

Herman Ramm Award 2023

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Abstract:

Previous studies of the burial rites granted to old adults in early Anglo-Saxon England have been limited, partly due to difficulties identifying those older than 46+ using traditional osteological methods. To improve our understanding of Anglo-Saxon age-associated burial rites and reconsider the biological and social age presentations of old adults, this dissertation considers a wide range of archaeological evidence, including osteological, artefactual, and funerary contexts. This research has shown that age was a factor considered during burial construction, but the treatment of old adults was more complex than a simple decline in material culture. Several individuals expressed burials of a reduced or adapted gender expression, whereas others retained a fully gendered youthful assemblage. This dissertation theorises that this shows an age-associated social threshold distinguishing between younger and older adulthood in the later life course stages. In some cases, social age presentation may have been informed by biological age appearance, as evidenced archaeologically through age-associated pathological changes that would have had a visible impact during life. However, this dissertation has also shown that the selection of a burial assemblage for older individuals was also greatly influenced by other aspects of personhood, including kinship, cultural background and economic status.