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## Image, Fact, and the Critical Imagination: Teaching Anglo-Saxon Studies through Archaeology

**Gale R. Owen-Crocker**

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Anglo-Saxon archaeology can provide a useful visual resource for teachers to illustrate Old English literature (especially *Beowulf*) and as source material for an understanding of Anglo-Saxon history and culture, including gender study. However, archaeological images presented to students can be a mixed blessing, both inspiring their imagination and limiting it in terms of their own critical writing and development.

There is nothing new about teaching *Beowulf* in relation to archaeology. A century ago, Knut Stjerna was drawing attention to Scandinavian cemetery excavation in order to question the accuracy and consistency of the poet's account of Beowulf's funeral.<sup>1</sup> However images of finds from the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial have subsequently come to dominate classroom 'illustration' of *Beowulf*, since they fit so neatly with the words of the poem (as discussed later). They have other advantages: they are, like the text, English, and generally more splendid than similar Swedish objects; and they are much more photogenic than reconstructions of wooden mead halls long decayed.<sup>2</sup>

The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, discovered in Suffolk, East Anglia, was immediately recognized as an Anglo-Saxon archaeological analog to *Beowulf*, especially with regard to the funerals in the poem, though the story that passages of the poem were read to the inquest jury turns out to be apocryphal.<sup>3</sup> The jury decided, according to British law, that the find was *not* Treasure Trove and therefore did not belong to the crown but to the owner of the land, Mrs. Edith Pretty. She generously gave it to the nation, and so it came under the protection of the British Museum.<sup>4</sup> The excavation, in August 1939, took place under the threat of World War II, and after hasty conservation, the Sutton Hoo treasure spent the duration of the war in a disused tunnel of the London Underground. After the war, the British Museum brought out a series of glossy paperback catalogues, well-illustrated, getting thicker and thicker as the years and the research progressed,<sup>5</sup> but all sticking to a

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at The University of Manchester in the United Kingdom.

basic structure that, for many years, established a way of thinking about the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, which has only been transcended relatively recently with excavation of the wider Sutton Hoo site, and a reconceptualization of it.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1960s, teachers were able to draw on a wonderful resource in the form of the Colour Centre Slides Sets, which came in cute little boxes accompanied by excellent, precise catalogues. Colour Centre Slides specialized in photographing medieval artefacts, especially Anglo-Saxon metalwork, and selections from manuscripts. Although, in the latter case, their repertoire was mostly later medieval, they produced a magnificent set on the eighth-century *Lichfield Gospels* (or *Gospels of St. Chad*), a manuscript which lacked—and still lacks—a facsimile edition and, being located in the relative obscurity of Lichfield Cathedral, is far less known than its sister manuscripts—the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, the *Book of Durrow*, and the *Book of Kells*.

As regards Anglo-Saxon artefacts, Colour Centre Slides produced a number of sets, including two on Sutton Hoo and a two-box set on archaeological finds from elsewhere. One box consisted of metalwork from the British Museum in London, which included the Taplow drinking horn, crystal ball and silver spoon from Chessel Down, Fuller Brooch, Witham pins, and numerous less famous pieces, including brooches of various types and sword hilts. The second box comprised metalwork from other museums, including the Alfred Jewel, from the Ashmolean in Oxford; Kingston Brooch, which is in Liverpool; and Benty Grange helmet, which is in Sheffield. Many of these items have become iconic pieces. I have often wondered who selected the objects to be photographed and who placed, lit, and captured them on film. I have no doubt that those persons have influenced the thinking of several generations of scholars. It was certainly the Sutton Hoo images, skillfully manipulated by my own teacher, Richard Bailey, which “hooked” me and directed my subsequent career. Not only what those people chose but what they omitted has been significant in dictating what teachers did and did not transmit to their students. I have supplemented my own teaching with other material, such as a drawing of the Sutton Hoo standard, which I commissioned for my first book.<sup>7</sup> There was no commercial slide of the standard—as a piece of rusty old iron, it is not photogenic. There was no slide either of the silver wand from Sutton Hoo, as much an item of royal regalia as the standard, whetstone/sceptre, and royal

helmet; and though one can photograph, it drops from considerable research experience fill them from other sources

Detailed, preferably demonstrate the minutiae exploration of the potential s in context. For example, t which is located in the Br shown as functional in shots metal loops on the back (Plat demonstrate the technique cloisonné (Plate 3), the mil Christian influence in the co the cloisonné with interlink *wyrmas*—and boars (Plate : protective emblems.<sup>8</sup>



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Plate 2. Sut  
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helmet; and though one can mention it in lectures, without a memorable photograph, it drops from the audience’s mind. A teacher needs considerable research experience of a topic to identify the gaps and to fill them from other sources (as discussed later).

Detailed, preferably colour, photographs enable a teacher to demonstrate the minutiae of decoration and to lead students into exploration of the potential symbolism of ornament and its significance in context. For example, the Sutton Hoo shoulder clasp (Plate 1), which is located in the British Museum, London, England, can be shown as functional in shots angled to show the curvature and the stout metal loops on the back (Plate 2); while detailed shots of the front faces demonstrate the technique of the gold, garnet, and millefiori glass cloisonné (Plate 3), the millefiori with its subtle crosses indicating Christian influence in the context of a pagan funeral rite (Plate 4), and the cloisonné with interlinked serpents—the ambivalent Old English *wyrmas*—and boars (Plate 5), identified in Old English literature as protective emblems.<sup>8</sup>

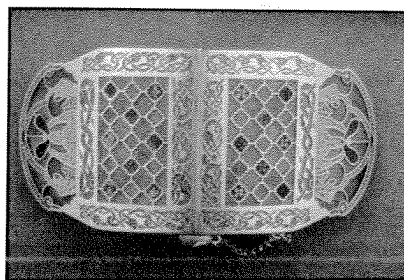


Plate 1. Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasp

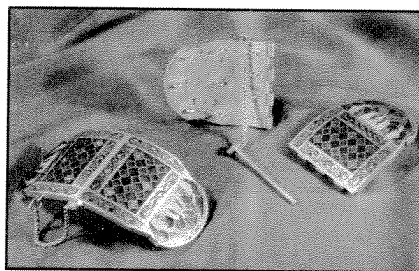


Plate 2. Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasp  
Showing Curvature and Loops

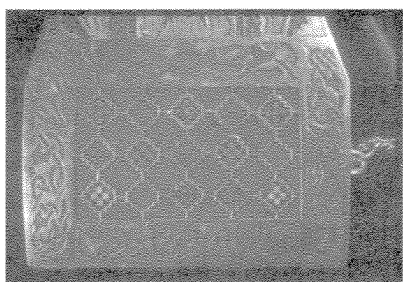


Plate 3. Sutton Hoo Shoulder Clasp Showing Details of Gold, Garnet, and Millefiori Glass Cloisonné

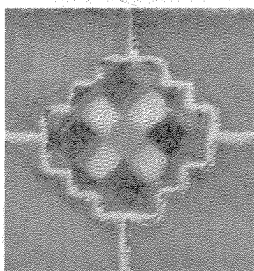


Plate 4. Sutton Hoo Clasp showing Millefiori with Subtle Crosses

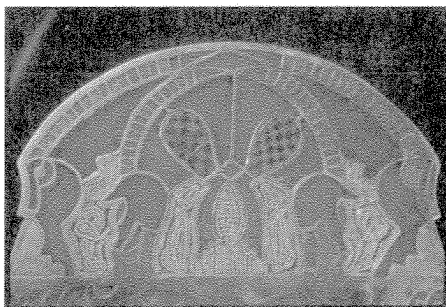


Plate 5. Sutton Hoo Clasp showing Cloisonné with Interlinked Boars

Yet the very magnificence of de  
The best Anglo-Saxon metalwork  
beautiful, eclectic, and meaningful,  
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book. To take a party of students  
having to crowd around a small  
battered, objects comes as a surprise  
out detail on a wall-sized screen

Colour Centre Slides and  
Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Art*, Jan  
the British Museum exhibition  
*Saxon Art* and *The Making of*  
of metalwork in the British Museum  
responsible for initiating general  
the cultural background of Anglo-Saxon  
the items chosen for illustration  
and the visually interesting—those  
undecorated items, and the simple  
ornamented with irregular ring-  
get left in the museum drawer rather  
showcase. The only way the treasure  
among drawings and photographs

It is also amusing to see  
Scandinavian archaeology turn  
the Paramount Pictures version  
Wealthew) wears the seventh-century  
green rather than garnet, *with*  
conversion to Christianity (which  
after her conversion, she wears the  
Icelandic *Beowulf and Grendel*,  
Jelling cup, a piece of tenth-century  
to the Jelling Style, and a male  
square-headed brooches, which  
The property researchers have explored  
trodden paths and enjoyed giving  
the same thing myself when I  
figures in the Lindisfarne Museum  
would not, manipulate chronological  
balance, as the films do.



Clasp Showing Details  
Glass Cloisonné



Showing Millefiori



Showing Cloisonné

Yet the very magnificence of detailed colour photographs can mislead. The best Anglo-Saxon metalwork is indeed magnificent. It is precise, beautiful, eclectic, and meaningful in ways that we understand and no doubt in ways that we do not; but it is not *big*. There are 4,000 garnets in the Sutton Hoo treasure, but they would fit on the cover of an octavo book. To take a party of students to the British Museum and see them having to crowd around a showcase containing tiny, sometimes battered, objects comes as a surprising reminder after years of pointing out detail on a wall-sized screen.

Colour Centre Slides and a few significant books—such as David Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Art*, James Campbell's *The Anglo-Saxons*, and the British Museum exhibition catalogues *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art* and *The Making of England*—together with the catalogues of metalwork in the British Museum and the Ashmolean, have been responsible for initiating generations of students studying English into the cultural background of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>9</sup> It is inevitable that the items chosen for illustration are the unique, the best of their kind, and the visually interesting—there is a general lack of photographs of undecorated items, and the simpler kind of bone and metal artefacts ornamented with irregular ring-and-dot motifs: the things that tend to get left in the museum drawer rather than making the front place in the showcase. The only way the teacher can find images of such items is among drawings and photographs in original excavation reports.

It is also amusing to see iconic items from Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian archaeology turning up in the recent *Beowulf* films: in the Paramount Pictures version, Wealthow (the poem's Queen Wealtheow) wears the seventh-century Desborough necklace, albeit in green rather than garnet, *without* its defining cross, before her conversion to Christianity (which is not in the poem, of course); and after her conversion, she wears the cross without the necklace.<sup>10</sup> In the Icelandic *Beowulf and Grendel*,<sup>11</sup> Hygelac apparently drinks from the Jelling cup, a piece of tenth-century Danish silver, which gave its name to the Jelling Style, and a male character inappropriately wears paired square-headed brooches, which are normally female dress accessories. The property researchers have evidently done their homework on well-trodden paths and enjoyed giving the artefacts a creative twist. I did the same thing myself when I designed costumes for four historical figures in the Lindisfarne Museum in 1988,<sup>12</sup> though I did not, and would not, manipulate chronology, gender, and pre-Christian/Christian balance, as the films do.

There has been a lack of professional slide collections on a number of topics, for instance sculpture and architecture. There is no lack of published images, however, especially now that the British Academy Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture is up to its eighth volume.<sup>13</sup> The fact that most photographs of stone works are black and white is nevertheless limiting, and the fact that these do not scan well may mean they get omitted from general teaching in the future. Colour, even in amateur hands, brings an object to life and can surprise: an Anglo-Saxon cross pictured *in situ* in a churchyard gains proportion and context, and the contours of a weathered carving are more obvious if subtle gradations of tone can be seen; the astonishing red of the Roman brick reused in the walls of Augustine's churches in Canterbury conveys one small part of the impact of the Roman mission on the English landscape. Anglo-Saxon textiles remain a relatively obscure topic, and illustrations of them are largely confined to a very few images of the embroidered vestments in Durham, found among the relics of St. Cuthbert. Other pictures of textiles, both photographs and reconstruction drawings, are mostly to be found only in specialist publications, though my colleague Elizabeth Coatsworth and I have begun to redress the balance with the illustrations to our recent *Annotated Bibliography of Medieval Textiles*.<sup>14</sup> There is a similar lack of slide collections on pottery. On this subject we have J. N. L. Myres's catalogue,<sup>15</sup> but pottery can appear extremely dull on slides taken from the black and white plates in Myres's book and in most archaeological reports. Supplementing the photographs by Myres's own drawings gives a false impression of the regularity of early Anglo-Saxon ceramics. Photographs and drawings by experts at representing artefacts but who are *not* medieval pottery experts can give quite a different impression,<sup>16</sup> and so do colour photographs, a fact that was exploited by another, later, commercial slide company, Pictorial Colour Slides, in their useful collection of artefacts from regional English museums.

Anglo-Saxon glass comes in a variety of colours as well as interesting shapes and, as such, is very photogenic; both commercial companies produced attractive images, though there have been a number of finds since then. There are excellent photographs of glass from Kent, taken by Winifred Stephens for her recently published volume.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously it is desirable to have a range of images from personal choice with different specialist interests. For a course on "Old English Literature" I have used images of some of the manuscripts from my archaeologist colleague's collection. One titled "Ancient Works of Germanic Art" shows the imagery in the poems is rooted in the past. It is a refreshing new approach to the subject.

The practice of making slides was largely stopped in Britain by budget cuts—my own University of Cambridge service long ago. Fortunately PowerPoint became available and I have been personalizing material; one can now show examples at will. Whereas a slide can be on the screen—except by using a remote control to manipulate two simultaneous slides—one can zoom in on digital images and show as many as six images, together with text. I have found this facility invaluable in showing the Bayeux Tapestry (and having a list of them sometimes for personal use). Slides are difficult to handle for a real danger, though, that in showing a series of images, getting progressively more detailed, turns the audience into passive recipients. I throw out verbally a series of facts, expecting the recipient to absorb them while still appreciating the pictures. I give the students with a list of the references in a bibliography so that they can find out more.

The end result of every slide show is the enjoyment but in the assessment of the classes have been the teacher's. I have found from specialist books that are available. How can the students revise and use the material? Giving students an opportunity to work with the received material, is a very real

Obviously it is desirable to supplement commercial products with images from personal choice and one's own travels, but colleagues with different specialist interests can be milked for teaching purposes! For a course on "Old English Poetry: Lyric and Elegy," I coaxed images of some of the many still-existing Roman walls in England from my archaeologist colleague Dr. David Hill to illustrate a lecture titled "Ancient Works of Giants." The revelation that some of the imagery in the poems is rooted in tangible, physical remains gives a refreshing new approach to these intellectual and emotional texts.

The practice of making slides for lectures from plates in books was largely stopped in Britain some years ago by copyright issues and budget cuts—my own University Library suspended its slide-making service long ago. Fortunately, after a short fallow period, scanners and PowerPoint became available. PowerPoint is very effective in terms of personalizing material; one can crop, enlarge, and show comparative examples at will. Whereas analog images are normally shown singly on the screen—except by Art History lecturers who regularly manipulate two simultaneous projectors with enviable skill—a lecturer can zoom in on digital images in minute detail and show perhaps as many as six images, together or in sequence, on the same screen. I have found this facility invaluable in recent presentations on the Bayeux Tapestry (and having made the composites, continue to use them sometimes for personal research since facsimiles of such a large work are difficult to handle for comparative purposes). There is a very real danger, though, that in bombarding the audience with digital images, getting progressively further from the original source, one turns the audience into passive receptors of the show. It is no good to throw out verbally a series of place-names, folio numbers, and other facts, expecting the recipients to comprehend and write them down while still appreciating the pictures. We must never forget to provide the students with a list of the illustrated material, its provenance, and a bibliography so that they can review and build upon it for themselves.

The end result of every module for the student comes not just in the enjoyment but in the assessment. If the primary features of the classes have been the teacher's own pictures—from research trips or from specialist books that are *not* in the library in multiple copies—how can the students revise and utilize the material in their own work? Giving students an opportunity to develop, rather than regurgitate received material, is a very real challenge, and the teacher must advise

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on wider reading. Meanwhile the provision of full and scholarly references sets a model for correct practice.

My repertoire of lecture material includes an illustrated talk currently titled "*Beowulf*: Text and Archaeology," which takes its headings from episodes and themes within the poem and which chiefly uses Sutton Hoo as illustration:

- Ship Burial. Here I use Sutton Hoo supplemented by images of burial ships from Denmark and Sweden, and ship-shaped Scandinavian graves.
- Royal Magnificence. I use images of the Sutton Hoo helmet, surely an item of royal regalia, both in its present rusted state and in the Tower of London Armouries' shiny reconstruction; and for comparison, helmets from Vendel and Valsgarde, Sweden, and Benty Grange, Derbyshire, pointing out the significance of the protective emblem of the boar on the Anglo-Saxon examples. Ceremonial items include the whetstone/sceptre and the standard. The Sutton Hoo sword and shield, complex both technically and iconographically, are invoked here, as well as samples of the gold and garnet jewelry, which presumably secured a cuirass and military strapping and the plaques surviving from the purse lid, unique among Anglo-Saxon archaeology.
- Treasures from Far Away. These are illustrated by Byzantine silver and a Coptic vessel; from closer to home but still "foreign" in Anglo-Saxon context, the three Celtic hanging bowls, the largest with its signature Christian fish inside; garnets, Frankish coins, and the Frankish sword blade; and the Swedish-made or -influenced shield, helmet, and decorative motifs.
- Joys of the Hall. These are demonstrated chiefly with drinking vessels—the enormous pair of aurochs horns, paralleled with a famous example from Taplow, reconstruction of a maplewood vessel, and a burr wood cup; the magnificent chain that suspended a pot large enough to cook a sheep; and the pitiful fragments of a lyre, all from Sutton Hoo. The lyre can be paralleled with images from Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, the *Vespasian Psalter* and the Durham *Cassiodorus*. The undisturbed chamber-grave found in 2003 at Prittlewell, Essex, also contributes a folding chair, another

lyre, and vessels, including of Anglo-Saxon luxury.

I have given different n continents and to all kinds of a Manchester. In the course of d the poet uses the word *hringed* prow," a synecdoche for "ship image of the Viking Age funera Viking Ship Museum in Osebe

Plate 6. Viking Age Funer  
(©Museum of Cultural Hist

Yet I am aware that this visual c and no other, in the minds of the potential of *hringedstefna* is gre include a two-page discussion of possible interpretations of the *ste* refer to the shape of the prow—a like Oseberg; the attachment of n of rings attached to swords); zoc Oseberg prow); and a dragon-hea be a kenning, based on the coils—the dragon that kills Beow [thing]" at line 2561.<sup>19</sup> The i endeavor to explain this potentia

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ributes a folding chair, another

lyre, and vessels, including a well-preserved flagon, to our picture  
of Anglo-Saxon luxury.

I have given different manifestations of this lecture on three  
continents and to all kinds of audiences as well as my own students at  
Manchester. In the course of describing Scyld Scefing's ship funeral,  
the poet uses the word *hringedstefna*,<sup>18</sup> which literally means "ring[ed]  
prow," a synecdoche for "ship," and I routinely illustrate this with an  
image of the Viking Age funeral ship (Plate 6), which is located in the  
Viking Ship Museum in Oseberg, Norway.

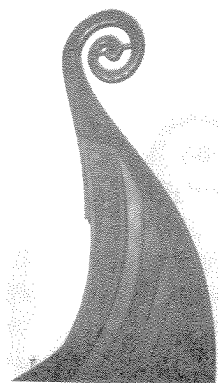


Plate 6. Viking Age Funeral Ship from Oseberg, Norway  
(©Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway)

Yet I am aware that this visual cue inevitably fixes this interpretation,  
and no other, in the minds of the audience. Meanwhile the semantic  
potential of *hringedstefna* is greater: in my own book on *Beowulf*, I  
include a two-page discussion of *hringed* in this context and offer four  
possible interpretations of the *stefn*. The suggested alternative readings  
refer to the shape of the prow—a simple loop or a more complex spiral  
like Oseberg; the attachment of metal rings to the prow (by the analogy  
of rings attached to swords); zoomorphic carving (again found on the  
Oseberg prow); and a dragon-head, in which case *hringedstefna* would  
be a kenning, based on the association of serpentine animals'  
coils—the dragon that kills Beowulf is called *hringboga* ("ring-curved  
[thing]") at line 2561.<sup>19</sup> The issue of how far the teacher should  
endeavor to explain this potential complexity is, I suggest, dependent

on the level of the students. For a general audience or basic-level university students, I suggest that the image of the Oseberg prow is sufficient. It is better that they visualize Scyld's funeral ship like this rather than forget it entirely. For a more advanced group of students, I suggest that it is best to introduce the image—along with others—in a formal illustrated lecture, as a possibility, not as a certainty, but without complicating the issue at that point; then, in a workshop or tutorial, with the text in front of them, to encourage students to explore the possibilities of rings and dragons in discussion.

The very act of using Sutton Hoo to illustrate *Beowulf* is a habit—an entertaining and instructive one—but not to be taken lightly by the teacher who is doing it. As Roberta Frank memorably pointed out, *Beowulf* and Sutton Hoo are in fact an “Odd Couple.”<sup>20</sup> The Ship Burial, from the evidence of the coins, was deposited about 625. This does not correspond with either of the two poles in the dating of *Beowulf*—the death of Hygelac, recorded in Frankish sources, which sets the “action” of the poem in the fifth century, and the unique manuscript, which has been dated to about the year 1000, give or take 50 years either way. “Treasures from Far Away” would not have included garnets any later than the seventh century, and a helmet would not have been considered royal insignia once the crown was established as the icon of kingship in Anglo-Saxon art and culture. I have argued elsewhere, at length, that the poet invokes, in an antiquarian way, the culture of the late sixth to early seventh centuries,<sup>21</sup> but unless you believe the poem or parts of it were composed in the seventh century, you must always remember that the Sutton Hoo treasure was out of sight from 625 to 1939, and the poet did not see what we are seeing.

### A Workshop Exercise

Themed courses are now the norm in Britain as well as the United States, and among the options I have offered at the undergraduate level are “Anglo-Saxon Woman” and “Life and Death in Anglo-Saxon England,” taught by equal numbers of formal lectures and seminars in which students are encouraged to present and discuss their work. I prefer, when dealing with these subjects, to treat the seminars as workshops, to divide the students into groups, and to give them a practical exercise arising from the lecture or to encourage them to bring their own research to the group and present the group findings

at the end of the session. So visual. There are problems in the nature of the majority of graphic nature of the material. libraries in the country, and students seem reluctant to use students prepare their non-ask without taking guidance or ve list. I am not denying the use of a major archaeological find discovery of the so-called London's website is more up- that undergraduates lack the c from the unsound, the blog scholar's original research. In own book, unacknowledged, fi and presented as “research,” a

Frustrations apart, these seminar titled “Body Language course, I devised the “Reconst from a piece of detective wo research on Anglo-Saxon dre ologist finds: skeletons from fifth to seventh centuries—wit as they would have been on the material such as wooden coffin bags, and wooden equipment away. You are left with meta bone artefacts. (This game l female graves have many more but you can do a similar exer supposedly indicate status and have been given the opportunit lecture will have given them burial practices so they can dis (“pagan”) from seventh-centu enable them to recognize whi Saxon, or Kentish areas and considered high status. Accon

eral audience or basic-level age of the Oseberg prow is Scyld's funeral ship like this advanced group of students, age—along with others—in lity, not as a certainty, but int; then, in a workshop or ncourage students to explore discussion.

to illustrate *Beowulf* is a —but not to be taken lightly a Frank memorably pointed n “Odd Couple.”<sup>20</sup> The Ship s deposited about 625. This two poles in the dating of l in Frankish sources, which th century, and the unique t the year 1000, give or take Far Away” would not have century, and a helmet would ce the crown was established t and culture. I have argued s, in an antiquarian way, the centuries,<sup>21</sup> but unless you osed in the seventh century, on Hoo treasure was out of not see what we are seeing.

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at the end of the session. Sometimes the work is textual, sometimes visual. There are problems in this approach, which are partly inherent in the nature of the majority of students but which partly arise from the graphic nature of the material. We have one of the best undergraduate libraries in the country, an excellent research resource, but many students seem reluctant to use books for graphic research. Many students prepare their non-assessed presentations using the Internet, without taking guidance or verification from the books on the reading list. I am not denying the usefulness of Internet resources. In the case of a major archaeological find, which is still under investigation, the discovery of the so-called “Prittlewell Prince,” the Museum of London’s website is more up-to-date than any book.<sup>22</sup> The problem is that undergraduates lack the discrimination to distinguish the sound from the unsound, the blog of a reenactor from an authoritative scholar’s original research. I have even had a plagiarized version of my own book, unacknowledged, from a reenactment website, downloaded and presented as “research,” and I am sure I am not alone in this.

Frustrations apart, these workshops can be great fun. For a seminar titled “Body Language,” part of the “Anglo-Saxon Woman” course, I devised the “Reconstruct the Anglo-Saxon Woman” exercise from a piece of detective work that I have done many times in my research on Anglo-Saxon dress.<sup>23</sup> You begin with what the archaeologist finds: skeletons from the era of furnished inhumations—the fifth to seventh centuries—with grave-goods still in place on the bones as they would have been on the body at burial, but without the organic material such as wooden coffin, textile parts of clothing, bedding and bags, and wooden equipment such as a spindle, which have rotted away. You are left with metalwork, glass, pottery, and occasionally bone artefacts. (This game lends itself to feminist studies because female graves have many more dress-related artefacts than male graves, but you can do a similar exercise with a male grave where weapons supposedly indicate status and possibly reflect age.)<sup>24</sup> The students have been given the opportunity to do some reading, and the preceding lecture will have given them a basic chronology of metalwork and burial practices so they can distinguish fifth- to sixth-century material (“pagan”) from seventh-century material (“conversion period”), and enable them to recognize which brooch types are typical of Angle, Saxon, or Kentish areas and to identify which of them can be considered high status. Accompanied by a list of gendered artefacts,

the picture is given to the students, who work in groups to “dress” the woman and consider what the burial may be saying in terms of its occupant’s gender, ethnicity, skills, belief system, and social significance. The purpose of the exercise is to move students away from the simplistic: a picture in a book / an item in a museum case / a brooch, an item of female jewelry. Instead they are encouraged, first, to make imaginative leaps that include the organic items that have decayed in the earth and, second, to appreciate that the provision of furnished burial alone was an indication of status, that the assembly of grave-goods was a creative act of the survivors, and that the ensemble reflects how they wished her to be seen in terms of her role in the family, the immediate social and religious community, and the wider tribal affiliation.

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### HANDOUT FOR WORKSHOP EXERCISE

#### ANGLO-SAXON WOMAN BODY LANGUAGE

1. Comment on the symbolic messaging of the reconstructed “Anglian woman” (Figure 1a)<sup>25</sup> (Plate 7)<sup>26</sup> and the grave of a woman from Kent with shoulder brooches, a pair of brooches at the waist, beads and pendants, crystal ball and silver spoon, and gold brocading round her forehead (Figure 1b) (Plate 8).
2. Construct a set of symbolic messengers (i.e., objects) for yourself that might present your identity. Would you choose the same criteria as the early Anglo-Saxons? Would you add more? Why did the Anglo-Saxons choose these things?

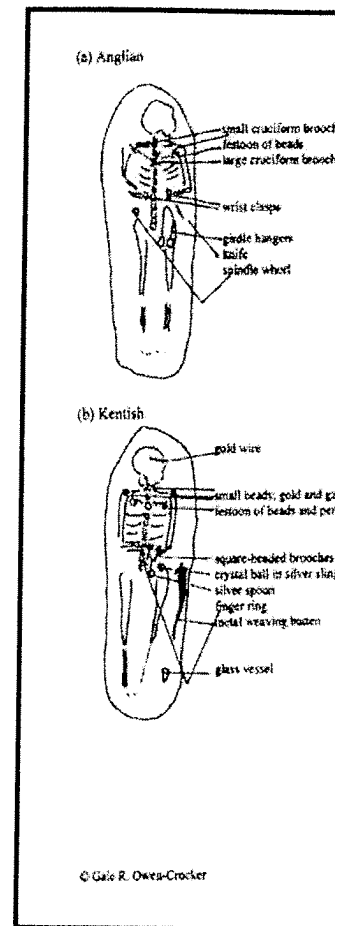


Figure 1(a). Typical Finds from Anglian Female Grave

Figure 1(b). Female Grave from Kent

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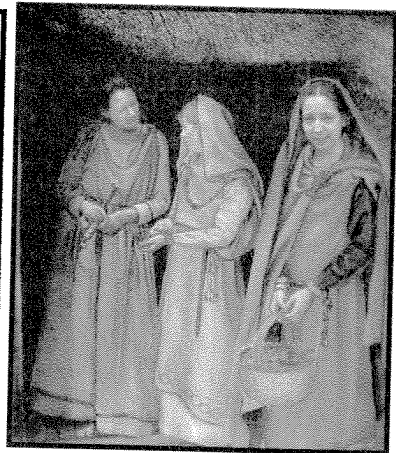
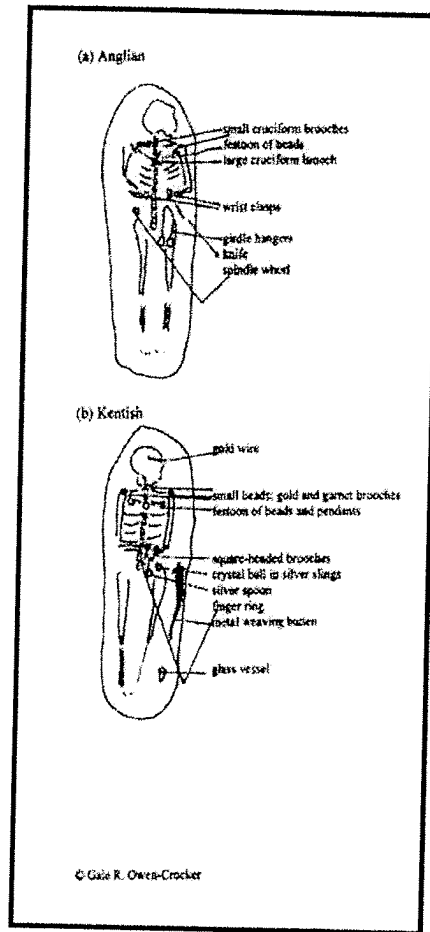


Figure 1(a). Typical Finds from Anglian Female Grave

Figure 1(b). Female Grave from Kent

Plate 7 (top). Reconstruction of Anglian Women's Dress of the Sixth Century

Plate 8 (bottom). Reconstruction of Kentish Women's Dress—Middle Ranking (left) and High Status (right)

Table 1  
Gendered Grave-Goods

Female <sup>27</sup>	Both <sup>28</sup>	Male <sup>29</sup>
<u>Decorative Dress Accessories:</u> beads brooches wrist clasps pendants finger rings bracelets gold fillets  <u>Useful Dress Accessories:</u> keys girdle hangers ivory [pouch] rings other girdle rings other pouch fittings crystal balls silver spoons toilet implements cosmetic brushes  <u>Tools and Other Equipment:</u> spindle whorls weaving battens 'workboxes' (? = reliquaries) pottery vessels glass vessels wooden caskets	knives belt buckles belt fittings pins combs tweezers	<u>Weapons, Armor, Tools:</u> spears shields swords seaxes helmet mailcoat axes other tools  <u>Other Grave-Goods:</u> buckets bronze vessels musical instruments horse bits

Pagan/Conve

Symbolic Message	Potential Me
Gender	male/female
Ethnicity	barbarian/Roma Germanic/Celtic Angle/Saxon/Ju Frank/ Norw
Belief System	religion: Christi northern god. totems and superstitions Shamanism
Age <sup>30</sup>	puberty post-childbearin

Table 2

Pagan/Conversion-Period Grave-Goods

ods

Male <sup>29</sup>
<p><u>Weapons, Armor, Tools:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>spears</li> <li>shields</li> <li>swords</li> <li>seaxes</li> <li>helmet</li> <li>mailcoat</li> <li>axes</li> <li>other tools</li> </ul> <p><u>Other Grave-Goods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>buckets</li> <li>bronze vessels</li> <li>musical instruments</li> <li>horse bits</li> </ul>

Symbolic Message	Potential Meaning	Manifestation
Gender	male/female	presence/absence in cemetery (Sutton Hoo all male but one) gendered grave-goods position of grave-goods indicating dress
Ethnicity	barbarian/Roman Germanic/Celtic Angle/Saxon/Jute/ Frank/ Norwegian	dress fashion dress fasteners (e.g., type of brooch) dress accessories (e.g., girdle hangers are Anglian) decorative jewelry (e.g., types of pendants) textile (e.g., tablet weave mostly in Anglian and Kentish areas; 2 x 1 twill possibly Celtic survival)
Belief System	religion: Christianity/ northern gods totems and superstitions Shamanism	cross pendant cruciform decoration reliquary box or buckle amulets shaped as Thor's hammer or Woden's spear animal images on objects amulets: parts of animals (claw, tooth); cowrie shell for fertility amber beads crystal beads, crystal ball
Age <sup>30</sup>	puberty post-childbearing	'full kit'/incomplete kit quantity of beads and brooches presence of keys, etc. pouches on ivory rings



Symbolic Message	Potential Meaning	Manifestation
Status <sup>31</sup>	'royal' high class <sup>32</sup> local ruler family 'middle ranking' lower class/slave	presence/absence of grave-goods quantity of artefact types quantity of artefacts of one type (e.g., over 100 beads, four or more brooches) type of jewelry: great square-headed brooch, polychrome disc brooch = high status use of gold/silver on grave-goods use of gemstones gold brocading on head band or sleeve cuff specific objects: crystal ball, silver spoon, glass vessel, metal weaving batten
Role <sup>33</sup>	high-status bride lady of the house dispenser of drink housekeeper (but not the highest lady in the establishment) spinner weaver or owner of weavers 'peaceweaver' healer/'cunning woman'	gold fillet wine spoon keys spindle whorl metal weaving batten little box containing textile (= workbox or reliquary?) amulet bag on ivory ring amulet made from animal part 'something old' (e.g., Roman bead) cowrie shell herbs unidentifiable amulet crystal ball

The second part of the exercise has produced some surprising and, it has to be said, digressive, results. I remember the mature student who had buried her child with his teddy bear; the girl who was weighed down with a collection of stones, which her mother kept presenting to her; and the fact that almost all the jewelry the girls were

wearing was not their own grandmother. On the whole with dress accessories, just a whereas male students, like not. Male students often per student life, such as their s mentioning these more ofte phone (cell phone). It was taking this exercise very se scholars rather than archety football were never mention with drinking vessels and th result might have been differ

Students learned th conclusions from grave-goc majority of surviving Anglo-! personalizes the artefacts and disturbingly close, to the me things. Yet, at the same time possessions, especially colle given to the person by others expression of *someone else*': certain way. As such, grave- than expressions of personal:

Advantages of the work it; those who have experienc original archaeological rep translates into examination however, if students viewing same as a researcher who has they interpret a drawing qu intended and, though sincere on building an edifice on non- the information that the so-ca shape created by its method Christian, not the conversion experience.

I remain totally com publications and teaching, w

Manifestation
presence/absence of grave-goods
quantity of artefact types
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type of jewelry: great square-headed brooch, polychrome disc brooch = high status
presence of gold/silver on grave-goods
presence of gemstones
gold brocading on head band or sleeve cuff
specific objects: crystal ball, silver spoon, glass vessel, metal weaving batten
gold fillet
silver spoon
spoons
needle whorl
metal weaving batten
leather box containing textile (= workbox or reliquary?)
ivory bag on ivory ring
ivory bag made from animal part
'something old' (e.g., Roman bead)
ivory shell
beads
identifiable amulet
metal ball

s produced some surprising results. I remember the mature teddy bear; the girl who was wearing shoes, which her mother kept all the jewelry the girls were

wearing was not their own choice: it had been given, often by a grandmother. On the whole, female students measured their identity with dress accessories, just as we find in Anglo-Saxon female graves, whereas male students, like male Anglo-Saxon interments, largely did not. Male students often perceived their identity through their tools for student life, such as their spectacles (eyeglasses) or a favorite pen, mentioning these more often than the ubiquitous iPod and mobile phone (cell phone). It was encouraging to see that male students, taking this exercise very seriously, chose to project themselves as scholars rather than archetypal British students, and that beer and football were never mentioned. Had the model been a rich male grave with drinking vessels and the remains of possible gaming pieces, the result might have been different.

Students learned that although modern scholars can draw conclusions from grave-goods, which have provided us with the majority of surviving Anglo-Saxon artefacts, the archaeological context personalizes the artefacts and brings the student extraordinarily close, disturbingly close, to the medieval person who wore or carried these things. Yet, at the same time, it distances them, because it is clear that possessions, especially collections of grave-goods, may have been given to the person by others or chosen to accompany the corpse as an expression of *someone else's* desire to represent the dead person in a certain way. As such, grave-goods may be symbolic constructs rather than expressions of personality.

Advantages of the workshop exercise are that students remember it; those who have experienced it make an easy transition to studying original archaeological reports; and the learned material readily translates into examination responses. One must not be surprised, however, if students viewing an image for the first time do not see the same as a researcher who has been studying the topic for years. When they interpret a drawing quite differently from what the teacher intended and, though sincere, are patently wrong; or when they insist on building an edifice on non-existent foundations (such as by ignoring the information that the so-called 'cruciform' brooch is named from a shape created by its method of construction and belongs to the *pre-Christian*, not the conversion period)—this can damage the learning experience.

I remain totally committed to illustrating my work, both in publications and teaching, with images from Anglo-Saxon material

culture. Picture research for publication is time-consuming and, it has to be said, expensive, in terms of paying for original images and permission to reproduce them. Producing images for teaching is easier and not expensive, but if the images are to be presented to the students in a scholarly way, rather than as entertainment, they require the same sort of effort as producing a course bibliography. The result is almost always successful in terms of student engagement with, and recall of, the topic. Creating a workshop with Anglo-Saxon visual material is more problematic. It can be a dazzling success. Occasionally it goes very wrong!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Knut Stjerna, "Beowulf's Funeral Obsequies," in *Essays on Questions Connected with the Old English Poem of Beowulf*, ed. and trans. John R. Clark Hall, Viking Club Extra Series, 3 (Coventry: Curtis and Beamish, 1912), 197–239, esp. pp. 200–1. Stjerna's objections are discussed and refuted in Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf: And the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester: University Press, 2000), 88–89, 106, nn. 8, 10.

<sup>2</sup>For an overview, see Rosemary Cramp, "Beowulf and Archaeology," *Medieval Archaeology* 1 (1957): 55–77.

<sup>3</sup>Roberta Frank, "Beowulf and Sutton Hoo: The Odd Couple," in *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. Calvin B. Kendall and Peter S. Wells (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 47–64, at pp. 48–49.

<sup>4</sup>Formal excavations at Sutton Hoo were first carried out in 1938 and 1939. The Ship Burial was reexamined under the direction of Rupert Bruce-Mitford from 1965 to 1971. The so-called "definitive publication" was R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, ed., *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, 3 vols. (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1975–83).

<sup>5</sup>The first version was Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: A Provisional Guide* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1947), which was reprinted in 1956 and 1957 and revised as *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: A Handbook*, which went through three editions in 1968, 1972, and 1979. The version by Angela Care Evans, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, was first published in 1986, revised in 1994, and subsequently reprinted.

<sup>6</sup>There was a further excavation of Sutton Hoo and its surroundings from 1984 to 1986, directed by Martin Carver. The definitive publication of the excavation was Martin Carver, ed., *Sutton Hoo: Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground* (London: British Museum Press, 2005). Sutton Hoo, apart from the specialism of Anglo-Saxon archaeology, much of which may be found in the studies listed here.

<sup>7</sup>Gale R. Owen, *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since 1900* (Newton Abbot, England, and reprinted New York: Dorset Press, 1977) (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993), 111–12, standard by Christine Wetton, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, several images.

<sup>8</sup>*Wyrmas* are protective symbols on Anglo-Saxon mounds—but it is as a fire-breathing dragon. Boars are recurrent symbols synecdochally at 1110–13, and helmets from Sutton Hoo, Bennington, and other sites are not confined to the helmet at Sutton Hoo, hanging bowl. See Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf*.

<sup>9</sup>David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxons to the Norman Conquest* (London: Duckworth, 1990); Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (London: Duckworth, 1991); Backhouse, D. H. Turner, and Yorke, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Art* (London: Foyles, 1991); Trustees of the British Museum, ed., *Sutton Hoo: The Ship Burial* (London: Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture* (London: British Museum Press, 1991); David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxons 700–1000 in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1964); David A. Hill, *Anglo-Saxon Metalwork 700–1100 in the British Museum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>10</sup>Robert Zemeckis, *Beowulf* (New York: Warner Bros., 2007).

<sup>11</sup>Sturla Gunnarsson, *Beowulf* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

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Obsequies," in *Essays on Poem of Beowulf*, ed. and tra Series, 3 (Coventry: . pp. 200–1. Stjerna's le R. Owen-Crocker, *The Structure of the Poem* 9, 106, nn. 8, 10.

Cramp, "Beowulf and 57): 55–77.

Hoo: The Odd Couple," in *Sutton Hoo*, ed. Calvin B. University of Minnesota

re first carried out in 1938 ed under the direction of The so-called "definitive d., *The Sutton Hoo Ship* olications Ltd., 1975–83). Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo* : Trustees of the British 6 and 1957 and revised as hich went through three on by Angela Care Evans, ished in 1986, revised in

<sup>6</sup>There was a further examination of part of the Sutton Hoo site and its surroundings from 1983 to 1992 under the direction of Martin Carver. The definitive publication of these excavations did not appear until 2005: Martin Carver and Angela Care Evans, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and Its Context* (London: The British Museum Press, 2005). There is a vast corpus of work on Sutton Hoo, apart from the specialist studies in the definitive publications, much of which may be found in the bibliographies of the encyclopedic studies listed here.

<sup>7</sup>Gale R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (Newton Abbot, England, and Totowa, NJ: David and Charles, 1981; reprinted New York: Dorset Press/Marboro Books, 1985; reprinted New York: Barnes and Noble, 1997). The drawing of the Sutton Hoo standard by Christine Wetherell (Figure 21), was compiled from several images.

<sup>8</sup>*Wyrm*s are protective—they occupy and defend grave-mounds—but it is as a fire-breathing dragon that a *wyrm* kills Beowulf. Boars are recurrent symbols on helmets in *Beowulf* (lines 303–4, synecdochally at 1110–13, and 1452–54) and have been found on helmets from Sutton Hoo, Benty Grange, and Wollaston, but they are not confined to the helmet at Sutton Hoo, occurring on both clasps and hanging bowl. See Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, pp. 46, 117.

<sup>9</sup>David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art: From the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984); James Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford: Phaedon, 1982); Janet Backhouse, D. H. Turner, and Leslie Webster, eds., *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art* (London: British Museum Publications for the Trustees of the British Museum and the British Library Board, 1984); Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse, eds., *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600–900* (London: British Museum Press, 1991); David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700–1000 in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1964); David A. Hinton, *A Catalogue of the Ornamental Metalwork 700–1100 in the Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

<sup>10</sup>Robert Zemeckis, *Beowulf*, Paramount Pictures, 2007.

<sup>11</sup>Sturla Gunnarsson, *Beowulf and Grendel*, Equinoxe Films, 2008.

<sup>12</sup>St. Aidan, the missionary to Northumbria; a contemporary Northumbrian king (I imagined him as King Oswy, since he had a Kentish wife, which opened up design possibilities), a scribe, and a boy assisting him. The thinking behind the creative process is explained in Gale R. Owen-Crocker, "Designing for the Seventh Century," *Costume*, 24 (1990): 2–14.

<sup>13</sup>Rosemary Cramp, gen. ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1984–). Volume 8 was published in 2008.

<sup>14</sup>Elizabeth Coatsworth and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Medieval Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1100: An Annotated Bibliography*, British Archaeological Reports 445 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007).

<sup>15</sup>J. N. L. Myres, *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Pottery of the Pagan Period*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup>See Owen, *Rites and Religions*, Plates 5, 19–21, 22–24; p. 29, Figure 9; pp. 90–91, Figures 15–16.

<sup>17</sup>Winifred Stephens, *Early Medieval Glass Vessels Found in Kent*, British Archaeological Reports 424 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>F. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnesburg*, 3d ed. (Boston, MA: Heath, 1950), line 32.

<sup>19</sup>Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, 23–27 (including plate).

<sup>20</sup>Frank, "Beowulf and Sutton Hoo: The Odd Couple."

<sup>21</sup>Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, 114–29.

<sup>22</sup>[www.molas.org.uk](http://www.molas.org.uk)

<sup>23</sup>Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004).

<sup>24</sup>See H. Härke, "Knives in Early Saxon Burials: Blade Length and Age at Death," *Medieval Archaeology* 33 (1989): 144–48; "Early Saxon Weapon Burials: Frequencies, Distributions and Weapon Combinations," in *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. S. C. Hawkes, Monograph 21 (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1989), 49–61; "Changing Symbols in a Changing Society: The Anglo-Saxon Weapon Burial Rite in the Seventh Century," in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), 149–65.

<sup>25</sup>This is a composite from more than one grave.

<sup>26</sup>Plates 7 and 8 are copied by Rosalyn Smith for Owen-Crocker in colour as Plates D and F.

<sup>27</sup>The items are arranged in each case, according to their function: weapons and accessories (beads to gold and silver cosmetic brushes), and tooled wooden caskets).

<sup>28</sup>In order of frequency.

<sup>29</sup>Weapons, armor, and grave-goods, in order of frequency of observation.

<sup>30</sup>For men, the size of the grave as well as status.

<sup>31</sup>For men, swords and helmets are rare and indicate high status. The coat of arms known at present, from Sutton Hoo, is from Prittlewell. The helmet is from Sutton Hoo and Taplow.

<sup>32</sup>The type of burial and the status may be indicated by the type of grave or burial under a mound. So far, all burials have been male (though some are of children).

<sup>33</sup>For men, the main identifiers are often by a spear and less often by 'musicians' and craftsmen.

Northumbria; a contemporary  
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 he Seventh Century," *Costume*,

*Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone*  
 University Press for the British  
 lished in 2008.

e R. Owen-Crocker, *Medieval*  
*9: An Annotated Bibliography*,  
 xford: Archaeopress, 2007).

*Anglo-Saxon Pottery of the Pagan*  
 Press, 1977).

Plates 5, 19–21, 22–24; p. 29,

*Medieval Glass Vessels Found in*  
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*The Fight at Finnesburg*, 3d ed.

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o: The Odd Couple."

114–29.

*Saxons in Anglo-Saxon England*:  
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 ging Symbols in a Changing  
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 Martin Carver (Woodbridge:

can one grave.

<sup>26</sup>Plates 7 and 8 are copies of watercolour reconstructions painted  
 by Rosalyn Smith for Owen-Crocker, *Dress*, 2004. They may be found  
 in colour as Plates D and F in that monograph.

<sup>27</sup>The items are arranged in the following order of frequency in  
 each case, according to my own observation: decorative dress  
 accessories (beads to gold fillets), useful dress accessories (keys to  
 cosmetic brushes), and tools and other equipment (spindle whorls to  
 wooden caskets).

<sup>28</sup>In order of frequency, according to my own observation.

<sup>29</sup>Weapons, armor, and tools are listed first, followed by other  
 grave-goods, in order of frequency in each case, according to my own  
 observation.

<sup>30</sup>For men, the size of knife and type of weapon may be relevant  
 to age as well as status.

<sup>31</sup>For men, swords and gold/garnet jewelry indicate status;  
 helmets are rare and indicate very high status. There is only one mail  
 coat known at present, from the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial; and only one  
 chair, from Prittlewell. There are elaborate drinking horns from Sutton  
 Hoo and Taplow.

<sup>32</sup>The type of burial might usefully be considered here. High  
 status may be indicated by the presence of a coffin, a bed, or a chamber  
 grave or burial under a mound. All the Anglo-Saxon ship burials found  
 so far have been male (though females have been found in Viking Age  
 ships).

<sup>33</sup>For men, the main identifiable role is 'warrior,' indicated most  
 often by a spear and less often by other weapons. There are very rare  
 'musicians' and craftsmen.