wealth, land management, and settlement patterns, which could have brought about changes in the control of burial resulting in increased positional uniformity, particularly given the marked decrease in positional variation and that this change happened relatively fast (Yorke 1990; Scull 1993: 76–77; Geake 2003). Meanwhile, the conversion of the English to Christianity was under way: the Frankish princess Bertha married King Æthelberht of Kent possibly as early as the 570s, and Augustine arrived in Kent from Rome in 597 (Walsh 1981; Brooks 1989). In the half-century that followed, England went through major political and territorial contestations as well as a substantial change in its professed religion. Noting the apparent association between Christian burial and the extended supine position (for a critical analysis, see Section 8.4.1 in Chapter Eight), conversion remains an explanation for the increased adoption of this

position in seventh-century England, but this must be understood through considering the complexity of political and religious organisation and how people responded to it.

Positional variability came to a slight surge again in the mid-seventh century. At the same time, furnished female burials were revived after around 630 and reached a peak in the 660s (Bayliss et al 2013: 479). Hines suggests that the upsurge in furnished female burials represents a conservative 'pagan' response to Christianity during a period of advance of the new religion (Bayliss et al 2013: 552). It has been argued that there existed an 'aggressively pagan' attitude towards Christianity (Meaney 2003: 241); for example, Asthall Barrow (Oxfordshire) is a unique example of the persistence or re-emergence of cremation rite in the seventh century, possibly as a defiant return to pre-Christian rituals (Leeds 1924; Dickinson and Speake 1992). If true, the slight peak in corpse-positional variations might represent an attempt to 'bring back' (or 'invent') 'traditional' funerary rites.

In terms of gender patterns in positional articulation, male and female burials appear to have slightly different trajectories of change and variation. Overall, female burials and burials with feminine assemblages show more marked, episodic shifts in variability, while such changes in male graves and burials with weapons appear to be much less radical. Importantly, in the mid-seventh century when England saw an increase in furnished female burials, positional variability peaked slightly for all graves (n.b. not only for well-furnished females). After 660, however, the rise in variability in female burials and burials with feminine goods steadily continued to the end of the seventh century, while male burials and burials with masculine assemblages became more uniform again. Hines postulates that particularly ostentatious female burials may represent prominent women who would have assumed positions within their local, community-based context, as opposed to men who would have been subject to more public and political interests (Bayliss et al 2013: 542–543). Thus, it was more appropriate for women to be given rich grave furnishing than it was for men. In a more recent article, Hamerow (2016) links the furnished female burials in the seventh century with the shifting attitudes towards property, inheritance, and religion, and argues that females played a sacralising role for landowning families in legitimising their continuing claim to landed wealth. The different trajectory of change for body positioning in female burials may be linked with the changing role of women in seventh-century England.

The second half of the seventh century continued to see major regional political contestations, with the expansion of Mercia and Wessex from the second half of seventh century, Kent's decline in power in the last quarter of seventh century, and the somewhat eventful union between Deira and Bernicia (Kirby 1991: 61–73). Unfortunately, due to the small data size of closely dated burials, the data become greatly problematic when further broken down into regional chronologies and are unable to give statistically significant results. Furnished burial rite came to an abrupt end and disappeared in the 670s or 680s. As the practice of furnished burial reached its demise, body positioning practice became relatively stable and consistent. However, it is important to note that this picture of uniformity was far from simple, as new repertoires of burial practices emerged. These include a range of new burial sites, such as field cemeteries and churchyard cemeteries, the emergence of chest burial (Craig-Atkins 2012), and the use of shrouds (Mui 2015). The diversity of burial practices in the late seventh and eighth centuries has also been noted in a previous study of early Northumbrian cemeteries, showing intra- and inter-site variations in burial positioning in post-Conversion cemeteries (Mui 2013). Other new practices also came about later in the eighth and ninth centuries, including charcoal burial (Holloway 2010) and grave commemoration with carved stone sculptures (Bailey 1980). Burial diversity continued into the later medieval period, as has been explored in great detail by Gilchrist and Sloane (2005).

Due to the confines of the study, this analysis does not extend beyond the early eighth century. However, given the results, examination of positioning practices in the late Anglo-Saxon period may provide unique insights into burial rites in post-Conversion England, particularly since the majority of these burials were given little material culture. Presently, corpse-positioning practices have shown to produce patterns of change relating to periods of social, political, and religious upheavals through the early and middle Anglo-Saxon period. This analysis shows that burial positions played an important part in funerary rituals during this period, and in the Anglo-Saxon response to the transforming landscape from the fifth through the eighth century. Importantly, this analysis has provided a more nuanced reading of the changes in burial positioning than accounted for in previous studies. Bringing together the results from this chapter, the discussion section below interprets these nuances and explores the social structures and agents that underlie the funerary record.
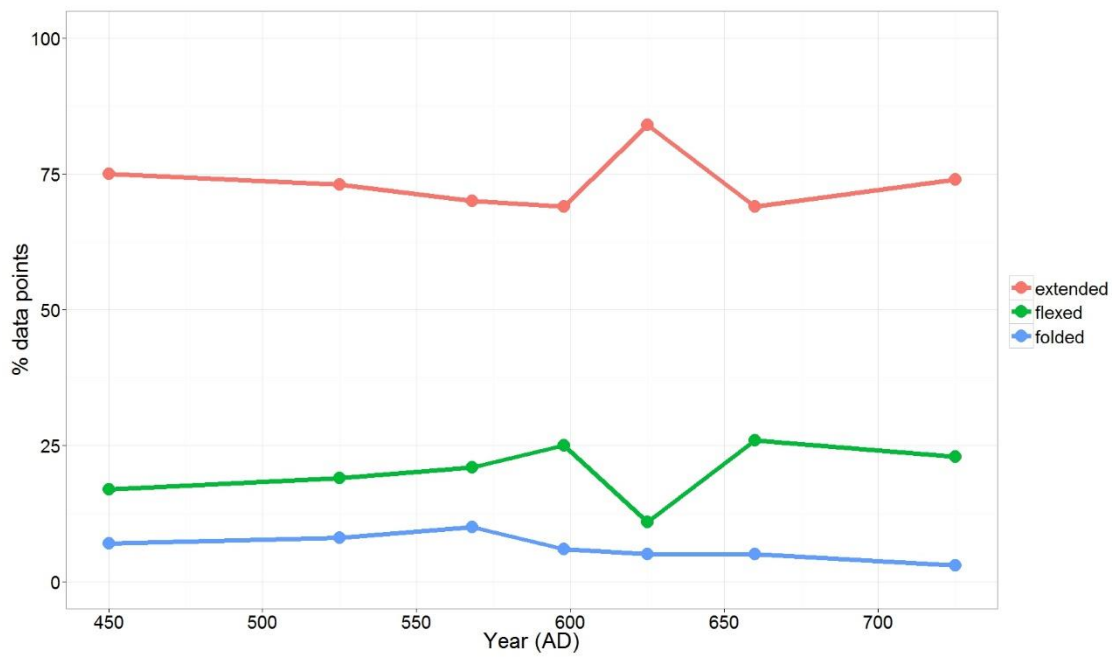
Figure 4.58 The changes over time in positional variability in terms of leg flexure, in male burials, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.
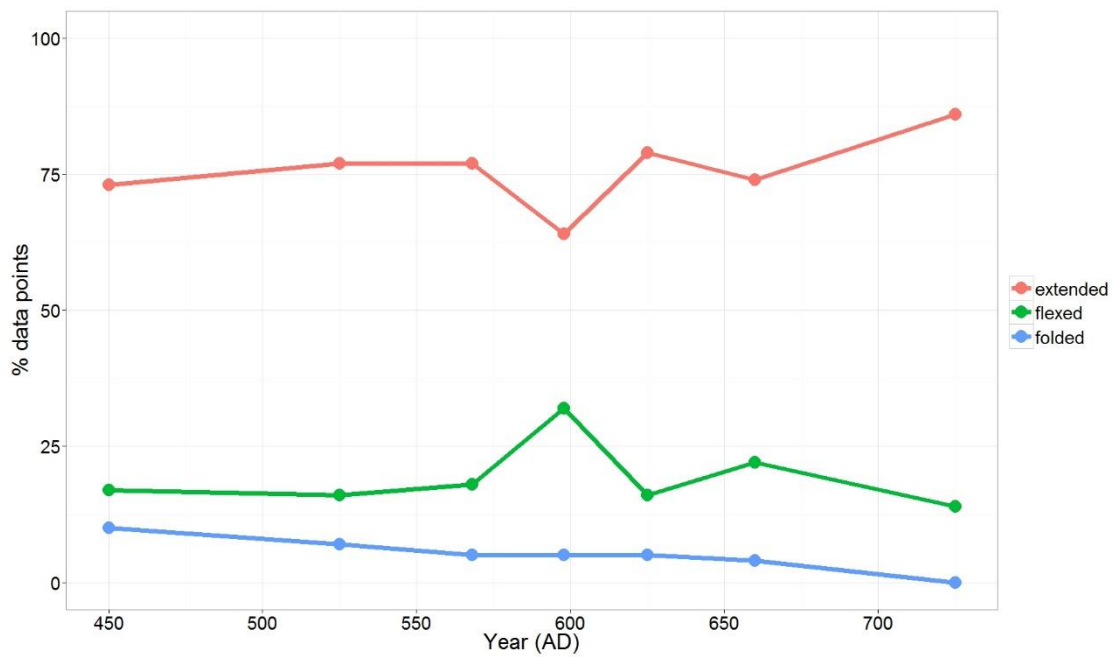
Figure 4.59 The changes over time in positional variability in terms of leg flexure, in burials with masculine assemblages, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.

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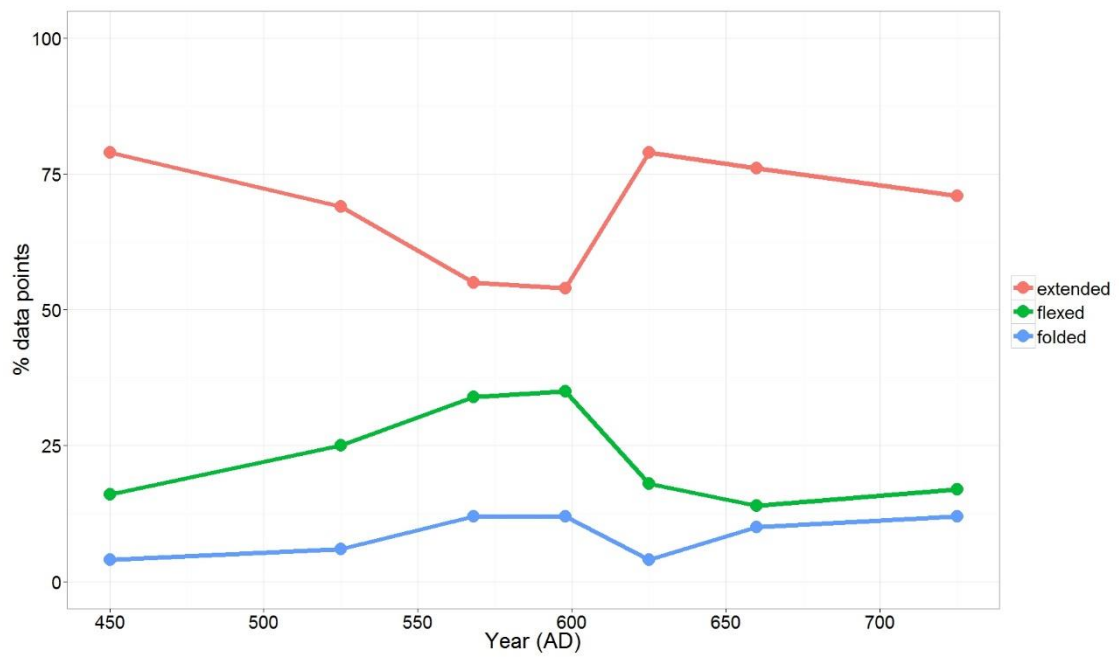
Figure 4.60 The changes over time in positional variability in terms of leg flexure, in female burials, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.
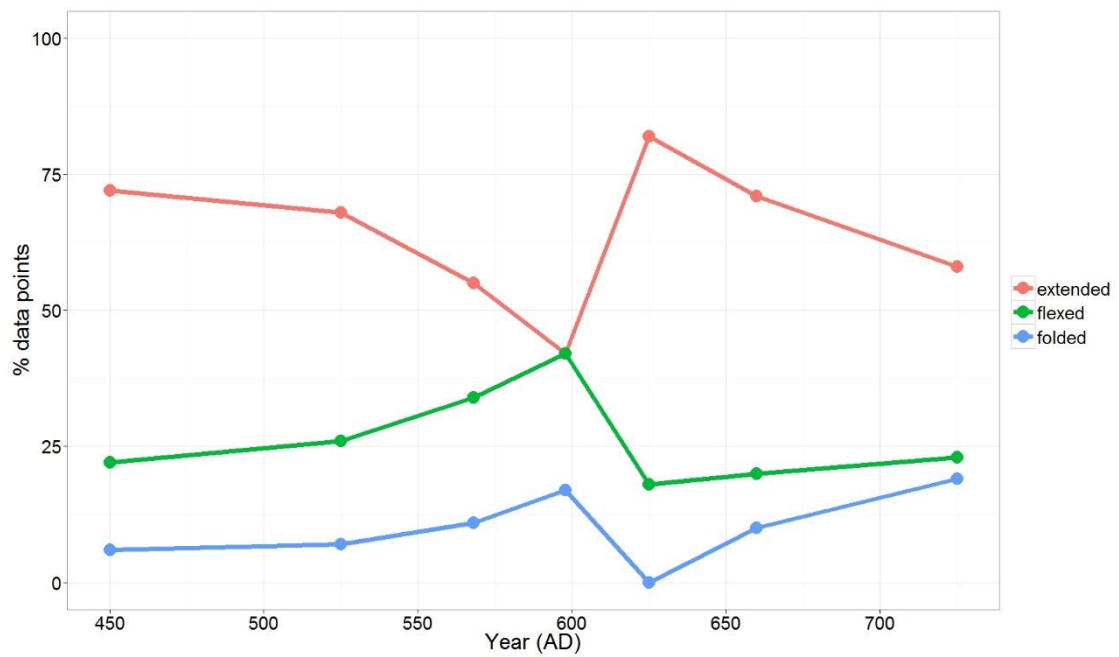
Figure 4.61 The changes over time in positional variability in terms of leg flexure, in burials with feminine assemblages, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.

4.6 DISCUSSION

The present analysis has identified patterns of body positioning in relation to regionality, social identity, and social changes in the landscape. These patterns suggest that any overarching narratives about body positioning do not fully account for the nuanced body-positioning practices that were produced, managed, and perpetuated at the local and individual levels. Corpse positioning practices oscillated between the 'normative' and the 'innovative', producing sets of dominant positional discourses as well as room for creativity and variations. The present data show that the groups which produce the most conformity to the 'norm'—supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types'—and the least variation from it are: adults, males, weapon burials, richly furnished burials, and particularly burials in southern parts of England. These categories may certainly overlap; the single group of individuals that are most likely to conform to the positional norm are adult men buried with weapons, particularly in southern England. On the other hand, while the positional norm was also practised among other burials (e.g. among women, children, less well-furnished graves, and in other parts of England), positioning practices in these groups of individuals were more varied overall. These include deposition of the body on one side, placement of legs in flexed or folded positions, the deployment of burial posture beyond the seven 'main types', and so on.

The variations in burial position and, indeed, the freedom that the mourners had to vary, provide an interesting picture of early Anglo-Saxon funerary practices and their management. These positions were not uncommon or non-normative, and they suggest that a generalising narrative about the prevalence of the extended supine position is insufficient. In her remarks on the relationship between dress assemblages and body positioning and orientation, Brush (1993) notes that '[m]ale burials, especially those with weapons, were slightly less likely to deviate from the cemetery norms than were female' (Brush 1993: 226). Stoodley notes in his study on early Anglo-Saxon age organisation that the older the individual, the more likely he or she is laid supine (Stoodley 2000: 460). Although the differing tendencies for different groups to exhibit standardised burial rite have been noted previously, in-depth discussion of such patterns is hitherto lacking. There is no straightforward interpretation as to why adult men with weapons were the least varied and other groups were more so, because the 'normative' and the 'variants' are closely involved in a complex and dynamic relationship,

and we cannot simply attribute a burial position to one group of people and a different position to another group.

Weapons in Anglo-Saxon burial have long been viewed as a symbol of masculine identity (Dickinson 2005; Stoodley 1999: 136; Brunning 2013). The relationship between weapon burial and the 'warrior' identity has been a subject of discussion and debate. Importantly, Härke (1990, 1992) has suggested that weapon burials represent the idealised or desired image of warriorhood, rather than burials of actual warriors who fought and died in battle. The limited range of male dress and costumes and masculine grave goods, compared to female burials and feminine assemblages, reflect a certain consistency in male burials. The consistent replication of the positional norm in the representation of the masculine body might thus have corroborated, alongside the deposition of weapons in grave, an idealised image of men within life which carried on to death.

The representation of the masculine body in death may have reflected an idea or expectation of men within life. As noted in Section 4.4.1, the masculine body appears to have been expressed as a more 'open', wide posture contrasting the feminine compact, slender look. This is particularly apparent in young adult men who, as it has been suggested, were more likely to be given weapons in burial than older men (Härke 1995). The extended supine position in weapon burials might allude to the image of a standing warrior, except placed horizontally: an image of masculine deportment, with a sense of arrogant prowess in the body. The living might have responded to a controlled masculinity in the portrayal of bodies in death, derived from local military mustering and rooted in the expectation of consistent masculine roles within society, and reflecting an idealised vision or expectation of what a man should look like and how he should go into death. Interestingly, the positioning of female-sexed skeletons buried with weapons was consistent with this pattern of 'masculine' positioning: out of the 16 female or possible female burials that contained weapons, they were all deposited supine, where deposition is known, and all but two were arranged with legs extended.

Greater variations in the positioning of women and children suggest that the controlled body image was not as rigorously managed in burying women and children as in burying men. A possible interpretation is that the groups that were most likely to conform to the norm correlate with the groups that were most likely to hold power, whether it be within the family,

the locality, or the wider region. This concept of power can be understood in Foucauldian terms, where society is conceived as a network of omnipresent, micro-power relations which have multifold manifestation (Jessop 2007). If this interpretation holds some truth, the implications would be that for individuals in more powerful positions, it was more appropriate to bury them in accordance with the positional norm. These individuals were more likely to be adults, particularly young adults; men, who appear to exercise more political power than women, although the latter may also retain power within the domestic as the bearers of keys and child-carers; wealthy individuals, which can be understood as having more disposable wealth as well as power to control resources, and thus higher status. Meanwhile, for the others who were not as prominently in power, there was a greater degree of freedom in positioning.

The drawback of this theory is that it is merely a framework that attempts to understand the positional data and is difficult to test. However, there are things we might consider. The association between funerary display and local power relations has been discussed by Halsall (2000), who argues that lavish public funerals would have created political tension, within which new, situational identities were forged and expressed (Halsall 2000: 267–272). Williams (2002) argues that the large cremation cemeteries in eastern England might have acted as central places for communities to gather and perform funerals and other ritual or social activities. If cemeteries were central places, the graveside—particularly that of high status elites—would have been a site of power involving elaborate, dramaturgical funerary performance and display. These would have played a significant role not only in negotiating the relationship between the mourners and the deceased, but also that between the communities themselves and how they related to the landscape in which they lived. The referencing of the ancestral landscape, notably with the reuse of prehistoric monuments, might have also provided sources for origin myths and territorial claims for communities (Williams 1998; Semple 2013). It thus seems probable that these funerals were attended by large crowds and were carefully planned and executed, which might then have resulted in a more consistent positional representation of the corpse.

This interplay between uniformity and variation, thus, may represent a network of power relations where the more powerful, prominent individuals in the household or the wider community followed more closely to formulaic burial practices. The funerals of these individuals were more likely to attract public attention and scrutiny, and thus would have

gathered a large assembly of mourners and funeral attendants. Hence, positioning rite here might have involved a greater emphasis on display and monumentality, reflecting more standardised and coherent ideas about how the corpse should look in the grave. The funerals of those less prominently in power, on the other hand, afforded more room for creativity and improvisation because there might be less of a need to follow the 'rules'. The funerals might have been smaller events with fewer attendants, most of whom would have been the deceased's family and close friends. A similar argument has been made by Hines (Bayliss et al 2013: 542–543) about the peak in furnished female burials in the mid-seventh century— that women were not subject to public interest as much as men were, so they could more freely be buried ostentatiously with grave goods. However, as argued by Hamerow (2016), the rise of furnished female burials may signal a shift in the role of women in the seventh century, who might have acquired new sacralising status in the legitimisation of family power. The shift of religious ideologies and power dynamics might thus have provided a context for the increased uniformity in positioning practices in the seventh century.

Furthermore, the relationship between networks of power relations and burial practices must also be understood within the regional context. As we have seen in Section 4.3, there are significant regional variations in positioning practices, with Kent and Wessex exhibiting most conformity to the positional norm. Here, we might be seeing the survival of Romano-British traditions and/or more centralised burial management already from the fifth century. In the central and northern regions, burial practices exhibit more variations within and between cemeteries, which may suggest that the management of burial and the social structures of these communities were again different compared to southern parts of England. In Northumbria, in particular, the extended supine position was far from being the 'norm'. Nuanced variations point towards smaller assemblies of funeral attendants, less coherent discourse regarding corpse positions, and locally managed burial rite.

The movement of people across the landscape might have also facilitated the exchange of cultural practices and resulted in increased variability in positioning practices, which might account for greater positional variations among female and children burials. In his paper on infant mortality, Sayer (2014) argues for a patrilocal exogamous marriage system in early Anglo-Saxon England, where the woman moves to live in husband's household after marriage and rears their children there, and may return to the home of her own kinsmen if her husband dies (Sayer 2014: 96–97). Sayer also points out that the seventh-century law

codes suggest a shift in the responsibilities and protection for children from their maternal kindred to their paternal ones, at around age five. Should a child die before reaching this age, Sayer argues, its body would be transported for burial to the cemetery associated with its mother's kin group (Sayer 2014: 97). Thus, greater mobility of women and children across the landscape and across different (but inter-connected) communities might have brought about differing positioning practices.

It should be noted, however, that regardless of the size of funeral crowd and how the funeral was managed, funerary rituals would have been emotionally charged events (Williams 2007b). In other words, more ad hoc, out-of-the-norm practice does not necessarily mean any more or less emotional investment. In fact, the analysis presented in this chapter shows that in graves where archaeologically-recoverable goods are scarce or absent, the body is still vested with symbolic and emotive power that should not be overlooked. The results here warn that, while the numerous 'normative' burials may not appear as 'interesting' as the unusual minority, they are by no means less informative or relevant. The notion of the funerary tableau crops up over and over again, stressing the importance of body adornment and display, but such discussions have focused mostly on exceptionally wealthy burials. This skews our view of early Anglo-Saxon funerary rite towards the richly furnished burials, where the extended supine position has been largely taken for granted and under-theorised. Meanwhile, other authors have occupied themselves with the 'deviant' burials and have generalised the practices of the majority. As Stoodley (2002: 103) points out:

> It is those that display unusual, or sinister, practices, which draw all the attention and are often interpreted in ritualistic terms. … The other more mundane, but more numerous, examples have generated little in the way of academic debate; simplistic or seemingly obvious interpretations of these have sufficed.

The present analysis offers means to study those burials that were not given much artefactual wealth, allowing the 'archaeologically uninteresting' ones to be scrutinised. As it has been shown here, unfurnished or poorly furnished graves are no less informative about living and dying in Anglo-Saxon England, but they contribute to the diversity of burial practices and emotive responses at the community and the individual levels.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The patterns and variations in body positioning explored above suggest that mourners in the early Anglo-Saxon period retained a degree of freedom in planning and executing burial

positions for their dead. Meanwhile, these positional repertoires were shaped and reproduced through considerations at the community level and at the individual level, and were situated within the wider context of social, political, and religious change in early medieval England. This analysis shows that burial postures were closely linked with aspects of social identity, including gender, age, and status, which might have impacted on the perception and representation of bodies in graves and how they changed through time. The posture of the corpse would have contributed to the construction the funerary tableau, where the idealised image of the deceased and the cold reality of the cadaver collapsed upon each other. The intimate intercorporeal engagement involved in the positioning of the corpse would have enabled the mourners to improvise, enact, and contemplate the identities of the deceased and of themselves. The next chapter will draw upon some of these themes regarding society and social identity, and examine the multiple burial rite in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.

CHAPTER FIVE
MULTIPLE BODIES IN A GRAVE

A scyle þa rincas   gerædan lædan
ond him ætsomne swefan;
næfre hy mon tomælde
ær hy deað todæle.

Those men must always give counsel, lead
and sleep together.
They may never spread tales
before death separate them.

(*Maxims I*, ll 177–179)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Old English gnomic poem *Maxims I* describes a picture of loyal intimate companionship, separated only by death. For a small proportion of Anglo-Saxons, however, the grave might not have been such a lonely place, as they were buried with other people in the same grave. Multiple burial, where two or more bodies were placed in the same grave, was a minor but significant burial rite in early Anglo-Saxon England. Multiple individuals could be buried in the grave at the same time, or one could be interred in an existing grave at a later event. The death of multiple individuals at the same time or in close proximity would have been emotionally distressing for small village-sized communities. The placement and positioning of their bodies in the grave might reflect this anxiety and the mourners' attempt to mitigate it. As we have seen in the previous chapter, burial positions were intimately linked with aspects of social identity and embedded in networks of power relations. The present chapter brings multiple burials to this discussion, through an examination of the significance of positional relationship between multiple bodies.

5.2 BACKGROUND

Early medieval multiple burial has long been recognised and recorded, but in-depth, systematic study of such practice in England is notably lacking. Wilson (1992: 71–72) differentiates between two types of multiple burial: the horizontal type (where bodies lie side

by side at the same or similar depths) and the vertical type (where one body is placed on top of another at varying depths). Another classification of multiple burial comes from Stoodley's (2002) brief but comprehensive discussion of early Anglo-Saxon multiple graves. He distinguishes two types of multiple burials: contemporary (where multiple bodies were buried at the same event) and consecutive (where multiple bodies were buried at different events over a period of time) (Stoodley 2002: 106). These are useful shorthands which will be employed in the present discussion, but it should be noted that these types of burials are not always distinct, or that sometimes there is simply not enough information to determine one way or the other. For instance, a grave may contain three bodies: two were buried together at the same time, and the third one was interred later. Likewise, one body may partially cover another body, or two bodies may be placed side by side and another body is placed on top in the same grave.

Wilson postulates that the horizontal type did not have particular religious or ritual meaning, but suggests that the vertical type might have had ritual significance (Wilson 1992: 71–72). Reynolds (2009: 64–65) suggests that, in the horizontal type, the digging of a grave wide enough to accommodate multiple bodies is suggestive of contemporaneous burial, while the vertical type may be indicative of a time-lapse between the multiple interments. However, it seems entirely possible that the Anglo-Saxons could dig a wide grave for the burial of one person and had the intention of returning and inserting another body at some point later, although such reopening would be likely to cause some disturbance to the earlier interment. Meanwhile, superimposed bodies were not necessarily buried at different events, as will be discussed in Section 5.5.1. Thus, contemporaneous vertical and consecutive horizontal burials might well have been practised alongside contemporaneous horizontal and consecutive vertical burials. It should be noted that it is also possible for people who died at the same time not to be buried in the same grave, but they might well have been buried in different graves next to each other, in different parts of the same cemetery, or perhaps even in different cemeteries (see Reynolds 2009: 67).

Attributing a grave that contains remains from more than one individual to a deliberate practice of multiple interment is far from unproblematic. As Crawford (2007) points out, a single piece of long bone from a second individual is sometimes enough for that grave to be considered a 'multiple grave' in excavation records and site reports. On the other hand, Crawford observes, the occurrence of animal bones in graves is frequently considered

nothing more than grave goods or animal sacrifice (for a discussion of the positional relationship between human bodies and articulated animal remains in graves, see Section 6.5 in Chapter 6). She argues that the assumptions surrounding the intrinsic values of humans and animals may erroneously project concepts of individuality from Western modernity onto past burial practices.

Interpreting multiple burial is particularly challenging given the inconsistency in grave recording and cataloguing. 'Multiple burial' often presupposes articulation of the skeletons (Sprague 2005: 74). The difference between articulation and disarticulation in consecutive vertical burials, however, may not be all that clear from the perspective of the buriers. Even intentional reopening and reuse of pre-existing graves may cause disturbance, to greater or lesser extent, to the lower burials. On the other hand, archaeological approaches to these burials may be skewed, depending on how 'multiple burial' is defined. Another problematic situation is when foetuses are found within the pelvic area of women. Different excavators may record this differently: some categorise the foetus as part of the mother, and therefore choose not to catalogue it separately; others document the foetus as a second individual in the grave, and assign it a separate burial number from the female skeleton. In the present study, these burials count as multiple graves. They represent a separate category of multiple graves from the horizontal and vertical types, but they are discussed in Section 5.4.2 in the chapter. It is important, nevertheless, to bear in mind these methodological and interpretive issues when assigning and approaching multiple burials.

5.3 OVERVIEW

Due to the confines of the present study, burials that are classed as 'multiple' in the database include the graves that are described as multiple burials, deliberately reused, or with foetus *in utero*, in their respective site reports. Disarticulated human remains or articulated body parts (but not the whole body) from additional individuals will be treated case by case, depending on the context of recovery, the overall preservation of human remains at the site, and the likelihood of the grave being an intentional multiple burial. This is done in order to mitigate different recording and cataloguing preferences in different site reports and maintain consistency, and to fully appreciate the variety of multiple burial practices in the early Anglo-Saxon period. A catalogue of all the multiple burials recorded in the present study can be found in Appendix Two.

131 graves from the present data set contained two or more bodies, representing 4.29% of the total number of graves: there are two quintuple graves, one quadruple grave, 12 triple graves, and 116 double graves.

Region	Double	Triple	Quadruple	Quintuple	Total no. of multiple graves	Total no. of graves	% multiple
Kent	44	3	0	0	47	876	5.36%
Wessex	11	1	0	0	12	458	2.62%
UThames	17	2	0	1	20	486	4.11%
EMidlands	35	6	1	1	43	733	5.86%
North	9	0	0	0	9	500	1.80%

Table 5.1 The frequencies of double, triple, quadruple, and quintuple burials, and the relative proportions of multiple burials, in each region.

Multiple burial was ubiquitous as a rite across different parts of England, but its prevalence and execution appear to vary between regions. The two regions which yield most multiple graves are Kent and the East Midlands, where multiple graves amount to 5.36% and 5.86% of the respective region's total number of graves. The East Midlands is also the most varied in terms of the number of individuals contained in the graves: nine out of 16 of the graves which contained three or more individuals came from this region. Multiple burials of three or more individuals were very rare in Kent, despite the large number of double burials from Kent compared to other regions. The three triple graves recorded in here are DBu 249, Mil 105, and Pol 1967/99. Beyond the present dataset, however, a grave that contained five skeletons has been recorded at Bifrons (Godfrey-Faussett 1880: 552), and another grave from Stowting contained six individuals (Smith 1908: 365–367). Multiple burials are the least common in the North of England, amounting to only 1.80% of the region's total number of graves.

Table 5.2 shows the cross-tabulation of grave construction of multiple burials in terms of chronological context and the arrangement of bodies. Both the horizontal and vertical types could be contemporary or consecutive: Table 5.3 illustrates the possible combinations of chronological contexts and bodily arrangements. Horizontal arrangements were more common than the vertical arrangement of bodies, and they appear to be largely associated

with contemporary burials (only one horizontal consecutive burial is recorded). Vertical arrangement, on the other hand, is equally likely to be contemporary or consecutive. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is more difficult to determine with certainty that multiple interments took place consecutively, which may result in the higher number of contemporary burials relative to consecutive multiple burials recorded here.

	Horizontal	Vertical	Both	In pelvis	Unknown	Total
Contemporary	47	19	0	5	0	**71**
Consecutive	1	16	0	0	3	**20**
Both	3	0	3	0	0	**6**
Uncertain	20	11	0	0	3	**34**
Total	**71**	**46**	**3**	**5**	**6**	**131**

Table 5.2 Cross-tabulation of the contemporaneity and arrangement of bodies of multiple burials in the data set.
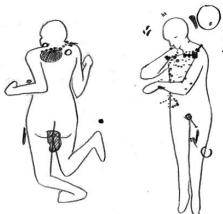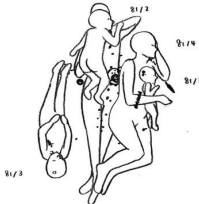
	Horizontal	Vertical	Both
Contemporary	WH 101/102	Sew 41/49	
Consecutive	Lec 172	Emp 66	
Both	Mil 105		Lec 81

Table 5.3 Examples of contemporary/consecutive and horizontal/vertical multiple burials. Blank spaces in the table denote the lack of examples of the corresponding combination in the present data set.

Double burial (n=116)		Triple burial (n=12)	
A A	55	A A A	5
A S	47	A A S	3
S S	9	A S S	3
Unknown	5	S S S	1

Quadruple burial (n=1)		Quintuple burial (n=2)	
A A A S	1	A A A A S	1
		A A S S S	1

Table 5.4. Tables showing the age combinations of multiple burials in the data set and their frequencies. Adult (A) is presently defined as the young adult age group (17–25) or over, and subadult (S) is defined as the adolescent age group (12–17) or under. 'Unknown' denotes graves with one or more unaged individuals.

The majority (88.5%) of multiple burials in the data set contain at least one adult individual (Table 5.4). 60 graves contained only adults (45.8%). Meanwhile, 56 graves (42.7%) contained combinations of adult and subadult individuals. Excluding five double burials which contained one or more unaged individuals, multiple burials containing only juveniles are very rare: they amount to only 10, out of 131 multiple graves in the data set (7.6%). These 10 examples all came from the Upper Thames Valley or the East Midlands. These graves were dated to no later than the early seventh century; the more closely dated ones came from the late fifth to the mid or late sixth centuries. A further example that is not recorded as 'multiple' presently, due to heavy disturbance and disarticulation, is GC 83 which contained the disturbed bones of six foetuses. Notably, although Kent is the region that produced the second most multiple burials, it yielded no multiple burials that contained only subadults.

Analysis of age combination in greater depth reveals that the picture is more complex. Figure 5.1 plots the age combinations in double burials, each axis representing the age of one individual. A few things can be observed:

- As noted above, double burials where both individuals are juvenile are much rarer than adult–adult or adult–subadult combinations.

- Where infants are buried with adults, the latter tend to be in the age range between 20 and 35. (n.b. mean age is reckoned on this graph, but real age range would be as young as 17 and as old as 40)
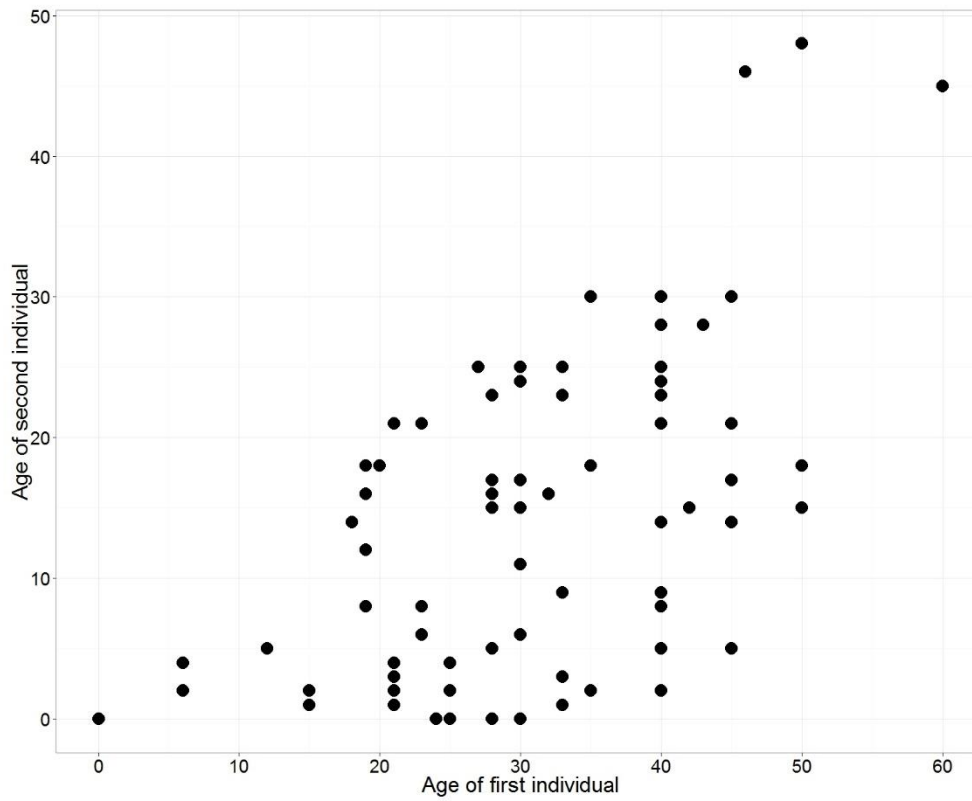
Figure 5.1. XY plot showing the age combinations in double burials from the present data set. Only the burials where both individuals have been aged are included in this graph. The 'first individual' is the older individual in the grave. In burials where age is given as a range, the mean age is plotted.

	Horizontal	Vertical	Both	In pelvis	Unknown
Only adults	26	32	0	0	2
Adult(s) + subadult(s)	34	11	5	5	1
Only subadults	7	1	0	0	2

Table 5.5. Cross-tabulation of the arrangement of bodies and age combinations.

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–   The very young and the very old are not buried together in the same grave.

It is interesting that, as far as the present data go, the individuals at either end of the age spectrum—very young and the very old—were not buried in the same grave. These two groups of people were likely to be the most vulnerable in the population, dependant on more youthful, healthy adults to look after them. This implies that it was not simply that those who died simultaneously got buried together: instead, the practice of multiple burial involved conscious decision-making about when such a rite was appropriate and when it was not.

The age combination of the individuals buried in multiple burials appears to be a factor in the different arrangements of bodies ($p = 0.002$). As shown in Table 5.5, multiple graves that contained only adult individuals are equally likely to be in horizontal or vertical arrangement. Graves that contained adults and subadults and those that contained only subadults, on the other hand, are more likely to have bodies arranged side by side.

Table 5.6 shows the sex combinations in multiple burials in the data set. There appears to be no particular preference or taboo concerning the burial of individuals of different sexes in the same grave. Figure 5.2 classifies the data plotted in Figure 5.1 by sex combinations, represented by different symbols. In adult–subadult burials, there seems to be no obvious pattern in the relationship between the age of the subadult individual and the sex of the accompanying adult (contra Stoodley's (2002: 113) observation that younger children were more likely to be buried with women, and older children or adolescents with men), with the obvious exception of four burials of adult females each with a neonate in pelvis (Oak 57 is excluded here due to Oak 57A being an unaged adult). In adult–adult burials, the age difference between the individuals do not appear to have any obvious influence on sex combination, or vice versa.

Double burial (n=116)			Triple burial (n=12)	
F M		19	F M M	2
F F		11	M M M	2
M M		9	F M U	2
F U		34	F F U	2
M U		26	F U U	2
U U		17	M U U	1
			U U U	1

Quadruple burial (n=1)			Quintuple burial (n=2)	
M M M U		1	F M M M U	1
			F F U U U	1

Table 5.6. Table showing the sex combinations in multiple burials in the present data set and their frequencies. Key: F = female, M = male, U = unsexed. F and M include possible female and male for simplification.
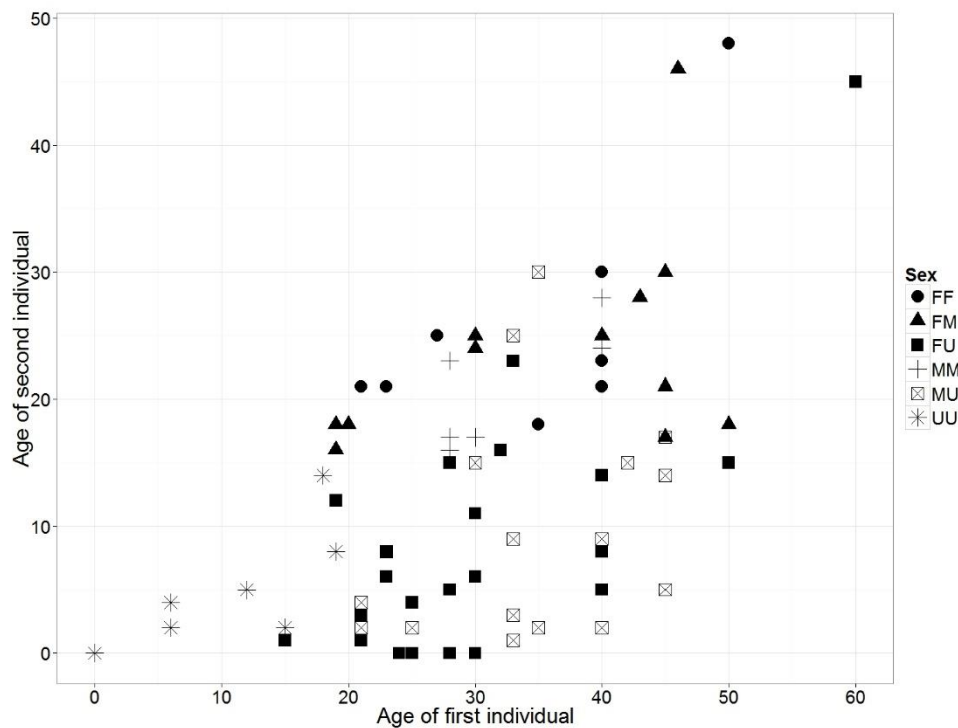
Figure 5.2. XY plot, based on Figure 5.1, showing the age combination of double burials from the present data set, classified by sex combination.

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5.4 HORIZONTAL MULTIPLE BURIALS

In horizontal multiple burials where bodies were placed side by side, each body would have been visible. Collectively, the bodies comprised a funeral scene, to which costumes, grave goods, and other grave features were all contributing factors. In terms of corpse positioning, bodies in a multiple grave may be arranged in relation to each other. Bodies in multiple graves, particularly contemporaneous burials, may interact with each other in terms of their positional articulation. Parts of their bodies may touch, direct, and indicate, in a body language suggestive of intercorporeal relationships that extended beyond life into the grave. Examining their positional interaction may shed light on the personal relationships between these individuals, the funerary process, and the meanings and implications behind the practice of multiple burial.

5.4.1 Body deposition

As observed in the previous chapter, the extended and supine position accounts for the majority of inhumation burials from the fifth to the early eighth century. In most cases, bodies in side-by-side multiple burials were placed in the same supine manner, with the torsos facing the same direction (up) (n.b. the direction of the head is not reckoned. For the methodological reasoning behind this, see Section 3.5.1). Oak 88 is an example of double burial thus arranged, and Emp 31 an example of triple burial. In some cases, bodies were placed close to each other, and in other cases bodies were not touching and were separated by a small gap (such as Mil 25).

In a few multiple burials, bodies were positioned on one side and facing the same direction, such as Emp 67 and Emp 85. In Oak 78, both bodies were buried prone and placed side by side, with Oak 78B slightly turned towards Oak 78A. In other instances, one-sided bodies may face each other, as in DBu 228 and Gun 53. In the case of the triple burial Pol 1967/99, the individual in the middle was deposited supine, while the individuals on both sides were buried one-sided, facing the individual in the middle, each with one hand placed on either shoulder of the middle individual. DBu 263, on the other hand, contained a possible female skeleton buried supine, and a prone male skeleton.
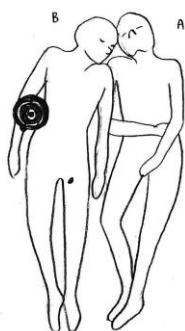
Oak 88   Emp 31   Mil 25
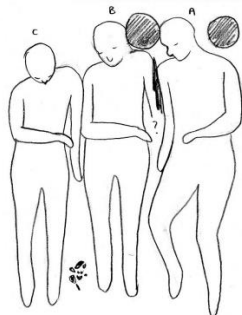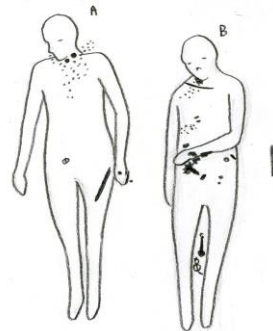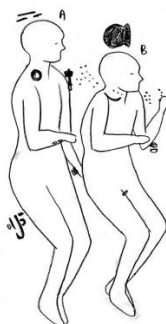
Emp 67   Emp 85   Oak 78

DBu 228   Gun 53
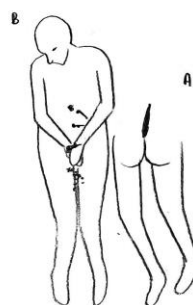
Pol 1967/99   DBu 263

Figure 5.3 Oak 88, Emp 31, Mil 25, Emp 67, Emp 85, Oak 78, DBu 228, Gun 53, Pol 1967/99, and DBu 263.

In some burials, one or two individuals were arranged supine and another individual was buried on one side, often facing the former, such as Pol 1967/43 and Emp 96. Examples of bodies facing away from each other are relatively rare. A possible example is Lec 118, where both bodies were slightly one-sided and faced opposite directions. Another example is Emp 119, a possibly contemporary-consecutive burial where three individuals were deposited facing the same direction, and one other individual was also one-sided but faced away from the other three.
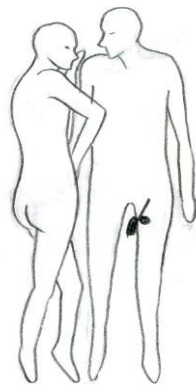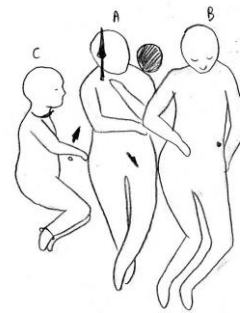
Pol 1967/43   Emp 96

Lec 118   Emp 119

Figure 5.4 Pol 1967/43, Emp 96, Lec 118, and Emp 119.

In most cases, bodies in horizontal multiple graves were buried in the same orientation, but there were exceptions. Mil 105 is an example of a contemporary-consecutive, horizontal multiple burial, which contained the remains of an adult man, an adult woman, and a child aged 12 to 14. The child, Mil 105A, was positioned between the two adults (Mil 105B and Mil 105C) in a reversed orientation from them. Interestingly, it is believed that the child was a later interment, which caused the two adults in the grave to be slightly moved aside. According to the excavators, '[t]his could explain the size of the grave; the angle in which

the adults were placed; the scatter of beads across the body of the man [Mil 105B] and the piece of gold braid at his feet' (Parfitt and Brugmann 1997: 28). In Lec 66, the two individuals were placed in reverse orientations. Lec 66/2's right arm was positioned at an angle away from the torso, under and around the legs of Lec 66/1.

Mil 105   Lec 66

Figure 5.5 Mil 105 and Lec 66.

All the above examples point towards intentional positional arrangement of bodies in horizontal multiple graves: bodies that interacted with and referenced each other. To summarise, bodies could be buried facing the same direction or turned towards each other. Burials facing away from each other were rare: there are a couple of examples of such an arrangement in the present data set, but even so, the bodies were placed close to and touching each other. Given the apparent bodily intimacy observable in multiple burials, it seems reasonable to suggest that individuals buried in the same grave, particularly those buried at the same time, were likely to have had close personal relationships in life, as opposed to acquaintances or strangers who happened to have died around the same time.

5.4.2 Adults with children

It has been explained in Section 5.3 above that 56 out of 131 graves (42.7%) contain a combination of adult and subadult individuals in the same grave. While the present analysis has not been able to identify any obvious pattern in the age of the subadult individual in relation to the sex of the accompanying adult, a group of double burials of adult females and subadults are of especial interest, in terms of the positional arrangement of bodies. The late sixth-century Emp 49 contained an adult woman aged between 17 and 25 years at death and a one-year-old infant. The left arm of the woman was extended by the side; within the crook

of the arm was the infant, tucked between the torso and the left arm. Placed next to the woman's left thigh was a group of jewellery and dress fasteners, including a cruciform brooch, a pair of annular brooch, more than 120 beads, and two pairs of wrist-clasps. Under her right thigh were iron latch keys with two iron rings. Similarly, Emp 79 contained the skeletons of an adult woman about 17 to 25 years old at death, and a child about 2 to 3 years old at death. Emp 79 was furnished with a similar assemblage to that of Emp 49, but the dress fittings were arranged around the woman's body, as if worn, instead of placed at the side. The child, like that in Emp 49, was placed tucked in the crook of the left arm of the woman, whose right hand is positioned either on her chest or on the child's head.

Their relationship in terms of their locations in the cemetery of Empingham is not very clear: Emp 49 was placed at the north-western fringe of the cemetery, oriented with their heads to the south-east. Emp 79, on the other hand, was located within the cluster of graves in the eastern half of the cemetery, oriented with their heads to the north-west. Regardless, these two graves are strikingly similar in terms of the combination of buried individuals, body positions, assemblages, and dates. The positioning of the child in the crook of the arm of the woman, in particular, suggests intentional arrangement of bodies and display of physical intimacy between the individuals.

Emp 49   Emp 79   Wat 78   Pol 1967/75
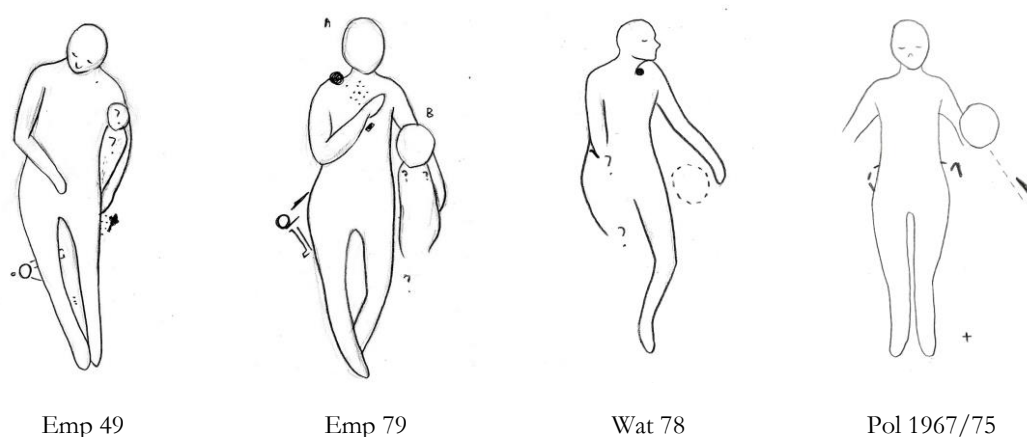
Figure 5.6 Emp 49, Emp 79, Wat 78, and Pol 1967/75.

These two graves from Empingham can be compared with Wat 78 from Water Lane, Melbourn (Cambridgeshire). A female skeleton, aged between 33 and 46, was deposited slightly on the left side. Her left arm was extended and positioned slightly away from the body. The remains of a foetus of less than six months gestation was found in the space

between the torso and lower left arm. The excavators note that the foetus was not found within the pelvis of the woman but by her side, and suggest it might have been a result of disturbance. Nevertheless, the positioning of the adult's arm slightly away from her torso and around the remains of the child may suggest deliberate arrangement. If this was the case, the child might have been a result of premature delivery or stillbirth, possibly leading to the death of its mother, and was already expelled from the maternal body by the time of burial. The woman was modestly furnished with a bone pin and a scutiform pendant of type PE2-d based on the new typology by Bayliss et al (2013: 211). Recent radiocarbon dating provides a date of cal AD 550–645 (95% probability), cal AD 565–610 (68% probability) (Bayliss et al 2013: 343). Thus, Wat 78 might have been contemporary with Emp 49 and 79, although it was possibly as late as the early seventh century.

A seventh-century example of such arrangement of bodies comes from Polhill (Kent). Pol 1967/75 contained a possible female adult who was buried in an extended and supine position, with a child no more than 5 years old at death. As the remains of the child as well as the arms of the adult were poorly preserved, it is difficult to precisely reconstruct the positioning of the bodies. However, it is clear that the child was positioned with its head resting on or near the left arm of the adult. The grave itself has not been closely dated, but the cemetery was in use no earlier than the early seventh century (Philp 1973: 172–173).

While we cannot be certain about the biological relationships between these women and children, the arrangement of these bodies would have forged an image of intimacy, in which the women took on the role as childcarers, holding and protecting the children into the grave. The children from the aforementioned double graves, ranging from a foetus of less than six months gestation to a five-year-old child, were all placed to the left of the adult, tucked between her torso and left arm. Interestingly, ethnographic studies have shown that mothers show a strong tendency to hold their children on their left, across different cultures and regardless of whether they are right- or left-handed (Schön and Silvén 2007: 111). By placing the child in its usual place of comfort and rest, the position of these bodies could have projected a performative space, within which the bodies of the dead interacted with each other. The intercorporeality of dead bodies was actively pursued, constructed, and communicated, such that relationships and expectations were carried forward through life into the grave.

Physical intimacy between women and children is a prominent theme in manuscript art from later Anglo-Saxon England (Dockray-Miller 2003). For example, folio 58r of the eleventh-century Harley Psalter depicts a seated, veiled woman gathering under her arms six naked children, an illustration to Psalm 112:9, '*Qui habitare facit sterile in domo matre filiox letante alleluia*' ('Who maketh a barren woman to dwell in a house, the joyful mother of children' (KJV)) (Figure 5.7a). Elsewhere in the same manuscript, an unveiled woman puts her arms around several children in a protective gesture (f 7v) (Figure 5.7b). Numerous illustrations from the late tenth- or early eleventh-century Junius Manuscript also depict bodily intimacy between women and young children. The veiled Eve on page 47, for example, holds the swaddled Abel and fixes her eyes on him (while the swaddled Cain was floating mid-air between Eve and Adam and was looked at by the latter) (Figure 5.7c). Cain's unnamed wife holds the infant Enoch in her arms in the bottom panel of page 51, as she stands with her husband at the City of Enoch, which was named after their son (Figure 5.7d). Maviael's wife sits with the child Mathusael on her lap on page 53, grasping and supporting the child with her hand (Figure 5.7e).

Other adult–child multiple burials might not display bodily embrace like the above examples, but bodies might still interact with each other in other ways. A number of burials contained a subadult leaning towards an adult female's arm, possibly also alluding to the notion of women as carers and protectors of children. In Lec 107, an adult woman was buried supine and extended. Her arms are folded with hands on the upper chest. To her left was an infant, deposited on its right side with its head resting on the woman's left arm. WH 102 was an adult woman, buried with a child aged five or six (WH 101) in a double grave. She laid slightly on her right side, her legs folded and her arms bent in a hugging position (type 'elbow D4'). WH 101 was buried on its left side, also with folded legs. Its arms survived poorly, but it is clear that WH 101 was placed facing the woman and leaning towards her right arm. Another example comes from Worthy Park (Hampshire). In WP 18, a young adult woman was deposited supine with extended legs and extended arms by the side. An infant laid on its left side next to (and facing) the woman's lower right arm, its legs tightly folded. Perhaps similarly, in Lec 188, skull fragments of a newborn (188/2) were found next to the left elbow of adult woman in the same grave (188/1).
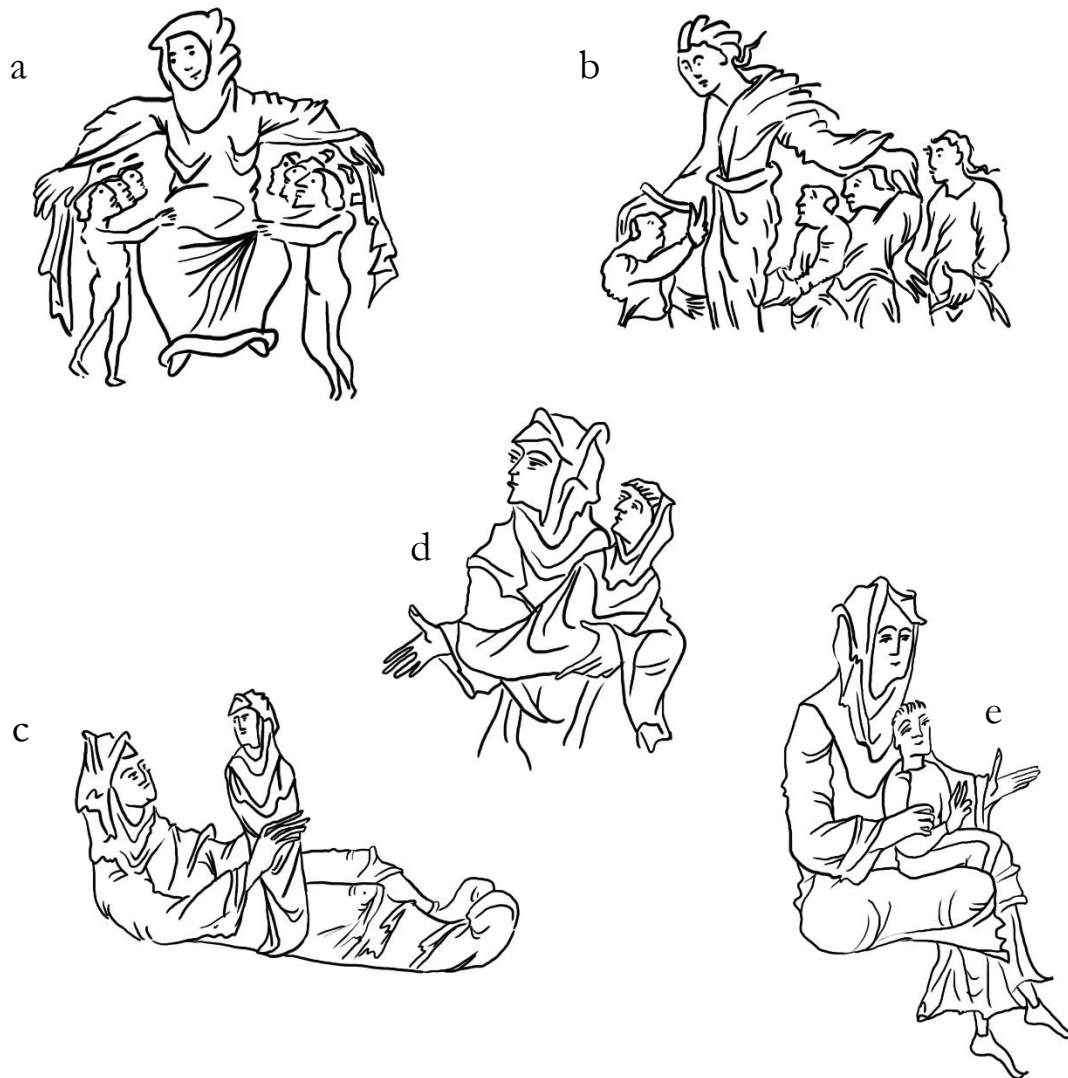
Figure 5.7. Woman with children. Harley 603, f 58r (a), f 7v (b). The British Library. MS Junius 11, p 47 (c), p 51(d), p 53 (e), The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Lec 107   WH 101/102   WP 18   Lec 188
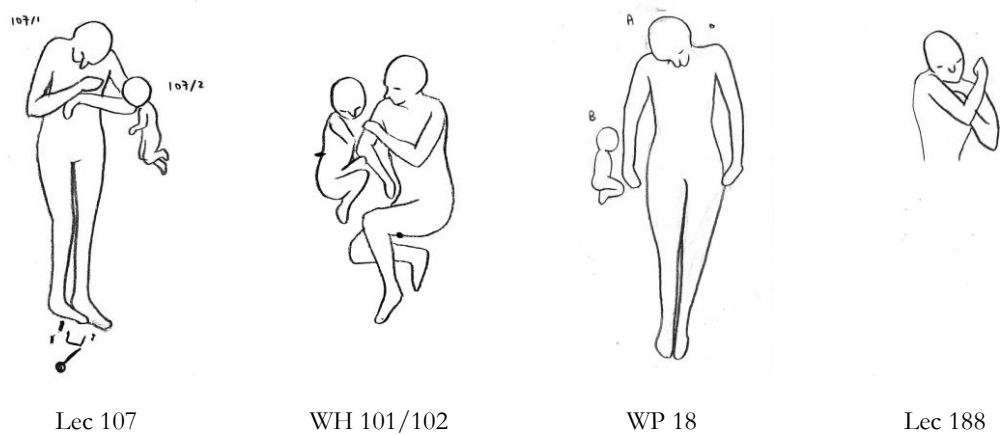
Figure 5.8 Lec 107, WH 101/102, WP 18, and Lec 188.

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In some examples, men were buried with children and possibly also displayed some degree of physical intimacy. Lec 119, for example, contained an adult male skeleton aged about 30 to 35 at death and a four-to-eight-month-old infant, buried supine and side by side. The torso of the man was turned slightly toward the child, who laid immediately next to the man's upper arm. Lec 89 was another example: a man of at least 45 years was buried closely side by side with an adolescent, who is unsexed but was accompanied by two stone spindle whorls, copper alloy pendant fragments, and a glass bead (Boyle et al 1998: 94). Both bodies were deposited extended and supine.
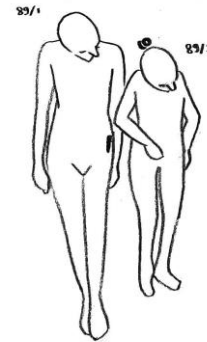
Lec 119   Lec 89

Figure 5.9 Lec 119 and Lec 89.

In other instances, the child was placed toward the lower half of the adult's body, such that the head of the child was levelled with the adult's hand. This was the case in Fin 125 and Fin 145. Each of them contained an adult male with a child on his right. In Fin 125, both of the man's arms were extended. The child, about nine years old at death and deposited supine, was placed next to the man's extended legs; its head was immediately next to the man's right thigh and below his right hand. This is very similar to the arrangement of the bodies in Fin 145. Here, the man's right arm was extended but his left arm was flexed with hand on the abdomen. The body of the child, lying on its right side, was placed next to the man's extended legs, and the man's right hand just about touching the back of the child's head. In Pol 1967/95, a child was placed next to an adult female, its head just by the left elbow of the adult. Similarly, a child aged about five was positioned slightly right-sided by the left elbow of an extended supine, possible male skeleton, in Pol 1967/69. A spearhead was found to the left of the adult's head, implying that a spear might have been placed between the two

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| Fin 125 | Fin 145 | Pol 1967/95 | Pol 1967/69 |
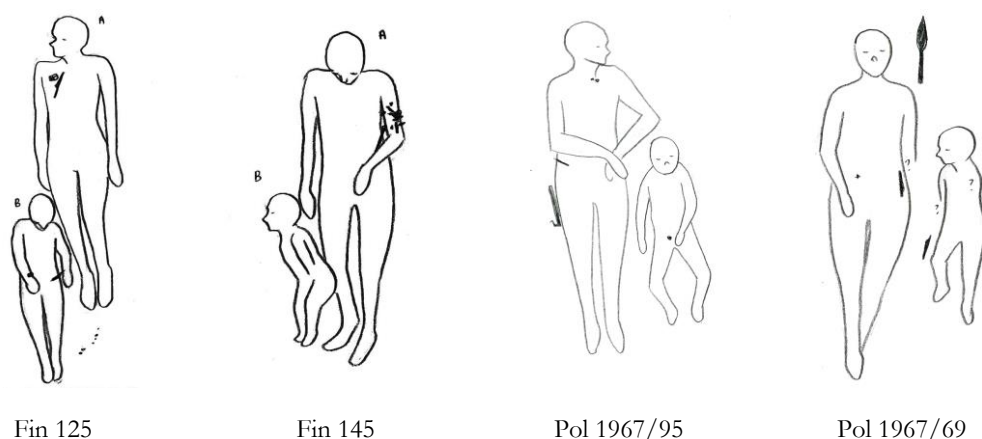
Figure 5.10 Fin 125, Fin 145, Pol 1967/95, and Pol 1967/69.

individuals. Some triple burials that contained adults and children were similarly arranged. In Emp 26, a 20-to-25-year-old man, an unsexed adolescent, and an unsexed child aged between 10 and 12 were all deposited supine, extended, and with their feet crossed. The individuals were of different heights, but positions of their feet roughly were levelled and formed a straight line.

Arranging the body of the subadult—the smaller individual—towards the lower half of the adult's body might have evoked a sense of power and authority, and perhaps protectiveness as well, of the larger individual. Such an arrangement would have more faithfully represented the actual heights of these individuals, and how they would have looked if they were standing upright next to each other. Hence, there might have been a desire to articulate a vertical image of life and living relationships, through the echoing horizontal arrangement of corpses in the grave (see also Section 6.4). This may explain why infants, who could not stand or walk and were extremely dependent, tended to be placed near or under the arm of an adult (usually female), instead of by the adult's legs. This interpretation, nevertheless, cannot be unproblematically applied to consecutive burials, as the image created by the arrangement of bodies would have necessarily been influenced by the state of decomposition. For example, Lec 33 contained the remains of two children and an adult woman. One child, 33/3, was placed to the right side of the adult and its head levelled with that of the adult. The other child, 33/1, was placed in the middle, towards the lower half of the woman, and partially overlay the other two skeletons. The excavators note that 33/3 is likely to have been interred with the adult at the same time, while 33/1 seemed to have been inserted at a subsequent
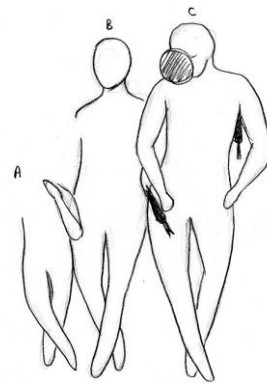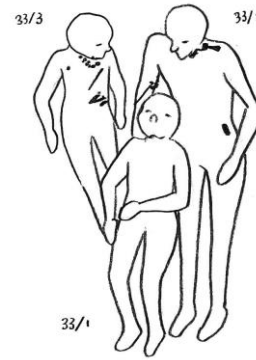
Emp 26   Lec 33

Figure 5.11 Emp 26 and Lec 33.

event (Boyle et al 1998: 68). In reopening the grave to bury another individual, mourners might have encountered partially or fully decomposed remains of the previously buried bodies, which would have formed a different visual, temporal, and emotional image from contemporary multiple burials.

A handful of multiple graves had rather peculiar positioning of bodies. The prone position, in multiple graves as in single ones, frequently attracts interpretations of sinister or punitive motives. In the double burial Oak 78, an adult female (Oak 78a) was buried facing downwards with extended legs and crossed feet, side by side with subadult (Oak 78b) who was also buried prone. Noting the prone position of the woman and her feet position, the excavators interpolate that her feet might have been tied, although they also caution that there is no direct evidence to indicate so (Sayer 2013: 39). Rather than jumping straight to the conclusion, approaching these prone bodies more carefully may reveal nuances that are otherwise overlooked. The woman's left arm was flexed and placed across the waist, her left hand touching the child's left arm. The wrist-clasps of her left sleeve, however, were found over the child's body, which implies that this hand gesture would have been hidden from view by the sleeve, possibly intentionally (Sayer 2013: 39). The woman's right arm was folded across the chest, her right hand seemingly clutching a necklace (Sayer 2013: 39). It is notable that such close attention was paid to the positioning of the fingers, the sleeve, and the necklace, especially since the body was deposited prone, which would have rendered manipulation of her arms and hands more difficult than if it were supine. The left arm of the child was placed extended, possibly also touching the woman. Meticulous arrangement of hands and fingers points towards intentional planning, careful execution, and close physical

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contact between the corpses and the buriers. This view dismisses the idea that there was necessarily a lack of care and respect in depositing bodies in the prone position.

One of the five bodies in Lec 81 was a child (Lec 81/2) aged two and a half to three at death, deposited in a prone position. The other four bodies were laid in a variety of positions: Lec 81/1 (adult woman between 18 and 20 years) was placed in an extended supine position; 81/3 (aged between six and seven) was also supine and extended, but in reverse orientation from the other skeletons; Lec 81/4 (female aged between 25 and 30 at death) laid on her left side with folded legs; her left arm bent double with hand under her face, and her right arm bent and placed across the waist of Lec 81/5 (15-to-18-month-old infant). Lec 81 is a unique example of quintuple burial where bodies were arranged largely side by side at the same depth, except for Lec 81/2 which appeared to have lain on top of Lec 81/1. It should be noted that Lec 81 belongs to both contemporary and consecutive types of multiple grave: Lec 81/1 was the earliest interment; Lec 81/3, 81/4, and 81/5 were possibly buried at the same time as well, but Lec 81/2 was inserted at a later event and caused disturbance to and removal of Lec 81/1's head. Despite the prone position of Lec 81/2, the burial has not been interpreted as 'deviant', because the context of which it was found makes 'family grave' a more attractive interpretation (Boyle et al 1998: 37–38; for a discussion of the 'family' argument, see below, Section 5.6.2). It may not be possible to fully explain why Lec 81/2 was buried prone while the others were not, but taking Oak 78 and Lec 81 together, the differing contexts from which prone bodies are found suggest that there is unlikely to be one single, universally applicable explanation for the practice (see also Sections 6.6, 7.3.2, and 8.4.1).

Oak 78   Lec 81
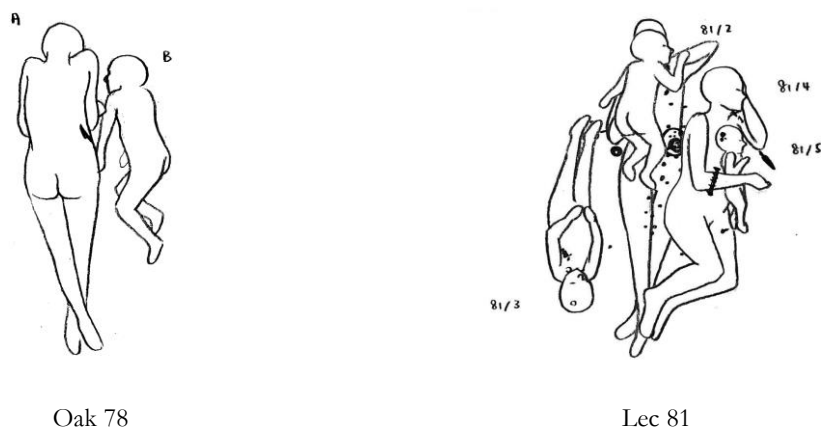
Figure 5.12 Oak 78 and Lec 81.

There are instances of female burials where foetuses have been found *in utero*, i.e. within the pelvis of the female skeleton. Cas 146 contained an adult female skeleton with a full-term foetus in birth position, and in GC 127, the foetus was descended and its skull within the pelvis of the woman. WP 26, an unfurnished burial of an adult woman with the remains of a full-term foetus between her thighs, has been cited as an example of post-mortem extrusion, where the foetus is said to have been expulsed from the uterus after the death of the mother, as a result of the building up of decompositional gases and intra-abdominal pressure (Lewis 2007: 36; for a counter-argument of this interpretation, see Sayer and Dickinson 2013: 289–290). Severe bleeding, infections, and mechanical complications are the most common causes of maternal death, but archaeologically it is often impossible to tell what the cause was for individual cases. A mother-with-foetus grave found at Oakington (Oak 57) contained an adult female skeleton with a full-term foetus lying transverse across the pelvis. In this stance, we can infer the cause of death of the woman and her foetus: the problematic positioning of the descending foetus would have been dangerous for both the child and the mother, and thus was probably the cause of the perinatal fatality (Sayer and Dickinson 2013: 286).

| Cas 146 | GC 127 | WP 26 | Oak 57 |
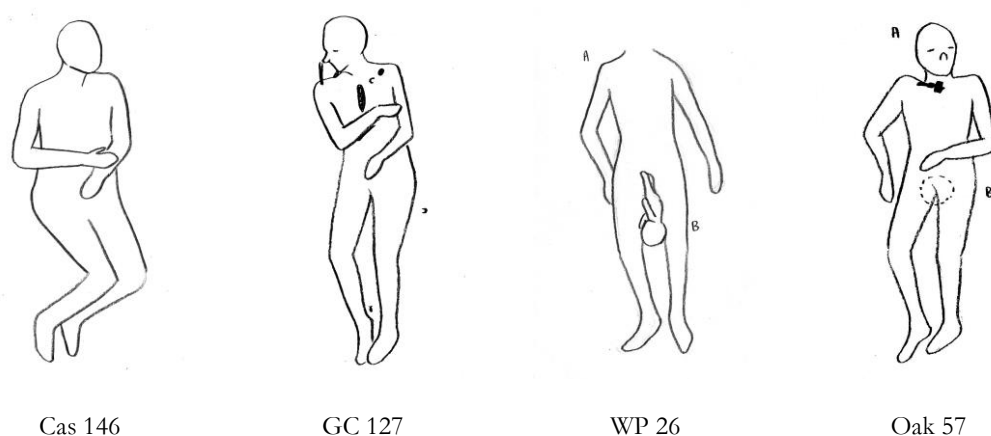
Figure 5.13 Cas 146, GC 127, WP 26, and Oak 57.

It remains debatable as to whether *in utero* burials should be considered 'multiple burials', given that there is only one body, practically speaking, involved in the burial process. However, as Sayer and Dickinson have noted, these *in utero* burials point towards a deliberate choice not to remove the unborn foetus from the womb, contrasting later medieval ecclesiastical law which required the removal and baptism of unborn children (Anderson and Parfitt 1998; Gilchrist and Slone 2005, 71, cited in Sayer and Dickinson 2013: 290). By leaving

the foetus in position, the mourners might have consciously considered this to be a fitting way to bury both the woman and the child, perhaps carrying symbolic meanings not dissimilar to the intimate woman–child double burials discussed above.

5.4.3 Gesturing in unison

As we have seen, bodies in multiple graves were sometimes positioned in ways that touch or interact with each other. Without directly touching or displaying bodily intimacy, however, bodies might still reference each other through their positional articulation, particularly in contemporary horizontal burials where the bodies would have formed a coherent image. Chapter Four has already explored the variations and patterns in positioning practices in early Anglo-Saxon burials, relating to group and individual identities of the dead and the community in which they lived. Translating these variations and patterns to multiple burials, especially contemporary horizontal multiple burials, it is important to assess the positioning of bodies holistically, as bodies may be arranged in positions that echo or mirror each other.

Edx 29 contained two unaged adults, one of them a male skeleton with a shield and the other an unsexed skeleton with brooches and beads. Both of them were positioned supine with extended legs, slightly shifted to the right, and left hand on pelvis or abdomen. In Fin 125, both the adult man and the nine-year-old child were deposited supine and extended, with arms similarly extended alongside the body. In Mil 105, a contemporary–consecutive horizontal triple burial already discussed above in Section 5.4.1, Mil 105B and Mil 105C were positioned very similarly, lying on the back with legs extended and hands over the waist, although Mil 105C appeared to have been slightly shifted when Mil 105A was interred at a subsequent event.

| Edx 29 | Fin 125 | Mil 105 |
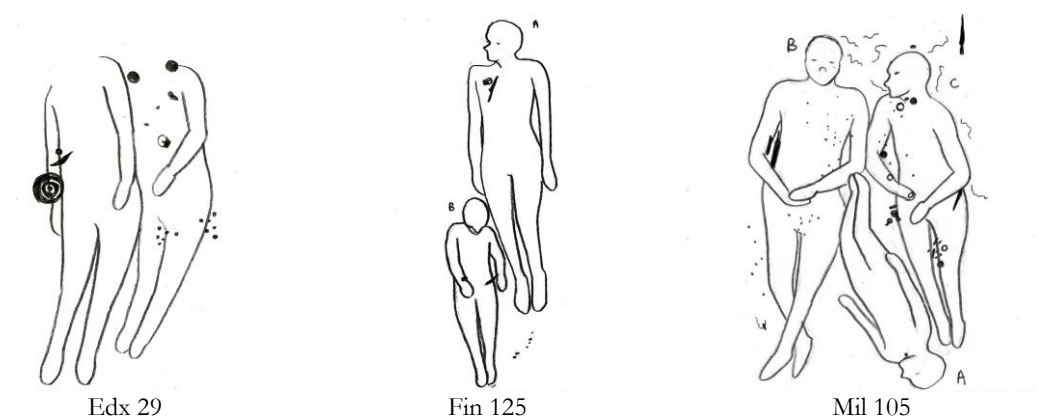
Figure 5.14 Edx 29, Fin 125, and Mil 105.

In some graves, bodies were positioned only very slightly differently. In Emp 85, for example, both bodies were buried on the left side with legs flexed, and right arm bent across the waist. The left arm of Emp 85A is extended, and that of Emp 85B is tightly folded. Cha 57 contained two adult male skeletons, both of which were deposited supine with legs extended. The left arm of Cha 57/59 was slightly flexed with hand on pelvis and the right arm extended alongside the body, while both arms of Cha 57/60 were extended by the side.

Emp 85   Cha 57
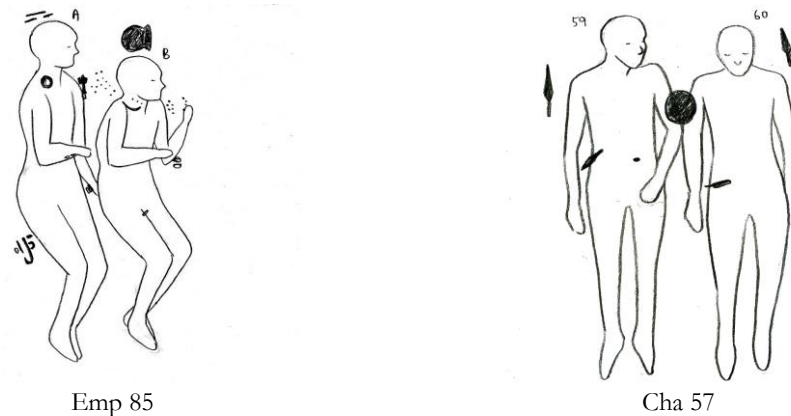
Figure 5.15 Emp 85 and Cha 57.

Bodies may mirror each other in their positional arrangement. Cas 33A, an adult female skeleton aged between 17 and 25 at death, lay supine with legs flexed to the left, and arms bent at elbow across the waist. Lying side by side to the right of Cas 33A, Cas 33B, adult male and over 45 years at death, formed almost a mirror image of the former: supine with legs flexed to the right and arms similarly bent across the waist. Similarly, Emp 31 contained three adults, all of whom were male or possible male. They were all deposited supine, with one arm bent across the waist, and the other arm extended beside the body (with the exception of Emp 31B whose left radius and ulna are missing). Pol 1967/99 was also a triple grave which contained the bodies of three adults. In the middle was a mature adult male over 40 years at death, positioned supine with splayed legs and knees pointing outwards. Two adult individuals were buried with him, one on his left and the other on his right. Both of these individuals were buried one-sided, facing the male individual in the middle, and each had their right hand resting on his shoulder, forming a somewhat symmetrical image. The meticulous arrangement of these bodies suggests that they were deliberately positioned as such. It may be noted here that, taken holistically, the image forged by these three bodies is perhaps reminiscent of the man-betwixt-beasts mount on the Sutton Hoo purse lid. While it

| Cas 33 | Emp 31 | Pol 1967/99 |
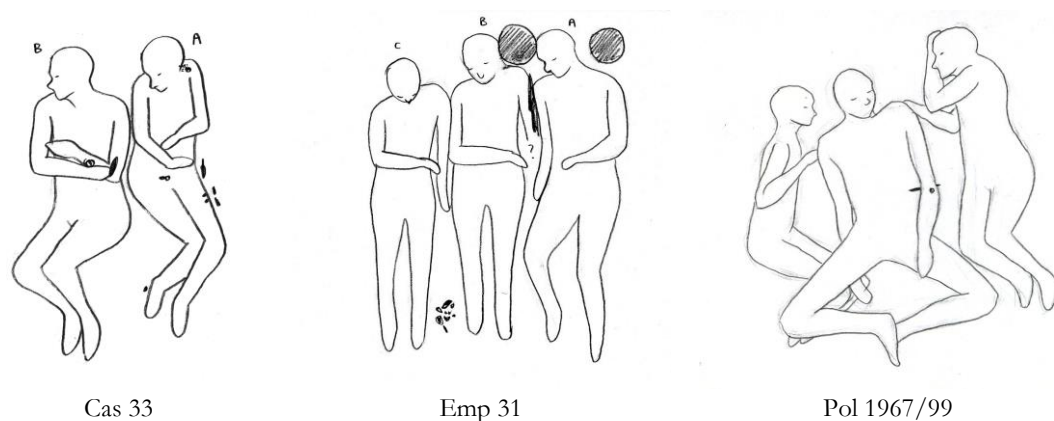
Figure 5.16 Cas 33, Emp 31, and Pol 1967/99.

is unlikely that there had been a direct link between the purse lid mount and the positioning of bodies in Pol 1967/99, it is possible that the arrangement of three bodies represents a particular gestural or positional motif. A full discussion of the relationship between gesticulation in art and corpse positioning will be given in Chapter Seven.

Like arms, the legs of multiple bodies may be similarly arranged. In many of the examples mentioned above, bodies in the same grave often have the same degree of flexure of legs, such as the flexed legs to the left side in Emp 85 and extended and parallel legs in Cha 57. In the triple grave Emp 26, which has been mentioned in Section 5.4.2 above, the young adult male, adolescent, and child were all positioned supine. Their legs were extended and feet crossed at the ankle, suggesting deliberate arrangement of the bodies and perhaps a desire to maintain consistency in body positioning. Similarly, the toddler and the possible male adult in Cas 68 were both positioned supine with legs crossed at the knee. It is perhaps notable that Cas 68A and Emp 26C—the adult male (or possible male) in each of these two graves—were very similarly arranged: they were both supine, their arms slightly flexed with hands on hips, their right legs crossed over their left legs, and they were both accompanied by subadult(s), although Cas 68B was much younger than Emp 26A or Emp 26B.

Not every multiple burial contained similarly positioned bodies. On the contrary, most multiple graves had no notable similarity in the positioning of the bodies, except those which have already been noted in Section 5.4.1 above with regards to deposition. In some graves, the bodies within them may even be arranged in vastly different positions. BnF 12 was a 22-to-25-year-old man, buried in the same grave as BnF 13, a female aged around 30 at death. The former lay on his left side with legs flexed; his arms were flexed and his hands appeared

to align with the spearhead, suggesting that he might have been holding the spear. The female, by contrary, was deposited supine with legs extended and hands on hips.

Emp 26   Cas 68
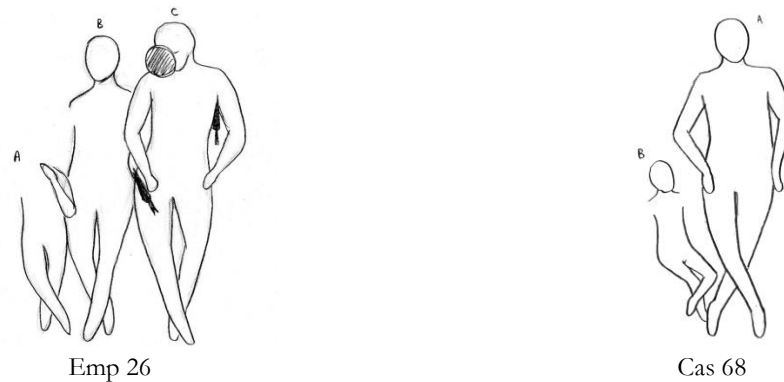
Figure 5.17 Emp 26 and Cas 68.
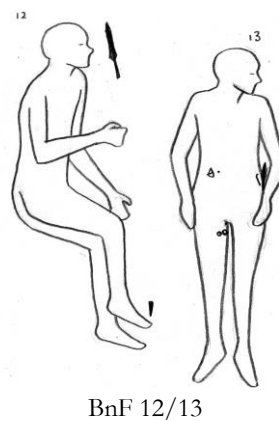
BnF 12/13

Figure 5.18 BnF 12/13.

5.4.4 The sharing of artefacts

Bodily gestures and interactions between individuals in the same grave, as discussed above, warn that multiple burials cannot be broken down in simple textual catalogues of separate individuals. Instead, they must be understood as a whole. In approaching early Anglo-Saxon funerary display, the burial gestalt highlights the holistic perception of the grave, rather than dividing it up into smaller objects of archaeological investigation. The gestalt theory of perception holds that the perception of the whole has an emergent quality other than the sum of its parts (Koffka 1935; Wertheimer 1938). Viewing multiple burials holistically instead of approaching the bodies individually, it is important to bring into question the attribution

of artefacts to single individuals, as is the case in most excavation reports and grave catalogues.

Emp 104 was a contemporary double burial that contained two adult male skeletons, one of them was aged between 25 and 35 and the other between 16 and 18 at death. Two spearheads were found placed in a crossed position, between the heads of the men. In this burial, it is problematic to assign the spearheads to one or the other, as they would have formed a coherent funerary display. It has also been noted that spears were sometimes found at a depth above the bodies, implying they might have been in the soil when the grave was partially backfilled (Welton pers comm). This further complicates the relationship between spears and corpses within their spatial and performative contexts. Likewise, in Gun 53 which contained two adult women, a pottery vessel was placed near their heads. Although the excavation report attributes the pot to Gun 53R (Patrick et al 2007: 217), the placement of the object in relation to the bodies suggests it might well have been a shared, rather than personal, object.
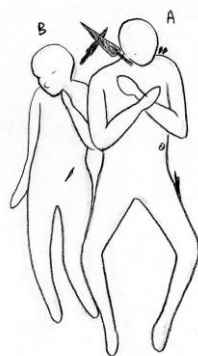
Emp 104   Gun 53

Edx 106   Mil 105

Figure 5.19 Emp 104, Gun 53, Edx 106, and Mil 105.

Attributing objects to specific individuals is underlain by assumptions regarding identity and personhood. Edx 106 contained two young adults buried side by side: a supine female skeleton (Edx 106A) adorned with a pair of saucer brooches, beads, wrist clasps, and a girdle hanger, and a male skeleton (Edx 106B), slightly turned towards the female. Between their heads was a spearhead, which has been assigned to Edx 106B. In this instance, assigning the spearhead to the male skeleton in the grave has little to do with direct physical evidence, but is based on the assumption that the spear was a masculine object and would thus have been exclusively associated with the male-sexed skeleton instead of the well-dressed female. It is true that in early Anglo-Saxon society, the conception and expression of gender appeared to be relatively consistent with biological sex, and weapons are, in the vast majority of cases, associated with male skeletons (see Stoodley 1999). However, organising the burial record by slotting grave items into specific individuals within the same grave ignores the coherent wholeness of multiple burials, and subtly influences how we approach and interpret such burials.

To further illustrate this point, Mil 105 contained an adult man, an adult woman, and a 12-to-14-year-old child. The spearhead found within the grave was in fact placed next to the female skeleton, who was also accompanied by brooches and beads, rather than the male skeleton. In the excavation report, however, the spearhead is recorded as a find under Mil 105B, the male skeleton (Parfitt and Brugmann 1997: 159). The issue here is twofold: firstly, by attributing the spearhead to the male skeleton even though it was found next to the female, it reinforces presuppositions with regards to gender identities and personal values and ownership of objects; secondly, it divides up skeletons and objects into small, recordable parts, and does not provide a view of the grave as whole.

It is possible that the spear belonged to the woman instead of the man, as weapons are sometimes found in burials with female skeletons (Stoodley 1999: 76–77). Given that Mil 105B and Mil 105C appear to have been buried simultaneously, it is equally possible that personal objects need not be placed in close proximity to the person. Moreover, these two individuals might have claimed joint ownership of some of the objects in life, or they might have been jointly given the objects by the mourners. If these are true, particularly the former scenario, we may be able to infer familial relationship between the two individuals, possibly as spouses, siblings, or paternal cousins: documentary evidence suggests that the ownership of objects might be retained in the household and the close kin group. In the seventh-century

Law of Æthelberht (78; 81), cited in the previous chapter (see Section 4.4.2), a widow may take half of her deceased husband's property, if she bears a living child. If she does not, her paternal kin shall have it. Interpolating relationships based on a single spearhead is by no means unproblematic, not least because Mil 105 predates Æthelberht's laws by up to a century, possibly more. Furthermore, the spear has known to bear specifically masculine connotations, as a symbol of warriorhood (Härke 1992). Named weapons in later literary sources also support the idea of a close personal relationship between the weapon and its wielder (Brunning 2013: 41) (although this may make the observation of the positioning of the spear nearer the woman than the man more interesting). This brief analysis, nevertheless, hopes to highlight the assumptions and issues that underlie our current approach to burial recording and cataloguing, and to address graves, multiple graves in particular, as a whole through viewing early Anglo-Saxon funerary tableaux holistically.

5.5 VERTICAL MULTIPLE BURIALS

Compared to horizontal multiple burials, vertical multiple burials are notably under-theorised and poorly understood, frequently overlooked and sometimes not catalogued as multiple burials from the outset. This is particularly true for those where the burials were interred at different times. Vertical multiple burials would have afforded very different visuality compared to horizontal burials, which might have interesting performative and symbolic implications. In a contemporary vertical burial, for example, the lower body would be lowered into the grave first, prepared and arranged in the desired manner, before the upper body was placed on top. The placement of the upper body, especially if the grave was partially or fully backfilled between the interments, would have involved a process of covering and concealing the body underneath. In a consecutive vertical burial, the lower burial(s) might be disturbed when the upper burial was inserted, uncovering the partially decomposed remains of the preceding burials underneath.

The reconstruction drawings created for the present thesis are based on the grave plans from cemetery reports. In most cases of vertical multiple burials, each body is presented singly on a grave plan. As a result, these bodies are also represented singly in the reconstruction drawings. Nevertheless, in cases where the grave cuts are also recorded and drawn in the report, the drawings can be combined digitally to offer a view of the superimposing bodies as they would originally have looked, if they were buried contemporaneously. In the below

discussion, when a digitally combined drawing is shown, it will be indicated under the image for clarity.

5.5.1 Contemporary bodies

Inferring the contemporaneity of multiple burials, particularly vertical ones, is not unproblematic. Nevertheless, careful excavation may help construct a better understanding of the context of burial. At Edix Hill (Cambridgeshire), Edx 9B was found undisturbed at the bottom of the grave, and Edx 9A laid on top of Edx 9B. The excavators point out that there seem to have been considerable post-burial subsidence in the grave, which had caused the head of Edx 9B to tilt forward and against the west side of the grave, and Edx 9A to extend to a depth of 0.18m and Edx 9B to slump to 0.05m beneath it. The shield studs that were found next to Edx 9B's right arm had not subsided, although some slippage had occurred. This leads the excavators to suggest that the superimposing Edx 9A and Edx 9B were buried at the same time and laid out in similar ways (Malim and Hines 1998: 46).

| Edx 9A | Edx 9B | Edx 9 (combined) |
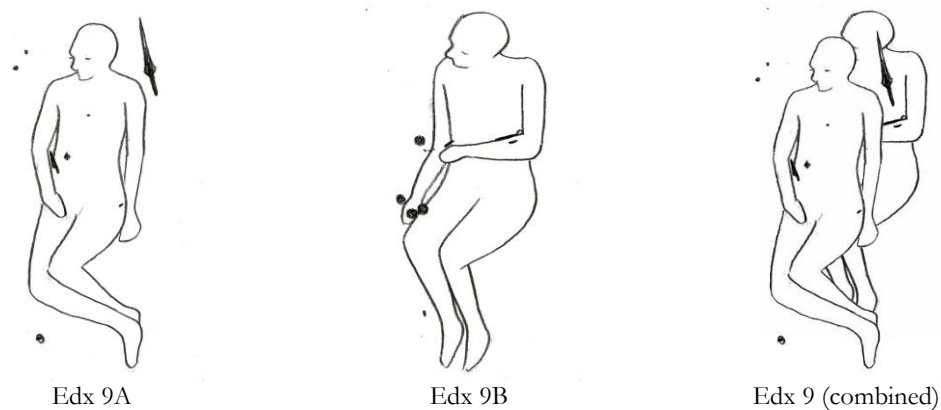
Figure 5.20 Edx 9A, Edx 9B, and superimposed image of Edx 9.

In another instance, Sto 1122 and Sto 1128 overlapped at differing depths, but the upper grave did not disturb the lower one (the excavation report is unclear about which was at the top and which was at the bottom. However, the grave numbers suggest that Sto 1122 was identified and excavated before Sto 1128, and might have thus been the upper burial). The two graves have been radiocarbon dated to cal AD 572–668 (Sto 1122) and cal AD 583–708 (Sto 1128), suggesting that they were possibly contemporaneous (Ford and Falys 2012: 16). Nevertheless, contrasting them with Edx 9A and Edx 9B, both of which were deposited supine with legs flexed to the right, Sto 1122 and Sto 1128 were positioned very differently.

Sto 1122 was a supine burial with legs extended and hands on hips; Sto 1128 laid on its left side, with tightly folded legs and arms, and hands to the chin, in a 'clasped OS' type.

| Sto 1122 | Sto 1128 | Sto 1122/1128 (combined) |

Figure 5.21 Sto 1122, Sto 1128, and superimposed image of the two graves.

Notably, the placement of the cranium of Sto 1122 and its missing mandible and first cervical vertebra have led the excavators to suggest that the individual might have been decapitated, with the skull having been display for a period of time before its deposition in the grave with the rest of the body. Deviant treatment of bodies in multiple burials has sometimes attracted speculations about possible human sacrifice in Anglo-Saxon England. The prone position, as suggested above for horizontal multiple graves (Section 5.4.2), has frequently been interpreted as a 'deviant' practice that signals disrespect, punishment, or ritual sacrifice. Edx 84, for example, contained a mature adult woman buried in a supine position, and under her head were the remains of an infant in a prone position. Considering the wealth of the grave, Crawford suggests that this grave may represent the sacrifice of the baby to accompany the woman in death (Crawford 2007: 88–90).

Edx 84

Figure 5.22 Edx 84.

184

The most well-known and cited example of an early Anglo-Saxon contemporary vertical multiple burial comes from Sewerby (East Yorkshire). The lower skeleton, Sew 49, was a well-furnished (RIAC = 11) adult female burial associated with a coffin. It was laid out in an extended and supine posture with arms arranged in the 'waist-shoulder D3' type. The upper burial, Sew 41, was inserted when Sew 49 was partially backfilled, reusing the existing grave fill. This burial was that of a fully-dressed older adult female, with slightly less material provision (RIAC = 6) than the lower burial. Notably, it was deposited in a prone position with two slabs of stones on its back, which have been interpreted by the excavator as having been thrown into the grave to keep the body in place (Hirst 1985: 39). The legs bent back with the lower right leg rising into the subsoil; the arms were folded with elbows close to the torso, and hands clenched in such a way that some believed the woman might have been trying to push herself up. The prone position and the unusual arrangement of limbs have led the excavator to interpret Sew 41 as a 'live burial', possibly as punishment, human sacrifice, or other kinds of ritualised murder (Hirst 1985: 39).

Sew 41   Sew 49

Figure 5.23 Sew 41 and Sew 49

Williams (2006: 99–100) points out that less gruesome interpretations remain possible, such as stressful and traumatic death. If the woman had died in an accident that resulted in such a position, the burial posture observed might have been a result of burial before rigor mortis was dissipated, as the hard, rigid body would not lie comfortably if it was arranged supine. In the case of house fire, the unusual burial position might have been caused by the contraction of muscle fibres, pulling the body into a pugilistic pose when the body was burnt (Harvig et al 2015). The stones then could have been there to symbolically hold the body in place, as opposed to physically, either as a well-intended action to bring peace to a person who died in sudden, traumatic circumstances, or as a precaution against a possible revenant.

Williams (2006: 102) suggests that the burial of Sew 41 on top of Sew 49 might be linked with a desire for the 'bad death' of the upper burial to be associated with the 'good death' of the lower burial. The fact that Sew 41 is one of the two most well-furnished prone burials in the data set perhaps makes the interpretation of an untimely death, rather than punishment or sacrifice, more plausible.

If the unusual posture of Sew 41 indeed represents burial before rigor mortis had dissipated, it would imply that the burial took place within two to three days after individual's death. If we assume that burial would normally take place after rigor mortis had faded, based on the argument that cadavers were intentionally positioned in their graves, Sew 41 may have been a relatively hasty burial where the buriers were eager to dispose of the body as quickly as possible. Bearing in mind the rarity of multiple burials in the North of England compared to other parts of England, the pair Sew 41/49 would likely have been as extraordinary and peculiar to their Anglo-Saxon audience as they are to the present-day archaeologist. Thus, any overarching explanations proposed for contemporary vertical multiple burials might not be comfortably translatable to Sew 41/49, or vice versa. This highlights the need for more nuanced treatment of burial records in their specific contexts, in providing a fuller picture of the variability of funerary culture in the early Anglo-Saxon period.

5.5.2 Chronologically differentiated bodies

Some bodies were placed in existing graves, resulting in consecutive vertical multiple burials, each interment at a different depth from another. The sight of human remains when cutting into old graves was probably common in the post-Conversion period, as explained by an anonymous homilist (Assmann XIV, 164–169): *we magan geseon, þonne man binnan mynster byrgene delfeð 7 þa ban þæron findeþ, hwilce we beon scylan* ('we may see, when one digs a grave within a minster and then finds bones therein, what we shall become'). In most early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, however, intercutting graves were not very common, pointing towards the use of grave markers, as well as the practice of intentional reopening and reuse of graves, when burials were cut into and stacked one on top of another.

An existing grave might be reopened to accommodate an additional body. Lec 81, already discussed extensively in Section 5.4.2 above, contained the remains of five individuals in total. The excavators contend that Lec 81/2 was interred at the later event and laid directly on top of the upper body of Lec 81/1: it appeared to have caused disturbance to Lec 81/1

head, which was entirely missing. Lec 33 seems to be another example of consecutive multiple burial, as the excavators note that Lec 33/1 appeared to have been a later interment and was placed partially over the legs of the two other individuals underneath.

In some consecutive vertical multiple burials, the grave might be of a considerable depth and was only partially backfilled after the interment of the first individual. At Finglesham (Kent), for instance, Fin 21 contained two superimposing bodies: Fin 21A lay above Fin 21B 'in a fill of loamy earth', while Fin 21B was at the bottom of the grave and undisturbed. The excavator suggests that the events possibly followed that Fin 21B was buried and left partially backfilled and, after some time, Fin 21A was placed on top of Fin 21B. It is unclear how much time had elapsed between the two interments, and whether any parts of the lower body were visible when the upper body was buried.
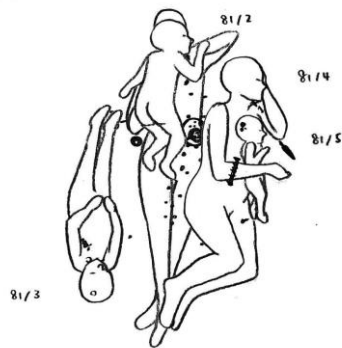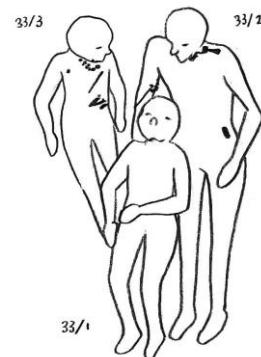
Lec 81   Lec 33

Fin 21A   Fin 21B

Figure 5.24 Lec 81, Lec 33, Fin 21A, and Fin 21B.

It is sometimes possible for the interments to be closely dated, and to assess how much time had passed between them. DBu 391A was the upper skeleton in a vertical double burial and laid on top of DBu 391B. The grave goods assemblages in the two interments have been independently dated: the lower skeleton, DBu 391B, is datable to the mid-sixth century, and the upper skeleton, DBu 391A, to the second half of the seventh century or the first half of the eighth century. The dates provided by the grave goods agree with two radiocarbon dates of cal AD 435–535 for DBu 391B and cal AD 600–660 for DBu 391A (Parfitt and Anderson 2012: 28; see also Bayliss et al 2013: 341). The evidence thus appears to suggest that over a century had elapsed since the first interment when the second was inserted. This example of grave reopening and reuse is remarkable, and is likely to have been facilitated by grave markers, burial knowledge, and the memory of individuals and events over several generations.

DBu 391A   DBu 391B

Figure 5.25 DBu 391A and DBu 391B.

At Water Lane, Melbourn (Cambridgeshire), three groups of burials show evidence of superimposed inhumations (Wat 71/72/73, Wat 77/78/79/80, and Wat 96/97). In each group, the graves were 'stacked' at varying depths, each succeeding grave roughly following the cut of the preceding inhumation and leaving the latter intact. It should be noted that Wat 77/78/79/80 are thought to have been buried together as a quintuple in the present catalogue of multiple graves, even though they appear as four graves in the site report: Wat 78 contained the skeleton of an adult woman and a foetus of about six months gestation, although the latter is not recorded as a second individual but as part of the female skeleton. Section 5.4.2 above has explained that the foetus Wat 78 might have represented a premature baby, and the arrangement of its remains between the woman's left arm and torso might have been intentional. Thus, Wat 78 is itself considered to be a contemporary horizontal

double burial, while also part of a consecutive vertical burial with the three other graves. Wat 94/95 and Wat 102/103 show similar practice of returning to an existing grave, but the second inhumation caused truncation of the original inhumation (Duncan et al 2003: 93).

<div align="center">

Wat 77   Wat 78   Wat 79   Wat 80

</div>
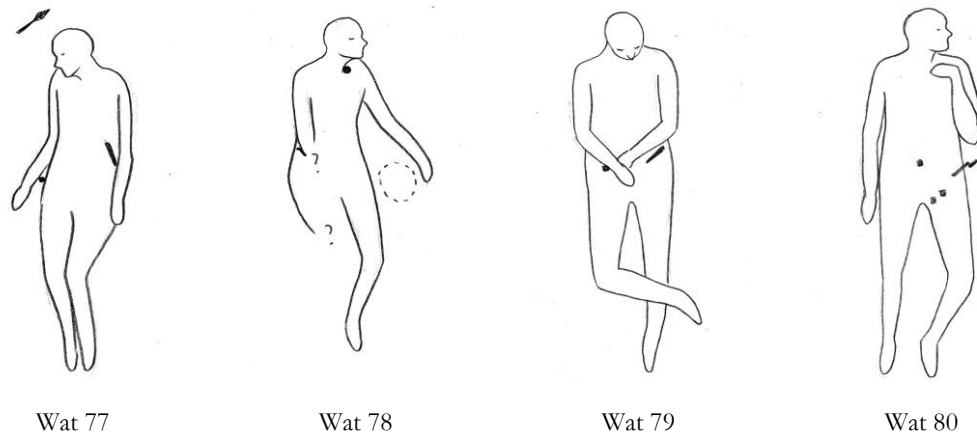
Figure 5.26 Wat 77, Wat 78, Wat 79, and Wat 80.

Compared to horizontal or contemporary vertical multiple burials, interments in consecutive vertical multiple burials were much less likely to reference each other in their positional articulation, for practical reasons. However, given the supposed importance of funerary display in the early Anglo-Saxon period, memories of previous funerals might persist, particularly if the time elapsed between burials was short. It is difficult to know whether the buriers of subsequent interments would have known what the skeletons beneath looked like, if they were left undisturbed. Taken together, it is probable that the positional referencing between bodies was not as important an element in the funerary ritual and display in vertical multiple burials, as it was in horizontal multiple burials.

5.6 DISCUSSION

This chapter has explored corpse positioning in multiple burials in early Anglo-Saxon England, through an examination of horizontal and vertical arrangements, physical touch between bodies within the same grave, contemporary and consecutive contexts of burial, and the viewing of the grave holistically. A number of themes have been highlighted, relating to the people who were accorded multiple burial rite, the symbolic meanings of multiple graves and the positioning of bodies, as well as some methodological and interpretive problems in approaching multiple burials. This section contextualises and explores these themes in greater depth.

5.6.1 Interpreting multiple burials

In his paper tellingly titled 'Multiple burials, multiple meanings?', Nick Stoodley (2002) emphasises that early Anglo-Saxon multiple burials would have had different meanings that were context-specific. As this chapter has shown, the positioning of bodies in multiple burials varied from grave to grave, which requires more nuanced understanding of the individuals who were accorded such practices and the local and historical contexts from which these practices arose. The choice between horizontal and vertical arrangements may simply be a question of local tradition and individual preference. While we recognise the visual and practical implications of different multiple burial practices, it would be unhelpful or even misleading to see any particular practice as more or less symbolically powerful than others. As Price (2010) points out, early medieval funerals would have been ritual narratives which embedded ancestral stories, created myths, and performatively acted out. The creativity and individuality, expressed in many of the burials discussed in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, attest to the importance of poetics and stories in Anglo-Saxon mortuary behaviour.

A more difficult question to answer is what sort of 'symbolic power' multiple burials would have had, which was perceived and understood by the Anglo-Saxon mourners. The Finnsburg episode in *Beowulf* offers a glimpse of the symbolic potential of placing multiple corpses together. The episode is inserted after Beowulf's fight with Grendel, when Hrothgar's *scop* entertains their Geatish guests in Heorot by telling the story of the tragedy of Hildeburg. In the story, Hildeburg, sister of Hnæf the Danish prince, was married to the Frisian king Finn. Conflicts between the Half-Danes and the Frisians resulted in the death in battle of Hnæf and Hildeburg's unnamed son (or sons). In the funeral scene, Hildeburg ordered that the bodies of her brother and her son(s) be placed on the same pyre:

> Het ða Hildeburh   æt Hnæfes ade
> hire selfre sunu   sweoloðe befæstan,
> banfatu bærnan,   ond on bæl don
> earme on eaxle.   Ides gnornode,
> geomrode giddum.

> Hildeburg then commanded her own son to be committed to heat on Hnæf's pyre, bone-vessels to burn, and to put in fire arm upon shoulder. The woman mourned, lamenting with songs.

> (*Beowulf*, ll 1114–1118a)

These lines evoke a heart-wrenching image of the dead men on the cremation pyre and the sorrowful singing of the mourning Hildeburg. Here, Hildeburg's brother and son(s) are placed next to each other on the pyre, shoulder-to-shoulder. The half line 'earme on eaxle' has been widely discussed by Old English scholars, and some attribute 'earme on eaxle' to Hildeburg, painting a picture of Hildeburg's gesture of mourning as she bends her head to her shoulder or upper arm (Lester 1986: 162). Holthausen's emendation of *earme* (noun 'arm', or adjective 'wretched') to *eame* (noun 'uncle') has been popular among scholars and is accepted by many editors and translators (Lester 1986; Orchard 2003: 182; Fulk et al 2008: 39). As noted by Owen-Crocker (2000: 48–50), the emendation 'reinforces the irony, by suggesting that the nephew is only at his uncle's shoulder in death when they should have been shoulder to shoulder in life' (Owen-Crocker 2000: 50).

Although this scene in *Beowulf* is a later Anglo-Saxon imagination of a pre-Christian cremation, the visual power of multiple corpses on display might have been similarly experienced in the early Anglo-Saxon period. The intimate positioning of bodies in multiple burials has been noted throughout this chapter, possibly reflecting intimate personal relationships in life. Body positions, in a sense, traversed the states of living and dying, and embodied the identities and relationships which defined the deceased and their mourners. Bodies became mnemonic tools, weaving and reproducing stories and memories about the individual people as well as their personalities, deeds, and relationships. In the case of contemporary multiple burials, the death of multiple individuals at the same time might have been particularly traumatic for small communities consisting only a few households, especially if under sudden and/or violent circumstances. Placing two or more individuals in the same grave might thus be distinctly memorable—a visual performance and display in commemorating the dead which served to create, mediate, and perpetuate memory. In the case of consecutive multiple burials, the location (and probably identity) of the earlier burial was remembered, and was assimilated in the subsequent burial event, preserving and reconstituting memory.

Memory is not simply created in mortuary events, but it can also be evoked in the process. The perception of funerals and graves would have been predicated upon the mourners' former experiences of funerary participations, with all associated meanings. Mnemonics, therefore, does not simply end with the construction of past memory, but it has much more profound implications for the present and the future. Thus, the notion of mnemonics

requires more diachronic scrutiny. Rather than any kind of fixed past, mnemonics embeds rhetorical power which points towards the heterogeneity of human attention: to past, present, future, or imagined situation (Oakley 2011: 283). In this way, mnemonics acquires the potential for prolepsis: pointing at the future in light of the present. Mortuary practices, in this light, constitute Walter Benjamin's 'dialectical image': a material representation whose intelligibility shifts along the temporal trajectory. The dialectical image is a material construction of the past and the present simultaneously, and its particular recognisability is specified and only attainable at a particular point in time (Benjamin 1999). Hence, the construction and technologies of memory are inherently specified and historicised, where mnemonic rhetoric switches between past, present, future, and imagined worlds.

Through arranging bodies together in symbolically meaningful ways, multiple burials called upon the networks of social relations in which the dead and the living were embedded. In this process, bodies and their positional articulation stood as the material crossing-point between states of living and dying, extending identities and relationships from the realm of the living to that of the dead. The positioning of bodies in multiple burials, as we have seen in this chapter, was carefully planned and executed. The emotional response from the mourners was manifested in the material image of multiple bodies in the same grave, memorable and evocative. Through the techniques of memory implicated in burial rites, multiple burials would have had lasting effects on the emotive experience of funerary attendants, as well as the perception of interpersonal relationships and their bodily manifestations.

5.6.2 The 'family' argument revisited

Multiple burials have frequently been assumed to be family graves, often with little supporting evidence. Wilson, for example, suggests that horizontal multiple burials were 'members of the same family buried in a communal grave' with no explicit explanation behind his reasoning (Wilson 1992: 71–77). More recent interpretations have called for greater caution with our presuppositions and have argued that multiple burials need not necessarily represent family burials. Crawford points out that multiple burials were comparatively rare in early Anglo-Saxon England, which implies that 'family burial chambers' could not have been a commonplace concept, and thus does not sufficiently explain the practice of multiple burial (Crawford 1999: 106).

In assessing the validity and usefulness of the 'family' argument, the nature and significance of Anglo-Saxon kinship system must be considered. Kinship formed the basis of early Anglo-Saxon social structure in providing personal status, affiliations, genealogy, access to and control of land, as well as in feuding and the payment of wergild (Härke 1997: 137). Previous studies have suggested that Anglo-Saxon family groups operated a bilateral kinship system with a slight patrilineal bias (Härke 1997: 137; Murray 2005: 97), while others have also conjectured a patrilocal system in which the married couple resides with or near the parental family of the husband and raises their children there (Sayer 2014). The size and occupation of settlement sites suggest that early Anglo-Saxon society was organised into small farmsteads or hamlets, with little hierarchies of settlement or pressure of land space (Crawford 1999: 103). Härke (1997: 137–141), combining cemetery and settlement evidence, suggests that early Anglo-Saxon settlement consisted of small farmsteads of between 12 and well over 50 people, but rarely exceeding 100. Each farmstead complex, he suggests, would have been occupied by a household, which formed the basic residential and economic unit.

West Stow in Suffolk, for example, contained only seven major buildings over a two-century period between the fifth and the seventh centuries (West 1985). Mucking in Essex likewise represents a shifting settlement occupied by eight to ten families over two centuries (Hamerow 1993). Each household comprised persons of different status, with the master of the household and his wife, an average number of three to four children, and other free or unfree dependants (Härke 1997: 140–141). The evidence thus points towards family groups that were based around the nuclear family, where young married couples moved away from their parental dwellings and set up new homes, as opposed to large extended family structures (Crawford 1999: 103–104). Anglo-Saxon kinship terminology also suggests an emphasis on the nuclear family, but terminology for more distant kin is limited: *nefa* could mean nephew, grandson, or stepson; *suhterga* could mean nephew or cousin (Loyn 1974: 198).

It is difficult, albeit not impossible, to identify the nuclear family and assess inter-generational relationships in cemetery evidence, because people died at different ages and at different times (for a critical analysis of generational information in cemeteries, see Sayer 2010). Occasionally, the bones themselves offer a means to assess the biological relationship between the individuals buried in the same grave. These include various metric and non-metric traits as well as diseases or abnormalities which are hereditary or have a genetic predisposition to their development. For example, DBu 228 contained a male and a female

skeleton, lying on their sides facing each other. The two individuals both display a condition in the occipital bone known as hypoglossal canal bipartite, suggesting they might have been genetically related (O'Rahilly and Müller 1984; Müller and O'Rahilly 2003). In the quintuple burial Lec 81, the two adults had very similar estimated stature, and they have both been identified with spondylolysis in the fifth lumbar vertebra. It has been suggested that spondylolysis is generally caused by stresses on the lower spine by locomotion, but there is also an element of genetic predisposition (Waldron 2009: 151). Given the rarity of this spinal condition in the cemetery of Lechlade (4 cases in total, 2%), it was no coincidence that these women were buried in the same grave. They might have either been biologically related, or they could have partaken in very similar activities in life, or both may be relevant.
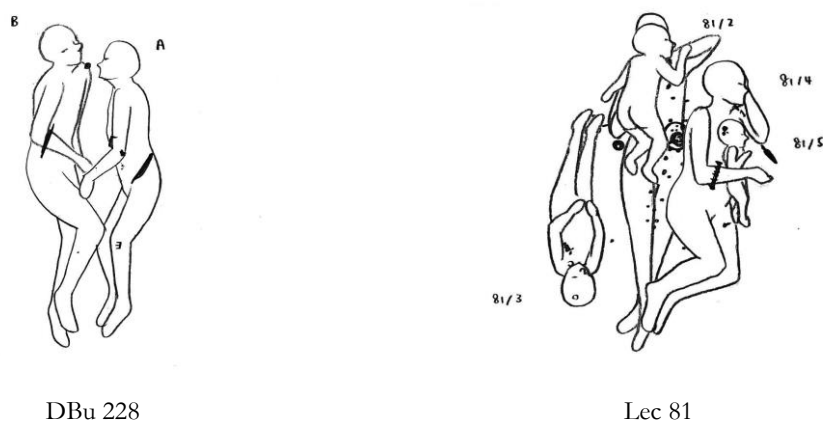
DBu 228   Lec 81

Figure 5.27 DBu 228 and Lec 81.

There is no direct evidence to suggest whether the three children that were buried with these two women in Lec 81 were biologically related to them. However, if we accept Härke's (1997: 140–141) suggestion that the Anglo-Saxon household made up of persons of different status, the women may not necessarily be biological mothers, but it is possible that they were child-nurses. Later literary sources suggest that child nurses were hired to care for, and possibly breastfeed, children. In a seventh-century law of Ine, it is stated that '*Gif gesiðcund mon fare, þonne mot he habban his gerefan mid him 7 his smið 7 his cildfestran*' ('If a nobleman travel, he may have with him his reeve, his smith, and his child-nurse') (Ine 63, Liebermann 1903–1916: 118). This implies that the nurse was an important member of the thane's retinue. In one of Gregory's replies to Augustine of Canterbury, he denounces the 'evil custom' where mothers hand over children to be looked after by nurses before they are weaned, although this may be based on his observation of such practice in the Mediterranean (*Registrum Epistolarum*,

Book XI, Letter 64). Wet nursing practice may forge a fictive kinship between the wet nurse, her family, and the family of the child she is nursing (Giladi 1999; Ensel 2002). Kinship, hence, may not be necessarily biologically-defined, but could be culturally-constructed.

Nonetheless, the intimate positioning of bodies strongly suggests that the individuals buried in the same contemporary multiple grave, particularly in horizontal arrangements, would have known each other in life, and might have enjoyed intimate relationships. Laying out bodies intimately in multiple burials may create an imagery of co-sleeping, an exercise which shows intense physical affection (Figure 5.28). As noted in the previous chapter (Section 4.4.2), the bodies of infants and young children in graves might have been positioned as an allusion to sleep and rest, and this allusion might apply to adult burials as well. It has been pointed out that bed-sharing between parents and children, particularly mothers and infants, is widely practised across different cultures (Davies 1994; Gantley et al 1993; McKenna and Mosko 1990; cited in Schön and Silvén 2007: 125). Infants sleeping separately from their parents has been suggested to have arisen relatively recently in the industrialised West (Schön and Silvén 2007: 148). Co-sleeping would not have limited to parents and their children, but spouses or siblings may also sleep together. The Old English poem *Maxims I* describes companionship manifested in participating in activities together, including sleeping together (ll 177–178; Frantzen 2012: 227; see Section 5.1 above). Interestingly, the word used here, *swefan*, may denote natural sleep or the sleep of death (Bosworth 1898: 945). This provides an alternative picture to the co-sleeping men in *Maxims I*, ambiguously in a sleep-like death or a death-like sleep, with their bodies close together. By positioning corpses in intimate positions in the same grave, the grave may become a performative 'bedside' for the bodies of the deceased to interact with and relate to each other, as well as the bodies of the mourners. If horizontal multiple burials indeed bore any relations to co-sleeping habits for the early Anglo-Saxon funeral attendants, the appropriateness of horizontal multiple burial practice may be restricted to those who were intimately related enough to share the same bed. On the other hand, the sleep–death metaphor might not be applicable in every instance: as discussed in Section 5.4.2 with regards to the positioning of children and adults such that their feet were roughly levelled, it is possible that the arrangement of corpses in some burials alluded to upright, standing bodies, instead of sleeping ones. Whether or not any sleep metaphor was deployed in corpse positioning would likely have varied between cemeteries and between individual burials.
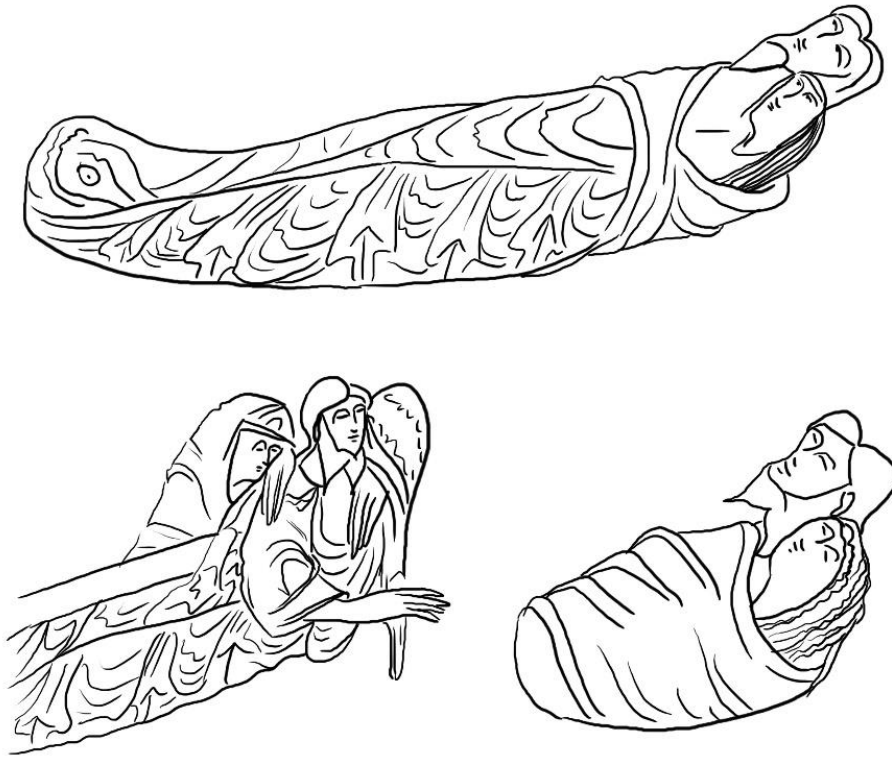
Figure 5.28 (Top) Abram and Hagar. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 27v. The British Library. (Bottom left) Abimelech and Sarah. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 34v. The British Library. (Bottom right) Lot and one of his daughters. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 33v. The British Library.
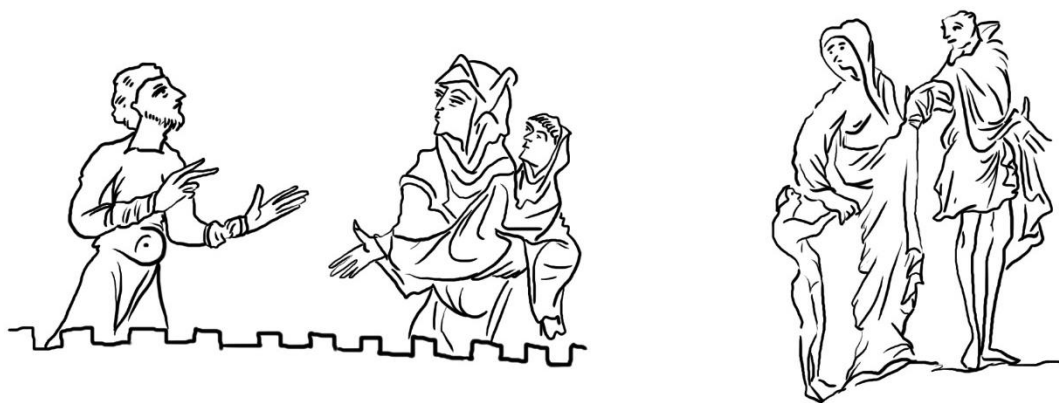
Figure 5.29. (Left) Cain with his wife and son at the city of Enoch. MS Junius 11, f 51. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Right) A family. Harley 603, f 15r. The British Library

As discussed in Section 5.4.2, bodily intimacy between family members appears frequently in later Anglo-Saxon manuscript depictions of biblical families, such as in the Junius Manuscript and Harley 603, both dated to the eleventh century. Both illustrations in Figure 5.29 emphasise physical touch—cradling a baby or holding a child's hand—between the mother and the child. There is archaeological evidence for the burial of women and their biological children in the same grave in the early Anglo-Saxon period: the present data set contains a number of female burials with foetuses in the pelvis area, strongly suggesting death during pregnancy or labour. Medically, maternal death refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy or within 42 days after termination or delivery (Høj et al 2003); common causes of maternal death include severe bleeding, infections, eclampsia, and mechanical complications in delivery. Thus, it is important to recognise that many more women would have died in childbirth, despite the relative rarity of burials with foetus *in utero* (Sayer and Dickinson 2013: 291–293).

Moreover, the death of a mother was likely to lead also to the death of her newborn child: contemporary medical studies of maternal and infant mortalities in developing countries suggest that, in the event of maternal death, the infant is more likely to die than to survive (Clark et al 2013; Finlay et al 2015; Moucheraud et al 2015). Young children are extremely dependent on their mothers for protection and breastmilk. Isotopic data from Berinsfield and Raunds suggest that, in the Anglo-Saxon period, and children were weaned by three years (Privat et al 2002; Haydock et al 2013). It is thus reasonable to suggest that even if a child was healthy when born, its chances of survival may be affected if the mother was very ill, dying, or dead. Furthermore, the mother could die for reasons other than pregnancy or childbirth complications (Stone and Walrath 2006). Whether and how long the child could survive without its mother would vary between individuals and contexts, and this possibly led to the practice of multiple burials in some cases and single burials in others.

From the late sixth century onwards, Anglo-Saxon society saw the emergence of regional lordship and the diminishing authority of the kindred—expressed in law code, centralised burial management, wergild payment, as well as a new Christian emphasis on forgiveness over conducting feuds (Loyn 1974; Härke 1997; Richards 2003; Abels 2009; see also Chapter 4.5). Against this backdrop, multiple burials came to a marked drop towards to the end of the sixth century, which coincided with a dramatic decrease in furnished burials identified by
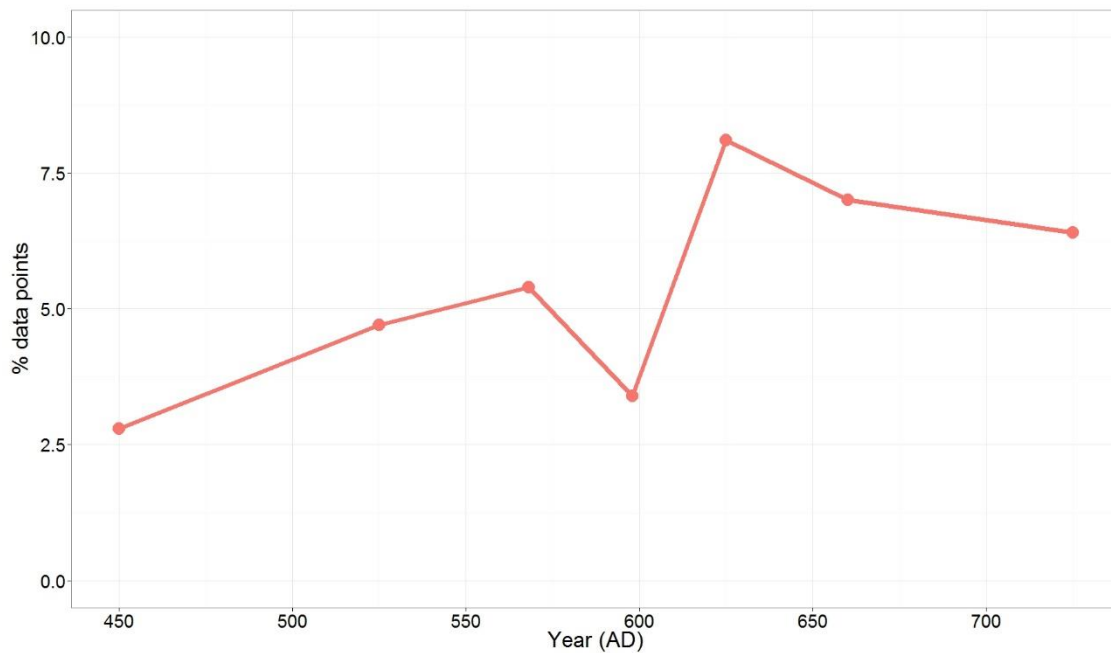
Figure 5.30. Graph showing the changes in percentage frequencies in multiple burials against the total number of 'data points' for each date range, reckoned at date resolution < 4 (see Section 3.3 for an explanation of date resolution and data points).

Bayliss et al (2013). In the period between AD 610 and 640, however, there was a notable upsurge in multiple burial practice, which largely persisted through to the early eighth century (Figure 5.30; see also Stoodley 2002: 106). This change may reflect changing settlement pattern, social stratification, the distribution of wealth and inheritance and, in turn, the idea of kinship and the family.

The intimate positioning of bodies in multiple burials, as explored in this chapter, suggests that these individuals might have also been intimately related in life. Although in most cases there is no bioarchaeological evidence for the biological relationships between the individuals buried, it is still possible to infer and interpret family and kinship indirectly from different sources. Given the importance of kinship in social organisation, cultural practices, and the formation of group and individual identities in early Anglo-Saxon England, it would be an oversight on the part of the archaeologist to dismiss the family interpretation for multiple burials without serious consideration.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Examining the positional relationship of bodies in early Anglo-Saxon multiple burials offers valuable insights not only into this significant but under-theorised burial phenomenon, but

also, more widely, the social relations that underpinned such practice and their bodily manifestations. This chapter has demonstrated that the positioning of bodies in multiple graves was deliberately staged, whether it involved horizontal or vertical arrangements, and whether contemporary or consecutive. Through performative acts and display, the holistic staging of multiple bodies evoked the embodied reality of interpersonal relationships and reproduced stories and memories surrounding the deceased, the mourners, and the world around them. Detailed analysis of the positional articulation of bodies in multiple burials helps decipher the visual codes behind Anglo-Saxon funerary rites, and challenges our understanding of the symbolic power of corpses in the graves. The next chapter will elaborate on the notion of burial holism within performance and display in positioning practices, and explore the role and significance of the posture of the cadaver in the context of the unfolding funeral.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BODY AND MORTUARY THEATRE

Hit wæs dead swa ær,
lic legere fæst.   Leomu colodon
þreanedum beþeaht.

It was dead as before,
The body stiff in the grave. The limbs turned cold
Covered in afflictions.

(*Elene*, ll 881b–883a)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

At the funeral, the pale, cold, silent corpse played a central part in the ritual process: from the tactile handling of the dying and dead body, the unfolding performance involving the bodies of the deceased and of the mourners, to the arrangement of the body juxtaposed with accompanying objects, dress, animal offerings, and other commemorative features. Together, these elements formed a coherent tableau which needs to be appreciated holistically. In order to examine the representation of the cadaver as a dynamic construct within the holistic tableau, this chapter explores the positioning of the corpse in the context of ritual performances in early Anglo-Saxon funerals. This exercise exposes the performativity, individuality, and creativity underlying funerary events, and considers the interaction between the posture of the corpse and different dramatic elements in Anglo-Saxon funerary rites.

6.2 A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO POSITIONING THE CORPSE

Before turning to early Anglo-Saxon mortuary theatre, it is important to first consider the physicality of the dead body and its implications for positioning rituals. Decomposition begins within minutes of death. The body's homeostatic mechanism is no longer operative following death, and ceases to regulate internal conditions (Clark et al 1997: 153). Decomposition occurs from within and without the body through two simultaneous processes, autolysis and putrefaction: the former refers to the breakdown of cells due to

internal enzymic digestion, and the latter by external agents including bacteria and fungi (Clark et al 1997: 155; Gill-King 1997: 97). These processes produce a series of observable postmortem changes in the body, which are often used in forensic contexts to infer the time and manner of death. As the heart stops beating, blood begins to settle due to the effect of gravity, resulting in a purplish red discolouration in the parts of the body closest to the ground; this is known as livor mortis (Cantor 2010: 76). Meanwhile, a lack of capillary circulation to the other parts of the body causes pallor mortis: paleness in the skin. As body temperature is no longer regulated, the body also begins to cool (algor mortis) (Janaway et al 2009: 314). The rate of these processes is dependent on the activities of enzymes and micro-organisms, which are affected by a number of factors, including body mass, temperature, pH, and the availability of water and oxygen (Rodriguez 1997: 459–461; Carter 2005: 6).

Within three to eight hours after death, muscles begin to stiffen. This is known as rigor mortis, which persist until about 32 to 76 hours post-mortem, depending on the environmental conditions (Henßge and Madea 2004). The stiffening of muscles is caused by chemical changes in muscle cells after death. In normal circumstances, calcium ions facilitate the cross-bridge attachment between actin and myosin, the two fibres that interact to cause muscle contraction. Adenosine triphosphate (ATP) provides energy to pump the calcium ions out of the cells, and the muscle relaxes (DiMaio and DiMaio 2001: 26). However, following death, ATP cannot be produced as respiration has stopped and oxygen is depleted. Meanwhile, muscle cell membranes and the sarcoplasmic reticulum are broken down, resulting in an increased concentration of calcium ions in the cytosol of muscle cells. As a result, muscles stiffen and stay contracted, until the muscle complex is eventually decomposed (DiMaio and DiMaio 2001: 26–28). Another form is muscle stiffening that occurs at death is cadaveric spasm, which is sometimes mistaken for rigor mortis. Cadaveric spasm is usually associated with violent death and affects groups of muscles, usually hands or limbs. Archaeological examples of this phenomenon are difficult to identify, although it has been attempted by some (e.g. Knüsel et al 1996).

In short, the optimal time for arranging the position of the corpse is either within hours of death before rigor mortis sets in, or about two to three days after death, after rigor mortis has dissipated. Moreover, corpses may be very heavy: a motionless corpse of a full-grown man may require the effort of two or more people to transport. Monastic constitutions from later medieval Britain suggest that at least six people were involved in laying out the body:

two monks would hold a funerary pall above the grave; another two monks would descend into the grave, while two more would pass the body to them, who would then lay the body out appropriately before covering it (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005: 26). To lay a corpse on one side, or to turn it over, requires strength as well as skills to ensure a speedy, smooth, and suitably respectful process: for example, turning the shoulders and the pelvis, folding the arms to avoid them getting trapped, using sheets or pillows to support or help with the turn, or tidying or combing the hair afterwards. To arrange a corpse in a seated position might require external objects to support the body and hold it in the desired position. The corpse may be manipulated to hold objects, which requires a tactile contact with the cold hands and fingers of the corpse.

Thus, touching, lifting, and arranging the corpse involves an active engagement with its appearance, texture, and weight. Depending on body mass, the time elapsed, the environment, and the manner in which the corpse is kept, the effects of putrefaction might affect the handling of the corpse, including the production of noxious odours, discolouration of the skin, skin slippage, and the formation of bullae (Clark et al 1997: 162). The rest of this chapter will explore the performative implications of body positioning in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary rituals.

6.3 BODY POSITIONING IN MORTUARY PERFORMANCE

The dying body would have formed a focal point for death to be realised, considered, and understood. Literary evidence from the later Anglo-Saxon period alludes to the significance of appropriate presentation of the body at the deathbed: it is instructed in the ordines for the sick in the eleventh-century Laud miscellaneous 482 that, upon death, the body is to be undressed, laid out eastward on a sackcloth, and the eyes are to be covered and the mouth fastened shut (Thompson 2004: 81–82). Although the pre-Christian period lacks textual evidence for rites associated with the treatment of the sick and dying, it is possible to reconstruct, to some extent, the practices surrounding the treatment of the body using the skeletons in the grave.

In the early Anglo-Saxon period, inhumation graves frequently contained dress fittings. These include brooches and pins in female graves and occasionally buckles in male or female ones. The frequent presence of dress fittings in graves implies that bodies were commonly interred in costume, which suggests that the dressing of the corpse was part of the funerary

preparations before burial (Lucy 2000a: 83). If they were not buried in the clothes they died in, the deceased would have to be stripped, and possibly washed, before they were dressed. Stripping, washing, and dressing would necessarily involve an intense sensory engagement with the corpse, its nakedness, texture, smell, and temperature. The body might have to be positioned in a certain manner for practical reasons in facilitating the preparations, as well as for cultural and emotional reasons pertaining to what constituted respectful and appropriate handling of the corpse. If two or more people died at the same time, the bodies might have been prepared for burial simultaneously, involving more people in the process, or one after the other, which would lengthen the whole preparation. The mourners also made decisions on the selection of dress, fittings, and grave goods that were to be buried with the deceased individuals, reflecting the convention propagated by burial specialist, if any, within the community and/or the identity of the deceased as perceived by the buriers.

It has been argued by Helen Geake (2003) that there existed burial specialists in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon society, who provided knowledge of how and where to bury the dead and what grave goods to include, and also passed down this knowledge about funerary management over many generations (Geake 2003: 262). She proposes that 'cunning women'—a group of female burials with seemingly strange assemblages of goods, who have been suggested to be ritual specialists, diviners, and magic users (Meaney 1981: 249–262; Dickinson 1993)—might have taken on the role of burial specialists. A similar figure of a female burial specialist also appears in the tenth-century Ibn Fadlan account of the funeral of a Viking chieftain, which notably includes the figure of the 'angel of death' in charge of overseeing the funeral (Warmind 1995: 133; Ellis Davidson 1992: 331; cited in Geake 2003: 265). There is no direct evidence that these 'cunning women', if they were indeed ritual specialists, were involved in performing or overseeing funerals as well, but the possibility remains, given their supposed involvement in ritual activities. On the other hand, given the variability in dress styles and goods, it would appear that mourners were given significant degrees of freedom in making these decisions.

While the corpse was being washed and groomed for burial, preparations were made for the grave itself. An appropriate location within the cemetery would have been sought for the grave to be dug. The grave might be a new grave which respected and avoided pre-existing graves, or it might reuse an old grave which already contained the remains of someone else. Some graves might have wooden coffin, timber lining or stone lining—the materials might

be sought, manufactured, or collected, and transported to the cemetery. The use of coffin or wrapping might affect the positioning of the body, if it was placed in a very narrow container or was wrapped tightly. For example, MLa 6 was an unsexed adolescent burial, positioned supine with arms and legs extended. The positional arrangement of the skeletal remains of MLa 6 suggests that the body was constrained in a very narrow and tight space, possibly as a result of shroud or coffin use (Williams and Newman 2006: 37). Textile lining or blankets might also be used in preparing the grave: although the actual material is almost invariably lost in the archaeological record, textiles were used extensively in burial practices in early Anglo-Saxon England (Walton Rogers 2007: 224-228). A study by Sue Harrington (2007) on cemeteries in Kent has shown that cloth was often used as layering or hanging around the grave, especially in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

MLa 6

Figure 6.1 MLa 6.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the positioning of the corpse in inhumation graves in the early Anglo-Saxon England was deliberately planned and executed by the burying communities. The intentionality behind corpse positioning, juxtaposed with the biological affordances of the dead body, suggests that the act of corpse positioning would have taken place before rigor mortis set in or after it had dissipated; thus, either within a few hours after death or at least two to three days after, although this would have been affected by weather and seasonal changes (see Section 6.2 above for an explanation of the mechanism of rigor mortis). It is difficult to know whether burials tended towards the shorter or the longer timeframe, and it was likely to vary between burials, cemeteries, and regional practices. If the time elapsed between death and burial was long, the corpses might be undergoing early stages of putrefaction when the funeral took place, resulting in the production of pungent

smell. Occasionally, entomological evidence is present to indicate extended periods of exposal, as a result of display or possibly delays in the process of transportation. Metalwork from Mil 39, Mill Hill (Kent) contained mineralised remains of fly pupa cases which suggest that the body had been exposed for at least several days before the individual was buried (Parfitt and Brugmann 1997: 267). Entomological evidence from the Suffolk cemeteries at Snape, Butter Market, and Boss Hall suggests that some bodies might have been exposed for up to a few weeks (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001: 226–227; Turner-Walker and Scull 1997). Although we cannot know whether the positioning of the body was altered during that time, we may still attribute significance to the observed position as it would have been the final appearance before the grave was backfilled.

Mil 39

Figure 6.2 Mil 39.

In positioning the cadaver, the physical and emotional dynamics of the corpse would have had significant performative implications. It has been suggested in Section 4.4.2, that the strong association between the burial of young children and one-sided positions with flexed legs may be suggestive of planned or unplanned arrangement of bodies in the individuals' natural positions of rest, stimulating a sleeping imagery in the corpse in the grave. In some other cases, certain arm positions may also suggest positions of rest, as will be discussed in Sections 7.2.4 and 7.2.5 in Chapter Seven. If this is true, in a child's funeral, for example, a mourner—possibly a parent or an intimate caregiver—might carry the body of the child, lower it to the grave, and arrange it in a resting position. The body could be approached as if the child were asleep: a mourner may kiss it, chant a lullaby, and bid '*gode niht*'. Similarly, the corpse of an adult might be incorporated in the performance in the same way as a dead child: the mourner may stroke or comb the hair of a spouse, a sibling, a parent, or a friend,

cover the body with a blanket, and apply a gentle kiss on his or her forehead before bidding farewell. In multiple burials, the staging of the bodies together would have likewise been emotively powerful, as the funeral scene unfolded (see Chapter Five). In the case of woman-child double burial, for example, the dead child might have been held by a mourner standing next to the grave, while the body of the woman was lowered and laid out in the prepared grave. The child was then handed over and placed next to the woman, whose arm and hand were manipulated to embrace the child. The performance through the positioning of the bodies would have conveyed a sense of intimacy between the individuals buried, and between them and the funeral participants.

There is possible archaeological evidence for the use of blankets in the early Anglo-Saxon period; for example, the seventh-century Lec 187 produced textile fragments of coarse 2/2 twill, hinting at the presence of wrapping, a cloak, or a blanket over the body (Weightman 2011: 98, 101). Toilet implements and combs are common finds in graves, suggesting that washing and grooming of the corpse might also take place prior to burial or during the funeral (Williams 2003, 2007: 86–88). In Oak 85, for example, a bone comb was found lying sideways close to the top of the skull of a female skeleton. Its location suggests that the comb might have originally been embedded in the individual's hair. The comb found in Cas 13, on the contrary, was placed on top of the feet of the individual, suggesting its placement in the grave following that of the body. Lec 81/4, one of the two adults in a quintuple burial at Lechlade, was also associated with a bone comb, which lay on top of Lec 81/4's right arm. The balancing of the comb precariously on the arm, rather than being tucked underneath, suggests that the comb might have been used during the funeral, when the bodies within Lec 81 were already in place and appropriately positioned, and was laid on top of Lec 81/4's arm shortly before the grave was backfilled. While combs have sometimes been interpreted as symbolic objects, previous studies have shown use-wear on the teeth, indicating that they were not merely symbolic but were used (Ashby 2006: 216). Notably, the positioning of the arms of Lec 81/4 (the left arm tightly folded with hand by the face, and the right arm flexed over the waist) is reminiscent of the 'raised hand to the face' gesture (will be discussed in Section 7.2.4 in Chapter Seven), which might have been a sleeping gesture. Lec 81/4 and the other bodies in the grave might have constituted a sleeping scene together, an interactive and emotively powerful 'bedside' (see also Section 5.6.2 for a discussion on the allusion to co-sleeping in multiple burials).

Lec 187

Oak 85

Cas 13
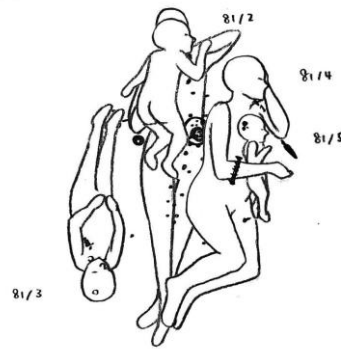
Lec 81

Figure 6.3 Lec 187, Oak 85, Cas 13, and Lec 81.

We cannot be certain whether these highly ritualised processes were directed, managed, or supervised by burial specialists such as 'cunning women'. Nonetheless, we can infer particular female association with mourning and with the treatment of the corpse from historical sources from the later Anglo-Saxon period. In the *Life of Guthlac*, for example, the eighth-century Mercian saint is said to have specifically ordered on his deathbed that his sister Pega prepare his body for burial, and that she wrap his body in the shroud given to him by the abbess Ecgburh (Swanton 1975: 59–61). The production and gift exchange of shrouds by saintly women emphasises the role of women in funerary preparations (Wickham-Crowley 2008). Mourning women often appear in illustrated manuscripts from the late Anglo-Saxon period, such as the Junius Manuscript and the Old English Hexateuch (see Section 7.2.4 in Chapter Seven). The female mourner in funerals is also a prominent motif in Anglo-Saxon poetic literature. In *Beowulf*, for example, Hildeburg mourns the death of her brother and her son(s): *Ides gnornode geomrode giddum* ("The woman mourned, lamenting

with songs', ll 1117–1118). Grendel's mother mourns the death of her son, goes to Heorot to repossess her son's arm, and takes revenge on Hrothgar's company by killing and beheading Æschere (ll 1251–1421). A mourning woman appears again later in *Beowulf* at the Beowulf's own funeral and sings sorrowful songs (ll 3150–3155). Beadohild mourns the death of her brothers, as the *Deor* poet tells us. The voice of *The Wife's Lament* speaks grievously of her lord's exile and her own misery; it has been suggested that she may represent a restless heathen dead, banished from the living and forced to dwell in a barrow (Semple 1998). Certainly, it would be problematic to impose these literary accounts anachronistically onto the pre-Christian period. Taken together, nevertheless, the notion that women played specific roles in funerary preparation and management should be considered seriously.

The position of the corpse itself projected a performative space in which the mourners interacted with the dead, filled with numerous possibilities for bodily engagements, as well as the use of props such as combs and blankets. The corpse and the graveside thus became a stage where mortuary performance could be improvised and played out. The performative, dramatic nature of mortuary rituals has been noted in studies of contemporary funerals, from backstage preparations to the frontstage performance, the characters, the mood, and the rhetoric (Turner and Edgley 2006). Approaching funerary rituals in the early medieval period as theatre, Neil Price (2008; 2010) emphasises that funerals in Viking-Age Scandinavia embedded complex elements of mortuary drama, underpinned by mythological narratives and the social memory of the deceased person. In early Anglo-Saxon England, the interplay between bodies (of the deceased as well as the mourners) and material props (such as combs and blankets; see also Section 6.4 below) created an unfolding drama. The meticulous positioning of the cadaver in the grave afforded a tactile focal point of interaction, at which mortuary theatre could be anchored and enacted.

6.4 MATERIAL OBJECTS AND BODIES

A holistic grave would have consisted of the body arranged in a desired position, the funerary costume, the placement of grave goods in relation to the cadaver, and other grave features. These elements would have complemented each other in forming a funerary tableau, which the mourners constructed and experienced. In a social world comprising embodied persons and material things, objects may become extensions of the body, blurring the boundaries between humans and things (Turner 1980; Martin 2014). Clothing, for instance, protects the

body against the environment, and helps construct a public persona of the individual, but also imposes restriction in movement. Dress items may bear visual or audio implications, such as pins or necklaces with spangles, which may bounce, swing, and create sounds as the body moves (Martin 2014: 34–35). Hence, material objects in the grave may limit, direct, or circumscribe the positioning of the cadaver. Longer garments worn by women, for example, may have contributed to lower proportions of female burials buried with legs in a splayed position, compared to male burials (see Section 4.4.1; Owen-Crocker 1986: 34, 72). The fluidity between animate human subjects and inanimate non-human objects is also a trope in Old English literary texts. In *Beowulf*, the shining armour of the Geats is a distinguishing feature of the troop of soldiers, and Beowulf's own armour and weapon are integral to his personhood (Hines 2008: 96). The Exeter Riddles play on witty *doubles entendres* of body metaphors, such as Riddle 61 which may innocently yield helmet or shirt, but has an obscene solution of vagina (Rulon-Miller 2006: 679).

Limbs, hands, or fingers may be arranged to hold or draw attention to certain objects. The unfolding of the funerary ritual may also create a performative context for corpses and objects to interact: such as the wrapping or covering of the body, the application of grooming tools, and the use of headstones or pillows. A well-furnished mature adult female skeleton in DBu 110 was positioned extended and supine. A pair of shears and a knife were placed on the stomach between the hands, as if held in them. In positioning the hands, the touching of fingers may resonate with similar physical contact in life, which would have been symbolically and emotively powerful. In Oak 80, a well-furnished adult female skeleton was buried alongside a cow in a large grave—an example unique in Anglo-Saxon England. The skeleton, placed on its right side, was accompanied by various objects, including 46 amber and 22 glass beads, a pair of disc brooches, wrist clasps, and a number of latch-lifters. The upper right arm was stretched out, away from the torso, and the lower arm bent back towards the chest, with the right hand clasping a string of beads (Sayer 2013: 41). Similarly, in the double grave Oak 78 from the same cemetery, the female individual was positioned prone, with her left arm across the waist and the right arm across the chest, and the right hand seemingly clutching her necklace (Sayer 2013: 39). The close attention paid to this person's hand position is particularly remarkable, given that the woman was buried prone which would have rendered the manipulation of her arms and hands difficult.
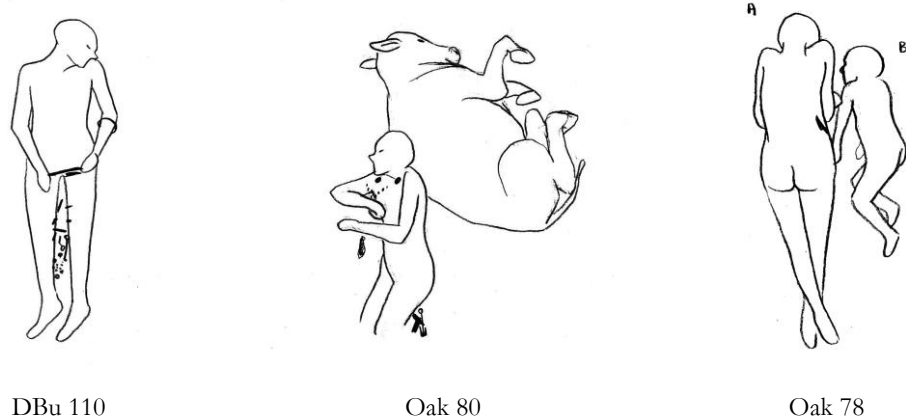
DBu 110   Oak 80   Oak 78

Figure 6.4 DBu 110, Oak 80, Oak 78.

In some graves, the arrangements of hands and limbs may respect or direct the onlookers' gaze to certain objects. Wat 67 contained an adult female skeleton laid out in an extended supine position, although the top half of the body was slightly turned to the left. The right hand reached towards the pubis, and the left arm was flexed and the lower arm pointed away from the torso. Hanging from the left side of the waist was a girdle group, which was positioned almost parallel to lower left arm. The arrangement of this arm not only respected the girdle group, but possibly also drew attention to it. Interactions between the cadaver and material objects would have embedded physical engagements with the mourners as well, which may be played out in an unfolding funerary performance. For instance, Lec 130 contained a female skeleton in a supine position with legs flexed, furnished with dress items, beads, and a spiral silver ring on the third finger of the left hand (Boyle et al 1998: 108–109). If it was a ring of sentimental value, slipping it onto a deceased loved one's finger may trigger memories which became coloured by the present experience of undertaking the process within a funerary context. Beyond the present data set, a notable example of corpse–object interaction comes from South Carlton (Lincolnshire), which was excavated by Time Team in 2004, where Inhumation 211 contained a male skeleton of over 45 years at death, buried almost prone with tightly folded legs (Figure 6.6). A large fragment of a pottery vessel was found in front of the torso, and held between the left hand and the right arm of the skeleton (Wessex Archaeology 2004: 14). The visual language afforded by the arrangement of the body and the pottery vessel, readily sympathised by the excavation team as they speculated about 'the man known for his love of alcohol' (S 11, Ep 4), was certainly deliberately staged

by the buriers, possibly offering a glimpse of the identity of the individual and how he might have been perceived by his mourners.

In burials with weapons, spears and swords were often placed close to the body. In some graves, the positions of the spearhead and the body look as if the person was holding the weapon. In BnF 12, for example, a flexed, one-sided male skeleton was found with a spearhead, the position of which appears to align with the hands, as if held. Mil 36 contained an extended supine male skeleton with a spearhead between the right arm and the upper

Wat 67   Lec 130

Figure 6.5 Wat 67 and Lec 130.
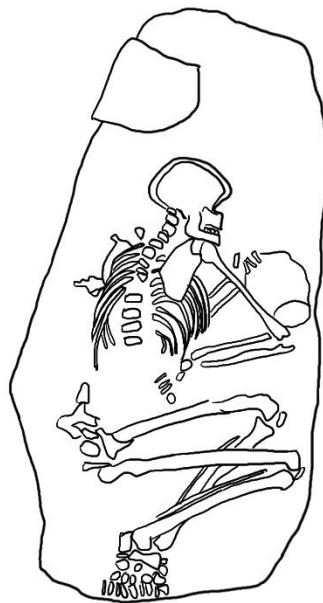
Figure 6.6 Grave plan of Inhumation 211, South Carlton, Lincolnshire (redrawn after Wessex Archaeology 2004: Figure 7).

torso, as if holding the spear close to the body. Similarly, Pol 1967/102N (in a double grave with Pol 1967/102S) was buried with a spearhead, laid on top of the skull. The arrangements of the spearhead and the arms suggest that the spear might have been held in the arms, over the torso. The positioning of the cadaver to hold a spear invoked the martial image of a man wielding a spear, which was transposed to the mortuary context and played out through positioning practices (Figure 6.8). Section 4.6 in Chapter Four has pointed out the consistency of body positioning in male burials, particularly those with weapons, which may allude to an image of masculine prowess, entrenched in the social role of men in local military mustering and performing consistent tasks. The lying-down corpse thus mirrored the upright wielder of the weapon, where the meaning of the image could be reproduced and reimagined. Noting the sleep–death metaphor explored in Sections 4.4.2, 5.6.2, and 6.3, the possibility that corpses were sometimes arranged to mirror the upright body complicates the notions of 'the restful dead' and 'good/bad death', and it highlights the role of grief and emotions at the individual level in creating the burial diversity we see in the archaeological record.

Swords are much rarer finds than spearheads, but they appear to have more intimate connection with the body. They were frequently tucked between the left arm and the torso, suggestive of right-handed wielders (Brunning 2013: 147–149). For example, Alt 42, Mil 93, and DBu 375 each contained a male skeleton with a full military gear: spear, sword, and shield. In each of these burials, the spearhead was found next to the head, pointing in a direction parallel to the body. The sword was placed on the left side of the body, between the left arm and the torso. Cas 179 also contained a male skeleton, but positioned with folded

BnF 12   Mil 36   Pol 1967/102
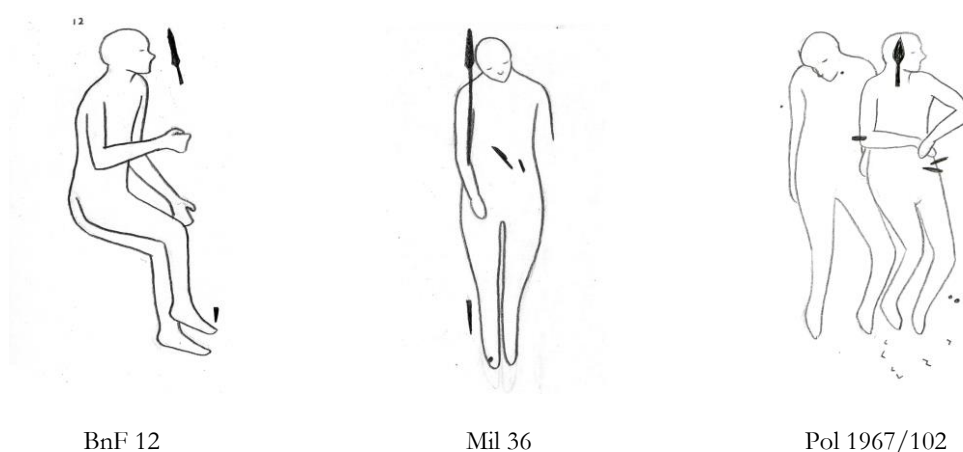
Figure 6.7 BnF 12, Mil 36, and Pol 1967/102.

Figure 6.8. Men with spears and shields. Harley 603, f 2v. The British Library.

| Alt 42 | Mil 93 | DBu 375 | Cas 179 |

Figure 6.9 Alt 42, Mil 93, DBu 375, and Cas 179.

legs, accompanied with a sword and a copper alloy bowl. Manipulating the cadaver to hold weapons requires tactile contact with the cold limbs, hands, and fingers of the dead body. The mourners may, for example, lift the arm and shift the torso of the corpse slightly before placing the sword in the desired position. In each of these examples, the sword was placed

close to the upper body as opposed to hanging from the waist. This placement of the sword has parallels in the Old English literary tradition, in which the sword is often found in connection with the wielder's lap or bosom (Davidson 1962: 150–151). In the Finnsburg episode in *Beowulf*, the placing of the sword Hunlafing on Hengest's lap initiated the breaking of the peace pact between the Danes and the Frisians (ll 1142–1143). Later in the poem, the sword given to Beowulf by Hygelac was also laid on the former's lap (ll 2192–2195). In the Old English gnomic poem *Maxims II*, lines 25b–26a state the rightful place of the sword: *sweord sceal on bearme, drihtlic isern* ('The sword must be on the lap, lordly iron'; *bearm*, 'lap' or 'bosom'; Toller and Bosworth 1921: 65). The imagery of the sword held by the bosom can be seen in a number of illustrated manuscripts from the later Anglo-Saxon period, such as in depictions of kingly figures in the Old English Hexateuch (Figure 6.10).

Figure 6.10 (Left) Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 59r. (Right) Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 79v. The British Library.

Although these literary and art-historical examples were at least a few centuries later than the burials discussed here, the arrangement of the swords close to the chest and thighs of the dead body may indicate that the appropriate placement of swords described in literary

sources had an earlier, pre-Christian origin. More importantly, it shows that the ritual act of burial positioning bore a tangible link with how the sword would have been stowed or ceremonially held when the wielder was alive. The locations of the shield bosses in these graves suggest that the meticulous placements of the swords might have been obscured; hence, the appropriate positioning of these swords was likely to have particular symbolic significance beyond its visibility.

Interestingly, the arrangement of a man hugging a sword is not dissimilar to some of the woman–child double burials recorded in the present data set (see Section 5.4.2 for a full discussion of adult–child multiple burials). It has been suggested that weapons in the Anglo-Saxon world were often perceived as persons, and the boundaries between objects and humans were blurred and muddled (Cavell 2014; Paz 2017). Inanimate objects can be given voices, such as in Exeter Riddles 20 and 73, with accepted solutions of sword and spear respectively, in which the weapons speak of being dear to and cared for their masters. Named weapons are common in the literature (such as Hrunting, Hunlafing, and Nægling from *Beowulf*), and they are frequently depicted as companions each with its own history and personality traits. In this light, the distinction between a woman hugging a baby and a man holding a battle-aged sword was perhaps not all that clear. In both cases, the positioning of multiple bodies or bodies and objects can be said to convey a sense of love, care, and protection for their prized possessions. These bodies and objects were brought together as the funeral unfolded, weaving stories about the dead, the living, as well as their material resonances.

| Emp 49 | Emp 79 | Pol 1967/75 | Wat 78 |
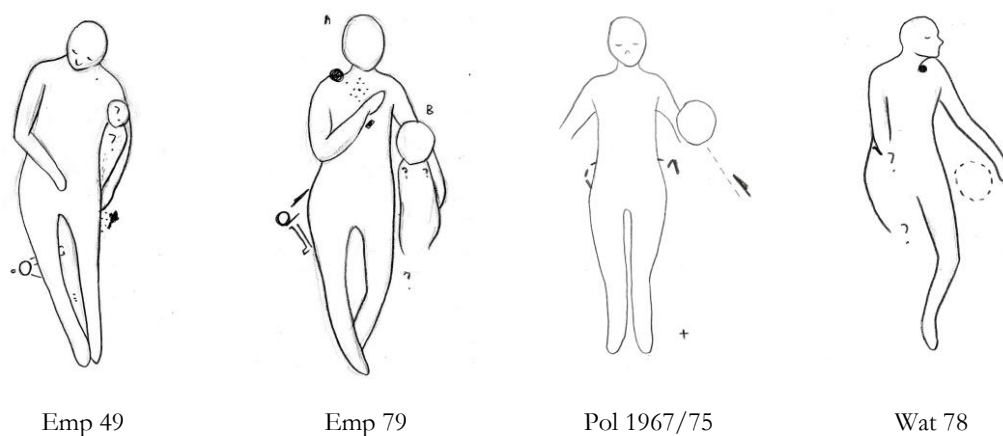
Figure 6.11 Emp 49, Emp 79, Pol 1967/75, and Wat 78.

6.5 ANIMAL BODIES, HUMAN BODIES

Whole, articulated animal are sometimes found accompanying humans in graves. As the body of the animal and the body of the human formed parts of a holistic funerary tableau, these bodies might reference, respect, or interact with each other in ways not dissimilar to the interactions between the cadaver and objects, or between multiple cadavers in the same grave. The inclusion of animal remains in burial contexts was not limited to Anglo-Saxon England, but it has been observed across the Germanic world in the early medieval period, and is argued to be a significant part of pre-Christian ritual practices and beliefs. There are broadly two types of such animal–human burials: one where the animal was placed in same grave as the human, and the other where the animal was in a separate pit adjacent to the grave. This section looks at positional relationship between animal and human bodies in graves, and hence the latter case will not be discussed in great detail.

In the deposition of animals in graves, a distinction may be drawn between the burial of companion animals (such as horses, dogs, hawking/falconry birds, and fighting cocks) and the burial of domestic animals bred for consumption (such as cattle, sheep/goats, poultry, pigs, and so on). It is important to note as well that companion animals may be consumed (see discussion on horse eating in Fern 2010), and animals bred for food may develop close personal relationships with their humans and become *de facto* companion animals. The treatment of animals in burial contexts may reflect the differing ontologies that underpinned the value and personhood attributed to different animals. These ontologies were inevitably tied up with pre-Christian beliefs and symbolism surrounding the natural world and animal magic (Pluskowski 2010).

A handful of burials in the present data set contained articulated animal skeletons buried in the same pits with the human skeletons. GC 142 is one of the 32 inhumations accompanied by horses identified by Chris Fern (2007) in his study of Anglo-Saxon horse burials. The adult male skeleton, laid extended supine in the grave, was buried with a spearhead, shield boss, iron knife, and pottery vessel. To its left lay a horse with a metal harness, placed on its left side and with its back against the human skeleton. The neat arrangement of the horse, in the same orientation and levelled with the human skeleton, and with its legs flexed and tucked close to the torso, suggests that the positioning of the animal was no less deliberately planned and executed than that of the human. A comparative example beyond the present data set is Eriswell Grave 4116, another horse inhumation which accompanied an adult male

weapon burial (Figure 6.13). Like GC 142, Eriswell Grave 4116 contained a supine male skeleton with extended legs (albeit in a crossed position). The horse was situated to the left of the human skeleton, and was laid on one side and facing the human with its ventral side.

Horse burials have been interpreted as acts of wealth and status display (Oexle 1984; Bond 1994), but more recent reassessment has emphasised the ritual and symbolic value of burying horses (Fern 2007; 2010). As horses were often buried with their harness, Fern argues that they were likely to have been trained riding horses as opposed to wild horses, and might have been buried to assist the deceased in their journey to the afterlife (Fern 2010: 131). He also draws upon the depictions of equine creatures on the right panel of the Franks Casket and contends that these creatures are not presented in the context of elite status and political power, but 'the emotional context of death and the afterlife' (Fern 2010: 147). The arrangement of the horse in GC 142 and Eriswell Grave 4116—carefully placed side by side and levelled with the human—possibly invoked an image of companionship. This contrasts with some other examples from Viking-Age Scandinavia, such as chamber graves at Birka, where the skeleton or sometimes only the skull of the horse was placed at one end of the grave, among other grave objects and offerings (Arbman 1940–43). By placing the two bodies side by side with each other, the human and the animal may be perceived as equals and arm-in-arm companions, perhaps not unlike some of the horizontal multiple burials explored in Chapter Five. Here, the animal was more than simply economic possession, but a physical and spiritual partner that accompanies the human into the grave, and perhaps onwards into the afterlife as well.
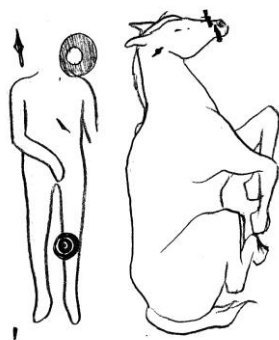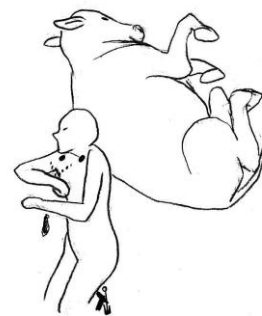
GC 142   Oak 80

Figure 6.12 GC 142 and Oak 80.

Figure 6.13. Plan of Eriswell 104 (RAF Lakenheath) Grave 4116 (redrawn after Fern 2010: Figure 7.1)

Oak 80 is a unique example of a cow inhumation, accompanying an adult female skeleton, from Anglo-Saxon England. The human was buried on her right side, and her arms were folded in front of her upper chest, associated with the posture type 'elbow upwards I'. The cow was laid on its left side and oriented at an angle to the human skeleton and facing away from her. The head of the human rested against the back of the cow 'in a deliberate staging', in the words of the excavators (Mortimer et al 2017: 311). The lower legs of the female skeleton did not survive, but the flexure at the pelvic joint suggests that the legs were possibly bent at the knee in a flexed position. If so, the positioning of the limbs of the human and that of the animal might have mirrored each other, the two bodies forming an almost symmetrical image. The cow, although generally a domestic meat animal, might have been buried as a companion in the grave, as it was buried whole and was positioned intimately with the human cadaver.

Burying a whole animal, especially a large one, beside the human corpse would have shifted the dynamics of the ritual processes associated with the construction of the grave and the funeral. The body of the animal would have created an impressive visual tableau, adding to

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the theatrical quality of unfolding funeral, particularly if the animal was large. Constructing these graves would have involved considerable effort and care in planning, as well as knowledge in handling dead animals. Burying large animals would require significantly larger graves in order to accommodate both the human and the animal. The body of a large animal would have been heavy to lift and to position, and might thus require several people with transporting devices in order to move it, lower it into the grave, and arrange it appropriately. The excavators of Oakington point out that the cow might have been placed in the grave first, after which the woman was also put in the grave next to the animal (Sayer 2013: 41). Furthermore, analysis of the cow bones shows evidence of at least one cut mark on the metacarpals and that the tail is missing—both conditions are consistent with skinning (Sayer pers comm). This suggests the possibility that the woman was placed in the grave next to the skinned, bloody carcass of a cow, heightening the theatricality of the grave tableau. These steps would have unfolded in a lengthy funerary ritual, composing a visually intense and coherent tableau consisting of the body of the woman, that of the animal, the material goods that accompanied the woman (see Section 6.4 above), as well as the buriers themselves as they took part in the ritual. The funeral itself would have been a memorable event, and the persisting memory of the grave might affect or direct future burial events. At Oakington, four out of the five prone burials excavated were located near Oak 80 (Mortimer et al 2017: 311). The burial of the cow with the woman might thus have acquired especial symbolic potentials, which influenced how the burying communities perceive the grave and the surrounding area.

Some graves contained much smaller animals. GC 86, for instance, contained the remains of an individual, aged between seven and eight at death, along with the skeleton of a dog, a spear, a shield, and some knife fragments. The human skeleton was buried on its right side, head pointing south-east, with the right leg slightly flexed and the left leg extended. Both arms were flexed with hands over the abdomen. The dog, on the other hand, laid on its left side at the north-west end of the grave. The feet of the human were by the abdomen of the dog, between the latter's two forelimbs and two hindlimbs. The orientation and the feet-to-feet arrangement of the human and the dog may be suggestive of intentional positioning of bodies. The legs of the humans were laid between the legs of the dog, while the dog's head pointed in the same direction as the direction at which the human faced.

GC 86

Figure 6.14 GC 86.

Cas 180 from Castledyke, Lincolnshire, contained 34 post-cranial bone fragments from a goose, placed on the left forearm of the individual, a male skeleton aged between 35 and 45 years. Measurements of the limb bones suggest that it was a domestic goose, although distinguishing between domestic and wild geese is notably difficult (Dobney et al 2007: 177–180). Geese, commonly found in Anglo-Saxon settlement sites, were exploited for meat, eggs, and feathers (Poole and Lacey 2014: 409). Familiarity with geese and the sounds they made in everyday life lent to their onomatopoeic name, *gos* (singlar) and *ges* (plural) (Poole and Lacey 2014: 404–405). The wild barnacle goose is featured in Exeter Riddle 10, as a being that grows from wood and water, and traverses the sea and the sky (Bitterli 2009: 37–38). Placement of the goose over the left waist of the individual in Cas 180, with the right hand touching the bird, would have involved deliberate staging and manipulation of the corpses of both the human and the bird. Considering this arrangement and the fact that Cas 180 was otherwise a poorly furnished grave, the goose might have been an animal with particular symbolic value pertaining to the emotional context of death, rather than economic possession or food offering.

In fact, Castledyke produced eight burials which contained bones from a domestic fowl or goose, five of which contained nearly complete skeletons (domestic fowls in Cas 39, 95, 124, and 167B, and goose in Cas 180) (Drinkall and Foreman 1998: 237–239). Notably, in all of these examples, only the post-cranial skeletons were found, suggesting that the heads were intentionally removed. Due to the lack of detailed drawings of the arrangement of the skeletal elements *in situ*, however, it is not possible to reconstruct the original positioning of the birds. The fowl recovered in Cas 39 was larger than the other fowls and might have been a cockerel

or capon (Drinkall and Foreman 1998: 239). It was placed by the feet of the individual, an unsexed skeleton aged between 25 and 35 years at death. Fragments of domestic fowl bones recovered from Cas 95 were found by the right shoulder, and those from Cas 124 and 167B were by the knees.

| Cas 180 | Cas 39 | Cas 95 | Cas 167B |
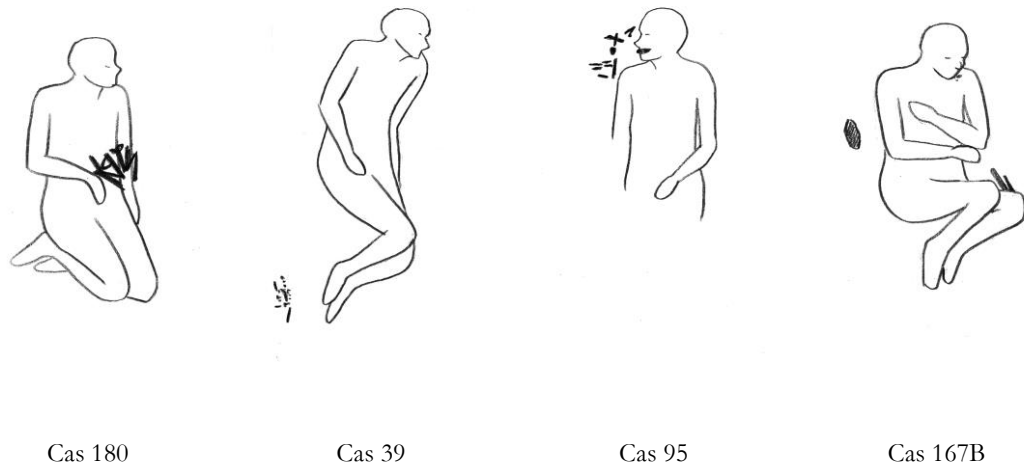
Figure 6.15 Cas 180, Cas 39, Cas 95, Cas 167B.

Bird motifs are featured prominently in Anglo-Saxon art as well as literature. The famous analogy of the sparrow flying through a mead hall, told by Bede in *Historia Ecclesiastica* (II §XIII, Sherley-Price 1955: 124–126), equates the flying bird with the fleeting soul in life. Different types of birds are depicted on metal artefacts, sometimes as whole animals and other times fragmented parts which intertwine and recombine with other fragmented humans or animals. The depiction of a bird (dove/duck/goose) with the Magi on the front panel of the Frank Casket has attracted discussions about its symbolism (Abels 2009: 559), and the flying bird under the horse in the centre of the right panel has been interpreted in the context of death, transformation, and communicating spirits (Fern 2010: 147). Viewed in this context, the inclusion of birds in the grave might have drawn upon knowledge about death, ancestors, and the supernatural, perhaps mediating between the world of the living and that of the dead (Gräslund 2004). It is entirely possible that some birds might have been kept, treasured, and loved as pets; but in the above examples, the removal of the head suggests that the birds were killed and deposited in highly ritualised processes, heightening the unfolding funeral (see also the killing of a dog, two horses, two cows, a rooster, and a hen in the Ibn Fadlan account of a Viking funeral; Logan 2005: 180).

The deliberate staging of human cadavers and the bodies of mammals or birds might have links with what Williams (2001) calls the 'ideology of transformation'. In his study of animal remains in early Anglo-Saxon cremations, Williams postulates that the inclusion of animals on the pyre facilitated a process of transformation, traversing the boundaries between humans and animals. Half-animal, half-human creatures frequently occur in Salin Style I art, and the idea of shapeshifting is also a frequent motif in Germanic myths and legends, such as in Old Norse poetry and sagas. Inhumation rites did not involve a material change as dramatic as cremation on the pyre, but concepts of animal magic and bodily transformation may be manifested by different means. The positional relationship between the human and the animal in Oak 80 as well as GC 86 might represent 'mirroring' images of the opposing bodies, in back-to-back or feet-to-feet arrangements, similar to animal-pairing motifs in early Anglo-Saxon art (Fern 2010: 138–140; Dickinson 2005: 147).

Approaching human–animal burial from this perspective, the practice of burying whole animals with humans in inhumation graves might have embedded an ideology of transformation no less important and pervasive than cremation rites. Section 6.4 above has discussed the fluidity between people and things, bodies and objects. In this light, perhaps we may consider wearing woollen clothing a physical and metaphorical adoption of a sheep's body as one's own. Likewise, animal motifs, which were common on metal dress fittings, may be as much symbolically taking on the bodies of animal as decorations. This would have incorporated the performative aspect of dressing and undressing, opening and closing wrist-clasps, fastening and unfastening belts, and so on, such that the body was consistently involved in processes of transformation, in life as well as in death.

6.6 DISABLED, SICK, INCOMPLETE BODIES

The body is neither perfect nor static, but is perpetually in 'a process of becoming' (Shilling 1993: 5). The body ages, catches diseases, suffers trauma, receives treatment, sustains health, and eventually dies; all of these processes may change the physical appearance of the body and, in turn, the perception of the self by the individual and by other people (Gowland and Thompson 2013). Within the context of social interactions and practices, therefore, the 'wholeness' of the body and the preservation thereof are cultural constructs rather than biological facts (Southwell-Wright 2013). Approaching physically impaired and sick bodies in early Anglo-Saxon England, analysis of their treatment in the grave may offer insights into embodied experience of health and sickness and the cultural significance of bodily wholeness

in early Anglo-Saxon society. This section explores the treatment of the abnormal, physically impaired or deformed bodies, their positioning in the grave, and the funerary performance associated with such practices.

Many diseases and conditions cannot be discerned archaeologically, but some leave traces on the human remains recovered from burials. In many instances, these individuals with physical illness or impairment were fully integrated into their communities, with no out-of-the-norm treatment to mark them out in death. Edx 18B from Edix Hill (Cambridgeshire) is the burial of a young woman, accompanied by a range of grave objects including dress items, a weaving batten, and a bucket. The skeleton laid extended supine, within a wooden bed-frame with iron fittings. Notably, the skeletal remains indicate that the individual suffered from advanced leprosy, which would have caused mobility and sensory issues, and significantly altered the physical appearance of the individual. In preparing the corpse for burial, the mourners would have had intimate engagement with the leprous cadaver in processes like washing and dressing (Williams 2006: 101). Not only was Edx 18B notably well-furnished, it is one of the 14 Anglo-Saxon bed burials hitherto discovered. The use of a bed presents an overt metaphor of sleep and rest in the context of death, possibly in association with the idea of a 'good death' (Williams 2006: 102). The wealth of the grave, the care and respect in the treatment of the corpse, and its inclusion within the Edix Hill cemetery suggest that Edx 18B was far from being separated from the community, unlike leprosy sufferers in the later medieval period who were separated from the community, in life as well as in death (Williams 2006: 101).

Edx 18B

Figure 6.16 Edx 18B.

Occasionally, it is possible to infer the use of medical device in treating injured or disabled parts of the body. Clm 40 from Cleatham (Lincolnshire) contained an adult male skeleton buried supine with legs folded. The left arm was folded with hand on the chest, and the right arm was slightly flexed and placed by the side of the torso. A small metal fitting, found on the lower chest, has been suggested by the excavators as possibly having come from a strap or sling, which was being worn on a disabled arm (the right arm) (Leahy 2007: 239). Similarly, Fin 208 laid extended supine, with 'right forearm bent across waist with hand bent downwards (dangling) with fingertips bent, as though holding something. The position of the right arm resembles that of an arm held in a sling' (Hawkes and Grainger 2006: 154). Here, the positioning of the limb was possibly influenced by the pathological condition and the use of external objects, even though we might not have direct osteological or artefactual evidence to suggest so.

Storey's Meadow, West Meon (Hampshire) produced two examples of possible medical objects. The excavators suggest that there might have been some medical 'specialists' in the area or associated with a healing centre, given the unusually large proportion of burials with medical intervention (e.g. three burials with healed trepanation), severe illness, or physical deformity in the cemetery (Ford and Falys 2012: 41–42, 45). Sto 1113 was a burial of an adult female between 20 and 25 years at death. The skeletal remains show evidence for disease, healing, and medical intervention through the individual's life: healed rickets which affected the tibiae, healed trepanation on the left side of the cranial vault, and infection in the area surrounding the site of the trepanation. A copper alloy clasp, made from two rectangular plates of metal that were riveted together, was found beside the head of the individual, possibly representing a medical device associated with the trepanation or infection on the head. Sto 1137 was also a female burial of between 20 and 25 years, whose skeleton suggests that the body was asymmetrical: the hip joint on the right side was deformed, possibly a dislocation. Based on the extent of the deformity on the skeleton, the excavators contend that the deformity was likely to have started at a young age, and the individual was likely to have walked with a limp, and was probably unable to run or jump (Ford and Falys 2012: 33–34). Interestingly, a collection of iron objects was found by the left hip. These objects might have formed part of a supporting device for the individual's malformed hip. Furthermore, the joints in right arm suggest that the right arm was subject to a significant amount of stress and strain, possibly indicating the use of a crutch for reliance or locomotion (Ford and Falys

Clm 40   Fin 208   Sto 1113   Sto 1137
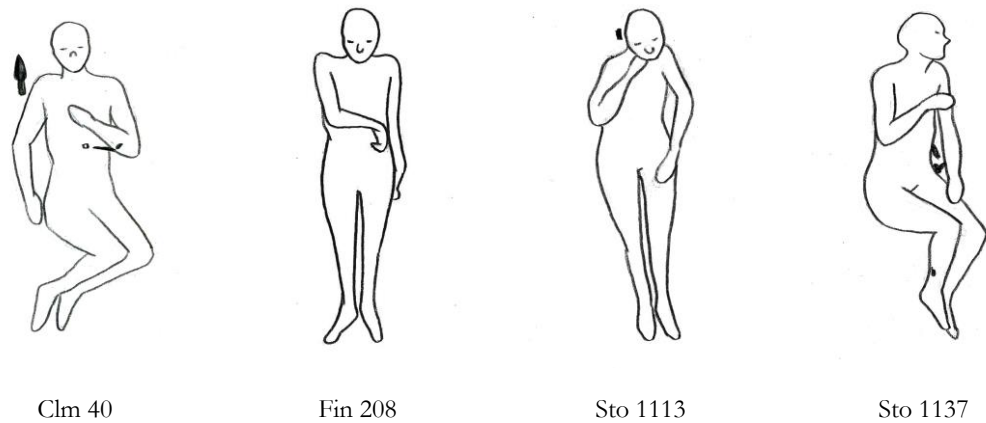
Figure 6.17 Clm 40, Fin 208, Sto 1113, and Sto 1137.

2012: 34). The asymmetrical body might have influenced the decision to deposit the body slightly turned to the left, with the legs flexed and the knees pointing left, such that the weaker right leg leaned on the stronger left leg.

If these examples indeed represent the use of slings, supports, or similar orthopaedic devices, it is notable that they were left in place during burial preparations. This may point toward the incorporation of the device in the perception of the deceased's personhood, particularly if the deceased had been affected by the condition and had been using the device for a long period of time before death. Moreover, burying the body with medical devices may imply the notion that the same body, with all its physical qualities as well as the potential to heal, continued on into the afterlife where the medical device continued to have function. Importantly, these individuals were fully integrated in their communities, cared for through their sickness and into death, and were accorded normative burial rite, if not particularly ostentatious as in the case of Edx 18B.

In some other cases, nevertheless, impaired bodies were given rather peculiar treatments. One such example is BecB 64; in many ways BecB 64 seemed like a typical Anglo-Saxon weapon burial—it contained a male skeleton buried supine, and a spearhead, shield boss, and metal shield fittings. The individual was positioned with legs splayed and arms folded on chest in a clasped posture. The curious feature of this grave, however, is that there were no traces of the individual's hands where they were expected to be. Meanwhile, four articulated fingers were found to the south of his head, next to the spearhead. It is not obvious from the ulnae and radii that a mutilation of the hands ever took place, and the

missing hands may simply be a result of poor preservation, although other parts of the skeleton were reasonably well-preserved on the whole (Evison and Hill 1996: 59). The four articulated fingers might have been brought to their location next to the head by burrowing animals, although this does not explain the orderly arrangement of the fingers or the whereabouts of the rest of the hand and the other hand. It seems possible that the hands of the individual were already missing when the burial took place, whether by accident or deliberate removal. The disembodied fingers, which could have originally belonged to the same individual or to someone else, might have been intentionally deposited along with the body, although not near where the hands would have been. The placement of the shield is worth noting: the shield boss covered part of the skull, suggesting that the shield would have originally covered the chest (where the hands were supposed to have been), the face of the individual, and the disembodied fingers. By manipulating the visuality of the grave, the shield might have played a part in masking, revealing, or negotiating between the missing hands and the detached fingers.

The manipulation of the body and detached body parts may be seen in MLa 1 from Market Lavington (Wiltshire), in which a young female was buried facing down in a grave that was located on the edge of the cemetery, marked out spatially from the other graves. The osteological report points out that the individual in MLa 1 had an amputated right arm. The arm, albeit physically detached from the body, was placed back to where it should be, by the right shoulder (see also Section 7.3.2). The idea of personhood being embodied in a severed arm appears in *Beowulf*, in the display of Grendel's arm at Heorot after the defeat of the fiend, and in Grendel's mother's reclaiming of it. The arm-shaped, twelfth-century reliquary of St Lachtin's arm from Ireland might have also been linked with a notion of embodied personhood in a limb (NMI, 1884: 690). The replacement of the severed arm in MLa 1 might have been as much as a symbolic act of making whole an impaired person as a physical act of 're-joining' the arm with the body.

Another example is Sto 1122 which contained a male skeleton which is estimated to be at least 46 years old at death. The cranium was detached from the body and arranged 'in an irregular orientation, with the face angled towards the rest of the skeleton' (Ford and Falys 2012: 19). The mandible and the first cervical vertebra were missing, and the excavators suggest that the skull might have been displayed before burial; as the soft tissues decayed, the mandible and vertebra became detached. After the display, the head was reunited in the

grave with the rest of the body and placed in anatomical position. It remains questionable whether it was a deliberate attempt to 're-join' the head with the body. Regardless, viewing of the grave might have implicated a visual dynamic whereby the body might have looked complete from a distance; but upon moving closer to the body, the detachment of the head would become clearer.

BecB 64   MLa 1   Sto 1122

Figure 6.18 BecB 64, MLa 1, and Sto 1122.

Sto 1122 overlapped with Sto 1128 but the two interments were at differing depths, and the upper burial did not disturb the lower one (see Section 5.5.1). The two interments have been radiocarbon dated to AD 572–668 (Sto 1122) and AD 583–708 (Sto 1128), suggesting that they were possibly contemporaneous (Ford and Falys 2012: 16). Whether contemporary or consecutive, the burial of the bodies in the same grave would have been intentional and possibly related to the identities of and relationship between the individuals and/or the circumstances of their death. Sto 1122's cranium displays antemortem trauma: a healed linear groove to the left side of the head, and a healed trepanation about 15.3 mm from the linear wound. Although we may know little about the life story of Sto 1122, we may infer from the trauma on the skeletal remains, the accordance of vertical multiple burial rite, and the possible decapitation and subsequent display of the head, that the individual appeared to have led an active and eventful life and died in curious circumstances.

Some bodies were clearly buried with parts of the body missing. Fin 26A was the upper burial of a consecutive vertical double grave, lying on top of and disturbed Fin 26B underneath. It was a prone burial of a male around 30 years at death, whose arms were largely extended with hands resting behind the lower back, suggesting that they might have been

tied. The individual's feet were severed which, along with the prone deposition and the positioning of the arms and the hands, indicates unconventional treatment of the body. This is similar to BnF 71, another prone male burial with perimortem amputation at the lower calves. The lower left arm of BnF 71 was also amputated, but it seemingly happened long before death and was fully healed by the time of burial. WH 114, again a prone burial but that of a young woman, had a severed left foot (the lower right leg did not survive). The positioning of the femora and patellae indicates that the knees would have been close together, which has led the excavators to suggest that the legs 'appear to have been tied together at the knee; an iron ring between the knee-caps was evidently used as part of the binding' (Haughton and Powlesland 1999: 189–190).
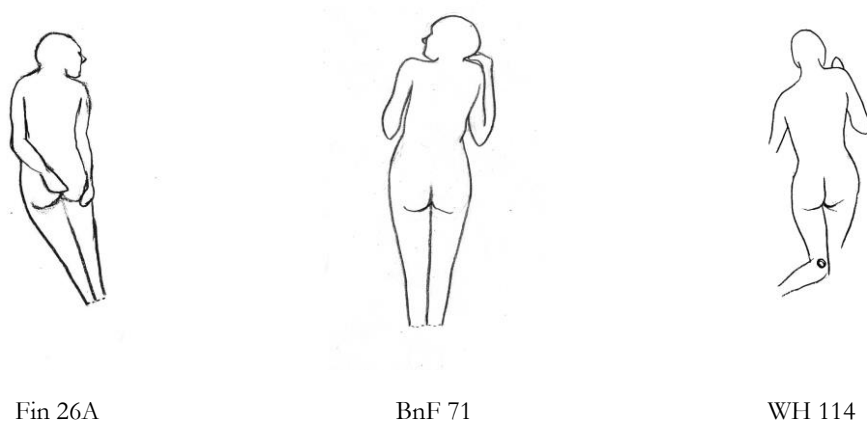
Fin 26A   BnF 71   WH 114

Figure 6.19 Fin 26A, BnF 71, and WH 114.

The removal of body parts appears in the context of feuding in *Beowulf* (Grendel's arm and Æschere's head), and is also attested in Anglo-Saxon law codes as punishment for crimes (O'Brien O'Keeffe 1998). The illustration to Psalm 141 on folio 72r of the eleventh-century Harley Psalter (Figure 6.20) depicts a group of seated figures with amputated feet, possibly representing condemned souls trapped within a mound (Semple 2003: 237–240; Marafioti and Gates 2014: 7). Without conclusive pathological indications, it is difficult to determine whether the amputation of Fin 26A, BnF 71, and WH 114 was surgical or punitive. On the other hand, it is notable that these examples are all deposited prone, and two seemingly had their hands or legs tied. While the prone deposition itself has multiple viable explanations that are context-dependent (see Sections 5.4.1, 5.5.1, and 7.3.2), its occurrence in conjunction with severed and possibly tied limbs points towards deliberate, violent treatment of bodies.

In contrast to MLa 1 and possibly BecB 64 discussed above, these individuals were denied bodily wholeness in their graves. The integrity of their bodies was violated, possibly in acts of shaming and manifestation of disrespect.

With the feet severed and presumably kept or disposed of away from the rest of the body, the individuals were physically and symbolically stripped of their ability to stand and walk. This may represent a measure against revenants rising from the dead, or may equally be a symbolic means to hinder the individuals in travelling to the afterlife: the individuals were caught between the realms of the living and the dead, banished from one, and unable to reach the other. The spirit or soul embarking on journeys after death is a recurring motif in Old English and Old Norse literature (Sanmark 2010: 160–163). *The Seafarer*, for example, contains descriptions of the spirit becoming dissociated, flying and travelling to different places, such as in lines 36–38:

monað modes lust   mæla gehwylce
ferð to feran,   þæt ic feor heonan
elþeodigra   eard gesece

My mind's desire always urges
my spirit to travel, that I seek
a land of strangers far from here.

It has been suggested that this 'flight of the soul' relates to a pre-Christian belief of shape-shifting into winged creatures (Glosecki 1989: 78–83; Sanmark 2010: 162). However, if the severing of the feet was indeed intended to render the individual unable to walk and travel after death, the physical quality of the body in its human form might have been perceived as having a lingering effect on this spiritual undertaking. Concerns about the physical health of the body in embarking on a spiritual journey, perhaps in reaching the world of the dead, might also explain the inclusion of the medical device in Sto 1137 discussed above. It is important to note that Anglo-Saxon medical knowledge was often tied with magic and superstition. Literary evidence for medical remedies from the later Anglo-Saxon period indicates that medicinal herbs were used alongside magical charms and spells, although there is little historical reference to surgery (Roberts and Cox 2003). The above examples of burials of the sick, the disabled, and the impaired articulate a sense of anxiety surrounding bodily integrity in Anglo-Saxon inhumation rite, which was likely to have implications not only for the physical health of the individuals, but also their spiritual (non-)well-being.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The corpse, albeit dead and motionless, was dynamically involved in the early Anglo-Saxon funerary ritual. For the archaeologist, although skeletons are not as visually appealing as gold-gilded brooches or pattern-welded swords, they were corpses which once embodied the people whom we study. Each grave represents the individual historical event which produced it, and is unique in terms of the assembly of funerary attendants, the time frame within which the event unfolded, and the experiential implications for the mourners. The cadaver in its grave captures the unique existence of each deceased person, as the life that this person lived and the choices that he or she made may be inscribed upon the corpse and played out through positioning rituals. The next chapter will discuss the possibility of identifying gestural symbolism behind corpse positioning in early Anglo-Saxon England, drawing upon a wide range of contemporary and near-contemporary art-historical sources from across western and northern Europe.

CHAPTER SEVEN
CORPSES AND GESTURES

læg se fula leap
gesne beæftan,   gæst ellor hwearf
under neowelne næs   and ðær genyðerad wæs,
susle gesæled   syððan æfre,
wyrmum bewunden,   witum gebunden,
hearde gehæfted   in hellebryne
æfter hinsiðe.

The foul corpse lay
lifeless behind, the spirit went elsewhere
under the deep earth and was subdued there,
restrained by torments forever afterwards
wound by worms, bound by miseries,
fiercely confined in hell-flame
after death.

(*Judith*, ll 111b–117a)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Old English biblical poem *Judith*, the heroine Judith stands victorious after having killed the anti-heroic leader of the Assyrians, Holofernes, who lies lifeless on the ground. The body postures of the lying-down villain Holofernes and the upright heroine Judith communicate the contrasting characteristics between God's enemy and God's servant (Arthur 2013). The positional representation of these two bodies speaks a body language, laden with symbolism and meanings. Although most Anglo-Saxon corpses were laid down in the grave horizontally, the arrangement of the limbs and the torso might have likewise been symbolically significant. The previous three chapters have identified patterns, variations, and change in the positioning of bodies in graves, and reviewed the relationship between corpse positioning, identity, and social relations in early Anglo-Saxon England. Building on this insight, this chapter seeks to offer interpretations of the symbolic meanings behind corpse positions, by exploring evidence for gestural and postural motifs that existed in the early medieval world.

The significance of gestures in early medieval Europe has been discussed extensively by a number of previous studies of human representations on metal artefacts and manuscript art (Dodwell 2000; Watt 2004; Hårdh 2004; Helmbrecht 2011; Brundle 2014). Burial positioning, on the other hand, has rarely been discussed alongside gestural representations in artistic sources. The recurrence of gestures in art and in burial, as this chapter sets out to explore, may point towards a wider gestural repertoire that comprised bodies from a range of contexts, artistic figures as well as corpses in graves. While it might not be possible to offer symbolic interpretations for every corpse position we encounter, detailed and careful analysis may reveal gestural motifs in corpse positions and in art, drawing upon a body-positional language that existed in the early Anglo-Saxon period.

Anglo-Saxon England was not an isolate on the fringe of the collapsed Roman Empire, but it was embedded in the wider cultural networks spanning from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and beyond. Body lore was situated within these networks, and might be exchanged, adopted, and negotiated at the regional and local levels. This chapter incorporates a wide range of artefactual and manuscript evidence from across the Anglo-Saxon period, the Roman and late Antique world, Iron Age and Viking Scandinavia, as well as the Byzantine world. The aim of the present analysis is to identity an Anglo-Saxon gestural repertoire in the context of burial, and thus to establish a better understanding of Anglo-Saxon corpse-positioning practices. As the discussion here will focus on areas where gestures in art overlap with those in burials, it is not the intention of this chapter to provide a comprehensive collation and analysis of the entire corpus of gestural material in art. In light of the aim of this chapter, however, there is mileage for more comprehensive enquiry in future studies to reveal long-term trajectories of gestural repertoires in Anglo-Saxon England and across western Europe throughout the early medieval period.

7.2 GESTURAL MOTIFS

7.2.1 Arms extended by the side

Figure 7.1 A burial with arms extended by the side (Alt 12).

The arrangement of both arms extended along the torso (Figure 7.1) is classified as the straight type in the present posture typology, although other variants (for example, arms positioned slightly away from the body, or hands on the either side of the pelvic girdle) are also encompassed in the 'straight' type cluster. The types 'straight' and 'not straight' are two of the seven most prevalent posture types identified in Chapter Four, particularly in Kent and Wessex (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3). The positioning of arms extended by the side is often deployed in conjunction with supine deposition, creating a neat and symmetrical image of the body. It may be reasonable to conjecture that the placement of arms by the side might have represented a 'natural' arm position, as the arms naturally fall into this position when a person is standing up and relaxes their arms to the effect of gravity.

This arm gesture is not particularly common in contemporary figural representations, but it occurs on an early seventh-century copper alloy figurine from Marham (Norfolk) (Figure 7.2a). The extended arms are merged with the torso, forming a columnar shaft. Two incomplete curved features project from the head of the figure, possibly forming two horns or a ring. The Marham figurine is one of a number of metal figurines dated to the seventh century, found primarily in East Anglia and Kent. These figurines are small items, not exceeding a few centimetres in height. Another example of such figurines with arms by the side of the body comes from Caistor (Lincolnshire) (Figure 7.2b). Unlike the Marham example, the thin arms of the Caistor figurine protrude from the shoulder areas and curved back towards the torso, with hands on the hips. Another similar metal object comes from Leighfield (Rutland), but is possibly dated to the Roman period (Figure 7.2c). The extended

arms are characterised by grooves on the torso, similar to the Marham figure, and might have been a knife handle.
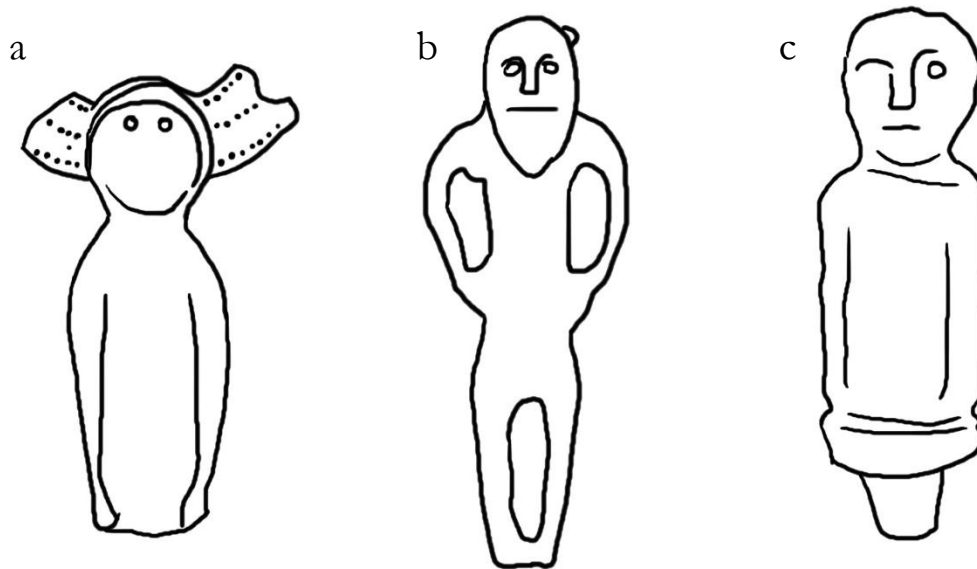
Figure 7.2 (a) Seventh-century copper alloy figure from Marham, Norfolk (PAS: NMS-4C3AD7). (b) Copper alloy figure from Caistor, Lincolnshire (PAS: NLM-A243C8). (c) Roman? copper alloy figurine or mount from Leighfield, Rutland (PAS: LEIC-09128C).

Another possible example of the straight posture in representational art is the figure on a buckle from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Finglesham (Kent) (Figure 7.3a). The figure wears a horned headgear (possibly similar to the curved features on the Marham figurine) and holds a spear in each hand. The representation of his arms as straight by the side, however, may be just a stylised treatment to simplify the arms. Some comparative examples of figures wearing similar horned headgear and holding spears depict the arms as bent upwards, such as the seventh-century copper alloy mount from Cambridgeshire (original location of discovery is not known), figures on a helmet plate from Sutton Hoo, as well as a parallel from the Torslunda helmet (Figure 7.3b–d). A later example of a figure with extended arms by the side and welding weapons is the tenth-century stone cross shaft from St Andrew's Church, Middleton (North Yorkshire) (Lang 1991: 182–184) (Figure 7.3e).
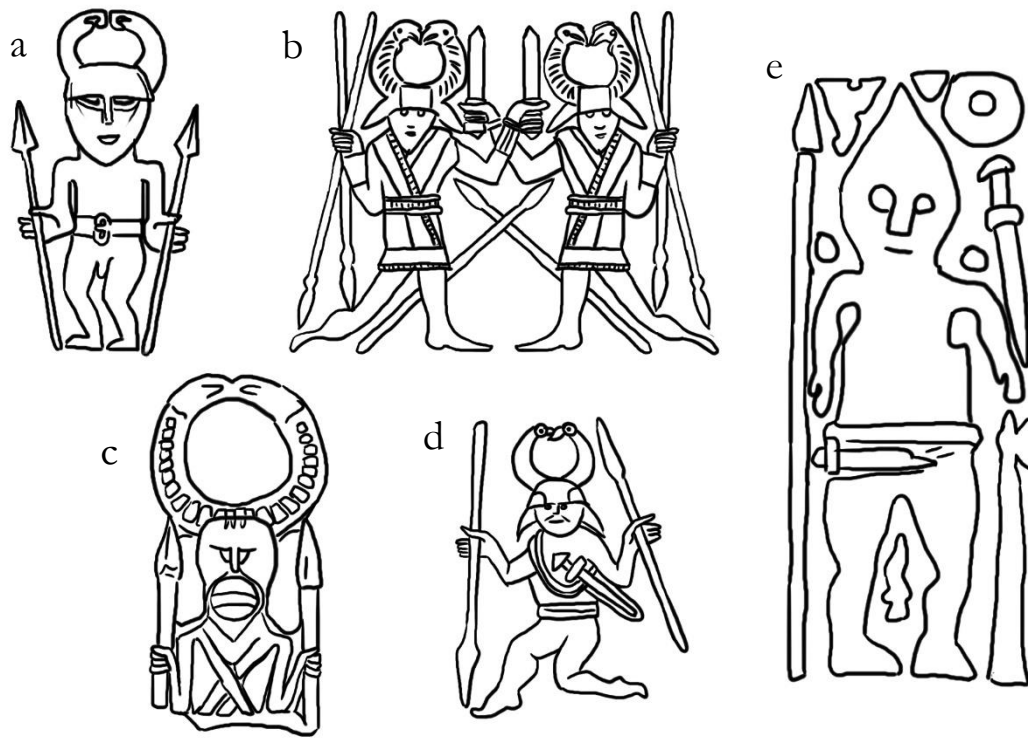
Figure 7.3 (a) Drawing of the figure on the Finglesham buckle. (b) Drawing of a helmet plate from Sutton Hoo. (c) Copper alloy mount from Cambridgeshire (PAS: FAHG-8EAAA3). (d) Drawing of a helmet plate from Torslunda. (e) Stone cross shaft from Middleton, North Yorkshire.

Late Anglo-Saxon depictions of the extended arms by the side posture are not very common, but the posture is sometimes adopted by women as a resting position. One such example is the wife of Lamech in the eleventh-century Junius Manuscript, a figure implicit in Genesis 5:28–31 as the mother to Lamech's son Noah and other sons and daughters (Figure 7.4a). Similarly, in the nativity scene from the tenth-century *Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, Mary lies on a bed with straight arms and hands on her thighs (Figure 7.4b). This scene is almost identical to a late tenth-century carved ivory panel, which replicates the posture of Mary (as well as that of Joseph, see Section 7.2.4 below) (Figure 7.4c). A supine body in the grave with arms along the side of the torso might have been a resting position, drawing upon a notion of rest or sleep in the grave. In fact, this arm gesture appears in an artistic representation of a funeral scene: the silhouette of Guthlac's shrouded body on Roundel 16 of the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Guthlac Roll clearly shows an extended left arm by the body (Figure 7.4d). The right arm is not visible, but this implies that it is extended on the other side of the torso, and therefore hidden behind it.
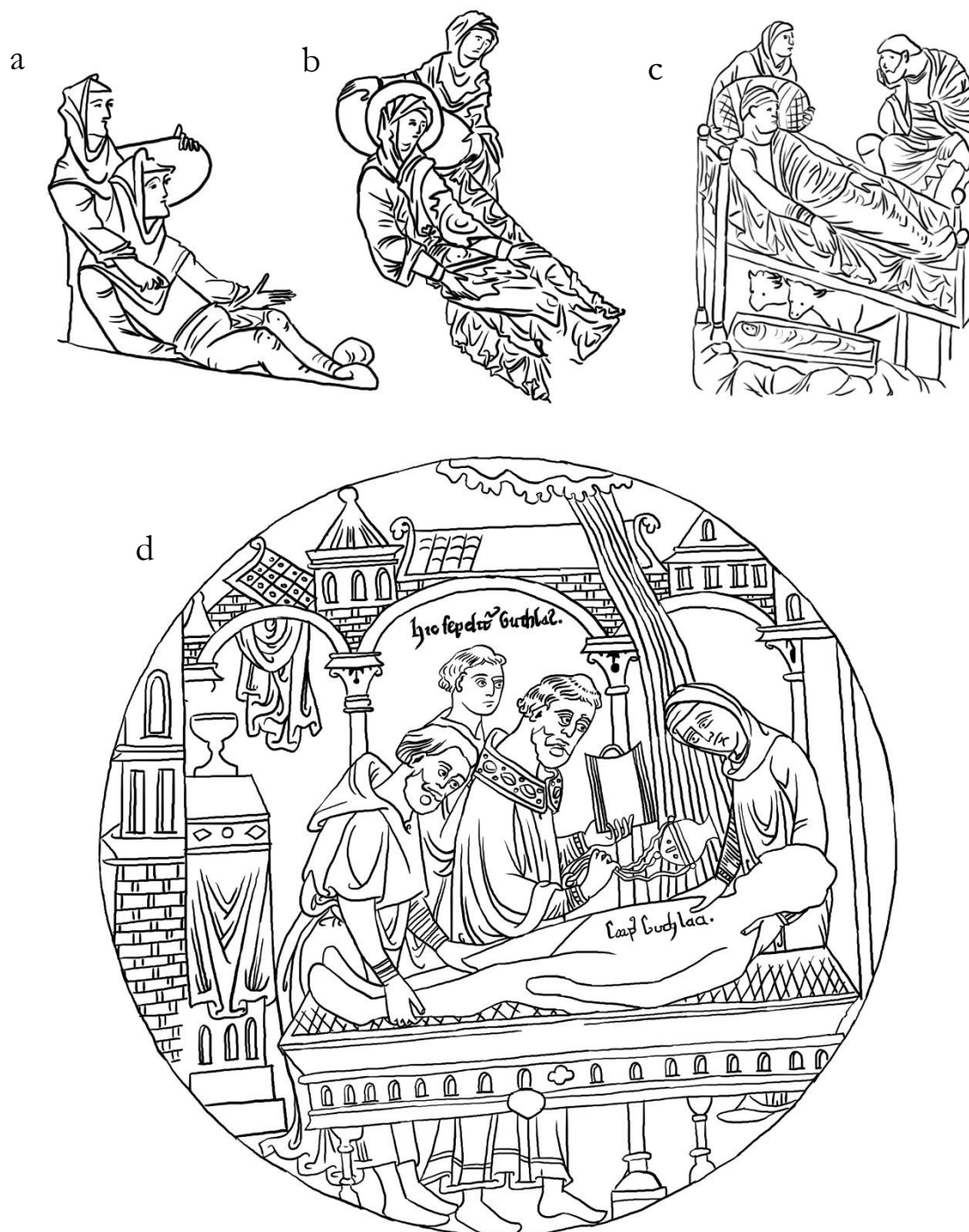
Figure 7.4 (Top left) The wife of Lamech. MS Junius 11, p 63. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Top centre) Nativity scene. The Benedictional of St Æthelwold. Add MS 49598, f 15v. The British Library (Top right) Tenth-century carved ivory panel, showing the nativity scene (National Museums Liverpool, M8060). (Bottom) The burial of Guthlac, showing Pega, Beccel, and two other monks placing Guthlac's shrouded body in his coffin. Harley Roll Y.6, Roundel 16. The British Library.

Going beyond late Roman and early medieval England, however, there are further examples of the motif of extended arms by the side from Scandinavia. The small gold figurine from Slipshavn, Denmark, dated to the third or fourth century AD, is a naked figure of a man, with detailed facial features and wearing a torc (Figure 7.5a). His legs and arms are extended, albeit slightly curved, and his hands curl backwards and inwards and palms facing up. The posture where both arms are extended by the side has also been on a number of gold foil figures, or *guldgubbar*, from Migration-Period Scandinavia, such as examples from Uppåkra and Bolmsö in southern Sweden (Figure 7.5b–c). Figural representations in this posture also appears in the Viking period, as seen on a small gilt silver figurine from Revninge in the east of Denmark (Figure 7.5d). The figure has slightly flexed arms with hands on the hips, and is clothed in a long, ornate gown with hair combed back and tied in a bun. The figure has been suggested to represent Freya or a valkyrie, although it may be problematic to assign gender to this figurine (Price 2015: 305).
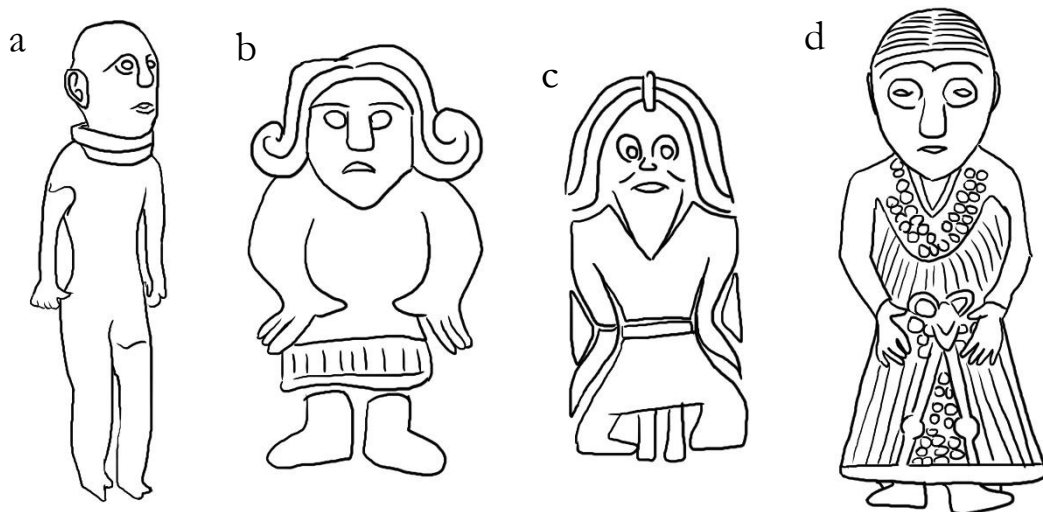
Figure 7.5 (a) Figurine from Slipshavn. National Museum of Denmark. (b) Guldgubbar from Uppåkra. (c) Guldgubbar from Bolmsö. (d) Revninge woman, Denmark.

It is difficult to assign any particular meaning to the positioning of arms along the torso. However, given its recurrence in figural representations in the Roman and early medieval periods in northwestern Europe, what appears to be a 'natural' arm position might have

possibly acquired particular meanings for the standing or reclining figures in art, as well as the corpses in graves.

7.2.2 Hands on abdomen
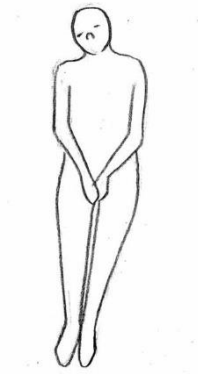
Figure 7.6 A burial with hands on abdomen (HDr 12B).

The positions where the arms are flexed and hands are placed over the stomach are grouped together into the 'stomach' type cluster, dominated by the types 'stomach' and 'almost stomach' (a total of 98 and 78 burials respectively in the present data set). Similar to the position wherein both arms are extended by the side, discussed above in Section 7.2.1, this hands-on-abdomen gesture occurs frequently in conjunction with supine deposition, promoting a neat, symmetrical image of the body. Conversely, however, the arms of a person do not fall naturally into this gesture, and its prominence probably relate more to culturally-attributed significance than the effect of gravity.

This gesture of hands over the waist or abdomen recurs throughout Germanic art in the early medieval period. A fifth-century wooden figure from Rude Eskildstrup, Denmark, is in a seated position, with hands together on the lap or lower abdomen (Figure 7.7a). Two figurines displaying this gesture were found in the settlement site at Lunda, Södermanland, which has been dated to around AD 450–600 (Andersson et al 2003) (Figure 7.7b). The erect penises indicate that these figurines represent males. A statuette from Öja, Gotland, displays a similar gesture where both arms are bent, and the right hand is placed over the left hand in a cradling-like gesture (Figure 7.7c). The figure is seemingly wearing a long tunic or gown, possibly representing a woman's garment. A pendant from Aska, Östergötland, also carries a figure with hands together under a swollen belly, supporting it (Figure 7.7d). This figure has been interpreted as a pregnant woman, possibly associated with the goddess Freya and

fertility (Helmbrecht 2011: 163–164). A series of *guldgubbar* from Migration-Period Scandinavia also depict figures in this gesture of hands over waist, such as ones from Uppåkra and Sorte Muld, Bornholm (Watt 2004) (Figure 7.7e).
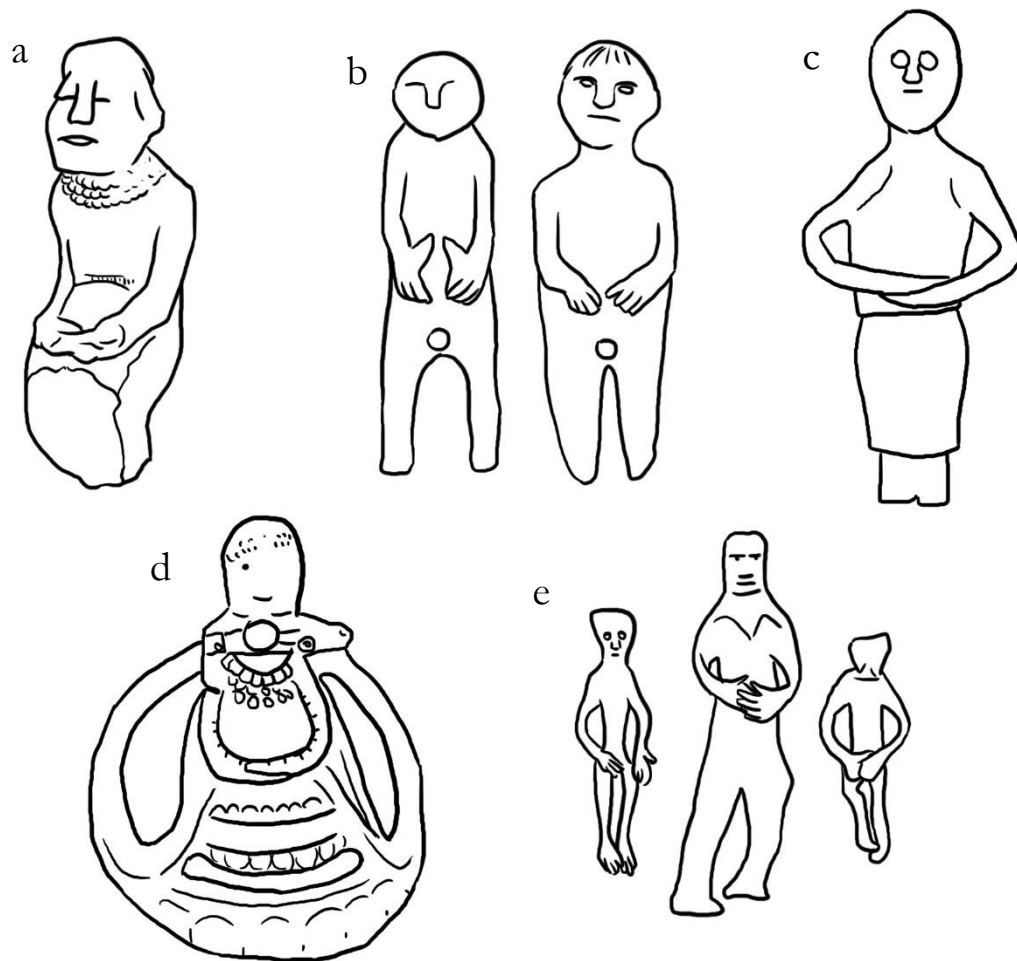
Figure 7.7 (a) Wooden figure from Rude Eskildstrup. National Museum of Denmark (b) Figures from Lunda, Sörmland, Sweden. (c) Statuette from Öja, Gotland. (d) Pendant from Aska, Östergötland. (e) Gold figures from Bornholm, Sweden.

In Anglo-Saxon England, the hands resting over the waist motif is present on some metal figurines dated to the seventh century (Brundle 2014: 251–252). The copper-alloy figurine from Bradstow School, Broadstairs (Kent) was found in a female grave by the waist, along with girdle items including an iron key, tweezers, knife, and iron fittings from a box (Meaney 1981: 231) (Figure 7.8a). A similar figurine came from Breach Downs (Kent), but unlike the Broadstairs figurine, it is not symmetrical: the left arm is slightly lower than the right arm (Figure 7.8b). The torso of the figure is elongated, the lower half of the body seemingly

wrapped in a skirt, but also showing the rough form of the buttocks and the penis, thus indicating that the figure is represented as male (Evison 1965: 215–216). The object is said to have been found near 'Saxon tumuli' in the 1840s. Evison observes that the 'delicate nature of the Breach Downs pin suggests a female owner' (Evison 1965: 216), although this may be tenuous as no contextual data exist. Another copper-alloy figurine was found by a metal-detector in Friston (Suffolk) in 2006 (PAS number SF-01ACA7), with hands together over the abdomen (Figure 7.8c). The bulge between the legs has been interpreted as a penis (Brundle 2014: 120, 213). The combination of a male figurine and a female grave is perhaps notable, although the present burial data show no particular gender pattern in the occurrence of the stomach posture types in graves.
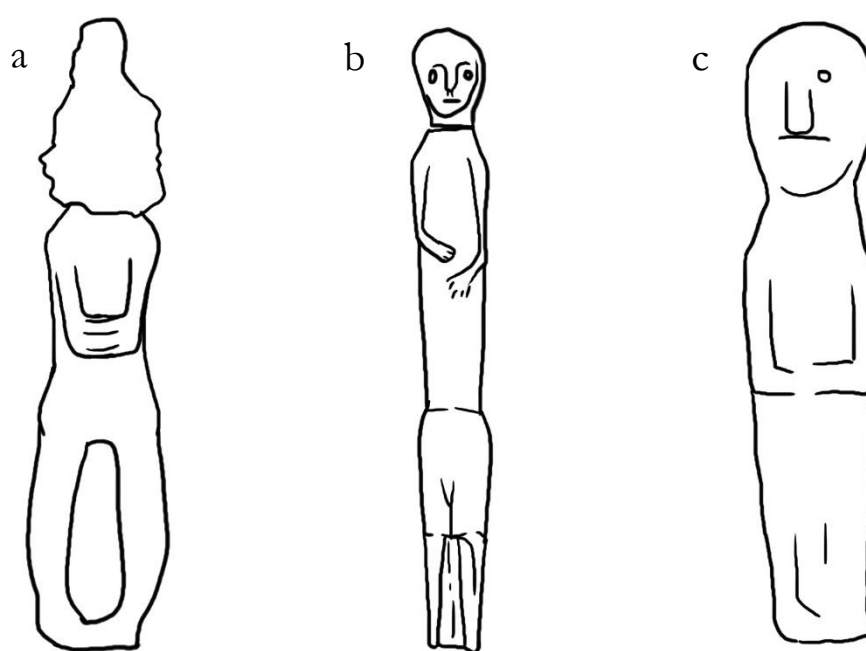
Figure 7.8 Figurine from (a) Broadstairs, Kent. (The British Museum: 1988,0412.1) (b) Breach Downs, Kent (redrawn from Evison 1965: 215), and (c) Friston, Suffolk (PAS: SF-01ACA7).

In burials where the hands met on the abdomen, some were positioned with one hand placed over the other or seemingly with one hand gripped the other wrist (e.g. DBu 266, Wat 101, Lec 84, among others). These gestures appear in the early Christian Mediterranean as a gesture of grief, sorrow, and humility (Maguire 1977: 154). For example, the fourth-century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, from the Old St. Peter's Basilica, contains a panel which depicts an apostle with arms lowered and one hand gripping the other, standing between

two soldiers (Figure 7.9a). In the panel underneath it, Adam and Eve stand next to the tree in the same gesture, with hands in front of and covering their genitals (Figure 7.9b). The use of this gesture to express of grief and humility continued well into the later medieval period, as shown in an early twelfth-century depiction of the Mocking of Christ from the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence (Figure 7.9c). The link between gestural repertoires in the Mediterranean and early Anglo-Saxon burial practices may be tenuous; however, as Dodwell (2000) has noted the connection between gesticulation in Roman plays and gestural symbols in later Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustrations, it is important to consider the exchange of cultural ideas and visual language across Europe in the post-Roman and early medieval periods. One possible example from England, albeit much later, is the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Guthlac Roll: Roundel 10 depicts the demon-possessed Ecgga being healed by Guthlac; his hands are crossed and tied together, and resting over the lower abdomen (Figure 7.9d).
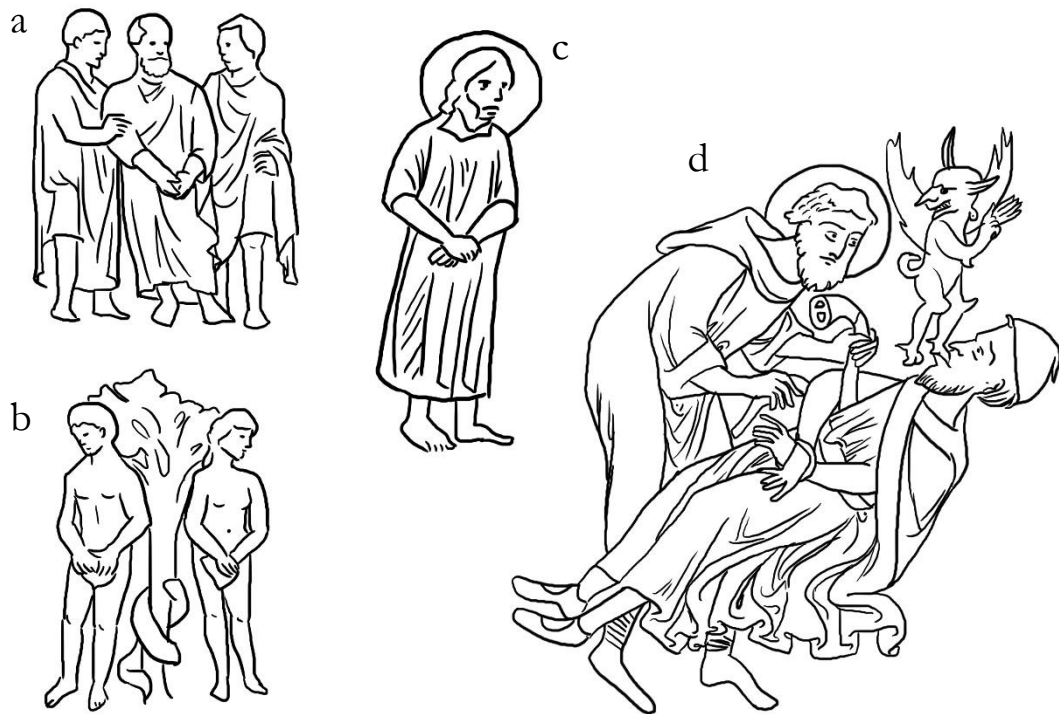
Figure 7.9 (a) and (b) Details from the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, Old St. Peter's Basilica. (c) Christ standing with one hand gripping the wrist of the other hand, from the Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence. (d) Guthlac casting a demon out of Ecgga. Harley Roll Y.6, Roundel 10. The British Library.

DBu 266   Wat 101   Lec 84

Figure 7.10 DBu 266, Wat 101, and Lec 84.

Interestingly, the gesture of hands together over the waist is present in the depiction of dead bodies in late Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustrations. In the eleventh-century Old English Hexateuch, an illustration to Exodus shows Moses killing an Egyptian by decapitating him and he is depicted lying dead with hands meeting over the upper waist (Figure 7.11b). While it may be regarded as a 'deviant' treatment of the body, another instance from the Junius Manuscript shows such posture in a funeral scene: at the burial of Mahalalel, he is laid in a coffin in a supine manner with interlocked fingers over the abdomen (Figure 7.11a). The top half of his body is left undressed, showing his breasts and nipples, but the lower half is wrapped.
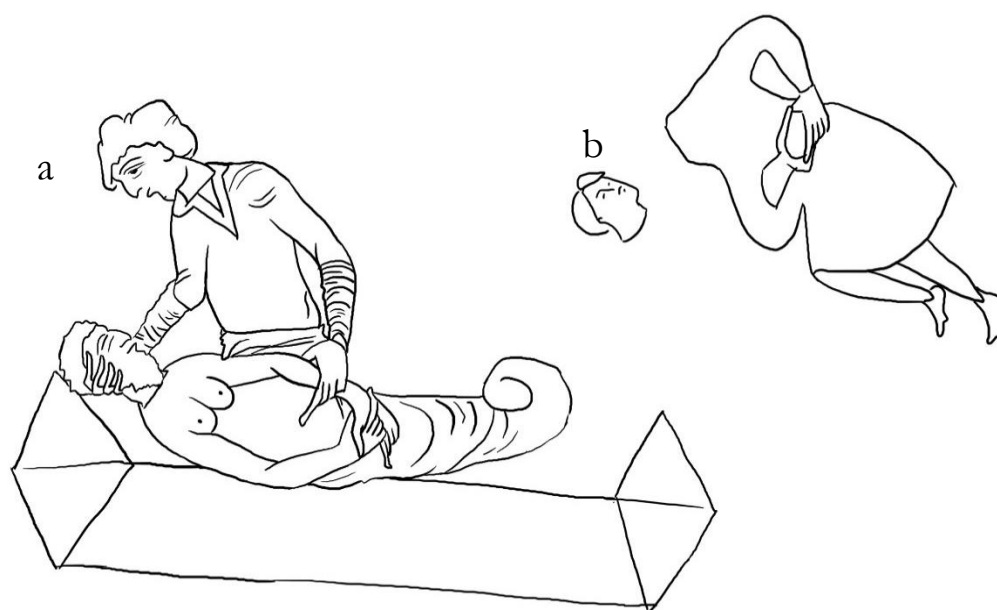
Figure 7.11 (a) The burial of Mahalalel. MS Junius 11, p 59. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (b) The decapitation of an Egyptian man. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 75v. The British Library.

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It would be problematic to impose a Christian notion of humility onto pre-Christian burials. Juxtaposing the gestural motifs of hands over the abdomen in Germanic metal figurines and in later manuscript illustrations, nevertheless, it is possible that the occurrence of this gesture in graves conveyed a set of ritual meanings relevant to pre-Christian burial rites, that acquired new significance in the Conversion and post-Conversion periods. The occurrence of burials of the 'stomach' type cluster certainly did not stay constant through the Conversion period, but followed a trajectory of initial decline towards the end of the sixth century, a marked surge in the beginning of the seventh century, and it remained one of the two most prominent type clusters by the mid seventh century, along with the 'straight' cluster (Figure 7.12). If the model of the acquisition of new significance was true, it would have the interesting implication that as corpse-positioning practices went through a period of re-negotiation, the same corpse position could have communicated multiple narratives and meanings at the same time.
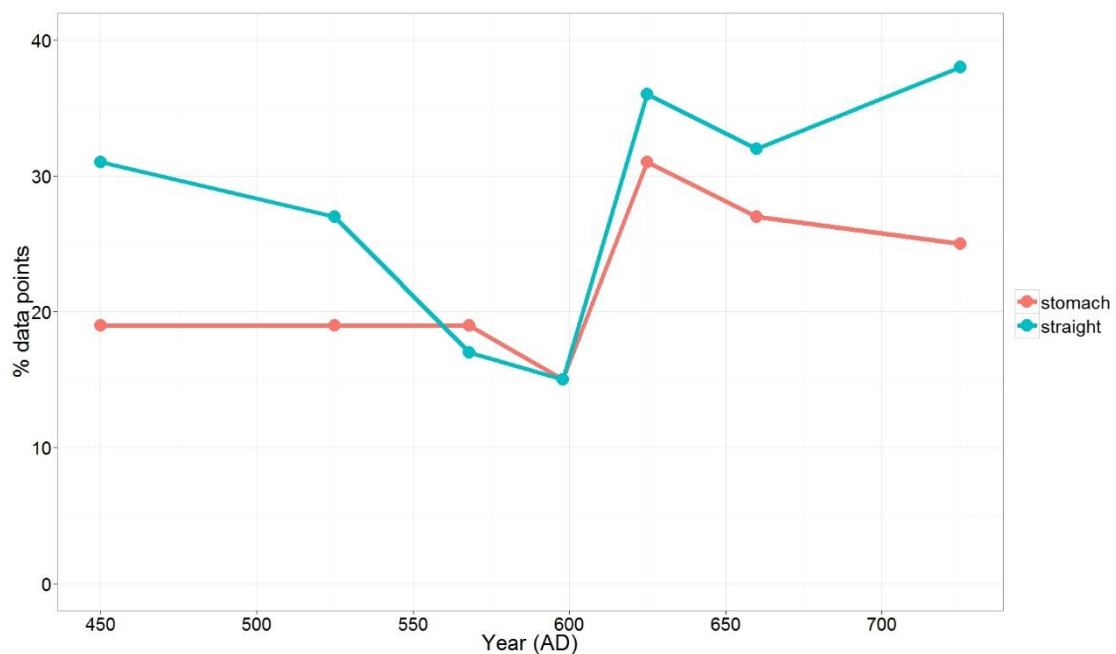
Figure 7.12 The stomach and straight clusters over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.

7.2.3 One arm over waist, the other across chest

Figure 7.13 A burial with one arm over the waist, and one arm across the chest (Fin 18).

The gestural motif of placing one arm across the waist and the other across the chest recurs in both burial and artistic contexts. This gesture is classified under the 'waist-chest' type cluster, which encompasses the 'waist-chest' and 'waist-shoulder' sub-groups: the latter referring to arm positions where the upper arm is more tightly folded so that it is bent double with hand on or near the shoulder. The 'waist-shoulder' sub-group will be discussed in Section 7.2.4 below in the context of the raised hand to the face motif. Unlike the arms-extended and hands-on-abdomen gestures, this gesture of one arm across the waist and the other across the chest features an asymmetrical arrangement of the arms, as they are bent to different degrees of flexure. As such, however, it is easier to identify as the somewhat orderly asymmetry implies intentionality, in burial as well as artistic contexts.

This gesture appears to be a prominent gestural motif in classical antiquity and the early medieval world. The *Venus Pudica* originated in Praxiteles' sculpture of the Cnidian Aphrodite of the fourth century BC. This posture has been discussed extensively by art historians in the contexts of female sexuality and shame, concealing the pubis whilst drawing attention to it (Salomon 1996). It is difficult to interpret, in the burial context, whether the positioning of hands over the pubis and/or breasts would have been sexually connoted. However, the excavators of the Oakington cemetery (Cambridgeshire), suggest that in the double burial Oak 88, the arrangement of the left hand of Oak 88a over the pubic area may have been an intentionally lewd position (Sayer 2013: 48). In the illustrations of the fallen Adam and Eve in the Junius Manuscript (pp 41 and 44), they are depicted as covering their genitals with

leaves. Eve, notably, covers both her chest and genitals in a way similar to the 'waist-chest D2' posture type (Figure 7.15).
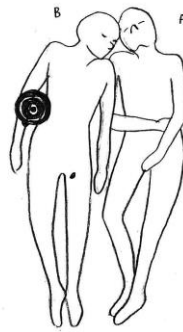
Oak 88

Figure 7.14 Oak 88.

Figure 7.15 Eve. MS Junius 11, p 41. The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

A series of seventh-century metal figurines from eastern England appear to replicate this gestural motif of one arm across the waist, one arm across the chest. A figurine from Carlton Colville, Suffolk, bear the gesture where the left arm is folded and reaches towards the right

shoulder, while the right arm is bent across the waist (Figure 7.16a). Clear depiction of the beard and a bulge for the penis suggests a possible association with male sexuality and fertility (see Brundle 2014: 230). It has been suggested that the figure seems to be clothed (Pestell 2012: 86), but more recent analysis has suggested that the figure may in fact be naked (Lake pers comm). The figurines from Halesworth (Suffolk), Eyke (Suffolk), Higham (Kent), also replicate this gesture, with the left hand on the chest and the right arm across the waist (Figure 7.16b–d) (Brundle 2014: 244–245).
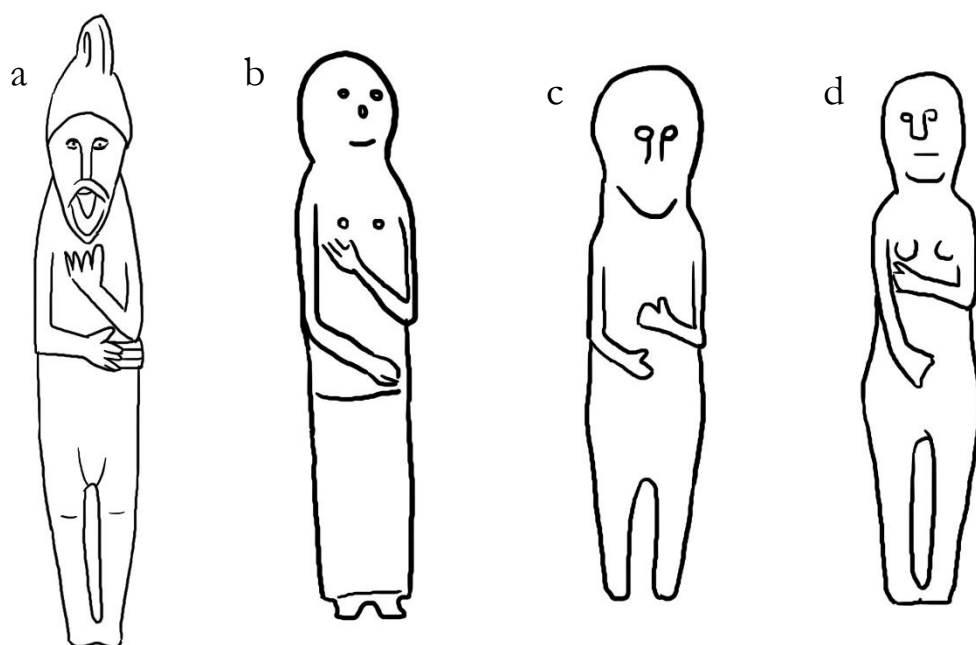
Figure 7.16 Figurine from (a) Carlton Colville, Suffolk, (b) Halesworth, Suffolk, (c) Eyke, Suffolk, and (d) Higham, Kent.

It has been suggested that the gesture depicted on these figurines is comparable to those of some of the figures on seventh- or eighth-century reliquary from the Fleury Abbey of Saint Benoît-sur-Loire, France (Brundle 2013). Based on the stylistic similarities and dates, Brundle (2013: 212) argues that this gestural motif was shared with Merovingian France, affirming a close link between England and Merovingia in the seventh century. Given the lack of religious paraphernalia, Brundle suggests that the gesture may signal secular authority, as opposed to religious meanings. Nevertheless, the same gesture also appears in a few Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells and the Book of Armagh (Figure 7.17a–b). Thus, this gesture might have carried particular symbolic significance within a

Christian context, especially in the positioning of a hand on the chest. The figures on the 'apostle side' of the St Cuthbert's coffin, for example, are consistently represented with their right hand against the left side of the chest, while the left hand is holding a book (Figure 7.17c).

Figure 7.17 (a) Matthew the Evangelist. The Book of Kells, f 28v. (b) The symbol of Matthew. The Book of Armagh, f 32v. (c) Andrew, on the 'apostle side' of St Cuthbert's coffin. Durham Cathedral.

Figure 7.18 The burial of Cuthbert. Life of Cuthbert. Yates Thompson MS 26, f 77r. The British Library.

Perhaps notably, in the late twelfth-century illustrated Bede's prose Life of St Cuthbert, the dead Cuthbert is portrayed extended and supine in associated with this gesture: his right arm folded across the chest, and left arm flexed across the waist (Figure 7.18). The similarity between the positioning of Cuthbert in his coffin, the portraits of saints explored above, and the recurrence of this gestural motif in burials further strengthen the present argument for a link between corpse positions and gesticulation in representational art in early medieval England.

Notably, the present data yield interesting results for the chronological development of the 'waist-chest' cluster. It was comparatively rare up until the mid sixth-century, when it saw a sharp surge, reaching a peak at the turn of the seventh century, before declining sharply and becoming rare again (Figure 7.19). The relative rarity of this position from the seventh century onwards appears to contradict the supposed Christian symbolism suggested by the above examples from manuscript art, although in-depth investigation of arm positions in burials in post-Conversion England is still lacking. On the other hand, the notable increase in prominence of this position in the second half of the sixth century may suggest an emergence of the gestural symbol in the context of social and political reformulations during that period. The seventh-century metal figurines are nearest in dates to this emergence,
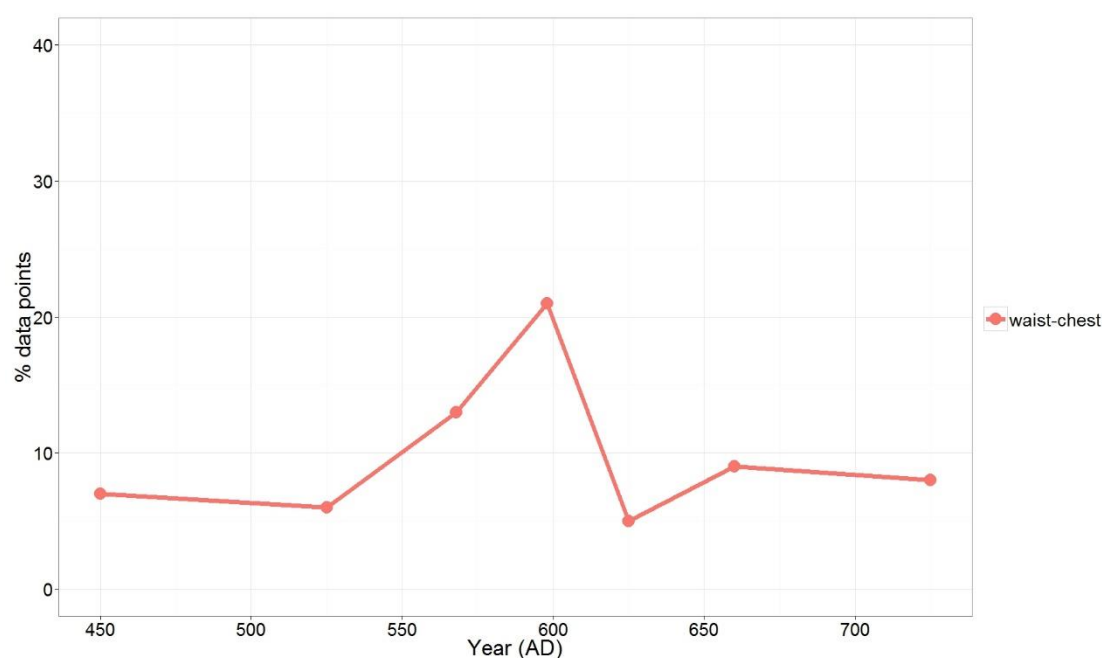
Figure 7.19 The waist-chest cluster over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.

although the symbolism has yet to be further explored. Regardless, given the decline of this position in burials in the seventh century, perhaps Brundle's argument (2013: 212) that the gesture carried secular political significance, rather than religious meanings, may carry considerable weight.

7.2.4 Raised hand to the face

Figure 7.20 A burial with one hand raised to the face (BnF 31).

157 burials were positioned with one or both arms tightly folded, such that the hand or hands were on the shoulder(s), under the chin, or near the face (Figure 7.20). These burials were relatively uncommon, and have been assigned to various type clusters depending on other characteristics, including the flexure of the second arm.

A number of interpretations of its symbolic meanings have been suggested for the raised hand to the face or the shoulder motif. Firstly, this gestural motif in the late Antique world is said to denote grief, sorrow, and mourning. For example, the mourning women depicted on the fourth-century Weepers Sarcophagus from Sidon, Lebanon, carry this gestural motif where one arm is bent across the waist and the other is bent double with hand to the face (Maguire 1977: 142, 157) (Figure 7.21a–b). In Anglo-Saxon England, this gesture appears in illustrated manuscripts from the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the Crucifixion scene in the tenth-century Ramsey Psalter, Mary stands with both hands raised to her face, weeping for Christ dying on the Cross (Figure 7.21c). Mourning women also appear in the background on page 59 of the Junius Manuscript, at the burial of Mahalalel, Genesis 5:17 (Figure 7.21d). Notably, the men in the same panels do not display the raised hand to the face gesture. Dodwell notes the similarities between such gestures that appear in the illustrations of classical plays and gestures depicted in later Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (Dodwell 2000: 111–

122). He thus conjectures that gestural symbols in Anglo-Saxon art were derived from the classical theatre, to which the Anglo-Saxon artists would have had access (Dodwell 2000: 153–154). In the Junius Manuscript (p 34), Adam and Eve display this gesture after they have eaten the fruit and try to cover their faces with one hand, and their genitals with the other, expressing sorrow which is perhaps also mingled with shame (Figure 7.21e). A similar gesture can also be inferred from the eleventh- or twelfth-century epic poem *La Chanson de Roland*,
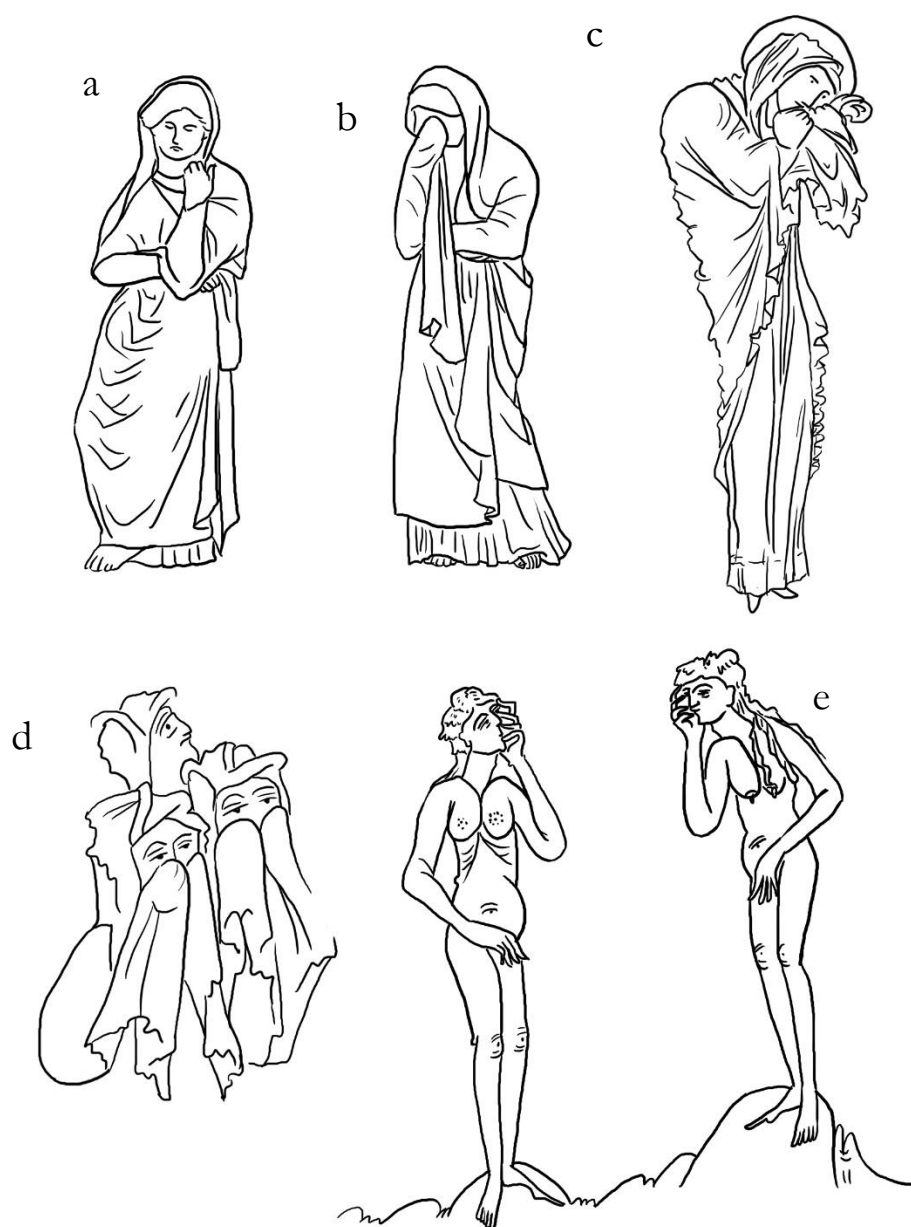
Figure 7.21 (a) and (b) Details from the Weepers Sarcophagus, Sidon, Lebanon. (c) Mary, at the foot of the cross. The Ramsey Psalter, Harley MS 2904, f 3v. The British Library. (d) Mourning women. MS Junius 11, p 59. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (e) Adam and Eve. MS Junius 11, p 34. The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

in which the grieving Charlemagne weeps and plucks his beard (ll 2930–2943, Whitehead 1942: 87).

A second interpretation of the raised hand to the face is that it is a gesture of contemplation. The enigmatic 'Spong Man' urn lid from Spong Hill (Norfolk) carries a figure who sits on a chair and whose arms are bent double such that the hands cupped the face (Hills 1980) (Figure 7.22a). There have been suggestions that this might have represented a gesture of contemplation and grief (Brundle 2014: 252). Juxtaposing the disproportionately long arms of the 'Spong Man' figure and its otherwise naturalistic representation, the gesture appears to have been an intentional design which might have carried meanings. This gesture is also adopted by the queen pieces of the twelfth-century Lewis chessmen: the right hand is raised to the face, and the left hand either over the waist and gripping the right elbow, or on the left knee holding a drinking horn or a length of drapery (Robinson 2004: 15) (Figure 7.22b). As the queen piece is related to the Persian and Arabic piece of vizier (counsellor, adviser), it has been suggested that her gesture represents a gesture of contemplation, wisdom, and thoughtfulness (Robinson 2004: 44–45). In a nativity scene showed on a carved ivory panel from the tenth century, Joseph is depicted in a very similar gesture as the queen piece, with his right elbow on his knee and right hand supporting his chin, possibly pondering the mystery and meaning of the Virgin birth (Figure 7.22c). The gesture also appears in some Byzantine depictions of the Crucifixion where Mary and John stand at the foot of the cross, as well as in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine ivories depicting Adam and Eve in their contemplation of the loss of Paradise (Robinson 2004: 44–45) (Figure 7.22d–e). In the latter examples, the pondering gesture may also be intertwined with grief and sorrow as explained above. The possible occurrence of grieving or contemplative gestures in corpse positioning is potentially significant, as it might have communicated a negative understanding of death, an unhappy separation or banishment from the living, or a sorrowful journey to an unpleasant place after death, such that the dead grieved their own death. The notion of the sorrowful dead will be discussed further in Section 7.3.4 below.

The third possible interpretation relates to political, ritual, or religious authority. The raising of the hand to the shoulder or the face appears on some of the *guldgubbar* from Migration-Period Scandinavia. Some *guldgubbar* from Uppåkra depict figures with one arm fully bent with hand under the chin, sometimes holding a staff, and the other arm bent across the chest or the waist (Watt 2004: 183, 186) (Figure 7.23a). The raised hand motif has been interpreted

as a saluting gesture of a late Roman origin, symbolising power, deference, or status (Watt 2004: 206). In some of the foils, the figure raises the hand in front of the face and bites the thumb, which has been interpreted as symbolic of the power of prophecy (Watt 2004: 186). The gesture where arms are tightly folded and hands are raised on chest or chin appears in figural representations on metal artefacts from Anglo-Saxon England. These include the design of a brooch from Grave 40 in Linton Heath, Cambridgeshire, and the Sutton Hoo purse lid mounts which depict a man between two beasts (allegedly wolves) (Figure 7.23b–c). The latter example, in particular, might represent mythological stories and
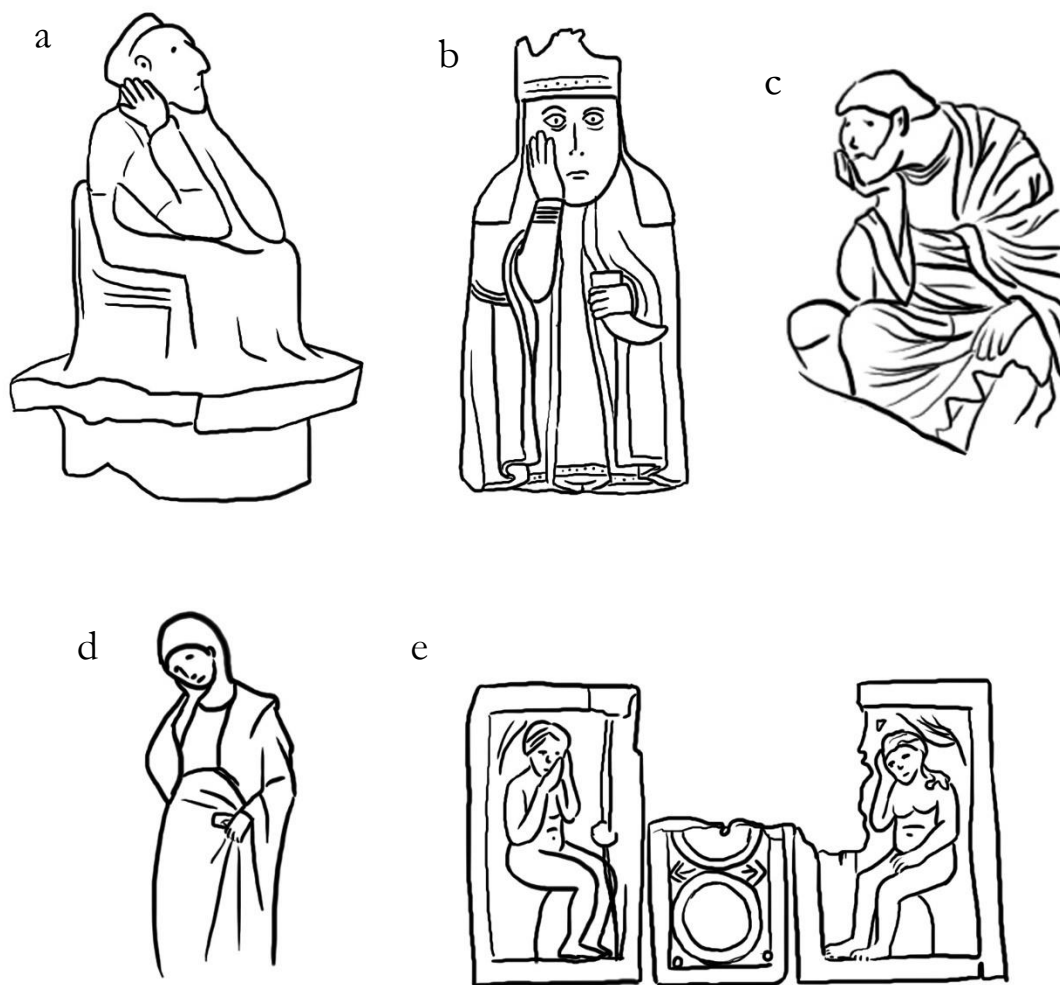
Figure 7.22 (a) Urn lid from Spong Hill, Norfolk. Norfolk Museums. (b) A queen piece from the Lewis chessmen. The British Museum. (c) Tenth-century carved ivory panel of the nativity scene (detail). National Museums Liverpool. (d) Ninth-century Crucifixion icon (detail, showing a mourning figure). The Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens. (e) Eleventh-century ivory box with scenes of Adam and Eve. The Cleveland Museum of Art.
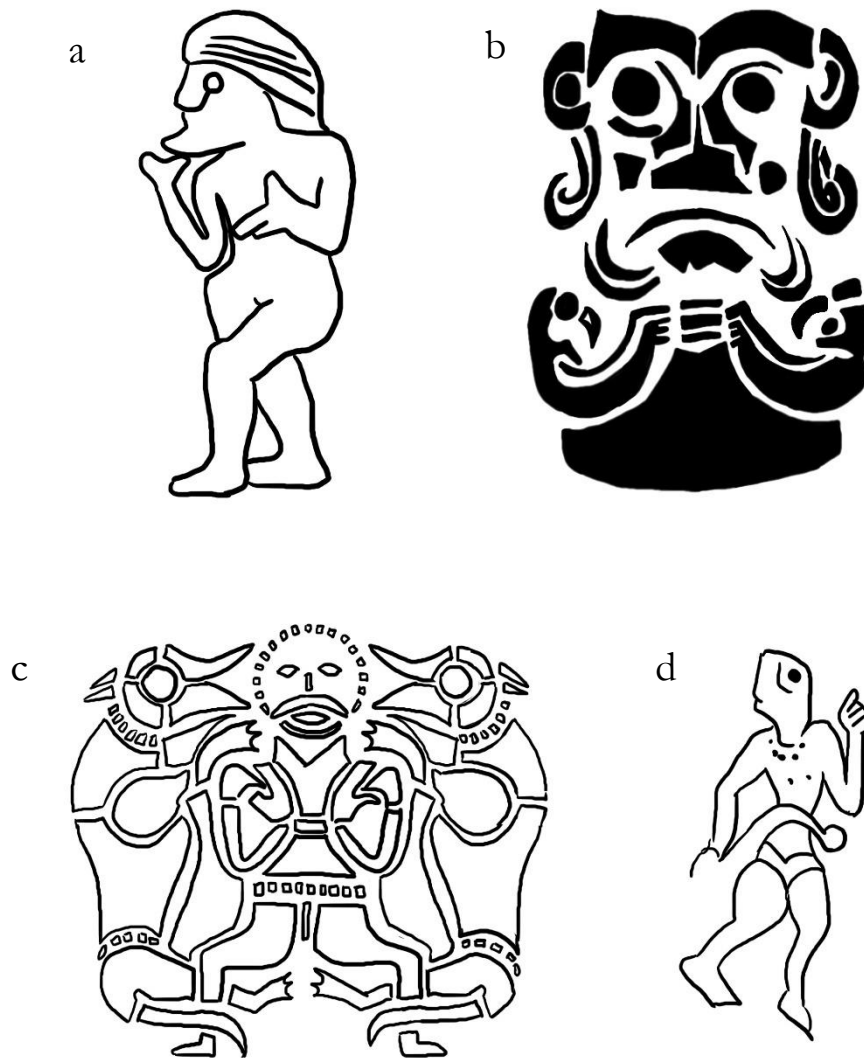
Figure 7.23 (a) Gold foil figure fnr 6406 from Uppåkra (Watt 2004: 183). (b) Brooch design from Grave 40, Linton Heath, Cambridgeshire. (d) Man-betwixt-beasts purse mount from Sutton Hoo. The British Museum. Figure. (d) Detail of the upper guard of the Abingdon sword. The Ashmolean Museum. AN1890.14.

characters and thus have carried certain ritual meaning. Another example is the figure of a man on the late ninth- or early tenth-century Abingdon sword hilt, which stands upright with his right arm extended by the side and his left arm bent double to his shoulder (Figure 7.23d). In this instance, the figure appears to be naked or semi-naked and bare-handed.

The possible association between the raised hand gesture and power and authority can be inferred from later Christian examples as well, although the hands are often raised only to the chest and not to the face. The ninth-century Alfred Jewel contains a figure with folded arms and hands raised to the chest, holding two stems of plants (Figure 7.24a). This figure

has often been compared with the central figure on the Fuller Brooch, which is said to represent the personification of the sense of sight (Webster 2012: 154) (Figure 7.24b). Given the dominance of the sense of sight over the other senses, as suggested by its central position on the Fuller Brooch, and the argument that the figure on the Alfred Jewel may represent Christ (Wilson 1984: 111), the gesture of raised hands to the chest may also signal dominion or authority. Mark the Evangelist is depicted with this gesture, holding a book, in the eighth-century Irish Book of Dimma (Figure 7.24c). It should be noted that clasped hands in front of chest appeared to only become the dominant gesture of prayer in the twelfth or thirteenth century, replacing the *orans* gesture of raised hands over the shoulders with outstretched palms (Schmitt 1991: 67–68; see Section 7.4 below).
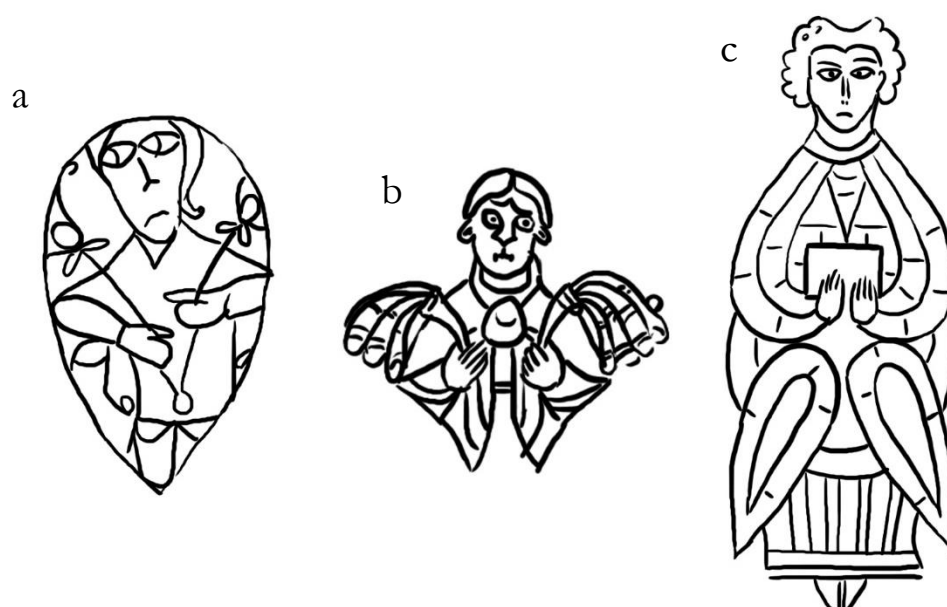
Figure 7.24 (a) The Alfred Jewel. The Ashmolean Museum. AN1836p.135.371. (b) The Fuller Brooch. The British Museum. (c) Mark the Evangelist. The Book of Dimma, f 30v.

The fourth and last possibility is that this gestural motif might have indicated a sleeping position. In the Junius Manuscript, Adam slumbers soundly in this posture, as God bends down to take a rib from him, from which he forms Eve (p 9) (Figure 7.25a). The sleeping Noah from the same manuscript is similarly depicted, with his right arm bent double and hand to the face, although his left arm is covered under his blanket (p 78) (Figure 7.25c). Likewise, in the panel illustrating the night of the Passover in the Old English Hexateuch, some of the people are depicted as sleeping in the same position, with one arm across the waist and the other raised to the face (f 89v) (Figure 7.25b). Notably, these figures are

represented lying on one side, like some of the burials (e.g. Ber 106, Emp 78, GC 137 etc.). It is possible that some of these burials might have been positioned to imitate sleep, which would have had significant performative implications, as discussed in Section 6.3 in Chapter Six. The interplay between sleep and death as a mortuary theme in Anglo-Saxon burial practices will be further explored in Section 7.3.1 below. Juxtaposing all the possible interpretations presently discussed, however, there is not a single overarching narrative that explains the raised hand gestural motif. As the motif in artistic sources saw both continuity and change in its contexts of use, the occurrence of this gesture in burials might likewise have carried meanings subject to context-specific negotiations and changes in the attitudes towards the body and death in the wider landscape.
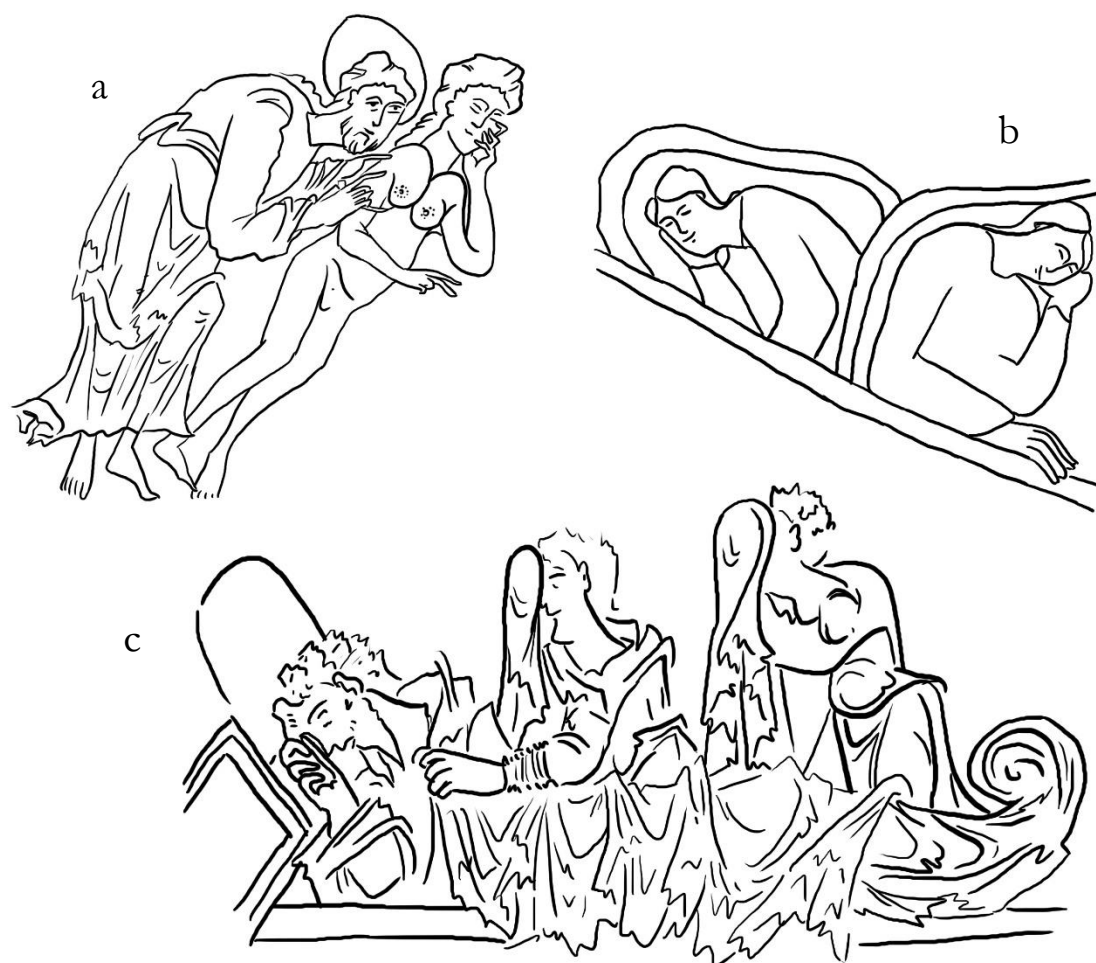
Figure 7.25 (a) God and the sleeping Adam. MS Junius 11, p 9. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (b) Sleeping figures. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 89v. The British Library. (c) The sleeping Noah. MS Junius 11, p 78. The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Ber 106   Emp 78   GC 137

Figure 7.26 Ber 106, Emp 78, and GC 137.

7.2.5 Arm stretched out and back
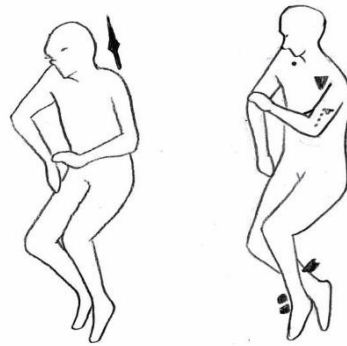
Figure 7.27 Burials with arms stretched out and back (left: Lec 196, right: Clm 50).

Some burials were arranged with one arm stretched out, bent at elbow and back towards to torso; the other arm reached towards the hand, elbow, or shoulder of the first arm (Figure 7.27). These burials are classified into the 'elbow' type cluster. In some cases, the space between the torso and the outward-pointing arm featured object(s). For example, Lec 78, a female skeleton aged between 25 and 30 years at death, contained 161 beads in the space between the ribs and the right arm. In another example, Emp 49 in fact featured a one-year-old infant in the crook of the left arm of a woman aged between 17 and 25 years at death. The intimate positioning of the child and the woman implies deliberate staging of the bodies, as discussed in Section 5.4.2 in Chapter Five. Furthermore, the gesture of an arm stretching out and back appears in manuscript art as an embracing posture. The bottom right corner of page 57 of the Junius Manuscript depicts Cainan's wife, wrapping her arms around her

child Malaleel and holding him securely (Figure 7.29; Muir 2004). As suggested in Section 4.4.1, the elbow cluster appear to be more strongly associated, albeit not exclusively, with female burials and burials with feminine assemblages, than male burials or burials with weapons. It is possible that this position represented a gesture of embrace, particularly in the context of the caring role of women.

Lec 78   Emp 49

Figure 7.28 Lec 78 and Emp 49.

Figure 7.29 Cainan's wife and the child Maleleel. MS Junius 11, p 57. The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that, in most cases where this gesture occurred, there were no traces of objects or additional bodies placed between the arm and the torso, although it is possible that some objects were present but did not survive archaeologically. The gesture, therefore, should also be addressed in its own right. This gesture appears a few times in the Old English Hexateuch, in the depictions of women resting after childbirth: e.g. Hagar (f 28r), the two daughters of Lot (f 34r), Rebekah (f 40v), Tamar (f 57r), and the mother of Moses (f 75r) (Figure 7.30a–b). The use of the arm-stretched-out-and-back gesture in positioning the dead may possibly represent a resting position, like the raised hand to the face sleeping position, see Section 7.2.4 above. It should be noted that these women all lie awake (with their eyes open) and turn towards the child, who is being placed in a baptismal font. On folio 34v, however, Abimelech sleeps in the position very similar to the resting women, as God speaks to him in his dream (Figure 7.30c).
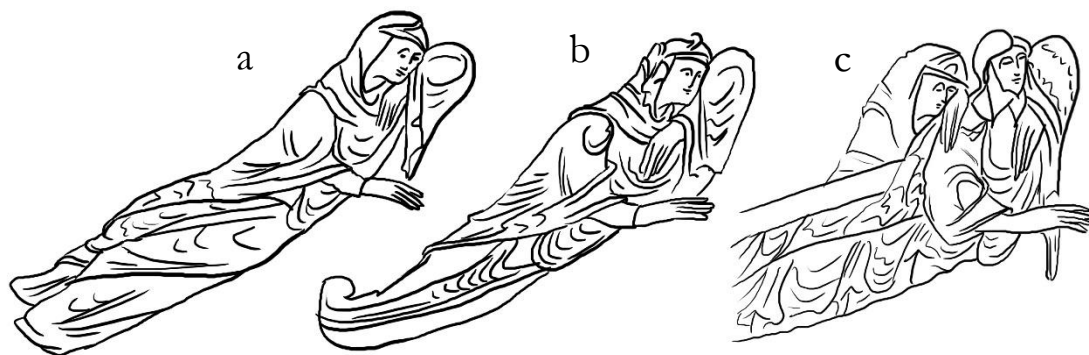
Figure 7.30 (a) and (b) The two daughters of Lot, after giving birth to Moab and Ammon. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 34r. The British Library. (c) Abimelech with Sarah. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 34v. The British Library.

This gesture appears to have a similar trajectory in its use over time as the gesture of one arm over the waist, the other across the chest (see Section 7.2.3). It was relatively rare until the middle of the sixth century, when it increased in prominence and, after reaching a peak in the third-quarter of the sixth century, dropped again and steadily declined from the beginning of the seventh century (Figure 7.31). This change was situated within wider changes of positional variations during that period (see Section 4.5 in Chapter Four). However, the relative lack of depictions of this gestural motif in representational art suggests that the use of this arm position in burial might have derived meanings from specific local funerary contexts, rather than a coherent gestural repertoire. Future studies of burial

positioning may seek to identify whether this gesture occurred in contemporary Frankia and Scandinavia as well, which may shed light on the use and symbolism behind this gesture.
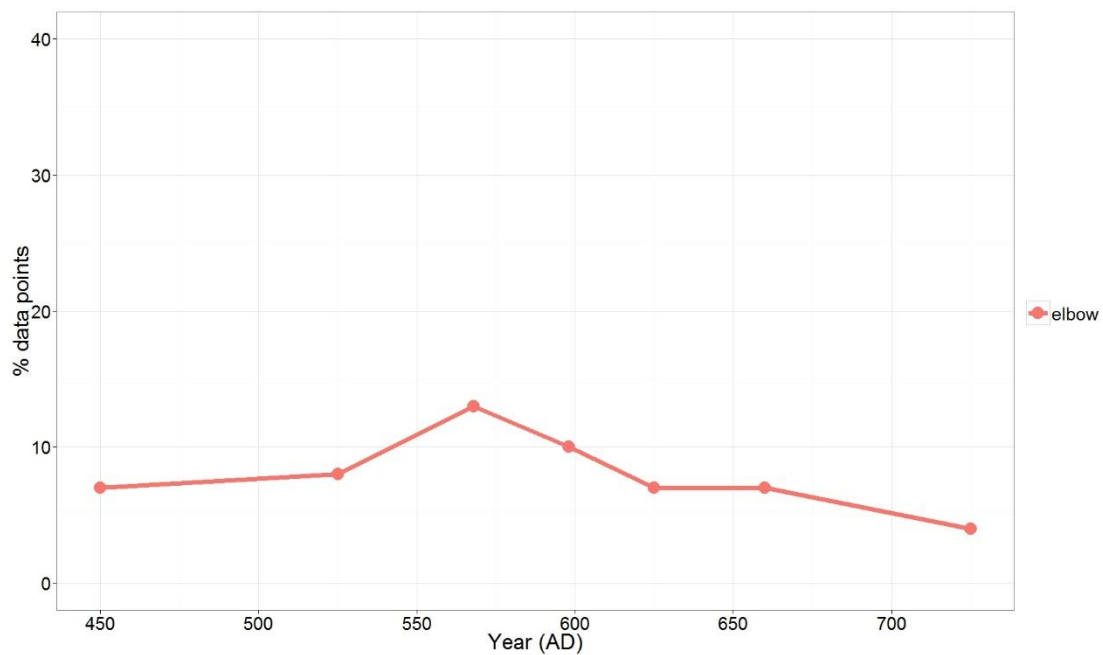
Figure 7.31 Elbow cluster over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3.

7.3 POSTURAL ARRANGEMENTS

7.3.1 Supine and one-sided

The supine deposition was the most widely employed method of deposition in early Anglo-Saxon England, making up 76% of all the burials with known deposition in the present data set, although it was also subject to regional and local preferences and negotiations (see Section 4.2 and 4.3). Bodies lying down supine are very common in later Anglo-Saxon manuscript art. In the twelfth-century Old English Hexateuch, folio 35r depicts Sarah, lying supine upon a pillow after giving birth to Isaac, who is being placed in a baptismal font (Figure 7.32). Her right arm is extended beside the body, and her left arm is slightly flexed, her left hand over the abdomen. Other examples have been mentioned above, such as Guthlac's shrouded, supine body in Roundel 16 of the Guthlac Roll, and the illustration depicting the burial of St Cuthbert in the late twelfth-century Life of St Cuthbert (Figures 7.4 and 7.18).
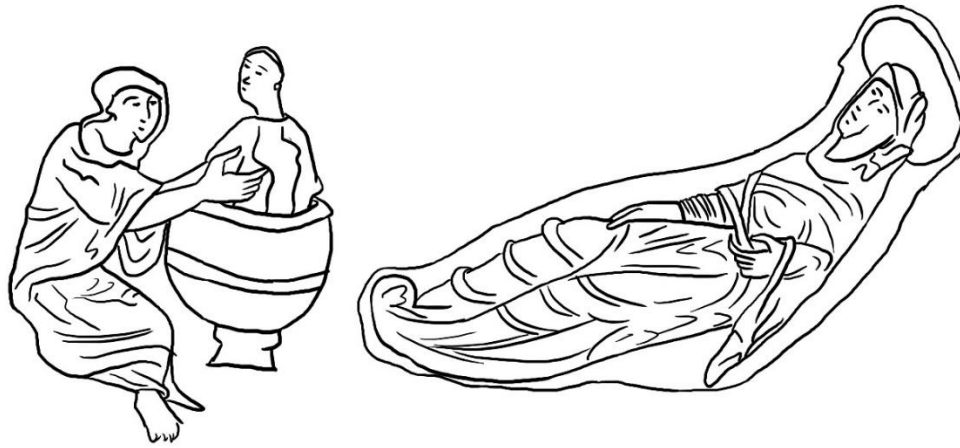
Figure 7.32 Sarah after giving birth to Isaac. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 35r. The British Library.

The unspoken preference for the extended supine position in Christian burials adds considerable difficulty when trying to assess the intentionality behind pre-Christian supine burial practice and tease apart any symbolic significance attached to it. However, there are visual implications relating to the supine deposition which we can infer. As parts of the above discussion have alluded to, the supine deposition would allow a more symmetrical image of the body, given symmetrical arm positioning as well. Furthermore, by placing the body in a supine position and positioning the head to face forward, spectators around the body would have, in theory, been able to view the deceased's face in equal measure, if they stood at the same distance from it. As a result, the locations of the mourners in relation to the body might not have mattered as much in the case of a supine body, compared to a one-sided body. In early medieval figural representations, it has been suggested that profile and frontal depictions of faces have different symbolic significance (Cramp 2008). The profile face embodies a third person engaged in activities with other profile-faces on the surface, thus detached from the viewer. The frontal face, on the other hand, addresses itself to and engages the viewer (Schapiro 1973). Although probably not all supine burials were arranged with their heads facing forward, they would still have afforded a very different visual field compared to one-sided or prone burials. The implications of the head positioning, however, remains to be further examined in future studies when relevant details become more consistently recorded and readily available (for the methodological reasoning behind why head directions are not presently studied, see Section 3.5.1 in Chapter Three).

In contrast to supine burials, the placement of the body on one side would have dictated the view of the body from the outset, such that the visibility of the body and parts of the body was dependent on the location of the viewer in relation to the grave. For example, if one was to stand where the body had its back against, the person would hardly be able to see the face of the corpse. In fact, if the grave was very deep, it is likely to have been more difficult to see the face regardless of where one stood, compared to if the corpse was placed supine. Thus, laying the corpse on one side would have had significant perceptual implications which might affect how the mourners engaged with the corpse. 21% of the burials in the present data set were buried one-sided, with a slight preference towards deposition on the right side. There were significant age variations, as infants were twice as likely to be buried on one side than supine, but the older the individual, the more likely they were to have been buried supine (see Section 4.4.2). One-sided deposition was also more common in cemeteries in northern England compared to the southern parts (see Section 4.3). Positioning the body on one side affords an asymmetrical image of the body, although some one-sided burials were buried with their arms in otherwise symmetrical arrangements, such as extended along the side or hands over the abdomen (the 'side straight' and 'side stomach' types respectively). One-sided deposition provides an extra dimension in which the arms can be arranged: i.e. the space in front of the torso. The burials with arms thus arranged are assigned types in the 'front' type cluster.

Bodies lying down on one side have appeared in some of the examples of manuscript illustrations explored above, such as the sleeping Adam on page 9 of the Junius Manuscript (Figure 7.25a), and various women, reclining on their beds after giving birth, in the Old English Hexateuch (Figure 7.30a–b). Some of the one-sided burials in the data set were arranged in some of the possible resting gestures explored above, supporting the argument that corpses in graves might have been positioned to imitate sleep, whether intentionally or subconsciously. It has been suggested in Section 4.4.2 that burials of infants and young children might have been influenced by their spinal development and the individuals' preferred positions of rest. Blankets might have been used in some burials, possibly in creating a performative 'bed-side' (see Section 6.3). Multiple burials were possibly executed to resemble co-sleeping between individuals in intimate relationships (see Section 5.6.2). The blurred boundary between sleep and death can also be demonstrated in the Old English verb *swefan*, which can denote natural sleep or the sleep of death (Bosworth 1898: 945), and is sometimes used in intentionally ambiguous ways. For example, lines 1007–1008a of *Beowulf*,

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which considers the inevitability of death, tell of '*þær his lichoma legerbedde fæst swefeþ æfter symle*' ('there his body, fast in the death-bed, sleeps after the feast'). It should be noted that the literary and artistic sources were produced at least a few centuries later than the present burial data. The conversion to Christianity might have also added a different meaning to the link between death and sleep, given the prominent theme of sleep in Christian funerary rites and its association with the notion of the peaceful dead at rest until the final judgment (Mutie 2015: 55-64; Gilchrist and Sloane 2005: 6). Nonetheless, the burial evidence analysed presently points towards the existence of the burial theme of the interplay between sleep and death in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary rites. Viewed in this light, perhaps the deposition of the body—supine, one-sided, or even prone—may represent not simply institutionalised practices, but also the historical presence and individuality of the Anglo-Saxons we recover: from their relationships and life stories, down to their preferred resting positions.

7.3.2 Prone

A total of 58 prone burials are recorded in the present data set. Northern England produces a much higher proportion of prone burials compared to southern parts of England, as 24 of these burials came from cemeteries north of the Humber Estuary. Burying the body facing downwards has important visual and practical implications for the construction of the grave. A prone body conceals, at least partially, the face of the individual, as onlookers may see mostly the back or side of the head. Likewise, if hands and arms are positioned on the anterior, they may be only partially visible, or not visible at all in some cases. Moreover, when the body is placed prone, any intentional arrangement of arms and fingers in desired positions—including gesticulating and holding objects—is rendered difficult.

Artistic evidence from the post-Conversion period points towards the association between the prone position, 'bad' death, and damnation. On the front panel of the eighth-century Franks Casket, the left side shows the story of Weland the smith, who takes revenge on Niðhad by killing his two sons and raping his daughter (Abels 2009: 559–560) (Figure 7.33a). In the bottom left corner of the panel, the headless, prone body of Niðhad's son lies by Weland's feet. The eleventh-century Harley Psalter contains numerous depictions of prone bodies in the context of suffering and damnation. For example, folio 4r depicts a figure lying prone in a pit, with arms raised over the head and legs flexed upwards (Figure 7.33b). This figure is curiously reminiscent of Sew 41, the upper interment of a double burial with Sew 49, albeit pre-dating the Harley Psalter by about five centuries. A literary example of the

prone position can be found in the excerpt from the Old English poem *Judith* introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Here, the villain Holofernes' spirit is said to have gone elsewhere under '*neowelne næs*' ('deep place', l 113): *neowol* can mean 'deep' or 'profound', as well as 'prostrate' or 'prone' (Bosworth 1898: 715), which might have been a wordplay linking Holofernes' prone body and the abyss to which he is condemned.
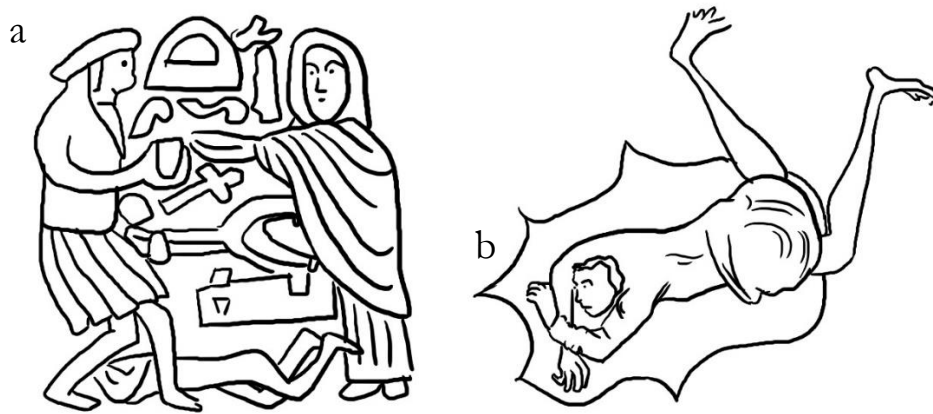
Figure 7.33 (a) Franks Casket, front panel (detail). The British Museum. (b) The wicked man in a pit. Illustration to Psalm 7. Harley MS 603, f 4r. The British Library.

Sew 41

Figure 7.34 Sew 41.

In the burial record, in most cases, there is no direct evidence for the intentional arrangement of arms, fingers, or legs in prone burials. If we accept the argument that prone burial represents disrespectful, punitive treatment of the dead, the arm and leg positions that we observe may be no more than random results in the disposal of corpses. Nonetheless, it is sometimes possible to infer deliberate positioning of limbs in prone burials. Oak 78, already

discussed in Section 5.4.2, is a double prone burial which contained an adult female and a subadult skeleton. The left arm of the woman was bent across the waist, reaching towards and touching the left arm of the subadult. The location of her wrist-clasps, however, suggests that the sleeve might have been intentionally arranged such that it concealed the gesture. The right arm of the woman was folded across the upper chest, and the finger bones of the right hand indicate that the hand might have been clutching the bead necklace that was found with her. Such attention to detail in the arrangement of the arms, fingers, and dress items strongly suggests that the positioning of the bodies in Oak 78 were deliberately planned and executed. Similarly, MLa 1 contained a young adult female skeleton, deposited facing down with flexed legs and arms over the abdomen area. Osteological analysis indicates peri-mortem severing of the right arm of the individual, suggesting that the arm was detached when the burial took place. The severed arm was put back in place next to the right shoulder, which points towards a deliberate attempt to join together the severed arm and the torso (see also Section 6.5).

<div align="center">

Oak 78   MLa 1   WH 166   Sew 22

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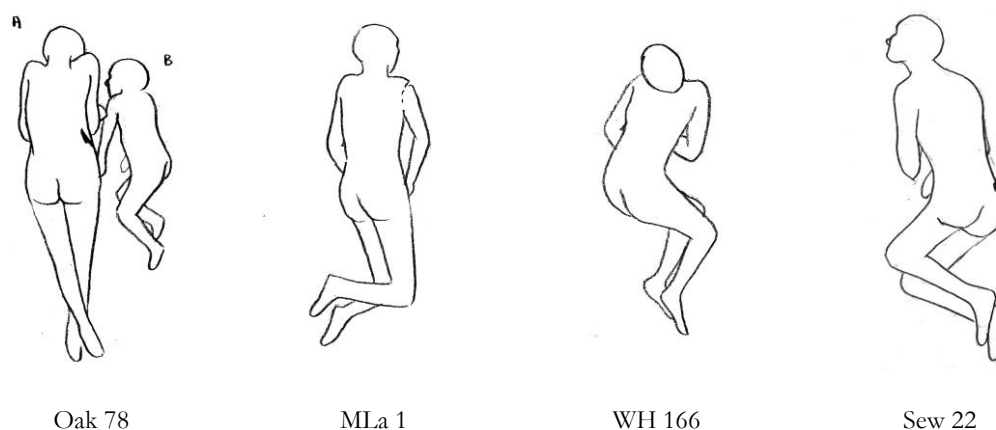
Figure 7.35 Oak 78, MLa 1, WH 166, and Sew 22.

These examples warn that the lack of direct evidence for intentional arrangement of limbs in prone burials does not necessarily mean the lack of care and planning in the positioning of these bodies. Thus, the gestural repertoires explored in this chapter may, to some extent, be discussed in terms of prone burials as well. Certainly, it is important to bear in mind that the prone deposition would have afforded a very different visual field to the grave holistically. However, if certain corpse gestures indeed had symbolic meanings, these meanings may be carried forward to contexts where they might not be immediately visible to onlookers (for example, the nuanced positioning of hands and fingers in Oak 78). In WH 166 and Sew 22,

for instance, the placement of arms is similar to the gestural motif of one arm over the waist and the other arm across the chest (Section 7.2.3). If these indeed represent the prone counterparts of the waist-chest postures discussed above, it would mean that corpse gestures were significant beyond their visuality from the mourners' perspective, but they would have been meaningful for the dead individuals themselves.

Although most of the prone burials contained no finds (41% of all prone graves), the RIAC index ranges up to 6 (two of the prone burials). Only three prone burials in the dataset contained weapons, and the skeletons have all been sexed as male: Emp 110, WH 155, and Clm 31. The placement of the spear by the side of the body is not dissimilar to the location of spears in their supine or one-sided counterparts. Emp 110 is a particularly interesting example, as the positioning of the spear and the right arm suggest that the spear might have been held by the right hand under the body. This further emphasises the deliberate planning behind body positioning despite the prone deposition.
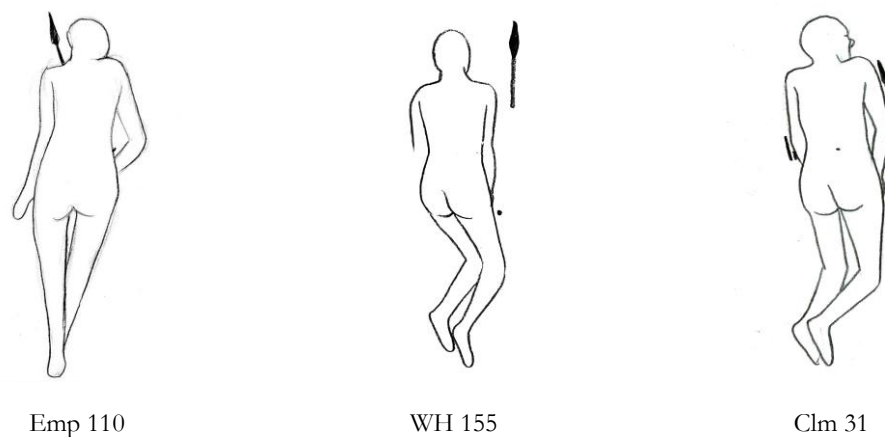
Emp 110   WH 155   Clm 31

Figure 7.36 Emp 110, WH 155, and Clm 31.

The examples discussed above all point towards no less intentionality and care in the positioning of limbs in these prone burials than supine or one-sided burials. Nevertheless, some prone burials appear have been buried much more carelessly or disrespectfully (see also Section 6.6). Fin 26A reused the grave of Fin 26B, which appears to have been fully decomposed by the time the former was interred, and was heavily disturbed by it. The lower legs of Fin 26A was severed and missing, and the arms were largely extended with hands behind the lower back. In Drx 7, an adult female skeleton was found in a prone position in an unfurnished grave. The right arm was raised above the shoulder and bent over the head,

while the left arm reached under the upper chest to the right side. In these two examples, the severed legs (in Fin 26A), the unusual placement of the arms, and the lack of grave artefacts, together with the prone deposition, point towards deliberate treatment of the body in non-normative ways, possibly as punishment, sacrifice, or a means to mark them out as special individuals in the community.
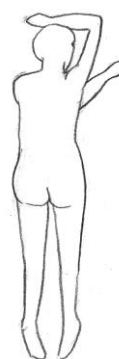
Fin 26A   Drx 7

Figure 7.37 Fin 26A and Drx 7.

Taken together, although prone burials are fascinating burial phenomena that attract many creative interpretations, they should not be over-generalised as embodiments of careless or disrespectful treatment of the dead. Echoing the discussions and conclusions in Sections 5.4.2 and 5.5.1, prone burials are likely to have different meanings and significance, depending on the local and historical contexts of each individual grave (see Section 8.4.1 in Chapter Eight). A more nuanced view of burial positions in aspects beyond deposition provides deeper insights into such contexts, to which archaeologists ought to attend so as to better understand why and how certain individuals were accorded this non-standard burial treatment.

7.3.3 Tightly crouched

The term 'tightly crouched' presently refers to the body position where both the knee joint and the pelvic joint are tightly bent, such that the legs are pulled up against the torso. This position is sometimes dubbed the 'foetal position', but this term is not presently used in this thesis so as to avoid making assumptions about early Anglo-Saxon understanding of foetuses and their positions within the womb (see Section 8.4.1). In this data set, only seven skeletons

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were arranged in tightly crouched positions, and even so, they are not very similar to each other.

Placing the body in a tightly crouched position contorts the body such that it affects the visual and material relationship between the torso, the arms, the legs, and the head. In GC 112, for instance, a mature adult female skeleton was buried on the right side with legs tightly folded and pulled up against the torso. The right arm was under the legs and wrapped around them, while the left arm was folded and tucked against the thighs and the torso. The positioning of arms in Cas 174 likewise made reference to the legs: the arms were flexed with each hand on one knee. Lec 150 was tightly crouched on the left side; the left hand was extended under the torso, while the right arm was tightly bent, with elbow slightly raised such that the right hand was at the upper chest or shoulder. Sto 1127 is a particularly interesting example, as both arms were tightly bent and tucked close to the chest, and the hands firmly held the head, which was bent slightly forward. This holding of head is strangely reminiscent of the 'Spong Man' urn lid from Spong Hill, the gesture of which may be related to gestures of grief or contemplation (Hills 1980; Brundle 2014: 252; see Section 7.2.6 above).

| GC 112 | Cas 174 | Lec 150 | Sto 1127 |
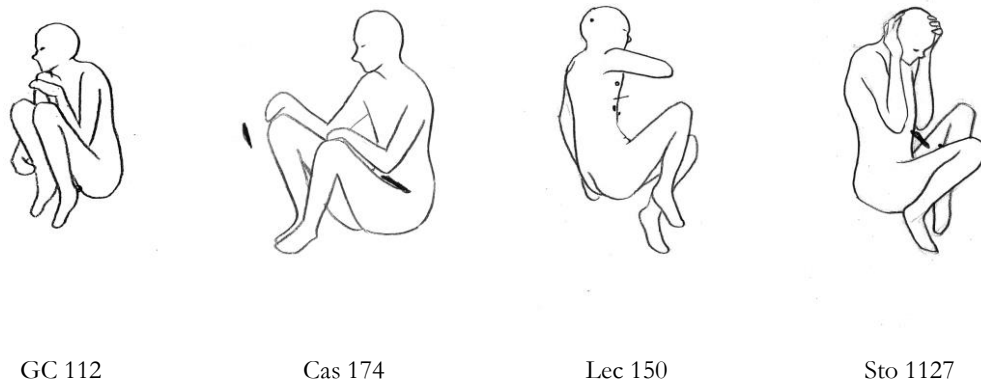
Figure 7.38 GC 112, Cas 174, Lec 150, Sto 1127.

The above examples were all deposited on one side. Sto 1144, an unsexed skeleton about 10 to 14 years at death, is the only tightly crouched body that was deposited with its back against the ground, i.e. supine. Sto 1144 was placed in a small round cut, and the body was pressed up against the sides. The legs were tightly folded and pressed against the torso; the left arm was flexed and positioned across the waist, while the right arm was extended along the torso, and the right hand just under the hip. The unusual positioning of Sto 1144 may be due to

the confined space that the body was buried in. Sto 1210 and Sew 25 were buried prone, with the tightly folded legs and arms tucked under the torso. The tightness of the crouched position might have been accentuated by the effects of gravity during decomposition.

Sto 1144   Sto 1210   Sew 25
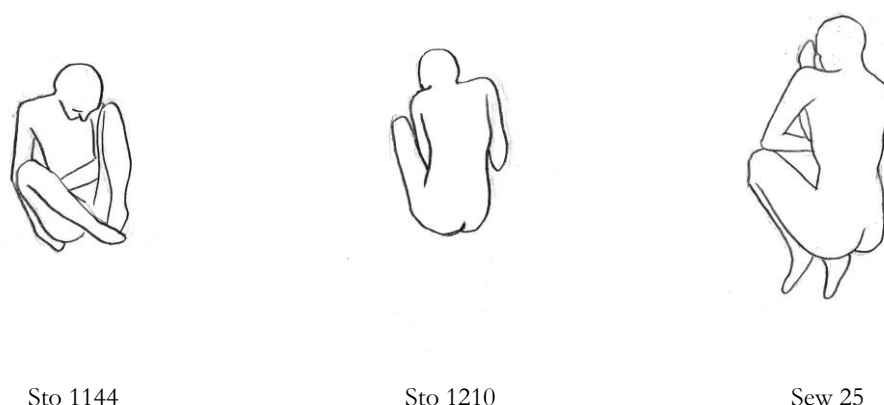
Figure 7.39 Sto 1144, Sto 1210, and Sew 25.

Given the rarity of tightly crouched burials in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, these bodies might suggest unusual circumstances of death and burial. As these burials were either poorly furnished or unfurnished, the temptation is to follow the same interpretation as prone burials, that they represent careless or disrespectful treatment of the bodies. Nevertheless, as argued above in Section 7.3.2, generalising interpretations risk overlooking the nuances in each individual burial. On a practical level, such peculiar positioning might have been the result of individuals having died in these positions and been buried before rigor mortis had dissipated. As discussed in Section 5.5.1 in Chapter Five, burning in house fire may also result in the contraction of muscle fibres, such that the body is pulled into a pugilistic pose (Harvig et al 2015). Equally, these bodies might have been deliberately positioned as such as a response to the particular identities of the individuals, or the circumstances of their deaths. Curiously, these burials are reminiscent of a series of small Roman copper alloy figurines of bound captives, which are suggested to be linked to slave transactions in second- and third-century Britain and across the Roman Empire (Jackson 2005) (Figure 7.40). Certainly, it would be problematic to claim that the one-sided bodies in early Anglo-Saxon England, with folded legs and arms in front of the torso, represent burials of slaves, but it is possible that at least some of these burials might have had their hands and/or feet bound.

Three of the seven tightly crouched burials in the present data set come from the same cemetery: Storey's Meadow, West Meon (Hampshire) (Sto 1127, Sto 1144, and Sto 1210). The site itself exhibits practices that are especially peculiar to the south west region of England, such as smaller proportions of the seven 'main types' relative to the region's
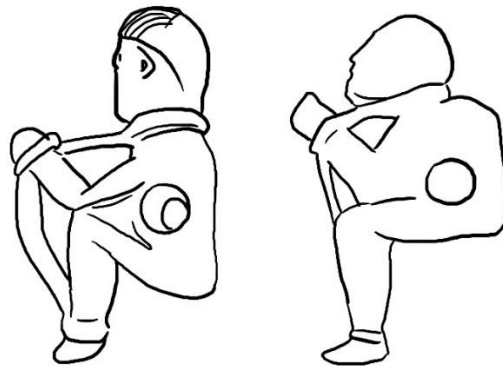
Figure 7.40 Roman copper-alloy figurines from Hampshire (PAS: HAMP-378231) (left) and Broxholme, Lincolnshire (PAS: DENO-EB7C77) (right), representing bound captives.

average (44%, contrasting Wessex's average of 55%). Several burials display evidence of medical intervention: one skeleton show severe physical deformity, three burials show well-healed trepanations on their skulls, and possible medical objects were found in two graves. These lead the excavators to suggest that there were likely to be skilled medical practitioners among the community at West Meon in the Anglo-Saxon period (Ford and Falys 2012: 41–42). The tightly crouched position, in this context, may represent patients with certain illnesses (such as those which result in stomach or back pain: we may even creatively imagine the headache Sto 1127 might have suffered before the individual died!) and burial when the body was under the effects of rigor mortis. This interpretation is difficult to test and apply to other cemeteries, but it warns that unusual burial positions may be specific to the individuals and their local contexts.

7.3.4 Seated

There are only two seated burials in the present data set: Lec 62 and Did 1, both of which came from cemeteries in the Upper Thames region. The former was an adult female and the latter an adult male, both were accompanied by gender indeterminate grave objects and were not particularly well-furnished. Beyond the present data set, there are further examples from

the Upper Thames Valley, such as Yarnton (Oxfordshire) (Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural and History Society 1860–64: 110–116) and Ewelme (Oxfordshire) (Smith 1907–9: 71–72). A particularly well-furnished seated burial was found in Caenby (Lincolnshire), a seventh-century barrow burial which contained a sword, a shield, horse fittings, and an assortment of ornate bronze and silver plates (Jarvis 1850). The practice of burying the body in a seated position was very rare in Anglo-Saxon England, but not without parallels in early medieval northern Europe. The most notable examples come from the Viking-period cemetery at Birka, Björkö, Sweden, where some chamber graves contained skeletons collapsed above and around remains of chairs, stools, or metal fittings (Arbman 1940–43). Notably two chamber graves contained a man and a woman each, with the latter sitting on top of the former in both cases (Price 2008: 263–264). The remains of iron chains that were found around the bodies appear to have been used to hold the corpses in place. In the two Anglo-Saxon examples from the present data set, however, the bodies were laid directly in the cut with their backs against the side of the grave.

Some Icelandic sagas contain descriptions of seated burials in Viking Scandinavia (Price 2002: 134–135), such as Gunnar of Hlíðarendi's burial in a cairn in an upright and seated position (§77) in *Njal's Saga*. The seated position is also mentioned in the tenth-century Ibn Fadlan account of the Volga ship cremation (Price 2008: 264). After the dead chieftain was placed in a temporary grave for ten days while preparations were made for his funeral, his body was dressed and carried into the pavilion on the ship. There, it was propped up in a seated position with cushions, before the food offering, weapons and gears, and animal sacrifices were brought in. Later, in the episode where the slave girl was lifted three times above a doorframe-like structure, she said she saw her dead relatives and master seated. This may be suggestive of a notion of an ideal death symbolised by the seated position, and in contrast to the possible sleeping gestures alluded to earlier in this chapter (arms extended by the side, raised hand to the face, and arms stretched out and back), the seated position might have represented a life-like—rather than sleeping or restful—arrangement of corpses.

In Anglo-Saxon England, the most notable reference to sitting in a funerary context is perhaps the 'Spong Man' figure on a chair on an urn lid from Spong Hill (Hills 1980). Little is known about the positioning of the body in cremation rituals in early Anglo-Saxon England, and perhaps 'Spong Man' cautions that some bodies might have actually been cremated whilst sitting upright, like the dead chieftain in Ibn Fadlan's account. The gesture

of Spong Man has been discussed above in Section 7.2.4, which may represent contemplation or grief. The motif of a sorrowful sitting figure appears also on the right panel of the Franks Casket (Figure 7.41). On the left, a winged animal figure holds plant-stems and sits on a small mound, facing a helmeted figure that holds a spear and a shield. The right panel is certainly the most enigmatic of the stories depicted on the Franks Casket. The runic inscription on this panel offers a clue (Karkov 2011: 151):

> Her Hos sitiþ   on harmberga
> agl[.] drigiþ   swa hiræ Ertae gisgraf
> sarden sorga   and sefa torna.
>
> Here Hos sits on sorrow-mound,
> endures misery as Ertae decrees for her
> a sorrow-den of grief and a heart of torments.

Figure 7.41 The Franks Casket, right panel (detail). The British Museum.

It has been suggested that Hos that sits on the sorrow-mound may be paralleled with the narrator of the Old English elegiac poem *The Wife's Lament* (Semple 1998). Rather than a physical exile, the narrator might have represented a dead person, a heathen, a spiritual exile banished from the living, as she laments:

> þær ic sittan mot   sumorlangne dæg,
> þær ic wepan mæg   mine wræcsiþas,
> earfoþa fela;   forþon ic æfre ne mæg
> þære modceare   minre gerestan,
> ne ealles þæs longaþes   þe mec on þissum life begeat.

There I may sit a summer-long day;

there I may weep my many exiles

of hardships, because I may never

rest from my mind-sorrow,

nor all the longing that seized me in this life.

(*The Wife's Lament*, ll 37–41)

Given the rarity of seated burials in Anglo-Saxon England, it is dangerous to over-interpret and extrapolate from the little physical evidence we have. However, Anglo-Saxon seated burials remain an area of funerary practices to be further explored in future studies, which will benefit from a comprehensive catalogue of Anglo-Saxon seated burials to more fully appreciate the specific contexts of the individuals accorded such rite, their variations and significance.

7.4 THE NON-POSITIONS

To more fully understand the intentionality and meaning behind corpse positioning, it is perhaps useful to examine how corpses were *not* positioned. There are gestural motifs that

Figure 7.42 (a) Maviael. MS Junius 11, p 53. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (b) Bracteate from Grave 9, Bifrons, Kent (Hawkes 2000). (c) Buckle mount from Loveden Hill, Lincolnshire (Pollington et al 2010, fig 13.54). (d) Snake-witch stone from Smiss, När socken, Gotland, Sweden. Gotland Museum.

are featured prominently in figural representations but rarely, if ever, occurred in burials. One such gesture is where both arms are bent double with elbows pointing outwards. In early Christian art, this is often associated with upward-facing palms—the *orans* gesture—frequently used as a gesture of prayer (Figure 7.42a). Similar gestures of bent arms extending sideways also appear in Germanic art, such as the figure on a bracteate from Grave 9, Bifrons (Kent) (Figure 7.42b). The figure, apparently naked bar a wristband or belt (Lake pers comm), lifts its arms sideways with outstretched palms, and its legs are bent and similarly pointing upwards, rather unnaturally. Some weapon-wielding figures that carry a similar gestural motif have been mentioned in Section 7.2.1. Another example from a mount from Loveden Hill (Lincolnshire), contains a figure that sports a moustache and extends his arms sideways, each hand holding one end of a two-headed snake (Figure 7.42c). Similar to this, the figure depicted on a picture stone from Gotland in a similar gesture, holding two snakes, with bent legs pointing sideways (Figure 7.42d). Other than type 'clasped D3', the closest parallel according to the present typology, this gesture is completely absent in the data set. Contrastingly, its prominence in representational art is particularly marked.

Another notable lack of positional motifs in burial is the crossing of arms over the head. This gesture frequently appears in later Anglo-Saxon manuscript art, adopted by demons or wicked men in their damnation. It is also frequently associated with the prone posture, although not exclusively. In the Tiberius Psalter, folio 14r depicts Christ trampling on the devil, whose arms are crossed and bound (Figure 7.43a). Similarly, some of the demons depicted on the Junius Manuscript also adopt this gesture, although it is not clear whether their arms were bound (Figure 7.43b). The same gesture appears in Harley Psalter in its depiction of wicked men, but again their arms do not appear to be bound (Figure 7.43c–d). The closest parallel in the present burial data set is Drx 7, an unfurnished adult female burial. The body was positioned facing down, with the right arm raised above the shoulder and over the head, while the left arm crossed under the chest to the right shoulder.

Acknowledging these non-positions, the gestural repertoires present in representational art cannot be transposed to the funerary realm without caution or without issue. Yet in short, we can say that in positioning the corpse, arms were most frequently placed inwardly: on, across, or beside the torso. Placement sideways and away from the torso was rare, and so was raising the arms over the head. The most obvious explanation for this is a practical one:
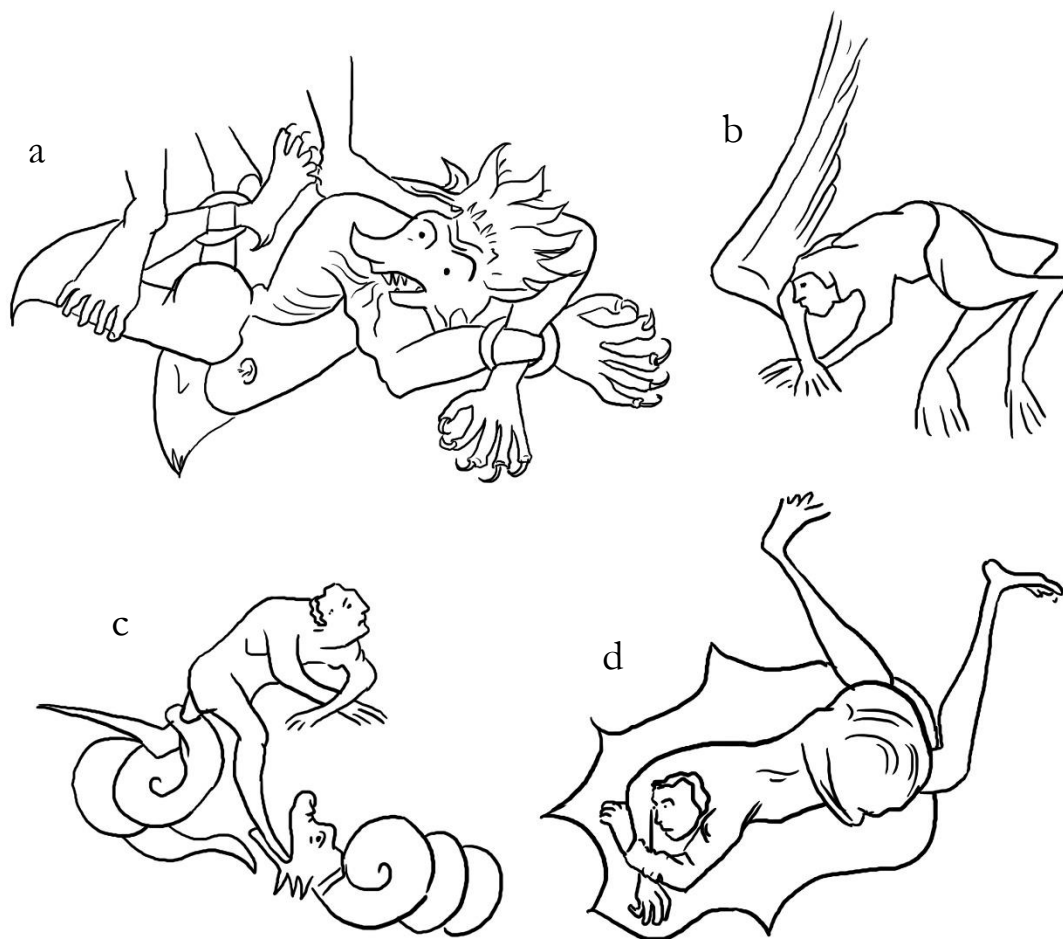
Figure 7.43 (a) The devil, trampled by Christ. Cotton MS Tiberius C vi, f 14r. The British Library. (b) Demon in hell. MS Junius 11, p 3. (c) Depiction of Sheol. Illustration to Psalm 6. Harley MS 603, f 3v. The British Library. (d) The wicked man in a pit. Illustration to Psalm 7. Harley MS 603, f 4r. The British Library.
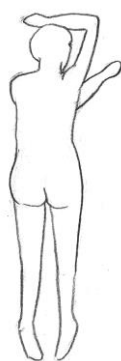
Drx 7

Figure 7.44 Drx 7.

placing the arms within the plane of the torso requires the least additional space, but extension from it would require a larger grave. On the other hand, some graves in the data set would have been large enough for the arms to be placed sideways or over the head. In such instances, the placing of arms inwardly is better explained as a cultural preference.

7.5 DISCUSSION

Studies of gestures and gesticulation in the medieval period have focused on palaeography, textual narratives, legal sources, sculptures and paintings, and manuscript miniatures (Schmitt 1991: 62–64), but studies of death rituals have rarely been discussed in the same terms (with notable exceptions, see Brundle 2014; Mui 2014; Atzbach 2016). This chapter has shown that there is contemporary and near-contemporary evidence for crossover between Anglo-Saxon corpse positions and early medieval representational art, suggesting a shared gestural language that pervaded people's perception of the body and its symbolic potentials. As corpse positions were symbolically meaningful, the practice of corpse positioning had significant implications for the Anglo-Saxon perception of living and dying, and the role of the body in mediating life and death.

First of all, by positioning corpses in symbolically meaningful ways, the mourners would have drawn upon beliefs and concepts about the departure from the world of the living, the passage to death, and the state of non-living. For instance, it has been suggested above that some positions within the stomach, waist-chest, and clasped type clusters may represent gestures of grief and sorrow: but why should a corpse be placed in a grieving position? It may be that the corpse grieves its own death and parting from the living; it may be the mourners' projection of their own grief onto the dead; it may be that death is perceived in a negative light as hugely undesirable, not unlike the wretched Hos on the mound on the Franks Casket or the exiled narrator of *The Wife's Lament*, as discussed in Section 7.3.4. The connection between body positioning and metaphysical concerns has been previously made by scholars with regards to deviant treatments of the dead (Blair 2009; Klevans 2013) as well as the notion of the prayerful dead in the later Middle Ages (Ariès 1983, Atzbach 2016). The body thus played a key role as mediator between the states of living and dying, traversing between the material and the spiritual and negotiating between the two.

Secondly, as we have already seen in Chapter Four, corpse positions were inextricably linked with local and regional funerary traditions as well as aspects of social identity. The symbolic

power of corpse postures, therefore, must be translated within the context of the historical, embodied individuals. In other words, the embodied nature of gestures means that gestural symbolism conveyed by the dead body is first and foremost circumscribed by the materiality of the body itself. Thus, the link suggested between the elbow cluster and gestures of care, embrace, and protection is supported by the statistics that the elbow cluster is much more strongly associated with female burials than male ones, but complicated by the results that it seemed to be more prevalent, relatively speaking, among children than adolescents or adults (see Table 4.1 in Chapter Four). Likewise, the interpretation that some burials (Section 7.2.4) in the waist-chest cluster may represent a sleeping posture should be considered alongside the fact that this cluster was almost exclusively associated with adolescents and adults, but very rarely children. Hence, it is important to examine the other contexts in which such gestures occur and what alternative interpretations they might offer.

Thirdly, and most importantly, we must assess carefully the extent to which we can compare gestures of the living with gestures of the dead. This chapter has brought together a wide variety of sources ranging from Roman figurines to medieval manuscript illustrations, spanning well over a millennium. In his study of gestures in Roman plays and later Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, Dodwell (2000) has discussed evidence for the persistence, revival, and sharing of gestural repertoires across Europe in the Roman and medieval periods. The borrowing and development of gestures from classical antiquity in the late Antique and early medieval world has also been suggested for Germanic art, such as the possible adoption of a late Roman salute gesture on *guldgubbar* from late Iron Age Scandinavia (Watt 2004: 206). The use of body posture to signal and signify can be seen across the Germanic world (Watt 2004; Hårdh 2004; Helmbrecht 2011) For example, one of the Gallehus horns from southern Jutland, Denmark, contains cipher runes made of two rows of images, including figural icons in different postures (Figure 7.45). This points towards a perception of the body as symbolically potent and capable of carrying meanings in place of letters and words.

Figure 7.45 Top segment of the larger Gallehus horn (detail). Redrawn after the etchings by J. R. Paulli, 1734.

Although corpse positions have largely escaped discussions about gestures, this analysis has highlighted the potential value in bringing burial practices to such discussions. Funerary rituals would have been one of the most tangible ways for the Anglo-Saxons to engage with their own bodies and the bodies of others. With the importance of visual display in early Anglo-Saxon funerary rites, the posture of the corpse would have played a central role in the construction of the funerary tableau, and it would have been under as much scrutiny as its costumes and grave goods. If the corpse was inadequately positioned, it might have caused as much offence to the Anglo-Saxon mourners as it would to funerary attendants in present-day western Europe.

Crucially, as the body mediated between living and dying, the gestures of the living and that of the dead were not epistemologically distinct: the relationship between gestures of the living and gestures of the dead was not a one-way process, but they would have formed a complex dialectic, shaping and influencing each other. This relationship is perhaps difficult to identify archaeologically, but one possibility is the replacement of the *orans* gesture by the clasped hands in front of chest as the dominant gesture of prayer. The development of the doctrine of purgatory and after-life purification by prayer, particularly since the twelfth century, might have co-evolved with the adoption of praying gestures in positioning corpses, where placing the hands together on the chest would be easier and require less additional space than raised the hands above the shoulders (see Atzbach 2016). Nevertheless, much of this remains to be speculated until further work help establish a better understanding of corpse positioning in post-Conversion period through to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that shared gestural repertoires existed in burial and in representational art across northwestern Europe in the early medieval period. It is evident that the corpse in the grave was no less carefully planned and symbolically powerful than the metal figurines from East England or figures depicted in Benedictine illuminated manuscripts. The corpse carried and communicated abstract meanings through its positional articulation. Gesturing between life and death, corpse positions provide insights about body languages that existed in the early medieval world. The next chapter of this thesis will bring together this and the previous chapters and offer some theoretical and methodological conclusions regarding corpse positioning in early Anglo-Saxon England and beyond.

CHAPTER EIGHT
DISCUSSION

'Ear' ᛠ byþ egle eorla gehwylcun, | ðonn fæstlice flæsc onginneþ, | hraw, colian, hrusan ceosan | blac to gebeddan; bleda gedreosaþ, | wynna gewitaþ, wera geswicaþ.

'Ear' is loathsome to every man, when the flesh quickly begins to turn cold, the corpse to choose the black earth for to lie; fruits perish, joys depart, covenants cease.

(The Rune Poem, ll. 90–94. Shippey 1976: 84)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Old English *Rune Poem* ends on a bleak picture of the '*Ear*' (ᛠ), generally regarded by commentators as meaning the grave (Millar 2006: 425). The poetic rendering of the lifeless corpse creates a powerful reminder of the eventual physical fate faced by every person. Retaining its agency to 'choose the black earth', the cold, pale dead body is more than just an emptied bone-vessel, but it becomes a source for grief, fear, and contemplation. Although archaeologists of early medieval England lack access to the bodies of the people we study, burial records provide us with what remain of these bodies. As this thesis has shown, the position of the dead body, along with funerary costumes, assemblages, containers for the body, linings, grave markers, and the unfolding ritual process of the funeral, provided a unique story for each grave relating to the deceased's personhood and relationship with others. Each funerary ensemble, specified in time and space, celebrated the individuality and historical presence of the person, as well as the networks of relations in which the person was embedded, and which were ultimately responsible for the theatre of death.

The present thesis is the first in-depth, systematic study of corpse positioning. It has shown that the positioning of corpses in early medieval England was far from a random by-product of the burial process, but a key element in mortuary rites in early England. While this work has focused on inhumations from early Anglo-Saxon England, the present findings has far-reaching implications for funerary archaeology and death studies more widely. The positioning of the cadaver is a fundamental aspect of burial rite that circumscribes how the grave looks and how it can be interacted with. This is entrenched in the cultural

understanding of death and what happens after death. Furthermore, bodies are numerous and they represent a valuable resource in offering an alternative perspective of the past from the one offered by the study of material culture. The study of body positions provides means to scrutinise the masses of graves which are poor or lacking in artefactual wealth.

This chapter contextualises the findings of this thesis and offers interpretations of the meaning and significance of corpse-positioning practice in early Anglo-Saxon England and in funerary archaeology more broadly. In the first section, the results of this thesis are brought together and examined to discuss the nature of body-positioning practice in terms of three aspects: the context of mortuary display, the relationship between the representation of the corpse and the lived body in daily praxis, and grief and emotion. In the second section, the results are discussed in terms of the broader context of social, political, and religious change in early medieval England. The long-term trajectories in burial development, evident in my data, allow an exploration of burial management over time, and an assessment of the changing perceptions of the body in Anglo-Saxon society from the pre-Christian to the post-Conversion period. In the third section of this chapter, the discussion extends beyond the early medieval period and assesses the implications of research on burial positioning for other past societies. The presuppositions in previous studies and the theoretical and methodological limitations of previous attempts at the topic are evaluated. The use and purposes of artistic reconstructions in terms of the funeral and the grave are considered, as well as the drawbacks, challenges, and epistemological significance of approaching mortuary data from a visual basis.

8.2 LIFE, DEATH, AND BODIES IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

8.2.1 Mortuary theatre and tableau

This thesis has brought together 3,053 burials from 32 fifth- to eighth-century cemeteries across England. This evidence has allowed the identification of a burial-positional 'norm' in the early Anglo-Saxon period, which was typified by supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types' according to the present typology of burial postures (see Section 4.2, Chapter Four). This norm accounted for the majority of the burials in the present corpus of data. Supine deposition amounts to 76% of all the burials where the method of deposition is known. 61% were buried with extended legs and 60% with feet arranged in a parallel position. The seven 'main types' made up 45% of the burials which

have been assigned posture types. The positional norm was, broadly speaking, prevalent in all sex, gender, and age categories. However, adult, male, and well furnished burials (especially those containing weapons) were more likely to conform to the positional norm than sub-adult, female, and poorly furnished burials.

The fact that adults, males, and well furnished graves represent the group that displayed the greatest conformity to the positional norm is suggestive of a relationship between power and the nature of funerary display (see Section 4.6). The funerals of these individuals might have attracted larger funeral audience and required more careful planning, and thus displayed more coherent positioning practice. The funerals of women, children, and lower status individuals, on the other hand, might have been smaller, more private gatherings, which allowed greater freedom and improvisation in the representation of the corpse. This evidence strongly suggests that the display and viewing of the cadaver was an important part of early Anglo-Saxon funerary rituals. Furthermore, the evidence shows that the rigour and attention to consistency in burial management were dependent on the individual being buried and the people who attended the funeral. In other words, the treatment of the bodies of those who were subject to greater public scrutiny followed more coherent, formulaic practices, suggesting that funerary displays were closely linked with local networks of power relations (Halsall 2000: 267–272). More importantly, the more varied practices associated with women, children, and individuals with less grave wealth attest to the freedom of mourners in planning and improvising burial positions for their dead. Other individual qualities such as the deceased's personality, family relations, social role, and circumstances of death would have also influenced the organisation of the funeral and the attendance of mourners.

Greater freedom in body positioning does not necessarily imply diminished importance of the display and viewing of the cadaver and less emotional investment (see Section 8.2.3 below). This thesis has identified graves which show evidence of funerary staging created by the deliberate arrangements of hands and fingers to hold objects (Section 6.4, Chapter Six). Oak 78a, for example, appeared to have its right hand arranged such that it clutched the beads of a necklace. The meticulous arrangement of the hands and fingers of Oak 78a strongly suggests that the mourners devoted great care in the laying out of these bodies. BnF 12 is an adult male burial, placed on his left side with legs flexed. The hands of BnF 12 appeared to align with the spearhead, suggesting the spear was possibly originally held in the hands. The arrangement of bodies and objects in these examples suggests that these graves

composed tableaux which had been carefully planned and laid out, directing the attention of the viewers to particular objects within the grave and their relationship with the body.
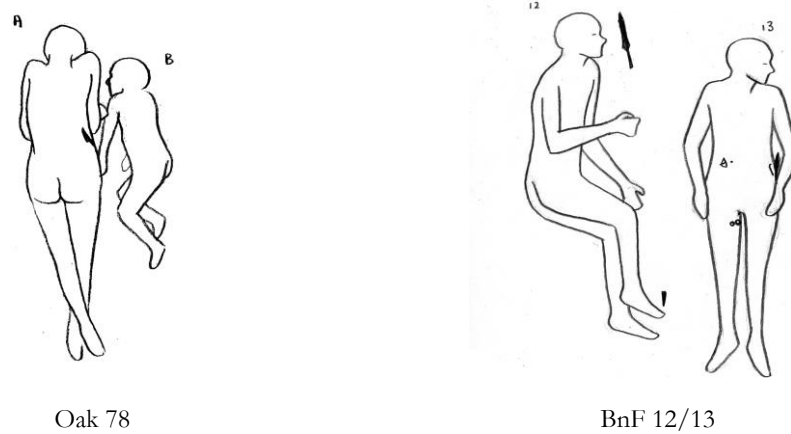
Oak 78 BnF 12/13

Figure 8.1 Oak 78 and BnF 12/13.

The positioning of bodies in multiple burials and burials with animals also suggests that bodies were arranged to be displayed. Wat 78 was a female burial modestly furnished with a pin and a scutiform pendant; between her left arm and left torso were the remains of a foetus of six-month gestation, possibly representing a premature birth which had caused the double fatality (see Section 5.4.2 in Chapter Five). The arrangement of the woman's left arm would have directed the onlookers' attention to the bodily intimacy between the two individuals, which might have recalled or created memories, elicited emotional response, or offered comfort to the bereaved (Williams 2007b, 2010; see Section 8.2.3 below). In Oak 80, a female skeleton was laid on its right side against a cow in the same grave. The hands and fingers of Oak 80 were carefully positioned so that they clutched a necklace. The tail of the cow skeleton is missing and there was at least one cut mark on the metacarpals, suggesting that the cow might have in fact been a skinned, bloody carcass when it was put in the grave (Sayer pers comm). This would have created a visually powerful and provocative display, incorporating the body of the human, that of the cow, and the grave assemblage.

Wat 78   Oak 80

Figure 8.2 Wat 78 and Oak 80.

The corpse, importantly, is not encountered out of context. Instead, it is framed within its context of the funerary process, incorporating the weight and texture of the corpse, its paleness and coldness, the simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar face of the dead, the eerie silence of death, the funerary dress and the positional articulation of the body, the space within which the corpse is present, the unfolding of the ritual along with music, speech, weeping, wailing, smells, temperature and lighting of the space, the presence or absence of other mourners and onlookers, and so on. Given that corpses were intentionally positioned in early Anglo-Saxon inhumations, as this thesis has demonstrated, the funeral would have involved intimate physical contact between the corpse and the buriers. For example, one or two people might be required to step into the grave in order to fold the limbs and turn the body, or to arrange the limbs, hands, or fingers in desired positions. Each step of the process may evoke differential emotional responses from different people, from someone actively involved in the positioning to a beholder standing nearby.

The clutching of a necklace, holding of a spear, cradling a small baby, and laying of the head against the skinned carcass of a cow might have drawn upon the personhood and once lived presence of the deceased, reflecting the identities and social relations of the deceased and expressing the grief and emotion of the mourners (see Sections 8.2.2 and 8.2.3 below for more in-depth discussions of these themes). The notion of the funerary tableau in Anglo-Saxon burial practice has been explored by some previous studies, most of which focused on costumes and grave provisions rather than the positional representation of the body (Carver 2000; Halsall 2003; Williams 2006). Nevertheless, the study of burial positions allows both well-furnished graves and ones that were less so to be scrutinised in terms of mortuary

theatre and display, as this thesis has shown. The positioning of the body in the grave was not an adjunct of the funerary process, but it was central to funerary displays and performances, and deliberately and meaningfully executed. It drew upon a cultural understanding of what burial positions were appropriate, offering a glimpse of the mortuary conventions of the respective burying communities, as well as the individuality of each buried person.

8.2.2 The cadaver and embodied, lived practice

Chapter Four has explored the relationship between the positioning of the corpse in the grave and aspects of individual and group identities. Adult male burials, particularly those containing weapons, display the greatest conformity to the burial-positional norm of supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types' (see Section 8.2.1 above). The limited variability of male burials and weapon burials points towards a consistent representation of masculine deportment within early Anglo-Saxon funerary display, possibly drawing upon a controlled masculinity rooted in the expectation of consistent masculine roles within society (see Section 4.6 in Chapter Four). In contrast, female burials and burials with feminine assemblages display more varied positioning practices than male burials and burials with masculine assemblages. In particular, the analysis has shown a strong association between female burials and more compact positioning of arms and legs, contrasting the wide, 'opened' posture that appears to be linked with male burials (see Section 4.4.1).

There might have been practical reasons behind this pattern; for example, the longer garments worn by women might have imposed physical restrictions on the arrangement of the legs during funerary preparations, or on their movement during decompositional processes (Owen-Crocker 1986: 34, 72). Nevertheless, it is also possible that the compact positions adopted by female burials articulate a feminine body image, perhaps expressing idealised feminine bodily manners of grace and modesty. In particular, as noted in Section 4.4.1, the 'elbow' type cluster shows a notably strong association with female burial. The 'elbow' cluster is characterised by an upper arm that is stretched away from the body, but the lower arm bends back towards the torso, which creates a space between the arm and the upper torso, as if hugging something. If the posture represents an embracing position, its particular prevalence among female graves may hint at the role of women as carers of the family and protectors of children.

The positional arrangement of children was more varied than that of adults. Notably, contrasting the extended-and-supine norm, infants (aged 0–2) were nearly twice as likely to be buried one-sided than supine, and three times more likely to be buried with bent legs than with extended legs. Similarly, burials of young children (aged 2–6) were more likely to be arranged with their legs bent than extended. Although supine deposition predominates among young children, it amounts to only 61%, which is lower than the average (76%). As pointed out in Section 4.4.2, the tendency for infants and young children to be buried flexed and on one side might have been due to the natural development of their spines. As human infants are evolutionarily adapted to being carried, the spine of a young infant is slightly rounded, such that the legs naturally fall into a flexed and abducted position (Schön and Silvén 2007: 106–107). Lying on one side with legs flexed may be a natural resting position for many infants and young children. The patterns in burial positioning presently observed, therefore, might be attributed to the physical affordance and resting habits of the bodies of children, whether or not such positioning in the funerary context was intentional.

This evidence supports the argument that the positioning and display of bodies in graves were linked with the bodily manner, techniques, and deportment in life, whether a graceful woman, a proud man, or a sleeping baby. This reading of bodies points towards a link between the position of the corpse in the grave and the lived body. This reference to lived bodies in death can be seen in many contemporary horizontal multiple burials as well. Chapter Five has explored in depth the positional relationship between bodies that were buried in the same grave (see Section 5.4). Bodies were frequently arranged facing the same direction or each other, and sometimes in very similar positions. Emp 26, for example, contained the remains of three individuals, all of whom were deposited supine with legs extended and feet crossed at ankle. The two individuals in DBu 228 were positioned close and facing each other, and their hands touching. The display of bodily intimacy in multiple graves is particularly evident in a number of graves which contained a child skeleton tucked in the crook of the arm of a female skeleton. Emp 79, for example, contained a young adult female individual, her left arm placed around the remains of a child about 2 to 3 years at death. The intimate positioning of bodies next to each other, touching, or even embracing, suggests that these individuals probably enjoyed intimate relationships in life, such that it became appropriate to position their bodies accordingly in the grave. Social roles and relations were thus manifested in the positioning of corpses.
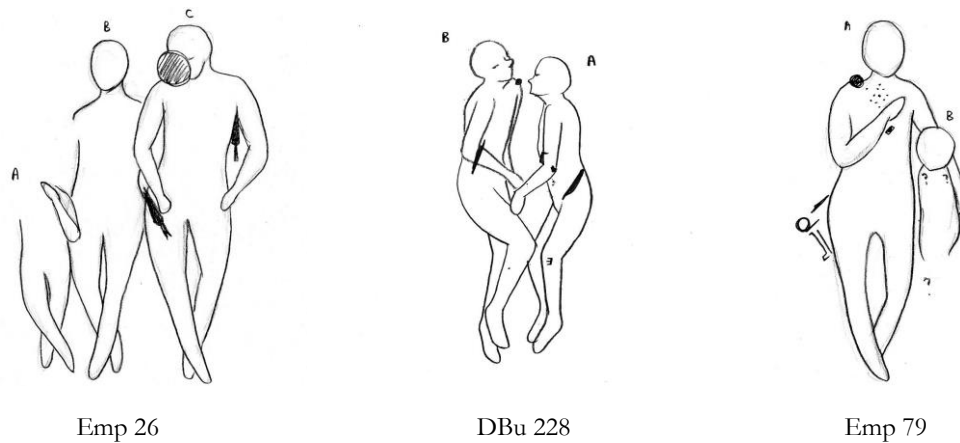
Emp 26   DBu 228   Emp 79

Figure 8.3 Emp 26, DBu 228, and Emp 79.

Dead bodies in graves thus drew upon, referred to, and reflected lived bodily manners and practices, as well as the networks of living relations comprising the deceased individuals and the mourners. Everyday interaction between the deceased (before they died) and other people shaped the deceased person's perception of the self, how they went about in life, and others' perception of them. The positioning of the cadaver presented an idealised body image of the deceased as imagined by the mourners, which was constructed alongside other aspects of the burial, such as clothing, grave goods, or burial with another individual. The corpse enacted the lived body by drawing upon embodied identities, relations, and practices, reproducing the graceful, feminine body of a woman, or the bodily intimacy between a parent and a child. Bearing the embodied imprint of living personhood and relations, the cadaver reflected and responded to the embodied lifeways of the Anglo-Saxons, delivering a scene that could be easily understood and sympathised by the funeral attendants. Such images may have elicited emotional responses, enabled the mourners to recall memories, and perhaps most importantly, helped those present create new ones. Thus, not only is the positioning of the body in the grave informative about the construction of identity, it may also offer a glimpse of the lived experience of the early Anglo-Saxons: how past people lived, perceived themselves, and interacted with other as embodied agents. The relevance of the study of burial positioning may extend beyond funerary archaeology to shed light on aspects of living in the past as well as dying.

8.2.3 Death, grief, and emotion

This thesis has argued for a theme of sleep–death interplay in early Anglo-Saxon funerary practices. Possible sleeping or resting gestures have been discussed in Chapter Seven: the

arms by the side gesture, the raised hand to the face, and the gesture where one arm is stretched out and bent back towards to torso. These gestures recur in later Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustrations as sleeping positions (Figure 8.4) and in the burial context, suggesting that corpses in graves might have been positioned to imitate sleep. Section 6.3 in Chapter Six has discussed possible evidence of blankets in some burials, such as the materialised textile remains recovered by Lec 187 (Weightman 2011: 98, 101). The use of blankets in the funerary ritual might have turned the grave into a performative 'bedside', a stage where mortuary theatre was enacted. The ritual performance might have also involved other material 'props', such as combs which were frequently placed in prominent locations and sometimes balanced precariously on the arm or the feet of an individual, such as in Cas 13 or Lec 81/4. The positioning of the combs suggests that they might have been used during the funeral, and their final placement was among the last steps of the ritual before the grave was backfilled. If some burials indeed imitated sleep, bodies in multiple burials might have brought into the mind individuals sleeping together. As Chapter Five has shown, bodies in multiple grave were often positioned in physically intimate ways, such as facing the same direction or each other, touching, reaching out towards, or embracing each other. It seems possible that multiple burials might indeed have mirrored co-sleeping practices, as argued in Section 5.6.2.
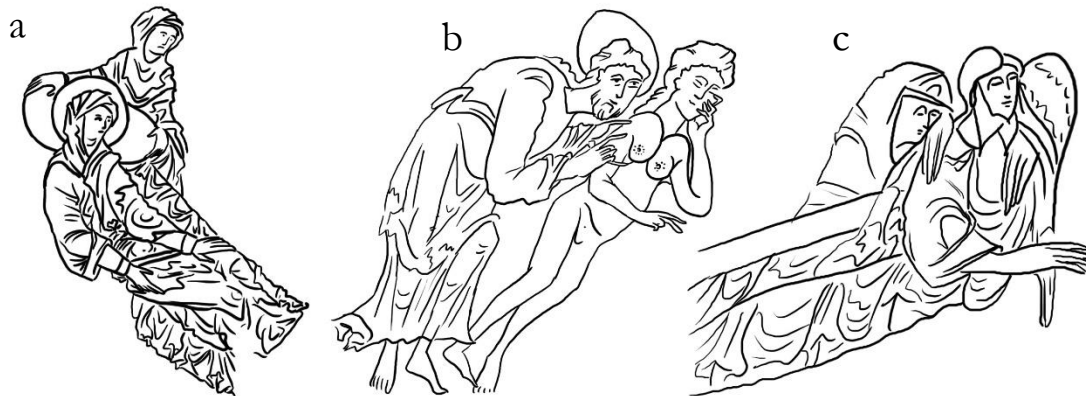
Figure 8.4 (a) Nativity scene. The Benedictional of St Æthelwold. Add MS 49598, f 15v. The British Library. (b) God and the sleeping Adam. MS Junius 11, p 9. The Bodleian Library, Oxford. (c) Abimelech with Sarah. Cotton MS Claudius B iv, f 34v. The British Library.
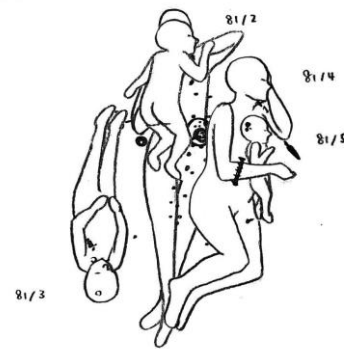
| Lec 187 | Cas 13 | Lec 81 |

Figure 8.5 Lec 187, Cas 13, and Lec 81.

The link between the position of the cadaver and the embodied identities, relations, and practices of the living, as argued above in Section 8.2.2, sheds light on the mourners' mentality behind burial practices. As discussed above, infant and young children were much more likely to be buried on one side and with legs flexed, compared to the older age groups. This pattern may be attributed to the physical restrictions imposed by the spinal development of human infants, which causes the legs to adopt a flexed and abducted position (Schön and Silvén 2007: 106–107). The flexed leg position, therefore, might have been a natural resting position for many infants, possibly in conjunction with lying on one side as well. While these burial positions might have been an unintended result of laying the bodies in graves, they could equally have been intentionally instigated to replicate the children's favourite sleeping positions. It has been noted in a contemporary study that burying a child's corpse in their preferred position of rest may help the grieving process of the parents (Gyulay 1989: 85). The pattern presently observed by the analysis may in fact be the bodily manifestation of the grief experienced by the early Anglo-Saxon mourners.

If the positional arrangement of corpses indeed reflected some of the emotional responses of the mourners, early Anglo-Saxon funeral tableaux should be understood not simply as theatrical, impressive power displays (discussed in Section 8.2.1 above), but also as emotionally charged processes. The placing of a young child in the crook of the arm of a woman, such as in Emp 49, Emp 79, and Wat 78, might have expressed a desire for the unfortunate pair to rest together. These examples each contained an adult female skeleton with her left arm wrapped around a child skeleton, ranging from a young infant of only six-month gestation (Wat 78) and a two-to-three-year-old child (Emp 79). The positional

articulation of these dead bodies communicated a sense of liveliness amid death, possibly as an attempt to reconcile the painful privation which had torn them asunder: child, woman, and survivors. Crucially, the expression of grief through burial positioning drew upon the relationship between the deceased and the mourners: how the deceased lived in relation to others, and how the others perceived the deceased. In the example of these woman–child burials, the arrangement of the bodies constructed and expressed the identity of the woman as the carer and protector of the child, in death as much as in life.
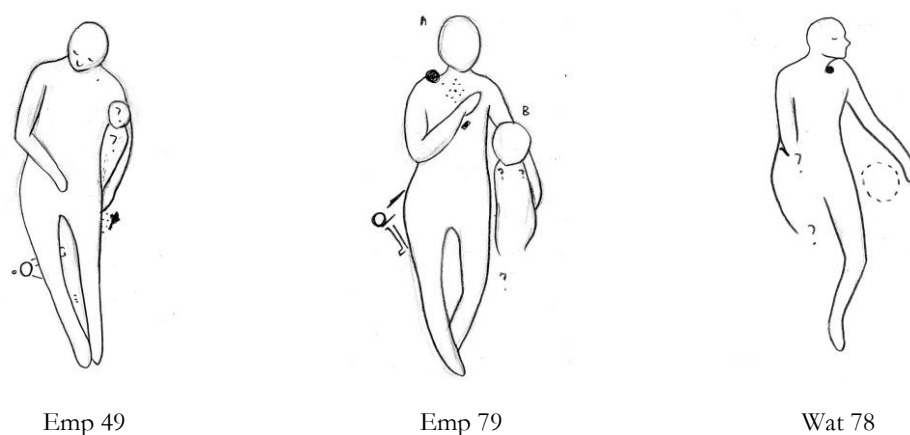
| Emp 49 | Emp 79 | Wat 78 |

Figure 8.6 Emp 49, Emp 79, and Wat 78.

The careful arrangement of objects in the hands or arms of some of the corpses might also have expressed similar emotion and care, perhaps providing the dead with objects for comfort or company. Section 6.4 in Chapter Six has explored in depth the positional interaction between bodies and objects in graves, hinting at the emotional value of some grave objects for the deceased person, the mourners, or both. The interplay of bodies, material goods, and ritual practices would have facilitated particular remembering and forgetting, through an intense emotional performance (Williams 2007b). In a number of burials containing swords, the sword was placed between the left arm and the torso of a supine male skeleton (e.g. Alt 42, Mil 93). The placement of the sword close to the bosom of the dead body might be related to how the sword would have been stowed or ceremonially held when the wielder was alive. Named weapons are also prominent motifs in Anglo-Saxon literature, supporting the notion of a close personal relationship between the weapon and its wielder (Brunning 2013: 41). The arrangement of bodies and swords might thus have provided means for the mourners to cope with their grief, by consigning the objects to the grave as the trusty companions of their wielders.

Alt 42   Mil 93
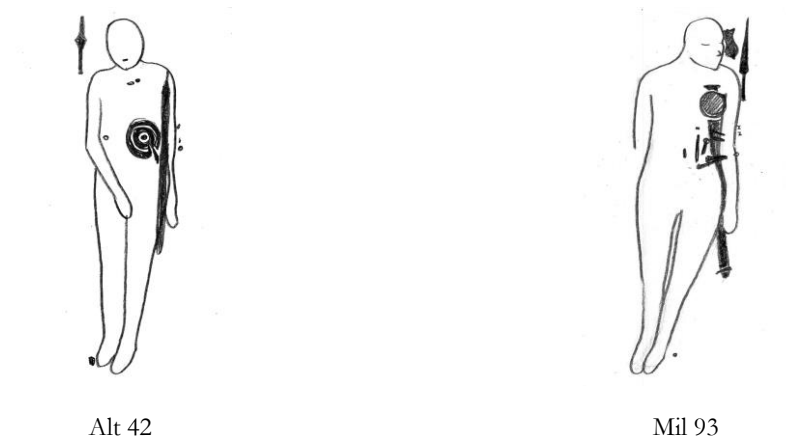
Figure 8.7 Alt 42 and Mil 93.

Acknowledging the emotional dimension in funerary positioning of bodies, it may be possible for archaeologists to approach sudden, traumatic death. Burials in 'deviant', non-normative positions do not necessarily warrant sinister interpretations of ritualised murder or punitive executions; rather, each burial should be considered in its unique context (see Section 8.4.2 below). The degree of care accorded to some prone burials (such as Oak 78a and b, see Section 5.4.2), as well as the possibility of burial when the body was under the effect of rigor mortis (such as possibly Sew 41, see Section 5.5.1), warns that some of what appear as 'deviant' burial in our eyes could have in fact been a coping mechanism for the bereaved dealing with the sudden death of a dear one.

Oak 78   Sew 41
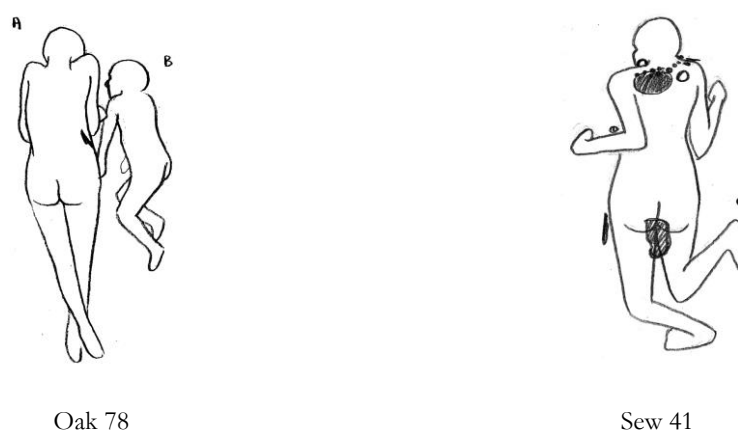
Figure 8.8 Oak 78 and Sew 41.

Although the emotional dimension of death often escapes archaeological imagination (with notable exceptions, see Tarlow 2002, 2012; Nilsson-Stutz 2003; Williams 2007b; Harris 2017), previous scholarship has recognised that pain and grief in mourning and bereavement

are important themes in Old English literature, particularly in the poetic tradition (Jorgensen et al 2015). Many elegies convey grief, sadness, and a sense of loss and emptiness at death (Ramsey 2010). In *The Wanderer*, the exiled and friendless narrator speaks of the grief and sadness of burying his lord (ll 19–25). The solitary narrator of *The Seafarer* reflects on the transience of life and earthly wealth through a description of ageing, dying, burial with treasure, and the judgement of God (ll 88b–102). *Beowulf* contains numerous descriptions of funeral scenes and acts of mourning: the four funeral scenes (see Owen-Crocker 2000), and mourning women (including Hildeburg, Grendel's mother, and other unnamed women), and mourning kings (Hrothgar's grieving the death of Æschere, Hreðel's grieving the death of his son Herebeald). In the handling of the dead, the corpse may also become a source of fear and anxiety, as described in *The Departing Soul's Address to the Body* from the Worcester Fragments: '*nulleþ heo mid honden his heafod riht wenden; heom þuncheþ þet hore honden swuþe beoþ ifuled gif heo hondleþ þene deade*' ('They do not wish to turn his head straight with their hands; it seems to them that their hands become very defiled if they handle the dead', ll 73–77, Phillipps 1845: 3).

By focusing on the mourners' engagement with the corpse, nevertheless, this thesis has shown that the study of burial positioning helps us approach the emotional aspect of funerary practices. Archaeological burial remains are not simply inert providers of osteological information, but fundamentally what were once the fleshed corpses of historical individuals who lived and died and were buried by their families and friends. Commenting on the study of burial positions in archaeology, Mike Parker Pearson writes that '[i]t is through statistical methods rather than empathy and intuition that we learn about the nature of past funerary practices' (Parker Pearson 1999: 6). It is true that rigorous statistical scrutiny is needed to reliably attribute burial positions to deliberate human actions. Nevertheless, the need for statistical reliability does not preclude the emotive capacity of the individual corpses. As this thesis has demonstrated, through careful and detailed analysis of archaeological bodies, we may uncover the emotional language behind past funerary practices.

8.3 BODIES IN A LANDSCAPE OF CHANGE

8.3.1 Graves and social and political changes

Individual burials were ephemeral phenomena within a landscape of vast social and political change. As discussed earlier in this chapter in Section 8.2.1, this thesis has identified a burial-

positional norm of supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types' (according to the present typology of burial postures). Although the positional norm remained the most prevalent burial positions throughout the study period (c AD 400–750), but its relative frequencies oscillated over time. As Section 4.5 in Chapter Four has shown, the positional norm declined in prevalence in the second half of the sixth century AD, during which time burial positions became notably more varied. At the turn of the seventh century, however, the positional norm saw a marked surge, and burial positions became less varied and more uniform. This levelled off from about the mid seventh century, and variations beyond the positional norm remained at a low frequency.

Juxtaposing this result with the social and political contexts of Anglo-Saxon England during this period, it is clear that the changing points of burial-positioning practice coincided with wider changes in Anglo-Saxon society. England in the second half of the sixth century saw the emergence of regional elites and power centres, resulting in a shift in social structures, the distribution of wealth, trade and economy, and kinship structures (Yorke 1990; Scull 1993; Brooks 1989). Within the context of these changes, grave good deposition began to decline in the mid-late sixth century (Bayliss et al 2013: 476–479). During this period, body positioning became more varied than before, as the results from the analysis have shown. This increased variability suggests that the mourners retained a certain degree of freedom in the treatment and representation of the corpse at death, despite the decline in grave good deposition. It is possible that the increased variability provided innovative means for the mourners to express their grief and commemorate the deceased, at a time when furnished burials and their associated ritual practices became less viable (see Section 4.5). Against the backdrop of profound social changes, burial-positional variations might have become 'invented' traditions, which helped local communities and kin groups to negotiate vast societal change and assert their identities against a destabilised political landscape (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

The mourners' freedom to choose how to position the dead body in the grave begs further questions about how burial practices were managed, perpetuated, and negotiated in early Anglo-Saxon society. As discussed in Section 4.3 in Chapter Four, this thesis has identified significant regional patterns and variations in body-positioning practices, pointing towards differing management of burial rites in different communities and parts of England. Kent and Wessex show the greatest conformity to the positional norm. Closer adherence to the

positional norm in southern England suggests a more consistent idea of the appropriate positioning for the body in the grave. Kent is particularly interesting, as it has been known to produce diverse material culture from Anglo-Saxon graves (Hawkes 1956; Richardson 2005: 27–33), but the evidence presented here shows that positioning practices in Kent were much more uniform in contrast. This uniformity was possibly rooted in surviving late Roman traditions or infrastructures, or derived from Kent's cultural links with the Continent (Richardson 2005: 53–54, 249–256; Scull 1995; Hawkes 1982). It displays a more coherent idea of the appropriate representation of the cadaver, and possibly points towards some form of centralised burial management which regulated the positional consistency in southern England.

Cemeteries in the Upper Thames Valley and the East Midlands also display considerable adherence to the positional norm, although there appears to be more varied positioning beyond the norm in these regions than Kent and Wessex. The North of England shows the most varied body-positioning practice compared to other parts of England, and the most limited conformity to the positional norm: the flexed leg position was preferred over the extended 'norm', only one of the seven 'main types' claimed prominence, and much lower proportions of burials were laid supine compared to other parts of England. This evidence suggests different burial management practices in central, eastern and northern England compared to southern England, possibly reflecting differing natures of interactions with pre-existing Romano-British communities and practices, as well as differing developments of regional cultures and traditions. The North of England, in particular, displays a strong preference for contracted positions, in terms of legs as well as arms. This particular association has been noted in previous studies and interpreted by some as evidence for continuity of 'native British' burial practices (Faull 1977). However, significant inter-site variations in body positioning within northern England, particularly in terms of arm positioning (see Section 4.3), warn against a simplistic picture of native–Germanic acculturation. On the other hand, great variability in the North of England strongly suggest that burial practices were more likely to be managed locally by kin-based communities and ritual specialists.

The sharp decline in burial-positional variations (i.e. increased adherence to the positional norm) in the beginning of the seventh century may point towards a shift in power relations, from locally operated ritual specialists or kin-based management to more closely regulated

and centralised control. Closer adherence to the positional norm from the seventh century coincided with the introduction of Christianity and processes of conversion in the seventh century (Stenton 1971: 105–106), although direct evidence for centralised control of burial by the Church is regrettably patchy (see Section 8.3.2 below for a discussion of burial positions in the context of religious change). England in the seventh century also saw the emergence of 'princely' burials, a change in grave good types, and the rise of 'Final Phase' cemeteries which were characterised by generally poorly furnished burials aligned west–east (Geake 1992, 1997: 274–275). The increasingly stratified society, growing power of the elites, and political contestations between kingdoms might have intensified the need to address, display, and consolidate kingship by regulating both grave good deposition and body positioning practices (Yorke 1990; Scull 1993: 76–77).

This change in practice, on the other hand, would have impacted different parts of England differently, as the management of burial rites appeared to vary significantly between regions. In other words, introducing the extended supine position as the norm to northern England (where flexed and one-sided positions were more common) would have presented a very different scenario compared to Kent (where the extended supine position was already the norm). However, even in northern England, the burial position typified by extended legs, supine deposition, and the seven 'main types' was never an undesirable or deviant practice; instead, it was the positional default when standardised, formulaic practice was called for (see Sections 4.6 and 8.2.1 above). Thus, the question was less about reconfiguring what constituted 'normative' burial positions than about pinning down, promoting, and consolidating what already existed and was accepted as normal practice.

Importantly, given the visual, performative, and emotive value of corpse positioning in early Anglo-Saxon funerary rituals (as Section 8.2 has explored), the change in body positioning would have been far from a simple, one-directional, top-down imposition, but required larger scale change in attitude as well as the infrastructure to support. Hence, the changing practice of corpse positioning signalled not simply a change in burial management, but a wider ideological reformulation of the perception of and attitudes towards death and the body in Anglo-Saxon society. The introduction to Christianity and processes of conversion might have given new impetus for this change in ideology, as will be explored below in Section 8.3.2. The levelling off and continued persistence of the positional norm from the mid seventh century onwards indicate that Anglo-Saxon mourners had accepted the management

practice, the prevailing ideal of the positional norm, as well as their political and religious ramifications.

8.3.2 Graves and religious change

Detailed analysis of burial positions may help uncover the pre-Christian attitudes towards the body, and provide a more refined picture of the changing perception of the body and death in Anglo-Saxon England. This thesis has identified a number of graves, in which the bodies were arranged as if holding objects. For example, BnF 12 and Mil 36 were arranged as if they were holding their spears; Alt 42, Mil 93, and DBu 375 each contained a male skeleton with a sword tucked between the left arm and the torso. The thesis has also explored a handful of burials which were possibly accompanied by medical tools or supports. Sto 1137 is perhaps the most notable example: the individual had a deformed hip joint on the right

| BnF 12 | Mil 36 | Alt 42 |

| Mil 93 | DBu 375 | Sto 1137 |
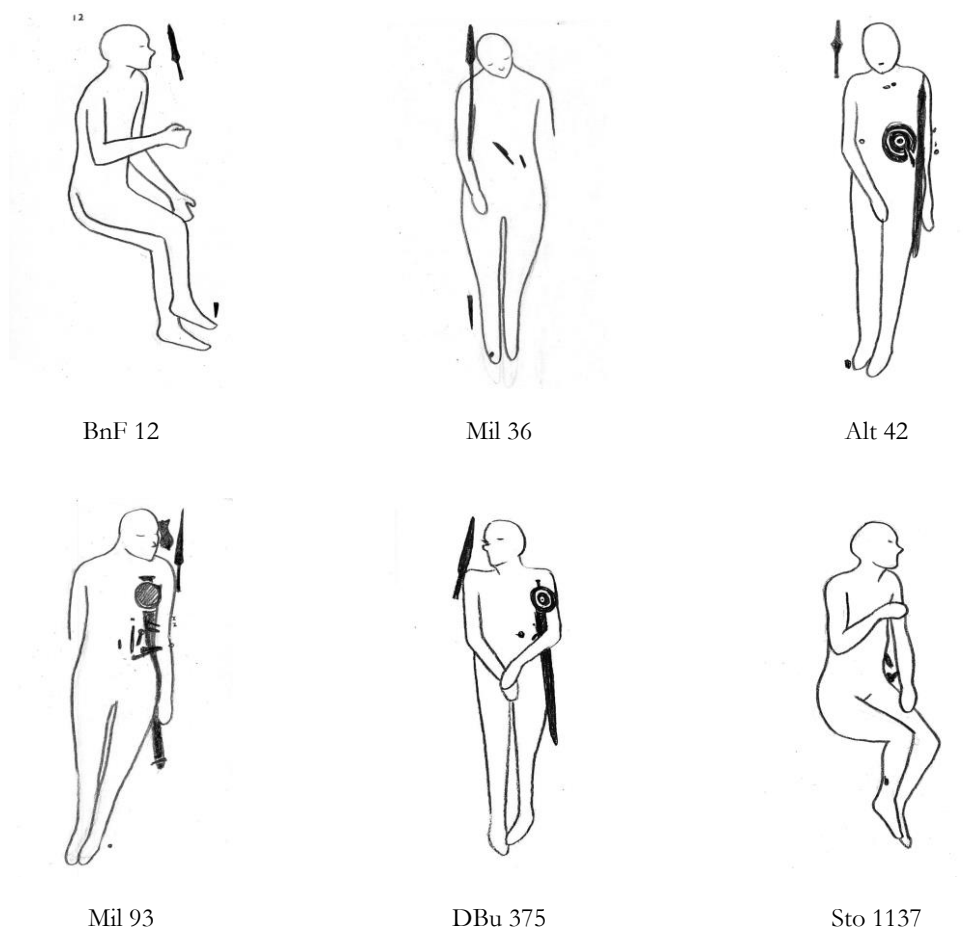
Figure 8.9 BnF 12, Mil 36, Alt 42, Mil 93, DBu 375, and Sto 1137.

side (Ford and Falys 2012: 34). A collection of iron objects found by the left hip might have been part of a medical supporting device. The decision to include iron objects with the body suggests that the objects might have been incorporated into the personhood of the deceased, especially since the condition was likely to have started at a young age, as suggested by the extent of the deformity (Ford and Falys 2012: 33–34).

The inclusion of the medical supporting device in Sto 1137 might suggest a belief in the object's continuing function beyond the grave, possibly with a view to assist the individual in their journey after death. The motifs of the disembodied, journeying soul, a liminal phase between life and death, and the necessity for the soul to travel between them, can be traced in later Old English and Old Norse literature, as discussed in Section 6.5 in Chapter Six (Sanmark 2010). The example of Sto 1137, however, suggests that the belief in the persistence of the soul after death does not imply a Cartesian substance dualism, which holds that the material body and the immaterial mind are ontologically distinct substances. Instead, the soul is bound up with the physical world, such that the health and integrity of the physical body may have an impact on the journeying spirit. In contrast to Sto 1137 which included a possible mobility aid, Fin 26A, BnF 71, and WH 114 were all prone burials with severed legs or feet. The mutilation of the lower limbs might have been inflicted with the intention to physically or symbolically strip away these individuals' ability to stand and walk, hindering their journey and denying them access to the afterlife. Such treatment of the body is reminiscent of the illustration from the Harley Psalter, which depicts a group of condemned souls trapped within a mound and their feet cut off (Figure 8.11).

Fin 26A   BnF 71   WH 114

Figure 8.10 Fin 26A, BnF 71, and WH 114.

Peter Ucko (1969) points out in his study of the use of grave goods based on ethnographic literature that, in many societies, grave good deposition does not necessarily imply a conscious and well-formulated idea of the afterlife. However, in pre-Christian beliefs in early Anglo-Saxon England, if the lived material world (including physical bodies as well as objects) was held to be capable of slipping into the world of the dead, the traditional interpretation that grave goods were intended as provisions and sustenance for the afterlife might still have relevance. In this light, holding a spear or a sword in the grave was not only a visual device in the funerary display (see Section 8.2.1 above), but it carried meanings for the deceased beyond the grave. Taking this approach, the positioning of bodies in graves would imply not only a reflection of lived, embodied practices (see Section 8.2.2) or grief and emotion (see Section 8.2.3), but perhaps also pre-Christian cosmology and understanding of the afterlife. The appropriately positioned corpse stood between life, death, and the afterlife, and negotiated the deceased's transition from one state of being to the next.

The impact of pre-Christian cosmology on corpse positioning may be further explored in terms of human–animal relationship. Section 6.4 in Chapter Six has discussed graves with whole animals buried alongside humans. In some graves, such as GC 142, a weapon burial and a horse, the human and the animal were neatly arranged side by side. The arrangement, not dissimilar to horizontal multiple burials, possibly signalled companionship, which is supported by Fern's argument that horses in horse burials were likely to have been trained riding horses and were buried to assist the deceased in their journey to the afterlife (Fern

2010: 131). Some other graves displayed 'mirroring' arrangement of the bodies of the human and the animal, such as Oak 80 where an adult female skeleton was buried on the right side, with its back against the back of a cow. A somewhat similar, but feet-to-feet instead of back-to-back arrangement, can be seen in GC 86 which contained a child skeleton, aged between seven and eight, and a dog. The feet of the human were by the dog's abdomen, between the latter's two forelimbs and two hindlimbs. Such mirroring arrangement was possibly reminiscent of mirror-image animal motifs in early Anglo-Saxon art (Fern 2010: 138–140; Dickinson 2005: 147). As argued in Section 6.4, the deliberate staging of human cadavers and the bodies of animals in inhumation burials might have drawn upon notions of bodily fluidity and transformation, no less powerful than the ideology of transformation suggested for animal remains in the context of cremation (Williams 2001).
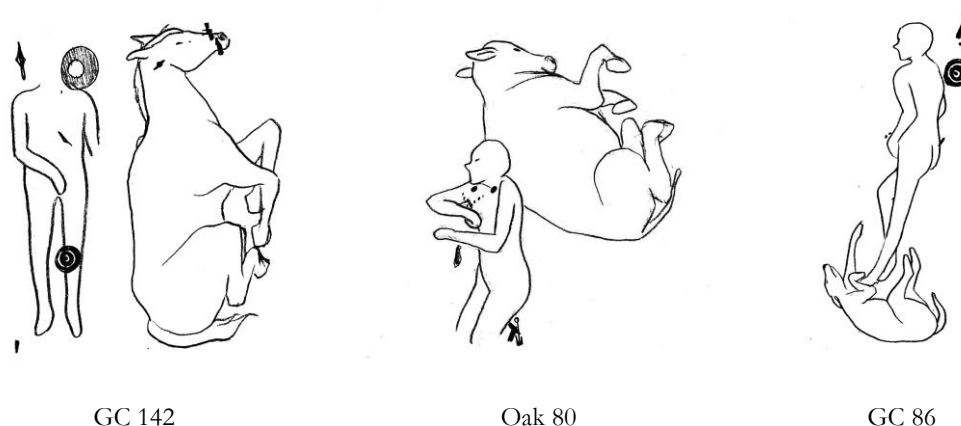
GC 142   Oak 80   GC 86

Figure 8.12 GC 142, Oak 80, and GC 86.

England in the middle of the sixth century saw a surge in burial-positional variability, which has been argued in Section 8.3.1 above to represent a new means to express grief at a time when commemoration by grave goods was less viable. From the beginning of the seventh century, body positioning became markedly more uniform, perpetuating the positional norm of supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types'. This increased uniformity in positioning practice happened at the point when the Christianisation of populations was underway in England. The body is a key aspect of Christian theology, and the processes of conversion would have introduced new ideas about the body and death (a review of the development of the Anglo-Saxon perception of the body can be found in Section 2.3.1 in Chapter Two). In Old Testament thought, man is created in the image of God (Gn 1:27), which had been proposed by both medieval and modern theologians to be

inclusive of man's bodily form as well as other, non-physical, characteristics (such as Gregory of Nyssa and John Calvin, see Wilkinson 1991: 199–200). The fall of man described in Genesis 3 brought sin and death into the world (Gn 3:19), and the concept of the sinful flesh is apparent in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament (Rm 7:5, 7:24). The fall had been suggested by many early Christian and Gnostic writers to be linked with the introduction of fleshly pleasure and sexual shame (Brown 1988: 94–96, 416–417). The crux of Christian theology rests in the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14): salvation of man through Christ's bodily suffering and resurrection (Ph 2:8; 1 Co 15:3–8). The doctrine of the resurrection affirms the belief in a universal resurrection of the body when Christ returns to judge the world (Ac 17:31, 24:15; 1 Co 15:20–28). These new ideas about the body and death might have played a considerable part in effecting the changes in body positioning practice that this thesis has observed.

Section 4.5 in Chapter Four and Section 8.3.1 above have discussed that the positional norm (typified by supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types') persisted as the preferred burial position, even during the later sixth century when positioning practice was more varied. Increased conformity to the positional norm in the seventh century, therefore, was not a process of complete revolution of the ideal burial position, but a process of limiting variability. Limited variability and the consistency of bodies might have facilitated a discourse of consistent personhood: a Christian solidarity wherein every person was equal before God, every person a depraved sinner who needed to do penance and be saved, whether they were man or woman, rich or poor, West Saxon or Northumbrian—as Ælfric of Eynsham stresses the unity of fellowship in Christ in his sermon on the Lord's Prayer (Gulley 2014: 125):

> [For] þi nu ealle cristene men ægðer ge rice. ge heane. ge æþelborene ge unæþelborene. 7 se hlaford 7 se þeowa ealle hi sind gebroðra 7 ealle hi habbað ænne fæder on heofonum.
>
> Therefore, now, all Christian men—both rich and poor, noble-born and ignoble, and the lord and the slave—are all brothers, and all have one Father in heaven.
>
> (Feria III. De Dominica oration, *Catholic Homilies* I.19, 326.40, in Clemones 1997)

This theological view is linked with eschatological considerations, pointing towards the notion of the grave as a penitential environment. Section 7.2.2 has discussed possible Christian connotations of the gestural motif of hands on stomach. After a decline in prevalence in the mid sixth century, this gesture saw a marked increase in the seventh

century, suggesting a shift in significance in the Conversion and post-Conversion periods. Noting that this gesture recurs as a gesture of grief and humility in early Christian art from the Mediterranean, and later in Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustrations, it might have been intended as a meek, humble, praying gesture for the dead. The relationship between arm positioning in the grave and prayer has also been noted in a recent study of medieval Christian cemeteries in Denmark (Atzbach 2016). Thus, consistent positioning of bodies might have emphasised the depravity and mortal state of man, and the anticipation for the second coming of Christ and the final judgement of the living and the dead.

In this light, the pre-Christian concerns that the treatment and positioning of the corpse carried the implications for the spiritual wellbeing of the deceased after death, as discussed earlier in this section, remained curiously consistent through the processes of Christianisation. In post-Conversion England, the denial of bodily integrity and banishment to liminal spaces served as punishment for crime, such as in decapitation and other forms of mutilation, or burial outside consecrated churchyards and at territorial boundaries (Reynolds 2002, 2009). Meanwhile, measures had to be taken, from saying prayers to reopening graves, to stop restless revenants from haunting the living or to protect dead bodies from being snatched or reanimated by evil spirits (Blair 2009; Klevnäs 2013; Foxhall Forbes 2013: 322–323). All of these show that, from the pre-Christian to Christian periods, there remained great anxiety for the physical wholeness of the body, and a fear for the liminal state between life and death. The ways in which the physical body was treated still had bearings on dead person's spiritual (non-)wellbeing.

Nevertheless, any attempt to describe religious conversion and syncretism runs the risk of over-generalising beliefs and practices and overlooking dynamic fluidity and nuances in religious paradigms. In early medieval western Europe, neither Christianity nor paganism was a coherent package of cultural and religious information, in practice or in doctrine (Petts 2011). Despite the challenges in unpacking and interpreting conversion and syncretism, careful approaches to the complexity and nuances of these processes may help provide a more refined and differentiated picture of religious interactions (Lindenfield and Richardson 2011). As pointed out in Section 8.3.1, direct evidence for centralised burial control by the Church is limited. John Blair points out that there is no evidence that the early English Church actively prohibited traditional burial practices, such as furnished burial rite (St Cuthbert's treasure has often been cited as an example of 'grave furnishing' from a Christian

context; Geake 1997: 283; Crawford 2004: 90) or burial in pre-Christian cemeteries (Blair 2005: 59). It is unclear what role the Church played in bringing about the increased conformity to the positional norm in the seventh century observed in this thesis. In interpreting the changing perception of the body and its impact on burial practices, it is important to make room for the intellect and agency of the mourners, local dialogues, endorsement, and dissent, challenges in the translation of languages and ideas, and the specific cultural and political contexts of such interactions (Carver 2010, 2011). At the same time, active engagement with and uptake of Christianity should not be easily dismissed. In translating the Church's teaching and burial control to the local context, the dying and the bereaved were faced with the appealing alternative that the Church offered, of the resurrection of the body and life after death (Blair 2005: 60). How the bereaved chose to position the dead body may be as much a private matter of personal faith as a public manifestation of conformity, and an outward conformity to the positional norm may become internalised eventually. Therefore, the body in the grave was not simply a manifestation of the people's attitudes towards body and death, but it also played an active role in perpetuating, informing, and negotiating such attitudes.

In this light, the body in the grave was not simply a product of societal change, but it played an important role in mediating and effecting such change. Following Foucault (1978), the body was the site connecting large-scale organisation of power with local practices. In the midst of social, political, and religious upheavals in seventh-century England, the body maintained its surety of physicality and mortality. The reformulation of how the dead were positioned in the grave was not only a change in practice but also in ideology. The body thus hovered between centralised power structures, the new faith, local practices and traditions, and grieving mourners. It may be through these ephemeral individual burial events that large-scale changes were enacted and materialised at the local level, and through the very same burial events, shifting ideas of personhood, relations, and society were fed back into the wider landscape. Perhaps, then, death had every relevance to life in Anglo-Saxon England.

8.4 A NEW DAWN FOR CORPSE POSTURES

8.4.1 Reassessing the normative and the deviant

Taking a careful and indiscriminate approach to burial positions in early Anglo-Saxon inhumations, the present thesis has revealed patterns and variations in the positioning of the

body in the grave and made new and original contribution to our understanding of early medieval mortuary practices. This thesis has identified a positional norm of supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and the seven 'main types' (according to the present typology of body postures). Furthermore, as Chapter Four has explored in depth, the relative prevalence of this positional norm varied between different parts of England, with southern England displaying the greatest conformity to the norm and northern England displaying the least. The positional norm also recurred to varying degrees depending on the status, gender, and age identities of the buried individuals: adult, male, and well-furnished burials were more likely to conform to the positional norm than sub-adults, women, and graves with less material provisions. The relative prevalence of the positional norm oscillated in the period between the fifth and the eighth centuries. The second half of the sixth century showed the greatest variability in burial positioning, followed by a marked surge in conformity to the positional norm at the turn of the seventh century, which levelled off from the mid seventh century.

These nuanced patterns, variations, change warn against over-generalised narratives about 'normative' positioning practices, and highlight the need for an emic approach to studying burial positioning. Thus, although this thesis has focused on body positions in early Anglo-Saxon inhumations, the findings have important implications for the ways in which burials are approached in archaeology more widely. The variability in corpse positioning practices across different cultures and societies, past and present, has been discussed in Section 1.3 in Chapter One, but corpse positions have been largely glossed over and under-theorised. All too often, this fundamental aspect of funerary practice is altogether overlooked, or explained away with generalised interpretations, especially in societies where burial in the extended and supine position predominates. In excavation reports and ethnographies, the extended supine position is often taken for granted and is thus omitted as a result. This is particularly the case in excavation records of cemeteries with known Christian association: poorly organised archives, the lack of grave catalogues, inadequate grave plans and textual description (or complete omission), and the general assumption that Christian burials are all the same and thus uninteresting. The assumption that the dead body should be laid out extended and supine is also evident in museum as well as popular contexts, whether in archaeological reconstructions or fictive portrayal of historical or fantasy worlds (Mui in press).

Supine deposition and the extended leg position constituted the positional norm in early Anglo-Saxon England, as this thesis has identified. At the same time, the nuances and changes in the use of the extended supine position, evident in the present data, point towards the historical situatedness and specificity of burial-positional preferences. In the contemporary West, the extended supine position represents the most common arrangement of the cadaver. However, to assume that the extended supine position is the universal 'proper' and 'normal' position for the corpse seriously overlooks the historical and cultural roots of our funerary preferences. The extended supine 'norm' in western Europe can be traced back to early Christian burial practices which were derived, in part at least, from Jewish practices. Evidence for the earliest Christian burials in Palestine is patchy, suggesting that burial practices of the earliest Christians were largely indistinguishable from those of the Jews (McCane 1992: 192). Jewish funerary rites in Roman Palestine were characterised by primary and secondary burials: bodies were commonly placed in rock-cut shafts in caves and, after the body had decomposed, the bones were gathered and relocated elsewhere, such as in an ossuary. Although the primary positions of bodies cannot be retrieved due to the relocation and reburial of bones, the deep and narrow niches in tombs suggest that bodies were commonly positioned with legs extended (McCane 1992: 43–44). Rare instances of undisturbed primary burials have been found in the cemetery at Qumran in the West Bank, dated to between the second century BC and the first century AD (de Vaux 1973). It is recorded that these burials were arranged stretched out on their backs, hands folded on the pelvis or extended by the side, and oriented with heads pointing southwards (de Vaux 1973: 46).

Distinctive Christian burial practices only became visible in Palestine from the fourth century AD onwards, in terms of the emergence of Christian symbolism and the locations of cemeteries (McCane 1992: 193–194). It appears that, by this point, extended supine inhumation had become more coherent, standardised practice among Christian communities across the late Antique world. The practice of inhumation among early Christians is evident archaeologically as well as in the writings of both pagan and Christian writers. It has been suggested that in the late Antique period, inhumation practice was linked with the belief in the resurrection of the body, which began as propaganda of the persecutors to ridicule Christians (Rebillard 2009: 82–83). A number of early Christian writers, such as Origen, Augustine, and Eusebius, stressed that God's power to resurrect the dead is not limited by the physical state of the corpse, and emphasised that inhumation should be practised out of

respect for the dead and as a testimony of faith (Rebillard 2009: 82–88). Nevertheless, the anxiety surrounding the physical integrity of the body and its implication for resurrection persisted through and beyond the Middle Ages, resulting in a variety of measures to protect the body, evident in textual and archaeological sources (Bynum 1995; Thompson 2004; Gilchrist and Sloane 2005: 222–223).

The eschatological anxiety surrounding the treatment of the body informed the practice of corpse positioning, and created what we now often credit as the 'standard' Christian burial. The west–east orientation was practised from at least third century AD in Gaul, Italy, and North Africa (Lang 2004: 51; Gräslund 1996: 118–119; Evans et al 2015). The earliest direct reference to the west–east grave orientation and its symbolism comes from Durandus of Mende who, writing in the thirteenth century, explains: 'A man ought so to be buried that while his head lies to the west his feet are turned to the east, for thus he prays as it were by his very position and suggests that he is ready to hasten from the west to the east' (*Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, vii, 35, Thurston 1908, cited in Gilchrist and Sloane 2005: 152). There are earlier allusions to the significance of this orientation, such as in Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita S. Macrinae* where Macrina's bed was aligned to the east so that she could say her dying prayers in that direction (984B, Lowther Clarke 1916), or the eleventh-century Laud miscellaneous 482 which instructs that the corpse be laid out eastward on a sackcloth upon death (Fehr 1921: 65). The extended supine position might have echoed the idea that the deceased in the grave may face upward to the heavenly sky in a prayerful gesture, and may readily rise and face the east on the day of judgement (see Section 8.3.2 above).

While the extended supine position is not exclusively used by Christians, the Christian preference for this position has strongly influenced the trajectories of burial cultures in western Europe. In Britain, the flexed or crouched position was the preferred burial position in the Bronze Age and Iron Age (Harding 2016: 167). Concomitant with the earliest evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain, the extended supine practice replaced the crouched burial rite and grew in prominence particularly in the third and fourth centuries (Watts 1991: 5, 196–197). This preference was interrupted by the coming of the Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century, and a variety of burial positions emerged again along with other changes in the funerary culture (Lucy 2000a: 78). These changes include the return of the flexed burial position particularly in eastern and northern England, as Section 4.3 in this thesis has shown. However, the conversion to Christianity in the seventh century brought about changes in

positioning practices, as the positional norm of the extended supine position, in conjunction with the seven 'main types', increased in prominence (see Sections 4.5 and 8.3.2 above). By the late seventh and early eighth century, the extended supine position resumed predominance, and this preference has continued through the medieval period more or less up to the present day.

It should be noted that the impact of Christian conversion on the adoption of the extended supine position was not exclusive to the early Christian West, but was also seen in European contact with indigenous populations in the New World in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, resulting in periods of change, contestation, and negotiation between the Christian extended supine practice and indigenous burial traditions (Seeman 2010; Valcárcel Rojas et al 2011). In seventeenth-century southern New England, for instance, the indigenous communities adopted the Christian supine fashion after decades of continued practice of the traditional flexed burial since first interactions of European missionaries (Seeman 2010: 171–174). The idea that the dead body should be respectfully laid out extended and supine might have also been reinforced by the medicalisation of death and the development of dissection of the human cadaver from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards. As the body became a medical subject, its posture also became highly regulated for the purpose of medical examination, surgery, and recovery (Anderton 1991; Knight and Mahajan 2004; Byrd 2005). Development of human dissection and anatomical knowledge increasingly position and portray the body in an extended, upward-facing manner, as evident in medical drawings and artists' illustrations of dissection sessions from the medieval period through the Renaissance and up to present-day medicine textbooks (Ghosh 2015).

Meanwhile, it is equally important to acknowledge variability within Christian burials, and the freedom and agency of the mourners in choosing how they position their dead. This is certainly true for post-Reformation Europe where many Protestant cemeteries abandoned the west–east orientation practice, but variations can also be observed prior to the Reformation. At the Anglo-Saxon churchyard cemetery at Monkwearmouth, Tyne and Wear, for example, the majority of the burials were extended and deposited on the right side (Cramp 2005). Moreover, it should be recognised that even amidst an overwhelming majority of extended supine burials in Christian Europe, arm positions varied greatly from one cemetery to another (Mui 2013; Atzbach 2016). The 'Christian way' of burying the dead had

never been static or uniform, but it was subject to religious changes and local negotiations for over a millennium.

This thesis has demonstrated that careful, inclusive, and detailed study of burial positions, without imposing pre-conceived notion of what constitutes 'normative' practice, allows an exploration of burial nuances that have hitherto been overlooked. As discussed in Sections 8.2 and 8.3 above, the identification of the positional norm and the nuanced patterns of its occurrence provide valuable insights into early medieval mortuary theatre and display. The findings of this thesis have allowed interpretations about the relationship between local power relations and burial rituals, as individuals under greater public scrutiny displayed more coherent positioning practice. Moreover, the data show varying degrees of adherence to the positional norm in different regions and over time, offering insights into the differing management of burials across England, as well as changes against the wider social, political, and religious contexts in the early medieval period. Scrutinising the extended supine norm has proven to be more fruitful and informative than our existing narratives have allowed.

In re-situating how we approach and study the 'normative' burial positions, it is necessary to also realign accordingly that which we attribute as 'non-normative' or perhaps 'deviant' practices. As our idea of the 'normative' is very much historically and culturally situated, we notice the 'deviant' burials because they are not what we expected them to be. Archaeologists are perhaps more accustomed to seeing bodies placed in a variety of positions, but we cannot escape our status as historical intellects, with our own cultural preferences, understanding, and experience. In a survey of prone burials across the world, Caroline Arcini (2009) identifies over 600 individuals from 215 cemeteries who had been buried facing down, from the earliest example of a 26,000 year-old burial from the Czech Republic to war graves from the First World War. More than one-third of these burials came from Britain, and 90 percent of these have been dated to the Roman period (Arcini 2009: 34). Arcini reviews a number of attempted explanations by archaeologists, all of which approach prone burials as individuals who were not full members of society (as criminals, victims of violence, disabled people, or shamans). Based on this, she contends that the prone position represents a negative response to the deceased, a response that is universal and deeply rooted 'in the collective human psyche' (Arcini 2009: 34–35), as she writes:

> But why did I react as if there was something wrong with this position? Why did I not
> accept this as one burial position among others? When I presented the case to people from

different professions, the reaction was the same: buried face down did not appear to be culturally acceptable. Buried face upwards, on the side, or sitting was accepted, but face down was unthinkable (Arcini 2009: 30).

It is questionable whether such negative interpretations for prone burials indeed reflect the sentiments of the mourners in the respective societies or, rather, the archaeologists' presuppositions that being buried 'face down was unthinkable' (Arcini 2009: 30). Such presuppositions provide a false justification for selectively studying the burials that are deemed offensive in the modern eye, and unhelpfully skew our interpretations by perpetuating unfounded assumptions about alterity, disrespect, and wrongdoing (Cave and Oxenham 2017). Thus, It is not sufficient to cherry-pick the 'deviant burials' to study, but there is a need for more careful assessment of the 'normative' and the 'deviant', and to develop more nuanced approaches to burial variability.

It has been emphasised throughout this thesis that there appears to be a number of viable explanations for burying bodies facing down, executed for different reasons and carried different meanings from one community to the next. It is important to attend to the context of each individual burial to form a more nuanced and accurate picture of prone burial practice. In some cases, such as the double prone burial Oak 78, great care was given to the arrangement of bodies and objects despite prone deposition, suggesting that they might not have been punitive at all. Some examples may be more enigmatic, such as the prone burial Sew 41 which laid on top of the supine Sew 49. The peculiar deposition and arrangement of arms and legs might have been related to the circumstances of death, possibly in a house fire or other violent situations, and/or burial before rigor mortis had dissipated (which begs interesting questions about the time elapsed between death and burial). In some other cases, prone bodies show evidence of having been mutilated around the time of death, such as the examples of Fin 26A, BnF 71, and WH 114 discussed in Section 6.5, whose feet or legs were severed before burial. These examples display intentional maltreatment of the dead, suggesting malicious disruption of the wholeness of the body. By taking greater care in approaching burials, we may steer away from over-generalised narratives about burial practices, and may possibly tease apart the emotionally disturbing, sudden, traumatic death from seemingly sinister, sacrificial, or punitive contexts.

The influence of our presuppositions on interpretations of burial positions is not limited to prone burials. The thesis has identified a handful of bodies buried in such tightly folded

position. Detailed study of the individual contexts in which these burials occurred offers a finer picture of the meaning and significance of this position, possibly indicative of punitive treatment in some cases and medical complications or violent death in others (see Section 7.3.3 in Chapter Seven). However, this tightly crouched burial position is frequently dubbed by archaeologists as the 'foetal position', sometimes with the interpretation that the position is used to signify a cyclical concept of life and spiritual rebirth in the grave (Harrold 1980; Formicola and Buzhilova 2004; Adachi et al 2006; Power and Tristant 2016). This view is informed by our present knowledge of medicine and the mechanical body, which we sometimes take for granted when studying and interpreting body practices in other societies, past or present. The positioning of the foetus in the womb was not properly understood until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when human dissection became widely practised. In fact, many representations of the foetus *in utero* from manuscripts from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe depicted the foetus in a variety of positions, often extended and sometimes sideways or upside down (Bonnet-Cadilhac 1995) (Figure 8.13). It would thus be a serious fault on the part of the archaeologist to assume past people's knowledge of the position of the foetus, without first researching into the medical paradigm of the time. This assumption is fundamentally ethnocentric and it unjustly forces our presupposed understanding of the human body on the past society in question.
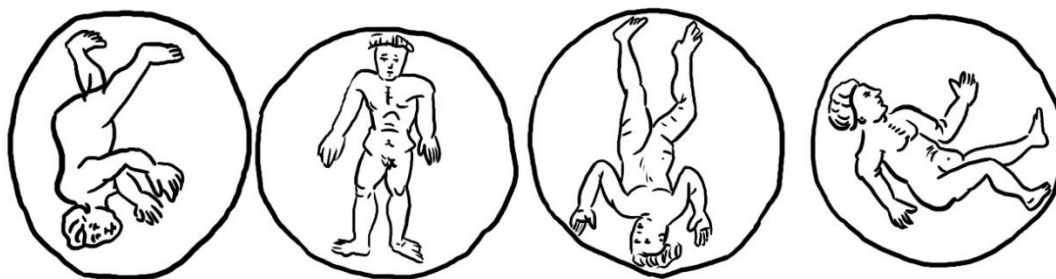
Figure 8.13 Foetal presentations, early 15th cent, MS Sloane 2463, f 217. The British Library.

In the instance of the 'foetal position', the term itself unhelpfully imposes an interpretation from the outset: a burial position that relates to the foetus in the womb. Such imposition of meaning is dangerous because it colours our perception of the burial, potentially perpetuating unfounded and misleading preconceptions of both the writer and the reader. The persisting use of such unhelpful terms is made worse by a lack of standardised lexicon for describing burial positions in English-speaking scholarship. The diverse and unstandardised

terminologies for burial positions present a serious challenge to funerary archaeologists in effectively describing, interpreting, and communicating findings (Sprague 2005; Knüsel 2014). As this work has uncovered the intentionality and significance behind positioning practices, it further emphasises a need for burial archaeologists to agree on burial terminology so as to facilitate future research on burial positioning. This will have implications not only within the archaeology of early medieval England, but across studies of different time periods and geographical regions.

In conclusion, the extended and supine position is by no means a timeless, universal instinct, but is historically entrenched in the trajectories of burial customs, religious interactions, political contestations, and intellectual development, whether in western Europe or elsewhere. Given the historical and cultural situatedness of our funerary preferences and norms, it would be a serious methodological oversight to assume that the extended supine position is universally normative, and to neglect to record or study it seriously when it occurs, in excavation records, ethnographies, or synthetic research studies. At the same time, without fully appreciating and contextualising the 'normative' positioning practices, as well as accounting for burial-positional variability, the study of 'deviant burial' can only provide at best a partial picture, and at worst a misleading one, of past mortuary rites. As this thesis has demonstrated, a detailed and inclusive approach to burial positions may fruitfully reveal insights not only into the belief and practice underlying past funerary rituals, but also their relevance to society at large.

8.4.2 Reconstructions, art, and archaeological interpretations

The present thesis has applied an old archaeological tool to the study of burial positions: artistic reconstructions. This section evaluates the application of artistic reconstructions and its potential in contributing to archaeological research.

In the present thesis, reconstruction drawings have been produced to envision human remains as corpses. Informed by taphonomic and anatomical knowledge, these drawings represent bodies as simple contours, showing the positions of the torso and the limbs but omitting hair, clothing and other detailed features. These drawings are then brought together and utilised to compose a typology of body postures and to study the positional repertoires in early Anglo-Saxon funerary rites, and the patterns, variations, and changes associated with them. This process of reconstruction requires a creative interpretation of the grave plan,

rendering every single skeletonised body into an artwork. Each grave has been invested with time and creative effort, which materialise into a pencil-marked drawing of a body (or several bodies). Although the effects of decomposition and disturbance are taken into account, assumptions are still inevitably made in order to fit the archaeological remains together into a coherent picture. A reconstruction is ultimately an interpretation, with its own temperament and influenced by the style of the original plan as well as the reconstruction artist's state of mind. The more detailed the reconstruction is, the more assumptions there are to be made. Thus, artistic reconstruction is imperfect by nature. Furthermore, as these drawings are produced based on the excavated grave plans and photographs, they show static snapshots of the graves before they were backfilled. This presents two problems. Firstly, the drawings do not record the performative nature of funerals, or indeed any sensory experience of the funeral beyond the visuality of the grave. Secondly, the bird's-eye perspective of corpses provided by these drawings does not match up with the oblique view of the grave which would be more realistic in the eyes of the funeral attendants.

However, when used with caution, the reconstruction method can be extremely powerful in adding textures to the burial information which otherwise escapes textual databases. Just as a conventional textual database converts information into standardised, measurable, and comparable data, the reconstruction drawings in this thesis have allowed standardisation across the dataset, which makes room for more detailed, comprehensive analysis and scrutiny. Moreover, by envisioning human remains as fleshed bodies, grave reconstructions add multiplicity to the burial information otherwise difficult, if not impossible, to capture by means of a conventional textual database. Reconstruction drawings can capture and convey multi-layered information, by condensing it into pictures. These reconstructions have presently been utilised to create a typology of burial positions, which has been shown to reveal nuances in funerary practices which have hitherto gone unnoticed in previous studies.

The drawings themselves, and in particular the process of planning and producing the drawings, redirect the questions asked about the burials. By drawing bodies, not only does the artist reconstruct the bodies themselves, but also addresses the bodies as part and parcel of the funeral. Although the drawings themselves do not include such details, the process of production makes it necessary to engage with, for example, performance and display, emotive power, clothing, the weight of the body and of objects, the logistics of arranging the body and constructing the grave, rigor mortis and the time between death and burial, the

overall visual impact of the grave, and so forth. At the simplest level, drawings of corpses allow us to engage with the very reality that they were indeed corpses, real people who lived and breathed and died. Recent studies have emphasised the power of reconstructed and preserved bodies and faces in humanising the past and in challenging archaeologists to engage self-reflexively with archaeological remains (Sanders 2009; Giles 2009; Beatty 2015). Reconstruction drawings force the archaeologist to recognise that the skeletons in pits were once corpses in graves, the materialisations of funerals which would have been vested with emotions and symbolic meanings. Not only can reconstructed bodies inform us about past peoples and societies, they may also shed light on practices and experience in the present and their bearings on academic approaches to death and burial.

Commenting on visual representations in early Anglo-Saxon funerary archaeology, Williams (2009: 203) writes that:

> The project of early Anglo-Saxon burial archaeology is therefore as much about constructing a vision of past mortality in relation to present-day experience and practice as much as it is about shedding light upon the past for its own sake. Early Anglo-Saxon graves have a unique position in this regard, between prehistory and history, between the pagan and Christian Middle Ages. Burial archaeologists may be even regarded as one further category of funerary specialist in the Western world. In this regard, perhaps archaeologists are 'artists' after all!

The production and use of reconstruction art have important epistemological and interpretive implications. Post-processual archaeology is an interpretive endeavour. If we accept Ian Hodder's contention that 'interpretation occurs at the trowel's edge' (Hodder 1997: 693), the interpretive, mediated, and constructed nature of reconstruction art does not invalidate its analytical capacity. The distinction between the grave plan and the reconstruction art is, in theory, far from a question of scientific objectivity versus creative subjectivity. Instead, they are produced with different intentions, addressing different aspects of the grave, and they can be utilised to answer different questions about the burial. Grave plans can be as much artworks as reconstructions, which can be as much data as the plans.

As time mediates the reduction of bodies into archaeological skeletal data, reconstruction art bridges the temporal gap and restores immediacy by transforming skeletons back into bodies. While we recognise that art is a powerful means to present information, it also has the power to inform the production of this information. Re-aligning archaeological art and data offers new possibilities for visual reconstructions to contribute to archaeological research. The

resulting corpus of reconstructed bodies stands between the physical skeletal remains and the abstracted body symbol. These bodies are not the bodies known by the Anglo-Saxons, but they offer glimpses of the Anglo-Saxon bodies in whose places they now stand. After all, the Anglo-Saxons did not bury skeletons with rusty iron artefacts—they buried corpses with knives! Heeding the nature and limitations of artistic reconstructions, art can indeed be treated and interrogated as data to answer questions hitherto unanswered or even unasked, as well as to provide a vivid and compelling vision of how things were in the past, and how they still intrigue and inspire us in the present.

8.5 CONCLUSION

Through an in-depth study of the positional representation of the cadaver in the grave, this thesis has shown identified a positional norm in early Anglo-Saxon inhumation burial rite as well as deviations, patterns, variations, and change. Detailed examination of skeletonised bodies has allowed an exploration of the Anglo-Saxon corpse in the context of mortuary tableau and ritual process. The position of the dead body in the grave drew upon lived, embodied practices in the daily lives of the Anglo-Saxons, from the graceful woman and the sleeping baby, to the sword-wielding man and the individuals who enjoyed an intimate relationship. The representation of the corpse mirrored the lived body, possibly reflecting the grief and emotions of the mourners and operating as a coping mechanism for them. From the fifth to the eighth centuries, positioning practice oscillated between variability and uniformity. These appeared to be linked with episodes of social, political, and religious change in the early medieval period. Close examination of the patterns of change in burial positioning allows a better understanding of how people and institutions reacted to this changing landscape. From the pre-Christian to the post-Conversion periods, bodies in graves articulated a remarkably consistent understanding of the relationship between the treatment of the physical cadaver and the spiritual journey after the event of death.

The findings of this thesis have wider significance beyond early medieval funerary archaeology. The new reconstructive and typological methods developed in the present thesis have been demonstrated to be immensely powerful tools in examining patterns and variations in burial positions. Emphasising the historical and cultural specificity of burial-positional preferences and traditions, the study of corpse positioning has profound implications for funerary archaeology as well as anthropology and death studies more widely.

The next and final chapter will summarise and offer a conclusion to the findings and significance of this thesis, and entertains directions and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSIONS

In the coffered
riches of grammar
and declensions
I found ban-hus,

its fire, benches,
wattle and rafters,
where the soul
fluttered a while

in the roofspace.

(Heaney 1978: 36)

9.1 SUMMARY OF THESIS

The Old English kenning *banhus* ('bone-house') encapsulates the body as a dwelling place, poetically imagined as a tactile house with wooden beams, fire-warmed benches, and a fluttering soul in Seamus Heaney's poem 'Bone dreams'. In metaphorically transforming a body into a building, the bone-house slips between materiality and symbolism, capturing the imagination behind the Anglo-Saxon perception of the body. Just as the poet discovers the *banhus* 'in the coffered riches of grammar', archaeologists uncover the bone-house in the coffer of earth, literally in the form of bones. The present thesis is a study of the treatment and representation of these archaeological bone-houses from excavated graves. Assessing the body positions of the dead and the ways in which the living placed and framed the dead in the grave, this thesis has established a new perspective on death and the funeral in Anglo-Saxon England and allowed a detailed reflection on the early medieval response to the dying and dead body. Through subjecting burial data to detailed analysis, this thesis has presented an innovative approach for studying body positions in archaeological contexts. Bringing together statistics, artistic reconstructions, a typology of bodies, osteological data, art-historical sources, and literary evidence, a novel and challenging examination of funerary remains is presented which reveals new insights relevant to early medieval populations and perhaps more broadly to other societies in time and space.

Recent archaeological scholarship has explored the centrality of the body in social participation and interaction, and highlighted the inextricable link between the body and the construction and expression of social identity (Gowland and Knusel 2006; Gowland and Thompson 2013; Robb and Harris 2013). This social body has been argued to persist beyond dying and death, and impinge on the experience of the survivors in the form of embodied grief and bereavement (Gudmundsdottir 2009; Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik 2014; Davies 2017). At the funeral, the dead body may be constructed through an elaborate mortuary theatre, forging and expressing the life stories of the deceased and the mourners, as well as ancestral tales and myths (Price 2010; Giles 2015). Through careful excavation and examination of burial remains and the application of taphonomic knowledge, it is possible to reconstruct the original context of the treatment and burial of the body (Duday 2009; Harris and Tayles 2012; Klaus and Tam 2015).

This thesis approaches corpses in early Anglo-Saxon England by studying archaeological human remains, and examines the positioning of the cadaver and what it can inform us about the preferences and traditions of the living. The present data set comprises 3,053 inhumations from 32 cemeteries across England, dated to the fifth to the eighth centuries. Burial positions are studied in terms of the deposition of the body, the flexure and placement of legs, and the flexure and placement of arms. Furthermore, approaching burials as visual composites, this thesis has artistically reconstructed 1,999 corpse positions, using evidence from excavated cemeteries. These reconstructions include accompanying objects and furnishing and allow the researcher to assess the overall visual impact of the grave and potential experience of an attendee at a funeral. From these drawings I have compiled a typology of burial positions, consisting of 53 postures. The posture types are organised into a 'typology map', which visualises the similarities and differences between the posture types (Figure 9.1).

As has been discussed in Chapter Four, 76% of the burials in the data set were deposited supine, 60% were positioned with legs extended, and 61% with feet in a parallel position. Of the 53 postures defined in the typology of burial positions, seven have been identified as the 'main types' as they make up almost half (45%) of the corpus. The seven 'main types' broadly comprise the positioning of arms flexed with hands on abdomen, arms extended by the side, and one arm extended and the other arm flexed across abdomen or waist (see Figure 9.2).
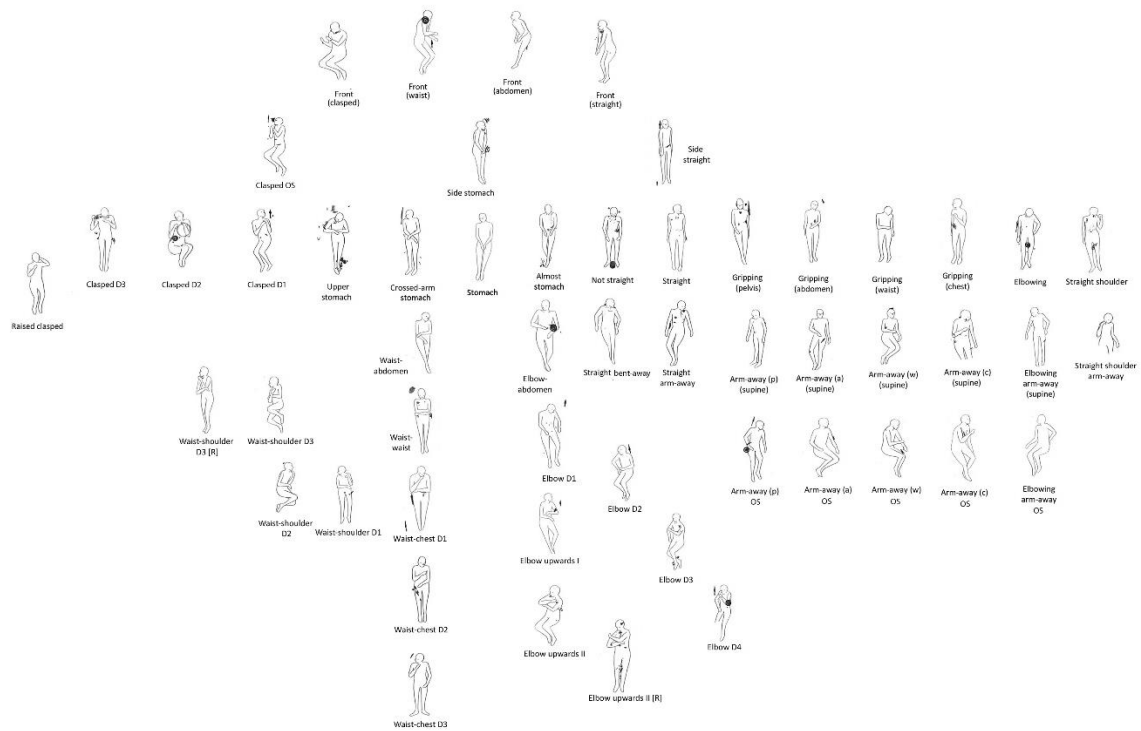
Figure 9.1 A 'typology map' of postures.

| Stomach | Almost stomach | Not straight | Straight | Gripping (pelvis) | Gripping (abdomen) | Gripping (Waist) |
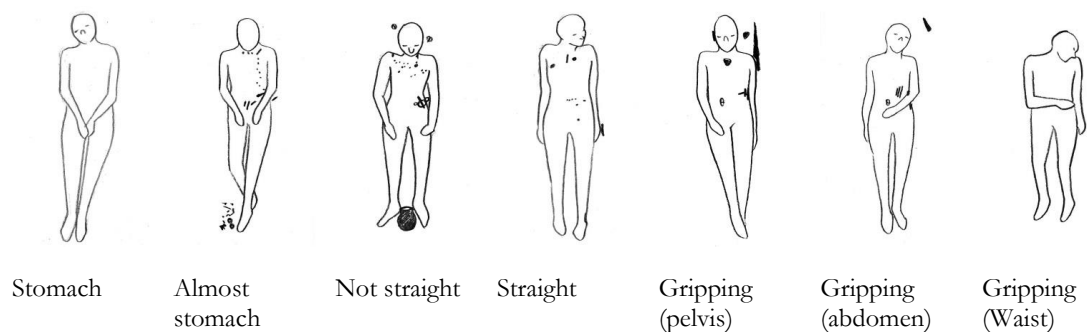
Figure 9.2 The seven 'main types'.

In summary, a burial-positional norm existed in early Anglo-Saxon England, comprising supine deposition, extended legs, parallel feet, and seven 'main types'. Other positions, such as deposition on one side or prone, the placement of legs flexed or folded positions, and arm positions beyond the seven 'main types', represent deviations from this positional norm.

The tendency to perpetuate the positional norm, or to deviate from it, was linked with regional and local practices. Kent and Wessex appear to have had the most highly regulated

processes in burying the dead, and the greatest conformity to the positional norm, while cemeteries further north show more variable treatment of the cadaver (for full discussion, see Section 4.3). For example, supine deposition amounts to 90% and 85% of the burials from Kent and Wessex respectively, but it is only recorded in 78%, 68%, and 50% of the burials from the Upper Thames Valley, the East Midlands and the North of England respectively. Likewise, 69% of the burials from Kent have been assigned to seven 'main types', while only 22% of the burials from the North of England have been thus assigned. This shows significant regional variations in body-positioning practice, which can be suggested to be linked with differing natures of burial management: more centralised control generated coherent practices, while localised, family-based management of burial rites produced more variable practices (Geake 2003; Scull 1993: 75–77).

This thesis has also identified differing positioning practices related to aspects of social identity (Section 4.4). For example, women were more likely to be buried in compact positions, while men were more strongly associated with wide, 'open' postures. This is possibly a result of longer garments worn by women, which restricted the movement of the legs during both the burial process and decomposition (Owen-Crocker 1986: 34, 72). On the other hand, compact positions may also point towards an image of the 'ideal' feminine body. There is a strong association between female burials or burials with feminine assemblages and the bent arm, possibly alluding to an embracing posture. Positioning may also be influenced by the body's physical affordance. For example, infants and young children were much more likely to be buried on one side, with legs flexed or folded, than all of the older age groups. This may be due to the curved spine of very young children, which would have caused the legs to naturally adopt a flexed and abducted position (Schön and Silvén 2007: 106–107). The prevalence of one-sided deposition and flexed legs among infants and young children might have been an unplanned natural position, or a deliberate arrangement into a resting position.

Furthermore, higher proportions of adults, males, and richly furnished graves (particularly burials with weapons) were positioned in accordance with the positional norm, compared to children, females, and poorly furnished graves (see Section 4.4). As has been argued in Section 4.6, adults, men, and persons with higher status would more likely have been individuals in positions of power, whose funerals would attract large audience and heighten political tension (Halsall 2000). Such public scrutiny might have called for more careful

planning in the representation of the corpse in the grave, and thus facilitated more coherent idea of the appropriate positioning of the body. On the other hand, the funerals of children and women were more likely to be smaller gatherings attended by close family and friends. These private events might have allowed more greater freedom in body-positioning practice. Thus, the arrangement of the cadaver in the grave was intimately linked with the deceased's social identity and networks of social relations.

Burial-positioning practice changed over time through an interplay between the positional norm and deviations from it (Figure 9.3): the positional norm (supine deposition, extended legs, seven 'main types') saw a marked drop in the mid and late sixth century, indicating a period of increased variability in body positioning and less conformity to the positional norm. This came to a turning point at the turn of the seventh century, when varied practices sharply declined and the positional norm surged and eventually levelled off by the mid seventh century. The points of change in burial positioning coincided with wider social, political, and religious changes in the wider landscape. The second half of the sixth century saw the emergence of regional elites and early kingdoms (Yorke 1990; Brooks 1989), as well as a marked decline in furnished burial rite (Bayliss et al 2013: 476–479), which might have
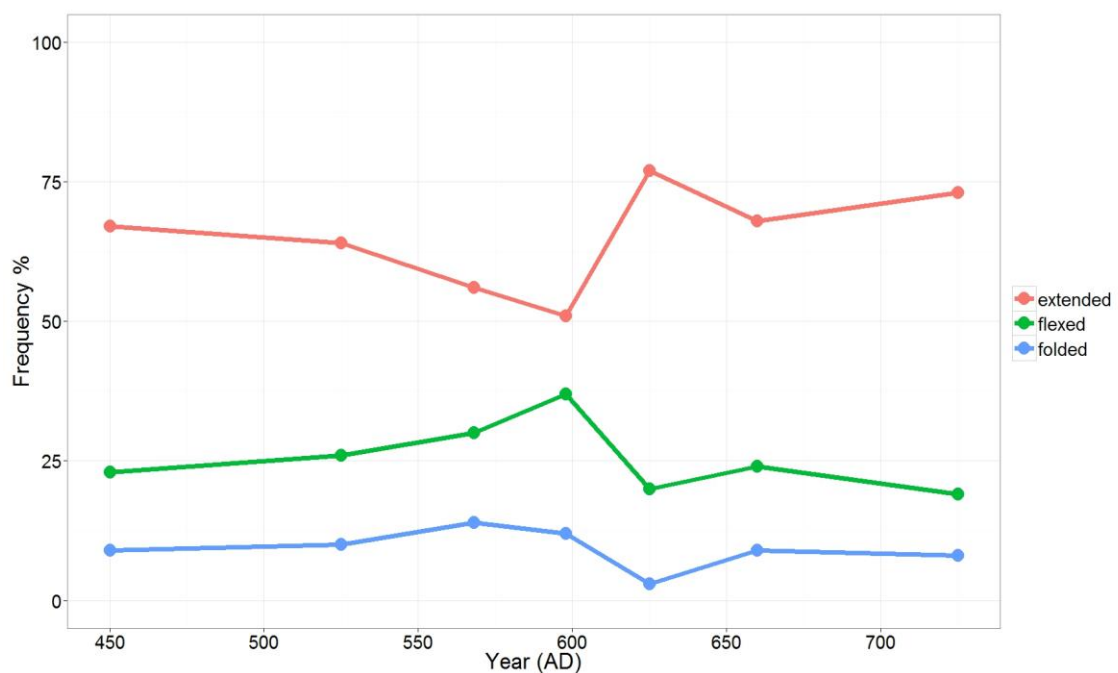
Figure 9.3 Leg flexure over time, by percentage frequencies of data points at date resolution < 3 (see Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 for an explanation of the methods for chronological analysis).

articulated a need for the Anglo-Saxon mourners to express their grief in new and creative ways. The introduction of Christianity and processes of conversion in the seventh century, on the other hand, might have introduced both a new discourse of body in death and new burial infrastructures (Paxton 1990; Geake 1992; Dunn 2009), which facilitated an increased uniformity in body-positioning practice.

Chapter Five has explored the practice of multiple burial, where multiple individuals were buried in the same grave, either at the same time or at different times (Stoodley 2002). Bodies might respect, mirror, or interact with each other in their positional articulation: for example, bodies could be placed close to each other (e.g. Gun 53), lay hands on and touched each other (e.g. Pol 1967/99), or arranged such that their arms wrapped around and embraced another body (e.g. Emp 79). The intimate positioning of bodies in many of these multiple burials implies that the individuals buried would have known each other in life and enjoyed intimate relationships. The arrangement of corpses in multiple burials might have drawn upon bodily interactions of the living, such as a woman embracing a child. These embodied lifeways were transposed to the grave, such as the positioning of a child tucked in the crook of the arm of a woman (e.g. Emp 79). Body positioning thus enacted the embodied relationship between the deceased, either as a comfort for the dead or to the mourners.

The positioning of bodies would have been central to the funerary ritual, as explored in Chapter Six. As the mortuary theatre unfolded, the deceased may be accorded objects or animal companions or offerings. Some burials were accompanied by whole animals, which

| Gun 53 | Pol 1967/99 | Emp 79 |
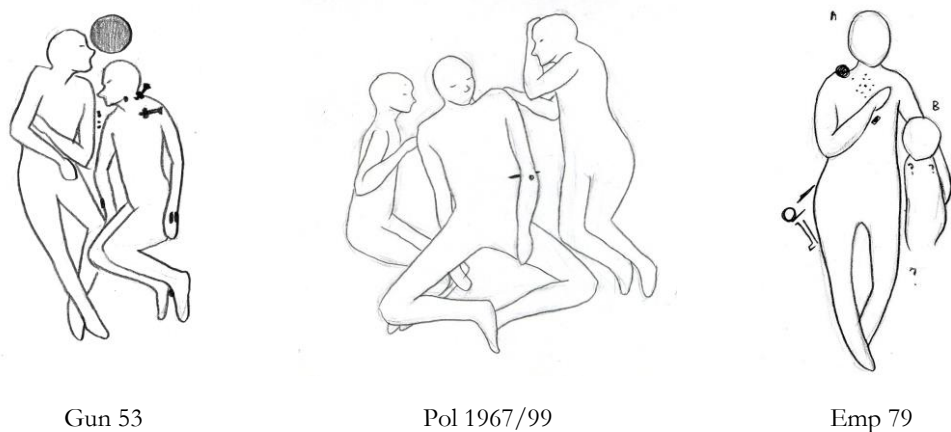
Figure 9.4 Gun 53, Pol 1967/99, and Emp 79.
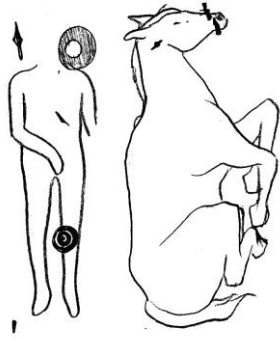
GC 142   Oak 80
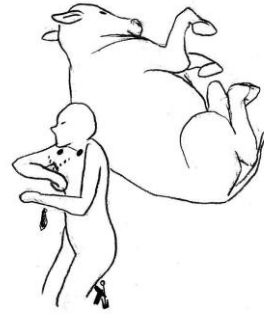
GC 86   Cas 180   BnF 12   Emp 49

Alt 42   Fin 208   Sto 1137

Figure 9.5 GC 142, Oak 80, GC 86, Cas 180, BnF 12, Emp 49, Alt 42, Fin 208, and Sto 1137.

were neatly placed side by side with the human (e.g. GC 142, with a horse), back to back (e.g. Oak 80, with a cow), feet to feet (e.g. GC 86, with a dog), or on the person's lap (e.g. Cas 180, with a goose). In some burials, the fingers, hands, and arms of the corpse were carefully arranged so that they clutched a necklace (e.g. Oak 80) or a spear (e.g. BnF 12), or that they cradled a dead child (e.g. Emp 49) or a sword (e.g. Alt 42). Some burials contained possible medical tools or supports (e.g. Fin 208, Sto 1137), suggesting that these objects had been incorporated into the personhood of these individuals, such that it became appropriate to bury them with the dead bodies (Martin 2014). This may also suggest a belief that the same physical body with all its defects and potential to heal passes into death and the afterlife, where medical objects continue to serve a function. All of these examples point towards the close link between corpse positioning and lived bodily experience and bodily interactions between people, objects, and animals. These meticulous arrangements of these elements in the grave would have heightened the theatricality of the funerary display, making it evocative, memorable, and emotively powerful (Williams 2007b; Price 2010).

From a wider perspective, corpse postures were situated within a more expansive corpus of evidence for gestural art and body representation across northwestern Europe in the early medieval period. The evidence presented in Chapter Seven shows significant crossover between corpse positions in early Anglo-Saxon burials and figural representations in early medieval art. This thesis has identified a number of gestural motifs that recurred in burial and in representational art (Figure 9.6): arms extended by the side, hands on abdomen, one arm over waist and the other across chest, raised hand to the face, and arm stretched out and back. The differing contexts in which these gestural motifs appear in art offer insights into the symbolic meanings that burial positions might have carried and communicated. The raised hand to the face motif, for example, appears on the fifth-century 'Spong Man' urn lid from Spong Hill (Norfolk) and a number of illustrations in later Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, possibly expressing grief, sorrow, and contemplation (Maguire 1977: 142; Dodwell 2000: 111–122; Brundle 2014: 252; Figure 9.7a). This motif also appears on a range of artefacts from pre-Christian and Christian contexts, including *guldgubbar* from Scandinavia (Figure 9.7b), the Sutton Hoo purse mount (Figure 9.7c), and the Alfred Jewel (Figure 9.7d), possibly associated with ritual or political meaning (Watt 2004: 206; Webster 2012: 154). Raising the hand to the face might also have represented a sleeping position, such as the sleeping Adam in the eleventh-century Junius Manuscript (Figure 9.7e). Taken together, by attending to the

| Arms by the side | Hands on abdomen | One arm over waist, the other across chest | Raised hand to the face | Arm stretched out and back. |
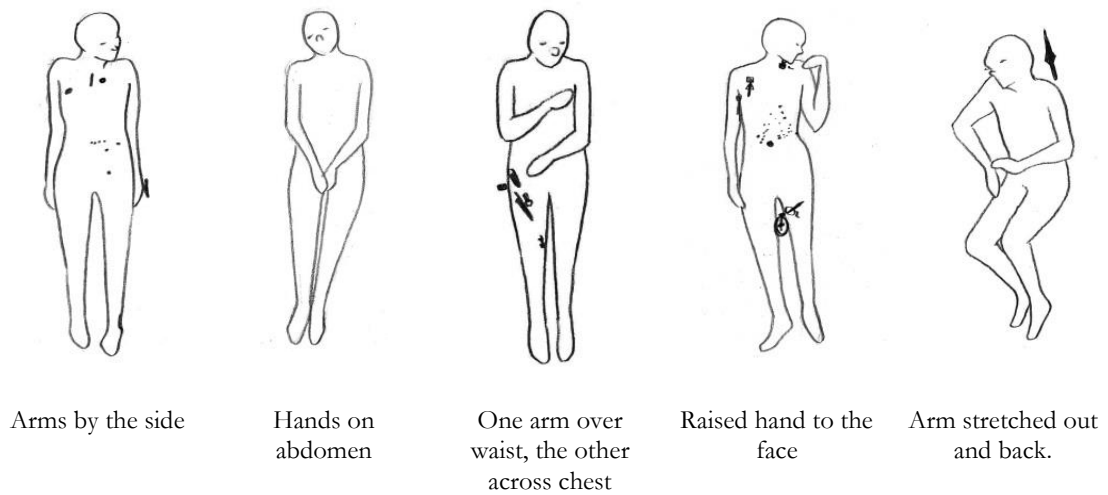
Figure 9.6 Gestural motifs that recurred in burial and in representational art.
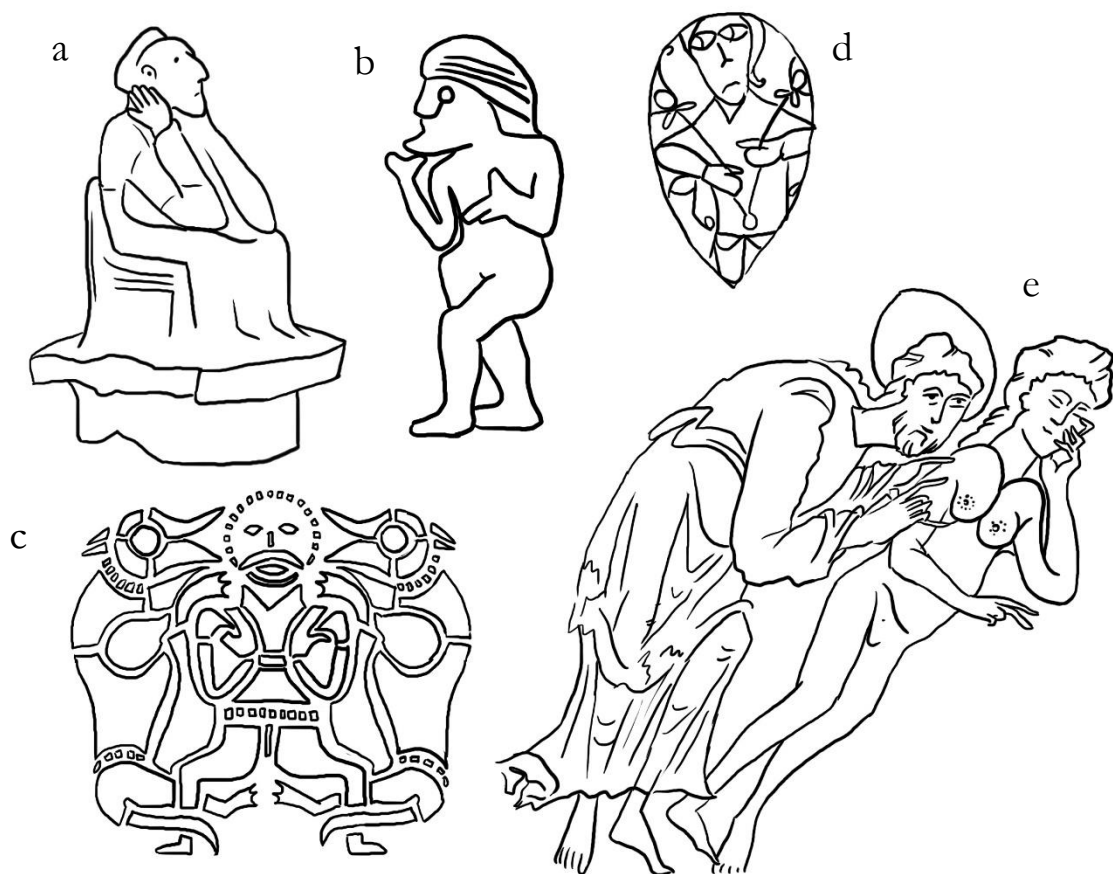
Figure 9.7 (a) Urn lid from Spong Hill, Norfolk. Norfolk Museums. (b) Gold foil figure fnr 6406 from Uppåkra (Watt 2004: 183). (c) Man-betwixt-beasts purse mount from Sutton Hoo. The British Museum. (d) The Alfred Jewel. The Ashmolean Museum. AN1836p.135.371. (e) God and the sleeping Adam. MS Junius 11, p 9. The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

positional nuances of archaeological burial data, it is possible to shed new and exciting light on the embodied relationships, emotions, and ideologies that underpinned the Anglo-Saxon changing perception of the body and death through the early medieval period.

This thesis has made significant contributions to the archaeology of funerary practices, which also have wider implications for other fields of death studies. It has brought to light the cultural and historical specificity of burial positioning, and offers a fresh perspective on the representation of bodies in graves. The extended supine position, in particular, has been unjustly over-generalised or sometimes overlooked in archaeology, anthropology, and death studies. This work has demonstrated, however, that careful and inclusive approach to burial positioning may contribute to a more nuanced and fruitful exploration, not only of positions that are alien to practices in the contemporary West, but also of the familiar extended supine position: a funerary feature so fundamental to present-day experience and practice but yet poorly understood and under-theorised. It is of profound importance that we recognise and put aside our assumptions and uncover the vibrancy and the significance behind the representation of corpses, in the past as well as the present.

9.2 AVENUES FOR FUTURE WORK

The present thesis is the first of its kind and has opened up a number of new avenues for future research. The implication of this research for future work is threefold:

Firstly, focusing on the positioning of bodies in inhumation graves, this thesis has made new and original contributions to the study of early Anglo-Saxon funerary practices. These practices were present within early Anglo-Saxon funerary rites, but it remains unknown whether such close attention to gestural symbolism can be tracked in post-Conversion England, in other parts of Britain and in comparative communities around the North Sea zone. Future work can expand the scope geographically and chronologically to examine the extent of burial-positional repertoires across early medieval western Europe more widely, as well as the changes in positioning traditions over time. This work has already identified significant changes over the period of conversion to Christianity. Future work may study the post-Roman transition, Viking settlement, and the Norman Conquest in these terms, in order to gain a better insight on the changing perception of the body and death over time, as well as how these people perceived themselves and related themselves to the changing social, political, and religious landscape over the *longue durée*.

Secondly, studies of gestures and gesticulation, as pointed out in Chapter Seven, have rarely included corpses in their discussions alongside representational art and gestural art. By incorporating detailed analysis of arm positions alongside other aspects of body positioning, this study has shown that burial positions may offer a rich body of evidence for such studies and thus should be considered seriously. This work has identified patterns and preferences in arm position, strongly suggestive of intentionality behind the arrangement of arms and hands in burial practices. It has also revealed possible associated meanings and symbolisms behind such arrangements. Careful analysis of arm gestures may offer valuable insights into mortuary practices and their symbolic implications. This does not limit to the study of early medieval Europe, but may be applied to different time periods and geographical regions, in examining the symbolism and significance of gestural art and body representation.

Lastly, the study of body positioning in funerary contexts has important and widely applicable implications for archaeology, anthropology, and death studies. This thesis has developed a new framework for approaching and interpreting burial positions. It has demonstrated the value of an inclusive, non-discriminatory approach to burial positions, incorporating *de facto* standard burial practices as well as non-normative ones in analysis. The strength of this approach lies not only in offering a more nuanced picture of burial culture, as this work has done, but also in its potential in providing an alternative and complementary perspective to material culture in studying mortuary rituals and their relationship with practices and traditions of the living. This thesis has also introduced new methods (or, old tools in a new guise) to the study of burial positions, namely typology and artistic reconstructions. Taking heed of their limitations and using them appropriately, reconstruction drawings and typological analysis have proven to be immensely powerful tools in studying funerary practices. The typology presently developed is still at its nascent stage, it may be refined and applied to different contexts to explore its full potential.

Fundamentally, the skeletons that archaeologists study were once corpses with all their physical and emotive qualities: mourners did not bury skeletons in their graves but fleshed corpses. These were tangible bodies which would have been cold to the touch, heavy to lift, unpleasant to smell, and impossible to position during rigor mortis. They would frequently have been recognised and known by the people who buried them, embodying memories, regrets, and unfulfilled futures. These physical and emotional experiences would have influenced decisions on how to arrange the corpses, whether to place a mother's arm around

a child, to arrange the hand so that it holds an object of sentimental value, or to place the body in the person's favourite sleeping position, so that he or she may slumber in eternal rest. Whether it be the inhabitants of early England, the fictional Clara Copperfield and her baby, or a deceased person in the contemporary world, the cadaver is not a static adjunct of mortuary practices, but rather a powerful agent that stands between life and death, past and present, person and object, material and symbolic. The corpse may help us understand not only death, but indeed what it means to be living, mortal, embodied humans.

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