



# RAPTORNESS: THE 'BODIES' OF HUMANS BECOMING-WITH BIRDS OF PREY IN THE ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

**Robert Wallis**

## Abstract

*In this article I consider several instances in which the body parts of birds of prey, namely talons, were brought into relationship with the bodies of humans in both cremation and inhumation funerary settings. Certain objects decorated with imagery including raptor body parts, namely square-headed brooches, were also brought into relationship with the bodies of humans and body parts of raptors in inhumations specifically. Raptor body parts, images of raptors and the objects they decorated were being treated like human bodies in ways that challenge speciesist distinctions and anthropocentrism, and boundaries between living beings and objects outside of modern mechanistic accounts of the body and humanistic conceptions of the subject/object divide. Drawing upon multispecies, relational and new materialist thinking, I argue that the evidence is suggestive of ontological contiguities between humans, animals and objects and also explore how these human, raptor and object intersections may articulate different forms of human-raptor sociality over time in early medieval England.*

**Keywords:** early medieval England, raptor bodies, square-headed brooches, Style I art, human-raptor relations, post-humanism, human-raptor sociality

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## Biographical note

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Banner image: Detail of niello-inlaid engraving of a haloed eagle-headed St. John the Evangelist upon gold plaque from Brandon, Suffolk. (©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence)

# RAPTORNESS: THE 'BODIES' OF HUMANS BECOMING-WITH BIRDS OF PREY IN THE ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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A range of visual and material evidence suggests that birds of prey were recognised as important other-than-human beings by the people of early medieval England. Take the example of a striking gold signet ring dating to around the late sixth to early seventh century, which is highly decorated with Salin 'Style II' art (Figs. 1.1 & 1.2). The imagery on the bezel of the north-west Essex Anglo-Saxon ring includes an anthropomorphic figure holding a long cross in one hand while the other intersects or fuses with the legs of a bird of prey, with a further raptor positioned above the pairing. The anthropomorph also has a beak-like nose and hair styled like the tail feathers of the raptor above. This imagery raises intriguing questions about how early medieval people understood their own and other bodies, particularly those of birds of prey, at around the time of the 'conversion' to Christianity. In previous work I have considered this ring within the wider context of the archaeology of falconry and the possible role of hawking as a high-status hunting pursuit in the negotiation of that 'conversion' (Wallis, 2020). I have also explored how perceptions of birds of prey may have changed over time, from numinous beings esteemed within an ideology of predation to hunting accessories valued in fiscal terms as part of a frivolous high-status pastime, one unbefitting the clergy (Wallis, 2025).

In this article I shall consider several instances in which the body parts of birds of prey, namely talons, were brought into relationship with the bodies of humans in both cremation and inhumation funerary settings. Certain objects decorated with imagery including raptor body parts, namely square-headed brooches, were also brought into relationship with the bodies of humans and body parts of raptors in inhumations specifically. In tune with recent thinking on early medieval ontologies, I question the back-projection of an essentialist humanistic conception of the world and approach the period with 'ontological



Figure 1.1: The northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon ring. (Photo: Courtesy of Saffron Walden Museum)

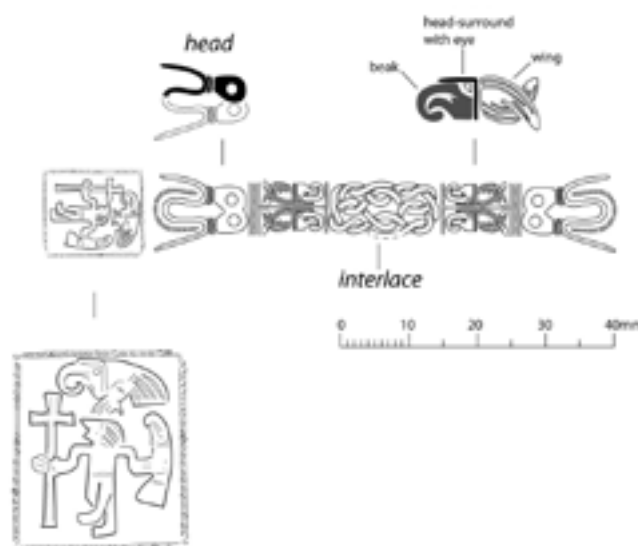


Figure 1.2: Line drawing of the decoration on the northwest Essex ring. (Courtesy of Chris Fern)

openness' so as to 'recognize a world where bodies and persons could be articulated in rich, complex and decidedly more-than-human ways' (Eriksen & Kay, 2022, p.334; see also Meents, 2017; Price, 2023). If 'personhood was recognized in its extension through multiple bodies, human and animal' and 'could inhere to an artifact, a human, or manifest in human and animal forms simultaneously' (Eriksen & Kay, 2022, pp.336–7), it is apposite to re-consider the archaeological and art-historical evidence for early English human-raptor intersections in light of posthumanist thinking (e.g. Vilaça, 2005; Henare et al., 2007; Witmore, 2007; Santos-Granero, 2009; Boyd, 2017; Ratican, 2024). Raptor body parts, images of raptors and the objects they decorated were being treated like human bodies in ways that challenge speciesist distinctions and

anthropocentrism, and boundaries between living beings and objects outside of modern mechanistic accounts of the body and the subject/object divide. Drawing on multispecies, relational and new materialist theory, I argue that the evidence is suggestive of ontological contiguities between humans, animals and objects (e.g. Armstrong Oma, 2010; Astor-Aguilera & Harvey, 2018; Pilaar Birch, 2018; Crellin et al., 2021). I also explore how these human, raptor and object intersections may articulate different forms of human-raptor sociality over time in early Anglo-Saxon England.

The faunal remains of birds of prey are rare in archaeological contexts, partly due to preservation conditions (e.g. Crabtree, 1995; Holmes, 2014, p.47; Serjeantson, 2023, p.1). And yet raptors figure prominently as important beings in the thinking and material culture of many societies (e.g. Wallis, 2023a). Accordingly, in early medieval England raptor remains are rare but the imagery of them in art is profuse, as is the case elsewhere in Europe (e.g. Kulakov & Markovets, 2004; Nugent, 2010, p.38; Price, 2023). As George Speake (1980, p.81) identified, '[i]n Anglo-Saxon ornament of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, exceptions to the predatory bird are rare'. The earliest faunal remains are from the cemetery of Spong Hill, Norfolk, dating to the fifth to sixth centuries, where two raptor talons were found in cremation burial urns (Bond, 1994, p.134). Both were perforated, perhaps so that they could be worn in some way, for example on a necklace, but assumptions that they were simply decorative or apotropaic are problematic. The most complete example, from vessel 2817, 'is at least 25mm long' (p.134) and while the original catalogue tentatively posits 'goshawk' (*Accipiter gentilis*) (Hills et al., 1994, p.79) the species remains uncertain (Dobney & Jaques, 2002, p.16). Amongst the cremated human bone, the talon was mixed with various objects including fragments of a copper-alloy cruciform or small-long brooch, a fragment of carpenter's iron spoon-bit (used for boring holes), coloured glass beads and an antler or bone comb (Hills et al., 1994, p.79). The second, incomplete talon, also pierced, was found in cremation vessel 2439, together with antler comb fragments, coloured glass beads and a fragmentary pig carpal (Hills et al., 1987, p.47; Bond, 1994, p.134).

Cremations like this present many challenges for investigation (e.g. McKinley, 1994a), including archaeologists' functionalist preoccupations with determining the sex, gender, age, ethnicity and status of the individual(s) interred (Williams, 2006, p.37), as well as the problem of imposing mutable categories such as these onto the lives of past peoples (e.g. Fowler, 2004; Williams, 2013). The inclusion of beads in both

Spong Hill cremations and brooches in one of them, categories of objects usually worn by Anglo-Saxon women, may indicate that the deceased were 'female', but the inclusion of a carpenter's tool in vessel 2817 is also suggestive of 'male' gender. Grave goods are not a clear indicator of gender because some of the objects deposited may have been those of the mourners (e.g. Parker Pearson, 1999; King, 2004), and instances in which objects from both sexes are found together suggest that more than one person was interred or that there may have been a degree of gender fluidity (e.g. Knüsel & Ripley, 2000), as in the case of vessel 2817. The raptor talons included with the cremated human remains add a further layer of interpretative complexity (e.g. Bond, 1996) and suggest that personhood may have been fluid not only in terms of gender but also across 'species' and 'body' boundaries (e.g. Bond & Worley, 2006; see Marshall et al. in this volume).

The cremation rite involves a pyrotechnic transformation of the human body/person and other things included on the pyre (Bond, 1996). The inclusion of animal remains suggests 'deliberate ambiguity' as well as 'metamorphosis between elements of animals and people' with animals as 'transformation agents' or 'catalysts' involved in the de-aggregation of the deceased's body/identity and reconstitution of a new identity as an ancestor (Williams, 2001, p.206; 2013). As Howard Williams suggests, '[i]t is almost as if the new body of the deceased consisted of the personalities of both humans and animals...[w]ith the cinerary urn 'a metaphorical "skin" for the deceased's "second body" following the cremation' (2004, pp.281–2). The Spong Hill cremations do suggest that early medieval people had very different understandings of their bodies to our own, as well as the bodies of the birds of prey whose talons they made use of, and indeed the other objects incorporated into the cinerary vessels. The talons from Spong Hill have traditionally been interpreted as 'amulets', 'beads' or 'talismans', that is, decorative and/or apotropaic in function (McKinley, 1994b, p.97; Bond, 1994, p.134; also Meaney, 1981, p.134; Sykes, 2015, p.70). If the latter, they may pertain to the specific role of healer or 'cunning' person and while this role was not gendered exclusively female, eagle talons found in graves thought to be those of women have been interpreted as relating to such presumed feminine concerns as fertility, protection, pregnancy, childbirth, illness, disease and death (Meaney, 1981, p.134; Dickinson, 1993; Pollington, 2000; Sykes, 2015, p.70; Meents, 2017, p.396). But interpretations around apotropaism do risk imposing modern scientific and anthropocentric thinking onto the past, for example,

by assuming that 'animisms' (e.g. Harvey, 2005, 2014) mistakenly project 'magical thinking' (Greenwood, 2005) onto inanimate objects, thereby devaluing their ontological reality and closing off more sensitive treatment.

The talons deposited in the cremation urns at Spong Hill indicate that the worlds of humans and raptors were not separate but, in some instances, intimately engaged. I want to consider the form of this engagement as arguably more than an unequal form of interaction, in which agency is simply acted out by humans onto passive others, with raptors firmly on the receiving end. Karen Barad's theory of agential realism may be useful here (see e.g. Fowler, 2013; Marshall & Alberti, 2014; Goldhahn, 2020, for the application of this theory in archaeology). Barad proposes that agency is not an inherent property to be acted out in one direction but rather a dynamism of forces that emerges through relationships (2007, p. 141). In this thinking, both raptors and humans were agentive and intra-active in co-constitutive relationality, in a world that is not 'pre-formed' and 'out there' but which is inalienable, in composition and becoming. The raptor talon pendants at Spong Hill should not be understood in a binary manner, in which they were once parts of living birds of prey that were then taken and made into passive objects by active human subjects. Outside of modern European thinking, it is quite normal that 'material things become subjectivised' and 'subjectivities become materialised' (Hill, 2009, pp.235, 236), and that bodies are understood as 'chronically unstable' or unbounded (e.g. Vilaça, 2005; also Fowler, 2004; Marshall et al. in this volume). In first millennium Northern Europe, as Eriksen and Kay (2022, p.335) set out, things we term 'objects' 'were animated or required treatment in specific ways. A range of artefacts probably fell outside Western subject-object dichotomies. Indeed, this may have encompassed a spectrum of non-human personhoods, agencies and assemblages'. This possibility disrupts the modern categorisation of the Spong Hill raptor talons as amuletic artefacts, in other words as passive objects incorrectly understood to be invested with magical agency by those that used them. In more nuanced and yet eminently practical terms, the talon pendants provided a vital connection between human and raptor which elided such dualisms as animate/inanimate, subject/object and life/death.

Many indigenous ontologies resonate with this line of approach (see papers in Wallis, 2023a). Amerindian communities for example, esteem raptors' flying and hunting skills and recognise that these are qualities that humans can 'muster through the use of materials that either embody or transmit them' such as raptor

body parts (Carocci, 2023, p.142). People acquire the spiritual power of birds of prey through dreams and visions of them, and this power can be 'formally transferred from one person to another, or tapped through the incorporation of a bird or part of that bird (feather, claw, or bone) into an object' (Chandler et al., 2016, pp.2–3, also p.72). Clothing the body in this way is transformative, so that wearing a raptor talon, for instance, makes inner parts of the person visible (Harris & Robb, 2012, p.670; Ingold, 2000, p.94). Amerindian ontologies certainly do not map straightforwardly onto the early medieval past, but these ways of knowing and being are useful for thinking with. This is because they help to destabilise understandings inherent in modern Western humanistically informed ontological frameworks. In the case of early medieval England, the association between the body parts of animals and bodies of deceased humans suggests that people believed they could take on certain desirable attributes of the species concerned (Poole, 2013, pp.68–9; also Poole, 2015). In other words, the body parts of birds of prey such as the talons deposited in the Spong Hill vessels were recognised as potentially powerful things, resonant with qualities of what might be broadly termed 'raptorness' (Wallis, 2025, in press). By this I mean that they encompass raptors' distinctive aerial, predatory and protective qualities and that raptor body parts acted synecdochally to establish an intra-active relationship between human and raptor.

When considered in this way, as potentially vibrant with intra-active raptorness, each of the raptor talons at Spong Hill would have had the potential to affect not only humans but also other objects or things that they were deposited with. They can be approached, in María Nieves Zedeño's terms, as 'index objects' which by 'proximity' can 'modify or altogether alter the properties of any object, human or place that becomes associated with it' (2013, p.124; also 2009). When they are brought together in this way, they form what Timothy Pauketat calls a 'relational field' or 'bundle' which mediates or articulates relationships (2013, p.34; for the application of this approach in archaeology see e.g. Fowler 2013; Moradi, 2017; Brück & Jones 2018; Wallis, 2023b). This bundle is potentially 'cosmically powerful' when 'the pathways of human and non-human beings or things-in-motion converge and whenever the activities of people might be witnessed by gods' (Pauketat, 2013, pp.27–8). In this thinking, the qualities of raptorness materialised in raptor body parts as vibrant 'living entities' and were generative in peoples' identify-formation through their life course (Chandler et al., 2016, p.3; also Meents, 2017). They were also active in their after-lives, as suggested by the proximal

bundling of the raptor talons with other objects/things in the cremations at Spong Hill, which may have been a way of memorialising forms of ancestral personhood in which humanness and raptoriness were co-mingled.

In addition to the Spong Hill cremations, the faunal remains of birds of prey have been found accompanying early inhumation burials at Alfriston, East Sussex, and Temple Hill, Kent. The raptor body parts interred there were, again, perforated talons, but in these cases they have been identified securely as belonging to eagles. Eagles are the largest raptors native to the British Isles, with golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) requiring large tracts of open land to hunt. Since much of England was forested in the early medieval period they would have been a rare sight for the early Anglo-Saxons (Wallis, 2017, p.7). White tailed sea eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), on the other hand, mainly frequent coastal areas, and with Alfriston less than four miles from the Sussex coast at Cuckmere Haven, and Temple Hill overlooking the Thames Marshes, these awesome birds may well have been a regular sight. It is possible, then, that the eagle talons deposited in these locations were sourced locally, although they could also have been traded some distance, including across the English Channel or the North Sea.

At Alfriston the excavators found a perforated eagle talon in grave 43 while a piece of bone, cut into the shape of a talon and perforated for suspension, was found in grave 28 with a broken ring still in the hole (unfortunately lost) (Griffith & Salzmänn, 1914; Griffith, 1915). The talon from grave 43 that survives in the collection of Lewes Castle Museum (Fig. 1.3) has been identified as that of a white-tailed sea eagle and was accompanied by various 'high-status' objects including a conical glass beaker, a great square-headed gilt copper-alloy brooch (Fig. 1.4), various beads including two perforated Roman coins and sixteen silver rings (Welch, 1983, p. 81). Notable grave goods accompanying the talon-shaped bone pendant in grave 28 included a great square-headed copper-alloy brooch (Fig. 1.5) and a pair of small square-headed brooches (Fig. 1.6), a small glass bowl, a pentagonal quartz crystal bead and 169 glass beads. Martin G. Welch suggests that these two graves and another containing a great square-headed brooch were probably deposited within a decade of one another in the middle of the sixth century (1983, p. 189).

As with cremations, inhumations present interpretative challenges for archaeologists (e.g. Stoodley, 2000; Williams, 2006). The grave goods suggest these persons were women and the great square-headed brooches and glass vessels in both graves, as well as the Roman coins in grave 43, point to



Figure 1.3: Perforated eagle talon (pendant), 5th–6th century, grave 43, Alfriston, East Sussex. (Photo: By permission Barbican House Museum, The Sussex Archaeological Society)



Figure 1.4: Great square-headed brooch (A001.43.2) from grave 43, Alfriston, East Sussex. (Photo: By permission Barbican House Museum, The Sussex Archaeological Society)





Figure 1.5 Great square-headed brooch from grave 28, Alfriston, East Sussex, scale 2:1 (photograph John Hines, reproduced with permission).



Figure 1.6 Small square-headed brooches from grave 43, Alfriston, East Sussex (photograph John Hines, reproduced with permission).

high-status. According to Hines, great square-headed brooches, especially, were the most complex and luxurious of elite dress jewellery produced during the fifth to sixth centuries in England, displaying command over resources, social status, political power and gender identity, and the graves containing them are among the wealthiest in terms of quantity and quality of objects (Hines, 1997, pp. 1, 294, 301). Alfriston graves 28 and 43 are indeed remarkable for being 'the richest female assemblages in Sussex' (Welch, 1983, p. 189). The presence of eagle talons lends particular nuance to these two graves and the way in which their sex/gender, status and social role has been interpreted.

The eagle talon in grave 43 was found on the chest, maybe worn as part of a necklace, while the talon-shaped bone in grave 28 was located at the waist perhaps as part of a belt or chatelaine (Welch, 1983, p. 189). Grave 43 is also notable for including a pouch of six copper-alloy rings and a cowrie shell, this sort of feature along with the talons perhaps relating to the ritual, healing and/or divinatory paraphernalia of cunning women (p. 189). Welch proposes that '[s]o similar are these two graves that it is tempting, but not necessarily correct, to suggest a close family relationship, perhaps sisters-in-law, if not sisters' (p. 189). Interestingly, the woman buried in grave 43 was also disabled by the left femur becoming fused (ankylosed) in the hip joint resulting from tuberculosis as a child, meaning that she would have needed crutches to walk (p. 36). As hers was the most high-status burial in the cemetery, it seems that her disability marked her out as special in some way. Perhaps because she lived following a life-threatening illness, her disability was believed to contribute to her spiritual powers as a cunning woman (see also Marshall et al. in this volume).

Cremation involves the complete de-aggregation of the person and reconstitution into another form, potentially as an 'ancestor' (variously understood). In contrast, inhumation keeps the human body intact and the deposition of grave goods would seem to work in socially constituted arrangements in relation to that body. The brooches, beads and eagle talons, as well as the way in which some of these things are decorated with Salin (1904) 'style I' art, indicates that furnished inhumation funerary practices established a close link between the in-tact body, ornaments/objects, components of the person and the post-death journey. The different funerary settings of graves 43 and 28 may also show how intra-active relationships with eagles were articulated differently by these persons and/or their mourners. The secure identification of the talon deposited in grave 43 as that of an eagle is worth some attention. The Anglo-Saxon English drew

on Roman precedents in some of their thinking, so it is notable that the eagle was the definitive symbol of Roman power and was subsequently adopted in post-Roman iconography as relating to ‘celestially-derived qualities and earthly power’ (Dickinson, 2005, p.158). The third century CE writers Cassius Dio and Herodian state that eagles were important in the funerals of Roman Emperors, with the release of an eagle timed with the lighting of the cremation pyre, the bird ‘symbolising the ascent of the emperor’s soul to heaven’ (Sykes, 2015, pp.119–20). Within a North European idiom, Lotte Hedeager (2011) considers how eagles and other raptors in the art of southern Scandinavia are associated with Odin and his predatory attributes of hunting and war. And in Anglo-Saxon England specifically, Tania M. Dickinson suggests that the eagle imagery on shields evidences a ‘bundle of connected ideas: a martial adult masculinity; subscription to a pagan cult, probably of Woden/Oðinn; a responsibility and capacity to exercise protection; and hence an authority to exercise power’ (2002, p.162). An emphasis on the predator-prey relationship in Anglo-Saxon thinking and an early medieval ‘ideology of predation’ have also been explored (Nugent, 2010, p.38; Pluskowski, 2010; Wallis, 2017). A striking visual example is the hawk-with-prey motif on the Sutton Hoo purse lid (e.g. Hicks, 1986; Dickinson, 2005, p.158, n.122).

While these previous considerations of early medieval thinking on eagles are interesting, the specific human-eagle assemblage shown in Alfriston grave 43 is less suggestive of symbolism and, rather contradictorily, male martial aggression, than it is of other forms of human-raptor intra-active relationship. Joakim Goldhahn’s concept of ‘eagleness’ may hold value here. Applying Barad’s agential realist thinking to human-eagle relationships in Northern Europe, he encourages us to consider ‘how eagles intra-act – their eagleness’, and how ‘the agencies of eagles contribute...actively to our interpretations of past worldings’ (2020, pp.64, 68; also, Goldhahn, 2023). Goldhahn cites examples of eagle lore in Northern Europe which were concerned with how to address potential eagle attacks on livestock and children. While the predatory abilities of eagles are esteemed in some instances, then, in others they are feared. Livestock can be lost to eagles and humans, or at least children small enough to be carried away by eagles, can become prey too. Added to this, Goldhahn notes that raptorial behaviour is not only aggressive but also defensive, particularly when female birds of prey protect their nest, eggs and young. As such, he considers eagles as agents involved in protective magical practices in which offensive qualities were generated in ‘contra-action’, a ‘defence that goes on

the offensive’ (2020, p.67). If grave 43 was the burial of a cunning woman, then perhaps the accompanying eagle talon indicates that she recognised eagles as helpers she could draw upon in her protective/healing/divinatory practices, using their body parts as object-allies which enacted aggressively defensive female eagleness.

It is problematic to back-project folklore and later medieval ideas such as Norse mythology surrounding eagles (e.g. Price, 2010; Hedeager, 2011). But it is worth noting the precise use of eagle body parts, including talons, in the Anglo-Saxon metrical charm *wip wenum*, ‘against wens’ (recorded in the twelfth century; British Library, Royal MS. 4 A XIV):

*penne, penne,            penchichenne,*  
*Under fot polues,        under ueper earnes,*  
*under earnes clea,      a þu gepeornie.*

Wen, wen, little wen,  
Under wolf’s foot, under eagle’s wing,  
Under eagle’s claw – ever may you wither.

This charm or *galdor/gealdor* (incantation, divination, enchantment, charm, magic, sorcery) was presumably used in healing practices to remove sickness (Clark Hall, 2006, p.147). ‘*Wen/wenn/penne*’ translates as ‘swelling’, ‘tumour’ and/or ‘disease-spirit’ (see respectively, Pollington, 2000, p.165; Clark Hall, 2006, p.403; Grendon, 1909). The phrase ‘*earnas clea*’ suggests eagle talons were part of the healer’s tool-kit to treat these *penne*. The consistent source of sickness in Anglo-Saxon literature is a class of other-than-human beings termed *ælfes*, ‘elves’, who fired arrows of disease, ‘elf-shot’ into humans (Hall, 2005, p.4). Records of elf-charms in late Anglo-Saxon England show that healers attempted to treat such attacks with purgative methods, for example, by blowing, smoking or pricking the elf out (Jolly, 1996, p.108). The charm *Wið færstice*, ‘against a stitch’, possibly dating to the tenth century is among four addressing elves in the manuscript (‘MS London British Library Harley 585’; see Hall, 2007a, pp.109–110). Thomas Oswald Cockayne translates *Lacnunga* as ‘Remedies’, indicating that this was a ‘leechbook’ or healer’s manual (1864–6) Part of *Wið færstice* states:

*scyld ðū ðē nū þū ðysne nīð genesan mote*  
*ūt lýtēl spere gif hēr inne sīe*  
*...ic him oðerne eft wille sændan*  
*flēogende flāne forane tōgēanes*

shield yourself now, that you may escape this evil  
 Out, little spear, if herein you be!  
 ...I back to them again will send another  
 a flying dart against them in return

(Jolly, 1996, p.139)

The aim appears to be to 'shield' or protect the patient, to 'out' or remove the 'spear' of sickness and 'return' the 'flying dart' to 'them', perhaps elves. Such textual sources are considerably later than the archaeological evidence discussed here, but elves were arguably a 'social reality' for an extended period in Anglo-Saxon England (Hall, 2007b, p.142). This is evinced, for example, in place and personal names and also in their prominence in some of the earliest texts, including *Beowulf* (Hall, 2007a). Indeed, belief in them persisted after the conversion to Christianity (e.g. Jolly, 1996). Bringing these various textual strands into dialogue with the Alfriston case opens the possibility that the eagle-talon pendant in grave 43 was used in the healing of *penne*, by pricking or cutting out elf-shot. To this should be added that blood-letting is a well-attested healing practice in the period (Pollington, 2000). The use of eagle talons to facilitate this may have involved a surgical-magical contra-action synecdochally presencing the aggressive-defensive qualities of female eagle-allies.

The assemblage in grave 43 included an actual eagle talon but in grave 28 the object deposited was an animal bone shaped into the likeness of an eagle talon, a notable contrast worthy of analysis. The excavators described the object as an 'imitation' (Griffith & Salzmann, 1914, p.53; Griffith, 1915, p.210). From a modern scientific perspective, the 'talon' is only such in appearance, but this fails to account for its possible integrity as an actual eagle talon for its wearer(s), user(s) and viewers. The concept of sympathetic magic would allow that its shape, by affinity, made it stand in for a real eagle talon, but this too makes 'magical' thinking around the copy scientifically incorrect. Postmodern philosophy permits that something which is imitative can be 'perfectly real' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p.238, also pp.273–4). The simulation can even be more definitive of the real than reality itself, becoming 'hyperreal' (Baudrillard, 2004). And in some Indigenous contexts, mimesis is not fantastical but facilitates a cosmically powerful reification of mythology (Taussig, 1993). These concerns over the mimetic object relate to debates over images and artworks as representations and symbols. In some instances, artefact and artworks elide the subject/object divide and they can be non- or anti-representational because they do not just mimic reality (Jones, 2017, pp.116–17;

Harris, 2018). Instead, they 'enact' and shape it (Jones, 2012, p.196). The animal bone shaped like an eagle talon, then, not only resembles an eagle talon but like its familiar in grave 43 instantiated, presenced and enacted culturally specific qualities of raptorness and specifically eagleness. To its users, it was probably a perfectly real eagle talon.

The co-mingling of human and raptor bodies in early-Anglo-Saxon funerary assemblages is also shown in the treatment of human and animal bodies in Style I art. This is a form of decoration which includes raptorial imagery and is found on several of the objects deposited in graves 28 and 43, most notably on the great-square headed brooches. Given their size and weight, these brooches must have been cumbersome and a hindrance when worn (Hines, 1997, p.293). Likewise eagle talons, the length of a human finger and very sharp, would have been awkward and perhaps hazardous to wear. Both objects seem to have been worn on the person between neck and waist, in the case of the talons possibly on a necklace, in the case of the brooches attached to clothing on the chest. As such they were bundled together into a proximal relationship which emphasised raptorial qualities. They, too, would have been visibly prominent for viewers, who would have understood the objects in their own ways (e.g. Martin, 2014, p.35). The imagery on the brooches conforms to the 'basic transformative logic' of Style I art 'which challenges and transcends settled categories' (Kristoffersen, 2010, p.261). There are animal and human masks and heads in profile, quadrupeds and animal leg motifs which are replicated, fragmented, rotated and juxtaposed (Eriksen & Kay, 2022, p.335; also Welch, 1983, p.71–2). Typically, the imagery completely covers the visible facing surface of the objects in a microcosmic suggestion of a wider-than-human world brimming –with interconnected life/death. While Style I art presents an inter-mixing of animal limbs and face masks which has led some scholars to describe the style as an 'animal salad', there is a 'visual riddling' which can, at least in part, be interpreted (Veetch & Williams, 2014; also Lindstrom & Kristoffersen, 2001). For example, the footplate side lobes on the great square-headed brooch in grave 43 present both an *en face* face-mask and/or two raptorial beak-heads in profile in mirror-image (Fig. 1.4). And the shape and decoration of the two identical small square-headed brooches from grave 43 resembles raptors (Hines, 1997, p.246). The back-to-back profile heads become piercing raptorial eyes in the 'head' of the headplate, a prominent hooked beak is formed by the bow, and a raptor's diamond-shaped body with folded wings and legs is suggested by the footplate (Fig.



1.6). So in Style I art there is a deliberate ambiguity for viewers to encounter and unpack, with skill needed to see, for example, both a face mask and raptorial beaks within the form of one image (Leigh, 1984).

Traditional studies on early medieval animal ornament have focussed on the formal properties of decoration or style, object typologies and artworks as indicators of social status (e.g. Salin, 1904; Hines, 1997). Changes in style over time have then been used to inform relative dating (e.g. Speake, 1980). And specific motifs have been interpreted as representations and/or symbols, for example, bearded human figures as the god Woden (Dickinson, 2002). More recent thinking on the archaeology of art has explored the generative qualities of the materials that artworks were made from, the processes of their making and their intra-active qualities (e.g. Jones & Cochrane, 2018; Back Danielsson & Jones, 2020). To reiterate Jones' argument, artworks are not necessarily representational or symbolic, they do not just mimic reality, they shape and 'enact' it (Jones, 2012, p.196; 2017, pp.116–17). Goldhahn (2019) agrees that images are not passive representations of reality but pivotal in practices of world-making beyond the secular/religious divide. With Max Carocci, I am interested in the ontological status of pre-modern artworks, how they were agentive and 'articulated the relationship between humans and what existed beyond imagery' (2023, p.136). In tune with Carocci and addressing Alfred Gell's (e.g. 1992, 1998) anthropological theory of art as agency, Fredrik Fahlander remarks that in certain ethnographic instances, artworks can 'work more like magic "devices" than representational images' so as to 'lure, attract, and evoke other-than-human beings' (2021, p.309). Similarly, in his anthropology of images, Hans Belting disrupts the early modern differentiation between religion and art to theorise artworks as material 'bodies' which 'presence' invisible qualities, becoming 'living images' (2020, p.98; see also 1994, 2011, 2016). And regarding early medieval art specifically, images of bodies and the actual bodies they resemble were in some cases 'ontological equivalents' (Back Danielsson, 2016, p.339), in ways 'far beyond our contemporary understandings of representations' (p.325; also Meents, 2017).

This thinking offers a useful approach to images of raptors and their bodies and/or body parts in early medieval artworks. These are not arbitrary objective representations of raptors which passively reflect wider social constructions concerning actual birds of prey and their constitution in religion or ideology. Rather, Style I images of raptors can be thought of as active embodiments of raptors (as other-than-human beings) and images of their body parts as manifestations of

raptoriness. Through their materialisation and the perception of those viewing them, or rather intra-acting with them, they instantiate human-raptor sociality in an ongoing process of emergent relationships. Put another way, images of raptors are the living presences or embodiment of raptors; just as the talon synecdochally is the raptor-body, so the image of a raptor body/part or image-body is the raptor-body. Certainly, the Spong Hill cremations with raptor talons suggest that early medieval concepts of bodies and personhood were very different to those of modern Europe, and the fragmentation and hybridisation of bodies in Style I art reinforces this point.

In pre-Christian Mediterranean cultures, a specific 'mouth opening ritual' conducted by priests brought artworks to life (Belting, 2020, p.96). In early Anglo-Saxon England, this aspect was likely less contrived and more diffused, but with cunning people and/or smiths as key agents. Smiths held the special knowledge and skills to transform base metals into highly burnished objects such as square-headed brooches that were festooned with images which shifted, 'alive' in the light. Like healers, these makers were held in high if wary esteem because of their artisanal skills (Hinton, 2000, 2011). Arguably, the things they made and the images on them were not inert, passive, symbolic or representational, but materialisations of the 'magic' associated with their making and maker as well as the numinous beings inhabiting their surfaces as living entities (Back Danielsson, 2016). Put differently, with their numinous and divine associations, smiths were involved in 'making the world' and this included the making of human-raptor relations as materialised in the vibrant and living raptor-entities on square-headed brooches (Back Danielsson, 2020, p.192).

Having discussed the two human-raptor inhumation associations at Alfriston in Sussex, I next consider the only other known instance of raptor remains in an early English inhumation context. This is from a different county of south-east England: grave 54 at the early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery at St Edmund's Church and Vicarage, Temple Hill, Dartford, Kent. This burial, probably of a high-status woman, has been dated by the 'richly furnished' grave goods to around 520–550 CE, so around the time of or perhaps a decade or so earlier than the Alfriston graves (O'Brien et al., 2015, p.36). Only '[p]arts of the lower limb bones and pelvis' were recovered and they were in poor condition, so the grave has been identified as 'female' based on the grave goods (p.36). These included an iron knife associated with the left-side of the body near to the waist and a gilded silver small square-headed brooch 'in the lower belly region' with Style I art including

prominent raptor imagery: 'a profiled animal or bird head with three-clawed foot and limb/wing' in each upper border of the footplate (pp.36–7) (Fig. 1.7). Other objects found in the 'pelvic region' were several 'amulets', possibly held in a bag or chatelaine, including the remains of two or more iron latch lifters, various beads, a cosmetic brush case, a crystal sphere in a silver sling – and a 'pierced eagle talon' with 'a fragment of a copper-alloy suspension ring in the perforation' (p.37). The excavators suggest that the crystal ball 'was probably suspended from the girdle, the talon may have been also' although it is uncertain what was in the bag and whether any of the objects were free-hanging or 'randomly placed' (p.49). The non-functional 'amuletic' objects and especially the crystal ball, of which there have been many found in Kent, East Anglia and the East Midlands, but not in Sussex are suggestive of the role of cunning woman (Meaney, 1981, p.86). The crystal ball at Temple Hill also suggests 'a degree of Frankish influence, as well as possible Anglian and east Kentish contacts' (O'Brien et al., 2015, p.1; also Richardson, 2005/6, p.81) while the great square-headed brooches at Alfriston are part of a Saxon group with a Scandinavian origin (Hines, 1997, pp.17, 30). These contrasts in how eagle talons were bundled together with various objects into different assemblages indicate how cunning practices and human-raptor relations were articulated in distinctive ways in each funerary setting and across different communities.

It is also worth considering how the three women discussed, two at Alfriston, one at Temple Hill, performed their identities within wider early medieval gender, social, political and human-animal inequalities (e.g. Meents, 2017). The wearers of great square-headed brooches and pierced raptor talons, while probably of high-status and in the warily respected role of cunning woman, would likely have meted out their healing skills according to the social status of the persons in need. Those with the most need were not necessarily afforded greater attention than those in less need but with greater wealth. Human-raptor sociality too was probably performed in unequal terms. The women may have acquired talons/eagleness by removing the body parts from dead eagles that they or others had found, or they may have trapped and killed eagles or organised for others to accomplish this risky act. While showing an element of human-animal asymmetry such killing would have been viewed in very different terms to those of urbanised modern Europeans. Cunning women may have been respected and high-status, in part because of their healing, divinatory and magical abilities, but these same skills may also have afforded fear, stigma and persecution (e.g. Meents, 2017, p.396). It is likely



Figure 1.7: Small square-headed brooch (54.2) from grave 54, Temple Hill, Dartford. (East Kent Archaeological Society / British Museum / DCMS)

that even male warrior-leaders would have approached them and their magical powers with wary respect. A broad gender distinction can be made between, on the one hand, the use of raptor body parts, focussed on eagle talons and Style I raptor body parts on brooches, in female contexts, and on the other, the use of the complete images of raptors, probably eagles, in men's war gear and especially shield decoration.

This distinction, however, is not absolute. Dickinson observes that women re-used shield fittings with Style I animal ornament as brooches, drawing the conclusion that 'the protective nuances and social status which animal-ornamented shields conferred on males could be partly transferred to selected females, just as occasionally shield ornament ... could borrow from feminine jewellery' (2005, p.162). A consistent theme in the meaning of eagles for both men and women seems to have been expressions of aggressive protection, enacted by women in healing/divinatory practices and by men in confrontation/battle. Style II art, which emerged a century or so later than the burials at Alfriston and Temple Hill, introduced at the start of this article in the form of the north-west Essex Anglo-Saxon ring, is associated especially with the realm of high-status men. This object offers an opportunity to extend the discussion of gender differences in human-raptor relationships. In particular, it helps to show how thinking on these interactions and human/raptor bodies changed over time in early medieval England,

particularly during the tumultuous period of the sixth to seventh centuries when the early kingdoms were being formed and Christianity was (re)introduced.

While the body parts of raptors are prominent in Style I imagery of fragmented and composite beings and are most commonly found on women's brooches, birds of prey in part and as whole bodies are also significant in the art known as Style II which emerges in the late sixth to mid seventh centuries and is associated with high-status men (Hinton, 2005, p.26). In many instances of Style II art, these predatory birds are reduced stylistically to the simplest element of a head bearing a curved beak and glaring eye, 'one of the chief distinguishing features of so-called Style II animal ornament' (Speake, 1980, p.81). This 'beak-head motive' is depicted, for example, on the early seventh-century gold, filigree and garnet bird triskele pendant, and gold filigree miniature buckle, both from Faversham, Kent (Minns, 1942, p.5; Marzinzik, 2013, pp.122–3). At Sutton Hoo, these forms appear on the great gold buckle, gilt-bronze lyre mounts (also at Taplow, Bucks.), silver-gilt drinking horn terminals (also at Taplow), and silver patch on the hanging bowl (e.g. Bruce-Mitford, 1947). The predatory bird is also prominent in the repertoire of imagery in the Staffordshire Hoard (Fern et al., 2019).

Aleks Pluskowski (2010) has discussed how the emphasis on predators in Style II art may reflect a wider 'ideology of predation' during the formative years of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. In this thinking, metaphors of predation enabled elite men to align themselves with predatory creatures (e.g. wolves, boars, raptors) and behaviours (fighting, killing, hunting, hawking), thereby defining themselves socially, politically and cosmologically as predators (Wallis, 2017, p.5; Wallis, 2020, p.13; see also Geake 2014 on the predatory pike in early Anglo-Saxon art). The predator-prey relationship seems to have been an especially salient one, as exemplified by the two hawk-with-prey motifs on the Sutton Hoo purse lid (Hicks, 1986; also Dickinson, 2002, p.158, n.122; Wallis, 2017) (Fig. 1.8). Two gold raptors, each trussing a duck-like bird in their talons, are rendered in cloisonné with a blue ring around the eyes, a blue and black chequer design on the upper legs, and fine garnet cells in a chevron design on the wing and tail to suggest feathers (e.g. Bruce-Mitford, 1947, p.73; Hicks, 1986, p.159). More specifically, the hawk's feet and talons truss the duck around the neck and upper wing which would suggest the prey is immobilized, while the intimate juxtaposition of the hawk's curved beak with the head of the duck might suggest it is beginning to 'plume' the prey of feathers prior to feeding.



Figure 1.8: One of the two raptors with prey, trussing a duck-like bird in its talons, positioned centrally on the Sutton Hoo purse lid. (© The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Carola Hicks interprets these striking hawk-with-prey motifs on the purse lid as pertaining to falconry (1986, p.161), which can be defined as 'taking quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of trained birds of prey' (IAF, 2018). Hicks (1986, p.161) finds that 'the closest parallel to the Sutton Hoo finds' is panel 3 of the calendar and hunting mosaics at the 'Villa of the Falconer' at Argos (c.500 CE; see Åkerström-Hougen, 1974; also Adams, 2015, p.49) (Fig. 1.9). These images show a formal similarity in their depiction of a hawk-with-prey and while Haseloff suggests the motif is a foreign, Mediterranean influence amidst the tendency for Germanic abstraction, Hicks insists that the Argos mosaic could have been 'the model for the scene on the Sutton Hoo purse' (Haseloff, 1952; Hicks, 1986, pp.153, 162). She concludes that 'the birds on the Sutton Hoo purse provide ... an accurate depiction of a contemporary sport, known to be a favourite pastime of aristocracy of Germanic stock' (Hicks, 1986, p.164). This interpretation aligns with the animal imagery in Style II art more generally, which reflects the 'classic animals of the hunt' and the high-status role of hunting 'popular c.AD600 in continental Europe', embedded in the context of 'male elites and their hunting fellowships' (Adams, 2015, p.49).

But to consider falconry only in terms of resource procurement (hunting for food), recreation (hunting for sport), social/political status (hunting as a high-status pursuit) and/or religious ideology (hunting to honour





Figure 1.9: Panel 3 depicting falconry in a mosaic from the 'Villa of the Falconer', 6th century. c.1.20 m × 1.10 m. Villa to the Northeast of the ancient theatre, Western portico of peristyle. (© Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis)

deities), that is to say, limited to anthropocentric associations and human-centred meaning-making, is problematic. This, I think, neglects the rich and complex picture of falconry as an intimate form of human-raptor sociality. A useful anthropological definition of falconry is that it is a hunting practice in which 'humans and birds of prey develop a hunting companionship through which they learn to hunt in cooperation' (Schroer, 2015, p.ii). As such, falconer and bird are entangled as 'beings in the making' (Schroer, 2021, p.141). Or put another way, falconry aligns with Donna Haraway's theorising of some human-animal relations as relational, in an intra-active 'generative cross-species practice' (2008, p.226). It would be idealistic to suppose that the relationship is symmetrical, but anthropocentrism can cloud thinking around the constraint/liberty of animals. This is a particular issue for those delimited by the modern concept of 'wild', especially when they have the more-than-human agency of flight, and perhaps of apex predators such as raptors as paragons of 'freedom'. In the specific case of falconry birds, they must be captured and trained during which time they are fettered, their raptorial agency inhibited. But by turns, once training is complete, the hunting bond is made, and they can be flown free, entirely at liberty and liable to be lost depending on the skill of the falconer. The human-raptor bond in falconry is relational and generative yet precarious, and with this thinking I want to suggest that the hawk-with-prey motifs on the purse lid are more than just representations of raptors catching their prey, more than just markers of the status of the wearer of the purse, and that falconry was more than just an economic hunting pursuit or recreational sport. I agree with Pluskowski that the

relationship formed between falconer and bird of prey is 'at the conceptual "cutting edge" of mutability' (2010, p.117). It can also be singled out as a particularly significant form of human-raptor relationship because it is intimate, relational and cooperative.

The hawk-with-prey motif indicates that high-status male intra-actions with raptorness were articulated differently to those of women. The presence of raptor talons and art with raptor imagery in women's graves suggests that they performed raptorness and especially eagleness in healing practices of aggressive defence. By contrast the display of hawk-with-prey motifs on the purse lid, worn facing outwards on the body, conspicuously presented and enacted the predator-prey relationship, with the high-status warrior-leader becoming-with the predatory bird. If the hawk-with-prey motif is suggestive of falconry practice, then it is notable that unlike other wild, predatory animals which usually remained outside of the domestic sphere unless brought back as dead quarry from hunting trips, 'wild' (trained, but never 'tame' or domesticated) falconry birds lived within the community. Accustoming the bird to falconer(s) and 'helpers' (dogs, horses, beaters) requires 'manning', where the bird is kept on the fist and exposed to various domestic and social settings over extended periods. So the trained bird on the fist would have offered a constant reminder of the falconer's predatory qualities, the bird an extension of the hunter's predatory qualities, the leader as ultimate predator (Wallis, 2017, p.21). The display of a trained hunting bird on the fist may have asserted predatory prowess, a desirable quality among competing warrior-leaders, in a particularly conspicuous way (p.11).

The imagery on the bezel of the north-west-Essex Anglo-Saxon ring may equally evidence human-raptor sociality and perhaps falconry practice specifically, in the simplest sense of visually showing a falconry bird on a falconer's fist. But the imagery is more complex than this, with the arm of the anthropomorph connecting or fusing with the legs of the raptor, and this may hint further at the nuances of the human-raptor relationship in falconry practices and of how raptorness was performed by high-status Anglo-Saxon men. A falconry bird cannot be forced into submission through starvation or rough handling. It is encouraged into tolerating humans and performing its natural hunting behaviour through an extended training process involving careful manning and the delivery of food rewards at key moments, which reinforce the hunting partnership. The relationship between falconer and falconry bird is thus 'a process of relational becoming or mutual making' in which the falconer must 'adjust sensitively to the bird ... avoiding bad experiences,

which might impede the further development of a hunting companionship' (Schroer, 2015, p.272). In short, the relationship is one of becoming-with one another, complicating the idea of early Anglo-Saxon warrior-leaders as the 'instigators of violence and the top consumers in their group' (Pluskowski, 2010, p.117). Practising successful falconry requires patience and restraint, respect and humility, fortitude and fine judgement, qualities which alongside military prowess may have been required of early Anglo-Saxon leaders and valued by their followers within a broader context of martial ontology.

The imagery on the bezel of the ring offers up yet further complexity. The anthropomorph possesses human and raptor qualities not only via the raptor it is fused with, but also in the form of a beak-like nose and hair styled like the tail feathers of the raptor above. This sort of imagery in which humans and animals metamorphose has been interpreted as representing transgressive relationships between animals and humans (Kristoffersen, 2010) as well as in relation to the cult of Odin and his predatory attributes of hunting and war (Dickinson, 2002; Pollington, 2024). The imagery may do more than simply represent something (whether a human 'wearing an animal headdress with a pointed snout' (Brundle, 2020, p.220) or a human-raptor therianthrope), however, by presencing and enacting transgressive human-raptor relationality. The artwork not only visualises and materialises human-raptor sociality, possibly in the form of falconry. In the context of an early medieval ontology of predation, the artwork also shows the actual, visceral acquisition of raptoriness, arguably a quality performed by the wearer or bearer of the ring.

Added to this, the imagery reinforces what Lisa Brundle identifies as 'a non-binary or hybridity of Christian and pre-Christian ideas', the raptor in traditional Style II form juxtaposed with the long cross of the new religion (2020, p.219). Rather than read this imagery as syncretic or evidencing a 'transition' from a pagan past to a Christian future, the object may have occupied a complex 'discursive space' of creative social, political and religious adaptation (Schjødt, 2009). The combination of distinctive imagery plus elite and possibly royal status suggests that the ring played a role in brokering between elements of pagan traditions and the (re)introduced Christian faith (Wallis, 2020, p.15). It is plausible to imagine a high-status person wearing this highly charged, flashy piece of jewellery on the finger of one hand, while holding a raptor on the fist of the other. Falconry was a fashionable pursuit held in common by high-status leaders across northwest Europe, so the wearer of the ring displayed

the diplomatic cachet required to negotiate the pagan-Christian milieu within which early Anglo-Saxon leaders were embedded. In collaboration with the ring as an object-ally, the wearer, mediating between the worlds of human and raptor, pagan and Christian, enacted the necessary raptorial qualities at a crucial religious and political moment. After this moment, hybrid and fragmented bodies in art, raptors included, came to be viewed very differently.

In the early medieval Christian view, the doctrine of resurrection reckoned that the human body created in God's image would enjoy eternal life in heaven if that person had lived and died on earth free of sin. In this ambition it was therefore important that during one's lifetime the body remained pious, uncorrupted and entire, and that the body was inhumed rather than cremated. Examining the changing imagery of the human body in seventh century art, Brundle identifies how 'elite and high-status religious figures ... were increasingly representing the whole and unsullied body as a virtuous one' while the once numinous, fragmented and hybridised body in 'pre-Christian belief systems which centred on transformation and shapeshifting... may have been increasingly perceived to have negative connotations' (2020, 219). Human-raptor relations and human-animal transformations that were once a normal part of an order of things became a disorder. Christians continued to esteem birds of prey but in very different ways to those explored in this article. For example, the eagle was now a much simpler entity, symbolically co-opted for the Evangelist St John, as represented in the *imago aquilae* or 'image of the eagle' in the Lindisfarne and Otho-Corpus Gospels (Fig. 1.10). Hybridisation was not eschewed altogether, as shown by the niello-inlaid engraving of a haloed eagle-headed St. John upon the gold plaque from Brandon, Suffolk (Fig. 1.11). But eagle body parts, eagle images and any sense of a numinous 'eagleness' were firmly reconfigured as being reserved for the heavenly rather than human realm.

In this article I have explored several archaeological assemblages in early England where the boundaries between human and raptor bodies, and those of living beings and objects bearing images, are permeated. These examples are suggestive of varied forms of human-raptor sociality and of how people's relationships with birds of prey changed over time. I began by considering four instances in which the body parts of birds of prey, specifically talons made into pendants, and artefacts decorated with Style I raptor imagery, including square-headed brooches, were deposited with human remains in funerary settings during the fifth to sixth centuries. Necessarily, the term 'body/bodies' (alongside 'art', 'object', and so



Figure 1.10: The imago aquilae or 'image of the eagle' (with parallels in Pictish art), i.e. symbol of St John the Evangelist, surrounded or protected by crosses, Otho-Corpus Gospels, Northumbria or Iona, c.700. (The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, CCCC MS 197B, p.245)



Figure 1.11: Niello-inlaid engraving of a haloed eagle-headed St. John the Evangelist upon the gold plaque from Brandon, Suffolk, 32720001. (©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence)

on) is problematic because of the modern baggage freighting this concept, such as the Cartesian mind/body dualism, speciesist hierarchies separating humans and animals, as well as anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. All of this is challenged by the material and visual evidence (e.g. Fowler, 2004; Harris & Robb, 2012). The archaeological and art-historical sources suggest that animals, objects and art held agency and personhood outside of human control and that human and animal bodies were not stable or bounded (see also Marshall et al. in this volume). While the faunal remains of raptors are rare, their careful deposition in funerary settings do suggest that certain people valued these apex predators and made relational connections to/with them. Rather than understanding these relationships and their material expression as symbolic or representational of a social or religious reality, I have drawn upon multispecies, relational and new materialist thinking to propose that they were intra-active, that human-raptor relations and the things associated with them (talon pendants, brooches with raptor imagery) were active shapers or enactors of ontology in an ongoing process of co-constitutive becoming.

The talons deposited in the cremation urns at Spong Hill indicate that the worlds of humans and raptors could be intimately engaged, the co-mingling of human and raptor remains suggesting that bodies and personhood were permeable across species (and socially contrived) boundaries, including at the juncture of life/death. Arguably, people esteemed raptors' abilities in flight and hunting and attempted to acquire these qualities of raptoriness directly by fashioning talons into vibrant entities (pendants) to be worn on the person. These then acted synecdochally to establish an intra-active relationship between human and raptor. When deposited in the cinerary vessels, these vibrant entities, by their proximity to other objects in the assemblages, affected the other things they were associated with. The talons thereby may have been key transformational agents in the metamorphosis to forms of ancestral personhood. Human-raptor relations were generative in peoples' identity-formation through life and into their after-lives. The proximal bundling of raptor talons with other objects/things in the cremations at Spong Hill probably served to materialise and memorialise an ancestral personhood in which humanness and raptoriness were co-mingled. Raptor body parts in inhumation graves were associated primarily with women, with the eagle talons in the two high-status female inhumation graves at Alfriston and the one at Temple Hill probably pertaining to female healers or cunning women. These important but ambiguous persons may have kept eagle talons as



living entities to materialise and enact the numinous, aggressive-defensive qualities of eagleness in the healing/removal of elf-shot, in a surgical-magical contraction synecdochally presencing female eagle-allies.

Raptorness could be acquired not only by wearing the body parts of birds of prey but also by wearing raptor imagery, as shown in the Style I decoration on square-headed brooches deposited with eagle talons. The brooches were charged with agency by the materials they were made from, including transformational copper-alloy, and the skilled process by which they were made, the magical art of smithing. If the eagle talon pendants disrupt subject/object boundaries, images can be theorised beyond representation as living entities with dynamic presence. Style I images of raptors were the living presences or embodiments of raptors (as other-than-human beings) and raptorness (as qualities), the image-body not a mere representation or symbol of a raptor-body but understood as the raptor-body per se with all of its potential predatory-aggressive and/or aggressive-protective raptorness. The bundling of raptor and other animal and human body parts into composite Style I visual riddles on great square-headed brooches formed a cosmically powerful relational field. Through their materialisation and the perception of those mediating their vibrant presences, image-raptor-allies enacted emergent human-raptor sociality and in the inhumation rite in which they participated, the transformation of deceased human persons into ancestor-beings.

The raptorness articulated in the imagery of and acquired by the wearing of art objects was expressed in different ways across genders and over time. For high-status men, Style I images of raptors on war gear such as shields dating to the fifth to sixth centuries afforded qualities of protective-aggressive raptorness. The emergence of Style II artworks replete with raptor imagery dating to the late sixth to mid-seventh centuries shows that the raptorness associated with men emphasised the role of predator in the predator-prey relationship. The hunting practice of falconry may be shown in the hawk-with-prey motif on the Sutton Hoo purse lid and, while raptor remains were not found in this burial, falconry equipment in the form of a small copper-alloy bell was present and this hunting practice was widespread among high-status men across northern Europe by the mid-first millennium. Falconry may have enabled high-status warrior-leaders to demonstrate their predatory qualities in a particularly conspicuous way, the falconry bird a proximal extension of the leader as ultimate predator. The north-west Essex Anglo-Saxon ring may offer a unique visual expression of the human-raptor

relationship in falconry, with the arm of the human fusing with the legs of the raptor on the fist, the one becoming-with the other. Added to this, the beak-like nose and hair of the anthropomorph styled like the tail feathers of the raptor above visualise and materialise the acquiring and enacting of raptorness in a distinctive idiom which may have involved negotiations over the (re)conversion to Christianity. The increasing attention to whole bodies rather than partial ones in early medieval art can be approached in relation to changing early medieval thinking around the body. As such, over time, images of 'pagan' human-animal transformation and raptors came to be viewed negatively, while the whole, virtuous human body was viewed positively in Christian thinking (Brundle 2020, p.219; see also Murray in this volume). Raptors remained important but within a Christian framework the eagle was co-opted for the Evangelist St John. Where once people had traditionally made connections with birds of prey in performances of predatory identity which brought human and animal bodies into direct relationship, a Christian paradigm of human exceptionalism ultimately foreclosed this visceral possibility.

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