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Landmarks of the Dead:

Exploring Anglo-Saxon Mortuary Geographies

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> *Him ða gegiredan   Geata leode*
> *ad on eorðan   unwaclicne,*
> *helmum behongen,   hildebordum,*
> *beorhtum byrnum,   swa he bena wæs;*
> *alegdon ða tomiddes   mærne þeoden*
> *hæleð hiofende, hlafor*d *leofne.*
> *Ongunnon þa on beorge   bælfyra mæst*
> *wigend weccan;   wud[u]ɼec astah,*
> *sweart ofer swioðole,   swogende leg*
> *wope bewunden   (windblond gelæg),*
> *oðþæt he ða banhus   gebrocen hæfd*e,
> *hat on hreðre.*

'The Geat race then reared up for him / a funeral pyre. It was not a petty mound, but shining mailcoats and shields of war / and helmets hung upon it, as he had desired. / Then the heroes, lamenting, laid out in the middle / their great chief, their cherished lord. / On top of the mound the men then kindled / the biggest of funeral-fires. Black wood-smoke / arose from the blaze, and the roaring of flames / mingled with weeping. The winds lay still / as the heart at the fire's heart consumed / the house of bone'.[1]

Introduction

Landscape perspectives have transformed our understanding of the early medieval world, but their emphasis is often upon the world of the living: settlements, farms, field systems, roads and estates.[2] In many accounts, burial places are absent or play only a supplementary role in shedding light on inhabited space. Conversely, early medieval graves, well-recognized since the eighteenth century, have tended to be intensively studied through the artefacts and bodies they contain rather than in terms of their spatial dynamics.

This gap has been filled in different ways over the last fifty years. Some studies have explored the shifting landscape locations of 'pagan' and 'conversion period' cemeteries.[3] The origins of minster churches and their burial grounds, and the subsequent development of the parochial system, have also been linked to the origins of 'Christian' burial in different guises, although it is now recognized that 'field cemeteries' were the norm for the rural population until the Viking Age.[4] These publications and others have made major contributions to

understanding early medieval mortuary geography, yet just as many landscape studies have ignored burials; recent papers on burial, even when taking a 'landscape' perspective, have tended to regard burial sites as undifferentiated dots on a distribution map and as little more than mono-functional places of corpse-disposal and commemorative landmarks.[5]

Despite a growth of evidence advanced through new research and discoveries, narratives of mortuary geography can remain simplistic, even though a rapid and linear progression from pagan grave-field to Christian churchyard is in general now recognized as inaccurate and simplistic. The idea of shifting mortuary terrains, resonant to the living on many levels, has been overlooked, as has the complex spatial organization of particular burial sites and the evidence for multiple localities within any particular area where the dead might be interred contemporaneously.

To move forward with a robust framework for understanding early medieval mortuary geographies, scholars must escape the romantic dichotomy of regarding the early medieval dead as either confined to the dead pagan 'communities' situated on the periphery and borders of the living world, or safely bounded within churchyards under Christian pastoral care. While there is widespread recognition of the variability in early medieval burial sites and their spatial components, only a handful of studies have considered them as places of memory within complex and evolving historic landscapes, despite evidence for rich overlapping and changing burial terrains across the period.

This chapter offers a new introduction and framework for just such an approach to early medieval mortuary geography. Here we regard burial places as active locales, laden with meaning and potentially serving many functions and roles across space and time. Burial grounds are argued as fluid phenomena in terms of their form and significance, attracting changing and complex biographies from inception to abandonment. For instance, some burial sites might have very short histories of use — whether by design or by chance — restricted to a single burial or a small group of graves in rapid succession before falling into disuse.[6] Archaeological research can also reveal burial grounds that have multiple phases of use, evolving over decades and centuries and receiving hundreds, sometimes thousands, of burials in the process. In such instances, burial places not only retained, but accrued and transformed as locales where memories and identities were invested in the landscape.

In many cases, burial location is influenced by some form of preceding architecture – whether natural or human-made: a spur, a river bend, a house, a boundary, a route, an ancient monument, a church, a chapel or other locus. These features, if they remained visible, could become enduring landmarks, attracting successive interments and forging relationships between graves and the locale through repeated 'reuse'.[7] Yet this approach must also contend with the 'afterlives' of burial grounds: many endured as landmarks for decades and centuries after abandonment whereas others reveal evidence that they were rapidly discarded, forgotten or overlain by settlement or other activities.[8] Hence, throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, burial grounds were complex, varied and shifting spaces of mourning, and of remembering and forgetting.[9]

This chapter deliberately avoids any attempt at a single, monolithic narrative aimed at replacing the traditional viewpoint of pagan grave-field to Christian churchyard. Instead, we explore a series of themes in early medieval mortuary geography, taking examples from either side of, and from within, the conversion period. We hope that by doing so, we prompt new ways of writing about early medieval burial that are less restricted by historical event-

horizons, emphasizing how burial places might have operated as 'time marks' in a varied and changing environment of southern and eastern Britain from the fifth to the eleventh centuries. We hope to show how, as locales operating on different scales and significances, burial places were mnemonic and social agents: places where burial took place and other gatherings occurred and where the dead — individually and collectively — were constituted as inhabitants and actors within Anglo-Saxon social and religious life. Our examples reveal the range of ways that early medieval people engaged with such places as they inhabited and moved through their daily world.

Previous and current research
Since the earliest antiquarian discoveries, the locations of Anglo-Saxon graves have been considered as indicators of the socio-political, economic and religious life of early medieval people. Early reports focused near-exclusively on artefacts and burial customs, yet occasionally they ventured inferences about landscape. For example, John Yonge Akerman,[10] writing about his excavations at Long Wittenham, now in Oxfordshire, noted that the area's place-names and graves revealed that the earliest Saxon settlements were drawn to the 'natural attractions' of the Thames valley. Others regarded location in terms of heathendom: graves at Broughton Poggs, Oxfordshire, for example, were connected by Akerman to springs: the natural places of veneration by 'our heathen forefathers'.[11] John Kemble saw burials as indicators of settlement, but influentially suggested that pagan graves might be located on boundaries, away from the landscapes and habitations of the living.[12] Vistas were taken into account in these romanticized visions of the heathen past: both Akerman and Richard Cornwallis Neville emphasized views and panoramas, the latter underlining the 'commanding position' of the Little Wilbraham cemetery in Cambridgeshire.[13]

A more systematic approach to burial location became a key component of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture-history quest to use early Anglo-Saxon grave-finds and cemeteries to chart the English conquest.[14] Burial location was explored via the distribution map of cemeteries, burials and find-spots in relation to Roman roads, towns and villas, topography and (in particular) river systems.[15] For individual cemeteries, historical narratives of settlement were generated in relation to their location: cemeteries next to Roman towns became evidence of settled *foederati* to protect extant sub-Roman populations (see for example Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk)[16] and burials along water courses reified historical accounts of Germanic invasion.[17]

By the 1970s serious attempts were being made to consider, both quantitatively and contextually, burial location from socio-political and territorial perspectives. Desmond Bonney's investigation of the relationship between burial and boundaries was key to this development,[18] followed by a systematic study by Ann Goodier.[19] Since then, burials and boundaries have continued to receive attention in studies that integrate burial and topographical analysis with historical and place-name evidence.[20] A range of other interleaving factors are now considered relevant to cemetery placement, such as topography, fields, routeways, water courses, viewsheds and proximities with ancient monuments;[21] analyses using Geographic Information Systems of the locations of known settlements and cemeteries and metal-detector finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme[22] have considerably enriched our understanding, as well.[23] Research has also revealed how, in middle and late Anglo-Saxon England, a pattern of fixed churches with churchyards slowly developed.[24] The Christian landscape was punctuated with landmarks to the dead, not only churches, but chapels and community and household burial grounds.

Two further categories of archaeological site, long recognized, but only recently integrated into discussions of mortuary geography, also featured in the mid- to late Anglo-Saxon landscape. Burial places of social outcasts, revealed through the reinterpretation of well-known sites and new discoveries, have seen appraisal as visible markers of power and authority as well as religious exclusion,[25] while standing stone crosses with memorial functions (among other roles), projected the identities of secular and ecclesiastical elites out across the landscape.[26] These later enduring markers may have continued a pattern of display established prior to Christian conversion in the location of prominent burial mounds.[27] Some are demonstrably located on boundaries by important routes;[28] others are likely to have been situated in relation to churches or sites of assembly.[29]

The Christianized landscape was also a terrain in which ancient monuments and places, including burial mounds, accrued associations that lingered on in memory and folklore.[30] Place-names and charter bound terms provide an insight into a landscape populated with imagined ancestors and heroes: natural features such as hills, pools and stones, as well as ancient monuments and places of burial, materialized the real, imagined and mythical dead in the world of the living.

While not denying important shifts in the organization and meaning of mortuary practice and its material traces during the period, we hope here to emphasize persistence of practice despite shifts in burial locations. In other words, we identify a varied but enduring significance in the role of the graves, cemeteries and other monuments as landmarks through which memories of the dead, individually and collectively, were facilitated and negotiated. From this basis, we begin by arguing that the dead were powerful and empowering elements within the world of the living, occupying a central rather than peripheral place: the dead (often but not always ancestors of those who disposed of, mourned and remembered them), in different ways and through varying strategies, are argued here as active forces in the Anglo-Saxon landscape.

Burial sites as places

Burials as mnemonic citations
The dead cannot bury themselves, and we can assume that every funeral attested within our record — cremation or inhumation — was managed by one or more individuals and involved many participants and audiences. Complex and elite burials such as the wealthy, early seventh-century ship-burial beneath Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, or the rich 'princely' chamber-grave from Prittlewell, Essex, are easily distinguished as the results of highly complicated and dramaturgical performances involving time, labour and the staged display and consignment of cadavers and material culture into a prominent, monumental burial facility.[31] Performance and procession are likely to have been significant to the early medieval cemetery as a place of power.[32] For Anglo-Saxon England, we lack the detail offered by the frequently-quoted tenth-century account of Ibn Fadlan describing the burial of a *Rus* chief on the Volga.[33] Archaeological evidence does, however, attest to comparably elaborate, high-status funerals in early England, and these were probably attended by large crowds, lasted several days and involved a host of performers, from the grieving relatives to ritual specialists, and even sacrificial victims (animals and just maybe humans).

Fig. 7.1

Every funeral at every site will have been different in terms of how many attended and how much investment was placed in the event, but the act of transporting a corpse to a cemetery and its burial at the very least necessitated the presence of one or two others. Individual, elite funerals were made memorable through their performance, but their role in cumulative commemoration came by the fact that the same *place* was selected and new graves were placed in relation to still-visible existing monuments: mnemonic citations.[34] In this way the buried dead became participants in each new funeral, creating an ancestral palimpsest: these cumulative assemblages of graves and mounds created real and constructed lineages of the communities from those interred. To retain efficacy, these cemeteries needed to be maintained and augmented. We generally accept how cemeteries expanded over time, but we rarely consider how such processes were managed, how burial was organized and arranged, how ongoing burial practices were encouraged and how graves were protected from grave-robbing and more casual environmental and animal disturbance.

The challenge of the archaeological evidence is that above-ground surface traces often elude us. It is recognized that prehistoric and Roman monuments, perhaps augmented and elaborated with shrines and posts, could have constituted collective foci for some cemeteries in the fifth and sixth centuries and more commonly in the seventh century, perhaps continuing through the eighth and ninth centuries.[35] Other structures appear to have been more contemporaneous to nearby burials, and regional variations in markers are recognizable. At sites like Apple Down in Sussex[36] or Broadstairs in Kent,[37] a variety of traces indicate above-ground structures — from standing posts to small and large square and rectangular structures — built, we assume, from wood, wattle and other organic materials. These cemeteries we might envisage as monumentalized terrains, visually evident within the landscape. Such locations accrued monumentality through a process of successive acts of building, maintenance and decay rather than single episodes of building large mounds.[38] Collectively rather than individually, these markers would have had a powerful visual impact on those active within, and in the vicinity of, the cemetery, even if individual memorials lasted in good condition for less than a generation.

We do not know if such structures were regularly maintained by the living. The occasional example at Apple Down implies some four- and five-post/structure settings associated with cremation burials were altered over time with the replacement of corner posts and the insertion of further cremation burials.[39] At the same site, inhumation graves were sometimes deliberately inserted into structures previously occupied by cremation burials,[40] suggesting these seemingly ephemeral structures may have had complex life-histories of their own. The maintenance and abandonment of standing structures is often a feature in discussions of the lifespans of settlements,[41] but such processes may have played an important role within the cemetery, too. Whether or not these were literally 'houses for the dead', such grave markers could have served as semi-permanent and collective repositories for the dead, sometimes maintained or reused, others, left to decay.

Before, during and after conversion, more enduring structures – burial mounds in earth or cairns in stone, and later stone tombs – were constructed over and for graves. Barrow cemeteries are arguably more common in the period of conversion than they were in 'pagan' cemeteries, although the survival of surface traces is likely the result of taphonomic chance rather than a hard-and-fast contrast often supposed between 'flat' and 'barrow' cemeteries.[42]

It is all too easy to visualize barrow cemeteries such as Greenwich, Greater London, just as they survive today, as places defined by a spread of apparently contemporary grassy

mounds.[43] However, cemeteries were developed over time, and to a visitor in the late sixth century, some barrows would have appeared old and covered with vegetation, and others newly built would have perhaps retained a more regular, turf-built shape or stood out as chalk or clay mounds, distinguished by the colour of the local natural soils.

Though details of the precise appearance of cemeteries are not preserved in written or illustrative sources, archaeological evidence does underline how repeated acts of augmentation — involving successive burials, new markers and monuments, as well as the reuse of burial places and older monuments — may have made cemeteries meaningful places of memory. Cemeteries, with barrows in different states of vegetative regeneration or new, repaired, reused or decaying markers, may have visually mapped out genealogies in death – a narrative spectacle that told the viewer of the life and death of a family, a community or even a dynastic line.[44] At Uncleby, in East Yorkshire, an old prehistoric mound was enlarged and augmented with each additional early medieval burial, the grave mound growing in diameter and height as one or more communities used it as a place to bury their dead.[45] In this way whole cemeteries can be reconceptualized as places of *cumulative memory,* landmarks to the 'communal dead', places where the entire cemetery offered a 'history' about that community. At some sites individual and group stories might have been visually picked out through the palimpsest of markers, just the way today a group of gravestones in a churchyard can attest to power of a single family across several generations or to a tragic loss of life for a small community.

Burials and structured activities in cemeteries
The 'shape' of cemeteries provides an important, tantalizing insight into the power of the dead as structuring agents for the activities of the living. The most obvious structuring principle is the founder grave, where one or more burials of early date, usually well-furnished and often monumentalized, were situated as the first burials on a site. This is not as discernible a feature in England as it is on the Continent, but is well illustrated, for example, at Finglesham, Kent, a well-known site with a fully published catalogue,[46] recently analyzed by Duncan Sayer.[47] The wealth of the cemetery is concentrated in a small number of graves. Sayer identifies three burial plots in concurrent use, but plots A and C were the wealthier ones.[48] The founder graves within plot A may have been two early sixth-century wealthy graves — H2 and 204 — perhaps the 'ancestors' for an extended household who continued to bury their dead around these graves for several generations.[49]

Such relationships imply early burials may have had a performative role, their spatial relationship forming a key part of the decision-making and ritual around the subsequent funerary events. They also imply that memory or myths surrounding the 'founder' graves may have been active in shaping later funerary events on the site. However, at many sites, like those explored by Sayer,[50] not all subsequent graves are 'satellites' to ancestral burial mounds; instead, there is a more complex process of location and re-location of burial plots, some contemporaneous, others successive, in which graves 'cite' each other over generations.

One way of approaching these relationships is to consider burial topography through precise chronological phases, as explored recently in the work of Duncan Sayer, who used a generational approach to the cemeteries of Berinsfield, Oxfordshire; Apple Down, West Sussex and Mill Hill, Deal, Kent.[51] In these instances, as at Finglesham in Kent, we can chart in broad terms the evolution of poly-focal cemeteries and identify clusters of graves as

particular 'generations' in their development. The terrain of the cemetery takes on a new dimension as an active and changing space with multiple, co-occurring burial plots in use over multiple generations. This is evident also at Buckland, Dover, in Kent, where excavations of the larger cemetery revealed a complex, evolving patchwork of more than twenty-three foci or plots: seven established in the fifth century, with more beginning during the sixth and seventh centuries as the earlier ones were abandoned. Within these foci, clusters and rows of graves mark out affinities and distinctions within the clusters, although 'founder graves' were elusive.[52] Some of the plots endured through many phases of the site, and some might represent 'reuse' at an intra-site level, with burials reactivating long-abandoned burial plots. The changing use of the terrain will never be elucidated with certainty, but Buckland does show how spacing could be fluid and used as an ordering and differentiating principle, separating out activity at different periods and between different burial groups: families, households or other social collectives.

Street House, Loftus, in North Yorkshire offers, by contrast, evidence of a strictly defined and 'planned' early Christian cemetery arena.[53] Here, in the seventh century, a remarkable and apparently single-phase cemetery of 109 inhumation graves was laid out in reference to an earlier and larger Iron Age/Romano-British enclosure. West-east aligned graves were used at Street House to create the cemetery space. A double row of end-on-end burials marked out the cemetery's northern edge, and two corners of the southern edge of a rectangular space. A single continuous row, partly in-filled with a second row, marked out the western edge, and a similar but incomplete arrangement can be seen to the east. Only two graves intercut at Street House. This implies that the site was laid out with markers we can no longer pick out and/or that it was created quickly, with the dug graves visible as reference points for the positioning of each new interment. An entrance or opening was left clear on the southern side and a second possible entrance on the eastern side. Internally there were further graves, including a spatially discrete bed-burial, a circular mound, a sunken-featured building (interpreted as a 'mortuary house') and a large setting of posts, perhaps a large timber structure. Together, this evidence suggests that the space inside this mortuary enclosure was an active place and the bed-burial was of special status. In fact the 'architecture' of the entire cemetery conveys a sense of theatre. The novelty and unusual nature of the layout is theatrical in its own right, but the creation of an internal, bounded space hints at on-going rituals with the dead as 'overseers' or even participants in the activities. The layout intimates too that, at certain sites, individuals or groups of people – whether families, monks or clerics – might act as 'cemetery designers'. The inclusion of the dead themselves as key props within such 'designs' points to an intentional selection; not all the dead were invited to be part of such arrangements. Some individuals, it seems, were more powerful in these designs. The 'boundedness' and entry point also hint at restrictions on the movement and access of living participants as well. The Street House cemetery, created at a time when Christianity was becoming established in England, although quite differently constituted, echoes the later structuring principles and organisation of burial within and outside a church: important graves acted as foci within the enclosed sacred space, and graves around the outside clustered around and defined the sacred ground around the church.[54]

Beyond burial: assembly and cult
The large cremation cemeteries of the fifth and early sixth centuries in eastern England attest to 'communal' or group activity as well, but of a distinctive nature not found in later centuries. First, the multiple burial of urns in apparently individual pits implies that the dead were collected, gathered together by the living until ready to be deposited as a group, or else the grave was kept accessible and open to further insertions before finally being covered by a

mound or marker. Second, the extent of these burial places could be considerable, with Spong Hill, Norfolk, and Loveden Hill, Lincolnshire, containing well over 2000 cinerary urns each. Both appear to have served dispersed communities.[55] Furthermore, it is possible that burial was simply the most visible aspect of a wide range of socio-economic and cultic activities taking place at prominent locations, places connected to a local sense of identity and origin. Loveden Hill, for example, is well-known as a site where a small, natural, barrow-shaped knoll provided a main focus for the funerary activity in the fifth century and may have persisted as a zone of assembly into the Christian era.[56]

What is equally revealing is that these 'cemeteries as central places' ceased as large-scale mortuary locales prior to the advent of Christianity.[57] Instead, smaller inhumation cemeteries dominated, and mixed-rite cemeteries, where both cremation and inhumation operated in tandem, endured beyond the lifespans of the large central cemeteries. These smaller burial places may have maintained similar roles, however, as places for gathering and focal activity such as visits, veneration and assemblies. Attention was recently drawn to the small yet compelling body of evidence for eating and drinking activities at early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, evidence all too easily overlooked because of its ephemeral nature.[58]

A handful of sites provide additional evidence for the later importance of cemeteries as places for activity other than burial. Saltwood, Kent, is an important new discovery for a range of reasons. Over 200 burials were located here, distributed across four discernible clusters or foci, three focussed on Bronze Age barrows. Saltwood has provided clear evidence for activity on the site after inhumation burial had ceased. A middle and late Anglo-Saxon phase of activity comprises clusters of pits to the west and east ends of the excavated area and includes stray finds from the topsoil. The site is likely to be the meeting place of the Domesday hundred of Heane, suggesting a long biography of use and reuse for this locale following the end of its use for burial.[59]

Not every hundred meeting place can be connected to an ancient site or feature, let alone an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery, but additional instances are known. Stuart Brookes has identified 19 hundred meeting-places that have an association with early Anglo-Saxon burial sites.[60] An informative example can be found on the Isle of Wight. There are several possible assembly sites attested by place-names, but one of these is Bowcombe Down, the site of an early Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery, broadly dated between the fifth and sixth centuries.[61] The cemetery occupies a prominent location, a high ridge or connecting spur with extensive views to the north and south. Several Bronze Age barrows provided a focus for early Anglo-Saxon activity which included cremation as well as inhumation burials. These types of site, though rare, suggest that early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and places of burial could continue to exert a profound influence in later centuries in the shape of local administrative practices.

The use of early cemeteries as later places for assembly is attested only in the south and east of England. Examples are sporadic but intriguing, such as Greenwich Park and Mill Hill at Deal.[62] There is insufficient evidence to claim any kind of model, but we can at least suggest that for some populations, cemeteries were important central places, intrinsic to local and regional identity, visited for funerary activity, perhaps feasting, decision-making or rituals connected to ancestry; some clearly continued to exert a strong influence, surviving as meeting places within late administrative arrangements.[63]

Landscapes of the dead

Burials, cemeteries and settlements

Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were long thought to exist separate from settlements, perhaps, on the edge of the cultivated world of the living. Increasing evidence points, however, to the integration of the dead within the settlement itself and for close spatial relationships between cemeteries and settlements. The excavations at Yeavering in Northumberland revealed a site with remarkable integration between the developing settlement activity and the positioning of burials.[64] To the west of the complex, burials were initially situated with reference to a standing post and square enclosure focussed on what the excavator termed the Western Ring Ditch. Through the developed phases of the palace complex at Yeavering, burial remained a key active practice. Burial AX situated at the threshold to the Great Hall, for example, must have been made with reference to this monumental building, with the funerary ceremonies and the interment taking place not far from the eastern entrance area of the hall. Even within the latest phases of the site, which may have remained active into the eighth century, burial was still present, with a great density of burials situated to the east of the complex around structure B – thought to represent a timber church.[65] Although Yeavering stands out as a particularly remarkable example, settlement sites in the Till and Tweed valleys are often paired with cemeteries. The palace complex at Sprouston in Roxburghshire, for example, can be seen in aerial photographs to be accompanied by an enclosed cemetery.[66] This may be a regionally distinctive trait, generated out of the long-term 'frontier' status of this northern border landscape. At Yeavering, however, burials are intimate to the design and architecture of the site over time, implying burial ritual was bound to the activities of the living on the site. The alignments of buildings, standing posts and burial *loci* imply an intrinsic connection between the interred dead and the activities of the living.

Far less structured, but no less interesting, are the appearances in the eighth century of human bodies and body parts in settlement contexts. At Yarnton, Oxfordshire, human burial seems to have taken place at the immediate edge of the settlement.[67] Infant burial too is claimed as a phenomenon on settlement sites in this post-conversion era.[68] Such disposals might present evidence of experimentation, prompted by pressure to abandon existing traditions, combined with the influence of incoming practices and ideas. These practices are certainly short-lived, but do intimate that at times individuals and communities carried out funerary activity within the domestic sphere.

Wics and later towns offer evidence for the most complex mortuary geographies. At *Hamwic*, Southampton, Hampshire, at least two seventh-century burial sites existed, but as the settlement expanded and consolidated, a series of further burial sites was established, some associated with churches, and others not.[69] The mortuary geographies of late Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian urban centres such as Norwich, Lincoln and York remain under-researched, but the assemblages of stone sculpture from different church sites across York make it possible to identify contrasting commemorative environments chosen by ecclesiastical, lordly and mercantile elites within the evolving urban topography.[70] For example, at St Mark's, Wigford, Lincoln, stone sculpture and extensive excavation revealed burials from the mid-tenth century onwards associated with a wooden church, and reorganisation in the eleventh century with the building of a new stone church. Originally explored by Brian Gilmour and David Stocker[71] and recently reviewed by Zöe Devlin,[72] St Mark's shows how individual cemeteries might accrue specific topographic 'funerary narratives', with stone grave-markers commemorating the identities and affinities of specific elite families.[73] St Mark's also reveals how this mortuary geography was integral to the rebuilding of the church, showing the punctuated equilibrium of acts of rebuilding by which

social remembering and forgetting could be orchestrated and earlier burial plots adapted and destroyed.

Travelling with the dead

The most well-known example of a cemetery or burials located with reference to water courses is the dynastic burial ground of Sutton Hoo, where large, primary barrow burials were constructed to be visible to those traversing and travelling inland from the coast into the early political territory of East Anglia, or indeed leaving to travel across or along the coasts of the North Sea.[74] Rather than just landmarks, we might think of these burial sites as active mnemonic agents within the Anglo-Saxon landscape. Elizabeth O'Brien,[75] inspired by the analogy of early medieval Irish literature, has argued for prominent (if not necessarily isolated) high-status barrow burials acting as 'sentinels' in the early historic landscape. Taplow, Buckinghamshire, is another example, the large burial mound located in relation to two bends of the River Thames. This mound, possibly part of a now-destroyed larger barrow cemetery, was constructed within an Iron Age hillfort with commanding views to the west, south-west, south and south-east.[76] In this instance, as Leslie Webster argues, the Taplow grave would have dominated those traversing along the Thames valley from the heartland of the *Gewissae* down through smaller territories towards the western edges of Kentish hegemony around London. This fluid and contested landscape might explain the significance of such furnished graves.[77] Burial grounds may well have taken on a role as more than territorial markers, acting as protective forces situated to keep coastal entry points and inland river routes secure, under the watch of the ancestral dead. The eighth-century account of Wilfrid's running aground on the South Saxon coast describes how a '*magus*' raised himself on a large *tumulus* or grave mound to perform a visible act of aggression directed at Wilfrid and his companions, which may hint at a wider recognition of mounds as guardians and sources of ancestral or protective power.[78]

Terrestrial topographies

Stuart Brookes has made convincing arguments for the important role of Roman roads as structuring forces in the placement of cemeteries and thus the shaping of territory in the early kingdom of Kent.[79] Recent research on the cluster of cemetery activity at Eastry and Woodnesborough in Kent takes such ideas a step further.[80] The positioning of a number of burials and cemeteries in immediate visual and proximate relationships to a stretch of Roman road connecting a pair of early royal/cultic locations, hints at travel and movement being key factors in the conception of an early micro-territory or royal and cultic heartland.

The funerary record in East Yorkshire provides an interesting northern analogy. During the fifth to eighth centuries, the chalk Wolds, a wooded upland environment delimiting the Vale of York and the Driffield basin, was used for a number of individual inhumations and cemeteries. The Wolds was not a special zone, but the changing nature of the practices employed suggests an increasing need in the seventh century for burials to be experienced and seen as prominent visual features by those travelling between the core zones of power and settlement. The Vale of York and the Driffield basin are both argued to be important early heartlands.[81] The kings of Deira are recorded in action (or in death) at the royal vill at York, at another vill elsewhere on the River Derwent, at a cult-complex at Goodmanham and later at Driffield too, suggesting a further royal vill near Driffield.[82] Movement between these royal estate centres, dictated by the need for kings to travel to maintain authority, suggests the Wolds represented a kind of buffer zone, seasonally exploited and settled and traversed by elites who needed to manage core zones in an expanding kingdom.[83] Routes across this wooded upland landscape include prehistoric tracks and Roman roads, and the

early medieval cemeteries and burials across the Wolds are all located within visual and physical reach of these known land routes, for example at Painsthorpe Wold, where four cemeteries sit in close proximity, reusing prehistoric monuments situated closest to the Roman road (Figure 7.3). Considering all the information together asks us to view funerary evidence of different dates and to think about how such events might be used cumulatively to signal territory, authority and legitimate control. It requires us to envisage Anglo-Saxon communities and populations as conscious in their choice and design of funerary landscapes, working with an awareness of different scales of signalling in order to convey messages and narratives to a range of audiences.

Fig. 7.3

Burial may indeed have been used in the same period at an even more ambitious scale. Many pre-Christian and conversion-period burial sites in upland locations, such as the seventh-century male buried Laverstock, Wiltshire, with weapons, a hanging bowl and crab apples, show signs of heavy investment, such as a large chamber and a raised mound.[84] Swallowcliffe Down, also in Wiltshire, represents a similar phenomenon, a female bed-burial of the seventh century, centrally placed into a large prehistoric barrow.[85] Both examples were on historic routes and hence not as remote and isolated as they might first appear. Furthermore, these burials were prominent and visible over long distances along these routes.[86] These burials were meant to be seen, encountered on the horizon as enduring markers and perhaps even an inter-visible network of ancestral graves.[87]

A cluster of early medieval burials at Roundway Down, Wiltshire, encapsulates the enigma of these types of mortuary acts. The routes from most directions up onto this upland are steep, and yet at least four locations were used for sixth/seventh-century burials.[88] New barrows may have been built as well as old barrows reused. At least two burials were well-furnished – a female-gendered assemblage with a box or bed and a typical suite of Byzantine-style jewels, and a possible male with a gaming board.[89] Similar to sites such as Cuddesdon in Oxfordshire[90] or Lowbury in Berkshire,[91] these were not principally sited to be visible places from the valley floor. If visibility was important, then it appears to have been in relation to extensive vistas — from one hill top and horizon to another — as much as a signal meant for the immediate locality and lowland settlement below. In other words, these burials may not have been conceived as isolated statements. At the grandest of scales we could envisage them as intentionally created, visually interlinked network of ancestral watchers, situated across the borderlands and contested zones that lay between territories and kingdoms, created cumulatively perhaps, with each burial reinforcing the network, and in turn, inspiring another – an elite colonisation of, and competition for, territory.[92]

Taking a multi-scalar approach to the Anglo-Saxon funerary record is profitable; it reveals just how important the dead may have been in terms of structuring activities and signalling conceptions of space and territory. By collapsing chronologies and seeing proximate and remote burials, often treated in isolation, as potentially connected events, we can reconceive how early medieval people experienced and lived with the dead, and actively used and drew on them in their own multi-scalar re-workings of the landscape.

Sacral terrains
Monasteries established in the second half of the seventh and early eighth centuries provided a new kind of mortuary geography.[93] At Ripon, for example, multiple churches and sacred markers and poly-focal Christian burial grounds marked out a monastic landscape. There are

intimations at Ripon that this developing sacralized terrain in part reflected or echoed a pre-Christian mortuary geography.[94] It is well recognized that there is little evidence for pre-Conquest churches and monastic complexes situated *directly* over early Anglo-Saxon, pre-Christian burial grounds – later ideological appropriations such as Repton also remain rare examples of site-specific acts.[95] The issue may be, however, the scale at which we have approached the issue of 'cult continuity'. At Ripon, multiple Christian foci including the minster, chapels and crosses were established across a terrain also marked by several cemeteries, some certainly Christian, some undated and one (Ailcy Hill) with a definite pre-Christian, sixth-century, beginning (Figure 7.4).[96] In this instance a place of pre-Christian significance may have been 'dealt with' as a landscape, rather than as an individual place or feature. Sam Turner has argued for such Christianizing processes over wide areas of landscape in southwest England.[97]

Fig. 7.4

The ways in which we think about cemeteries and landscapes as places serving a local or regional hinterland may also be a limiting factor in the interpretation of burial practice. Ann Coles has recently used English place-names to suggest the existence of macro-level conceptions of space and travel and the usual small limits that we might assume applied to a rural community's sense of space and place.[98] Rather than serving an immediate locality or region, we should perhaps consider that some cemeteries may have served as repositories for the dead from far more dispersed populations. The development of scientific investigation using strontium oxygen isotope variations drawn from surviving skeletal data is providing new information on the composition of burial populations.[99] At West Heslerton in North Yorkshire, lead strontium isotope analysis revealed that the early medieval population buried at the site was a mix of local and non-local groups.[100] At the fifth-century cemetery at Ringlemere, Kent, similar analyses suggest a proportion of the population had spent part of their lives in another region, perhaps the west of Britain.[101] At a superficial level, such information provides an insight into the profile of a living population, supporting the idea of communities with mixed geographic origins or descent. There is room, however, to think about such results in terms of funerary activity and ritual. Do such cemeteries represent nothing more than the local place of disposal for the local resident community, or might such places serve a much wider population that perceived themselves as linked to a certain place by political or familial ties? Perhaps we have underestimated how far early medieval populations might travel with the dead to ensure their burial in a family plot or a site closely allied to a sense of origin, lineage or identity.

In rare instances, we do have evidence for early medieval funerary activity and ritual that was geographically ambitious in scope. For example, the journey made by the monks of Lindisfarne with the remains of Cuthbert is an iconic tale, caused, according to the sources, by the Viking raiding and destruction of the monasteries in the North East of England. The resting places of the saint have been marked out for a millennia by holy foundations connected to the cult of Cuthbert.[102] The monks were exiles, travelling from place to place with the body before arriving at Chester-le-Street, and eventually, Durham. By the eleventh century, the various stopping places and resting places of the saint served to structure a spiritual landscape connected by a network of potent places of sanctity.[103] The remains of St Cuthbert emerge from these stories as an active agent in the structuring of ecclesiastical power in the North East. Even earlier in time, Bede describes how the Northumbrian Christian King Oswald was slain in battle by Penda at Maserfeld, thought to be Oswestry, and his head and arms severed by Penda and fixed to a cross of wood.[104] Not only were these body parts collected and revered as relics (the head travelling with remains of Cuthbert and

the community), Bede describes how the place became a site of pilgrimage, with a great pit excavated by people who took 'away the very dust from the place where his body fell'.[105]

The Anglo-Saxon dead (at least the Christian ones) emerge from these accounts as powerful agents, mapping out and driving cult activity and pilgrimage. Such sources also hint at people engaging in travel to iconic and sacred locations associated with the dead some time before medieval pilgrimage emerged as a formal and structured experience with royal and ecclesiastical sanction. A question for the future is whether this is confined to Christian tradition or whether these aspects — the use of places of burial by dispersed communities, long journeys to burial sites, the commemoration of special places connected to the funerary ritual and visits to places of the dead to gather mementoes — could reflect aspects of ritual present in a pre-Christian era, as well.

Landmarks for the dead: cenotaphs and commemoration
In the Christian era, the sources reveal an immense emphasis was placed on the act of dying.[106] The death-bed scenes of Cuthbert and Bede describe the gathered audience, drawn to the powerful moment during which the individual was conceived as being between two worlds, that of the living and of the dead. Christianity demanded that the living were proactively involved in interceding for the dead through prayer. New forms of commemoration emerged, executed in stone and probably in wood, as well.

The establishment of cenotaphic commemoration finds a clear footing in the early medieval landscape through the evidence of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*.[107] Some of the carved stones have been identified as commemorative monuments for the dead, as for example, among the collections of stones surviving from Lindisfarne and Hartlepool.[108] Alongside the investment in such enduring and at times elaborate grave markers, other forms of display involving the dead also developed, and these can also be connected to elite signalling and displays of power.

Power and display: structured experiential landscapes
Execution cemeteries, places for the killing and disposal of individuals who had transgressed secular law and religious norms, can be recognized as early as the seventh century.[109] It is not until the tenth century, however, that a highly organized system, including places of judgment and places of execution and burial for felons, is unequivocally apparent in archaeological and written sources.[110] Careful mapping suggests execution sites were nearly always situated on local administrative or hundred boundaries, always in visible positions, frequently next to or overlooking major thoroughfares or routes (land and water)[111] and usually placed in association with earlier (prehistoric and sometimes early Anglo-Saxon) monuments and burials.[112] Such choices were, it seems, driven by a need to signal and reinforce the idea that these unfortunates were being consigned to heathen places, liminal sites outside Christian sanctity, suitable only for the torture, killing and disposal of the damned.[113]

Fig. 7.5

The tenth-century pattern is sufficient to demonstrate a vision of power in which the visible display of executed felons was an important element in a planned network of royal authority, which adopted theatrical display as a way of signalling and maintaining authority. Those holding elite positions of authority were not just signalling their power over people, but over the supernatural as well. By using places associated with the heathen dead, they conveyed the message that even in a Christian era they still had power over such places, able to consign

unfortunates at will to hellish damnation in ancient heathen places.[114] A vivid illustration of the true vision and reach of late Anglo-Saxon royal power is the landscape connecting Winchester to Old Sarum. As a traveller exited north from Winchester, Old Dairy Cottage, situated immediately north of the settlement, would come into sight. Situated on downland overlooking the Winchester to Silchester Roman road, this execution site was active in the ninth and tenth centuries, with archaeological and written evidence for the display of decapitated heads, no doubt intended to inspire visual horror.[115] Turning and travelling west along the Roman road linking Winchester to Old Sarum, a traveller would next have encountered Stockbridge Down. Positioned in an impressively visible position marked by a non-sepulchral barrow, this quite large execution cemetery site was active in the tenth century. Decapitates were present, and two large postholes have been interpreted as the setting for a gallows.[116] Some two and half miles further on, past Stockbridge, is Meon Hill, a rise of downland that lies south of the Roman road. Execution burials were located here in the ditch of the rampart of an Iron Age hillfort, and finds indicate activity in the tenth century, with evidence for decapitations and possibly hangings for our traveller to witness.[117] Finally, on arriving at Old Sarum, to the south of the Roman road, a traveller might have found an execution site situated in relation to an old but undated barrow on a natural elevation. The site is undated, but at least 14 burials were recovered, all with tied hands, suggesting perhaps the use of hanging rather than decapitation.[118]

The rule of the house of Wessex in the tenth century was dynamic and expansive, with the Vikings representing a constant military and political threat, and for at least a time, the achievement of a 'unified' Anglo-Saxon England occurred under the rule of Athelstan.[119] Power in the old heart of Wessex was sustained through a number of important and long-lived royal residences and estates. The regular system of hundred units and estates extant in Hampshire and Wiltshire in this era, tied to such a rigorously organized judicial system with its own distinct 'visual' geography, implies a far-reaching vision of power in the traditional heart of the ancient kingdom that used killing, burials, ancient burial places and landscape as a means of establishing and signalling royal power for all to see. The ways that the bodies of felons were treated in life and in death is further evidence of the assertion of power that such sites could represent. Mutilation and injury, as well as display of bodies and heads, demonstrate that crimes against the powerful could result in the forfeiture of an individual's bodily integrity *and* bodily privacy, as well as his or her life.

Handling the dead

Sequences at funerals
The elaborate dress fittings found in some early Anglo-Saxon inhumation graves, including brooches, clasps, buckles and straps, reveal that a corpse might be interred in costume and wrapped in layers of clothing or cloth.[120] The dressing of a corpse is a considerable undertaking, requiring close work with a cadaver, and needs to be done after *rigor mortis* has dissipated. It is likely, as some evidence suggests, that bodies were left a number of days before interment. The dressing of the body was only one element, however, of potentially elaborate post-mortem rituals. The miniature tools found in cremation burials include items that may have been connected to personal grooming: tweezers, miniature shears and ear scoops.[121] We cannot be certain, but it seems likely that such instruments would have been used, along with cloths for washing and combs for arranging head and facial hair, in the preparation of the body for cremation or indeed for inhumation.

Later written sources, from a Christian milieu, provide textual insight into death rites. The eighth-century *Life of St Guthlac* by Felix describes how Abbess Ecgburh presented Guthlac with a lead coffin and winding sheet in advance of his death.[122] After his death, Guthlac's sister Pega buried him with these items in his church – a timber structure built on the island of Crowland next to the ancient barrow in which the Saint had dwelt. A year later the body was disinterred. The account implies an inspection of the corruption of the garments and body by Pega before she wound the corpse again in a new sheet and had it placed in the coffin, but the coffin was not again interred in the earth.[123] As Victoria Thompson has carefully revealed through her exploration of documentary sources, these kinds of familiar practice — the washing and wrapping of the corpse — are also incidentally mentioned by writers like Werferth.[124] Death was not just intimate for families; it could involve many others. In an account of late Anglo-Saxon gild activity, members were responsible for brethren who fell ill or died up to sixty miles from home, with a company of 15-30 men obliged to ride with the dying or dead man carried in a cart.[125] Thus, evidence exists across the period to suggest that relatives and associates could expect to be in extremely close contact with the human corpse.

Bodies and body parts
How normal it was, across the Anglo-Saxon era, to exhume and handle human remains, fleshy or defleshed, remains difficult to ascertain? Grave robbing, an activity that necessitated the broaching of the grave and disturbance of the corpse, has recently been explored in detail by Alison Klevnäs, who suggests that excavated evidence attests to an intense outbreak of grave disturbance in Kent in the sixth and seventh centuries, paralleled in Merovingia, signalling a change in approach to the place of burial.[126]

In late Anglo-Saxon England, the increasing interest in relics — the body and body parts of Anglo-Saxon saints — resulted in some unusual activity by members of Christian monastic communities. Two accounts survive that describe monks knowingly or unknowingly digging in ancient barrows, on the hunt for human remains.[127] Although body fragments were kept and circulated as Christian relics, including heads, limbs, digits and even hair,[128] it is worth remembering that some 80 whole body shrines are documented in late Anglo-Saxon England,[129] underlining a distinct late Anglo-Saxon interest in intact human remains.

The disturbance and dismemberment of corpses thus did occasionally take place, but for a wide variety of reasons. In 1040, King Harthacnut ordered the exhumation of Harold I from Westminster in 1040, the beheading of the corpse and its disposal in a river or fen.[130] Unusual accounts, like that of the *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, recount the disinterment of individuals believed to be troubling the living, and their post-mortem mutilation: in this instance, decapitation and the placement of heads by legs and the removal of hearts, which were carried across running water to a junction of parish boundaries, where the hearts were burned on a pyre.[131]

These late Anglo-Saxon events seem extreme, rather than a norm, perhaps pointing to a disinclination to disturb and disperse human remains after burial. It is certainly the case that evidence for popular rites involving the handling or circulation of human body parts remains extremely rare. A group of seven human teeth were located at the shoulder of a male interred in the seventh-century cemetery at Marina Drive, Dunstable, Bedfordshire. They did not belong to the individual and seemed to have been held in a small bag and might have had an amuletic function.[132] A century or so later, Alcuin wrote condemning the popular practice of carrying of 'bones in little bags',[133] but the contrastingly frequent mention of animal bone

amulets may well explain his words.[134] The late Anglo-Saxon magical charms do record practices such as visiting a cemetery to step over a dead man's grave (*Lacnunga* 169) and the taking of 'a piece' of a child's grave (we might assume earth or soil) to ward off miscarriage and infant death (*Lacnunga* 170), but no mention is made of the use of human body parts in these popular magical/medicinal rituals and recipes.[135] A unique and obscure find, dating between the ninth to twelfth centuries from Baston, Lincolnshire, appears to be a 'mask' manufactured from the facial part of a human cranium. This was recovered alongside a second partial human skull from a ditch on an iron-working site at Baston, Lincolnshire – attesting to what seems to be an exceptionally rare example of popular activity involving the handling of disinterred or curated de-fleshed human remains.[136]

Conclusion

Even by the late Anglo-Saxon era, when archaeologists have traditionally considered death as being regulated, bounded and confined geographically to minsters, churches and consecrated cemeteries, evidence points instead to death and the dead being agents in the world of the living through their remains, graves and monuments. To travel through the late Anglo-Saxon landscape was to experience a terrain marked by the ancient burial places of the heathen past, old folk cemeteries and barrows associated with long dead princes and kings, active places of judicial killing and execution burial where bodies and body parts were displayed and stone markers and structures that housed the Christian dead and commemorated them. Body parts and bodies were displayed in monasteries and churches, and the tombs of saints were venerated. We have argued here that by taking a non-linear approach, collapsing chronologies and adopting a multi-scalar perspective, we can begin to show the ways in which the dead were agent and powerful in the world of the living before, during and after the conversion.

In the pre-Christian and conversion periods, populations used burials proactively to shape territory, define lands and create a sense of belonging. The experimentation with elite graves in the seventh century begins to take on more ambitious connotations if we re-envisage such acts as connected rather than isolated. Indeed, by seeing burials in cemeteries and isolated or dispersed graves and burials as a series of 'cumulative' acts, we can begin to re-conceptualize the multi-layered meanings that were being invested in the landscape through the handling, treatment and interment of the dead. We have also argued that places of burial were not wholly 'liminal' or inactive, but that evidence instead points to some cemeteries and graves being the focus of activities which might sometimes have included re-accessing and circulating human remains and mortuary material cultures. Funerals were a form of theatre: repeated visits to cemeteries allowed mourners to enact rituals and performances, and the spaces and monuments within those cemeteries provided a context and stage for such acts. Monuments, whether reused ancient features, new mounds, timber structures or later Christian commemorative markers and crosses, visually marked out places of the dead, but also commemorated them, making the dead relevant to the living population. The connections with later assembly sites, and hints in the archaeological record of temporary gatherings and eating or feasting at some sites, also serve as a clear indicator that we should begin to re-conceive cemeteries and burials as visited places that were not on the periphery of the world of the living, but powerful in the daily lives of Anglo-Saxons, before and after the changes wrought by Christian traditions.

Fig. 7.1 Artist's impression by Aaron Watson of an Anglo-Saxon funeral inspired by the location of the 7th-century bed-burial on Swallowcliffe Down (reproduced with kind permission of Aaron Watson).
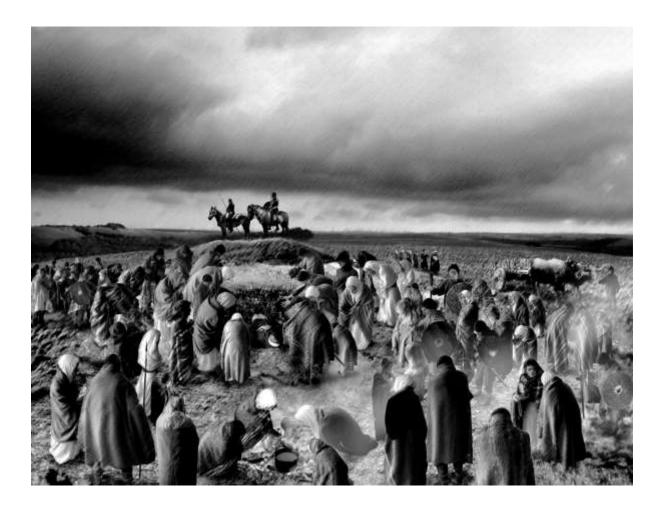
Fig. 7.2 The surviving burial mound at Taplow, Buckinghamshire: a 7th-century princely grave (photograph: Howard Williams).
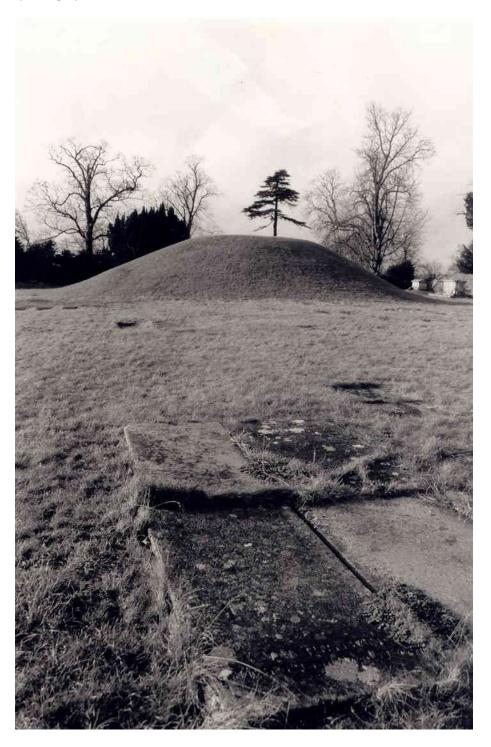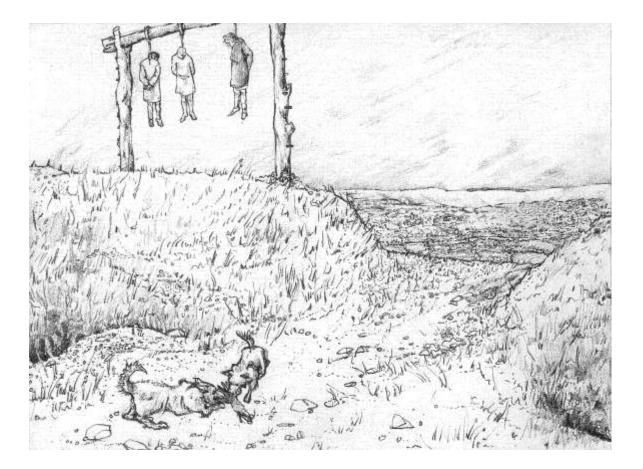
Fig. 7.3 View of a reused prehistoric barrow on Painsthorpe Wold, East Yorkshire: the early Anglo-Saxon burials and cemeteries reusing these large mounds flanked an early route across this landscape (photograph: Sarah Semple).

Fig. 7.4 Ripon Cathedral in its landscape setting: Ailcy Hill hidden in the clump of trees to the right of the cathedral. Early Christian monuments and activities may have been used to convert this wider landscape (photograph: Axel and Sophie Steenberg).

Fig. 7.5 Reconstruction of a late Anglo-Saxon gallows site, positioned on an old earthwork on the chalk down land (reproduced with kind permission of Andrew Reynolds (© Sarah Semple))

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[7] Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes'; S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Ritual, Religion and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[8] Hadley, 'The Garden Gives Up Its Secrets', pp. 200-01.

[9] See discussions in Williams, *Death and Memory.*

[10] J.Y. Akerman, 'Report on Researches in an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Long Wittenham, Berkshire, in 1859', *Archaeologia* 38 (1860), p. 327.

[11] J.Y. Akerman, 'An Account on Researches in Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Filkins, and at Broughton Poggs, Oxon', *Archaeologia* 37 (1857), p. 145.

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[15] Such as Myres, *Pottery and Settlement.*

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[17] Myres, *Pottery and Settlement.*

[18] D.J. Bonney, 'Pagan Saxon Burials and Boundaries in Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 61 (1966), pp. 25-30.

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