

AAP 387 - Death and Burial in Anglo-Saxon and medieval England

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General Information

This is a new module which, similarly to some of the other modules in the CILASS project, uses a two-hour format to deliver one hour's lecture and one hour of group student activity. It therefore provides a good example of a module in which an IBL approach is continuously and substantially utilised throughout, combined with traditional elements of lecture-based delivery and essay-based assessment.

IBL components

Independent inquiry

The module contains three smaller pieces of assessment, one of which is comprised of entirely student-led inquiry. This involves a fieldtrip to the church at Bakewell to study the medieval grave slabs housed in the porch as well as other medieval features inside the church. Students will have already become familiar with the grave slabs via images of these available on WebCT as well as with general methods of analysing this information via pre-class reading. Students are asked to fill out a worksheet as well as to provide some general interpretation of mortuary practices thereby carrying out a 'mini' research exercise insofar as data is first gathered, then utilised in the deployment of an argument.

The inclusion of this, and two other smaller pieces of assessment (one is based on a practical class involving an introduction to skeletal analysis and the other is an image analysis) in addition to the two major pieces of work, encourages much wider student engagement with the content of the module than would otherwise be the case.

Collaborative learning

An IBL approach is extensively used in each of the one-hour slots that follow the lectures, much of which involves group work. In the second hour of the class in Sessions 1-6, students will be asked to read a synthetic piece of a site report or part of BAR volume which has previously been assigned. Each week they will be asked to consider how, if at all, the author addresses the following:

- The significance of gendered distinctions,
- The assignment of status among the buried population,
- The treatment of infants in the cemetery,
- The treatment of the elderly in the cemetery,
- Issues concerning health and diet.

In Session 7, the hour subsequent to the lecture will be devoted to the groups feeding back to the larger class on their findings on a couple of these points each. The class as a whole will then be asked to reflect on the differences between the various authors' interpretations of and weight given to these issues, thus enabling a consideration of historiographical issues and the constructed nature of archaeological knowledge as well as aiding in the development of group-work skills.

Critical engagement with sources

In order to develop students' critical thinking and evaluation skills, Assignment Three (the mid-term report) asks students to take an essentially critical approach to cemetery evidence, thus substantially developing their higher-order Information-Literacy skills.

Students will pick a particular cemetery from a list provided, and the assignment, should as a minimum, address the following:

- The nature of the excavation (e.g. the circumstances of excavation, the comprehensiveness of excavation etc.)
- The nature of the excavated graves (e.g. what was found, what levels of preservation were there, had the site been disturbed etc.)
- The content and appropriateness of the interpretations of the site offered by the excavator, and, where applicable, those who have subsequently studied the cemetery
- The broader context of the cemetery (e.g. how different from or similar to other broadly contemporary sites is the cemetery, what light does it throw on contemporary social, political or economic circumstances etc.)