THE PAST IN THE PAST: ROMAN OBJECTS AND GROUP DYNAMICS IN EARLY
ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

by INDRA WERTHMANN

Roman objects recovered from early Anglo-Saxon graves and settlement contexts have been
discussed in recent years in a number of publications, but the topic has only recently become the
subject of comprehensive research. This paper contributes to the debates by exploring this
phenomenon through evidence from case studies drawn from Kent, Essex, Norfolk and
Worcestershire. Initial results suggest regional variations in the way that these items are used by
early medieval communities. In this sample, Roman objects appear to be connected to rich grave
assemblages and may have been used to signify cultural affiliations and social divisions.

Keywords: Past, antiquities, reuse, identity, affiliation

Introduction

The presence of Roman objects in early Anglo-Saxon graves has been acknowledged by
archaeologists, but such studies have often relied on selective examples and adopted to
prove a particular standpoint on the purpose for their deployment in early medieval
assemblages (Eckardt and Williams 2003; Swift 2012; Fleming 2012). These authors have
acknowledged that the reuse of Roman objects in early Anglo-Saxon funerary contexts was
rare and variable and may have served symbolic or more practical purposes (White
1988; Eckardt and Williams 2003). This study reveals that only 10 percent or less of the
burials within a given cemetery include Roman objects, suggesting such items served a special
purpose. To date, little interpretation exists to explain why particular items were included in
grand assemblages and why only certain individuals were buried with Roman items in the
5th, 6th and 7th centuries. By comprehensively assessing six case studies from different areas (Fig. 1),
this paper discusses Roman material culture and contends that they can be regarded as one
component of the rich and varied processes of identity creation evident in Anglo-Saxon
England during the era of furnished burial rites.

Creating biographies: cheap substitutes or signals of spirituality

The concept of object biographies has been widely discussed in archaeology and Chris
Gosden and Yvonne Marshall’s (1999) publication remains one of the most influential
discussions. Their paper considers the processes by which objects were kept, curated,
altered and changed over time, arguing that through such processes, the artefacts
themselves could change in meaning and importance. Gosden and Marshall (1999) also
suggest that objects and people can accumulate histories throughout their lifetime
and that these stories can be sometimes interrelated. These ideas have proved to be
influential in broader discussions of curation and recycling practices in past societies.

More recently in medieval archaeology, there has been an uptake of ideas in regards to
heirloom objects and curated and modified items (e.g. Devlin 2007b; Eckardt and
Williams 2003; Martin 2011). The dynamics behind choosing old objects are explained in
the light of memory making, spiritual and exotic aspects (e.g. Eckardt and Williams
2003; Williams 2006; Hinton 2010). Some of these items were regarded as symbols to
strengthen lineages among elite families (Geake 1998; Gilchrist 2012; 2013).

Roger White’s 1988 publication remains the key contribution to early medieval debate,
charting the presence of Roman objects in 42 early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries from across the
entirety of England. White identified some 539 items and explained their presence as raw
materials or scrap collected for manufacturing purposes or as cheap substitutes for
contemporary items (White 1988). In contrast, Audrey Meaney has posited that these items
could be amulets with magical purposes (Meaney 1981: 4). In their recent appraisal of
Roman items in funerary contexts, Hella Eckardt and Howard Williams suggest that
such objects may have represented items with an unknown past, thus they acquired ‘new
regimes of value through their inclusion in grave assemblages’ (Eckardt and Williams
2003). This sits in contrast with Robin Fleming’s suggestion that iron, bronze and
brass were collected from abandoned sites for use as scrap metal. Ellen Swift also favours the
interpretation of an economic decline,
followed by a time of scarcity when Roman objects may have been employed as substitutes or objects with changing cultural values (Swift 2013: 110-14).

Taking inspiration from these studies, this paper considers how Roman objects might have been used in life and death in early Anglo-Saxon England. The cemeteries were chosen to provide a means of comparing and contrasting practices within different communities in broadly the same time period.

Roman objects in early Anglo-Saxon graves
The core data for this paper is drawn from six cemeteries across Kent, Worcestershire, Essex and Norfolk (Fig. 1; Tab. 1). Kent has the largest repertoire of well documented excavation reports, with around 4000 graves recorded. In comparison, a similar amount of graves emerges from the combined regions of East Anglia, mainly Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Although large sites have been recorded within these regions, the evidence for material culture in closed contexts is not as varied as in Kent. The discussed cemeteries outside Kent have been chosen due to their well-documented evidence and their unique nature of the treatment of Roman objects within graves, which contrasts with the rather uniform deployment of curated material in Kent. Thus, these cemeteries will provide an outline of different notions for reusing Roman objects instead of explaining the occurrence as a whole. The cemeteries explored were mainly active in the 5th to 6th century (Tab.1). The largest cemetery is Long Hill, Buckland, with 449 graves. The size of the remaining cemeteries varied between 10 and 194 graves in total. Of a total of 587 objects recovered from 1040 graves, 112 Roman objects were identified. The large majority of reused objects were present in supine adult single female graves; however, the age range and burial type can vary and White pointed out that female graves in Anglo-Saxon England were often more lavishly equipped than male burials (White 1988: 165). This might account for the high frequency of Roman items in female assemblages.

The object types fall into a distinct number of categories: coins, glass fragments and bronze objects were the most favoured items. The discussed ‘Roman objects’ are referring to all items associated with a Roman past, including Romano-British as well as imported late Roman continental finds, in order to trace the overall Romanitas in curated and collected Roman objects. Usage is discussed below on a case study basis to highlight the variety and nature of the reuse of Roman objects by certain groups within early medieval communities.
assemblage

The Kentish cemeteries of Mill Hill, Deal; Bekesbourne II Aerodrome; and Buckland Dover II were included in this assessment. Bekesbourne II Aerodrome and Buckland Dover II are in use from the late 5th to the 7th century, whereas Mill Hill, Deal, is active in the 6th century. The large cemetery of Buckland, however, spans a more substantial time period until the middle of the 8th century. Some of the examined graves were more closely dated, indicating that the majority of the graves are dating to Phase 1 to 2. Phase 1 incorporates the earliest date range of AD 475 to 525, whereas Phase 2 ranges from AD 525 to 575. Table 2 lists all Roman finds from grave contexts in these cemeteries. Proportionally, Roman objects make up only 11.34 percent of the overall assemblages and a diverse range of material is present.

Table 2. Overview of sites and graves containing Roman Objects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemeteries</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mill Hill, Deal</th>
<th>Buckland, Dover</th>
<th>Bekesbourne, Aerodrome</th>
<th>Great Chesterford, Essex</th>
<th>Oxborough, Norfolk</th>
<th>Beckford, Worcester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
<td>6th c. AD</td>
<td>AD 475-750</td>
<td>AD 475-600</td>
<td>5th to 6th c. AD</td>
<td>6th c. AD</td>
<td>AD 475-550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves in Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves with Roman objects</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhumation</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cremation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsexed graves</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults 20-44 years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature Adults 45+ years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juveniles 10-20 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infants/Children under 10 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves with Roman coins in Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves with Roman coins associated with lower left torso (possibly in bag)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves using Roman coins at the chest area (possibly in a necklace)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves with other use of Roman coins (including Charon’s Oboi)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves with other Roman material associated with the lower left torso (possibly bag)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves with other Roman material at the chest area</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman objects in graves in Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of other grave goods in Total</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human remains</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Cu alloy dress adornments</th>
<th>Glass</th>
<th>Intaglio</th>
<th>Spindle whorl</th>
<th>Pottery</th>
<th>At left lower torso</th>
<th>At chest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Old Adult 45+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Adult 24-44 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Young Adult 16-24 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Juvenile 7-15 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Adult 24-44 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, Age Unspecified</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsexed Old Adult</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsexed Adult</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Unsexed Young Adult</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsexed Juvenile</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsexed Child</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of sites and graves containing Roman Objects

Table 2 Kentish cemeteries
The most characteristic items present in these assemblages are Roman coins (Parfitt and Brugmann 1997: 32) (Tab 2). In total, 26 coins were found in 21 Kentish graves and of those, five coins were perforated and displayed at the chest area, forming components in necklaces. These necklaces were in some cases alternated with beads. Thirteen coins, mostly unperforated and heavily worn, were positioned at the lower torso, suggesting that they had originally been parts of bag collections. The majority of these assemblages in the cemeteries considered here were associated with the left hand side of the individual, quite frequently the left hip. The assumption is made that these bags carry amuletic values as they often comprise a set of peculiar objects, such as broken glassware, fossils and teeth (Meaney 1981: 4). The majority of graves including coins bear a relatively high proportion of artefact assemblages and in some cases precious metals, such as silver rings and Kentish silver gilt brooches. However, two of the graves were exceptionally rich. The highest amount of grave goods, including a wealth of precious gold and silver jewellery, was found in grave 391B at Long Hill, Buckland. The female inhumation, aged between 20 to 25 years, dated to the latest period of the active use of cemetery, AD 650 to 750. Two Roman coins dating from AD 270 to 274 and a crystal intaglio held in silver slings were deposited on the left side of the body, perhaps in a pouch. This is similar to the female inhumation of grave 30 in the mid-7th–early 8th-century Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Shrubland Hall Quarry, Coddenham in Suffolk. This bed burial was the only grave in the cemetery containing a Roman object in the form of a coin from the House of Valentian (AD 367 to 375) in a pouch. A Merovingian coin pendant from Dagobert I (AD 629 to 639) was deposited in a separate pouch (Penn 2011: 27; 30). Similar to grave 391B at Buckland, this burial was exceptionally richly furnished. This wealth in comparison to other graves during this time period corresponds to the formation of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and an emerging elite from the late 6th to 7th century onwards (see Bassett 1986; Yorke 1990; Geake 1998). The variety of included Roman antiques, however, seems to be more limited, which perhaps relates to the increased preference for derived Roman style objects (Geake 1998).

Roman glass is also a frequent find; out of 22 inhumations from Mill Hill, Deal and Long Hill, Buckland, eight included reused Roman beads and in one case, grave 326 of a female adolescent, a bead was made of a Roman rim sherd and deposited in a bag collection at the left pelvis. The majority of Roman beads were included in necklaces. At Mill Hill, Deal, Brugmann identified four types of Roman beads and all of them were intermingled with contemporary beads (Parfitt and Brugmann 1997: 60). This implies perhaps that they were not necessarily valued for their antiquity, but for their visual aesthetic effect. In contrast to beads, the remaining glass fragments, consisting mostly of vessel and window glass, were found at the lower torso on the left hand side. This pattern of deposition shares similarities with the treatment of Roman coins. Intact Roman beads were used in necklaces, whereas broken glass fragments were parts of bag assemblages.

The sheer variety of Roman material integrated within the Kentish graves is interesting in its own right. This includes a Roman intaglio, buckles and brooches, spindle whorls made of Roman pottery, a horse harness pendant and glass fragments. The burials containing perforated coins are comparatively wealthy graves, as is demonstrated by grave 105c from Mill Hill, Deal, dating to the 6th century. This burial included 27 grave goods and is the sole example in this study incorporating both a perforated coin in a necklace and an unperforated one in a bag collection. This burial is distinct within the cemetery, as it is a triple grave, including a male, female and a child, and it is the only grave to include coins.

A low number of burials containing Roman coins is also evident at Long Hill, Buckland. The female inhumation in grave 14 incorporated a perforated coin within a necklace, whereas in grave 204 one perforated coin was located at the left femur. Although grave 14 has not been closely dated, grave 204 dated to Phase 2, AD 525 to 575. Both graves at Long Hill, Buckland, included female inhumations aged between 20 and 30 years and these were well furnished. The female individual in 105c Deal was aged between 30-40 years and considering the male and child within this burial, this might represent a family unit. The female inhumations of similar age from Long Hill, Buckland, incorporated a wealthy amount of grave goods, which could signal their status within the community. Both graves support the interpretation that Roman coinage was included in rich graves and perhaps connected to an elite funerary custom. Although beyond this scope, similar patterns can be observed in Merovingian cemeteries in
France and in Germany (e.g. La Baume 1967; Fremersdorf 1955; Pilet 1980; Joffroy 1974). Two cemeteries in the region of Cologne in Germany and two cemeteries in northern Gaul have shown a wide range of reused Roman objects similar to the range found in Kent. Coins were treated in a similar way perforated in necklaces or concealed in pouches; however, in some cases coins were found within the mouth or hands of the deceased, a custom which is discussed below. Furthermore, White states that the Alamannic grave 500 from Basel contained a female inhumation wearing coins in pairs, alternating with paired beads (White 1988: 158). At Marktoberdorf, Allgäu, coins were reused as parts of necklaces and Roman keys were suspended from chatelaines (White 1998: ibid). More research is underway but initial results suggest strong links between Britain, especially Kent, and the continent.

Creating social differences:

Roman objects also occur in some specific burial contexts which were not those of wealthy individuals, but must have been chosen for other reasons. The cemeteries at Beckford, Worcestershire and Oxborough, West Norfolk, both active in the 6th century, are of particular interest as different object types occurred at each site, creating a distinction.

There are two cemeteries at Beckford, cemetery A and cemetery B, both dating to AD 475 to 550 and 550 metres apart from each other. Due to their close proximity, it has been suggested by the excavators that they were in use at that same time (Evison and Hill 1996: 38). Table 3 lists the full range of examples of reused Roman items in graves from Beckford, Worcestershire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Human remains</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Beads</th>
<th>Spoon</th>
<th>At left lower torso</th>
<th>At right lower torso</th>
<th>At chest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beckford A</td>
<td>Female Adult 25-44 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckford A</td>
<td>Female Young Adult 16-24 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckford B</td>
<td>Female Adult 25-44 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckford B</td>
<td>Female Young Adult 16-24 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckford B</td>
<td>Female Juvenile 7-15 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckford B</td>
<td>Female Child 2-7 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Beckford, Worcestershire

Figure 2 Distribution map of cemetery A with marked graves containing Roman objects in different plots. The parallel line indicates the possible relationship between two graves after © Evison and Hill, fig. 2, Council for British Archaeology
Twenty-four burials were located in Beckford cemetery A; and a further 106 inhumations and four cremations were excavated in cemetery B (Evison and Hill 1996: 38). It is difficult to date individual graves, as most of them contained grave goods which were in use during the 75 years of the cemeteries' existence, only a few graves dated slightly earlier or later. The only datable graves containing Roman material were A12 and B24, both containing a Roman bead identified by Evison due to their high amount of antimony (Evison and Hill 1996: 11). These graves of two female adults belonged to the earliest phase of the cemetery. Both cemeteries were structured according to phases; cemetery A from phase I to III and cemetery B from phase I to VIII. These phases were determined after spatial distribution and grave orientations. Figure 2 and 3 show the cemetery plan and phases; the graves with Roman objects are marked.

Figure 3 Distribution map of graves with Roman objects in plots at cemetery B, parallel line indicating a connection between graves after Evison and Hill, fig. 3, Council for British Archaeology

Figure 4 Unperforated coins from bag collection B6 and thin and blank perforated coins from B39 and B44 Scale 1:1 Evison and Hill, fig. 19, 9 e-d; fig. 26, 10; 1, Council for British Archaeology
Roman coins were exclusively found in six female inhumations at cemetery B and re-used in characteristic ways; as integral components of necklaces or according to their position, within bag collections (Evison and Hill 1996: 20). In this cemetery, however, the perforated coins within necklaces displayed a special treatment unmatched by the other case studies in this paper: They were worn thin and blank without any recognisable impressions (Evison and Hill 1996: ibid.). By contrast, the Roman coins found at the lower torso, possibly in bag assemblages, were left with clearly visible imprints (Fig. 4).

It seems that the coins in necklaces were not chosen for their depictions, but for other reasons, which may relate to their shape or to the performance of erasing imagery. It is debatable if the image was erased due its Romanitas or for other purposes; however, the stark contrast to the coins with imagery concealed in pouches and the uniform treatment of perforated coins in this cemetery suggest that wearing a thin and blank coin was more desirable for open display within the attire. The imagery of the coins may have still carried amuletic values when concealed in a bag collection. It is difficult to assess if there was an awareness of Romanitas in this small isolated community and to what extent this awareness had an impact on the make-up of the pouch assemblages.

By examining the skeletal remains, the excavators argue that there was a lack of diversity in this community and little or no contacts to other groups (Evison and Hill 1996: ibid). This may also relate to the distinctive treatment of the coins in comparison to the discussed usage in Kent. The group of individuals wearing coins as pendants were buried in close proximity to each other, perhaps indicating social relations.

The most elaborate necklace, comprising two Roman coins in the centre alongside 14 amber and 2 glass beads, was that of the female adult inhumation in B75. No other grave goods were included, ruling out the factor that the inclusion of coins only occurred in very wealthy and prestigious graves. An interesting example is a coin found inside the right humerus of the female juvenile in grave B44 (Evison and Hill 1996: 83). The coin was pierced twice, due to a breakage of the first perforation, which suggests that it was deliberately re-pierced, presumably to facilitate its continued use and display by the wearer. The remainder of unperforated coins we found in positions which indicate possible bag collections. One of the burials, B6, included five Roman coins and a high quantity of grave goods. Furthermore the excavators relate women with coins in bag collections with wearing disc brooches decorated with ring-and-dot stamps (Evison and Hill 1996: 21). They observe further that the graves B6 and B89 are located at the edges of the cemetery, the former at the northwest corner and the latter at the southeast edge. B68 was midway those burials and near B75, which lead the excavators to the conclusion that the graves with unperforated coins are forming a parallel line throughout the cemetery (Evison and Hill 1996: ibid) (Fig. 3). The remaining graves with Roman coins B39, B44 and B75, all perforated and the majority worn on the neck, were clustered in plot V fairly closely together. Thus, these might be indications that the individuals including Roman coins were deliberately chosen and given their spatial distribution, had a relationship to each other. In the case of the individuals with unperforated coins, they may have had a different appearance with disc brooches than the rest of the community.

In this context and given that both cemeteries A and B were contemporary, it is intriguing that no Roman coins were found in cemetery A. Cemetery A did, however, demonstrate two incidences of use of a Roman object type not found in cemetery B: two pierced Roman spoon bowls which were included in two female inhumation burials (Fig. 5).
In contrast to the other burials, these graves were very well furnished with a high number of grave goods (Evison, Hill 1996: 77-78). According to its position at the left femur, the two spoon bowls may have occurred in bag collections. The stems of these copper alloy Roman spoons were missing and in both cases the bowl was pierced for suspension. This might suggest that they had once been worn or suspended, perhaps from a girdle. Indeed the example from grave A16 bore two perforations, and a beaded ring was threaded through one of the pierced holes. Similar to the distribution of burials in cemetery B, the two graves containing Roman spoon bowls appeared to be distinct markers in this cemetery. A16 was located at the northwest corner of the cemetery and A12 in the centre of the main cluster, forming a parallel line (Fig. 2). Given the observations at cemetery B, it might have been possible that another grave was located somewhere at the southeast edge. However, as the limits of the cemetery were not found, this cannot be said for certain.

Osteological analysis suggests that some of the graves in cemetery A were those of lepers and five individuals were identified as sufferers of spina bifida (Evison, Hill 1996: 38). In addition to this, there was a high non-adult death rate in comparison to cemetery B. As these are cemeteries active at the same time, it is suggested by the excavators that this particular community were segregated due to an outbreak of illness. Although bone preservation was insufficient in cemetery B to prove sickness there, given the small amount of graves and multiple burials with sickness in cemetery A, it can be suggested that this cemetery was made for a particular group of individuals. The non-presence of Roman coins and integration of suspended spoon bowls is interesting in its own right. It is difficult to discern the role of the individuals with spoon bowls in cemetery A – if they were not directly chosen to heal the sick in their community.

Although metal spoons in the Roman period are frequently associated with dining ware, bone spoons have been associated with spices and herbs and as measurements for medicine, which is also demonstrated by the notion of a “spoonful” as a measure mentioned in Roman medical texts (Eckardt 2014; forthcoming; Cool 2006: 50). As mentioned above, bag collections have also been ascribed amuletic values on the basis of the range of items they contain (Meaney 1981; Geake 1997). The presence of spoon bowls within these collections might concur with this. Sometimes these pouches contain objects with changed cultural values, such as coins with perforations. The perforation indicates that the coin has been originally suspended either from a necklace or another medium, but its purpose has changed as being part of a bag assemblage. Sometimes coins show more than one perforation, partly when the first one was broken off. This is an indication that the coin has been in use as a pendant over a long time period. Thus, it is possible that the perforated spoon bowls were suspended and used at first. However, after its usage, perhaps for medicine, its apotropaic value may have been increased by being included in a bag collection. Even if healing sickness was not their primary purpose, it can be said that these special items were unmatched with any other objects in the cemetery and thus, probably used by special individuals.

This sample suggests that with more wide-ranging research, more examples may emerge of the special use of Roman items in early medieval contexts. Another example that underlines this is grave 9 at Oxborough, West Norfolk. The cemetery consisted of 10 graves in total; however, only a single grave included Roman objects (Penn 1998). It is worth noting that this particular site was damaged by extended ploughing and only parts of an
assumed cemetery were excavated, situated around a mound (Penn 1998: 4). Due to its incompleteness, dating was difficult but some grave goods could be dated to the latter half of the 6th century (Penn 1998: 26). The grave with the Roman objects was the inhumation of a female mature adult, containing a copper alloy brooch beneath the chin and two Roman gold-in-glass beads forming part of a necklace (Fig. 6) (Penn 1998: 12). It is suggested that the brooch might have been suspended by a string on either side between two copper alloy brooches, which, in addition to the bead necklace, would have created a striking visual display. This individual was also distinctive as her skull was perforated with evidence of a partly healed neat hole. This is interpreted as the result of trepanation (Penn 1998: ibid).

Here, then, is another interesting example that suggests Roman objects were reused in the dress and assemblages of those with special status, in this case, sickness.

This selective study shows that Roman objects were capable of accumulating other connotations and values in early Anglo-Saxon society. They were certainly used in well-furnished graves which might suggest an association with wealth or prestige. However, other traditions are present, which are rare but not entirely unique, involving the use of Roman items in dress and bag assemblages in graves where individuals may have held a distinctive status. More work is needed but in any case it demonstrates that certain groups of individuals either chose to or were chosen for the incorporation of Roman objects in their lives. The roles and statuses which are associated with the usage of these items may have distinguished them from the rest of the community. In the case of Beckford, the distinction is underlined by spatial separation.

Echoes of the Past: Coins in hands and on skulls

A different and more wide-ranging tradition has been identified in this study which points to cross-regional practices involving the use of Roman coins in graves. The cemetery of Great Chesterford, Essex, comprised some 161 inhumations and 33 cremations. A low number of graves included Roman objects (Fig.6). The date of the early medieval cemetery was separated from Phase I to IV and ranged from AD 450 to 600; however, there were also some Roman cremations present in this cemetery (Evison 1994: p46). The majority of graves containing Roman objects were undatable. Of those datable, most of them dated to Phase I, AD 450 to 500, while a few dated to AD 500 to 575. Being located near a Roman cemetery and northwest of the Roman town, there were countless unstratified finds, however, only a few objects were intentionally selected for 14 individuals (Tab.4).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human remains</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Brooches</th>
<th>Belt buckles</th>
<th>Beads</th>
<th>Glass Fragments</th>
<th>Spindle whorl</th>
<th>Hair pin</th>
<th>Bracelet</th>
<th>Iron object</th>
<th>Pottery</th>
<th>In hands or on skull</th>
<th>At chest</th>
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**Figure 6 Distribution map Great Chesterford with phases, the graves containing Roman objects are marked after: © Evison, fig. 91, Council for British Archaeology**

**Table 4 Great Chesterford**

A female, inhumation 29, was buried with two coins; one was pierced twice due to the breakage of the first perforation and was located at the neck, forming part of a necklace and the other was placed underneath the fingers of the left hand (Evison 1994: 29) (Fig. 7). Two male burials also incorporated coins at the head of the grave and on the skull (Evison 1994: 113, 108). The inclusion of coins in graves where they have a clear association with the head or the hands is evident at other sites. In burial 37/38 at Bekesbourne II Aerodrome, two coins were recovered from an unsexed double burial, one placed in the hand of individual 38 and another at the waist of the inhumation in grave 37 (Richardson 2005: 128). From the position of the latter, it is evident that the coin belonged to a bag collection. It is widely known that the Franks placed coins in the mouths and hands of their deceased in the 5th to 6th centuries (White 1988: 157; Effros 2003: 164; Halsall 2007: 150f). Examples are also known from Late Roman cemeteries such as at Lankhills, Winchester, comprising 25 graves with coins either in the hands or mouth (Evison 1994: 27; Clarke 1979: 357). Such practices have been argued as a continuity of a Roman tradition, representing payments for the journey to the afterlife, the so-called ‘Charon’s Obol’. This practice has been argued by White to be absent in early Anglo-Saxon England, but these examples suggest otherwise (White 1988: 163; Geake 1997). Grave 29 was located within the plot of Phase I, AD 450 to 500, while grave 122 of a male inhumation was situated within the plot dating to Phase II, AD 475 to 525, suggesting some overlap in dating. The male inhumation of grave 149, however, belonged to the plot of the later Phase III, AD 525 to 575. Grave 122 is of particular interest, as it is positioned fairly centrally within a cluster of
Graves 122 and 29 of a male and female inhumation respectively, were yet again well furnished, incorporating 10 to 11 objects. Grave 29 was one of three graves containing a perforated Roman coin included within a necklace. The other two burials with perforated coins, 111 and 34, were located in close proximity to burials 122 and 29, forming roughly a cluster. Both graves were those of female infants; 111 was located above grave 122, while 34 was proximate to 29. The coin in grave 29 was pierced twice due to breakage and in both cases the position of the perforation suggests the image would have been worn upright. There was a difference in weight between the coins of grave 29, as the one worn at the neck weighed 2.77g, whereas the possibly Charon Obol’s coin weighed 19.62g (Evison 1994: 87).

The majority of Roman coins occurred in infant burials and one of them was exceptionally well-furnished. Generally infants were buried with one coin, however, the infant burial 136 incorporated nine Roman coins, placed in four lots near the foot (Evison 1994: 136). Additionally, in infant grave 71, an exclusively Roman assemblage was deposited, including an iron finger ring with decorated bezel and a coin (Fig. 8). The position of the grave is quite distinct too, as it was situated at the south eastern edge of the cemetery. The association with burying infants with Roman items is significant; we can say here that the rite was not something which related to status or knowledge accrued through age. These individuals died very young and the inclusion of coins may be associated with a group with special status.

The cemetery again demonstrated the diversity of Roman objects incorporated in grave assemblages, including hobnails, a bracelet, a glass bowl, an iron razor and a bronze pin (Evison 1994: 60, 96, 103, 107) (Tab. 4). Additionally, there was an example of Roman objects used in an exceptional burial. The female inhumation 127 is argued, through the presence of a foetus in her pelvis, to have died during childbirth. She is the only individual within this cemetery wearing a Roman lead pattern for the mould of an annular brooch, comprising part of a flat ring with triangular installations.

Graves containing Roman objects, including that of a female infant in 111 with a twice-perforated Roman coin just above the grave. It is also interesting to note that the majority of graves at Great Chesterford including coins are positioned within close distance to each other in the northern and north-eastern part of the excavated cemetery.
Being a mixed-rite cemetery, it is important to note that Great Chesterford also provided evidence for the re-use of Roman objects in cremation rites, as cremation 32 was covered by the flat base of a Roman pot and coins were placed near the cremations 26 and 29 (Evson 1994: 21). Again this practice is distinctive and worthy of more extensive study in relation to the wider panoply of distinctive Roman reuse identified in this initial study.

These differing perceptions of Roman items may be related to spatial separations on a regional level, diverse organisations and values within communities or the amount of contact these groups have to other communities in and beyond England.

**Linking material culture with places**

This paper reveals the potential of gaining insights into the curatorial practices from past societies by drawing on key elements such as funerary context, object positioning and use wear analysis. Biological data and spatial positioning within the cemetery are also valuable factors. The usage of Roman items is considered here within the conceptual framework of the ‘past in the past’. It is widely recognised that cemeteries were often deliberately sited near or within prehistoric and Roman monuments and a quarter of known Anglo-Saxon burial sites are suggested to have direct relationships to ancient antecedent features. Of these, barrows of Bronze Age date are by far the most frequently used feature (Williams 1998: 92-94). Roman sites were also adopted in the 5th to 7th centuries as places for the burial of the dead (Bell: 1998).

Such associations in the 6th and 7th centuries have frequently been interpreted as ‘elite-power strategies’, signalling connections to an ancestral past as a way of claiming land or land ownership (Lucy 1992: 2000; Williams 1997; 1998). These do seem to be especially connected with the arrival in the 7th century of larger kingdoms and dynastic claims to land and territory (Williams 1997; Semple 2013). The distinction between reusing prehistoric and Roman features has not, however, been sufficiently explored in this recent scholarship. Attempts have been made by some to associate emerging elite groups with symbols of power and prestige drawn from Roman traditions and goods originating in the contemporary Late Antique world of the 6th and 7th centuries (Geake 1997: 135-36).

It is debatable whether the re-use of Roman objects by early medieval populations was regarded in the same way as the re-use of prehistoric or indeed Roman monuments. First, if there was an increased interest in drawing on ancient monuments for landownership during the 7th to 8th centuries, it should be pointed out that recent examinations suggest a decline of re-used Roman antiquities from the 7th century onwards. This corresponds to the aforementioned emergence of prestigious goods in exceptional rich burials, either imitating Roman traditions or being exports from the Byzantine world (Geake 1997: 135f; Bruce-Mitford and Evans 1975). However, the evidence discussed here illustrates that not all items found in graves come from rich assemblages and many objects are heavily worn, in some instances repaired, suggesting they were already significant to Anglo-Saxon communities during their lifetimes. Considering the wide range of objects included in grave assemblages and their varying treatment indicated by use wear analysis, it seems that the insertion of reused Roman objects carried a multitude of connotations, contrasting with the apparent uniformity and scale of monument reuse.

**Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this paper was to shed new light on the significance of Roman antiquities in the process of creating identities relating to selected groups within early Anglo-Saxon communities. The frequent low percentage of burials containing Roman objects across all regions underlines the distinctiveness of the rite.

By selecting case studies from different areas, the intention of this paper was to illustrate that the reuse of Roman objects in Anglo-Saxon graves is not uniform, but that there are many variations from one cemetery to another depending on individual factors. In the Kentish cemeteries examined here, the insertion of Roman objects is rather uniform, with a wide range of Roman items occurring in well-furnished graves. They were either openly worn at the body or concealed in bag assemblages.

At Beckford and Oxborough, the individuals buried with Roman items were distinctive, perhaps for health or status, demonstrating that the meaning of including these items could change and in these instances were associated with selective rites.
Some rites seem to reflect Roman traditions such as the inclusion of coins on heads and in hands and there is evidence that these rites were carried out in 4th-century Roman Britain (Philpott 1991: 115). Moreover, examples are also known from the continent. In Francia, silver and gold coins were placed with the deceased in similar patterns to Bekesbourne II Aerodrome, and Great Chesterford (White 1988: 157, Effros 2003: 164; Halsall 2007: 150f).

In sum, the use of Roman objects in early Anglo-Saxon graves can no longer be regarded as a universal phenomenon, but rather should be assessed through case studies and contextual factors. Curated Roman material needs to be examined in the light of signalling different identities and statuses within distinct groups of communities. Future work will expand on this topic with more examined case studies around the coastal line of England, East Anglia and Kent, and the results will be compared and contrasted with evidence from case studies on the continent.

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